

There is a current need to assemble information and interpretations of all the usable dance traditions in England because of the needs for variety, regionalism or character of the performing troupe. One such limited dance form uses ribbons. Ribbons were used for a dance in a classical ballet about 1840 so it may be assumed that such were also in the general stock and trade of the entertainment organisers of the period. There are a few continental ribbon dances which are shown at international dance festivals which are pretty display items. There is one English longways dance known as the "Ribbon" or "Handkerchief" dance which seems to have been very common as a social dance. It was published by Cecil Sharp in the Country Dance Book and frequently used in displays of children dancing. This particular dance was used in seasonal celebrations as for example as "The Morris Dance" at East Coker, near Yeovil. Sharp noted many social dances in his collecting travels, two of which were mentioned to have been danced with ribbons on occasion. One of these has been found under a very similar name in a printed collection.

Dancing for display is not the same as social dancing. It is quite practical to present dances in their social form but they often lack visual impact because they are essentially participatory. The value of introducing a new feature such as a ribbon is that it allows new movements or new interpretations where the nature of the ribbon and how it is held can be exploited. There has been the need to workshop these dances and try them in the dance troupe environment to establish a genre. The following descriptions relies on such experience. Few sides have taken to the ribbon dances as they do not require robust dancing as does Cotswold or Clog and the linking of dancers like long sword makes it unforgiving of mistakes. Very effective performances are done by the Court Square dancers in Charlottesville, USA and they have composed a dance of their own.

**Formation :** longways. Partners linked by a ribbon. It is natural to hold this in the right hand but this leads to swings being with the left hand or arm, or movements in which the ribbons can not be held up.

**Size of Set and Ribbon :** the normal display set would be as for Cotswold morris, finger tip separation both along and across the set. The ribbon needs to be about 8 feet long. It would be held at the quarter points, about 2 foot in from the end, in the right hand, and the left holds the actual free end. Cheap ribbons for practice are a good idea but ones for dancing out need to be of good material, bright, perhaps in club colours and quite wide for ease of handling and visibility. They could be two held together. Foreign teams sometimes carry their ribbon wound around their waists when not in use.

**Step :** a travelling 1 2 3 hop. As these are Southern dances the hop would have been more of a lift of the body than a proper hop. There are some movements, eg processing up under arches when the choice of foot might be significant so that all are on some rule to be the same.

## EAST COKER MORRIS DANCE.

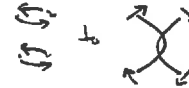
Tune : version of Helston tune. It is enough to do the sequence three times through.

Set : longways for multiples of 4. Need not be progressive but looks better if it is

When there are neutral pairs at the end they stand with ribbon slack not up.

## A1 Star Clockwise - go round twice.

To form the star, take all the first bar, the 1st and 2nd pairs change places, passing left shoulders, sideways, along the set, so that the ribbons wrap round and can be held up to show a cross. (It can also be formed in two bars by



diagonals crossing in turn). If all twirl on the spot, to right, once around before moving off it looks good.

## A2 Star Anticlockwise - also go round twice.

Turn in to come back if retaining ribbon in right hand and making a smaller diameter cross, or turn out if changing ribbon to left hand to hold up.

Return to original place by the inverse of method of forming the cross in bar 1.

## B1 Arches, done twice round, working in two pairs again. Pair coming up the set at each change go over. Time it 1 bar move and 1 bar face opposite. The pair going under lower their ribbon, but do not let it go slack. It looks better if the pair turning in the 2nd place to come up the outside with their ribbon over turn out rather than in, and the two pairs face up and down when travelling rather than across.

