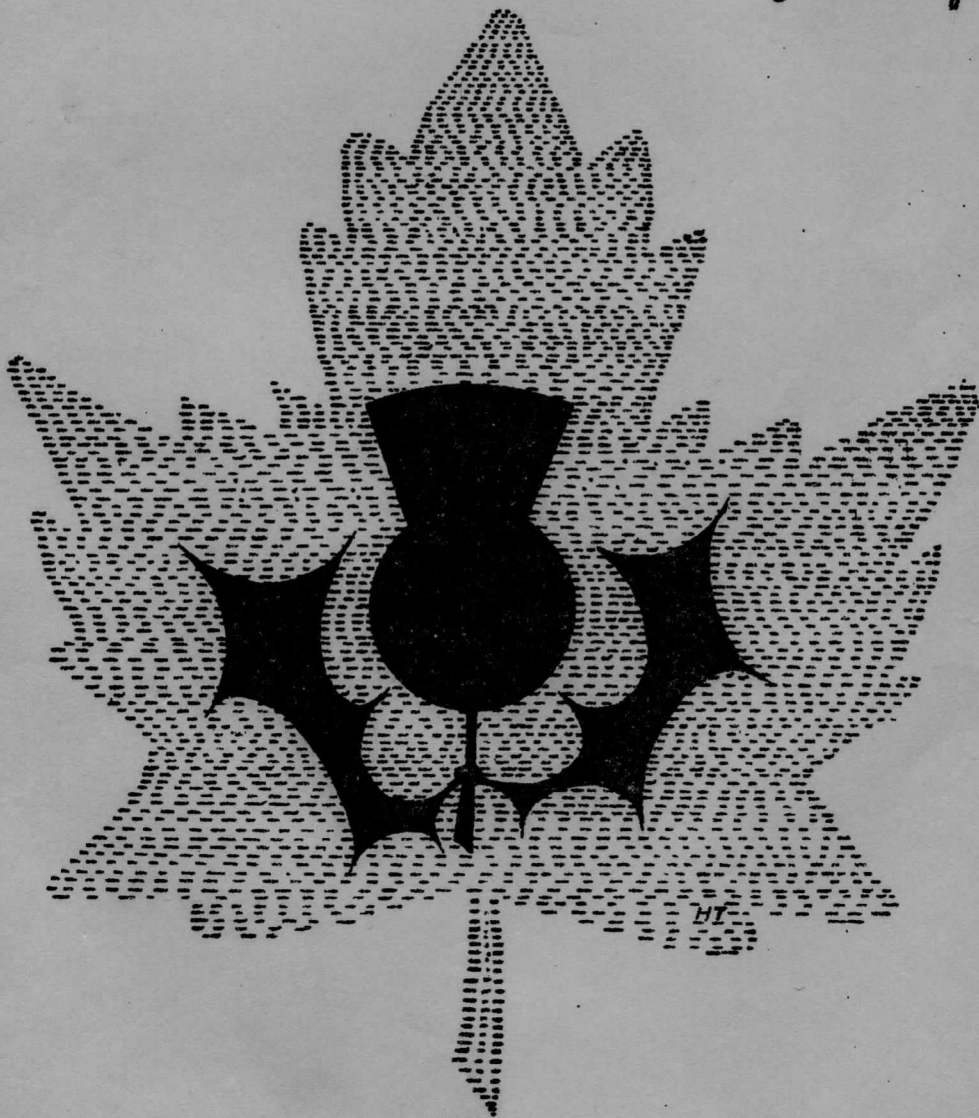


THE THISTLE

1966-7



Issued by the Thistle Club.
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Editorial Address: 3515 Fraser, Vancouver 10, B.C. Canada.

NO. 31.

February, 1967.

EDITORIAL.

We have good news for all potential readers in the sterling area who find it difficult to get dollars: Hugh Foss will act as our sterling agent.

To subscribe to the Thistle, or to buy back-numbers, write to him, asking for what you want, and enclosing payment at the rate of 6/8d per dollar. (Thus \$1.25 = 8/4d, 10¢ = 8d). You will receive your copies by mail from us. The same applies if you want to order any of the dance-descriptions that we advertise but Mr. Foss does not himself sell.

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The address is

Hugh R. Foss, Esq., O.B.E.,
Glendarroch, Dalry, Castle Douglas,
Kirkcudbrightshire, Scotland.

