

“Calling the Tune and leading a Merry Dance” part 12 - The Irish Equation, continued again.

Peter Ellis



The only other very early dance with an Irish connection that's possible during the Regency period is the Irish Trot that is mentioned in the Sydney Gazette of 1803. A dance by this name extends back to the Playford collection, but it has not been possible to find out what the dance was at the time of settlement in Australia. The nearest is by Thompson in the 1760s and I've located a tune of the 1780s. Thady You Gander is not the Irish Trot of 1803, its configuration more likely of a collected folk dance of nearly 100 years later. The major immigration of Irish to Australia is after the Regency period when the triple minor dances had largely vanished.

It's worth noting the Irish emigrated from Ireland in droves to escape extremely hard times, particularly during and following the potato famine of the 1840s and it is said one third of our population was Irish. Their arrival in Australia didn't necessarily end up with the promised land; the conditions of the environment, as to all settlers, extremely harsh and unfamiliar compared to European climate and soils. Also, a good percentage of emigrating Irish were Protestant. It's also worth noting a large proportion of convicts on the first fleet, although English were second or third generation Irish descent. But what made it worse, this is my personal opinion, to be Catholic and to be Irish was to attract further disadvantage and persecution under the British dominated scheme of order and regulations of the day. Ladies' advertisements in newspapers seeking a suitable partner with the view of marriage frequently had the footnote – *'no Irishman need apply'*.

In the picture on page 2, it is the First Set of Quadrilles, a part 'buck set', that the Kelly Gang are dancing at the Glenrowan Inn just before the siege and final shoot-out in 1880. It is the 4th figure of the First Set that is illustrated by publishers Alfred May and Alfred Martin Ebsworth 17th July 1880 (State Library of Victoria, La Trobe Collection) and film producers should take note of that. This picture is also reproduced in the Australasian Sketcher, 13th July 1881 and held by the Mitchell Library of NSW. Note also the vis a vis (opposite male partner) to the line of 3 appears to be filling in with a bit of 'stepping'. From Nell Challingsworth's "Australia's Dancing Heritage" – **'The Dance at Glenrowan Inn before the fight'**:-

'Between 12 and 1-o'clock on Monday morning one of Mrs Jones' sons sang the Kelly song for the amusement of the gang. Most of the prisoners were then cleared from the front parlour and the gang had a dance. They danced a set of quadrilles, and Mr Mortimer, brother in law of the school master, furnished the music with a concertina. Ned Kelly had the girl Jones for a partner, Dan had Mrs Jones and Byrne and Hart danced with the male prisoners.'



Illustration courtesy the State Library of Victoria, La Trobe Collection. A/S17/07/80/168 Image No. b50933

