



RATTLE UP

My Boys

A quarterly publication for those with an interest in sword dancing

Issue 2, Series 7 Summer 1998

Some months ago Gordon Ridgewell wrote to me suggesting that a paper, given at a CECTAL Day School in December 1993, deserved a wider audience and suggested its publication in "Rattle Up My Boys".

The author of this paper was Peter Clarke, a subscriber to RUMB who I knew well and who often spoke to me about his thoughts and observations dating from the time he joined the Grenoside Sword Dancers in 1983.

At the time of Gordon's letter friends of Peter had heard of his illness and obviously this was not the right time to follow-up the project. Peter died on April 22nd 1997. However, some time after Peter's death, I was delighted to hear from his widow Shirley that she, and other members of his family, would welcome publication of Peter's work. With the help of a former colleague Peter's lecture notes were deciphered and a tape recording of the presentation was transcribed.

From the 1950's onwards there has been growing criticism of the magico/religious theories of meanings and origins of "traditional" dance. However when similar thoughts, ideas and observations are presented by a respected professional physiotherapist then I believe that the subject should be re-examined.

One aspect arises - I never envisaged that I would publish an article which contained the phrase "the philosophy of constructural alternativism versus accumulative fragmentalism"!

ENDINGS, BEGINNINGS AND IDENTITY

By the late Peter Clarke

Our Need for Midwinter Rituals

*Oh ladies and gentlemen I'll have you make room
Contented a while for to be
It is I and myself who have brought us along
And my trade you will quickly see.*



Grenoside Traditional Sword Dancers march off having performed in the Main Street, Grenoside. They dance outside The Old Harrow pub every Boxing Day. Peter Clarke is in the centre of the picture.

*Whilst in foreign parts we've rambled
All both proper stout and tall
Though we've passed through many dangers
And at last I caught a fall.*

*Wounded by a charming lady
Her charms I almost dread
To die for her I am quite ready
And at last I conquered her.*

*Six stout lads have I a-by me
Both of honour and renown
Festive time is drawing nigher
And since we've come in this town.*

*Since that we have all come hither
Fiddler draw thy strings, advance
Play beside us, here to guide us
And these lads will show you a dance.*

These are the words of the Nomine which the Captain of Grenoside Sword Dance sings outside the Old Harrow in Main Street Grenoside at 11.00 a.m. on Boxing Day. I want to explain what to expect if you come to see the dance on Boxing Day and to tell you how I became involved in the dance and my views about why such midwinter customs continue to be observed.

Boxing Day at Grenoside

So what happens on Boxing Day? The dancers assemble to dress at the house of our fiddler and secretary. Just before 11.00 a.m. (surprisingly punctual for a folk event) the team march down Main Street to the Old Harrow headed by their Captain and followed by the fiddler. The crowd will open to let them pass and close again around them and the team will halt in the middle of the road. The Captain will sing the song and the dancers will link sword hilt in the right hand, tip in left making a ring round the Captain. The ring then circles first clockwise and back to the right (widdershins). When they get back to place they make a sword lock round the Captain's neck, he's taken off his hat and kneels for this to be done. As the Captain holds up the lock the team circles left and right again. The Captain again kneels with the lock round his neck, puts his hat on and sword in hand as the dancers draw their swords from the lock. The Captain falls out of the set, loses his hat and lies "dead". This fall hasn't always been fully enacted, it is the aspect that prompted our last Captain to retire.

The dancers circle left and right again clashing swords and then reform the ring of swords for the "over your neighbour's sword" figure. By this time the Captain has revived and he supervises the rest of the dance. There follows linked circle figures common to many longsword dances, led by each dancer in turn, and passing round the set widdershins again. So - 6 x "over neighbour's sword", 6 x "single sword down", 6 x "single sword up", 6 x "double sword down", 6 x "double sword up" before the circle is broken again into two separate lines of dancers. There is another song and four repeats of a "circular hey" with clashes and a series of accelerating "rolls" before the final figure where the dancers form a close ring and end with a final upward thrust of the swords into the air, dancers knuckle to knuckle.

