

Gisburn Processional Dance

In a leaflet printed by the EFDSS , entitled MORRIS HISTORY/PHOTOS The History of Morris (Writer Roy Smith, Preston) states:

“In the 19th century the North West gave rise to a very different concept of the Morris: processional dances - often associated with rush-bearing, with Wakes Week festivities or with local (often religious) processions. No-one is certain what it was based upon - if anything. These dances were scored for a minimum of 8 dancers, and going up in multiples of 4 or 8 thereafter; they were spectacular in the numbers taking part, in the costume, in the musical accompaniment (often a full brass band) and sometimes in the vigorous 'stepping' in clogs.

http://www.lancashirefolk.co.uk/Morris_Information.htm

A leaflet about old Gisburn also adds the following:

“Gisburn Morris Dancers,

Gisburn Morris Dancers performed at local village functions as far back as 1916 (possibly even earlier). Morris Dancers should, strictly speaking, always be male, but because Gisburn was a remote village it managed to get away with female Morris Dancers as well. In 1935 during a May Day procession, Bob Capstick's horse and lorry was used to carry "BRITANNIA" and her retinue through the streets of Gisburn. The 8 strong Gisburn Morris team danced GIBBURN PROCESSIONAL MORRIS, which, as the name suggests is one which is danced in a procession. The annual May Day celebrations ceased when the second world war began. GIBBURN PROCESSIONAL MORRIS is still well known and danced by Morris Dancers today.”

<http://www.gisburn.org.uk/gisburnvillage/traditions.htm>

It is open certainly to discussion whether in modern times all morris dancers should be male, and as the photographic evidence suggests, the dance took place with mixed dancers at least as far back as 1909, predating the usual explanation that women took up morris dancing when many of the men were killed in the Great War.

Points of interest:

In the early twentieth century the dance was performed by a mixed team: men on left as facing up and women on right. Often in more modern times it is performed by single sex groups.

Dancers wore clogs and pictures show white blouses/shirts, with dark trousers with a short tie worn by men and white skirts and a sash worn by female dancers. When colour was used it was usually red, or blue.

Sticks

Originally usually one, held in outside hand was used. Dancers carried only one short, white stick wound with braid with a bell at either end raised in the outside hand when walking. Almost universally modern morris dancers carry two sticks for this dance, of a style similar to that described above.

Music

John of Paris, aka The Old Ninety Five.

http://tunearch.org/wiki/Annotation:Gisburn_Processional

Step

As a processional dance it progresses at a steady pace, though often in more modern times it is performed as a stage set piece, with a chorus which allows the dancers to dance in a limited area.

Chorus

Originally a “jaunty walk” (Leta Douglas) with 8 steps forward between every figure starting on the outside foot.

Another option offered was a single cast “outsides” between figures.

A modern version from 1970s when it was seldom an actual processional dance, would have three steps forward with a semi kick for the fourth, taking the raised foot back to start three steps backwards, thus one, two three, kick, one two three step on the fourth but no weight transferred, the whole to be repeated once.

Figures

1. Cross over
2. Twos
3. Star
4. Arches
5. Swing down the middle
6. Back to front

Pictures

NB it is likely that the dance in the following pictures was "The Gisburn," but this cannot be confirmed.



1. Group Standing. Written on back "1909 Gisburn Morris Dancers First time out". Written on face of photo "Gisburn Morris Dancers". From Henry Slater. Confirmation of the date of this and No. 2 from Mrs. Rebecca Clayton, nee Wright, who also has copies; she also says that these were "the very first Morris dancers at Gisburn". (Notes by Julian Pilling, March 1962) Picture courtesy of Manchester Morris Men.



2. The same team (as photo 1) dancing through Main Street. Written on face of photo "Gisburn Morris Dancers. Photo by E. Buck, Clitheroe" From Henry Slater. (Notes by Julian Pilling, March 1962), picture courtesy of Manchester Morris Men Archive.



Picture 3: Team dancing at Main Road, same view as No.2. Written on face of photo "Gisburn Festival 1913". From Mrs. Wilkinson. (Notes by Julian Pilling, March 1962) .

<http://www.manchestermorrismen.org.uk/arc-photos/towns/target22.html> Picture from Manchester Morris Men archive: c.1913) .



4. Team dancing at Main Road. Same view as photos 2 & 3 Written on back "1912", on face "Gisburn Fete, 1913." E. Buck photo. From Henry Slater. (Notes by Julian Pilling, March 1962) Photo courtesy of Manchester Morris Men Archive. <http://www.manchestermorrismen.org.uk/arc-photos/towns/target23.html>



Picture from Manchester Morris Men archive 1918)

[First](#) | [Previous Picture](#) | [Next Picture](#) | [Last](#) | [Thumbnails](#)

5 The same team as in photo 6. From Henry Slater. (Notes by Julian Pilling, March 1962)

<http://www.manchestermorrismen.org.uk/arc-photos/towns/target24.html>



Picture from Manchester Morris Men archive (c.1918)

6 The same team as in photo 5, and of a later date. This photo has a bull-nosed Morris car in view, which would make 1918 (?) the earliest possible date. From Henry Slater. (Notes by Julian Pilling, March 1962). Picture from Manchester Morris Men archive.

