

3 September 1955

Fotta.

Flotta, Sept 17th - 20th, 1955

Mr William Sutherland*, Aval, aged 63 [two visits] (32)

A keen dancer in his younger days. Has performed the Sixsome Reel quite recently. The men usually placed their hands on their partners' waists. As the Bride's Reel, it was performed by the bride & groom, best man & bridesmaid, & the honest folk, these being a married couple closely related to the bride. Mr Sutherland has hazy recollections of all three men dancing with the bride! This use of the Sixsome Reel had been discontinued by 1910-14.

The Swomes Reel is the usual kissing dance. I did not ask for details, but it ended with a Scotch Reel.

Mr Sutherland gave me a dance programme of ca 1920, of which he was in c. It began about 9 p.m., & finished at 5 or 6 in the morning, & they would probably have included other items besides those on the programme.

The Threesome (Handie) Reel was in fashion when he began dancing, ca 1910.

Mr John Simpson, The Bu, aged 78

When Mr Simpson first started dancing, the most popular dance was the Sixsome Reel. There were three men on one side, their partners opposite them. When "running the reel", the men followed

* Brother in law of Mr Injell.

the ladies, sometimes placing hands on their partners waists. Three tunes were played, & it was in both strathspey time and reel time. They changed places each time, returning at the end to their own places. The ^(Highland) Schottische step was used for the strathspey part. There was "mutter" after every dance.

Sownie Reel. A man starts, takes up the lady with a handkerchief & she comes to him, is kissed by him to the accompaniment of a squeak from the fiddle, & the two walk round arm in arm. She takes up a man in the same manner, he falling in behind them, and so on. When all are on the floor, the dance just breaks up. All this is done to the tune "The White Cockade".

Ca 1895, a teacher called Smith came to the island, & taught Lancers and Quadrilles, & various Country Dances. Ca 1905, a Mr Clayton came & brought with him the Reel of Eight. Otherwise he taught much the same dances as Mr Smith.

Selkie's Dance is the kibby dance, done to the tune "Merrily Dance the Quaker's wife".

I did not like to question Mr Simpson too closely, since his daughter in Edinburgh is closely associated with the R.S.C.D.S.

(34)

Mrs Margaret Mowat, Bowcot, aged 80 [two visits]

When she first began dancing, the sixsome Reel was the only dance performed on the island. It was in both strathspey & reel time, & there were "three springs" [in each time?]. She cannot remember how the reel was run. The setting step in strathspey time was the Highland Schottische step [side, up behind, side, up in front, step to side, close, step to side, & hop]. She remembers an old aunt doing the same step, holding out her big wide skirt as she went from side to side. The setting step in reel tempo was the pas de Basque.

The men hooched a little, but not much [unless fu']. Both sexes raised their arms & cracked finger & thumb, but the ladies did not hooch — that would have been thought rude.

At first the men wore their Sunday shoes, & later patent leather pumps. The ladies' shoes had heels of medium height. The more well-to-do ladies wore white starched muslin frocks, otherwise best Sunday frocks.

As the Bride's Reel, it was performed by the ~~Bride~~ ^(at the top) ~~Bride~~ * & Groom, Best Man & Bridesmaid, & the Honest folk. The

* I shall denote these by B + G, BM + M, HF, respectively.

[Mrs. Mowat told me that at one wedding held in her house there were about 20 couples. They danced in a room about 12' x 15', six at a time, the fiddler sitting in one corner. The only dance was the Sixsome Riel, & when all had had their turn, the first set began all over again.

last were the married couple who were the closest relations of the bride [but not her father + mother]. This usage dropped 50 years ago. Mrs Monat is not sure about a change of places + partners.

The Foursome Reel came in a few years after she started dancing.

The Threesome Reel, Eva Three-Step, Maxina + the like came in during the first War.

