

# **Star and Shadow Traditional Competition DERT 2019**



**Dancing Westerhope**

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## History of Westerhope

Westerhope is a small village in the North West of Newcastle upon Tyne. It relied heavily on the discovery of coal reserves in the 1800s. In 1896 a pit opened at North Wallbottle opened, and it was here that the founding members of Westerhope rapper team worked. The team was founded in 1906 and in 1912 Cecil Sharp visited the team and recorded their dance, however, he named it North Wallbottle rather than Westerhope.

Les Williamson published the notation of the Westerhope dance in 1973, and it is this notation we have used to form the foundation of our dance and is included in the appendices (1).

Rapper Online explains that North Walbottle and Westerhope are 'essentially the same traditional dance at different points in time'. This was important in our interpretation of the sword dance because the Westerhope notation is sparse. Therefore we have taken some of our inspiration and explanation of figures and styles from the North Walbottle dance, which has a more explicit notation. In learning the dance from scratch, it was useful to review Four Corner's version of North Walbottle. To get a sense of the fast pace of traditional dances, we have looked at the style of dancing from High Spen and the contemporary film of the Winlaton dancers.

## Notation

As mentioned above we have taken the notation from Les Williamson published in 1973 as our foundation.

It is mentioned in this notation that the figures could be performed in any order. We have chosen an order which we feel provides variation in shapes and sounds.

Williamson (1) advises that while North Walbottle would complete Single Guard and Lock between each figure, Westerhope preferred to omit the single guard and therefore perform more figures on more auspicious occasions. This is the formula we are following, which has a lock held high in between the figures to show each one has finished but without the single-guard.

Breaking the knot is done the same way throughout the dance. No. 1 stands and allows No. 2 to turn sharp right followed by Nos. 3, 4 and 5, No. 1 falls in, in front of No. 2 on completion of a circle again.

Start - We are starting with the line formation which Westerhope developed for the stage, as we believe this fits in well with the performance space provided in DERT.

1. Single Guard. Each dancer in turn lifts his rapper turning left out of the set, dances around the set and back into place. We have decided that when each dancer re-enters the set they will bring their sword down, and then each new dancer raises the swords up again. In the video some dancers follow this pattern, and we feel that a uniform approach helps the dance flow.

2. Cramper from guard position. No. 3 walks forward under a lifted rapper turning left around set and back to place. Nos. 2 and 4 move forward around Nos. 1 and 5 respectively; all tie-up. As this description doesn't provide any beats to follow we have decided to allow four beats for the display to be shown.

3. 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. There is no mention in the notation of what the swords do, so we have decided to sweep the swords which need to be lifted but leave the others down. This provides a very different look from a similar figure like right and left.

4. 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 have added some stepping to the three people not moving to add rhythm and move the set forward so that it remains in the same place on the dance floor. Once again as sword handling wasn't mentioned we have decided to lift any sword that needs to, but to add some interest if the sword doesn't need to be lifted we've left it down.

5. Right and left. Begins as curly, three times through. At bottom of the set Nos. 1 and 5 cross to “wrong side” of set followed by 2, 4 and 3. Order of crossing 1, 5, 2, 4, 3. Almost immediately the men cross back to own side of set in same order. Figure performed three times.
6. 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 position, knot untied by half turn to right. We do this figure after Right and Left which means we get into it slightly differently. We feel that a lock to show at this point in the dance lifts the energy, and Westerhope were a team that liked energy and showmanship. We also come out of the lock slightly differently to allow the traditional Westerhope unlock into the next figure.
7. Fourth corner from stepping in the guard. Nos. 1 and 5 lift 5's 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 feel that bringing the swords down to jump over from a position with all swords up provides more energy, and since there was no mention in the notation on what to do with swords not being swept we felt this was a suitable decision.
8. Double crammer starts as “Cramper” with No. 3 moving forward and to left back to place and as the pass No. 1, No. 1 and No. 2 move around each other and No. 5 and No.4 move around each other to untangle. This is all repeated with No. 3 turning to the right and back to place.
9. 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.

## Stepping

It was slightly later in the team that they added the conventional jigging, which they were taught by Tom Soulsby, the Westerhope clog-dancer. Stepping was in single jigging phrases of 8 with a stamp break (1). We have kept this newer style as we like the crisp sound and rhythms it produces. For most of the dance we have kept the 8 but there have been a few occasions where we felt a different rhythm was beneficial to the dance. One example is as mentioned in Jigging Guard.

'Earsdon' was occasionally used, although this slowed down the dance (1). Therefore, we have tried to keep to stepping as straightforward as possible in order to maintain the tempo required.

## Kit

Below is the description of the kit worn by the Westerhope team. It is important to know the traditional kit worn, however, we have decided to wear our Star and Shadow kit. Each member has their own Star and Shadow skirt made, and to get a whole second kit would prove costly.

