

Mrs Grace Robinson, 1 The Avenue, Grange Fell, Grange-over-Sands, N. Lancs, aged 76

Mrs Robinson is the widow of young Toss Robinson, the dancing-master. I visited her in company with her nephew, Norman Robinson.

The earliest of the family whom she knows to have taught dancing was Joseph Robinson (Old Toss), who died c 1910, when he was in his late seventies. His son was Stainton B. Robinson, who died at the age of 35, probably about 1904. Stainton Robinson was certainly teaching by 1889, for she has in her possession a testimonial presented to him in that year by the members of a class. Her husband, Joseph S. Robinson (Young Toss) died in 1943 at the age of 56, and was the son of Stainton Robinson. Mrs Robinson thinks that Old Toss retired some years before Stainton died, and left the teaching to Stainton; there was thus a gap of a few years before young Toss took over.

Other teachers whom she remembers are Howson of Cartmel and Cannon of Underbarrow.

Mrs Robinson was herself taught by Stainton Robinson at the age of 5 or 6, at Lindale-in-Furness, and the dances she learnt from him were

Highland Fling

Nigger Dance

Irish Jig

Jockey Dance

Butterfly Dance

Sailors Humpipe

Skirt Dance

Clog Dance

Skipping-Rope Dance

Garland Dance

Tambourine Dance

3-Reel

Schottische

Military Two-step.

All of these were taught later by Young Toss. The only ones which were "stepping" dances in Humpipe style were the Nigger Dance, Jockey Dance, Sailors Humpipe, and Clog Dance, and possibly the Tambourine Dance [The Norman agreed with this]. The

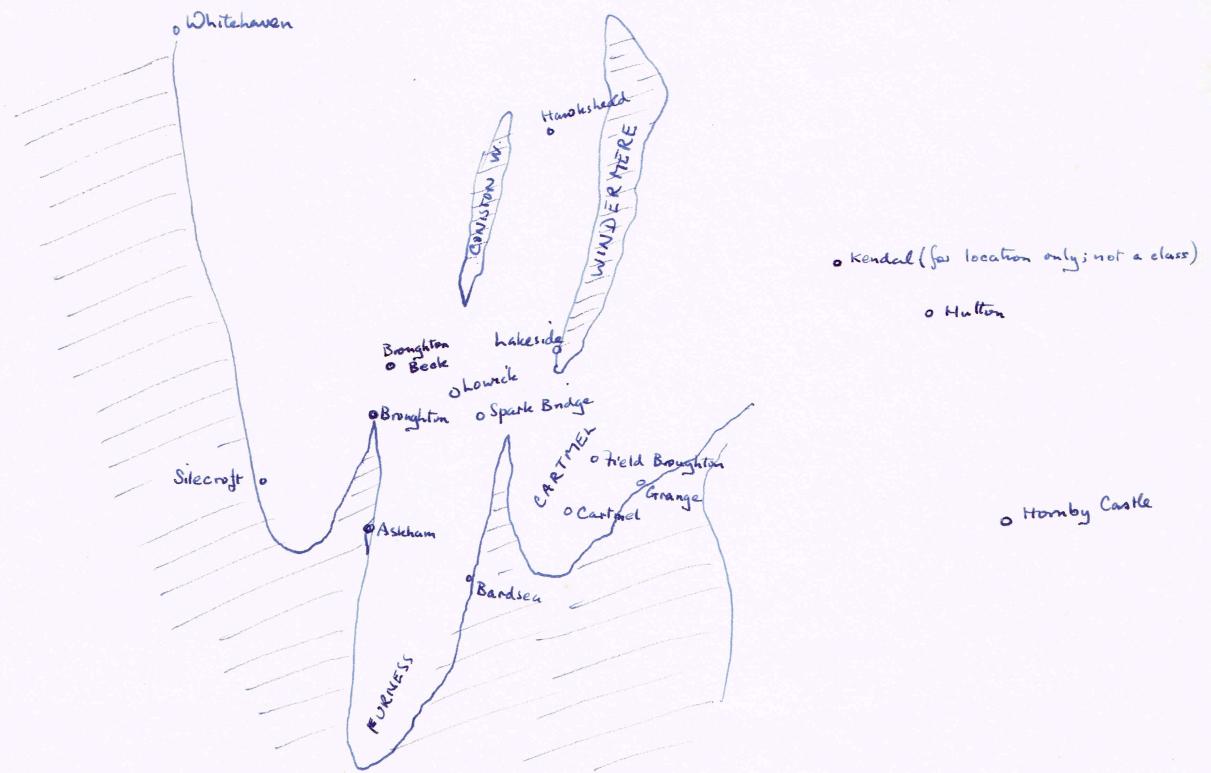
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Nigger Dance was in the style of the Christie Minstrels. Also Sailor's Hornpipe and the Clog Dance had different steps.

