



The Scottish Traditions of Dance

This pack has been produced as an introductory guide to the variety of Scottish dance traditions. Information is included about the following dance styles:

Ceilidh
Country
Early
Hebridean
Highland (Scottish Official Board of Highland Dancing)
Highland (Scottish Official Highland Dancing Association)
Ladies' Step
Shetland
Step

(Military factsheet to follow)

This information has been gathered and presented by the Scottish Traditions of Dance Trust to help raise awareness about Scotland's incredible dance heritage. We hope that by reading this pack you will be encouraged to try one or two of the dance traditions which might be new to you or learn more about the styles with which you may be familiar. We also hope that you will want to find out more. Please contact the people named at the end of each factsheet for specific information about each dance style. You can also contact the Scottish Traditions of Dance Trust at the address below.

The Scottish Traditions of Dance Trust was established formally in November 1995 as a result of wide consultation undertaken by the Scottish Arts Council. The Trust has been specifically charged with the remit to research, conserve, foster and promote **all** of Scotland's dance traditions.

The Trust aims to establish a National Resource Centre for Scottish Dance embracing all the forms of dance and dance music associated with Scotland. This centre will provide a single source of information about the fascinating history of Scottish dance and a place where Scottish dances can be performed and enjoyed.

The Scottish Traditions of Dance Trust is a membership organisation and welcomes new members of all ages who enjoy any kind of Scottish dancing. Members receive regular newsletters about the Trust's work in research and conservation as well as keeping up-to-date with Scottish dance events. In additions, there are regular member offers such as reduced rates for dance workshops and discounts on dance books. Most importantly, members contribute to the vitality of a significant part of Scottish life and culture.

**Contact: Liam Paterson, Co-ordinator, The Scottish Traditions of Dance Trust,
54 Blackfriars Street, Edinburgh EH1 1NE Tel./Fax.: 0131-558 8737.**



Scottish Step Dancing

Scottish Step Dancing is at present seeing a very healthy revival throughout Scotland, and indeed elsewhere. This may be due partly to the relaxed, percussive style in which the steps are performed. The dance and the music are very closely linked, the dancer following the music at all times by beating out the rhythm with the feet. These steps, usually danced in hard-soled shoes, can be danced within social dances or as solo performances.

Scottish Step Dance was part of the Reels - the eighteenth century social dances of the Highlands and Western Isles. The solo performances may have evolved as better dancers elaborated on some of these setting steps. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries other influences had an effect on the popularity of this style of dance. Amongst these was the introduction of a soft leather shoe, which began to replace the hard shoe for dancing from around the turn of this century.

There is evidence in Scotland for this step-dance tradition this century but it is much better known in parts of Canada where the Highlanders settled particularly at the time of the clearances, eg Cape Breton and Newfoundland. Much may be learned about our own traditions by looking at these other communities.

Weekly step dancing classes are being held throughout Scotland by dance enthusiasts, many of whom have visited parts of Canada to study this dance form.

The Feis movement has also been willing to include step dancing as part of the Feis programme. There are also week-long courses which take place in Skye and South Uist where tutors from Cape Breton are invited to teach.

Contact addresses:

Classes

Sandra Robertson

[Redacted contact information]

Week-long Courses

Gavin Parsons

Sabhal Mor Òstaig

Sleat

Isle of Skye IV44 8RQ

[Redacted contact information]

Taigh Dannsa - Mats Melin

[Redacted contact information]

Kirriemuir

[Redacted contact information]

Fèisean nan Gàidheal

[Redacted contact information]

National Gaelic Arts Agency The Scottish Stepdance Company



THE SCOTTISH OFFICIAL BOARD OF HIGHLAND DANCING

Scottish Highland Dancing

The Scottish Official Board of Highland Dancing, based in Edinburgh, has created a truly international appreciation of the finer points of Highland Dancing, and a world-wide community of Scottish dancers working for and with one another towards even higher standards of excellence. It is estimated that at least 50,000 young people are actively involved in Highland dancing throughout the world with at least half of them based in the large Scottish communities of Canada, USA, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand.

