

Mr and Mrs Dick Middleton, Backstonegill, Dentdale, Yorks, aged 77 & 71 respect.

Both born and brought up in Dentdale. I think They are very reliable sources. Mr Middleton still dances occasionally at dances in the dale

Mrs Middleton danced only in Dentdale, but Mr Middleton has danced a good deal outside the dale. He was in service in Sedbergh for a time in his youth, and whilst there attended dances both in Sedbergh & Firbank. He has also danced in Kirkby Lonsdale, Windermere, Kendal, and Morecambe.

The dances in use in their young days in Dentdale were as follows:

Quadrilles	Lancers	Waltz Cotillion
Square-8	Swinging-6	Turn-off
Cottagers	3-Reel	Highland Fling
Buttered Peas (at Cowgill)	Ninepins	Waltz
Polka (usually 1st dance)	Schottische	La Varsoviana

Ban Dance.

but not Circassian Circle.

In addition, Buttered Peas and Huntsman's Chorus were danced at Firbank. Mr Middleton said also that Swinging-6 and Square-8 were danced at Kirkby Lonsdale, Windermere, and Kendal in his young days.

There was also The Brush dance. "There used to be a chap up dale, Bill Sunter, would do it regular. Like a step-dance, with a brush".

When I asked them about the 3-Reel, Mr Middleton said "Step-dancing? Nay, I didn't do that."

They gave me the usual description of the 3-Reel. Mostly done by men. The centre man step-dances with one man, turns about & step-dances with the other, then all three dance a reel of three, and one of the outer men comes into the centre

The whole is then repeated as often as desired, each man coming into the centre in turn. The dance was going out in their young days, and "there weren't many people who could step-dance properly."

There were a number of different steps in use, all of hop-pie type. The flatter step was definitely one of them. The action in all the steps was a wide one, much more like the standard Treble than like Bob Cann's Devonshire steps. There was possibly something like a Treble, but using both heel & toe, and they had also seen the low cabriole as in one of Norman Robinson's steps (p. 56). Mr Middleton had also seen something like the hagworm crawl. They were also both quite positive that they had never seen anything like the crunch.

Square-8. This dance dropped out of use about 40 years. When I asked for the description, Mr Middleton said "Swing up in the middle, two on 'em", that is to say that two people swung in the middle. But Mrs Middleton interposed here, and said that this was incorrect; the top and bottom couples crossed hands (4 hands across) and danced round and back, with a polka step. After some thought, Mr Middleton agreed with his wife that she was correct.

After this, the top and bottom couples "spin-up all four", then the side couples repeat the hands across and the spin-up. They then join hands in a ring, and "galop" (i.e. step-step) round to the left, completely round (one way only). Then spin-up with partners. If the music went on, they repeated the figures over again - the repetition depended on the musicians.

Cottagers. Couple meets couple round the room. "Cross hands and go round and back, and spin-up", to meet a new couple

Turn-off. No real memory of this, except that it was like the Grand Old Duke of York.

Buttered Peas Stand as for Cottagers, couple facing couple. The dance was something like Cottagers, in that you pass on to another couple. There was clapping in it, but that was all they could remember. I asked them whether it contained the thumbs-up figure of the published version, but they were quite puzzled by this, and it clearly didn't ring a bell. It definitely wasn't in longways formation, and I feel that their information that it was like Cottagers may be taken to be reliable, at least for the Thirbank area.

Pop John Mason's Dancing Classes. Both Mr and Mrs Middleton were taught to dance by Pop John. Pop John's classes were held every few years, as the demand required. "He made some good dancers; he made them keep time". The classes took place on two evenings a week, Wednesday and Saturday - from November to March. The men had to pay 7s 6d for the season, but girls were admitted for nothing (as Mr Middleton said, "you couldn't dance wi'out women"). The classes were held in the entrance of the George & Dragon in Dent.

