

Fiddle Tune History

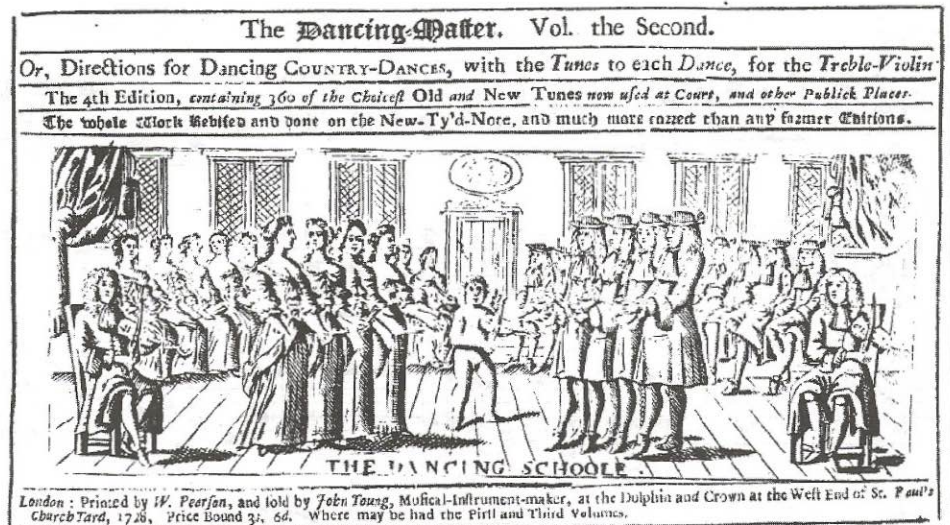
By Andrew Kuntz

Surviving Playford

Many will be familiar, at least by (the last) name, with the English publisher John Playford (1623-1686) and his son Henry (1657-c. 1707), who published a long-running series of volumes under the title *The English Dancing Master* from 1651 to 1728. These volumes were manuals for country dancing and included instructions for performing popular dances of the era, “longways” (parallel lines) and circle dances. The basic dance forms are familiar to anyone who has engaged in modern contra-dancing or in English country dancing.

Who were the Playfords? John was, quite simply, a publisher and bookseller, whose business was in trading in books to meet the demands of an audience that was interested in the social pleasures of music and dancing. Although one supposes he must have been well-trained in music, there is no record of either him or his son being musicians. John, who was born in Norwich, apprenticed at age sixteen to publisher John Benson, with whom he stayed for about eight years, from 1639 to 1647, learning the trade. The times in England were tumultuous. The same year John began his apprenticeship, portions of Scotland revolted over religious issues, a rebellion that continued to wax and wane for some time. In 1641 the Irish also rebelled against English rule, which again proved to be a protracted struggle. Finally, Parliament, beset by pressures internal and external, and stressed by religious differences with a Catholic monarchy, went into open revolt against Charles I in 1642. During the latter years of John’s apprenticeship the country was in the midst of the English Civil War, pitting the Parliamentary forces, of which Oliver Cromwell emerged as the leader, and the Royalist forces loyal to King Charles Stuart — the Roundheads versus the Cavaliers.

How could such a momentous conflict not engulf a young man? John had Royalist sympathies, and, while he apparently did not take up arms he was working as a war correspondent of sorts, presumably funneling information to his master John Benson for publication. John was captured by Cromwell’s men, and, while he was not executed or imprisoned by the Roundheads, he did receive stern instructions to amend his sympathies along with his ways, and to consider a change of career. Playford heeded the warning, and as his apprenticeship ended, he forsook reporting and established himself in London, where he opened a shop on the porch of Temple Church to sell music. First erected by the Knights Templar (hence the name), the Temple church was actually a grand complex that included gardens, courts, and halls, which had gradually become secularized. Law professors who worked in the area began to rent space in it, and by the 1600s James I granted control of the complex to their societies. As a retail location near an educated, cultured population who might be consumers of social dancing, the Temple area was probably ideal.



Meanwhile, Cromwell consolidated power and in 1648, after a final defeat of Royalist forces (who had managed to align themselves with Scottish forces, to no avail), Parliament tried and executed Charles I, and England became a republic. The next decade saw Cromwell dissolve Parliament to become the Lord Protector of Britain, after which he crushed Ireland in a vicious war. They were difficult years politically and militarily for many in and out of the country, but there were also significant social consequences to the struggle. The Protestant ascendancy reacted strongly to the perceived social excesses of the ruling classes, and quickly acted to enforce austerity and sober, deliberate thought and action. Indeed, one might recall the Puritans and the “Puritan Ethic” in America as a model (the Mayflower generation was in its hey-day in Massachusetts). In fact, it was the Puritans who closed English theaters in 1642. Christmas or yuletide celebrations were frowned upon and curtailed.