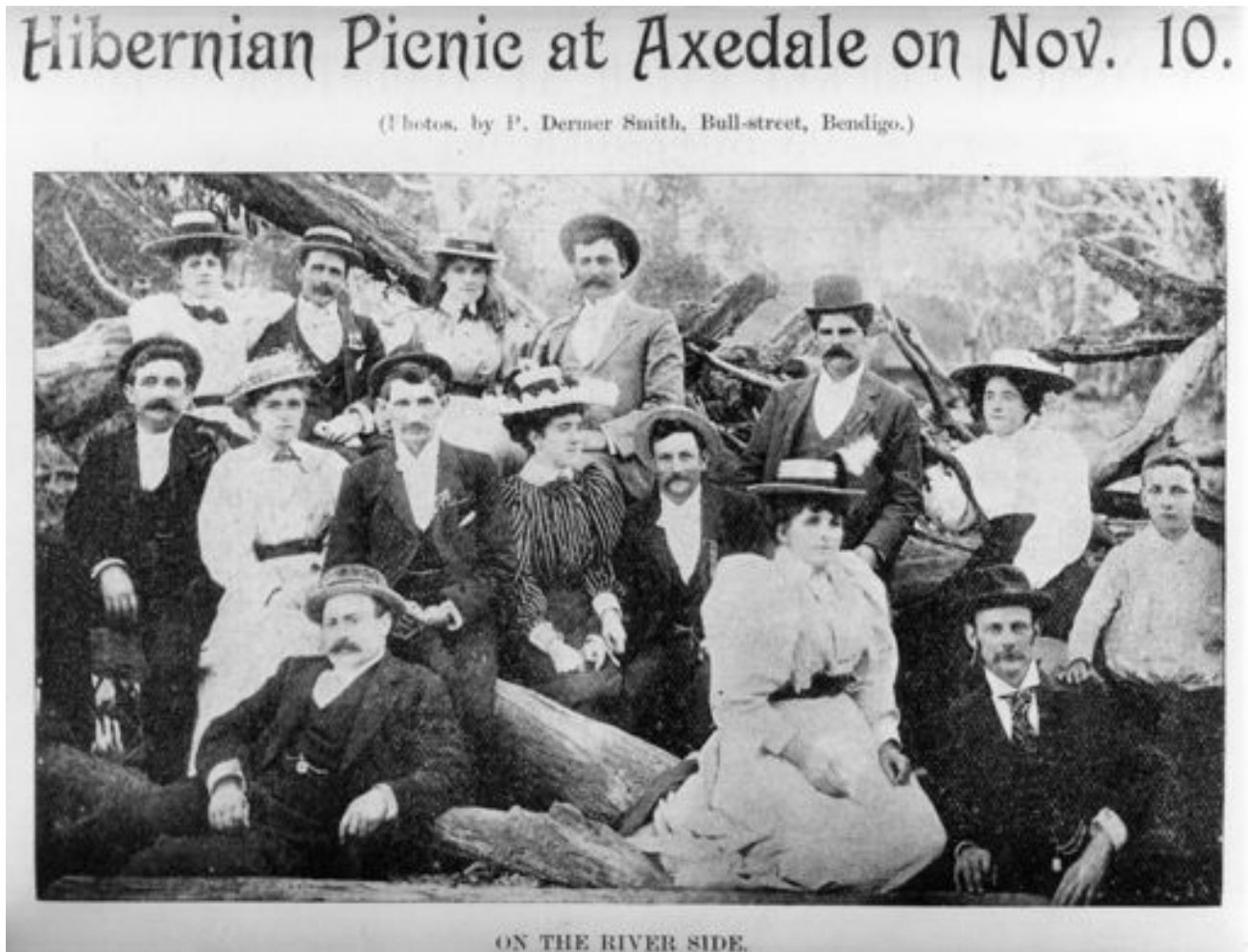
There is no doubt in my mind that Ned Kelly was a victim of persecution which led to his bushranging notoriety or infamy, depending on which side of the fence you choose. Today his popularity soars over time and the identification of his remains at the very moment brings his history to the fore again. His 'Jerilderie letter' remains testimony of his character and intellect in my view. The Kelly family were singled out and driven to the brink by the unprincipled and discriminatory hierarchy of 'justice' of the times. Yet there were also Irish in the constabulary that were players against the Kellys. Dave de Hugard points out all in the bush had a rough time surviving and has this to say:

“My understanding of horse and cattle theft during the time of Ned Kelly was that everyone was into it - the squatters and the battlers. The difference was that the battlers tended to be alienated from the legal system even when it could have been used to their advantage. This meant that that they tended to seek retribution in kind. The squatters however invariably prosecuted and were prepared to spend whatever it took to get a result. From the perspective of the battlers the Law appeared to side with those with money - and it undoubtedly did in any case. The squatters were also invariably interested in increasing the size of their holdings and there was also continuing resentment over various aspects of the Free Selection Acts. Another way to put pressure on the poorer selectors around the place was to impound straying stock (horses and cattle) - as fences hardly existed. Having continually to pay the pound fines was another device to threaten the fragile existence of the poorer selectors. Consequently there was no great love lost between these two different sections of the bush communities. This was the social scene within which Ned grew up. He was a superb horseman, game, proud and protective of his family and a natural leader of men. Something was inevitably

going to happen. Fitzpatrick of course was 'the rat', the catalyst that set the whole end game into motion."

At the time of writing Ned Kelly's remains from Pentridge Gaol in Melbourne have finally been identified and the Victorian Government after 131 years has agreed to Ned's wish that he be buried with his family near Glenrowan (this would be an unprecedented act on behalf of the authority).

Despite all the difficulties the Irish were successful in Australia and demonstrated their loyalty quite proudly and rightly to Irish traditions through their family and Hibernian gatherings.



Hibernian Picnic Axedale (Vic.) Nov. 10th 1897 from the Bendigonian.

