

CHATHAM HARBOUR

Dance by Chris Turner.

4 couples longways: 4 x 32bars:

Suggested tune Elegance by Dave Brown.

A1 On the right diagonal set forward, almost meeting, making the eye, then fall back four small and reluctant steps before coming together again for a two hand turn all the way round, finishing close and NOT letting go until . . .

A2 On the left diagonal set forward, almost meeting, making the eye, then fall back four small and reluctant steps before coming together again for a two hand turn all the way round, finishing close and NOT letting go until . . .

B1 In fours, right hand star and left hand star

B2 The first couple cast around the second couple (who lead up), then lead between the third couple (who side step up), then go down outside the fourth couple (who lead up) before falling into line and everybody steps right and honours their partner

Elegance

© Dave Brown 1986

Play smoothly and with "Elegance"

Dm Dm Dm A⁷ B^b Gm⁶ Dm A⁷

Dm Dm Gm⁶ Gm⁶ C⁷ F A⁷ Dm

Dm G⁷ C F B^b B^b A⁷ A⁷

Dm Dm Gm Gm C⁷ F A⁷ Dm

Background Notes:

English sailors in the seventeenth century had a hard and dangerous calling. They were badly paid and ill used by the officers and ship owners. The poor pay was, in good times, supplemented by 'prize money' if the voyage was successful, such success often including a degree of licensed piracy. When the ship 'paid off' at the home port, it was a time for the whole town to celebrate, particularly the innkeepers and any loose women. Chatham on the River Medway in Kent was a key port for the British navy.

Printers in naval towns usually produced penny ballad sheets to celebrate the events of a successful voyage. Much of the text was prepared in advance and the name of the ship only added at the last minute. Such accounts were often exaggerated and fanciful and were thus the precursors of today's newspapers!

Some dancing masters were on occasion equally unscrupulous, changing the names of dances to flatter new sponsors or recently fashionable celebrities, and using popular tunes to earlier dances as the fancy took them and to maximise their earnings. They, too, would fit the dance title to the occasion!

Printers and publishers were well set to exploit the gullible. The haste in which they produced their wares led inevitably to errors and incongruities. Hence some dances celebrating the return of a ship from a successful voyage might have included textual anomalies, or musical phrases inconsistent with the choreography. Such dances may not have been used often and may quickly have fallen into disuse, but were still published in order to 'fill the book'.

Over the years I have found many such dances with inconsistencies and irregularities, and indeed even more that have fallen out of favour, largely because, in my judgement, they were formulaic and dull.

Taking elements from several such dances, all of which were published under titles like 'The Gallant Captain', 'The Dressed Ship', 'The Sailors Return' and 'Ye Mariners', I have assembled the dance that I call 'Chatham Harbour'.

Having called and danced it many times without a really satisfactory tune, I took it to the dancers at Halsway Manor, England's only Residential Traditional Folk Music Centre in January 2012 and asked Dave Brown to select a suitable tune to play. The tune he chose was Elegance which lit up the event. Dave's brilliant violin playing and Elaine Meechan's driving piano inspired the dancers and brought the dance to life.

Chris Turner

January 2012.

'FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THIS DANCE, OTHER PIECES OF CHRIS'S HISTORICAL RESEARCH OR INDEED ANY OF HIS ORIGINAL DANCES, CONTACT BY EMAIL : CHRISDANCING@AOL.COM'