

On Common Ground 3: John Playford and the English Dancing Master, 1651

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TUNES IN *THE ENGLISH DANCING MASTER*, 1651: JOHN PLAYFORD'S ACCIDENTAL MISPRINTS?

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This conference has given me the opportunity to investigate a theory I began to formulate twenty years ago, when I compiled my book of the country dance tunes from the 18 editions of *The Dancing Master*¹. It seemed to me, as I compared variant readings from one edition to another, that John Playford's original printer, Thomas Harper², had lacked certain bits of musical type for the first edition of 1651³ (as in all subsequent editions, the music was printed with movable type). In particular it seemed that he lacked the means to indicate high or low notes which required additional stave lines, and that he lacked a sufficient number of sharps⁴. I also wondered if this lack of type might not be the principal reason for Playford's claim on the title page of the second edition (1652), that it is 'Corrected from many grosse Errors which were in the former Edition'. Despite the correction of the notorious misprint reversing the symbols for men and women in the key to the first edition, there are, as the second edition progresses, many more alterations to the tunes than to the dance instructions. Initially therefore one might conclude that all the musical changes are corrections, and that musicians today who fail to take them into account play the tunes wrongly. I hope to demonstrate that the implications of the alterations are far from being clear cut.

Examples 1–5 show how music printing with movable type operated, though some detail is lost in reproduction. Every item of musical information needs a separate piece of type; the clef, key signature and other accidentals, time signature, each note, each dot, each bar line, comes on its own little piece complete with stave lines. This results in the characteristically uneven, discontinuous appearance to the staves. Type could be disassembled and re-used once it was no longer needed; 'Newcastle' (example 1, first edition; example 2, second edition) has been completely reset for the second edition, as have all the other tunes.

The lack of additional stave lines is manifest; Harper did not use them anywhere in the first edition, yet they occur abundantly in the second edition⁵. In the first strain of 'Newcastle' in both editions, my single-headed arrow points to the highest note, a minim *g*. In the second strain, the double-headed arrow points to a similar *g* in the first edition; in the second edition, this note is *a*. Both notes make musical sense, yet the change can only be interpreted as a deliberate alteration. Not only does the minim head have a line through it, but additional stave lines have been set either side of the head. The only argument against the *a* being a corrected 'gross error' is that the second edition introduces new errors; see for example the crotchet *g* preceding the *a*; in the first edition it is followed by a dot, correctly; in the second edition the dot is omitted, creating a rhythmic anomaly. However, in three other tunes notes above or below the stave have been altered, similarly to 'Newcastle', in the second edition. In two – 'If all the World were Paper', and 'The merry, merry Milke Maids' – these corrections are necessary; the tunes share the key of *c* major, and it is clear from the contexts that the notes in question should be the tonic *c*, either below the stave or above it. In the third tune though, 'Cherily and merrily', complications arise from the alterations. In the first edition (example 3), the lowest and highest notes (indicated by the arrows) are *d* and *g* respectively. The low *d* makes musical sense, but the high *g* does not. The second edition (example 4) has a clearly, if clumsily indicated top *a* replacing the *g*, whereas the low *d*

remains. But this edition also includes a new title, ‘Mr. Webbs Fancy’ (example 5), which has the same tune and dance instructions as ‘Cherily and merrily’. Here the low *d* becomes *c*, and the top *a* remains as *a*. ‘Mr. Webbs Fancy’ disappears from the third edition, but ‘Cherily and merrily’ remains right the way through to the 18th edition. Only in the 14th edition of 1709, nearly 60 years after the first edition, is that low *d* altered; not to *c* though, but to *e*, which also makes musical sense⁶. The complications arise because the acceptability of the low *d* allowed it to escape notice for many years.

Now, on to the sharps. Here the evidence for a shortage in the first edition is primarily statistical: there are indeed far more sharps in the second edition; 60% more, with 101 in the first edition and 161 in the second. There is a much smaller increase in the number of flats, from 50 to just 57. So, are all the additional sharps corrections of ‘grosse errors’, and are musicians who play for example the accidental-free first edition version of ‘Jenny pluck Pears’ (example 6), playing it wrongly?