That's the bit that really counts. The teams' current custom is to hand over to invited teams of dancers and finally to repeat the sword dance to end the proceedings about noon. But this second sword dance does not feel as important and satisfying as the first one - the right to dance first in the first session is carefully shared.

My involvement

The current Boxing Day pattern is relatively new - I started watching in the early 70's when the sword dance was only done once. In the old

days it was done outside specific cottages and taken round the 'big houses' over the course of several days.

From the first time I saw the dance I was hooked on it - probably at the Grenoside Summer Festival in 1971 and I have turned out faithfully every Boxing Day since then (*I believe that Peter's last Boxing Day outing was 1996 - Ed.*). I began as a witness of the dance and it became an important part of my family ritual to watch it. But I'm a southerner and I felt I had no right of place in the dance myself. Indeed when I asked to learn the dance in September 1983 I felt the anthropologist's anxiety about corrupting a local custom by my inclusion in it. I should have known that it was robust enough to absorb the energies of anyone who takes it seriously.

I first danced in the Boxing Day ceremony in 1984 and discovered that the inside and outside feelings are different. The team does feel that to perform the dance in its own time and place has a special importance and meaningfulness - it isn't just another dance display or an excuse for a get together or to collect money (like good Yorkshire folk the team is keen to get collect money but on Boxing Day the money goes to charity, not on beer). On this special occasion the dance is a satisfying ceremony with which to end one year and to greet the lengthening days of the next.

I am discussing the Grenoside Sword Dance because it is my midwinter ritual but there are many other such ceremonies e.g. carolling, the mumming, Handsworth and Goathland sword dances, the Haxey Hood battles - and you may have your own family customs to mark this time of year. So I want to explore why such rituals centre on this time of year, and still get invented in our 'scientific', secular' age.

My experience of Grenoside Sword Dancers plus my professional work as a psychotherapist with an interest in anthropology led me to think about the place of magic in our society - magic in the sense of procedures for making sense and thereby giving us control over the uncontrollable forces we have to come to terms with, simply because we are alive.

Kelly's theory

I want to introduce you to the work of George Kelly who developed a theory which I think will help us to understand why people observe and create rituals and, perhaps, why midwinter seems to attract rituals of a particular sort. I will start with what Kelly called "the philosophy of constructural alternativism versus accumulative fragmentalism". Don't be put off, he wasn't pompous but he did enjoy a good round mouthful of words!

There is a tendency to think that the causes of things - and indeed - of our recognition of natural phenomena, has accumulated over the centuries because 'discoverers' have gone about finding ready-formed 'facts' rather like a sailor on uncharted seas finding an island; it has been there all the time but he didn't know it was there. Major developments in scientific thought have been more conceptual leaps than toe-stubbing discoveries, e.g. Archimedes' bath water, Galileo's feathers and weights, Newton and Einstein etc. Kelly reckoned that we have to construct our own reality and to establish or create facts by making guesses about

what might be a pattern and checking to see if it happens again. If our guesses look like holding up we may set out deliberately to jigger about with its antecedents and thus conduct experiments to become confident that we can predict what follows what and even why. Often a reliable pattern turns out to be something quite different when we check it out.

Kelly was not being sceptical about 'reality' being 'out there' somewhere, just warning that our attempts to make sense of the vast and ever changing complexity of what is out there are our attempts to understand. The world gets on very well without our understanding it and it is only when we try to change or control bits of it that we have to do something about it. Then it's not just a matter of mapping successive continents as we cross them but rather having to be at different times multi-faceted individuals.

If we really try to get a hold of the slipping stuff - we may hold it down with both hands and one knee and look at a corner of it. No sooner do we let go with one hand to write a note or draw a sketch and the giant amoeba has suddenly turned into a football crowd. Any insightful glimpse we get may evaporate in our words or be out of date by the time it is published.