He taught all the dances in use in the dale at that time. In particular, he definitely taught the Square-8, Swinging-6, Turn-off, and Cottagers. He also taught the 3-Reel complete with steps. He was a good step-dancer, and used to say that there were 6 steps in step-dancing; he had names for these. He showed his pupils how to do these steps (if they wished to learn; not all did), counting the beats by numbers.

For most of the class he played the fiddle himself, but when he was teaching steps he asked someone else to play. If there was no-one there who could play for him for this, he would whistle the music whilst he danced.

Pop John taught the etiquette of the ballroom - he was insistent on this. He was strict over misbehaviour, and would clip the lads ears with his fiddle bow if they misbehaved. This was also the reward for those who were very slow in picking up a dance.

His classes were for adults only (i.e. for those who had left school). He himself would be about 10 years older than Mr Middleton. He died about 15 years ago. He was only a part-time dancing teacher; he made his main living by making hay-rakes [the old wooden type, with wooden pegs for teeth. Mr Middleton said that every hay-rake on his farm had been made by Pop John; he was a first-class craftsman].

For his classes "he liked you [the men] to have dancing-pumps, but said nowt if you went in ordinary shoes or boots. But most people had pumps". The girls usually wore evening shoes, with a heel about 2" high.

Every Saturday night, strangers were allowed to come into the class to take part in the dancing - they paid 6^d for this. Then "at finish-up he had a right ball".

Dent Fair. There were three opportunities for dancing on the occasion of Dent fair in their young days, on the Friday evening immediately preceding the Saturday of the fair, on the fair day itself, and on the following Monday.

On the Friday, the dancing took place in the "outrooms" of the two pubs, from about 7.30 until about 10 p.m. On the Saturday, the dancing started with the fair, at about 1%, and went on until midnight. Both dances would be run under the "penny a dance" system. Pop John Mason took the outroom of the George & Dragon and "used to play fiddle wi' coat and weskit off, and it was a penny a dance". He acted as his own M.C.,

but usually had someone to go round to collect the pennies - from the men only. Whoever collected the cash just put it in a pocket - they had no special receptacle. Generally someone from outside Dent took the outroom at the Sun, but the system was the same. Often the Sun was taken by a concertina player.

The dance on the Monday evening was a proper dance, held in the schoolroom, tickets 1/- for men and 6^d for ladies. Mr Middleton often cycled from as far away as Hawes for the Monday evening dance.

It is hard to imagine how congested Dent must have been on fair day, with stalls on both sides of that narrow street. The sound of the music in the outrooms must have floated down from the open windows - remember it was May or June - and provided a constant background to the shouts of the stall-holders.

In Dent itself there might be dances of some sort once a fortnight during the winter. There was, for instance, the Reading Room Ball in aid of the Reading Room, the Church Warden's Dance in aid of the church, and the George and Dragon ball given by the owners of the pub. At one time one of the vicars gave 6^d "hops" once a week, but this was unusual.

Pace-egging took place at Easter-time, and in their day the pace-egggers were lads still at school. They were dressed up in old shirts, with paper streamers stitched to the shirts so that they hung down. There were 3 dressed like this [were they the Jolly Boys?], then old Tosspot

The next that comes in is old Tosspot, you'll see

He's a valiant old fellow in every degree

He's a star on his breast like diamonds to shine

....

[The third line here is obviously incorrect, for it belongs to Lord Nelson, another

of the characters]. Lord Nelson was one of them. The "old lady" was the last to come in, carrying a bit of a stick.

Only one of the pace-eggers of their young days (who were the last to perform in Dentdale) is still alive, Matthew Aygarth in Dent village.

In Mr Middleton's youth, he danced regularly in an old empty farm-house at Coat Faw (a big house near Cowgill). "Old Chapman", a local fiddler, used to play, and it was all free. They used to dance in some of the upstairs rooms, since the floor was better there.

One last piece of information - the dancing place at Beckermunds in Langstrothdale is now "tumbled in" [roofs in the dales are very heavy - of thin slabs of stone - and when the rafters rot, the whole roof must come down with a crash].