

## THE HIGH SPEN SWORD DANCE

*This notation was written by Bill Cassie and originally published in 1965<sup>1</sup>; it incorporates part of an earlier article published in 1954<sup>2</sup>. Please note that the High Spen sword dance is a living tradition still being developed and performed by the High Spen Blue Diamonds, and so this notation should not be considered a definitive description of the dance as it should be performed today.*

On 8<sup>th</sup> July 1964, Fred Forster of High Spen died in hospital at the age of 71, after an illness (see Obituary in *English Dance and Song*, October 1964). He was one of the old school of staunch rapper men, of phenomenal memory, and of tremendous enthusiasm for the rapper. The knots described below serve as his best memorial.

High Spen lies a little to the south of the Tyne on a ridge between the Tyne and the Derwent valleys in Co. Durham. It lies at the centre of a group of well-known rapper pits – Winlaton, Swalwell and North Walbottle.

In October 1952, the Kings College Morris Men were on their annual tour of the Miners' Clubs of Tyneside. Each year they dance in these Clubs in the autumn and meet many old rapper dancers who tell tales of teams long vanished, or who, like Jack Roscoe who used to dance No. 1 for Winlaton, join in the performance. Three teams were out on this particular evening, and the one which reached High Spen carried through its usual programme, and was greeted by delighted remarks by the men in the Club. One of them said that was just the kind of dance he used to do, and when the team discovered this was a local High Spen tradition, they immediately started to track down someone who could tell them details. Although many of the old rapper dancers can remember that they danced in a team, not many can now give details of the "knots" or figures. However, in this instance, the team was fortunate to find Fred Forster who had led teams in the past, and who still knew the dance in detail. Twenty years earlier, Fred had been very enthusiastic to keep alive the High Spen tradition, but he had met many disappointments, and it was only after some persuasion from his son and from the late Mrs Forster, who was always a sturdy supporter of the High Spen rapper sides, that he agreed to undertake the considerable task of teaching and helping to record the dance.

Talks with older people of the village and study of any records and memories available, cannot place the dance back any further than about 70 years ago, but it has no doubt a much longer history than can now be resurrected. About 70 years ago, George Stobbs was the leader of the side, and most of the teachers of succeeding sides were taught by him. Three of his dancers were George Gibbon, Robert D'eath, and Jack Keith. Of these three, George Gibbon at least, passed on his knowledge to succeeding teams, and in fact the name Gibbon appears a number of times in the team's history. As in many other villages, the tradition depended to some extent on one family, and Mrs Fred Forster who had done so much to encourage boys' and men's teams of the past was also a Miss Gibbon.

The teams danced and passed away and others revived the dance once more, and at the time when Fred Forster became interested in the local tradition, the team dancing was called the Vernon Troupe because the landlord of the 'Miners Arms', where the team practised, was Mr Fred Vernon. The Vernon Troupe consisted of Jack Keith, Eddie Blyth, Eddie Gibbon, Tommy D'eath, John Coulson, and Arthur Watson. Their musician was Victor Watson who played the melodeon. One day Fred Forster met some boys of the village, each carrying a piece of stick and he showed them how to tie the star. This aroused their interest and they asked if they could be taught the dance. Mr and Mrs Forster went to considerable trouble to teach the new team, and had the assistance of George Gibbon, Mrs Forster's brother, and was one of the pupils of the old George Stobbs. Fred Forster had many amusing memories of how he had to sit eating his supper wedged behind the table while the boys wore out the linoleum at the other end of the kitchen. The musician was again Victor Robson who had come along to help.

