

The Cowper Family Biography and Waltz Routine

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Newcastle Series

THE COWPER FAMILY

Part 1

Biography and Waltz Routine

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1) EARLY HISTORY

As far as we are aware the first member of the Cowper family to teach dancing was Robert Cowper. Robert taught at 8 Stonegate, York, until his death in about 1890. It is not known where he learnt his dancing. He was an excellent fiddle player and used to provide the music for his own classes, indeed he was renowned for whacking errant pupils with his fiddle bow. He lived in a large house, which had a ballroom on the first floor. His great nieces Elsie and Beatrice recalled that even after the ballroom was split into two after Robert's death, it was still possible to get five sets of Quadrilles up at one time, and for circle dances one could get 140 people dancing at once.

Robert's brother owned a sweet manufacturing business in Wakefield. He had two sons, Oliver, born 1854, and Arthur, born 1857, and it was his intention that both sons should follow him into the family business. Both boys had however come under the spell of their uncle Robert, who, in addition to teaching them the violin had inspired them to try and follow him in the profession of dancing master. Arthur was successful in persuading his father and eventually went to live with his uncle in York to learn his trade. When Robert retired, Arthur took over his dancing academy.

Oliver was not so lucky, and in spite of his wishes was put to work in the family business for some time. He would however bring his fiddle into the factory and play for the workmen, distracting them from their work. Eventually his father capitulated, but perhaps feeling that one dancing son was enough he apprenticed Oliver to a draper in Manchester. Oliver completed his apprenticeship and continued to work in Manchester in the fullness of time he married a Keswick girl and shortly after this took up a post as manager of a large draper's shop in Workington. Although he worked in this job for a number of years it seems that he was never really satisfied with his lot and eventually gave up his post to become leading violinist at the Workington opera house! At the same time he began to teach music and dancing. After a while he had so many requests for classes that he gave up the opera house, took larger rooms and began to make a living as a full time teacher of dancing. His studio was in Christian St, Workington.

2) ARTHUR COWPER

Arthur was born in about 1857, and as outlined above learnt to play and dance and eventually took over from his uncle Robert. After Robert's death Arthur held ballroom dancing classes twice a week in York. On Mondays the class ran from 7.00 - 10.30 pm the first hour being for beginners. On Thursdays the length of the class was the same but this was devoted entirely to beginners. Arthur charged a guinea a "term", which lasted for ten or twelve weeks. The pupils had numbered tickets and when they arrived the doorman would tick off their numbers in a book. On Saturday afternoons he held a children's class at which he taught not only ballroom dancing but also a number of fancy dances. Arthur held both a juvenile and adult ball at Christmas time. These were for pupils and their guests only, and were devoted entirely to ballroom dancing with no exhibitions.

On the evenings when he held no classes in York, Arthur took classes in some of the villages and towns in the surrounding area (for example Sutton on Derwent, Sutton on Forest, Shipton, Poppleton and Coxwold). These were frequently held in barns and lasted only for one term, although if the pupils requested it he would return for a second term. Arthur frequently walked to these classes and on one occasion when the roads were deep in snow he became tangled in telephone wires brought down by the weather. At the end of the term in the villages he would hold a ball lasting until 3.00a.m. and on these occasions Arthur would provide a band.

Arthur had three daughters. Elsie, Beatrice and Gladys. The first two assisted him with the classes when they were old enough and eventually took over their father's dancing academy when he retired.

From Elsie's memory her father taught the following dances:

Quadrilles
Waltz Cotillion
Caledonians
Sir Roger de Coverley
Lancers

*Corkscrew (this only until c.1900)

Waltz
Galop
Polka
Barn Dance
Schottische
Highland Schottische
Valeta

Arthur also taught the following fancy dances for use in concerts:

*Skirt Dance (or the Dame Marjorie Gavotte)

Japanese Dance
Tambourine Dance
Gypsy Dance
Spanish Dance
Fan Gavotte
Gavotte and Minuet
*Sailor's Hornpipe

Many of the fancy dances were in fact composed by Beatrice, using material borrowed from other teachers and adapted for her own use. Those marked "*" were however her father's dances.

Step dancing only occurred as part of fancy dancing, but some of the steps were used in the sailor's hornpipe and may date from Arthur's or Robert's teaching.

