

Bampton Weaver's Dance

Mike Jensen

Notation

I describe the dance as done by the ***Carlisle Sword*** team, so I shall refer to each dancer as "he" throughout. Please emend to "she" as appropriate. ***The Bampton Weavers*** performed a sword dance and play at an "upshot" at Great Orton on Shrove Eve in 1781. This dance was reconstructed by Mike Jensen and Carlisle Sword. Anyone wishing to learn and perform the dance should contact [Mike Jensen](#).

The swords used by the Carlisle team are 36 inches long, tapering from 3/4" to 1/2" wide, and are hardened and tempered chrome stainless spring steel. The handles are cast aluminium, string-wound, with two brass ferrules. The point of balance is twelve inches from the handle end. Swords are held in the right hand. At the beginning of the dance the hilt is at waist level with the point resting against the right shoulder.

The music is a slip jig (9/8), for example, *Polly the Lass*, played at about 140 beats per minute.

The 9/8 time signature has an important influence on the dance. Each bar of music has three triplets, and each phrase of the tune occupies two bars. That means there are six foot-falls in each phrase of music: and the figures of the dance have to be completed in six paces, or multiples of six.

The step is a smooth fast walk. The foot-falls resemble a racing walker's heel-and-toe movement: the heel lands first, then roll forward onto the toe. The thrust is forwards not upwards - no bouncing; knees are kept slightly bent and act as shock absorbers so that heads remain steady. The dancers should appear to flow over the ground; even at slow speeds there should be a lilt - dancing not walking.

The movement used to fill up the music in and between figures is a fast clockwise circling in a hilt-and-point linked ring stepping with the right foot on the first beat of a phrase, ready for the next figure. ***The figures*** are: ***Single Under; Insides; Single Under; Outsides; Single Under; In and Out; Single Under; The False Knight; Nut.***

The Dance

The five men stand close together in a circle facing inwards, numbered #1 to #5 in a clockwise direction. Each holds his sword in his right hand, with the tip resting on his right shoulder. The music starts: on the seventh beat each man takes hold of the sword of the man on his left with his left hand, close to the hilt. On the last three beats of the same phrase of music - 10, 11, 12 - each man takes three steps backwards starting on the left foot and slides his left hand down the sword to form a hilt and point ring. (12)

Single Under (Chorus figure)

On the first beat #1 and #5 stop circling and half turn towards each other, raising #1's sword high above their heads horizontal between them. #4 moves under this sword and round #1 to the right, raising #5's sword parallel to #1's. #3 follows and round #5 to the left, raising #4's sword to join the other two, and then #2 follows #4 round to the right raising #3's sword parallel to the rest. This occupies six beats, and then six beats more as everyone keeps moving around and the circle unwinds, with swords held high until the end of the music. #2's sword is the only one not raised in the manoeuvre, but should be raised immediately on the first beat of the next phrase of music for #5 to go under etc.. The movement is repeated four times, each sword leading in turn. (60)

Insides

On the first beat #1 steps inwards to form a straight line with #5 and #2. They put #1 and #2's swords between them to the floor. #3 and #4 step over them on the second beat (left foot), and immediately bend down to lower #4's sword between them to the floor; #1 steps backwards over this on the fourth beat. #5 and #2 facilitate this by turning outwards on the spot, "windmilling" with their arms through 360°. Everyone moves back to their place in the circle and walk clockwise for six, the whole move occupying 12 beats. The move is repeated with #4 and #5 going over the swords on either side of #2, and so on until every man has "led" the figure. (60)

Chorus

Outsides

#5, #1, and #2 put their swords to the floor as in "Insides", but this time #5 and #2 step in towards one another on beat 1, so that the swords form a narrow V with #1 at the point. #4 and #3 walk round the outside - round the backs of #5 and #2 respectively - and, on beat 4, each steps over the sword as #5 and #2 step back into their places, sweeping the swords under their feet. Walk for six. Repeat four times with each man leading the figure in turn. (60)

Chorus

In and Out

#2, #1, and #5 lower their swords in a straight line. On beat 2, #3 steps over 1's sword and turns right. On beat 4, #4 steps over 1's sword and turns right (following #3). On beat 6, #3 steps over 2's sword. On beat 8 (beat 2 of the next phrase of music), #4 steps over 2's sword. #3 and #4 turn and back into place. Repeat four times with each man leading the figure in turn. (#2 in the middle with #4 leading over, etc.)(60)

Chorus

False Knight

#5 and #1 step into the circle and lower #1's sword. #3 steps over it on beat 2, followed by #2 and #4 shoulder to shoulder on beat 4. #2, #3, and #4 then do a half turn left shoulder back to form a straight line with the swords across the front of their bodies. #5 and #1 turn away from each other, and raise #1's sword to form an arch. #2, #3, and #4 walk under this, and all back to place.

This is repeated with #2, #3, and #4's swords being lowered in turn, and #4, #5, and #1 leading over in turn. The fifth time, however, when #2 leaps over #5's sword, #5 and #4 do not turn out, but turn inwards to **form a Nut** - a sword lock. (60)

#1 **raises the Nut** to display it, all keep circling clockwise. At this point the designated "victim" moves into the circle of dancers. The lock is turned over and lowered, and loosened to slide over the victim's head. On the last beat of the music, at a given signal, each dancer stops in his tracks and **draws his sword from the lock**. This "decapitates" the victim who dies as best he can.



Carlisle Sword performing the Bampton Weavers' Dance at Sidmouth International Folk Festival 1997