

RATTLE UP

My Boys

A quarterly publication for those with an interest in sword dancing

Issue 1, Series 11, Spring 2002

THE FLAMBOROUGH LONGSWORD DANCE

By Richard Traves and Trevor Stone based on Richard Traves' talk on Flamborough at the third Sword Spectacular Conference and including additional material uncovered by Gordon Ridgewell.

Part 2 - Since the Second World War

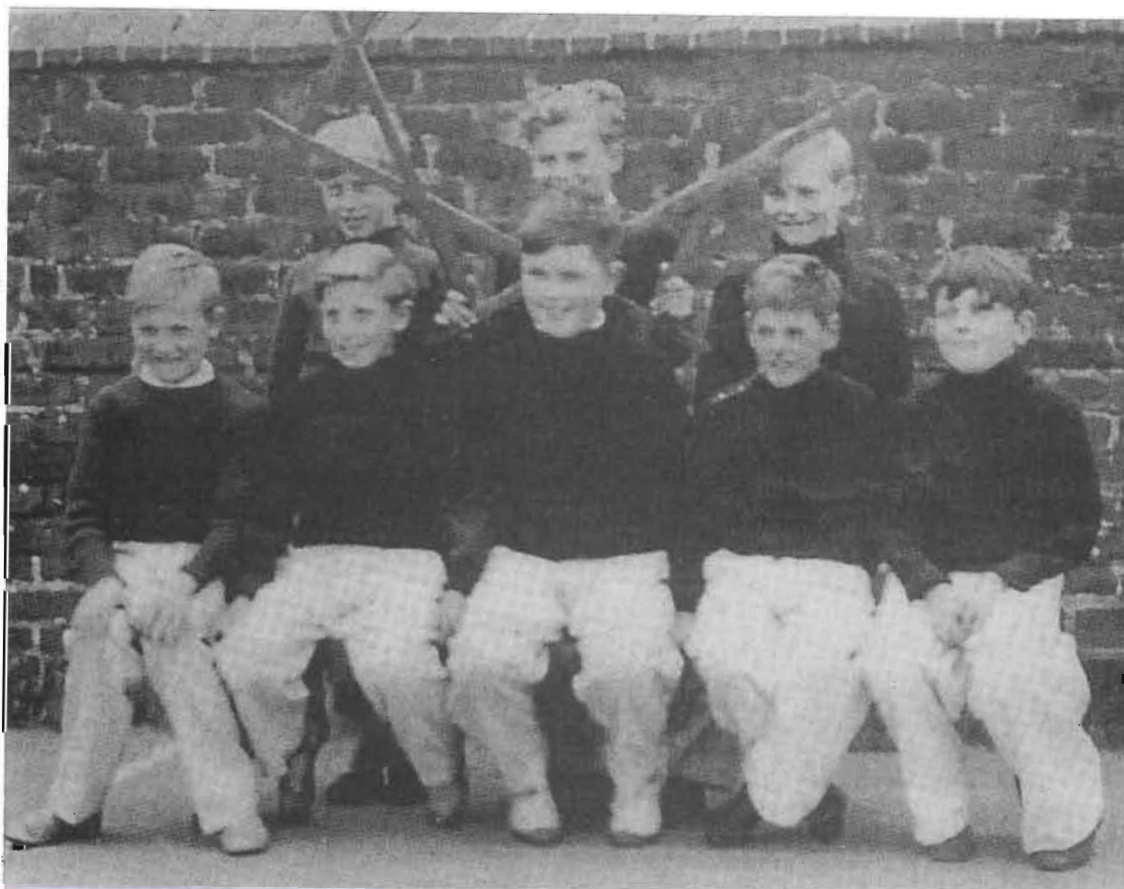
The Second World War dealt a major blow to many customs. In addition to a shortage of male performers there was also a change of attitudes resulting in less enthusiasm for folk

customs in general. All but the strongest traditions were swept aside by a post-war desire to "modernise". But once again the Flamborough Longsword tradition survived, initially due to the activities of junior teams from the village school up until an adult team was revived in 1977.

Junior teams to the rescue

Many dance teams died out during, or soon after, the Second World War but not the Flamborough team. For a few years before, and during the war years, a school team performed regularly as is confirmed by an entry in the school log book for 21st July 1934 when the team took part in a competition and were awarded "a First Class Certificate, missing the Cup by one point" - this was thought to be at the Eskdale Festival, forerunner of the Whitby Competitive Festival. The importance of junior teams was recognised by Mr T T Wall, Headmaster of the village school - some of the boys he taught in the years after the War went on to take part in reviving an adult team in 1977.

