

English Country Dance Steps

SL -- Single Left

Step with the left foot and then bring the right foot together to finish with feet closed. This step takes 2 beats.

SR -- Single Right

As above, but start with the right foot.

DL -- Double Left

Step with the left foot, right foot, and left foot, and finally with the right foot to finish with feet closed. This step takes 4 beats.

DR -- Double Right

As above, but start with the right foot.

Singles and doubles can all be done either forward, backwards, or to the side, which specifies the direction of travel during the step. Thus, a side single left is a step to the left with the left foot and a step with the right foot to bring the feet together. These steps are notated as follows:



Step	Forward	Backward	Side
Single Left	SLf	SLb	SL or SSL
Single Right	SRf	SRb	SR or SSR
Double Left	DLf	DLb	DL or SDL
Double Right	DRf	DRb	DR or SDR

TL -- Turn Left

Make a full turn (360°) over the left shoulder with one DL.

TR -- Turn Right

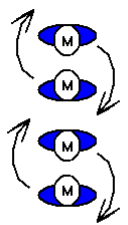
Make a full turn (360°) over the right shoulder with one DR.

STL -- Set and turn Left

Do a side single left, then a side single right, then do a Turn Left (SL, SR, TL).

STR -- Set and turn Right

Do a side single right, then a side single left, then do a Turn Right (SR, SL, TR).

Side Left	<p>This step is done with partners facing each other. There are several ways to do this step. The one described below is from Raoul-Auger Feuillet's <i>Recueil de contradanses</i>, printed in 1706, and is the earliest description of siding that has been found.</p> <p>SLf towards your partner, bringing your right shoulders into line, then SRb into place, then SRf, bringing your left shoulders into line, then SLb into place again.</p>
Side Right	<p>As above, except starting to the right instead of the left.</p>
Arm Left	<p>This step is done with partners facing each other. Each takes partner's right arm at the elbow and walk around partner with a DL, DR to walk a full turn back to place.</p>
Arm Right	<p>As above, but join left arms and walk a DR, DL back to place.</p>
Honour	<p>A bow, either to the front of the hall or to one's partner. In the middle of the dance it can be a simple acknowledgment if it is meant to be quick.</p>
Slip	<p>A quick single, sliding the second foot into position to complete the step.</p>
Cast	<p>To cast, the couple spins away from each other and travels down the line past one or more people to meet in a different position in the set.</p>
Heys	<p>Many Playford dances include a hey, but the number of dancers, number of beats, or the actual figure may differ. However, there are features common to all heys. Basically, a hey is a figure in which dancers pass by each other in a set number of counts. Passes are done alternating sides, so if the dancer passes first to the right, the next person will be passed on the left., and, generally, all dancers end the hey in their original places.</p>
	
	<p>Positions for Hey</p>
	<p>One common hey is for four people, starting in a line as shown in the diagram. Beginning by passing right shoulders, the dancers pass each other alternating sides until back in place. When the top or bottom is reached, the dancer circles around an imaginary person and winds up facing down the line to pass the next person. Therefore, each person will pass someone 8 times (including imaginary passes at the top and bottom of the line) before returning to position. This hey is used in <i>The Merry Merry Milke Maids</i> and <i>Goddesses</i>, among many other dances. Other heys tend to be similar in style.</p>
Hey for three	<p>A hey for three people is also quite common. In this case, the two bottom people are both facing upwards, and the top person is facing down the set. The first two people swap, and then the first person finds himself in the second person's place, and swaps with the third person.</p>
	<p>This continues in the same way as a four person hey, so that everyone returns to place.</p>
	<p>This hey is used in <i>Grimstock</i>, and other dances.</p>

Other Heys

A circular hey for 8 (known as the double hey) is used in the last verse of Goddesses. Similarly, the last verse of Woodcock has a circular hey for 6, and The Old Mole has a circular hey for 6 done twice (a double double hey!). To do these heys, have the top (and bottom, in an 8 person hey) couple face each other, while the second and third man face each other, as do the second and third lady. Simply continue the hey progressing around the circle until you get back to place.

Chestnut contains half of a hey, in two places. This is a hey for 3 that finishes half way through, with the first man in the third man's place, and vice-versa (the second man will have returned to place).

Picking of Sticks contains a hey that can only be described as “weird”. I think it proves that hallucinogenic drugs were available in the 17th Century.

Discussion on Step Styles

In this section I give some rationale about a few of the decisions I make about step descriptions. Feel free to skip this if you aren't interested in the details.

Do you take hands during a hey?

Yes, you do.

OK, so if you are doing modern folk dance, modern country dance, scottish country dance (with one or two exceptions), or recreating dance from the 18th C onwards then you probably don't take hands during a hey.

If you are attempting to position English Country Dance as an SCA activity (which restricts itself to pre-17th century culture), or re-enact dances from the first edition of Playford, then you probably do take hands during a hey.

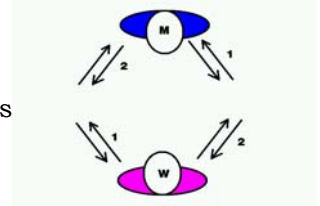
Hey figures did not originate with Playford, although he was the first to use the term “hey”. They appear in 16th C Italian dance (Contrapasso Nuovo, Bizzarria d'Amore, and others), and in all of those dances where a hey-like figure is danced, Caroso or Negri specifically say to take hands during it.

In two places in the first edition of the English Dancing Master (Nonesuch, Dargason), Playford specifically says to take hands during a hey. In one place (Wherligig) he is arguably saying to take arms at the beginning of a hey, and in one place (Scotch Cap) he says to take hands and do a figure which is very similar to a hey although slightly different. Nowhere does he say to not take hands during a hey. Nowhere does he say that taking hands during a hey in the places where he says to do so is anything unusual.

I've argued this one with a number of people over the years, but basically the evidence as far as I'm concerned is stacked on the side of taking hands during a hey.

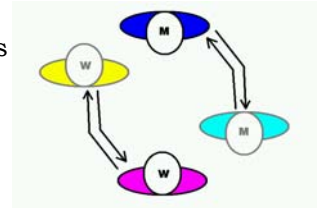
What sort of sides do you do?

If you have danced in any of my classes you've probably seen the standard sides which we do around here, which look like the ones on the right. These are a fairly literal interpretation of the sidings described in Feuillet's book of 1706. Unfortunately there are no earlier evidence for sides than that, although Julia Sutton has been quoted as saying that this is consistent with some of the 16th C Italian descriptions as well (I have not heard that first hand).

**Pat Shaw**

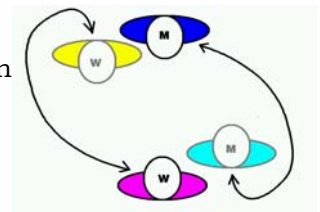
Many country dance groups these days do the "Shaw" sidings, named after Pat Shaw. These sides look like this:

These are also highly possible reconstructions, although they are at best as good a guesswork as the Feuillet sidings, and at worst a later reconstruction based on 20th C observations.

**Cecil Sharp**

You may have seen sides that look like this:

If so then you have probably learned from a modern English Country dance group. These sidings are based on Cecil Sharp's books of the early 1900's, and there is no evidence to suggest that they existed before then. They probably should be avoided if you are reconstructing pre-18th century dance.

**Left and Right**

In most cases, Playford does not specify whether step sequences begin on the left or right foot. When he does, steps almost always begin on the left foot. I have followed this pattern in describing other steps, and some steps arise either from natural continuations from previous steps or simply from aesthetic considerations.