

Dancing in the Inns of Court

by Cécile Laye

Appearing at the end of the 13th century and still going strong, the Inns of Court are a professional association for barristers and judges, made up of several London establishments, providing training for future lawyers and magistrates, as well as club facilities, and exerting disciplinary functions over its members.

The four main colleges were and remain **Inner Temple** and **Middle Temple** that use buildings confiscated from the Order of Knight Templars, Lincoln's Inn named after Henry de Lacy, third Earl of Lincoln, and **Gray's Inn** associated with the powerful Gray family.

Many well-known names are to be found in the registers of the Inns of Court from the 16th century to present days. Statesmen (Thomas More, Lord Burleigh and Lord Walsingham – Tony Blair and about 15 Prime Ministers – Mahatma Gandhi); writers, poets and explorers (Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins – John Donne and Sir Walter Raleigh); many crowned heads, sometimes honorary members (James II, George VI, Edward VII, the Duke of Edinburgh and Princess Diana). Shakespeare is said to have first played his "Comedy of Errors" in the hall of Gray's Inn, well known for the quality of its shows, as witnessed by "Graies Inn's Maske", the last but one dance published by John Playford in 1651.

From the Middle Ages to the Restoration, the Inns of Court were places of power and influence, training the men who would represent the King in the counties. Their wealth and history were celebrated with yearly festivities, in particular "All Hallows" on November 1st and "Candlemas" on February 2nd. Between Christmas and the first days of January splendid Masques were also organised there, rivaling those of the Royal Court.

A series of six manuscripts were found in the Inns of Court's libraries, lists of dances and of books belonging to three members of the Inns of Court or some of their relatives. In spite of being a century apart (the oldest manuscript dates back to 1570, the latest one 1675), the same eight dances are found on the lists; they were eventually called "the olde Measures".

In all six manuscripts, in spite of the time difference, the eight dances are described in the same way, meaning they had eventually become the unavoidable rite to start "The Solemn Revels". Younger members of the Inns of Court, to whom the first edition of the "Dancing Master" is dedicated, were expected to have trained for the

dances, mastered the complicated sequel of moves, and dance properly. Thus Bulsrode Whitelock, who was to become Cromwell's counselor, wrote about the 1628 Christmas Revels in Middle Temple:

« theis measures were wont to be trulie danced, it beinge accounted a shame for an innes of Court man not to have learned to dance, especially the measures, but nowe their dancing is tourned to bare walking ».

Here is the list of all eight measures found in the Inns of Court libraries :
The Quadrian Pavan, Turkylynye, The Earle of Essex Measure, Tinternell, The Old Almayne, The Queen's Almayne, Sicilia Almayne or Madam Cicillia Pavin, The Black Almain.

Thanks to the manuscripts and the carefully described dances, we have a link between dances known at the end of the 15th and 16th century and the English dance repertoire published as late as 1651 but already taking shape in the late years of Elizabeth I's reign.

Starting in the last third of the 16th century, measure is synonymous with the two major dance forms of the time: Pavans and Almans. However measure also means a long or short series of choreographic moves made up of a random sequel of singles and doubles.

It is thus close to the 15th century "basse danse", except basse dances were built according to rules that, although complicated, were memory aids.

The first Inns of Court manuscript, "The Gunter MS" still includes some basse danse vocabulary such as "repyrme", a word that is not found in later documents.

Here is for instance the description of My lord of Essex Measure:
"A duple forward repyrme backe 4 tymes / 2 singles syde a duple forward repyrme back"

Let us now compare the six choreographic "measures" of « la basse dance du Roy Despaingne » found in the BD manuscript of the Burgundy library (last third of the 15th century), (1), with the four or I would say five choreographic measures of "la longue pavian", in the Gunter MS, around 1572

(1) *R b ss ddd rrr b/ ss ddd r b/ ss ddd rrr b/ ss d r d r b/ ss ddd rrr b/ ss d r d r b c.*

(2) *2 singles a duple forward 2 singles syde reprime backe once/ 2 singles syde a duple forward repyrme back twyse/ 2 singles a duple forward one single backe*

twyse 2 singles a duple forward 2 singles side reprime backe once/ 2 singles side a double forward reprime backe twyse.

Or, using the same abbreviations as for a basse danse :

ss d ss r/ss d r ss d r /ss d s ss d s/ss d ss r/ss d r ss d r.

Besides seeming to be the missing link between society dances that, with variations, were fashionable in Europe at the end of the 16th century, and the specifically English repertoire taking shape in the reign of the first Stuarts, the Inns of Court measures greatly help us understand the dances collected by John Playford:

they give us all-important precisions about which foot to start with for simples and doubles, in particular in the « compulsory figures » found in all dances. Thus the sixth measure « The Queens Almayne » seems a typical dd ssd - dd ssd sequence, found in so many dances of the early editions of the « Dancing Master ».

Try and compare « The Queens Almayne » in its Ashmole version, a manuscript dated 1634 (1), and the later version of Buttler Buggins (2) with the choreography of « A Health to Betty », a first edition dance (3).

(1) *A duple forward and a duple backe set two singles and face to face and turne a round in your owne place a duple forward with the right legge and backe with the left legge set two singles face to face and turn a double round...*

(2) *A double forwards and a double back with the left legg turne face to face, and set and turn with the left legg/ A double forward and a double back with the right legg turn face to face and sett and turn with the right legge...*

A Health to Betty. *Longways for as many as will.* ⊙ ⊙ ⊙ ⊙
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Lead up all a D. forwards and back, set and turn S. That again. First Co. sides, turn her once and a half about. Sides each with the 2. and turn them. Do thus to the last, the rest following and doing the like.

Sides all, set and turn S. That again. First Cu. meet a D. back again, fall into the 2. places, and turn your own. Do this Change to the last, the rest following.

Arms all, set and turn S. That again. First Cu. go a D. back, meet again, take both hands, slip down between the 2. turn S. Do thus to the last, the rest following.

(3) *Original score of « A Health to Betty »*

Last but not least, here is the original description of « The Black Almain », also from the Buttler Buggins manuscript:

*Syde 4 double round about the hall
And close the last double face to
Face. Then part your hands and goe all
A double back one from another and
Meet a double againe, The goe a
Double to the left hand and
As much back to the right hand
The all on the Wome side stand still
and the men set and turne
then all the men stand still and
the women sett and turne, theb hold
both hands and change places with a
double and slide four French slides to the
mans right hand change places againe
with a double and slyde 4 french slides
to the right hand again, then
part hands and goe back a double one
from another and meande a double again.
Then all this measure once over and soe on.
The 2nd all the men stand still and the
Women begin sett and turne first and then
Men last*

(spelling and page setting as in the original text)