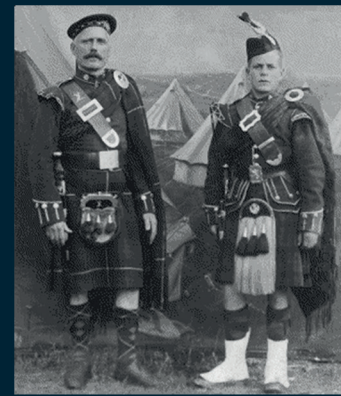


Hebridean Step Dancing

—the legacy of nineteenth-century dancing master Ewen MacLachlan—



*Tales, histories, and
descriptions of ten solo
dances from South Uist
& Barra*



Mats Melin

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Melin, Mats, author

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Sabra MacGillivray’s website for accessing the video clips of the dances: <http://www.sabramacgillivray.com/store/> Additional fees for accessing these videos may apply as this is done as an independent project.

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Conducting research on one single individual from the mid-nineteenth century requires some sleuthing, and finding any concrete written facts about the storyteller, catechist, and dancing master Ewen MacLachlan has proven to be just that. Much of what is known is based on hearsay and accounts that have morphed over time, recorded in local folklore by the Fletts, Rhodes, and later, myself. The following people have been instrumental in helping me finding the material representing the legacy of the Hebridean solo dance tradition.

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Finally, as always, research is fraught with the possibility to misunderstand, interpret scenarios wrong, and get timelines and people involved slightly off centre. For this I apologise if I have unintentionally made any mistakes or left anyone out of these pages.



Lorg Press

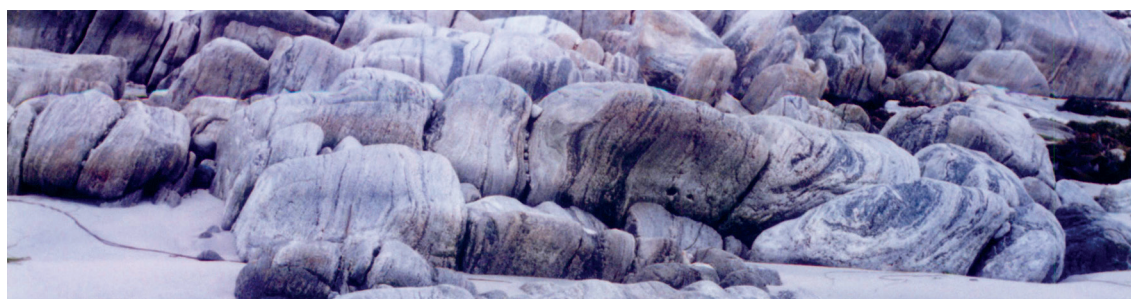
In 2017, I established *Lorg Press*. The word *Lorg* is Scottish Gaelic for ‘footprint’ and ‘to seek.’ I was compelled by the idea that archived dance descriptions need to be published, and dances brought back to life, so the current generation of dancers can access them, and enjoy the act of dancing them. 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 2016 book. In it, he compares the act of ‘dancing’ to ‘dances,’ examines archival methods, and wrestles with the concepts of tradition and intangible cultural heritage being alive and used. These issues are also intertwined in the core intentions of *Lorg*.

When an iteration 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 point in time, a new, other, edition 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. Each time a dance is performed it is rendered anew. So, something written in 1935 was accurate when it was noted down and according to those dancing it, teachers and students alike, at that time; an interpretation of the same material in 2016 can be correct in its own right at that date. At each point in time, a new, correct, interpretation of a dance by a dancer can be made. This notion is perhaps at odds with some peoples’ view that there is a mystical, ‘correct,’ way of performing a given dance that is somehow frozen across the ages. As I agree with Mats Nilsson, I do not think that is case, or even possible. The ephemeral act of ‘dancing’ is unique at each moment it occurs and will be different every time. Tradition, in my view, and again agreeing with Nilsson and Henry Glassie, is a way of looking forward, rather than to the past. Glassie said: “tradition is the creation 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”¹. The dance material in this volume should be viewed in the context of being a vernacular form.

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!



Tha mise deiseil airson rud sam bith a ghabhas dèanamh airson an toirt beò 's an cumail beò.

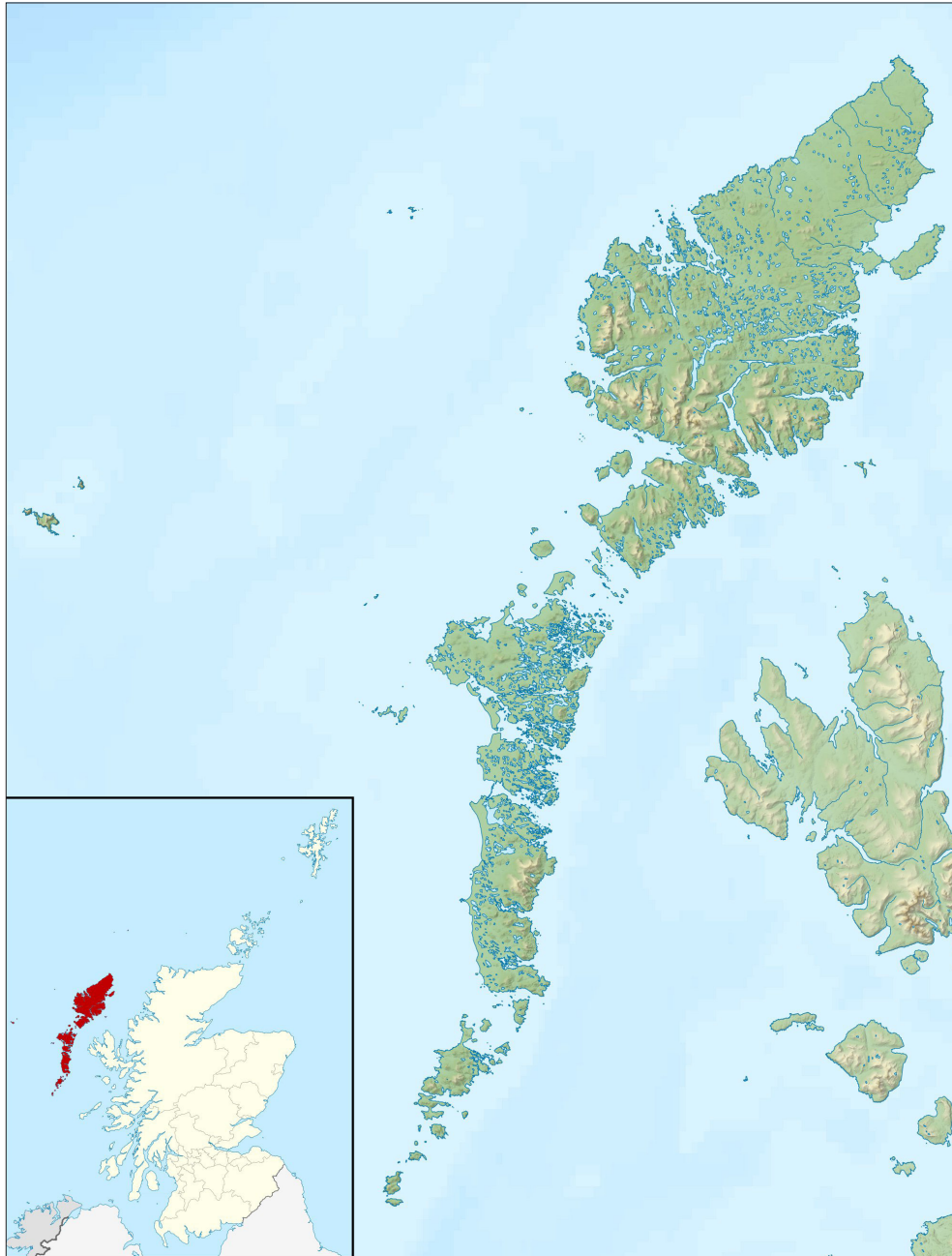
Oh, I am ready for anything that can be done to bring them [the dances] to life and keep them alive.

Fearchar MacNeil, 1982.

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The Outer Hebrides



South Uist and the Isle of Barra are part of the Scottish Western Isles / *Na h-Eileanan Siar* or *Innse Gall* / Islands of the Strangers, to give another Scottish Gaelic name for the islands, also known as the Outer Hebrides. South Uist and Barra are the two southernmost islands of the chain.

[Map source: Creative Commons https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Outer_Hebrides_UK_relief_location_map.jpg]

Introduction

In the summer of 1989, I travelled from my home city of Stockholm, Sweden, to *Sabhal Mòr Ostaig*, the Gaelic College on the Isle of Skye, Scotland, to attend a week-long course in what was labelled ‘Hebridean dance.’ As a keen learner of Scottish Country and Highland dance, I was curious about what this dance form was going to be like. I had previously only come across the label ‘Hebridean solo dances’ in the title of Jack McConachie’s 1972 booklet of that name, in which he described a number of solo dances he had learnt in the late 1940s. The label ‘Hebridean’ also figured in the dance ‘Hebridean Laddie’ in the Scottish Dance Teachers’ Alliance’s ‘Scottish National Dances’ booklet with directions for a separate, different version of the solo dance ‘Highland Laddie.’ The only ‘Hebridean’ dance that I knew well at that time was the First of August, which I had been taught by Chris Metherell in Newcastle in the late 1980s. I had a great week in Skye learning dances from Isle of Barra-native teachers for the week: Katie-Ann MacKinnon and her daughter Catriona, who took us through a number of the solo dances and introduced me to a different style of dancing. After that week, I travelled to Barra with the MacKinnons to visit one island where the dances had been kept alive and where one of the MacKinnons’ own teachers, Fearchar MacNeil, still lived. I returned to Barra the following year in March 1990, when I interviewed Fearchar and learnt more solo dance steps directly from him. This was the starting point of my relationship with these dance legacies hailing back to a nineteenth-century dancing master based in South Uist and sometimes in Barra.

The dance material discussed and described in this book thus represents a selection of my findings and embodiment of the legacies by a group of individuals who have been tradition bearers for these solo dances from the teaching of dance master, catechist, and storyteller **Ewen MacLachlan** (Greenock c. 1799–Daliburgh, South Uist 1879) between about 1840 and the mid-1860s.

—The contents of this book—

This book contains versions of the following dances from Barra native Fearchar MacNeil’s repertoire: Aberdonian Lassie; (Scotch) Blue Bonnets; Flowers of Edinburgh; Highland Laddie; Over the Water to Charlie; Scotch Measure (Scotchmakers); *Tulloch Gorm*; and MacNeil’s own choreography *Caisteal Chiosamul*. I discussed Miss Forbes with MacNeil; however, the dance steps were taught to me by Katie-Ann MacKinnon. Furthermore, the hornpipe First of August is included, predominantly from the dancing of John / *Iain Ruadh* MacLeod of South Uist. Variations of steps for some of the dances as known by John MacLeod are also provided from Tom Flett’s and Frank Rhodes’s notebooks. Other step variations given are based on information from Donald ‘*Roidein*’ MacDonald’s family and pupils in South Uist.

This book begins with the first chapter discussing the importance of dance legacies; the second chapter offers a brief overview of South Uist and Barra in the second half of the nineteenth century. The third chapter concentrates on detailing the available information about dancing master Ewen MacLachlan, drawing upon various sources and separating some facts from fiction. In the fourth chapter transmission contexts are presented, including black house ceilidhs, storytelling, music for dancing, and dance teaching. The development of and changes to the Hebridean dances are discussed in chapter five. Chapter six concentrates on the biographies of Fearchar MacNeil, John / *Iain Ruadh* MacLeod, and Donald ‘*Roidein*’ MacDonald. The seventh chapter details stylistic parameters of the dances and describes some of the motifs used. Footwear, dress used recently, and music are also outlined. The eighth chapter gives instructions for ten dances as I have interpreted them. The ninth chapter provides some final thoughts on the Hebridean solo dance tradition and links the written dance notations to online video resources made for this publication.

In our globally connected world, this book is written in the hope of spreading the knowledge of

these dances ‘Over the Hills and Far Away.’ I started writing the first draft of this material in 1989 and have added bits from time to time ever since. I have spent much time teaching the dances, observing others dancing and teaching them, and asking probing questions on how they were danced over the course of the past 30 years. It is time to conclude this journey. Let’s make these dances come alive and to be danced regularly again. I hope this outsider perspective on the Island dance culture help to do just so.

Mats Melin, Limerick, Ireland, 2019.



Chapter 1—The importance of dance legacies

—Research and embodiment—

Movement material constantly changes when each person in turn embodies the material. The dances in this volume are my understandings of and interpretations of the Hebridean dances as shown to me primarily by the late Isle of Barra native and dancer Fearchar MacNeil in 1990. In addition, New Zealand dancer Glenys Gray, who learnt the same material from Fearchar a few years earlier in 1987–1988 and who shared her dance knowledge with me in the 1990s, has influenced this material. Some of the dances were shown to me by English Clog and Step dancer and researcher Chris Metherell, who was taught them by the late English dance researcher Tom Flett. Tom Flett, in turn, in the early and mid-1950s, alongside research colleague Frank Rhodes, got ‘steps’ and information from Islanders Fearchar MacNeil, John / Iain Ruadh MacLeod, and pupils of Donald ‘Roidein’ MacDonald and Archie MacPherson, all of South Uist. The Flett and Rhodes research archive² provides us with many snippets of dance information from several other people in both South Uist and Barra they met at that time; some of those snippets are incorporated into this book.

The dance descriptions detailed in this publication rely in part on my own observations of how the people of South Uist and Barra danced from the late 1980s through to the present day. I have spent a considerable amount of time dancing, teaching, and researching in the islands over the years and local stylistic preferences have become clear to me over time. All of the first-hand ‘sources’ and the various written descriptions available have helped shape my own embodiment of the dance motifs.

A core theme of this work, and a message to any dancer engaging with the material, is that one can, and perhaps, *should* make personal choices about and interpretations of the movements not specified by these instructions. However, one should do so in an informed way, which is why the detailed cultural context is provided. Most other published dance descriptions provide only the dance notations without considering contextual and stylistic information. Exceptions to this norm are the research of Flett, Rhodes, Metherell, and Henderson.

Only the act of dancing these movements can make the dance come alive; the written word is only a static historic snapshot in time. I believe that the dances are only alive through an actual process of embodying them. My own body makes this learned material real in the moments I dance these motifs and dances. Each interpretation, either from deciphering dance notations, learning from a source, only enables our own bodies to make a unique interpretation of the material at any given time. I always keep in mind Fearchar MacNeil’s words from our conversations in Castlebay in 1990: that steps and movements were interchangeable between dances and time signatures. A step could be done equally effectively in a jig-time as in a reel-time dance, depending on the mood of the dancer. Every dancer embodied the dances differently. It was the tunes that inspired and gave character to the interpretation of the motifs danced by any one performer of them.

A problem encountered when referencing notated, published Scottish dance material is that authors tend to feel a need to provide authenticity and attempt to place dances within established stereotypical assumptions about dance traditions. Often it is suggested that the dance material is static in some way, as if there were a ‘true’ original way seen as being ‘correct,’ and that it should always be performed as a replica of that way. These notions are at odds with actual practice, as mentioned above. Many authenticities have existed over time and are continuously created with every performance by each individual who perform or performed these dances.

I must admit that when I started learning these dances in the late 1980s, I was obsessed with this notion of ‘getting it right,’ as was often suggested to me by teachers in Scottish Country and Highland dancing contexts. Today, I take a more open-minded and flexible view that what one feels

is right in relation to the way the tune is played when dancing *should* influence the performance at that moment. Thus, new variations can appear at the spur of the moment, just as Fearchar MacNeil indicated. This is exemplified in a couple of step variations I give which emerged naturally from dancing these dances regularly over the years.

The perception of a static tradition is in opposition to seeing a tradition as something living and constantly changing through interaction with the material in question, as discussed in the introduction. It is perhaps more accurate to treat the older notations and descriptions of dances being done at particular dates as ‘historical.’ A notion worth considering was presented by Canadian musician and ethnomusicologist Mike Anklewicz in 2012, who stated that he is more comfortable using the word *historical* instead of *traditional* ‘to avoid the academic and ideological burden the term “tradition” has come to bear,’³ when speaking of music or dance styles of the past. Using the word ‘historical’ allows one to discuss a plurality of styles of the past without ‘subscribing to a hegemonic concept of a singular “tradition.”’⁴ A good way of looking at ‘traditions’ when reading this book are, as Susan Spalding and Jane Woodside put it, as them always being a ‘work-in-progress.’⁵

—*Oral and published notated memories of a dance tradition*—

The dance tradition in South Uist was an orally transmitted and individually flexible one until visitors to the islands wrote versions of the dances down. One must be aware of the effect that outsider observations, interpretations of the material, and in turn influence, has had on popular perceptions on this dance tradition. Specifically, material published by Edinburgh dancing master D.G. MacLennan including his promotion of the ‘French’ origin of the dances in the 1950s, as well as Speyside-born, London-based dance teacher Jack McConachie’s dance notations had far-reaching impacts. In this analysis it becomes clear that both MacLennan and McConachie altered the material they published from their sources ways of performing the dances into a more mainstream Highland dance aesthetic, which should be recognised. Morphing has continued in subsequent interpretations and often uncredited replications of their versions.

D.G. MacLennan saw some of the dances performed at the Askernish Highland Gathering in 1925 onwards and later admitted, in correspondence to Tom Flett, to altering the versions of the dances published in his book *Highland and Traditional Scottish Dances* in 1950 and revised in 1952. Perhaps he felt he improved the dance material to suit a Highland-Games, and, to an extent, Lowland aesthetic preference, favouring technical ability to execute aerial feats and hold bodily shapes over qualities of transitional flow and subtlety of musical phrasing by individual dancers?

In addition, Highland dancer Jack McConachie learned some dances from John MacLeod in 1949, probably in Glasgow where MacLeod worked, and subsequently noted down his interpretations of these steps, published posthumously in 1972 in the booklet *Hebridean Solo Dances*. McConachie’s published versions have a more competitive Highland dance approach to them, as opposed to the Hebridean aesthetic this book is aiming to bring to the forefront. I suspect that the treble shuffles, leaps, and highcuts included in McConachie’s publication may be additions he made himself. Perhaps he added treble shuffles to add another level of technical difficulty to the dances and set them apart from the usual Highland dances? Perhaps also, in adding leaps and highcuts, McConachie was equally attempting to improve, in his view, the technical level of these dances to the Highland dance standard of his day? His 1972 booklet also seems to have added a version of Flowers of Edinburgh to the Hebridean repertoire; however, his version is actually quite similar to a Highland Laddie described by G. Douglas Taylor in 1929. It is perhaps ironic that this version of Flowers of Edinburgh entered into the current tradition through Fearchar MacNeil’s use of McConachie description as will be discussed later.

By creating their own versions, and labelling them ‘Hebridean,’ both MacLennan and McConachie froze the home tradition to outside eyes with their published interpretations. To a degree, it stopped the natural way the dances in the islands evolved and morphed among individual practitioners to those on the outside of the living tradition. With their statures in the Highland Games world, their

words were seen as having authority on the matter and became referred to as the way to perform these dances by many. This can be contrasted with the fact that, as in the case of Fearchar MacNeil, the Islanders were not necessarily aware of that the dances had been published.

From the late 1980s onwards Hebridean dance descriptions appear as part of medal test curricula published by the various British dance teacher organisations such as the Scottish Dance Teachers' Alliance (SDTA) and the United Kingdom Alliance of Professional Teachers of Dancing (UKA).⁶ These descriptions are however, upon comparative scrutiny, derived from those given by Jack McConachie with only small differences. Their 'National' dance descriptions also include variants of several of MacLennan's dance versions, notably, Blue Bonnets over the Border, the Scottish Lilt, and Highland Laddie. In the case of the *Hebridean* Highland Laddie appearing in these publications, this dance is commonly renamed 'Hebridean Laddie' to differentiate it from these organisations' previously published Highland Laddie version derived from MacLennan.

In contrast, we can now access the copious observations of Hebridean dance made by the aforementioned Tom and Joan Flett and Frank Rhodes online through the Instep Research Team site. Their snapshots in time of the dance tradition as remembered in the 1950s were carefully noted down as they were seen, and done with a great degree of ethnographic detail, judging by the amount of specificity in their published material and correspondence. They went to great lengths to show that dancing included varied practices and physicalities and were meticulous in recording the slight variations made from dancer to dancer coexisted. Their research helps us get a personal sense of dancing that we cannot see today. From their original notes and published material, it becomes obvious that the Hebridean dance aesthetic was quite different at the time to what encompassed Highland dancing on mainland Scotland. Some of the Flett material has been published by Chris Metherell in 1982 in the booklet *The First of August*; the solo dances the Fletts observed are described in their 1996 publication *Traditional Step-dancing in Scotland*.

The most recent publication on these dances is the 1995 book *Hebridean Dances—Dannsa nan Eileanach* by Còmhlán Dannsa nan Eileanach predominantly based on the then current versions of the dances in Barra while acknowledging the rich local tradition as passed down from local dancers. In the early 1990s Katie-Ann MacKinnon gave me notes on the dances and showed me dances as she knew them, which became the basis for the book material which I notated for Còmhlán Dannsa nan Eileanach at that time.

All these published notations show clear signs of different interpretations of the dance material by dance organisations, observers, and researchers, which in turn also reflect variations in how the dances were performed by sources, as well as reflect various teachers' preferences.

The fact is that specific details on how the original source, and possibly creator, of these dances, dancing master Ewen MacLachlan, danced them himself are not actually known. There is no notation surviving from his own hand, nor from people he taught in person, only one of whom, Archibald MacPherson, was observed dancing by D.G. MacLennan in the 1920s. All other descriptions are based on third-, fourth-, or fifth-hand sources, including the Islanders interviewed and observed by the Fletts, Rhodes, McConachie, MacKinnon, and Melin.

As highlighted above, the dances are sometimes considered without regard to them being *legacies* of the person who made them up in the first place, as well as the people who continued dancing them and thus passed on their embodied dancing knowledge to others. What is often overlooked is that underlying them is an intangible cultural heritage of an ephemeral nature existing predominantly in Gaelic-speaking culture. Today, Gaelic is commonly spoken in both South Uist and Barra. As discussed in Chapter Two, during the period these dances were initially taught in the late nineteenth century by dancing master Ewen MacLachlan in South Uist and Barra, the islands saw great changes to their culture and language. English was beginning to make inroads towards becoming a dominant language, pushing out the native Gaelic language, as did mainland customs and ideas encroach on cultural practices. However, as Ishabel T. MacDonald recalls in recent correspondence in 2018, the

real impact of English was felt much later:

When I used to go to Uist in the [19]50s and [19]60s, I seldom heard a word of English. In Daliburgh, where I always stayed with Harriet and John [Pipe Major John *Roidein* MacDonald], no one in that community ever uttered a word to me in English when I was there. The same was true in the communities of Kildonan and Bornish where I also had relatives. Even the clergy were Gaelic speakers at that time, so the Masses and sermons were all in Gaelic. However, in the 60s many things happened which seriously weakened the language and culture in Uist. Country and Western music and [other American music influences such as] Elvis became fashionable, and Gaelic music declined. The rocket range⁷, and the number of outsiders it brought to the island had a major effect on [the language] on the northern end of South Uist particularly.

Forced and voluntary emigration saw many culture bearers leave the islands for foreign shores, with many ending up in Ontario, Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia including Cape Breton Island in Canada, parts of the USA, New Zealand, and Australia. Later, the First and Second World Wars further depleted the ranks of culture bearers who included musicians and dancers.

In this constant cultural flux, it is significant that a number of solo dances managed to survive, not simply surviving as names of forgotten series of movements, but as complete dances, actively danced by Islanders into the 1920s, 40s, and 50s. They were still remembered well enough to be taught to me in the 1990s. This is a testimony to the Gaelic cultural strength of the islands; one that has spanned at least 150 years since these dances started to be danced in the islands, as far as records tell.

In the oral tradition, these dances were fluid in their form and content. The choreographies were not set in stone in the way that competitive Highland and National dances are today. Each individual put their own interpretation on the movements, added, changed, and substituted motifs at their leisure. What was kept true was the relationship between movements and song and dance, a cultural oneness, where rhythm and pulse of these aspects interacted closely with each other. It is clear from my own observations, and those of Flett's and Rhodes's original notes, that the dancers we observed performed from the heart. The core was leading, and the foot movements followed. They were one with the music. Only the act of notation, which strongly depends on how it is viewed, set the movements in stone. One can, on the one hand, read the notations as one moment in time, or on the other, as a guide to how the dances 'should' be danced. This publication is trying to find a middle ground, where the notation of a moment in time offers suggestions how to dance the dances in the 'Hebridean' style of its source which allows for personal interpretation, but which should be done with respect for the people, culture, language, and place the dances come from.



Chris Metherell dancing the First of August, Newcastle 1989.

Photo Mats Melin.

Chapter 2—Nineteenth-century South Uist and Barra conditions and social contexts

The few ethnographic descriptions in print dealing with Scottish dance traditions, particularly the 1964 (1985) and 1996 books by the Fletts and Rhodes, detail repertoire and teaching methods, and give some outline of the livelihood of a dancing master, but only thinly describe the context and environment in which the dances were practised. Most other dance descriptions available concentrate on the dancing itself only. Only a handful of ‘dance notators’ were ever in the field, recording dance as part of their ethnographic research. Collectors tended to prioritise music, songs, and folktales, that they considered being under threat of vanishing. Few of the collectors had the necessary movement notation skills at hand, or did not see the relevance of detailing dance as a core part of fully integrated cultural expressions. Therefore, recorded movement details and contextualisation descriptions of dance environments has been greatly neglected by scholars looking at Scottish culture in general, and at Gaelic culture in particular.

