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JOHN OF GAUNT AND THE MORRIS DANCE

by Rhett Krause*

For well over two centuries, John of Gaunt (1340-1399) has been thought by many to have introduced morris dancing into England, the argument based on his extensive travels in Spain, the possible origin of European morris dancing in that country, and the absence of mention of morris in England before his time. While this argument has been doubted by other authors, the name of John of Gaunt remains associated with the morris, with, for example, one English team of long standing being named the John of Gaunt Morris Men. The facts of John of Gaunt's life that would pertain to the morris are not to be found in any morris book. This article gives a brief biographical sketch of John of Gaunt with emphasis on his adventures in Spain, and also describes his appearance in literature and morris scholarship, so that the reader will understand the facts and arguments concerning his possible connection with the morris, and the unlikelihood that the presumed connection is actually correct.

John of Gaunt in History

John of Gaunt was born in 1340, early in the Hundred Year's War, the fourth son of King Edward III and Philippa of Hainault. His parents had come to Flanders prior to his birth to cement ties with England's continental allies and to push Edward's claim to the throne of France. Their son's curious name comes from the English pronunciation of his place of birth, the Flemish city of Ghent.

As the King's fourth son, John of Gaunt had little chance of ascending to the throne. However, he would find enormous wealth and power through marriage to his distant cousin Blanche, daughter of Henry, the first Duke of Lancaster. When the Duke died of the plague in 1361, his vast holdings were passed on to Gaunt who thus became the largest landholder and most powerful subject of Edward III, and was created Duke of Lancaster in 1362.

To understand John of Gaunt's involvement in Spain, we must examine Spanish politics of that time. The Iberian peninsula was then divided into five kingdoms: Portugal to the West (near its present boundaries bordering the Atlantic), Castile in the center, Aragon to the East bordering the Mediterranean, Navarre in the Pyrenees mountains

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(above Castile and Aragon along the French border), and the remaining Moorish lands around Granada far to the South, as shown in Figure 1.

In 1365, crisis came to Castile and its King Pedro when an army led by Pedro's illegitimate half-brother Enrique Trastamara, commonly known as Henry, invaded the province. Pedro fled into exile while Henry, with the support of France and Aragon, was crowned King of Castile. In 1367 Pedro was restored to the throne by a predominantly
English army led by Edward the Black Prince and his younger brother John of Gaunt. Soon after the English army withdrew, however, Henry again defeated Pedro and this time killed his half brother with his own hands, as is described in Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*. Pedro’s death left his three daughters exiles, but with the legitimate claim to the Castilian throne.²

In 1367 John of Gaunt’s first wife died during another flare up of the plague. Two years later he married King Pedro’s daughter Constanza, and through her claimed the title King of Castile. Meanwhile Henry and later his son Juan remained the de facto kings of Castile, and it was not until 1386 that Gaunt mounted a military campaign to claim his Spanish throne. This expedition had only limited success. Faced with an unwinnable war, Gaunt and King Juan agreed on a compromise in 1388. Key to this agreement was the marriage of John of Gaunt and Constanza’s 14 year old daughter to the nine year old Enrique, eldest son of King Juan and thus heir to the Castilian throne. Having thereby won the right to the throne of Castile for their daughter, Gaunt and Constanza renounced all personal claims to Castile. In exchange, King Juan agreed to pay an enormous compensation which was said to be 600,000 francs followed by an additional 40,000 francs each year for life, with payment secured by numerous Castilian hostages.

This agreement ended John of Gaunt’s involvement in Spanish affairs, and thus
the years of his supposed influence on the morris dance. His extensive adventures elsewhere on the continent, in Scotland, and at home are not relevant to this discussion.³

John of Gaunt in Literature and Popular Culture

The best known mention of John of Gaunt in literature is as the well respected, aged advisor in Shakespeare’s Richard II, introduced as "Old John of Gaunt, Time honoured Lancaster." Shakespeare was more flattering to Gaunt than many historians and this may very well be related to the fact that Gaunt, as great-great grandfather of Henry Tudor (Henry VII), could be considered a forefather of the Tudor monarchs of England (1485-1603), and Shakespeare (writing c. 1595) would presumably not wish to displease the royal family.⁴

John of Gaunt is also mentioned in Shakespeare’s Henry VI, Part III, where a brief posthumous comment somewhat exaggerates his military success in Spain: "Then Warwick disannuls great John of Gaunt, which did subdue the greatest part of Spain."⁵

In modern literature John of Gaunt appears as the male lead in Anya Seton’s historical romance Katherine (1954), based on the life of his mistress and third wife Katherine Swynford. This novel was fairly popular, and a number of American morris dancers are familiar with the basic details of Gaunt’s life by reading it.⁶

Faint echoes of John of Gaunt occasionally occur in popular culture. I recently noted that the writers for the new medieval soap opera Covington Cross named one of their characters Henry of Gaunt, apparently using the wide recognition of John of Gaunt’s unusual name to lend an air of authenticity to their fictional character. Also, at the time this is being written, a United Airlines television commercial advertising travel to England shows quintessential English scenes while a narrator reads John of Gaunt’s ultra-patriotic speech from Richard II:

This royal throne of kings, this sceptered isle.
This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars.
This other Eden, demi-paradise....
This happy breed of men, this little world.
This precious stone set in a silver sea....
This blessed plot, this Earth, this realm, this England.⁷

John of Gaunt and the Morris Dance

The theory that John of Gaunt introduced the morris dance into England was first proposed by Francis Peck in his New Memoirs of the Life and Poetical Works of Mr. John Milton (1740):

The morris or morish dance was first brought into England, as I take it, in Edward III time, when John of Gaunt returned from Spain, where
he had been to assist his father-in-law, Peter, K. of Castile, against Henry the bastard. This dance was usually performed abroad by an equal number of young men, who danced in their shirts with ribands and little bells about their legs. But here in England they have always an odd person besides, being a boy dressed in a girl’s habit, whom they call Maid Marian....I cannot forbear observing on the boy dressed in girl’s cloaths introduced into this dance, that, tho’ the young folks of England had, by this Spanish expedition, got a new diversion, yet they could not forbear dashing it with their old favorit one of Maid Marian. 

