



# RATTLE UP

## My Boys

AN OCCASIONAL BROADSHEET FOR THOSE WITH AN INTEREST IN LONGSWORD DANCE

Issue 1 Series 2, Autumn 1988

## The design of Swords for Longsword dancing

Over recent years the impression has sprung up amongst people with a casual interest in Longsword that there are only two types of Longsword. Many people assume that the choice is between the "standard" metal sword and the wooden sword, used for practice and for the Flamborough Dance.

Examination of Sharp's notes show that there were once many variations in the size and design of swords. The swords he recorded ranged from decorated metal swords to basic wooden laths.

Of the nine Longsword dances published in "Sword Dances of Northern England" Sharp records the details of their swords as:

### Kirkby Maizeard

Steel swords, made by the village blacksmith, 25" long, 3/4" wide, 5 1/2" handles, no guard. The leader carried a normal sword.

### Grenoside

Similar swords "to those of the Kirkby Maizeard men" - the leader used a small cavalry sabre.

### Sleights

Blade of steel about 28" long, 1" wide, with a rib down the middle. A bunch of ribbons was attached to the hilt. At the tip a metal circle "about the size of a shilling" with a hole in the centre to attach ribbons. Handle of wood.

### Flamborough

Made of ash or larch 37" long, 1 1/2" wide shaped at one end to form a handle and tapering slightly to tip. The leader once had a metal sword which "he used to raise the lock".

### Esrick

Well made steel swords, blade 31" long, 1 1/8" wide at the hilt tapering to a point. The handle was 6" long with brass knob at top. Tassels of different colours on lower parts of hilts.

### Handsworth

Highly polished swords (presumably made of steel) 26" long, 1 1/2" wide, handle 5" long.

### Ampleforth

Steel sword with a 29" blade, 1" wide at the hilt tapering to 1/2" at point. Two notches both sides of blade just below the hilt and a T shaped projection at tip. Wooden handle 5" long.

### Askham Richard

Wooden sword of ash, approx 3 feet long, pointed at one end. Thickened at handle by addition of two blocks of wood on either side of blade. When the team processed small coloured flags were attached to the tips of swords.

### Haxby

A wooden sword of ash, 3 feet long, 1 1/2" wide, pointed at one end. A cross piece 4" long was added as a guard at right angles to the hilt.

Sharp found many teams with wooden swords but held the view that they would formerly have used metal swords. His descriptions, summarised above, are in some cases at odds with contemporary photographic evidence. For example Sharp's photos of the Sleights team in 1911 show swords without the "metal circle at the tip with a hole to attach ribbons"



Close examination of the Sleights swords in this photo from 1911 do not show the design of tip Sharp refers to in "Sword Dances of Northern England"

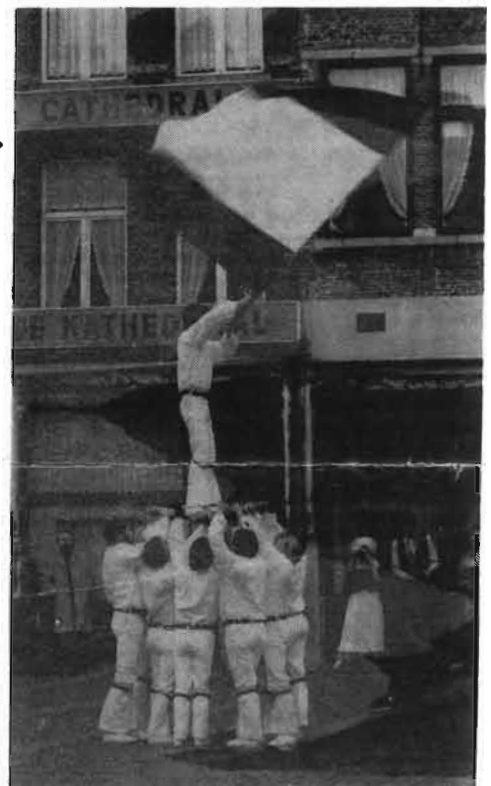
### Are they really swords?

