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SOME EARLY HIGHLAND DANCING COMPETITIONS

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HIGHLAND GAMES in their modern form have been so closely associated in the popular mind with Queen Victoria and Prince Albert's delight in everything Highland that we have become accustomed to think of Highland Games as a product of the early Victorian period, and indeed only one of the great Games of today [1] was in existence prior to the beginning of Victoria's reign. It is with a slight sense of surprise, therefore, that we learn that the first professional Highland piping and dancing competitions began as early as 1781, and that there were at least two Highland Games in being by 1820.

By far the most important of these early competitions were those established in 1781 by the Highland Society of London. The primary purpose of these competitions was the encouragement of the playing of the classical pibrochs, and at first dancing was introduced only as a diversion for the audience. Dalyell gives an account of these competitions in his *Musical Memoirs of Scotland*, but does not say a great deal about the dancing. By the kindness of Lieutenant-Colonel J. P. Grant of Rothiemurchus and Archibald Campbell of Kilberry, we have recently been permitted to examine some manuscripts relating to these competitions. These enable us to fill most of the gaps in Dalyell's description, and so to give a fairly complete account of the dancing part of these competitions.

Three other early competitions in piping and dancing have come to our notice, but here the available information is very scanty. The first, organized by the Society of True Highlanders at Inverlochy, was on the lines of the later Northern Meeting Games at Inverness,[2] that is to say, there was a social gathering of the nobility and gentry of the district for a few days festivities, the competitions forming part of the entertainments. These meetings began in 1815, and lasted only for a few years. The first to approximate in form to our modern Highland Games seems to have been the meetings of the St. Fillans Highland Society, which began in 1819. These too were of fairly short duration, but they are of importance because they saw the first appearance of the Highland Sword Dance on a competition platform. Of the third, the meetings of the Stirling and Bannockburn Society, we know only that one was held in 1825, and that a dancing competition formed part of it.[3]

Although these early competitions covered the period during which our well known Highland dances came into prominence, they seem to

[1] Braemar, which began in 1832.

[2] The Northern Meeting Games began in 1840, dancing being introduced the following year.

[3] Meetings of a Caledonian Society were held in Dunkeld from 1822 until at least 1826, but we do not know whether a dancing competition formed part of them (see Murray, *Chronicles of the Atholl and Tullibardine Families*, iv (Edinburgh, 1908), 368).

have escaped the notice of modern writers on Scottish dancing. It seems worth while therefore to give the history of these competitions so far as it concerns dancing. Since the history of Scotland's dances seems to be very little known, and since the available literature on the subject is extremely inadequate, we add a brief sketch of the known history of each of the dances encountered.

We turn first to the Highland Society competitions. The first three were held at Falkirk in 1781, 1782, and 1783, under the auspices of the Glasgow branch of the London Society.[1] These consisted of piping only, and the first one is said to have lasted three days. On the last of these occasions, the decisions of the judges caused so much dissatisfaction that many of the competitors immediately proceeded to Edinburgh to find other patronage. An organizing committee was formed and a further competition took place in Edinburgh in October 1783. One of the results of this meeting was the formation in the following year of the Highland Society of Edinburgh. The organization of all the subsequent competitions was taken over by this Society, the prizes still being awarded by the Highland Society of London.

The competition for 1784 was arranged to be held at Falkirk at the time of the big cattle market, but this being unexpectedly postponed, the competition was transferred to Edinburgh. All subsequent competitions were held in Edinburgh in one of the theatres, annually from 1784 until 1826, and thereafter triennially. The last of which we have any record is that of 1844.

Dancing first entered these competitions at Edinburgh in 1783. On this occasion "several of the pipers afforded no small entertainment by giving a specimen of their agility or spirit in Highland dancing". This interlude was repeated in 1784, and again it was some of the pipers who danced. Faujas de Saint-Fond, the geologist, witnessed the competitions in this year, and he records [2] that "the competition was followed by a lively and animated dance, formed by a part of the pipers while the others played suitable airs, which possessed expression and character; but the union of so many bagpipes produced a most hideous noise". But the rest of the audience either liked the "hideous noise" or were prepared to endure it for the sake of the dancing, for the *Scots Magazine* reported [3] that the dancing was "so much to the satisfaction of the company, that we hear it is requested that premiums may be devised for [this] . . . upon the next occasion of competition". This suggestion, however, was not adopted for some years.

Dalyell reproduces the programme for 1785, and from this we see that a dance was introduced after every dozen or so pipe pieces.

We receive in 1787 the first indication of the appearance of dancers who were not pipers, for in this year the *Scots Magazine* reported [4] that the money obtained by the sale of tickets was divided among the unsuccessful competitors in the piping competition "and such as entertained the company with Highland dancing, between the different parts of the

[1] This account of the early competitions is taken from Dalyell, *Musical Memoirs of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1849), pp. 94-106.

[2] Faujas de Saint-Fond, *Travels in . . . Scotland and The Hebrides*, ii (London, 1799), 247.

[3] *Scots Magazine*, xlvi (1784), 552-553.

