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Stepping On

**Proceedings of the 2019 conference on
stepping in dance** ⇨ Edited by Toby Bennett



Stepping On: A conference on Stepping in Dance presents the proceedings from a two-day conference held at Cecil Sharp House on the 16th and 17th November 2019, organised jointly by the Historical Dance Society, English Folk Dance and Song Society, Instep Research Team and the Dance Department of the University of Roehampton.

The focus was on various forms of stepping and step dancing with connections to Britain and Ireland, with papers featuring England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Australia, Canada and the United States. A number of dance styles were featured, including English clog, Cape Breton step dancing and stepping in social dances, and a broad range of themes was addressed including history, analysis, migration, competition, social dance, reconstruction, music and transmission.

The **English Folk Dance and Song Society** is the national folk arts organisation for England. It is dedicated to promoting, preserving, championing and developing the English traditional arts.

The **Historical Dance Society** is the leading organisation for historical dance and its associated music, running conferences, workshops and publishing for over 40 years.

Instep Research Team has been at the forefront of researching, promoting and disseminating step and clog dancing since 1981. It hosts a major archive (much of which is available via its website), runs its own events, and has recently implemented a bursary scheme supporting a range of step and clog dance projects.

The **Dance Department at University of Roehampton**, incorporating the Centre for Dance Research, is internationally recognised for excellence in research in dance.



STEPPING ON: A CONFERENCE ON STEPPING IN DANCE

Papers from a conference held at Cecil Sharp House, London,
Sat 16th and Sun 17th November 2019

Edited by Toby Bennett

Conference Sponsors: English Folk Dance and Song Society, Instep
Research Team

Organized in partnership by the Historical Dance Society,
the English Folk Dance and Song Society,
Instep Research Team, and the Dance Department of the University
of Roehampton.

Conference organiser: Toby Bennett



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CONTENTS

Introduction	1
<i>Patricia Ballantyne</i> Are These Steps Percussive? An Investigation into Francis Peacock's Highland Steps	9
<i>Heather Blasdale Clarke</i> Steps in Australia: The History	23
<i>Annabelle Marshall Bugay</i> Competition, Consumerism, and Conformity: A Study of the Manifestation of American Ideals in Competitive Irish dance Culture	39
<i>Anne Daye</i> Finding our Footing: A Discussion of the Evidence for a Social Dance Step Vernacular to These Islands	51
<i>Alexandra Fisher</i> In Search of Street Clog Dance: New Thoughts on Step Dance Analysis Based on Two Lancashire Clog Dancers	67
<i>Sean Goddard</i> The Recording Output of the EFDSS in Two Case Studies: 'Kendal Ghyll' and 'La Russe'	77
<i>Simon Harmer</i> Whistling Billy's Barefoot Hornpipe: A Presentation on the Process of Creating a Hornpipe Sequence from Named Steps in Henry Mayhew's London Labour and the London Poor (1851)	95
<i>Samantha Jones</i> Dancing Hands and Rhythmic Voices: Historical Traces and Archival Excess	109

Mats Melin

The 'Scotch Reel' as a Solo Dance: An Examination of the Circle Motif and Structure and its Connection to some Scotch Reels and Scottish Solo Dances 129

Chloe Elizabeth Middleton-Metcalf

Hornpipe Stepping at Barn Dances and Ceilidhs in England 145

Heather Sparling

History of the 'Scotch Four': A Social Step Dance in Cape Breton 155

Lisa Sture

Devonshire Step Dancing: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow 175

Kathryn Tattersall, Ru Rose and Jon Davison

From Family to Team: The Transmission of Pat Tracey's Clog Steps and the Formation of Camden Clog 207

Huw Williams and Angharad Jones

Everything You Wanted to Know about Welsh Clog Dancing but Were too Afraid to Dance 229

Conference Programme 243

Introduction

Britain and Ireland have a rich history of step dancing in many forms and contexts, spanning centuries and linking with traditions across the world. The aim of the conference is to further knowledge and understanding in these traditions and to stimulate debate.¹

Dance has long been regarded as the Cinderella of research in the arts. To a certain extent this situation is the result of the relative difficulty of describing dance, but the centuries' old view, in Eurocentric culture, of dance as being more frivolous than other major artforms has also played a major role in its neglect. The study of stepping and step dance is especially disadvantaged because it is often rooted in vernacular culture and is hard to document due to its speed and intricacy. As a result, research in this area is in its infancy. Although there have been some conferences in Britain and Ireland which have included papers on stepping, to my knowledge this is the first one devoted entirely to this subject.²

Our aim with this conference, therefore, was to add to the body of literature, and, given the current renaissance of interest in step dancing, both as a practice and as a subject of research, the time was ripe to dedicate a whole conference to its study.

After an initial meeting between Anne Daye (Director of Education and Research for the Historical Dances Society) and me (Toby

¹ From the pre-conference publicity and call for papers.

² Some examples of conferences in Britain and Ireland with some step dance content are:

Traditional Dance Conferences held at Crewe and Alsager College in the 1980s; The Hornpipe Conference held by the National Early Music Association in 1993; some of the North Atlantic Fiddle Convention conferences held every few years (from 2001) <<https://www.abdn.ac.uk/nafoo/publications/>>; a series of conferences held every other year by Dance Research Forum Ireland (from 2006).

Bennett: step/clog dance practitioner, member of Instep Research Team, and former faculty member at University of Roehampton's Dance Department), we brought together a number of people from the four partner organisations to plan the event – The Historical Dance Society (Anne Daye and Peter Barnard), English Folk Dance and Song Society (Katy Spicer, Laura Smyth, Malcolm Barr-Hamilton, Michael Heaney), Instep Research Team (Toby Bennett) and Roehampton University's Dance Department (Theresa Buckland). Apart from the logistics of 'when and where?', our first decision was how to frame the scope of the conference.

To begin with, we needed to decide what we meant by stepping/step dancing. That is not as easy as it first seems. Percussive dance perhaps first comes to mind, but not all stepping is percussive. Also, although we might expect some degree of complexity to merit the term stepping, the boundaries are not always clear and it may be better to think in terms of a continuum, for example, from the humblest steps incorporated into a social dance to a complex Irish competition step dance. Consequently, we decided to keep the scope of stepping quite broad, 'stepping in dance'.

Our focus narrowed to the stepping found in these small islands of the North East Atlantic. In these proceedings, we mainly refer to them as Britain and Ireland, but we recognise that there are numerous smaller islands which make up this archipelago.³ These traditions are undoubtedly intimately connected, and rather than looking at them in smaller national or regional boxes, we felt that by extending our gaze across them, new perspectives might be opened up.

Various migrations have taken these steps and dances to different parts of the world where new forms have emerged through separation from their original contexts and contact with other influences; we wanted to include these too. The connections are web-like and multidirectional, with the older and the newer acting in dialogue across boundaries and through time. Although it is relatively

³ Various names have been coined for these islands in order to avoid the imperialist overtones of the name 'British Isles', for example North(-East) Atlantic Archipelago, Islands of the North Atlantic (IONA), and Anglo-Celtic Isles; see, for example, Joan Fitzpatrick, *Shakespeare, Spenser and the contours of Britain : reshaping the Atlantic archipelago* (Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2004) p. ix.

well known how step dance forms from Britain and Ireland fed into the development of step and tap dancing in North America, less well documented (or indeed investigated) is how tap dance came back and influenced local forms. For example, the waltz and jig routines of dancer Sam Sherry (1912-2001), which he created for teaching purposes in the English clog dance revival, reveal a strong influence from steps he picked up on the music hall stage (including some he characterised as ‘soft shoe’ steps) alongside others which are far closer to older ‘traditional’ clog dance steps.⁴ Another example is the way that Cape Breton step dance (which derives from stepping taken there by Scottish immigrants) has informed a revival of traditional step dancing back in Scotland.⁵

We also explicitly opened up the conference to include consideration of the music, as in most cases the types of stepping we were interested in are performed to music. Indeed, sometimes the music and stepping are so interdependent that the distinction between them can seem arbitrary, but even in a simple country dance, although the forms and patterns appear to be the dominant feature (and something that is relatively easy to document) the character of the dance in performance is hugely dependent on the steps used which are intimately tied to the music. Unfortunately, although there are many records of social dances in old manuscripts, they are often confined to

⁴ Sam Sherry, who was one of the biggest influences on the clog revival in England, had been a music hall artist (e.g. with the Five Sherry Brothers) before coming out of theatrical retirement and focussing on teaching clog dancing;

see <<https://insteprt.co.uk/dancers/sam-sherry/>>;

C. Metherell, *Sam Sherry. The Waltz Routines* (Newcastle: Newcastle Series, 1990)

<http://insteprt.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/NS09-Sam-Sherry_The-Waltz-Routine.pdf>,

C. Metherell, *Sam Sherry. The Jig Routine* (Newcastle: Newcastle Series, 2010)

<<http://insteprt.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/NS-Sam-Sherry-The-Jig-Routine.pdf>> [accessed 12 March 2022].

⁵ see: Mats Melin “‘Putting the dirt back in” - an investigation of step dancing in Scotland’, in Ian Russell & Anna Kearney Guigné, eds., *Crossing Over: Fiddle and Dance Studies from Around the North Atlantic 3* (Aberdeen: The Elphinstone Institute 2010) pp. 215-227; and

Patricia H. Ballantyne, ‘Regulation and Reaction: The Development of Scottish Traditional with Particular Reference to Aberdeenshire, from 1805 to the Present Day’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Aberdeen, 2016).

simple descriptions of figures, omitting details of the steps and the way the music was played.

Lastly, we were also keen to recognise the huge range of contexts for these practices, for example, from formal classes taught by dancing masters, through local village dances, to ships and stages, and to local as well as international competitions.

Over forty proposals were received which we whittled down to sixteen papers, one panel presentation, two posters, and a video presentation; fourteen of the papers are presented in these proceedings. Further documentation of the conference can be consulted in recordings held at the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library at Cecil Sharp House and the full programme is reproduced at the end of this volume.

Looking at the contents of these proceedings, Scotland features prominently with various papers focussing on different aspects. Patricia Ballantyne (*Are These Steps Percussive? An Investigation into Francis Peacock's Highland Steps*) examines the steps themselves. She reflects upon her own changing interpretations of these historical Scottish descriptions, and investigates the steps' relationships with step dance steps from Cape Breton, an area of Scottish immigration. Anne Daye (*Finding our Footing: A Discussion of the Evidence for a Social Dance Step Vernacular to These Islands*) takes many of the same sources (alongside others) and sheds light on earlier stepping in social dances in England, Scotland and Ireland, stepping which is frequently referred to simply as 'footing' or 'foot it', with little further explanation.

Mats Melin (*The 'Scotch Reel' as a Solo Dance: An Examination of the Circle Motif and Structure and its Connection to some Scotch Reels and Scottish Solo Dances*) and Heather Sparling (*History of the 'Scotch Four': A Social Step Dance in Cape Breton*) also discuss dances originating in Scotland. Melin is interested in the circling figures of solo step dances and considers their function, along the way making connections with reel-form dances for multiple dancers. Sparling analyses how a Scottish reel-form dance has undergone an interesting transformation in Cape Breton as it moved from social contexts to more performative ones. She also considers how the vagaries of

memory, during the waxing and waning popularity of these dances over the years, might have played a part in these changes.

Memory is key to Samantha Jones's paper (*Dancing Hands and Rhythmic Voices: Historical Traces and Archival Excess*). Here she describes how dance steps are represented by dancers and teachers through movements of the hands and fingers, and by word-based 'dance poems'. She discusses ways in which dances are recorded, transmitted and recalled corporeally, in memory, and in more formal archives. Her focus is on Irish step dancing, but these are themes which are much more widely applicable.

An interesting parallel with Sparling's paper on the 'Scotch Four' in Cape Breton, is Annabelle Marshall Bugay's (*Competition, Consumerism, and Conformity: A Study of the Manifestation of American Ideals in Competitive Irish dance Culture*) which also considers a form of step dance translocated from one place and culture to another. Both these papers illustrate how changes in location and cultural context can have profound repercussions on a dance form.

The theme of migration is also at the heart of Heather Blasdale Clarke's paper (*Steps in Australia: The History*) which traces how step dancing manifested in Australia following the movement of people, often transported convicts, from Britain and Ireland. It is a tale of class as well as translocation, which sheds new light on this largely forgotten strand of step dance history. One fascinating aspect of Blasdale Clarke's paper is consideration of dancing on ships, both for the health of the migrants and as part of sailor culture, and the theme of sailors' dancing continues in Simon Harmer's reconstruction of 'Whistling Billy's Barefoot Hornpipe' (*Whistling Billy's Barefoot Hornpipe: A Presentation on the Process of Creating a Hornpipe Sequence from Named Steps in Henry Mayhew's London Labour and the London Poor (1851)*). Although hugely creative, Harmer's dance is inspired by a broad review of historical records and images of hornpipe dancing, including dancing on board ships. It offers us a flavour of what that dancing must have been like which is quite different from the more stylised and codified 'Sailor's Hornpipe',

familiar today from staged versions and in dancing teachers' repertoires.

In an investigation into more recent stepping in social dances, this time in the English folk dance revival, Chloe Middleton-Metcalf examines what has become known as the 'hornpipe step' (*Hornpipe Stepping at Barn Dances and Ceilidhs in England*). It is a fascinating investigation into the relatively recent origins of this current practice, which is fortuitously juxtaposed with Sean Goddard's investigation into more or less contemporaneous changes in the music for English social dancing (*The Recording Output of the English Folk Dance and Song Society in Two Case Studies: 'Kendal Ghyll' and 'La Russe'*). Goddard's focus is largely on tempo which is, of course, closely tied up with the steps and their manner of performance.

No investigation into step dancing in a venue such as the one for the conference (Cecil Sharp House) would be complete without some discussion of English clog dancing. The well-known Lancashire-born clog dancer Pat Tracey (1927–2008) is particularly associated with Cecil Sharp House, and Kathryn Tattersall, Ru Rose and Jon Davison consider her legacy from a very personal point of view (*From Family to Team: The Transmission of Pat Tracey's Clog Steps and the Formation of Camden Clog*). It is a fascinating reflection from some of Tracey's students who now run her dance group, Camden Clog; they bring insights into the roots of Tracey's dancing, teaching, and performing, as well as how they have approached her legacy since her death in 2008.

Based on her own fieldwork interviews, Alexandra Fisher compares two other clog dancers from Lancashire and questions assumptions about regional styles (*In Search of Street Clog Dance: New Thoughts on Step Dance Analysis Based on Two Lancashire Clog Dancers*). Fisher contrasts a 'stage style', danced 'off the toe' performed by one of her informants, with a more improvised 'street style', based on 'heel and toe' technique, performed by the other. The stage style has dominated the English clog revival with little focus on the street style, but Fisher points out the similarities between this street clog style from

Lancashire and some of the 'step dance' styles more often associated with East Anglia and southern England, as well as Wales and Ireland'.⁶

From the south west of England, Lisa Sture offers an in-depth, historical investigation into the surviving step dance tradition that is known today as Devonshire/Dartmoor step dancing (*Devonshire Step Dancing: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*), in doing so she raises interesting questions about its origins and history. Together, Sture and Fisher's papers provide insights into step dancing in England beyond the stage/competition clog dancing that has been such a focus for twentieth-century revival dancers.

Finally, Huw Williams and Angharad Jones present a fascinating account of clog dancing in Wales (*Everything You Wanted to Know about Welsh Clog Dancing but Were too Afraid to Dance*). In spite of gifted exponents, a vibrant scene in the eisteddfod competitions, and growing interest outside its home country, the nature and history of Welsh clog/step dancing in Wales has been rather neglected, so this paper is a welcome addition.

To conclude, the presence of so many wonderful dancers and researchers from different parts of the world provided an excellent opportunity to organise an evening 'Step Ceilidh Party' to celebrate the content of the conference in dance. In various ways, this was a real part of the academic conference which brought many of the themes to life in a range of informal performances and a fitting selection of social dances from many countries, all of which relied on stepping as a vital part of their character. Many of the conference participants performed or called dances and the band ('Brown Boots': Will Allen on melodeon and Martin Clarke on fiddle, with Will Chamberlain on piano) worked tirelessly with them to capture the diverse musical styles required to bring out the steps.

It was a night to remember and we hope that all who were there, conference delegates and general public alike, went away with a

⁶ In England the term 'step dance/dancing' is often used to distinguish dancing done in footwear other than clogs (often hard-soled shoes) from step dancing in clogs which is often referred to simply as 'clog dance/dancing'.

8

renewed fascination for the value of stepping, past, present and future in the study and performance of dance.

Toby Bennett

May 2022

Patricia Ballantyne

Are These Steps Percussive? An Investigation into Francis Peacock's Highland Steps

Abstract

In this paper I reflect on my experience of interpreting the strathspey and reel dance steps described by the Scottish eighteenth-century dancing master, Francis Peacock. I also consider the problems I faced as both performer and researcher and how each of these stances informed the other. I begin by discussing Francis Peacock and the background to his description of the Highlanders' dance steps and reflect on some of the ways in which the Highlanders' dances, now commonly known as 'Highland dances', have changed since the eighteenth century. I describe the dance steps and set out my approach to interpreting them. Finally, I question if there might be a connection between these steps and Cape Breton percussive step dance by considering three questions: are these dance steps percussive, could Cape Breton step dance have developed from them, and what do I learn by reinterpreting them?

Introduction

Francis Peacock taught in Aberdeen, in the north-east of Scotland for over sixty years, from the mid-eighteenth century into the early years of the nineteenth century. As a member of Aberdeen's intelligentsia, his circle included influential philosophers and academics as well as artists and musicians. Perhaps Peacock's most significant contribution to Scottish dance and history was his description and discussion of ten dance steps that he had observed Gaelic-speaking Highlanders dancing in the Highlands and in Aberdeen itself. At that time, Aberdeen attracted people from the Highlands to its two universities.

In 2008, when I first decided to attempt to interpret Peacock's dance step descriptions, I was particularly interested in identifying a possible historical antecedent in these steps to Cape Breton percussive step dance. This style of dance which originates in Cape Breton, an island at the top of Nova Scotia in eastern Canada, had become popular in Scotland in the late 1980s and early 1990s. It was generally thought to have derived from a style of Scottish dancing that had had travelled to Canada with nineteenth-century emigrants to Nova Scotia.¹ By interpreting Peacock's steps and comparing them with Cape Breton percussive steps, I hoped to establish a clear historical link between Highland and Cape Breton dance.

Who was Francis Peacock?

In 1747, Aberdeen Town Council engaged Francis Peacock (1723–1807) as the 'official' dancing master to teach dance, and therefore good manners, to the young people of the town. The council paid Peacock's salary and provided him with premises to teach from.² Peacock was not only a dance teacher, he was also a musician, a founder member of the Aberdeen Musical Society, and an arranger, he published his arrangements of *50 Favourite Scotch Airs* in 1762.³ In 1805, at the age of 82, he published a treatise on dance which I will refer to for short as, *Sketches Relative to the History and Theory, but More especially to the Practice of Dancing*. At the end of its long title, he explained that the book was 'intended as hints to the young teachers of the art of dancing'.⁴ The contents show that Peacock expected teachers to be very well educated. The book, therefore,

¹ See Patricia H. Ballantyne, *Scottish Dance Beyond 1805: Reaction and Regulation* (Oxon: Routledge, 2020);

Mats Melin, *One with the Music: Cape Breton Step Dance Tradition and Transmission* (Sydney, N.S.: Cape Breton University Press, 2015);

John G. Gibson, *Gaelic Cape Breton Step-Dancing: An Historical and Ethnographic Perspective* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017).

² *Extracts from the Records of the Burgh of Aberdeen, 1643–1747* (Edinburgh: Burgh Records Society, 1872), p. 316;

Alexander Keith, *Eminent Aberdonians* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen Chamber of Commerce, 1984), pp. 179–80.

³ Francis Peacock, *Fifty Favourite Scotch Airs for a Violin, German-Flute and Violoncello, with a Thorough Bass for the Harpsichord* (Aberdeen: [n.pub.], 1762).

⁴ Francis Peacock, *Sketches Relative to the History and Theory but most especially to the Practice of Dancing* (Aberdeen: J. Chalmers & Co., 1805).

included a brief history of dance, some of his own dissertations, exercises for good posture, and descriptions of his inventions to correct poor posture. There was also a lengthy section on anatomy, some philosophical discussions, and a chapter on the music and dance steps of the Gaelic-speaking Highlanders. In this chapter Peacock discussed the importance of this style of dancing, its music – reels and strathspeys – and advised teachers how they might interpret strathspey rhythms correctly.

Peacock explained to his readers that many of the students from the Highlands and Islands who attended Aberdeen's two universities were superb dancers. They excelled in performing Scotch reels, to such an extent that he believed these dancers to be 'worthy of imitation'.⁵ During the second part of the eighteenth century, particularly after the Jacobite rebellion, the people of the *Gàidhealteachd*, that is the Gaelic-speaking Highlanders, their language and their culture, were generally considered to be savages. In 1775, in *A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland*, Dr Samuel Johnson had described the Gaelic-speaking Highlanders as 'barbarous'.⁶

By the 1790s, choreographed Scotch step dances, such as 'The Marquis of Huntly's Highland Fling', the 'Sean Triubhas' and various reels were popular in England. In *Sketches* Peacock referred to the dancing masters who travelled from London to Edinburgh, to gain a 'right knowledge' of the steps.⁷ Peacock appears to have been keen to make this 'right knowledge' available to his readers, so he described some steps that he had observed people from the *Gàidhealteachd* performing. Not only did he notate ten of these steps, but he also used a native Gaelic-speaking scholar from Aberdeen's King's College, Ewen Maclachlan (1773–1822), to identify an appropriate and descriptive Gaelic terminology for each step.⁸ At the same time and

⁵ Peacock, *Sketches*, p. 86.

⁶ Samuel Johnson, *A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland* (London: Strahan, 1775), p. 86.

⁷ Peacock, *Sketches*, p. 87.

⁸ For information on Maclachlan, see Peter J. Anderson, *Notes and Queries*, s10–11.269 (Feb 1905), pp. 150–3.

until his death in 1822, Maclachlan was involved in the compilation of the first Gaelic dictionary, which was not to appear until 1828.

Peacock's desire to assign Gaelic names to the steps suggests that they did not already have descriptive names attached to them. Maclachlan and Peacock created the terminology specifically for *Sketches*. Phonetic spellings were used so that teachers with no knowledge of Gaelic could use the terminology. As the steps had come from Gaelic-speaking dancers, it was appropriate that they should have Gaelic descriptive names. Peacock may have wanted to assure his readers that these were indeed genuine Highland steps.

As a practising musician, Peacock felt it was important that his readers should understand some of the similarities and differences between reels and strathspeys – two styles of dance rhythm – before he described the steps. He explained that the strathspey had dotted quavers (eighth notes) and semiquavers (sixteenth notes), and that the bar frequently terminated in a crotchet (quarter note), whereas the reel usually had four crotchets or eight quavers in a bar. He also noted that in the Highlands, people preferred the strathspey over the reel. It is clear that Peacock expected that teachers and dancers who performed Scotch reel steps should know their music and know it well, or they would not be able to fit the steps successfully to it. Peacock placed some emphasis on the importance of fitting steps closely to the music. This suggests that the rhythms of steps that a dancer would choose to dance to a particular strathspey or reel should fit closely with the rhythms of the actual melody being danced to.

Interpreting Peacock's steps is not straightforward. In common with other dance manuals produced over the past couple of centuries, certain elements of a step's description were often omitted. Such omissions were usually of aspects that, at the time, may have been considered obvious and not necessary for explanation, such as how high the foot might go or which direction a leg should be kicked out. These omissions can have an impact on the present-day interpreter's understanding, particularly as dance performance styles and steps have evolved and changed over time, often to a significant extent.

As *Sketches* was a handbook for teachers, Peacock did make some detailed explanations of those points which he felt were important

and that might have been overlooked by some teachers, such as his clear instructions for counting beats and interpreting strathspey rhythms. He used the standard five foot positions which is certainly useful for the present-day interpreter, although foot positions now vary between dance styles and have also altered since the eighteenth century. He noted which foot a movement should be started from and described each step as either a two-beat minor, a four-beat single, or an eight-beat double. That knowledge is especially useful for the interpreter as it sheds light on how each step might be fitted to the music.

Some changes in Highland dancing

Highland dancing has changed dramatically between Peacock's time and the present day. The heelless soft shoes in current use were not generally adopted until around the second decade of the twentieth century, although illustrations suggest that professionals may have been using them for performance some time before that. Soft-soled, heelless dance shoes led to a change in style as shoes without heels allowed close foot and leg work as there were no heels to get in the way. This also contributed to an increased emphasis on pointing and leaping. The subsequent influence of ballet on Highland dancing also led to turned out positions, higher leg movements and arms that were used 'expressively' rather than used for snapping the fingers to keep time.

In 1910, one hundred years after *Sketches* was published, Scottish dance teacher Donald R. MacKenzie made a differentiation between dance steps and dances that he believed were suitable for men to dance and those that were suitable for women in his *Illustrated Guide to the National Dances of Scotland*.⁹ Men were allowed to dance significantly more dances and steps than women. According to MacKenzie, the 'Highland Fling' was a dance for men. He explained that the male dancer could bring his heel up to his knee to dance the 'fling' movement.¹⁰ At the same time, many dancers were flinging the

⁹ Donald R. Mackenzie, *Illustrated Guide to the National Dances of Scotland, Containing an Alphabet of the Actual Step Positions for Self-Instruction and Improvement* (Stirling: D.R. Mackenzie, 1910; Glasgow: MacLaren & Sons, 1939).

¹⁰ Mackenzie, *Illustrated Guide to the National Dances of Scotland*, pp. 33–40.

working foot around the knee which is even higher. As Highland dance excerpts on the British Pathé and National Archives of Scotland websites demonstrate, some dancers flung the foot around the leg whilst others slid the foot smoothly round the leg. A Highland Fling danced on the short silent film clip *A Military Highland Gathering 1914–1918* shows the smooth, round the leg style. This contrasts with the flung around the leg style shown on the silent film *Scottish Dances* which was filmed around the same time.¹¹ If such variations existed in Highland dance style one hundred years ago, it is equally likely that there were significant variations in Highland dance practice and style two hundred years ago, although it does not appear that dances and steps were necessarily gendered. At the present time, however, the dance style is strictly regulated and all dancers are expected to perform Highland dances in a uniform manner. This differs significantly to step dance in Cape Breton as there is no regulatory body to decide exactly how dancers should perform steps.

If we consider all the changes in accepted styles of performing dance that have taken place since Peacock wrote his manual, and all the possible variations in how steps might be performed, it becomes clear that ‘recreating’ Peacock’s steps from a distance of two hundred years is not possible. Interpreting them is a different process and opens up many more possibilities.

How I approached my interpretation and why

When I started my project to interpret Peacock’s steps in 2008, I took a different approach to that which I might have used if I were only starting on it today. At that time, I was keen to establish a link between Cape Breton step dance and Peacock’s steps in an effort to establish a possible Scottish origin for that style of dance that was introduced to

¹¹ For *A Military Highland Gathering (1914–1918)* see British Pathé Historical Collection, <<https://www.britishpathe.com/video/a-military-highland-gathering>> [accessed 18 October 2020]; for *Scottish Dances* see the National Library of Scotland Moving Image Archive, <<https://movingimage.nls.uk/film/8199>> [accessed 18 October 2020].

Scottish dancers in the early 1990s.¹² Just as Peacock had explained that the steps could be improvised and altered as long as these variations fitted with the music and pleased the performer, so is musical improvisation a key factor in Cape Breton step dance. Initially, this suggested a clear link to me between the two styles.

Drawing on a relatively wide vocabulary of Cape Breton steps which I had acquired over many years of dancing, observing and learning from Cape Breton dancers, I believed that I would be able to identify enough commonalities between Peacock's step descriptions and some or many of the percussive steps that I knew. I felt sure that Cape Breton step dance had a strong Scottish component. I believed that I would have little trouble interpreting what Peacock had written, particularly as I had learned to understand the Scottish Official Board of Highland Dancing's step descriptions. Over a period of more than fifty years, The Scottish Official Board has attempted to make its textbook instructions as detailed and precise as possible to avoid possible misinterpretation. The steps are not easy to read and it takes time to learn how to interpret them.

I commenced my investigation by watching a short film which demonstrates the first four of Peacock's steps as interpreted by Elizabeth Aldridge for the Library of Congress. The steps are the 'kemshóole' or travelling step, and the minor, single and double 'kemkóssies' or walking steps. The film demonstrates how an interpreter might bring her (or his) own prior knowledge to an interpretation of historical dance. The music is not of the correct style as it is neither a reel nor a strathspey from the Scottish Highlands and the dancing is neither lively nor expressive, as Peacock described. Each step has a little insertion, not described by Peacock. When I first watched the film, I was surprised by these insertions, which I later came to realise fitted with Peacock's suggestion that the improvisation should be pleasing to the performer/interpreter.

¹² Mats Melin, "Putting the Dirt Back In": An Investigation of Step Dancing in Scotland' (unpublished master's thesis, University of Limerick, 2005) examines Scottish percussive step dance; the step dance introduction to Scotland is also investigated in Patricia H. Ballantyne, 'Regulation and Reaction: The Development of Scottish Traditional with Particular Reference to Aberdeenshire, from 1805 to the Present Day' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Aberdeen, 2016).

Peacock's steps

The first of the steps that Peacock describes is the kemshóole (from the Gaelic *ceum siubhal* which means 'travelling step') which Peacock calls a 'forward' step. This implies that the step was used to travel around the dance space. Peacock described it as a 'single' step, that is, a four-beat step which takes up a single bar of the music. The kemshóole (step forward, bring other foot to the heel and step on it, step forward with the first foot, hop) may be one of the most universally common dance steps and is not merely found in Scottish dance, although it is particularly suited to strathspeys. This step is the basis for both the progressive strathspey and the progressive reel movements in Highland dancing and is also used in Scottish country dancing, where it is known as 'skip change of step'.

In 2008, I felt that there could be some ambiguity in interpretation, for Peacock did not state what to do with the working foot on the fourth beat whilst the other foot hopped. This is an example of one of those unwritten conventions that make interpretation difficult. In *Traditional Dancing in Scotland*, J.F. and T.M. Flett related this step to four different variations that they had encountered but they could not understand why Peacock's description omitted the 'important' differentiations. These are the variations in interpretation of the basic movement that Peacock encouraged.¹³ Peacock gave a variation of the step which works well as a travelling step in the reel, as dancers have to move quite smartly. The dancer should repeat the movement with the same foot before closing it off (step, bring other foot up behind, repeat twice with the same foot, step, hop).

I had no trouble relating this travelling step to the travelling step that I had been taught when learning Cape Breton step dance. I had also taught it. Like many others, I believed it was used by Cape Breton step dancers when travelling round in the strathspey part of their 'Scotch Four' dance. But was it? On reflection, I had never seen dancers in Cape Breton using it at all, whereas I had certainly seen Scottish step dancers use it in their versions of the Cape Breton 'Scotch Four'. Might this be an example of evolving transmission?

¹³ Joan F. Flett, Tom M. Flett, *Traditional Dancing in Scotland* (London: Routledge, 1964), pp. 93–6.

The second step, a minor kemkóssy, from the Gaelic *ceum coiseachd* 'walking step', was easier to interpret. This two-beat step is what we would call a back step. It is commonly found in both Highland and in Cape Breton step dance, as well as in many other forms of folk dance, although in Highland dancing the working foot now slides closely round the supporting leg. Peacock said that it was a favourite English country dance step.¹⁴ Scottish country dance derives from English country dance, and when Peacock was teaching, and for many years subsequently, the style was known in Scotland as English country dancing. This step is no longer found in Scottish country dancing.

The third and fourth steps, the single and double kemkóssy respectively, are longer variations of the kemkóssy. They are sideways travelling steps. The single (behind, step to side, bring first foot beside and extend second foot) repeats on each bar and the double extends the sideways movement for two bars with the extension at the end of the second bar. These and variations of them are found in Cape Breton step dance. A version of the double is used in Highland dancing and I have encountered versions of all three kemkóssy variations in other styles of dance, for example, the 'sevens' which appear in Irish set dance.

I found the fifth step, lematrást, from *leum a thràs*d 'jump or spring across', or cross springs, more difficult to interpret. This was mainly a problem of sorting out rights and lefts between my brain and my feet. Peacock described the step as a 'series of Sissonnes' although the performance of *sissonnes* has changed since the eighteenth century.¹⁵ He instructed the dancer to spring forward with the right and hop with the left, and spring backward with the right and hop on it. This single, four-beat step can be repeated on one foot for as long as the dancer wishes before changing feet. I eventually concluded that the step could be interpreted as a version of a 'Charleston' step and found that sliding the feet out and in made it easier to perform the movement. I found a variation of this step in the Fletts' version of the

¹⁴ Peacock, *Sketches*, p. 92.

¹⁵ Peacock, *Sketches*, p. 93.

nineteenth-century percussive dance the 'First of August', and the movement is popular in some Cape Breton reel steps.¹⁶

The sixth step, *seby-trast*, *siabadh trasd* 'wiping or sweeping across', which Peacock called chasing steps or cross slips, was also difficult to interpret. Peacock described it as being 'like the balotte [sic]'.¹⁷ At first it seemed that it might be a rocking step, where the feet are close together and the weight is transferred by rocking back and forth, from one foot to the other. There are many steps which use rocking movements in Highland dancing and especially in nineteenth-century examples.¹⁸ Rocking steps also appear in Cape Breton step dance and are mostly performed on the outside edge of the foot. However, rocking did not fit with Peacock's description of 'slipping' one foot in front of the other nor did it fit with either the '*balotte*' or balance movement or the meaning of *siabadh*. The connection was assured once I had consulted Tomlinson's *The Art of Dancing Explained by Reading and Figures* to understand the terminology Peacock used.¹⁹ Whilst the *sissonne* mentioned in the *lematrást* and the *balloté* mentioned in the *seby-trast* are used today in ballet, in the eighteenth century, these terms were used for steps in the minuet and were softer and indeed, quite different to the contemporary interpretation. Once I had understood that this was a balance step, I found an exact reproduction of the step in D. R. Mackenzie's *Illustrated Guide to the National Dances of Scotland* which he even described as being 'suitable' for women.²⁰ Balance steps do not appear in Cape Breton step dance. As the movements involve stretching the leg out in the air diagonally in front then displacing the weight and stretching the other leg out diagonally behind, the ball of the foot and the heel do not come in contact with the floor in a percussive manner.

The seventh step, *aisig thrasd* 'cross passes', is the foundation for the well-known Highland fling step. In this minor, two-beat step, the foot

¹⁶ J. F. Flett, and T. M. Flett, *Traditional Step-Dancing in Scotland* (Edinburgh: Scottish Cultural Press, 1996), p. 107.

¹⁷ Peacock, *Sketches*, p. 94.

¹⁸ See Ballantyne, *Scottish Dance Beyond 1805*, Appendix of Tables.

¹⁹ K. Tomlinson, *The Art of Dancing Explained by Reading and Figures* (London: K. Tomlinson, 1735).

²⁰ Donald R. Mackenzie, *Illustrated Guide to the National Dances of Scotland*, p. 27.

is passed behind and in front of the leg. Peacock suggests that the dancer should spring to one side with the right foot, immediately passing the left across it then hop and cross again.²¹ This type of movement is described in the first step of the Flett's version of the 'First of August', a dance which was certainly performed in the first half of the nineteenth century in Scotland. The minor step becomes a single step by 'passing the foot four times alternately behind and before, observing to make a hop previous to each pass'.²² I knew of Cape Breton steps where the foot swings back and forth around the ankle.

The eighth step, kem (*ceum*) Badenoch or 'Badenoch step', so named because it was found in the Badenoch area of the Highlands, would not appear in the Cape Breton repertoire. In today's terms, this step is a series of *assemblés* and leaps. The ninth step, *fosgladh* or open step, is another step that is not found in Cape Breton step dance. However, I did find it incorporated into yet another step in the Flett's version of the 'First of August'.²³ The *cuartag* or turn, which is the last of Peacock's steps, is based on and complements the *aisig thrasd* or Highland fling step. It is not found in Cape Breton step dance although dancers do use turning strathspey steps.

Where did that leave my attempt to find a connection between Cape Breton step dance and percussive dance? By the time I had created some interpretations of Peacock's steps I was no longer convinced that I would be able to make any connection. To take just one simple example, in the eighteenth century, many Highlanders, like some of those that Peacock would have seen dancing, went barefoot. Percussive dance requires footwear with a hard sole.

By this time, I had also come to understand the connection between the percussively punctuated choreographed dances that were popular in nineteenth-century Scotland and the present-day national dances that are performed by Highland dancers in soft-soled dance shoes. Versions of the percussive dances are described by the Fletts in *Traditional Step-Dancing in Scotland* and a few of these dances, such

²¹ Peacock, *Sketches*, pp. 94–5.

²² Peacock, *Sketches*, p. 95.

²³ Flett and Flett, *Traditional Step Dancing*, p. 105.

as the 'Earl of Erroll' and the 'Irish Jig' have now become collectively known as 'Scottish National' dances and have been stripped of any percussive aspect. Some of the dances were described, in almost enough detail to recreate, in a notebook of dance steps compiled by a tailor working in Alford in Aberdeenshire in 1841. The notebook was published in 2009.²⁴ The percussive dances in the notebook included the 'Earl of Erroll', 'King of Sweden', 'Flowers of Edinburgh', 'Irish Jig', 'College Hornpipe' and 'Trumpet Hornpipe'. Such dances were not confined to Aberdeenshire, nor were they confined to Scotland.²⁵ Numerous emigrants from all over the Highlands and the Western Isles ended up in Nova Scotia in the nineteenth century. They apparently did take their dances with them and it is perhaps these dances that were more likely to have contributed to step dance than Peacock's steps.²⁶

Are these steps percussive?

Are these steps percussive? On the face of it and by interpreting them literally, the answer has to be 'not necessarily'. Some steps like Peacock's lematrást balance step, or the kem Badenoch, are clearly not. However, whether or not these steps can be interpreted as percussive depends on how they are performed. For example, if the working foot remains relatively close to the floor for reasons of speed and neatness, then some judicious taps that fit the melody can be added to almost every step. This results in a cross between Highland dancing and the nineteenth-century semi-percussive dances such as 'Jacky Tar', the 'Sailor's Hornpipe', the 'Irish Jig', the 'Earl of Erroll', the 'First of August', the 'Flowers of Edinburgh' and many more. The percussiveness of a dance does not detract from either its grace or its elegance, two concepts which were of some importance to Peacock. Percussive dance can be extremely graceful if performed by a light-

²⁴ Alistair MacFadyen and Alan Macpherson, eds., *Frederick Hill's Book of Quadrilles & Country Dances Etc. Etc. March 22nd, 1841* (Stirling: The Hill Manuscript Group, 2009).

²⁵ See Mats Melin, *Hebridean Step Dancing: the legacy of nineteenth-century dancing master Ewen MacLachlan* (<<https://lorg-press.com/>> 2019).

²⁶ See for example, Allister MacGillivray, *A Cape Breton Ceilidh* (Sydney, Nova Scotia: Sea Scape Music Limited, 1988).

footed dancer who is able to marry the choice of steps closely to the music.

Francis Peacock had said that the dancer could interpret and combine steps in any way, as long as these improvisations fitted closely to the music and the results pleased the dancer.²⁷ Going by this rule, the answer to 'are these steps percussive?' becomes 'yes'. They can mostly be interpreted percussively if the dancer's feet are kept close to the floor for speed and dexterity. If it is not possible to dance them completely percussively, it is possible to add taps. And why not, for that accords with the nineteenth-century dances. As for the question of whether Peacock's steps may have had any influence on Cape Breton step dance? The jury is still out.

What of my own interpretations? Armed with all my knowledge, I have revised them many times. It was enlightening to realise that I could never reproduce the steps as Peacock had taught them because there is no way of knowing exactly how the Highlanders danced. We have no tangible or photographic evidence. We have no recorded evidence of the music as musical notation cannot reproduce the 'swing', that is, how musicians in different areas make their reels sound. We can only do our best to interpret Peacock's steps but always qualify our interpretations by explaining exactly that they are merely individual interpretations. We simply do not know exactly how people danced in the eighteenth century. Peacock has left us many clues but perhaps not quite enough. My realisation of these steps is exactly that, my own realisation, as is every other interpretation that has been made by other interpreters of Peacock's steps. Although he was extremely thorough, Peacock did not provide enough information. He was, after all, writing for people who had seen what he was describing – unlike me.

About the author

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²⁷ Peacock, *Sketches*, p. 98.

ethnography courses. Her recently published book, *Scottish Dance Beyond 1805: Reaction and Regulation* focuses on Scottish dancing masters and the influences that have contributed to the current state of traditional music and dance in Scotland. Pat has been performing and teaching Scottish dance and playing in a cèilidh band for many years. She has taught and performed in Scotland, Europe and Canada.

Heather Blasdale Clarke

Steps in Australia: The History

Abstract

From the earliest days of Captain Cook's explorations in the Pacific and the beginning of European colonisation, Australia's history abounds with accounts of step dancing. It was fashionable on the stage, in dance schools, and in the community, and musicians around the country played for people to dance 'a bit of a step'.

The first white settlers to Australia brought with them their popular culture and this was quickly established, with dance featuring as a favourite pastime. As the colony developed there was a significant gender imbalance which did not abate the enthusiasm for dancing. There are many of stories about men gathering in pubs to dance (and drink) and as the Gold Rushes brought even more men to the colony, dance competitions became prevalent. This coincided with the clog dancing revolution in Britain with many migrants bringing steps to the new land, and dancers from the Antipodes travelling to compete in the old. Prime examples of this are Harry Macklin Shaw, the boy from Lancashire who became the clog dancing champion of Australia and ancestor of celebrity, Craig Revel-Horwood; and the darling of Sydney, Bella Perman, who competed for the championship of England in 1898.

Dr Heather Blasdale Clarke examines the story of step dance in Australia and the vestiges that remain of a once vibrant culture, where 18,000 people gathered to watch the Great Intercolonial Clog Dancing Championship of 1869. This paper has been adapted from a video presentation at the Stepping On conference at Cecil Sharp House, London in 2019. The video is available at <https://www.colonialdance.com.au/history-of-step-dancing-in-australia-3770.html>

The British discovery and settlement of Australia began relatively recently, only two hundred and fifty years ago, and consequently we have a well-documented history. On the surface this does not extend to the art of dancing, but there are many records which inadvertently give an insight into what was once an important pastime. This is a brief overview of the history of step dancing in Australia.

When Captain James Cook set out from England in 1768 on a quest to discover the Great Southern Land, he took with him a fiddler and encouraged his crew to dance hornpipes and country dances in the belief, not only that it kept them fit and healthy, but it was also good for their overall wellbeing. It was common practice for sailors to dance, and it had long been a regular part of life onboard ship (Figure 1). Cook was exceptional because he recognised the benefits of dancing and actively supported it in his regime of caring for his crew.¹ He also used dancing as part of the cultural exchange as he travelled the South Seas, and although most accounts focus on the dances of the indigenous people he met on his travels, there are also descriptions of his men performing hornpipes and country dances to entertain the locals, and accounts of the onlookers imitating them – often with great hilarity.²

In 1788, the first consignment of convicts arrived in Australia to establish a penal colony. Within days of arriving in Botany Bay, it was noted that several seamen went ashore and danced to the music of a fife, to the delight of the local inhabitants.³ Shortly after this, the first accounts of the convicts dancing with the indigenous people begin to be described.⁴ Although it is impossible to know exactly what dances

¹ C. Blasis, *The Code of Terpsichore* (London: E. Bull, 1830), <<https://www.loc.gov/item/44016304/>> [accessed 20 April 2020].

² H. E. Blasdale Clarke *Captain James Cook: a culture of music and dance* (2020), retrieved from <<https://www.colonialdance.com.au/dancing-with-cook>> [accessed 22 August 2021].

³ N. Fowell, N. and N. Irvine, *The Sirius letters : the complete letters of Newton Fowell* (Sydney: Fairfax Library, 1988).

⁴ W. Bradley, *A voyage to New South Wales: the journal of Lieutenant William Bradley RN of HMS Sirius, 1786–1792* (Sydney: Trustees of the Public Library of New South Wales in association with Ure Smith, 1969).

they shared, it seems highly likely that step dances would have been part of these exchanges.



Sailor's Hornpipe

Figure 1: By the early nineteenth century the 'Sailor's Hornpipe' was regarded as the national dance of England.⁵ Engraving from Frazer's *Dancing*⁶

The evidence suggests that step dancing was a significant element in the popular culture of the 'lower orders' throughout Britain at this time. The term 'lower orders' was used to describe the poorest social groups, and it was this level of society that supplied the majority of the convicts for transportation to Australia. In 2018, I completed a doctoral research project at the Queensland University of Technology focusing on convict dancing in the early colony.⁷ This entailed

⁵ G. Yates, *The Ball: or, a glance at Almack's in 1829* (London: Henry Colburn, 1829) <<https://archive.org/details/balloraglanecat00yategoog/page/n13/mode/2up>> [accessed 5 May 2020].

⁶ L.G.L. Frazer, *Dancing* (London: Longmans, Green, 1907) <<https://archive.org/details/dancingfrazer00fraziala/mode/2up>> [accessed 5 May 2020].

⁷ H. E. Blasdale Clarke, 'Social dance and early Australian settlement' (doctoral thesis, Queensland University of Technology, 2018) <<https://eprints.qut.edu.au/121495/>> [accessed 22 August 2021]

investigating what the lower orders were dancing in Britain and Ireland in the period between 1788 and 1840.

One of the most extensive sources of information about the lower orders is available through the records of the central criminal court in London, the well-known the Old Bailey. The digitised court transcripts reveal a considerable amount of detail about dancing. Much of the material relates to social dancing, describing where, when, and with whom people danced. However, there are also accounts of step dancing which includes evidence of people dancing alone, and noisily on the shutters of cellars – a recognised place for step dancing.

If people were found guilty of a crime, convicted and imprisoned, it did not necessarily stop them from dancing. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, prisons included tap rooms where people, both prisoners and their friends and family, could gather to drink, sing and dance. Floor plans from this period show the Newgate prison in London had three tap rooms, and the Kilmainham prison in Dublin had both a tap room and a tap sitting room. It is rare to find illustrations of prisoners dancing, despite the fact that there is sufficient evidence to confirm that dancing was a common activity. One illustration of a prisoner dancing comes from the work of Charles Dickens. Drawing upon his childhood experiences when he visited his father in the Marshalsea debtor's prison, Dickens wrote 'The Warden's Room' where he described in detail an inmate of the prison dancing a hornpipe.⁸ The story, published in *Pickwick Papers*, included an illustration by Hablot Browne (Figure 2) which shows the prison cell, the audience and the dancer.

At the time, dancing was such an integral part of life that the term was used metaphorically to describe other activities. For those who fell seriously foul of the law, their death throes at the end of a hangman's noose were referred to with such evocative terms as the Newgate or Tyburn jig, the Paddington frisk,⁹ the gallows or hempen jig, or in

⁸ C. Dickens, *Pickwick Papers* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1837).

⁹ D. Hay, *Albion's fatal tree: crime and society in eighteenth-century England*, Vol. 1st American (New York: Pantheon Books, 1975).

Ireland, the Kilmainham minuet.¹⁰ Those unfortunate enough to be included in a group execution were said to be dancing at the sheriff's ball.¹¹



Figure 2: A prisoner dancing 'the most popular steps of the hornpipe' in Fleet Prison.¹²

For those convicts who avoided the gallows, there was transportation to the colonies. Even prisoners awaiting transportation seem to have found opportunities to dance. A number of accounts confirm that convicts kept on prison hulks would dance once they had been locked

¹⁰ *An excellent new copy of verses, called, by way of its title, De sorrowful lamentation of de bowld Jemmy O'Brien, late keeper of bloody Bedford Tower, ... who danced de Kilmainham minuet at de sheriff's swing swong, in Green-street, on Monday 21st July, 1800, for de ... murder, of Mr. John Hoey* (Dublin, 1800).

¹¹ Hay, *Albion's fatal tree*, p.66.

