

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 GIBURN 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. GIBURN 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.

The information about the dance is closely connected with the dancers as each team generally had its own special dance names after the area.

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