

4 September 1955  
N. Ronaldsay, S. Ronaldsay etc.

Tuesday, Sept 20th.

(53)

Mr + Mrs Roy Scott, Schoolhouse, Rendall, Mainland of Orkney

~~Mr~~ Mr Scott<sup>†</sup> belonged to N. Ronaldsay, though he had lived on the mainland for the last 9 years. His father was very knowledgeable concerning old customs, & had a fine memory. He was very keen to see some of these old ways preserved, & had passed his knowledge on to his son.

Mr Scott was very familiar with the N. Ronaldsay "Axum" Reel. He had taught it to Mrs Scott, and she had taught it on N. Ronaldsay, effectively reviving it. It is still performed there, though probably once again in danger of disappearing. Mr Scott's son wrote the dance down, and they sent it to Miss Milligan in 1950. They received a most gracious reply - the dance was to be taught at St. Andrews, & ~~it~~ would be published in a forthcoming collection of traditional dances. Since then, they have heard nothing further. They have given me permission to publish the dance, and Mr Scott has agreed not to give anyone else that right for the next twelve months.

The dance is of the standard reel structure, that is to say, it begins with 8 bars setting ("dancing"), then 8 bars "running the reel", then 8 bars setting, & so on. The pattern of the reel is, however, most complicated. It also departs from the usual reel structure in the quick time.

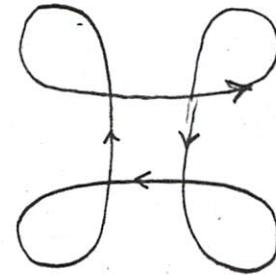
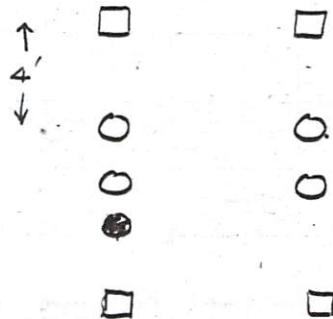
The dancers stand as shown in Fig 1.<sup>#</sup>, & the pattern of the

<sup>†</sup> Aged 50

<sup>#</sup> The ladies are at the corners of a square

[ Mr John D. MacKay, The Central Schoolhouse, Sanday, was teaching on N. Ronaldsay for 4 years, & remembers the Scots' reteaching this dance there, & has done it himself at weddings there - this by telephone ]

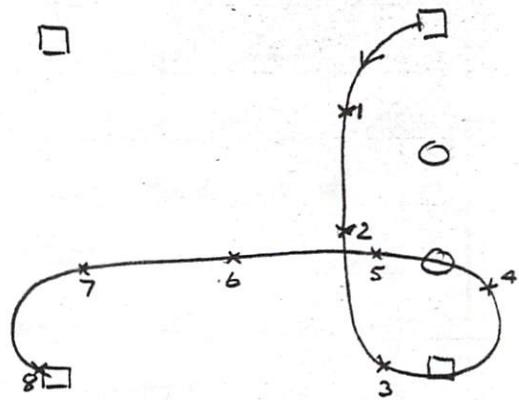
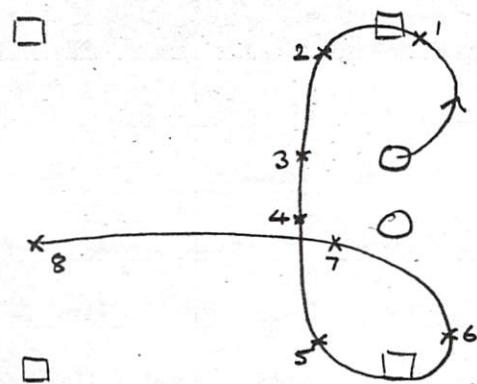
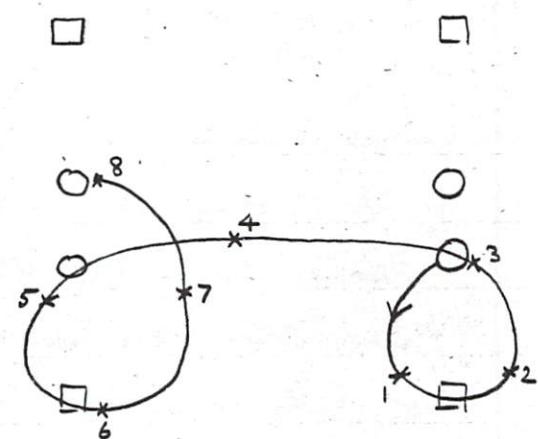
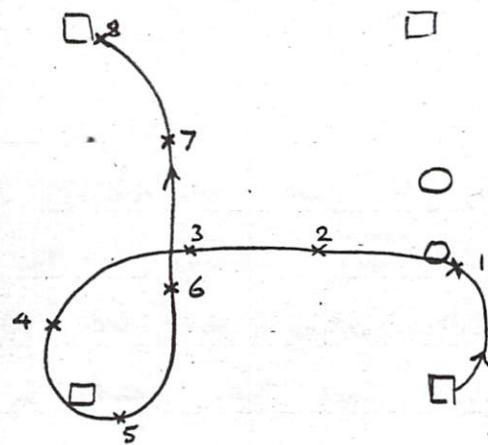
reel is that shown in Fig. 2. When going round the loops, each



