

The Playfords

by Cécile Laye

John Playford's family stemmed from the Norwich area, the eastern part of England. The Playfords sold and published books, in particular in the field of science and music. It was a family of good fame, with a coat of arms and links with Scotland.

When his father died in 1639, the John Playford that interests us was 17 years old. He went up to London to try his luck and served a 7-year apprenticeship with a Mr Benson. In 1647 he opened a shop near Temple Church; the shop soon became London's hub for music publishing.

Shortly after publishing the first edition of his « Dancing Master » (registered and submitted to Cromwell's harsh censure on November 7, 1650, published in 1651), John Playford married the daughter of publishers of theological and political books. With money inherited from her father, Mrs Playford bought a large house that she later converted into a school and worked in up to her death in 1679.

Playford delegated the printing of the 6th and 7th edition of the « Dancing Master » to his nephew – they are the last to have been published under his own name. In 1684 John Playford handed over the business to his son Henry. He died two years later, held in high regard by all. Purcell wrote an elegy for his departed friend and publisher.

Henry Playford carried through the editions of the “Dancing Master” from 1690 (8th edition) until his death in 1706. He brought about a renewal of the dances, leaving out many of those published by his father to introduce new ones better suited to the fashion of the day and the mores of an already deeply changed society. The last editions were the work of lute-maker John Young and appear as a memory of country dancing.

Many changes occurred in later editions, in particular the musical notation became more accurate (many melodies in the 1st edition are noted without bars); they are given for the viola but as early as the 3rd edition the tunes include measures and are written for the violin. In the 11th edition in 1701 the music is printed using “new fonts”, with linked quavers and round, instead of diamond-shaped, notes.

In order to illustrate this point we show below various versions of the dance «Cuckolds all arrow ». This “olde English dance” King Charles II asked for at the Whitehall Ball on December 31, 1662 in front of Samuel Pepys who mentioned it in his diary, is to be found in all successive editions, while another square for two couples, “Rufty Tufty”, vanishes as early as the 2nd edition!

Samuel Pepys, who could play the flageolet, viola, lute, theorbo and harpsichord and, above all, loved singing, knew John Playford, just as all London music lovers then

did. He mentions him several times in his famous diaries. He used to purchase the latest music scores by Henry Lawes, Christopher Simpson, Matthew Locke and Henry Purcell at his shop.

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Books printed and sold by Henry Playford

The three following facsimiles show how the symbols used by Playford changed over time

A T A B L E Explaining the Characters which are set downe in the Dances,

A Double is foure steps forward or back, closing both feet.

A Single is two steps, closing both feet.

Set and turne single, is a single to one hand, and a single to the other, and turne single.

D.	Is for a Double.
S.	Is for a Single.
Wo.	Stands for woman.
We.	Stands for women.
Cu.	Stands for Couple.
Co.	Stands for Contrary.
2.	Stands for second.
3.	Stands for third.
4.	Stands for fourth.
.	Stands for a straine playd once.
∴	Stands for a straine playd twice.
∴∴	Stands for a straine playd thrice, &c.
	These Characters expresse the Figure of the Dance.
)	This stands for the Men.
o	This for the women.

The sex-symbols at the foot of this Table were incorrectly printed by Playford. The symbol o should have been for men,) for women.

A T A B L E of the Explanation of the severall Characters made use of in this Book.

D. ———	Stands for Double. A Double is four steps forward and backward, closing both Feet.	
S. ———	Single. A Single is two Steps, closing both Feet.	
Set and turn S. }	Is a Single to one hand, and a Single to the other, and turn Single.	
Wo. ———	Stands for Woman.	
We. ———	Women.	
Cu. ———	Couple.	
Co. ———	Contrary.	
1. ———	First.	The Figure half round, is the Hey half round. The whole Figure, is the Hey all four round.
2. ———	Second.	
3. ———	Third.	
4. ———	Fourth.	
Proper —	Is when the Men and Women are on their own Sides.	
Improper	Is when the Men are on the Woman's side, or the Women on the Men's side.	
.	For a Strain of the Tune played once over.	
∴	For a Strain twice over.	
∴∴	For a Strain thrice over.	
⊙ ———	This stands for the Men's Places in the Figure on the top of each Page.	
) ———	This stands for the Women's Places in the Figure on the top of each Page.	

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A TABLE explaining several Characters, which are set down in the *Rules for Dancing.*

D.	Is for <i>Double</i> . A <i>Double</i> is four steps forward and backward closing both Feet.	
S.	Is for a <i>Single</i> . A <i>Single</i> is two steps closing both Feet.	
	<i>Set and turn Single</i> . Is a <i>Single</i> to one hand, and <i>Single</i> to the other, and turn <i>Single</i> .	
Wo.	Stands for <i>Woman</i> .	
We	Stands for <i>Women</i> .	
Cu.	Stands for <i>Couple</i> .	
Co.	Stands for <i>Contrary</i> .	
2.	} Stands for } <i>Second</i> .	
3.		} <i>Third</i> .
4.		
$\frac{1}{2}$	This is for a <i>Strain</i> play'd once.	
$\frac{1}{4}$	This is for a <i>Strain</i> twice	

These two Characters express the Figure of the *Dance*.

●	This stands for the <i>Men</i> .
⤵	This stands for the <i>Women</i> .

Evolution of the music score of « Cuckolds all a row », from edition 1 to 17