The boys were not able to afford rappers at the time, and in order to make enough to have rappers forged for them, they performed with their pieces of stick at local Miners' Clubs in the

evening entertainments, winning a prize regularly as the High Spen Blue Diamonds. One of the friends of the team at the time was Mr Priestman, the Managing Director of the Victoria Garesfield Colliery where many of the High Spen people then worked. He had a board made 5 ft 6 ins square to protect Mrs Forster's linoleum, rapidly being worn away. This board stood upright against the wall when not in use, but it was used a great deal by the boys in practising, and by the adult team later. The effect of this board has been to make it "traditional" to dance the High Spen rapper dance within this small area. The adult team formed later were called the Amber Stars – Eddie Gibbon, John Coulson, Tommy D'eath, Isaac Wood and Fred Forster. The teams at this time were competing in the North of England Musical Tournament at Newcastle upon Tyne, where classes for traditional dancing had long been in existence. The boys won the first place in 1927 (see cover photo, *English Dance and Song*, vol. 18, No. 3), and the men's team were frequently second, although much to their regret, they were never placed first.

In 1933, an ambitious idea grew in the minds of the men; they would tour England showing the rapper dance as they went. The first thing was to obtain permission to leave their work, but when Mr Priestman heard that the Tyneside dance was to be displayed to other parts of the country, he told the men that their jobs would be waiting for them when they came back, however long they stayed away. So towards the end of August they packed up and set off, Mr and Mrs Forster even giving up their house and storing their furniture for the period. The tour was an extensive one and those who were on it were Jim Crampton, Bill Holroyd, Fred Forster, Tommy Purvis (also known as "Tucker"), Norman Lowes, and Tommy Wilkes (melodeon) was the musician. Mrs Forster also went with the team as the "mother", and young Freddy Forster (not quite 14) was also there helping to carry the baggage during the long walks and short bus rides from place to place. One of the memories of the people who went on this tour is of the excellent arrangements made, and welcome given by many of the E.F.D.S.S. Branch secretaries. The tour included such places as Bishop Auckland, Barnard Castle, Kirkby Stephen, Kirkby Lonsdale, Burnley, Wetherby, York, Doncaster (in time for the St. Leger!), Bawtry, Retford, Newark, Lincoln, Grantham, Melton Mowbray, Leicester, Evesham and Kettering. At Kettering, three weeks after the start, the team completed their tour and went back to the pit with memories which lasted through the years.

In 1934, at the suggestion of Lady Trevelyan (President of the Northumberland branch) the High Spen knots were filmed for the Society at the North of England Musical Tournament, the side on this occasion consisting of Freddy Forster, Fred Forster, Jackie Coburn, Jackie Ripley and John Short, with Tommy Wilkes as musician and Albert Tulip as the "Tommy". This film is in the Society's archives at Cecil Sharp House.

It was after a lapse of nearly twenty years and as a result of the encounter already described that the dance was again performed at the May Day Festival, Kings College, Newcastle, on 1<sup>st</sup> May 1953, and a day or two later, and a day or two later it was shown at the North of England Musical Tournament by a Kings College team, when Fred Forster (as Captain) had the pleasure of receiving a certificate for first place in the Open Rapper Class – an ambition fulfilled at last. At the Derwent Valley (Co. Durham) meeting of the Morris Ring in August of the same year Fred took his old position as No. 3 in the team.

In the years 1954 to 1956 the revived High Spen Blue Diamonds consisted of: Fred Forster (Captain), Freddy Forster (No. 1), Albert Walker (No. 2), John Short (No. 3), Joe Cox, later Billy Herron (No. 4), Isaac Wood (No. 5), 'Kelly' Laws (Tommy), Billy Clasper (Betty), and the musician was at first Jimmy Farrage (mouth organ) and later Jimmy Johnson (melodeon).

They danced in many places in the North. One of their first engagements was in a "Top Town" television programme celebrating Blaydon, the nearest town to High Spen. This was on 15<sup>th</sup> October 1954. In the same year, they won their class at the Darlington Musical Tournament, and they appeared in the E.F.D.S.S. New Year Festival at the Royal Albert Hall in January 1955. Fred and Mrs Forster also started a new junior team in 1955. On 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1956, the Blue Diamonds took part in a programme opening the new Television Studios at

Dickenson Road, Manchester, and in the following November they danced at the Society's Festival at Birmingham. The team broke up because of people leaving the district, but Freddy Forster started another which operated in Birtley until about 1960.

