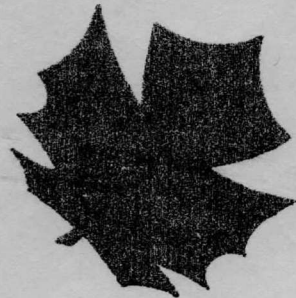


THE THISTLE



Issued by the Thistle Club.

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## EDITORIAL

Some of our familiar items like "Your questions answered", "Hints on better dancing" and "Comparison Corner" have been absent from The Thistle lately. This is only because they have been squeezed out by such things as the Record Lists or the special issue for Mrs. MacNab. We shall be bringing them back from time to time, starting with this issue.

## OUR DANCES NO. 45: STRIP THE WILLOW

No-one who has been dancing for more than twenty years will need any introduction to "Strip the willow"; nor will anyone who takes the floor on those occasions when Scots gather mainly because they are Scots. But those who dance mainly at classes, or at specialist country-dance clubs, may not have seen it - though they can scarcely avoid having heard of it, for it is, like everything in the Royal Scottish Country Dance Society's Book Number One, one of the traditional popular dances of the early part of this century.

The reason why it is out of favour with country-dance hobbyists is that none of the details of technique that have to be learnt for standard country-dances are of much use, though general principles are - by general principles I mean things like control of one's rhythm and balance, good positioning, good phrasing and, above all, teamwork. A second reason is perhaps that the dance is easily turned into a disorderly romp, especially when the dancers are weak in some of the general principles, especially teamwork and in control of balance.

There are two rhythms in which "Strip the willow" can be danced: triple and duple. The favourite triple-rhythm tune is "Drops of Brandy", a tune which is common to Scotland and Ireland. It is not merely triple but triple-triple, and is written with a 9/8 time-signature: the Irish call such a tune a "slip-jig" or a "hop-jig". A plain running-step is used with it. When the dance is performed to duple rhythm, tunes with a 6/8 time-signature are chosen (Kerr's Collection gives "The mucking of Georgie's byre" for "Strip the willow") and a "hop-one-two-three" step is used.

The dance is known in England as "Drops of brandy": clearly the English are calling the dance by the name of its commonest tune, so it is a trifle odd that they do not use that tune: they use schottische tunes (and step-hops).

The characteristic figure of "Strip the willow" is found in other dances, notably "The Foula reel", "Barley Bree", and some versions of the American dance "Virginia Reel". Its appearance in one printed version of the Hebridean Weaving lilt is, however, a mistake, probably due to confusion with the Foula Reel. The most surprising place of all to find this figure is in Portugal: the dance Vira Extrapassado described in Lucile Armstrong's Dances of Portugal (Parrish, 1948) consists entirely of an attractive variant of the "Strip the willow" figure.

Finally, "Strip the willow" seems to have come down by oral tradition. It is clearly not a new dance, yet the earliest written description I know of is the one in Kerr's Collection, which would be about 1910 or so (the Collection is not dated precisely).

#### OUR DANCES NO. 46: MRS. BINGHAM'S FANCY

This country-dance was composed by Beryl MacMillan in honour of Mrs. Thomas Bingham. (Mrs. Bingham introduced R.S.C.D.-type country-dancing to the Vancouver area some forty years ago now, and was an active teacher until quite recently). The music was specially composed by Bob MacMillan: the tunes are "Mrs. Bingham's Fancy", "Ceperley Park", "Harwood House" and "Lady Aberdeen". The titles will have pleasant associations for all VANcouver dancers. If any reader would like the original music, we will pass requests on to Bob. Those who use gramophone records can substitute band 5 of side 2 of Dominion LP 1255 ("Scottish Country Dances" by the Dunedin Scottish dance band).

#### Bars

- 1- 8 The first couple set; cast off one place; lead down through the third couple; cross over; and cast up one place (finishing in second place on "wrong" sides). The second couple move up to top place on bars 3-4.
- 9-16 The first woman dances right-hands-across with the third couple, and the first man with the second couple; then the first woman dances left-hands-across with the second couple, and the first man with the third couple, finishing with the first couple still in second place on "wrong" sides.
- 17-24 All six set; cross over, giving right hands; set; and turn with right hands, ending by taking promenade hold, each woman on her partner's right, in the following orientation: the first couple (in the middle) facing down and slightly right, the second couple (at the top) facing down and slightly left, and the third couple facing up and slightly right.
- 25-32 The three couples dance a left-shoulder reel-of-three, releasing hands at the end and finishing in side-lines (first couple in second place).

