

The Waltz in England, c.1790 to 1820


Paul Cooper

The introduction of the ‘Wicked’ Waltz dance to England has been written about many times before. Many commentaries rely on a single primary source work – Thomas Wilson’s 1816 *A Description of the Correct Method of Waltzing*. It’s a wonderful book that’s well worth reading. This paper aims to offer a more diverse selection of source material for consideration.

There are various widely believed myths concerning the introduction of the Waltz – that it was first danced in London in 1816 (or 1812, or 1811); that it was first danced socially by Countess Lieven (or Princess Esterhazy, or Baron Neuman); that it was brought to England by Officers returning from the Napoleonic Wars; that no right thinking parent would allow their daughter to Waltz... these stories contain elements of truth, they also oversimplify what was in reality a complex pattern of entangled and multi-faceted social history.

Waltz Dancing References, to c.1790

- a tune in triple time, suitable for Country Dancing




The Walse from The Caledonian Medley Dance, for the Year 1787, T. Skillern - 2/4 measure

When **the walse** commenced, all the couples, which were whirling round, at first jostled against each other. We very judiciously kept aloof till the awkward and clumsy had withdrawn; when we joined in there were but two couples left. I never in my life was so active; I was more than mortal. To hold in my arms the most lovely of women, to fly with her like the wind, and lose sight of every other object!—But I own to

M.DCC.LXXIX.

The Walse in the 1779 translation of Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werter*, (orig 1774 in German)



The Garman Spaw Waltz, from Campbell's 7th Collection, c.1792 – 3/8 measure

Hessian Dance, Thompson's 24 Country Dances for 1758 - 3/8 measure

The Lady the Gent call back again the Lady following the Gent: Lead down the middle up again Allemande lead thro the bottom come up one Cu: lead thro the top cast off

First man turn the 2^d wo. round by the right hand. 1st Wo the same with the 2^d Man 2^d hands across & back again 1st Cu turn Right hands & cast off 2^d turn both hands & Balance

Figure 1 : Waltz dancing references to c.1790

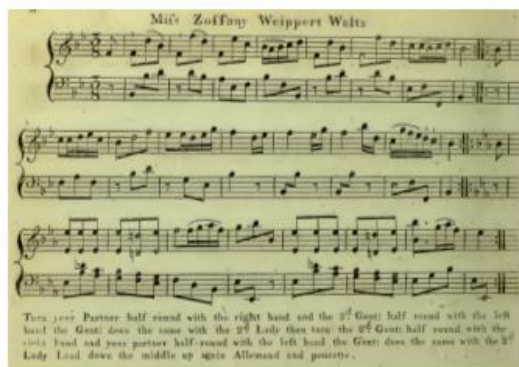
The word ‘Waltz’ first surfaced in the English language around the year 1780. The very first reference may have been in the 1779 English language translation of Johann Wolfgang von

Goethe's German language novel *The Sorrows of Werter* (See figure 1, note that later translations changed the name *Werter* to *Young Werther*). At that early date it's unlikely that the British public would have any comprehension of what a Waltz (or "Walse") actually was, beyond perhaps some vague association with an exotic and ill-defined couple dance of Germanic heritage named the Allemande, it would take a further decade for explicitly named Waltz tunes to be published in London. The earliest example I've found of the word Waltz attached to a musical score published in London is in Thomas Skillern's 1787 *Caledonian Medley Dance* (See figure 1). This publication featured a medley of different tunes arranged to be danced to the same set of Country Dancing figures, one of which was named "The Walse". Skillern's "Walse" was a tune composed in 2/4 time signature; waltzing tunes are composed in triple time (3/4, 3/8 or 6/8 measure), this early example is not a typical Waltz. It's likely that the name "Walse" was selected without comprehension of a deeper meaning, Skillern presumably thought the word "Walse" to be a pretty name for a tune and perhaps that's all there was to it. It would take a few more years for the word Waltz to be applied in a consistent and recognisably meaningful form.



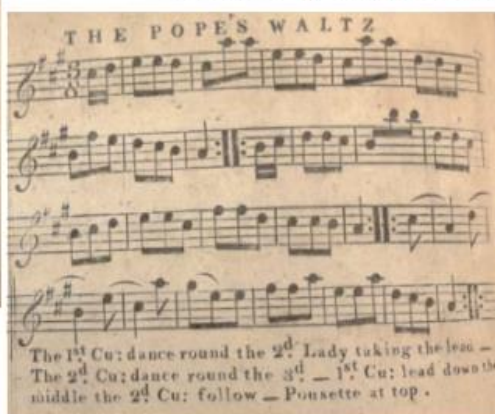
Duke of Kent's Waltz,
Cahusac's 24 Country Dances for the year 1802

More Examples



Miss Zoffany Weippert Waltz, Campbell's 12th Collection, c.1797

A Waltz, by Maria Hester Park, 1801
Mixture of 3/4 and 3/8 measure



The Pope's Waltz,
Goulding Phipps & D'Almaine's 24 Country Dances for the Year 1810

Figure 2 : Further early examples of Waltz tunes

By 1790 the first genuine Waltz tunes began to appear in London's Country Dancing collections. Several surface in collections issued for the year 1790, one of the early favourites being a tune named the *German Spa Waltz*. A c.1792 arrangement of this tune is shown in

The Waltz in England, c.1790 to 1820

Figure 1, it's composed in 3/8 measure and features three strains of music each of which are repeated, it's arranged to fit an ordinary set of Country Dancing figures. There's no reason to think that the dancing experience associated with these early Waltz tunes was any different to that of other Country Dancing tunes in 3/8 measure of a similar date. The term Waltz seems only to apply to the music. For example, Figure 1 also includes a Country Dance published in the 1750s named the *Hessian Dance*; it was also composed in 3/8 measure and also featured three strains of repeated music; the dancing figures attached are broadly similar to our Waltz country dances. The Waltz tune may have arrived in London c.1790 but it'd take a few more years for evidence of distinctive turns, steps and dancing to emerge.