Soon after the War junior teams took up the tradition of the Boxing Day outing. A report in the *Bridlington Free Press* on 31 December 1949 stated:



This is a photograph of the team referred to in the article in the December 1949 issue of the Bridlington Free Press. It demonstrates the continuity of the dance tradition. The young dancers are - left to right, back row Nick Chapman, Mike Traves (Lead dancer), Peter Traves and in the front row Richard Traves (current team organiser) Peter Hodgson, John Cross, Alan Atkinson and Colin Moverley.

Photo from the team's archive



Some of the lads shown in this 1967 photograph went on to dance with the adult team. For many years the junior team was taught by Mr. T. T. Wall, the Headmaster at the village school [shown in the foreground].

Photo from Kathy Mitchell's collection

***BOXING DAY CUSTOM REVIVED:**

A team of eight Flamborough schoolboys this year revived the custom of dancing the ancient Flamborough sword dance round the village on Boxing Day morning. The dancers performed in High Street, around the Council Houses, along South Landing Road, and as far as the North Star Hotel on North Marine Road. Mr J Stephenson provided the accompaniment on a concertina.

Mr T T Wall, who arranged the tour, told the Free Press: "The boys did the dance as I believe it was done years and years ago by young men in the village on Boxing Day."

A later press report from 1953 refers to a team from the school participating in village celebrations at the time of the Coronation. The boys team regularly took part in such village events and for most years kept up the Boxing Day tour.

Encouragement for the tradition

The influence (and enthusiasm) of teachers and dancing masters has always been an important factor in keeping the dance tradition alive. In addition to the leadership given by Mr. Wall in the 1950s and 60s the junior teams have also benefited from the support and encouragement of three women.



Mrs Cross inspected the dancers when they danced outside her home on Boxing Day 1987

Photo by Trevor Stone

Mary Cross, nee Bayes (shown in the photograph below) was a resident of Flamborough and teacher in the village school who encouraged school pupils to understand, enjoy and perform the dance. Some members of the current adult team were taught to dance by Mrs Cross. A report in the *Bridlington Free Press* dated Tuesday, December 23rd, 1980, refers to the background and history of the dance, including references to pagan origins and possible Viking ancestry. Mrs. Cross was quoted in this report as being responsible for teaching the dance for many years. Significantly it appears that she also taught the dance to teams from outside the village. She is also quoted as recalling details of a Girls Guide team of young women which she called the "Flamborough Lasses" but no date was given for the existence of this group. The report refers to the revival of an adult team in 1977, a ladies clog team in 1980, and also mentions Richard Traves as the team's organiser.

Kathy Mitchell, from Hull, helped to motivate the revival team from 1977 onwards. She guided the dancers and was an active researcher and tireless publicist for the Flamborough dance, encouraging the people of the village to take pride in their dance. Mrs. Mitchell died in 1990 but she left many films and photographs from the 1950's onwards of the teams performing the Flamborough dance. The teaching of the dance at the village school died out sometime after the adult team was revived.

However, information and instructions for the dance had been passed on from Mrs. Cross to Mrs. Carol Coultas, another teacher at the village school. Mrs. Coultas recently recommenced teaching of the dance at the school which, it is hoped, will provide a new generation of dancers to move into the adult team. By her involvement Mrs. Coultas is not only safeguarding the future of the village dance but she is also following a family tradition of involvement in the dance - she is the granddaughter of George Emmerson - the man who taught and led the team which was active when Cecil Sharp (and probably Mary Neal) visited the village in 1911 and 1912.

Boxing Day 2000 was the first time in some years that a junior team had joined the men to tour the village. Their presence encouraged large crowds, including parents and grandparents, who recalled performing the sword dance in their youth. Typical was Flamborough resident Mrs. Amelia Stevenson, whose husband and father danced with the team in their youth. She was overjoyed to watch her granddaughter participate in the junior team.

The involvement of girls in the junior team is not surprising when we consider the activities of the team of Girl Guides [known as the "Flamborough Lasses"] in the 1930's or the occasional initiatives from the mid 1980's to the 90's when village women learned garland dances and joined the men on their Boxing Day tours of the village.

