



***THE***

***T H I S T L E***

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Issued by the Thistle Club

President: Dr. Norman MacKenzie, C.M.G., M.M. & Bar, Q.C., LL.D.

No. 47

February 1971

OUR DANCES No. 68: Dumbarton drums

This dance comes from Thomas Wilson's famous book, published in 1816, whose full title is

A companion to the ballroom, containing a choice collection of the most original and admired country dances, reels, hornpipes, waltzes and quadrilles etc. etc. with appropriate figures to each.

Wilson gave two or three dances to each tune. The first one, which he labelled "single figure" was short and simple; the last one, "double figure", was longer (and usually not so simple). For the tune "Dumbarton drums" the dances were

Single figure      Hey on your own sides —  
                            lead down the middle and up again  
                            and set to the top couple —

and

Double figure      The 3 ladies lead round the 3  
                            gentlemen —  
                            the 3 gentlemen lead round the  
                            3 ladies —  
                            lead down the middle and up  
                            again and allemande —  
                            and set 3 across and set 3 in  
                            your places. —

Readers who compare this with the version in RSCDS book no. 5 will notice that there a rather odd thing has happened: the two sequences have been telescoped into one (the figure "lead down the middle and up" acting as the coupling).

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## ANSWERS TO THE QUIZ IN THE LAST ISSUE --

1. (a) *Cath nan coileach; An long; Cabair feidh; Sean Triubhas, Reel a down a mereken (this one is heavily Anglicized in spelling); Tullochgorum (also somewhat Anglicized)*  
 (b) *La Russe; La tempête,*  
 (c) *none.*
2. *There are several 16-bar dances, including Off she goes, and Miss Murray of Ochtertyre. The Long Chase lasts for 64 bars.*
3. *There is one in The Border book, at least two from Shetland, one from Oxton and one from Lauderdale. (There are also some Irish reels for six).*
4. *Red house  
 A kiss for nothing  
 La tempête  
 Circassian circle  
 Cauld kail  
 The dashing white sergeant  
 The swine's tail  
 The three sheepskins  
 The highlandman kissed his mother  
 The tushker*
5. *Miss Murray of Ochtertyre*
6. *Mucklestane muir*
7. *Waverley, or Fergus MacIvor*
8. *Thomas Wilson. (Hugh Foss is probably second).*

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## \* \* \* COMPARISON CORNER - IRISH DANCING (concluded) \* \* \*

We have seen that there are three main types of Irish dancing, and we have looked at two of them. The third type consists of the "ceilidh" dances. These are pretty much the equivalent of our "Petronella", "Duke of Perth", "La tempête" and so on: figure-dances, performed by couples, mostly in longwise formation with the usual "repeat having passed a couple" progression.

None of them are hornpipes - all are nominally reels or jigs, but not strictly reels and jigs: they are frequently danced to marches, songs and other tunes played in jig or reel tempo. "The Spanish lady" is quite a favorite. On the whole they are simpler than the corresponding Scottish dances - all the longwise ones are two-couple, for instance. But they are livelier. No couple ever has as little to do as, say, the

second couple in our "Flowers of Edinburgh" (let alone the third couple!) The commonest ceilidh dances are

The walls of Limerick	(in Circassian circle formation)
The siege of Ennis	(very like La Tempête)
The bridge of Athlone	(a whole-set dance, a bit like Barley Bree)
The waves of Tory	(a longwise dance with an "under and over" figure like the one in the weaving-lilt)
The haymakers	(like our dance of the same name)
The harvester's jig	(a three-facing-three round-the-room dance)

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#### CORRESPONDENCE

From J. Walker Mitchell

The R.S.C.D.S. have officially published over 300 dances, and is apparently opposed to "NEW" dances on the grounds that there are already sufficient.

It is understood that in the year in which the Society undertook to publish a book of "NEW" dances over 300 were submitted for consideration. A few of these are current, but it is hard to know which current dances were submitted. It is likely that at least 100 are submitted each year to the I.S.T.D. for the McConnachie Sword competition; so the total number of dances is anybody's guess. We do, however, know that the good dance will live, the others will be danced occasionally by keen dancers for a bit of variety.

My collection of current dances is far from complete. I know of at least four books of dances in print which I have as yet been unable to obtain copies of. Yet my collection of current dances amounts to over 1500 including the Society publications.

One book which I have only seen one copy of was printed in Kirkcudbright, and apparently published in New York - The Bryn Mawr book. This seems to be completely unobtainable: but this apart I am hoping to be able to collect all current dances as they are published.