Mr David Sutherland, The Smiddy; aged 81

Mr Sutherland went to Chicago in 1893 + returned in 1901. He returned to Chicago for a second period from 1903 to 1909. These dates have enabled him to fix the other dates given below with complete accuracy.

In his young days, the only ~~old~~ dance performed in the island was the Sixsome Reel. The men stood in one line, their partners opposite to them in another. The fiddlers played strathspey time, + they all danced on the spot. There were no proper steps - they just jumped around + kicked their legs about. They then "ran the figure 8". Mr Sutherland could

not remember how this was performed. This was repeated 3 times. The music changed to a reel, & the whole was repeated another 3 times. Then the men changed partners, ~~the~~ the ladies remaining in their places, & the whole sequence was repeated. Then the whole sequence was repeated again with fresh partners. [On second visit, said They ran the reel before setting.]

At the Bride's Reel, it was performed by B & G, BM & M, & some near relatives of the bride, possibly her father & mother. Cannot remember the positions of these people on the Reel.

Some men from Flotta went to Holm [Mainland of Orkney], & there learnt the steps of the Highland Fling.

In 1890 or 1891 a Teacher called Smith came to the island. There was no hall then, but the house at Windbreak was completed save for the internal dividing walls, & he obtained the use of that. Part of the floor was stone, & part was wood, but this was a minor detail. He stayed only two weeks, but taught every evening except Sunday. He taught the Polka, Highland Schottische, Waltz, Dutch Polka, Grand March, set of Quadrilles, Lancashire, Petronelle, Rory O'More, Flower of Edinburgh, Triumph, Haymakers [there were 4 couples to a set]

in the Country Dances]. Ninepin Reel, "Foursome Reel & Reel of Tullock. This was the first time that the Foursome Reel had been done on the island so far as Mr Sutherland knew. Mr Smith sold some little books on the island, & after he left the boys & girls learnt dances from these books. They used to meet on the grass down by The Bu, & practice. There was such a craze for dancing that the lads would even practice the step for "running the reel" when following the plough. Until the advent of Mr Smith, dances had been leisurely affairs, with plenty of time between dances [there was a good deal of time spent passing the bottle], & the fiddler was not overworked. At the New Year's Dance after Mr Smith came, (the fiddler, Danny Rosie, confessed later to Mr Sutherland that it was the hardest night's work he ever did, & that he had worn the skin of the fingers of his left hand fingering the strings - Mr Sutherland saw them, & they were quite red & raw). He had not heard of an 8-some from old people, nor of the Swine's Reel or Bobbity Bowties.

The Selkie's Dance was sometimes called the Fisherman's Dance.

Mr Sutherland explained the meaning of "mutter" as "malture" [or should it be "malture"] when farmers put their oats to the mill to be ground, the malture is the amount of the meal kept back by the miller as payment.

Mr Robert Mowat, ca 50

The Brides Reel was performed by the B & G, BM & M, & the "Honest Pair", these [he thought] being the last couple to be married before the wedding. They stood up at the wedding, & if the wedding was held in a church, they walked in front of the bridal couple on the way to the place where the reception was held. They did not need to be related.

The 6-couple was rowed some years ago just as a social dance, but not many could do it.

He had seen the Threesome Reel ca 1920, & most people could do it then, so it had probably been in for some time.

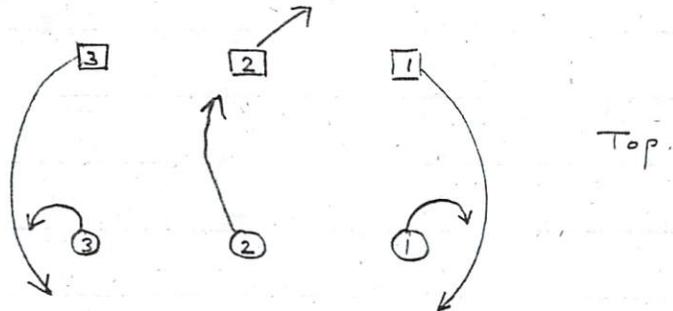
Mr Roland Barnett, The Cottage, aged ca 50

Threesome Reel done over 20 years ago, with banjo & fiddle. Slow time only.