Further examples of Waltz tunes were published in Country Dance collections throughout the 1790s, several important early examples were associated with the composer and publisher James Platts. Platts issued collections of *Four Favourite Waltz's* in 1791 and *Four Schleifers or Waltzers for 1792*; both of these collections feature simple Waltz tunes arranged with standard country dancing figures, they were amongst the first pure-waltz tune collections to have been officially registered at London's Stationer's Hall for copyright purposes.

The most popular of the early Waltz tunes with the modern Regency Dancing community must surely be the *Duke of Kent's Waltz* from the Cahusac collection of *24 Country Dances for 1802* (see Figure 2). There's no reason to think that this tune was popular when first published, it's simply a favourite with modern enthusiasts. A tune may be named after a historical person (such as the Duke of Kent) without being endorsed by the dedicatee in any way; I'm amused by the existence of *The Pope's Waltz* (see Figure 2) in an 1810 collection, it's a cheeky title.

The first of the more serious musical compositions to be issued in London under the title of Waltz began to appear around the turn of the 19th century. A representative 1801 example by Maria Hester Park is shown in Figure 2, it was published over three sheets of manuscript music and is of a style that is likely to have accompanied the early Waltz couple-dance. The London based publisher Monzani & Cimador would issue a collection of *twelve waltzes for the Piano Forte, by Beethoven* in early 1802 (*Morning Post*, 10th February 1802); other continental Waltz compositions circulated from around that same date.

The Waltz as a Dance, c.1800

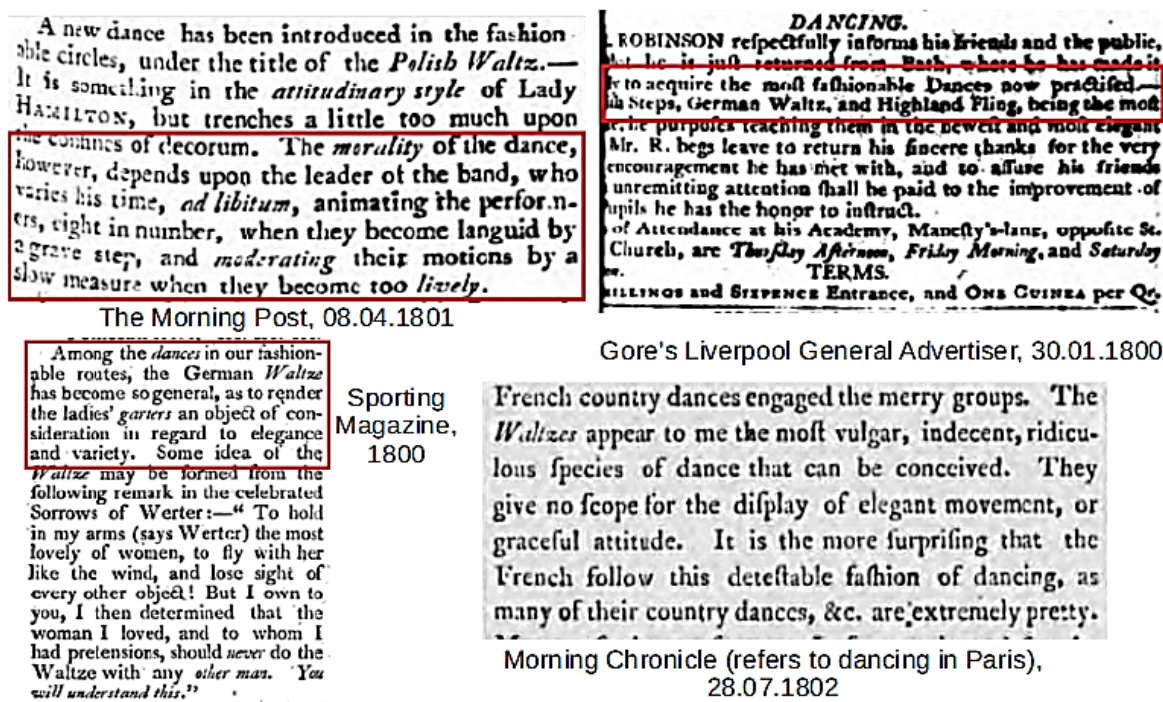


Figure 3 : The early Waltz couple dance references, c.1800

This turn of the century date coincides with the early references to the Waltz as a couple dance in England. Figure 3 depicts several early references to the couple Waltz; the Morning Post newspaper from the 8th April 1801 reported that “A new dance has been introduced in the fashionable circles, under the title of the Polish Waltz. It is something in the attitudinary style of Lady Hamilton, but trenches a little too much upon the confines of decorum.” Lady Emma Hamilton was the mistress of Lord Nelson (they had a daughter together in early 1801), she had also achieved infamy for having posed in revealing ‘attitudes’ for the artist George Romney. The term “attitudinary” is therefore of some significance. It continued: “The morality of the dance, however, depends upon the leader of the band, who varies his time, ad libitum, animating the performers, eight in number, when they become languid by a grave step, and moderating their motions by a slow measure when they become too lively.” Even at this early date the morality of the dance was questioned. Changes in tempo are described as being important – we’ll find this observation repeated elsewhere.

A further reference in Figure 3 is derived from a gentleman’s magazine of 1800 (the Sporting Magazine), it commented that “the German Waltze has become so general, as to render the ladies’ garters an object of consideration in regard to elegance and variety”!

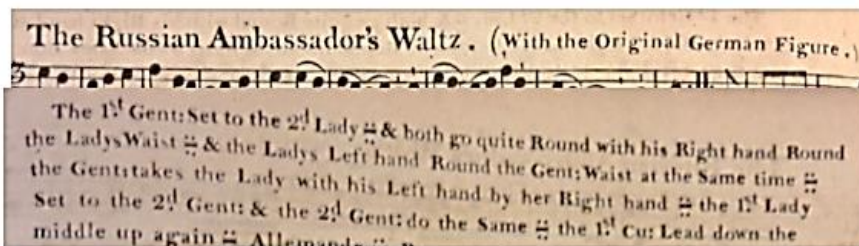
This same c.1800 date was when dancing masters started advertising tuition for the Waltz. Figure 3 includes an example from Mr Robinson of Liverpool (*Gore’s Advertiser*, 30th January 1800), he wrote that he had recently returned from Bath where he had learned “the most fashionable Dances now practised – Irish Steps, German Waltz, and Highland Fling”. Students were encouraged to attend his academy. Not all references were positive however, a

Parisian correspondent published in the *Morning Chronicle* (28th July 1802, see Figure 3) offered a dim opinion.

