

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

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ENGLISH COUNTRY DANCES IN NORTHERN GERMANY AROUND 1800

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INTRODUCTION

Johanna Schopenhauer (1766–1836), the mother of the philosopher, in her own time was far more famous than him as a best-selling writer of novels and travel books. She wrote about the balls she attended in her hometown Danzig¹ in her youth:

“... At that time no dancing soul among us thought of waltzes, “*Dreher*” or gallops. These dances belonged to southern Germany and had not yet found their way to the icy shores of the Baltic Sea....”.

She mentioned that polonaises, mazurkas, minuets and quadrilles were being danced and went on:

“...After the polonaise came the *anglaise*. The trains, which had swept over the floor during that festive national dance, were neatly tucked up by the careful Mamas, and everyone hurried to stand in rank and file as closely to the top couple as possible. It was a great enterprise indeed to dance 6, 8 or even 12 figures down the set with each of the 20 to 30 couples, then stand still, until the very last of all couples had turned top and wound themselves down to the end of the set in the same manner....”

If you look at German folk dance today, south of the river Main you will find more round dances – like waltzes – while in the north (including former East Prussia) most dances are figure dances – like squares, tempests, longways² – which have their origin in those social dances of the early 19th century that are descendants of Playford’s country dances. In this paper I want to concentrate on the longways dances in 3 German dance collections of the late 18th and early 19th century.

LONGWAYS DANCE FORMS

Longways dances became popular in Germany in the early 18th century. The most important German source of longways dances from that period we have today is Jayme’s “*Recüeil de Contredances*”³, a collection of 119 dances that he seems to have copied from French sources. But his contemporaries were well aware of the English origin of the dances. In German they are called “*Anglaise*”, “*Angloise*”, “*Englische Tänze*” or “*Englische Landtänze*” – this being the literal translation of “English Country Dances”. In his comprehensive book “*Rechtschaffener Tanzmeister*”⁴ Gottfried Taubert refers even directly to the 13th edition of the English Dancing Master from 1706.

Longways dances continued to be in fashion until the early 19th century, and then slowly died out in the 1820s and 1830s. For the dancing master Franz Anton Roller in his “*Systematisches Lehrbuch der bildenden Tanzkunst und körperlichen Ausbildung*”⁵ they were already a thing of the past, but nevertheless he gives a detailed explanation of how they were danced. He mentions for example that most people would rehearse the day before the dance, as one needed some experience and a good memory for the choreographies.

Those choreographies could be taken from various sources. Of course people would learn how to dance from dancing masters⁶. Dance manuals usually explained the steps for different dance forms and added choreographies in notation. Various collections of notated

dances were available, including Joseph Lanz's "*Portefeuille Englischer Tänze*"⁷ that enabled dancers to make up their own dances from given figures – all that, if they could read the notation, and as we will see later that knowledge probably was spread quite widely. The dances in such collections are often identified only by numbers, not individual names, so perhaps dancers and dancing masters felt indeed that any country dance was just one of many possible combinations of standardized elements.

Notation

Very few of the German sources describe the dances only verbally; usually they were notated, with or without additional verbal explanation, in the floor pattern notation derived from the simplified Feuillet-notation for country dances. Sometimes the track for the ladies would be drawn in red, or either the ladies' or the gentlemen's track was indicated with dotted lines⁸ to make it more clearly. It was not necessary to include bar lines, as the number of bars for each figure was fixed. The track for figures like the chain caused some problems, so often it was completely replaced by the word for them, like "*chaine*" or "*Walzer*".

Angloise

By the second half of the 18th century the choreographies of longways country dances had become quite standardized. The figures would either use up all 8 bars of one phrase of the music – in German this was called "*ganze Tour*" (whole tour) – or just 4 bars, called "*halbe Tour*" (half tour)⁹. If the figure was a half tour, the other 4 bars would be filled with steps on the spot, notated as little dots. In contrast to early 18th century notation almost every plate in notation covered exactly 8 bars of music. Only very rarely do we have 4 bars, that is when 2 half tours were combined. The notated dances I have seen each have 4, 6 or 8 whole tours, while in other descriptions, for example Schopenhauer and Roller, up to 12 or 16 tours are mentioned, it is possible, however, that these were half tours.

Also the sequence of the figures was quite fixed. Most of the *angloises* in various European sources end with a chain or in some cases with a round, the progression would usually take place in the plate before that.

