

# THE NORTH WALBOTTLE SWORD DANCE

*This notation was originally published by Cecil Sharp in 1913<sup>1</sup>*

Walbottle is a suburb of Newcastle-on-Tyne. The sword dance, which is now annually performed at Christmas-time, was introduced there as recently as 1906 by a dancer of the name of Raine, who taught the Walbottle men the sword dance which used to be, but is not now, danced at this native village, Bedlington. The dance now to be described is, therefore, strictly speaking, the Bedlington dance.

There are five dancers, a Tommy or Fool, a Bessy, and a concertina player.

## COSTUME

The dancers are dressed in white cambric shirts with a sailor-knotted tie of velvet, violet velveteen breeches, white stockings of rough texture, black shoes, and a broad sash of yellow silk or sateen round the waist, tied in a bow over the left hip. Each dancer carries a rapper of the ordinary pattern, but of thicker metal than usual. The blade is twenty-four inches long by one-and-an-eighth wide, and the revolving handle five inches in length, making twenty-nine inches in all.

The Bessy, a man-woman, has a bonnet and chignon, and a dress of crimson-flowered calico with a ribbon round the waist.

The Tommy wears a tall hat, a tail-coat, and loose trousers of the same material as the Bessy's dress, and a false moustache and beard. Both he and the Bessy carry swords.

## THE MUSIC

There is no special tune belonging to the dance. The airs usually played are "Irish Whisky," "The Rollicking Irishman," and "The Irish Washerwoman."

The figures of the dance are performed without a break. The music controls the steps only, except in those movements for which a definite number of bars is prescribed in the following instructions.

The musician should always accompany the Rose with the second strain (B) of the tune, at any rate when he intends to change the air in the next Nut.

## THE STEP

In the ordinary figures, the dancers use a springy, short-paced walking step, executed on the ball of the foot, at the rate of 140-160 per minute. In the Rose, and where otherwise directed, they "step" in the way described for the Grenoside dance<sup>2</sup> (see Part I, p. 56).

## **THE DANCE**

### **CLASH-AND-TURN-SINGLE**

The performers, swords over right shoulders, stand in a large circle, twelve or fifteen feet in diameter, facing centre thus:

At the beginning of the next strain all take three running-steps forward on the first and middle beats of the first bar and the first beat of the second bar, and clash their swords together on the middle beat of the second bar. In the third and fourth bars each dancer makes a whole-turn on his axis, counter-clockwise, in four steps, beginning with the right foot. At the beginning of the fifth bar, all face clockwise, turning clockwise to do so, place rappers over right (i.e. inside) shoulders, grasp with left hands the tips of the swords in front and at once break into Single-Guard, the first movement of the first Nut.

In construction, the Walbottle dance is similar to the Swalwell<sup>2</sup> and Earsdon<sup>3</sup> dances. It consists, that is, of a series of Figures or Nuts, each containing three movements – (1) Single-Guard, (2) a distinctive movement varying with each Figure and ending with tying of the Nut, and (3) the Rose.

### **SINGLE-GUARD**

Single-Guard is the same as One-Turn-Off of the Swalwell dance<sup>2</sup> (see Part I, p. 74)

### **THE NUT AND ROSE**

#### **(a) THE NUT**

The normal way of tying the Nut at Walbottle is a compromise between the two methods used, respectively, at Swalwell<sup>2</sup> and Winlaton<sup>4</sup>.

No. 1 makes a three-quarter turn, counter-clockwise and faces No. 5, who raises his sword and makes an arch. Simultaneously, Nos. 1 and 5 move down a step or two and pass the raised sword over the heads of Nos. 4, 3 and 2, who together move up under the arch, face centre by turning counter-clockwise, separate hands and lock the swords together, hilts under points. This operation should be executed very smartly, in two bars of the music if possible. The leader should call "Nut," a bar or two before the end of a strain, so that the Rose may be begun at the commencement of the next strain, which, as already stated, should always be the concluding one (B) of the tune.

When the Nut is tied in the way above described, the leader should always, if possible, give the call when he and No. 5 are at the top, i.e. nearest the audience. Then, when the Nut is tied, Nos. 1 and 5 will be at the lower end, facing the audience.

The Nut is, of course, untied by a reverse movement, No. 1 turning clockwise, Nos. 2, 3 and 4 moving down under the sword, and all (except No. 5) turning clockwise to face centre. This is the method by which, in the absence of instructions to the contrary, the Nut is always to be tied.