dancer passes two others of the opposite sex. They have to vary the length of their steps to enable the other dancers to pass in front of them.

The four dancers in each row perform the same figures, the positions of the two sets of four being interchanged after each running of the reel. I give below the paths traced out by the four in the right-hand row, the crosses ~~numbered~~ <sup>numbered</sup> crosses denoting their positions at the end of ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> succeeding bars.

[This is ~~meant~~ the result of thought & experiment on paper. It is intended only to give the pattern, & variation either way is possible. The version printed in the Orkney Herald has a better description of the phrasing. The Scots have done the later version, & told it was "just like a North Ronaldsay wedding".]



The dance begins in strathspey time, the tempo being the normal 42-43 bars per minute. They ~~are~~ set to partners for 8 bars, then run the reel (8 bars), & then repeat this sequence of 16 bars as often as the fiddlers like. The dancers, or someone in the audience often calls "run it ~~out~~" when the fiddlers ~~are~~ gradually speeds up the music, ~~until~~ until it is at reel tempo or thereabouts, but still using the same strathspey time. During this part the dancers just keep moving round the figure, without any pause, making something like 4

complete circuits.

The setting step used in the first part was originally the Highland Schottische step, but, after Mackenzie taught dancing on the island, the Highland Ring steps were used. When setting, it was very rare to see hands raised - the men normally placed their hands on their hips (fishwives' way, not with backs of hands against body), while the ladies held their skirts out. The travelling step was just step, close, step, hop, with a "swing-through" on the hop [not up in front of the leg].

Mrs Scott said that the older dances used to make the figure curved - they kept very close to each other while passing, & they made the whole figure flow - they didn't seem to hop much.

Any strathspey tune could be used, but Calder Fair was a favourite [Doctor Doctor ?]

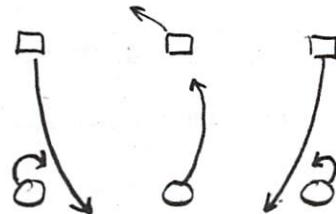
At a wedding, this was the last dance. It was performed first by 8 ladies. The bride & groom stood in the centre, back to back with their arms linked, while the 8 girls performed the dance. At some point during the "running it out", the fiddler suddenly stopped, when the bride & groom had to try to unlink their arms, turn & kiss each other, ~~but~~ whilst the 8 girls had to try to kiss the groom before they could do so. The dance was then repeated by 8 men, who had to try to kiss the bride.

in the same manner.

There was no special dress characteristic of the island, & ordinary clothes were worn, including Sunday shoes or boots.

In N. Ronaldsay, the Brides Reel was the Scotch Reel. It sometimes ended with "running it out" rather than alternate setting & setting, but there was no hard & fast rule.