Figure 4 : Waltzing in the 1800s

Waltzing, 1800s

Campbell's 22nd Book
of New and Favorite
Country Dances &
Strathspey Reels,
c.1807



"both go quite Round with his Right hand Round the Lady's Waist; & the Lady's Left hand Round the Gent's Waist at the Same time; the Gent takes the Lady with his Left hand by her Right hand"

embellish life. To see so many lovely and elegant young women moving with grace and activity--their charming faces light up with pleasure, and their eyes sparkling at the admiration they excited, was, to an old fellow like me, a sight truly delightful, though I could not help agreeing with Werter, who said, his wife should never dance a waltz. The partners of those lovely creatures, said I, mentally, must be very happy; for though dignity and good-breeding preserved the most perfect delicacy in each, yet I still agreed with Werter, that my wife, if ever I have one, shall never dance a waltz--though it was charming to see the angels fly down the room as if they had already wings. The

Royal Cornwall Gazette, 17.11.1810

BRIGHTON, Nov. 25.
The Ball was opened, about half past 9 o'clock, by Colonel FULLER, and Lady ANN MARIA STANHOPE. Near thirty couples followed, to the agreeable air of *Lady Decca*. The PRINCE looked in extreme good health, and was in most excellent spirits. In the course of the evening His Royal Highness danced a Waltz with the accomplished Princess de GERIBTZOFF. The dresses of the Ladies were splendid to a degree. The prevalent dress was white; the hair out of powder, and ornamented with a profusion of diamonds. Marchioness of DOWNSHIRE was dressed in white satin, tastefully embellished with diamonds to an immense amount. Many of the most beautiful women we ever saw were present; and never did they appear more interesting and lovely. Mr. SHERIDAN, who arrived here the day before, was of the Royal Party.

Belfast Commercial Chronicle, 04.12.1805

Waltzes should never be play'd very fast.

Parry, Set of Dances, c.1807

Time went by however and references to Waltzing became increasingly common. For example the *Belfast Commercial Chronicle* for 4th December 1805 mentioned the Prince of Wales having danced a Waltz with the Princess de Geribtzoff at his pleasure palace in Brighton. The Prince, later the Prince Regent (ultimately King George IV) was influential in promoting the Waltz. I find this early reference ironic in light of the infamous editorial offered by John Stoddart (the editor of *The Times* newspaper) in 1816; Stoddart published a strong anti-waltz opinion on the 16th July 1816, allegedly under the belief that the Waltz had recently been introduced at Court. Stoddart was removed as editor shortly thereafter due to his overly political editorials, his attack on the Waltz was part of a wider political narrative. The Prince had evidently been Waltzing since at least 1805, that was over a decade before Stoddart made his infamous anti-waltz opinions known.

It was probably in 1807 that a fascinating dance named *The Russian Ambassador's Waltz* was published in London by William Campbell (see Figure 4), it was suffixed: "With the Original German Figure". It's an ordinary Country Dance but it included a waltz-like turn within the suggested figures; it's the first description of a Waltz embrace that I know of in the English

language, it's also my first clear evidence for a Waltz-like figure being introduced into a Country Dance. Campbell's having explained the embrace suggests that his customers would not have been expected to know it, I suspect this c.1807 date is approximately when 'Waltz

turns' began to be absorbed into the mainstream of country dancing. Waltz Country Dances (at least in the form subsequently promoted by dancing master Thomas Wilson) would take a few more years to emerge.

Figure 4 also includes a reference from 1810 written by a delighted but concerned spectator of a Ball at Saltram House near Plymouth (*Royal Cornwall Gazette*, 17th November 1810) and a c.1807 musical instruction from John Parry concerning the tempo at which Waltz music should be played for dancing.

Figure 5 : Waltzing 1811


Waltzing, 1811

THE WALTZ. 1825

DESCRIPTION OF THIS DANCE.

The whole of the party that is to dance the *Waltz* stand round in a circle, smaller or greater, as the company may happen to be, each couple (Gentleman and Lady, his partner) face each other; he passes his arms along hers, and holds her by the elbows; she does the same to him; and when the dance begins, he dances round with her, turning towards the left, and taking up the ground of the next couple on the left, and so the whole circle continues to move at the same time. At first the music plays very slow, but the time increases until the whole is in very rapid motion; and when they continue for some time at this, the music begins slow again, and increases as before. If there be room enough, the Gentleman only holds his partner by the tips of the fingers. Certainly the dance now in question is danced in a far different way among the inferior orders of society, as they hold each other tight by the middle, and thus in each others embrace go round like whirligigs. But this is no argument to condemn a dance, which I think is decent, harmless, and elegant.—The only objection I could ever see in the *Waltz* was, that the dancers were liable to get exceedingly dizzy, by repeated turning; but the dance is by no means indecent, as danced by the better sort of people, and it has the most brilliant effect.

NO PURITAN.



WALTZING

On Wednesday, the Baron Motalenbert had a fashionable dinner party, and in the evening a ball and supper, which were most numerous attended.—The principal amusement was waltzing, which seems now to be a *sine qua non* in all our fashionable assemblies. Indeed, the advocates for this graceful dance are now become so numerous, that a ball is no ball unless waltzing is introduced!—Amongst the waltzers were the Marquis of Worcester, Lady Millicent Acheson, Lady Olivia Sparrow, &c. The following distinguished personages were also present:—
The Marchionesses of Downshire and Wellesley; Ladies Aldborough, Arran, and Gore; Lord and Lady C. Somerset

Morning Post, 05.08.1811 The Globe (refers to dancing in Brighton), 16.11.1811

By 1811 the Waltz was sufficiently popular to excite a good deal of commentary. It was especially popular amongst the dancers who frequented the Royal party town of Brighton, Figure 11 includes a report of a Ball (*The Globe*, 16th November 1811) at which “The principal amusement was waltzing, which seems now to be a *sine qua non* in all our fashionable assemblies. Indeed, the advocates for this graceful dance are now become so numerous, that a ball is no ball unless waltzing is introduced”. Waltzing was ubiquitous at Brighton in late 1811.

