

Isle of Wight Country Dances

“Plenty of noise, chatter and dancing so everyone can catch the news.”

“Dances repeated during a session with variations”

“Stepping different for each dance- skipping, wide legged, Nippert Walk, strides, heels, dips to beat.”

“Some dances just known, others dances set in a story and called.”

“Music from violin, oboe, serpent, drum, ocarina, a cappella sing and respond, bagpipes and whistle.”

“Lively Playford, local dances, round dances in every village, waltz, polka, mazurka and standards were all used”

“Carole Dancing is seen in all the villages and towns across the Island.” Circle progression left (clockwise). Step left followed by right closing to left. Hold hands waist or shoulder height. Many lyrics and tunes survive. Main singer then all sing. Sometimes a group of instruments.

“Stories, songs, gossip, jokes, party pieces, food and drink, stone jars, cracked nuts and oranges with some gambling in the nave or hall.”

“Dances imitating work, animals and life similar to some Morris dances.”

“Many a day ends in an engagement, a Saacy Jig or an early morning walk”

The IOW Schools' Country Dance Festival was held on the bowling green at Carisbrooke Castle. Common dances were the Maypole, Pat a Cake Polka, OXO Reel, Carole dances and Circassian Circle. Other dances could have been Pop goes the weasel!, Off she goes!, Rose Dance, Scarf Dance, The Merry Milkmaids, Ring Dance, Season Dances, Daffodil Dance, Elfin Frolic, Gnomes Revels, Dance of the Autumn Leaves, Sleigh Bell Dance, Shepherds Dance, Court Fan Minuet, Crinoline Dance with Parasols, Return of Spring.

Many of the Country Dances we take as traditional were developed in the 1920s and 1950s to 70s. We decided to create some from various bits. They were termed Country character dances. Some we picked tunes for or wrote new ones but that list has been lost. I played some on the concertina and I do remember playing the Bat Reel and Oak Apple Day. Thanks to the adults and children of Newchurch and other villages for ideas.

Some would be a little risky today and would need modification. Blowing a kiss instead of kissing, cheeks not actually touching etc. They were not finished and would need a young fresh faced inventive caller to give them life and some fun musicians to add a tune! We played in the Black Velvet Band for many years where we mixed standards with European dances.

Here are the rough notes we made back then. They would need to put into standard 32 / 48 bar and A & B formats. Many standard movements such as hands around, back to back etc. need to be added. The band would have been the church band but today a good mix of instruments including brass, island pipes, serpent would be great!

Red Squirrel Waltz

Circle. Forward and back, hands held high in the air and then low.

Face partner, blow up cheeks and pop, swing round and move on arm in arm, bibbing from side to side together. At the call 'chase' the whole circle follows leader through the 'forest' for one length of the tune, then dance continues.

Style: Alert, looking all round, hands close to the body.

The Fogo Jig (The bad smell jig)

Long ways set.

Forward and back. Nose - ear sequence. Right hand on nose, left hand on right ear, then left hand on nose, right hand on left ear and keep swapping in time to the music.

Pass through couple at top arch - go through had on nose - "You smell like a pig. You smell like a pig. Let's dance the Fogo Jig".

Style: General look of disgust, looking to see where it came from.

Pitzaa Polka (Saw Pit dance)

Free dance Pairs Jerky polka. Calls to do the following:

- A. Hold partner's hand sawing motion. One high, one low.
- B. With other partners saw across.
- C. In lines to make long saw holding elbow.
- D. Hand clapping sequence (to clear dust) - clap close to side of hand, left then right, then behind.

Leave floor at regular intervals to have a drink to get the dust out of your throat and then join in again.

Rattle Trap Polka (Noisy Cart Dance)

Circle dance.

Into centre and back.

Form spokes of wheel - couples join other couple with men's hands in centre, move in one direction. Row of 4.

Make noises - squeaks, bang ground, whistles.

Couples can ripple up and down as if hitting large stone.

Couples dance round room to form circle again.

The Mottistone March (A favourite of the Lord)

Big circle with partner, facing round room, men on inside - or long set outdoors in garden.

Move forward eight out and in with partner.

Twirl with partner backwards and end facing the way you started.

Face partner and rub ankles and lower calf with partner's right foot, then left.

