

The Science of Country Dancing in the Early 19th & Late 18th Centuries

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The early nineteenth century was a period in Britain's history in which Scientific and Engineering discoveries marvelled the populace. This paper will explore how England's Country Dances were influenced

by these changes, c.1770-1820.

At least seven major books were published throughout this period on Country Dancing (see Figure 1). Nicholas Dukes and the

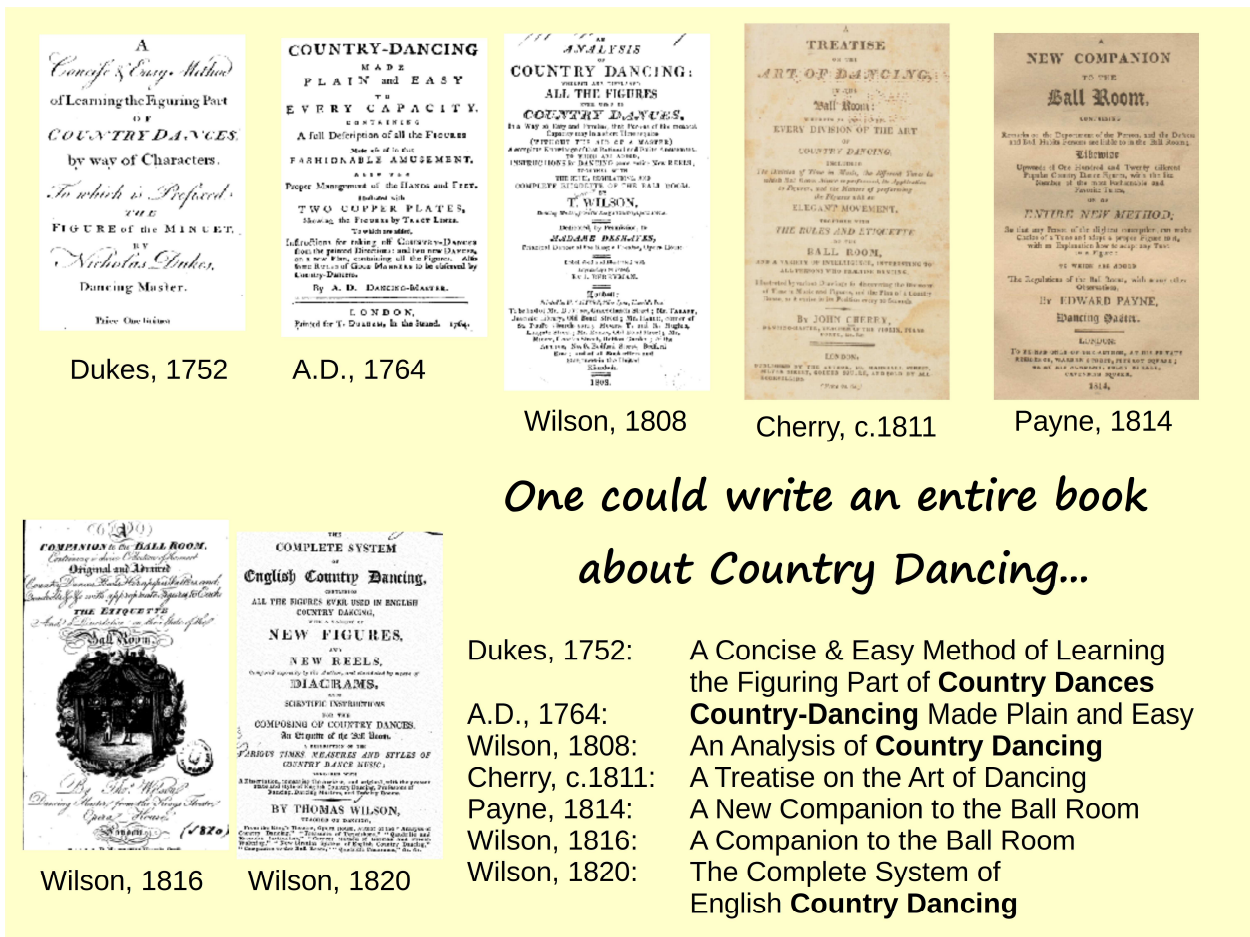


Figure 1: Major Texts on Country Dancing

The images in Figure 1 are the covers of:

Nicholas Dukes, 1752: *A Concise & Easy Method of Learning the Figuring Part of Country Dances*

A.D., 1764: *Country Dancing Made Plain and Easy*

Thomas Wilson, 1808 (1st Edition): *An Analysis of Country Dancing*

John Cherry, c.1813: *A Treatise on the Art of Dancing in the Ball Room*

Edward Payne, 1814: *A New Companion to the Ball Room*

Thomas Wilson, 1816 (1st Edition): *A Companion to the Ball Room*

Thomas Wilson, 1820 (final form): *The Complete System of English Country Dancing*

One could write an entire book about Country Dancing...