The pages of the *Morning Post* newspaper saw a flurry of moralists publishing letters both for and against the Waltz; ‘No Puritan’ submitted an extensive description of the Waltz as part of this ongoing narrative (5th August 1811); Figure 5 reproduces that description. The entire passage is of great interest: we’re informed once again that changes in tempo are important, we learn of the risks of dizziness and that a range of different embraces were in use. Genteel dancers were encouraged to adopt an open embrace, with arms joined either at the elbow or at the finger

tips; the “inferior orders” were reported to dance with a much tighter embrace. The experience of the Waltz evidently varied by context, the dance wasn’t universally consistent.

A previous letter to the *Morning Post* (published 3rd August 1811) referred to the morality of the dancers and offered the opinion that the dance was not dangerous to the reputation of young ladies because: “on these occasions an unusual power of chaperons attend, and, lynx eyed, in triple rows surround the arena. A much more numerous band of opponents also are present, who would be happy to detect any deviations from propriety, and use them as documents for the destruction of the Waltzing party. Thus these two adverse parties cooperate to the same end, and thereby decorum reigns as rigidly as in the good old orthodox country dance”.

Medleys & Russians, 1810s

Skillern & Challoner's
22nd Collection of
Popular Country
Dances, c.1815

Morning Chronicle,
20.01.1817

Tsar Alexander in London ahead of the 1814 Congress of Vienna

SIX WALTZES
Partly original, and partly selected from the most popular in use, particularly those danced in the most fashionable circles, by the Emperor of Russia &c: when in England.

WALTZ 1
Andante Allegretto

N.B. These Airs are arranged so as to be played in immediate succession and to form one continued WALTZ

ENTERTAINMENT AT THE PAVILION.
In compliment to his Imperial Highness, Duke Nicholas, the Prince Regent gave a splendid entertainment at the Pavilion, of a dinner and ball.
The ball was opened before eleven o'clock by the Duke of Clarence and Lady Charlotte Cholmondeley. About thirty couple, with suitable vivacity, followed. Tune, *The Prince Regent*.
The next was a waltz—the third, a cotillon; and the fourth a country dance, called *Waterloo*, which was led off by the Grand Duke and Lady Charlotte Cholmondeley, followed by the Duke of Clarence and the elegant Mrs. Wigan.
The fifth was a waltz, called and commenced by the Grand Duke. His Imperial Highness, as adopted in Russia, preceded the waltz by a Polonaise march and steps, in which the dancers move round the space allotted for the exercise in graceful motion, ere the more intricate varieties of the waltz are pursued.

At seven in the morning, “Morgiana in Ireland,” a nondescript kind of dance (quite new), being in three parts, an Irish jig, and the fourth a waltz figure, afforded a fund of merriment to all the amateurs present. The party exceeded 400 persons, comprehending mostly all the beauty and fashion then in London.

Another medley followed “Orange Blossoms.” Previously to retiring to the supper tables, a waltz medley was introduced. The supper was an excellent and well arranged banquet, it was sumptuous in the extreme. The wines, ices, confectionary, and fruits, were of the first order; about 400 sat down in the principal rooms on the ground floor. Dancing was afterwards resumed, and kept up until six o'clock. The party were numerous and most splendid.

Morning Post, 22.06.1812

“I should like to waltz of all things,” said Rhoda; “but I certainly will not, if you disapprove it.”

Quote from “Rhoda”, by Frances Jacson, 1815

Morning Post, 03.05.1810

The second dance was a Waltz Medley. The spirit of the scene remained unaltered until half past three o'clock (an hour unusually late), when the supper was announced. The banquet was extremely sumptuous; it was served wholly on plate, and French china. Covers were laid for 720, in the two principal apartments on the ground floor. At half past five in the morning the dancing recommenced.

Morning Post, 19.05.1810

WALTZ DANCING.

AS the present style of Dancing is different to what it was since the Emperor of Russia has made Waltzes and Waltz Country Dances so general by his Dancing them while he was in London, Mr. Yates has had many applications to teach them; therefore, he respectfully makes it known, that as he has not time to attend each individual separately, he will be happy to teach them in Parties, either at their own house, or at his room.

50, Great George-street,
Oct. 11, 1814.

Figure 6 : Russian Influence, and Waltz Medleys

As time passed Waltzing continued to gain traction, this was despite the negative and widely known (at least among modern commentators) opinions published by Byron in his 1813 *Waltz, an Apostrophic Hymn*. It was in June of 1814 that (I think) the tipping point for general acceptance of the Waltz occurred; Paris had fallen to the allied forces earlier that year and

Napoleon was exiled to Elba, the allied monarchs would go on to meet at Vienna (home of the Waltz) to plan the future of a new Europe. Britain was celebrating. June of 1814 saw the allied sovereigns in London ahead of that conference. Tsar Alexander of Russia was accompanied by the King of Prussia, the Chancellor of Austria, the Prince Regent himself and around 2500 of the British aristocracy. Several grand balls were held in honour of the foreign guests, the dignitaries were evidently fans of waltzing as the newspapers abounded with references to their dancing.

One such example was published in *Bell's Weekly Messenger* for Sunday 26th June 1814. It reported on a society ball held on Monday 20th at Burlington House at which: “The Emperor Alexander waltzed with at least ten young ladies, selecting his partners for their shape and beauty, regardless of rank or distinction. The company began to dance at half past twelve o'clock, led off with waltzes by the Emperor and the beautiful Countess of Jersey. The young Prussian princes were likewise amongst the first who danced”. Jane Austen's brother Henry is understood to have been present at this same Ball, or so Jane hinted to her sister Cassandra in a letter dated 23rd June 1814.

