

Some Tunes Collected from the Leominster District

Compiled by John Messenger

The purpose of this small book is to encourage the playing of tunes collected in the Leominster area by today's local musicians, especially those of The Leominster Morris. I have tried to give some background to each tune but I have not conducted exhaustive research and my notes are based on readily available sources. Most of the tunes have been published but in books that are now out-of-print. I have also tried to present the tunes as they were collected, with the exceptions of changing the keys of some to suit D/G melodeons (or to keys that many players now prefer). I have left the tunes collected by Sharp in the 1A 1B format as he wrote them down, although they can be played as 2As 2Bs with little or no alteration. I have included the 'variants' for some bars as noted by Sharp where Locke, as most fiddlers do, varied the tune each time through. Those bars are marked with a lower case letter and the 'variants' are given at the end of the tune.

John Messenger
30th September 2008

Some historical background

Cecil Sharp (CS) visited the Leominster area around Christmas 1909. It seems that he had been in contact with Ella Mary Leather (EML) and this might have prompted his visit.

We know that he travelled to Orleton with EML to see a morris side on Boxing Day, and that he met a Mr Trill whom he visited again a few days later. Two photographs of the side were taken by EML and later lodged at the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library (VWML) but these have been lost. However, a small reproduction of one of these photographs appeared in a magazine (Dommett 1969) and this has allowed us to determine that the location was Orleton Manor.

The next day CS met John Locke (JL), described as a gipsy fiddler, in Leominster where he noted down 10 of Locke's tunes. CS noted on the manuscripts if they were taken from phonographic recordings and these 10 are not so marked. However, there is one manuscript (Sheepskins?) that was taken from a recording on the same date. Rather frustratingly CS seems to have recorded little else about his visit, but we do know that JL was 38 years old. On the manuscript of Mad Moll of the Cheshire Hunts CS

has written “White Horse pub” (currently the Profile Hair Design Salon at 39 West Street) and we are left wondering if this was where he met JL. A photograph by CS of a fiddler that might be JL exists at the VWML, but this was not properly documented. If this is of JL in Leominster then the location could be the walk through at the side of the Black Swan at 35 West Street. Research on this continues.

On 29th December CS met William Preece (WP) of Dilwyn and noted down three tunes. CS recorded that WP was aged 62. Another tune by WP was noted down by Alice J Ovens and appears in the EML’s book, “The Folklore of Herefordshire”. In this book there is reference to “an old fiddler at Dilwyn” who danced the morris with sides at Dilwyn and Leominster, and although it seem likely that this was WP, EML did not always disclose the identity of her sources and no direct connection is made.

EML made cylinder recordings of JL but none seem to have survived.

The Blue Eyed Stranger

This tune appears to be a version of the morris dance tune as used at Headington and elsewhere. William Kimber can be heard playing it on EFDSS CD 03 Track 21, "The Music of William Kimber".

This tune was originally written down in the key of A, a popular fiddle key. I have transcribed it to G.

The Blue Eyed Stranger

John Locke (1909)

The musical score is written in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. It consists of four staves of music. The first staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 4/4 time signature. The melody starts on G4 and moves stepwise up to D5, then descends. The second staff continues the melody, featuring a double bar line after the second measure. The third staff continues the melody with a similar rhythmic pattern. The fourth staff concludes the piece with a final cadence and a double bar line.

Boyne Water

This is not the tune, “The Boyne Water”, that commemorates the Battle of the Boyne in 1690, although Kuntz confuses Locke’s tunes with this one. There is another transcription of this tune in Sharp’s notebook that was, “noted from phonograph Jan 26. 1912” and displays further slight variations. The source is not mentioned but it appears on the same sheet as the 1909 transcription of Locke’s “Blue Eyed Stranger”. Sharp made use of Boyne Water for the Sleights Sword Dance in his book of dances and tunes published in 1912 (Schofield 2006).

The original transcription of this tune is in E, a key not popular with many of today’s folk fiddlers. I have transcribed it to G.

Boyne Water

John Locke (1909)

The musical score for "Boyne Water" is presented in three staves. The first staff shows the main melody in treble clef, G major, and 4/4 time. The second staff provides a bass line, featuring a repeat sign. The third staff continues the bass line, with variations labeled 'b', 'a - var', and 'b - var'.

Getting Upstairs I Never Did See

This tune appears to be another version of the morris dance tune as used at Headington. William Kimber can be heard playing it on EFDSS CD 03 Track 5, "The Music of William Kimber". According to the Morris Ring web site, this is a relatively modern tune that originated in music hall. Apart from Headington the tune was also used at Hinton in Northamptonshire, where it had been imported directly from Leominster (Kuntz, A.). This tune is also quite widely known in the USA.

Sharp noted down this tune in the key of A and I have transcribed it to G.

