# LYMM, CHESHIRE
# NOTES FROM A COLLECTOR'S DIARY

G. Bibby, 1981

Oughtrington team before 1900 in Henry Street. Left to right: Hugh Martin, Abraham Wilson, Tom Holt (leader), Jack Wilson, Ned Holt, John Wilkinson, John Robert Downward, James Holt (?), Charles Simpson

Before the turn of the century, the Lymm area boasted two morris teams; one based in Lymm, the other in Oughtrington. Only the Oughtrington team continued to dance after 1900, and it was thought that this team had disbanded before the end of the first decade; so in March 1938, when Maud Karpeles came in search of material, her chances of gleaning any notation seemed slim. She knew only that three dancers were still alive: Charles Simpson, Abraham Wilson, and John 'Down*wood*'. From Charles Simpson Maud Karpeles noted a 'step up' (and back), and a 'step and turn'. Both movements typical of what Dan Howison and Bernard Bentley describe as 'Penine' tradition figures, although Maud noted that the 'step up' was performed with 'slow walking steps', one to each bar of music—which is in itself unusual.

Armed with such little background knowledge as this, I determined to concentrate on collecting as much material as possible. Looking back, I cannot understand how I could be so enthusiastic: with no surviving dancers, how could I collect any more dance notation? It was impossible. I did have one advantage over Maud Karpeles however; I would be able to visit Lymm again and again if necessary.

In order to avoid 'discovering' information which had already been collected (a frustrating situation when you eventually find out), I made a list of everyone I could think of who might have further knowledge of the dance, and began writing.

Principally, these were ex-Manchester Morris Men—Derek Froome, Eric Pollitt, Julian Pilling, and Dan Howison. Derek and Eric were very helpful, but could offer no real clue as to where to go from here. Eric Pollitt wrote to me with the opening words 'Welcome to the league of the Dead-Horse floggers.'—Not very encouraging!

From Dan Howison, I learned that some brief notes on the dance had been deposited at Warrington Library in the Local History Archive, and when I discovered that these had gone missing, Dan Howison sent me a photo-copy of the information. In the meantime, I had collected together the 'already-known' information:

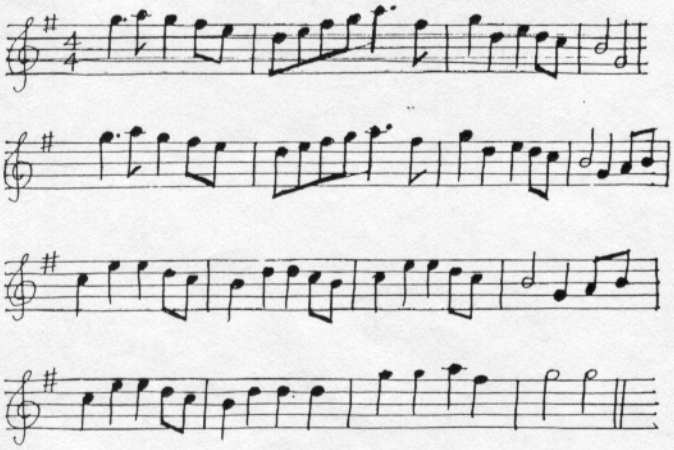
1. Maud Karpeles notes (March 14th 1938)—*see JEFDSS, Vol. VI, No. 3.*
2. Ardern's *'Illustrated Guides to Lymm & District'.*

Charles Simpson supplied M.K. with her notation, which he performed slowly, and without music—'he was rather vague and did not keep good time.'

John Robert Down*wood* who seemed to be the last leader (Man/Woman) of the surviving team, supplied a tune which M.K. noted.

The team's musician, a melodeon player John 'Wilkman' was still alive in 1938, but could not play the 'proper tune' as the dancers always preferred 'Yankee Doodle'.

