



**THE**

**THISTLE**

Issued by the Thistle Club

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No. 42

December, 1969

OUR DANCES NO. 59: Greig's pipes or The Cameronian rant

As is fairly well known, something of a change came over Scottish country dance in the early nineteenth century, and very many of the typical nineteenth century dances ("Petronella", "Flowers of Edinburgh" etcetera) cannot be traced back earlier than the first of the typical nineteenth-century ball-room manuals (of which the first was "The ballroom", 1823), whereas the dances of the eighteenth-century manuscripts (The Holmain MS, Castle Menzies MS etc.) failed to survive after 1760 or so.

However, one or two of the nineteenth-century dances can be traced back earlier. The best-known of these is The Duke of Perth; and Greig's pipes is another. Both these dances, as it happens, have the very typical Scottish ending of "set to and turn corners and reel of three at the sides". The R.S.C.D.S. source is Boag's "Reels and country dances, 1797". We have not seen this description, but another early description (the Blantyre MS, about 1805) goes

Hook with right hand, throw off one couple.

Hook with left, round 3d gentleman's back, --  
in between him and his partner, catch hands,  
set 6, turn round partner, sett cross partners and reel.

It is in several of the ball-room manuals. Anderson (who gives the rhythms for the various dances) has it as a reel, though the R.S.C.D.S. have it as a strathspey.

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OUR DANCES NO. 60: The thirtytwosome reel

Most of our readers will know the sixteensome reel, or double eightsome reel, (formed from the eightsome reel in exactly the same way as the double quadrille is formed from the quadrille) as it has been published by the R.S.C.D.S. in book 6. A further doubling gives us the thirtytwosome reel, which almost certainly originated in military circles. There are two versions, of which the one we describe here is the commoner.

Music: The same as for the eightsome reel.

Formation: Sixteen couples in a square : four couples to a side. The sides are numbered clockwise.

Introduction

Bars

- 1 - 8 All dance hands round and back
- 9 - 16 Each side, separately from the other three sides, dances a double-hands-across-and-back, as in the eightsome reel.
- 17 - 24 Partners set to and turn each other.

## Bars

25 - 40 Each side dances a grand chain. At the end everyone dances back to his (or her) original place in the large square.

The first women's figure

- 1 - 8 The women of side 1 advance three or four feet, turn right about, and set until the end of the phrase. (For example, advance with four pas-de-basque, turn with two pas-de-basque, and dance four spring points). Meanwhile the others dance hands round and back.
- 9 - 12 The women of side 1 set to and turn their partners. On bars 10-12 the men of side 3 walk forward until they are just far enough from the women for a comfortable turn.
- 13 - 16 Each of the women of side 1 sets to and turns the man of side 3 opposite her.
- 17 - 24 Each woman dances a reel of three with the men she has just set to and turned. The women finish the reel where they started, but the men return to their places in the square.
- 25 - 32 The women join hands in line and wheel anticlockwise to face side 4. (One method is to wheel with six pas-de-basque and then dance four spring points). Meanwhile the others dance hands round and back.
- 33 - 48 The women repeat the setting and turning and reeling with the men of sides 4 and 2.

This figure is repeated by the women of the other sides and then by the men of the four sides in order. In bars 25-32 of each men's figure, the men in the middle wheel clockwise. Finally, the introduction is repeated.

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-- THE BACKGROUND -- (continued)

In the last issue we had a look at "The Ballroom", the earliest of the typical nineteenth-century Scottish dance-manuals. There are a dozen or more of these manuals which an interested student can (with a certain amount of trouble) find. They are all fairly similar, and some dances occur in them over and over again -- "Petronella", for instance, or "The Duke of Perth". And they all contain plenty of Quadrilles. Only in the early ones do we find a division of dances into English and Scottish. The reason is that the country-dance died out in the English ballroom quite swiftly round about 1825-30. English ballroom manuals after 1825 contain very few country dances -- Triumph, Spanish waltz, Tempête, Sir Roger de Coverley are about the only ones which occur, and even of these only Sir Roger seem to have been danced very much.

