

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

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**THE DANCING MASTER, 1651–1728: AN ILLUSTRATED COMPENDIUM:
AN ON-LINE RESOURCE FOR THE ANALYTICAL STUDY OF
ENGLISH COUNTRY DANCES**

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This project had its inspiration from the work that Tom Cook had done in his personal study and documentation of English country dances. A number of years ago, when I visited him in Neston on Wirral, he showed me his notebooks, with the McBee Keysort cards with holes and notches in the edges. He had been analyzing dances for 25 years, and had developed his own system for identifying dance forms and figures. The coding scheme that he had developed involved arcane symbols for the form, progression and first occurrence of each unique Dance. Tom defined a Dance as having the same title, figure and music. It was wonderful and I tried to understand it. Every few years I would take out my copy of the notebooks that he had provided to me. I would try again to understand his coding scheme and to adapt them to a database for recognizing identical or similar dances.

I had also been working on a simple coding scheme to identify country dance forms and figures, and had published an index of early American country dances, which used letters to identify the figures or tracks in a dance. In my system, “C” stood for “Cast Up or Down”, “L” for “Lead Down and Back”, “O” for “Hands Round and Back”, and “X” for “Hands Across and Back”. These codes are used in the database.

I decided to blend Tom Cook’s system to my letter codes to analyze country dances in *The Dancing Master*, published by John and Henry Playford, and then John Young. We already had copies of most of the editions in facsimile or microfilm, so I didn’t have to travel to collect data. After I had coded all the dances, I put the data into a database for ease of analysis and comparison. I also had machine-readable tune incipits (first three measures of music, in scale-degrees), so I could compare the music and the dance at the same time.

After I had all the data collected, I could do a sort on Title and Figures and Music, to bring similar dances together. Doing a sort on Figures and Music and Title also revealed similar dances which had been recycled under different titles or music.

For this project, I have not reconstructed the dances. In my coding I report what the instructions actually say.

COMPOSITION OF EDITIONS OF *THE DANCING MASTER*

The first edition of *The Dancing Master* was published in 1651. The series eventually grew to eighteen editions of the first volume (1651–1728), four of a second (1710–1728), and two of a third (1719?–1726?) and long out-lived its originator. My coding revealed that the three volumes eventually encompassed 1,053 unique dances and their music. Many were copied from one edition to the next so that the entire contents, with duplicates, amounts to 6,217 dances, including 186 tunes without dances and 3 songs (*Dunmore Kate*, *Mr. Lane’s Magot*, and *The Quakers Dance*).

As published on the Internet and on CD-ROM, my database has a complete Table of Contents for each edition, as well as a browseable Title Index, a Search Engine for searching Titles or Figures strings, and a facsimile image of unique or “ur” dances. Uniqueness is defined in this database as identical (or very similar) Title, Music and Figures.

METHODS OF ANALYSIS

Using Tom's example, my analysis examined several different parameters for each dance. These were Form, Progression and Miscellaneous Events. The Form parameter identifies the *shape* of the dance (Set, Longways, Round, Square, and Miscellaneous) as well as the number of dancers and active dancers in the minor set. The Progression parameter identifies the *movement* of the dancers, if any, as they go up or down the set. Miscellaneous Events includes Honors, Introductions, Changing Partners and Improper starting positions.

TERMS USED IN THE DATABASE

Old Progression:

In examining some of the dances, primarily those in the first Volume, it appeared to me that each Part may have been done progressively to the bottom and back before the next part was danced. This form of progression occurs in many of what modern dancers call "set dances", where there is progression in the middle of each part of the dance, which has been interpreted so that the various parts of the dance start with different couples in the top position. I call this "old progression."

In these dances, after the first couple has progressed, the words may appear somewhat as follows; "Do thus to all, the rest following." A good example of this is *Once I Lov'd a Maiden Fair*. This is a "Longways for as many as will" Form, with an Introduction, then a Verse and a Chorus, Verse and Chorus, and Verse and Chorus. The end of each Chorus has the "Do thus..." words. If we take the instructions at face value, this could be interpreted to mean that the first verse and chorus are repeated until the first couple has gone all the way down the set and back, then the second verse and chorus are repeated to have the first couple go down and back, then the third verse and chorus are repeated in the same fashion. This would mean that an "USA" dance* with a progressive chorus would be: "Up a double, Chorus to progress, Up a double, Progression, Up a double, Progression, etc., etc.; Siding, Progression, Siding, Progression, Siding, Progression, etc., etc.; Arming, Progression, Arming, Progression, Arming, Progression, etc., etc." Other examples of "old progression" can be found in *Duke of York's Delight*, *Lady Murray's Delight*, *Kemp's Jigg*, *Dissembling Love*, and *The Night-Piece*.

