





# —A Story to Every Dance—

*The role of lore in enhancing the Scottish solo dance tradition*

Mats Melin



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## Lorg research hub & Lorg-press

In 2017, I established *Lorg* as my research hub, and *Lorg-press* as a means of spreading my research beyond academic journals and other outputs, using the word Lorg which is Scottish Gaelic for ‘footprint’ and ‘to seek.’ I was compelled by the idea that archived dance descriptions need to be published so the current generation of dancers can access them and enjoy the act of dancing them and bringing them back to life. Thus, I use the motto ‘*Bringing the past into the present.*’ Using a mix of the written word and links to suitable video clips available online, *Lorg* aims to achieve this. These descriptions represent the *legacies* of dancers, teachers, and researchers who have gone before us. It would be a pity if these precious heirlooms were no longer actively used or accessed.

*Documents Do Not Dance* is the title of Swedish dance ethnologist and colleague Mats Nilsson’s book (2016). In it, he compares the act of ‘dancing’ to ‘dances,’ examines archival methods, and wrestles with the concepts of tradition and intangible cultural heritage and those concepts being alive and used. These issues are also intertwined in the core intentions of *Lorg*.

When a performance of dance is archived through notation or in a film or video recording, the act of ‘dancing’ is frozen, no longer alive. Documentation cannot dance. In some cases, the home dancing tradition from which the material was archived is a living and healthy one, and while the material in the archive stays static, the real-life dancing by people interacting with each other keeps evolving and changing. When archived material is accessed and interpreted at some future point in time, a new, other, rendition of the dance can be established.

As Mats Nilsson asks, which version is correct? A simple answer could be both. Both versions or aspects of the dance can be seen as being correct. At each point in time, a new, ‘correct,’ interpretation of a dance by a performer can be made. This notion is perhaps at odds with some peoples’ view that there is a mystical, ‘original and correct,’ way of performing a given dance that is somehow frozen across the ages. I agree with Mats Nilsson, I do not think that is the case, or even possible. The ephemeral act of ‘dancing’ is unique at each moment it occurs and will be so every time a dance is performed.

Tradition, in my view, and again agreeing with Nilsson (2016) and Glassie (2003), is a way of looking *forward*, rather than to the past. Glassie said: ‘tradition is the creation

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of the future out of the past. If tradition is a people's creation out of their own past, its character is not stasis but continuity.<sup>1</sup>

*Lorg* is about continuity. The aim is to share archived materials or notations of dancing, so they can live again, and in the process, allow readers to offer their own interpretations of the materials. Bring the footsteps of the past into the present by seeking new ways of interpreting them! Keep the act of 'dancing' alive!

Mats Melin

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## ***Abbreviations used within the text***

BATD (British Association of Teachers of Dancing)

New Zealand Academy (New Zealand Academy of Highland and National Dancing, Inc.)

RSCDS (Royal Scottish Country Dance Society)

SDTA (Scottish Dance Teachers' Association)

SOBHD (Scottish Official Board of Highland Dancing)

SOHDA (Scottish Official Highland Dancing Association)

UKA (United Kingdom Alliance of Professional Teachers of Dancing)

VSU (Victorian Scottish Union, Australia)

## ***References and spelling***

Due to drawing references from numerous historical sources, original source spellings of tune and song names will be retained. However, in the analytical sections, current Gaelic spelling for names, such as *Seann Triubhas* and *Gille Chaluim*, will be used.

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## Foreword

While growing up, I occasionally learnt some Highland dances through my local Scottish Country Dance class in Stockholm, Sweden. I later deciphered solo dances through various textbooks, a process that taught me much about the shortcomings of written manuals as sources as compared to being taught in person. Along the way I encountered some of the stories associated with the most well-known Highland dances. At the time, I did not pay much attention as to whether there was any truth to them or not; I merely thought of them as stories being part of Scottish folklore.

I started looking into this topic back in the early 1990s but writing seriously about it was put on hold until now. So, with my ethnochoreologist's hat on, and having spent close to 25 years in Scotland and Ireland combined, working as a dance teacher, performer, choreographer, lecturer, and researcher, I finally, in 2014, decided to pursue charting these stories and asking what meaning-making function they may have had and possibly still have.

In 2014, I conducted an online questionnaire with Highland dance teachers and dancers, distributed through emails and social media with ethical research approval from the University of Limerick. The number of responses was quite low, which may indicate how little importance these stories have to the current competitive Highland dancing world. However, I did get some interesting answers which, in turn, helped inform this short study on the role of lore in enhancing the Scottish solo dance tradition.

Mats Melin

Stockholm, Sweden and Limerick, Ireland, 2018

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# Introduction

The Scottish solo dance tradition is peppered with stories attached to specific dances which appear in Highland Games and performance programmes, and today commonly also on the internet. These, range in content from:

- The sword dance appearing in the eleventh century with Scottish King Malcolm Canmore dancing it; being danced as a victory dance; or being a bad omen if you touch the swords;
- Wilt thou go to the Barracks, Johnnie? being used as a dance to recruit soldiers for the Scottish regiments;
- The Highland Fling being the imitation of the strength and agility of a leaping or 'curvetting' stag;
- Various dances being connected with the 1745–1746 Jacobite Rising and its aftermath;
- The *Seann Triubhas* being linked to 1746 Dress Act prohibiting the wearing of tartan; and
- Flora MacDonald's Fancy being devised in honour of the Jacobite heroine Flora MacDonald.

Most of these stories suggest an origin for a dance anchored in a distant past, but they may also form some level of meaning-making. It could be that they were created to help dancers perform certain dances with particular images in mind.

This work questions whether there is any actual truth to the stories by taking some of the facts apart. The main questions are: What function did the story have for dance teachers and dancers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries? Why was it necessary to validate the dances by setting them in antiquity? Are there still purposes served by these stories if and when they are applied today? Also, is it now, or even, was it ever, necessary for dancers to have a certain image, or story, in mind to help them perform these dances in character? By outlining and deliberating on historical references on some of the best-known Scottish solo dances, this overview places these associated stories against a contextual and historical framework. The analysis set out equally to investigate what was, and is currently, the meaning-making behind these stories.

I first take a detailed look at several stories of suggested meaning-making related

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to the three main dances of the Highland dancing repertoire of today—Highland Fling, the *Seann Triubhas* and the Sword dance. Each of these has at least one story, that on some level, has lived on into common knowledge among practitioners of Highland dancing today. Three dances with stories relating to the Jacobite rising of 1745–1746 are discussed next, where I ask if they have any real connection with this historical event. After that, I explore ten ‘miscellaneous’ dances (including Blue Bonnets, Highland Laddie and Wilt thou go to the Barracks, Johnnie?) each of which have stories unrelated to each other, but which are in some way used to explain the purpose of the dance or the step pattern or style in which the dances are thought to have been danced. Next, I discuss two Character Dances found in the Scottish solo dance repertoire, the Irish Jig and the Sailors’ Hornpipe, which, both have particular sets of storylines associated with them. Lastly, it is also worth examining one group dance, the Reel of Tulloch, closely associated with the competitive solo dance scene in the last 100 years or so. The Highland Reel, in its many manifestations,<sup>2</sup> was at one time the most common dance of Scots and does not seem to have any stories attached to it at all, with the exception of the later and specifically named form, the Reel of Tulloch, mentioned above.

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# 1 Background on the role of dance stories

Scots seem to have a fascination with the meanings of their dance music tunes and, in turn, the names of their dances. As Scottish-Canadian dance scholar George Emmerson correctly states, ‘until very recently, Scottish Country Dances took the titles of their tunes’<sup>3</sup> for example, the reels ‘The Duke of Perth,’ ‘De’il Amang the Tailors,’ and ‘Flowers of Edinburgh.’ To a certain degree this is also true of dances included in the various Scottish solo dance traditions, such as Highland Laddie, Dusty Miller, and Blue Bonnets. Solo dances historically or presently referred to as High Dances, Highland, National, Lesser Known, Hebridean, Ladies’ Step, or Step dancing, are choreographed arrangements of particular movement motifs combined into choreographed phrases, referred to in the dancing idiom as ‘steps.’ These ‘steps’ have particular repeat patterns and are commonly arranged in set orders to comprise a named dance often associated with a particular tune. The same dances might be categorized under more than one label depending on context. For example, the National dance Scotch Measure as notated by the BATD, SDTA, and UKA is not made up of the same ‘steps’ as a dance with a similar title in the Hebridean legacy; however, those National dance steps are similar to a *twosome*<sup>4</sup> version of the Scotch Measure labelled and arranged as a Step dance by Isobel Cramb and by extension by the RSCDS.

## *Naming of solo dances*

One should remember that these dance-associated tunes occur in many regional variations, which, at one time, would have influenced the movement material devised in relation to each version. Changing dance fashions affected the performance of dances in different regions, which helps explain there being dances with the same names but comprised of differing motifs. Time, place, and style of music would all impact the step arrangement and performance qualities. Dances passed on to others in the oral tradition were more likely to shift in style than ones written in books and promoted by dance teachers’ organisations.

Not all Scottish solo dances are named after their tunes, however. Some dances have discrete names, for example the Sword Dance, the Highland Fling, or the *Seann Triubhas*, but have now one or more associated tunes of different names of a certain time signature or style associated with them.

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## *Steps in or out of order?*

The convention of set orders for ‘steps’ seems to hail from when dances began to be taught and arranged by dancing masters for individuals or groups of pupils. The set order helped dancers to memorise the movement sequences. The set order of steps became further cemented, from the nineteenth century onwards, in dancers’ and teachers’ minds, when these dances started to be written down in books and manuals reflecting an author’s preference: either a dancing master’s, or, later, an organisation’s preferred choreographic order for medal tests or competition contexts.

Some manuals advise that sequences of certain steps can be altered, as, for example, the order of the steps in the Highland Fling. And, no doubt, dancing masters changed the order of a dance’s steps depending on circumstances. Dancers themselves swapped the order when performing. Over time, with the influence of competitive dancing and dance organisations running medal tests, a set order has now become the norm. Currently, as a case in point, the SOBHD sets the order of their championship steps for dances such as the Highland Fling, the Sword Dance, and the *Seann Triubhas* for a whole year at a time. This edict is then applied to all championship competitions under their rules worldwide for that year. Another perception is that some steps are ‘traditionally’ danced first or last in a dance while other steps are interchangeable in order. This applies to the first step and last step, with one variation, in the Highland Fling, a first step and variation in the *Seann Triubhas*. Dancing around the swords, or ‘addressing’ them, always begins the solo Sword Dance. Under New Zealand Academy rules, interchangeable steps show wider variety and can reflect a more specific interpretation of musical phrases.

## *Meaning-making*

Meaning-making is the process in which people understand, construe, or make sense of life events and the world around them. In this case it applies to a specific focus on solo and group dances being an aspect of the Scottish dance traditions.

In his book, *Scotland Through Her Country Dances* (1981 [1967]), George Emmerson gave accounts of many of the stories and associated songs and tunes attached to Scottish Country dances published by the RSCDS at the time. Emmerson wrote that he felt the titles had special meaning to ‘all interested in Scotland and Scottish lore.’<sup>5</sup> He, however, did not give much detail regarding who devised the dances and devisors’ possible choreographic motivations, but rather concentrated on the meanings of the dance names themselves and associated songs and tunes.

The stories and meanings associated with many Scottish solo dances have not received as much attention as the Country dances in Emmerson’s work. There are snippets of information scattered through several sources, such as R.H. Calder (1928) and, presently, many also accessible on the Internet. Few of these accounts have been

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given any critical appraisal. Many of the stories passed around could be appropriately labelled 'factoids,' to use Norman Mailer's 1973 term.<sup>6</sup> The Washington Times<sup>7</sup> described Mailer's new word, factoid, a combination of *fact* and the ending *-oid* meaning 'similar but not the same,' as something that looks like a fact, could be a fact, but, in fact, is not a fact. In other words, it is a questionable or even spurious statement presented as a fact but with no veracity. Thus, it is an item of unreliable information repeated so often that it becomes accepted as fact. One of this study's aims is to bring together many of the available stories, myths, and presumptions about some of these solo dances, to interrogate them and illustrate inaccuracies and, often, wishful connotations applied to most of the associated stories.

The connection between the character of a specific melody and its associated dance choreography is strong. Most dancing masters devised their own dances set to tunes with the same name. As with the tunes themselves, many versions of solo dances came into being. In most, if not all, cases, associated storylines have been applied at a later stage, beginning in the late nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth century. It is feasible that these stories were created by dancing masters, and later, teachers, to inspire dance students to perform a dance in a certain way. It is often more effective to encourage a student to dance strongly or gracefully if an applied story or imagery somehow explains why those qualities should be aimed for. It could equally be part of the Romantic eras keen enthusiasm to refer back to ancient pasts and to claim a deeply rooted origin of a tradition.

It may be the case that when dancing masters began shifting focus from teaching *dancing*, the ability to move and perform movements musically, to teaching *dances*, which emphasizes an ability to memorize sequences choreographed to music, that some earlier community-based meaning-making in dance was lost. As will be detailed later, Alexander Carmichael (1899) hinted at more dramatic content in some dances 'now lost' and that particular dances were danced on certain occasions such as *Seann Triubhas* being performed at the St Michael's Day balls in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Even though not describing any of the solo dances now in use, the Fletts (1956) refers to several dance dramas involving short interludes of dancing performed to music or song such as *Cailleach an Dùdain* (The Old Woman of the Mill Dust) in their article *Dramatic Jigs in Scotland*.

Most of the known Scottish examples of dramatic jigs come from the Highlands and Islands, and there are two different types of jig. The first type is that where the jig is primarily a social dance in which miming occurs. The miming here would probably only occur where the dance was being performed to a dance-song, the actions of the dancers being suited to the words of the song [...] The second type of jig is that which is primarily for the entertainment of onlookers [...] most seem to have had their appropriate dance-song, the miming being suited to the words of the song.

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Sometimes the dancer both sang and danced [... they] were not confined to the Highlands [... but] were once a popular entertainment at festive gatherings in the Border countryside.<sup>8</sup>

The dances the Fletts and others, mentioned later, show different ways of meaning-making in enactment, such as in the Dirk dance, combat skills are enacted through the dance; showing dexterity skills in dancing a sword dance; performing 'hornpipe' steps at certain occasions; dancing to resurrect the *Cailleach* and many more. The dance movement had a function and meaning that was understood by the local community.

Perhaps, on occasion, certain dances were included in events of a ritual nature now lost? The dances would not have been the actual ritual in itself, but only done as part of larger ritual practice. Some elements of ritual connection may still be discernible in some storylines and dance practices presented later, as in the sword dance done in preparation for battle or as a celebration of victory, and also in the sword salute. The old Seann Triubhas may have been part of a ritual or at least formed part of the St Michael's Day celebrations in the eighteenth century. According to Ronald Grimes, rituals are enacted and ephemeral, just like dance. In some modes of ritual sensibility, such as ritualization,<sup>9</sup> magic, and celebration, dance can form part of the process. Dance is not the ritual in itself. No ritual dance genre exists, so modes of meaning may be attached to a dance in certain contexts.<sup>10</sup> Perhaps older forms of the solo dances did just that: just like the Scotch Reel became the Wedding Reel and part of the wedding ritual in parts of the Highland and Islands and the Northern isles of Orkney and Shetland. The Wedding Reel still exists on occasion but in a very small way, as the bridal waltz is now the common first dance at Scottish weddings.

In shifting some of these dance elements on to the stage, and later onto the competitions boards, or introducing more complex figure dances from abroad, such as Country dances, move meaning making to perhaps one of aesthetic preference as a priority for the stage and to the execution of figures rather than animated, musical dancing of Reels and Dramatic Jigs? The need for specific 'meaning-making' may thus have shifted and even increased. This could have created the need for stories explaining the dances in their new environments.

The shift in teaching emphasis is perhaps a topic for a detailed separate study, but in my own research and experience, there are a few issues worth pointing out here. There is a subconscious and voiced objective among the public that they are learning 'dances' first and 'dancing' secondly. This shift towards dances as objects can also be detected by comparing dancing manuals, starting with one written by Francis Peacock, the Aberdeen dancing master, who, in 1805, valued movement qualities and music and movement interaction, and suggested that dancers combine motifs as best suited themselves and musical accompaniment. Later nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century dance manuals,

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such as Anderson (various editions 1880–1897) and Skinner (1905), concentrated on listing steps, describing dance figures and emphasising ballroom etiquette over physical descriptions of the movements. The authors of these later manuals may of course have taught ‘dancing’ in class at varying degrees but there is not much documented evidence on what they taught or how they did so.

We must also remember that any meaning-making or applied storyline relating to a choreography set to a specific tune may become obsolete when, over the course of time, the associated tune for the dance changes, which may in turn change the character and speed of the performance of this dance. This is aptly illustrated by the *Seann Triubhas* and the Scottish Lilt or Jig as discussed later.

### *Labelling of solo dance families*

Many current labels of solo dances, such as ‘Highland,’ ‘National,’ ‘Lesser Known Solo Dances,’ and ‘Ladies Step’ seem to have come into being around the 1940–1950s, when dance organisations felt the need to categorise groups of dances for advertising classes and created syllabi for medal tests and for competition categories. The ‘Lesser Known’ label is today a misnomer, as most of these dances are frequently taught, performed, and competed in by various national and global associations promoting Scottish solo dancing. What were they lesser known in comparison to, in any case? Like in comparison to the main dances featured at Games, such as the Highland Fling? Today the label is probably generally defunct in reality but still appears on the internet and in some publications.

Late nineteenth-century Ballroom manuals such as Anderson’s (1897) and Wallace’s (1872) place solo dances under the label ‘Scotch Reels’ in their content lists. They may have seen the Highland Fling, among other dances, as extensions of the Scotch Reels and the Reel of Tulloch (as a combination of ‘reel’ steps?). It is also likely that they wanted to highlight the national identity of the dances by placing them under the label ‘Scotch.’ As a parallel it is worth noting that in parts of Canada and the USA the labels Irish Reel, Scotch Reel or Scotch Four and French Four denote similar dances but with different geographical identifiers, suggesting an origin or ethnic connection to a specified way of Reeling. By the late nineteenth-century, numerous versions of Three Hand, Four Hand, Five Hand, Six Hand, Eight Hand, and so forth. Reels were in use in both England and Ireland. But rather than using the label English Reel, reels from England were named after location and number of dancers involved such as the Dorset Four Hand Reel. The use of the label ‘Scotch’ could be part of emerging and spreading nationalist identifiers fuelled by the Victorian interest in the ‘exotic’ Highlands with all its trimmings?

According to Joan and Tom Flett, a new term for solo dancing—‘High Dances’—appeared in many a dancing master’s repertoire in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Many music collections reflect this with tune titles such as ‘Miss ‘So and

So's' High Dance' or 'Mr X's High Dance' as dedications to their patrons, especially for the children of the gentry and for their favourite pupils. In Aberdeen dancing master Archibald Duff's 1812 collection, *A Choice Selection of Minuets, favourite Airs, Hornpipes, Waltzes &c.*, many tunes named and arranged for particular people are given. Eleven Minuets are given at the beginning, including 'Miss Burnett of Leys Minuet,' and 'Miss Nicol of Stonehavens Minuet' (all in  $\frac{3}{4}$  time), which are followed by the listed melodies below:

|   |  |
|---|--|
| 'Miss Russell of Black hall's Favorite Dance' (2/4);      | 'Miss Margaret Nicols High Dance (2/4),                |
| 'Pas Seul Danced by Miss Margaret Burnett of Leys' (2/4), | 'Pas Seul Miss Shivas (2/4),                           |
| 'Pas Seul, Danced by Miss Frances Urquhart' (6/8),        | 'Pas Seul Miss Margaret Russel of Aden' (3/4),         |
| 'Pas Seul Danced by Miss Eliza Hadden' (6/8),             | 'Pas Seul Miss Mary Adamson' (6/8 and 2/4 time),       |
| 'Pas Seul. Miss Elisabeth Urquhart' (4/4),                | 'Pas Seul Miss Isabella Simpson' (4/4 and 2/4 time),   |
| 'Pas Seul Miss Jane Forbes' (4/4),                        | 'Pas Seul Miss Sherrifs' (3/4),                        |
| 'Pas Seul Miss Ann Mitchell' (2/4),                       | 'Miss Christina Abercromby's High Dance' (2/4),        |
| 'Pas Seul Miss Eliza Robertson' (2/4),                    | 'Pas Seul Miss Eliza Innes' (6/8, 2/4 and 4/4 time),   |
| 'Pas Seul. Miss Sophia Grant' (9/8),                      | 'Pas Seul Danced by Miss Mary Nicol' (2/4),            |
| 'Miss Mary Ann Urquhart's High Dance' (2/4),              | 'Pas Seul Miss Margaret Black of Forresterhill' (2/4), |
| 'Miss More of Raedens favorite Dance' (6/8),              | 'Pas Seul Miss Jane Hector' (6/8),                     |
| 'Miss Eliza Low's High Dance' (6/8),                      | 'Pas Seul Miss Jane Robertson' (3/4, 3/8 and 9/8),     |
| 'The Graces a Pas Trois' (6/8),                           | 'Pas di Trois Misses Glennie' (2/4 and 4/4 time),      |
| 'Pas Seul Miss Ann Milne' (2/4),                          | 'Master John Turner's Hornpipe' (4/4),                 |
| 'Pas Seul Miss Helen Hadden' (6/8, 4/4 and 9/8),          | 'Mr Hadden's Hornpipe' (4/4),                          |
| 'Pas Seul Miss Elsy Hadden' (3/4),                        | 'Master James Rose's Hornpipe' (4/4),                  |
| 'Pas Deux Misses Grant of Monymusk' (2/4),                | 'Master William Duguids Hornpipe' (4/4),               |
| 'Miss Buchan of Auchmacoy's High Dance' (2/4),            | 'Master Thomas Bests Hornpipe' (4/4)                   |

Another dance label that came into use was *Pas Seul*, as in A Pas Seul for Miss Jane Forbes, as seen in the above list. Sadly, very few of these dances were written down. Other titles connect dances to specific people, as in Miss Gayton's Hornpipe.<sup>11</sup> It should be noted that Miss Gayton was not a Scottish dancing student but rather was a dancer on the London stage in the early nineteenth century. Lord Byron (George Gordon), referred to her in his 1808 poem *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, as 'bound'ing before 'marquises' and 'dukes' at Drury Lane.<sup>12</sup> The dance features bells worn on the wrists.

Surviving examples, in name only, of some of these dances were primarily recreated to the known tunes of these *Pas Seul*, *Pas de Deux*, and *Pas de Trois* arrangements by Isobel Cramb in the 1950s. They are today commonly danced in a soft ballet-influenced

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style, particularly as promoted and taught by the RSCDS, and they may well have started out at the time of creation as soft shoe (slippers) ballet-like dances. Certainly, within the RSCDS framework, new dances are devised in that aesthetic style. These French labels became, in the nineteenth-century quite popular with dancing masters, as they explain the choreographic character of the dance., Dances with names such as the Sword Dance or the Highland Fling were in contrast not made for individuals, nor did they have specific tunes attached to them. The Highland Fling, as a prime example, became used by many English dancing masters as a character dance to showcase a Scottish slant to an element of their repertoire. Perhaps the accompanying stories helped capture the imagination of dance students or an audience on both sides of the border?

Robert Hogg Calder (1850–1930) in his publication *The Scottish National Dances* from 1928, labelled the Sword Dance, the Highland Fling, the Shan Trews [*sic*], Highland Reel, and the Reel of Tulloch as ‘national’ dances, this fits nicely with popular views of the Romantic era and discourses such as Tartanry, Highlandism, and Balmorality that will be discussed further later. Hogg, a native of Durriss in Kincardineshire,<sup>13</sup> was a minister, composer and collector of songs and poems, and indicated that his musings were originally published in the *Aberdeen Press and Journal* and in the *Northern Scot* newspapers in 1893. The label National was latterly used by Edinburgh dancing master D.G. MacLennan (1950), alongside the labels Highland, Traditional, and Hebridean, in his writings from the 1920s to the 1950s.

### ***Ideological placing of dances in storied narratives***

Placing the dances in ‘antiquity’ is clearly important, judging by the writings of nineteenth-century authors, such as James Logan (1831) and Charles N. McIntyre-North (1881), who used phrases about dances such as ‘almost forgotten’ or ‘has disappeared,’ when describing the practices and ‘rituals’ of the ‘ancient’ Gaels or Celts. As James Porter in *Locating Celtic Music* points out, one may now ‘smile at the antique rhetoric of nineteenth-century Celtic enthusiasts, a rhetoric that linked Ossian and St. Patrick to King Arthur and a host of otherworldly characters who inhabit a magical, heroic past.’<sup>14</sup> A link to important aspects of the past seems to be a core feature of most dance stories in this investigation.

It is important to note that most of the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century commentators on Scottish dance discuss *dances* rather than the quality of *dancing*. This, of course, may well have been in line with the general Victorian and post-Victorian desire to describe and categorise the world around them and, by extension, the political affiliations of nationalism. These reflections also highlight the emerging educated, middle-class-driven, study of the peasant or ‘folk’ music and dance culture of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. According to English dance historian and

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ethnographer Theresa Buckland the concept of the 'folk' was an 'ideological construct whereby rural communities and their older practices were perceived by the intelligentsia as survivals from an ancient, pure culture.'<sup>15</sup> In the early writings referred to above, Gaeldom was perceived as a vanishing 'folk' culture whose knowledge needed rescuing by means of collecting and description. But, as Scottish historian Thomas Divine tells us Gaeldom's people and tradition bearers were not in reality supported to any extent, if at all, if we consider the treatment of the people by those in power.<sup>16</sup>

Elements of National Romanticism and the Romantic Era (which spanned from the late eighteenth century to about 1910 but which peaked in the mid-nineteenth century) potentially impacted the need for, and proliferation of, these stories. By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Romanticism was manifest in the arts, particularly in European countries or regions of Europe that once had been subject to foreign artistic or political domination, so this may also have influenced post-Enlightenment Scotland. This movement, from its early beginnings around the turn of the nineteenth century, frequently focused on the development of the national folklore and languages and the often-spiritual values of local customs and traditions, which led to study of the 'folk' as indicated above. The discourses of Tartanry, the cult of tartan as a symbol of identity, and Highlandism, the cult of the Highlands 'as visual and poetic metaphor, which is involved not only with that Romantic, Ossian-influenced past but also with cultural patrimony and the vexed question of land ownership'<sup>17</sup> fit into this paradigm. The poems of Ossian, actually written by Badenoch born Highlander, poet, writer, literary collector, and politician, James MacPherson (1736–1796) 'have been a source of inspiration, enthusiasm, acrimony, distaste, excitement, impatience, honour, and dishonour in equal measure'<sup>18</sup> over time. Despite his critics, MacPherson nonetheless produced a work of art which by its deep appreciation of natural beauty, and the melancholy tenderness of its treatment of the 'ancient' legend, did more than any single work to bring about the Romantic movement in European literature. Maybe it is not too far-fetched to see elements of the Romantic spirit in the stories associated with the solo dance tradition? As Porter tells us:

Generally speaking, historians have not distinguished carefully enough between popular (urban) culture and genuine folk traditions,<sup>19</sup> and this is also true of Scotland. Appropriated by the Music Hall and Harry Lauder in the interwar period, tartanry came to represent, for Lowlanders, a garb to which they could claim allegiance only vicariously, through identification with the heroic image of the Highlanders who had once been the enemy [...] Highlandism is also a discourse that has to be confronted to be understood [...] Dominant views of the Highlands tend to be imposed from without [...]<sup>20</sup>

With the Highland Fling, the *Seann Triubhas*, the Sword Dance, and the Reel of Tulloch all being prominently featured at Highland Games since the early nineteenth century,

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it is worth considering Scottish professor Grant Jarvie's discussions on the myth making around the Highland Societies and Highland Games and Gatherings and the appropriation of Highland Gaelic culture in his award-winning book *Highland Games: The Making of the Myth* (1991).