Mr Robert Rosie. Sarquoy, aged 74. Also Mrs Rosie, aged 69

Mr Rosie is the son of Danny Rosie, the fiddler, mentioned by Mr David Sutherland. He plays the fiddle still, though not very well now, & he does not seem to remember many tunes. He played Strathspeys at 42-43 bars per minute, & reels at 53-54 bars per minute.

They remember the Sixsome Reel fairly clearly. They were not



sure how they stood, but Mr Rosie had a feeling that "Top" was as shown above. Mrs Rosie was quite definite about the path of the 1st couple, & felt fairly certain about the path of the 3rd couple. Neither were sure of the path of the 2nd couple, but Mr Rosie felt that it was as shown above. They were positive that the ~~the~~ 2nd couple were the last to get into their places.

The dancers "run the reel" to begin, in Strathspey time (8 bar) & then "dance" on the spot, using Highland Fling steps (8 bar). They repeat this twice more, then do the same 3 times in reel tempo, using the pas de Basque for setting. Then 1st & 2nd men [or women; they weren't sure which] change places, & the whole is repeated, then 1st & 3rd change places, & the whole is repeated again. There was no definite method of carrying out their changes, & they were rather hazy about this.

We tried the figure 8 as shown above, & they felt ~~quite~~ reasonably certain that we had it correctly. For dancing the figure 8 in reel tempo they used a chassé step or traveling pas de Basque, but not step-change-of-step. The dancers were about 4' apart.

When the Sixsome Reel was used as the Bride's Reel, it was performed by the B&G, BM&M, & HF. The last were the married couple nearest related to the bride or groom. [They were not sure which]. They had no duties at the wedding, but stood up behind the bridal couple at the actual marriage ceremony, & went with them to the church.

with her in turn. I was told later by Mr David Sutherland & members of his family that Mrs Ross also thought that the men moved, but that she did not want to tell me in case she was wrong —she confided this to them in the shop.

They could not remember how to run the figure 8. The setting step in Strathspey time was the ~~R to L~~, Highland Schottische step, while that in reel time was the Pas de Basque. The travelling step in reel time was a chassé; & Mrs Ross remembered how the old folk would swing their shoulders, R shoulder forward for R foot but she had never danced it, having only seen the old folk do it. There was not much shouting or raising of arms except when fun.

They were both taught to dance by Mr Clayton. He taught them how to ask their partner for a dance, & to escort her to her chair. And they had to be as quiet as mice while he was teaching. He played the fiddle, often while dancing or demonstrating steps.

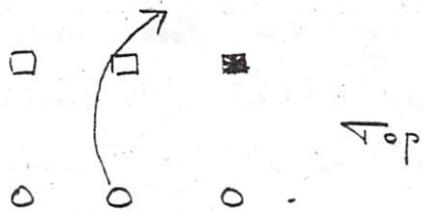
One of the steps which he taught was "Shuffle over the

"buckle", this being the double (or even treble)[†] shuffle. He told them to practice it whilst holding on to the back of a chair.

Mr Archie Barnett, Hemigar, aged 72. Also Mrs Barnett,
aged 64

Mr Barnett is a sister of Bob Rosie.

Rather hazy recollections of the Sixsome Reel, Mr Barnett having danced it only 4 or 5 times. It went out ca 40 years ago.



Mrs Barnett thought that the middle lady turned away & went towards the music. They both remembered that the middle couple "started" & were the last to return to their places. Mr Barnett thought they always returned to the same place & partner. It was in both strathspey & reel tempo.

[†] And definitely not the single shuffle

As the Bride's Reel, the 3rd couple were the Honest Folk, an elderly married couple related to the Bride. Mr Barnett had seen it thus used more often than Mrs Barnett, & he thought that the bride was the lady masked ~~in~~ in the figure overleaf.