¹² Phiz (Hablot K. Browne) 'The Warden's Room', illustration for C. Dickens, *Pickwick Papers*, Chapter 41,

<<https://www.victorianweb.org/art/illustration/phiz/pickwick/33.html>>, image scanned by Philip V. Allingham <<https://www.victorianweb.org/pvbio.html>>.

in by the guards in the evenings.¹³ A surgeon-superintendent who cared for convicts, Peter Cunningham, remarked on the ‘nonchalance of some of the prisoners who turned the jingling of their chains into music to accompany their singing and dancing as they were moved from the hulks and loaded onto the ship’.¹⁴ There was a precedent for this notion of dancing in fetters dating from the late 1600s when dancing in chains became an act in the theatre.¹⁵ It gained popularity when it was used in the *Beggars Opera* and was well known as a stage act well into the 1800s. Perhaps for convicts, the act of dancing in fetters lent a little theatrical glamour and humour to their unfortunate situation.

Once onboard the convict ship, some of the surgeons responsible for the convicts’ wellbeing actively promoted dancing as a daily activity and recorded this in their journals. One example comes from Surgeon William Leyson on the convict transport *Henry Wellesley* who believed that physical activity was important for the prisoners’ ‘tranquillity of mind’ and encouraged dancing whenever the weather would permit.¹⁶ Given the limited space onboard, it seems likely that step dancing was one of the most prevalent types of dance.

When convicts arrived in Australia, their dancing was mentioned in police reports published in the newspapers. Dancing itself was not illegal but the circumstances surrounding it often led to it being described: it was often (but not always) associated with drinking, creating a public nuisance, being out after curfew or without permission, or dancing in a ‘disorderly house’. Disorderly houses were premises without a license to sell alcohol and were commonly sites for prostitution. Both licensed and unlicensed public houses

¹³ ‘Extracts From The Report Of The Select Committee On Secondary Punishments’, *The Sydney Monitor (NSW: 1828 - 1838)* (Sydney, 1833), <<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article32143993>> [accessed 5 May 2020].

¹⁴ P. Cunningham, *Two Years in New South Wales* (London: Colburn, 1827).

¹⁵ J. Bratton, *Dancing a hornpipe in fetters*. *Folk Music Journal*, 6.1 (1990), pp. 65–82; J. Barlow, and M. Goff, *Dancing in Early Productions of The Beggar’s Opera*. *Dance Research*, 33.2 (2015) pp. 143–158.

¹⁶ W. Leyson, ‘Surgeon’s Journal: Convict Ship Henry Wellesley’, in *Free Settler or Felon?*, ed. J. Willetts (1837/2017), <https://www.jenwilletts.com/convict_ship_henry_wellesley_1837.htm> [accessed 5 May 2020].

flourished in the early colony, and the convicts found in such places were brought before the local magistrate for trial, leading to reports in the local press. Individuals were also charged with dancing in the streets, especially if drunk or noisy, and were frequently noted dancing hornpipes, jigs, flings and reels, and occasionally less common dances such as the fandango. An example from the *Sydney Monitor* reported that 'John Peppermill was charged with dancing a hornpipe in George Street [one of the main streets of Sydney], against the peace of our Sovereign Lady'¹⁷ and received the unusually harsh penalty of fifty lashes. Punishments were more often a charge of five shillings to be paid to the poor fund, or an hour in the stocks. Unlike the factual transcripts of the Old Bailey, the accounts by the colonial journalists were often written to entertain by including amusing and scurrilous details, and consequently cannot be taken at face value.

Even after the main transportation era ended in 1840, traces remained of convict dancing. In 1915, the Brisbane *Truth* recalled:

Some of the dames who on occasion needed some kindly police attention were relics of the convict system. These poor souls were usually quiet in their conduct and subdued in their manner, but on festive occasions they were apt to demonstrate their ability to step-dance in 'cutty sarks' or other deshabelle, which at their time of life could scarcely be accepted as fascinating undress.

One well-known character of this class was an old woman named Hannah Rigby, who used to live alone in a hut near Queen street. She died at 77 years of age in 1853 of apoplexy, induced by her terpsichorean liveliness and general conviviality, at a wedding in the house next door to her humble establishment.¹⁸

Over time, more free settlers arrived and the gold rushes in the mid to late 1800s caused a surge of new immigrants. The links to Britain

¹⁷ 'News of the Day', *Sydney Monitor (NSW: 1828-1838)*, 4 July 1838, p. 2, <<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/32160594>> [accessed 5 May 2020].

¹⁸ 'Early History Of Queensland', *Truth* (Brisbane, Qld. : 1900-1954), 1915: Brisbane, Qld. p. 12, <<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article203041038>> [accessed 5 May 2020].

were very strong and the culture followed what was happening there, despite life in the colony being very different. The gender balance was considerably more male, particularly in rural areas and step dancing was very popular amongst the men who worked as shearers, stockmen, boundary riders and bullock drivers. There are many tales of these men gathering in pubs or in campsites to drink, dance and tell yarns. One story tells of a shearer who would shear one sheep, take a break and dance a few steps, then start on the next sheep, and so on throughout the day.¹⁹ Another fellow danced on fence posts to drive them into the ground, and in a droving camp, the cook entertained by dancing a hornpipe on top of a box as 1200 sheep and 400 cattle looked on in astonishment.²⁰



'There is Billy dancing a step in the middle of the floor.'

Figure 3: Step dancing was popular amongst rural workers, as illustrated by a shearer dancing in a woolshed to the music of concertina.²¹

¹⁹ J. Meredith, R. Covell, and P. Brown, *Folk songs of Australia and the men and women who sang them*. Vol. 2. (Kensington, N.S.W: Renwick Pride, 1987).

²⁰ J. Hawdon, *The journal of a journey from New South Wales to Adelaide (the capital of South Australia) performed in 1838 / by Mr. Joseph Hawdon*, Rex Nan Kivell Collection; NK10813 (Melbourne: Georgian House, 1838/1952).

²¹ 'Types of Australian life', *Illustrated Sydney News* (NSW : 1881 - 1894), 7 February 1889, p. 16, <<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article63621451>> [accessed 9 March 2022].

There was often a strong competitive edge to the men's step dancing, and it was common for doors to be taken off their hinges and laid flat on the ground to provide the appropriate platform. The author, Banjo Paterson described such an event at a country race meeting in 1906:

an excited crowd of people gathered round a fiddler, who was playing away for dear life, and the yells and whoops told them that partisanship was running high. All the young 'bloods' of the ranges were there in their very best finery – cabbage-tree hat (well-tilted back, and secured by a string under the nose), gaudy cotton shirt, and tweed trousers of loud pattern, secured round the waist by flaring red or green sashes. In this garb such as fancied themselves as dancers were taking their turns on the door. They began by ambling with a sort of strutting walk once or twice round the circumscribed platform; then, with head well back and eyes closed, dashed into the steps of the dance, each introducing varied steps and innovations of his own, which, if intricate and neatly executed, were greeted with great applause.²²

The first record of a clog dancing appears in 1833 when a clog hornpipe was danced on a tight rope in the Sydney theatre to 'thunders of applause'.²³ After this date, accounts of clog dancing become increasingly common, mirroring its popularity in England. The National Library of Australia has an extensive resource of digitised newspapers, and research undertaken in 2019 revealed over twenty thousand references to clog dancing in Australia between 1830 and 1950, demonstrating its widespread following. There are reports and anecdotes of all manner of clog dances: hornpipes, waltzes, schottisches, Lancashire clog, the 'Liverpool Double', Manchester clog dance, country clog; performed on pedestals, chairs, and with a skipping rope; in doubles, triples and quartets. There are hundreds of reports of contests, including the Great Intercolonial Clog

²² A.B. Paterson, *An outback marriage: a story of Australian life* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1906).

²³ 'Domestic Intelligence', *Sydney Herald (NSW: 1831-1842)*. 1833: NSW. p. 1, <<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article12848319>> [accessed 14 April 2020].

Dance Competition (Figure 4) which was held at the World's Fair in Sydney in 1869.²⁴

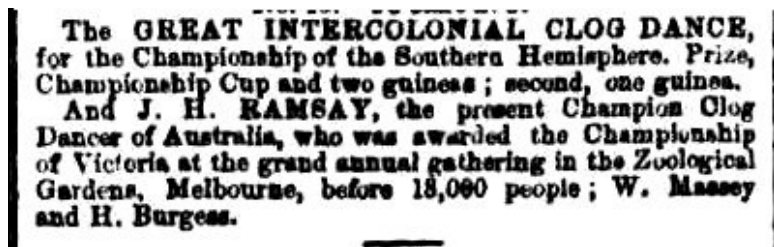


Figure 4: J.H.Ramsay, one of the contestants in the Great Intercolonial Clog Dance Competition, had won the championship of Victoria before an audience of eighteen thousand.²⁵

But for all its widespread prevalence in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, there are few tangible relics of this once vibrant tradition. Therefore, it was remarkable in 2016 when the family history programme *Who Do You Think You Are?* investigated the forebears of the celebrity Craig Revel Horwood and discovered that his great-great-grandfather, Harry Macklin Shaw, had been the champion clog dancer of Australia. Significantly, Craig's family had kept the championship medal awarded to Harry in 1871, without recognising its full importance. This is the only known artefact to remain of the clog dancing tradition in Australia.²⁶

I was involved in the research for this programme and talked to Craig on the show, presenting him with Harry's medal which he had not seen before, and teaching him a few clog steps. I was able to locate a step dance tune, a hornpipe, which had been collected in the Glen Innes area where Craig's ancestor Harry had lived and danced, and

²⁴ *Bell's Life in Sydney and Sporting Chronicle (NSW: 1860–1870)*. 1869: NSW. p. 1, <<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article65471253>> [accessed 16 April 2020].

²⁵ Advertisement in *Evening News* (Sydney, NSW: 1869 - 1931), 24 December 1896, p. 3, col. 2, <<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article107129131>> [accessed 9 March 2022].

²⁶ H. E. Blasdale Clarke, 'Harry Shaw: champion clog dancer', *History of Music and Dance in Australia, 1788-1840*. (2017), retrieved from <<http://www.colonialdance.com.au/harry-shaw-champion-clog-dancer-2680.html>> [accessed 22 August 2021].

this was used in the show. The tune, known as ‘The Breakdown’, was collected by the folklorist Dave de Hugard from the button accordion player, Kath McCaughey (1901–1989). Kath had learnt the tune from her parents who were both fiddlers who played for local dances in the New England area of New South Wales in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Craig was delighted and impressed to discover a step dancer in his ancestry and has since become the patron of the Instep Research Team.

Clog dancing competitions were not solely for men, and one noteworthy female dancer was Bella Perman. Bella was the clog dancing champion of Australia and performed on the stage with her two brothers, Willie and Percy, in theatres around the country. In 1898, Bella visited London and challenged the reigning world champion, Minnie Ray to a clog dancing contest.

Miss Bella Perman [...] speedily showed herself to be worthy of the title of Australian champion, putting a deal of variety into her steps, and showing some wonderful execution. [...] Miss Minnie Ray [...] was in no hurry, and set her own time with great determination. She scarcely commenced well, but soon getting into her stride, her work became close and intricate, and her time was marvellously accurate.²⁷

The competition was widely reported, including criticism in Australia about its outcome. Bella danced twelve steps over eight minutes, including a ‘twizzle’, but Minnie was judged the superior dancer and retained the title. For further information about this competition, see Caroline Radcliffe’s ‘The Ladies Clog Dancing Contest of 1898’ in *Step Change: New views on traditional dance*.²⁸

At the beginning of the twentieth century, just as in Britain, step dancing was a popular form of dance for the working classes. It was customary during an evening’s entertainment, particularly at a concert or social dance, to include an item of step dancing. In dancing

²⁷ ‘Clog-Dancing Contest’, *Era* (British Library Newspapers, 1898), <<https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/BB3202525855/GDCS?u=bccl&sid=GDCS&xid=5d620777>> [accessed 23 October 2019].

²⁸ G. Boyes, ed., *Step change : new views on traditional dance* (London: Francis Boutle, 2001).

schools the standard repertoire (Figure 5) included a clog hornpipe and waltz, 'Sailor's Hornpipe', 'Irish Jig', 'Highland Fling', 'Sword Dance', and a reel, as well as a range of 'fancy' dances such as butterfly, skirt, and fan dances.



Figure 5: Emily Leggett of Melbourne (1890s) in the costume appropriate to each dance form: (clockwise from top right) Highland Fling, Clog Dance, Irish Jig, Sailor's Hornpipe. Photos courtesy of Phil Leggett.

There is some evidence that a distinctive Australian style may have evolved and this is represented in the dances ‘The Melbourne Clog Dance’, and ‘The Sydney Flash’, however, few details of these dances remain.²⁹ As a large proportion of the population either came from Britain or Ireland, or were descendants of such, the culture of the time reflected this connection and a distinctive local dance culture had little time to develop. Just as modern ways began to erode the folk traditions in England, so the popularity of these dances began to fade in Australia in the 1900s.

The collecting of European folk dance began in Australia in 1959 when Shirley Andrews was requested by the Victorian Bush Music Club for assistance in studying the history of social dance traditions.³⁰ Andrews’ work formed the basis of the colonial and bush dance tradition, however, it did not extend to the art of step dancing. In the 1980s, when I began to search for the old step dances, there were very few people who remembered them and the task of finding information has been largely restricted to written records and a few brief film clips. On the positive side, collectors had been gathering tunes and stories connected to step dances, so there is a reasonable selection of these preserved in the National Library of Australia, and readily available through the Australian Traditional Music Archive.³¹

Currently in Australia, there is very little step dance outside the modern competitive Irish and Highland dance studios. It is easy to find a class for tap dancing, or even Appalachian clogging, but there is no awareness that Australia ever had a vibrant culture of step dancing which was central to folk life. There are a few small groups of people who dance *sean nós*, and a some who dance English clog. Traces of the older styles remain, kept alive by people like Margaret Winnet in Sydney who teaches and performs old-style traditional Irish step dances. Margaret’s repertoire also includes an English clog waltz known as the ‘Milkmaid’s Waltz’, which was taught in Irish and

²⁹ It is notable that a version of the ‘Melbourne Clog Dance’ is still performed in New Zealand.

³⁰ S. Andrews, *Take your partners: traditional dancing in Australia* (Melbourne: Hyland House, 1979).

³¹ *Australian Traditional Music Archive* (Bushtraditions: NSW, 2020), <<https://bushtraditions.wiki/>> [accessed 5 May 2020].

Scottish dance schools up until the 1970s but has since disappeared from the curriculum. At some stage, perhaps in the 1930s, the clog waltz began to take on a Dutch identity and lost its connection to the English tradition.

In conclusion, from the first days of British settlement, Australia had a lively culture of step dancing, brought by the convicts and free settlers. Throughout the nineteenth century, step dancing in its various forms continued to be a popular and widespread leisure activity. Following the trends in Britain, step dancing became a major form of entertainment, on the stage, in the home and at social gatherings. In the twentieth century, interest in these dances changed and they largely disappeared from the folk tradition.

Today, Irish and Highland dancing remains prevalent in Australia, particularly for school aged children. It is danced at a highly competitive level which tends to emphasise athletic virtuosity, and few continue to dance when they reach adulthood. These dances are rarely seen outside the world of competition and are not part of the general folk scene.

In seeking to re-establish the step dance tradition in Australia as a non-competitive folk art, we will need to follow the Scottish example, where traditional dances which had been lost in Scotland had survived in Cape Breton and have been reintroduced into Scottish culture in recent years. There is some interest in these traditions in the upcoming generation, and it would be a fine thing if we could collaborate with others who are interested in the field to bring the dances back into our folk culture. Connecting with the Instep Research Team has been extremely valuable in providing support and resources to further this aim.

About the author

Dr Heather Blasdale Clarke is a dance teacher and historian specialising in early Australian colonial culture and step dance. Heather's doctoral research examined early Australian convict dance; other areas of interest include the history of dance for seafarers, and Captain Cook. By combining a comprehensive understanding of the many dance traditions relevant to colonial Australia she is able to

reveal unique perspectives in history. Heather is the Australian member of the Instep Research Team, frequently presents workshops and seminars, and regularly publishes articles on her website www.colonialdance.com.au.

Annabelle Marshall Bugay

Competition, Consumerism, and Conformity: A Study of the Manifestation of American Ideals in Competitive Irish dance Culture

Abstract

Following the success of Riverdance in 1995, Dr. John Cullinane recorded that in North America there were over 500 Irish dancing teachers officially recognized by *An Coimisiún Le Rincí Gaelacha*, over 160 competitions per year, as well as over 50,000 people learning Irish dance. Competitive Irish dancing has remained a popular sport in the US. What was once an activity to encourage camaraderie between Irish immigrants in America has become an extravagant and elite sport. American dancers are now willing to frequently travel across both the country and the globe to participate in competitions. Likewise, they are willing to invest thousands of dollars into new costumes and accessories to reflect each year's fashion trends. Competitive Irish dance has evolved into an expression of the American ideals of competition, consumerism, and conformity. Drawing from personal experience as a competitive Irish dancer from the United States, as well as interview material and historical research, this paper discusses how both traditions and current trends in competitive Irish dance are not a reflection of Irish culture, but rather an expression of the blending of Irish and American cultures in a post-Diaspora world.

According to a 2016 study conducted by the Irish government, over seventy million people claim to possess some form of Irish ancestry.¹ Many of these people reside in the United States as a direct result of the Irish Diaspora, in which millions of Irish fled starvation, poverty, and violence following the devastation of the Great Famine in the late seventeenth century.² As Irish immigrants dispersed across America, so did their music and their dancing. Irish dancing masters were recorded as operating in America as early as 1789 and the legacy of these masters continues to exist today with the prevalence of formally established Irish dance schools across the country.³

Irish dance competitions in the United States were originally a vital social event which strengthened Irish immigrant communities.⁴ Prior to the 1994 debut of *Riverdance*, the sport was a predominantly Irish-American pastime found in densely populated immigrant communities across the United States. Although the popularity of *Riverdance* inspired massive participation in competitive Irish dance around the world,⁵ it was America that experienced the greatest increase of competitive Irish dancers under the organization of *An Coimisiún Le Rincí Gaelacha* (CLRG).⁶ By the late 1990s, competitive Irish dance was evolving into a mainstream sport. In 1996, it was estimated that there were over 500 Irish dancing teachers officially recognized by CLRG, over 160 competitions per year, as well as over 50,000 people learning Irish dance in North America.⁷ All of these statistics surpassed those of Ireland at that time, and the numbers have only continued to grow in the past two decades.

¹ Devon Haynie, '10 Countries With the Most Irish Emigrants', *US News*, 17 March 2016, <<https://www.usnews.com/news/best-countries/articles/2016-03-17/10-countries-with-the-most-irish-emigrants>> [accessed 25 March 2019].

² Constitutional Rights Foundation, *The Potato Famine and Irish Immigration to America*, <<http://www.crf-usa.org/bill-of-rights-in-action/bria-26-2-the-potato-famine-and-irish-immigration-to-america.html>> [accessed 25 March 2019].

³ John P. Cullinane, *Aspects of the History of Irish Dancing in North America*, 11 (Dublin: Central Remedial Clinic, 2001) p. 15.

⁴ Cullinane, *Aspects of the History of Irish Dancing*, pp. 20–21.

⁵ S.J. Velasquez, *Today's Irish dancers step away from stereotype*, National Public Radio, October 27, (2014), <<https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2014/10/27/358107719/irish-dance-steps-up-diversity>> [accessed 25 March 2019].

⁶ Cullinane, *Aspects of the History of Irish Dancing*, pp. 20–21.

⁷ Cullinane, *Aspects of the History of Irish Dancing*, pp. 20–21.

According to psychologists McDonald and Crandall, social norms within a group ‘not only detail what is appropriate behavior, but [...] define what the group does and who the group is’.⁸ Due to the fact that American Irish dancers and teachers outnumber those of Ireland, it is the American majority who have carried the greatest influence in determining what trends and behaviours are socially acceptable within the international Irish dancing circuit since the 1990s. Inevitably, American cultural ideals, such as competitive spirit, consumerist values, and conformist behaviours have been embedded into the unspoken rules and social norms of the sport. Today’s high-stakes competitions, as well as exorbitantly priced and aesthetically homogenized fashion trends, are easily miscredited as originating from Ireland alone. However, these newly emerging traditions in competitive Irish dance are not entirely a reflection of Irish customs, but rather are an expression of the blending of Irish and American cultures in a post-Diaspora world.

From cultural activity to competitive sport

One mother from Virginia reports that she has never Irish danced in her life. Despite this, she is the mother of three champion Irish dancers. ‘It’s part of our heritage’ the mother says.⁹ If you ask her children why they are so invested in Irish dance, they give a very different answer, ‘I like competing [...] I like to win’, one child remarks.¹⁰ Both the mother and the children proceed to stress the deep amount of personal commitment young dancers must make in order to be successful at Irish dance, such as skipping social events and sustaining serious physical injuries. While tradition and heritage

⁸ Rachel I. McDonald and Christian S. Crandall, ‘Social Norms and Social Influence’, *Current Opinion in Behavioral Sciences* 3, (2015), pp. 147–51, <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.cobeha.2015.04.006>> [accessed 25 March 2020].

⁹ Interview by Teri Winslow, ‘Teri Talk: Champion Irish dancing sisters put their best feet forward, even when bloody’, *The Virginian-Pilot*, February 3, (2017), <https://pilotonline.com/news/local/columnist/teri-talk/article_95dad8d0-afbd-52b1-9b9d-7308b9a27bb7.html> [accessed 25 March 2019].

¹⁰ Interview by Teri Winslow, ‘Teri Talk: Champion Irish dancing sisters put their best feet forward, even when bloody’, *The Virginian-Pilot*, February 3, (2017), <https://pilotonline.com/news/local/columnist/teri-talk/article_95dad8d0-afbd-52b1-9b9d-7308b9a27bb7.html> [accessed 25 March 2019].

were originally stated as their reasons for Irish dancing, the family makes it clear that their primary focus is on competitive success.

Although it may be a sweeping generalization to state that Irish dancing's shift from cultural activity to elite sport is of the United States' influence alone, there are certain aspects of American culture that predispose dancers to be competitive in a way that is distinctly American. 'In American society we don't know what balance is', states Megan Davis, a recently retired Irish dancer from the southern region, USA.¹¹ Davis states:

I think that if you look at American society especially as very capitalistic, it's like, 'If you're not going to do [something] to monetize it, why are you doing it at all?' [...] It's about that puritan idea of 'idle work is the devil's playground.' [...] If you just went to [dance] class [...] one time a week for an hour and a half, that's like, 'Why are you doing it at all? You should be competing somewhere'.¹²

American cultural historian Steven Gelber states that the association of leisure time and corrupted morals first became apparent in American society in the pre-industrial era.¹³ Because of the relative flexibility of working hours, 'guardians of public morals [feared] that time spent not working would be time spent getting into trouble'.¹⁴ Gelber stresses that it's the voluntary nature of productive leisure activities that gives participants a feeling of freedom that would 'otherwise make hobbies indistinguishable from work itself'.¹⁵ Because capitalism in America was, and continues to be, a hegemonic aspect of society, productive leisure time has remained the most acceptable form of pastime. Today, productive leisure time for American youth often comes in the form of competitive hobbies, such as Irish dance.

Although the expectation to maintain productive leisure time has been common in the United States since the pre-industrial age, it has

¹¹ Name has been changed to protect anonymity.

¹² Megan Davis (retired dancer) in discussion with the author, 27 July 2019.

¹³ Steven M. Gelber, *Hobbies: Leisure and the Culture of Work in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

¹⁴ Gelber, *Hobbies*, pp. 1-2.

¹⁵ Gelber, *Hobbies*, pp. 296.

only been in recent decades that Irish dance has garnered enough attention to be affected by this cultural ideal. Diana Dersch, a senior champion dancer and multi-time world medal holder from the mid-Atlantic Region, USA comments,

I don't think we were really a sport twenty years ago. I think it was probably starting in that direction, but I think we've become sporty [...] because of the focus on competition. And the nature of competition is that people are always going to be trying to better each other [...] We wouldn't be where we're at without the competition side.¹⁶

Many dancers, such as Dersch, recognize that the recent shift towards elite athleticism has brought increased participation and a higher standard of dancing to the sport overall. Because these changes are often viewed as predominantly positive, it is easily forgotten that the growing trend towards competitiveness comes at the expense of the participation of those who wish to pursue Irish dance for enjoyment alone. Megan Davis states that her decision to finally quit Irish dance was due to her inability to 'separate competition from just dancing and learning things for the fun of it'.¹⁷ She comments, 'I don't feel like there's anywhere for me to go [in Irish dance] because everything is so competition focused [...] I just didn't feel like there was really a place for me'.¹⁸ As Irish dance culture in America continues to heighten its competitive standards, non-competitive dancers, such as Davis, will continue to feel unwelcome to participate.

Competitive spirit and the university application process

Another way in which American Irish dancers have increased competitiveness within the sport is related to the prevalence of third level education in the United States. As of 2011, roughly 30% Americans were documented as having completed undergraduate degrees.¹⁹ In the same year, it was recorded that only around 16.1%

¹⁶ Diana Dersch (dancer) in discussion with the author, 28 July 2019.

¹⁷ Megan Davis (retired dancer) in discussion with the author, 27 July 2019.

¹⁸ Megan Davis, 27 July 2019.

¹⁹ United States Census Bureau, 'Bachelor's Degree Attainment Tops 30 Percent for the First Time', *Census Bureau Reports*, February 12, (2012),

of Ireland's population held any form of third level degree.²⁰ According to Colman Joyce, these statistics indicate that 'the likelihood is that many of the current or future third level students in Ireland Higher Education are likely to be first generation students'.²¹

Growing rates of third level education since the 1960s in the United States has resulted in 'a growing competitive frenzy over college admissions as a badge of parental fulfilment'.²² Because the majority of both current and incoming students to Irish universities will be the first generation to attend third level education, the effects of competitive parenting with the goal of future collegiate success has not yet manifested itself in Irish society to the extent seen in North America. Still, with the majority of competitive Irish dancers hailing from North America, they carry this competitive lifestyle with them into international Irish dance competitions. This in turn encourages Ireland-based Irish dancers to approach their training with the same ferocity.

While Irish university applicants are judged objectively based on their Leaving Certificate scores, American university applicants are obligated to prove their worth not only with standardized tests, but also with previous grade transcripts, personal essays, resumés, and letters of recommendation. American universities value a well-rounded application that demonstrates a student's commitment to extracurricular activities. The expectation for high schoolers to actively engage in a diverse set of hobbies remains a driving factor behind American involvement with Irish dance.

Courtney Jay, a certified TCRG instructor (*Teagascóir Choimisiúin le Rinci Gaelacha*) within CLRG, is the owner and operator of *Scoil Rince Luimni*, 'Irish Dance Academy', in the New England region, USA. Jay states that although she doesn't believe her students' sole purpose for Irish dancing is to appear favourable on a university application, she

<<https://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/education/cb12-33.html>> [accessed 23 July 2019].

²⁰ Joyce Colman, *Unheard Voices: First Generation Students and the Community College* (PhD diss., Maynooth University, 2015).

²¹ Joyce, *Unheard Voices*, p. 9.

²² Peter N Stearns, *Anxious Parents: A History of Modern Childrearing in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), p. 100.

believes that '[h]yping] it up in their college application', will increase their likelihood of university admissions.²³

Consumerism in costume trends

The American ideals of conformity and consumerism have also found their way into competitive Irish dance fashions. Dresses covered in Swarovski crystals, spray-tanned legs, and voluminous curled wigs have become the image Irish dancers aspire to create for themselves. Although the concept of carefully styling one's hair and wearing one's finest clothing are all rooted in Ireland's dance traditions,²⁴ the boom in excessive investment in Irish dance apparel and accessories is a post-*Riverdance* phenomenon²⁵ directly related to the importance of consumerism and conformity in the United States.²⁶

With the leap from modest costuming to the current trend of over-the-top dresses and wigs, comes a drastic leap in costuming prices. Champion dancers often go through a cycle of two new dresses per year, which can add up to \$2000 (USD) or more per costume alone.²⁷ One mother flaunts that between dance classes, shoes, accessories, travel, and medical expenses, their family invests a minimum of \$10,000 into the sport annually.²⁸

Although it appears that both parents and children who go to these great lengths 'have taken leave of their senses',²⁹ these sacrifices are all made with the faith that these trendy costumes will give dancers a competitive edge. This is not unlike Frantz's conjecture in his essay, *Consumerism, Conformity, and Uncritical Thinking in America*, that 'advertising convinces us [Americans] that consumption is the answer

²³ Jay Courtney in discussion with the author, 22 July 2019.

²⁴ John P. Cullinane, *Irish Dancing Costumes: Their Origins and Evolution Illustrated with 100 Years of Photographs, 1892–1992* (Cork: Dr. John P. Cullinane, 1995).

²⁵ Cullinane, *Irish Dancing Costumes*, p. 75.

²⁶ Gregory A. Frantz, *Consumerism, Conformity, and Uncritical Thinking in America* (Third Year Paper, Harvard University, 2000), pp. 2–8, <<http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:8846775>> [accessed 19 October 2020].

²⁷ 'The cost of culture', *Irish Echo*, February 17, 2011, <<https://www.irishecho.com/2011/02/the-cost-of-culture-2/>> [accessed 19 October 2020].

²⁸ Winslow, 'Teri Talk'.

²⁹ Irish Echo, 'The Cost of culture'.

to life's challenges'.³⁰ Although parents and dancers cannot control the adjudicators' marks at a competition they can control the look. Many dancers and parents have become convinced that competitors who dress the best will receive higher marks.³¹

Dersch states that she has seen the rate of dancers opting to invest in new costumes and accessories, rather than focusing on improving their dance technique, increase in recent years.

I definitely do think that there's – especially in middle-of-the-road dancers, like those people who have high goals but are relatively far from achieving them – I think it's a tendency to say, 'Oh, well, this is going to fix my problem'.³²

In a consumerist society, such as the United States, 'fantasy and fairy tales are extremely marketable'.³³ The more American Irish dancers perpetuate the belief that looks can determine the outcome of a result, 'quick fixes and easy answers'³⁴ found in the form of fake tans, dresses, and wigs will be perpetuated in Irish dance culture around the world.

Conformity in costume trends

According to Irish dance historian John Cullinane, Irish dance costumes have become increasingly more uniform in style since the 1970s.³⁵ While each competitive costume is 'unique to the individual [...] there is a worldwide homogeneity in the overall format of what [costume trends] are acceptable'.³⁶ Similarly, Cullinane also states that since the 1990s, costume trends have evolved and spread across the world more rapidly than in years previous.³⁷ It is no coincidence that this date correlates with that of the upsurge of American participation in Irish dance following the popularity of *Riverdance* in 1994. Aside from bringing new costume aesthetics to the forefront of

³⁰ Frantz, *Consumerism*, p. 2.

³¹ 'The Cost of culture', *Irish Echo*.

³² Diana Dersch (dancer) in discussion with the author, 28 July 2019.

³³ Frantz, *Consumerism*, p. 8.

³⁴ Frantz, *Consumerism*, p. 2.

³⁵ Cullinane, *Irish Dancing Costumes*, p. 75.

³⁶ Cullinane, *Irish Dancing Costumes*, p. 75.

³⁷ Cullinane, *Irish Dancing Costumes*, p. 75.

the competitive Irish dance scene, the American majority has also exchanged the ideal of conformity in the process.

Frantz states that Americans 'are not encouraged to create our own image, our own identity', and that 'our only task is to aspire towards the corporate image that has been created for us'.³⁸ Likewise, American Irish dancers have brought this principle to the global community of Irish dance through strict social expectations of what competitors should and should not wear at *feiseanna*.

In a 2011 interview for the *Irish Echo*, Lucille Murphy states that, 'It's important to have the right dress and hair done the right way. You really can't be in competitions without the look'.³⁹ Diana Dersch, who is well known in CLRG's competition circuit for refusing to wear wigs in favour of her natural pixie haircut, appears fearless in defying the unspoken rules of fashion for top-tier Irish dancers. Behind the scenes of her competitive success, Dersch grapples with the anxiety that comes with pushing the boundaries of fashion norms.

[I do] feel pressure to conform [...] There's a huge part of me that questions whether or not I should just conform to be more successful [...] Will wearing the wig make me place higher? [...] I know that there are adjudicators who don't appreciate the fact that I don't fit in or who don't give me the time of day because I don't have the look that they want.⁴⁰

Although Dersch comments that there are just as many adjudicators who appreciate her competitive image as those who do not, the underlying fear persists that it's her physical appearance, not her dancing, that's holding back her competitive success.

Outside of the realm of competitive Irish dance, wigs, dresses and tans have now become the advertising image of what being an Irish dancer means to the general public. Because of this, Courtney Jay states that when advertising her dance school, she is careful about what image she promotes about both her school and Irish dance as a whole.

³⁸ Frantz, *Consumerism*, p. 5.

³⁹ Carolyn Conroy, interviewed by staff reporter, 'Cost of Culture', *Irish Echo*, 17 February 2011.

⁴⁰ Diana Dersch (dancer) in discussion with the author, 28 July 2019.

As a business owner, I am very, very careful of what I put out on our social media or on our website [...] I want [outsiders] to see it for more than just costumes [...] Unless we've just come back from a big competition or it's unavoidable that the costumes will be part of the picture, I would much rather post a picture of the girls in their practice gear, hair up in a bun, with their arms around each other having fun than a picture of them in their solo dresses and wigs.⁴¹

Although Jay takes a balanced approach in highlighting that there is more to competitive Irish dance than elaborate costuming, she feels in the minority of dance schools who advertise the sport in this way.

There are other schools where they have the opposite attitude where it's like, 'Oh, if we put all of our dancers out there in their solo costumes people must think that they're really good which means the school looks really good, so that's the image that we're rolling with'.⁴²

Because the majority of Irish dance schools in the world are located within America, the way in which American dance academies represent allegedly 'Irish' traditions holds a great deal of power over how the rest of the world perceives both Irish dance, and the country of Ireland itself. Irish dance schools within the United States primarily advertise the sport with eye-catching photos of their champions in elaborate costuming, which has normalized images of what being a 'typical' Irish dancer means to those outside of the sport.

Irish dance and 'reverse migration'⁴³

The history of Irish dance in America is not unlike that of St. Patrick's Day. Although the observance of St. Patrick's Day first began in Ireland as a religious feast day, it inevitably was carried to North America during the Irish Diaspora.⁴⁴ The first celebrations of St. Patrick's Day

⁴¹ Courtney Jay (TCRG) in discussion with the author, 22 July 2019.

⁴² Courtney Jay (TCRG) in discussion with the author, 22 July 2019.

⁴³ Patrick Tally, interview in Becky Little, 'How America (not Ireland) made St. Patrick's Day as we know it', *National Geographic*, 16 March 2015, <<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/news/2015/03/150316-st-patricks-day-ireland-irish-holiday-nation/>> [accessed 25 March 2019].

⁴⁴ Little, 'How America made St. Patrick's Day'.

in America date back to as early as the seventeenth century as a way to remember their homeland.⁴⁵ Cities that were densely populated by Irish immigrants began hosting large-scale municipal celebrations of St. Patrick's Day from the eighteenth century onwards. By the twentieth century, the popularity of St. Patrick's Day celebrations had been absorbed into mainstream American society and was no longer celebrated by those of Irish heritage alone.

While St. Patrick's Day in America evolved into a day of drinking and merrymaking, the holiday remained the same way it had for centuries in Ireland – 'a religious holiday that involved much more sobriety than debauchery'.⁴⁶ It wasn't until grand celebrations of St. Patrick's Day had become popular in America, that Ireland began to emulate Irish-American celebrations of heritage as a 'kind of reverse migration'.⁴⁷ This same form of reverse migration can be seen in trends in competitive Irish dance from the early twentieth century on.

For over twenty years, North America has maintained the highest numbers of Irish dance teachers and learners.⁴⁸ What was once an activity to encourage camaraderie between Irish immigrants in America has turned into an extravagant and elite sport. American dancers are now willing to travel across both the country and the globe to participate in competitions and sink thousands of dollars into new costumes every year.⁴⁹ The consumerism and hyper-competitiveness exhibited by American Irish dancers have been emulated by dancers and teachers in Ireland. Although competitive Irish dance today is not inherently 'Irish' in the sense that the tradition has been untouched by outside influences, it has evolved into an expression of the inherently American ideals of competition, consumerism, and conformity. This may not be the same idea of 'tradition' that participants and onlookers of competitive Irish dance believe they are experiencing. Nevertheless, these practices have been

⁴⁵ Little, 'How America made St. Patrick's Day'.

⁴⁶ Elizabeth Kennedy, 'Are you celebrating St. Patrick's Day the American way or the Irish way?', *The Washington Times*, March 15, (2015), <<https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2015/mar/15/st-patricks-day-in-ireland-has-differences-from-am/>> [accessed 25 March 2019].

⁴⁷ Patrick Tally, interview in Little, 'How America made St. Patrick's Day'.

⁴⁸ Cullinane, *Aspects of the History of Irish Dancing*, pp. 20–21.

⁴⁹ Winslow, 'Teri Talk'.

so embedded in both Irish and American dancers that it has become part of competitive Irish dance traditions nonetheless.

About the author

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Anne Daye

Finding our Footing: A Discussion of the Evidence for a Social Dance Step Vernacular to These Islands

Abstract

The instruction to 'foot it' and the term 'footing' are found in social dances for England, Scotland and Ireland. What do they refer to? Are they simply a way of saying 'dance in place' or did they reference specific steps, which might also be used to travel through a figure? Were certain steps vernacular to these islands, in contrast to fashionable French steps, and, if so, did they originate in England, Scotland or Ireland? Evidence for footing from the mid-eighteenth century onwards from a variety of historical sources is analysed including that of Francis Peacock (1805) for the reel, and several sources for the country dance. The continuation of the 'back skip' as a form of footing in traditional dancing is discussed. The analysis is supported by evidence from German sources for English and Scottish steps. Through the exploration of footing steps, the question of national identity in dance is raised as is the employment of steps across different genres of dancing, whether social or not.

Introduction

The Stepping On conference was an opportunity to analyse for the first time the evidence for the practice of footing in England, Scotland and Ireland. The presentation brought valuable information from other delegates, which I have incorporated here. I apologised that at this juncture I had no information on the topic specific to Wales: the contribution by Huw Williams confirmed there is a paucity of historical sources for Wales. The investigation draws on historical records of the dances of these islands, which mainly record the social

dancing of good society and professional stage dancing. Records for step dancing per se are few before the late nineteenth century. Steps for solo or small groups in performance or simple enjoyment could be learnt without a book or a dancing master and were the virtuosic skill of the servant and working classes in jigs and hornpipes.

Although the country dance was well-established as the vernacular dance of England from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, the information we have on the steps with which the figures were danced indicates the employment of the fashionable steps of each period, generally of French origin. When we come across the command to 'foot it', we have an inkling that some other kind of stepping is indicated. Often, the context of the terms 'foot it' or 'footing' within dance instructions suggests that they are synonymous with setting, that is, dancing in place in front of another dancer. Is that the only meaning of footing or is there a specific step called footing?

Footing steps

The earliest description of a footing step is provided by a dancing master who identifies himself only by the initials A. D. in *Country-dancing made Plain and Easy* (1764). For him, there is only one easy plain step for dancing the figures, which is described as 'a step forwards, and a hop, or rather a little slip, of the same foot, by an easy spring along the floor'. He then states: 'In setting, or footing, there is no other difference but that of moving the foot behind close to the other, instead of stepping forwards with it, and hopping as before, being careful to move yourself as little backwards with it as possible'.¹ In the following account of dance figures, this footing step is consistently required for setting only. A. D. does not give a name to the travelling step, but we might call it a skip and the footing step a 'back skip'. John Essex in his translation of Feuillet on the steps in country dancing suggests a small selection of French steps but also that 'small jumps forward of either Foot in a hopping manner, or little hoppes [...]

¹ A. D. Dancing-Master, *Country-dancing made Plain and Easy to every Capacity* (London: T. Durham 1764), p. 14.

are more in fashion', in other words skips, called by Feuillet 'demys contretemps'.²

The only dancing master to describe more 'Setting or Footing Steps' is Francis Peacock in 1805, but for the reel not the country dance, in *Sketches Relative to the History and Theory, but more especially the Practice of Dancing*. His fifth sketch was headed 'Observations of the Scotch Reel, with a Description of the Fundamental Steps made use of in that Dance, and their appropriate Gaelic names'.³ The figure of eight of the reel is executed with a travelling step, which he calls the 'kemshóole' or forward promenade step. Peacock then describes nine setting steps, of which the first three are also called footing steps. The first is called by him 'minor kemkóssy', with the remark 'This is an easy familiar step, much used by the English in their Country dances'. The instruction is 'You have only to place the right foot behind the left, sink and hop upon it, then do the same with the left foot behind the right'. The action is identical to that of A.D. and could also be called a back skip, two back skips complete one bar of music. The second is 'single kemkóssy' which is a back skip followed by a step and close to the side in one bar of music. The third is 'double kemkóssy' which is a back skip followed by three side steps and close, taking two bars of music. The Gaelic names create the impression that these are Highland steps. Peacock emphasises that the hop 'must always be on the hindmost foot'.⁴

Instructions for footing c. 1700–1820

A survey of the use of the term 'footing' or 'foot it' in dances in manuscript and print may throw some further light on the step. I have initiated a survey but understand that this is unlikely be comprehensive for what is an extensive field of publication. The earliest example of the command to 'foot it' in dancing instructions is found in 'Mr Eaglesfield's New Hornpipe' published in the *Dancing*

² John Essex (trans.) *For the Further Improvement of Dancing* (London, J. Walsh & P. Randall 1710), p. 15; Raoul-Augur Feuillet, *Receuil de Contredances* (Paris: Feuillet 1706), Préface non-paginated.

³ Francis Peacock, *Sketches Relative to the History and Theory but most especially to the Practice of Dancing* (Aberdeen: J. Chalmers & Co., 1805), p. 85.

⁴ Peacock, *Sketches*, p.92, 93

Master (1696): ‘The 1. Man turn his partner half round and foot it’. According to Barlow the dance is reprinted in successive editions up to c. 1728. Henry Playford advertised this supplement as containing dance instructions ‘most of them are made by Mr. Beveredge and the rest by other Eminent Masters’, which confirms that footing steps were part of the repertoire of respectable dancing masters.⁵

The next records of footing are in publications by John Walsh, John Johnson and T. Davis between 1736 and 1748. Only Davis is dated and claims to publish dances ‘all new and never danc’d before they were printed’. Walsh and Johnson are undated and copy dances from each other and other publishers. Walsh’s *Caledonian Country Dances* comprises English dances and others specified as Scottish to Scottish melodies. The terms ‘setting’ and ‘footing’ are used frequently, with no discernible distinction. The ‘Lads of Duncce’ is significant in the instruction for footing as a travelling step: ‘Two couple slip down and up footing’.⁶ This dance is printed again by Johnson. His collection includes ‘Hare in the Corn’ with the instruction to ‘jigg it’, ‘Punchanello’s Hornpipe’ specifying the hornpipe step, as well as eleven dances in 9/8 metre, known later as the Irish jig or slip jig. Here are tantalising glimpses of English and Scottish vernacular steps, for which we have some information on performance: the 6/8 jig of both England and Scotland, the triple-time hornpipe originating in Northern England and Lowland Scotland, the slip jig associated with Ireland and Highland Scotland. They are published alongside minuet country dances such as ‘Geminiani’s Minuet’ of the fashionable French repertoire, indeed all the dance metres could be danced with the widely taught and well-documented French steps.⁷ T. Davies’ collection mixes dances referencing English places and people with dances referencing Scottish ones. ‘The Green Room’ and ‘The Lovisa’ provide two further examples of footing as a travelling step for leading

⁵ *The second Part of the Dancing Master* (London: Henry Playford 1696), p.209; Jeremy Barlow, *The Complete Country Dance Tunes from Playford’s Dancing Master (1651– ca.1728)* (London: Faber Music Ltd, 1985), p.7

⁶ John Walsh, *Caledonian Country Dances Being a Collection of all the Celebrated Scotch Country Dances now in Vogue* (London: J. Walsh [1736]) p.44.

⁷ *Caledonian Country Dances* (London: J. Johnson [1748]), pp. 15, 20, 73, 74.

up to the top of the set.⁸ Peacock's double kemkóssy step would suit these travelling figures.

A significant source linked to Perthshire, Scotland is *Register of Dances at Castle Menzies 1749*, a manuscript of eighteen country dances in which both setting and footing are required. However, there seems to be some difference between the two. For example, in no. 5 'Couteraller's Rant a Strathspey Reel', the figure includes '(setting en passant to each other) and then foots it into their own place', and no. 12 'The Mighty Pretty Valley or Reel of Tulloch' has the first man footing it 'half round ye the first woman', then the second and third women, while the first woman foots it around the men. In both these dances, the footing is a travelling step.⁹ Three dances in the collection reference figures to dances printed in England: 'Jamaica' published by Playford (1670), 'Lads of Duncce' (see above) and 'Ranting Highland Man' both published by Walsh (c. 1740). Alongside the Jacobite and Scottish emphasis in the dance titles (e.g. 'O'er the Water to Charly' and 'He'll Aye be Welcome Back again') here are indications of the flow of dances and stepping between England and Scotland.

The first Scot to publish country dances was Robert Bremner, but he chose to do so in London. There is frequent use of the term footing in *A Collection of Scots Reels or Country Dances of 1769*.¹⁰ It is not possible to claim footing as solely Scottish, however. Later Scottish publications do not use the term at all: Bowie of Perth (1789) gives French steps for the figures, such as *balancé* and *pas de rigaudon*, while Campbell's collection of 1795 with a strong Scottish flavour does not mention footing at all.¹¹ In contrast, English collections of the time frequently call for footing, such as Rutherford (c. 1756) and Preston (1793) or use both footing and French steps as in Skillern's

⁸ T. Davies, *Twenty Four Country Dances for the year 1748* (London: H. Waylett, 1748), p. 11, 23.

⁹ Register of Dances at Castle Menzies 1749, Ms. K534 A. K. Bell Library, Perth.

¹⁰ Robert Bremner, *A Collection of Scots Reels or Country Dances for the year 1769* (London: R. Bremner 1769).

¹¹ John Bowie, *A Collection of Strathspey Reels and Country Dances* (Edinburgh: N. Stewart & Co. [1789]);

William Campbell, *Campbell's 1st Book of new and favourite Country Dances & Strathspey Reels* (London: Wm Campbell [1795]).

'London Assembly': 'foot out the Time' and 'An Adventure in Margate' calling for 'ballance, pas Rigadoon'.¹²

Footing is stated to be a fundamental step for country dancing by Nicholas Dukes (1752). His publication *A Concise and Easy Method of Learning the Figuring Part of Country Dances* uses Feuillet dance notation to trace many of the figures. His only remark on steps notes that 'according to the present method of dancing they keep continually footing, as in casting of, crossing over, or any other part of Figuring, you may foot it forwards or backwards [sic] or sideways as the Case requires'.¹³ Is footing here a specific step, or just a general word for dancing? Significantly, J. Fishar uses footing as a marker of Englishness in a collection of cotillons published in London. Cotillons were considered French contre-dances, to be performed with French steps, but Fishar's cotillon number three, entitled 'L'Angloise', replaces the *balancé* and *rigaudon* of the changes with eight footing steps to fill the four bars of music, which indicates a step such as Peacock's back skip, and the figure itself finishes with footing. The only English element in this cotillon called 'L'Angloise' is the footing.¹⁴

We can see that footing was considered an English step in European eyes. The German master Lange in *Choreographische Vorstellung der Englischen und Frazosischen Figuren* offers a *pas anglois pour figurer quatre ou deux mesures* in Feuillet notation (Figure 1).¹⁵ The notation is for four repetitions of the step; reading from the top of the diagram, the first step is danced as follows: starting with L foot in front of R (third position), release L foot, sink a little on R leg in preparation for a spring onto L foot behind R; make four cuts by moving R foot in, out, in and out again across L instep. It is then repeated with right, left,

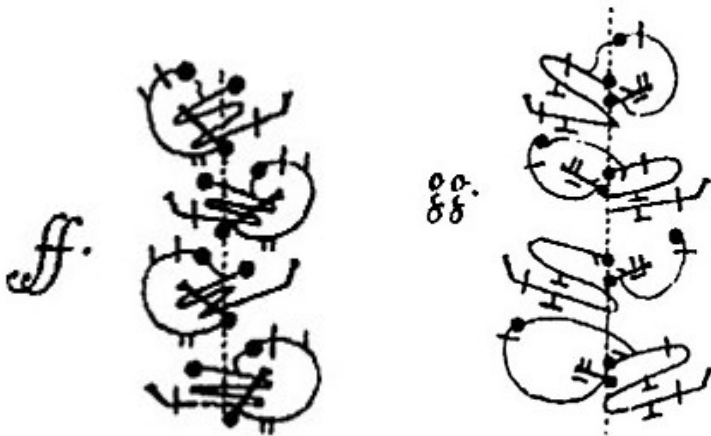
¹² David Rutherford, *Rutherford's Compleat Collection of 200 of the most celebrated country dances both old and new* (London: D. Rutherford [1756]); Preston, *24 Country Dances for the year 1793* (London: Preston 1793); Thomas Skillern, *Twenty Four Country Dances for the year 1780* (London: T. Skillern 1780) pp. 9, 11.