By contrast, the country-dance flourished well in Scotland. We read in Queen Victoria's diary of her enjoying a ball in which the dances were mainly reels (played by a piper) and country-dances (played by a band), and she even took part in the country-dances. About the last of the dance-manuals, published by David Anderson of

Dundee about 1890 or so, described over 80 country-dances, besides a number of Quadrilles, various couple dances like the Schottische, and some highland solo dances. The country-dances include all the old favourites, and some half a dozen new ones invented by Anderson himself. Three of these interest us. One is "Ladies Fancy", which survived and was collected by the R.S.C.D.S. The second is "Dundee Royal Arch", was collected by Miss Jean Milligan, and presented to the Ling Society, and you will find it in their booklet 'Dances of many lands'. It is a dance which deserves to be better known. (It seems to have got changed in the course of time. In Anderson's original version the 'down the middle and up' was like the "Glasgow Highlanders", i.e. the second man didn't stand idle). The third interesting dance of Anderson's is "La danse Florence". When you read the description you find it is exactly our "Dashing White Sergeant", except that when the time comes to progress one trio forms arches and the other dances under (and as a matter of fact, quite a lot of people dance DWS this way, though the Society is said to consider it vulgar). Anderson gives no particular tune for the dance: evidently someone at some time did it to the 'Dashing White Sergeant' tune, and (as was natural) gave the name of the tune to the dance. So we owe our DWS to three people: the Englishman Sir Henry Rowley Bishop, for the tune; the Scotsman David Anderson for the figures; and the unknown person who at some time between 1890 and 1920 or so put the two together.

Besides dances Anderson describes ballroom dress (men wear a black suit and a "nice clean shirt-front". Evidently the custom of wearing the kilt for country dancing had not yet come in, though presumably anyone who normally wore highland-style evening dress for formal functions would wear it in the ballroom. Remember that Dundee is not in the highlands. Nor, for that matter, are Edinburgh, Perth, Glasgow and other large towns where balls would be common), foot positions (almost exactly the ones used today), steps (several Quadrille-steps, but only one country-dance step, which he calls 'Petronella step'. It is like our pas-de-Basque but with no jete, and using fifth position instead of third. In fact, very like one version of the highland pas-de-Basque), bowing (there was no introductory chorus. A bow took two bars of music), and tunes.

He gives seven lists of tunes as follows: Mazurkas, Waltzes, Hornpipes, Strathspeys, Reels, 2-4 tunes, and 6-8 tunes.

Nowadays there is a rather sloppy habit of classing all reel-tempo 2/4 and 4/4 tunes as "reels", whether they have a true reel rhythm or not, so the tune called "reels" on modern gramophone records will be spread through three of the above categories, namely Hornpipes, Reels, and 2/4 tunes. The last category is really a "miscellaneous" one: it includes all duple-time country-dance tunes which do not have a definite reel or hornpipe or strathspey rhythm: e.g. the light-opera tune "Dashing white sergeant" or the song-tune "Highland laddie".

Typical hornpipes are:- The East Neuk of Fife, Flowers of Edinburgh, Durham Ranger, The Soldier's joy, Roxburgh castle, Staten Island, Petronella.

Typical reels are:- The Fairy dance, The Wind that shakes the barley, Loch Earn, The high road to Linton, Mrs. MacLeod of Raasay, Glenburnie rant.

In case you haven't spotted the main difference: hornpipe tunes go "pom pom pom" at the end of the phrase, whereas reel tunes go "deedle deedle deedle" all the way through. To put it in more technical terms, a reel has an eighth-note rhythm, and a hornpipe a quarter-note rhythm. In particular, a hornpipe has a quarter-note on each of the first three beats of the last bar of a phrase, whereas a reel keeps singing along in eighth-notes.

If you want to know what the other dance-manuals were like, they were roughly midway between Boulogne's and Anderson's book. You will find a few more details in "Scotland's dances".

[to be continued]

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\*\*\* A Short History of Highland Dress \*\*\*

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Human lower garments are of two main types -- a wrap-around garment, like a toga, a skirt, a kilt, a mantle and so on, and a double-tube type like trousers, breeches, or leggings. In early times in Europe the more civilized nations -- Greeks and Romans -- wore wrap-arounds and only the barbarians wore double-tubes. As time passed, however, the double-tube for men became more and more popular until by the 16th century the only males in western Europe wearing wrap-arounds were the Scottish highlanders and the Irish. The garment they wore was the leine croch : this is usually Englished as "saffron shirt" but "mantle" or even "cloak" would be a better word than "shirt". In Scotland this developed into the "feile mor", which was gathered round the waist so that the lower part was like a skirt and the upper part like a shawl. The saffron yellow gave place to chequered patterns. In the next century, someone had the bright idea of dividing the garment in two. The lower, skirt-like, part was known as the "feile beag" and developed into the kilt, and the upper part developed into the plaid. The modern kilt, which probably developed under regimental influence, is a neat, tidy, tailored garment with the "gathering" at the waist replaced by knife-edge pleating (or, very rarely, box-pleating) round the back, and with a plain apron front.

