

Officers Mess
 Royal Air Force
 Shawbury.

13th June 1956.

Dear Tom,

The whole of May was rainy in the Outer Isles so when I took a few days of bright sunshine with me everyone dashed out to the peat and played hide and seek with me. I had great fun trying to catch them. They were in all sorts of odd spots like South Loch Boisdale, Loch Eynort and the pier at Loch Boisdale. Unfortunately some of them were much too busy to see me even when I did catch them.

However, I did find one or two interesting things as well as several confirmations of by now well known things.

Mrs Smith woke up from her afternoon nap to greet Mgr Mackellaig and me. It took her a

long time to gather her wits and even then she did little more than let the questions soak in. Yet she did lean on M^r Mackellarig and flicker her feet about in her version of Jack-a-Tar. Since she is over 90, was wearing slippers and had her feet almost covered by her dress it was impossible to note anything about the dance (except that it contained beats and trebles). Even so, that was the nearest which I got to Jack-a-Tar.

Earlier in the day Mrs Margaret MacAskill (one of Isobelle's grand-daughters) had danced Over the Hills and far away. But then she is a mere 80. The dance deserves to be forgotten. It is effectively a rough role-to-role Pas de Basque followed by a chase forward 'over the hills' and a back chase 'back home'; each part takes an appropriate number of bars, and there may possibly be other steps of a similar nature.

According to her *Dannsa na Dinnag* was danced by pairs facing each other on hunkers and holding hands. It seems to have been a follow-my-leader dance for pairs; though it was possible from the conversation to eliminate the idea of a set pattern. We hunkered about together, Mrs MacAshill showing her agility and me trying vainly to get some idea of what the set pattern was, if it existed.

Later she swung me round most energetically while demonstrating her *Rhuidhleadh na Gailleach Dubh*. Start pairs facing, ladies on right. Change places with opposite (4), set (4), turn right and left (8) with opposite. Ladies change places and so do men immediately afterwards (4), set (4) turn right and left (8) with partner. Repeat ad. inf.

Her special tune for the wedding reel was a *Pant-a-Bail* to 'The Campbells are coming', a tune

whose gaelic name is 'Ghaidh mi gu bainis
'in baili Imbhaora' (I went to the wedding
of ? ?). The chorus of the Pent-a-kint is

'What makes you sad the night of your wedding,'

'(Repeat twice)

'Piper before you and your choice at your side?'

while the reply given in the only verse which I could
get is

Oh, Oh, I have no dinner,

'(Repeat twice)

'And its no easier to get any supper.'

Here is the solution of the mystery about
dancing at the cross roads - and it came
from Donald Walkers wife! When the wedding
party walked from the church to the reception
place they 'danced away the cross' at every
cross roads with a bridal party Rhuidhleach.
Old Mrs Walker was in the house at the time

and she confirmed this.

As for solos, I only managed to get Donald's Blue Bonnets, Scotch Measure and Highland Laddie. Annie could only remember the first steps of the rest of her dances and Harriet was not willing to remember anymore. Neither Angus John (who, with the rest of his family, wishes to be remembered to you) nor Roderick MacPherson had any more to give. One of the false alarms for new information took me to a pupil of Guthrie's who gave me a wonderful display of bits of his swords and fling. I did not note them, but I did note the swords and fling of Angus MacIntosh with whom I was staying. He was taught by MacLeod about 1900-1910.

When are you bound for Scotland? I hope to be in Liverpool on the 23rd & 24th June but I

will let you have the notes of the trip before
then. Incidentally, I did ~~not~~ see Charles Kennedy
at Cannel Ferry so you may like to hunt him
out (I have no address to help you, but
ex-Daliburgh should be enough). Hope you had
as good weather as I did.

Frank.