The argument in favor of John of Gaunt’s role depends on four basic assumptions, each of which I will discuss: (1) The morris does not appear in England until after John of Gaunt’s travels to Spain; (2) the morris is of Moorish/Spanish origin; (3) the morris came to England from Spain; (4) John of Gaunt, through his Spanish connections, was in a position unique among his countrymen to introduce the morris into England.

John of Gaunt last left Spain in 1389. The first written record of the morris in England is 1494. The fact that John of Gaunt’s travels in Spain precede mention of the English morris dance is necessary to Peck’s theory but is not sufficient to prove it. Indeed, the length of time between these two dates, over a century, may be used as one of the strongest arguments against Peck’s theory. For the two centuries following 1494, I can find no period greater than ten years without written mention of morris in England, and I suspect a more detailed compilation would make the longest gap between records even shorter. This makes the absence of any record of the morris from 1387 to 1494 very suspicious, and is one reason that Douce (1807) believed instead that records suggest introduction of the morris during the reign of Edward IV (1461-1483), well after John of Gaunt’s death.

At Peck’s time, it was generally believed that the morris was a dance of Moorish origins that was adopted by the Spanish. Any theory of origin that denies a Moorish/Spanish origin of the dance denies or at least significantly weakens the John of Gaunt theory. The major example of this is the very popular "survival theory" popularized by Sharp, which holds that the morris represents the survival of an ancient European ritual already present in much of Europe long before John of Gaunt’s time.

Regardless of where the morris originated, there is no specific evidence that it came to England from Spain. It could have been introduced from any of several other countries, as there are multiple references to morris in European countries other than Spain during the 1400’s. This is the opinion of Douce, who writes, "it is much more probable that we had it from our Gallic neighbors, or even from the Flemings." The English would certainly have had ample exposure to Continental customs, as for centuries during the Middle Ages, England claimed and occupied parts of the European continent, especially parts of what is now France, with the last continental claim, the city of Calais, not being abandoned until 1558.

If it is assumed that the morris came to England from Spain in the late 14th
century, then John of Gaunt is clearly the person who would have been in the best position to effect this. His extensive travels in Spain, his marriage to the heiress of the Castilian throne, the large number of Spanish noblemen he took hostage to England, and the huge payments made to him to end his claim to Castile (which could have included the services of entertainers as suggested by Tony Barrand in *Six Fools and a Dancer*, cited in Note 11) all could have allowed the spread of a Spanish custom to England.¹³

However, when we recognize that importation of the morris from France, the Low Countries, or elsewhere in Europe during the 15th century is another (and arguably more likely) option, then John of Gaunt becomes simply one of many possibilities. Generations of English nobles and aristocrats battled and governed in their continental possessions. When we also consider the soldiers, merchants, and hostages that passed from one country to another, there are vast opportunities for cultural exchanges. We need look no farther than the royal family for specific examples, as three of the kings of England between the time of John of Gaunt and the first mention of the morris in England married European noblewomen. Each of these women would have been in at least as good a position as John of Gaunt's wife Constanza to introduce a Continental custom such as morris dancing into the English court.¹⁴

With the lack of specific evidence to support Peck's theory, and the overwhelming influence of the survival theory during the past 80 years, it may be wondered why John of Gaunt's name is still frequently associated with the morris dance. The answer may be as simple as this: Cecil Sharp and the *Encyclopedia Britannica*.

The notion of Sharp as a supporter of the John of Gaunt theory will surprise some, as Sharp spent virtually all of his career supporting theories of morris origins that strongly deny any Moorish/Spanish origin and any special role of John of Gaunt. This was not the case, however, in his first edition of *The Morris Book, Part 1* (1907). This edition "was written in July 1906, when the movement for the revival of folk-dancing was in its infancy, within, to be precise, three months of the first exhibition of Morris-dancing given in London." Sharp falls over himself to give disclaimers noting his superficial treatment of morris origins and history.¹⁵

In this first edition, Sharp accepts the Moorish/Spanish origins of the morris, writing that "the weight of testimony must be held to show Morocco as the fount and origin....As for the date of its introduction into England that is impossible to state with certainty; but most authorities point to the time of Edward III, maybe when John of Gaunt returned from Spain as probably the earliest when Morris-men were seen in England."(16)

In *The Sword Dances of Northern England* (1911) and the second edition of *The Morris Book, Part 2* (1912), Sharp would greatly change his opinion, and put forth his more familiar theory that the morris is "the survival of some primitive religious ceremonial," beholden to the Moors only for its borrowed name, and as a pan-European phenomenon, not requiring John of Gaunt to bring it to England. By this time, however, thousands of copies of the first edition, which considered the John of Gaunt theory quite possible, were in circulation, and presumably remained in use long after the publication
of the second edition. For the morris enthusiast of early this century who was curious about morris origins, the written opinion of Sharp, by far the most influential morris authority of this century, would vary widely, depending simply on which edition of The Morris Book, Part I was available.17

The Encyclopedia Britannica is a very respected and frequently referred to source of knowledge for the English speaking world; I have examined several editions of this work to note the changing entry under "Morris Dance." The 11th edition (1911), published early in the morris revival, makes no mention of John of Gaunt. The 1945 version of the 14th edition, however, describes the morris as "old English dance, which is said by various authorities to have been introduced by John of Gaunt from Spain or borrowed from the French or the Flemings." The author of this piece lists three sources in his bibliography, one of which is The Morris Book. The mention of John of Gaunt and the absence of acknowledgment of the survival theory strongly suggests that the author was still using the first edition of The Morris Book, Part I, despite the fact that at the time the Encyclopedia was published, the second edition had been available for 33 years! All mention of John of Gaunt has been dropped from more recent printings of the Encyclopedia Britannica, at least since the appearance of Douglas Kennedy's article in the 1971 version of the 14th edition.

