

Teaching Notes: English Country Dance

Country dances are a type of dance that were danced both by country folk and in courts beginning in the late Renaissance and continuing into the 18th century. They have a number of steps in common, but each dance quite often has steps unique to that dance. Country dances in general are an evolution of the bransles, and have some steps in common with these dances. Country dances originated in England, and later spread to Germany and France.

Introduction

Teaching Notes

Line, Square, and Round Dances

None of these dances are particularly complicated, and most of them can all be taught to beginners.

In particular, the 4, 6, and 8 person circle dances, such as Heart's Ease, Rufty Tufty, and Jenny Plucks Pears are the simplest to teach. The line dances and some of the more complex 4 person dances (such as Argeers) are better suited to people who have been dancing for a while.

Don't underestimate the amount of time it takes to teach one of these dances to absolute beginners. I can normally teach one of these in 15 minutes or less to a reasonably experienced SCA class, but as a benchmark it took me approximately 1 hour to teach a bunch of complete newcomers how to do Jenny Plucks Pears.

Repertoire

I have included only a short repertoire of English Country Dances in this book. The dances include a sampler of each type of dance, including circle and line dances, in the order in which they should be taught. It should be relatively straight forwards to teach more of Playford's dances starting with this sampling.

Playford and The English Dancing Master

Primary Sources

There is really only one primary source for Renaissance country dances and that is *The English Dancing Master* (renamed *The Dancing Master* after the second edition), by John Playford. Over 500 country dances are listed in total in the 18 editions that were printed, most of which contain music.

Other Sources

Del's Dance Book contains reconstructions of several more English Country Dances that are not contained in this book. It is relatively simple, however, to reconstruct these dances from the original source – it is reasonably easily available both in hard copy and on the internet, and it is in English.

Lesson 1: Basic Steps

Singles and Doubles

SL -- Single Left Step with the left foot and then bring the right foot together to finish with feet closed. This step takes 2 beats.

SR -- Single Right As above, but start with the right foot.

DL -- Double Left Step with the left foot, right foot, and left foot, and finally with the right foot to finish with feet closed. This step takes 4 beats.

DR -- Double Right As above, but start with the right foot.

Singles and doubles can all be done either forward, backwards, or to the side, which specifies the direction of travel during the step. Thus, a side single left is a step to the left with the left foot and a step with the right foot to bring the feet together. These steps are notated as follows:



Step	Forward	Backward	Side
Single Left	SLf	SLb	SL or SSL
Single Right	SRf	SRb	SR or SSR
Double Left	DLf	DLb	DL or SDL
Double Right	DRf	DRb	DR or SDR

Sides

Side Left This step is done with partners facing each other. There are several ways to do this step. The one described below is from Raoul-Auger Feuillet's *Recueil de contradanses*, printed in 1706, and is the earliest description of siding that has been found.

SLf towards your partner, bringing your right shoulders into line, then SRb into place, then SRf, bringing your left shoulders into line, then SLb into place again.

Side Right As above, except starting to the right instead of the left.

Arms

Arm Left

This step is done with partners facing each other. Each takes partner's right arm at the elbow and walk around partner with a DL, DR to walk a full turn back to place.

Arm Right

As above, but join left arms and walk a DR, DL back to place.

Set and Turn

TL -- Turn Left

Make a full turn (360°) over the left shoulder with one DL.

TR -- Turn Right

Make a full turn (360°) over the right shoulder with one DR.

STL -- Set and turn Left

Do a side single left, then a side single right, then do a Turn Left (SL, SR, TL).

STR -- Set and turn Right

Do a side single right, then a side single left, then do a Turn Right (SR, SL, TR).

Heart's Ease

A square dance for 2 couples. Start holding hands with partner and facing the other couple.

Verse 1

1 - 4	DLf	To meet the other couple
5 - 8	DRb	Away from the other couple
9 - 16	DLf DRb	As above

Chorus

1 - 4	DRb	Away from partner
5 - 8	DLf	Towards partner
9 - 16	Arm Left	With corner
17 - 20	DRb	Away from corner
21 - 24	DLf	Towards corner
25 - 32	Arm Right	With partner

Verse 2

1 - 8	Side Left	With partner
9 - 16	Side Right	With corner

Repeat the chorus.

