



***THE***

***THISTLE***

***(1971/2)***

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### Editorial

Arithmetically-minded readers will notice the nice round number of this issue: number fifty. We have reached our half-century, a minor landmark. We would like to thank our readers, whose support (and subscriptions) have made this possible; and we must admit to being touched by the faith of those who send in subscriptions for two or three (and in one case, four) years at a time. We always feel that our readers must be a very good-natured group of people; we so seldom get any complaints. (If any reader has a suggestion for possible improvement which he has not told us about because he feels we might regard it as a complaint; let him not hesitate. Suggestions are very useful to us. We do not promise to adopt all suggestions sent in, but we do promise to consider them all carefully).

### OUR DANCES NO. 71: St. Patrick's day

Everyone's first reaction on coming across this dance is to wonder how it comes to be called a Scottish country dance: it is so obviously Irish.

However, it is only the name and to some extent the tune that is Irish; the dance itself is a short simple little country dance of no particular character which could equally easily be English, Irish, or Scottish. It is a late nineteenth-century dance, and appears in two of the leading Scottish dance-manuals of that time, namely Mozart Allan's and David Anderson's.

We say that the tune is only "to some extent" Irish, because to fit this country-dance, the tune "St. Patrick's day" has to be rephrased. The country-dance lasts for 24 bars, but the tune is one of a large and interesting class of Irish tunes called "set tunes" (see the Thistle numbers 45-47 for more information on the "set dances" that go to them). Set tunes are of irregular structure, and St. Patrick's day has a first strain of 8 bars and a second strain of 14.

The tune is also used in New England, under the name "St. Patrick's day in the morning" for a contra-dance. Just as in Scotland, the phrasing of the music has to be altered, the American dance being 48 bars long.

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THE GENERAL DANCED AT DAWN (concluded)

The day came, and disaster struck immediately. The sentry at the main gate turned out the guard at the approach of the General's car, and dropped his rifle in presenting arms. Thereafter a fire broke out in the cook-house, a bren-gun carrier broke down, an empty cigarette packet was found in "B" company's garden, and Private McAuslan came back off leave. He was tastefully dressed in shirt and boots, but no kilt, and entered the main gate in the company of three military policemen who had foolishly rescued him from a canal into which he had fallen.

So it went on; anything that could go wrong, seemed to go wrong, and by dinner-time that night the General was wearing a sour and satisfied expression, his aide was silently contemptuous, the battalion was boiling with frustration and resentment, and the Colonel was looking old and ill. Only once did he show a flash of spirit, and that was when the junior subaltern passed the port the wrong way, and the General sighed, and the Colonel caught the subaltern's eye and said loudly and clearly: "Don't worry, Ian; it doesn't matter a damn".

That finally froze the evening over, so to speak, and when we were all back in the ante-room and the senior major remarked that the pipe-sergeant was all set for the dancing to begin, the Colonel barely nodded, and the General lit a cigar and sat back with the air of one who was only mildly interested to see how big a hash we could make of this too.

Oddly enough, we didn't. We danced very well, with the pipe-sergeant fidgeting on the outskirts, hoarsely whispering, "One, two, three," and afterwards he and the Adjutant and two of the best subalterns danced a foursome that would have swept the deck at Braemar. It was good stuff, really good, and the General must have known it, but he seemed rather irritated than pleased. He kept moving in his seat, frowning, and when we had danced an eightsome he finally turned to the Colonel.

"Yes, it's all right," he said. "But, you know, I never cared much for the set stuff. Did you never dance a sixteensome?"

The Colonel said he had heard of such a thing, but had not, personally, danced it.

"Quite simple," said the General, rising. "Now, then. Eight more officers on the floor. I think I remember it, although it's years now ... "

He did remember; a sixteensome is complicated, but its execution gives you the satisfaction that you get from any complex manoeuvre; we danced it twice, the General calling the changes and clapping (his aide was studying the ceiling with the air of an archbishop at a cannibal feast), and when it was over the General actually smiled and called for a large whisky. He then summoned the pipe-sergeant, who was looking disapproving.

"Pipe-sergeant, tell you what," said the General. "I have been told that back in the 90's the First Black Watch Sergeants danced a thirty-twosome. Always doubted it, but I suppose it's possible. What do you think? Yes, another whisky please."

The pipe-sergeant, flattered but slightly outraged, gave his opinion. All things were possible; right, said the General, wiping his mouth, we would try it.

The convolutions of an eightsome are fairly simple; those of a sixteensome are difficult, but a thirty-twosome is just murder. When you have 32 people weaving and turning and circling it is necessary that each one should move precisely right, and that takes organisation. The General was an organiser; his tunic came off after half an hour, and his voice hoarsely thundered the time and the changes. The mess shook to the crash of feet and the skirling of the pipes, and at last the thirty-twosome rumbled, successfully, to its ponderous close.

