



THE

THISTLE

(1971/2)

Editorial

The February issue of *The Thistle* always appears just as the Burns season is over (we say "Burns season" rather than "Burns night" because in Canada numerous organizations commemorate the Bard on various nights, and a fanatic can attend up to a dozen celebrations). This put us to thinking about one difference between Scottish dancers and "folk-dancers". When a folk-dancer becomes interested in the dances of some country, he soon becomes interested in its cuisine, its customs, its costumes, its songs, its language and (if he is highbrow) perhaps even its history and geography. This does not seem to happen to Canadian and American aficionados of Scottish dancing; but Burns Night to some extent redresses the balance. A taste of haggis as an example of Scottish cuisine, and a few verses by Burns as an example of Scottish poetry, is at least a start.

OUR DANCES NO. 72: The Haughs o' Cromdale

Here we have one of those traditional nineteenth-century dances which gave Scottish country-dancing a character quite distinct from that of any other nation. It is individual in a number of ways. First, it is a local dance, from the south-east of Scotland. The RSCDS, who published it in *Scottish Country Dance Book number 4*, described it as "Collected in Galloway"; J.F. and T.M. Flett give us more detail in their *Traditional dancing in Scotland*: their researches showed that it was popular in the Dalbeattie district of Kirkcudbrightshire before the first World War. (The Haughs of Cromdale themselves are nowhere near these places: they are much further north in Morayshire). The second individual characteristic of the dance is that it is a strathspey. The strathspey is a peculiarly Scottish rhythm (even the Irish do not have it) and dances in this rhythm were (until the modern "revival") quite rare; moreover they were all, or nearly all, local. The dance is named after its tune, which is a well-known one: it appears in the first volume of Kerr's *Merry Melodies*, and occurs as well in a number of other sources, sometimes under other names. The third peculiarity of the dance is the incorporation of the highland schottische step, which is perhaps the main detail that gives the dance an unmistakable Scottish flavour. In fact *The Haughs o'*

Cromdale incorporates the whole of the highland schottische dance and can be summed up as "hands-across-and-back and highland schottische". As a final point we might mention the unusual length of the dance: few are as short as 16 bars.

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? ? ? YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED ? ? ?

Which dates/periods in the traditional Scottish country dance correspond with the early, middle, late Playford periods and the decline of the Country Dance in England?

Playford—the earliest printed source of country-dances—was first published in 1651 and ran through many editions, the last one appearing in 1728. In the first half of this period there was no country-dancing in Scotland: the first known reference to a country-dance in Scotland is just after 1700. Country-dancing did not become really popular until very much later: it was popular enough in 1820, as the historical quotation in this issue shows; but as late as 1775 it was not (see the sixth historical quotation in Thistle no. 39).

One important point about Playford is that in the course of its seventeen editions the country-dance changed greatly. In early Playford, dances were in various different shapes (round, square, single-file, double column and so on) and usually for a fixed number of people (often two couples or three couples). By about 1700 all but one of these formations had died away; the surviving formation being the well-known double column of arbitrary length with the "repeat having passed a couple" progression. However, all this development took place in England before the dance reached Scotland: only the longwise progressive dances ever crossed the border. Cecil Sharp, in the introduction to part V of *The Country Dance Book*, suggested that the early types of country-dance did reach Scotland, but he had absolutely no evidence for this, and there is plenty against it. (Sharp was here trying rather desperately to support his theories on the origin of the Appalachian square-dance: theories that in fact do not hold water for a number of reasons).

Thus the development of the country-dance in Scotland corresponds entirely to late Playford (or later-than-Playford): nothing corresponds to early Playford. There is nothing yet to correspond to the decline of the country-dance in England.

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OBITUARY

It is with very great regret that we tell our readers that Hugh Foss died last December. He will be known to some of us as a composer of new dances (including such favourites as Greenwich Hill, Rob Roy, Lucy of Lammermuir, J. B. Milne, Curleywee, Belhaven, and The Celtic Brooch); he will be better known to others as an efficient and knowledgeable distributor of new dances, his own and those of other composers. But his services to and influence on Scottish Country Dancing transcend these two roles. He was always a discerning writer on many aspects of Scottish dancing, and was the Editor of one of the earliest and best of the dance-magazines (The Chelsea Reels' Club Intelligencer, Entertainer and Reporter - The CRIER, for short) and was the first Editor of The Reel. Indeed, he was the direct inspiration for the magazine you are now reading: The Thistle. No doubt many of our readers will know his fairly recent contribution to The Reel: "Roll up the carpet and dance".

Hugh always took a broad-minded interest in dancing. He was aware of the history and background of the dances as well as the details of the dances themselves. He was knowledgeable about the types of tunes used for Scottish country dances as well as being punctilious about the choice of tunes for his dances. In the days when leaders in the Scottish Country Dance movement tended to be narrowly dogmatic, Hugh pleaded for liberality based on knowledge. He took an interest in highland dancing, and when he danced an eightsome or a four-some reel it would be with the correct steps, neatly and beautifully executed. He was a clear and enjoyable teacher—even the past year or so, when he had to teach sitting down, the way in which he could shepherd a large roomful of dancers through a complicated dance was an object lesson in effective teaching.

