



RATTLE UP My Boys

A quarterly publication for those with an interest in sword dancing

Issue 1, Series 7 Spring 1998

For some years I have been aware that Andrew Kennedy (who has danced with Gallus Morris, Clydeside Rapper, Carlisle Sword and Morris, North British Rapper - and others) was researching sword dances from Scotland. Progress toward a reconstruction of the Elgin Dance became a regular topic of conversation whenever we met. When I heard that he had moved to the South of England (he currently lives in West Sussex) I assumed that his interest in things Scottish may die away. I was delighted when Andrew sent the enclosed report on the research he has done so far. He writes:

"You may remember that I started out a good few years ago looking at the Perth dance. Well, I accumulated bits and pieces and found along the way that I was becoming more interested in the Elgin dance, or, more accurately, in the Elgin dancers, since they were all named and it seemed likely that I might be able to find out a little about the people who did these dances. I found out more than I expected, although not what I had expected when I began.

Meanwhile I had put together a dance which went under the name of the Elgin Sword Dance. Clearly a modern invention, it came about as occupational therapy for a dancer who had been badly injured by a car and who, while not yet up to rapper, wanted to start dancing again. It was a simple dance for five men, with four figures (one adapted from Papa Stour), done to a brisk 9/8 jig. This was in 1992, with Clydeside. By this time I was dancing more with Carlisle, who had been toying for years with the idea of a five man dance because of a local record they had. As Squire (1992-3) I encouraged this, contributing one of the Elgin figures to what became the Bampton Weavers' Dance. Meanwhile, Clydeside had developed my "Elgin", giving it more of a Yorkshire feel. I believe they still dance it on occasion.

The idea lay dormant while I moved south and got settled. Then I started on the Elgin article again, and things began to fall into place.

This year North British Rapper danced a revived version of the dance I taught Clydeside, but with a chorus in between each figure. We danced it again at Saddleworth. One figure has changed a little because that's the way I remembered it after a five-year gap, but it seems fine. We are now going to be dancing it again in December, for Folkworks' "Wassail" show. By then it will have acquired a fifth figure

and retained the chorus. With its right-foot start and a reel for the chorus it has an undoubted Scottish feel.

Going back over my notes from Elgin itself I realise the importance of the guising aspect of the dance. For now this will have to mean making the dance as lively as possible and, as a compromise, blacking our faces. I realise that authenticity requires the wearing of masks, but I've never yet found a design I'd be happy to dance in. There's also the question of costume: for now we are confining ourselves to making our waistcoats as bright as possible, but if we are to stick with it we shall have to think about coats and headwear (apparently it was commonplace for men and women to swap when guising).

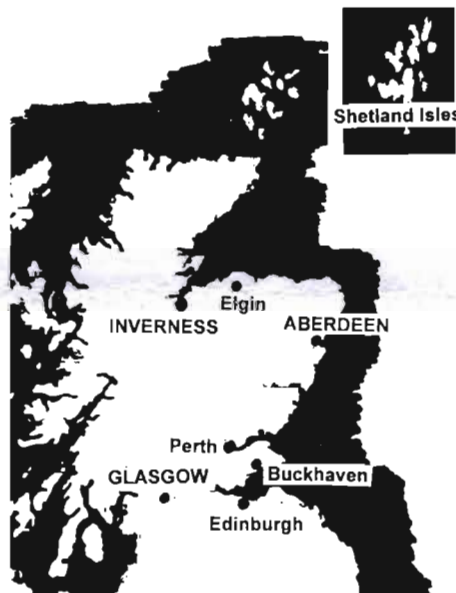
In due course I shall be sending you a short piece about the Scottish sword dances in general, but don't hold your breath. It will be difficult to do any more about Perth from here in Sussex."

The Elgin Sword Dancers who they were and why they did it.

by Andrew Kennedy

Many dancers will have heard about the "Morris dancer's" costume which survives in the Scottish city of Perth, and some will be aware that the Perth dance (in fact a sword dance) was not the only one of its kind. The town of Elgin saw a sword dance performed under very different circumstances.

Elgin is situated about three miles inland on the River Lossie, on Scotland's Northeast coast, to the east of Inverness. Despite its location so far north it is culturally a Lowland town. In earlier, unsettled times the people feared attacks



**Final details of the Second Sword Spectacular inside
May 21st to 25th 1998, based on Whitby**

from what they regarded as Highland savages, and by the 13th Century the burghesses were recognised as a merchant guild and the trades formed themselves into Corporations, gaining representation on the Town Council, which in turn elected the MP. By the standards of the day it was a prosperous and politically advanced burgh. (1)

The facts are these:-

"7th January 1623:- James Bonyman, Alex Petrie, John Petrie, Robt. Dunbar, Archibald Law. Theas past in an sword dance in Paul Dunbar his closs and in the kirkyeard with maskis and wissoris on their faces." Each "gwysser" was fined 40s" (2)

Much of what is known about the Elgin sword dancers survives because of the religious attitudes of the time. The Calvinist Reformation sought to purge the Church of superstitions, of corruption, and of pagan or Romish practices. At the same time the political vacuum caused by Queen Mary's exile and abdication had led to the government of the Church from below, theoretically by the Churchgoers themselves, rather than by royal authority as had happened in the Church of England. Each parish elected a body of "elders" to undertake the daily business of the parish; the congregation as a whole appointed the Minister; and disciplinary matters were dealt with by the elders sitting as a court, the Kirk Session. A group of parishes made a presbytery, and every year delegates from every parish met as the General Assembly, to settle matters concerning the Kirk as a whole.

