

The History of the Scottish Reel as a Dance-Form

II

J. F. and T. M. FLETT

In Part I of this article (*Scottish Studies* 16:91) we discussed the Threesome and Foursome Reels, and the West Highland circular Reel and its allied forms, *viz.*, The Eight Men of Moidart, Cath nan Coileach, Ruidhleadh nan Coileach Dubha, and Ruidhleadh Mòr. In this second part, our principal purpose is to survey the history and development of the remaining Scottish Reels, of which there are over a dozen. These Reels, most of which are unfamiliar to present-day Scottish dancers, fall fairly naturally into three groups, namely (i) The Reel of Tulloch and the double Reel of Tulloch, (ii) double versions of the Threesome and Foursome Reels, the Reel of Nine, and the Hankies Reel, and (iii) Orkney and Shetland Reels. We discuss each group in turn, and in order to make our survey comprehensive we employ both literary and traditional sources of information.

As in Part I, we refer to our book *Traditional Dancing in Scotland* by the abbreviation TDS.

The Reel of Tulloch

The tune called 'The Reel of Tulloch', or in Gaelic 'Ruidhleadh Thulachain', first occurs in the 'Collection of the best Highland Reels' in the Duke of Perth's MS of 1737, where it is entitled 'Tulich Reel'. In the manuscript it was probably intended for use simply as a reel tune, though it is heavily overlaid with variations, and runs to nearly twenty parts. It occurs also, with even more variations, in the McFarlan MS of 1740, where it is entitled 'Reel of Tullich'.

Several local traditions concerning the origin of the tune were recorded in the nineteenth century. One of these traditions claims that the tune was composed during a wild impromptu dance at the Kirk of Tullich, near Ballater, one bitterly cold Sunday about the year 1690: the minister had failed to arrive to take the service, and his waiting parishioners kept themselves warm with a potent mixture of whisky and dancing, which sufficiently inspired the fiddler to compose the tune (Grant 1861:83-5). Another tradition attributes the tune to Black John M'Gregor of Roro, Glenlyon, about the year 1690. M'Gregor was one of two rival suitors for the hand of Isabella, the daughter of the

laird of Tulloch, near Nethybridge in Strathspey, and the tune, together with accompanying Gaelic verses, is said to have been composed after M'Gregor, with Isabella's aid, had narrowly defeated an attempt on his life by his rival (Shaw 1859).¹

Of these two traditions, the former seems the more likely, in view of the reference to 'Tullich' rather than 'Tulloch' in the Duke of Perth's and the McFarlan MSS.²

Although the tune 'The Reel of Tulloch' is undoubtedly one of the older reel tunes, the dance of the same name seems to be more recent, and it was probably composed about the year 1800. So far as we know, the first reference to it is in the *Caledonian Mercury* for 27 March 1819: in a report of a ball held by the Edinburgh Society of Highlanders we are told that 'the ball opened with the Reel of Tulloch by four of the office-bearers'.

The dance next appears at the piping and dancing competitions held by the Highland Society of Edinburgh in 1829, when it was performed by two sets of four men. At the next competition, in 1832 (at this time the competitions were triennial), all the dancing competitors performed the Reel of Tulloch at the preliminary test, but at the final performance, which was held in an Edinburgh theatre, they seem to have performed only ordinary Foursome Reels. In 1835 the Reel of Tulloch did not feature in either the preliminary test or the final performance, but it reappeared in 1838 and 1844 (Flett 1956).

In 1835 a competitor who was new to the competitions that year wrote to the Secretary requesting 'to have the Breadalbane Ball reel [] mostly termed, the reel of Tulloch danced' (the manuscript of the letter is damaged at the point in brackets and a word may be missing). This letter would seem to indicate that the Reel of Tulloch was originally a 'Society' dance which was developed at the Breadalbane Balls, just as the modern Eightsome Reel was developed at the Northern Meeting Balls and the Skye Balls. The Breadalbane Ball referred to here was probably held at Taymouth Castle, for in Joseph Lowe's *Collection of Reels, Strathspeys and Jigs*, Edinburgh, c. 1844, there is the following note on the tune 'The Reel of Tulloch':

The Queen's Favourite or Reel O'Thulichan. It was this Reel which so especially delighted her Majesty, Queen Victoria, when on a visit to Scotland, in 1842. At the Ball given by the Marquis of Breadalbane, at Taymouth Castle, the original figure of the Reel o'Thulichan was danced in the Royal presence, with admirable characteristic spirit, by the Marquis of Abercorn, the Hon. Fox Maule, Cluny McPherson, and Davidson of Tulloch: the Queen seemed quite elated during the performance of this ancient Reel, and expressed herself much delighted and astonished at the lively execution displayed by the Dancers.

There are also other indications that the Reel of Tulloch was at this time more a 'Society' dance than a dance of the ordinary people. For instance, at the celebration to welcome the newly married Marquis of Lorn on his return to Inverary, which is described in the following report from the *Inverness Courier* for 2 October 1844, the Highland Fling and the Sword Dance were performed by anonymous Celts or Highlanders, but the Reel of Tulloch was performed by four of the cadets of Clan Campbell:

About ten o'clock . . . a low platform was erected in front of the portico, and the Highlanders in the garb joined in the dance, by torchlight, to the music of the pipes. They displayed no small amount of agility and animation, in which they did not spare the floor. . . . A Highlander danced the Gille Callum, or sword-dance—a most difficult performance indeed—with rare beauty and admirable precision; and another Celt vied with him in another line of excellence, viz., the spirit and vigour with which he performed the Highland Fling. One of the most animated performances of the whole was the 'Rille Thallachain', or Reel of Tulloch, danced by Campbell younger of Islay, Campbell of Glendaruel, Campbell of Balenaby, and Campbell of Ormsary, the graceful performance of which called forth the loudest plaudits.