Kelly's position is that it is not just scientists and philosophers that are in this mess but that it is a basic feature of being alive as a human - as long as we're alive and conscious we are in the business of trying to make sense of what is going on round us; we can no more stop that for long than stop eating or breathing. As I said, Kelly takes as his model of the person 'the scientist'. Starting at least from birth we struggle to create a stable, understandable world out of what would otherwise be chaos. Of course we aren't alone - our parents (and their parents and teachers before them) do a powerful lot to help us (force us?) to make the same sense of the world as they did. And of course we aren't conscientious, thorough-going, honest and clever scientists a lot of the time.

We buy into other people's hoaxes, we hoax ourselves and others, and we often cook the evidence and hang on to pet theories which let us down again and again.

Kelly defined anxiety as what we experience when we realise that we're about to come up against something we know we don't really know enough about to make safe predictions, e.g. moving to a new school or job, eyeing up a potential attractive sexual partner. We know that schools and jobs and attractive partners are like to some extent, but until we take the risk of experiencing them first-hand we shan't know if our old scientific principles will still work. Quite often we can choose not to take these risks and so preserve our science (and our ignorance).

Sometimes we are faced with tougher options or no choice. Kelly defined threat as what we experience when we recognise that minor tinkering with our science won't be enough. We can see that henceforth we shall have to make major changes in understanding who we are - if you like we shall be like a Newtonian confronted by Einstein. Examples of such major demands are the impending death of a lifelong lover, amputation of a limb, perhaps the loss of children we have reared for 20 years when they get ready to leave us, perhaps redundancy or even well earned retirement. Often we have just to "get on with it" or die, though there are resting places (sick beds, breakdowns, tantrums etc.).

When we are faced with uncertainty about how to understand, make sense of, predict what's going to happen next, there is a tension between anxiety or threat from the uncertainty on the one hand and, on the other, there may be excitement about the possibility that things may be different. The Chinese ideogram for crisis is (I believe) a combination of the ideograms for danger coupled with opportunity. When an insect moults one hard case for another it is vulnerable until the new, bigger one hardens. A hermit crab that outgrows the shell it has borrowed is an easy meal while it is transferring into a bigger one. When a child becomes an adult, an apprentice a journey-man, a bachelor a husband, a wife a widow we recognise the risks of the transition. During the transition we often give special licence for abnormal behaviour and may also give special instructions for how to cross safely to the other side.

Factors which influence us

With this as background I will outline some of the strategies or states that the uncertainty (the Kelly anxiety and threat) of living in a changing world, which is something we can only avoid by dying.

The more effective my understanding of the world (my construct system) the less likely I am to experience anxiety or threat. The more the world around me is being chaotic the less likely am I to be able to predict it accurately. Some of the chaos can be reduced by keeping the world steady; for example, by not exploring and staying in a familiar social environment, among known friends and enemies. If I can establish myself as a person I know really well with a clearly defined place in relation to my family and community, the world will be steadier - at least from my viewpoint.

So having a definite home - not just a dwelling but fitting into a social place, and a definite job, and circle of friends and social routine (washing on Mondays, pay-day Friday, bath on Saturday, sword practice on Thursdays etc.) will all serve to reduce threat and anxiety. Daily, weekly and seasonal routines will all work in this way e.g. sword dance Boxing Day, Bacup Nutters Easter Saturday, Bank holidays, AGM's, tax returns, birthdays, anniversaries.

Also institutions will set up procedures for dealing with rare and dangerous crises; emergency services, fire-drills, safety procedures in bank robberies, first-aid training and so on. These offer extensions to what I can expect of myself or others in tight corners.

Particularly important for my purpose are the structures provided by rites of passage. Social groups frequently have highly specified rituals for managing the inevitable uncertainties of major transitions in living. Typically birth and death and marriage have such rites but so too do various ageing changes - specially about puberty but also about induction into different educational and work institutions. Although they may often seem cruel and chaotic, those aspects may only be concrete symbols of the losses and fears experienced internally. These outward socially accepted acts may also offer helpful expression to the less accepted feelings by disguising or displacing them. Now how can this be applied to mid-winter calendar customs?

