

### MOLLY DANCING

Some account of the Molly has been given by Needham and Peck in JEFDSS 1933 and Wortley and Papworth in EDS covering Girton and Camberton dances. The Molly was widespread in inland East Anglia although few traces of the dances have been recovered.

The dancing used to centre on two opportunities,

1 Flough Monday. The team could consist of ploughmen dressed as Molly Dancers, led by a Lord and Lady, who was a man, perhaps with a plough. It was said that it took two good women to dress a Molly Dancer and a good deal of time would be taken up the evening before in dressing up. The team would dance during the day and then dance in the evening in the pubs without their costumes and, as desired, including women in the set, treating the dances as social dances.

2 The Village Feast. The pubs would open up the bars for dancing. Perhaps it would be for the Benefit club and the club night consist of a supper and dance but it was quite different from the Molly. The "Feast Dances" would be the same dances as for the Molly but danced mixed. Only men did the Molly in living memory.

Cecil Sharp saw the dancing near Littleport by Ely. 6 men with white shirts, ribbons, sashes and box hats but no sticks or handkerchieves, dancing a "set jig".

Needham and Peck wrote of the dancing around Cambridge and around Ely as separate groups. Around Cambridge at Girton, Histon, Comberton etc the team was 6 dancers, one of whom was a Bessy or Molly, plus a musician and several cadgers. They could carry handkerchieves and wear a form of wide baldrick with many rosettes but no bells. At Girton the dances were, College Hornpipe, Birds a Building, Smash the Window, Double Change Sides, Gypsies in the Wood and Soldiers Joy.

Around Ely the best known because it lasted longest was Little Downham where the 4 dancers dressed in ribbons, flower decorated hats and danced couple dances.

At Haddenham it was said that broom stem dancing was done by the plough party and elsewhere near Ely 4 or 6 handed reels were danced.

Cyril Papworth teaches the dances from Comberton. A broom dance from members of his own family and the Feast dances, Gypsies in the Wood, Birds a Building, Up the Sides and Down the Middle, a 6 hand Reel, the College Hornpipe and We went Go Home Till Morning. He gives a consistent style for the dancing using a "Cambridge Polka", a 123hop which is 3 small steps and a lift, bringing the free knee fairly high in front, but being light on the ground.

The attempt to present the old dances in their villages in the old style has not been very well received as they are about the least spectacular dances that can be offered. Other revival attempts such as the Seven Champions have sought an alternative solution going for heavy boots and a heavy stamping step, slow deliberate stepping and non social dance interpretations of common country dance figures such as the swing. Some attempts such as Royal George have this style but broken away from the Molly repertoire to something of their own that fits better.

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# MOLLY DANCES

GIRTON & HILTON - Cambridge shire

team:- 6 dancers - one of whom a Bessy or Molly.  
Fiddler or concertina player (perhaps with an umbrella man)  
Several collectors or cadgers.  
Maybe up to 3 men dragging a plough & others cracking whip  
costume:- carried handks & wore a form of baldrick - wide with many  
rosettes - but no bells. White shirts & tophats decorated.

COLLEGE HORNPIPE - tune - Sailor's Hornpipe.

Hands 6 - 7 slips clockwise, 7 slips back.  
Face up & engage with partner, putting arms behind partners backs  
cast off to left & back to place, waving handk in free hand.  
Nos. 1 & 4 swing; Nos 2 & 3 swing.  
1 & 2 lead down middle & back.  
First 2 cus. swing & change places.  
Repeat whole till reach original places.

BIRDS A BUILDING

Nos. 1 & 2 cross over giving right hands, Nos. 1 & 3, 2 & 4 change  
down the sides & so on to places.  
Nos 1 & 2 lead down middle & back.  
First two cus swing & change.

Repeat by Nos. 1 & 2 from 2nd place. Carry on till all back home.

SMASH THE WINDOW

Nos. 1, 2 & 4 hands three round & back.  
Nos 1, 2 & 3  
1 & 2 lead down middle & back.  
First 2 cus swing & change etc.

DOUBLE CHANGE SIDES

Nos 2 & 4 lead between 1 & 3 & fall back; Nos 1 & 3 lead between  
2 & 4 & fall back.  
1 & 2 lead down middle & back.  
First 2 cus swing & change.

Step throughout ordinary country dance step - no double steps or  
capers.

N.B. step-hop w. knee lift.

Clearly any duple or triple minor country dance could be pressed  
into use. The costume suggests what FESTIVAL dress for men could  
be; a single or double wide baldrick decorated with rosettes &  
carrying a handk., over white shirt & dark trousers - as this  
seems to be the standard traditional ceremonial dress for the  
English.