The first printed description of the Reel of Tulloch is that in *The Ballroom Annual*, London, 1844, where the dance is given under the title 'The Duchess of Sutherland's New Highland Reel'. The identification of this 'New Highland Reel' with the Reel of Tulloch presents no difficulty in spite of the different title, for this same description is given in the ballroom guides of Willock (Willock 1865) and Wallace (Wallace c. 1872, 1881) under the title 'Hullachan', an English rendering of the Gaelic 'Thulachain'. We may safely ignore the title in *The Ballroom Annual*, for several of the other dances described in this work have been assigned new aristocratic titles by the author.

The instructions from *The Ballroom Annual* are given below: we have added in brackets the number of bars of music required for each part of the dance—these are specified in Willock's and Wallace's guides.

Four stand up in a line, ladies outside, and set [8]; reel, or figure of eight [i.e. 'reel of four', 8]; the two gentlemen face and set [8]; all go round [after] each other in a circle [8], and ladies take the centre and set to* partners [8]; the reel as before [8]; gentlemen take the centre, and set to* reverse partners [8]; the circle as before [8]; the two gentlemen set and turn all round, with right arms locked [8]; again set and turn with left arms [8]; the reel as before [8]; ladies take the centre and set and turn each other [16]; the circle as before [8]; gentlemen take the centre, set and turn the ladies [16], and finale [?].³

The turns 'with arms locked' are more fully explained in later ballroom guides: to turn with right arms locked the two dancers concerned link right arms, and each passes the left hand behind the back to grasp the other person's right hand.

The dance as described above employs three travelling figures, namely the 'reel of four' from the (Scotch) Foursome Reel, the circle from the West Highland circular Reel, and a turning figure 'with arms locked'. Thus to some extent the dance is a hybrid derived from both the Foursome Reel and the circular Reel. We have seen in Part I of this paper that about 1800–20 the circular Reel was the principal Reel in use in the West and west Central Highlands, and that the Foursome Reel belonged to the Eastern Highlands and the Lowlands. We should naturally expect a hybrid between these two dances to be produced where the two traditions met, and Breadalbane is just such a region.

The turning figure is also not new, for there is a reference to 'setting and wheeling

round each other' in the description of the dance 'America' seen by Samuel Johnson and Boswell at Armadale in Skye in 1773 (Boswell 1936:242). However, we know of no reference to the 'locked arms' prior to the description in *The Ballroom Annual*.

The Reel of Tulloch as described above is not an easy dance to perform, for it involves frequent changes of position, with no clear guiding principle to indicate at each point what the next change should be. It is therefore not surprising that various simplified forms of the dance arose.

In the most widely accepted of these simplified forms, only the 'swinging' portion is preserved, and this is added as a coda to a Foursome Reel.⁴ The 'reeling and setting' sequence of the Foursome Reel is performed three or four times in strathspey tempo, then once in reel tempo, and this is followed by the swinging and setting of the Reel of Tulloch. Such a composite dance is first described in the second volume of McIntyre North's *Book of the Club of True Highlanders* (North 1881), an encyclopaedic survey of general Highland matters. However, the part of this composite dance that is in reel tempo is described c. 1870 in W. E. Allan's ballroom guide (Allan c. 1870), the description being as follows (there is no indication that this sequence follows the strathspey part of the Foursome Reel):

- Stand as for Reel of Four. 1. All reel, or figure of 8.
2. Gentlemen set to ladies, turn round, taking hold of hands, the left being behind the back, then right hand behind—ladies forward to centre.
3. Ladies set to each other and turn as above.
4. Ladies set to gentlemen and turn as above.
5. Gentlemen to the centre, set and turn.

It is probable that this simplification of the Reel of Tulloch and its combination with the Foursome Reel took place independently of the professional dancing-masters, for in a revised edition of his ballroom guide W. E. Allan (Allan c. 1880) substituted a version of the Reel of Tulloch rather similar to that given in *The Ballroom Annual*, and this version was retained in Mozart Allan's well-known recension of Allan's guide (Allan c. 1890). Moreover, it is not until 1900 that we find the complete composite dance described in any work written by a professional dancing-master.

In addition to the ordinary Reel of Tulloch, there were also 'double' forms consisting of two Reels of Tulloch performed simultaneously in the form of a cross. Such a double Reel of Tulloch is described in Atkinson's *Scottish National Dances* (1900), and we have also recorded two such versions from oral tradition in Lochaber and Ardgour (TDS:153).

To sum up, the Reel of Tulloch was most probably composed about 1800 somewhere in the Central Highlands, as a dance of the upper classes, though drawing on the folk traditions of the region. Indeed, it is possible that the dance was a formalization of traditional Reels, danced by all strata of society in the Central Highlands throughout the late eighteenth century, in which the 'reel of four', the circle figure, and swinging were combined as desired. Whatever its origin, the earliest recorded version of the Reel of Tulloch was patently a badly devised dance, and over the period from about 1860

to 1900 various simplified forms arose, owing more to folk influence than to the cultivated ballroom. These simplifications culminated in the combination of the Reel of Tulloch with the Foursome Reel, to produce a dance that embodies the essence of Highland dancing.

