

Miss Lucy Short, White Platts, Kelwick Road, Ambleside, aged 82.

Interviewed with Clara Boyle in the latter's house.

Miss Short has lived in Ambleside all her life. At the age of 12 or so she attended dancing classes held in Ambleside by old Jos. Robinson - she went for two winters in all.

Jos. Robinson held his classes in Ambleside in one of the schools there [? Miss Short wasn't absolutely certain of this.] The classes were one per week, 24 classes in all, from October to Easter. This counted as two sessions, the sessions running from October to Christmas and from Christmas to Easter. The classes themselves lasted from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m.

The dances which she learnt from Jos. Robinson were 3-Reel, 6-Reel, 8-Reel (in a square), Triumph, Sir Roger de Coverly, Lancers, Quadrilles, Waltz Cotillion, Cottagers, Waltz Country Dance, Waltz, Heel and toe polka, Gavot (a circle dance), Schottische, Barn Dance, La Va, Mazowka, and Highland Schottische (under the name of The Highland Fling).

He did not teach a 4-Reel.

In addition to all this, there was step-dancing. He taught a number of steps - Miss Short could remember the names of some - the Shuffle off, Single shuffle, Double shuffle, Treble shuffle, Crunch, Double crunch, Hagworm Crawl. These steps were worked into various step-dances. There were Skirt Dances, some with a tambourine, some with a hoop which you jumped through. There were also some with a garland. The "Highland Fling" was done as a duet, in kilts.

All the social dances listed above were taught as ballroom dancing. After showing me some of the steps and figures of the dances, Miss Short turned to me and said "This is ballroom dancing, mind. I don't folk dance; I only do ballroom

dancing". Folk-dancing, apparently, was what Mrs Boyle taught when she was EFDS HeadTeacher for the Lake District.

Jos. Robinson taught all his pupils the etiquette of the ballroom. He made the girls sit on one side of the room, the boys on the other, the girls with their hands crossed on their laps, the boys with their hands on their thighs. He taught the boys how to ask a girl to partner them. They had to walk across the room to the girl of their choice, put a hand on their solar plexus and bowed, and say "May I have the pleasure of this dance". The girl rose, and curteyed, holding her skirt out to the sides, and took the boy's proffered arm. If it was a figure dance, they went straight to their places on the floor, but if it was a Circle Dance, they had to parade round the floor till the music began. At the end of the dance, the boys had to escort their partners to their places, bow, and thank them, whilst the girls curteyed.

At the end of the season, there was a finishing ball, an exhibition night for the parents. The children's parents were sent invitations for this by Jos., and in the hall the parents sat round the room in a sort of horseshoe, while the children sat in the remaining space round the edge of the room. At the finishing ball, all the dances in his repertoire were done, the step-dances and social dances being mixed up together. The show began and ended with a waltz. In the social dances the boys had free choice of partners - he had the same number of boys as girls in his classes in those days. The hoop dances etc were only done by the girls, but the boys did the Sailor Hornpipe. Miss Short couldn't remember any clog-dancing. So far as she can remember, the parents remained as spectators throughout, and at no time did they dance.

Jos. Robinson was a fiddler who could play and dance simultaneously. He played for all his classes himself, but for the finishing balls he brought along two

extra fiddlers to help him. He used to hit erring children with his fiddle bow - he didn't mind where he hit you - and once broke his bow over one boy's head.

He was a large man, about 20 stone in weight, but danced as lightly as a feather.

When Miss Short began going to ordinary social dances in Ambleside, the various Reels, Cottagers, and Triumph, and Sir Roger de Coverly which she learnt from Jos. were no longer performed, though Lancers and Quadrilles were still done. On the other hand, you might have got an odd dance up in Langdale where they would have done Cottagers.

