

William Richardson, Dancing Master – an Appraisal.

William's occupation as a Dancing Master signals him out as a rather special person. It is not necessarily a profession that someone would require special training for. William was the son of a Tailor, not the background one would have expected for a dancing master. William might have learnt from attending local dances and possibly he had a special aptitude for dancing and memorised the different dances and steps as a young man. It is also possible that he was a musician, in particular of the violin, the 'fiddle', with which he may have played the dance music.

The dances of that period were usually Assembly Dances often held in rooms associated with Inns. It might also be the case that he was employed at grand houses for the gentry of the area. Unfortunately we do not yet have any evidence other than his appearance in 1841 at a house in Northumberland with his wife Christina while their children remained at their home village of Swinton in Berwickshire. This suggests that he was away from home to teach a 'customer'/'client', in this case possibly the surgeon also resident in the house of a shoe maker.

William and Christina were about 44 years old and had been married for 21 years, long enough to have established himself. The absence of earlier information is at the present an obstacle to a fuller understanding of how he became a dancing master.

Census records show that he went by the title of dancing master for over 30 years, that is quite an achievement and a testament we hope to his proficiency. I have not discovered trade directories for Berwickshire for suitable dates to locate William. Such directories are frequently found for England.

It is not possible to know what type of dances William taught – most likely 'modern' for that period, possibly Scottish, or what we call 'Playford' style dancing which were set English dances for which their were dancing music and instruction publications.