During the late 1700s and early 1800s, Highland Societies emerged, claiming saving Highland culture as a goal. Some of them promoted and developed Highland Gatherings and Games as a part of that revival. Another part was the encouragement of wearing the Highland dress, as well as the promotion of competitions in both piping and dancing, both within and outside the Gathering and Games venues. These competitions had little to do with older traditions. The wearing of Highland dress became popular with both the Highland social elite as well as with their Lowland counterparts after the repeal of the Act of Proscription of 1782; however, it became primarily a ceremonial dress, even though some landlords wore the kilt for everyday purposes.

A paradoxical situation also emerged in which many of the descendants of those people who had been responsible for the destruction of the old Highland social order were now becoming the guardians and promoters of both Highland culture and of Scottish cultural identity in general. Having first mythologised the Highlander as a threat to Hanoverian hegemony and the progressive forces of capitalism, the symbolic artefacts of the Highlander such as the kilt, tartan, dirks and sporrans now came to be regarded as the crucial symbols not of a specifically highland cultural identity but of Scottish cultural identity as a whole.<sup>21</sup>

These Highland societies were socially exclusive—open only to Anglicised landowners. The popularisation process of Highland culture occurred mainly between about 1850 and 1920. It was closely associated with the Victorian 'Balmorality' though that was not the only factor. Sheep farming had become less profitable, so the landlords had turned to other sources of income, such as turning the Highland estates into sporting playgrounds for the aristocracy and the *nouveaux riches*. The Braemar Royal Highland Society and Gathering gained popularity and a particular identity of representing selected and presentable expressions of the Highland way of life. The Balmoralisation process, and the royal seal of approval furthered Highland sport in general. Balmorality also encouraged the production and reproduction of the still present images of royalty, loyalty, tartanry, and clannishness closely associated with the Braemar Gathering in particular. On the other hand, the same monarchy associated itself with the forces that forced the true tradition bearers, the Highlanders, to leave their homeland or experience poverty and famine. The popularisation process was also made easier by the improvement of communications and transport enabling huge crowds of visitors to reach the Highlands and locations of the various Gatherings and Games. The traditions and practices associated with Highland Gatherings and Games continued to be selective and divorced from their original social context. Emily Forsyth adds that the 'highlands were regarded

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as an anthropological curiosity, and the Gaels were viewed as a charming and untouched example of archaic culture' and 'essentially the Romantic perception of the Scottish Highlander was a more auspicious and aesthetically pleasing motif than the realities of Highland destitution and poverty,'<sup>22</sup> the latter as portrayed by some newspapers and journals of the time. Interestingly, those papers which were particularly contemptuous of the Highlanders were still prone to Romanticise the historical Highlands: the gatherings, the tartan, and the glorified Jacobite past.<sup>23</sup>

The lore around the most common dances featured at Highland Games and at some dance competitions fits into a pattern revealed in Jarvie's analysis above. Many of the stories discussed here repeatedly appear in multiple variations in Highland Games programs,<sup>24</sup> in books and guides about Highland Games culture<sup>25</sup> and in Highland Society and Association publications.<sup>26</sup> Today these myths are still found on various sites on the internet. Apart from reinforcing these tales, these accounts commonly include misspelled Gaelic dance or tune titles, such as *Seann Triubhas* and *Gille Chaluim* which shows a lack of understanding of or disregard for the language and the culture the dances are supposed to have originated within. Nor do many of the authors appear to check for accuracy in relation to any aspects of Gaelic culture they describe.

A misrepresentation and, often, derogatory view of the Gaels, or Highlanders, is ongoing, whether deliberate or not. When I attended the 1994 *Conference on the Diversity of the Scottish Dance Traditions* in Stirling, organised by the Scottish Arts Council, Alex McGuire, the then Highland dance teacher, adjudicator and spokesperson, representing the SOHDA, started his paper presentation thus:

I'd like to begin by asking you what might appear to be an obvious question—just what is Highland Dancing? When Highland Dancing is mentioned, I suppose to the uninitiated a picture is conjured up of a hairy, war-like Highlander, arms raised aloft, emitting wild guttural sounds, as he leaps over and around the naked blades of claymores! Well, possibly a few hundred years ago, this image could, in reality be seen in certain parts of Scotland, but, I'm glad to say we are today a bit more civilised than the wild clansmen of yesteryear and now look on Highland Dancing as a social and convivial art which is available to all! Highland Dancing developed along with the Clan system and was performed when, as a change from fighting over territorial rights, political disagreements or just settling old scores, the various Clan Chieftains came together in 'friendly' combat, when each in turn would 'show-off' and boast of the dexterity of various members of their Clan. This prowess, of course, took many forms, e.g.: from the strength required for putting the stone, balancing skills needed for tossing the caber, through the speed and stamina involved in the running. All of these characteristics of human strength and endurance, I believe, are embodied in the skill of the Dancer, but much more disciplined and controlled for, as well as strength and endurance, there is in Highland Dancing a combination of skill, individual technique, without doubt —athleticism and of course grace of movement.<sup>27</sup>

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In his 2013 blog entry, *Cultural Appropriation: Gaels and other Natives*, Michael Newton quoted part of the above text, and commented

[...] the fact that it purports to represent Highland culture and history while taking careless liberties with it, and in fact misrepresenting and fabricating it, is highly problematic. [...] The disjuncture of the 'barbaric' past of the people from whom the dances were supposed to have been taken and the present day enables this form of entertainment. [...] This triumphalist view of the past completely disregards the historical experience of domination and conquest that allows the commodification of any Highland cultural element that the anglophone world wishes to 'own' for itself.<sup>28</sup>

For many Highland dance participants today, these issues may be seen as irrelevant and of no interest being in it just 'for the sake of dancing' or 'competing.' But, the reality is that the wild Highlander stereotype is very much part of the heritage attached to the current Highland dancing scene, acknowledged or not, by the people involved. This forms part of an ongoing cultural marginalisation of the Gaelic culture in many ways. For example, this trope has been seen in the Scottish and British mediascape since the 1840s at least; the beginnings of that is discussed by Krisztina Fenyő in her thesis *Contempt, Sympathy and Romance—Lowland perceptions of the Highlands and the clearances during the Famine years, 1845–1855* (1996). Furthermore, Scottish historian Thomas Divine comments in detail on the mid-nineteenth century 'irreconcilable differences between the traditional values of Gaeldom and the prevailing ideologies of contemporary capitalism, improvement and social morality.'<sup>29</sup> These historical biases feed in to current perceptions of Highland history.

In addition to the above it is important to keep in mind how the fashioning of dance stories takes place. In Theresa Buckland's excellent monograph *Society Dancing: Fashionable Bodies in England, 1870–1920* (2011), which is an historical study of ballroom dancing in England tracing the strictly regulated manners of the Victorian ballroom to the 1920s dance floor. The book covers the transformation of ballroom dancing influenced by war, modern conceptions of class, race, gender, nationality and American influences on dance repertoire and style. The ballrooms and dance repertoires of Scotland would have been similarly influenced as the Scottish dancing masters and dance teachers drew upon the same sources and influences as their English counterparts. Among many aspects Buckland puts her lens to, is how dance was disseminated and reported on by the intelligentsia and newspapers to the various social classes of Britain. Buckland clearly shows how these reports in part helped shape and influence the thinking about social dance in that time period. A couple of her observations are relevant to this study. It is useful to keep in mind that 'for much of the twentieth century, interpretation and classification in dance historiography were mediated through a nineteenth-century evolutionist and racist framework.'<sup>30</sup> This only changed in the 1980s when 'literary and cultural studies furnished the principal filter into dance scholarship' opening up the field

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to cultural relativity, feminist discourse and postcolonial theory to name but a few. These approaches 'stimulated scholarly interest in dance forms and practices that had been previously positioned as 'other' to the mainstream of Eurocentric theatre and concert dance.'<sup>31</sup> The current scholarship approaches encourage researchers to view historical dance reporting from various angles and critically engage and analyse the material. Furthermore, Buckland importantly reminds us that

until the early twentieth century, traffic in dance practices across stage and salon, between the professional and the amateur, remained fluid. Hard and fast division of classification and practice between the social and the theatrical is a later phenomenon. The flow across stage, salon and indeed street is rarely reflected in twentieth-century mainstream dance scholarship. Instead, a hierarchical dichotomy between dance as art and dance as a social or ritual practice become cemented in Euro-American literature [...] theatre and concert in the early twentieth century came to be viewed as a higher more evolved form, with its roots in the comparatively simple social or ritual forms of dance.<sup>32</sup>

It is worth remembering that the dances we today find performed on the competitive and performance stage, did migrate there from a social or even ritual past. They have undergone development and morphed through the hands of the dancing masters, teachers and organisations shaping them for their needs. It is quite possible that real or supposed pasts of these dances were and are highlighted through folklore and stories to help legitimise their place as higher, more evolved forms of dance on these platforms alongside theatre dance and ballet. Thus, the stories can be seen to help place them above other forms of 'folk' or 'traditional' dance, while at the same time claiming a strong connection with those same pasts.

We note that other storylines live both outside and inside of the Highland Games circuit, such as those tales with a Jacobite connection, where there is an undertone that their storylines have been created with a nationalistic purpose as its core function. These dance stories were thus aligned to patriotic poems and songs set to certain tunes such as 'Blue Bonnets', 'Over the Water to Charlie,' and '*Seann Triubhas (Uilleachan)*.' However, the primary reason for a common use of certain tunes for choreographed versions of dances bearing the same name, or being commonly associated with, was that they were simply good, catchy tunes which were popular for dancing.

When did these stories begin to be passed on to the wider public? Oral tradition formed a particular part of this lore, as stories were passed from dance teacher to dance teacher until anecdotes eventually got written down and disseminated through Highland Games programmes and newspaper articles, and, recently, some scholarly records. Some brief mentions of origin stories appear in the early- to mid-nineteenth century (see Sword Dance), but the majority appear in the late nineteenth century and then seem to peak in the 1950s and 60s. This seems to indicate that with the establishment of

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the Highland and Scottish Country Dance organisations in the early to mid-twentieth century, the need for published stories increased. This would be in addition to the Games programmes mentioned earlier. The variety of storylines does, however, indicate that oral tradition among the many dance teachers using these stories, to help give the dances meaning, is still strong. Again, this may show that the meaning-making of the dances taught was part of the dancing teachers,' and earlier the dancing masters,' trade, which would have infiltrated the Highland Games circuits. The dancing master trade initially, during the Romantic era, must have conformed to ideas of nationhood building, royalism, Balmorality, and eventually imperialism, with its built-in fervour of referring to mystic and nostalgic pasts. In more recent times, we can add Brigadoonery to a list of tasteless usage of Scottish stereotypes and symbols representing Scotland. No doubt the popularity of Romantic themes of mythic fairy tales, ancient pasts, and even exotic locales in classical ballets, such as *Giselle* and *La Sylphide*, in the early- and mid-nineteenth century helped fuel these ideas. Just as the choreographers of these ballets were also inspired by 'folk' dances, real or imagined for their creations, each genre being facets of the same thing. The boundaries were fluid between stage and non-stage as Buckland (2011) pointed out earlier.

And now, a final reflection on the material to be presented, this time from an orthographic view point. Many of the storylines, and the names of dances used, reflect a strong connection with Gaelic speaking Highland culture, perhaps, in places as the 'exotic other' or to give a stronger connection with a distant past or the roots of the 'folk.' It is therefore of interest to see how lacking in scrutiny the spelling of Gaelic names and places have been and still is as presented in English language media. In some instances what is given is probably mock-up spelling of the phonetic sounds of names, but in more recent times, with Gaelic dictionaries readily to hand, there is no such excuse for the lack of respect for Gaelic language (and culture). For example, *Tulloch/Tulach Gorm* or often phonetically given as Tullochgorum; and Reel of Tulloch when Gaelicized by some authors suffers similar treatment. There are scores of spellings for both *Gille Chaluim* and *Seann Triubhas* appearing in the quoted sections throughout this book. The latter, when given one of its associated tunes, '*Seann Triubhas Uillichan* or *Uilleachain*,' is commonly misspelt as 'Seann Truibhas Willichan,' or 'Shon Truish Willichan.' For starters, 'w' does not exist in the Gaelic alphabet. Thus, based on the best advice available, the Gaelic names of dances presented in this book have been spellchecked unless they appear in direct quotes where the original spelling has been retained.

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## 2 The Highland Fling

The term ‘fling’ or Highland fling’ seems initially to have referred to a class of steps used in either 4/4 hornpipe or reel time and sometimes used in the group dance The Highland Reel. For example, Jamieson’s *Etymological Dictionary of the Scottish Language* from 1808 describes the Highland Fling as ‘one species of movement’ in dancing, and, in *The Memoirs of a Highland Lady*, Elizabeth Grant remembers taking dance classes in Kinrara on Speyside in about 1804:

A dancing master taught us every variety of wonderful highland step [...] Lady Jane was very clever in the Gillie Callum and the Shean Trews, I a little behind her in the single and double fling, the shuffle, and heel-and-toe steps.<sup>33</sup>

In her memoirs, Englishwoman Susan Mein Sibbald (1783–1866), described childhood memories from spending time at her father’s estate at Eildon Hall, near Melrose in Scotland at around the same time. In *The Memoirs of Susan Sibbald*, she mentions an elderly friend of hers dancing a Reel, ‘cracking his fingers; ‘Highland Fling;’ ‘Pigeon’s Wing;’ and ‘Cut the Buckle;’ all performed most wonderfully for so stout a person.’<sup>34</sup> In 1790, Robert Burns wrote in his narrative poem *Tam o’Shanter* ‘*Loupan* and *flingan* on a *crummock*’<sup>35</sup> (Leaping and flinging on a stick), which seems to suggest, in the context of the poem, that the witches or hags are dancing on the spot. Robert Chambers enlightens us further in his 1842 *Chambers Information* by stating that

Highlanders dance reels with great agility and are fond of introducing the steps ordinarily called the Highland Fling, which is of the character of dancing on each foot alternately, and flinging the other in front and behind the leg which is dancing.<sup>36</sup>

The above statement was also given in *The English Dialect Dictionary* by Joseph Wright (1898). These and other examples strongly suggest that the term ‘flinging’ in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in fact indicated references to a specific style of dance step and strengthen the interpretation of the fling step being included in a strathspey-style Reel. Actually, the term ‘flinging’ was used to describe the round-the-leg movement of the active, or working, foot in some Ballroom manuals<sup>37</sup> while others used ‘swinging.’<sup>38</sup> To this day, the New Zealand Academy of Highland and National Dancing still uses the term ‘flinging’ for this movement motif, as does the Highland and National Dance Association of Victoria, Australia. In Scotland, the SOBHD and SOHDA names the same movement ‘shedding’ from the 1950s onwards.

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Emmerson further suggests that to Lowlanders in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the terms ‘Strathspey’ and ‘Highland,’ as they applied to dance, were synonymous.<sup>39</sup> A Highland Fling appears at the Theatre Royal in Edinburgh in April 1793. The following year, *A True Highland Fling* appears at a piping competition, danced by the winners of the same, also at the Theatre Royal in July 1794.<sup>40</sup>

Over time, from the late eighteenth century onwards, the various dancing masters operating round Scotland started to combine these steps into specifically named sequences, or Highland Flings. By the early nineteenth century, we find the first music arrangement with the word ‘Fling’ in the title of ‘The Marquis of Huntly’s Highland Fling,’ a tune attributed as being composed in 1793 by George Jenkins (c. 1760–1806), appearing in his *First Collection of New Scotch Music &c.*, dedicated to the Prince of Wales. George Jenkins was a teacher of Scottish dancing in London, but little is known about him. It has been suggested that he knew or at least corresponded with the Gow family and that he may have been from Perthshire.<sup>41</sup> Note that this tune is similar to the port a beul ‘*S ann an Ìle*’ (‘It was on Islay’), The first two written descriptions of the Marquis of Huntly’s Highland Fling as a dance appear in Aberdeenshire dance student Frederick Hill’s 1841 dance notebook. Each is attributed to a different teacher; one starts with the right foot while the other starts with the left. It is plausible that the Marquis of Huntly’s was one of the first Fling routines with specifically choreographed or arranged steps to a specific tune. Did Jenkins initially arrange the steps too? We do not know. James Logan mentions this dance, or type of step, ten years earlier, in 1831 as ‘dancing the Highland fling, in that style called the Marquis of Huntly’s’ in *The Scottish Gael*.<sup>42</sup>

Later in the century, the Lonach Highland Fling (tune and dance arrangement by James Scott Skinner) appears in Aberdeenshire newspaper articles. John McNeil’s Highland Fling and Delvine Side Highland Fling are described in dancing master John Reid’s 1935 notebook, the former dance title quite possibly stating the originator, dancing master John McNeil of Edinburgh, but may indicate the tune of the same name by Skinner. The Delvine Side arrangement possibly denoting the preferred tune for this Fling step sequence. Scott Skinner composed strathspeys titled ‘John McNeil’s Highland Fling’ and ‘Lonach Highland Fling’ or ‘Peter Baillie,’ both published in his *Harp & Claymore Collection* 1904.<sup>43</sup> The Lonach Highland Fling was danced by pupils of Mr Frank Cummings in Victoria Hall in Arbroath in 1899,<sup>44</sup> but what distinguished it cannot be discerned. It could be that this was the same dance called the New Lonach Highland Fling danced by pupils of James Scott Skinner, and by himself, dancing and playing the fiddle at the same time, at Crathes in 1863.<sup>45</sup> The ‘Lonach’ was mentioned as early as 1855 in the press<sup>46</sup> when Charles Forbes’s two sons danced it at the Lonach Games in Strathdon. A Professor Niven danced it in the Assembly Hall in Dundee in 1863.<sup>47</sup> When Scott Skinner published his *People’s Ball Room Guide* in 1905 he did not mention the Lonach arrangement but described his brother Sandy’s (Alexander F. Skinner’s) ten step

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Fling.<sup>48</sup> There is also a Rob Roy's Highland Fling mentioned in Hill's notebook of 1841, but no steps are described. It could be that a dancing master arranged a selection of steps of this name to celebrate the fame of Sir Walter Scott's novel *Rob Roy* of 1817, but it is equally possible that it was the dance featured in Act 3 of the play *Rob Roy* popular at theatres at the time. As the Fletts point out

within living memory [in the mid-1950s] the Strathspey setting steps most commonly used in Reels were those comprising of the solo dance, the Highland Fling. [...] Most dancing-teachers taught their pupils the Highland Fling as a solo dance, and at the same time taught them to use the individual steps of the dance as setting steps in Reels.<sup>49</sup>

So, the relationship between these types of steps used for both solo and Reel dancing was maintained into the twentieth century and in fact remains at present. It is also important to note that many published tune and dance arrangements for Flings originated outside the Highlands and Scotland as a whole, a point that both the Fletts and Scott make.<sup>50</sup> Early printed descriptions of the Highland Fling appear in Mozart Allan's *New Reference Guide to the Ball-Room* (ca. 1870) and in Charles N. McIntyre-North's book *Leabhar Comunn nam Fìor Ghael* of 1881. In my own collection, I have recorded close to 200 different Fling steps, of which only a handful are presently in active use, mostly by competitive Highland dancers.<sup>51</sup>

Turning to lore associated with the Highland Fling, there are several storylines in use. The most detailed story is found reprinted in *The Book of the Braemar Gathering* 1976 and in the *Arbroath Herald*<sup>52</sup> article 'Random Thoughts on Highland Music and Dancing' written in the 1970s by the late Angus-born dancer, teacher, and adjudicator George B. Lowe:

Alistair Duff lived in the Forest of Mar, and one day he was sitting by the River Dee initiating his grandson, Malcolm, into the mystery of the bagpipe chanter. The sound of the chanter was broken by a rustle close at hand, and from the thicket there sprang a stag, lithe and ruddy, with antlers strong. With a swish and a watery splash it leapt over the stones of the riverbed, and disappeared into the forest on the other side. 'Ye couldna dae that,' cried the old piper to his grandson, and the young lad replied, 'I could,' and suiting the action to his words, he danced from rock to rock as the stag had done, his arms and hands above his head, in imitation of the stag. Winter came, and by the glow of the log fire, the old man played his pipes, and the young lad recaptured the movement of the stag. So well did the boy dance that when there was a gathering of his clan he was called upon to do this stag dance to the music of the pipes, and the dance became known as 'The Fling.' The dance passed down from one generation to another through the ages, and is the dance we know today as the Highland Fling.<sup>53</sup>

A slightly longer version of the above tale is given in Webster.<sup>54</sup> This story highlights a

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common theme for the ‘meaning-making’ of the Highland Fling; that the dance should, in some fashion, resemble the agility, strength, and visual sight of a stag. Another legend simplifies the story somewhat and states only that the dance was inspired by the sight of a stag curvetting against the distant skyline—hence the raised arms throughout the dance, representing the stag’s antlers.<sup>55</sup> One may ask, whether the celebrated English artist Sir Edwin Landseer’s famous painting—*The Monarch of the Glen*—from 1851, in which the majestic stag is seen as a proud and untamed creature, against a backdrop of dramatic shrouded peaks, has something to do with the Fling lore? Landseer’s paintings were very much in keeping with the Romantic tradition and his paintings of animals in a Highland setting epitomised the attributes most admired by the Victorians: the wild, unconstrained and bold majesty of the animal. The image of the stag may perhaps also ‘be read as a more complex symbolic expression—containing an analogy of the Romantic Victorian ideal of the Noble Savage.’<sup>56</sup> It is certainly one of the most widely reproduced images being the most celebrated painting of a Scottish subject matter and is without a doubt one of the most famed paintings in British art.<sup>57</sup>

With regards to the current finger grouping in use by Highland dancers (thumb pressed against middle finger with other three fingers held in a curve), which is similar to how ballet teachers used to teach the hand and finger position and thus makes it a plausible influence on the finger grouping in the Highland dancing. The finger grouping is, in addition to the representation of the stag’s antlers, also said to be a symbol of Catholic protest, representing the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.<sup>58</sup> What is also of interest is that the story is placed in Mar in Aberdeenshire but still evokes an image of the wild outdoors of the Highlands. Was the word ‘Highland’ added to the ‘The Fling’ to make the dance more exotic along Romantic era ideals?

There is another strand of stories that has it that the dance was originally performed by warriors on the *targe* (a round Highland shield made of wood, leather, and some metal and often with a large central spike) of a vanquished foe as a victory dance, or as a good luck omen if one could stay on the exact spot when dancing. This presumably accounts for the precise stepping on the spot aimed for in most Fling steps. David Anderson, the Dundee dancing master, states in the 1890s versions of his ballroom guide that all Fling steps should be danced on the spot but does not refer to a legend stating why this should be the case.<sup>59</sup>

It should be noted that certain Scottish regimental versions of the Fling include some steps with lateral travel, as do versions of what is known as the ‘Huntly step.’ This practice may date back to the concept of a Highland Fling being a collection of arbitrary reel steps.<sup>60</sup> In a circa 1915 film clip in the National Library of Scotland collection, a Highland Fling featuring sideways movement can be viewed.<sup>61</sup> The piper on the right in the clip is George Douglas Taylor who later, in 1929, published *Some Traditional Scottish Dances* in which he describes the Highland Fling as being danced on the spot. Possibly



William Cameron dancing the Highland Fling in  
E. Burchenal, *Dances of the People*, 1913.



Gregor Bowman dancing the Highland Fling, 1990. Photo © M. Melin. Note that his arm is held much straighter and higher than the curve suggested in the antler stories, showing that competition culture influences the arm positions. Currently many dancers hold the arms straight up in second and third positions.

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this indicates a shift in preferences by dance teachers at this point in time?

The idea of dancing perfectly on the spot remains a strong technical point to this day. Steps with lateral movement were not in common use on the SOBHD competition scene for many years but have since 2016 been re-introduced by the organisation. Indeed, some stories suggest that the Fling used to be danced on a bonnet laid flat on the ground, so all could see if the dancer could keep on the same spot throughout the dance. Similar techniques were practised by teachers who used small coins or marked a spot on the floor in various ways to keep their pupils ‘on the spot.’ My own Highland dance teacher, the late Bobby Watson of Aberdeen (1914–1997), told me in a conversation in his class in August 1988 that when he, as a small boy, was taught by Aberdeen dancing master John Pirie (1875–1947), any dancer in class that could keep their supporting foot over a coin on the floor throughout the dance would get the coin afterward. The ideal skill of keeping on the spot is the overarching ambition, alongside strength, agility, and lightness. Steps with lateral travel would, interestingly, go against this notion of staying on the spot, but were nonetheless commonly used by many dancers, including Bobby Watson.

The notion, and accompanying skill set of dancing on the spot, is also a common motif in some forms of Irish and English step dancing where, if you could dance on a ‘plate’ you did well, but to dance on a ‘sixpence’ was better. You may see dancing on top of a table, or on top of a barrel, or on a half-door pulled off its hinges as a sounding board (which at one time was placed on the sod, clay or stone floor of the houses), or dancing on top of a cart, are all still fairly commonly occurring skills displayed in certain contexts. There are also storylines in the Irish tradition that greatly exaggerate these skills, in which the door started on the floor and was raised in successive rounds like a high bar—up onto the table, up onto barrels on top of the table. In one story, the contest ends with the door on top of the chimney. The door was the confined area of the stage. Those dancers who stayed most in place shot up highest in regards among the watchers and commentators on the dancers’ skills. The ability to equally execute every step starting with either foot was also prized. Even though this evenly balanced pattern of dancing steps on the right and left foot alternately, is a common trait in Scottish dance steps, it is not mentioned in any storyline, to my knowledge, as a significant skill in relation to Scottish solo dance.

These stories do, on a ‘meaning-making’ level, highlight desired dancing qualities such as strength, virility (e.g., the image of a stag with a dancer’s arms and finger positions representing antlers), surefootedness, and lightness. However, most available photographic images before the 1920s (such as the one of William Cameron from American folk-dance educator Elizabeth Burchenal’s *Dances of the People*, 1913) show arms held at a lower level than is used in current practice. Stories further suggest that the Highland Fling is a warriors’ dance, bringing some connotations of ‘wild’ Highlanders.

