



RATTLE UP

My Boys

AN OCCASIONAL BROADSHEET FOR THOSE
WITH AN INTEREST IN LONGSWORD DANCE

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AN AMAZING DAY

THE ÜBERLINGEN SWORD DANCE CEREMONY

I first read of the sword dance from the German town of Überlingen in 1976 in Violet Alford's translated summary of Richard Wolfram's book *Schwertanz und Männerbund*. Dr Wolfram described the Überlingen dance as the last remaining sword dance from a family of at least thirty which he claimed once existed in Germany.

In 1987 at an event in Sint Niklaas Belgium, organised by the Belgian team Boerke Naas, I saw the German team perform.

That event involved an indoor afternoon show (in a school hall if memory serves me correctly) and an evening social. I had been invited to present

The climax of the Überlingen Sword Dance is, when the swords have been woven overhead into "The Mesh" and the Hånsele character has gone into the centre of the set under the swords, the banner is waved over the group and the Leader calls for three cheers.

an illustrated talk on English sword dancing supported by displays of Rapper and the North Skelton Longsword Dance given by Martlett Morris & Sword Dancers who had long standing links with the host team. Other teams performing at the event included Sint Sebastiaansgilde (Westerlo, performing the Flemish Trawantel dance), Boerke Naas themselves and a second German team from Baden-Württemberg.

Following the event David Webster of Spen Valley Longsword, who also attended the Sint Niklaas event, kept in contact with Fritz Zügmantel, the leader of the Überlingen team. Fritz has now handed over the role of leader to a younger man although he maintains regular contact with the team.

Visit to Überlingen

In 1995 a visit to Überlingen was arranged in conjunction with my friend and fellow sword dance fanatic, Renaat Van Craenenbroeck, founder and leader of the Lange Wapper team from Antwerp.²

On arrival in the town we were met by Bernhard Kitt, the current Number 1 **Platzmeister** (leader) of the team. Later that evening we joined Bernhard and two other team members for supper in the team's base in an ancient building known as **Aufkircher Tor**, a tower built over a gate in the walls which once surrounded the town. Some years ago the group approached the local authority with a request for a meeting place and were surprised and delighted to be granted use of this most fitting building.

Überlingen is in wine growing country in the south west of Germany and is on the northern shores of Lake Constance (known locally as Bodensee). Germany, Switzerland and Austria all have borders on the shores of the lake and the area attracts many tourists, although there are not many British visitors - as the area is off the usual package holiday tourist routes. The town relies heavily on tourism and there is little heavy industry in the area. Although this ensures few factories and limits eyesores and pollution, it also increases the problems of unemployment and seasonal employment. The town is well known as a **Bad-Kneipp** (Spa town) and has a number of famous "health farms and clinics" attended by the rich and famous. The cultural life of the area is rich and varied with festivals, Concerts and special tours (one concentrates on gardening and garden design) vying for a visitor's attention.

Many local people are conservative and have a strong feeling for tradition. They are also predominantly Catholic and supportive of church traditions. We were astonished to find that the church was almost full for the special Mass which formed part of the events which preceded the sword dance.

The history of the Überlingen tradition

The earliest written record of the sword dance dates from 1646 but popular opinion dates it from 1538. The Sword Dance Company's traditions, in common with many other historic Continental dances, were once regarded as the property of a powerful craft guild - in this case the Vintners' Guild. This ancestry has left the group with a number of characteristics - from the costume worn by the participants through to the method of recruiting and selecting new members to the Company.

The team claim that records of their Company date from 1538 when the Vintners' Guild was first mentioned in records. Some years later the town was said to have raised a fighting force to help repel an invasion by Swedish forces and as a result of the Guild's support they were granted the right to perform the sword dance. This may have been one of the reasons why the tradition survived through the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries - a period when the influence of craft guilds waned and such traditions were regularly banned by city authorities in other locations throughout the Continent.

The history of the Überlingen Sword Dance Company, gleaned from available records, is dealt with by Stephen Corrsin in his forthcoming book **Sword Dancing: a History**.³ Corrsin states:

As is so often the case with these sorts of popular customs, even in a prosperous and literate area such as this, the real origins of the **Schwerttanz** are obscure. From the mid-seventeenth to the early eighteenth centuries, the dancing was always at Shrovetide. The first reference dates from February 1646: "*On repeated application of the unmarried lads they are allowed the sword dance from 12 to 5 o'clock, however without musicians and without the girls dance.*"⁴ The use of the phrase "unmarried lads" may mean that the dance was done by journeymen and apprentices.

In the second reference, from 1670, we have what appears to be a refusal on the part of the town council to allow the dance:

"the vintners are permitted Shrovetide celebrations on the next Sunday and Thursday, as well as the three days of Shrovetide, only until 9 at night and no later, with the promised moderation: excepting the sword dance."