Flourishing bow and pass lady on to next partner.

Style: Fun for the younger people and those with a rakish eye. Elegant but enjoyable.

Newtown Randy Polka (The Fair Dance) Newtown and Yarmouth had books relating to markets, customs, fairs etc An interesting area for research.

Free Polka with couples - heel and toe polka both slow and fast.

Cheek to cheek.

Music stops to drum roll - cheek to cheek during this time. Cheek to cheek meant stop for a chat or actual cheek to cheek! Carry on polkering when music starts again. Excuse me allowed during drum roll if quick.

Style: Known to carry on 3 days, not continuously but between other events.

Ronk Jig (Growing Strong Dance)

A dance not for the faint hearted but for all ages. Music keeps going, no parts. Strong regular beat. Drum to guide dancers.

Circle around in pairs.

1st time go around holding hands return to original place,

1 Straight arms for one partner, lift and "toss" partner to the centre. Continue with circle.

2nd time arms linked go around return to original place,

2 One partner holds round back of waist so as not to be seen, other partner moves around trying to see partner. Continue with circle.

3rd time arms crossed return to original place.

3 Knee bends and spring in turn with partner. Continue with circle.

Repeat

Billy Bitter Jig (Blue Tit Dance)

A very fast dance only for the nimble. Slower version possible if group older.

Longways and then into circle.

Longways part: Fly past partner and fly back. Hold partner round waist facing her back, rub on her back, swap and rub on his back. Longways set join hands and at ends to swing round into circle.

Circle part: Into centre and out twice, follow round in row with hand on shoulder of person in front getting faster and flutter back into longways set blowing a kiss to partner on the way.

The Dumbledore Dance (The Bumblebee Dance)

A dance with no equal.

Practice Buzz (outer circle) and hum (inner circle) for different sections of dancers.

2 sets of inner and outer circles. Same number of people.

Inner circle makes pattern of flower. Hands interlaced. Moving round.

Outer circle move round swaying in to kiss neck of flower dancers. (men, girls; girls, men)

Free dance around room to form the flower again and so on until swap. Flowers become bees and bees become flowers.

Put upon Polka (1845 style Polka)

'No, no, no, no, no, no' (Women would shout out pointing finger)

Free dance. Stop next to another couple for No, no, no, no, no, no section. Each lady taking in turns.

Men pointing up and down new couple's lady - No, no, by partner. Go off polkering again. Nearer end it turns into Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes!

Rattlemouse Reel (Bat Reel) - minor music

Longways set.

Hold hands - forward and back, arms flapping in rows like a bat. Flap round partner.

Top couple - one flaps down centre scaring the rest - drum section. Other flaps round outside - end up at top.

Both move down to bottom, turning each person and flap in middle.

All flap forward, hands in air before starting again.

Franchiseville Mazurkas (later named Newtown)

Circle dance, no partners at first.

Arms on shoulders, move to left, right leg crossing over 64 steps or longer clockwise.

Back left, leg over 64 steps or longer - several times.

On the drum ladies to middle, gents' hands on hips - 64 steps clockwise.

Ladies chat, point to the men, dance around.

On drum "love may meet", take/snatch a lady, mazurka with her.

Any left in middle circle round.

After a while drum calls to form into circle.

Start again, try your luck with a new lady or catch the same one.

Broad Street Trot (Portsmouth road leading to Isle of Wight ferry)

1. Couples hold hands across.
2. Trot forward and curve 16 steps. Trot back sixteen steps.
3. Hands round partner's waist like shafts.
Trot in and out of set ad lib then back to place.
4. Top couple trot round to bottom, rest follow, make arch, follow through and continue on forward curving different ways.

Step Dances

Formed by rhythmic scuffling and beating of the feet. Could be solo, duo or as a group. A mix of what seemed standard movements and improvisation. Could find no reference to clogging.

The Hulverstone Dance

'There was the sound of the sea and blown kisses in a beautiful garden.' Music slow air.

Longways set (to do 3 times)

Forward to say 'how are you?' and back.

Forward to ask each other's name.

Parade partner up and back.

Set of differing movements to demonstrate times of year.

Spring: Dance away from group to whisper, then back. Light skips.

Summer: Dance away to pick flower and give to lady. With abandon.