Many questions can be asked about how these dances came to be devised and how Ewen MacLachlan lived and taught, but few of them can be answered with any certainty. Much of what we know of Ewen’s life comes to us through hearsay and local lore. Why did Ewen leave mainland Scotland? Was he cleared from Morar, or did he go there to be closer to his sister? Was he sent there to be a catechist? What was the economic landscape in Uist and Barra in 1840–1880? How did most of the population live and make a living while Ewen told his stories and shared his dance knowledge? Was he paid, or was he paid in kind with food and put up by relatives as the memories and census records seem to suggest? Even if it does not answer all of these questions, providing a short historical and contextual outline is thus helpful to form a picture of life in general in the nineteenth-century Outer Hebrides.

The following is only a short summary of some of the main historical points of the Highlands, and in particular, South Uist’s and Barra’s economic and living conditions in which Gaelic traditions were maintained, almost against all odds. Drawing upon literature, such as James Hunter’s book *The Making of the Crofting Community* from 2010, and more specifically Joshua Dickson’s ethnographic and historical study of the Uist piping tradition in *When Piping Was Strong* published in 2006, helps us get a few glimpses of the environment and contexts just before and in Ewen’s time. Furthermore, some thoughts on his teaching contexts are outlined.

—Nineteenth-century South Uist and Barra—

When Ewen arrived in South Uist around 1840, the island was undergoing fundamental changes on many levels, including social, economic, and traditional. South Uist was then and remains today a predominantly Catholic island, with perhaps just a 20–25 percent Protestant population. Barra has also historically been equally predominantly Catholic. After the Reformation in 1560, the Catholic faith remained strong in the islands, due to a conservatism and traditionalism of the greater Clanranald territories, which from the seventeenth century onwards encompassed Arisaig, Ardnamurchan, Knoydart, Mallaig, Moidart, North and South Morar—an area known as *Na Garbh-Chrìochan* or ‘The Rough Bounds’—Canna, Eigg, and the southern half of the Outer Isles (North and South Uist, Benbecula, and Barra). This territory was seen as a safe haven for priests and travelling missionaries throughout the seventeenth century, and it was only after Culloden in 1746 that Clanranald adopted, under duress, the Protestant doctrine of the National Church. To further understand the importance of the Clanranald Catholic associations, one must be aware of their fundamental and strong connection to the north of Ireland, particularly to the MacDonnells of Antrim and the O’Cathan family of Derry. These connections encompassed a steady traffic between Clanranald’s Hebridean territory and the north of Ireland through liaisons of marriage, military support, and through the Clanranald

hereditary bards—the MacMhuirichs, who originally hailed from Ireland—and Irish Catholicism through the thirteenth to the late seventeenth centuries. We note with interest eighteenth-century poet's *Alasdair MacMhaighstir Alasdair's* composition '*Birlinn Chlann Raghnaill*' that tells the story of a war party setting off from Loch Eynort in South Uist for the port of Carrickfergus in Antrim which may be based on truth.⁸ Even in the twenty-first century, people in Barra and South Uist speak of people in the north of Ireland as cousins or close kin.

With such a long and strong historical connection between the places it is perhaps only natural that among Ewen's dance repertoire Frank Rhodes found traces of a dance called *Carraig Fhearghais* or Carrickfergus, also recalled as *Màili a Chrandonn* / 'Molly/Mary of the Brown Mast'.⁹ We will come back to these dance and tune names later in the Flowers of Edinburgh description in chapter 8.

—Religious communities—

As Dickson points out, 'Protestantism today owes its presence in South Uist mainly to the work of the Society in Scotland for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge (SSPCK), a Protestant body directed by their Majesties' Letters Patent in 1710 to "erect and maintain schools in such places in Scotland."¹⁰ The speaking of Gaelic was discouraged in schools by individual schoolmasters, who practised a variety of punishments for the offence. This followed the SSPCK's anti-Gaelic policy in education. Secular music and dance were often discouraged by evangelical ministers, catechists, and laymen of the Presbyterian church(es), during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries especially.¹¹ The first school in South Uist was set up in 1726 and more were consequently set up during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when anti-Catholic sentiments were common. Today Protestants and Catholics neighbours co-exist peacefully in South Uist.

So, the religious environment into which Ewen entered as a catechist and storyteller is one where Catholic priests, such as Fr Alexander Campbell (1820–1893), parish priest of Bornish, actively supported indigenous arts and oral traditions, including storytelling, piping, and dancing to name but a few. Quoting a historical paper written and shared with me by Father Michael MacDonald in 2017 about the local religious nineteenth-century landscape:

Prior to 1827, the Catholic Church was divided into the Highland and the Lowland Districts for administrative purposes. The boundary between the two was the boundary of the Gaeltachd. In 1827 the administrative boundaries were changed and this time the country was divided into three—the Western, Eastern, and Northern Districts. The Western District extended from the Western Isles to Galloway and took in the rapidly growing central belt cities and towns. These were growing rapidly as a result of Highland and Irish immigration. In charge of each area was a Vicar Apostolic, a bishop. Bishop Ronald MacDonald was the first bishop of the Western District, but he was old and practically blind (he was previously the last bishop of the Highland District). An assistant with the right of succession was appointed—Andrew Scott.^{12a}

Andrew Scott himself received an assistant in 1833 who concentrated on the Central Belt while Scott moved to Greenock to undertake the administration of the Highlands and Islands. He dedicated himself to building new churches and to improving the life of the priests and people of the parishes of the Highlands and Islands. He built churches in Bornish, Badenocho, Morar, and Glencoe in 1837. He took personal charge of the details of building and of arranging for suitable sites for churches. Scott carried on this work until his retirement in 1845. He died in 1846.

His Vicar General in the Isles was Fr John Chisholm of Bornish. At the time, there were only two parishes in the Uists, Ardkenneth in the north and Bornish in the south. Father Michael MacDonald doesn't believe that it would have been an accident that Ewen would have come to Locheynort to live with his sister, but he believes that Ewen was appointed as catechist for that parish. There is some evidence that Fr John Chisholm's sister and Ewen's sister Iseabail MacDonald were well acquainted—she appears as sponsor at the baptism of one of Iseabail's children. It may even be the case that Ewen was suggested as catechist by Bishop Scott who may have known him personally.

The early part of the 19th century, under the guidance of Scott and Fr John Chisholm, is a period of revival for the church in the Uists. Ardkeneth (1827) and Bornish (1837) churches are built and there is a general sense of prosperity and wellbeing. There were 400 people staying in the immediate area of the church at Bornish when it was built.^{12b}

—*Island economics—absentee landlords and the impact of imperial global economy—*

The mid-nineteenth century saw a shift from the formerly established Highland economy based on subsistence agriculture plus the rearing and selling of cattle to a commercially based economy emphasising landowner profit. Commercial profitability became the dominant influence on estate management. Highland chiefs or landlords, as they now became, fell into easy and inevitable alliances with the commercial and industrial capitalism of southern Scotland and England. The primary commodities became kelp manufacturing, sheep farming for a growing wool industry, and herring fishery. The kelp industry was set up in the 1730s, with landowners forcing tenants into kelp manufacturing, resulting in local economies and life cycles becoming dependent on global market forces and wars in foreign countries. The kelp trade started to falter after the Napoleonic Wars, while the large sheep farms remained, as did herring fishing.

1815 onwards marked a period in which crofting communities were established. Arable *runrig* lands were divided up from pre-existing jointly run farms into individual holdings in the West Highlands and Hebrides, to help landlords accommodate these changes to their financial benefit. The crofting system provided cheap labour for landlords. The only way for the crofters to pay landowners rent was to work in the kelp or fishing industry, as the yield from their own small croft holdings did not generate enough revenue. Most of a tenant's energies went into the landlord's industry. By design, it was made impossible for tenants to be self-sufficient agriculturalists on their tiny subdivided units of rentable land. Most of the land was put under sheep grazing at this period, pushing the previous human population into crofting townships in the process. The population rose, with a 211% increase in South Uist alone, between 1755 and 1831.¹³ As long as kelp harvesting was still profitable, emigration was discouraged. This was not to last, as the population eventually expanded beyond a number the land could maintain.

—*A time of emigration and hardship—*

Since the late eighteenth century, population migration from place to place and emigration to the New World became increasingly common. Gibson, in his 2017 book *Gaelic Cape Breton Step-Dancing. An Historical and Ethnographic Perspective*, gives the demographics of Arisaig and the Morars in 1820–1845 and shows that by 1820 there was a considerable loss of people from the tenant and sub-tenant strata. Between 1800 and 1843, about one hundred and seventy-two people left Morar. Some went to Canada, but possibly, if MacLachlan lived there at the time, he may have left for South Uist to join his sister and find work as a teacher, (through storytelling and dancing). Although all Highland estates experienced serious difficulties in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, the impact of the economic crisis was greatest on properties relying on kelp. Lord MacDonald of Clanranald had sold off all his lands, barring North Uist, by 1855 in an effort to cover his debts. His South Uist estate was sold to Protestant Aberdeenshire landowner John Gordon of Cluny in 1838. Cluny also acquired a more-or-less impoverished population of 2,300 on Barra in 1841 from the bankrupt Lieutenant General Roderick MacNeil of Barra, most of whom he shipped to Canada by 1851.¹⁴ Earlier, in an effort to reduce his debts, Clanranald, on the advice of his South Uist factor and Edinburgh lawyers, made large sections of the population emigrate to Canada by the 1830s. The land they left behind was made available for sheep farming.

—*The famine 1846–1850—*

Potatoes provided the mid-nineteenth-century Hebridean crofter with about four-fifths of his food. As a consequence the fungal potato blight that caused the 1846–1850 famine was a human tragedy unparalleled in modern Scottish history; it was unprecedented in severity and duration.¹⁵ On most

Highland estates, crofters and their families were left to make do as best they could. Landowners were generally indisposed to act to ease their tenants' sufferings. One of the most negligent was Gordon of Cluny, who at the time was one of Victorian Scotland's richest men, and who as a new owner of the Barra and South Uist estates did little or nothing to help. Dysentery, typhoid, and cholera were widespread and commonly caused death sooner than starvation. It was only after the threat of parliamentary intervention in 1847 that Cluny reacted by setting up road works; the main road in South Uist is still remembered as the 'destitution' or 'potato' road. Cluny supplied his tenants with meagre quantities of meal.¹⁶ In fact, that the starving population of the Hebrides and west Highlands, regardless of faith, got more help and direct food relief from the Free Church Destitution Committee from 1847 onwards, is telling. Gordon of Cluny forcibly evicted and transported 2,906 crofting tenants from Barra, Uist, and Benbecula to Canada between 1847 and 1853, often in the most brutal and inhumane manner, in a development now referred to as part of the Clearances.¹⁷

During the following 20 years after the Clearances, conditions improved to a small extent. Rents were still high, but crofters' incomes steadily rose, and many found employment in herring fishing as boom conditions required more labourers. Hebridean men and women either worked in and from the islands when the herring fishing was nearby, or they travelled to the north and east coasts of Scotland on a seasonal basis. In the 1870s and 1880s, many women and girls began to travel to the east coast with their men folk, after getting initial training at either Castlebay or Stornoway curing stations, to work as herring gutters. This may well be one of the inspirations for the dance title Aberdonian Lassie, as Fearchar MacNeil suggested.

—Social contexts and housing—

To further understand the social context in which Ewen lived, Hebridean houses must be considered. In their 1964 publication *Traditional Dancing in Scotland*, the Fletts outline the teaching environment of the many dancing masters portrayed in their book, describing mainland, east coast, and lowland Scottish teaching environments, plus those in the Orkney and Shetland isles. In these locations, in the second half of the nineteenth century, rural barns, granaries, village halls, and schoolhouses, along with urban assembly rooms, were common teaching places. A variety of earth, stone, and wood floors served as dancing surfaces in these settings. Only Frank Rhodes indicated that dancing in the Hebrides took place in the croft houses. There was not the same building infrastructure in the islands as on the mainland, and this practical detail must be considered. Building materials were scarce in the Islands, drift wood was often used as roof timbers, and the houses were built to withstand the weather conditions. Space was often very limited and floor were earthen or possibly of stone. The teaching of dance in these contexts would have been quite different from contemporary mainland environments. Francis Thompson asserts that up until 1870 there were no mortar built houses on Barra except for the priest's house, a manse, Eoligaray House, and one old building in Castlebay which served as a merchant's store and later as licensed premises.¹⁸ A description of a Hebridean black house, as built from the 1770s onwards and inhabited in the 1840s is useful:

... varying somewhat in design from one locality to another, the black house's principal architectural feature was an enormously thick outer wall made by building two drystone dykes, the one inside the other, and filling the space between with earth and rubble. Seldom more than six or seven feet high, the walls were as many feet in breadth at the base but tapered slightly towards the top. On them was raised a framework of rafters, often consisting—especially in the Outer Isles where timber was almost unobtainable—of a nondescript collection of old oars, masts and pieces of driftwood. The rafters were covered with 'divots' or large turfs and those, in turn, were thatched with straw from the householder's corn. The thatch was secured with heather ropes weighted with large stones [...] The floor was of earth, and because of the absence of eaves, the walls were perpetually damp. [...] Houses of this sort had no windows and no chimney, the smoke from the peat fire which burned day and night, winter and summer alike, being left to find its way out through the thatch. Furnished with some planks and barrels, a few three-legged stools, a box bed which was often roofed over to shelter its occupants from the sooty rainwater which dripped from the thatch, the archetypal black house

consisted of a single apartment. The crofter and his family lived at one end; their cattle inhabited the other; and, as if it was not diversity enough, the crofter's hens roosted in the rafters above the fire. Animals and humans entered through the same door and only rarely was any attempt made to erect an internal partition between their respective halves of the dwelling—the only general concession to sanitation consisting of an effort to incline the earthen floor towards the byre, or cowshed, in the hope that dung and urine, if not the stench they emitted, could be confined to that end of the house.¹⁹

In English schoolmaster Frederick Rea's memoirs published in 1906, his first recollection of seeing black houses in South Uist in about 1890 is telling:

I shall not forget the shock I had, after a mile or so searching the road right and left for dwelling houses, and only seeing in the fast failing light what I took to be large isolated heaps of stones or earth, lying well back some hundred yards or so from the road we were travelling. I burst out: 'But where are the houses?' Pointing to one of the [...] heaps I had noticed, my companion replied, 'These are the houses!'²⁰

As can be imagined, this was not a very hygienic environment. Poor sanitation and dampness caused typhus, typhoid fever, and tuberculosis, which became scourges for crofters. When tuberculosis appeared towards the end of the nineteenth century, it came when 'migrant labourers, returning from Glasgow, brought the bacillus back from their lodgings in the town.'²¹ Only the general isolation between townships kept contagious diseases at bay, as did the traditional practice of shunning the victims. It was said by some that Ewen MacLachlan's house was burnt after his death due to fear of fever, even though he is recorded simply to have died of old age.

—Late-nineteenth-century Lowland attitudes to Highland Gaels—

One final aspect of nineteenth-century South Uist and Barra is worth highlighting in all its ugliness. A deep and growing conflict of values and ideologies became as relevant as economics and law to the final outcome for the Gael, where the people of Gaeldom were depicted as 'lazy' and an inferior race. Scottish historian Thomas M. Divine writes in 2011 that

Articulate Lowland attitudes to the Highlands in the Victorian era were profoundly ambivalent, and varied in tone and emphasis over time. On the one hand, romantic Highlandism had made the region a fashionable tourist destination for the elites of British society [...] But there was also a much darker side to Lowland perceptions which became increasingly dominant and influential during the famine years. One of the first published works arguing for an innate inferiority of the Celtic race was John Pinkerton's *Dissertation on the Origin and Progress of the Scythians or Goths* of 1787. He described the Celtic peoples as the aborigines of Europe, fated to be relentlessly displaced by the superior Anglo-Saxon Teutonic race until forced to retreat to the fringes of European civilization in Ireland and northern Scotland. [...] Pinkerton's analysis was founded on eighteenth-century Enlightenment beliefs on different societies developing at different stages [...] Even if the views of Pinkerton and his ilk were shared by only a small intellectual minority in the eighteenth century, they still helped to lay one of the key foundations for the later flourishing of racist thought: the assumption that the Celt was inferior to the Anglo-Saxon. In Scotland, this distinction came to be seen by some as a racial divide between the Highlands and the Lowlands. In the first half of the nineteenth century, race became an even more central part of medical and scientific research. [...] The Teutonic-Celtic distinction was further refined, the former associated with industriousness, a strong work ethic and enterprise, the latter with indolence, sloth and dependency. [...] the economic failures in the Highlands came to be explained by some as a result of Celtic inadequacy rather than a consequence of environmental constraints [...] The famine crisis made these views even more influential. The two most important Scottish newspapers, *The Scotsman* and the *Glasgow Herald*, supported them, as did the *Inverness Courier*. [...] What had emerged then, by 1848–9, were irreconcilable differences between the traditional values of Gaeldom and the prevailing ideologies of contemporary capitalism, improvement and social morality.²²

From this excerpt it is clear that mainland Britain and Scotland developed a very particular and

negative stance towards the Highland and Hebridean Gaels during the nineteenth century.²³ Sadly, shades of this negative attitude can be found in Scottish political discourse, the press, and on social media today. What was, and is, lacking is a fundamental understanding of and respect for a way of life, culture, and language that is historically sensitive. It may explain why Ewen MacLachlan's period of teaching was so unknown and went unrecorded by outsiders, as landowners and other observers may not have even registered his activities as having been noteworthy. Furthermore, collectors of the time prioritised tales, songs, and tunes they saw disappearing, but dance was a different matter. The ephemeral nature of dance was difficult to note down in the first place, and at that time dedicated dance scholars, ethnochoreologists, were not yet on the scene.

—*Times of change*—

During the period of Ewen MacLachlan's presence in South Uist and Barra 1840–1899, it is clear that the demographics of the Gaelic speaking population saw great changes and these changes were primarily negative. In Ewen's time the population had to endure hardship at the whims of profit-making business on the part of landowners in the form of kelping and herring fishing, on which they were made completely financially dependent in order to pay rents to their employers. They saw land being taken over for sheep grazing, and their own allotments, as crofting townships were created, were made smaller, indeed turned minimal in size, and by design hindered them from being self-sufficient. The population dropped significantly in number due to the poor economy. English, a language irrelevant to the Gaelic speaking community's daily lives, was being taught in their schools. Towards the end of the century they were, however, beginning to enjoy a renaissance of Catholic freewill and security of tenure.²⁴ English sources share precious little about the state of the traditional arts in this period. The Gaelic oral tradition, as Dickson's research uncovers, reveals more; however, it also shows that traditional functions and priorities did fragment rather than change 'under the encroaching influence of modernity' by 1900.²⁵



One of these croft house ruins in South Uist was, in 1997, still remembered as the dancing master's house.
Photo © Mats Melin.

Chapter 3—Ewen MacLachlan, a dancing master, storyteller, and catechist

The only written references not based on oral histories regarding Ewen MacLachlan (sometimes spelled Ewan, or *Eòghann MacLachlainn*, born Greenock c. 1799, and died in Daliburgh 12 July 1879) are the census records made in South Uist and the record of his death.²⁶ All other information regarding his person comes from oral sources, including a few from people who actually met him, but mostly from people who had only heard of him—resulting in images of Ewen MacLachlan that are fragmentary and often confusing and contradictory.

In South Uist, Benbecula, and Barra, he seems to have been known by a few names, all translated variously depending on source: *Fear na Làimhe Bige* / the short-handed (armed) man), or *Eòghan na Làimhe Bige* / Ewen of the short-handed or shrivelled hand, or *An Dannsair Coitach* / The Stumpy Dancer²⁷ and was not here known either by reference to his father or his mother. It seems the Gaelic phrase *na Làimhe Bige* can have several meanings and refer to the whole or part of the arms and *Coitach* also meaning left handed. We will come back to the nature of his deformity further on.

The only fact that is certain is that Ewen MacLachlan died on July 12th, 1879 at five-o'clock in the morning in the house of Neil McCormick, in Daliburgh, South Uist. The cause of death is given as ‘natural decay.’ There was no medical attendant present. His death certificate gave his profession as ‘Dancing Master.’ His father was listed as Angus McLachlin, a sailor by profession, but no mention was made of his mother—just two lines and a question mark were written in the space reserved for her name! The absence of the name of his mother may simply be due to the fact that she was not known either to the informant, Neil McCormick, or to the registrar, George MacKay.

If he was 80 years of age, as the death certificate states, he would have been born in about 1799, but the references regarding age in census and death certificate records are often variable. The first record of Ewen appeared in the 1841 census, where he was found staying in his sister’s house at Strom Dubh, Loch Eynort, South Uist.²⁸ There he was said to be 35 years old, thus born about 1806, and a catechist, living with his sister Isabella, aged 32, and her husband Donald MacDonald / *Domhnall MacDhomhnaill ‘Ic Iain*, aged 35. In the 1851 census, Ewen was listed as a visitor staying with Christina or Kirsty MacDonald, who was the head of the household, aged 36, and listed as a cotter and former farm labourer, in Lower Bornish, with notes that he was born in Greenock and his occupation was a ‘Teacher of Dancing.’ Ten years later, in 1861, Ewen appeared at Cumhang, Ormiclate, as a boarder with the same ‘Cotter’ Christina MacDonald, and listed as ‘Dancing Master,’ born in Greenock, Renfrewshire.²⁹ In 1871, he was listed as Hugh MacLachlan, again at Cumhang, as unmarried and a former teacher of dancing born in Greenock, Renfrew, aged 71, still boarding with Christina, now aged 60 and a domestic servant. Christina MacDonald died in 1873 at the age of 62 and Ewen then seems to have drifted from place to place, and eventually ended up in Daliburgh / *Dalabrog* where he died in 1879.³⁰

No	Name and surname Rank or profession and whether single, married or widowed	When and where died	Sex	Age	Name, surname and rank or profession of father Name and maiden surname of mother	Cause of death, duration of illness and medical attendant by whom certified	Signature and qualification of informant and residence, if out of the house in which the death occurred	When and where registered and signature of registrar
28	Ewen MacLachlan Dancingmaster Single	1879 July 12 Daliburgh South Uist	Male	80	Angus MacLachlan Sailor Deceased ?	Natural Decay None Attendant-	Neil McCormick Resident	1879 July 21 Daliburgh George MacKay Registrar

Copy of Ewen MacLachlan’s death certificate (Melin archive).

The list of facts from the various censuses in the nineteenth century may hide a more dramatic story, when taking into account some of the ecclesiastical and social history of the time. The ongoing social and financial upheaval outlined in Chapter 2 forced the population to move from place to place within the islands, or even to emigrate, leaving empty townships behind.

People moved or ‘were removed’ within the [Clanranald] estate area—many of the people of Locheynort ended up in Boisdale or in Eriskay. The people of Upper Bornish were removed when that Estate was sold. [...] Ewen’s moves were forced on him by personal circumstances but were also forced on him by social circumstances. On the death of his sister, there was no place for him at Locheynort. In 1851, we find him as a boarder in Lower Bornish. This is near to the place where the church is and where the priest, his employer, lives. But in the mid-1850s his landlady is evicted from Lower Bornish and finds a spot at Ormiclate. There is now no-one living at Bornish apart from a few farm servants. The church, which had previously been placed at the centre of the community, is now isolated. One of the nearest populated places to it is Cumhang, Ormiclate. [...] Fr John Chisholm died in 1867 after 48 years as parish priest of Bornish. Kirsty MacDonald died in 1873 so Ewen could no longer stay at Ormiclate. He moved to Daliburgh shortly after her death, probably penniless or near it.³¹

Members of the South Uist community, who were the sources for most of the following information, were interviewed by researchers Tom Flett and Frank Rhodes, who in 1955 and 1956 were investigating Scottish dancing on the West Coast and in the Hebrides. The following extracts come from original notes in the Flett Archive.

—Greenock beginnings and the Morar connection—

The Flett notes tell us that Ewen MacLachlan was usually believed to have been a Morar (Inverness-shire) man. He stayed single throughout his life, but there was at least one woman, a certain Mary, daughter of Ronald, mentioned as being special to him, and with whom he lived for a while until she died. Is this ‘Mary’ confused with Christina (Kirsty) MacDonald mentioned frequently in the census records as a person Ewen stayed with? Then, according to Mr Neil Walker of Bornish, ‘he went about living with many people.’³²

He was often thought to have been born on the south shore of Loch Morar, in, or adjacent to, the Meoble section, now uninhabited. No records from the time of his birth exist as church and local records were not kept in that area until 1832. Nevertheless, it is known that a family of MacLachlans lived in nearby Inverailort.³³ That Ewen was believed to have come from Morar may have stemmed from the belief that his father, Angus MacLachlan, was said to have been the tenant of R(h)etland. There are ruins in the *Camas Rèidhlean*, near the Retland Burns, of what was known as the Retland Lodge. If Angus MacLachlan was the tenant and had grazing rights on part of the hill, he would have been regarded as a man of substance, as there was a reasonable amount of land at Retland.³⁴ One may perhaps speculate that Angus MacLachlan was first a sailor, as was stated on his death certificate, based in Greenock, and then moved to Retland. This would explain why Ewen was recorded as having been born in Greenock, while his sister Isabella was noted as having been born in Inverness-shire, thus making Morar a possible birthplace for her. One source said Ewen came from Arisaig. Since that is close to Retland, perhaps he might have stayed in the area at some point.³⁵

Ewen’s mother’s name is not recorded in any register, as already mentioned. Ewen was sometimes called *Mac Iseabail Reitealain* / son of Isabella of Retland, suggesting that his mother’s name was Isabella and that Ewen came from Retland in Morar,³⁶ but, on the other hand, this may simply refer to the fact that he stayed with his sister, Isabella, and since she came from Retland, the ‘Mac’ might simply signify kinship. Ewen had another sister who seems to have lived in South Uist but died young and unmarried.³⁷ The sister on record, Isabella, housed Ewen for a time. The only other information about her is that her family objected to her marriage to Donald, and that she moved from Greenock, where she was working, to live with him in Loch Eynort.³⁸ Thus a picture emerges that seems to indicate that Ewen MacLachlan was born in Greenock, from Highland parents, namely Angus MacLachlan and



Isabella, probably a MacDonald, and may have been brought up in South Morar.