¹³ Nicholas Dukes, *A Concise and Easy Method of Learning the Figuring Part of Country Dances* (Nicholas Dukes, 1752).

¹⁴ James Fishar, *16 Cotillons, 16 Minuets, 12 Allemandes and 12 Hornpipes composed by j. Fishar* (London: John Johnstone [1775-1780]).

¹⁵ Carl Christoph Lange, *Choreographische Vorstellung der Englischen und Franzosischen Figuren in Contretanzen* (Erland und Leipzig: J. C. Müller 1762).

right feet. The step is a back spring rather than a back skip with a flourish on the free foot and may be the step called 'cut the buckle'. T. F. Petersen 1768 *Prachtische Einleitung in die Chorégraphie* published in Hamburg discusses English country dancing: 'The most commonly used steps in this kind of dance [...] are the gavotte and bourée steps and certain little jumps, especially those which you usually do facing each other, from one foot to the other, instead of the balancé, and known as Figuré, Footé, and so on'.¹⁶ I am grateful to Jorgen Schou-Pedersen for introducing these sources and the translation, alongside a manuscript of c. 1780 now in Krakow containing several English country dances, such as 'Cockney's Frolic' with instructions to 'foot it'. Lange also notates a *pas écossois pour figurer deux ou quatre mesures aux Contre-dances*, making plain that footing is not exclusively English (Figure 2). The notation of the first of the four repetitions can be described as follows, reading from the top: starting with R foot in front of L (third position), release R foot, spring and fall onto R foot, while taking it behind L and releasing L to the side; brush L foot in and out behind R ankle, in other words a shuffle.



Figures 1 & 2: Lange 'pas anglois' (L) and 'pas ecossois' (R)

¹⁶ Theodorus Franciscus Petersen, *Prachtische Einleitung in die Chorégraphie...und 12 Englischen Country-Tänzen* (Hamburg: Johann Lucas Conrad Konigs Wittwe, 1768).

There is virtually no evidence for solo step dancing before the nineteenth century, so the steps for the vernacular forms of jig and triple-time hornpipe are almost lost. A remnant of them is in a report on a manuscript now lost: *The Dancing Steps of a Hornpipe and Gigg. As also, Twelve of the Newest Country Dances, as they are performed at the Assemblys and Balls. All Sett by Mr. John M’Gill for the Use of his School, 1752*. The original had described sixteen steps for the hornpipe and fourteen for the jig; only the names are extant such as slips and shuffles forwards, heel and toe forwards, single and double round steps, but including ‘back hops’, which sound like Peacock’s footing steps. The lost manuscript had listed minuets, reels and country dances, the latter including the ‘Lads of Dunse’.¹⁷

A cluster of country dance publications came out in Dublin in the late eighteenth century, still drawing on the English genre and following the same system of publishing figures with little to no information on stepping. One example is *Cooke’s New Dances for 1797* with dances from the English and Scottish repertoire, including ‘Flowers of Edinburgh’ and ‘Lord Eglinton’s Reel’ both of which include ‘footing 4 times’ as a setting step in two bars, so indicating the back skip.¹⁸ An English publication conveyed something about the performance of Irish footing. Alexander Wills in *Ten New Fashionable Irish Dances* (c. 1800) was concerned that there were no suitable steps in the fashionable vocabulary for country dances to 9/8 tunes, which were common in the ballroom and generally known as Irish jigs. He states that he has learnt the steps from Mr Second, an admired Edinburgh dancing master, and now ‘offers them to the public with that deference which ought at all times to accompany professional men’. He advises ladies to use ‘the double Irish footing’ for casting off and going down the middle, ‘the running step’ for the corners, and ‘one double footing step and one back step’ with each foot for the setting. He then advises finished dancers to use single Irish footing, running footing and for setting one double Irish footing and three Irish shuffles. Furthermore, he says that one cut must be added to the double Irish footing and the running step. The words back step, single

¹⁷ W. J. ‘Dance and Dancing Tunes’, *Notes and Queries* no. 305 (1 September 1855).

¹⁸ Bartlett Cooke, *New Dances for 1797* (Dublin: Cooke, 1797).

and double footing suggest that his Irish basic steps are related to Peacock's of 1805, despite no detailed explanation of how to do the steps. There is little evidence of the performance of Irish steps before 1800, so it is not possible to ascertain whether footing had an Irish origin.¹⁹

The last historical source for consideration is Thomas Wilson, a London dancing master with a prolific publishing list, mainly dealing with the figures of the country dances with little on the performance of steps. His final work was *The Complete System of English Country Dancing* of 1820, in which he is clearer than before on some aspects of stepping. He quotes a ballroom dictionary that 'Foot and set are terms that signify the same' and specifies footing steps for several country dance figures. For the figure called 'set and change sides', he says 'the setting should be performed with two back, or one Scotch setting step, which require two bars, and the crossing over seven side Steps, two bars, together four bars'. Guided by Wilson's reference to bars, his back step is probably Peacock's single footing, and his Scotch step is presumably Peacock's double footing. In other figures, such as 'Set to man 2 and turn man 3', he gives the fashionable travelling sequence from the quadrilles of *chassée* and *jeté assemblé* for moving towards the man, with two back or one Scotch step for the setting. The records for country dancing reveal that dancers had combined French and vernacular footing steps for over a hundred years.²⁰

Footing in traditional stepping

We can also trace the continuation of footing steps into the late nineteenth century and traditional dancing of the twentieth century and current times. Anyone who practises Irish ceildh dancing will recognise that the fundamental sequence of 'seven and two threes' is Peacock's double footing followed by two single footings, although nowadays it is seen as quintessentially Irish, included for example as

¹⁹ Alexander Wills, *Ten New Fashionable Irish Dances...humbly inscribed to the Countess of Yarmouth and carefully selected by Alexander Wills, Dancing Master* (London, 1800).

²⁰ Thomas Wilson, *The Complete System of English Country Dancing* (London: Sherwood, Neeley & Jones 1820), pp.15 – 18.

step 4 in Pat Tracey's Lancashire Irish clog dance.²¹ The sink and grind step for setting in Irish ceildh dances is an embellished back skip, as is the rise and grind.²² The back step of the 'Highland Fling', as described in official books such as D. G. Maclellan's 1952 *Highland and Traditional Scottish Dances* is still the back spring, like Lange's *pas anglois* but without the flourish. This is also given in J. F. and T. M. Flett *Traditional Dancing in Scotland*. Lange's *pas ecossois* shows a shuffle behind the supporting foot, similar to Fletts' shuffles for the 'Highland Fling' in front of the supporting foot.²³

Testimony to the enduring life of the back skip footing step is found on film. Derek Schofield guided me to the first one here. *The Shetland Reel Story* of 2017 shows several communities on the island discussing and dancing the characteristic reel as a casual promenade step or a walk, interspersed with back steps (that is, back skips) for setting to partners. Archive footage of the same reeling and stepping is included. A back step followed by three stamps in the eighth bar is also shown.²⁴ Both forms of back step are described by the Fletts.²⁵ The second film has recently been made public by the London branch of the Royal Scottish Country Dance Society: *Scottish Country Dancing in the Borders in the early 1930s* with an accompanying essay by Joan Flett. The film was made by Ion C. B. Jamieson of Langshaw near Galashiels. The interest of the film is in the more natural style of dancing before the balletic precision of the RSCDS teaching had become widespread. Nevertheless, movements such as the allemande hold already show the influence of the revival teachers on the dancers, although some steps shown are no longer taught. The second dance is 'Jenny's Bawbee in Quick Time' in which the dancers set with the back

²¹ *Notation. Pat Tracey's Lancashire Irish: a beginner's level dance* (<www.camdenclorg.org.uk>, 2010).

²² *Ár Rincí Foirne: Thirty Popular Figure Dances* (Dublin: An Coimisiún le Rincí Gaelacha, 1939).

²³ D. G. Maclellan, *Highland and Traditional Scottish Dances* (Edinburgh: T. & A. Constable, 1952); J. F. & T. M. Flett, *Traditional Dancing in Scotland* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964), p. 110.

²⁴ Maurice Henderson, *The Shetland Reel Story* (2017), <<https://vimeo.com/232629151>>.

²⁵ Flett, *Traditional Dancing in Scotland*, pp. 210 - 212

skip.²⁶ ‘Hop-back-steps’ are listed as part of the Hebridean solo dances originating in the 1920s to 1950s, according to Mats Melin. He observes that, although most steps were learned by copying and rarely named, this step had a Gaelic name on Barra *ceum cúl dúbailte*, which Melin likens to the *retiré* skips of current Highland dance vocabulary.²⁷

National claims for the origins of footing

Peacock has provided us with the fullest information on footing steps for c. 1800. Do the Gaelic names inform us that footing originated in the Highlands of Scotland? Francis Peacock was an English dancing master who had studied under George Desnoyer, a leading stage dancer and teacher to the Royal Family. By the age of 24 he had been appointed as the ‘sole dancing master within the burgh’ of Aberdeen being considered a young man of ‘a sober, discreet and moral character’. He was at the heart of Aberdeen’s musical and social life, and, like many dancing masters of his calibre, led a respectable and financially-secure life. He published a collection of *Fifty Favourite Scotch Airs* arranged for the violin in the style of the admired Italian Francesco Geminiani, all titles being in Scots or English, none in Gaelic.²⁸ Aberdeen was not within the Highland line, nor was it a Gaelic speaking area, the local dialect being Doric Scots. Gaelic speakers would have been found in the colleges of Aberdeen University, the third oldest in Scotland, and the resort of the sons of educated and wealthy Highlanders. Peacock claims to have studied the reel and its steps from the dancing of these students. In the first paragraphs of his chapter on the ‘Scotch Reel’, Peacock emphasises the excellence of the Highlander in dancing the reel, whether child or

²⁶ *Scottish Country Dancing in the Borders in the early 1930s*

<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mZfFMRfmpIM>> [accessed 8 June 2020];

Joan Flett, *Scottish Dancing in the early 1930s*

<https://mcusercontent.com/e99600795be903898a16df4ed/files/2e475c30-b9bf-426c-9840-6b51962bd1d3/Border_Dances.pdf> [accessed 8 June 2020].

²⁷ Mats Melin, *Hebridean Step Dancing: the legacy of nineteenth-century dancing master Ewen MacLachan* (<<https://lorg-press.com>>, 2019).

²⁸ Mary Anne Alburger, ‘Peacock, Francis (1723/4–1807), dancing-master and musician’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 23 September 2004,

<<https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-54595>> [accessed 8 June 2020].

low-born, and concludes: ‘those qualities must either be inherent in Highlanders, or that they must have an uncommon aptitude for imitation’.²⁹ Peacock was living at the time of a revival of interest in Highland culture, strongly influenced by Romanticism. The notion of the untaught but noble savage has coloured his narrative, overlooking the possibility of individual mobility and cultural exchange between Highland and Lowland Scotland, Ireland and England.

The earliest dictionaries of Gaelic had recently been published, and efforts to put new life into Highland culture were being fostered by the Highland Society of London. Peacock was a man of his time in seeking to promote his reel steps as authentically Highland. He explains that he has endeavoured to ascertain the Gaelic names of the steps, with help from ‘a literary friend (well-versed in the Gaelic language)’, and the resulting dance names make their first appearance in his book of 1805.³⁰ The earliest dictionaries of Gaelic were limited lexicographically, the first full and well-organised one being that of Robert Armstrong 1825.³¹ Investigations with these dictionaries suggest that his literary friend composed the dance names from separate elements of Gaelic vocabulary. Peacock states that ‘kemkóssy’ is composed of *ceum* and *coiseachadh*, meaning ‘to foot or ply the feet’. The approximation in Armstrong is found in separate entries for *ceum* translating as ‘a step’ and *coiseachadh* ‘the act of walking’.³² At the least, the compound word had not reached Armstrong’s Gaelic vocabulary, but more likely, Peacock’s literary friend had obliged him with devised Gaelic words. Of the remaining reel steps, the ‘cross passes’ and ‘turning step’ are versions of the highland fling step and probably characteristic of the vernacular dancing of Scotland. The other reel steps are also found in French and English theatrical and social dancing. During the eighteenth-century step names in English were soon obliterated by French vocabulary,

²⁹ Peacock *Sketches*, p. 86.

³⁰ Peacock, *Sketches* pp. 88–89.

³¹ Iseabel Macleod, *William Shaw: Controversial Gaelic Lexicographer* <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/pfrlsu/documents/PFRLSU/Macleod_William_Shaw.pdf> [accessed 8 June 2020].

³² Robert Archibald Armstrong, *A Gaelic Dictionary, in two parts* (London: James Duncan 1825),

but Peacock preserves some of them, as does John Weaver. Peacock and Weaver's 'cross springs' are *sissonnes*, their 'cross caper' is *entrechat*: Peacock's 'open step' is Weaver's 'falling step upon both feet', later called *échappé*; his 'chasing step or cross spring' is also *ballotté*. Weaver preserves 'bound' for *jeté* and 'drive' for *chassée*.³³ All of these are common or generic steps, not exclusive to one nation. We can also note that there is no sign (either in dance notation or words) of a back skip or similar footing steps in publications concerning the French repertoire. As can be seen from the evidence from English practice before 1805, footing steps were not exclusive to Highland Scotland. With London masters currently prepared to travel to Edinburgh to learn the reel, Peacock's publication offered practical information coloured with Highland glamour.³⁴ The proceeds from the book were donated to charitable causes and the book remained of interest into the 1880s.³⁵

Memoirs can record how dances and steps cross national boundaries and spread into remote areas. James Boswell of Edinburgh easily joined in the reels and dances of his Highland hosts in 1773. At Armadale on Skye on Saturday, 2nd October, Boswell enjoyed a snowball form of dance, started by two couples setting who then each brought in another couple until the whole company were dancing. His hosts called the dance 'America', explaining that it showed how emigration caught on. Such a dance genre was uncommon in English and Scottish ballrooms but was likely to have been *la perigordine* from France, danced to a reel tune.³⁶ The Grants of Rothiemurchus are an example of families who lived as much in England as in Scotland. Elizabeth Grant was in trouble in London for dancing the springing form of the strathspey promenade (as also described by Peacock) taught by Mr. Grant instead of the regular even version used in England. At the annual Harvest Home ball in Rothiemurchus, her

³³ Peacock, *Sketches* pp. 93 – 97;

John Weaver, *Orchesography or The Art of Dancing...an exact and just translation from the French of Monsieur Feuillet* (London: H. Meere, 1706).

³⁴ Peacock, *Sketches* pp. 87 – 88,

³⁵ Alburger, 'Peacock, Francis'.

³⁶ James Boswell, *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides with Samuel Johnson L.L.D. 1773* (London: Heinemann, 1963).

mother danced ‘in highland matron fashion’ whereas her father ‘shuffled away in double quick time steps of his own composition [...] as English it was as if he had never left Hertfordshire’.³⁷ The complexity of dance and step transmission around Britain and Ireland shows that national boundaries could be permeable but also anxiously guarded. Mats Melin offers a useful insight into the transmission of steps and dances across these islands and across social, theatrical and step dancing in his overview of Highland dancing, particularly the reel.³⁸

Conclusion

There is no firm evidence that footing steps originated in any one part of Britain and Ireland, but that since around 1700 they were known across England, Scotland and Ireland. I propose that the term to ‘foot it’ was used as a general term for dancing, and frequently indicated setting or dancing in place with any steps of the dancer’s repertoire. Additionally, and more importantly, I propose that ‘footing’ refers to specific steps, being a group of steps based on the fundamental back skip or back spring, that could be extended and elaborated with nimble embellishments. They could be interspersed with fashionable French steps in completing country dance figures or reels, as well as adapted for travelling in figures. Practical exploration of footing steps in country dances and reels proves the charm and utility of the basic ones and their variants. Practice also identifies situations when footing could occur, even when not stated in the laconic instructions of country dance publications. In an eight-bar strain, a hay or reel for three can be completed in six bars, leaving two bars for footing steps in place. If the tune is a hornpipe in duple time, then the characteristic rhythmic emphasis of the seventh and eighth bars invites a footing finish. I suggest that these footing steps belonged both to social dancing as well as step dancing and may indeed have originated in the dancing of hornpipes, jigs and slip jigs. They were not, however, confined to the lower orders, but were employed by all levels of

³⁷ Andrew Tod, ed., *Memoirs of a Highland Lady: Elizabeth Grant of Rothiemurchus* (Edinburgh: Canongate Classics, 1988), pp. 140, 261.

³⁸ Mats Melin, *A Story to Every Dance: the role of lore in enhancing the Scottish solo dance tradition* (<<https://lorg-press.com>>, 2018), pp. 87-90.

society. I propose that in finding our footing, we can rediscover the vernacular steps of these islands.

About the author

Anne Daye is a researcher and teacher in historical dance, with a special focus on dancing in the British Isles. Anne's doctoral thesis of 2008 presented new thinking on the Jacobean court dance theatre extending understanding beyond the texts. Post-doctoral research and publication includes further investigation of dancing at the Elizabethan and Stuart courts and in the public theatres.

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Alexandra Fisher

In Search of Street Clog Dance: New Thoughts on Step Dance Analysis Based on Two Lancashire Clog Dancers

Abstract

This paper highlights aspects of the author's ethnographic research in Chorley, Lancashire from 2003 and puts forward a new basis for the analysis of clog and step dance material. The paper calls into question the revivalist view that stepping styles can be distinguished by regional identity – a useful promotional tool but perhaps a barrier to much meaningful research.

In identifying two basic genres of step dance, the 'stage' style and the 'street' style, the paper notes similar findings in the writings of previous researchers and focuses on material collected from two clog dancers, one who was taught 'The Lancashire Clog Dance' in the 1930s (stage style) and the other, who had picked up stepping from men dancing in the street in the 1940s (street style). The paper establishes the analytical framework by examining each stepping style and social context and relating their characteristics to existing step dance material. The stage style is found to be the most familiar clog dance style but the street style proves more difficult. The author's consequent 'stepping journey' considers styles from many parts of Britain and Ireland and, in embodying the true nature of street stepping, uncovers some unexpected results.

Since the beginning of the clog and step dance revival in the 1950s, much material has been collected from primary source dancers from all over Britain. As step dance is essentially a solo dance form which promotes individual flair and expression, it is not surprising that this material demonstrates considerable variation in style and technique.

Over the years, dancers and researchers have sought to find ways to distinguish one style from another and this has often led to a belief in the existence of 'regional' styles. This notion maintains that if steps are collected from a dancer in a particular region, then those steps are somehow peculiar to that region irrespective of their actual social history and development. Such labels can be useful promotional tools but I have always considered that perhaps they mask any real understanding of the broader picture of step dance.

In illustrating another method of analysis, this paper puts forward the view that there seem to be two basic genres of step dancing: the 'stage' style and the 'street' style. The starting point for this idea was some fieldwork evidence that emerged whilst I was carrying out ethnographic research in Chorley, Lancashire between 2003 and 2008. I had been collecting memories of different aspects of clog culture and I came across two clog dancers – Vera Nightingale, who had been taught 'The Lancashire Clog Dance' in the 1930s, and Ken Brindle, who had picked up stepping from watching men coming out of the pubs in the 1940s. Although both from Chorley, these two styles appeared to illustrate fundamental differences in context and technique and, for me, started to represent a new way of viewing clog dance material: the formal routine danced 'off the toe' (stage style) and improvised dancing involving 'heel and toe' (street style).

This distinction is not a new concept, as I discovered whilst looking back on previous papers written in the early days of the clog dance revival. In Tom and Joan Flett's research from the 1960s in the old Cumbrian counties of Cumberland, North Lancashire, and Westmorland, they refer to 'stage dancing' as well as to 'more informal extempore dancing which developed wherever clogs were worn'. The Fletts also note that clog dancers themselves seemed to acknowledge the difference between 'toe dancers' and 'ordinary clog-dancing on the ground'.¹

Julian Pilling had collected steps and memories from dancers in Lancashire in the 1950s and 60s. He states that several informants made a distinction between dancing with 'shuffles' and dancing with

¹ J.F. and T.M. Flett, *Traditional Step-Dancing in Lakeland* (London: EFDSS 1979), pp. 19–20.

'heel and toe steps which had no shuffles', but that it was normal to perform steps involving both. He observes that: 'many old people, and some not so old, can do clog steps who would never call themselves "clog dancers"' as 'it is something that everyone knows a little about'.²

The clog dancer, Pat Tracey (1927–2008), inherited many clog steps and memories from her grandfather in East Lancashire and again, in her writings she describes two basic styles of stepping: 'high dancing', which is 'basic stepping on the toes with heels only used for special effects' and 'ground dancing' which is the 'old Heel and Toe'.³

Returning to my research in Chorley, the following piece of film features some of my informants sharing their memories of clogs and clog dancing, and we hear Vera Nightingale describing her first clog dance lesson. We will also see some brief footage of Ken Brindle dancing.⁴

Focusing on Vera Nightingale, I first met her in 2003 when, despite arthritis, she was able to show me five of the clog steps she learnt. Born in Chorley in 1924, she had been taught by a local man called Mr Bearon. Nightingale's father was a miner and in about 1931, her mother had arranged these weekly lessons. She wore proper dancing clogs, performed on a slate slab and was told that she was learning 'The Lancashire Clog Dance'. Nightingale also remembers that her teacher would often mention the dancing of Dan Leno. There were seven steps in the routine, each danced off both feet and all off the toe with no heel beats. There was no music, but I identified the rhythm as a dotted hornpipe. The steps started with the usual 'step, shuffle, step, step, hop' (known to many clog dancers as 'First Lancs') and built up in complexity to finish with 'hopping double shuffles'.⁵ When Nightingale had mastered the steps, she used to perform them on a

² Julian Pilling, 'The Lancashire Clog Dance', *Folk Music Journal*, Vol.1 No.3 (1967), pp.158–197.

³ Patricia Tracey, 'The Lancashire Hornpipe' in *The Hornpipe: Proceedings of the National Early Music Association Conference 1993*, ed. by Janet Adshead-Lansdale (Cambridge: National Early Music Association, 1993) pp. 15–22 (p.17).

⁴ Alex Fisher, *Chorley Sparks – A Social History of Clog Culture*, DVD (Ecclestone Heritage Clog, 2008), Section 3, [available in Vaughan Williams Memorial Library, London].

⁵ See Step 1: Sam Steele, 'Seven Lancashire Steps', *Folk Music Journal*, Vol.2 No.2 (1971), pp.115–121.

barrel top in 'go as you please' talent shows and at local cinemas. At the time, although clogs were still normal footwear in Chorley, she was not aware of anyone else dancing in clogs.

These steps are classic examples of the stage style. I was immediately able to identify with them as I realised that, in reflecting on my own thirty-five years of clog dancing, most of the steps I have learnt would fall into this category, being formally structured and danced off the toe using shuffles as well as heel beats. The stage style can be traced back to the eighteenth-century dancing masters and this is believed to be the main influence on the development of much of the clog dance material that exists today.⁶ This repertoire can be sub-divided into musical categories: waltz, schottische, jig, reel, ragtime, and both dotted hornpipes and un-dotted hornpipes. Dotted hornpipe steps constitute the largest category, and these were the steps used in most clog dance competitions. They appear to have very similar characteristics in that they have a formal structure, are danced off the toe, and are repeated off both feet using a narrow base or even a pedestal. Dancers would wear 'dancing clogs' (with no irons or rubbers), and the dotted hornpipe rhythm would enable them to utilise the maximum number of beats using all parts of the clog.⁷

The seven 'Lancashire' steps taught to Vera Nightingale could be described as 'competition' clog dance steps. Evidence suggests that sets of seven Lancashire steps have been collected from several dancers since the 1950s and a quick comparison of these steps shows that they are all slightly different combinations of simple off the toe steps with hardly any heel beats.⁸ Why do they exist? A speculative guess would be that perhaps they represent an introduction to competition clog dancing. However, at world championship level, dancers were given marks for 'originality' so would want to produce the maximum number of beats in all ways possible, making the use of heel beats essential.

⁶ Flett and Flett, *Traditional Step-Dancing in Lakeland*.

⁷ For example, see Sammy Bell's hornpipe steps on <<https://insteptrt.co.uk/>> [accessed 11 September 2020].

⁸ Steele, 'Seven Lancashire Steps'; Julian Pilling, 'The Lancashire Clog Dance', pp. 167-171.

So why did these introductory steps emphasise off the toe dancing and exclude the addition of heel beats? This question has puzzled researchers for many years and is still unresolved.⁹ A possible explanation may emerge if we look at the other dance style in my classification – the street style, as illustrated by Ken Brindle.

Brindle was born in 1938 and grew up in Chorley. During the 1940s, he remembers seeing men outside the pubs in Chorley ‘having a pint or two and acting the goat’, and this would involve tapping out rhythms with their clogs and maybe someone playing the bones.¹⁰ It was considered ‘just a bit of fun’ and no-one thought it anything special. At the time, Brindle remembers that clogs were standard footwear for most people so, as children, he and other family members would amuse themselves at home on the flags outside, tapping their clogs to ‘make it sound nice’ and maybe produce a few sparks.¹¹

When he was first interviewed in 2007, it was part of the Chorley Sparks community project. Brindle had been invited into a primary school in Chorley to talk to a group of pupils who were learning how to clog dance. He showed the children several pairs of clogs and demonstrated, on a last, how they could be repaired. He put on a pair of ordinary working clogs, stood up and suddenly started to dance. During a subsequent interview, Brindle described this as ‘heel and toe’ and said that this was the basic action he had picked up from watching the men on the streets. Apparently, this continued up until 1945 and, as my research in the Chorley area continued, I came across other individuals who remember relatives performing heel and toe stepping in the 1950s in pubs and at family gatherings.

These memories indicate that heel and toe stepping was probably a common activity in Chorley, and the dancing of Ken Brindle could perhaps illustrate what it looked like. In my analysis, this brief

⁹ Peter Clifton and Ann-Marie Hulme, ‘Solo Step Dancing within Living Memory in North Norfolk’ in *Traditional Dance, Proceedings of the First Traditional Dance Conference*, Vol. 1, ed. Theresa Buckland (Crewe & Alsager College of Higher Education, 1981) pp.1–25 (p. 2).

¹⁰ ‘Bones’ or ‘rick-racks’ – a vernacular percussive instrument (originally made from animal rib-bones) played in a similar manner to the ‘spoons’.

¹¹ Fisher, *Chorley Sparks*, Section 4.

moment of stepping and its surrounding context could be said to demonstrate the street style very clearly; it is heel and toe dancing that is improvisational and spontaneous, and it could be danced on a pavement in ordinary working clogs. For Brindle, however, it had clearly not been forgotten despite its obvious status as a childhood memory.

At the time of this encounter, I had not come across this particular heel and toe move in any existing clog dance material. Indeed, there are many heel beats woven into the repertoires of most primary source dancers and we understand that at least two of these dancers have heel and toe material that is, or at least was, originally improvisational.¹² Having said this, I could not relate any of this material to Brindle's heel and toe action.

This situation continued until, in 2010, I had my first experience of Welsh clog dancing in a workshop led by Huw Williams. One of the first moves he taught was the 'pit-a-pat-a' and this seemed to be an exact match of Brindle's heel and toe motif. With the developing awareness of my street/stage analysis, it occurred to me that the characteristics of Welsh clog dance appeared to tick all the boxes of a street clog dance style, being essentially a freestyle heel and toe technique which could be danced in ordinary working clogs.

So, could the stepping that Ken Brindle witnessed in the 1940s be an example of Welsh clogging occurring on the streets of Chorley? This is certainly a possibility, for there is plenty of evidence to suggest that from the 1870s, pitmen from North Wales came over to South Lancashire to work in the Wigan coalfield and, as a town only ten miles from Wigan, Chorley was inhabited by many miners and other industrial workers well into the 1960s.¹³

While this issue clearly warrants further research, in my investigation, the discovery of Welsh clog dance seemed to represent a missing link which prompted a re-examination of previous step

¹² Madeleine Hollis, 'Bill Gibbons, Canal Step Dancer', *INSTEP*, No.1, ed. Chris Metherell (1981) pp.7-8; see also Pat Tracey 'heel-and-toe' routines, <<https://insteptrt.co.uk/pat-tracey-heel-and-toe-1987>> [accessed: 11 September 2020].

¹³ Correspondence with Ian Winstanley (The Coal Mining History Resource Centre).

dance experiences. When I first witnessed the dancing of Ken Brindle, I have to confess that I *had* met this move before, but not in clogs. In 2005 I had stumbled upon a step dance festival in Eastbridge, Suffolk – my first experience of stepping in East Anglia. There was a competition and the winner was a young woman whose stepping style inspired me to practise hard shoe stepping at home. I began to appreciate that this ‘flat-footed’ freestyle stepping felt considerably different from the off the toe clog dancing that I habitually danced; the basic heel and toe action providing a steady percussive rhythm and lift, around which the dancer could improvise.

About this time I was attending a regular Irish set dance class and we all went along to a *sean nós* stepping workshop led by Kathleen and Michael McGlynn. It was a structured routine, but I was surprised to find that the first bit of stepping they taught was the same heel and toe action I had been practising in hard shoes. I also began to realise that this percussive motif seemed to represent the basic element for the stepping that occurs in many Irish sets.

As I have illustrated, on seeing Ken Brindle’s heel and toe action in 2007, I had already become aware of the existence of freestyle hard shoe stepping, but somehow I had assumed that there was no equivalent in the English clog dance repertoire, or at least none had yet been found. On hearing that Brindle had, quite literally, picked up these steps from the streets of Chorley, I recognised that this could well be an example of street clog dance and it was, without doubt, the complete opposite of Vera Nightingale’s stage style clog steps.

In 2013, I encountered the heel and toe action again at a step dance workshop run by Jo and Simon Harmer of the Instep Research Team.¹⁴ The Harmers had studied the dancing of Val Shipley, a freestyle step dancer from West Sussex. The workshop began with some suggestions of basic stepping ideas and these included the now familiar heel and toe action. We were then encouraged to develop our own stepping style by improvising around these ideas and allowing the music to guide us. At this moment, street stepping suddenly became a reality to me rather than just an idea – the flowing heel and

¹⁴ See <<https://instept.co.uk/>> [accessed 13 October 2020].

toe action, dancing close to the ground, and really interacting with the music. This was the embodiment of street step dance.

Returning to consider my street/stage analysis, these two styles have been acknowledged and practised amongst clog wearing communities for generations. Although dancers would habitually mix the two styles, it seems that, to the serious clog dancer, the stage style had a higher status than the street style and I refer back to the existence of the 'seven Lancashire steps' and why they rarely included heel beats. If we consider that the dancing of most ordinary folk was the orally transmitted heel and toe technique, this perhaps indicates that the art of stage stepping in clogs, was treated as a distinct skill to be acquired. Consequently, anyone wishing to learn this style, particularly for the purposes of competition, would have to get used to the different feel of dancing off the toe; hence the 'no heels' training strategy. From personal experience, the two styles certainly feel quite different to perform.

This investigation into street step dance (with or without clogs) has been very revealing. Ethnographic research past and present, including remarks by Cecil Sharp in 1911, has confirmed how widespread it was throughout Britain and Ireland.¹⁵ Ken Brindle's reminiscence of men clog dancing on the streets of Chorley in the 1940s demonstrates a strong link with clogs, so it would seem logical to expect that street clog dance would have occurred in other clog wearing communities. We have already established that it was common in Lancashire and, as this paper demonstrates, it has been identified as the dominant style in Wales and is still evolving there as a strong and vibrant tradition. The clog dancer, Bill Gibbons, born in 1898 in West Lancashire, was interviewed in 1979, and made the following observation about his heel and toe dancing: 'I think I do more of a Cumberland type dance; it's a heel and toe dance with no shuffle step'.¹⁶

¹⁵ Georgina Boyes, *The Imagined Village: Culture, Ideology and the English Folk Revival* (Manchester University Press, 1993), p.101.

¹⁶ Dave and Toni Arthur, 'Bill Gibbons: Barge Dancer', *English Dance and Song*, Vol.42 No.1 (1980) pp.10-12 (p. 10).

Clog wearing was common in many industrial regions, for example in Yorkshire, Durham, Northumberland, Derbyshire, and southern Scotland, but although it would seem likely that street clog dance occurred in these areas, not much evidence exists.¹⁷ However, perhaps as researchers, we have not fully recognised its existence (as I hadn't), so consequently have not asked the right questions in order to access it? Like most freestyle stepping, street clog dance, by its very nature, only really exists 'in the moment' for it is often hidden deep in its social context, making it problematic to find, let alone record. It seems unlikely that street clog dance only happened in Lancashire, Wales and Cumberland, for census returns demonstrate that, during the nineteenth and early twentieth century, it was normal for the working man to move around a great deal to keep himself in work. In addition to other physical challenges, it seems that step dance was a shared pastime and was integral to many a social gathering, particularly where clogs were worn.¹⁸ As a consequence, step dance styles would have travelled across borders and county boundaries, fuelling a melting pot of ideas and influences.

In this paper, we have had the opportunity to reflect on what could be referred to as the 'raw material' of clog dance and the resulting debate has caused us to examine and scrutinise our understanding of step dance in its broadest sense. Through the dancing of Vera Nightingale and Ken Brindle we are presented with two extremes on a spectrum that, although both from Chorley, make us focus on the connection between style and context rather than style and region. This has created a framework from which we can begin to view all step dance material, and it also adds substance to the findings of those earlier researchers who, having the benefit of a richer ethnographic field, were arriving at similar conclusions.

The chance discovery of Brindle's stepping style has not only highlighted key factors in this stage/street analysis, but has taken me on a journey to appreciate the true nature of street step dance and, in establishing a link with Welsh clog dance, has identified the existence

¹⁷ See J.F. and T.M. Flett, *Traditional Step-Dancing in Scotland*, (Edinburgh: Scottish Cultural Press, 1996) p.42.

¹⁸ Pilling, 'The Lancashire Clog Dance', p.161.

of street clog dance as a distinctive aspect of this genre. There is more research to be done for, unlike stage step dance, the vernacular nature of street stepping means that as yet, we can only speculate on the influences that may have shaped it. In a more romantic mode, however, it could be said that these two clog dancers from Chorley have, inadvertently, illustrated the whole story of step dance, in a nutshell.

About the author

Alex Fisher works as a community clog dancer and researcher based in the north west of England. She is a member of the Instep Research Team and has an MA in Dance Studies (Univ. Surrey) – her dissertation: ‘Clog Dance. Revival, Performance, & Authenticity – An Ethnographic Study’ (2000) focuses on clog dancer Jackie Toaduff. She has given papers at the North Atlantic Fiddle Convention (Aberdeen 2006) and at the conference Stepping On (EFDSS 2019). Publications include the chapter ‘Fancy Footwork. Reviewing the English clog and step dance revival’ in *The Routledge Companion to English Folk Performance* (2021), and articles in *English Dance & Song* (Spring 2010, Winter 2018, Winter 2019, Summer 2021).

Sean Goddard

The Recording Output of the English Folk Dance and Song Society in Two Case Studies: 'Kendal Ghyll' and 'La Russe'

Abstract

Music tempo is one of the main factors which contributes towards the enjoyment of dance. If it is played too fast or too slow, the specific steps cannot be performed correctly. The introduction of the mechanical metronome in the early nineteenth century allowed composers and musicians to play music at a pre-determined tempo. Nineteenth-century dance book authors, such as Thomas Wilson and Michau identified a range of tempos. Cecil Sharp, when transcribing historical dances at the beginning of twentieth century specifically identified that there was no set authority for a particular tempo for country dance music or performance and many factors influenced the final tempo.

In this paper the range of recorded tempos is investigated using two country dances 'Kendal Ghyll' and 'La Russe'. These were first published in the 1930s and 1940s by the EFDSS and were mainly recorded by EFDSS associated musicians and bands.

Any performance of country dancing relies upon appropriate music. When the folk dance revival started at the beginning of the twentieth century led by Cecil Sharp (1859–1924) and others, the piano was the instrument of choice. However, the record industry soon caught up and began to issue recordings of country dances, initially for use in classes beginning during World War One. This paper will consider the recordings issued mainly by the English Folk Dance and Song Society (EFDSS) with a special emphasis on the tempo, and why some dances were recorded and others not. It will then consider two country

dances 'Kendal Ghyll'¹ and 'La Russe Quadrille'² to illustrate how tempos have change since 1915.

With the development and availability of the metronome in 1816, it became possible for music publishers, choreographers, composers and musicians to specify a particular speed or tempo for a piece of music. For dancing masters and teachers, a suggested recommended speed for a dance performance, as defined by the choreographer or composer of the dance, could be put into practice. Although not widely used in performance, the metronome enabled musicians to practise tunes at the required speed.

In 1820, dancing master and publisher Thomas Wilson suggested that the tempo for country dances in 6/8 meter should be played at 104 beats per minute (bpm)³ while tunes in 2/4 meter should be played at 120 bpm.⁴ Evidence from quadrille composers and teachers such as Michau in 1818,⁵ White from the period 1817–1821,⁶ and research by twentieth-century researcher Ellis Rogers, suggested the range should be between 88 and 120 bpm.⁷ However, E. Kopp writing in *The American Prompter and Guide to Etiquette* in 1896 suggested a higher range between 116 and 136 bpm⁸ and Cecil Sharp in 1909 between 88 and 120 bpm.⁹ Figure 1 illustrates this in table form. Wilson goes on to indicate that if tunes are played faster than the nominated

¹ Leta Douglas, *Six Dances of the Yorkshire Dales* (Giggleswick: Douglas, 1931), dance 2.

² Douglas Kennedy, ed., *Community Dance Manual: Volume 2* (London: English Folk Dance and Song Society, 1949), pp. 14–15.

³ Those readers who are used to working in bars, in 6/8 and 2/4 meter, the beats per minute number should be halved, therefore 104 beats per minute equals 52 bars per minute.

⁴ Thomas Wilson, *The Complete System of English Country Dancing* (London: Sherwood, Neely and Jones, 1820), p. 227.

⁵ Michau, *Second Set of New Quadrilles Performed at Almacks Argyll Rooms* (London: Chappell, 1818).

⁶ J. White, *White's Quadrilles as Danced at Almacks. Set 1.* (Bath: White's Music and Piano Warehouse, 1817).

⁷ Ellis Rogers, *The Quadrille: A Practical Guide to its Origin, Development and Performance*, 4th edn (Orpington: Rogers, 2008), pp. 79–85.

⁸ E. Kopp, *The American Prompter and Guide to Etiquette* (Cincinnati: The John Church Company, 1896), pp. 18–19.

⁹ Cecil Sharp. *Country Dance Tunes: Set 1*, (London: Novello, 1909), pp. 1–13.

metronome tempo, there would not be sufficient time to perform the steps and figures with ease and elegance.¹⁰ However, he did not explain what happens if the tunes are played slower, and it is suggested if the dancers complete the steps and figures too fast they will have to wait for the music to catch up!

Source	Date	Tempo range
Thomas Wilson	1820	104-120
Michau	1817-1821	88-120
E. Kopp	1896	116-136
Cecil Sharp	1909	88-120
Ellis Rogers	2003	88-120

Figure 1: Indicative tempos.

Before proceeding further, it is important to understand what is meant by the tempo of say, 104 bpm. Listen to the Morris Motors Band playing 'Yorkshire Square Eight' (tune 'The White Cockade') which is played at 104 bpm.¹¹ Some might consider this recording is too fast, too slow or just right. When the Woodley Yeoman recorded 'Yorkshire Square Eight' for the EFDSS in 1978 it was recorded at 118 bpm.¹² The bpm on individual recordings used in this paper have been taken at the beginning of the second time through the tune using a smartphone metronome application. It is possible on many apps to tap the screen to gain a value the 'tap test'. The second time through has been selected as it is suggested the musicians have settled down by then 'into the groove' and this gives a realistic value. Rarely did the EFDSS give specific details of musical key, bpm, tune structure and time on their recordings, unlike some US labels, such as Folkraft who routinely added this metadata as illustrated in Figure 2.

When using a band, the tempo can be easily altered to satisfy the crowd: the band can be asked to speed up or slow down the tempo. This is more difficult when using recorded music. A recording is not

¹⁰ Wilson, *The Complete System*, p. 279.

¹¹ Morris Motors Band, *Yorkshire Square Eight*, 26cm 78 rpm record (Columbia DB 1674, 1936); also available on Mike Wilson-Jones, *Listen to the Band: Dance Music from the Archives*, CD (EFDSS CD 12, 2007).

¹² Woodley Yeoman, *Yorkshire Square Eight*, 30cm LP (EFDSS CDM 2, 198); also available on *Community Dances*, CD (EFDSS CD 15, 2007).

an accurate indication that this is the speed the dance was recorded at in the studio as there are many variables. For example, if you are playing a physical record, the turntable platter might be rotating faster or slower than the prescribed playback speed, or the musicians may have originally recorded the tune too fast or slow in the studio. Likewise, speed variations could be introduced within the manufacturing process, especially if dealing with historical recordings. Any reissue of a recording will introduce or remove sounds and may try to correct or introduce a new tempo. I am not advocating that there is a 'one size fits all' tempo solution for country dance tunes.



Figure 2: Folkraft label showing key, tune structure, bpm and length for record 1156, 'Cincinatti [sic] Hornpipe', c. 1952¹³

In 1915 a series of eight recordings of English country dances, recorded by the Victor Band in New Jersey with Cecil Sharp supervising the session,¹⁴ the dance 'Goddesses' was recorded at a

¹³ George Gulyassy, *Cincinatti Hornpipe*, 26cm 78 rpm record (Folkraft 1156, c 1952).

¹⁴ American Historical Recordings Discography of American Historical Recordings, *Recordings made Thursday, April 15, 1915*, <<https://adp.library.ucsb.edu/index.php/date/browse/1915-04-15>> [accessed 27 March 2020].

speed of 128 bpm.¹⁵ In his *Country Dance Tunes Set 4*, Sharp indicated there was no authority for a specific tempo for the dance ‘Goddesses’ or any of the Playford dances he subsequently transcribed, but suggested that a tempo of 112 bpm might be appropriate and a general rule for all dances.¹⁶ Sharp further explained that the tempo must to some extent depend upon the performers.¹⁷ While Douglas Kennedy (1893–1988) suggested that the vital factor is rhythm, and that bands must find the proper way to play them, so they can lift the dances along.¹⁸

In the period between 1922 and 1967, the HMV and Columbia record companies issued recordings under the auspices of the EFDSS; the EFDSS started issuing its own series of records after World War Two using Recorded Productions Limited based in Regent Street, London. In the 1960s some records produced on the EFDSS label were only sold to members or associates of the Society. To give an idea of the number of dances issued, in the 78-rpm country dance era (1915–1958), 320 historical style dances were issued on records, while 176 were from the *Community Dance Manuals* or similar publications. Figure 3 shows the difference between historical and community dances. The term ‘historical’ has been used to include dances from the Playford collections transcribed by Sharp;¹⁹ dances contained in the

¹⁵ Victor Band, *Goddesses*, 26cm 78 rpm record (Victor 17846, 1915), also available online at: <<http://adp.library.ucsb.edu/index.php/matrix/detail/700000907/B-15918-Goddesses>> [accessed 26 March 2020].

¹⁶ Cecil Sharp, *Country Dance Tunes: from The English Dancing Master (1650–1686) Set 4* (London: Novello, 1911), Introduction.

¹⁷ Sharp, *Country Dance Tunes: Set 4*, introduction.

¹⁸ Douglas Kennedy, ed., *Community Dance Manual, Volume One: a Programme of Community Dances Suitable for Indoor and Out-of-door Recreation, with the Description of Fourteen Dances and Fifteen Tunes* (London: English Folk Dance and Song Society, 1949).

¹⁹ Cecil Sharp, *Country Dance Book, part 2: Containing Thirty Country Dances from the English Dancing Master (1650–1686)* (London: Novello, 1911); Cecil Sharp and George Butterworth, *Country Dance Book, part 3: Containing Thirty Country Dances from The English Dancing Master (1650–1686)* (London: Novello, 1912);

Cecil Sharp and George Butterworth, *Country Dance Book, part 4. Containing Forty-three Country Dances from The English Dancing Master (1650–1728)* (London: Novello, 1918);

Cecil Sharp, *Country Dance Book, part 6: Containing Fifty-two Country Dances from The English Dancing Master (1650–1728)* (London: Novello, 1922).

Apted Book;²⁰ dances from the *Country Dance Book E.F.D.S. New Series*²¹ and other similar publications. 'Community' refers to dances from the *Community Dances Manual* series and those recordings titled reels, jigs, hornpipes etc. which can be used for a variety of dances. There was much duplication especially with the historical dances with 'Sellenger's Round' being recorded 11 times.

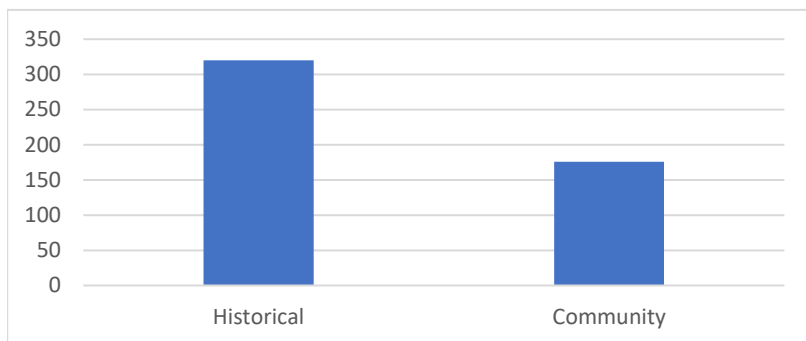


Figure 3: 78 rpm recordings of historical and community dances.

It was the EFDSS's executives, such as Maud Karpeles (1885–1976), Douglas Kennedy, Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872–1958) and Nibs Matthews (1920–2006) who decided the content and tempo of the recordings. On the EFDSS anthology *Listen to the Band*,²² a CD of archive recordings available in the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library, the dance 'Christchurch Bells', recorded by the Folk Dance Band in 1925,²³ is one the fastest dances on the CD of either 6/8 or 2/4 tunes, recorded at 138 bpm.

Some publications did not have any recordings issued. *Five Country Dances* published by the Sheffield Branch of the English Folk Dance

²⁰ William Porter, Marjory Heffer and Arthur Heffer, eds., *The Apted Book of Country Dances: Twenty-four Country Dances from the Last Years of the Eighteenth Century with Tunes and Instructions* (Cambridge: Heffer, 1931).

²¹ Douglas Kennedy and Helen Kennedy, eds., *Country Dance Book: Containing the Airs and Descriptions of Thirty Country Dances from "The Dancing Master"* (London: Novello for the English Folk Dance Society, 1929).

²² Michael Wilson-Jones, *Listen to the Band: Dance Music from the Sound Archives*, CD (London: EFDSS, 2007).

²³ Folk Dance Band, *Christchurch Bells*, 30cm, 78 rpm record (HMV C 1264, 1935).

Society in 1927,²⁴ and *Maggot Pie*, a collection of composed dances issued in 1932 never had any recordings issued.²⁵ In 1936, the EFDSS issued a list of publications from which dances could be selected (namely those associated with Cecil Sharp) to be performed at EFDSS events and they effectively banned any other dances.²⁶

The dances 'Kendal Ghyll' and 'La Russe' have been identified as dances suitable for case studies. These dances, collected during the twentieth century, were popular with dancers and musicians alike. Each dance has been recorded a number of times by different musicians and each recording has different characteristics.

Kendal Ghyll

Leta Douglas (1888–1951)²⁷ collected the dance 'Kendal Ghyll' and first published it in *Six Dances from the Yorkshire Dales* in 1931, and Douglas further identified that the dance and tune was collected from Fred Falshaw of Buckden, Wharfedale.²⁸ It is a short, three couple set dance using handkerchiefs, and Douglas does not specify any

²⁴ David Wall, *Five Country Dances: Together with their Tunes, Circa AD 1764 as Recorded by David Wall, Ashover, Derbyshire* (Sheffield: English Folk Dance Society (Sheffield Branch), 1927).