[4] *Scots Magazine*, xlix (1787), 360.

competition". Not until 1795 do we find a mention of premiums for the dancers,[1] and even then there was a marked distinction between the treatment of the pipers and dancers. The premiums for piping were awarded by the Highland Society of London, and were distributed at the close of the competition by one "who is selected on account of his rank, talents, acknowledged patriotism; or a Highland chief, if one of the number".[2] The premiums for dancing, on the other hand, were awarded by the Highland Society of Edinburgh, and the prizewinners collected their prizes privately two or three days after the meeting (presumably when the accounts had been settled).[3] In 1817 the Secretary of the Edinburgh Society received an anonymous letter on this subject in which the writer points out "that two thirds of the audience that assembles yearly to see the competition comes merely to see the dancers and they have always been disappointed by never seeing any prize bestowed upon the best dancers".[4] This state of affairs was eventually remedied, however, and by 1826 the Highland Society of London provided premiums for both dancers and pipers, and both were awarded at the close of the competitions.[5] All the dancers received some money to help them with their expenses.

We know very little about the dances performed at the early competitions. The first mention of a specific dance is in 1788, when Highland reels were danced.[6] Moreover, the reports for 1789, 1791, 1795, and 1798 [7] seem to indicate that in these years at least *only* Highland reels were danced. That for 1789 is typical: "The dancing of highland reels between the different parts of the competition afforded much entertainment." For 1797 we have the recollections of a writer who attended the competitions that year as a boy of twelve, and again only reels are mentioned. He recalled "the awful *skirling* of those pipes; it was really dreadful, and until the dancing of reels commenced, I wished myself a hundred miles away".[8]

The "Highland reels" here would presumably be either the Threesome or Foursome Reel. The reel, as a form of dance, can be traced back in Scotland to pre-Reformation days, but the early references give practically no details. The first such reference known to us occurs in Douglas's *Virgil*, Book 13, *ca.* 1525:

> And gan do dowbill brangillys and gambatis,
> Dansys and rowndis traysyng mony gatis,
> Athir throu other reland, on thar gys:
> Thai fut it so that lang war to devys
> Thar hasty fair, thar revellyng and deray,
> Thar morysis and syk ryot, quhil neir day.[9]

[1] *Scots Magazine*, lvii (1795), 476.

[2] Dalyell, *loc. cit.*

[3] Manuscript records.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

[6] *Scots Magazine*, l (1788), 359.

[7] *Scots Magazine*, li (1789), 410; liii (1791), 360; lvii (1795), 476; lx (1798), 574.

[8] Philoscotus, *Reminiscences of a Scottish Gentleman* (London, 1861), p. 77.

[9] *The Aeneid of Virgil Translated into Scottish Verse by Gavin Douglas Bishop of Dunkeld*, Edinburgh (Bannatyne Club), 1839, ii. 895. "Reilling" is also mentioned in the poem "Peblis to the Play", allegedly written by James I, but the earliest extant version of this is in the Maitland Folio MS. *ca.* 1580. The earliest reference given by the *Oxford English Dictionary* is dated *ca.* 1585.

The first mention of a " reel " which we can identify as at least similar to the modern reel is in 1710, when we find the " Threesom Reel " described as a dance " where three dance together " (see under *Rele* in the Glossary to Ruddiman's edition of Douglas's *Virgil*, Edinburgh, 1710). From 1710 onwards references to reels are frequent, but until 1776 the only specific form mentioned is that for three persons. In 1776, Topham [1] mentions reels for both three and four persons, and after this date the reel for four (i.e. Foursome Reel) seems to have gradually ousted the reel for three (Threesome Reel). It should be noted here that the usage, adopted by the Royal Scottish Country Dance Society and the B.B.C., by which any dance performed to a reel tune is called a reel, whether it be a Foursome Reel or a longways Country Dance, is very modern. All older writers use " reel " to mean a Foursome or Threesome Reel or one of the later developments of these dances.

The wide selection of setting steps used in the reel about the year 1800 no doubt atoned somewhat for the simplicity of the figure of the dance. Nevertheless, the organizing committee of the competitions must have been aware of a certain lack of variety in the dancing, for in 1799 they engaged Madame Frederick of the Theatre Royal, who, " dressed in an appropriate garb, danced Strathspeys, Jiggs, and other dances ".[2] It would be interesting to know what was considered an appropriate garb, and even more interesting to know what the Strathspeys and Jiggs were.

Strathspeys are also mentioned in the *Scots Magazine* account of the 1802 competitions, " Highland Reels and Strathspeys " being introduced between the acts.[3] The Strathspeys here could be a Threesome or Foursome Reel performed to Strathspey tunes, or it could be the " twasome Strathspey ", of which we shall speak later.

In 1806, again possibly with the intention of introducing more variety into the dancing, we find Sir John Sinclair writing to the Duke of Atholl's factor:

> Sir John Sinclair's compts. to Mr. Palliser. There are one or two persons at Dunkeld who dance slow Highland dances, emblematical of war or courtship. The Committee of the Highland Society wish much to have these dances exhibited at the Edinburgh Theatre on Tuesday next, and wishes that the men should be sent so as to be in Edinburgh on Monday night, or early on Tuesday morning.
>
> Neil Gow knows who they are and the tunes that ought to be played, the names of which they should bring with them.
>
> Let them call for Lord James Murray at Dumbrech's Hotel, or Sir John Sinclair, Charlotte Square.

The letter is endorsed in pencil, *Alex^r Gow—Peter Robertson.* " The Battle ", " Mc an Fhorsair " [the Forester's son]—played by Donald Dewar.[4]

It is possible that the men from Dunkeld were not considered good enough dancers to perform their dance at the competitions, for the account of the 1806 competitions in the *Edinburgh Evening Courant* does not mention them.