Mid-winter customs

First, the change in daylight hours from shortening days to lengthening days is probably recognised by even those who don't explicitly celebrate it. The weather encourages us to hole-up, which brings us physically close to home. Economically work and cash have often been short. We date our year end and beginning at this season, we tend to centre on this season for family reunions, we arrange special feasts with special foods and parties; in social activities, in offices, in firms. Christmas or New Year and Jewish and Muslim festivals happen about this time.

I see three main trends:

- social groupings draw together enhancing the sense of group membership
- disorder reigns in licence and often in clear reversal of 'natural order' and rituals focus on birth, death and renewal.

The 'normal' rules of behaviour and hierarchy are broken - the lord of misrule doesn't get officially nominated, but employers often treat employees, in the services officers serve men tea in bed, doctors carve turkeys for patients in hospital, drink is used to loosen tongues and corsets and sexual inhibitions, men play dames and women 'principal boy', begging becomes respectable. Such rule breaking may serve two purposes - first it may relieve tensions from conflicts and resentments built up over the year; second it may reinforce the social order by making more explicit the normally un-stated hierarchies and boundaries by the very contrast of their absence.

The 'office party' is perhaps one example of such midwinter customs and it is also an example of a social group reasserting, affirming its group membership - scent-marking all members of the ant heap. Family reunions similarly exemplify the affirmation of "belongingness", of family ways of doing things, of family rules about what should not be done. It marks the inter-generational changes - the dispersion of the young and the setting up of new families, the growth, maturation and loss of potency that goes with age. The potency of these forces may become apparent if you ponder on the tensions thrown up by the need to decide who spends Christmas with whom and how, and on the way your family rituals hold your family together (or set them apart) and how rituals may act as substitutes for families. So I want to argue that a major value of such reunions is to keep us, and the world more steady - we are reminded who we are and to whom we belong and how we normally behave. The licence for disorderly conduct may also provide protection as we pass through this dangerous transition from darkening to lightening days - but that leads on to the symbolism of death and rebirth.

The Sword Dance

And now I want to look harder at the Grenoside Sword Dance. First, as it symbolises the affirmation of belonging and of personal identity.

No one can do the dance alone. The dance cannot flow to completion unless each man does his part correctly in his appointed turn.

These truisms are experienced acutely by the dancers, particularly when joined in hilt and tip ring - whenever anyone gets it wrong, the steel carries the message round the ring to all. Experienced dancers can read

the message and often put things right, but for me all I notice may be that something is wrong somewhere - conversely when it flows really well there is a great sense of satisfaction and exhilaration for all.

Now what about symbols of death and renewal and recycling? The form of the dance is a continual doing and undoing, and cycling round to the beginning again. We make and break the lock. The Captain allows himself to be killed and brought back to life.

The pattern can serve as an affirmation that the year will turn, that the days will lengthen, and give us faith that the weather will get warmer.

The problem is not so much a doubt that it will happen, but whether we can survive until it does, whether the spring will come in time to get good crops. This may be clearest in relation to farming, but it's wider than that. Consider facing the chaos of Bosnia with winter already set in, and months to wait until it yields to the sun. The symbol of the willing sacrifice of the Captain affirms that life will go on for the group and the dead man's identity will live after him. Death follows life, but life follows death. There is a sense of gaining some control of the unpredictability of death when someone submits to it willingly (and people do get ready for death often and feel it is time to go, and others do end the uncertainty by killing themselves). Few of us have much first hand experience of people dying, let alone of killing people, and little even of killing animals for food but death is always there to confront us and our lack of familiarity with it makes it harder to know how to deal with it (these days people may need professional help to know how to mourn effectively).