²⁵ Marjory Heffer and William Porter, *Maggot Pie: a Book of New Country Dances* (Cambridge: Heffer, 1932).

²⁶ Inez Jenkins, 'Letter from Inez M. Jenkins, EFDSS Secretary to EFDSS Staff and Executive Committee re Official Curriculum and Dance Repertoire and Enclosed List of Dance Publications Comprising Approved Dance Repertoire' (6 January 1936), <<https://www.vwml.org/record/MK/5/195>> [accessed 26 March 2020].

²⁷ W. Mitchell. *Music of the Yorkshire Dales*. (Settle: Castleberg, 1997); 'Obituary. Leta Douglas.' *English Dance and Song*, Vol XV (5) (1951), p. 150; Leta Margaret Douglas (birth name Letitia) was born in Portbalintrae, Co. Antrim on 25 January 1888. In the English and Wales census of 1911, she is recorded as aged 23 and a student and boarder at the Bedford Physical Training College, where her name is recorded as Leta. After college, she settled to Giggleswick, near Settle in Yorkshire, where she taught and recorded folk dances, and self-published two books of her research in the 1930s. In the 1939 National Registration she lists her occupation as a shopkeeper specialising in arts and crafts supplies, and part-time masseuse. She died in 1951 of complications from a broken pelvis after a road traffic accident after having stopped to help a broken-down motorist and another car drove into it from behind. Douglas would appear to be one of the unsung heroes of the folk dance revival and more work could be undertaken to investigate her life and influence more fully. The author is grateful to Derek Schofield for pointing me towards some of this information.

²⁸ Douglas, *Six Dances*, Dance 6, preface.

particular stepping; however, as the tune is in 6/8 meter, dancers can choose to walk, skip, use the double step or run! The EFDSS, as Julian Pilling observed, still could not make up its mind in 1960 whether to skip, use the double step or walk. At the annual Royal Albert Hall festival in 1961, Pilling suggests the demonstration team were going to walk.²⁹ When danced today, handkerchiefs are not generally used. It is interesting to note, neither of Douglas' books appeared on the EFDSS approved 1936 publication list!³⁰

George Tremain (1898–1965) an ironstone miner from North Skelton, Brotton, near Middlesbrough, first recorded the dance playing the melodeon in 1935 at 138 bpm, and he then recorded it again in 1947, this time played at 124 bpm, a reduction of 14 bpm or 10%.³¹

It would be appropriate to compare these two recordings as Tremain was the first traditional solo performer to be recorded by the EFDSS playing for community dances. The record labels are shown in figures 4 and 5, it will be seen that Kendal is spelt Kendall on the 1935 record. Tremain recorded the exactly the same dances on both records, and as 'Kendal Ghyll' is a short dance it was possible to record an additional short dance 'Meeting Six' on the same side, the dance on the reverse side is 'The Huntsman's Chorus'. The 1947 record label clearly shows the recording was specifically made under the auspices of the EFDSS, the 1935 record does not show this as shown in figures 4 and 5.

Extreme care must be taken when considering historical recordings, especially with instrument which may not be kept in tip-top condition like melodeons. Dirt and rust can accumulate on the reeds which will lower the frequency of the reeds and the key will change although the melodeon is likely to stay in tune with itself.

²⁹ Letter from Julian Pilling to Tom Flett, 19 November 1961. <<https://insteptrt.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Pilling-Flett-19-Nov-1961.pdf>> [accessed 16 May 2020]; the author is grateful to Chloe Middleton-Metcalf for identifying this reference.

³⁰ Letter from Inez M. Jenkins;

Leta Douglas, *Three More Dances of the Yorkshire Dales: together with the Boosbeck Traditional Longsword Dance* (Giggleswick: Douglas, 1934).

³¹ George Tremain, *Kendal Ghyll*, 26cm 78 rpm record (HMV B 8365, 1935); George Tremain, *Kendal Ghyll*, 26cm 78 rpm record (HMV B 9540, 1947).



Figure 4: Record label of George Tremain's 1935 recording. HMV B 8365



Figure 5: Record label of George Tremain's 1947 recording. HMV B 9540.

The adoption of A=440Hz as the international standard concert pitch was agreed in 1936 and it is possible that instruments made prior were tuned to a lower pitch. When played on a 78 rpm turntable the recordings, as expected do not correspond directly to A=440Hz tuning and a correction is required. The 1935 recording requires only a small

correction of +4% to concert pitch to play in the key of D (concert pitch), while the 1947 recording requires a small correction of +2.3% to play in the key of C (concert pitch). Significant changes of -8% would be required to correct the 1935 recording to the key of C, and +15% for the 1947 recording to the key of D. The keys of B and C# have been discounted as they are uncommon in traditional music. If concert pitch was originally used by Tremain and the correction made as identified, the bpm would increase as shown in Figure 6. This confusion could have been avoided if the EFDSS/HMV had recorded the metadata as used by the Folkraft label, or a tuning fork used to identify the pitch at the beginning of the recording.

For the purposes of this paper, I am using the bpm recorded on the turntable at 78 rpm. Figure 6 shows the corrections required.

	Correction required to Key of C	bpm	Correction required to key of D	bpm	bpm used in this paper from 78 turntable
1935	-8%	128	+4%	142	138
1947	+2.3%	136	+15%	148	124

Figure 6: Correction of Tremain's recordings to concert pitch.

It is suggested the 1935 recording is almost certain played on a one-row, probably two stop melodeon notionally in the key of D, whereas the 1947 recording is played notionally in the key of C, probably on a C/F two-row melodeon. The two-row is suggested as three individual chords can be heard and an 'unexpected bass note', which sounds like a D bass with a G chord which is unusual unless you were a very good player. Likewise, the penultimate chord is a G with a G bass.³²

'Kendal Ghyll' was recorded twice more by the EFDSS. In 1961, by the Country Dance Band where it is played at 126 bpm, and the sleeve notes identify that the tune is a medley of nursery rhymes.³³ The front

³² The author is grateful for the help from Chris Jewell in identifying the musical keys and possible type of melodeon used.

³³ Country Dance Band, 'Kendal Ghyll', *Five Yorkshire Dales Dances*, 15cm 45 rpm record (HMV 7EG 8716, 1961).

of the sleeve is shown in Figure 7, where it shows dancers circling left in a rural setting; it is interesting to note, this figure with this number of dancers does not appear in Douglas's books.



Figure 7: Picture sleeve of 'Five Yorkshire Dances'

It was again recorded in 1978 by the EFDSS by the Devon-based Greensleeves Country Dance Band and recorded at 112 bpm.³⁴ It is unfortunate to note the Greensleeves Country Dance Band record was titled *English Country Dances for Young Folk*, as it contains five dances from Douglas's Yorkshire collections, four from Sharp's *Country Dance Book part 1*, two from Sybil Clark's 1955 publication *Seven Midland Dances*³⁵, and finally the widely known dance 'Bridge of Athlone'. Furthermore, the dance instructions were included on the reverse for all the dances, except Douglas's Yorkshire dances thereby requiring dance callers not familiar with those dances to purchase the book, recently republished by the EFDSS in 1975.³⁶ Although these are

³⁴ Greensleeves Country Dance Band, 'Kendal Ghyll', *English Country Dances for Young Folk*, 30cm LP (EFDSS BR 5, 1978).

³⁵ Sibyl Clark, ed., *Seven Midland Dances* (London: English Folk Dance and Song Society, 1955).

³⁶ Nibs (S.A.) Matthews, and Dennis Darke, eds., *Dances for the Yorkshire Dales: Collected by Leta M. Douglas. Prepared for Publication by S.A. Mathews and Dennis Darke* (English Folk Dance and Song Society, 1975).

relatively simple country dances (using steps such as skipping, travelling polka step, balance; and dance figures including circles, arches, and casts) they form an essential part of traditional canon of English regional collected country dances. The ‘Young Folk’ tag might put more mature dancers off performing them.

The Ealing-based Old Mole Band³⁷ recorded the dance ‘Kendal Ghyll’ in 1980 at 120 bpm on the Pansound label³⁸ to accompany the book, *Your Book of Country Dances* which included the dance description and tune.³⁹ As Robert Lobley, leader of the Old Mole Band, recalls, this was a dance which was performed regularly at barn dances, used by their regular callers, Brian Coupe and Ben Lobley.⁴⁰

Performer	Date	bpm	Label
George Tremain	1935	138	HMV
George Tremain	1947	124	HMV
Country Dance Band	1961	126	HMV
Greensleeves Country Dance Band	1978	112	EFDSS
Old Mole Band	1980	120	Pansound

Figure 8: ‘Kendal Ghyll’ showing bpm from 1935–1980

It can be seen in Figure 8 that from Tremain’s first recording in 1935 to the Greensleeves Country Dance Band in 1978 there has been a reduction in tempo of 26 beats per minute or a 19% change. The Old Mole Band ends this trend with an increased tempo to 120 bpm.

La Russe

‘La Russe Quadrille’ is a dance in 4/4 time collected by Peter Kennedy (1922-2006) in the north of England and published in *English Dance and Song* in 1948 and then again in the *Community Dance Manual*.⁴¹

³⁷ Telephone interview with Robert Lobley, 31 March 2020.

³⁸ Old Mole Band, ‘Kendal Ghyll’, *Old Mole Plays English Country Dances*, 30cm LP (Pansound PAN OM 793, 1980).

³⁹ Priscilla and Robert Lobley, *Your Book of English Country Dances* (Faber and Faber, 1980), p. 40–41.

⁴⁰ Lobley, interview, 2020.

⁴¹ Peter Kennedy, ‘Two Simple English Quadrilles from the Border’, *English Dance and Song*, Vol XII (3) (1948), pp. 44–45; D. Kennedy, *Community Dance Manual 1* (1949).

LA RUSSE QUADRILLE

D.C. al segno

Intro. Honour partners. Honour corners.

A.1. All pass partners (gentlemen pass behind partners to meet ladies on right who advance to meet them with four balance steps). Balance and swing corners (set to right and left and pivot-swing with ballroom hold).

A.2. Pass back ; balance and swing partners.

B.1. (Leading) couple swing.

B.2. Promenade inside the ring (balance step moving slowly round counter-clockwise visiting the other three couples).

A.3. Leading couple cross over with opposite couple (passing between them, partners change places) and cross back (as before) (balance step. The opposite couple can make an arch for the leading couple).

A.4. Repeat cross over and cross back.

B.3. All join hands and circle left (reel or flat hop-step).

B.4. Promenade partners back to places (counter-clockwise with reel or flat hop-step).

(This figure is performed four times, B.1 and B.2 being done by each couple in turn acting as leading couple.)

Figure 9: Peter Kennedy's description of 'La Russe Quadrille', *English Dance and Song* (1948).

Depending upon how you dance it, as there are many regional variations, and it can contain the following steps: walking, balancing, balance step, pivot swing step, double or polka step, rant step, slip step, reel and hop step. Kennedy's original description and tune can be seen in Figure 9.

Peter Kennedy recorded the dance for HMV in 1949 at 124 bpm where he uses a medley of tunes, 'La Russe', 'Gallops Hey', 'Fisher's Frolic' and, not noted on the label, 'Goodnight Ladies' for the last eight bars.⁴² This was the first time that a popular song tune was used on an EFDSS sponsored recording. Like Tremain's 1947 recording, Kennedy played a two-row melodeon, this time in D/G. 'La Russe' is a square dance, with each round taking 64 bars, to allow each couple to lead, it generally lasts between 4 minutes and 4 minutes 30 seconds, it was issued on the larger sized 30cm 78 rpm record. The record label can be seen in Figure 10.



Figure 10: Record label of 'La Russe' played by Peter Kennedy. HMV C 3892.

'La Russe' was obviously popular, as the Birmingham Square Dance Band recorded it again in 1954, when a different set of tunes were

⁴² Peter Kennedy, *La Russe*, 30cm 78 rpm record (HMV C 3892, 1949).

used: 'La Russe', 'Bluebell Polka' and 'The Breakdown'.⁴³ This time it was recorded slightly faster at 126 beats per minute.

Earlier, when discussing 'Kendal Ghyll', it was suggested there was a reduction in tempo over a period of time and a similar trend is identified here with 'La Russe'. The tempo has reduced and settled around 114 bpm as illustrated in Figure 11.

Performer	Date	bpm	Label
Peter Kennedy	1949	124	HMV
Birmingham Square Dance Band	1954	126	HMV
Jack Armstrong and his Northumbrian Barnstormers	1958	110	HMV
Greensleeves Country Dance Band ¹	1972	114	EFDSS
Ashley Hutching's Sawdust Band	1977	120	Harvest
Blue Mountain Band ¹	1978	114	EFDSS
John Kirkpatrick All Stars	1998	120	BBC/EFDSS
Richard Smith, Maggie Fletcher and Christine Oxtoby ¹	2003	114	EFDSS

Figure 11: 'La Russe', showing bpm from 1949–2003

Kennedy's and Birmingham's recordings have the fastest tempos issued by or under the auspices of the EFDSS with Jack Armstrong and his Northumbrian Barnstormers' 1958 recording being the slowest at 110 beats per minute.⁴⁴ The others all run at 114 beats per minute except John Kirkpatrick's All Stars and Ashley Hutching's Sawdust Band which are faster at 120 beats per minute.⁴⁵ Each recording uses a different set of tunes.

It is possible to look at the tempo of 'La Russe' through regional recordings. Using four commercially available recordings of Northumbrian bands the bpm have been identified and are shown in

⁴³ Birmingham Square Dance Band, *La Russe*, 30cm 78 rpm record (HMV C 4254, 1954).

⁴⁴ Jack Armstrong and his Northumbrian Barnstormers, *La Russe*, 15cm 45 rpm record (HMV 7EG 8455, 1958).

⁴⁵ John Kirkpatrick's All Stars, 'La Russe', *Dancing Folk*, CD (BBC Education/EFDSS no number, 1998); Ashley Hutching's and the Sawdust Band, *La Russe*, 30cm LP (Harvest SHSP4073, 1977).

Figure 12. Again, there is a trend of a tempo reduction, although this is less clear.

Performer	Date	bpm	Label
Jack Armstrong's Barnstormers ¹	1950	124	Mawson and Wareham
Jack Armstrong and his Northumbrian Barnstormers ¹	1958	110	HMV
Cheviot Ranters ¹	1974	118	Topic
High Level Ranters ¹	1979	106	Topic

Figure 12: Northumbrian bands commercial recordings from 1950–1979.

Conclusion

It was suggested by Thomas Wilson that dances in 6/8 and 2/4 meter should be performed between 104 and 120 bpm, while others such as Ellis Rogers and others suggest the tempo should be slightly faster, and Kopp indicates it could reach 136. Using 'Kendal Ghyll' as an example, the first recording by George Tremain in 1937 is recorded at 138 and by 1987, in the Greensleeves Country Dance Band recording, it had reduced to 112. A downward trend.

Likewise, 'La Russe', a popular dance from the North, starts off at a fair lick with Peter Kennedy and then the Birmingham Square Dance Band hitting 126 bpm, and then reduces significantly with Jack Armstrong's 1958 recording at 110 bpm. The mainly EFDSS sponsored recordings level out at 114 bpm. When considering the four recordings by Northumbrian bands, it can be seen there is a wide discrepancy of speeds with a downward trend.

It would appear that the EFDSS and others have not imposed a strict 'one size fits all' tempo for country dance tunes. There is evidence of a reduction of tempo, however, the sample I have used is very small, and more work is needed in this area.

About the author

Sean Goddard lives in Brighton, Sussex and has been involved in various aspects of folk dancing all his life: as a caller, dancer, morris dance teacher and barn dance band leader. Sean recently completed

an MA By Learning Objectives at the University of Brighton where he researched the history of English Country Dance.

Simon Harmer

Whistling Billy's Barefoot Hornpipe: A Presentation on the Process of Creating a Hornpipe Sequence from Named Steps in Henry Mayhew's London Labour and the London Poor (1851)¹

Abstract

Reflecting on a brief clip of stoker Ted McKenzie dancing on the deck of the Terra Nova during Scott's Antarctic Expedition (1910-13) I pondered the question – what did sailors actually dance on board ship? This led me to search for references to and illustrations of sailors dancing. These illustrations offered a wide range of possible answers to my question. It struck me that if they were dancing a hornpipe it was very different to how I was taught to dance hornpipe steps in clogs in the late 1970s. A description of hornpipe steps from the 1850's in Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor* provided a starting point for creating a dance piece reflecting my research together with step dance styles that have attracted and influenced me over the years from a range of sources. The presentation will explain the process I went through and acknowledge the people who helped before concluding with a performance of the steps.

When I retired from full-time teaching, I wanted to find a creative dance project that would involve my interest in historical research and my love of step dancing. It was also important to me that this would be a collaborative project involving other dancers and

¹ Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor*, Vol.3 (London: Griffin, Bohn, and Company, 1861).

musicians. You will see just how many people have helped in this project as we go through.

Whilst searching for a project I remembered that Kerry Fletcher had loaned me *The Great White Silence*, Herbert Ponting's official film record of Scott's Antarctic Expedition 1910–1913.² In the film there is a short clip of one of the crew step dancing. I was intrigued and decided to find out more.

With the help of Katie Howson we found that the dancer was a young stoker called Edward McKenzie. His mother had been born in Fareham, Hampshire (where I had taught for most of my career) had married a sailor, and lived in Portsmouth in Portsea, a street away from relatives of mine. Edward, or Ted, spent his early childhood in Portsmouth, my hometown.

This short clip of Ted inspired me to undertake a number of collaborations which included: a three couple dance in waltz time; a comic boxing dance; a film of a dancer and jig doll combined; a song setting of a poem by Ted with an accompanying step dance; a stepping and spoons duet; a performance piece combining biographical detail with music, dance and song called 'In Step With McKenzie'; and a response to the research material in collage with visual artist Carrie Hogston. The clip of Ted is sadly very short, but it is a miracle that we even have that much.

I began to wonder what sailors actually danced on ship. Was it hornpipe steps, improvised stepping or the 'Sailor's Hornpipe' which as a child I had seen danced by Royal Navy ratings at the Royal Tournament and at Navy Days in Portsmouth?

After extensive research I can say with confidence that it was all of these and plenty of other dancing styles and influences including reels, partner dances and random dancing around, greatly affected by the popular music of the day and probably alcohol.

As part of my research I decided to look for images of sailors dancing. Looking on the website of the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich

² Herbert Ponting, *The Great White Silence, the official record of Captain Scott's heroic journey to the South Pole*, DVD, BFIB1085 (BFI, 2011).

I found this painting entitled, *English sailors & French soldiers. A Dance on board HMS Vulture August 7* (Figure 1).³



Figure 1: *English sailors & French soldiers. A Dance on board HMS Vulture August 7*, by Edwin Thomas Dolby, © National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London, Creative Commons (CC BY-NC-ND) licence.

During the Crimean War the British and French allies planned to attack the island fortress of Bomarsund, in the Gulf of Finland held by the Russians. *HMS Vulture* picked up French soldiers on the 7th of August and landed them on the morning of the 8th. In the picture a British sailor and a French soldier are dancing to each other and wearing each other's hats. I started thinking about body and arm positions in the painting and how they contrasted to the way I was taught to dance hornpipe steps in clogs by Graham Cole in the late 1970s standing very straight with my hands by my sides in one of the rooms downstairs here at Cecil Sharp House.⁴

I then searched the internet and made a collection of images of sailors dancing, to which I have gradually added. An internet search of images for 'sailors dancing' or 'sailors' hornpipe' will bring up many

³ Edwin Thomas Dolby, *English sailors & French soldiers. A Dance on board HMS Vulture August 7*, (1854), held at National Maritime Museum, Greenwich.

⁴ Graham Cole (1938–2012) taught clog dance for many years at Cecil Sharp house during the 1970s and 1980s.

examples, for example Figure 2. It is important to remember that we do not know whether the artists are using their imagination or drawing from life. Nor do we know if these dancers are sailors or people dressed as sailors.



Figure 2: ‘There was a big sailor going through the steps of the sailor’s hornpipe’, source: George Manville Fenn, *The Little Skipper* (Philadelphia, H. Altemus company, 1900) p. 19, <<https://lccn.loc.gov/00006392>> [accessed: 9 December 2021].

I then began other related research, collecting notations of hornpipes from different dance genres, descriptions and reports of actual sailors dancing, photographs and film clips of sailors dancing and descriptions of sailors dancing from fiction.

In doing this I had an enormous amount of support from members of the Instep Research Team and an amazing amount of information

from step dance and tall ship expert Chris Brady. I have been extremely fortunate to have his support and interest in this project.

I was at the point of wondering where this was all going when Dr Heather Blasdale Clarke sent me an extract from Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor* about hornpipe steps danced by 'Whistling Billy'. This is contemporaneous with the painting of *HMS Vulture* in Figure 1. This is what Billy said:

For the hornpipe I begin with walking round, or 'twisting' as the term is; then I stands up, and does a double shuffle or the 'straight fives' as we calls it; then I walk around again before doing the back-snatches, another kind of double-shuffle. Then I does the Rocks of Scilly, that's when you twists your feet and bends sideways; next comes the double steps and rattles, that is, when the heels makes a rattle coming down; and I finishes with the square step. My next step is to walk around and collect the money.⁵

I decided that I wanted to create a dance piece out of these steps reflecting the images I had found of sailors dancing and also the dancers that have influenced me from learning my first clog steps through to the present day. Importantly, I wanted to challenge myself to do something new, hence the decision that, like Billy, I would dance barefoot. I was not trying to be historically accurate in any way but to create something new out of the research.

After consulting members of the Instep Research Team at one of our AGMs, I had a clear idea of the steps that Billy described except for the square step. For this step I worked on some suggestions from Alex Boydell, the dancer who has most influenced me in my dancing and my attitude towards dancing. Interestingly, one of the old men Alex learnt from was a Mr Scarisbrick who had been a sailor and danced on board ship on a barrel. I rehearsed the steps into an order following Billy's description except for putting the second 'twisting' at the end which I felt gave the sequence balance. I continued to work on my steps experimenting with the body and arm positions in the images I

⁵ Henry Mayhew, 'Whistling Billy', *London Labour and the London Poor*, Vol.3, pp. 200-204.

had collected, I was also influenced by the 'Sailor's Hornpipe' still taught to Physical Training Instructor Qualifiers at *HMS Temeraire* in Portsmouth.

In November 2018, at a Folk Educators' Group meeting, I met singer songwriter Joe Danks, artist in residence at the Royal Maritime Museum, Greenwich. He was writing songs in response to artefacts and stories he found in the museum. I explained my project and I was over the moon when he invited me to perform with the Seaspeak Ensemble at the final performance of his residency on the *Cutty Sark*.

After seeing me dance, Joe and fiddle player Sarah Matthews selected three hornpipes and with Jean Murphy (harp) and Danny Pedler (accordion) arranged them to fit my seven step routine. I can't emphasise enough how much their playing then influenced the way I danced and the development of the sequence.

Two of the hornpipes, 'Uncle George's' and 'Tommy Roberts' are from the playing of Bob Cann who is well known for performing with his jig doll, Sailor Jan. In the Spring of 2019 Seaspeak Ensemble recorded Joe's work in beautiful rooms in the Queen's House, Greenwich. For the purposes of the CD I danced what was to become 'Whistling Billy's Barefoot Hornpipe' in shoes for the percussive effect.

I felt I was making progress but wanted some input from another dancer. The Instep Research Team AGM was being held in Derbyshire and it was an opportunity to talk through my ideas with Sara Rose, community dance practitioner and performer, a friend whose opinion I greatly respect. We had limited time together, but the outcomes were crucial. These were her main suggestions:

- I said I wanted to move away from the upright dancing position I was used to, but the images show a variety of postures including the upright position – Rather than exclude an upright stance I might like to use it in contrast to other positions.
- If I want to show more flexible positions – I needed to do more than I thought I was doing.
- I was using body percussion on one step – This could be extended to other steps to make the sequence more coherent.

- Go back to the text to see if there are any more clues to the character of the dancer and the steps which could be included.

This last point was really important and the article about Whistling Billy that Heather Blasdale Clarke had sent me answered a number of questions and suggested further development.

In *London Labour and the London Poor* Henry Mayhew wrote, 'At the present time there is only one English boy going about the streets of London dancing, and at the same time playing his own musical accompaniment on a tin whistle'.⁶ One thing that made Billy stand out from other street performers was that he could play the whistle up his nose!

Mayhew continued:

He was a red-headed lad of that peculiar complexion which accompanies hair of that colour. His forehead was covered with freckles, so thick, that they looked as if a quantity of cayenne pepper had been sprinkled over it; and when he frowned, his hair moved backwards and forwards like the twitching of a horse shaking off flies.

He explained to me that he wore all his boots out dancing, doing the double shuffle.

He went through his dances for me, at the same time accompanying himself on his penny whistle. He took his shoes off and did a hornpipe, thumping his feet upon the floor the while, like palms on a panel, so that I felt nervous lest there should be a pin in the carpet and he be lamed by it.

The boy seemed to have no notion of his age, for although he accounted for twenty-two years of existence, yet he insisted that he was only seventeen 'come two months'.

he [...] clung to his assertion that he made £2 per week. His clothes, however, bore no evidence of his prosperity, for his outer garment was a washed-out linen blouse, such as

⁶ This and all subsequent quotes from Henry Mayhew, 'Whistling Billy'.

glaziers wear, whilst his trousers were of course canvas, and as black on the thighs as the centre of a drum-head.

During the interview with Mayhew, Billy said:

I'm known all round about the Borough as 'Whistling Billy'.

I ain't a very fat chap, am I? But I'm just meaty enough for my profession, which is whistling and dancing in public-houses

Mother and father was both uncommon fond of dancing and music, and used to go out dancing and to concerts, near every night pretty well, after they locked the shop up.

I used, when I was at father's, to go to a ball, and that's where I learnt to dance. It was a shilling ball in the New-road, where there was ladies, regular nice ones, beautifully dressed. They used to see me dancing, and say, when I growed up I should make a beautiful dancer; and so I do, for I'd dance against anybody, and play the whistle all the time. The ladies at these balls would give me money then for dancing before them.

It's like an amusement for me to dance; and it must be an amusement, 'cos it amuses the people, and that's why I gets on so well'.

After a period in prison for stealing Billy reported:

I made about eleven bob the first week I was out, for I was doing very well of a night, though I had no hair on my head. I didn't do no dancing, but I knew about six tunes such as 'Rory O'More,' and 'The Girl I Left Behind Me,' two hornpipes, (The Fishers' and the Sailors') 'St. Patrick's Day,' and 'The Shells of the Ocean,' a new song as had just come up.

I generally pitched before the hotels and the spirit-shops, and began whistling and dancing

I didn't do as well in winter as in summer. Harvest time was my best time. I'd go the fields where they was working, and play and dance.

Many a chap's got the sack through me, by leaving off his work and beginning to dance.

The farm hands would say, 'Come up to the doss and give us a tune, and they'd come outside and dance in the open air, for they wouldn't let them have no candles nor matches.' They only danced when there was moonlight.

It was penny a dance for each or 'em as danced, and each stand-up took a quarter of a hour, and there was generally two hours of it; that makes about seven dances, allowing for resting. I've had as many as forty dancing at a time, and sometimes there was only nine of 'em. I've seen all the men get up together and dance a hornpipe, and the women look on. They always did a hornpipe or country dance.

They was mostly Irish and I had to do jigs for them, instead of a hornpipe.

I've often been backed by the company to dance and play against another man, and I generally win.

I do all manner of tricks, just to make them laugh – capering or 'hanky-panky,' as I term it.

I've been engaged at concert rooms to dance. I have pumps put on, and light trousers, and a Guernsey, dressed up as a sailor.

Then some say, 'I will see the best dancer in England; I've got a mag.'⁷ Then after the dancing I go to the gentleman who has given me most, and ask him six or seven times 'to give me a copper,' declaring he's the only one as has given me nothing, and that makes the others laugh.

I generally gets good nobbings (that's a collection, you know). They likes the dancing better than the music; but it's doing 'em together that takes.

I was clear that if Billy wasn't more entertaining than his competitors he would not earn money and would not eat. There was humour in his

⁷ A 'mag' is a ha'penny.

introductory banter with his audience and in his dancing, 'hanky-panky' he called it. His dancing was energetic, he danced barefoot and there was a clear appeal for money. It was the popular street dance of the time, not a folk art.

Through FolkActive⁸ I met Portsmouth based movement artist, B-boy and authentic street dance educator, Sasha Biloshisky and I started attending his adult classes. He agreed to work on the sequence with me adding his ideas after a briefing, seeing the steps and hearing Sara's comments. The outcome you will see at the end of the presentation.

The break I use at the end of each step was based on the film of Ted McKenzie dancing.

'Twisting', the first step of a hornpipe, is usually around in a circle. Chris Brady warned that because of deck cargo, space on board for dancing could be limited. Certainly, for the *Cutty Sark* performance, I needed to dance in a small space so I decided to twist on the spot. For this step I wanted to introduce clicking fingers from one of the images and also bring in changes in level.

The second step, 'straight fives', is the simple 'cross the buckle' step I learnt from Graham Cole. Sasha added elements of a hip-hop step, 'twist o flex', and some more body percussion.

The back-snatches are typical of a 'Sailor's Hornpipe' danced with folded arms. I introduced arm slaps from the *HMS Temeraire* version. Some versions have a semaphore section included so we alluded to this through arm rotations and I added a bit of wrist popping⁹ for good measure.

The 'Rocks of Scilly' step recognises the influences of Canadian dance teachers: Judy Weymouth from Ontario, Wayne Beckett from New Brunswick and the wonderful Jean MacNeil from Cape Breton. I also

⁸ FolkActive is a social enterprise based in southern Hampshire using traditional music, songs and dances as flexible tools for achieving the aims of: improving health and wellbeing, bringing communities together, and educating young and old, to connect and engage with their folk heritage in lively and relevant ways.

⁹ Popping is an improvisational dance style originated in California during the late 1970s. Popping is a technique of quickly contracting and relaxing muscles continuously in time with the music. 'Pops' can be done by various body parts simultaneously and in isolation.

wanted to use a particular leg position from an illustration (see Figure 2). The second half of the step, with foot slaps, pays homage to Gypsy step dancer Peter Ingram.

For the 'rattles' I reordered 'short crunch' a Westmorland step I learnt from Graham Cole with some hip-hop body movement added.

For the 'square step' I took one of Alex Boydell's suggestions. It is very typical of his style combining an element, the rattles or crunches, from the previous step with a turning motif and I also brought back some body percussion.

For the final 'twisting' I revisited the first step but added fundamentals from locking,¹⁰ 'muscle man' and the 'over leg lock'. This I contrasted, in the second half of the step, with freer movement inspired by another illustration (Figure 3) and the more improvised heel and toe stepping I had learnt from 'Southern' step dancers Valerie Shipley and Janet Keet-Black.

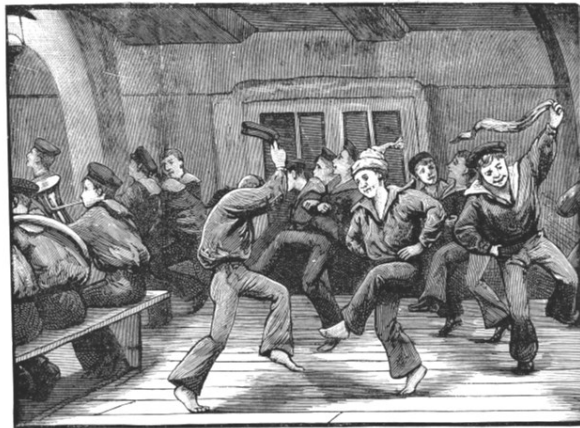


Figure 3: source: Mercie Sunshine, pseud., *Chats about Soldiers and Sailors* (Lond. &c.: Ward, Lock, Bowden & Company, 1893) no page numbers.

¹⁰ Locking is an improvisational dance style created by the Don 'Campbellock' Campbell in Los Angeles in the 1970s. 'The Lock' means stop and is the foundational move in locking. The lock is done for a short moment at a specific time in the music and is combined with other dance movements. Locking has inspired many generations of hip-hop dancers.

The final break finishes with the hip-hop move ‘giving yourself a five’ and a reference to the Portsmouth Football Club mascot the Pompey Sailor (Figure 4).



Figure 4: Pompey Sailor (Image of the Sports Mail sailor reproduced courtesy of The News, Portsmouth).

I am left wondering what happened to Billy. He grew up not far from here.¹¹ His father's barber shop was in Fitzroy Square and coincidentally that is where our hotel has been this weekend.

I hope, in the words of Billy, you find the hornpipe, ‘a little bit of amusement’.

As the music started, but before I danced, I spoke these words from Billy:

When I first go into a public-house I go into the tap-room, and say, ‘Would you like to hear a tune, gentlemen, or see a dance, or a little bit of amusement?’ If they say, ‘No,’ I stand still, and begin a talking, to make ‘em laugh. I am not to be choked off easy.

I say, ‘Come gentlemen, can't you help a poor fellow as is the best dancer in England? I must have some pudden for breakfast, because I ain't had nothing for three weeks’.

¹¹ Cecil Sharp House, London, where the conference took place.

I used to go about with a mate who had a wooden leg. He was a beautiful dancer, for he made 'em all laugh. He's a little chap and only does the hornpipe, and he's uncommon active, and knocks his leg against the railings, and makes the people grin.

I ask them if they'll have the hornpipe or the Irish jig, and if they says the jig I do it with my toes turned in, like if I was bandy; and that's very popular.

I also ask the landlord to give a half-pint of beer to grease my feet, and that makes 'em merry.

When I dance in a public-house I take my shoes off and say, 'Now gentlemen, watch my steps'.

A video of Whistling Billy's Barefoot Hornpipe is available at <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BXMCOrGT0KQ>>.



Figure 5: Simon Harmer dancing at Samuel's Rest pub session in Hampshire (Photo Mike Conquer, with permission).

About the author

I have been teaching and performing a range of step dance styles for over forty years. I learnt English clog steps from Graham Cole at Cecil Sharp House in the late 1970s and continued learn from a range of different teachers and performers but most particularly from Alex Boydell.

In 1990 I began dancing and choreographing with Chequered Flag, performing a repertoire of Appalachian clogging and steps from Quebec, Ontario and Cape Breton Island.

More recently I have been improvising with southern English steps, researching what sailors may have danced onboard ship, and how modern dance styles such as hip hop and house have evolved.

Samantha Jones

Dancing Hands and Rhythmic Voices: Historical Traces and Archival Excess

Abstract

The conventional archive of Irish dance includes textual and audio-visual documentation of choreographic repertoire. But this archive omits the experiential aspects of Irish dance. Mediating the archive and experience are transmission technologies that exhibit 'excess' and thus do not fit neatly into experiential awareness or historical documentation. Drawing upon ethnography and historiography, I suggest that learning practices such as 'hand dancing' and 'dance poems' facilitate the transmission between bodies and the translation between text and experience. Hand dancing and dance poems exist on the edges of awareness for dancers, despite their ubiquity in personal methods for remembering choreography. These transmission methods also exist on the edges of Irish dance history, appearing as brief mentions in broader descriptions of dance transmission. Although a search for glimmers of hand dancing and dance poems in primary and scholarly sources is itself a practice centred around text, recuperating these historical traces provides a ground for recuperating lived experience. Recovering these transmission techniques from the margins of Irish dance history is one step toward linking the textual archive of Irish dance to the lived and embodied repertoire of Irish dance.

Introduction¹

In 2010, a video of two professional Irish step dancers, Suzanne Cleary and Peter Harding, went viral on YouTube.² Unexpectedly, Cleary and Harding dance not with their feet, but with their hands to the pop song 'We No Speak Americano' (Yolanda Be Cool and DCUP). In trading the usual fast footwork and an immobile upper body for complicated hand gestures and stony facial expressions, Cleary and Harding re-contextualize and poke fun at existing narratives surrounding Irish step dance. The viral popularity of this video helped to reshape the content of their performance collaboration 'Up and Over It', the name of which is a play on words. 'Up and over' is a phrase that refers to a particular Irish step dancing choreography. The 'it' that they are over could be conventional performance opportunities, expectations surrounding comportment and style, the idea that Irish dancers perform 'tradition', or even all of the above.

Beyond its fun qualities, their use of hands instead of feet does important work toward restaging Irish dance performance and its history. 'Hand dancing' is a rehearsal technique and by foregrounding it, Cleary and Harding bring attention to a learning method that is both long-standing and widespread throughout the transnational Irish step dancing community. Although most Irish dancers do not employ hand dancing in staged performances as Cleary and Harding do, many Irish step dancers certainly dance with their hands. Dancers are generally unaware of the extent to which this gestural practice has become habitual. In fact, the motivation to perform hand dancing came from Cleary and Harding's producer, who saw them practicing their steps with their hands and thought it would be useful in a trailer for their upcoming tour.³ The widespread presence of hand dancing as part of Irish dance practice became apparent to me over the course of my ethnographic fieldwork in Boston and areas of Ireland. While

¹ Special thanks go to Theresa Buckland for her comments and suggestions following the oral presentation of this research at 'Stepping On: A Conference on Stepping in Dance' (November 2019).

² <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iANRO3I30nM>>.

³ James M. Russell, 'Up & Over It: They Don't Speak Usual Irish Dance', *Huffington Post* (2010) <https://www.huffingtonpost.com/james-m-russell/up-over-it-they-dont-speak_b_782052.html> [accessed 18 March 2019].

interviewing dancers about the revival of regional Irish step dancing styles, I observed that a majority of my interlocutors were using their hands to demonstrate steps during our conversations. Younger dancers used their hands as they talked about dance, but elderly dancers with stamina, balance, or other age-related movement limitations would use their hands to demonstrate dancing that they might have struggled to do on their feet. This revelation prompted me to reflect upon my own dance practice, and to redirect my observations and interviews to investigate hand dancing more thoroughly. In addition to accompanying talk about dance and demonstrating steps, hand dancing is used as a tool for personal recall of choreography and as an activity for socialization and play. Often, hand dancing is paired with another ubiquitous but rarely addressed memory tool: mnemonic 'dance poems'. Dance poems are a kind of 'dance speak', to borrow a term coined by ethnomusicologist Tomie Hahn, consisting of rhythmically organized vocables that describe different footwork movements and metrical patterns.⁴ While used to aid in learning choreography, both hand dancing and dance poems help dancers cultivate the highly valued characteristic of musicality.

Combined with the complication that many dancers are unaware of the extent to which they rely on their hands or voice to remember footwork choreography, there is a great amount of variation in how dancers use their hands and what words they use in dance poems. Furthermore, though hand dancing and dance poems are pervasive among Irish step dancers, they are not universal. These are just some possible explanations for the dearth of ethnographic and historical information about transmission techniques in Irish step dance. In the rare occasion when hand dancing or dance poems are mentioned in scholarly literature, they appear as unelaborated asides, in footnotes or appendices, or without references to source material. In the historiography that follows, I will demonstrate that hand dancing and dance poems have been part of Irish step dance transmission since at least the mid-nineteenth century. Present on the margins of Irish dance and on the margins of Irish dance scholarship, hand dancing

⁴ Tomie Hahn, 'Sensational Knowledge: Embodying Culture through Japanese Dance', *Music/Culture* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 2007).

and dance poems are a kind of 'archival excess' that may provide insight into choreographic memory, musicality, and the embodiment of cultural knowledge.

Archival excess

The idea that movement can generate knowledge is a political one, challenging centuries of colonialist logocentrism. Diana Taylor has coined the term 'the repertoire' to refer to the enactment of embodied memory through performance.⁵ The repertoire encompasses those experiences and practices typically described as ephemeral or impermanent – the kind of material that would be excluded from a conventional archive filled with texts and objects that persist through time rather than manifest through its passage. The repertoire, like the archive, is mediated through specific systems, and this is what allows embodied knowledge to persist as memory:

Multiple forms of embodied acts are always present, though in a constant state of againness. They reconstitute themselves, transmitting communal memories, histories, and values from one group/generation to the next. Embodied and performed acts generate, record, and transmit knowledge.⁶

Taylor notes that the archive and the repertoire are not necessarily mutually exclusive, and I suggest that sensory and media studies provide a path to understanding how these categories intersect.

Responding to similar issues of logocentrism in anthropology a decade earlier, Thomas Csordas proposed 'somatic modes of attention' as a framework for treating the body and bodily experience as the starting point for understanding culture: 'somatic modes of attention are culturally elaborated ways of attending to and with one's body in surroundings that include the embodied presence of others'.⁷ To reveal the 'cultural patterning of bodily experience' we must

⁵ Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

⁶ Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, p. 21.

⁷ Thomas J. Csordas, 'Somatic Modes of Attention', *Cultural Anthropology*, 8.2 (1993), 135–56, p. 138.

attend to the body as a sensing, feeling, and living subject.⁸ Contemporaneous to Csordas, Nadia Seremetakis proposed the concept of sensory memory, whereby the senses mediate experiences of the past. Her example: tasting a rare species of pear, brings into the present the experience of previous tastings and the cultural understandings surrounding its rarity. For Seremetakis, the senses are ‘the switching place where the structure of experience and the structure of knowledge converge and cross’.⁹ Applying Taylor’s terminology to Seremetakis’ formulation, I propose that the senses are irrevocably part of both the archive (the structure of knowledge) and the repertoire (the structure of experience), while simultaneously mediating their intersection as a switching place.

Peter McMurray explores the role of the senses within an actual archive, noting that archives contain many objects that defy standard cataloguing and information management protocols.¹⁰ A tape recorder, for example, is an object that is integral to the production of tape-recorded oral culture, and also allows access to that tape (and by extension to the content that is the oral culture). The tape is catalogued as an archival object, but the tape recorder is not, despite its necessary existence. Furthermore, McMurray uses the sensational experience of these ‘boundary objects’ to elaborate upon the limits and ruptures of archival practice. The smell of card catalogues, the taste of dust, the feel of wood engraving all produce knowledge, but none are captured as archival material in finding aids or inventories. Dust, card catalogues, engravings, all exhibit what McMurray calls a quality of ‘archival excess’. The condition of archival excess is historically contingent, the result of longstanding practices in archive management that determine what content does and does not belong in historical narratives. McMurray points out that materials that might appear inside an archive and yet exist outside its conventional confines create ‘material points of rupture’, where the bounds of an

⁸ Csordas, ‘Somatic Modes of Attention’, pp. 140–41.

⁹ C. Nadia Seremetakis, *The Senses Still: Perception and Memory as Material Culture in Modernity* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), p. vii.

¹⁰ Peter McMurray, ‘Archival Excess: Sensational Histories Beyond the Audiovisual’, *FONTES ARTIS MUSICAE*, 62.3 (2015), pp. 262–275.

archive might burst open.¹¹ Like Taylor's repertoire expanding the 'traditional archive', archival excess too expands the archive and provides a bridge to access embodied cultural knowledge.

Taylor's intervention focuses on performance as a transmission process, yet her focus remains on the thing performed – the dance, the gesture, the act. Like the archive, the repertoire also contains materials that exhibit 'excess', namely transmission methods. Movement practitioners do not only embody choreography, they also embody ways of learning choreography. The senses are an intimate aspect of any dance performance, but they are especially present for a performer during periods of learning. When learning, all resources are brought to bear. In the case of Irish dance, the performance of which involves fast percussive footwork as the main attraction, these resources include the transformation of aural/oral and proprioceptive sensing into other parts of the body. Instrumental melody is sung with the voice, and choreography is performed with the hands.

The conventional archive of Irish dance includes textual and audio-visual documentation of choreographic repertoire. The repertoire of Irish dance includes enactment of footwork choreography that might be fossilized in this archival textual documentation. But on the margins are the expressive practices that facilitate the transmission between bodies and the translation between text and experience. Hand dancing and dance poems exist on the edges of awareness for dancers, despite their ubiquity in personal methods for remembering choreography. These transmission methods also exist on the edges of Irish dance history, appearing as brief mentions in broader descriptions of dance transmission. Attention to Irish dance transmission to date could be described as logistical, recounting the who, what, and where of the nineteenth-century travelling dance master tradition or the basic structure of a twentieth-century competitive dance class. The methods themselves, however, are rarely elaborated or analysed. Although a search for glimmers of hand dancing and dance poems in primary and scholarly sources is itself a

¹¹ McMurray, 'Archival Excess', p. 265.

practice centred around text, recuperating these historical traces provides a ground for recuperating lived experience.

Hand dancing, dance poems, and musicality

Documentary evidence of the value of musicality in Irish dance appears in sources from the late nineteenth century. Dance masters would challenge one another by ‘calling a tune’ (singing the melody of a tune, or ‘lilting’) with judgement placed on how well the challenged dancer could ‘follow the tune’.¹² This ability is still valued today among Irish traditional dancers and musicians. A dancer is judged by their ability to dance musically, to demonstrate their knowledge of the music and their skill at interpreting it with rhythmic footwork. Musicality in this context is inextricably linked to rhythm – dancers and musicians alike are taught that rhythm is the most important aspect of their performance. If a performer cannot play or dance in time, they are doing it wrong.

The importance of musicality and rhythm is perhaps most obvious in dance poems, which are used explicitly in Irish step dance instruction. Irish dance steps are eight measure long choreographies that can be broken down into smaller choreographic elements and motifs (also often called ‘steps’).¹³ An instructor breaks an eight-bar step into smaller sequences and motifs, teaching each in turn. Each sequence or motif is described as it is demonstrated. As a dancer learns the

¹² Helen Brennan, *The Story of Irish Dance* (Dingle: Brandon, 1999), p. 50.

¹³ Using terminology defined by the International Folk Music Council in 1972 (now the International Council for Traditional Music), Foley describes a method for the structural analysis of Irish traditional step dance. An ‘element’ is the lowest order of movement and is comprised of gestures such as a hop, kick, or stamp, et cetera. A ‘cell’ is composed of two or three elements that combine to form a movement such as a shuffle. A ‘motif’ consists of arrangements of cells that form a meaningful unit. For example, the final movement sequence of Kevin Doyle’s hornpipe (‘tip down shuffle cut shuffle hop back’) is a common motif for ending hornpipe steps. The fourth structural level is a ‘minor phrase’, which link motifs together into repeated patterns; and the fifth structural level is that of the ‘major phrase’, which aligns with the four bar musical phrase. The ‘step’ is the sixth structural level and describes an entire eight bar choreography. The seventh structural level, ‘repeat’, refers to the common practice of repeating the entire eight bar step on the opposite foot. The eighth and final structural level is called the ‘dance’ and refers type in terms of meter and rhythm (e.g., hornpipe, jig, reel).

See Catherine Foley, *Irish Traditional Step Dancing in North Kerry: A Contextual and Structural Analysis* (Listowel: North Kerry Literary Trust, 2012).

particular movement associated with a particular beat or moment in the musical structure, the description of the movement is reduced to vocables that align with the rhythmic patterns of the music. Over time the dance poem is internalised. The dance poem that results from this process thus contains structural links between music and choreography but requires an embodied understanding of the underlying motifs to be deciphered. For example, the dance poem that I associate with a hornpipe step taught to me by Rhode Island dancer Kevin Doyle (his 'showy step') refers to common Irish step dance motifs as well as idiosyncratic movement patterns:¹⁴

Jump **out** jump **out**, step **step** step **heel**,
 Tip **down** shuffle one-**two** one-two, tip **down** shuffle one-**two**
 one-two
Prance two-three, **prance** two-three, **step** toe-heel down, **step**
 toe-heel down,
Hop shuffle hop **back**, tip down shuffle **cut** shuffle hop **back**.
 [my emphasis, marks prosody]

Without an accompanying visual depiction or without pre-existing knowledge of the choreography, the words in this dance poem are vague (see Video 1, <https://youtu.be/A5_LjaP552s> for a demonstration of the step). For example, the first motif 'jump out jump out' may refer to a multitude of movement patterns within Irish dance. A more clear and instructive description of this movement segment might go something like this:

1. Jump with the ankles crossed, right foot in front of the left.
2. Jump again on the left foot, and simultaneously extend the right leg out and away from the body, hinging the leg at the hip without any bend in the knee. As the leg is extended, the dancer should turn slightly to their left so that they are at a 45-degree angle to the audience.
3. Bring the right leg back down to bring the feet together, again with the right in front of the left, crossed at the ankles. the 45-degree angle to the audience should remain.

¹⁴ For a video clip of Kevin Doyle performing this step, among other hornpipes, see the following link: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o048yEx5sUY>>.

4. Jump again on the left foot, and simultaneously extend the right leg out and away from the body, hinging the leg at the hip without any bend in the knee. The 45-degree angle to the audience should remain.