The local Kirk Sessions quickly became very powerful, and the boundary between civil and ecclesiastical jurisdiction could be rather blurred. The minutes of the Elgin Kirk Session keep returning to the same issues: the enforcement of regular Church attendance; the outlawing of profane pastimes and forbidden rites; and accusations of witchcraft (these were rarely accepted and seem to have been more to do with the settling of scores). The old festivals, even Christmas, were outlawed because no day was seen to equal, let alone surpass, the Sabbath. (3, 4 & 5)

Examples include: -

- 1580 - an order forbidding the lighting of fires on St John's Eve;
- 1581-2 - order forbidding the lighting of midsummer (St John's or St Peter's) or midwinter (St Nicholas') fires, or the ringing of bells on Uphellie Eve (Uphalie Day - the first day after the ending of the Christmas festivities, hence Epiphany, the 12th [or sometimes 13th] night); (6)
- 1596, December - session forbids use of church yard for any pastime - 40s fine; also forbids guising or dancing anywhere in town at any time - £5 per household where this happens;
- 1598, December - several men convicted of offences including dancing, wearing a woman's coat, and having blacked or masked faces;
- 1599, December - guising & dancing in Churchyard again forbidden;
- 1600, January - girl fined for guising in a man's coat; twelve women convicted of singing, dancing, and guising;
- 1600, May - Master of the grammar school fined half a year's salary for engaging a piper, buying bells and dancing clothes, and allowing the scholars to perform; (guising and dancing forbidden, followed by prosecutions, in May, 1603; December 1603; December 1604; and so on). (7)

It was not just seasonal festivities that were banned: -

- 1601 - people cautioned for making an idolatrous pilgrimage to a chapel;
- 1602, (January) - eight people imprisoned and made to repent for making a barefoot pilgrimage to a Speyside chapel, drinking at the (holy) well, and visiting a cave there for its healing powers. The punishment was to continue weekly until August; two of the offenders were described as servants (as we shall see, a different class of person from those undertaking the midwinter festivities), and by February one man was still refusing to swear not to repeat the pilgrimage.

Four more admitted barefoot pilgrimages to the chapel in March, and another four in April.

The prohibitions and prosecutions continued into the 1620's, 30's, 40's, and even 50's - the old customs were not easily eradicated, and it is against this background that the sword dance took place. (8)

Sword Dancing elsewhere in Scotland

The Elgin dance is not an isolated example in this period, and many of the dances enjoyed official patronage, at least for a time.

EDINBURGH

- in 1588 the City authorities paid for costumes, hats, and bells for six dancers and a fool as part of the celebrations for the marriage of Queen Mary to the Dauphin.
- in 1590 they paid for 12 flowered hats, sets of bells, and pairs of white shoes for the sword dancers, honouring a visit by Anne of Denmark.
- in 1617, in honour of the return of King James, they paid for a hobby-horse, 5 sets of bells, and a musician. (9, 10)

PERTH

- in 1617 the City Council commanded the Skinners Incorporation to provide for a sword dance, at a cost of £40.
- in 1633 they again ordered a sword dance, at a cost of £23 - 1 shilling, to mark the King's visit. (11)

Sir Walter Scott tells of dances from Papa Stour and Buckhaven, although it is hard to say just how far back in time they can be placed. All these dances are located in East coast ports, although only the Papa Stour and Buckhaven dances are linked to fishermen. Given the poor land communications of the time, and the fact that most long distance and heavy-goods transport was by water, the sword dances could have been spread by any travellers and for a variety of reasons (see also Beadnell and Flamborough, further down the coast). (12)

There is also a 16th Century Scots ballad describing the ritual killing of a bull and likening it to the beheading in a Morris dance (in this period the term "Morris" applied equally to all forms of "ritual" dance). (13)

ELGIN

We come back, then, to James Bonyman, Alexander Petrie, John Petric, Robert Dunbar, and Archibald Law performing a sword dance outside Paul Dunbar's house and also in the Churchyard, wearing masks and visors on their faces, and this at Yuletide.

As we have seen, for decades the Kirk had been attempting to suppress Yuletide celebrations, reminding people every December of the consequences of ignoring the prohibitions. The younger people of the town seem to have regarded this as a challenge.

The Dancers

James Bonyman

His father, John, was a burghess and a pillar of the Kirk. Already active in town life by 1596, in 1598 he was described as an elder and "searcher", with the job of reporting on after-hours drinking and enforcing Church attendance. In 1603, a bailie (a sort of magistrate), he and James Petrie (Alexander's father) were involved in appointing the new schoolmaster. He was still an elder in 1615, and left 50 marks (33 shillings) to the hospital in 1626.

James' elder brother, another John, was in trouble with the Kirk Session in May, 1622, for being part of a group of 19 men and 11 women (including John Petrie's brother, James) who were accused of being together in Spynie Wood (nearby) from 11.00pm until 4.00am on a Saturday night despite Sunday being a fast day.

James himself first comes to light around this time. He appears to have been born round about 1600, had three recorded children, and first fallen foul of the Kirk when fined 40 shillings for being part of the sword dance. That May he was fined 1 mark (13 shillings and 4 pence) for running profanely up the high street,

plus 20 shillings for missing Church one Sunday, drinking with others, not paying his guising fine, and breaking out of goal! (And yet all that together amounted to less than the fine for guising and dancing at Yuletide). In July, 1626, he was in trouble for taking part in a blasphemous pledge of friendship at the market cross between 3.00 & 4.00am. In August, 1629, he and his wife, Janet, were summonsed for failing to keep the Sabbath. After this he appears to have settled down, and by 1650 he was made an honorary burgess for having served the town as a soldier.

