

The
Men of Wight
Morris Dancers

Notes on the use of the ABC notation
file for the MoW Musicians Handbook,
version 2

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MIKE BUTLER

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Purpose

The file which contains the abc notation for the music included in Version 17 of "The Men Of Wight Musician's Handbook" can be downloaded from the Men of Wight web site/Music page. For version 17 of the handbook, this file is

`Musician's_handbook_tunes_v17.abc.`

The purpose of this document is to explain the ways in which the file can be used and/or modified to, for instance, generate different printable output, or to play individual tunes.

The scores for the MoW Musicians Handbook have been created using the ABC notation [1] and are all contained in a single file. This file can be modified in many ways using any of the many ABC notation applications available, e.g. EasyABC [2].

It is assumed that the reader is familiar with ABC notation and can use one of the many ABC notation applications that are available.

The ABC file

The whole collection of tunes on the abc file comprises nearly 160 tune scores.

A typical individual score is coded in the file like the example below, which shows all the available fields of information that could be added to the printable output.

```
X: 40
T: Flowing Bowl (Landlord) Adderbury
N: Stick dance (thrown)
M:4/4
S:Bacon (RD ex Blunt)
A:Adderbury
L:1/16
Q:1/4 = 135
P:Intro.Song.(A.B)6.B (final B is faster)
K:G
P:Intro
B8 A8 | /
P: Song
G4 D4 B,4 D4 | G4 G4 G6 G2| A4 A4 A4 A4 | B8 G4 B4 |
w: Land-lord fill the flow-ing bowl, un-til it doth flow o-ver. Come
G4 D4 B,4 D4 | G4 G4 G4 G4| A4 A4 A4 A4 | B8 G4 B2A2 |]
w: Land-lord fill the flow-ing bowl, un-til it doth flow o-ver
Q:140
P:A
  G4 D4 B,4 D4 | G4 G4 G4 G4| A4 A4 A4 A4 | B8 G4 B4 |
| G4 D4 B,4 D4 | G4 G4 G4 G4 | A4 A4 A4 A4 | B8 G4 |]
P:B
B2A2 | "X" B4 "X"B4 "X"B4 "X"d4 | "X"d4 "X"c4 "X"c8 |
"X"A4 "X"A4 "X"A4 "X"c4 | "X"c4 "X"B4 "X"B8 |
"X"G4 "X"G4 "X"G4 "X"B4 | "X"B4 "X"A4 "sticks thrown" \
(c8|c8) z4 A4 |
"X"F4 "X"D4 "X"E4 "X"F4| "X"G8 "X"G4 |]
W: Land-lord fill the flow-ing bowl,....etc
```

Changing the printable output content

All the normal ABC applications will create printable output in PDF format. The content of the output is controlled by various command lines in the header of the ABC file, so for instance it is possible to include notes, source information, to re-scale the size of the print, etc, etc.

The commands in our file header have been selected specifically to create individual scores in the format for the printed handbook, so many of the data fields that are contained in the ABC notation have been suppressed. If it is desired to use the ABC file to create a different printed output (e.g. Incipits), then the header of the file can be changed to include various data fields and to change the format to one you desire.

Various commands can be added to change the layout (number of bars per line, etc) or to re-size the score, etc. We have not gone into these details here, so please refer to the 'abc standard' [3] for more information but note not all applications implement the standard fully and some have their own added features.

Relevant control lines (those starting with `%%`) can be modified to produce a different output. Particularly, the `%%writefields` line can be modified to add or exclude various fields from the output.

However, we have made a number of entries in the tune data that are not always recognised by the ABC applications, and some that are not in the standard (but work for us). In particular we have taken liberties with the P: fields in order to create the scores we needed for the book. In the standard for abc notation [1], the P: field consists of a single letter, however we have used long names for parts of tunes to make them clearer. For instance "Intro" as a part name. All the ABC applications we know of use the same underlying pdf conversion package "abcm2ps" which handles long part names correctly, but we have not tested this on any other ABC applications so it may be necessary to do some modifications to the P: fields to make the file work for you.

Note also that the X: field is treated differently in some ABC applications. For instance in the EasyABC application [2], the 'writefields' command does not recognise the X: field so it is necessary to go to : Settings/ABC Settings/Abcm2ps tab where you can select or de-select "Add X reference number". Other applications will no doubt have different ways of doing this.