The Sixone Reel was also performed on N. Ronaldsay, though it has not been performed for some years now. Ca 1925 some of the young people revived it from the memories of old people. The pattern of running the reel was as shown :-



The dancers change <sup>positions</sup> after each reel, ~~the~~ the paths of the two couples during the first reel being as shown [there is perhaps a



little doubt about this]. The dance is in fast time only [?], & it begins with setting [8 pas de Basque], then running the reel.

[8 bars], & so on.

Dances in use in N. Ronaldsay ca 1920 were Petronella, Flowers of Edinburgh, Roy O'Mae, Cumberland Reel, Step in the Willows, Quadrilles, Lancers, Highland Schottische, French minuet, Military two-step, Heel or toe polka, Hesitation waltz, Polka, 7-step Polka, Scotch Reel, Reel of Tulloch, Threesome (handie) reel. The Axum was done only at weddings, because at that time only old people knew it. The modern 8-some came in ca 1915

Mrs. Scott knew the Venus Polka from her young days in the Sandwich district of the mainland of Orkney. Stand with couples in two lines (A consists of a couple). All movements done with ballroom hold & (proper)

(A)      (B)      — polka step.

Bars

(C)	(B)	1-4	A & B' change places
(C)	(B')	5-8	B & A'
(D)	(D')	9-12	A & B' return to original places
		13-16	B & A'
		17-24	A & A', B & B' go <sup>once</sup> round each other in an anti-clockwise direction returning to original places
		25-32	A & B, A' & B' go $1\frac{1}{2}$ times round each other in an anti-clockwise direction ending in each other's place

(5)

Couples A & A' now repeat the dance with C & C'.

2nd Visit, Saturday, Sept 24/15

The following Highland fling was taught to Mr Scott by his father, who learnt it from a Mr Mackenzie in N. Ronaldsay ca 1882.

Bars 5-8 of each step are the mirror image of bars 1-4.

Step 1. As usual, save that both arms are raised for the Turns.

Step 2. Bar 1. (1) Spring on L, R in 2nd, (2) Hop on L, R in rear leg position, (3) Hop on L, R in 2nd, (4) Hop on L, R in front leg position.

Bar 2. ~ of bar 1,

Bar 3. Repeat bar 1.

Bar 4 Turn with L as in 1st step ~~~~~~~~~

Opposite hand to foot on bars 1-3, & both raised on bar 4.

Step 3. Bar 1. As Step 2.

Bar 2. (1) Drop on R foot in 5th position, at same time bringing L to rear leg position (2) Hop on R, retaining L in rear leg position (3) Bring L through front leg position, & drop on it in 5th position at same time bringing R to rear leg position, (4) Hop on L, retaining R in rear leg position.

Bar 3. ~ of bar 1

Bar 4 Turn with R? as in 1st step.

Opposite hand to foot on bars 1-3, & both raised on bar 4

Step 4. Bar 1. As 1st step

Bar 2. 4 backsteps.

Bar 3. ~ of bar 1.

Bar 4. Turn with R! as in 1st step.

Hands as in Steps 2,3.

Steps 5,8,10 Missing [Mr Scott's father had forgotten it]

Step 6 Bar 1. (1) Ronde R out through 2nd & place it crossed over L as shown . Then "ankle-rock", placing weight on R, & going over on the edge of the L, (2) the straight on L & on edge of R, (3) then weight on R & on edge of L, (4) Hop on R, & ronde L to 2nd low aerial pos".

Bars 2,3. ~ a repeat of bar 1.

Bar 4. Turn with L as in 1st step.

L hand up on bar 1, R on bar 2, L on bar 3, & both on bar 4

Step 7 Bar 1. (1) Spring on L, R in 2nd (2) Hop on L, R in rear leg position (3) Hop on L, R heel in a close 4th pos. , (4) Hop on L, R toe in the same place.

Bars 2,3. ~ a repeat of bar 1.

Bar 4. Turn with L as in 1st step

Hands as in Steps 2,3.