It is somewhat curious then, that John published his first important work, *The English Dancing Master*, in 1651, at the beginning of the Cromwellian decade. It basically is an instruction book for social dance. Dancing, if not outlawed outright, was frowned upon by many as a source of unnecessary frivolity at best, and a dangerous dark seduction of the young at worst. Why did Playford think his volume of dances and airs would prove profitable? Was it simply his old Royalist sympathies bleeding through in his shop on the church steps, or a literary protest? Whatever the case, *The English Dancing Master* found a ready (if discrete) audience, and Playford must have been encouraged, for several similar volumes quickly emerged from his press, including *A Musical Banquet* (1651), *Catch that Catch Can* (1652 — a lovely pun of a title, for a catch was a song sung in a round, for several voices), *Musick's Recreation on the Lyra Viol* (1652), a tutor for the cithern (a type of early guitar), and a general music tutor. His *Choice Musick to the Psalmes of David* (1656) may have been a sop to those in political power, perhaps because he was having some success in printing and selling more “seditious” volumes and needed to retreat a bit.

In 1658 Oliver Cromwell died and was succeeded by his son Richard as Lord Protector, a decidedly poor choice who was quickly overthrown by the army. Parliament was reconvened as the governing body of England, but it, too, displeased the army,

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Seamus Ennis and Elizabeth Cronin sang the “kettle” lyric to this jig, for example. If a lyric is “married” to a tune, then “What would you do if you married a soldier” is definitely in a polygamous relationship!

What does this have to do with Playford? Let’s trace back a bit the primary “Frost Is All Over” tune from the first example, the one which concerns us. The melody is common in modern Irish collections from the mid-20th century on, and even some North American ones, as it is a good vehicle for contra-dancing. Its ubiquity attests to its popularity in modern times, although it is associated with the Irish repertoire. Most of the time it appears as a two-part tune, although a three-part version was played by the late Kerry accordion player Johnny O’Leary, picked up by Cork accordion player Jackie Daly for his band Patrick Street. Under the title “The Frost Is All Gone” the jig appears in the first volume of the printed music collection of the Roche brothers, compiled in the early 20th century.

The melody also has a history in America. “Owl Creek” is a title for the melody in fife repertoire, perhaps named for an early settlement in Ohio. In the 1930s “The Praties Are Dug and the Frost Is All Over” appears in country dance tune lists from Orange County, New York, and Sam Bayard collected it as an untitled cotillion from Pennsylvania fiddlers in the same decade. In 1921 one of the first sound recordings of the tune was made in New York by County Sligo fiddle master Michael Coleman. It was recorded again in 1923 by the trio of Chicago piper Tom Ennis, fiddler Tom Quigley, and piano player John Muller, and yet again in 1928 by the Flanagan Brothers. All were released on 78 RPM in the United States. English collector Peter Kennedy printed the tune with the baffling title of “American Dwarf” in his 1951 *Fiddler’s Tune Book*, but gives no source information. What the title refers to is unknown.

alternate title “The Dancing of the Rabbits in Honan’s Garden,” after a local Doolin man who owned a field north of Fisherstreet). The plethora of alternate titles are interrelated and embedded in the words associated with the melody — sets of ditties, really, rather than lyrics:

What would you do if the kettle boiled over?
 What would I do but fill it again.
 What would you do if you married a soldier?
 What would you do but follow the drum.

or, these, sung by Mrs. Anastasia Corkery in the 1930s, collected in Pennsylvania by Samuel Bayard:

What would you do if you married a soldier?
 What would you do but carry his gun?
 What would you do if he died in the army?
 What would you do but marry again?

or, these, sung by Johnny Moynihan of the group De Danann:

The praties are dug and the frost is all over,
 Kitty lie over, close to the wall.
 What would you do if the kettle boiled over?
 What could I do but fill it again?
 What would you do if the cows eat the clover?
 What could I do but set it again?
 What would you do if you married a soldier?
 What could I do but to follow the gun?

Singing the above with the melody one understands how these lyrics were powerfully associated with the tune, for, as has been suggested by others, the repeated mono- and bi-syllabic words mimic exactly the tripleted (6/8) melody. This may have been a kind of “mouth music” to diddle the melody sans instrument, or a mnemonic to help a musician recall the tune. If the latter, it didn’t quite work, for the same lyrics are powerfully associated as well with another — unrelated — jig melody that often goes by the title “Paddy’s Return” or “Young Tim Murphy”:



The “Frost Is All Over” tune also appears in Irish collections of the 19th century, and here things start to get interesting musically. Collector George Petrie (1789-1866) collected the melody with the “Frost Is All Over” title in County Armagh in the first half of the 19th century, appearing in print in 1855 (and again in 1902 in the *Complete Petrie Collection of Irish Music*, edited by Charles Villiers Stanford). Both parts of Petrie’s Armagh version are substantially the ones heard today in Irish sessions. Another version was collected by Irish antiquarian Patrick Weston Joyce (1827-1914) from an earlier collection by William Forde, who compiled his manuscript around 1840-50. Joyce printed the tune in his *Old Irish Folk Music and Songs* (1909, No. 516) as an untitled air in the key of F major. The first part is pretty much the familiar “Frost Is All Over” melody, although the second strain is a different one than is usually heard — actually, the form of Joyce’s melody is AABA (if each four-bar line is labeled as a part), which is a common traditional song structure, and since he (or Forde) labeled it as an “air” we must assume that it was sung. Finally, a version appears in the manuscripts of a third great Irish 19th century collector, James Goodman (1828-1896), a Church of Ireland cleric who was an Irish-speaker and an uilleann piper. Goodman collected from traditional musicians in County Cork and elsewhere in Munster, and also obtained tunes from manuscripts and printed sources. His melody, called “D’Imthig an Sioc” (The Frost Is All Gone), is an unusual setting in which the B part is cognate with the