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While this suggested warrior connection may imply physical strength and surefootedness it is far more common in relation to the sword dance. Generally, the Highland Fling has probably more to do with the idea that the dance should be danced on the spot such as on a bonnet, coin, or *targe*, even if the latter is rather improbable in reality.

Some authors, such as Thurston and Scott,<sup>62</sup> rightly point out that dancing on a *targe* would not be feasible due to its construction featuring spikes, handles, and straps. The stories tend largely to ignore these practical facts. Even though one of the ‘stag’ themed stories says the dancer jumps from stone to stone, suggesting he is *not* staying on the spot, this detail is ignored within the general on-the-spot aesthetic. The movement from side to side (jumping from stone to stone) could nonetheless indicate the earlier Fling aesthetic when the dancer used the old-fashioned spread or *échappé*, with both feet in second position to start a step, which would then naturally require two stones for support and involve some lateral movement in its execution.

At the same time, it is probably not worth analysing any of the stories in too much factual detail; the real importance lies in them as aesthetic pointers. In the case of the relationship between a Highland dancer’s current preferred arm position and finger grouping and that of the shape of a stag’s antlers, the story also ignores that before Highland dancing got standardised in the 1950s, many differing arm and hand positions were in use by dancers and teachers from different areas of Scotland. The finger grouping, and positioning of arms is more likely to do with the aid of balance and snapping of fingers in time with the music! And, very likely they were a transfer over from the romantic ballet ideals so popular in Europe when these changes to Highland dancing aesthetics began to take place. Finally, in association to the stag-related stories originating from dancer, teacher and adjudicator George B. Lowe’s teaching in the northeast of Scotland (Angus and Aberdeenshire), it is worth highlighting a story Bobby Watson told me in a conversation in 1988. Dancer and teacher James L. MacKenzie of Aberdeen had found a set of stag antlers that he used to place in front of his pupils in class so that they could place their arms in a similar curvature, as the shape of the antlers pleased him. If he was inspired by the story to do so is unknown, but it does indicate a practical use of a specific shape to indicate a preferred aesthetic look.<sup>63</sup>

In summary, early mentions of the ‘Highland Fling’ or ‘Flinging’ suggest it was a particular step used in the dancing of Scotch reels. Later, combinations of similar steps were combined into routines, or named dances, such as the Marquis of Huntly’s Highland Fling arranged to the tune composed by London-based teacher and musician Jenkins. The various stories applied to the dance create meaning by providing imagery for aesthetically preferred qualities of strength, lightness, verticality (staying on the spot), and arm and hand positioning of the dancer when performing the dance as developed and encouraged by dance teachers and commentators over time. In an online questionnaire conducted in 2014 I found that some of these stories are still used by some

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dance teachers around the world to illustrate just these aesthetic qualities, particularly when explaining the dance to an audience in a stage performance context.



The dancers in Canadian dance company Change of Step display arm, body, head, and leg positions in contemporary Highland Dancing choreography at Celtic Colours International Festival, Cape Breton Island, Canada, October 2016. This position in dances such as the Highland Fling, Tulloch Gorm, and Highland Laddie to name but three. Photo © David Greenwell, 2016.

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### 3 The *Seann Triubhas*

The Scots Gaelic-titled dance *Seann Triubhas*, which translates to ‘Old Trews’ in English, is currently performed in 4/4 tempo, starting with four to six steps danced slowly, then finished with one or two in a quicker tempo. The earliest references to this solo dance appear in the 1790s but the dance has evolved and changed greatly over time. The visual characteristics of the dance currently involve the performance of distinct steps travelling in circular, diagonal, and sideways directions in the slow part, while the quick-time section features Highland Fling-type steps. The hands and arms are kept active through the dance and certain steps include characteristic circular arm actions, which have now become the hallmark commonly associated with this dance. Potentially these few ‘action spots’ are all that remains of what must once have been a dance full of acting and drama. Edinburgh dance teacher D.G. MacLennan refers to it as ‘a man’s miming solo dance.’<sup>64</sup> In 1831 James Logan referred to it as ‘Sean Trius’ danced to a Highland hornpipe of the same name, which ‘is danced with much grace,’<sup>65</sup> and earlier in about 1810 it was described as ‘a merry dance,’ by the Paisley poet Robert Tannahill (1774–1810) who, in his poem ‘The Kebbuckston Wedding,’ wrote —

*Sawney M’Nab, wi’ his tartan trews,  
Has hecht to come down in the midst o’ the caper,  
An’ gi’e us three wallops o’ merry Shan Trews  
Wi’ the true Highland fling ‘o’ Macrimmon the piper.*<sup>66</sup>

In 1928 Robert H. Calder<sup>67</sup> further suggested that ‘in his evolutions the dancer seems to aim at gracefulness rather than vigour (though vigour may also be displayed); as if the Highlander, whom he represents, were seeking to conform to the polish and refinement of the Lowlands, or to win the favour of some Lowland lass.’ In 1951 William Cameron, a dance teacher from Aberdeen, wrote in his textbook *Highland Dances of Scotland*, that

The ‘Shean-trews’ dance like all other beloved traditional ‘Highland’ dances, is performed with much grace, is lively and very smoothly executed, this arrogant and conspicuous dance covers a good deal of ground, is like all other Highland dances, performed almost noiseless, and is believed to convey a small boy’s delight wearing his first pair of trousers.<sup>68</sup>

Cameron makes no mention of any Highland connotations, nor does he give the now common trouser kicking as a central image, which will be detailed in due course, but he does give six different spellings of the dance’s name.<sup>69</sup>

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Apart from the gracefulness of the dance it is worth noting the bias in this statement towards a perceived Lowland refinement versus the rustic nature of the Highlander, again indicating refinement ideals of the Romantic era. Michael Brander adds that the trousers storyline may 'be that the dance was used to make mockery of the hated southern dress, for if the Lowlander feared and hated the Highlanders, the dislike was returned in full measure, in both cases extending to their customary garb.'<sup>70</sup>

Much suggests that the sophisticated and graceful dance we have today evolved from one of the many dramatic jigs once in use in the Highlands.<sup>71</sup> D.G. MacLennan tells us that this dance was originally an old 'Scotch Measure,' which is a form of double hornpipe, and at the end of the eighteenth century, the dance was referred to as a well-known 'double' hornpipe.<sup>72</sup> At that time, the word 'hornpipe' had a much wider meaning than it enjoys today, and this may well further indicate that it was originally more of a dramatic dance or jig, i.e., the simple acting dances involving only the most rudimentary movements, with possible inclusions of step dancing. Alexander Carmichael (*Alasdair Gilleasbaig MacGilleMhicheil*, 1832–1912), the Lismore-born famed exciseman, folklorist, antiquarian, and author, who states in his *Carmina Gadelica* vol. I<sup>73</sup> that the *Seann Triubhas* was danced at the St. Michael's Day balls in South Uist together with other dramatic dances now lost, and 'contained much more acting' than it did in his time. Also, according to dance scholar Frank Rhodes, stepping, i.e., beating out the rhythm of the music with the feet, was used in both a *Seann Triubhas* and what Rhodes identified as a version of the Fling in the Scottish settlements in Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia, remembered in the late 1950s, which adds another performative dimension, and which may belong with the older more dramatic forms of the dance.<sup>74</sup>

The *Seann Triubhas* is, in storytelling tradition, said to represent the Highlanders' wishes to shake their trews off and regain their kilts, during the times following the 1746 Dress Act, and that the quick steps represent the celebration of the latter. Another tradition claims, that, on the contrary, the dance recalls the celebrations that attended the repeal of the Act in 1782. According to D.G. MacLennan in *Highland and Traditional Scottish Dances* (1950),

an old grand-uncle in Glen Urquhart once told me, when a youth, that there were Government officers going through the glens to trap any offenders against this proscription law, and he had heard that sometimes stubborn Highlanders could be seen walking along the roads wearing tartan trews, but holding behind their backs their hodden grey pair, folded up, so that if warned that any official was in the vicinity, the despised pair could be put on over the tartan.<sup>75</sup>

In addition, Jean Milligan and D.G. MacLennan (1950), tells us this old hornpipe, formerly known as 'Scotch Measure' was the only dance the Highlanders condescended to dance whilst wearing the prescribed (grey) trews, and that

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the trews in the eighteenth century were worn [mainly] by chiefs and might have been considered an honourable article of dress, but the clansmen despised them and various flicks of the fingers and quick turns of the wrists [in the dance] indicate derision and abhorrence of the tight, confining things and longing for the freedom of the kilt.<sup>76</sup>

The above statement suggests that the above storylines are part of a growing nineteenth-century Tartanry discourse, where an outsider, or, Lowland viewpoint was applied to a manufactured Highland scenario. This scenario celebrates the fighting spirit of the defeated Highland or Gaelic culture by a dominant urban and Lowland culture.

The late Canadian dancer and teacher Janet T. MacLachlan gives us a different interpretation, where the movements of the dance include a symbolic brushing away of evil, similar to Scottish women's practice of sweeping their houses clean on Hogmanay (New Year's Eve) in preparation for the New Year.<sup>77</sup>

There is also another storyline, according to Speyside-born and later London-based Highland dancer Jack McConachie's *Letter Service Series*<sup>78</sup> (c. 1950–1953), that says 'that a somewhat similar dance was brought to Scotland from France, in the 16th century, by Mary Queen of Scots' French courtiers which was copied by the Highlanders who called it the 'old trews' dance.' This idea was said by McConachie to be further corroborated by references in historical books, which mention that Mary Queen of Scots 'donned long tights and danced to Scottish airs.' What sources McConachie refers to, however, are not known.

An article appearing in the *Scots Magazine* 1798,<sup>79</sup> states that 'Shan Trews' is an old hornpipe tune and dance imported from the European continent, together with 'Jack, o the Green' and 'King of Sweden's March' in the seventeenth century. After 'the restoration of Charles II' they filtered down from the court to the common man and 'are now common throughout Scotland.' The article further, and rather speculatively, claims that the name is probably a derivation from the French 'Sans Trews' or *sans culottes* and that the dance and tune was 'probably' composed in honour of the common soldiers fighting in the German War. As a matter of fact, several tens of thousands of Scottish mercenaries did fight in the 'German' or Thirty Years War (1618–1648) in the Swedish army under King Gustavus Adolphus (among other armies involved in the conflict) but we do not have any specific evidence whether any of them brought dance-related material back to Scotland apart from stories like this.

Three group arrangements of 'Shauntreuse,' one labelled 'Irish' and two 'Scotch,' for six-to-eight dancers appear in the anonymous manuscript *The Extraordinary Dance Book T.B. 1826*.<sup>80</sup> The mnemonic notation seems not to be clear enough for a full interpretation of the steps given nor do we know much about this manuscript or the sources of the dances in it.

Sbairr'Fhuilich Williehan

A handwritten musical score for the piece 'Sbairr'Fhuilich Williehan'. The score is written on ten staves, organized into five systems of two staves each. The notation is in a historical style, featuring a treble clef on the first staff of each system and a bass clef on the second. The music consists of a single melodic line with various rhythmic values, including eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests. There are several repeat signs (double bar lines with dots) and dynamic markings such as 'f' (forte) and 'p' (piano) scattered throughout the piece. The handwriting is clear and legible, typical of 18th-century manuscript notation.

Robert Bremner, 1757, A Collection of Scots Reels or Country Dances.

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Seann Triubhas Uilleim

Luinneag

'S o tha a'bhriogais liath-ghlas  
Am bliadhna cur mulaid oirnn,  
'S è'n rud nach fhacas riamh oirnn;  
'S nach miann leinn a chumail oirnn;  
'S nam biomaid uile dileas  
Do'n Rìgh bha toirt cuiridh dhuinn,  
Cha n-fhaicte sinn gu dilinn  
A'stroidhadh do'n chulaidh so.

4

'S o'n a chuir sinn suas a' bhriogais  
Gur neo-mhiosail leinn a'chulaidh ud,  
'Gan teannadh mu na h-iosgannan,  
Gur trioblaideach leinn umainn iad;  
Us bha sinn roimhe misneachail,  
'S na breacain fo na criosan oirnn,  
Ged thà sinn ann am bitheantas  
A nis a' cur nan sumag oirnn;

9

Cha taitinn e gu bràth ruinn  
A choiseachd nan gleann-fàsaich,  
'N uair rachamaid a dh'àirigh,  
No dh'ait'am biodh cruinneagan  
'S è Deàrsa rinn an eucoir,  
'S ro-dhiombach tha mi fèin deth,  
Oon thug e dhinn an èileadh,  
'S gach eudach a bhùileadh dhuinn.

Chorus

And since the light-grey breeches  
This year make us so sorrowful,  
Such things were never seen on us;  
Nor do we care to keep them on;  
And had we all been faithful  
To the King who asked for aid from us,  
We would not be for e'er beheld  
A-yielding to this sort of garb.

4

And since we put the trousers on  
That clothing does not please us well,  
Pinching us around our houghs  
Uncomfortable 'tis to wear;  
And erstwhile we were spirited,  
With our plaids on beneath our belts,  
Though now indeed we're commonly  
Clothing ourselves in saddle-cloths.

9

And ne'er will we be pleased with it  
A-walking in the lonely glens.  
Or when we go a-shieling-wards  
Or anywhere that lassies are  
King George it is who's wronged us,  
And I am much in wrath for it,  
Since he did take the kilt away  
And each dress that belonged to us.

John Lorne Campbell ((1933) 1984) *Highland Songs of the Forty-five*.



A Highland Wedding by David Allan, 1780

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According to the Fletts, the earliest mention of a ‘Shant Trews’ being danced is in Musselburgh Town Hall, Midlothian, in 1793 in Mr Salmon’s dance class.<sup>81</sup> It is worth noting that any connotations with the highlands of Scotland seem not to be evident at this point in time, even though it was danced to the tune ‘*Seann Triubhas Uilleichan*’ (‘Willie’s Old Trousers’) as mentioned previously. An earlier name for this fiddle tune was ‘De’il Stick the Minister’ which dates back at least to 1690, when the associated song had words insulting to ministers. This tune title appears in a Scottish tune collection by Henry Playford in London about 1700.<sup>82</sup>

I would suggest that the root of the Jacobite-related storyline is to be found in the song ‘*Seann Triubhas Uilleim*’ that Gaelic poet Duncan Ban MacIntyre (*Donnchadh Bàn Mac an t-Saoir*, 1724–1812) wrote to the earlier tune; a song which has the additional title ‘*Oran do ’n Bhriogais*’ (‘Song to the Breeches’). Duncan Ban’s song lyrics protested the 1746 Dress Act banning all forms of Highland dress, including trews (see further below), and that it did not distinguish between Highlanders or Lowlanders wearing them.<sup>83</sup> Uilleim, or Willie, in the song refers to the Duke of Cumberland, in whose Loyalist forces Duncan Ban reluctantly served during the 1745–1746 Jacobite rising, but in this song, he displays his Jacobite sympathies. On page 27 are extracts of the chorus and verses 4 and 9 set the tone of the song.

As was commonly the case, in time, the tune changed its name to the song title ‘*Seann Triubhas Uilleim*<sup>84</sup>—‘Willie’s Old Trousers’—and it is quite possible that this is the original tune with which the earlier forms of the solo dance were associated. It is equally possible, as the Fletts suggest, that the dance was composed to ‘the first tune and when the tune changed name the dance did likewise just as in the case of social dances which, in former times, took the name of the tune to which they were danced.’<sup>85</sup>

It should be noted that in James Scott Skinner’s *The Scottish Violinist* (1900), an antiquarian tune entitled ‘Gin Ye Kiss My Wife, I’ll Tell the Minister,’<sup>86</sup> appears as a 4/4, which is said to be ‘a very old air’ and he gave as the original tune for ‘Sean Trews.’

Scottish Highlanders wore trews (*triubhas*) contemporaneously with the belted plaid (*fhèilidh-mòr* or *breacan an fhèilidh*) until the end of the eighteenth century. The late tartan academic James D. Scarlett explains that

trews are a kind of trouser tailored to a tight fit, the material being cut on the bias to give the necessary elasticity, and they incorporate hose [...] genuine trews are tights. [...] In the Highlands, trews became, in course of time ‘gentlemen’s’ wear, being more suited to a horseman than was the belted plaid; out of doors, a separate plaid was worn, folded, and belted about the body, ready to give protection against the elements when required.<sup>88</sup>

There are many fine paintings of Highland men wearing trews, and a good example is the painting ‘A Highland Wedding’ by David Allan,<sup>89</sup> depicting a fiddler and cellist (Niel

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Gow and his brother Donald) playing for a dance on the Athol estate in Perthshire in the summer of 1780, with the main male dancing character wearing a pair of tartan trews gartered below the knee.

At the time of the painting, the tartan was worn illegally. In the Dress Act of 1746, (Geo, II c 39), it was stated that most use of tartan, any form of kilts and *trews* or any aspect of Highland garb were equally forbidden, and this act was not repealed until 1782.<sup>90</sup> The Act stated:

That from and after the first day of August, one thousand seven hundred and forty seven, no man or boy, within that part of Great Briton called Scotland, other than shall be employed as officers and soldiers in his Majesty's forces, shall on any pretence whatsoever, wear or put on the clothes commonly called Highland Clothes (that is to say) the plaid, philibeg, or little kilt, trowse, shoulder belts, or any part whatsoever of what peculiarly belongs to the highland garb; and that no tartan, or partly-coloured plaid or stuff shall be used for great coats, or for upper coats.<sup>91</sup>

Scottish historian Hugh Cheape deliberates upon the issues of the importance of dress and its significant mark of distinction and how these forms a major aspect in Gaelic poetry and song:

It is undoubtedly of great significance that the language and rhetoric of poetry and song in Gaelic concentrates not on the individual and particularist interests of the clan but on a Gaelic nation and on a greater social order. Praise of an individual invokes a complicated series of images whose focus is much wider than the individual. Among the stock of epithets used for to qualify and augment a name, either of family or individual, the words for dress and tartan are common; they interlock in intimate context with other epithets such as 'ship,' 'galley,' 'standard,' 'flag,' 'battles' or 'deeds.' They supply a coherent system of great resonance and evocative power whose details illuminate as many facets as possible of aristocratic life, and reinforce it by extending its standards and aspirations throughout society.<sup>92</sup>

Highland society was variously clothed, and this was often used by poets to belittle a clan's or family's adversaries by writing about them in disparaging terms. Even though the warring factions, at times, both belonged to Highland society, the words of the poets would place the enemy firmly outside Gaelic society by describing them in terms such as the 'men in cloaks,' or 'the folk of the black hats.' Hugh Cheape continues

Whatever attitude that lies behind these words such as 'cloaks,' 'hodden grey,' 'breeks,' it is clear that dress is a significant mark of distinction. One of the most crushing insults in late mediaeval lyrical rhetoric is *bodaich nam briogais* ('the peasants of the breeks').<sup>93</sup>

Could it then be that the dance *Seann Triubhas*, alongside the words of the song, was another means of expressing a feeling, or a point of view, about someone or a class of



William Sutherland, dancing the *Seann Triubhas* in Dannevirke, New Zealand in 1926. Published with kind permission, copyright Ewen McCann.

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people, by making up a miming or pantomime dance around the subject of ‘old trews’? This stylistic image was utilised by Duncan Ban MacIntyre in his song ‘*Seann Triubhas Willeim*,’ and that the disparaging sentiments have become concentrated on William’s old trousers and the connected issues of the 1746 Dress Act as one of the storylines accompanying the dance seems to suggest?

Keeping in mind the above discussion of Gaelic song writing style and taking into account that the *Seann Triubhas* was once referred to as a hornpipe of some description, this 3/2 (with common time singular bars) port a beul ‘A’ *Bhriogais Uallach* (‘the Pompous Trousers’) could be taken into account as an earlier tune contender for the pantomime and early hornpipe versions of the dance.<sup>94</sup> The first verse goes<sup>95</sup>:

|   |
|---|
| <p><i>Leis a’ bhriogas uallaich, horo-o hì</i><br/><i>Leis a’ bhriogais uallaich, ho ri ho rò</i><br/><i>Briogais an duin’ uasail, horo-o hì</i><br/><i>‘S iomadh duine chual i nach robh na còir</i><br/><i>With the fantastic breeks, horo-o hi</i><br/><i>With the fantastic breeks, ho ri ho ro</i><br/><i>The gentleman’s breeks, horo-o hi</i><br/><i>Many a person heard of them that was not near</i></p> |
|---|

From a movement point of view, the *Seann Triubhas* would have undergone many transitional changes in appearance from its suggested pantomimic qualities in a hornpipe character to its current form as a soft-shoe competitive Highland dance with strong influences from the discipline of ballet. Its current aesthetic preference is one of grace combined with rigid technique and stamina.

As a competitive dance, the *Seann Triubhas* was first introduced at the Braemar Games in 1853 alongside the Highland Fling, Reel of Tulloch, and *Gille Chaluim*.<sup>96</sup> Jack McConachie noted considerable changes to the dance in the period 1920–1950s alone, with the general style becoming more influenced by ballet, and new movements, such as leaps, vigorous leg shakes and double cuts, gradually introduced into the competition form to replace the simple graceful movements of the past.<sup>97</sup>

The shaking, kicking, and brushing movements of the modern version of the dance in particular are often explained in relation to the primary story as representing the wish to shake off a pair of trews. Teachers use the story to make their students understand why these movements should be executed in a vigorous or even sharp fashion and why they should show joy (of regaining the kilt) in the quick part, while some just say it related to shaking off an old pair of trousers.<sup>98</sup> These movements were however added intentionally by influential improvers such as brothers Donald or D.G. (1869–1965) and William MacLennan (1860–1892), not to enhance this imagery but rather to improve

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the technique and difficulty of the dance<sup>99</sup> and possibly to reduce earlier dramatic acting features of the dance. Both brothers were trained in ballet technique and may have been exposed to both Enrico Cecchetti (1850–1928) and August Bournonville (1805–1879) methods whilst in London in the late nineteenth century. Certainly, some of the movements are reminiscent of Cecchetti’s dancing. D.G. MacLennan was trained by the Danish ballet master Alexandre Genée (active in the second half of the nineteenth century and sometimes based in London) for nine summers from 1900, alongside the later-titled Dame Adeline Genée who was Alexandre Genée’s niece (MacLennan 1950: preface). MacLennan stated that his brother William was the first to introduce the high cutting, side cutting, double beats front and back and entrechat into the *Seann Triubhas*, while D.G. himself devised the characteristic introductory circular brushing step<sup>100</sup> in about 1908. Lowe (1976) adds that D.G. MacLennan was inspired into implementing this outward brushing movement after having watched the ballet *La Sylphide*, set in Scotland, in either London or Paris, and was probably the version of the ballet choreographed by Danish ballet master August Bournonville in 1836 rather than Taglioni’s version from 1832 as Bournonville’s certainly involves brushing movements in the choreography. Thus, the MacLennan ‘composed,’ as he puts it, ‘brush’ movements has nothing at all to do with ‘shaking, or kicking off the trews,’ but he added an interesting note that ‘in my own day no other dancer ever copied it, [... and] my brother was the only one to use entrechat in his day.’<sup>101</sup> A bit of an irony that a Scottish dance was changed to adopt movements from a ballet which purported to show Scottish dancing!

It should be noted that the tune commonly used for the dance at present is the mid-eighteenth century 4/4 strathspey ‘Whistle O’er the Lave o’ t’<sup>102</sup> This tune is also known as ‘The Auld Breeks,’ ‘The Shoddy Breeks,’ and often simply as ‘*Seann Triubhas*’ (with a variety of spellings) to name just a few titles.<sup>103</sup> The tune is sometimes attributed to Dumfries musician John Bruce at around 1720, and various lyrics and poems are attached to it, most famously by Robert Burns. It seems that this consciously-implemented change of tune for the dance took place sometime in the mid-nineteenth century to favour tunes played on the pipes for Highland dance competitions rather than as sung or played on the fiddle in class or for a performance. This tune change has no doubt had considerable impact on the stylistic and tempo changes to *Seann Triubhas*, which has helped in shaping the character of the dance into its current aesthetic and technical form. ‘Whistle O’er the Lave o’ t’ would have been the tune the MacLennan brothers danced to. As a parallel note, Irish Gaelic League members James G. (or Seamus) O’Keeffe (1865–1937) and Art. O’Brien (1872–1945) tell us that in northern Donegal, Ireland, the solo set dance, Maggie Pickens, was danced to the song air ‘Whistle O’er the Lave o’ t’ at the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>104</sup>

To conclude, the current solo dance *Seann Triubhas* seems to have several possible origins, one early one being a dramatic jig danced to a *port a beul* in Gaelic culture.

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The current dance has some elements of many earlier versions, which have evolved and modified over time into its current aesthetic and technical appearance. The story line of a preference of wearing a kilt over wearing trews, and the dance's connections of the aftermath of the 1745–1746 Jacobite rising, fits into the nationalistic projections of the Romantic era and Tartanry discourse of the kilt as a Highland attribute symbolising Scotland. Very little suggests any true connection to issues relating to the decline of Gaelic culture. Rather, stories support that this dance was an appropriation of a Highland tradition by urban and Lowland dance teachers and organisations applying meaning to a dance featuring at Highland Games and at competitions applying an exotic meaning of the Highland other.

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## 4 The Sword Dance—*Gille Chaluum*

Taking an historical point of view, there are three categories of Scottish sword or weapon dances mentioned in historical references. There are ritualistic chain-sword dances commonly known as ‘hilt-and-point sword dances;’ there are pantomimic dramas, or Pyrrhic dances, where the dancer flourishes a sword (or other weapon) to act out a fight; and finally, there are a number of sword dances where a dancer moves around and over swords placed cross-wise on the ground.<sup>105</sup> Myths surrounding Scottish sword dances mainly refer to the latter type of sword dancing, executed over swords placed cross-wise on the ground.

There are many traces in Highland folklore of weapon dances although most of those actual dances are forgotten. The main difference between the older dances and the Sword dances known today is that in the past the dances seem to have involved more acting or play. A surviving hilt-and-point, or linked sword dance is the still-practised Sword Dance from the small island of Papa Stour in Shetland, described in part in Emmerson (1972) in full by Johnstone (1912), Johnson (1926, based on Henderson MS, 1788), MacLennan (1952) and Sir Walter Scott in *The Pirate* (1822), and which can be watched in performance on recent YouTube clips.<sup>106</sup> The Papa Stour sword dance is also discussed in detail by Stephen Corrsin in his book *Sword Dancing in Europe: A History* (1997).<sup>107</sup> In Pyrrhic forms, the sword (or other weapon) was flourished and a fight was dramatized. Today this aspect is no longer practised. In R.R. McIan’s *Gaelic Gatherings, or Highlanders at Home*, (1848), James Logan wrote:

The Highlanders have a dirk dance, now almost forgotten, and the Sword dance. The original name of the tune was ‘Mac an ‘orsair’ which, with the mode of dancing, General Stewart of Garth tells us, has disappeared; but he had seen it executed by some old men. As now performed, two naked Swords are laid across each other on the floor [...] the dance is broken should either be touched ever so slightly. As danced by old men, in the course of the dance they took up the Swords and made certain flourishes as if fighting.<sup>108</sup>

MacLennan<sup>109</sup> stated that two grand-uncles of his danced a Dirk Dance in London in the 1850s, which Logan describes in the *Scottish Gael* (1831, 1876). MacLennan said his eldest brother, William, learnt it from one of the uncles and, in turn, he and D.G. used to practice it. MacLennan said that it was known in Gaelic as *Bruicheath* or Battle Dance and was a form of a duelling dance showing attack and defence. A solo version of the



William Cameron dancing the sword dance. In Burchenal, *Dances of the People*, Volume 2, (1913: 13).