'Jump out jump out' is a memory device that communicates a complicated choreographic pattern. The words may not on their face convey very much information, but the process of learning to dance imbues those small words with a rich amount of choreographic data. The dance poem is also a carrier of musical information. Sometimes, a dancer will sing the dance poem to the melody of a favourite tune to facilitate recall or to serve as a metrical guide. Here, either the tune they select will have been closely associated with the dance when they learned it, or it will have been memorized for the express purpose of structuring dance choreography recall. For example, when I try to remember any hornpipe step, my tune of choice is 'Fly by Night'. Like other Irish dancers, remembering the tune helps me remember the metrical and rhythmic feeling of the dance (see Figure 1).¹⁵ The process of breaking down the movement and rhythm and associating them through speech and music creates a tacit knowledge of musical structure.¹⁶

Like dance poems, hand dancing is a reduced version of a more complicated footwork pattern that marks structural moments in the choreography and cultivates musicality. The rhythm and choreography of Irish dance is transferred from the feet into the hands where movement patterns can be practiced with less overall physical and cognitive effort. This is a useful technique for instructors needing a break from dancing or for dancers to practice when they might be prohibited from using their feet or making noise. The

¹⁵ Hornpipes are commonly notated in 4/4 meter, but are traditionally played with a swing. Thus, for ease in comparing melodic and choreographic structure, the tune 'Fly by Night' has been notated in 12/8 meter. This tune (like most instrumental tunes) consists of two eight-measure repeated parts, taking the form AABB. The tune transcription was done by the author from a recording by accordionist Dan Gurney, *Irish Traditional Music on the Button Accordion*, CD (RealWorld Studios, 2012).

¹⁶ Frank Hall, 'Irish Dancing: Discipline as Art, Sport, and Duty' (unpublished PhD Dissertation, Indiana University, 1995). Notably, mention of the use of dance poems in Irish dance transmission is omitted in the book version of Hall's dissertation: *Competitive Irish Dance: Art, Sport, Duty* (Madison, WI: Macater Press, 2008).

transfer of movement from feet to hands also has practical ramifications for musicality as it reinforces a whole-body internalisation of musical movement. As any expert mover can relate, gestures that seem to be confined to a particular body part in fact rely heavily on the entire body for successful actualisation. Hand dancing and dance poems may be used by dancers independently of one another, or they may be used together (see Video 2 <<https://youtu.be/cHSWtME9izc>> for a demonstration of Kevin Doyle's 'showy step' via hand dancing, accompanied by a dance poem sung to the tune 'Fly by Night').

The image shows a musical score for the tune 'Fly by Night' in G major, 12/8 time. It consists of four systems, each with a melody line (Tune) and a corresponding dance poem line (Step). The lyrics are: jump out jump out step step step heel tip; down shuf - fle one two one two tip down shuf - fle one two one two; prance two three prance two three step toe heel down step toe heel down; hop shuf - fle hop back tip down shuf - fle cut shuf - fle hop back.

Figure 1: Musical transcription of the tune 'Fly by Night' and of Kevin Doyle's 'showy step', accompanied by the dance poem for the step choreography.

Dancing with the hands in Irish dance is not explicitly taught nor tied to a conventional instructional pattern in the same way as dance poems. Though dancers might purposely use hand dancing to demonstrate or facilitate recall, they also dance with their hands spontaneously while describing a movement pattern or even when

referencing dance in a general nondescript way. For dance students, continual exposure to hand dancing as it is used in these intentional and non-intentional ways encourages implicit acquisition. The wide variety of hand dancing techniques is further evidence of the implicit nature of this process. Boston based dancer, Hannah DeRusha recounted, 'I don't think anyone taught me because I actually tend to do it with my fingers rather than my whole hands. I remember noticing at some point that other dancers did it with their whole hands' (see Figure 2).¹⁷ Some dancers use their entire hands and either gesture in the air or against their lap or a table. Others, like Hannah, use just their fingers, with two fingers marking the movements for each foot against their thumb. For some, the use of a 'ground' affords haptic feedback that mimics the percussive quality of the dancing and reinforces rhythm and meter.

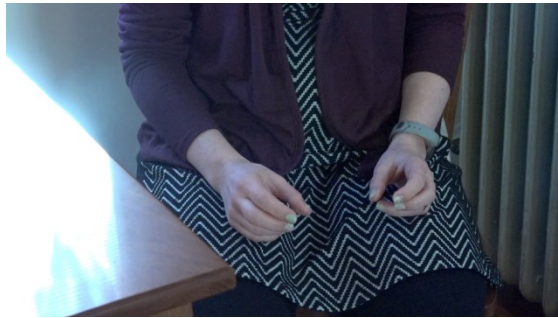


Figure 2: Hannah DeRusha's uses her fingers to demonstrate a step, 4 November 2019 (photographed by author and reproduced with permission of the subject).

Dance poems in the historical record

Dance poems and 'dance speak' more generally have received some attention by scholars, primarily due to their use in dance education. Part of the travelling dance master tradition of the nineteenth century, they were noted by two of the earliest sources on Irish dance master culture: William Carleton's account of country dancing masters from 1840 and R. Shelton Mackenzie's account of the Irish dancing master from 1855. Both describe the use of a particular dance poem meant to help the learner distinguish their right foot from their left. To the right

¹⁷ Hannah DeRusha, personal communication, 18 March 2019.

foot was attached a *suggaun* (a piece of woven straw) and to the left foot was attached a *gad* (a piece of woven willow). The dance master would then recite in 6/8 jig time: ‘**rise** upon *suggaun* and **sink** upon *gad*; **rise** upon *suggaun* and **sink** upon *gad*’ [emphasis added to indicate prosody].¹⁸

Dance scholars have cited this source material from Carleton and Mackenzie, but none have discussed the importance of the dance poem for learning actual step choreography. Mary Friel, Catherine Foley, and Helen Brennan reference this dance poem and its vocables to acknowledge the earliest accounts of the itinerant dance master tradition and form a description of the practices of this profession.¹⁹ Brennan transcribes the rhyme as follows:

Come *súgán*, come *gad*
 Come *gad*, come *súgán*
Agus hop upon *súgán*
 And **sink** upon *gad*²⁰

[my emphasis, marks prosody]

Though they describe the rhyme as a mnemonic and learning aid, beyond teaching students to distinguish their right foot from their left, Friel, Foley and Brennan do not elaborate on what else this rhyme may have taught. Actual choreographic information is absent from Carleton and Mackenzie’s accounts, so it cannot be expected that Friel, Foley and Brennan would have answers to what repertoire might be hidden in this textual archive. Nevertheless, it is not just that this rhyme served to help distinguish the right foot from the left, but also that it assisted the dancer in *remembering* step choreography reliant

¹⁸ William Carleton, ‘The Country Dancing-Master: An Irish Sketch’, *The Irish Penny Journal*, 1.9 (1840), 69–72 (p. 72);

R. Shelton (Robert Shelton) Mackenzie, *Bits of Blarney* (New York: Redfield, 1854), p. 298.

¹⁹ Mary Friel, *Dancing as a Social Pastime in the South-East of Ireland, 1800–1897* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2004), p. 12;

Catherine Foley, *Step Dancing in Ireland: Culture and History*, Ashgate Popular and Folk Music Series (Farnham, Surrey, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2013), p. 67; Brennan, *The Story of Irish Dance*, p. 52.

²⁰ Unlike Friel and Foley, Brennan does not associate her rhyme with Carleton and Mackenzie and simply mentions that it is ‘a little learning rhyme from Muskerry in County Cork’, p. 52.

on weight shifts between the right and left. The prosody of the dance poem, matched to the meter of 6/8 jig time reinforces the rhythm of the step choreography as it is ingrained into embodied memory. Its re-inscription in newly written histories of Irish dance reinforce the fact that dance poems are highly relevant information mediums for dancers active today, and perhaps have been continuously so for the last two hundred and fifty years.

In her 2013 study based on fieldwork from the 1980s, Foley traces the career of Jeremiah Molyneux (c.1881–1965; known to his pupils as ‘Munnix’) through oral histories with his students. She argues that Molyneux represents an uninterrupted connection between the nineteenth-century itinerant dancing master tradition and Irish dance practices of the twentieth century. Considered by many to be the last teacher to use the itinerant dance master system, Molyneux was a pupil of the itinerant dance master Nedín Batt Walsh (c. 1835–c. 1901), who in turn was a pupil of Thomas ‘Múirín’ Moore (1823–1878). Molyneux was active as a dance teacher from 1903 until 1953, after which he shared steps occasionally until his death in 1965. Based on interviews with Molyneux’s students, Foley pieced together his format for dance instruction, which resembles that of earlier accounts and of practices today: he taught each step in pieces, gradually, until the entire choreographic phrase had been learned. He used specific terminology for motifs and movements, and he made up dance poems, such as this one for dance well known among Irish dancers today, called the ‘rising step’:²¹

Out with the right, and **out** with the left,
Out with the right, and **grind** with the left
Out with the left, and **grind** with the right
Out with the right, and **grind** with the left²²

[emphasis in original]

Foley assumes a particular embodied knowledge of the reader by including this dance poem without further elaboration on the

²¹ Foley, *Step Dancing in Ireland*, p. 83.

²² Foley, *Step Dancing in Ireland*, p. 82.

movement patterns embedded within it.²³ Like references to the *suggaun/gad* rhyme, Foley uses this dance poem to demonstrate a teaching and learning process but does not elaborate on the work this dance poem does. Translated into text without a performative component, dance poems are entered in the archive, while being divorced from the repertoire.

Hand dancing in the historical record

Dance poems can and do take a textual form, and thus they lend themselves well to preservation in historical records, albeit scant. Dancers are intimately familiar with dance poems because of their explicit use in instructional formats and they often write down dance poems in personal notebooks. One dancer recounted to me how her childhood dance teacher would require the students to bring cassette tape recorders to record the teacher's voice reciting the dance poem along with the music for the students to have as practice aids.²⁴ When collecting oral histories, dance scholars are likely to copy these dance poems down from their interlocutors. As I have demonstrated, dance poems are often included in histories of Irish dance, even if they are not elaborated upon. This lack of elaboration and performative context naturally lead to a partial representation of embodied knowledge.²⁵ Dance poems appear in the archive, but they do not fit neatly, similar to the mediating technologies that occupy space in an archive but are nevertheless excluded from its catalogue (e.g., McMurray's tape recorder).

Hand dancing, however, exemplifies excess. While the practice is naturally bound up with the transmission and performance of Irish

²³ In a footnote attached to this rhyme, Foley directs her readers to her unpublished dissertation (1988) and the book version of her dissertation (2012) for Labanotation transcriptions of the steps she collected from Molyneaux's students. While incredibly precise, Labanotation is limited in its accessibility to readers not literate in that dance notation. See Foley, *Irish Traditional Step Dancing in North Kerry*.

²⁴ Hannah DeRusha, Interview, 4 November 2019.

²⁵ In describing the relationship between the archive and the repertoire, Taylor notes that textual accounts of performance in pre-Conquest Latin America relied upon performance to make sense: 'More precise information could be stored through writing and it required specialized skills, but it depended on embodied culture for transmission', *The Archive and the Repertoire*, p. 17.

dance, dancers are typically unaware they even use it as a technique. Hand dancing is foregrounded when it becomes necessary, for example among dancers who cannot dance with their feet due to age or injury. Like infrastructure, it is invisible until something breaks down. As a result, its presence in the historical archive is fragmentary. References to hand dancing in the historical narrative are further strained by the fact that the way dancers employ the technique is deeply personal. As mentioned earlier, techniques range from the use of two hands to the use of fingers on either or both hands.

One example of this fragmentary presence of hand dancing in historical accounts of Irish dance comes from the life of Molyneaux. Both Foley and dance historian John Cullinane recount how he used his fingers to compose steps. Cullinane's account is drawn from a speech given by Listowel writer Bryan MacMahon at a 1973 memorial event honouring Molyneaux's life:

Not very long before he died, Jerry knocked at my door one Saturday. He came in and sat down, and for almost half an hour we spoke of many topics, and yet I could not determine what really he had on his mind. I spoke of everything except dancing; I thought that if he wished to speak of it it should come from himself. Then he took his cap off his knee and said quietly, 'This is the way I used to make up my steps', at the same time dancing his forefinger and middle finger on his thumb. An hour after he had gone I realised that he had come to tell me all he knew so that he would be remembered when he passed on.²⁶

Foley's introduction of Molyneaux describes his personal memory work techniques and the fact that they are a feature of how he himself is remembered in local memory. This is, however, the only time that she mentions 'finger dancing' in her book-length account of Molyneaux's life and career:

²⁶ Bryan MacMahon in 1973 as it appears in John Cullinane, *Aspects of the History of Irish Dancing* (self-published, 1999), p. 42. Foley also references a recording of this oration, which is held in archives at the Siamse Tíre National Folk Theatre of Ireland.

Molyneaux had a number of accomplishments. He was a dancing master, first and foremost, and he was also a cobbler, a carpenter, and worked in the forge with his father. He also bred canaries as a hobby. However, it was as a dancing master that he is best known. He spent most of his life creating and teaching step dance, and it is remembered within local memory how he made up step dances using his fingers in lieu of feet, and how, when seated by the fire, he would create choreographic patterns with a stick on the ashes in the fire.²⁷

Like Molyneaux's use of dance poems and his general instructional technique, the use of his fingers to choreograph steps suggests the possibility that instructors of the nineteenth-century itinerant dance master tradition also used manual gesture to facilitate recall and creativity. If we are to accept Foley's argument that Molyneaux represents a bridge between instructional practices of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, then it is not only step choreography that bridges these dance practices, but also how the choreography was taught. If hand dancing is implicitly learned by dancers today, and then used by them explicitly, then it is reasonable to imagine that Molyneaux himself may have also implicitly learned to finger dance from a teacher.

On the edges of Foley's research, further evidence for the implicit but crucial nature of hand dancing appears in an appendix of biographical notes about dancer Jack Dineen (b. 1907–d.?). One day in his youth, he learned a step from an 'older man' named Micky Connor up on the cliff over Poll Buí strand near Bedford, County Kerry. Dineen recounted to Foley:

A great dancer but *he had a habit of working the hands* [...] Had great sound [...] I don't know whoever taught him, I never asked him, a great sound dancer. About an hour and a half I learned the long part of the Blackbird, and I must be young for and I coming hither, I went into Ruddens [...] and you'd see a half-door in every house that time [...] *didn't I put*

²⁷ Foley, *Step Dancing in Ireland*, p. 78.

*my hands up on the half-door to know if I had it right before I'd lose it. I came down anyway and my mother was making the tea in the old house and our father had the hearing of a cat. Didn't I go up in the room to give at it, and I having a hold of the round table above in the upper room, the west room now in the old house. 'So, is it trying the Blackbird that fellow is?' says he.*²⁸

[my emphasis]

Dineen opens by describing how Micky Connor 'had a habit of working the hands', implying that Connor made some kind of hand movement either while dancing or while teaching. Perhaps this is a reference to Connor using a form of hand dancing. Dineen's language also suggests that he himself used his hands to gesture the step choreography: 'didn't I put my hands up on the half-door to know if I had it right before I'd lose it'. Based on other information from these biographical notes, it can be estimated that this was sometime in the 1910s. Thus, Micky Connor, described as 'older' by Dineen, would have also represented a bridge between nineteenth and twentieth-century dance practices, just as Molyneaux had.

My final example of historiographic evidence of hand dancing comes from Helen Brennan. Her book is the only published material that addresses both improvised and choreographed styles of Irish dance. She makes many interventions in the small field of Irish dance studies, and one of those is to suggest that the nineteenth-century itinerant dance master tradition was not the only mode through which dance steps were learned and circulated. One example of a dance lineage outside of this convention is of dancer Paddy Magee from Beleek, County Fermanagh. Magee was taught how to step dance in approximately 1936 from his eighty-year-old uncle Johnny McGirl. If McGirl had himself learned as a young person, then his steps could be traced to the 1860s. According to Magee, McGirl would 'hold on to the back of a chair while showing them the stepping and demonstrated leg movements with his fingers "dancing" on the table while he

²⁸ Jack Dineen in 1985, as recorded in Foley, *Irish Traditional Step Dancing in North Kerry*, pp. 221–22.

lilted'.²⁹ McGirl used a form of hand dancing to demonstrate a step, while also lirting a tune. Not only does this example demonstrate the use of hand dancing as technology of learning from the mid-nineteenth century, but it also indicates the intimate link between musicality and transmission methods.

Conclusion

As these examples of dance poems and hand dancing in historical literature about Irish dance indicate, references to these transmission methods are incidental and appear on the margins. Exemplifying archival excess, the record of these transmission methods does not fit easily into the historical narrative around Irish dance, and yet they are pervasive and persistent. And as McMurray has noted of boundary objects and archival excess, these objects rupture the potentialities of the material archive. In cases of both dance poems and hand dancing, the embodied knowledge of step dancing is transformed by technologies of memory production and reproduction, and is thus necessarily bound up in the physicality of learning a step. The information that is embodied within these technologies is given up to interpretation by the many dancers who learn, embody and enact these choreographies in their own bodies and with their own style. Hand dancing and dance poems encourage continuity, but also contain the potential for breakdown – they point to areas of discomfort with bodies, ability and what counts as tradition.

There is space for rupture within dance poems and hand dancing because without the context of the transmission process these methods are informationally impoverished. Dancers have recounted to me that they cannot really learn a step from hand dancing or dance poems alone, or that they need to learn the step first with their feet before attempting to write down the words or translate it into their hands. I count myself among the many dancers who return to a dance poem associated with a step learned months or years prior and are baffled by our own description – time turns once informationally rich words into nonsense. Yet, hand dancing and dance poems are an essential means of communicating dance knowledge, particularly in

²⁹ Brennan, *The Story of Irish Dance*, p. 59.

situations where a dancer is physically unable to dance upright on their feet. Thus, the use of hand dancing and dance poems is inherently collaborative and experiential: in personal practice, it is a collaboration between forms of embodied memory and recall; and in exchange and instruction, it is a dialogic collaboration between teacher and learner.

Cleary and Harding's 2010 YouTube performance challenges prevailing narratives by invoking joy through a humorous rupturing of expectations. Their movements are nonsensical and absurd to the uninitiated viewer and induce nostalgia and empathy among viewers who are reminded of the role of hand dancing in their own Irish step dance experiences.³⁰ Rupture in transmission also allows for stylistic interpretation and the embodiment of the movements of one body into another. It is transformative and integral to the way cultural expressions adapt, develop, and change, allowing them to persist through time. Hand dancing and dance poems are keys to understanding how movement attains meaning in Irish dance as they are intimately tied to *being* and *becoming* an Irish dancer. Recovering these transmission techniques from the margins of Irish dance history is one step toward linking the textual archive of Irish dance to the lived and embodied repertoire of Irish dance.

About the author

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³⁰ See the comments section of the YouTube video page <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iANRO3I30nM>>.

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Mats Melin

The 'Scotch Reel' as a Solo Dance: An Examination of the Circle Motif and Structure and its Connection to some Scotch Reels and Scottish Solo Dances

Abstract

This paper is exploring the possible relationship in dance structure between the 'Scotch Reel' and older Scottish solo dances. A number of early forms of the Scottish social dance, the 'Scotch Reel' for four people, featured a two-parted dance structure involving a circle during the first part of the tune and a stepping sequence by the dancer on the spot for the other part of the tune. This binary structure is also apparent in older solo dances such as 'Dannsa nam Flurs', and other solo dances researcher Frank Rhodes found and noted down in the Gaelic communities in Cape Breton Island in 1957.¹ The circle motif occurs in a number of Scottish/British and Irish solo dances and also in some social dances from the same areas. The paper explores some possible connections between these dances and ask questions about the structure of the steps done in the circle and setting parts of the dances and possible meaning making of the circle motif.

The circle as a motif or formation is common to many dance forms in both solo and group dances around the world. Even genre labels such as 'circle' or 'round the room' dances indicate the shape's popularity. The following discussion focuses generally on a choreographic pathway in Scottish solo dances where a dancer is moving round in a circle and references some related dance traditions in Ireland, England, and North America. The circular section is known under

¹ In J. F. Flett and T. M. Flett, eds., *Traditional Step Dancing in Scotland* (Edinburgh: Scottish Cultural Press, 1996).

many names: the lead, lead round, promenade round, circle round, the address or, simply, circle, to name some. More specifically, this examination concentrates on a possible relationship between the 'Scotch Reel', in particular the circular 'West Highland Reel' as described by the Fletts and Rhodes (1964), and a group of Scottish solo dances exhibiting a similar two-parted structure (Rhodes 1996). Could the solo dance be the representation of a reel by a solo dancer? Segmentations of internal steps into motifs and changes in levels of movement intensity in relation to the associated music are also presented.

The 'circle round' in the solo step dance

For the purpose of this discussion I will refer to any choreographic circular travelling section as the 'circle round'. In the circle round, a solo dancer travels around a circular pathway using a step appropriate to the dance genre and musical time signature, for example, the motif 'step close step hop/sink' in 4/4 reel time. A few examples from Irish step dance and North American tap dance traditions are useful to highlight as reference points.

In 1914, O'Keeffe and O'Brien wrote, in their *Handbook of Irish Dances*, regarding the structure of step dances:

Jigs are divided into two parts of eight bars each. For purposes of dancing, each part is played twice before proceeding to play the other part – to conform with the usual mode of dancing jigs. The dancer commences with the right foot, dances his steps till the completion of eight bars, when he doubles the step, that is, dances it over again, the left foot this time doing exactly what the right foot did during the first eight bars, and *vice versa*. This completes a double step, [...] The jig may be danced singly or by one or more couples; in the former case the dancer, on the completion of each double set of steps, dances round in a circle during sixteen bars.²

² J.G. O'Keeffe, J.G., and Art O'Brien, *A Handbook of Irish Dances* (Dublin: Gill & MacMillan, 1912).

The reel is written in two-four or common time and is always danced singly, that is, the parts are never doubled. Steps are danced to eight bars, then the dancers glide round in a circle to the next 8 bars, when they resume their steps, performing as a rule the reverse of the former step. [...] It is the custom in many places to divide the reel into two portions, the first portion consisting of simple, graceful movements, wholly devoid of trebling, the second portion consisting almost solely of the most difficult trebling steps.³

The hornpipe, like the reel, is written in two-four, or common time, [...] It is usually danced by one man alone, or by two men who stand opposite each other. It is rarely danced by women. Like the jig, it is danced to double time, 16 bars being devoted to steps and 16 more to a kind of promenade or glide round in a circle keeping time to the music by the simple one, two, three, movement. When danced by two it assumes the character of a friendly contest, each man dancing his steps in turn, one resting while the other is dancing. In Donegal the hornpipe is usually danced with twelve steps, each step having an appropriate 'cover' or finish differing from the steps.⁴

These Irish examples show that the circle round was done both when dancing solo and when dancing with one or more dancers in a group. If there were four dancers performing, then the circle round part would commonly be a right hands across and a left hands across back. It seems that in the examples given by O'Keefe and O'Brien the stepping or 'trebling' sequence always came first and was followed by the circle round part. This was also the case in the 9/8 'hop jig', where the pattern was the same as in the reel.⁵

Across the Atlantic in America, the popular minstrelsy performances of the 1830s to 1850s often closed with a walk around, a promenading

³ O'Keefe and O'Brien, *A Handbook of Irish Dances*, p.106.

⁴ O'Keefe and O'Brien, *A Handbook of Irish Dances*, p.107.

⁵ O'Keefe and O'Brien, *A Handbook of Irish Dances*, p.107.

solo in playbills of the 1840s which swelled into an ensemble act during the following decade.⁶

As the company clapped and patted knees and shouted encouragement, one dancer would advance downstage, walk in a circle, execute a fancy step or a funny one, and return to the group. Then another dancer would repeat the sequence, displaying his own step and style. At the end, everyone would circumnavigate the stage.⁷

The display format of taking turns by circling and showing a step is often seen at the end of Irish dancing competitions and variants of this also happens on occasion in *sean nós* dance competitions. In today's Cape Breton 'Scotch Four' which I will describe in further detail later, dancers, after alternating circling and stepping on the spot a number of times, line up so that each dancer can take a turn going forward to 'show a step'. The walk around was featured in newspaper reports of African American dancer Master Juba, 'King of All Dancers', who performed throughout England and Scotland with Pell's Ethiopian Minstrels from 1848 to 1850.⁸

A critic for the *Manchester Guardian* seized on the way breaks of furious motion were preceded by slow, circular promenading ('with an air of satisfaction') [by Juba]. It sounds like a walk-around [...] like contemporaneous descriptions of Irish dancers 'circumambulating' before a jig (and, for that matter, like a flamenco *bailaor* or a break dancer catching his breath as he builds up anticipation, then diving in again)⁹

The choreographic circle motif appears in a wide variety of solo dances, made for stage/display or competition, including many versions of the 'Sailor's Hornpipe' (Scottish, English, French etc.), the Scottish competitive version of the 'Irish Jig', and the 'Seann Triubhas'

⁶ Brian Seibert, *What the Eye Hears: A History of Tap Dancing* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015), p.66.

⁷ Seibert, *What the Eye Hears*, p.67.

⁸ Seibert, *What the Eye Hears*, p.84.

⁹ Seibert, *What the Eye Hears*, p.86.

of Scottish Highland dancing. In Irish solo dancing today, the lead is sometimes a done in a circle. It also appears in Irish *sean nós* dancing as a characteristic motif. Many skills dances in the Scottish and Irish tradition, such as the brush or broom dance, or dancing over and around a candle, involve circling around the object in question. In some English step dances and in morris dancing circling likewise appears. Further afield, we see solo dancers doing the Norwegian *Halling* dance using the circular motif throughout the dance to name but one further example.

Why does this dance structure appear in so many places and why is it so widely used? Is it simply a way for a dancer to announce his presence and draw attention to his dancing from a crowd around him or when entering a stage? Or does the circle round serve a choreographic function, to contrast with movements of other steps performed, as a 'resting' step between more complex 'show-off' steps? Or, does it reflect the character of the part of the tune the dance is performed to? Or, was it simply a choreographic idea shared among many dancing masters, who each applied their own take or version of it, which later filtered out into vernacular use among dance styles that improvise footwork? This discussion may not answer any of these questions, but they are worth keeping in mind. In the literature consulted the usage of the circle round appears as a fact but why it is included is hardly ever considered.

The structure of the circle round

The circle round may be done clockwise or counterclockwise depending on the dance, and commonly lasts eight bars, danced to one single part of the tune, or a four bar length part repeated depending on the tune's length. Sometimes it is done as a sixteen bar long single circle. In some dances, such as the 'Irish Jig' and 'First of August', the circle round part is performed round clockwise for eight bars and then repeated in a mirrored fashion going around counterclockwise during the following repeated eight bars of music.

Another common feature of a circle round has the circle part done in six bars, using a travelling motif movement, with a two-bar closing motif specific to the dance and musical time signature, often 4/4 reel

time or 6/8 jig time. This motif is performed on the spot in the place where the circle originally commenced, and is commonly called a 'break'. This may be done once only, going around clockwise, or danced with a repeat going around counterclockwise. In the 'Sailor's Hornpipe' and 'Seann Triubhas', for example, the first circle is counterclockwise and the repeat is done clockwise. The common denominator in these circle round variations is that the simpler, repetitive travelling motif generally contrasts with more complex steps performed in the rest of the dance and in the closing motif if used. Thus, its inclusion creates a distinctive and recognisable feature of these dances.

The circle round in the Scottish traditions of dance

In the Scottish solo dance tradition the circle round is today commonly seen as the first step performed in the 'Sailor's Hornpipe', Scottish version of the 'Irish Jig', 'Scottish Lilt', and in the 'Seann Triubhas'. They all, apart from the 'Scottish Lilt', exhibit the same structure of six bars (three bars in 'Seann Triubhas' 4/4 timing) circling round and a finishing motif break before the sequence is repeated, circling in the opposite direction. The 'Scottish Lilt' features one complete counterclockwise circle with a three-bar travel motif done twice followed by a one-bar stationary motif at the halfway point and at the end of the circle. The starting direction (clockwise or counterclockwise) of the circle round depends on the dance and sometimes on which version of the given dance is being performed. The circle round in these dances does not appear in a recurring and repeated choreographic pattern; it is only used as a starting step. The circle also appears in less commonly featured dances such as the imported and arranged Scottish version of the American 'Cakewalk', related to the minstrel walk around example given above.

Detailed descriptions of the 'Sailor's Hornpipe' and the 'Irish Jig' appear first in Scottish dancing masters' ballroom guides published in the later nineteenth century; *David Anderson's Ballroom Guide and Solo Dance Guide*, published in Dundee 1897, is an excellent

example.¹⁰ Both dances were part of the nineteenth-century British stage dancing tradition. Much earlier, in a 1752 manuscript, dancing master John McGill named only one hornpipe step as 'single and double round step'.¹¹ In New Zealand today, the first hornpipe step is known as either the 'circle' or 'clear the deck'.¹² The name clear the deck certainly suggests a reason for this circle step and is perhaps the only meaningful label of a circle round step to do so. The circle round in the 'Seann Triubhas' was introduced to the dance by D.G. MacLennan in the early twentieth century, fashioned after classical ballet movements that he admired from his brother William MacLennan's exhibition dance 'Parazotti'. The 'Scottish Lilt' was first described in print in D.G. MacLennan's 1950 book, and was possibly also arranged and altered by him.¹³ A recently devised Scottish solo dance also includes circle round introductory steps, including 'A Tribute to J.L. MacKenzie' choreographed by the late Miss Elspeth Strathern.¹⁴

Some other solo dances collected by the Fletts and Rhodes in the 1950s include clockwise introduction steps which get repeated in the other direction. These dances are the 'First of August', 'Over the Hills and Far Away', 'Miss Forbes', 'Miss Gayton's Hornpipe', and '(East Fife) Clog Hornpipe', which has a counterclockwise start.¹⁵ Known versions of the Scottish and Manx 'Dirk Dances' involve a circle rounds.¹⁶ Many Scottish sword dances (such as the solo version 'Gille Calum', 'Jacobite', 'Lochaber', and 'Argyll' named arrangements, to mention just a few), start with circles round the swords, but this may,

¹⁰ David Anderson, *David Anderson's Ballroom Guide and Solo Dance Guide* (Dundee: W. P. Saunders, 1897).

¹¹ John McGill, Manuscript (1752) <<https://archive.rscds.org/index.php/mcgill-manuscript>> [accessed 2 November 2019].

¹² New Zealand Academy of Highland and National Dancing (Inc.), *Syllabus of Technique for the Sailor's Hornpipe Exam. Stage 2*, (1989).

¹³ Donald George MacLennan, *Highland and Traditional Scottish Dances*, 1st edn (Edinburgh, 1950).

¹⁴ Scottish Dance Teachers' Alliance, *The Scottish National Dances*, 8th edn (Glasgow, 1991).

¹⁵ J. F. Flett and T. M. Flett, eds., *Traditional Step Dancing in Scotland* (Edinburgh: Scottish Cultural Press, 1996).

¹⁶ Manx Folk Dance Society, *Rinkaghyn Vannin—dances of Man* (Isle of Man: Sleih gqn thie, 1982).

however, have other reasons. One reason of the circle round in the sword dances, is that you ‘address’ or acknowledge each sword or point before you engage in the skills challenge of dancing over them, ideally without touching them in the process. The circle motif is a very important component of these various dance traditions.

None of the descriptions for the dances mentioned above, apart from the New Zealand version of the ‘Sailor’s Hornpipe’, indicate why the circle round is preferably done as a starting step. Some of the questions posed earlier in this discussion may well be applied to the ‘why’ for these dances, but at present I have found almost no suggested answers in available literature. However, in the Irish examples given by O’Keeffe and O’Brien above, it was clear that the alternating pattern of percussive footwork and the circle round was used by solo dancers and groups, which suggests that the contrast of the movement elements was important.

This leads on to my core focus in this examination of possible relationships between circular ‘West Highland Reels’ and ‘Scotch Reels’, and solo dances remembered by ancestors of Highland Gaels in Cape Breton Island in the 1950s. These various reels have been researched by the Fletts, Emmerson, and, more recently, Sparling.¹⁷ However, only Frank Rhodes picked up on the use of the circular ‘reel’ in the Gaelic/Highland solo dances he observed in Cape Breton Island in 1957 and suggested the link between the Reels and the Solo dances in passing.¹⁸

The ‘Scotch Reel’ as a social dance and its binary structure

The ‘Scotch Reel’, often also known as the ‘Highland’ or ‘Foursome Reel’ in Scotland, and as the ‘Scotch Four’ in Cape Breton, is a two part

¹⁷ J.F. Flett and T.M. Flett, *Traditional Dancing in Scotland* (London: Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1964);

J.F. Flett and T.M. Flett / Joan Flett and Tom Flett, ‘The History of Scottish Reel as a Dance-Form: I’, in *Scottish Studies*, (1972), 16, pp. 91–120;

George Sinclair Emmerson, *A Social History of Scottish Dance. Ane Celestial Recreation* (Montreal and London: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1972);

Heather Sparling, ‘History of the Scotch Four: A Social Step Dance in Cape Breton’ *Canadian Folk Music*, 49:2/3, Summer/Fall (2015), pp. 11–18.

¹⁸ Frank Rhodes, ‘Step Dancing in Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia’, in J. F. Flett and T. M. Flett, eds., *Traditional Step Dancing in Scotland* (Edinburgh: Scottish Cultural Press, 1996), pp. 185–211.

dance. A true 'Scotch Reel' is a dance consisting of setting steps danced on the spot, which can be varied as the dancers please, alternated with a travelling figure that usually repeats throughout the dance. Some, possibly older, forms use a circle pathway for travelling; a figure of eight pattern is another common pathway. An unusual feature of social dances, some reels involve a change in musical tempo in the course of the dance, usually from slow to quick, from strathspey time to reel time. These Scotch reels, depending on geographic location and historical time frame, existed in a number of variations involving, three, four, five, six, or up to eight people. They were danced by single-sex formations of men or women only or by mixed gender formations. According to the Fletts' 1950s research, from within living memory at the time, 'the traditional style of performance of reels was vigorous, and distinctive features were the use of arms, either raised or placed akimbo, and the snapping of finger and thumb'.¹⁹ The 'Scotch Four' as danced in Cape Breton and reels as remembered in the West Highlands in the 1950s alternated clockwise circular 'reeling' parts with dancing steps on the spot, which will be detailed below.

It is not necessary to try to establish which type of reel came first, as they all evolved and changed on parallel paths in different communities and contexts over time. However, the Fletts' 1950s research suggests that what they labelled the 'Old West Highland Circular Reel' was one of the older forms. In this reel, dancers follow the path of a circle for the reel, or circle round, segment of the dance, and then 'set' by dancing steps on the spot to either a partner or opposite partner in an alternating fashion. Some forms started in a square formation with couple facing couple, then continued in a circle and square formation throughout. Others, possibly later evolved versions, went from a square formation into a circle, then to an in line formation, followed by another circle, then another in line ... and so on.

An ABAB pattern is the basic structure for almost all these various reels. Accompanying music may be played AABB if short four-bar 4/4 part tunes are used, or ABAB if eight-bar part tunes are chosen. These reels likely did not have specific names or labels at the time; each

¹⁹ Flett and Flett, 'The History of the Scottish Reel', p.91.

seemed to serve as ‘the’ social dance of the community and was often the only dance known in the area. The importance of the reel is clear; it evolved into the ‘Wedding Reel’ of yesteryears. This custom has also seen a resurgence in recent years in some places in Scotland and Cape Breton.

When considered through modern standards, where variety in dances and tempos is expected, the simplicity of the reel form may be perceived as being boring. However, complexity of footwork, accompanying tune choices, and social interactions provide a great deal of variation. The idea that fewer dance formations enables greater individual movement variation endures today at the Cape Breton square dances, for example. All dancing was referred to as reeling, particularly in Gaelic-speaking areas where *ruidhle* was the term used for dancing before the term dance, or *damhsa*, came in as a loan word from the European continent. The term reeling has also lived on today in Scotland among a subset of social dancers known as ‘reelers’. Reelers use a fairly limited repertoire of social dances, mainly Scottish country dances, but sometimes the ‘Highland Reel’ features on reelers’ programmes.

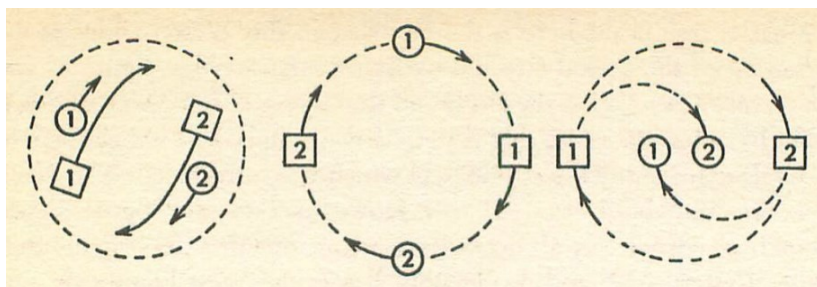


Figure 1: Illustration of one type of circle pattern in the ‘Scotch Reel’ (Flett and Flett, *Traditional Dancing in Scotland*, p. 158)

The link between the solo and the group dance structure

So, is there a connection between these solo dances and the circular ‘Scotch Reel’? A connection is alluded to by the Fletts and Emmerson, who point out throughout their research that steps we find in solo dances, such as the ‘Highland Fling’, were used in the reels. They also highlighted the notion that solo dances were often composed of

enchaînements of reel steps by dancing masters. The fling was simply the name of a particular step used in the reels. The Fletts point out that in the early nineteenth century, the reel and the fling were thought of as almost synonymous. Some sources are so ambiguous in the labelling of a dance that we do not with certainty know whether a solo or a group dance is being referred to. As early as 1805, Francis Peacock, dancing master of Aberdeen, described a number of setting steps for the reel.²⁰ He did not, however, refer explicitly to a circular reel or to solo dances using any circular motif; he simply remarked that Highlanders excelled in their reel dancing. With this information in mind we can envision a connection between the social reel and its footwork that could be performed as solo dancing.

In the Highland games dancing today, the structure of the 'Strathspey and Highland Reel' involves the binary travelling and setting pattern as in the earlier reels.²¹ In 4/4 strathspey time the travelling figure of eight, done by four dancers, consist of seven travelling steps and a one-bar finishing motif; the setting steps are Highland fling steps. The modern day Highland fling steps seem to have three main structures. The first is a four-bar sequence consisting of a three-bar motif repeated on alternate sides and a one-bar contrasting finish motif. These four bars are repeated in a mirrored fashion to finish the eight-bar step, as in the traditional first step of the dancing known today as 'shedding'. The second structure is two contrasting one-bar motifs danced off the right foot, then repeated three times by the L, R and L. A good example is the back step. The third structure is based on uneven motif repetitions making up eight unique bars. A good example is the last step in the Highland Fling. In reel time the travelling figure of eight pattern is executed with seven travelling steps and a one-bar finish motif, as in strathspey time; the reel time setting steps have varied structures but one common structure is that of six bars' repetition of a certain motif or motifs with a contrasting two-bar finishing motif. An older Highland fling arrangement found described in dancing master or 'Dancie' John Reid's notebook from

²⁰ Francis Peacock, *Sketches Relative to the History and Theory but most especially to the Practice of Dancing* (Aberdeen: J. Chalmers & Co., 1805).

²¹ Scottish Official Board of Highland Dancing, *Highland Dancing. Official Textbook.*, 4th edn, (Edinburgh: Holmes MacDougall 1985).

1935, details the steps used by dancing master John McNeil of Edinburgh, as all having the same six-bar step motif with a two-bar finish motif structure as we commonly see just in reel or jig time today.²² This is in contrast to most Highland fling steps in use today as described above. This step structure of six-plus-two bars is not exclusive to these dances and is also found in many Scottish solo dances without circle motifs. This same step structure, along with the binary alternating circle and stepping dance pattern, is found in all the old structured solo dances collected in Cape Breton Island.

The solo ‘Scotch Reel’ of Gaelic Cape Breton and Scotland?

The only solo dances explicitly describing alternating ‘reel’ circles and steps danced on the spot in the pattern of the ‘Scotch Reel’ were noted down by Frank Rhodes in 1957. Rhodes visited John Gillis, in Gillisdale, South West Margaree, twice. Rhodes learnt that Gillis’s grandfather had come from Morar in west coast Scotland, and had been ‘taught dancing as a child in Cape Breton Island by an itinerant tailor from Scotland, Donald Beaton’.²³ John’s daughter, Margaret, danced a number of solo dances for Rhodes during his two visits, including the ‘Flowers of Edinburgh’, of which she could remember ten out of an original twelve steps. In fact, all eleven dances in the family repertoire originally had twelve steps, including the ‘Fling’, the ‘Swords’, ‘Princess Royal’, and ‘Tulloch Gorm’. Apart from the sword dance, these were close to the floor beating dances, where stepping was alternated with the dancing of a circle round or ‘reel’. Other families recalled similar dances of the same structure to Rhodes, so this was not an isolated feature remembered by one set of informants.

The various setting steps alternated with a travelling figure called a ‘Reel’. In this the dancer danced round in a circle clockwise during the first half of the music. The steps used in the Reel were often six chassés followed by two bars of stepping though the dancers might mark out extra beats in the chassés. The setting steps of each particular solo were

²² John Reid, *Solo Dances / John Reid, Newtyle* [copy of notebook manuscript] (Mats Melin private archive, Limerick, 1935).

²³ Rhodes, ‘Step Dancing in Cape Breton Island’, pp. 185–211, p.189

danced to the second half of the music. In the old days the setting steps were not continuous beating, each setting step had some special movement followed by a beating end. The older form was for each setting step to be danced one way only; it was not repeated starting with the other foot as is usual in Highland and Hebridean dances. The phrasing of this alternation of Reel and setting steps is the same as in the old West Highland circular Reel although sometimes the second part of the music was doubled up on the violin to give sixteen bars for the setting step and eight bars for the Reel. The sequence of Reel and setting step was repeated to the end of the dance.²⁴

To give a closer look at one of these dances, we will look at the structure of the Cape Breton 'Flowers of Edinburgh'/'Dannsa nam Flurs' described in detail by Rhodes in the Fletts' 1996 book *Traditional Step-dancing in Scotland*. What is significant about this particular dance is that, in 1957, it was danced in an ABAB fashion with a recurring 'reel', a clockwise circle round, danced for six bars ending with a two-bar finishing motif, to correspond with each repeating A part of the tune played for the dance. Ten, originally twelve, unique steps were danced in succession to each B part of the tune, employing the same finishing motif, as does the tune. The B part steps reflect the melody of second part of the 'Flowers of Edinburgh' tune to perfection. If you take musical accompaniment away when the B part step is danced you can clearly make out the tune. Each step is uniquely constructed but all carry the tune. Thus we find a structure where the movements of the A part are more generically constructed in relation to the melody with only the motif of the last two bars reflecting the tune, while all of the stepping in the B part reflects the rhythmic structure of the melody in full. The structure thus was a circle clockwise, which Rhodes called the reel, ending with the finishing motif, followed by a step off one foot during the B part.

When I met Margaret Gillis in her family home in Gillisdale in 2007, I asked her about the dance, and she demonstrated parts of it to me. What was significant was that her style and aesthetic of dancing

²⁴ Rhodes, 'Step Dancing in Cape Breton Island', p.191

reflected everything that Frank Rhodes described in 1957, but the structure of the dance had changed. It was now twice as long. In the fifty years between the two visits the dance had changed in format from being danced ABAB to AABB. The A part circle was now danced to the right (counterclockwise) and repeated to the left (clockwise) in an AA pattern. Then the step was danced off the right and left feet in a BB pattern. I queried this change, but Margaret said that as far as she could remember she had always danced it this way. Then, asking Dr Rhodes in 2011 about the same he reiterated his memory that all the dances he observed had the ABAB structure, and the 'Flowers of Edinburgh' was no exception. We can only speculate that perhaps the general playing of the tune has, over the years, changed from being played predominantly ABAB to being played predominantly AABB? Perhaps when the frequency of the dance being danced in the community declined, the older way of playing the tune was no longer strictly adhered to? In the meeting, Margaret indicated that it had been at least twenty years since she had danced the dance. She also said that when she used to dance it, she performed with her late sister and that they used to mirror the dance movements when dancing on stage. This could be another reason why the movements were doubled up at some point and also suggests the dance was more of a group performance dance. When she showed me the steps there was certainly no hesitation in her doubling up the steps in an AABB fashion. Since Margaret showed no apparent concern that the structure had changed, perhaps we should accept it as a natural change within the music and dance tradition. As Margaret's father was present when Rhodes notated these steps in 1957, one would think John Gillis would have objected if the pattern danced was not as he felt it should be done. In either instance, dancing it single or double does not alter the general binary dance pattern.

The idea of a dancer doing a reel on his or her own is a feature of these solo dances that enabled a good dancer to show off their skills. Was it a conscious construction following the musical structure, or was it simply a natural development in close-knit communities, where the reel naturally morphed into a solo dance? We may never know for sure, but since the social reel is such a central feature of the social

fabric in Gaelic Cape Breton, it seems that could be a natural development.

This type of binary structured solo dance has today completely disappeared from common use in Cape Breton. It was not remembered in the Highlands of Scotland in the 1950s where it was said to come from. So, were these binary structured solo dances an isolated form from western Scotland, possibly reflecting influences from Irish customs or theatrical conventions? Perhaps further investigations will enlighten us, but this, I hope, can serve as a good starting point for further discussions. As to the case of why other Scottish solo dances include circles round, other investigations might answer the 'why' questions posed but not accounted for at this time.

About the author

Mats Melin is a Swedish-born traditional dancer, choreographer, and researcher; he has worked professionally with dance in Scotland and Ireland since 1995. He held the position as Traditional Dancer in Residence for four Scottish Local Authorities. He was an office bearer for Traditional Dance Forum of Scotland. Mats is an Ethnochoreologist and a Emeritus Lecturer in Dance of the Irish World Academy of Music and Dance, University of Limerick, Ireland.

Chloe Elizabeth Middleton-Metcalf

Hornpipe Stepping at Barn Dances and Ceilidhs in England

Abstract

The ceilidh hornpipe step is a simple ‘single step’, or ‘step hop’/‘hop step’ to slow music in 4/4 time. This paper explores the contemporary hornpipe step from a number of different angles. Firstly, historical precedents in traditional and early revival settings are considered. Then four case studies drawing upon my PhD research into non-specialist barn dances and ceilidhs in Buckinghamshire (2017-2018) are presented elucidating how this step is currently taught. Finally, this paper focuses upon the development of contemporary hornpipe stepping in the English ‘ceilidh’ social folk dance scene of the 1970s, arguing that this stepping pattern was part of a deliberate attempt to re-anglify English social dance.

The ceilidh hornpipe step is a simple ‘single step’, or ‘step hop’/‘hop step’ danced off alternate feet to tunes in hornpipe metre played relatively slowly (see case studies two and three). At non-specialist events it is unusual for any dance detail, including footwork, to be taught; hornpipe stepping is a notable exception to the general trend. Even amongst connoisseurs, English social folk dance is not commonly associated with fancy footwork or ‘stepping’. Douglas Kennedy, who succeeded Cecil Sharp as director of the English Folk Dance Society (hereafter the EFDS) in 1924 pushed ‘the dance walk’ as part of a wider attempt to broaden the popularity of the genre. In this Kennedy was successful and his dance walk came to dominate at the expense of more complicated footwork. A precedent for emphasising figures over footwork had already been set by Kennedy’s predecessor, Cecil Sharp, who was of the opinion that:

The Country Dance is pre-eminently a figure dance, depending in the main for its expressiveness upon the

weaving of patterned, concerted evolutions rather than upon intricate steps or elaborate body-movements.¹

As attempts to document footwork in English ‘traditional’ social dancing were, until the Fletts’ research in the 1960s, somewhat limited, it is unclear the extent to which Sharp’s assertion was true.² Anyhow, despite Sharp’s focus on figures, the dancing of the early EFDS (pre-Kennedy) was not devoid of stepping³ and included footwork similar to the contemporary hornpipe step. In *The Country Dance Book* instructions are given for a ‘skip step’ and a ‘hop step’, both of which involve patterns of stepping and hopping upon alternate feet, the skip step being in jig (6/8) and the hop step in even (4/4) time.⁴ However there is no unproblematic precedent for contemporary hornpipe stepping in Sharp’s publications. Upon examining his pianoforte arrangements, and referring back to his dance instructions, it is clear that tunes in 6/8, 2/2, and 4/4 are all used for both skip steps and hop steps. There is no indication that either step was particularly associated with hornpipes.

