

Mrs Joan Lawrenson, Brechin Hospital (4th visit).

Further questions in the light of further knowledge.

Question Can you tell us anything about the Auld Reel?

Answer "That is just the Bride's Reel. That is all it is."

Question Was the Bride's Reel the first dance at a wedding?

Answer "It is the last dance at the wedding".

Question So the Bride's Reel is the Auld Reel, is it?

Answer "Yes. I never heard of any other kind. There was the Bride's March, The Bride's Welcome Home, and the Bride's Reel."

Question Did you ever do the Auld Reel apart from the Bride's Reel.

Answer "No, no, never except at weddings. The Shetland Reel and Schottisches ... were done at ordinary dances".

Question When the Auld Reel was done, was it all women?

Answer "No. It was always men and women, one of each kind in every set".

Question Four couples?

Answer "Sometimes more".

Question How many couples were there in the Shetland Reel?

Answer "Just 3 couples".

Question But for the Auld Reel?

Answer "Just as many people as to go round".

Question What was the smallest number you could do it with?

Answer "2 pairs, or as many as you wanted".

Question What was the step?

Answer "It was just according to the music".

Question Was there a special step?

Answer "It was just according to what he was playing".

Question Was this the tune [here I sang Com Rigs]

Answer "I never heard you"

Question You said that in the Brides Reel you went first on one foot, then on the other - how?

Answer "You stepped first on one foot, then on the other".

Question Did you hop along [here I showed a hop]

Answer "No."

Question Did you do this [here I showed a 'step, hop']

Answer "Yes".

Question How long ago did you show the dance to Mr Wilson?

Answer "A good while ago".

Question Did you teach the Brides Reel to the Rural.

Answer No. They could see the steps - they were at weddings.

Question Can you remember the tune.

Answer "I cannot mind. I can't sing, I've lost my voice".

Question Had it a name?

Answer "The Brides' Reel".

Question Was it Arith's Rant?

Answer "There's be kist and etc.

"It was Kake and Knocked Com"

Question When did they pay the fiddler at a wedding.

Answer Not clear.

Question Did they sweep the bride?

Answer "I've never heard of that."

Question Have you heard of the Bride's Reel done by 8 women, and then by 8 men?

Answer "No, never saw it".

Question Was there a gunner on the way to the church?

Answer "No, only at home on the return".

Question Have you heard of a tail-sweep?

Answer "No."

Question But the Bride's Reel was the Auld Reel?

Answer "Yes".

Mrs Lawrenceson has a remarkable knowledge of old beliefs and customs. Her own memory extends about 55 years, and she has much information gleaned from her parents and others.

She was brought up in Firth of North Delting. Her people belonged to the United Free Presbyterian Church, and looked down on dancing as a low-class amusement. However, they saw no wrong in dancing at a wedding, because in the Bible there is mention of singing and dancing at the wedding at Cana of Galilee [St John ii, 1-11]. One could also dance at the return of a prodigal, but the set-up of dancing "for nae reason at all" was wrong. For this reason, Mrs Lawrenceson has danced only at weddings; she was never at a rant in her life. ("A rant was just a dance set up for no reason except to dance - that was considered low-class". Apparently this attitude to dancing was typical of the members of her church, not of the people in the Delting area as a whole.)

(1) We asked Mrs Lawrenceson to give us an account of a wedding in her district in her young days. The following refers to actual weddings which she attended in Mossbank, N. Delting, and in S. Delting, except where I have noted that the information is of an older period.

When the couple decided to marry, there was the spörin'. On the first Saturday, the would-be bridegroom went to the bride's house. He called the bride's father into the ben-end [i.e. the bedroom end], and asked permission to marry the daughter of the house. The would-be bridegroom carried a matchkin - about half a bottle - of the best spirits, usually brandy, and he and the girl's father took a drink from the same glass. Meanwhile, the girl and her mother would be

preparing tea, which was served in the ben end. The women of the house were then told the news, and they all had a drink from the spörin' bottle, all using the same glass - the loving cup.

On the following Saturday, the bridegroom and the best man went to the minister to ask for the wedding to be proclaimed. They then went to the bride's house, where had gathered all the Contract folk. All the young folk [Mrs Lawrenceson said 'old' first, then corrected herself] were there, and they had feasting and dancing until about 11 p.m.

The news of the wedding was proclaimed by the minister on the Sunday following the contract, and the wedding was usually on the following Thursday. The choice fell on Thursday because Thor had a special blessing for brides and bridegrooms. The guests met at the bride's house, the time of meeting depending on the distance of the house from the church. When all were gathered there, they marched to the church, led by the fiddler, playing the Bride's March<sup>†</sup>. There were also words to this march which were sung:

Noo man I have fader and mudder etc.

And follow the fate of a friendman's son.

[Mrs Lawrenceson has only been at three weddings where they marched, the first in 1907, the ~~—~~ last in 1915].

The order of precedence at a wedding was bride and groom, then female relations of the bride, then female relations of the groom, then male relations of the bride and groom, respectively.<sup>‡</sup> Thus the best maid was often a sister of the groom, and the best man was often a brother of the bride. In the actual procession to the church, the order was bride and best man first, then the bridesmaid and

<sup>†</sup> Tommy Anderson has the Deltin Bride's March. <sup>‡</sup> I may not have noted this correctly

then the married folk, and after that in order of precedence and age. But usually only the younger guests marched; the married folk stayed to prepare the feast.

After the ceremony, they reformed and marched home, with the fiddler leading, & the bride and bridegroom at the head. One of the essential tunes on the march home was 'Wood and married an' a', but other tunes could be used.

Several gunners (sometimes as many as 3) accompanied the procession back to the reception. They were armed with blunderbusses, which they filled with powder and paper wadding, and discharged into the air whenever they felt like it. Bits of burning paper descended on the procession, to add to the general merriment - "I mind o' us trying to keep the burning paper oot o' oor hair". There was yelling and laughing all the way:

In her district, the houses were fairly close together, and they would usually arrange to make the food in one house, eat in a second, and dance in a third - though they also sometimes danced in the barn.

[We asked her if they ever had a tail-sweeper in her time [this arose from the description of a wedding in Ursula Venables' book]. "Not in my time, but I remember my father talking of a tail-sweeper." What did the tail-sweeper do? "He had a long brush; he was a bit of a sweep - he was dressed in ordinary clothes. He swept the road alongside the procession. I mind my father telling me sic a night he had sweeping for his auntie. He had a brush made o' straw, wi' a long handle" [Apparently the job of sweeper was given to a young boy - here a favoured nephew. Mrs Lawrenceson's father would have been about 11 or 12 at the time of this wedding - he was born in 1862 and died in 1946. He was from West Sandwick in Yell, so that this account of the sweeping refers to that area.]

We asked if the guests were given bridescake. "Yes, in my time. But in my father and mother's time they made a huge oat-cake. How they kept them whole, I don't know, but they could make them 18" in diameter. When the bride crossed the threshold [on her return from the church], her mother broke [one of these oat-cakes, called] the bride's-scone over her head, and the bride's maidens scrambled for it. They picked it off the ground, and kept it and dreamt on it.<sup>2</sup> How did they dream? "They put it under their pillows - they were supposed to dream about the man they would marry".

We questioned Mrs Lawrenceson about the use of the word bridesmaidens here. Apparently all the unmarried girls present at a wedding in her young days were known as 'bridesmaidens'. The bride's personal attendant was distinguished by the title of the 'best maid'.

Mrs Lawrenceson has also heard (though from younger people, not from older people) that if a bridesmaid passed her piece of the bride's-scone through the bride's wedding ring three times, then the bridesmaid's dream would come true. But few dared to ask the bride to take her wedding ring off, for she was not supposed to do so.

To resume the story of the wedding: The tables are set when the bride arrives, and the feasting begins. There would be plenty of stewed mutton, and sometimes a calf would be killed to provide stewed veal. There would be a huge piece of boiled pork, served cold, and sometimes beef. "I mind an old woman talking of her grandfather's wedding; there were 5 calves killed, besides mutton and pork".

They also had numerous 'floor scones', 'floor bannocks', 'floor brownies', and

'oven brownies'. The 'oven brownies' were baked in the Dutch oven, and contained all the ingredients of the cakes we have today - currants, raisins, etc. The 'floor [flour] brownies' were baked on a brand-won, a flat steel plate on four short legs, which was placed on the hearth-stone, over a glowing peat that had stopped smoking.<sup>†</sup>

When everyone had their fill, the dancing commenced with the Bride's Reel, just an ordinary Shetland Reel performed by the usual 3 couples. Then followed general dancing.

We asked if the tail-sweeper did anything during the Bride's Reel. "My father said he had to be there ready to sweep when they started dancing! If he could find any dust in the room, even in the furthest corners, he had to sweep it among the bride's feet, for luck."

Were there gusseis? "Oh yes, the gusseis". Usually people who hadn't been invited. But if there was no-one about who hadn't been invited, some of the guests would go out & disguise themselves. Did the gusseis have a broom? "Yes, the gusseis carried a broom, and swept everything [in the room?] to the bride. They sometimes swept all the dirt outside through the door into the house." The sweeper [among the Gusseis?] was not known as a sweeper, but as a 'skekler', probably an old Norn word.

On the Saturday after the wedding, there was the 'hemfave' or 'fire-lighting' [cf. house-warming], when the newly-married couple entered their own home. This was attended by the elderly folk, each one bringing a present - something to set up house on. Here again, they spent the evening in dancing and drinking, though

<sup>†</sup> In the ordinary course of events, fish were cooked on the brand-won.

the hemfare was usually greater than the contract

We asked as a check - the contract was for the young people, the hemfare for the older people? "Yes."

I asked Mrs Lawrenceson for the source of her remark that Thursday was a good day for marrying because of Thor's blessing, ~~and~~ but she said that it was just something she had always known. She added that Wednesday was a bad day, since Odin had nothing to do with marriages. Saturday was a particularly dreadful day for a wedding, but one could marry on a Tuesday.

One final remark - many of the guests contributed food.

In Mr Lawrenceson's young days, weddings only lasted the one day.

(2) We then went on to ask Mrs Lawrenceson about dances. The Shetland Reel in her district was begun in alternate positions, even by the oldest people, and was first 'dance', then 'reel'. It was for 6 people.

We asked her about a Shetland Reel for 8. She told us that there was one, known as the Auld Eightsome, but not in her district. She thinks she may have heard Reid Tait mentioning it at a Folk Society meeting.

(3) Mrs Lawrenceson has heard, in her own district, of a dance called the Auld Reel. She cannot remember more than the name, & has no idea how it was danced.

(4) We asked if she had ever heard of separate Bride's and Bridgroom's Reels. She said not in her district, "but they have that at Cummingsburgh". With reference to men and women dancing separately, she said that "when a' the lasses were tired, they had a Ram Reel", with men only. But this was just the same Shetland Reel as usual.

(5) She then went on to say that "the Flugga was a Reel I was very taken with. That was in Collafirth about 1918; there were several weddings there at the time. They went through motions as if they were at a storm at sea. Like pulling ropes. And before you seen them do that, you seen them kicking up their foot." This kicking up the foot was a sort of "twirling step". But there was an old lady of about 80 present at the time, and she told Mrs Lawrenceson that there was no-one now who could do the Flugga properly.

... "They kept beautiful time. Then kept hauling on ropes".

Did they ever hold their partners? "No, they followed their partners all the time. But they took their partner's hands [both hands] and seemed to throw their partner in the air".

Both men and women danced The Flugga, in sets of 6. There was both 'reeling' and 'dancing' in it, in about the same proportion as in a Shetland Reel. They always reeled separately [i.e. following partners, without joining hands].

We tried to get some idea of the twisting step by demonstrating various steps. She definitely rejected both John Harold Johnson's step, and also an ordinary front-step. The nearest we could get was the swinging 'single shuffle' from Westmorland. [She said that Arthur Cooper, Church Lane, Berwick, could play the tune for the Flugga, and had danced it himself].

(6) On the same occasions she had seen a dance called Barley Honey. It was something the same as the Flugga, ~~but~~ but with different movements of the hands. It was similar in structure to a Shetland Reel.

(7) Cuddy? That was a bairn's dance. They sit on their hunkers, ~~and~~ with their hands clasped behind their knees, and jump forward and backward like a rabbit. There were words which were sung:

In the cuddy, out the cuddy.

And link awa m'lane, says cuddy.

A cuddy is a small kishie that you carry when fishing.

Mrs Lawrenceson's grandmother, who was from Fetlar, used to play cuddy with Mrs Lawrenceson when Mrs Lawrenceson was young. Another old lady in Dilling used to show it to Mrs Lawrenceson's son.

(8) No soles

(9) Never heard of a fool at a wedding

(10) 'Biggin' the milk' was a boy's game, building a human pyramid on one another's backs. Never heard of words to it.

68 St Olaf St.

Lovwick 31:10:59

Dear Dr. Fleet,

Thanks for your nice letter.  
It is good to know our little talk  
was helpful.

By-the-way I gave you  
a wrong word i.e. SKEKKER for  
the sweep at a wedding.

The correct word is SKIBLER.

Skekkler is a ginger dressed in a  
straw suit. This is the first form  
of clothing known in Shetland.

Hope you may be able to get  
this collected in your item.

I am sorry for the mistake the  
reason is we seldom mention  
these very old words and one  
is apt to forget.

If there is anything you'd  
like to ask me just send a note  
and let me know I'll be pleased  
to help if possible.

With kind regards to your  
book - Yours faithfully,  
K. Lawrence

Mrs Flora Hutchison, Easthouse, Fladdabister, aged 79.

Mrs Hutchison was born in Fladdabister, and went to Whalsay at the age of 19, as Nanny to Mrs Bruce of Symbister. She was married there to a Whalsay man, and returned to Fladdabister at the age of 38, when her husband died.

(1) The order of events at her wedding was as follows:

(i) Procession to the church, married folk first, then the best maid and bridegroom, then the best man and the bride, then all the guests in pairs.  
They walked to the church - and Mrs Hutchison quoted the usual verse  
"Noo man o' love ... .

(ii) The wedding ceremony. Then followed bridescake and wine at the Church

(iii) They marched back. As they arrived home, crushed oatmeal cake was thrown over them, just as confetti would be now.

(iv) Tea, then dinner.

(v) Dancing. The first dance was a Shetland Reel with the usual 6 people.

Question. Did they have Gussers in?

Answer "Yes."

Question. Did the gussers have sweeping brushes?

Answer "No. They were used at the Brides Reels. They had strew brushes"

Question Was that at the first dance?

Answer "No, that was just before midnight".

Question. What was the dance at midnight?

Answer. "One with 6 ladies." "Just six ladies did the Brides Reel. They danced and did the figure 8. They kept hold of each other, two and two, and just kept going round the figure 8".

Question. How did they hold?

Answer [Demonstration] Arms round waists, other hands held in front.

Question Did they 'dance' in this?

Answer "No."

Question Did they change partners?

Answer "No"

Question Who were the 6 ladies?

Answer, Bride, bridesmaid, married woman, and 3 of the bride's closest relations.

Question Did the men do it?

Answer No.

Question Did you have a sweep

Answer Yes. When she was the bride, Mrs Hutchinson was actually touched with the straw brushes

Question Was there a dance with 6 men, following the Bride's Reel.

Answer No.

At her wedding, her husband paid the fiddler.

Mrs Hutchinson never went to dances much after she was married.

(2) The Drunken Skipper. "6 Men danced that - they danced much the same as in a Shetland Reel. Then the fiddler played slow and soft, and they all fell down as if drunk. Then the fiddler played quickly and they all jumped up."

(3) Shaalds o' Foula She has no memories of this. Has never seen it.

Mrs Hutchinson's daughter, aged ca 50.

- (1) Remembers her grandmother saying that long ago they didn't have a bridescake. Each household that was invited would provide ~~a~~ oat-meal scones - the women-folks of the household baked so many, spread them with butter, and took them to the wedding.
- 2
- (2) Has heard of the Auld Reel, but that is all.
- (3) Has never heard of 4 couples in a Shetland Reel.
- (4) Bab at the Bowster One of the young men would throw down his hanky, while the fiddlers played a tune. The man would dance round the hanky, then take it up, and kiss a girl. And so on until they were in a big ring.

Mrs Robina Christie, Skibhoul, Cunninghamburgh, aged 79.

Also Mrs Robina Jamieson, daughter of Mrs Christie.

Mr McLeod had a quick conversation with Mrs Christie on Sept 20th when he was coming round with me. He mentioned the Bride's Reel to her, and ascertained that she knew a little about it. He did not, however, mention the Auld Reel, nor did he tell her that we would be coming to see her on the following day.

Mrs Christie danced very little, though her late husband had been a keen dancer. She did dance at weddings, though.

We asked her first about the order of events at a wedding. First they went to the church and back, then they had tea and the cake, and then they began to dance.

Question. What was the first dance?

Answer. "I thought the Bride's Reel was first".

Question. Was it the bride and groom?

Answer. "Yes, and the best folk and the married folk", also their nearest friends".

Question. It was 4 men and 4 ladies, then? Not necessarily, e.g. 2 6-somes.

Answer. "Yes; long ago, of course".