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dance is published by the Fletts (1996). The only lore associated with the Dirk Dance is that it shows mock fighting and is possibly a remnant of martial arts practice among the Highland warriors.

The solo Sword Dance, often better known as *Gille Chaluim* after its associated tune, is the dance we are most familiar with today, primarily through the Highland games competition scene. Gaelic writer and journalist Henry Whyte (1853–1913), a native of Easdale and Glasgow wrote under his pen name ‘Fionn’ in the January 1896 edition of the journal *The Celtic Monthly*:

There is no Highland Dance older or better known than Gille Calum, or the Sword Dance. It is said that this Gille Calum was no less a personage than Calum a’ Chinn mhóir (Malcolm Canmore [‘Big Head’]). This monarch provoked the displeasures of the Highlanders by removing the court of the Scots from Dunstaffnage Castle, its ancient seat in Argyllshire, and establishing it at Dunfermline; further, by marrying the Saxon Princess Margaret, which led to the change of court language from Gaelic to English, further to his having added to the coinage a very small coin, the bodle, or two Scots pennies, equal in value to the third part of our halfpenny. It was called in Gaelic *bonn-a-sia*, or coin of six, being the sixth part of a Scots shilling, which was so small as to be contemptible in the eyes of his Highland subjects. The term penny and halfpenny, or bawbee, are used in the translation only for want of a better [term]; they give no idea of the value of the old Scottish money.<sup>110</sup>

What Henry Whyte does here is draw together various strands of myth into one story without separating whether any of the elements are based in fact or just fiction. The Angus Highland dancer and adjudicator George B. Lowe treats the story similarly in his article ‘Random Thoughts on Highland Music and Dancing’ in the 1976 edition of the *Braemar Book*:

The Sword Dance in its present form has been danced for hundreds of years in Scotland, and so far, no-one has been able to give an exact date for its beginning. It is thought that this Sword dance was originally performed by a dancer in the centre of a circle of eight other pyrrhic dancers who introduced swords into their dance. The Sword Dance is Celtic in origin, but the Scandinavians also had an ancient Sword dance and probably some of the steps have come to us through the Shetlands, which were long under Viking domination.<sup>111</sup> [...] The story goes in the village and country surrounding Braemar that the Sword dance as we know it today originated when Malcolm Canmore in the eighth century [!] returned from one of his victories to the Castle of Kindrochit<sup>112</sup> in Mar, and placing his own claymore over the Sword of his vanquished combatant, danced over the crossed swords to the wild Highland music of the bagpipe.’

It is distinctly possible that Lowe based part of his story on C.N. McIntyre-North’s 1881 entry in *‘Leabhar comunn nam fìor Ghael’* which goes:

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[T]he so-called Gillie Calluin; this, we think, must be a corruption of *Claid-heamh Cuthullin* [Cuchullain's<sup>113</sup> sword], a song in which the heroes' exploits are recited, to stimulate the Keltic youth to deeds of valour, a most appropriate theme for pipe and voice as an accompaniment to the Sword dance. There appears to have been three methods of performing this dance: first, the grand dance used on solemn occasions; the second would be a trial of skill and agility, and the third would be an exhibition by one person, like the modern style. The grand dance was, no doubt, similar to that described as being the favourite of the Northern Goths and Swedes, 'wherein they exercise their; first with their swords sheathed and erect in their hands, they dance in a triple round, then with their Swords drawn, held erect; afterwards extending them from hand to hand, they lay hold of each other's hilt and point, while they are wheeling about moderately round, and, changing their order, throw themselves round in a hexagon, which they call a rose; but presently raising and drawing back their Swords, they undo that figure to form with them a four-square rose that may be rebound over the heads of each; at last they dance rapidly backwards, and vehemently rattling the sides of their swords together, conclude the sport; pipes and songs direct the measure, which at first is slow, but increasing after, becomes a very quick one towards the conclusion.' The second style [...] the two performers were armed with Sword and targaid, the dance resolving itself into a trial of skill, and it is very possible that the victor placed the two swords on the ground and danced round them in exultation of his victory.

This last story seems to refer mainly to hilt-and-point sword dancing as in the surviving version known as the Papa Stour Sword Dance still performed in the Shetland Islands. In fact, when reading the first description above the first instance sounds just like the performance of an English linked sword dance. Similar descriptions appear in Stephen Corrsin's 1997 discussion on English sword dancing in the late eighteenth to early twentieth century.<sup>114</sup> The second instance sounds reminiscent of parts of the English *Bacca Pipes double jig*.<sup>115</sup>

The earlier two stories, which are perhaps the most common stories associated with *Gille Chaluim* and both mention *Maol Chaluim mac Dhonnchaidh*, more commonly known as Malcolm Canmore, who was Malcolm III (1031–1093, king 1058–1093), as being victorious in battle, and refer to his possible financial problems. In folklore, another story actually claims that Canmore defeated one of MacBeth's chiefs near Dunsinane in 1054 and took his own sword and crossed it with his opponent's, thus making the sign of the cross, and danced across and around them in exultation over his fallen enemy.

According to some accounts, Malcolm defeated and slew MacBeth at Lumphanan in Aberdeenshire in 1057, and subsequently he was crowned Malcolm III in 1058. He became known as *Ceann Mòr*, anglicized to Canmore, which is customarily translated as 'Big Head,' but it is more credible that 'head' in this context bears the same meaning as 'headman,' so that *Ceann Mòr* ought to be translated as 'Great Headman' or 'Great



Victorian Scottish Union (Australia) sword dancer waving his bonnet in the quick step. Photo © S. Smith, 2015.

Chief.<sup>116</sup> The current Gaelic word for president is *ceann-suidhe*. Malcolm III had nothing to do with the small copper coin, the Scots twopence, or the *bodle*, as it was not introduced until 1604 by James VI, and was only known by the name *bodle* from 1642.<sup>117</sup> What we can ascertain is that the words associated with the tune *Gille Chaluum* date to sometime after 1642, while the tune itself may well be older.

It is quite possible that the Sword Dance has simply adopted its current name, *Gille Chaluum* (and many various spellings of the same) after its association with the 4/4 strathspey/*port a beul* of the same name became commonly accepted. Henry Whyte gave us one of many versions of the *port a beul*<sup>118</sup> as given below.

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <i>Gille-Calum dà pheighinn,</i>         | <i>Gillie-Callum, twa pennies, (a bodle)</i>         |
| <i>Gille-Calum dà pheighinn,</i>         | <i>Gillie-Callum, twa pennies,</i>                   |
| <i>Dà pheighinn, dà pheighinn,</i>       | <i>Twa pennies, twa pennies,</i>                     |
| <i>Gille-Calum bonn-a-sia.</i>           | <i>Gillie-Callum, ae bawbee.</i>                     |
| <i>Gheibhinn leannan gun dad idir,</i>   | <i>I can get a lass for naething, (a sweetheart)</i> |
| <i>Gheibhinn leannan gun dad idir,</i>   | <i>I can get a lass for naething,</i>                |
| <i>Gun dad idir, gun dad idir,</i>       | <i>Lass for naething, lass for naething,</i>         |
| <i>'S rogha 's tagha air bonn-a-sia.</i> | <i>My pick and wale for ae bawbee.</i>               |
| <i>Gille Calum, etc.</i>                 | <i>Gillie-Callum, etc.</i>                           |
| <i>Gheibhinn bean air dà pheighinn,</i>  | <i>I can get a wife for tuppence,</i>                |
| <i>Gheibhinn bean air dà pheighinn,</i>  | <i>I can get a wife for tuppence,</i>                |
| <i>Dà pheighinn, dà pheighinn,</i>       | <i>Wife for tuppence, wife for tuppence,</i>         |
| <i>'S té nach fhiach air bonn-a-sia.</i> | <i>A useless ane for ae bawbee.</i>                  |

The distinct rhythm of this dance tune, or *port* in Gaelic, when played slowly as well as quickly, is what gives the dance its specific rhythmical aesthetic for which it is recognised, and which sets it aside rhythm-wise from all other Scottish solo sword dances. In the 1901 *Games and Diversions of Argyleshire*, R. C. MacLagan remarks on its rhythmic significance as part of his explanation of what a *port* is:

Mention has been made of a 'port.' This is the substitute in case of the absence of pipes, fiddle, or Jew's harp—the so-called trump. These ports are single verses, generally fitted to a specific tune suitable for the dance proposed, and are sung by one of the girls present who have the necessary talent, or by one or more in succession according to their capabilities. If the young men have to be the musicians, they generally fulfil that duty by whistling. One of the most marked of these ports is the tune of the Sword Dance, 'Gille Callum.'<sup>119</sup>



Gille Calum by R.R. McLan, 1848 (illustration in public domain).

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There are, however, more stories. Some claim that this is simply a victory dance of any Highlander dancing triumphantly over his sword crossed with that of his fallen enemy. Sometimes this version is set after a duel. Another tradition tells that it is supposed to have been danced before a battle and, if the dancer completed the dance without touching or dislodging the swords with his feet, it was an auspicious omen. Another story relates that the crossed swords would be placed on the ground at the chosen site of the battle, and that steps represented the planning and manoeuvring and when the tempo quickened it represented the victory of the battle. Cameron (1951) and Thomson (1983) both mention that the swords were placed on the ground with the edge uppermost, which would have required a means of support not needed when placing them flat. Donaldson,<sup>120</sup> alongside various Games programmes, repeats the story featured by D.G. MacLennan (1950) that quotes the Roman historian Tacitus for saying that the ancient Caledonians danced among upturned swords. What Tacitus actually wrote was that he had seen European tribesmen (Germans) perform some kind of weapon drill:

They [the Germans] have only one kind of public show, which is performed without variation at every festive gathering. Naked youths, trained to the sport, dance about among swords and spears levelled at them. Practice begets skill, and skill grace; but they are not professionals and do not receive payment. Their most daring flings have their only reward in the pleasure they give the spectators.<sup>121</sup>

Among war-like origins for the dance, Catriona Scott's thesis further offers this unsubstantiated theory, and a rather far-fetched one at that: that the *Gille Chaluim*, as we know it, is actually composed of specific steps which would have been tailored for training in combat. This theory draws attention to the diagonal motions of certain steps, whereby the front or 'working' leg is, more often than not, diagonally opposite to the supporting leg. This practice in positioning would have best ensured that the soldier would have kept his balance when crossing rough terrain, especially in the dark. The elevation of both arms would have acted as a balance and, should only one arm be raised, it would have been opposite to that of the front or 'working' foot, for reasons of equilibrium.<sup>122</sup> There is even a version where soldiers returning from the battle of Bannockburn in 1314 are allegedly said to have danced victoriously over swords and other weapons.<sup>123</sup>

The idea of dance as part of the training for Highland warriors also forms part of the Sword Dance lore, where stories tell us that it was used alongside agility and heavy sports at gatherings to strengthen men's physiques. However, I would, as does New Zealand Highland dancer Kim Whitta<sup>124</sup> in his thesis *Scottish Highland Dance—Tradition and Style* (1982), take the standpoint that in a society consisting of fit and agile people living and working in a rough landscape, strenuous types of dancing would rather have been second nature to them. It should be noted that the various Scottish military regiments, as were (since December 2004 they were amalgamated to the Royal Regiment of Scotland),



Sword dancers at the Braemar Highland Games, late 1980s. Photo © M. Melin.

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all had strong dance traditions, including many versions of Sword Dances in use, partly fulfilling a function of physical strengthening of the regiment's soldiers.

In these stories, there are also geographical distinctions, such as place names (Lumphanan, Bannockburn, Argyll, Lochiel, or Lochaber) or events such as a particular battle, which suggest an importance in connecting the Sword Dance with a particular place, person, or event. Some Sword Dances have identifying names such as Lochaber Swords or Argyll Broadwords. Whether these dances actually come from these geographical locations is sometimes difficult to prove conclusively, but the naming suggests a wish to set versions of the dances apart or to place a version specifically. According to the late Black Watch regimental piper and dance instructor Bill Clement (1994) the Argyll Broadwords was arranged from an earlier incomplete group Sword Dance by dancer William MacLennan around 1888 and named Argyll due to the fact that the MacLennan family lived in Minard on the shores of Loch Fyne in Argyll. The various Highland regiments subsequently picked up the dance, and due to inter-regimental rivalry new steps and versions of the dance were developed over time.<sup>125</sup>

There are superstitious connotations applied to the actual step patterns as well, with the first step, dancing around the swords, seen as asking permission of the swords to dance above them by executing this 'address' step correctly. Then whilst dancing 'inside' or 'over' the swords, it was bad practice to turn one's back to the swords as only a fool would do so. Linked to this is also the notion that dancing clockwise around the swords would bring good luck, whilst dancing anti-clockwise or widdershins (the way of the witches) would invoke the devil. Some older versions of the *Gille Chaluim* were danced clockwise, such as the version described by McIntyre-North in 1880. Other versions had the slow part danced anti-clockwise while the quick part was danced clockwise to celebrate the victory of good over evil. Michael Newton (2012) points out: 'one Gaelic folklorist noted in 1928 that whereas traditional sword dances, performed like other rituals for good luck before battle, would have only been done *deiseal* (clockwise) in the past, they were now being done *tuathal* (counter-clockwise), a movement that no traditionally minded Highlander would have considered a good idea before risking his life.'<sup>126</sup>

The current practice is to dance anti-clockwise round the swords all the way through. The change of direction around the swords may reflect a transition from the dance having been seen primarily as a ritual performance to a newer aim of displaying technical difficulty, where showing excellence of foot dexterity is prioritised. The belief, as mentioned earlier, that it was a bad omen to touch the swords (before battle or otherwise) also enhances the superstitious undertones associated with the dance.

In another set of stories, this time with Biblical connotations, *Gille Chaluim* is none other than a son of Noah. Catriona Scott cites a story given in Gaelic during a recorded

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interview with Hugh MacRae of Skeabost in 1953:

He could see that the waters were going down and down, so that more of the rock or knoll he was standing on was appearing [...] He was so pleased that he shouted to his father, ‘This is dry land!’ and he got two bits of wood that the waters had left on top of this knoll and laid them crosswise and began to dance. This was the first dance that ever was danced. And as he was prancing from point to point of those sticks, and Noah was so delighted that he cried out: ‘Mo ghillie Calum!’ [Calum’s my boy!] said he. And that was the beginning [...] how that dance got its name. And one way or another, whether there is any truth in the story or not, one thing is certain: Noah spoke Gaelic anyway.<sup>127</sup>

This tale should conceivably be seen as a good representation of Gaelic society’s sense of humour rather than a claim that the first language of Eden was Gaelic or that the first dance according to the Bible was the Sword Dance. The religious connotation of the dance does, however, not end here. The late dance teacher Janet T. MacLachlan of Ontario, Canada, put forward a theory that *Gille Chaluim* is associated with St. Columba, and that the dance should represent the victory of good over evil. Held in the right hand is the sword of the victor and it is symbolically crossed over the sword of the vanquished held in the left hand.<sup>128</sup> Another suggestion<sup>129</sup> is that Calum is a corruption of Gilycolum who was said to be one of Somerled’s sons. Somerled was a Norse-Gaelic warlord, Lord of the Isles, who died at the battle of Renfrew alongside his son GilleBride in 1164. Somerled had at least five sons and one daughter, but his eldest son was named GilleBride, not Gilycolum, so this connection needs no further historical investigation.

According to personal communication with Gaelic scholar Ronald Black (1990) any person or thing bearing the name Calum or Colum, or Colm is named in honour of St. Columba (Colm Cille, 521–597) the first of the name and the patron saint of the West Highlands and Islands. In the Celtic church, it was considered disrespectful to a saint to give his/her name directly to anyone else. Thus, we have a succession of by-forms of Calum/ Colum/Colm. At first there was Colmán, Latin Columbanus. Then *Mael-Colum*, the name of Malcolm Canmore and the origin of the anglicised form Malcolm. This gave way in the twelfth century to Gille Coluim, which may be translated as ‘the devotee of St. Columba.’ By the eighteenth century, when it went out of use, it had become Gille Chaluim. So, we might be looking at two different things—*Gille Chaluim* (a boy belonging to Calum) and Gille Calum (a boy named Calum). So, the name of the lyrics of the tune and the dance associated with this tune bears a name which in itself was quite a common man’s name in the Highlands and Islands from the twelfth to the eighteenth century. It was a favourite name in certain families, notably the MacLeods of Raasay and the Beaton medical family.

What does the word ‘gille’ refer to in this instance? The word means a boy, lad or servant, and has entered the English language in Scotland as ‘ghillie’ and ‘keelie.’ But

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there are metaphorical uses implying an inferior relationship according to Black (1990). *Gille na geire*, 'the lad of tallow' is a candle. *Gille-mirein* 'a lad of madness' is a whirligig or top. Scribes referred to their ink sometimes as *an gille dubh* 'the black lad.' The usage is similar to that of *mac* 'son' in *mac-talla* 'son of rock' or 'son of hall' (echo) and *mac-samhla* 'son of similitude' (equal); also *mac-meanmna* 'son of spirit' (imagination), and other terms. *Mac an Tòisich* 'the Son of Ferintosh' and *mac an bracha* 'the son of the malt' are terms for whisky. *Gille* is also used for plants, etc. *Gille-guirmein* 'lad of indigo' is field-scabious. *Gille-fionn* 'white lad' is a large periwinkle. Involving a saint's name, *gille Brighde* 'Bridget's lad,' is the oystercatcher. Could *gille Chaluim* be a plant, animal, or bird, too? *Gille Màrtainn* is the fox because of St. Martin's association with that animal; *lus Ghaluim Chille*, the St. John's wort, was one of the most blessed plants, bringing good fortune to those who found it without looking for it.

Black (1990) further suggests that *gille Chaluim* may be a sword. His reason for believing this is that in the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, guns were regularly given names like pets, and were always female — *Nic Còiseim* 'Constantine's Daughter,' *Nic a' Chòirneil* 'the Colonel's Daughter,' *Nic Ailpein* 'Alpine's Daughter,' *a' Chuthag* 'the Cuckoo,' *Bean na Bainnse* 'the Bride.' Constantine, the Colonel and Alpine were names borne by the people from whom the gun in question was obtained. If guns were given names, is it not then logical that swords would have been given names, too? What evidence do we have? Well, Ronald Black can think of only one named sword: it is masculine, using *mac*: Fingal's sword *Mac an Loinn* 'the Son of Anger'.<sup>130</sup>

If *Gille Chaluim* refers to a sword, who then is Calum? With the suggestions above in mind two possibilities are given. Either he could be Calum Cille the saint (an Irish prince, and a great warrior in his youth who fought and won the battle of *Cùil Dreimhne*, so not an unlikely person after whom to name the sword that brings 'the victory of good over evil'), or else he could be some person from whom the sword was obtained. If the latter, the person's name would have been *Gille Chaluim* in the first place, assuming that he lived during the twelfth to eighteenth centuries!

With no written evidence in existence the above speculation is probably the nearest we will get as to who *Gille Chaluim* could have been. Perhaps we are no nearer than James Logan's statement from 1848 'the Sword Dance, known all over the country, as 'Gille Calum,' from the name of the tune by which the movements of the performer are regulated, but it has no relation to the performance itself, being simply the name of a man, about whom some unimportant verses are repeated'.<sup>131</sup>

One of the earliest mentions of the dance I have found is in a letter from a Captain MacDonald (a cousin of Flora MacDonald's husband Allan) stationed at Fort Edward in Nova Scotia in December 1778, to an unknown correspondent, where he is looking forward to 'see you dance Guillicallum over two broad Swords lain across'.<sup>132</sup>

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Regarding meaning, the strongest underlying message that has lived on to modern-day use seems to be that of the skill implied in the stories of not touching the swords whilst dancing bringing luck or victory to the dancer. So, similarly to the Highland Fling aim of dancing on the spot, the skill here is about dancing over and close to the swords without touching them, and by only glancing down as the upper body and head are held erect. In other parts of the British Isles, in Ireland, and in other continental European countries and Scandinavia similar skills are tested in dances performed over sticks (in Sweden—*skinnkompass*, from the French *Les Cinq Pas*<sup>133</sup>), swords of different kinds, brooms or brushes (in Ireland, for example), and so forth. The common skill sought is to dance close to the object without touching them in time with the music. This skill goal seems to have translated well into the Scottish competition and performance platform aiding the modern mindset to aim for a successful energetic and skilful completion of the sword dance. Perhaps there are elements in some storylines alluding to the sword dance being part of a ritual to cast a good omen on the outcome of a forthcoming battle or duel? Some sword salutes done in conjunction with Broadsword dances certainly gives an impression of a ritual link. Also, superstition is apparent in the good omen connotation of not touching the swords, as well as whether you dance clockwise or counter-clockwise round the swords. Perhaps these aspects of the stories were highlighted in the Romantic era as part of the reaction against the earlier Enlightenment rationalism and the growing nineteenth century interest in ‘folk’ culture and the creation of ideas of ‘who’ we are supposed to be as a distinct group of people in Europe.

According to my 2014 questionnaire, respondents tell me the stories help to encourage dancers (boys in particular) to dance and to explain what performance characteristics and aesthetics are aspired to. With this in mind, the Highland warrior associations, including the Malcolm Canmore lore, suggesting strength, agility, and a mythical framework placing the dance in a distant romantic misty past, are to a certain extent still relevant. Not only has the use by some dance teachers of these stories in some form in a class situation lived on until today, but also official webpages of Highland dance organisations repeat and reinforce these ideas as do the occasional TV documentaries, newspaper, and magazine articles on Highland dancing. This is nothing new, per se, as most written handbooks from the mid- to late-nineteenth century to the present have propagated aspects of this lore. At some level, these types of stories give cohesion and meaning to the dance beyond the pure technical aspects of its execution. The nostalgia and the ideas of agile Highlanders, certain superstitions, and hints at ritual from a distant past are still attractive mindscapes.

From a more practical point of view it may simply be said that the Sword Dance has become associated with the particular 4/4 strathspey style *port a beul* named ‘*Gille Chaluim*’ with its characteristic rhythm and that over time the two have become synonymous. Dance competition culture and perhaps even the use of the sword dance

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by the Scottish Regiments have helped to foster this link. This then also implies that any stories and deliberations regarding who *Gille Chaluum* was become coincidental.



Aboyne costume, 1990. Photo © M. Melin

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## 5 Stories relating to the Jacobite rising of 1745–1746

In addition to the *Seann Triubhas* three solo dances—Flora MacDonald’s Fancy, Over the Water to Charlie, and Tulloch Gorm—all have stories relating to the Jacobite rising of 1745–1746. There is no factual evidence that any of the choreographies have any real connection to the rising, apart from that the tunes and associated song lyrics to some of them may have connections with this historical event. The local folklore in South Uist and Barra tells us, in one story, that a number of solo dances taught by dancing master Ewen MacLachlan were brought back by him to the Islands after he had learnt them from descendants of South Uist Jacobite followers in France.

### *Flora MacDonald’s Fancy*

The origin of this dance cannot with any certainty be established but it was a dance within the Cruickshank family of dancing masters’ repertoire. What written evidence I have discovered in Scottish census records suggests that dancing master John Cruickshank of Fyvie (born c. 1781/3), and his son, George Cruickshank (born c. 1836/8 in Fyvie) both taught the dance. Towards the end of his life, George Cruickshank was known as Scotland’s oldest dancing teacher. John and George were based in Fyvie and Peterhead respectively. The family had a notebook of dance descriptions, dated 1820, which was handed down to George’s daughter Flora (born 1874 or 1877; Scottish census records differ), who in turn passed the dance on to Mrs Isobel Cramb in the 1950s. According to Cramb’s 1952 explanation, Flora Cruickshank was herself taught the dance by her grandfather when very young, and if true, he would have been close to 100 years old. Flora learned the dance as taught within her family’s traditions; while the dance may have originated with her grandfather.

The original tune for the dance was the 6/8 jig ‘I Haè Laid a Herrin’ in Saut [Salt], which was a popular humorous courting farming song from the Aberdeenshire area, dating back to at least 1776 and attributed to James Tytler (1747–1805). Sometime in the 1950s Mrs Cramb changed the music to ‘The Last Measure Prince Charles Danced with Flora MacDonald’ and ‘Wha’ll Be King but Charlie,’ both in 6/8 time, as the original jig was already in use by the RSCDS for the country dance Lord Rosslyn’s Fancy. Also,

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Mrs Cramb seems to have felt that these two tunes were more appropriate in association with the title and an assumed connection to the Jacobite heroine, and these are the tunes to which the dance is often performed today. Another popular tune in use is the Atholl Highlanders.

