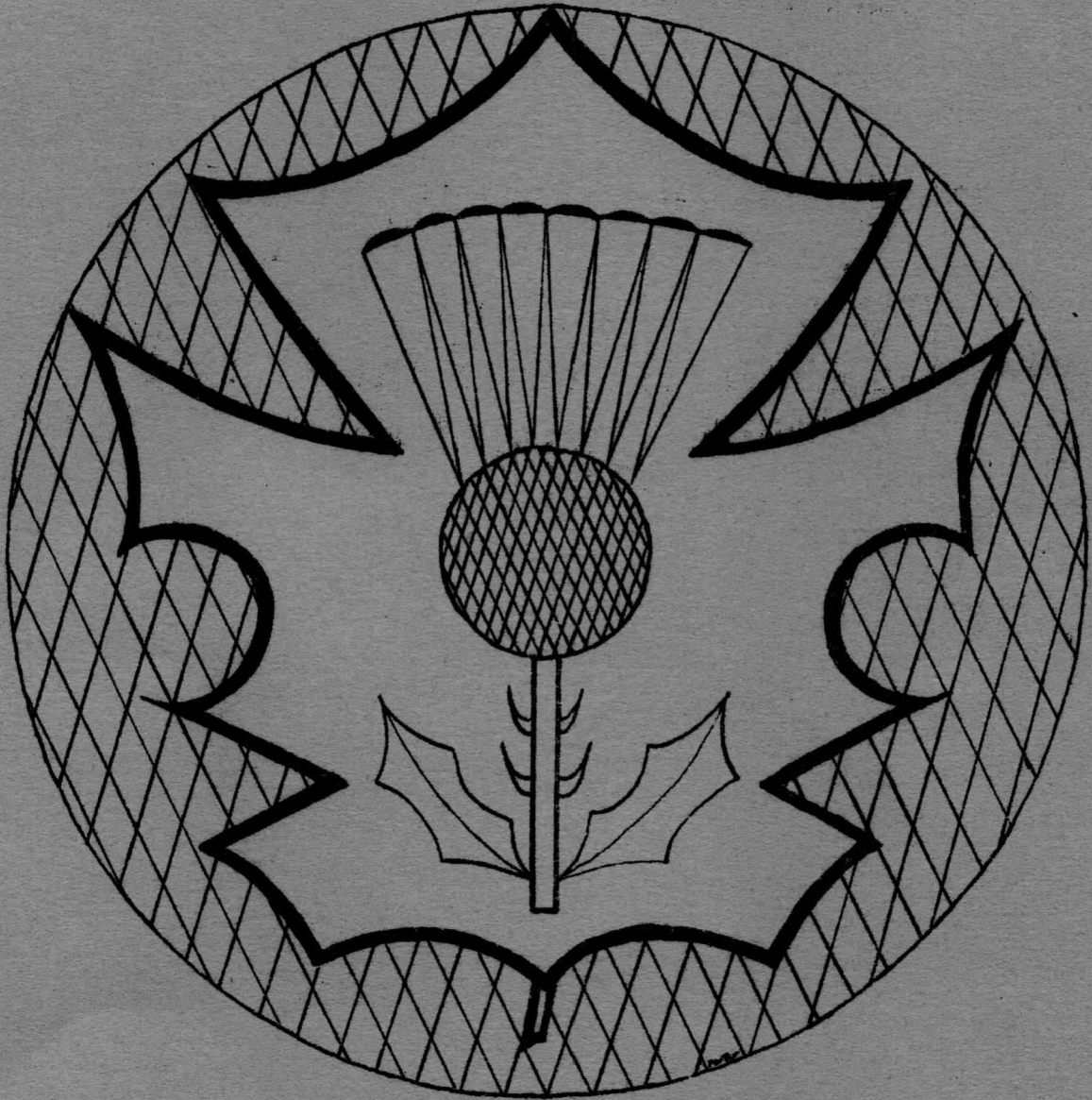


the thistle



a magazine of scottish country
dancing & allied subjects

Issued by the Thistle Club (formerly the West Point Grey S.C.D. Club)
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EDITORIAL.

The recent most successful Ball at the Coach House, North Vancouver, will have evoked many memories among the old-stagers of earlier balls at the Astor, Oscar's and the Georgia. And it is indeed gratifying that at long last an appropriate setting should have been found for this highlight of the Social Season.