At the time of Ewen's birth, Greenock was expanding and developing new port facilities with increased work opportunities both on shore and at sea. Travel between the Highland area and the cities, including Greenock, increased. With Ewen's father having been a sailor, the Morar connection was possible. Writer Alasdair Roberts recently pursued his own search through this confusing evidence and suggests that Ewen's parents were the said Angus MacLachlan and Isabella MacDonald of Rhetland, daughter of Angus MacDonald, eldest son of Angus Rhetland, who drowned near Skye in 1774. Isabella is said to have lived with her mother fifty years after her mother was widowed, and this may have been at Lettermorar near Retland Burn.³⁹

That Ewen was called *Mac Iseabail Reitealain* may also indicate that he was illegitimate,⁴⁰ as, according to Gaelic scholar Ronald Black / *Ragnall MacilleDhuibh*, only illegitimate children are referred to by matronymics.⁴¹ Ewen's patronymic, or male line ancestor surname is son (Mac) of Lachlan conveying lineage. MacLachlan's death certificate contradicts these illegitimate speculations. Roberts further elaborates in 2016 that the Catholic clergy held rather tolerant views of illegitimacy and that this notion hardly existed among West Highland Catholics at the time:

For a gentry family of means (and with inheritance in mind) it would have been possible to regularise the marriage of Angus MacLachlan and Isabella MacDonald. That would have rendered Ewen MacLachlan legitimate, although the irregular circumstance of his birth was not forgotten in his native country.⁴²

This is about as far the few facts available go regarding Ewen's family background. Even sketchier is any detail about his life in Uist. Local memories of him in the 1950s paint a fragmented picture.

Angus MacLean, of Smerclett, of the age of about 91 in 1955, thought that Fr John Chisholm of Bornish brought Ewen across to South Uist; thus, MacLachlan seems to have stayed in the Bornish vicinity until it was cleared by the late 1850s. Mrs Kate Morrison, of Greybridge, said that Ewen initially travelled up and down the island by walking along the *machair*, there being no road then, and also that Ewen stayed, for a time, with her father.⁴³ Archie Munro (spelled Monrowe in the Fletts' and Rhodes's notes), of Lochboisdale, said that Ewen had many relations in South Uist whom he visited on his travels. According to Angus James MacIntyre of Loch Eynort, Ewen lived for a short time on Eriskay with MacIntyre's grandfather, Angus MacDonald, and it is believed that some of Ewen's uncles visited him there. This indicates a perceived larger network of relations. It is also said that Ewen MacLachlan claimed the famed Flora MacDonald as a relation, being the daughter of one

of his great-aunts on his mother's side, or in other words, that his mother was Flora's cousin. It should be noted that in Uist, Flora is not as famed as on mainland Scotland, but that the local hero was Neil MacEachan, the father of Marshal MacDonald of Napoléon's army.⁴⁴ Perhaps this is another of Ewen's many stories? Mrs MacLeod, of Ormiclate, said that Ewen had a house in a now uninhabited spot at Cumhang where there was, in 1955, a place still known as MacLachlan's ruin. Rhodes also spoke to a Mr Neil Walker of Bornish, who said that his father had lived next door to Ewen in Cumhang, and that Ewen lived there with a certain Mary, daughter of Ronald (as mentioned earlier, possibly Christina MacDonald).⁴⁵ Ewen MacLachlan was buried at Howmore but according to Rhodes's informant Msgr MacKellaig, of Daliburgh, there are no church records of the burial.⁴⁶

—*Ewen the short-armed seanachaidh/storyteller and catechist*—

The written census records give Ewen MacLachlan two professions at different times: a catechist; and a dancing master. How and where was he educated and where he learned to dance are not known and can only be speculated upon. His education has been open to speculation and oral transmission of histories has morphed the storylines.

Edinburgh dancing master D.G. MacLennan, in his 1950 book *Highland and Traditional Scottish Dances*,⁴⁷ wrote a story of Ewen's life and education, and this story has, since then, served as the main background circulated by many sources regarding Ewen's life. MacLennan got his story primarily from Archie MacPherson, whom MacLennan saw dance at the Askernish Games in 1925, and who had learnt dancing from Ewen directly as young boy. MacLennan stated that the following often quoted passage:

Ewen had been sent by his parents to the Scots College, Douai, France, to study for the priesthood, but, being deformed in the arms, he could not be ordained, after almost completing his Divinity course. He had always been fond of dancing (like many French lads at College), and studied the art with a teacher in leisure times. On returning to Scotland he found that he could not do much for a livelihood in the towns so he decided to go off to the Outer Hebrides—(about 1855)—where he might help the priests in the duties he had known at College. In his work, he was quite useful. The late Dean Gillies of South Uist, was greatly interested in the career of this Ewen MacLachlan and told me he had heard that he was very well-educated, had full knowledge of theology, philosophy, bible story, Christian doctrine, etc.; and the original reason for his going to South Uist was to work as a catechist, and he was a sort of itinerant teacher of catechism, who discovered in the course of his work that the teaching of dancing and telling of stories was an attraction for the youth of the place to come out and learn proper religious principles. He was a great folk-lorist and “Seanachaidh” or story-teller, possessing a remarkable knowledge of old tales—French and English as well as Gaelic. [...] Although in a scattered locality, he started to teach dancing, arranging dances from his experience in France, set to Highland bagpipe tunes.⁴⁸

There are several problems with this information. One is, firstly, whether Ewen would have been accepted to study for the priesthood in the first place having a deformity to the arms or hands. Secondly, the type of deformity described must have been congenital and not something developed later in life. Thirdly, no information suggests any French connection to the dance material at all. Fourthly, in consideration of Ewen's age, the Scots Colleges in France closed at the beginning of the French Revolution in 1793, six years prior to Ewen's birth, and never reopened as a college.⁴⁹

The Fletts noted, when interviewing Angus James MacIntyre at Loch Eynort, South Uist, who was Isabella's grandson and grand-nephew to Ewen, that Angus presumed Ewen was trained for the priesthood at Valladolid in Spain. A Barra recollection of Ewen MacLachlan was collected from Neil Angus MacDonald, a schoolmaster and noted piper:

*Dubhairt Niall Aonghus gour chuala seisean a mhàthair a' cainnt faoi'n "Dannsair Ciotach." Rin-
nceóir clúmhar a bhí ann agus bhí sgoil dhamhsa aige i n-Uibhist. Eoghain na Laimhe Bige a thugaidis
air. Bhí sé 'sa Spáinn a' foghlaim de bheith 'n-a shagart agus ní raibh sé oiriúnach le bheith 'n-a shagart
mar gheall ar an lámh ghórtach a bhí air. Nuair a d' fhill sé as an Spáinn thosaigh sé a' foghlaim rinncí*

*agas a' bailiú sean-sgéalta. Bhí sean-fheari n-Uibhist a d'fhoghaim rinncí uaidh agas bhí sé féin 'n-a mhuinteóir rinncé.*⁵⁰

Neil Angus heard his mother speak about the *Dannsair Ciotach*: a great dancer who had a dance school in Uist. He was called *Eòghain na Làimhe Bige* / 'Ewen of the Shrivelled Hand' and he had been in Spain training for the priesthood but left due to his disability. After his return from Spain he started to teach dancing and to collect old stories. An old man still alive learnt to dance from this man's tuition and who subsequently became a dance teacher himself.⁵¹

John / Iain Pheadair MacInnes, the one-time registrar in South Uist, thought that it might have been to the college in St Lô or Coutances in Normandy, France, that Ewen was sent for his ecclesiastical studies.⁵² Again, neither suggestion is supported by factual record, as Ewen cannot be found in any lists of students in any Catholic Seminaries.⁵³ Father Michael MacDonald adds:

The only possibility is that Ewen could have been what was called a 'lay student' at the seminary at Lismore i.e. someone who was there for the education, who paid his way but was never going to be ordained a priest. We don't have a comprehensive list of all the students at Lismore – only a list of those students who were ordained. The two priests in Uist, Chisholm (Bornish) and McGregor (Ardkenneth) did their entire training at Lismore and both taught there for a short time. So, if Ewen McLachlin was a student amongst priests and students for the priesthood it could only have been at Lismore.⁵⁴

Recently it has been suggested by writer Alasdair Roberts in an unpublished document from 2016 that a close relationship did evolve between Lismore and Paris by the end of the Napoleonic Wars, with the first students arriving in Paris in 1818 from Aquhorties, later followed by students from Lismore. Ewen was not among them. Roberts suggests the possibility that MacLachlan studied at Lismore as a gentleman boarder, as his Rhetland family would have had the money, and that he may have continued his studies at Vaugirard or another Paris institution. This suggestion does, however, not take into account MacLachlan's arm deformity.

On the other hand, there is no doubt, according to Father Michael MacDonald⁵⁵ that Ewen was a 'catechist' i.e. a lay teacher of the faith in under the authority of a parish priest. It is clear that Ewen was an educated man, but those he taught as a catechist would generally have been unable to read or write in any language and would have been mainly monoglot Gaelic speakers. His storytelling skills would have been very useful to him. The Catholics were not willing to send their children to SSPCK and Ladies' Highland Association Schools at the time.⁵⁶ Ewen is referred to as 'catechist' in the baptismal records of Bornish parish where he is listed as sponsor—'Ewen McLachlin, Catechist.' Ewen would likely have been a catechist in support of Vicar General John Chisholm in Bornish. He is also referred to in the same way in the unpublished diary of Fr Allan MacDonald of Eriskay, a diary covering a period of ten months or so from 1898–1899. Fr Allan bemoaned the fact that he bored the people of Eriskay with his catechetical instruction and wished he were like Ewen 'McLachlin,' the catechist, who held them spellbound with a story and taught them in a way that they could understand. These stories remarked Fr Allan, who came to Daliburgh five years after MacLachlan passed away, were remembered for many years afterwards because they made a deep impression on the hearers. On 28th September 1898 Father Allan wrote:

In one of the 'tales' the avoiding of 'uisge tairbh' is inculcated as one of three precepts and perhaps it is because it is so inculcated that they lay it to heart. I wonder who the sanitary novelist was who hit upon the expedient of so teaching them. He knew how to get at the people, and gives me not a bad wrinkle. The recital of St Adamnan's 'Vision' was a lesson given in the same way and more effective than a hundred sermons. Could I devise a Tale of the kind that would fix even one useful idea indelibly on their minds? I might compose one such, but I doubt if I could make it interesting or classical enough to take with them. The Old Catechist the short-winded dancing master McLachlan whose religious influence in the country probably equalled if it did not surpass that of any priest in the district was philosopher enough to adopt this plan, and he flooded the country with tales religious and secular. He did not speak Gaelic elegantly either nor classically.⁵⁷

Father Michael MacDonald told me in correspondence in 2017 that there is no doubt that MacLachlan was a great storyteller, as his stories were repeated by others for many years after he initially told them. He was certainly a catechist with an extraordinary capability of teaching the truths of the faith through the use of verbal illustration.

His method of catechesis (telling stories to illustrate elements of the faith) would lead me to believe that he didn't engage in the formal study of theology but had rather picked up his material from religious studies. Certainly, by the time of Fr Allan MacDonald, catechesis was to be delivered chapter by chapter from the *Sincere Christian*, the *Devout Christian*, and the *Pious Christian*, a book written by Bishop George Hay towards the end of the 18th century! No wonder the people of Eriskay were bored!⁵⁸

In this period, there were other laymen doing this kind of work in the islands.⁵⁹ Two examples are John MacDonald / *Iain Mac Aonghais Mhoir* worked in a similar capacity in South Lochboisdale; and also, a near contemporary, *Ruairidh Ruadh MacCuithin* / Red-haired Roderick MacQueen, was a catechist.⁶⁰

In the records at the School of Scottish Studies in Edinburgh, there are many tales recorded from one of Gaeldom's greatest storytellers, Angus MacMillan of Griminish, also known as *Aonghas Barrach* / Angus the Barraman (1874–1954), Benbecula. According to the Fletts, some of these are said to have come from Ewen's large collection.⁶¹

In Angus's family there had been a tradition of story-telling. His father, Calum MacMillan, who died in 1917, was in his day a noted story-teller. Angus maintains that he does not have even a third of the tales his father had. About the year 1850 there arrived in South Uist an itinerant dancing-master named Ewen MacLachlan. He was also a noted story-teller. In South Uist he met Calum MacMillan. When MacLachlan decided to go to Benbecula and hold a dancing-school there, he went to live in MacMillan's house. Such a guest as an itinerant dancing-master, who as well had a large repertoire of tales, would have been welcome in any house in the Hebrides. In that little house in Griminish, Calum MacMillan learned most of the tales he knew and later passed on to his son. MacLachlan stayed with MacMillan for the greater part of a winter, and in the evenings on his return from the dancing classes told tales well into the night.⁶²

An example of Ewen's storytelling ability is this short story from Mrs Campbell, Garryhellie, Daliburgh, originally of Loch Eynort, who was around 90 years old when Rhodes asked her about Ewen MacLachlan in April 1955. Mrs Campbell obtained it from her mother⁶³—

Ewen was told by a lady in Arisaig that one day, while ploughing, her husband turned up a beautiful statue of a lady. It was in no way broken so he cleaned it up and took it home where he put it in the mantel piece. The weather immediately broke. There were gales and continuous rain. One day the lady saw the statue smiling, so she said, "He who hath given thee power to smile hath given thee power to tell me who thou art." "Just so," said the statue, "I am one of the bad angels who came down from heaven with Satan, and you will get no good weather until you put me back exactly where you found me."⁶⁴

—Ewen's arm condition—

The exact nature of Ewen's corporal irregularity and general appearance can probably not be ascertained. It was however most likely that the arm condition was congenital. There are some reports told to me that descendants of Ewen's sister have had some sort of hand or arm deformity and that one person had a '*làmh bheag*.' There is plenty of anecdotal evidence, as mentioned earlier, starting with his being known in the islands as *Fear na Làimhe Bìge* / the short-handed (armed) man, or *Eòghann na Làimhe Bìge* different sources give it as Ewen of the Shrivelled Hand, or smaller arms/hands, or *An Dannelsair Ciotach* / 'The Stumpy Dancer' indicating that his arms or hands were unusual. Ishabel T. MacDonald tells me that '*ciotach*' also means left-handed, the word *ciotag* is used for the left hand and was in common usage in South Uist. This could suggest that it was Ewen's right arm that was short, and that he used his left.⁶⁵ Regarding his arm deformity, the Fletts were told various details,

including that his arms were short, and that his hands were almost at shoulder level. Some medical conditions, such as phocomelia, are known to cause deformities of the type described by the Fletts' informants. Holt-Oram syndrome is another condition in which partial or complete absence of bones in the forearm results, but with this condition, severe heart problems are also common, so this seems less likely to apply to MacLachlan, who taught dancing for decades.⁶⁶ These medical conditions are present from birth [*ab initio*], and disease in later life is not known to cause deformities of the nature described.⁶⁷ Being born with one of these conditions would, however, effectively have stopped Ewen from undertaking any formal religious studies. Fearchar MacNeil's thoughts in 1982 on Ewen's arm condition was that he would have had problems conducting some religious rituals:

Co-dhiù, bha fear, Eòghann MacLachlainn, cha eil fhios 'am cò às a thàinig e, ach bha e anns an Fhraing ag ionnsachadh airson a bhith na shagairt. Agus ... tha coltach gu robh e ann an còmhradh ris an fheadhainn a bhiodh thall, tha fios gum biodh ma bha Uibhistich no Barraich no Albanaich sam bith ann gum biodh iad ann an còmhradh. Agus bha esan, bha e ag ionnsachadh a bhith na shagairt agus aig an àm bha siud, nuair a bhiodh an sagairt a' dèanamh na h-Aifrinn, bha a chùl ris na daoine. Agus aig an rud an can 'ad the elevation of the host ... dh'fheumadh e a togail suas os cionn a chinn is chitheadh na daoine e thairis air a cheann. Tha coltach gu robh na làmhnan aigse cho goirid nach b' urrainn dha a togail os cionn a chinn, nach b' urrainn dha an t-aran a shealltainn os cionn a chinn. Agus chan eil mi cinnteach a-nis co-dhiù an d'fhuair e air aghaidh [a bhith] na shagairt no nach d'fhuair, tha mi den bharraich nach d'fhuair air a shàilleibh sin. Ach bha ionnsachadh gu leòr aige airson deagh [obair?] tha mi 'creids.

Anyway, there was a man, Ewan MacLachlan, I don't know where he was from, but he was in France studying to become a priest. And ... it seems he was in conversation with the ones over there, of course if there were Uist or Barra people or Scots they would be in conversation. And he was learning to be a priest and at that time, when the priest would be conducting Mass, his back would be to the congregation. And at the thing they call 'the elevation of the host' ... he had to lift it above his head and the people would see it over his head. It seems his hands [/arms] were so short that he couldn't lift it above his head, he couldn't show the bread over the top of his head. And I'm not sure now whether he went on to become a priest or not, but I believe not because of this. But he had enough education for a good [other job?] I believe.

It is said that, on the West Coast of Scotland, people born with some kind of physical abnormality were looked upon as being special.⁶⁸ They were often brought up to learn a particular trade that the local neighbourhood needed, and which would serve as a means of supporting themselves. They often became tailors or shoemakers and travelled from place to place living off their trade. Historically, there were several blind musicians, such as the blind early-eighteenth century piper John MacKay, also known as *Iain Dall MacAoidh* / Blind John MacKay of Gairloch.⁶⁹ Furthermore, these itinerant tailors and shoemakers often engaged in the custom of telling stories to the family they worked for, and thus they built up large collections of stories to tell.⁷⁰

The Flett archive records that Mr Archie MacDonald, of Daliburgh, said Ewen was a small man, and a Mrs MacLeod, of Ormiclate, who claimed she had seen Ewen, said he was small and bent.⁷¹ Mrs Kate Morrison, of Greybridge, Daliburgh, who was aged 89 when asked, and who would have been about 12 when Ewen died, said he 'was a hump-back with very long legs, normal arms and deformed hands. He could use a fork to eat but could not cut his own food with a knife.'⁷² However, from the same Kate Morrison, Rhodes got the following statement in 1955, that 'at Kate's mother's wedding Ewen jumped on to the shoulders of a man who was dancing a Scotch reel and went through the figure eight there. Later he put out the lights on the wall [height of the lights approximated by Rhodes as 5'6"] with his toe while dancing.'⁷³ This feat would have required profound agility. This same feat was also attributed to Ewen by Roderick MacPherson, of Liniclett Muir.⁷⁴ From Angus James MacIntyre, who was born around 1880, Rhodes learned that Ewen was said to have been tall and that he had a standing jump of 12 feet. 'He would jump one way, turn in his tracks and jump back again.'⁷⁵ Maybe the contradictory observations regarding his height were due to when people saw him. A dancer who was tall when younger could have shrunk, or his back become bent with age, and be seen as short in stature and possibly also short winded later in life.

—The feat of *Smàladh na Coinnle*—

John Francis Campbell, the noted collector of folk tales, mention Ewen MacLachlan in his 1859 journal when he describes ‘*Smàladh na Coinnle*’, or the ‘smoothing the candle’ feat —

There is a dancing master without arms who is now in Barra and who has hundreds of Sgeulachd [stories ...] One of his best steps is to leap up and extinguish a lamp with his heel without spilling a drop of the oil.’ This was the feat known as ‘*Smàladh na Coinnle*’—smoothing the candle.⁷⁶

The late Canon Angus MacQueen, in personal correspondence in 1992, told me about *Bean Iain Ic Sheumais* (Wife of Ian, son of James), the housekeeper to the priest in Bornish, who clearly remembered Ewen MacLachlan putting out candles with his big toes—‘*cur as nan coinnlean le ordaig*.’ This happened in the priest’s barn where the dancing classes happened. He would stand on tiptoe and swinging round completely he would snuff the candles with the wind caused by the speed of the gyration.⁷⁷

A story, this time from the Barra tradition, was related to Calum MacLean, a collector of Gaelic stories and lore, shared by a postmaster and storyteller known as ‘The Cuddy’, Iain MacPherson, from Northbay (in Irish Gaelic as per the source page):

*Dubhairtan Coddie gur innis Calum Barrach go raibh an Dannsair Ciotach air “bhanais-taighe”, bainfheis tighe, i n-Ormaicleit agus go raibh sé a’ rinncé ann. Mhúch sé an cruiseán (cruisgean) seach n-uaire le n-a chosa leis chomh maith agus bhí cumhacht na gcos. Fuair na rinncéoirí i mBarraidh agus i n-Uibhist na rinncí o’n bhfear seo. Bhí sé le bheith ‘na shagart ach b’ éigin do éirigh as mar gheall ar na lámha aige a bhith giortach.*⁷⁸

The Cuddy heard from Calum MacMillan about the *Dannsair Ciotach* and how he had been at a wedding feast in Ormaiclete in South Uist and had danced at it. This man was so good at dancing that he managed to snuff out candles with his feet seven times in a row. The dancers in South Uist and Barra were taught dancing by this man. He was going to become a priest but had to give this up because of his injured hand.⁷⁹

John Francis Campbell recalled Archie Rhu MacDonald restoring harmony to a public dinner in Portree when he ‘mounted the table and went through every step of a Highland reel without once touching one of the glasses or dishes spread over it.’⁸⁰ When visiting Cape Breton in 1957, Frank Rhodes was told by a couple of informants about similar tricks: how ‘three candles were placed in a row on the floor and the best dancers tried to flick off the wicks without putting out the candles. [...] In another version, the dancers had to put out candles by snuffing them between their heels in the middle of a dance.’⁸¹

—Glimpses of Ewen the dance teacher—

There are no records of when, where, or from whom Ewen MacLachlan learnt to dance. No information is available to determine what influenced his style or even what his dancing actually looked like. We rely fully on oral histories and speculation when we discuss his dancing skills, but what was remembered in the 1950s would give us a good indication of the local aesthetic norms.

It is entirely possible that Ewen, in his younger days, was taught dancing on the mainland, perhaps by an itinerant dancing master. This could have taken place in Morar, but it is equally possible he learnt elsewhere, in Glasgow or even Edinburgh, as some sources suggest. As already established, the dance repertoire that Ewen eventually taught in Uist and Barra was commonly known in Scotland in the late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and the West Coast and the Hebrides was no exception to that knowledge base.

The Uist and Barra oral tradition informants in the Fletts’ archive collection told that Ewen came to Uist from Glasgow and had taught dancing there, as well as studied dancing in Edinburgh while he had been a schoolteacher there in his younger days. Edinburgh ball programmes were said to have been found among his effects.⁸²

After Ewen’s death, tradition claims that his books and papers were taken by some of his relations

with whom he was staying at the time. These effects are said to have contained two books written in ‘hieroglyphics.’ D.G. MacLennan⁸³ stated in his 1950 book that he interviewed Ewen’s nephew, a sailor—‘who told me about two particular books found in his cottage, one resembling printed shorthand or Chinese writing. It was shown to this sailor who had sailed the China Seas, but he could not interpret it—only the title was *Chorégraphie*.’⁸⁴ MacLennan suggested that these were Raoul Auger Feuillet’s books of dance notations published in 1700 and 1709, thus strengthening the theory of the ‘French Connection’ he subscribed to as discussed further on. These books, the local tradition claims, were later burned during an outbreak of fever. None of these claims can be verified however.

—The Gaelic dancing master tradition from Morar—

It is of interest to note the traditions and practices of Highland settlers from Morar in Nova Scotia, and Cape Breton Island in particular, carried over to the new world from the Scottish Highlands. These settlers hailed from Lochaber, Moidart, Morar, Barra, and Canna, with an immigration period spanning between 1790 and 1830.⁸⁵ For example, Alasdair Gillis, also known as *Mac Iain ic Alasdair* / Son of John, son of Alasdair, and born in 1801, arrived from Ardnamurach, North Morar, in 1826 and settled in South West Margaree. His great-granddaughter, Margaret Gillis, says, ‘He had been a dance instructor in Scotland and continued to be one here.’

The structured solo dances out of this tradition that Rhodes was told were once taught in Cape Breton were the Fling, the Swords, *Seann Triubhas*, Flowers of Edinburgh, Jacky Tar, Duke of Fife, The Girl I Left Behind Me, Over the Hills and Far Away, *Tullochgorm*, Irish Washerwoman, and Princess Royal, all dances originally having twelve steps.⁸⁶ Each of these dances was set to a tune, often reflected by the title. All of these dances, barring the Sword dance, had a set structure, where a ‘reel’ or a circle was danced to the first part of the tune, and step on the spot mirroring the melody line was done to the second part of the tune. This ABAB 8-bar pattern was repeated for the length of the dance. There was no set order to the steps. The names for the dances were predominantly in English, despite having been taught in what was at the time predominantly Gaelic speaking areas in Cape Breton. This usage of English tune titles may indicate that these dances had mainland Scottish connections which corroborates the same in Ewen’s case.

There was clearly a widely spread knowledge of this dance repertoire, even though many local variations of dances must have been in existence, but with shared structures that aligned well with melody lines of associated tunes. Margaret Gillis of South West Margaree, as mentioned earlier, is the great-granddaughter of Alexander Gillis / *Mac Iain ic Alasdair*, dancing master. Her family tree sports an impressive number of quality step dancers, and she is one of the very few living Cape Bretoners who have ‘gone through’ the Flowers of Edinburgh. When interviewed by Allister MacGillivray in December of 1987, she said:

I think *The Flowers of Edinburgh* was one of the dances in Scotland, and you’d have *The Jacky Tar* and all the hornpipes that were danced individually. There was form to it, a format. *The Seann Triubhas* was a different dance than the one that they do in Highland dancing today with piping. That wasn’t *The Seann Triubhas* our early settlers had at all! Our old *Seann Triubhas* had eight steps, and you didn’t go around in a reel. You see, each dance had a method to it with different steps. It would be like singing a song where you would have to know every verse and do them in order. For instance, with *The Flowers* you start with the first step, but then the pattern for ending of each step is the same. There’s a continuity, you know. It follows a pattern where each step is a little different, but the ending is the same. So, with our *Seann Triubhas* you had a shuffle at the end of each step. *The Flowers*, of course, was always danced to the tune *The Flowers of Edinburgh*, and there were twelve steps, each one being done twice [note that this means an AABB music pattern]. It didn’t necessarily get more complicated as it went on, though [...] Besides *The Flowers*, my father did a quite a few other solo dances like *The Jacky Tar* and *Princess Royal*. Plus, my father and my aunt would do a *Seann Triubhas* and had lovely steps for the strathspey—a lot of strathspey steps. Then they had reel steps and they had the different steps for the hornpipes. They also danced a solo jig which is just a change in your tempo [...] My sister, Helen [...] We danced together, and we had our father’s steps.