This photo shows Kathy Mitchell setting up to film the dancers on Boxing Day 1985. On this outing a group of women performed "North West Morris style" dances and toured with the men's team. This initiative has been repeated two or three times in the past but it has not caught on as a permanent feature..

Photo by Trevor Stone





The children involved in the Boxing Day tour of the village in 2000 are pictured here with Eric Storey (musician) and Carol Coultas (teacher and organiser).

Photo by Trevor Stone

The revival of the sword dance in 1977

The Flamborough dance has a history of enthusiasm followed by a lack of interest. Such was the situation in the mid 1970's when junior teams performed regularly but it was many years since there had been a revival of interest by adults. It was timely that in 1977 the then Vicar of the village, the Reverend Simon Stanley, persuaded some men (who had not performed the dance since they left school), to dance at the Church flower festival. Often in the past such village events have resulted in a "spurt" of enthusiasm kick starting the tradition

and keeping it going. The Reverend Stanley has produced a record of the start of the last revival:

"Simon Stanley became Priest-in-Charge of Flamborough in 1975. A popular flower festival had been run for some years at the local St Oswald's Church and Simon was hoping to make it into a village festival. In conversation at the Timoneer Hotel in 1976 the subject of the Flamborough sword dance was brought up.

It transpired that the dance, which had been taught in the Flamborough school and performed by village fishermen up until World War 2, was preserved from extinction first of all by a women's team and then, from the 1950's onward, by children at the school. A revival of the dance by men seemed to be possible. The first public performance of the revived team was given at the newly-expanded Flamborough Festival in August 1977. A report of this outing



The revival team from 1977 photographed when they were about to tour the village (left to right) back row: Simon Stanley, Trevor Gilson, Richard Traves, John Pratley, Gordon Charlesworth, front row: Ian Robson, Ronnie Traves and Ian Gibbon. Three members of the 1977 revival team still perform regularly - they are Richard Traves; John Pratley and Ian Robson.

Photo from the team's archive

appeared in the Parish Magazine and was seen by Eric Storey, musician for a Sword & Garland team from Middleton. Eric contacted Simon and arranged for a social evening for the Middleton and Flamborough teams. The defining moment came when some Flamborough men went to a dance evening in Middleton-on-the-Wolds, which was organised by the Middleton men's team who performed a number of Longsword dances, including the Flamborough dance.

The Flamborough men's team was reborn and practised hard over the ensuing months under the early tutelage of Kathy Mitchell, who was delighted to know that the Flamborough Longsword Dance (as she insisted was its proper name) was again being performed by local men.

The tradition of doing the dance around the parish on Boxing Day was revived in the same year and has happened every year since (bar one year when the weather was too bad).

Eric Storey, who came from Hull but was brought up in Flamborough, offered to provide music for the team. Initially this took the form of a cassette tape from which a local musician learnt the tunes and played for the team's outings for several years, often joined by Eric. When this musician retired Eric took over as team musician and has played for them ever since, usually accompanied by his wife Sue."

Since this last revival there have been a number of short-lived junior teams formed, often for a specific event such as when a team was formed by the local Scouts for a visit to Germany.

The team dance visit Derby



The team accepted an invitation to dance at an event in Derby - an important showcase for traditions from many parts of the country. The invitation to appear boosted the Flamborough team's confidence and enthusiasm.

Photo from the team's archive

In January 1983 the Flamborough men were invited to perform at an event called "Dancing England" in Derby. For 16 years this outing remained as the adult team's sole appearance outside the village.

For many years reports of Boxing Day outings have appeared in the local newspapers. Most of these have been researched and recorded by Gordon Ridgewell. Further details of this valuable collection of press cuttings and sources will appear in the next issue of *Rattle Up My Boys*.

Music for the dance

The usual tunes used for the dance at Flamborough are "Buffalo Girl" (called "Old Johnny Walker" by the Flamborough team), "Bobby Shaftoe" and "In and Out the Windows" (known locally as "Black man got poor Sarah") which were popular tunes in the early 1800's. The team's current musician Eric Storey has added a fourth tune "This Old Man" so the tunes can change with the figures of the dance. These tunes, and the way they are played, give the dance its unique tempo and drive - although an elderly village resident recently chastised the men's team



The team appreciate the support and skills of their regular musicians, Sue and Eric Storey. Eric played a part in encouraging the revival of the adult team in 197

Photo by Trevor Stone

because they do not perform with enough gusto for her liking. It will obviously soon be time for a younger team to take over!