An article by Melusine Woods in the Journal of the English Folk Dance & Song Society (vol IV no 6 1945) presents theories on the origin of swords. Her particular example was the wooden Flamborough sword which she likened to the tool used by local fishermen to repair their nets.

Her thesis is a little fanciful but it makes interesting reading and it is difficult to disagree with her main point that the swords we perform with today are just as likely to have developed from work tools as from any known type of sword.

A brief examination of conventional swords indicates three main types - the Broadsword, the Cutlass and the Rapier. It takes a considerable stretch of imagination to imagine how our dance swords derive from any of these swords. A usual description by the uninitiated is to call them pokers

It is even more difficult to see how conventional swords could safely be used as dance accessories.



Raising of the Captain, the climax of the dance by Lange Wapper from Antwerp. Photo taken at their traditional event at Half-Lent in 1984.

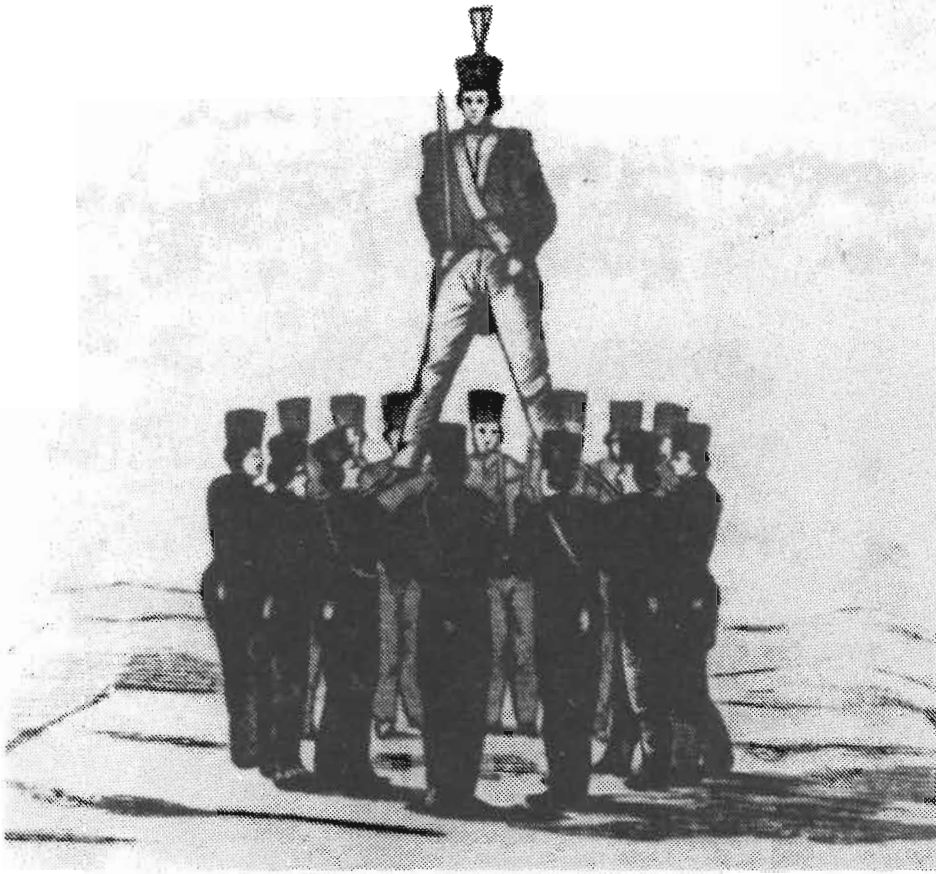
### Dance swords in recent years

Obviously the needs of the dance usually dictate the design of sword to be used. Some Continental teams, who raise their Captain on a platform made from the swords, opt for heavy duty broadswords. Our own Longsword dances all involve a woven lock, hence the choice of a simpler and more flexible metal bar with few projections. Some Continental teams, who neither raise the Captain nor form a lock, use real swords.