This implies that the dance had been done before without, perhaps, the "promised moderation." There are more references scattered through seventeenth and eighteenth century records, as the city's economic and political fortunes rose and fell. In 1784-85, for example, "*Because almost no wine was produced last fall, the vintners are not allowed (to perform) the sword dance*"⁵

Beginning in 1789, the records become more complete as the vintners began to keep their own chronicles, with the goal of preserving their guild heritage: **Ordnungs-Buch für die ledigen Rebleith** (Rule book for the Vintners).

The records are clear in positioning the sword dance as a Shrovetide custom. However, on seeing a video of the programme produced by a local television company⁶ depicting the day's events - including the procession and the sword dance - Corrsin was surprised that the two elements - the procession and the sword dance - have come together on one day in July. He suggests that this may have happened relatively recently and that the **Schweden prozession** (processions of the Swedes) and the Sword Dance were once separate customs, each held on its own traditional day. This view is confirmed by Renaat Van Craenenbroeck who adds that there are two **Schweden prozessions** in the town, the Company take part in both but perform the sword dance only after the second procession which is held on the second Sunday of July.

The current team - The Überlingen Schwerttanz Kompagnie

The group describe themselves as a "Sword Dance Company" but retain a number of characteristics, the structure and methods of operating, of a craft guild. They have an authoritarian structure and restrict membership, if not nowadays to men working in a specific craft, certainly to selected individuals. The Vintners' Guild have a rule book which sets out the basis of many of their traditions and practices - including a form of burial service for a deceased member, a feature found in the traditions of the Masonic orders (originally craft guilds) which have survived in Great Britain.

We found that the team members take great pride in their membership of the Company and in their customs but they were surprised to learn that sword dances existed in so many other countries. They had a strong conviction of the uniqueness of their tradition. They have assembled, in their base, a fascinating collection of written records and photographs relating to their dance which range in date from 1892 to recent performances.

Stephen Corrsin has established that there are records of the dance having been performed from 1789 to 1805, occasionally in the 1820's and then spasmodically until the 1930's. Performances were stimulated both by Shrovetide and by the visits of dignitaries to the town. The Company was reformed in the early 1950's following the granting of permission to carry arms which had been forbidden after the surrender of Germany at the end of the Second World War. This team was led by the father of the current leader.

Membership of the Company is strictly controlled by the group's officers who meet once a year to consider applications from prospective members who stand a better chance of acceptance if their fathers have participated in the Company before them, or if they have supported voluntary activities in the town. There are usually more applicants than vacancies, even though the Company totals in excess of thirty men.

Records of earlier performances indicate that the team have appeared out of season for visiting royalty and for local learned societies but today the Company seldom perform their sword dance in the town at any other time than on their traditional day in July, although they regularly participate in local charity and fund-raising events.

The Company have kept superb scrapbooks for more than forty years which photographically record the members of the company both in dance costume and at work in their everyday garb as butchers, farmers, office workers and so on - a fascinating feature which adds greatly to the interest of the scrapbooks.

The event

In England there is debate about use of the term "traditional" when applied to teams and dance performances. In the case of Überlingen there can be no other phrase to describe their once-a-year performance. The day is packed with customs and traditions which have the feel of having developed over many years.

The event we saw was held on the second Sunday in July - July 9th 1995, the day the Company nowadays regard as the traditional day for the sword dance to be performed after the second **Schweden prozession** (the first is on the Sunday after May 16th - the Company take part in the procession but do not dance on that day). The two processions are held to commemorate the successful defence of their town against a Protestant force of Swedish soldiers. The procession we saw started with a Mass usually held in the Cathedral but transferred to the town's second church on this occasion because of restoration work to the fabric of the Cathedral, and then processed through the town. At the end of the two hour procession there was a final Mass and only then is the Sword Dance performed, - once in the main town square and once outside Saint Nicholas' Cathedral.

The dancing ends at around 12.30 p.m. and after a reception by the town officials with short speeches and thanks to all involved in making the day a success, the Sword Dancers assemble and march off to the grounds of the local museum, which attractively overlooks the town and the lake, to enjoy an afternoon of food, wine, beer and singing.

The Sword Dancers day starts at 6.00am - sharp

We were delighted, and privileged, to be invited to join the team's key officials at the customary breakfast at 6.00 am. A party of fourteen, comprising four of the team officials, plus the **Fahnenträger** (Banner carrier), musicians and the masked character called **Hänsele** met in the Company's base. We were joined by three camera crews who were preparing a television documentary of the event, for a regional television company.

The breakfast of local sausages was taken with wine or water - no coffee, smoking or other stimulants being allowed.

Following the breakfast **Hänsele** was given a blessing by the leader of the Company and then "booted out" from the room to spend the rest of the day in silence on the fringes of the activity. All participants at the breakfast were then presented, by a woman in eighteenth century costume, with a sprig of rosemary which was worn on the left lapel. It was claimed by the dancers that the rosemary was to ensure that - should a man nod off during the lengthy church service which followed the smell of the rosemary would wake him.