In the 1990s the Scottish Official Board of Highland Dancing is considered by dancers world-wide as their ultimate authority on the technique, organisation and administration of our ancient cultural heritage, but it was not always so. Not so many years ago a competing dancer in Scotland took into consideration not only the condition of the platform and the effect of the weather on the day's activities but also the particular likes and dislikes of the adjudicators on duty. Sometimes the steps and movements were modified, sometimes even the order in which the steps were danced was changed to meet the 'correct' way of dancing as seen by that particular judge.

Now, not only in Scotland, but all around the world, dancers are judged on the same technical basis, to the same standards and under the same competition rules, thus allowing dancers to compete across national and international boundaries.

This would not have been possible without the Scottish Official Board, now celebrating almost 50 years of successful administration of all aspects of Highland dancing from agreement on technique, discipline and deportment to competition organisation and administration.

The Board was formed in 1950 by forward looking Highland dance teachers plus prominent dancers and administrators of the day, with the support of the dance teachers organisations and associations, some of which had already been in existence for up to sixty years. The British Association of Teachers of Dancing was founded in 1892, the United Kingdom Alliance in 1902 and the Scottish Dance Teachers Alliance in the 1920s. They all realised the need for a co-ordinating body through which agreement could be reached on matters of technique, style and even dress for dancers.

Just as successful as agreement on technique has been the acceptance by all Highland dancers and teachers of the SOBHD recommended dress for girls and ladies, now taken for granted as the appropriate dress for competitions but somewhat controversial when originally introduced.



The Board's membership covers every aspect of Highland Dancing from the Professional Teachers Examining Associations through Area Dancing Societies, to organisations which promote Scottish activities of all kinds (eg sponsoring Highland Gatherings). They have all been welcomed for they all have something to contribute in experience, whether that be in competition or on the social or administrative side.

Delegates representing member organisations throughout the world meet regularly in Edinburgh to ensure that rules, regulations and administrative methods meet the demands of each new generation, to take advantage of new ideas in systems and technology and to promote Highland Dancing to the wider general public.

The Board also introduced, in association with competition organisers, a dancers' development scheme which helps children compete with others of similar ability. It enables them to monitor their own progress through various categories. Primary, Beginners, Novice and Intermediate, until they reach Premier standard, to compete with champions and with hard work, to achieve the distinction of winning Championship Trophies themselves.

Through the dedication and efforts of a relatively small number of people working with and through their Associations, the SOBHD has enabled young people in many different countries to enjoy our colourful Scottish heritage, in the knowledge that they are using the same steps and technique as the dancers 'back home'.

Today's communications and modern methods of travel allow dancers to fly regularly between Provinces, States and even countries, taking part in demonstrations and competitions. Our summer in Scotland would not be complete without the annual influx of first class dancers from Canada, United States, South Africa and Australia. Indeed the home Scots now look to their laurels as dancers from all of those countries compete and win regularly at the major Championships.

It is encouraging to find our Scottish cultural traditions bringing young people together, not only in Scotland but wherever Scots live, and that means all over the world. The colour, the zest and vitality, the sheer enjoyment of Scottish Highland dancers is there for all to see and the Scottish Official Board of Highland Dancing is proud to be the central administrative focus which binds it all together.

For further information on Highland Dancing or the address of a teacher near you contact the
**SOBHD Director of Administration, Heritage House, 32 Grange Loan, Edinburgh
EH9 2NR, Telephone 0131-668 3965, Fax 0131-662 0404.**



THE SCOTTISH OFFICIAL HIGHLAND DANCING ASSOCIATION

Scottish Highland Dancing

The picture one conjures up when the words Highland Dancing are mentioned is possibly of a bearded “Braveheart”-style warrior, arms held aloft, leaping over crossed swords and delivering guttural yells every so often.

But just a glimpse at any of today’s talented exponents of the art will quickly dispel that myth for ever! Over the past few decades, due to many innovations in teaching technique and methods of “handing down” and “passing on the word”, the craft of Highland Dancing has been honed and polished into the artistic spectacle that can be admired today.

Highland Dancing was carried throughout the world by thousands of Scottish emigrants. To this day, the steps and movements can still be seen at class and competition in countries like Australia, Sweden, New Zealand, etc.

In 1947, the Scottish Official Highland Dancing Association was instituted and from then it has grown into a dancing association that is proud to welcome ALL dancers.