The references to the Waltz immediately following this burst of national pride tend to be more tolerant than those of earlier dates, they increasingly referred to waltzing as a ‘Russian’ dance. Figure 6 includes an advertisement from the Liverpool dancing master Mr Yates who recorded of the Waltz that “the present style of dancing is different to what it was since the Emperor of Russia has made Waltzes and Waltz Country Dances so general by his dancing them while he was in London”. Figure 6 also includes an image from a c.1815 dance collection issued by Skillern & Challoner which featured a “Waltz Medley”; they asserted that their medley of waltz tunes “are partly original, and partly selected from the most popular in use, particularly those danced in the most fashionable circles, by the Emperor of Russia, &c when in England”. They further explained of the medley that “These Airs are arranged so as to be played in immediate succession and to form one continued Waltz”.

There are references to Waltz medleys being danced at society balls throughout the 1810s, several are included in Figure 6. My impression (while lacking in any unambiguous evidence in support of the theory) is that each tune would accompany a single round of waltzing; the tune would commence being played slowly, then slowly increase in tempo to a suitable degree, then slow back down and gently transition to the next tune in the medley in order to repeat the cycle. I suspect that the dancers would take that opportunity to vary their embrace between rounds. Several of our early waltz commentaries mention the changes in tempo as being important to the dancing of the waltz, a medley of tunes is a logical mechanism by which that might be achieved.

Figure 6 also includes a fragment from the 1815 novel *Rhoda* by Frances Jackson in which the eponymous heroine swore to avoid waltzing in order to satisfy her guardians; suppressed desire for the waltz was a principal theme of that novel. Many young ladies genuinely were forbidden from dancing the Waltz.

Tsar Alexander's brother, the Grand Duke Nicholas (later Tsar Nicholas), traveled to Britain in late 1816. Figure 6 includes a reference to his having enjoyed the waltzing at Brighton Pavilion in a typically Russian style: “His Imperial Highness, as adopted in Russia, preceded the waltz by a Polonaise march and step, in which the dancers move round the space allotted for the exercise in graceful motion, ere the more intricate varieties of the waltz are pursued.” (*Morning Chronicle*, 20th January 1817).

Waltzing, 1816

WALTZING.

Get all the Ladies that you can,
And let each Lady have a man;
Let them, in a circle plac'd,
Take their partners round the waist;
Then by slow degrees advance,
Till the walk becomes a dance;
Then the twirling, face to face,
Without variety of grace,
Round and round, and never stopping,
Now and then a little hopping;
When you're wrong, to make things worse,
If one couple, so perverse,
Should in the figure be perplex'd,
Let them be knock'd down by the next.
"Quicker now," the ladies cry;
They rise, they twirl, they swing, they fly,
Puffing, blowing, jostling, squeezing,
Very odd, but very pleasing—
Till ev'ry Lady plainly shows,
(Whatever else she may disclose),
Reserve is not among her faults:—
Reader, this it is to waltz!

Argyle-Rooms, Friday, June 28, 1816.

The Star, 05.07.1816

ON WALTZING.

Shall the girl I adore on another recline?
Shall her form be pressed near a bosom not mine?
Shall I calmly look on and contemplate her charms,
Entwined and embraced in another man's arms?
Can I feel that such conduct in her I approve,
Can I say it excites admiration and love?
No—distant from love or respect is the gaze
That she meets as she floats through the waltz' giddy maze;
Yet onward she glides and unhurt seems to brook,
The unrestrained glance, or the libertine look.
While I follow her steps with a sorrowing eye,
And breathe with regret for her errors, a sigh,
If my heart is from pity not wholly exempt,
Yet its feelings are nearly allied to contempt.
Should I dare in this scene to examine her mind,
Could I hope from the view any pleasure to find?
If purity there her sweet blossoms had shed,
Their beauty is sullied, their essence is fled,
For folly and vice both alternately toil
To scatter their weeds o'er the once lovely soil—
Yes, fair is her face and enchanting her form,
Yet for me they have lost ev'ry power to charm.
From her face have the blushes of influence flown,
And confidence there has established her throne—
While modesty, banished at fashion's desire,
No longer presumes to arrange her attire,
For modesty's veil is not wanted to shade
What fashion ordains shall be "nature displayed!"

True genuine love will an antidote seek
In a form exposed to an unblushing cheek,
Nor chuse from such samples a partner for life,
He might look for a mistress, and not for a wife.

Belfast Commercial Chronicle, 20.07.1816

Figure 7: Waltzing in 1816

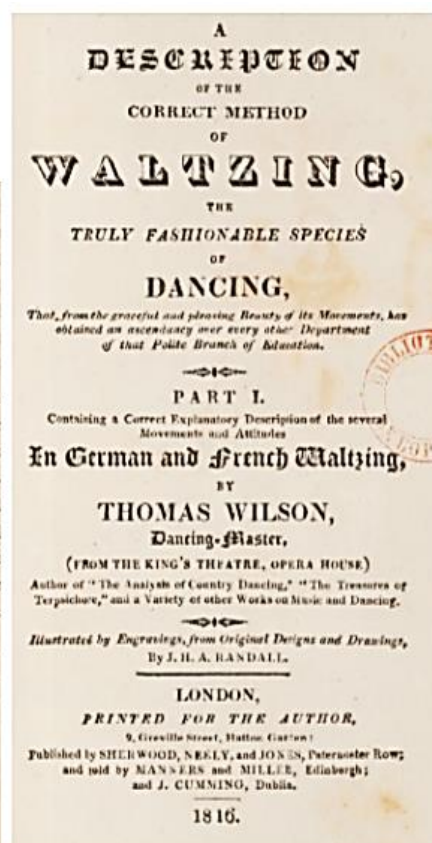
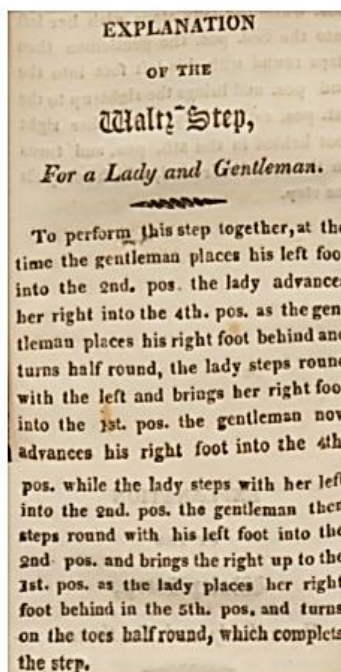
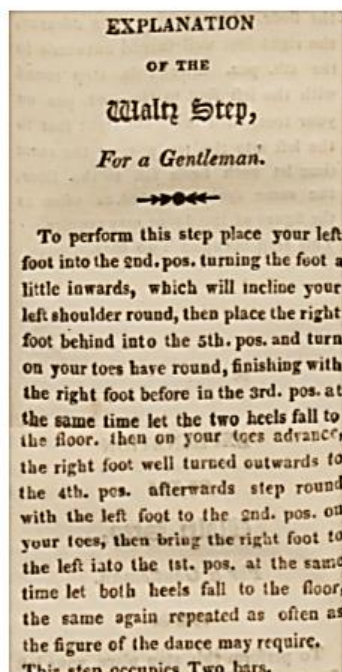
By 1816 the Waltz had become relatively mainstream, at least for English society balls. Anti-waltz sentiment still existed of course, John Stoddart's opinions as editor of *The Times* newspaper have already been commented upon. His outrage was felt across the country as numerous provincial newspapers reprinted his anti-waltz tirade, he publicly (*The Times*, 16th July 1816) referred to the Waltz as a dance for "prostitutes and adultresses" and stated that "we feel it a duty to warn every parent against exposing his daughter to so fatal a contagion"!

