

*"And out of his knapsack
he drew a fine fiddle"*

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE TECHNIQUE
OF ENGLISH FIDDLELING By JOHN TIMPANY



AND OUT OF HIS KNAPSACK
HE DREW A FINE FIDDLE

An introduction to the technique of English fiddling

By John Timpany

The English Folk Dance and Song Society
Cecil Sharp House, 2 Regent's Park Road, London, NW1 7AY

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank all those who have contributed information and suggestions. In particular I would like to thank:

Harry Minting of West Wickham (who set up my first fiddle) for his advice and assistance with the technical sections.

Arnold Woodley of Bampton, Oxon for his tunes and allowing me to use his technique as an example.

The English Folk Dance and Song Society for their help in my research.

Audrey Smith for editing and checking and her encouragement.

Cover: Arnold Woodley of Bampton, Oxfordshire.

Photograph: Roy Barratt

Illustrations designed by the author and prepared for printing by Lisette Demant.



Roy Barratt
12 Glebelands
Bampton
Oxon.
OX18 2LH
Tel: 01993-850484

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Section	Description
1.0	Introduction
2.0	Choosing a Fiddle
3.0	Setting up the fiddle
	3.1 The sound post
	3.2 The tail piece
	3.3 Setting a new bridge
	3.4 The strings and tuning
4.0	Playing
	4.1 The key of D
	4.2 The key of G
	4.3 The key of A
	4.4 Bowing
	4.5 Decoration
	4.6 Decoration in detail
5.0	Conclusion

INTRODUCTION

This book is certainly no substitute for the method by which a traditional fiddle player would have learnt his instrument, which was from hearing and watching another player and trying to copy him.

It can only act as a guide and answer some questions a beginner will need answered.

This book is almost entirely about English traditional fiddling. Ireland, Scotland and the Shetland Isles have their own traditions, so on occasions I have tried to point out the differences in style.

The most fundamental way of learning to play, is to buy a fiddle and start trying to play dance tunes. Most of the technicalities can be worked out, and providing the tune is given a strong beat which is neither too slow nor too fast to dance to, it doesn't really matter how you play.

Perhaps the purpose of this book is to help the beginner to see his next step, and to decide early on what he eventually wants to do with his fiddle!

I have used conventional methods of indicating the fingers of the left hand and showing the bow directions since they are logical and there is no need to invent new ones.

In the diagrams showing the notes and fingering in each key, I have only shown the ranges necessary to play the tunes given in the book. These are adequate for

most tunes and when it becomes necessary to exceed them, you will have the required experience to find the notes for yourself.

The term 'fiddle' is rather obscure, but colloquially it means 'violin'.

Evidently in the dark ages, it represented a plucked instrument and the bow was only introduced after the 10th Century, when the word became to mean a bowed instrument. The word was used for flat backed instruments rather than for the Rebec type.

Webster states that the 'fiddle' was a folk instrument especially for dancing.

Small, flat-backed, even oblong instruments were carried by dancing masters in their pockets and the local 'folk' fiddler played for community dancing as well as, in the country, for the local Morris side. No-one ever called him a violinist.

2.0 **Choosing a Fiddle**

It is useful to have at hand someone who is familiar with fiddles and knows what to look for. Be advised but not persuaded. If you buy your fiddle from a music shop, and especially a dealer who specialises in violins, you should have no need to check the condition and will be able to choose simply from the "feel" of the instrument. The "feel" is a combination of many factors which include the ease of fingering the notes, how comfortable the fiddle is to hold and its look. There is also a factor which is difficult to define and is perhaps a judgement as to whether or not the instrument suits you.

If you are proposing to buy a second-hand fiddle you must be careful since many second-hand fiddles are not immediately playable. If the fiddle is strung it probably means that all the parts are there. If there are parts missing, other than pegs, strings, tailpiece, bridge and chin rest, you can have them replaced but obviously the average fiddle in this condition is worth very little, especially if the varnish is in a bad state. The varnish on factory-made instruments is usually a hard, high gloss. Handmade fiddles do not usually have a high gloss since the varnish has also been made by the maker, and is usually an oil varnish. Looking through the "f" holes, you will probably see the maker's label, but, I might add, this is very unreliable.



Fiddle

Bow

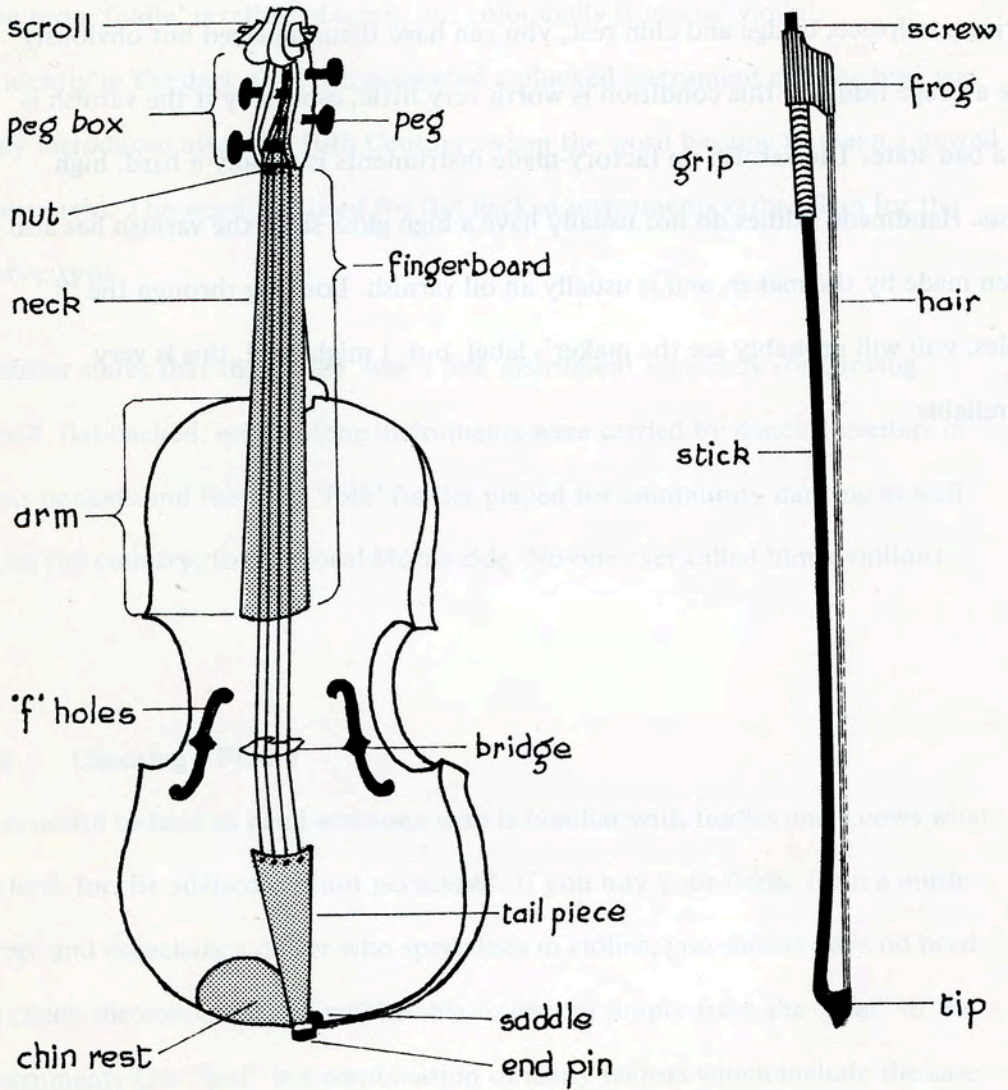


Fig. 1

The important things to check are:

