

**Searching for
Mr. Becket
Thursday Dance
News Update**



Fall 2003 – Vol. XXIX #3

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message)**

In Search of "Becket"

Beckett

Bowcote

Bewcott

by Dan Pearl

Why is it that we do dances in "Becket" formation, and not "Podunk" formation? What or who was "Becket" anyway? My search began in March of 2003, when Michael J O'Connor innocently posted this question to the English Country Dance Digest (on the Internet):

"Who was Becket, anyway?"

We all know that the term "Becket Formation" is used to denote contra dances that begin in the same couple-facing-couple position as used in the first contra dances of that type, *Becket Reel* by Herbie Gaudreau. The term was first applied to the general formation in the mid-1970's. Roger Diggle wrote in the ECD Digest on 1 August 2000:

"I was told by prolific contra choreographer Al Olson that Larry Jennings is responsible for naming Becket formation. I'm inclined to believe it, since I've seen the name in no source material older than Zesty Contras."

Ask Larry, and he would give credit to Al Olson.

(BECKET, Continued on page 2)

Springstep Center Opens

Springstep ("A Center for Traditional and Contemporary Arts"), located in Medford Square (Mass.), is slated to open its doors to the public with an inaugural "Arts Blast" on September 6th, 2003 from 11am to 5pm. Everyone is invited to drop by, tour the facility, sample a mini-class, and learn what Springstep will be offering the community and Greater Boston.

A catalogue of courses and special event offerings is now available at its website (www.springstep.org) or by calling the office at 781-395-0402.

Several years in development and construction, the brand new facility on George P. Hassett Drive, across the street from Medford City Hall, features three dance and concert spaces, two kitchens, offices and conference rooms. When it was originally conceived by Deborah Hawkins, a prime contributor and Springstep board member, the facility was to have been the home of NEFFA, the Folk Arts Center of New England, CDS Boston Centre, and the Royal Scottish Country Dance Society Boston Branch. Economic realities forced a recasting of the goals of the center. While it is not going to be the home of these dance organizations, the Folk Arts Center and the RSCDS are planning on offering regular events at the center. – *Editor*



Springstep

A center for traditional and contemporary arts

(BECKET, Continued from page 1)

Herbie Gaudreau devised *Becket Reel* in the 1950's. Herbie, as other dance composers in the area, named dances after Massachusetts towns. The connection to Becket, Massachusetts was a camp, Camp Becket, at which Herbie was a dance caller. All this is well-known in dance caller circles, but I didn't stop there. How did the town of Becket get its name?

Becket, Massachusetts was originally laid out in 1735 as "[New] Plantation No. 4", and when it was incorporated in 1765, was named by Sir Francis Bernard, the Royal Governor of Massachusetts. But why did he pick that name? A document on the wall of the Becket Town Hall clears up this issue:

"Beckett"

Shrivenham, Berkshire, England

The original "Beckett" for which the town of Becket was named, is an estate or "tithing" which once belonged to the Admiral Lord Barrington [as in "Great Barrington, Mass."]. It is located at the southern tip of Berkshire [England], about five miles east of the important railroad town of Swindon.

Sir Francis Bernard, the Royal Governor of Massachusetts in 1765, was a close friend of Lord Barrington and was himself a native of Berkshire. It is said that he enjoyed many a happy restful holiday in the beautiful surroundings of Beckett, and that these pleasant memories influenced him in 1765 to give the name Becket to Township Number Four when he approved its incorporation.

The mansion was rebuilt in the early 1800's, only the cellars and part of the kitchens remaining as they were

Becket Reel by Herbie Gaudreau

Becket Formation, double progression clockwise
A1. Allemande left corner (adjacent to you along the line), swing partners.

A2. Women chain over and back.

B1. On the left diagonal, right & left through. Straight across, right and left through.

B2. Star left. Star right.

in Sir Francis' day. Surrounded by landscaped gardens, Beckett is excellently preserved today. By happy chance, it is now on the grounds of the Royal Military College of Science and has served as its library. This college [now called Cranfield University], interestingly enough, was the American Military College in England during World War II.