In Ambleside, the older dances survived chiefly through the "Old Folks do". This is an annual affair, originally held in mid-January (the old New Year?) but now moved to mid-December because the weather is usually more clement then. It is organized by a committee of the tradesmen and townpeople, and supported by a house-to-house collection. All the old people present in the town on that evening, from the richest man in the town to a tramp in the lodging house, are invited, and to them everything is completely free. There is free transport from and to their homes, and the actual "do" consists of a tea from 6 p.m. to 7 p.m. (or thereabouts) followed by vocal and instrumental music and dancing from about 7 to 10.30 p.m. In the old days when the 'do' was held in the Assembly Rooms, ~~any~~ people under the age limit could come in after 9 p.m. for a fee of 2/6, but now the numbers are such that the privilege of attending the 'do' is extended to people under the age limit by a sort of rota system, depending on the first letters of their surnames.

Miss Short has, of course, been eligible to attend the "Old Folks do" for many years, and she is actually the President of the organizing committee. Her first appearance there, however, was when she was 14, when she was invited to give an

exhibition of the 3-Reel along with two other children from Jos. Robinson's class.  
(perhaps it is relevant that her mother was on the committee).

Mrs Boyle has been associated with the "Old Folks do" since 1911. In that year her mother-in-law stood down from the organizing committee, and Mrs Boyle was elected to replace her. As a committee member, she has attended ever since, subject to absence, or omission during the war years. During the dancing at the "do", the older dances, 3-Reel, 6-Reel, 8-Reel, Cottagers, Triumph, continued to be danced, and with the exception of the 3-Reel, Mrs Boyle took part in them.

The 3-Reel continued to be danced by the older people at the "do" up to about 1935, and up to this time there would usually have about 4 sets of 3 on the floor.

The dances Mrs Boyle has seen at The "Old Folks Do" actually included the 3, 6, 8-Reels, Triumph, Speed the Plough, Cottagers, Lancers, Quadrilles.

Miss Short said that she heard of a dance called Derry down Derry before the first War, but has never danced it.

Mrs. Short showed me the various steps she learnt from Mrs. Robinson. [But all this was a bit hazy, and she couldn't really make her feet do what she wanted.]

Shuffle off: Done with feet very flat - heels just off the ground.

1. 1& Double beat with R toe to front

2 Step on RF in 1st pos<sup>n</sup> (with feet almost parallel)

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4& Double beat with R toe to front

2. 1. Stamp on the flat of RF in near 5th position

2 Stamp with LF on spot in front 5th position

3 Stamp with RF in 1st position (with feet almost parallel).

Single Shuffle. As collected by Dan Horison, but with the swinging foot keeping its movement to the front & back, with little lateral movement. Begin by swinging foot out to front, with a hop.

#### Double Shuffle.

1. 1. Step on LF in 1st position (with feet almost parallel)

& Beat forwards with ball of RF through ~~1~~ position halfway between 1st & semi 4th

2 Beat backwards with ball of RF through ~~1~~ position "

& Beat forwards with ball of RF " "

3 & 4& ~ 122.

Treble Shuffle Couldn't be certain of what she did.

Crunch. Agami very doubtful, but what she said was:

1. 1 Step on RF in semi 2nd position

2 Step on LF in crossed position

& Bring R toe to 1st position

3 and a 4 Beat heels on the floor alternately, making 4 beats in all.

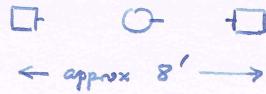
Can be done with alternate feet (single crunch?) or with the same foot repeated (double crunch?)

Hagwam Crawl As collected by Dan Howison, the foot which moves to the rear being either slid or lifted as the dancer pleased.

In his teaching, Jos Robinson never mentioned the 5 positions of dancing - he made no use of them.

Between them, Miss Short and Mrs Boyle showed me the following dances.

3-Reel.

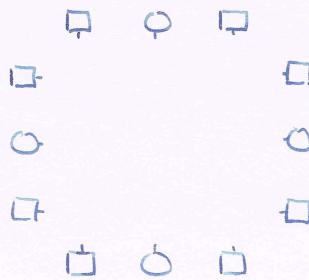


Start as shown, and all dance the Shuffle off to begin. Then

- 1-8 . The man begins to step, and the lady whom he is facing watches him and to the best of her ability does the same as he does. They finish with the Shuffle off on bars 7,8 , and the second lady comes in on this (she stands still on bars 1-6).
- 9-16 They dance a reel of three, the man beginning by giving right shoulder to the lady he is facing. The reel is completed in bars 9-14, and they all finish on bars 15,16 with the Shuffle off, the man — facing the second lady. [Ladies return to their original places each time].
- 17-24 The man now steps with the second lady, while the first lady stands still, all three dancing the Shuffle off on bars 23-24 .
- 25-32 They reel etc.