Tune from Robert Downwood of Adey Road, Rushgreen—March 14th 1938:



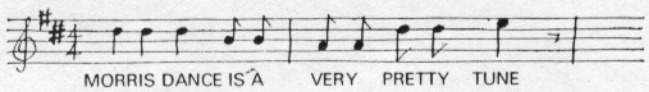
Excerpt from 1913 edition of Pel Ardern's Guide to Lymm & District:

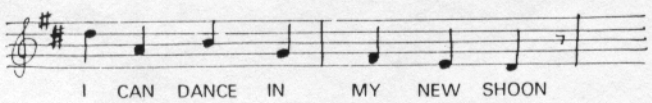
> 'The rushbearing was fixed on the feast of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, and the rushes were carried to the Parish Church each August previous to that festival'.

Ardern then goes on to quote Ormerod (1817) on rushbearing in the area, afterwards giving the information that two 'Troups' of Morris Dancers paraded the village each Rushbearing *Saturday* to the tune of 'Morris Dance is a very pretty tune' until a few years before the publishing of his guide books. The Lymm team was led by a Lymm fustian cutter—Thomas 'Dossey' Brooks, and the Oughtrington team by Tom Holt of Sandy Lane. Both leaders were dead before Ardern published his second edition guide book.

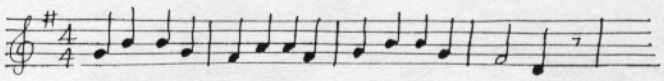
Up to about 1881 the rushcart paraded the streets each year, and was drawn by grey horses, which is believed to have given rise to old inhabitants of Lymm being called 'Lymm Greys' (Old Statham residents are called 'Statham Blacks', and their rushcart was drawn by black horses).

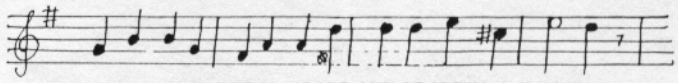
The tune as in Ardern's 1913 guide book:

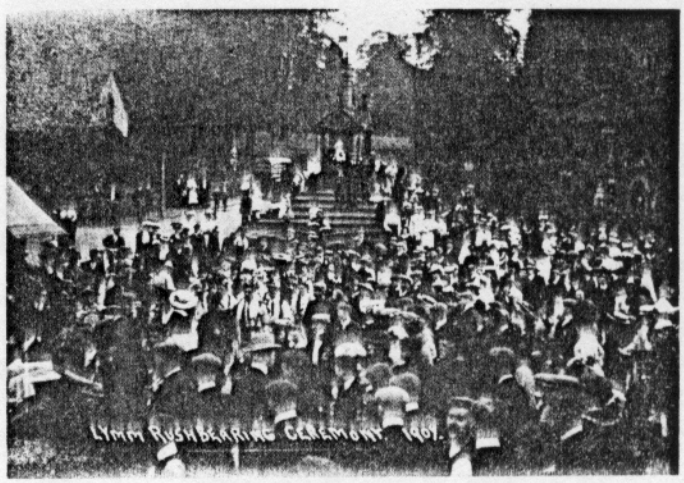



A tune sent to Maud Karpeles by Miss A. C. Walsh of Snelsdon House, Chelford, Cheshire, shows the above notation as 'A' music, and 'B' music as follows, with the information that this was used for Knutsford Morris.




Lymm team at Lymm Cross. Reverse of original card dated 1906. Front dancer (with moustache) Ned Rowles

The notes from Mrs. Booth via Dan Howison were as follows:

**The Lymm Morris**

Information given by Mrs. Booth of 15 *Barnsbank Road** (Her father, Mr. Higgins, danced with the Morris Men in the early 1900's. He taught her the dance.)

**Formation**

2 4 6 8
1 3 5 7 (or with 6 men)

**Music**

"Yankee Doodle" or "Oh Susannah"

**Tempo**

Fairly quick

'A' music: dance/walk forwards, hands circling alternately.
'B' music: Turn to face opposite end; hands and feet crossing together.

Same for procession and stationary dance.

No. I may call out any figure, such as 'Corners', 'Back to back', etc.

The boys of Statham performed a version of this dance in 1923, as part of the May Queen celebrations.

*This is in fact *Barsbank Lane.*

So the boys of Statham had danced in 1923. Dan Howison said that they were about eleven years old at the time, and this meant that I may be able to trace them. A tiny light at the end of the tunnel; at last I had a direction to follow.

