

THE DANCES OF WILLIAM JONES

Julian Pilling

Although the village of High Ercall in Shropshire appears now to be in an 'English' part of the county it formerly had strong Welsh connections, the blacksmiths during the whole of the 17th century belonging to the Welsh family of Lingen while during the same period and up to the end of the 18th century there was a family called Johns. It has also been postulated that at one time there was a 'meifod' in this area. At the present time there is no place where one could say that there had been anything like a village green, although in former times when the parish was much bigger it could have been possible. However, there is a passage in Richard Baxter's 'Narrative of the most memorable Passage of his Life and Times' which could suggest dancing on the village green on Sundays in this area. In 1932 Hugh Mellor wrote, "Who could imagine that a MS describing in full the set dances learnt on the village green at High Arcol in Shropshire in the year 1685 would remain buried in a library and unknown until recently?"

William Jones of Llangadfan, Montgomeryshire, was born around 1729 and died in 1795. He was an antiquary and the subject of this article is a letter he wrote to Edward Jones of Henblas, Llandderval, Merioneth. Edward was a harpist and was in London in 1775, becoming harpist to the Prince of Wales in 1783. He published 'Musical Relicks of the Welsh Bards' 1786, a book of dance tunes, in 1794, and 'The Bardic Museum' in 1802. He died in 1824. Despite the name the two men were not related.

We give the text of the letter below and believe that this is the first time that it has been given in its entirety. The dances have been published in two forms but without any critical appraisal other than laudatory. Those are dealt with first.

According to Hugh Mellor in the 'Journal of the English Folk Dance and Song Society' Vol.1, No.1 1932, he first came across the MS in the National library of Wales "a few years ago" and he feels that "the particulars confirm that the 'English Dancing Master' of Playford is, in the main, a description of genuine traditional dances and not, as has been sometimes suggested, a compilation of inventions of contemporary dancing masters." He gives his arrangement of the dance, 'Lumps of Pudding' as it was danced at the 1931 London Festival. This arrangement is a reasonable one though he has undue difficulty with the 'Round O' and in addition there is a small mistake in its notation.

In 1935 Mellor published 'Welsh Folk Dances' (Novello). In this he says that the Jones MS was first drawn to his attention about ten years ago by Mrs William George of Criccieth, so one might say around 1925. In this work Mellor repeats much that he said in the Journal article but quotes more of the MS and gives two more dances. These are 'Difyrrwch Gwyr Dufi' and 'The Cambro Britain'. Neither of these are William Jones' titles and the dances are made up with figures from the MS and indeed, include one that is not there at all. Mellor's attitude was that the MS was one dance with a multiplicity of figures from which one might choose at will. This corresponds in some ways to the 'ballet enchainement' attitude that some revivalists use in the interpretation of historical dance.

The other publication of the Jones MS was a partial one of the dance descriptions only in 'Welsh National Music and Dance' by W.S. Gwynn Williams (Curwen 1933). Here there was very little commentary except that Williams accepted William Jones' view that usage had made these dances Welsh.

In 1936 Gwynn Williams with Lois Blake published 'The Llangadfan Dances' (Hughes & Son and the Educational Publishing Co. Wrexham). A second edition, 'completely new and with errors corrected in the light of experience' was published by the Gwynn Publishing Co. Llangollen, in 1954. In this edition it states that the MS was found about 25 years ago whereas in the first edition it had said that it had been recently found. It does not say who found the MS and there is no reference to Hugh Mellor, the Englishman who was so keen to find a repertory of dances for Wales.

In Blake & Williams is given Jones' two other dances with their correct tunes: 'The Roaring Hornpipe' and 'Aly Grogan' and two new 'Round Os' have been compiled for these dances to tunes taken from Edward Jones' "The Bardic Museum". These are: 'Mopsi Don:Yr Hen Ffordd' and 'Cymro O B'Le'. These arrangements are reasonable interpretations of the MS. The third dance, 'Lumps of Pudding' is a different arrangement from that of Mellors' and in some ways not so good.

