

THE ROYAL SCOTTISH COUNTRY DANCE SOCIETY

Objects:

To preserve and further the practice of traditional Scottish Country Dances.

To promote and encourage the formation of branches.

To provide, or assist in providing, special education or instruction in the practice of Scottish Country Dances.

To publish, or cause to be published, descriptions of Scottish Country Dances, with music and diagrams, in simple form and at a moderate price.

To collect books, manuscripts, and illustrations relating to Scottish Country Dances.

Generally to do such things as are considered by the Society to be incidental or conducive to the attainment of the objects above stated or any of them.

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 tion for four years: £2 10s.; ten years, £1 10s.

EDITORIAL

A GAIN this season there has been an increase in Branch Membership, an increase in the number of dances and classes and an increase in the attendance thereat. We understand that in planning for next season the Committee have assumed this growth will continue.

A preliminary list of next season's dances is given on this page. There will be an Annual Ball, probably in May. The Anglo-Scottish Dance, last April, went so well that the Dances Sub-Committee is arranging another.

Next season's class list is not yet available. It will be published in the September Reel.

Some of you, we know, are all-the-year-rounders, attending dances and classes from September to June, demonstrating in the open air in July, and in August spending a week or fortnight at the Summer School at St. Andrews. But most of you aestivate (aestivate, to spend the summer; esp. [zool] in a state of torpor—Shorter-Oxford English Dictionary) returning refreshed to dancing and the renewal of friendships in September. To all of you we wish a pleasant summer and if any of you find torpor irksome, particularly when the week brings round empty your usual night for dancing, we suggest you think about dancing, write down what you have thought and send it to us.

What is your favourite dance? And why? If the first question is too difficult, what are your favourite dances? But the most important part is the "and why?" at the end. Write and tell us. Even if we cannot publish your letter we will pass it on to the Dances Sub-Committee for their guidance.

In a daily or even in a weekly paper a controversial subject may be discussed in letters to the Editor. In The Reel we cannot treat controversies in that way. By the time a reply to a reply has been published so many months will have passed that readers will have forgotten what was said in the first letter. But if several of you write to us on the same subject at the same time Light and Dark will be able to sort and quote your views. Here is a subject for you.

What do you think about beginners? Should they be pampered, encouraged, patronised, tolerated, segregated or ostracised? People spoke about beginners at the Annual General Meeting. What do you think?

S. G. Skinner's Band is playing for all these Dances, except for the Hallowe'en Dance at Seymour Hall, where we shall dance to the music of Jimmy Shand and his Band. There is plenty of room in Seymour Hall, and we hope that classes and other groups will form parties. Parking space for charabancs is nearby in Cosway Street; for cars opposite the Hall. Make a note of the date now. It is not often that Jimmy Shand comes to London.

DANCES

A PART FROM THE ANNUAL BALL on the 20th June, there is one more Dance this season, a Guest Dance, for Members and others, at St. Pancras Town Hall on Friday, 27th June, from 7 to 11 p.m. Licensed Bar Tickets, 3/6, excluding refreshments, from Ronald Ryall, 5 Courtfield Road, S.W.7.

Friday, 27th June

Guest Dance

	S.C.D. Book		S.C.D. Book
Circassian Circle ...	1-3	Dulkeith's Strath-	
Campbell's Frolic...	15-3	spey	9-
The Camp of		Petronella	1-
Pleasure	15-4	The New Rigged	
The Montgomerie's		Ship	9-
Rant	10-1	Glasgow High-	
Eightsome	2-12	landers	2-
Foursome	3-11	Eightsome	2-
The Duke & Duchess		The Machine with-	
of Edinburgh ...		out Horses	12-
Lord Rosslyn's		Duke of Perth	1-
Fancy	15-6	La Tempete	2-
Monynusk	11-2	Waltz Country	
Hamilton House ...	7-10	Dance	4-
The Dashing White			
Sergeant	3-2		

LAST SEASON

If, like most people, you feel the season began in the Autumn, you will reckon that there have been eleven Members' Dances. Fetter Lane and one Guest Dance at Caxton Hall in January. If your year, like the Hon. Treasurer's, began last July, you will count another Guest Dance, at St. Pancras Town Hall on 3rd July, 1951. This was not novelty, but it was an experiment to make it a large Dance in hot weather; so successful an experiment that a Summer Dance becoming an annual event.

