Lordsmere Longsword, Christmas 2017

Years ago there was a longsword team called Lordsmere, and then somebody noticed that almost (but not quite) all of the dancers belonged to the Saddleworth Morris Men, and so the two teams amalgamated. Every year, on the Saturday between Christmas and New Year, the dancers continue to take the Lordsmere dance round selected Saddleworth pubs. There's also an Easter outing, but that's a story for another occasion.

So it was that the tour started almost punctually at the *Wellington* in Greenfield, a little after 1pm on the 30th December. The dance is, for the most part, for five men, with some interesting and attractive figures and a selection of five-, six-, and seven-man locks. It begins with two men, who are soon joined by two more, and then a fifth. All the while the swords form a high basket, but rather than being clashed at this stage they are rubbed against each other in a slightly disturbing way.

The team seems to be roughly four votes to one in favour of it being a right-foot dance, but the debate is clearly continuing. They put on a proper performance: the dancers wear clogs (mercifully with the bells removed), and this works rather better in pubs without carpets; the dance is preceded by a loud and sesquipedalian announcement from a Tommy (?) who manages the audience's expectations very clearly with regards to money. The swords are lighter than is usual, having been tapered by means of drilling and grinding; the result looks good.

After the *Wellington* came the *Railway,* also in Greenfield. Somebody dropped a rosette, but it was hard to tell who. The pubs have clearly bought into this event, setting aside space, moving furniture, and in the case of the *Railway* roping off an area for the performers, who brought down hardly any Christmas decorations and just a small shower of dust from the overhead projector.

Next came the *Swan* at Dobcross, and after the dance the audience were treated to an impromptu refresher workshop in seven-man lock-making. That set things up nicely for the *Diggle Hotel*, where the performance was preceded by some serious furniture-moving by the staff, clearing an alcove opposite the bar. The team danced by the doorway. The afternoon part of the tour finished at the *Commercial* in Uppermill, after which there was a pause. At this point your correspondent left, but the tour reconvened up the hill at the *Cross Keys* and finished with a session at the *Church Inn*.

It was a happy, relaxed event and an opportunity to see an interesting and attractive dance performed by a team who are rarely noticed in the sword-dancing world - and here's the thing: there's quite a number of morris teams who also do some sword, but who very rarely bring it out

when there are other sword teams about. Saddleworth MM at least have the Lordsmere tours as a focal point, but I've come across a number of teams who will take the swords with them to a performance and then refuse to bring them out if there are other sword dancers around. It would be a really good thing if some informal opportunity could be created to tempt out those whom we might call the 'shy sword dancers'. Any ideas?

Rattle Up, My Boys: Spring 2018