Conclusion

The theory that John of Gaunt introduced the morris dance into England was initially proposed by Francis Peck in 1740. Since that time a few authors have agreed with Peck but most have argued against his theory. An examination of John of Gaunt's life and what little is known of early morris dancing is unable to strongly support or definitively contradict Peck, but suggests that Gaunt is one of a large number of people who could have been involved in an introduction of morris into England during the 14th or 15th centuries, if indeed such an introduction took place. John of Gaunt's position in morris folklore was probably strengthened this century by Sharp's hastily researched and later totally revised first edition of The Morris Book, Part I and by works that were apparently influenced by this book, such as some editions of the Encyclopedia Britannica.

Perhaps the wisest treatment of the subject by morris scholars is by Roy Dommett, who in his thoughtful essay on morris origins states simply that "perhaps John of Gaunt really did bring back a performance of the Morisco to England," and leaves it at that. Despite lengthy evaluation of the pertinent facts and the recognition of multiple possible theories, in the end we can conclude no more than did Roy's single sentence, and agree that yes, perhaps he did.18 Circumstantial evidence, however, strongly suggests that he did not, and a broader search of European contexts will discover different and more likely sources.
NOTES

1. John of Gaunt will be mentioned in any historical text of Britain covering his era. For a more detailed look at his life, I would recommend: Sydney Armitage-Smith, *John of Gaunt*, (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1964). Earlier works which are less complete and more difficult to locate in this country are Arthur Collins, *The Life and Times of Edward, Prince of Wales. Also the History of John of Gaunt*. (London: Osborne, 1740). William Godwin, *Life of Chaucer*, (London: Phillips, 1803). It should be noted that ultimately much of the information used by these authors is drawn from medieval chroniclers contemporary with John of Gaunt such as the English writers Holinshead and Knighton, the French writer Froissart, and the Spanish writer Ayala.

2. Henry was the son of King Alfonso of Castile by his mistress, and was commonly referred to as "Henry the Bastard." Pedro was the legitimate son of Alfonso and came to the throne upon his father's death in 1350. For his vigorous persecution of his political enemies, he was commonly referred to as "Pedro the cruel."

   Out of thy land thy brother made thee flee;
   And after, at a siege, by subtlety,
   Thou were betrayed, and laid unto his tent,
   Where he with his own hand slew thee,
   Succeeding in thy reign and in thy rent.

   --Geoffrey Chaucer, "The Monk's Tale"

3. John of Gaunt succeeded remarkably in placing his heirs in the royal families of Europe. As already mentioned, his daughter Katherine became Queen of Castile, and her granddaughter Isabella married King Ferdinand of Aragon, fusing their countries to form modern Spain and, in 1492, financing Columbus' first voyage. Katherine's half sister Philippa was married to the Portuguese King Joao I, and their descendants ruled Portugal for centuries, including their son, Prince Henry the Navigator. Back in England, John of Gaunt's son Henry Bolingbroke would depose Richard II to become Henry IV. Finally, in 1485, the War of Roses would end at Bosworth where Henry Tudor, a great-great-grandson of John of Gaunt and his third wife Katherine Swynford, would kill their great-grandson Richard III, to become Henry VII and begin the Tudor line of English monarchs.


9. Some will disagree with the statement that the morris does not appear in England until John of Gaunt's time or after, as there is a school of thought that the name "morris" first appeared in England in the 14th or 15th century, but was applied to a dance form that had already been in England for a long time.

10. The logic used in ignoring this long gap of time could be applied to the following more modern case with an absurd conclusion: Commodore Matthew Perry was an American of great power who made well known trips to Japan in 1853 and 1854, as recorded in any textbook of American or Asian history. No other contemporary American had as much influence in Japan. Sushi bars are not mentioned in New York City prior to 1853, but are known to have been popular 120 years later in the 1970's. Therefore Commodore Perry introduced sushi bars to New York City.


11. To discuss the validity of the survival theory is well beyond the intent of this article. It is discussed and quite convincingly rebutted in Anthony Barrand, *Six Fools and a Dancer*, (Plainfield, Vermont: Northern Harmony Publishing Co., 1991). A variant of the theory that the morris originated with the Moors is that it was originated by European Christians and initially represented a ritualized battle between Christians and Moors. I cannot find any mention of this variant until the 20th century.


15. The first quotation is from Cecil Sharp and Herbert Macllwaine, *The Morris Book, Part 1* (second edition), (London: Novello and Co., Ltd., 1912), p. 7. The remaining quotations, including those listed below, are from Cecil Sharp and Herbert Macllwaine, *The Morris Book, Part 1* (first edition), (London: Novello and Co., Ltd., 1907), pps. 13-19. Sharp's treatment of morris history begins: "We claim for this sketch no completeness." This is followed by deference to other researchers: "Schemes of wider research, however, we are content to leave in the hands of the intrepid folk-lorist." Sharp ends his discussion with yet another disclaimer: "As a conclusion to this imperfect sketch we would point
once more to the warranty of its imperfections and sketchiness offered in the beginning."


Theodore Albert Viehman was born in Pittsburgh in 1889 and died, after a long and distinguished career in the directing and teaching of theater, in California in 1970. With no prior thought of a college education, Ted was working in a collections/bookkeeping capacity at the Macbeth-Evans Glass Company in Pittsburgh in 1914 when a new Department of Drama was opened at the young Carnegie Tech, endowed by Andrew Carnegie some years earlier as a trade school, but which now offered degrees as well.

Ted was immediately entranced, and, though older than many other students, enrolled in night classes. Finally, he decided to enter the college full-time, earning his A.B. from Carnegie Tech in 1918, at the age of 29, and his Master’s degree in 1922. During this time, Ted threw himself enthusiastically into all branches of his chosen field of interest—including dance—thus bringing him, practically coincidentally as he tells it, in contact with Cecil Sharp at the first English folk dance camps in America. Ted’s involvement with folk dance stood him in good stead in his career for many years.

Ted’s reminiscences of his life and his impressions of the theater were written by him over a two or three year period in the nineteen-sixties, and were bequeathed to his niece, Marianne Thornton, who graciously permitted the publication of the following portion of them.