There are, however, some historical precedents for hornpipe stepping as it was known in ‘traditional’ settings in the early twenty-first century. In 1928, Maud Karpeles noted two figuratively identical versions of ‘Drops of Brandy’ one from Netherton⁵ and one from

¹ Cecil Sharp, *The Country Dance Book: Part I* (London: Novello and Company, 1909), p.20.

² Eminent dance researcher Tom Flett noted in 1962 the use of a ‘lovely lilting step’ in Orkney which he said was similar to the step used by ‘the traditional dancers of Northern England’, Tom Flett, ‘Heeuchs and Yeeuchs’, *Folk*, 1(1) (1962), pp.13–14.

³ Footage of the EFDS’s demonstration team stepping (‘change hop step’) in a social folk dance in 1929 can be viewed here: *British Folk Dancers*, film (1929). Fox newsreel footage available through University of South Carolina Newsfilm Library. MVTN 4–219, recorded on 10/11/1929, 7 minutes. Available as ‘1929 Morris Dancing in New York State - part 1 of 2’ at:

<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CuqhEix8lGY>> [accessed 14 August 2019].

⁴ Cecil Sharp, *The Country Dance Book: Part I*. 2nd edn, ed. Maud Karpeles (London: Novello and Company, 1934), p.23.

⁵ Maud Karpeles, ‘Drops of Brandy’ (Vaughan Williams Memorial Library Digital Archive: Maud Karpeles Manuscript Collection), MK/1/1/4536, available at: <<https://www.vwml.org/>> [accessed 18 December 2018].

Otterburn⁶ (both in Northumberland). Both of these dances were done to a 'slow skipping step i.e. step and hop to each beat' and the 4/4 tune played by musician Tom Foggen at Netherton bears familial resemblance to 'Yankee Doodle Dandy'.⁷ The dance 'Drops of Brandy' was printed in *The Community Dances Manual Three* in 1954 with the instructions that it should be done with a 'step hop' which is referred to as a 'Highland Schottische Step'; the recommended tune is 'Ka-Foo-Zalum' a 4/4 dotted hornpipe.⁸ *Any Man's Kingdom*, a British Transport Film shot in the early 1950s, also features a social dance (probably 'Drops of Brandy') where the dancers use a step hop. However, the nature of the movement is quite different to that witnessed at contemporary social dances because of the tempo, the 'Redesdale Hornpipe' (James Hill c. 1811–1853) appears to proceed at a cracking 188 beats per minute (bpm).⁹ As the recorded tempos in case studies two and three illustrate the pace was much slower at the events I recorded in 2017 and 2018.

The non-specialist dances I attended in Buckinghamshire for my PhD field research were hosted by groups including charities, churches, and village hall committees. The caller, who is responsible for selecting and teaching the dances, often had a hard enough time getting people up onto the dance floor without worrying about footwork too. Most dances were walked by attendees, although some participants, with or without caller prompting, did a skip step of the kind familiar from junior school PE lessons. Stepping, of any kind, was only taught at three out of the thirty events I attended (case studies two to four). I also witnessed teaching at a workshop for musicians (case study one) and at an English Folk Dance and Song Society

⁶ Maud Karpeles, 'Drops of Brandy' (Vaughan Williams Memorial Library Digital Archive: Maud Karpeles Manuscript Collection), MK/1/1/4571, available at: <<https://www.vwml.org/>> [accessed 18 December 2018].

⁷ Maud Karpeles, 'Drops of Brandy Country Dance' (Vaughan Williams Memorial Library Digital Archive: Maud Karpeles Manuscript Collection), MK1/3/5000, available at: <<https://www.vwml.org/>> [accessed 18 December 2018].

⁸ Peter Kennedy, *Community Dances Manual Three* (London: English Folk Dance and Song Society, 1954), p.5.

⁹ *Any Man's Kingdom*, film, dir. Tony Thompson (British Transport Films, 1956), released on DVD by Northern Heritage (2007).

(hereafter EFDSS)¹⁰ training day.¹¹ On these five occasions the stepping was always to a hornpipe although it was not always called hornpipe stepping, it was also referred to as a 'step hop' or a 'hop step'. As the following four case studies illustrate callers had a variety of approaches to teaching hornpipe stepping. In case study three a more complicated footwork pattern was taught which deviated from the more common, simple step hop, whilst in case study four the feel of the step is altered as it is characterised by being slow and gentle, rather than slow and energetic.

Case Study One: Introduction to ceilidh dancing at the start of the ten week Ceilidh Experience course

At this event the musicians are being taught about different types of rhythm and stepping. The first tune type they are introduced to is the hornpipe. One musician demonstrates this. He takes a heavy step with his leading foot on the first beat of the bar kicking out his other leg on the second beat, and continuing to raise his leg below the knee until it reaches an approximately 45-degree angle by the end of the beat. He then repeats this step on the other foot. His posture is bent over and his footfall is rhythmic/heavy the emphasis is very much on when the foot lands.¹²

Case Study Two: Sheena Masson at the Ceilidh Experience end of course dance

Dance: 'Clopton Bridge'. Music: 'Lunch in The Pub' (4/4) and 'Peat Fire Flame' (2/4) at 76 bpm.

Just before we start, I would like you to stand on one leg and then I would like you to stand on the other leg. There is a reason for this ladies and gentlemen there really is. Stand on the first leg again. In most of these dances all you need to be able to do is count to eight that is pretty much all you need to do, oh and know which is your left hand and which is your

¹⁰ The English Folk Dance Society (est. 1911) merged with the Folk Song Society (est. 1898) in 1932 creating the English Folk Dance and Song Society.

¹¹ 'How to Teach Social Folk Dance' held at Cecil Sharp House, London 16 June 2018.

¹² Field notes made as part of my PhD research, not publicly available, copy in author's possession (21 January 2017).

right hand. Often the left one has got a watch on. So, on one of your legs, one of your feet, I would like you to hop eight times. Off you go a 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8 [spoken in rhythm] and then we are going to swap onto the other foot for eight times a 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8 back to the first one a 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8 back to the next one, eight times on each one.... [She repeats this but with four hops and then two off each foot]. There we are we're all step hopping now, this dance is done to that step all the way through [laughter from the dancers] ... the music will tell you that's how you should be doing it, OK. Try going up and down at the same time as the people you are dancing with, otherwise you will end up with a bit of a shoulder problem, I have public liability but it's a shame to have to make a claim.¹³

Case Study Three: Val McFarlane at the Chiltern Folk Association's family dance

Dance: 'Three Hand Star'¹⁴. Music: 'Navy on the Line' (4/4) and 'The Trumpet Hornpipe' (alias 'Captain Pugwash') (4/4) at 63 bpm.

Right we are going to have a different rhythm now, it's a hornpipe, a hornpipe right so you can do a hornpipe to a slow swagger if you like, that is perfectly acceptable or you can, there are some energetic ones amongst you, you might want to do it to a step hop, step hop, one two three hop, step hop, step hop, one two three hop [stepping in rhythm] or you can just swagger it round. I don't mind as long as you fit it to the music.¹⁵

The stepping pattern described here is identical to the 'double step' much utilised amongst contemporary Cotswold-style morris dancers.

¹³ Quote from video recording made as part of my PhD research, not publicly available, copy in authors possession (18 March 2017).

¹⁴ This dance was composed by Nibs Matthews. Matthews does not prescribe a hornpipe, but suggests that the dance can be done 'to any reel or jig'; Michael Bell, *Community Dances Manual Five* (London: English Folk Dance and Song Society, 1957), pp.15–16.

¹⁵ Quote from an audio recording made as part of my PhD research, not publicly available, copy in author's possession (22 October 2017).

Case Study Four: A dance for retired girl guides

Dance: 'Nottingham Swing'. Music: 'Boys of Bluehill' (4/4), no bpm recorded.

This dance is described as a nice gentle dance and the tempo is very slow. The attendees are all retired Girl Guides. The caller says 'Nottingham Swing, imagine ladies in lovely lace skirts, very sedate and very slow'. The caller demonstrates the stepping (step, hop, step, hop) swinging an imaginary long skirt.¹⁶

All four teachers/callers described in these case studies had links to the wider folk dance world, where at specialist events, particularly ceilidhs at folk festivals, hornpipe stepping can be regularly seen.¹⁷ For example, Sheena Masson is an established caller on the folk festival circuit, whilst the caller at the event for retired Girl Guides used to attend regular ceilidhs/barn dances held in Woburn Sands, Milton Keynes in the early 2000s.

The comparative popularity of hornpipe stepping can be located in the ceilidh movement of the 1970s, a time noted for a heightened interest in traditional choreography which has been referred to as the second¹⁸ or third¹⁹ folk dance revival.²⁰ Folk dance researcher Elaine Bradtke has described this period as being one of 'flux' with a waning appeal for the EFDSS which, she argued, 'supported a narrow

¹⁶ Field notes made as part of PhD research, not publicly available, copy in author's possession (19 June 2018).

¹⁷ Although anecdotally it appears to be less popular now (2016–2019) than it was in the 1980s and 1990s.

¹⁸ Theresa Buckland, 'Being Traditional: Authentic Selves and Others in Researching Late-Twentieth Century Northwest English Morris-Dancing', in Theresa Buckland, ed., *Dancing from Past to Present: Nation, Culture, Identities* (Madison, Wis: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), pp. 199–227 (p.202).

¹⁹ Norman Stanfield, 'Rough Music, Rough Dance, Rough Play: Misrule and Morris Dance' (PhD Thesis. The University of British Columbia, 2008), p.35. Available at: <<https://open.library.ubc.ca/media/download/pdf/24/1.0066479/1>> [accessed 12 April 2018].

²⁰ 1965–1980 marked a new wave of dance collection which ushered in the revival of dance styles such as north-west morris (Lancashire and Cheshire), border morris (Herefordshire, Shropshire and Worcestershire), and molly dancing (Cambridgeshire and the Fens). Women also started to form morris teams and The Women's Morris Federation was established in 1975.

interpretation' and 'discouraged any variance from the established norm'.²¹ In England the popularity of folk dance had followed the trajectory set by folk song. The number of folk song clubs had proliferated from approximately nine in 1959 to seventy-eight in 1962.²² The folk song movement was reckoned to attract a different demographic to the established EFDSS dance clubs. There was felt to be both a generational and ideological divide.²³ L.E. Samson from Leicester folk band the Woollybacks recalled:

When we first arrived on the scene there was a noticeable gulf between the folk song addicts and those whose main interest was in dancing. The two activities attracted different types. My first recollection of a Society [EFDSS] dance was of a small, respectable, sombre affair in a school hall (because it's cheap) with modest refreshments (no bar!) and dancers comprising mainly middle-aged couples with more than a fair proportion of these employed in the pedagogic profession. The Folk Song Clubs inhabited a different world, noise, smoke, booze and excitement prevailed.²⁴

By the 1970s many song clubs had branched out into dance, holding social dances, fostering barn dance bands, and creating morris teams.²⁵ This loose grouping of people connected through folk song was largely responsible for the creation of English 'ceilidh' dancing.

The word 'ceilidh', which has obvious Celtic derivation, might seem an unlikely choice for this particularly Anglocentric interpretation of

²¹ Elaine Bradtke, 'Molly Dancing and the Seven Champions Postmodernism and the Re-Invention of Tradition' (PhD Thesis. University of Maryland, 1997), p.1, available from the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library, London.

²² Derek Schofield, 'The Dance Musician: One of the Catalysts of the Re-Discovery of English Country Music was Reg Hall. Derek Schofield Tracks him Down', *FRoots*, 9(10), (1988), pp.23–26.

²³ Michael Brocken, *The British Folk Revival 1944–2002*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), p.110.

²⁴ L.K. Samson, 'Letters: Dancing in the Midlands During the Last Decade', *English Dance and Song*, 34(2), (1972), p.67.

²⁵ Dave Arthur, 'Thunder and Lightning! It's Bob Rundle!' *English Dance and Song*, 46(2), (1984), pp.14–15; Barry Moule, 'Drearier and Drearier', *English Dance and Song*, 34(3), (1972), p.109; 'The Next Five Years: The Society in the Seventies', *English Dance and Song*, 33(1) (1971), p.39.

social folk dance. Its adoption probably stems from the desire to demarcate difference from the 'dances' run by the older generation of EFDSS clubs and the American themed 'barn dances' which had followed from the popularisation of square dancing by Princess Elizabeth in the early 1950s. By the 1970s 'ceilidh' was often used to describe an evening of predominantly English social folk dance, perhaps with an interval containing song, music, and/or a performative folk dance display such as morris or percussive clog. A crucial part of the ceilidh movement was an increased emphasis on Englishness with bands deliberately moving away from American and Irish tunes.²⁶ Ceilidh band musician John Adams recalled of dance bands which were utilised by EFDSS dance clubs (such as The Blue Mountain Band and The Ranchers) that there was: 'excellent musicianship but with a style that seemed to owe a little more to America than to these shores. Some of the bands even wore cowboy shirts'.²⁷

The ceilidh movement drew upon the increased availability and interest in field recordings. The Old Swan Band and Flowers and Frolics (both established in 1974) were two influential groups who cultivated what they perceived to be a particularly English style of social dance music.²⁸ This interpretation drew inspiration from recordings of traditional southern players such as Walter and Daisy Bulwer, Billy Cooper, and Scan Tester, which had been released on the LP *English Country Music* in 1965. A desire to produce a sound which was notably different to the music of white North America, Scotland, Ireland, and existing EFDSS affiliated bands, resulted in the production of an English style of ceilidh music with a notably slower tempo. The hornpipe and the polka gained particular prominence in the 'English' social dance and session repertoire. Musician and morris dancer John Kirkpatrick recalled the appeal of stepping in country dancing to these slower tempos: 'You can give each step and flourish

²⁶ Dan. M. Worrall, *The Anglo-German Concertina: A Social History Volume 1* (Fulshear, Texas: Concertina Press, 2009), pp.169-170.

²⁷ John Adams, 'The English Country Music Movement as Viewed from the Top of the Pennines', *English Dance and Song*, 73(3), (2011), pp.14-15.

²⁸ Dan Quinn, 'Still Swanning Around', *English Dance and Song*, 73(3), (2011) pp.16-17.

its full worth if you give it time. Dancing fast closed too many doors for me. I wanted to dance slowly'.²⁹

Musician Rod Stradling recalled caller Mark Berry teaching stepping at dances with the London-based band Oak (1965–1976), members of which went on to form the Old Swan Band. According to Stradling, Mark Berry would select English dances to go with Oak's music and 'more or less singlehandedly said that these two fit together [...] He would teach people to do the stepping and to dance them rather than step [walk] them'.³⁰ John Adams of The New Victory Band recalled seeking guidance from step dance researchers Ian Dunmur and Jenny Millest who were affiliated to the Reading Traditional Step Dance Research Team. By 1983 The Reading Traditional Step Dance Research Team was running the EFDSS initiated 'campaign for real reels' which aimed to reintroduce stepping into social dances, the team's workshops were instrumental in furthering knowledge and enthusiasm for stepping in the English ceilidh scene.³¹

As John Kirkpatrick argued, the slower tempo was seen as an important way of encouraging stepping by giving the dancers more time. However, there is a convincing argument that the musicians of the ceilidh movement, in an attempt to create a distinctly English sound, misguidedly applied the slower tempos used by traditional musicians for schottisches to reels and hornpipes.³² As the aforementioned dance in the film *Any Man's Kingdom* demonstrated, the slow tempo used by these ceilidh bands was very different from the approach of traditional musicians operating in the north of England in the 1940s and 1950s, the very musicians who had inspired

²⁹ John Kirkpatrick, 'The Shropshire Bedlams: A Talk by John Kirkpatrick', *American Morris Newsletter*, 23(1), (2000). Available at: <https://www.johnkirkpatrick.co.uk/mo_ShropshireBedlams.asp> [accessed 22 March 2019].

³⁰ Colin Irwin, 'The Catalyst: Rod Stradling', *Folk Roots*, 59(10) (1988), pp.13–17.

³¹ Chris Metherell, 'Campaign for Real Reels: Workshop with Reading Step and Traditional Dance Group Sheffield 17.12.83', *Instep*, 11 (1984). Available at: <<https://insteptc.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Instep11.pdf>> [accessed 22 August 2019].

³² Author's interview with Reg Hall (13 October 2017) original audio and transcript in authors possession; Derek Schofield, 'The Dance Musician: One of the Catalysts of the Re-Discovery of English Country Music was Reg Hall. Derek Schofield Tracks him Down', *FRoots*, 9(10) (1988), pp.23–26.

the EFDSS's approach to dance music against which the ceilidh musicians of the 1970s were now rebelling.

In English social dance, slowish hornpipes have become one of the few rhythms where there is considered to be a special step. Whilst there are historical precedents for this step, the 1970s neo-traditionalist interest in reviving English music and dance forms played an important role in popularising this footwork. Arguably, contemporary hornpipe stepping is the unsurprising outcome of an attempt to fit country dances to a favoured musical metre. A possible reason for the comparative popularity of the hornpipe 'step hop' is its relative simplicity compared to what was the most widespread social dance step in 'traditional' settings in the early twentieth century – the polka step.

About the author

Dr Chloe Middleton-Metcalf completed her PhD on the subject of English social folk dance at the dance department of Roehampton University in 2021. Focusing on non-specialist dance events and post-1945 developments, this research combined oral history, archival research, and dance ethnography to look at how the contexts and repertoire of English folk dance events have been utilised, constructed, and understood by adherents. Founder of the English Folk Costume Archive, she has an ongoing interest in folk costume and material culture. Further information about her various research outputs can be found at <https://middleton-metcalf.weebly.com/>.

Heather Sparling

History of the ‘Scotch Four’: A Social Step Dance in Cape Breton

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Abstract

This article provides a history of the ‘Scotch Four’ in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, drawing on ethnographic interviews collected by three different scholars at three different time periods (Frank Rhodes in the 1950s, Barbara LeBlanc in the 1980s, and the author in the 2010s), as well as recent video footage. The Scotch Four was once a popular social dance in Cape Breton with roots in Scotland’s ‘West Highland Circular Reel’ and ‘Foursome Reel’. It eventually gave way to solo step dancing (based on the Scotch Fours’ stepping) and social square dancing (similar to the Scotch Fours’ partnered dancing) as its context changed from Scottish black houses to Nova Scotian wooden houses, village halls, and concert stages. Various efforts to revive the Scotch Four appear to have introduced changes to the practice. This article contributes to a recent and growing scholarship on percussive dance of Britain and Ireland and to the history of vernacular dance in the Scottish diaspora.

If you have any interest in traditional dance or music in Canada, chances are good that you’ve heard of Cape Breton step dance, if not seen it. If you google ‘Cape Breton step dance’, you’ll get a large

¹ Sparling, Heather, ‘History of the Scotch Four: A Social Step Dance in Cape Breton.’ *Canadian Folk Music, special issue on Percussive Dance in Canada*, 49 (2/3), (2015) pp.11–18.

number and variety of hits, from articles in Canada's *Globe and Mail* newspaper ('How to Look – and Dance – Like a Local at a Cape Breton Ceilidh'²) and dancing school websites to histories and bibliographies (e.g. 'Cape Breton Step-Dance: An Irish or Scottish Tradition', by Sheldon MacInnes³) and instructional resources.⁴ And lots and lots of YouTube videos.

Cape Breton step dance is recognized internationally, particularly among 'Celtic' music and dance circles. For the last few decades, Cape Breton step dancers have been brought to Scotland on a regular basis to teach step dance. They are regularly hired to teach dance at fiddle and dance camps. And they are frequently featured at Celtic music and dance festivals.

Modern Cape Breton step dancing involves individual dancers improvising steps and routines in response to the music they hear. The music starts with strathspeys and finishes with reels. Although both are duple time tunes, they each have distinct styles and associated steps.⁵ Solo dancers are regularly featured on concert stages, at both formal and informal ceilidhs,⁶ and at square dances. Although house parties featuring traditional cultural expressions (such as stories, Gaelic songs, music, and dancing) are no longer as common as they once were, dancers still sometimes share a step spontaneously when visiting someone who appreciates traditional dance.

² 'How to Look – and Dance – Like a Local at a Cape Breton Ceilidh', *Globe and Mail*, June 4 (2011), <<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/life/travel/destinations/how-to-look---and-dance---like-a-local-at-a-cape-breton-ceilidh/article582029/>> [accessed 17 August 2015].

³ <<http://www.ibiblio.org/gaelic/Albanuadh/4.2.html>>, no date [accessed 17 August 2015].

⁴ For example, Mary Janet MacDonald, *A Family Tradition: A Cape Breton Stepdancing Instructional DVD* (Antigonish, Nova Scotia: SeaBright Productions), <http://www.seabrightproductions.ca/A_Family_Tradition_DVD.html>.

⁵ For an explanation of the differences in tune types see: Heather Sparling, *Reeling Roosters & Dancing Ducks: Celtic Mouth Music* (Sydney, NS: Cape Breton University Press, 2014).

⁶ 'Ceilidh' (pronounced KAY-lee) is the Gaelic word for 'visit', but has come to refer to a formal variety concert featuring local talent.

But this improvisatory solo step dancing is a relatively recent development in Cape Breton, rooted in two older forms of dancing: named solo step dances with fixed choreographies (such as the 'Flowers of Edinburgh' and the 'Fling') and the 'Scotch Four', a social dance featuring improvisatory step dancing. Neither form is practised much today, although the Scotch Four is sometimes performed at concerts and there's a growing interest among younger dancers in its revival. This article offers a history of the Scotch Four in Cape Breton.

It is, of course, difficult to write a history of vernacular culture since so little of it was, in the past, deemed worthy of notice, let alone worthy of documentation and publication. Researching dance history offers particular challenges, since video and even audio recording technology was not readily available until relatively recently, and written descriptions, when they exist at all, are rarely detailed. Even those few descriptions that do offer details are difficult to interpret. It's hard to render sonic qualities and physical motions into words.

Despite the limitations of studying the history of vernacular dance, we are fortunate that several scholars have made a point of studying traditional Cape Breton dance since the 1950s. Frank Rhodes wrote two important appendices in *Traditional Dancing in Scotland* and *Traditional Step-Dancing in Scotland* by the dance scholars Tom Flett and Joan Flett.⁷ Rhodes conducted fieldwork in Cape Breton in 1957, interviewing tradition-bearers and dancers from various parts of the island. About thirty years later, Allister MacGillivray published *A Cape Breton Ceilidh*, a series of 'portraits' of Cape Breton dancers.⁸ Around the same time, in 1986, Barbara LeBlanc and Laura Sadowsky conducted interviews with dancers, dance musicians, and 'callers' (people who 'call' instructions for square dances) throughout Inverness County (on the western side of the island, where most Scottish settlement took place in the late eighteenth and early

⁷ J.F. Flett and T.M. Flett, *Traditional Dancing in Scotland* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964);

J.F. Flett and T.M. Flett, *Traditional Step-Dancing in Scotland* (Edinburgh: Scottish Cultural Press, 1996).

⁸ Allister MacGillivray, *A Cape Breton Ceilidh*, (Sydney, Nova Scotia: Sea Scape Music Limited, 1988).

nineteenth centuries) for what was then called the Museum of Man in Ottawa (today's Museum of History). Another thirty years on and scholars like Mats Melin, Pat Ballantyne, and I are researching step dancing in the present.⁹

The Scotch Four today

So let's start with the present and work backwards. The Scotch Four can sometimes be seen performed at concerts. Variety concerts featuring traditional music and dance are common during the summer tourist season, from large scale and long running once-a-year events like the Broad Cove Concert and Highland Village Day, to smaller, weekly events like the Baddeck Gathering Ceilidhs or Thursday night ceilidhs at the Inverness Fire Hall. I have seen a Scotch Four performed at a Gaelic College concert (22 July 2015) and at the Celtic Colours International Festival. There are a small number of YouTube videos of Scotch Fours performed by Cape Bretoners.¹⁰

Two couples face each other, with a woman standing to the right of her male partner, in a 'square' formation. As a fiddler launches into a set of strathspeys, the couples bow or curtsy to the opposite couple, then to their partners. The women cross in front of their partners, pass the opposite woman right shoulder to right shoulder, carry on to the opposite woman's home position, then circle around clockwise back to their own original position. Meanwhile, the men remain at home for a few beats, then follow their partners, passing the opposite man right shoulder to right shoulder. However, instead of carrying on to the opposite man's home position, as they would if they were mirroring the women, they circle each other tightly, moving in a

⁹ Pat Ballantyne, 'Closer to the Floor: Reflections on Cape Breton Step Dance', in *Driving the Bow: Fiddle and Dance Studies from Around the North Atlantic 2*, eds. I. Russell and M.A. Alburger (Aberdeen: Elphinstone Institute, University of Aberdeen, 2008);

Mats Melin, 'Exploring the Percussive Routes and Shared Commonalities in Cape Breton Step-dancing', PhD dissertation (University of Limerick, Limerick, 2012);

Mats Melin, 'Step-dancing in Cape Breton and Scotland: Contrasting Contexts and Creative Processes', *MUSICultures*, 40 (1), 2013, pp.35-56;

Mats Melin, *One with the Music: Cape Breton Step-dancing Tradition & Transmission* (Sydney, NS: Cape Breton University Press, 2015).

¹⁰ Two good ones are <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i6qTWcsUEis>> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6GXM5_GLgKw>.

clockwise direction, until they face their partner from the centre of what has become a line formation (the women are at the ends, facing the centre, and the men are standing back-to-back, facing their partners). As they move into these new positions, the dancers use one of a few basic, repeating travelling steps. Once they have reached their new positions, they all extemporize a selection of strathspey steps. It's important to understand that the steps are not generally synchronized or pre-planned; each dancer individually chooses and executes steps, regardless of the steps the other dancers are performing. The length of time for the travelling and setting steps seems somewhat negotiable, although shifts from travelling to setting and back tend to correspond to the ends of musical phrases.

When they're ready to travel again, the women move to their right and their partners come forward from the centre so that partners pass each other left shoulder to left shoulder. The women then cross each other in the centre, right shoulder to right shoulder, carry on to the opposite woman's home position and circle back to their own home positions, as before. The men circle tightly behind their partners, pass each other right shoulder to right shoulder, but stay in the centre, ready to dance with a new partner. The women always return to their home positions, but the men constantly change places so that, with each iteration of the setting step, they're dancing with a different partner.

Eventually, the tunes shift from strathspeys to reels, and the travelling step changes, as do the setting steps. But the overall travelling pattern remains the same. Theoretically, the alternation between travelling and setting steps can continue as long as the musicians and dancers desire. However, typically it's two rounds for the strathspey and two to four rounds for the reel. The combination of two different tune types in a single dance is somewhat unusual in vernacular social dance traditions, and is one of the defining characteristics of what the Fletts consider to be a 'true' reel.¹¹

Once the dancers are done alternating setting and travelling steps, they travel into a line and face the audience with the women in the

¹¹ Joan Flett and Tom Flett, 'The History of Scottish Reel as a Dance-Form: I', in *Scottish Studies*, (1972), 16: 91-120, p.91.

centre and the men at the ends. They all hold hands, although one of the women moves forward out of line and proceeds to dance a few steps on her own while the others dance a basic step behind her. She moves back into line, and one of the men comes forward. Each takes a turn being featured. Afterwards, the original couples put their arms around each other in pairs, promenade in a circle, and exit the stage, finishing the dance.

I asked some step dancers born in the 1970s and 1980s, who I know are familiar with the Scotch Four, how they had learned it. A couple of them admitted to learning the Scotch Four in the wings of a concert stage just before performing. This told me that the details of the Scotch Four were largely unfamiliar to them; they had not seen it danced enough to know how it worked without instruction, and they certainly hadn't learned it through informal transmission in a home or family context as previous generations of dancers would have. And yet they are aware of Scotch Fours and are interested in performing them. The relative rarity of Scotch Fours today contrasts with their popularity and even ubiquity in the early part of the twentieth century.

Memories of the Scotch Four in the 1980s

In 1986, when Barbara LeBlanc was interviewing people in Inverness County about dancing, a significant number recalled the Scotch Four, especially those who had been born prior to 1940. They recalled Scotch Fours being danced at house parties, weddings, schoolhouse dances, box socials, frolics, and at parish picnics.¹² Indeed, the Scotch Four was, at one time, the most important and popular social dance among communities of Scottish descent. The Scotch Four was a popular first dance for wedding couples, together with the best man

¹² Single-room schoolhouse dances used to be held to raise money for the teacher's salary. Box socials involved young, single women packing a meal into a box she had decorated. The boxes were auctioned off to young, single men. The men then ate the meal with the woman who had decorated the box he'd bought. The auction followed a dance. Frolics are communal work events, such as barn raisings, and were almost always followed by a dance. Parish picnics were outdoor community events designed to raise money for the church; square dancing and Scotch Fours were generally popular inclusions.

and maid of honour.¹³ Margaret Gillis told LeBlanc that during her father's time, they didn't dance square sets at all, just Scotch Fours. Isabelle MacInnis recalled that Scotch Fours were danced in Marble Mountain until their new hall was opened in 1937, after which she didn't remember Scotch Fours being danced any more. Based on LeBlanc's interviews, it seems clear that Scotch Fours were commonly danced in homes and in small, community venues. When square dances were first introduced to Cape Breton from the US in the late nineteenth century, they were danced alongside Scotch Fours at house parties.¹⁴ However, square dances were ill-suited for house parties, given the space they require for even a single set of dancers. Once larger parish halls that could accommodate multiple square sets began to be built in the early to mid-twentieth century, square dancing reigned supreme and Scotch Fours were largely abandoned. What follows are some of the detailed descriptions of Scotch Fours offered by Barbara LeBlanc's older interviewees who remembered Scotch Fours in their youth.¹⁵ Note in particular the different descriptions of how the dance starts, how the travelling figure works, and the final section of the dance. I have placed them in order from the oldest to youngest interviewees; all were originally from Inverness County in Cape Breton.

That's [sic] be the four-hand Reel but that'd be a step-dance. It was very professional if you followed the rules. You went around several times and you faced your opposite partner and you danced opposite her for a while and then you went around again and you met your own and you danced opposite her. That went on for a while and by this time

¹³ See, for example, Stephen Rory MacNeil's description of the 'Wedding Reel' in MacGillivray, *A Cape Breton Ceilidh*, pp.133–134.

¹⁴ Frank Rhodes, 'Dancing in Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia', in *Traditional Dancing in Scotland*, ed. J.F. Flett and T.M. Flett (1964), p.274.

¹⁵ It's important to note that these transcriptions are LeBlanc's, not my own (Museum of History Control #B312 f6-9, Accession #LEB/SAY-Ac-1-41). It is clear that the transcriptions offer significant passages word-for-word but summarize other sections. Unfortunately, I have not cross-referenced the transcriptions with the audio recordings. However, the recordings, along with the transcriptions quoted here, are available in the Museum of History's archives and are also available via the Beaton Institute's digital archives (<<http://beatoninstitute.com/>>).

you'd be on for two or three minutes, that'd be about the limited time for a Scotch Four. It was done in a square formation. Every time you danced opposite this partner or whoever then you went around until you get back to the other one. You would alternate dancing with your opposite and dancing with your own. That was about all there was to it.¹⁶

There'd be a boy or a man take a girl or a woman with him. They'd set on one end and the same [would happen] on the opposite end. And when the Scotch Four music would start – it's different than the other kind of step-dancing music, reels and all that. The woman [would be] on the right and when the music would start she'd cut across in front of the man and make the circle, one on the upper end – or the other end was the same way – and when they come around to their own position again the men would go out to the centre and do their step-dancing there. They step-danced so much, they'd go through the same procedure again which was taking a little while they'd just about be ending at the reel and they'd make the two circles. The woman made that circle. Now I'm the one that's here and you're there and when the music starts you just go across in front of me that way and you keep on this way following the other couple that's doing the exact same thing we're doing. So I'd walk through the centre of the dance floor behind my opposite man and come back to my place, if I was the girl. Then the two men would get into the middle and they'd step-dance. Then the two women would do that again. As far as I can remember, that's all that was going on. They'd do that same thing two or three times.¹⁷

Oh yes, they still do [the Scotch Fours] yet. You've got to be a good dancer. You just stand there on the floor. It's supposed to be four in the outfit and it's Scotch. And four people. Two

¹⁶ LeBlanc interview with Donald MacLellan, b. 28 April 1903.

¹⁷ LeBlanc interview with Malcolm MacDonald, b. 2 October 1904.

men and two women. They step-dance. It's pretty hard to do, it's got to be born in you. They go in and out, they cross through the centre. It's like a left and right through. When they are all finished they circle around. They step-dance the whole time.¹⁸

The first dance I know of is the Scotch Four. It was danced by four people: two ladies and two gents. They danced the strathspey for the start, the slow part. Then they finished off with a reel. There wasn't too much to the dance, the partners, the two couples, [the] first woman faced the opposite gent. The next time she faced her own. After coming around, they just danced around, one after the other. He let the lady go ahead. And when they came to their place, this gent faced the opposite lady and step-danced. And then they went around again. They did that about four times and then they danced (stepped) all together, they faced the audience. It was all step-dancing when they went around. There were no figures, just the slow part and then with the reel they danced fast but they just went around. They finished off facing the audience. I danced this myself.¹⁹

[In Detroit, where many Cape Bretoners moved in search of work] they would switch to the reel from the strathspey and they done the same thing. This was done by people from Cape Breton. They would go in a circle. Then they would stay in a square formation. They danced the first time with their partner and then with the turn of the tune, they would switch partners and dance with the opposites and they would march around and I think there was four turns. Then they went into the reel. It would be more or less the same. They never got into a straight line. It was always in a square formation. That was in the 50s when Father Hughie had the

¹⁸ LeBlanc interview with Danny Wright, b. 20 Mar 1912.

¹⁹ LeBlanc interview with Alex Graham, b. 8 Jun 1913.

first concert out there. That would be thirty years this fall (1956).²⁰

There was two couples [in a Scotch Four]. I just thought they'd step-dance for a while and then they'd change partners. The man and woman were opposite one another and then they went around and step-danced for a while in a circle. And then they'd take the opposite partner.²¹

There was the Scotch Four and Scotch Eight. The Scotch Eight had four couples. I think it was almost identical only with the two couples, they were doing their thing at the same time whereas with the eight, the head couples would do theirs and then the side couples would do theirs. The Scotch Four had two couples. The ladies changed somewhere in it. They did this strathspey step but then they did like an exchange or figure eight where the ladies chain and at one period they would stay with their opposite partner and they did some of their strathspey there and then they came back to their own partner. The men stayed in their places and it was just the women who changed places.²²

We would line up two and two. I would be A's partner, I'm B. So B would pass in front of A and move on to the next gentleman. And his partner would move on to here, so that they are just passing. [interviewer: forming a circle?] Yes. And then you did your dance step [back at place in a square formation]. And then you continued. You would shift partners. The lady moved, the man stayed home.²³

That was just four step-dancers. They'd dance opposite and then they'd change. They'd change from the head and move to the side. Then they'd dance opposite and they'd keep that

²⁰ LeBlanc interview with Mary Jane MacIsaac, b. 1906, and Margaret Macdougall, b. 29 Jan 1916.

²¹ LeBlanc interview with Donald Roddy Rankin, b. 16 Jan 1919.

²² LeBlanc interview with Isabelle MacInnis, b. 23 Dec 1921.

²³ LeBlanc interview with Margaret Gillis, b. 28 Feb 1926 (square bracket insertions in the original transcription).

up until they danced on the four sides and got back to where they started and they'd dance with their own partner then. They'd first dance with their opposites. Then we'd do the four sides and you'd come back to where you started. You had to be pretty good to dance to do that. They all did it when they got drunk enough. They step-danced and they held hands and danced in a circle. The first time it was with your opposite and then with your own. Two couples are standing opposite one another. They hold hands and dance to each side of the square. They stop at each side of the square facing their opposites and step-dance. They let their hands go each time they get to the side of the square after they've step-danced there for a while, they take hands again and they move to the next side of the square. Then they dance opposite the opposite couples there. They do this until they get home. Once they get home, they face their respective partners and step-dance there. That was pretty near the end of the thing. They may just dance off. They started off with the strathspey and then to a reel. The dance lasted about ten minutes. They changed sides according to the bars in the music. For the reel, they stayed pretty much at home. They did different steps for it.²⁴

I'll summarize some of the major differences. Importantly, it seems that the Scotch Four used to remain in square formation, whereas the modern-day version only starts in square formation before quickly moving into a line formation. Several people make this point explicitly (Donald MacLellan, Alex Graham, Mary Jane MacIsaac and Margaret Macdougall, Margaret Gillis, and Dan Hughie MacKinnon) while others do not, although most of the other descriptions are consistent with a square formation throughout. Dan Hughie MacKinnon's description is distinct in that he describes partners remaining together and in a square formation throughout the dance, but they move to a new position on the floor after each travelling step, as though moving around the points of a compass. It is likely no coincidence that his kind

²⁴ LeBlanc interview with Dan Hughie MacKinnon, b. 3 July 1928.

of 'progressive' movement is common in square dances. Dan Hughie MacKinnon is also the youngest of the interviewees quoted here, and his description may indicate ways in which square dancing was beginning to affect the Scotch Four. Malcolm MacDonald's description suggests a line formation with his reference to the men in the centre.

The descriptions of the travelling formations are generally vague, but it is worth noting the vocabulary used. Donald MacLellan and Alex Graham talk about going 'around', suggesting a circular travelling movement. Mary Jane MacIsaac, Margaret Macdougall, Roddy Rankin and Dan Hughie MacKinnon refer explicitly to a circle. Based on these comments, I think the women would cross in front of their partners, their partners would fall in behind (creating a circle) but the women would do a rotation and a half, winding up in the opposite woman's home position whereas the men returned home every time. There is otherwise no reason to have the women cross in front of their partners to start the circular travel step. This also means that the women would change places, which several of LeBlanc's interviewees noted (Isabelle MacInnis, Margaret Gillis), whereas it's the men who trade places in today's Scotch Four.

Danny Wright describes going 'in and out, they cross through the centre', which may mean that, assuming they're in a square formation throughout, there was a simple crossing pattern (the women might trade places first, then the men). However, Mats Melin has a different interpretation, believing that 'in and out' refers to a circling movement while 'cross through the centre' may refer to figure of eight movement.²⁵ It is hard to say what might be correct. Isabelle MacInnis describes a more complex figure of eight interaction which may be the same as the one associated with the 'Foursome Reel' in Scotland (see below). Only Alex Graham describes a final section during which the dancers face the audience, as can be seen in present-day Scotch Fours.

Based on these descriptions, it would seem that there are significant differences between the structure of the Scotch Four at the beginning of the twentieth century and its structure today. There seems to have been a gap when Scotch Fours stopped being danced socially and

²⁵ Personal communication, 20 August 2015.

when they began being danced presentationally on stages. Barbara LeBlanc's interview with Mary Janet MacDonald is telling in this regard. Mary Janet MacDonald is a very well-known step dancer and dance teacher. She describes having to learn a Scotch Four and her uncertainty about the details. It was clearly not something familiar to her; it was not something she had been accustomed to dancing in her youth, or something that she regularly saw others dancing, even though she was brought up among well-respected musicians and dancers, and in Mabou, a community where traditional Scottish-derived culture continues to have a strong presence:

We did a Scotch Four not very long ago, over two years ago Minnie and I and Natalie and Tammy [ca. 1984]. We did a Scotch Four as a number in about four concerts in a row one summer. It was Father [John] Angus Rankin [who told us how it's done?]. We had a hard time finding out the proper way of doing a Scotch Four. We weren't that sure. But we did it, but we did one part wrong we found out afterwards. The idea was we were just four and two were facing their partners and when the strathspey started you went around to the left. Then you went around once more in the strathspey. Then we were facing the opposite partner, and then the reel began and you danced facing one another and then you went around and you came around again facing the opposite partner and at the end you split up and [...] there were just four of us. This is a step-dance, the Scotch Four. It is supposed to be two men and two women. We had synchronized dancing too but that wouldn't be necessary. It is important to remember the direction you go in. You go to the left one time and to the right one time. I think you only do it twice in the strathspey and twice in the reel.²⁶

The fact that they got a part of the dance wrong is potentially significant. For one, it underscores the fact that the Scotch Four was unfamiliar to the performers; it was not something they had seen performed much, if at all. For another, it had the potential to shape

²⁶ LeBlanc interview with Mary Janet MacDonald, b. 17 Feb 1952.

future iterations of the Scotch Four, since many younger dancers have learned to dance a Scotch Four from watching it on stage. It's possible that a mistake in a staged version of the dance could become regularized as part of the dance. In a similar vein, I have seen the YouTube videos cited above used as a reference for learning the Scotch Four today; any mistakes would be perpetuated and ultimately integrated into the tradition. It is possible that some of the differences I have identified between modern and historical versions of the Scotch Four resulted from accidental modifications such as those described by Mary Janet MacDonald.

The Scotch Four at the turn of the twentieth century

So what is the early history of the Scotch Four? Where did it come from, and how did it come to be practiced in Cape Breton? I now turn to Rhodes and the Fletts for their insights. In 1957, Frank Rhodes came to Cape Breton and interviewed a slate of older tradition-bearers and dancers. He found that:

The dances taken to Cape Breton Island by the Scottish settlers seem to have consisted only of 'four-handed Reels,' 'eight-handed Reels,' a group of solo dances, and a few of the old Gaelic dance-games. Most of the various forms of four-handed Reel danced in Cape Breton Island have close affinities with the old West Highland Circular Reel [described by the Fletts; see below] – they consist of setting steps danced on the spot alternated with a simple circling figure, the setting steps being performed with the dancers either in a straight line or in a square formation. I also met one form of the four-handed Reel in which the dancers swung each other instead of setting and in which the travelling figure was performed by the diagonal pairs changing places. This last form [...] was described to me by the oldest of my informants, Mrs Jack MacDonald of Scotch Lake (she was over 100 at the time when I visited her).²⁷

Unfortunately, Rhodes' fieldwork records and interviews remain in his private possession and are not publicly available. We therefore

²⁷ Rhodes 'Dancing in Cape Breton Island', p. 270.

must accept his interpretation of his interviewees' words. However, his description of the Scotch Four is consistent with the recollections of LeBlanc's older interviewees.

The Fletts, who conducted research in Scotland, describe the old 'West Highland Circular Reel', to which Rhodes likened the older Cape Breton Scotch Four, as follows:

The ladies [standing next to their partners and facing the other couple] begin by passing across in front of their partners; [...] the men stand still for the first two bars, then on the third bar they join in the circle a quarter of circumference behind their partners. All four then dance round, equally spaced round the circle [...] and finish in a line of four facing partners.²⁸

[After setting to their partners,] the four dancers again dance round in a circle, all now starting together. The ladies move off directly to their left, while the men dance out to the left and join in the circle a quarter of the circumference behind their partners. [...] The ladies dance a complete circle, while the men depart from the circle on the last two bars of the phrase, so that all finish [facing their partners, as before].²⁹

Like the Scotch Four, the 'West Highland Circular Reel' is danced to a combination of strathspeys and reels, and involves the alternation of travelling and extemporized setting steps. The circular travel movement is reminiscent of the travel steps described by LeBlanc's older informants, although they generally recalled that the Scotch Four remained in a square rather than moving into a line. So where did the line formation come from? The Fletts speculate that it came later, believing that the circular formation was best suited for dancing in Scottish black houses with their central fires.³⁰ Scottish settlers in Cape Breton did not build black houses; rather, they built wooden homes with wooden floors (perfect for percussive dance) with

²⁸ Rhodes 'Dancing in Cape Breton Island', p. 157.

²⁹ Rhodes 'Dancing in Cape Breton Island', p. 158.

³⁰ Flett and Flett, *Traditional Dancing in Scotland*, p.159.

chimneys and fireplaces built on walls rather than central fire pits. The circular travelling figure would not have been necessary in this context, although it no doubt continued to be practiced among some dancers, while others introduced innovative alternative figures.

Rhodes agrees with the Fletts, speculating how the in-line formation may have come to be:

I am inclined to believe that the square form of the four-handed Reel is older than the in-line form, and that the latter arose through two sets of the four-handed Reel being danced side by side in the eight-handed Reel, and there being flattened out to give the dancers more space.³¹

It is also the case that today's Scotch Four seems to have been influenced by Scotland's 'Foursome Reel', a very popular dance in the Lowlands and eastern Scotland in the early 1900s, and similar to the 'Highland Circular Reel' in many ways, including the fact that it's for two couples, it involves both strathspeys and reels, and it alternates travelling and setting steps. The similarity in name itself suggests connections. However, the 'Foursome Reel' travelling formation is quite different from that of the 'Circular Reel', involving a more complex interweaving in a figure of eight movement rather than a simple circular movement.³² It is also characterized by arm movements and finger snapping, neither of which is a part of the Scotch Four or 'Circular Reel'. Today's Scotch Four starts off like the 'Foursome Reel' figure of eight, but deviates with the women moving in a half circle, and the men's part attenuated so that they stay in the centre of the line.

Rhodes believes that the 'Foursome Reel' came to influence the Scotch Four in Cape Breton, but only long after the initial Scottish immigration and settlement of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century:

³¹ Rhodes, 'Dancing in Cape Breton Island', p. 278.

³² See Flett and Flett, *Traditional Dancing in Scotland*, pp. 143-8; Flett and Flett 'The History of Scottish Reel as a Dance-Form: I'.

Up to about 1939, the Scottish Foursome Reel, with its 'Figure 8,' was known only to those people on Cape Breton Island who had travelled outside the island, and I could find no evidence that it was ever danced at the ordinary dances among the descendants of the old Scottish settlers. The situation in Cape Breton Island thus provides strong evidence that about the period 1800–20 [the period of peak immigration from Scotland to Cape Breton] the Foursome Reel, with its 'figure 8,' was not used in the West Highlands and the Western Isles (and indeed in more central regions of the Highlands such as Lochaber) [from whence most Cape Breton Scottish settlers came], and that the common Reel for four in these districts at that time was circular in pattern.³³

Rhodes indicates the figure of eight travel movement had become popular in Cape Breton by the time he conducted research in the 1950s, although it was not, according to his research, something that had come with the original Scottish settlers. Today, the travel movement seems to be different again from all previous versions. It is not a complete figure of eight movement, but neither is it a simple circle or crossing of places. My guess is that it evolved as younger dancers attempted to revive the dance form but were unsure of its structure.

Another significant difference today is the final section during which the dancers face the audience and each dancer comes forward to be individually featured. Although Danny Wright (b. 1912) describes this section, he's the only one to do so, and I wonder whether it was something that he remembered from his youth or was something that he had seen or performed closer to the time of his interview in 1986. It would certainly make sense if it had been added to the Scotch Four when it began to be performed on stage. The Scotch Four was originally a social dance; it was meant for participation and not necessarily for an observing audience. The social aspect of the dance is clear in the orientation of the dancers towards each other (in both the square and line formations), rather than towards an outside audience. This dancer orientation is a feature of most, if not all, other

³³ Rhodes, 'Dancing in Cape Breton Island', p.270.

social dances, from couple dances to progressive country dances to square sets. The final section shifts the orientation from dancers to audience: the dancers face towards an audience rather than towards one another.

For all that it was a participatory social dance, the Scotch Four also had something of the spectacular to it. Several of LeBlanc's interviewees noted that only very good dancers could dance a Scotch Four. It required many steps and endurance. It's clear that people enjoyed watching dancers in a Scotch Four. It was therefore not a stretch to turn it into more of a presentational dance form. Several of LeBlanc's interviewees recalled that special stages were constructed for Scotch Fours at picnics, separate from the square set stages that were also built. Stages were necessary in order to provide a suitable dance floor outside and are not in and of themselves indicative of a presentational orientation. The square dances, for example, were meant as a participatory activity at the picnics rather than as a showcase directed at an audience. However, Malcolm MacDonald, in his interview with LeBlanc, recalled that the Scotch Four stages were raised to ensure that the dancers' feet were visible to non-dancers who gathered around to watch. And the fact that Scotch Four stages were separate from the square set stages suggests that there was something distinct about the Scotch Fours.

Parish picnics began to decline in popularity by the 1950s. Other traditional Scotch Four venues (schoolhouse dances, box socials, and house ceilidhs) had all declined by this time, and so did the Scotch Fours. Meanwhile, square dances held in many newly constructed halls across the island continued to grow in popularity and a new event, the community concert, began to be held. The annual Broad Cove Concert, the first of these concerts, started in 1956 as a parish fundraiser (just as the picnics had been in years prior) and continues to this day, featuring an outdoor variety concert of primarily local talent. Others followed, including Highland Village Day, the Big Pond Festival, and the Glendale Concert. All feature a raised concert stage and a formal seating area for the audience. It is at one of these concerts that one is most likely to see a Scotch Four today. If the final Scotch Four line up did not start before this period, it almost certainly did at

this point. However, I have not been able to pinpoint exactly when the final line up was introduced, or by whom.

