**Tower Ravens: Westerhope**

Tower Ravens will be dancing a traditional rapper dance collected from the team “Westerhope” (sometimes referred to as the Northumbrian Traditional Sword Dancers (Heaton, 2012)), who took their name from a mining area west of central Newcastle. Little has been written about the Westerhope dance, and the only source of notation available is that printed in the article *Westerhope Traditional Prize Sword Dancers* by Les Williamson, published in Folk Music Journal, 1973, and more recently made available through the Open Rapper website (www.rapper.org).

Westerhope was the junior team of North Walbottle– a team from which both Cecil Sharp and George Butterwoth collected between 1906 and 1912. Therefore, dances from Westerhope and North Walbottle share some similarities, e.g. both feature a knot-rose (referred to as “nut and rose” by Sharp) and single guard chorus, and both share a number of figures in common such as curly, cramper, fast-knot, etc. However, there are some figures unique to each team, such as Westerhope’s jigging guard, chain, double cramper, gymnac and crown. For this reason, Tower Ravens have referred, on the whole, to the notation provided by Williamson.

**The Figures**

The figures notated by Williamson include:

Single Guard

Curly

Right and Left

Jigging Guard

Tipping Guard

Fourth Corner

Fast Knot

Chain

Cramper

Double Cramper

Back-over-knot

Gymnac

Crown

The traditional Westerhope team would usually perform 8 of these figures, each separated by a knot-rose and single guard chorus. For showcase performances, the team would perform more figures with only a knot-rose chorus. A sixth dancer (not Tommy or Betty) would join the dance for the last 3 figures.

The figures were danced in no particular order, but merely as remembered. This allowed for greater flexibility and the opportunity to create an exciting dance.

Referring to Williamson’s notation as closely as possible, Tower Ravens have opted for the knot-rose chorus (as it is a showcase performance?), and have aimed to include as wide a variety of figures as possible in an order which builds to a climax. For this purpose, we intend to perform the dance as follows:

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| **Figure** | **Les Williamson’s Notation** | **Tower Raven’s Interpretation Notes** |
| Start | Straight line, swords on shoulders, step 8, No.  1 moves to grip No.  5 rappers, completing a circle.  This is a further stage amendment, more convenient than the in-facing ring, which was retained for outside performances. | We walk on for a count of 16 to get into the straight line (without music). Step for 8 with the music. |
| Single Guard | Each dancer in turn lifts his rapper turning left out of the set, dances around the set and back into place. | Since we are using this as one of our figures and not part of the chorus, we will tie up the knot-rose after completing the Single Guard. |
| Fast Knot | (Fast meaning tight) figure begins as curly (X2) and “right and left” (X3).  After third circuit of right and left No.  1 stays on the wrong side of the set (with No.  2), Nos.  5 and 4 also stay on wrong side (No.  3 can stay on either side).  Team then executes a “curly".  Dancers then cross back to own side (like right and left) Nos.  1, 5, 2, 4 and 3; once through “curly” to untie rappers ...  tie-up. | No further comments |
| Fourth Corner | Stepping in the guard.  Nos.  1 and 5 lift 5 rapper allowing Nos.  2 and 4 to slip through and to sides, leaving No.  3 in the middle of the line. No.  3 then lowers both his rappers allowing Nos.  1 and 5 to jump over them; almost immediately Nos.  1 and 5 lower the rapper between them (5 rapper) to allow No.  3 to jump over ......  tie-up. | We interpret the “stepping in the guard” to mean a step for 8 before executing the figure. We have also added a step for 4 after the dancers line up so that it completes the phrase the phrase of 8. We have also put at step for 4 not in the notation? |
| Double Cramper | Starts as “Cramper” with No.  3 moving for-ward and to left back to place, then moves forward again to right and back to place.  Nos.  2 and 4 untie rappers by moving around Nos.  1 and 5 TWICE; all tie-up. | No further comments |
| Chain | From guard position, Nos.  1 and 5 turn out as for “curly”, stand facing down, Nos.  2, 3 and 4 turn on spot to face down; No.  3 crosses rappers behind head.  Nos.  1 and 5 sweep 5 rapper under Nos.  2, 3 and 4 who jump over it simultaneously.  Nos.  1 and 5 execute fast turns and all tie-up. | We found that if nos. 1 and 5 turned out as in a curly, their arms would be crossed making it impossible to complete the sweep. We assumed this notation was incorrect, and instead nos. 1 and 5 turn inwards. Stepping in guard is not mentioned in this notation, however we have added a step for 8 in preparation for safety reasons. |
| Tipping Guard | Jigging in the guard position, No.  3 jumps over 5 rapper and tips (somersaults); all tie-up.  If No.  3 cannot tip then the team can stand in the guard in a different order with tipper in 3 position. | We interpret “jigging in the guard position” to mean that the figure starts with a step for 8. |
| Curly | From circle guard:  Nos.  1 and 5 face up, and turn away from each other to the bottom of the set and followed by 2 and 4; No.  3 follows Nos.  1 and 2.  Nos.  1 and 5 face each other, dance up the set and repeat the movement.  Figure is usually repeated three times. | We interpret from circle guard to mean that there is no stepping prior to executing the figure.  A 6th dancer will join during this figure and remains in the set until the end of the dance. |
| Jigging Guard | Starts in the guard position (fiddler or coach and horses), stepping.  Nos.  1 and 5 turn away from each other and stand behind No.  3, jig to end of bar, Nos.  2 and 4 turn away from each other and stand behind Nos.  1 and 5, leaving No.  3 jigging at front of set.  No.  3 moves to right or left and all tie-up. | We interpret “starts in the guard position, stepping” to mean that the figure is preceded by a step for 8 in the guard position.  Since a sixth dancer will be part of the set, 3 moves left and the 6th dancer moves right. |
| Back-over-knot | In circle guard all dancers turn half-left, i.e.  facing outwards, raising rappers above head, tie an upside-down-lock.  Dancers fall into display and back into back-to-back positon, knot untied by half turn to right | Since this is our last figure, we have chosen not to untie the knot, but to finish the dance after the display. |
| Finish | In Williamson’s article under *Notes on the Dance*, he states that “On displaying the knot the team falls into a straight line facing up, No. 1 holding the knot in the middle of the line”. | We will step and display the 6-person lock with No. 1 in the centre..  The music starts up again, and we will stamp on 8 andjog off. |