Repeat having passed a couple.

#### BOOK REVIEWS

Uniform Buttons. By Lt. Evelyn Vickers-Smith, R.O.C.

Buttons are not a subject on which any of the Editors of The Thistle is an expert. The book illustrates over 800 buttons, including 90 from Scottish regiments, and is obtainable from the author at Enfield Arsenal, Box 5505, Washington D.C., 20016, U.S.A., at \$3.00 ppd.

Traditional Scottish dances, collected by Mary Isdale MacNab, 8th and 9th sets.

The 8th set contains "McNichol of the Black Isle" and "McNeil of Barra". In addition it contains "Tir nan og", collected in Lewis by Iain MacFarlane, and "From Scotia's shores we're noo awa'", composed by Bob Campbell. (This is the dance in which the tournee first appeared). The 9th set contains "The Lerwick Reel" and "Miss Fiona MacRae of Conchra". In addition it contains "The silver tassie", composed by John Drewry.

These dances will form a welcome addition to the repertoire, especially "McNeil of Barra" which has not only a character all its own, but also an interesting background, as readers of Thistle no. 33 will know.

The description of "The Lerwick Reel" is the one used by Mrs. MacNab when she taught the dance at the Vancouver Scottish Week-end: it was written for her by one of the Editors of The Thistle. However in several places a right-hand turn has been changed to a turn with both hands. The same change has been made in McNichol of the Black Isle, so these two dances must join the list of those in which there will be difficulty when those who have learnt directly from Mrs. MacNab try to dance with those who have learnt from the pamphlet.

#### GRAMOPHONE RECORDS

Addendum:

Jimmy Shand: Back home to Auchtermuchty. Parlophone  
PMC 1263

The mason's apron	The heather mixture jig
Off she goes in the north	The punchbowl
The reel of Glamis	Argyll's fancy
The royal salute	Lord McLay's reel
Jimmy Shand's jig	Kendall's hornpipe
	Ellwyn's fairy glen

Jimmy Blair: Hielan' Laddie. Fontana FJL 504

Jack O'Carron	The Bumpkin
Angus MacLeod	West's hornpipe
Trip to Tobermory	The Scottish lilt
The Nut	Moulin dhu
Waltz country dance	The Fyket
The Bonspiel	Hielan' laddie

#### ANNUAL WEEKEND

The Vancouver Scottish Dance Week-end will be held at the usual time (Victoria day week-end - registration on the Friday evening, last session Monday afternoon), usual place (University of B.C.) and with the usual arrangements (including a Saturday-evening formal dance to the music of The Teuchters). This year, once again, C. Stewart Smith, from San Francisco, will be with us as out-of-town-teacher. For further information, application forms, etcetera, write to the Secretary, Greta Smith, 964 Balbirnie Bvde, Glenayre, Port Moody, B.C.

Dancers have come to this week-end from as far afield as Los Angeles or Alaska, and visitors are always made welcome. They can

be met at the airport (or railway station), for example, and on the Saturday evening before the ball there are a number of small cocktail parties. Each out-of-town dancer is invited to one of these, where he can get to know a dozen or so of the other dancers.

It is surprising how many of the dances that have recently become popular over here were first put into circulation at this week-end.

#### COMPARISON CORNER

##### American contra-dances

We are used to thinking of Scotland as the country in which the country-dance survived most flourishingly; and certainly it survived more strongly there than in its homeland, England, or in Ireland or Wales. But in fact, America can beat Scotland handsomely: the number of surviving dances is larger; and they were danced more often. Country-dancing in Scotland came near to dying out about 1914-1920; it did not come anywhere so near to dying out in America. To be precise, the region where it survived was northern New England (New Hampshire, Vermont and Maine), and, on a smaller scale, parts of the rest of New England, Upper New York State, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia.

On the other hand, the American dances are much less varied than the Scottish ones and are substantially simpler. Although early American dances had the reel of three, this figure did not survive past about 1820, so there is no American dance that can compare with "The Duke of Perth". And the Americans have no strathspeys, (nor schottisches nor slow hornpipes): all their contra-dances are in the same tempo.