*Double Threesome and Foursome Reels, the Reel
of Nine, and the Hankies Reel*

All the dances in this group are obviously derived from either the Threesome or the Foursome Reel. The first three dances discussed below, namely the Reel of Five, the Reel of Six, and the Double Foursome Reel, are 'double' versions of the Threesome and Foursome Reels, consisting essentially of two Threesome or two Foursome Reels performed in the form of a cross. Atkinson, in his *Scottish National Dances* (Atkinson 1900), comments that all three of these 'double' Reels 'are seldom seen except in the Dancing School', and none of our informants in Scotland had ever either performed them or seen them performed.

The Reel of Five

This is a double Threesome Reel, performed by five people standing in cross formation, with one person at the centre of the cross. The Threesome Reels are performed alternately on the two arms of the cross, and the centre person takes part in each Reel. The first Scottish reference to the dance is in the Lowes' *Ball-Conductor* (Lowe c. 1830), where the description is as follows:

(Places—one Lady at the top of the room, one at the bottom, one at each side, and the Gentleman in the middle.) The Gentleman, with two of the Ladies, makes a reel of three, while the other two Ladies circle round them; all set, during which the Gentleman turns to each Lady alternately; he then forms the reel of three with the other two Ladies.

Two other versions, differing slightly from each other, are given by Wilson in the two editions of his *Analysis* (1808, 1811); in these each dancer comes into the centre in turn. The only other writer to mention the Reel of Five is Atkinson (*op. cit.*), who gives the same version as the Lowes, except that 'circle round' is replaced by 'circle part way round and back'.

The Reel of Six

This is a form of double Foursome, but with the centre two people taking part in each of the cross Reels. It appears first in the Lowes' *Ball-Conductor* (c. 1830), their description being as follows:

(Places the same as in the Reel of Five, only two Gentlemen in the middle.) The Gentlemen, with two of the Ladies, form a reel of four, during which, and when the two Ladies are close together in the middle, the other two Ladies cross over, and re-cross, when the first two

Ladies are in the middle again; all set, the Gentlemen turning to the Ladies alternately; they then reel with the other Ladies.

Virtually the same description is given in the ballroom guides of Smythe (1830), Wallace (c. 1872) and McLeod (1897), and also by Atkinson (1900). The dance was collected from oral tradition at some time prior to 1930 by the late I. C. B. Jamieson and was published by him in *The Border Dance Book* (Scottish Country Dance Club 1936). Jamieson has left no record of his informants, but we have reason to believe that this dance was recorded from someone who had learnt it in Inverness.⁵

The Double Foursome

This is performed by four couples, and consists of two Foursome Reels performed simultaneously in cross formation. In the 'reels of four' the four ladies pass simultaneously through the centre, and the men likewise. It is mentioned only by Atkinson (Atkinson 1900), who gives a clear description. It is in fact the best of the three 'double' Reels discussed so far, and when combined with a double Reel of Tulloch is both enjoyable and spectacular.

The Reel of Nine

Three basically similar dances of this name are given in the ballroom guides of Willock (1865), Anderson (c. 1886-1902) and McLeod (1897), and we have collected from oral tradition another similar dance entitled The Rob Roy Reel, which was performed in Lanark before 1890 as an exhibition dance for children. The name Reel of Nine or Ninesome Reel is also used nowadays for the Bumpkin, a dance which was popular in the early nineteenth century and which is probably the progenitor of the other four. Of all these dances, only Willock's Reel of Nine and The Rob Roy Reel involve the characteristic 8-bar setting periods of the true Reels, and these two dances are essentially 'triple' Threesome Reels. (Descriptions of both dances, and of Anderson's Reel of Nine have been given in Flett 1966-7, part IV; and the description and early history of the Bumpkin in Flett 1965.)

The Threesome (Hankies) Reel

This dance is performed by a man and two ladies, who stand in a line across the room, facing the top, with the man between the two ladies. The man is linked to each lady by a handkerchief held in their nearer hands, and this link is retained throughout.

The dance consists of alternate setting and reeling, and in the reeling figure the two ladies each circle twice round the man in opposite directions. The man and his left-hand lady form an arch, and the right-hand lady passes beneath it, the man following this lady under his own arch. All are now facing down the room, and the man and his right-hand lady form the arch while the left-hand lady passes beneath it. They are now

again facing the top, and they repeat the 'arches figure' once more, ending in original places.

We recorded this dance in the Borders, where it was common up to about 1920, and in parts of Aberdeenshire and Banffshire, where it was in use (less commonly) up to about 1905. In all these places it was used purely as a social dance, and was performed to strathspey tunes only (TDS:173).

Another version of the dance, which was performed to a combination of strathspeys and reels, was collected in Perthshire and Angus by the Royal Scottish Country Dance Society (R.S.C.D.S. 1930), but among our informants we have met this version only as an exhibition dance for children.

We do not know of any literary reference to the dance in Scotland, but the first version above was published by the English Folk Dance and Song Society, who collected it at Kielder in Northumberland.

Orkney and Shetland Reels

With the exception of the North Ronaldshay Axum Reel, which is discussed separately at the end of this section, the Orkney and Shetland Reels are basically similar.

As recently as 1880 the only dances in use in the country districts of the Mainland of Orkney and on most of the smaller Orkney islands were the Foursome Reel, which was identical to that of the mainland of Scotland, the Sixsome and Eightsome Reels, which were peculiar to Orkney, and the ubiquitous kissing dance Babbity Bowster (TDS Chs. 3, 7).