[1] Topham, *Letter from Edinburgh* (Edinburgh 1776), pp. 262-268.
[2] MacKay, *A Collection of Ancient Piobaireachd* (Aberdeen, 1838), p. 17.
[3] *Scots Magazine*, lxiv (1802), 705.
[4] Murray, *op. cit.* iv. 219.

We have no record of a Highland dance emblematical of courtship, but there are several records of sword dances which throw some light on the subject of this letter. Rolt, in his life of John Lindesay, Earl of Craufurd, tells us that " The earl of Craufurd was not more remarkable for his elegance in dancing, than in his noble way of performing the Highland dance, habited in that dress, and flourishing a naked broad sword to the evolutions of the body; . . . he was so celebrated for his performance, that he was requested to dance before his Brittanic majesty; which he did at a numerous court, to the great satisfaction of the king and company ".[1] This must have been prior to 1739, for in that year the Earl was wounded at the battle of Krotzka, and was thereafter unable to dance. Stewart of Garth quotes this passage, and adds the following footnote: " This dance was called Makinorsair. I have seen it performed by old men, but it has now disappeared. As arms were not in use in later times, an oaken staff supplied the place of the sword." [2] Since Stewart of Garth could not have witnessed the Earl of Craufurd performing his dance, we cannot be certain that the Earl's dance was in fact " Makinorsair ". What this passage does tell us, however, is that " Makinorsair ", or with more accurate spelling, " Mc an Fhorsair ", was the name of a sword dance in which the dancer flourished a naked broad sword to the evolutions of the body.[3] This is in marked contrast to the modern sword dance " Gille Callum ", in which the sword is laid on the ground.

From 1816 onwards, there are manuscript records of the competitions which give more or less complete information about the dancing. The prizewinners in the dancing competition were decided, not at the public meeting at the theatre, but at preliminary tests held a day or two before the public meeting. The dancing at the theatre on the day of the public meeting therefore consisted of exhibition dances only. In these all but the very worst of the original entrants danced at least once, while the better dancers performed several times. In 1812 the Committee passed a resolution that only twenty of the best dancers selected at the preliminary test be allowed to take part in the public meeting, but this was not adhered to, for the average number of competitors who took part in the performance at the theatre was about twenty-five. The number of competitors at the preliminary tests varied from eighteen in 1819 and 1820 to forty-four in 1844. The total number of men [4] who competed between 1816 and 1844 was over 170, comparatively few competing over long periods.

There were apparently a number of judges, and the prizes were awarded by votes, each judge voting for the man whom he preferred. One or two adjudication sheets are preserved among the manuscripts, but these give practically no information on the method of adjudication. There are frequently terse comments, " just tolerable ", " very good ", " indifferent ", the highest praise being " capital ", earned by Donald

[1] Rolt, *Memoirs of . . . John Lindesay, Earl of Craufurd and Lindesay* (London, 1753), p. 92.
[2] Stewart, *Sketches of the . . . Highlanders of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1822), Appendix, p. liii. It is noteworthy that Stewart of Garth lived in the vicinity of Dunkeld.
[3] In his notes to Adamson's *Muses Threnodie* (2nd ed., Perth, 1774), Cant mentions " a war-dance by the motions of the body practised yet among the Highlanders ". The choice of words here is strikingly similar to that of Rolt's description.
[4] It is perhaps unnecessary to remark that, with one exception to be noted later, only men took part in these competitions.

McTavish, Pipe Major of the 42nd Regiment, in 1821. Occasionally there are equally terse comments on dress, " good, well-dressed " (this in 1820 of an Edinburgh tailor), or " only tolerable, kilt too short behind " (this in 1832 of a piper on one of the big estates). But only three times are there comments on technique. In 1829 one of the pipers was " indiff't —raises knee too high ", while another competitor " takes too big a reel "; and in 1832 one of the prizewinners " dances too high ".

There is an amusing letter from an anonymous critic preserved among the manuscripts which gives a good picture of the dancing at the competitions. It is addressed to Henry Mackenzie and dated 14 July, 1817.

> Having been informed that you are a member of the Highland Society under whose patronage the Competitors in Highland Music hold their annual exhibition—I beg leave to suggest to you (as a man of taste), that the dances which accompany the music are susceptible of a very simple and obvious improvement—viz. by lighting the lamps in front of the Stage, in place of introducing light from the window on the side of the Stage opposite to the audience, as at present. At present only the dark side of the dancers is visible, without the smallest variety of shade. In consequence the limbs of the dancers resemble, to my fancy, those of the black-legged Highland sheep when collected together . . . and their monotonous appearance together with the clattering noise produced, do . . . detract . . . from the true effect of that highly energetic dance. . . .
>
> There is just one other point . . . that on account of the manner in which the light is introduced, the exposed limbs of the dancers are sometimes exhibited to view in a manner altogether superfluous, and highly offensive to every Lady of correct taste and feeling—and not a little so, to some of the other sex, who may not perhaps be entitled to express themselves according to their true sensations on the subject.
>
> Were this matter, Sir, properly regulated, I am satisfied that many of the fair would think it no offence to attend the exhibition, which is not the case at present. And the increased attendance would far more than repay the additional charges of wax candles and lamps.