OUR DANCES, NO. 37 : THE EIGHTSOME REEL.

This dance is the main subject of the article by Joan and Tom Flett in this issue.

OUR DANCES, NO. 38 : ANGUS MACLEOD.

Angus MacLeod is a co-founder of the Clan MacLeod pipe-band of Liverpool. This dance was composed in his honour by the present pipe-major, Alex. T. Queen. The figures of the dance represent the cap-badge of the Black Watch, the regiment to which pipe-major MacLeod formerly belonged. The music was composed by Andrew Rankin (and is played by his band on Farlophone R4661).

Formation: Four couples in a longwise set. The first and fourth couples are called "corners".

Music: Own tune; reel tempo.

- 1 - 2 The second and third couples facing diagonally in, dance into the centre of the set with skip-change steps.
- 3 - 4 They turn right about (with pas-de-Basque steps) to face corners. (The second man faces the first man etc.).
- 5 - 6 They dance out to the corner positions, while the corners dance in, passing right-shoulder.

- 7 - 8 All set, the corners turning right about on the second step.
- 9 - 10 The corners dance out to their original positions, while the others dance into the centre, facing diagonally in. (Pass right shoulders).
- 11 - 12 All set, the centre dancers turning right about on the second step.
- 13 - 16 Each of the dancers in the centre turns his corner with the right hand once round.
- 17 - 20 The centre dancers dance LEFT hands across once round, finishing facing corners again.
- 21 - 32 Double diagonal reels of four. The first and second women and third and fourth man dance a reel of four on a line stretching from the first woman's place to the fourth man's. Simultaneously the other four dance a reel of four on the other diagonal. To start, each centre dancer and his corner pass right-shoulder. (The exact phrasing is not laid down, but as a rough guide the corners take two steps in, two to "wheel" (hands across) and two out to the opposite corner, and the same back. The centre dancers take two steps out, two in, two to wheel, two out, two in, two to wheel to places, but not right out to the side lines).
- 33 - 34 The second man and woman change places, giving left hands; so do the third man and woman. (The second woman and third man make a polite turn). The four dancers finish back to back in the middle, each facing partner's original corner.
- 35 - 36 All set.
- 37 - 40 The centre dancers turn their corners so that the second couple pass between the first man and woman and the third between the fourth (i.e. the second woman and first man use LEFT hands, so do the fourth woman and third man; the others use right hands) and cast into the middle of the set, facing in.
- 41 - 48 The centre dancers dance pas-de-Basque and four points, twice.
- 49 - 52 The second couple dance between the first and cast into the middle, (the man round the woman and the woman round the man) and the third couple dance similarly through the fourth.
- 53 - 56 The centre dancers dance pas-de-Basque and four points (once)
- 57 - 64 The third couple form an arch and dance up, cast off round the first man into the middle and, letting go hands, dance down to fourth place in the set. Meanwhile the second couple dance down under the arch, cast up round the fourth woman into the middle and, letting go hands, dance into the first place in the set. On bars 63-64 the first couple step down and the fourth up.

Repeat the dance in the new positions.

DAVID ANDERSON OF DUNDEE AND HIS BALLROOM GUIDES. III.

by J.F. and T.M. Flett.

The six editions of David Anderson's ballroom guides span the years 1886-1902, and this was precisely the period when the modern Eightsome Reel developed into its present form. In each new edition Anderson attempted to give the most up-to-date form of the Eightsome Reel, and his ballroom guides thus enable us to trace the various stages of the development of the dance. The study of this development shows clearly that under the normal processes of oral tradition there is no such thing as a single "correct" version of a dance, and that a well-known dance can vary considerably throughout its life.

In the 1886 edition of Anderson's Ball-Room Guide, the Eightsome Reel appears in the following guise.

"SCOTCH REEL QUADRILLE OR REEL OF EIGHT.

REEL TIME. Tune - "Soldiers Joy", played a little slow.

Stand the same as for the Quadrille.

Eight hands half round and back to places.

Ladies give right hands across in the centre, take hold of gentlemen's right hands with left, and go half round. Gentlemen then give left across in centre, still keeping hold of ladies' left hands with right, and back to places.

Top lady set and turn top gent. (4 bars of music). Then set and turn bottom gent. (4 bars).