The two interpretations reflect different periods in the revival of 'folk'dances. Mellor thinks of Playford as interpreted by Cecil Sharp and Lois Blake takes into account the developing 'traditional' style. It is interesting that in 1932 there were criticisms of Playford as 'folk'. The dancing masters' influence cannot now be denied and the Playford 'apologists' have modified their position and suggest that the dancing masters' versions of country dances were enervated versions of dances from the village

and those such as Bernard Bentley and Tom Cook have reworked them in a style that the English Folk Dance and Song Society feel to be appropriate for the present day. My standpoint here is that traditional dances are but society dances that have remained while fashion has changed.

I think that one may take the term 'Green' as a standard romanticism, for Jones' terms are those of the ballroom. His layout is as if copied from a treatise on the dance and it is prescriptive and not descriptive. Perhaps it is one that had been in his father's possession. Some of his preliminary instructions are not used in the dances he gives and this helps give credence to this view. The length of time from the dances being 'first danced' to being noted is somewhat remarkable, though Jones suggests that his father had taken the dances from 'High Arcol' to Llangadfan and that they had been danced there; this gives the 'Welsh' justification. I incline to a more 'universal' provenance. Certainly Kellom Tomlinson had pupils in Merioneth, Montgomeryshire and Shropshire.

Mellor suggests a date of 1790 for the letter which, taking into account the style of the handwriting, seems reasonable. Mellor's justification for a date of 1685 for the dances is purely on Jones' evidence that he was about 60 when he wrote to Edward Jones, and that his father had married when he was 60 and danced when he was 19. It does not take into account Jones, the antiquarian, the nationalist and the modest dancer who knows little of the art and yet can write in dancing master's terms and refer back to previous instruction as he grows weary with his task of writing out the dances.

It is the form of the dances that is most interesting and intriguing. It is that of a three couple set dance, without internal progression and making full use of heys. The dances are long but not longer than the later quadrille. They have a similar form to the Playford three couple longways dances but represent a development of these and one wonders how and why this development occurred; was it the exigencies of space at a client's house? There is much chorus-like repetition as well as the periodic 'Round Os'. This name appears as a dance in Playford 1709 where it has certain similarities to that of Jones'. As a dance name it occurs elsewhere but with less relevance.

Jones says that his father knew nothing of longways dancing so one can presume that the son does; did he ask his father about it or were there none in the treatise that he had? One can perhaps presume that by 'longways' he means 'longways progressive' because the number in a longways set would be determined by the space available and probably was never intended in an extravagant sense anyway.

The nearest dance form in English terms to that of Jones' is the current midland morris dance. This has the non-progressive three-couple feature and is in three parts with the standard introductory figure to each. Rounds and heys are frequent though the length is appropriate to a display, whereas the length of Jones' dances is obviously for the enjoyment of the participants – indeed he says that the people of his day could not manage it as it requires “ ‘French’ Skill and Activity in the performance”. Mellor omitted 'French'; perhaps with Playford he found French dancing masters a sore point. If the midland morris developed after the Commonwealth during the revival of 'Merrie England' at the Restoration, then it is possible that the same influences formed both groups of dances, but there is little evidence.

The tune for 'Lumps of Pudding' was used for the song, 'Thus I Stand Like a Turk' in Gay's 'Beggars' Opera' which was performed in 1728. Aly Grogan has a relative in 'Larry Grogan' in O'Neill (No.879) and Difyrrwch Gwyr Dufi in the traditional tune, 'Arscott of Tetcott'. 'Britons Strike Home' is a song from Purcell's 'Bonduca' 1695. The 'Clapping Shoulders' movement is suggestive of kissing; it is replaced by hand-clapping in modern versions. Finally, one wonders if these dances had been in use in Wales for so long as is suggested, and here are two Welshmen writing to each other, why then is the text in English?