Autumn: Dance away to admire and pick harvest fruit. Heavy but with deep feeling.

Winter: Trudge away through snow. Snowballs?

Back into longways set, blow kiss, parade around garden and back into set to continue.

'The men's cod pieces were specially decked with the most wondrous ribbons.'

Oak Apple Day Dance

Boys and girls were bedecked with oak leaves. Each had a small branch in their hand.

Circle dance.

Into centre. Branches up in centre twice. Varies each time.

Turn on return.

Circle breaks off to follow one boy and touch watchers on.

Two boys form arch of leaves for others to pass through and this leads them back into circle.

Shuffle round circle chanting song 'Shickshack Day' or part thereof. Dance starts again.

'It's the 29th May, it's Shickshack Day.'

The Rudder Reel (Shake one's head)

Longways set

A1 Lines forward and back twice

A2 Up to partner, turn and good wiggle with bottom and back to place.

B1 Top couple gallop down middle and back wiggling.

B2 Top couple cast and top couple make an arch at bottom, rest go through.

Shake heads to partner.

Style: Plenty of laughter and pretend pinching.

The Saacy Jig (Wanton dance)

Choose a partner you know well.

Longways set.

A1 Forward and back getting very close, twice.

A2 Woman parades around man in wanton manner.

B1 All men go around woman chosen women in circle with hands round first at height of thighs. Choose next lady circle this time hips height, then waist, chest. Men's hands must not let go until that part of music finishes. Woman stands still.

B2 Polka round into a new place in set - some swapped partners.
This can be reversed later in dance with women going round the men.

Style: 'A chance to test the goods before you buy'.

Children's Puzzle Dances

Circle round both ways - call to form shape e.g. arrow, house (square), cross, hoe/cart
Dancing on the spot - move back into circle 'Puzzle, puzzle, don't get in a muddle'.

Maypole

1. Men
2. Boys
3. Women
4. Girls

As elsewhere but Men & Women's more a chase to get the best partner. Distinctive village patterns. Shalfleet started at bottom. Maypole high, low and movable. Men wore bedecked cod pieces.

Manor Dances

Kingston, Billingham, Merston, Bowcombe, Ningwood, Swainston, Woolverton, Hulverston, Wydcombe, Shorwell, Mottistone. They had many of the standard longways set movements but each house had its own distinctive movement. Danced to a lively mix of tunes.

Nippert Jig

Long line. Simple patterns - forward and back, hands together, with the Nippert quad hand turn.

Ladies' Garland Dance

Pairs carrying arches of leaf and flower.

Interweave garlands to form the flower knot. Entrap a gentleman to feel his piece, continue on to drum, bell and horn. Light skip and thump. Garland line, turn, circle and weave. The flower shake and exchange of flowers.

The Boys' Dances

Groups of boys bedecked with leaves and ribbons and carrying either household, farm or sea objects.

Main movements

- A. Circle and into centre and yell a Saint's name or similar. "Good St George"
- B. Circle
- C. Half go one way round in circle in and out of each other.
- D. Each section follow into crowd or around field, around village, town square. Join up to form circle again.

Varied every time with difficult patterns too hard to follow.

Fizgig Jig

Frivolous women gadding about.

Women take the lead. Ask the men to dance, no refusals allowed. An old maid would call. "It's a fizgig ladies! Try 'em out!" Standard movements, forward and back, star with another couple, etc. 'Swap partners' called.

Devil's Dancing Hour

Nippert dance to the fiddle. A wild fling, arms out, with low moaning sounds, masks used, speeding up and down. Ad lib movements.

Playford and similar

They make their appearance every so often on the island.

Sellenger's Round, Gathering Peascods, Nonsuch, Black Nag, Goddesses, Rufty Tufty, Dick's Maggot, Comical Fellow, Quadrille with fans, Galliard, Minuet, Bransle, Portsmouth etc

Smuggler's Reel

More a mime than a dance. Call outs to say what to do .

Circle - carrying kegs on shoulder, Polka Pouring drink and polka. Light signal fire and Polka and circle, watch for ships then polka, etc finish with circle.

Thanks to IOW WI, Ventnor Library, Newchurch School, Various homes and more. Plenty more work on this!