<http://www.manchestermorrismen.org.uk/arc-photos/towns/target25.html>



Pictures from Manchester Morris Archive (c.1922)

7. A children's team photographed in front of Gisburne Park Gates. This photo was contributed by Mr. H.E.Patefield, whose uncle Walter Ireland is the leader (centre) in this photo. In this photo the position of the boys and girls is reversed. Perhaps, as they are at a blind alley, they had done an 'insides' movement to assemble for the photograph. (Notes by Julian Pilling, March 1962)

<http://www.manchestermorrismen.org.uk/arc-photos/towns/target26.html>



Pictures from Manchester Morris Men archive (c.1912)

8. Team dancing at head of Procession in Main Street, Gisburn. This from Mrs. Waterworth. It would appear to be the same team as (in photo) No. 3 (Notes by Julian Pilling, March 1962)

<http://www.manchestermorrismen.org.uk/arc-photos/towns/target27.html>



Picture courtesy of David Middlehurst, 1920s Clitheroe Advertiser.



The bizarre custom of Morris Dancing, down the Main Street in Gisburn around the late 1930s

<http://www.oldclitheroe.co.uk/page233.htm1930's>, source of picture unidentified from Old Clitheroe website.



THE CLITHEROE COUNTRY FAYRE: SUNDAY 8 JUNE 1980.

Clitheroe Morris Men dancing The Gisburn in Clitheroe, 1980

Versions adapted by other teams.

<http://www.megbrad.demon.co.uk/shrogys/gisburn-garters.htm>

It is based on the processional dance from Gisburn (once in Yorkshire but now in Lancashire) that was danced annually at the Village Field Day by a team of 12 men and 12 women in clogs with a single stick in the outside hand

Gisburn Processional notes—Ripon City Morris Dancers from Chas Marshall’s website:

<http://www.crimple.demon.co.uk/rootstour.htm#gp>

The Gisburn Processional is the first dance ever learnt by the team. We originally performed it as a stationary dance, but we now use it exclusively as a processional dance to which we have added some extra figures of our own, including Weave and Wind up. This dance is now used in most of the processions danced by the team, although the Ripon Millenary Polka, Nine Man’s Morris and the Chorley Display Dance have been used in previous years.

Gisburn is a village in Lancashire situated on the A59 not far from Clitheroe. It used to be in Yorkshire until the boundary changes of 1974. The dance was collected by Leta Douglas, amongst others, who published it in a collection called “Three More Dances of The Yorkshire Dales”. This booklet includes the following description :-

“As danced by a team of 12 men and 12 women annually at the Village Field Day, generally held in June. The men wear white shirts, red knee breeches, the women wear white dresses, red sashes over the left shoulder tied on the right hip, with bells across the chest, red stockings and clogs, and a red band on their hair.

All carry short white sticks with a bell attached at each end, the men’s wound round with red braid and the women’s with yellow braid. These sticks are carried in the outside hand by their sides during the procession and at head level during the dancing of the figures, and continuously shaken to ring the bells. The dance is done throughout with the left foot leading, a jaunty walking step for the procession, skipping step for the figures.”

The dance was first performed around 1909 or 1910 and the last recorded time it was done by a Gisburn team was in 1953 when children danced. It is thought that the dance was introduced to Gisburn by a pedlar from Burnley way, who settled in the village.

The descriptions of the figures in Leta Douglas’s notation do match reasonably well what we do. However there are other descriptions of the dance, which inevitably differ from Leta Douglas’s notation to a greater or lesser extent. The dance may well have changed over the years and dancer’s recollections may vary.

Our version is based on the teachings of Trefor Owen, with further changes made to suit the Ripon City style. Thus care needs to be taken in referring to the dance - at best it may be described as Ripon City Morris Dancers’ interpretation (or version) of the Gisburn Processional.