The reference to " the clattering noise produced " by the dancers is interesting, for it indicates that they wore hard shoes, in contrast to the soft pumps now worn by professional Highland dancers.

In 1816 and subsequent years the advertisements for the competitions announced that premiums would " be given for the best DANCERS of HIGHLAND REELS, or other approved Highland Dances ". As in earlier years, Highland reels formed the greatest part of the dancing, and we know from the manuscripts that from 1816 onwards they were always reels for four men.[1] But now in addition the " twasome Strathspey " was danced.

This last dance is rather a mystery. The earliest references to " strathspey " as a dance concern the " strathspey " minuet. According to Bishop Forbes, when Prince Charles Edward stayed at Lude House in September 1745, on his way to Edinburgh, " he took his share in several dances, such as minuets, Highland reels . . . and a strathspey minuet ".[2] That the strathspey minuet was a dance for two people is clear from a

[1] This would indicate that the reels at the earlier competitions were also Foursome reels rather than Threesome reels.

[2] Forbes, *The Lyon in Mourning*, Scottish History Society (Edinburgh, 1895), i. 208.

reference to it in 1756, when two Scots danced it at a ballroom run by a Scotsman in Spa in Belgium.[1] There are no subsequent references to the Strathspey minuet, but it seems likely that it was the same as the " straspae", again a dance for two people, seen by Topham in the Edinburgh ballrooms in 1774-75. This was " a kind of quick minuet. . . . Nothing of the minuet is preserved except the figure; the steps and time most resemble a hornpipe ".[2]

There is some reason to identify this latter dance with the " twasome Strathspey " of the Edinburgh competitions. Dalyell, commenting that in general the dancing at the competitions showed more agility than grace, asks " can anything blunt our sympathies more than beholding two brawny sons of Terpsichore leading up each other in measured time and pace? "[3] Of all the dances known to have been performed at the competitions, this remark can only be applied with any real meaning to the twasome Strathspey, and " leading up each other in measured time and pace " does savour of the minuet.

The word " Strathspey " is also used to denote a particular class of dance tune in common time. So far as we know, the first appearance in music collections of tunes actually labelled " Strathspey " occurs about 1750. These tunes were also known as " Strathspey reels ", the two terms being apparently synonymous. Thus, for example, Bremner includes about a dozen tunes of this class in his *Collection of Scots Reels* . . . , Edinburgh, 1757-60, all labelled " Strathspey ", but adds a footnote to the first of them " The Strathspey Reels are play'd much slower than the others ". Music collections published between 1760 and 1800 sometimes differentiate between the Strathspey and the common reel by calling the one a " Strathspey Reel " and the other an " Athole Reel ". The majority of Strathspeys have the characteristic " Scotch snap ", but this is not invariable.

So far as we are aware, no attempt has been made to trace the origin of the Strathspey tunes. It seems worth while, therefore, to digress briefly from our subject in order to put forward the following theory which, while mainly conjecture, does at least take into account the general picture of Scottish dancing at the beginning of the eighteenth century.

This particular period is of great importance in the history of Scotland's dances. There was practically no dancing during the seventeenth century in the Lowlands and in those parts of the Highlands which came under the influence of the Presbyterian Church. By 1700, when the Church was beginning to take a less narrow view of the lighter pleasures, most of the pre-Reformation folk dances and court dances had disappeared from these districts, and with them had gone most of the traces of French influence. English influence was now paramount, and it was natural that Scots, just beginning to dance again, should learn the dances current in England at that time. They therefore took the minuet and the Country Dance from England, and, since these were a little dull for Scottish tastes, they took also the reel, which had been preserved in the remoter parts of the Highlands. It seems probable that the " Strathspey " was a distinctive type of tune for the reel which developed in the north-east of Scotland at about the same time as the revival of dancing took place there. Popular

[1] *Coltness Collections*, Maitland Club (Edinburgh, 1842), pp. 195-196.

[2] Topham, *loc. cit.* [3] Dalyell, *loc. cit.*

tradition current in the north-east about 1790 named the Browns of Kincardine and after them the Cummings of Castle Grant, as the first composers of Strathspeys,[1] and there seems no reason to doubt this tradition.[2]

Certainly there is some reason for supposing that the Strathspey is a fairly late development. Approximately contemporary with the revival of dancing described above (and probably related to it) is the appearance of dance music set for the fiddle and the pipes in Scottish manuscript collections. This may be taken to be evidence of the acceptance of these essentially folk instruments in polite society, for the ability to write down music presupposes a fair level of education. Now it is generally agreed that the reel is essentially a pipe tune, while the Strathspey is essentially a fiddle tune, and both are very obviously dance tunes. If both the reel and the Strathspey were fully developed musical forms by the year 1700, there is every reason to expect to find them *both* in manuscript collections shortly after that date. In fact, reels (actually labelled as such) appear just when we would expect them, but Strathspeys appear only later. The implication is that the Strathspey did not exist as a fully developed musical form by the year 1700.