The reminiscences provide anecdotal evidence of the early dance camps and of the interest among certain well-to-do Americans in the English folk dance movement. The fact that folk dancing was a subject available for Ted to take at college also points out the early connection between folk dancing and social work. Many of the pioneers and benefactors in the folk dance revival, such as Elizabeth Burchenal and Helen Storrow, were interested in the dance as a medium of wholesome recreation for working girls and men: a recreation far more to be desired than the much decried public dance halls of the period. While Ted doesn’t seem to have been interested in this aspect of the dance, the fact that dancing was offered at Carnegie Tech as part of the physical education and social work programs offered by the women’s college is indicative of this link.

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It was early in 1915 that I became a student in the Drama Department of Carnegie Tech. There was no dance instructor on our staff, so all Drama students went over to the Margaret Morrison Gym three times a week to have dancing sessions under Elizabeth Stoner. She had spent a summer studying with Cecil Sharp in England, so with boys to work with (Margaret Morrison classes were all girls) it was perfectly natural that she would teach us the Flamborough. It was just about that time, dramatic and dance activity having slowed up somewhat in England because of the First World War, that Granville Barker was doing a production of Midsummer Night's Dream in New York and he brought Cecil Sharp over to do the dances of the fairies and the clowns, maintaining that all the characters should be Elizabethan, not Greek. In the last act Sharp had the mechanicals do a traditional comic Morris dance on the cue: "Come, your Bergomask." It was known originally as the Wryesdale Greensleeves, later by the English dancers themselves as the Old Man's Jig, and in America after Barker's production, quite naturally as the Bergomask. I did not see this production, but I learned it from Sharp and have used the dance myself in several different productions, invariably with great success: I am sure the audiences in New York must have enjoyed it thoroughly.

Now several influential people in the United States, led by George Pierce Baker, who was then still at Harvard, prevailed on Sharp and his secretary to stay in this country during the war and organize and teach classes at the several American centers of the English Folk Dance Society, thereupon organized in Boston by Mrs. James J. (Helen) Storrow, in Chicago by Mary Wood Hinman, in St. Louis by Percival Chubb, in New York by Charles Rabold and in Pittsburgh by Mrs. J. Dawson Callery. A summer session of the School of English Folk Song and Dance was set up in Eliot,
Maine near Portsmouth "at Dr. Moore's camp on the beautiful Piscataqua River." But a school had to have students, especially men if Morris and Sword Dances were to be taught. The only intact group of men who would be free for the summer and who had any inkling of what Morris and Sword dances were all about were in Elizabeth Stoner's classes at Carnegie Tech. Would we like to go? Lucy Barton and several others would, and did, but all the boys said no, it was too expensive and took too much of our work time. "Oh," said Miss Stoner, "the expenses of eight of you men would be paid; Mrs. J. Dawson Callery was taking care of that." Eight of us quickly changed our minds; we found that all the things we thought would take up our time that summer faded miraculously out of the picture. So Turk Steen, Johnny Burke, Hal Munnis, Charlie Meredith, Si Cather, Howdy Smith, Norry Engel and I took train for New York, Boston and Eliot; it was going to be a great summer such as none of us had ever experienced before.

It was. We went swimming as soon as we arrived. What if the water of the Piscataqua (the name brought forth plenty of puns) was cold? There were plenty of girls to shame away our shivers. Classes started the day after we arrived. The first full hour was confined to Morris Dancing, and we went after them with "pep and go," the English equivalent of vim and vigor. Folk Songs, Demonstration by the Staff, Interval for tea, Country Dances, Sword Dances, Lunch, Rest and Recreation, Morris Jigs, More Country Dances and Informal Discussions followed in that order each day except Sunday, so we had little time to get into mischief. All these activities took place in a large cleared barn just at one end of the camp. We slept in tents with wood floors, four of us to a tent; comfortable enough except when it rained, which, as I recall now, it did just about the whole three weeks we were there. The food was hardly what you would call plentiful: the menu planned for an English and Bostonese clientele, well advanced in years, which quickly brought forth loud protests from "those eight Pittsburgh young men" in the first week. This situation was quickly corrected by the administration. But nobody could turn off the rain and entertaining girls in tents at night was strictly taboo--in 1915. Then it was only a few days before all the Morris dancers began to have cramped leg muscles and fallen arches. A foot specialist was brought up from Boston, who bound up our feet and shins with yards of scotch tape. Turk Steen, who had flat feet to begin with, spent most of the three weeks in his bunk.

So it went--the first summer session of the school of the United States Branch of the English Folk Dance Society. Chuck Meredith, our best Morris Jig man, never returned to Carnegie Tech, but remained in New York to join the acting company of the Washington Square Players. Turk Steen foreswore all English Folk Dancing, although he relented later to fill his accustomed Number 5 place in the Carnegie Tech Flamborough team in various exhibitions given later that year on one of the greens of the golf course on Schenley Oval. Three of us had been awarded an elementary certificate [in 1916]. I was one of them, although I am certain I was not the best. However, in the Flamborough Sword dance I had always danced Number 1, the key position, and in that spot I was never replaced.

During late winter, regular weekly English Folk Dance parties were held in all
the centers: Boston, New York, Chicago, St. Louis, Cincinnati, Philadelphia and Pittsburgh. But interest had begun to lag and to revive it, a summer session of the school was set up for the following July, this time at the Massachusetts Agricultural College at Amherst, and each center urged to send students. With practically no other registrants from Pittsburgh, I was offered a full, expense-paid scholarship, if I would also teach part-time. I accepted, and on July 20, 1917 I received my Advanced certificate to teach, one of the first to be awarded in America.

When I returned to Tech Drama School that following September, Thomas Wood Stevens, the head of the department, offered me a part-time job on his staff teaching Beginners and Advanced English Folk Dancing. As I look back now, I have the feeling that there was some connection between this arrangement and my scholarship and teaching with Sharp the summer before. But Stevens seemed to feel strongly that the only kind of body control and movement that his students had had up to that time, aesthetic dancing, was too artificial, especially for men students, and that the naturalness and relaxation which the English folk dancing required would help to give the actor more ease and confidence.

I taught at Carnegie and for the Pittsburgh Center until I left school for Reserve Officers Training Camp in May, 1918. On my return to school in January, 1919, I immediately went back on Stevens' staff teaching Folk Dancing part-time, and doing graduate student work toward my master's degree, which I was awarded in 1922. I continued teaching the classes in English Folk Dancing there until I left Pittsburgh in 1929.