"Dam' good! Dam' good!" exclaimed the General, flushed and applauding. "Well danced, gen'men. Good show, pipe-sarn't! Thanks, Tom, don't mind if I do. Dam' fine dancing. Thirty-twosome, eh? That'll show the Black Watch!"

He seemed to sway a little as he put down his glass. It was midnight, but he was plainly waking up.

"Thirty-twosome, by Jove! Wouldn't have thought it possible." A thought seemed to strike him. "I say, pipe-sarn't, I wonder ... d'you suppose that's as far as we can go? I mean is there any reason ... ?"

He talked and the pipe-sergeant's eyes bulged. He shook his head, the General persisted, and five minutes later we were all outside on the lawn and trucks were being sent for so that their headlights could provide illumination, and sixty-four of us were being thrust into our positions, and the General was shouting orders through cupped hands from the verandah.

"Taking the time from me! Right, pipers? It's p'fickly simple. S'easy. One, two, an' off we go!"

It was a nightmare, it really was. I had avoided being among the 64, and from where I was standing it looked like a crowd scene from "The Ten Commandments," with the General playing Cecil de Mille. Officers, mess-waiters, batmen, swung into the dance as the pipes shrilled, setting to partners, circling forwards and back, forming an enormous ring, and heughing like things demented. The General bounded about the verandah, shouting; the pipe-sergeant hurtled through the sets, pulling, directing, exhorting; those of us watching clapped and stamped as the mammoth dance surged on, filling the night with its sound and fury.

It took, I am told, one hour and thirteen minutes by the Adjutant's watch, and by the time it was over the Fusiliers from the adjoining barracks were roused and lined along the wall, assorted Arabs had come to gaze on the wonders of

civilisation, and the military police mobile patrol was also on hand. But the General was tireless; I have a vague memory of him standing on the tailboard of a truck, addressing the assembled mob; I actually got close enough to hear him exhorting the pipe-sergeant in tones of enthusiasm and entreaty: "Pipe-sarn't! Pipey! May I call you Pipey? ... never been done ... three figures ... think of ... hunner'n-twenty-eightsome ... never another chance ... try it ... rope in the Fusiliers ... massed pipers ... regimental history ... please, Pipey, for me ... "

Some say that it actually happened, that a one hundred and twenty-eightsome reel was danced on the parade ground that night.

General Sir Roderick MacCrimmon, K.C.B., D.S.O., and bar, presiding; that it was danced by Highlanders, Fusiliers, Arabs, military police, and three German prisoners of war; that it was danced to a conclusion, all figures. It may well have been; all I remember is a heaving, rushing crowd, like a mixture of Latin Carnival and Scarlett's uphill charge at Balaclava, surging ponderously to the sound of the pipes; but I distinctly recall one set in which the General, the pipe-sergeant, and what looked like a genuine Senussi in a burnous, swept by roaring, "One, two, three," and I know, too, that at one point I personally was part of a swinging human chain in which my immediate partners were the Fusiliers' cook-sergeant and an Italian cafe proprietor from down the road. My memory tells me that it rose to a tremendous crescendo just as the first light of dawn stole over Africa, and then all faded away, silently, in the tartan-strewn morning.

No one remembers the General leaving later in the day, although the Colonel said he believed he was there, and that the General cried with emotion. It may have been so, for the inspection report later congratulated the battalion, and highly commended the pipe-sergeant on the standard of the officers' dancing. Which was a mixed pleasure to the pipe-sergeant, since the night's proceedings had been an offence to his orthodox soul.

"Mind you," he would say. "General MacCrimmon had a fine agaility at the pas-de-bas, and a decent sense of the time. Och, aye, he wass not bad, not bad .... for a Campbell."

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Correspondence From Arthur Williamson

In copies nos. 46, 47 there was a quiz and answer section. Question 8 asked, Who is the most prolific composer of country dances known. The answer being Thomas Wilson. With Hugh Foss probably second. This I presume would be dances composed and published. So far I have 39 of my Scottish dances published; but I have composed 403 Scottish dances to date, also 58 Irish dances, 4 English dances, 2 Welsh dances, 1 Swedish and 1 Norwegian.

- - - - OUR EARLIEST DANCE? by Glover Whittaker - - - -

Some 100,000 years ago (so says P. Wendt in "Search for Adam") our Neanderthal ancestors and the strictly vegetarian Cave Bears co-existed in the caves of central Europe.

It was the bear's hard luck that Man liked meat and often enjoyed barbecued bear steak. Belly full, Man began to have guilty feelings about his ex-cave mate and fearful least the bear spirit might haunt him. So he organized a propitiatory dance.