I suggest that there are four factors to consider before assuming that the addition of a sharp in the second edition is correct. The first factor is that, despite Playford’s claim, there are many demonstrable inaccuracies in the second edition; it not only introduces new misprints, but also fails to correct some obvious gross errors in the first edition. To give one example: ‘The Maid peeped out at the window’ has a flat in the key signature in both editions, making a very strange sounding tune⁷ (example 9). Only in the fourth edition (the most musically accurate of John Playford’s own editions) is the flat removed, so that the tune makes sense (example 10).

Another factor to consider is that early editions of *The Dancing Master* were published during a period of change and transition in notational practices, including the indication of accidentals. In the previous century, musicians would add accidentals which were not indicated in the music, both sharps and flats, according to the rules of *musica ficta*. A particular case in point is the final leading-note; the habit of not placing a sharp before the leading-note, but leaving the player to supply it, lingered on well into the 17th century⁸. It might be argued that, in his second edition of *The Dancing Master*, Playford felt that he needed to indicate more of the leading-notes as sharpened, according to modern practice. Yet he is not at all consistent in the way he distributes his new found sharps. Some tunes are liberally sprinkled – ‘Jenny pluck Pears’ (example 7) and ‘Graies Inne Maske’ for example – whereas others remain denuded; ‘Wooddickock’ (example 11) and ‘The fine Companion’ (example 13) are two that remain without any sharps, not only in the second edition, but through to their final appearance in the eighth edition in 1690 (though several alterations are made to the notes of ‘Wooddickock’).

The third additional factor which might affect the printing of sharps, and which is linked to the question of *musica ficta*, relates both to the type of tune on the one hand and type of performer playing it on the other. We might today describe ‘Jenny pluck Pears’ and the rather similar ‘Wooddickock’ as having the character of English traditional or folk melodies; if Charles II’s call at a court ball in 1662 for ‘Cuckolds all awry, the old dance of England’⁹ is anything to go by, then a sense of tradition and antiquity in relation to at least some country dances existed in Playford’s time too. ‘Graies Inne Maske’ though had a relatively recent history. Its various tempo and metre changes give it the character of music for an antic dance in a court masque; according to Andrew Sabol¹⁰ the music was probably composed by Giovanni Coperario for Beaumont’s *Masque of the Inner Temple and Gray’s Inn*, which

had been performed on a royal occasion at Whitehall in 1613. By Playford's time the music appears to have become widely known, and included a ballad setting too, 'Mad Tom'. Of the ten concordances mentioned by Sabol, two out of the four that I have seen in reprints include more or less the sharps found in Playford's second edition¹¹; the third includes most¹², and the fourth, according to Sabol's commentary, omits all except two¹³.

What I have said so far provokes questions that I cannot answer with certainty. Did the musician then who could not read music, and had not been taught the rule about sharpening leading-notes, have a repertoire of tunes with flattened leading-notes? Would such a musician then have flattened the leading-notes of recently composed tunes which had become popular, but which originally had sharpened leading-notes? And did the literate, educated musician sharpen the leading-notes of older, traditional English tunes as a matter of course?

We all know that, one hundred years ago, a revelation for Cecil Sharp and the other folk-song collectors was the way in which the English singers left leading-notes flattened; this so-called modal characteristic was for the collectors an important defining aspect of what they considered to be folk melody, even though they collected many traditional songs with sharpened leading-notes (see Sharp's views on 'Jenny pluck Pears' below)¹⁴. Scottish traditional tunes, which became increasingly popular in England from Playford's time onwards, were allowed by the educated English, and by the Scots of all classes, to have flattened leading-notes¹⁵; it was part of their Scottishness. We may like to assume that English traditional tunes were performed with flattened leading-notes in the 17th and 18th centuries, but evidence outside the first edition of *The Dancing Master* is hard to come by, because written transmission of those tunes was, ipso facto, in the hands of the musically literate. Earlier concordances in virginal manuscripts of 'Woodcock' (example 12)¹⁶ and 'The fine Companion' (example 14)¹⁷ have sharpened leading-notes.

