

SECTION 1: GENERAL COMMENTS

GARLAND DANCES

Garland dances are widespread in Europe, but not very common outside Austria where the garland replaced swords in some ritual dances. In most places the garlands are large and used as a frame for the head and top of the body. In Austria many are rigid and small, of "A" frame or triangular shape as well as complete circles. The earliest English reference is in a ballet. Earlier references to garlands are to a different type of thing that is not a dance implement but something that is carried to accompany a party of dancers or singers. In the 1840's garland dances were part of the stock in trade of the dance display choreographer along with maypole dances and theatrical morris. The Bacup and the original Whitworth dances probably date from the middle of Victoria's reign but most English dances seem to be late Victorian or Edwardian period compositions. A particularly well known one is the "Victory" dance from Knutsford which was danced with a slack garland, like a flower decorated skipping rope, now danced by Poynton Jenners. Garland dances are still part of the repertoire of children's dancing schools and a waltz garland was performed at Knutsford May Day 1982. This dance was done with small rigid framed garlands which allowed quick and easy change from linked to stand alone formations.

The only English dance to include linked movements is the "Rose" collected from a college team from Sunderland at an inter college folk event and apparently taught by an ex long sword dancer from Cleveland. Originally seen danced by 12 it now appears with 8 with some loss of scale, and even by 6 by English Miscellany but they use a character with the dance who passes through at appropriate moments. English dances seem to include bows, from the waist but keeping the head up, as at Bacup, Blennerhasset and the Mayers "Maze" dance at Lancaster. Garland dances do not attract fancy stepping. Within a club's repertoire there is a need for a variety of rhythms and speeds from waltzes to polkas and it is not unusual for teams to change the collected material for the sake of the balance in their shows. A good garland dance uses the garland as part of the dance, rather than having the garland just to look pretty. However garlands have been added to existing dances such as the reconstructed Mrs Hepple's dance. There are now in circulation a number of composed dances from the 4 handed Sweet Garland Dance, seen danced by Wessex Woods, and the 5 handed dance by Plymouth Maids, the 6 handed Tina's dance by Englands Glory up to the Wain for 14, which is a much longer dance now than when first seen at Sidmouth danced by a visiting overseas team. Several garland dances have been composed in Australia and rumours exist for them in the USA. Garlands can be made of a variety of materials - plastic water pipe is just about the right diameter and flexibility and first suggested I believe by Prof Tony Barrand of Boston University, USA. Some have used Ho@lahoops but cane is desirable if the garlands are to be clashed, or even wood steamed to a permanent shape. Weight seems an important criterion, especially if someone has to carry 8 or 12 of them and a set of garlands in basket wickerwork has been seen. Decoration is very much a matter of the teams personal taste as there seem to be no common ideas.

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