Janet herself was taken before the Kirk Session in August, 1623, for ripely insulting another woman, and in 1637 she was gaoled for adultery until such time as she might give surety for her good behaviour. (14 - 17)

John and Alexander Petrie

These were the sons of James Petrie, a merchant burgess of Elgin, who by 1593 was already on record as being a major taxpayer on account of his extensive land holdings. He and his family were no strangers to controversy: in 1593 his wife, Elspeth, was slanderously accused of witchcraft by one Annapill Thomson; in 1609 he and two of his sons, James and John, had to put up 400 marks as surety that they would not harm various people named Cumminings, Johnsons, and Hays; and in 1613 Elspeth was again accused of witchcraft this time by Janet Nicoll (on the other hand, in 1622 she and two Bonyman women were before the Session for accusing Grissall Urrall of witchcraft). Nevertheless, by 1603 he was a baillie and by 1613 an elder.

John was his second son, and old enough to have been considered capable of harming his father's enemies by 1609. He was named as one of those who were fined for the incident in the wood in 1622. He seems to have kept out of trouble after the sword dancing, and by 1651 he was a burgess and freeman of the town.

Alexander was the fourth son. He was with the others in the wood, he was one of the sword dancers, but unlike his brother he does not seem to have learned from his experiences. In May, 1623, he was fined 40 shillings for "uttering presumptuous speeches". In May, 1626, he and two others were fined 1 mark each for "riding ... the grey mare". Nevertheless, in March, 1631 he became Kirk treasurer, and that October an elder! By 1648 he was described as a vintner, and in October, 1657 he became a councillor. However, in 1661 he and his wife were accusing Isobel Cumming of witchcraft, but, even so, by 1670 he was a baillie. In 1674, feeling his age, he gave up the Church lands he had been renting, and we hear no more of him.

Robert Dunbar

The son of another Robert, a Kirk elder, the younger Robert's only serious brush with the authorities was the sword dance. After this he crops up as an officer of the burgh (1636), a customs collector (1639), merchant burgess (1643), vintner (1648), and town councillor (1657). He and some of the Bonymans were involved in a slander case in 1631, and in 1646 he and Jean Bonyman were ordered to pay a gardener for his services. (In January, 1636 his brother, Alexander, was punished for the clinking of basins through the town on Uphaly eve.) (20 - 22)

Archibald Law

Of good family, Archibald seems to have led a quiet life. His father, James, was a former Snowdon Herald at the Court of the Lord Lyon in Edinburgh, and had been Sheriff Clerk of Elgin and Moray, in which capacity he had assisted James Rutherford, the Provost, in collecting taxes.

Rutherford went on to marry James' daughter (Archibald's sister), having represented Elgin at the 1615 Parliament. Rutherford had, in 1605, admitted dancing in the Canonry Churchyard at night and marching through the town with a piper - and this on the 26th of December. (23 - 7)

Paul Dunbar

No link has been made between Paul, on whose property the men danced, and Robert Dunbar. Paul was a gardener, older than the dancers (in 1597 he had been in trouble with the Session for working on the Sabbath and subsequently trying to avoid going to Church), and out of a different social set. In 1630 he was

ordered to present his son to the Session for being cheeky to the beadle. His offence seems to have had more to do with simple disregard for the Kirk than the others' youthful high spirits. (28 - 9)

Conclusions

Knowing all this enables us to put both the dance and the dancers into context. A glance through the relevant dates shows a consistent pattern of December prohibitions followed by January summonses, and a further series of May time incidents. The old seasonal customs clearly had a hold, and yet whatever their origins they do not seem to have contained any religious significance since their adherents tended to settle down as they grew older, to be replaced by a new generation of seasonal revellers. The example of the forbidden pilgrimages is of a different nature, since it seems to have attracted a different type of person, and out of a genuine belief in the value of pre-reformation customs.

The dancers themselves were mostly drawn from the educated, merchant class. They formed a close business and social circle (some examples are: Bonyman's brother and the Petries were involved in the 1622 woodland incident; the Petries' mother joined two Bonyman women in an accusation of witchcraft; Alexander Petrie and Robert Dunbar both became vintners; Bonyman, John Petrie, and Robert Dunbar became burgesses; Dunbar and Alexander Petrie became town councillors; and Dunbar and the Bonymans were several times involved together in litigation).

Archibald Law was slightly different, belonging more to the administrative than the merchant class. By and large they all seem to have had their bit of youthful rebellion and settled down to become respectable members of Elgin society, although, despite four of them having had fathers who were Kirk elders, only Alexander Petrie went on to become an elder himself.

The Elgin sword dance differed from what is known of the examples from Perth and Edinburgh in that whereas they were officially sponsored as part of larger civic celebrations, it was a spontaneous expression of seasonal festivities which persisted in the face of official disapproval. Where the Perth and Edinburgh performances were dances in their own right, in Elgin the stress was on the guising, of which the sword dance was just one expression.

I must have been reading too much, as I came to this area expecting to find a dance performed by fishermen in time of hardship, or in commemoration of the Old Religion, or maybe just as an expression of community solidarity and identity, yet found instead a rare example of a folk custom untainted by collectors or folklorists, showing an activity which must have been deeply rooted and yet was performed, contrary to most current theories, by young, middle-class men for nothing more than fun. Let's face it, delete the "young" and that's just what we have to-day.

Footnote

On the 11th November, 1618, within the Burgh of Elgin, Thomas Grant was "struck throw the craig (through the neck, throat,) (30) with a rapper" and wounded mortally. On the same occasion, Patrik Grant was run "throw the bellie with a rapper". (31)

Unless some itinerant miners were dancing particularly recklessly, this leaves no doubt as to the origin of the word "rapper" - simply, as some have long maintained, a Northern dialect word for a sword.