From John Bowie Dickson

I hope there will be a follow up to the comment on the strathspey part of the Perth Medley. I am concerned that the virile quality of the traditional strathspey is disappearing. Dancers and dance bands have come to accept the "Sluggish Waltz" as normal and it is more than a country dance band dare do than play a strathspey in any other

manner. The lack of a lead violin in some bands is, I'm sure, a contributing factor. I always look forward to a new record especially if there is the prospect of a good strathspey. The latest disappointment was the latest Stan Hamilton with a selection for the Saint John River which is more funereal than any so far. I know that these opinions would be regarded as rank heresy in many quarters. All too many dancers, I find, are disenchanted with the strathspey.

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? ? ? YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED (follow-up) ? ? ?

The question on "leading" has stimulated a number of comments, the first of which might almost have gone in our correspondence columns, as it is from a letter from Evelyn Murray Lenthall. The question was: when and why did leading change from right-hand to nearer-hand? Our reply to "when" was "in 1963", but we didn't know why. We also mentioned that some traditionalists continue to do it the old way.

1. The leading down the middle changed about six years ago. The rule now is to use nearer hands *unless* the active couple are going to cross over or dance allemande on returning to the top of the set, when right hands are obviously more useful. The reason for the change is that leading down by the right causes, or tends to cause, the dancers to drift away from the centre line; by using nearer hands their hand grasp should now travel down this imaginary centre line. When one thinks of a dance like "The Silver Tassie" which has a rondel after the lead down and up it is clearly easier and more attractive to use nearer hands. "The Wild Geese" would be another example, however, in "Light and Airy" I instruct the class to use right hands.
2. Who are these *wicked* people who continue to use the *outmoded* technique copied from their parents and grandparents, instead of following the rules laid down by the R.S.C.D.S.? How can a certificated teacher possibly teach with *authority* unless her pupils are willing to follow the rules?
3. It is not true that leading was always done with right hands: when I was young we often faced each other, joined *both* hands and used a chassé step - especially in The Cumberland reel. (But perhaps, since we moved sidewise, we shouldn't call that "leading").
4. I hope it is *not* true that everyone now leads with nearer hands. Surely there is a place for each technique - and no doubt there is some dance somewhere in which a left-hand

lead is best. One context in which I definitely do not like a nearer-hand lead, is when two reels of three are going on side-by-side. Possibly it is best not to take hands at all: certainly if you take nearer hands the hold pushes the dancers a couple of feet apart, and tends to squash the loops of the reel into a mean angular little shape.

5. I don't think it matters twopence what hand you lead with, but for heaven's sake don't get neurotic about it. If your partner offers you one hand, take it gratefully; don't grab for the other, no matter what "technique" you may have been told is "correct".

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#### HISTORICAL NOTES (concluded)

The music for our balls is supplied by one of the fiddlers of the district, who is seated on a chair raised aloft upon a table, which forms the minstrels' gallery for the time being. He always has with him an assistant, who takes his place when he needs rest or refreshment. It cannot be said that our borderers are a musical people, and yet it would be difficult to find in any part of England, in the same area, so many who play the violin, as far at least as dance music is concerned. They do not profess to be more than fiddlers, and many of them keep good time and tune, and find the winter a profitable season. It seems a pity that even this talent should not be further cultivated, and our church and chapel music varied by the addition of stringed instruments, as in the days before organs dominated the choir.

#### Programme of Dances in Ford Village, 1905-1907

Triumph...Contra Dance	Lancers
Plain Schottische	Patronella,* Contra Dance, to
Polka	"Highland Laddie" tune
Waltz	Dutch Polka*
Reel o' Tulloch, or Hooligan	Nancy Till*
Barn Dance	Pin Reel, danced by nine persons,
Quadrille	one forming the pin in the
Highland Schottische	centre of the circle
My love she's but a lassie yet	Leap Year Polka
Ribbon Dance*	Spanish Waltz*
Heel and Toe Polka	Roxburgh Castle*
Circassian Circle	Hornpipe and Highland Fling, in
Scotch Reel, <i>The Reel</i> Strath-	interludes
spey and Reel danced to the	God Save the King
tunes of "Harvest Home" and	Auld Lang Syne
"Harvest lang a' coming"	

\*Mr. D.D. Dixon, of Rothbury, tells me that these six dances are not known in the Rothbury district of Northumberland.

Programme of Dances in Ford Village 65 Years Ago

The Reel	Strathspey
The Reel o' Tulloch	Newcastle Hornpipe
Sixsome Reel	Berwick Johnnie (Hornpipe)
Reel of Tullo'goram	Sailor's Hornpipe
Ninesome Reel	

Little seems to be known of the history of the dances most in vogue on the English Border. The greater number are Scotch Reels, Strathspeys, and Country Dances. But there are some other dances here which have a marked individuality of their own, and this makes one curious to know their origin. There is what is called in our programmes the Spanish Waltz. It is not a waltz at all, but at one stage the dancers do join hands, and as they turn wave their arms gracefully up and down in quite an un-English fashion.