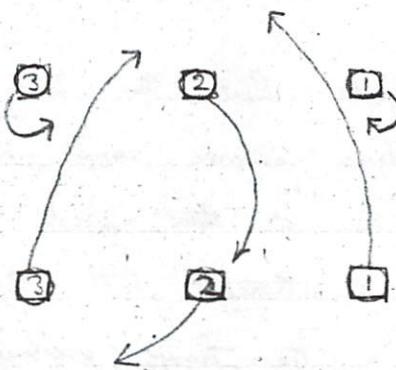
Mrs Barnett remembered seeing the Sixsome Reel danced when she was still at school, at age of 12. There was only one tempo, the tune being "Pop goes the Weasel."

Mr Barnett possessed a copy of the People's Ballroom Guide which he has lent to me.

Mr David Flett, The Dam, aged 67, also Mrs Flett, aged 67

Mrs Flett was very positive as to how the Sixsome Reel was performed - she demonstrated it on the table without any hesitation, using ~~the~~ teaspoons for the ladies, & knives for the men.

The figure was as shown below:



The dances first "run the reel", then "dance" on the spot, in Strathspey time.* This is repeated twice more, then repeated 3 times in reel time. The music then stopped & was slowed down to enable the ladies to change partners. In Strathspey time, the travelling step was step, close, step, hop, just swinging the foot through on the hop. The setting step was the Highland Schottische step. In quick time they used skip-change of step for travelling & pas de Basque for setting. There was some suggestion that they swong partners with ballroom hold instead of setting, but I think this should be discounted.

The men & ladies hooded, the men held up their arms & snapped fingers & thumbs, while the ladies held their skirts out to the side.

The change of partner was effected by 1st lady moving down one. The whole was then repeated, & then repeated.

* Mr. Fleet thought that they "danced" before running the reel.

- again after a further change of partner

When the dance was used as the Brides' Reel, the 1st couple [numbered as shown] were the B & G, 2nd couple the B.M & M, & 3rd couple the H.F. These last were the married couple nearest related to the bride [if such existed; if not, they were related to the groom]. They stood up with the other 4 at the actual wedding ceremony, & went with the other 4 when the bridal couple were "kirket". There was no "mutter" when the dance was used as the Brides' Reel. It was last done as the Brides' Reel ca 43 years ago.

The Threesome Reel was first done on the island at least 40 years ago.

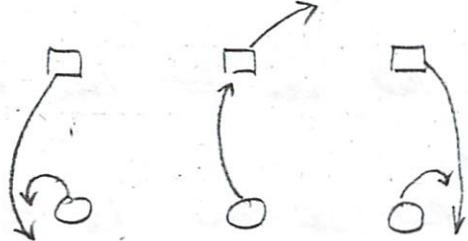
The Swine's Reel was done when Mr Fleet was young. It was the hussing dance, but I did not press for details.

* Some discussion between Mr & Mrs F about this, but they agreed finally.

Mr. Frederick Sutherland, Windbreak, aged ca. 60.

Mr. Sutherland's mother used to tell him that the only dance in the old days was the Sixsome Reel, but he had an impression that the Foursome Reel & the Polka came to the island before Mr. Smith arrived.

The Sixsome Reel was revived ca 1920 by the younger people on the island, they having learnt it from Mrs Barnett of Hungershonout & several older people [but not from Mrs Flett or Mrs Rosie]. It stayed in fashion only for a year or two. The positions were as shown, & they started to



run the reel as shown. Mr. S. has definite recollections of the men at the end turning away from the centre man. He was not certain of the path of the middle folk, but thought they moved as shown.

The dance was performed as follows. First run the reel,

& then "dance" opposite partners. Repeat this twice more, toll to Strathpey time, & then repeat three times, in reel time. The fiddler then stopped for a moment, & the men changed places, the right-hand man going to the other end, & the other two men moving over one place. He was quite certain that the men moved, because they had to dance all three "paths" each time they performed the dance.