When Kings College Morris Men rediscovered Fred in 1952, he was the only surviving dancer who could describe the knots. Even the complex *Bulldog* (rumours of this knot, but no description, had reached K.C.M.M. via one of the North Walbottle dancers) came fresh from Fred's memory.

## THE DANCE

In the High Spen knots, the men danced with rappers held high above the head. This recognises the principle that in the Tyneside rapper dance, it is the rappers, and not the men, who perform. The pattern and movement are best shown when the swords are well seen – high rappers and no crouching!

The knots described need not be danced in any particular order, except that “running knots” and “jigging knots” should, as far as possible, alternate for the sake of interest. Neither is it necessary that the High Spen knots should be kept together as a special dance. Knots, from whatever source, can be introduced into a repertoire without harm to the rapper as a whole.

High Spen sides, however, had a First, Second, etc. dance, although it is doubtful if the combinations of knots used showed the High Spen tradition to its best advantage. These arrangements of knots are given as a historical note, in the Appendix.

At the end of the (shortened) calling-on song the dancers step forward, from a straight line, into *Coach-and-Horses*. This is the same as the normal “Guard” [“Fiddler”] position, but the rappers are not held on the shoulders but as high as possible above the heads of the dancers. From there, the first knot is always *Single and Double Guard*.

Most knots end with one, two or three circuits of *Curly* – a well known rapper movement. From *Curly* a continuous movement into the *Star* is made.

After twenty years without a performance Fred Forster remembered and taught to the Kings College Morris Men (Newcastle University) the following knots:

### SINGLE AND DOUBLE GUARD

No. 1 and No. 5 cast off and circle the set in opposite directions holding their rappers high. No. 1 meets No. 5 at the back of the set and passes on the inside (between No. 3 and No. 5). Nos. 1 and 5 continue in the same directions and meet and pass again at the front of the set without turning. This time, No. 5 is on the inside and passes between No. 1 and the set.

They now continue in the same directions into a second circuit, this time followed by Nos. 2 and 4. When the second circuit is completed by four dancers, it is important that they should regain their original places. This is accomplished by No. 1 and No. 5 apparently commencing on a third circuit, but turning into their own places, followed by Nos. 2 and 4 who keep close behind them. The set is now in *Coach-and-Horses* position. At this stage, Nos. 1 and 5 have their rappers crossed. This is quite in order and is put right by subsequent movements.

No. 5 now casts off and No. 1 performs one quick counter-clockwise turn on his own axis in front of the set as a short solo performance. The *Curly* figure follows, and the *Star* is made.

Throughout this knot the movement is quite continuous and smooth, there being no pause when the dancers regain their original positions after the second circuit. During the whole of the knot, until he joins in *Curly*, No. 3 jigs in position.

## FIXY

Nos. 1 and 5 both cast off to the back of the set. All dancers then perform a phrase of jigging, all facing forward. Nos. 2 and 4 now cast to the back, and, at the same time, Nos. 1 and 5 step forward and make a half-turn to face Nos. 2 and 4, keeping the rappers open. No. 3 is in the centre. In this position, with the swords held well up above the heads, there is a phrase of jigging. No. 3 then moves forward between Nos. 1 and 5, casting to his left. All dancers then move into *Curly* and *Star*.

## TOMMY KNOT

This knot is well known in other variations of the rapper dance as the Figure Eight, but it is worth repeating for the more picturesque title, and for the excellence of the knot. Nos. 1 and 5 cast out and go to the bottom of the set, followed by the others. At the bottom, dancers cross to the opposite circles, Nos. 1, 5, 2, 4 and 3 crossing in that order. On the next circuit, all cross back again from the bottom of the set to the home circuits, and this figure-eight crossing is repeated as often as necessary. The men should dance close together with bent rappers, giving the impression of great complexity. This is one of the rapper figures which is much appreciated by audiences although it is one of the simpler ones to perform.

## CHOKER

From the *Coach-and-Horses* position, No. 1 casts out and No. 5 moves to his left towards the back of the set, No. 5 meets No. 1 and crosses on the inside of the set between No. 1 and No. 3. Nos. 2 and 4 are still at the front, the set having moved forward slightly. All dancers then jig in position until the end of the phrase.