**Style and Appearance**

As well as the actual figures performed in the dance, there are other stylistic considerations to take into account. .

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| **Stepping** | “The original Walbottle men did not tap-step, they merely lazy-shuffled in time to the music. The Walbottle men added the conventional jiggig after being taught by Tom Soulsby, the Westerhope clog-dancer. Stepping was in single jigging phrases of 8 with a stamp break. They did occasionally double-step, although it tended to slow down the dance.” | We interpret “a jigging phrase” as shuffles for a phrase of 8, with a stamp-break finish- because North Warbottle did? |
| **Sword handling** | Williamson’s article makes no special mention of the sword handling style of the Westerhope team. However, a photograph printed in The Illustrated Chronicle (1921), shows that when in the guard position (aka coach and horses), 1 and 5 held a straight sword. | 1 and 5 will hold a straight sword when in the guard position (see appendix). Otherwise sword handling will be as standard. |
| **Music** | Westerhope musician, Joe Davidson, stated that no special tunes were used and any 6/8 would do. He, however, played Father O’Flynn and The Irish Washerwoman and also recognised The Blackthorn Stick and Tenpenny Bit as having been used.  In Sword Dances of Northern England(Sharp, 1914), Sharp noted that North Walbottle’s musicians played Irish Whisky and The Rollicking Irishman, which we have assumed that the Westerhope team would have also been familiar with. | Our musician will be playing Father O’Flynn, Tenpenny Bit, Thru the Lang Moor, and Warkworth Castle. |
| **Kit** | Williamson’s article states “The old team wore dark purple velvet “hoggers” (not in the strictest sense, as hoggers are shorts) i.e.  open knee-length trousers, while Westerhope varied between dark blue and purple depending upon the material available.  A thin gold stripe was added with three gold buttons on each knee.  White shirts with collars, black ties and thick white wool stockings were worn.  Both teams wore an old-gold sash tied in a bow on the left.  Shoes were heavy leather brogues for dancing outside and black patent-leather pumps for stage work.  The latter had a clamp added to the instep to carry small cymbals.  The next team, from Allerton, discarded the ties and collars c.  1924 as uncomfortable”  Photographs of the Westerhope team, for the most part, verify this description – white shirts, ties (with EFDSS badge), velvet hoggers with stripe down the sides, sash, and knee-high socks (see appendix). | We have opted not to dress exactly as Westerhope would have done, but instead have amended our kit to reflect influences from the team, whilst remaining true to the Tower Ravens colour-scheme of black and blue. Can we add any specifics or do we need to keep it vague? |
| **Characters** | In Sharp’s notation for the Walbottle dance, he states that there were both a Tommy and Betty character. Williamson’s article in reference to the Westerhope team, however, is unclear as to the inclusion of a Tommy or Betty in the Westerhope dance. He states, “The notable point of the dance is the inclusion of a sixth dancer… The sixth man joined in the last three or four figures.  In lighter moments the sixth man was beheaded, long-sword fashion, though only for pub performances.  Sharp noted the extinct Walbottle practice of “hanging the Betty” in the same way.  Both men insisted that the Tommy and Betty never danced but merely acted as the collectors and provided the humour.  Billy Clark’s team at Newbiggin also omitted the Tommy and Betty figures.”  When both men insist that the Tommy and Betty never danced, is this in reference to the Walbottle team or the Westerhope team?  When Billy Clark’s team also omitted the Tommy and Betty figures – does this mean that the *characters* were omitted, or that the *figures which the Tommy and Betty joined* in on were omitted?  None of the photos of the Westerhope team feature a Tommy or Betty character (see appendix), and contemporary press reports never mentioned the characters. | After examining the sources, we’ve decided that it appears that Westerhope danced without a Tommy or Betty, but included a sixth dancer as a substitute. |

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**Appendix**



