

“Calling the Tune and Leading a Merry Dance” Part 13 - The Irish Equation, conclusion & Contemporary Interpretation of the Country Dance

Peter Ellis



Continuing from Paart 12, these are the Australian newspaper references in relation to the Irish three-handed reel & four-handed reel.

Two indicate they were known in the British tradition, so not necessarily exclusively Irish, on the other hand it may have been a show of support by Royalty for the Irish in the same way as the Scotch Reel was a show of support for the Scots. I'll leave you to make up your own minds on situation, but here are the references:-

The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser Tuesday 8th November 1836

‘Police Incidents’

*Kate Hoy, Maria Hely, and Ellen Gorman, were charged with bolting and becoming remarkably funny, which caused them to dance a **three-handed reel** in George-street, to the amazement of*

folks returning from Church, after a little trouble and a short chase they were secured.

The Empire (Sydney) Friday 9th January 1852 “The Goldmines Turon River”

*Most of the miners be-took themselves to their ordinary avocations on New Year's Day, but a goodly number assembled on the hill above Sofala to witness , the horse-racing which took place there. The hill is pretty flat on the top, and making all allowances, formed a tolerable course. The publicans had transferred their licenses thither, and between canvas and boughs, made a passable fit out for the day. In one booth, a crazy fiddle, and a dilapidated tambourine attracted an attentive, and, I need hardly add, a thirsty audience! In another, desperate attempts were made to execute **four-handed reels** and country dances to the inaudible music of a flute in a clamorous company, which had hardly room to stand, let alone dance.*

The Mercury (Hobart) 20th February 1863 ‘Oatlands Petty Sessions’

*On the night of the 12th instant the attention of witness was called to the defendant's house. Witness went inside and saw a man playing a triangle, and three women dancing a **three-handed "reel"** to the tune of that instrument, in front of the bar (Laughter). The defendant was not present, but his wife*

was behind the bar, which was full of people. William Exton, Superintendent of Police, corroborated the testimony of the previous witness, and added further that he saw the dancers change places two or three times in the "reel." (Laughter). Cross-examined: Witness had not seen dancing in any other public house in the town- ship since he had held office.

Empire (Sydney) Tuesday 15th January 1867 (The Duke of Edinburgh at the Cape of Good Hope and his intended departure thence for Adelaide direct)

*A Royal Prince who has so little regard for the aristocratic buckram of the colonies as to entertain the company at a ball by dancing the highland fling, may expect that the members of our Cabinet will also unbend a little, and, in honour of so illustrious an example, exhibit their saltatory skill in a hornpipe, or at least in a jig or a **four handed reel**. There would be some heartiness in this, and it is evident that the Duke is not coming out to Australia in the expectation of witnessing ceremonies in rivalry of those of Buckingham Palace or the Tuileries. The lively recreations in which his Royal Highness seems disposed to indulge, and no doubt would be pleased to see others indulging, might appear rather grotesque if attempted in gold laced coats and swords, and it is to be feared that some of the dancers would come to grief.*

The South Australian Register (Adelaide) Thursday 24th October 1867
(From the *Anglo-Brazilian Time* July 23rd) 'The Royal Ball at Rio'

*The Princess Imperial's dress was of white satin, covered with tulle, trimmed with scarlet roses, and she wore these flowers likewise in her hair. Her jewels were pearls and diamonds. The dancing commenced at 10 o'clock, the Emperor and Empress opening the ball. After a few sets had past Prince Alfred introduced his Highland piper, who played with his great bagpipes round the room, to the delight and equal astonishment of the Brazilians. His Royal Highness then volunteered to perform in a Scotch reel, which was executed with the proper spirit, to the great gratification of every one of the audience that it attracted. At the supper the Emperor arose, and in the most joyous and heartfelt manner proposed the following toast :- "Ladies and Gentlemen" I want you to unite with me in drinking the health of Queen Victoria, the dignified object of our veneration; also, of all the British residents, who deserve our hospitality for their energy and activity in promoting the happiness and prosperity of this country.' After supper the dancing was resumed, and the Duke of Edinburgh joined in a **four hand reel** with some ladies and officers, which gave such pleasure to the witnesses that the cry of "Encore" burst involuntarily from the lips of many of them, and nothing can exceed the impression which the British Prince has left on the hearts of the Brazilian and other guests of the evening. The management throughout the ball was excellent.*