Nos. 2 and 4 then cast to stand behind the other three, and the rappers are held in the form of a breastplate in front of No. 3 while the dancers jig in position once more. If the audience is all around the dancers, the jigging can be carried out while the whole set rotates on its own axis, displaying the breastplate in all directions.

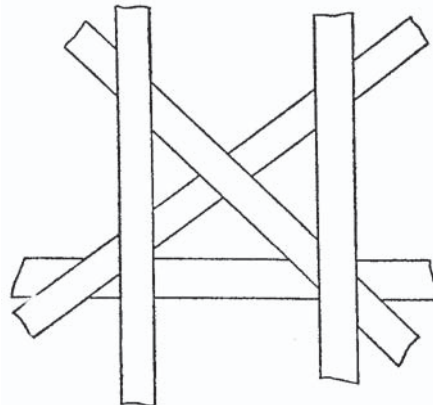


DIAGRAM 1

*Choker Breastplate as seen by Audience*

It is very important that this breastplate should be held in a symmetrical pattern. This is obtained if No. 3 pulls down the ends of the rappers so that they are curved, and puts his thumb behind the two which cross at the bottom of the rappers he holds. Diagram 1 shows how the pattern should appear to the audience. To achieve this, it is also important that Nos. 2 and 4 should both hold their hands close together on each side of the shoulders of No. 3.

To untie, No. 3 lifts the rappers high and passes underneath them, casting to his left round the set. No. 5 then crosses in front of No. 1, making a half-turn clockwise to the *Coach-and-Horses* position. No. 1 follows No. 3 and *Curly* and *Star* are performed. Again, it is important that in this and all High Spen knots, the untying, *Curly* and *Star* form a continuous and smooth movement.

## DOUBLE FIGURE EIGHT

In this knot the basic pattern is the Curly or Twos-and-Threes movement of opposing circles, the dancers remaining in their own circles unless they are performing the double figure eight. This movement is performed by pairs of dancers in turn, the pairs being Nos. 1 and 5, Nos. 2 and 4 and others described below. The dancer named first in each of these pairs is the leading dancer for the particular movement.

The knot is commenced from the Coach-and-Horses, Nos. 1 and 5 casting off to the bottom of the set, and then crossing from there into a figure eight, reaching the top of the set on their wrong sides. In crossing from the bottom to the top the leading dancer (first named in the list below) crosses in front of the other. At the top of the set, Nos. 1 and 5 cast off into a second circuit (on the wrong sides) and cross back again to their places from the bottom. The other dancers merely follow on their own sides and do not cross.

For the rest of the knot it is probably easier to understand the movements if the men are imagined to return to a loose circle facing inward before commencement of the next cast. No such circle is, however, formed, the movements being smooth and continuous.

The second pair to perform the movement (Nos. 2 and 4) pass through between Nos. 1 and 5 without crossing (shoulder to shoulder). They are followed by No. 3 (behind No. 2) and No. 1 (while No. 5 follows on No. 4's side). When Nos. 2 and 4 reach the bottom of the set they cross to their wrong sides as they come up once more to the top. On reaching the bottom of the next circuit, they cross once more to their own places, and the formation is once more that of *Coach-and-Horses* or a loose circle. The next pair immediately move through (Nos. 3 and 5 moving between Nos. 1 and 2, and No. 4 occupying position three) followed by Nos. 3 and 5 respectively. Two crossings of Nos. 3 and 5 bring all back to places.

When the dancers are back in position each time, another pair passes through, casts off and does two figures of eight back to places as before, the dancer in 3's position following the leading dancers immediately and the pair in the second column below following on last. The sequence is:

<i>Pair casting</i>	<i>Passing between (before casting)</i>
1 and 5	- - -
2 and 4	1 and 5
3 and 5	1 and 2
4 and 1	3 and 2
5 and 2	4 and 3

When the dancers return to the *Coach-and-Horses* position after the fifth movement, Nos. 1 and 5 cast off to complete one circuit of *Curly* before the *Star* is called.