We danced the complete *Flowers of Edinburgh* many times but, unless it was for the sheer purpose of seeing one step after the other or unless you were interested in that particular dance, it could be very boring for the onlooker. You had to have some insight into what was happening. Father often said, “Six steps are plenty. After six steps of it you don’t have the attention of the audience anymore.” But we have many times danced it right through to the end. You know, I never met anyone in the other sections of our island who could do it. Perhaps we weren’t in circles where it was being done.⁸⁷

Keeping this perspective in mind, we can postulate that Ewen, when he arrived in South Uist some time around 1840,⁸⁸ also had an embodied expertise of these kinds of dances in his knowledge base. Even though the dance structures of Ewen’s dances are different from what Margaret Gillis describes above they still belong to the same family of semi-percussive dances. Perhaps the difference in structure indicates a certain branch of mainland solo dance repertoire that was different from where the Cape Breton dances originated? Perhaps Ewen’s dances are from a later stage of development and morphing of this dance tradition? The Cape Breton material seems to hail from late-eighteenth to early nineteenth-century repertoire.

—Links to Ewen’s dance repertoire from the wider Scottish solo step dance tradition—

The dances that Ewen is associated with are Scotch Blue Bonnets; First of August; a percussive version of *Flowers of Edinburgh* (alternative names or associated tunes: *Carraig Fhearghais* and *Màili a Chrandonn*); *Gilleann an Fhèilidh* or The Lads wi’ the Kilt (which may be an alternative name / tune for Scotch Blue Bonnets); Highland Laddie; Highland Fling; Miss Forbes; Over the Hills and Far Away; Over the Water to Charlie; Scotch Measure; *Seann Triubhas*; Scotch Reel; Sword Dance; and Tulloch Gorm. In addition, Aberdonian Lassie / *Till a-Rithisd* is part of the Hebridean repertoire but it is not certain that it came from Ewen or whether from one of his pupils, Ronald Morrison. MacLennan also listed five other dances on page 31 of the 1952 edition of his book that he says Ewen ‘(partly) composed.’ These were First of August (or Fishers’ Hornpipe⁸⁹), Over the Hills, Bonnie Anne, *Flowers of Edinburgh*, and *Scottish Measure*. He would have seen First of August, *Flowers of Edinburgh* and *Scottish Measure* danced at the 1925 Askernish Games. More dance names were mentioned to the Fletts by local people who had been Ewen’s students or mentioned dances that his pupils did (see appendix). For example, Donald Steele recalled a number of ten-step dances including Jack-a-Tar and Paddy O’Rafferty; and Margaret MacAskill remembered Over the Hills and Far Away.

Whether Ewen brought the dances with him to the islands or if he made them up himself, I doubt we will ever find conclusive evidence for. It is likely, I feel, that it was a mix of the two, because he taught the Fling, *Seann Triubhas*, and Sword Dance which were all commonly known all over Scotland. If the local dancing consisted mainly of vernacular and extemporised step dancing and the dancing of reels when he arrived, Ewen’s structured dances would have been seen as different. Many of them are a kind of hybrid combining percussive step dancing and Highland dancing. As commonly dancing masters devised their own arrangements of steps Ewen would not have been an exception to this tradition. It is also impossible to tell how much these dances may have been influenced by subsequent generations of dancers. All I can say is that my own memories and embodiment over time have altered the style in which I dance.⁹⁰

There is a strong resemblance between many movements in these Hebridean dances, especially in the dance the First of August, and movements found in some of the solo ‘High Dances’ in the Hill manuscript of 1841 from Aberdeenshire on the Scottish mainland. Dances practiced in the 1830s and 1840s and known to us through this notebook’s notations are the College Hornpipe, *Flowers of Edinburgh*, Trumpet Hornpipe, King of Sweden, and the Earl of Erroll. All of these feature single and double trebles; and their general step structure is similar to that of the dances from MacLachlan’s teaching. The Hill manuscript notebook also includes country dances named Carrickfergus (a name that is mentioned in relation to the tune used for variants of Ewen’s *Flowers of Edinburgh*), Paddy O’Rafferty, and Over the Hills and Far Away. These titles clearly cross over between the two lists of dances, which indicates the commonality of the associated tunes, at the very least, at this point in time.

One of Ewen's pupils, Archie MacPherson, recalled a version of the Flowers of Edinburgh containing double trebles done simultaneously on both feet! Chugging, an iconic motif in Appalachian clogging among other dance styles, comes to mind as an idea of what a two-foot shuffle might resemble. The Hill manuscript notebook version of the Flowers of Edinburgh contains double trebles, as does a version of the Flowers of Edinburgh that survived in Cape Breton Island. MacPherson's 'Flowers' also included a step in which the dancer dropped on one knee, which is a motif found in the Trumpet Hornpipe in the Hill manuscript. These few examples suggest a commonality of dance repertoire over a large geographical area. There is also a dance named the White Cockade, also the title of the tune commonly accompanying the dance First of August, which is very similar to the Hill manuscript version of the Flowers of Edinburgh in a dance notebook published in 1990 by Jenny MacLachlan.

—*Dance names in English*—

That the dances were known by the English names also suggest a mainland connection. Some of the Gaelic names of the dances we have come from Fearchar MacNeil, as his grandfather, Neil Buchanan, had them. Ishabel T. MacDonald tells me, on the other hand, that her grandfather, Donald 'Roidein' MacDonald only had English names for the dances. Equally, the Fletts and Rhodes only got English names for the dances as well when they collected in the 1950s. Thus, it does seem possible that some Gaelic names were translated from the English ones in the 1980s to make them stand out more compare to the standard English named dance repertoire.

For a teacher working in a Gaelic speaking community, keeping the dance names in English may perhaps indicate that was how they were known to him, as were the associated tunes. Were the tunes at the time only known by their English titles and therefore the dances took the same name? Some of the tunes, however, do have Gaelic titles, so why were they not used? These English titles strengthen the notion that Ewen picked them up on the Scottish mainland. He would then have brought the dances, choreographic motif ideas, and tunes with him to Uist and Barra, where he created local versions of the dances. In this process they simply retained their English names.

This could help answer some of our questions regarding the dances English names, certainly in relation to where the dance and tune bears the same name. But it does not help explain a dance name when the tune has different name, such as with First of August and Scotch Measure. Aberdonian Lassie / *Till a-Rithisd*, which is likely not one of Ewen's dances, probably acquired its dual names when it was devised on Barra.

—*The claimed French dance connection in the oral tradition*—

Why is a possible French connection so strong in the local tradition? Does it relate to a wish for a foreign influence on Ewen, to make him stand out more? Or was it an attribution of fashion, as in so many other places and countries, that French customs were looked up to, in comparison with one's own customs? Or, being a good storyteller, perhaps he fashioned a French connection storyline about himself for the local community as it suited his needs and that it gave prestige to his background?

Michael Newton⁹¹ and Melin and Schoonover (forthcoming) recount the influence French and Italian court dancing had on clan chiefs and their families in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and how forms of dance, including percussive footwork, and instrumentation, such as the fiddle, would have filtered down through society over time. Was being from the mainland enough to have singled him out as foreign at the time? Or, were Ewen's possible foreign dance influences, or even just mainland dance knowledge, and teaching of dances that were different from local ones, the things that singled him out to be special, alongside his ability to tell a good story? We must remember that nineteenth-century dancing masters throughout England and Scotland relied heavily on the French *caché* to sell their classes, whether they said their dances were acquired in Paris, by using French titles for dances and movements (*pas de Basque, entrechat*, etc.), or just by changing their names to sound French, such as Londoner E.A.

Taylor spelling his last name as Théleur. A small backlash against the French connection comes towards the end of the century when dancing masters like David Anderson of Dundee advertised his 1890s editions of his Ballroom Guide as being ‘without the use of French terms.’ The French connotations were very much in vogue after the Napoleonic War ended and it would be quite unlikely for Ewen not to be aware of it. Islanders’ connections as soldiers on both sides of the war would also have been a factor as were the French connections of the 1745–1746 Jacobite Rising.⁹²

Certainly D.G. MacLennan subscribed to the story he heard and expressed a firm belief that the dances were of French origin, based on the story that Ewen had been educated in Paris and that, after he was discharged due to his arm deformity, was unable to return to Scotland immediately. MacLachlan was thought to have lived out in the country in France, either in Normandy or in Brittany. The story continues that Ewen settled for a time among a French community, became interested in, and took part in local affairs and entertainments. As pointed out earlier, no evidence exists confirming that MacLachlan travelled to or studied in France. Furthermore, MacLennan’s notion of a French connection from seeing French children dancing on a postcard that he thought was the dance the Flowers of Edinburgh, detailed in correspondence from MacLennan to Flett, 27 October 1952, seems far fetched.

Some similarities do exist between some motifs in dances researched, described, and performed by French dancer and researcher Yves Guillard⁹³ and the Hebridean dances; however, the French solo character dances of *gigues* and *gavottes* from the *Sarthe* area by *Le Mans* seem to hail mainly from the latter half of the nineteenth century. Other solo hornpipe character dances from Provence do involve foot and leg movements similar to those in the Hebridean dances, such as round-the-leg, toe and heel, and extended shake movements.⁹⁴ I am not suggesting that there is a direct connection here, but it is important to realise that taking a broader view on European dance reveals many similarities between dances practiced in geographically distant locations.

It would certainly have been the fashionable thing for Ewen to claim a French connection, real or not, of his dance repertoire. Perhaps it provided him with a higher status locally and perhaps he was more easily accepted as a foreigner to the area, it may certainly have given him material to use for his storytelling prowess?

—Where did Ewen teach his dances?—

Where would he have taught the dances? Attempting to apply the model of mainland East-Coast or urban Scottish dancing masters, who taught in landowner houses and in local barns and halls in the second half of the nineteenth century, does not serve for the Western Isles. Large barns or village halls did not yet exist in the islands. There is no record of Ewen teaching in the few wealthy landowner houses, leaving the generally small croft houses scattered around townships in the islands. It seems likely that Ewen would have used black houses or the local *ceilidh* houses to teach dancing. Maybe he taught at the crossroads, or perhaps it was a mix of both. If he taught in the black houses, the space would have been fairly limited and the dance surface earthen.

There are no references in the Gordon-Cathcart family papers that he taught for the Gordon of Cluny family. He is not mentioned in the 1862 celebrations at Askernish as detailed in the appendix. He may of course have been one of the hundreds unnamed Islanders attending. This rule out the likelihood of landowner interaction, or teaching in, for example, Askernish House, a sturdy Georgian-style farmhouse built in 1835 that became, later in the century, the factor’s house. This was one of the three new farmhouses in existence by 1837; all substantially built of stone and lime, and slated,⁹⁵ with a nearby range of steadings dating from 1846. On the mainland, this might have made for a dance teacher’s venue, but it is very doubtful that a Catholic catechist and storytelling dance teacher would have been granted access to these premises. Likewise, the schoolhouse in Garrynamonie mentioned in Frederick Rea’s memoirs was built in 1876, perhaps too late for Ewen to have used?

No local names for steps or movement motifs seem to have survived in usage among the South Uist

and Barra sources interviewed in the 1920s–1950s. All terminology used today to describe motifs in these dances was applied by observers and researchers. Many dancing masters were known to merely show pupils what to do and let them copy the movements as best they could.⁹⁶ According to Fearchar MacNeil, who was tutored partly by his grandfather, Neil Buchanan, and partly by John MacLeod, his teachers only showed him where to place his feet and arms. Perhaps, and quite likely, this was the way Ewen taught as well. They simply led by example when passing on their dancing skills.

—*Stories for many of the dances*—

Most of the dances associated with Ewen MacLachlan have one or several stories attached to them. Most recount some connection to the 1745 Jacobite uprising. Similarly, with the traditions surrounding Ewen MacLachlan, these dance stories have no known corroborative evidence supporting them.⁹⁷ Perhaps they were even made up by Ewen himself? They may have become enmeshed with these solo dances in the same way as similar stories have come to flourish in connection with so many other aspects of Highland life such as pipe tunes and sites connected with the '45, projecting the wish for a different ending to the Jacobite uprising and thus the hope of a brighter future. These dances were taught during the period of the Highland Clearances, when the Highland people were in dire circumstances. This could have fostered an atmosphere wherein these kinds of stories would develop and spread as a well of cultural support and hope. Associated stories are given along with each dance description in chapter eight.

—*Summary of Ewen MacLachlan's life*—

We know remarkably few facts about Ewen MacLachlan as outlined in this chapter. The census records give us some sense of timeline; otherwise he exists only in the oral histories and through the dances that survive that are said to be his legacy.

Sutherland-based Gaelic scholar Alasdair MacMhaoirn suggested in conversation that confusion concerning who Ewen was and what he did could result from a number of issues. We can view him from two perspectives: first, the historical person; and secondly, Ewen as a figure, a symbol, or an image. Ewen is associated with an area where all aspects of culture and society were under attack. Could traditions have accumulated around him to make him a symbol for everything the society wanted to protect from change? His image may have been manipulated in relation to the following areas. From a religious point of view the Protestants were trying to force Roman Catholics to convert, so in making Ewen a priest, or associating him with the priesthood, his image counteracted this. Also, Protestants were discouraging dancing, so in associate a religious man as a teacher of dance helped keeping the dancing strong.⁹⁸ Finally from a historical perspective relating to Bonnie Prince Charlie and the disastrous outcome of the Rising, with which the people of Barra, South Uist, and Benbecula were associated, a canon of stories were created to several of the dances associating them with the 1745, to try salvage something good? Ewen being a catechist, and as he excelled in storytelling and dance teaching would have helped these aspects and he may even have fuelled the storylines himself!

In fact, maybe it is all a much simpler storyline, where the above ideas are mixed in with the tales Ewen told himself? Among all the uncertainties, guesswork, and speculation about him, we do know that he was a gifted storyteller, and clearly an equally gifted dancer and teacher, who left a legacy remaining to this day. Whatever the truth of the matter is, Ewen could certainly tell a tale to be remembered!





Loch Morar, looking south-east from the north shore towards Lettermorar and Retland.
Photo © Mats Melin, 1992.



Loch Eynort from the south shore at dusk,
Photo © Mats Melin, 2017.

Chapter 4—Gaelic transmission contexts of stories, music, and dance

Writing about Gaelic narrative and music, both John Shaw in his 1992–93 article and John Gibson in his 1998 book about *Traditional Gaelic Bagpiping* touch upon holistic and interconnected ways of thinking about Gaelic traditional arts. At the end of the seventeenth century, Martin Martin, who recalled his travels in 1713, set South Uist apart for its deep level of conservation of the Gaelic language and traditional culture in general. Clanranald patronage certainly supported the Beatonas as learned physicians and the MacMhuirichs as bards and *seanchaidhean* / historian genealogists from the sixteenth to the mid-eighteenth centuries. This patronage would have set firm foundations and encouraged orally transmitted knowledge and arts to be carried on by the general population. The fact that the 1860s and 1870s saw both folklorist John Francis Campbell and his contemporary Alexander Carmichael collecting Gaelic oral tales and lore in Barra and South Uist that had been lost in other mainly Presbyterian areas after the 1843 Disruption is a testament to this tradition. It is a great pity that they did not collect dancing in detail as well, as Ewen MacLachlan was still alive at the time, and, as mentioned, garnered recognition by Campbell in his journal, recounted as a storyteller and dance teacher. Reading Dickson's overview of the piping tradition in South Uist, it becomes clear the survival rate of the local traditions was affected by the openness, or not, to the arts by what local faith was practised:

In the popular mind, the Catholic faith has a record of incorporating and encouraging indigenous tradition among Gaels (for reasons noble and not so noble), while the Presbyterian faith has come to possess a reputation, spurious or otherwise, for stamping it out from acceptable social behaviour in deference to a more ascetic spirituality.⁹⁹

This allowed grassroots music, song, and dance culture to continue more freely and openly in Catholic South Uist and Barra at a time when communities under Presbyterian control were compelled to avoid the same. Conversations with Fearchar MacNeil showed this to be crystal clear in his mind: he certainly felt his dances, music, and other traditions had at times been under threat due to Presbyterian influence.

The scars left after the turbulent period of the nineteenth-century evictions, famine, and emigration remain in the South Uist landscape today, with ruined houses of cleared townships still evident. In the local folklore and song tradition, memories of times gone by persist. Often these stories set the hardship endured during this period against a backdrop of a perceived happier past, a notion common to the history of many communities and societies. 'The myth of the clan past—the commonly held notion that 'the old population of the country lived in some condition of arcadian bliss, founded on the relation between Celtic clansmen and their chiefs'—was of this type.'¹⁰⁰ Hunter elaborates

... the enduring significance of crofters' view of the past is not to be found in its historical accuracy or lack of it, but in the fact that it enabled crofters to set the grim realities of the nineteenth-century present against a vision of an older order in which material plenty was combined with security and social justice. Crofters were thus provided with an effective if unsophisticated, critique of the social and economic system which was necessarily associated with commercial landlordism. Like their longstanding beliefs about the nature of their rights to the land [...] the myth of the clan past, though ostensibly backward looking, enabled crofters, therefore, to define and articulate their by-no-means-conservative demands in a language that all of them could understand.¹⁰¹

Taking this way of thinking into account, it is easy to see why several of Ewen's dances, such as *Tulloch Gorm*, *Blue Bonnets*, *Scotch Measure*, and *Over the Waters*, evoked strong connections in the local folklore to the 1745–1746 Jacobite Rising, Bonnie Prince Charlie, and Flora MacDonald. Some stories tell us the dances were created by followers of Charles Edward Stuart who had to flee to exile in France in the aftermath of the rising. Stories persisted into the 1950s that Ewen himself allegedly

learnt the dances from these followers and brought them back to South Uist and Barra from France to be enjoyed by the Gaels again. Perhaps Ewen in his role as a storyteller embellished his teaching with stories to capture the imaginations of his learners and give the dances meaning.

The suggestions that the dance First of August / *Latha Lùnastail* had possible associations with older celebrations of the Scottish quarter day of the same name, this type of joyful celebration or meaning was equally worth recalling in story. It would be so easy to associate movements in the dance to symbolism, such as the first step moving in a circle clockwise to be reminiscent of walking sunwise around a holy well, or the percussive steps to the grinding of corn into flour from the first cut of the new harvest for the making of the *lunastain* cake or bannock. A good storyteller could indeed weave a good tale to fire the imagination. The *Lughnasadh* festival could perhaps be in line with Alexander Carmichael's observations in *Carmina Gadelica* from South Uist that 'the Night of St Michael is the night of the dance and the song, of the merry-making, of the love-making, and of the love gifts,'¹⁰² a ritual clearly earthly as well as spiritual.

The storytelling aspect of the dance tradition should certainly not be seen in quaint isolation as an afterthought, but rather as an integral part of combined aspects of Gaelic tradition, as expressed in the parallel lore related to the piping tradition Dickson described in 2006, inextricably interweaving language, story, song, music, and dance. This creates an overlapping interrelationship of the arts, as American ethnomusicologist Alan Merriam stated in 1964, where all aspects of the arts stem from the same sources making them only one 'Art' expressed in different ways depending on the medium used. Dickson adds that

The late Sorley MacLean once referred to this duality of words and music in traditional Gaelic culture as products of a 'simultaneous creation,' by which he referred to the melodic, stylistic and lyrical overlapping that occurs between these two faces of Gaelic orality.¹⁰³

This same interplay is at work in the creation of dance motifs, where the rhythm of the language, expressed through song or music, becomes expressed through movement, sometimes with a story or reason in mind and sometimes not, through the embodied knowledge of a dancer responding and improvising to the music in real time.

—The *ceilidh* house tradition—

The natural setting for this flow of creativity and transmission would have been the *ceilidh* house or *taigh cèilidh*. In 1943, Werner Kissling, the German ethnologist, described a Hebridean house *ceilidh* as a gathering taking place from sundown to early morning, where stories and news were exchanged, and discussions and singing [and music and dance] took place.¹⁰⁴ By the second half of the nineteenth century, the storytelling tradition was in decay over most of the mainland Highlands, whilst in the Uists and Barra it was still flourishing. Most storytellers were men, rather than women 'with clear heads and wonderful memories [...] speaking only Gaelic.'¹⁰⁵ In every township, there was at least one house noted as a *cèilidh* house. These popular meeting places provided focus for the social and intellectual life of the surrounding areas. Storytellers, singers, and musicians catered to needs that later came to be supplied by books, newspapers, films, radio, television, and now, the internet and social media. At these gatherings, the normal work of the household would often continue through most of the evening, but when serious storytellers began, close attention and respectful silence were expected, apart from exclamations prompted by some incident in the story or the discussion and comment preceding or following the telling of the tale.¹⁰⁶ Ewen would have been a central figure in this environment with his storytelling ability.

As Thomas McKean put it in 1998, the *taigh cèilidh* was the key to preserving many Gaelic vernacular traditions, as was the similar institution of house dances in Ireland as described by Foley in 1988. The particular house or houses in which the community met was a place for entertainment and learning, or, rather, 'sharing' knowledge, and those present were encouraged to participate and experience the whole range of cultural expressions. Ceilidhs were and are spontaneous affairs, involving

family, close relations, neighbours, and visitors from far afield, depending on the circumstances. Furthermore, John Shaw states: ‘the ceilidh house [...] serve[s] to maintain the integrity of Gaeldom’s oral and musical culture by creating a social occasion which sustained the ties between the interdependent elements of the tradition.’¹⁰⁷

I would like to add that the ceilidh house also serves to maintain the coherence of dancing and movement skills, although this element of the tradition is often excluded from any discussion. What is key in this setting is the fully integrated environment the ceilidh provides for immersive and holistic learning ‘by ear.’ This method of transmission also travelled to Canada with those who were forced to leave Gaeldom in the nineteenth century. Michael Kennedy’s 2002 report on Nova Scotian Gaelic culture highlights two vital points about ceilidh house transmission: Nova Scotian Gaelic culture is maintained, transmitted, and retained primarily through memory; and that, what Kennedy calls the common stock of Gaelic culture values, was passed on without the support of a stabilizing professional or institutional culture; thus

in spite of its relative vigour, the Nova Scotian Gaelic community did not recreate an elite Gaelic culture or a Gaelic institutional infrastructure. As in Scotland, Gaelic survived almost exclusively as an informally transmitted folk culture in rural communities [...] and the] Gaels nevertheless proved astonishingly adept at maintaining and passing on their culture with the less formal means available to them. Gaels from all levels of society and from every region of the Gàidhealtachd were well educated in the common stock of their culture. They appreciated the same masterworks of the same great poets, shared much of the same vast stock of traditional songs and tales, discussed the same lore, preserved the same rich historical and genealogical records, played the same type of music, and danced the same dances. Alongside this common stock of cultural expression, there was also a large store of local tradition and a vital institution of regional and *individual creativity*.¹⁰⁸

In other words, the more organic ways of transmitting and maintaining core cultural knowledge, and the development of good memory skills through stories, songs, tunes, and dance motifs, were both continued predominantly through the Scots Gaelic community-based ceilidh tradition.

—A different aesthetic framework in dance—

Come the twentieth century, the influences of the outside world on the local dance tradition should not be underestimated, highlighted in chapter five. The local fluidity and, to an extent, improvisational nature of the dances is pitted against the technique and requirements set down in books and manuals by dance organisations. The two different mindsets clash, and even though an element of competition and excellence in standards exist in both, they are quite different. One is about excellence in the local cultural norms, while the other are norms decided upon by remote committees of dance.

There are plenty of comments in the Fletts’ and Rhodes’s 1950s diaries and notes indicating that the foot movements of the Hebridean dance informants were not placed according to the by-then standardised position work laid down by the Scottish Official Board of Highland Dancing (SOBHD) and Scottish Official Highland Dancing Association (SOHDA), and slightly earlier by dancers and teachers such as D.G. MacLennan and Jack McConachie as mentioned earlier.

The ‘Hebridean’ dance movements were done with less static tension and more free flow than in the style seen in other ‘Games’ dances. Each individual dancer was encouraged to express themselves, through movements and motifs unique to them. A valued skill in this way of dancing was to make choices about the order of the steps to be performed during the moment of dancing. Dancers had greater license regarding the component segmentations of each step and how they put together the dances. This is a factor in why so many different versions of the steps were collected from the various people interviewed by the Fletts and Rhodes, and why orders of the steps vary. Even Fearchar MacNeil spoke to me in 1990 about the fluidity of steps, and that they could be suitable for many different dances. A step of the Highland Laddie could be done in Over the Waters for example. That one was danced to music in 4/4 time and the other in 6/8 time was not an issue. Fearchar spoke of the

rise and sink of the body in motion and that the whole body must be in time and flow with the pulse in the music. The dancer must know the tunes and the embodiment must make the music come alive.

Exact foot placement may not have been as important, in comparison with modern Highland Dancing, but the movements being balanced and performed on both sides of the body would have been. The musicality of the dancing, in a similar way, any percussive step dancer relates to the flow of music and find the pulse of the tune would have been paramount. Lightness was emphasised but stiffness, or tight control as in sharp extensions or snapping a foot to a position, was not part of the aesthetic. This is a very different mindset compared to the prescribed position work, execution of steps ‘by the book,’ and set orders of steps that Highland dancers are required to follow on the competitive circuit today. This aesthetic preference, governed by an adjudicated system, was only beginning to manifest itself in the mid-twentieth-century Highland dance competitive scene.