This also clarifies the Perth reference to "schering [i.e. cutting] rapers" (32), regarded by some as a great puzzle, since a rapier cannot, by definition, have a cutting edge. While it should in any case have been obvious that some other sort of sword was meant, the matter is now beyond all doubt.

Notes

- (1) Mackie, J. D. - A History of Scotland, chapter 9
- (2) Minutes of the Elgin Kirk Session - in Cramond's "The Records of Elgin", v2, p177
- (3) Mackie, *ibid.*
- (4) Kirk Session Minutes, various pages

- (5) Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary
- (6) Jamieson's Dictionary of the Scottish Language
- (7) Kirk Session Minutes
- (8) Kirk Session Minutes
- (9) Mill, - Medieval Plays in Scotland, pp 15 & 115
- (10) Cawte E. C - Ritual Animal Disguise, pp 61-2
- (11) Bennett - The Perth Glovers' Sword Dance Dress of 1633
- (12) Lockhart's Memoirs..., p 265
- (13) Hayward - Folk Drama in Scotland
- (14) Register of Births & Marriages
- (15) Kirk Session Minutes, Presbytery Records, Town Council Minutes (all in Cramond)
- (16) Privy Council Register
- (17) Great Seal Register
- (18) Register of Births & Marriages
- (19) Kirk Session Minutes
- (20) Register of Births & Marriages
- (21) Kirk Session Minutes, Burgh Court Book, Town Council Minutes
- (22) Privy Council Register
- (23) Register of Births & Marriages
- (24) Kirk Session Minutes
- (25) Great Seal Register
- (26) Seton - Heraldry in Scotland
- (27) Robert - Lord Provosts
- (28) Register of Births & Marriages
- (29) Kirk Session Minutes
- (30) Chambers Scots Dictionary
- (31) Privy Council Register
- (32) Bennett - Glovers' Dress

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- Minutes of the Town Council of Elgin
- Presbytery Records of Elgin

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Register of the Great Seal of Scotland

Register of the Privy Council of Scotland

Robert, D. - Lord Provosts of Elgin (1926)

Seton, George - Heraldry in Scotland

Andrew Kennedy, September 1997

THE 1998 SWORD SPECTACULAR

Vince Rutland, Festival Secretary, writes:

The second Sword Spectacular Festival will take place from 21st - 25th May 1998 in North Yorkshire. Held in the historic port of Whitby, an excellent, festival-friendly venue and a full programme of tours, concerts, ceilidhs, workshops and other attractions is planned. The cost of staging the Festival,

including accommodating the overseas groups, is substantial, without your support this Festival could not happen!

The first two days of the Festival will involve groups - mainly from overseas - visiting local schools in addition to giving public performances throughout the area. Some UK teams and individuals will be participating in these activities - to join us please contact the Festival Secretary as soon as possible for details.

The first overseas groups will arrive on the evening of Wednesday 20th May. The following day they will be dancing at local schools in the area plus public performances in and around Whitby. In the evening, more groups will arrive and we will enjoy a social gathering.

On Friday school visits continue, plus open-air dancing in the area and up the coast at Redcar. If you were at Scarborough '96, you'll recall the fantastic evening atmosphere as dancers arrived from across Europe and the UK - and then proceeded to let their hair down. So Festival Friday will again see an informal "get-to-know-you" session at the Community College, where all the groups and individuals can meet and provide our own entertainment in the best possible atmosphere. A bit of singing, some music, maybe a little dancing - it's up to you!

Saturday will see tours by coach by all groups to dance in the towns and villages of the area. Individual ticket holders may join these tours (cost is included in the ticket price) - but you must book for the tour of your choice at the Festival Office on arrival in Whitby. Tickets are subject to space being available.

All teams return to Whitby by about 4.00pm for simultaneous performances at three adjacent spots - the Bandstand, Capt. Cook's statue and the Pavilion - you can wander from one spot to another to see the groups of your choice. Saturday evening will begin with an informal "get to know you" session, with all the dancers present and open only to ticket holders, before a traditional Ceilidh at the Pavilion, with dance spots by some teams. Sunday morning brings workshops followed by a parade to the Bandstand; a second parade will be at 3.45pm from here to the Pavilion for the indoor Gala Concert where all groups will demonstrate their dances. The weekend will close on Monday with informal dancing in the beautiful moors village of Goathland - "Aidensfield" of TV's popular Heartbeat series - where sword dancing has taken place for centuries.

ACCOMMODATION & CATERING

From 6.00pm on Friday 22nd May, the Festival will have as its base the Whitby Community College, where overseas and UK teams will be based. The facilities here are excellent for camping and the College is an easy walk from town centre venues. There will be limited indoor camping on a first-come-first-served basis at the College (book in advance!). Those who prefer self-catering, hotel and bed & breakfast accommodation should contact the Whitby Tourist Information Centre on 01947 602674. Until April, this office is open from 10.00am - 12.30pm and 1.00pm - 4.30pm. The Festival closes on Monday, 25th May with informal dancing in Goathland.

The Moor & Coast food tent will be at the campsite throughout the weekend and snacks are available at the Pavilion during the events on Saturday and Sunday nights. Whitby has a huge number of eateries - you'll be spoilt for choice!

DANCE LOCATIONS

The Saturday tours will visit many of the surrounding towns and villages to give performances during the day. Whitby itself has many excellent dance locations and we are looking for new spots in the town. One of our principal aims is to give everyone the opportunity to see performances by all the teams taking part. With almost 40 groups attending, this is no mean task! The Saturday afternoon dance tours will end with performances by all groups at adjacent arenas and, on Sunday evening, all the dancers will come together for a gala concert in the Pavilion.