Standard Progression:

This is the familiar progression where the first couple progresses down the set one couple at a time, usually by a cast off, but sometimes with a cross-over and a half of a figure eight. I have also found a number of instances where this progression occurs with either three or five changes of rights and lefts. Examples include: *The Queen of Hearts* and *Devonshire Lass*.

Cross-Over Progression:

This strange form of progression puts the progressing couple on the opposite sides, so that as they progress, they cross-over, and then cross back on the next progression. An example of this is seen in *The Irish Lady*, which is a three part dance, with Verse and Chorus. In the Chorus, the active couple ends up on the opposite side at the end of each Chorus, then crossing back on the next Chorus. Other examples include: *Once I Lov'd a Maiden Fair*;

* Up a Double, Siding and Arming (USA): This is the familiar "Up a Double, Siding and Arming" figure, sometimes with a Chorus that may or may not progress. Examples include: *Grimstock* and *Picking of Sticks*.

Pauls Wharfe, The Country Coll, or Sir Nicholas Cully; Daphne or The Shepherdess; Dissembling Love, or The Lost Heart; and A Health to Betty.

Honors:

Honors to the Presence and Partner may be done with or without Leads. *King's Jigg* is a good example of this. We do not know whether music was played for the honors. An unpublished study by Kate Keller addresses this question in detail.

Change Partners:

This infrequent figure changes partners during the dance, as in *The Chirping of the Lark*. This “4S4” (4 Couple Set 4 Couples Active) dance has the First Man go to the bottom of the set and “Bring up the last [woman]”. The other women probably shift down each time. The “Bring up” section is repeated three times, thus getting the First Woman back to her partner. *Picking of Sticks* is also another example of changing partners, albeit for a short time. Other examples include: *Stanes Morris; The Phenix [#1]; Peppers Black; and Hockley in the Hole.*

Introduction:

This figure has a figure at the start, such as: “Lead up forwards and back: That again” which may have been done only at the start of the dance. Obviously there would be a need for music for this figure. *Green Stockings* and *Hockley in the Hole* demonstrate this figure.

Improper:

Some dances had instructions either for the first man to “stand in the woman’s place”, or “The First Man being improper,...”. The first obvious use of the Improper place appears in *Arcadia*, in 1-7, 1686. Other dances where the first couple starts out improper, include: *The Painted Chamber; Mug-House; Lincoln or Bolton; King of Poland; Arundel-Street; Europes Revels; Moll Peatley, the New Way; and Hare Hatch.*

Major Figures:

When I first started coding country dances about twenty years ago, I defined the major figures using letters, as listed below.

Cast Up or Down	Honors (J)	Arming (Q)
Down or Up the Outside	Back to Back	Right and Left
Lead In/Out the Sides	Lead Up or Down the Middle	Setting
Figure Eight	Body or Hand Movement	Turn by 1 or 2 Hands
Change Sides or Places	Turn Single	Cross-Over
Hey	Hands Round	Hands Across (X)
Sliding	Pousette or Draw	Wild-Card (Y), (Z)

Steps:

I also defined special number codes for use in the Steps for each dance. For example, a dance with a bourrée step, would be coded “10” in the COMMENTS, and a dance with balance would be coded “24”. A sampling of these is given in Table 1, below:

Table 1 – Dances with Steps Required

Figure (# of Occurrences)	Dance Title	Volume-Edition
Bourrée Step (2)	<i>Kelway's Maggot</i>	2-3
Jig Step (4)	<i>Humours of the Age</i>	1-17
Balance (3)	<i>Belsize</i>	3-2
Gallop (9)	<i>Miss Hoyden</i>	2-1
“New” Rigadoon Step (3)	<i>Hellena</i>	3-2
Hornpipe Step (1)	<i>Happy Couple</i>	2-3
Minuet Step (13)	<i>The Marlborough</i>	1-17

Interesting Figures:

I also found a number of interesting figures that I have listed in Table 2, below. These jumped out at me as I was coding the dances, and may answer some of the questions posed by reconstructors, such as: “Can we do three or five changes to get proper?”