"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 Callerton, discarded the ties and collars ca. 1924 as uncomfortable."(1)

## Music

Joe Davidson who played for Westerhope has stated that no special tunes were used and that any 6/8 jig would be suitable (1). However, he did play Father O'Flynn, and so we have kept this tune as our starting tune. The second tune chosen is Flatly Green Dance. This has been sourced from Book 2 of "The sword dances of northern England, song and dance airs" by C Sharp.

The North Walbottle (2) notation gives an ambitious tempo 'at the rate of 140-160 [beats] per minute' (p1), which we are attempting to match whilst retaining the sharp stepping that made the later Westerhope teams distinctive. It also mentions playing the B part of the tune for the Rose, which we have included when we lock in between the figures.

## Characters

One of the differences between the Walbottle dance as notated by Sharp and the Westerhope dance is the inclusion of a sixth dancer. Photographs of the Westerhope Traditional Prize Sword Dancers always show a six sword lock. There is also discussion of the sixth dancer joining in the last figures as well as discussions that the Tommy did not dance. We have therefore decided that since our last figures flow well with five dancers the Tommy will only be included in the lock to show in the middle of the dance.

## References

1. Williamson, L (1973) The Westerhope Sword Dance. Published by 'Rapper Online'. This references Cecil Sharp, The Sword Dances of Northern England, London: Novello, 1913; volume 3 pp. 103-115. It was digitalised on [www.rapper.org.uk](http://www.rapper.org.uk) by John Asher in 2004. Available: <http://www.rapper.org.uk/notations/westerhope.pdf>
2. Sharp C (1913) The North Walbottle Sword Dance. In The Sword Dances of Northern England, London: Novello; volume 3 pp. 103-115. Digitalised here by John Asher in 2004. Available here: [http://www.rapper.org.uk/notations/north\\_walbottle.pdf](http://www.rapper.org.uk/notations/north_walbottle.pdf)
3. Four Corner (2015) North Walbottle – New York 2015. Available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Os75QfvqbVc>



## Appendices

### THE WESTERHOPE SWORD DANCE

This notation was written by Les Williamson and originally published in 1973.

WESTERHOPE IS A SMALL MINING COMMUNITY engulfed by the creep of the Tyneside conurbation, and now part of Greater Newcastle, the old village having been considerably enlarged by post-war and modern housing development. Originally the village's only employment was the pit at North Walbottle, a short distance away. This fact accounts for the misleading "North Walbottle" name applied to the team Sharp saw and collected from, although all the team lived in Westerhope. North Walbottle Pit was, of course, the common factor among the men; all the adult dancers worked at the pit.

A lucky combination of circumstances has allowed the Westerhope team to be re-formed. Since first hearing of the tradition, while with the Durham team (at college), I had been sifting pubs and clubs for old dancers without great success. However, Mr Tony Wilson, a musician and librarian at Newburn Central Library launched a new library magazine with a leading story on the sword dancers. The article, in which I explained rapper and what little I knew of the old team, was sufficient to bring forward two dancers. (Meanwhile I was appointed to a school in Westerhope and a spirited Newbiggin rapper by the Sallyport men at the school concert was sufficient to interest the 3rd and 4th forms, thus completing the circle.)

Both dancers were from the second generation of dancers who preferred to call themselves "Westerhope." Frank Lee remembers the old team dancing from the beginning i.e., 1906 and remembered Billy Raine from Bedlington, who Sharp states founded the team. As early as 1914 the Juniors (Westerhope) were considered proficient enough to allow the older Walbottle men to retire and join the Army. The Juniors were taught by one of the original team, Dick Davison elder brother of Joe, who was killed in the war. Another Sharp original was Billy Clark (acknowledged by Sharp as leader in his *Sword Dances of Northern England*) who moved to Newbiggin-by-the-Sea and was responsible for the formation of the team there c. 1920. Therefore, Newbiggin and Westerhope have several common figures e.g. Fast Knot, 4th Corner and Cramper, both dances being variations on the same common old-Walbottle dance. It is also interesting that both teams met at the Music Tournament in 1923.

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 Callerton, discarded the ties and collars ca. 1924 as uncomfortable.

Both men remember the old team performing with long stiff rappers, which were very difficult to bend. However, Westerhope were bought Society rappers by rich benefactors like Lady Brown of Benwell. The team became a great favourite with the local gentry and danced at all the big houses around Tyneside at Christmas time for a £10 Christmas Box.

The original Walbottle men did not tap-step, they merely lazy-shuffled in time to the music. The Walbottle men added the conventional jigging 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...

"Earsdon danced too slow" . . . Joe Davison (No. 1).