- Dukes, 1752: A Concise & Easy Method of Learning the Figuring Part of **Country Dances**
- A.D., 1764: **Country-Dancing Made Plain and Easy**
- Wilson, 1808: An Analysis of **Country Dancing**
- Cherry, c.1811: A Treatise on the Art of Dancing to the **Ball Room**
- Payne, 1814: A New Companion to the **Ball Room**
- Wilson, 1816: A Companion to the **Ball Room**
- Wilson, 1820: The Complete System of **English Country Dancing**

anonymous A.D. writer published in the mid-eighteenth century, they offer insight into where the dance form had evolved from. Thomas Wilson, John Cherry and Edward Payne were London-based dancing masters, broadly of the Regency era; they each published books on Country Dancing, independently of each other, but tackling the same broad subject. Wilson went on to publish numerous other books on dancing, two of his later works are included in Figure 1. His *Complete System of English Country*

Dancing is the single most important of the publications, it reached its final form in 1820.

Numerous works of lesser importance were also published, Figure 2 shows a few examples. Most of them were published in England, though Saltator is an American work, the Lowes' and Smyth publications are both from Scotland. Dozens of works were published that offer similar insights into Country Dancing, Figure 2 only depicts some edited highlights.



Figure 2: Minor Works

The images in Figure 2 are the covers of:

Matthew Welch, c.1776: *Variety of Country Dances for the Present Year... By Cards*

G.M.S. Chivers, 1821: *The Dancers' Guide*

G.M.S. Chivers, 1822: *The Modern Dancing Master*

Lowe Brothers, 1822 (1st Edition, 3rd Edition pictured): *Ball Conductor & Assembly Guide*

Saltator, 1802: *A Treatise on Dancing*

W. Smyth, 1830 (2nd Edition): *A Pocket Companion for Young Ladies & Gentlemen*

W.H. Woakes, 1825: *An Essay on the Attitudes*

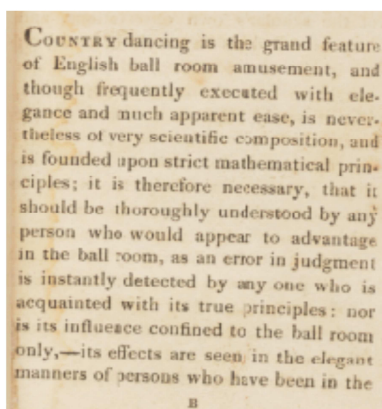
Thomas Wilson, 1818: *A New Circular System of English Country Dancing*

The trigger for creating this paper was the recognition that several writers of the early nineteenth century described the Country Dance as being of "scientific" and "mathematical" composition (see Figure 3). Cherry, writing c.1813 described Country Dancing as “nevertheless of very scientific composition”; Wilson echoed the same idea in the introduction to his 1820 *Complete System of English Country Dancing*, he tells us "A Country Dance is constructed on Mathematical and other Scientific principles...".

Wilson went on to write that “Formerly, before the introduction of Steps, it was customary to play every Air, whatever might be its character, in one time: namely, with the utmost rapidity... but since Dancing has

become a Science, various Steps have been introduced....” If taken literally, Wilson seems to have been reporting that the use of Steps in Country Dancing was part of the scientific reinvention of the dance form, in his own generation. That idea is explored further in this paper, but first we’ll explore some tools and techniques used by writers of this period.

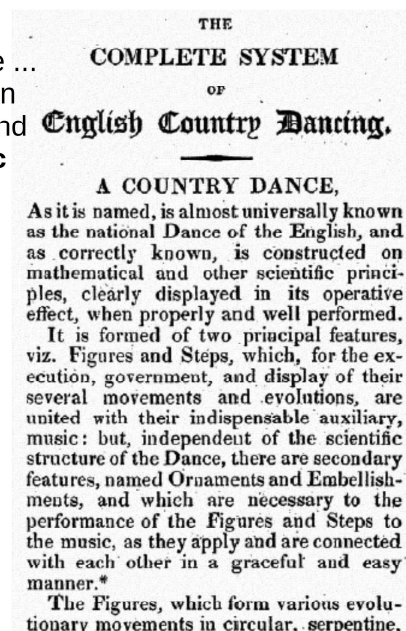
Several of the writers described the individual figures used in Country Dancing. They enable us to track how those figures were described over time. In some cases interesting variations can be found; for example, Figure 4 shows that the “Right and Left” figure received a new name somewhere around the start of the nineteenth century, becoming known as the “Chain Figure of Four”. More confusingly, a new figure emerged that adopted the old name