Table 2 – Interesting Figures

Figure	Dance Title	Volume-Edition
Double Hey	<i>The Old Mole</i>	1-1
Back-to-Back R&L Sides	<i>Never Love Thee More</i>	1-1
Diagonal Figure of Eight	<i>The Monk's March</i>	2-1
5 Changes-R&L to Progress	<i>Tunbridge Walks</i>	1-12
Diamond Shape-2 Couples	<i>Love for Love</i>	1-9
R&L on Sides	<i>The Pilgrim</i>	1-11
Draw for Men & Women	<i>The Devil's Dream</i>	1-3A
Hey all Four	<i>Punch Alive</i>	3-2
Use of Proper	<i>Pool's Hole [#1]</i>	1-8
Double Figure	<i>Hare's Maggot</i>	1-11
Draw	<i>The Soldier and the Sailer</i>	1-9

I also found a number of cases of apparent “side-by-side” siding. Examples include: *A la Mode de France*, *Parson upon Dorothy [#2]*, *The Cobbler's Jigg*, *Smith's New Rant*, *Joan's Placket*, *Moll Peatley*, *the New Way*, *May Fair [#2]*, and *Juba*.

RECYCLED AND REVISED DANCES

Comparison of the various editions shows that John Young recycled numerous dances, by simply changing the title in many cases, or changing the title and music in others. There are at least twenty-nine recycled dances, all from 2-3 into 3-2, and twenty-three partially recycled dances, mostly from the second volume, but some from the first volume, as well. Examples include: *Dudmason Hall* which became *Sabina and Strephon*; *The Merry Conclusion* which became *The Assembly*; and *The Mock Match*, with recycled figures in *The Tatling Miss*.

John and Henry Playford also published dances with changed figures as well as music, mainly from the first to the second volume. In most cases the music and title stayed the same, but the figures changed significantly. My analysis has shown that approximately fifty dances were published with new figures. Examples include: *The America*, [#1] in 1-11 to 1-

