

THE BEADNELL SWORD DANCE

This notation was originally published by Cecil Sharp in 1912¹.

Beadnell is a small village situated on the north-east coast of Northumberland, a few miles south of the Farne Islands, and about fifty miles north of Newcastle-on-Tyne. The sword-dance is annually performed there by fishermen on New Year's Day. The dancers, five in number, are accompanied by two Bessies and a musician with an accordion.

COSTUME

The dancers are dressed in blue jerseys and navy blue cloth trousers, and wear, over one shoulder and breast, single baldrics or sashes of pink silk or sateen, four or five inches wide, upon which several large rosettes of different colours are sewn. They dance bare-headed.

Each dancer carries a flexible sword or rapper, made of hoop-iron, similar to, but rather longer than, those used by the Swalwell and Earsdon sword-dancers, and without a revolving handle, blocks of wood being fastened on the upper and lower surfaces of each extremity.

The two Bessies are impersonated by men dressed in women's clothes, one of them carrying a red sunshade.

The musician is dressed in his ordinary clothes.

THE MUSIC

There is no special tune traditionally associated with the dance; the musician may choose any dance air in 6/8 time that he thinks suitable.

THE STEP

Ordinarily the dancers walk or tramp in time with the music, two steps to the bar, but at certain points in the dance, as hereinafter directed, they "step" in the way described in the Grenoside² dance.

THE DANCE

The dance consists of five Figures. As in the Swalwell³ and Earsdon⁴ dances, the movements are continuous, no pause being made between the several evolutions. The locking of the Nut must be completed at the end of one or other strain of the air.

FIGURE 1.

The dancers stand close together in a ring, facing centre, and hold their swords, points up and slanting a little forward, hilts at chin-level, while the musician plays the first strain of the tune (8 bars).

They then perform the following movements:

(a.) The Clash as at Kirkby Malzeard⁵. (8 bars).

(b.) Dance round in a ring, clockwise, each dancer placing his sword over his left shoulder and grasping with his left hand the tip of the sword belonging to the man in front of him. The hands are lifted to forehead-level, so that the swords are raised about six inches above the shoulders (8 bars).

(c.) One-Turn-Off as at Swalwell³

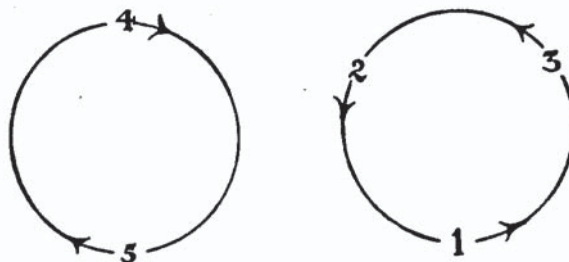
(d.) The Rose. The swords are meshed together in the way that is usual in rapper-dances, a to say, No. 1 raises his left arm and, followed by Nos. 2, 3 and 4, turns outward to his left. Directly the Nut is formed, it is raised horizontally to breast-level, while the dancers move slowly round clockwise (8 bars).

All make a half-turn, clockwise, halt and step, backs toward centre, hands at shoulder-level (8 bars).

Nos. 1 and 2 each make a half-turn, the former counter-clockwise, the latter clockwise, raise the sword between them, No. 1's, move forward a step or two and pass the sword over the heads of Nos. 3, 4 and 5, who slowly back beneath it. The dancers are now in a ring, facing centre, linked hilt-and-point.

FIGURE 2.

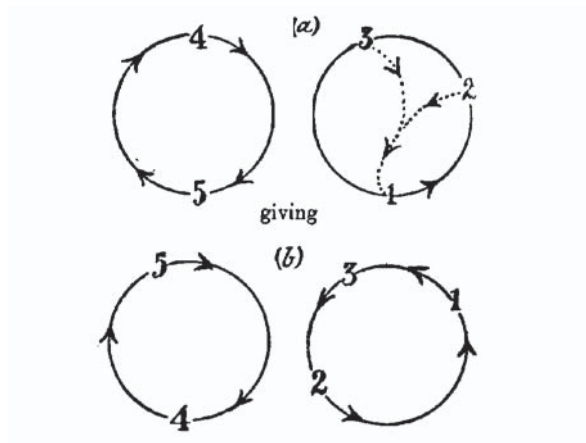
No. 1 raises his left arm and, followed by Nos. 2 and 3, turns outward to his left and moves round in a small circle, counter-clockwise; while No. 5 raises his right arm and followed by No. 4 dances round in a circle, clockwise. The dancers in the two circles move round synchronously, Nos. 1 and 5 beginning each fresh circuit, as they face the audience, at the same moment:--



At a call from the Leader, which must be given when he and No. 5 are about to enter upon a new circuit, all face centre, hilt-and-point. No. 1 then turns outward to his left, the Nut is tied, and (d), (e) and (f) are danced as in the first Figure.