In his notes about the Flamborough dance in his book *Sword Dances of Northern England* Cecil Sharp confirmed that he did not find any reference to folk play associated with the dance nor did he know of an introductory verse or song. However a set of ribald words, once sung by the dancers at the end of each performance, are still remembered in the village.

The adult team is invited to Antwerp



The group who visited Antwerp for the Half Lent celebrations in April 2000 were Richard Traves (Organiser), Andrew Hall, Ian Robson, John Pratley, Gareth Ibbotson, Paul Crossland, Robert Kemp (Lead dancer), John Allison, Craig Readhead, Jonathan and William Traves (Richard's sons) and Eric and Sue Storey (Musicians).

Photo by Trevor Stone

Over recent years the village team chose not to travel from their village nor did they dance at any other time than Boxing Day so it came as a great surprise for them to be invited to an event in Belgium in April 2000 - especially when it was suggested that the team should also practice for the event! This invitation to Antwerp - and to practice - came from the late Renaat Van Craenenbroeck, a Belgian researcher who travelled widely and made many visits to see English teams. Such was his authority, and his powers of persuasion, that the team accepted.

The decision to attend the Half Lent sword dance event in Antwerp involved much planning and intensive fund-raising efforts. For such an important event the team needed new kit (such as a banner and new caps) and the travel costs were great. However a measure of the respect local people have for their dance was the encouragement and support they offered the team. Lots of local organisations gave the team support and encouragement - for example the "Flamborough Pigeon Club" gave generous financial support and the "Lions" paid

for the new banner. It was especially gratifying that so many individuals also helped, both practically and financially.

The event, which was organised by the Flemish dance team "Lange Wapper" from Antwerp, (who also have a sword dance but it is very different to the Flamborough dance) attracted huge crowds, especially for the highlight of the event on Sunday morning when both teams danced in front of the magnificent Antwerp Cathedral. Researchers and dance experts from all over Europe attended the event and the Flamborough men were surprised to find that their sword dance is well known amongst these scholars. This high esteem convinced the dancers of the need to give a first class performance - judging from the audiences reaction, they did so.

Part of the village's heritage

The Flamborough sword dance is a valuable part of our heritage - not just of local interest but also of national importance. In recent years the custom has been referred to at academic conferences as far apart as Italy and New York. And yet the Flamborough team, as opposed to the dance, is almost unknown more than a few miles from the village! The dance has been published and is extensively taught (often by people unaware of the existence of a village team). Because of the many published descriptions of the dance it has become popular with teams wishing to take up sword dancing and to expand their repertoire but the village team are anxious not to be "swamped" by other versions of their dance. Performance details of the dance are "in the public domain" but that does not prevent the Flamborough team from hoping for respect for this original village custom. They hope that other teams will, at least, acknowledge the difference between the village tradition and other versions of the dance.

A report from *The Dalesman*, Vol. 21, No 4, July 1959 illustrates this point:

"The White Rose Morris Men, of Leeds, who will be out and about again this month, have been busy rehearsing a dance which (some say) was introduced into Yorkshire by the Norsemen.

Flamborough Sword Dance is being kept alive by a team of local boys supervised by the village headmaster. Says R E Laughton, one of the Morris Men: "They do not, however, perform the dance away from their own district, and I think that our presentation in the streets will be the first for a long time."

In the village of Flamborough the dance is a living (and changing) custom - it is not an outdated curiosity nor a museum piece of academic interest, nor is it regarded as a challenging dance to enable teams to demonstrate their dancing skills.

The team's trip to Antwerp brought home to many people just how important the village dance is regarded by international folklorists. This understanding has increased interest in the tradition within the village and has also increased the local sense of "ownership".

The Flamborough team has begun to welcome recent opportunities to present their village dance at a number of events but they are determined to keep the annual Boxing Day tour of the village, for the villagers, as their tradition - their major outing. The key question is how will future generations regard the dance? The current revival of interest in the village and the resumption of teaching of the dance in the village school by Carol Coultas should help to safeguard the tradition for some years to come. Recently the Victoria Club in Flamborough has provided the team with a base in which to display artefacts and an impressive collection of photographs gathered mainly from the people of the village.

If you really want to see the real Flamborough tradition, why not come and see the team on their home patch next Boxing Day?