With the uneaten bear's head stuck upon a pole in the center of a circle, all the Neanderthals gathered round and circled to the left (CW) with a slow shuffle, at the same time chanting their sorrow for the deceased. And wouldn't the spirit please go away, for after all they had killed him so that his spirit might be free to join his friends and relatives in the far-off spirit world?

Of course this is pure guess work. But we have some scraps of evidence. Poles with cave bear skulls have been found in caves, and footprints of probable dancers remain in the soft clay.

But what of that silly song? Well, today, along the Yenesei river and on Hokaido island of Japan, possible descendants of Neanderthals still live and dance the "bear dance". (Only they and Neanderthal have a peculiar skull formation and certain flat long limb bones). These people (the Ainus of Japan) use the skull of the native brown or black bear and chant a story similar to above.

The few Ainu dances I have seen (on film) always moved to the left. I confirmed this with a Maryknoll nun who made a study of the Ainus. Some experts say this sunwise movement, so often found in modern circle dances, denotes an agricultural origin, to honor the warmer of crops. However, Alaskan Eskimos, who never were farmers, always carefully move in a leftward circle in their dedication ceremonies. Sun worship must be very ancient.

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Correspondence From Mrs. Frederick D. Sharp III

If the rule for the reel of 4 is "right at the ends and left in the middle", why is not the pass in the middle for half reel reels of 4 with corners always made with the left shoulder?

Since this is the rule for the full reel of 4, why should it not be followed in all such dances containing this figure? I refer chiefly to the new dances. It seems to me that it would be far less confusing for the dancers and a definite rule should be established. Too many teachers say, when the question arises, that each couple should decide first what they are going to do. This is surely begging the issue.

[Editorial comment: it is clear that teachers who ask

individual couples to decide are wrong, because modern composers normally specify which way the half-reels should go. For example, "Mairi's wedding" has a left-shoulder pass in the middle, while "Rest and be thankful" has a right-shoulder pass in the middle. It might, indeed, be convenient to establish a definite rule that composers would be expected to follow. Who would enforce such a rule, and how?]

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+ + + COMPARISON CORNER FRENCH COUNTRY DANCES (concluded) + + +

In 1702 the French began to imitate the English custom of producing annual collections of dances, a custom which never caught on in Scotland (unless you count the S.C.D.S. books, in the days when they appeared at the rate of one a year, as "collections"). These were smaller than the corresponding English collections, each volume containing from two to ten dances, and the dances were described at much greater length. These collections were started by Feuillet and continued by Dezais, the last one appearing in 1720.

At this point (which is well before the date at which any country-dances were printed in Scotland) publication in France ceased for forty years (country-dance music was published, but no descriptions of dances). When publication resumed in 1760 a complete change had come over the dances: they had changed their shape and structure, and were now square dances.

Perhaps the last sentence puts things a little too strongly. There were a few square-dances before 1720, but they were distinguished by being called "contredanse à huit" or subtitled "cotillon". And there were a few longways progressive dances after 1760, but they were called not "contredanse" but "anglaise". Another change was that by now the dances had spread to the middle classes (though not to the peasants, who still preferred folk-dances). A few new steps had been introduced, including *balancé* and *rigaudon*, and so had a few new figures including *chaîne anglaise* [grand chain] and *chaîne des dames* [ladies' chain]. Although the dances had given up the progressive structure, they had a very definite structure of their own: a verse-and-chorus structure. The verses were a fixed sequence of figures which formed the skeleton of every dance; then each dance had its own individual chorus which separated the verses. (The structure is similar to, but simpler than, that of the Irish rinnici fighte -- see Thistle no. 46).

Many of the printed descriptions relied heavily on diagrams, giving one diagram for each figure, and looking amazingly like a Glendarroch sheet.

At the time of the revolution, the titles of French country-dances tended to become very revolutionary (just as in Jacobite times the titles of Scottish country-dances tended

to be rather Jacobite) but the reign of the country-dance was now growing to a close; it was being replaced by the quadrille.

The stories of the quadrille and the country-dance are not easy to untangle without studying the dances in some detail, for several reasons. (1) the dances were fairly similar, both square-shaped, using much the same figures and steps, but with a very different structure. (2) the quadrilles were not a completely separate type of dance, but grew out of the country-dance; the country-dance was simplified and shortened, and then several were put together in sequence. Thus the "Lancers" with its five figures, is really a sequence of five degenerate French country-dances. (3) In Germany, Denmark, and part of Sweden (Skåne), the name Quadrille, Kvadrille, and Kadrilj became attached, not to the French quadrille, but to the French country-dance, and in these countries there are scores of "folk dances", many with the name quadrille in the title (like Landskrona kadrilj from Skåne) which display the French country-dance structure to perfection, though this structure has long ago died out in France. (4) In England and Scotland the name "French country-dance" became attached to quadrilles -- exactly the reverse of the above. Thus the Scottish writer Barclay Dun recognized three types of "country-dance", namely "French country-dances", by which he meant quadrilles, "English country-dances", by which he meant country-dances, and "Scotch country-dances" by which he meant reels. (In France, up to 1720, "contredanse française" meant simply a country dance by a French author. After that date, the term was not used).

