

Dances from Gresley

The Gresley Manual forms part of a small notebook that was discovered in Derbyshire in 1984.

The manual contains a total of 8 dances where there are both music and choreography. There are a number of other dance choreographies in the manual without music, and some music for dances that have no description. It also mentions a large number of other dances by name.

The manual was probably written some time between 1480 and 1520 or so. There are some minor similarities between some of the dances and the dances of 15th Century Italy, although they form a separate tradition of dance.

The Gresley Manual was an interesting find, because it forms the first recorded set of dance descriptions in English.

Introduction

This section was written by Hoskuld Atlason of Iceland (Norman Gray) who has given me permission to reproduce it here. I have included a shortened version of Norman's full article.

Interpretations

This article summarizes my current interpretations for the Gresley dances. This part concentrates on the steps and step patterns. I have separated the part on the trace so I could fit in the examples. Two pages deal with the dances themselves. The last page summarises the discussion I lead on interpreting *Prenes on gre* at the St. Vitus dance weekend in Canberra 1999.

Interpretations of these dances include their music which has been interpreted by Katrina Hunt. As we interpreted the dances we also interpreted the music. This means that the interpretation has been two ways, sometimes the dance effected the interpretation of the music while at other times the music effects the dance.

Dances

There are only 8 dances in the Gresley Collection, which have both music and a description of the steps. Of these only 4 (*Esperance*, *Prenes on gre*, *Temperans* and *Northumberland*) have complete descriptions. The other four are missing the description of their trace.

Descriptions

You can tell how close to complete an interpretation is by how detailed the diagrams and descriptions are. Some will have a link to notes. These are very rough descriptions of how we came to a particular decision when doing the interpretation. The notes for *Prenes on gre* are very detailed. They started of as notes for a class at a dance weekend here in Canberra, and contain detailed discussion of the options and decisions which had to be made while working on the dance. Other options which came to mind afterwards have also been explained.

What we do not know

After all the work on these dances we still do not know for certain how the steps were done or the social context in which they were performed.

It is possible that these dances are not social dances but form part of masques or plays. Some seem more like "a bit of business" to keep the audience entertained while a scene changes or as a way of getting actors into the right place for the next bit of the mask or maybe mystery play. Only men are mentioned in the dances. None of the dances have the form that allows for partners.

It is also possible that these are dressage or horse dances. Although I can not figure out how a horse would do a "horn pipe".

Assumptions

There have been a number of assumptions made while interpreting these dances. Some are the "normal" assumptions made when interpreting any piece of music and accompanying dance description. Others are useful only as a starting place when figuring out the forms or patterns made in the dance.

1. The steps alternate right and left, and dances start on the left foot.
2. One bar of music equates to one single.
3. A single is a passo i.e. step on the ball of the foot on first beat then slightly sink on the second beat. You can bring the other foot forward but slightly behind. Do not close the step.
4. All singles are the same size, for interpretation purposes. This is not a good assumption for the final version of an interpretation but it is a good place to start. Most dancers will change the size of their steps so that they end up where they should.
5. Sections of the music can be matched to sections of the dance as set out in part one of the dance descriptions. This appears normal for most dances and their music.
6. Sections of dance descriptions do not go over the ends of repeats of the music.
7. Music is less ambiguous than trying to describe dances in words. This means that the music is more likely to be "correct" than the description for durations of patterns.
8. The document can stand alone. That is we can find out everything about the dances from other dances in the manuscript.

Word count

Introduction

I felt that it might be helpful to count the occurrence of the dance steps and patterns mentioned in the dances. While doing the count I changed from just counting the words to counting the occurrences of a step or movement in the dance. The following table is the result.

403 Single	8 Double	16 Flowerdelice
19 Brawle	39 Torne, half turn	5 Meve, move
40 Trett	16 Change places	2 Hertt

54 Retrett	6 Throw	1 Horne pepy
5 Obeysaunce	4 Lepe	22 Rakis

Expanding the patterns we know and converting some of the movements provides a better indication of the occurrence of the usual steps. The flourdlice contains 2 doubles and 3 singles. In the dances so far interpreted “turns”, “changing places” and “throws” take two bars so are probably a double. This gives a total number of singles and doubles as below.

Single	451	Double	101
--------	-----	--------	-----

Steps, patterns and words

Singles and doubles Are the singles step and close as in Arbeau or the step and pause, like a passo, in the bassa dances? The dances work with either. The step lift style single suggested for earlier dances and the forerunner to an almain step would also work. Or they could be something more exotic, what about a hop and step or step and hop?