Third from left, Tom Worral. Man/Woman, John Robert Downward. Third from right, Hugh Martin. Musician, John Wilkinson. Lymm/Oughtrington team circa 1904. Corner of Henry Street and Eagle Brow. From Ardern's guide book 2nd edition, 1913

My first action was a letter to the local newspaper; a simple statement that the Statham lads had danced a traditional morris dance in the May Queen celebrations of 1923, and an appeal for any information. I have *since* found that many *relevant* people had read the plea, but at the time there was no response. My next step was a trip into Statham to place an advertisement in the window of the village post office, and to call for a lunchtime drink at the village pub 'The Star Inn'. There was immediate interest in the post office, and in the Star, but I did not follow any leads up straight away, thinking it best to call back and spend a full day there. Hopefully, the locals would begin to talk of the morris, and memories would be jogged, and the word get round. It is very fortunate that Statham was, and still is, a very close-knit community, and on my next visit, I was *immediately* directed to the Star to see a 'Mr. Edwards' who 'knows all about Statham May Queen, having been involved with the organising for several years.'

Mr. Edwards, of 34 Oldfield Road, was an invaluable informant. He confirmed that the Statham lads had danced 'over a number of years, from about 1920 onwards,' and that the leader was dressed as a woman, wearing a bell on 'her' waist at the back, and carrying a wooden ladle, dancing up and down the set shouting 'smack 'em up lads.' I had the photograph from Ardern's guide books with me, and Ted Edwards was able to identify the dancers—to my surprise! He knew some first hand—for example 'Bob' Down*ward*, but identified others by family likeness.

Ted told me that Ned Rowles, 'an old Lymm dancer' had been the leader of the Statham boys team, and he suggested that I call on his son, Dick Rowles, giving me directions to his house. In 1946 Ted Edwards, together with his wife had managed to re-establish the Statham May Queen celebrations, after a break of several years, and in one particular year, a 'morris' team had been hurriedly got together with local boys, but no-one could remember the dance, so they had used figures from country dances. This was only performed the once.

Dick Rowles did not live in the suggested area, and my next trip to Statham was a long search. I eventually traced Dick Rowles at 15 Fletcher Lane, and found him sitting with his wife enjoying the sunshine.

Ned Rowles, The 'Old Fool' Leader of Lymm, 1912

Dick remembered the Statham lads who danced in 1923, and knows (generally) where they live now. His wife said she has a photograph of the team, but cannot find it, so I left my address, and asked her to let me know as soon as it turns up. A week later I received a card from Mrs. Rowles, and I called round immediately. Dick named all the boys on the photograph, and I borrowed it to have a copy made.

Statham 1923, taken on the Star bowling green. Left to right: Willy Watts, Harold Struthers, Brian Leigh, Herbert Taylor, Ernie Wibberley, Ned Rowles (leader), Albert Riley, Arnold Struthers, Ken Lockyer, George Finney, Frank Stirton. Front: Bob Hartley

Dick was a year or two too old to dance in his father's team, as Ned only had boys of 11 years old, so Dick knew nothing of the dance itself!

From this date onwards (July 1977) continuing to the present day, I have a diary of my movements concerning recovery of the dance, and peripheral information, which is too long and boring for publication. My informants so far number well over thirty, and each person I meet passes me on to more suggested sources, so that I can never stop. I still have three of the 1923 dancers left to trace, and one dancer who is speculated as being a twelfth lad missing from the photographs.

**Chronological list of important informants:**

*1977*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Apr. | | Ted Edwards—Organiser of May Queen in mid 1940's |
| Jul. | 21 | Dick Rowles and wife—Son of the leader of Statham (and earlier Lymm) |
| Jul. | 26 | Albert Riley—Statham dancer, 1923 |
| Aug. | 1 | Mrs. Stirton—Mother of Frank<br>George Finney—Statham dancer, 1923 |
| Aug. | 3 | Frank Stirton—Statham dancer, 1923 |
| Aug. | 16 | Mr. Higgins—Son of Oughtrington/Lymm dancer |
| Aug. | 17 | Edi Russell (née Leather)—Old woman/fool with boys team in 1946/47 |
| Aug. | 31 | Mrs. Leigh—Wife of Brian |