Thus, to sum up, the last stages in the history of the French country-dance: it died out in France, being replaced in middle- and upper-class urban circles by a greatly-modified derivative, the quadrille (which spread to similar circles in England, Scotland, New England and other countries, and eventually gave rise to the New England square-dance) and remaining only as a folk-dance, and mostly outside France (in northern Europe). Of these folk-dance remnants, some are called contra dances (for instance, Russisk kontra, from Laesten in Denmark) but many are called quadrilles.

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\*\*\* NEW RECORDS \*\*\*

[Comments are - as usual - by the Record Reviewer of The Reel, and are re-printed by permission].

- |  |                          |
|--|--------------------------|
| <u>Jigtime with Jimmy Shand</u> SZLP2122 |                          |
| Heather mixture rant                     | Weaving lilt             |
| Larkhill welcome                         | Rory O'More              |
| Drumelzier                               | Ian Powrie's farewell to |
| Hollin buss                              | Auchterarder             |



Rock and the wee pickle tow  
New Ashludie rant

Black dance  
Bonnie Lass o' Bon Accord

(Jimmy Shand not so good as when he is at his best, with Reels and Jigs played at 62/64 bars to a minute; strathspeys are better at 31 b.t.m.)

Music for Scottish Country Dancing

REC 94S. BBC Records

Miss Dumbreck  
Hollin Buss  
Bramble Bush  
Wild geese

Braes of Mellinish  
Kingussie Flower  
Three bonny Maidens  
The sailor

(This record is played by six musicians led by Archie Duncan. A photograph of Jean Milligan is on the sleeve and her expert advice and assistance is acknowledged).

Alasdair Downie Band Beltona Sword MBE 109 or SBE 109

Galloway house  
Green grow the rashes (only  
4 x 32)  
Dumbarton's drums

Admiral Nelson  
Machine without horses  
Yellow-haired laddie

(This was originally issued in 1962 at full price on the Beltona label. The tempo is very steady, indeed some dancers may find it a shade slower than the pace many of them are adopting in the 1970s).

Rob Gordon and his band Talisman STAL 5018

Rosnor Abbey (4 x 40)  
Mr (sic) Wilson's hornpipe  
Lea rig (4 x 32)  
Rakish highlandman (4 x 40)  
Threesome reel

O'er the Dee and o'er  
the Don  
Hooper's jig  
Alltshellach (4 x 32)  
Buchan eightsome reel  
Lady Sophia Anne of  
Bute (4 x 48)

(Rob Gordon's record is good, indeed very good in jigs and reels with probably the best Buchan eightsome ever recorded, but his strathspeys are a bit "loppity").

Bobby Crowe's band BSLP 67

Galloway house (4 x 32)  
The Reivers (4 x 32)  
Logan Brig (2 x 32)  
Mairrit Man's favourite (4 x 32)  
Threesome reel  
St. Johnstoun reel (4 x 32)

La Tempête  
Drumelzier (2 x 32)  
Cauld Kail (four times  
through)  
Cumberland reel (4 x 32)  
Wild geese (5 x 32)

(Excellent tempo throughout. Good balance and recording. Accordion, fiddle, double bass, piano and drums are all heard individually, but add up to a wholesome sound. The coordination between the bass and the piano is first-rate. Just listen to The Reivers or the Threesome Reel and you will want to listen over and over again. The only black mark from a dancer's viewpoint is for that 5 x 32 in Wild geese; the other tracks give a full or half dance.

-- ADVERTISEMENTS --

J.T. McHARDY CO. LTD., 538 Seymour Street,  
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Each issue brings you interesting articles on  
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dance, folk-song, folk-lore. Traditional  
recipes too, for hungry dancers.

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THE THISTLE

3515 Fraser Street, Vancouver 10.  
Subscription: \$1.25 per year (four issues). Six or more  
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numbers: 2-6, 8-18 25¢; 32,33,34,36 to date 35¢. The  
rest out-of-print, but Xerox copies available on request  
at 15¢ per exposure. Other publications: Schiehallion  
10¢, Inverness Reel 10¢, Inverness gathering 5¢, Argyll  
broadswords 20¢. Sixteen Country Dances (1945-1967) by  
Hugh Thurston 60¢.

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