The dance is commonly associated with Flora MacDonald, or *Fionnghal nic Dhòmhnaill* (1722–1790), the 23-year-old Jacobite heroine who helped Bonnie Prince Charlie escape from Scotland, after the Battle of Culloden in April 1746. She was the only daughter of Ranald MacDonald of Milton, South Uist. On 12 July 1746, eleven days after leaving the prince at the Inn of Portree, Isle of Skye, Flora was arrested and eventually taken to the Tower of London. Released after the 1747 Act of Indemnity, she returned to Scotland and married Allan Macdonald of Armadale. In 1774, they emigrated to America where her husband was captured at the battle of Moore's Creek in the American War of Independence. She had seven children. She finally returned to Skye and died on 4 March 1790.<sup>134</sup>

According to one story, this was the dance Flora MacDonald danced for Bonnie Prince Charlie. There is no hard evidence that this was the case or that the dance even existed in 1745 or shortly thereafter. The character and steps of the dance as it has survived suggests a nineteenth century origin. The style of the dance suggests a nineteenth-century origin because repetitive virtuosic turning was a movement promoted in Ballet which steadily rose in popularity during the 1800s. Furthermore, the recurring Hop-Brush-Beat-Beat movement, so characteristic in the dance, only appeared in the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>135</sup> It is possible that this dance was devised in Flora MacDonald's honour, as one may assume by the title. There is no written confirmation that Flora Cruickshank's family tradition ever attributed it to the Jacobite Flora MacDonald, only that they had a dance routine of this name in their repertoire hailing back to the early 1800s. The fact that its original tune was the 6/8 jig 'I Haè Laid a Herrin' in Saut' seems to undermine any Jacobite connection. The tunes associated with the dance now, were assigned in the 1950s as mentioned earlier specifically to promote an association with Flora MacDonald and Bonnie Prince Charlie. Surviving records do not make plain whether Flora Cruickshank associated the dance title with the Jacobite heroine to Isobel Cramb, or if the connection was just assumed. In the 1953 RSCDS publication *Four Step Dances*, Cramb wrote 'it was *probably* composed some years after the '45 as a tribute to Flora Macdonald.'<sup>136</sup>

I would suggest that a more plausible candidate than the Jacobite heroine for an attribution of this dance would be the very well-known Scottish singer and dancer Flora MacDonald. Flora MacDonald was possibly a stage name for a successful entertainer who performed all over Britain, and whose name appears in newspaper articles and concert notices in the 1860s and 1870s. Flora MacDonald was active c. 1864–c. 1872 as a British music hall performer, billed variously as a 'Scotch and Irish Serio-Comic

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and Dancer,' 'Character Vocalist,' and 'Scottish *cantatrice* and *danseuse*.' She appeared in London, as well as throughout England, Wales, Northern Ireland, and Scotland.<sup>137</sup> In the 1860s she performed with the Elgin Concert Band.<sup>138</sup> This dance could have been made in her honour since she was such a celebrity. It could have been part of her dance repertoire for the music hall circuit. Possibly it endured due to the popularity of both the music-hall singer and her Jacobite heroine namesake. As an aside, there was another music hall performer, a prize-winning Highland dancer named Flora MacDonald, who was born c.1893, probably in Dennistoun, Glasgow, whose father often accompanied her on the melodeon. She appeared for a season in Montrose. Later, as a seasoned performer, she performed all over the UK with her husband Dalton Payne, a pianist and songwriter, touring South Africa in 1915, and Australia and New Zealand in the 1920s.<sup>139</sup>

The name 'Flora' also lives on in the alternative name for the Aboyne costume that appeared in 1952 having been developed and sponsored by the Aboyne Games committee. This outfit is often referred to as the 'Flora costume.'<sup>140</sup> Their design was loosely based on perceptions of female Highland dress, the *arasaid* (*earasaid*). The dress's introduction was a reaction to concerns that women wore men's outfits when performing the Highland dances and the feeling that the Sword Dance was 'originally a war dance and it is felt to be incongruous that girls should do it' (Dundee Courier, 20 July 1954). That year, the Aboyne Games banned girls from performing the Sword Dance, and in its place, the recently discovered Flora MacDonald's Fancy was substituted. Wearing of the Aboyne outfit for girl dancers over the age of eleven was made compulsory at the games for some years after that.<sup>141</sup>

## *Over the Water to Charlie*

Sometimes also known as Over the Water, or Over the Waters, Over the Water to Charlie is a solo 6/8-time jig known in several versions. In Barra and in South Uist this dance is today known in Gaelic as either *Thairis an Aiseig gu Tearlach* [lit. translation: Across the Ferry (Water) to Charlie] or simply *Thairis air an Aiseag*. It forms part of the dancing repertoire of Hebridean dancing master Ewen MacLachlan. His version emerged sometime in the period between 1840 and 1870.

In the South Uist and Isle of Barra tradition, this dance supposedly shows how Island clansmen travelled 'over the waters' to the Scottish mainland to fight for Bonnie Prince Charlie in the '45 Jacobite rising. The third step in one of the versions, which involves forward travel, supposedly shows hopping from island to island to reach the mainland!

Another story recalled by the late Dundee Highland dance teacher Charlie Mill (c. 1985) claims that the name of the dance comes from a toast given by the followers

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of Bonnie Prince Charlie. It appears that when the Hanoverians raised their glasses to the King, the Jacobites would inconspicuously pass their glasses over a fingerbowl or any such liquid on the table and reply, 'To the King (who's over the Water!).' This was in praise of Bonnie Prince Charlie, the man in their eyes who should have been king but had to flee 'over the water' to France and safety. However, from correspondence with Ronald Black<sup>142</sup> we learn that the 'The King Over the Water' could only mean Charles's exiled father James, the Old Pretender. Charles would have been 'The Prince Over the Water,' as, according to Black, Jacobites would have been very punctilious about these distinctions. James was *de jure* James VIII, and by the time he died in 1766 Jacobitism was no longer a serious force, so there were few Jacobites left to toast the Prince as Charles III.

Though the title stems from the Jacobite era, the tune is older and has had many names such as 'The Pot Stick' or 'Sean Buide.' In the Scots Musical Museum, it is stated that in *Johnson's 200 Country Dances*, London, 1748, there is a version of this tune under the title 'The Pot Stick.' By the late 1740s it appears in published collections with the *Over the Water* title, a title that first appeared in John Walsh's *Compleat Country Dancing Master, volume the Third* (London, 1749). This version is similar to the one given in David Rutherford's *Compleat Collection of 200 of the Most Celebrated Country Dances* (London, 1756), and again in Oswald's *Caledonian Pocket Companion*, (1752), as 'Over the Water,' and 'Over the Water to Charlie' respectively. Clearly the London public memory faded quickly as the title appears only a few years after the end of the 1745–1746 Jacobite rising and Prince Charles Edward Stuart's exile to France. Emmerson<sup>143</sup> quotes a letter written by Ralph Bigland in 1749 detailing an entertainment on the London stage which mention this tune as played on the bagpipes. We have reason to come back to the full letter quote in chapter 9. *Over the Water to Charlie* was employed variously as an accompaniment to dancing in the

***Over the Water to Charlie (Burns)***

*Come boat me o'er, come row me o'er,  
Come boat me o'er to Cherie:  
I'll gie John Ross anither bawbee  
To boat me o'er to Charlie.*

Chorus:

*We'll o'er the water, we'll o'er the sea,  
We'll o'er the water to Charlie;  
Come weal, come woe, we'll gather and  
go,  
And live or die wi' Charlie.*

*I lo'e weel my Charlie's name,  
Tho' some there be abhor him:  
But O, to see auld Nick gaun hame,  
And Charlie's faes before him!*

*I swear and vow by moon and stars,  
And sun that shines so early!  
If I had twenty thousand lives,  
I'd die as aft for Charlie.*

*Aince I had sons but now I hae nane,  
I bred them toiling sairly;  
And I wad bear them a gain  
And lose them a for Charlie.*



David Beattie (1905–1965) from Brechin, dancing at the Braemar Games in the 1940s or 50s. Photo given to Melin by his daughter Maude Beattie who, in the late 1990s, still ran the Beattie School of Dance in Brechin. The pure joy on his face perhaps exemplifies the spirit of Highland dancing at its best.

British Isles and was exported as a dance tune to America. A Morris Dance version was collected in the village of Bledington, Gloucestershire, in England's Cotswolds, while Country Dance instructions, but not the melody, appear in the Scottish *Menzies Manuscript*, 1749 (contained in the *Atholl Collection* of the Sandeman Library, Perth). Robert Burns, among many others, put words to the tune (see previous page). Being such a popular dance tune, it could be that the nostalgia of the tune title and the song lyrics have simply been transferred on to the solo dance lore.

## ***Tulloch Gorm***

Tulloch Gorm (Gaelic: *Tulach Gorm* pronounced 'tooluch gorum' meaning 'Green Knoll') is the one surviving solo dance from the Hebrides that is widely known by its Gaelic name. It also forms part of the dancing repertoire of Hebridean dancing master Ewen MacLachlan with this version emerging sometime in the period 1840–1870. Another, slower arrangements of steps named Tullochgorum, was known to Bobby Watson of Aberdeen.

In a story collected from Katie-Ann Mackinnon in the Isle of Barra in 1990 the movements of the dance are supposed to relate to the knolls or mounds the lookouts stood on, watching out for the enemies of Bonnie Prince Charlie. Not to look suspicious they performed this dance, it is said, and all the steps are performed more or less on the spot with turns to get a good view of the surroundings. The sharp head movements are also supposed to indicate the watchman's surveillance of the neighbourhood. I personally find this story illogical, as any trained lookout would simply have kept in hiding to avoid detection.

The late Barra dance teacher Fearchar MacNeil said that the Green Knoll was where Bonnie Prince Charlie and Flora MacDonald parted company.<sup>144</sup>

The dance is sometimes suggested as being another Highland Fling arrangement

### ***Tulach Gorm***

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <i>Brochan tìoradh Anna Tholm,</i>        | <i>Anna Holm's porridge of kiln-dried grain,</i>       |
| <i>Brochan tìoradh, tìoradh, tìoradh,</i> | <i>Porridge of kiln-dried grain, kiln-dried grain,</i> |
| <i>Brochan tìoradh Anna Tholm,</i>        | <i>Anna Holm's porridge of kiln-dried grain,</i>       |
| <i>Brochan mòr is greim ann,</i>          | <i>Big porridge you can get your teeth into,</i>       |
| <i>Dh'ith thu ìm sa Ghlinne Mhòr,</i>     | <i>You ate some butter in the Big Glen,</i>            |
| <i>Dh'ith thu ìm, muc us ìm,</i>          | <i>You ate some butter, pig and butter,</i>            |
| <i>Sud 'us ìm sa Ghlinne mhòr,</i>        | <i>That and butter in the Big Glen,</i>                |
| <i>Dh'ith thu siud mun d'fhalbh thu.</i>  | <i>You ate that before you went away.</i>              |
| <i>Brochan tìoradh, etc.</i>              |  |

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or being the forerunner of the same. It is plausible, that, similarly to Highland Fling arrangements, it is a combination of Reel steps set to the tune ‘Tulloch Gorm.’

The tune appears as a rant in the 1734 *Drummond Castle manuscript* as ‘The Reel of Tullochgorum’ but later it always appears as a strathspey, for example, in Bremner’s 1757 *Collection of Scots Reels or Country Dances*. It features in K.N. MacDonald’s book *Puirt-à-Beul* from 1901 where it is considered as the king of strathspeys. The tune has both English and Gaelic words set to it and one version of the Gaelic *port a beul* is given above.

There seems to be no substantial reason why this dance should be attached to Jacobite rising lore, apart from that it may give some meaning to the movements of the dance, or a sense of nostalgia.

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## 6 Short stories for ten dances

### *Aberdonian Lassie*

Aberdonian Lassie, or, as it has been named in Gaelic since the 1980s in Barra and South Uist, *Till a Rithisd* (Come Back Again),<sup>145</sup> is a 6/8 solo dance combining Highland Fling-type movements with some percussive footwork. Aberdonian Lassie is thought to be from the repertoire of dancing master Ewen MacLachlan. The dance was initially only known in the Isle of Barra. When the Fletts collected dances from John MacLeod and others in South Uist in the 1950s, they found no trace of it.

This title, according to one source,<sup>146</sup> relates to the dance having been devised in honour of a female teacher from Aberdeen who had been living and teaching in Bornish on South Uist for a very long time. She was apparently very well liked, and upon her departure for home, this dance was devised in the hope that she would return. One may ask, however, why a dance originating and initially only danced in Barra was made for a teacher living and working on the neighbouring island of South Uist to the north? Another critical point is that, with the religious practices of the time when MacLachlan taught in South Uist, it is unlikely female teachers would have been regarded favourably. The only mention of a woman schoolmistress in relation to a dance I have found in South Uist appears at her farewell dance around the year 1900 that finished with the White Cockade which was somewhat similar to Sir Roger de Coverley according to Frederick Rea.<sup>147</sup>

On the other hand, in a letter sent to Mrs J.F. Flett from Fearchar MacNeil in October 1990, we find a passage which sheds a more plausible light on the title—

[W]hen I learned that dance [in Barra growing up], the name was just as natural as Highland Laddie [...] It was the only dance my grandfather [Neil Buchanan] ever used an English name for and I can't remember him ever using a Gaelic name for it. At the time these dances came to the islands and right up to the start of World War Two there was a lot of contact between the Hebrides and the East Coast of Scotland through fishing, especially herring fishing. Hundreds of drifters, other boats, and a fair share of them from Aberdeen, came to Barra for the summer fishing season. Curers, coopers as well as other workers came, too. During the school summer holidays their wives and families came as well and a lot of Aberdonian lassies and laddies too, could be seen playing with locals, or just walking with their mothers. I can only

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speaking for Barra but I would think all the fishing ports on the other islands would be the same.<sup>148</sup>

This seems to indicate two things: one, Fearchar indicates the possibility of the dance having been introduced from the mainland, possibly even after Ewen MacLachlan's time; and two, that the title represents an aspect of this interaction with the Aberdeenshire-based herring fishing industry. Certainly, both Barra and South Uist were main ports of call for the herring fishing industry and fishermen and girls that gutted fish that came with it in the nineteenth century.

The tunes used for this dance are the 6/8 marches 'The Quaker' and the very similar tune 'The Quaker's Wife,' which are sometimes played as jigs.

## ***Blue Bonnets***

A theme of girls flirting with soldiers is linked to graceful stylings of Blue Bonnets. Here some versions of the dance depict a young woman trying to flirt or catch the attention of a 'blue bonnet.' Blue Bonnets was, according to the story, a term used for Scottish soldiers. This story may well have originated from the military connotations in the early nineteenth-century lyrics of the song *Blue Bonnets Over the Border*. In fact, according to Emmerson the wearing of bonnets made of dark blue material was so common that in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the 'Blue Bonnets' were the Scots. Adorned with a white cockade the blue bonnet was also adopted as an emblem of Jacobitism.<sup>149</sup>

The tune is frequently found as a 6/8 jig but may be found as a march and as song air as well and many versions exist under slightly different names. Samuel Bayard (1981) thinks the melody was fashioned in the 1740s into a quick dance piece in 6/8 from a slow 3/4-time song tune from about 1710 or earlier called 'Oh Dear Mother

*March! march! Ettrick and Teviotdale,  
Why, my lads dinna ye march forward in order?  
March! march! Eskdale and Liddesdale!  
All the blue bonnets are over the Border!  
Many a banner spread, Flutters above your head.  
Many acrest that is famous in story.  
Mount and make ready then,  
Sons of the mountain glen,  
Fight for your King and the old Scottish border.  
March! march! &c.  
Come from the hills where your hirsels are grazing,  
Come from the glen of the buck and the roe,  
Come with the buckler, the lance and the bow  
Trumpets are sounding, war-steeds are bounding  
Stand to your arms and march in good order  
England shall many a day tell of the bloody frey  
When the blue bonnets come over the Border.*

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What Shall I Do?,' while Michael Diack, who arranged the music for RSCDS Scottish Country Dance Book Three thought the tune was derived from a seventeenth century Scottish tune called 'Lesley's March to Scotland.' 'Lesley's March' was printed by Oswald (Book 2, 1755), and lyrics to the tune were written by Sir Walter Scott, who based them on an old Cavalier song. Scott also mentions the song in his novel *The Monastery*, published in 1830 (see previous page).

Again, we have the theme of placing the storyline in an unspecified past, this time with military connotations. The song 'Blue Bonnets Over the Border,' has several versions and is often thought of as referring to Bonnie Prince Charlie's march into England in 1745. Be aware that there a number of different choreographies named Blue Bonnets from different locations in Scotland. Each may have their own story, if any, associated with it.

## *Dusty Miller*

There is only one brief mention that I encountered, in oral tradition from Bobby Watson of Aberdeen, about the 6/4 triple-time hornpipe *Dusty Miller*. Watson said that the heel beating steps represent the miller shaking the mill dust off his clothes. Dusty Miller can be danced in either an even or accented rhythm to the tune of the same name. The earliest notation of the dance known is found in the 1841 Hill Manuscript, in which all eight steps danced today are described. It seems likely that Mrs Cramb, together with Bobby Watson, brought this dance to the attention of the Scottish dancing world in the late 1950s.

The tune also has bawdy, humorous lyrics attached to it which fit the rhythm of the 3/2-time signature like 'Hey the dusty Miller,' Burns' version of the traditional song (next page). In 1776 Sir John Hawkins wrote in his *A General History of the Science and Practice of Music* that '[...] the measure of the Hornpipe is triple time of six crotchets in a bar, four whereof are to be beat with a down, and two with an uphand.' Emmerson added:

It [the tune] lends itself to syncopation, perhaps its most noticeable—and attractive—characteristic. Certainly, this does not find expression when the tune is constrained to a framework of words, but when treated instrumentally, the propensity for syncopation becomes evident.<sup>150</sup>

The tune 'The Dusty Miller' is first encountered in the *Holmain Manuscript* (1710–50); then in Robert Bremner's *A Collection of Scots Reels or Country Dances* (no. 45, undated but published between 1751 and 1761) and in the *Gillespie Manuscript* (1768), and in these, labelled 'a Hornpipe.' When used for the dance in today's competitive dance scene, the tune is, as already mentioned, played in 6/4 tempo. However, it appears as a 3/4 in

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the *Kershaw MS* (Lancashire, c. 1820), and as a 6/8 jig in Elizabeth MacLachlan's *First Border Dance Book* (1931).<sup>151</sup>

*Hey, the dusty miller, And his dusty coat,  
He will win a shilling. Or he spend a groat,  
Dusty was the coat,  
Dusty was the colour,  
Dusty was the kiss, That I gat frae the miller.  
Hey, the dusty miller, And his dusty sack,  
Leeze me on the calling, Fills the dusty peck,  
Fills the dusty peck,  
Brings the dusty siller,  
I wad gie my coatie, For the dusty miller.*

(Burns 1993: 355)

## ***Earl of Erroll***

The step dance, the Earl of Erroll, is found in Frederick Hill's 1841 notebook. Both Isobel Cramb (1953) and Emmerson (1972) attributed it to the Aberdeen-based dancing master Francis Peacock (1723–1807). This assumption is based on the lone fact that one of Peacock's patrons (as listed in his book (1804)) was James Hay, fifteenth Earl of Erroll<sup>152</sup> and because of this, the dance should be performed in a suitably stately manner. Evelyn M. Hood goes further in her book *The Story of Scottish Country Dancing: The Darling Diversion* (1980) claiming that 'the earl, Lord High Constable of Scotland, was a pupil and friend of Francis Peacock who may have composed this dance for him to perform.'<sup>153</sup> There is no further evidence currently available to substantiate these claims of the origin and suggested aesthetic style of dance. On the other hand, one website claims this is 'almost certainly' an eighteenth-century Irish-style hard shoe dance.<sup>154</sup>

## ***The Flowers of Edinburgh***

There is no direct lore associated with the versions of the solo dance known as the Flowers of Edinburgh. More is said about the tune, with an early version of the tune appearing as a Scotch Measure in 1742, under the title 'My love's bonny when she smiles on me' in Oswald's collection. By 1751 it has taken its present title and appears in Oswald's *Caledonian Pocket Companion*. Many versions of the tune now exist, and many stories attached to it, often referring to the street smells of Edinburgh, but since Oswald wrote

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a long series of pieces about flowers, a suggestion is that the title simply means what it says. Note that this popular tune is also played for versions of country dances with the same name and the Morris dance tradition has a Flowers of Edinburgh too.

The versions of the solo dance, however, are of interest if one looks at how they appear chronologically. Both hard-shoe and soft-shoe versions of the dance exist. D.G. MacLennan said Ewen MacLachlan had a version in South Uist in the late-nineteenth century, but MacLennan never published it, if he knew it. Whether this dance was comprised of the same steps as the one appearing in 1929 in *Some Traditional Scottish Dances* by G. Douglas Taylor under the name Highland Laddie, we may never know. In the Fletts collection occurs a dance performed to the tune 'Highland Laddie' with similar characteristics to the Highland Laddie step motifs published by Taylor. These steps are now, however, most often danced to the tune the 'Flowers of Edinburgh.' This suggests that this dance was originally another Highland Laddie arrangement that was at some later time set to the tune the 'Flowers of Edinburgh.' Colin Robertson suggests in his book *Hard Shoe Step Dancing in Scotland and The Flowers of Edinburgh*<sup>155</sup>, that Jack McConachie, who was aware of several versions of Highland Laddie from different sources, decided to find suitable alternative tunes for some of them, and changed their names in order to separate and preserve the versions of the different steps labelled with the same 'title'—hence the dances thereafter known as Bonnie Dundee and The Flowers of Edinburgh. This repurposed version was, according to Jack McConachie (1906–1966), 'also Hebridean' and 'collected' in 1949. Later, McConachie's lecture notes were distributed in one of the bulletins for the Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing in 1961,<sup>156</sup> and eventually published posthumously in 1972. Looking at the dance structures, timelines, and dissemination patterns of these dances, it looks far more plausible that McConachie's 'Hebridean version' is in fact G. Douglas Taylor's dance mentioned above. Fearchar MacNeil told me in conversation in 1990 that he got the 'soft-shoe' version of Flowers of Edinburgh out of McConachie's 1972 book, and that it did not form part of the dances he learnt as a child in Barra.

There are a number of hard shoe dances known as Flowers of Edinburgh as well. The Fletts found traces of only a few steps of the hard shoe step dance during their research in the Hebrides. They refer to it as a beating-dance similar to the style and versions taught on the mainland by Mr Adamson of Fife and Mr Anderson of Dundee.<sup>157</sup> According to the same source the Hebridean version contained double trebles done simultaneously with both feet and a step in which the dancer drops on one knee.<sup>158</sup> The traces of the steps of *Carraig Fhearghais* or *Màili a Chrandonn*, found by the Fletts in the Islands, and what their informants told them, suggest that this was the same dance as Flowers of Edinburgh, but performed to a different tune/s. *Carraig Fhearghais* apparently also included a step where one drops on one knee.<sup>159</sup> The Fletts recorded that '*Màili a Chrandonn*' ('Molly of the Brown Mast') was the song sung to the tune '*Carraig*

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*Fheargais.* The song was in praise of a rock, which a man who is lost recognise and so finds his way. Slightly different is the tale told to Rhodes that the song was composed in praise of a girl, Mary, with round face and brown hair, who put up the composer of the song for a night when he was lost and set him on his way again the next day.<sup>160</sup> An early version of what has been interpreted as a hard shoe step dance is found in the 1841 Hill manuscript; one interpretation was published by Colin Robertson in 1982. The hard shoe versions are characterised by many trebling motifs, while the soft shoe versions have a repeating closing motif involving a shake and a pivot turn.

## *Highland Laddie*

There are many choreographic step combinations bearing the name Highland Laddie (sometimes given as 'Hielan' Laddie') and set to the 4/4 or 2/4-reel version of the tune. The tune is known in manuscripts under various names from the 1690s and is originally a Scots or Scottish Measure. In the late eighteenth and nineteenth century various sets of words were arranged to the tune, by, among others, Burns and Ramsay, often with a Jacobite slant to them. Burns wrote<sup>161</sup> (below right). Another set of verses is found in George Farquhar Graham's '*The Popular Songs of Scotland*,' Glasgow, 1887, titled 'Where ha'e ye been a' the day?' set to the tune 'Bonnie Laddie, Highland Laddie,' (below left).

A Highland Laddie is mentioned in a letter sent to the Edinburgh Gaelic Society in 1835,<sup>162</sup> and an early version appears in the Hill 1841 manuscript. Other Highland Laddies are known to have been taught by dancing masters including Mr Adamson of Fife and David Anderson of Dundee's Ballroom Guide for 1902 gives a version that starts with a curtsy, which indicates that this version was for women. Another of Anderson's versions was renamed by Jack McConachie in 1952 to Bonnie Dundee and set in 6/8-time to the tune of the same name. Furthermore, Dancie John Reid of Newtyle had a recognisable version for girls.<sup>163</sup> Dancing master Ewen MacLachlan is said to have introduced a version of the dance to South Uist and Isle of Barra sometime in the latter half of the nineteenth century where it was danced to the tune 'Mac Iain Ghasda' ('Son of

*Where ha'e ye been a' the day,  
Bonnie laddie, Highland laddie?  
Saw ye him that's far away,  
Bonnie laddie, Highland laddie?  
On his head a bonnet blue,  
Bonnie laddie, Highland laddie,  
Tartan plaid and Highland trews,  
Bonnie laddie, Highland laddie.*

Graham

*The bonniest lad that e'er I saw,  
Bonnie laddie, Highland laddie,  
Wore a plaid and was fu' braw,  
Bonnie laddie, Highland laddie.  
On his head a bonnet blue,  
Bonnie laddie, Highland laddie,  
His royal heart was firm and true,  
Bonnie laddie, Highland laddie.*

Burns

Noble John'), which is the Gaelic equivalent of the song 'Highland Laddie.' Four versions of the dance were recorded by the Fletts, and two versions were recounted by Fearchar MacNeil. Note that the version used for medal tests and Highland dancing competitions is D.G. MacLennan's composition devised sometime in the 1930s or 1940s and later published in his book.<sup>164</sup>

The Old Ruisgarry crofter on Berneray, Malcolm Munro (*Calum Lachlainn-Bhàin Dhòmhnail* 1801–1879), who had a good sense of humour in his old age judging by the below poem, described *Mac Iain Ghasda*. The bard Malcolm MacAskill writes about the old man dancing a sprightly reel in this extract from the poem *Slan Gun Till na Dh'Fhalbh*, published in *Orain Chaluim*:

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|--|--|
| <i>'Nuair chuala Calum mac Lachlainn<br/>Gu robh Padruig a'tigh'nn dachaidh,<br/>Theann e dhannsa 'Mhic Iain Ghasda'<br/>'S a bhoineid paisgte 'na dhorn.</i>  | <i>When Calum Lachlan's son heard<br/>That Patrick was coming home<br/>He began to dance Mhic Iain Ghasda<br/>With his bonnet folded in his fist.</i>                            |
| <i>Thug e leum as air an urlar,<br/>'Hug horray' aige 's e tionndadh;<br/>Chaidh a mhulad chur air chul,<br/>'S e bocail sunndach le port-beoil.</i>           | <i>He jumped on the floor<br/>Hug horray, he shouted as he turned<br/>Gloomy thoughts behind him<br/>And a happy skip/bounce to the mouth music</i>                              |
| <i>Bha Fionnghala nighean Dhomhnail<br/>Is Calum a'dannsa comhla,<br/>'S Oighrig ni' Phadruig gu stolda<br/>Deanamh spors dh'an charaid oig.<sup>165</sup></i> | <i>Flora Donald's daughter<br/>And Calum danced together<br/>Patrick's daughter Oighreag sarcastically<br/>Making fun of / poking fun at the young<br/>couple.<sup>166</sup></i> |

Some of the Highland Laddie dance arrangements may conceivably have had Jacobite connotations tied in with song sentiments of the tune, but there is no mention of this in any written or oral sources available. Highland Laddie is sometimes believed to be Bonnie Prince Charlie due to lyrics such as 'Geordie sits in Charlie's chair,' and 'Charlie yet shall mount the throne.'

One story says that a version of the dance was made up by Scottish soldiers during World War I, but I have not been able to establish which version that could be or if it even if it is still in use. Highland Laddie, as a Regimental March was, however, used by most, if not all, the Scottish Regiments, so it would have been commonly known among soldiers.

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## *Scotch Measure, or Scotchmakers*

There are several different dances referred to as Scotch Measure and which have nothing in common with each other. In the Hebrides, Fearchar MacNeil considered the dance known as Scotchmakers, or Scotch Measure, in the Isles of Barra and South Uist, to be an easier version of the Blue Bonnets. It was here danced to the tune and song ‘The Twa Bonnie Maidens,’ also known as ‘The Isle of Skye,’ or ‘Dornoch Links.’

The Hebridean version should not be confused with the Scotch Measure found in the 1841 Hill manuscript, nor should either of these two versions be confused with the Twosome Scotch Measure as arranged by D.G. MacLennan (1950) or another version arranged by Isobel Cramb in the 1950s and later published by the RSCDS in *Four Step Dances* (1953). This last version can today be danced either as a solo or as a twosome and appears at times at Highland Dancing competitions and in medal test syllabi for the various dance organisations, such as BATD, SDTA, and UKA.