*1978*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Jan. | 4 | Molly Hartley—Sister of Robert Hartley<br>Brian Leigh—Statham dancer, 1923 |
| Apr. | 9 | Robert Hartley (contacted by post)—Statham dancer, 1923 |

*1979*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Dec. | 13 | Harry James—Statham dancer, *c*1927 |

1980

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Apr. | 3 | Jack Gilbert—Statham dancer, *c*1927, and source of Lymm souling play |
| Aug. | 14 | Mrs. Massey—Bob Downward's daughter |
| Aug. | 26 | Lymm Church and Oughtrington Church burial registers<br>Dorothy Higgins (née Struthers)—Daughter-in-Law of Lymm dancer<br>Mrs. Loie Booth—Daughter of Lymm dancer (depositor of notes in library) |

**April 3rd, 1980**

I intended to go to Statham today to find out from Dick Rowles the date Ned Rowles had died. I called in at the Pickering Arms in Thelwall on the way, and while I was there someone produced an old photograph of a Grappenhall boys football team, which was being passed around; so I took out my photographs of Statham morris and it seemed that many people had acquaintances, and some had relatives, on the photographs. Jack Gilbert, an old Statham 'Black' who now lives in Bewsey with his second wife, could recognise almost all the people on the pictures, and was delighted and surprised to see them. He told me that his grandad used to be in the Lymm soul-caking play (expecting me not to be interested) and that he had remembered lines from the play from his grandad—John Bate. While at Pepper Street School in Lymm, his headmaster (a Mr. Clarke) had heard Jack reciting these lines, and had asked him about them. His headmaster became interested in the play and collected it from the surviving players of Jack's grandad's generation, reviving it in 1930 using his school pupils, who performed it in All Hallows Week. Jack was proud of being responsible for the revival of the play and when his headmaster gave him the choice of parts, he chose to be King George, and he also learned *all* the other parts, and the song. Jack could not remember anything about the costumes for the play, nor could he remember anything of the dance, although he did say that he danced in the team after 1923.—He is three or four years younger than those in the photographs, being born in 1917.

I arranged to meet Jack on April 13th at 'Tyrol House' Bewsey where he goes for a Sunday lunch-time drink, and there he dictated the play to me. I called Jack an 'Old Statham Black' once during the conversation, and he was pleased and surprised—don't think he had heard anyone say that for a while. He confirmed that in Statham the work horses were all black, and that the 'Lymm Grey' phrase came from the famous horse breeder of Lymm called Sammy Gould. He could not remember the Statham breeder. He said that 'Lymm Greys' were always better horses than 'Statham Blacks'.

**August 14th, 1980**

I called on Mrs. Massey who still lives at her father's old address. She told me that most of the old dancers were 'fustian' cutters in Lymm, and that her uncle 'Jack Wilkinson' who ran the fustian-cutting shop, employing about 12 cutters, was the musician for the team, playing the melodeon, which belonged to her father.

The fustian was white velvet, which when cut into ribbon was sent to Manchester, on packet steamers, to be dyed.

She told me that she would never forget one particular Monday morning when 'a gentleman and a lady' pulled up outside the house in a large car, and asked for her father by name, saying that they had come all the way from London to see him.

They asked him to dance the old dance for them, and this sight apparently tickled his daughter extremely. They took out a music stand, and made notes on the dance and the tune, and, before they left, gave him two pound notes.—This was obviously the visit of Maud Karpeles to Lymm in 1938. Mrs. Massey said her father died aged 84.

**Oughtrington Church burial records:**

*James Henry Holt.* Died 1905, aged 41.
*Abraham Wilson,* 5 Hopefield Road. Buried Jan. 20th, 1950, aged 76.
*Charles Frederick Simpson.* Buried June 30th, 1948, aged 78.
*John Robert Downward,* Adey Road. Buried Jan. 29, 1947, aged 84.
*Edward Holt,* 15 Hopefield Road. Buried July 27th, 1937, aged 75.
*Isaac Wilson.* Buried March 22nd, 1949, aged 81.