[And now the good bits.] The origin of the name "Beckett" is still a puzzle. In early days it had been spelled "Becote" and is believed to be of Norman French derivation. There seems to be no known connection with the name or family of the famous Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas A'Becket. The name always went with the property, long before it was granted to Lord Barrington as part of his perquisites when he was raised to peerage.

In "Short History of the Beckett Estate" (author unknown), there is included a description of the property as depicted in the Domesday Book:

"The King holds Shrivenham in demesne [domain], king Edward held it. There are 46 hides. There is land for 33 ploughs. On the demesne there are 4 ploughs and there 80 villeins and 17 borderers with 30

(MORE BECKET, Continued on page 4)



Date: **September 20, 2003**

Time: 2:00pm - 5:00pm

Event: **Another Afternoon of New and Old Calculated Figures**

English Country Dance experience needed - Basic figures will not be taught

Caller: Gary Roodman

Musicians: Joyce Crouch (piano); Chris Rua (oboe & recorders)

Location: Munson Memorial Library, South Amherst, MA

Admission: \$8

Information: Ruth 413-253-3828 or Cat 413-253-0887 (How to avoid "Big E" traffic around Springfield)



Editor: **Dan Pearl**

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Editorial Review: **Maureen Carey, Shelagh Ellman-Pearl, Lisa Greenleaf, Robert Johnson**

The NEFFA News, a publication of the New England Folk Festival Association, Inc., is published four times a year to communicate with its membership and other interested persons. **Please send all**

editorial submissions to Dan Pearl, 15 Buffalo Run, Southborough, MA 01772, or to Daniel_Pearl@yahoo.com. Opinions of individuals are not necessarily the opinion of the NEFFA Executive Board.

Publicize your events! Display advertising is available for qualifying folk-related organizations. For more information, contact the editor.

| Issue | Deadline |
|--------|----------|
| Spring | Feb. 15 |
| Summer | May 15 |
| Fall | Aug. 15 |
| Winter | Nov. 15 |

Personnel Changes

The Thursday Night Dance Committee (TNDC), the volunteer committee that produces the Thursday night contra dance at the VFW in Cambridge, has been a remarkably stable committee over the years. In 1990, we took over administration of the dance from Tod Whittemore. The initial committee was composed of Steve Boylan, Cal Howard, Larry Jennings, Leslie Morrison, John Rowen, Ernie Spence and me. We've gained a few (Lisa Greenleaf, Angel Roman), and lost a few (Leslie, Angel and John).

I'm sad to have to report that Steve Boylan has left the committee after his 13-year stint. Tireless and thoughtful, Steve made a concrete contribution to the committee and the dance. Alas, Steve has decided to trade in his urban lifestyle for that of northern Vermont. Steve promises to drop by from time to time, so watch for him here (and at the Montpelier dances, of course).

I am happy to welcome two new committee members to the TNDC. Victor and Nell Wright have been regular attenders at ours and other dances for years. They are this year's co-chairs for the CDS Boston Labor Day Weekend at Pinewoods, and have been volunteering at the NEFFA Festival for years. They bring a positive, cheerful attitude to the job. Welcome, Victor and Nell!

The Government Discovers Dancing

After 26 years, the City of Cambridge Licensing Department became aware that there were public dances at the VFW hall. Such dances require licenses, as it turns out. In the spring, the VFW received notice that such events (featuring dancing and charging admission) needed to be licensed.

There are two types of license. The first type is a one-event license, which would cover just one dance at a cost of \$40 a week. Starting in April, we began obtaining these licenses. We were able to obtain them in batches of 8, but each batch required several stops in Cambridge to initiate paperwork, get police approval, finalize the paperwork, etc. After the third batch, it

became very tedious. Actually it became tedious during the first batch. There had to be a better, and cheaper way.

There is. The second type of license is the annual license. This is for us, we figured. Actually, it is not a license for us; rather, it is for the VFW hall. Getting an annual license was not easy. For one thing, the city needed all sort of floor plans and property drawings from the VFW – just the kinds of things that are lost after decades of operation.

Then came the public hearing. The VFW is located in a Residential zone, and annual entertainment licenses are usually not granted in such a zone. The VFW applied for a zoning variance to allow the live entertainment.