FIGURE 3.

The Needle, as at Swalwell³.



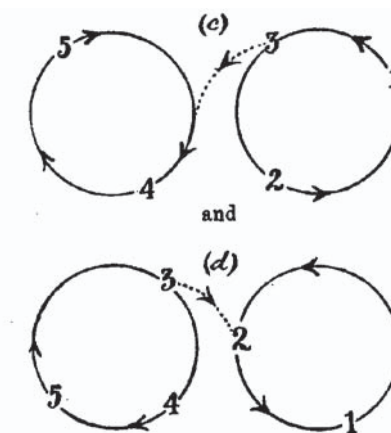
No. 1 raises his left arm, turns outward to his left and, followed by Nos. 2 and 3, moves round in a circle counter-clockwise. Simultaneously, No. 5 raises his right arm, turns outward to his right and, followed by No. 4, moves round in a circle clockwise

The dancers are now moving round in two circles, like cog-wheels, at the same rate, but in opposite directions, Nos. 1, 2 and 3 counter-clockwise, and Nos. 5 and 4 clockwise (see diagram b).

At the beginning of every fresh circuit No. 8 crosses over from one circle to the other, and dances, therefore, in successive circuits, alternately behind No. 2 and No. 4, shown in the following diagrams.

The leader must be careful to call "Nut" only when No. 3 is just entering the right-hand circle, and is about to follow behind No. 2 (see diagram d. No. 1 then continues moving round, counter-clockwise, followed by Nos. 2, 3 and 4; while No. 5 moves forward a step or two, makes a three-quarter turn counter-clockwise and faces centre.

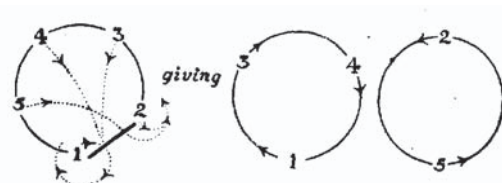
In this and in all figures in which the performers are moving round in adjacent circles, it will be necessary for the dancers to keep their hands well above their heads.



At its conclusion, the Leader gives the call and all face centre, hilt-and-point; where-upon (d), (e) and (f) follow as in the two preceding Figures.

FIGURE 4.

No. 5 passes under No. 1's sword and, followed by No. 2 proceeds to dance round in a small circle, counter-clockwise; while No. 1 turns outward to his right, passes under his own sword and, followed by Nos. 4 and 3, moves round in a circle, clockwise, thus:



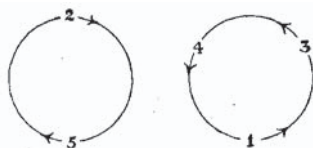
No. 3 may, if he so pleases, change over in successive circuits from one circle to the other, alternately following No. 4 and No. 2.

At a call from the Leader, given when he and No. 6 are beginning a fresh circuit, and when No. 3 is in the left circle, No. 5 backs between Nos. 1 and 3, No. 1 makes a three-quarter turn counter-clockwise, and all face centre, hilt-and-point.

The Nut is then tied and (d), (e) and (f) performed as in preceding Figures.

FIGURE 5.

No. 5 raises his right arm, turns outward to his right and, followed by No. 2, dances round in a circle, clockwise. Directly No. 2 has crossed in front of No. 1, No. 1 raises his left arm, turns outward to his left and, followed by Nos. 4 and 3 (No. 4 in front of No. 3), moves round in a circle, counter-clockwise, thus :--



The Leader, at his pleasure, and when he and No. 5 are setting out upon a new circuit, gives the call; whereupon No. 2 moves forward between Nos. 1 and 3 and makes a half-turn, clockwise.

No. 1 then turns out to his left, the Nut is tied, and the Rose danced as in the first Figure. On the conclusion of the Rose, No. 1 raises the Nut in his right hand, high above his head, and faces audience, the rest of the dancers forming up in a straight line and facing in the like direction, Nos. 5 and 4 on No. 1's right, Nos. 2 and 3 on his left.

This concludes the dance.

References:

1. Cecil Sharp, *The Sword Dances of Northern England*, London: Novello, 1912; volume 2, pp. 39-43
2. *ibid*, 1911, volume 1, pp. 54-67
3. *ibid*, 1911, volume 1, pp. 72-81
4. *ibid*, 1911, volume 1, pp. 82-103
5. *ibid*, 1911, volume 1, pp. 37-53

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