

A Broom Dance from Devon

WE met Mr. Rowe, the miller, through Cynthia his daughter, and as we sat by the bright kitchen range talking about the old dances, Mr. Rowe said he well remembered the last time he had done the broom dance, but that, of course, was a dance everyone knew. We said everyone seemed to know bits and pieces of a broom dance but we believed there must be a complete dance and would he tell us about the last time he danced, which he so well remembered.

It was a very cold morning, he said, and as he stood about the mill waiting for the rat-catcher to come he saw the old broom leaning against the sacks and he thought to dance would bring him warmth at least, if it did nothing else.

So he danced all alone with the sacks and the flour dust and the rats who were soon to die.—Thinking his music he was, for there were only mill sounds to be heard that frosty morning.

When the rat-catcher came just as he finished he was glowing and ready for work.

Then, very gallantly, for Mr. Rowe is no longer young, he showed us how he danced.

When he had finished he was as hot as he had been on the day the rat-catcher came. Chuckling, he said, "Things don't really change, you know, for though there are no rat-catchers now—"Rodent Operatives" they call themselves—somehow it seems to me that just as there always was a pair of rats who escaped the rat-catcher, so now there is always a pair that escapes the rodent operative, and that you might say is good for the rats, and who would want a rodent operative to fall out of work!"

THE BRADNINCH MILLER'S BROOM DANCE

Music : The Keel Row, or similar tune

- 1st Figure.—Standing at the left of the broom handle end and facing the head, hop on the left foot and tap the right across up to the head and back.
- 2nd Figure.—Repeat standing on the right and tapping across with the left foot.
- 3rd Figure.—Standing at the end of the handle and facing the head, dance up the broom and back, using this step : Jump—feet apart—feet crossed (right in front)—feet apart—feet crossed (left in front).
- 4th Figure.—Standing on the left of the broom handle end and facing across the handle, hopping on the left foot, tap across with the right foot up to the head and back.
- 5th Figure.—Standing on the right, hopping on the right and tapping with the left foot repeat the pattern of Fig. 4.
- 6th Figure.—Standing on the left, facing across the handle, tap with right foot and left foot alternatively across the handle up to the head and back.

7th Figure.—Pick up the broom and pass the handle under the right leg always passing the handle from the outside in.

8th Figure.—Pass the broom handle under the left leg always passing from the inside out.

9th Figure.—Pass the handle under the right and left legs alternately, always passing from the inside out in a figure of eight.

If you have completed the dance successfully throw your broom violently upon the floor in a grand gesture.

Notes.

The dance is often done by a pair —||| |||— sometimes to show off its pattern and sometimes in an endurance competition.

It appears to have a special association with weddings—in our own family it was done on these occasions up to about twenty years ago.

Women definitely did it even in the days of long skirts ; it being a matter of feminine pride that a woman could outlast the men when in competition.

Bradninch village have their dance again—some of the boys and maids can do it again !

THE HUMPHREYS FAMILY,
School House, Sidbury, Devon.

From Our Postbag . . .

The Festival Ballet

From MR. J. A. NORRIS, Hugh Stewart Hall, University Park, Nottingham.

Recently I have heard the Folk Dance Ballet discussed by all and sundry of the Society. Having listened, with as unbiased and dispassionate ear as possible, to the arguments as to the desirability of its inclusion in the Festival programme, I came to the following conclusion.

Apparently the main criticisms levelled at this venture are firstly that it is not a "Folk" Dance and is not consistent with the principles of the Society who have always looked with disfavour upon the untraditional (e.g. female Morris dancers). Secondly, it was merely a theatrical performance the like of which could be seen on the stage of a London Musical.

Much as I believe in the principle expounded in the former argument and realize that the utmost caution should be observed before the Society gives its sanction to a venture which is neither traditional nor indeed, even looks like a Folk Dance, I believe it should be waived in this instance.

Has anybody—either individual or organization—other than the E.F.D.S.S. the intimate knowledge of the basic essentials necessary to create a work with the vibrant urgency and primitive vitality which are so characteristic—in fact which are—the Folk idiom ?

It was creative art, and none but the Society have the tools for creating it, and no matter what arguments are levelled against it, therein lies its justification.

The Jew's Harp in Folk Music.

The following interesting notes on this curious instrument are contributed by MR. J. M. BEAUMONT, 53 Headingley Avenue, Leeds, 6 :

I was very interested to hear Corn Rigs played on the Jew's Harp at the Barn Dance at Ponteland in a recent Country Dance broadcast.

I was fortunate enough to attend the World Scout Jamboree at Bad Isch in Austria in 1951 and we had as our badge the Jew's Harp or as it is called there the