

THE COMBERTON BROOM DANCE

I first saw my grandfather, William Papworth, known as "Tulla", dance the Broom in 1937. He was 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 Papworth, 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. At a later date (1973) my aunt, Lily Badcock, told me about the Hobby Horse figure and how my grandfather ended the dance. From her I learned many traditional points: the "Step Up" coming early in the dance and the "Hobby Horse" near the end. Her memory was not so clear about the "Fools Jig Figure", "Broom Under Legs". She thought grandfather may well have done it, and spoke of him throwing the broom round his back. Thus it took me about 36 years to learn the dance, and the accompanying notation is my impression of how the Broom was danced in Comberton.

At one time I danced to the "Keel Row", the tune my grandfather used, but now I prefer to dance to a Comberton Feast Dance tune "The Cross Hand Polka", which was given to me by another of my aunts, Mary Ellis, who often played it at the "Old Folks Socials", at which dancing was part of the evening's entertainment.

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 during Feast Week, or at the time of Harvest Suppers when the barns were swept out for the evening's merrymaking, and brooms would be readily available.

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

Broom dancing in Comberton and East Anglia has no connection with Morris and I have no record of the Molly Men performing it on Plough Monday at Comberton, although this may have happened at Little Downham and elsewhere. (Palmer 1974.)

The Comberton dance seems to have been a spontaneous event with no costume, except for rosettes worn on the knees.



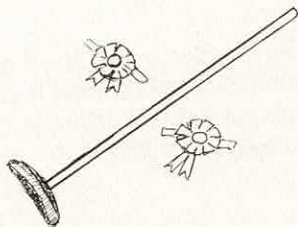
THE CROSS HAND POLKA TUNE Repeat "A" as required



NOTATION

- A Once to yourself — rattle broom on last bar
- A Dance round — clockwise
- B Legs-over-broom
- A Dance round — in last bar lay broom on floor, bristles down
- B Step-up-broom — kick it up on last 2 beats
- A Rattle broom — increase tempo
- A Dance round — lively step
- B Broom-under-legs — as in Morris Fool's Jig
- A Rattle broom
- B Dance round — slow tempo in last 4 bars, lay broom on floor, in last bar
- A & B Hobby horse
- A Dance round
- B Finish — shoulder broom and walk or dance slowly off.

The first part is danced at a moderate speed with only gentle rattling of the broom, but after the step up the broom comes to life and the dance becomes brisk and lively, slowing down again for the Hobby Horse figure.



OR a useful short version can be danced to the Keel Row tune:

- A Once to yourself
- A Dance round
- B Step-up-broom
- A Legs-over-broom
- B Dance round
- A Broom-under-legs
- B Rattle broom for first 4 bars, lay broom on floor and dance up the right side to start Hobby Horse
4 bars
- A Hobby Horse
- B Dance round — then walk off to A music.

GLOSSARY

In the absence of traditional terms, those used are my own interpretation.

Dance Round

Hold broom in right hand and dance round, using the Cambridgeshire Polka step — 3 short steps and a hop or lift, raising the knee of the free leg in front and rattling broom head with music.

Legs Over Broom

The handle is passed to and fro under each leg in turn (under left first) while hopping on alternative feet, and rattling broom head.

Step Up Broom

With broom on floor start at handle facing head, move halfway up right side of handle and back, hopping on left foot and swinging right foot over to touch floor on left of handle and then on right — 2 bars up and 2 bars back — repeat on left side of handle with opposite feet but continue forward to broom head, turn, landing on left foot facing handle on left side of broom, then with right foot on nearest side of head lever the handle up, catching it with the right hand.

Hobby Horse

With broom on floor, start at handle facing head, dance 3 bars towards head on right side of handle in Bar 4 while still facing the same way, place left foot on nearest side of head to lever the handle up into the left hand, turn left to face handle and swing *right* leg over broom — Bar 5 — dance forward up handle to end, using broom as a Hobby Horse (Bars 6–8A and 1–6B) dismount by swinging *left* leg over handle, then rattle broom on last 2 bars.

Rattle Broom

The head is rattled from side to side in time with the music while the dancer keeps stepping from side to side.

C/P: Cambridgeshire Polka — three short steps and a lift, raising the knee of the free leg in front, the amount of knee raised depends on the vigour of the dance.

Lead Down: Men take their partners with right hand, lead down the middle. They turn inward and lead back with crossed hands to original place. On arrival all take hold of partners so that all couples are in line down the centre of the Set, whereupon there is a brief pause before the Polka Round and change. To make sure of this it was often the custom for the leading man to call "Set" at the end of the previous phase of music.

P/R: Polka Round — couples polka around one and a half times counter-clockwise with, traditionally, upper arm hold — or ballroom hold can be used.

W/S: Walking Step — this is used for the lead down and back.

All Longways Dances are described as "Hands 4 from the Top" ignoring the traditional way of top couples beginning.