Which is chosen will have an effect on how the trett is interpreted.

At first I assumed that a single was the step close variety. I am beginning to lean towards the step pause or step lift singles now that I have had it explained that the step close single is a much latter development.

Trett and retrett

In Northumberland and Temperans a trett is described as three singles with a stop. Working on Esperans showed that a trett takes three bars.

So a trett is could be

- 3 singles (step close) and a stop at the end,
- 3 passi (step pause) with a close at the end,
- or is to 3 singles as a double is to 2 singles.

There is not enough music for the first. If the stop at the end is ignored then there is nothing different between a trett and three singles.

If it is 3 passi with a close you have a slow double, i.e. a double in three bars. This would work.

The last, a trett is to 3 singles what a double is to 2, gives a trett of step, step, step, step, close. This is the one I prefer. However we need to do some more experimenting with getting the flow of the dances. Currently they do not flow well.

Unfortunately the author of the papers is not consistent with the use of “retrett”. He sometimes uses retrett as a trett done backwards, sometimes a single done backwards and sometimes it is a direction.

In these documents I use retrett to mean a trett going backwards.

Rak, raks, rakkes, rake

Appears to be a sideways movement of indeterminate length (see #16 *Aras* and #26 *Northumberland*). Perhaps the Negri represa where the feet "zigzag"? While #19 (*Roye*) suggests a forward movement. One dance (#21 *Hawthorne*) calls for 3 raks with a stop, does this imply they are open steps?

Oxford English Dictionary - has one description from 1530 - a horse's pace where both feet move on the same side. This is like the single step we do in Del's interpretation of the bassadanse Rositiboli. When doing singles the foot and shoulder on the same side move together.

It could be a set, as in Inns of Court and ECD. It can be moving forward if you turn 45 degrees before the first step and 90 degrees thereafter.

Rak, rakis, raks and rakkes do not appear in the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary.

Rake also refers to a garden implement, a path or way and angle to the perpendicular (eg vein of oar, mast). The way a hawk flies after game. To run with nose to ground like a hound on scent.

Currently We are treating this as a sort of continenza. You take a step to the side and rake the floor when you bring the other foot up to the first.

Flourdelice

The pattern of the flourdelice seems to represent the hereldic fleur-de-lys, with 3 people dancing it starting side by side. The only full description of it comes from *Temperans* where it takes 8 bars.



Flourdelice for 3



Fleur-de-lys
from *AC Fox-Davies, Complete Guide to Heraldry*



Flowerdelice over Fleur-de-lys

The first double forms the bar as first casts out and the other two change places.

In the 3 singles and jump (passo, passo, passo, cadence) the middle person goes straight forward forming the inner part while the two outside people go forward for the first passi and turn out and half way round on the second and third passi. The cadence is on the spot and is not part of the turn.

Then the outside people cast out again on the last double to make the outside parts of the fleur-de-lys.

A flourdelice from Temperans

Person 1 casts left for a double while the other two change places

All forward 3 singles (SR, SL, SR) with first and second (ie the outside couple) turning outward and ending facing the way they came. All leap in one bar (LL). Ie 3 passi with a cadence.
Then the outside men cast out with a double so all end facing the same way side by side. DR

If the fleur-de-lys is for two, depending on how they are placed at the start, they can cast or change places to make the bar and then do the outside parts of the three person version.

If there are three in a small triangle the first double could be used to get into line by making the bit below the bar. Then do the rest the same.

If there are three doing it one after the other maybe they do the individual parts.

Esperans

This is a dance for 3 dancers, subtitled 'Brestow is a mery town'.

"3 Trace: Al the 6 singlis with a trett. Then the fyrst man goo compas till he come behend, whil the medyll retrett thre, and the last 3 singlis, and the medil 3 singlis, leyng the last on the left hand, and the last 3 retretts. Thus the medill endyth before the last in the meddist and the ferst gehynd. Thus daunce 3 tymes, callyng every man as he standdith.

3 After the trace, the ferst 3 furth outward turnyng ayen his face. Then the last contur hym, and the medill to the fyrste; and then the first to his place. Then the last to the medyll and the medyll to the last mans place.

1 The first and last change place whil the medyll tornyth.

1 Al at onys retrett 3 bake. Bak al at ons.

1 Then the first turne whill the last turne in (in) his own place.

1 Then al togeder thre furth."

Reference: DF p7

This dance starts off with a intricate pattern and gets simpler as the dance progresses, although you have to be in the right place to be able to do a couple of latter sequences. I have grouped the 6 musical sections into it into 3 dance parts.