3) OLIVER COWPER

In the winter months (from the first week of September until just before Easter) Oliver taught each night of the week in a different town or village in Cumberland - Workington, Whitehaven, Wigton, Maryport and Cockermouth. Saturdays were reserved for private lessons. During the summer he went out into the surrounding villages (e.g. Bulgill, Aspatria and Bagerer). It seems that he normally travelled by train. He provided his own music for the classes, playing the fiddle. Eventually Oliver's wife and three sons, Harold, Parry and Roland assisted him with the classes.

The classes were divided into two sessions, the first for children of school age from 5.30-7.30 and the second for adults from 8.00-10.30. Each series of classes ended with a "Grand Ball". In the villages he also held "long night dances" for adults three times during the course of the summer. These would go on until 4.00 a.m. These were also held in the towns but with less frequency. In the towns Oliver insisted that his pupils wore white gloves, in the villages he tried to make the same stipulation but with little success! He always taught etiquette however, and when a pupil wished to ask a lady to dance he had to say "May I have the pleasure of this dance?" and after the dance was over, take her back to her seat on his arm, bow to her, take two steps back and then turn and walk back to his seat. At the children's classes the boys and girls sat where they liked but usually they preferred to sit separately. Oliver also had two special classes, one in Whitehaven and one in Workington for more well heeled clients. He also gave private tuition.

Oliver Cowper's children's dances included the Skirt Dance, Fan Gavotte and the Tambourine Dance. He also arranged a big children's dance display in Workington once a year.

As regards his repertoire generally, it is difficult to decide which items he learnt from his uncle Robert, which he composed himself and which he acquired locally. When he began teaching full time he recieved several requests for lessons in step dancing, which he was unable to teach, knowing nothing of this himself. Realising that there was a demand for this form of dancing he sent his eldest son Harold to learn from Jack Robinson of Seaton, who was renowned as a very clever Cumberland step dancer. This would have been in about 1894. When Oliver was holding his children's classes, those who wanted to learn step dancing went off into a seperate room with Harold.

Oliver's adult repertoire in c1905 was as follows -

Quadrilles
Caledonians
Lancers
Alberts
Sir Roger de Coverley
Triumph
Square Eight
Long Eight
Six Reel (Oliver only taught this by request - he considered
"it got too rough.")
Varsovie
Polka and Polka Mazurka
Schottische
Barn Dance
Valeta Waltz
Scotch Reel
Circassian Circle (two versions)
French Cotillion
Ninepins

In addition it is known that Oliver composed a number of speciality dances for children although these are outside the scope of this work.

4) HAROLD COWPER

Harold, born in 1877, was Oliver's eldest son, and, as recorded above is credited with introducing step dancing into the family repertoire. It seems that in spite of this he took little part in the running of the dancing academy and eventually left Cumberland to become a newspaper editor in Devon.

5) PARRY COWPER

Oliver's second son, Parry was the "family expert on 'folk dancing'", although it is not known whether this was derived from contacts with the E.F.D.S and later the E.F.D.S.S. or from his own local knowledge. He ran his father's business after the latter retired, in conjunction with his brother Roland until Parry emigrated to New Zealand after W.W.2.

6) ROLAND COWPER

Roland was Oliver's youngest son, born in 1899. He became a painter and decorator in Whitehaven, but taught dancing in his spare time. He was also an excellent cellist. His daughter MARION COWPER carries on the family dancing school, and continues to travel around the surrounding villages teaching dancing to local children as did her father, grandfather and in York her greatgrandfather.

The waltz units given below were all collected from Marion in 1983, she having been taught these by her father.

CLOG WALTZ STEPS

The following are the units used by Marion Cowper to make up a choreographed waltz rhythm routine. The routine is split into units rather than steps, and each unit is utilised as appropriate within the routine. It is up to the individual choreographer to use the units as he or she sees fit when building up a sequence. Marion prefers to have a mixed set if possible. The units are not "steps" as such, they may be used for as long as required within any given routine and are not necessarily of 16 bars in duration. Marion normally begins each unit with the R foot, but clearly this would depend to a great extent on how the units are mixed together.

There is no set "finish" to any unit, the only fixed point being that unit 12 was usually performed for the last 16 bars of a routine. The routine should involve movement around the stage and the formation of patterns, for example stars, reels or circles, dependant upon the number of dancers.

Where Marion felt that particular hand or arm movements were appropriate to a particular unit an attempt has been made to describe these.