I have come across two written passages from the 17th and 18th centuries, which suggest that there was then a different attitude to the sharpening of leading-notes between those who had been taught to read music and those who learnt aurally. Both extracts concern the singing of psalms in church, and the first comes in a book of psalms published in London in 1688¹⁸. In an introductory section on the rudiments of rhythm and pitch and their application, the author writes that in church 'the clerk must remember to declare with an audible voice, ... when they [the congregation] will observe the *b. flat*, called in Musick the *fa* Notes, or half Notes, and the mark # called sharp, or when they will omit the value of them. ... For otherwise the people in Congregations will confound one another all over'¹⁹.

This suggests that such confounding was not unknown, and more specific corroboration comes from a later source, Robert Bremner's *The Rudiments of Music*, published in Edinburgh (second edition, 1762)²⁰. Bremner laments that the psalm tune known in Scotland as 'Dundee' ('Windsor' in England) was no longer being sung because the precentors or church-clerks 'found it was impossible to bring their Congregations to fall the *Half-note*, which concludes the *first* and *third Measures* ... they having been in use for many Years past to fall a *whole Note*, that is, to sing *G natural* instead of *G sharp*'²¹ (a sharp is placed above the disputed note in example 15).

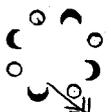
Bremner is referring to the tenor part, which is where the tune lay, and his solution is to transfer the sharpened *g* to the treble and to give a different note, *b*, to the tenor; for, as he writes 'It is found by Experience, that the Generality of People learn it [the tenor part or

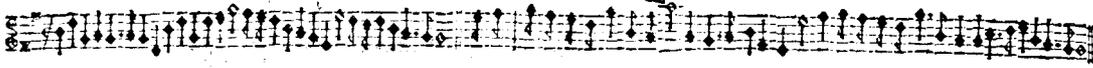
Newcastle *Round for eight* 



Meet all, back again, set to your own, and to the next. That again. Arms all with your own by the right, men all fall with your left hands into the middle, We go round them to your places. Arms again with your own, and We left hands in, men go about them towards the left to your places.

Example 1

Newcastle *Round for eight* 



Meet all, back again, set to your own, and to the next. That again. Arms all with your own by the right, men all fall with your left hands into the middle, We go round them to your places. Arms again with your own, and We left hands in, men go about them towards the left to your places.

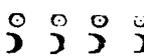
Example 2

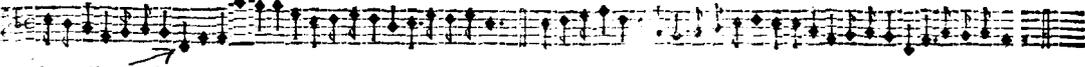
Cherily and merrily *Longways for eight* 



Lead up all a D. forwards and back. That again. Set and turn S. That again.

Example 3

Cherrily and merrily *Longways for eight* 



Lead up all a D. forwards and back. That again. Set and turn S. That again.

Example 4

Mr. Webbs Fancy *Longways for eight* 



Lead up a D. forwards and back. That again. Set and turn S. That again.

Example 5

Example 6 

Example 7 

Example 8 

Example 9  etc.

Example 10  etc.

Example 11 

Example 12 

Example 13 

Example 14 

Example 15 

Example 16  etc.

Example 17  etc.

In musical examples 6-17, time signatures have been modernised; repeats have not been indicated.

tune] at Church by the *Ear*, whereas none will attempt to *sing Treble* that have not been properly instructed²².

Although this is Scotland, where in traditional melody flattened leading-notes were accepted by all, the passage demonstrates a gulf in attitude between the literate musician and those who learnt aurally towards the way non-Scottish tunes should be performed.

The fourth factor which may have affected the way in which Playford distributed his sharps is quite simply subjective taste. There are many slight alterations to the notes and rhythm of tunes in the second edition which appear gratuitous or trivial; they do not correct misprints, but seem to be a preferred variant of the tune. So at least some of the extra sharps in the second edition may likewise have been added through personal preference; writers on musical theory, such as Thomas Morley (1597)²³ and Christopher Simpson (1667)²⁴, do allow for differences in taste over decisions about whether or not to sharpen a leading-note, provided that note does not immediately precede the final tonic or key-note. Simpson, illustrating how to ‘joyn a *Treble* to the *Bass*’, has, in the treble, a sharpened leading note with a similar context²⁵ to the problematic note in ‘Windsor’, and he writes that this sharp is ‘disputable, as many times it happens in Musick; in which doubts the Ear is alwayes to be Umpire’²⁶. The flexibility the two writers allow suggests that the leading-note at the end of the first strain of ‘Parsons farewell’ for example, which is flat in Playford’s first edition of *The Dancing Master* (example 16) but sharpened in the second (example 17), might be played either way. This note too has a similar implied harmonic context to the Bremner and Simpson examples, and like them occurs at the end of a phrase or sub-phrase. And the embellishment added to the third bar of ‘Parsons farewell’ in the second edition is a good example of a variant rather than a correction.