To make up for the lack of trouser-pockets, a leather purse (known in Gaelic as a "sporan") is slung round the waist on a chain. The kilt can be worn with a variety of complementary garments -- just as trousers can, but because of the striking pattern of the tartan material out of which the kilt is usually made, the other garments are often plain. A white shirt looks especially suitable with a kilt, whereas a Hawaiian-type floral shirt would be ludicrous. If a jacket is worn it should be of a special shape -- cut much shorter round the waist than a jacket designed to go with trousers. If a tie is worn, it is a good idea to choose one to match one of the colours in the kilt: many people consider it bad

taste to wear a tartan tie with a kilt. There are several styles of evening-dress jacket (all, of course, cut short at the waist). Some can be worn with a black tie, but no-one ever wears a white tie with a kilt. For an occasion formal enough to demand a white tie, the Highlander wears a lace jabot. For evening-dress occasions the various accessories are more elaborate -- the sporan can be sealskin in a silver frame, for example; and the sgian dubh (the small "black knife" slipped into the stocking-top) will have a silver-mounted cairngorm stone set in the top of the handle.

The kilt is not much worn as an every-day garment in Scotland nowadays. It is, however, part of the uniform of every highland regiment; and many Highlanders wear it to church on Sundays, and to attend special occasions such as Highland games. Some people think it would be a good idea if it were part of the Scottish police uniform (at least in highland districts) which would make our policemen as spectacular as those in Fiji. The police, however, do not think much of this idea. Rather recently (from about 1930 onwards) country dancers have taken to wearing the kilt, and it looks as though this custom has become permanent.

The bright chequered pattern of the kilt (and of the plaid) is known as tartan (or "breacan" in Gaelic). It is a four-way symmetrical check -- the same pattern back-wards as forwards, the same up-and-down as side-to-side. The type of weave used is the twill -- two over, two under -- and this is what gives the effect when the cloth is examined closely, of the pattern being made up of tiny oblique bars. Tabby weaving -- one over, one under -- gives an effect of tiny spots.

The early patterns do not seem to have had names; and early portraits often show the kilt in one pattern, the plaid in another, and the jacket in yet a third.

In 1746, after Culloden, highland dress was proscribed until the disarming act was repealed in 1782. Then tartan became legal again, but one cannot say more than that until 1824, when George IV visited Edinburgh -- the first visit of a British monarch to Scotland for over 100 years. This visit seemed to renew interest in things Scottish in general and tartan in particular. James Logan was the first to collect tartan patterns and describe them in a book -- *The Scottish Gael*, published in 1831. It contains 55 patterns, including Abercrombie, Sutherland, Buchanan, Clergy, Dalzell, Drummond, Fraser, Grant, Inverness, MacAulay, MacDonald, etc. etc; and it appeals to readers for details of others. (About 450 are known today). It seems to be about this date that the custom started of giving every pattern a name -- a clan name, or a place-name as a rule. Up to this time all tartans were highland, but in 1842 a most peculiar and fascinating book appeared called *Vestiarium Scoticum*, produced by John Sobieski Stuart, who claimed that it was based on an old manuscript (since lost) of the sixteenth century. This claim was certainly false, and many people thought and still do think that the whole book was a forgery. It describes 75 tartans, for only a dozen of which there is any independent evidence. And for the first time

lowland and border families are allotted tartans : Armstrong, Bruce, Dunbar, Erskine, Hamilton, Home, Kerr, and so on. One of the Vestiarium tartans is the well-known yellow-and-black McLeod, which a friend of Sir Walter Scott described as being an excellent pattern -- for a horse-blanket. It consists of three equally-wide black stripes on a yellow ground -- a very crude design when compared with the subtly-varying width of the stripes in the older highland patterns. Many Vestiarium tartans, however, are made up of these unsubtle equal-width stripes : Crawford, Hamilton, Montgomerie are the best-known. Several clans now found themselves with two tartans -- one from Logan and one from the Vestiarium, or in a few cases one from another source such as an old portrait or a preserved garment. When one tartan is bright and the other dark, they might be called "dress" and "hunting" tartans, as in the case of the two Leslie tartans. Or they might be named after different branches of the Clan (sometimes arbitrarily): the yellow and black McLeod from the Vestiarium is often called "McLeod of Lewis", and Logan's McLeod is called "McLeod of Harris". The next step was for "dress" and "hunting" tartans to be invented for those clans that lacked them. Sometimes a dress tartan would be produced from a standard tartan by turning one of the colours into white: the Dress Stuart comes by replacing the red of the Royal Stuart by white. Another way of making a dress sett is to insert white into the pattern : this is how the dress Gordon is formed. A hunting pattern can be made by darkening one of the colours : replacing the red in the Fraser by brown gives the hunting Fraser. Another way is to alter the proportions so that there is more of a darker colour at the expense of a brighter colour : the Mackintoshes do this. It is sometimes thought that hunting tartans were used for hunting. There is, however, no evidence that they were. And, indeed, we would not expect them to be so used, in view of the fact that even the army did not get out of its red coats and into sombre khaki until the Boer war.