Question. Then Shetland Reels?

Answer. "Yes. The bulk of the dances were Shetland Reels".

Question. What came at the end?

Answer. "Bob at the Bowters".

She then went on: "I mind when my sister was married."

Question When was that?

Answer "I can't mind"

Question How old would you have been?

Answer "15 or 16. I'm now 79".

Question Was that your first wedding?

Answer "Yes. The first I can mind about".

Question How many people took part in the Brides Reel?

Answer "I thought that there were eight"

Question Have you ever heard of the Auld Reel?

Answer "Yes, I've heard of it".

Question What can you tell us about it?

Answer "Well, it was a funny reel. They hooked arms and danced round a figure 8"

Question How many people took part?

Answer "There were 8, I think".

Question In the Auld Reel, they hooked arms?

Answer "Yes."

Question Can you show us how?

Here she linked inside arms. Apparently the other arm was free to do anything it liked.

We also showed her the hold demonstrated by Mrs Margaret Smith, and also that used by the Cunningham demonstration set. She said "yes" to both.

At this, Mrs Jameson intervened.

Mrs Jameson "Was not the Auld Reel just the Bride's Reel? I thought it was heckling round" [i.e. hopping round]. Some calls the Bride's Reel the Auld Reel. I think they are both the same."

F & F.R. Where does the hop come from?

Mrs Jameson. "I learnt it at a Rural [W.R.I] Rally. Miss Lawrenceson, who is now in the hospital showed this. She showed us the Bride's Reel, and I think the Auld Reel is just the same. You stand just 2 and 2. Miss Lawrenceson showed it."

F.R. There asked for some explanation of the 2 and 2.

Mrs Jameson "You stand in the corners of a square. The first comes do it, then the second comes do it, then all four comes do it"

F.R. asked for further explanations here. Mrs Jameson became somewhat confused, and her only suggestion was that two diagonally opposite couples reeled with one of the other two.

We then turned back to Mrs Christie.

F & F.R. Did you ever see the Reel taught by Miss Lawrenceson?

Mrs Christie "No"

F & F.R. Have you seen the Bride's Reel as it has been exhibited in recent years?

Mrs Christie ~~No~~ "No".

F & F.R. Do you remember heckling?

Mrs Christie "Yes - I did it, but I had to be guided round"

F & F.R. In the Auld Reel, did you ever let go and follow round behind your partner?

Mrs Christie "I can't mind".

F & F.R. to Mrs Jamieson. Did you learn it from Miss Lawrence exactly as done at present?

Mrs Jamieson "Yes, just as done now". They did it that way in the Auld Reel".

F & F.R. to Mrs Christie. Was the Auld Reel done at ordinary dances?

Mrs Christie "I never was at an ordinary dance".

F & F.R. So you saw it only at weddings?

Mrs Christie "Yes".

F & F.R. to Mrs Jamieson. You did hop?

Mrs Jamieson "Yes"

F & F.R. It was twining?

Mrs Jamieson "Yes"

F & F.R. to Mrs Christie. Did you hop, too?

Mrs Christie "Yes"

F & F.R. Did you change feet?

Mrs Christie "You could, but you shouldn't".

F & F.R. Have you ever heard of someone sweeping at a wedding?

Mrs Christie "No".

Then she added. "No awful many weddings I went to. Its long since they all stopped" [i.e. all the old customs]

Mrs Jamieson The first dance now is the Grand March and Quadrilles now

F & F.R. to Mrs J. When you learned the Bride's Reel in the Rural, was it all women?

Mrs Jamieson "Yes".

F & F.R. to Mrs Christie. When you saw the ~~Bride~~ Reel, was it mixed couples?

Mrs Christie "Yes".

F & F.R. It was the first dance?

Mrs Christie "Yes".

F & F.R. Was the Auld Reel separate?

Mrs Christie "Yes. It was done when it was asked for".

F & F.R. Was it men and women?

Mrs Christie "Yes"

F & F.R. How long ago did you last see it?

Mrs Christie [After some calculations] 1903.

F & F.R. You have a daughter who was married 15 years ago?

Mrs Christie Yes

F & F.R. We have heard that Joan Jameson & some others did the Auld Reel at this wedding. Did you see it?

Mrs Christie I didn't see it.

Mrs Jameson [I am not sure what her reply was. In our notes, we have that she saw it, and it was the same as is done now]

F & F.R. But it is not done now with heckling. Did you do it [i.e. heckling] at the Women's Rural?

Mrs Jameson "Yes, the whole time. Last time it was done here, my daughter was in it, and they hopped all the time. They had just about had it when they finished".

F & F.R. to Mrs Christie. Could you tell us how they paid the fiddler at a wedding.

Mrs Christie They took round a hat to collect from the men.

F & F.R. What time in the evening?

Mrs Christie "I'm sure I couldnae just say"

F & F.R. Was there a special time for the Auld Reel?

Mrs Christie "I cannae mind".

Mrs Jamieson Tommy Anderson has the time

[Here I dealed Com Rigs]

Mrs Jamieson "Yes, that".

F & F.R. Have you seen the Rural do the Brides Reel recently, with the turns in the middle of the reels?

Mrs Jamieson "Yes."

F & F.R. When you learn it, did all 8 dance all the time?

Mrs Jamieson "Yes".

F & F.R. They started in a square?

Mrs Jamieson "Yes".

F & F.R. First comes started, & then the second?

Mrs Jamieson "Yes".

Then she added "The last time it was done here was for Picture Post, about 4 years ago.

Mrs Margaret Smith, Arith, Cunningsburgh (2nd visit).

Much general conversation. Then:

Question When you were speaking to me yesterday, you said you saw the Auld Reel done on the platform in the hall at Cunningsburgh. Is this right?

Answer "Oh, that was up in the hall here. But they didn't dance on the one foot"

Question Who danced it?

Answer "4 Men and 4 ladies".

Question More than 4 years ago. Say within the last 10 years?

Answer "Yes, yes".

Question And that was the Auld Reel?

Answer "They reeled it exactly as we did, but they didn't dance on one foot".

Question Did they call it the Auld Reel?

Answer "Yes".

Question When you danced on one foot, did you change feet?

Answer "Yes. The man changed his foot, and we changed the other one".

Question Did you go once completely round to your place on one foot, or did you go twice?

Answer "Twice. You could go twice — we were young then".

Question You did this with 4 couples?

Answer "Yes".

Question How did you stand?

Answer "On the corners of a square".

Question Did you all start off together?

Answer "Yes".

Question. Did you ever go to dances apart from weddings?

Answer "Yes; every fortnight to a house in South Cumnock".

Question Why that house?

Answer "Because it was the biggest house that was there".

Question Did you have to pay?

Answer "The boys did; we didn't. They [the boys] provided the food".

Question Did you do the Auld Reel at ordinary dances?

Answer "Yes".

Question It was just one of the dances that was done?

Answer "Yes".

Question What was the Bride's Reel in your days?

Answer "Just danced like a Shetland Reel. Could be 6 pairs or 3 pairs."

Question Have you any recollection of having heard your mother & father speak of the Bride's Reel?

Answer "No".

Question Have you ever heard of a Bridegroom's Reel?

Answer "No".

Question How did you pay the fiddlers at a wedding?

Answer "Either the best man or the married man announced after supper that 'the fiddler's money would be taken up now', and would go round with a hat".

At this stage, I described the Auld Reel as we had gathered it from her. She agreed roughly with my description, which involved turns in the middle similar to those of the demonstration version. Then:

- Question Did you ever let go your partner and follow her?  
 Answer "No. Never".
- Question Did you sometimes go through the figure 8 without turning in the middle?  
 Answer "Yes, you could do if you wanted to".
- Question You never let go of your partner and followed behind them?  
 Answer "No".
- Question Could you put in an extra turn at any time, and wherever you were?  
 Answer "Yes, wherever you liked".
- Question Wouldn't this confuse the others?  
 Answer "No".
- Question But what did they do?  
 Answer "They just danced on".
- Question Something about colliding, which I didn't get down  
 Answer "You just nekked backwards if you were coming close to each other".
- Question Then you just hopped back together?  
 Answer "Yes".
- Question You never let go of your partner? As in the Shetland Reel?  
 Answer "No. Its not like the Shetland Reel at all".
- Question Not even a bit?  
 Answer "No".
- Question Can you remember the tunes?  
 Answer "No".
- Question Was Corn Rig's one?  
 Answer This was not clear. She could remember the titles of the tunes in the old days. These were 'Abraunt the Deeks o' Voe', and 'Napoleon's

'March to Moscow'. She did not know of a tune called The Auld Reel.

Question Have you heard of Aith's Reel?

Answer "Yes".

Question Did they ever call for that tune for The Auld Reel?

Answer "I can't remember that".

Mrs Smith can't remember either if Kale and Knocket corn was used.

She has never heard of a sweeper or sweeping at weddings.

(Elizabeth)

Mrs T Smith, Athsetter, Cuningsburgh, aged 89.

Very deaf, so that communication was difficult. As far as possible, the following is verbatim, but her daughter had to translate my questions into dialect in order that they should be understood.

Question Can you tell us anything about the Bride's Reel?

Answer Merely an indication that she knew what we were talking about

Question How many people took part.

Answer "4 men & 4 women. They called it The Eightome"

Question Did they no' call it the Bride's Reel?

Answer "Yes. But they called it also The Eightome Reel".

Question Did they also call it the Auld Reel?

Answer "No".

Question Was the Bride's Reel the same as a Shetland Reel?

Answer "Yes". Apparently there was definitely a figure 8. Then there was something about dancing opposite one another, and then doing the Bride's Reel.

Question Did the lady go first & her partner follow her in the reel.

Answer Yes.

There was really awful confusion at this point. We tried a different tack, and asked about the Auld Reel.

Question How many took part?

Answer "8. Four men and four women."

Question Did they hold on to one another?

Answer "They danced on the floor" (!)

Question In the Auld Reel, did they just do the figure 8?

Answer "Yes"

Question Did they no dance a little? Did they do the figure 8?

Answer "Yes. They just kept doing the figure 8"

Question Was the Auld Reel the same as the Bride's Reel?

Answer "Much the same".

There followed some more confusion as to whether they held on to partners or not. We couldn't get a ~~real~~ clear reply either way.

We then asked if she had ever seen 8 Women, and then 8 Men dancing together at a wedding. At first she misunderstood the question. When the penny dropped - when she grasped that we meant separate dances - she then thought that she did remember such an event. It was at the wedding of Barbara Williamson of Gord and John Jameson of Arthscott. She was just left school at the time, and was probably about 15 or 16.

Thomas W Thomson, Swinister, Sandwich, aged 85.

Mr Thomson was a very keen dancer in his young days. He was, however, rather over-eager to convince us that he had been a good dancer, and we felt that this might have led him to try to pretend to knowledge which he did not possess. The following notes, therefore, are not wholly trustworthy.

Question. What dances did you do in your young days?

Answer. "Shetland Reel, Schottische, Reel of Tulloch, Scotch Reel".

Question Polka, Lancers, Quadrilles?

Answer Not in his young days.

Question Did you do a dance called the Auld Reel, or the Muckle Reel?

Answer No.

Question How many took part in a Shetland Reel.

Answer 8, arranged 4 on each side, alternate positions.

Question How is the Shetland Reel done? Did you dance opposite your partner?

Answer "You danced opposite your partner, then you danced in a zig-zag round and round".

Question When you were going round, did you hold hands, or follow behind your partner?

Answer "Follow behind. In a zig-zag way, so that when it finished you were right where it began".

Question Can you remember a dance in which you held your partner and danced a continuous figure 8?

Answer "That's the Schottische".

- Question      Repeated
- Answer      "I never saw that - that would be reelsing all the time. I never saw that".
- Question      What was the Bride's Reel?
- Answer      Couldn't remember.
- Question      What was the first dance at a wedding?
- Answer      "The first dance was the Bride's Reel"
- Question      Was it a Shetland Reel, or was it a special dance?
- Answer      "A special dance. The reel was the maist o'it [and then something I didn't manage to get down]
- Question      How many took part in it?
- Answer      "Oh, 10 people were in it".
- Question      Was the Bride's Reel a Shetland Reel, or was it a special dance?
- Answer      "It was just a certain dance that was the Bride's Reel. The people that danced the Bride's Reel were friends o' the bride".
- Question      Men and women?
- Answer      "Yes".
- Question      In the Bride's Reel, how did you stand to begin?
- Answer      You stood in a long line [Here he apparently wanted a single line, alternately man & woman facing in pairs]
- After some general conversation, we repeated the last question.
- Answer      "You stood in a long line. Men on one side, girls on the other. Ye weren't mixed like a Shetland Reel."
- Question      Did they hold hands with partners?
- Answer      No.

Question Did they hold their partners round the waist?

Answer "No"

Question Did they dance a figure 8?

Answer "Maybe no a figure 8, but they reeled. [Something I couldn't get].

Once they began to reel. The most o' it was reeling. It was just  
"a mixer"

Then, from a general conversation, I noted:

"It was friends of the bride that danced the Brides Reels"

Question Did you say Brides Reels?

Answer "It was called 'the Bride's Reels'".

*My step, not his*

Question Were there Bridegroom's Reels?

Answer "No".

Question What was the last dance at a wedding before they went to bed?

Answer "It just depended"

Question Do you remember Gusuers at a wedding?

Answer "Yes"

Question What did they do?

Answer "Came in and joined the company"

Question Did they bring brooms?

Answer "No"

Question In the Bride's Reel, did they dance opposite their partners?

Answer "Well, yes, a little. But it was practically reeling all the time".

Question Was the reel just as in the Shetland Reel, or did they hold hands?

Answer "The men followed their partners. They did not hold hands".

A Scotch fellow who was here for the curing taught he and some friends the dance Strip the Willow, ca 55-60 years ago.

Another Scotsman here for the fishing danced a sword dance - at weddings after Mr Thomson was married (at so after 1905).

He did not dance either the Tonla Shealds or the Tonla Reel in his young days - he was quite old when he first heard of them. He was under the impression that they were separate dances [or tunes?].

Miss Barbara Halcrow, Punton, Cuningsburgh, aged 76

I have recorded the complete conversation as far as possible. A good source.

Question. Can you tell us about the Bride's Reel?

Answer "I think it was a dance like 8 just round"

Question How many people took part in it?

Answer "There would be 8. They just danced the figure 8 as far as I can remember"

Question Did they hold on to each other, or go separately?

Answer "No. There would be two, holding on".

Question Two?

Answer "Yes. There would be two hand in hand, lady and gentleman".

Question When did it take place during the wedding?

Answer "I think it was just when the wedding was finishing. I think it was the last dance".

We then asked Miss Halcrow who took part in it. There were the newly married couple, the best folk, and the married folk, and two people, man and woman, who were the nearest relatives of the bride and groom.

We then went on to ask Miss Halcrow about the step. She was not certain on this point, but thought it was a 'step, hop' rather than a hop.

Question Did they separate into two lines and dance opposite each other?

Answer "No. I don't think so"

Question What tune did the fiddlers play for it?

Answer Couldn't remember.

We then asked about the Shetland Reel. This was for 6, and she thought they began in alternate positions.

Question. In the Shetland Reel, the man followed behind his partner in the figure 8. In the Bride's Reel, you said that they held on to each other. Did you ever go in front of your partner for a while in the Bride's Reel in the figure 8?

Answer "Not as far as I can remember".

Question Have you heard of an Auld Reel?

Answer "That would just be the old Shetland Reel"

Question Who took part in the Bride's Reel?

Answer "As far as I can remember, it was the last dance at a wedding." The people in it were the obvious 6, and "anyone as was next to them".

Question Have you heard of the Bride's Reel done by 8 women?

Answer "No. But I'll tell you what I have heard of. I have heard of the Bride's Reels being done with the bride and bridesmaid maybe being together". My sister, not her.

Question Who else would make up the rest of the 8?

Answer She didn't know, and clearly tried to apply logic. Her answer was not worth recording.

Question How do you know this?

Answer I'll tell you what I remember about this. When I was about 12, I heard a bridesmaid talking about the wedding she had just taken part in. She didn't believe in dancing, and said "I didn't dance", and then went on to name another girl who had taken part in the Bride's Reel and danced with the bride. But it is a long time since they stopped the Bride's Reels

"as far as I know."

Question      How long is it since you saw the Bride's Reel danced

Answer      "Over sixty years"

Question      Why do you call it the Bride's Reels?

Answer      Effectively none.

We questioned again whether it was the last dance. She was quite certain it was. We also questioned whether she remembered the people following their partners at any time in the figure 8, but she thought they didn't.

Question.    Do you recall any variation in the figure 8? Did any couple just turn round by themselves in the middle of the figure 8? [Here F.R. demonstrated what he meant.]

Answer      No recollection.

Mrs Ann Halcrow, Quie, Cummingsburgh, aged ~~74~~ 74.

Question. Can you tell us about the Bride's Reel.

Answer "It was before my time that the Bride's Reel was used. The Bride's Reel was danced at weddings before my time. Then it was sort of renewed at a Rural a good long time ago.

Question Did you ever see it done at a wedding?

Answer "No. But it might have been done and I've not seen it".

Question Have you heard your parents speak of it?