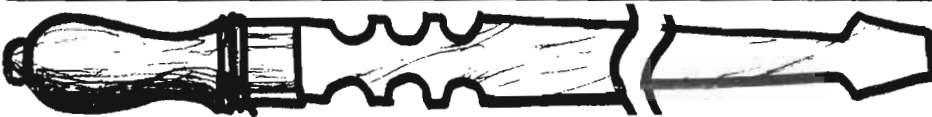
Conversely the size and design of the sword can have a considerable effect on the way the dance is performed. How many readers have tried the Papa Stour dance and found problems with the "over neighbours sword" figure? In it all dancers together, without bending, kick the left leg over the sword and hopping over with the right leg.

It is less daunting when we learn that the Papa Stour team made their swords from long and flexible straps used on herring barrels. These could be curved almost to the floor to enable a more elegant move than the high kick.

Sleights photo by permission of Vaughn Williams Library. Lange Wapper by Author.



Many Continental teams, particularly those from Germanic countries, involve the hoisting of the Captain. The feature has been recently 'adopted' by Ebor Morris (in their version of Escrik) after they saw Lange Wapper at a Longsword Weekend.



The Ampleforth sword drawn from the copies made for the 1950's revival team.

These copies were made by Father Damian Webb based on an old sword found in the nearby village of Coxwold and on the information given by Willie Worthy, an ex dancer from the 1895 team.

#### Earlier swords

With the exception of the Ampleforth swords, the swords Sharp describes are simple designs.

A recently discovered photograph of the Ampleforth team dated circa 1900 shows an unusual design of sword. They have three semi-circular cut-outs immediately below the handle, a long taper to the blade and an arrow head shape at the tip.

The photograph is supported by a set of swords (still in existence) used by the 1950's Ampleforth revival team which were based on an old sword found propping up chrysanthemums.

Another sword, thought to be pre-1923 was found in a barn in Gostland. It is now displayed in the Ryedale Folk Museum. It is very rigid and rather crude and would have been difficult to weave into a lock. A lock of six such swords would be very heavy.

The 1926 and 1935 films of the North Skelton White Rose team clearly show very long swords, certainly in excess of 3' 3" overall blade length. The North Skelton dance takes on a different style and pace, especially in the circling when such long swords are used.

#### Suppliers of swords

Dance teams wanting swords are currently faced with three options. They can purchase from the EFDSS Folk Shop or direct from Specialised Products of Sheffield. Swords with a 2' 2" blade length cost approx £16 each (at April 1988).

Steve Marris of Specialised Products will produce specials to order including longer swords or swords with tapered blades but these are considerably more expensive.

#### Make your own?

The other alternative is to make or have made, swords to your specification. The major problem is to ensure the metal will hold a good spring. The most successful swords I have used have been made from EN40 grade steel. They hold their temper for a long time and have the spring to return to a straight blade. But they are difficult to polish if you prefer a shiny sword.

Many teams choose to make their own swords. The 1950's Loftus team had swords made from saw blades used in the local quarry. Redcar Sword have a nifty way of getting round the problem of fixing handles. They heat short lengths of hose pipe until pliable and then slide the hose over the end of the swords, which, when cool, makes a handle with a good grip.

Adlington Morris Men from Cheshire started life as a sword side but changed to Cotswold Morris many years ago. They recently got out their old swords to dance Longsword again. These swords have a distinctive etching of a different animal engraved on each sword close to the handle.

A simple and cheap expedient for teams wishing to practice Longsword without the expense of a set of swords is to follow Sharp's advice and use thin bamboo canes with string bound round one end to form a handle.

#### The standard sword?

There is no such thing as a standard sword. The average blade length is 2' 9" and at least two teams use tapered swords which I find helps to give balance and greater control in clashes.

I encourage teams to produce swords specif-



The Strani sword dancers from Czechoslovakia dance with rigid wooden swords. The swords are approx 15mm thick, have brass studs for decoration and brass rings to create a ringing noise when the swords are shaken. The sword is painted red. Our sword lock is unknown to them.

ically to suit them. A womens team uses swords made of "Dural", a type of aluminium. They give a subdued ring when clashed but they are light and easily handled, especially when locked and raised.

The main characteristics I prefer in a good dance sword are ...

Flexible enough to bend at least 3" out of true and still return to a true, straight blade.

Good balance to the blade to give good control.