**St. Mary's Church, Lymm burial records:**

*Thomas Brookes.* Died 1897, aged 56.
*Thomas Brooks.* Died 1923, aged 77.
*Ned Rowles.* Died 1948, aged 73.

| *Date* | | |
|---|---|---|
| *c*1890 | Lymm Morris led by Thomas Brookes | Oughtrington Morris led by Thomas Holt |
| | \| | \| |
| *c*1900 | Lymm no longer dance | Oughtrington now the only Lymm team: led by John R. Downward |
| | | \| |
| *c*1908 | | Team led by Ned Rowles |
| 1922 onwards | | Statham boys team taught and led by Ned Rowles |

1930 Lymm soul-caking play revived by headmaster and pupils of Pepper Street School.

1938 Maud Karpeles visits Lymm to see only three of the surviving dancers from the 1900 team! (Ned Rowles was still alive!).

1946/7 A version of the morris is hurriedly got together using figures from country dancing. This does not continue.

## THE STATHAM MORRIS

**Kit:**

Ordinary shoes or boots; dark knee-length socks; ordinary schoolboys' short trousers (with braces); white, or at best, pale shirts with rosettes pinned up the front and back in vertical rows, usually pinned onto braces; straw hats decorated with paper flowers; long ribbons hanging from waist band all round; a long white cloth held in each hand; some wore ties.

**Tune:**

Various tunes eg 'Pop Goes The Weasel', 'Oh Susannah', but mostly 'Yankee Doodle', which was generally called 'Charlie Barber', after the words sung by Ned Rowles:

'Charlie Barber shaved his father,
With a wooden razor;
The razor slipped and cut his lip,
Well done Charlie Barber.'

'Toasted cheese is very, very good,
Toasted in a lantern;
A bit for me, and a bit for you,
And a bit for the Morris Dancers.'

Ned also sang: 'Smack 'em up me lucky lads.'

Dancers numbered 8 or 12, but could be done with any multiple of 4.

**Figures:**

Step up
Step across (and back) = 2 figures
Star
Cast (up or down)
Corners
Double cast
The step up and turn is used as a repeated chorus.

**Notation:**

STEP AND TURN: 8 bars (used to start dance, and as a chorus)

FEET:

**1**

Jump on both feet, left in front of right.
Jump onto left foot.
Jump on both feet, right in front of left.
Jump onto right foot.

**2**

Turn (single upwards and outwards, starting on left foot making three steps and stamping right foot—walked).

Repeat **1** with opposite feet.
Repeat **2** downwards and outwards starting on right foot.

HANDS:

**1**

Cross hands in front at waist level, left in front of right,
Flick hands outwards (apart)
Cross hand again with right hand in front.
Flick outwards again.

**2**

On first and third step, bring cloths smartly down from head level. On stamp flick cloths above head.

Repeat **1** with opposite hands in front.
Repeat **2**.
Even numbers reverse feet and hands.

Stepping for the figures is a fast skip-step, two steps to a bar of music, with the free leg behind, and starting on the inside foot. Hands are over-arm bowling action, left arm with right leg etc., and are flicked above head on the 'feet-together stamp'.

**Figure Notation:**

1 STEP UP:

Three steps forward starting on the inside leg, then outside leg thrown forwards. Three steps back starting with the outside leg, then free leg is stamped 'feet together'.
REPEAT—Eight bars in all.

2 STEP ACROSS:

Partners change places, and turn to face, using eight steps (four bars).

All perform step and turn, then repeat to cross back to original place (16 bars of music in all).

3 STAR:

Partners cross passing right shoulder,* then all turn left to form left hand stars in groups of four. Stars travel half way round, and partners again cross* (this time left shoulder) and turn right into right hand star back to place.

Inside foot start: 8 bars in all: no information on hands.

4 CAST (UP):

Bottom couple dance together up the middle of the set, and cast out and down the outside back to places, with continuous steps starting on the inside foot. As this couple pass the top (four bars of music) the next pair dance up together and cast round, followed by each couple in order. While not on the move, all dancers perform the step and turn, and move off at four bar intervals.

