

An Afternoon of Early RSCDS Dances: Celebrating the Centenary of the Publication of Book 1.

Rod Downey, April 2024.

Preamble:

The Wellington RSCDS Region Committee decided to have an afternoon of early RSCDS dances in the same spirit as for the 2023 afternoon of [Early Wellington Region Dances](#), celebrating the Centenary of the Society. The Society's first publication, Book 1, appeared in 1924, so that 2024 will be the centenary of its publication. The committee agreed upon the afternoon being dances from books 1-5, which all appeared before 1930. As I discuss below, an afternoon only about Book 1 would have included no Strathspeys, and a very limited set of formations; thus, we broadened our scope to include a wider range of Historical RSCDS Dances.

On the Selection:

To begin, I will give some general commentary for the selection chosen. Detailed background notes for the dances chosen will appear at the end of this document. I am not sure how many of the dances below I will get through as it is hard to know with unseen dances. [Marjorie McLaughlin](#), ex-RSCDS archivist and longstanding tutor at San Diego Branch, has also kindly provided notes on books 1-6, and their history, which I have [posted here](#).

Books 1-5 contain 60 dances. From these 60 I have selected 13 based on interest and danceability. I have tried to avoid dances we commonly do, at least for the most part. I have also tried to keep a variety of formations, which is not so easy in the early books. For example, 7 of the 12 dances of book 1 finish with a poussette. (How times have changed! There was a time when knowing "down the middle and up, poussette" meant you knew half of most dances!)

Some of the dances are genuinely difficult to dance, such as [The Falkland Beauty](#), which was probably wrongly reconstructed. I also chose not to do [Strip the Willow](#) or [Glasgow Highlanders](#). Regarding *Strip the Willow*, I have included an alternative dance with running step (*Haymakers*). Instead of *Glasgow Highlanders*, I chose *Lady Macintosh's Rant*, which does have an unusual similar starting position and is not commonly done. Besides, *Strip the Willow* and *Glasgow Highlanders* are quite often done worldwide, and not always celebrated! I have included at least one dance from each of Books 1-5.

An interesting point is that Book 1 has no Strathspeys. I am told that in the early days of the society, beginning teachers could only teach from Book 1, until they earned their spurs.

Music:

Our musicians, [Lynne Scott](#) and Sam Berkahn, are coming to the party. They will play some of the dances only using instruments which were available in mid-18th century-

Fiddle and Cello. Thanks for this idea, Lynne. Additionally, I have included music notes to the extent I could dig them up.

SCD Evolution:

Kristin and I remember dancing in Cambridge (UK) with the [Capriol Dancers](#), who dance historical early dances with many demonstrations. (We found it quite humbling and challenging going back to being beginners and doing steps which resembled those we use in SCD, but were not the same.) We talked to them about older forms of dance. They said one of the main problems was to interpret what dances actually were, and steps were, from so long ago. They reconstructed from descriptions of dances handed down from the 17th and 18th Century. Our founders, particularly Miss Milligan and Mrs Stewart, put a lot of effort into dance and music reconstruction. Many of the old dances were not in sets, but in long lines, and the music would have an instruction such as: “*Longways for as many as will.*” The Society made the decision to have all dances adapted into sets, except some round the room dances.

Some References:

One nice history of how SCD developed in its current RSCDS form is by [Hugh Foss](#) “*Evolution of Scottish Country Dancing.*” (1973). (These notes can be downloaded as a pdf if you type “Notes on the Evolution of Scottish Country Dancing” into Google.) In particular, Foss relates how the RSCDS style of Scottish Country Dancing evolved from the dances in the very [famous multi-edition book](#) by [Playford](#) (*The Compleat Dancing Master*, 1651+). Foss remarks “Miss Milligan and Mrs Stewart got their steps by demonstration and word of mouth from old dancers, so they would probably be of the style of, say, 1860-80”.

Reconstruction of the Poussette:

Many, many early dances finish with a Poussette. “Old time” ballroom dances along the line of *St Bernard’s Waltz*, the dance very often finishes with 4 bars of waltz/rotary chasse/polka turns, and in the early dances it seems that whatever the Poussette was at the time, apparently it served a similar dance ending role.