Although little in dance as 'original Irish' could or seemed to have been introduced into the general Australian mainstream culture, the Irish contributed a number of great dance tunes to the Australian aural repertoire and many of the folk songs of hardship and endurance have come from Irish sources. The Wild Colonial Boy, Bold Jack Donahue, Maryborough Miner and the Catalpa are just some examples. Then there's the more light hearted songs such as Drover's Dream from Killaloo (although Killaloo is originally from an English broadside) and Bullockies' Ball from Finnigan's Wake. It should also be taken into account that many of the Irish jigs and reels were also in publications of the day such as Kerr's, Chappells, Booseys and Mozart Allen's and Australia had its own flourishing music publishing industry which included tunes such as the Irish Lilt and Connaughtman's Rambles as well as Irish themed quadrilles with jigs and reels for the likes of Erin Go Braugh, Donnybrook, Knights of St. Patrick, and the Royal Irish Quadrilles, respectively. The Orange and Green Quadrille

music in the Roche Collection is likely from the same origins. Many of the aural musicians learnt these tunes second hand from the sight reading dance bands as well as those Irish musicians who were teachers. Daisy Sutton of Wedderburn learnt the Irish Lilt, her party piece, from an Irishman - Ted Noonan; he provided her with the notation from Kerr's Music and Daisy changed it from key of A to G, this important observation detected by Alan Musgrove.

The Royal Irish Quadrilles from 1849*, despite the elite connotation provided a mark of show for the Irish and was very prominent on Australian dance and ball programmes after the middle nineteenth century. This set of quadrilles (the First Set to Irish music) provided for a tremendous selection of Irish jigs and reels as the theme during the night. Jullien's selection was Fig 1 'The Sprig of Shillelah, Fig 2 The Girl I Left Behind Me, Fig. 3 Nora Creina, Fig 4 The Irish Washerwoman & Fig 5 Paddy Will You Now. There were many other arrangements; Harry McQueen of Castlemaine had Bill McGlashan's 1st. figure tune, but also converted things like the Wild Colonial Boy into 2-4 or 6-8 according to his whim as well as sourcing Phil the Fluter's Ball and McNamara's Band. The Irish Washerwoman always his finali for the last figure. Variations of the 'Perfect Cure' have been collected for the lead up figure in the First Set, namely from Lindsay Carr, as well as for the 3rd figure of Bill McGlashan's, handed on by Harry McQueen.

When times had changed by or following the 1940s it was the Pride of Erin that took its place for Irish sentiment, even if the dance was arranged in Edinburgh and the tunes (songs) generally of Irish-American origin. The Irish nevertheless were extremely fond of these as were most Australians. Incidentally, it was the **centenary of the Pride of Erin in 2011**. Come Back to Erin and When Irish Eyes Are Smiling are the classic signature tunes, but many others such as Nelly Kelly, Sweet Rosie O'Grady, The Stone Outside Dan Murphy's Door, Where The River Shannon Flows & The Mountains of Mourne are amongst the repertoire. Sometimes Scottish tunes like Loch Lomond, Bonnie Doon & Annie Laurie are selected by the Old Time Bands. Folk bands tend to adapt more genuine Irish tunes such as For Ireland I'd Not Her Name, South Wind, Planxty Irwin, Spinning Wheel and Slieveramon.

In summing up, the dances the Irish knew during the major immigration to Australia in the Colonial period might have included the reel of three, reel of four and eight hand reel, but were generally the popular ball-room dances of the time, not only throughout Britain and Ireland, but the Western World of the day. The Irish had many of their indigenous tunes that had become coupled to these dances which they brought out to Australia as well as the universally very popular tunes. The dances overwhelmingly were the quadrilles (First Set & Royal Irish, Lancers, Caledonians and Waltz Cotillion) and couple dances of the likes of the Waltz, Polka, Schottische, Varsoviana, Polka Mazurka and Highland Schottische. For individual items at dances and balls they excelled at their native jig and step dance. These were on programmes quite regularly. We also had the Fitzroy and Exions quadrilles, Parisian Quadrille, Prince Imperials, Polka Quadrille and waltz figures in the Alberts including the Spanish waltz and Mazurka.

Heather Clarke also provides the following information:-

'There are a number of step dances for which I have found references as being danced in Australia, particularly Garryowen and Erin go Bragh which were danced on the goldfields though no instructions are available. An important part of the tradition is displaying individual skill and ingenuity which is not something easily recorded.'

Certainly an occasional country dance such as the Haymaker would have survived a long time and a special version of the Highland Reel under another 'Irish Jig' name might have been known in the Celtic settled districts such as Carisbrook and Maryborough Victoria. It may have utilised fancy jig steps within the 'reel of four' to Irish tunes. It is vaguely described in Lovenberry's Ithaca Dance

Manual of 1884, Brisbane, and Ellis Rogers has made an interpretation of this for me.

Although by the turn of the century the quadrilles at home would have taken on Irish stepping and a certain individuality on the one hand, the Gaelic League caused much of this to be obliterated or to have gone 'underground'. It is possible, as with Kath Hughes' 1867 descriptions of the dances, that in fact the overall figurework of quadrilles was similar enough to that throughout 'the Empire' at the time of settlement in Australia.