Trace

This figure is repeated 3 times and consists of 6 singles and a trett (5 steps and a close). If you agree with the idea that a left always follows a right then a left occurs, then the second repeat will be on the right foot.

The Trace**A 1-6**

In the first six singles:

The person in first place casts out to fourth place,

While second and third change places in an anti-clockwise circle,

second place does 3 singles backward to third place and then 3 singles forward to place,

Then third place does 3 singles forward to second place and then 3 singles backwards to place.

**A 7-9
A 10-15**

Then all do a trett forwards.

In the second repeat every one starts on the right,

First casts to the right

and the other two circle clockwise.

**A 16-18
A 19-24**

Then all do a trett forwards.

The third repeat is the same as the first with every one starting on the left,

First casts to the left

and the other two circle anti-clockwise.

A 25-27

Then all do a trett forwards.

Part 2

This figure consists of 3 repeats of 4 singles (all RLRL) followed by a double to get back into "proper" order. It starts on the right foot.

The Pattern

B 1-4



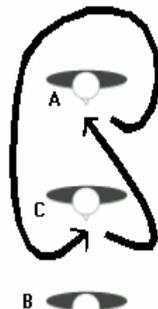
Person A goes in a circle to their place casting left.

While the other two cast right and change places.

All end facing the back.

The middle person should move into first place with the first single.

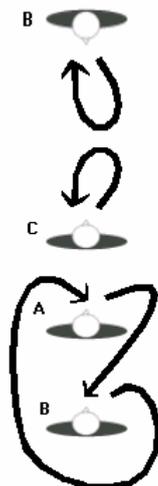
B 5-8



Person B, in third place, now goes in a circle left, while the other two cast right and change places.

All end facing the front.

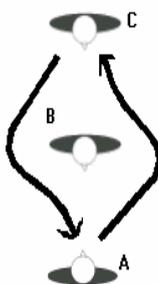
B 9-12



Person C, in first place, casts in a circle ending facing second place, while the other two cast right and change places ending with B facing the front and A facing B.

It is important for the formation to be very tight here.

C 1-2



Person C and A change places with a double while B does a turn single.

Everyone ends up facing up the dance floor.

Part 3

The pattern:

Back and Forward a trett with first person ending facing second.

First turns second with a double while third does a turn single.

All do 3 singles forward.

Prenes on Gre

This is a dance for 2 dancers, subtitled 'Alas the herd whill that i coth dans'.

"Trace forthright 6 singlis; ather torne other aboute, and forthright 6 singles agen.

After the end of the trace, rak both togeder and torne.

3 Then face to face 6 singlis, eithir contrary oder, and 3 retrettes ayen.

2 Then a flourdilice of both at oyns.

r Then change places and torne face to face. Then a flourdelice and come togeder."

Reference: DF p8

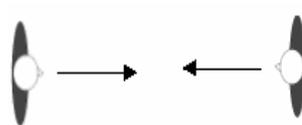
I gave a talk at a dance weekend on the problems with interpreting these dances and we came up with two possible interpretations for this dance.

Since then we have tried a few variations and come to this "final" interpretation. The main breakthrough came when the dancers did the doubles in the time of four singles instead of two as is more normal. Suddenly the foluredelice fit the repeats in the music rather than going over the phrases.

Start at opposite ends of the room, ie about 8 singles apart. **Note** a single is the step-pause style (passo) rather than the step-close style.

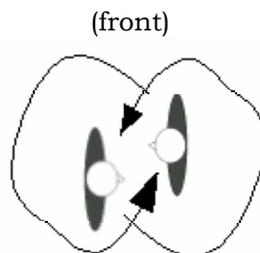
The Trace

A 1-4



Forward 4 singles (LRLR),

A 5-8

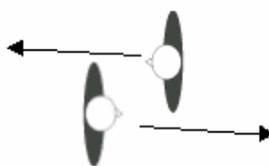


Turn each other with 4 singles (LRLR),

If you do a half turn you go back to your place with the next four singles. If you do a full turn you end in the other persons place.

We usually do a half turn here.

A 9-12



Forward 4 singles (LRLR).

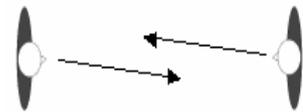
Part 2

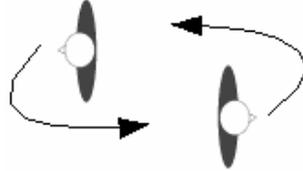
B 1-2



Set (SL SR)

B 3-4  and a half turn to face each other with two singles (SL, SR).