The man has his hands down by his side; the ladies have hold of their skirts. The travelling step for the reel of three is hop 1 8 2 , with a definite hop, and a perfect near 5th position (flat) for the close on the count 8 .  
A typical time is Soldier's Joy,  $18\frac{1}{2}$  seconds for 16 bars. (52 bars per min)

6-Reel: (Given by Mrs Boyle to D.N.K.)



Tune: Quaker's Wife. 8 bars introduction, Shuffle off on bars 7,8.

1-8 Top and bottom couples link arms, advance and retire

They advance again, and the men exchange partners, the ladies passing the opposite lady with right shoulders, and all fall back to the square.

9-16 Sides the same

17-24 Top & bottom men take their R.H. partner with balloon hold, and galop straight across the set (men passing back to back) and back, then do the same with L.H. partner.

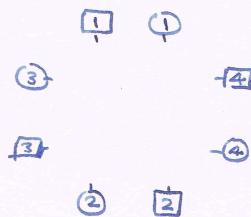
25-32 Sides the same

33-64 Repeat 1-32.

Phrasing doubtful.

Use hop 1 & 2 (i.e. the reel step) in bars 1-16.

8-Reel.



Stand as shown [the numbering is mine]

Tune: Soldiers Joy. 8 bars introduction. Shuffle off on bars 7,8.

1-8 Top and bottom couples dance RM & LH star, with walking step

9-16 Sides the same.

17-24 Top and bottom couples polka round each other round the inside of the set, anti-clockwise, (once round), to places.

25-32 Sides the same.

33-40 Top and bottom couples dance a baby basket to the left, with pivot step, forming the baby basket by the men putting arms round the ladies' waists.

41-48 Sides the same.

49-56 Circle 8 all the way round to left with hands joined, using reel step.

57-64 Couples take ballroom hold and all polka round anti-clockwise, to places.

Mrs Boyle and Miss Short had some discussion on the use of the Shuffle off in the middle of the dance. Miss Short couldn't remember it being used except at the beginning, but Mrs Boyle said that it was used wherever you could fit it in, but particularly by the couples standing still, just before they began their next figure.

Cottagers

## Circassian Circle formation, couple meeting couple

(1) [2]

[1] (2)

Tune. Quakers wife. No shuffle off at the beginning.

1-8 RH and LH star with walking step ["g' think walk". L.S.]

9-12 "Set to partners" [Jes's term] The step is a form of the Quadrille setting  
step, i.e. 1.1 Step on RF in 2nd position

2 Close LF to near 3rd position

2 Repeat 1.3,4 ~ 1,2

13-16 Swing partners with ballroom hold and pivot step.

17-24 Ladies chain (see below)

25-32 Baby basket, with pivot step (as in 8-Reel).

33-40 Take ballroom hold, and advance and retire, using the set to partners  
step (man with LF, then RF, lady ~), then change place by walking  
counter clockwise round the opposite couple.

Ladies chain: Ladies give R hands to each other, and pass across to the opposite men. The men takes the lady by her left hand with his left hand, turns her to her right under her own left arm, and passes her round behind his back, then takes her left hand with his right behind his back, and leads her out on his right side ready to repeat the same to places. As the lady passes behind his back, the man moves forward a little to give her room to pass, but he remains facing the front throughout



I am by no means sure of this description of Cottagers. I have no doubt that the dance began with the 'stars' and ended with the 'advance and retire and waltz on', and that it contained ladies chain as I have described it. But I am doubtful whether the dance contained both 'set and swing' and 'baby baskets', and equally doubtful of the position of either in the sequence. On the other hand, I would not be unduly worried by the possibility of a 40 bar sequence - you just kept time with the music, not with the tune.