Queen Victoria's two sons George and Albert visited Australia in 1881 and they were partnered respectively in a double set of quadrilles in Sandhurst (Bendigo) by two of the councillor's wives. All knew the same version of the Quadrille, nobody would want to put a foot wrong in this circumstance; but whilst it might have been Sandhurst society of the time in one sense, they were simply citizens of the day. I doubt (outside of England) it was much different elsewhere - in the Colonies at any rate. This quote is from the Bendigo Advertiser re July 6 1881:-

“The ball in honour of the Princes’ visit took place in the Corn Exchange.The music was exceptionally excellent, nearly the full strength of Mr. Monaghan’s band being engaged. As the Princes and Governor, accompanied by the Mayor and most of the councillors, entered the room the National Anthem was played. The opening quadrille was then formed, the first set being composed as follows: - Prince Albert Victor and Mrs.Clark, Prince George and Mrs.Bayne; vis-à-vis His Excellency the Governor and the Mayoress, and the Mayor and Mrs.Holmes. Sides – Cr Clark and Miss Hayes, Cr Bayne and Miss Holmes, vis-à-vis Cr Jackson and Miss Bayne, Cr Sterry and Mrs.Burrowes.”

Note the First Set (of Quadrilles) is the ceremonial dance, whether for the opening of a Royal visit ball or the finali for the Kelly Gang.

I believe the major changes and versions of the Australian quadrilles came after the jazz era of the 1910s and 20s during the 'old time' revival of the 30s. Apart from ignorance in terms of the 'modern ballroom teachers' in reviving these, there was also a 'folk process' in country districts and a breakdown of formality, with 'swinging on after promenades' etc. I really wonder whether it was greatly different in Ireland that the big changes came following the revivals during and after the Gaelic League and with the same modern revivals the Irish also liked. Nevertheless our Melbourne St. Patrick's Day illustration of 1881 clearly shows the 'Irish style' and this is well before the influence of the Gaelic League. With reference to the Gaelic League Pat Murphy provides the following information about the first céilí that was held:-

“It was a bit ironic the first public céilí ever was held in London's Bloomsbury Hall in 1897 organised by Fionán MacColum, the Scottish secretary of the Gaelic League in London. In his own description of this céilí, he says that the dances performed on the occasion included 'sets, quadrilles & waltzes to Irish music.”

I'm inclined to think this indicates the general dance repertoire of the day. It is likely the reference to sets is not in the contemporary Irish view and coming from a Scotsman meaning, more likely reels, quadrilles and country dances. But I could be wrong.

Terry Moylan points out that the development of some quadrilles in Ireland was obviously of independent Irish origin:-

“The idea that there was one episode for the introduction of quadrilles into Ireland is obviously simplistic. So too is the idea that they remained the preserve of the gentry for an extended period. William Hammond, in his dance manuals "Call the Set No 2" and "Call the Set No. 3" (Cork Folk Publications, 1990 and 1994), provides a good overview of the dispersion of the form through

Ireland, especially Munster. For instance as early as 1817 a Cork dance teacher, Miss Escher, was advertising that she could teach the fashionable dances, including Quadrilles and Waltzes, and there were at least four others in Cork at the same time offering to teach the dances. It is true that there are accounts of the quadrilles taking 70 or 80 years to reach certain areas, but there is no reason to suppose that these were not exceptions rather than the general rule". "If further hints as to Irish elaborations of the quadrille idea into new dances were required, it could easily be found in the proliferation of sets, particularly in Munster, that have no equivalents in the standard quadrille repertoire, and are not versions of the 'First Set' or the Lancers. The story of the Knight of Glin instructing the dancing masters in his territory to teach the new dances (quoted by Breathnach) is supported by the existence of these dances. It seems that they not merely adopted the form, but created new dances on the model."

Note in Australia we had several more popular quadrilles than just the Lancers and First Set and this might have applied to Ireland as much as anywhere in the colonies.

Certainly the two hand reel, three part reel, four hand reel and eight hand reel are dances the Irish may have brought out to Australia from the very early period. Although there is a Scottish link with these dances and the Gaelic League tried to eliminate them as of not of Irish origin, they would certainly be characteristically Irish. If they had been brought out here and survived they would have been included amongst dances of the Australian tradition. I have located some Australian newspaper references indicating they must have been well enough known. These vary from one which seems to be thumbing the nose at the police and a similar account in which it may have been a humorous send up - to others in stage or dance competition, but also some that are obviously referring to a ball or social dance circumstance.