



Scottish Traditions of Dance Trust

NEWSLETTER AUTUMN 1997

NOT SO MUCH AN AGM - MORE A FAMILY GATHERING

It was a pleasure to meet so many of our members on Saturday 23 August at the Trust's first AGM in the Albert Halls, Stirling. Thank you to everyone who was able to attend. For members, far and near, who were not able to come that day, here is a brief account of what took place.

Evelyn Hood, the Trust's Chair, welcomed members and thanked them on behalf of the Board for their interest and encouragement. In outlining the Trust's activities to date and plans for the future, she stressed that although the Trust had already demonstrated how great a need there had been for such an organisation, members of the Board were acutely aware of the magnitude of the task ahead and of just how much help and goodwill will be required to safeguard for future generations this remarkable aspect of Scotland's heritage.

Trust Co-ordinator, Jennifer Swanson, reported on the work which has gone on behind the scenes to establish the Trust and develop good relations with everyone from national organisations to individuals. In particular, the Trust has met with representatives of the Scottish Tourist Board to discuss a number of projects which would help raise the profile of all the Scottish dance traditions. As you know, the Trust has Associate Membership of the Scottish Museums Council and a well-established relationship with the Scottish Arts Council. Liaison has also been made with a number of local authorities where the Trust plans to focus the first phase of its research programme. Members were also reminded of the Trust's main aims:

- To promote and enable dance activity and awareness.*
- To establish a programme of educational outreach.*
- To establish an international research network.*
- To establish a Scottish dance archive with a suitably qualified archivist.*
- To establish a national resource centre for all the Scottish dance traditions.*
- To increase membership and raise our profile.*

Committee Reports

Alastair MacFadyen, Chair of the Education Sub-committee, reported on the relations that have been established with education authorities and university departments as well as with teachers and other dance practitioners. He also outlined the touring exhibition plans for Angus in 1998 and reported that a Factsheet Pack had been produced with information about each Scottish dance tradition.

Jimmy Spankie, who Chairs the Events Sub-committee, spoke about the activities organised over the last year to raise the Trust's profile and help encourage more people to participate in all the Scottish dance traditions. These included a very successful press launch, a talk tour to 5 locations in Scotland and dance workshops at the Edinburgh Folk Festival.

The Chair of the Finance Sub-committee, Bruce Wood, spoke of the Trust's concern to seek funding from a variety of sources. Although the Scottish Arts Council has agreed to support the Trust, we must find other additional funding in order to meet our aims of researching Scotland's dances,

before it is too late, and to raise awareness of these.

Joan Henderson, Chair of the Research Sub-committee, gave an entertaining account of some of the research already undertaken. She made a plea to members to give her the names of elderly informants who might remember their dancing days and who would be willing to talk to someone from the Trust about these memories. Joan also encouraged volunteer researchers to come forward and added that a weekend training session would be organised.

In the absence of Bob Blair, Billy Forsyth spoke for the Resource Centre Sub-committee. Billy reminded members that one of the Trust's earliest aims was to have a Centre which would represent everything about the Scottish Traditions of Dance. It would be a place to collect and archive material, where people could come to discuss and learn about all forms of dance in Scotland; a place with dance space - large enough for ceilidhs, small enough for Highland dancing with a good floor, and different space again for Step dancing. Obviously, such a building would cost a substantial amount of money and would probably

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come about by the Trust working in partnership with others. Billy added that the Sub-committee had had discussions with a number of groups which have proposed to create traditional arts centres in Scotland.

Jimmy Spankie spoke again, as Chair of the newly-established Sponsorship Sub-committee, and appealed to members to come forward with sponsorship and fundraising ideas.

And for afters ...

After lunch, Joan Flett spoke to an enraptured audience about the research which she and her husband, Tom, undertook in the 1950s and '60s. Some of their informants remembered dances from the end of the 19th century and their work is the only record we have of its kind. (We are pleased to include in this Newsletter, an article by Joan Flett about a dance from Eigg. The Trust is very grateful to Joan that she agreed to come and talk to members and give so much encouragement to us all.)

Afterwards, the Jim MacLeod Band led the dance and members had an opportunity to try some simple Shetland Reels and Polkas as well as Old Scotch Reels.

The first AGM will certainly be remembered as a very enjoyable day and we hope that when we meet again you will be able to join us.

One final plea: during the AGM, the need for the Trust to raise money was repeatedly highlighted. Please, can **YOU** run just one fundraising event in aid of the Trust? This could be a ceilidh or a coffee morning, a sponsored dance or a fundraising fair - anything (legal!) that will raise money. If each of our members raised only £100 from an event the impact on the Trust's work would be tremendous. It would allow us to accelerate our education and research and get more and more folk up and dancing.

