

THE LICHFIELD MORRIS DANCES

As interpreted by the Burton upon Trent Morris Club

It was whilst giving a Morris Show with the Men of Mercia at Lichfield on Coronation Day in 1953, that we conversed with one of the older inhabitants who was able to remember the dancing of the "Lichfield Bower Processional Dance". Final details were provided by the help of Mr. W. Everett of St. Matthew's Hospital, Burntwood.

The following year we performed the dance at Lichfield Bower on Whit Monday, as a result of which, I received an anonymous letter containing instructions on the performance of the "Vandalls of Hammerwich" and "The Sheriff's Ride", with the names of the tunes. About a fortnight later, Mr. Everett received the notation for "The Shepherd's Hey Jig, Ring o Bells, and Nuts in May" and this was followed in August by the "Castlery Morris Dance."

Much work, directed by Mr. Jack Brown was put into the interpretation of these dances, and in October 1954 three of the dances were performed at the Rag Folk Dance Festival of King's College Newcastle (University of Durham), and in January 1955, three of them were performed at the Albert Hall Festival by the Men of Mercia.

Shortly before this, the notation for "The Barefooted Quaker" had been received by Mr. Tony Phillips after the tune had been piped over the phone to Mr. Everett. Last year a further two dances were received by Mr. Everett:- "Milley's Bequest" and a jig "All the Winds". Much help over the arrangement of the tunes was given by Mrs. H. Manning.

We understand that although the "Bower Dance" was performed as late as 1932, the other dances have not been danced publicly since 1903. Unfortunately we have been unable to trace anyone who has danced in the original team, or the person who has forwarded these dances anonymously. We gather, however, that he was the musician.

The dances themselves have names associated with the Lichfield District, and though they bear resemblances to both Lancashire and Cotswold Morris, they have figures peculiar to Lichfield. They are performed by a team of eight men, plus the usual characters. The old manuscript notes recovered, state that the dances should be performed "with vigour". The positions of the dancers at the start of each set dance is shown in Fig. 1.

LICHFIELD STEPS

There are three types of travelling step:- the single (4/2), the double (4/3) and the swagger (walk). These are as performed in COTSWOLD MORRIS. In addition, there are special LICHFIELD capers, swing back steps, galley over steps, and a scissors step.

THE LICHFIELD CAPER

This is performed starting either with the right or with the left foot. Starting with the right, the notation is:-

Caper on to R., caper on to L., swing right foot back bending a little at the knee, and land on the right. Arms are held easily outwards to the side (as in hockle-back, NUTTING GIRL, FIELDTOWN. The movement can then be repeated starting with the left if required.

LICHFIELD SWING BACK

This is used for settling back into place (as are the hop-backs in COTSWOLD MORRIS). Arms are held out as for the caper.

The right foot is swung wide and behind the left then the left is swung wide and behind right. Two slight hops are necessary on each foot. Usually this is done twice, making four movements in all. If the swing back ends a movement there are usually three swing-backs and a foot together. In these movements the body should not swing.

GALLAY OVER

This is always in the outwards direction by a step to the side on to the outside foot. The rest of the movement can be described as

an attempt to jump over one's own leg! The movement finishes with two ordinary capers, the whole step taking 4 beats.

The Gallay over can be performed through a $1/2$, $3/4$, or whole turn as in COLSWOLD MORRIS. If it is part of a "foot up to foot down" movement, a feint step has to be inserted so that the second set of $4/3$ steps facing down, begins on the outside foot. As for No. 1, the $1/2$ gallay over after foot up is:-

Step on to L, swing, R over L leg and make a half turn in doing so, landing on R. Two capers L and R and feint step on to the left to leave outside foot (right) free for foot down.

After foot down there is a $3/4$ galley over to bring the dancers facing front ready for the chorus. After the chorus movement in THE BAREFOOTED QUAKER AND MILLEY'S BEQUEST, the galley over is performed through a whole turn to the right for even numbers, and to the left for odd numbers; finishing facing front.

SCISSORS STEP

This is exactly as performed at the end of the movements in BRIGHTON CAMP (EYNHAM).

LICHFIELD FIGURES

DANCE AROUND AND SWAGGER AROUND

These are the opening figures of five of the set dances. Both normally start on the right foot, and are performed by the odd numbers circling clockwise, and the even numbers anti-clockwise. The odd numbers travel on the outside for the first half, and inside for the second. These figures start immediately after a chord. There is no "once to yourself".

DANCE AROUND is used only for RING-O-BELLS and is performed with $4/2$ (single) steps. There are 14 of these, followed by a spring and feet together, the dancers finishing facing front in their original positions.