Occasionally a tartan is invented ab ovo : Prince Albert devised the "Balmoral" tartan for Queen Victoria; the Royal Canadian Air Force has a tartan; someone has devised a tartan for each of the Canadian provinces (B.C. in fact has at least three) and a New England tartan (to be sold to American tourists in Nova Scotia); the crew of the Polaris depot-ship while stationed in Loch Fyne got a local weaver to design them a tartan; and recently in Vancouver I saw three "authentic tartans" labelled "Corvette", "Corvair", and "Jaguar". Sometimes I wonder where it will all end.

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-- HISTORICAL QUOTATIONS --

A Scottish duet (1804)

A dancing-master taught us every variety of wonderful highland step -- that is, he taught me, for William could never learn anything, though he liked hopping about to the fiddle -- and we did "Merrily danced the Quaker's wife" together quite to the satisfaction of the servants, who took lessons too, in common with the rest of the population, the Highlanders considering this art an essential to the education of all classes, and never losing the opportunity of acquiring a few more flings and shuffles.

(From Elizabeth Grant's "Memoirs of a highland lady").

## --- INDEX TO THE THISTLE ---

Dances

[OD = "Our dances". References in parentheses are minor.  
30.5 means page 5 of issue number 30, etc.]

- Abernethy lasses (30.5)  
 Am bonaid gorm 9.3  
 An long Bharrach 33.9  
 Angus McLeod 31 OD  
 Anne 34 OD  
 Barley bree 15.3 (35.1)  
 Barley riggs 20 OD  
 Bathget bogs 17.2  
 Blue bonnets 21.2  
 Bonny breistknots 31.6  
 Bonny wee Glen 39 OD  
 Boriston Ness 16 OD  
 Braes of Balquhidder (33.7)  
 Brechin fancy (30.5)  
 Bride of Iona (33.8)  
 Broadwords (29.4)  
 Broadwords of Lochiel 33 OD  
 Brooch of Lorne (33.8)  
 Broughty ferry castle 30.7  
 Broun's reel (Brown's reel)  
 (1.2) 16.4 (27.8)  
 Buchan eightsome reel 6.1  
 (36.6)  
 Bumpkin 8.3 (see also ninesome  
 reel)  
 Cadgers in the canongate 35.5  
 (36.6) 38.5  
 Cailleach an dudain 7.3  
 Cairn Edward (37.4)  
 Cameronians (33.7)  
 Cauld kail 7 OD  
 Circassian circle 26.8 28 OD  
 (29.4) (37.8)  
 Circassian mixer 32 OD  
 Clansmen (33.7)  
 Corn riggs 20.2  
 Dainty Davie (37.6)  
 Dannsa nam bioran 9.3  
 Dannsa nan tunnag 9.3  
 Dashing white sergeant 3 OD  
 5.2 21.4  
 Dirk dance 7.3  
 Drambuie 2 OD 4.3  
 Duke of Perth 1 OD 4.2 5.2  
 15.4 31.6 (37.7)  
 Dundee Royal Arch (30.5)  
 Earl of Errol's reel (33.7)  
 Eight men of Moidart (1.3)  
 6.4 (33.8)  
 Eightsome reel (9.4) 10.3 15.3  
 (29.4) (29.5) 31.3-5  
 Ellwyn's fairy glen (36.6)  
 Fergus McIvor 26.2  
 Fight about the fireside 27 OD  
 Flower of Benbecula (1.3) (33.8)  
 Flowers of Edinburgh (29.4)  
 34 OD  
 Foula reel 1.3 (35.8)  
 Foursome reel 7.3 (10.3) 15.4  
 (17.4) (29.4) (29.5) 31.4  
 39.6  
 From Scotia's shores (35.3)  
 Gassy Jack's eightsome 37 OD  
 Gates of Edinburgh 35.5  
 General Stuart's reel 26.7  
 Gille Calum 7.3 (see also  
 sword-dance)  
 Glasgow highlanders 15.4 16.4  
 18.4 21.4 24.3  
 Greenwich Hill 25 OD  
 Grey daylight 8 OD  
 Hamilton house (20.4)  
 Hamilton rant 17.2  
 Haymakers (29.4)  
 Highland fling 7.3 (9.3)  
 (29.4) 29.5)  
 Highland laddie (29.4) 34.2  
 Highland reel 37.8  
 Hullochan (36.7) see also  
 reel of Tulloch  
 Inverness (30.5) 30.6  
 Inverness country dance 27.1  
 "Irish" jig (29.4)  
 Janet's delight 38 OD  
 John McAlpin 28 OD  
 Katy's rambles 23.1  
 Keep the country bonnie lassie  
 (1.2)  
 Kelvingrove (33.7)  
 Kingussie flower (30.5)  
 Kyles of Bute 26 OD  
 La danse Florence 3.1 5.2  
 (29.4)  
 La Flora 30.8  
 La Tempête (37.8) 39 OD  
 Lad with the plaidie 14 OD  
 Ladies' fancy (30.5) 30.6  
 Lady Mary Douglas 5 OD