A new feature this season was the Anglo-Scottish Dance in April, held in the hon. of the E.F.D.S.S., Cecil Sharp House. This turned out to be a most instructive occasion for both parties, both in the dancing and in the watching of demonstrations of Morris English Sword and Scottish Dances.

To prevent overcrowding, the Fetter Lane Dances were limited to Members, and on some occasions even Members had to be turned away. To give you all an equal chance of getting tickets, whether or not you attended classes or the previous Dance we asked you to write for them. Many of you wrote on behalf of several Members thus saving postage and trouble.

NEXT SEASON

So far the following Dances have been fixed for next Winter:

Members' Dances

Royal Scottish Corporation Hall,
 Fetter Lane

1952	1953
Saturday, 13th September	Saturday, 10th January
Wednesday, 15th October	Friday, 6th February
Thursday, 6th November	Thursday, 26th February
Friday, 28th November	Friday, 20th March
Wednesday, 17th December	Saturday, 11th April
	Saturday, 9th May

Guest Dances

Friday, 31st October, 1952, Seymour Hall.
 Friday, 24th April, 1953, St. Pancras Town Hall.
 Friday, 26th June, 1953, St. Pancras Town Hall.
 (Continued in centre column)

WE AGREE TO DIFFER

4—New Dances

I WAS at a Reel Club last night and someone tried to make me do a dance he had composed himself. "Thrums," he called it. If it had been an R.S.C.D.S. show I should have complained to the Committee. As it was, I just refused to join in.

Would you have joined in if he had called it "St. Ronan's Well," and told you he had got it from an old manuscript dated 1800?

I should have been suspicious. St. Ronan's Well wasn't written until about 1825.

Dated 1825, then?

Yes, I should have tried it, but I should not have liked it. A present-day composer can't catch the spirit of those times, any more than a present-day composer of music could write like Mozart, even if he was Mozart.

I agree that if Mozart lived again now he would write a different sort of music, but I am sure I should like to hear it.

I shouldn't. What I like is the spirit of the eighteenth century coming out in Mozart, or, to return to the subject, in the Scottish Country Dances of the period. A present-day composer would try to be too clever, or would be clever in the wrong way. Besides, I enjoy the link with the past. You mentioned St. Ronan's Well. Scott brings Nathaniel Gow into it. I like to think I am dancing the same dances that Scott's characters, or perhaps even Scott himself, danced to Gow's music.

Well, Dark, it's a relief to hear that you like to think. But you may get a shock when you start studying old books. Our dancing has developed a lot since Scott's time. Our composition should develop too. After all, there must be nearly as many people dancing Scottish Country Dances now as in 1800. I mean, of course, in actual numbers, not percentage of the population. What will the Scottish Country Dance Society of 2052 think of the present age if it produces no more than a dozen dances? Or of the present Society if it takes no steps to encourage or guide dance composition. When the Con-

stitution was being revised recently the Ayr Branch proposed that an additional object should be "to encourage the invention of new dances, and that suitable dances should be approved by the Society."

I know. I am glad the proposal was not carried.

I know of a Reel Club in London that tries out home-made dances on Members' Nights, and even introduced one successfully at their Annual Ball. And there is a club in the West of England where between a third and half of the programmes are of new dances. But, Dark, every Reel Club, every Branch of the Society ought to be bubbling over with new dances.

A horrible thought, Light. Think of the Dance Committees beset by eager composers furiously hawking their productions. Prima donna demonstrators are bad enough, but prima donna composers too—horrible! And, as you know, I like uniformity. I want to go to any dance run by any Branch of the Society with my booklets in my sporran, knowing that, given a few minutes to study the booklets, I can join in any dance in the programme.

Would you object to having one or, at the most, two new dances in an evening, provided the figures were announced by the M.C., or, better still, printed in the programme. Then if the dance is too clever, let someone else modify it and the new form be tried later. In fact, let the dance knock around and have its raw edges rubbed smooth by the "folk" dancing it. Then if it becomes popular let the Society collect and publish it, as they did The Reel of the 51st Division.

Your scheme might land the Society with actions for infringement of copyright. And personally, though I like The Reel of the 51st, I think it was a mistake for the Society to publish it.

Do you like The Duke and Duchess of Edinburgh?