Before concluding, here are some statistics concerning the use of sharpened leading-notes in minor or dorian mode tunes in the first and second editions. There are 11 such tunes with final leading-notes already sharpened in the first edition²⁷, and 9 without. Of those 9, 4 have their final leading-notes sharpened in the second edition²⁸; 3 of the remaining 5 tunes have their leading-notes sharpened in later editions²⁹. This leaves just ‘Wooddicock’ and ‘The fine Companion’, which, as demonstrated, occur in other sources with sharps. ‘The fine Companion’ also occurs in a version where it is transposed entirely into the major; according to Andrew Sabol, who reprints the source³⁰, there is evidence that this transposition was a deliberate act on the part of the arranger³¹. Switching between minor and major occurs with a few tunes in successive editions of *The Dancing Master*. Sometimes the change is an obvious correction, as we have seen in the case of ‘The Maid peept out at the window’. On other occasions the decision seems like a whim, as with ‘Jenny pluck Pears’ in the fourth edition, 1670 (example 8).

Finally, I would like to quote Cecil Sharp’s view on the changes to accidentals in successive editions of *The Dancing Master*³²:

Remembering the standpoint from which the professional musician of the day regarded the music of the people, it is not difficult to conjecture the nature and purpose of these changes. Their object, of course, was to bring the tunes into conformity with the musical notions of the day. Indeed, I suspect that many of the “grosse errors” of the first edition were no more than modal peculiarities, which, by the suppression or addition of sundry accidentals, were subsequently “corrected” in the second and later editions. The wonder is, not so much that changes of this nature were made, as

that tunes were ever printed in the unedited forms in which many of them appear in the earlier editions.

Sharp then gives the three versions of 'Jenny pluck Pears' to illustrate his point. Some of my evidence appears to support his suspicions; the problem is that he does not explain why the musically knowledgeable John Playford should have had the tunes printed one way in the first edition, only to have decided a year later that they contained gross errors, and to have made the sharpening of notes a particularly frequent correction. A dearth of sharps for the printing of the first edition seems to me to be the likeliest explanation. Although I have not resolved the issues raised by their uneven distribution in the second edition, I hope I have said enough for musicians to feel that they may continue playing the tunes exactly as they always have done.

NOTES

- 1 Barlow, J. (ed.) *The Complete Country Dance Tunes from Playford's Dancing Master (1651–ca.1728)*. London: Faber Music, 1985.
- 2 Harper's name appears on the first edition but not on the second. He died in 1656, so Margaret Dean-Smith, in the Introduction to her edition *Playford's English Dancing Master, A Facsimile Reprint* (London: Schott, 1957), p. xxii, assumes that he was probably the printer. The third edition (1657) was printed by 'W. G.' (William Godbid, Harper's successor).
- 3 The book was called *The English Dancing Master* for the first edition only.
- 4 The fount which Harper used had originated with Thomas Este in the late 16th century. See Dean-Smith, *op. cit.*, p. xxii, and for further details of its history, see D. W. Krummel's *English Music Printing 1553–1700* (London: The Bibliographical Society, 1975), p. 61.
- 5 Additional stave lines occur in 24 tunes, including 15 times each in 'The Gun' and 'Graves Inne Maske'. Their use in tunes other than those under discussion results from transposition, either of the tune into a new key, or of the treble clef sign from the lowest stave to its modern position on the second stave.
- 6 The low *c* makes better musical sense in relation to the rest of the first strain, since the resulting first bar motif *gagc* is echoed a fifth higher in notes 15–18, *dedg*.
- 7 Strange sounding because of the diminished fifth/augmented fourth relationships of the prominent *e* naturals and *b* flats in the tune. Flattening the *e* naturals according to the old rules of *musica ficta* (see below) merely causes a new augmented fourth relationship with the *a* in the second bar.
- 8 For a summary of early practices regarding unwritten accidentals, see Robert Donington's *The Interpretation of Early Music* (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), pp. 139–151.
- 9 As recorded by Samuel Pepys in his diary entry for 31 December, 1662.
- 10 See Sabol's edition *Four Hundred Songs and Dances from the Stuart Masque* (Hanover, USA: Brown University Press for University Press of New England, 1978 and 1982), p. 152.
- 11 See Sabol, *ibid.*, nos. 255 and 256 (pp. 347 and 348).
- 12 In the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, MS. Rés. 1186; reprinted in Martha Maas's edition *English Pastime Music, 1630–1660: An Anthology of Keyboard Pieces* (Madison: A-R Editions, 1974), p. 21.
- 13 See Sabol, *op. cit.*, no.152 (p. 244).