Another difference lies in that the Hebridean dances did not seem to have specific arm movements. Either arms were held by the sides, or one or both arms were held akimbo throughout the dance. Only occasional references to arm movements appear in notes taken by Fletts and Rhodes. Arm positions specified by Fearchar seem to be based more on his mainland interaction with Highland dancing than on what he learnt as a young boy in Barra. Donald Steele and Archie Munro, who were both interviewed by Frank Rhodes in 1955 summed up the dance style as done with the hands hanging naturally by the sides or being placed on the hips. The dancer did not jump up; his body was absolutely still, and had he been dancing in a crowd with his feet obscured he would not have stood out with any up-and-down movement of his body. The style was the same for men and women. No special shoes were worn for dancing (see appendices for further recollections).

These differences in dance aesthetics highlighted are not surprising, as Dickson discusses similar aesthetic differences in the South Uist piping tradition based on *ceòl cluais*, or ear learning, in contrast to mainstream and military piping standards relying on notation.¹⁰⁹ One aspect of difference between the Hebridean and mainland, mainstream music and dance interactions is what American ethnomusicologist Alan Merriam labels psychic distance. Psychic distance as a term implies a sense of objectivity, ‘that an observer within a society can stand back and analyse that society’s music, or a performance of it, with a detached awareness of the sum of its parts.’¹¹⁰ In the modern Western World, when one accesses music through the radio or online, that music that is often unfamiliar, or removed from familiar experience: one usually is not personally acquainted with the composer or the players of commercial music. One can evaluate it and decide whether it is liked or not depending solely on personal taste and can in turn express opinions about it without knowing who the music players are or having any concern for the musicians’ objectives or feelings. In the absence of psychic distance, familiarity between people playing music, dancing, and observing ‘leaves an aesthetic based not only on the sheer artistry or beauty of the music concerned, but on the social and functional values associated with it.’¹¹¹

In my research on step dancing in Cape Breton Island, Canada, I have described in detail the close interconnectivity between musician and dancer and how both together negotiate and find the flow of music and movement.¹¹² One of the core elements in this is establishing a shared rhythm and flow, finding the pulse, lift, or ‘lilt’ in the performance, or ‘drive,’ to use a Cape Breton term, through a non-verbal connection between musician and dancer. Another is the manipulation of, or improvisation within the melody by the musician and the movements by the dancer, creating a continual feedback loop between the two in performance. Paramount to this relationship is the contextual value of the community it is taking part in: the silent nods of approval; the shouts of encouragement; or small shakes of the heads to signal the opposite. There is constant evaluation by all present in this close-knit environment, and discussions can be held afterwards, praising or critiquing what took place, and constructive criticism can be offered. Each context, such as a house ceilidh, an open-air dance, or showing, has its own parameters to be negotiated within this scenario. Many of the Cape Bretoners are descendants of Barra and Uist people who emigrated predominantly in the nineteenth century. It is therefore not surprising to see many similar traits among Uist and Barra people dancing today

as observed in Cape Breton Island. Not being bound by written sources, regulations, or a stipulated standardised aesthetic is key in this *ceòl cluais*, or ear learnt style, and naturally picked up in dancing by observing, listening, and kinaesthetically picking up movement. This is a process of learning and transmitting knowledge in an older house ceilidh context, where social and functional aspects are naturally blended. For the dancer, the goal is to become one with the music.¹¹³ This context, by nature, wills participants to play, sing, and get up and dance. Having experienced this in both South Uist and in Cape Breton Island, this feeling of natural flow is real, and it is strong.

—Music for the dancing—

Fearchar MacNeil told me and others in 1989–1990 that Ewen’s dances would have been performed to pipe music only. This notion falls in line with the claim that there was no instrumental music in South Uist in the early decades of the twentieth century other than that of the bagpipe, an exaggeration born of nostalgia for a time when piping was much more widespread.

Contrary to present-day nostalgia, however, the surviving gamut of waulking songs depicts our vibrant multi-instrumental tradition in the South Uist of centuries past, presenting images of bagpipes, fiddles, harps and trumps all revolving around the act of dance in both common and aristocratic circles.¹¹⁴

Although pipes would probably have been the most common instrument in the mid- to late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century Uists, some fiddlers were known. Ishabel T. MacDonald tells me in correspondence that Lachlann Bàn MacCormick of Creagorry, Benbecula, a famous piper and composer of pipe tunes, could also play the fiddle.

Later in the twentieth century, melodeons also appeared.¹¹⁵ Stuart Eydmann¹¹⁶ traces the introduction of the accordion to Scotland from 1830 to 1930 and note its increased popularity over time, but does unfortunately not cover its introduction to the Western Isles. Due to the cost of the instrument and the low to almost non-existent wages of the population in the islands in the nineteenth century, it would have taken time before the instrument became more commonly used.

What is clear, is that instruments, other than bagpipes, must have been used to play the tunes connected with the dances Ewen taught, as for example ‘Flowers of Edinburgh’ and ‘Carrickfergus’ do not fit within the nine-note piping scale. It is a great pity that most reports of the Uist Games at Askernish in the 1920s (see appendix) does not detail whom or what instruments were played for the dance competitions and displays as the dance Flowers of Edinburgh featured in 1925 for instance. If pipes were used for the competitions, and it is very likely they were, then the pipers probably played alternative tunes that work on the pipes for the dances. As have already been mentioned, alternative tunes were used for some of the dances, so it was not an unknown practice, and thus these dances sometimes also became known after the alternative tune names.

Reading John Lorne Campbell and Francis Collinson’s 1977 book *Hebridean Folksongs*, Vol 2, the following lines illustrate the local instrumentation and music and dance landscape¹¹⁷: *Fioghall ‘ga seinn, pìob ‘ga spreigeadh* / And the fiddle played, and the pipes struck up; and from a more aristocratic setting among the Clanranalds showing the use of both small and great pipes and the fiddle, as well as the dancing reels on the floor, be it wooden or stone.:

Daoine uaisle mu bhòrdaibh dùmhail / Ruidleadh mu seach air an ùrlar, / Le pìob mhòr nam feadan dùmhail, / Le pìob bheag nam feadan siùbhlach

Gentlemen crowded round solid tables / Reeling in turns on the floor, / With the bag pipe of thick drones, / With small pipes of flowing tones.

Dickson¹¹⁸ further shares the acclaimed South Uist storyteller Duncan MacDonald’s description in 1956 of a *Bàl Suitheadh* / blackhouse ball or a community ceilidh of piping, dancing, and drinking, a type of event that disappeared around 1900. Ewen MacLachlan was known, as was the piper *Domhnall Bàn (Roidein)* MacDonald, for performing the *Smàladh na Coinnle* or ‘smoothing the candle’ feat of snuffing candles with dancing feet, as was described in chapter 3; it was very likely at a *Bàl Suitheadh*.

Even in Dickson's detailed work on the piping in South Uist, the lack of source material detailing the state of local piping in the 1840–1880-year bracket is apparent, and there is even less information regarding the use of other instruments or of dancing. Dickson does include a local minister's comment from the 1840s that residents of the Isle of Barra 'have no games or amusements but what are common to the surrounding islands, Dancing, with music of the bagpipe, is a favourite pastime.'¹¹⁹



South Uist landscape. Photos © Mats Melin.

Chapter 5—Twentieth-century Hebridean dance

—‘Hebridean dances’ as a labelled category of dances—

The label ‘Hebridean dances’ that now singles out these particular dances seems to have first appeared in the *Oban Times* report on dance competitions at the South Uist and Barra Highland Gathering held at Askernish in South Uist in August 1926, where dances are referred to as ‘old-world Hebridean dances.’ In August 1927 and 1928 they are labelled ‘Old Hebridean Dances.’ Before these dates, the same dances were called ‘Old Highland Dances’ in the *Oban Times* and by the Royal Celtic Society, who awarded the prizes as the appendix extracts show. That the label appears the year after D.G. MacLennan appeared as a judge, and that he subsequently used the label in his 1950 book makes one suspicious that he may have been influential in the labelling of the dances by the Royal Celtic Society in 1926 and causing them to be reported in the *Oban Times* as ‘Hebridean dances’ the following year.

Six years later, when Barra dancer Fearchar MacNeil displayed three of these dances at a 1934 festival sponsored by the English Folk Dance and Song Society (EFDSS) at the Royal Albert Hall, London, the label appeared again. That was the first time MacNeil heard them labelled ‘Hebridean Dances.’ Perhaps they were labelled so to differentiate them from the more commonly known dances, such as the Highland Fling and the Sword Dance, and also to reflect the fact that the performer came from the geographical location of the Isle of Barra in the Hebrides. It is possible that the label had also filtered down to London due to the use of the term by MacLennan and the media.

—The 1920s, the first revival of the dances—

Highland Games commenced in South Uist as a regular event in 1898 and were held at the Ardvachar machair.¹²⁰ Alongside Highland athletic sports and a light music piping competition, the Highland Fling and the Sword Dance were competed. After a gap of a few years, the Games were held at Nunton Farm between 1902–1906, after which they moved to the Askernish machair, just north of Garryhellie.¹²¹ Dancing featured at the Games’ inception, but in the beginning, took place in the form of the Highland Fling, the Sword Dance, and the Foursome Scotch Reel. Later, the *Seann Triubhas* and other dances were added, but as Dickson also observes, these were also being increasingly performed in the developing mainstream of Highland Games in a smoothed-out and standardised framework from the late nineteenth- into the twentieth century. Similarly, to the piping scene, ‘the scope for free and dramatic interpretation diminished under the constraints of adjudication.’¹²² The Fling, Sword, Reel, and *Seann Triubhas* are performance dances performed to pipe music, but were never unique to South Uist or Barra, or the rest of the Hebridean islands for that matter. The ‘Hebridean’ dances had never been regulated or adjudicated but were subject to constant reinterpretations and improvisation. This changed to a certain extent, after the Games were re-established after the First World War in 1923, when some of these dances were included in the dancing competitions.

Interest in these dances was awakened by the South Uist Games Committee in 1923 when they decided to put on ‘a competitive exhibition of old Highland dances [...] remembered in South Uist and Barra, but which are almost forgotten in other parts of the Highlands.’¹²³ In fact, only two men turned up to compete, Archibald ‘Archie’ MacPherson, Iochdar, aged over 75, and Donald ‘Roidein’ MacDonald, the renowned step dance piper from Daliburgh mentioned by Frederick Rea.¹²⁴ They stepped out the First of August, Over the Water to Charlie, and Scotch Blue Bonnets Over the Border to pipe music in the same manner as the other competitive dances. The 1923 *Oban Times* declared: ‘This event was much appreciated by the judges and spectators and will be suitably developed at future gatherings’. Local tradition has it that Archibald MacPherson ‘won the day having given a good performance of a solo danced in his stockinged feet with his trousers tucked into the tops of his socks.’¹²⁵ This anecdote probably refers to the 1924 gathering, as he took first prize in three of the events that

year. Thereafter, the two performers began to teach local boys and girls who soon picked up the steps and style and thereby formed greater local interest. More competitions were advertised at subsequent games and more dances appeared in the period from 1924–1931. Highland Laddie, Flowers of Edinburgh,¹²⁶ Scotchmakers or Scotch Measure, Miss Forbes, and *Tulloch Gorm* became known to a wider audience.¹²⁷ With younger people now taking an interest in learning from MacPherson and MacDonald, the Games began offering prizes for the best learners under the age of 30. Prominent sponsors, such as William MacDonald of Glasgow, Duncan MacLeod of Skeabost, Skye, and the Celtic Society in Edinburgh, donated prize money, according to the *Oban Times* reports.

—Edinburgh dancing master D.G. MacLennan’s ‘discovery’ of the dances—

At this time, the Edinburgh dancing master, D.G. MacLennan, took an interest in the dances after he was invited to adjudicate a dance competition at the South Uist Games held 4 August 1925. At the Games, he was surprised, he admits, to see solo dances he did not previously know, nor had even heard of. After the games, he went to visit Archibald MacPherson at Iochdar¹²⁸ who told him about the dances and their origins as he knew them. Archibald also danced some of the dances for MacLennan.¹²⁹ Interestingly, MacLennan seems to have based an assumption that the origin for these dances was France, an opinion he published in his 1950 book, on a postcard showing some French boys dancing what he believed was the Flowers of Edinburgh and which he showed Archibald MacPherson in 1926.¹³⁰ In correspondence with the Fletts in October 1952 and April 1953,¹³¹ he elaborated on this:

Only one or two men there learned them properly. Ewen MacLachlan made up most of these dances to the pipe music from steps he learned in France; not originally Scottish, but French; and I surprised Archie McP[herson] greatly when I asked him if a certain step should not be “so & so”; simplified by McL[achlan]. He once exclaimed excitedly & laughing “man, you’re just him”. The following year [1926] I showed a p.p.c [postcard?] of French boys doing the steps Ewen had taught,—‘The Flowers of Edinburgh.’ (27 October 1952). [...]

He [Archibald MacPherson] only knew he [Ewen MacLachlan] learned dancing in France. Only when I showed him my ppcards[postcards] from France, did he exclaim “my goodness! The floor’s of Edin[burgh].” He was quite convinced with my conclusion about all the dances (4 April 1953).

Tom Flett asked MacLennan what was on the postcard shown to ‘Old Archie’ and whether he found ‘the whole of Flowers of Edinburgh danced in France, or just one step, or several steps.’ MacLennan replied ‘No.—*not* all the steps I had seen in France, & *not the same*. He [Ewen MacLachlan] *made up* the dance with hornpipe steps to scot. *Tunes*’ (4 April 1953). When asked if he was willing to teach Tom Flett the steps of the Flowers of Edinburgh MacLennan replied ‘Not worth learning: too much a copy of the others; and only 3 or 4 steps. I *finished* all those in my book’ (4 April 1953). Extracts from the letter below:

16. What was on the postcard you sent “Old Archie”? Did you find the whole of “Flowers of Edinburgh” danced in France, or ~~one~~ just one step, or several steps?
No—not all the steps I had seen in France, & not the same.
He made up the dance with hornpipe steps to Scot. Tunes.

18. And would you be willing to teach me ‘Flowers of Edinburgh’ and ‘Over the Hills & Far Away’ exactly as ‘Old Archie’ taught them to you?
Not worth learning: too much a copy of the others, and only 3 or 4 steps. I finished all those in my book, //

Not only did MacLennan confirm that the dances he saw in France were not the same, but rather that he felt Ewen made them up, and most importantly, that MacLennan amended and finished the dances he saw Archibald MacPherson dance to his own satisfaction, which are the versions appearing in his 1950 book. One may ask what Archibald MacPherson made of MacLennan, who was, at the time, ‘the’ Highland Dance authority, coming over from Edinburgh to adjudicate the games at Askernish? The Fletts’ notes remark that Archibald was a good storyteller in his own right. Perhaps he simply provided a good story as he knew it, for an outsider authority visitor.

In the 1950 first edition of his book, MacLennan gave his take on the story of the origin of the dances and Ewen’s life as he says he got it from Archibald MacPherson, and the inclusion of these dances certainly helped the popularity of MacLennan’s seminal book. He described six dances: Highland Laddie; Blue Bonnets; Miss Forbes; *Tulloch Gorm*; Over the Water to Charlie; and Jacky Tar. But, as indicated above, MacLennan told the Fletts in correspondence that the versions published were not the same as those he was shown in 1925 by Archibald, and, rather, were his own arrangements. The Jacky Tar he describes, for example, is more akin as a variant of the Sailors’ Hornpipe. From what will be discussed later in Fearchar MacNeil’s biography, MacLennan also got information from him on these dances, on Scotch Blue Bonnets in particular, but never credited him. MacLennan was equally vague on what he actually learnt or observed Archie MacPherson perform. Therefore, the dances in MacLennan’s book should be seen as his own creations or interpretations, based on what he saw.

—Decline in interest in the dances now labelled ‘Hebridean’—

After 1931, interest in these dances seems to have slackened. Only Over the Water to Charlie and Highland Laddie seem to ‘have featured more or less continuously since.’¹³³ Other dances, commonly featured all over the Highland Games dancing world, have subsequently been filtered in to the island repertoire since that time, including the Scottish Lilt, Barracks Johnnie, and Flora MacDonald’s Fancy, after they were introduced at Highland dance competitions in the late 1950s and 1960s. Dickson, however, questions how ‘Hebridean’ the dances introduced from 1923 to 1931 actually are:

The dances seen at Askernish during the 1920s were indeed peculiar to the Hebrides, and we are left with the impression that the South Uist community considered their local games a venue for exhibiting—that is, preserving—what they perceived as a genuinely Hebridean style of dance. At the same time, the Games authorities and the press applied the stamp of romantic caricature to these dances by presenting them as ‘ancient,’ ‘Celtic’ and as ‘old world Hebridean dances [...] rescued from oblivion’; it bespeaks an invention of tradition, deliberate or otherwise, in the spirit of the Games phenomenon itself.¹³⁴

Dickson’s summary rings true, to my mind, because the label ‘Hebridean’ seems only to appear after D.G. MacLennan turns up on the scene, providing this group of dances with a convenient and remote geographical marker that set them apart from the commonly known Highland dances of the day. As we have established elsewhere, these dances belong to a wider known genre of solo dances, so their ‘uniqueness’ should be focused on the way they were performed locally as considered in Chapter One rather than as a completely separate genre. The labelling of dances may be helpful when comparing one style to another but can also lead to confusion. It is particularly misleading if the labelling is not generated by the tradition bearers themselves.

—Pre- and Post-World War II dance repertoire—

When Scottish dance ethnologist Joan Henderson researched traditional dancing in Lewis and South Uist and Barra in the early 1980s doing a comparative study mainly of the social dance tradition, she interviewed eleven people involved with dance. These eleven people included Fr Calum MacNeil and Fearchar MacNeil. Henderson lists the solo dances popular pre-World War II in order of importance as: Highland Fling, Sword Dance, *Seann Triubhas*, Over the Waters, Hielan’ Laddie, *Tulloch Gorm*,

Aberdonian Lassie, Scots Blue Bonnets, Sailors' Hornpipe, First of August and the Irish Jig. After the War, the Jig had disappeared but new ones, bracketed here, had been added: Highland Fling, Sword Dance, [Flora MacDonald's Fancy], Over the Waters, Aberdonian Lassie, *Seann Triubhas*, Hielan' Laddie, *Tulloch Gorm*, [Scottish Lilt], First of August, Blue Bonnets over the Border [note change of name], [Argyll Broadswords], [Clan Ranald], and [Uist Strathspey]. These lists clearly show that the Hebridean dances are second in popularity to the mainstream Highland dances such as the Highland Fling and the Sword Dance. One may surmise, however, that the pre-War versions were of the local variety while the post-War versions would be influenced by the prescribed steps by SOBHD rules and influence of visiting teachers.

The solo dance repertoire has since World War II seen considerable changes to both extent of repertoire and style, which is illustrated in the following sections. It would be impossible to name all the people who may have taught formally or informally taught these dances over the years, but a few names and events are worth mentioning, while not forgetting all the others.

—South Uist and Barra in the 1960s and 1970s—

In August 2001, I met a good number of people in South Uist discussing dance memories. The meetings were set up with the help of Lena MacLellan of North Boisdale, who ran the social dance classes in St Peter's Hall in Daliburgh until July 2018, and who, in her youth, played the pipes and did both Highland and Hebridean dancing. Two public meetings were held, one in St Peter's Hall in Daliburgh where fourteen people attended, and one in Craegorry Hotel in Benbecula where eight people attended. From these gatherings and a number of individual meetings, it was recalled that, in the 1960s and 70s in the Daliburgh area, some people were taught by John / Iain Ruadh MacLeod, while others learnt from Fr Calum MacNeil of Barra.¹³⁵

Fr Calum apparently taught out of a book, but nobody could recall what book it was. Considering the timeframe of teaching, it is most likely a copy of MacLennan's book or, if this refers to the 1970s, it may possibly be McConachie's 1972 booklet, Fr Calum had, as this was before any other books featuring versions of these dances were published. Note that some of the dances recalled below, including Aberdonian Lassie, do not appear in either book. They must have come from local sources. The dances recalled at the St Peter's meeting were Aberdonian Lassie / *Till a-Rithist* [the six steps I give in this book were recognised]; Argyllshire Broadswords; Barracks Johnnie; Blue Bonnets; a Highland Fling danced with six steps; Flora MacDonald's Fancy; Highland Laddie / *Mac Iain Ghasda*, which was recalled as flowing in style; a Highland Reel done in line formation; [Sailors'] Hornpipe; Miss Forbes; Over the Water; Reel of Tulloch; *Seann Triubhas* done as either three slow and two quick steps or four slow and two quick steps; Sword Dance danced as three slow and one quick steps; *Tulloch Gorm*; and the Wedding Reel starting in a square formation. Not much detail was given at that time. Flora MacDonald's Fancy was brought in by mainland Highland dance teacher Betty Jessiman when she visited the island at Fr Calum's invitation in 1949. Barracks Johnnie appeared in the 1950s. *The Highland Dancer* publication of July 1950 reported that, 'last January the children of South Uist were treated to a unique and beneficial experience in that Miss Jessiman was their teacher for two weeks. Her own impressions of the trip were that it was perhaps the happiest two weeks of teaching she has ever done due to the great enthusiasm of the children.'¹³⁶ A number of set dances were recalled at the meeting as well, of which only some were remembered by all.¹³⁷

The active support of the Church in the transmission of dance knowledge is traceable both between World Wars I and II and after World War II up to 1981 says Henderson in her 1980s study of South Uist and Barra dancing.

Father MacLennan used to have a class once a week for the school children. He even taught the boys. You have to get them from eight years upwards and then they learn" [Chrissie Mary MacNeil, Eoligary]. "We had Father Calum MacNeil who was very keen. He started teaching and he gave the biggest lift to dancing. He used to hold their feet in his hands and start them like that. And everybody

thought that the priest's house was mad because you'd hear the record played going, and there would be kids dancing! [John / Iain Pheadair MacInnes] [...] With the teaching of dances by the priests, and knowledge of the historical connection in Uist between the Church and dancing, the people of South Uist and Barra appeared encouraged in the learning and transmission of their dance culture.¹³⁸

At the Daliburgh meeting in 2001 Fr Calum's dance classes were recalled as taking place on Saturday mornings and were two-to-three hours long. He used an old gramophone with a big horn to provide accompanying music for dances, and the favourite music was by Bobby MacLeod. Some classes may have been held in Chapel House as well. It was merrily recalled that a bus picked everybody up, starting at the South End up south from Ludag and working its way down north to Daliburgh for these classes. Some kids travelled in Fr Calum's car, with three or four of them sitting in the boot with the lid open! Apparently, there was not much traffic or fast driving back in those days. Others walked in to attend the classes. It was remembered that Annie Walker, Annie Blair, John MacDonald / *Seonaidh Roidein*, and Donald Walker, who all lived in one area on the west side of Daliburgh, could all dance the First of August at one time or another.

There were so many attending Fr Calum's classes at times that he used to have five circles in the hall, with a tutor in the middle of each helping out.¹³⁹ Once a month, a piper played for Fr Calum's dance classes. It seems that particular dances became associated with certain individuals, who then performed them at concerts from then on. Similar recollections were made in another meeting in Benbecula by several individuals.

Evening dances in St Peter's Hall started late around 11:00 pm and lasted until 3:00–4:00 in the morning. Pipers played for most dances. Occasionally melodeon, accordion, and Gaelic singing or *puirt-a-beul* were featured, but more seldom, as one could not hear them for the noise in the hall. The piper was by the window, with his back to the dancers, when the dances were held in the old Iochdar School. Pipers usually took turns in playing. One of the ladies attending recalled that she felt that one was more tired the following day after a dance to the pipes, as one put more into the dancing than one would have done to the melodeon.

John / Iain Ruadh MacLeod was recalled teaching weekly from October to March with a break for Christmas. He taught in at least five places: Iochdar; Howmore; Stoneybridge; Daliburgh; and Garrynamonie. At some point, MacLeod received funding to teach for one year, but it was not recalled what year this was, though it would have been before 1979, when he passed away. He likely taught at other times as well. He taught both Lancers and Quadrilles. John MacLeod whistled the tunes while he taught, while Fr Calum counted out the steps and used his hands to show where the feet would go in the solo dances.

Between 1975 and 1978 mainland Highland dance teacher, and later instructor of Highland dance at Queen Victoria School, Dunblane, Gillin Anderson, taught Highland dancing in the Hebrides as part of a project funded by *Comhairle nan Eilean Siar* education authority at the time. The project was set up 'with a view to reviving and preserving the traditional Highland solo dances within the native Gaelic cultural environment.'¹⁴⁰ I have not been able to find out how much Gillin Anderson interacted with the Hebridean dances, but the project resulted in a new choreography named Clanranald, a six step 2/4 solo dance, inspired by the local lore around Bonnie Prince Charlie, the 1745–1746 Rising and the Gaelic environment of South Uist and Benbecula.

The dances featured at the Uist Games at Askernish towards the end of the 1960s were: Highland Fling; Sword Dance; *Seann Triubhas*; Strathspey and Reel; Flora MacDonald's Fancy; Highland Laddie; Over the Waters to Charlie; and, by the mid-1970s, Scottish Lilt and Barracks Johnnie had appeared. In the mid-1980s to mid-1990s, the same dances were danced but Over the Waters had disappeared, and the Sailor's Hornpipe, Irish Jig, and Half Tulloch had been added. One observes a clear shift towards mainstream competitive Highland dances and away from the 'Hebridean' dances of the 1920s in this period. In addition, in the 1980s and 90s the *feisean* movement offered classes taught by Morag MacSween and others in Over the Waters, Blue Bonnets, and *Till a-Rithist* / Aberdonian Lassie in

South Uist. Fearchar MacNeil taught at *Feis Bharraigh* in the 1980s and, later, Katie-Ann MacKinnon taught there as well into the 1990s. Some of their pupils eventually followed in their footsteps and continued teaching these dances for a period of time.