The next stage must surely be to develop the Ball into the Vancouver equivalent of the St. Andrew's Ball in Montreal or better still the Royal Caledonian Ball in London. The enthusiasm is there as witnessed by the long distances travelled by our out-of-town visitors from such places as Victoria, Seattle and Kamloops. It only requires the necessary polish to bring it fully up to the level of its more distinguished counterparts elsewhere.

JIGGERY POKERY.

I don't quite know why, but I feel rather shy -
Perhaps I'm a bit of a prig -
When I have to admit that the name does not fit,
And that Miss Cahoon's Reel is a Jig.

All at sixes and eights, the accompanist waits,
Thinking, "What's the next rhythm to play?"
While with simmering brain I attempt to explain
Why Grant's Reel's in fact a strathspey.

That Hornpipe of Jessie's, I have to confess, is
A reel (the distinction's not big),
But, hard though I try, I can never see why
The Cumberland Reel is a jig.

My senses I feel are beginning to reel
(or strathspey) in a strange whirligig,
While each dance I label as well as I'm able,
As strathspey or reel or jig.

ARCUS.

NORTHERN JUNKET.

The square-dance magazine that is different. \$2.50 for 12 issues, from
Ralph Page, 117 Washington St., Keene, N.H., U.S.A.

Each issue brings you interesting articles on all phases of dancing : squares
contras, folk-dance, folk-song, folk-lore. Traditional recipes, too, for hungry
dancers.

This is one of the many dances composed by Thomas Wilson. In "The Companion to the Ballroom", he published 300 or so of his own compositions; and he composed dances for a number of the annual collections which appeared regularly in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This particular dance occurred in Button, Whitaker and Beadnell's "24 Country dances for 1816". It is named, of course, after two of Sir Walter Scott's characters - not, as some people seem to think, after Waverley railway station in Edinburgh.

The dance was republished in Scottish Country Dance Book number 15, but the republishing seems to have been rather carelessly done. The date is given incorrectly as 1812 and the last name misspelled as "McIver". (Does it, we wonder, reflect on the popularity of Scott's novels that so many country dancers repeat this spelling without apparently realizing that it is wrong?) Moreover, the original tune, a rather interesting one, has been replaced by "The lawland lads think they are fine", a stirring and effective quickstep, but one that has no genuine connection with this particular dance.

Here are the original directions for the dance.

The 3 Ladies lead round 3 Gent: $\dot{+}$
 3 Gent: lead round 3 Ladies $\ddot{+}$
 Set & change places with 2^d. Cu: set & back $\dot{+}$
 Whole pous^e $\ddot{+}$
 The double triangle $\dot{+}$
 Lead thro' bottom & right and left with top Cu: $\ddot{+}$

The colon was, at this period, the standard mark of an abbreviation, as in Gent: and Cu: (which is short for "couple"). Pous^e means poussette. The signs $\dot{+}$, $\ddot{+}$, etc. mark eight-bar phrases.

Readers familiar with "Waverley" in book 15 will notice that the last figure has been altered. (In 1816 the standard "right and left" took four bars, so the original phrasing here is quite normal).

That readers might not know, however, is that the "double triangle" figure has been considerably altered. It is one of the score or so of figures that Wilson invented himself and incorporated in his dances, and is fully described in his text-book "Complete system of English country dancing". It is quite a simple figure - the first man, starting in second place on his own side, dances round one of his corners and then round the other and back to where he started, thus going round a triangular track; meanwhile his partner does the same. The figure in book 15 is, of course, quite different. It is not difficult, however, to see how it could have arisen. If you were trying to reconstruct the dance from the above directions, and did not know about Wilson's text-book, you would want to find a figure which (i) took eight bars, (ii) started and finished with the first couple in second place, and (iii) involved in some way, two triangles. In this case you might have come up with something like the book 15 figure, especially if you did not realize that forming a visual pattern (in this case by the upheld arms of the dancers) is something quite foreign to country dancing, though such a pattern would be quite reasonable for a stage-dance.

This perhaps answers such queries as "In double triangles, why don't the second and third women join nearer hands, and the second and third men likewise? A triangle has three sides, and I can see only two". It also means that those people who dislike "double triangles" because it seems unnatural to dance for eight bars behind-to-behind with one's partner in what is, after all, supposed to be social dancing, have not only common sense and "the spirit of the dance" but also historical exactitude on their side.

OUR DANCES, NO. 28 : THE KYLES OF BUTE. Devised by John F. Rigby.
(Three-couple strathspey).