Verse 3

1 - 8	Arm Left	With partner
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9 - 16	Arm Right	With corner
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Repeat the chorus.

Rufty, Tufty

A square dance for 2 couples.

Start holding hands with partner and facing the other couple.

Verse 1

1 - 4	DLf	To meet the other couple
5 - 8	DRb	Away from the other couple
9 - 16	DLf DRb	As above
17 - 24	STL	Facing your partner and dropping hands
25 - 32	STR	

Chorus

1 - 4	DLf	Away from the other couple, dropping hands and turning back to face the other couple at the end of the double
5 - 8	DRf	Towards the other couple
9 - 12	Turn Single	Turn away from partner, end facing away from partner, join hands with corner
13 - 20	DLf DRf	As above, but with corner
21 - 24	Turn Single	Turn away from corner, end facing partner

Verse 2

1 - 8	Side Left	With partner
9 - 16	Side Right	With partner
17 - 24	STL	
25 - 32	STR	

Repeat Chorus

Verse 3

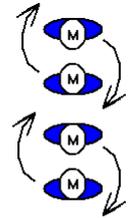
1 - 8	Arm Left	With partner
9 - 16	Arm Right	With partner
17 - 24	STL	
25 - 32	STR	

Repeat Chorus

Lesson 2: The Hey

Heys

Many Playford dances include a hey, but the number of dancers, number of beats, or the actual figure may differ. However, there are features common to all heys. Basically, a hey is a figure in which dancers pass by each other in a set number of counts. Passes are done alternating sides, so if the dancer passes first to the right, the next person will be passed on the left., and, generally, all dancers end the hey in their original places.



Positions for Hey

One common hey is for four people, starting in a line as shown in the diagram. Beginning by passing right shoulders, the dancers pass each other alternating sides until back in place. When the top or bottom is reached, the dancer circles around an imaginary person and winds up facing down the line to pass the next person. Therefore, each person will pass someone 8 times (including imaginary passes at the top and bottom of the line) before returning to position. This hey is used in *The Merry Merry Milke Maids* and *Goddesses*, among many other dances. Other heys tend to be similar in style.

Hey for three

A hey for three people is also quite common. In this case, the two bottom people are both facing upwards, and the top person is facing down the set. The first two people swap, and then the first person finds himself in the second person's place, and swaps with the third person.

This continues in the same way as a four person hey, so that everyone returns to place.

This hey is used in *Grimstock*, and other dances.

Other Heys

A circular hey for 8 (known as the double hey) is used in the last verse of *Goddesses*. Similarly, the last verse of *Wooddicock* has a circular hey for 6, and *The Old Mole* has a circular hey for 6 done twice (a double double hey!). To do these heys, have the top (and bottom, in an 8 person hey) couple face each other, while the second and third man face each other, as do the second and third lady. Simply continue the hey progressing around the circle until you get back to place.

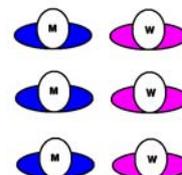
Chestnut contains half of a hey, in two places. This is a hey for 3 that finishes half way through, with the first man in the third man's place, and vice-versa (the second man will have returned to place).

Picking of Sticks contains a hey that can only be described as "weird". I think it proves that hallucinogenic drugs were available in the 17th Century.

Grimstock

Starting Position

This is a line dance for 3 couples.



Verse 1

1 – 4	DLf DRb	Double forwards and backwards
5 – 8	STL	Face your partner, and set and turn left.
9 – 12	DLf DRb	Double forwards and backwards
13 – 16	STR	Face your partner, and set and turn right.

Chorus 1

1 – 8	Hey	The first couple begin a hey by going between the second couple, and around the outside of the third couple, and so on back to place. Essentially this is a hey for the 3 men, and a hey for the 3 women, both done at the same time, but in mirror image.
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Verse 2

1 – 4	Side L	Facing your partner, side left.
5 – 8	STL	Set and turn left.
9 – 12	Side R	Side right.
13 – 16	STR	Set and turn right.