In German *angloises* from the 1790s onwards these last 2 figures are gradually being replaced by 2 phrases of waltzing. In this case the top couple could start the waltz section either in position 1 or 2.

The music for *angloises* could be in duple or in triple metre.

The typical travelling step for the *angloise* seems to be the ordinary *pas de bourrée*.

Escossaise

Even though in the first half of the 18th century there are already occasional references to the "*Ecossoise*" or "*Scotländischer Tanz*"¹⁰ the "*Ecossoise*" as the most important subspecies of the *angloise* came in fashion in the 1790s. The difference between *ecossaise* and *angloise* is not always clear. A typical *ecossaise* tends to have fewer – often just 4 – phrases, the last 2 of them making up the figure called "*Chasseur*" – a chassé down and up the middle for the top couple. The music tends to be in 2/4 time. It is generally described as being danced faster than the *angloise*, and the step started with a hop on the upbeat.

Française

In the early 19th century the word “Française” is used for dances with different choreographic structures and metres, some of them with floor patterns quite like *angloises*. A *française* perhaps best could be defined as a longways dance with difficult steps.

Other longways dances

The “*Hopser*”, “*Hopsa*” or “*Hopsanglaise*” is described as a dance halfway between the *angloise* and the *ecossaise*.

In some other dances related to the *angloise* the unit that moves down a longways set is not a couple but a different combination of dancers:

Dances called “*Terzett*” or “*Triolet*” have each gentleman dancing with 2 ladies, dancing down the set like in a duple minor. The word “*Dubelohne*” I found only in the Heine manuscript; he uses it for dances where not 1 couple but 2 couples progress. Other similar dance forms are *tempêtes* (with lines of 2 couples progressing) or *ecossaises* for 2 combined sets; these dances became popular in the 1820s.

THREE SOURCES

The following 3 dance collections are interesting to compare because they come from different social contexts: from country to town and up to the court. Also, they represent 3 different types of sources: private notes, dancing master’s manuscripts and printed collections.

Wernigeröder Tanzbüchlein¹¹

The manuscript “*Wernigeröder Tanzbüchlein*” from the little town Wernigerode in the Harz Mountains is a collection of more than 100 dance tunes for one or 2 violins, written in different hands. On the title page and at the end of the book several dates between 1786 and 1793 are given; at one time a lady by the name of Johanne Henriette Gereken appears to have been the owner. Sometimes names with Latin notes are added to the music (“*Scriptit Kraft, amicus noster*” or “*Scriptit Gereke, frater amatissimae sororis*”). The authors may have been local citizens who played for dances on various occasions as the local court restricted the occasions the town waits were allowed to play for. Whoever they were, they very well knew dance-notation.

For about 30 of the dances not only the music but also the choreography in notation is given, with very little verbal additions. Almost all of these are *angloises*, and *angloises* are also by far the most common dances in the whole manuscript. Usually they are in 2/4 time and have not a title but just a number, with the exception of one dance entitled “*Prinz Ferdinandt*”.

Apart from these we find the music for a polonaise, both an American and a Russian dance, 6 marches, 12 minuets, about 9 cotillions or quadrilles and only about the same number of round dances for couples. Several of the melodies were popular tunes that can be found somewhere else as well, like the song “*Vetter Michel*” that appears in many other German and Dutch sources¹². One of the *angloises* bears a striking resemblance to “*Over the hills and far away*”. There are also concordances between this manuscript and the ones by Heine.



Figure 1. Wernigeröder Tanzbüchlein¹¹

When we take a closer look at the choreographies, we see that most of them fit with the music given. We find dances with 4, 6 (Figure 1) and a few with 8 8-bar-phrases. In almost all of the dances the last figure is the chain, with “Schäne”, “Schene” or “Schaene” being wrong spellings of “chaine”.

Choreographies by Johann Wilhelm Heine¹³

Heine, born in 1742, was a dancing master and puppet player who moved to the village Badbergen (near Osnabrück) in 1786 and worked there for more than 20 years, with his wife as his assistant and successor, teaching the local farmers. 3 manuscripts with notated dances by him have been found, written about 1797. The repertory of the 3 books is too similar to make it likely that the books were notes for himself, so one must assume some of his pupils could actually read the notation. In all of these 3 manuscripts the ladies’ tracks are drawn in red ink. Most of the plates have some verbal explanations.

The first manuscript in the reprint consists of 2 separate volumes, one containing the notation, the second the music; in most cases there are 2 choreographies to one tune. Most of the 51 dances in this collection are longways dances; but there are also 10 quadrilles. 2 dances Heine calls “Terzett”, and 2 other ones “Dubelohne”.