I have also seen sprigs of rosemary worn by dancers who performed during pre-Lent in Moravia, Czechoslovakia in 1988.

The team officials and musicians then assemble and march to join the remainder of the group who assemble outside a house which is decorated with a large and dramatic painting of the sword dancers. It was at this house that the team formerly met on the Thursday of Madi-Gras before attending Mass in a chapel opposite and then touring the town.

The character of Hänsele

Perhaps the most distinctive element of the tradition is the part played by the character known as **Hänsele** who is masked and whose black costume is covered by tatters of brightly coloured cloth with small bells added. He carries, and occasionally cracks with great effect, a massive bull-whip. During the day the character is, by tradition, forbidden to speak and he is not allowed to enter the Church for the Mass or to take communion.

The grotesque figure of **Hänsele** in various costumes appears in many other customs in the area and is said to represent evil influences. The character we saw was a member of the Sword Dance Company but there is also an event in February each year at **Fasnacht** (Carnival) which involves a **Society of Hänsele** when up to two hundred participants dress in their regalia and process through the town.

The folk beliefs surrounding this character in Überlingen are fascinating. Popular belief has it that the town raised a fighting force of a hundred men to fight in the army of the Holy Roman Emperor. All but one of these recruits attended a Mass before leaving the town - the odd man out spent his time in hostels. He was the only one to be killed in the battle. The remaining men were awarded the right to perform the sword dance by the Emperor.

The role of **Hänsele** in the sword dance is to clear a space for the dancing (which his antics with his whip does very effectively), to announce the coming of the dancers and to collect money from bystanders.

The Schweden prozession

The **Schweden prozession** involves the Sword Dance Company but they are only one part of an event which involves most of the local organisations. After the Mass over five hundred people - Scouts, Church groups, the local band, representatives from neighbouring towns, members of the City Council and the Sword Dance Company - lined up and processed through the town. The largest group, and the most colourful, was the contingent of women and girls dressed in circa eighteenth century traditional costume. The Überlingen women wear an elaborate gold lattice head-dress shaped like a high tiara and creating a halo-like effect. The long dresses worn by the women are in many bright colours. Women from a nearby parish sported a similar lattice bonnet but in black and the colours of their dresses are more subdued. With the women were a group of young boys in sword dancers costume walking with girls in traditional dress and head-dresses.

The procession had as its central point the holy apparatus found in the religious **Pardons** (outdoor services) held in many Catholic countries. Behind colourful banners carried by boys dressed in white came flag bearers, holy statues and a canopy richly decorated and carried by four men - the canopy protected a priest who carried the holy relic and was flanked by young children who had just received their first communion. The procession stopped at shrines set up at key points on the route where hymns were sung and blessings given. As each service neared its end, a cannon high above the town was fired to signify that the **Schweden prozession** was about to move on to the next shrine.

The participants

The sword dance performance involved twelve dancers including the No 1 **Platzmeister**. There were a number of men with the party who did not dance and these, together with the **Hänsele**, the **Fahnenträger** and eight musicians (four with fife and four with side drum) brought the party up to thirty two.

Many of the members of the Überlingen Company are older than sword dancers in England - I estimate that the average age is over forty years with only a handful of men being under thirty years old. From the scrapbooks I was able to establish that the majority of members were traders (shop keepers, small businessmen etc.) with less teachers and professionals than in England.

The dancers were smartly turned out in a costume based on formal wear from the eighteenth century. During the day there were a number of "inspections" by the first **Platzmeister**. The dancers costume is a well tailored mid-calf length frock coat of dark blue over a red waistcoat with gold buttons, white wing collared shirt with an old fashioned black bow tie and black breeches with white socks of differing knitted patterns. Highly polished shoes have buckles of silver with red ribbon inserts. The musicians wore black frock coats and white waistcoats otherwise their costume is the same. All wore white gloves throughout the day.

All except the **Fahnenträger** wore black triangular hats. The **Fahnenträger** wore a military style cockade hat with a red feather down the centre, otherwise he was dressed the same as the dancers. His banner is triangular and approximately five feet from the pole to the point with fringe edging and a restrained, embroidered design of flowers. This banner was carried behind the musicians and in front of the main party and was waved from side to side as the team marched in the procession.

All members have a bow of orange and red ribbon on their left lapel which is also used to secure the sprig of rosemary. The team's officials, two of whom lead the troupe and two bring up the rear, also wear orange and red sashes over their right shoulders. Members of the group (except the **Fahnenträger**, musicians and



The Sword Dance Company meet regularly in their base in this listed building which forms part of the Gate in the original town walls.



While the team leaders enjoy their traditional breakfast in their Headquarters building the rest of the team assemble outside a house in the town which is decorated with a painting of the dancers and which has been used for this purpose for many years.

Hänsele) carry their sword in it's scabbard in their left hand - the sword is only drawn during the sword dance itself.