Empire (Sydney) Saturday August 21st 1869 'The Flaneur in Sydney'

*"Rule 'Britannia," "Hail Columbia," and "Partant pour la Syrie." Such are the inspiring airs which I would fain hear reciprocated by the ships now lying in Farm Cove, and my heart, like that of the benevolent Mr Samson Brass, would be "a singin' comic songs within me;" for I wish well to "the three parties forsooth." and should very much like to see them dancing a **three-handed reel**. As to the British flag, and the ships over which it floats, long may they flourish;*



Contemporary Country Dance of 'Bush Dance' in the Coorong – Colonial Ball, National Folk Festival 1990s

Kalgoorlie Western Argus Thursday 14th April 1903 United Irish League.-*The usual monthly meeting of the Boulder branch of the United Irish League was held in the Friendly Societies' Hall, Burt Street on Sunday evening, and the attendance by far surpassed all expectations. Many ladies and children were among those present and thoroughly enjoyed the various items on the programme. After the reading of correspondence and leading articles from newspapers on the Home Rule question recitations were nicely rendered by Messrs. Lynch, B. Scott. T. L. O'Toole and G. Wiles, and some fine dancing was done by Messrs. Commerford and Staley. Mr McKay, whose rendering of "Killarnev" was a musical treat was followed by two ladies and gentlemen who wound up the evening's programme by a **four part reel**, which stirred up old memories of a happy long ago with many a one present.*

The important factor of course is that Irish dance has been nurtured in its various post Victorian era forms and enjoys major worldwide patronage. Ellis Rogers states the 'High Caul Cap' is one of the best square set dances ever invented; there is also information (Brendan Breathnach) that is it older and predates the Gaelic League as well as surviving the Gaelic League. Ellis also highly recommends the Sweets of May (as do I) and the Eight Hand Jig to his readers.

From the last issue - * Jullienn's music for the Royal Irish Quadrille in August 1849 '*Composed expressly for the Dublin Promenade Concerts also at the Grand Balls given at the Viceregal Lodge Dublin in honour of the visit of Her Most Gracious Majesty, Queen Victoria, to Ireland Augt. 1849 ... and re demanded by Her Majesty on each occasion ...*'

I tried to locate details of this ball and in correspondence with the then 'Keeper of Printed Books' Dónall Ó Luanaigh of the National Library of Ireland; he sourced newspaper accounts of the day

only to find the ball was never held. It was at the peak of poverty in Ireland with the potato famine and there was considerable unrest in Dublin. The ball was cancelled and Queen Victoria whisked off to a substitute event in a private house. This Royal Irish Quadrille, also known as the 'Hibernian Quadrille' had very different published figures (Seaton's Ball-Room manual London 1864) to that which were popular in Australia as the First Set to Irish music. One variation also has a diagonal form from the Mallee which I collected. It is with all couples dancing at once, tops with the sides to the right, then with the sides to the left and repeated where necessary.

Just as I've completed this series on the Irish Equation the following information has been sent to me by Chris Brady of England:-

The long expected new recording from The Assembly Players is now out and available. It is "A Neal Ball", comprising twenty tracks from "A Choice Collection of Country Dances" published in Dublin c1726 by John and William Neal and republished some years back by George Fogg and Rich Jackson. Full details, including price, list of tracks and 30 second samples of all tracks are to be found on my website:

www.nicolasbroadbridge.com Nicolas B., Lanark, Scotland. I referenced Neal's publication of 1726 in the first section of the Irish Equation and Ellis Rogers made the point the dances would really be English country dances published in Ireland. Nevertheless the Dancing Masters may have taught some of these in Ireland and they could have become 'Irishised' as already mentioned. For anybody interested, this recording could be a tremendous asset.

