

# THE PSEUDO-UPTON-UPON-SEVERN STICK DANCE

*by Peter Boyce*

## HOW IT HAPPENED - AND HOW IT HAS BECOME THE BASIS FOR A NEW CHINGFORD TRADITION

The Pseudo-Upton-Upon-Severn Stick Dance has been a mystery for the past fifty years. "It isn't the Upton dance". "Where does it come from?" "Which one is right?" "Chingford have stolen Upton". We've heard them all, many times, ad nauseam, hence this account brought to you by courtesy of the Morris organisations. The dance has become quite a celebrity; many sides perform it including the Chingford Lads on Blue Peter and at the Royal Ballet School - see Ron Smedley's article in ED&S, Spring 2008, "Teaching Billy Elliot". Ron is at it again using up-to-date instructions from Geoff Hughes. The Royal Ballet Company also did it on "The Generation Game". Some American sides do it. Geoff went over there and taught them... So, how did it happen and why are there two dances with the same name? Want to know? Then read on! We've also added the descriptions of several other Chingford dances.

It started with Nibs Matthews at a 'Morris Day of Dancing' run by him in c.1957. At that time I went on as many courses as I could to enlarge Mendip's repertoire. Bean Setting and a couple of Adderbury dances couldn't sustain interest for very long. Come on, we've all got to start somewhere! Nibs presented the original Upton stick dance as poorly remembered and a shadow of what it had been. "It needed working on" were his exact words. Perhaps others who were at the day remember those words too?

I took this information back to Weston, played and sang the given tune over and over again in an attempt to reach its essence and spirit. It was wild, joyous and vigorous. Then I tried to imagine the young men of Upton dancing. You see, there was a witness to the original dance: the tune. It had a strong first beat and then an even stronger fourth. A hop? Something stronger: a hook. The off-beat disappeared for the stick tapping, the on-beat being very strong. And, what about the **boom-boom** at the end of the phrase? The creative process wasn't contrived or deliberate or an attempt to be novel; the footwork, form and structure just happened; it all seemed to flow out of the tune. I had the very odd feeling that here was an incarnation of the way it was done at Upton. Out of respect for the men of Upton, I decided, rightly or wrongly, to retain the name, "The Upton Upon Severn Stick Dance". That was the original version now danced, I believe, by Mendip.

Now, I'm not one for historical accuracy or scholarship, so I was blissfully unaware that the tune gathered from Nibs was never used by the Upton dancers. Oh dear! What was created, I now find, was something completely new, created as a response to *that* tune. Its connection with Upton was only coincidental.

The Mendip Boys, including Mike Wilson-Jones of Westminster who no doubt would answer any questions you might have, helped to fill in the details. I took the dance with me to Chingford where Geoff Hughes not only made further adjustments but also added the Cross and Turn figure. Geoff gives below what happened looked at from his perspective. Geoff and I used to chat for hours about Morris, Clog, Newbiggin and North Skelton. It was pretty clear that this lad was really fired up and bursting with ideas. I remember when he came up onto the stage at school waving a brown folder. "I've done another one", he said and that was the start of the Chingford tradition, the new dances being based on the Pseudo-Upton

movements. Why not try some? They are every bit as good as the number one. Chingford now perform his dances and have added more in the same style. They now do fifteen of these dances done to suitable tunes devised by the present Squire, Adrian Hilton, an ex-Chingford Lad if only as observer at school. It was my very good fortune to have as the leader of the Lads' team Geoff. For some you only have to light the fuse! Couldn't remember my dance Geoff? That sounds like a teacher's ploy to me!

I've always been a maverick; you wouldn't recognise some of my Playford presentations. Roughly Jamaica done to the Royal Albert? Well, well! I believe absolutely in a living tradition just as it used to be. We English have always been eclectic. Absorb inspiration from anywhere and make it our own. Come to my club and you'll find yourself doing vines and struts in a Country Dance. May heaven preserve us! Line Dancing is anathema! "Bampton is done like this" from purists destroys creativity, the essence of all art. Television is full of such adaptations so it must be right!

That was all very sombre, so here's a joke to finish with, my one and only for the past fifty years. Anyone who knows me well would have heard it before. The inaugural meeting of Mendip took place in my flat on the outskirts of Weston. Nearby was Bleadon Hill. One of the guys wanted to call the side 'The Bleadon Morris Men'. Can you imagine it? "*The next dance danced for you by the bleedin' Morris Men will be...*" Actually, Bleadon Hill, roughly halfway between Clevedon and Burnham, the homes of some of our recruits, is the start of the Mendip range of hills. The Mendips start at Weston. How appropriate!

Peter Bayce.