The travelling-step in contra-dances is a walking-step. Perhaps it is better described as a dance-walk, because although it satisfies the dictionary definition of "walking" it is, when well performed, by no means the same in spirit as the determined striding of a hiker: the steps are short, with the weight of the body controlled vertically over the balls of the feet, and there is an attractive lilt in the motion. (The same step has been found in Scotland: in Orkney and the border country). For setting, the Americans use any one of a wide traditional repertoire of balance-steps: a balance-step can be a simple "step-close" (with a lilt on the close) or a step-swing, or a pas-de-basque, or a quadrille setting-step, and so on. There are persistent rumours of attractive and spectacular setting steps used by expert dancers of the past generation but these do not seem to have survived. (However, since Tom and Joan Flett recovered corresponding Scottish steps, whose very existence was not suspected by most people, there is still hope that some-one might find and describe the American steps).

In contra dances there are no two-handed turns: instead, two dancers "swing" in ballroom hold (or a very comfortable modification of ballroom hold in which the man's left hand grasps the woman's right elbow instead of her hand, and her right hand grasps his left elbow). The step used is a propelled-pivot, known as a "buzz-step", and the more expert dancers spin at high speed. This step is also found in traditional Scottish dancing (in "Merry lads of Glasgow" for example) and in Vancouver it was quite common in "Circassian circle"

until about ten years ago, when it was replaced by an R.S.C.D.S.-style two-handed turn. (The "Circassian circle" promptly died out of the Vancouver repertoire).

One-handed turns, called Allemandes, are danced by contra-dancers as follows. Each raises his hand fairly high, so that the fore-arms are at about forty-five degrees above the horizontal, and palms cross at right angles. The thumb is kept alongside the fore-finger. The tips of the fingers are curled slightly over the other dancer's thumb, but the main physical contact is by palm-pressure. The grasp suits the dance-walk step beautifully.

The main repertoire of traditional contra-dances seems to have arisen about 1840-1860 (thus 20-40 years later than the comparable Scottish repertoire); dance-collections of before that date contain very few dances that survived, and are indistinguishable in content from similar English collections. The main difference, in fact is in the names of the dances; not only do American place-names occur, but at the time of the War of Independence many dances were given revolutionary names ("Cornwallis' retreat", "British sorrow" etc.) just as many Scottish dances had been given Jacobite names about 1740.

One result of the fact that the American dances are later is that "ladies chain" occurs more frequently than it does in Scottish dances. (It is a comparatively late figure, having come into country-dances from quadrilles). Many of the American dances are of the "Écossoise" type: that is, they are two-couple dances in which the first man is on the women's side, and the first woman on the man's (as in the Scottish "Jacky tar" and "My love she's but a lassie yet").

We shall describe more resemblances and differences between the two types of dance in a second instalment in the next issue.

#### YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED

Q. The twin reels that start some dances appear in two versions. In "Cadgers in the Canongate" and "Tullochgorum" both reels are right-shoulder, whereas in "Maxwell's rant" and "Gates of Edinburgh" one is right-shoulder and the other is left-shoulder. I have tried to find out what is behind the difference. For instance, do early dances have one version and later ones the other? Or do the two versions come from different parts of Scotland? I cannot find any clear criterion. Do you know?

A. Yes: it is nothing to do with the dance itself; it is a question of the date at which the dance was reconstructed and published in the R.S.C.D.S. books. Dances published in book 14 and earlier books had the version with two right-shoulder reels; dances in later books had the symmetrical version. There are enough descriptions in old books to make it quite certain that the symmetrical version is correct. The R.S.C.D.S. discovered their mistake in 1948, but evidently decided not to alter the earlier books.

Q. In the "double half-reels of four" figure in "Mairi's wedding", which way do the first man and woman pass in the middle:

right-shoulder or left-shoulder?

A. Left-shoulder. The figure is described quite clearly in the booklet by James Cosh in which the dance first appeared. And, a year or so ago, James Cosh wrote to The Reel, pointing out that left-shoulder was correct. (Notice, however, that in the rather similar figure in "Rest and be thankful" the first couple pass right-shoulder in the middle. This dance is by Jack McConachie).

Q. What Queen is referred to in "Queen's Welcome"?

A. Queen Victoria, presumably. At any rate, the dance is a nineteenth-century one, and she was on the throne for most of that century.