1. There should be no splits in the body or peg box. In particular, check the seams.
2. The fingerboard should not be twisted or warped. This is seen by looking down the finger board from the peg box.
3. Check that the finger board has not come away from the neck.
4. Look at the neck to see if it has been broken and repaired. Do not mistake this for the line where the varnish has worn away with use.
5. Holding the fiddle first on one side and then on the other, look down the seams (ribs). They should be parallel. If they are not the fiddle has warped.
6. Holding the fiddle flat, examine the arm. The arm is the projecting part of the finger board over the body. If it dips towards the belly, it will be impossible to obtain the standard height for the bridge, although the fiddle will still be playable.

3.0 Setting up the fiddle

If your fiddle is a new one it should not need setting up. If it is a second-hand one it probably will and you are strongly advised to take it to a reputable repairer.

Setting up a fiddle is very much a matter of personal preference. For example, some fiddlers choose to cut down their bridge and flatten it to make for easier chording with the bow. The following description is for setting up a fiddle like a violin since this is relatively standard and later alterations can be made in the light

of experience. There are many ways of setting up a violin and this is only a suggestion for a very basic method.

3.1 The Sound Post

Hold the fiddle with the front up to the light and look through the 'f' holes. You should see a vertical piece of dowling firmly set beneath the foot of the bridge on the rear side of the 'E' string. This is the sound post and produces the volume and resonance. If it is missing, you are advised to have it set by a repairer. If it is on the opposite side under the 'G' string, it means that the fiddle was originally made for a left-handed player. A repairer cannot alter it to a right-handed fiddle easily, and if he does, it probably will not have as good a tone.

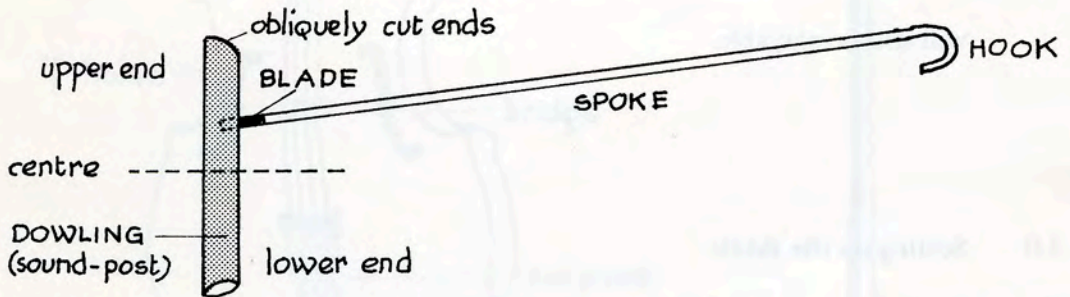


Fig. 2

Putting in a Sound Post

If your sound post is loose, you can re-set it. If it is missing you will need a piece of $\frac{1}{4}$ inch diameter, soft, straight-grained dowling, (e.g. pine), a little too long for

the depth of the fiddle; and a bicycle spoke. String could be used instead of a spoke, but it makes the job a lot more arduous.

Cut the ends of the dowling obliquely and shape them to match the sloping belly of the fiddle.

Sharpen one end of the spoke to a blade point and at the other end make a hook to catch the dowling inside the fiddle to pull it into position.

First press the blade firmly with the grain into the dowling a little nearer to one end than to the other. Then carefully poke the dowling through the 'E' string 'f' hole. Turn the dowling until the end with the spoke in is uppermost. Position the lower end of the dowling on the inside of the fiddle back and pull the upper end with the spoke towards an upright position. At first the dowling will be too long and it will be necessary to remove it and cut some off. The correct length will be when it is slightly at a slant beneath the bridge foot. At this stage, pull the spoke until it comes out of the dowling, then with the other end hooked round the upper section of the post, pull until the post is firmly in a vertical position under the foot of the bridge nearer the 'E' string. Do not use force to position it.

Until the strings are on, be careful not to knock or jar the fiddle since the sound post may come loose.

3.2 The Tail Piece

If there is a tail piece already on the fiddle, examine it underneath to see that the wood and gut are strong enough to take the strain of the strings. If either needs replacing, you are advised to take it to a repairer.

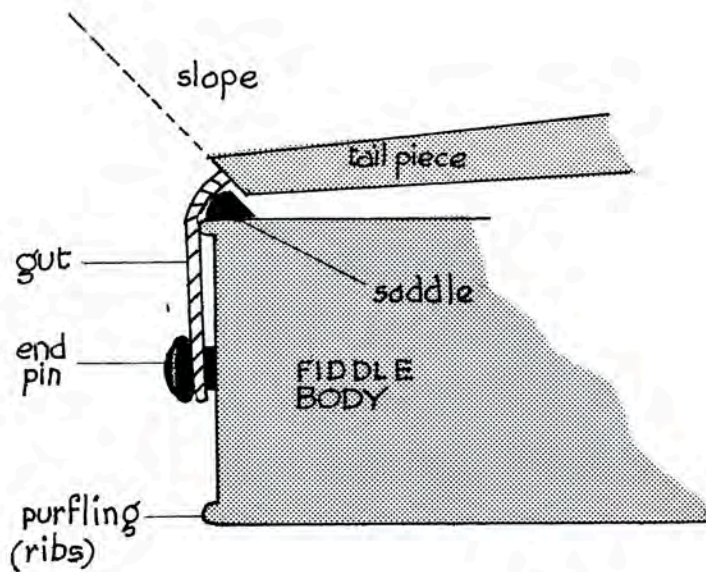


Fig. 3

Setting a Tail Piece

Obtain the correct gauge gut or nylon from a dealer, burn one end and bind it for an 1/8th inch. Push the other end through one of the two holes in the underneath of the tail piece in the direction of the bottom of the fiddle, then take it back through the other hole leaving a loop about two and a half inches in length projecting from under the slope of the tail piece. Put this loop over the end pin at the bottom of the fiddle and pull on the spare gut until the slope of the tail piece is overlapping the saddle. Carefully remove the tail piece and gut without altering the loop and turn the tail piece over. Where the spare gut comes through the hole is the position for the next binding. Cut off the extra, burn the end, bind the gut and refit the tailpiece. Check that the alignment of the slope and saddle is correct.

3.3 Setting a new bridge

Place the bridge on the fiddle belly between the 'f' holes with the curved face towards the finger board. Under the bridge feet lay a small sheet of fine sandpaper. Rub the bridge very slightly up and down until the feet fit flush with the face of the fiddle. Remove the sandpaper. The top of the bridge must now be shaved or sanded to the correct height. The generally accepted dimensions are when the 'E' string is $5/32''$ above the end of the arm of the finger board, and the 'G' string is $9/32''$. Be careful not to alter the arc. The top of the bridge will now be too thick and the top of the face nearest the finger board should be sanded so that the bridge appears to lean backwards.