Correction to part 1

The last issue quoted Cecil Sharp's notes from his second trip to Flamborough in January 1912. The notes refer to Richard and William Major. Checking in the village Richard Traves wishes to clarify the details. In his notes Sharp infers that his main informant in 1912 (Richard Major) and his earlier informant (who he

describes as William Major) are brothers. William's surname was Emerson and the two men were brothers-in-law.

Lange Wapper to visit Flamborough

The Flamborough men enjoyed their visit to Antwerp and, on their return home they commenced planning to invite the Belgians to Flamborough. Renaat's untimely death caused the Flamborough men to proceed with care - they were anxious not to cause upset and appear too intrusive. However things turned out OK and the Lange Wapper team are to visit on August 2nd, 3rd and 4th. Plans include a boat trip, a performance by a local Fishermen's Choir, a visit to Bempton Cliffs, sight seeing and, of course, some dancing.

Sword dancers from Northumbria

The following article was discovered by Gordon Ridgewell in *The Times* of January 4th 1843, page 5. A similar piece was posted on the Internet by Peter Bearon in April 1998. It had appeared in the *Bolton Chronicle* dated January 7th 1843 and it was described as from "The Correspondent of The Times" but it omitted a section from the article sent in by Gordon. I am uncertain as to whether the article refers to Longsword or Rapper but I am delighted to note that, in the intervening 150+ years the pessimistic conclusion of the author has not yet come about. I see no signs of the dance "rapidly shrinking into desuetude".

The version from *The Times* reads:

Sword Dancing in Northumberland

(From a Correspondent)

There is a very singular custom, called "Sword-dancing," prevalent in many parts of Northumberland, and, I believe, in the county of Durham also, during the Christmas holidays, which it may perhaps interest some of your readers to describe, as I am inclined to think that it is peculiar to this part of the kingdom. The sword-dancers are men entirely or chiefly composed of miners or pitmen, and of persons engaged in the various other vocations of a colliery, who, during the week intervening between Christmas and New Year's day, perambulate the country in parties, consisting of from 12 to 20, partly in search of money, but much more, I believe, of adventure and excitement. On these occasions they are habited in a peculiarly gaudy dress, which, with their dancing, principally attracts attention. Instead of their ordinary jackets they wear others, composed of a kind of variegated patchwork, which, with their hats, are profusely decorated with ribands of the gayest hues, prepared and wrought by their sisters or sweethearts, the sword-dancers being usually young and unmarried men. This, with slight individual variations, is the description of dress worn by all the members of a sword-dancing party with the exception of two conspicuous characters invariably attached to the company, and denominated amongst themselves respectively the "Tommy" and the "Bessy". Those two personages wear the most frightfully grotesque dresses imaginable; the former being usually clad in the skin of some wild animal, and the latter in petticoats and the costume of an old woman; and it is the office of these two individuals, who play by far the most important part in sword-dancing excursions, to go round amongst the company which collects to see them dance, and levy contributions in money; each being furnished for this purpose with a huge tin or iron box, which they rattle in the faces of the bystanders and perform other antics and grimaces to procure subscriptions. A fiddler also is an indispensable attaché to a company of sword-dancers; and it is the business of another of the party to carry about a change of wearing apparel for his comrades, which becomes necessary when they make protracted journies, as they sometimes do, into the country, going round amongst the towns and hamlets, and farm-steadings, and exhibiting their dance before the inhabitants. This is a peculiar kind of dance, which I should in vain attempt to describe. I can only say that it bears some resemblance to an ordinary quadrille dance, with this difference, that the sword-dancers are

NEWS

Claro Sword create a five man dance

In the last issue I printed news of a new dance being "worked on" by Claro Sword from Harrogate. In the course of assembling details I got an invitation to the first public outing of the dance after the Plough Blessing ceremony at St. John's Church, Knaresborough. Photos and details of the dance will be in the next issue.

Ron Shuttleworth comments on "The Coat"

Ron writes:

"Musing on Tom Chambers' *The Strange Case of the Sentry's New Greatcoat* (see issue 2, series 10 for Tom's original piece on a passage from the play from Ripon) I hit on a conjectural link for that enigmatic fourth line.

In the Sowerby version it is "That you and me court". If one transposes the pronouns and puts it into something close to local speech, with a diaeresis on the last word, you get -

THA' ME AN' YOU CO-URT. Say it quickly and you can see how easily confusion might arise. (An' me a new co-at)"

Coat or Court?