ADDL.MS.171E

I suppose our Ancestors had no Dances but what they borrowed from the English together with the Terms of the Art; we have not a word in our Language which properly signifies a Dance; nor can I recollect that I have ever read in the Poets the most distant thing concerning dancing; Tudor Penllyn who lived about 300 years ago, in his satirical description of an English Wedding at Flint, makes no mention of dancing but is severe enough on their Music – the Bagpipe; whence it may appear that it was not at that Time in Use in Wales, even among the English. I am inclined to believe that Parties of six were once in general use throughout England & Wales; my father (as he informed me) lived with a relation at High Arcol in Shropshire about 1686, being 19 years old, and frequented a Green there, and I imagine by his appearance when I first remember him (being about 60 when he married my mother) that he might be at that time a jolly Lad; and as he knew very little or nothing of dancing longways; I suppose (but am not positive) that Parties of six were then in Use. The time it was introduced into England or Wales I know not, but am of the opinion that it is not likely to be ever revived, being too fatiguing for the Bodies and Minds of the present Generation, and requiring French Skill and Activity in the performance. It is usually said that whoever enters into a Party of six must not rest the Sole of his

Foot nor withdraw his attention a Moment during the Whole Dance. When two or more Parties set up at once, Complaisance requires that the first Couple that name their Tune consult their opposite couples whether such a tune will be agreeable to them? but when that is neglected all that the opponents can claim is to hear the Tune play'd once over, and they may either dance, sit, or assign up their Place to another Couple; and when it comes in their Turn (as it is always by Rotation) the haughty opponent will certainly be put to their Trumps & if they are purled or bullied it never fails of extorting a Smile or a Sneer, altho' the Plan in all these Dances is much the same, it admits of sufficient Room for a person to exercise his Fancy in a variety of Movements; these which I shall here subjoin, are the most plain and simple of all. Having never been Proficient in the Art, & not well acquainted with the proper Terms I shall here premise an Explanation of the words and Abreviations which I shall make Use of.

Set: to set forward 2 or 3 steps & fall back: or dance in suitable steps during half or a whole Strain.

Set Sides: to set to one another always facing but veering to your left or right or improper or proper.

Slip Sides: to dance around one another without turning their Faces.

Cross Hey: when the first man go the Hey with the women and the 1st Woman with the Men. and —

Hey with yr own: the man with the Men and the woman with the Women, which always to the strain playd the 3rd time.

Hey between: after setting with whomsoever.

Double Hey, proper (or by the Man): Men turn their Backs to their Partners, the women following them all going the Hey in couples.


Double Hey improper: the Men following the Women as before.





Ring: Hands 3 or 6 & whirl around.

March: cross over the 2nd Couple, meet & Cross over the 3d Couple meet at the bottom & turn. Back again in like manner with them & the same strain repeated.

Under & over: Right Hands all, the 1st Couple stoop to the 2nd & the 3d to the 1st. so on alternately till all are return'd to their own places. Or contrariwise the 2nd stoop &c.

Following: The man go down behind the Men the Woman follow him, Man up behind the women and the woman up the middle, the woman down behind the Men, the Man follow her &c till they come to their places the strain play'd twice.

Figures 1.2.3. &c the Tune play'd so many Times over.  1st strain play'd once.

 Do. twice.  2d Do once.  Do twice.  3d strain once &c.

M. Man. Me. Men. W. Woman. We. Women. Cu. Couple.

These Dances consist of three Parts besides the Round O. The first is called the Leading or the Man's Part: The second is called the Tracing & is properly the Woman's Part: The Third we call the Turnings (Tro Llaw) or the cross Part. The Round O best suits short Jiggs which are sometimes play'd after each of the foregoing Parts.

THE ROARING HORNPIPE



The Leadings

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|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>1. All lead up & down That again Cross Hey </p> | | |
| <p>2. 1st M set with the 1st W & slip sides with the 2nd
Set to yr 2nd & slip sides with yr Partner
Hey between Hey with your own </p> | <p>At the
same time</p> | <p>The 3d W. do the like with 3d & 2d M.
The 3d W. do the like with yr Me.








Do. do the like.</p> |
| <p>3. 1st M. set to 2d & 3W &c as before
Hey between Do with yr own </p> | | <p>1st W. do the like with the 2d & 3d M.
W. do the like.</p> |

The Tracings

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| <p>4. All, sides with your Partners, till you change Places & turn single The like again till you are come to yr places Cross Heys Do. with your own</p> | | |
| <p>5. The 1st W. set & slip sides with the 3d & 2d M.
and with the 2d & 3d &c.
Hey between Hey wth yr own </p> | <p>At the
same time</p> | <p>1st M. set to the 2 & slip sides with the 3d W. &c.

M. do the like</p> |
| <p>6. 1st W. set &c. to the 2d & 1st Man
Hey between With yr own </p> | | <p>3d M the like with yr 3d & 2d W.