If the Strathspey tunes did develop during the early eighteenth century, then it is probable that they were composed primarily for a Speyside version of the Highland reel. The interchangeability of the terms "Strathspey" and "Strathspey Reel", and the differentiation between "Strathspey Reels" and "Athole Reels" in the collections from 1750 to 1800 would alone indicate this. But we have more definite evidence, at least implicitly, in the writing of Francis Peacock, an Aberdeen dancing teacher. He tells us that the Strathspey "is, in many parts of the Highlands, preferred to the common reel" for the Highland reel, although "the latter, by reason of its being the most lively of the two, is more generally made choice of in the dance".[3] Although Peacock wrote this in 1805, he was then an old man of eighty-two, and had been teaching dancing for some sixty years. Since he does not mention the use of Strathspey tunes for the Highland reel as a recent innovation, it is reasonable to infer that it was then of fairly long standing. The absence of any earlier specific mention of the use of Strathspey tunes for the reel may perhaps be accounted for by the fact that such use was only local.

If our theory that the Strathspey tunes first emerged as tunes for the Highland reel is correct, the strathspey minuet would have been simply a Scottish variant of the minuet performed to Strathspey tunes. It should be noted that there was a difference in the tempo of a Strathspey tune when played for a reel and when played for the twasome Strathspey. Alexander Campbell, in his *Albyn's Anthology* (2nd vol., Edinburgh, 1818), adds a footnote to the tune "Donald Caird's come again" as follows: "This air is a dancing-measure, or slow Strathspey, danced by two

[1] Newte, *Prospects . . . on a tour in England and Scotland* (London, 1791), p. 163.

[2] A writer in *Notes and Queries* in 1861 offered the alternative theory that "Strathspey", referring to a dance (and so presumably to a tune as well), was a popular corruption of the word "stravetspy", the name of a dance mentioned in the works of Zachary Boyd, *ca.* 1610. The word in question, however, has been misread from Boyd's original manuscript, and is probably not the name of a dance at all [see Flett, *Notes and Queries* (N.S.), ii (1955), 11].

[3] Peacock, *Sketches relative to . . . dancing* (Aberdeen, 1805), Sketch V.

Highlandmen with appropriate gesture, but without the *fling* or gambol peculiar to the quicker Strathspey or reel."

The introduction of the twasome Strathspey to the later competitions would appear to have been in 1813, for in 1812 the Committee passed a resolution "that Robert Gunn, Alexander MacLellan and two others dance a Strathspey Reel at the Competitions if they can be learned to do so against next year". The original minutes of the Committee for 1812 are lost, but a copy of the above resolution made in 1824 is preserved among the manuscripts. The "Strathspey Reel" here may be a copyist's mistake for "Strathspey", or may have been a genuine misunderstanding on the part of the Committee. In any case, whatever the intention of the Committee, the dance which Robert Gunn and his fellows brought to the competitions in response to this resolution was the twasome Strathspey.

The twasome Strathspey was never a popular dance at the competitions. Only seventeen of the 170 or so who competed between 1816 and 1844 entered for it, the maximum in any one year being eight (in 1821). At the theatre, it was usually performed by two couples. Alexander MacLellan retired from the competitions in 1821, and we have no record that he ever did perform the twasome Strathspey, but Robert Gunn performed it regularly. In 1832 there were only five competitors who wished to perform the dance, and of these Robert Gunn and James MacGregor were chosen to perform it at the theatre. One of the judges made a note that their performance was only "tolerable", and evidently Robert Gunn had passed his prime, for he did not appear in any further competitions. James MacGregor returned in 1835 and won the second prize for reel dancing, but, though he wished to perform the twasome Strathspey, no one could be found to partner him. In 1838 James MacGregor was absent from the competitions, and the Committee that year lamented "that the Highland Strathspey seems to have disappeared". But when James MacGregor returned to the competitions in 1844, they seem to have made no effort to preserve the dance, and we must therefore list the twasome Strathspey with "Mc an Fhorsair" as lost dances which the Highland Society of Edinburgh could have saved.

The next known dance to appear at the competitions was the Reel of Tulloch, which was performed by two sets of four men in 1829. In 1832 all the competitors danced the Reel of Tulloch at the preliminary test, but at the theatre it would seem that they returned to the ordinary Highland reel. In 1835 the Reel of Tulloch did not appear at all, but it returned in 1838, and again in 1844.

Leaving the Reel of Tulloch for a moment, we come now to the most popular of the introductions to the competitions, the sword dance "Gille Callum" which first appeared there in 1832. Five men danced this at the preliminary test that year, James MacGregor from Tomintoul (our hero of the twasome Strathspey), John MacKay, piper to Lady Gwydyr at Drummond Castle, Roderick MacKay, piper to Abercairney, William MacLeod from Lochbroom, and William Stewart from Athol. Of these John MacKay was elected to perform it at the theatre.[1] The minutes of

[1] Dalyell is rather misleading here, for he gives the impression that John MacKay was the only competitor who knew the dance. The manuscript records, however, show that it was not so uncommon as might be supposed from Dalyell's account.

the organizing Committee recorded that " The ancient Ghille Challaim or sword dance over two naked swords was peculiarly gratifying, and was performed by John MacKay with a degree of precision and ease altogether extraordinary, considering the intricacy of the figure and the rapidity of the motions ".

