

# Stout Centre Review

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## SPECIAL DANCE ISSUE

Edited by Allan Thomas and J.M. Thomson

### The Lowe family collection of dance books and manuscripts

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## Stout Centre Review

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### Editor

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John Thomson

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design and production

Roger Joyce

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The Secretary, Stout Research Centre, PO Box 600, Wellington, New Zealand, Telephone (04) 472 1000

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## Stout Research Centre

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## Editorial

This special issue of the Review gives a background to two new publications on baroque and 19th-century dance drawn from a source known as the Lowe Collection deposited on loan with the Turnbull Library. They comprise a facsimile edition of a hitherto unknown Work-Book by a notable London 18th-century dancing master Kellom Tomlinson and the diary of a Scottish counterpart, Joseph Lowe, based on his visits to Balmoral and Windsor from 1852-60 to teach dance to the family of Queen Victoria. Both manuscripts first came to New Zealand when Joseph Eager Lowe, Joseph's son, settled briefly in Dunedin before moving to Melbourne where he ran a dancing academy. Members of his family, bringing the manuscripts with them, later returned to New Zealand, where several generations have taught dance ever since. Associated by marriage with the family, is Jon Trimmer, Head of Company with The Royal New Zealand Ballet, who recalls as a child being read to from Joseph Lowe's *Journal*. He drew Jennifer Shennan's attention to the Tomlinson manuscript, the first step in the somewhat complicated route to the present publications.

The Tomlinson manuscript is of international significance with special relevance to our knowledge of 18th-century theatre being his only surviving dances in this genre. The Lowe is not only an addition to the history of Scottish dance (which became a principal form of recreation in early Dunedin) but an intriguing social document with its pictures of an animated Queen Victoria and her family performing reels and quadrilles, of trout fishing and the rigours of contemporary train travel. Dancing masters similar to Joseph Lowe taught in 19th-century New Zealand until the new styles of this century made such instruction obsolete. Jennifer Shennan and Allan Thomas have respectively edited and supervised the production of these books, illustrating them with considerable flair. The Royal Archives at Windsor yielded striking photographs, some by Roger Fenton, fortunately secured before the recent fire. John Casey, formerly of Victoria University has photographed the Tomlinson manuscript with incomparable skill, to provide a model of archival ingenuity. Wendy Hilton, the distinguished New York baroque dance authority, who became acquainted with this material on her first visit to New Zealand, established the link with Robert Kessler of the specialist dance publishing house of Pendragon Press, New York.

Such important primary musical sources continue to appear in New Zealand as when some fifteen years ago Robert Petre recognised a Purcell keyboard instruction book in the Rare Books Collection of Auckland Public Library to be a unique published copy. Purists may question the relevance of such manuscripts to our own culture and pose a form of that perennial question that helps ensure we remain truly provincial and parochial: 'But what has it to do with New Zealand - we're Kiwis not Europeans?'. In reply one might ask what would happen to Maori studies if they were not set in their Polynesian and Pacific context and the shock of European contact not measured in relationship to its comparable effect on the indigenous peoples of the Americas and Australia? J.C. Beaglehole once remarked that a great deal of New Zealand history lay in the ephemera to be found on the barrows of London street markets. Without a constant outward flow back and forth to its origins New Zealand culture becomes stultified, starved of imagination, sterile and arrogant. We need every possible contact with the raw materials of our historical past.

J.M.Thomson

*Copies of 'A WorkBook by Kellom Tomlinson', edited by Jennifer Shennan and 'A New Most Excellent Dancing Master', edited by Allan Thomas, are available exclusively from the National Library Bookshop, PO Box 1467, Wellington at \$54.95 each. Please include \$2.50 p&p for each, throughout New Zealand. Overseas prices on application.*

*Front cover: The title page to Lowe's Collection of Reels and Jigs, Joseph Lowe, Paterson and Sons, London.*

*Back cover: 'A Single Dance for a Young Lady', from The Art of Dancing, Kellom Tomlinson, London, 1735, Plate XVI from Book I.*