Answer "Oh yes".

Question Have you heard of the Auld Reel?

Answer "The Auld Reel and the Bride's Reel. I believe it was danced much the same [as the Bride's Reel], but it was men and women."

Question Was the Auld Reel done with just women?

Answer "I think it was done with pairs". They just called it the Bride's Reel and the Auld Reel".

Mrs Halcrow has not seen either the Bride's Reel or the Auld Reel in her younger days. She was not at many weddings.

At her own wedding, they had about 40 guests. Hers was one of three weddings each a week apart, and a man who lived nearby, and who was related to two of the contracting ~~pairs~~<sup>pairs</sup>, took down the partitions in his house and allowed the dancing to be held there.

They just danced there - They cooked and had meals in the bride's house in each case.

Mrs Laura Malcolmson, Westlea, Cunningsburgh (2nd visit).

A very hurried visit, for she was on the point of going out.

We asked her first about the way in which ~~the~~ Miss Lawrenceson taught the Bride's Reel to the W.R.I. when the dance was first revived about 1928. In particular, were the Turns so regularly placed in the original? Mrs Malcolmson said at once that in the original the turns were not so regularly placed. When Miss Lawrenceson taught them the dance in the W.R.I., she told them that in the original the turns were put in whenever the dancers pleased, and were more frequent than in the revived version. "When they really got going, they turned oftener" [or words to this effect]. Miss Lawrenceson actually advised them to do the Turns, two couples at a time, for the effect of neatness on a concert platform, and after some experiment, the W.R.I. evolved the form which we saw on the 15th. Mrs Malcolmson also went on to say that she meant to tell us this, but in the bustle of packing up after the exhibition, it went out of her mind.

We then asked her about the reel in which the women follow one another. This was quite definitely in the version taught by Miss Lawrenceson.

We next asked about the step shown to us previously. This, too, had come from Miss Lawrenceson.

We then asked about the Auld Reel. Apparently the Auld Reel was the Bridegroom's Reel ("The Men's Reel"), and in that they hopped. She reminded us that she had said the men "nae hoppit it".

She knew also that the Auld Reel could be done as an ordinary social dance with both men and women in it. The following reel was definitely in The Men's Reel [and so, presumably, in the Auld Reel]

Miss Lawrence told the W.R.I. of the dances use in the Brides Reel and the Bridegroom's Reel, but Mrs Malcolmson also knew something of this from her mother and father.

Mr Jamison, Mail, Cunningburgh, aged ca 70

Mr and Mrs Peter Smith, Mail, Cunningburgh, aged ca 70

They had no information on either the Brides Reel or the Auld Reel.

Mr and Mrs Thomas Moar, Northouse, Wester Sheld (2nd visit).

We asked them about the dance of Auld Reel type. Questions & answers not verbatim  
 Question. Was there a dance in which they reeled continuously?

Answer Yes.

Question Did they hold each other, or follow one behind the other?

Answer Held each other.

Question [as a check] In the Shetland Reel, did they hold each other, or follow?

Answer Follow, the man behind the woman.

We also asked about the 8-Man's Reel. They were quite certain that there were 4 men on one side, 4 ladies on the other. Mr Moar was now quite certain that they just danced and ran the figure 8. But when I questioned whether it was identical with two cross-hand four-somes, I thought Mrs Moar had some doubt about this. Mr Moar, however, remained absolutely unshaken in his assertion that it contained a figure 8.

Tommy Anderson (final visit on our last night)

We told him of the results of our search. He added one bit of information:

- (1) We had heard that the older people insisted on the convention that the top man in a Shetland Reel had their backs to the fiddler.

Additional information:

- (2) The Shetland Reel was never danced to a  $\frac{6}{8}$  or a dotted hemippe, only to an undotted hemippe and to a reel.
- (3) At a change of tune, the fiddler gave notice of this by working in a double reeling turn [How? By repeating the last part of the previous tune?]. In Ssha Ness, the older people would shout "Dan she wasters" [there she wastes] when the change came.
- (4) When there was a death in a house, there was no fiddling in that house for anything up to three years. Moreover, in any house where there was fiddling going on, the fiddling was immediately stopped for the evening if anyone came in who had a recent bereavement — unless they asked specifically for it to continue.

John Graham (final visit on our last night)

We told him of our results. He added one bit of information — that "to beat the Hugga" means to beat oneself with one's arms in order to restore circulation in cold weather. This might explain some of the hand movements seen by Mrs Lawrenceson in the Hugga Reel.

[An alternative expression is 'to beat the scarf' — from the scarf, or cormorant, which beats its wings like this].

Look up Jacobsen's Dialect Dictionary to see what it says on all these things.

The Rev. A.B.A. Wilson, Torryburn Manse, Torryburn, Fife.

Mr Wilson was the person responsible for the more recent of the two renewals of the Brides Reel in Cunningsburgh. He actually denies this, and says that his sole contribution to the story was to collect the tune from Joan Lawrenceson.

When he went to Cunningsburgh, he heard of this dance, and learnt that there was only one person who had the tune - Miss Lawrenceson. He therefore went along to her with his fiddle, and noted the tune from her singing. It was called "Black and brown", and may, or may not, have been related to the other Auld Reels. He has promised to send it to Frank.

When he collected it, he did send a copy to Reid Tait, who presumably still has it.

The only item of information about the dance he can give us is that Miss Lawrenceson used the word "hent" when talking of the step [He wasn't sure of the word. I tried both 'hekkle' and 'hent', and he was certain that it was 'hent'.]

I attach an account of Mr Wilson's wedding reception, at which the Brides Reel was performed.

Moved in August 1960 to  
St Aubyn's School  
Howden Court  
Tiverton  
Devon.

## WEDDING RECEPTION OF CUNNINGSBURGH MINISTER.

### SHETLAND AND ORIGINAL MUSIC.

A very entertaining and interesting evening was spent by the people of Cunningsburgh on Wednesday, January 10th, at the Cunningsburgh Public Hall, when a reception and dance was held to celebrate the homecoming of the Rev. A. Barclay Wilson, M.A., Minister of the Church, and his bride, who have recently returned to Shetland after their marriage in the south. Mr and Mrs Wilson were host and hostess, and elaborate preparations had been made both by them and their guests, who totalled 200.

The hall was packed with people, not only from Cunningsburgh, but from the surrounding districts, many of whom had walked three or four miles to be present on this occasion. One of the highlights of the evening was the performance of a few members of the Shetland Concert party who journeyed to Cunningsburgh to perform some of the Shetland folk-tunes sung at the concert in Lerwick a few weeks previously. Mr J. R. S. Clark, M.A., was in charge of the party, which included Miss Ethel M. Reid-Tait, accompanist, Miss Hilary M. Campbell, soprano, Mr T. Pottinger, tenor, and Mr Wm. Sandison, fiddler.

After the Rev. Mr and Mrs Wilson had entered the hall, the latter looking very charming in her Slavonic peasant's wedding dress, an excellent tea was served by the ladies, followed by the cutting of a tier of the wedding cake, which had been sent for this occasion to Shetland. More gifts were presented to the bride, including donations of cash amounting to £28. After speeches were made by Rev. Mr Wilson, and Mrs Wilson, the cake was passed round the large company. The hall was then cleared for the games, which came first in a large and varied programme. These games, organised especially for the children, were in the very capable hands of Mr and Mrs Wilson, and many grown-ups joined in with enthusiasm quite equal to that of the children. The games continued for almost two hours, creating just the right atmosphere for the first part of the evening.

The entertainment then followed, starting with the Cunningsburgh Dance Team demonstrating the very pretty Bride's Reel, which was danced with all the grace and beauty it requires. The ladies were dressed in their lovely frocks dating from 50 to 160 years old, and they did indeed make a pretty picture in the quaint traditional dance. An unearthly uproar followed when there crashed into the room a wild team of guizers, two of them old-time "skekklers," whose dancing to a local fiddler's playing led to Shetland dancing for all, in which the minister and his bride gladly took part.

A rest was provided for all, when the first item of the musical entertainment was introduced. Mr Wilson made a neat speech welcoming the visitors from Lerwick, mentioning that he was sure the company would enjoy the many fine folk-songs which were to be presented for the first time in this district. Mr Tom Pottinger opened with a very comical song, *Da Bressa Lighthouse*, sung in his inimitable manner, which was heartily encored. Mr Sandison followed with a fine selection of Shetland reels played in the true Shetland way. Miss Campbell's first song was the *Bressay Cradle*

Song, which also delighted the audience, and was well received. The Cunningsburgh dance Team, including Mr Pottinger, demonstrated the traditional Shetland Reel, followed by another song from Mr Pottinger, where the audience joined in each chorus. This was also encored. These two songs, "Helyinagro," and 'Da Knowe o' da Firt,' were, words and melodies, by Mrs Horace Saxby, accompaniments composed and played by Miss Reid Tait. Miss Campbell then sang the *Bressay Lullaby*. This was followed by the 'Pin Reel,' danced by the younger members of the Dance Team. It may be mentioned that the dancing was accompanied by two local fiddlers, making the scene a real 'Shetland Nicht.' They were John Irvine, Hamar, Gord, Cunningsburgh, and John Duncan Setter, Sandwick. Wm. Smith, jnr., Meal, Cunningsburgh, sang several dialect songs, and there were also "twa peerie guizers" dressed to represent an auld Shetland couple.

Tea was then served towards the end of the party, and the Rev. Mr Wilson again thanked the Lerwick Party for contributing so much to this memorable evening, and also to the people of Cunningsburgh for the way in which they had welcomed his wife to their community. Mrs Wilson made a very charming speech, in which she also said how much she had enjoyed the musical entertainment provided, especially when she was so very interested in the folk music of Shetland, and asked the company to remember those ladies who had made and served the teas, and to everyone who made this evening so enjoyable for young and old alike. She was indeed proud to become a member of the village of Cunningsburgh.

### BRIDE AND BRIDEGROOM'S COMPOSITIONS.

Two very lovely Modal Carols, one each composed by the bride and bridegroom, were among carols sung by the parish church choir during the evening. The four-part harmony in the bride's carol is by Mr Albert A. Gregory, Mus. Bac., F.R.A.M., and the similar harmony in Mr Wilson's carol is by Dr Melville Cook, well-known to Lerwick music lovers. In this more difficult but equally beautiful composition the male parts did great justice to themselves.

The function continued with more dancing, till 1 a.m., when it came to a close with carols and prayers.

We feel sure that the Rev. Mr and Mrs Wilson's many friends will wish them every happiness in their new life, and express the hope that they may be many years here in Shetland.

### THREE BRIDES KIRKENED TOGETHER.

On Sunday, January 14th, in Cunningsburgh Parish Church, there was an unusual kirknin' service marked by the presence of three brides—Mrs Adamson (formerly Miss Joey Halcrow), Mrs Smith (formerly Miss Ella Halcrow), and Mrs Wilson (formerly Miss Margaret Ella)—this being the first time for 34 years that three brides had been present together on kirknin' Sunday. The service was a special one, with organ music, hymns, scripture readings, prayers and sermon appropriate to the occasion.

Sep: 29<sup>th</sup> 1859.  
Newmills 293.

Torryburn Manse.  
Nr. Dunfermline.  
Fife.

Dear Dr. Fleet,

I enclose a copy of the promised melody. I see that my original hasty note had brackets around the first line. Since I made the note about sixteen years ago, & have not thought much about the Tune since that time, I can not tell you what is meant by the bracket, & am sorry. I have however retained the bracket in my staff copy, in case it may convey a meaning to you & your colleague as experts.

I have sent to Mr. Rhodes a small booklet

of a drawing.

The booklet is entitled "Programme of Shetland Folk Music & Dances, Tocca Hall Lerwick. Wed: 6<sup>th</sup> Dec & Thurs: 7<sup>th</sup> Dec: 1944 at 8.0.P.M." The Programme is obviously annotated & contains a note on the Bride's Reel in accordance with what I was told. I would add to the half page commentary the observation that what was danced at our own wedding reception in 1945, & was called "The Bride's Reel" did not appear to be what is generally understood by the word dance. A procession of young women (dressed in fine old dresses held hands & moved with a lifting step. The line of procession ran crossed the village hall

Rhodes  
a band  
costume  
& roses  
with a  
(very)  
ribbons.  
Top;  
or fees

see for  
you.  
Lorraine

II

The drawing sent to Mr. Rhodes is of a "skudler" or leader of a band of washers or "skekklars": costume of straw worn on top of dark trousers & white shirt: Face veiled with white napkin: Straw <sup>crown</sup> crown (very high & elaborate) with coloured ribbons: Bodice of straw pattorned at top: Skirt. Ribbons or macassars on feet. (Costume for a man.)

I am sorry to say that we forgot to show the costume to you. If you should ever like to borrow it, we would send it to you.

Alternatively you may like to come  
to us again. We should be  
delighted to see you & Mr. Rhodes  
again.

We had two left on from  
Shetland this morning. Though they  
have rejoiced in a good harvest, many  
Shetlanders are unhappy at the church  
- unions necessitated by an acute  
shortage of clergy.

Best wishes from  
Bonday Wilson.

"Da Black an' da Broon", stated by an old lady of Hamar Gord, Cunningsburgh, to be the traditional tune for "the Brides Reel". Collected by Barclay Wilson, 1943.

A handwritten musical score consisting of six staves. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is common time (indicated by a '6'). The first staff contains a single measure starting with a quarter note. The second staff starts with a eighth note followed by a sixteenth-note pattern. The third staff starts with a eighth note followed by a sixteenth-note pattern. The fourth staff starts with a eighth note followed by a sixteenth-note pattern. The fifth staff starts with a eighth note followed by a sixteenth-note pattern. The sixth staff starts with a eighth note followed by a sixteenth-note pattern.

"Da Black an' da Braan," stated by an old  
lady of Hamar Gord, Cunningsburgh, Shetland. To be  
the Traditional Tune for "the Bride's Reel."

noted by Bessie Wilson, 1943.

A handwritten musical score consisting of six staves of music. The first five staves are in common time (indicated by a 'C') and key signature of one sharp (F#). The first four staves begin with a treble clef, while the last two begin with a bass clef. The music features various note heads, stems, and beams, with some notes having vertical dashes through them. The final staff begins with a bass clef and contains a single measure of music. Below the score are several blank lines for continuation.

Sep: 29<sup>th</sup> '59.  
Newmills 293.

Torryburn manse.  
Nr. Dunfermline.  
Fife.

Dear Mr. Rhodes,

I sent today to Dr. Fleet a copy of the promised melody entitled "Da Blakman' da Broon," said by an old lady of Hamar good, cunning enough, to be the traditional tune for the Bride's Reel. It contains 24 bars.

I see that my original hasty note had brackets around the first line (containing 4 bars.) Since I made the note about sixteen years ago, & have not thought much about the tune since that time, I can not tell you what is meant by the bracket, & am sorry. I have however

with white napkin: Straw crown with coloured ribbons: Bedice patterned at top: Skirt.

Rivlins or moccasins on feet. (Costume for men.)

retained the bracket in the copy (staff) just made, in case it may convey - meaning to you + to your colleague as experts.

I enclose our annotated booklet, on account of our wedding reception, & a drawing.

I would direct your attention to the note on the Bride's Reed made in accordance with what I was told; I would add to this half page commentary the observation that what was danced at our own wedding reception in 1945, & was called "the Bride's Reed" did not appear to us to be what is generally understood by the word dance. A procession of young women (dressed in

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n (dressed in

five old dresses) held hands & moved with  
a lifting step. The lifting procession cross-  
-crossed the village hall.

Since we did not remember in  
time to show you our skudler's  
costume, I enclose a drawing. The costume  
is a good example of workmanship  
in straw. The crown is very high &  
elaborate. I am sorry to say that  
we forgot to show the costume to  
you. If you would ever like to borrow  
it, we would send it to you;  
Alternatively you may like to come

and observe and take notes. We dressed  
with white napkin; Straw crown with colour-  
ed ribbons; Bodice patterned at top; Skirt.  
Rivlins or moccasins on feet. (Costume for men.)

To visit us again. We should be delighted to see you & Dr. Flett again.

We had two letters from Shetlanders this morning. Though they have rejoiced in a good harvest, many Shetlanders are unhappy at the church unions necessitated by an acute shortage of clergy.

Best wishes from

Banbury Wilson.

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with white napkin; Straw crown with colour-  
ed ribbons; Bodice patterned at top; Skirt.  
Rivlins or moccasins on feet. (costume for men.)

Dear Mr Wilson,

Thank you very much indeed for the copy of 'da Black an' da Broon'. We shall submit it to various experts to see if it has any connection with tunes belonging to dances from other parts of Shetland which are similar in construction to the Bride's Reel. I will let you know ~~the result~~ what we can find out about it.

It is true that the Bride's Reel isn't much of a dance in the customary sense — they simply tilt round a figure ~~xxx~~ for as long as the music lasts, but dances of this type seem to have been known in several parts of Shetland, and in at least two places played a distinctive part in the old wedding ceremonies. We hope to write up ~~this~~ part of our findings which deals with dances of this type, and I will try to send you a copy if and when we get ~~it~~ it published.