The file header for version 17 is given below (lines starting with `%` are comments).

```

I:abc-charset utf-8
% Version 17
% NOTE: The settings below can be edited to include
% Title, Lyrics, Notes, etc, in the printed output.
% and to modify the look of the print
% NOTE the X field is treated differently by the EasyABC app,
% to add/remove the X field, go to
% Settings/ABC Settings/Abcm2ps tab
% where you can select "Add X reference number"
%
% SETTINGS:
%%barnumbers -1
%%writefields TXWN false % I've left X in here in case
% this works in other ABC applications
%%wordfont Helvetica 16 % This is the text for W: fields i.e. the lyrics
%%partsbox true % draws a box around part names i.e. the P: field data

```

Modifying the pdf outputs

Post-processing of the pdfs may be necessary if they are to be inserted into other documents as, by default, they are created as full size A4 pages, which usually results in lots of white space.

For this handbook, we output individual pdf's for each score and then crop each to fit the pages of the book. Re-sizing can be done manually by cropping the pdf graphic, or by using the shell script [4] "pdfcrop" [5] which automatically crops the files to the minimum size by removing the white-space.

Here is a z-shell script [6] that will automatically process all the files in the same folder as the script:

```

#!/bin/zsh
for FILE in ./*.pdf; do
  pdfcrop "${FILE}"
done

```

Playing the tunes

It is possible to use any of the available ABC player applications to play the tunes within the file, but there are some features that would need to be edited in order that they play the sequences given in the formulae (the first P: field in each tune) correctly.

As explained above, we have taken liberties with the data in the P: fields, i.e. the names of the parts of each tune. Where we have used extended names for the parts, e.g. "Intro", we have found that this does not affect printed output, but does affect the playing of the tunes in that the sequences of parts (give as the first occurrence of the P: field) is not followed. This is because the underlying software packages (ABC to MIDI converters) that all ABC applications use seem to only recognise single letters for parts on re-play.

For ABC player applications to recognise the formulas so they play the correct sequences, each P: field would have to be re-named to a single letter so that the MIDI package can play the sequences of the tunes correctly. So, editing the file to change these names to single letters in each score and also in the sequences in the first P: field of each score, would enable the tune sequences to play correctly. A simple search and replace should do. So for instance the above example, "Flowing Bowl", could be edited by replacing "Intro" with "I" and "Song" with "S" resulting in the following:

X: 40
 T: Flowing Bowl (Landlord) Adderbury
 N: Stick dance (thrown)
 M: 4/4
 S: Bacon (RD ex Blunt)
 A: Adderbury
 L: 1/16
 Q: 1/4 = 135
 P: I.S.(A.B)6.B. % The new sequence
 K: G
 P: I
 B8 A8 |/
 P:S
 G4 D4 B,4 D4 | G4 G4 G6 G2| A4 A4 A4 A4 | B8 G4 B4 |
 etc
 Q:140
 P:A
 etc
 P:B
 etc

This will then play the correct sequence of I.S.(A.B)6.B.

Bibliography

- [1] ABC is a text notation for music devised by Chris Walshaw, Professor of Informatics at University of Greenwich, which has become the standard notation for not only folk music but many other genres. Guidance and access to tunes can be found at <https://abcnotation.com/>.

Scores containing many parts and voices can be written using this notation. There are many other web sites which give guidance, advice and access to tunes. There are many applications which enable writing, playing and publishing of scores using ABC notation.

- [2] EasyABC is one of a large number of applications that interpret abc notation and enable scores to be written in abc. It can be downloaded from <https://sourceforge.net/projects/easyabc/>.

- [3] The abc standard currently is Version 2.1. It can be found in full at: <https://abcnotation.com/wiki/abc:standard:v2.1>.

- [4] A shell script is a simple text file containing code in the base language of your computer. For Apple Macs, this language is Linux for instance.

- [5] PDFCrop is a Perl script that crops the white margins of PDF pages. It is copyright 2002-2023 by Heiko Oberdiek, and is available from <https://github.com/ho-tex>. PDFCROP 1.42, 2023/04/14 Copyright 2002-2023 by Heiko Oberdiek.

- [6] Z shell (Zsh) is a Unix shell that can be used as a command interpreter for shell scripting. Zsh was created by Paul Falstad in 1990 while he was a student at Princeton University. Zsh is available for Microsoft Windows as part of the UnixUtils collection and has been adopted as the default shell for macOS, Deepin and Kali Linux.

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