Bars

- 1 - 2 All set to partners
- 3 - 4 The first man and second woman change places, giving right hands; the second man and third woman do the same at the same time.
- 5 - 6 The first and third men change places giving left hands; the first and third women do the same at the same time.
- 7 - 8 The first woman and second man change places giving right hands; the second woman and third man do the same at the same time.

- 9 - 12 The first and second couples dance half right-and-left
- 13 - 16 The first and third couples dance half right-and-left.

- 17 - 20 The first couple lead down the middle, crossing over as they do so and cast ~~the~~ round the second couple (who are in third place), the man round the woman (who is on the woman's side) and the woman round the man. The third couple move up to top place on bars 19-20.
- 21 - 24 The first couple dance half a figure-of-eight round the third couple (who are in top place) and finish in second place on their own sides.

- 25 All six cross over (partners passing right shoulder to right shoulder) and
- 26 - 28 dance hands-round halfway.
- 29 - 30 All six cross over (partners passing right shoulder to right shoulder)
- 31 - 32 First couple cross over, giving right hands.

(This is a revised version of the dance, and was performed for the first time at the Scottish week-end at U.B.C. last May, when John was visiting Vancouver).

NEWS FROM SCOTLAND - ST. ANDREWS (Second fortnight). By Hugh R. Foss.

Again about 250 dancers. Again Miss Milligan at the top of her form. Again very enjoyable.

Miss Milligan taught the five dances from the new S.C.D. Book and three other new ones : Lady Sophia Anne of Bute, Rothesay Castle and The Red Doublet. Her emphasis this year was on phrasing.

Bobby Watson unfortunately was not able to come. The men's Highland class was taken the first week by Bill Clements and the second by Mrs. West. Ladies' Highland was taken the first week by Rene Fidler, who introduced a new dance of her own composition, called "The Thistle", and the second week by Mrs. Cramb. It was invigorating to go again to a class taken by Miss Allie Anderson.

Nan Main gave a very interesting talk, illustrated by a team, on the relation of the music to the dance, showing how the pianist can help by leading the dancers rather than by merely accompanying them. Tune selection was very important, she said, not only for alternatives, but also for step practice. The New Rigged Ship tune, for instance, fits the dance well, but if used for practising skip-change encourages a bent knee on the first beat.

The largest foreign contingent was a group of five men and seven women from Germany, mostly from Stuttgart. Though beginners in S.C.D. they were good dancers and very quick to learn. The U.S.A. was represented by Miss Jeannie Carmichael, Bob Gruskin and Mrs. Freddy Sverdlove. A new dance by the two latter was demonstrated one evening at Younger Hall.

The Friday night Ceilidhs have now become a regular feature of the School. For both of them Alec McPhillips made a persuasive compère. In addition to the more predictable, but very pleasant, items such as choruses, Scottish songs, German dances, Highland pas de deux by Derek Haynes and Jennifer Wilson to mouth music by Bill Ireland, and an American Polka by Bob Gruskin and Freddy Sverdlove, were rather less usual contributions such as Alec McPhillips and Bill Ireland dressed as choir-boys rendering, falsetto, "O for the wings of a dove!", a dancing racehorse (Duncan Macleod and Bill Ireland), a team demonstrating Hamilton House and Cumberland Reel backwards, to the music played backwards by Jennifer Wilson and, for the finale of the second Ceilidh, an abbreviated version of Les Sylphides with an all-male cast in white petticoats (prima ballerina : Derek Haynes; male dancer and lifter Alec McPhillips).

QUIZ.

Some magazines and newspapers have a tradition of providing a "Christmas quiz" over the holiday period. Here is a quiz which should interest Scottish dancers.

1. What dances, popular with Scottish country dancers, are named after (i) an Englishman, (ii) A dutchman, (iii) a Chinese bird, (iv) an artificial insect, (v) a card-game, (vi) a war-like female, (vii) a friend (or at least an acquaintance) of Robert Burns, (viii) a small animal, (ix) an Irish celebration, (x) bad weather, (xi) alcoholic refreshment.
2. Most country dances can be performed in sets of any number of couples from four upwards; many (like the Glasgow Highlanders) from three upwards. But one country dance requires at least five couples. Which is it?
3. In what parts of Scotland was the traditional travelling step for country-dancers a "hop-one-two-three", and in what parts was it a "one-two-three" without the hop?
4. Find the "odd-man out" in each of the following sets of dances.
 - (a) Speed the plough, Cauld kail, Linton Ploughman, Duke of Perth, Queen's welcome, Tartan plaidie.
 - (b) "Duke of Perth", Eightsome reel, The Bumpkin, Mrs. McLeod, Montgomeries' rant, I'll make you fain to follow me, Shepherd's crook, The Braes of Tullicnet.
 - (c) De'il among the tailors, Mrs. McLeod of Raasay, Eightsome reel, Reel of Tulloch, Flowers of Edinburgh, Far up the glen, Speed the plough, Torryburn lasses, Fairy dance.
 - (d) Cumberland reel, Duke of Atholl's reel, Lord Hume's reel, Struan Robertson's reel, Countess of Crawford's reel, Lady Auckland's reel, Miss Cahoon's reel, Grant's reel, The Border reel, Invercauld's reel.