The symbolic killing may also relieve unacceptable feelings of anger and hate - it expresses at the same time the doing and the controlling of the violence (what can be expressed may not have to be done, what can be acted in symbols may not have to be felt). If the Captain doesn't die very well, the team, and the crowd, experience some disappointment. If he dies particularly well, there is the sudden exultation, often followed with the team by a joke to soften it.

Peter Clarke, December 1998

(Peter wrote a poem about Grenoside Sword Dancers which first appeared in English Dance and Song, Vol 43, No 3 1981 and has also appeared in RUMB, issue 2, series 5, Winter 1994/95)

The Second Sword Spectacular some first thoughts

The second Sword Spectacular Festival took place from 21st - 25th March 1998 in Whitby, which proved an excellent venue, much more festival-friendly than Scarborough which suffered from a shortage of dance spots for large groups.

It is many years since I enjoyed such a relaxing Bank Holiday weekend. I have spent many of them organising events of various sorts, not the least being the first Sword Spectacular in Scarborough two years ago.

This second event was an eye-opener for me - I had the freedom to go anywhere and to see the performances which attracted me without worrying about any dramas (such as a foreign team losing their cash).

What is the origin and where lies the meaning of this ritual dance? Many historians have tried to uncover what may be called a 'MYSTERY', but in vain!

The Gauls, the Romans, the Greeks, the Knights templar..... all have been suggested, but the enigma remains. The truth is that Pont de Cervieres from time immemorial has jealously preserved the 'Bacchu-Ber'."

See RUMB, issue 5, series 1, Summer 1988 for a report by Bob Schofield on a visit to see the dance on its traditional day. A review of the book "Le Bacchu-ber et Les Dances D'Epees dans Les Alpes Occidentales" by Gillian Guest (wife of a dancer with York Gentlemen) will feature in a future issue.

Recent news

I was very disappointed to learn that Loftus Sword Dancers have called it a day and disbanded. I hold the view that a major part of the Longsword tradition is the disbanding and subsequent revival of the dance by later generations but it is still depressing to hear of the demise of a team who achieved such a high standard and demonstrated the dance widely (including many trips abroad) with such skill and elegance.

Corrigenda and Addenda

When replying to my request to approve the article in this issue by the late Peter Clarke his widow Shirley went on to point out that, in the photo of the Grenoside village tour, the team included Ray ELLISON (not as I had it Ray Illingworth). Thanks to Shirley for pointing it out and my sincere apologies to Ray for the error. In her letter Shirley also explained the difference between psychotherapists (which Peter was) and psychoanalysts (which he was not).

In my report on the dancing on Plough Sunday at Bolton Percy (in the last issue of RUMB) I stated that the York Gentlemen performed the Kirkby Malzeard dance. They performed the Askham Richard dance - the error was mine and no way reflects on their dancing!

I am sure some readers would be disappointed if we did not have a contribution by Gordon Ridgewell - his important points are:

RUMB, issue 5, series 6, Winter '97 (Article on Sharp's postcards)

page 2, Summary, para 1: add a vital comma "...to another 13, dancers.."

RUMB, issue 3, series 2, Spring 1989 and issue 5, series 3, Autumn '92:

Crambe is in the North (not the West) Riding

Witton-le-Wear not Whitton-le-Wear

Hutton Bonville was not listed in Section 7 but was cross referenced from section 1

Under South Kilvington should read "Ask Miss Jopling..."

RUMB, issue 5, series 6, Winter '97 (Article on East Saxon Sword)

for "William Kempe" read "William Kemp"

Thanks Gordon.

I was pleased to receive a number of complimentary comments about Andrew Kennedy's article on The Elgin Sword Dancers including a request for copies from The Scottish Traditions of Dance Trust, an organisation that is new to me.

The Clew

The Papa Stour tradition continues to fascinate readers. Following on the heels of Ron Shuttleworth's article on the origin of the "Shield" (RUMB, issue 5, series 6, Winter 1997) Gordon Ridgewell writes about "The Clew".