When they revived the dance, the men put their hands on their partners' shoulders, but this was merely to help them, & it was not correct according to the older way.

William Mowat, a Flotta man, taught ca 1920 "Reel of Tulloch in a circle", this being "Hallachan sound. The house". He had learnt it on the mainland of Orkney. The Threesome Reel was in favour when Mr S. first went to dances in 1919.

Mr S. plays the fiddle, though somewhat out of practice. He played for some years with Danny Rose for the dances on the island. His tempo for Strathpeys was 43 bars per minute. The Highland Schottische was played

more slowly, at 40 bars per minute. Reels were played at 59 bars per minute.

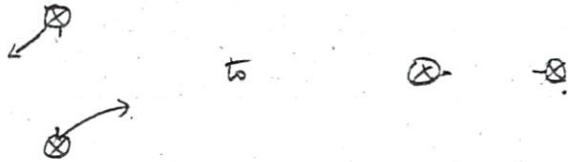
He ~~told~~^{Told} two stories which are worth recording. When he first began playing with Danny Rose, he once stumbled over a difficult part of a tune, & lost time. Afterwards Danny Rose commented on this, & told him never to lose time by trying to get in ~~in~~ a note - the dances wouldn't notice if you left it out. There are only three things which are important when playing for dancing, "Time, sound, and durd".

Danny Rose held his fiddle resting against the upper part of his chest, & not under his chin ~~in~~ in the modern manner. He taught a fiddler in Hoy, a large man with a fine beard, & this man held his fiddle in the same manner. On one occasion when Mr Sutherland was ~~playing~~ at a dance in Hoy where this man was playing, Mr Sutherland suggested to him that he might find the modern method of holding the fiddle under his chin an easier one. The bearded one ~~had~~ tried the suggestion, tucked his fiddle under his chin, &

away went the music. But at one point in the music the fiddler swept his bow across his string, & , catching part of his beard between bow & string, twisted the beard very firmly round his string. With a roar of pain & agony — new-fangled ways, he jerked the beard away, but a good deal of it was left behind!

Mr Sutherland had seen the Settler's dance done by two people. ~~It~~ It should be done by a lady & a gentleman, but the lady's part was usually taken by another man.

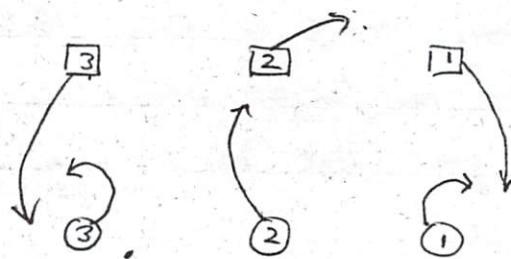
Start face to face, advance to meet each other, then retire. Then the man retires & the lady advances, then the man advances & the lady retires, then they turn from



& repeat the whole thing. Repeat this until back in original places. Time "Merrily Dance the Quakers" (I asked him if he thought this was it, & he said yes), & keep step to the front throughout.

Mrs Mowat, Seaview, aged ca 55

Mrs Mowat is Mr Fred Sutherland's sister. She remembers The Sixsome Reel as it was revived ca 1920.



She was quite definite that the middle couple started as shown, & that they were the last to regain their places. She was also quite definite that the 1st & 3rd men began by stepping inwards towards the centre lady, & thought that the 1st & 3rd ladies moved as shown.

They ran the reel & danced 3 times in 3-4 time, & 3 in reel time [a bit doubtful of this], & then the music stopped, when the men changed partners. She was not sure how the men changed.

Mrs Rosie & Mrs Flett were not present at the dance.

Mr Donald Sinclair

Had seen the Lissone Reel at a wedding in 1919.
He thought the ladies changed places. So also did
his wife, & also Mr George Barnett who moved off
the island to Colchester.