## B2 Swing and change places, for the progression.

Pairs link left elbow for the swing, facing alternate ways, right hands up and ribbon horizontal over the heads. If the ends are retained in the left hand then it is suggested that the even side take the lead in forming the link as it is quite possible to get them tangled. Do not cross the ribbons, one does an arm over, not round. All pairs travel round each other, a half circle, progressing anticlockwise, all pairs rotating in synchronism. It is suggested that each pair make one complete revolution every 2 bars, and that they time the movement, for example like 1 turn on the spot before moving, 1 turn moving out to the side, 1 turn moving into the set to the progressed place, 1 turn on the spot. Some such rule is essential for appearance. Separate and fall back to place in last bar.

In the first repeat there will be neutrals at the ends.

It will be found easier if dancers are paired off in height.

## OFF TO CHARLESTOWN or TRIP TO WEYMOUTH (neighbouring places in Dorset)

Set : longways for multiples of 4, but some moves are for the whole set.

- A1 Opposites cross and return rather as in "Speed the Plough" country dance. The path is rather dictated by the need to keep the ribbon up and taut. Suggest make the path curved, passing one's opposite by left shoulder (2 bars) and turning to face back to the right in one's opposite's place (2 bars). Repeat to place.
- A2 Circle in 4's to left and back. In joining hands, one of each pair change hands on the ribbons, also both slide inner hand towards each other along the

### Ribbons 3

ribbon so that the loop between each dancer hands can be swung over their heads and form a ring around the outside of the circle.

- B1 All the pairs except the top swing on the spot, while the top pair separates, holds their ribbon high and walk(dance) down the outside of the set to the bottom carrying their ribbon over everyone's heads. When they reach the bottom the other pairs stop swinging, separate and form arches holding their ribbons up high.
- B2 The top pair, from the bottom, move up to the top again under the arches. This pair can either hold their ribbon up so that it passes close under the rest or more likely, because of the problem of height of ribbons being determined by the shortest pair, hold their ribbon across themselves, taut, at about thigh level. The arches step on the spot.
- A3 In 4's, star clockwise and back. As in East Coker dance but half the length.
- B3 Top pair swing to bottom, with the swing defined above, under the arches, while rest hold up ribbons high, and clap both hands together in rhythm overhead. It may be necessary to hold the ribbon at the end.

If danced as a normal social dance each pair would do alternate sequences with the pairs on either side. It has been found in practice that it is easier to always dance with the same pair so that every other sequence has neutral couple at the ends.

CUMBERLAND REEL - collected in Devon.

Set : 4 pairs in a longways set.

Dance :

- A1 As collected this was a different movement each repeat - suggestions below.
- A2 Arches - as in East Coker Morris.
- B1 Bottom pair stand and make an arch, rest single cast from the top, carrying the ribbons over everyone's heads to the bottom, and then come up the middle to place through the stationary bottom arch, with ribbons down.
- B2 As B3 above, top swing under arches to bottom, and all move up one place.

Court Square found it better to delete the "arches" of A2 and either repeat the movement of A1 or make the halves of the figure 8 bars each.

As a social dance, different movements can be done to A1 at the whim of the MC, eg. star, circle, rights-&-lefts, ladies chain, basket, balance-&-swing, diagonals cross, turns, and movements for all 8 such as circles, stars, dip-and-dive. Some are better for a display dance and the following have been worked up.

#### 1. Diagonals Cross - in units of 4

First corner cross passing left shoulder, 2 bars, so that ribbons are crossed.  
Second corner cross passing right shoulder, 2 bars. Return to place, 2nd corner first passing left shoulders and then 1st corner passing right. 8 bars in all.

#### 2. Circle for Eight

Form a circle by one of the middle diagonals crossing the set so that linked

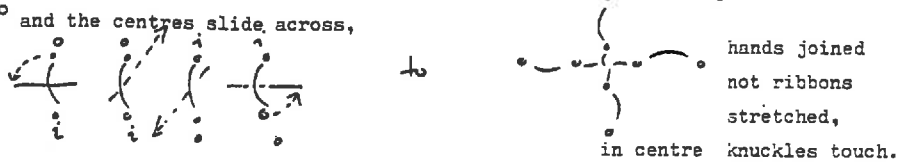
Ribbons 4.

pairs are adjacent. All join hands and circle to the left and back to the right. Arrange to hold the ribbons so that they can hang outside the circle as in previous dance. Probably take 2 bars to form circle and 6 to circle etc.