## RECORD REVIEW

Da 40 Fiddlers Entertain  
(Shetland Fiddler's Society TD 5363).

This record is something of a disappointment. The reputation of Shetland fiddling is high, but this disc does not produce the thrill that, say, a typical Swedish spelmanslag gives. This may not be entirely the fault of the fiddlers: the arrangers have been unable to resist the temptation of filling in with two pianos. Side A is not particularly Shetland: it includes The Teetotaler (Irish), The Flowers of Edinburgh (Scottish) and The Soldiers' Joy (Universal). Side B is more characteristic, and the second band - a medley of reels, of which two are the genuine Shetland article - is good. In fact, as the record is only a 7" 45 and not expensive, it may well be worth getting it for this band alone.

## THE TOURNÉE

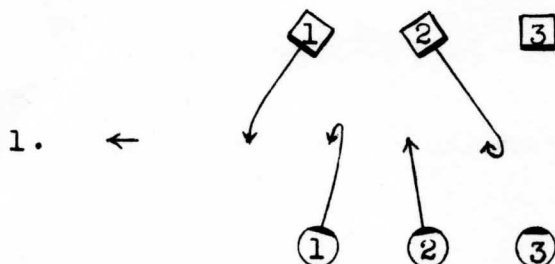
It seems that uncertainties have arisen over the phrasing of the tournée. Bob Campbell, who invented the figure, comments that the only satisfactory way to learn a dance or a figure is from personal instruction, and adds that when this is not possible, it is best to support the printed description by bar-by-bar diagrams. When the tournée was devised it was thought that the printed word would be enough, but this turned out to be wrong. Bob therefore sent us the diagrams that appear on the next page, which should dispel the confusion and make the figure an enjoyable one to dance.