The dance display

Just after a quarter past eleven the imminent arrival of the Company in the town square was announced by a display of whip cracking by Hänsele. The team marched on with precision and great style to the music of fifes and drums, they lined up along one side of the dance area and the leader carried out the first inspection of his troupe. Each of the two displays was prefaced by the leader with his assistant formally requesting permission to perform the dance, firstly from the **Bürgermeister** for the town square display and then from the Deacon or Bishop for the display outside the Cathedral. Permission was given by both these dignitaries but the group insist that this is not simply a formality because if permission is not granted they would not be able to dance.

After the granting of permission the first **Platzmeister** and his assistant rejoined the group and carried out a further inspection in which the leader checked the line of members. The inspection being satisfactorily completed the leader gave commands for a series of salutes - hats off, hats on, draw swords, present swords, etc. - all done with military precision to the beat of the drums.

The dance involves twelve dancers who each draw their swords from their scabbards. The sword is a modern copy of a dress sword of the rapier type. The musicians start up with a traditional tune in 6/8 time and the dancers link up by grasping the point of the sword of the man in front but they never close the circle. Led by the leader they start the dance with a number of snake-like figure-of-eight moves then follows a figure known by the dancers as the **Maschen** (Mesh) in which two dancers stand still and form a high arch with one sword whilst the rest of the team snake round and pass under. The last dancer in each circuit passes under the arch but joins the stationary dancers and adds his sword to the arch. This movement is continued with the group of dancers who form the arch growing each time the team pass through. Finally the leader joins the arch and all have their swords held above their heads in a **Mesh**. Hänsele then moved into the centre under the swords, the **Fahnenträger** waved the banner over the group and the leader removed his hat and called for three cheers as the whole set moved slowly round clockwise. This move was regarded as particularly significant by Richard Wolfram in an article he wrote in the 1950's.

The dancers then reversed their movements to untie the Mesh shape and proceed to perform a move **Degensprung** which we would call single over which is followed by **Tor** (literally a Gate) similar to our single under performed over a sword held approximately twelve inches above the ground by the last two dancers followed by once under the same sword. This is followed by more

looped circuits and then, after the sword dance has lasted just over five minutes, the dancers line up with the rest of the party.

The whole of the dance is performed with a pronounced hop step with the left leg kicked forward - the degree of kick differed from dancer to dancer and it was noticeable that the performances we saw in Überlingen were a good deal more spirited, and covered more ground, than the dance I saw in Sint Niklaas and this was obviously due to the influence of a younger leader.

The Sword Dancers then sheath their swords and fourteen of them take a partner from the party of women in traditional costume who have waited on the sidelines during the sword dance. In two circles these couples then perform four short dances of differing tempos to traditional tunes played by the group's musicians - the male dancers carrying their sheathed swords in their left hands throughout the social dancing. The Company insist that this social dance element is part of their tradition and do not perform the sword dance without it. This sequence of "couples dancing" adds a further six minutes to the full display which lasts a total of approximately eighteen minutes in each location.

The dancers then regain their positions and, after further inspections and salutes, the group line up in pairs and process off led by the **Fahnenträger** followed by the musicians.

Overview

Of all the foreign teams I have seen the Überlingen Sword Dance Company made the most impact on me. The scale of the whole event, the drama of the procession and solemnity of the Catholic Mass, the style and precision of the participants, the superb weather and the help I was given by many English speaking local people all contributed to an event which will stay in my memory for many years to come.

I am pleased I made the 700 mile journey to Überlingen to see the event as the setting added much to the overall impression but, putting aside the impact of the surroundings and the associated traditions, the Überlingen Sword Dance has enormous character and cannot fail to impress.

Überlingen, and two other foreign teams mentioned in this article, Baden-Württemberg and Boerke Naas, hope to attend the international Sword Dance event to be held in Carlisle next May. The Überlingen team have expressed their preference to dance outdoors so lets hope for good weather!

References

1. Richard Wolfram; *Schwertanz und Männerbund* (Sword Dance and Men's Societies); (Kassel: Bärenreiter Verlag, 1935) - the translation summary is document ref. GRQ 30 in the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library, Cecil Sharp House, London. This was from part



The Sword Dance Company are just one of the local organisations who take part in the procession through the town. They march in style through the whole event.



An impressive part of the procession is a large group of women of all ages who were dressed in traditional costume. They were accompanied by a small number of boys, usually sons of dancers, dressed in small versions of the dancers costume.



of a work in three sections written by Wolfram but the manuscript for other parts was destroyed during the Second World War before it was published.

2. The visiting party comprised Renaat Van Craenenbroeck and his wife Marie-Christine Benoit (Puce), Maureen Tinker and myself.

3. Stephen D Corrsin; **Sword Dancing: a History**; (Enfield Lock: Hisarlik Press, date to be confirmed) - is to be published in May 1996 for the International Sword Dance event.

References 4 and 5 are from **Sword Dancing: a History**

4. Stolz, **Die Fasnacht in Überlingen** There is no further information on "the girls dance" [presumably this does not refer to the social dance which ends the display].