Getting Up Stairs I Never Did See

John Locke (1909)

Musical score for "Getting Up Stairs I Never Did See" by John Locke (1909). The score is written in treble clef, key of D major (one sharp), and 4/4 time. It consists of three staves. The first staff contains the melody, starting with a quarter rest followed by a quarter note D4, then a series of eighth and quarter notes. The second staff continues the melody with similar rhythmic patterns. The third staff provides a harmonic accompaniment using a series of eighth notes, primarily on the lower notes of the scale, with some rests and a final double bar line with repeat dots.

Greensleeves

Sharp apparently knew this tune and noted on the manuscript, “Seen this danced over the pipes. Never heard it called Greensleeves”. It appears to be a version of the tune used for the Bacca Pipes morris jig. Intriguingly, there is a reference in Cecil Sharp’s Field Notes (Bacon 1974) to a Bacca Pipes jig being performed in Leominster. Could it be that this annotated manuscript is the source of this claim? It seems clear to me that Sharp was making a general comment and not one specifically relating to Leominster, and so this would amount to a rather obvious misinterpretation of Sharp’s words.

Presented here in G, the key it was collected in.

Greensleeves

John Locke (1909)

The musical score for Greensleeves by John Locke (1909) is presented in five staves of music. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 6/8. The score is divided into sections labeled (a) through (d), and various alternative endings are indicated by labels such as (a-alt), (b-alt1), (b-alt2), (c-alt1), (c-alt2), (c-alt3), (c-alt4), and (d).

The first staff contains the main melody, starting with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp, and a 6/8 time signature. It is divided into sections (a) and (b). The second staff continues the melody, including section (c). The third staff shows section (d) and another instance of section (c). The fourth staff contains five alternative endings: (a-alt), (b-alt1), (b-alt2), (c-alt1), and (c-alt2). The fifth staff contains two more alternative endings: (c-alt3) and (c-alt4), followed by a final section (d).

Hunting the Squirrel

This is one of a number of different tunes that bear this name. This tune will be familiar to the Leominster Morris as the one used for the dance "Titley John".

Presented here in the original key of G.

Hunting the Squirrel

John Locke (1909)

(a) (b)

(c)

(c) (a - alt)

(b - alt1) (b - alt2) (c - alt)

Untitled hornpipe - “John Locke’s Polka”

This tune, which has been attributed to John Locke, exists as a wax cylinder recording at the British Library. Apparently Locke’s name was written on the case of the wax cylinder (Bradtke - pers com). It is a hornpipe and clearly a good stepping tune. That recording is presented on the library’s web site in the key of circa F# and played at a very lively pace. The recording also appears on Ashley Hutchings’ ‘Rattlebone and Ploughjack’ album where it is in the key of circa Eb. A copy of the original wax cylinder recording appeared on the EFDSS web site in the key of D, and it seems likely that this was the original key. The British Library probably played the cylinder at the wrong speed.

I have transcribed the tune to the key of G, which seems to be the one most commonly used when this tune is played.

John Locke's Polka

John Locke (1909)



The musical score for "John Locke's Polka" is written in 4/4 time with a key signature of one sharp (F#). It consists of five staves of music. The first staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp, and a 4/4 time signature. The first measure contains a triplet of eighth notes (F#, G, A) followed by a repeat sign. The second staff continues the melody with eighth and sixteenth notes. The third staff features a repeat sign at the beginning and a triplet of eighth notes (B, C, D) later in the measure. The fourth staff continues the melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes, including another triplet of eighth notes (E, F#, G). The fifth staff concludes the piece with a simple eighth-note melody and a repeat sign.

Mad Moll of the Cheshire Hunts

There are no dotted notes in bars 3 and 4 of the B part as noted down by Sharp, but most players prefer to continue 'dotting' in these bars to maintain the tune's rhythm. It seems that Locke's playing is probably the first recorded source of this popular tune.

Transposed to G from the original key of A.

Mad Moll of the Cheshire Hunts

John Locke (1909)

(a) (b)

(a - alt) (b - alt)

Sheepskins (?)

On his manuscript Sharp wrote, "This was noted from phonographic record taken by Mrs Leather. Locke told her that this was Sheepskins but he gave me the other tune (2416) by that name". The meaning of the word 'Cobbler' written next to the title on the manuscript is not clear. The tune appears to be that usually known as Om si the Gom or Not For Joe. Possibly Locke or Mrs Leather made an error or perhaps Locke actually knew this tune as another Sheepskins. Sharp pressed this tune into service for the Sleights Sword Dance in his book of dances and tunes published in 1912 (Schofield 2006).

Originally noted down in A, I have transposed the tune to the key of G.

Sheepskins (?)

John Locke (1909)



Sheepskins

Sharp noted on his manuscript, “Tested by phonographic record taken by Mrs Leather”, by which I take it to mean that he noted it down from Locke on his visit but then checked it against the recording. This tune appears to have been popular in the 18th century and is probably older (Kuntz). It appears in several collections published in the 1700s. Sharp made use of this tune for the Flamborough Sword Dance in his book of dances and tunes published in 1912 (Schofield 2006).

Originally in A but I have transposed it to the key of G.