## Geoff Hughes' perspective of the dance commonly called The "Upton-upon-Severn Stick Dance" –

In January 1961 Peter Boyce took up a teaching post at Chingford County High School and immediately set about introducing Morris dancing into the school. He had previously taught in Weston-Super-Mare and was a member of Mendip Morris Men. I had been introduced to Morris dancing at primary school and became a founder member of the school team which shortly became The Chingford Lads Morris Team. Chingford Morris Dancers (as they were originally called) came into existence in 1962 but Chingford Lads were entirely separate, the common factor being Peter Boyce. After a couple of years The Chingford Lads became a sort of junior section of the Chingford Morris Dancers which was renamed Chingford Morris Men. However, the younger school teams continued to be known as Chingford Lads for several years.

In 1962 Peter organised a weekend when teams from his previous school in Weston-Super-Mare visited us in Chingford. As well as a team of boys the same age as ourselves there was also a team of about sixth form age who all danced with Mendip Morris Men. This team included among its members two of Geoff Rye's sons, Mike Wilson-Jones and Richard Brock. The musician was John Brock. During one of the shows that weekend this team of older dancers performed a dance which they called the Upton-Upon-Severn Stick Dance. As Foreman of the embryo Chingford Lads I found this dance fascinating as the stick clash came at the beginning of the phrase instead of at the end! Some weeks later I asked Peter to teach us this dance but he said he could not recall the whole dance. However we were able to remember the chorus figure with three distinctive stick movements and a small CCW circle finishing with a double stamp. We also recalled Whole Rounds, Whole Hey and a distinctive Hey across the ends of the set. Taking this as a starting point I then began to put together my own version of the dance which I had seen.

Since there were six choruses in the dance there would obviously need to be at least six figures and since the dance I had seen started with Whole Rounds and finished with Whole Rounds and All In there seemed no reason why other figures should not be repeated. (At this stage of my dancing career I did not know a great many figures and so this seemed the easiest solution.) I therefore repeated the Hey across the ends of the set with the middle couple dancing it at the other end of the set on the repeat. These were called Hey Right and Hey Left. The Whole Hey was called Hey Up and began with the middle couple dancing up between the top couple who moved backwards to make space for them during the first two bars. This made Hey Up consistent with the other Heys in that the middle couple always passed between the end couple. It also made the Hey Up a very angular figure with none of the flowing curves of the usual Hey.

These Figures now meant that the dance had a total of five figures. If the dance finished on the final chorus instead of a figure after the final chorus, only one more figure was needed. I wanted a figure which meant travelling forwards all the time so that it would be consistent with the other figures but, as I said earlier, I did not know many figures at that time and none of those which I did know seemed appropriate, apart from Headington Crossover. Peter Boyce had already encouraged me to read *The Morris Book* and while leafing through it one day I spotted a diagram for Ilmington Cross and Turn. I had never even heard of Ilmington but the track shown in the diagram seemed ideal as to me it resembled a Hey for two. Without bothering to read the written notation of the figure I introduced the figure at practice the next day. (We practiced every Lunch time!) The figure fitted the dance perfectly and it seemed natural to repeat the clash on the first beat of the return cross to match the first half of the figure. Having also made the Circle Left in the chorus into a much larger movement the dance was therefore complete in this form:

Whole Rounds  
Tips and Butts  
Hey Right  
Quarterstaffs  
Hey Left  
Fencing  
Cross and Turn  
Tips and Butts  
Hey Up  
Quarterstaffs  
Whole Rounds  
Fencing and All Up

Like Peter, I called the dance the Upton-Upon-Severn Stick Dance although I had not at that time seen Maud Karpeles' notation. We used the same tune as the team from Weston-Super-Mare which Peter told us had been collected by Maud Karpeles. Some time later, when we had been performing the dance for many months, I was given some old copies of *The Journal* and found in one of them Maud Karpeles' notation of the Upton Stick and Handkerchief dances and noticed that not only was the dance quite different from my dance but that the tune which I had believed to be the traditional one was in fact collected in North America!

We continued to perform my version of the dance, the names of the figures gradually shortening through use to Rounds, Right, Left, Cross and Hey Up (or occasionally just Up). After a couple of years, and mainly because the dance was so different from the published Upton dance, we began calling it simply The Stick Dance. However the tune was so well known to many people and we had called it the Upton-Upon-Severn Stick Dance for long enough for the name to stick in most people's minds. It was certainly Chingford Lads' (and later Chingford Men's) trademark and it was from us that Bob Parker and others "collected" the dance, Unfortunately, they continued to call it the Upton stick dance because of the tune, which is ironic really since that tune had even less connection with the traditional dance than my version!