The Orkney Sixsome and Eightsome Reels are danced by three and four couples respectively, and in both dances the setting steps are performed with the dancers placed in two parallel lines, all the men being in one line, with their partners opposite to them in the other. In the travelling figure in the Sixsome Reel the dancers perform the 'reel of three' in pairs, each couple moving as a single unit, with the lady leading and her partner following immediately behind her. In the Eightsome Reel the travelling figure is a 'reel of four', performed in pairs in a similar manner. Like the Foursome Reel, these Orkney Sixsome and Eightsome Reels are both performed to a combination of strathspeys and reels.

The first reference to these Orkney Reels known to us is dated 1905 (Dennison 1905), but this and other subsequent references give only the names of the dances and the number of couples required in each.⁶ Detailed descriptions of the dances were first given by one of us in a series of articles in the *Orkney Herald* in 1956, and are reproduced in TDS.

The Shetland Reels, which are for two, three, or four couples, were the principal dances in Shetland up to about 1900 (detailed descriptions of all the forms mentioned here can be found in TDS).

The three-couple and four-couple Shetland Reels existed in a variety of forms, in all

of which the setting steps are performed with the dancers in two parallel lines, with partners in opposite lines. In some forms (and these seem to us to be the oldest), all the men are in one line and the ladies in the other, exactly as in the Orkney Reels. In other forms, however, the couples are arranged so that the lines consist of alternate men and women. In all the known forms the travelling figures are basically similar to those of the Orkney Reels, *i.e.* they consist of the 'reel of three' or the 'reel of four' performed in pairs, though there are differences of detail between the Shetland and Orkney versions.

The two-couple Shetland Reel is exceptional: in this the setting steps are performed with the dancers placed approximately at the corners of a square, and the travelling figure is simply 'four-hands across and back'.

There is one major difference between these Shetland Reels and those of Orkney and the other parts of Scotland, namely that the strathspey tunes so popular elsewhere do not appear to have been accepted in Shetland. Shetland Reels are in fact performed to reel tunes and Scotch measures only—in Shetland both types of tune are called reels, and are usually played at a tempo of about 52–54 bars per minute.⁷

At least one version of the three-couple Reel was known in every district of Shetland. On the other hand, within living memory the two-couple Reel was confined to the western part of the Mainland of Shetland, while the four-couple Reels were confined to the south and west Mainland and to Burra Isle (which is neighbouring to the south and west Mainland).

In most places all these dances were known simply as 'Shetland Reels'. However, in the district of Skeld on the west Mainland of Shetland the local versions of the two-, three-, and four-couple Reels were known as the 'Four-man's Reel', the 'Six-man's Reel', and the 'Eight-man's Reel' (or the 'Fourpenny, Sixpenny, and Eightpenny Reels'), and there the term 'Shetland Reel' seems usually to have meant the three-couple Reel.

These Shetland Reels have attracted more attention from writers than the Orkney Reels. The earliest reference known to us which gives specific information about the form of the dances is the following description of dancing at a Shetland wedding published in the *Shetland Journal* for 1 July 1837.⁸

The [wedding] dinner being finished, the house is 'red up' (cleared) for dancing. Two fiddlers are perched up on high seats on one side of the room, the lasses, decked out in their best, are ranged on seats along the opposite side, each putting on her most agreeable airs and as fully bent on conquest as the finest drawing-room belle. The young men are also spruced up, and trying to do the agreeable in their best way. The fiddlers begin to tune, the men start up, and selecting their partners, prepare to 'tak da flûre' (take the floor). The 'Foula reel', a native air, is perhaps called for, the fiddlers strike up, and the dancers perform 'a saxome reel', a very simple sort of dance in which the dancers merely perform a figure of 8 in pairs, setting and dancing a jig at each turn of the tune. It must be confessed that there is more of hard work than grace in the dancing of the Shetland peasantry, but there are no people who enjoy that diversion more, and were a fashionable quadriller to see the leaping, shuffling, snapping of fingers, and shouting of a Shetland 'saxome reel', however he might

miss the elegance, he would be obliged to own that in *spirit* his tame performance would bear no comparison with it.

Two other descriptions of Shetland weddings, the first in the *Shetland Times* for 8 February 1875,⁹ and the second in George Stewart's *Shetland Fireside Tales* (Stewart 1877), both refer to four couples dancing Reels. The *Shetland Times* article describes a wedding which took place in the Scousburgh district in the south Mainland of Shetland about 1837, and, although the article is unsigned, the account itself leaves little doubt that it too was written by George Stewart. Unfortunately, the article is written with such masterly, if unintentional, ambiguity that one cannot say with certainty that the four couples mentioned are dancing a four-couple Shetland Reel—they could equally well be dancing two Scotch (Foursome) Reels.

The second description, in *Shetland Fireside Tales*, is a little less ambiguous, and here one can be almost certain that the four couples in question are dancing a four-couple Shetland Reel, involving a 'reel of four' performed in pairs. We may therefore take it that such a four-couple Reel goes back at least to Stewart's early youth about 1840.¹⁰

Yet another description of a Shetland wedding occurs in *Chambers Journal* for 1859 (*Chambers Journal* 1859). On the occasion referred to, the dancers were in two lines, with all the men in one line and with the women in the other, and in the reeling figure they 'run once or twice round the house', whilst the setting period continued for 'half an hour, thumping and pelting at it, till perspiration streams to the ground and mist ascends in clouds'.

In more recent years detailed descriptions of two versions of the three-couple Reel have been given by Shuldham-Shaw (1949) and MacLennan (1950), and there is also a somewhat misleading description of one of these versions by Saxby (1932). The other versions, and the two-couple and four-couple Reels are first described in TDS.