He will be missed; but his dances will remain.

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* * * Historical Notes * * *

From L. A. Necker de Saussure's *Travels in Scotland*
(Published in London in 1821).

They [the Scots] are passionately fond of dancing. The Scottish reels are remarkable for vivacity of movement; the music is purely national, and a well-marked rhythm animates the dancers. The greater part of the ladies display much talent and grace.

Dancing, in Edinburgh, is the most general pleasure, and they hardly renounce it until an advanced age. Nothing is more common than to see father and son, mother and daughter, figure in the same country-dance. This cannot take place but where dancing is considered an amusement, rather than as an art requiring study, and by which the people seek for applause.

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+ + + NEW RECORDS + + +

[Comments by the record reviewer of The Reel]

The sound of the north STAL 5007

Mason's Apron (6 x 32)	Jigs	(4 x 32)
Irish jigs (4 x 32)	Shetland reels	(4 x 32)
Bottom of the punch-bowl (4 x 32)	The haymakers	(24 + 3 x 48)
Jessie's hornpipe (5 x 32)		

(The Wick Scottish dance band is lively, but reels and jigs are dangerously fast for dancing).

Stan Watts and his band BMD 01 (EP)

Blue bonnets (6 steps)	Earl of Erroll (6)
Highland fling (6)	Argyll broadswords (4 + 1)
Miss Forbes (5)	

Stan Watts and his band BMD 02 (EP)

The shepherd's crook	Flora MacDonald's fancy (6)
Sword-dance (4 + 1)	Wilt thou go to the barracks, Johnny (6)
Hielan' laddie (6)	

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News from Australia

The Mitcham Scottish Society keep a list of the dances they do. In case others might be interested in comparisons, we show here the dances they did eight or more times in 1970-71. In addition they danced 39 dances either five, six or seven times; 63 dances either two, three or four times; and 72 dances once only.

Angus MacLeod 22	Angus reel 9
Argyll's fancy 14	Baldovan reel 13
Balmoral strathspey 9	Betty's wedding 8
Duke and Duchess of Edinburgh 12	Duke of Perth 17
Express 9	Ellwyn's fairy glen 10
Garry strathspey 12	Fireside reel 12
Haddington assembly 10	Glasgow highlanders 8
Holyrood house 17	Hollin buss 9
Kendall's hornpipe 8	Just as I was in the morning 13
Lamb skinnet 9	Lad o' Kyle 9
Luckenbooth brooch 8	Longwise eightsome 11
Maxwell's rant 11	Mairi's wedding 11
Miss Jacqueline James 10	Middleton medley 8
Mrs. Annette Cameron 8	Montgomerie's rant 9
New rigged ship 14	Mrs. MacPherson of Inveran 11
Reel of Mey 9	Peat fire flame 11
Robertson's rant 11	Rest and be thankful 26
Schiehallion 19	Sailor 10
Silver tassie 8	Silver city 8
White cockade 8	Stirling castle 8
	White heather jig 10

?? ? YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED ? ? ?

*What is a fugue; and what is a fugal country-dance?
I enjoy several of the "Waverley Fugues, and I'd
like to know more about fugal form.*

The simplest kind of fugue is a "round"; that is to say, a piece of music in which one voice starts, and a second voice starts later, singing the same song at the same speed, and so staying exactly the same distance behind the first voice. If a third voice joins in (at the same distance behind the second as the second voice is behind the first, we have a "three part" round; and so on). For example, the round "London's burning" goes like this:-

Voice 1: London's burning London's burning Fetch the
 Voice 2: London's burning London's

1: engines Fetch the engines Fire fire
 2: burning Fetch the engines Fetch the engines

1: Fire fire Pour on water Pour on water
 2: Fire fire Fire fire Pour on water Pour on
 water.

A fugue is based on the same idea, but the second part does not have to follow the first part exactly. There are various modifications it can make. It might start on a different note, but preserve the same shape; for example, every note might be at an interval of exactly one fourth below the corresponding note in the first voice's tune. Or it might be "upside down", going up where the first voice goes down, and vice versa. Another thing that can happen is that a stretch of the main tune can be repeated twice as fast (either by the first voice or the second voice) or twice as slowly. These devices are given technical names in musical theory—doubling the speed (and therefore halving the time taken by the music) is called "diminution"; halving it (and doubling the time) is called "augmentation". Another term commonly found in reading about fugues is "stretto"—a stretto is a stretch of music where all voices seem to be at their busiest.