I would very much like to see the Skudler's costume, but would hesitate to ask you to commit it to the tender mercies of the G.P.O. May I therefore accept your very kind invitation to call on you when I am next in your district. I am sure that Dr Rhodes would also like to do the same.

With <sup>sincere</sup> ~~sincere~~ thanks for your help.



Tom Flett'

Oct: 11<sup>th</sup> '59.

Newmills 293.

Manse.

Torryburn.

Nr. Dunfermline.

Fife.

Dear Dr. Flett,

I have just received news from Shetland,  
that the name & former address of the person  
from whom I collected the alleged Traditional  
melody To the Bride's Reel are:-

Miss. Joan Laurenson.

Gord.

Couingsburgh.

Shetland.

She is however now in the British  
Hospital, Lerwick. My informant (Mera Bain)

unto concerning John Laurenson:

"She keeps well & is able to visit in Cunningsburgh occasionally. --- She is still very alert in mind & would have been able, I think, to tell ... something of the old Shetland Reels."

I have given this information also to Dr. Rhodes

I thank you for your letter of Oct: 3<sup>rd</sup>.

We shall be very interested to learn what experts think concerning the melody "Da Black an' da Brown." On thinking over the possible meaning of the bracket around the first line, I can only conclude that it is to indicate a sort of unit of melody which is later repeated in the tune.

We shall be interested indeed to

have a conference to  
Bride's Reel

+ Dr. R  
when the  
your despa

son:

visit is coming -  
is still very absent.  
me, I think, to  
land Reels.

also to Dr. Rhodes  
letter of Oct. 3rd.  
interested to  
concerning the  
soon. On thinking  
the bracket or-  
concrete that  
of unit of me-  
ted in the tune.  
sted indeed To

have a copy of your findings, with re-  
ference to dances of the type of the  
Bride's Reel.

We very much hope that you  
+ Dr. Rhodes may visit us again,  
when the skudder's costume would be at  
your disposal, if you so desired.

Best wishes from

Bonday Wilson.

To the Editors of the Shetland News and the Shetland Times.

Dear Sir,

We have recently been in Shetland on a visit, in search of information on the old Shetland dances and old customs associated with dancing. We were everywhere given the most kindly welcome, and we would be grateful if you would print the enclosed letter as some small acknowledgement of our indebtedness.

T.

Encl.

Dear Sir,

Through your columns, may we extend our very sincere thanks to all the people who made us so welcome on our recent visit to Shetland in search of information about dances and dancing in the old days. We would like to express our indebtedness to the many people who took us into their homes, and gave us not only the information we sought, but also such delightful hospitality.

T.

HR

Dear ——,

Thank you very much for the help you gave Dr Rhodes and myself on our visit to Shetland last month. The information you gave us was most valuable, and we are very grateful.

I am sorry to have been so long in writing to you, but our trip was so successful that it has taken us all this time to write up our notes.

Thank you once again.

Yours sincerely

F.

To. Mrs and Miss Smith, Hill Cottage, Sandwick (with extra thanks for hospitality received).

Mrs Barbara Shetbyne, Elvister, Walls.

Miss Mary Smith, Elvister, Walls.

Miss Jean Pole, Walls

Mrs James Isabister, Easter Skeld (with thanks for hospitality).

Mr and Mrs Thomas Moar, Northhouse, Wester Skeld

Mrs Margaret Smith, Aith, Cunningsburgh (with thanks for hospitality).

Mrs Flora Hutchinson, Easthouse, Haddabister

Mrs R Christie and Mrs R Jameson, Skibholly, Cunningsburgh

Miss Barbara Halcrow, Punstow, Cunningsburgh.

Mrs George Polson and Mr Irvine, Marster, Whalsay.

Mr and Mrs Andrew Moar, East Burns, Whalsay

Miss Elizabeth Nicolson, Symbister, Whalsay (with thanks for hospitality).

Also, with slight variations, to

Mr Peter Henry, 1 Burgh Rd, Lerwick (with a note to say that we shall ask Sec. of F.S. to let him see our summary).

Mr Peter Fraser, 55 Burgh Rd, Lerwick (with a promise to call next time we are in Shetland.)

Mr Peter Moar, 4 Thorfinn St, Lerwick.

Mrs C. Lawerson, 68 St Olaf St, Lerwick

Mr and Mrs J McLeod, Schoolhouse, Cunningsburgh.

To Mrs Laura Malcolmson, Westlea, Cunningsburgh.

Dear Mrs Malcolmson,

Thank you very much indeed for all the help you gave Dr Rhodes and myself on our recent visit to Shetland. You must have been put to a great deal of trouble to arrange the exhibition at such short notice, and we are most grateful.

We were very impressed by your exhibition of the Bride's Reel. The dance is both interesting, and attractive to look at, and we do hope that you will not let it be forgotten.

I am sorry etc.

To Miss Agnes Johnson, Ligg, Cunningsburgh.

Dear Miss Johnson,

May I thank you most sincerely for dancing for Dr Rhodes and myself on our visit to Shetland last month. We were very much impressed by your exhibition of the Bride's Reel, and we hope that you will not let the dance be forgotten.

After we dropped you at your house on the night of the exhibition, Dr Rhodes and I tried to put down what you had told us of the Bride's Reel, but I am afraid that we could not agree as to what you had actually said. We did not want to trouble you again at your home, but we would very much like to have an accurate account of the dance, and your information is of very considerable value.

May I ask if you would be so kind as to write down what you told us in the car that night. The information we are particularly interested in concerns the actual position of the Bride's Reel in the festivities - was it the first or last dance - and who took part in it. Also, when was the Men's Reel performed. And finally, how did the Bride's Reel and the Men's Reel differ from the Auld Reel. If I am sorry etc.

Dear ——,

On behalf of Dr Rhodes and myself, may I thank you most sincerely for dancing for us on our recent visit to Shetland. We were very much impressed by your exhibition of The Bride's Reel, and we hope that you will not let the dance be forgotten.

I am sorry to have been so long in writing to you, but our trip was so successful that it has taken us all this time to write up our notes.

Thank you once again.

Yours sincerely

F.

<u>To</u>	Mrs Janet Malcolmson, Millburn,	}
	Mrs Nancy Johnson, Beolka.	
	Mrs Jansson, Heatherbrae	
	Mrs Adamson, Post Office	
	Mrs Walterson, Dykes,	
	Mrs Deamess, Eldgarth,	

Cunningsburgh.

Dear Mr Irvine,

May we thank you for playing for the exhibition of the Bride's Reel at Cunningsburgh the other night. It was very good of you to come at such short notice, and we are most grateful.

I am sorry etc.

To Mr John Irvine, % Post Office, Cunningsburgh.

Roadside  
Lunningsburgh  
Shetland.  
19th Oct 1959

Dear Mr Flett,

I received your letter thanking me for the playing of the "Brides Reel" at Lunningsburgh Hall. I was really glad to give you any assistance I could to help in your collection of old dances. You will remember we spoke about old collections of fiddle music and one of you quoted an address where I might get some of these which had been reprinted. As I did not take a note of the address I would be very grateful if you could send it on to me when you have time. If ever you are in Shetland again I will be very pleased to meet you. Addressed envelope enclosed.

Yours sincerely,  
John Irvine

To. Mr and Mrs William Wilkinson, Manister  
 Mr and Mrs Robert Wilkinson, 40 Gardentown, Symbister.  
 Mrs Hamet Sandison, 30, Gardentown  
 Mr William Irvine, 10 Gardentown  
 Mrs Jessamine Tethy, Hillhead, Symbister.

Dear ——,

May I say thank you for dancing for me at Mr and Mrs Irvine's last month. You and your friends gave me a glimpse of Shetland in the old days — of the real atmosphere of an evening's dancing in the crofts — which no amount of conversation with old people could have given me. I enjoyed every minute of that evening — it came to an end ~~far~~ too soon for me. My only hope is that I can come back one day and have another one like it.

I —————.

Yours sincerely

Tom F.

To Mrs Janet Bruce, Sandshoull, Isbister, Whalsay.

Dear Mrs Bruce,

Thank you very much indeed for your help when I visited Whalsay last month in search of information about old dances. The information you gave me was of the greatest value, and enabled me to complete a picture of dancing in the old days which is of very considerable interest.

I hope you will accept the enclosed present as a small token of my gratitude.

Yours sincerely

F

To Tommy Anderson, 7 Queen's Place, Herne Bay.

17.10.59

Dear Tommy

Thank you for all the help you gave Frank and myself on our visit to Shetland last month - not only for all the information you yourself gave us or obtained for us, but also for steering us so well through the diplomatic shadals. Our visit was extremely successful from the point of view of our research, and at the same time immensely enjoyable.

I have only just finished writing up our notes. This is both a measure of the success of our visit, and my excuse for not having written to you before this. We hope to write our summary of our 'finds' for the Folk Society soon, but just at the moment mathematics is intervening.

On our way down, we called in at the School of Scottish Studies. Both Calum MacLean and Hamish Henderson were there, and they gave us a very warm welcome indeed. We spent the whole afternoon there, and it was nearly 7% before we got on the road back to Liverpool. Perhaps that was just as well, for we were treated to a couple of double whiskies for lunch, and I wouldn't have been any too happy driving for a little while after that!

I have been having second thoughts about that tape of John Irvine's that I asked you for. I would still very much like to have a copy, but may I leave it until I have a tape recorder of my own - I hope to do so in the not too distant future - and then ask you to send me one which will fit my machine.

I hope to return to Shetland before too long passes, and ~~that~~ your home will be one of my first calls. But in the meantime, if you are ever in our vicinity, my wife and I will be only too delighted to see you.

My regards to Mr Anderson, and thank you once again.

To John Graham, Esq., M.A. & Mrs Graham.

President, The Shetland Folk Society.

Dear Mr and Mrs Graham,

Thank you for all the help you gave Frank Rhodes and myself on our visit to Shetland last month, and for your most kind hospitality. Our visit was extremely successful from the point of view of our research, and at the same time immensely enjoyable.

I have only just finished writing up our notes. This is both a measure of the success of our trip, and my excuse for not having written to you before this. We hope to write our summary of our 'finds' for the Folk Society soon, but just at the moment mathematics is intervening.

I haven't forgotten your suggestion about an article for The New Shetlander, but at present it looks as if it will be Phew-Time before I can settle down to it. Could you give me some guidance concerning its approximate length, please?

When we were talking one evening, you mentioned a reference to a dancing-master who came to teach the laird's children (a Mr Troop, I think). Would it be putting you to too much bother to ask if you could let me have a copy of the quotation - or the reference if it is in some reasonably accessible book. If my memory of the name is correct, I think the same character may have appeared in Orkney records.

I hope to return to Shetland to continue our researches in the not too distant future, and I hope I shall have the pleasure of seeing you again then. But in the meantime, if you are ever in our vicinity, my wife and I will be only too delighted to see you.

Yours sincerely

Tom F.

To T. A. Robertson, Esq., M.A

Honorary Secretary, The Shetland Folk Society.

37 Burgh Rd, Leamore.

Dear Mr Robertson,

Thank you very much for the help you gave us on our visit to Shetland last month. Both you and Mrs Robertson, and the people with whom you put us in touch, gave us a very clear picture of dancing in Shetland in the old days, and we found this most valuable in our visits later on in our stay.

As we mentioned to Mrs Robertson, we hope in the near future to send to your Society a summary of what we found, so that if anyone is interested, they can follow up what we have done. We ourselves hope to return at some not too distant date to continue our search for information, particularly in the northern parts of Shetland.

I am sorry etc.

Thank you once again.

Yours sincerely

A.

*F*  
See notes & letters from  
John Harold Johnson

Aug 1930.

Ghettom Reels:-

Mamble reel o' Fennyarth.

Da Borein. Flaggas. Bridle  
reels. Yorla reel and shaddo  
o' Yorla (similar). Pin reels.  
new want.

Mamble Reel o' Fennyarth

Visited Wales to find out about marble  
reel, but very unproductive of  
information. Visited about 20 houses  
containing old people between  
40 and 90 and while somewhat  
obscure

the reel it could not be recalled  
with any clarity. Seemingly a break  
break in its performance due to a  
lackment of possession of  
harmements of Fennyarth.

Seemingly 13 turnings in the original  
assured by two old ladies that there

were 13 independent figures,

not so first supposed that the

13 turnings referred to the entire

Even visit to Fennyarth produced

little information, and much

misunderstanding.

15 Dr. Bremier's Society of Dance

In Scotland was usually danced in  
Sandness and Wango, with dance:

"Marie" being Shetland word for fermenting  
liquor. Name given elsewhere in  
Shetland words, this same name  
and also frequently by another  
name "De Wacham". This means  
that it had to do with the action  
connected to brewing "Wacham" (or  
the course Shetland, Tawd).  
No clear pictures of the dance were  
got but from West could gather  
from old Sandness man it was  
similar to the Shetland reel except  
that the reel would run but the  
whole dance was danced in one set  
each set comprising 4 couples who  
-faced each other alternately in the  
set, e.g. two men and two women  
on either side. Normal Shetland  
reel runs finishing with a time  
called "An Dirne". No one seems to  
know this time and my informant  
could not recollect it. Baron Robert of Dillky well knew it.

Burlesco, danced in Whalay  
and Cunningsburgh. Two different  
versions but so far I have only  
seen the Cunningsburgh one, and  
it seems to be faithfully preserved.  
There, evidently there is a local  
variation of the Whalay version at  
least a man much intermixing  
between Whalay & Cunningsburgh  
gives me at account for this

Held in great variety, danced  
all over the country with local  
variations in several parishes  
principally Dilling & Northmore  
Whalley, Yule & Knott, the west  
side and the rest, this latter  
area includes all places south  
of Cummington. Variations  
mainly concern positioning.  
mainly there was one side  
three women the other. Other  
variations 2 men & 1 woman facing  
two women and 1 man. (the  
west side version) positioned  
as stated, the odd couple being at  
the bottom. In this case the red  
is run  $1\frac{1}{2}$  times and position  
changed to bring alternate  
couples to bottom where they  
and the couple immediately above  
them cross over thus returning  
the positioning of couples in relation  
to the set. This variation 2 men  
& 1 woman between them one side  
facing 2 women & 1 man between  
the sides. Sometimes red run 4  
times causing change of couples, but  
not always.

paired. Imported dance,  
having danced in many places  
on the Shetland and fairly  
well known.

Yule bel: very many versions  
and variations, and of a similarity  
to the older dance "De Shalder Telt,"  
which seems to have been lost or  
merged into the more recent Yule  
bel. Definitely a work dance  
as will be obvious in the main  
though parts seem to indicate  
the openinging of the sea over the  
"shoulder," thus leading me to  
believe that the original dance  
and its more modern version  
have been combined to make  
one dance. Striking similarity  
to the Hebrewian Drawing belt which  
I have seen for the first time last  
year. Must find out if any  
connection between the two.  
Just collected complete dance  
from various versions seen  
and have tidied it up to make  
it more presentable. This  
also has been revised by  
Maggie Sutherland and  
corrected from various versions  
heard.

Henderson's Hoopope. Shetland  
expression when referring to anything  
complicated or difficult = "as hard  
as Henderson's Hoopope". An old  
man from Shetland told me that he  
could remember seeing them danced done,  
when he was a boy (about 1845).  
Then it was called Hendriebray dance,  
and was a solo effort combining  
Hoopope and Elbow dance.

Probably came to Shetland from  
the Dutch, or from the Hanseatic  
traders. Could get no precise  
details, except that it was  
much lighter than Henderson's Hoopope  
with elbow dance added, and  
required considerable agility  
and ability to perform, and  
was considered a test piece for  
any young man and well nigh  
impossible for an old man.  
However the one he had seen do it  
was over 60 and was considered  
to be exceptional, & considered  
undignified for women to attempt to  
dance this, though some did do  
it gaily with feminine  
variations.

newlyweds was danced at  
weddings by the men just as the  
brides and newdances by women.  
It concerned the bedding of the  
couple. The men took the groom  
and danced him to his bedroom,  
where they divested him of his  
clothing and put him to bed.  
The girls performed a similar  
office for the bride. The dance  
was continuous progression  
and continuous reeling till the  
bedroom was reached. When  
the normal Shetland Peal  
figures were performed complete  
culminating in tossing the groom  
on the bed, some trip dancing  
seemingly introduced from time  
to time as the dance progressed  
(probably by sailors men), though  
there is little clog or tap in Shetland

Dugga Reel. Not a true reel but danced as an appendage to the movement of the net and reel. I have only seen it in Collafirth, Iceland. A work dance to do with hauling in fish lines or rowing. Seems to me more likely to be rowing, as the two beats are danced with leg moving out front and only 1 beat out back which would indicate the long pull and the quicker return of the oar. The reverse was also seen which could indicate the hauling of lines.

Benson Robertson says, that this dance was peculiar to Iceland for a long time, and later to Lilling and North Norway, imported when the Haff fishermen were at Iceland and Fjord and intermixing and intermarrying. This is "Dr. Dugga," and seems to be fairly well known.

## Da millstone.

millers waltz, or mill stone waltz.

This dance seems to have been done in Scotland in the early 1800's and was danced by two couples.