Sheepskins

John Locke 1909

(a)

(b)

(c)

(a - var1)

(a - var2)

(b - var1 - very often)

(b - var2 - rarely)

(c - var)

Speed the Plough

This is an interesting version of the popular tune. The A part is very much 'standard' but the B part is quite different to that of the popular version heard today at sessions. Speed the Plough was written in 1797 by John Moorhead for a stage show in Covent Garden (where he worked as a violinist), but has been widely adopted and modified since then.

Originally in A, I have transposed it to the key of G.

Speed the Plough

John Locke (1909)

The musical score for "Speed the Plough" is written in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. It consists of four staves. The first three staves represent the main melody, which is a lively, rhythmic piece. The fourth staff is a shorter accompaniment line, likely for a piano or organ. The melody features a mix of eighth and sixteenth notes, with some triplet-like patterns. The accompaniment consists of a simple, rhythmic pattern of eighth notes.

Staffordshire Hornpipe

This is another popular tune for which the original source seems to be John Locke. Sharp made use of this tune for the Flamborough Sword Dance in his book of dances and tunes published in 1912 (Schofield 2006).

The tune is not 'dotted' although most of today's musicians play it so. Sharp noted this in the key of A but I have transposed it to D, which 'cuts through' better on the fiddle.

Staffordshire Hornpipe

John Locke (1909)

The musical score for "Staffordshire Hornpipe" by John Locke (1909) is presented in three staves. The key signature is G major (one sharp) and the time signature is common time (C). The melody is written in eighth notes. The first staff begins with a treble clef and a common time signature. The second staff continues the melody, featuring a triplet of eighth notes marked with a '3' below the notes. The third staff concludes the piece, also featuring a triplet of eighth notes marked with a '3' below the notes.

Trip to the Cottage

There is a tune of this name played in Ireland but it seems to be quite different to this one. Shropshire musician John Moore, whose manuscripts have been preserved, gives a tune of this name but it is not the same as Locke's.

Collected in the key of A and I have transposed the tune to G.

Trip to the Cottage

John Locke (1909)

The musical score is written for a single melodic line in G major and 3/8 time. It consists of three staves. The first staff contains the first six measures, ending with a dynamic marking 'a'. The second staff contains the next six measures, ending with a dynamic marking 'a - var'. The third staff contains the final four measures, also ending with a dynamic marking 'a - var'. The melody is characterized by eighth and sixteenth notes, with some dotted rhythms.

Flowers of Edinburgh

This appears to be a standard version of tune, which perhaps accounts for it apparently not being published in the past.

Flowers of Edinburgh

William Preece (1909)



Hunting the Squirrel

Presented here in the key of G, as noted down by Sharp.

Hunting the Squirrel

William Preece (1909)



Jack off the Green

This is an interesting tune, having one bar in 9/8 and a 12 bar B part. Sharp's manuscript carries the following verse, but its connection with the tune is not clear:

**There was a young woman
As fine as ever was seen
And with an old broomstick
She knocked Jack off the Green**

The tune is featured on the 1975 Ashley Hutchings album, "Rattlebone and Ploughjack"

Jack off the Green

William Preece (1909)



Three Jolly Black Sheep-Skins - First Tune

This tune seems not to have been collected by Sharp. It appears in Ella Mary Leather's "Folklore of Herefordshire" having been noted from William Preece by Alice J Ovens in 1908. This is the first of two tunes given for the Three Jolly Black Sheepskins dance, the second similarly untitled but being Locke's tune 'Sheepskins'. Sadly we do not know what Preece called his tune. It is quite different to either of Locke's Sheepskin tunes.

Index to Tunes

John Locke

The Blue Eyed Stranger	4	
Boyne Water	6	
Getting Upstairs I Never Did See	8	
Greensleeves	10	
Hunting the Squirrel	12	
Untitled hornpipe - "John Locke's Polka"	14	
Mad Moll of the Cheshire Hunts		16
Sheepskins (?)	18	
Sheepskins	20	
Speed the Plough	22	
Staffordshire Hornpipe	24	
Trip to the Cottage		26

William Preece

Flowers of Edinburgh	28	
Hunting the Squirrel	30	
Jack off the Green		32
Three Jolly Black Sheep-Skins - First Tune	34	

Sources

Bacon, L (1974) A Handbook of Morris Dances, The Morris Ring

Dommett, R. (1969) "The Brimfield morris dance", *ED&S*, XXXI, 3, p98.

Kuntz, A. - The Fiddler's Companion -
<http://www.ibiblio.org/fiddlers/index.html>

Leather, E M (1912) The Folk-Lore of Herefordshire, Jakeman & Carver, Hereford

Morris Ring - <http://www.themorrisring.org/>

Schofield, D. (2006) "The Fiddle Tunes of John Lock", *English Dance and Song Winter 2006* pp10-11.

The Vaughan Williams Memorial Library

I would like to thank the staff of the VWML, Malcolm Taylor, Peta Webb and Elaine Bradtke for their help with this project.