According to Foss, the current RSCDS version of a Poussette is based on their interpretation of the 1790 Ballantyne manuscript. The book [A Complete Guide to Scottish Country Dancing](#) by Allie Anderson and John Duthie (1931) talks about two versions of the Poussette one of which is “popular in the Borders” (I used a version of this alternative form in my dance [Borders Traditional](#) if you want a look. The men begin on their right foot in this version, BTW.). There are many old manuscripts and interpretations, especially when RSCDS dances evolved from English Country Dances. For example, in such an 1809 ECD version of “The Triumph” a well-known author [Sharp](#) describes the poussette as “Partners meet, engage in waltz fashion, and dance round in a small circle between the lines of the General Set. At the beginning of the last bar they disengage, return to places and bow.”

Another paper discussing what might have been a Poussette can be found by Paul Cooper on the [Regency Dancing site](#), and another long discussion thread [here](#) on the Strathspey Server site.

Limited Formations:

Nowadays, we have many, many formations in our dance form. Some have suggested too many. In the early dances, this was not so true, and traditional core formations were quite common. For example, Foss remarks that ``In books 1-16 there are 171 progressive dances...there are 53 down the middle and ups, 37 poussettes, 30 rights and lefts, 28 set to and turn corners, and so on''.

My Notes on the Selection:

The notes below are based on readings I have found; and add background to the selections. I have added comments from George Emmerson ``*Scotland through Her Country Dances*'', which I gather some regard as not completely accurate. I am most definitely no archivist nor historian, so have relied on secondary material.

I love the quotes (with 17th Century spelling f=s) below about the Art of Dancing from the first edition of Playford (1651)

The book's subtitle:

``Plaine and eafie Rules for the Dancing of Country Dances, with a tune for Each Dance''

On dancing:

``The Art of Dancing called by the Ancient Greeks *Orchestine* is a commendable and Rare Quality fit for Young Gentlemen, if opportunely and civilly ufed. And *Plato*, that Famous Philofopher thought it met, that young Ingenious Children be taught to dance''.

1. **Light and Airy.** *Book 4 Number 5. Jig* William Campbell's Collection of Dances, 1790. Music taken from Neil Gow's Collection. [This website](#) has a lot about the music, so click on the link. From there ``The phrase light and airy is probably one that had been used by both Dancing Masters and Musicians over the centuries to encourage a nimbleness or sprightliness of movement. For example, *George Jenkins* in his 1822 *The Art of Dancing* wrote about the importance of an *airy, light and easy* costume for dancing in and also of a *light or airy* dancing gait. *Matthew Towle* in his c.1770 *Young Gentleman and Lady's Private Tutor* commented that *When you are going to any dancing, dress yourself airy, light and decent*. The phrase might therefore be thought suitable for a dance tune, one in which dancers are encouraged to be up on their toes.'' I will make sure to look around the room for this.
2. **The Triumph** *Book 1 number 2. Reel*. Introduced by Nathaniel Gow in 1808. Music 1797 (Aird). I have an old version of Book 1. In this version, this dance is given as an 8 by 32 R where 1C and 2C do a normal poussette. That version of Book 1 also has an ``Alternative Ending'' with a poussette for one couple, and the one couple Poussette has become the one we now do. I remember seeing an old video of Miss Milligan saying that old-timers claimed a lady can have ``only one triumph'', verifying that it was a one couple Poussette. She recounts her discussion with Mrs Stewart about whether it was a 1C or 2C poussette. Go to [this video](#) at time 33.50, where Miss Milligan is pleased she turned out to be correct, that it is a one couple Poussette. There are many similar early dances, and

one early English Country version was recorded as “*La Triomphe / The Triumph / The Dorset Triumph*” is an English Country Dance transcribed by Thomas Wilson in 1809. According to "[The Playford Assembly](#)" it started its evolution from a dance published by Thompson in 1790.” [This version](#) was recorded by Cecil Sharp in 1909, after observing what the country villagers of England were dancing. It is a proper triple minor longways dance.”

