



The THISTLE

A MAGAZINE OF SCOTTISH COUNTRY DANCING AND ALLIED SUBJECTS
Issued by the West Point Grey Scottish Country Dance Club of B.C.

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EDITORIAL

We have decided to issue a magazine. This is it.

Firstly, it will be a means whereby our members can have a record of the times, dates and places of other groups dances, and they of ours. We therefore suggest that any "open" group, or group willing to receive visitors should let us know their time and place of meeting, and the address of someone who would supply further information. We would welcome this information from any group in Canada or the U.S.A., as our members travel. We hope the magazine will travel, too.

Secondly, we hope, inspired by the example of "The Reel" published in London, England, and of the "New Zealand Scottish Country Dancer", to print articles of general interest, correspondence (if we get any), perhaps even verse or fiction. What exactly we include depends upon you, our readers, in two ways. We will try to print what interests you; and we can only print what you send to us. Here we cannot do better than quote (with the editor's permission) from the first copy of "The Reel":-

"Write about something connected with Scottish country dancing, Highland dancing or, if the comparison is interesting, other dancing. But don't assume that our readers will understand or be amused by obscure "family" jokes or oblique references to members of the group".

We add that Scottish music, Scottish costumes, Scottish customs and Scottish folk-lore are certainly "connected with Scottish dancing".

We propose to publish six copies per year, at monthly intervals during the winter, the last issue to contain a brief report on the year's doings by every group which cares to submit one. (We have in mind something like the New Zealand magazine).

Subscriptions: 20¢ per copy (30¢ for the last issue of the year) or \$1.25 per year. Readers in the sterling area may not be able to get dollars: if so send a postal order for 7/6 for the year and we will try to negotiate it.

OUR DANCES . No. 1: The Duke of Perth.

We propose to include an article on one of the dances in the local repertoire each month probably alternating old favourites with lesser known dances. We will start with what is quite certainly the most popular country dance of all.

There is no need to describe the figures: the dance is in both "101 Scottish Country Dances" and "Scottish Country Dance Book No. 1", and we imagine that every reader has one or other of these.

The dance first appeared in a manuscript known as the Blantyre manuscript, written in 1806, and at present in the public library in Perth. Perhaps this date does not look very old to anyone who scans the dates in the footnotes in the Scottish Country Dance books, but in fact most of these dates are of documents which recorded old dances which were quickly for-

gotten and were, after a lapse of years, reconstructed (some more accurately than others). The Duke of Perth, however, was never forgotten, but was handed down from one generation of dancers to the next. Indeed, the RSCDS did not get the dance from the Blantyre MS: the source quoted is "The Ballroom", 1827, which is the earliest printed version of the dance. And they could, if necessary, have done without documents altogether but have recorded the dance from traditional dancers.

Here is the description in the Blantyre MS: -

"Hook right hand with partner, turn round, throw off a couple. Hook partner with left. Turn round downmost lady with right, partner with left, upmost lady with right, partner with left twice round. Sett across corners, reels".

There follows the instruction "End with four round, four across, r and l once". These figures are not part of the particular dance. They (or something similar, such as "End in the usual way") occur at the end of every dance in the MS, and were evidently a general finale.

"Throw off" means simply "cast off". The "hook" seems to me to imply that an elbow link was used for the fast turns. Our "elbow cup" hold has presumably descended from this (I think it is a better hold: the elbow link is slightly awkward with our steps, and it is not easy to let your partner go smoothly at the speed at which we dance. In any case, no-body uses an elbow link to-day as far as I know). A one-hand hold would have struck the Scots of the early nineteenth century as very English - in those days country dancing was still done in the English aristocratic ballroom, and was done in a more genteel fashion than would appeal to the more vigorous Scots. The custom, which has become unfortunately prevalent in some quarters, of trying to dance the tune with a hand-hold and (on finding that it cannot be done) twisting wrists together in what looks like a jiu-jitsu grip, or pushing one's partner round with one's free hand, is a consequence which any sensible person ought to be able to foresee of the use of an inadequate technique.

The name "Duke of Perth" is the name of a tune (as indeed all names of country-dances were in those days). It is the familiar tune to the dance: it is on plenty of gramophone records, and is the first tune given for the dance in the Scottish Country Dance Book. This sequence of figures has, from time to time, been regularly danced to other tunes, and so has had other names. In "The Ballroom", for instance, the dance is called "The Duke of Perth, or Keep the country bonnie lassie". Many books give it as "The Duke of Perth, or Brown's reel". In the Scottish Country Dance Book, "Brown's reel" has become "Brown's reel"; while in D.R. Mackenzie's "National Dances of Scotland" it has become "The Brownie's reel". Another tune which was very commonly used is "Pease strae" (sometimes called "Clean pease strae").