The hearing process was definitely not a rubber stamp. At the hearing it became clear that there have been some problems with events at the VFW in the past. Residents of Fresh Pond Place (the condos next to the hall) testified that there have been instances of fistfights, disturbances, catering trucks blocking driveways, etc. It also became clear that there were no problems associated with any of the dance groups (contra, tango, swing) at the VFW; the problems were mainly from one-shot events (weddings, retirement parties, etc.).

After two nights of hearings, the zoning board delivered their decision: The variance allowing live music would be granted for the three dance groups, but all music needed to end by midnight. This was a very good decision. If the variance had been denied, then very likely the weekly licenses would also be denied too, and the dance would now be looking for another home.

There are various fees involved in the annual license: Live music, recorded music, a fee for the stage, etc. The three dance groups are going to split the cost of the annual license, and it will add about \$10 to the cost of operating each night of dancing for us.

A main reason why the zoning decision went our way was that our dance crowds are well-behaved, quiet when leading the dance, we don't litter, and we are considerate when parking. It is thanks to you we still have a place to dance. — *Dan Pearl, Chair, TNDC*

News From

THURSDAY

contras at the VFW

The New England Folk Festival Association, Inc. is a non-profit educational and cultural organization, incorporated under the general laws of Massachusetts to preserve folk traditions in New England and elsewhere; to encourage the development of a living folk culture; and to encourage high standards of quality and performance in the folk arts.

Membership entitles one to voting privileges, publications, and to reduced admission to selected NEFFA-sponsored activities. It is open to interested persons who support our objectives.

Annual Dues are \$7/individual (\$18 for 3 years); \$11/family (up to 2 people over 18) (\$28 for 3 years) Contributions are tax-deductible to the extent permitted by law. Send check, payable to NEFFA, to the office. Occasionally, NEFFA shares its mailing list for a one-time use by like-minded folk organizations. If you do not want your name and address shared in this way, tell us with your membership. **Please direct all inquiries** to the NEFFA office: PMB 282, 1770 Massachusetts Ave., Cambridge, MA 02140 or (781) 662-6710, or via email: neffa@neffa.org

Interested persons may get on NEFFA's mailing list for one year at no charge. Send request with full name and address to the office.

(MORE BECKET, Continued from page 2)

ploughs...In the Manor are two mills worth twenty shillings, and 240 acres of meadow and woodland to render 20 swine. In the time of King Edward it was worth 35 pounds, and afterwards 20, not 45 pounds.”

At the time of that writing, the property was held by William, the Count of Evreux on behalf of King John (who was in residence in 1204).

“In 1633,...the Manor was bought by Sir Henry Marten, a judge. ... On the death of his son, the lands were sold first to Sir George Pratt..., and in 1666 to John Wildman. Wildman’s son adopted John Shute as his heir and when in 1716 Shute succeeded to the Barrington Estates he changed his name accordingly, and established Beckett as the family seat.”

Rachel Daniels, who is part of the Engineering Team at the Cranfield University library, contributed this:

“The name Beckett, as with many other ancient place names, has evolved over the years. It was

Becote in the 11th Century, Buccot or Bockate in the 13th, Bewcott and Bowcote in the 17th, and did not emerge as Beckett until the 18th century! The de Becote family, granted ownership by the King, held the manor until 1424.”

Interestingly, a descendant of Sir Harry Marten, is currently a student at Cranfield University.

At this point the search has ended. Becket dances may be a modern contra dancing fad, but the name goes back to the 11th century!



Beckett House at Cranfield University

History of the Banners That Hang in the Big Gym at The NEFFA Festival

They were designed and put together by Ted Sannella’s sister Anna in 1968. Twenty years later, a group of us redid them because the burlap backing was falling apart. Elgie Ginsburg gave up her living room floor for several weekends as we carefully removed and transferred each felt piece onto firmer ground (a lot of measuring and sewing; we worked in teams, snacking in between).

2001 – The picture wiring that holds them aloft was replaced by Jane Breede and me on my living room floor.

The designs are Swedish, American Indian, Bulgarian, and Ukranian. — *Angela Taylor*



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