Usually the basic figure was an imitation of the turning mill-stone (clockwise) each couple joined hands across making the set like the spokes of a wheel. <sup>1</sup> and made a sort of polka step one-two-three-hop. Then breaking figure to many parties for one complete revolution then rejoining hands and continuing wheel figure.

Final figure was a spinning wheel figure but with disengaged arm outstretched and to represent the mill "girl." This figure done at high speed in mill time - work dance of uncertain origin.

Shoulder dance. Some times  
called sheekhless dance

A war舞ers dance. Performed  
dressed in storm costume.

"They arter henkin' an' lunkin'  
lunkin' an' duckin'," to  
an old worn tune, mainly  
mow. Solo in each case  
but danced by as many  
as possible. Danced done  
in straight line, with  
progresses and retreats  
in turn. Very simple  
and primitive dance  
which has gone down  
through the ages, and  
possibly had a religious  
or superstitious influence  
in helping to ward off evil  
spirits from crops, house  
and animals, and as an  
acknowledgment of supernatural  
help. Also to invoke blessing  
on further crops and fertility  
of man and beast.

John Harold Johnson, Missionary Guest House, College Walk, Selly Oak, B'ham 29.

I made the trip to B'ham especially to see Mr Johnson, and gave him plenty of warning. In consequence, he had thought about the old dances for some weeks previously, and he now cleared up a number of things in my notes from 12.9.59 which had puzzled me.

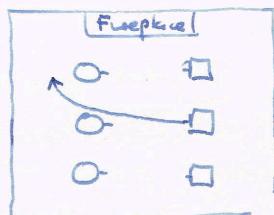
1) Versions of the Shetland Reel in use ca 1925-30. Mr Johnson had met ~~five~~ six distinct versions

(a) "Foursome, or Two-couple Reel". Done only on the West Side, in Walls & Aith.

(b) "Sixsome", 3 men on one side, 3 ladies on the other.

In the reel the centre lady came above her partner, and the first loop of her reel was described clockwise. In 1925-30 this was still being done in Northmavon, Delting, and

Lunnasting, and "overflowed" sometimes into Aith. Esha Ness people also did it, for they would dance at the halls in Northmavon. Mr Johnson actually collected this version from current tradition.

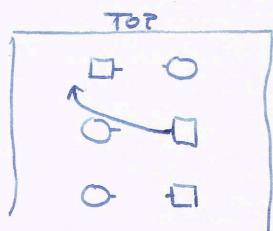


(c) "Sixsome" with alternate men and women on each side, each person returning to his or her own place after each reel. This occurred in the South End of Shetland (but

(b) also occurred in the South End occasionally).

(d) Whalsay version

(e) Sandness. Mr Johnson saw this version only once, at a dance in Sandness after a concert there in 1931. There was a group of older people present at this dance, and they did this version in the course of the ordinary dancing.



Stand as shown. The centre lady comes above her partner to begin the reel, and describes the first loop of her reel clockwise. The top two couples dance a figure 8 plus a half loop to interchange places, whilst the bottom couple

dances a complete figure 8 to return to their own place. On the second reel, the new centre couple changes places with the bottom couple. The same couple moved on each reel.

(f) Sandness. A version for five couples, seen on the same occasion and done by the same people as (e). The five couples stood longways, and they danced a reel XXXX. Then the bottom couple took 'Shetland swing' hold (i.e. link R arms, and each person holds their own right wrist with left hand) and swung up to the top. They then reeled again, and the new bottom couple came up to top, and so on. They just kept on doing this, irrespective of the music.

Mr Johnson has never heard of a Shetland Reel for 8.

In most places they ran the reel first, then set, etc. The step for running the reel was very variable. A common one was the "step-hop". Ladies frequently used "hop, step, close, step". Both men and ladies very frequently inserted extra twiddles (i.e. 'turns single' in C#s notation) in the reels. Perhaps ladies did this more often than the men.

On the Mainland in his young days it was normal for partners to join both hands when setting, but older people didn't do this. The older men usually had their hands raised, while the older ladies had their arms akimbo, with thumbs to the front & fingers to the back (so that their palms were upwards). The men often snapped finger and thumb. Some men could almost keep up the rhythm of the tune by using 2 fingers on each hand.

Mr Johnson has heard about the joining of hands on the sides and the swinging to alternate sides, as described by Mr Holloburn - he learnt of this from old people in his collecting days, but has never seen it. It was called "gracing the dance" (a term that Mr Johnson had heard many years before he learnt its meaning).

Ladies always curteyed to their partners at the beginning of the Reel - this was considered correct".

The tempo depended on the fiddles. Mr Johnson's Team used a tempo of 16 bars in 18 seconds.

There were various setting steps. Many people did back-step-with-a-hop throughout the setting turn. The back-step-with-a-hop alternated with 3 ~~long~~ stamps shown to us by Pat Shuldharn. Shew was common all over Shetland, though normally done only by men [ "If you ever saw a woman do that sort of thing, it was because she didn't know any better" ]. Double shuffle was used by the men on Outer Skerries.

The following step for ladies, from the Outer Skerries, was shown to Mr Johnson by Jessie Williamson of the Folk-lore Society.

1. 1 Drop on RF in rear 3rd position and at the same time take LF off to 4th int low aerial position
- 2 Place LF in 4th int position and lift RF just off the ground above its original position
- 2 122 3 stamps on the spot, RF, LF, RF.
- 3, 4 Perform bars 1, 2 counterwise, etc.

Another ladies step was learnt from Andrina Green of North Yell ca 1925-30; at that time Andrina Green was about 20. Mr Johnson has also seen other Yell people do it.

The step was actually noted from Mrs Johnson's performance.

Tune used by Mr Johnson was Soldier Joy; the counting is as follows.

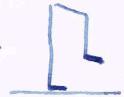


1 and<sub>1</sub> and<sub>2</sub> a 2 and<sub>1</sub> and<sub>2</sub> a

Count a Hop on LF

1 Beat RF in crossed position, but with feet almost parallel.

and<sub>2</sub> Hop on LF and raise RF forward by bending the knee



a

2

} Repeat the previous 3 counts

and<sub>2</sub>

1

and<sub>2</sub>

} Step on the spot with RF, LF, RF

2

and<sub>2</sub> Hop on RF

(2) The Muckle Reel of Timigarth, Mr Johnson investigated this in Dale of Walls, and in Walls generally except round the shop. The information he obtained was very sketchy, and some of it was contradictory. His impression was that the dance was a Reel with 13 turnings. He wondered what was meant by "turnings"; according to what he picked up, there were 13 different figures. "I may have been wrong, but this was the impression I got". Although Peter Fraser's father was alive at the time, they didn't visit him, because Peter was available and they learnt what he had to say.

(3) The Flugga. Mr Johnson has seen this only once, in Collafirth in Delting, at a dance on Auld New Year, 1930

It was done several times during the evening, as a part of a Shetland Reel.

The 6 dancers began by going through an ordinary Shetland Reel, reeling & reeling alternately. Then the music switched to the Flugga, and each person joined hands with partner and danced the Flugga step (below) on the spot, for as long as the fiddler played the Flugga tune (he might have them dancing it for 5 minutes). Then the music switched to a Shetland Reel for a reel of three, then back to the Flugga for the "dancing", and so on. The sequence always ended with the Flugga.

Men and women both did the same step:

1. Hop LF & extend RF to 4th aerial pos"
  2. Hop LF, & extend RF to 4th near aerial pos"
  3. As 1.
  4. Drop on RF and extend LF to 4th aerial position
- Etc (how?)

Also done with 2 extensions to the back & one to the front.

The fiddler on this occasion was Barron Robertson, and he told Mr Johnson that the Flugga symbolized the men pulling in their fishing lines and changing their feet because of the heaving of the boat.

(4) The Fij. Lawrence Williamson knew something about this.

(5) Hebridean Weaving Lilt. He saw this in the summer of 1924 (?) in huts belonging to girls from Barvas in Lewis. The only names he can remember are Cameron (or Carmen) MacDonald from Barvas. He also saw it again later, at this time the girl he remembers was Fiona Macrae from Stornoway. But all this is understandably vague.

(6) The man who came to Lerwick in 1923 was Jamieson (see Notes 12.9.59/3), he took the Borders Book, first volume. This Mr Johnson lent me.

Records of the Shetland Folk-lore Society. (Now in the possession of Mr Johnson).

The Society was founded by Miss C Jameson on March 9th, 1928, having for its object "the collection and preservation of historical traditions and legends, arts, crafts, music, songs, dances, games, amusements and customs."

It incorporated a Sword Dance team organised by Alex Johnson.

In the minutes for Sept 19th, 1928, it is recorded that "The Tousa Reel, the Shetland Reel, and the Pin Reel had been revived and practised, with the result that an exhibition of old Shetland dances and dresses had been given in the garden of Twagios [Miss Jameson's house] on May 30th to a most appreciative audience".

In the arrangements for a Shetland Evening to be held in Scalloway, it was arranged that the two teams [of dancers, a senior & a junior, team] should form a crew of Skellakers, led by a Skellader, all dressed in the ancient straw guising dress, and contributing a dance, songs, and recitations." At this point Miss Jameson adds the following note:

"It may be noted in this connection that it was difficult to arrange the Skellader's Dance. There was no known special dance for Skellakers. We had not yet recovered the music or movements of the Muckle Reel, which we should otherwise have used. So it was decided to enter to the strains of the Trows Spring, and do the Trows' Dance;— Dey cam' in hentin' an' lunkin', an' dan gripped haands, an gived arround da hoose, sw'yin' frae side ta side, an dancin' in an' oot".

Among other events, a garden party was held at Twagios House in June 1930. A newspaper cutting is included in the Records, and this reports that "a party of dancers, appropriately attired, gave exhibitions of old folk dancing, commencing with the Skellader's Dance, followed by the Tousa Reel, the Shetland Reel (first the more modern

and then an older form, danced by one couple only), and the "Pin Reel" ...

By 1930, the energies of the Society seem to have been devoted to their 'Shetland Evenings'. In 1931 there is a note "The Concert Party did nothing special this year. Robert M Jameson died October 23rd".

At the Annual General Meeting in October 1932 "the company were urged to interest themselves in getting up original plays and sketches and to take note of any old stories, sayings, or customs that could be turned to account [My underlining: F]

In 1933 there were apparently only 9 members who had paid their subscriptions, and Miss Jameson made good a deficit of £10 in the accounts out of her own pocket. The records cease in 1934-5.

To Mr and Mrs John Irvine and Magnus, Saltress.

Dear Mr & Mrs Irvine and Magnus,

I do not know how to begin this letter, for any thanks that I can express seem to me quite inadequate. By bringing together your friends and persuading them to dance for me, you gave me a glimpse of Shetland in the old days - of the real atmosphere of an evening's dancing in the crofts - that no amount of conversation with old people could have given me. I enjoyed every minute of that evening - my only hope is that I can come back one day and have another one like it.

Apart from that, I have to thank you, Mr Irvine, for all the information about old dances and old customs you have given me. It is all of the highest value to me, and I am deeply grateful to you for sparing me so much of your time.

When I brought home the <sup>(that Mrs Irvine)</sup> scarf ~~you~~ gave me for my wife, the ~~our~~ little girl was so taken with it that we let her have it for use in the car - she has always wanted a scarf, and she is absolutely thrilled with it. I enclose her own letter of thanks.

I enclose a small present for your pipe, Mr Irvine; I hope it is the right sort.

Thank you all once again.

Yours sincerely

Acknowledged. ea 20. 12. 59

Missionary Guest House,  
College Walk,

Selly Oak,  
Birmingham 24.

14/12/59

Dear Dr. Flett,

Herewith, belatedly is some of my notes on Shetland dances which I have unearthed after much searching from a mass of accumulated manuscript. I know I had much more and more elaborated accounts of various seen versions, but the mice have destroyed some, and as a result of many "fittings" others have been lost. Still, I'm glad that this little notebook has survived for it contains most of the basic details, and from it I can re-construct all the dances, and remember all the versions and figures, along with relevant details.

To you they may seem sketchy, and perhaps of little use, but if you want any additional information I shall be only too happy to oblige at any time.

I regret the delay, but the mass of stuff all bunged into a box, higglety-pigglety was a formidable deterrent to any speed.

However here it is for what it's worth. Hope you can decipher writing. It was bad to begin with, and 30 years has not improved it.

Seasonal greetings and best wishes;

Sincerely. John H Johnson

Notes written by John Harold Johnson in August 1930 as part of an investigation undertaken by members of the Shetland Folk-Lore Society.

7.1.

Aug : 1930.

Shetland Reels :- Muckle reel o' Tinnigart. Da Barmin [?]. Flugga. Brides reels. Touna reel and Shealds o' Touna (similar). Pin reel. men's rant.

Muckle Reel o' Tinnigart. Visited Waes To find out about muckle reel, but very unproductive of information. Visited about 20 houses containing old people between 70 and 90 and while some had done the reel it could not be recalled with any clarity. Seemingly a break in its performance due to a bereavement or succession of bereavements at Tinnigarth. Seemingly 13 Turnings in the original. Assured by two old ladies that these were 13 independent figures, not as I first supposed that the word turnings referred to the music. Even visit to Tinnigarth produced little information. Another visit proposed by Society.

7.2.

In the mid 1800's the dance "Da Barmin" was seemingly danced in Sandness and was a work dance. "Barm" being Shetland word for fermenting liquor. Dance known elsewhere in Shetland under the same name and also seemingly by another name "Da waakin". This suggests that it had to do with the motions carried out to shrink "wadmull" [?], i.e. the coarse Shetland tweed. No clear picture of the dance was got but from what I could gather from an old Sandnessman it was similar to the Shetland reel except that the reel wasn't run, but the whole dance was danced in one spot, each set comprising 4 couples who faced each other alternately in the set, e.g. Two men and Two women on either side. Normal Shetland reel tunes finishing with a tune called "Da Pirm". No one seems to know the tune, and my informant could not recollect it. Perhaps Barron Robertson of Delting will have it.

*He did  
Probably now lost.*

Brides reels, danced in Whalsay and Cunningsburgh. Two independent versions but so far I have only seen the Cunningsburgh one; and it seems to be jealously preserved there. Probably this is a local variation of the Whalsay version or vice-versa. Much intermarriage between Whalsay and Cunningsburgh. This might account for this.

#### 7.3.

Shetland reel universally danced all over the islands with local variations in several parishes principally Delting and Northmavine Whalsay, Yell and Unst, the west side and the Ness. This latter area includes all places south of Cunningsburgh. Variations mainly concern positioning. Mainly three men one side three women the other. Other variations two men and 1 woman facing two women and 1 man (the west side version) positioned as stated, the odd couple being at the bottom. In this case the reel is run  $1\frac{1}{2}$  times and position changed to bring alternate couples to bottom where they and the couple immediately above them cross over thus retaining the positioning of couples in relation to the set. Other variation 2 men and 1 woman between them one side facing 2 women and 1 man between them other side. Sometimes reel run  $1\frac{1}{2}$  times causing change of couples, but not always.

#### 7.4

Pin reel. Imported dance. Seemingly danced in many places outwith Shetland and fairly well known

Toula reel:- very many versions and variations, and of a similarity to the older dance "Da Shaalds o' Toula" which seems to have been lost or merged into the more recent Toula Reel. Definitely a work dance to do with weaving in the main though parts seem to indicate the breaking of the sea over the "Shaalds", thus leading me to believe that the original dance and its more modern version have been combined to make one dance. Striking similarity to The Melondian Weaving Lilt which I have seen for the first time last year. Must find out if any

connection between the two. Have evolved complete dance from various versions seen and have tidied it up to make it more presentable. Tune also has been revised by Magnus Sutherland and corrected from various versions heard.

#### 7.5

Henderson's Hornpipe. Shetland expression when referring to anything complicated or difficult = "as hard as Henderson's Hornpipe". An old man from Skeld told me that he could remember seeing this dance done when he was a boy (about 1845). Then it was called Hendrickson's dance, and was a solo effort combining Hornpipe and clog dance. Probably came to Shetland from the Dutch, or from the Hanseatic Traders. Could get no precise details except that it was much like the Sailors' Hornpipe with clog dance added, and required considerable agility and ability to perform, and was considered a test piece for any young man and well nigh impossible for an old man. However the one he had seen do it was over 60 and was considered to be exceptional. Considered undignified for women to attempt to dance this, though some did do it, seemingly with feminine variations.

#### 7.6

Mens rant was danced at weddings by the men just as the brides reel was danced by women. It concerned the bedding of the couple. The men took the groom and danced him to his bedroom, where they divested him of his clothing and put him to bed. The girls performed a similar office for the bride. The dance was continuous progression and continuous reeling till the bedroom was reached where the normal Shetland Reel <sup>(figure)</sup> was performed complete culminating in tossing the groom on the bed. Some tap dancing seemingly introduced from time to time as the dance progressed (probably by sailor men), though there is little clog or tap in Shetland.

7.7.

