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EDITORIAL

I must first apologise for the late arrival of this issue, due to difficulties with printing. This time the magazine includes a fairly comprehensive list of dance groups. I fear that this is not exhaustive and that apologies should be tendered in advance to all those who have been missed out. There are over 40 groups listed and using the information given it is of some interest to be able to compare the relative popularity of the different types of dances which are performed.

Westmorland stepping comes top of the list with 29 entries i.e. almost 75 of groups. Northumberland and Durham is a close 2nd. with 24 entries (presumably mostly steps from the Ellwood family). In 3rd. place comes Lancashire Hornpipe with 21 entries. Separate entries are given for Sam Sherry's steps, and it would be interesting to be able to break this figure down further, perhaps you might write and tell us exactly what steps you do. The scorecard continues with Sam Sherry's waltz 19, Lancs Toe and Heel 17, Sam Sherry's hornpipe 15, with other entries averaged 5 or 6.

READING STEP AND TRADITIONAL DANCE GROUP - THIRD ANNUAL CLOG AND STEP DANCE FESTIVAL - A REVUE BY JOHN THE FISH

It was with youthful excitement that we six left Cornwall for the 3rd. Reading Day of Clog, a must for all enthusiasts. A whole day of goodies including - instruction by Sammy Bell, Jennifer Millest, Ian Dunmur, Mike Cherry and John Walford, a continuous film show by Barry Callaghan including Sammy Bell's new one. We could buy books, records and instruments from Old Father Abraham, clogs from Jerry Atkinson; Neil Stading had a vast display of clogs and cloggers' accoutrements. Food was provided by club members and music while we ate, led by Pete Clifton. In Sam Sherry's absence, Alex Boydell gave 'the lecture'. Outstanding in the dance displays were Anthony O'Connor's broom and candle dance (he'd still be dancing had he not slipped and shed a clog), and Pat Tracey (the group are planning to film Pat in 1982). We used up our remaining energy dancing to The Rakes directed by Roy Dommett, then crawled home to consolidate what we had learned. Thank you Reading - until October 2nd. 1982.

Off-the-toe Dancing in Lancashire

Pat Tracey

In 1977 the first Lancashire and Cheshire Clog Dancing Championship was held at Fleetwood in Lancashire. The rules of the competition stated that dancers should perform ten steps entirely off-the-toe (i.e. no heel beats to be used). Before the rules were decided upon, enquiries had shown that in the past there had been competitions with similar rules, where the dancers heels were marked with chalk so that a dropped heel would be readily detected. Some former dancers had asserted that Lancashire dancing was performed entirely off-the-toe, anyway. It was this assertion that put the cat among the pigeons. Following discussions after the 1978 and 1979 Championships, the organisers decided to retain the off-the-toe ruling for the Championship itself, but to add a clog waltz contest where the heel could be used. This was generally accepted at a 'clog forum' following the discussion. It was a recognition, on the one hand, that Lancashire clog dancing was not confined to one narrow style, and on the other, that competitions had to have rules.

Although the controversy was over as far as the Lancashire and Cheshire Championship itself was concerned, it still goes on among clog dancers. For this reason I have been asked to say why I disagree with the state statement that 'Lancashire clog dancing was performed entirely off-the toe'.

"The one thing you must remember in clog dancing is to use all the wood."

This advice comes down to us from the 1870's. It was given by my great-uncle, a talented step and clog dancer. His aim was to use the clog to maximum advantage, making the taps with the base and sides of the soles, and the base and sides of the heels. Born about 1867 in Colne in Lancashire, he learnt to dance as a boy in the 1870's, during the great hey-day of clog dancing.

The old Lancashire toe-and-heel dancing, a flat footed style, where the heel was used as much as the toe to make the sounds, had developed earlier in the century when cotton factories were spreading over East Lancashire and clogs were increasingly becoming the accepted footwear. These early Lancashire clogs were heavy and loose-fitting and slipped off at the ankle. For this reason, clog dancing in Lancashire began as a flat-footed toe-and-heel style, where the whole foot was kept close to the ground and the dancers inevitably made use of 'all the wood'.

By the late 1860's however, dancers were also performing a style of clog dancing where the basic step was a shuffle danced off-the-toe, the heel being used for special effects. Where did this style come from? My grandfather, born in 1856, always said that there was 'dancing before there was clog dancing' and my mother remembered this as referring to a style of hornpipe dancing which could not have been performed in the early working clogs. This pre-industrial dancing seem seems to have been lost, but perhaps there are echoes of it in the dancing we do today. During the 1860's the expanding cotton towns were attracting entertainers from all parts of the country. Contemporaries of my grandfather believed that these professionals, coming into Lancashire, saw the local clog dancers and realised the potential of the the clog for their own use. Certainly, by the 1870 s, neat, light-weight, tight-fitting clogs were being made for professional dancers, who went on to develop to spectacular heights a basis off-the-toe style of dancing where the heels and the sides of the clogs were used to provide extra taps. Aspiring artistes competed with each other in Championship contests. Clog dancing became a national craze.