—*The 1980s–1990s second revival of Hebridean Dancing in Barra and South Uist*—

In the early 1980s, a number of people in Barra and South Uist realised that these dances would pass into oblivion unless special efforts were made to preserve the knowledge about them. In July 1984, a meeting convoked by *Comann Feis Bharraigh* was held at Castlebay Community School in Barra, where interested locals discussed the future of these dances. At that time, the dances were only taught to the children in Barra by Katie-Ann MacKinnon and Fearchar MacNeil at the children's Gaelic festival, *Feis Bharraigh*. Likewise, Morag MacSween was also sharing these dances in Uist and Barra at the time. The meeting was to establish who was interested in the promotion of these dances and to create a central Hebridean Dance Association! The minutes of the meeting reveal that, at that time, there clearly existed two, or more, variations of the same dance, and indicate a certain 'Uist' style of Donald 'Roidein' MacDonald and a certain 'Barra' style associated with John / Iain Ruadh MacLeod 'An Dannsair Ruadh.' Also, it is mentioned, that those present at the meeting only knew about one other place these dances were being taught at the time: London, where a North Uist instructor taught some dances 'whose style was clearly drawn from various sources.'¹⁴¹

The 1984 meeting ended with the formation of *Bòrd Dannsa nan Eileanach* / the Hebridean Dancing Board, as a custodian organization with two research bases, in Barra and in South Uist. The aim was to stabilise the versions already taught to children, and the variant steps and gestures to be retained and recorded as alternatives. It was further said that the researchers should try and trace the styles of *Roidein* MacDonald and John / Iain Ruadh MacLeod and retain the most *authentic* [emphasis added] elements in both styles. It was argued that the collection 'must retain the freedom of expression to be found in "traditional" Gaelic song.'¹⁴² The chairpersons for the local committees were elected, with Morag MacSween for Uist and for Barra, Katie-Ann MacKinnon. Fearchar MacNeil was elected patron.

After this meeting, research was conducted locally. The dances were promoted and taught locally in both Barra and South Uist at the time. Workshops were held in various places: the *Sabhal Mòr Ostaig*, the Gaelic College in Sleat; and summer courses taught in the Isle of Skye in Hebridean dance in 1989 and 1990 by Katie-Ann MacKinnon and her daughter Catriona from Barra. Catriona taught the classes the following summer of 1991.

Also, the *Feisean nan Gaidheal* movement, festivals primarily focused on furthering Gaelic arts and traditions, featured Hebridean dancing at several of the local *feisean* around Scotland in the early 1990s. The *Bord Dannsa nan Eileanach* disappeared and was superseded by *Sgoil* (School) *Dhannsa nan Eileanach*, also sometimes known as *Còmhlan* / Group *Dannsa nan Eileanach*, that ran classes, at least in Barra, on a regular basis in the 1990s. This company produced a book titled *Hebridean Dances—Dannsa nan Eileanach*, published in 1995 by Acair in Stornoway, based on the versions of the dances selected by Ceitidh Anna NicFhionghuin / Katie-Ann MacKinnon, Ceiteag Chaimbeul, and Mairead Nic Nèill. At the time, I offered my assistance in transcribing the dance notations in computer documents for the publisher's benefit from notes and typewritten pages given to me by *Comhlan Dannsa nan Eileanach*.

A new outfit was adopted by *Bòrd Dannsa nan Eileanach* in 1987 to be used by girls for displays of Hebridean dance. It consisted of a white blouse with puffed sleeves and a striped cotton skirt worn over a full white underskirt. The skirt was to be lifted above the right knee and the hemline fastened to the waistband. A cape in a colour to match the striped skirt and a knitted shawl could be worn as well. How commonly used these outfits were is hard to know, but I saw girls wearing them for a display at a *Cèolas ceilidh* in South Uist in 1997.

The style of the dances had changed by the 1990s, in comparison to the notations the Fletts and Rhodes made in the 1950s. One important change was the wearing of Highland dancing pumps, as well as the fact that the 1990s dance practitioners commonly were also Highland dancers, and therefore, naturally, the latter form seems to have influenced the style of the former. Also, the introduction of a girls' Hebridean dance costume in 1987 had an impact on the dancing style. Whatever the details and the causes, the style seen in the 1990s was definitely more akin to competitive Highland Dancing character than what had been found and recorded in the 1950s.

This shift was noted by Barra teacher Fearchar MacNeil. In the mid-1980s, there were reports of children being discouraged by their Highland Dancing teachers from doing the Hebridean dances, for various reasons. This caused Fearchar MacNeil to use strong words on the television programme *The Need to Dance – Footing It* shown on BBC in 1987, where he, using strong words, said that 'Highland Dancing was killing Hebridean dance.' He reiterated this standpoint to me in person in 1990. This scenario sadly continued in the 1990s when local dancers were told to choose between competitive Highland dancing or Hebridean style dancing but not both, as the 'Hebridean style' would ruin their Highland dancing technique. At least one local teacher of Hebridean dance in Barra stopped competitive dancing due to this and continued to teach Hebridean dance for a period of time in both Barra and through the *Feisean* movement.

This uneasy relationship with mainstream Highland dance competitive ethos and organizational guidelines is also mentioned in Henderson's 1980s research. Both supportive and negative comments are voiced in this study. The main points of contention were the freedom of expression and musicality versus standardised norms of execution of the dances for medal tests and competition purposes and that the latter should take precedence. One main concern was that parents and teachers were being discouraged to pass on the dances in their own way. It seems that the more supportive comments came from 'Uisteach' side while misgivings were expressed by 'Bharrach' representatives at the time, but *note* that these views only reflect the opinions of the small number of people queried in this study.¹⁴³



Catriona MacKinnon[-Garvin] in the Hebridean dance outfit. Barra, 1989. Photo Mats Melin.

The fact, however, is that as of 2018, nobody is regularly teaching or performing Hebridean dance in Barra or South Uist. Kerry Dolina MacDonald, based in Glasgow, does, however, teach some Hebridean dances, such as Aberdonian Lassie, as part of her Highland dance classes when she is on the islands.

—*Personal observations, reflections, and research since 1990*—

In the late 1990s and early 2000s I interviewed several people who could remember some steps of these dances in both Barra and South Uist. Their recollections clearly show the complex web of transmission from various sources to each other within the community.

In Barra, Mona MacNeil and her sister, Nellie, both from the island, held a dancing class at some point in the 1960s and 1970s in Castlebay. Mona and Nellie were both taught by Fearchar MacNeil, as was Mona MacKenzie, née Douglas, who taught dancing in Barra in the early 1990s and later at various *Feisean*. Mona travelled to the School of Scottish Studies in 1984 to have some of the dances recorded with Fearchar MacNeil.

Katie-Ann Mackinnon, that I met in 1989 and 1990, was primarily taught by John / *Iain Ruadh* MacLeod in Glasgow and by Mona MacNeil in Barra as I understand. Katie-Ann was involved in the forming of *Sgoil Dhannsa nan Eileanach* in the mid-1980s as mentioned elsewhere. Her daughter Catriona carried on teaching the dances for some time.

Other students of Katie-Ann also carried on teaching and performing the dances. One of them was Joanna MacMinn née Campbell, who, from age 16, taught at *Feisean* on Barra, Uist and Tiree. She performed at numerous community functions, ceilidh and Feis concerts alongside Michelle MacLean and Shona Gillies.

In South Uist, Morag Walker and Philomena MacQuarrie danced some steps for me in Daliburgh in August 2001. Philomena MacQuarrie danced steps out of Over the Waters, Flora MacDonald's Fancy, Aberdonian Lassie, Highland Laddie, and *Seann Triubhas*. She would have learnt her dances from Fr Calum and Betty Jessiman among others. Morag Walker showed me Flora MacDonald's Fancy, Over the Waters, and some steps out of the Highland Fling. Morag Walker said she got Flora steps from both Philomena MacQuarrie and from Marjory MacDonald in Arisaig. The latter also taught her the Sword Dance and *Seann Triubhas*. Morag Walker furthermore got Over the Waters from Effie MacLean (who took classes from Fr Calum and Betty Jessiman as well); and she got the Hornpipe from Mary Steele, and Fling steps from Fr Calum. Morag Walker knew of Aberdonian Lassie but did not learn it, but she knew Morag MacSween taught it.

In addition, Lena MacLellan of Boisdale learnt her dances from Morag Walker, Philomena MacQuarrie, and Gillin Anderson, and her repertoire included Over the Waters, Highland Laddie, Highland Fling, Sword Dance, Barracks Johnnie, Scottish Lilt, and Flora MacDonald's Fancy.

Morag MacSween from Benbecula was taught primarily by Fearchar MacNeil, Katie-Ann MacKinnon and John / *Iain Ruadh* MacLeod in Iochdar. She mainly got Highland dances (Fling, Swords and *Seann Triubhas* etc.) from MacLeod but the Hebridean dances (Over the Waters, Aberdonian Lassie / *Till A' Rithisd*, Highland Laddie, and Tulloch Gorm) came from the other two sources. She also knew the Scottish Lilt, Flora MacDonald's Fancy, and Barracks Johnnie. She taught at *Feisean* in Barra and at *Feis Tìr a' Mhurain* in Uist and sometimes in the local schools on Saturdays in the 1980s and 1990s.¹⁴⁴

During the 1997 *Ceòlas* Summer School in South Uist, some local girls performed a couple of Hebridean dances in costume, including four steps of the Aberdonian Lassie, at a concert in Stoneybridge, accompanied by pipe music. In the mid-2000s, I taught the First of August to Shona MacLellan from North Boisdale, and she and I subsequently performed at a couple of *Ceòlas* Summer School ceilidhs and dances, most recently at St Peters Traditional Dance Club's 20th Anniversary in July 2018. At these points in time did some of the older Uist community members tell me that our style of performing the dance reminded them of what they had seen danced when they were young.

Shona MacLellan has on occasion taught some of these dances locally. Alongside dancers Frank McConnell, Sandra Robertson, and Caroline Reagh, I performed First of August and occasionally taught Aberdonian Lassie at workshops on many occasions between 1999 and 2005 as part of the group *Dannsa*.

In 2016, I met and spoke with the one-month-shy-of-102-year-old Mary Godden in the Sacred Heart House in Daliburgh. Through an interpreter, as her memories were recalled in Gaelic, she remembered how light John / *Iain Ruadh* MacLeod was on his feet when dancing, and that he taught both solo dances and figure dances such as the Quadrilles and Lancers.

An event held on 27 May 2017, with new choreography and music called *Hebridean Dance Fantasy* commissioned for Morar Community Trust, celebrated the dance contribution of ‘Dance Master’ Ewen Mac Iseabal Reitlean, or Ewen MacLachlan, Retland, ‘the Morar man who created the Hebridean Dances of the 19th century,’ on the south shore of Loch Morar. Music was composed by Eddie MacGuire. Choreographed by Vincent Hantam, Morar Community Trust was delighted to host the première of *Hebridean Dance Fantasy* at their 2017 Gala Day at the Lovat Games Field, Morar. Dancer and choreographer Frank McConnell, who has strong South Uist connections, acted as the master of ceremonies and demonstrator for the Hebridean dance segment of the event. Frank has done regular dance workshops in Uist over the years and is a frequent teacher at the *Ceòlas* summer school.

In July 2017 and again in 2018, I taught the First of August as part of the *Ceòlas* Summer School. Hopefully more promotion of these dances will continue in years to come.



Two girls dancing at the Uist Games at Askernish in the 1920s. Perhaps they are two of the prize winners in the lists given in the *Oban Times* (see appendices). Photo used with kind permission courtesy of Edinburgh City Libraries and Information Services–Edinburgh Room. The image can be viewed on www.ambaile.co.uk.

Chapter 6—Legacies of tradition bearers

The two primary sources for the dances in this volume are Fearchar MacNeil, whom I learnt from myself in 1990, and John / *Iain Ruadh* MacLeod, who was one of Flett's and Rhodes's primary sources. In addition, dance information is included in the dance descriptions from the family and pupils of Donald 'Roidein' MacDonald. Short biographies of a number of other Islanders who, in the 1950s, provided information to Flett and Rhodes are also given for reference in the appendices. They were all instrumental in providing information about these dances and to our knowledge regarding Ewen MacLachlan.

—Fearchar MacNeil, Isle of Barra (1909–1997)—

Barra native Fearchar MacNeil was born on 23 April 1909, in Leanish, Barra, and died in 1997 at the age of 88. He was perhaps one of the last dancers to learn the 'Hebridean' solo dances along the old-fashioned informal way. He danced some of these dances in his youth. Fearchar, or Farquhar MacNeil, also known by the patronymic *Fearchar Eoin Fhearchair* / Fearchar son of John son of Fearchar, was left without a mother at age 4. Fearchar and his younger brother were brought up by his Buchanan grandparents in Leanish. His father, grandfather, and great-grandfather were all joiners and boat builders. His father was in the navy during the First World War and remarried a widow a couple of years after the war ended. Fearchar's father and second wife moved to Eoligaray, but Fearchar spent as much time as possible with his grandparents.

Fearchar grew up a fluent Gaelic speaker and a Catholic. He learnt his trade as a joiner, but never found employment as one, as work was extremely scarce in 1920s Barra. He took various labouring jobs and ended up with the Forestry Commission where he worked until the Second World War. Between 1936 and 1939, Fearchar taught dancing in Barracaldine, north of Oban on the mainland, where his pupils gave concerts at the end of each term. He was with the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders as a dispatch rider for the duration of the war. He was in France until four weeks after Dunkirk, and then spent time in England until being stationed in Jedburgh in the Borders. It was here he met and married Ann Wood. Shortly afterward, he was sent to North Africa where he received minor wounds. Following that, he spent four years in Italy, which he left on V.E. Day, and was demobilised in January 1946. After a spell in Barra, Fearchar and his family moved to Jedburgh where he worked in a silk factory. Fearchar and Ann had two daughters, and in addition, brought up a boy. After about 15 years, the couple went their separate ways, and Fearchar moved to Ayr where he spent the next 22 years working in a metal foundry.

Fearchar returned to Barra in November 1984 and settled, first in Upper Brevig, then in Leanish where he lived about 50 yards from where he grew up with his grandparents.¹⁴⁵ During his childhood and right up to World War Two, the Scotch Reel was the best-known social dance, at least in Barra. The Scotch Reel was usually the first dance a beginner would attempt in public, and often it would be danced six or seven times in one night. Dances ended with a Grand March and the White Cockade, also known as the *Dannsa nam Pòg* / Dance of the Kiss.¹⁴⁶

I stopped teaching in Barra in 1936 and at that time there were hundreds of children able to dance Hebridean dances and in fact, competed at both the Uist and Barra Highland Games. South Uist and Benbecula had a teacher, a Mr MacLeod who taught them there, and he left about the same time as I left Barra. These Hebridean dances were the main dances at both games. I never went back to stay in Barra and after the war I was teaching in Jedburgh, but as Hebridean dances were not in competition, there was no demand for them, however I kept doing them myself at displays and that kept them fresh in my mind. I stopped dancing altogether when I came to Ayr in 1963 but did a little judging at minor events, and about 1970 I gave that up. In 1982, I was asked to judge a competition in South Uist and that appealed to me, for I was keen to see the Hebridean dances done once more. I was of the opinion that they were still as well-known as they were in the 30s, but I was wrong. It

was all Highland and National dance they did. I made inquiries both in Uist and Barra and could not find one person who could remember a complete dance although quite a few of the older people could remember one or two steps of nearly all the dances. I appealed on the radio for anyone who knew them to contact the BBC but with no success. [...] However, they have been rescued. Luckily the dancing Associations of both Uist and Barra were very interested and allowed me to teach their teachers and pupils and anyone else who wanted to learn, and I am today in the happy position of knowing that they are being taught at every dancing class in Uist and Barra, and are in competition at the Uist Games (the Barra Games didn't restart after the war) and what is more important, they have a better chance of survival now thanks to modern methods (Video etc.).¹⁴⁷

Fearchar was taught dancing by his grandfather Neil Buchanan, frequently referred to as *an Clench*, from Earsary, Barra, who lived from 1858–1940 and made his living as a fisherman. In an 1982 interview he said; 'S e....Niall beag Dhòmhnaill a' mhathain. Ach 's e an Clench a b'fheàrr thuigeadh e fèin 's a thuigeadh càch. Thuigeadh a bhean cuideachd-sa. [It was ... Small Neil [son of] Donald the bear. But it was 'the Clench' he was best understood [known] as by himself and others. His wife [knew him as that] too.]

'The Clench' never left the island apart for fishing trips off the East coast of Scotland and on the lochs in Skye and the west coast. Neil Buchanan was taught social and solo dancing by two people. One was a student of Ewen MacLachlan: Ronald Morrison, known as *Raghnall Dannsair* / dancer Ronald; the other was a MacLeod from Skye who was a stonemason and known as *An Clachair* / The Stonemason.¹⁴⁸ Fearchar deliberated on this in an interview from 1982:

Thill esan a-nall, cha b'urrainn dhomh ràdh an ann o'n Eilean Sgitheanach a thàinig e no gu dè mar a fhuair e Sgitheanaich ach tha mi a' smaoineachadh gur e Dòmhnall a bh'air, Dòmhnall MacLeòid, fear à muinntir an Eilein Sgitheanaich a dh'ionnsaich na dannsaichean o Eòghann MacLachlainn, no Eòghann nan làmhnan beaga mar a bheireadh iad ris. 'S e sin am fear a chaidh a Bharraigh, Dòmhnall MacLeòid, agus aig an àm a bha sin chan urrainn dhomh 'g ràdh a-nisde an robh duine sam bith eile eadar mo sheanair agus Dòmhnall MacLeòid, no an e Dòmhnall MacLeòid a dh'ionnsaich mo sheanair. Chan eil cuimhne 'am ach 's ann daonnan air Dòmhnall MacLeòid a bhiodh esan a' bruidhinn. Agus cha do bhodradh mo sheanair ri duine sam eile ionnsachadh idir ann am Barraigh, cha robh ach an rud a bha sinn a' dèanamh a-staigh airson—tha fhios agad—airson an teaghlaich fhèin.

He returned, and I couldn't say if he came from the Isle of Skye or how he got [the name?] Sgitheanaich but I think his name was Donald, Donald MacLeod, a man from Skye folk who learned the dances from Ewen MacLachlan, or Ewen of the Small Hands as they called him. That was the man who went to Barra, Donald MacLeod, and at that time I couldn't say now if there was anyone else between my grandfather and Donald MacLeod, or if it was Donald MacLeod who taught my grandfather. I don't remember, but he was always talking about Donald MacLeod. And my grandfather didn't bother teaching anyone else in Barra, it was only ever something we did in the house—you know—for the family.

Fearchar described his grandfather as an entertaining dancer, who only danced privately for friends and perhaps at ceilidhs, and who danced simply for pleasure. He was a piper and was generally an athletic sort of man. To Fearchar's knowledge, his grandfather did not teach anyone other than himself. Fearchar last saw his grandfather dance at Hogmanay in 1938, two years before he died at the age of 82.

According to an interview with Fearchar by Joan Henderson in the early 1980s, Neil Buchanan taught him: 'He started me on Hielan' Laddie. He also taught me Fling, Swords, *Seann Triubhas*, Over the Water to Charlie, Sailors' Hornpipe, Irish Jig, Scots Measure, Scots Blue Bonnets, First of August, Aberdonian Lassie, and Tulloch Gorm.'¹⁴⁹ Fearchar continued: 'Grandfather taught me in the house. I was in stockings soles or barefeet. First, he taught the steps, and then he would use a chanter.'¹⁵⁰

Again in the 1982 interview he recalled: ...*chan eil cuimhne agam, thòisich mo cho òg sin. Anns na làithean a-sin am Barraigh far an robh mi—[far an] do rugadh 's do thogadh mi, far an robh mi 'nam phàisde beag—bhiodh mo sheanair air oidhche 'gheamhraidh gu sonraichte nuair nach robh dad eile ri dhèanamh (cha robh an uair sin telebhisean na sgàth sam bidh eile a chuireadh seachad ùine), agus 's ann do mo sheanair bu tric 's a bha mise. [...I don't remember, I started so young. In those days in Barra where I was—where I was born and raised, where I was a wee child—my grandfather would be—on a winter's night, especially when there was nothing to do (there was no television then or anything that*

would pass the time) and I was often at my grandfather's place)]. Family learning was well practised in the island communities in Barra and South Uist at the time as further evidenced in the 1980s research by Henderson and by extension in the Cape Breton Gaelic communities in Canada by Melin.¹⁵¹

Fearchar's grandfather did not have any names for the various steps in either Gaelic or English, but he did have Gaelic names for most of the dances, i.e., *Tulach Gorm*, *Thairis an Aiseag (gu Teàrlach)*, *Mac Iain Ghasda*, and *Bonaidean Gorma*, as would have made sense with Gaelic being the daily spoken language, with the exception being the name for the dance Aberdonian Lassie. In a letter to Joan Flett, Fearchar elaborated on learning to dance:

As a boy I was very keen on dancing especially solo dancing but unfortunately none of the local boys of my age were, which meant that on many occasions I was ridiculed for even mentioning dancing, boats and sailing were the only subjects considered worth talking about. I was not aware of one boy or man who could dance but I was told about two sisters who did dance solo dances and this did convince me at the time, that solo dancing was indeed a female pastime, however my desire to learn solo dancing was so strong that I took every opportunity to do so but had to be unknown to my pals.¹⁵²

Fearchar told me in 1990 that he had 34–35 steps¹⁵³ in the Highland Fling when he was young, so he could dance at least three Flings without repeating a step. He always taught just eight steps but only ever danced six when performing. He taught 'hundreds' of people to dance in Barra over the years he said but he never 'took a penny' for it. He taught Barra locals for the love of it, but when he lived on the mainland, he charged students fees to take his classes to cover hall charges and other expenses.¹⁵⁴

Fearchar said he visited D.G. MacLennan in Edinburgh at one time in the early 1930s, and MacLennan asked Fearchar to show his dances to him. When he came to the Blue Bonnets, MacLennan said 'I did not know that one, I saw it but did not write it down, but if you don't mind, I'll write it now.' Fearchar felt there was nothing that special about the dance, but MacLennan asked him to start repeating the steps: 'Do that first step again, so I did, and then he said, I wonder could you do the step this way.' Over a period of three or four weeks, MacLennan changed the dance from what Fearchar did to what he wanted. Fearchar admitted he liked the new way, and he was not too worried about whether it was changed or not. At that time there were very few dancers in Barra apart from the ones he taught, and he was always asked to perform locally. He felt he was running out of dances to show, so with the new version from MacLennan fresh in him, he decided to perform it, as he was just back on Barra after his Edinburgh visits. So, he performed MacLennan's version at a ceilidh. In the audience, was Fr John MacMillan, present as the 'chairman' for this ceilidh, and he came over to Fearchar after the dance asking 'what dance is that you did? I told him it was Blue Bonnets, and he said, 'I did not know it was done like that, I never saw it before.' Fearchar told Fr John about how MacLennan had encouraged the changes in Edinburgh. 'Oh no, he said, don't do that! He was a purist, you know, don't do that he says. Either give it another name. It is nicer than the original but give it another name. Did you teach it to anyone else? No... that was it. Either drop it or give it another name.' So Fearchar was left with instructions to keep the dance by all means but not to call it Scotch Blue Bonnets.¹⁵⁵ He stopped teaching the version in 1936 or 1937.

Fearchar never realised that D.G. MacLennan disseminated this version of the dance without crediting Fearchar including publishing it in his book in 1950. Fearchar was quite surprised to see this 'new' version performed many years later by a girl from the mainland at a *ceilidh* in the early 1980s, thinking this version had been forgotten. MacLennan's version is the one known by Highland dancers as a 'National Dance' in a slightly altered and evolved form.¹⁵⁶ Fearchar only resumed teaching after the war when he went to live in Jedburgh where he taught the Fletts Aberdonian Lassie in 1953.

In my interview in 1990, I asked Fearchar how his versions compared to Jack McConachie's descriptions in his book that based on John / Iain Ruadh MacLeod's steps. He said there were some differences, and also that there were more steps to the dances than he knew. Fearchar had, for example, never heard of or seen a 'treble shuffle.' He used to do double or single shuffles himself and he preferred the 'double.' He also said the only version of the Flowers of Edinburgh he knew was the version

he learnt through McConachie's 1972 book. He had never seen it before that. He never danced Miss Forbes himself, but knew about it, and had at one time had a written description of it, which he had lost. He believed it was more suitable as a girl's dance.

Fearchar was interviewed by Frances MacEachen for the Canadian paper *The Clansman* in 1993. In this interview, he recalled seeing Barra people step dance in his youth, and the way he met Cape Breton step dancer Mary Janet MacDonald when she taught at the *Feis Bharraigh* a few years earlier:

There was an old woman, a cripple and her sister who used to come to our house very often. And one time I called in on them to find out how she was, you know, while I was passing. "Oh dance for us, dance for us," they said—I was then dancing on the q-t [quiet, in secrecy], however, I did dance. (Then) the fit one, she got up and she said, "this is how I danced when I was young." And of course, there was an earthen floor and she had a long skirt on, and I could see the toes peeping out underneath the bottom of the skirt. I said to myself, she must have seen tap dancing or something somewhere. But I did admire the way, the rhythm of it. You couldn't hear anything but seeing the toes peeping out. Well a year or two later I was in another house, maybe three or four miles away and something the same happened. It happened on three different occasions and different people. But it was this tapping thing, and the moment I saw Mary Janet [MacDonald] dancing, I knew that was what they were doing.