Enough spring to hold together in a lock.

Gives a sharp, clear "ring" when clashed together.

A comfortable handle, easy to rotate in the hand.

The metal should retain it's temper (or hardness) for a long time to avoid notches and dents in the edge of the blade.

Easy to work up to a good finish.

The design I favour is 3' 3" long overall, including a 6" handle of wood fixed by a spike going into the handle (a ferrule is essential to stop splitting) or sandwiched either side of the blade with rivets through to fix it together.

My ideal sword is tapered from 1" wide just below the handle to 1/2" at the tip. The tip of the sword is cut at 45° and a hole is drilled 3/4" from the end for ribbons.



# Birth of the Ashvale Longsword: a Non-traditional side?

by Clive Partridge



## ASHVALE LONGSWORD IN 1987

from right to left:

Bob Higgs (Iggs)

Geof Austin

Clive Partridge

Chris Gurteen

Lis Barratt

George Parr

Fool: Keith Hicks

Concertina: Brian Blanchard

The opening paragraphs of "The Gospel According to Sullivan Sword", in Issue 4, were of particular interest to us as it reflected our own beginnings. Like Sullivans ... Ashvale has its roots in Mumming and we dance with a "tattered" Fool.

Also like Sullivans ... we have great hopes of eventually producing a Sword-play. We have already made a start, having written our own play based on well-known characters from past centuries. We are to perform this for the first time in public at the Hatfield House Living Crafts Fair.

There is no tradition of Longsword Dancing in Hertfordshire. A number of local Rapper and Mummer sides have dabbled; but none dance regularly. However there is now a small but growing band of enthusiasts in the South East of the country.

It all started in 1985 when some members of Lea Valley Mummers attended Sidmouth Festival and made a bee line for Trevor Stone's Longsword Workshop. They soon became intrigued by the movements and team work of the dance.

So, fired with enthusiasm, they returned to Hertfordshire to spread the gospel. First efforts were directed towards raising a team to dance at the wedding of two folk dancing friends.

The first "side" was composed of "volunteers" from Standon Morris, Crownsmen Rapper and Lea Valley Mummers. Needless to say - given the sort of occasion it was - the first public outing was not exactly a technical triumph but it was regarded as a success by the spectators.

After the euphoria of the Day-of-Wed the next task was to find enough dancers to form a regular side. This proved difficult, as many of the Day-of-Wed dancers were already members of other dance sides and not able to take on further commitments.

Soliciting in local folk clubs flushed out a number of dancers, including several females (do I hear a deathly hush emanating from the North?). Eventually enough people were inveigled to a local hostelry where, plied with strong ale, all present agreed to "give it a go".

Tuesday was chosen as practice night. So, equipped with swords borrowed from Hoddesdon Folk Club, our trials and tribulations began.

Not only did everyone appear to have two left feet, but interpretations of movements were as numerous as the number of dancers. Our first efforts were somewhat varied ... people discovered that they might be double jointed after all!

The figures we used were based on Sidmouth workshops, published material and suggestions from two of the team (yours truly and our concertina player Bryan Blanchard); who are expatriate Yorkshiremen remembering snippets from dances performed or seen as school children. Our first dance contained elements from Helmsley, Sleights, Escrick and North Skelton.

In April 1987 we first danced out publicly. Appropriately enough it was another Day-of-Wed. The first spot went reasonably well but, by the time we got around to a second, John Barleycorn begun to intrude: not with totally disastrous results, but certainly not one of our better efforts.

Since then we have danced out a number of times, either by ourselves or with other dance sides at folk dance evenings at local watering holes.

One notable occasion saw us dancing at The Buffalo's Head Agricultural and Stationary Engine Rally. One of the prize exhibits was an apple chopping and crushing plant for cider making. Attached to the pub is a large orchard which was to supply the fodder for the cider plant. We were invited to Wassall the trees before harvesting began - which was fair enough, except that we all narrowly missed having our heads blown off by the Landlord, determined to blast the apples from the trees with his 12 bore shotgun! Still, we have been invited back next year to taste the fruits of our efforts.