Thanks to Scarborough Borough Council, the facilities of The Pavilion are ours for the weekend. This will host two Festival highlights - Saturday will see a grand ceilidh with Pete Coe's band plus friends and on Sunday, an evening concert will feature demonstrations by all participating teams, finishing with an informal session for all festival goers.

Festival tickets include entrance to a Craft Fair at The Pavilion throughout the weekend, before it moves to Goathland for the Monday. Stall holders wishing to take part should call the Festival Secretary.

WORKSHOPS

Sunday workshops at the Community College will run from 9.30am - 11.30am, with a break for coffee and be in Longsword (Ivor Allsop); Beginners' Rapper; Advanced Rapper; Overseas Dance; and Children's Dance (5 - 11 year olds).

TICKET PRICES

The vast majority of ticket income will go towards accommodating the overseas teams. Full weekend tickets are £25 (Junior £12.50) these cover camping/indoor camping, coach travel on tours, workshops and admission to concerts, ceilidh and craft fair. If you arrange your own accommodation a non-camping ticket offers all the other benefits at £7.50 (Junior £3.75) for a single day or £15.00 (Junior £7.50) for the full weekend. Junior rates apply to children aged 10-16; children aged 9 and under are free BUT MUST HAVE A TICKET.



Members of the Bagnasco team (before the start of tours at the 1996 event) in their colourful costumes pose with their Jester.

Groups confirmed at January 1998

BELGIUM: Volkdansgroep NELE, Grimbergen (Thur-Sat), De Wouwe, Werbeke (Thur-Sat), Boerke Naas, Sint Nicholas, Lange Wapper, Lier (Fri-Sun); CZECH REPUBLIC: Javorina Strani; FRANCE: Le Baccour, Briançon; ITALY: Bal do Sabre de Bagnasco; NORWAY: Jack the Rapper; SPAIN: Estampas Burgalesas, Burgos.

FROM THE UNITED KINGDOM: Bishop Gundulf's Sword, Black Adder Rapper & Rap, Brompton Scorpers (Thurs), Carlisle Sword, Morris & Clog, Castleford Longsword, Claro Sword and Morris Men (Sat), Coventry Mummers, East Saxon Swords, Gift Rapper, Goathland Plough Stots, Handsworth Sword Dancers (Sun), Highside Longsword (Sat), High Spen Blue Diamonds, Newcastle Longswordmen Sword Dancers, Northgate Rapper, Pengwyn Rapper, Royal Earsdon Sword Dancers*, Ryburn Longsword, Ryknild Rabble Rapper, Sallyport Sword Dancers, Seven Stars Sword Dancers, Short Circuit (Sat), Snark Rapper (When you find 'em), Southport Swords, Stevenage Sword, Stone Monkey Sword Dancers, Sullivan's Sword, Thrale's Rapper, White Star Sword Dancers, Wyples Longsword.

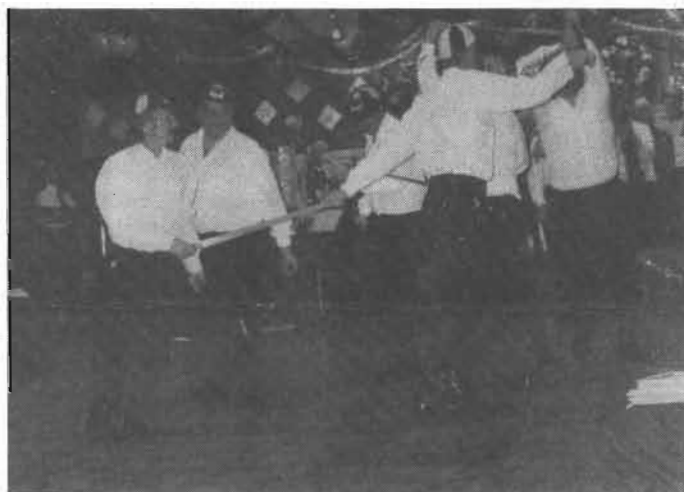
FOR MORE INFORMATION phone or write to:- The Festival Secretary, Vince Rutland, 37, Church View, Brompton, NORTHALLERTON, North Yorkshire, DL6 2X. phone: 01609 780536 E-mail: Rutland@onyxnet.co.uk

DANCING OUT OVER CHRISTMAS AND THE NEW YEAR

EFDSS Carol Concert

The Carol Concert organised by the English Folk Dance and Song Society at Cecil Sharp House has become an important event in the run up to Christmas. Two years ago I attended the concert and took part in the presentation of the Society's Gold Badge posthumously to Harry Pitts, long time leader of Handsworth Traditional Sword dancers. It was an enjoyable evening and, although I was unable to attend the last concert, I am told that it too was a memorable evening especially for Barnsley Longsword, the sword team chosen to perform this year. Gordon Ridgewell was there and he writes:

"... on Sunday 14th December 1997 ... Barnsley Longsword performed the Kirkby Malzeard Sword Dance to the music of the pipe and tabor being played by their musician and past Squire of the Morris Ring, Bert Cleaver. Also dressed and in attendance was the club's founder foreman and past Squire of the Morris Ring, Ivor Allsop. I am prompted to send these photos (and information) as a follow up to the item "Rebirth on the cards?" (Rattle Up My Boys, Issue 5, Series 6, Winter 1997) and to report that Barnsley Longsword appears to be once again in fine fettle!"



Barnsley Longsword "showing 'em how" dancing the Kirkby Malzeard dance at the Carol Concert organised by the English Folk Dance and Song Society.