## **(b) THE ROSE**

The Rose is usually danced in the same way as at Earsdon, all standing in a ring and “stepping” while the Nut is raised to a horizontal position (see Part I, p. 90). Sometimes, however, after holding up the Nut horizontally for a couple of bars, the dancers leave the Nut in the hands of No. 1 and fall back into line facing the audience, returning to the original Rose position at the end of the strain. This variation, however, is scarcely to be recommended. It seems better to dance the Rose in the normal way, and to reserve formal exhibition of the Nut, in line, for the conclusion of the dance.

It should be noted that in two cases, Number-One-Ring and Number-Three-Ring, the Rose is tied in a different way, as will be seen in the directions.

The distinctive movements of the several Figures will now be described. It may be said, in passing, that the order in which these are performed is determined by the leader, who usually calls out the name of the next movement during the performance of Single-Guard. The order in which the movements are here presented is that which the Walbottle men observed when they were good enough to dance for me.

### **CURLY**

No. 1, raising both hands, turns out to his left and, followed by Nos. 2 and 3, moves round in a small circle counter-clockwise; while simultaneously, No. 5, raising both hands, turns out to his right and, followed by No. 4, moves round in a small circle clockwise.

This movement is, of course, the same as Figure 2 of the Beadnell dance<sup>5</sup> (see Part II, p. 41), and similar to Three-and-Two of the Swalwell dance<sup>2</sup> (see Part I, p. 77), except that No. 3, instead of changing from one circle to the other in alternate circuits, remains throughout in No. 1's circle.

The leader should call “Nut” when he and No. 5 have just completed a circuit and are facing the audience, and, if possible, when near the end of one or other of the strains of the music.

### **FIGURE OF EIGHT**

This is danced in very much the same way as Right-and-Left in the Swalwell dance<sup>2</sup> (see Part I, p. 79), the dancers, however, following one another in a different order.

The movement begins in the same way as Curly; Nos. 2 and 3 following No 1 in the right hand circle, No. 4 following No. 5 in the left hand circle. The two sets of dancers change their respective circles at the end of each circuit, crossing from one circle to the other in the following order: Nos. 1, 5, 2, 4, and 3.

The leader must, of course, call “Nut” when he has just completed a circuit in his own circle, i.e. the right-hand one.

### **NUMBER-ONE-RING**

All move round in a ring, hilt-and-point, hands at hip level, clockwise, for one complete circuit. They then raise both hands, make a half-turn counter-clockwise, stand close together back-to-back, and lock the swords together over their heads, each man placing his left hand under the right hand of his right neighbour, and his right hand over the left hand of his left neighbour.

The Rose is then tied in the following way. The leader raises the Nut vertically in his right hand, while all “step” standing back-to-back (8 bars). He then lowers it to its original position and all grasp their swords as before, make a half-turn clockwise, and face centre. This, of course, unties the Nut.

### FAST-NUT

This begins in the same way as Curly. After the dancers have made two or more circuits, at a signal from the leader all cross over from one circle to the other, as in Figure-of-Eight. They now move round in their wrong circles, i.e. Nos. 1, 2 and 3 clockwise in the left circle, and Nos. 5 and 4 counter-clockwise in the right circle, and continue to do so until, at a signal from the leader, they return to their own circles, crossing in the same order as before, viz., Nos. 1, 5, 2, 4 and 3. The Nut is then immediately tied.

### FOUR-CORNER

Nos. 5 and 1 make each a half turn, clockwise and counter-clockwise respectively, and face audience. Simultaneously, No. 2 moves forward under No. 5's sword, backs under No. 1's sword and stands on No. 1's left, facing the audience; No. 4 moves forward under No. 5's sword, backs under his own sword and stands on No. 5's right, facing the audience; while No. 3 moves forward and stands between Nos. 1 and 5, thus:-



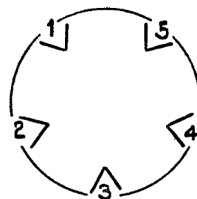
All "step" in this formation until the end of the strain (8 bars). Nos. 2 and 3 now lower their swords, over which Nos. 1 and 5, respectively, jump, and all "step" to the end of the strain (8 bars).

No. 3 then makes a half-turn, counter-clockwise, places his back against No. 5's sword, turns a back-somersault over it, and all "step" (8 bars).