Chingford Morris Men eventually, after much experimenting, found a different tune for the dance and I taught them the genuine Upton-Upon-Severn stick dance from Maud Karpeles' notation in order to show people how totally different the two dances are.

# The Chingford Morris Dances

Chingford Morris Men were formed in about 1962 by the amalgamation of Chingford Morris Dancers (a fledgling men's team struggling for members) and Chingford Lads, a school team. Both teams were started by Peter Boyce after he arrived at Chingford High School in January 1961 to take up a teaching appointment. Peter had formerly been a member of Mendip Morris Men. I was one of the first to join Chingford Lads having been introduced to Morris dancing at primary school the previous year.

The first of the Chingford Dances was the Stick Dance. Peter Boyce's story of its origination explains how it led to the composition of the other dances which now form the "Chingford Tradition".

The dances given in these notes are those composed by me while I was Foreman of Chingford Morris Men. Most were composed between about 1967 and 1972. There are other dances in the "Chingford Tradition" composed by other Foremen of the team after I left and moved to Lancashire in 1973. During this period Chingford danced most of the usual Cotswold traditions with the Chingford dances forming a small part of the club's repertoire. It was always my ambition for the club to concentrate solely on the Chingford dances but it never happened during my time with the team.

Chingford Morris Men now dance only Chingford dances, with one exception; The Upton-upon-Severn Stick Dance as published by Maud Karpeles!

Please note that tunes are referred to by the name of the dance rather than the name of the tune itself, even if it has undergone virtually no adaptation e.g. "The Eighteenth of March", **not** "Lillibulero".

Hankie dances generally finish on a figure and therefore an "A" music, whereas stick dances finish on a final chorus ("B" music)

## **Footing:**

In the Chingford double step, the free foot is hitched across the supporting leg to mid shin height during the hop.

The last bar is danced "step left, stamp right, stamp left" (step bang bang)

The Chingford Caper is a capered double step!

Figures start on right foot.

Circle left starts on Right foot in stick dances but Left foot in hankie dances!

## **Hands:**

In stick dances the stick is carried in the middle by the right hand which is allowed to hang down by the side.

In handkerchief dances the hankies are thrown up on the hop and then floated down to the midriff. 2 circles in front of the body are made on the "step bang bang". The movements for the Chingford caper are down, up then 2 circles above the head, parallel to the ground (c.f. Sharp's Longborough)

## Figures:

(In stick dances, sticks are clashed on the first beat of the figure not at the end!)

<b>Once to yourself: Rounds</b>	Face partner and "step bang bang" at the end of the phrase. All dance two double steps backwards then full rounds back to place
<b>Hey Left</b> (aka Left)	Ends dance two double steps backwards while middles dance to their left between the end couple initiating a hey across the end of the set.
<b>Hey Right</b> (aka Right)	As Hey Left but middles move to the right.
<b>Cross and Turn</b> (aka Cross)	All dance pass right shoulders to cross over to the opposite side moving slightly right before turning left to face across and continue same movement back to place. There is no hop at the end of the 4th double to step to facilitate a spring caper at the beginning of the fifth bar (clashing sticks in stick dances
<b>Hey Up</b> (aka Up)	Ends dance two double steps backwards while middles dance up between the top couple initiating a hey which is danced almost in straight lines like two triangles touching apexes )

***The following descriptions are only intended to give a flavour of these dances. Apart from the Stick Dance there is no attempt to give an actual notation; no music is attached to the notes and the dances need to be danced to the correct tunes. Some of them, for example, include Slows at specific parts of the dance while others use specific Chingford versions of the tune.***

***However, if you are interested in learning the dances properly then a workshop could be arranged – just ask.***

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## Handkerchief Dances

### Constant Billy

The first hankie dance I composed - the younger team always called it Geoff's Dance. It's a hand-clapping / foot kicking chorus

### Cuckold Out O' Nest (or Cuckoo Face Up)

This was based on the standard *Cuckoo's Nest* and the 3 couples perform the face up caper movement starting half way through the previous couple's caper, sometimes described as the first Mexican wave.

### The Innocent Hare

Named after the tune and song from The Copper Family, it includes a change of orientation in the chorus based on the handkerchief dance from Upton-upon-Severn.

## Prince Albert's Farewell

The Prince Albert was one of the pubs we used to drink in after practices. The tune is The Barley Mow and I originally used the tune for a drinking jig (c.f. Coronation Jig) which had its one and only public performance at the wedding of Dolly Collins (sister of Shirley Collins) to Dave Busby who was at that time a member of CMM. Chingford now have a dance based on the Coronation Jig called "Down the Jubilee". The chorus involves a caper over to partners place so that the figures are danced on alternate sides of the set!