# TOURNÉE

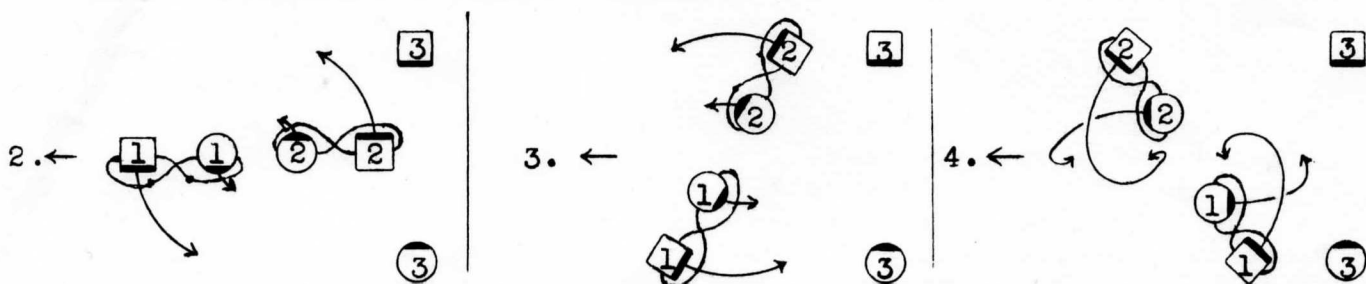
## Bars

### A new form of progression

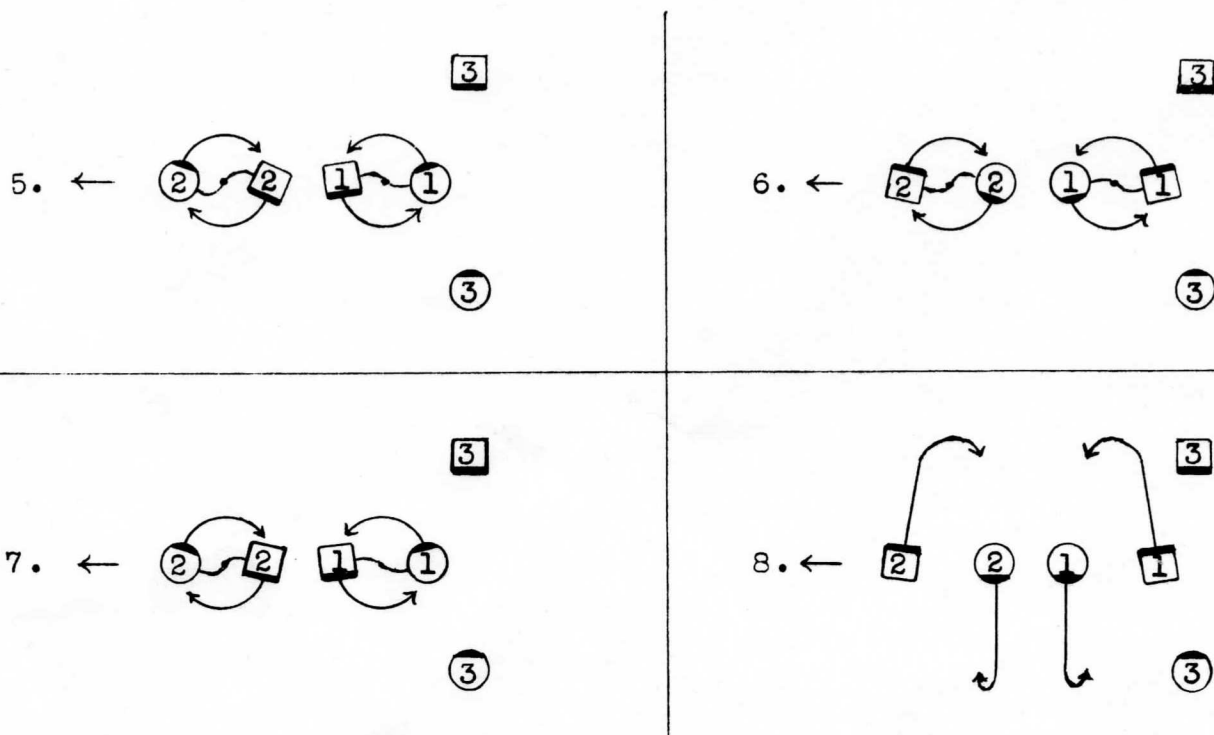
1 First and second couples dance towards partners, the first man turning left at the end of the step to finish on his partner's left taking up Promenade hold as he does so: at the same time the second woman turns right to finish on her partner's right with Promenade hold.



2-4 The two couples wheel round a half turn counter-clockwise, the two men turning their partners across in front of them on the last step so that all are in a line in the middle of the dance ready to turn, first couple with the left hand, second couple with the right.



5-8 First couple turn time and a half with the left hand then dance out to finish on own sides in second place while second couple turn time and a half with the right hand and dance out to finish in top place.





## SCOTTISH DANCING AND QUEEN VICTORIA

From a letter from Lady August Stanley to her sister.  
Abergeldie, September 20th, 1849.

" A beat before and a beat behind and down upon it - turn the figure slightly; round the arm, the shoulders back nicely - it is only repetition that makes it easy - beat hop, beat hop, one 2 3 hop!! to the tune of ... "

Yes, there he is - years have not diminished the spring, the grace, the music of his easy action - his voice, his intonations, his turn of the head, his reproofs, his encouragements, his bland smile, his deep earnest look are the same. One sees that like L. Napoleon, he believes in his destiny, in the sacredness of his mission, and that unshrinkingly he pursues his glorious object with unabashed zeal and energy.

" The figure slightly turned, the figure is never seen to such advantage as when slightly turned, look at the pictures all round the room; the attitude is invariably slightly turned, the eyes raised to heaven if you please - when the eyes are down to the ground it loses all the expression of the countenance. It's only repetition that will do it. Only! Only!!"

[The letter then explains that Queen Victoria's daughters were to go to learn reels with their cousins at Balmoral. Lady Stanley had to see the dancing-master to make arrangements and he turned out to be "the object of my heart's young idolatry, my only, my Lowe!" This is presumably John Lowe, member of a famous family of Scottish dancing-teachers. The editors of the letters add a footnote: This dancing-master many years before had amused and horrified Lady Elgin by proposing that Lady Fanny Bruce should be trained as a ballet-dancer, and by his blank astonishment when he found that she did not regard it as the highest destiny for her daughter. The letter continues:]

Many were the memories of the past we awoke from their long slumber - "Your father liked my reel tunes and I remember him being struck with my 'one 2 3 hop'" He said when one can do that step, one has the key to all the rest.

### Later

... the Queen came the other day and joined the reel - too dear - H.M. comes in for her share of praise, advice, encouragement, and, where it is necessary, reprobation, just like other people - "Now gently me dear try and dance like a lady". This is what we imagine he says to his sovereign in private.

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