3. **The Bob O’Dowally** *Book 2 number 10 Strathspey*. 1760 from “Caledonian County Dances”. Music Miss Stewart’s Collection 1761. Dowally (pronounced “Dooley”) is a village near Dunkirk. Also called “*Salmond tail up the Water*”, “*Carlin is your daughter ready*” and “*Bainis choinich*” (This last one I would not even try to pronounce.).
4. **Rory O’More** *Book 1 number 9 Jig*. Collected “locally”. My old version of Book 1 says it is called “*The American Dwarf*” in the borders. In this old version, for Bars 21-24, first couple dance up the middle backwards. Music Aird 1782. According to what I have read, *Rory O’More*, is likely *Sir Rory O’Moore* ([Irish: Ruaidhrí Ó Mórdha](#)) (1600 –1655), also known *Sir Roger O’Moore* or *O’More* or *Sir Roger Moore*. He was an Irish landowner, and is most notable for being one of the four principal organisers of the [Irish Rebellion of 1641](#). He also had a similarly [rebellious forebear](#) of the same name who was executed by the Tudors.
5. **The Princess Royal**. *Book 2 number 7. Reel*. Music from Neil Gow’s Repository. This is the only 28 bar RSCDS dance I know of. According to [the Scottish Country Dance Dictionary](#), “Note that this dance” was collected c. 1850. In the mid-19th century, the title “The Princess Royal” referred to Victoria, Princess Royal (1840-1901), the eldest daughter of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert. Born on November 21, 1840, her full name was Victoria Adelaide Mary Louisa. In 1858, she married German Crown Prince Friedrich Wilhelm of Prussia, later Emperor Frederick III. As the Princess Royal, Victoria played a significant diplomatic role in fostering relations between Britain and Germany. She had a keen interest in cultural and social affairs, patronizing the arts and supporting various charitable causes. In her later years, she became the German Empress and Queen of Prussia, although her husband's reign was brief due to his illness. The Princess Royal's lineage is notable for its impact on European royal connections during the late 19th and early 20th centuries.”
6. **The Haymakers** *Book 2 number 11 Jig*. Around 1761 or earlier. *Miss Stewart’s Collection*. *Running step* was popular in some of the old dances, such as this one and *Strip the Willow*. Emmerson: “*The Haymakers* was a most popular dance in the late 18th Century and gained entrée long before Country Dances to many of the social gatherings in the Highlands of the 18th century. ...The tune, known in Scotland as *The Mautman comes on Monday*, is a 9/8 Jig and hence normal Scottish technique is not suitable. A running step is requisite.” The Society in its wisdom changed this to a standard 6/8 jig, but kept the use of the running step.
7. **Haughs O’ Cromdale**. *Book 4 number 10* “Collected in Galloway”. 18th Century. We do very few 16 Bar dances now and there are a number in the early books. In the early books, they liked Highland Steps. According to Emmerson

- ”Cromdale=Crooked Dale is a district of Strathspey.The word “Haugh” for a *river meadow* is common in Scottish Lowlands. The ballad describes an event which took place during the Civil War when some Royalist Highlanders were routed by a detachment of the “army of the covenant” on the “Haughs of Cromdale”, only to avenged by the great Montrose shortly thereafter”.
8. **The Merry Dancers.** *Book 4 number 2. Jig.* From ``*The Ballroom*'' 1827, music from Bremer Scots Reels and Country Dances 1757. I am not completely sure, but it seems that the *northern lights* are the “merry dancers”: “One of the great experiences during the Shetland winter is the 'Northern Lights', or *aurora borealis*, known locally as 'Mirrie Dancers'.” At least according to [this site](#).
 9. **Dumbarton Drums.** *Book 5 number 2. Reel.* From ``*A Companion to the Ballroom*'' 1816, music 1763 and Oswald 1742 ``Dumbarton Drums beat Bonnie.” Early Version in *Playford 1697*. Emmerson: “The Earl of Dumbarton (who) was appointed by King James VII to the command of his forces in Scotland, and who defeated the insurrection-the Monmouth Rebellion-led by the Earl of Argyll, June 18, 1685.”
 10. **Fight about the Fireside.** *Book 1 number 10. Reel.* From Gow’s ``Five Favourite Country Dances’’ 1822. Music Neil Gow’s Collection 1809. The old version of Book 1 has differing bars 17-24 involving the 4th Couple on the second time through, which I will teach on the afternoon. The [Scottish Country Dancing Dictionary](#) provides the following information about the music: “*Fight About The Fireside*” (also known as *Road to Arisaig*, *Strathspey in Memory of Angus Allan Gillis*, *White Clover*, *Fecht About the Fireside*) is the title of a tune appearing in *Complete Repository* Part 1, page 91, edited/compiled by Niel And Nathaniel Gow c. 1799. “ [Here](#) is another reconstruction of the dance which differs from the one we use.
 11. **Lady Susan Stewart’s Reel.** *Book 5 number 9. Reel. Caledonian Country Dances* 1754. There is a lot of (sometimes speculative) information on [this site](#) about Lady Susan Stewart, Daughter of John Stewart, 7th Earl of Galloway: “At the age of 24, Lady Susan entered into wedlock with the Duke of Marlborough, the 5th in fact. She went on to have four children, all boys, during which time the Duke, Spencer-Churchill himself, added a further 9 illegitimate offspring elsewhere..... All of which seems to indicate quite clearly a blood relationship between Winston Churchill, the late Princess of Wales, and the focus of our story, Lady Susan Stewart. Although I am by no means a Royalist, I am moved to believe that she deserves a celebratory reel in her name.” (Taken from *Set and Link*, RSCDS Toronto Newsletter.)
 12. **The Duke of Hamilton’s Reel** *Book 5 number 8. Strathspey. Caledonian Country Dances* 1754. Interestingly, an alternative tune is ``Mrs Macleod of Raasay’’, which we usually dance as a reel. *Duke of Hamilton* is a title in the Peerage of Scotland, created in April 1643. Emmerson:”The title of Duke of Hamilton was first conferred, along with that of Marquis of Clydesdale, on James, Earl of Arran, elder son of the second Marquis of Hamilton. (17th Century) The Duke of Hamilton is the hereditary keeper of Holyrood House and premier peer of