So if you are interested in taking up Highland Dancing, be it up to professional, competitive standard or simply to keep yourself fit and healthy, then there is no time like the present to make enquiries of classes in your area! For the raw beginner, a Highland Dance class can be a place to meet new friends and have some fun into the bargain!

So just how do you go about finding a highly-qualified, fully-certificated teacher to suit your needs? A simple letter or phone call to our General Secretary will get you full details of your nearest SOHDA teacher. Ensure your teacher *is* SOHDA approved - then you’ll be certain you will be receiving the best of tuition of the widest range of traditional dances around!

Most people think of the Highland Fling or Sword Dance whenever Highland Dancing is mentioned, and when you start attending classes these will probably be the first dances you will quickly learn.

The range of dances that our teachers are passing on to their pupils include Highland Dances, but dances with titles like “Linkumtodie”, “The Lassies of Kyle”, “Hebridean Laddie”, “Louden Lassies”, “The First of August”, “Miss Forbes”, “Aberdonian Lassie”, and “Tulloch Gorm” are also taught.

To help you learn Highland Dancing the SOHDA gives you every encouragement to further your knowledge. Every teacher can supply all the essentials that are necessary to make every class a success - soft dancing shoes, swords, audio cassettes for class, practise and concert work, leaflets on theory and instruction booklets on all the dances.

The SOHDA regularly hold dancing examinations throughout its many branches. Younger dancer members up to 12 years old can enter the basic Primary, Grade I, Bronze and Silver exams. For dancers from 13 to 16 years of age, there are the Star Award exams (which include more of the theoretical side of Highland Dancing as opposed to actual dancing). The Associate Teacher’s exam for dancers 16 to 18 years allows successful candidates to



organise a dancing class. After some training they can also adjudicate at indoor competitions. The Full Teacher's exam allows the successful candidate to become an adjudicator for competitions, Highland Games and examinations.

We have affiliated with similar dancing organisations throughout the world. We are in constant communication with them and regularly exchange hints and suggestions on the steps and movements of the Highland Dances we all admire. There is also an exchange of videos which show the various dances, steps, dress, history of each country. These serve to remind us of the Scottish origins of the dances. All these facilities are available to our members.

There is a wide choice of Highland Games dancing events organised by the SOHDA during the summer season and there are popular indoor competitions every weekend during the winter months throughout Scotland. These culminate in Championship events in both Highland and Hebridean Dancing. ALL dancers will be made most welcome!

So now that we've got you interested, why not contact our General Secretary and find out all you need to know about becoming a member of the SOHDA and start your career as a Highland Dancer - just write or phone.





EDINBURGH EARLY DANCERS

Early Dancing

The **Edinburgh Early Dancers** is a dance company which performs and teaches historic dance. The present group have taught and performed together for the last 10 years, during which time they have developed a wide repertoire of court and social dances ranging from the 15th to the 20th Century.

The aim of the company is to teach and perform works based on material drawn from original sources, such as manuscripts, books, music and paintings, most of which relate to the activities of the upper strata of society. The main research and reconstruction of the dances has been undertaken by Joan English, a well respected authority within this field. Joan has worked with and developed the group from its inception and still has a consultancy role.

Attempting to reconstruct and perform Early Dance is an exciting and challenging project but complete accuracy is virtually impossible as some of the descriptions or texts lack important details such as which foot to start on, in which direction the dancer is to travel and often no indication is given as to the number of repeats. Nevertheless this does not detract from the enjoyment of participating in or watching Early Dance.

The delicate Basse Dance and lively Saltarello, from 15th Century Italy, are two examples of the earliest of our dances. Continuing through the Renaissance Period, into the 16th Century, with its French and Scottish influences, we encounter the energetic Galliard and Tordion and more stately Pavane. The Baroque Period brings with it the challenge of the delightful Gavotte, Gigue, Reels and Minuet. The daring -0Waltzes, Old and New Reels, Quadrilles and Ecossaise are all intricate and exciting dances of the 19th Century. To complete the picture, the early 20th Century encompasses the exuberant Charleston, charming Turkey Trot, One Step and Quick Step.