Reel 3, with top and bottom gents. into places.

Repeat from beginning, each lady in turn taking the leading part until all the ladies have finished.

Then the gentlemen take the leading part, viz. eight hands half round and back to places.

Gentlemen give left hands across in the centre, take hold of partners' left hands with the right and go half round. Ladies then give right hands across in the centre, still keeping hold of the gentlemen's right hands, and back to places.

Top gent. set and turn top lady (4 bars). Then set and turn bottom lady (4 bars).

Reel 3, with top and bottom ladies into places.

Repeat from beginning, each gentleman in turn taking the leading part until all the gentlemen have finished.

N.B. Sometimes Grand Chain is introduced in this Quadrille, the Setting and Reel Three being kept out, or it may be introduced additional".

It will be noticed that in this version there are no solos in the centre, and that the 'eight hands round' and 'Grand Cross' are repeated before each person goes in the centre. However, each person goes in the centre only once, so that the dance is only 256 bars in length, whereas the present-day Eightsome reel is 464 bars in length.

The N.B. here presumably refers to an earlier Reel of Eight which is recorded in a Scottish manuscript of 1818 (National Library of Scotland MS 3860), and in the ballroom guides of Lowe (c.1830), Willcock (c.1865), Allan (c.1870), and Wallace (c.1872). This consisted of eight hands round and back, grand cross, set to and turn partners, and grand chain. It still survives as the introduction and finale of the present-day Eightsome Reel.

In the 1891 edition of his Ball-Room Guide, Anderson altered the above description by inserting at the end of the first 'Grand Cross' the instruction "top lady in centre, seven hands half round and back", and similarly for the men. He also gives the numbering explicitly, i.e. "Top couple is No. 1; couple to right, No. 2; bottom couple, No. 3; couple to the left, No. 4". These are presumably viewed from the top. The N.B. is now omitted, and the dance concludes "Then 1 and 2 couples form in line for Scotch Reel, 3 and 4 the same".

In this version we have the usual solos in the centre (though only one for each person), and the length of the dance has increased to 320 bars. The division into two Scotch (Foursome) Reels at the end of the dance is interesting, for Dr. Frank Rhodes has recorded that in eight-handed Reels danced in Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia, it has been customary at least as far back as 1830 for each Reel to divide into two four-handed Reels near the end.* The division of the Eightsome Reel in Scotland is still practised at the County Balls.

In the 1894 edition of Anderson's Guide, the dance is entitled "Eightsome Reel. The Society Dance at the Northern Meeting Assemblies, Blair Athole, etc." The only alteration from the 1891 version is that a 'Grand Chain' (occupying 16 bars of music) is substituted for the 'Eight hands half round and back'. The length has thus increased to 384 bars.

In the 1899 and 1900 editions, the instructions are given exactly as in the 1894 edition, but there is now added in small print the following:

"Another way, - Eight hands half round and back. Ladies right hands across. Gentlemen back with left (as above). Top lady in centre. Seven hands half round and back. Top lady set and turn top gent, then set and turn bottom gent. Reel three with top and bottom gents. Top lady set and turn No. 2 gent. Then set and turn No. 4 gent. Reel three with the side gents, finishing into places. Repeat from beginning, each lady in turn, taking leading part, then the gentlemen leading."

This "another way" is more like the present-day version, but there is still only one solo in the centre by each person, and the 'Eight hands round' and 'Grand Cross' are still repeated before each person

* These eight-handed and four-handed Reels are described in the appendix by Dr. Rhodes on dancing in Cape Breton Island in our Traditional Dancing in Scotland.

goes in the centre. The specific inclusion of the set and turn and reels with side couples as "another way" confirms that in the earlier versions each person reeled only with partner and opposite.

In the final edition of Anderson's Guide, c.1902, we find almost the present-day version of the dance. It begins with "Grand Chain full round to places. Finishing with setting 2 bars and turning 2 bars with partners". Then 'Grand Cross' as above, and then each lady into the centre, without the 'Chain' and 'Cross' being repeated each time. The 'Chain' and 'Cross' are then danced once before all the men go in the centre, and the dance concludes with a 'Grand Chain'.

The main version of the 1891 edition is still given, but it is now demoted and appears in small print as "Another way".