The only lore connected to the mainland version is that it is based on the eighteenth-century dance tune category the Scotch Measure. There was early mention in literature of a Twosome or *Twosome Strathspey*,<sup>167</sup> a dance that, according to MacLennan, eventually also evolved into the Highland Schottische.<sup>168</sup> MacLennan describes his theory that the Highland Schottische evolved from the Twosome Strathspey in his book.

## *Scottish Lilt*

The 9/8 solo jig the Scottish Lilt, is a dance generally performed today in a very light and graceful manner. D.G. MacLennan (1950) stated it originated after 1746 in Perthshire, and was said to have been handed down, through the years, from one teacher to another. MacLennan did not provide us with a source for this claim. MacLennan further stated the ‘Lilt’ could be traced from dancing masters’ advertisements.<sup>169</sup> Searching the online newspaper archives available today, the earliest mentions of dances labelled Scottish or Scotch Lilt I can find, are Miss Avern dancing the Scotch Lilt at Theatre Royal, Dundee (*Dundee Courier*, 26 May 1864); eleven years later at the Edinburgh Music Hall which featured ‘Saturday Evening Highland and Lowland Entertainment’ organised by Champion Highland dancer John M’Neill. M’Neill, who performed as part of the evening’s show danced the ‘Scotch Lilt’ as well as the Sword dance, Highland Fling, Shean Trews [*sic*] and Sailor’s Hornpipe (*Edinburgh Evening News*, 26 February 1875). In England, in 1890, ‘Mr Cross’s Annual Scotch Concert’ featured Mr William Graham dancing the Scotch Lilt (other dances performed were: Sailor’s Hornpipe, Ghillie Callum, Highland Fling, Seau Triubhse [*sic*], and double swords—The Caledonian Broadsword) (*Manchester Evening News*, 24 January 1890); and a dancing exhibition in Broughty Ferry in Angus in 1919 are only some examples.<sup>170</sup> I have not yet found a

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dancing masters' advertisement mentioning the Scotch Lilt. There is no way of knowing if these choreographies were similar or whether they simply shared the same name. Likewise, one may ask, if they had any resemblance, bar the name, to the dance featured at competitions and taught in dancing schools in Scotland since the 1950s. We may simply never know. The earliest mention of a Scotch Lilt in England was an *entr'acte* performance in London in the first quarter of the eighteenth century according to Emmerson,<sup>171</sup> which I will come back to in the next chapter, neither is there any record of the choreographic details of this dance.

MacLennan (1950) credits the survival of the Scottish Lilt to the late John MacNeill, senior (mentioned above in 1875), dancing master of Edinburgh, a recognised champion in his day who, at that time, claimed to be the only one who knew the dance. According to D. G. MacLennan, John MacNeill did not even teach the dance to his own son because he believed in the old Scots saying: 'Aye keep something tae yersel' ye widna tell tae ony,' (Robert Burns); and only taught the dance to William MacLennan, who in turn passed it on to D.G. to carry on the tradition.<sup>172</sup>

We find one story which tells us that the Four Marys, the attendants of Mary Queen of Scots, devised the dance to cheer the Queen up when she found late sixteenth-century life in Edinburgh dour and horrible.<sup>173</sup> This anecdote is not supported by historical evidence. Another story suggests it was a courting dance that was performed by Scottish gentlewomen to show how gracefully they could move.

While we do not know where the dance originated, the current Scottish Lilt choreography could well be the creation of a Perthshire dancing master as suggested by MacLennan. The current style suggests a nineteenth-century origin with balletic elements, refining the character of the dance.

There seems to be a wish on the part of the story tellers to situate the dance in an 'ancient' Scottish past by placing in it in either the sixteenth or mid-eighteenth century, and with the latter, hinting at the 1745–1746 Jacobite rising connection. It is, however, the only solo dance in current use that is danced in 9/8 time, which may point to an older origin, originally danced to tunes such as 'Brose and Butter' and 'Drops of Brandy,' both mid-eighteenth century 9/8 jig melodies. Now it is often performed to First World War pipe retreat marches 'The Battle of the Somme,' composed by Pipe Major William Laurie (1882–1916), or 'The Heights of Dargai.' Note that these last two tunes are of a fundamentally different character than the former two and are relatively recent compositions. Another investigation may perhaps look at how this tune change has altered the performance of the dance?

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## *The Village Maid*

The Village Maid, according to one story, was said to have been danced by young girls of a village at a yearly fair to impress the young men and to try to catch a husband. Alternatively, girls of the village danced it when the regiments would come recruiting to try and catch the eye of a soldier. Another version says a barmaid danced it on a bar or table top.

Mrs Isobel Cramb collected the dance in Aberdeenshire from Miss Flora Cruickshank of Peterhead. Thus, it is probably another dance, like Flora MacDonald's Fancy, that originated in the Cruickshank dancing master family tradition from the mid-nineteenth century. The 2/4 tune 'The Village Maid' was included in Thomas Wilson's *Companion to The Ballroom*, (1816)<sup>174</sup> and may be English or Welsh in origin. More recently the dance is commonly performed to the 'Liberton Pipe Band Polka' at dance competitions which no doubt, as in other cases of change of tune, has altered the character of the dance.

## *Wilt thou go to the Barracks, Johnny? (Go to Berwick, Johnnie)*

The 1841 manuscript notebook written by London born dance pupil Frederick Hill of Alford, Aberdeenshire, includes two arrangements or 'High Dances' set to 3/2-time tunes or songs named Dusty Miller and Wilt Thou Go to the Barricks Johnnie.<sup>175</sup> The latter is possibly a misinterpretation of the song title 'Go to Berwick, Johnnie.' Both step arrangements are quite similar in structure as noted down in the manuscript, which seems to confirm they were danced in the same time signature. The Dusty Miller has lived on in Highland dance competition culture as a dance in 6/4 time, while the interpretation of the other dance took a completely different path and, in the process, acquired an associated storyline based, it seems, on imagination.

In the early 1950s, Mrs Isobel Cramb brought this dance to the attention of the Highland and Scottish country dance world when the then owner, Mrs Lorimer of Aberdeen, lent her the notebook now known as the 'Hill manuscript.' From the start, the late Aberdeen dance teacher Bobby Watson was involved in interpreting the notes and was instrumental in shaping it into its present form. Labelled as a 'new Highland dance' he performed it as named Will thou go to the Barracks, Johnnie? at the Imperial Society Congress in Aberdeen in July 1955<sup>176</sup> and before that, in 1953, it was premiered at the Aberdeen Music Hall.<sup>177</sup> Watson, often said to have been the finest exponent of this dance in his time, once told me how he came to do the third step, i.e. 'point, behind, front, backstep,' in double time. He was in his studio in Aberdeen, when the local pipe band marched past outside playing the 'Cock O' the North.' He listened to the syncopated rhythm beaten out by the bass drummer, and the rhythm stuck. He applied

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it to the step, now doing four ‘point, back, front, backstep’ movements instead of two before the characteristic four-bar break. He admitted in a conversation in the late 1980s that he based his arrangement very much on his own Highland dance knowledge rather than trying to interpret the manuscript notes accurately.<sup>178</sup>

Mrs Cramb wrote in the *Clan Hay Magazine* that judging by the name of the dance (Wilt Thou Go to the Barricks Johnnie) she assumed that ‘this must be a recruiting dance.’<sup>179</sup> The belief that the dance, now firmly titled Wilt Thou Go to the Barracks, Johnnie?, was once a recruiting dance for the Gordon Highlanders regiment in Aberdeenshire dates from this point. The custom, according to the emerging story, was to have it danced at the old ‘Feeing’ Market or Fair in Aberdeen,<sup>180</sup> by a regimental dancer, with either pipe or drum accompaniment. This was to entice the onlookers to become volunteers and join the fighting forces. Another story tells that, sometimes, a pretty girl performed the dance in front of the regiment standing on parade, for the same purpose. The Army Barracks in Aberdeen was also said to have been a performance place. A third version of this storyline is found in David Webster’s *The World History of Highland Games*<sup>181</sup> where we are told that

long ago, Bonny Jean, the Duchess of Gordon, raised the Gordon Highlanders with her own unique recruiting strategy. She rode around Aberdeen, presenting a spectacular picture. On seeing any able-bodied young man, she called her catchphrase ‘Wilt thou go to the barracks, Johnnie?’ She then offered a shilling from between her lips and many braw lads could not resist a kiss from this beautiful noblewoman. Her kiss sealed the contract and the Gordon Highlanders became a very active and famous regiment. A dance was composed in honour of the Duchess ...

One further storyline suggests the dance was a test for new soldiers used to examine their battle fitness if they could complete this physically demanding dance without tiring.

Interestingly, when conducting research on regimental dancing in the mid-1980s, the Gordon Highlanders had no knowledge of this dance and they were not aware of a connection to the Regiment. Other Scottish regiments when queried on the matter responded in a similarly negative fashion.<sup>182</sup>

The music initially used for the modern 1950s version of the dance was the 6/8 jig-time

*Go to Berwick, Johnnie;  
Bring her frae the Border;  
Yon sweet bonnie lassie,  
Let her gae nae farther.  
English loons will twine ye  
O’ the lovely treasure;  
But we’ll let them ken  
A sword wi’ them we’ll measure.*

*Go to Berwick, Johnnie,  
And regain your honour;  
Drive them ower the Tweed,  
And show our Scottish banner.  
I am Rob, the King,  
And ye are Jock, my brither;  
But, before we lose her,  
We’ll a’ there thegither.*

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tune 'Cock O' the North' as that was the favoured tune by Bobby Watson, it being the regimental march of the Gordon Highlanders. At that time, also, the last two steps (7 and 8) were performed to a quicker tempo. Since then, examination organisations, such as BATD, SDTA, and UKA all seem to favour the tune 'The Braes O' Mar' in 2/4 time, which puts another character and lilt to the dance than when performed to a jiggling 6/8 pipe march. More recently, the dance is also performed to 4/4 strathspeys.

Until fairly recently, nobody has attempted an interpretation of the original notes as set to the 3/2 hornpipe music of the tune 'Go to Berwick, Johnnie?' Currently, however, some new 3/2 interpretations are being researched by myself, Jennifer Schoonover, and Colin Robertson. The song set to the original tune contained Jacobite sentiments and one version, penned by John Hamilton, is found in *The Modern Scottish Minstrel*, 1855.

### **Go to Berwick Johnny. Jig Time.**



Extract of part A in 3/2 time from Niel Gow and Sons, Part Second of the *Complete Repository of Original Scots Tunes*, 1802.

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## 7 The Character dance in the Scottish traditions of dance

The term ‘character’ dance can mean several related ways of performing dance pieces. Emmerson tells us that performances on the London stages in the eighteenth century did include

dance interludes, reminiscent of the Elizabethan practice, [which] were doubtless of considerable influence on the development of stage character dance in Great Britain, and it is of interest to us here to notice the dances of Scottish motifs which appear on London play announcements during the eighteenth century and earlier.<sup>183</sup>

These *entr’acte* performances were dance and music interludes performed between main parts of a stage performance. Some of the dance titles Emmerson discovered were The Dance of the Bonny Highlander (Drury Lane Theatre, 1700), Scotch Dance (1703, 1706 and later), Scotch Whim (1703), and Scotch Whim and Irish Trot (1704). Other dances that appear in first quarter of the century were Highland Lilt, The Highland, New Scotch Dance, Scotch Lilt, and Scotch Highlander.<sup>184</sup> In 1750–1757 the occasional appearance of the terms A New Scotch Dance, Scotch Measure, and Highland Reel can be found.<sup>185</sup> Emmerson further points out that the terms strathspey and fling begin to appear on playbills towards the end of the eighteenth century.<sup>186</sup> Towards the end of the eighteenth century the interest in these Scottish themed interludes seems to be at its zenith according to Emmerson and not only in Britain but also in the New World, where we find a ‘Scots Pastoral Dance—The Caledonian Frolic’ in Boston in 1795 choreographed by ‘William Francis recently arrived from England.’<sup>187</sup> Celebrated American dancer John Durang performed, for example ‘a Highland Fling’ around 1805.<sup>188</sup>

Related to this idea of performing ‘national’ characteristics is the crystallisation of ‘folk’ dances into a classical dance subdivision now called ‘character dance’ which is indelibly linked to the Romantic movement (c.1780–1910) in literature and the arts. These inclusions were stylized representations of ‘folk’ dances of, for example Hungary, Poland, Russia, Italy, and Spain. Really, Character Dance uses both movements and music adapted for theatre performances of ballets. Russian Aleksandr Shirayev, assistant to choreographer Marius Petipa at the Mariinsky Theatre in Saint Petersburg is credited with having developed and improved the incorporation of ‘folk’ motifs or traditions in ballet, as seen above, into a unique, integrated and codified artform of classical dance in the closing years of the nineteenth century.<sup>189</sup>

**D. ANDERSON'S IRISH JIG.**

**TUNES**—"Irish Washerwoman" or any 6-8 Tune.

**OBEDIENCE STEP.**—Step out with right 2nd position, bring left behind 5th position, step out with left, 2nd position, bring right behind 5th position, step out with right, 2nd position, bring left up in 1st position and bow.

All the Steps are gone over twice commencing with right and finish. Repeat, commencing with left and finish.

**Finish of each step unless 6th and 9th steps—**

Hop on left, two heel beats with right in 5th position, beat behind with left, beat out, beat in with right in 5th position, hop on left, bring right down behind in 5th position, beat in front with left, beat behind with right. These movements count 10, occupying two bars. The reverse with left foot.

**Finish of 6th and 9th Steps.**—Put out right foot in the line of 4th position, then bring back in 1st position, ditto left, ditto right, ditto left. No hopping in the movements.

**DESCRIPTION OF DOUBLE BEATS.**

Hop on left, beat behind with right in 5th position, beat in front with left 5th position, beat behind again with right 5th position. Reverse with left foot.

**FIRST STEP.**—Heel toe heel, going full round to right hand and finish; second time, step out with left, strike behind with right, step out with right, strike behind with left. Done eleven times going round to left hand and finish.

**SECOND STEP.**—Single flatter with right foot, then left double beats, and bring right down in front.

Single flatter with left foot, then right double beats and bring left down in front.

Single flatter with right foot, then left double beats and bring right down in front and finish. Repeat commencing with left.

**THIRD STEP.**—Beat before and behind with right, going to right hand seven times and kick out, then bring right down behind, beat behind, and before with left four times, and finish. Repeat commencing with left.

**FOURTH STEP.**—Beat in front with right foot and kick out, then bring right down behind and double beats, beat in front with left foot and kick out, then bring left down behind and double beats. Ditto with right again and finish. Repeat commencing with left.

**FIFTH STEP.**—Beat before and behind with right, strike heels together twice; bring right down behind. Beat behind and before with left, strike heels together twice, then cross in front with left, strike heels once, then cross in front with right, strike heels once and finish. Repeat, commencing with left.

**SIXTH STEP.**—Flatter twice with right foot, bring right down behind, double beats and throw out left, flatter twice with left foot, bring left down behind, double beats and throw out right, out on heel of right, and out on heel of left, and finish. Repeat, commencing with left.

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In the latter half of the nineteenth century Character Dances were commonplace in Scottish dancing masters' repertoires. Where they, as a feature, inspired by, and developed from the interludes of the stage dance tradition? Spanish, Dutch, Russian, and blackface dance choreographies featured alongside the Irish Jig, Sailors Hornpipe (Jacky Tar), and a Jockey Hornpipe in which the young dancers dressed up as jockeys and mimicked riding while dancing. Skills dances such as the Skipping Rope dance (or Fling—a Highland Fling danced whilst skipping a rope), and the Sand Dance or Jig were also popular. One dance was known as the Cakewalk and was taught by Dancie David Kydd (1874–1950) in Forfar, Angus, in the first half of the twentieth century. It involved the manipulative skills of carrying and presenting a cake whilst dancing. This Cakewalk should not be confused with the American couple dance with origins as discussed in *African American Fraternities and Sororities*:

[T]he social dance of the Africans [slaves in the US] perpetuated the tradition of mocking those possessing a higher social status of showing the performer's ability to control his or her body while executing complicated movements [...] the ritual challenge and the elements of control are contained in the cakewalk, a stylized dance performed as a means of entertainment, competition, and subtle rebellion [...] this dance evolved from a mid 19<sup>th</sup> century plantation pastime, to being popularized in turn of the century African American productions [...] The Cake-Walk originally was a kind of shuffling dance that evolved into a smooth walking step with the body held erect [...] the movement became a prancing strut.<sup>190</sup>

This version of the Cakewalk was introduced into Scottish Highland dance competition culture by J.L. MacKenzie MBE (1905–1992), who brought it to Scotland from the US sometime in the 1950s. It is the only dance that is performed as a duo in competition and generally only by senior dancers at larger competitions. It is commonly danced to the 1899 Kerry Mills tune 'Whistling Rufus' and is performed in fanciful or even outrageous costumes as Cakewalk costumes are not regulated by Highland dancing competition rules.

Of these dances, only the most common and standardised versions of the Irish Jig and the Sailors' Hornpipe remain in regular use for competition.

## *The Irish Jig*

It is quite possible, based on evidence at hand, that Dundee dancing master David Anderson started the choreographic process that has led to the version of this dance that is still in use as a competition dance in the late nineteenth century. It is plausible that the dancing skills among the large immigrant Irish workforce in the city inspired him to a degree. Certainly, the earliest published written description of this Scottish 'Irish Jig'



Female Jig dancers at Cortachy Castle Highland Games, Angus, 1990.  
Photos © M. Melin.



Female dancers in New Zealand Academy costume (left) and Victorian Scottish Union, Australia costume (right) for the Single, Double time Jigs. Photos © S. Smith 2015.

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appears in David Anderson's *Ballroom Guide* of 1897, where it is called D. Anderson's Irish Jig. In 1935, Dancie John Reid of Newtyle, Angus, wrote in his Notebook, which also contains his own notation of the dance:

The Irish Jig a solo dance for either men or women has been a prominent item among the Step Dances at Highland Games etc. for many years. It was know[n] by the name of Paddy Rafferty and was just a shadow of the present Irish Jig. About 50 years ago the late David Anderson who before [him being] a Teacher of Dancing in Dundee travelled in Variety Theatre which would have performances in Ireland for whole seasons, to him must be given the credit of revolutionising this dance from the above name to the present Irish Jig. Another professional was the late J. W. Cardownie who also introduced parts into the steps not hither—too known, but which were considered typically Irish. A radical change has therefore been made by these two men in the perfection of this popular dance.<sup>191</sup>

Before that, three steps are noted down in Frederick Hill's notebook from 1841,<sup>192</sup> which may be the earliest description of Irish Jig steps in Scotland. The Irish Jig appears as a competitive dance from the mid-nineteenth century. A certain J. McKenna won the first prize at a dancing and bagpipe competition in the Music Hall, Edinburgh in March 1865.<sup>193</sup> Irish Jigs also appear in many playbills during the first half of the nineteenth century. Earlier, in 1828, at the Music Hall in Edinburgh, a Mr Campbell from Theatre Royal in Birmingham performed both the Highland Fling and an Irish Jig.<sup>194</sup> Dance teachers also advertise it, for example Mr Burghall of Lincoln taught both Irish Single and Double Jigs in 1802 alongside Scotch Reels, Strathspeys, and 'Chantreuse.'<sup>195</sup> The late Highland dancer and adjudicator George B. Lowe wrote the following about the Irish Jig in the *Braemar Highland Gathering Book* in 1976:

Although not danced at the Highland Games at Braemar, Aboyne, and Donside, the Irish Jig is a great favourite at Highland Games. Dundee has a jig that is all its own. The explanation is that about the middle of last century, many families left Ireland to work at the potato dressing on Angus farms. In the winter they percolated into the jute mills. With them, they brought their jig steps to Dundee, which they danced on every possible occasion. Within the last two decades, Cuthbertson taught special classes in Dundee and influenced the jig. The Scottish jig danced at the Highland Games is a version of The Irish Washerwoman and has steps in it like 'The Tipperary Trot,' 'Paddy's Breeches,' and 'The Donnybrook.' In Dundee, even



Irish Jig, from *National Dances* 1889. In public domain.

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to this day when a young man or woman is setting off to a dancing class they say, 'they are goin' tae the jiggin.'" Aberdeen has its own variation of the jig, which is not unlike the Dundee jig, perhaps a little more refined. The late Mary Aitken and Betty Jessiman were fine exponents of the jig, and the jigs of Bobby Watson and Brian Sievwright, both of Aberdeen, have great character in them.<sup>196</sup>

Interestingly, Gaelic scholar Michael Newton in his article *The Hidden History of Highland Dance* (2012) suggests that the dance was previously known as 'The Irish Washerwoman' and 'is clearly derived to some degree from the French dance 'Branle des Lavandieres' noted by Thoinot Arbeau (the pen-name of Jehan Tabourot) in his 1589 dancing manual *Orchésographie*.<sup>197</sup> Consulting the original notation and additional Labanotation score in Mary Stewart Evan's translation of Arbeau<sup>198</sup> I can see no resemblance between 'The Washerwomen's Branle' which is in duple-time, to the triple-time Irish Jig in the movements described, apart from both being able to be categorised as character or miming gesture dances. Newton also sees a probable link to the now extinct Gaelic death and resurrection dance drama *Cailleach an Dùdain*, but, as the Irish Jig does not have any of those sentiments, apart from, perhaps, the angry fist-shaking movements that knock the *Cailleach* out, I cannot see a firm link.

Leaving the exact location and choreographer/s of the Scottish 'Irish Jig' aside, the stories associated with it reflect an era when propagating a derogatory stereotypical image of the Irish was acceptable and viewed as being entertaining. Sadly, Irish Catholic sectarian sentiments are still, in places, apparent in Scotland.<sup>199</sup> The term 'Donnybrook' is not only associated with a jig time tune and dance step but also a slang term for a brawl or riot, possibly referring to disturbing behaviour at the Donnybrook Fair which was held from the thirteenth century to about the 1850s in Dublin.

When I learnt the dance from the late Bobby Watson at workshops in Aberdeen in the late 1980s he told me two stories that he was told when he learnt the dance and which, he explained, were to help dancers understand the character in which one should dance this Irish Jig. The first story tells of an Irish Washerwoman, angry with those who soiled her clean washing hanging on the line to dry, dancing as though crazed with anger, as she now has to wash it all again. The other story is for a male dancer encouraged to portray an Irishman, who after a long day's work, has a little too much to drink and starts to fight.<sup>200</sup> Or, he is the happy-go-lucky Irishman facing his wife's outbursts? There are many versions of these stories, but themes of anger, madness, and drunkenness etc., are the core elements. Adding to the stereotypical aspect and caricature of the Irish is the costuming, prevailing to this day for competition and show with the male dancer dressed in nineteenth-century Irish breeches, waistcoat, hat, and tailcoat complete with shillelagh in hand, while the girl dresses as a peasant colleen usually with an apron as can be seen on postcards and book illustrations from late nineteenth- and early twentieth centuries.<sup>201</sup> Edinburgh dancing master D.G. MacLennan wrote in the 1950 edition of his book

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### *Highland and Traditional Scottish Dances:*

I much regret to state I have a very poor opinion of the Irish Jig, which passes under that name in Scotland. It seems to get worse during the passing of the years. In these days of expert tap dancing, which was originally derived from Hornpipes and Jigs, over half a century ago, it is surprising to find that the style of dancing the Jig is so defective in the execution of the steps. The whole performance is rough, and lacking in fine beating. I would advise our dancers to try to visit an Irish Feis (Festival), and obtain lessons from one of the many good Irish Champions.<sup>202</sup>

MacLennan does not discuss the character of the dance but is however clearly not particularly pleased with the dance as part of the Scottish dance tradition. Only a few years after this statement, the main Highland dancing organisations, SOBHD and SOHDA, formally included the dance in their competition repertoire.

Some Highland dance organisations in Australia and New Zealand, which are not part of the competition structure as governed by Scottish organisations, have Irish Jigs as well. These dances are very different in structure, character, and history, as they developed while sharing competition platforms with Irish dancers in the late nineteenth century days of dance competitions in the diaspora. According to O'Donnell's research, the Irish Single Time Jigs appeared at the Caledonian Games in Dunedin, New Zealand, in 1866, and the first time it was danced in costume was in 1895.<sup>203</sup> They are more akin to the dance style of the old Irish dancing masters, and they do not carry with them the story of the 'mad Irish washerwoman'.

One may find it interesting that the Irish Jig stories have lived on into the current era of twenty-first century political correctness. In a quick check of websites giving background to the various Scottish solo dances you will still see the Irish Jig referred to as 'a parody of an Irish Jig,' or 'depicting the infamous Irish temper,' and so forth. Note that the criticism above relates to these particular storylines only and reflects in no way any points of view on the choreographies and the execution of these by dancers and teachers today.

### *The Sailors' Hornpipe*

The 1976 edition of the SOBHD manual for the Sailors' Hornpipe states that it 'is a development of the traditional English version of that dance and portrays actions used in the daily work routine of the sailor.'<sup>204</sup> Jack McConachie wrote in his 1950s *Letter Service* series that 'good action in the Hornpipe is essential, otherwise the character of the dance is lost, in spite of the tricky footwork and good rhythm.' McConachie names some of the steps as 'crab walk,' 'look out,' 'signalling,' and 'pulling up.' The New Zealand Academy on the other hand, names an array of movements and steps named to illustrate the work and

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life on a sailing ship as ‘Look-out-sighting,’ ‘telescope,’ ‘bucket haul to chest,’ ‘cable haul through legs,’ ‘farewell,’ ‘hoisting the sails,’ ‘clearing the deck,’ ‘Jack Tar,’ ‘double shuffle–deck step,’ ‘cutlass drill,’ ‘crab walk,’ ‘coiling spirals–batterie,’ ‘rowing,’ ‘scrubbing the clothes,’ ‘scrubbing the deck,’ ‘sweeping the deck,’ ‘pump,’ ‘three cheers,’ ‘boat rocking,’ ‘climbing the rigging,’ ‘rations,’ and ‘walking the plank.’<sup>205</sup>

Sailors’ dances were familiar among other character or comic dances, but they were not associated with the hornpipe until after 1740. The dancer Yates, who frequently performed hornpipes, was suddenly billed at Drury Lane in Covent Garden, London, in May 1740 to perform ‘A Hornpipe in the Character of a Jacky Tar.’<sup>206</sup> Emerson further observed that women did the dance equally as often as the men on the eighteenth-century stage. To begin with the theme or character was not predominantly nautical, but percussive, a forerunner to modern day Tap dancing. When it appeared on stage it evolved from being limited to percussive footwork into a theatrical character dance, which from the 1760s onwards often symbolically depicted a sailor’s life.<sup>207</sup>

Whether any of the steps originated with eighteenth-century sailors, and if they actually were labelled ‘hornpipes’ is difficult to prove. Emerson, again, points out that in the nineteenth century, hornpipe steps had become part of the British naval drill, supposedly intended to provide exercise for the ship bound sailors, but where this tradition originated is hard to tell. It may well be the case that the stage Character Dance tradition influenced the naval drill. Safest to say, quoting Bratton, that ‘what we have in the several forms of the hornpipe is an exemplary instance of a famously ambiguous category (one might even say, paradigm): the hornpipe is a ‘popular’ dance.’<sup>208</sup> Bratton further muses...