The company's main method of promoting and developing authentic Early Dance is through performances, workshops and classes. Within all these areas, careful attention is given to the detail of dress worn within the specific period being studied. All costumes worn by the company are reconstructed from contemporary descriptions and kept as authentic as possible.

The **Edinburgh Early Dancers** have performed in a variety of venues ranging from beautiful historic settings and elaborate ballrooms to the small village halls. The dancers are often accompanied by musicians which give an even greater authenticity to the performance.

For further information about Early Dance, please contact:





Shetland Dancing

The dancing in Shetland has gone through many changes over the last one hundred years. The oldest traditional dances such as the Auld Reels, three types of Shetland Reel and Da Shaalds o'Foula were done in croft houses, usually in the home of a local fiddler and most dancing happened at Yule (the festive season). That was the ideal time to have house parties as the dark winter nights were long. Dr Tom Anderson said in one of his interviews about Shetland music and dance, that the first reel recorded being danced on Shetland was in 1759.

'The Auld Reels' consisted of continuous reeling and were done to slower tunes. The dancers called to the fiddler for the Auld Reel when they needed a cool down. It gave a welcome break from the repeated 'reeling' and 'dancing' (setting steps) in the Shetland Reel. The steps and reeling figure differed slightly in most districts of Shetland. They were used as part of the wedding rituals and also called Bride and Bridegrooms Reels.

It was not until about 1930 that these dances fell into disuse, but this again depends on the area. The croft house dancing was replaced by dancing in the new local halls, where the people could do the latest arrivals, i.e. Lancers and Quadrilles that came into most parts about 1904. The compact reels were ideally suited to the croft house 'butt end' (kitchen) and lost their atmosphere and appeal in the more spacious buildings.

Just before the turn of the century, a lot of different dances were flooding into Shetland, the Scotch Reel, the Contra Dance, Haymakers Jig, the Waltz and the Polka. During the first part of this century, Shetland was one of the main centres of the herring industry. Nearly 9,000 fishermen and boys were employed and 5,000 girls were employed as gutters and packers. Evening dances were held in the huts, and the local girls learned the standard Reels, Square Dances, and Circle Dances, all of which were popular in the areas from which the fishermen and girls were drawn.

The style in which the old dances were done was restricted by the compact croft house kitchen. As six or more people were dancing at one time the steps tended to be neat and near to the floor. Although the steps and figure eight differed slightly in each area, the most common feature in every reel was the three stamps (called 'digs' in Shetland) at the end of each 8 bar sequence. These 'digs' also formed part of the more common setting steps.

Another characteristic was the way in which the men enjoyed the dance. The vigour and excitement was so intense that it is said the fiddler was sometimes barely audible above the noise of the dancers as they 'heuched'. The women did their steps much more quietly than the men and didn't 'heuch' or snap their fingers.

Today in Shetland the style is much more refined but the vigour and enjoyment have remained. The ladies in the past had to be tough because most of the men would show their strength by swinging the women off their feet. This trait still exists but is diluted and most couples enjoy controlled 'sensible' dancing now.



Fifteen years ago the local repertoire consisted of six dances, the Boston Two-step, St Bernard's Waltz, Eightsome Reel, Gay Gordons, Highland Schottische and Palais Glide (the latter two were only used in the Paul Jones). The Lancers had lost its ground at this time and the Quadrilles was the more popular dance. Nowadays the Lancers is the favourite of the two around the dance halls but both have made a healthy come back. In addition to the dances listed above are the Pride of Erin Waltz, Dashing White Sergeant, Canadian Barn Dance, Strip the Willow, Britannia Two-step, Veleta Waltz, Hesitation Waltz and Lomond Waltz. The Highlands Schottische, Palais Glide and Paul Jones are rarely ever used now. In 1992 Shetland Folkdance was set up and started reviving and dancing the old dances. The only other group at that time were the Lerwick Old Time Dance Group.

Presently there is a Scottish Country Dance Group and Line Dance is spreading all over the Islands. The School of Dance teaches children Highland and Tap dance, and the Shetland Arts Trust have employed two traditional and two contemporary dance artists-in-residence over the past two years. The traditional dance aspect has had a massive, positive response both among school children and adults on the dance scene in Shetland.