The 'Jockey Dance' was only a nickname for this dance, for according to the ball programmes the proper name was "The Horse to Newmarket". This dance was performed by boys only, and the performers wore white breeches, blouse, ordinary stockings and dancing pumps, and a jockey cap, and had jockey's whips.

Stainton Robinson had a little piano which one of his daughters played. He himself was a fiddler, and at the end he had a little band of his own. Young Toss learnt the fiddle from a proper violin teacher in Cartmel, and then went to one in Ulverston "to finish off"; he did not learn from his father, although Stainton is known to have taught people to play [Norman mentioned Tom Barnes].

Mrs Robinson often accompanied her husband to his classes, and gave me a very good account of them. The places at which he taught were Whitehaven, Silecroft, Broughton,



Broughton Beck, Askham, Bardsea, Lowick, Spark Bridge, Lakeside, Hawkshead, Cartmel, Grange, Field Broughton, Hutton Roof, and Hornby Castle. Usually he taught in halls, but occasionally (e.g. Lowick) he made use of a barn. He taught one night a week in any given place, for a nominal quarter of 10 weeks, the charge for the quarter being 10/- If there were two in a family in the class, the second member was allowed in at a reduced fee. Usually he taught for one quarter before Xmas and one after.

He canvassed parents to send their children to his classes. His juvenile class was for those aged 3-12; those of 13 upward attended the adults class, and here he taught the modern dances such as the Quickstep, Slow Foxtrot, and Tango. In his classes he taught the usual etiquette of the ballroom. Little girls wore ballet shoes, boys wore black patent leather shoes. Young Toss himself had patent leather shoes, and wore a dark suit for his classes, and full tails for his balls.

One of the main items in his repertoire was the step-dancing. This was billed as "Lancashire Hornpipe" and "Lancashire Clog Dance" according as the dancer wore ordinary shoes or clogs, but under either name the steps were the same. When Toss was teaching this stepping he stood in the middle of the room with the pupils busily practising round the walls—each person was given a step and sent off to practise it. When he had finished with one pupil, he would tap on the back of his violin with the butt end of his bow; his pupils would all look up, and he would beckon one forward; the selected pupil had to demonstrate the step he had learnt previously, and if successful, was taught another. If the pupil couldn't do the step, faults were corrected, and the pupil was sent back to the sides of the room to continue the practise. Always the first step taught was the shuffle-off.

The classes finished with a ball, which was outside the run of 10 classes. This was advertised, but no invitations were sent to parents. There was a charge of 2/-

per person, and programmes were printed for it.

The juveniles' ball began about 7%. The parents sat round the room, leaving a space for the children. It began with Napoleon's Grand March, once round the room. The two smallest children were chosen as King and Queen, and were dressed in velvet robes, and had crowns (parents used to make the costumes, though the Robinsons had a few costumes which they used to lend to those children whose parents couldn't afford to make costumes). The Grand March was led by the King and Queen, and then followed the children in pairs, boy and girl, the boy carrying the girl's shawl on his left arm, and leading the girl with his right hand. When they had been once round the room, each boy took his partner to her seat, handed her her shawl, bowed, then turned about and went to his own seat (30 or 40 of them) on the opposite side of the room. The children kept those positions and those partners for the rest of the night. The King and Queen sat in the middle at the top of the room.

The named dances were done by groups of children, 6 or 8 at a time, depending on the dance. These group dances, which were usually encored, would be interspersed with solo exhibitions of the step-dancing. Every child got a turn to show what they could do; some could only do 4 or 5 steps, the better dancers could do 12 or more. These solo exhibitions were always encored, and money and boxes of chocolates were thrown onto the floor for the performer to pick up at the end of the exhibition. Young Toss's son Stanton, and his nephew Norman, were normally asked to give exhibitions, but they were not allowed to collect any of the loot thrown on the floor. These solo performances of the stepping were done in hard shoes, not in clogs.

The ball ended, about 10.30, with the Garland Dance. Except for the King, only girls took part in this. The girls were equipped with a paper garland of roses each, and the dance was done with a Waltz step.



The King and Queen rose from their thrones [they did not otherwise dance as far as I can gather - a useful way of immobilising the most awkward!] and moved to the centre of the room. Then each girl came forward and fastened one end of the garland to either the King's or Queen's robes. The King and Queen then led the girls once round in a grand procession, then formed a tableau, and the ball ended.

The adults' ball took place after the juveniles' ball - usually some of the older juveniles also stayed to this. There was first an exhibition by Young Toss himself, then a cup of tea, and then the ball started, ending about 3 or 4%.

Mrs Robinson and her husband travelled to and from these classes by gig and horse. The horse knew his way home, and often after a ball they would be fast asleep in the gig. There was one pub, Halfway House, between Holker Moss and Greenodd, and the landlord there always put out hay for them when he knew they were passing - the horse would stop and paw the ground till he got his hay.

The account of the ball is also true of Mrs Robinson's own ball under Stanton Robinson at Lindale-in-Furness.