3d M do the like</p> |
| <p>7. All right Hands to your Partners & turn quite round Left hands the like back again.
Cross Heys as before </p> | | |

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|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>8. First M. set &c to the 3d M
& 2d M  
Hey between  Ring wth 1st
& 2d W. </p> | <p>At
the
same
time</p> | <p>3d M. the like with the 1st
& 2d W.
Hey between, 3d W.
Ring with 3d & 2d M.</p> |
| <p>9. 1st M. set &c to the 1st W.
& 3d M &c 
Hey between  Ring wth 2d
& 3d W. </p> | | <p>2d M. set to the 2d & 3d W.

Hey between. Ring wth the 3d M. &
1st W.</p> |

The Galloping Nag & Round O.







Men & Women longways in their Places: The 1st M. change Places with his Partner, the 2d W. slip aside & place herself between the 2d & 3d M. the 3d Cu. set  All being posited in a circle, each having his Partner on the right Hand, set to yr left Hand We.  turn yr right hand We. wch are yr own partners  go forward on the right Hand & turn the next We  Being between the We you had turn'd, set to your right Hand We.  Set to yr Left Hand We.  turn yr Right Hand We.  go forwards as before  set to yr Right Hand We.  to yr Left  turn yr Right — go on as before & turn the We. who are yr own Partners & slide to yr Places.





This or some other cheerful Tune of four Bars in a Strain is usually interposed between any Part of the former Dance or its like, that will not suit the Round O.

Aly Grogan









Leadings




1. All lead up and down  that again  1st M. Hey with his own & turn his Partner 
1st W. do the like 

2. 1st M. set to yr 1st & 2d W.  Hey between  & turn the 3d W. Hey both sides with yr own & turn Partners
- The 3d W. do the like with yr 3d & 2d M. Hey between –
3. 1st M. set to the 2d & 3d W.  1st W. at the same time do the like with the 2d & 3d M. Hey between turn Partner  with yr own & turn yr Partner

Tracings

1. All, sides & change places  Back again  1st W. Hey her own & turn &c  1st M. the like 
2. 1st W. set to the 3d & 2d M. Heys between &c as before  1st M. & 2d & 3d W. the like
3. — to the 2d & 1st M. &c. The 3d M. the like with the 2d & 3d W.  (the 3d M. turning the 1st W.) after the 1st Hey & turn their partners after the last

The Turnings

1. Right hands to Partner & change Places  left hands the like back again  Cross Heys, always turning Partners 
- 2.) The same method as in the first Dance always turning Partners after the Heys and Rings.

Round O

In the same manner as in the Galloping Nag, but men & We. slipsides or dance around each other according to the length of the strain before they turn.

Lumps of Pudding



1. Lead up & down, Honor to the Presence $\begin{array}{|c|} \hline \bullet \\ \hline \end{array}$ That again $\begin{array}{|c|} \hline \bullet \\ \hline \end{array}$ Left Hand to yr partner a step to meet the 3d Cu. and give her the right & meet the 2d Cu. set sides to yr Partner & turn $\begin{array}{|c|} \hline \bullet \\ \hline \end{array}$ the like again to the first to yr men then to We. sides & turn yr Partner $\begin{array}{|c|} \hline \bullet \\ \hline \end{array}$ Cross Heys, turning yr Partner $\begin{array}{|c|} \hline \bullet \\ \hline \end{array}$
2. Set & slip sides with the 1st & 2d We. the 3d W. with the 2d & 3d M. as before $\begin{array}{|c|} \hline \bullet \\ \hline \end{array}$ Cross Heys 1st M. step to the 2d & 3d We. his Partner to the 2d & 3d M. sides & turn $\begin{array}{|c|} \hline \bullet \\ \hline \end{array}$ contrariwise $\begin{array}{|c|} \hline \bullet \\ \hline \end{array}$ The second strain as before Hey between $\begin{array}{|c|} \hline \bullet \\ \hline \end{array}$ with yr own $\begin{array}{|c|} \hline \bullet \\ \hline \end{array}$ &c. The first strain is to be danced in the same manner as the Roaring Hornpipe & the third as Aly Grogan, I shall take no notice of them but shall shew some variations on the 2d which may be altered at Pleasure.
3. The 1st M. Clap the 3d W. on her shoulder while the 1st W. do the like with the 2d M. the 1st M. do the like with the 2d W. & while his partner does the same with the 3d M. sides in the middle & turn $\begin{array}{|c|} \hline \bullet \\ \hline \end{array}$ The M. with the Me. & W. with the We. crosswise as before & set sides & turn $\begin{array}{|c|} \hline \bullet \\ \hline \end{array}$ Heys &c $\begin{array}{|c|} \hline \bullet \\ \hline \end{array}$