It is interesting to note that when the dancers perform the travelling figures in any of these Orkney and Shetland Reels they are said to 'run the reel'. This usage is an old one, for in two of the Country Dances in the Young MS of 1740 (Flett 1967) we find the instruction to 'run the Heys' (*i.e.* run the 'reels of three'). We recall also the lines from Ross's *The Fortunate Shepherdess* of 1768, quoted in Part I, where 'throw an' throw they lap, they flang, they ran; The cuinray dances an' the cuinray reels . . .'.¹¹

It is possible that a Reel of the same general form as the Orkney and Shetland Sixsome Reels was once known also on the mainland of Scotland, for there is a nineteenth-century reference to a Reel for three couples in the Highlands, and another in North-east Scotland. The first of these occurs in W. Grant Stewart's *The Popular Superstitions and the Festive Amusements of the Highlanders* (Stewart 1822), where, at a wedding:

The dinner being over, the 'shemit reel' is the next object of attention. All the company assemble on the lawn with flambeaux and form into a circle. The bridal pair and their retinue then dance a *sixsome* reel, each putting a piece of silver into the musician's hand. Those desirous may then succeed, and dance with the bride and the two maids of honour; and are gratified at the commencement and termination of a reel by the usual salutes.

The second reference, which also concerns the 'shemit' or 'shamit' reel is given in Gregor's *Notes on the Folk-lore of the North-East of Scotland* (Gregor 1881: 95).

The dancing [at the wedding] was begun by the *shaimit reel*. This dance was performed by the bride, the bride's maidens, the bridegroom, and the best young men. The music to which it was danced was called the *shaim-spring*, and the bride had the privilege of choosing the music. The male dancers then paid the musician his fee. Another dance was performed by the same six, after which the floor was open.

Gregor goes on to remark that in other districts the 'shaimit reel' was a Foursome Reel performed by the bride and her best maid with the two sens as partners. A similar use of the Foursome Reel, under the name 'Shame-Reel' or 'Shamit Dance', is mentioned in the 1879 edition of Jamieson's *Dictionary of the Scottish Language*, with the remark that 'this dance was common in Forfarshire twenty years ago', *i.e. c.* 1860. The same use of the Foursome Reel is described by John Grant in *The Penny Wedding*, referring to the Elgin area about 1806. Grant says that the name 'Shamit Reel' arose 'as it was considered that it [*i.e.* this Reel] would take away the shame and bashfulness which the bride laboured under before so many people' (Grant 1836:30). The 'sens' mentioned by Gregor may possibly be the messengers sent to bring the bride to the wedding.

We cannot be certain that the Reels referred to by Stewart and Gregor were of the same form as the Orkney and Shetland Reels, for neither author describes the travelling figure, but it is perhaps significant that in most districts of Orkney and Shetland the first dance at a wedding was a Sixsome Reel, performed by the bride and bridegroom and their attendants.

We should mention also that a simple 'Six Reel' for three couples, involving a 'reel of three' performed in pairs, was collected by Cecil Sharp in Goathland in Yorkshire in 1914. Moreover, the usage 'to run the reel' also occurs in Yorkshire, as is seen in the following lines from the Cleveland district:

Becath awd an' yung wad hev a dance
Tell they gat tired wcel;
They'd crack their fingers an' cry *Yuck!*
As they ran t'kuntry reel

(Gutch 1901:256; *cf.* the passage from *The Fortunate Shepherdess* on p. 99).

It is natural to wonder why strathspey tunes have never taken root in Shetland, and a possible reason may lie in the extreme popularity of the Sixsome Reel there, for a reel is much better suited to this dance than is a strathspey.¹¹ In Shetland the Sixsome Reel was normally danced in the confined space of a croft kitchen, and in the travelling figure the dancers had to pass closely round each other as they performed the 'reel of three' in pairs. With the quick tempo of a reel, the travelling steps tended to be short, and the figure fitted perfectly to the music—the dancers returned to their places with just enough time for the three quick stamps which terminated the reeling part of the measure.

On the other hand, to the slower tempo of a strathspey dancers tend to take longer steps, and the use of a strathspey in the Shetland Sixsome Reel would therefore have meant either that the dancers would have tended to finish the reeling figure well before the music, or that their steps would have had to be unnaturally cramped. It is true that the very similar Orkney Sixsome Reel was danced to a combination of strathspeys and reels, but in a confined space the strathspey part of the Orkney dance fits the music much less well than does the reel part.

The popularity of the Sixsome Reel in Shetland might also explain why the (Scotch) Foursome Reel was not accepted into the repertoire of Shetland dances until about 1900. The Sixsome Reel does in fact make a better use of the dancing space available in the small croft kitchens of Shetland than does the Foursome Reel.

If the popularity of the Sixsome Reel in Shetland was responsible for the non-acceptance there of strathspeys and the Foursome Reel, then we may infer a little more about the age of the Shetland Sixsome Reel than is provided by the earliest literary reference, in 1837. We have seen in Part I of this paper that strathspey tunes first became common on the mainland of Scotland about 1760–70, and that the Foursome Reel came into general favour in Scotland (except in the West Highlands and the Western Isles) about 1775–1800. A knowledge of the existence of these new fashions would have travelled almost immediately to Shetland, either *via* polite society or *via* fishermen, but the new tunes and the new dance would not have been adopted into local repertoires if the Sixsome Reel was already well established there.