Write and tell us what you plan to do and we'll publicise it in the next Newsletter. We could also send you leaflets to distribute at your event.

If you manage to hold a fundraising event before our next Newsletter, write and tell us all about it so that we can share the news.

The Trust is making enormous progress - but we DO need your help to continue. The future of Scotland's dances is in your hands.

A 'FORGOTTEN' DANCE FROM EIGG

Joan Flett

When my husband and I started our research nearly fifty years ago we were fascinated by references to 'forgotten' dances with Gaelic names. Some were noted by Alexander Carmichael in his *Carmina Gadelica* and a list of 'old Highland dances' with Gaelic names was given by D G MacLennan in his *Highland and Traditional Dances*. On our very first collecting trip to the Hebrides in 1953 we found four of the five dances mentioned by Carmichael together with several other 'forgotten' dances. One of these was the so-called Eigg War Dance - actually An Dannsa Mor (The Big Dance). In 1953 this was still danced on Eigg and we were able to collect a complete description from several sources.

The dance was brought to Eigg, via Rhum, after some men from Eigg, working on Rhum, learnt it from men from the Strathaird district of Skye. A son of one of those men and the nephew of another were still living and confirmed this origin. This means that the dance reached Eigg about 150 years ago. The most complete description was given to us by Hugh MacKinnon of Cliadale who often played one of the main roles and it was confirmed by other sources.

According to Hugh MacKinnon it was danced by men only, as many as pleased taking part (other sources said eight or twelve. This probably depended on who was present when the dance was performed). It was performed to verses sung by two of the dancers with a chorus, sung by all the dancers, at the end of each verse. The dancers joined hands to form a ring, all facing inwards, the hands being held just below shoulder height, with arms straight. The two men who sang the verses, we will call them X and Y, started in diametrically opposite places in the ring. The first man, X, sang the first line of the verse, and, as he did so, both he and Y came inside the ring. The second man, Y, immediately followed with the second line, X sang the third and so on. As they sang they walked backward and forward across the ring, watching each other all the time. The 'walk' was a light jaunty walk on the balls of the feet, arms

swinging and with elbows well bent, with a half 'flirting' half arrogant tilt of the head as they watched each other. While the two men were singing the verse the others continued to stand with arms joined but leaving gaps for X and Y. On the first line of the chorus, which was sung by all the dancers, X and Y dropped quickly back into their places in the ring and joined hands as at the start. The whole ring danced round to the left, moving slowly for the first half of the chorus and then quickly until the chorus was finished. The same two men then came into the centre and sang the next verse and so on. During the chorus the dancers hopped round on the left foot, keeping the right legs extended towards the centre of the ring, with legs straight and the feet about 18 inches from the floor. They made four hops to a line of the chorus.

The meaning of the words seems somewhat obscure. The second part appears to refer to a miller's daughter who had 'lain' with a soldier - some sources said this was an enemy. The first verse and the first chorus seem to be meaningless but the translation of the other verses and the chorus of the second part are as follows:

Kenneth of the Rudha (headland) has gold,/ And not every man has gold./ Kenneth of the Rudha has gold./ And so has the Goodman of Rudha Dunain.

A kiss for the Smith's daughter,/ Without a kiss for every girl,/ A kiss for the Smith's daughter,/ And for MacLucas' granddaughter.

There will be mud on the tattered hose,/ Oft is he among the girls,/ There will be mud on the tattered hose,/ And he will be ranging the country.

How shall I chase the girl,/ When there are two in my way?/ How shall I chase the girl,/ When there are four on the floor?

2nd part - Alas, alas, alas,/ Alas, alas, alas,/ What harm have I done?/ I lay with a soldier,/ Has not many a girl done it? (Here the singer covered his eyes and bowed his head as if sobbing)

Chorus - Said the daughter of the young miller,/ Said the daughter of the miller,/ My love is the yellow-haired Minister (twice)/ With thee I

would sit/ In the garden of herbs. I shall not go to the stool (twice)/ Till I get a satin gown,/ And a yellow apron for show.

I would dance to a trumpet,/ I would dance with a trumpet at all,/ I would dance to a fiddler,/ I would dance without a fiddler at all,/ With the mill-dust.