- 14 See also Vaughan Williams's comparison of two versions of 'The miller of the Dee', one from an 18th century ballad opera (with sharpened leading-notes), the other collected by him from a singer in Sussex (with flattened leading-notes), in 'English Folk-Songs', a pamphlet 'abridged from a lecture' published by The English Folk Dance Society, London (n.d.),
- 15 See for example 'Up with Aily', introduced into the 12th edition of *The Dancing Master* (1703, p. 343). The tune is in *d* major, with two sharps in the key signature, and at the end of the first strain all the notes *c* in bar four are flattened.
- 16 'Woody-Cock', melody only, with embellished repeats omitted, from the *Fitzwilliam Virginal Book*, compiled 1609–19; edition by J. A. Fuller Maitland and W. Barclay Squire (1894–99, reprinted in facsimile by Broude Brothers, New York, n.d.), Vol. II, p. 138.
- 17 'The Meiry Companion', melody only, from *Anne Cromwell's Virginal Book*, 1638; edition by Howard Ferguson (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 18. This edition eliminates redundant accidentals according to modern practice.
- 18 *The Whole Book of Psalms, As they are now sung in the Churches: with the Singing Notes of Time and Tune Set to every Syllable ...*. London: Printed by R. Everingham for the Company of Stationers ... , 1688.
- 19 *Ibid.*, f. b2v.
- 20 Bremner, R. *The Rudiments of Music ... To which is annexed, a Collection of the best Church-Tunes, Canons, and Anthems ...* second edition. Edinburgh: Printed for the Author, 1762.
- 21 *Ibid.*, p. 36.
- 22 *Ibid.*, p. 37.
- 23 Morley, T. *A Plaine and Easie Introduction to Practicall Musicke*. London: printed by Peter Short, 1597. Facsimile edition: Shakespeare Facsimiles no. 14. London: Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press, 1937. See p. 94: Morley gives several examples of descants against the same plainsong cantus firmus, the latter beginning and ending on *g*, with a sharpened *f* leading-note in the middle of the melody; in one example Morley omits the sharp, stating that because of the particular descant 'I thought it better flat than sharpe, ... but if anie man like the other waie better, let him use his discretion'.
- 24 Simpson, C. *A Compendium of Practical Musick in Five Parts*, second edition. London: printed by William Godbid for Henry Brome, 1667; there is a modern edition by Phillip J. Lord (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1970).
- 25 *Ibid.*, p. 25. Simpson gives three examples of melodies, four bars long, against a bass in *g* dorian; the note on which Simpson comments is a sharpened *f* at the end of the second bar in the second melody.
- 26 *Ibid.*, p. 26.
- 27 'Confesse', 'Dull Sir John', 'Faine I would', 'A Health to Betty', 'Heart's Ease', 'Lulle me beyond thee', 'Madge on a Cree', 'Millisons Jegge', 'My Lady Cullen', 'Petticoat wag', 'Prince Ruperts March'.
- 28 'The Cherping of the Larke', 'Irish Trot', 'Jenny pluck Pears', 'The New Exchange'.
- 29 'The Maid peept out at the window', 'Nonesuch', 'An Old man is a Bed full of bones'.
- 30 Sabol, op. cit., no. 406, p. 516, 'The Boon Companion'.
- 31 Sabol, op. cit., p. 622.
- 32 In Sharp's *The Country Dance Book*, Part II, second edition, revised (London: Novello, 1913), p. 23.