At the Carol Concert described above the English Folk Dance and Song Society presented their Gold Badge to Cyril Swales who has, for many years, been a major supporter of folk activities in North Yorkshire. In addition to many years service on EFDSS Committees and regular teaching and M.C.'ing activities Cyril has played an important role in the popularisation of Longsword in the Whitby/Scarborough area. Cyril assisted Joe Brown with the many junior teams from the area and for some years has taught and "managed" a local team. Congratulations Cyril - keep up the good work!

Boxing Day

Boxing Day brought the usual profusion of goodies - so many teams dance out that it is impossible to see more than two or three teams. Last year I went to see my "local" team - Flamborough Longsword - who are a measly 15 miles away.

This year I played host to Renaat Van Craenenbroek and his wife - Renaat wanted to see the Grenoside and Handsworth teams. These outings have become major events in the Folk Calendar and enormous numbers of people turn out, a far cry from Boxing Day outings by the same teams in 1964 which were filmed by Kathy Mitchell and show a handful of people at The Old Harrow, Grenoside and the Parish Church at Handsworth).

Grenoside village tour



Grenoside Sword dancers dancing outside the Post Office on their village tour. Ray Illingworth, their usual musician, is dancing second from the left.

In recent years the Grenoside team have decided that, in addition to the "folk dominated" (my description not theirs) spot on Boxing Day they would like to dance around the village for local people. This year, on January 3rd, the rain was coming down sideways and it was bitterly cold but the team turned out for a relaxed and enjoyable dance tour which was regrettably cut short at lunchtime due to shortage of dancers. The rain stopped every time the team danced and, with the exception of the dance spot outside the Post Office where a man walked through the dance set to get to the post box, it was a friendly and enjoyable outing which I hope they continue for many years.

Boar's Head Morris tour

Although I seldom dance nowadays I take whatever chances I get to see my old team, Spen Valley Longsword. This year I decided to leave the Grenoside village tour at lunch time and pick up the teams on the Boar's Head Morris Men's' walking tour of Bradford where I hoped that, in addition to seeing friends with Boar's Head, I would also see Kirkburton Rapier Dancers and Spen Valley at their last spot.

Kirkburton were in fine (and noisy) form but I missed Spen Valley who, short of dancers, had spent the morning doing a 5 man variant of their dances and had left at lunch time.

Plough Sunday at Bolton Percy

In Rattle Up My Boys, issue 3, series 6, Spring 1997 Pat Malham described an outing on Plough Sunday featuring two teams which were new to us (although they have been around for some years) York Gentlemen Longsword and their guests West Riding Longsword.

Both teams have managed to exist (and thrive) for some years without coming into contact with other teams on the "folk circuit". The day was very enjoyable - for me it was the most memorable event of the winter of 1996/97, possibly because of the "freshness" of the outing and the friendliness of the two teams.

I was concerned this year in case that essential "difference" had disappeared but I need not have worried.



Dancers (and friends - bring the total to more than 25 participants!) join York Gentlemen in a good humoured and enjoyable outing.

Following the Church service when the plough is blessed we joined a crowd of church goers, local people and "folk visitors" for dancing outside the church, a spot which was almost missed by some visitors due to flooded roads in the area. First the York Gentlemen performed the Kirkby Malzeard dance and then handed over to the West Riding team who performed a different version of the Rapper dance. Unusual and very distinctive their version took a fresh look at the recorded details and, un-hindered by "accepted practice" they put together a fascinating variation. An example of their innovation is that in "coach and horses", in place of stepping on the spot the team moved forward 2 or 3 yards and then back to position. At first it looked strange - 25 years of watching Rapper had brain washed me, but halfway through the dance it grew on me and by the end it seemed most natural. The team commented on the fact that this wasn't the usual way of performing the dance but some of us were quick to encourage them to stick to their version rather than go the way of "British Standard Dances".

The long awaited book

After a wait of more than 18 months and after countless letters of complaint I finally received a copy of the book by Steve Corrsin "*Sword Dancing in Europe - a History*" (A publication for the Folklore Society: Tradition Series published by Hisarlik Press, 4 Catisfield Road, Enfield Lock, Middlesex EN3 6BD. ISBN 1 874312 25 7. Price £30). The book, which was originally scheduled for June 1996, is well worth the wait! For the first time we can see and compare in one publication the development of Sword Dances through out Europe over the past six centuries.

The handful of readers who placed an order for the book at the 1996 Sword Spectacular should be receiving copies soon. If you are still missing out please let me know and I will chase it up for you - it appears that the publishing/distribution system is not all it should be.

Coincidentally Renaat brought me a copy of the French book "*Le Baccu-ber and la Danse des Epees dans les Alpes Occidentales*" and I can now go ahead and arrange the reviews of these two books which I promised some time ago.

TEAM PROFILES



**A new team on the scene
Seven Stars
Sword and
Step Dancers
of Wigan, Lancashire**

Steve Armitage writes:

"Partly in an attempt to fill the apparent sword team void in the North West of England, and partly to satisfy the desires of rapidly ageing individual founder members to get involved with sword again, Seven Stars was formed in 1996.

Seven Stars at the Angers Festival

XIXth Festival Mondial de Music et Folklore, Sept. 1997

We were the representatives of Wigan (and G. B.) to its twin town Angers, in the Anjou department of France, in the Loire valley. The connection between Wigan and Angers may seem odd to the casual observer! Indeed it is a bit obscure and ancient -- something to do with the relief of Spanish occupation and the granting of Royal charters.