Country Dancing as a Scientific Discipline

"Country Dancing ... is nevertheless of very **scientific** composition, and is founded upon strict **mathematical** principles; ... " - Cherry, c.1811

"A Country Dance ... is constructed on **mathematical** and **English Country Dancing**, other **scientific** principles ... " - Wilson, 1820



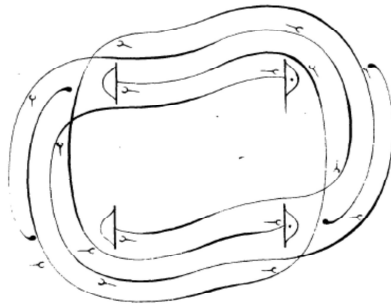
should be played.* Formerly, before the introduction of Steps, it was customary to play every Air, whatever might be its character, in one time: namely, with the utmost rapidity, because the Dancers were at a loss what to do, either with their feet or themselves, if they were not in perpetual motion. But, since Dancing has become a Science, various Steps have been introduced, with a view to display the skill of the Dancer; and as these require more Time to perform them with elegance, it follows of course, that the Time in which they ought to be played will be considerably slower than before their invention. STRATHSPEYS, from the nature of

"Formerly, before the introduction of Steps, it was customary to play every Air ... with the utmost rapidity ... but, **since Dancing has become a Science**, various Steps have been introduced ... " - Wilson, 1820

Figure 3: Country Dancing as a Scientific Discipline

Figures can be Analysed

Right and left quite round

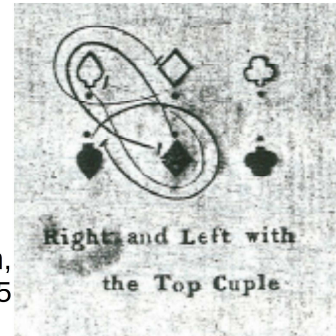


Dukes, 1752

To Right and Left.

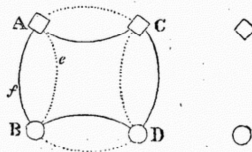
THE most difficult figure to young beginners is that of Right and Left: to perform this, it requires two Couple, being placed properly, each opposite their partner; then let all be sure to pass on the right side of their partner, and give the right hand in passing, all moving forward round; the first man and second woman on a circle to the right, and the first woman and second man on a circle to the left,

A.D.,
1764



Welch,
c.1775

Chain Figure of four.

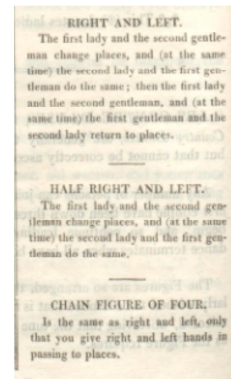


The Gentleman at B with his right hand takes the right hand of the Lady at A, he moves in the line *f* and the Lady in the line *e*; the Gentleman then with his left hand takes the left hand of the Lady at C, while the Lady with her left hand takes the left hand of the Gentleman at D, they all continue to swing with the right and left hands alternately till they all regain their original situations.

Wilson, 1820



Cartoon, c.1816



Chivers, 1822

Figure 4: Figures can be Analysed

of “Right and Left”, the new figure involved diagonal corners swapping places and back again. Most of the figures used in Country Dancing can be analysed in this same fashion.

Many writers of this period employed diagrams and other visual tools to help convey meaning. The top-left image in Figure 5 is from Cherry’s publication, c.1813, it’s an unusual tool that the owner can use to teach themselves the rhythm, or internal timing, of the figures in a Country Dance. The student is encouraged to sit by a pendulum clock, and to

draw their finger along the length of the straight line in 8 seconds. Eight red dots are equally spaced along the line, symbolising the eight bars in a typical strain of Country Dancing music. Once a fluid motion is achieved in eight seconds, the student can repeat the exercise with the other shapes; and then again with half and three-quarter second transitions per red-dot. In so doing, they learn how far through a figure they should be in a given period of time. This technique may be unique to Cherry, it’s an unusual and distinctive use of an image.

Lists can be Constructed

THREE PART FIGURES.

Hands across and back again, lead down the middle, up again, allemand and swing corners.

Set and change sides, the same back again, lead down the middle, up again, set and poussette.

Chain figure of six, promenade and poussette.

Whole figure at top, lead down the middle, up again, turn your partner and swing corners.

Hands across and back again with hands four round, pass the second couple, and do the same with the third, lead down the middle, up again, and cast round the top couple.

Cast off two couple and back again, lead down the middle, up again, allemand, hands four round, and back again at bottom.