Waltz Step Units

Platform Unit

1		<u>step</u>				A:
and)	shuffle	:E/F,E
2)		
and					<u>step</u>	:A
3		<u>step</u>				A:

The unit given above occurs in a large number of the following waltz steps, and where it occurs, reference should be made to the above notation.

Unit 1

A part = Platform unit

B	1		<u>step</u>				A:
	2				catch out		:RB↑,B,C/D↑
	3		<u>hop</u>				A:

Unit is AABA
 ||||
 RLRL

Note. This unit is normally repeated off alternate feet.

Unit 2

a			tap) flop	:A
1			<u>step</u>)	:Aex
a		tap) flop		A:
2		<u>step</u>)		Aex:
a			tap) flop	:A
3			<u>step</u>)	:Aex
4		tip tap		RXD:
5		tip tap		RXD:
6		tip tap		RXD:

Note. This unit is normally repeated off alternate feet. During the course of beats 4/5/6, when the step is danced off the R foot the body is inclined forwards from the waist and the left arm extended vertically downwards so that the hand is about two feet above the ground. The right hand is extended horizontally backwards. Keep the head well up. (When the step is danced off the L foot the hands are reversed.)

Unit 3

a			tap) flop	:A(B)
1			<u>step</u>)	:Aex
a		tap) flop		Aex:
2		<u>step</u>)		A:
a			tap) flop	:A
3			<u>step</u>)	:Aex
4		heel touch		E:
5				
6				

Note. Beats 5 and 6 involve "dusting off your shoes". On beat 5, the body is inclined forwards, and the L hand brushes the tip of the L foot, moving from L to R. On beat 6, the L hand brushes the tip of the L foot, moving from R to L, and the body then straightens up.

This unit is usually repeated on alternate feet.

Unit 4

A	1				<u>step</u>		:A
	2		catch out				:RB↑,B,C/D↑
	3				<u>hop</u>		:A

B part = Platform step (beginning L)

C	1				<u>spring</u>		:A
	2		<u>step</u>				RXC:
	3				<u>step</u>		:A
	4		<u>spring</u>				:A
	5				<u>step</u>		:RXC
	6		<u>step</u>				:A

Step is ABC
|||
RLR

Note. Unit is usually repeated off alternate feet.
On the C part there is a distinct lilt of the body.

Unit 5

1		touch [f]					Bbt:
2					<u>hop</u>		:A
&)	shuffle					C/D,C/D:
a)						
3		<u>step</u>					A:

Note. This unit is repeated off alternate feet.

Unit 6

A	1			<u>step</u>	Atup:RÉ*
	2	catch in			É↑,B,A↑:
	3	<u>step</u>			A:
	4			<u>step</u>	:RÉ*
	5	click heel(R),heel(L)			A↑:
	6			<u>hop</u>	:A

B = Platform Unit

C	1			<u>step</u>	:A
	2	catch out			:RB↑,B,C/D↑
	3			<u>hop</u>	:A

Step is ABC
 |||
 RLR

Note. Step is normally repeated off alternate feet.
 On beats A 4/5/6 a complete turn is made, clockwise if performing the step off the R foot, counterclockwise if off the L.

Unit 7

A part = Platform Unit

B	1			<u>step</u>	:XC*
	2	↑			F↑:
	a	click heel(R),heel(L)			A↑:
	3			<u>hop</u>	:A

Step is AABB
 ||||
 RLRL

Note. Step is usually repeated off the same foot.,

Unit 8

A part = Platform Unit

B	1		<u>flat jump=</u>		<u>flat jump=</u>		A:A
	2						Á,À,Á:À,Á,À
	3		<u>swivel click heel (R)=</u>		<u>swivel click heel (L)=</u>		Á,À,Á:À,Á,À
	4		<u>swivel click heel (R)=</u>		<u>swivel click heel (L)=</u>		Á,À,Á:À,Á,À
	5						
	6						

Step is AAB
 |||
 RL=

Note. Step finishes with heels together.
 Step is usually repeated off the same foot.