Conclusions

By drawing on the fieldwork conducted in three different periods (1957, 1986, and the present day) by three different scholars (Rhodes, LeBlanc, and me), we can see the evolution of the Scotch Four, a social step dance from Scotland that enjoyed a period of popularity, decline, and revival in Cape Breton. I have focused on the overall structure of the dance without any reference to the steps themselves – the topic for a whole other study! Over time, the Scotch Four has changed – sometimes deliberately (such as the final line-up) and sometimes not (such as the changes to the travelling figures). This is, of course, no real surprise to anyone familiar with living traditions. The 'gap' between practice and memory during the decline of the Scotch Four certainly facilitated the introduction of change when it began to be revived. Regardless of the fact that change is to be expected, it is always interesting to trace specific changes and to consider what conditions might have led to them. It is also worth creating an accessible history so that contemporary dancers can learn about the dance they perform, and make educated decisions concerning its performance.

About the author

Heather Sparling is the Canada Research Chair in Musical Traditions and professor of ethnomusicology at Cape Breton University. She researches Scottish Gaelic song in Nova Scotia, Atlantic Canadian disaster songs, and vernacular dance in Cape Breton. She has a particular interest in the relationships between language and music, and in memory, memorialization, and cultural forgetting. She is a fluent Gaelic learner and is learning to play the fiddle.

Lisa Sture

Devonshire Step Dancing: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow

Abstract

Devon step dancing is one of the better-known English step dance traditions, known particularly for its annual competition at the Dartmoor Folk Festival. Some people love it, and others consider it as a 'set piece' with little room for personal expression or artistic development. I learnt to dance in this tradition from those who grew up when it was a vibrant and very popular pastime being danced in a range of social settings. The tradition is currently at a point of transition. The societal context in which Dartmoor step dancing exists today is significantly different to the context in which the dancers of the last generation danced and competed. In this presentation, I will set out what my experience and research so far tells us about the historical practice of Devon step dancing, its context, participation, influences, and transmission. I will then compare it to today's context and practice to identify outstanding questions, development opportunities, and potential future direction.

Introduction

This paper seeks to explore the current situation, and understanding of, the step dance tradition in Devon, a county in the south west of England. By the 1970s, this unbroken tradition had almost died out, with only a handful of the generation born in the early twentieth century, who remembered the days when step dancing flourished, still dancing. We know most about step dancing in Devon from the dancers and communities on and near to a high area of moorland in the centre of the county, called Dartmoor. In the period during and following World War Two, influenced by popular movies coming to Britain from the US, new forms of dancing and entertainment became

fashionable, and the traditional entertainments such as step dancing, broom dancing and country dancing, making music and playing the spoons, increasingly lost their popularity.

In the 1970s, in fear that the local entertainment traditions would die out, Bob Cann, a step dancer and musician from Dartmoor, started to teach step dancing and broom stick dancing workshops, both locally and as he travelled around England playing for dances.¹ In 1977 he started an annual folk festival, the Dartmoor Folk Festival, particularly to both showcase and revive these local entertainment traditions. For the first few years, there was a step dance workshop where everyone who could dance, or who had attended the festival dance workshop, was encouraged to display what they could do. By 1984, encouraged by others teaching classes² and the number of dancers increasing, Bob organised a competition in the style of the old competitions, on a low pedestal on top of a wagon. Since then, this competition has continued annually, providing an anchor for the tradition to survive.

It appears that in the past, there was greater variation and individualism than we currently have in our stepping 'gene pool'. The tradition continues with only a small range of steps that have been passed on from two dancers from the previous generation (Bob Cann and Leslie 'Les' Rice) supplemented by variations that have occurred in transmission since and from intended embellishments. In the past, there weren't set steps, but there was a definite style that was considered acceptable and recognised locally as 'Devonshire step dancing'. Although, when the older dancer Dickie Cooper commented on Les Rice's dancing, there was a hint that even this style may have changed.³

¹ Bob Cann, full name was Robert Frederick John Cann, b. 5 August 1916, d. 25 May 1990.

² Notably Leslie Rice (b. 2 May 1912, d. 26 December 1990), known just as 'Les Rice', a champion step dancer who was of the same generation as Bob Cann. Also, Lisa Sture (b. 1960) who was initially a student of Les Rice's and also learnt with Bob Cann. Lisa Sture was the 1984 and 1985 champion and assisted Bob teaching at the 1984–1986 festival workshops.

³ *Stepping in South Tawton* (Doc Rowe Archive) <<https://youtu.be/C7tcmr8Z4ec>> at 3:55 [accessed date 7 January 2021].

The current challenge is how to take Devon step dancing forward so that it is recognised as having interest and relevance as a social activity and an engaging, local cultural signifier. To do this, a clearer understanding of what is and is not Devon step dancing is required, and whether it was a local style that was distinct from step dancing in neighbouring counties or the rest of the country. Part of this is bound up in the wider history of step dancing in England, where local traditions sit within this history, and how 'local' and distinct they were. The other part is to know all we can about the practice of step dancing in Devon. This paper examines some of the historical information about Devon step dancing, outlines the post 1970s revival, and considers current and future issues. The genesis of this enquiry resulted from the 2017 Heritage Lottery Fund funded project 'Taking Steps: Discovering and Enjoying Dartmoor's Step Dance Heritage'.⁴

The English context for Devon step dancing

Research in the British Newspaper Archive reveals step dancing in almost every county of England. Records for step dance competitions can be found for the neighbouring counties of Somerset and Cornwall, and references to the performance of step dancing can be found, not just in Devon, but also in the neighbouring county of Dorset. Devon newspapers also carried articles that mentioned step dancing in London and in Bristol. Devon theatres advertised step dancing acts from all over the United Kingdom, and beyond. So, it is clear that step dancing was not a Devon-only activity, it was a countrywide tradition.

The earliest Devon step dancer on record

To date, the earliest record of a step dancer in Devon is of Mrs Jane Arscott, who lived in a small village called Throwleigh on the northern edge of Dartmoor. She was born in 1827 and died in the same area, at the age of ninety-four, in 1921. It is reported that she

had great accomplishments and when well over 80 would do her step-dances and broom-dance very gracefully in the

⁴ This project was run by Traditional Arts Support in the Community [TASC] <<https://www.tradartsupport.org.uk/>>.

Barn on gala occasions, holding herself very upright and keeping that set expression of face meanwhile which is peculiar I think to all step-dancers.⁵



Figure 1: 'Grannie' Jane Arscott. With permission, the Throwleigh Archive.

⁵ Emmie Varwell, *Throwleigh: The Story of a Dartmoor Village* (Exeter: Sydney Lee Ltd., 1933, reprinted 2017), p 55, available from the Throwleigh Archive <<http://throwleigharchive.org/>> [accessed 9 February 2021].

Earliest photograph of step dancing in Devon

The Annual Sports Day at Whiddon Down (see figures 2 and 3) held the most popular step dance competition in the North Dartmoor area with, reportedly, up to forty competitors.



Figure 2: Photograph: Albert Crocker dancing and George Cann playing at the Whiddon Down Annual Sports Day step dance competition, 1932. Newspaper cutting: Exeter and Plymouth Gazette - Friday 05 August 1932, p.18. Image courtesy of John Long

The dancer in figure 2 is Albert Crocker (b. 1885), who won this competition, and was known locally as the most celebrated Devon step dancer of his generation. His winning ‘double backstep’ was recounted with admiration by the younger dancer Les Rice.⁶ Albert won many competitions in the area and was classed as a ‘champion step-dancer’ holding ‘several medals he had won dancing at fairs in the district’.⁷

⁶ Leslie Rice, video demonstration of his standard steps and a version of Albert Crocker’s double backstep <<https://insteptr.co.uk/leslie-rice-1988/>> also <<https://youtu.be/AjbKvpXUoY8>> [accessed 15 Oct 2019].

⁷ Marjory Eckett Fielden, ‘Old-time Survivals in Devon [Torquay Museum’s Devon Folk Collection from Farms and Cottages]’ *Transactions of the Devonshire Association*, (1934) vol. 66, pp. 357–373, p. 372.

He would travel round villages competing at the various fairs and sports days, as the prize money for step dancing was good and would have been worth travelling for. He also welcomed 'engagements as an exhibition dancer'.⁸ In the photograph, Albert is accompanied by concertina player, George Cann,⁹ who played for many of the competitions in the area.

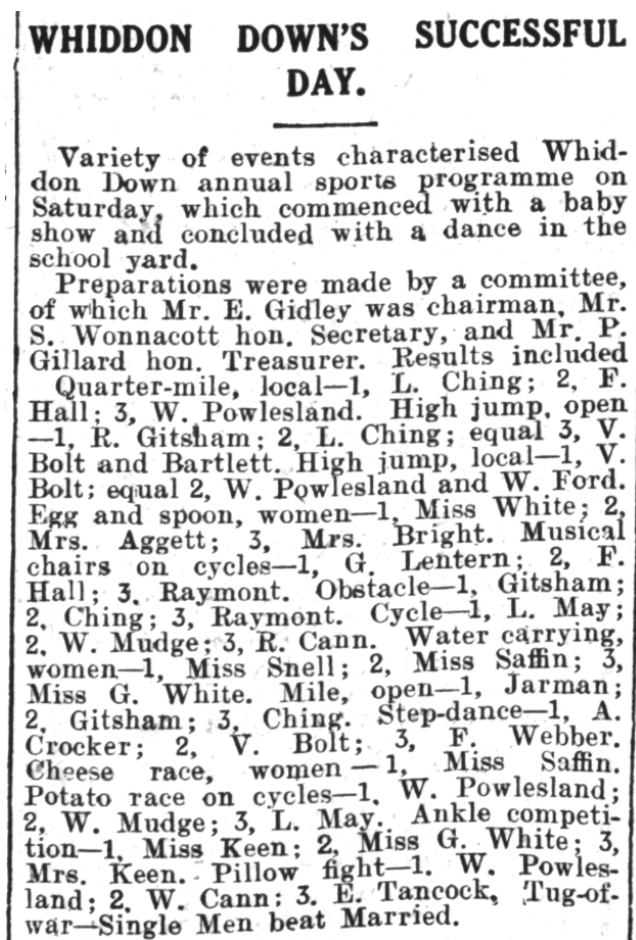


Figure 3: Newspaper cutting: Exeter and Plymouth Gazette - Friday 05 August 1932, p.18, reproduced with thanks to The British Newspaper Archive (www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk) © Mirrorpix, all rights reserved.

⁸ Fielden, 'Old-time Survivals' p. 371.

⁹ George Cann (b. 1875) worked as a horseman on a farm and was the uncle of Bob Cann.

Although there is no film footage of Albert Crocker dancing, there is an eyewitness description of him step dancing with a few others in Whiddon Down on Sports Day. The writer initially describes step dancing as ‘an exceedingly rapid and apparently complicated style of dancing, and approximates it to the Irish Jig and the Tyrolese “Schuh-plattling”’. He goes on,

In August of this year I had the pleasure [...] of attending the village sports at Whiddon Down. [...] There were refreshment stalls and a tea-tent, and the amusements consisted of various games of skill, such as throwing rings for prizes, various races, high jumping, skittle-bowling for a pig, and a step-dancing competition. [...]

The dancing was skilfully executed on a box only 2 or 3 ft. square placed in a wagon in the centre of the field. The ‘fiddler’ Mr. Cann was an expert performer of old dance tunes on the concertina, humming them to himself the while, and playing with half-closed eyes.

At my request, Mr. Albert Crocker, accompanied by the ‘fiddler’, kindly performed several rapid step-dances with great vivacity and a high degree of skill, on the pavement opposite the inn in the middle of the village, various other men stepping forward from time to time from the knot of onlookers by the smithy, to take their turn in the dance.

The scene presented a true picture of Old English life.

An interesting footnote adds,

Step-dancing consists mainly of rapid footwork and what is virtually ‘clog-dancing.’ The body does not alter its position, and the arms hang by the sides until the climax of the dance, when the sides and feet are vigorously slapped and the right leg thrown forward to be brought back with a smart stamp of the foot at the final chord.¹⁰

It is not known whether the foot slapping was ‘larking around’, nor whether it was commonplace, nor whether it was acceptable in a

¹⁰ These quotes Fielden, ‘Old-time Survivals’ p. 371–372.

competition. This has been the only reference to leg and foot slapping currently found. In the same excerpt we are told, 'I am informed by Mr. and Mrs. Jack Hook, of Upton, Torquay, that in their young days, step-dancing was always spoken of as 'jingling'". This comment is interesting as the informant may have been referring to clog dancing, as it was common for clog dancers to hide bells in the heels of their clogs. These were called 'jingles'. At this time all percussive dancing, stepping in shoes, clogs and tap dancing, was called 'step dancing'. However, dancing lots of fast beats could also be thought of as 'jingling' your feet, so it may be that step dancing was also called 'jingling' in Torquay, or perhaps clog dancing and step dancing, which we now differentiate, were thought of as the same thing.

Earliest film footage of step dancing in Devon

As for film, there is just one short 1971 clip of Dickie Cooper, a contemporary of Albert Crocker, dancing in South Tawton.¹¹ Dickie was an active competitor in the 1930s and came equal third in the 1936 Whiddon Down competition.¹² He is remembered for dancing well into his old age. In the film he dances a unique step which he dances off one side only, always finishing with the right foot forward, similar to Les Rice's dancing. Bob Cann danced and finished off both sides.

Bob Cann can be seen in the photograph in Figure 3; he is the bystander with a cap on. He is of a younger generation than Albert Crocker, the dancer in this photo. He is sixteen, and has just moved to Whiddon Down. Two years later, in 1934, Bob came third in this competition, and in 1936 he went on to be the winner. He would later become a key figure in securing the future of step dancing in Devon through step dance workshops, founding the Dartmoor Folk Festival and starting a modern-day competition, which has held the tradition through the loss of the older generation of dancers.

¹¹ *Stepping in South Tawton* <<https://youtu.be/C7tcmr8Z4ec>>, at 4:12–5:50.

¹² 'Competition for Step Dancers', *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette*, Friday 07 August 1936, p. 13
<<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/BL/0000512/19360807/143/0013>> [accessed 2 March 2019].

Newspaper reports of step dance competitions in Devon pre-World War Two

Only half of the newspaper references to step dance competitions in Devon pre-1900 were on Dartmoor. The earliest reference found was in 1881 in Topsham, which is sited close to the city of Exeter. The next references were in Braunton, North Devon in 1884 and 1889. Then, in 1891 and 1898, a couple of competitions were noted on North Dartmoor, in two adjoining villages: South Zeal and South Tawton.

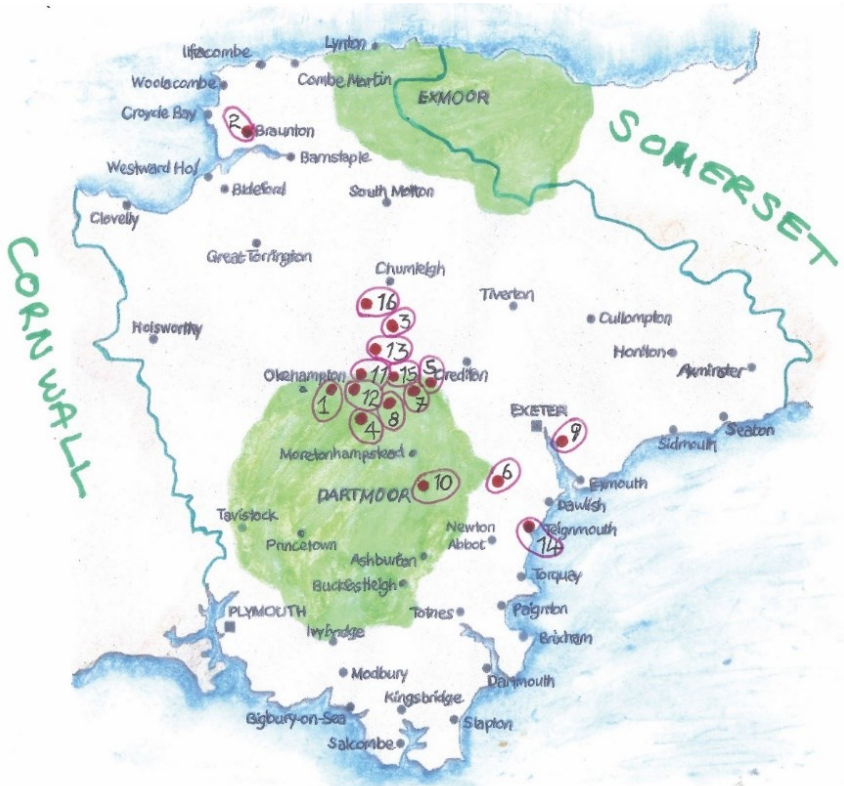


Figure 4: Newspaper reports of step dance competitions in Devon 1881–1939.

The first 38 newspaper reports found that referred to step dance competitions in Devon were between 1881–1939, and are shown in Figure 4. A further 24 reports were later found, bringing the total to 62, of which: 5 were between 1880 and 1900; 56 between 1900 and 1939; and one found in a magazine was in 1951.

Newspaper reports of social performances of step dancing in Devon pre-World War Two

Figure 5 shows the distribution of 25 newspaper reports of social performances of step dancing between 1886–1941. Since this map was drawn, over 200 further reports have been identified, which are distributed across every corner of the county.

Records for both social step dancing and step dancing competitions are found through to 1939, except during World War One.



Figure 5: Newspaper reports of social performances of step dancing in Devon 1886–1941.

Post-World War Two: Step dancing competitions after the wars

The last record found of a competition before World War Two was at Whiddon Down on the 4 August 1939¹³. The United Kingdom declared war on Germany just a few weeks later on 3 September 1939.

The first accounts of step dance competitions post-World War Two are an article by Peter Kennedy, and an oral account by Les Rice's daughter. In a report in the magazine 'English Dance and Song', Peter Kennedy recounts that in South Zeal on 5 February 1951, on behalf of the English Folk Dance Society, he organised the first step dance competition in Devon for 'nearly twenty years'. Afterwards, the dancers and spectators were asked to give their views on the competition and it is reported that 'Everyone appeared to be very grateful to the E.F.D.S. for stimulating interest in a local art of which they were all very proud'. The first prize for the best dancer and musician was to be recorded live the following evening on his BBC radio programme, *Village Barn Dance*. The article states that, 'The winner was Leslie Rice, a champion from Chagford, and his accompanist was Jimmy Cooper,¹⁴ a concertina player of South Zeal'.¹⁵ Les Rice's daughter, Marlene, recounts how she beat her father in a competition at Spreyton, a small village nearby. She remembers being between seven and ten years old, which would mean the competition was held sometime between 1949 and 1952. Marlene reports watching step dance competitions at Whiddon Down Sports Day as a child. She remembers both her father, Les Rice, and Bob Cann competing, and the rivalry between everyone being friendly. As yet, no newspaper accounts can be found for these competitions – it is likely they were no longer considered newsworthy.

¹³ 'Farm Waggon "Arena" For Step-Dancing Champions', *Western Times* (4 August 1939).

¹⁴ Jimmy Cooper was the son of the previously mentioned dancer Dickie Cooper.

¹⁵ P. Kennedy, 'A West Country Step Dance Contest', *English Dance and Song*, XV, 5, (1951), p. 145.

A local singer, Bill Murray, explains, ‘The next generation didn’t take it on at all. I can’t think of anyone my age who was able to Dartmoor step dance’.¹⁶ This was probably due to the changing tastes in entertainment, which were influenced by films, introducing new dances and modern music. Then, in the 1960s televisions became commonplace and people stayed home more, going out to public houses less.



Figure 6: Pre-World War Two dancers still dancing in the 1980s. L to R: Bob Cann (1916–1990), Les Rice (1912–1996), Jack Rice (1915–1994), Bill Cann (1913–2002) and Jimmy Cooper. Images courtesy of Nigel Sture, apart from Bob Cann (far left) by Alan Quick and Jimmy Cooper (far right) courtesy of Girlie Cooper.

Of the dancers in figure 6, we have video and notated steps from Bob Cann and Les Rice, and some video snippets of Jack Rice. A clip of Les Rice dancing, with Jack Rice on the mouth organ and Bob Cann narrating, can be viewed here <<https://youtu.be/dC42IqYIpW8>>.

It is not known how much step dancing was happening in the 1960s, but in a 1971 film Bob says, ‘It was a dying art until last year, when I revived it after about forty years and started teaching the youngsters’.¹⁷ A few years later, in 1978, supported by his family and friends, Bob started the Dartmoor Folk Festival to preserve the

¹⁶ Lisa Sture, Step dance Conversations with Bill Murray, field notes (unpublished, 2019).

¹⁷ ‘The Children of the Moor’, *About Britain*, dir. by John Bartlett (Westward TV, 1976). Previously South West Film and Television Archive XF0108, this archive has now been taken over by Plymouth City Council a part of ‘The Box’ <<https://www.plymouth.gov.uk/museumandartsbox>>.

entertainment traditions of Dartmoor. Then, in 1984, he revived the local tradition of the step dance competition. None of the older, traditional dancers competed, but two of them were judges, Jack Rice (1915–1994) and Bill Cann (1913–2002), whilst Bob Cann played for the competition. In the 1991 Dartmoor Folk Festival, the festival after Bob Cann's death, a junior step dance competition and a junior broomstick dance competition were introduced. The festival has been a great success and is still an annual event, as are the competitions.

How Devon step dancing is performed

The Devon tradition is danced to hornpipes that have a lightly dotted rhythm and are thirty-two bars of music long. The tune is in two halves and each half consists of music that is repeated. In the first half, the 'setting' is danced twice, and in the second half the 'dance' is performed twice. There is a choice in both the 'setting' and the 'dance', that either the eight bars are danced straight through with only a short finish step, or after six bars of music a two-bar 'break' is added, which will include the 'finish'. The eight-bar 'setting' with its chosen break/finish combination is repeated exactly, then the eight-bar 'dance' with its chosen break/finish combination is repeated exactly. This ensures the dancer is dancing with skill and is able to repeat what they have danced. In competition, a 'step' is made up from two eight-bar settings and two eight-bar dances. After each step the contestant steps down and allows the next contestant to dance a step. When all the contestants have danced a step, the dancers go twice more, performing a different step, until everyone has danced three steps each.

Les Rice explains that you had to do

different steps altogether, as long as it was the same tap and the same heel and toe bit, the actual action of the feet had to be different. There was the cross over step from heel to toe, then the forward step heel and toe and then the side step heel and toe. You had to start off the left foot and finish on the right. The art of it, which some of them couldn't do was to finish on the right foot. You must finish on the right foot if

you are doing competition dancing. Judges would look for you to dance in the centre of the board.

When asked if you can make up anything, Les continued,

Yes you can, so long as you keep within the region of the beat, as long as you keep on the board, and any type of step that is new to the original step, it's perfectly alright to do it as long as you can keep within the region of the beat, and finish with your right foot. No, no disadvantage at all.¹⁸



Figure 7: The stepdance competition at the 2016 Dartmoor Folk Festival. Beth Frangleton is dancing and Thomas White is the musician. © Alan Quick, reproduced with permission.

Footwear

Traditionally, dancers would not have had special dance shoes, they would dance in a pair of shoes or boots that they already possessed – and they may have only possessed one pair of footwear. If you worked in the fields or in a quarry in Devon, you would wear nail or hobnail boots. Other shoes were originally leather-soled, and when Blakeys and segs were invented (small metal plates), they were commonly

¹⁸ Les Rice interviewed by Lisa and Nigel Sture in Chagford, unpublished sound recording (1983).

nailed into the heels and/or the toes of the footwear to slow down the rate of wear of the leather. Then, hard plastic soles were introduced, and these also made a good sound for dancing.

In the last couple of decades of the twentieth century 'trainers', casual shoes with rubber or plastic soles, became popular, along with many other new, soft-soled shoes. These are not good for percussive dance, so now dancers generally wear shoes specifically chosen to step dance in. The shoes that make the clearest and loudest beats are tap shoes, but these have not been favoured in the tradition because they were seen as possibly giving an advantage, and so viewed as unsuitable to wear for the competition. However, since 2007, hobnail boots have been reintroduced to the tradition and a number of dancers favour them.

Judging Devon step dancing in competitions

In a competition, there are three aspects that are judged: timing, complexity of steps, and style; you are disqualified if you fall off the board.¹⁹ Without elaboration, it can be said that timing is critical, and there is a local saying that the dancing has to be 'every nail knocking'.

When it comes to style, Bob Cann and Les Rice considered an upright stance with arms relaxed by the sides, looking ahead rather than at your feet, to be the basis. There was a tacit knowledge of what was considered to be the 'local style'. The steps are judged on their complexity and whether they fit well with the rhythm. The steps that were taught by Les Rice and Bob Cann, along with video footage we have are all based on heel, toe and whole foot beats, without either tap-style or clog shuffles (although Les Rice did perform a step he called 'the box step' where he shunted forward and back on both feet). The steps were generally performed low to the ground, and on the spot. When tap dancing steps, or other steps, were offered that stood out from 'the style', they were not well regarded.

¹⁹ If a dancer touched the side of the board they were also sometimes disqualified, disqualification was at the discretion of the judges.

How did Devon step dancing develop?

Is Devon step dancing the vestige of a style that was common throughout England? Had Devon step dancing developed a distinct character from the rest of the country, or was it that it had its own flavour through locally emphasised elements and idiosyncrasies? Did it originally develop from a formal and formally taught practice, such as from dancing masters? If this was an influence, was there an underlying practice that had always been vernacular? These are all questions I hope ongoing wider research will eventually answer, however, I can start by looking at the influence of dancing masters. So where did the tradition develop from?

It is documented that dancing masters in the north of England were teaching solo hornpipes,²⁰ but we know less about the activity of dancing masters in the south. Were there dancing masters at work in Devon?

Dancing, organised and taught by specialist teachers, has been around since at least the Renaissance when the dancing masters operated in Italy and France. In 1651 John Playford published *The English Dancing Master*, a considerable collection of country dances and their tunes. This long history of dancing masters in England, Scotland and Ireland, continued into the twentieth century. Dancing masters, often from Europe, sought to be associated with royalty (as did Mr T Mason, dancing master in Exeter from the late 1700s), the local gentry (all of the dancing masters addressed this audience), and the latest fashions; they would visit London, or Paris when they could, to keep up with the latest trends. This sounds a world away from the improvised, or at least fairly individual dances that were danced locally. However, a closer look is required as in her article Masten states 'Almost everyone in nineteenth-century Ireland [...] trained with a dancing master'.²¹ Was this true in Devon?

²⁰ For example: Oliver Cowper, see <<https://insteptrt.co.uk/dancers/oliver-cowper/>>.

²¹ April F Masten, 'The Challenge Dance: Black-Irish Exchange in Antebellum America', in *Cultures in Motion*, ed. Raman Rogers (Princeton University Press, 2014), part 1, chapter 1, p. 30 <<https://www.academia.edu/7343563/>>.

Monsieur Huet, dancing master in Plymouth and later in Barnstaple, in his lengthy 1830 advertisement stated that he and his sons could teach ‘every kind of Dancing, such as English, Scotch, Irish, Spanish, and French National Dances; Minuets, Gavottes, Waltzes, Fandangoes [...] and every other species of Fashionable Dancing, which no other Dancing Master in the West of England can produce’ he does not mention step dancing or hornpipes, however no conclusion can be drawn from this.²² Looking through the newspaper archive, there were some dancing masters and mistresses that advertised routinely in the regional press. They were found to be teaching, not just in Plymouth and Exeter, but in all Devon towns at various times from the end of the 1700s.

One dance school that stands out is Mr Thomas Mason’s ‘The Exeter Academy’, which was first mentioned in the newspapers at the beginning of the 1800s. The Exeter Academy had five principal dancing masters after Mr Mason until the academy’s last appearance in the papers in 1912. Madame Adele Schneider was the last principal of the Exeter Academy we see advertising in the papers. She took over the school from Mr Giovanni Vinio in 1875, and under her guidance, The Exeter Academy became the largest dance school in Devon, providing lessons throughout the county via a network of local, ‘accredited’ teachers. She states in her adverts that she had taught royalty: an important signifier as to the standing and ability of a particular dancing master (figures 8 and 9).

Madame Schneider was the only one of the Devon dancing masters to advertise step dance classes, which she did throughout her tenure. It is also worth noting that she had been based in Liverpool before arriving in Devon.²³ This indicates that it is unlikely that the step dancing she taught was the local style of un-named, adaptable steps. It is also unlikely, as dancing masters were always keeping up with the newest trends, and so what was being taught must have been reflecting a wider dance development.

²² *Western Times*, Saturday 04 September 1830, p. 1
<<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/BL/0000265/18300904/030/0001>> [accessed 2 March 2019].

²³ *Kilkenny Moderator*, Wednesday 18 December 1872, p. 2 [accessed 4 Sept 2017].

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Figure 8: North Devon Gazette, Tuesday 7 Sept 1897, © The British Library Board. All rights reserved. With thanks to The British Newspaper Archive.

To put this in context, in 1875, the year young Mademoiselle Schneider arrived in Devon, there was already a strong vernacular step dance tradition and competitions are reported in a number of places. So, it is not clear whether the steps being taught were: 'dancing master steps' like the hornpipes being taught in Cumbria by the contemporary dancing master Oliver Cowper (1854–1922), the style used by professional dancers on the stage, or the new style of step dancing starting to arrive from America, later to be called tap dancing.

How far the steps from The Exeter Academy's formal step dance lessons influenced the vernacular step dancers is hard to assess. If the steps from The Exeter Academy's formal step dance lessons influenced the vernacular step dancers, the routes to influence could have been: directly via lessons for a few that may have been able to

afford it and travel to a class; indirectly through contact with students of the dance school; or by observing steps performed in shows. However, at this stage there is no evidence to link the dance school's teaching with the vernacular dancing. As yet, the specific style being formally taught has not been identified and there are no other linkages except that they were both percussive dance styles, i.e. step dancing.

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Figure 9: Exmouth Journal, Saturday 7 Sept 1912, © The British Library Board.
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Step dancing in Devon theatres

Current research has found over thirty mentions of step dancing in Devon theatres in the local newspapers between 1882 and 1937. The shows were cabaret or variety-type shows and performers were from all parts of Britain and Ireland, with some from America. One was a step dance on stilts, another on a tray with two clay pipes, some are noted as being performed by a group of people, e.g. The Four Flashes. Confusingly, one report said, 'Exonians²⁴ dearly love a step dance, and especially a hornpipe', and in this instance 'step dance' was referring to clog dancing.²⁵ So, theatre-going audiences in Devon were exposed to a wide variety of step dance styles, including clog dancing, and the new and developing dance form of tap dancing. However, to what extent these shows influenced the local step dancing style is not known. Certainly, in the years to follow, as films and then television programmes became more widespread, minstrel shows and tap dancing would have been familiar to a wide audience.

Step dance across society

Step dancing was so embedded in the culture and everyday awareness of life in Devon, and maybe across the whole country, that in 1891 there was even a step dance joke in the paper!

A FINE STEPPER – Our butcher boy always indulges in the rattling double shuffle while he waits for the girl to open the door. When she asks him 'what sort of a row' he calls that, he says it's a step dance – a door-step dance.²⁶

Whether this was a local joke or one syndicated across the country is as yet undetermined, but probably the latter as it was in a column called 'Cuts from the Comics'. The term 'double shuffle' has not been passed down in the local tradition, although it could have been a local step in 1891. Whether generally at this time there were names for steps locally, is not known. Naming would indicate agreed, standard steps and potentially that they were taught steps. The only locally

²⁴ Exonian – 'a native or inhabitant of Exeter', *Oxford English Dictionary*.

²⁵ *The Devon Evening Express*, Thursday, January 3rd, 1895, p. 4.

²⁶ 'Cut from the Comics', *The East and South Devon Advertiser*, Saturday 31 January 1891.

danced step to be called by a name is 'Albert Crocker's Double Backstep'. This step is only known through the recounting of dancer Les Rice. Other terms relate to sections of the dance, not the steps.

In the period between 1887 and 1931, the general informality of the tradition and the extent to which it was embedded in general society is highlighted when reading newspaper reports of people arrested for step dancing. Reasons for arrest are cited as: step dancing whilst drunk;^{27,28} step dancing in defiance of a police officer;²⁹ and making too much noise whilst step dancing. In another case, the account to the court reported the guilty party to have used step dancing to cause distraction and falsely indicate innocence.³⁰ Here is an example of one of the reports:

DRUNKENNESS – Abel Uglow, fisherman, did not appear in answer to a summons charging him with having been drunk and disorderly in Union Street. PC Lynn said the defendant tried to jostle people and commenced to do a step dance on the footpath. Fined 10s. 6d. inclusive or 10 days.³¹

Step dancing or tap dancing

Although tap dancing had been developing in the US through the 1800s, it was only around 1920 that taps were screwed or nailed to shoes. By the 1930s the 'talkie' films with big bands, 'modern tap' extravaganzas, and tap dancers such as Fred Astaire, Shirley Temple and Bill Robinson, had burst into Britain via films. The transition to tap dancing is described well by professional tap and clog dancer Sam Sherry from Nottingham (1912–2001), whose father was a clog dancer in the music halls in the 1880s:

Over here [England], clog dancing was generally dancing to old-fashioned tunes like jigs, reels, hornpipes and polkas.

²⁷ 'Incident in Kingsteignton', *Totnes Weekly Times*, Saturday 15 July 1899, p. 7.

²⁸ 'Incident in Honiton', *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette*, Thursday 02 April 1903, p. 3.

²⁹ 'Incident in Okehampton' *Western Morning News*, Thursday 10 November 1887, p. 7.

³⁰ 'Incident in Devonport', *Western Morning News*, Saturday 09 May 1931, p. 13.

³¹ 'Incident in Torquay', *Torquay Times, and South Devon Advertiser*, Friday 17 December 1909, p. 7.

Whereas in America, they would dance to jazz. Tap brought the syncopation and negro rhythms into it, and of course, the American influence took over completely here. After the First World War, it became tap dancing and from then on it was tap dancing, and it was tap dancing from my point of view all through my career in the theatre because of course I also did acrobatics, and you can't do acrobatics in clogs.^{32,33}

In the period 1934–1939, the Devon newspapers report on music festivals where there were a considerable number of dancing competitions for dance-school children in various age ranges and dance categories, including step dance and 'toe-tapping'. Dance schools from across Devon attended, with the occasional dance school attending from outside of the county, e.g. Birmingham.³⁴ Step dancing was featured in every one of these festivals, often with acrobatics. Tap dancing was mentioned in two contexts: in an interview with the dance competition judge in 1935; and in two competition categories in a festival in 1938 listed as 'Any type of dance, except tap', whilst in the same competition there were six categories of step dancing mentioned and no tap dancing competitions.

A report of the 1937 competition had the headline 'General Standard Only Average Says Judge'. The report read,

Madame Espinosa was sorry there was not more of the modern tendency in the tap-dancing classes. She hoped the teachers would endeavour to prevent their students from performing in a 'dated' style. She stated that she awarded first prize in one class to a child simply because she had a nice modern style.³⁵

³² Sam Sherry, see

<<https://www.theguardian.com/news/2001/may/22/guardianobituaries>>,

<<https://insteptr.co.uk/dancers/sam-sherry/>>.

³³ Omnibus programme: *Fascinatin' Rhythm: The Story of Tap* (BBC 2001), available as *Tap dance documentary BBC 2001* (recorded from Swedish television)

<<https://youtu.be/3DFuonJY168>> at 34:26.

³⁴ 'Torquay Musical Festival', *Western Morning News*, 22 April 1939, p. 5.

³⁵ 'General Standard Only Average Says Judge', City of Plymouth Music Festival, *Western Morning News*, Tuesday 9 March 1937, p. 4.

The important thing to note here is that there were no tap-dancing competitions in this festival, they were all listed as step dance competitions. Madame Espinosa³⁶ herself clarifies why in an article she wrote for 'The Dance Journal',

The word 'step' covers any kind of 'tap' or 'beat' work, whether it be Buck, Schottische, or Valse time. The word 'step' was introduced years ago to make a distinction between the lighter type of beat dancing which followed the heavy clog dancing.

Modern step dancing is very different to that of our forefathers; whereas their main object was to get as much noise as possible, we study style, formation of steps, syncopation, much more than the amount of beats we can get into a bar of music.³⁷

So, it is clear that the term step dance was used to describe 'tap dance' for some considerable time. It took until after World War Two for this American term to become the usual term for this style in England, which then created space for a distinction to be made between tap dancing and the older, widespread, long-established practice of native dancing now covered by the term 'step dancing'.

It looks reasonable, after Sam Sherry's statement, to assume that the step dance classes advertised after 1918 were tap dancing classes.

Is it likely that step dancers on Dartmoor took formal dancing classes?

Local dancers, brothers Bob and Bill Cann, grew up with music and step dancing all around them, both at home and in their extended family and 'picked it up'.

Local dancer, Les Rice won many local step dance competitions and never had a formal dance lesson. He had two uncles who were

³⁶ Madame Espinosa's family was from Russia and was an important family of dancers. Her brother, Edouard Espinosa (1871–1950) was co-founder and principal examiner of the Association of Operatic Dancing, for more information see <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edouard_Espinosa>.

³⁷ Lea Espinosa, 'Step or Tap Dancing', *The Dance Journal*, NS Vol 3, No 1, 1930

musicians and step dancers and was shown how to dance and play the concertina when a young child by his Uncle John – but apparently he danced more like his Uncle Ernie.³⁸ This indicates the method of ‘showing’ or ‘teaching’ was not a process of exact transmission.

Albert Crocker was another local ‘champion’ step dancer. He was born in 1885 to a family of seventeen children and his father was a farmworker on Dartmoor.³⁹ He joined the Royal Navy at age seventeen and on leaving the navy worked as a carter. It is unlikely he attended dance classes due to the wage level of his father and the number of his siblings, however he may have learnt some steps whilst in the Navy.

Another source of steps was from the travelling community. Bob Cann claimed that ‘Gypsies brought a lot of these dances to Dartmoor [...] we learnt their steps and they learnt ours’.⁴⁰ Bob has a distinct setting, which he said he learnt from a Gypsy Traveller.⁴¹

The start of teaching Devon-style step dance

Bob Cann was concerned that the entertainment traditions of Dartmoor would be lost, so as he toured the country playing for ‘country dancing’ he started giving workshops on Devon step dancing wherever he could. At the beginning of the 1980s Les Rice was also concerned the tradition would be lost, and so organised a series of weekly evening classes. He said he started with ten people, but they didn’t have enough interest and started to fall away. Not many of the people who attended these classes carried on dancing. However, if Les ever came across a person who was interested to learn, he would teach them individually. When Bob Cann started the Dartmoor Folk Festival, he ran a step dance workshop and the same day encouraged

³⁸ Marlene Lethbridge, interviewed by Lisa Sture, 10 November 2019, unpublished recording.

³⁹ Katie Howson, personal communication, 9 November 2017.

⁴⁰ ‘The Children of the Moor’.

⁴¹ Gwilym Davies, ‘Mono audio recording of Bob Cann at the Dartmoor Folkfestival, recorded South Zeal August 1979’, Gwilym Davies Collection, British Library Collection C742-26, unpublished.

workshop participants and competent step dancers alike to publicly display what they could do, no matter how new they were to it.⁴²

Bob Cann’s workshops and Les Rice’s classes were a new way of passing on step dancing in the area. Before this, dancing had been learnt from family members and by copying other dancers as best you could.

Changes in the style

There is evidence of the local style changing. Dickie Cooper’s son, John Cooper, said his father thought that Les Rice wasn’t a step dancer but a ‘tap dancer’, which was not a complimentary comment.⁴³ Les did do what he considered a ‘tap dance’ in a couple of local shows, although he never had a lesson. He would have been applying his step dance skills and imitating what he had watched. So, the question arises as to how these two styles of dancing were distinguished by the vernacular dancers. Marlene Rice, Les Rice’s daughter and a competition winner herself, is clear and emphatic about the distinction:

Step-dancing	Tap dancing
Upright loose stance	Arms important, stylised and expressive
Arms are by your sides	
Not moving around whilst dancing, i.e. dancing in a small space/on the spot	Not standing still, moving over a large area
Everybody has a different step, everybody dances differently	Everyone dances the same steps, steps are taught, with a prescribed way of doing them
Danced informally in social situations and in competitions	Danced in practiced ‘shows’

However, it remains, that even though Les Rice was clearly a step dancer, there was a perception that his style was in some way different to what the older dancer was used to,⁴⁴ albeit there is the potential for there to be some rivalry expressed within the comment.

⁴² Gwilym Davies, 1979.

⁴³ John Cooper, at home, in conversation with Lisa Sture and Bill Murray in 2018.

⁴⁴ *Stepping in South Tawton*, (Doc Rowe Archive).

Romany Gypsy Traveller step dancing in the Devon tradition

The local Romany Gypsy Traveller community were always part of the step dance culture in the area, and still are to this day. However, their social step dancing tradition has survived with a broader base: the dancing is to jigs and waltzes as well as hornpipes; there is a love of dancing to singing, reflecting the older tradition of dancing to the voice, locally called 'tuning up'; and the dancing is improvised and does not conform to the competition structure. However, Bob Cann considered the traveller community to be a big influence on the local step dancing style.

Bob Cann tells us, that

One of the very strong areas for pony breeding is around the South Zeal, Whiddon Down, Sticklepath area – and around there, there has always been a very strong tradition of step dancing. It may be that Gypsies bringing horses and trading in horses came to this area, as it was a common land area.

The Gypsies used to gather, and the horse dealers, and they'd get in the pub of a night an' they'd start to broom dance and step dance. No other entertainments, they used to entertain themselves by doing this.⁴⁵

The Gypsies, drovers and pony dealers, they used to bring a lot of these step-dances to these villages, which they had probably found in other parts of England, especially, I think, in Sussex, or in that area'.⁴⁶

There were lots of Romany Gypsy Traveller dancers around: Penfolds, Stanleys, Smalls, Orchards. Anyone could enter the competitions and these families were good dancers. Women often entered – and did well. A competition at Whiddon Down that Les Rice recounted told how he drew for first place with Romany Traveller, Mary Small. It was

⁴⁵ 'Children of the Moor'.

⁴⁶ Bob Cann, 'A Dartmoor Evening', 1980, filmed November 1979 for Westward TV (later TSW TV), South West Film & Television Archive (SWFTA) AC1318, this archive has now been taken over by Plymouth City Council a part of 'The Box' <<https://www.plymouth.gov.uk/museumandartsbox>>.

suggested they took joint first, but this was not acceptable on Mary's side, so they danced a further step to decide the winner. Les was able to dance a different fourth step which his competitor couldn't – and so won the contest.

In the past, both Romany Traveller men and women would enter the local step dancing competitions. They were good dancers and won prizes. Some of the women who are remembered as having won prizes are Bessy Small, Dehlia Crocker, Mary Small and Rebecca Roberts.⁴⁷

A local Romany Gypsy Traveller family that is still well known for their music, singing and step dancing today is the Orchard family. Each year at the Dartmoor Folk Festival they host a lively session in the Kings Arm's bar where there is always music, song and a step dance board for everyone to have a go. Tom's father, Tommy Orchard Snr, was skillful at 'tuning up' - singing for dancing.⁴⁸



Figure 10: The Orchard family at Cecil Sharp House. Courtesy of Sam Lee.

⁴⁷ Lisa Sture, *Dartmoor Stepdancing: Yesterday, Today & Tomorrow*, (Traditional Arts Support in the Community, 2017), p. 14, <<https://www.tradartsupport.org.uk>>.

⁴⁸ Tom Orchard Snr. 'tuning up' followed by Tom Orchard Jr. playing a step dance tune <<https://open.spotify.com/artist/2ZheF5oFk5Fx5wLpUmW2tt>>.

A video of Tommy Orchard Jr. dancing, with his son Ashley Orchard playing for him, in the Jubilee Hall, Chagford in 2017 can be viewed here: <<https://youtu.be/elNBYCHeBis/>>.



Figure 11: Tom Orchard Jr. passing on the tradition at his Birthday Party.
Courtesy of Jean Orchard

Where does the Devon step dance tradition go from here?

Although the step dancing tradition in Devon is an unbroken tradition, it has been continuing with only a small range of steps that have been passed on from the previous generations, and without the social context it had in the past. There are not many 'handed down' steps and only a few video clips, but since 2010, new combinations within the steps are emerging: some dancers are increasing the beats in the steps; steps are emerging from the examination of records; and the presentation of the steps in different formats is being considered. This, along with the opportunity for individualism and interpretation, is slowly expanding the repertoire. During one workshop, it was realised that some of the more experienced dancers did the same sounding basic dance step with a different series of heel and toe taps; recognising this variation has brought a new feeling, one of it being a

'living tradition'. Dancing to different types of tunes and alternative rhythms, as well as breaking up the strict structure of the dance, has also been successfully experimented with, the boldest example being the inspiring and creative presentation by Matt Norman during his band Gadarene's performances. So, small variations and increased sophistication in the steps are slowly developing.

Competitions, as far back as records exist, were an important and widespread part of the tradition. The competition that Bob Cann started at his Dartmoor Folk Festival in 1984 was in a village that had a long history of competitions, making it a 'revival'. This was the only competition until, during 2017 and 2018, two further local competitions were started, increasing local awareness of the tradition, as well as providing more opportunities for dancers.

The 2017 project 'Taking Steps: Discovering and Enjoying Dartmoor's Stepdance Heritage' involved collecting materials and recording memories relating to the step dance tradition in Devon, as well as taking information and dance classes into a range of community settings, such as local schools and community groups. This was carried out with a longer-term vision and ambition that step dancing will be regarded as a recognisable and relevant part of the local cultural heritage by the wider Devon community once more.

The project raised local awareness, and the demand for dancers to attend events to showcase the dancing significantly increased. However, many dancers do not currently live in Devon, so there is not enough capacity to accept many speaking invitations, or to travel to perform at events across the county.

The popularity of other traditional percussive dance traditions, notably the Irish and Appalachian traditions, is encouraging, however there is also some caution. There is a desire for Devon step dancing to develop with its local signature, and to remain recognisable. Steps and routines inspired by other traditions could be introduced but unless carefully chosen, there is the potential for the Devon tradition's identity to weaken. However, the lessons of how to hold the attention of a modern-day audience through mixing dance elements (e.g. mixing step dancing with the local broom dance) and group step dancing,

could be employed to hold the attention of a modern audience for a greater length of time.

Also, traditions change and perhaps this is a point to be bold and creative, to use the components of the tradition freely, as Matt Norman has.⁴⁹ As we have seen in the tradition, steps were not prescribed in the first place, and when they were handed down, it was imprecisely, and personal 'takes' were part of the tradition. Perhaps all it needs is for today's dancers to be tasked with being creative and sensing what 'feels right'.

Positively, there are now some young people on Dartmoor, and beyond, who have grown up step dancing, dance to an excellent standard, are keen, and are starting to teach. So, the continuance of the tradition for at least another generation has been secured and the tradition is finding new confidence.

Final thoughts

The tradition of Devon step dancing is in a good place. Research is giving us information that is helpful in the development needed to move the tradition forward in a way that maintains the tradition's integrity. There is a new and keen generation of dancers. The range of steps is expanding and new ways of presenting them to modern audiences are being considered.

Helpful to this process would be further research into the development and practice of step dancing throughout England, and how it is related to the Irish, Scottish and Welsh step dance traditions. This would help the Devon tradition to see its place in the family tree of percussive traditions that have their genesis in Britain and Ireland, both historically as well as into the future. Other traditions are showing that there is a large potential interest in the tradition, and the value it could hold as a better-known and more widely-practiced artform both in Devon, and beyond.

It is hoped that time will take the tradition to a place where it is once more widely embedded in the local identity of Devon, as well as being able to offer the modern audience something they recognise and want

⁴⁹ Matt Norman dancing with Gadarene <<https://youtu.be/5uTKeVGXS6Y>> at 15:30

to come back for, providing entertainment, enjoyment, and pride of place.



Figure 12: Photograph © Alan Quick

Digital version of *Dartmoor Stepdancing – Yesterday, Today & Tomorrow* can be downloaded from <<https://insteptrt.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Dartmoor-Stepdancing-FINAL-05-double-page.pdf>>.