In the second part of the song dancer X represents the miller's daughter and on the last line Hugh MacKinnon made a quite unconscious gesture as if he was throwing up two handfuls of mill-dust to cover himself. The second part had a steady monotonous rhythm perhaps suggestive of a mill-wheel and the figure formed by the men in the chorus may also suggest a mill-wheel, particularly if only eight or twelve men take part. The exact movements of the dancers varied according to who was taking part and some men used to make the dance much more violent, almost shouting the words at each other. This may have given rise to it being mentioned in English newspapers, earlier in the century, as the 'Eigg War Dance'.

This is a very brief account just to whet the interest of members. I have not been able to acknowledge the great help we received from people who helped in so many ways. Full descriptions of the dance, the Gaelic words and the music, together with seven other Gaelic dances are given in the *Journal of the English Folk Dance and Song Society*, Vol. 7, Pt 2 (1953). All our research notes, together with an index, can be found at the School of Scottish Studies, The University of Edinburgh.



THE DANCING BOOKWORM

Review:
A SUTHERLAND DANCE
by Mats Melin

In their book *'Traditional Dancing in Scotland'*, Tom and Joan Flett describe the routines of the many itinerant dancing masters to be found in Scotland up to and just beyond the First World War. In Mats Melin those old dances have found a spiritual heir. Unlike them, however, Melin has not

been working on his own account, but at the behest of the Highland Council, a body whose efforts on behalf of traditional dance in its area deserve to be thoroughly acknowledged.

For much of last year and this, Mats Melin has been making a circuit of halls throughout Sutherland, taking dance classes, and, as importantly, talking to and setting down the memories of many of the older dancers in that district. Thus he has been able to find many neglected dances and local variants on dances known throughout Scotland. The beauty of the project is that he has then acted as a kind of mediator and taught the dances back to newer generations. In addition Melin has introduced Sutherland dancers to many new and enjoyable dances picked up on his travels both here and in what we might call Gaelic Canada. By his efforts and those of his classes the tradition is restored, repaired and renewed.

'A Sutherland Dance' is not simply an instruction manual. Melin has been careful to place dancing in its cultural context, citing, for example, major changes in social life wrought by the Clearances, and the supplanting of the ceilidh house by the village hall. These and other changes all had their effect on how and what people danced, and it is refreshing to find this acknowledged. Dancing is after all more than just a hobby like upholstery or collecting moths and butterflies. It is more a fundamental component of our social life.

The dances in the first half of the book are set out in the order that they would have been danced at a typical Sutherland event. We begin with the Grand March and progress through Reels Foursome and Eightsome, a great variety of couple dances, to the all-important Lancers and Quadrilles, the grand old sets like Petronella and Haymakers, and finishing up with the Circassian Circle. Here you will find Strath Halladale's Eightsome, Rogart's Lancers, and a very definite commitment to pousetting in ballroom hold with a polka step. Local variety is further enhanced with instructions for Melin's own introductions like the Foula Reel and the Inverness County Square Set. There is also a brief look at memories of step dancing in Sutherland and

some of the basics of that exciting and contentious art.

Mats Melin is to be congratulated on a meticulous and illuminating piece of work. We look forward to that work being replicated in every one of Scotland's districts (why not take the old counties as our guide?) and a valuable and freely available resource being established.

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Note:

A Sutherland Dance by Mats Melin, published by Highland Council, 1997. A limited number of copies has been printed with the intention of distributing the book freely to people in Sutherland. If you would like to order a copy, please contact the Scottish Traditions of Dance Trust.



Books for Sale

The Trust has been offered a number of books issued by The Scottish Country Dance Society between 1924-38 including some reprints re-issued in the 1950s. There are 16 books in all (volumes 3, 5, 6 and 14 are missing). The books are in paperback and contain both music and descriptions of each dance. All are in good condition. They are being offered for sale at £50 for the set. If you are interested, please contact Margaret Duncan, telephone 0131-556 4591 (afternoons only).

LETTERS

From Bill Clement, Chairman of the RSCDS:

The article in your recent Newsletter on Highland Dancing in the army by a Major in the Black Watch told us they dance the Lochaber Broadswords. I enclose a letter written in 1957 from the Secretary of the Scottish Official Board of Highland Dancing which clearly states there is no historical evidence for this dance.

The enclosed letter, addressed to a Captain T S Davidson, Heather Bank Cottage, Park Road, Bingley, Yorks., dated 1 July 1957, reads:

"Further to our letter of 13th June in connection with the differentiation of the Argyll and Lochaber Broadswords,

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we hope that the following information is what you require to know:

'The Argyll and Lochaber Broadsword Dances - The Argyll Broadswords in its present basic form is a MacLennan family conception. Its origin was in an ancient Pyrrhic or Group Dance in which four or more warriors danced with their broadswords. The exact form of the dance was in doubt when the elder brother (William) of the well-known D G MacLennan revived it at the end of the nineteenth century. The form and steps are described in D G's Book on Highland and Traditional Scottish Dances, and the Dance was given its present title because the MacLennan family lived on the shores of Loch Fyne.