5. Theodor Lachmann, **Der Schwerttanz in Überlingen**, Alemannia, 14 (1886)

6. I have a VHS video copy of the television programme **Schwedenprozession und Schwerttanz in Überlingen** (Swedish Procession and The Sword Dance in Überlingen) made by Landesprogramm (Baden-Württemberg) as part of a series presenting local folklore called **Treffpunkt**. It has a German language commentary and is available for viewing by arrangement.

7. Trevor Stone; 'Sword dance traditions in Czechoslovakia' (in **Rattle Up My Boys** Issue 2, Series 2: Winter 1988/89).

8. Leander Petzoldt: **Volkstumliche Feste**, Munchen, 1982, p222

9. Richard Wolfram, **Der Anschnitt**, Nummer 4, Jahrgang 7

See also: Violet Alford; **Sword Dance and Drama**, (London: Merlin Press, 1962), pp 117-18

Trevor Stone, September 1995

I would like to thank our hosts in Germany for their kindness, especially Bernhard Kitt and the Kirchmann family who made us welcome and supplied the video recording of the television programme. I am grateful to Steve Corrsin for permission to quote from the manuscript of his book and for his comments on the video records I took during my visit. I would also like to thank Renaat Van Craenenbroeck for his adding his recollections of the event and Gordon Ridgewell for many helpful observations on the draft of this article

The International Sword Event in Carlisle

At the time of writing there is some problem with a location for the event but, in the hope that this will soon be resolved, we hope to welcome the following teams who have already expressed interest:

OVERSEAS TEAMS

For the majority of these overseas teams this event will be their first visit to Britain. Their dances have developed to suit the conditions and related customs in their own country - for example the Italian teams perform a dance with a number of set piece displays, the hoisting on a platform of swords, capturing 'Moors' and a leader who reads a proclamation, a maypole figure and much more. The total dance lasts over 20 minutes (compared with the 5 or 6 minutes taken for an English sword dance) and is usually performed out of doors.

Some teams will not be dancing every day of the weekend.

Bagnasco Bal do Sabre (Italy)

A dance team from the Piedmont area (which has a number of teams) in the North West of Italy. The Bagnasco dancers carry curved scimitars and their dance includes a distinctive maypole figure. The dance is performed to the beat of drum alone. Turkish style costumes with golden pantaloons, red shirts, green waistcoats and striped turbans.

Baden-Württemberg Sword Dancers (Germany)

Details to follow.

Boerke Naas (Belgium)

A seven man team from Saint Niklaas, in an area rich with historical references to sword dancing, who perform their own sword dance, based on the English style but performed with long broadswords much bigger and heavier than the

usual English swords. The dancers also perform the surviving Flemish "Trawantel" dance which is performed with sticks and a hoop.

Bystrice pod Lopenikem (Czechoslovakia)

In Southern Moravia there are a number of sword dance groups who traditionally tour their villages in a Carnival in the days before Lent. The team from Bystrice pod Lopenikem is one such team and it is known locally as "The Recruits" as the team once comprised young men who were about to go into the armed forces. Four dancers usually perform their short dance. They travel in black hats with long white feathers - but the hats are taken off to dance.

Fennestrelle Bal du Sabre (Italy)

There was a major International Folk Dance Event held in England in 1935 - an Italian sword dance team from the village of Fennestrelle in Piedmont, in the North West of Italy, attended the event and attracted interest in their performance of the traditional sword dance from their home area. We welcome the current team back to England. Their long dance is from the same area, and is similar to, the Bagnasco dance and is performed to the beat of drum alone. The dancers wear breeches - one leg red and the other green, waist sashes with a criss cross pattern, white shirts with a sash over one shoulder, striped 'pork pie' hats.

Half Moon Sword (USA)

A well established and skilful women's dance team from New York who perform English Rapper and Longsword dances - they have a distinctive version of the Papa Stour dance. The team have travelled widely and are organisers of an annual "Sword Ale" dance meeting held in New York in February every year.

In de Kring (France)

This Dunkirk team was formed six years ago as part of a local choir - they decided to breakaway and concentrate on sword dancing. They knew of historical records of a sword dance having been performed in their area and decided to recreate a dance with the help of continental dance expert Renaat van Craenenbroeck. Their dance, in common with many Continental sword dances, ends with the Captain being hoisted into the air on a platform of swords whilst he flourishes large flag.

Komna (Czechoslovakia)

One of a dozen sword dance teams from the country formerly known as Czechoslovakia. The Komna team travel around and perform their short dance in their home areas "to bring good luck" on the days before the start of Lent. The four dancers are accompanied on their tours by a large group of characters in various exotic fancy dress costumes and musicians with all types of instruments.