## GRANNY KNOT

No. 5 moves out behind No. 4, who moves slightly forward. At the same time, No. 1 moves out and comes behind No. 3. Up to this point there is no casting or turning of the dancers. In this position, No. 5's rapper is in front of No. 3. Nos. 2 and 4 now cast behind Nos. 1 and 5. In this position all rappers are in front of No. 5's rapper. A pattern of swords should now be formed by arching them and holding them up. The whole set can then move round to display this pattern (Diagram 2). To untie, the rappers are lifted high, and No. 3 passes through under them and casts to his left. The other dancers move into *Curly* and *Star*. This is a simpler version of *Choker*.

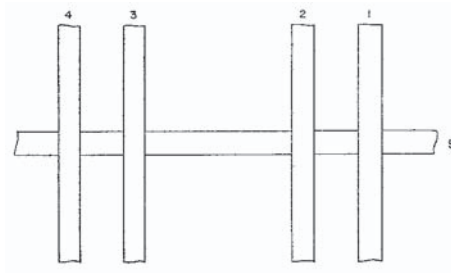


DIAGRAM 2  
*Granny Knot*

### DOUBLE FRONT JUMP

In breaking the *Star* from any previous knot, the men do not return to *Coach-and-Horses* but to a rough circle. No. 3 now steps under No. 5's rapper and the dancers stand in a straight line (Diagram 3). The end dancers in the lines formed during this knot face inward along the lines. Observe the directions in which the dancers face:

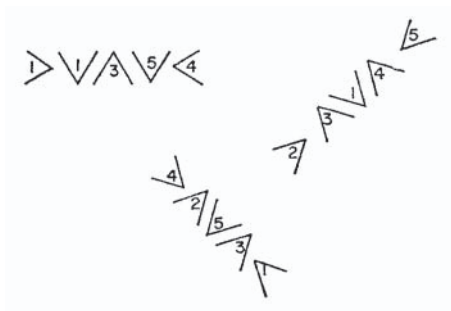


DIAGRAM 3  
*Three phases of double front jump*

The dancers jig in this position, and in the last bar Nos. 1 and 5 leap upwards while the rappers are swept beneath them. This is followed by another phrase of jiggling which should start immediately. This means that the men should land in position on the last beat of the bar, and on the right foot. The timing of this leap must be practised to suit each team, but should not be made on the first beat of the new phrase. After the second phrase of jiggling, the rappers are swept back again while the dancers perform another leap. On no account should the dancers be allowed to jump backwards or forwards, but only vertically upwards. An exaggerated sweeping movement of the rappers, even scraping the ground, adds interest to the knot.

At the end of the second jump, the dancers change places in 4 steps (L, R, L, R) so that No. 1 moves forward under the middle rapper opposite him to stand between Nos. 3 and 4 while Nos. 2 and 5 are at the ends of the line facing along the line. If this is done properly, the line is at an angle to the position of the previous line. After leaps by Nos. 3 and 4, another loose circle is formed and No. 5 moves immediately forward under the middle rapper to stand between Nos. 2 and 3 while Nos. 1 and 4 face inward along the line. This line is again at a different angle. After the final movement, the men should bunch together quickly or the *Star* movement and be too open for comfort.

As in all rapper knots the backward jump can be replaced by a back somersault, a movement which is known as *coup the rapper* ("coup" pronounced as "cowp"). It is clear that five lines could be formed, although three is usually sufficient for such a jiggling knot. The man who moves under the middle rapper for the last line should be selected so that the men on either side of him are capable of coup-the-rapper. If the knot is performed with the Tommy and Betty in the set, a triple coup can be performed, and makes a very effective end to a group of knots.

## BULLDOG

This knot starts with a warming up, in which Nos. 1 and 5 perform a Double Figure Eight (see above). Nos. 2 and 4 remain on their own sides, and No. 3 follows No. 4. When the second crossing of Nos. 1 and 5 has been completed, the knot, proper, commences.

Nos. 1 and 5 step slightly outwards to allow Nos. 2 and 4 to come through between them. No. 4 crosses to his left in front of No. 1 and No. 2 crosses behind No. 4 to move in front of No. 5. The rappers, of course, must be held high. No. 3 moves forward to the front.

