

Mrs Gertrude Keith (née Robinson), Cranford, Kent's Bank Rd, Grange-over-Sands, aged 66

Mrs Keith is old Jos. Robinson's granddaughter, and Norman Robinson's mother.

So far as Mrs Keith knows, old Jos (Joseph) was the first of the family to teach dancing. He was only a part-time teacher, and his main business, which was followed at Lakeside, Windermere, was that of coaching. He died when Mrs Keith was aged about 4 (i.e. ca 1898) and was then in his 70's. Thus he must have learnt his dancing ca 1845-1850.

For some years before he died, old Jos had been working in partnership with his son Stanton (so far as the dancing was concerned; Stanton Robinson ran The Lakeside Hotel and The Laurels as his main living). When old Jos died, Stanton Robinson took over the dancing business completely. He, however, died only a few years after Jos, at the age of 40.

Stanton Robinson had one son, young Jos (Joseph), and six daughters (Mrs Keith being one). When Stanton died, young Jos was aged about 15 or so (young Jos was 8 years older than Mrs Keith), but had already learnt all his father's dances. He started work as a taxi-driver, and as soon as he was old enough he took up his father's spare-time profession as dancing-Teacher. Young Jos died ca 1926 at the age of 39. He had ceased to teach dancing a few years earlier because there was not sufficient demand for his services.

Mrs Keith can speak of her father's (Stanton's) and brother's (young Jos') teachings, and they both worked the same system. The places in which she knows them to have held classes were:

Rustland (2 m. N.W. of Newby Bridge)

Lakeside

Grange-over-Sands

Broughton in Furness

Cartmel

Ulverston

Lindale in Furness

Hawkshead

Lowick Bridge (between Coniston Water & Ulverston)

Haweswaite

Spark Bridge ( " " " " " )

So far as Mr Keith knows, old Jos would also have taught in these places. None of them ever went beyond the Kirkstone Pass. Old Jos and Stanton travelled to their classes by pony and trap; young Jos travelled in his taxi.

Both Stanton and young Jos held classes on 6 evenings a week, each in a different place. In each place the classes lasted for 3 months (one night a week), and the last meeting was the "ball". There was only one session each evening, from 5.30 p.m. to 7.30 p.m. approximately, and the ages of the pupils in the class ranged from 5 or 6 to 15 or 16. Most of the pupils, however, were still at school. The fees were something like 10/- a quarter; two of the same family counted as one (Mr Keith couldn't remember an occasion when 3 of the same family came). When Mr Keith went to one of her father's classes, there were 30 or 40 pupils.

Stanton and young Jos taught only during the winter months, from October to Easter, and, as far as possible, visited the same places at the same time each year. They used to go round the farms and villages and ask parents to send their children to the classes. If possible, they hired a village hall. If no hall were available, they made do with the schoolroom; if there were neither hall nor schoolroom available, they hired a farmer's barn. All lit by oil lamps, of course.

All three, old Jos, Stanton, and young Jos, were fiddlers, and could play and dance simultaneously — even the elaborate step-dancing could be done to their own playing. Stanton also took a small black piano (picena?) with him in the trap — one of his daughters played this for him. This piano was about 3' high and 2' 6" long, and had all the octaves.

The dances which Stanton and young Jos taught were as follows: The "ballroom dances" were Quadrilles, Caledonians, Lancers, Waltz, Cotillion, Circassian Circle (the big circle), Sir Roger de Coverly [not Triumph or the Spanish Waltz], Waltz, Polka Mazurka, La Varsoviana, Highland Schottische, Barn Dance, Military Two-Step, Veleta, Boston Two-Step. "Step dances" included the 3-Reel, 4-Reel (done by 4 couples), 6-Reel (6 people only), Sailor's Hornpipe, Skirt Dance, Tambourine Dance, Highland Fling, Irish Jig, Jockey Dance, Nigger Dance, Garland Dance. [The Highland Fling was a duet.]

In any one place, the first thing Stanton and young Jos taught was the Shuffle off - even for the veriest beginner. The tuition in step-dancing was individual - the Teacher showed each child a step, and sent them off to the side of the room to practice. When he had finished with one child, he rapped on the back of his fiddle with the end of the bow to attract the class's attention, and then beckoned the next child to come to him. If a child couldn't do the step he was supposed to have learnt, he or she was sent back to the sides of the room to practice further, often with a rap on the shoulder from the fiddle bow.

Both Stanton and young Jos taught the etiquette of the ballroom. The boys had to sit on one side of the room, the girls on the other - and they couldn't sit with their legs crossed. The boys were taught how to ask a girl to dance with them; they could select their own partner, but had to walk across to her, bow, and ask "May I have the pleasure of this dance?". The girl rose, curtseyed, and if willing, took the boy's arm. If the dance was a Circle Dance, the couples promenaded until there were enough couples on the floor. If the dance was a Square Dance, Sir Roger, or a Reel, they went straight to their places in the sets. After each dance was over, the boys escorted their partners back to their places, bowed - and the girls curtseyed - and then returned to their own seats.

The ball was divided into two. The first part, from 7.30 to 9.30 p.m. was for the younger children, up to the ages of 12 or 13. Their parents were sent a free invitation to this, rather like a programme which is also a ticket of admission. The parents sat round three sides of the room, leaving the fourth side for the children. The two youngest children in the class were the King and Queen of the ball, and they entered first, and took their seats, followed by all the other children. The programme consisted of step-dancing only (i.e. the dances listed as "step-dances" in p. 67); there were "no set dances". The children rose from their seats in turn and gave their appropriate exhibition.

The last dance of the children's ball was the Garland Dance. The King and Queen, who so far had not danced, now danced into the centre of the room, and there knelt down. The girls and boys now danced round them with garlands waving, then pinned the garlands to the royal robes - the girls' on the Queen's, the boys' on the King's. Then the King and Queen walked round the room with the garlands trailing from their robes, then left the room followed by the other children; this completed the ball.

After this there was a ball for the elder children. This was a straight ball, social dancing only, with no exhibitions at all. Outsiders could come to this for a fee.

The music for the ball was the same as that for the ordinary classes. Both Stanton and young Jos insisted that the boys should wear black patent leather evening slippers, & that the girls should wear black patent leather shoes with a low heel and a strap across the ankle. The boys had to have white gloves for the ball, but not for the classes. Stanton and young Jos themselves wore patent leather slippers for class and ball, even for the step-dancing. For the classes they wore an ordinary suit, but for the ball they wore evening dress.

3-Reel No clear memory of it, but thinks they stood



6-Reel Definitely only 6 people did it (cf. Lucy Short); on one occasion Stanton's 6 daughters did it. Mrs Keith thinks that this did not have the Shuffle off in it. Two sides of 3.

4-Reel Square set for 4 couples. The shuffle off quite definitely came in the middle of the sequence of figures as well as at the end of the sequence.

Shuffle off Probably the same as Norman Robinson's.

Treble shuffle. She knew this as "double shuffle", but her version was definitely similar to Cicie Wilson's (see p. ) with a rhythm "1 2 2 3 4 and a", rather than Norman Robinson's "1 2 2 3 4 8" (see p. )

Alemande Never heard the term.

The other teachers in the district were Thomas Cannon of Wetherillack (?) and the Howson brothers in Cartmel

[I enquired about the Howson brothers in Cartmel when I put up there for the two nights. They were probably taught by Stanton Robinson; if not by him, then by old Jos. Both are still alive, and run decorating & building businesses, and have their offices in the main square.]

Young Jos's widow is still alive

Mrs J Robinson, The Crescent, Orange Fell.