Nos. 1 and 5 now move backward a step (No. 1 under No. 2's sword, No. 5 under No. 3's), and all face centre, Nos. 1 and 4 each making a whole-turn counter-clockwise. This ties the Nut.

### NUMBER-TWO-RING

All move round, clockwise, hilt-and-point, until Nos. 1 and 5 are at the bottom thus:-



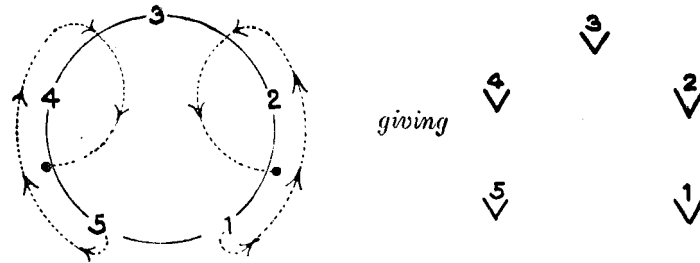
Raising their hands, all make a half-turn counter-clockwise, stand close together, and "step" (8 bars). No. 1 then lowers his sword and stands still; while No. 2, right hand up, jumps over it, turns to his left, and still holding the sword down, moves round counter-clockwise to No. 1, Nos. 3, 4 and 5 successively jumping over the sword and turning to their left. No. 1 then turns clockwise, faces centre, and the Nut is tied.

## NAVY

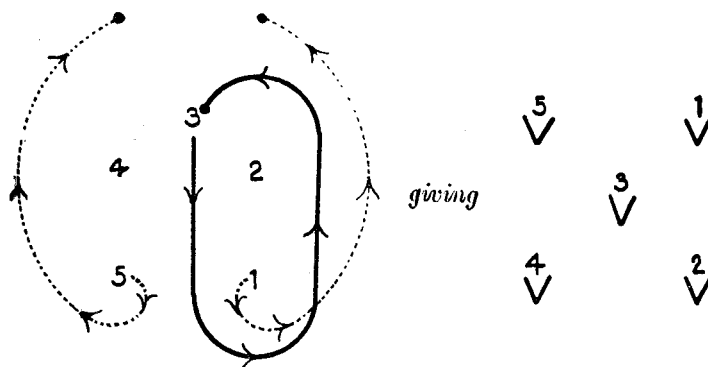
This begins in the same way as Curly (see above).

At the end of the first circuit, Nos. 2 and 3 cross over into the left circle, and No. 4 into the right (leaving Nos. 1 and 5 each in his own circle), the three dancers crossing, at the junction of the loops, in the following order: Nos. 2, 4 and 3. At the end of the next circuit Nos. 2, 3 and 4 cross back into their own circles. This dual movement is continued as long as the leader elects, the Nut being called only when all are in their proper circles.

## CRAMPER



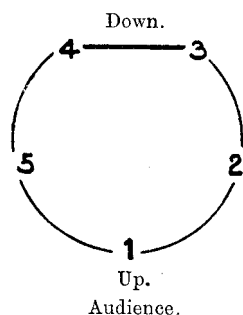
No. 5, raising his right arm, turns out to his right, passes between Nos. 4 and 3, and stands in front of No. 4, facing the audience; while, simultaneously, No. 1, raising his left arm, turns out to his left, passes between Nos. 2 and 3, and stands in front of No. 2, facing the audience.



No. 3 now moves forward between Nos. 5 and 1, turns to his left and passes completely round No. 2, No.1 following him part of the way only, coming to a halt behind No. 2, facing audience. Simultaneously, No. 5, turning out to his right, moves behind No. 4 and stays there facing the audience. During these operations, Nos. 2 and 4 stand still, No. 4 turning round on his axis once, clockwise, and No. 2 twice, counter-clockwise.

No. 3 again moves forward between Nos. 2 and 4, turns counter-clockwise and faces centre. No. 5 makes a whole turn counter-clockwise, and all face centre. This ties the Nut.