Yes, fairly well, but I don't think it should be danced at any show run by the Society. In any case, you don't meet my chief objection, which is that dance composition is a lost art. And why worry anyway, even if

it won't be all the same in a hundred years time. We have sixteen books with twelve dances in each, and I expect we shall have another dozen in 1953. What is the point of making up new ones?

Well, for one thing, composition is fun and, for another, it teaches you to understand and enjoy the dances better.

I can enjoy a poached egg without being a hen, or even a chef. In fact, I prefer to eat a meal someone else has cooked.

But think of the tradition. It is traditional to compose dances as well as to dance them. Shouldn't the Society encourage people to carry on the tradition. Thomas Wilson, in his Complete System (1825), describes a number of stock figures, supplemented by some of his own invention, and invites his readers to compose their own dances from them. At balls in his day, apparently, each lady drew a numbered card and when it came to her number she had the right to choose the dance. She could make one up if she wanted to.

I have been told that if you set a number of monkeys to type at random and that if they went on for ever, they would be bound in due course to type the whole of Shakespeare's plays.

Yes, or any other book, including many masterpieces that have been lost or would not otherwise be written. The only trouble is that you would have to skip a lot to get to the interesting parts. What of it?

Only that I think that Wilson's ladies would have just as much chance of producing a good dance as the monkeys or typing Shakespeare.

Nonsense! You seem to think that all very small chances are equal. Even the monkey could do better at dance composition than at typing. They would produce Duke of Perth or General Stuart's Reel before they got to typing even the title of King Lear.

How would they compose?

By putting together the stock figures. Look! Start with the rule that they must keep strictly within the tradition, and only use 8-bar figures that are already in the S.C.D. books.

I see. You write each figure on a nut, and put all the nuts in a bag.

Yes. And get the monkeys to draw out four nuts to make a 32-bar dance. Then you choose the music. After that you put the nuts back, shake them well, and start again. I wonder how many different dances they could get, thousands, millions or what?

I guess about half-way between millions and what. How many nuts?

I have no idea. Is this a conversation or a discussion?

Why?

If it is a discussion we ought to find out how many nuts. If it is a conversation we should spoil it by being so accurate.

If you find out how many nuts, I will make it a discussion.

That's not fair. You dragged in the monkeys.

But I don't want to know the answer. Curse you, Dark! See you soon.

* * * * *

Hullo, Light, I haven't seen you for weeks. What have you been doing lately?

From 330 nuts the monkeys could get 11,644,783,920 dances. Some physically impossible, some deadly dull, some too like others, and, I hope, some really good ones.

I had forgotten all about the monkeys. How did you get the nut figure?

In the 16 S.C.D. Books there are 171 long dances with the normal progression. I kept the monkeys off circular dances like Waltz Country Dance, set dances like the Four-some, and dances where the first couple progress straight to the bottom in one round as in Strip the Willow.

Quite right. Strip the Willow is dangerous enough with humans.

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There are 53 plain down-the-middle-and-ups, and 10 more with and-cast-off at the end, 37 poussettes, 30 rights-and-lefts, 28 ser-and-turn-corners, and so on down to 34 figures that come in twice each and 258 that come in once each in the 699. As I said before, there are altogether 330 different 8-bar phrases. Of course, I could get more nuts by breaking them into halves and quarters and joining them up differently, but I stuck to the rules we laid down.

Have you any idea what proportion of the dances would be physically impossible because even monkeys could not get from one figure to the next?

That is difficult to estimate. You know Mrs. Stewart's Strathspey?

Yes. It has the best opening of all the dances.

I agree. Well, in the fourth nut—I mean in bars 25-32—the first couple have made their progression and are in the second place, turning corners. The next figure is an allemande, so they have to nip back to the top to make their progression over again. The reason for this non-sequitur is that in 1800, when the dance was recorded the figure then called the allemande did not involve progression. In the course of development the dance retained the name of the figure, but not the figure itself. In Mrs. Stewart humans can easily fake the end of turning corners by dancing up to the top again, so I thought the monkeys could fake other figures in the same way and if they couldn't dance from one figure to the next they could get there by running, jumping or swinging by their tails.

A beautiful thought. Now what about all these 8-bar figures that only occur once each? Doesn't the fact that you had 258 of them show that the monkeys' rules were wrong? Evidently true folk composers invented figures rather than dances, and it was dancing masters like Thomas Wilson who collected figures from different dances and encouraged his pupils to do monkey-selection.