Fugal country-dances are country-dances in which one dancer (or group of dancers) performs certain figures, corresponding to the first voice's tune; and a second dancer (or group) follows later with the "second voice"—the same figures or a slight variation on them. The idea is an invention of Hugh Foss, whose book of twelve "Waverley Fugues" appeared in 1963. (I still have not come across any good fugues by anyone else).

Let us look at the first of these: "Fugal Fergus". This is a two-part fugue, the women being the "first voice" and the men the second. It is at an interval of eight bars: that is to say after the women have been dancing for eight bars the men start, and they start with the same figure as the women. In fact they repeat exactly what the women did; and we have the simplest type of fugue, namely a round. There is a fairly obvious "stretto" at bar 28, when the men are passing through the women's reel.

Now let us look at another: Rob Roy. This is more complicated—we have turned from "Three blind mice" to Johann Sebastian Bach. This is a four-voice fugue, the first, third, second and fourth couples being the first, second, third and fourth voices. It is at an interval of four bars. The first voice starts "set and turn [4 bars], cast down and lead up [8 bars]". The second voice starts "set and turn [4 bars] cast down and up [4 bars]". Thus the second half of this

part of the dance is diminished for the second voice. The third voice does the same as the second, but there is an interesting overlap on bars 13-16, the first three voices cooperate in half of a reel of three: the third voice's (i.e. second couple) cast down and lead up is their part of the half-reel. For the fourth voice the cast down and lead up is eliminated altogether. Thus by bar 16 every voice has caught up the first voice. The fugue ends here, and the rest of the dance consists of orthodox country-dance figures.

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* * * LEGENDS By McDaniel * * *

One of the maddening things about proverbs is the way they contradict each other. You know the sort of thing—"He who hesitates is lost" against "Look before you leap". The same kind of thing seems to happen with legends about dances.

The sword-dance (1)

The triumphant dance of a warrior who has crossed his sword over that of a fallen enemy.

The sword-dance (2)

Danced before battle: if the dancer doesn't kick the swords, his side will win. [Well—it's no worse than the ancient Romans, who cut open an unfortunate hen, and looked at its liver. I've always thought that if they cut open their top general and looked at the state of his liver they'd be more likely to find out something about their chances].

The Fling (1)

Danced on a shield—which accounts for the neat on-the-spot steps. [Have you ever tried to dance on a highland shield?]

The Fling (2)

Inspired by the sight of a stag curvetting in the distance—the dancer's raised arms represent the stag's antlers. [What do his feet represent? A friend of mine says they obviously represent a fly cleaning its legs].

The Reel of Tulloch (1)

To keep warm while waiting for the minister one wintry Sunday at Tulloch in Perthshire, the congregation danced reel steps in the aisles and swung each other by the arms. [I wonder who taught the dance: the organist?]

The Reel of Tulloch (2)

I quote: "several people were kicking skulls in a barn. One would say, giving a kick from behind *Bho chul a' chinn*, and another would reply, kicking the skull from the front *Bho bheul a' chinn*, which quickly descended to *Bho Thulaichean gu Bealaichean*, and in this way the dance originated; but I do not recollect the full particulars". [This must be true—who could possibly make up such a story, grimmer than Grimm].

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: : : : A CONVERSATION : : : :

You must be fond of Scottish country-dancing—I see you here a lot. What do you like most about it?

I've never really thought about that.

Could it be the music? Scottish country-dance music is tune-ful and lively.

No, I don't think so. The music is lively enough, but then so is Irish dance-music, and even square-dance music (traditional—not the modern stuff). The music alone wouldn't make me choose Scottish over these dances.

What about the steps?

Now you're talking. Certainly when I compare Scottish country-dancing with square-dancing the chief difference is in the steps. It's much more fun to go through the figures with a travelling step, interspersed with a setting step, than to walk through them.

How do the figures compare?

The differences don't amount to much. In fact some Scottish dances, like Bonny Brux or Braes of Balquidder could be square-dances if it weren't for the steps.

So that's the first thing you like about Scottish dancing?

Yes; but I must make one thing clear. It is not the particular steps we use: it's the general idea of being able to move fast and freely, not just walk on the one hand, and not use terribly complicated steps on the other.

So you'd probably enjoy German dancing, with the polka step as a fast travelling step and the Rheinlander (their name for the schottische) as a slow one.

Yes, I expect I should. But while we've been talking I've been getting a bit clearer about just what I like about Scottish country-dancing. I read somewhere that a good driver takes pride in always being at the right place in the road, facing in the right direction, going at the right speed, in the right gear.

How is this like Scottish country-dancing?

Well, I take pleasure in always being at the right place on the floor, facing the right direction, and going at the right speed with the right step. There is one snag, though.

The other dancers?

Yes: it is no good for just one person to be doing this: the supreme enjoyment comes when everyone does it. The dances become so smooth and easy and natural; and yet still stimulating.

So you are happiest when you're in a group which takes pride in phrasing well?

Yes, I think that sums it up nicely.

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