This is not a folk festival of the British ilk, but an annual city festival of dance and music from around the world which has been held for many years. Very well organised and with a true international flavour, it has the edge over many British efforts although, of course, it lacks the more intimate aspects of song, social dance, etc. As one of our number was heard to comment "this knocks Sidmouth into a cocked hat!" The other teams were very colourful and varied, making us seem a bit dull by comparison. There were the standard European dance teams from Hungary, Spain, Germany, Poland and Greece, plus the more exotic representatives of Niger, Mexico, Bolivia and Philippines. Many of these large folklorique sides are "professional" in most senses of the word, with state financial backing, team managers, etc; and are mainly composed of young students enjoying the benefits of sponsored travel. We took solace in the fact that we do it for the love of it! (although we did, admittedly, receive a sizeable sum towards expenses from the Wigan Twinning committee.)

The Seven Stars party departed at midnight from a dimly lit coach depot near Wigan. It was a very quiet and subdued journey South by motor way towards our ferry terminal. There's something very eerie about a M-way service area in the early hours of the morning; some of us managed to summon up an appetite for the self-service cafe whilst others gazed, bleary-eyed at the array of electronic games machines. We eventually made it to Portsmouth and the ferry terminal and, after a flat calm crossing to Le Havre on which most of us caught up with lost sleep, passing through Normandy via Le Mans to Angers. We arrived mid-evening and were met by our guides who directed us immediately to the magnificent guildhall for a meal. Then to our digs, an old convent which is now a Catholic seminary and retreat (they had obviously misread our character references!) After allocation of rooms and a quick unpacking session we were off into town on the coach to a local bar (nothing new there then!)



Seven Stars dance their self composed Longsword dance in the Main Square at Angers. The group were very well received by audiences and by other countries teams.

Thanks to our wonderful guides, Nadia and Isabel, we were to make forays to socialise in local bars during our breaks from dancing, but they took a while to gauge our tastes after first making the mistake of taking us to an Irish 'theme bar' complete with large video screen and exorbitant drinks prices.

We managed to engineer three excellent evenings of congenial merrymaking over the weekend, entertaining ourselves and the tolerant locals with music sessions and impromptu dancing. Our team coach driver, Kevin, was wonderful as ever, ferrying us about between dance spots and also on our social outings.

The Festival Proper

The Seven Stars entourage, including some family members, numbered fourteen. The team was accompanied by Maureen Tinker and the venerable Trevor Stone; tagging along as video diarists and occasional sword dancer. Trevor managed to fall and crock himself on day one (some unkind team members suggested that he'd done it to get out of dancing!). Our French guides whisked him off to a doctor and then to a casualty department in order to get him patched up. So for him it was worth taking an E111 form!

We had scheduled dance spots in three of the city squares, an old peoples home and the festival arena. Being a fairly new team with a small repertoire, I think we gave a good account of ourselves with our limited program of one longsword dance, one rapper dance and about seven assorted group and solo clog dances. Festival events included a formal theatre presentation, a civic reception, and the grand parade on the Sunday afternoon which was the highlight of the weekend's events. All groups and bands, including several additional French bands and social dance groups, process through the city for about four miles. The crowds are huge and enthusiastic. Any British sword or Morris side would give their eye teeth for something like this back home! The route is fairly gruelling and the frequent watering stops were very welcome as it was hot and thirsty work. We processed as best we could whilst presenting the sword locks and doing a few rapper figures along the way when the occasion, and the crowd, demanded. The procession ended with each dance team doing "their thing" on the arena stage in front of a large audience and all the festival and foreign dignitaries. We chose to do our longsword dance. A "nervy" performance with a slippery surface!

One last rollicking evening at our favourite bar and were, sadly, homeward bound on the Monday. After a mad dash to the ferry and after by-passing both the passport and custom check points we made it with five minutes to spare.

Hopefully Seven Stars will get nominated to represent Wigan at Angers again and, if we do, we'll have to work hard to live up to the expectations that this trip has engendered in us.

We are small in number and based at Wigan Pier, Lancashire, (yes, it does exist; no, it's not a joke) where we practice weekly on Thursday evenings. We dance longsword, rapper and group and solo clog. Our clog dancers have had the most gigs up to now, however other notable appearances have been made at Fylde Festival and at the International Folklore Festival of music and dance in Angers, France. Seven Stars needs new 'blood', so, if you live in the area and want to try your hand (or feet) at sword or clog why not come along and join us. We're a friendly bunch and enjoy our dancing.

Contact Geoff Hughes on 01942 861084 or Steve Armitage on 01925 754871.

Steve Armitage for Seven Stars Sword and Step Dancers, December 1997

Southport Swords

THE Southport SWORDS



Dick Shillaker, a RUMB subscriber who dances with both Green Ginger Morris and Southport Swords, wrote recently to give a little background on the formation and early years of the Southport team. He supplied a copy of an article he wrote in 1989 for "Bothy Blag", the magazine of the Bothy Folk Club.

"1968 was an eventful year on the local folk scene. The Victoria Hotel, home of the Liverpool Folk Club, was pulled down; the Bothyfolk (original organisers of the Bothy) split up and the Southport Swords were founded by John Smith and friends. John considered that the idea of forming a sword dance team can be traced back to early 1968 when he saw an impromptu display of Rapper on the thick carpet of Morpeth's Queen's Head Hotel.

Later that year a trip to Keele Folk Festival provided John and Pete Mackie with an opportunity to attend a workshop where the Flamborough Longsword Dance was taught. On returning to Merseyside, John and Pete discussed their sketchy knowledge of the Flamborough dance with a number of friends and a decision was made to stage the dance on the sad occasion of the Bothyfolk's last night at the Blundell Arms, just ten days hence. They had enough volunteers for the eight man dance - John Smith, Pete Mackie, Paul Watson, Tony Stott, Mike Holding, Rick Scott, Dave Morgans and Dave Whitehead - but no swords, kit or musician. They also needed to practise!

