



RATTLE UP My Boys

AN OCCASIONAL BROADSHEET FOR THOSE
WITH AN INTEREST IN LONGSWORD DANCE

Series 2, Issue N° 4, Winter 1989

Bal do Sabre

A sword dance team from Italy

Readers may recall an article in the Broadsheet (Series 2, Issue 2) describing sword dance traditions to be found in Czechoslovakia. The visit to Czechoslovakia which gave rise to that article came about as a result of meeting a Czech team when they visited the Half Lent dance event in Antwerp organised by the Belgian team Lange Wapper.

Occasionally Lange Wapper invite foreign sword dance teams to their event. In March this year the visiting team was from the village of Bagnasco in the Piedemont district in the North East of Italy.



This area of the South West Alps, less than 30 miles from the French border and 20 miles from the Mediterranean coast, boasts a number of sword dance traditions. Just across the border into France we find sword dances from Baccubert and Pont de Cervieres. Violet Alford, in her book "Sword Dance and Drama", lists dances from the area at the villages of Fenestrelle and Vicoforte. Bagnasco was not listed, nor was another team currently dancing at nearby Castelletto Sturo.

Dances from the Piedmont area

The dance from the village of Fenestrelle has received more attention in England than that from Bagnasco, even though both have a similar recent history and are known to have been active in the early 1900's.

The Journal of the English Dance Society (No 4, Second Series, 1931) carries a detailed description of the Fenestrelle dance, based on a performance given for the author of the article, Miss Estella Canziani. The article is reprinted from Miss Canziani's book "Piedmont". At that time the sword dance was not performed regularly but the author was able to persuade the team to dance for her. She established that it had been performed regularly for many years up to 1920.

Four years after this Journal article was published one of five teams from Italy who attended the International Folk Dance Festival held in July 1935 in London performed the Fenestrelle dance. Snippets of this performance are portrayed in silent black and white film held in the Vaughan Williams Library.

Comparison of all the sources, the 1931 description of the Fenestrelle dance, a recent video of the Fenestrelle team, and my observation of the Bagnasco dance show little differences between the performance of the dances. To the uninitiated, the most significant feature of all three performances is their length - the present day teams from both villages present dances which last more than twenty minutes each. In her report of the Fenestrelle team Miss Canziani reports that the dance lasted one and a half hours.



The Bagnasco team claim an ancestry in the 17th century. They have written records from Spring Carnivals in the years 1900, 1905, 1914, 1927 and 1948. The team have a photograph which portrays the team in February in 1914. Like so many other traditions, the Bagnasco dance has undergone a series of revivals and demises. The latest revival has continued since the end of the war, led by the teams' current leader Giuseppe Carazzone.

photographs of the 1914 Bagnasco team depict a very different costume to that worn today, especially in the head gear. The 1914 hats can best be described as squat top hats with no brim.



The characters in the dance

The dance troupe who visited Antwerp involved 12 dancers although the dance has been performed with more, or less dancers. To ensure a regularly practiced team the Bagnasco group have decided on a set number of 10 or 12 dancers.

Other characters with the team are a Jester (a Harlequin in the Fenestrelle dance) a Spokesman, a prisoner dressed like a monk and two Negroes with black faces and fuzzy wigs looking like to the character we know as a black golly.



At some point since 1914 the Bagnasco team have adopted a "Turkish style" costume, what Violet Alford describes dismissively as "being tainted by Moorish influence". The most significant change involves the adoption of a turban as head gear. The Bagnasco men did not know when the change in head gear was made but they admit that the rest of their costume was recently adopted. They also wear long baggy trousers made from an orange silky material, topped by highly decorated shirts with full sleeves and a tight-fitting dark green waistcoat, all of which add to the Eastern look.

This effect is enhanced by the use of slightly curved swords, like scimitars. The 1914 team performed with swords of a similar design.

The participants in the Bagnasco team range in age from 15 to early 30's. They are trained and generally organised by Giuseppe Carrazone who is the local school master. He stresses that, although the school is used as a base the tradition is kept alive as a village tradition and not tied specifically to the school. There is keen competition among young adults in the village to join the team as membership brings the opportunity to travel and brings a good deal of local esteem. The team is well supported locally and the Mayor of the village accompanied the team on their visit to Antwerp.

The dancers have similar attitudes and motivation to many groups in England. Theories about the "rite of vegetation" and the encouragement of crop growth and fertility abound.



Apparently teams from this region hold a bi-annual meeting of sword dance teams, involving particularly the Baccubert, Fenestrelle, Castelletto Sturo and Bagnasco teams. The organisers would be delighted to welcome English teams but in the past they have been disappointed by the lack of response to their invitations. The next event is in July 1991 - let me know if there are any takers.

