

Amble rappers: keeping it in the 'hood

This photograph is thought to have been taken around 1920-1930. It shows members of the Flanighan family and others. Sadly, the sword dancing tradition has not been maintained by the family, although the dance steps and routines have been recorded.

The rapper dance in Amble was handed down in the Flanighan family and taught and performed mainly by members of the family from the late 19th century until their last performance in 1931. The family also supported rapper teams in the nearby villages of Widdrington, Broomhill and Hemscott Hill.

The traditional performance days were Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, Boxing Day and New Year's Day, with performances usually starting at 8.00a.m. and kept going all day, performing a few figures at each dance spot before processing to the next with a few refreshment stops on the way.



The Amble team had danced as far afield as Morpeth and references were made to a show at Alnwick Castle for the Duke of Northumberland.

Members of the King's College rapper team travelled to Amble in the late 1950's and met up with Mark and Eddie Flanighan who taught them the figures of the dance. Notation was published in 1966.

The actual swords last used in Amble are

Flanighan sword dancers

Back Row - l-r: Fiddler Young: John (Jack) Flanighan Snr Leader and grandfather of my husband Bert: Dickie Charlton: Padder Clark: John Flanighan Jnr (Father of Bert): George Arkle: Henner Gray.

Front Row:
Mark Flanighan: The Betty? This would be the name of a dance character: Geordie Guthrie. In the doorway - Grandma Flanighan (wife of John Snr): Jim Flanighan (young boy). The character on the extreme right is unknown.

now in Cecil Sharp House, the HQ of the EFDSS in London. They were apparently made from machine saw blades with handles made from clothes pegs and were probably made in the maintenance shops in Broomhill pit or at The Drift where one of them worked.

Anne Flanighan
Photo courtesy of John Gow