This was also performed as a CAST DOWN.

5 DOUBLE CAST:

This is a combination of the CAST UP and the CAST DOWN, and was invented by Ned Rowles.

Each couple goes in a different order, and in alternately opposite directions: Bottoms cast up, followed by tops casting down, and so on, until all couples have performed a cast. Again step and turns are performed in position while awaiting turn, or after returning to place.

FIGURES 4 and 5 both take 24 bars of music for an eight-man set, and 32 bars for 12 men.

6 CORNERS:

First corners, in each group of four cross over, passing by right shoulder, while the second corners do a step and turn. Second corners cross, while first corners do a step and turn.

This may be four bars or eight bars long, and the step and turn could be either 'half' or 'whole' in each case. If the crossing takes eight bars, then this is really two figures: a corners cross, and a cross back, as in FIGURE 2.

* Our practice is to perform the partners cross as if it were the first part of a step up: That is 3 steps across and outside leg thrown forward, before moving into the star, though I have no evidence that this was done in 1923.

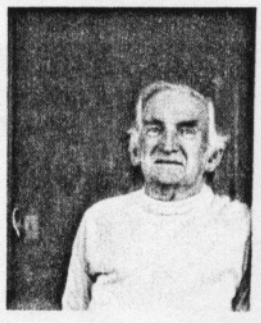
G. Bibby

**Postscript:**

Statham dancers on the photographs still left to trace: Willy Watts, Ken Lockyer, Arnold Struthers (and also Arnie Atherton (musician?))—not on photographs. Still to interview: Mrs. Hankey, involved in training Heatley boys morris; and Mr. Sutton, who trained girls' teams from the late 1920's onwards in Lymm.

Thelwall Morris Men have now revived the Statham dance, and I hope that the Lymm Souling Play will again be performed in Lymm and Statham before very long, some of the Statham locals having already expressed an interest.

G. Bibby, June, 1981



Albert Riley 1980

George Finney 1980

## THE LYMM SOULCAKING PLAY

**as performed 1930**
**from Jack Gilbert, April 13, 1980**

CHARACTERS:
Letter-In, King George, Black Prince, Old Woman,
Quack Doctor, Beelzebub, Derry Doubt

The song is sung before the action starts, and again at the end

LETTER-IN:
In comes I, Letter-In, Strike a fire and make a light,
'Cause in this house, there's going to be a terrible fight,
'Tween King George and the Black Prince,
If you don't believe these few word I say,
Step in King George and clear the way.

KING GEORGE:
'Twas I who fought the fiery dragon, and brought it to the slaughter,
And by these means, won the King of Egypt's daughter,
If you don't believe these few words I say,
Step in Black Prince and clear the way.

BLACK PRINCE:
In comes I, Black Prince, born of high renown,
This night I come to take King George's life and courage down,
If that be him that standeth there,
That slew my master's son and heir,
If that be him of royal blood,
I'll make it flow like Noah's Flood.

KING GEORGE:
Stand back thou black Morocco dog,
Or by my sword thou'll die,
I'll pierce thy body full of holes,
And make thy buttons fly.

BLACK PRINCE:
How cans't thou pierce by body,
And make my buttons fly?
When my body's ..... covered with steel?

KING GEORGE:
On guard!

(They fight, and the Black Prince is defeated)

If you don't believe these few words I say,
Step in Old Woman, and clear the way.

OLD WOMAN:
Oh! King George, King George, what hast thou done?
Thou'st killed and slain my only son, my only heir,
See how he lies bleeding there.

KING GEORGE:
Well, Old Woman, he challenged me to fight,
Better to fight than to die,
If you don't believe these few words I say,
Step in Quack Doctor and clear the way.

QUACK DOCTOR:
In comes I, Quack Doctor,
Here I come from the continent,
To cure this man which King George has slain,
In my inside, outside, backside pocket,
I've some ooky-pooky-snooky,
It will bring a dead man back to life again.

(Doctor revives Black Prince with small bottle)

If you don't believe these few words I say,
Step in Beelzebub, and clear the way.