Lange Wapper dansgroep (Belgium)

Founded over 25 years ago the Lange Wapper group, by regularly inviting other sword dance teams to their traditional Half Lent event in Antwerp, have acted as a catalyst for this International event. Their eleven man dance is a reconstruction based on Flemish dances described in old records and depicted in a painting and etching. The haunting music is provided by drums and traditional instruments such as Hurdy-Gurdies. They are named after a traditional giant who was reputed to tour the town at night and throw drunks into the canal. The dancers wear cast brass bells which give their dance a distinctive sound.

Longwood Rapper (USA)

An all-male team - noteworthy amongst American dance teams - who are from the Boston area and who perform the English Rapper dance. Watch out for their updated calling-on song which is used to introduce the performers and don't miss their 'Betsy', who has 'Americanised' the activities of the character.

Markina ko Zerutxa (Spain)

A team from the twin towns of Markina and Xemein in Biscay in the Spanish region of Euskadi. The team perform a wide range of Basque dances from Northern Spain including the local sword dance - the 'Xemeingo ezpata dantza', similar to the well known Sword Dance of Guipuzcoa Province. Markina are one of a number of dance teams from the Basque area who perform sword dances.

Marlboro Morris & Sword (USA)

An American women's dance team from Vermont who specialise in performing English sword dances, in particular their version of the dance from Handsworth in South Yorkshire.

Orion Sword (USA)

A mixed sexes team from Boston, America, a town which is a major centre of folk activity. The team dance their own interpretations of a number of English Longsword dances. They are excited by the prospect of dancing with so many teams who have a long established tradition of sword dancing.

Papa Stour (Shetlands)

A UK sword tradition with a long and well recorded history - the dance was originally performed by men from the remote Shetland island of Papa Stour, north off the coast of Scotland and almost nearer to Norway than to the UK mainland. One of the early records of this tradition was by Sir Walter Scott when he visited the Shetlands in 1814. The dance is now performed by a team on Mainland Shetland. The performance involves a spoken prologue and epilogue. The seven dancers are said to represent the Seven Knights of Christendom.

Quevaucamps Sword Dancers (Belgium)

The newest of the dance teams to attend the event, this team from Southern Belgium perform a sword dance they have developed in conjunction with Continental sword dance expert Renaat van Craenenbroeck.

Toronto Women's Sword (Canada)

A Canadian women's team who perform English sword dances at a dramatic and impressive speed. The team wear white trousers and shirts with a pink waist sashes and pink socks.

San Sebastian (Spain)

A well travelled Spanish dance team from the Northern Spanish coast who perform a wide range of dances including two Basque sword dances which are found in their home region.

Strani/Javorina (Czechoslovakia)

From Southern Moravia - formerly part of Czechoslovakia, the Strani team maintain an active sword dance tradition in their home village and they also travel widely. Their's is a carnival dance done to a sung accompaniment provided by women in traditional dress and to much whooping from the dancers.

The team have two costumes - white shirts, cream trousers decorated with black braid and jackets (worn 'off the shoulder') and 'pork pie hats' or for their carnival costumes their trousers and waistcoats are in black and are richly embroidered and trimmed with bright colours. Their 'swords' are made of wood and painted red and decorated with brass studs and rings.

Überlingen Sword Dance Company (Germany)

A dance, possibly the earliest recorded sword dance on the Continent, which is performed by members of the Vintners Guild from Überlingen on the shores of Lake Constance, who claim the right to perform the dance in return for their loyalty when their town was under siege by Swedish troops during the Thirty Years War. The team performs to pipe and drum and includes a flag bearer and a grotesque character known as "Hänsele" who uses a long bull-whip to clear the space. Their performance ends with "couples" dances to varying tempos when the men are joined by women dressed in 18th Century style costumes.

BRITISH TEAMS

Addison Rapper

Details to follow.

Barnsley Sword

Founded in 1963 and dancing both Longsword (Haxby and Kirkby Malzeard dances) and the Newbiggin rapper dance this team come from the town of Barnsley in South Yorkshire. For the Haxby dance they wear waistcoats decorated with many red rosettes.

Bishop Gundulf's Sword

A mixed sexes team from Boston, America, a town which is a major centre of folk activity. The team dance their own interpretations of a number of English Longsword dances. They are excited by the prospect of dancing with so many teams who have a long established tradition of sword dancing.

Carlisle Sword, Morris & Clog

The Carlisle team perform their version of the Papa Stour Longsword dance they perform two Longsword dances of their own composition - one of which is already going through the 'folk' process as it has been copied as far away as America. They also perform rapper and "Cotswold" Morris and Clog dances.

Castleford Sword

The Castleford teams was founded by the late Rennie Pickles. They dance the Escrick Longsword dance and a rapper dance, and from a mining village in South Yorkshire. In common with most other English Longsword dances the Castleford dance ends with the interweaving of the swords into a "lock" which is proudly displayed above the team.

Claro Sword & Morris

From Harrogate in North Yorkshire this men's team mix a selection of "Cotswold" Morris dances with two Longsword dances - the dance from the villages of North Skelton (in Cleveland) and the one from Kirkby Malzeard (in North Yorkshire).