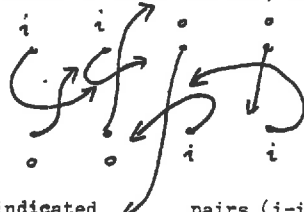


3. Double Star for Eight

The move into the double star can be simple as below, the end pairs rotate 90° and the centres slide across,



or all can appear to start to cross the set, but rotate about the ribbon



constraint till the indicated pairs (i=inside,o=outside) are in position. For the simple method dancers turn on the spot to come back, for the other the pair rotate as a pair, changing places with each other, hence looking more effective. Either way, on the return, getting back to place is the inverse of the first description, ie a simple slide into position.

Both figures 2 and 3 can be done half - ie not coming back but going straight into position for the next figure.

Other possible figures for extending the dance or as alternatives if any of the above are used in other ribbon dances,

4. Spins

Face opposite, step for 2 bars on the spot not turning, and then turn single on the spot, 2 bars. Both must turn up (or down) to avoid twisting the ribbon. Repeat either same way or the reverse.

5. Dip and Dive along the set.

Pairs face up or down and go under and over the length of the set and back to starting place. Always go under coming in at the top and over coming in at the bottom. Optional to turn out at the ends while waiting or to do spins as pass over a pair.

Endings

- A. End with extra phrase of music and partners swing on spot.
- B. End on the Dip and Dive (fig.5) accelerating the music.

C. Court Square end by replacing the last B1/B2 with a half reel and rounds.  
 The reel is started from the top, progressively, and the first pairs pass right shoulders so that the two reels are in parallel not mirror to each other. It is done progressively to tie the ribbons together. At the end of the half reel with the set reversed, all go into a circle clockwise for 8 bars. End all face outwards from the circle, feet together.  
 To leave, move into longways again and do the reverse of the half hey and lead off.

OFF SHE GOES - composed by Court Square and as filmed.

Set : 4 pairs in a longways set.

A1/2 Star in 4's. While inactive, step on the spot.

- Bars 1-2 1st corner change place passing left shoulder and face clockwise.
- 3-4 2nd corner change place passing right shoulders and face clockwise.
- 5-8 circle clockwise
- 9-12 turn in to face back, not changing hands, circle anticlock to start
- 13-14 2nd corner change back passing left shoulders and face front.
- 15-16 1st corner change back passing right shoulders

B1 Dip and Dive. Progressive from the top, going under first. The ribbon is lowered or raised quickly in the passes. All way round till back to start.

B2 When 1st pair back to top, immediately cast, taking ribbon over the heads, followed by the other pairs. When the top pair get to the bottom they form an arch and the others come under, also forming arches as soon as they are through, so that the row of arches builds up progressively from the bottom and the set ends reversed. The ribbon is held down when coming under the arches.

A3/4 Scissors.

Bars 1-2 1st and 3rd pairs move to left of set (when facing up) and 2nd and 4th move to the right, so that ribbons do not overlap, and turn to face the pair on their side.

Bars 3-4 The facing pairs change places, the outer pairs ( 1st and 4th) going under and all turn out to face back.

Bars 5-6 The facing pairs change places again, the other pair going over.

Bars 7-8 All dance back into original set formation.

B3/4 as B1/2.

A5/6 End pairs (1st and 4th) form a star around and over the middles, who form a circle holding hands in the centre. Star is formed as described for East Coker. The star goes clockwise and anticlockwise 8 bars each way and the inner circle goes anticlock then clockwise.

B5/6 as B1/2, ending facing up.

ending : top pair lead off under the ribbons through the bottom of the set.