## NUMBER-THREE-RING



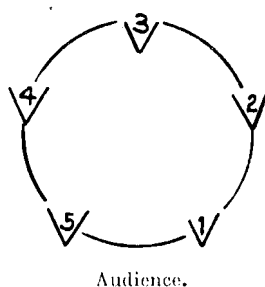
Nos. 3 and 4 hold up the sword between them (No. 3's), face each other, and make an arch. Nos. 5, 1 and 2, in order, then pass under the arch, turn to their right, and return to their places. All now face outward, Nos. 5, 1 and 2 making a quarter-turn counter-clockwise, No. 3 a quarter-turn clockwise, and No. 4 rather more than a whole-turn counter-clockwise. All, standing close together, back-to-back, now lock the swords together above their heads, by separating their hands and bending points under hilts.

The Rose is then performed in the following way. The leader holds up the Nut in this right hand, arm erect, and all, standing back-to-back, "step" to the end of the strain.

The leader now lowers the Nut to its original horizontal position, all grasp their swords as before, and the Nut is untied in the following way: Nos. 2, 1 and 5 turn clockwise, move round outside No. 3, turn to their left and pass *up* under No. 3's sword and return to places, turning to their left. Directly No. 5 has passed through the arch, No. 4 makes a rather more than whole-turn, clockwise, No. 3 makes a half-turn, counter-clockwise, and all face centre.

## STAND-IN-THE-GUARD

All face the audience, hilt-and-point, and stand thus:-



No. 3, moving forward, jumps over No. 5's sword, and all "step" (8 bars).

No. 3 now turns a back-somersault over No. 5's sword, and all "step" (8 bars)

The Nut is then tied in the usual way.

Directly the Nut is untied, and when all are in hilt-and-point formation, the Tommy joins the ring between Nos. 2 and 3. After two or three circuits, clockwise, have been danced, three of the Nuts are repeated, as follows:

## CURLY (for 6)

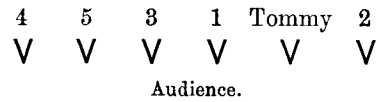
As before (see above), Tommy and No. 2 following No. 1, Nos. 4 and 3 following No. 5

### FIGURE-OF-EIGHT (for 6)

As before, the dancers in the first circuit following one another as in the preceding Figure, and then crossing in this order: 1, 5, 2, 3, Tommy, 4.

### FOUR-CORNER (for 6)

As before, the dancers lining up thus:-



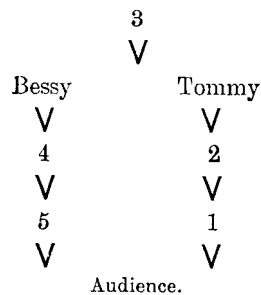
At the conclusion of the last Nut, the Bessy joins the dance, coming into the ring between Nos. 4 and 3. After two or three circuits clockwise, hilt-and-point, have been danced, three of the Figures, above described, are repeated as follows:-

### CURLY (for 7)

As before, No. 2, Tommy and No. 3 following No. 1; No. 4 and Bessy following No. 5.

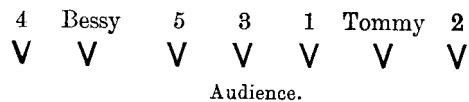
### STAND-IN-THE-GUARD (for 7)

As before, the dancers standing in the following formation:



### FOUR-CORNER (for 7)

As before, the dancers standing thus:



Directly the Rose in the last Nut is concluded, the leader raises the Nut in his right hand, arm erect, while the rest of the dancers line up, three on each side, face audience and "step" to the end of the strain (8 bars, B music).

This brings the dance to a conclusion.

## NOTATION

Clash and Turn Single

*Each of the following movements is preceded by Single-Guard, and followed by the tying of the Nut and the Rose.*

Curly

Figure-of-Eight

Number-One-Ring

Fast-Nut

Four-Corner

Number-Two-Ring

Navy

Cramper

Number-Three-Ring

Stand-in-the-Guard

Curly (for 6)

Figure-of-Eight (for 6)

Four-corner (for 6)

Curly (for 7)

Stand-in-the-Guard (for 7)

Four-Corner (for 7)

Exhibition of the Nut in line

*NB – Dancers, other than skilled gymnasts, are advised to substitute a backward jump for the back somersault which occurs several times in this dance, and is a dangerous movement.*

## References

1. Cecil Sharp, *The Sword Dances of Northern England*, London: Novello, 1913; volume 3 pp. 103-115
2. *ibid*, 1911, volume 1, pp. 72-81
3. *ibid*, 1911, volume 1, pp. 82-103
4. *ibid*, 1913, volume 3, pp. 91-102
5. *ibid*, 1912, volume 2, pp. 39-43

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