It is recommended that you do not cut down any further or flatten the bridge until you have had some experience at playing and know what you want from the fiddle.

3.4 The Strings and Tuning

You now have to decide whether you wish to use gut or steel strings. Each has advantages, and to choose you should really hear playing on both sorts. As a general summary, gut strings are not so long lasting but are usually less expensive. Steel strings tend to keep their pitch well, even in hot steamy Folk Clubs, and the fine-tuners make small pitch changes simple. Gut strings tend to lose their pitch quickly and are difficult to tune, but for all their disadvantages gut strings give a strong, earthy sound whereas steel strings, although strident, give a more mellow tone.

Whichever string you use, first poke it through the hole in the respective peg and wind it on an inch or so with the string going over the peg. With steel strings you then simply slip the roller into the steel tuner slot, place the rubber ring (only with certain makes) over the string notch in the bridge and slide the P.V.C. sleeve up the string until it is over the ring. With gut strings, pass the free end of the string through the hole in the tailpiece, take it from underneath and pass it over the string in front of the tailpiece. Then put the end back under the string through the loop you have just made.

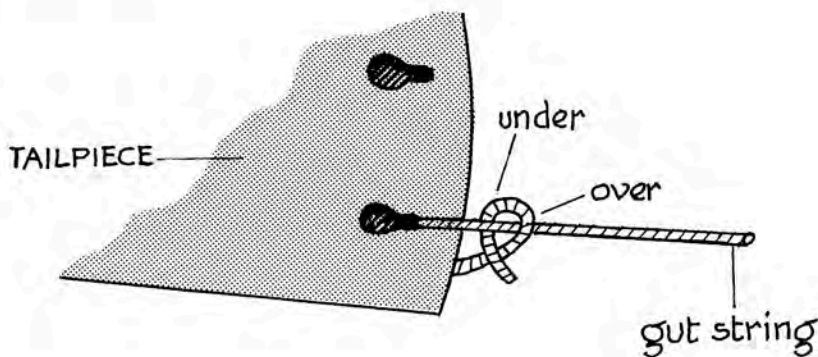


Fig. 4

Check that the bridge is sitting between the notches in the "f" holes, then tighten up the strings at the pegs until they reach the pitches shown in Fig. 3.

G is below middle C

D is above middle C

A is above middle C

E is above an octave above middle C

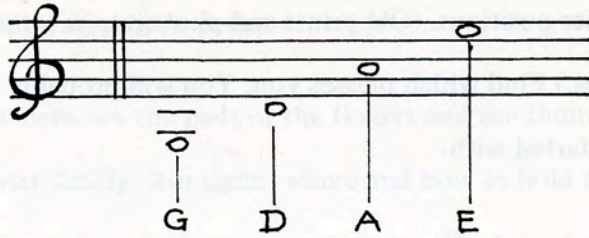


Fig. 5

4.0 Playing

Holding the Fiddle

There are two main ways of holding the fiddle. The first is by tucking the heel under the chin and the second, by pressing the bottom of the fiddle against the chest.

The first method gives support to the fiddle allowing the left hand complete freedom of movement. It allows chording with the bottom string (G) and makes chording in general easy.

The second method is used more by fiddlers who call the dances and who need to move their chins. It means that the left hand is gripping the fiddle and consequently chording becomes difficult since movement is restricted and the second position on the finger-board is unobtainable. The latter is not too great a loss, since it is not used in traditional English playing. This method gives a degree of detachment from the playing.

There are many other positions. (Old prints and photographs sometimes show quite surprising ones.) Find which pleases you. You will probably not finish up using the one you started with.

The Left Hand

The usual position of the left hand on the fiddle is to have the neck of the fiddle sitting in the palm of the left hand, almost with the nut between the thumb and index finger, and the neck on the heel of the hand. I have never seen a traditional fiddler hold his instrument otherwise. The most comfortable position is the sensible choice.

Holding the Bow

There are two lengths of bow, but the way you hold the bow and the way you play to some extent determines which one you should choose. Most English traditional fiddlers play one bow stroke to each quaver, which means the bow goes in a different direction for each note. Hence the apparent sawing action. This means that only a small part of the bow is used. To obtain the speed of bow movement, the bow is often held further up the stick near, or on the point of balance. Consequently, the part of the hair which is actually used is that nearer the point of the bow. Using this manner of holding the bow on a short bow means that most of the work will probably be done on a few inches of hair at the point. It is quite possible that in emphasizing a note with a downward stroke, the bow will slip off the strings altogether. With care this can be avoided but a longer bow could

make this style of playing a little easier.

If you grip the bow between the pads of the fingers and the thumb you will be able to use your wrist fluidly. But again, where and how to hold the bow and especially how to use it, is entirely your own choice. The hair should not be too tight but should not touch the stick when playing.

Putting your fiddle and bow away

When you finish playing, loosen the bow hair but not the fiddle strings. Keep both fiddle and bow in a case.

