

BONNETS SO BLUE and ROSE TREE - English Country Dances

There are ever so many dances from different parts of England called Crossed Hands, Bonnets So Blue, or Rose Tree. They're all variations on the same dance. I thought you might like to do the Oxfordshire one because I don't think it's often done. It's not in any book so you may want to make a note at the end. There's only slight variations. I'll come down, and show you. If you'll just clear the floor and if I can have two couples, or a man for me and a couple to dance with. A longways set. I think we'd better walk it through because that lead down is rather unusual.

Right hand star, left hand back

Second couple go on until they are side by side on the side

First couple take ballroom hold, and galop down the middle,
come back

Second take ballroom hold and dance around the first couple
(progression).

English Country Dance with Sibyl Clark, May 5-6, 1979
Miami Valley Folk Dancers, Dayton, Ohio

Can I just make one little point that makes for good dancing. Every time you make a star, you're doing two things. You are greeting the person on the other end of your hand and you are swinging with that person. So, you've got two things happening. It is just as if you were doing it with your partner. It's exactly the same on the star except that you're meeting a different girl every time. What we find in most English dances is that when you get this little short moment of greeting and meeting you haven't time to step and talk that bit. Other times during the dance you'll be stepping. If you are taking hands, you are supposed to be saying, "Howdy," to that person over the way, but you don't step.

Incidentally, a dance like this, like mountain dancing in the mountains, wait to see how it's done in any community before you go off if you go to England because I think there are probably as many ways of dancing this dance as there are communities that dance it, and they're all just that fraction of a little bit different. You want to try to conform and fit in with whatever is done. This is the way it was done in Oxfordshire at one stage.

Just in case you might want this information, there are three dances that are virtually interchangeable with the tune and what you do when you dance it and according to the tune they will be called Bonnets So Blue, Nancy's Fancy and Rose Tree. Those three. Rose Tree is sometimes done with the corner swing separated up. So, first man turns the second girl there and back and the second man does the first girl. Sometimes it's done with the star just like that but not with the getting over on to one side

But you won't find them written like this in the book, unfortunately, because what has happened in the book is they've stylized things. If you get into the communities in the country, you'll find there is this sort of fluidity. Let's do Rose Tree straight away. We'll do the other form of Rose Tree. That was Bonnets So Blue from Oxfordshire. This is how it goes. It's almost the same. Hands four.

Top man right hand swing with corner, back with left
 Other corners do the same
 First couple right hand lead down the middle, turn her under
 away from you, dance back to place, cast around that couple
 Ballroom hold, dance-swing around the second couple.

I will now tell you, if you go to the village where this came from, one generation will do what we were doing, another generation will do it two hand hold, and a third lot will even stay on the spot and just do a pivot swing. It's just whatever they can manage. It's not uniform, that swing. So please yourselves, but try that one at least once.

Well, that's one of many versions of the Rose Tree. That comes from the county of Northamptonshire.

I thought it might be an idea to do one more dance from that area while we're at it because you've got the style now. Who knows Nottingham Swing? Only one or two. I know about six different ways of doing it all coming from six different places within ten miles of each other. And everybody says they're right and everybody else is wrong. They're all right, of course, in their own place. Would you like to take hands four from the top and I'll just come down again and show you the way that I find most fun and I've seen most often.

Hands four from the top if you're not there. Do you want to go through it once?