## Princess Royal

A hand clapping dance based on Shepherd's Hey from Chipping Camden which uses the Princess Royal tune! I first saw Chipping Camden on TV in black and white in the early 60s and later saw them live and met them at various events around the country. One of these was at Cecil Sharp House where they danced Shepherd's Hey and I composed the Chingford dance almost immediately afterwards as a result of their performance that night.

## Chingford Processional

The tune is Bartholemew Fair which was often sung by one of the dancers after it featured in a school theatrical production. It's a basic processional with a capered cross over chorus. You can repeat the processional figure without the intervening chorus to speed progress by playing the A music ad nauseam!

## Pole Hill

This was composed in 2002 in honour of Chingford's Ruby Anniversary with the working title "Going for a Ruby". Sensibly they renamed it after Pole Hill in North Chingford on the edge of Epping Forest. I had taught the Chingford dances at CDSS Pinewoods camp in the mid 90's and had brought back a tape of North American Morris Music by (among others) Tom Kruskal whom I had first met at Sidmouth in 1966 when he spent a couple of nights with Chingford who were camping in the Sea Scout hut behind Manor Pavilion. Tom was my workshop musician at Pinewoods and one of the tunes on the tape was ideal for a Chingford dance. It's a face partners and caper type chorus and Chingford have said that it's very enjoyable to dance, especially as it has a different sort of 'feel' to it from most of the others so makes for even more variety.

### **Other hankie dances:**

**Down the Jubilee**

**The Iron Duke**

**No Room for the Cuckoo**

These were composed by other Foremen after I'd left to move to Wigan

## Stick Dances

Clashes: Tips are normally forehand, Butts backhand

### Eighteenth of March

Danced to Lilliburlero it was composed on my birthday and given its first public performance at my 21st Birthday Party. The stick clashing includes a caper movement while twirling the stick. Originally I had included a stick clash made behind the back while facing out which I had based on an "Elizabethan Morris" recreation at an EFDSS Albert Hall Festival at which we were performing. I rapidly dropped the idea after a series of dangerous misses and resultant bruises!

### Follow the Drum

The dance is named after the tune and song which I learnt from The Yetties whom we met on our first visit to Sidmouth in 1966 - the dance came later and the stick clashing simply follows the tune

### Old Woman Tossed Up in a Blanket

I composed the dance to celebrate the birth of my daughter about 2 years after I left Chingford and moved to Lancashire. The Nursery rhyme was one I frequently sang in a vain attempt to get Louise to sleep! The stick clashing is a mixture of the "Quarterstuffs" and "Tips and Butts" clashing from the Stick dance but in the same chorus.

### Shooting

The tune is the 14 bar Irish Set Dance St Patrick's Day which I used to perform with an Irish dance team in London. The dance just came to me while humming the tune one day and follows the usual shooting type chorus with everyone clashing tips with partners on the first beat before each corner performs the butts, tips and shoot movement in turn. This takes 6 bars and so it's the only Chingford dance without a "Circle Left" in the Chorus although the final figure consists of a Circle Left and shoot the musician.

### Golden Glory

Composed for Chingford's 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in 2012! The dance reflects key moments from the team's past: the chorus combines elements of the stick tapping from the original Chingford Stick Dance together with the Chingford caper movement from 18<sup>th</sup> March and is danced to Balance the Straw which is the dance we performed with 3 other sides at the RAH Festival in the late '60s. The name seemed entirely appropriate and came from the beer brewed in Blandford Forum which is where my parents retired to in the '70s.



# The Original Chingford Stick Dance

(It's a long, involved story but it's NOT the Upton-upon-Severn stick dance!!!)

The dance has an extra Rounds figure to accommodate the sixth chorus

*1st & 4th Chorus: (Tips and Butts)*

Clash tips and butts 4 times then circle left starting with a clash.

Repeat Chorus

*2nd & 5th Chorus: (Left hand down)*

Hold sticks at both ends and clash middles of sticks together left hand down, the right hand down 4 times then circle left starting with a clash

Repeat Chorus

*3 & 6th Chorus: (Fencing)*

Hold stick by butt and clash tips forehand above head height then backhand at knee height, 4 times then circle left starting with a clash.

Repeat Chorus

NB last time through at end of first Circle Left grasp stick with both hands and rap the ground twice with the tip instead of the usual "step, bang, bang" then Fence as before but with gusto! 2 handed clash into the Circle Left!

Any "messaging about" should be left to 3 & 4 only! Chingford usually give No 3 a weedy little stick and allow No 4 to bully him throughout the dance until the final chorus when No 3 exchanges his little stick for a BIG stick during the Circle Left and turns the tables! Even better if the Fool dances at No 3.

## **Other stick dances:**

**Morning Star**

**Old Mabel**

These were composed by other Foremen after I'd moved to Wigan