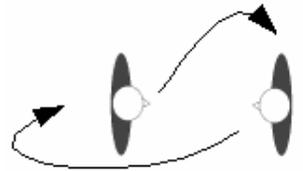
C 1-6  6 singles forward passing left shoulder, (LRLRLR),

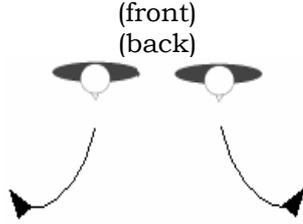
D 1-4  3 singles turning left back the way you came end facing each other (LRL).
The fourth bar is only half the length of the other bars. We use it for a pause or a close.

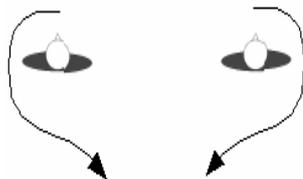
Part 3

Part 3 of the dances comprises two flourdelice, with an intervening section.

The first flourdelice

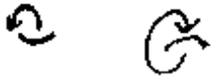
E 1-4  Facing, change places ending side by side facing the same way ie the front. DL (a double grave, a slow double, or may be three singles and a close.)

E 5-8  (front)
(back)
Both go forward 3 singles (SR, SL, SR) turning out to face the back.
Leap in one bar (LL) - a cadence

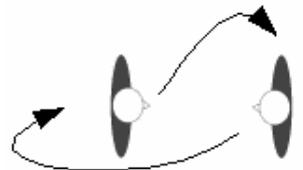
E 9-12  Then do a double to cast out ending face to face. Slow DR

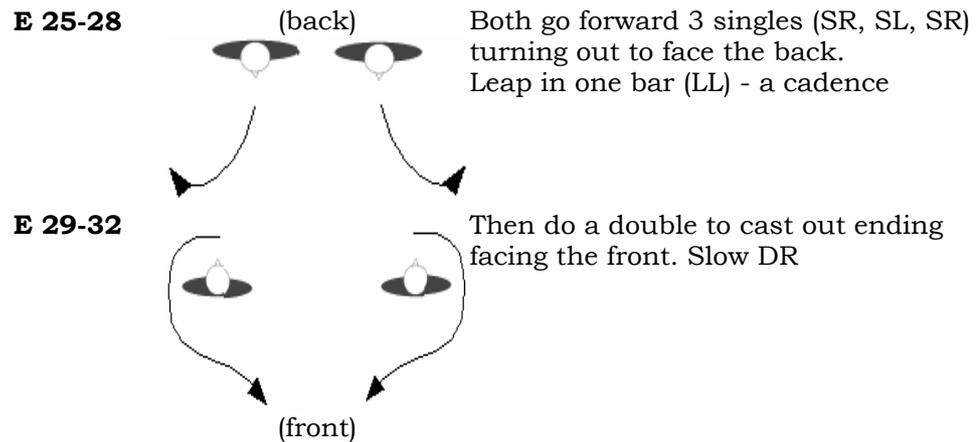
Between the Flourdelice

E 13-16  Change places with a slow double left.

E 17-20  Turn or cast with a double right to end facing.

Second Flourdelice

E 21-24  Facing, change places ending side by side facing the same way (the front). DL (a double grave, a slow double, or may be three singles and a close.)



Further Information

On line articles

The original document was published as a web page, located at: <http://members.ozemail.com.au/~grayn1/gresley/Gresley.html> Norman's article includes a discussion of the interpretation of Prenes on Gre, (<http://members.ozemail.com.au/~grayn1/gresley/interpgr.html>), and a more detailed description of the trace (<http://members.ozemail.com.au/~grayn1/gresley/Trace.htm>).

For a further introduction to the Gresley Dance Collection see [The Gresley Dance Collection](#) in *The Letter of Dance*, available on line at <http://www.pbm.com/~lindahl/lod/vol5/gresley.html>.

Printed Sources

Almost all quotes, text in italic, in this document come from the article by David Fallows (indicated by "DF" in the text). Music was reinterpreted from the photocopies of the manuscript as presented in the same article.

"The Gresley Dance Collection, c.1500" David Fallows, *RMA research chronicle xxix* (1996) pp.1-20.

"Dance in early Tudor England: an Italian connection?" Jennifer Nevile, *Early Music*, May 1998

W.R. Streitberger, *Court revels, 1485-1559*

Acknowledgements

Katrina Hunt (also known as Mistress Mathilde, Baroness Politarchopolis) has interpreted the music.