4.1 The Key of D

Scale of D

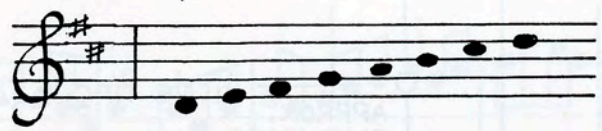


Fig. 6

The Notes You Will Use ~ in D

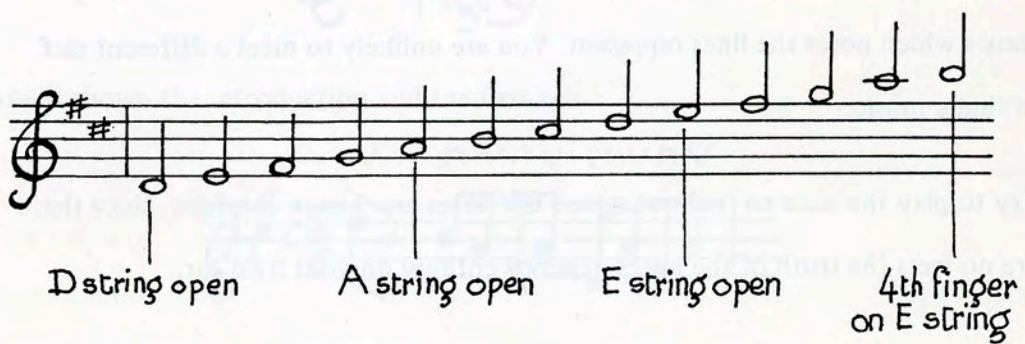
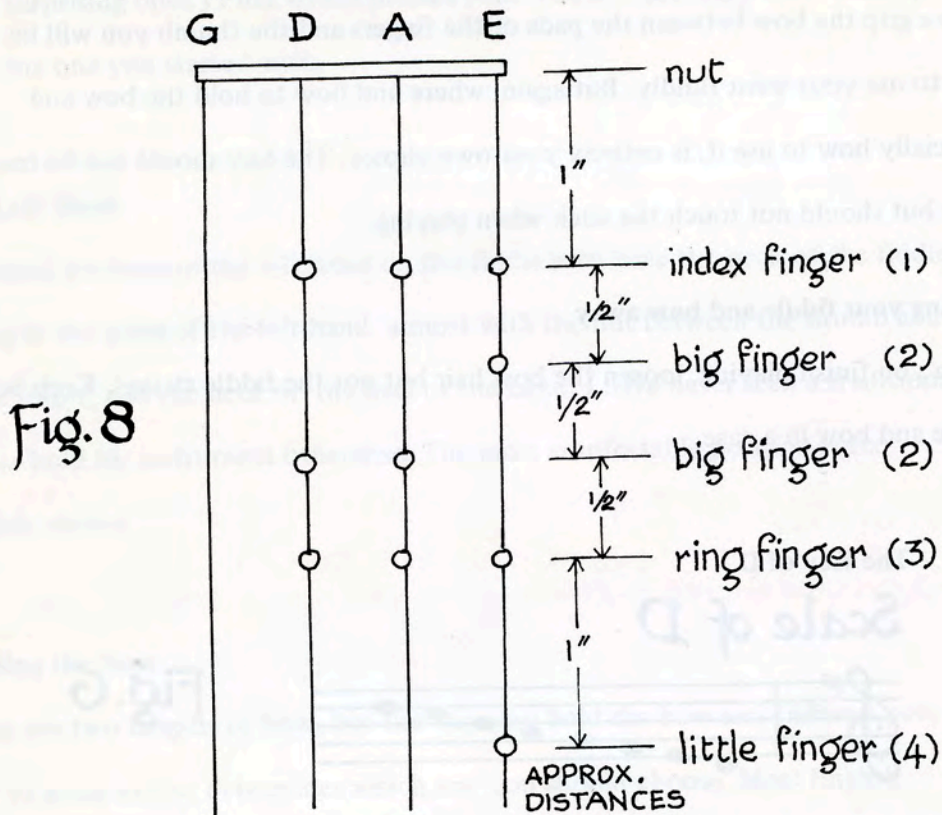



Fig. 7

Fingering The Notes - in D



The two # (sharp) signs indicate the key of D and the  the treble clef which shows which notes the lines represent. You are unlikely to meet a different clef in fiddle music.

Try to play the scale to find out where the notes are. Listen carefully, since there are no frets the truth of the notes depends entirely on your own ear.

Rather than plough your way through a lot of dreary tunes teaching you one note at a time, why not have a go at a simple Hornpipe.

The tune breaks down naturally into phrases and can be learnt a bar at a time.

Give yourself time to get the notes true.

Beaux of Oakhill.

The musical score for 'Beaux of Oakhill' is written in G major (one sharp) and common time (C). It consists of four staves of music. The first staff begins with a repeat sign and a first ending bracket. The second staff ends with a repeat sign and a first ending bracket. The third and fourth staves continue the melody, with the fourth staff ending with a repeat sign and a first ending bracket. The melody is a single-line tune in treble clef.

Printed by permission of
"Folktracks and Soundpost Publications"

Fig. 9

Below is shown the introduction and the first bar.

Fig. 10 shows the introduction and the first bar of the tune. The introduction consists of two measures of music in G major and common time. The first bar of the tune is also shown, starting with a repeat sign and a first ending bracket. Above the first bar, there are rhythmic markings: a 'v' above the first measure, and 'v v v v' above the second measure, indicating the placement of the first ending bracket.

Fig. 10

The symbols above the notes show the direction of the bow.

▢ means that the bow is drawn down and

▽ that the bow is pushed up.

The C means that the tune is in common time, i.e. has four beats to each bar.

Let us examine the first bar.

The first bar has eight notes in it altogether, but these in fact are half notes (quavers) so there are the equivalent of four full notes. Each full note is a beat so there are two of these quavers to each beat.

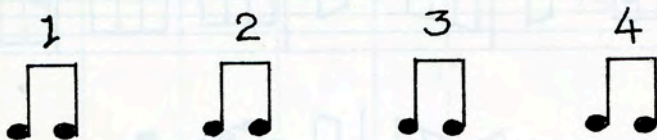


Fig 11

To get an idea of the relationship of the quavers to the beat, count aloud.

“One and two and three and four and”.

The first quaver is ‘one’, the second is ‘and’ and so on.

The introductory two quavers do not effectively have a stress, but for the bars the stress comes on the first beat. You can experiment later on by putting the stress elsewhere or other stresses in. As an example, another stress on the 3rd beat.

It is necessary to start playing very slowly to ensure that you have the correct timing.

As was pointed out earlier, English style is not predetermined so the bow directions shown are not the only ones, but they are probably the simplest and most straightforward.

Having embarked on the first bar, listen carefully to the pitch of each note. It is easy to develop the habit of playing a particular note off true. It is possible to play the first bar, (without the introduction), over and over again without stopping or altering the timing. This should be a good exercise providing you do not rush and you listen carefully to what you are playing.

If you are scratching or the notes are very harsh, you are probably applying too much pressure with the bow or the strokes are erratic and not smooth. The correct pressure is the minimum you need to produce a clear note – this should be a little more than the weight of the bow. If it squeaks, you may be touching the string with another finger or using too little rosin. The right amount of rosin is a matter for the individual. On a new bow you will need a lot, but after the first application, three or four pulls of the bow hard on the rosin along the length of the hair should be enough for 10-15 minutes playing.

Poor notes may occur if the bow is not parallel with the bridge. A sensible place to play is about an inch to an inch and a quarter from the bridge.

When you are able to play this bar smoothly, you will notice that your right hand performs a circular motion in the air. It is a worthwhile action to cultivate but you must make sure that you do not continue to circle when you return to the beginning of the bar or start the next bar.

When you are confident that you are playing well, progress to the second bar.



Fig. 12

The three notes together are a triplet and are each a third of a full beat. In this case they are played in the same bow stroke. Let us count the whole bar.

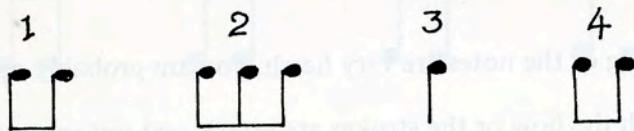


Fig. 13

The second bar is fairly difficult at this stage.

This is the timing for the tune so far:

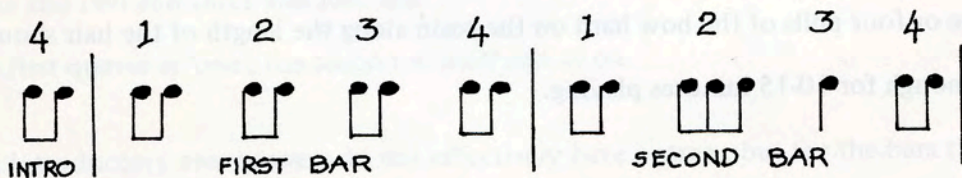


Fig. 14

When you are reasonably happy with the 2nd bar. progress to the 3rd and 4th which are straight-forward.



Fig. 15

After this you will find that the second half of the 'A' tune (next four bars) is the same as the first except that the last bar contains three full notes. Since the timing is four beats or four full notes to a bar, we are left with a full note, or two quavers short.