On this topic Tom Chambers tells me he has found a reference from **Yorkshire Notes and Queries** from 1907. The confusing verse in this version reads:

Oh Sentry! Oh Sentry! All stand in a row,
I bid you fair manner of eve,
and I wish you all Sweethearts
and you of blue Jackets
So ladies I bid you farewell,
So ladies I bid you farewell.

As Tom comments - Couriouser and couriouser!

York Gentlemen dance again

Readers will recall the news that the York Gentlemen and West Riding Longswordmen had folded (the latter was reported in issue 4, series 9). It was good to hear that, although they are not fully operational, the two teams combined to dance in York on the evening of Plough Monday. Can we hope for more?

Jeff Lawson writes....

Dear Trevor

"I have to say I don't agree with your comments in the last *Rattle Up My Boys* about dancing "living" traditions, as a dancer of Papa Stour I have to say that. I think that there is a complex argument on this one, with different strands, some of which conflict. Traditions such as Handsworth, who have made it clear that they do not want to be copied may have a point. Others such as Flamborough are more difficult, the Flamborough team have not been continuous and there may well be teams dancing Flamborough which have a longer "continuous tradition" of it than Flamborough themselves. You also have dances, such as Papa Stour, which just wouldn't be seen if they were not done by revival teams. In addition, again like Papa Stour, the traditional team may have given it's blessing to other "versions" provide it is made clear they are a version. You then get into the whole minefield of what is a traditional team, which I shall leave for the moment!"

Jeff goes on to tell me that, following a career move, he now dances with Southport Swords, Sallyport and North British. The latter team have expanded their repertoire to include longsword and are specialising in Scottish longsword dances. The team's version of the Perth dance missed out the raft!

Comments on "attracting more dancers"

Ron Shuttleworth writes of his experience of setting up and "bonding" a team:

"With regard to Jack Ledger's request for ideas for boosting team morale, I can offer the following:

I observed that several Morris teams practised in school halls, etc. They got through as quickly as possible and then went their separate ways. Some went for a drink, but it was rarely possible for them all to sit together in any sort of communion, which could easily lead to the formation of internal groupings.

When I started Coventry Mummers, I wanted the weekly meetings to be a social event as well as a practice. I wanted a private room on licensed premises, preferably with a large table round which all could sit, drink and chat. This promotes 'all mates together' and inhibits the formation of cliques. We are now in our thirty-fifth year.

The fact that we have only about thirteen members makes the following an economically viable solution. We find a Working Men's Club, or similar organisation, which has a suitable room available on our practice night, and pay for all our men to become members. Last year the annual sub was £4.50 each, this year it is £2.00! We then get the room free."

Norris Winstone can be relied upon to add his (extensive) experience to matters which come up in these pages. Norris saw a link between Renaat's last article (in issue 2, series 10) which set out his theories of creating a long lived team and Jack Ledger's appeal for ideas on how to build up a team and improve morale (issue 3, series 9).

Norris commented:

"I don't think that the 'secret society' approach would work in England nowadays. The ideal way to attract more participants is to make the dance interesting and challenging so that people will comment that they would like to learn the dance and will add it to the repertoire of their club."

Norris also commented that Weaver's Morris of North Walsham [*Norris's team*] are hooked on the sword dance and have enjoyed performing it in public over the last season.

Whitby Competitive Dance Festival folds

By the time you receive this copy it will be too late to qualify as news but it may interest readers to hear that the Whitby Competitive Dance Festival was not held this year. The event dates back to the 1920's (when it was known as The Eskdale Dance Festival). Over recent years the numbers of competitors has steadily reduced and last year's event incurred a financial loss which caused the organisers to throw in the towel.

Ian Davies (of Goathland Plough Stots) hopes to assemble a new group to present a similar event in future years.

Exotic workshops

I thought that I had reached the top when I took workshops in New York and Belgium a few years ago. However those trips pale into insignificance alongside Pete and Sue Coe's activities - they are to travel to New Zealand and the United States to do workshops!

Many thanks

I was most flattered by the messages congratulating me on the receipt of the English Folk Dance & Song Society Gold Badge. I was also touched by the many readers who expressed their regret at the impending end of the road for *Rattle Up My Boys* - I continue to hope that someone will take over from me but so far I wait in vain.

The next issue will carry extracts of the press cuttings collected by Gordon Ridgwell which refer to the Flamborough dance. It will also include a list and order form for back issues.

I also hope to present information of a new five man dance by Claro Sword & Morris and give details of an impressive video and booklet about Redcar Sword which they produced as part of a local history project.

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