

News from Canada — Toronto Women's Sword Tour to the North of England: The Traditional Home of Sword Dancing

by Bev Bernbaum and Laurie Cumming, with contributions from the TWS team

After two years of planning, Toronto Women's Sword (TWS) began a whirlwind tour of the North East of England in July 2018. What follows is an account of our stays in Sheffield, Goathland, Darlington and Northallerton. The trip was made even more memorable by the World Cup happening alongside our dancing adventures.

On Saturday after a hearty, almost full-English breakfast/brunch prepared by Sheffield Steel Rapper at Jo Maher's place, we all donned our kit and headed out to meet up with Gaorsach Rapper for our first dance out in Sheffield. So fabulous to be dancing with two other great all-women teams! We danced at all the favorite dance haunts in the city including: The Bath Hotel, The Uni Arms, The Closed Shop, The Hallamshire House, The Wellington, Ship Inn, and then Shakespeare's Ale and Cider House for drinks and takeaways.

Sunday we met up with 5 Rivers and Handsworth for an afternoon of dancing at the picturesque Old Horns Inn overlooking the Bradfield Moors. It was one of those perfect, sunny days in the English countryside for dancing and, we found out that our sword-dancing icons in Handsworth have adopted our approach to making the double-triangle lock. A true testament to the folk process to be sure. Our warmest thanks go out to all of the dancers and their families for making the trip to Upper Bradfield to dance with us!

Later that evening the team met back at Ron and Jenny Day's beautiful house to enjoy their garden, a fabulous feast which they had prepared, and just a few G & T's. Ron surprised us by playing a slideshow of our last trip to Yorkshire in the Spring of 2004, TWS has gained some new members and lost a few but we certainly seemed to be having as good a time then as we were having this time 'round. The evening ended with a quiet sing and we all left to go back to our hosts knowing that we had a hike in the Peaks to get ready for the next day.

Sheep dozing along an old stone wall, climbing to the top of one of the many hills surrounding Hathersage for a spectacular view, practicing rapper tumbles safely in the outdoor pool were among the highlights of our day with seasoned hike leaders Rosie, Hattie and Jo.

Back in Sheffield, we met up with Pecsætan, another great all-woman team dancing Cotswold, for dinner at Church - The Temple of Fun, and then dancing at Kelham Island Tavern and The Gardener's Rest. Along with the dancing, there was some wonderful singing at The Rest. It was a wonderful last day in Sheffield. Huge thanks to all the incredible hosts there who took such great care of us

The next day we headed north to Goathland by way of York for an afternoon of sightseeing (and laundry!). Approaching Goathland we marveled at the purple heather in bloom and the abundance of sheep roaming everywhere. When we arrived at the Community Hut we were feted with copious cups of tea, biscuits, pizza and great conversation by Keith, Chris and the rest of our Plough Stots hosts.

On Wednesday the Plough Stots had arranged a huge coach to ferry us around in grand style. The dance stands included: The Ryedale Folk Museum, The Lion Inn, The Fox and Hounds Inn, The Moors National Park Centre, The Board Inn, The Witching Post, and the Mallyan Spout Hotel. Our day of dancing ended with a delicious BBQ at the Inn on The Moor.

Thursday morning the Plough Stots arranged passage for us (stellar hosting!) on the coal-fired steam engine train from Goathland to Whitby. Apparently, the Goathland train station and train were used in the Harry Potter movies, much to the delight of the Potter fans among us. We all had a great time wandering in the seaside town of Whitby. Back in Goathland we made the happy trek down to Beck Hole for a pint, before hitting the road for the Darlington/Durham area and the incredible Victorian mansion of Catherine and Adrian. The sword lock they placed in their driveway as a wayfinder made us all smile.