The double line and two dots at the end of the eighth bar means a repeat from the previous double line and two dots, which come before the introduction. So, when you repeat, the two introductory notes are used to fill the hole in the eighth bar. Similarly, when you have finished the repeat and begin the 'B' tune, then the 'B' tune introductory notes are used.

Content yourself with playing the 'A' tune over and over until it is smooth and your fingers are almost automatically finding the notes.

Up to this point we have been considering the tune from the point of view of trying to play it as a tune. You should now have a feeling of what the tune should sound like.

Instead of just playing the tune, examine your playing critically. Is each note true? Have you a strong beat at the beginning of each bar? Is there lilt and rhythm? There is no point in continuing until there is. When you are satisfied with your playing, try the 'B' part of the tune. You should have no difficulty, although in the second bar you will use your little finger. The last three bars are the same as those in the 'A' tune.

Hornpipes are not usually played fast; they are normally played at a moderate speed with special attention being given to the beat.

Bow Treatment

Generally English style fiddling is playing one bow stroke per quaver, but of course traditional fiddlers don't make a point of playing this way, so neither are you bound to do so.

We could theorise by saying that assuming English style playing to be one bow stroke for each quaver, the long bow stroke is decoration.

Indeed a lot of traditional fiddlers use a long bow stroke to emphasise a few notes. Occasionally it is used throughout.

4.2 The Key of G

This key and D, because of the ease of playing in them on fiddle tuning, are the most popular for fiddling. G is very similar to D. Below are diagrams of the

fingering and the equivalent notes in script.

Treat the scale in the same way as you did D; that is, to find out where the notes are. Listen to each note carefully for its truth.

The Scale of G

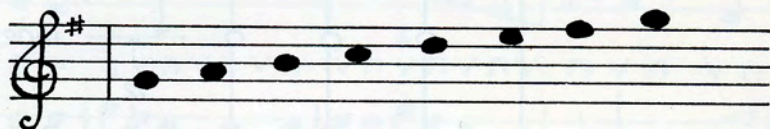
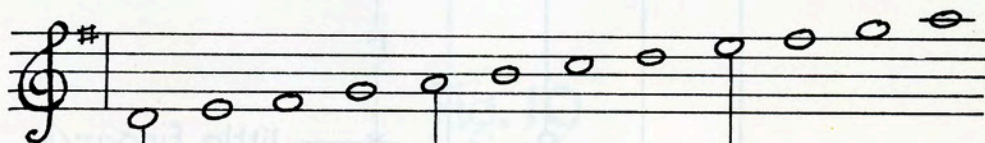


Fig. 16

The Notes You Will Use ~ in G



D open

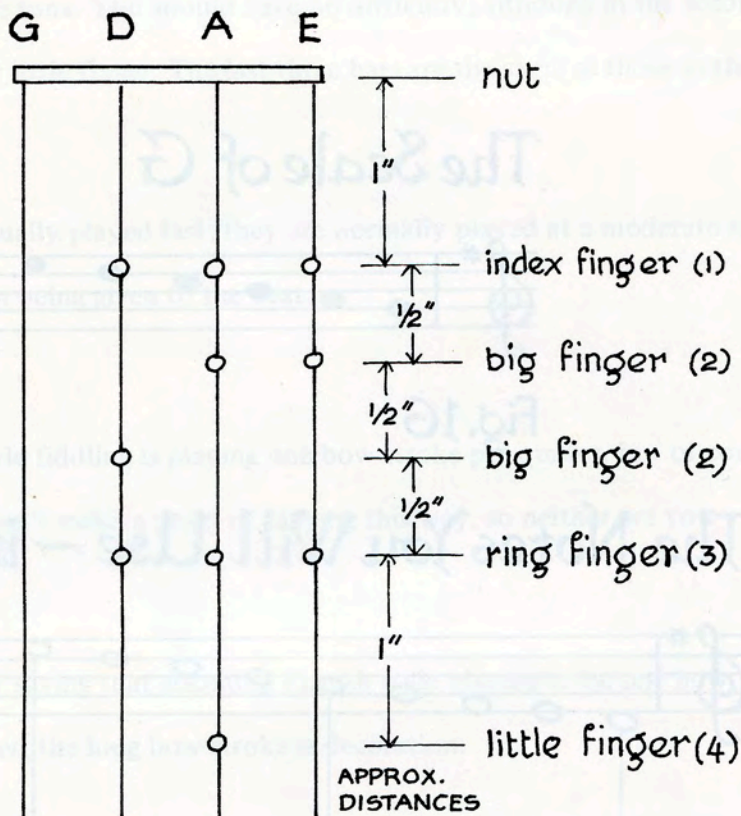
A open

E open
(or 4th finger
on A string)

Fig. 17

Fingering The Notes – in G

Fig. 18



The tune shown below is a Morris dance tune from Bampton in Oxfordshire and was taken down from the traditional fiddler there. The bow strokes and fingering are his. Incidentally, this tune is the first tune which Jinkey Wells of Bampton ever played to Cecil Sharp.

Highland Mary.

The image shows a musical score for the tune 'Highland Mary' in G major (one sharp). The score consists of four staves of music, each with a corresponding line of tablature above it. The tablature uses letters 'h' and 'v' to denote notes. Arrows point to specific notes in the tablature: the first arrow points to the first 'h' in the first line; the second arrow points to the first 'v' in the second line; the third arrow points to the first 'h' in the third line; and the fourth arrow points to the first 'v' in the fourth line. The music is written in a treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#).

Fig. 19

The places in the script which I have marked with arrows are notes which can either be played on the open 'E' string or with the 4th (little) finger on the 'A' string.

This is an excellent tune for open chording and open droning.

Both are forms of decoration and it might be as well to describe them here.

For an open chord you would play the open string below a note at the same time as the note, drawing your bow across both strings. You will do this with a note or

notes on the melody string to which you wish to give decoration or importance and emphasis; as an example, the end notes of a phrase.

Droning is playing a series of notes on the melody string together with the constant note of the string below.

In both cases you will be playing two strings at once. Chording is not necessarily open, you can work out chords for yourself, although in English fiddling, if you chord or drone it is usually on the open string below. Since both are forms of decoration, there are no rules as to where to use them.

If, in Highland Mary, you play the E note on the 'A' string with the fourth finger you will see that most of the second bar and all of the third can be played on the same string which means that you do not have to bow another string and can play a very long drone with the 'D' string. If you play the E on the open 'E' string, it is awkward to remove your 3rd finger to chord the E with the open A then replace it for the next note.

I am not offering any further suggestions for decoration since the fiddler from whom the tune was collected used no decoration other than chording.

One important point is that you should neither chord nor drone until you are able to play the tune, otherwise you will tend to play off true through not being able to hear the notes. Do not continue until you are able to play the tune smoothly.

It is once more time to stop playing the tune for the sake of the tune and criticise your playing – without chords or drones. Listen for the truth of notes especially the E played with the 4th finger. Listen for squeak and scratching and aim at playing the tune technically correctly. Surprisingly this tune is played quite fast, but I suggest you play it slowly until you have mastered it. The beat should be very strong, for dancing.