For each longways dance we are told which step to use (“mit Ecosè pas” or “mit Englische pas”). The 14 dances that are explicitly called “ecossaise” have just 4 phrases, the 2 last ones reserved for the “Chasseur”; the music is always in 2/4 time. 12 other dances have the metre, step and often also the typical structure of the ecossaise but are not entitled “Ecossaise”. They all have 6 phrases, so perhaps Heine felt that a real *ecossaise* had to be shorter. The 11 dances that are to be danced with *angloise* steps usually have a chain as the final figure. All of the quadrilles and 2 of the other dances include a last section in waltz rhythm with the waltz figure.

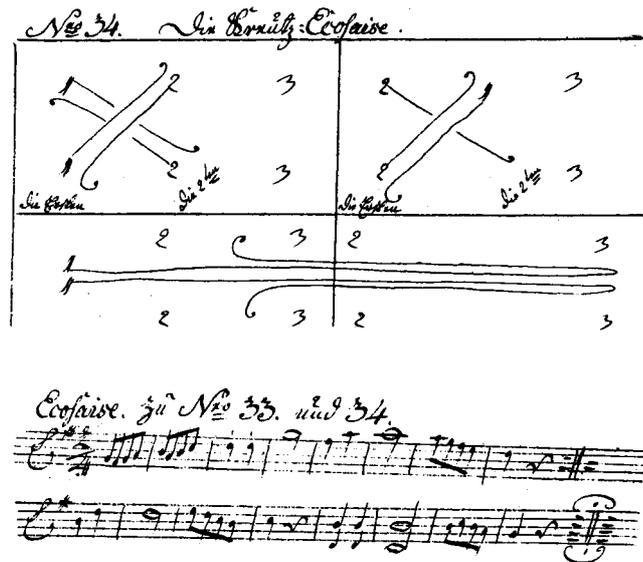


Figure 2. J.W. Heine: *Die Kreuz-Ecosaise*¹³

The chains are simply indicated by the words “*Chaine*” or “*Chaine a Siess*”. The dances have names, some of the names perhaps just to identify the dance by its main figure, like “*Die Kreuz-Ecosaise*” (Figure 2).

Unlike the first manuscript one the second is dated (1797/98). The music is not given, but we get more verbal explanations.

The first section comprises 39 longways dances, the second 11 cotillions. Some of the dances are the same as in the first book. None of the dances have a waltz section. 5 of the longways end with a round, 2 with a chassé, and the rest – 37 – with a chain figure, so they are all quite typical *angloises*.

The third manuscript is not fully reproduced in the reprint, as it seems to be basically a copy of the 2nd one.

Becker’s *Taschenbücher zum geselligen Vergnügen*¹⁴

Almanacs and “*Taschenbücher*” – pocketbooks – were very popular in Germany in the late 18th and early 19th century¹⁵. There were pocketbooks for children, lovers, priests, carpenters, merchants, for the friends of wine, horses, music, dance or gardening. Parodies of this fashion resulted even in a pocketbook for the “business of digestion” (1785). Some of these almanacs also deal with dancing in one way or another. The successful series “*(Almanach und) Taschenbuch zum (geselligen) Vergnügen*” was published annually in Leipzig between 1791 and the early 1830s. The editor of most of the earlier editions was Wilhelm Gottlieb Becker. After Becker’s death in 1813 Friedrich Kind continued the series changing the name to “*Becker’s Taschenbuch zum geselligen Vergnügen*”. The items in the books are poems, stories, riddles, parlour games, songs and plays, and a calendar of the year in question. We find nice illustrations, and a beautiful silhouette alphabet (1820) – by the way created by the daughter of Johanna Schopenhauer.

The editions 1791 to 1827 – a time span of 37 years – all contain dances¹⁶, mostly in notation with some verbal explanations added. In many editions the names of the dancing masters responsible for the choreographies are given. Usually the music for the dances is supplied as well; in addition there is music for minuets and waltzes.