Payne, 1814

Long Figures at top, that begin and end in the same place.	Long Figures in centre that begin and end in the same place.	Short Figures at the top, that begin and end in the same place.	Short Figures in the centre, that begin and end in the same place.
3	1	4567891011	2
5	1	34567891011	2
7	1	34567891011	2
9	1	34567891011	2
11	1	345678910	2
	1	234567891011	
3		24567891011	1
5		234567891011	1
7		234567891011	1
9		234567891011	1
11		2345678910	1

Wilson, 1811

THE CONTRE DANSES. 81

Five Part Figures.

*. The general way of dancing five part figures with two tunes, is to have a two part tune played first and then a three part tune.

The Tank and Jallons...Whole figure your own sides—hands across—back again—down the middle—up again and cast off one couple—swing corners—poussette at top—

The Russian Dance and Morgiana in Ireland...Cast off three couple, back again—promenade three couple—swing with right hands, cast off one couple—swing with left—hands four round and back at bottom—right and left at top—

*. The following tunes named may be played as five parts, and either of the above figures can be danced to various other five part tunes

La Fetein...Chain figure of six—whole figure your own sides—lead down the middle—up again—lady hands three and back at top, while the gentleman does the same at bottom—back to back—turn your partner—

Chivers, 1821

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
2	70	14	164	199	26	163	18	167
3	10	64	109	12	149	30	161	11
4	33	1	160	163	77	166	168	179
5	36	114	8	95	111	39	137	44
6	103	130	37	71	117	32	139	130
7	163	162	119	15	147	97	73	109
8	7	81	131	37	91	195	49	115
9	142	106	40	69	43	140	23	89
10	89	68	86	139	190	32	143	83
11	83	42	90	138	89	199	78	26
12	145	37	6	121	46	67	63	16

N. Simrock, c.1798

LIST
OF
THE NEW FIGURES,
With their Uses.

DOUBLE LONG FIGURES, PERFORMED AT TOP,
Requiring in their performance a Strain of long Measure repeated.
Figures equal to, and to be used the same as the three Ladies lead round the three Gentlemen, and the three Gentlemen lead round the three Ladies.

The snake.
En passant.
Half Figure on all sides.
The Labyrinth.
The March.
Through the bottom and half Figure contrary sides.

DOUBLE LONG FIGURES, PERFORMED IN THE CENTRE,
That require in their performance a Strain of long Measure repeated, and may be used in lieu of long Figures in the centre.
Round the corners.

Wilson, 1811

Figure 6: Lists can be Constructed

Payne attempted to address this lack of confidence through his book. He categorised 120 of the most popular tunes according to how many parts of music they had, and provided lists of suitably choreographed figures; he encouraged dancers to use any combination of tune and figure they liked, so long as the number of parts in the tune and figures were compatible. Figure 6 includes the first page of his three-part figures. Payne died in 1819. Another London contemporary published a similar system in the early 1820s, G.M.S. Chivers. The first page of Chivers' five-part figures is also shown. Wilson had an equivalent system, though rather more complicated, involving tables and lists, and lists of lists. Experienced dancers were encouraged to try new arrangements, and not

to rely on favourite pairings of tunes and figures.

The top-left image of Figure 7 is taken from Cherry's book, c.1813. It shows the plan of a Country Dance, with three part tune and figures; it depicts twelve couples in a longways set, and shows who is dancing with whom on each iteration. The first iteration involves just three couples, by the ninth everyone is moving, eventually the lead couple gets to the bottom of the set, back to the top, and almost back to the bottom a second time, over 45 iterations of the dance. Cherry suggested that each iteration should take around 18 seconds to complete, and the entire dance would be over in a little under 15 minutes. 18 seconds is a rather fast pace for a three part Country Dance, the lead couple is

Progressions can be Tracked

Plan of a Country Dance, three-part Figure and Tune.
(To face page 56)

Ready	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60	

Cherry c.1811

Wilson, 1820

The Progressive Motion of a Country Dance.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60