Scotland.” There is a huge amount of information about story behind this dance taken from Eugenia Sharp’s book *Scotland Dances* [here](#). It is too long to include but fascinating. Another Jacobite dance.

13. **Lady Macintosh’s Rant (The Duke is Welcome to Inverness)** *Book 3 number 9. Strathspey. Rutherford 1754.* Own tune. I wanted something from Book 3. This has 1C starting on opposite sides only returning to own sides when they reach the foot of the set. Not often done. This seems a Jacobite dance: According to Eugenia Sharp (*Scotland Dances*):

“Lady Macintosh was Anne, daughter of John Farquharson, 9th of Invercauld, wife of Angus, 22nd Chief of Clan Macintosh, a young lady who at the age of twenty raised two battalions among Clan Chattan for Prince Charles Edward. It is interesting to note that while “Colonel Anne” was riding about the clan countryside in blue bonnet and tartan habit that her husband was away, an officer in the service of George II who remained loyal to his commission.

The seat of the Macintosh is Moy Hall, eleven miles from Inverness and very near to Culloden Moor. On the night of 16 February, 1746, Prince Charles Edward was staying with Lady Macintosh at Moy Hall when word was brought by young Lachlan Macintosh from the Dowager Lady Macintosh then at her town house in Inverness that 1,500 of Lord Loudon’s soldiers were marching upon Moy in the hope of capturing the prince. Lady Macintosh did not wish to awaken her sleeping royal guest so she put the situation into the capable hands of Donald Fraser, the local blacksmith. Fraser and four other men, armed with muskets, moved into the darkness past the prince’s sentries and through the hamlet of Moy until they came upon Loudon’s men creeping steadily through the shadows. The five men then spread out until they formed a line a regiment in width. They fired, killing one of Loudon’s men. With shouts and orders that would make the Hanoverians think that they had run into the prince’s army, and with the five men racing back and forth and firing their muskets, Loudon’s soldiers turned and ran, with Fraser and his companions in hot pursuit. One of the men left dead among the peat stacks after the Rout of Moy was Donald Ban MacCrimmon, that paragon of pipers, who had accompanied the Hanoverians that night. Before he left Skye, Donald Ban had had a premonition and he composed the great pipe lament, “Cha till, cha till, cha till Mac Cruimein”, “MacCrimmon will never return”.

Lady Macintosh was taken prisoner after Culloden, but she survived captivity and died at Leith in 1787, a staunch Jacobite to the end.

There is another side to the story behind this dance, the Hanoverian, the other side of the coin. From 21 February until just before the battle of Culloden, Inverness was the headquarters of the Highland army of Prince Charles Edward. Inverness had been a Jacobite city, but on the afternoon of 16 April there was a reversal in loyalty. At four o’ clock, fresh from his victory on Culloden Moor, Prince William Augustus, Duke of Cumberland (1721–1765), rode into Inverness and was greeted with thundering peals from the city’s church towers. When the duke went to his lodging, it was to the townhouse of the Dowager Lady Macintosh, the same house that had sheltered his cousin during his stay in Inverness. When Lady Macintosh was taken prisoner, she was reputed

to have said, "I've had two king's bairns living under my roof in my time, and to tell you the truth I wish I may never have another".

Robbie Burns chose this as the tune to fit the words to his poem ``*A man's a man for a' that*'' Here is the first stanza:

*Is there for honest poverty
That hings his head and a' that
The coward slave, we pass him by
We dare be poor for a' that
For a' that and a' that
Our toils obscure and a' that
The rank is but the guinea's stamp
The man's the gowd for a' that*