The dance is performed with a hitch step which is used for most figures, with one or two exceptions, which involve a steady running step. The whole dance is performed to the beat of a drum.

The movements seldom involve the formation of a circle as in our English dances. Rather the 12 dancers form a line or chain. For the displays in Antwerp the Bagnasco team divided their dance into two main sections but it is normally performed as a whole.

The first part of the performance contains movements which are closely related to those in our dances including under and over arches created by the first and second dancers. Other moves include through a hoop carried by the Jester, forming a tunnel and a move which creates a cage of swords tied around the neck of one of the character dressed as a monk or prisoner.



The second part of the dance is much more unusual. It involves the "execution" of one of the prisoner by hoisting him high in the air on a platform of swords and withdrawing the swords as he falls to the ground. The Spokesman reads out a proclamation.



a maypole is introduced to perform a simple maypole figure. The team's literature links the 12 ribbons on the pole with the 12 months of the year and they equate the weaving of the ribbons with "life's ups and downs".

The full dance sequence is:

The dancers salute the audience

Swords onto right shoulders, in turn

All pass over No 1's sword (held by No 1 & the Jester) The dancers are led by No 2 followed by each of the others in turn

Over own swords, all together

Under No 1's sword in turn

Over own sword, each dancer jumps over his own sword in turn

Into two files - back to back and swords over heads. Each dancer passes down the centre to get out

In two files - hold one sword high & next sword low to create windows for each pair to pass through

In pairs the dancers perform a dip & dive

In pairs the dancers clash their partners sword and pass under the arches

Shoulders

Each dancer leaps through a hoop held by both of the Moors

Each dancer passes the hoop over his own head and jumps through it and passes the hoop on to the next man

Moors bring on a captive (dressed as Monk) whose head is encircled by swords

The captive escapes but he is recaptured

A platform is made of the swords and the Monk is made to stand on it and is hoisted into the air

The Spokesman reads a proclamation

The swords are drawn out all together and the Monk falls dead

The Jester makes a magic spell to bring the Monk back to life

A Maypole is introduced and the dancers do a simple figure

Dance ends - it takes 27 minutes to perform the full dance



If any reader wishes to have copies of the leaflets and other material used in compiling this, or any other of my articles they should contact me. Also the offer extends to viewing most of my videos (where teams have given approval) but videos cannot be loaned out.

Trevor Stone, 1989

A NEW LOOK AT THE OLD WIFE

by Martin Graetz

The third volume of Cecil Sharp's *Sword Dance Tunes*, published in 1913, contains an "alternative air" for the Ampleforth Longsword Dance, called "T'Auld Wife of Coverdill". In a prefatory note, Maud Karpeles writes that the tune was originally collected "by the late Rev John Tinkler from an old sword-dancer in Yorkshire in 1869". As published, "T'Auld Wife" is a jig, in 6/8 time



Trying to play it that way has been a problem for musicians and dancers ever since.

To begin with, the six-bar phrase, which is unusual if not unique, doesn't gracefully match the phrasing of the dance's figures. (Sharp does say that the dancers did not try to keep to the musical phrase, which was common enough in the weaving figures of a linked-sword dance. But the figures that run out of a column formation - *Plaiting*, *Waves of the Sea*, and *Three Reel* - need some phrasing or they won't work).

Furthermore, the melody fights the meter. The B strain goes well enough, though the long held note in the last measure muddles the rhythm. The A strain, on the other hand, is plain awkward, it just won't move at 6/8.

Someone, some time ago (does anyone know who or when?), recognised that "T'Auld Wife" is a slip-jig. In 9/8 time, the A strain flows easily, and the phrases round off nicely at four measures each



The tune now works as an alternative, especially for the column figures.

But we have a new difficulty. The B strain moves a little less smoothly, and that held note is shifted so that it puts an unnatural emphasis on the second beat, which can throw off the dancers. Musicians usually maintain the dance pulse by adding an extra accent on the third beat, or even by playing a separate note altogether.

But why should there be such a note at all? It fits neither the dance nor the idiom in general. Perhaps the old sword dancer's memory was faulty. Or maybe the Rev Mr Tinkler copied it down wrong. Either way, it's a mystery. (A corollary mystery is why Cecil Sharp, a trained musician and one sensitive to the needs of traditional dance, should have let it get by him without some evidence of having tried to rationalise it).

Several years ago Tom Kruskal, the principal musician of the Pinewoods Morris Men, came up with a resolution of the mystery that seems to me so right and natural it's amazing no one had thought of it before ...