The Frost Is All Over

Musical score for 'The Frost Is All Over' in 6/8 time, key of D major. The score consists of three staves. The first staff begins at measure 1. The second staff begins at measure 6 and includes a repeat sign. The third staff begins at measure 13 and ends with a double bar line and repeat dots.

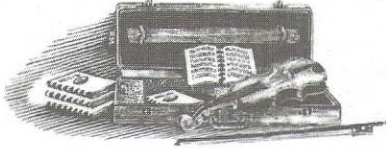
Hey to the Camp

Musical score for 'Hey to the Camp' in 6/8 time, key of D major. The score consists of three staves. The first staff begins at measure 1 and includes a fermata over the final note. The second staff begins at measure 6 and includes a repeat sign. The third staff begins at measure 13 and includes a fermata over the final note. Fingerings '2' are indicated above the final notes of the first and second staves.

Untitled Air

Musical score for 'Untitled Air' in 6/8 time, key of D major. The score consists of three staves. The first staff begins at measure 1. The second staff begins at measure 6 and includes a repeat sign. The third staff begins at measure 12 and ends with a double bar line and repeat dots.

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standard tune played today, although the A part is completely different. The only time "The Frost Is All Over" appears in 19th century American collections is in *Ryan's Mammoth Collection* (1883), printed by Boston publisher Elias Howe. It does not appear in earlier Howe publications, to my knowledge, and thus may have been introduced to the firm by William Bradbury Ryan, an employee.

The "Frost" tune does not appear in Irish

publications earlier than the 19th century. However, it appears in Lowland Scottish and English publications throughout the 18th century, albeit under a different name entirely, "Hey to the Camp." It's a curious title, at least to modern ears. A "hey" was another word for "meander," and referred more specifically to a type of dance movement in which two lines of dancers weave past each other in single file in opposite directions. It's a common movement in English country dancing, and derivatives of it remain in contra and square dancing in such movements as the Grand Right and Left. Why would one hey to a camp, and what camp might be referred to is unknown. It hardly seems to refer to a military camp, although that's possible, but undoubtedly some sort of impermanent location is to be understood. Whatever its meaning, the melody was popular as a jig for 100 years, and appears in publications from Gow's *Complete Repository* (Part 2, 1802), to Oswald's *Caledonian Pocket Companion* (Book VIII, c. 1755), to London publisher John Walsh's *Compleat Country Dancing Master*, both 3rd and 1st volumes (1731 and 1718, respectively).

Which leads us, finally, back to the Playfords, for the "Hey to the Camp" title first appears in the second supplement of Henry Playford's 7th edition of the *English Dancing Master*, published in 1688. It also appears in subsequent editions of the work, occasionally elaborated. Curiously, "Hey to the Camp" is not the primary title in the 1688 supplement, but rather the second, alternate title, the first being "The Mask." This suggests that the tune was an older one that had two primary names attached to it when it was harvested from tradition by the Playfords. Indeed, the two

titles (same tune) have separate entries in *Dancing Master* editions 11 through 16 (1701-1716). The "Mask" title probably refers to the Masque, a form of courtly entertainment popular with the Elizabethan and Stuart courts. The masques had begun as costumed balls around a theme, and costumed guests would be invited to perform a dance in front of the company, after which they would invite the spectators to join them. Later, professional stage designs and speaking and singing parts were added to the dance, making the event pageant-like and of high drama. Often classical or allegorical stories were used as themes, sometimes with political overtones to the times. Both Henry VIII and Charles I performed in masques at their courts, and courtiers regularly participated. Popular especially at Christmas and weddings, the Masques could sometimes degenerate into revelry, sometimes unruly — in 1605 one post-masque banquet "was so furiously assaulted that down went tables and trestles before one bit was touched."

The Cromwellian era had, of course, put a stop to all this. It is true, however, that the masque as an entertainment had long since peaked to be replaced by English semi-opera developed by John Dryden and composer Henry Purcell. It is perhaps for this reason the "The Mask" title did not survive Playford, while his "Hey to the Camp" survived.

[Andrew Kuntz is the author of a book of old time songs and tunes called *Ragged But Right* (1987) as well as the on-line tune encyclopedia "The Fiddlers' Companion" (www.ibiblio.org/fiddlers). When not researching tunes, he enjoys playing in Irish music sessions.]

The Mask