Step 9. Bar 1. (1) Spring on L, R in 2nd, (2) Hop on L, R in rear leg position (3) Hop on L, bring R through front leg position, & kick ~~backwards~~ forwards & downwards, aiming at a point about 15° in front of L toe, (4) ~~Repeat the~~ (4) Repeat the kick of (3)

Bar 2,3. ~ & repeat of bar 1.

Bar 4 Turn with L on m. — 1st step

Opposite hand to foot on bars 1-3, both raised on bar 4.

Step 11. Bars 1-4. (1) Spring on L & point R toe in close 2nd position (ca 6" from L heel), (2) Hop on L, R in rear leg position, (3) Hop on L, R in close 2nd pos', (4) Hop on L, R in rear leg position.

Bars 2-4. Repeat (3) & (4) of bar 1 6 times. On bars 1-4, two complete turns are made to the left. Both arms raised throughout

Step 12 Bar 1 As 1st step

Bars 2-4 Repeat (3) & (4) of bar 1 6 times, On bars 1-4 two complete turns are made to the left. Both hands raised throughout.

The Double backstep, + pas de Basque + balance were used as setting steps in the Scotch Reel in N. Ronaldsay.

In the absence of a fiddle, the women decided - "nothering" was the local word. Mr Scott knew this as a word for a lullaby with no definite words.

(62) Wednesday, Sept 21st.

Mr Yorsten, Kirkwall, aged 75

A native of Rousay, which he left 10 years ago. He had heard old people there speak of an 8-some or 8-couple reel. There was no sixsome reel, & no threesome (hankie) reel. He had heard of Bobbity Bowster, but not seen it. There had not been a dancing teacher there so far as he knew. When fiddlers were scarce, the women decided for the dancing. The Bridal reel was the 4-some.

Mr James Louttit, St Margaret's Hope, S. Ronaldsay, aged 72.

Not a very keen dancer, but remembers something of his young day when he was 9 or 10, he thought that <sup>almost</sup> the only dance was the 6-some Reel. In this the men sometimes put their hands on their partners' shoulders in order to guide them.

Another dance was the Lang Reel. This was Bobbity Bowster. At a wedding, the bride started it, & the convection was that ~~each~~ lady was taken home by the man whom she took up. The dance just broke up when all were on the floor. Just a walking step.

The first teacher on the island whom Mr L can remember was McDougal. He also taught the fiddle. He made several visits to the island. Clayton also came once.

McDougal taught the Highland Fling, Sword-dance, & Sailor Hampshire. These last two being taught privately.

(6)

Mrs Louttit, Sr Margaret Hope, S. Ronaldsay, aged 80

Some relative of the preceding. She thinks that polkas & schottisches were ~~done~~ done as well as the Sixsome Reel in her young days. She attended McDougall's classes, & he taught Polka, Polka Mazowka, Flower of Edinburgh, Petronella, Rory O'More, Queen Victoria CD, Glasgow Highlanders, Scotch-Reel, 8-some Reel.

In her young days the Bride's Reel was the 6-some, the 6 being B & G, BM & M, & HF. Both Mr Louttit & Mrs Louttit thought that in the 6-some the dancers returned to their original places after each reel, but Mrs L had a hazy recollection that there was also some change in in Hotta in the Bride's Reel.

Thursday, Sept 22nd:

Mrs David Wylie, The Cabin, Burry, aged 76.

A very keen dancer in her young days, but not much of a memory. A schoolmaster, Mr Summers, had taught dancing on the island just as a hobby, but most of the islanders learnt from each other.

In her young days the Sixsome Reel was going out, & she only danced it a few times. Not at all clear about its use as the Bride's Reel. But older folk always cried out for the 6-some Reel. The

The dances popular in her young days were ~~Six~~ Scotch Reel

(the most popular), Polka, Petronella, Flower of Edinburgh, Royal O'More, Triumph, Cumberland Reel (a "horse dance"), Strip the Willow, Reel of Tullibed Caucasian O, Pinne (the Pin Reel). She had not done either Queen Victoria or Glasgow Highlander (though had heard of the latter), nor had she done the 8-some Reel. She knew Bobbity Bowster by that name complete with the hankie & kissing.