Joe Davison played Father O'Flynn and the Irish Washerwoman, but stated no special tunes were used and any 6/8 jig would do. He heard a tape of Forster Charlton fiddling for the boys and recognized The Blackthorn Stick and Tenpenny Bit as having been used.

The Westerhope dance is obviously an extension of the Sharp-Walbottle dance, amended for stage performances. The notable point of the dance is the inclusion of a sixth dancer. Photographs of the Westerhope Traditional Prize Sword Dancers always show a six-sword knot and six dancers. 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. As for the song, Joe remembered the old men singing a calling-on song and sang the following, which he admitted was not traditional.

1 "We are the boys from Whorlton, we can dance and sing,  
And in the sword-dancing line we know everything. We do the curly, the crammer and  
the old gymnac, And we're doing our best to bring the old dance back.

1 Wharlton is a pub and church between Westerhope and North Walbottle.

Both Walbottle and Westerhope had used the "Jingling Gate" pub's smithy to practice in, after moving the anvil! Later Westerhope and Callerton used the church hall of St John's also at Whorlton. Callerton referred to themselves as Whorlton for the Tournaments held from 1919 to 1923. Later they split away from the older Westerhope men to become the Callerton side. Callerton being a row of pit-houses adjacent to the pit.

## **WESTERHOPE DANCE CA . 1910**

(ref. Sharp Sword Dances Vol. 3, pp. 103-115)

Start: Straight line, swords on shoulders, step 8, No. 1 moves to grip No. 5 rapper, completing a circle. This is a further stage amendment, more convenient than the in-facing ring, which was retained for outside performances.

1. Single Guard. Each dancer in turn lifts his rapper turning left out of the set, dances around the set and back into place.
2. 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.
3. Right and left; begins as curly, three times through. At bottom of the set Nos. 1 and 5 cross to "wrong side" of set followed by 2, 4 and 3. Order of crossing 1, 5, 2, 4, 3. Almost immediately the men cross back to own side of set in same order. Figure performed three times.
4. 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

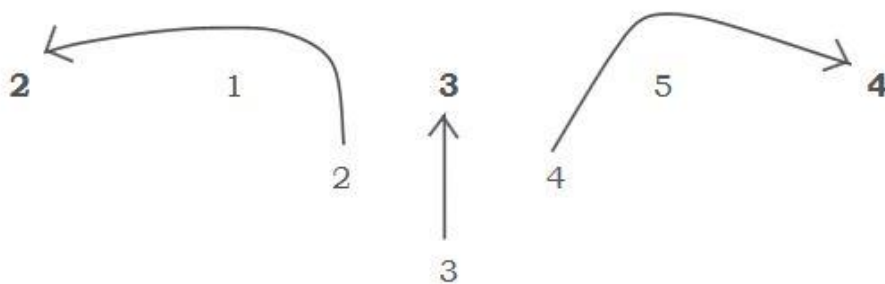
jigging at front of set. No. 3 moves to right or left and all tie-up.

5. Tipping Guard jigging in the guard position, No. 3 jumps over 5 rapper and tips (somersaults); all tie-up. If No. 3 can not tip then the team can stand in the guard in a different order with tipper in 3 position. In boys' team No. 5 tips; from circle guard team falls into guard in following order:



No. 5 then acts as No. 3 in tying up.

6. Fourth Corner stepping in the guard. Nos. 1 and 5 lift 5's 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.

7. 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.
8. 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.
9. Cramper from guard position, No. 3 walks forward under a lifted rapper turning left around set and back to place. Nos. 2 and 4 move forward around Nos. 1 and 5 respectively; all tie-up.
10. Double Cramper starts as “Cramper” with No. 3 moving forward 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.
11. 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 position, knot untied by half turn to right.
12. Gymnac as for fourth corner. As set moves into a straight line, Nos. 1 and 5 turn down and tip. Both men insisted that the rappers should not be laid across the tippers backs. Tip should be an unassisted somersault, i.e. No. 3 holds rappers forward at arm's length. As with tipping guard, any two dancers in set can tip as long as they are paired in the guard, i.e. 1/2 , 2/3, 3/4, 4/5 or 5/1; team merely alters order of standing in the guard. No. 3 jumps over No. 1 rapper ... tie-up by turning half left.
13. Crown added by third generation ... Callerton. Walking clockwise in an open ring Dancers close up and No. 1 tips between Nos 5 and 2 . 2 ,, 1,,3. 3 ,, 2,,4. 4 ,, 3 ,, 5. 5 ,, 1,,4.

All tie-up with a half-curly.

This figure of course calls for five or six dancers who can somersault unassisted by rappers ..... great care!!!

Tying the knot ... by passing through the guard position, No. 3 leads through and turns to left, Nos. 1 and 2 turn right, No. 5 slips allowing No. 4 to move in front and ties the knot by turning left.