Pro-waltz sentiment also abounded including the wonderful poem published in *The Star* newspaper on the 5th July 1816 (see Figure 7). It documented a waltzing experience at London's fashionable Argyll Rooms in which several features of the early Waltz emerge, they included the changes in tempo that we've seen in earlier descriptions and also the expectation of dizziness for the dancers; a key line reads "Quicker now, the ladies cry / They rise, they twirl, they swing, they fly / Puffing, blowing, jostling, squeezing / Very odd, but very pleasing". The waltzers on this occasion evidently approved of a tight embrace, the wide elbow embraces of 1811 perhaps having been dropped. Figure 7 also includes a poem published just two weeks later in Ireland, it offers a very different perspective on the Waltz.

The Irish anti-waltz poem forewarns that the partners one meets in a Waltz may have something other than matrimony on their minds, the poem shockingly ends with the line "He might look for a mistress, and not for a wife"!

Figure 8: Waltz manuals

Waltzing with Masters



Instructions for Spanish Dancing, Edward Payne, 1818 Description of Waltzing, Wilson, 1816

1816 was the year in which the dancing master Thomas Wilson published his *A Description of the Correct Method of Waltzing* (see Figure 8). This important text documented much of what is known about the technical aspects of dancing the early Waltz. Wilson published it as *Part I*, he evidently intended to publish a sequel; I know of no evidence that he actually issued that follow-up volume. He did document an intention of explaining his Waltz Country Dances in a companion work, I suspect that's what he'd intended the Part 2 document to be; this second volume may have remained unfinished and unpublished however. *Belle Assemblée* magazine in 1817 published the opinion that "no one has brought the Waltz to such perfection in this country as Mr. Wilson", a testimony that reflected the significance of his book among contemporary readers.

Wilson was not the only writer to document the Waltz however. Figure 8 includes images from Edward Payne's 1818 *Instructions for Spanish Dancing*. Payne's Spanish Country Dancing was a minor modification to the regular English Country Dance, he'd promoted them from around the year 1815; Payne intended the "Waltz Step" to be used when dancing Spanish Country Dances and he documented his understanding of that step accordingly.

Numerous 'attitudes' or embraces for waltzing existed by the mid-1810s. Figure 9 shows depictions of many of them collected from several different works, together with Payne's 1818 advice that an open hold remained the most appropriate embrace for use in genteel company.

A letter was published in the *Chester Courant* newspaper in 1817 (4th February 1817) that adds further detail to the story of the Waltz; a correspondent wrote that: “There is at Cheltenham, an assembly for the tradesmen's daughters, and buxom country lasses; to which, though the fashionable fair do not attend, you may be sure all the lads of spirit go. When Waltzing first came up, these girls had it introduced there, but, in its adoption, they made, what some may think, an egregious mistake; for after the first round, when the gentlemen had the honour of measuring their waists, they, in their turn, actually gave them a return of the ceremony. Many laughed at it, but I assure you, upon my word, that I approve of it highly; and do sincerely think, that if the gentlemen are so good as to give the embrace courteous, the ladies cannot do less than make the embrace mutual.”. The terms “first round”, “measuring their waists”, “embrace courteous” and “embrace mutual” hint at an entire vocabulary of waltzing that is otherwise lost today, the entire passage hints once again at class and wealth related distinctions over how the Waltz was danced.