Meantime, many of my activities outside of Tech then and since have been based on my two summers with Cecil Sharp. As early as Christmas vacation, 1916, Sam Hume invited me to come to Detroit and stage the Revesby Sword Play, a pre-Elizabethan Folk play based on Morris and Sword dancing, at the Arts and Crafts Theatre there. The first four summers after the war I was a member of the summer session staff at the University of California at Berkeley, teaching large classes of Country and Morris dance students, while also working with Sam Hume in various productions in the Greek Theatre. A year later I did the same at UC in Los Angeles, then known as the Southern Branch. At Carnegie, now Institute of Technology, I put the dances in all of Iden Payne's Shakespeare and William Poel's unique production of Ben Jonson's The Poetaster productions and arranged, choreographed and directed my own production of "Robin O' The Wode." Outside of school hours, for several successive years I had children's classes in English Folk Songs, Dance and Singing Games, and, at the same time I taught adult classes in Sewickly. At the Wilkinsburg High School, each year I staged productions of various Gilbert and Sullivan operettas, including the dances, which I based on the traditional English steps and movements. Also at nights in 1923, I went to Duquesne, Pa, to choreograph and teach a local group of steelworkers a Dance of the Steelmen, based on the Flamborough, for Stevens' Christmas Pageant there.

Another regular source of income for me in Pittsburgh during the twenties was my teaching of English Folk Dancing to classes outside of Carnegie Tech. The most solid
of these was at Miss Shearer's private school of girls. Sara Shearer, when I first met her, was a past middle-aged spinster with an excellent teaching background, who had taken over a large old ten room Shadyside residence and converted it into a school. With exceptional connections among the wealthier families in the East End, she conducted a very successful school for girls of all grades through the twelfth. With no kind of recreation room, she needed organized dancing and the country dances I taught were just the thing for her girls. I never could understand, however, her insisting on my giving her older girls Morris and Sword dances. I drove to the Shearer school for three late morning classes each week. During part of this period, I was also conducting adult classes in English country dancing in Sewickley one night a week in the home of Charles B. Horton. My sister Olive played the piano accompaniments for these parties. At about this same time I had one class a week in English Singing Games mostly for children of Tech faculty members.

It was five years after I left Carnegie Tech, in 1934, that Stevens planned the abbreviated versions of Shakespeare to be played in the lovely little replica of the Elizabethan Globe theatre in the English Village at the Chicago Century of Progress. He invited me to put a group of country dancers on the Green beside the theatre, they to dance for ten minutes every hour just before the beginning of each play. I did this, and also staged the *Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Comedy of Errors* in the Globe. In succeeding years, many of my dancers did the same dances at the San Diego, Dallas and Cleveland revivals of the Globe. As late as 1940 I had classes in English Country dancing at the Youngstown (Ohio) Playhouse where I was then directing. Thus did my summer of hoped-for fun result in years of profit and enjoyment.

The United States branches died out gradually during and after the First World War [Ed. Note: some activity continued in Boston, New York, etc.]. Sharp and Miss Karpeles continued their amazing work in our Kentucky mountains of unearthing and saving for posterity versions of old English songs and dances that had entirely disappeared in England. They returned to London where he died in 1924 at the age of 65. The Cecil Sharp House was later built in London in his memory and to keep alive his work, a pretty difficult job in this latter day of the Beatles and the Watusi.

But that's not the end of my story. In the late fifties, on a painting trip in England, my wife Gerda and I were sitting in our rented Anglia in the lovely Cotswold village of Moreton-on-the-Marsh when Gerda said, "Listen!" I did, and heard the thin strains of traditional Morris dance music coming from dead ahead of us. We locked up the car and hastened toward the sound and found the dancers in the village square, decked out in the traditional shoulder baldrics with ribboned rosettes, and the tinkling bells fastened just below the knees and short sticks tapping rhythmically to recorder and tabor music, while several hundred Villagers looked on curiously. We watched for a while, delighted to find the dances on their native soil. I was disappointed, however, to find their execution rather careless, at least with nothing like the perfection which Sharp had insisted on in the old days at Eliot and Amherst. Seeking out their leader, I learned that they were young Englishmen from Malvern, who were giving up their holidays to
go about and try to restore the traditional dances to the small villages. When I asked them to do certain dances by names, he naturally exhibited polite surprise at such requests coming from an American. When our monosyllabic (scanty) colloquy turned to comic dances, I asked him if his men did the Wryesdale Greensleeves. "I suppose you mean the Old Man's Jig? Unfortunately, no," he said. "We have hunted all over England for somebody who might remember it but have not had any luck. Do you know it?" When I told him I did, his British reserve disappeared completely. Would I teach it to them? "Certainly," I said, "Where shall we do it?" "Right here," he replied, and set about picking out his three best dancers, while I worked with the musicians to get the slow, thumping tempo of the old "Greensleeves" air. I showed them the steps, and made them go over it several times to their great delight. They thanked me profusely and hoped Mrs. Viehman and I would join them that evening at the village "Pub" and have a "pint o' bittahs" with them. We would be most happy to. They returned to their program of dancing, and now there was a noticeable improvement in their style. Like many better actors, they had only eased up in their efforts when they thought the audience did not demand any better.

That night we had a very enjoyable two hours with them, and we all drank to the fortuitous return of the old English traditions to England.

NOTES

1. Elizabeth Rheem Stoner was on the staff of Margaret Morrison College, the women's college of Carnegie Tech, from 1908 to 1916, gradually rising to the position of Assistant Professor of Physical Education. She was a graduate of the Boston Normal School of Gymnastics in 1899 and of the Gilbert Normal School of Dancing in 1906. In 1911, she attended the Stratford-on-Avon School for English Folk Songs and Dances.

   In 1910, Mary Neal and her Esperance guild of Morris Dancers organized the first vacation school at Littlehampton, Sussex, for about 60 teachers for County Council Schools. Later that year, the school was transferred to Stratford, where about 200 attended. (Kidson, Frank and Mary Neal, English Folk-Song and Dance, Cambridge University Press, 1915, p. 166). Cecil Sharp took over the school in 1911.