The star of the rally was a beautifully restored, 1876, Gavioli Fair Organ. I wonder if any other side has tried dancing to fairground organ music? I can tell you that it is an experience that has to be tried to be believed.

For us and the audience, it proved to be hilarious and highly entertaining. Enduring memories are of finishing a set singing and dancing to the words of "Yellow Rose of Texas" as the Gavioli had given up in mid-stream. Also our impromptu rendering of the Can-Can with the music at full blast ... Oh well! I guess that's another nail in our non-traditional coffin - although the former Squire of the local

Morris side was in stitches and vowed he hadn't seen anything so entertaining for a long time.

Lis Barratt and I visited Malton (the Longsword Weekend) last year and much enjoyed ourselves. The weather helped and the Saturday evening and Sunday lunchtime sessions at The Crown proved to be very pleasant interludes.

The Sunday morning was taken up with Trevor's workshop on the Salton Dance. Lis and I danced with Spen Valley (strictly recreational of course ...) learning the rudiments of this short but interesting little dance. The unusual skip stepping caused problems at first, but the session ended on a fairly high note with a couple of reasonably fluent efforts.

We are now working on the Salton dance, in between other dances which we are sharpening-up, for what promises to be a busy year ahead.

We are booked for a number of important engagements and are hoping to organise our own Day-of-Dance. Some of us will also be renewing our association with Trevor at Sidmouth this year.

A cautionary tale to finish with. Our most notable triumph to date, paradoxically was also our biggest let-down. It occurred last Christmas. We had from the outset, as a non-traditional side, been regarded with suspicion by the established local Morris, Rapper and North West sides. So, when invited to do a "turn" at the Hoddesdon Folk Club Christmas Party, we decided to conjure up a special little number.

The idea was to take the not too gentle rise out of the other dance sides. We eventually concocted a dance which as well as Longsword, incorporated a number of figures and steps taken from all the other dance styles. When our big moment arrived at the club, we marched on suitably adorned with all the morris bells we could lay our hands on.

There was an expectant hush (or it could have been a stunned silence) as we formed up ... then off we went at a great rate. We were thoroughly enjoying ourselves and thinking ... "that'll show 'em!" Imagine our chagrin when we completed the "Peet Akin" dance with the triangular lock and loped off to rapturous applause.

Damn!! They actually loved it! Oh dear, whatever can we do for an encore next Christmas?

# HIGHSIDE LONGSWORD

by Jim Coulson



Highside Longsword outside the Kirkby Malzeard Church in January. The local paper already describes them as the "Kirkby Malzeard Longsword dancers".

Although we are (arguably) the most recently formed Longsword team, we have probably the longest historic claim.

We were formed in 1986 to learn and revive a local version of the Kirkby Malzeard Sword Dance, and we actually danced it out for the first time on Boxing Day 1987, in Kirkby Malzeard itself.

The last "official" team danced in the 1920's and 1930's in the village (although a team of ladies gave a brief revival in the 1950's) and we

thought it would be nice to have a village team once more; although strictly speaking, most of our team come from just outside the village.

We took our name from the area of land on the moorland side of Kirkby, towards Pateley Bridge, which is locally known as "The High Side". Our uniform was an arbitrary choice of turquoise waistcoat, black cords and shoes and white, collared shirts.

Our Captain (who sings the associated Calling-on Song) has an embroidered emblem on the back of his waistcoat, giving the team name and depicting the special Kirkby Malzeard sword-lock.

This is the "disputed" double triangle lock, which has been doubted in some areas, but strangely enough, our revival of the dance has inadvertently shed light on the matter.

When we had danced on Plough Sunday (in the Church, I might add!) and were walking back along the High Street to perform at the "Henry Jenkins" pub, we were stopped by an elderly lady at one of the cottages.

"I remember, as a girl, when Sharp came and asked to see them dance," she said. She told us that the men showed Cecil Sharp the ordinary hexagonal lock, because, "We didn't want outsiders knowing all our secrets." The ordinary lock is indeed the one given in Sharp's book on the Sword Dances of Northern England. Also, somewhat mysteriously, in one of the cottage windows, is a box whose lid is engraved with six lines forming a double triangle....