Farquhar does not remember any hand movement and says he is almost positive their hands were kept by their sides. After seeing Mary Janet dance, he set out with a bit more determination to see if he could find any clues as to what they were doing before [Ewen] MacLachlan. "No one could give me anything on what they were doing. Not a soul. I was searching, searching, and not just the islands. What I found was that when the Free Church got kind of strong, dancing and musical instruments were the work of the devil. [...] But I think that Cape Breton dancing is not far away from the origin of the dance [here in Barra]. And there's nothing like that here [now]."¹⁵⁷

In my 1990s interview with him, Fearchar told me he could not find any trace of solo dances, either Highland or Hebridean, before Ewen's arrival in South Uist, which led him to believe that the dancing before that time was more in line with the percussive style he saw Mary Janet doing and what he recalled the Barra women dancing in his youth. In addition to the recollection in the interview above, he told me that he recalled three different times, in different years, when he had been shown step dancing in a style similar to that done in Cape Breton, and unlike tap or Irish dance, in which he had taken a class at one point to learn what it was like. On one occasion at a ceilidh, after he had danced several solo dances, an elderly woman danced in a similar way as in the above story and showed him 'how they danced in her day.'

On 5th January 1935, Fearchar, then aged 25, performed three Hebridean dances at the EFDSS Festival at the Royal Albert Hall in London. Fearchar recalled the event in both 1982 and 1993:

6. **HEBRIDEAN SOLO DANCES**
By FARQUHAR McNEIL of the Isle of Barra
Aberdonian Lassie
Highland Laddie
Scots Blue Bonnets
Piper: DR. GEORGE MACKINNON
These dances, according to Mr. John McPherson, of the Post Office, Barra, were introduced into the Island by Ewen-of-the-short-arms, whose house was destroyed by fire, and with it perished the history of the dances and records of old stories. The islanders claim that both in their dances and their mode of dancing there is a clear distinction from the generally recognised Highland tradition.

Bha mi a' dannsadh ann am Bàgh a Tuath aon oidhche agus thàinig boireannach a bha seo, Margaret Dellahie [?]. Bhuinnedh i dhan English Folk Dance and Song Society is chan fhaca ise riamh na dannsaichean agus thug i- dh'fhaighnich i dhìomsa an rachainn sìos gu Lunmainn [...] agus uill cha robh fios 'am ach co-dhiù chaidh mi sìos a dhèanamh na dances anns an Albert Hall. Is chaidh an t-ainm an uair sin a's gach pàipear is a h-uile sgàth mu dheidhinn agus bha feadhainn a' sgrìobhadh thugam [...]

I was dancing in North Bay one night and this woman came, Margaret Dellahie [sp?]. She belonged to the English Folk Dance and Song Society and she never saw the dances and she asked if I would go

down to London ... and, well, I didn't know, but anyway I went down to do the dances at the Albert Hall. And the name then went into every paper, and everything about them, and some people were writing to me [...]

[To me, in 1990 he added:] That there was a lady here from the English Folk Dance and Song Society [...] who saw me dancing [...] and she picked the dances I was to do. I did not realise that there was any significant difference between them and Flings and Sword dance, but told me "Oh, we don't know these" [...] and I think that is when they were being started to be called "Hebridean dances."¹⁵⁸

But, as described earlier, the term was used slightly earlier in the *Oban Times* in 1925. That was, however, the first time Fearchar heard them labelled 'Hebridean Dances.'

The Irish Free Press (Thursday January 3, 1935) reported:

From Scotland will come Farquhar McNeil, a solo dancer from the Island of Barra in the Outer Isles, who dances in his stocking soles to bagpipe accompaniment the traditional Hebridean dances. These are closely akin to the Highland dances and the tunes are variants of the Highland airs.

Evening Herald added on the 5 January 1935:

[...] Farquhar McNeil has also arrived in London to dance at the Albert Hall to-night. He is going to dance, this dark-haired sturdy islander, just as he would at home—in his stockings pulled up over the bottoms of his trouser-legs. The Albert Hall does not frighten him. "I know my dances and I don't know the people so I shall be all right"—that is the way he looks at things. "I think I should be more nervous if I knew the people who were watching or if they knew me," he told a reporter. [...] He had not seen the hall until he went there for the rehearsal—but he had bought a photograph of it. "I have danced in all the halls in Barra, but never in a great place like this," said young McNeil. In Barra, where he was born and where he still lives, he works at joinery and masonry. [...] He has had a look round London now. But he prefers Eoligaray, which is the name of the lonely village where he lives. [...] Young McNeil has heard the stories of Eoghan Beag or Ewen of the Short Arms. "It is said that Ewen danced on a table that he had a candle at each corner and that he was able to put out the flame of the candles with his feet as he danced without knocking them over." Said McNeil. "I hope they don't expect me to do that to-night." [...] Approximately four hundred English dancers representing twenty county and city branches of the Society [EFDSS] will take part. Scotland will be represented by a traditional country dance team of "bondagers"—the old border name for servants bound to the farm which is still applied to women farm workers.

The *Sunday Post* (January 6, 1935:2) reported a small notice titled '*Dancing joiner from the Isles makes a Hit on His first visit to London*' adding that 'M'Neil [sic], a sturdy, dark-haired man, is a joiner [...] [is] a 25-year-old native of Barra [...] His part in the London performance, for which he was dressed in a blue sweater and trousers, not a kilt, consists of three dances performed in the manner of the Highland Fling. These are danced in stockinged feet to the accompaniment of the bagpipes.' After this he recalled in 1982 that

Agus às a dheoghaidh sin bhithinn a' dol sìos gu Lunnainn. Bha mi shìos ann a South ... [?] Hall is dhà no trì de dh'àitichean eile—bhithinn a' dol sìos trì no ceithir uairean sa bhliadhna. Ach thòisich an cogadh is dh'fhalbh mise is sguir an danns. Agus an deoghaidh dhomh tilleadh, an dèidh a' chogaidh, bha mi ann an Jedburgh agus, och, bha mi a' dèanamh beagan de dhannsa a' sin nuair a thàinig Flett, Professor Flett, a-nuas à Liverpool. Is thug mi dha an dà dhannsa ... airson a leabhair. Ach gu mi-fhortanach bhàsaich e mus tàinig an dara leabhar a-mach. A' chiad leabhar, 's e dannsaichean ceathrar no còignear a bh' anns'. Bha danns aon-duine a bha dol san ath leabhar.

And after that I would go down to London. I was down the in South ... [?] Hall and two or three other places—I would go down three or four times a year. But the war started and I left and stopped dancing. And after I returned, after the war, I was down in Jedburgh and, och, I was doing a little bit of dancing when Flett, Professor Flett, came over from Liverpool. I gave him two dances ... for his book. But, unfortunately, he died before the second book came out. The first book was of dances for four or five people. It was solo dances that were going in the next book.

Again, in the 1982 interview from the School of Scottish Studies archive Fearchar recalled his thoughts

on the dancing he knew from Barra when he left the island and later realised people did not know or remember the dances:

Nuair a dh'fhàg mi an t-eilean cha robh duine sam bith eile anns an eilean aig an àm a bhiodh a' danns fhad 's fhiosrach mise, [sin gu math?] a' teagasg danns. Ach bha aon fhear ann, Tommy Beag a bh' aca air, Ruairidh [Ruarachain?] agus chunna mi esan a' dèanamh Danns a' Chlaidheimh ann an Sgoil a' Bhàgh a Tuath aon turas agus sin a' chiad uair a chunna mise riamh duine a' dannsadh, sin a-mach o'm sheanair fhèin.

When I left the island there was no one on the island at that time who was dancing, as far as I know [?] teaching dance. But there was one fellow, Little Tommy they called him, *Ruairidh Ruarachain*, and I saw him doing the Sword Dance in North Bay School one time and that was the first time I ever saw someone dancing aside from my own grandfather.

[...]

Chuala mi an uair sin, thàinig fear a-nall à Uibhist a Bharraigh agus bha e ag ionnsachadh nan dannsaichean Gàidhealach—Fling, Swords is rudan dhen t-seòrs'—agus bha e ag ionnsachadh an fheadhainn-se [Hebridean Dances] cuideachd. Agus fhuair mi an uair sin a-mach gu robh gu leòr dhiubh ann an Uibhist is bha mi just a' feuchainn ri faighinn a-mach mu dheidhinn sin. Agus 's e MacLeòid a [bh'ann] cuideachd a thàinig às an Eilean Sgitheanach a dh'ionnsaich aig Eòghann MacLachlainn. Chan eil fhios 'am an e an aon fhear a bh'ann, neo an e dithis – bha e furasda gu leòr dà MhacLeòid fhaighinn anns an Eilean Sgitheanach. Agus 's e Mac a' Phearsain a dh'ionnsaich [bh]uaithesan. Agus thug Mac a' Phearsain na dansaichean air aghaidh ann an Uibhist.

I heard then that a man came from Uist to Barra and he was teaching the Highland dances—the Fling, Swords and dances of that kind—and he was teaching those ones [i.e. the Hebridean Dances] too. And I then found out that there were plenty of them [Hebridean dances] in Uist and I was just trying to find out about that. And he was a MacLeod as well who came from the Isle of Skye and learned from Ewan MacLachlan. I don't know if he was the same man, or if there were two – it was easy enough to find two MacLeods on the Isle of Skye. And it was MacPherson who learned from him and MacPherson brought the dances on in Uist.

[...]

Nuair a dh'fhalbh mi gam chosnadh, chaidh mi dhan Òban. Agus bha mi aig na geamaichean san Òban agus anns an àm a bha sin, cha bhiodh duine fo shia bliadhna' deug a' dannsadh aig Geamaichean an Òbain agus cha bhiodh boireannaich idir ann. Agus bha mi car a' coimhead an latha a bha seo agus rinn iad na dannsaichean a b'abhast: Danns a' Chlaidheimh, Flings, Seann Triubhas, danns no dhà eile. Thug mi an aire nach robh gin dhen fheadhainn a bha mise ag ionnsachadh: Mac Iain Gasda, 's Thairis



Fearchar MacNeil outside his house in Upper Brevig, Barra, March 1990.
Photo Mats Melin.

Air an Aiseag, 's Tulach Gorm, cha robh gin dhiubh air...

When I left for employment, I went to Oban. And I was at the Games in Oban and in that time, there wasn't anyone under the age of sixteen dancing at the Games and there weren't any women there at all. And I was kind of watching, this one day, and they did the usual dances: the Sword Dance, Flings, *Seann Triubhas*, one or two other dances. I noticed that there weren't any of the dances I had been learning—*Mac Iain Ghasda* [Highland Laddie] and Over the Water, and Tulloch Gorm, there were none of them.

'S cuimhne 'am [gun do dh'fhaighnich mi do] f[h]ear dhe na dannsairean nuair a fhuair mi cothrom, carson nach do rinn iad na dannsaichean a bha seo is dh'aidich e dhomh nach cual' e riamh [sgeul?] orra gu dè...no rud san bi eile. 'S thòisich mi an uair sin a' faighneachd is 's ann a thuig mi nach robh iad ach ma na h-eileanan fhèin. Agus rinn mi tuilleadh sgrùdaidh mun cuairt air a' gnothach agus fhuair mi a-mach gur e 'Hebridean Dances' a t-ainm a bh'aca orra. Is fhuair mi a-mach beagan mun eachdraidh aca, is cha b'urrainn dhomh 'g ràdh co-dhiù a bheil e fìor no nach robh ach [chuala mi?] mar a thàinig iad dhan eilean.

And I remember I took [?] one of the dancers when I had the opportunity, why don't they do these dances and he admitted to me that he had never heard [of them?] or anything else. And I started asking then and I came to understand that they were only around the islands themselves. And I did more research around the matter and I found out that they were called 'Hebridean Dances'. And I found out a little about their history, I couldn't say if it is true or not but [I heard?] how they came to the island[s].

Agus às a dheoghaidh sin, bhithinn a' dol a Bharraigh ach chan fhaca mi danns' ann, cha d'fhuair mi cothrom. Ach bha mi riamh a' smaointinn gu robh Uibhist is Barraigh làn dha na Hebridean Dances a bha seo, gu robh iad mar a chunna mi fhìn iad ron chogadh. Ach o chionn trì seachdainean, fhuair mi bràth a dh'Uibhist a dhol suas airson [a bhith] nam bhrìtheamh gu dannsa—judge—[aig] danns anns an Iochdar, b' e sin Disathairne sa chaidh. Is cha robh dùil sam bith agam a dhol a dhèanamh sgàth sam bith le dannsa ach bha mi ag ràdh, uill, Uibhist, tha sin diofraichte. Dh'fheumainn a dhol a dh'Uibhist is chaidh mi ann.

Ach bhrìst an cridhe agam – cha robh aon fhear... Bha dannsa no dhà aca nach robh riamh agam ri'm linn-se, nach fhaca mise riamh iad a' dèanamh ann an Uibhist, a tha cumanta gu leòr air tìr mòr. Agus bha na dannsaichean Gàidhealach a b'abhaist dhaibh bhith dèanamh ach cha robh gin aca de na Hebridean Dances. Is nuair a thòisich mi air faighneachd [...] thòisich a h-uile duine, 'ò, chan aithne dhuinn' is, 'cha chuala'. [Bha] feadhainn a chuala is feadhainn nach cuala. Ach tha mise a' smaoinneachadh gu bheil gu leòr beò an-diugh fhathast ann an Uibhist a bha a' dannsa [aig] na Games ron chogadh, agus leis gu bheil cha bhiodh iad cho sean sin. Ma tha cuimhn' aca air na dannsaichean, 's dòcha nach eil.

And, after that, I would go to Barra but I didn't see dances there, I didn't get the opportunity. But I always thought that Uist and Barra were full of these Hebridean Dances, as I had seen them before the war. But three weeks ago, I was called to Uist to go and be a judge at a dance in Iochdar—this was last Saturday. And I wasn't expecting to go and do anything with dance, but I said, well, Uist, that's different. I had to go to Uist and so I went.

But my heart broke—there wasn't a single one... They had some dances that I never had during my time, that I never saw them doing in Uist, [but which] are common enough on the mainland. And they had the usual Highland dances, but they didn't have a single one of the Hebridean Dances. And when I started asking ... everyone started [Fearchar shrugs his shoulders], 'oh we don't know' and 'I never heard'. There were some who had heard [about the dances] and some who hadn't. But I think there are still plenty of people alive today in Uist who were dancing at the Games before the war, and who therefore wouldn't be too old. If they remember the dances, maybe they don't.

Towards the end of the interview Fearchar was asked *Agus co-dhiù, tha sibh airson 's gum faic sibh na dannsaichean sin a bheòthachadh a-rithist?* / And anyway, you would like to see the dances brought to life again?

Tha mise deiseil airson rud sam bith a ghabhas dèanamh airson an toirt beò 's an cumail beò. Tha mi glè chinnteach gum faodainn a bhith air tuilleadh ionnsachadh dhan fheadhainn a tha mi ag ionnsachadh ann an Uibhist. [...] Agus bha mi a' smaointinn air dòigh eile, bha trìùir ann agus nam bithinn air dà dhannas an t-aon a thoirt dhaibh, diofair danns, agus às deoghaidh sin bha mi ag ràdh rium fhìn, ma

chailleas gin aca sgàth chan urrainn duine an cuideachadh. Is thug mi na trì dannsaichean dhaibh—an aon seòrsa dhan a h-uile duine. Ma chailleas an darna tè aca, ionnsaichidh an tèile, bidh fios aig tè dhan triùir co-dhiù.

Oh, I am ready for anything that can be done to bring them to life and keep them alive. I'm very sure I could be teaching more to the ones I'm instructing in Uist. [...] And I was thinking of another way, there were three [women] and if I was giving each one two dances, different dances, and after that I was saying to myself, if any one of them loses [a dance] no one can help her. And [so] I gave them three dances – the same one to each of them. If one girl loses one, the other can teach her, at least one out of the three will know it anyway.

Some years later Fearchar kept promoting the dances he loved and he had started choreographing a new dance, *Caisteal Chiosamul*, which was eventually and first performed at the *Feis Bharraigh*, a children's music festival centred on Gaelic traditions, in 1986 in tribute to the late Fr John MacMillan of Barra.

Fearchar taught and influenced many dancers over the years in Barra and on the mainland. Among them were sisters Mona and Nellie MacNeil, Katie-Ann MacKinnon, and Mona MacKenzie, née Douglas, who in turn held dancing classes in Barra.

—John MacLeod, South Uist (1907–1979)—

John MacLeod (1907–1979) also known as *Iain Macleòid*, *Iain Ruadh* / Red John, and *Mac Phadraig 'Ic Iain Ruaidh*, listing his patronymic lineage,¹⁵⁹ came from Buaile Dubh, Buaile Uachdrach, Iochdar, South Uist. He was also known as *An Dannsair Ruadh* / The Red Dancer, presumably his hair was ginger coloured, and was the son of Peter MacLeod / *Mac Iain Ruaidh Thormoid* (1864–?) and Mary Anne MacDonald / *Mairi Anna NicDhomhnaill*.¹⁶⁰ There were four in the family: two daughters named Mary and Kate; and two boys. *Pàdraig 'Beag'* / 'Little' Patrick, his brother, was a skilled piper. In addition to croft work, the family had a shop they ran between them. They sold milk, crowdie, cream, cheese, and anything else that they could source from their croft. After mobile shops grew more common, however, their own shop was not as successful, and they closed it. In the 1950s, Red John worked as the deputy manager of the Duke Street Hotel in the east end of Glasgow, and he ran a café on Sauchiehall Street. He worked in hotels in Oban and Tobermory throughout the tourist season and returned home in winters. In addition to being a skilful dancer, John was a good poet and a good singer.¹⁶¹ He and 'Little' Patrick were paid by the Council to teach dancing and piping throughout the Uists and Barra. When at home, John would very often organise dances and ceilidhs in an old school house in Iochdair. He would often sing with John / *Iain Pheadair* MacInnes at ceilidhs and at each other's houses.¹⁶²

John was regarded as one of the major sources of these Hebridean dances. He was apparently too young to attend classes, so he seems to have hidden under a table to watch them. Later, after demonstrating his dancing skills, he was permitted to join the class taught by Archibald MacPherson.¹⁶³ John taught dancing during the winters in Barra during the 1930s and early 1940s, and he also taught in South Uist, where he was known for his direct manner and good heart. He was often referred to as having a 'Barra' style. Katie-Ann MacKinnon of Barra was a pupil of his in her youth. It was also from MacLeod that the Fletts obtained a bulk of their detailed material in 1953 while he was working and living in Glasgow on a seasonal basis and returning home when he could. John MacLeod taught Jack McConachie of London, who at that time was in his prime as a competitive Highland dancer, several dances in 1949, who made notes and taught the dances in turn.¹⁶⁴

The dances John MacLeod knew were Tulloch Gorm, Highland Laddie, Over the Water to Charlie, First of August, and Blue Bonnets. All were danced to the tunes of the same name except 'First of August,' accompanied by the tune 'The White Cockade.' He never learned the Flowers of Edinburgh from Archie as he thought it too difficult. It contained double trebles done simultaneously with both feet and a step in which the dancer drops on one knee. He had never heard of the dances Over the Hills and Far Away or Jacky Tar and had only seen Donald 'Roidein' MacDonald's Miss Forbes, and only heard of Fearchar MacNeil's Aberdonian Lassie. When John MacLeod danced, he

used arm movements in a similar fashion to what is used in Highland dancing today, i.e., opposite arm to working foot, arms akimbo, and both arms up.

—Donald ‘Roidein’ MacDonald, South Uist (1864–1945)—

Donald MacDonald, also known as *Dòmhnaiill Bàn* / Fair Donald, and widely known as *Roidein*¹⁶⁵ (1864–22 February 1945), was ‘a renowned piper and exponent of Highland dancing’ who taught classes locally and played for step dancing and Reels at local dances, according to Frederick Rea, in the first decade of the twentieth century.¹⁶⁶ He was a native of Daliburgh, South Uist, and was the twin son of Roderick and Annabella MacDonald. His twin sister was not a piper, but some of his other siblings were, including older brothers Ronald and James. ‘Roidein’ and his wife Isabella, or Bella, lived near Daliburgh.

Donald ‘Roidein’ was known as a step dance piper who often competed in both piping and dancing at the Uist Games. According to Dickson, he was in the ‘old Militia,’ which later became the Queen’s Own Cameron Highlanders (1793–1961) and he would have been in his prime as a piper in the 1890s.¹⁶⁷ He won prizes at the Askernish Games from 1923–1928 for both dancing and dance teaching. It is told that he learnt his dancing from Ewen’s pupil Ronald Morrison / *Raghnall Dannsair*. According to his son *Ruaraidh Roidein* (see below) it is possible that *Roidein* knew Ewen and may have learned something about dancing directly, perhaps by observation. *Roidein* would have been



Donald ‘Roidein’ MacDonald and his son John ‘Seonaidh Roidein’ MacDonald. It was taken in 1913 at a Lovat Scouts camp in Beaulieu. John was 15 when it was taken, and Roidein would have been about 49. Used with kind permission by Ishabel T. MacDonald.

about 15 years old when Ewen passed away.¹⁶⁸

His own pupil, Donald Walker, said *Roidein* taught dancing by showing the steps to his pupils, and did not use words to teach to any great extent. Apparently *Roidein*'s party piece, in the small hours of a ceilidh night, was to flick out the candle with his big toe while dancing on the table, i.e. *Smàladh na Coinnle*.¹⁶⁹ Another trick, according to his granddaughter Ishabel T, as a piper this time, was that *Roidein*

would play a tune on the chanter, take his cap off and place it on the floor while still playing, and then perform the trick in reverse, without breaking the tune. I have never found out which tune he used, but it would have to be one in which part of the melody was predominantly played with one hand.¹⁷⁰

The dances he knew were Scotch Blue Bonnets, First of August, Flowers of Edinburgh, Highland Laddie, Miss Forbes, Over the Water to Charlie, Scotchmakers, and Tulloch Gorm. He also knew and taught the Highland Fling, Sword Dance, and *Seann Triubhas*.

Another story is told in the MacDonald family about *Roidein* dancing at the Games in the early 1920s. Seemingly, he slipped slightly on the platform. When he came to repeat the step, he improvised a second slip into the dance, as if it was part of the step.¹⁷¹

One may note with interest that the dances collected from Donald Walker in the 1950s by the Fletts and Rhodes differed from those collected from John MacLeod and from *Roidein*'s own daughter. This might indicate that each person made these dances individual and put their own takes on them. In a tradition where individual improvisation is encouraged within the song tradition and, if the earlier step dance tradition was improvisational, this notion would have been normal. It is quite possible that it is *Roidein* that an *Oban Times* notice mentions in 1895:

Dalibrog: The pupils attending the Evening Continuation School closed the session with a most enjoyable soiree and dance [...] Music was supplied by Mr D. MacDonald, Dalibrog, on the bagpipes, while Mr. A. Morrison, joiner, Kilpheder, handled the bow with his usual good style and spirit [...] A feature of the evening was the fine step-dancing of D. MacDonald.

Roidein's daughter Harriet *Roidein*, (1908–27 July 1977) competed at the Askernish Games from 1924 onwards, as seen in *Oban Times* extracts in the appendix. Harriet and her friend Annie MacDonald (no relation) showed Rhodes six steps of Over the Water to Charlie in 1955, and later, Annie showed him some steps she remembered from a number of dances she and Harriet had once known in full.¹⁷² There were two more daughters, Bella, who emigrated to Canada in 1923 and Mary Ann who lived in Glasgow.

Roidein's sons were noted pipers and knew these dances too as they were introduced to these traditions at a young age. One was PM John MacDonald / *Seonaidh Roidein* (1898–1988) of the City of Glasgow Police Pipe Band, who set records for winning the gold medal at both the Northern Meeting in Inverness and the Argyllshire Gathering in Oban, the march and the strathspey and reel events in Inverness, the open *ceol mòr*, the strathspey and reel, and second place in the March–Strathspey–Reel for former winners at Oban in 1926. *Seonaidh Roidein* served in the Great War with the Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders and later joined the Glasgow police force in 1920. He was known to be a superb piper for dancing.

The other son was Roderick / *Ruaraidh Roidein* (1901–1981) who won two Pibroch Medals in 1938 (Oban) and 1946 (Inverness). *Ruaraidh Roidein* was also in the Glasgow Police and the band from 1923. He won prizes as a dancer, at Askernish Games where he competed as a piper. He danced in stocking soles. Obviously, rules about footwear at the Games were not so strict in the 1920s and 1930s! Like his brother John, he knew dances such as the First of August and Over the Waters. He was also a member of the Glasgow Police Dance Team. He competed in Athletics and won prizes for that too.¹⁷³



Chapter 7—Notes on the Hebridean dance style

The style of dancing, as was, differs from current competitive Highland dancing as practised today around the world by various governing associations, whether global, national or regional. It is important to remember that these dances were not originally danced for competition or for medal tests. They were intrinsic expressions embedded in the South Uist and Barra nineteenth-century Gaelic cultural heritage. They were part of the fabric of everyday life and they survived into the twentieth century due to a handful of people who could remember them and still dance them and pass them on. As Henderson observed:

Although some individuals within any community group were aware that they took a responsibility for passing on the group's traditions, in many cases the dance culture was transmitted from one individual to another by means of imitation, watching dancing in the progression of the community's life. Most people learned their dances in this way, picking up, as they did so, the local habits, ways and nuances of moving, and behaviour expectations. Their concept of "good" dancing and "good" dancers was acquired together with other cultural norms within the community. Learning basically occurred within the local social group, within the family group. At times regular classes for formal dance lessons were attended, either at school or by a locally accepted "authority" on dance.¹⁷⁴

This was exemplified by Fearchar MacNeil, taught by his grandfather informally as a child at home, who went on to teach formal classes to pass on the dances to the community.

The following are some of the stylistic hallmarks I've picked up over the years from my primary sources. It is, however, important to stress that each individual had their own interpretation of the dance style and there never was a rule book for how 'one should dance.' The ideas of being one with accompanying music when dancing and expressing individual movement qualities are the foremost considerations.

—Footwear and clothing—

At the time these dances were collected in the 1920s and 1950s, they were performed by men in ordinary boots and girls in shoes. Hard soled brogues were also worn. Sometimes the dances were performed in stockings, as no one had the soft soled shoes Highland dancers wear today. Presumably they were danced in bare feet, too. Dancing in bare feet is said to be acceptable in the 1995 *Hebridean dancing* book.¹⁷⁵ The wearing of hard shoes causes the style to be quite different from when the dances are performed in soft modern day 'ghillie'-type shoes.