Altered and embellished, clog dancing came back to the streets of Lancashire from the professional stage. Although the 'old' style remained predominant, enthusiasts for the new packed the toes of their working clogs, and the better dancers among them scrimped and saved to buy neater fitting clogs. An accepted way of dancing developed among them. It is reflected in my great-uncle's dancing. The steps he passed on to my mother included use of dropped heels, heel beats, heel scuffs, crunch-style steps, pick-ups and half pick-ups, as well as the use of the wooden sides of the soles and heels.

A generation later, my uncle, whom he also taught, was clog dancing in Nelson. At a time when most people could do a bit of clog dancing, my uncle was in the mainstream of local tradition. The message was the same. 'Use all the wood.'

Clog dancing in Lancashire virtually died out with the First World War. There was a hint of revival towards the end of the 1950's. During the 1960's I spent some time tracking down former clog dancers and talking to them about their dancing. Most of those I spoke to had been born in the 1890's and 1890's, and were dancing before the First World War. All who could remember their steps had used heel beats when dancing in the off-the-toe style. Of course I did not meet everybody, but the point is that all these dancers from Blackburn to Colne regarded themselves as Lancashire clog dancers.

So where does the idea come from that heels were not used in Lancashire clog dancing?

1. Could it be harking back to the dancing of pre-industrial Lancashire? If so, it would not have been clog dancing as such.
2. Did it stem from professional teaching in the days of theatrical clog dancing? It is usual to teach the easier off-the-toe steps first and add the heel beats later. Youngsters then, as now, would often not get beyond a few simple routines.
3. What of the complications themselves? A 'no heel beats' rule might have been a way of ironing out local styles for the purpose of judging. It is all too easy for rules to be taken as the criterion of correctness - especially years later.
4. Could a 'toe only' style have been used in a particular area of Lancashire, or been adopted by one dominant dancer and his follower followers? There was plenty of variety in clog dancing, and a 'toe only' style could develop its own standards and intricacies. My own conviction is that such a style could only have been a small part of the clog dancing done in Lancashire.

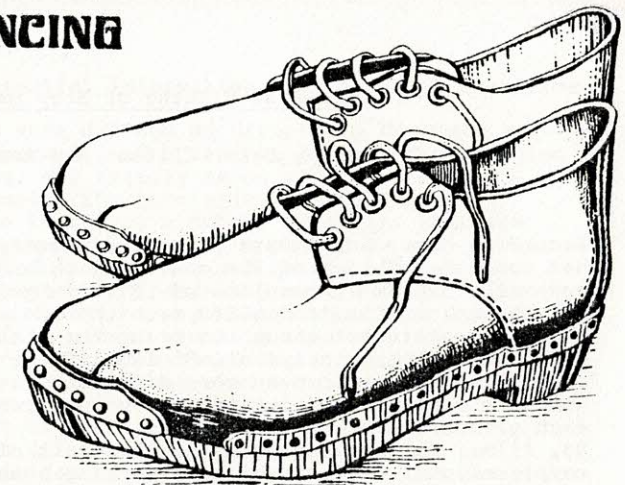
Ultimately, a 'toe only' style, except perhaps as a means of getting conformity in competitions, does not fit the Lancashire working-man's image of himself, the image that had to be preserved at all costs - the image of toughness! In a county which went in for clog-fighting, male dancing had to be fairly robust to be acceptable. Good strong heel beats, hitting the sides of the clogs, using 'all the wood', gave power to the dancing. If the professionals and semi-professionals wanted to dance on their toes only, so be it, but it would not have suited the ordinary working man wearing ordinary working clogs. And that I believe is what folk tradition is all about.

DAY OF CLOG DANCING

WITH

Pat Tracey

OLD LANCS STYLE



SATURDAY 27 FEBRUARY 1982

Clayton Brook Village Centre, Great Greens La. Bamber Bridge, Preston

PROGRAMME

PRICES

TICKETS FROM

9.30-10.00 Coffee

Madeleine Hollis

10.00-12.30 First Session £1.50/Session

21 Parkgate Drive Leyland

2.15-5.30 Second Session £1.25 EFDSS

Preston 0774422079

Good Pub Food next door

Reading Traditional Step Dance Group

4th ANNUAL

FESTIVAL of STEP DANCING

Saturday October 2nd 1982

further details available June 82

to be on mailing list contact

Ann-Marie Hulme 19 Winterbrook, Wallingford
OXON OX10 9DX. 0491 39609

Royal Oak Clog (Coventry)

AVAILABLE FOR BOOKINGS

CONTACT

J Halliwell 41 Bristol Rd, Coventry.

Tel Coventry 713847

M Hatton 131 Charter Ave, Canley, Coventry.

Tel Coventry 461433

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