   While the physical education classes that Stoner offered to the women varied over the years, at the time that Ted was a student, she was offering Swedish Gymnastics—"exercises which tend to develop an erect carriage, correct faulty posture and promote agility and good health"—Aesthetic Dancing—"The teaching of pantomimic and symbolic dances is intended to enable the student to interpret musical and dramatic ideas by means of rhythmic movements"—and Folk Dancing and Games (Carnegie Tech General Catalog, 1915-1916, pp. 276-277). In addition to the physical education classes, in which dancing was taught for many years, starting in 1916-17 and for some years thereafter, a class in "Games and Folk Dancing" was offered in the Social Work department. It covered a "practical program for group activities including calisthenics...the simple folk dances of the Lithuanians, Bohemians, Poles, Scotch, Irish, English, and other nationalities" (Carnegie Tech General Catalog, 1918-19, pp. 42-43).
2. Barker’s bringing Sharp over in 1915 is recounted in "Lily Roberts Conant; A Memorial," by May Gadd (Country Dance & Song, No. 6). Sharp had arranged the dancing and music for the London production of the "Dream" and of "The Man Who Married a Dumb Wife." He spent six weeks in New York recreating these productions, then "visited Boston, Chicago, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh and St. Louis" (p. 11). During his visit to Pittsburgh—which Ted does not mention—Sharp lectured and taught several classes. One of his students was the novelist Willa Cather. Of his visit, Sharp later wrote, "I worked terribly hard at Pittsburgh, taking five and six hours' classes each of the four days I was there and lecturing three times." Twenty-six years later Willa Cather recalled that she and her two friends "regained a youthful exuberance from the dancing classes." (Byrne, Kathleen D. and Richard C. Snyder, Chrysalis, Willa Cather in Pittsburgh, 1896-1906, Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania, pp. 68-69).

3. Baker was a dramatics professor at Harvard. He had a camp at Chocorua, New Hampshire, "where more than fifty people, including children, joined classes in English dancing." These were taught, along with morris and sword, by one of Cecil Sharp's morris dancers, A. Claude Wright. (Wilfert, Ed, "Pinewoods Camp Fifty Years Ago," Country Dance & Song, vol. 19, 1989, p. 1.)

4. Storrow was an early benefactor of country dancing who met and encouraged both Mary Neal and Cecil Sharp. She also had an interest in the Girl Guides, and in 1917 turned a piece of property on Long Pond, Massachusetts into a camp for the girls. In 1933, she moved the Girl Guides next door and put the dancers in (Wilfert, p. 3).

5. Mrs. Dawson, nee Julia Van Bibber Welch, was the wife of a Pittsburgh businessman.

6. Each of the five groups were to send a quota of students, which not every group met. Consequently the school lost money and this, along with the war, was one of the reasons why the camp was forced to close for several years.

7. The American branches of what was then called the "English Folk Dance Society" issued certificates, mostly when the English examiners were visiting. Certificates were offered in Elementary and Advanced Country Dancing and Elementary and Advanced Morris and Sword. The practice continued even after the American branches separated into the Country Dance & Song Society, through the early 1940s, when the war contributed to its demise (Wilfert, p. 29).

8. An English dance camp was held in Amherst, Mass., in 1916 and 1917 when a combination of the War and its monetary losses forced it to close. In 1924, the New York branch of the English Folk Dance Society resumed a summer dance school in western Massachusetts, and in 1925 and 1926, the Boston branch had its own summer school, attended largely by women, at Long Pond. Finally, in 1927, Boston and New York combined at Amherst and brought in Maud Karpeles, Douglas Kennedy, May Gadd and
Marjorie Barnett to teach (Wilfert, p. 3).

9. Ted's name and the course in English Folk Dancing appears in the Carnegie Tech General Catalogs from 1918-19 through 1929-30. In 1920-21 only one course was offered: "Dancing: The work in dancing continues throughout the course. The first year is devoted to Folk Dancing, followed by training in Esthetic Dancing and the dances of various periods." (Carnegie Tech General Catalog, 1920-21, p. 193).

By 1923-24, the course was broken down to add the following detail:

"Folk Dancing I. Twenty-five English folk dances, with special emphasis on the principles of rhythm and design in group dances. Freshman year..." (Carnegie Tech General Catalog, 1923-24, p. 124).

"Folk Dancing II. More difficult folk dances and certain exercises in dance choreography built on the English Folk Steps and movements. (Ibid., p. 125).

10. An affluent suburb of Pittsburgh.

11. Sadly, no details of this effort have been found to date. Flamborough is, of course, a wooden sword tradition, but it is likely that it was the only sword dance that Ted was familiar with.

12. Charles Beardsley Horton was a Pittsburgh businessman who was involved from 1893 onwards with the YMCA and other boys' welfare work, such as the nascent Boy Scout movement.

13. The trip occurred in 1958. In a newspaper article, Ted identified the group as the "Malvern Sword Dancers." (The Tulsa (Oklahoma) Tribune, 2 September, 1958.)
OLD SIDE DOOR:  
A KENTUCKY MOUNTAIN DANCE

by Patrick E. Napier*

(Editors Note by Florence Goodell: One of the difficulties we face in strengthening the American part of our three-fold dance tradition--American, Danish, and English--in the Southern Highlands is the lack of published material describing native dance. In the hope of stimulating people in other parts of the region to set down local dances and share them with us, the Recreation Editor asked Patrick E. Napier, a student at Berea College whose home is in Perry County, Kentucky, to describe one more or less typical dance along with a description of the social and cultural setting in which it was used.)

Like many other people I am interested in seeing our Kentucky mountain square dancing revived. We have a rich source from which to draw material.

Most of the square dancing in my community has moved from the home to the "beer joints," "road houses," "honky tonks," or "jenny barns" as they are now called. Good square dancing and beer or "moonshine" do not mix. By allowing these places to take over the square dances the young people as well as the old have suffered. So has the dancing, for it has become more or less commercialized and is not nearly as good now as it was several years ago. Since I enjoy square dances so much, I have been a few times to the "dancehalls by the side of the road." There was no caller. The music was too loud and everyone was dancing a different figure at the same time; it was a riot. There was not much to the dance and what there was was so rough that it was impossible to enjoy it.