On the other hand, true Reels involving alternate setting and reeling do not seem to be native to Shetland. This may be inferred from a paper given to George Low in 1774 by the Reverend William Archibald, Minister of the island of Unst in Shetland, and printed in Low's *Tour* (Low 1879:163). Of the people of Unst Archibald wrote:

Diversions obtain only in winter, and consist in dancing on some stated days about and after Christmas, when they meet in considerable numbers. . . . There is one species of dance which seems peculiar to themselves, in which they do not proceed from one end of the floor to the other in a figure [*i.e.* as in a Country Dance], nor is it after the manner of a Scotch reel, but a dozen or so form themselves into a circle, and taking each other by the hand, perform a sort of circular dance, one of the company all the while singing a Norn Visick. This was formerly their only dance, but has now given entire way to the reel.

The ring dance described by Archibald survived in Unst up to about 1860 (Saxby 1932), and similar dances still survive in the Faroe Islands. However, what is relevant here is the assertion, implicit in Archibald's statement, that the Reel is not native to Unst, and that it had been brought into the island not too long before 1774, possibly shortly after 1700.

We have already remarked in Part I of this paper that the beginning of the eighteenth century saw a revival of social dancing in Scotland, following the religious prohibitions of the preceding century, and this is obviously the period at which we should expect Reels to have spread into regions where they had hitherto been unknown. However,

the form of Reel most likely to have come to Shetland in this way would have been the Threesome Reel, for in the first half of the eighteenth century the Threesome Reel seems to have been the principal Reel in those parts of the mainland of Scotland having closest links with Shetland. A possible relic of such an importation is a dance for three people called The Little Maltman, which was performed in Esha Ness on the Mainland of Shetland about 1875, though unfortunately our information about this dance is fragmentary (Mouat 1959). The Sixsome Reel might well be a Shetland development of the Threesome Reel obtained by 'doubling up' the participants¹² to obtain a more even matching of the sexes. From Shetland the Sixsome Reel could then easily have been exported to Orkney and North-east Scotland, and also to the Yorkshire coast, by the crews of the fishing vessels who used Shetland as a base during the summer months.

We must mention here the 'Auld Reels' of Shetland. These too existed in various forms, for three or four couples, and consist of a 'reel of three' or a 'reel of four' which is repeated over and over without pause, each couple dancing as a single unit, with partners either side by side or one behind the other. The Auld Reels are thus essentially similar to a three-couple or four-couple Shetland Reel from which the setting steps are omitted. However, the similarity of the Auld Reels to the Shetland Reels does not extend to the music, for the surviving Auld Reel tunes are strongly Scandinavian in character: in particular, one of them has exactly the same form as a type of Norwegian dance-tune known as a Halling, while another, if not of exactly the same form as the Halling tunes, has at least close affinities with them (see TDS Chs. 4, 8; Flett 1971, and references given there).¹³

The Auld Reels are first referred to in 1813, but no details of the form of the dance are given (see Flett 1971).¹⁴ As the 'Bride's or Bridegroom's Reels' the Auld Reels were once performed as the closing dances (or dance) of a Shetland wedding, just prior to the bedding of the bride (TDS Ch. 4), and a version for eight dancers under the title of the 'Brides Reels' is mentioned in *Shetland Fireside Tales* (Stewart 1877).

The undoubted antiquity of the Auld Reel tunes, and their equally undoubted Scandinavian origin, make it certain that the Auld Reels, as dances, existed in Shetland prior to the introduction of the true Reels. However, they may not originally have employed the 'reel of three' or the 'reel of four'. The Halling dance, as known in Norway today, is a couple dance involving feats of athleticism by the male partner, and it is possible that the Auld Reels were originally couple dances in which the couples simply circled the floor. After the introduction of true Reels, this circling could easily have given way to a reeling figure, which makes a more interesting use of the space available. It is also possible that the existence of a couple dance in Shetland at that time might have accelerated the 'doubling up' of the participants in Reels.

So far, we have said little about the Orkney and Shetland Reels for four couples. Those which involve a 'reel of four' performed in pairs seem to us to be developments from the Sixsome Reel, and are not very successful. Within living memory they were distinctly uncommon, and their reeling figures do not fit the music particularly well.

On the other hand, the interesting Eightsome or Axum Reel from the Orkney island of North Ronaldshay, which has the most complicated travelling figure of all Scottish Reels, is a well-constructed dance which deserves to be better known.

The figure of the Axum Reel, which is illustrated in Fig. 1(c) in Part I, consists essentially of two 'reels of four' arranged in the form of a cross, but, in contrast to the Double Foursome, here each dancer passes from one 'reel of four' to the other on entering the central loop. The dance commences with alternate setting and reeling, performed to a strathspey, and in this part each dancer covers half the travelling figure in each reeling period. Following the call 'Run it oot', the music gradually becomes faster and faster, and the dancers thereupon continuously traverse the travelling figure, without setting, until the fiddler brings the dance to an end.

The continuous reeling of the last part has obvious features in common with the Shetland Auld Reels, and, like the Auld Reels in Shetland, the Axum Reel was once the closing dance in North Ronaldshay weddings.

In spite of its unusual nature, the Axum Reel was unknown outside Orkney until recently. A detailed description was first given by one of us in a series of articles in the *Orkney Herald* in 1956, and is reproduced in TDS, Chapter 7. An inaccurate description is given in *Scottish Country Dance Book 18* (R.S.C.D.S. 1955): this is based on correspondence with the same sources from whom we recorded the dance.