[Perhaps we should remind readers of the rules of the "odd-man-out" game. You have to find something that all except one of the dances have in common. Thus you cannot say "Bumpkin is the odd one out in (b) because it is the only one for nine dancers". However, if all the dances except one were for nine dancers, then that one would be an odd one out. Tortuous answers like "all except the Bumpkin are for some number of dancers other than nine" are not regarded with favour].

HINTS FOR BETTER DANCING.

This time our hint is for M.C.s. One mark of a good M.C. is that he can estimate the right speed at which to move the programme along. The shorter the evening, the shorter the gaps between dances, in general. Other things which would affect the speed would be perhaps the average age of the assembly, the temperature, or such considerations as whether most people present are occasional dancers or regular dancers.

But whatever the interval between dances may be, the enjoyable relaxing part is the part between the end of one dance and the call to form sets for the next. The part from the call to form sets until the moment when the dance actually starts is of no benefit, either socially or choreographically, and should be as short as possible. In other words - don't waste time in forming sets.

One great time-waster is the effort to drum up an extra couple when an odd number of couples happens to come onto the floor for Waltz country dance or Circassian circle. Although it is convenient to start with an even number of couples it is by no means necessary, and it is certainly not worth while delaying the start of the dance.

If an odd number of couples are on the floor, one couple will stand in the general circle, without another couple to make up a complete set (it doesn't matter which way round the circle they are facing). This is no more difficult than the waiting out one turn at the top of a longwise set which everyone is used to.

At the end of the first time through, the odd couple will be joined by another couple who have progressed to meet them in the normal way, and it will be some other couple's turn to be the odd one out.

OUR CONTEMPORARIES.

We have received another issue - the 1965 one - of the New Zealand Scottish Country Dancer. New Zealand seems well off in one department: humour. Most issues of their magazine have items both witty and relevant, and this one is no exception. On the more serious side there is a historical article by one of the editors of The Thistle, and a most interesting interview with Mrs. Florence Lesslie. Most readers will know of Mrs. Lesslie as one of the composers of the dance "The Duke and Duchess of Edinburgh": she was for many years one of the principal teachers of the Edinburgh branch of the R.S.C.D.S. and now lives in New Zealand. Some of the questions she was asked were specifically about New Zealand, but the answers to some others are of general interest. For example, about the "hello and goodbye setting" in General Stuart's reel, she says; "Originally this figure was danced with the first couple always visible within the lines of the set, and the whole figure was easy and graceful ... much more natural and graceful than the newer way of leaping into the sidelines and back again into the centre. Comparatively few dancers can do this with any elegance at all, and I can think of nothing in its favour". She approves of giving hands in crossing over (while admitting that there is no definite rule) because "it looks better and is graceful". She does not like joining hands when "moving up", and says this has only "recently become fashionable".

On the subject of complicated dances she says "There are many dancers today who know all the complicated dances but have never danced Corn rigs and Petronella. This is a sad state of affairs, for you cannot be a good country dancer unless you know the simple old traditional dances, too. An average dancer should be able to enjoy most programmes without feverish reference to little books".

HISTORICAL NOTES.

The écossoise.

The fundamental, standard type of country-dance is, of course, the longwise dance with progression. This was the dominant type from 1700 on. True, early dances were in a variety of formations, including squares, rounds, and at least one dance with all the dancers in a single line, but by 1700 these had all gone out of fashion. For over a century, the longwise country-dance was, in fact, the only type of country dance; but about 1820 quite a spate of new types became popular. They mostly consisted of standard country-dance type figures danced in new formations.

One of these new formations was the Circassian circle. (Of the half-dozen dances in this formation, only one survived: that is why Circassian circle is today the name of an individual dance, not a type of dance). Another was Mescolanzes (four-facing-four, as in *La Tempête*). Yet another was the Swedish country dance (three-facing-three). Mescolanzes were sometimes called Spanish country dances, but they did not come from Spain, nor did the "Swedish" country dances come from Sweden: they are as British as "French toast".