Not quite. You are overlooking two points. Firstly, the dances collected by the Society do not represent a random sample from all the dances there ever were. Apart from picking the good ones the Society would, quite rightly, not publish a dance that was very like another they had already published. To take one instance, the opening figure of Hamilton House only occurs once in the 16 Books, but it was quite a common figure 150 years ago. Secondly, of course, composers, even dancing masters, invent new figures as well as new dances. I told you some weeks ago when we began this discussion that Thomas Wilson invented figures of his own for his Complete System. Modern composers do the same.

You mean like the three-hands-across across figure in The Duke and Duchess of Edinburgh? I don't like it. If I give my hand I want to take someone else's with it, not just put it into a pool.

Other dances have new figures too. In The Fair Maid of Perth the first and third women cross to the men's side and dance a reel of four with the second and fourth men, while the first and third men dance a reel of four with the second and fourth women on the women's side. In Princess Margaret's Strathspey the first couple dance a reel of four with their first corners while their second corners dance an imaginary reel of four at right angles to it (it is nearly but not quite the same as the figure in The Reel of Six in the Border Book). Then in the Macphersons of Edinburgh there is a reel of four with first corners followed by one with second corners. The reels are preceded by setting, but personally I prefer them without, and I know three un-

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published dances with these two reels of four. And one dance I recently heard of had a grand new figure. The first couple are facing first corners. They dance the first half of a reel of four with their first corners, then the first half of another reel of four with their second corners. Then, to get their corners home again, they dance the second half of the reel with their first corners and then the second half with their second corners. Put four dots in a square to represent the four corners and draw the first man's route. It's a pretty pattern.

Yes. I see. You're right. But it's too clever . . .

Well, all the figures, even the reel of three, must have been clever once. And very puzzling, too. Ask any beginner.

And it is not in the tradition.

How would you compose new figures or new dances that were in the tradition?

I wouldn't.

Well, how do you suppose they did it in the old days?

I don't know. It's a lost art.

Well, then. What is the difference between a good dance and a dull one? Why do you like some dances more than others?

That is difficult to say. I don't like dances with a violent wrench in the middle. I want —er . . .

Continuity? Flow?

Yes. Flow. And, more important than that, I want a certain something that gives the dance unity.

A theme? Story?

Theme rather than story. She's Ower Young to Marry Yet has a story you can put into words, and it is one of my favourite dances, but some of my other favourites have no such story, but each has a theme, whether or not you can put it into words. Yes. Theme, flow, and, thirdly, variety.

Variety in steps? Not all travelling like Mary Douglas, or no travelling like Hamilton House?

They are both favourites of mine too. Mary Douglas varies the pace. The leisurely bars 25—32 act as a contrast to the rest. The last eight bars of Hamilton House give it just the touch of variety it needs. Still,

I do like variety in the steps. I don't know if it is a coincidence, but three of my greatest favourites, Duke of Perth, The Montgomeries' Rant and Glasgow Highlanders all have 16 bars travelling, eight bars setting—or setting and turning?—and then eight bars travelling. Miss Nancy Frowns has the same three to one proportion, but the setting comes at the beginning.

Miss Nancy Frowns flows very well.

Yes. The only complaint I have against it is that four bars is too long to look at or of your own sex. Another thing—and you ought to have mentioned it before—is the tune. The tune must fit the dance. Or it might even be better to start with the tune.

Thomas Wilson started with the tunes. In his Companion (1816) he gives three sets of figures for each tune, "the first easy; the second more difficult; and the third for the most part double." That is, 32 bars of figure for a 16-bar tune repeated. He says . . .

Stop! I am tired of Thomas Wilson.

Quite. From what you have been saying I believe you could do as well yourself. How do you distinguish between theme and flow?

Flow means that the end of each figure all the dancers are not only in the right positions to begin the next, but are also facing—or can gracefully turn to face—in the right direction. No swinging by their tails. In a dance with flow each figure follows easily after the last, but in a dance with a theme each figure follows inevitably. By the way, since I saw you last I have had a go at "Thrums," the dance that started this discussion. It flowed all right but it had no theme, which just shows that the art of composition is lost. You see, at Bar 17 . . . By Jove! I hadn't thought of that. At Bar 17 . . . yes, it could be made into a jolly good dance if you scrapped the second half, and at Bar 17 . . .