We do not know how many competed in the sword dance in 1835, but again only John MacKay was selected to dance it at the theatre. In 1838 there were three competitors from whom only Alexander Stewart was selected for the public performance. In 1841 there were five competitors, of whom four danced at the theatre, while in 1844 there were nine competitors, of whom five danced at the theatre. In this last year some of the competitors " avoided quick steps very cautiously from apprehension of touching the swords, which impaired the effect of the performance ".[1]

According to Dalyell, John MacKay's exhibition in 1832 was the first introduction of " Gille Callum " to the Lowlands. The history of this dance, like that of most of the older Highland dances, is obscure. It is first mentioned, so far as we know, by Alexander Campbell in 1804.[2] He says that " *Gille Callum da' pheigin*, is generally danced by one man, who performs it with great address over a naked broad-sword laid on the floor; this dance is sometimes danced by two, three or four men ". The account probably refers to Campbell's younger days *ca.* 1780 in the Perthshire Highlands. In any case it is obvious from the context that, at the time of which Campbell wrote, " Gille Callum " was a genuine folk dance, and indeed he gives it as one of " our national dances which are daily becoming obsolete ".

In 1832 and 1835 the music for " Gille Callum ", as for all the other dances performed at the competitions, was provided by an ordinary instrumental band, and in the latter year this provoked the following interesting letter from a newcomer to the dancing competitions, Allan Cameron MacKay of Strontian.[3]

> A. C. MacKay took the liberty . . . to suggest . . . to have some old highland hornpip(es d)anced on Wednesday—he had also the pleasure ( ) have liberty from some of your ( ) able members to have the Breadalbane Ball reel ( ) mostly termed, the reel of Tulloch danced—he moreover begs liberty to have the sword dance hornpipe [4] played to by his native music—Edinburgh Musicians may play well enough for Quadrilles et Micolanzes. But they are certainly insufficient to play gillie Callum. Highland Laddie and highland fling—with—over the Hills and far away—are in his humble opinion worth the viewing
>
> Allan Cameron MacKay, Dancer.

The Committee adopted the proposal relative to " Gille Callum ", and in subsequent competitions the music for this dance was played by the Champion of the pipers.[5]

[1] Dalyell, *loc. cit.*

[2] Campbell, *The Grampians Desolate* (Edinburgh, 1804), p. 263. The tune " Gille Callum " is given in Book II of Walsh's *Caledonian Country Dances*, *ca.* 1740, but there is no mention of the sword dance there.

[3] The manuscript is damaged at one edge, a few words (indicated by brackets) being missing.

[4] " Hornpipe " is evidently used to mean a solo dance,

[5] Dalyell, *loc. cit.*

MacKay's letter also throws some light on the origin of the Reel of Tulloch, for it indicates that this dance was developed at the Breadalbane Ball, just as the modern Eightsome Reel was developed at the Northern Meeting Balls. The first mention known to us of the Reel of Tulloch as a dance [1] is in 1819 when four of the office-bearers of the Edinburgh Society of Highlanders opened the Society's Ball with it.[2] The first printed instructions for the dance which we have been able to find are those in Wallace's *The Excelsior Manual of Dancing*, Glasgow, *ca.* 1872, under the dance's " Gaelic " name of " Hullachan ". Strangely enough, these are identical with the instructions for the " Duchess of Sutherland's New Highland Reel " in the *Ballroom Annual* (London, 1844) (and later reprinted in *Etiquette for Ladies and Gentlemen . . . to which is added the Ballroom Manual*, London, *ca.* 1850). The evidence would therefore indicate that the Reel of Tulloch was originally a " Society " dance and not a folk dance.

Of the other dances mentioned by MacKay, a version of " Highland Laddie " survives in the Hebrides, while another version is described in Anderson's *Universal Ball-room and Solo Dance Guide*, Dundee, *ca.* 1900. " Over the hills and far away " survived until recently in the Hebrides, but must now be feared lost.

There were several mysterious solo dances introduced at the competitions. In 1829 John Grant from Strathspey, first prizewinner in reel dancing that year, performed an unnamed solo, which called forth the following letter from another competitor, Donald MacIntyre of Glenorchy.

> . . . I thought their would have been no partiality shown towards . . . competitors but I am sorry to say that Grant is to be allowed to dance singally while I have come purposely to compate with him—I intended to have danced the same time singaly myself after him and to think I should be deprived from doing so I have friends who think it unjust. . . .

The organizing Committee replied to this letter by banning MacIntyre from all further participation in the competitions. It would appear from other instances that this was their invariable reaction to any criticism of their decisions!

John Grant performed another solo, a " Strathspey Dance ", in 1832, although he did not figure in the prize list that year. Another unnamed solo was performed in 1838 by Thomas MacIntyre of Perth, first prizewinner in reel dancing that year. It is pleasing to note that on his only previous appearance at the competitions, in 1829, Thomas MacIntyre had been only " indifferent ".

In both 1841 and 1844, two prizes were awarded for an unnamed solo " Strathspey Dance " for which there were three competitors in 1841 and at least four in 1844. There is reason to believe that this was the " Highland Fling ". The first prize for this " Strathspey Dance " in 1841 was awarded to Peter Comrie, and in a manuscript list of competitors in 1844 there is a note against the name of Peter Comrie " gained 1st Prize for Highland Fling ", the last three words having been crossed out. It is possible that the " for Highland Fling " was an error. But it was normal at that time to have the lists of competitors printed, and this

[1] The tune is in the MacFarlan MS. (*ca.* 1740) in the National Library.