"I was most interested to read in Barclay Wilson's 'Further Comments on the Papa Stour Sword Dance' (RUMB, issue 3, series 6, Spring 1997) that Alex Johnson of Papa Stour called the seven pointed star a 'clew'.

Sir Walter Scott used the word 'clew' in his description of figure 7 of this dance and its meaning eluded Ivor Allsop who in his article 'The Sword Dance of Papa Stour - Shetland' (Folk Music Journal, vol 3, Number 8, pp 324-42) asked 'What is a clew?'. To this I have no answer; This word is a most ancient word with numerous meanings and derivations, and I would refer you to the lengthy entry for Clew in 'A New English Dictionary on Historical Principles; founded mainly on the materials collected by The Philological Society' edited by James A. H. Murray, Vol. IIC, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1893, pp 495-96."

Gordon Ridgewell, October 1997

This entry occupies most of an A4 page and is too long to reproduced here - if any readers would like a copy simply ask.

A new copy of the North Skelton film

The English Folk Dance and Song Society has two versions of the film record made of the North Skelton White Rose dancers filmed at Skelton Castle in October 1932. The first version is on 16mm film (transferred onto VHS video circa 1980) and has been in the possession of the Society for more than 25 years; the second is in the form of a VHS video donated by Mr Cyril Swales of Scarborough in 1997.

Comparing videos of the two versions minor differences are evident:

1. The two video versions present the dance at different speeds - the dance in the "EFDSS" version lasts 8mins 55secs and in the "Cyril Swales" version it lasts 9mins 26secs. The latter is likely to be closer to the correct speed.
2. The "EFDSS" version is presumably a more finished version - it has an opening caption with the names of the dancers and a caption at "THE END".
3. From the videos it is evident that the "Cyril Swales" version is in better condition - it does not have the disconcerting changes in contrast and marks on the film which can be seen on the "original". However both have glitches in the editing and both show two significant burn marks where the projector has been stopped but the light left on.

4. The "EFDSS" version contains slightly more of the REHEARSAL sequence and does not cut off the ending of the figure 5 lock as does the "Cyril Swales" version.

It is obvious that both versions portray the identical event and may well be from the same "master edit" but the "new" version is at a realistic speed and appears to be in better condition.

Trevor Stone. March 1998

Questionnaire

Up to the other day I had received about a dozen completed questionnaires and could see a trend regarding ages then a questionnaire from Ryburn Longsword (two teams motivated by Pete Coe including a number of youngsters) upset the averages.

However, leaving this "bias" aside it is interesting to see that such new recruits as there are are older than recruits at the time of the last survey!

If your team hasn't returned their questionnaire yet please urge the relevant person to do so - the information will provide a valuable source for future students. If you haven't had a questionnaire yet let me know and I will send one ASAP.

Review of Steve Corrsin's book

Some time ago I promised a review of the book "Sword dancing in Europe - a History" by Steve Corrsin. However I am afraid that there are continuing distribution problems (none of them are within Steve's control) and the Folklore Society are seeking legal advice on the matter. I will hold the review until the problems are sorted out - some orders placed at the FIRST Sword event two years ago have not yet been supplied in spite of regular contact and all the pressure I can muster.

Seven Stars dancing an Orion Dance

Many individuals have commented about the attractive dance titled "The North Shirley Volunteers" performed by Orion Sword from the Boston area of the United States. Seven Stars Sword and Step Dancers, the recently formed team from Wigan (see team profile in the last issue - issue 1, series 7, Spring 1998) have gone one step further and sought approval from Orion to learn and perform the dance.

Marcy, the secretary of the Orion team expressed herself "surprised and delighted" at the request. After stipulating a few simple rules, gave their agreement and dance notes were supplied by Judy Ericson, the creator of the dance. An extract from Judy's letter is enlightening:

"I am thrilled that you would like to try out our dance. Here is the notation as best I could.....