Hugga Reel. Not a true reel but danced as an appendage to the normal Shetland reel. I have only seen it in Collafirth Delting. A work dance to do with hauling in fish lines or rowing. Seems to me more likely to be rowing, as the two beats are danced with leg swung out front and only 1 beat out back which would indicate the long pull and the quicker return of the oar. The reverse was also seen which could indicate the hauling of lines. Barron Robertson says that this dance was peculiar to Unst for a long time, and later to Delting and Northmavine, imported when the Haff fishermen were at Fedeland and Uyea and intermixing and intermarrying. Tune is "Da Hugga", and seems to be fairly well known.

7.8.

#### Da millstone.

Millers rant, or Mill stane rant. This dance seems to have been done in Shetland in the early 1800's and was danced by two couples. Seemingly the basic figure was an imitation of the turning mill-stone (clockwise) each couple joined hands across making the set like the spokes of a wheel  and danced a sort of polka step one-two-three-four, then breaking figure  to swing partner for one complete revolution then rejoining hands and continuing wheel figure. Final figure was as main wheel figure but with disengaged arm outstretched to represent the mill "tirl" . This figure done at high speed in reel time - Work dance of uncertain origin.

7.9.

Skudlers dance. sometimes called skekklers dance. A mummers dance. Performers dressed in straw costume, "They enter henkin' an' lunkin'; bentkin' an dunkin'", to an old norm tune. Mainly men. Solo in each case but danced by as many as possible. Dance done in straight line, which progresses and retreats in turn. Very simple

and primitive dance which has come down through the ages, and possibly had a religious or superstitions significance in helping to ward off evil spirits from crops, house and animals, and as an acknowledgement of supernatural help. Also to invoke blessing on further crops and fertility of man and beast.

Missionary Guest House,  
College Walk,  
Selly Oak,  
Birmingham 29.  
1/1/60.

Dear Dr. Flott,

your letter received before Xmas. Glad to know that my little notebook will be of some help to you. For some time during my search I had a horrible suspicion that it had been lost. Through thick and thin I've managed to hang on to it as it contains the nucleus of all I know of Shetland dancing, or at least, most of all I know.

You needn't be in any hurry returning any of the books, as I know they are quite safe, and if you can obtain any information from them that may help you, they will be serving a good purpose.

I know my writing is horrible - sometimes I can't read it myself - so if you have any difficulty in deciphering I shall only be too glad to help. So do not hesitate to ask any time.

My wife and daughter join me in wishing you all the best for 1960.

yours sincerely,

John H Johnson  


Dear Mr Johnson,

I am returning under separate cover ~~your~~ <sup>The</sup> little notebook which you sent me, & the 3 books I borrowed when I last saw you. I am sorry to have been so long with them, but time just seems to have flown since Xmas, and I have only just completed my notes from them.

There are several ~~notes points in your~~ little notebook ~~which I would like to add~~ where I would very much like further information if you could be so kind some application of the notes. ~~This would be possible~~ (I don't think the easiest way, if you are agreeable, would be for me to) Would it be ~~more~~ convenient for me to call on you once again to ~~call~~ talk over the material in your notebook? I am sure this would be the easiest way if you are agreeable. If I could manage the evenings of either Sunday May 8th or Sunday May 15th. ~~If possible, I would be late to make~~ <sup>Should be</sup> ~~(in the afternoon on my way down)~~ a call in Leicester <sup>which</sup> ~~on the same day~~, so would not be able to guarantee my exact time of arrival, but I should be able to manage 7% with certainty. Would you let me know if ~~this day~~ <sup>which</sup> whether this would be <sup>suit</sup> satisfactory to you, and, if so, which day would suit you best. If neither day is convenient, perhaps you would suggest an alternative. With very best wishes, & hoping to see you soon.

Yours sincerely.

*After*

John Harold Johnson (3rd visit)

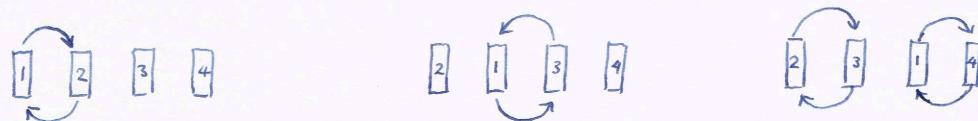
After I had returned Mr Johnson's little notebook, I visited him in order to get him to amplify the notes given there.

(i) Da Barnin. Mr Johnson has further information which is subsequent to that given in the notebook. This came from several elderly Sandness men - he pieced the dance together from what they told him.

The dance was performed in a longways set of four couples, man & woman turn about on each side.



The first two couples link right arms with partner, and swing, with something like a normal Shetland Reel step-hop, to change places, the top couple going out to the ladies' side. The second couple swing at the top, while the first couple and third couple change places with swinging, the first couple now going out to the ~~men's~~ side. Then the second & third couples change places at the top, while the first & fourth couples change places at the bottom, still swinging, with the first & second couples both going out to the ladies' side:

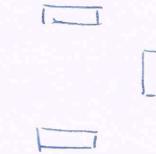


The swinging is now continued, each couple dancing down to the bottom as the



others swing up.

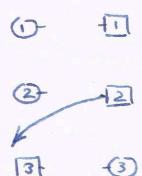
This swinging figure is continued without pause until the fiddler signifies the next figure by striking his bow twice on the strings above the bridge. Starting from the top of the set (i.e. starting with the couple who are at the top of the set at that moment), the couples swing into square formation, and set on the spot. The fiddler then signals again



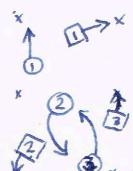
in a similar manner, and the dancers return to the longways set & begin to swing again.

This alternation of swinging & setting goes on as long as the fiddler cares to play. He then finally changes to "The Firm" which was a jig tune. The couples then form a circle with the men facing one way & the ladies facing the other. They then "neel" [presumably a Grand Chain without hands], and when the music stops the ladies take the man facing them, go into a square set, & swing these persons to finish.

(2) The West Side version of The Shetland Reel (Notebook, 7.3). This is the version (e) of my notes for 17.10.59, and Mr Johnson now tells me that he gave me this wrongly on that occasion - his notebook is correct.



The middle lady crosses over & goes down to begin the neel. The figure 8 is done with <sup>(2nd & 3rd couples doing)</sup> an extra half loop, so that the 2nd & 3rd couple change places; in each case the lady stops in the lady's place & the man has to cross over to get into the man's place. Thus the end of the neel is as shown below



(3) Toula Reel. The version performed by the Folklore Society team was as follows.

longways set of 4 couples, men one side, ladies the other.

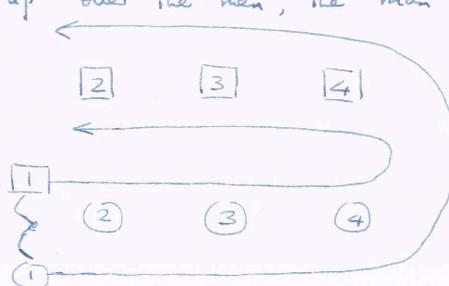
Honour partners - bow & curtsey.

(a) C<sub>1</sub> skip down the middle, holding R hands, turn at the bottom, and skip back.

Here L<sub>1</sub> has her L hand on her waist, with fist clenched.

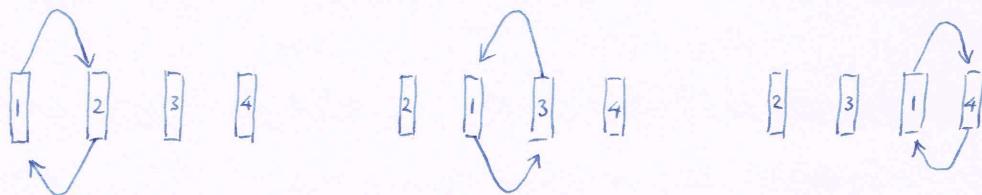
(b) C<sub>1</sub> turn at the top with R arms linked, then L<sub>1</sub> dances down the men's side, turning each man & her partner alternatively, with linked arm (i.e. L<sub>1</sub> turns M<sub>2</sub> with L arm, her partner with R arm, M<sub>3</sub> with L arm, her partner with R arm, M<sub>4</sub> with L arm, and her partner with R arm). The man walks down the centre to meet his partner as she leaves each man). After C<sub>1</sub> have turned at the bottom, M<sub>1</sub> dances up the ladies' side, turning each lady & his partner alternately, while L<sub>1</sub> walks up the centre to meet him. After C<sub>1</sub> have turned at the top, M<sub>1</sub> dances down the ladies' side & L<sub>1</sub> down the men's side simultaneously, swinging each other after each turn on the sides (i.e. M<sub>1</sub> turns L<sub>2</sub> while L<sub>1</sub> turns M<sub>2</sub>, then C<sub>1</sub> turn, then M<sub>1</sub> turns L<sub>3</sub> while L<sub>1</sub> turns M<sub>3</sub>, etc.). On reaching the bottom, C<sub>1</sub> swing, and change to L arms, then they return to the top, swinging the sides (with R arm) and each other (with L arm) alternately. [Mr Johnson called this swinging figure "reeling", and in the notes below I differentiate between "single" reeling, where one ~~of C<sub>1</sub>~~ is swinging the sides, a "double" reeling, where both of C<sub>1</sub> are swinging the sides].

(c) At the end of the "reeling" figure, C<sub>1</sub> turn at the top. Then M<sub>1</sub> swings to the outside of the ladies, and with nearer hands joined C<sub>1</sub> pass down over the ladies, and then back up over the men, the man on the outside all the time.



Meanwhile the others go down on their hunkers and clap (they do not go down on one knee).

(8) When C<sub>1</sub> reach the top, they interweave from top to bottom as shown below. In



this action, the couples take hands, & face in the same direction (i.e. L<sup>W</sup> to the length of the set) throughout.

The travelling step used was an ordinary skipping step. This was used for all the figures except in the reeling figure, where the man or lady coming up or down the centre walked. In the ~~stretches~~ final interweaving figure, the dancers skip forward, then backwards, or vice-versa.

Mr Johnson has seen 50 or 60 versions with minor variations between them. The particular version above was collected from current tradition c. 1930, and is a compilation of figures from Walls, Sandness, Northmaven, Delting, & Nesting. All these versions had (x), (y), and (8). In place of (3), Walls had single reeling down by the lady & double reeling up; Northmaven had double reeling down & up, but no single reeling; and Nesting had single reeling down & up, but no double reeling. No traditional version contained the complete (3) as described above.

Mr Johnson has never met a version where the reeling started from the bottom, i.e. where C<sub>1</sub> danced down the centre, but not back up, in (x).

The dance can be done with more than 4 couples, but 4 is enough. Mr Johnson has seen it done with 6 couples, but then it was half as long again as the 4-couple version, and fiddlers didn't like it.

The part which appears to simulate the breaking of the seas is (S).

I then asked Mr Johnson about the Hebridean Weaving hilt.

Was there an aching figure [i.e. "loom"] in the Foula Reel? "No"

Was there such a figure in the Weaving hilt? Here Mr Johnson thought almost certainly not. "What sticks in my mind was seeing the Hebridean Weaving hilt and thinking that they had hold of the Foula Reel and weren't doing it completely. So I doubt if that figure was in it."

Was there a figure in the Weaving hilt in which they joined hands in a circle? "Yes, I remember that fine enough. And as a matter of fact I've seen that done in the Foula Reel".

Was there a wind-up and an unwind [as in the case of the "loom"], I described the figure in detail] in the Weaving hilt? "No."

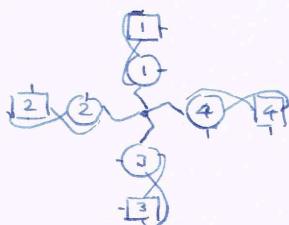
I also asked Mr Johnson about the old man from Foula who told him of the Weaving hilt having been taken to the Hebrides by a Foula man (see notes for 12/9/59/3).

The old man who told him of this was John or James Ratter, ~~he was~~ and at the time — about 1924 — he was aged c. 70. This old man told Mr Johnson that in the Hebrides they had a Weaving hilt, and that this was derived from the Foula Reel — it had been taken there by a crew of a ship wrecked in the Hebrides. The skipper was a Foula man, Johann Johansson.

This story was told to Mr Johnson considerably before he saw the Weaving hilt — it was the first time he heard of its existence. After he saw the dance, he recalled old Mr Ratter's story — he had almost forgotten about it.

(4) The Men's Rant. The description given in the notebook is compiled from bits and pieces drawn from all over Shetland (this is quite definite). The last time Mr Johnson heard of its being done was at Cunningsburgh, during the '14-18 War. [ Try Jim Angus, aged c.60, who works in the Ministry of Labour Office in Lerwick; he has some information on the subject].

(5) The Miller's Rant. Mr Johnson first heard of this from an old person who had lived in Yell c. 1850, and seemingly it was done in Yell at that time. The information given in his notebook (which contains a misprint - it is few couples) was derived from this person. Subsequently to making the note in the notebook, Mr Johnson obtained additional information from an old man on the West Side who had seen it done in Yell. Danced by 4 couples, who stand in a grand cross [my term], men on the inside, with hands joined in the centre, dad with other arms round ladies' waists. They all

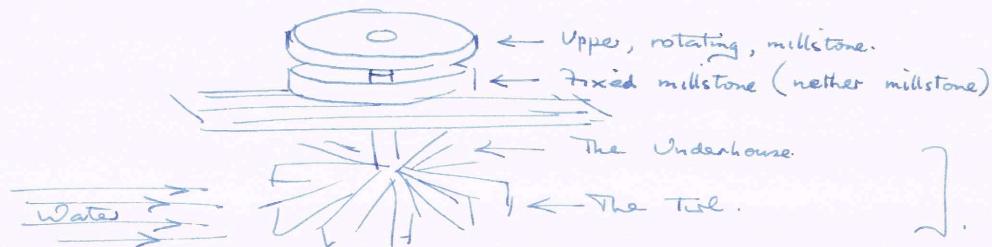


dance round clockwise, then break hold in the centre to swing partners round for one complete revolution, then join hands again and dance round in the same direction as before. This alternation of grand cross & individual turning was followed by a grand cross in reel tempo, with the ladies disengaged arm outstretched to represent the mill 'tirl'. After this high-speed grand cross, they danced the grand cross once again, then the ladies released hold of the men ~~& danced~~ (on a signal from the fiddler) & danced round the outside of the men in the opposite direction (i.e. anticlockwise). Then on a signal from the fiddler, they stopped, & each lady took the man now facing her.

The dance was also progressive in some way. Apparently on a signal from the fiddler the dancers stopped, & the two couples at the bottom of the set joined the set below them (the two couples at the bottom of the last set in the room coming up to join the top set).

Another name for the dance was The Meal-bogie (= meal bag).

[In Shetland, the typical water-mill has a horizontal wheel. This is called the 'tirl', and is fitted with vanes.



(6) The Skudlets dance. The dance described in the notebook under this title was that done by the Folk-lore Society team. This, however, was the Tirl's dance, and had nothing to do with the gluseis [see the minutes of the Folk-lore Society for Sept 19th, 1928, and also (7) below].

(7) The Tirl's dance. When Miss Jameson was aged c. 20 (she was born c. 1865) she asked an old man how the Tirl's dance was performed. According to Mr Johnson, she couldn't grasp ~~that~~ the old man's description of the dance until he made the remark quoted in Mr Johnson's notebook: "They enter henkin' and punkin'; benkin' an' dunkin'", & then she understood.

henkin' = hopping,

lunkin' = walking as if crippled, going down heavily on one leg

benkin' = bowing

dunkin' = bobbing.

[Note, however, that a different remark is quoted in the Minutes of the Folklore Soc. for Sept - 19th, 1928].

(8) The old form of the Shetland Reel for one couple (cf Records of the Shetland Folklore Society). This came from an old couple called Cheyne in Sandness; Mr Johnson & Miss Jameson were there on a trip, & were told of the dance by the Cheynes. Other people in Sandness & Walls also knew it, but Mr Johnson has never heard of it outside the West Side. It was called the "Auld Reel" or the "Auld Shetland Reel".

Two people, a man and a lady, stand facing each other. They set, the man with one hand on waist, other up, using a step of Highland Flig type, the lady with hands on waist, palms upward, using <sup>Andina</sup> ~~Abdina~~ Green's step (see notes for 17.10.59). They then dance a reel with an imaginary top & bottom couple (i.e. as if they were the centre couple in a Shetland Sixsome Reel, the lady crossing towards the man to begin, & passing him with L shoulder). Then repeat the alternate setting & figuring.

Tune & phrasing as for an ordinary Shetland Reel, but with emphasis always on the step. Mr Johnson thinks it was more of an exhibition dance.

[Note by T.M.T.: I am certain that there is confusion here with the "Jig"; — that the dance was really the "Jig", and that the 'solo reel' is Miss Jameson's & Mr Johnson's interpretation of the turning figure of the Jig. Just as I was leaving, I asked Mr Johnson if this could be the "Jig", & he thought it was the same.]

(9) Gracing the dance (see notes for 17.10.59). This came from Collafirth in Delting.

(10) General. (a) All Shetland dances begin & end with bow & cutsey; (b) Men frequently raised both hands in a Shetland Reel, rarely one; (c) it was a general saying that in a Shetland Reel you must "dance tight tight and peeriewise wi' your feet" i.e. you mustn't throw your ~~leg~~ about.