The écossoise is one of these formations: in it the dancers are arranged in two rows, as usual, but the first man and woman are interchanged. Examples of dances in this formation in the Scottish Country Dance books are *My love she's but a lassie yet* and *Come ashore, jolly tar*. Both these can, as it happens, equally well be danced in Circassian circle formation, but not every écossoise can be so danced - it might contain a down-the-middle-and-up for instance.

The word "écossoise" itself is the French for "Scottish": it is an old form of the more familiar "écossoise". Unfortunately, just about the same date as the écossoise became popular, so did an entirely different kind of dance called the Schottische: a couple-dance (of which the Highland Schottische is one example and the Barn dance, though not a Schottische in name, a very typical example). The main characteristic of a Schottische is its rhythm, a steady definite four-pulse rhythm, very like that of a strathspey. Now "Schottisch" is just the German for "Scottish" and, because at this date French was the language of the dance, the Schottische was quite often referred to as an "écossoise". Thus the word "écossoise" is thoroughly ambiguous; and one can get a certain amusement from the average musical dictionary or encyclopedia by looking up "écossoise" in it and seeing how the description there given amalgamates the two dances.

The écossoise, like the country-dance of that date, could go to any danceable music - traditional reels, hornpipes and jigs; contemporary tunes written in the same style; popular songs; even pieces of symphony or opera adapted for the purpose. Schubert, Beethoven and Chopin all wrote écossoises; these are more enjoyable to listen to than to dance to.

At a surprising distance - in Silesia - we find *Die Schlesische écossoise*, a very typical écossoise. It is described in detail in *The Folkdancer* number 1 (1954). The dance starts with a very individual and characteristic figure in which the two lines move apart and together, the dancers facing up-and-down the set and moving sideways with slow and dignified chassé steps (like slow-motion slip-steps). Then follows a figure very like the opening figure of Scottish Reform. The dance ends with each couple taking a two-hand hold and pushing and pulling round the couple they are dancing with, using light running-steps. This is an early form of *poussette* or *draw*: it is something like the corresponding movement in the *Foula Reel*. There is no turning, as in the R.S.C.D.S. style *poussette*: just a straight push-out, and pull-back on the other side of the other couple. It is interesting to see this old figure preserved, in view of the changes which the *poussette* underwent in Scotland and England.

YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED.

After our answer to "What exactly is a country dance" in The Thistle number 24 we had a number of questions on the lines of (i) "What is the difference between a reel and a country dance?", (ii) "Why are some country dances called reels when they contain no reel of three or reel of four", (iii) "How come the Axum reel is a strathspey and Miss Cahoon's reel is a jig?", and (iv) "Is an Irish reel the same as a Scottish reel?" The best thing seems to be to pose and answer the comprehensive question "What exactly is a reel?"

The word reel has many meanings. Some, as in "cotton-reel", have nothing to do with dancing and do not concern us here. There are three main uses in dancing : as a type of figure, as a type of dance, and as a type of tune.

The first use - the figure - is easily dealt with. The reels in question are the familiar reels of three and reels of four. This use may be connected with the everyday word reel in phrases like "reeling from side to side" but has no connection with the use of the word "reel" for a type of dance or a type of tune. In particular a dance is never called a reel or given the title "The so-and-so reel" because it contains a reel figure. This answers question (ii).

Now let us turn to the reel as a type of tune. Reels are characteristic of Scotland and Ireland, and the two Gaelic sister-nations have between them several hundred reels, some of them very fine tunes indeed. Examples are "The fairy dance", "The wind that shakes the barley", "The mason's apron" (Common to both countries); "The high road to Linton", "The kilt is my delight", "Reel of Tulloch" (Scotland); "The teetotaller's reel", "The peeler's jacket", "Ships are sailing", "Peter Street" (Ireland). What makes a reel a reel is its rhythm. All reels, whether Scottish or Irish are in a fast even duple rhythm with duple phrasing. That is to say, all counting, whether of beats or of bars, can be done evenly in twos or fours (or eights).

In Ireland there are two main fast dance-rhythms. The other is the jig, built on a triple rhythm ("The Irish Washerwoman" for example goes tuntata tuntata, and is counted in threes or sixes). Each traditional Irish group-dance goes either to a reel or a jig. These dances are called after the type of tune and the number of dancers taking part : "eight hand jig", "four hand reel" and so on. The same applies to their solo dances (except that they use hornpipe tunes also). With a few exceptions, called "set-dances", of which "St. Patrick's day" is the only common example, they are called after the type of tune, perhaps with some distinguishing adjective. Thus at a Feis you will find dances named "Reel", "Hardshoe reel", "Light double jig", "Treble jig" and so on.