However it originated, the hornpipe would seem to have developed nationwide familiarity early in the nineteenth century as a solo or competition stepdance in 4/4 time, done in hard shoes. It was thought of as having traditional roots as a men’s dance, but it was often done on stage, and there it was also performed by women, usually in men’s clothes. The men whom it was most closely associated with were sailors; and the sailor was at this period being given powerful mythic status as Jack Tar, an archetypal national hero shaped by the response to the navy’s role in the Napoleonic Wars.<sup>209</sup>

The *Belfast Newsletter* (4 May 1824) advertised a Miss Clara Fisher to dance a Sailors’ Hornpipe in character at the Theatre in Belfast. A Highland Reel was also featured in the same programme. *Freeman’s Journal* (18 August 1847) reported that Queen Victoria and Prince Albert, on a Royal visit of to the port of Dartmouth on the Royal yacht, were treated to ‘the merry dance and hornpipe with the ‘double shuffle and cut’ to the well-executed notes of the fiddler, capering, jumping dodging, &c., and other larks of the light-hearted seamen, were indulged in.’ *The Caledonian Mercury* (7 March 1859) reported that brother Thomas Maclagan performed the ‘high dance, the Sailor’s Hornpipe’ at a



English Hornpipe dancer 'Paying Out the Slack' in Burchenal, *Dances of the People*, Volume 2, (1913: 21).

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concert to rapturous cheers.

The women's role in the nineteenth century dancing of hornpipes is also discussed by Bratton, who says there

was no suggestion that women did this dance anywhere but on the stage. Throughout the century the line between women off and on the stage was very firmly ruled, and one of the most obvious markers was that stage performers revealed their legs. The very act of dancing required it; and many women, following a tradition as old as the first appearance of women on the English stage, wore men's clothes for their dancing, and so revealed the outline of buttock and thigh. [...] illustrations of [...] female performers doing the hornpipe invariably show them either in bell-bottoms or, even more provocatively, in the tight white breeches of the midshipman. [...] The female hornpipe was [at this time] a specifically stage phenomenon, and its encoded meanings included those of sensual and sexual display.<sup>210</sup>

The illustrations in Alice M. Cowper Coles book *The Hornpipe* (1910, 1936) shows a girl in a naval inspired costume but wearing a skirt illustrating the various movements of the dance. On the competitive Highland dance scene girls and young women, the majority of competitive Highland dancers today being female, still wear trousers and tops as part of a 'male' sailors' costume of yesteryear.

These two commonly surviving examples of theatrical stage dance on the current Scottish competitive dance scene stand out for related, but different, reasons from a storyline perspective. Each dance portrays some degree of stereotypical imagery of their subject matter. The Irish Jig, through its associated stories, propagates a derogatory view of Irish people and manners. One may argue that in the twenty-first century era of political correctness it is extraordinary that these stories are still passed on. With the Sailors' Hornpipe still portraying the working life of a Jolly, or Jacky Tar, the male persona of the 'British' navy, it is perhaps ironic that the clear majority of Highland dancers performing this dance today are female.



Victorian Scottish Union (Australia) dancer. Photo © S. Smith 2015.



Female dancer in Sailors' Hornpipe outfit. New Zealand Academy.  
Photo © S. Smith 2015.

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## 8 Scotch Reels

The Scotch Reel<sup>211</sup> does not seem to have any specific stories or specific lore attached to it. It held its own for generations as the staple social dance of Scotland and particularly the Highlands and Islands including Orkney and Shetland. It was often the only social dance available and each community seems to have had their own version. The details of several Scotch Reel versions are carefully detailed in the Fletts' research published in 1985 and we learn that the centrality of this dance extended into serving as the Wedding Reel in many communities. Probably because it was so centrally placed in community life, it did not generate any myths or stories. However, one Reel of slightly later date, and one that is specifically named—The Reel of Tulloch—does have storylines attached to it. This may be because it did not grow organically out of rural community life but seems to have been composed around 1800.

### *The Reel of Tulloch*

This group dance for four people consists of a two-part sequence involving steps danced on the spot alternating with swinging other dancers to continually change places. This two-part structure is in line with all Reels found historically in Scotland. It seems probable that the dance was composed around the year 1800 somewhere in the Central Highlands. Drawing on folk traditions of the area, it appears as a dance for the upper classes. The Fletts believe, 'it is possible that the dance was a formalisation 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.'<sup>212</sup> The first mention of the dance is made in the *Caledonian Mercury* (March 27, 1819), where four of the office bearers of the Edinburgh Society of Highlanders are described performing the dance at the opening of the society's ball. The Fletts tell us that it was featured

in the piping and dancing competitions organised by the Highland Society of Edinburgh—these competitions took place in Edinburgh annually from 1784 to 1826, and then triennially until 1844. The dance was first performed at these competitions in 1829, and was repeated in 1832, 1838, and 1844.<sup>213</sup>

The Fletts further suggest that the dance originally was a 'Society' dance and that it developed at the Breadalbane Balls, probably held at Taymouth Castle,<sup>214</sup> in the same

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manner that the modern Eightsome Reel was developed at the Northern Meeting and the Skye Balls.<sup>215</sup>

Tulloch is the English form of the Gaelic *tulach*, meaning a knoll. Because Reel of Tulloch thus means the ‘reel of the knoll,’ some people believed that the name implied the reel was danced on a knoll or beside and among them, where fairies were thought to dance, and, where human dancers presented a fairy-like appearance.<sup>216</sup>

Several locations are said to be the birthplace of this dance: Tulloch Castle near Dingwall; Tulloch in the Parish of Abernethy in Strathspey; or the Kirk of Tulloch on Deeside near Ballater. All are contenders, and this is reflected in some of the stories.

One story claims that both the tune and dance were composed at a wild and impromptu dance outside the Kirk of Tulloch, near Ballater, in Aberdeenshire, when, on a bitterly cold Sunday morning, the minister failed to arrive to take the service. This is said to have been about 1690. It was snowing heavily, and the waiting parishioners kept themselves warm by stamping their feet, clapping their arms, and last but not least, by passing flasks of potent whisky around. As the time passed, people started to swing each other by the arms and dance reel steps in order to keep warm. This must have sufficiently inspired the local fiddler to compose the tune. Another version of the story adds that when the minister finally arrived, heavily delayed by the weather, he soundly rebuked his dancing parishioners for their act of sacrilege. Not a single one who took part, it is said, is to have survived the year!<sup>217</sup>

Another tradition appears in K.N. MacDonald’s *Puirt-à-beul*, and comes from a paper, written by Benjamin Taylor, F.R.G.S., first published in *Atlanta*, and reproduced in the *Aberdeen Free Press* some years prior to 1901.

As we enter Strathspey by the Abernethy forest, we pass through the district of Tulloch, the scene and birthplace of the famous reel of Tulloch. Here, some two hundred years ago, lived the laird of Tulloch, with his lovely daughter Isobel. To her came many suitors from many lands, for she had beauty and her father had wealth. Among them was a MacGregor, whom the maiden secretly loved, and a Robertson, whom her friends favoured, but whom she disliked. As time went on, the rivalry between these suitors became fierce, until the Robertson resolved on the destruction of the MacGregor. Getting together a small party of his own clan, he surprised the MacGregor as he wandered down Speyside with the lovely Isobel. But the MacGregor was more than a match for the Robertsons, whom he kept at bay until he reached the friendly shelter of a barn. Dashing in there, he kept them all at a distance until Isobel had barricaded the door, and then he picked them off with his musket, which Isobel loaded for him as fast as he could discharge it. And so he destroyed the whole band, which included the treacherous brother of the persecuted damsel. Thereupon the MacGregor issued from his shelter and, seizing the pipes celebrated his victory by playing a new dance, which he composed in a moment of fierce inspiration. And

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this was the famous Reel of Tulloch, and the date of the story was in or about the year 1640. The story goes on to say that the brave MacGregor and the fair Isabel were apprehended and imprisoned; the MacGregor was shot, and when his head was presented to the lady, she immediately died of grief. [...] Another traditional account describes the dance over MacGregors (or Robertsons) skulls in a barn, where they had been assassinated. There are other versions of the story, and several versions of the song; they do not all agree in detail. When Balmoral was being built, I knew several men from Skye who went to work there every year, and the story they heard at Braemar was that there were several people kicking skulls in a barn. One would say, giving a kick from behind, '*Bho chùl a' chinn,*' and another would reply, kicking the skull from the front, '*Bho bheul a' chinn,*' which being done, quickly descended into '*Bho Thulaichean gu Bealaichen,*'<sup>218</sup> and that this way the dance originated; but I do not recollect the full particulars.<sup>219</sup>

*'In the Shadow of Cairngorm—Chronicles of the united parishes of Abernethy and Kincardine'* by the Rev. W. Forsyth, published in 1900, tells a similar story, but some of the added detail is of interest so is given in full—

*The Reel of Tulloch*—Tulloch, meaning knoll or height, is a common name in the Highlands. Owing to this, and the reel being so popular, it is claimed by several localities. Our parish seems to have the best right to it, both on the ground of tradition, and from the existence of the Gaelic song relating to the Tulloch tragedy, although it is only fair to state that in the ballad the air is said to have been composed by a Macgregor from Glenlyon. *Ishbel dhubh*, black-haired Ishbel, was the only daughter of Allan Grant of Tulloch. It is said that at her birth all the guns in the house went off together. The night when Joan of Arc was born (1412), the cocks crowed all night long. This was regarded as a good omen; but it was otherwise with Ishbel. The going off of the guns was held to presage bloodshed and death, and the midwife cried out, 'Wretch! put her between pillows' (*'A bhradaig! cuiribh cadar chluasagan i'*). But Ishbel was spared, and grew up to be a handsome, strong-minded woman. She had a lover among the raiders, John Dowgar Macgregor. Black John, because of his misdeeds, was outlawed. An endeavour was made to arrest him in his own country, but it failed. He then fled to Tulloch. Ishbel stood his friend, and put him to hide in the ox byre. She also smuggled as many guns as she could get into the place, saying she would help to load them, and that he was to keep his back to her a shoot away. Black John was tracked by an officer and twelve men, who surrounded the byre. Helped by Ishbel, he made a brave defence. One of Ishbel's brothers was with the party and this so incensed her that she kept saying, 'Hold at the man with the red waistcoat'—that was her brother; but Black John was wiser, and let him alone. According to the song, John killed or wounded the whole party, and he was so elated with his success that he cried, 'Love, since I have done this brave deed, haste to give me a draught of beer, that I may dance the Tullichan!' and then he breaks out in praise of the tune. Tullochgorm and Seann Trews and the Cutach-chaol-dubh were



Reel of Tulloch c. 1870 from a vintage postcard by Valentine & Sons (in public domain).

good, but they could not come near the Tullichan. It was the delight of all gatherings, and old and young felt its charm and stirring power. It is said that Black John was shot some time after, near Ballindalloch, and that his head having been brought to Ishbel, the shock caused her death. She was buried at Kincardine, and a plain slab, without any inscription, marks her grave. The men killed at Tulloch were buried under the knoll called ‘Torran Mhortaidh’ (The Knoll of the Murder). This is the story according to tradition, but the facts, as found in the records of the Court Justiciary, Edinburgh, are somewhat different. The fight took place on 25th December 1636. The soldiers were commanded by Commissary John Stuart, and the only persons alleged to have been killed were the Commissary and Donald M’Inleith, one of his men. John Grant, alias M’Jockie, and his two sons, Patrick and John, were delated at the instance of Sir Thomas Hope and Elspeth Stuart, relict of John Stewart, for the resetting of John Dowgar and other Macgregors, and for the murder of two soldiers, and were duly tried.<sup>220</sup>

There are several more similar versions of this story, one featured in John MacDiarmid’s *Folklore of Breadalbane* from c.1904.<sup>221</sup> In Perthshire tradition, for example, it is claimed that the MacGregor was named *Iain Dubh Gearr*, and that he created the dance steps together with his wife Isabel in Strathspey in about 1600, and also that they improvised words to the port a beul.<sup>222</sup>

The genesis of the song is discussed in an article entitled ‘The reel of Tulloch in fact and fiction,’ about the folklore attached to it and the so-called Tulloch Tragedy, published in *The Transactions of Gaelic Society of Inverness*.<sup>223</sup> In this article, the author, Donald P. MacLean, argues strongly for an Abernethy (Perthshire) origin of dance due to the combination of fact and fiction referring to that place. The song itself is published in Archibald Sinclair’s 1879 collection *An t-Òranaiche*.

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|--|--|
| <i>Their britheamhan na tìre</i>       | <i>The judges of this land</i>           |
| <i>Ma labhras iad an fhirinn:</i>      | <i>Will say if you believe them:</i>     |
| <i>‘De na thig de cheòl à fìdhlean</i> | <i>‘When music comes from any fiddle</i> |
| <i>S e rìgh dhiubh Na Tulaichean.’</i> | <i>the Reel of Tulloch’s the King.’</i>  |

Archibald Sinclair, *An t-Òranaiche*, Glasgow 1879: 117–120.

Have these stories had any impact on the performance and development of the dance? Probably not at all, though occasionally the first version of freezing parishioners swinging each other on a cold morning is used in programme notes for dance performances. The Reel of Tulloch is the only ‘Reel’ on the current Highland dance scene where dancers make physical contact with each other using the ‘swing’ hold. All other ‘Reels’ involve travelling around one other in different patterns without touching fellow dancers. There are other Reels in which ‘swinging’ occurs, described primarily in books and articles by

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the Fletts and Rhodes (1985, 1996). There are some good illustrations available online of nineteenth century artistic renditions of the dance. One of the better is labelled ‘Scottish Society of London Fete, Reel of Tulloch, Illustrated London News, 1849.’<sup>224</sup> The dance featured on postcards as on the image above, of unknown origin and date, from the Dornoch Games in Sutherland.



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## 9 Highland dancing—the label

There is no ‘lore’ associated with the term ‘Highland dancing’ but the label is of interest in itself. It is commonly taken for granted that, because it has the geographical term ‘Highland’ in it, the dancing associated with it therefore naturally originates in the Highlands of Scotland. With regard to the form of competitive dancing seen today, however, this is not necessarily the case. It seems, initially, to originate from Lowland and urban stage dancing more than reflecting possible Highland or Gaelic origins. Today, Highland dancing and the interpretation of its terminology and aesthetic preferences is evolving and changing globally, and is thus no longer solely the domain of Scotland.

The earliest, and perhaps correctly ambiguous use of the term ‘hielan’ dance identified by Emmerson<sup>225</sup> appears in a pageant for James VI and his new wife Princess Ann of Denmark held in Edinburgh 1589. No details are given as to what it entailed, and the term seems only to apply to that event. Without more references we do not know if the term was used more widely in the sixteenth century. Emmerson sees a strong relationship between continental European dances, such as the Minuet and possibly also the Gavotte, becoming popular in Scotland up to the end of the eighteenth century. He identified that ‘this infiltration perhaps explains the cultured foot and leg movements which characterize what is called Highland dancing, distinguishing it in refinement and elaboration from other dances of the British jig or hornpipe tradition to which it belongs.’<sup>226</sup> Interestingly, Emmerson labels the jig and hornpipe ‘British.’ By doing so, was he excluding Irish influence while keeping English, Welsh, and Scottish influences on styles of jigs and hornpipes in mind only? Colonel Thornton refers to the percussive hornpipe he saw in Dalmally in 1786 as ‘Highland dancing.’<sup>227</sup> What he saw was not, however, a Highland Fling or a *Seann Triubhas*, but rather something of a different and perhaps an older order that was not labelled. Who the dancing master who danced it was is not known.

Only a few years after the 1745–1746 Jacobite rising, Scottish-themed theatrical song and dance interludes featured on the Bath stage as Ralph Bigland reported in a letter dated 3 March 1749 in London:

I have since I came here [London] been lately two or three times at the play and what invited me most was to see a new dance called the Scots Dance consisting of about 20 lads and lasses dress’d after the Highland fashion. The scene represents a very romantic, rocky, or mountainous country seemingly, at the most distant view you be-

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hold a glorious pair (which far surpass all the other actors) sitting among the rocks, while the rest are dancing below among groves of trees. Some also are representing with their wheels a spinning; all the while the music plays either Prince Charlie's minuet or the Auld Stewarts Back Again. At last descends from the mountains the glorious pair which to appearance is a prince and princess. Then all the actors retire on each side while the royal youth and his favourite dance so fine, in a word that the whole audience clap their hands for joy. Then in a moment the spinning wheels are thrown aside and every lad and lass join in the dance and jerk it away as quick as possible while the music briskly plays—Over the Water to Charlie, a bagpipe being in the band. In short it is so ravishing seemingly to the whole audience that the people to express their joy clap their hands in a most extraordinary manner indeed.<sup>228</sup>

Note that this play took place when the Disarming and Dress Act was still in force in Scotland, which stipulated that aspects of Highland dress and the playing of bagpipes were discouraged or forbidden. Seemingly, there was no such restriction for the London or Bath stages. The actors and dancers were most likely not Scottish, and one may query whether they would have researched actual Highland social gatherings, beyond what might have been reported in the London newspapers at the time. Even using the word 'Highland' in relation to dance, a connection to Scotland through that signifier, is proclaimed.

Edinburgh writer Henry Mackenzie (1745–1831) wrote, in *Anecdotes and Egotisms*, that Edinburgh dancing master Downie 'taught the strong active Highland Dances but with little grace' in about 1755.<sup>229</sup> As Mackenzie wrote this reflection many years after the fact, did he use a label contemporary with the early nineteenth century to describe Downie's dancing, or did he perhaps change the term 'high-dance' into 'Highland' dance in his later writing?

Dancing master d'Egville, who trained at the King's Theatre, London, advertised his speciality as 'Scotch Reels, Highland Flings and all Caledonian Steps' for his Edinburgh classes in the 1790s.<sup>230</sup> Boswell and Johnson 'had a Highland dance' in Raasay in 1773. Looking at the satirical illustrations of the two travellers dancing on top of 'Dun Caan,' it seems they danced a Reel rather than a solo dance.<sup>231</sup> Certainly, various writers, including Queen Victoria, in the first half of the nineteenth century refer to the dancing of the 'Highlanders' and Lowlanders they encounter as performing the 'Reel.'

There is a close relationship between the vernacular hornpipes referred to, such as Thornton's description, and the stage hornpipe of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It is with the stage production playbills we find the usage of labelling certain dances 'Highland' to make them appear exotic perhaps. Reading Emmerson's<sup>232</sup> research reveals that eighteenth-century playbills<sup>233</sup> in the London theatres, principally Drury Lane, Covent Garden and the Royal Opera House, advertised dance titles such as The Dance of the Bonny Highlander (1700), Highland Lilt (1702), The Highland (1703),

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The Scotch Highlander (1719), A Highland Dance (1722), and The Highland Reel (1768), among many other examples. Emmerson states that he cannot find any Scottish performers listed among those dancing, nor, presumably, choreographing these pieces for the stage plays they featured in. We are left with an assumption that these dances, featured alongside ‘Irish’ and other ethnic-sounding dances, were not based on material observed in the Highlands, or learnt from Highlanders, as no evidence showing this seems to exist.

Later, interestingly, the first detailed commentator on Scottish dance steps, Aberdeen dance master Francis Peacock (1805) does not describe any solo dances. He points out that his students from the western isles and the Highlands excel in the ‘Reel’ and that he feels some of them ‘worthy’ of ‘imitation.’<sup>234</sup> Peacock only describes a number of Reel steps in his book.

A survey of the research of the Fletts (1985, 1996) and Emmerson (1972), as well as other sources now searchable through online newspaper and book archives, yields no evidence of the term ‘Highland dance’ or versions thereof including ‘Highland’ as originating in the Highlands. This appellation seems to appear predominantly in urban Scottish Lowlands, East Aberdeenshire, and in English sources such as the examples above. The name Highland mainly comes from stage play and dancing usage. There seems to be no indication that the term originates in the Highlands or has a Gaelic equivalent. On the contrary, historical usage suggests that the term was applied to dances by Lowlander and English observers, commentators, and authors of theatrical playbills. Use of the modifier Highland eventually migrates north and west over time, becoming popular in Scotland itself in the 1840s–1850s. Another term placed on a style by observers rather than practitioners would be the label ‘Hebridean,’ coined from outside the Hebrides, possibly by Edinburgh dancing master D.G. MacLennan in 1926, and certainly first used in writing in the *Oban Times* reports of the Askernish Highland Games, South Uist, in that year. As has been discussed elsewhere by Melin (2015), there is no word for Highland dance in Gaelic and the usage among Gaels was to ‘dance’ (*damhsa*) or to ‘reel’ (*ruidhle*). A Highland Gaelic origin of the term is unlikely.

With this overview in mind I suggest that the term ‘Highland dance’ came into existence with the popularity of the ‘Highland Reel’ in the eighteenth century. The Highland Reel became the fashion at many assemblies throughout Lowland and urban Scotland, England, and in Europe. London born organist, editor and composer John T. Surene (1814–1878) commented that in 1852 the Reel and Strathspey Reel were very popular ‘all over Britain.’<sup>235</sup> Emmerson’s short summary about this scenario (1972) gives us a clue about this although he does not elaborate towards this possible conclusion:

The passion for dancing which developed in the Scottish capital during the eighteenth century brought the Highland Reel (or Scotch Reel) very dramatically to the attention of the ever-increasing flow of foreign visitors who came to savour the heady

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vigour of the northern intellect. We have seen the reactions of Topham; but while he was letterwriting, other Englishmen were introducing the Highland Reel to the assemblies of London itself, to Almack's and to Bath, so that by the turn of the century many dancing masters in the English capital were advertising their qualifications for coping with the vogue. Peacock tells of two London dancing masters travelling to Edinburgh by coach to take lessons in the Highland Reel from the most 'fashionable' master in the city (probably Strange) who was so busy with the preparations for a ball that he was obliged to refer them to Peacock's assistant who happened to be in town, and with whom they pursued a course of instruction of three lessons a day during their sojourn. Peacock assumed from the fact that these gentlemen possessed their own coach that they were teachers of means and consequence. [...] Some few years later, Thomas Wilson, whose works on English country dancing are a mine of information, wrote in the *Complete System of English Country Dancing*: 'No species of Dancing has ever been so universally danced, nor has ever become so great a favourite, either in this Country or any other, as Reels; not even Country Dancing, most persons, whether in possession of knowledge of Country Dancing, or not, are able to dance Reels, and particularly the Scotch' (p. 139). In another place in the same work, he mentions that the Scotch Reels 'have been introduced into most of the foreign Courts of Europe, and are universally practised, in all our extensive colonies...' and that 'assemblies are very frequently held for the purpose of dancing them only' (p. 135). [...] The aristocratic Captain Gronow tells us that in 1814 the dances of Almack's were Scotch Reels and the 'old English country dance,' and that the orchestra was from Edinburgh.<sup>236</sup>

The widespread popularity of the Highland or Scotch Reel perhaps helps explain why there is no story lore attached to the dance, and why the Gaelic term 'reeling' becomes equated with the continental term 'dancing' as time passes, and how more dances come to fall under this label. Thus, the Reel can be seen as a plausible explanation for the origin of the term 'Highland dance,' which became associated with the solo dances that began to be featured at piping competitions from the mid-nineteenth century.

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## 10 Final reflections on the solo dance lore

There are numerous stories linked to specific solo dances in the Scottish dance traditions. Some of them have lived on until the present, mainly used by some Highland dance teachers to help create meaning for a learner or an audience of a dance performance. While there may be limited or no factual truth to most of these stories, they seem to have been created with a ‘meaning-making’ function in mind by dancing masters, teachers, and commentators on Scottish dance culture. It seems to have been important that a named dance should be performed with certain characteristics to enhance performance aesthetics. However, as has been indicated, these dances have undergone considerable changes in performance aesthetics, technique, and movement vocabulary over time.

Furthermore, in many instances, the dances’ associated music has changed as well. Both tempo and time signature changes have been implemented and suggested tunes have been changed for *Seann Triubhas*, Flora MacDonald’s Fancy, The Scottish Lilt, and The Village Maid, which further contributed to significant changes in performance characteristics. One could, in some cases, argue that completely new dances have evolved after many years from various changes having been applied. In the process of these stories being propagated to wider audiences, any earlier ritual or other ‘meaning-making’ connections, particularly earlier manifestations of dances such as the *Seann Triubhas* and the Sword Dance, seem to have been lost from cultural memory. We might think of any earlier manifestations of these dances as being separate ones, with no or very little connection to the current ones. In some sense, the meaning-making emphasises a title of the dance rather than choreographic movements or music used.

Do these stories have meaningful functions today? Some voices among respondents to the 2014 online questionnaire had the following things to say:

- ‘[t]he stories, whether fact or fiction, provide a basis for teaching and learning something that is so intrinsically historical.<sup>237</sup> Some students find it easier to take on the character they are representing,’
- ‘[t]hey seem to encourage dancers to take the dances seriously;’
- ‘I do believe having stories helps dancers retain the steps,’ or
- ‘I think the wee stories give a “feel” for the dance.’

On the other hand, we find comments such as ‘I use them more for displays and engagements than in class, the dancers don’t appear to pay much attention to the stories

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(unfortunately);’ and ‘Everybody loves a good story and audiences enjoy hearing the history behind the dance (true or not).’ Maybe the following comment sums up why in a way the stories were created in the first place and why they keep being repeated:

I think that using the stories in performance are helpful to the dancers to remind them of the ‘character’ they are portraying and the history they are sharing. It also is nice for the audience to have some background. Because Highland is such an old form of dance, I find that audiences like to know where it came from – it’s not like a ballet or tap choreography that you do for one year or whatever and then it’s put away. These dances have evolved and have history. Plus, they help share the story of Scotland and the Scottish people. I find that audiences like to hear that.

The nationalistic and romanticised undertones are still present, as is the mysticism of an ancient, almost forgotten past, of which glimpses can be imagined through the performance of the dances and the telling of their related stories. A number of themes emerge in the analysis of the stories.