The last time I went to a dance in a private home was in my home town of Hazard, Perry County, Kentucky, on the New Year's Eve when we welcomed 1940. We danced all night and went home at daylight the next morning.

Patrick E. Napier is a long-time member of CDSS, dancer, and caller of Southern dances, who now lives in Bowling Green, Kentucky. Retired from the Presbyterian ministry and school teaching and administration, he has been on the staff of the Berea Christmas Dance School for over forty years and continues as an active square-dance teacher/caller, and teller of mountain folk tales. The articles reprinted here were first published in Mountain Life and Work (The Organ of the Southern Council of Mountain Workers) XXV (Summer 1949), 23-5 and The Country Dancer 5:4 (Autumn 1949), 3-5. We are grateful for Dr. Napier's permission to reprint the articles here. Another article of his, "Square Dancing--Kentucky Mountain Style," appears in Journal of Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance 55:7 (September 1984), 39-42 in a symposium of five articles on country dance and clog dance entitled "Dance Dynamics."
Since square dancing differs in each community I will describe a dance which we did that night and one which is typical of my region. I do not know where this particular figure originated but it has been danced there for many years.

The size of rooms in the mountains limits the number of couples in a set. We danced with four couples in each set, as a rule. If there were more couples who wanted to dance, and there always were, they could join the set but we never had over seven couples to the set. If there were eight couples then the furniture was moved out of another room and another set with its own caller was formed.

Local musicians were used (and at no cost). We had a fiddle, guitar and banjo player. Usually only two of them played at a time in order to give the third a chance to dance. The musicians were pretty good and never tried to drown out the caller.

The tunes they played were numerous and varied. Some of them were: "Cripple Creek," "Turkey In The Straw," "Little Birdie," "Chinese Breakdown," "Billy in the Low Ground," "Flop Eared Mule." One of the most important qualities needed in the music is a good steady beat.

The steps used varied with the individual dancers. Some used a fast walk, some a slow running step; some used few foot movements and change-steps while others used a great variety of foot movements. Each dancer had his own pattern and usually those who had the most intricate foot movements were considered the best dancers. Regardless of the steps used all the dancers kept together.

We used the social dance position for swinging but my father (who is a native of Perry County, and is now sixty-eight years old) tells me that back when he was younger they used the two-hand swing.

The "run a set" means that each couple dances the figure with each of the other couples in the set, the set being four couples as a rule. (Often the word "set" is used to refer to the dance itself.)

The Number 1 man calls figure for the dance. One of our favorite figures is called "Old Side Door." It goes like this:

**Opening Call**

ALL HANDS UP AND CIRCLE LEFT  
(All eight take hands in a ring and circle to the left.)

HALFWAY AND BACK  
(All eight circle back to the right still holding hands.)

SWING YOUR PARTNER  
(Swing your partner once around.)

CORNER TOO  
(Swing your partner once around.)

SWING YOUR OWN LIKE YOU USED TO DO  
(Swing your partner once around.)
PROMENADE
(Promenade counter-clockwise to places--right hands in right over left hands in left.)

Figure

AROUND THIS COUPLE LADY IN THE LEAD
(The second couple drop hands and stand facing the inside of the ring while the No. 1 lady, followed by the No. 1 man, moves to the right of the No. 2 couple and goes behind the No. 2 couple.)

GENT FALLS THROUGH AND HE TAKES THE LEAD
(The No. 1 man comes between the No. 2 couple while the No. 1 woman goes on around the No. 2 couple. The No. 1 man is now in the lead. He goes to the right behind the No. 2 couple while the No. 1 woman follows behind him.)

LADY FALLS THROUGH THE OLD SIDE DOOR--SIDE COUPLES SWING
(The No. 1 lady passes between the No. 2 couple and is swung by the No. 1 man while the second couple swings.)

AND COUPLE FOUR
(First and second couples join hands in a ring and circle to the left.)

DO-SI-DO
(This do-si-do, one of the simpler ones, is usually done after the figure is danced with each couple. Each man takes his partner's left hand in his right. She walks around her partner, passing in front of him as she moves to the left, goes behind him, and comes out to her own place on his right. Each man then swings his opposite lady once around and thereafter swings his partner once around.)

AND A LITTLE MORE DOUGH
CHICKEN IN THE BREADPAN PICKING UP DOUGH
DON'T YOU KNOW YOU CAN'T TRACK A RABBIT WHEN THERE AIN'T NO SNOW
ONE MORE SWING AND ON YOU GO.
(This is optional, depending on how much wind the caller has.)
After the No. 1 couple has danced the figures and do-si-do with the No. 2 couple they dance with the No. 3 couple and then with the No. 4 couple.

The two couples who are not dancing the figure may dance a hoe-down or just pat their hands and keep time with the music by patting their feet on the floor.

After the No. 1 couple has danced the figure and do-si-do around the set one-fourth of the dance is over, and then what is sometimes called a "filler," or another "opening call," follows.

CIRCLE EIGHT
(All eight take hands and circle to the left.)
BACK TO THE RIGHT AND GET THEM STRAIGHT
(All eight circle back to the right still holding hands.)
PARTNER SWING
CORNER SWING
PROMENADE YOUR PARTNER AROUND THE RING
(Always promenade back to your original places.)

The No. 2 couple now dances the same figure and do-si-do with No. 3, and No. 4, and finally the No. 1 couple. Then another "filler" is usually called. The filler may be anything the caller desires. Here is another one:

SWING YOUR PARTNER
(Swing your partner once around.)
OPPOSITE TOO
(Swing your corner once around.)
NOW SWING THAT PRETTY GAL IN BLUE
(Swing your partner once around.)
AND PROMENADE
(Promenade once around to your original place.)

The No. 3 couple now dances the same figure and do-si-do with No. 4, and No. 1, and then No. 2 couple. After this, another "filler" is called. Here is a short one:

CORNER SWING
(Swing your corner once around.)
PROMENADE YOUR PARTNER AROUND THE RING
(Here, the partners do not swing but take hands in the promenade position and promenade once around to places.)

