



What are the Scottish Dance Archives? A Brief History by Bob Donald

The Birth of a SCD Service: The date was 1972. The trigger for our starting Scottish Dance Archives was that shared by many people at the time.

Namely, that there was a blizzard of dances being devised but not published formally. When one heard of a dance as being worth trying how could one find the instructions and how could one be sure that the instructions you had dug out were authentic? So often what one could find was a scribbled crib on a scrap of paper from someone else. As an example of this while we were part of Roy Clowes' *Eaglais a Chnoc* Dance Group on Merseyside a friend from Edinburgh sent me a scribbled copy of *Ian Powrie's Farewell to Auchterarder* which had just come out but with no simple way of obtaining it. The first eight bars simply said 'circle' (not circle round and back). We were, naturally, very taken with the dance but we had built it with eight bars of circling to the left with a later figure of circling eight bars to the right. This became the standard version of the dance on Merseyside despite our later discovery that this was not as Bill Hamilton created it. Bill did not agree with our interpretation (which of course I accept) but at least for many years it was our misinterpretation that ruled in Merseyside.

The Way Forward: So, the four of us (Roy and Gill Clowes, Mamie my wife and myself) decided to try to improve the situation. The mechanism was that devisers were invited to send any of their dances to us. We had set up a network of dance groups whose experience we trusted to try them out and return a verdict to us. To ensure that these verdicts were based solely on the dance itself, the testing group were not aware of the deviser in case a well-known one was thereby favoured. Those dances that were given the thumbs up were published by us on differently coloured sheets (defining jig, reels, strathspeys and medleys) and sent out annually to subscribers. In the early years 20 dances were selected for each year. From 1979 this was reduced to 10 because not enough dances were passing the scrutiny. In addition, we sent out general sheets covering matters of interest to the dance community. These comprised six sheets of highland dance steps, seven set dances and discussion sheets on a variety of topics such as how best to teach dances. In all, over a period of 10 years 190 new dances were sent out plus the general sheets. While SDA retained copyright, the deviser had blanket permission to re-publish/ distribute/ sell as they wished.

Other Activities: As there were other activities related to dances there were formal publications by SDA. An example was our being sent a set of handwritten dances by Major AA Bourne of Newcastle after his death. We selected the best five and published these as a book available for purchase. After Roy Clowes' death in May 1988 we published a complete set of the six Ormskirk Books plus other dances in one volume as a memorial to Roy's contribution to Scottish dancing which included his well-known dances *Postie's Jig* and *Shiftin' Bobbins* plus his last dance *Uppies and Doonies* (c1988) devised and sold in support of cancer research. A further four had been published from 1968-69 in *The Reel* 106-109.

NB The jig *The Nurseryman* in RSCDS Book 37 is dedicated to the late Roy Clowes.

In 1979 (if my memory is reliable) SDA held a seminar in Liverpool timed to suit those coming to the RSCDS Summer School. This was well attended and attracted many respected and influential teachers. These teachers gave seminars on aspects of dance. The topics were: Teaching Techniques (Duncan Macleod), Floor Patterns and Starting a Scottish Country Dance Class (both Derek Haynes), Teaching Set Dances (Roy Clowes), The Use of Music in Scottish Dancing (Dr Ian Hall) and Using Recorded Music (Bob Campbell). The presentations were then published formally in a book *Notes on Teaching Scottish Country Dancing*. This is still available from SDA. There was of course social dancing in the evening exploring the wealth of new dances (and not only those published by us!). Those attending the weekend meeting encouraged us to continue the format in future years but it had taken so much effort from the small number of *Eaglais a Chnoc* members that we could not manage to continue with this.

End Game: Where are we now? Once publication of the sheets and associated activities came to an end in late 1982 and especially after Roy Clowes' death Mamie and I looked to preserve access to as much of the mass of 'hard to find' publications as possible. We set up the website www.dancearchives.co.uk/ which contains all the information that we could put together. Not just dance instructions but historical documents (often, never published). An example of this is a description of how to dance the *Sword Dance of Papa Stour* and accounts of a Scottish dance only now retained in Tarcento, Italy brought back by Italian craftsmen who had worked in Scotland. After Hugh Foss had passed away in December 1971 we approached his widow Alison who transferred the copyright of the Hugh Foss dances to Hugh Foss (Formby).

The Future: Finally, due to our advancing age we deposited at the Central Music Library, Edinburgh all of the many books manuscripts, etc that we had including Hugh Foss' collections of dances. As much as possible permission to copy was obtained from devisers. This is a resource that will survive our time.

Ed. Bob Donald is a dance deviser in his own right contributing five dances to *The Green Lochan Book* plus 11 others (1971) including *Gavin's Reel* taking the name of his youngest son.

Keep Your Dancing Shoes in Good Condition

Slippery floors are worrying for dancers, and teachers and MCs do their best with *Slip Stop* and trays of water. However, how much effort do we make as dancers to ensure our dancing shoes remain in good condition? Without care, the suede soles of our shoes quickly pick up dirt, polish, varnish, *Slip Stop* etc. and become compacted and sticky/slippery.

James Senior shoes advises that dance shoe soles require 'regular cleaning with a stiff wire brush' after every wear.

Dance shoe sole brushes are much stiffer than ordinary suede brushes and can be bought cheaply online or from dance wear shops.

A Circular Question

by Charles Foss

My Father also researched the origins and development of Scottish country dance in the



hope that he could put it into book form.

A point that teased him went something like this. 'Did Mr A meet Mr B in Edinburgh in 1690 or did Mr B meet Mr A in Glasgow during 1700'? Much hung on the answer. Father asked his dancing friends. None knew, but

one said he would write to a research company in America who could find out 'anything'. Weeks passed. Nothing forthcoming, Father inquired but there had been no reply. Months passed. More gentle prodding. Then the friend wrote in delight. The firm had tracked down an expert in SCD and would have a definitive answer soon. Days later a letter arrived from America. 'Dear Mr Foss,' it said, 'we have a client who wishes to know the answer to this question. As you are the leading expert on SCD, please tell us if Mr A met Mr B in Edinburgh in 1690 or if ...'

Ed. In the second part of Hugh Foss' 1960s 48 page booklet *Roll Back the Carpet/We Agree to Differ* a similar hypothetical discussion is created between Mr Light & Mr Dark. Subjects covered in this are: what is traditional, reel of three perplexities, right or left shoulder reels, accepting new dances and looking after beginners. Readers can research all 17 articles by Hugh Foss through visiting *The Reel Archives* on the London Branch website. They make interesting reading - here we provide an index of these:

Reel No.	Date	Title
We Agree to Differ		
4	February 1952	The Reel of Three perplexes me
5	March 1952	Should We?
6	May 1952	The Woman's Reel
7	June 1952	New Dances
8	September 1952	Beginners
Roll Back The Carpet		
71	February 1963	Madrigals
72	April 1963	New Figures from Old
73	June 1963	More New Reels
74	August 1963	Grafting
75	October 1963	Counterpoint
77	February 1964	Joints: Plain and Fitted
77	February 1964	Joints: Flows and Pauses
78	April 1964	The Dance and its Tune
79	June 1964	The Tune: Structure
80	August 1964	The Tune: Content
81	October 1964	Petronella
82	December 1964	The Montgomerie's Rant