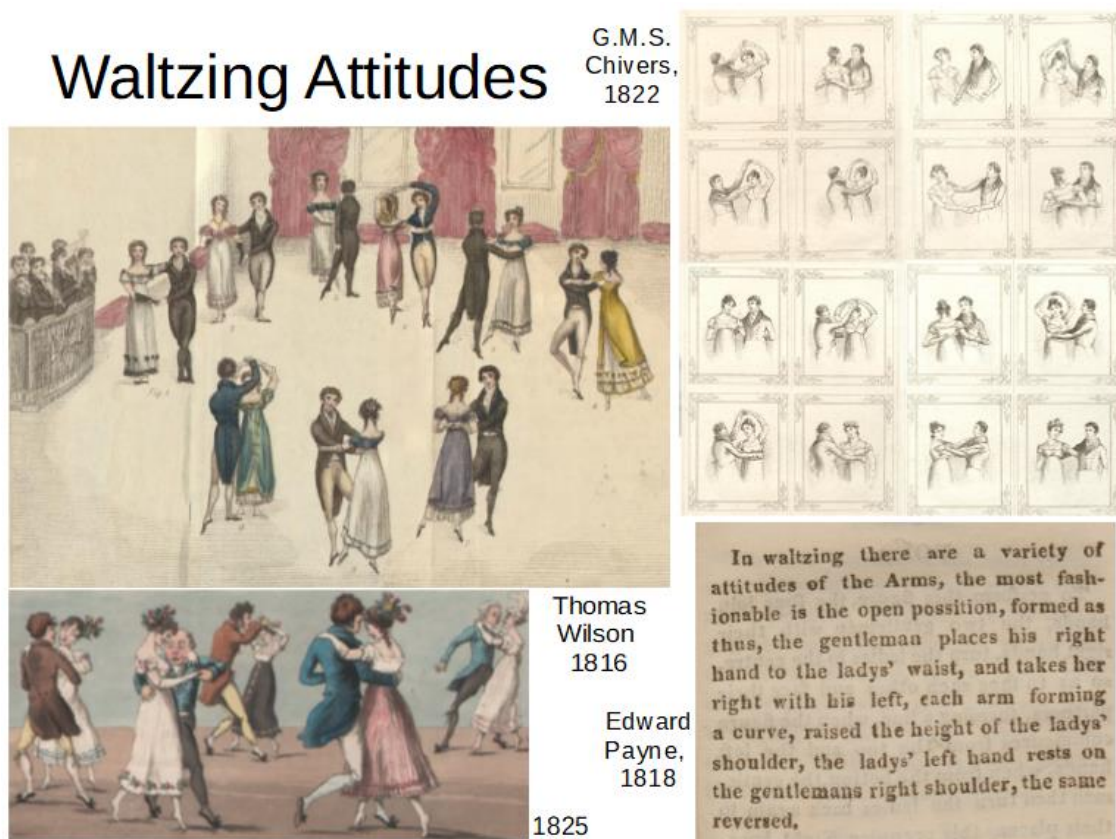


Figure 9 : *Waltz embraces, or “attitudes”*

A variety of hybrid waltz-influenced dances emerged from around 1816, several of which are mentioned in Figure 10. Edward Payne introduced his “Waltz Quadrilles” from perhaps 1816 (he died in early 1819, his precise date of publication is unknown but was probably either 1816 or 1817). Payne also promoted his Waltz inspired “Spanish Country Dances” from around 1816.

Thomas Wilson claimed in his 1821 *The Address* to have invented two new Waltz variants back in 1815 (see Figure 10). The first was his “English Waltzing”, a form of choreographed display dance. He had a troupe of young ladies who would perform a waltzing routine with pauses at key moments in the dance, the dancers would briefly halt whilst forming the shape of a letter, then continue dancing; the successive letters could be combined to form a word. He used this

gimmick in his Valentine’s Day Balls over many years from 1815 onwards, the secret message spelled out the word “Valentine”. I’m not aware of his use of the term “English Waltzing” being adopted by any other dancing masters, it seems to have been unique to Wilson.

The other Waltz variant that Wilson claimed to have invented was the “Waltz Country Dance”. This is a more interesting claim. Waltz Country Dancing (see Figure 10) involved a Country Dancing tune being played in Waltz rhythm with Waltz inspired figures being danced to it. He invented an entirely new repertoire of figures with such names as “waltz double allemande” and “waltz whole pousette”, though precisely what he meant by such terminology remains uncertain. He included examples of these dances in most (possibly all) of the country dance collections that he choreographed from 1815 forwards. A few examples were issued from other publishers but the vast bulk of the extant repertoire of these dances was choreographed by Wilson himself.

Waltz Variants

Waltz Quadrilles,
Edward Payne,
c.1816

Thomas Wilson, The Address, 1821

The following are New Species of Dancing, invented and composed by Mr. Wilson, and correctly taught by him:

THE ENGLISH WALTZING, first introduced at his 68th public Ball, at the Crown and Anchor Tavern, and danced by 46 of his Pupils.

THE WALTZ COUNTRY DANCING, was first introduced at his 69th public Ball, at the New London Tavern.

[These Public Balls were held in 1815]



Example **Waltz Country Dance**, 1815

LE SYLPHÉ 1815. The Figures by Mr WILSON.
Duke of Wellington's Waltz.



WALTZ FIGURE (Each strain with Da Capo repeated to Fine)
Hands 3 & waltz round with 2d Lady; repeat for 2d Gent; waltz whole pousette; chain figure 4 with bottom cu & top; waltz double allemande; thro' bottom join hands & waltz 4 round at top."

"Hands 3 & waltz round with 2d Lady, repeat for 2d Gent; waltz whole pousette; chain figure 4 with bottom cu & top; waltz double allemande; thro' bottom join hands & waltz 4 round at top."



Edward Payne's Spanish Country Dances, from c.1816.

Image is from his 1818 *Instructions for Spanish Dancing*

Figure 10 : Waltz variants

What remains unclear is the extent to which Wilson genuinely invented the Waltz Country Dance; we’ve seen evidence of waltz-turns within a Country Dance as far back as 1807 and Tsar Alexander was reported to have danced something described as a “Waltz Country Dance” in London in 1814. Wilson certainly popularised the format and coined a new repertoire of figures to accompany it, to some extent he perhaps did invent the format, though not in isolation. He wrote of his invention in his 1816 *A Companion to the Ballroom*: “The new species of Waltzing so denominated is entirely of the Authors invention, & being of a more recent date than that given in his last "Treatise on German & French Waltzing" is of course wholly different

from it --- this note therefore is requisite to prevent those who are unacquainted with the various kinds of waltzing from supposing that work to be deficient on this account. --- A Treatise on this new department of waltzing is now preparing for the Press & in the meantime any instruction on this head may be acquired by applying at the authors residence.”.

As time went by the Waltz was increasingly accepted into the English social dancing experience. Figure 11 includes a reference from the holiday spa town of Cheltenham in 1819, it was lamented that the traditional English Country Dance was being forgotten in favour of Waltz and Quadrille dancing.

An extract from a poem published in 1822 can also be found in Figure 11, it offers some rational advice to avoid giddiness when waltzing; the dancer’s eyes should “love the ground”, an expression that resonates with practicality, along with the implied advice to practice Waltzing with a family member.

