

PLAYFORD AND THE COUNTRY DANCE

John Playford was born in Norwich in 1623. He was 28 when he published "The English Dancing Master" in March 1651, 4 years after setting up shop in the angle of the porch of the Temple Church and becoming the only music shop of account in London at that time. He had published the official account of the trial and execution of King Charles, but from 1651 he produced little else than music and he set about amassing a stock-in-trade of the musical works published in the previous 100 years. John retired in 1684 and died in 1686 aged 63. On his retirement, his son Henry moved the business to the Temple Change, over against St. Dunstan's Church in Fleet St., from where he sold the 8th to 12th editions. John Young of the Dolphin and Crown at the west end of St. Paul's Churchyard, published the remaining editions after Henry's death in 1706.

The front plate of the book was an illustration from the pornographic book "The Academy of Love" by John Johnson, published in 1641, showing the Young Gentleman, guided by Cupid, arriving at the last stage of his progress. Country Dancing did not form part of that Academy's activities! When the design was redrawn for the 7th edition, Cupid, now playing a violin, was retained, but it is not uncommon to find on surviving copies that he was snipped out by owners of delicate susceptibilities or his person was clothed with pen and ink unmentionables. The new title page for the final edition suggests the Pump Room at Bath.

The production of a book which could be circulated throughout the Kingdom was the answer to the prevailing condition in which many people stayed at home in the country and were cut off from the dancing schools. The book circulated widely, not only in England and France, but among the Puritans and others in North America. Later editions cost 3s. 6d. for about 360 dances. The most important rival collection, Walsh's "Compleat Country Dancing Master" only appeared in 1719. From then onwards till the early 19th century nearly 10,000 notations appeared in print, many repetitions of course, but reflecting that the country dance had become fashionable and had to have the appearance of innovation.

The first to recognise in *The Dancing Master* a source of English melody was Malchair, who interested his friend Crotch sufficiently to include examples in his "Specimens of Various Styles of National Music" in 1807. Thirty years later Chappell brought out "245 National English Airs" and from 1855-9 "Popular Music of the Olden Time". He and later workers have identified many of the tunes, 66 out of 105, in broadside ballads, English MSS collections, eg Fitzwilliam Virginal Book or foreign printed collections. It is unlikely therefore that the editor of the first edition drew on any traditional sources for the music directly.

The tunes were often altered between editions, particularly to eliminate archaic features, especially modal characteristics much prized by the revivalists. Oddly it is often the tune that attracts the revivalist to the dance, in no way does the popularity of a dance in the 20th century reflect its popularity in its day, at least as measured by persistence through several editions. *Ruffy Tufty* appeared in the 1st edition only and the well known version of *Sellengers Round* not till the 4th edition.

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It is surprising that there has been no attempt to further use the vast corpus of Playford and later collections, although it seems incongruous to use collections of Irish and Scottish tunes which themselves draw on such sources without acknowledgment.

The English Country Dance seemed to spring fully developed from Playford's shop but it must have grown from something even though the evidence is scanty. The Sixteenth Century was the end of the old world in which all the forms from the Twelfth Century onwards were gathered up and worked out to their logical conclusion. In 1501 Katherine of Aragon came to marry Henry VIII's elder brother and brought Spanish music and dancing to England. When Henry's sister Mary, the widow of Louis XII, returned, with her lady-in-waiting Anne Boleyn, French fashions became the order of the day. Rounds as dances were mentioned by Sir Thomas Elyot in 1531. The term Country Dances was used in 1560 in a play. In 1600 the Queen liked to watch her ladies dance the "old and new" Country Dances. There was also La Volta and the Galliards. Whilst mediaeval gentlemen could fight in tournaments to show off before their ladies, 16th century gentlemen were deprived of this outlet. Sport as we understand it did not exist, so the Elizabethans became the "Dancing English".

In dancing as in costume and other things affecting social life, there was a clean break during the first quarter of the 17th century with a fresh start on new lines: in 1625 Charles I succeeded his father and married the sister of Louis XIII.

The Gavottes became prominent because after their solo the gentleman kissed all the ladies and his partner all the gentlemen. Gavottes were progressive but not in the Country Dance sense. The top couple did not work their way down the dance set but after the kissing immediately took the lowest place. Ten of Playford's 1st edition included kissing, only 2 of which were revived by Sharp, and it is assumed that this type of dance belonged to an earlier period. Foreign visitors to England in the 16th century observed that kissing was a salutation ubiquitously used and that the habit as a common greeting went out by the mid 17th century. The Galliard became a shadow of its former self with the springs reduced to instep movements and so was forgotten by society, but it contributed to the Cotswold Morris at the revival of Merrie England at the Restoration in 1660.

At Court the simple outdoor dances came indoors and, as it had happened earlier in Italy under similar circumstances, they quickly became figure dances. The disturbed conditions in England in the 17th century favoured the development of domestic dancing with few dancers. The Country Dance was impersonal and made it possible to call in servants to make a set. The existence of rigid distinctions made it easier for classes to mix. There was also less of a difference between town and country. Towns were smaller and products and produce were directly exchanged and fashions and behaviour readily observed. Many of Playford's dances fit comfortably into the average room of the period with the Longways for use in the Long Gallery that was a feature of so many country houses. The countryman's ballroom would be the threshing floor of beaten earth or fitted boards, about 20 ft by 14 ft. Later, when public assemblies had largely replaced dancing at home, the Longways formation was the sole formation, and forms, such as the

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triple minor were popular, both to accommodate socialising and yet another basic change in the fashion of clothes.

