

## **Y Gaseg Eira - The Snow Mare - Welsh Morris from Nantgarw**

The apparent growth of an interpretation

### **1. Translation from the Welsh**

*Eight Dancers* - My mother believed that only men should dance this dance. She saw men only and men and women dancing but every time there were women amongst the dancers they wouldn't dance seriously but made stupid tricks.

1. The dancers stood in 2 rows one behind the other facing the harp and "stepped" by kicking their feet to the right and left was always done in the Nantgarw area whilst "stepping". This for quite a time (possibly a minute).
2. Standing and shaking(?) their arms to clap themselves, as men attempting to warm themselves.
3. The dancers form in 3 and 3 with 2 behind. The 3's move close together and the 2 behind touch the backs of the 3 in front lightly as though they were pushing them. The feet were slid in this movement, the right foot forward and the left foot drawn to the heel. The whole set moved in this fashion for quite some distance.
4. Turning, not single, but some dancing together that my mother was unable to describe correctly, but they moved amongst each other whilst turning back. Ending as before back to the original position.
5. Shaking arms to warm up again. Then weaving wildly amongst each other. 1, 2 and 3 and a jump while holding the toes towards the floor.
6. Form 2 rows and "step" as at the beginning. Finish by striking the feet 3 times deliberately, smiling, shaking hands as though saying farewell and walking away.

### **2. Communicated to Alex Helm by Loïs Blake**

8 men (possibly including 2 supernumeraries, called A and B below).

Formation : column - changing to 2 rows of 3.

6	5	6	4	5
4	3	2	3	1
2	1	A	B	
A	B			

1. Column formation, facing up, step on the spot (swing change, with free leg out to side) beat breasts.

2. Second formation, facing down, move down, raising alternate arms, while A and B appear to push behind.
3. Turn, step on spot as before, beating breasts, while A and B move down between the others to the back.
4. All advance, A and B pushing behind.
5. Step on the spot as before, while A and B return to the top and numbers 3 and 4 take places in original column.
6. Circular hey.
7. Column, step on spot as in 1.

The whole may be repeated. Then lead off single file, waving.

### 3. Welsh Folk Dance Society Journal 1978

Dance for 8 Men - "*Y Gaseg Eira*" (literally "The Snow Horse") is one of the Nantgarw dances recollected by Mrs Margretta Thomas. The original notes as written down by her daughter Dr Ceinwen Thomas were published by the Welsh Folk Dance Society in the 1973/4 edition of DAWNS. The dance was described by Alex Helm in the EFDSS Journal of 1957, (p 103), and referred to by Lois Blake in the Journal of 1960 (p 56). It was first published with music by the WFDS in the 1959/60 edition of "Newsletter" (in Welsh and tonic solfa). No suggestion as how to solve the obvious difficulties of interpretation have been made. It was reprinted by the WFDS as a separate sheet in 1978.

#### *Formations*

Top						
A	B	C	Ch	D	Dd	E
1 2	1 2	8 4 7	4 3	4 3	8 7	8 7
3 4	6 4 5	5 3 6	2 1	7 8	3 4	6 5
5 6	7 3 8	2 1	8 7	1 2	5 6	4 3
7 8			6 5	6 5	2 1	2 1

#### Bottom

1. Column formation (see figure A), facing up. All step on the spot (8 bars)  
All step on the spot and swing arms.\* (4 bars)

\* 'Swing Arms' is interpreted as beating the arms across the chest as if warming oneself on a cold day.

2. 1 and 2 still face up and step. Others face inwards and swing arms (8 bars)  
3 and 6 change places, with 3 going between 8 and 7 ; 4 and 5 change places, with 4 going between 5 and 6. Everybody face down (figure B) (4 bars)
3. Everybody move down with 1 and 2 touching the last row (8 bars)  
7 and 5 change places, 8 and 6 change places ; 1 and 2 move to bottom of set, and all face up (figure C) (4 bars)
4. Everybody move up (8 bars)  
3 and 4 return to places, 1 and 8 change places (figure Ch) (4 bars)  
2 and 7 change places (to original positions) (4 bars)
- 5 Repeat first figure (12 bars)
6. 1 and 4, 2 and 5, 5 and 8, 6 and 7 change places (figure Ch) (4 bars)  
Top three on both sides dance hey for three (8 bars)
7. 1 and 8, 2 and 7 change places (figure D) (4 bars)  
Top three on both sides dance hey for three (8 bars)
8. 1 and 5, 2 and 6, 3 and 7, 4 and 8 change places (figure Dh) (4 bars)  
Bottom three on both sides dance hey for three (8 bars)
9. 3 and 6, 4 and 5 change places (figure E) (4 bars)  
Bottom three on both sides dance hey for three (8 bars)
10. Grand chain (1 and 2, 4 and 6, 8 and 7, 5 and 3 face, and pass right shoulder) half-way round to original places (8 bars)  
Dancers in a circle face the centre : step towards the centre and swing arms. End with a shout and jump (4 bars)

#### 4. As written and danced by the Cardiff Morris Men winter 1976-7.

<i>Music</i>	<i>Figure</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Formation</i>	<i>Step</i>	<i>Arms</i>
A	O2YS	8 man set.	Column	ft.tog.jas	Fieldtown ft.tog.j
A	Foot-Up & 4PC	On spot, turning rt to face down on 4PC.	as above face up	2 doubles & 4PC	d&u on step, wave on PC
A	Foot-Down & 4PC	On spot, turning rt to face up on 4PC.	as above face down	as above	as above