All these tunes are reel tunes. However, if you compare the tune as played nowadays with the written notes you will find that it is being played at exactly half speed, i.e. one bar of the written tune is turned into two bars. At this speed, of course, the tune is not a reel tune, because the quaver-rhythm of the reel has been slowed down into a crotchet rhythm. The rhythm has, in fact, become that of the Scottish measure, which is a very suitable rhythm for country dancing, though of course it could not be used in a reel (such as the eightsome or foursome reel).

It seems very likely that this is the original way of playing the tune, for it appears away back in 1750, under the name "Lord Rockingham's reel or Scampden's Cade" in Jno. Johnson's "200 favourite country dances" (published in London). Here the bars are half as long as the bars in the reel version.

Next issue "Drambuic"

CORRESPONDENCE.

This being our first issue, we have none yet. We welcome questions concerned with dancing.

Rather than run a blank space in this first issue, because of lack of correspondence, I felt it would be appropriate to give our readers a little of the background of Dr. Hugh Thurston, who was the inspiration behind this little magazine.

Dr. Thurston first became interested in Scottish country dancing in 1946. Since that time he has done a lot of research into the art and is responsible for the revival of a number of the old dances, some of which have now become popular with groups throughout the world.

Dr. Thurston has also created several new and very interesting dances, some of which are danced regularly by the groups he instructs. Among these the most popular are Drambuic, Black Ness, Lylestone house, Castle Campbell, Rosslyn castle, Schiehallion and Far up the glen.

We will be publishing a number of these dances in the future issues of the Thistle, the first being Drambuic in the next issue. I am sure that any group who learns these new dances will obtain a great deal of pleasure and enjoyment from them.

It is possible that we might get Dr. Thurston to create for us a new dance and call it The Thistle to mark the publication of this Magazine.

Douglas Duncan.

COMPARISON CORNER.

The first contribution to this is reprinted from "The Reel" by permission of the editor.

Weaving Lilts and Ninesomes.

"Nine dancers stand in three rows, each having one man between two girls, the whole forming a square. After a preliminary movement, the centre man dances with a corner girl and with one opposite. The second time through he dances with the girls on the other diagonal; the third time with his partners; and the fourth time, with the other men." No, I am not describing the ninesome reel. This is the Swedish Trekarlspolska (Three men's polska). A polska has a certain rhythm, as characteristically Swedish as the Strathspey is Scottish; and a fascinating lilting rhythm it is.

Whereas Swedish dances popular today mostly date from the end of the 19th century, the ninesome reel goes back to the early part of that century (the date 1748 given in the Scottish Country Dance books is not correct) and the Trekarlspolska is evidently an import. Some of the differences that have crept in are rather amusing. A party from the Cambridge reels club saw it danced during a tour of Sweden in 1951. When the men set to each other they flung their arms wide and grimaced wildly: the original movements had degenerated into open aggression. Was this a relic, we wondered, of setting with arms raised? Although the ninesome is from an elegant age, we know that Scots danced in a fashion which the more stylish English dancing masters disapproved of. "The sudden howl or yell - introduced into some Scotch parties as partly national with them - ought particularly to be avoided, as partaking too much of the customs of barbarous nations," wrote Thomas Wilson, in 1816.

An exception to the comparative newness of Swedish dances is given by the Vava vadmal; no one knows how old it is. When we saw it, we felt at home immediately, for the figures of the Foula reel and nearly all those of the Hebridean Weaving Lilt are included in it. The tune is that of the Foula reel; not the newish 6/8 tune given in the Scottish Country Dance books, but the 3/4 tune given by D.G. McLennan in his recent treatise. It is, then, not surprising to read that the Foula reel used to be known as "The Swedish Dance". It would be interesting to know how it became associated with Foula. Did the Vava vadmal come to the Shetlands with the Vikings, survive in a shortened form in Foula and thence go to the city ball-room? Or did the dance come from Scandinavia to the ball-rooms of these islands, die out of fashion, but remain alive in the remote Shetlands? The second alternative seems to me much the more likely. Certainly the dance is described in a book of 1890, and again in 1906, as "The Scandinavian Country Dance" with no mention of Foula. In no sense of the word is the dance a reel.

