

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

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JIGG SAW PUZZLE – A TALE OF 3 JIGS

Hazel Dennison

[The paper was introduced by ‘The North Country Lovers: or: The Plain Downright Wooeing Between John and Joan, a pleasant new song as it was sung before the court at Windsor’, sung by Peter Greener.]

This is a simple study of a practical nature which sets out to explore the form and content of the jig as a dance in 1651.

PART 1. 1651

It is March 1651. Mr Playford’s book of dances has just been published. The ballad jig we have just heard will not be published until the Restoration, yet elements of both have their roots in 16th century England and beyond.

A young man (let us call him Master Trippet) has just arrived to study at the Inns of Court. He brings with him a degree of terpsichorean talent, but is anxious to acquaint himself with the latest London dances, especially the jigs of which he heard much as a boy.

Master Trippet may have seen or heard ballad jigs still in outdoor performance, or have purchased one which would give him the “drama bite” of the latest play. So, upon opening his sparkling new edition of the English Dancing Master he finds much to learn, including a jig:

Millisons Jig a longways dance for 3 couples, in 6/8 time;

oh – and here is another:

Kemps Jigge for 3 couples again and in 6/8 time but this time in a round;

and yet a third:

Lord of Canarvons Jigge back to a longways set again but this time in 6/4 time and now for 4 couples

Which dance, if any, is a true jigge? Perhaps the steps will provide a clue. Singles, Doubles, Turns, Slips ... – a common vocabulary for the whole book.

Unperturbed, but wishing to clarify matters before he attends the Freshers Ball he goes through the dances in more detail; but let Mr Playford speak for himself:

A sweet and ayry Activity ... making the body active and strong, gracefull in deportment and a quality much beseeing a gentlemen... For the gentlemen of the Innes of Court.

[The patterns of 3 jigs were demonstrated]

These three unique little choreographies contain echoes of past forms and figures and possible hints of dances to come, but are they to be executed by a seemingly bland and simplistic code of steps? What is it that distinguishes them as jiggs? Are they old dances with new names? Jiggs in name only? John Forrest (A History of Morris Dancing) refers to Playford as “a grabbag of choreographic ideas” But has Playford removed all traces of the past and ironed out all of the creases in order to provide a “sweet and ayrey activity for gentle folk”. We know it contains dances from 16th century England but no specific infor-

mation to distinguish a jig from any other dance, This is the case with dance manuals of any age. We must search elsewhere.

PART 2. THE JIGG 1560–1600

Form

A brief selection of the many references from primary social, theatrical and dance sources reinforce the following:

- That a jig could be a social and recreational dance at court or country level; Sir Henry Sidney reports on the beautifully dressed noblewomen of Galway who danced an Irish jig in an excellent fashion. Yet an informal jig was part of the rounds and measures danced regularly “on pastures graced with flowers”
- The jig was also a popular performance dance, danced with and to a sung ballad, usually on the theme of coupling and copulating, often subversive and obscene, as a solo, dialogue or group entertainment, as interlude or curtain piece for a play.
- Ballad and jig were synonymous – the words, music and steps carrying throughout the distinctive strong light “tumpy, tumpy” beats that echoes the storyteller’s driven narrative – as we first heard in John and Joan.

Content

The jig was often linked and likened to the *galliard* and *morescha* – a skilful show piece that required: “turning on the toe”, “turning on a globe” or whirligig. It contained capers and tumbles, leaps and jumps, cuts and tailes. It was both “hot and hasty and full fantastical”, nasty, wanton, prettie, merrie, nasty and sportful. It required nimble steps and precise footwork, a strong vertical dynamic, yet must be light. Riche bemoans the fact that his heels are “too heavie” for a jig.” “Jigges are light, squibbish things, only fit for fantastical light-headed people” says Mace, and yet the one Thomas Platten saw in 1599 at the Globe was danced “very marvellously and gracefully”. Florio, in defining a *chiarantana*, likens it to a

