

How does the name Borowlaski come to be in Book 24 in the original tune's name for the dance "Oh, Whistle and I'll come tae ye, my lad"?

About ten years ago I had occasion to search for information on Joseph Borowlaski, and found Tom Heron's book amongst others in the University of Durham's Library. Joseph Borowlaski was the composer of the tune "Oh Whistle and I'll come to you, my lad" sadly not used for the dance. The Society substituted the tune, Borowlaski's Fancy from Campbell's collection. However, Borowlaski, known as Joujou by his friends, and "barrel of Whisky" in Edinburgh because of the difficulties in pronouncing his name, was a very interesting person.

He was a dwarf being only 39 inches tall. Born in Poland, he was a storyteller and became an excellent violinist, a master of diverse styles and travelled extensively in Holland, Austria, Germany, France, England, Scotland and Ireland. The houses of the nobility welcomed him, and he was introduced to George IV, Marie Antoinette and King Stanislaus II, at whose court he met his future wife, Isalina Bourboutin, a French girl. They married in 1780. In 1781 he met Sir Robert Murray Keith in Vienna and was persuaded by him to come to Britain. He visited Edinburgh and became great friends with Neil Ferguson, a lawyer, who was very tall, more than twice Joseph's height. Neil Ferguson organised a concert and public lunch in the Duns Hotel, St Andrew's Square. Tickets were 3s 6d and were soon sold out. To compensate those who could not get in, Joseph held court in his flat in St Andrew's Street, at 1s 0d per person.

In his memoirs, Joseph wrote that he paid his respects to Lord Dumfries, and was given a letter or recommendation to meet the Countess of Loudon, at the time called Lady Moira. He was introduced to friends, one, the amiable Colonel Hope, who organised a concert attended by their Graces, the Duke and Duchess of Buccleugh. The Countess of Loudon paid him well, and after the concert there was a grand ball at which he mostly likely played. At this time he composed several tunes of which "Oh Whistle and I'll Come to You, My Lad" was one. Interestingly, the poem by Burns was written in 1793, apparently after the tune.

He returned to England attracting the patronage of the Duke and Duchess of Marlborough. He paid another visit with much acclaim to Scotland. At the end of 1785, he was in Birmingham with friends of the Hutton family. Caroline Hutton was much taken by him and wrote down his personal history.

His last visit to France was in 1790 before his retirement to Durham. As a friend of Thomas Ebdon, the famous Cathedral singer, he had been much indulged by the Cathedral dignitaries and local gentry. He dined with such people as Stephen Kemble, Shakespearean author and brother of Mrs Siddons and John Kemble.

Joseph was proud of being small and only noted two instances of being offended by other people's behaviour towards him. He was very talented, but not overbearing and wanted to be known as a cultured Polish gentleman. At 97 years old, he is still the longest-lived dwarf in the Guinness Book of Records.

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