4.3 The Key of A

This is a comparatively popular key which means that a lot of tunes are played in it. For this reason it is included. Below is the scale and fingering which you should treat in the same way as previously. You will find the A scale is very different from the others because the 'E' string is used a great deal and because of the unusual position of the notes on the 'D' string.

The Scale of A

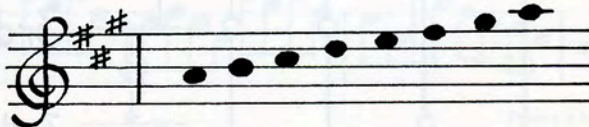


Fig. 20

The Notes You Will Use ~ in A

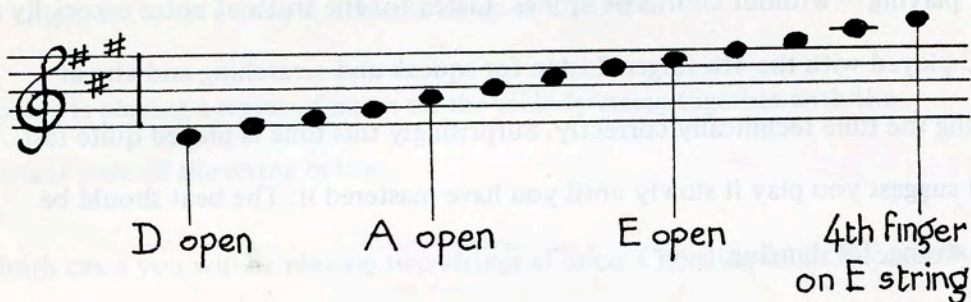
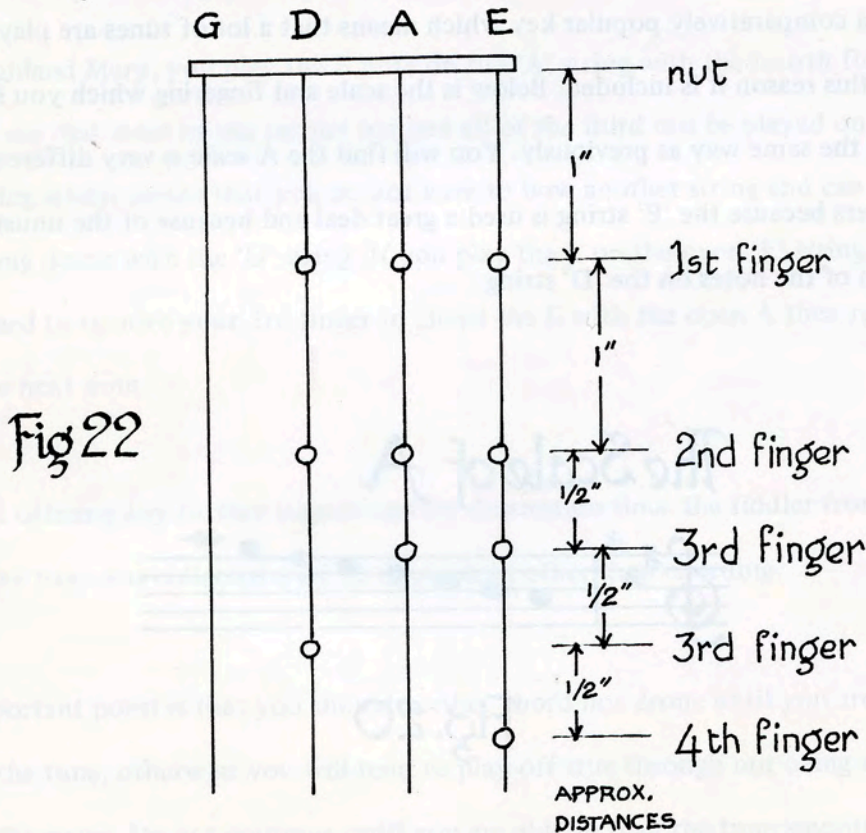


Fig. 21

Fingering The Notes ~ in A



The tune below is a reel called “Timur the Tartar”. Timur lived in the 14th century and conquered most of Asia and Eastern Europe, starting the first Mogul dynasty in India.

With all this fighting his reputation spread considerably and he was regarded in England as a very wild character. Tales were told of him, songs written about him (Tamburlaine, derived from Timur Lenk, Timur Lane), and tunes named after him.

Timur the Tartar.

n v n v nvnv nvnv n v n v nvnv nvnv

n v n v nvnv nvnv nvnv nvnv nvnv n v

n v n v nvnv nvnv n v n v nvnv nvnv

nvnv nvnv nvnv nvnv nvnv nvnv nvnv nvnv

Printed by permission of
“Folktracks and Soundpost Publications”

Fig. 23

You will notice that the right hand is again circling – don't get carried away with this when you have to return to normal bowing. Try circling continuously on the 'A' and 'E' strings during the run down on the 'E' string in the A tune. At the moment you are giving equal stress to each note. The melody, which mainly relies on the notes played on the 'E' string, can be emphasized in two ways. The first would be to lengthen the time on each of these notes, but the second way is much more subtle, and that is to shorten the time. See Fig. 24.



Fig. 24

The 'B' tune is a lot more difficult than the 'A' since it involves a run down from top A on the 'E' string to E on the 'D' string. It will require a lot of practice before you are able to play this smoothly and with accurate timing. It leads again into 'A' a repeat of which is necessary to finish the tune. Since it is a common time tune, it could be played as a hornpipe, which indeed it often is and also has another name – Blanchland Races. The Reel is played faster than the hornpipe.

4.4 Bowing

In general, the way a traditional fiddler learnt his instrument was by watching another and copying. If another fiddler was not available, he taught himself.

Naturally he would approach the subject, if he were teaching himself, from the easiest angle. This doesn't mean to say he would start by playing one bow stroke for each note, but it does mean that he is more likely to, since this is the most fundamental and perhaps the most obvious way of playing.

English fiddling never really broke away from a fairly rudimentary style as it did in Ireland. Perhaps this is because the purpose of the tune has always been dominant in England. That is, the players learnt tunes and played tunes especially for dancers and not purely for the sake of the tunes.

The recorded fiddlers in England are very few, which leads one to think that there never were many and that perhaps there never was a need for many. This means that if a fiddler found difficulty with a tune, he would probably have to find a way round it for himself. Most of the difficulties he would be likely to encounter would be with bow work. With very little experiment his fingers would find the necessary notes, but it is only when he is almost able to play the tune that he finds his bow work inadequate. The two big difficulties are changing strings very frequently or very fast bowing on the same string. Both require a great deal of effort and concentration.

There are economies of movement that he can make with his left hand fingers which make playing easier, but any alteration to his bowing technique will affect his style. Some will stick rigidly to using one bow for each note whether consciously or not, no matter how difficult the piece, others will bring in the long bow stroke.

The long bow stroke will make certain parts of the tune much more easily, and consequently better, played, but the English fiddler has not developed the use of the long bow and this is what makes me think that he has played more for the purpose of the tune than for the tune itself. It seems that English fiddlers intentionally kept to a style which is very much easier to dance to. The image of the English fiddler returning home or to the 'local' after working long and hard on the land and not having enough time and energy to practise, although not entirely untrue, is not reason enough for this style of playing.