The local dances are not difficult and there is no 'proper' way in which the dances have to be done. This makes it easy for beginners to join in and likewise for visitors. The atmosphere in Shetland is said to be akin to only two places in the world, Ireland and Cape Breton.

At the moment it would seem that the local dances are at a high point. One only has to read the Shetland Times entertainments page or listen to the local radio each night to hear how popular dancing is at the present time.

For further information about Shetland dancing, contact:

Maria Leask, Shetland Folkdance Group





Ceilidh Dancing

Traditionally in Scotland a ceilidh was an evening of song, music and storytelling and it was only around the early 1970s that the word began to be associated with dance.

Before then many people were familiar with the dances done at weddings, parties and socials where the programme invariably included such dances as the *Gay Gordons*, *Pride of Erin*, *St Bernard's Waltz*, *Barn Dance*, *Strip the Willow*, *Broom's Reel* or *Duke of Perth*. These dances were, on the whole, passed on in a fairly traditional way without being taught formally, although there were clubs and gatherings where dances were taught. These included some that went under the banner of "Old Time" or "Sequence Dances". There are clubs and dances today, chiefly in rural areas, which still follow this pattern of dance, and in which the words "ceilidh dance" would be greeted with wonderment and protestations that what is now being described as "ceilidh dancing" is no novelty but something they've been doing all their lives!

There is a difference, however, and it is simply that in the 1970s there emerged a "caller" who taught dances, not as part of a formal teaching process, but as part of the social dance evening. Before then dancers would simply have been given a reminder of how to do the dances, if need be.

But callers taught dances from scratch. They encouraged people to get up on the floor and have a go - and people did, and found they were thoroughly enjoying themselves. They told their friends and consequently all sorts of clubs, organisations and individuals were looking for ceilidh dancing in preference to the disco or modern dance.

Callers certainly helped initiate the upsurge in ceilidh dancing. It was also helped by the increased interest in Scottish music and song that was happening at the same time.

It all seems to have begun in the Glasgow area but quickly spread to other urban areas - and it remains an urban dance revival. By and large there was little need of a rural revival since there the Scottish dancing never stopped.

What are the dances done at ceilidh dances?

There is no simple answer. For some people it is the half dozen or so dances - *Gay Gordons*, *Dashing White Sergeant*, *Pride of Erin*, *Barn Dance*, *Strip the Willow* and *Schottische*. For the remainder, every caller, band and probably every hall where ceilidh dancing takes place has a different repertoire - and sometimes different ways of doing the same dance.

There is no formal organisation or society for ceilidh dancing, therefore the best advice for anyone who wants to find out about it is that they look out for advertisements in the "What's On" columns in the local and national press - and go along and join in the fun.



After all, as Scottish Traditions of Dance Trust Board member and renowned ceilidh dance caller Bob Blair says, “If you can walk, you can dance!”

For further information on ceilidh dancing please contact:





Ladies' Step Dancing

Ladies' Step Dancing flourished in the 18th and early 19th century. It was a predominantly solo dance style, though there are known examples of both duets and trios. The dances consist of "an enchainment of steps in varying mixtures of French and Highland styles". They are danced softly and avoid the vigour of men's Highland dances.

Ladies' Step Dances were taught by the Dancing masters, "the Dancies", who had schools in the main towns and who toured the large houses teaching the young ladies of the household. They were performed as an after dinner entertainment and also in the dancing master's annual ball or "Publick". Major Topham, an English officer writing in Scotland in 1776 says, "The children on these occasions are dressed with much elegance. The dancing masters enliven the entertainment by introducing their High dances in the performance of which they excel best in the world. I wish I had it in my power to describe to you the variety of figures and steps they put into it so great was their agility that an Irish friend of mine, standing by, said, 'I never saw children so handy with their feet'.

Much of the credit for the reawakening of interest in Step Dancing must go to Mrs Isobel Cramb. Her attention was drawn in 1946 to a notebook written by Frederick Hill of Alford in Aberdeenshire in 1841, and which has come to be known as the Hill Manuscript. This gave the instructions for eleven Step Dances of which "Blue Bonnets", "Highland Laddie", "The Earl of Errol" and "The King of Sweden" are perhaps the best known.