FUN AND GAMES Excuse-me Dances

SETS are formed and the dance started but one or two men are left over. These "wild men" have to decide which women they want to dance with, and displace her partner from the set. The wild man should wait until the woman and her partner are separated, and then take the partner's place as neatly as possible. For example, in The Triumph he could be waiting at the bottom of the set on Bar 12; in The Duke and Duchess of Edinburgh he could slip into the three-hands-across. The d.p. immediately becomes a wild man.

Consequences

Consequences can be played in the usual way, but limiting the entries to names of dances.

WINCHESTER BRANCH

THE Winchester Branch of the R.S.C.D.S. formed last January, concluded a successful season on the 27th May with an open-air dance and A.G.M. at the home of the Hon. Secretary, Mr. John Hunt, Oak Hammer, Itchen Abbas, Winchester. Floor lighting and fine weather made it possible for the company to go on dancing until 11.15 p.m.

The Branch now has 32 members. The weekly class has been taken by Miss E. R. B. Fraser. If the demand increases a second weekly class may be started next October.

The Hon. Secretary invites enquiries from readers of The Reel living in or near Winchester.

ROYAL SCOTTISH COUNTRY DANCE SOCIETY (London Branch)

announce

A GRAND HALLOWE'EN DANCE

at

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YOUR SUBSCRIPTIONS are due on 1st July, 1952, but will be welcome any time now. The Annual Subscription is 5/-. Would-be Life Members will find particulars on page 1, column 1.

Please send your subscription to the Hon. Secretary, and tell him which book you want. The new book this year is a selection of popular dances from Book 6 onwards, with music, but this will not be ready until the autumn. Others available now are Books 6 to 16 inclusive, booklets covering books 1-3, 4-6, 7-9, 10-12, 13-15, or the leaflet of the Four Set Dances (Weaving Lilt, etc.). The index to the booklets is available, price 3d.

Please tell the Hon. Secretary if your address or name has changed, giving the old version as well as the new. Tell him, too, if you did not receive a book for this year's subscription.

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OLD HIGHLAND DANCES

ANYONE interested in 18th-century Scottish dancing soon comes across E. Topham's "Letters from Edinburgh."

"The dancing masters enliven the entertainment by introducing between the minuets their High dances (which is a kind of double hornpipe). I wish I had it in my power to describe to you the variety of figures and steps which they put into it. Besides all those common to the hornpipe they have a number of their own, which I never before saw or heard of, and their quickness and neatness in the performance of them is incredible. The motion of the feet is the only thing which is considered in these dances, as they rather neglect the other parts of the body."

The arm-positions characteristic of modern Highland dancing are clearly absent. In fact, the description seems to be of Irish rather than Scottish style. This need not surprise us; the further we go back, the more alike do we find the Scots and the Irish.

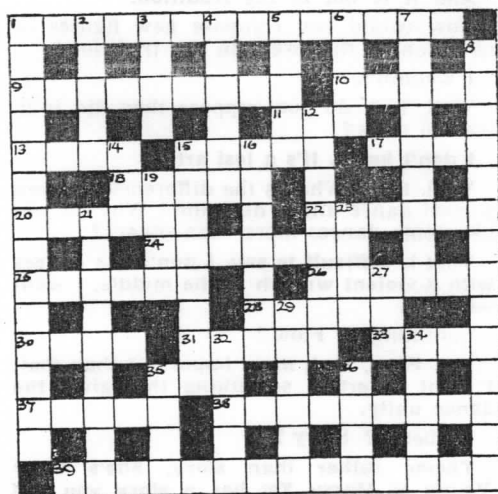
According to a letter from Mr. Angus MacDonald, Premier of Nova Scotia—a province peopled by emigration from Scotland, starting in 1790—the most common dance when he was a boy was a "Scottish reel" for four dancers. "There was very little use of the hands in this dance. Sometimes in the reel part a man and a woman would join crossed hands while setting. Sometimes too, a man would link his right arm in the woman's left, and they would execute a turn or two. Beyond this, the dance was entirely a matter of footwork. There was no use of the arms as one sees today in the highland fling or Seann Triubhas. My recollection is that the use of the arms (other than the occasional crossing or linking mentioned above) was not considered good dancing... the most highly-thought of dancers held the body from the waist up quite stiffly and relied entirely on the use of their feet and legs." There was also "step-dancing"—"a piper or violinist strikes up a strathspey followed by a reel and one individual dancer goes through such steps as suit his fancy and ability."