The main version given in Anderson's edition of c.1902 is also given by Graham MacNeillage of Alloa in his How to Dance the Eightsome Reel..., Alloa, c.1900. The first appearance of the present-day version is contemporary with this, for it is given by the Edinburgh teacher J. Grahamsley Atkinson in his Scottish National Dances, Edinburgh, 1900. The version in which the introductory figures were repeated before each person went into the centre lingered on for a few more years, and we have ourselves recorded a version of this type which was taught in Moidart about 1911 by a dancing-master called McGillivray.

NEW RECORDS. (45 r.p.m.)

Jimmy Blair (Fontana)

- TE 17456 Argyll's farewell to Stirling, Deanston House, Minard Castle
TE 17457 The Reel of Mey, Prince of Orange, Lady Sophia Anne of Bute, Highlanders' quickstep.
TE 17458 Alyth Burn, McDougall's March, the Stanley Reel, Bonnie Shira Glen.

Jimmy Shand (Parlophone)

- 6 EP 8950 Reel of Glamis, Argyll's fancy, Lord McLay's Reel.

Note: The records in the earlier parts of the list may not all be in print, but some out-of-print records remain in stock for a surprisingly long time. The lists are probably not complete--record companies and retailers no longer produce complete catalogues, so there is no way of ensuring completeness. We should be glad of further additions, and we thank Bob Campbell of Oakville for some of those in our last issue.

NEWS ITEM.

Bagpipes may soon be relieved of the 15% import duty levied by the U.S. The House of Representatives has voted for repeal of the duty; the final decision rests with the Senate.

BOOK REVIEW.

Notes on movements and figures commonly used in Scottish country dancing. Thomas S.T. Henderson. 75¢. (Obtainable from Mr. Harry C. Ways, 5902 Dalecarlia Place, N.W., Washington 20016, U.S.A. He would probably appreciate it if you include postage).

This little booklet describes posture, style, and common figures for those who follow the R.S.C.D.S. canon. The descriptions are clear, complete and logical, and were no doubt a great help to the group for whom they were devised in Washington. They will be equally helpful to other groups who need a pocket reference for these things. The author uses the term "active couple" instead of first couple. This is a piece of modern terminology from American contra-dancing. Oddly enough, though it is misleading there, it is much less misleading in Scottish dances where the first couple often is very active. (Think of "Rest and be thankful"). Typical of the hints on deportment is:-

" Remember, no matter how fast or exuberant a turn may be, it is the man's job to place the woman correctly and gently in her next position. She must never have to fight to get into position, and she should never be even slightly thrown off balance. "

YOU QUESTIONS ANSWERED.

Q. In J.F. and T.M. Flett's book "Traditional Dancing in Scotland" the turns in The Duke of Perth are described as linked-arm turns, not only in bars 9-16 (as in the description you gave in The Thistle No.1) but also in the "set to and turn corners" figure of bars 17-24. There is, however, a foot-note "... the method of performing the turns in "Set and turn corners" with linked arms was not in general used in other dances in which the figure occurred". Here is my question: how were these turns in this figure performed in other dances?

A. We asked Dr. Flett if he would answer this (and we took the opportunity to ask him to amplify the next answer, too):-

The only really common dance incorporating this figure was Duke of Perth/Pease strae/Keep the Country/Broun's Reel, and we have been able to record descriptions of only three other dances incorporating it, namely Merry Lads of Ayr, Bonny Breistknots, and Speed the Plough/Inverness Country Dance.

Merry Lads of Ayr was known in Dumfriesshire, where it was taught by Mr. Blackley of Lanark, and in his version the turns in 'set and turn corners' were done with linked arms, as he taught in Pease Strae. Merry Lads of Ayr was also known in Angus (though it was not common) and was probably performed in the same way there.

Bonny Breistknots was known in West Berwickshire, and began to fall out of use soon after 1900. The turns were performed either with

right hands, crossed hands, or arm hold.

In the case of Speed the Plough, we merely checked that the published figures were correct, and didn't ask about choice of hands or arms for the turns.

The other traditional dances containing 'set and turn corners' published in the Border Book and the R.S.C.D.S. books fell out of use well before 1914. In some cases we have met people who had danced or seen dances of the same name as the published dance, but who could not remember the figures. In other cases, none of our informants had heard of the dance.