The interpretation of the Hill manuscript was not straight-forward since it was in the form of brief notes for Frederick Hill's own use. Fortunately Mrs Cramb was able to call on the assistance of Miss Flora Cruickshank who was, at the time in her 80's. Miss Cruickshank had, in her youth, been a dancing teacher as had her father and grandfather before her. Thus she had a continuity of dancing experience back to the early years of the 19th century. She was able to interpret the notebook and demonstrate to Mrs Cramb the style in which the dances should be performed. She was insistent that they should be performed with the grace and elegance befitting the 18th century and in the soft shoes used indoors at that time.

In the late 1940's Mrs Cramb was invited by Miss Jean Milligan to give a fortnight's course in Ladies' Step Dancing at the RSCDS Summer School in St. Andrews. She continued to give this course every year for nearly thirty years and established the style which is now regarded as definitive.

Many of the dances in the Hill manuscript have now been published, as has a lecture prepared by Mrs Cramb, shortly before her death in 1996, for presentation at the Scottish Arts Council Conference on Scottish Dance held in Stirling in 1994. The author is greatly indebted to this lecture, which forms the basis of this note.

Dr and Mrs R M Nedderman.

Further details may be obtained from
**The Royal Scottish Country Dance Society,
12 Coates Crescent, Edinburgh, EH3 7AF**



The Royal Scottish Country Dance Society

Scottish Country Dancing

Today the term “Scottish Country Dance” embraces the social, usually progressive, dances of Scotland which have evolved from many traditions and are danced throughout the world with much pleasure by Scots and non-Scots alike.

The figure dances of the countryside, many set to Scottish or Irish tunes, became very popular in the 16th century and were called Country Dances. The constant influence of one European Court upon the other meant that the dancers in Scotland were always absorbing new ideas of style and content. The greatest flowering of this form of dance was in the Assembly Rooms of the 18th century. Edinburgh, emulating the dance assemblies in other European cities, conducted the dancing with utmost decorum, and it flourished. Other cities and towns in Scotland soon followed and dancing was an accepted part of social interaction.

Scotland, of course, had its own older traditions of dance and north of the Border the Country Dances incorporated features from older strathspeys, reels, rants and jigs, etc. This was a style of dance with which the whole society of Scotland could feel comfortable. There was the elegance and courtesy of the Country Dance and the energy and precision of step of the old Reels. The Scots, with their “auld allies” the French, valued dancing for its own sake and often showed great skill and vigour.

The Country Dances continued to flourish in Scotland after they had died out in England and now the repertoire also included the new couple dances, quadrilles, and polkas. The dancing masters, who travelled extensively throughout Europe, taught the skills of dancing to all levels of society in Scotland. They were often skilled musicians and taught the older Country Dances as well as the newer, fashionable dances.

By the beginning of the 20th century the number of Country Dances appearing on programmes had dwindled but they were still popular and appeared regularly. The Great War of 1914-18 changed the world for ever, a generation had lost its men folk, syncopated rhythms of jazz and ragtime were sweeping the country and the Scottish Country Dance had all but disappeared.

After the war Mrs Ysobel Stewart of Fasnaclloch (from a distinguished family from Appin, Argyll) and Miss Jean Milligan (a teacher of physical education at Jordanhill Teachers’ Training College) wished to restore the old social dances of Scotland and with them their music. These two committed and energetic ladies researched and collected the dances from friends and family and assisted by Paterson & Sons Publications published their first book. After placing an advertisement in a Glasgow newspaper, a meeting was held on 26th November, 1923 and the Scottish Country Dance Society was formed. The title “Royal” was conferred upon the Society in 1951 and Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II graciously became its Patron in 1952.



Since those early days the RSCDS has evolved into a world-wide organisation, with approx. 25,000 members. It is administered from a Head Office in Edinburgh through a network of 170 Local Associations and over 500 other affiliated groups.

Mrs Stewart, Miss Milligan and their associates were keen to see the Country Dances restored to their dignified and sociable best and to that end, they encouraged classes and taught a new generation of dancing teachers. They adopted a measure of standardisation, but were well aware of the regional variations in many of the popular dances.