(EXPLANATION.)
The Figures 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, are placed progressively about the circle in their respective order in the dance or ground set in the 1st part of the leading couple, in the 2nd part of the leading couple, in the 3rd part of the leading couple, in the 4th part of the leading couple, in the 5th part of the leading couple, in the 6th part of the leading couple, in the 7th part of the leading couple, in the 8th part of the leading couple, in the 9th part of the leading couple, in the 10th part of the leading couple, in the 11th part of the leading couple, in the 12th part of the leading couple, in the 13th part of the leading couple, in the 14th part of the leading couple, in the 15th part of the leading couple, in the 16th part of the leading couple, in the 17th part of the leading couple, in the 18th part of the leading couple, in the 19th part of the leading couple, in the 20th part of the leading couple, in the 21st part of the leading couple, in the 22nd part of the leading couple, in the 23rd part of the leading couple, in the 24th part of the leading couple, in the 25th part of the leading couple, in the 26th part of the leading couple, in the 27th part of the leading couple, in the 28th part of the leading couple, in the 29th part of the leading couple, in the 30th part of the leading couple, in the 31st part of the leading couple, in the 32nd part of the leading couple, in the 33rd part of the leading couple, in the 34th part of the leading couple, in the 35th part of the leading couple, in the 36th part of the leading couple, in the 37th part of the leading couple, in the 38th part of the leading couple, in the 39th part of the leading couple, in the 40th part of the leading couple, in the 41st part of the leading couple, in the 42nd part of the leading couple, in the 43rd part of the leading couple, in the 44th part of the leading couple, in the 45th part of the leading couple, in the 46th part of the leading couple, in the 47th part of the leading couple, in the 48th part of the leading couple, in the 49th part of the leading couple, in the 50th part of the leading couple, in the 51st part of the leading couple, in the 52nd part of the leading couple, in the 53rd part of the leading couple, in the 54th part of the leading couple, in the 55th part of the leading couple, in the 56th part of the leading couple, in the 57th part of the leading couple, in the 58th part of the leading couple, in the 59th part of the leading couple, in the 60th part of the leading couple.



Rowlandson, 1817

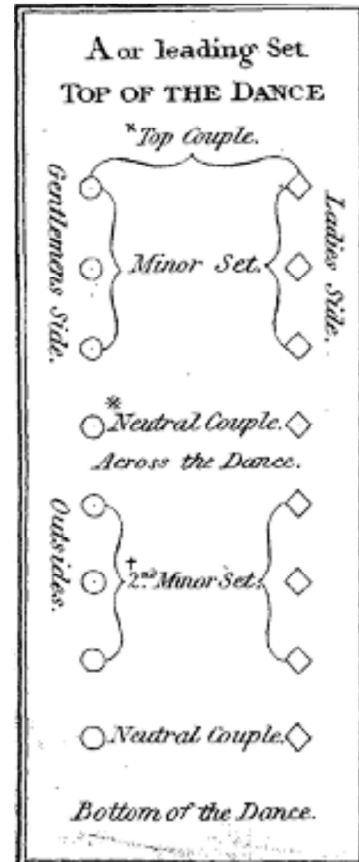


Figure 7: Progressions can be Tracked

likely to have been tired by the conclusion of the dance.

A variant of Cherry's chart was also included in Wilson's 1820 *Complete System of English Country Dancing*, with the timing information removed. It is curious that it is found there, it does not demonstrate the typical Wilsonian Country Dance; Wilson preferred a new

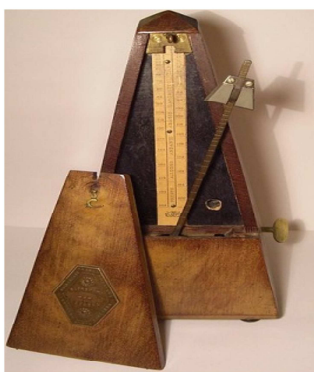
couple to lead-off every fourth iteration rather than every third (resulting in neutral couples between each minor set), and he would terminate the dance around iteration 38. The Rowlandson image in Figure 7 shows six couples in a Country Dance, the top three are dancing, the bottom three awaiting their turn to join the dance.

Timing can be Measured

are various, some tunes having two strains, some three, some four, and so on; every strain contains or occupies the same portion of time, which is divided into eight parts or bars, each bar being equal to, or containing, a certain portion of time, about the space of three quarters of a second; but as country dance music is composed in various sorts of time, the bars will occupy or contain more or less, in proportion to the music being quick or slow, and varying from half a second to a second, or perhaps rather less or more; however, if the music be properly played, its division by bars will be as perceptible as the music itself; and the dancer must move the feet slower or quicker in proportion as the bars are shorter or longer.

"each bar being equal to or containing ... about the space of **three quarters of a second** ... the dancer must move the feet slower or quicker in proportion as the bars are shorter or longer." - Cherry, c.1811

Maelzel's Metronome, 1816



QUADRILLE ORGAN.

MR. PAYNE, has the pleasure to announce to the Nobility and Gentry, that he has Invented an ORGAN, which plays with the greatest precision a complete set of Quadrilles, without shifting the Barrel, having the effect of a Band; the Richness and Brilliancy of its tones, and the admirable quality of keeping in tune, not only renders it a most valuable acquisition to the lovers of Quadrille Dancing, but also an elegant appendage to the Drawing-Room, possessing in its appearance something of the elegance and uniformity of a Cabinet Piano Forte. Barrels may be set which have an excellent effect; containing Spanish Dances, Waltzes, Country Dances, Sacred Music or the most difficult pieces, from the extent of scale, requisite to perform Quadrilles — This Instrument is well adapted for the East or West Indies, its construction being so compact and solid, that it resists any Climate.