Clydeside Rapper

This Rapper sword team have made a study of some of the recorded sword dances from Scotland. Their current dance is a reconstruction of the sword dance from Elgin - the team hope to arrange a reconstruction of the Perth Glovers Guild dance.

Coventry Mummers

The traditional folk play, usually called the 'Mummers play', was often associated with the Longsword dance. This mummers team are from Coventry in the West Midlands and this is their 30th year. They perform a number of folk plays based on the usual traditional formats. They wear various costumes for various plays.

Dorset Button Rapper

The original Dorset Buttons team is a well established women's team. The team's musicians, most of them men, were determined not to be outdone and in 1990 took up Rapper dancing in a distinctive and unusual style. In common with a number of Rapper teams they have competed at the DERT - the Dancing England Rapper Tournament which has done much to promote Rapper dancing.

East Saxon Sword

At one time sword dances were concentrated on specific parts of Northern England - nowadays the dance traditions have spread throughout the country. This team draws it's members from Essex but they travel widely performing Rapper and Longsword dances - their last trip was to Canada.

Flamborough Longsword

A sword dance team was well established and flourishing when, in 1912, Cecil Sharp visited the small fishing village of Flamborough on the Yorkshire coast. The current team seldom leave their village and we are delighted to welcome them to this event. Their dark blue knitted sweaters with a knitted pattern which is distinctive to their village was used mainly to identify the bodies of any sailors who were drowned at sea.

Gift Rapper (Women's Team)

Sword dancing was, in the past, a male only pastime, possibly because of its ceremonial associations. However the dance style has been taken up by a number of women's teams. This team is proud to have been taught one of the dances developed by the Kirkburton Rapier Dancers plus a rapper dance.

Goathland Plough Stots (including a junior team)

A team with a long history, the last revival after a break of 60 years was in 1922! The team are known as 'Plough Stots' because of their association in the past with the Plough Blessing tradition when, after a Church service, a plough was taken around the village to bring good luck. The current team sometimes take out a model plough. 'Stot' is a local dialect word for the bullocks which used to drag the plough. The jacket colours of pink or pale blue are said to have been chosen in the past to suit the politics of the household the team were visiting.

Grenoside Traditional Longsword Dancers

A long established traditional team from a village near Sheffield, their dance is one of the few English dances which do not end with the display of the sword lock - the Grenoside men display that early in their dance - just before the

Captain is 'beheaded'! The dancers wear clogs and the leader wears a hat of animal skin.

High Spen Blue Diamond Rapper

The High Spen Blue Diamonds are a traditional rapper sword dance team from the pit village of High Spen (near Chester-le-Street) in the North East of England. They began as a boys team in 1926, taught by Fred Forster. The 100 year old village dance is still in the care of the Forster family. The High Spen tradition has some 40 figures mainly grouped into three dances. This is their 70th anniversary year and we wish them well.

Kirkburton Rapier Dancers

Revived 22 years ago the Kirkburton team heard of the existence of a 'Rapier' dance in the village and, because the details of the dance had been lost, they created their own range of distinctive dances. They are from a village near Huddersfield in West Yorkshire. The dancers wear clogs and black their faces on their New Year outing.

Pengwyn Rapper (Women's team)

Rapper was formerly a 'men only' tradition but a growing number of women are taking up the dance. This women's team, based at Byker's Cumberland Arms (near Newcastle), proved their worth by winning their class at the 1995 Dancing England Rapper Tournament despite the fact that this was only their fourth time out in public!

Redcar Sword

An established team who were assembled in the early 1970's to perform the Longsword dance from the nearby village of Greatham.

Ryburn Longsword Dancers (mixed team)

Founded only 18 months ago and based in Ripponden in West Yorkshire. They dance the Bellerby dance.

Rynkild Rabble

Details to follow.

Sallyport Rapper

Details to follow.

Snark Rapper

An "occasional" team of dancers from a number of other teams, Snark have visited Belgium and the United States and are seen at many events in the UK.

Southport Swords

Founded by John Smith in 1968, the team perform dances from North Skelton (including their own compilation figure which ends with a triangular lock) plus the Papa Stour sword dance and Morris dances from villages in the Cotswolds.

Spn Valley Longsword

Founded 21 years ago this team are based in Cleckheaton in West Yorkshire. They perform the Longsword dances from Helmsley and North Skelton.

Stevenage Sword

Details to follow.

Stone Monkey Rapper

Many teams owe their origins to the teaching or organising activities of an individual or small group. Such a group exist in the vicinity of Derby. Stone Monkey Rapper were encouraged, trained and led by Phil Heaton, one of the group who initiated an annual showcase for traditions called Dancing England.

Thrales Rapper

Details to follow.

White Boys of Mann

The White Boys are a team who perform a number of dances and traditions from the Isle of Man, including a sword dance associated with a Manx mummers play collected earlier this century by Mona Douglas. The White Boys traditionally toured homes to bring good luck.

