

THE COMBERTON BROOM DANCE

by Cyril Papworth



I first saw my grandfather, William Papworth, dance the broom in 1937. He was over 80 years of age at the time and only performed the "dance round" and "legs over broom". For many years I performed the dance in the same way, until about 1965 when my uncle Wallace saw me dance, he told me I had not done all of it and gave me information about the step-dance up the broom and kicking the broom up. As the youngest of the family, his knowledge of the actual steps was vague but it enabled me to add to what I already knew. Then only last week my aunt, Lily Badcock, told me about the hobby-horse figure and my grandfather's way of finishing the dance. So it has taken me about 36 years to learn the dance, and the accompanying notation is my impression of how it was danced in Comberton.

Until recently I used the same tune as my grandfather, "The Keel Row," but on a recent occasion a less well-known tune was required and I now find that the dance is improved with one of the Molly Dancing tunes, "The Cross-hand Polka," which was given to me by my aunt, Mary Ellis, who often played it at the Old Folk's Socials. There was no special occasion for the Broom Dance in Comberton. It was mostly performed as part of a social evening in the pub, especially in Feast Week, or at Harvest Suppers, when the barns in which they were held were swept out.

In April, 1973, I was able to dance the broom at Little Downham where broom dancing had also been performed. A former Molly Dancer, Alfred Shelton, told me I did much the same as them; the rattling of the broom was a distinctive feature in both villages.

NOTATION

Music

A (bars 1-4 only)

A

B

A

B

A

A

B

A

B

Dance

Walk on and rattle broom in last bar.

Dance Round (clockwise).

Legs over Broom.

Dance Round; at end lay broom on floor, bristles down.

Step up Broom; kick it up on last two beats.

Rattle Broom (increase tempo).

Dance Round (lively step).

Broom under Legs (Fool's Jig fashion).

Rattle Broom.

Dance Round; slow down in last 4 bars, at end lay broom on floor, bristles down.

A and B

A

B

Hobby Horse.

Dance Round.

Finish; shoulder broom and walk or dance slowly off.

Dance Round. Molly Dancing step: a form of polka step, taking very short steps with accents on the first step and the hop (1 2 3 and 1 2 3 . . .). Rattle broom-head on floor in time with music.

Legs over Broom. The handle is passed to and fro under each leg in turn while hopping on alternate feet and rattling the broom-head.

Step up Broom. Start at handle end, facing towards head. Moving halfway up right side of handle and back again, step and hop on left foot, swinging right foot over to touch floor first on left then on right side of broom handle (2 bars up, 2 bars back). Repeat on left side of handle with opposite feet but continue up broom to head end, turn and place right foot on head to bring handle up (4 bars).

Hobby Horse. (Broom on floor, bristles down.) Starting at handle end, dance along right hand side of handle to head of broom (3 bars Molly dancing step); in 4th bar place left foot on broom-head to lever handle up into left hand, turn left swinging right leg over broom to straddle it; dance forward (Molly step) progressing up the broom-handle (A, bars 5-8; B, 1-6); dismount by swinging left leg over, then rattle broom (B, 7-8).

The first part of the dance is done to a slow step with only a gentle rattle of the broom-head, but after "Step up the Broom" the broom comes to life and the dance becomes brisk and lively, slowing down again in the Dance Round before the Hobby Horse figure. "Broom under Legs" (Fool's Jig fashion) is my own addition to the dance.

CROSS-HAND POLKA



Ms. of Mrs. Mary Ellis, Comberton, Cambs. c. 1935