Chorus 2

1 – 8	Hey	The second hey is the same as the first hey, except that the couples remain holding hands while doing it. The first couple goes into the middle under the second couple's arms, then over the third, and so on back to place.
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Verse 3

1 – 4	Arm L	Facing your partner, arm left.
5 – 8	STL	Set and turn left.
9 – 12	Arm R	Arm right.
13 – 16	STR	Set and turn right.

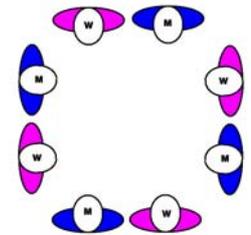
Chorus 3

1 – 8	Hey	The third hey is the same as the first hey, except that the top couple swaps places before beginning it, and crosses over again at the bottom of the set so that the man and lady come back up their own side. The second and third couples do not swap.
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Lesson 3: Simple Circle Dances

Gathering Peascods

A circle dance, for as many couples as will. Dancers begin the dance holding hands.



Verse 1

1 - 8	SDL SDL	Two doubles to the left.
9 - 12	TL	All drop hands and turn over your left shoulders
13 - 20	SDR SDR	Join hands again and go 2 doubles to the right.
21 - 24	TR	All drop hands and turn over your right shoulders.

Chorus

The chorus repeats throughout the dance.

Part A

1 - 12	Men circle	Men step forwards into the center of the circle, join hands, and slip left around the circle to finish in original position.
13 - 24	Ladies circle	Ladies repeat above

Part B

1 - 4	Men DLf into the center of the circle, meeting in the middle, and clapping on the third beat. ¹
5 - 8	Ladies repeat the above while the men DRb to original position.
9 - 12	Men DLf into the center, clapping on the third beat while the ladies DRb to position.
13 - 16	Men DR back into position, turning over the right shoulder.
17 - 20	Ladies DLf into the center of the circle, meeting in the middle, and clapping on the third beat.
21 - 24	Men repeat the above while the ladies DRb to original position.
25 - 28	Ladies DLf into the center, clapping on the third beat, while the men DRb to position.
29 - 32	Ladies DR back into position, turning over the right shoulder.

¹ Different groups clap on either the third or fourth beat of the measure. Neither is incorrect, so do whatever is common in your area.

Verse 2

1 - 8	Side Left	With partner
9 - 12	TL	
13 - 20	Side Right	With partner
21 - 24	TR	

Chorus

Repeat Chorus, except that the ladies begin and end the sequence

Verse 3

1 - 8	Arm Left	With partner
9 - 12	TL	
13 - 20	Arm Right	With partner
21 - 24	TR	

Chorus

Repeat Chorus, with the men beginning and ending the sequence.

Lesson 4: Set Dances

Merry, Merry Milkmaids

A line dance for 4 couples, starting facing the front of the hall.

Verse 1	1 - 4	DLf	Towards the front of the hall
	5 - 8	DRb	
	9 - 16	STL	Facing partner
	17 - 24	DLf, DRb	As above
	25 - 32	STR	Facing Partner
Chorus 1	1 - 4	DLf	1st and 3rd couples double forward to meet partner
	5 - 8	Slips	1st and 3rd couples slip down the line to occupy positions held by 2nd and 4th couples. Even couples move up the line to 1st and 3rd positions.
	9 - 24	Spins	1st couple joins hands and spins in place, falling back to 2nd position in line at the end. 3rd couple do likewise, falling back to 4th position.
	25 - 48	As above	2nd and 4th couples repeat above, ending back in original positions.
Verse 2	1 - 8	Side Left	With partner
	9 - 16	STL	Facing partner
	17 - 24	Side Right	With partner
	25 - 32	STR	Facing Partner
Chorus 2	1 - 8	Men cast	1st man casts off and goes to 4th man's position, with the other men following, ending with the line inverted.
	9 - 16	Women cast	As above
	17 - 24	STL	Facing partner
	25 - 32	Men cast	1st man casts off and returns to position, others following
	33 - 40	Women cast	As above
41 - 48	STR	Facing partner	
Verse 3	1 - 8	Arm Left	With partner
	9 - 16	STL	Facing partner
	17 - 24	Arm Right	With partner
	25 - 32	STR	Facing partner
Chorus 3	1 - 24	Men's hey	Single hey for the men, as described in step introduction
	25 - 48	Women's hey	Single hey for the women