Suppose the B strain had "slipped", rhythmically, turning the first note into a short upbeat. (Something similar happens when a morris musician who is used to, say, the Headington "Trunkles" tune tries to play the slow-caper music of the Bledington version). Tom slipped the phrase back by lengthening the upbeat note and making it the first beat of the measure. In

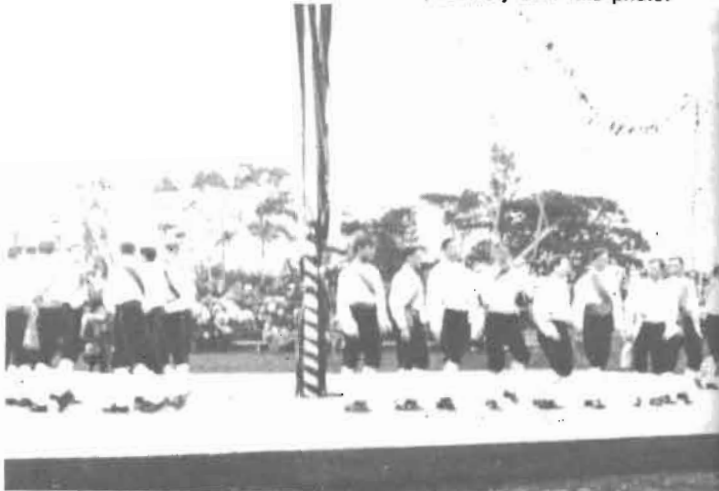
one stroke the held note disappears, the B melody takes on a new grace, and the whole tune makes excellent melodic and rhythmic sense.

Two questions remain. Who was the Rev John Tinkler, and has anyone else made this same discovery, or solved the mystery in a different way?

My thanks to Arthur Cornelius and Tony Barrand for their help in preparing this note. I asked Tom Kruskal if he could remember how he worked out his solution. He said he thought he got it from Earl Gaddis, another fine dance musician who used to play for us occasionally. Earl said no, it wasn't his idea. No wonder collectors have such a hard time.

Sword Dancing at the Leyland May Festival

Roy Smith, archivist for Leyland Morris, recently sent this photo:



Roy writes "I cannot find anyone who remembers dancing or seeing the Sword dance shown in this picture - all we know is that it is Leyland Morris, in the late 1920s at the Leyland May Festival.

Leyland May Festival began as an event for the children of the Day and Sunday Schools of St Andrews Parish Church. It was very successful, grew quickly and soon incorporated adults too. So successful was the event that World War I only caused a temporary hold-up, whereas elsewhere it caused the disappearance of many events and dance teams.

In the mid 1920s a new Vicar came to Leyland. Very evangelical he was! He objected to the fact that many people from 'outside' the Parish Church organisation had become involved in organising and running the May Festival. Worst of all, one was an ex-publican!

Loyalties were strongly tested and the village was rent asunder. No 'grey' areas on this question. Either you were with the Vicar or against!

Legal battles were fought and eventually there were TWO May Festivals: Leyland May Festival and Leyland Parish Church May Festival - sometimes occurring on the very same date.

From then on more new ideas were brought into the town's May Festival. The men's Morris team continued. The boy's Morris team became two boys teams: the younger team for boys about 8-10 years old; the older team for boys about 11-14 years old. There was even a team of young ladies (teenagers) in 1935 & 1936.

I would think that introduction of the Sword Dance came in with this 'push' for new ideas, although we cannot be certain.

Even using a strong magnifying glass I can't identify anyone on the photo I sent you - which is very annoying.

Could the photo be older than I at first imagined? Could it be pre World War I, or 1919-1923 vintage?

The Leyland Morris Dancers always had a team of 24 dancers plus leader, and danced to music provided by the local brass band. Very convenient for the Flamborough Longsword dance: the dancers divest themselves of straw boaters and Morris sticks and split into 3 teams of 8 dancers for the Longsword. The Leader retains his hat, and his dignity, and oversees the performance of the Sword Dance! I wonder if the Leyland Subscription Prize Band played for the Sword Dancing?"

Can anyone add to Roy's information?

The next issue, the last in this series, will be extended to feature two articles on the Papa Stour sword dance tradition and its recent performance on the Shetland Isles.

I also hope to report on the sword dance survey. Have your team replied yet?

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

Contributions welcome....

Copyright of all photographs, articles and material used in the Broadsheet rests with the author, or in some cases with the team or performers involved. Permission must be obtained before submitting material to the Broadsheet. Views in the Broadsheet do not necessarily represent the views of the publisher.

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 approval.