From the middle of the 16th century there are literary references to a few Country Dances whose names eventually found a place in Playford, but there is little certain knowledge of the steps or figures used. Only in two cases are there documentary evidence, Turkeyloney and Basileza, in MSS about 1590, when such dances are assumed to be coming to Court. There is little resemblance to the form now associated with Playford and it is reasonable to assume that any original dances, if such really existed, were much altered and improved. The characteristic form of three Introductions followed by a figure repeated or three unique figures has no known antecedent, yet 69 dances in the first edition are of this form, including over half the Longways-for-as-many-as-will. Some dances, for example Chestnut, are common with Wright's Country Dances Vol I c. 1720 without these movements so perhaps they were taken for granted and actually were used even more frequently than the Playford volume states explicitly.

The formations in Playford are Rounds, Squares and Longways for 4, 6, 8 or as many as will although it is unlikely that the Longways for as many as will were done originally with many more than 4 couples - the days of the New England String Dances was still a long way off. It was usual to continue a longways dance till all had returned to their starting place so that even simple Longways would last at least as many minutes as couples in the set.

From the original 105 dances the numbers grew with each edition. Major changes in content were associated with the changes in publisher. Before the 8th edition, 1690, with 220 dances only 5 of the original first edition had been dropped. By the 10th edition, 1698 with 212 dances only 53 survived. The final edition was in three parts, Part 1, 18th edition, 1728 had 357 dances, Part 2, 4th edition had 360 and Part 3, 2nd edition had 200, but 31 dances survived from the first edition. With the changes and omissions over 1000 dances were published, an impossible number to have been in general use. Current fashion was reflected, in the 3rd edition, 1665/7 there were tunes for the "most usual" French Dances.

Up to the end of the 17th century dancing remained domestic and informal and a part of everyday life with a spontaneity in occurrence. At the turn of that century the Country Dance crossed the English Channel and was taken up with enthusiasm in many European countries. Except for a brief period under Queen Anne the Court gave little lead to Society and the English nobility and gentry remained on their estates. The tenantry were often regarded as an extension of the family and festivities at the big house were shared by all in addition to the round of local seasonal festivals. As the century progressed Society started to congregate at places of amusement like Vauxhall Gardens and Ranelagh or at the fashionable spas and watering places such as Bath, where the highest standards of dancing and deportment were demanded. Up and down the country every town and many a village inn had its Assembly Room which was used for public and private balls. As people were now living in comparatively small houses they found it convenient to join forces to hire the local hall.

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Cecil Sharp published a selection of dances starting in 1911, rising to 158 in all, in 4 of the 6 volumes of the Country Dance Books. At the time to be able to describe something as of folk origin conferred upon it a particular merit both moral and artistic and Sharp at the height of his fame was determined that Playford should contribute, even though the dances were not of pure folk form, which may seem surprising considering his firm ruling about traditional song. Maud Karpeles wrote that Cecil Sharp believed that the older dances in the collection were deeply rooted in tradition although certain features may have been added at a later and more sophisticated period while others owe a great deal to the creative efforts of Playford's contributors. This view of a conscious manipulation of traditional material by those who were immersed in the spirit of the dance justified republication along with the artistic beauty of the results. The style of the original notations suggest several hands helped but so far no one has made a serious study of the likely number of collaborators.

The rich variety of form provided by the early editions could reflect a sweeping together of archaic forms. The slow rate of change considered typical of tradition would imply a long history for such diversity to have developed, all unnoticed, and would imply also a more sophisticated folk form than in polite society because one would not expect Society to pick up all the peasant material. Alternatively and much more likely is that it reflects a brief period of intense innovation with very tenuous connection with the roots of inspiration.

The question still remains, where is the Folk in all this? Where did the dances come from and where did the tunes? The literary references can only be extrapolated to the immediate circle of contact of the gentry. More recent tradition only provides negative evidence. Such dances are simple and party like, most of the English ones can be traced to published sources or can be shown to have evolved from such, as for example the separate dances derived from the figures of the Quadrilles. Thomas Hardy remembered as a youth the Country Dance form spreading into the social life at the common level in Dorset about 1840. The Fletts established that it spread into the Highlands and Islands of Scotland in living memory. In this century when dancing can become a pastime or hobby for anyone, it is notable that the standard or complexity of the dance of the enthusiast is akin to that of Playford. By contrast the Playford material contributes little to the recreational leader or caller at a one night stand.

Often those who have written about folk dance are steeped in the Song. Song is personal and shows an ability to persist of a different order to the dance which requires group participation. For example Mervyn Plunkett has shown that the nonsense burdens of ballads in the carol form can often be explained as rationalisations of Mediaeval Latin phrases. The story of folk song gives a false background to understanding the social dance as does the so called ritual dance.

Of all the folk arts, I believe that the content of the social dance is unique in that it is all devolution from higher society. Such a mechanism for diffusion downwards can be demonstrated in other areas so it should not be surprising.

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