Gisburn Processional from https://tunearch.org/wiki/Annotation:Gisburn_Processional

GISBURN PROCESSIONAL. AKA and see: "[John of Paris](#)," "[New School \(The\)](#)," "[Old Ninety-Fifth \(The\)](#)." English, Morris Dance Tune (6/8 time). G Major. Standard tuning (fiddle). AB (Raven): ABA (Barnes). The tune and dance were collected from the village of Gisburn, near Clitheroe, England, in the Ribble Valley; once part of Yorkshire, it has been since 1974 (when the boundaries were changed) in Lancashire. The tune is not unique to the area, being relatively common under the alternate titles given (it is even printed by O'Neill as "[New School \(The\)](#)"). The Gisburn dance was collected by Leta Douglas (and others, such as Maude Karpeles) and dates from the end of the first decade of the 20th century, when it was thought to have been introduced to the village by a peddler from the Burnley area, who settled in the village. Douglas, a gym mistress at Settle High School, published the dance in a collection entitled "Three More Dances of The Yorkshire Dales" (1934), and gives this description:

As danced by a team of 12 men and 12 women annually at the Village Field Day, generally held in June. The men wear white shirts, red knee breeches, the women wear white dresses, red sashes over the left shoulder tied on the right hip, with bells across the chest, red stockings and clogs, and a red band on their hair.

All carry short white sticks with a bell attached at each end, the men's wound round with red braid and the women's with yellow braid. These sticks are carried in the outside hand by their sides during the procession and at head level during the dancing of the figures, and continuously shaken to ring the bells. The dance is done throughout with the left foot leading, a jaunty walking step for the procession, skipping step for the figures. http://tunearch.org/wiki/Annotation:Gisburn_Processional

Letter re "The Gisburn."

With reference to the photo published last week of dancers at Gisburn, I can throw some light. When I joined Leyland Morris Men in 1974 the Gisburn Dance was one of their repertoire. Amazing as Gisburn was at that time still in Yorkshire! And I included it in 1977 when I revived the Clitheroe Morris Men. Please do send a copy to Cecil Sharpe House in London, the home of the English Folk, Dance and Song Society, where the notation was stored long before the 1970s. This inclusion was upsetting to the powers that were, who did everything possible to discriminate against women in Morris Dancing and, of course, Gisburn was unique in that it was MIXED dancing! Indeed it is the most accomplished image I have seen of the Gisburn Dancers – the Pierrot figure at the back with the blackened face is most intriguing. Perhaps the "Fool" as Clitheroe had for a time with a character

found in the Library, known as Jem Tossplot. The Gisburn dance was a wonderful street Processional and as well as Clog Hurling, the Three Clogged Race it was included in the 1980s at Downham (because the pub was open on the Sunday afternoon) for the Clitheroe Morris Men's Weekend of Dance – this being a massed dance in the village with, at one stage, 80 couples taking part, with the majority of women being from the public having been coerced by the (very) merry Morris Men to participate. Perhaps the Dance can be revived if ever street closures can be negotiated .BRUCE DOWLES, Clitheroe Advertiser, Saturday 18 February 2012.

Read more at: <https://www.clitheroeadvertiser.co.uk/news/your-say/letter-memories-of-gisburn-dance-1-4260536>

“GISBURN FESTIVAL WEEK June 10th to 16th (inclusive) PROGRAMME SUNDAY—Special Services at St. Mary's Church. MONDAY.—Crowning of Festival Queen (Miss Ann Wilkinson). 6-30 p.m., by Mrs. J. R. Hindley; Planting Trees; Judging of Decorated Houses. TUESDAY.—Grand Procession of Tableaux, Characters, Morris Dancing, etc.; Open Air Dance; Regal Band.” 8.6.1951 “Clitheroe Advertiser and Times”
<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0002041/19510608/012/0001>

Other versions of The Gisburn

: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eHoJ-h3qimc> is very similar to the original version in the notes, Mountain Folk Festival 1993, Gisburn Processional.m4v

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fHF0MML7wGI> barely recognisable though main figures included with rant step by South-East-North-West Morris dance Gisburn

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9nNrme-9fQA> again, barely recognisable with some figures included. Published on 9 Oct 2015 .Hoxon Hundred Dance Gisburn, Cross Geys, Redgrave

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eY8fINDShQ4> Plymouth Maids dance Gisburn again, not recognisable though some standard figures included.

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B94GzSWSEeV7c05DejhZiNJMFE/view> Reference notation for Gisburn. Leta Douglas and Julian Pilling.

Bibliography:

Pictures from David Middlehurst (Flicker) and loaned also to Manchester Morris Men Archive

Notes taken from the Internet and hand written source WMF/RD's Notes on Garland Dance and Lancs and Cheshire morris. Article attributed to Leta Douglas "Three More Dances of the Yorkshire Dales" 1934 and local information gathered by Julian Pilling and others in 1960s

Clitheroe Morris Men Notation Sheet 1: the Gisburn: author unknown: no date but circa late 1970s/early 1980s.

Personal recollection of writer: 1970s

http://www.lancashirefolk.co.uk/Morris_Information.htm **(Written by Roy Smith, Preston) MORRIS HISTORY/PHOTOS: The History of Morris**

<http://www.gisburn.org.uk/gisburnvillage/traditions.htm> author unknown