An assortment of Organs may be seen at the Inventors, 32, Foley St. London.

Allegro is the quickest movement used in Country Dancing, it is chiefly applied to Common Time, when the steps are the same as in $\frac{6}{8}$ and the Measures containing two Quavers more, require more rapid execution.

In regulating the above movements by Maelzel's Metronomy, * *Andante* will be (♩ 80, or, ♩ 80) *Allegretto* or *Moderato*, $\frac{6}{8}$ will be (♩ 104) and $\frac{9}{8}$ will be (♩ 104) *Allegro*, (♩ 120.)

Common Time of both kinds are so various and eccentric in their composition, no general

* The most eminent professors frequently differ from each other in opinion, as to the exact Time in which an *Allegro* or an *Andante* should be played. These terms relate more to the style in which they should be played, than to the Time. Therefore in order to mark the true

Wilson, 1820

"Organ... having the **effect of a Band** ... containing Country Dances... well adapted to the East or West Indies" - Payne, 1818

Figure 8: Timing can be Measured

The Metronome arrived in London in 1816 (see Figure 8), it triggered an important change in the musical industry. For the first time composers could indicate the tempo or speed at which they intended their music to be played, and musicians could reproduce the music at that same speed. metronomic settings for social dances of this period are rare, but not unheard of. The best information for Country Dancing comes from Wilson's own *Complete System of English Country Dancing*. He indicated therein what he understood by such terms as *Andante*, *Allegretto*, etc., as applied to a Country Dance. The best information prior to that comes from Cherry, who indicated that a bar of Country Dancing music should average around three-quarters of a second in duration.

Cherry promoted a vigorous Country Dance, but Wilson encouraged a slower speed. Wilson allowed time for the dancers to ornament and embellish their dancing, and the opportunity to use a wider range of steps. It appears that a range of experiences were encountered two-hundred years ago, some assemblies danced as fast as they could, others preferred a more elegant and graceful experience.

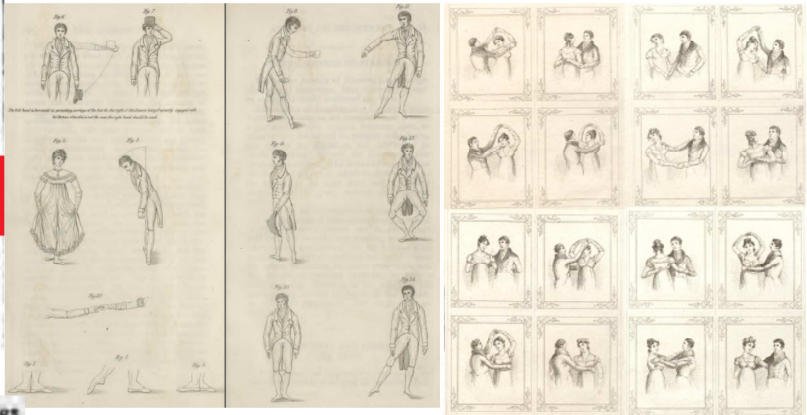
Barrel Organs had been used for Country Dancing since at least the 1750s, the example advertised in Figure 8 is from 1818.

The Cotillion dance form was gaining popularity in England throughout the 1760s. The popularity of that dance appears to have influenced the evolution of the Country

Grace can be Defined

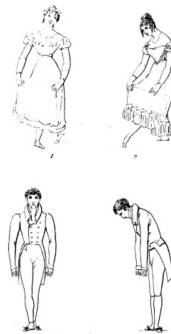
Mr. L U C A,
Begg Leave to inform the Ladies and Gentlemen in general
in and about MANCHESTER.
That he intends
Opening his SCHOOL,
On Monday the 2d of February next,
At Mr. TURNOCK's, in Half-street.
Mr. LUCA offers the Opportunity of an EVENING
SCHOOL, to facilitate the proper Mode of English
Dancing, by introducing the Variety of French Steps,
mostly used in French Dancing. Pupils from under
the TUTION of other Masters, will be received without
of Entrance. Mr. Luca will wait on Gentlemen and
Ladies, by Notice received at Mr. Turnock's.
N. B. The Reason of Mr. Luca postponing the Opening
of his School, was owing to the want of a proper
Room for that Purpose.