Figure 11 also includes a passage from the 1860s that reflects back on the introduction of the Waltz at Almack’s Assembly Rooms; Almack’s was the most fashionable of Regency London’s many dancing venues, it’s where the social elite went to be seen. The author of the retrospective wrote: “lo! A revolution in men and manners! The waltz was introduced. Modestly, at first, did young men and maidens, who had scarcely so much as shaken hands, come into contact tender enough for affianced lovers. Deeply did virtuous matrons blush whilst worthy fathers looked in from the card-room with horror on their roseate faces”, it continued: “It is very long since matrons have ceased to blush when they see their young daughters carried off in the whirl of some human teetotum. They blush only, and with resentment too, when their blooming daughters are suffered to sit still.”. That one paragraph of text neatly spans between a time when it was scandalous to dance the Waltz, to a time when it was scandalous to not be invited to dance the Waltz!

Acceptance

The waltz we began with was Lieber Augustin.
 First, Richard and I, like a proper-taught pair,
 Whirl'd round in quick time, clearing sofa and chair:
 One hand firmly grappled his shoulder, the other
 Hung gracefully down, far apart from my brother.
 My eyes "loved the ground," that I might not be giddy:
 How like a Mercandotti spun elegant Liddy!
 Thus, thrice round the ball-room, without pause or flurry,
 I shew'd how we managed those matters in Surrey,

The New Monthly Magazine,
 1822

lol a revolution in men and manners! the waltz was introduced. Modestly, at first, did young men and maidens, who had scarcely so much as shaken hands, come into contact tender enough for affianced lovers. Deeply did virtuous matrons blush, whilst worthy fathers looked in from the card-room with horror on their roseate faces; but being assured that all was right, and that my Lady Sophy Lindamell had waltzed away, first of all with Captain Cutbush, went back again with an air of resignation to their long whist. It is very long since matrons have ceased to blush when they see their young daughters carried off in the whirl of some human teetotum. They blush only, and with resentment too, when their blooming daughters are suffered to sit still.

Recollections of Almacks,
 by "A Chaperon", 1863



Sir, I am sure you will not refuse to give a place in your paper to the humble femonstrance and petition of an ill-treated family, of genuine British origin: and in this seat of Mirth, Harmony, and Good-humour, where the natives of the principal portion of the king's domains live together like members of one family; I hope your readers will view with pity and compassion the case of three injured sisters: and that the formal Quadrille and inamodest Waltz, shall no longer be suffered to drive from their recollection, their old favourites, THE IRISH, SCOTCH, and ENGLISH COUNTRY DANCES.

c.1817

Cheltenham
 Chronicle,
 18.11.1819

Figure 11 : Waltz acceptance

Another commentator of 1829 (*London Standard*, 13th July 1829) referred to the introduction of the Gallopade dance to English ballrooms, they satirically commented that it would have an adverse affect on marriages: “the insidious gallope (some say gallopade, but we prefer gallop) has triumphed over the waltz” ... “for it is acknowledged that since the introduction of dances which require the whole attention of the performers, and, above all, place partners at a considerable distance from each other, marriages have decreased in an alarming degree”. The comment was only an ironic joke of course; twenty years earlier the moralists were concerned that the Waltz would destroy English society, by 1829 a new dance was threatening to do the same thing by displacing the Waltz! Over the course of some twenty or so years the English had completely fallen for the charms of the Waltz.

Figure 12 depicts the timeline of major events that we’ve discussed throughout the early history of the Waltz in England, spanning the first arrival of the term c.1780 to achieving ubiquity c.1820. It’s often stated that the Waltz was unpopular during the Regency period, and it’s true that for many it was, but history is not that simple: there was no binary switch toggled on the 1st January 1820, or at the Coronation of George IV, that made the Waltz acceptable. The introduction of the Waltz was a social movement, there are trends to consider; even the terminology itself varied in meaning over time – a Waltz of 1800 was not necessarily the same as a Waltz of 1815, a Waltz at The Crown & Anchor Tavern was not necessarily the same as a Waltz at Almack’s Assembly Rooms, a Waltz with an open embrace was not necessarily the same as a Waltz with a tight embrace. So yes, the Waltz was indeed shocking, perhaps even scandalous; but it was also warmly embraced and widely enjoyed. The anti-waltz rhetoric of

Stoddart and Byron may have influenced the modern perception of the early waltz to a greater extent than it achieved amongst contemporary readers – many daughters of good parents evidently were waltzing during the 1810s, they can't all have been forbidden from doing so!

Figure 12 : *Waltz time-line*

English Waltz Time-Line

- c.1780-1800 the word 'Waltz' arrives in the English musical lexicon
 - It describes a form of music in triple time, references are rare pre-1790
 - Features in Country Dance collections from c.1790
- c.1800 the **Waltz** couple dance arrives
 - Early commentary is mixed, but often disapproving
 - Tempo changes and turning are important, 'morality' is associated with tempo
 - Some features in common with the earlier Allemande dance
 - More significant musical compositions are published, waltz dance tuition advertised
- c.1805 The Prince of Wales (future King) is reported to have **Waltzed**
 - Waltzes routinely danced at society balls, Brighton Pavilion, etc.
- c.1807 first unambiguous use of a **Waltz** turn within a Country Dance
- c.1811 the **Waltz** dance remains controversial
 - But "A ball is no ball unless waltzing is introduced" (Brighton); medleys are danced
 - Both popular and genteel waltz variants exist, it's also danced by the 'inferior orders'
- June 1814 the allied sovereigns **Waltz** in London at numerous Balls
 - The waltz is widely associated with the Tsar's state visit and Russian influence
 - An early reference to 'Waltz Country Dances' mentions the Tsar's visit
- c.1815 first 'Waltz Country Dances' are published by **Thomas Wilson** 1828
- c.1816 the **Waltz** couple dance still increasing in popularity
 - Though the (overtly political) editor of *The Times* famously disapproves
 - *Thomas Wilson* publishes his book on the Waltz, promises a sequel
 - A multitude of embraces and steps are in use, the open hold is fashionable
- c.1820 the **Waltz** & Quadrille are preferred over Country Dancing
 - At least in the elite Assemblies



"They didn't approve of The Scandalous Waltz during the Regency." Erm, yes, but it's not that Simple! There are trends, contradictions, complexities... it was a social movement.

References:

References to source material are provided in-situ. Images of historical newspapers are provided courtesy of the *British Newspaper Archive* and are copyright of the *British Library*.