Wype Doles Sword Dancers

Founded four years ago this team is from Whittlesey in Cambridgeshire. They dance a number of dances loosely based on the notations of earlier dances from

Death of Fred Myers

The death occurred in the Summer of Fred Myers, a member of the important Grenoside Rover Scout team which, in the early 1950's, went on to form the basis of the current Grenoside Sword Dancers. For many years Fred Myers was the Secretary of the Grenoside team. He was thorough, efficient and a pleasure to deal with. When I got to know him, in 1990 shortly before he gave up dancing out with the team, I realised that he was one of the old school with a real pride in the tradition! The last time I met him, when Grenoside toured the village in January 1995, he was delighted to welcome the dancers and was generous in his advice to them - and in his hospitality.

At his funeral service Ted Frost, the past leader of the Grenoside team gave a moving and often amusing series of recollections including the time that Fred told some of the men off when they stuck their swords into soft earth!

Death of Richard Wolfram

Dr Richard Wolfram, who carried out research into sword dancing in Germany and Austria, died recently. He presented a paper on his research into sword dancing at the conference held as part of the International Folk Dance Festival in 1935. His work was important and is often quoted (see the references to the report on the Überlingen Sword Dance event in this issue).

Dr Wolfram was born September 16th 1901 and he died on May 30th 1995.

Death of Joe Brown BEM



In Issue 3, Series 1 I printed an interview with, and reported on the Sword Dance teaching activities of Joe Brown. Later, in the newsletter with Issue 3, Series 2 (Spring), details were announced of the presentation to Joe of the English Folk Dance & Song Society's Gold Medal at the Whitby Competitive Festival in 1989. Since then Joe's activities, understandably for a man over 90 years old, have been reduced and after a short illness Joe died in Whitby Hospital on Sunday August 13th 1995, aged 94 years.

The next issue, the last in Series 5, will carry the promised article on Longsword in print - postcards and the like. It will also update plans for the Sword Spectacular. I also hope to print the citations for the presentation of the English Folk Dance and Song Society's Gold Medal to Ivor Allsop and the widow of the late Harry Pitts.

Awaiting publication is a fascinating article on sword locks by Rhett Krause. Any other submissions gratefully received.

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

Joseph Weatherill Brown was born in Whitby and, for over 25 years he was groundsman at the towns Grammar School until his retirement in 1970. He was educated at Friends School at Great Ayrton where he first became interested in morris and sword dancing. It was whilst working in Ravenscar in the early 1950's that he first formed a junior team and in 1951 a team of Sea Scouts trained by Joe danced at an EFDSS event at the Albert Hall. Since then he has trained and inspired many youngsters and regularly entered two or three teams in the Whitby Competitive Festival for which he was a member of the organising committee and Vice President.

In Whitby Joe was well known and regarded as a character. Until a few years ago he was often to be seen cycling through the town on an old 'sit-up-and-peg' cycle. He was a member of two local choirs, and had close links with the Sea Scouts, local churches and other organisations. Joe brought teams to attend Longsword weekends (in 1981 and 1984) and was well known to many sword dancers. We will miss his mixture of eccentricity and commitment.

Ivor's book

Work is proceeding apace on the book, written by Ivor Allsop and being produced by Tony Barrand, which will contain the accepted notations for 26 Longsword dances, supported by background information. More details of this welcome publication later.

Team leaflet produced by Grenoside

I am always delighted to receive copies of literature put out by teams. In my view the more literature available to the general public the better, especially when it puts over a balanced story, avoids the clichés and is informative on the background to the tradition. I was pleased to see the latest offering by Grenoside which I understand has been a long time in the planning stage. It gives well presented background to the team including a photograph of the team from 1894.

Bibliography on Morris Dancing

Following the issue by Vaughan Williams Memorial Library of Steve Corrsin's bibliography on Sword Dancing I have received a copy of *An Introductory Bibliography on Morris Dancing* by Mike Heaney 2nd edition, Library Leaflet No 19). I have found these publications invaluable and I urge anyone with the slightest interest in Morris or Sword to get a copy - available from the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library at £3 plus 50p for post and packing each. Cheques should be payable to EFDSS.

Dance dates

Only two events have been notified, both overseas -

In De Kring (Dunkirk) - Sunday March 4th

Lange Wapper (Antwerp) - Sunday, March 17th 1996

The first outing of a new Belgian team from Quevaucamps may take place late in March. Contact me for more details if you are interested.

The next issue (the last in Series 5) will carry Boxing Day/New Year outings - send your details in ASAP.

The details of the Gold Badge awards to Ivor Allsop and (posthumously) to Harry Pitts (referred to in the last issue) have been arranged. The presentation to Ivor will be held at the Society's Annual General meeting on Saturday, November 11th and that to Harry's widow will be at the Carol Festival on Sunday, December 17th; both to be held at Cecil Sharp House.

Contributions welcome....

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