BEELZEBUB:
In comes I, Beelzebub,
On me showlder I carries me club,
In me 'and me dripping pon,
I reckon mesel' a reglar owld mon;
If you don't believe these words I say,
Step in Derry Doubt and clear the way.

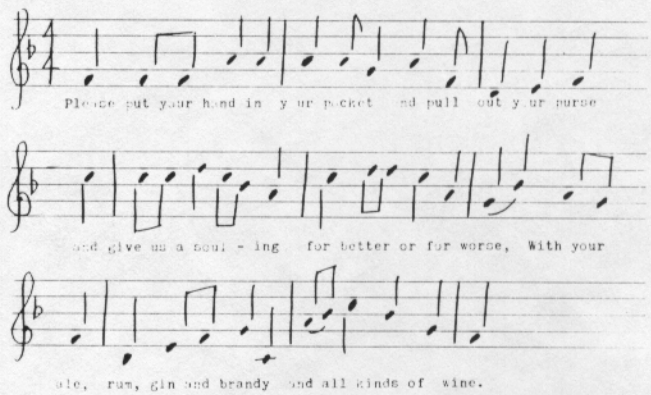
DERRY DOUBT:
In comes I, Derry Doubt,
With me shirt-lap hanging out,
Five yards in 'and five yards out,
Out goes I, little Derry Doubt.

SONG:
—Jack only remembered two verses. There are five verses in A. W. Boyd's collection of 1931, but no tune.

God bless the master of this house,
And the mistress also,
And the dear little children,
That gather round your door,
With your ale, rum, gin and brandy, and all kinds of wine.

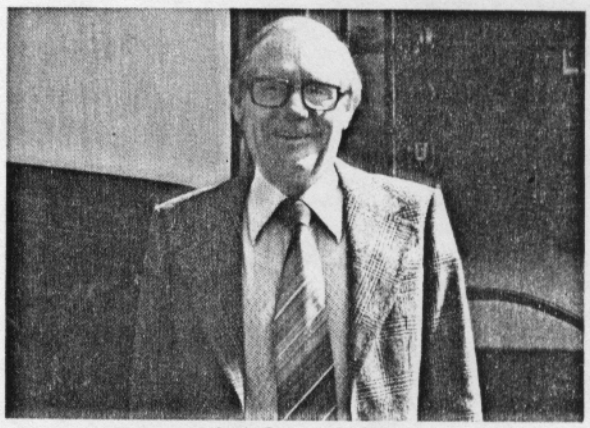
Please put your hand in your pocket,
And pull out your purse,
And give us a souling,
For better or for worse,
With your ale, rum, gin and brandy, and all kinds of wine.

Tune to Lymm Soulcaking play as sung by Jack Gilbert: April, 1980.