Eight dancers holding three foot long swords at full arm's length form a circle of a considerable diameter and therefore finding sufficient space in which to practise could have been a problem. Luckily the fine summer weather held and the team was able to practise every evening on Tony Stott's large lawn. Musical accompaniment was provided by a tape recording of Stan Ambrose and Dave Boardman (two members of the Bothyfolk) playing 'Keep that wheel a 'turning', interspersed with Tony Stott's mother 'live' on grand piano. Flamborough is an energetic dance, made even more tiring to master with grass underfoot and so a quick dash to 'The Imp' at the end of the evening was a must. As all the dancers possessed a pair of blue denim jeans and a white shirt, this became the basis of the team's kit. Some colour was added, thanks to Trudy Smith working away at her sewing machine, by red and white spotted handkerchiefs and waist sashes, plus red, white and blue 'flashes' on the shirts. As a finishing touch, a rather surprised pet shop owner was asked for 32 budgee bells and these were attached to elastic leg bands. The evening of the Bothyfolk's farewell, Sunday 21st July, arrived and the team performed in the courtyard behind the Blundell. Live musical accompaniment was provided by Stan Ambrose on whistle and Dave Boardman. The team's first booking was at a Mormon social gathering the following Friday!"

Other outings

Dick went on to tell me of three sword outings he came across - Dick writes:

"White Rose Sword from Scarborough and Castleford Longsword were two of the 16 or so teams, from a variety of dance traditions, to appear at York's Tenth Annual Festival of Traditional Dance in October last.

Noteworthy was Castleford's dancing of Escrick in front of the mayor on the Saturday afternoon, showing off their smooth-flowing technique (hint of American running sets?) with easy unforced precision. A most enjoyable performance.

The Festival is organised by the City of York council to create vibrancy, spectacle and colour within the large pedestrianised city centre. The 1998 Festival will be on the 4th, 5th and 6th of September."

Dick's second "sighting" was a team new to me called "Solstice" who appeared at the 1997 Beverley and East Riding of Yorkshire Folk Festival. Their blurb in the Festival programme reads:

"Solstice is a side of young people from Pocklington School in East Yorkshire., who perform traditional dances and Mummers plays. Among their repertoire are Longsword dances from Yorkshire and the Isle of Man, Rapper from the North east and various Cotswold and Border stick dances.

They are also probably unique in their performance of a Renaissance French Martial dance and the Builders' Guild Trowel Dance"

The third sword dance was performed as part of the touring show "Wassail" which, in Beverley in December, featured Ebor Morris dancing sword.

In addition to the date for the 1998 York event Dick also points out that Yorkshire Day (August 1st) this year falls on a Saturday. Lets hope that this will encourage longsword teams to dance out - perhaps some of them will let me know of their plans to print in future issues of RUMB.

Open mouthed at Belmont's Sword Dance

Noel Jackson, organiser, trainer and inspiration of a team from Belmont School (near Durham) wrote to tell me that Belmont have joined the ranks of UK teams who have "adopted" the Continental feature of hoisting their Captain on a platform of swords - however Belmont have slightly modified the feature to hoist the smallest (and lightest) member of their team. Noel says that at their recent outings the hoisting "brings the house down". He also writes:

"A couple of winters ago, the excellent Folkworks organisation organised a mid-winter workshop at Longton in Cumbria. I took half a dozen members of the school Ceilidh band over and they spent a wonderful day learning the basics of Longsword from members of Carlisle Morris. We practised every day for the next fortnight and the team performed flawlessly in the School Christmas Concert.

The team opened the second half and the dimmed lights and the weird sound of slip jigs created a tense atmosphere. This was compounded by the rhythm of the dancers feet as they descended through the tiers of seats from the back of the Hall to reach their dancing spot.

The rampant paganism made a wonderful contrast with the rest of the Christmas show and I was delighted to see the effect the dance had on the audience. Many were gaping with their mouths open from the first clash to the final lock.

These dancers have now left to pursue higher education but the tradition has been ably handed on to an enthusiastic group of 14 year olds (mainly girls) who dance in shorts and insist on being called Belmont's Sexy Sword Squad.

We do not follow a particular tradition but have been using a number of sources to develop an entertaining dance that does not break the ring. We have been under some pressure from some Geordie dance aficionados to convert to Rapper but the team are sticking to their guns (or rather, swords) and continuing to explore what Longsword has to offer with various numbers of dancers. We already raise the Captain and carry out a ritual beheading and the next venture will be to incorporate some different locks, although we will need to invest in springier swords to achieve this.

After a crash course in Longsword, we felt we had created an "instant tradition", so we were delighted to find that sword dancing had been recorded at Haswell Plough, less than four miles away from our school. "The Plough" still serves as a public house and I am considering this as a venue for dancing, possibly next Christmas tide.

Noel Jackson, Belmont School, Durham, January 1998

Late extra

The class winners at the Dancing England Rapper Tournament (DERT 98) held in Ryton on Saturday February 21st were:

Open Class - Pengwyn Rapper

Premier Class - Stone Monkey Rapper

Congratulations to High Spen and Short Circuit who organised the event.

Don't forget that your subscription for the seventh series covers 4 issues which will be published quarterly!

The next issue will be published in June.

The next issue will contain the manuscript of a presentation by the late Peter Clarke. In addition to a professional assessment (Peter was a psychoanalyst) it presents Peter's thoughts and impressions as a member of the Grenoside team. Issue 2, due out in the Summer, will also carry an initial report on the Sword Spectacular due to be held on May 21st to 25th.

Contributions are welcome ...

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