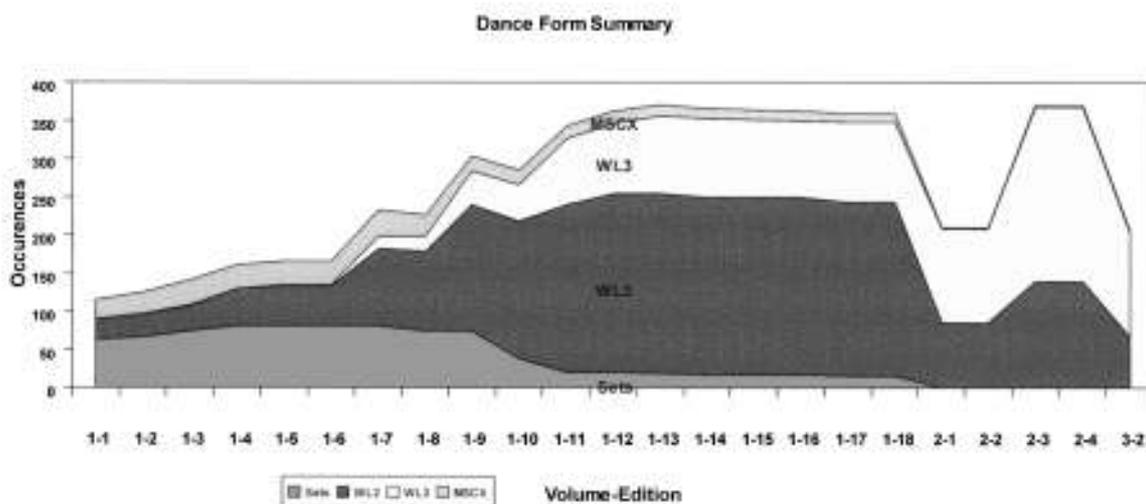


Figure 1 Dance Form Summary

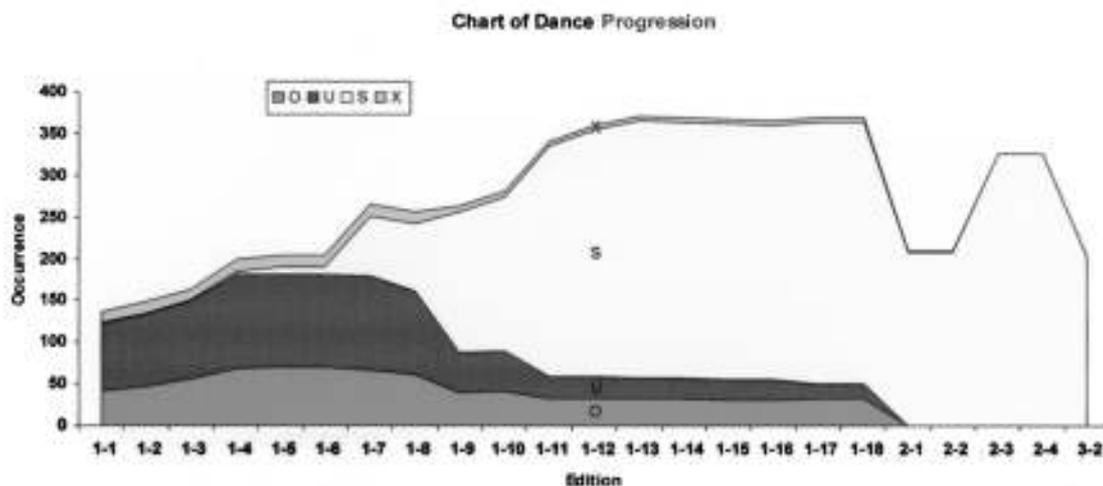


Figure 2 Chart of Dance Progression

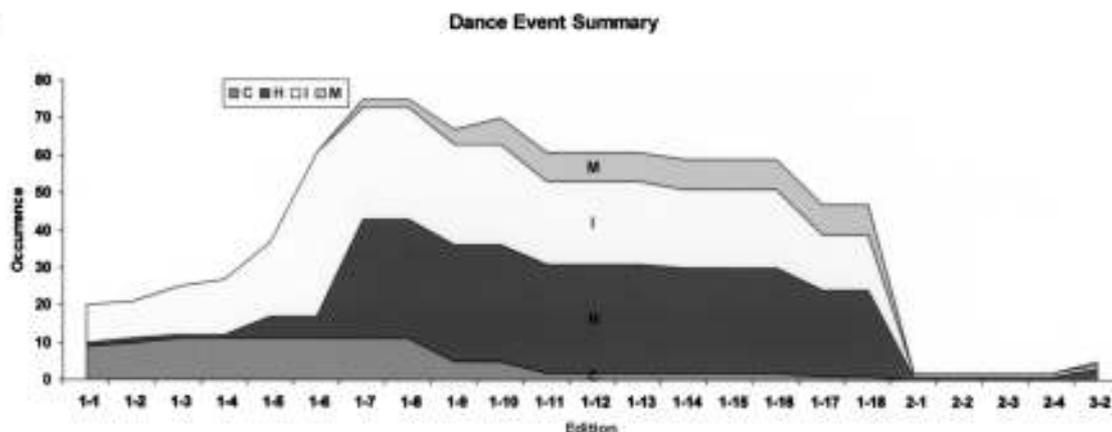


Figure 3 Dance Event Summary

16, which became *America* [#2] in 1-17; *Miller's Jigg* [#1] in 1-1 to 1-16, which became *Miller's Jigg* [#2] in 1-17; *Shropshire Lass* [#1] in 2-1 to 2-4, which became *The Shropshire Lass* [#2] in 3-2; and *Parson upon Dorothy* [#1], or *The Shepherds Daughter* [#1] in 1-2 to 1-8, which became *Parson upon Dorothy* [#2] in 1-6 to 1-16, which then became *Parson upon Dorothy* [#3] in 1-17.

NUMERICAL SUMMARY OF OCCURRENCE IN EACH EDITION

I have prepared three charts, Figures 1, 2, and 3, showing a numerical summary of the occurrence of each of these parameters in each edition. In the Dance Form Summary we can see the growth and continued popularity of the longways dances for two or three couples (WL2 & WL3), and the decline of the set dances. In the Chart of Dance Progression we can see the growth of Standard Progression(S), and the decline of Old (O) and Cross-Over (X) Progression, and the USA dances. In the Dance Event Summary, we can see the start of Improper dances (M), the growth and decline of Introductions (I), and the growth and decline of Honors (H), as well as the initial popularity of Change Partners dances (C).

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