Lady Susan Stewart's reel (23.4)  
 Lady's triumph 23.1  
 Lamb skinnet (18.2)  
 Lamont of Inveryne (33.6)  
 Lerwick reel (35.3)  
 Lincoln assembly 4 OD  
 Lord Rockingham's reel (1.2)  
 Lovat star (1.3)  
 Mac an Fhorsair 7.3  
 MacDonald of Sleat (33.10)  
 MacKinnon's rant 12 OD  
 MacLaine of Lochbuie (MacLaine's  
 hogmanay) 4.3 (33.7)  
 MacLeod of Dunvegan (33.7)  
 MacNeil of Barra 33.8  
 Mairi's wedding 35.5  
 Maxwell's rant 35.5  
 Meg Merrilees 31 OD  
 Menzies' rant (17.4)  
 Merry lads of Ayr (31.6) 38 OD  
 Miss Bonny Parker 29 OD  
 Miss Mary Douglas 5.2  
 Monifieth star (30.5)  
 Montgomeries' rant 11 OD 12.1  
 Monymusk 7 OD 37.7  
 Mrs. Bingham's fancy 35 OD  
 Netherby hall 28.3  
 New-rigged ship 9 OD 24.4  
 Ninesome reel 1.3 8.3 32.5  
 Nut 25 OD  
 Paddy O'Rafferty 36.1  
 Pease strae (1.2)  
 Perpetual jig (36.7)  
 Perth inch 30.7  
 Perth medley 27.1  
 Petronella 17.2 21 OD (29.4)  
 30.5  
 Port of Vancouver 10 OD 12.1  
 Prince of Wales 19.1  
 Princess' country dance 30.8  
 Quadrilles 39.5  
 Queen's welcome (35.6)  
 Record reign 30.7  
 Red house 13 OD (37.6)  
 Reel of eight 31.3-4  
 Reel of nine 29.5 32.5  
 Reel of six (29.4) 32.4  
 Reel of the black-cocks (33.8)  
 Reel of the 51st division 29 OD  
 Reel of Tulloch 7.3 (29.4)  
 Rest and be thankful 27 OD  
 Riggs of corn 22 OD  
 Rob Roy reel 32.6  
 Rory O'More (29.4) 36 OD  
 Rose of Benbecula (33.8)  
 Rouken glen (33.10)  
 Royal visit (30.5)  
 Ruidhil nam pog 9.3  
 Sailor's hornpipe (29.4)  
 St. Patrick's day (36.1)  
 St. John River (34.7)  
 Scampden's cade (1.2)  
 "Scandinavian" country dance (1.3)  
 Scotch reel quadrille 31.3  
 Scottish reform 19 OD 20.4  
 (22.4)  
 Seann Triubhas (9.3) (29.4)  
 Shepherd's crook (33.10)  
 Shetland reel 36 OD  
 Ship of grace 37.11  
 Somebody 24 OD  
 Sow's tail 28.4  
 Speed the plough (9.4) 15.4  
 27 OD  
 Strathtummel 18 OD  
 Strip the willow (29.4) 35 OD  
 "Swedish" dance (1.3)  
 Swine's tail to Georgia 28.4  
 Sword-dance 7.3 9.3 (29.4)  
 Tayport beauty 30.7  
 Thistle 26.3  
 Threesome reel 7.3 (29.4)  
 32.4 39.5 39.6  
 Triumph 23 OD  
 Tullochgorum 35.5  
 Twosome strathspey 7.3 38.5  
 Waltz country dance 15.3 24.3  
 (29.4)  
 Waverley 26 OD  
 Weaving lilt 1.3 (33.5)  
 (33.10)  
 White cockade 3.2  
 White rose of Scotland 6 OD

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