

Tell Me More—Hambleton's Round O

by Graham Christian

One of the most enduring and loved English country dances in triple minor formation, "Hambleton's Round O" first appeared in *Vol. the Second* of Playford's *Dancing Master* c. 1710, and again in the 2nd edition of that collection, as well as Walsh's *New Country Dancing Master the 2nd Book* of c. 1711, set to a driving 3/2 tune; we know it thanks to Bernard Bentley, who presented it as part of the Fallibroome series of historical dance interpretations in 1962. The track was used again for Wright's *Twenty Four New Country Dances for the Year 1719* as "Smiths Round O," and as such was reprinted in the *Third Volume of the Dancing Master* in c. 1726, as well as in Johnson's *Choice Collection of 200 Country Dances for the Year 1744* under the title of "Hot Grey Pease, Or Pipeing Phips," but the distinctive tune disappeared after the 1710s until our own day.



Kitty Keller and Genny Shimer's presentation of the dance in *The Playford Ball* draws a tentative connection between the title and the Hambleton Hills

in Yorkshire, but the reference may be even more exact than suggested there. Hambleton had been home to a racecourse since at least the early 17th century. The diarist Thomas Chaytor says, in 1613, "Att Hambleton, Sir George Conyers mare bett a mare of Sir William Blaxton," mentioning it with other well-established racecourses. Records suggest that the lucrative Royal Gold Cup was run at this course, better known as Black Hambleton, by the 1690s, and it was open to all mares, stallions, and geldings up to five years, requiring them to carry ten stones of weight (about 140 pounds) over four miles. Sometime in the reign of Queen Anne, the race was restricted to mares alone; in August of 1715, a bay mare by the name of Who Would Have Thought It belonging to a Mr. Gage won a hundred guineas, and thereafter the Cup was run alternately at Black Hambleton and the Knightmire track in York until 1776, when it moved entirely to the York course. By some measure, the

most famous representative of Hambleton's glory was Hambletonian (1792-1818), a thoroughbred bay colt named after the now-defunct course, who won a remarkable eighteen of his nineteen races, before retiring in 1801 to an honorable career as the father of numerous race-winning progeny; his portrait (as shown on the left) was painted by England's greatest horse painter, George Stubbs (1724-1806).

The dance's stirring tune is of interest; it is of the type known as the "circular" tune, which has no harmonic resolution, but returns inevitably to the beginning of its A strain, like an ouroboros. The English named many of these tunes, like this one, "Round O" or the like, misunderstanding the Italian and French rondo/rondeau format, which typically introduced a new strain after every instance of the first strain (A-B-A-C-A-D, etc.). One wonders, however, if its application here was an instance of wry humor. "It is possible," says the Handbook for Yorkshire of 1904 in describing Black Hambleton, "that a restive horse may at some time have carried its rider over the cliff." Perhaps it seemed prudent, in 1710, to supply dancers and musicians with a tune as self-enclosed as a racecourse, so that enthusiasm would not carry them off altogether.

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Hambleton's Round O. ♩♩♩♩
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Longways for as many as will.

The 1st Cu. cast off, the Man going the Hey with the 3d Cu. and the Wo. with the 2d Cu. then turn Hands in the 2d Cu. Place. Then the 1st Wo. change Place with the 2d Man, and the 1st Man do the same with the 2d Wo. then Hands half round and turn fingle, then right and left into the 2d Cu. Place.