Breaking the knot No. 1 stands and allows No. 2 to turn sharp right followed by Nos. 3, 4 and 5, No. 1 falls in, in front of No. 2 on completion of a circle again.

#### **NOTES ON THE DANCE**

The figures are in no special order. They were merely as remembered.

The North Walbottle men had used a knot-rose and single-guard chorus between each figure (like Earsdon). Westerhope preferred to omit the single guard and perform more figures for more important stands. However, on less auspicious occasions they reverted to the formula (usually five figures for 5 men, three for 6 men) with a single guard between each figure. On displaying the knot the team falls into a straight line facing up, No. 1 holding the knot in the middle of the line.

Joe stressed the importance of tying up each figure, merely to prove that the figure has been completed correctly in knot, and never performing two figures together. Also the knot should always be tied high, about eye height and untied by sharply cracking down the knot. The rose is never bent into a tight basket as some modern teams have performed.

#### **HISTORY OF THE WALBOTTLE -WESTERHOPE TEAMS 1914-28**

The team was invited to the EFDSS Summer School at Cheltenham College in 1921 to teach rapper, and were introduced to Cotswold Morris, but could not “get away with it.” They regularly performed in the back streets of Westerhope usually for charity. The Montagu Pit disaster of 1925 prompted the team to dance for the widows and orphans, as the “Monty” pit owned many stone-rows in Westerhope. Similarly, during the General Strike in 1926, the team collected for the Westerhope soup-

kitchens. They gained valuable experience dancing in local clubs, pubs and “Go-as-you-pleases” (talent contests) for cash prizes before going professional for short periods of time during the period 1921-5. The co-operation of the pit manager allowed them always to return to a job in the pit, after dancing all over Britain, even at the London Palladium. The team finally balked at an offer of an American tour, and returned home for good. A series of bad pit accidents incapacitated the team, allowing Joe's second team “Callerton” or “Whorlton” to take over until they eventually stopped dancing ca. 1928. A school team called the “Westerhope Chips off the Old Block” performed at the Music Tournament in 1925 and 1926, together with the Westerhope Council School team of 1926. In fact that year Westerhope fielded four rapper teams in the competition.

Both Junior and Senior Westerhope teams made several appearances at the North of England Music Tournament held in Newcastle in the 1920's. As well as the usual brass-bands, choral singing etc., there was a class for traditional sword. Traditional teams had wealthy patrons to support them, one such being Lady Jane Cowen who gave the sword-dancing cup bearing her name in 1919 (with silver and bronze medals for the first and second teams). Westerhope are shown after winning the cup in 1919 wearing the medals. There was also a Junior class (11 to 18 years). This was practically a rapper cup, although Grenoside and North Skelton did appear and a separate longsword class was instituted in 1926. The Winlaton White Stars won the cup outright in 1925, by winning three times although the medals were still awarded. Many experts have frowned on competitive morris and sword-dancing but it cannot be denied that the Tournament spawned many teams in the twilight of traditional dancing. Frank Lee could not understand why the Sallyport danced at all if not for competitions. Winning at competitions was the ultimate standard he recognized.

The Musical Tournament of the 1920's provides an interesting “Who's Who” of rapper and shows the attempts made by traditional teams to pass on the dance through school and Junior teams, in a very troubled period in Northern Social History.

- 1919 Westerhope Whorlton

- 1921 Earsdon Earsdon-Royal  
Prudhoe (West Wylam) Westerhope
- 1922 Backworth School Westerhope  
Winlaton White Stars Whorlton Excelsior
- 1923 Callerton ("Whorlton") Earsdon-Royal  
Newbiggin  
Westerhope Senior Winlaton White Stars
- 1925 Winlaton White Stars North Skelton  
Westerhope Seniors Blaydon (High Spen)  
1st Newbiggin Sea Scouts
- 1926 Blaydon Westerhope Senior

Westerhope Juniors in non-traditional class

Westerhope Juniors in Junior Class

Westerhope "Chips off the old Block" in the Junior Class

Westerhope Council School and Westerhope Chips in Juniors

Since forming the "Bairns" Westerhope Boys, a tremendous upsurge of local interest in sword dancing has been apparent in the district. Both Westerhope and Sallyport have danced in the district to tremendous local reception. As the lads are not yet of drinking age, Sallyport visited the local clubs and pubs, meeting several members of the Westerhope School teams of the 1920's now in their 60's and a full circle was made when Westerhope was able to perform with Royal Earsdon and High Spen at the Sallyport's birthday Ale, a fitting tribute to Westerhope rappersmen old and new who have kept the dance alive in spirit and persevered to give the village a team again after more than 40 years.

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Earsdon-Royal

Winlaton White Stars

Seghill Colliery Welfare

Northumbrian Westerhope ("Callerton")

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