The Ribbon Dance is also very interesting and distinctive, and surely must have a history. The partners stand in opposite rows holding ribbons of various bright colours which cross the space between, and the dance consists chiefly in the partners successively passing under the ribbon that is held by the couple at the end. The Ribbon dance is very pleasant to watch, especially if seen at the end of the rows of dancers, where the effect is that of the interweaving of bright colours, bending forms, and happy faces. It is sometimes called the Handkerchief Dance, but without coloured ribbons it loses something of its brightness and originality.

The Reel o' Tulloch, otherwise called the Hooligan or Hoolakin (a Gaelic word) is a rather rough and noisy dance, but one always included in our programmes. It is a great favourite, and is danced with tremendous energy and spirit.

The Pin Reel is a circular dance, but also somewhat rough. Whatever be its origin or history it would seem to be characteristic of those ancient dances of imitation in which capture for marriage is represented. It is always danced once at least during the evening.

The Highland Schottische was originally a martial dance, and women did not engage in it.

There is a dance called the Cushion Dance which often comes at the conclusion of kirns or harvest balls, and which deserves notice. The chief feature is the action of individual dancers. The man, or woman, as the case may be, dancing about, places a cushion at the feet of a chosen partner, kneels upon it, and as a suppliant receives a kiss. Meanwhile, the rest of the company dance in a ring singing:-

"The best bed, the feather bed  
The best bed ov a';  
The best bed i' wor hoose  
Is clean pea straw."

The person giving the kiss then takes up the cushion in turn and repeats the ceremony with another, all singing the refrain:

"That dance of dances, the cushion dance."

It is only of late years that quadrilles and waltzes have been danced in our neighbourhood by the working classes, but, as we have seen, foreign and Court dances have from time to time in the past become naturalized in our village dancing, so no doubt it will be in the future.

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- - - HISTORICAL NOTES - - -

From *A voyage to the Hebrides or western isles of Scotland* by the Swiss writer Necker de Saussure, published in 1822. The extract is from the chapter dealing with Iona.

Dancing is a favorite amusement of the Hebrideans of all ages. They brought us a fiddler, and we invited the inhabitants of the village to dance in our hut. We much admired the gaiety, the liveliness of their national dances, and the address with which they avoided the deep holes of the ground on which they leaped. The luxury of floors is unknown here, and in the interior of the houses the inhabitants still tread on a damp and rough soil. We plied the dancers with toddy, and in the interval between reels they sang several Gaelic songs in full chorus.

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BOOK REVIEW

*Dance in Society* Frances Rust Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969

This book is essentially a report of a survey of attitudes to dancing obtained by sending a questionnaire to students aged between 13 and 23 in various schools and colleges in London. Thirteen of the questionnaires were followed by interviews (averaging fifteen minutes in duration).

Sample results: 88.1% of the day release boys questioned show no interest in the samba, 88.1% show no interest in the rumba [are they the same boys in each case? We are not told] and 54.7% show no interest in the cha-cha. By an amazing coincidence, exactly the same percentages, namely 88.1, 88.1, and 54.7, are given for business studies boys. The students came up with the following reasons (among others) for disliking ball-room dancing -

They are a drag  
 That's easy to answer - RUBBISH  
 Because they are the same old steps and  
     you have to be sure your feet are in  
     the right place or you can look odd  
 Lessons usually have to be taken before  
     one is perfect in the dance  
 Dancing is an effeminate pastime  
 They have repetitive steps and little  
     opportunity for experiment

The methodology of the survey is somewhat naive (there seems to have been no effective technique for ensuring that "random samples" really were random) and the conclusions overdrawn. For example, one conclusion (p.144) is simply "girls have a greater interest than boys in dancing". The most that can possibly be deduced is that "girls between the ages of 13 and 23 who go to school in the London area have a greater interest than the corresponding boys in dancing". The tastes of boys and girls in other towns, or in rural districts, might be quite different.

The survey is preceded by a "socio-historical study" which is a historical sketch of social dancing in England from the 13th century to date. The earlier information is mostly gathered from *Social dance: a short history* by A. Franks, and *The social dances of the 19th century* by P.J.S. Richardson, with occasional references to Lily Grove's *Dancing*; and does in fact form a convenient resume of the contents of these and similar books, the historical background being filled in from G.M. Trevelyan's *English social history*. The later information seems to have been gathered by personal investigation, and the reviewer found the chapters on 1940-1970 much more interesting than those on earlier times.

BOOK REVIEW

??? YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED ???

Q. You said that "Angus MacLeod" represents the Black Watch cap-badge. What is this badge like?

A. A picture of St. Andrew holding his cross, surrounded by an oval border bearing the motto "Nemo me impune lacessit", in turn surrounded by six thistles and topped by a crown. Just beneath it is a sphinx. The whole has a background of a very broad St. Andrews cross, and behind this is an equally broad cross but oriented up and down (not diagonally) with stepwise tapered ends. (Don't ask us what part of the dance connotes the sphinx).

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