- (11) I described Mr. Halboun's Reel to Mr. Johnson. He said that the widdershins Reel made him think that it might be the Devil's Rant, or Witcher Rant, a dance he has heard about from old people.
- (12) Another possible source, Mrs Robertson, Cockle Haa, Hellafirth. Her people were old & good sources.
- (13) I asked him about publication of this material; he has given me full permission to publish it as I please.

Missionary Guest House,  
College Walk,  
Selly Oak.

Birmingham, 29.

29/5/60

Dear Dr Heth.

Since your visit to me I have been doing some thinking and also some browsing among odd papers and notes, so I'll let you know the outcome of the brain-storm etc, hereafter.

You asked about the "jig" on one occasion, and last time you were here you coupled the jig with the Shetland Reel, old style. Now I think we can safely assume that these two dances were one and the same. Many years ago I was in conversation with an old lady and during the course of conversation she alluded to the jig, - or the "jag" as she called it - and by way of explanation indicated that it was the "auld reel". This is the name applied throughout Shetland to the old style reel danced by one couple. By various subsequent allusions to the jig and the old reel by various people, I am now thoroughly

first says, my memory says now as you  
now say when you say "green" I mean you  
mean green so edge of green is  
longer than edge of my green you say  
by saying of green - before ever you  
convinced that they were synonymous.

Perhaps I did not stress that the Shetland  
Reel was always referred to as the "Skenebough".  
The reason is as follows. A skenebough was  
the float used by the fishermen to mark  
the position of their fishing lines. A combination  
of two words, "sken" the skin of the sheep from  
which it was made, and "bough" a round object  
filled with air and used as a float. The nearest  
similar word in English is "ball". The action  
of the waves in making the "bough" jump  
about is symbolised in the Shetland Reel.

Only in fairly recent years has the name  
"Shetland Reel" been used to signify this  
particular dance.

Another two small items that may be of  
interest to you. There was a variation of  
the Shetland Reel known as "Da Taesin".  
-(TAESIN is the first process applied to raw wool  
in preparation for spinning into yarn, and  
consists of pulling the matted wool fibres apart  
and extracting all the "roughage" and waste  
matter collected in the wool, e.g. bits of heather,  
peat dust, etc.) - The variation was simple

and was simply a releasing of hands by partners and each line of dancers retreating a couple of steps and advancing again and joining hands. This might be done two or three times during the "static" part of the dance before the reel was run, and was usually left to the discretion of the dancers. Somebody would shout "TAESE" and that was the signal for commencement.

Another item that was jogged back into my memory was another simple dance known in Shetland as "Da Shovel". Normally this dance was done by children, and could hence been called a children's game. My grandmother used to reminisce, and this reference stuck for some reason, in my memory. I have never heard it alluded to by anyone else.

Incidentally my grandmother (maternal) died in 1914 at the age of 76 when I was 8 years old.

I remember clearly her saying that as a child (probably about the 1840's) she had done this dance - (or game). I could not see the connection between the name "Da Shovel" with anything.

A "shovel" in Shetlandic signifies a shovel.

Only later when I had absorbed some French did I see the connection with "cheval".

The figure was of a circle of children dancing round with a galloping motion each child resting his or her hands on the buttocks of the preceding child and all going round in a stooping position.

There was an "odd man out" who stood in the centre of the circle. When the dancing round stopped, this "odd man" had to try by pushing ~~to do~~ or pulling to dislodge one of the circle. If successful the one dislodged became "odd man", and the game went on as long as they wished. There was a song sung while dancing, which contained many strange words. I remember my grandmother singing it, but as at that time I knew no French it was so much gibberish, and no fraction of it stuck in my memory. Undoubtedly it came to Shetland from France, as Shetland was cosmopolitan, and there are words in the dialect from Germany, France, Norway, Spain and even one word which is Hindostani.

... & of course is also many with  
memories, upon which you will find yourself  
some recollections of my early life.  
& hope the foregoing may be of some  
interest. Quite possibly I may unearth  
some other relevant things from my store  
of memories. If such should happen  
I shall note them and send them along,  
as I am as anxious as you that what  
is left of the old things shall be preserved.

I hope you will let me know when  
your research is published so that I  
may get a copy or copies for my collection.

Hope you got home in good order.  
My family send their kind regards.

Best wishes,

sincerely,

John H. Johnson

Dear Mr and Mrs Johnson,

I feel very guilty at not having answered your last letter - my only excuse is that we have been spending all our spare time working on our book on dancing. The book is now completed, and we sent it to a publisher a fortnight ago, but we haven't heard yet whether they will accept it - as you can imagine, we will be very much on tenterhooks until we hear from them.

(49)

Frank Rhode made another visit to Shetland this September - our visit coincided with the tail end of the hurricane, so that we had a stormy welcome! We spent most of our time on Unst and Yell, and had very little time on the Mainland. The visit was most enjoyable, but the results were disappointing, for the North Isles have not preserved their older customs nearly as well as other parts of Shetland - I suspect that <sup>(in these islands)</sup> there was religious intolerance of the lighter pleasures during the 19th century, and this has effectively eradicated the older customs. We looked for the Millstone Reel <sup>(on Yell)</sup> but could find no trace of it. We also looked for the Merry Maids Reel and the Pretty Dancers Reel on Unst - both dances are mentioned by Jessie Saxby in her book on folklore - and although we found people who had heard of them, we could obtain no details.

I wonder if I can query one thing you told me which we want to use in our book - the old saying <sup>(Shetland)</sup> that one should dance 'tight, tight, and peerwise'. In my notes, I have this as written here, with 'tight' repeated, but I don't know whether it should read 'light, light, and peerwise'. I can't imagine 'light' as an appropriate word for the Shetland style of dancing, but would be grateful if you would confirm or correct my notes here.

I can't get this on a Christmas card, so am borrowing one of Yours

Missionary Guest House,  
College Walk,  
Selly Oak,  
BIRMINGHAM, 29.  
7/I/62.

Dear Dr. Flett,

thank you for your good wishes received over the festive season, and the interesting letter, which I now take pleasure in answering.

I am glad to hear that your book has reached the advanced stage of prospective publication, and shall await with interest the outcome. I hope it is favourable, as I know the vast amount of work and research that goes into a work of this sort. I shall look forward to having a look at the finished volume and to including it in my small library.

I note with interest that you visited Shetland this year again, and was not surprised to hear that it was unproductive, considering that Yell and Unst were your main objectives. For some obscure reason, those two islands have been more prone to religious revivalism, and fanaticism than any others in the Shetland Group. There have been three major religious revival movements particularly affecting Yell and Unst in my memory. Unfortunately all these things carried a "taboo list" along with other rules for self sacrifice. Among them was music and dancing. I know that the trend for religious instability reaches back for centuries and that is the reason why so ~~much~~<sup>IN YELL & UNST</sup> of the old music and dance forms have sunk into obscurity. In the mid 19th. century, it was a crime fraught with dire peril of excommunication, and eternal damnation, to play a fiddle or to dance. A few courageous people did both in secret, and through their courage and foresight kept alive what is left of the folk music and dancing associated with the two Islands, which isn't very much. Yell and Unst natives who married out of the islands and lived in other parts of Shetland took with them their traditional tunes and dances, and they became integrated into the general pattern and lost any individuality.

The Bursteen Reel (Millstane Rant), The Merry men's rant, often called the Drukken Reel, and the one Jessie Saxby called the Pretty Dancers' Reel have all sunk into obscurity. The latter reel should have been called the Mirry Dancers reel. The word "mirry" has nothing to do with merry. Mirr in Shetlandic means to vibrate or oscillate, and as the Mirry Dancers are the Aurora Borealis, when watching them, one can fully appreciate the literal meaning of the word. Unfortunately, with the decline of the Shetlandic as a spoken and written language, and the necessity of Anglicising speech and script, the word is now erroneously written "merry", and it's descriptive significance completely lost. Even the word "pretty" as applied to the reel by Jessie Saxby gives the wrong meaning. It should have been written "Praitty" which has a meaning of subtle difference from "pretty". Praitty in Shetlandic means mighty, and magnificent, with an element of beauty subordinate to the might and magnificence, but nevertheless present in great measure. Slips like these are common in the works of many Shetlandic writers, and are extremely puzzling, when one considers that writers like Saxby undoubtedly knew better, but decided for some obscure reason to ignore their knowledge, and to mislead rather than preserve the old er, more descriptive words.

I could go on giving instances for hours, - and pages! Suffice to

give the items directly concerned with the subject under consideration. A gentle word of advice, however. Never take a Shetland word at its face value, even when Anglicised. One can go so wrong in its application.

Regarding the query about "-tight, tight, an' peerie-wise wi' your feet." It is as I have written it. Shetlanders have the habit of doubling words to give emphasis to a statement, e. g. = "weet, weet" = very wet; a downpour: "t'in, t'in" = extremely thin; emaciated: "auld, auld" = extremely old; ancient, etc., etc. So, with all due respect to your wife's suggestion, I'm afraid that the original must stand. I can't agree that "light" is inappropriate as a description of some Shetland dances. The Old Reel was extremely light and graceful, as were the Foula Reel and Pin Reel when properly done. Unfortunately these dances got "debased" by people who wouldn't take the trouble to learn how to do them correctly, and lumbered round the set like baby elephants.

So much for that. I hope you had an enjoyable festive season. We did not so badly, but we miss our Hogmanay, and later, our Up-Helly- A'. Now that it's all over here, we're back to normal. -almost! We are extremely short staffed so are having extra duties, and not liking it much. However, perhaps we'll get straightened out later.

This summer we spent part of our holidays in Edinburgh and enjoyed revisiting the capital after a lapse of over 20 years. I have been doing work for the Scottish National Dictionary, the Scottish National Museum of Antiquities, and the Scottish Records Office, and supplying each with varied information, so the trip was partly to get to know my colleagues, and to see the various exhibitions and shows connected with the various researches. I thoroughly enjoyed it all.

We've just emerged from a severe spell of snow and frost, and are beginning to discern the ground again, thank goodness! I could stand the Shetland cold, but the English variety gets me down, it's so much more severe, and strikes so suddenly. Certainly we have severe spells in Shetland, but we do not get the extremes of temperature that we have experienced here, and with the lower overall temp. in Shetland, we were always better prepared.

I am writing this, and hope that you get it fairly soon, but with the Butler dispute in the G.P.O. heaven knows when it will arrive.

In the meantime, my wife, my daughter and myself wish you and yours the best of everything for 1962.

If, and when you have the time, please let me know the outcome of your submission of the MSS. to the publishers. Best of luck in the project.

Please extend my best wishes to your colleague, Mr. Rhodes.

Happy landings!

yours,

.. ✓

# OLD-LORE

## Miscellany

of  
Orkney Shetland Caithness  
and Sutherland

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Part IV.

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1912

## THE SWORD-DANCE.

PAPA STOUR, SHETLAND.

BY ALFRED W. JOHNSTON.

THE following description of the sword-dance in Papa Stour, Shetland, is taken from the works of Dr. Samuel Hibbert (afterwards Hibbert Ware) and Sir Walter Scott.

Dr. Hibbert, who visited Shetland in 1817 and 1819, gives the following account of the sword-dance in his *Description of the Shetland Islands*, published in 1822, pp. 554, 555-560:—

"Papa Stour is the only island in the country where the ancient Norwegian amusement of the sword-dance has been preserved, and where it still continues in Thule, to beguile the tediousness of a long winter's evening. . . . We shall suppose Yule to be arrived, which is always announced at break of day by the fiddles striking up the *Day-dawn*, an ancient Norwegian tune, that, being associated with gaiety and festivity, is never heard without emotions of delight. As the evening approaches, piles of turf are lighted up in the apartment where wassail is to be kept; young and old of each sex make their appearance, and, after the whisky has gone liberally round, it is announced that the sword-dancers are making their appearance. . . . The company then seat themselves on the forms, tubs, beds, and benches, that serve the place of chairs, leaving a large space in the middle of the room for the exhibition. The fiddle strikes up a Norn melody, and at the sound of it a warrior enters in the character of St. George, or the master of the Seven Champions of Christendom, a white hempen shirt being thrown over his clothes, intended to represent the ancient shirt of mail that the Northmen wore, and a formidable looking sword being girt to his side, constructed from the iron hoop of a

barrel. St. George then stalks forward and makes his bow, the music ceasing while he delivers his epilogue." (See below).

Sir Walter Scott in his diary for 1814, while in Shetland (*Memoirs of the Life of Sir Walter Scott, bt.*, vol. III., 1837, p. 162), made the following entry:—

"August 7th.—At Scalloway my curiosity was gratified by an account of the sword-dance, now almost lost, but still practised in the island of Papa, belonging to Mr. Scott.<sup>1</sup> There are eight performers, seven of whom represent the Seven Champions of Christendom, who enter one by one with their swords drawn, and are presented to the eighth personage, who is not named. Some rude couplets are spoken (in *English*, not *Norse*), containing a sort of panegyric upon each champion as he is presented. They then dance a sort of cotillion, as the ladies described it, going through a number of evolutions with their swords. One of my three Mrs. Scotts<sup>2</sup> readily promised to procure me the lines, the rhymes, and the form of the dance. I regret much that young Mr. Scott was absent during this visit; he is described as a reader and an enthusiast in poetry. Probably I might have interested him in preserving the dance, by causing young persons to learn it. A few years since a party of Papa-men came to dance the sword-dance at Lerwick as a public exhibition, with great applause."

Sir Walter Scott, in *The Pirate*, has the following note (O):—

"I am able to add the words sung or chanted, on occasion of this dance, as it is still performed in Papa Stour, a remote island of Zetland, where alone the custom keeps its ground. It is, it will be observed by antiquaries, a species of play or mystery, in which the

<sup>1</sup>John Scott of Scalloway, born 1756, died 1833.

<sup>2</sup>Two of Mr. Scott's daughters were married to John and James, sons of Mr. Scott of Melby.

Seven Champions of Christendom make their appearance, as in the interlude presented in 'All's Well that Ends Well.' This dramatic curiosity<sup>1</sup> was most kindly procured for my use by Dr. Scott, of Hazlar Hospital, son of my friend Mr. Scott of Mewbie,<sup>2</sup> Zetland. Mr. Hibbert has, in his description of the Zetland Islands, given an account of the sword-dance, but somewhat less full than the following,"<sup>3</sup> (See below).

Mr. James Wilson, in his *A Voyage round the Coasts of Scotland and the Isles*, Edinburgh, 1842, Vol. II., pp. 352, 355-366, gives a description of the sword-dance, as performed before him in Papa Stour by special request, on August 30, 1841. The words are identical with Hibbert's, but the description of the figures is a report of what Mr. Wilson observed himself, and agrees with Hibbert's account. "Of the many thousand steps which we saw danced one of them may have been that which conducts from the sublime to the ridiculous." The sword consisted of "a straightened portion of a herring hoop." During the dance they "give utterance to wild unearthly cries, or sudden shouts and screams, and such a turmoil takes place that we at one time deemed ourselves rather in bedlam than in Papa Stour." "The exhibition was really an animating one, and not deficient in a certain wild gracefulness, in spite of the occasional prevalence of exuberant and uncouth glee."

Dr. Robert Cowie, in his *Shetland*, Aberdeen, 1879, p. 187, states that: "Until within the last twenty years [1859] the 'Sword Dance' continued to be performed during the winter evenings" in Papa Stour.

*Note.*—The following text is a combination of

<sup>1</sup> From a MS. by Wm. Henderson, junior, of Papa Stour, see below.

<sup>2</sup> Should read Melby. James Scott, surgeon, son of John Scott of Melby and whose wife was a daughter of Mr. Scott of Scalloway, as mentioned above.

<sup>3</sup> *The Pirates* was first published in 1821, so that this note could not have been written before 1822; when Hibbert's *Shetland* was published.

Scott's and Hibbert's versions of the words, of which the former version is used as the groundwork. Those words in Scott which do not occur in Hibbert, are placed in brackets [ ]; while those in Hibbert which do not occur in Scott, are placed in parenthesis ( ). Words in Scott's text which differ from Hibbert's are preceded by an asterisk (\*) and followed by a reference number to a footnote, in which Hibbert's version will be found, marked (H). Quotations from Wilson are given in footnotes marked (w).

## (Text).

[Words used as prelude to the sword-dance, a Danish or Norwegian ballet, composed some centuries ago, and preserved in Papa Stour, Zetland.]

[PERSONÆ DRAMATIS<sup>1</sup>].

[Enter Master, in the character of St. George].<sup>2</sup>

## PROLOGUE.

Brave gentles all, within this boor,<sup>3</sup>  
If ye delight in any sport,  
Come see me dance upon this floor,  
[Which to you all shall yield comfort.  
Then shall I dance in such a sort,  
As possible I may or can;]  
You, minstrel man, play me a porte,<sup>4</sup>  
[That I on this floor may prove a man.]

[He bows and dances in a line].

(The minstrel strikes up; the master bows and dances).<sup>5</sup>

Now have I dane[e]d with heart and hand,  
Brave gentles all, as you may see,  
For I have<sup>6</sup> been tried in many a land,  
[As yet the truth can testify;]

<sup>1</sup> Scott mentions that this was "So placed in the old MS."