Jinke Wells of Bampton, probably the most renowned of English fiddlers, could hardly have been called a hard-working man. It is true that his style was more decorated than his successor's, a working man with many other interests, but he never lost the fundamental style which is neither over-decorated nor elaborate. It was rather sparsely decorated, each note strong, with much importance to beat, timing and clarity. He was in the fortunate position of having no competition and the satisfaction that his fiddling fulfilled its purpose. For all this, Jinkey Wells' playing loses nothing. It is very exciting.

From the evidence available this style appears to be the general English bowing technique. I have seen an interpretation of Jinkey's playing by an English fiddler who obtained the strength and beat by slapping the bow on the strings. Jinkey did not slap his strings and I don't think the style is authentic but it achieves the desired effect which is reason enough.

The only other point to mention is that the down bow stroke is much stronger than the up stroke and it is likely that the down bow was usually used for the beat and stress.

4.5 Decoration

To some extent, the same reasons for bowing technique remaining primitive, apply to left hand decoration, but another important point to consider is that when bowing each note separately there is a shortage of time. You must subtract from the time of the note, the time it takes to alter the direction of the bow. For this reason the average fiddler would find it almost impossible to decorate with effectiveness in a very fast run of notes using the short bow technique. Somewhere is a balance between playing solely for the dance and solely for the tune. Obviously English fiddlers enjoyed playing the tunes otherwise the tunes would have ceased to exist. It is most probable that in playing and listening to a tune, decoration crept in almost unconsciously, perhaps in an attempt to relieve the boredom of constant repetition of the same well-known tune. An obvious place to decorate is a long note, for two reasons. To the fiddler's ear the tune may sound lifeless if the note is played without any decoration, and also here he has adequate time to decorate.

Decoration is entirely a matter of individual taste and balance.

Under-decorating is not a bad style, but over-decorating is. With the shortbow

technique over-decoration tends to produce sloppy, scratchy playing that is too fast. You should never try to cram in decoration and should only use it if you are capable of playing it with comparative ease. The decoration should not draw attention to itself. A good principle is to decorate only where the tune lends itself, which is usually where you have plenty of time.

If you don't wish to decorate, there is no reason why you should. Decoration does not make for good fiddling. Good fiddling is how well you execute your style.

Few of the old fiddlers decorated to any extent, some not at all. Their purpose was different from the new fiddlers of today. There are more musicians today than there are dance groups, besides which the accordion has greatly taken over the role of the fiddle, so players are left with no choice but to play for the love of the tunes. Some are bound to find themselves decorating automatically and slipping in long bow strokes to make it easier, so very soon the characteristics of English style are lost.

This doesn't mean that once you have mastered English style fiddling, if you progress you will lose it, but it does mean that you will have to be very careful not to.

4.6 Decoration in Detail

In this passage, I am offering suggestions of possible ways to decorate. Below is the first bar of Boring With The Gimblet, a Northumbrian tune.



Fig. 25

We will take the first note in the bar which is an E and examine how it can be decorated.

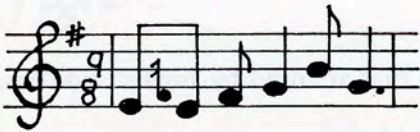


Fig. 26



Fig. 27

The most popular decoration is the mordent. There are two types of mordent, the upper and lower. The upper mordent is played by dabbing the finger next to the one you are using on the next note above. Don't remove the finger you are using. The lower mordent is played by lifting off the finger you are using to play the note below and replacing it very quickly. Even in this one note there are combinations of mordents you can make.



Fig. 28



Fig. 29

You will see for yourself there are other possibilities using mordents. There are other forms of decoration on this one note.

The vibrato is played by keeping the finger on the note but rolling the tip of the finger on the string slightly raising and lowering the note.

I must mention grace notes, which are notes you play briefly before arriving at the correct note; similarly slides, sliding up or down to the correct note; bouncing the bow on the note; stopping the bow and starting again in the same direction on the note; pressing the bow against the string, almost the same as bouncing but not so violent.

There are many, many ways to decorate.

Those I have shown and mentioned are about all that are used by English fiddlers. Complicated Mozartian decoration would be out of place.

5.0 Conclusion

You should now have a good idea of the possibilities and have come through a basic training fairly smoothly.

You must always develop the habit of criticising your own playing. Of course do not play critically, play because you enjoy it, but you must always come back to step one. Are the notes true? Is the beat strong? Are there any squeaks?

Continual playing of the same tune leads to lazy finger and bow movements which will need correcting, otherwise they will become part of your style. They are then not easy to correct since you normally only notice them once they are a habit. Then it is difficult to play the tune as it was.

It is worthwhile experimenting with other styles, although, if you wish to keep your original style, you will have to be conscious of your playing so that it is not affected without your noticing. The last point to mention is that you can always learn from another fiddler, irrespective of how poor his playing. There are very few traditional English fiddlers left, but if you can, you should try to see and hear them.

The Scale of B \flat



Fig. 30

The Notes You Will Use ~ in B \flat

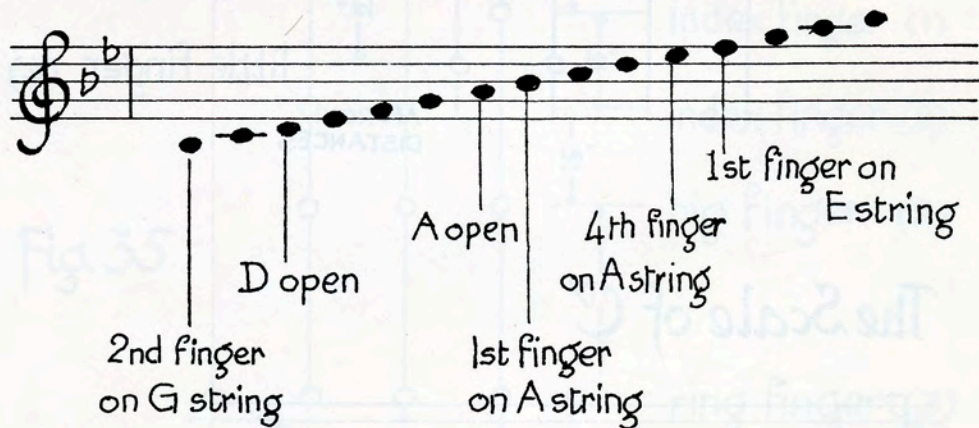
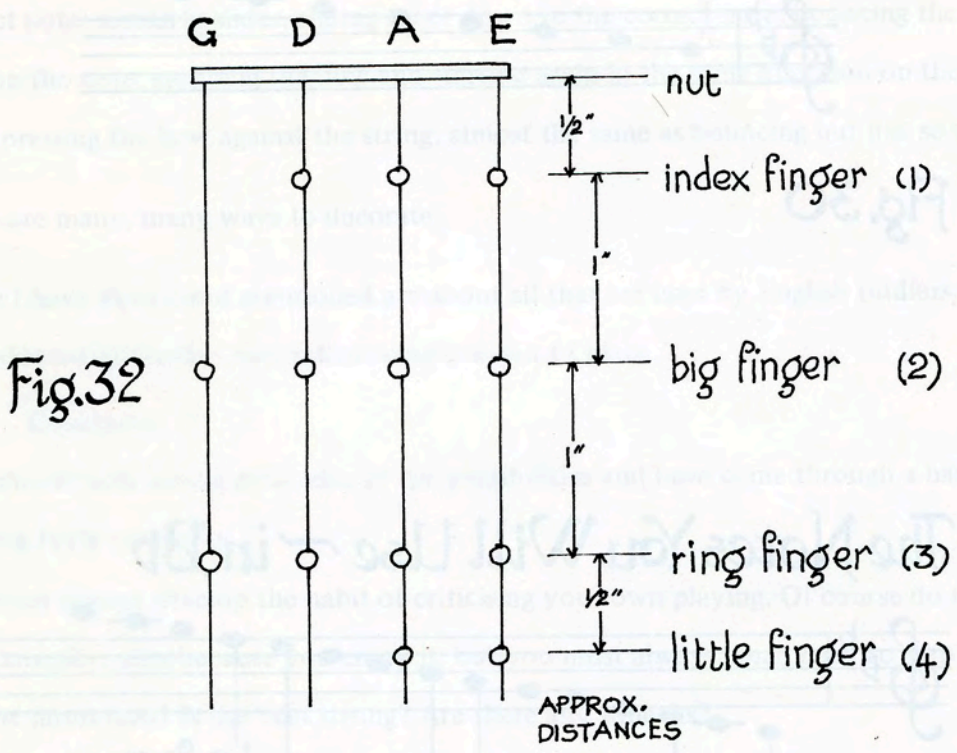