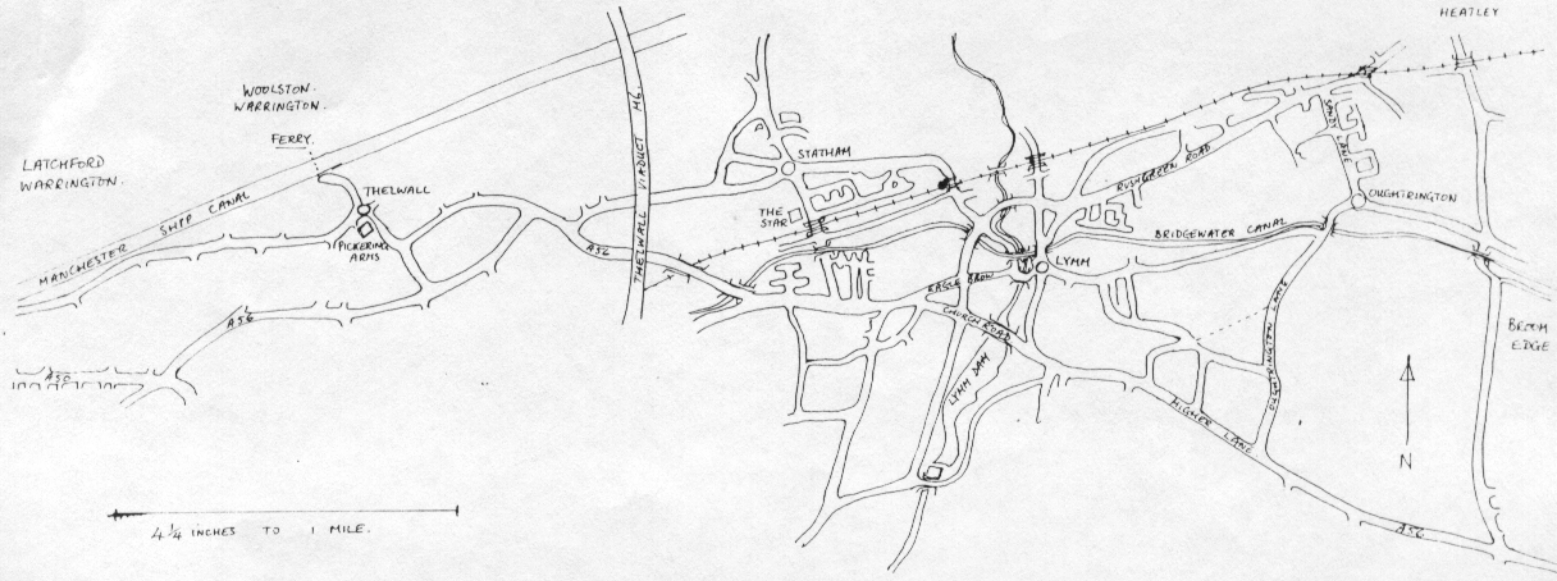



N.B. The B$^{b}$ in the fourth bar was not always sung. Jack sometimes sang the preceding C as a crochet instead.

For a version of this song with five verses, see the A.W. Boyd Collection of 1931. Boyd has no tune.



Jack Gilbert 1980




Map of Lymm, Cheshire, and surrounding area. Drawn by G. Bibby


*Crowcombe Taunton*

# Halsway Manor

# Christmas is coming . . .

This year, why not get away from it all and treat yourselves to a real Traditional Christmas.
No cooking for her . . . No washing-up for him!
Enjoy yourselves! We have a full programme of events to suit all ages.

**19th December (282) CHRISTMAS CEILIDH.** 8.00 p.m. with Ken Johnson and his Musicians.

**24th-28th December (283) CHRISTMAS HOUSE PARTY** with Tony and Eda Dugmore with Musicians, Joan Winsor and Kathie Upton.

**28th-31st December HOBBY HORSE CLUB,** especially for the children, with Leaders David and Janet Mills.

**31st December-3rd January (284) NEW YEAR HOUSE PARTY.** Ring out the Old Year, ring in the New with Ken and Veronica Johnson and their Musicians.

**8th-10th January (285) MADRIGALS.** Apply to Miss Barbara Johnson LRAM, Flat 4, 38 Carnarvon Road, Redland, Bristol BS6 7DS.

**29th-31st January (285a) EARLY ENGLISH MUSIC.**

For more details of the numbered events, please contact the Manager at Halsway Manor. Tel: CROWCOMBE 274.

*Perhaps you enjoy the peace and solitude of the restful country surroundings—we have that too! Meet old friends and make new ones. We hope we will see you at Halsway Manor, at one of the above events.*

## 350 YEARS AGO

'Dancing is for the most part attended with many amorous smiles, wanton compliments, unchaste kisses, scurrilous songs and sonnets, effeminate music, lust-provoking attire, ridiculous love-pranks; all which savour of sensuality of raging fleshly lusts. Therefore it is wholly to be abandoned of all good Christians. Dancing serves no necessary use, no profitable, laudable, or pious end at all; it issues only from the inbred pravity, vanity, wantonness, incontinency, pride, profaneness, or madness of men's depraved natures. Therefore it must needs be lawful unto Christians. The way to heaven is too steep, too narrow, for men to dance in and keep revel-rout: No way is large or smooth enough for capering roisters, for jumping, skipping, dancing dames, but that broad, beaten, pleasant road that leads to hell'.
William Prynne, *Histriomastix,* 1633.
Sent by Ian McCulloch.