Our other historical claim, apart from performing the first ever recorded sword dance (by Sharp, that is) is that our melodeon player is the son of the musician who played for the 1920/30 side. He still has his father's melodeon, from which EFDSS recorded the Kirkby Malzeard tune - a version of "The Girl I Left Behind Me".

Again, interestingly, the Calling-on Song ends "Music strike up and play 'Told Lass o' Dallowgill' .... Now, Dallowgill is a remote village up on the moors, in or near the "High Side". But, although there is a tune called "The Lass of Dallowgill", we were told most insistently by one of the surviving 1930's team members that we must dance to "The Girl I Left Behind Me".

We first learned the dance from Sharp's notes to the "Lass of Dallowgill", but when Ray (our present musician) joined us with his father's melodeon, he played "The Girl I Left Behind Me" and we all felt that it fitted the stepping much better. This is the tune we now use.

Our full line-up is

Ted Dodsworth (Leader)  
Jim Coulson (Secretary/Treasurer)  
Roland Catter (Captain i.e. singer)  
Paul Freeman  
Geoff Hyde  
Keith Worden  
Roy Waite  
Ray Waite (Musician)

(Roy Waite and Ray Waite are second cousins)

As can be seen, we are a "bare" side, with no extra bodies. But we try and get out when we can, although we have had an enforced rest since Keith broke his wrist whilst taking his children skating!

We get requests to appear in and around Kirkby and the villages near Ripon, and we have been invited to Richmond in June. We fully endorse the view that sword dancing is fun, very sociable and enjoyable when danced crisply and properly, which has been our constant aim.

Rattle up!

I possess a box similar to that described by Jim Coulson. It is a cigar box, purchased in Portugal but originating in Cuba, and the makers trade mark is a "double triangle lock" formed of the conventional design of sword (with a hand guard). The trade mark also includes the words "Monte Cristo Habana". As yet enquiries have failed to get any further information. Can any reader help?

Anyone care to elaborate on the dispute surrounding the triangular lock?  
Editor.

Goathland Plough Stots supplied this obituary to record the death of their former leader and President, Jack Scarth.

**JOHN GEORGE (JACK) SCARTH**  
1904 to 1988

Jack died on May 2nd of this year after a long illness. He was the mainstay of the Plough Stots for many years, beginning with the reformation of the team after a break for the first World War.

In later years Jack was to become the Dance Leader, teaching his teams with a strict authority, but at the same time achieving great respect and much affection.

In 1974 Jack was elected President of the Plough Stots, a position he held with great pride until his death.

In 1986, at their annual dinner in January, the Plough Stots awarded Jack a Plough Share in recognition of his work with the team. The photo shows Jack being congratulated by the then Chairman, Mick Atkinson, who succeeded Jack as President in June of this year.

Photo by David Webster

## Jack Scarth - an appreciation



The next issue will feature an article based on a recent visit to Czechoslovakia to see their pre-lent traditions which include many sword dances. Additional material, especially team profiles would be most welcome.

A small number of all five issues of series 1 are still available.

Be sure to let me know if you change your address.

### Contributions welcome....

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Reasonable efforts are made to check the accuracy of material used and ensure that the author has the undisputed right to publish such material. However, we rely heavily on authors to follow the usual conventions and obtain appropriate

More about tradition    Accompanying sheet to 'RUMB' 1.2. Autumn '88

Following the item on "when does a team become traditional" in the last issue Mike Cook asked to add to his earlier comments ....

" ... could I add, please, that if a team creates their own dance (as Kirkburton have) then they are automatically a traditional team as they have established a tradition. It is only where a team recreates traditional dances using workshops, notes etc they are termed revival.

At the same time a team is still a revival team even if it develops a traditional dance (after all if the traditional team had still been dancing who knows how they might have developed their own dance).

One further thought - the word "traditional" is not the most suitable for teams who have carried on their own dance for generations. Most teams are handing down Longsword from generation to generation and are therefore traditional. Without recourse to Roget I cannot find the most suitable name for the type of team which has existed for a long period of time, who maintains its own sequence of movement in a permanent manner to the exclusion of all other influences (from other dances). Agreed it maintains and develops its tradition - but so do other teams (who) revive and develop the traditions of dances from other locations.