Luca, 1778



MR. MISDALE, of Hipperholme, begs
Leave to inform the LADIES and GENTLE-
MEN of Leeds and its Vicinity, that he purposes Open-
ing a SCHOOL on Friday the Twenty-second of Aug-
ust Instant, in the Concert-Room, Albion-Street,
Leeds, for the Instruction of Young Ladies and Gentle-
men in DANCING.
Mr. MISDALE takes this Opportunity of acquainting
the Ladies and Gentlemen of Leeds, that he has lately
been in London, where he has attended the ablest Masters
in Order to qualify himself to teach all the most fashion-
able Country Dance Steps, now used in the politest Cir-
cles in the Metropolis, such as the Scotch, Irish, Italian
&c. and he has the most sanguine Hopes, that his Meth-
od of teaching will give universal Satisfaction.
N. B. Mr. Misdale would be glad to give Instructions
to grown Ladies and Gentlemen, who may be desirous
of attaining the fashionable Movements in Country
Dances now in Use.

Misdale, 1800



Blasis, 1829

Wilson, 1821 Chivers, 1822



Figure 9: Grace can be Defined

Dance. An example of this can be seen in the increased use of French terminology in Country Dancing over about a decade from around 1768; such terms as *Promenade*, *Pousette*, *Allemande*, *Pirouette* and *Rigadon* begin to appear in Country Dances throughout that decade. The first three of those terms were ubiquitous in published choreographies by 1780. That said, the figures were in many cases older; the A.D. writer in 1764 described both the *Promenade* and *Pousette* figures using different names, it's the French terminology that was adopted in the 1770s.

What is harder to show, but for which some evidence exists, is a renewed interest in Steps for Country Dancing over that same period. Prior to around 1780 it was unusual for

Dancing Masters to refer to Steps for Country Dancing in their adverts, but from 1780 it became reasonably common. This could imply a trend, and that ordinary dancers were expecting to be taught Country Dancing Steps from around this date. The top-left image in Figure 9 is an advertisement by Mr Luca of Manchester, published in 1778, in which he indicated an intention to apply French Steps to English dances. It is an unusually clear example. Below that is an advert for Mr Misdale of Leeds, published in 1800, in which he claims to have returned from London with the most fashionable Country Dancing Steps. The widespread references to Steps in Country Dances indicates that they were part of the mainstream experience by

Creativity can be Protected



Figure 10: Creativity can be Protected

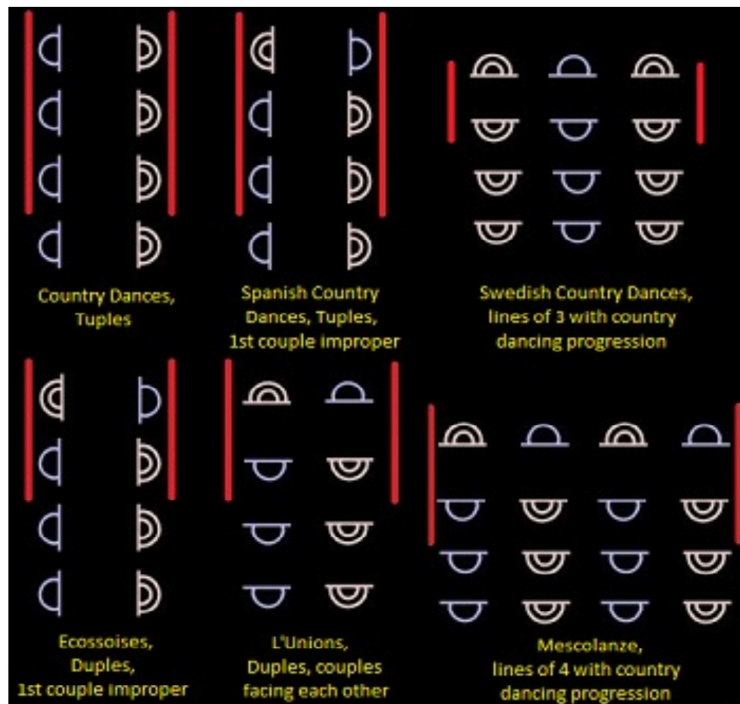
1800. This relates back to the Wilsonian quotation (see Figure 3) that implied that Steps for Country Dancing were a relatively recent phenomenon in 1820; the evidence from advertisements does seem to support that suggestion. I have no doubt that an aristocratic dancer, taught by an elite dancing master, would have learnt a wide repertoire of Steps for Country Dancing; but ordinary social dancers may have employed a more primitive repertoire of Steps in the 1750s through 1770s.