Today the aims and objectives of the RSCDS are stated as follows:-

- (a) To preserve and further the practice of traditional Scottish Country Dancing
- (b) To provide, or assist in providing, special education or instruction in the practice of Scottish Country Dancing;
- (c) To promote/publish by all available means, information and music relating to Scottish Country Dancing and in particular to publish or cause to be published descriptions of Scottish Country Dances with music and diagrams in simple form and at moderate price;
- (d) To collect books, manuscripts, illustrations and other memorabilia relating to Scottish Country Dancing and to the Society.

The RSCDS has always stressed the importance of the social nature of the dance form - giving plenty of opportunities for fun and friendship - but is equally concerned with upholding the standards of correct dancing technique. It is this unique blend of wonderful music, disciplined dancing, intricate floor patterns and sociability that appeals to so many people throughout the world.

Since 1923 many old printed books and manuscript collections have been searched for dances and their tunes. The dance instructions have been interpreted and sometimes adapted for modern use. The success of the genre is that now many new dances are composed in traditional form, new formations are introduced, new forms of progression are devised and new tunes written. The dances published by the RSCDS and distributed to members all retain the essential characteristics of the traditional Country Dance. The RSCDS also produces sound recordings and videos to accompany many of the books.

The RSCDS organises an ongoing teacher training programme, both through the world wide Local Association network and at the Annual Summer School in St Andrews. The Local Associations ensure that a wide variety of classes and social events are provided for all ages and all skill levels. The Local Associations can also provide qualified teachers to assist in schools and colleges and bring an important and enjoyable part of Scotland's heritage to the younger generation.

For further information please contact:-

**Gill Parker, General Secretary, The Royal Scottish Country Dance Society,
12 Coates Crescent, Edinburgh EH3 7AF.
Tel.: 0131-225 3854. Fax.: 0131-225 7783.**



Hebridean Dancing

The term 'Hebridean Dancing' is a fairly modern one and probably first saw the light at the English Folk Dance and Song Society's (E.F.D.S.S.) Festival at the Royal Albert Hall, London in 1934, when Fearchar Macneil from Barra was asked to perform some dances known in South Uist and Barra. It is often believed that these dances acquired this label to differentiate them from the more widely known Highland Dances, and to pinpoint their place of origin.

The solo dances now embraced by the term 'Hebridean Dances', and of which several versions are known, are *Tulloch Gorm*, *Highland Laddie*, *Over the Water to Charlie*, (*Scotch*) *Blue Bonnets*, *Flowers of Edinburgh*, *First of August*, *Scotch Measure*, and *Aberdonian Lassie*. Only fragments of the dances *Jacky Tar*, *The Lads wi' the Kilt*, *Over the Water and Over the Hill*, *Carraig Fhearghais*, *Over the Hills and Far Away*, and *Petronella* survive to this day.

It is not known with any certainty where these dances originated but we do know that dances bearing these names were all taught by the dancing master Ewen MacLachlan (*Dannsaidh – Eòghann MacLachlainn*, c. 1799-1879), who taught dancing primarily in South Benbecula, South Uist, Eriskay, and in Barra in the mid-1800s. Whether he created any of the dances himself or whether he merely passed on the dances he knew, has not been established.

The dances as we know them today are performed in a more relaxed and rather spontaneous manner than Highland Dancing, and they often involve a great deal of percussive footwork. Perhaps these dances could be seen as an intermediate dance form between pure percussive step-dancing and what we know as Highland Dancing. It is also plausible that Ewen MacLachlan amalgamated the step-dancing he found in the islands with the style of dancing he possibly knew from the mainland.

In the mid-1980s there was a great fear amongst the local people in Barra and South Uist that these dances would be lost for ever. There were still several people on the islands who knew these dances from their youth and had been taught them by pupils of pupils of Ewen MacLachlan.

The dances were subsequently introduced to Feis Bharraigh (Barra Festival) and in both South Uist and Barra the dances were introduced to children by local tradition bearers. The dances have also featured at a number of children's Fèisean around the country, and at the Summer courses at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig in the Isle of Skye.

Another category of dances that rightfully belong under this term are the many old forms of Scotch Reels that have recently seen a revival round Scotland.

Contact: [REDACTED]