The tune is the Sportsman's Hornpipe which Jim learned off a Rod Stradling tape. The alternate tune we use is the Jolly Beggarman, which is widely available. I don't know about Sportsman's Hornpipe but it was listed as 'Trad'. The name of the dance is from a local memorial to soldiers of the Civil War. Most small towns in New England lost many of their men in the war between the States and there are memorials in all

the small towns around us. I chose this for a collection of random reasons: In the tradition of British sword teams we wear a version of military dress, ours is from the 1860s. Dances tend to be named for towns and Jim and I live in North Shirley. I just liked the way it sounded.

You are welcome to call it its regular name and credit Orion with its creation when appropriate.

You probably have some of the dance on videotape from the Sword Spectacular. If there are murky spots, let me know and I'll try to clear them up. I am happy when my morris or sword dances get out and about. Maybe they'll take on a life of their own and not just die with our team. I have been teaching our version of Salton for a few years now, and people seem to like it. Have fun with the dance."

News of my death.....

I heard from Rhett Krause (whose wife Sukey can no longer face the long drive to Boston to practice with Orion and no longer dances with them) that they now have a daughter - Molly - who was born last September. Rhett also wrote a couple of months ago to check up on my health. Pat Pickles also rang and seemed most surprised to find that I was still alive. Apparently there has been a report circulating that I had died. This may be due to confusion following the untimely death of Gordon Crowther, organiser and well known dancer with Yorkshire Coast Morris, (who was involved in the planning of the 1996 Sword event).

Plans to up-date the Geographical Index

Over the years I have used the data in the 'Geographical Index' many times and I have had cause to appreciate the work put in by the original authors. However, a substantial amount of new information is now available to us. After a few preliminaries (contacting the original authors etc) I am about to start on the mammoth task of up-dating the Longsword material from the Geographical Index of the Ceremonial Dance in Great Britain". Journal of the English Folk Dance and Song Society, Vol IX, No 1, 1960 (Also as Journal reprint no 10)

As usual I will work closely with Ivor Allsop and I have had encouragement and guidance from E. C. Cawte, Roger Marriot, Julian Pilling and Norman Peacock. I still hope that someone who specialises in Rapper will tackle updating that section of the index.

Sword makers

Following the sad news of the death of Steve Marris who, trading as Specialised Products, was for many years the preminent maker of swords a number of people expressed concern about sourcing new sets of swords. I understand that two makers have set up to supply both Longswords and Rapper swords. They are Flaxdale Products, phone 01423 066613 and Frank Lee (who dances and plays for Carlisle), phone 01697 2649. Both makers offer to make sets of swords to suit the customer and can vary the length etc. Prices start at £15 each for Longswords and £22 each for Rappers.

Photo update



1. Recently re-formed Royal Earsdon Rapper danced at Ryton during DERT '98; 2. 1892 photo of a team (Loftus or Skelton?) supplied by the late Fred Iganni, the last of the original founder members of Redcar Sword Dancers, who died in February of this year; 3. The magnificent decoration on the tunics of the Ryburn Longsword teams; 4. East Saxon Sw... at their enjoyable 25th birthday celebrations last October; 5. Goathland Plough Stots (and film crew) on their January Plough Tour; 6. Barnsley Longsword perform the Haxby dance, part of their post-Christmas tour; 7. The late Gordon Crowther (left), well known for his enthusiasm and commitment, who died some months ago; 8. Presentation of the EFDSS Badge to Cyril Swales of Scarborough at the 1997 Carol Concert at Cecil Sharp House.

Photos are numbered:

- 1 2
- 3
- 4 5
- 6 7 8



The next issue will carry a thorough and thought provoking article by Norman Peacock on the mechanics of sword locks - Norman tells me that, among his family, it is known as "The Uri Geller article". It will also carry a number of general interest items, including an appeal for support for the Whitby Competitive Dance Festival. The following issue will carry a comprehensive report on the Second Sword Spectacular and a synopsis of the book "Le Bacchu-ben et Les Dances D'Epees dans Les Alpes Occidentales" by Gillian Guest.

Contributions are welcome ...

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