Perhaps someone can come up with a more suitable name for a team which can trace its origins back for centuries and which maintains its dance customs for present entertainment and for the future".

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By the same post Brian Tasker sent a copy of this letter to Mike....

"....I strongly disagree with the opinion expressed in your second paragraph in the last newsletter. My view is that if a "new" traditional side is formed it can have no right whatever to expect other teams who have been dancing "their dance," to ask for permission to continue dancing it.

I learned Boosbeck as a member of Castleford, and have taught it to my new side. I would strongly resent anyone telling me that I had to ask permission of anyone to continue dancing it".

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41, Morningside,  
Coventry. CV5 6PD  
tel. (0203) 76721

Ron Shuttleworth Collection.

Dear Trevor,

AMPLEFORTH SWORDS

I was interested in the description of swords in RAMB, particularly the Ampleforth one. It seems odd to me that anyone would deliberately cut into the base of the blade just where it would cause weakness at a vulnerable place.

The prosaic explanation may be that these were already there in the metal that was used - certainly those semicircular slots would provide a very secure means of fixing the blade into some piece of machinery.

There is another possibility which could only be verified by checking fit and angles using the real thing, and if the sword-lock was similar to the Sleights one in the photo on page one, i.e. with the points only just showing beyond the other sword. If two of the tabs between the slots at the base of the blade were bent outwards a little, they might locate with the 'arrow' tip of the next sword in a way which would make the completed lock into a very strong and indestructible unit. The opposite tabs could have been put in to conceal the device from all but the most detailed inspection. The people viewing the blade recovered from the garden may well have overlooked this, believing it due to more recent damage.

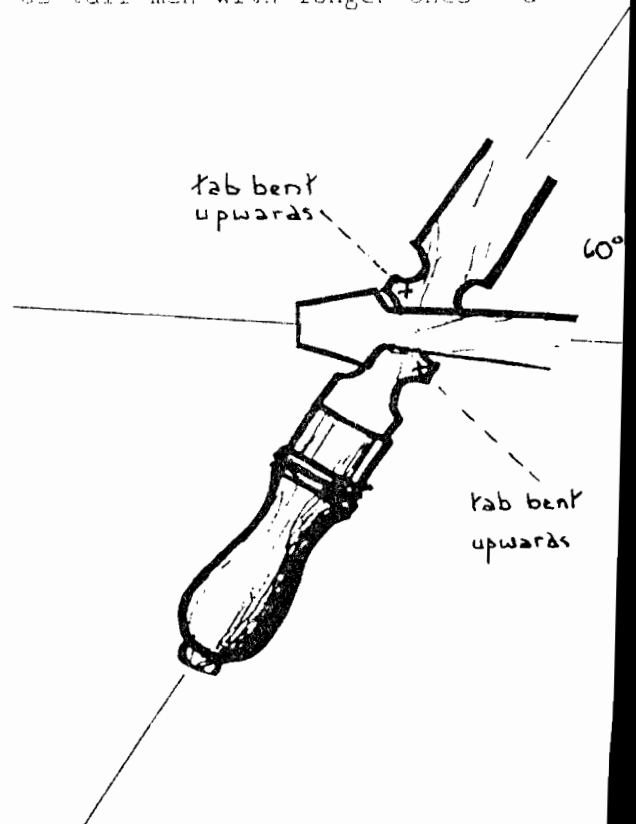
When considering the varying lengths of swords, I suggest that attention should be paid to the average height of the team using them. Small men with shortish swords would be in much the same case as tall men with longer ones - a point for revivalists to consider

Always happy to stir it up.

Wassæl,



22.10.88



EVERY PICTURE TELLS A STORY



SWORD-DANCE MEETING, CLEVELAND, JULY 1931

The Rev. K Legless about to present the awards  
to the Gold, Silver and Bronze medalists in  
the "Wheel" event

Harry "Hercules" Higginbottom set his world record  
which remains unbeaten

"Granida" Throstlethwaite retired from competition

"Blind Jack" Jackson sustained a rupture which  
later proved fatal