Conclusion

It is interesting to note the extent to which we have had to rely on information collected recently from oral tradition for our knowledge of Scottish Reels. An historian of the dance, writing in 1948 (when we began our research) and employing only printed and manuscript sources, would have had available detailed information of only eleven of the twenty-one Reels described in this paper¹⁵ (and there would have been some doubt whether one of these, the Shetland Eightsome Reel, really existed). In addition, he would have known that there once existed Reels in Orkney for three and four couples, but would not have known any details of these dances. He would also have known that there once existed dances with the titles *Cath nan Coileach* and *Ruidhleadh nan Coileach Dubha*, but would not have known that these were Reels. As we have remarked in Part I, he would have been entirely unaware of the existence of the circular Reel and the allied *Ruidhleadh Mòr* and *The Eight Men of Moidart*. He would also have been unaware of the existence of the Axum Reel from North Ronaldshay, the Shetland Foursome Reel and the Shetland Auld Reels. Perhaps more important, he would also have been largely unaware of the extent to which Reels once dominated local dance repertoires in Scotland outside the Lowlands and the immediately adjacent Highlands. Indeed, without the evidence from oral tradition concerning this last point, he might well have given Reels less than their due as the most universal and the most national dance-form in Scotland.¹⁶

NOTES

- 1 The Gaelic verses given by Shaw were recorded from 'an old Highlander' who was born c. 1760. The song is also given in Sinclair's *An t-Oranaiche*, Glasgow, 1879.

K. N. MacDonald, in his *Puirt-a-beul*, Glasgow, 1901, gives a similar tradition concerning Black John M'Gregor, and says that this was first recorded by a Dr Benjamin Taylor in an article in *Atlanta*. The date of this is said to be c. 1840.

- 2 It should be noted that the Duke of Perth's MS and the McFarlan MS were compiled by the same person, David Young (see Part I).

- 3 The material in *The Ballroom Annual* also appears in *Etiquette for Ladies and Gentlemen; . . . to which is added the Ball-Room Manual*, London, n.d. In this, the part of the instructions for 'The Duchess of Sutherland's New Highland Reel' between the asterisks marked in the text is omitted, probably by a compositor's error.

An abbreviated version of *The Ballroom Annual*, including 'The Duchess of Sutherland's New Highland Reel', again with the omission of the part between the asterisks, was published under the title *The Art of Dancing*, London, n.d., and in this form seems to have had a fairly wide circulation in Scotland.

- 4 Further details of the various forms of the Reel of Tulloch known within living memory are given in TDS, Chapter 6.

- 5 There was also another Reel of Six, the 'Scotch Reel for Six', which was used by the Dundee dancing-master David Anderson as an exhibition dance c. 1895-1910 (see Flett 1966-7: parts I, IV). In this dance the dancers performed their setting steps in a line of six, and to begin the travelling figure they faced in pairs. The pattern of the travelling figure was similar to that of the 'reel of four', but with an additional loop at each end, and each dancer performed exactly half this figure in the reeling period.

- 6 According to Dennison (1905:34) the dances performed at an Orkney wedding 'were generally "Reels". There were the "twosome", that was the two-couple reel; the "treesome", the three-couple reel; and the "aightsome", the four-couple reel.' Dennison was born in 1826, and was a native of the island of Sanday, where he resided for most of his life. His account presumably refers to the period c. 1840.

The same three Reels are mentioned in almost the same words by John Firth in 1910 (see TDS: 50), referring to the district of Finstown on the mainland of Orkney.

- 7 There was considerable variation in tempo between one fiddler and another, and we have recorded speeds varying from 62 to 48 bars per minute (we have also met one fiddler who played as slowly as 40 bars per minute, but he was completely exceptional).

- 8 The issue of the *Shetland Journal* for 1 July 1837 was the mourning issue announcing the death of William IV on June 20, and two editions were printed. The article 'A Shetland Country Wedding' quoted in the text occurs only in the earlier edition, which was apparently sent to subscribers outside Shetland (a copy is in the Orkney County Library in Kirkwall). In the later edition (copies of which are in the Shetland County Library in Lerwick), the article is replaced by an editorial on Queen Victoria's accession and other material on the life of William IV. We are indebted for this information to Mr D. M. N. Tinch, Deputy County Librarian of Orkney, and Mr G. W. Longmuir, County Librarian of Shetland.

The article is reprinted in *Peace's Almanac and County Directory for 1903*, Kirkwall 1902, with a reference to the *Shetland Journal* of the above date. (We first found the article in Peace's reprint some years ago, but at that time we were unable to trace the original of the reprint, for we consulted the Lerwick copies of the *Shetland Journal*, which we now know to be of the wrong edition. The existence of the earlier 'overseas' edition was discovered recently by Mr Tinch when we wrote to him with the faint hope that Peace's original source might be somewhere in the Kirkwall library.)

- 9 This description is reprinted in *The Orkney and Shetland American* (published in Chicago) vol. 3, Nos. 10, 11, April, May 1890, and also in *Anderson's Orkney and Shetland Guide, Directory and Almanac for 1891*, Kirkwall 1890. An abbreviated version is given in Ursula Venables, *Life in Shetland*, Edinburgh, 1956, p. 34, and a short extract is also given in TDS, p. 65.
In all these works the original source of the description is not specified.
We are indebted to Mr G. W. Longmuir for much bibliographical assistance in relation to these and other references.
- 10 Stewart was born in 1825.
- 11 Mr Peter Cooke has kindly pointed out to us that it is not quite accurate to say that strathspeys were absent from Shetland. In fact a small number of tunes that were played by Shetland fiddlers as tunes for the Shetland Reel (at the appropriate reel tempo) can be traced back to Scottish strathspey tunes, and it seems that Shetlanders pressed into service any tune that was to hand and that could be made suitable for the Shetland Reel. However, with the exception of the one fiddler mentioned in note 7, it is true that strathspey tempo was not used for Reels in Shetland, and our remarks should be interpreted as referring to strathspey tempo.
- 12 We have seen such a 'doubling up' of a 'reel of three' take place extemporaneously in the modern Eightsome Reel during the last twenty years.
- 13 Some of the Auld Reel tunes have features in common with the tune for the Papa Stour Sword Dance.
- 14 The first (partial) descriptions of the Auld Reels are given by Shuldham-Shaw (1949). Complete details can be found in TDS, Chapter 8.
- 15 This total does not distinguish between the various forms of the Shetland Sixsome Reel, and similarly for the other Reels.
- 16 Cf. the albums of the Royal Scottish Country Dance Society, which contain only four true Reels.