B	Chest slapping	All face up.	Column	single step straight legged	cross arms lt over rt rt over lt alternately
A	Chest slapping	Bottom 6 turn & face across, top 2 face up.	Column	as above	as above
B	Middles change	1&2 turn & face while 3&6 change places first then 4&5. (Always pass by rt shoulder in changes & then turn rt). Then 4 moves between 8&7 3 moves between, 5&6, all face down.	1 2 6 5 4 3 7 8  1 2 6 3 5 7 4 8	double step	d&u
A	"Chipping Campden"	3-8 do Chipping. 1&2 do crossed single step, all face down.	as above	3-8 single "cycling step" 1&2 crossed single step	3-8 arms raised & lowered alternately, same arm as foot. 1&2 do pushing movement with arms
B	Corners change, reverse the set	6&8 change places first, then 5&7, 1&2 pass thro' the set, changing sides, 1 in front of 2, meanwhile 3&4 turn round. All face up.	8 3 7 5 4 6 2 1	double step	d&u
A	"Chipping Campden"	3-8 do Chipping 1&2 do a crossed single step, all face up.	as above	3-8 single "cycling step", 1&2 crossed single step	3-8 arms raised & lowered alternately, same arm as foot. 1&2 do pushing movement with arms
B	Return to original position	3&4 drop to their original relative positions. 1&8 change places, then 2&7, so 3&4 now in	Column	double step	d&u

original positions.

A	Foot-Up & 4PC	On spot, turning rt to face down on 4PC	as above face up	2 doubles & 4PC	d&u on step, wave on PC
A	Foot-Down & 4PC	On spot, turning rt to face up on 4PC.	as above face down	as above	as above
B	Everybody change	1&4, 5&8 change first, then 2&3, 6&7 In all changes pass rt & then turn rt.	4 3 2 1 8 7 6 5	double step	d&u
A	Top Hey	Top 6 do morris hey, bottom 2 (5&6) do chest slapping.		Top 6 move to position on 2 double steps then turn out on the spot with 4PC, ditto for second half of hey. 5&6 single step straight legged, cross arms lt over rt, etc.	d&u on doubles wave with capers
B	Middles change	2&7 change first, then 1&8.	4 3 7 8 1 2 6 5	All do the double step including 5&6	d&u
A	Top Hey	Top 6 do morris hey, bottom 2 (5&6) revert to chest slapping.		Hey as above. 5&6 revert to single step straight leg	d&u on doubles wave with PC, 5&6 cross arms.
B	Everybody change	1&5, 4&8 change first then 2&6, 3&7, pass rt then turn rt.	8 7 3 4 5 6 2 1	double step	d&u
A	Bottom Hey				
B	Middles change	3&6 first, then 4&5. (reversed & on opposite side)	8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1	double step including 7&8	
A	Bottom Hey	Top 2, chest slapping.			

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|---|---------------|--|---------------------|--|
| B | Circular Hey  | 1&2, 7&8, face across,<br>6&4, 3&5 face each other,<br>follow circular track, pass rt<br>shoulder then lt. Pass by 4 men<br>until back in original positions,<br>but in a circle | double<br>step      | d&u  |
| A | Ring & All-in | 2 doubles on spot in a ring,<br>then close in & finish with 4PC.   | 2 doubles<br>& 4 PC | Throw hands high<br>on last caper &<br>shout |

### 5. As taught by Cardiff Morris Men winter 1980 with Lichfield flavour

- A1 Foot-up & Foot-down.  
*All start rt foot, 2 double steps and galley-over rt.*
- B1 Beat breasts.  
*Swing change step is like galley-over according to Alex Helm.*
- A2 1&2 face up, but double step with Fieldtown arms, rest face across & wave as B1.
- B2 3&6 change in bar 1, 4&5 in bar 2, 3 go between 8&7, and 4 between 5&6 in bars 3&4
- A3 All face down, 1&2 with sidesteps "push" rest of set.  
*Set moves down, 1&2 appear to push - 3-8 alternate arms according to Helm*
- B3 7&5 change in bar 1, 8&6 in bar 2, 1 diagonally to bottom of set in bar 3, 2 diagonally to bottom of set in bar 4.
- A4 As A3, all face up.
- B4 3&4 to place in bar 1, 1&8 change in bar 2, 2&7 change in bar 3, bar 4 all face up and double step.
- A5 As A1.
- B5 1&4, 5&8 change in bars 1-2, 2&7, 6&4 change in bars 3-4.
- A6 Top hey - other 2 beat breasts - rest hey with galley-overs.
- B6 2&7 change in bars 1-2, 1&8 change in bars 3-4.
- A7 Top hey.
- B7 4&8 change in bars 1-2, 3&7 change in bars 3-4.
- A8 Bottom hey - 7&8 face across, 3&4 are "at the top".
- B8 3&6 change bars 1-2, 4&5 change bars 3-4.

- A9 Bottom hey.
- B9 Circular hey - 1&2, 3&5, 4&6, 7&8 face, go half-way round to original places - one bar per change.
- A10 Bars 5-8 only - all face centre and shout "Hwp" to end.  
*Face centre at end - move in - wave arms, finish with shout & a leap.*

Somewhere I have a cine film of the CMM doing this dance.

## **6. As taught at Wantage March 2000**

The tune used was "Brighton Camp" for convenience, played ABAB ... in 8 bar phrases allowing some dancing on the spot to fill out. The galley over was taught in the foot-up and foot-down only. 1&2 "pushed" with sidesteps.

## **7. Reflections**

Mrs Thomas had them dancing on the spot for 2 or 3 times through the full tune at the start.

Swing change step now limited just to the chest slapping (straight leg single stepping).

What is to be done about Mrs Thomas' "jump" with "holding toes towards the floor"?

Mrs Thomas had the ending as the beginning, finishing with 3 stamps and then with opposites shaking hands before walking off.

How far should the set move when being "pushed"?

All heys, top or bottom, start with the 'middles' going towards the top.