

The John Mitchell Collection

Enhancing a Valuable Treasure: The Mitchell Project by Viktor Lehmann

Some years ago, a British girl named Alison Mitchell, studying in Heidelberg, started to visit our local dance group. At some stage, she came forward with 'some dances her father wrote'. Ah ok, Scottish dancing seems to be a family matter! But, who could have known that she is John W Mitchell's daughter, the man who devised over 800 dances, spread over 24 Whetherly Books and 79 Whetherly Sheets?

Apart from John's best known dances (*Iona Cross*, *The Dundee City Police Jig* and *Caddam Wood*), most dances were not available through the SCD database, and the publications were only available as reprints through TAC in Canada.

Do you know that moment, when you say something and know instantly that it might turn into something really crazy? This was when I agreed to Alison's suggestion of re-editing all of John W Mitchell's publications and giving her a hand. We started to scan all documents, trying to automatically extract the text (from old photocopies of typewritten master copies with broken letters on grey paper...). After a while we brought in more people to adjust the basic text or to retype bigger parts of it.

We are now ploughing through every book. Alison helps to verify the dances, as we know that most certainly John didn't have the time nor the group to trial every single dance. We need to re-edit some obvious errors, typos, renamed figures. We also want to find out which figures were his own creation (for example the *Highland Schottische Petronella* or *Counter-Splat* - as far as the latter is concerned: funny figure, but don't ask about the name).

We will then publish in non-chronological order book by book, including introductions to the original editions by John and to the new editions by Alison. I had the pleasure of creating a publication tool for the Central Germany Branch website where members or Branch friends are allowed to digitally publish their dances and books online, with links to the SCD database. As and when a book is about to be published, you will find it on by <https://www.scd-germany.de/publications/>

At some point in life, everything you need will be linked, and through visiting Summer School, I met Keith Rose who without a blink agreed to help us creating diagrams, and let's face it: that alone is a task for a lifetime. John's catalogue is as large as Drewry's portfolio... And finally, the e-crib-Team, especially Roland Telle, also assured us their help in creating cribs and linking everything back from the SCD database to the Central Germany Branch publications site.

Alison and I keep saying, that, albeit not every dance being a diamond, the oeuvre in total is a treasure, and we feel that every minute that goes into bringing it back to the dancing community is worthwhile. And you all can help - either by assisting in the re-editing process or by just going through the re-edited books and picking out one or another dance to try. As John says in the introduction to Whetherly Book 23, "With any luck they will do as the instructions say, which may not be what was intended but may be even more enlightening". As a character, John Mitchell surely was "something" - and so is his legacy. A valuable treasure.

Contact: Viktor Lehmann, mitchell@tone2tone.com

Online sources:

<https://www.scd-germany.de/publications/>

<http://my.strathspey.org/dd/person/270/>