REFERENCES

As in Part I, the following list does not include manuscript or printed collections of music or dances whose titles are given in full in the text. The abbreviation TDS in the text denotes our book *Traditional Dancing in Scotland*, London 1964.

ALLEN, W. E.

- c. 1870 *New Reference Guide to the Ball-Room*. Glasgow.
c. 1880 A revised edition of the above.
c. 1890 *Allan's Reference Guide to the Ball-Room* (published by Mozart Allan). Glasgow.

ANDERSON, DAVID

- c. 1886-1902 *D. Anderson's Ball-Room Guide. With full tuition in the art of dancing without the use of French terms*. Dundee, c. 1886. Revised editions c. 1891 and c. 1894. Also *The Universal Ball-Room and Solo-Dance Guide*. Dundee c. 1899, a revised and much enlarged version of the *Ball-Room Guide*. Also further editions of *The Universal . . . Guide* c. 1900 and 1902.

ATKINSON, J. GRAHAMSLBY

- 1900 *Scottish National Dances*. Edinburgh.

BOSWELL, JAMES

- 1936 *Boswell's Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides with Samuel Johnson, LL.D. Now first published from the original MS*. London.

CHAMBERS JOURNAL

- 1859 'Shetland Marriages', *Chambers Journal* 12:383-4.

DENNISON, WALTER TRAILL

- 1905 *Orkney weddings and wedding customs*. Kirkwall.

- FLETT, J. F. and FLETT, T. M.
 1956 'Some early Highland Dancing Competitions'. *Aberdeen University Review* 36 : 345-58.
 1965 'The Bumpkin'. *Scottish Studies* 9:85-90.
 1966-7 'David Anderson of Dundee and his Ballroom Guides, I-IV'. *The Thistle*, Nos. 29-37 (1966-7). Also in *The Reel*, Nos. 93-4, 96-8.
 1967 'The Scottish Country Dance: its origins and development, II.' *Scottish Studies* 11 : 125-47.
- FLETT, T. M.
 1971 'The Auld Reel, The Foula Reel, and The Shaalds of Foula.' *Shetland Folk Book* 5: 22-31.
- GRANT, JOHN
 1836 *The Penny Wedding*. London.
 1861 *Legends of the Braes o' Mar*. Aberdeen.
- GREGOR, WALTER
 1881 *Notes on the Folk-lore of the North-East of Scotland*. London.
- GUTCH, MRS (ed.)
 1901 *County Folk-Lore, Vol. II. Examples of printed folk-lore concerning the North Riding of Yorkshire, York, and the Ainsty*. London.
- LOW, GEORGE
 1879 *A Tour through the Islands of Orkney and Shetland*. Kirkwall.
- LOWE, J., R., J., and J. S.
 c. 1830 *Lowe's Ball-Conductor and Assembly Guide*, 3rd edition. Edinburgh.
- MACLENNAN, D. G.
 1950 *Highland and Traditional Scottish Dances*. Edinburgh.
- MCLEOD, JOHN N.
 1897 *Pocket Companion to the Ball-Room*. Kirkcaldy.
- MOUAT, MALCOLM
 1959 Information obtained at an interview with Mr Mouat at Hillend, Hillswick, Shetland, September 1959.
- NORTH, C. N. MCINTYRE
 1881 *Book of the Club of True Highlanders*. Vol. II. London.
- ROYAL SCOTTISH COUNTRY DANCE SOCIETY
 1930 *The Scottish Country Dance Book*. Book 6.
 1955 *The Scottish Country Dance Book*, Book 18.
- SAXBY, JESSIE M. E.
 1932 *Shetland Traditional Lore*. Edinburgh.
- SCOTTISH COUNTRY DANCE CLUB
 1936 *The Border Dance Book*. London.
- [SHAW, DONALD]
 1859 *Highland Legends and Fugitive Pieces of Original Poetry*. Edinburgh.
- SHULDHAM-SHAW, P.
 1949 'Folk Music and Dance in Shetland'. *Journal of the English Folk Dance and Song Society* 6 (1948-51):74-80.
- SMYTHE, W.
 1830 *A pocket companion containing the directions for the performance of Quadrilles, Scotch, English, Irish, French and Spanish Country Dances, Reels, etc.* London.

[STEWART, GEORGE]

1877 *Shetland Fireside Tales*. Edinburgh.

STEWART, WILLIAM GRANT

1822 *The Popular superstitions and the Festive Amusements of the Highlanders*. Edinburgh.

WALLACE, J. F.

c. 1872 *The Excelsior Manual of Dancing*. Glasgow.

c. 1881 *People's Edition of the Excelsior . . . Dancing*. Glasgow.

WILLOCK, H. D.

1865 *Manual of Dancing*. Glasgow.

WILSON, THOMAS

1808 *An Analysis of Country Dancing*. 1st edn. 1808, 2nd edn. 1811. London.