The figures of the Vava vadmal are more complicated than those of the Hebridean Weaving Lilt, partly because it is a dance for twice as many couples. There is one figure which does not occur in the Hebridean dance: the first couple turn each other in the middle, then the top man and bottom woman, then each other, then the top-but-one man and bottom-but-one woman, and so on.

The dance seems to be one of the most popular folk-dances in Sweden. It is as pleasant to perform as to watch, and makes an especially fine display when danced, as it was each time we saw it, in the traditional local costumes.

And now I cannot help wondering whether some Swedish student, returning after a Festival visit, is busy explaining how he saw here dances obviously related to the Vava vadmal and the Trekarlspolska.

LOCAL NEWS.

There is only one piece of local news in this issue because it overshadows all others: Miss Milligan's visit. She took a class consisting of most of Vancouver's country dancers in an enormous gymnasium kindly lent by the School Board, and in her own kindly but definite way taught us four dances. More important, she insisted that we hold our heads up, use our hands at shoulder level (especially in the chain) and use our biceps when turning. She felt a few biceps to make sure that they were there. The next day she saw a performance of Vancouver's own dances, arranged by Mrs. McNab. The highlight was the scintillating performance of "Eight Men of Moidart" and "Lovat Star" by 16 dancers, which worked up from the slow minuet-like opening rhythm of the "eight men of Moidart" to a brilliant climax with a Schiehallion-like reel of eight danced in couples. The women's highland dances, of which Mrs. McNab has a dozen or so, were unusual and valuable items, and it was good to see "The Flower of Benbecula" danced as it should be. Country dances by the Braemar group and an all-girls team from the night school classes were a good foil to the highland dances, but both groups would have improved their performance by having only one good set each.

SCOTTISH DANCE GROUPS.

The Prince Charles Club - Lord Tennyson School, 1900 block of West 11th, every Tuesday, 7.30 - 10.00 p.m. Mr. and Mrs. Kerr, 4258 Ontario. TR4-2181.

The Vancouver Branch of the Scottish Country Dance Society of B.C. - Dunbar Community Centre, 4747 Dunbar, first and third Saturdays of each month, 7.45 - 11.00 p.m. Mr. H.P. Gregory 3369 Puget Drive. RE8-5333.

The West Point Grey Branch of the Scottish Country Dance Society of B.C. - The University dance hut, Fridays, 7.30 - 10.30 p.m. Mr. Andrew Shawyer, 995 Bute. No phone.

The Night School Classes. - Fairview School, Broadway, three classes: Monday, Wednesday and Thursday. Information from the School Board, or Mrs. Thomas Bingham, 1020 Harwood. MU4-4900.

The White Rock Branch of the Scottish Country Dance Society of B.C. - Ocean Park Hall, Wednesdays. Mr. and Mrs. Miller, 14739 Goggs Ave., White Rock.

The Gaelic Ceilidh, Seattle. - Yolanda Landon, 11640 3rd Ave. Sth., Seattle 88. (Scottish and Irish dancing.)

Bill and Barbara Howie's group. - 2035 London, New Westminster, Fridays (except the first in each month), 8.00 p.m. Mr. and Mrs. Howie, 2036 London, New Westminster. LA6-7638.

Victoria Scottish Country Dance Society - Willow's School, Victoria, first and third Wednesdays of each month. Nancy Ferguson, 4897 Cordova Bay Rd. GR9-3112

Kamloops. St. Andrews Church Hall - Saturday 8.00 p.m. Mrs. McSween, 253 Battle St.

We propose to repeat this list in our next issue, together with information about any other groups who care to write to us.

Scottish dancers might also like to visit The Vancouver Society for International Folk Dancing, Scottish Auditorium, 12th and Fir, every Thursday, 8.00 - 11.00 p.m. Mr. and Mrs. Sawyer, 6758 Knight Rd. FA5-0338.

The Fidalgo Folk Dancers, Anacortes, Washington. Second and fourth Saturdays of each month. Mr. and Mrs. Hicks, RT3, Box 62, Anacortes. CY3-3302. (Write or 'phone first: this is not an "open" group).

Coming events (local).

West Point Grey group's party, December 9th, 7.45 p.m. International House, on the University Campus.

Lady Aberdeen Club's Christmas party, December 15th.