'The Dance was taken up by the Highland Regiments, and in the course of time and inter-Regimental rivalry new steps were introduced. The Dance has recently found its way into civilian favour and competition. If the Dance is to be adopted for recognised competition a standard form must be accepted by all concerned, including judges.

'The Lochaber Dance is a name without substance. There is no known form of the Dance, only a legend that it was danced by the Eight Men of Moidart when Prince Charlie had landed and raised his standard at Glenfinnan in the '45. As the Prince himself was reputed to be one of the Eight the Dance without his presence must have been an odd affair. It is possible that the Lochaber is a variant of the Argyll Broadswords, but legend apart, there is no known form of a Dance under the Lochaber title.'

The letter is signed Miss M Stokes,
Hon. Joint Secretary.



EVENTS

Dance Base - new brochure out now with details of autumn/winter dance classes; lots to choose from including Ceilidh Dancing for the over-50s, Step Dancing, Highland Dancing for Adult Beginners, and English Country Dancing. For details contact Dance

Base at Assembly Rooms, 54 George Street, Edinburgh EH2 2LR Telephone 0131-225 5525, Fax: 0131-220 6812, email: geheyne@cybersurf.co.uk

Fiddle '97 - Scotland's Fiddle Festival: 21, 22, 23 November 1997 at the Assembly Rooms, 54 George Street, Edinburgh. A weekend of concerts, recitals, fiddle masterclasses, workshops: fiddle, playing for dance, step dancing with Frank McConnell, cabaret, ceilidhs, dance jams, talks, tunes, sessions, with Alasdair Fraser, Charlie McKerron, Paul Anderson and many more. For a full programme contact ALP Scots Music Group, 184 Dalry Road, Edinburgh EH11 2EP, Telephone: 0131-337 5442, Fax: 0131-337 9316.

Fiddle Force Winter School

Fiddle Force, a club for those interested in Scots Traditional Fiddle, plans to hold its 5th Annual Winter School in early January 1998. In addition to Fiddle playing, the programme will include workshops on Playing for Dance (Step, Country and Ceilidh), Accompaniment, Step Dance, Traditional Dance and Singing. Full details will be posted on the Web at www.bryanmac.demon.co.uk/fiddle.htm once they are finalised. Alternatively, contact S. Bell on telephone 0141-779 1898.

What's happening in your part of the world? Write to the Trust with details of events which might be of interest to other members and we'll include this in our next Newsletter. Next deadline is 18 November for publication in mid-December.



Courses and Conferences

History and Development of Scottish Dance: University of Strathclyde - Senior Studies Institute, Graham Hills Building, Room 773, Tuesdays from 7 October 1997, 2.00 - 4.00 pm, 10 meetings, fee £45. Joan Henderson presents an anthropological perspective on the variety of dancing styles practised by Scots from the 16th century to the present day, including

the pros and cons for standardisation, comparative dance styles, the Folk Music revival and its influence, the Feis movement, and Scottish Dance in an international context. Evelyn Hood examines the earliest records before 1560 and sets out historical influences and developments up to the turn of the 19th century. Videos, discussion and debate ensure an entertaining and informative class.

Dance in Scotland: University of Edinburgh, Open Studies - part-time courses for adults. Bowhill Room, 11 Buccleuch Place, Mondays from 13 October for 9 weeks, 7.00 - 8.30 pm fee £35/£24 concessions. An historical / anthropological insight into the variety of dancing styles practised by Scots from the 16th century to the present day. Tutor: Joan Henderson. Those attending may opt to take a credit towards a Certificate either in Scottish Studies or in Cultural Studies.

"Changing Resources" - the Fifth Arts & Communities Forum, Scotland, on Saturday 25 October 1997 at Theatre Workshop, Edinburgh. With new funding patterns, new structures, and new relationships - how can the arts and communities sector deal with these changes and benefit from them? Speakers will include Christine Hamilton, City of Glasgow Council, Hervé Atmaniuk, Strasbourg, Banlieues d'Europe, David Boyd, Belfast, The Beat Initiative, and Roger Fox, Voluntary Arts Network. For a full programme and registration form please write to Eric Robinson, 16 Broughton Place, Edinburgh EH1 3RX.

Please send letters, articles and events information for inclusion in the next Newsletter by 18 November 1997 for publication in mid-December.

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