- *Skill*, in dancing, comes to light in the ability to stay on the spot in the Highland Fling and by not touching the swords in the sword dance.
- Notions of *superstition* appear in the omens associated with touching the swords or not, or by dancing clockwise or counter-clockwise round them.
- Elements of linked *ritual* may be seen in the sword dance done in preparation for battle or as a celebration of victory, and also in the sword salute. The Sword dance is mentioned as beginning the Babbity Bowster/*Ruidhle nam Pòg* in some areas. The dancing is not the ritual itself but forms part of one, as indicated by mentions of the old *Seann Triubhas* being part of the eighteenth-century St. Michael’s Day balls in South Uist together with other dramatic dances now lost. Also, perhaps, ritual is underlying the recruiting notions of Barracks Johnnie being part of the process of supposedly selling the Regiment to able bodied young men?
- *Defiance* against the London government-enforced laws discouraging the wearing of tartan and the kilt appear in *Seann Triubhas*.
- *Celebration and remembrance of the heroes* of the 1745 Jacobite Rising come into play in Flora MacDonald’s Fancy, Over the Water to Charlie, Tulloch Gorm, and the Hebridean version of Scotch Measure. The Jacobite connotations are also present in the association with wearing the blue bonnets and to some extent in the mention of the Scottish border raids into England by the ‘Blue Bonnets’ (The Scots).
- *Characteristic stereotypes*, in celebratory and derogative fashion appear in the Sailors’ Hornpipe and Irish Jig. Maybe an element of ‘character’ dance is discernable in the stories associated with Dusty Miller too.
- Certain *locations*, for example Tulloch, Aberdeen, Hebrides etc., can be found in a

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number of stories.

- *Historical figures*, such as Malcolm Canmore, the Earl of Erroll, Flora MacDonald, Bonnie Prince Charlie, and Mary Queen of Scots are connected to dances in some storylines.
- Hints of *stereotypical gender roles* are apparent when a young woman tries to attract a man as in the Village Maid, when Flora MacDonald dances for Bonnie Prince Charlie, and in the Barracks Johnnie story that the men who, if they join the Regiment, get a kiss from the Duchess.

Highland dance lore does not feature warrior women, despite the presence of martial women characters throughout Gaelic stories, such as the mythical Queen *Scathach*, a master of combat on the Isle of Skye, who trained *Cú Chullain* in the Ulster Cycle in Irish mythology. Instead, nineteenth-century ideals regarding women's place in society are reflected in the dance narratives promulgated today. It seems poetic justice that since that time, a great shift has occurred in Highland dancing from predominantly male to predominantly female dancers, with women excelling in technique, strength, and performance on contemporary competitive platforms.

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### *Illustration notes*

Thank you to Ewen McCann for permission to publish the photo of William Sutherland ([www.highlanddancinghistory.org](http://www.highlanddancinghistory.org)). David Greenwell, Canada, for the use of a photograph of Change of Step. Shiobhan Smith, Dunedin, New Zealand, for the use of various photographs of Sword dance, Jig and Hornpipe dancers. All other photos are by Mats Melin or in the public domain as far as is known. If you know of a copyright issue in this work, please contact Lorg-press.

Note that the dancers featured in the photographs included are in no way directly connected with the stories discussed or the commentary on the same. Their fine performances stand alone.



A modern choreographed Reel performed by Change of Step with members of Beòlach in the background at Celtic Colours International Festival, Cape Breton Island, Canada, October 2016. Photo © Mats Melin.

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## Endnotes

1. Glassie, 2003: 176.
2. See Flett, 1972, 1973, 1985.
3. Emmerson, 1981: vii.
4. *Twosome* is the Scots word for a twosome or a duet dance in this case.
5. Emmerson, 1981: vii.
6. Mailer, Norman. (1973). *Marilyn: A Biography*. Grosset & Dunlap.
7. Pruden, Wesley. (2007). *Washington Times*, 23 January. *Ah, there's joy in Mudville's precincts*.
8. Flett, 1956: 84–89.
9. Ritualization is when meaning or performance are more important than functionality.
10. Grimes, 2010 and 2013.
11. Flett, 1993, 1996: 151.
12. Byron, 1898: 347–348.
13. Robert Hogg Calder: <http://www.tobaran-dualchais.co.uk/gd/fullrecord/63416/1> [accessed 9 January 2018].
14. Porter, 1998: 205.
15. Buckland, 2006: 7.
16. Divine, 2011.
17. Porter, 1998: 2.
18. Porter, 2001: 423.
19. As far as I am concerned. 'Folk' culture can exist and thrive in an urban context, so I do not necessarily agree with Porter's, perhaps old-fashioned dichotomisation of urban vs. rural statement.
20. *Ibid.*
21. Jarvie, 1991: 56–57.
22. Forsyth, 2001: 184–185.
23. Fenyó, 1996.
24. See for example Lowe, 1976; Mill, c. 1985.
25. See for example Webster, 1973, 2011; Donaldson, 1986; Brander, 1992.
26. See for example McIntyre-North, 1881.
27. McGuire, 1994: 9.
28. Newton, 2013.
29. Divine, 2011: 118.
30. Buckland, 2011: 14. Buckland's chapter 'Fashioning Dance Histories' (pp. 13–21) should be consulted by the interested in full.
31. *Ibid.*
32. *Ibid.*, 2011: 13–14.
33. Grant, (1898) 1950: 31–34.
34. Sibbald, 1926: 188.
35. Crummock (Ayrshire dialect)—a stick with crooked head, a shepherd's crook.
36. Chambers, 1842: 560.
37. See J. F Wallace, c. 1881; MacKenzie, 1910; Taylor, 1929.
38. Anderson, 1897; D.G. MacLennan, 1952 describing steps from before 1885.
39. Emmerson, 1972: 181–182.
40. *Caledonian Mercury*, 11 April 1793, and 12 July 1794.
41. See: [http://tunearch.org/wiki/Annotation:Marquis\\_of\\_Huntly%27s\\_Highland\\_Fling\\_\(1\)\\_The](http://tunearch.org/wiki/Annotation:Marquis_of_Huntly%27s_Highland_Fling_(1)_The). [accessed 20 December 2016].
42. Logan, vol. 2 (1876) 1976: 315.
43. See <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/scottskinner/display.php?ID=JSS0075> and <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/scottskinner/display.php?ID=-JSS0112> [accessed 20 December 2016].
44. *Arbroath Herald and Advertiser* for the Montrose Burghs, 5 January 1899.
45. *Aberdeen Journal*, 22 April 1863.
46. *Aberdeen Journal*, 29 August 1855.
47. *Dundee Advertiser*, 13 October 1863.
48. See <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/scottskinner/display.php?ID=JSS0927> [accessed 20 December 2016].

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49. Flett, 1985: 98.
50. Scott, 2005: 77.
51. Melin, 2006.
52. *Arbroath Herald*, 18 December 1976.
53. Lowe, 1976.
54. Webster, 2011: 144.
55. Thurston, 1954: 72.
56. Forsyth 2001: 163.
57. *Ibid.*, 2001: 355.
58. Schoonover, 2014.
59. Anderson, 1897.
60. Melin, 2006.
61. <http://movingimage.nls.uk/film/8199> [accessed 20 December 2016].
62. Thurston, 1954 and Scott, 2005.
63. Melin, 2006.
64. MacLennan, 1950: 10.
65. Logan, vol. 2 (1876 edition) 1976: 314.
66. Calder, 1928, Semple, 1874.
67. Calder, 1928: 10.
68. Cameron, 1952: 31.
69. The names given on page 31 are: Shean-Trews, Seann-Triubhas, Sean-trews, Sean-trius, Shean-treuse, and Chan-treuse.
70. Brander 1992: 27.
71. See Fletts 1956.
72. Emmerson, 1972: 157.
73. Carmichael, 1899: 209.
74. Rhodes, 1985: 272.
75. MacLennan, 1950: 22.
76. Milligan and MacLennan, 1950: 10–11.
77. Donaldson, 1986: 159.
78. Jack McConachie (1906–1966) was born in Carron in Speyside. Moved to Glasgow in his 20s and was tutored by Robert Cuthbertson. At the age of 30 he moved to London. Taught Highland, Hebridean, Scottish Country and Old-Tyme dancing fulltime from 1949 (<http://colinrobertson.net/McConachie.html> [accessed 5 February 2018]). He published a Letter Service Series of Highland dances and movements at the time SOBHD was being set up and was codifying and standardizing Highland dancing. Some of his typed manuscripts were published in the 1970s.
79. *Scots Magazine*, Saturday 1 September 1798. Vol. 60: 599 <http://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000545/17980901/009/0023> [accessed 26 September 2014].
80. Aldrich et al., 2000.
81. Flett, 1996: 35.
82. *Ibid.*
83. *Ibid.*, 1996: 35–36.
84. Sometimes spelt *Seann Triubhas Uillichan* or *Uilleachain*, which probably has led to the misspelt version of Seann Triubhas *Willichan*, still given as the name of a Scottish Country Dance in RSCDS Book 27. It appears in Thomas Wilson's *Companion to the Ball-Room* London, 1820 as Shon Truish Willichan [[http://petrucci.mus.auth.gr/imglnks/usimg/6/6c/IMSLP239785-PMLP388206-wilson\\_companion\\_to\\_ballroom.pdf](http://petrucci.mus.auth.gr/imglnks/usimg/6/6c/IMSLP239785-PMLP388206-wilson_companion_to_ballroom.pdf)]. Note that ‘w’ is not part of the Gaelic alphabet.
85. Flett, 1996: 36.
86. Gin Ye Kiss My Wife, I'll Tell the Minister. Source: <http://thesession.org/tunes/11362/11362?print=true> [accessed 26 September 2014].
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87. Telfer Dunbar, 1977: 32.
88. Scarlett, 1974: 42.
89. Illustration—A Highland Wedding by
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David Allan 1780. In public domain. Original in the National Galleries of Scotland. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/User:PKM> - <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:Allan-highlandwedding1780.jpg>

- 90. Telfer Dunbar, 1977: 2–3.
- 91. Johnston and Robertson, 1872: 35.
- 92. Cheape, 1993: 41.
- 93. *Ibid.*, 1993: 41–2.

A Bhriogais Uallach



- 94. *A Bhriogais Uallach*. Source: <http://thesession.org/tunes/9866/20127?print=true> [accessed 26 September 2014].
- 95. Full text of *A' Bhriogais Uallach* can be found at <http://thesession.org/tunes/9866> [accessed 26 September 2014]. Also, a good recording of the song with the Battlefield Band is on YouTube [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sj5Q\\_I6YAFU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sj5Q_I6YAFU)
- 96. Emmerson, 1972: 247.
- 97. McConachie, c. 1952.
- 98. Anonymous questionnaire, 2014.
- 99. MacLennan, 1950: 23.
- 100. MacLennan, 1950: 23; 1952: 27.
- 101. MacLennan, 1952: 27.
- 102. Sometimes now also known as Seann Triubhas among other names. See <http://thesession.org/tunes/2051> [accessed 26 September 2014].
- 103. *Whistle Ower The Lave O't*—Strathspey (<https://thesession.org/tunes/2051>) [accessed 5 March 2017].
- 104. O'Keefe and O'Brien, 1944[1912]: 112.
- 105. Alexander MacDonald's article 'Studies in Gaelic Music' (*Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness*, 27: 1908–11) tells us: 'It has been suggested by students of

the development of the dance that the Highland Sword Dance is but part of a larger ceremonial in which a number of persons shared, and that probably it is a variant of what was known at one time as the Yorkshire Sword Dance, which worked its way northwards ... Strengthening this theory is the fact that it is danced to the playing of the bagpipes, which was long the favourite provider of music to the English rustic dancer. ... in Gaelic language, through its port-a-beul words, has had a strong influence in moulding the specially Scottish characteristics of dance music—particularly the much written about 'snap ...' (p. 78).

- 106. Papa Stour Sword Dance: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_8PKIjFER78](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_8PKIjFER78) [accessed 24 July 2017].
  - 107. Corrsin, 1997: 237–247.
  - 108. McLan, 1848: 60–61.
  - 109. MacLennan, 1950: 32.
  - 110. Whyte. 1896: 49.
  - 111. See references to hilt-and-point sword dances and the Sword Dance of Papa Stour in Emmerson, 1972.
  - 112. Castle of Kindrochit is said to have been the hunting seat of King Kenneth II (971–995), whom it is also said started up the first and original Braemar Gathering, giving his name to *Craig Choinnich*. Malcolm Canmore, the story continues, built the first Castle of Kindrochit, though if he did it was probably of earthwork and timber. Note that in oral tradition also Malcolm Canmore is said to have fostered the 'Braemar Gathering.'
  - 113. Cuchullain is the great hero in the Ulster Cycles of Irish Mythology.
  - 114. Corrsin, 1997: 183–236.
  - 115. One of several online videos of Bacca Pipes Jig: <http://dancevideos.childgrove.org/morris/morris-cotswold/81-bacca-pipes> [accessed 8 June 2018].
  - 116. Grimble, 1980: 96 and Ritchie, 1954.
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117. Kroha, 1977: 445. This copper coin is of a kind called Turner, from the French *tournois*. The name 'bodle' is thought to be derived from the name 'Bothwell,' and could have to do with the marriage between the Earl of Bothwell and Mary Queen of Scots, the latter being the mother of James VI, though this is not verified. The coin was known as 'bonn-a-sia' or 'bonn-a-sè' in Gaelic, lit. meaning 'coin of six,' i.e., six *peighinn* or Scots pence.
118. Whyte, 1896: 49.
119. MacLagan. 1901: 105–108.
120. Donaldson, 1986: 157.
121. Tacitus, 1970.
122. Scott, 2005: 109.
123. *Ibid.*, 2005: 114
124. Whitta, 1982: 163.
125. Clement, 1994: 1.
126. Newton, 2012: 5.
127. [SAI953/165/8 and 177/1] Scott, 2005: 110.
128. Donaldson, 1986: 157.
129. Scott, 2005: 121.
130. Scandinavian, Celtic, and Japanese traditions among others have many examples of swords named in honour of the bearer or after a famous battle. The most famous sword named in Celtic/Arthurian legends is 'Excalibur.' J.R.R. Tolkien adapts this tradition in his books where many Elvish swords are named, for example.
131. MacLan, 1848.
132. Douglas, 1994: 259.
133. Swedish dance researcher Ernst Klein (1887-1937) has put forward this connection between the skills dance of sticks known as *Skinnkompass* and the dance referred to as *Les Cinq Pas* in Arbeau, 1588. Wallin, Börje. (1982). *Gamla Dansar i Skåne. Tävlingsdanser och Skicklighetsdanser*. Helsingborg: 21.
134. Douglas, 1994.
135. Observing ballet choreographies over time
- it becomes clear that rapid turns become more popular as the century progresses. The Hop brush beat beat movement only appears similar to its present form during the latter half on the nineteenth century.
136. Cramb, 1953: 5. Italics my emphasis.
137. Information on Flora MacDonald, singer and dancer: <https://footlightnotes.wordpress.com/tag/serio-comic/> [accessed 31 May 2018].
138. *Dunfermline Saturday Press*, 23 January 1864. She seems still to be performing in 1913!
139. Maloney, 2003:155.
140. According to the late Highland dancer and writer Charlie Mill (no date for the article), the Aboyne costume was initially developed and designed, by C.V.S. Jackson and at one time Lord Lyon, Sir Thomas Innes of Learney in 1949.
141. Another article, in *Milngavie and Bearsden Herald* (21 August 1954), also state that women dancers would not be allowed to compete in the sword dance at the Aboyne Games on the 8 September that year. 'This is one of two new rules drawn up by the Aboyne Games Committee, who for several years have been carrying out a campaign to make present-day Highland dancing more historically accurate. The Committee explained that, while they admitted that women executed the steps with skill and grace, the fact that the sword dance was originally a war dance made it rather incongruous. Instead, women will be asked to dance "Flora MacDonald's Fancy," [...] The second change is that the wearing of the Aboyne dress, which was introduced two years ago after a great deal of research, will be compulsory for all women dancers, with the exception of girls under 11. The Aboyne dress, which is as historically accurate as present-day conditions permit, comprises a light-weight tartan skirt worn over a white petticoat with plaid of the same tartan material, and a tight-fitting
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- sleeveless velvet corsage above a white blouse. When the dress was first introduced, it came for a great deal of criticism, but it has gradually been gaining favour.’
142. Black, 15 July 1991.
143. Emmerson, 1972: 128.
144. Gray, 1990.
145. ‘*Till a Rithisd’* in modern Gaelic spelling would be ‘*Till a-Rithist*.’
146. Katie-Ann Mackinnon, in conversation, Isle of Barra, 1990.
147. Rea, 1997: 118–119
148. MacNeil, 1990.
149. Emmerson, 1981: 42–43.
150. Emmerson, 1988: 118.
151. See Emmerson, 1988: 119 for melody examples.
152. Melin and Schoonover, 2018.
153. Hood, 1980: 89.
154. Sim School of Dance. <https://www.sim-dancers.ca/about2-c85z> [accessed 10 May 2018].
155. Robertson, 1982: 4–5.
156. MacLachlan, 1991.
157. Flett, 1985.
158. John MacLeod, Iochdar, South Uist, 5 April 1953 interviewed by T.M. Flett.
159. *Carraig Fhearghais* is the Scottish Gaelic for Carrickfergus, a town situated north of Belfast in Northern Ireland. Could there be an Irish connection here? *Màili a Chrandonn* is a mystery. *Màili* is a girls’ name, ‘*a chrandonn*’ may ‘of the brown mast or plough.’ A song version was recorded by the island doctor, Dr MacLean, in the 1950s according to the Fletts. In 2017 I got a copy of the song recording from Cailean MacLean, Dr MacLean’s son, with the original notes. It is here called *Si Maili si Maili* and was sung by John MacInnes: ‘This song was composed to the tune Carrickfergus. When South Glendale in South Uist was settled with crofters [1850s] it was decided to build a school midway between the two to serve North and South Glendale. The school was so isolated that John Campbell composed a skit telling how the postman was getting lost getting there.’
160. Dr MacLean, Daliburgh, South Uist, and Mrs Monk, Creagorry, Benbecula, interviewed in April 1955 by Frank Rhodes.
161. Emmerson, ‘Scotland through her Country Dances,’ 1967: 88–89.
162. Flett, in ‘*Some Early Highland Dancing Competitions*’ Aberdeen (1956), states that the letter was sent in 1835 from a dancer named Allan Cameron Mackay of Strontian to the Edinburgh Gaelic Society, where he suggested that a number of ‘old Highland hornpipes’ be danced at the Edinburgh Competition. The dances he mentions were Gillie Callum, Highland Laddie, Highland Fling, and Over the Hills and Far Away.
163. RSCDS, 2010 and Melin, 2018.
164. MacLennan, 1950, and 1952.
165. <http://www.hebrideanconnections.com/people/68177> [accessed 4 March 2017].
166. Translation by Alasdair MacMhàoinn, Rogart, Sutherland, 2017. Slightly ambiguous meaning of *...dh’an charaid*.
167. Emmerson, 1972: 174; 197; 207.
168. MacLennan, 1950: 30.
169. MacLennan, 1950.
170. *Dundee Courier*, 20 December 1919: 3.
171. Emmerson, 1972: 127–128.
172. MacLennan, 1950: 27.
173. Anonymous questionnaire, 2014.
174. Wilson, 1816: 93.
175. MacFadyen et al. 2009.
176. *Aberdeen Evening Express*, Tuesday 19 July 1955. The ‘new’ Highland dances were only new in the sense that they were recently revived by Bobby Watson according to the article. [accessed February 27, 2016, The British Newspaper Archive].
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177. *Aberdeen Evening Express*, 1953.
178. Melin, 2006.
179. Cramb, 1952: 24.
180. *Feeling market or fair*—according to the *Concise Scots Dictionary* (1987) it was held at *Whitsunday* and *Martinmas* where farmers engaged servants for the coming term.
181. Webster, 2011: 145–146.
182. Melin, 2006.
183. Emmerson, 1972: 127.
184. *Ibid.*, 1972: 127–128.
185. *Ibid.*, 1972: 127.
186. *Ibid.*, 1972: 128.
187. *Ibid.*
188. <http://johndurang.yorkheritage.org/dancing-ballets/> [accessed 5 February 2016].
189. Robinson, 2009: 301–2.
190. Brown et al 2012.
191. Reid, 1935. Notebook extract.
192. MacFadyen, 2009.
193. *Caledonian Mercury*, 21 March 1865: 2.
194. *Caledonian Mercury*, 3 May 1828: 1.
195. *Morning Chronicle*, London, 25 September 1802: 1.
196. *Braemar Book*, 1976.
197. Newton, 2012: 6.
198. Arbeau, 1967 edition: 155–157, 258.
199. See for example the 2003 BBC report “Many Scots “still face sectarian abuse”” [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/scotland/2935922.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/scotland/2935922.stm) [accessed 21 January 2015].
200. Melin, 2006.
201. Example of ‘Ould Irish Jig’ post-card—<https://www.pinterest.ca/pin/479703797778946804/> [accessed 9 January 2018]. Irish Jig from National Dances, 1889 is credited to The Jefferson R. Burdick Collection, Gift of Jefferson R. Burdick and issued by Kinney Brothers. In public domain. [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Irish\\_Jig\\_from\\_National\\_Dances\\_\(N225\\_Type\\_2\)\\_issued\\_by\\_Kinney\\_Bros.\\_MET\\_DPB874573.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Irish_Jig_from_National_Dances_(N225_Type_2)_issued_by_Kinney_Bros._MET_DPB874573.jpg) [accessed 9 January 2018].
202. MacLennan, 1950: 25.
203. O’Donnell, 1998: 35, 48.
204. SOBHD, 1976: preface.
205. New Zealand Academy of Highland and National Dancing, Inc. (1989).
206. Emmerson ,1970: 22; Pforsich, 2003; Oxford Reference Online. See Hornpipe reference: [http://artisanrenovation.com/Baroque\\_Dance\\_For\\_Musicians/Hornpipe\\_files/Hornpipe%20-%20Oxford%20Reference%20Online.pdf](http://artisanrenovation.com/Baroque_Dance_For_Musicians/Hornpipe_files/Hornpipe%20-%20Oxford%20Reference%20Online.pdf) [accessed 2 August 2017].
207. Emmerson, 1970: 17 and 22.
208. Bratton, 1990: 66.
209. *Ibid.*, 1990: 68.
210. *Ibid.*, 1990: 70–71.
211. As an aside, it is notable that some dancing masters placed the solo dances they published under the label *Scotch Reels* in their Ballroom Guides.
212. Flett, 1973: 92.
213. Flett, 1985: 134.
214. In Joseph Lowe’s *Collection of Reels, Strathspeys and Jigs, Edinburgh*, c. 1844, the ‘Reel of Tulloch’ is called the Queen’s Favourite or Reel O’Thulichan. It was said to have delighted her Majesty, Queen Victoria at a Ball given by the Marquis of Breadalbane, at Taymouth Castle, in 1842. It claims that ‘the original figure of the Reel o’ Thulichan was danced in the Royal presence, with admirable characteristic spirit...’
215. Flett, 1985: 134.
216. Calder ,1928.
217. Versions of this story can, for example, be found in John Grant, *Legends of the Braes o’ Mar*, Aberdeen, 1861; D. Webster, *Scottish Highland Games*, Edinburgh,
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- 1973; and H. Thurston; *Scotland's Dances*, London, 1954 (1984).
218. The Gaelic phrases mean 'From the back of the head' and 'From the mouth of the head.' *Bho Thulaichean gu Bealaichean* are the first words of the *port a beul* to the tune.
219. MacDonald, 1901: 6–7.
220. Forsyth, 1900: 278–280.
221. A similar story occurs in the diary of James Neill, dancing master in Forfar from 1860–1920. It is reprinted in the RSCDS Bulletin, Autumn 1951. (Flett, *Scottish Literature Collection* Vol. 1).
222. According to MacDiarmid (1904–7) the words to the *port a beul* describing the fight at Killin as composed by Black John goes: *Bu Ghriogarach do rìreamh / A Ruadh Sruth ann Gleann liomhunn / A rinn an ceol tha rìomhach; / Ris canar leinn na Tulaichan // 'O Thulaichean gu Bealaichean / 'S o' Bhealaichean gu Tulaichean / 'S mur faigh leann's na Tulaichean / Gu'n òl sinn uisge Bhealaichean.*
223. The Transactions of Gaelic Society of Inverness, Volume LIX: 118–128.
224. Scottish Society of London Fete, Reel of Tulloch, *Illustrated London News*, 1849 (<https://www.scottishdanceinart.com/painting--drawing>) [accessed 12 December 2017].
225. Emmerson, 1972: 58.
226. *Ibid.*, 1972: 151.
227. Thornton, 1804: 238.
228. Bishop Forbes, *Lyon in Mourning*, vol. 2, p. 254. Letter from Ralph Bigland to Alexander Macmorland, Leith, March 3, 1749.
229. Mackenzie, 1927: 74.
230. Emmerson, 1972: 155.
231. The Dance of Dun-Can, Thomas Rowlandson. *Picturesque Beauties of Boswell*, Part the Second, 1786.
232. Emmerson, 1972: 126–128.
233. Searching [www.ambaile.co.uk](http://www.ambaile.co.uk) for dancing and theatre playbills will result in a series on nineteenth century playbills for Scotland featuring dancing.
234. Peacock, 1805: 86.
235. Surenne, 1852: iii.
236. Emmerson, 1972: 154.
237. If something can be regarded as 'intrinsically historical,' it would depend on a person's relationship and understanding of a specific historical timeline, I would argue.
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## The Author

Swedish born traditional dancer, choreographer, ethnochoreologist, and researcher **Mats Melin** has worked professionally with dance in Scotland since 1995 and in Ireland since 2005. He has been engaged in freelance work nationally and internationally as well as having been Traditional Dancer in Residence for four Scottish Local Authorities: Shetland, Sutherland (Highlands and Islands), Angus, and Perthshire. He further worked and researched in Orkney, the Hebrides and Aberdeenshire primarily. He has extensively also researched and analysed Cape Breton dance traditions. Mats co-started the dynamic Scottish performance group 'Dannsa' in 1999. He is a former member of the Scottish Arts Council's Dance Committee, Scottish Traditions of Dance Trust, Dance Research Forum Ireland, and Scottish Government Working Group on Traditional Arts, and is currently an office bearer for Traditional Dance Forum of Scotland.

He teaches Cape Breton step dancing, Hebridean solo dancing, and various genres of Scottish, Cape Breton and Irish social and figure dancing.

Mats is a Lecturer in Dance at the Irish World Academy of Music and Dance, University of Limerick, Ireland. He authored *One with the Music: Cape Breton step dancing tradition and transmission* published by Cape Breton University Press in 2015.

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## ***A Story to Every Dance***

***The role of lore in enhancing the Scottish solo dance tradition***

***by Mats Melin***

*The Scottish solo dance tradition is peppered with stories attached to specific dances. These range in content from the eleventh-century Scottish King Malcolm Canmore dancing a sword dance, using a dance to recruit soldiers for regiments, and imitating the strength and agility of curvetting stags, to connections with the 1745–1746 Jacobite Rising and its aftermath, the Dress Act, as well as the Jacobite heroine Flora MacDonald.*

*Most of these stories suggest an origin for a dance anchored in a distant past, but they may also form some level of meaning-making. It could be that they were created to help dancers perform certain dances with particular images in mind.*

*How much of this lore is based on any factual content? Also, is it now, or even, was it ever, necessary for dancers to have a certain image, or story, in mind to help them perform these dances in character?*

*By outlining, and deliberating on, historical references on some of the best-known Scottish solo dances, this overview places these background stories against a contextual and historical framework. This analysis aims to investigate what was and is currently the meaning-making behind these stories. In the process, some facts, music and name histories, and timelines are connected to these dances.*

***A Lorg Press Publication***