The No. 4 couple now dances the same figure and do-si-do with the No. 1 couple, then the No. 2 couple, and finally with the No. 3 couple. Now that all the couples have completed the round of couples we have an "ending call," one of which might be:
Ending Call

CIRCLE LEFT
(All eight join hands and circle to the left.)

BACK TO THE RIGHT IN A SINGLE LINE LADIES IN FRONT, GENTS BEHIND
(All eight drop hands and circle back to the right; the man’s partner in front of him.)

YOU SWING YOURS, AND I’LL SWING MINE
(Swing your partner once around.)

DON’T FORGET THAT GAL BEHIND
(Swing your corner once around.)

PROMENADE--YOU KNOW WHERE AND I DON’T CARE
TAKE YOUR HONEY TO A ROCKING CHAIR.
(Promenade out to the side of the room; the first couple usually leads off first.)

This completes the dance. The fillers may be changed, interchanged, or left out, but only one figure is danced while the set is being run. When you dance all night, as we used to do, all the figures that a caller knows can be used and none will be repeated. Everyone will know the figures after they have been danced in this way.

I realize that people dance differently in all parts of our State and Southern Region; so if people in other places don’t dance like this then, all right, it does not hurt the dance nor the dancers. None of us is wrong; we are just different.
SET RUNNIN’ IN EASTERN KENTUCKY

by

Patrick E. Napier

"Tune up the fiddle, rosin up the bow; Grab a partner and a dancin’ go---"

(1949 Ed. Note: Patrick Napier is a graduate of Berea College and is now teaching at the Highland Institution; Guerrant, Kentucky. He attended Pinewoods Camp this summer and made a great hit with his dancing and "calling.")

The traditional square dance of Eastern Kentucky has been the chief form of recreation in that area for many years. With the coming of better transportation, better roads, better communication, and more varied forms of recreation, the square dancing has changed some. For one thing, the square dancing is moving from the private homes to the commercial dance halls and beer joints. Much is being lost from the true dance. However, with all the changes that have taken place you may still find the traditional square dances being done in some parts of the area.

The size of the rooms in the mountains is the limiting factor as to the number of couples in a set. Usually there are only four couples in each set. If there are more than four couples in the house who wish to dance, and that is the reason for going to a square dance, the extra couples make another set and move the furniture out of another room and have their own caller.

The step used does not differ from any other type of square dancing. The feet should stay close to the floor. The step used will vary with the dancer. Some prefer a fast walk, some a slow running step, some use very few foot movements and change-steps while others use a great variety of foot movements. The fancy foot-work is usually left for the more advanced dancer.

The swing is usually the two-hand-swing-once-around. The social dance swing is sometimes used but the "buzz" or "pivot" step is never used while swinging. The two-hand-swing-once-around keeps the dancers together and makes for a much smoother dance.

The Caller is usually the Number One man. He calls the figures and keeps the dance together while he is dancing. The success of the dance depends mostly on his calling the figures and keeping the dancers with the phasing of the music.

The music for set-runnin’ need not be any faster than that used for any of the American squares. Quite often the true character of Kentucky square dancing is lost when the music is played too fast.
For the set to run smoothly the dancers should pay close attention to the calls. Each person should dance with his partner as well as the others in the set. If the set (area enclosed by the dancers) is kept small, the dance will be more enjoyable.

The first couple starts the figure for the set. They dance with the second, third, and fourth couples; a filler is then called. The filler may be anything the Caller desires. The second couple leads the same figure around the set; another filler is called, etc., until each of the couples in the set has lead the figure.

Many of the figures which are done in Kentucky are similar to those done elsewhere. The following figure, which we call "OCEAN WAVE," is sometimes called "OPEN AND SHUT THE GARDEN GATE" in other parts of the Southern Area.

THE CALL

OCEAY UP  *(Pronounce: OH SHE)*
OCEAY BACK
OCEAY AROUND THAT OUTSIDE TRACK

OCEAY UP
The first couple takes hands in the promenade position (right in right over left in left) and move four steps forward between the second couple. The second couple move forward four steps on the outside of the first couple.

OCEAY BACK
The first couple turns in place, still holding hands, and move four steps forward between the second couple to their original place. The second lady and second gent turn in place and move back to their original places. (Oftentimes the couples do not turn but back into their places).

OCEAY AROUND THAT OUTSIDE TRACK
The two couples reverse action. The second couple moving between the first couple, forward and back to place.

CIRCLE FOUR AND AROUND YOU GO
BREAK THAT RING AND ON YOU GO
or
CIRCLE FOUR AND AROUND YOU GO
BREAK THAT RING WITH A DO-SI-DO.

The DO-SI-DO that is usually done in the mountain area around here is the one that Frank Smith likes to use for the BIG SET at Berea. It goes like this:

After a figure is danced by two couples, the call DO-SI-DO is given by the Caller.

The two couples face; the gent’s partner is on his right with her left hand in his right hand. The gent allows the lady to pass in front of him, around behind him and back to her place (both couples do that at the same time). The partners hold hands through part of this figure and drop hands when the lady is passing behind the gent.

The gent then swings his opposite (corner) lady and (without completing the turns) then swings his own lady. (The two-hand-swing is used in the do-si-do as well as in the figures)."

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**Pat Napier's book Kentucky Mountain Square Dancing($6.50) and a cassette Dances from Appalachia($8.50) are available from CDSS; a second volume of Dances from Appalachia II ($8.50) is available from CDSS in LP record format.**
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Compiled by Allison Thompson*

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Beautiful star in heaven so bright,
Softly falls thy silver light,
As thou movest from earth afar,
Star of the evening—beautiful star.
Beautiful star, beautiful star,
Star of the evening,
Beautiful, beautiful star.

In fancy's eyes thou seemest to say,
Follow me, come from earth away;
Upward they spirit's pinions try,
To realms of love beyond the sky
Beautiful star, &c.

Shine on! oh star of love divine,
And may our souls around thee twine,
As thou movest from earth afar,
Star of the twilight—beautiful star
Beautiful star, &c.