<p>Millisons Jegge</p> 	<p>Longwayes for six</p> 
<p>Leade up all a D. forwards and back ˘ That againe ˘</p>	<p>First man take his Wo. by both hands and foure slips up, and stand the 2. as much, the third as much, turne all S. ˘ Third Cu. foure slips downe, the 2. as much, first as much, turne all single ˘</p>
<p>Sides all ˘ That againe ˘</p>	<p>First Cu. change places, the second as much, third as much, turne S. ˘ Third Cu. change places, the 2. as much, first as much, turne all single ˘</p>
<p>Armes all ˘ That againe ˘</p>	<p>First man change places with the 2. Wo. first Wo. change with 2, the last change with his owne, turne S. ˘ First man change with last Wo. First Wo. change with the last man, tother change, turne all single ˘</p>

kind of carol or song “full of leapings like a Scotch jigge”. Tom’s girl, Priscilla, danced it with buttocks “quaking like custard.”

What were all these steps and embellishments?

Did any of them filter down to enhance the neat pages of Mr Playford?

PART 3. STEPS

In the only major scholarly work on the Elizabethan jig, C R Baskerville (in the 1920’s) acknowledges that despite 600 pages, ten chapters and 30 extant jig texts he was unable to attempt a detailed description of the dance because:

“in origin and background the stage jig is ultimately connected with the general field of the dance. For these reasons some understanding of the state of contemporary dance in England seems to me of no little importance for the study of a jig”

He had no contemporary sources so it is this “missing puzzle piece” that I have sought to fill using the sources available to us – Arbeau, Negri, Caroso, the Inns of Court Manuscripts and the recently published, anonymous “Instruction pour Dancer”. From these I selected:

- steps for travelling, crossing, meeting, casting and setting;
- steps for turning, spinning, jumping, leaping and going round;
- steps for embellishment

all reflecting and reinforcing what Louis Horstz calls “that quickest of all dance forms, possibly the most exciting rhythmic images of all music, due to the rapidly moving groups of 3 notes.” I kept in mind this driving rhythm found in music / words / and dance.

The travelling double steps in Playford asks for 3 steps and a closure. We experimented with Arbeau’s *fleuret* but found it difficult to maintain the spring and quick changes needed in *Millisons*, and used it instead for the shorter siding figures. Instead we substituted a buoyant hopstep, small and high. To emphasise the rounded arming figure in *Millisons* we used a

Lord of Carnarvans Jegg

Longwayes for eight



Leade up all a D. forwards and backe ˘ That againe ˘	Each man and Wo. goe about each other, not turning your faces ˘ That againe ˘
First Cu. crosse over and fall into the 2. place on the outside the 2. Cu. the men on the out- side of the Wo. and the We. on the mens side ˘ Crosse over againe and fall into the third place ˘	Take hands with your Wo. and leading her downe betwixt the last Cu. cast off all and meet above the first Cu. in the first place, and the last Cu. in the 2. place, the third Cu. in the last place ˘ Armes all ˘
Lead downe forwards and back ˘ That againe ˘	Go about each other as before ˘ That againe ˘
The lowest Cu. crosse over as before ˘	Cast off as before. —
¶ Tap up all a D. and back ˘ That againe ˘	Go about each other as before ˘ That againe ˘
The uppermost Cu. crosse over as before ˘	Cast off as before.
Lead downe forwards and back ˘ That againe ˘	Go about each other as before ˘ That againe ˘
The lowest Cu. crosse over as before ˘	Cast off as before.

more grounded *passi trangati*, said by Caroso, with its curved body posture, to be used in *moresche* dances.

Playford marks the end of phrases in *Millisons* with turns single and asks for 2 steps and a closure for each. We tried 2 of Arbeau's *pied en l'air* and a *saut*, then risked censure and added a third kick to provide momentum and lift.