Nos. 1 and 5 now come through to the front and cast out, Nos. 4 and 2 following them. Nos. 1 and 5 thus lead a *Curly* movement with Nos. 2 and 4 on their wrong sides. This movement goes through a full two circuits until Nos. 1 and 5 reach the front for the second time.

The knot depends on a solo performance by No. 3. While the other four dancers are performing the two *Curly* circuits, No. 3 moves from the front and casts left to the bottom, then comes to the front again down the centre and casts right. He then moves round in a complete circuit of the set *passing outside all the dancers*.

As he reaches the front again, the second ring of *Curly* is just ending. At that stage, Nos. 1 and 5 step out sideways without turning, to make a line with Nos. 2 and 4. No. 3 comes into the centre between Nos. 2 and 4, turning completely on his own axis (clockwise) to do so, and backing in under the rappers.

No. 3 then pulls down on the rappers which should be in a complex rope in front of all the dancers, and should be held about shoulder level. All rappers ought to be held tightly by friction. If any rapper is loose and can be moved easily, some of the movements have been wrongly made.

The rope of rappers should now be displayed, as in *Choker*, by rotating the whole set while the dancers jig.

To untie, No. 3 lifts the rappers high and passes underneath them, casting to his left. No. 1 and 5 step sideways to the centre as No. 3 reaches the back of the set. Nos. 2 and 4 cross (No. 2 on the inside). In this movement, No. 4 does a complete counter-clockwise turn. On crossing, No. 2 steps behind No. 1 while No. 4 remains at the front of the set. Nos. 5 and 1 cast off followed by 4 and 2 into *Curly* and *Star*.

## CENTRE DANCE

This can follow immediately any *Star* is made. The dancers, with the rappers held above their heads all make a half turn, left, to face outwards from a circle. Each dancer will find his hands crossed. Each dancer in turn now moves backwards into the centre of the set, the other four forming a compact square round him. All jig in this position. On the conclusion of the five (or fewer, as the Captain calls) phrases of jiggling, the dancers turn half right and move into the next knot.

## SINGLE FIGURE EIGHT

This is a two-circle knot, with three of the dancers changing from circle to circle, thus performing figures of eight. From *Coach-and-horses* No. 1 casts off into a counter-clockwise circle followed by Nos. 2 and 3. Simultaneously No. 5 casts right into a clockwise circle, followed by No. 4. After the first circuit, No. 1 joins the clockwise circuit behind No. 5, performs a circuit and returns to his own side.

No. 3 now joins the clockwise circuit behind No. 4 for one circuit and returns to his own side.

After another circuit with Nos. 1, 2 and 3 back in their counter-clockwise circuit, Nos. 3 and 5 change across, 5 crossing in front of 3. They perform a circuit and return to their own sides (No. 3 moves behind No. 4 and No. 5 behind No. 2).

As soon as they have returned to their own sides a *Star* without the preliminary *Curly*. Throughout this knot, Nos. 2 and 4 remain on their own sides without crossing.

### **FOLLOW WE** (*pr.* "Wir")

In this knot, the dancers are, at any one time, more or less stationary except for any necessary rotation to keep the rappers free. The other dancers move round in larger circles. One of the three goes off clockwise by himself, the other two going counter-clockwise. The movement is repeated by different groups of dancers, and can, of course, be done five times. It is probably unnecessary to ring all the changes in a public performance.

The pairs of dancers who stand firm are, in turn:

5 and 4, 1 and 5, 2 and 1, 3 and 2, 4 and 3.

For each of these pairs, the moving dancers are:

1, 2, and 3	(1 leads)
2, 3 and 4	(2 leads)
3, 4 and 5	(3 leads)
4, 5 and 1	(4 leads)
5, 1 and 2	(5 leads)

The leader passes between the stationary dancers, the first named being on his left and makes a clockwise turn round the second stationary dancer. He then goes counter-clockwise (in figure-eight) round the first named stationary dancer. Meanwhile, simultaneously the other two go counter clockwise round the first named stationary dancer, and then clockwise round the second stationary dancer.