“Contemporary Interpretation of the Country Dance”

The Jane Austen series of films has certainly added to the interest of the broader Regency Period and I think provides a good overview of the nuance of the era, but keep in mind producers of films take an excessive amount of 'license out of historic context'. Ellis Rogers had this to say:-

“Mr Beveridge's Maggot, which is the main dance in Pride and Prejudice, with Colin Firth, was chosen because the producer liked the tune. The dance would have been 60 to 80 years out of date by that time. In the film the dance is walked, rather than danced with steps, because the actors had to speak while dancing and could not be out of breath. The film of Sense and Sensibility, with Emma Thompson, probably gives a better impression of a Regency ball which includes cotillions.”

Also in the film series, 'Wives and Daughters', is a very good dance scene in which the dancers actually use a variety of dance steps and the costumes for the era are very accurate. However the dance figures have been dressed up from folk dance collections by Cecil Sharp some 80 years or more after the Regency and therefore not accurate as by that time the waltz, galop, polka and the revival of the ladies chain in the quadrille had considerable effect on any derivative dances. As mentioned by the Regency Period over 27,000 dances had come and gone. Referring back to these sources can be extremely confusing. There are totally different selections of figures for the tune referenced by the various publishers or in the case of Wilson in the same book or period. In the earlier Playford era from a century earlier the dances were tune specific and by the end of the Regency there was a settling out and consolidation back to tune specific dances. Whilst many were different, as with the numbers of examples in the manuals, there are also a significant number of cases when the dances with the same name are either the same or resemble each other very closely. As with the twentieth century, the latest and most fashionable were those dances sought each season although there were also favourites that lasted and may have been more representative of lower class repertoire.

Changes and New Country Dances

To a large degree we really don't have much information on what the lower classes in Britain were

dancing at the time, but generally the Industrial Revolution had caused much of the rural population to be bundled into the cities and it seemed the newer dances taught by the itinerant dancing masters or 'dancies' were more to the repertoire than any surviving village dance. The village dances might have their own particular tunes, but in other districts different dances to those same tunes. There is no evidence of English Village dances and folk traditions such as from Northumbria being transported to Australia in contrast to the fashionable dances popular in the English Ball-Room. The fashionable dances from Europe had an immense popularity in Britain but in comparison to the Scots and Irish the English in particular seemed to quickly discard their native country dance. The triple minor longways for as many as will was largely abandoned.

The Quadrille, Waltz, Galop and Polka had a profound effect on changes to Country Dances or any new forms by and after the 1840s. The Gallopade Country Dance survived to within living memory (1950s) in England and Scotland from over half a century earlier (at least) and incorporated the Galop step and revived Ladies' Chain via the Quadrille, but does not appear on formal ball programmes. This perhaps supports the theory Country Dances lasted a lot longer in informal, family and district dances and possibly Scottish and Irish traditions lasted quite some time in these circumstances. Generally the only country dances to be included on ball programmes in contrast were the Triumph, Circassian Circle, Sir Roger de Coverley, Spanish Waltz (the newer Waltz Country type) and the Scotch or Highland Reel (Foursome). The new Highland Reel and the similar Dashing White Sergeant maintained the 'reeling between three people' as in the style of the old Scotch or Highland Reel, but arranged in the newer Swedish Country Dance progression of three facing three. Circassian Circle had appeared by the 1830s and was generally based on the first figure of either the First Set (Quadrille) or the Caledonians Quadrille; however there were other possible combinations and one that is particularly good is no. 5 described in the Ithaca (Brisbane) Ballroom Guide (The Australian MC by Lovenberry) of 1884 in which the Galop is introduced in part of the figure. La Tempête also appeared about the 1830s and was said to combine the sociability of the Country Dance with the cheerfulness of the Quadrille.