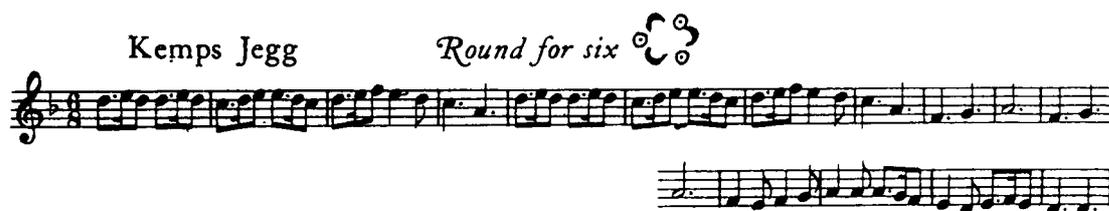
The challenge in *Millisons* was the slip step – this could have been the *French Slyde* of the Inns of Court or *glissades (pas glisses)* of the “Instruction pour dancer”, but a reference to cuts suggested slipping the foot under rather than along the floor, and we used Arbeau's *ruade* / Caroso's *sottopiede*.

In *Kemps Jigge* we kept the driving force of the hop step, balanced by a *doppio grave Francese* when we needed a more controlled figure. From the incredibly rich store of leaps turns and embellished steps, the *ru de vache* and *saut* of Arbeau, the *pirlozzo*, *saltos (tondo, riverso, fiocco)*, the *battute*, *scambiate*, *fioretto*, *trabuchetto*, *capriole* and *grosso* of Negri and Caroso, each man devised his own brief solo for the moment when he takes centre stage before he turns the third lady.

All these were abandoned when it came to *Lord of Carnavons Jigge*. Whether it was the 6/4 timing or the more fluid figures, it immediately suggested the new *fleuret* used throughout, moving towards the open serpentine of Hogarth and the eighteenth century.

The choice of steps was not a random selection. Of course not all or any of these may have been used in any context where a jigge was danced, but all were used to gain a greater insight into the nature of the dance, and the true spirit of the jigge.

[*Millisons Jigge* and *Lord of Carnavons Jigge* were performed]



One man lead in two We. forwards and back twice: Honnor to one, honnor to the other, then turn the third $\underline{\cdot}$. Lead your owne with your left hand, and the woman you turnd, and as much $\underline{\cdot}$. Then as much with the other two We. turning your owne $\underline{\cdot}$. The next man as much $\underline{\cdot}$. Then the third man as much $\underline{\cdot}$.

First man lead the We. as before : Turn half round, holding both hands, and his owne as much to the other, turn the third Wo. $\underline{\cdot}$ Do thus to all the rest following and doing the like.

First man take the We. as before by the Co. hands behinde, then lead them forwards and back, Pull one halfe about and kisse her, as much with the other, turne the third $\underline{\cdot}$. Doe thus to all: The rest following and doing the like.

PART 4. KEMPS JIGGE – AND SO END.

Within a span of 50 years the jig marked the transition from vigorous out door dance socially and theatrically, to more restrained performances within the ballroom and enclosed theatres.

What did emerge was this fascinating driven beat, which I found in all 24 extant English ballad jig texts in Baskerville – not in the music, but in the words. They carry this pattern in their *living* spoken language:

- One could dance a jig to the spoken word.
- A very heightened celebratory pattern.

Only one of Playford's Jiggs remains to be danced – Kemps Jigge. There is no time to talk of Kemp the dancer or of the nature of the curtain jiggs. Of the 12 jiggs however listed on the register of dances licensed for performance in 1595, four were his,

1. A third and last part of Kemps Jigge.
2. A pleasant newe jigge of the Broome man (Kempes name in the margin)
3. Master Kempes new jigge of the Kitchen Stuffe woman.
4. Kempes newe jygge betwixt a soldiour and a miser and Sym the clown.

The last is fascinating as it suggests a possible connection with commedia figures Kemp may have seen in his Italian travels. A challenge for another time perhaps? I can only hope that by the time the jigge was executed by the young lawyers and their ladies of 1651 they had retained something of the renaissance spirit of improvisation that had enhanced the dancing of their forbears.

And so to end with Kemps jigge. But which one? With echoes of the Soldiour, the Miser and the Clown, with threads pulled through from the English Dancing Master and our wonderful inheritance of 16th century steps we will dance for you Kemps Jigge.

[Dance – Kemps Jigge – and exeunt]

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Hazel Dennison

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