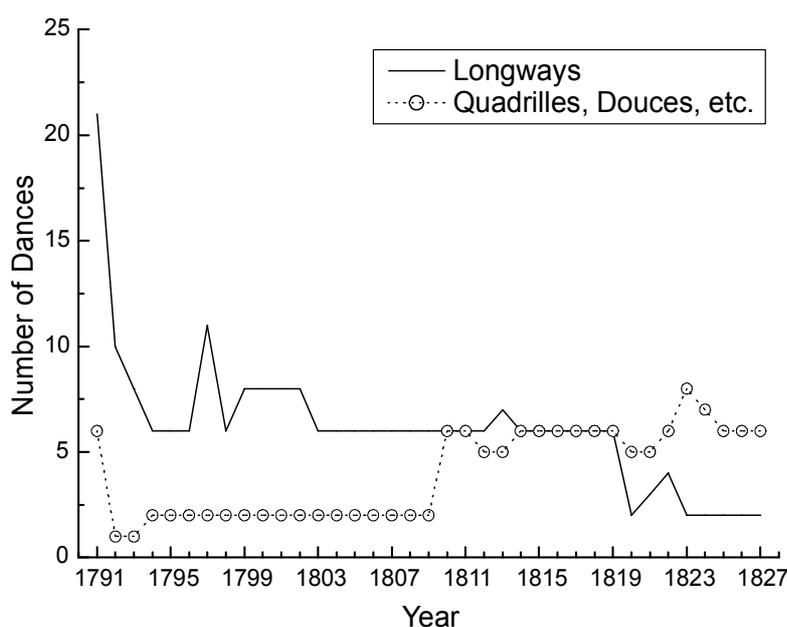


Figure 3.

When we look at the notated dances, more than half of them are longways dances. The majority of the other ones dances like quadrilles/cotillions and similar squares or circles for 6, 8 or 12 couples. Apart from that we find some other fashion dances like “*Monferine*” (1821), danced in a longways set but not really a genuine English country dance – or the French couple dance “*Perigourdine*” (1791). In 1813 there is an “*Ecoissaise mit 2 Collonnen in Verbindung*”, and in 1824 there is a *tempête*. After 1820 *angloises* disappear completely; instead we get a few *françaises* that look surprisingly like earlier *angloises* in that in most cases they have a 2/4 time and not a waltz as final figure. To a certain extent the choreographies and the relative proportions of the dance types reflect changes in dance practice (Figure 3). However, one has to keep in mind that different dancing masters were responsible for them, sometimes for many successive editions, like Roller (1810–1820). In the earlier editions we find many *angloises*, in the 1799 and 1800 editions a “*Hopser*” (in 3/8 time) and an early *ecossaise* called “*Schottisch*” appear. From 1810 on we find *ecossaises* every year. Almost none of the *angloises* and *ecossaises* have individual names but half of the *françaises* do.

While in the first years the music for the *angloises* could be in 2/4 or 3/4 time, from 1798 onwards they are all in 3/8. This change goes hand in hand with the disappearance of any variety in the final figures. At first there were different possibilities, the waltz being just one of them, or an additional option instead of, for example, the accustomed chain (1792). From 1798 on it would be waltz for the *angloise* (Figure 4), and *chasseur* for the *ecossaise*. Only Roller leaves a choice of these 2 for both kinds of dances.

CONCLUSION

We find the same dances being danced in very different social settings and contexts. The fact that they all are notated is quite significant as it shows that more people than just some dancing masters were “notationally-literate”. Even though the farmers, townsfolk and court would not often have attended the same balls, they shared a mutual dance culture that included a common system of dance notation.

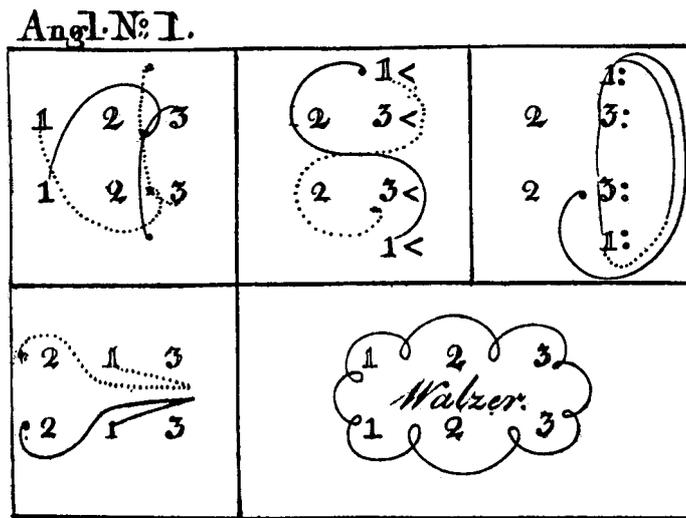


Figure 4. “Taschenbuch zum geselligen Vergnügen” 1804¹⁴

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