The Ladies' Chain figure introduced into some of the new Country Dances generally came more directly from the Quadrille although Ellis Rogers examples earlier use in some of the French Contredanses and Cotillons from 1760. Also the complexity of snowballing of progression of the old Country Dance eventually gave way to a simplicity of figures, often with all dancing at once in sets limited to between four and eight couples and the top couple finishing immediately at the bottom of the set and led by the next couple and finishing in four to eight sequences relative to the number of couples.

The progressive Sicilian circle was another newer innovation allowing all couples to dance at the same time. The 6th or last figure of the First Set (The Quadrille) was adapted by joining up all sets in a circle round the hall in what became known as the Australian 'Bullring' or 'Stockyards' and sometimes danced singularly in its own right and sometimes under the older figure name of 'Flirtation'; so called because of the continual changing of partners. Originally this progression would continue until back to original partners and the band would switch into waltz time for a 'waltz the hall' finale. I.e. all couples separating out and waltzing round the hall in what became known as the 'Circular Waltz' (Old-time Waltz). This was based on the old rotary waltz and should not be confused with the modern Country Dance known as 'Circle Waltz'.



An old country dance, possibly the 'Stockyards' at the "Colonial Muster" National Folk Festival 1990s

Many more country dances are listed in the manuals from mid-nineteenth century as well as the tunes in the music albums. They probably only occurred as occasional variety at the dancing master's assembly rather than at a ball and even more likely at the special Caledonian and Hibernian events. It is also likely they were taught at schools as an aid towards social dancing and it is well known children often practised the social dances such as the various quadrilles in the school yard.

Of course the dancing teachers always maintained more interesting variety at their private assemblies in comparison to the public dance or ball. Pop Goes the Weasel was one of the new novelties that lasted a season or two mid-nineteenth century. The Ball-Room Manual of Mr J. Seaton of 1864 (London) held by the Gulgong Folk Museum was owned in 1870 by Catherine Cohen of Uarbry NSW. This manual describes all the well-known quadrilles and couple dances of the day as well as some of the more exotic including the Queen's Quadrilles (Royal Victorias), Hibernians (Royal Irish), Spanish Quadrilles, Original Mazourka Quadrilles, Galopede Quadrilles, Original Polka Quadrilles and many others.

Significantly, a number of Country Dances & Reels are also described, including:- The Princess Royal (Air The Girl I Left Behind Me), Duchess of Leinster's Favourite (Air Rory O'More), Lord Burghersh's Favourite (British Grenadiers), Her Majesty's Favourite (Air The Triumph), Prince Albert's Favourite Country Dances (1 and 2), Polka Cotillon, Polka Country Dance, the Duchess of Sutherland's New Highland Reel (danced at the latest Caledonian Ball at Almack's), and Highland Reel. Likewise, in 1884, the 'Ithaca School of Dancing' (Brisbane) or the 'Australian MC & Dancers Inquire Within', lists most of these same dances as well as Petronella, Nancy Dawson, Long Live

The Queen, Dashing White Sergeant (an earlier longways form), Queen's Welcome, Flowers of Edinburgh, Scotch Reel, Irish Jig, Torrieburn Lasses, Triumph and La Minuette.

The newer country dances are those which provided the basis for the somewhat erroneously titled 'bush dance revival' over a hundred or so years later in the 1960s and 70s. In contrast the Carisbrook Annual Farmers' Ball (near Maryborough Victoria) of 1874 gives us an overview of what a real ball programme in the bush might consist of. Apart from the usual Polka, Quadrille, Lancers, Waltz, Caledonians, Polka Mazurka, Waltz Cotillion, Parisian Quadrille and Varsoviana are the Scotch Reel, Circassian Circle, new Highland Reel, Irish Jig, Spanish Waltz, Sir Roger de Coverley and an unnamed Country Dance on the programme. It provides the best possible example we have of a mix of old and new dances of the period for a rural farming community in the bush.