[2] *Caledonian Mercury*, 27 March 1819.

particular manuscript was probably a press copy. On printed lists of competitors for other years there were only comments such as " gained 1st prize ", but no indication of for what or when. The deletion of the " for Highland Fling " may therefore have been to conform with earlier practice rather than because it was incorrect.[1]

The " Highland Fling " is today undoubtedly our best known Highland dance, and it is therefore a pity to have to point out that it is of relatively recent origin, and possibly not Highland at all. Until about 1800, the " Highland Fling " was simply a setting step in the Highland reel. Jamieson's dictionary (1808), for instance, gives the *Highland fling* as " one species of movement " in dancing. Much clearer evidence than this is contained in a letter from Lord James Murray to his mother written in London in 1814, when he had Count Platoff, a Russian envoy, staying with him. Lord James wrote that " He [Count Platoff] was very anxious to see the Highland Fling, and accordingly I got Moon [Lord James's valet] who dances very well, and some others to figure in a Reel ".[2]

The solo dance was probably an arrangement of various Reel setting steps, the original " Highland Fling " being probably the same as the first step of our modern " Highland Fling ". The solo dance seems to have been performed originally to the tune " The Marquis of Huntly's Highland Fling ", which was composed by Thomas Jenkins, a teacher of Scottish dancing in London, about 1794. It is possible that Jenkins himself arranged the solo dance, but in any case we know of no evidence that it originated in the Highlands.

Two other dances performed at the Edinburgh competitions claim our attention. One was a " local national dance " performed in 1832 by Donald MacKay from Sutherland and Duncan Sinclair from Islay. Unfortunately this progressed no further than the preliminary test, and we know nothing about it. The other, a Dirk Dance, performed in 1841 by John MacBeth, piper to the Highland Society of London, and John Thomson, piper to Alexander MacAlister of Torrisdale, fared somewhat better, and was performed at the theatre. Thomson returned in 1844 and expressed a wish to repeat the performance, but unfortunately his partner was absent that year, and no substitute could be found.

Dalyell's description of the dance is worth reproducing:

> . . . a dancer appears brandishing a dirk or poniard, lays it on the stage and dances round it. While he is describing a wide circuit another coming forth snatches up the weapon. The owner having a second in reserve they fight: one is stabbed, and falls; the victor, dragging him to a suitable place, dances round his body in a very savage style, then slaps one foot which begins to quiver, next a hand, which quivers also, after this the other hand, which quivers—and as all three members quiver a further slap on the other foot produces symptoms of animation. Whiskey is now offered to the resuscitant, who proving incapable of the draught, most of it is swallowed by the victor himself. He raises the wounded man, then able to share the proffered beverage, restoration follows, and both dance together.[3]

Dalyell comments that " whether it has been transmitted from earlier times or is merely of modern—very recent contrivance, as some assert—may be questioned ". The dance, however, is strikingly similar to an

[1] It is important to note that Peter Comrie won no first prize other than that in 1841.
[2] Murray, *op. cit.* iv. 256.
[3] Dalyell, *loc. cit.*

ancient miming dance " Cailleach an Dudain " (The old woman of the mill-dust), fragments of which are still to be found in the Hebrides,[1] and although the whisky may have been introduced for light entertainment, there can be little doubt that the dance was closely based on a genuinely old one.

We have earlier commented that the competitors at the Edinburgh competitions were almost invariably men. The exception was in 1844, when four juvenile dancers appeared. The youngest, Francis Harris of Edinburgh, who was only seven, performed a solo at the theatre. Dalyell seems to have approved of this; at least, he says that the spectators much enjoyed these children's performance. Could he have foreseen our Highland Games at present, overrun by hordes of little girls wearing full Highland evening dress, kilt, sporran and all, we wonder whether he would have approved of the introduction of juveniles at Edinburgh in 1844.

We turn next to the meetings of the Society of True Highlanders at Inverlochy. The first such meeting was held in 1815, and the last of which we have any record is that in 1820. The meetings were primarily social gatherings of the local gentry, but there were also competitions for piping. It is not clear whether there were also competitions for dancing, and indeed our knowledge of dancing at these meetings is confined to two items in the Inverness press. Thus in 1816, there was " exhibited Cudgelling, the *Broad-sword exercise* and the Durk Dance, *especially the two last*, in great style by M'Donald, Ross and Gunn, *gave much satisfaction* ", while in 1817 we learn that the company witnessed " the broad-sword *played*, and the dirk dance ". We do not know whether there was a competition for the dirk dance, nor do we know what dirk dance this was.

The meetings of the St. Fillans Highland Society, which were held for some years beginning in 1819, were more on the lines of our modern Highland Games. There were competitions for dancing, piping, and running, for jumping at a standing leap and for putting the weight. There were also prizes for the best-dressed Highlander, for the Gaelic Bard who produced the best song or essay of his own composition, and for the best singer of a Gaelic song. The best dancer of Highland reels obtained " a handsome sporran mollach " awarded by Lord Gwydyr, while the second, third and fourth in this competition each won a " pair of stocking hose " awarded by the Society. The " best dancer of the ancient Scotch Sword Dance " won a silver mounted dirk awarded by Lady Perth. In addition to these Lady Gwydyr presented suits of Drummond of Perth tartan to the best dancer of Highland reels and the best sword dancer under fourteen years of age. The competitions for Lady Gwydyr's prizes and for piping were open to anyone, but all the other competitions were limited to members of the Society.[2]

We do not know whether the sword dance performed here was " Gille Callum ", but in view of the date it is extremely likely that it was. It is perhaps significant that it was Lady Gwydyr's piper who won the prize for " Gille Callum " at Edinburgh in 1832 and 1835.

