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THE

# Circular

Edited for the Morris Ring by Eddie Dunmore  
72 Mayfield Road, South Croydon, Surrey CR2 0BF

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## Rumworth on Mothers Day

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# Halfvasten op Antwerpen

*An account of the visit to Antwerp by 'The Rumworth Morris of Bolton' as guests of 'Lange Wapper'.*

**Y**OUR editor has asked me to write a few words about Rumworth's experiences in Antwerp, so that he has something to put with the pictures that he took!

The Lange Wapper sword dance team grew out of a folk dance group in 1970. The dance was choreographed by Renaat van Craenenbroeck who has been instrumental in the revival of various sword dance teams in Belgium and France. Records of sword dancing in Flanders go back to 1389, although it is not known if there was a linked sword dance or not. Pieter Breughel the Elder did a painting or drawing called 'The Fair of St George's Day' which included a group of 11 dancers, apparently dancing a linked sword dance. Also in the Antwerp area, a dance called the Trawantel has survived as a guild dance. This is similar to a sword dance but is performed with sticks and a hoop.

From these sources, together with information about other Euro-

pean dances, Renaat choreographed the Lange Wapper



pean dances, Renaat choreographed the Lange Wapper dance. The dance takes about 15 minutes and is at a very measured pace. During the dance there are 'set' pieces where the dancers get into a formation and hold the position for a while. There is a fool who is killed and carried off and a hobby horse that dances round throughout the performance. A 5-sword lock is made during the dance, but it is the finale that is its highlight.

Ten dancers form a platform with their swords, 5 swords interlaced with 5 swords at right angles. The captain steps onto the platform which is then raised to shoulder height, where he unfurls a large flag which he waves in typical Belgian fashion.

The invitation to join Lange Wapper at their annual Half Lent dance in front of the Cathedral in Antwerp came as a surprise. I had twice been to watch the team perform their sword dance, but never thought for one moment that I would become involved in the event. Previously, the invited teams had always been sword teams such as Goathland, Handsworth, Snark and Grenoside from England, and Überlingen, Markina and Bal do Sabre from



## Halfvasten op Antwerpen

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the continent. They'd seen us at the Scarborough Sword weekend in 1996 (we each did a spot at the evening ceildh) where we'd been invited to show the continental sword teams a different dance form from England.

Lange Wapper arranged an informal session in a typical Antwerp café on the Friday night. This was slightly marred, or enhanced depending on your viewpoint, by a student event in the adjacent bar with a really good brass band. The dancing part of the weekend in Antwerp started with Rumworth performing by themselves at four sites around the city centre on the Saturday afternoon. The crowds were good, and the collections that Lange Wapper were making whilst we danced were obviously good, since they refused to let us buy the drinks! In the evening, both Rumworth and Lange Wapper performed at a Folk dance/concert. Lange Wapper performed social dances since they try and keep their sword dance in the Antwerp area for only Half Lent.

The Sunday show started early: we met at a café called the Hopsack at 7.30 a.m. (remember they're an hour ahead of us so it was really 6.30 a.m.). About 8.25 we left the Hopsack and processed to the square in front of the Cathe-

dral. When I've watched this event before, this first performance is really quite mystical. Standing in the almost empty square, with a touch of mist, and then hearing the first strains of the Flemish bagpipes and drums echoing down the streets really sends quite a shiver up the spine. Actually being in the procession didn't have quite the same magical effect, although our bass drum probably woke up a lot of residents!

Lange Wapper went into the square first and formed up a circle which we danced inside. Lange Wapper then performed their dance and the two teams processed back to the Hopsack. This was repeated at 0930, 1015, 1130, 1230 and finally at 1330. As the day progressed, the crowd got larger and larger, and so did Lange Wapper's band. The band mainly comprised of bagpipes and drums, with a few flutes and violins. The day finished with a very pleasant meal for the two teams, the usual thank you's and a social dance.

I can thoroughly recommend a visit to Antwerp at Half Lent (it's always the same day as our Mothering Sunday). Next year will be Lange Wapper's 30th year and I understand that they will be inviting Markina from the Basque area to join them.

I have been involved with 'The Rumworth Morris of Bolton' since their formation in 1976, and I can't remember a weekend which had such good dancing and such a wonderful atmosphere. We were extremely well looked after, and there seemed to be a genuine rapport between the two teams.

If anyone in the North West would be interested in joining Rumworth, please contact me on 01942 816569. We practise once a month on the 3rd Thursday of the month with occasional Saturday practices.

*Peter Bearon*





*Another action shot of Rumworth in action, this time with Antwerp Cathedral as the backdrop*