At this stage the leader backs smoothly into his place and brings the next leader through and round himself to start the next following movement.

For example, when No. 4 is leader, he passes between Nos. 2 and 3, moves clockwise round No. 2, then counter-clockwise round No. 3. Meanwhile, Nos. 5 and 1 pass counter-clockwise round No. 3 and then clockwise round No. 2.

The next movement is for No. 5 to lead and pass between 3 and 4, going clockwise round No. 3. Thus as No. 4 reaches his place he pulls No. 5 past him, passing him between Nos. 3 and 4. No. 4 remains stationary for the final circuit. Each dancer stands for two circuits, No. 4's turns being at the beginning and at the end, the others standing twice in succession.

At the end of the last movement, as No. 5 finishes his figure-eight he stands almost stationary with rappers raised. No. 1 does a loop (counter-clockwise) at a point on No. 5's right. No. 1 is followed by No. 2. Simultaneously No. 3 opens his crossed rappers by rotating counter-clockwise. As he finishes this movement Nos 2, 3 and 4 pass under No. 5's rapper to make the *Star*.

There is usually no *Curly* to end this knot, the *Star* being made immediately after No. 5's lead.



## THE OLD FIDDLER

This is a jigging knot which gives variations to the *Coach-and-horses* position and is similar to the one shown by Earsdon Royal. Each movement takes four steps followed by a phrase of jigging. It is important that these phrases of jigging be very short to keep the interest alive. The best plan is to use four walking steps to change position and four beats (to include steps and a break) for the jigging. In learning the knot, longer phrases may be used.

In each movement the two dancers in front cast to the back, one dancer making a long cast to the original position of No. 3 and the other dancer making a short cast to the position immediately behind the one he occupies.

The order of casting is as follows:

<i>Long cast to the back</i>	<i>Short cast</i>
Nos.	Nos.
1	5
2	4
5	3
1	4

Throughout the knot the rappers are held very high above the heads of the dancers.

After the first phrase of the jigging, No. 1 casts to the back of the set and No. 5 casts to No. 4's position. As this is being performed, Nos. 2, 3 and 4, still jigging, move forward to maintain the position of the set, No. 3 moving into the position behind No. 2 (i.e. to his left).

The other changes are shown above, the important point to note being that Nos. 3, 1 and 5, when they are at the back move forward to the left, but that No. 2 when leaving the rear position moves forward to his right.

After the final position with Nos. 2 and 3 in front, No. 2 crosses in front of No. 3 and casts, while, simultaneously, No. 3 crosses and casts to the back of the set. At the same time No. 5 is crossing in front of No. 4 to his own side, and the dancers move into *Curly* and *Star*.

## THE LINE

This is an unusual and effective ending to any knot, and forms the end of the High Spen performance.

While jigging under the *Star* in the usual way, the whole set moves halfway round (counter-clockwise) so that No. 3 faces the audience.

At the end of the phrase, Nos. 1 and 5 fall back bringing the set into a straight line facing the audience, the rappers being held in a line at waist level.

Jigging continues to the end of the phrase, when the set moves again into a circle, rappers at waist level. The rappers will automatically form a *Star* which is held up immediately by No. 3 while the others fall back again into line facing the audience. If this is well done, the sudden appearance of the *Star* seems almost miraculous.

## APPENDIX

### *Note on Nomenclature*

The terms used by traditional rapper dancers differ from those used by Sharp. The term “figure” is not used. The subdivision of the dance is called a *Knot*. The lock was known by High Spen dancers and others as the *Star*. The distinctive rapper stepping is known as *jigging*.

### *Knots*

There is evidence amongst old papers that at one time, 35 knots were known by the High Spen Blue Diamonds. These were made into “dances”, the first dance at any performance being the most attractive, and the second, third and fourth dances less attractive or easier, and usually shorter.