This answers question (iv). If the question is about the reel as a type of music, the answer is:- Yes, "reel" means the same in Scotland and Ireland. But if the question is about the reel as a type of dance, the answer is no : in Ireland a reel is a dance of exactly the same type as a jig, the only difference is in the music; but in Scotland a reel is a definite type of dance. Thus the Irish Four-hand reel is so called because it goes to reel tunes, the Scottish Foursome reel is so called because of the type of dance it is.

Before we consider this type of dance, however, we need to draw a careful distinction between "name" and "title" to avoid possible confusion. "Petronella", "Princess Royal", "Maxwell's rant", "Campbell's frolic", "Broun's reel" are all titles; whereas Eightsome reel, Sword dance, Rothesay country dance are names. The difference is that names are descriptive, whereas titles are purely formal. "Petronella" could have been given any title that its composer wished, whereas the eightsome reel could not possibly have been called a fivesome hornpipe. Some dances have both a name and a title : for example Sword dance and "Gillie Callun", or

Waltz country dance and "la Guaracha" or Kissing dance and "Babbity Bowster". Thus a dance named Eightsome reel is a reel, whereas a dance entitled "Broun's reel" is not necessarily a reel, any more than "Maxwell's rant" is a rant (whatever that might be) or "Campbell's frolic" a frolic. However, we can sometimes tell something about a dance from its title because quite often the title of a dance is the title of its tune - this was in fact the general rule for country dances from about 1700 to about 1900. Thus we can tell that "Broun's reel" though a country-dance, not a reel, goes to a reel tune; and that "Mrs. Wilson's hornpipe" goes to a hornpipe tune, and so on.

Now we turn to the final part of the question - what exactly is a reel as a type of dance? A very typical reel is the Foursome Reel. Most readers will know that this Reel starts with four dancers performing a reel of four, then they all dance a setting step (any one they like), then a reel of four, then a step, and so on alternately until the dance ends. Thus the dance has a "verse and chorus" structure, the steps being the verses and the reel of four being the chorus. The Axum reel, threesome reel, double foursome reel, fivesome reel, sixsome reel, Reel of Tulloch, Orkney reel (both sixsome and eightsome versions), Shetland reel, and many others have this structure, and in all these dances the chorus is a figure and the verses are steps.

Besides these dances which, with their very definite and precise structure, we may call true Reels, there arose later certain dances that were performed in the same general style, by the same sort of people, on the same sort of occasions, and with traces of the verse-and-chorus structure. The best-known of these is the eightsome reel, which has eight verses, but no chorus, the figures and stepping both being amalgamated into the verses. Other dances that are reels in this wider sense are The Bumpkin (also known as the Lanark reel and - not strictly correctly - as the Minesome reel) and the Six reel from Oxton (also known as the Oxton reel).

Reels play an important part in Scottish dancing. The oldest reference to a reel goes right back to the sixteenth century - long before country-dancing reached Scotland, and before highland dancing was ever heard of. They remained the main form of Scottish dancing until the time of the Great War; and even today, although highland dancing pupils may prefer the fling and members of the R.S.C.D.S. may prefer country-dances, the dance which goes down best at a large general gathering of Scots is undoubtedly the eightsome reel.

A SCOTTISH BALL.

The following account in the "Oban Times" of the Argyllshire Gathering Ball caught the editorial eye:-

This evening, members of the Argyllshire Gathering and their guests attend the annual ball in the Argyllshire Gathering Halls, in Breadalbane St, Oban, where they will dance throughout the night to the music of Jinnie McIntosh and his band. Pipe-Major Ronald MacCallum, 8th Bn. Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, and his son L/Cpl Archie MacCallum, will play for the reels. The scene in the hall will be one of gaiety and colour. The kilt, as usual, will predominate, while many of the ladies will wear the tartan sash of their clan. The drawing-room has been decorated by Lady Maclean of Duart and her daughter, the Maid of Morvern, and a red carpet completely covers the floor.

There follows a complete list of guests, starting with Sir Charles Maclean of Duart and Morvern, which completely fills two columns of small print.

(Such an occasion may strike some of our readers as somewhat old-fashioned; but Scottish dancing has usually been slow to change over the years, and our traditions are all the better preserved for this.)