About the author

Lisa Sture first met traditional Devon step dancers Les Rice and his cousin Jack Rice in 1980 and soon learned to dance from Les, the champion of his generation. There was a lot of interest and she soon started to teach others, which she has continued to do. She also met the step dancing Orchard family and has enjoyed dancing with them and their friends ever since. Then she met Bob Cann and learnt his steps and he invited her to teach the step dance workshop at the Dartmoor Folk Festival with him. When the competitions on Dartmoor were revived by Bob Cann in 1984, Lisa was the first winner and currently has won four titles. In 2017, Lisa was the co-ordinator of a project that recorded and collected information about the step dancing tradition on Dartmoor, for which she wrote a short summary booklet, 'Dartmoor Stepdancing: Yesterday, Today & Tomorrow'.

Kathryn Tattersall, Ru Rose and Jon Davison

From Family to Team: The Transmission of Pat Tracey's Clog Steps and the Formation of Camden Clog

Abstract

In this presentation/demonstration we will explore how the clog steps danced by the Tracey family from East Lancashire, popularised by the late Pat Tracey during the height of the clog dance revival in England from the 1950s onwards, were transmitted, adapted and evolved over the ensuing decades. How did a set of individual steps, danced by individual family members, come to be taught outside that context? How did the virtuosic individual style of Pat Tracey translate to the newer team approach of clog dancing? And how have the trustees of that tradition continued to maintain and pass on the embodied knowledge of steps and style? Responses to these questions will lead us to explore issues of change and variation in the evolution of folk forms as they re-emerged in the modern English folk revival. Drawing on our embodied knowledge of the tradition and its transmission through the formation of Pat Tracey's team, Camden Clog, we shall explore how traditional knowledge evolves and maintains itself within the specific material contexts and circumstances that clog dancers have found themselves in.

This paper is a transcript of a live conversational-style presentation.

Step 1: A 'typical' Pat performance

*Video 1: Pat Tracey Old Heel and Toe – excerpt.*¹

¹ <<https://youtu.be/Y3SPyyxHJ14>>.

Video description: Pat Tracey performing old heel and toe steps (unknown date). Musician is playing 'Oh Susanna' on a melodeon and is noticeably reducing the number of notes included in order to keep up. Pat is smiling, dancing with her body still and feet apparently not moving, though there are the very light clicks of her clogs. As the steps go on, Pat encourages the musician to play faster, with a big smile and a waving hand and it is clear to the audience what she wants. There is great fun and excitement as the music gets faster and Pat is asking for it to be faster still. They finish together, with great smiles and laughter from Pat and cheers from the audience. Pat thanks the musician with great affection.

Jon: That's Pat Tracey. By this time she would have been dancing for some sixty years or so. It's a solo dance, obviously. Perhaps Pat may have described it as 'a performance of her family heritage steps'. Those were her steps, the heel and toe. Many of those steps she would have taught to many of you here, and to many other people, though some of them she wouldn't have taught to anyone. But anyone who has come across her dances would have recognised the structure, the order of the steps, similar to other routines that she danced or taught.

Kathryn: This is quintessentially Pat, and what you can get from it is the sheer joy when she danced. It's impossible not to share that as an audience member. But more importantly, you can see Pat would always push the dance faster and faster until at the end the performance, as Pat would say, 'takes off', and the poor musician is losing notes left right and centre. But if this was what Pat really wanted and the only thing that she was about, then why is Camden Clog a performance team with many dancers and why are we not one dancer doing the fastest and showiest steps that we possibly can?

Step 2: Early years

Kathryn: In this photograph we see a performance put on by Pat's mother, at the local Methodist church hall. It's a tea-total community hall entertainment that did not involve going to the pub. You'll see Pat standing wearing a white dress, you can see her legs, standing on the



Figure 1: Bradshaw St Chapel show cast, mid 1930s. Pat Tracey family archive, with permission.

right-hand side. She would be aged about eight or so here, the mid-1930s. In this event, put on by her mother, the first half would have been a variety act, then there would have been a pie supper, and then there would have been a pantomime. Pat's first dance in public was at such an event, her mother wanted a clog dancer for the variety part, couldn't find one, so taught Pat a heel and toe dance, which she danced in her mother's clogs with newspaper stuffed into the toes. It was her first experience of public clog dancing, and she loved it. The thing is, this isn't just her dancing by herself, this is a performance, a display, it's worked into a narrative and it is above all entertaining. It is a shared experience and it's designed for its audience's pleasure.

They were her family's steps and was dancing them to her mother's choreography. Her mother learned to dance as a child, from her mother and her family, but she was nervous on stage and 'didn't have what it took to be a performer' but was adept at putting together shows.



Figure 2: The Eight Lancashire Lads.



Figure 3: Far left: Robert Tattersall, Kathryn's father, photographed in the mid 1930s. Kathryn Tattersall family archive, with permission.

Such entertainments had been common for some time. And would remain common well into future decades. Here are the Lancashire Lads, for example, a popular act of the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century that at one time or another included Stan Laurel and Charlie Chaplin among their ranks (figure 2). And they were still dancing through to the 1920s. These were the sort of influences there were on Pat's mother's performances.

And that's my dad in the kilt there (figure 3). But let's not talk too much about him.

Jon: So how did this girl get from those community entertainments to this (figure 4) ...?



Figure 4: Early clog class in Trefusis Hall, Cecil Sharp House. Pat Tracey Family archive, with permission.

Step 3: Teaching

Kathryn: Well, EFDSS² had a lot to do with it. You can see this dancing is going on in this very hall. In 1959, Douglas Kennedy, was aware of north-east clog dancing and knowing that there was clog dancing in the North-West but didn't know who the dancers were, put an advert in *The Times*. Roy Tracey, Pat's husband, persuaded her to answer it. Through EFDSS she went round, teaching at festivals, putting on performances and displays.

What I think is in this photograph is (and perhaps other people may have their own opinions), I think that this is a rehearsal or an early performance for a Ken Russell *Monitor* film called *The Light Fantastic*, which was a story about folk dancing in the whole of England. This was a performance that Pat has put together especially. She has a clog class. Within a year she has taught them some simple steps and taught them to dance them brilliantly together. And they are being filmed to be aired on the BBC.



Figure 5: Pat Tracey teaching a clog class in the 1970s. Pat Tracey family archive, with permission.

² The English Folk Dance and Song Society

Step 4: Dances with a strong narrative

Kathryn: This film is from about four years later.

Video 2: Pat Tracey 'Policeman's Dance' at Royal Albert Hall 1963 – excerpt³

Video description: A video of the performance at the Royal Albert Hall in 1963. The stage is dark, with a single spotlight directed down on to the clog boards with a lamp post alongside. A dancer, Tom Cronin, dressed as a policeman saunters onto the stage and performs a series of hornpipe steps. The style is very relaxed and includes some slightly 'bigger' movements as well as a 'policeman's look'. Smartly, three other dancers all dressed as police, including Pat, march onto the stage and join in the hornpipe steps.

Jon: But that's not a folk dance, is it?

Kathryn: No, not by any means. This is Pat going back to her heritage in those community/church halls back in Nelson. She has put together a display based on current themes, *Z-Cars* and *Dixon of Dock Green*.⁴ It's a group dance, choreographed, thought out, it has transitions. Basically, it's a variety dance.

Step 5: A renewed passion for the tradition

Ru: So, after a brief hiatus where Pat left teaching and had her family, she returned in the 1970s, the Dashwood family were very integral in pulling Pat out of her temporary retirement and bringing her back.⁵ She had carried on dancing at home during this time, but for her own enjoyment. In 1973, she was back in Felixstowe for the festival, teaching. I am sure many people will have been aware of Pat, standing

³ <<https://youtu.be/yhRtvIDlfac>>.

⁴ Two popular television programmes at the time.

⁵ Peter Dashwood worked for EFDSS in a number of roles spanning 1960s–1980s. Through his role as Eastern Area Organiser Peter and his wife Janet met Pat and identified her as an asset that 'was not being used'. Peter said 'I soon had her operational for workshops at Folkeast, Felixstowe and later at Broadstairs and before long it seemed she was all over the country'. Peter and Janet Dashwood, *They Haven't Got Me Yet!* (Rotherham: self-published, 1994) p. 33, available at <https://dashwood.me.uk/2006/07/26/they-havent-got-me-yet-by-peter-and-janet-dashwood/>.

on a board in front of a room full of people staring at her hopefully, trying to work out what she was doing. Pat with a microphone helpfully telling you exactly where you should be hopping and stepping and tapping. But for Pat it was really important that the steps and the style were correct. So the focus at this time really shifted from doing her displays as a workshop and the old variety dances, moving forward to making sure that her heritage and her steps were performed and taught properly.

You can see a letter that forms part of a series of correspondence between Pat and Janet and Peter Dashwood in the mid-1980s. She has

These are problems. There are many different styles of clog dancing and teachers specialize in just a few of them. This is the list:

Northumboland	Diwham	} from Johnson Ellwood
"	" waltz	
Fife Clog Hornpipe	} from Tom Platt	
Liverpool Hornpipe		
Lakeland		
Sam Skerry	Hornpipe	} His stage routines
"	waltz	
"	Jig	
"	Reel	

Figure 6: Correspondence between Pat and Janet and Peter Dashwood in the mid-1980s. Courtesy of Janet Dashwood.

identified all the various forms of clog dance and style and teachers that are specifically associated with each style. She was very aware and concerned that we were seeing the rise of a generic form of clog dancing and we were losing the individual styles and characters. She was really concerned that it would become a mess. Also, she was concerned that clog steps weren't going to be taught in a way that would make them useable, approachable and available to other people. So Pat started notating. She took her mother's notation style and she started notating. So this is a bit of Pat's notation, which are old heel and toe steps but are part of a sailor's hornpipe. We call this 'Portsmouth Clog Sailor's Hornpipe'.

LANCASHIRE CLOG HORNPIPE - SAILORS.		PAT TRACEY © 1998	
<u>STEP 2.</u>			
(A)	1	ST	Arms folded and held at shoulder level
	+ TAP		
	a HL. PIV. OUT		
	2	ST	
	+ CATCH BK.		
	3	ST	Tilt folded arms down to R
	+ HL(TAP)		
	+ CATCH x L		
	a	ST x L	
	4	TAP (x L)	
	+ ST (x BK L)		
(B)	5	ST	Tilt arms down to L
	++ a HL. CATCH. ST (x R)		
	6	ST	
	++ a HL. CATCH. ST (x R)		
	7	ST	
	++ a HL. CATCH. ST (x R)		
	8	ST	
	+ TAP		
(C)	REPEAT (A) ON L		
(D) BREAK	5	ST	Tilt arms down to R
	++ a	HL. CATCH. ST (x L)	
	6	ST	
	++ a	HL. CATCH. ST (x L)	
	7	ST	Shoulder-arms straight in front
	+ ST (x L)		
	8	ST	

Figure 7: Pat Tracey's notation for the Lancashire Clog Sailor's Hornpipe 'Portsmouth', Kathryn Tattersall personal collection.

Step 6: Teaching to display

Kathryn: So here (figure 8), Pat has started teaching again at Cecil Sharp House, this is around about 1984 that the classes started. It was a class, it wasn't a display team. You came to the class, you started at the beginners' class, as I did. As Ru did. You had to start in the beginners' class. It didn't matter how good you were, how good you thought you were, how experienced you thought you were, you all started in the beginners' class.



Figure 8: Pat Tracey's clog class at Cecil Sharp House, mid 1980s. Pat Tracey family archive, with permission.

Jon: And you were all happy with that right?

Ru: Nope. But you came back if you wanted to learn.

Jon: And did everyone come back?

Ru: Nope.

Kathryn: So there's a typical class going on there. This is the advanced class now, we've progressed from the beginners' room. Pat taught a class for some years, but her aim really was to have a display team. She wanted a team, she wanted to do more, she wanted to put on shows, she wanted to choreograph things up – that is what she was really working towards. Pat taught us to a standard that she was

happy with where we could start to dance and display at the same time.

Jon: So did everybody learn all of the steps?

Kathryn: No, my first particular dance out, I was allowed to do half a dance.

Step 7: Solo to group, an adaptation

Video 3: Pat Tracey shuttle step excerpts⁶

Video description: There are two clips. The first clip shows Pat Tracey dancing the shuttle step. In the second, six dancers from Camden Clog, dressed in 'traditional kit', also perform the shuttle step

Kathryn: Here's Pat doing the shuttle step. This isn't one that she would teach us. It was too hard, too difficult, too fast and couldn't be done as a team very well.

Ru: But that definitely looks like you, Kathryn dancing there even if she thinks she wasn't allowed to do it.

It is important to note though, Pat made sure it was danced so that everybody was dancing together. She could dance that step ten times faster than everybody else but when she put the team together she wanted everyone to be dancing together.

Jon: So she didn't resent having to simplify or slow things down?

Ru: Nope, better to take steps out and everybody dance it. Taps were taken out in practice; taps could be put in (rarely) so that we would all sound good together.

Kathryn: [Referencing figure 9] We can see an early iteration of Camden clog. This was at Gateshead Garden Festival where they had a variety of acts. A lot of effort had gone into this. There was a member of our team who worked at the Museum of London in the costume department and she and Pat worked out the traditional costumes that people would have worn in Nelson in the nineteenth century. So there we are, still wearing this costume today though we did have a bit of a rebellion over the aprons – they didn't really stay on so they got

⁶ <<https://youtu.be/YDNQ1APx40M>>.

removed. Though neither did the shawls but we've got little brooches to sort that now.



Figure 9: Camden Clog on stage at Gateshead Garden Festival 1990. Pat Tracey family archive, with permission.

So when Pat first set up Camden Clog, according to her family, she spent a lot of time fretting over what to call the team. She had in mind something quite 'dancey' – something quite airy and something quite beautiful. But in the meantime, we had become known as Camden Clog by everybody and she was stuck with that. Sometimes we were even called Camden Cloggies – we don't like that.

Jon: So how did it become Camden Clog that looks like this [referencing figure 10]?

Step 8: A 'typical' Camden Clog performance



Figure 10: Camden Clog performing 'Underneath the Arches'. Pat Tracey family archive, with permission.

Kathryn: Here you see Pat's arranged us into performances. The image is of us performing a dance called 'Underneath the Arches' where there was a lot going on, people dancing with sticks and so on. Our umbrellas started closed and ended up open with glitter flying out all over the floor – that wasn't very popular with some of the festival organisers.

Ru: The most important thing to note here is actually the transitions between each dance are given as much thought as the dances themselves. So the dances are very definitely a stage dance, but there is a key focus on the transitions between the dances as you start to put together a whole display.

Video 4: Camden Clog performing a 'Sailors Set' – excerpt⁷

Video description: Camden Clog performing a 'Sailor's Set'. Equal emphasis is given to the creation of the dance as to the transitions between dances. The last steps of a 'Sailor's Hornpipe', for four dancers dressed in sailors' costumes or as Edwardian ladies. The dance finishes and

⁷ <<https://youtu.be/GhpInDByYhM>>.

the dancers hold their pose as the audience claps. Together, all four dancers stand up from their finishing positions of bended knee and salute and adopt an 'at ease' position. The introduction of the 'Sailor's Hornpipe' begins and the dancers dance to join the other performers in a line at the back of the stage, within eight bars of music. The audience claps. The dancers are arranged in costumes alternating between sailors and ladies. The music changes and two dancers walk smartly out to start the next routine. In this case, 'Nola'.

Jon: Both of those dances have their own narrative and they're also linked

Kathryn: Yes. I think if you've seen us perform, that is a very typical Camden Clog performance. It is a string of dances that come together to make a full story. It started with a sailor dance, it moves swiftly into a courting couple, at the end, the couple kiss behind a hat, Pat bursts through sending the courting couple to one side ready for her solo. It is all performed in sailors' costumes. To Pat, this was incredibly important. This was why she formed Camden Clog, this is what it was about. We were going to do a neatly staged, smart performance with respect for the audience, even if we were performing in a church hall or at the Royal Albert Hall.

Jon: So lots of time was spent practicing transitioning.

Ru: Indeed, sometimes we would spend the entire class not doing a shuffle at all!

Jon: And how many dances were there which were put together as a stage narrative?

Ru: There is an enormous collection. So we have about thirty-six dances in total that Pat wrote down. That is not including the ones that she just did. These are just the ones that she notated. Of these there are dances such as 'Underneath the Arches', 'Nola', 'Ragtime Cowboy Joe', which involved me getting outrageously drunk and then Pat shooting me in the middle of the dance. They were always created, often with an event in mind.

Jon: The music is also complex and part of the narrative as well?

Ru: The music is the key that binds us together. We are very lucky. We have John Dickson who we couldn't do without, and Pat couldn't have done without. Pat would have great ideas of doing this great dance to, for example, 'Nola', which is an orchestral score and John is given the task of taking music for a twenty-four piece orchestra and fitting it onto a melodeon.

Jon: John is part of that performance too rather than just providing the sound.

Ru: Well, when we did a particular production of 'Nola', which we will talk more about later, John had a particularly important role!



Figure 11: Pat Tracey, dancing at the Barbican, accompanied by Vic Godrich. Pat Tracey family archive, with permission.

Step 9: Maintaining the tradition

Ru: In the early 2000s Pat struggled to come to practices as much as she would have liked. We continued without her but Pat would send her instructions through the medium of Kathryn. Kathryn was summoned to Little Braxted in Essex where Pat lived. Kathryn was instructed on the latest form of the dance and then was despatched back to us to teach us.

Jon: And why did she use Kathryn in this way?

Ru: Kathryn became like the chosen one. The most important thing for Pat was not just the transmission of the steps but it was an understanding of the steps in their wider social context. And of all the millions of people who turned up and begged to learn from Pat, Pat chose Kathryn. We don't know why. My guess is, from reading what Pat said, and from conversations with Kathryn about Kathryn's family, Pat understood Kathryn, and Kathryn understood Pat. Kathryn's family were all mill workers, Pat's family were all mill workers. Kathryn's dad, as you saw, was used to doing these variety performances. These were things that they understood. And as much as it would have hurt many people who came in and tried to learn from Pat, Pat chose to hand the Camden tradition to Kathryn.

Jon: At this point if Kathryn is going to get 'orders' from Pat, the notation becomes even more important?

Ru: The notation was fantastic. The notation was often faxed.

Kathryn: Do you remember faxes? Do you remember what they looked like when they came out?

Ru: Blurry messes. The problem was that the instructions weren't always clear. So we spent an entire evening trying to work out what 'left knee over right leg' looked like. It did look a little bit like you needed a wee in our version. It looked very elegant in her version! It did not look like that when we first tried it!

Jon: In some sense did it become a way of preserving 'Pat's way' when she was no longer able to be there, or was it still evolving?



Figure 12: Camden Clog performing at Captain Cook's monument, for Whitby Folk Festival. Claire Boyd, with permission.



Figure 13: Camden Clog performing at Whitby Abbey, for Whitby Folk Festival. Camden Clog archive, with permission.

Ru: I think we were all desperate to make sure that it was exactly the same for when Pat could come. There was a definite fear that if Pat wasn't there, it had to look exactly like she would like it, when she did come.

Jon: And then since her death, was that urge to preserve and keep it the same?

Kathryn: We went through a very difficult period after her death. We preserved it exactly as she would have done it. We spoke to each other about what she would have wanted, what she would have done and how we should do it. And it took a request from Whitby Folk Festival to do a music hall piece that sparked off Janice Dickson, our great choreographer, to do a new piece called 'A Day in the Park', featuring our musician as a flasher, who flashed his accordion at the audience; the famous 'Nola', with the kiss, with me taking the male role this time, and Ru taking the female role. And then finally a performance of 'Football Crazy' where the rest of the team came on in football shorts and ended up with the FA cup being handed to Tottenham.

Ru: Chelsea. Practices are great fun by the way!

Step 10: Moving forward

Ru: I really think that performance was a one off. More recently, we have been joined by two professional clowns Jon [Davison] and Bienam [Perez]. They have brought back the sense of fun and allowed us to be more creative.

We were asked by Sidmouth Folk Festival to be part of a London themed event as it seemed that most of the display teams were very heartily from London. So we presented a dance, based on the London Underground using our 'Beginners Hornpipe'. Here we kept the idea that you retain the steps and dance them exactly as they would be danced but you change the environment.

Video 5: Camden Clog: 'London Underground Dance' at Sidmouth Folk Festival – excerpt⁸

Video description: Camden Clog dancing at Sidmouth Folk Festival. The performers are dressed in a variety of

⁸ <<https://youtu.be/Ky6Zo8Gt94U>>.

costumes, typical for the London Underground. Dancers are performing the steps of the 'Beginners' Hornpipe'. During the first step, the dancers are moving in a circle around an imaginary pole that they are all holding onto. Some dancers have large bags on which the others have to avoid, while the steps continue. The stepping is clean while the bodies and storytelling is going on. Other dancers are sat on chairs. A lady dressed in a smart pastel suit, with a hat and handbag (danced by Janice Dickson) moves into the dance and is greeted by a gentleman in bowler hat and suit (danced by Kathryn Tattersall). This step is danced on the opposite feet as they face each other. Hand gestures suggest that the gentleman is trying to let the lady sit down but they both step into each other's way, with increasing frustration on both parts. The audience is laughing.

Jon: I never learnt directly from Pat, as I began clog dancing with Camden Clog after her death. But it seems to me that each member of



Figure 14: Camden Clog in the Committee Room at Cecil Sharp House, ready to dance 'London Tube', Christmas 2018. Camden Clog archive.

the team now continues to hold some of these qualities that we have

described of Pat. Kathryn continues to lead the team. Ru still strives for solo excellence where it is permitted.

Ru: My feet will never move as fast as hers

Jon: Janice, looks after transitions, choreography. Making sure it looks right, how we are going to get on the stage. We can't get on the stage without dancing on – much like today! John is still is our musician, and a character on the stage also.

Kathryn: Not forgetting our two professional clowns, who help with the jokes. Our most recent routine was created for the Lancashire Wallopers clog weekend, who asked for circus themed dances. We decided to use Pat's Lancashire Irish steps for a clown narrative, which we will perform this evening.

Ru: As the years have passed, we have often asked ourselves 'is this style – the old heel and toe, and Pat's dances in general – is this still interesting to people?'. In an age where the step dance styles are focused on fusion and innovation does this 'the oldest clog form' still excite people? Is it still relevant?

Pat entrusted her family history with us and we feel a burden and obligation to make sure that it continues. That heritage, the style, that presentation, that respect for the audience and so on, continues. But perhaps now we have reached a key moment in our own re-learning of how to choreograph and put on a show, using many of Pat's family steps. So we have really taken the family to team and continued that full circle.

Thank you.



Figure 15: Photo: Ru Rose.

About the authors

Kathryn Tattersall

Kathryn Tattersall was born in Lancashire into a family of mill workers and miners, and was entrusted by Pat Tracey with the preserving and passing on of the Tracey family tradition of clog dancing originating in East Lancashire. She has led Camden Clog since the early 2000s, originally founded by Pat Tracey in the late 1980s.

Ru Rose

Ru Rose began clog dancing aged 5 and had her first lessons with Pat Tracey at 6, finally joining Camden Clog aged 18. She is a three time Old Heel and Toe world champion, the principal dance style of the Tracey family.

John Davison

Jon Davison is a specialist in performance practice as research at Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, and began learning Pat Tracey's steps from those entrusted with the tradition at Camden Clog. He has also been a musician since age 4, with a special interest in folk traditions of the British Isles and North America.

Huw Williams and Angharad Jones

Everything You Wanted to Know about Welsh Clog Dancing but Were too Afraid to Dance

Abstract

This paper forms an introduction to the tradition of Welsh clog/step dancing. It is aimed particularly at dancers to whom the Welsh tradition is a mystery. I shall chart the history and explore recent developments of the tradition.

Historically, the religious revival had a particularly detrimental impact on traditional dancing and music, however step dancing is Wales' unbroken dance tradition. I will consider Welsh dancing in its diverse settings: from formal eisteddfod competitions with their rigorous guidelines, to dancing in celebratory and more informal settings. The unique style of Welsh step dancing, compared to that in other step dance traditions, will be explored, along with the differences between men's and women's dances. I will also discuss the music and instruments associated with Welsh dancing. Finally, the tradition's recent developments and its future with regard to style, and particularly the introduction of syncopated steps, will be explored.

Note: A first person narrative has been used throughout this paper to reflect both Huw Williams' life-long participation in Welsh Dancing, and his solo presentation of the paper at the EFDSS conference in 2019.

Introduction

This paper is an introduction to Welsh clog/step dancing. Throughout the history of the tradition in Wales, dancers have sometimes worn shoes and on other occasions clogs.

I shall use the term step dancing/stepping throughout this paper for the purposes of consistency, and to conform to the term used in formal competition – although the majority of step dancers in Wales perform in clogs. I shall, briefly, chart the history of step dancing in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, review the revival of folk dancing in the early twentieth century, and explore my own ideas on the developments during the period between the 1990s and 2019. This paper is aimed particularly at dancers and enthusiasts of stepping who have little or no knowledge of Welsh dancing, but I also hope that it might be of interest to non-specialists. Dancers, from both the UK and overseas, who specialise in performing dances of diverse traditions often see Welsh step dancing as a mystery. It is the stranger in the room at a party. The face might be familiar, but you are reluctant to introduce yourself for fear of embarrassment in forgetting their name. Thus, the rather frivolous title of this paper. I must add however that whenever I deliver teaching workshops, particularly outside Wales, there is always a keen interest and a strong enthusiasm from dancers who are eager to learn something new.

Eisteddfodau

Throughout this paper the reader will notice many references to competition dancing usually taking place at an eisteddfod. An eisteddfod is a festival held annually featuring competitions and performances in many artistic fields. The largest of the *eisteddfodau* (the plural, in Welsh, of eisteddfod) include *Eisteddfod Genedlaethol Cymru* (National Eisteddfod of Wales), *Eisteddfod Genedlaethol Urdd Gobaith Cymru* (National Urdd Eisteddfod – organised for youth under the age of twenty-five) and the Llangollen International Eisteddfod which features competitors from various countries. But also, there are various local *eisteddfodau* scattered around the country.

Eisteddfodau have been popular in Wales for many years; the very first event of this kind is believed to have taken place in 1176 with the modern equivalent dating from 1861. There are three reasons why an eisteddfod is important for step dancing or indeed other art forms:

1. The competitions help maintain standards – after all, the only way to win will be to perform well.

2. They contribute to establishing what we consider to be 'Welsh dancing', in effect keeping our tradition safe when much of Welsh step dancing concerns inventing new steps and movements when one could be in danger of veering away from its roots.
3. It encourages young people to take part and develop an interest in our cultural heritage. This is particularly the case with the *Urdd Eisteddfod* organised for the youth of Wales i.e. under the age of twenty-five.

However, this does not mean we should discourage dancing outside these parameters. When at a barn dance or ceilidh or *twmpath* who cares? Just dance and have fun.

Where?

Today step dancing in Wales is most popular in the Welsh-speaking communities. A Welsh-speaking community could be an area in which people live, a family, a club, or any group where people engage through the Welsh language. Lois Jones has worked for the National Eisteddfod of Wales for over thirty years and says 'there's a definite pattern' as regards the language used for entries to competitions.¹ Step dancing applications are predominantly written in Welsh whereas disco dance entries tend to be written in English. The entries arrive from all areas of Wales.

It is fair to say that what we now call folk music and folk dance was once the mainstay of farming communities. During the nineteenth century there was a sharp influx of people from rural Welsh communities, and from outside Wales, to work in the South Wales valleys. They were attracted to the area because of the possibility of finding work in the rising iron and coal industries. Although some workers arrived from areas such as rural Carmarthenshire, they did not necessarily bring their singing and dancing traditions to their new industrial life. Due to this influx of workers, the Blaenau Gwent area of the South Wales valleys in which I was born, is very much an anglicized part of the country; as a result, the Welsh language and its culture began to take a back seat. However, within the anglicized

¹ Jones, Lois, 'info regarding clog dance competition' (email to Huw Williams, 18 June 2020)

areas, small pockets of Welsh cultural activity developed, e.g. Brynmawr Welsh Folk dancers (established in 1952) who operated exclusively through the English language. I must add though, that step dancing was also popular in the small industrialised Welsh-speaking community of slate quarry workers in Blaenau Ffestiniog.

Religious revival

It is said that the great religious revival in Wales during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with its puritanical outlook, all but wiped out Welsh folk dancing. As non-conformist fervour swept the country it succeeded in sweeping away the traditional dances and music. After all, most of this activity would take place in the taverns where alcohol, it was thought, could tempt anyone into a wayward life. Dancing was considered sinful.

Gemau Doethindeb (Gems of Wisdom) was published in 1714 by Rhys Prydderch, a minister of the gospel in Carmarthenshire. In the book he discusses twelve sins. The sins include, among others: long hair, sorcery, usury, cock fighting, marrying children in their infancy, and top of the list – *dawnsio cymyscedig*, ‘mixed dancing’. This kind of condemnation inflicted great harm to music and dance throughout Wales.² Nearly a century later Edward Jones, (1752–1824), states that:

The sudden decline of the national Minstrelsy, and Customs of Wales, is in a great degree to be attributed to the fanatick imposters, or illiterate plebeian preachers, who have too often been suffered to over run the country, misleading the greater part of the common people from their lawful Church; and dissuading them from their innocent amusements, such as Singing, Dancing, and other rural Sports, and Games, which heretofore they had to delight in from the earliest time. [...] I have met with several Harpers and Songsters, who actually had been prevailed upon by those erratic

² Rhys Prydderch, *Gemau Doethineb*, 3rd edn (Cardiff: E Walters, 1859).

strollers to relinquish their profession, from the idea that it was sinful.³

The early twentieth century saw some resurgence of interest in Welsh traditions. Emma Lile, discovered that: 'A Welsh folk dance society formed in 1926 (which, according to the South Wales News, intended to tap into 'hitherto unknown resources of old folk-lore, song and tradition")'.⁴ However, it seems to have disbanded soon afterwards and no books were published in this field.⁵

Folk dance revival

The revival of folk dancing in Wales gathered momentum following the 1930s publications: *Welsh National Music and Dance*⁶ and *Welsh Folk Dances: An Inquiry*,⁷ However, it is generally considered that this revival began, in earnest, with the work of Lois Blake (1890–1974) an English woman credited with almost single-handedly rescuing folk dancing in Wales and who was instrumental in the formation of the current Welsh Folk Dance Society in 1949.

Welsh step dancing, or jigs and hornpipes as they were also known, is an unbroken tradition in Wales, surviving and continuing through the religious revival. In the early days of the folk dance resurgence post World War Two, there were living exponents still practicing the art. Caradoc Pugh of Llanwchllyn and Hywel Wood of Parc y Bala were particularly well-known. Hywel Wood was a member of the famous Romany/Gypsy Wood family who played an important role in the folk traditions of Wales. Hywel had a great reputation as a clog dancer and briefly appeared as a dancer in a scene in the 1949 film, *The Last Days of Dolwyn* starring a young Richard Burton.⁸ The Wood family also produced fiddle players, singers, and harpists.

³ Edward Jones, *The Bardic Museum*, (London, A Strahan, 1802).

⁴ Emma Lile, *A Step in Time: Folk Dancing in Wales*. (Cardiff: National Museum of Wales, 1999).

⁵ Lile, *A Step in Time*.

⁶ W S Gwynn Williams, *Welsh National Music and Dance*, (London: J Curwen & Sons, 1932).

⁷ Hugh Mellor, *Welsh Folk Dances: An Inquiry* (London: Novello, 1935).

⁸ Russell Lloyd, *The Last Days of Dolwyn*, (British Lions Films, 1949).

During the 1950s Mrs. A. E. Parker and her children did much to raise the interest in step dancing. Mrs Parker's children are featured in a short film entitled *Clog Dance* held at the British Film Archive (BFI).⁹ The content is typical of its time in portraying an overly sentimental and romantic view of life in Wales. The steps are amazingly simple, but the film delivers a fair impression of the character and style of a Welsh clog dance.

Through the 1950s and 1960s Len Roberts gave demonstrations of solo dancing. A performance at the Manchester International Folk Dance Festival was particularly well received: 'Len Roberts gave a solo demonstration of the "Llanwyddin [sic] Jig" and the humour expressed by his feet alone was extraordinary'.¹⁰ I would be intrigued to understand what is meant by 'the humour expressed by his feet'.

From the 1950s through to the 1970s Owen Huw Roberts (1931–2018), from Anglesey in North Wales, did much to develop step dancing, and taught many young people in and around Colwyn Bay, gaining considerable success in eisteddfod competitions.

Style: what is it?

Step dancing in Wales was primarily a solo activity and was mostly danced by men. Although there are historical records that contradict the idea that women did not step dance which I will come to later. Nowadays both men and women step dance but the tradition, style and technique are different between the two, and at *eisteddfodau* male and female competitions are separate. The basic style of Welsh stepping relies on using both the heel and the toe and does not involve throwing out the feet in front of the dancer as one might do in a 'shuffle', popular in Lancashire and Appalachian routines. The feet of the Welsh dancer are kept under the body. Although there have been references to a toe tradition in the Bangor area, I have been unable to find any convincing evidence to support this. I shall leave that for others to find.

⁹ *Clog Dance*, Ken Talbot, dir. (1959). <<https://player.bfi.org.uk/free/film/watch-clog-dance-1959-online>> [accessed 27 June 2020].

¹⁰ *The Folklorist* (Manchester: Manchester Folk Dance Centre, 1961) Volume 7,

The dance often involves using a broom, which is why the dance is sometimes mistakenly referred to as 'the broom dance'. In Welsh stepping the dancer often uses props such as a lighted candle placed in a bottle, a piece of slate laid on the floor, or old-fashioned agricultural implements such as a flail. Dancers use these props to enhance their performance and the inclusion of a broom is optional.

Owen Huw Roberts, the well-respected dancer mentioned earlier, has given us this description in a short article written for the *Dawnsywyr Nantgarw* (Nantgarw Dancers) web site:

Clog Dancing is a solo dance with its roots firmly based in the stable lofts, fairs and inns where dancers would compete against each other in dexterity and tricks. But it calls for more, much more than fast feet. It is essentially an exhibitionists dance where the personality and character of the dancer must be transmitted to the audience, otherwise the dance becomes mechanical and spiritless.¹¹

In modern times duos, trios and step dancing groups have formed and become an integral part of the tradition today. But this is quite a modern development.

It is important to emphasise that the Welsh clog dance is a living tradition and exists in a freestyle form. Each dancer will use established steps and tricks but dance them in their own way whilst inventing new ones.

Historically, some dancers wore clogs whilst others wore shoes. The Llanwddyn dancer, for example, wore ordinary shoes and danced over two crossed sticks.¹² Thomas Pennant came across farm labourers dancing after their work was done.¹³ Sir John Morris Jones collecting folk songs in Caernarfonshire, was told that it was danced over two clay pipes laid on a sheepskin, and anyone who broke a pipe

¹¹ Owen Huw Roberts, *Clog Dancing*, <<https://www.dawnsywyrnantgarw.com/dances.html>> [accessed 03 July 2020].

¹² Hether Kay, *The Land of the Red Dragon* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1972).

¹³ Thomas Pennant, *A Tour of Wales* (London: Hughes, 1773).

would pay for a round of drinks.¹⁴ It is worth noting here that these dances may not have been percussive sounding dances as we think of step dancing today. I cannot imagine a sheep skin producing any kind of percussive rhythm or sound. But solo dances and step dances often share the same umbrella in Wales and the distinction can be confusing. There have been occasions when a winner of a step dance competition (*dawns stepio*) has performed a solo folk dance with little or no percussive stepping. How and why this situation developed is uncertain. Nowadays the competition at the *Urdd* and National *eisteddfodau* use the phrase ‘individual dance’ (*dawns unigol*) so a dancer can perform a solo folk dance or a solo step dance. Both can be accepted under this category.

‘Morfa Rhuddlan’ is the title of a solo dance for women with a theme. The dance tells the story of the death of Llewelyn the last prince of Wales. It is danced using a shawl and each movement has a meaning to the story. How this dance was originally performed we can never be sure. It is a dance that has been revived and reconstructed. How is this related to step dancing? In recent years it has become popular to combine theme dancing i.e. telling a story, with step dancing which I think has undermined the stepping tradition due to the dance’s emphasis on telling a story rather than the concentration on stepping. The two should be considered separate art forms. A discussion which continues here in Wales with regards to competitions.

Historical records tell us that the step dance was an energetic dance which needed great stamina to perform. In his collection of Welsh airs, John Parry (*Bardd Alaw*) gives us ‘*Twm yn dawnsio at i’w gariad*’ (Tom dancing to his sweetheart). A note says: ‘This jig is danced by two people very fast, if one sits down another takes his place, and so on, for half an hour or till the harper ceases to play’.¹⁵

¹⁴ Huw Roberts, ‘Anglesey’s dance tradition, yesterday and today’, in *Ontrac* (Cardiff: trac, 2010) issue 26, Autumn.

¹⁵ John Parry, *A Selection of Welsh Melodies with Symphonies and Accompaniments* (London: J Power, 1821), volume 2.

Gwynn Williams tells us of an extract from *Cymru Fu*, a collection of Welsh fables and traditions published by journalist Isaac Foulkes, which describes a *noson llawen*, (an evening's gathering) held in a spacious farmhouse kitchen.¹⁶ It says:

After a tune on the flute – a wild brisk spirited one – Auntie Gwen called a second time, 'Roli come to the floor', and the old man obeyed the call in a moment. To show this, he flung his two clogs (taflu ei ddwy clogsan), and went to it to open the dance (ac yn piccio atti i agor y ddawns). There were at least seven of them at it shaking their ankles with orderly liveliness (yn ysgwyd eu berrau yn hwylws heinyf). Old and young amused themselves with the same vigour and eagerness.¹⁷

Welsh step dancing also includes what has become known as 'tricks'. These are often strenuous movements such as high leaps into the air and toby stepping, a style familiar to Cossack dancing which might be why the Welsh step dance became associated with men rather than women. For a girl to emulate the movements of the men would have been considered unladylike. Men often competed against each other in impromptu step dance competitions where, through trials of strength and dexterity, they could display their manhood, the winner being the one who could dance the fastest, perform the more intricate steps, or strenuous movements, or tricks. In 1798 the Rev. Richard Warner touring through Wales, arrived at Pont Nedd Fechan where he attended what he called 'a genuine Welsh ball', stating: 'The ball concluded by a contest of agility between two brothers who danced two distinct hornpipes with so much power of muscle, and variety of step and inflexible perseverance as exceeded everything of the kind we had seen'.¹⁸ In 1911, the *Cardiff Times* reported in a weekly column on Welsh lore: 'The jig was practised only by males. To excel as a jigger or stepper was a point eagerly sought for and competing for the applause and appreciation of the onlookers'.¹⁹ But in his second

¹⁶ Isaac Foulkes, *Cymru Fu* (Wrexham: Hughes, 1862-4).

¹⁷ Gwynn Williams, *Welsh National Music and Dance*.

¹⁸ Revd Richard Warner, *A Second Walk Through Wales* (Bath: Cruttwell, 1798).

¹⁹ 'Cadrawd' (Thomas Evans), *The Cardiff Times* (8 November 1911).

volume of Welsh airs, John Parry (*Bardd Alaw*) gave us what he terms as an:

imitation of Welsh jigs that used formerly to be danced at all weddings and wakes by male and female, as long as either could hold out, when another person would jump up and foot it neatly [...] It has frequently been the case that a merry Welsh lass has danced three men down, to the great amusement of the company. The jig was always kept up with infinite spirit, as long as the harper was able to play.²⁰

Accompaniment

The musical instruments played during this period to accompany dancing primarily include the harp, the flute, the fiddle and the pibgorn (a reed instrument made from the horns of a bull and a wooden pipe). Although sometimes there were others – the Llanwddyn dancer accompanied himself on a mouth organ.²¹ The harp seems to be the most popular instrument to accompany Welsh dancing, but not the single row version with which we are familiar today; *Y Delyn Deires*, the Welsh triple harp, was the most popular. *Y Delyn Deires* was a harp developed in sixteenth-century Italy with three rows of strings to enable chromatic playing. It was so popular with Welsh harpists it became known as the Welsh harp. It has an unbroken tradition of playing in Wales whilst other traditional music was lost due to the religious movement. Today, the main exponent of the triple harp in the Welsh dance tradition is Robin Huw Bowen.

The sweeping away and discouragement of traditional music has left an unfortunate legacy in that Wales now suffers from having a limited number of traditional instrumentalists. Folk dance groups find it difficult to attain the services of fiddle, flute, or harp players etc, and often rely on a piano accompaniment played with a semi-classical technique. In some areas the piano has become the natural musical accompaniment, I might even say preferred, due to the lack of profile of any kind of ‘traditional’ instrument. However, in more recent years enthusiastic individuals and newly formed organisations such as Trac

²⁰ Parry, *A Selection of Welsh Melodies*.

²¹ Kay, *The Land of the Red Dragon*.

Cymru (the folk agency for Wales) have inspired a resurgence in the interest in traditional music. The beginnings are very encouraging.

Most of the stepping is danced in 4/4 time with occasional changes to jig time in 6/8 or a dotted hornpipe.²² Popular tunes include 'Pwt ar y bys', 'Pant Corlan yr Wyn' and 'Croen y Ddafad Felan'. A waltz rhythm is often played for a female routine as it is considered suitable for a woman giving her an opportunity to use light stepping along with graceful and fluid movements, thus emphasising her femininity.²³ The desire to emphasize the different styles between men and women I believe is the result of dancers' eagerness to win competitions.

The adjudicators' guidelines for step dance competitions, created by the Welsh Folk Dance Society, includes this description:

Confident dancing is expected with the men exhibiting strength whilst the women display lighter movements. When using props, these should usually be picked up and put down as part of the dance rather than be indifferently discarded. Tricks should be performed by men only.²⁴

Reading these guidelines in isolation i.e. being removed from the history and background of the tradition, one might consider the wording sexist. A form of discrimination, by the way against which I have personally campaigned. However, because of the competitive nature of Welsh stepping it would be suitable to liken it to a gymnastic competition at the Olympic games. Male and female Olympic gymnasts are very much separated and required to take part in different competitions. The skills necessary to achieve success rely on different challenges and disciplines giving performances a diverse and interesting appeal.

These comments concern eisteddfod competitions and dancing in a formal way. Who knows what can happen in a pub after the drinks are served?

²² 'Daniel Jones – Ysgol Gyfun Plasmawr', S4C, (2019), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rc0B0xn_vKI> [accessed 03 July 2020].

²³ 'Lleucu Parry – Aelod Unigol Cylch Gorllewin Caerdydd' (S4C, 2019), <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=67AsKT0p81k>> [accessed 3 July 2020].

²⁴ Cymdeithas Ddawns Werin Cymru/Welsh Folk Dance Society, *Clogging/Stepping Adjudication Guidelines* (Caernarfon, Cymdeithas Ddawns Werin Cymru, 2020).

Syncopation

In 1989 I decided to experiment with something that was not a feature of Welsh stepping – syncopation. From my early days of learning stepping it was apparent to me that the steps were very much ‘on the beat’ with each step sequence beginning on the first beat of the bar and ending on with the completion of the first part of the tune. Usually after four or eight bars. With syncopation this does not necessarily happen. A step sequence may end or begin in the middle of a tune or carry on beyond the completion of four or eight bars. To begin with I experimented with using standard steps but danced them for a much shorter time and then invented new routines using syncopated rhythms. I enlisted the services of dancer Tim Brown and a well-known musician Stephen Rees as accompanist and together we performed a duet at the National Eisteddfod competition in Llanrwst. We were unsure of how it would be received but the reception was favourable, and we won that year’s competition.

A few years later I was asked to choreograph a television show using Welsh stepping and many dancers from different parts of Wales were invited to audition. Along with the producers Cliff Jones and Eirlys Britton we developed performances using syncopated rhythms which I was able to pass on to other dancers taking part. The result of these two events have led to dancers taking these ideas and expanding them to develop routines and steps that are more intricate than the steps with which I began.

This development continued throughout the 1990s and into the 2000s and syncopation became part of standard repertoire. The result of this has meant on occasions a decline in the use of the old-style stepping or the overuse of syncopation which results in the lack of variety in sound. The tradition is by no means under threat, but it is certainly something we need to follow closely.

What next?

Welsh stepping has a long history. Styles and fashions have, and will, move with the times. After all a tradition is not set in stone. Stone is solid, hard, and unalterable. A tradition is malleable, more comparable to a piece of clay. Tradition can be kneaded or pinched

and pressed into shape without breaking or cracking. Each generation makes its mark, and then leaves it for the next generation to make theirs.

About the authors

Huw Williams

Huw Williams began dancing when he was fifteen and has been described as the 'public face of clog-dancing in Wales'. He was the first dancer to introduce syncopated rhythms into the tradition and many of the steps he developed have become standard repertoire for Welsh clog dancers. His accolades include solo champion dancer at the National Eisteddfod and also won the duet and group competitions more than a dozen times. He toured Europe and North America with the band Crasdant and in a previous incarnation was a singer songwriter working alongside Fairport Convention and Ralph McTell. His clog dancing pupils have included comedian Rory McGrath and hurdler Colin Jackson. Yes I know ... don't ask ...

Angharad Jones

Angharad Jones is an instrumentalist and composer of dance tunes who has accompanied many of the top winning dance groups at the National Eisteddfod of Wales. She has been a computer analyst, a university lecturer, a student of the clarinet at the Welsh College of Music, a conductor of a choir, and mother of a daughter in an indie/folk band. She composes all her best tunes whilst sat in the car at traffic lights and describes herself as a Doctor Who companion-in-waiting. She began her academic career at the Polytechnic of Wales studying Computer Science, then attended Wolfson College, Cambridge. She organises Welsh tune workshops in South Wales and says she will continue to compose until the Tardis and Doctor come calling.

Conference Programme

Saturday

- Session 1 Chair: *Malcolm Barr-Hamilton*
Alexandra Fisher
 In Search of Street Dance – New thoughts on step-dance analysis based on two Lancashire Clog Dancers
Sherry Johnson
 Ontario old-time step dancing: Searching for Roots
- Session 2 Chair: *Michael Heaney*
Sean Goddard
 The English Folk Dance and Song Society's sponsored recorded music output: What went on?
Chloe Middleton-Metcalf
 Hornpipe stepping at barn dances and ceilidhs in England
- Session 3 Chair: *Derek Schofield*
Anne Daye
 Finding our Footing: a discussion of the evidence for a social dance step vernacular to these islands
Siobhan Butler
 The Movements, Motifs, and Influences of The Mullagh Set Dancers
- Session 4 Chair: *Alex Burton*
Huw Williams
 Everything you wanted to know about Welsh Clog Dancing but were too afraid to dance
Annabelle Bugay
 Competition, Consumerism, and Conformity: A study of the manifestation of North American ideals in Competitive Irish dance culture

Kathryn Tattersall, Ru Rose and Jon Davison

From Family to Team: the transmission of Pat Tracey's
clog steps and the formation of Camden Clog

Evening Step Ceilidh Party

Sunday

Session 5 Chair: *Theresa Buckland*

Heather Blasdale Clarke

Steps in Australia: The history

Simon Harmer

Whistling Billy's Barefoot Hornpipe – A presentation on
the process of creating a hornpipe sequence from named
steps in Henry Mayhew's London Labour and the
London Poor (1851)

Session 6 Chair: *Anne Daye*

Mats Melin

Exploring the notion of the Scotch Reel as a solo dance

Heather Sparling

A History of the Scotch Four: Early Step Dancing in Cape
Breton

Session 7 Chair: *Peter Barnard*

Pat Ballantyne

Are these steps percussive? Reflections on an
interpretation

Samantha Jones

Dancing Hands and Rhythmic Voices: Transmission
Methods in Irish Step Dance

Session 8 Chair: *Toby Bennett*

Lisa Sture

Dartmoor Stepdancing: Yesterday, Today & Tomorrow

*Carmen Hunt, Janet Keet-Black, Jo Harmer, Katie Howson,
Kerry Fletcher, Les Bennett, Lisa Sture, Toby Bennett*

(chair)

Panel discussion – English and Cornish Step Dance:
Revival and Continuity

Session 9 *Prof. Theresa Buckland and the conference team*
Closing Comments and discussion.

Posters

Wendy Lutley

References to Broom and Step Dancing from the Blackdown Hills,
Devon/Somerset, England

Charnwood Clog Step Dancers

Getting People to Tell us About Clogs

Video

Paul Hudson

Spirit of Clogfest