<sup>2</sup> The master, "St. George," entered with a straightened portion of a herring-hoop in his hand, to represent a sword. Bowing his head and body, and scraping the ground with one of his hind legs, he then gave utterance to the following prologue. (W).

<sup>3</sup> Bower, O.N. *bir.*

<sup>4</sup> Gaelic, *port*, a tune.

<sup>5</sup> He then toddles about the floor for a few seconds, with a shifting motion of the feet, the toes turned well inwards, and making a low sweeping reverential bow to the assembled multitude, the music ceases. (W).

<sup>6</sup> F've (H).

\*In England, Scotland, Ireland, France, Italy and Spain,  
Have I been tried with that good sword of steel.

*Draws, and flourishes.*

Yet I deny that ever a man did make me yield;<sup>1</sup>

(*Draws his sword, flourishes it, and returns it to his side*).

For in my body there is strength,  
As by my manhood may be seen;  
And I, with that good sword of length,  
\*Have oftentimes in perils been;<sup>2</sup>  
And over champions I was<sup>3</sup> king,  
And by the strength of this right hand,  
Once on a day I killed fifteen,  
And left them dead upon the land.  
Therefore, brave minstrel, do not care,  
But<sup>4</sup> play to me a porte most light,  
That I no longer do<sup>5</sup> forbear,  
But<sup>6</sup> dance in all these gentles' sight;

(*The master then bows, and while the music plays, again dances; and thus, after having "rid his prologue like a rough colt, knowing not the stop," he gives notice of the further entertainment that is intended*).

\*Although my strength makes you abased,  
Brave gentles all, be not afraid,  
For here are six champions, with me, staid,  
All by my manhood I have raised.<sup>7</sup>

[*He dances*].

Since I have<sup>8</sup> danced, I think it best  
To call my brethren in your sight,  
That I may have a little rest.

And<sup>9</sup> they may dance with all their might;  
[With heart and hand as they are knights,]  
And shake their sword of steel so bright,<sup>10</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In Britain, France, Spain, Italy,  
I have been tried with this good sword of steel,  
Yet never did a man yet make me yield. (H.)

<sup>2</sup> In perils oftentimes have been. (H.)

<sup>3</sup> was I (H.).

<sup>4</sup> To (H.).    <sup>5</sup> may (H.).    <sup>6</sup> To (H.).

<sup>7</sup> Brave gentles all, be not afraid,  
Although my sight makes you abas'd,  
That with me have six champions stay'd,  
Whom by my manhood I have rais'd. (H.)

<sup>8</sup> For since I've (H.).    <sup>9</sup> That (H.).    <sup>10</sup> stout (H.).

And shew their main strength on this floor,  
 For we shall have another bout  
 Before we pass out of this boor,  
 Therefore, brave minstrel, do not care  
 To play to me a porte most light,  
 That I no longer do forbear.  
 But<sup>1</sup> dance in all these gentles' sight.

[He dances, and then introduces his knights as under].

(The minstrel obeys; the master again dances, and then, with much polite discretion, introduces into the room six formidable looking knights, each with a white shirt over his clothes in the place of a shirt of mail,<sup>2</sup> and a good sword girt to his side, their respective names and deeds being announced in well set verse).

Stout James of Spain, \*both tried and stour,<sup>3</sup>  
 Thine acts are known full well indeed;  
 And champion Dennis, a French knight,  
 \*Who stout and bold is to be seen;<sup>4</sup>  
 And David a (brave) Welshman born,  
 \* Who is come of<sup>5</sup> noble blood;  
 And Patrick, also,<sup>6</sup> who blew the horn,  
 An Irish \*knight amongst<sup>7</sup> the wood.  
 Of Italy, brave Anthony the good,  
 And Andrew of (fair) Scotland King<sup>8</sup>;  
 St. George of England, brave<sup>9</sup> indeed,  
 Who to the Jews wrought muckle tinte.<sup>10</sup>  
 Away with this!—Let us<sup>11</sup> come to sport,  
 Since that ye have a mind to war,  
 Since that ye have this bargain sought,  
 Come let us fight and do not fear.  
 Therefore, brave minstrel, do not care  
 To play to me a porte most light,  
 That I no longer do<sup>12</sup> forbear,  
 But<sup>13</sup> dance in all these gentles' sight.

[He dances, and advances to James of Spain].

(The master, after shewing his brethren a specimen of the sort of pas seul that they will be required to

<sup>1</sup> To (H).

<sup>2</sup> They were clad in their best attire, though their coats were doffed, their shirt-sleeves being as white as snow. (W).

<sup>3</sup> come in our sight (H). <sup>4</sup> stour, great, potent, from O.N. *stórr*.

<sup>5</sup> Who shows not either fear or dread (H). <sup>6</sup> Descended of right (H).

<sup>6</sup> too (H). <sup>7</sup> warrior in (H). <sup>8</sup> knight. <sup>9</sup> here (H).

<sup>10</sup> spite (H). <sup>11</sup> tinte, loss, damage; Scotch, *tyn*, O.N. *týna*, to lose, *týðn*, loss, damage.

<sup>11</sup> let's (H). <sup>12</sup> may (H). <sup>13</sup> To (H).

exhibit before the company, draws his sword, and addresses all the knights in succession).

Stout James of Spain, both tried and stour,  
Thine acts are known full well indeed,  
Present thyself \*within our sight,<sup>1</sup>  
Without<sup>2</sup> either fear or dread.  
Count not <sup>3</sup>for favour or for feid,<sup>4</sup>  
Since of thy acts thou hast been sure;  
Brave James of Spain, I will thee lead,  
To prove thy manhood on this<sup>5</sup> floor.

[James dances].

(James of Spain draws his sword, and on the fiddle being heard, he proves his manhood on the floor by a pas seul).

Brave<sup>6</sup> champion Dennis, a French<sup>6</sup> knight,  
\*Who stout and bold is to<sup>7</sup> be seen,  
Present thyself here in our sight,  
Thou brave<sup>8</sup> French knight, who<sup>9</sup> bold hast been,  
Since thou such valiant act<sup>10</sup>s hast done,  
Come let us see some of them now;  
With courtesy thou brave French knight.  
Draw out thy sword of noble hue.

[Dennis dances, while the others retire to a side].  
(The minstrel strikes up; Dennis draws his sword and dances).

Brave David a bow must string, and (big), with awe,  
Set up a wand upon a stand,  
And that brave David will cleave in twa.

[David dances solus].

(David draws and dances).

Here is, I think, an Irish knight,  
\*Who does not fear, or does not fright,  
To prove thyself a valiant man,<sup>10</sup>  
[As thou hast done full often bright;]  
\*Brave Patrick, dance, if that thou can.<sup>11</sup>

[He dances].

(Patrick draws and dances).

<sup>1</sup>upon the floor (H). <sup>2</sup>And shew not (H).

<sup>3</sup>on favour for thy meed (H), <sup>4</sup>the (H). <sup>5</sup>Stout (H).  
<sup>4</sup>feid, hostility, see E.D.D., but cf. O.N. *fæð*, coldness,  
<sup>5</sup>fær (few), neut. *fætt*, coldness, coolness. <sup>6</sup>that (H).

<sup>7</sup>tried (H). <sup>8</sup>As by thy manhood may (H). <sup>9</sup>true (H). <sup>10</sup>that (H).

<sup>10</sup>To prove himself a valiant man,

Who has not either fear or fright! (H).

<sup>11</sup>Let Patrick dance, then, if he can. (H)

*The Sword Dance.*

Thou stout Italian, come thou here;  
 Thy name is Anthony, most stout;  
 Draw out thy sword that is most clear,  
 \*And do thou fight without any doubt;<sup>1</sup>  
 Thy leg [thou] shake (bow), thy neck thou lout;<sup>2</sup>  
 \*And shew some courtesy on this floor;<sup>3</sup>  
 For we shall have another bout,  
 Before we pass out of this boor.

(Anthony draws and dances).

Thou kindly Scotsman, come thou here;  
 \*Thy name is Andrew of Fair Scotland;<sup>4</sup>  
 Draw out thy sword that is most clear,  
 \*Fight for thy king with<sup>5</sup> thy right hand;  
 [And aye as long as thou can stand],  
 Fight for thy king with all thy heart;  
 \*And then, for to confirm his band,<sup>6</sup>  
 Make all his enemies [for] to smart.  
 (And leave them dead upon the land).

[He dances. Music begins].

(Andrew draws and dances).

SCOTT.

"Figuir. The six stand in rank with their swords reclining on their shoulders. The master (St. George) dances, and then strikes the sword of James of Spain, who follows George, then dances, strikes the sword of Dennis, who follows behind James. In like manner the rest—the music playing—swords as before."

HIBBERT.

"The minstrel now flourishes his bow with spirit, and the sword-dance commences. The master gives a signal to his brethren, who stand in rank with their swords reclined on their right shoulders, while he dances a *pas seul*. He then strikes the sword of James of Spain, who moves out of line, dances and strikes the sword of Dennis; then Dennis sports a toe on the floor, and in the same manner brings David out of line, and thus each champion is successively made to caper about the room."

<sup>1</sup> And fight thou without dread or doubt. (H).

<sup>2</sup> Scott adds this note: "Lout = to bend or bow down, pronounced *lout* as *doubt* is *doot* in Scotland." O.N. *lita*, to bow down. This order the master, St. George,

"Accompanied by a tap of his sword upon the Italian's crown." (W).

<sup>3</sup> Some courtesy shew on this floor (H).

<sup>4</sup> Andrew's thy name of Scottish land! (H).

<sup>5</sup> And by the strength of (H).

<sup>6</sup> Fight to confirm his loyal band. (H).

SCOTT.

"After the six are brought out of rank, they and the master form a circle, and hold the swords point and hilt. This circle is danced round twice."

HIBBERT.

"The champions then extend their swords out at full length, when each of them is seen to grasp his own sword with his right hand, and the point of his left hand neighbour's sword with his left hand; and being thus formed into a circle, *hilt and point*, as it is named, they dance a double roundel."

"The whole, headed by the master, pass under the swords held in a vaulted manner. They jump over the swords. This naturally places the swords across, which they disentangle by passing under their right sword. They take up the seven swords, and form a circle, in which they dance round."

"The champions hold their swords in a vaulted direction, and, headed by the master, successively pass under them; they then jump over their swords,—this movement bringing the weapons into a cross position, from which they are released by each dancer passing under his right hand sword. A single roundel, hilt and point, is then performed as before."

"The master runs under the sword opposite, which he jumps over backwards. The others do the same. He then passes under the right-hand sword, which the others follow, in which position they dance, until commanded by the master, when they form into a circle, and dance round as before. They then jump over the right-hand sword, by which means their backs are to the circle, and their hands across their backs. They dance round in that form until the master calls 'Loose,' when they pass under the right sword, and are in a perfect circle."

"The roundel is interrupted by the master, who runs under the sword of his right hand, and then jumps over it backward; his brethren successively do the same. The master then passes under his right hand sword, and is followed in this movement by the rest. Thus they continue to dance, until a signal is given by their director, when they form into a circle, swords tended, and grasping hilt and point as before. After a roundel has been danced, the champions jump over their right hand sword, by which means their back is to the circle, and their hands across their backs, and in this form they dance round until the master calls 'loose!' They then respectively pass under their right hand swords, and are in a circle as before."

## SCOTT.

"The master lays down his sword, and lays hold of the point of James's sword. He then turns himself, James, and the others, into a clew. When so formed, he passes under out of the midst of the circle; the others follow; they vault as before. After several other evolutions, they throw themselves into a circle, with their arms across the breast. They afterwards form such figures as to form a shield of their swords, and the shield is so compact that the master and his knights dance alternately with this shield upon their heads. It is then laid down upon the floor. Each knight lays hold of their former points and hilts with their hands across, which disentangle by figures directly contrary to those that formed the shield. This finishes the Ballet."

## HIBBERT.

"The master now lays down his own sword, and seizing hold of the point of James's sword, turns himself, James, and the rest of the champions, into a clew, and the swords being held in a vaulted position, he passes under them, and thus removes out of the circle, being followed in the same manner by the other knights. A repetition of all, or part of the movements already described, then ensues. The master and his brethren, in the next place, throw themselves into a circle, each holding his arms across his breast, and with their swords, form a figure intended to represent a shield; this being so compact, that each champion alternately dances with it upon his head. The shield is then laid down upon the floor, when each knight, laying hold of the hilt and point which he before held, and placing his arms across his breast, extricates his sword from the shield, by a figure directly opposite to that by which it had been formed. This movement finishes the sword-dance. The master then gravely steps forward and delivers the following."

## EPILOGUE.

"Mars does rule, he bends his brows,  
He makes us all aghast,  
After the few hours that we stay here,  
Venus will rule at last.  
Farewell, farewell, brave gentles all,  
That herein do remain,  
We wish you health and happiness  
Till we return again."  
—[*Exeunt*].

With regard to Scott's version, he writes that:—

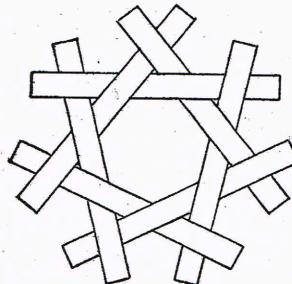
"The manuscript from which the above was copied was transcribed from a very old one, by Mr. William

Henderson, jun., of Papa Stour,<sup>1</sup> in Zetland. Mr. Henderson's copy is not dated, but bears his own signature, and, from various circumstances, it is known to have been written about the year 1788."

Dr. Hibbert states that in his version :—

"The words of this drama are taken from an official *prompt-book*, for which I am indebted to a lady of the island; a few glaring interpolations have been omitted, and the words have been corrected according to other recitations."

The accompanying illustration of the shield formed of swords is constructed from a model kindly supplied by Mr. James Stout Angus, of Lerwick.



The description of the Swedish sword dance will be found in Olaus Magnus: *Historia de Gentibus Septentrionalibus*. Romae, M.D.L.V. liber xv., cap. xxiii. "De chorea gladiatoria." In this account the interlaced swords are called a rose.

A review of the reprint of this paper will be found on p. 186.

Sir Walter Scott's reference (p. 177 *ante*) to the interlude in "All's Well that Ends Well," is an obvious slip for "A Midsummer Night's Dream," the interlude in which is appropriately quoted (p. 179 *ante*) by Hibbert, whose book Scott consulted before writing the above note.

<sup>1</sup> William Henderson, junior, of Papa Stour, born c. 1770, died 1796, son of William Henderson of Papa Stour, who died in 1799, see *Zetland Family Histories*.

## NOTES ON BOOKS.

*The Bishops of Scotland*, being notes on the lives of all the Bishops under each of the sees, prior to the Reformation. By the late RIGHT REV. JOHN DOWDEN, D.D., LL.D., Bishop of Edinburgh. Edited by J. MAITLAND THOMSON, LL.D., pp. 472, 5 $\frac{1}{2}$  x 9. Glasgow: James Maclehose & Sons, 1912. 12s. 6d. net.

In the July number of the *Miscellany* a review of this important and valuable historical work appeared, and made special reference to the Bishopric of Orkney, and it was promised that a review of the section dealing with the Bishops of Caithness would appear in this issue. It is only by dealing with the individual sections that the book can be satisfactorily treated.

At the outset it may be said that this is decidedly the most complete list of Caithness Bishops that has yet appeared. There is abundant evidence of great historical research, and the material gathered has been well marshalled. Here and there one may come across a few points on which additional information is desirable. For instance, in the Calender of Entries in the Papal Registers (Letters), I, 612, there is a reference to a decree of Benedict XI., giving power to Leonard (de Flisco), who is described as "bishop elect of Caithness," to appoint two fit persons to canonries and prebends of Bruges. "Caithness," we think, must be a misreading, but Bishop Dowden makes no reference to the said "bishop-elect of Caithness." Again, the successor of Alexander (Man) is said to be Alexander de Vaus, but in Pope Boniface's letter (dated 9th Jan., 1402) nominating Conrad to the bishopric of Sodor, reference is made to the transference of John to the see of Caithness (*Diplom. Norveg.* XVI., No. 951, p. 881). At p. 286 Bishop Dowden makes reference to a John Donkan, who was translated "ad Cathedensem ecclesiam," and makes further reference to a John Sproten, who received appointment on the same date. The question arises, does "ad Cathedensem ecclesiam" refer to the church of Caithness, or is "Cathedensem" a misreading and *Caithness* a mistranslation. These are points on which the opinions of experts would be valuable.

D. B.

*The Sword-Dance, Papa-Stour, Shetland, and Four Shetland Airs*, by ALFRED W. JOHNSTON. "The Viking Club," 1912. 7d.

*The Seven Champions of Christendom*.

MR. A. W. Johnston has done a useful service in reprinting the published narratives of the performance of the Sword-Dance in Papa-Stour, Shetland, but its origin appears to be rather obscure.

It is evidently connected, directly or indirectly, with the English romance published by Richard Johnson, under the title of "The Famous Historie of the Seven Champions of Christendom, St. George of England, St. Denis of France, St. James of Spaine, St. Anthony of Italy, St. Andrew of Scotland, St. Patricke of Ireland, and St. David of Wales."