

THE NORTHUMBERLAND AND DURHAM CLOG DANCE.

The origins of the Northumberland and Durham style of clog dancing are uncertain, but it is probably the industrial development of an earlier rural clog dance. Until recently the dance was almost entirely associated with mining communities in the North East.

The pitman had to contend with great discomfort and danger while at work. Outside the pit, life was something to be hugely savoured and enjoyed and in leisure he 'played hard'. It didn't matter what he did: play football, grow leeks, breed whippets, play brass bands, whatever it was, there were competitions and clog dancing was no exception. Competition was fierce and it was not unheard of for a judge to be "nobbled" by payment of a back-hander. Standards were high competitors being asked to dance anywhere between 10 and 20 steps to a hornpipe rhythm finishing with double shuffles. Prizes included championship belts, cups, medals and money awards. Judges marked on originality, beats (counting these missed or not sounded crisply), execution (complexity and difficulty), carriage (how a dancer moved and held himself) and timing (to ensure that the same tempo was maintained throughout). Pedestal competitions occurred where competitors had to dance on a slate topped 2 or 3 feet square pedestal, the rule usually being "if yer faal ov yer oot". A champion not only had to have a "canny pair of feet" but also had to produce steps that were original and complex. Competition was an essential part of the tradition.

Clog dancers appeared on the stage and in music hall in the late 19th and early 20th century and some went on to make international reputations in show business. Don Leno won the world clog dance championship in Oldham in 1883. Charlie Chaplin danced clog with a group called the Lancashire Lads and he and Stan Laurel appeared in the Sunderland Empire Theatre in 1913.

The stimulus of competition and the influence of music hall were both important forces in the development of this complex intricate step dance that we know today.

By the 1940's with the development of alternative forms of entertainment in cinema and radio and the break up of the mining village as a community, the pitmans competitions had died out, music hall was on its knees and the popularity of clog dancing on stage was in decline. Competitions were revived briefly in

There is a dissertation entitled "Folk-Music in Lincolnshire" written by Robert Pacey, who has collected songs in the county recently (1974-6)

Amongst printed matter are all the songs from Lincolnshire that have appeared in the various publications of the English Folk Dance & Song Society and in County Folk Lore. There are copies of all of Grainger's published settings of Lincolnshire folk-songs.

There are gramophone records of almost every Lincolnshire song that is known to have been issued on disc commercially.

The archive includes other kinds of 'folk' material: a number of Lincolnshire Plough Plays, together with a good deal of printed information about them. There are also publications concerning dialect and market-traders' argot.

Bona fide students are welcome to make use of the archive, and applications to do so should be addressed to the Warden of Pilgrim College, Clive Pemberton, M.A. Items may not be removed from the building.

Nearly a hundred of the songs in the collection have been published under the writer's editorship and appear in three compilations: 21 Lincolnshire Folk Songs, More Folk Songs from Lincolnshire and Yellowbelly Ballads (Parts 1 & 2). All three are in print and another is in preparation.

Patrick O'Shaughnessy
Boston.

If you wish to build up a collection of books on folk music, folklore and folklife a service is provided by David & Chris Bland (David used to be librarian at Cecil Sharp House). They have a large collection of second hand books and circulate a catalogue monthly to those on the mailing list. Anyone interested should write to D & C Bland, 10 New Road, Mythelmroyd, Halifax, Yorkshire.

E.F.D.S.S. Folk Music Publications - The official sales representatives for this district are Mrs J. Constable, 12 Manor Road, Bottesford, Scunthorpe and Miss G. Cheetham, 12 Bunkers Hill, Lincoln. Mrs. Constable keeps a stock of records, tapes, books, and trinkets - these items are usually on sale at the main functions in the district.

the early 1950's and again in the 60's but by the beginning of this decade there was probably only a dozen people dancing clog regularly in front of audiences.

One family, the Ellwoods, have since the popular days of music hall made an enormous contribution to clog dancing in the North East. Johnson, and now Mary his daughter, who carries on his tradition of teaching, have between them taught generations of young clog dancers. It was, largely due to Johnsons single minded devotion to, and enthusiasm for clog dancing that in 1976 at Durham Folk Festival the first competition for about 15 years was held and it was no surprise to discover that most of the competitors were Ellwood pupils.

The last six years have seen a surge of interest in clogging with more and more enthusiasts now dancing before audiences all over the country. This is welcome news since it is here where the dance must survive, in live performance. Because it developed in this context it should always remain essentially a dance for entertainment in which the dancer displays his skills and showmanship.

Peter Brown.

The Hobby Horse Club of England is a club for the promotion of folk activities for young people. They organise folk events, holidays for the 11 to 13 year old and have their own badges.

If you are interested in forming a club or require more information please contact Mr. Keith Constable, 12 Manor Road, Bottesford, Scunthorpe.

If you are looking for a holiday well away from all the hustle and bustle of the mainland but with someone from Lincs with folk connections they try Gwen and Paul Chapman recently from Torksey who have just opened a guest house on the Isle of Skye. The address is 1 Balmeanach, by Struan, Isle of Skye.

ALFORD FOLK CLUB

Alford Folk Club will celebrate its 7th birthday in June of this year. The club was started in 1973 by the present organiser Michel Ducos. Through the enthusiasm and efforts of the landlord of the Half Moon Inn, the club was provided with an excellent club room. Since the bar was a later addition the 1st folk clubs were open to children and admission was free. Silver Birch were the guests on the opening night and the floor artists included three of the present residents Katie Abbott, Tony Beaumont and Woody. (David Woodforth).

So great was the response that even before the addition of the bar the room was full to overflowing.

Apart from a few dreary winter evenings and a two month winter break when the club is closed the Folk Club continues to be full every other Wednesday. Indeed a 'House Full' sign is not an uncommon sight.

Every month there is a guest and these are carefully chosen (not only to fit the budget as is the popular belief! but) to offer a variety of traditional, contemporary and even jazz and blues music. The Alford audience appreciates all types of folk music and indeed poetry has been successfully included in the Wednesday evenings.

On the other end of the scale, the Silly Song Contest has become increasingly popular. The struggle for the coveted "Golden Boot" award has become an inter-club event. (This year May 14th).

A quite recent off shoot of the Folk Club has been the Alford Morris Dancing team. They made their debut in Grimsby on Boxing Day 1977 and will perform at the Alford Craft Market this summer.

Alford Craft Market's special attraction is the August Bank Holiday Fair which lasts three days. In addition to the numerous craft stalls there is non-stop entertainment in the afternoon and evenings.

The Folk Club works in close co-operation with the craft market and the residents who are available perform in the market at the Bank Holiday.

From time to time the Folk Club organises special events such as concerts, ceilidhs and barbecues.

Thanks to the hard work and efficiency of Michel Ducos Alford has suffered few of the setbacks that have affected some other clubs. It is well supported by a large following of enthusiasts both performers and non-performers. Newcomers are welcome.