After a lazy morning and brunch at the mansion on Friday, we headed to the village of Toronto in Yorkshire, to have lunch and do some rapper dancing at The Toronto Lodge. The ladies from Toronto, Canada, in Toronto, UK. There was poetry in that. Then we headed to the Tunstall Reservoir for a walk around the water with Vince Rutland, and then a quick stop at The Black Lion for a drink. That night was full of cup games, tunes and talk after a yummy

English dinner of mince, potatoes and the best Yorkshire puddings ever. Not only did Catherine and Adrian house TWS, they also put up one of our favorite sword teams, Sallyport Sword Dancers. It was a fun night but we needed to get to bed. It was going to be a very early, long and, according to Vince, emotional day on Saturday. We understood that we'd feel fatigued at the end of the day but, emotional? Little did we know....

The pinnacle of our tour was unquestionably The Durham Miner's Gala. Also known as the Big Meeting, the Gala is the largest annual gathering of trade unionists in the UK. People from across the country descend on Durham City to celebrate the mining industry. It dates back to 1871. We had a 6 am wake up call to have "butties" and then jump on another big coach to head to Wingate, where we'd been invited to march with Sallyport, the Wingate Lodge, their colliery union banner, and brass band through the town. It was an incredibly powerful and moving experience, most of us in tears at some point or another. So that was the emotional part then!

Back on the coach, we drove to Durham City to converge with many, many, many more miner lodge communities and bands along the way. Reportedly, there were approximately 150,000 people in Durham City that day (apparently smaller than previous years!) and as we paraded past the balcony of VIPs, TWS got a chance to dance in front of the crowd! Pretty amazing. Then it was on to a rapper crawl around the pubs, where we also ran into Stone Monkey, long-time dance friends who came to visit us in Toronto a number of years back.

The pub stops that day included Sallyport's usual haunts: The Victoria, The Shakespeare, Ye Old Elm Tree, among others. We learned a thing or two about dancing in extremely tight spaces! We also now know what to do when a brass band bears down on you when you're in the middle of the street in the middle of a dance: get the heck out of the way - and smartly! During the pub crawl, one of our young dancers took a risk and sang A Miner's Life unknowingly to some rather famous local folk singer legends (Chris Wilson, Pete Woods, Graham Unthank and Jim Mageean) at The Victoria. In full vocal support the crowd, including the folk legends, all joined voices in one of the most rousing renditions of the song we've ever heard. Cue the tears of emotion. Again.

After a very long and, yes, emotional day, we took the train back to Northallerton/Brompton to the home and



The Toronto Women's Sword Team in the Durham Parade (TWS)

wonderful hospitality of Vince and Sue Rutland to collapse, have a great BBQ dinner and meet up with Pengwyn Rapper, a women's team that had come out of retirement just to spend time dancing with us. The thank you toast on behalf of TWS was given along with a final bout of emotion. It couldn't be helped. Everyone had been so incredibly wonderful to us, every single day. So Vince, we get it. The Gala is an overwhelming and emotional experience, not to mention an event with some fine spots of dancing.

Our final day of the tour was hosted by Pengwyn Rapper and the Brompton Scorpers on Sunday July 15. The day started with a trip to The Forbidden Corner, a unique labyrinth of tunnels, chambers, follies and surprises created within a 4 acre garden in the heart of Tugill Park and the Yorkshire Dales. Then we headed to pubs, The Dante Arms, Coverbridge Inn and Station Hotel, for some dancing and conviviality. And refreshments, of course.

At days end, many of the team started to head off in their own directions, to other places or back towards Manchester to head for home. That night, a few remaining TWS spent the evening with Vince, Sue, and a handful of other Scorpers and Pengwyns at The Green Tree Inn, having dinner and pints and winding down. It was hard to believe that this fabulous tour was at its end.

Thanks again to all of the teams and their families who so generously hosted us. It was such a fantastic week! I don't think any of us will ever forget it.

A founding member of Toronto Women's Sword back in 1989, Laurie discovered her love of traditional and ritual dance forms including rapper, longsword, contra, Irish set, Scottish Country in addition to old Ontario step-dancing almost 30 years ago. The love affair continues....