The resemblance is striking, and the dates agree. There can be no doubt that Nova Scotia preserves a Scoto-Irish form of dancing which in Scotland was superseded by (or developed into) the fling style. This agrees with the fact that the first reference to the fling are shortly after 1800. In 1807 Francis Peacock described the Scotch Reel with no fling-style steps, and with a "promenade" in place of the reel-of-four used today. The Nova Scotia version has a "sort of march" in place of the reel.

Have the old dances completely died out here? Not quite, perhaps. "The Earl of Errol" has a hornpipe tune, recognisable hornpipe steps, and arm-movements in only one of its six steps (an obvious reel step and possibly an interpolation). Could this be the one relic in Scotland of the once dominant style? If so, this dance is of unusual interest.

H. A. THURSTON.

THE REEL CROSSWORD—No. 4



SOLUTION OF CROSSWORD No. 3

The Editors regret that, owing to a mistake in printing, solvers had to reconstruct the pattern themselves. They congratulate all those who managed to solve the crossword in spite of these unintended difficulties.

ACROSS: 1—Strip the willow. 10—Leeds. 11—Contralto. 12—Good mornings. 14—Nattiness. 16—Arid. 18—Neon. 19—Sick at sea. 21—And Whittaker. 24—Adoration. 25—Somme. 26—Rakes of Glasgow.

DOWN: 3—Insomnia. 4—To corners. 5—Ennui. 6—In rags. 7—Lilt. 8—Wood and married. 9, 2—I'll gang nae mair ta' ye toon. 13—Arms akimbo. 15—Sectional. 17—Fantasts. 20—In-laws. 22—Whiff. 23—Rock.

- | | |
|--|--|
| ACROSS | DOWN |
| 1. If moors stretch (anag.) (8, 6). | 1. To do this now a machine is better than horses (5, 3, 6). |
| 9. The Muses would be one too many for this (9). | 2. Makes pipe music (5). |
| 10. Slower than 25 (5). | 3. Too small to be pushed about in jorums (4). |
| 11. "Lacking life, zip, ... and pep. Because they won't skip-change-of-step." (3). | 4. Illegally acquired from one who comes to lend (6). |
| 13. Throw in at odd angles (4). | 5. About the day before? (5). |
| 15. Fivesome? Well, five in a dance (5). | 6. This may have several reels (4). |
| 17. A commanding officer and a doctor have one decoration inside another (4). | 7. It sounds as if one was inciting him to get further into debt (4, 5). |
| 18. Peace, woman (5). | 8. Building about 80 miles south-east of 29 (8, 6). |
| 20. It sounds attractive on a cold and raw morning (6). | 12. Badly phrased (8). |
| 22. A Tartar (6). | 14. Short form of rock (3). |
| 24. Biblical wood (7). | 15. Is this where a communist president would live? (3, 5). |
| 25. Faster than 10 (6). | 16. One vest makes a difference in a windy month (7). |
| 26. Obsolete makes (6). | 19. Silence between notes (4). |
| 28. "Now, reader, on this poignant... I fear that I must intervene" (5). | 21. Under blue bonnets in song (3, 6). |
| 30. What you dare say to a Goossens (4). | 23. The priest in him and his books (4). |
| 31. What gets her down? A piece of broken crockery among other things (5). | 27. You could fill several jorums from this (3). |
| 33. Festive with tea she was made by a man (4). | 29, 36. Market not far from Ochertyre (6, 4). |
| 35. "I'll meet thee on the... riz" (Burns) (3). | 32. Something a good dancer should not show (5). |
| 37. Too much turning makes you this (5). | 34. Deck (5). |
| 38. Laid on, looked after and taken care of (4, 5). | 35. Beastly sounding King at Arms (4). |
| 39. Fruity William, but not a pear (6, 2, 6). | 36. See 29. |

Solvers will find a list of Scottish Country Dances helpful.

DEMONSTRATIONS

THE London Branch will be giving several demonstrations during the summer. Here are some of the dates:

Wed., 18th June—West Wickham Townswomen's Guild, West Wickham, Kent.
Sat., 21st June—Open-air Festival Party, Barnes.
Sat., 28th June—Battersea Pleasure Gardens*
Mon., 4th August—Chingford Fete, Ridgeway Park, Hendon Show.

Sat., 6th September—Battersea Pleasure Gardens*
*On the lawn behind the open-air theatre. Three performances during the afternoon and evening.