Q. Where, in Scotland, was a walking-step traditionally used for country-dancing?

A. In Orkney (see the description of Queen Victoria by T.M. Flett in The Orkney Herald, 9th October, 1956). It was also used in the Borders, round Jedburgh, though I have no idea how widely it was used there.

ITALIAN EXCURSION.

"How on earth do you manage in the heat?"

The obvious question to ask anyone back from dancing in Italy - and we are certainly used to being asked it. "We" refers to the exhibition team of the Westbury Scottish Club (from Bristol), reinforced by a piper from Cambridge; and the occasion was a tour a few years ago under the auspices of Ente Nazionale Assistenza Lavoratori (don't ask me what this means).

The answer? When in Rome do as the Romans do : get up early, have a siesta at mid-day, and don't start dancing until ten. Dancing is al fresco which may mean in a court-yard, in a roof-garden, or simply out-of-doors.

The Padua folk-dance club has a very pleasant headquarters on the banks of the Bacchiglione, with a dance-floor indoors and another on the roof. The Northern Italian dances are not the sort that the "folk-dancer" recognises as Italian - no tarantellas or saltarellos; no mandolines or tambourines - but have rather a Tyrolean aspect; and the same holds for the costumes. There is good reason for this: Padua is not so far from the Italian Tyrol, and in nearby Bolzano the chief language is still German.

In this region, Italian dancing is not for the multitude. It is practised for sentimental reasons by local societies who also keep alive folk-songs and dialects. The Padua group, for instance, were founded in memory of the vernacular writer Ruzante, and call themselves the Ruzantini. A lively, jolly crowd they are, finding their dances great fun in spite of voluminous costume and heavy boots. We wondered what would strike them most about our dances, so different from theirs in the intricate stepping of the Broadwords; the formal rectilinearity of the country dances; the intransigent rhythm of the Strathspey; the very existence of solos. We found out the next day - it was the "grace and elegance" of the Scottish style. We were rather pleased, as it is only too easy to give foreigners the impression that

Scottish dancing is just gymnastics to music.

In great contrast was an All-Scottish performance in the most palatial restaurant in Padua, again on the roof. The management provided a beautiful copperplate printed programme (in which Seann Triubhas was correctly spelt - which doesn't always happen in Scotland, a microphone, and the services of a dance-band if we wanted it. (We declined).

A flood-lit net-ball pitch was the scene for a goodbye-and-thank-you performance at our hostel. This time we made our announcements in Italian (we had been in Italy five days and were feeling wonderfully fluent) to the delight, the wonder, and, all too often, the amusement of the audience. But they understood except when we announced that the next dance would be our last. So after a quick sip of ice-cold but otherwise quite repulsive fizzy drinks we danced again, announcing that this was really our last. Again they didn't go. Another sip, another dance, and we called for an interpreter.

Not all our dances were premeditated. At Milan we thought we would dance a foursome and broadswords while waiting for the train to go. Four dancers and the piper got out of the carriage, the dance started, and after four bars...the train moved off, ten minutes early. Panic - not over the four dancers or even the two swords (we had dancers and swords to spare); but our one and only piper was indispensable. Luckily, the train was only shunting, and came back to the next platform.

At the next table in our restaurant in Ferrara was an officer of the Carabinieri (i.e. the state police, as opposed to the local police the Questura). Attracted by our kilts and plaids, he got into conversation with us and asked if we were going to dance. Nothing had been arranged, so he suggested dancing in a piazza, and offered to take us to the Questura for the necessary permission. When we got there, the constable on duty took us to an official in a rather better and brighter uniform, presumably a sergeant. He took us along to a higher-ranking and correspondingly more resplendent official. Finally we reached an official so high-ranking that he wore no uniform at all, and sat at a desk in an office. After some talk with the Carabinieri, too quick for us to follow, he said that he saw no reason why we shouldn't dance, adding that unfortunately he was tied to his desk. We took the hint, and the first dance was under his window.

We were surprised by the speed at which the audience gathered for this impromptu performance and for similar ones later at Ravenna and Parma. It was not the mere novelty of the kilts or the strange (to them) sound of the pipes, because the crowds would still be there at the end of the performance. The local press, too, would soon be there, and we collected more candid action photographs in our second week in Italy than in two years of dancing in and around Bristol - to say nothing of flattering but not always accurate newspaper articles. And there was always someone at the finish who wanted to buy us drinks and ices - no light matter for a party of sixteen.

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