[1] J. F. and T. M. Flett, " Some Hebridean Folk Dances ", *Journal of the English Folk Dance and Song Society*, vii, no. 2 (1953), 112-127; no. 3 (1954), 182-184.
[2] This information is taken from a printed hand-bill preserved among the manuscripts relating to the Edinburgh competitions.

A Miss Wright attended the St. Fillans Games in 1820 and left a good picture of them in her diary,[1] but unfortunately the dancing received only a brief mention. There is a print of the St. Fillans Games showing four dancers on a platform in J. M. Wilson's *Scotland Illustrated* (London, 1849), but at the time at which this book was written there had been no meetings for some years.

The third and last of our early Games is that held by the Stirling and Bannockburn Society, and here our knowledge is briefly told. A note attached to the name of Donald MacIntyre in the list of competitor at Edinburgh in 1829 says that he gained first prize for dancing at the meeting of this Society in 1825; and we know of no other record.

UNIVERSITY SILVER

By GEORGE DAVIDSON

THE return to ancient custom by the gift of a silver candelabra to their university by members of the medical class of 1922-27 recalls memorials of this happy usage which preserves to us, despite the rabblings and ravages of past time, some of the earliest remains of silver work of " baith touns " of Aberdeen.

In 1778 Jonathan Troup, surgeon, gave part of a massy chain of silver found in the parish of Nigg. Since his day others have been found, complete with their penannular clasps incised with Pictish symbols which indicate by the form of their incisions the use of enamel and so hint that colour had been a part of the pictured stones of these Picts of a thousand years ago. The easy caligraphic quality of the drawing of the symbols suggests an earlier use of a more pliable ground for these works in their evolution before they were applied to heathen stones. Recalling the scraffito treatment of some of the Abbé Breuil's beasts these again may have been preceded by pictures in the sands of early time.

In 1735 a censer chain of silver gilt complete with its large boss with a central cabochon carbuncle, pendant tassel, and sliding beads, was found under the floor of the old library at Marischal College in the foundations of the Greyfriars Monastery there. On the back of the boss, beside its sturdy hook, are the maker's die stamps which conform to some used in the district of Bruges, when the merchant, Halyburton, traded for Bishop Elphinstone at the Flemish fairs and " Carried ower the Bishops' knock " for repair. This remains one of the few survivors of pre-reformation silver of Aberdeen and of Scotland.

Next by date, though not in age, are a small knife and fork given in good faith as of 1503 and so engraved by the donor, John Leslie, silversmith, in Aberdeen in 1802. The fork bears the London hall-mark for 1682 and the knife blade in its form and in its cutler's mark is also of that time. For Scottish use this was an early fork. The earliest known

[1] Porteous, *The History of Crieff* (Edinburgh, 1912).

Scottish-made fork was made by Colin McKenzie in Edinburgh about the same date for Struan Robertson the poet Chief, who was perhaps more fastidious in his manner of dining than in his rhymes.

These small pieces of cutlery of ours are of the form known of old on Strathdon as a bride's knife and fork. Sometimes mounted in brass, sometimes in silver or horn, they were brought north by packmen and were often of that type made in Ayrshire and known as " Kilmaurs whittles ". They were usually cased together in a small leather sheath, and sometimes two forks are found so that the groom might also partake of the dainties.

The mid-eighteenth-century spoons which Coline Allan made for King's College are our only reminder of the second recorded Old Aberdeen Silversmith. Coline, as he signed himself on his etching of the Convenery arms of the trades of Aberdeen, was a journeyman in the old sense, his mark CA sometimes accompanied by a pike's head, is found associated with Dublin, with Banff, and at home in Aberdeen, where he was a freeman of both towns. One of the Allens of Pitmuxton, his name survives in Allenvale on part of the " ootseats " of Pitmuxton. His many and varied pieces, ranging from dainty and finely hinged snuff boxes to a large ewer with a dolphin handle, are always soundly made with an integrity of aim for the lasting use of the article, which is often delicately engraved and lettered. His little model of brass and steel for an invention for road measurement is inscribed and dedicated

" To the Rever^{d} Doc^{tor} Grig.
Sharpe Master of the Temple London
Coline Allan Fecit et invenit
A scale of 21 feet for Highways
The Brass to bee wood 1770."

William Scott of Banff, a journeyman silversmith in the latter half of the seventeenth century, made among his varied works, some fine quaichs. He worked in the district between Elgin and Aberdeen and occasionally seems to have been as far south as Perth and Dundee. Among his earliest things are three of the Aberdeen Grammar School archery medals, and among his latest is one of the Strathbogie challenge sword hilts. A few pieces he made and marked ABC are thought by association to have been made in Aberchirder. Some of his pieces are beautifully engraved with flowers, which, however, are not the usual politically significant formal flowers of his time but more akin to a botanist's drawings. His is the work of an individual artist rather than that of a silversmith thirled to continental originals or to current local fashions. Seldom, save in church work where the forms required it, did he break the plain beauty of his surface with other than line drawn ornament.

The fine quality of his quaichs in particular seem to have paved the way for the making of a series of three lugged quaichs of large proportions which are associated with Banff. These, built in wood, often laburnum, are mounted in silver, engraved and inscribed. Such a quaich is the large one in Aberdeen University engraved with mottoes which suggest that it had been made for a family or for a club where soldier-like sayings