A legal battle was fought in the courts of late 1818 over a Country Dance called "Captain Wyke" (see Figure 10). The Bath-based

publishers of the dance complained that a music shop in London had pirated one of their dances (specifically the tune), and they sought legal respite. The case is interesting as it was widely reported upon in the press at the time, the details of which offer insight into the entire Country Dancing industry at that time. The plaintiffs from Bath won their case, and in the process they demonstrated that a Country Dancing tune could show sufficient creativity and ingenuity to be worthy of legal protection, just as in any other field of human endeavour.

Variations of the Country Dance were introduced, to varying success, throughout the

Innovations can be Promoted



New Figures, 1811
 Spanish Country Dances, c.1815
 Waltz Country Dancing, 1815
 Ecossoises, 1817
 Swedish Country Dances, 1818
 Circular Country Dances, 1818
 Quadrille Country Dances, 1819
 Mescolanze, 1819
 L'Unions, 1821

A JUVENILE FETE,
 On MONDAY the 8th of JULY, 1805,
 When he humbly solicits of his Friends and a generous
 Public a share of that patronage to which merit unsupported
 by interest is his only claim
 The Ball will be opened by a Minuet Pas Grave, by a
 young Lady and Gentleman, after which will follow, in
 regular succession, Cotillions, in Eights, Sixteens, and
 Quarter Quadrilles.
 The Minuet de la Cour, will be danced by Mr. West
 and a young Lady.
 Also, L'Union, Mescolanze, Single and double Hornpipes.
 Likewise Mr. West's improved method of dancing
 Country Dances, wherein the inconvenience of waiting
 for the first couple's coming down is obviated, and the
 whole company are in motion at once.

“improved method of dancing Country Dances, wherein the inconvenience of waiting for the first couple's coming down is obviated, and the whole company are in motion at once” - West, 1805

Figure 11: Innovations can be Promoted

1810s (see Figure 11). Thomas Wilson introduced a new repertoire of figures in the 1811 second edition of his *Analysis of Country Dancing*, including such figures as the “Double Triangles” and “The Labyrinth”. Payne promoted the “Spanish Country Dance” from around 1815, the chief characteristic being that the first couple started improper (a convention which was being danced a hundred years earlier, but had dropped out of fashion). Wilson introduced his “Waltz Country Dances” in 1815 (not to be confused with a Country Dance in Waltz time) and his “Ecossoise” in 1817 (again with the first couple starting improper, but in a duple minor formation that had also dropped out of fashion). Chivers taught his “Swedish Country Dances” from 1818 (danced in triples rather than couples), and Wilson introduced

his “Circular System” in 1818. A variety of hybrid dances merging concepts from the Quadrille and Country Dance were also invented. In some cases these dance variants remained relatively obscure, but achieved support from the provincial dancing masters; most of them were being danced in London by the 1830s.

The newspaper clipping in Figure 11 was published for Mr West, a dancing master from Derby, in 1805. He published the agenda for his juvenile ball; this event was a common occurrence at the time, dancing masters would sell tickets to the families of their students, and the scholars would display what they’d been taught. Fancy dances and complicated figure dances were typically performed. Mr West’s program began with a “Minuet Pas

Summary

- Country Dancing in the Early 19th Century
 - **Inventions** had modernised the dance form
 - **Engineered** to be perfectly reproducible
 - **Regularity** and **Order** rather than Irregularity
 - Categorised, **rules** and **forms** are well defined
 - Graceful **machine-like** systems
- At least, that's what the Dancing Masters wanted
 - Reality was rather more chaotic!



Postscript: Country Dancing was mostly displaced from English Assembly Halls by 1820. All hail the Quadrille and Waltz!

Figure 12: Summary

Grave”, a succession of Cotillions in Eights and Sixteens, Quarter Quadrilles, a “Minuet de la Cour”, then West’s “improved method of dancing Country Dances, wherein the inconvenience of waiting for the first couple’s coming down is obviated, and the whole company are in motion at once”. This fascinating passage is the first clear evidence I know of for simultaneously started Country Dances in over a century, though it’s not clear what West’s technique involved. Whatever West was teaching, it was noteworthy, and outside the experience of typical Country Dancers.

If the writers from two-hundred years ago are to be believed, the venerable Country Dance had been engineered to perfection by the start of the nineteenth century, and the dancers performed like cogs in a well-oiled machine (see Figure 12).

However, the first-hand accounts of attendees at Balls rarely indicate that degree of perfection, they instead report on a jovial and sometimes chaotic experience. I suspect the social dancing experience was rarely as crisp as the professional writers would have us believe. The unfortunate irony is that no sooner had the Country Dance supposedly been perfected, then the fashions changed, and social dancers moved on to the Waltz, Quadrille, Gallopades, Mazurkas, Polkas... and so forth. The Country Dance never went away, it was danced in Britain throughout the nineteenth century, but it had lost its pre-eminence in the English Ball Room, it became just another dance in the social repertoire.