Unit 9

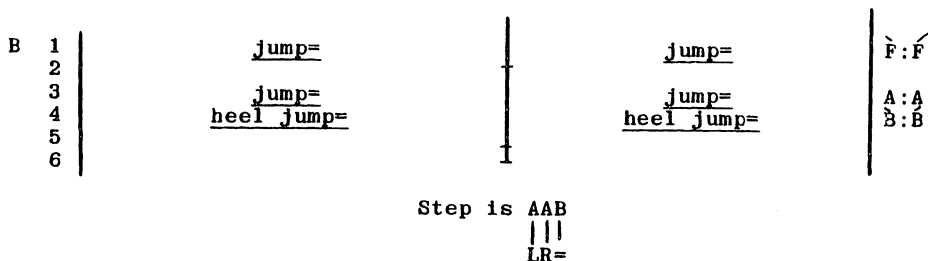
A	1				<u>step</u>		Atup:RE*
	2		catch in				:E↑,B,A↑
	3				<u>hop</u>		:A
	&)	shuffle				C/D,C/D:
	a)					
B	1				<u>step</u>		:A
	2		catch out				A↑,B,C/D:
	3		catch in				C/D↑,B,XC↑:
	4		<u>toe step</u>				XC*:
	5						
	6		<u>drop heel</u> [p]				A:

Step is AAB
 |||
 RLR

Note. This step is usually repeated off the same foot.
 The heel drop on beat B6 is hardly sounded at all, and is
 in reality a preparatory movement for the following tup.

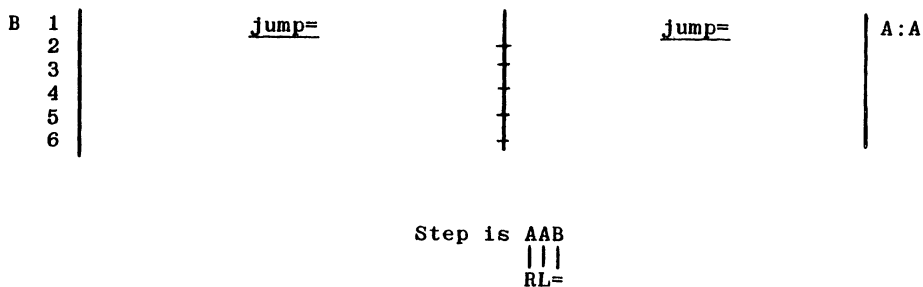
Unit 10

A = Platform Unit



Unit 11

A = Platform Unit



Note. Not a difficult step this!
Always performed with a partner.
On B1 hit palms of hands on thighs, on B3 clap hands,
on B4 clap hands with partner, L on R and R on L.

Unit 12

A	1	<u>jump=</u>	<u>jump=</u>	À:XĆ
	2	<u>jump=</u>	<u>jump=</u>	XĆ:Á
	3	<u>jump=</u>	<u>jump=</u>	Ĥ:Ĥ
	4	<u>jump=</u>	<u>jump=</u>	A:A
	5	<u>jump=</u>	<u>jump=</u>	À:XĆ
	6	<u>jump=</u>	<u>jump=</u>	XĆ:Á
	1	<u>jump=</u>	<u>jump=</u>	Ĥ:Ĥ
	2	<u>jump=</u>	<u>jump=</u>	A:A
	3	<u>jump=</u>	<u>jump=</u>	À:XĆ
	4	<u>jump=</u>	<u>jump=</u>	XĆ:Á
	5	<u>jump=</u>	<u>jump=</u>	Ĥ:Ĥ
	6	<u>jump=</u>	<u>jump=</u>	A:A

Step is four times through on the same foot

Note. Begin with the R foot moving into XC for the repeats.
Finish with :

5	<u>jump=</u>	<u>jump=</u>	A:A
6	<u>jump=</u>	<u>jump=</u>	A:A

on the last repeat.

Note. This is always the last step.

Unit 13

1		heel tap	:É
2		catch in	:É†,A,RC†
and	<u>hop</u>		A:
3		tip tap	:RC
4	tup	<u>step</u>	Àtup:RC*
5	catch in		É†,A,RC†,: :
and		<u>hop</u>	:A
6	tip tap		RC:
1	<u>step</u>	†	A:C/D†
2			
3		<u>step</u>	:A
4	heel touch		É:
5			
6			

Note. Step is usually repeated off alternate feet.

The information contained in this booklet is derived from visits made to Marion Cowper in 1983 by the Instep Reasearsc Team, augmented by biographical material from two visits made by T M Flett to the family.(To Roland Cowper on 6/1/60 and to Elsie and Beatrice Cowper on 23/3/60)