Tracings

1. 1st Cu set to the 3d Cu & to the 2d Cu & sides & turn $\begin{array}{|c|} \hline \bullet \\ \hline \end{array}$ The like to the We. & the Me.
2. & 3. $\begin{array}{|c|} \hline \bullet \\ \hline \end{array}$ the like as in the Leading pt.

Turnings

1. 1st M. right arm with the 3d W. & turn proper, left arm with the 2d turn improper, right again with yr Partner & turn, she at the same time arming the 2d & 3d M. in like manner $\begin{array}{|c|} \hline \bullet \\ \hline \end{array}$ W. wth the We. & M. with the M. $\begin{array}{|c|} \hline \bullet \\ \hline \end{array}$ The rest as before. (?)

I shall not trouble you nor myself any more at present, but if it is agreeable I may send you some again. They may appear at first very perplexing, but when the theory is once understood they will soon become familiar to persons of tollerable skill & activity & the dances may be diversified & suited to various sorts of Tunes. They formerly here had Dances to Ffarwel Ned Puw, Y Fedle Fawr, Neithior ac Echnos, Crimson Velvet & such like but these were left off before my Time, However Morfa Rhuddlan is a very pleasant Dance if all the party perform their parts well.

I should be very much satisfied by having the Air of Malbrook (if I remember the name) which is said to be so captivating to the savages from California to New Holland. Whether it resemble or is the same as that plaintive Tune which we call here Y Dôn Feihan? and is as follows,



The Charms of Music are many, to animadvert upon them is beyond my capacity, Natural simplicity in that art, as well as in others, many times overpowers the skill of the most skilful professions. What a contemptible thing is the Tarantella ? etc.

If you would please to add parts & proper Symphonies to the above Scrap, I imagine it might be a very odd sound upon an Organ; I remember once in my youth that I did put the 1st & 2d string of a violin under the Bridge & played this tune on the Bass & 3d so that the Bridge rattling on the Breast the music resembled a French Horn, wich greatly surprised the company I being then in another room ingognito.

Whether do you think our Unbennaeth Prydain may be Britons Strike Home? and borrowed from Us by the English with their Derry Down Down Derry.

I am indebted to Mrs Mary Paget of Cheltenham for her great knowledge of the village and area of High Ercall and to Mrs Lilian M. Broughton, née Davies, for help with the Welsh.

Cymro O B'Le — A Welshman from where. (Stage Welsh has the pleonastic, A Welshman from Whence)

Difyrrwch Gwyr Dufi — Men of Dovey's Delight.

Ffarwel Ned Puw — Farewell Ned Pugh.

Mopsi Dôn:Yr Hen Fford — Mopsy's tune:The Old Road.

Morfa Rhuddlan — Rhuddlan Marsh. (There are two tunes with this name)

Neithior ac Echnos — Last Night and the Night Before, or, A Week of it.

Tro Law — Turn Hands.

Unbennaeth Prydain — Sovereign Britain.

Y Don Feihan — The Sweet Melody, or, The Little Song, or, The Young Song.

Y Fedle Fawr — The Long Dance, or, The Big Medley.

(The alternatives are contextual)

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English Country Dances, Fallibroome Collection. (Several booklets originally published privately now sponsored by E.F.D.S.S.) — *Bernard Bentley*

Come Let's Be Merry. EFDSS 1975/Again Let's Be Merry. EFDSS 1979 — *Tom Cook*

It should be pointed out that, with the exception of the special case of Cecil Sharp, no attempt has been made at historical accuracy in the above works. The concentration is on the floor pattern and steps are formalised according to modern ideas and the needs of the 'Barn Dance/Ceilidh' etc.

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