One group given verbally by Fred Forster was:

#### *First dance*

- 7 Single and Double Guard
- 24 Fixy
- 5 Tommy Knot
- Choker
- 14 Double Figure-Eight
- 11 Granny Knot
- 13 Double Front Jump
- 16 Bulldog
- 18 The Line

#### *Second dance*

- 7 Single and Double Guard
- 3 The Needle
- 25 Centre Dance
- 8 Double Figure Eight
- 10 The Old Fiddler
- Follow We
- 21 Doctor Cook
- 18 The Line

Another group, found noted on the page of an exercise book was:

#### *First dance*

- 24 Fixey (spelt with an “e” here)
- 12 Cramper
- 13 Double Front Jump
- 10 The Old Fiddler
- 25 Centre Dance
- 18 The Line

#### *Second dance*

- 7 Single and Double Guard
- 9 Double Backover
- 16 Bulldog
- 35 Single Backover
- 11 Granny Knot

#### *Third dance*

- 5 Tommy Knot
- 4 Single Front Jump
- 8 Single Figure Eight
- 11 Granny Knot

The *Fourth Dance* begins: 1 Hilts upwards, 2 Betty, 3 The Needle, - but becomes illegible at the foot of a torn page.

The numbers refer to an accompanying list of knots, though this list extends only to number 21. Other knots from the list, or mentioned by Fred Forster, are:

2	Betty Dance
4	Single Front Jump
6	Single Backover Jump
-	Double Backover Jump
12	Cramper
19	Chanry
20	Doctor Parry

Single Backover (35) and Double Backover (9) are “coup the rapper” knots.

### *Curly*

This well known movement forms the chorus or link between the *Knot* and the *Star*.

Nos. 1 and 5 cast off followed by Nos. 2 and 4 respectively. No. 3 joins No. 1's circuit the first time, and alternates thereafter. Nos. 1 and 5 meet at the bottom of the set, come up the middle and cast again followed by the others keeping on their own sides. This is repeated until the Captain calls for the *Star*.

Jigging under the *Star* is performed for a phrase before the *Star* is broken and the *Coach-and-horses* position taken up for the next *Knot*.

## CALLING-ON SONG

(It is usual to sing only verses 1 and 8.)

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| 1 Kind friends now I pray give attention,<br>And just listen to what I've to say<br>In the first place I merely will mention,<br>By chance we have travelled this way.<br>We're travelling this country for pleasure<br>Likewise to take of your cheer<br>And the lasses we mean to be courting<br>And taste all the publican's beer. | 5 The next is the son of a Seaman<br>Like Nelson he's great in command<br>He's true, he's bold and he's worthy<br>And the leader of this little band.  |
| 2 I've brought here five merry young fellows<br>So noble, so handsome, so nice<br>Be quick bonny lassies and tell us<br>Which of my five men is your choice   | 6 The next is the son of a farmer<br>His father has plenty of cows<br>His sister she's kept for to milk them<br>While Jack drives the horses and ploughs.  |
| 3 The first of men is Bold Robin,<br>The greatly renowned Robin Hood<br>He's the hero of the Forest of Epping<br>The forest of bonny Sherwood.<br>He's the hero of many a brave action<br>He conquered whatever befell<br>And his enemy went to destruction<br>But none can this person excel.  | 7 The next is the son of a miner<br>He works by the strength of his arm<br>He sends the coals up in the summer<br>And winter to keep us all warm.  |
| 4 The next is Will Scarlet so merry<br>So noble, so handsome, so nice.<br>His cheeks are as red as a cherry<br>With a bloomful of love in his eye.<br>He's the hero of many a brave action<br>He conquered whatever befell<br>And his enemy went to destruction<br>But none can this person excel.                                    | 8 Kind friends now you've seen my five actors<br>They mean to act up to their part.<br>They have travelled this world full of danger<br>With strong hand and stout willing heart.<br>Be calm lads, be mindful and steady<br>You're fit to jump over the moon<br>Now player I hope you are ready<br>And play us a canny bit tune. |

### References:

1. Cassie B. Rapper Knots from High Spen. *Folk Music Journal* 1965;1(1):6-24.
2. Cassie B. The High Spen Rapper Dance. *English Dance and Song* 1954;18(3):98-100.

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