Fig. 31

Fingering The Notes — in B \flat



The Scale of C

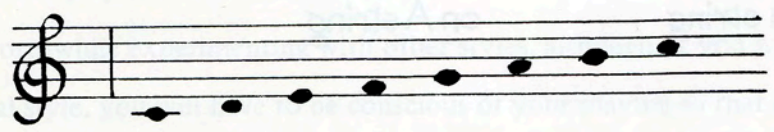


Fig. 33

The Notes You Will Use — in C

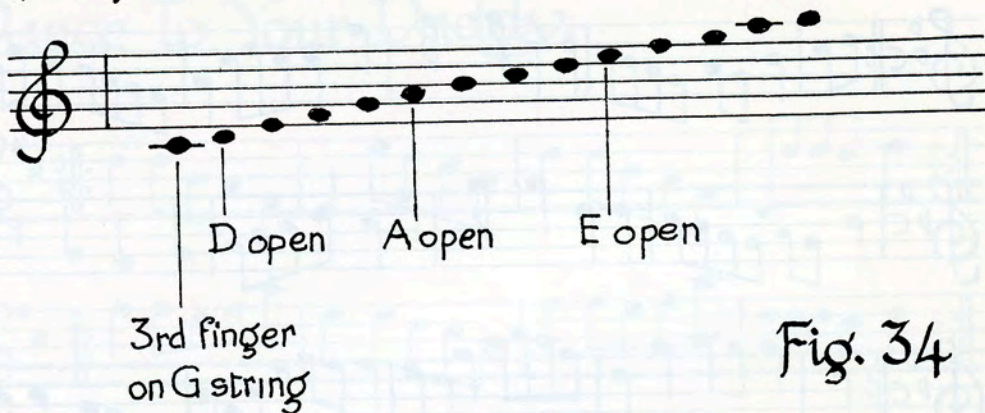


Fig. 34

Fingering The Notes — in C

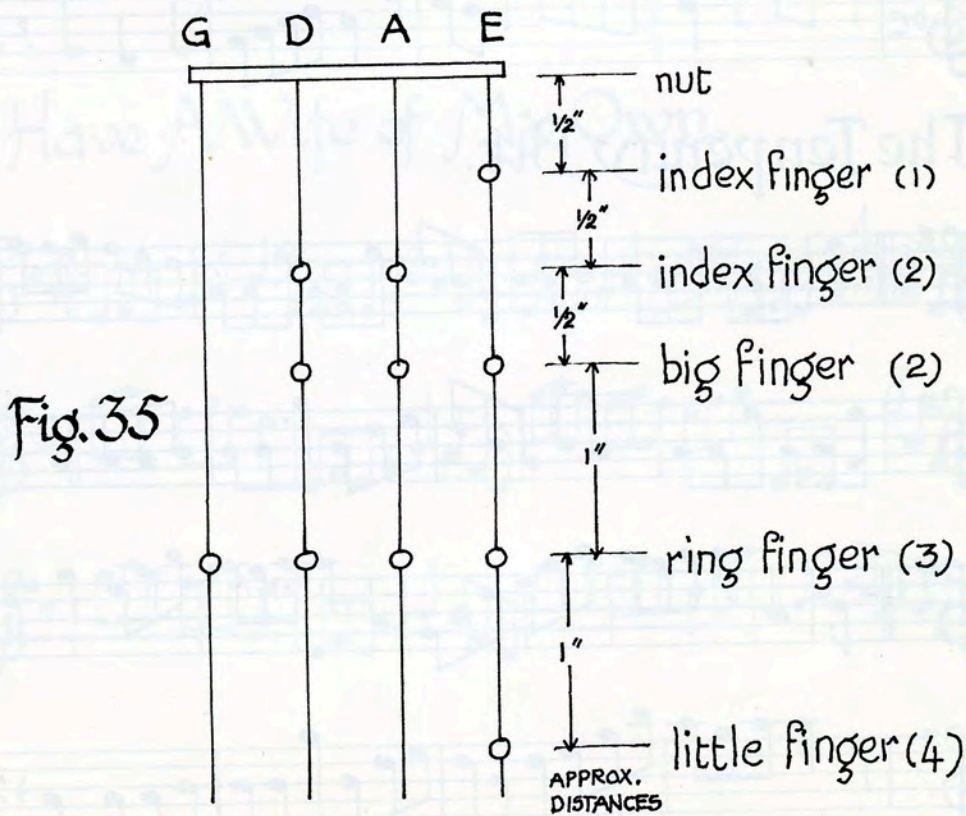
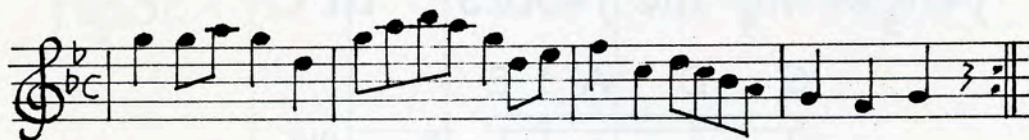
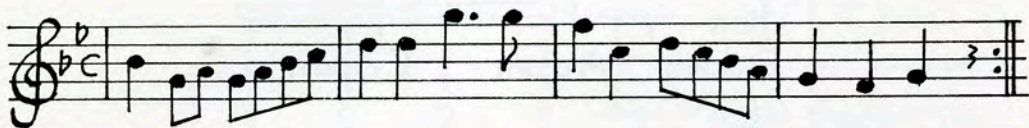


Fig. 35

Balquhiddar Lasses.



The Tenpenny Bit.



Dance To Your Daddy.



I Have A Wife of My Own.