As to dress, dancers wore ordinary clothes; no special dress seems to have been worn. There are no records suggesting that male dancers wore kilts when these dances were performed at the Askernish Games from 1923 onwards. A photograph from these Games of girls doing 'Old Hebridean' dancing shows them wearing light coloured dresses. In the nineteenth century, Islander crofters and fishermen wore jerseys, trousers, and bonnets, all made of homespun yarn. The material was usually dyed brown or dark blue. The women took pride in knitting jerseys in elaborate patterns. Women wore long voluminous skirts of dark stuff, a coarse fabric, which could be bunched up at the back to help support a creel. On Sundays, they wore sleeved vests (tight fitting vests with sleeves) or double-breasted jackets of shop cloth having velvet collars. Generally, dark stockings were worn, and aprons protected the skirts. Above the skirts a blouse would be worn, along with woollen headscarves, small shoulder plaids called *guailleagan*, and, on Sundays, larger plaids. The older women generally wore black clothing, and all the married ones, mutches, which were soft, white caps.¹⁷⁶

As mentioned previously in chapter five, a local dress was developed in the 1980s for girls dancing these dances, and it was used at least into the late 1990s.

—Notes on style of dancing and teaching—

These dances were part of a visual and kinaesthetic tradition of teaching done by showing movements, rather than using verbal commands and position directives commonly used in teaching dance today. As far as the Fletts' records show, and what Fearchar told me about his own learning, one learnt by observing and copying. None of the steps or movements had names. It must be remembered that they initially were taught in a Gaelic speaking environment.

The ball of foot is used unless otherwise stated and springs and hops should not be overly elevated. Sometimes the supporting foot may be flat on the floor or with the heel just off the ground. The style of movement should maintain a steady flow, with rising and sinking of the body resulting from a good bend of the knees as appropriate. The feet often slide across the floor rather than step on to it, though that depends on the movement in question. When shuffling, the foot should slide across the floor and maintain contact with the floor throughout the movement. When trebling, a dancer must listen to the music and not hurry the movement to follow the accompanying tune's rhythm. Each dancer should aim to find an individual style. Fearchar said that the most important thing was to dance 'with' the music. 'Listen to it and feel what it gives the dance. Never rush through movements, the music will tell you how quick certain movements need to be. All movements must be on the beat.'¹⁷⁷

Opinions on aesthetic preferences and 'good' dancing were described by Henderson's sources as:

"Good" dancers were recognisable to South Uist and Barra islanders as those who possessed a particular movement quality when dancing the leg and foot actions in this type of dance: "He was a very tight stepper—close to the leg—not far away like that—not wide and splechy." "The tight step is the right step" [John / Iain Pheadair MacInnes]. "The tight step is right. The points of the toes and the tight step" [Patricia McIntyre]. "The neat tight step is the best" [Angus McLeod].¹⁷⁸

Lightness and musicality were other hallmarks. Fr Calum MacNeil expressed his opinion on methods of instruction for dance to Henderson in the early 1980s:

Too precise instruction for these people can spoil the spirit of the dance [referring to accredited teachers from mainland organisations teaching locally as appointed by the local council]. They know in their heads from the Gaelic phrasing how long they have to turn their partners. Don't count for them in the dancing [...] it is the music that's in them that makes them want to dance.¹⁷⁹

Henderson gives the following story told to her about Fearchar MacNeil showing the acceptance of him as an authority on dance in his community and the respect for his teaching:

... he used to teach us when we were little; he was a very, very good dancer. He used to dance in the Army and his people danced before him. You had to point your toes—in fact he used to hold you by the toes. We were so light and he used to put your feet in the palm of his hand and sort out the toes. [...] He was here a few years ago—and a group of girls were dancing and he said how much he enjoyed the island girls' way of dancing, because he said, it's different when you're getting taught by a professional. It's just like traditional singing—They (the girls) were dancing the way they were taught at home, and he said he loved that. Once you are trained, it's never the same.[...] the island girls were doing it just for pleasure and he saw the difference. They still had to point their toes, but it was different from the girls who used to come from the mainland. Another thing, the island girls can dance to any tune—they adapt to any—but the ones from the mainland, they've got their certain tune to dance with and they stick to it ...¹⁷⁹

—Music—

Traditionally these dances would have predominantly been danced to pipe music provided by local pipers. Gaelic song and in addition the fiddle and accordion were and are used as well at ceilidhs and other functions. Pipe music is today still the preferred instrument when performing a Hebridean solo dance, even though *puirt-a-beul* may be used and the First of August has in recent years often been performed to the song *An Tailleir Mòr*.

There must always be an understanding between the musician and dancers when performing. In the past, in particular, this came normal in the local ceilidh house and local function contexts. The piper, would commonly always play a few bars of the tune as an informal introduction before a dancer started performing, thus setting the tempo, after he had finished tuning the pipes. As many, if not most pipers, were dancers themselves they knew what a good dance tempo would be, and they would provide suitable pulse and swing to the music to encourage the dancer to perform their best.

With the introduction of Highland dance competition culture into the local domain, this has changed somewhat, where dancers now ask for specific tempos, number of bars of introduction and so forth from the musician. The Hebridean dances thus have more of formal start procedures than they used to have. As Fearchar MacNeil tells us elsewhere, when the right tune was played you just got up to dance without much formality. Fearchar also recalls his grandfather playing an improvised set of pipes for him learn to dance:

He cut a hole in the end of a ‘Mae West’ [type of life jacket] and put the chanter in, and blew it. The whole pipes and chanter would have made such a noise, but with the ‘goose’ and Mae West, he could keep going longer.¹⁸⁰

Others interviewed in the Henderson’s study could recall singing whilst they were being taught dancing. One recalled a mother singing *puirt-a-beul* whilst the children learnt to dance. Other remembered dancing to *puirt-a-beul* with the schoolmates in the dinner hour at school.¹⁸¹

—Tempo or Speed—

If, as Fearchar MacNeil told me in 1990, when the right music was played, one just got up and danced with no formality, but just for the pure joy of it, then the tempo or speed of the dance and music is something that becomes mutually agreed on between a musician and a dancer. Many of the musicians danced, so they would have known how to play for the dances. I am reluctant to give tempo suggestions as I feel each dancer needs to find a comfortable tempo that helps him or her dance best. Some of the publications I have cited do give suggested tempos and the Fletts and Rhodes recorded what tempos dances were shown to them. Below is a tempo comparison between some of the major sources to give a good guide as to how the sources danced compared to the tempos provided by dance organisations.

<i>Tempo differences in published descriptions of the Hebridean dances. Tempo given in bpm (bars per minute).</i>	Flett & Rhodes	F MacNeil	McConachie	SDTA/BATD	UKA	SNDC	SOHDA	Dannsa nan Eileanach
Aberdonian Lassic	60	50	—	—	—	—	—	50
Blue Bonnets	52-53	50-54	50-60	48	48	—	50	56-60
First of August	44-48	—	44-46	—	—	—	—	—
Flowers of Edinburgh	—	54	52-56	—	56	54	54	54
Highland Laddie	50-60	56-60	50-60	50	50	—	52	56-60
Miss Forbes	n/a	—	—	—	—	—	48-50	48-50
Over the Water to Charlie	56	52-54	56-60	46-52	56	56	52	52-54
Scotch Measure	42-44	38	—	—	—	—	—	38
Tulloch Gorm	40	40	40	—	34	—	40	40
<i>Caisteal Chiosamul</i>	—	34	—	—	—	—	—	34

—Notes on arms—

Fearchar MacNeil said that dancers held arms down by sides or put one or both hands on the hips while dancing. He also said that more elaborate arm movements, similar to ones in Highland dancing, were used, which may have been added in more recent times. He showed these to Glenys Gray, a

dancer from Auckland, New Zealand, who learnt a number of the dances with Fearchar in Barra in 1987–1988, just a couple of years before I met him. He did not show any arm movements to me apart from those in *Caisteal Chiosamul*.

When John MacLeod danced, he used arm movements in a similar fashion to what is used in Highland dancing today, i.e., opposite arm to working foot, both arms up, and arms akimbo, but

the elbow was approximately at eye level with the lower arm and hand curved slightly in over the head. The fingers were held loosely curved with the thumb and middle finger almost touching, a position derived from the snapping of thumb and middle finger which was always a feature of dancing in Highland Reels. When both feet were moving in rapid succession both arms were raised except for movements such as the ‘shuffles’ used to complete a step. Then the arms would be placed akimbo on the waist with fingers and thumbs turned back.¹⁸²

In this publication, I am going to be less prescriptive than is customary in today’s Highland dancing and leave it to the dancer to find a way of using, or not using, the suggested arm positions as given by Fearchar MacNeil.

—Special motifs—

Several movement motifs are recurring. They are described below with a name given to each, but these are my own, unless otherwise stated. I have used some terminology and position names recognised in modern Highland dancing for simplicity, such as in 3rd, 4th, and 5th positions.

The terms **front-leg-position** and **rear-leg-position** mean, to use modern terminology, 3rd aerial and 3rd rear aerial positions respectively, but these positions should be lower on the leg than the placement specified in Highland dancing today. In **diagonal position** the leg is extended at 45-degree angle forwards, and, if elevated, not too high off the ground. Also, I use **side position** to indicate a placement modern terminology gives as 2nd position, but this position was never as rigorously pointed to the side in the past as it is in today’s Highland dancing. Right foot will be abbreviated as **RF**, and left foot as **LF**. R alone stands for right and L alone stands for left.

Assemble—Whenever assembling in 5th position or closing to 5th rear position, do so with a softening down through the knees.

Chassé—Step RF diagonally forward (1); close LF to 5th rear position (and); step RF slightly diagonally forward, at the same time, swivel heel outwards on R ball, sliding LF to 3rd position (2). Heels held quite close to the floor and movements are flowing, and when changing direction (see the first step of Scotch Blue Bonnets) a swivel action of the balls of both feet may occur. (Appears in Scotch Blue Bonnets; Scotch Measure, Miss Forbes)

Heel-toe-beat—With RF: Beat R heel in a wide 5th position (and); drop RF down on to the ball in the same position (wide 5th position) (a); beat LF on ball in place (1). The beats with heel and ball should be accented, but the beat made by the rear foot on the main count, or down beat should be stronger. The heel-toe movement can also be done as an accentuated shuffle, catching the foot out with the heel and back on the toe and keeping the foot close to the ground all the time. The Fletts describe this movement as: Place R heel about 6 inches to the right of L instep (and); Rock the RF to place the ball of the foot on the ground, transferring weight to it. The heel should be kept low off the ground (a); close LF to 5th rear position flat (1). (Appears in Aberdonian Lassie).

Hop-back-steps, or *Ceum cùl dùbailte*—(this Gaelic term was used in Barra in the 1990s to refer to Hop-back-steps). Hop on the supporting foot (and), lifting the working foot up and around to the rear of the supporting leg, then bring it down behind to step on it (1). This is similar to a *retiré* or *retiré* skips in Highland dancing (Appears in Aberdonian Lassie; Scotch Blue Bonnets; Miss Forbes)

Shakes—Should be strongly accented on the count but never be stiff. (Appears in Aberdonian Lassie; Over the Waters; Flowers of Edinburgh).

Shake-shake-round—With RF—Hop on LF, extending RF with a Shake action to diagonal aerial position (1); hop LF, bringing RF in then re-extending it with a Shake action to side aerial position (and); assemble with RF in 5th rear position (2). For LF, dance above contra. (Appears in Highland Laddie; Flowers of Edinburgh).

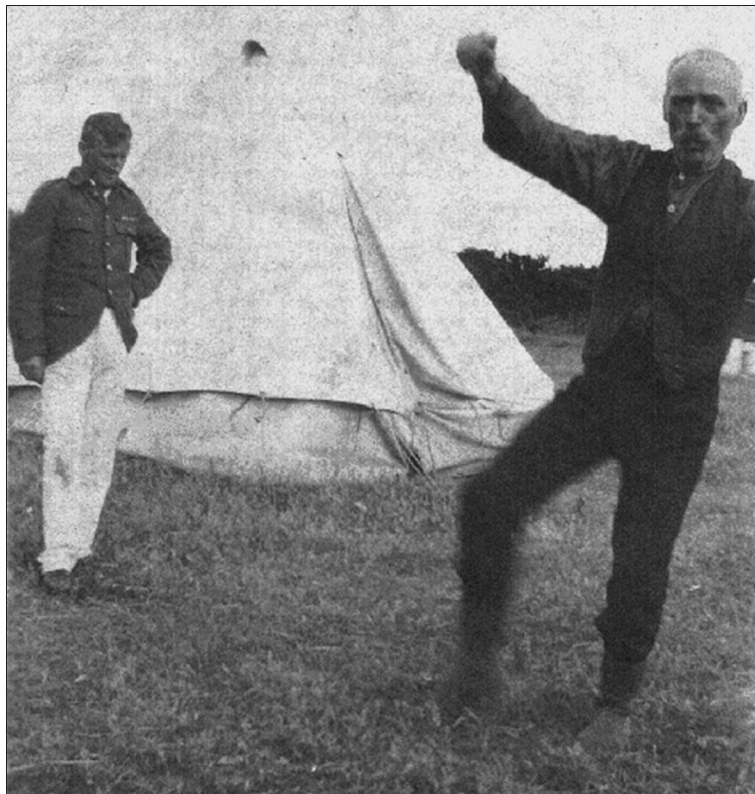
Shuffles—Single or Double as to a dancer's capability, or preference. The supporting foot is always held with the heel close to the floor and the working foot does not leave the floor; it slides out and back in again with the ball of the foot touching the floor at all times until the spring to change foot. (Appears in Scotch Blue Bonnets; Scotch Measure; Over the Waters; Tulloch Gorm; Highland Laddie).

Shuffle out-in—Catch RF out towards diagonal aerial position low (and); catch RF in towards LF, finish with RF just off the floor (and). (Appears in the treble movements in First of August).

Point-close-beat—This is MacNeil's way of performing them: Hop or spring on to LF (1); point [tap] RF in diagonal position (and); low, lilted spring on to RF in 5th position, keeping weight on it (a); place LF in 3rd rear position taking the body's weight (2). (Appears in Highland Laddie; Over the Waters; Flowers of Edinburgh).

Hop-step-beat [Similar to Syncopated Hops in Highland dancing]—With RF: Hop on LF, lifting R leg towards diagonal aerial position with bent knee and shin and foot hanging vertical and pointed (1); place RF on demi-point (pads of toes in touch with floor, but if hard shoes are worn the ball of the foot is used) in open 5th position (and); beat LF in place (2). With LF: As for RF, but contra. (Appears in Miss Forbes).

Some special movements that only occur once are described in detail where appropriate.



Donald 'Roidein' MacDonald dancing a step. No date but possibly at the Games at Askernish in the late 1920s. Used with kind permission by Ishabel T. MacDonald.

Chapter 8—Ten Hebridean solo dances

The following versions of the ‘Hebridean’ dances are given primarily as handed down to me in 1990 and New Zealand Highland dancer Glenys Gray in the 1980s by Fearchar MacNeil. Steps and dances remembered by John / Iain Ruadh MacLeod as noted down by Flett and Rhodes are also given. Miss Forbes was shown to me by Katie-Ann MacKinnon. Some information used was gleaned from information provided by pupils and family of Donald ‘Roidein’ MacDonald, as presented in the Flett manuscript collection. In addition, Fearchar MacNeil’s dance *Caisteal Chiosamul* from 1986 is given.

Many more and varying steps from several versions of the all the solo dances collected that were attributed to Ewen MacLachlan can be found in the Flett manuscript online archive. The entries include steps from *Gilleann an Fhèilidh*, Over the Hills, and references to the percussive Flowers of Edinburgh.



Fearchar MacNeil demonstrating Over the Waters in 1982. Photo still taken from 1982 video clip, used with kind permission courtesy of School of Scottish Studies Archives, Edinburgh.

1. *Aberdonian Lassie—Till a-Rithist*

Aberdonian Lassie has movements similar to those used in the Highland Fling combined with percussive shuffle movements and heel and toe beats. The **dance** has six steps. All the versions known to us come from Fearchar MacNeil. He taught it to the Fletts in 1953, while living in Jedburgh. Over the years he taught it to many dancers on Barra. I have two slightly different versions noted down. The versions he showed to me in March 1990 and to Glenys Gray in 1987–1988 differ in some timing, movements, and direction of travel from those of Katie-Ann MacKinnon of Barra, who taught me at *Sabhal Mòr Ostaig* in 1989. This is an example of how a healthy living cultural expression morphs over time.

The dance seems to have been known only in the Isle of Barra, so it could hail from Ronald Morrison who taught Neil Buchanan. It is not known if Ewen MacLachlan taught this dance or if it was introduced after his time. The Fletts found no trace of it in South Uist and MacLeod had only heard of it. Later in the 1960s through to the present, it is still done occasionally in South Uist and Barra. The dance became known under an alternative Gaelic name in the 1980s and early 1990s in Barra and South Uist—*Till a-Rithist* / Come Back Again.¹⁸³

Local **folklore** says various things about this dance. One story says that this name relates to the dance having been devised in honour of a woman, a teacher from Aberdeen, who had been living and teaching in Bornish on South Uist for a very long time. The story goes that she was very well liked, and upon her departure for home, this dance was devised in the hope that she would return.¹⁸⁴ The forward and backward movements in the dance are supposed to symbolise a departure and return. Folklore also recounts that the wish for somebody to return might relate to the Jacobite clansmen's wish for Bonnie Prince Charlie to come back. A passage from a letter sent to Joan Flett from Fearchar MacNeil in October 1990 puts a different view on the title —

... when I learned that dance 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 and 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 speak for Barra but I would think all the fishing ports on the other islands would be the same.

Fearchar is the only source for the theory that the dance may have a strong link with the North-East workers and fishermen who worked in Barra and Uist. His letter also remarks on similarities between the style of Aberdonian Lassie and dances in Nova Scotia noted in the research by Frank Rhodes. Fearchar was not at all surprised at this and he continued—'[...] a lot of the present-days inhabitants [of Nova Scotia] are descendants of people who left these islands many years ago.' As Ewen MacLachlan is presumed to have taught dancing six years prior to the Barra Clearance of 1851, it is possible emigrants brought elements of the dances with them.

The **tunes** used for this dance are the 6/8 marches 'The Quaker' and the very similar tune 'The Quaker's Wife', which can also be played as a jig. A version appears in print in Robert Bremner's 1757 *Collection of Scots Reels or Country Dances* and in many collections in Scotland and Ireland since then. Another version appears in Gow's 1802 *Second Repository* as 'Merrily Danced the Quaker's Wife'.¹⁸⁵ The first, third, and fifth steps are danced to the first part of the tune and the second, fourth, and sixth steps are danced to the second part.

The **steps** given are as Fearchar MacNeil taught the dance to me and Glenys Gray. The few differences between these versions and that of the Fletts are inserted in this text. Fearchar danced this at a

speed of 16 seconds per step when he showed it to the Fletts in 1953. This dance is performed facing front during bars 1–6, then making a half turn on bars 7–8. It is then danced facing back on bars 9–14 and making a half turn on bars 15–16. The idea is to travel forwards and back whenever possible or where stated. Each step is danced off the right foot for eight bars and then repeated contra off the left for the next eight bars. Count 2 to each bar of music.

Aberdonian Lassie Break Right (*Side, behind (1/2 turn), side, in front*)

Each step has a two-bar finishing motif. It is repeated at the end of right and left side of each step.

- Bars** Hop on RF, pointing LF in side position (5);
7 making a half turn to the right, hop RF, taking LF to rear-leg-position (6).
8 Hop RF, pointing LF in side position (7); hop RF, bringing LF to front-leg-position (8).

Arms—Right arm raised on bar 7–8 (opposite arm to working foot).

First Step—*Side, Behind, Toe and Heel*

Travel straight forward on bars 1–6 and back to place during bars 9–14.

- Bars** Spring onto LF, pointing RF in side position
1–2 (1); hop LF, taking RF to rear-leg-position (2); spring RF, pointing LF in side position (3); hop RF, taking LF to rear-leg-position (4)
3–4 Hop RF twice, making a Toe and Heel in 5th position with LF (5 6); Spring then Hop LF, making a Toe and Heel in 5th position with RF (7 8).
5–6 Spring RF, Repeat bars 1–2 contra.
7–8 **Aberdonian Lassie Break Right.**
9–16 Hop RF to begin, repeat bars 1–8 contra.

Arms—Bars 1–2, and 5–6 opposite arm to working foot; bars 3–4 Akimbo.

Second Step—*Heel-toe-beat*

- Bars** Hop LF, pointing RF in side position (1); hop
1–2 LF, bringing RF to rear-leg-position (2); make a Heel-toe-beat movement with RF, moving towards side position using the wide 5th heel position and closing the LF in to 3rd rear position (and a 3); Heel-toe-beat movement RF, again moving towards side position (and a 4); Beat R Heel in wide 5th position (and); dropping RF on to Toe in the wide 5th position (a).
Count: 1 2, and a 3 and a 4, and a
3–4 Spring RF, repeat bars 1–2 with contra.
5–6 Spring LF, repeat bars 1–2.
7–8 **Aberdonian Lassie Break Right.**
9–16 Hop RF to begin, repeat bars 1–8 contra.

Arms—Arm raised in opposition to working foot.

Third Step—*Shake and Travel*

- Bars** Hop LF, pointing RF in side position (1); hop
1–2 LF, taking RF to rear-leg-position (2); hop LF, making a round-the-leg movement with RF to front-leg-position (3); hop LF, executing a Shake action with RF to diagonal aerial position (and 4).
3–4 Spring RF, pointing LF in 5th position (5); hop RF, execute a Shake action with LF to a side-aerial-position (and 6); place LF in 3rd rear position (flexed knees) (7); glide RF towards side position (and); slide LF to place it in 5th crossed position (flexed knees) (8).
Note—The travel towards side position should be a sliding movement, upon the balls of the feet, but with feet in contact with the floor all the time.
5–6 Spring LF, repeat bars 3–4 contra.
7–8 **Aberdonian Lassie Break Right.**
9–16 Hop RF to begin, repeat bars 1–8 contra.

Arms—Arm raised in opposition to working foot (bars 1–2);
Either: both arms raised; or circle arms up in front of body, then out and down the sides to meet low in front of body to finish. This should be a more flowing circle of the arms than what is used in the *Seann Triubhas* today (bars 3–4).

Fourth Step—*Hop-back-steps (Ceum cùl dùbailte) and Heel-toe-beat*

- Bars** Hop LF, pointing RF in side position (1); hop
1–2 LF, bringing RF to rear-leg-position (2); hop LF to begin, keeping RF in rear-leg-position, dance 2 Hop-Back-steps (*Ceum cùl dùbailte*) RF and LF (and 3 and 4). Finish with RF in front-leg-position.
3–4 Spring RF, execute Heel-toe-beat-heel-toe movement in a slightly open 5th position with LF in place (5 and a 6 and a). Spring LF, execute Heel-toe-beat-heel-toe movement in a slightly open 5th position with RF in place (7 and a 8 and a).
5–6 Spring RF, repeat bars 1–2 contra.
7–8 **Aberdonian Lassie Break Right.**
9–16 Hop RF to begin, repeat bars 1–8 contra.

Arms—Arm raised in opposition to working foot (bar 1). Both arms up (bar 2). Arm raised in opposition to working foot or akimbo (bars 3–4).

Fifth Step—*Assemble, Travel Backwards and Hop-back-steps* (*Ceum cùl dùbailte*)

- Bars** Hop LF, pointing RF in side position (1); hop
1–2 LF, taking RF to rear-leg-position (2); hop LF, making a round-the-leg movement with RF to front-leg-position (3); hop LF extending RF and, executing a Shake action with RF to diagonal aerial position (and 4).
- 3–4 Assemble RF in 5th position (bent knees) (5); step RF straight backwards (and); step LF across the RF to the R side, i.e., over-crossed side position, taking the weight (6); hop LF to begin, lifting RF to rear-leg-position, dance 2 Hop-back-steps (*Ceum cùl dùbailte*) RF and LF (and 7 and 8).
- 5–6 Repeat bars 3–4 contra.
- 7–8 **Aberdonian Lassie Break Right.**
- 9–16 Hop RF to begin, repeat bars 1–8 contra.

Arms—Arm raised in opposition to working foot (bars 1–2); both arms up (bars 3–4).

Note—The step taken backwards involved in bars 3 and 5 should be fairly short—about the length of a foot. According to Fearchar MacNeil, the direction of travel in this step, i.e., back and over crossed, should be very precise. The direction of travel should come as a surprise to the audience.

Sixth Step—*Point, Turn and Rock*

- Bars** Hop LF, pointing RF in side position (1);
1–2 hop LF, bringing RF to rear-leg-position (2); spring RF, pointing LF in side position (3); hop RF, bringing LF to rear-leg-position (4).
- 3–4 Spring LF, pointing RF in side position to begin, execute a Fling Turn to the Left on the spot. Finish with RF in rear-leg-position (5 6, 7 8).
- 5–6 Spring on to RF and pointing LF in 5th position (1); execute 3 Rocks, springing LF, RF, LF (1 2, 3 4).
- 7–8 **Aberdonian Lassie Break Right.**
- 9–16 Hop RF to begin, repeat bars 1–8 contra.

Arms—Arm raised in opposition to working foot (bars 1–2); arms akimbo (bars 3–4); both arms up (bars 5–6).



2. Scotch Blue Bonnets

Scots or Scotch Blue Bonnets, also known as Blue Bonnets, or Blue Bonnets Over the Border, exists in many differing versions on both mainland Scotland and in the Hebrides. The only common denominator between these dances is the music they are danced to. D.G. MacLennan (1950), Jack McConachie (1972), and the Fletts (1996) collected several versions that they published. I was shown these steps by Fearchar MacNeil, in Barra in March of 1990. According to Fearchar, this was how he danced when he was young, and was what he showed D.G. MacLennan in 1936 while still living on the mainland. The name given in 1990 for this dance was *Bonaidean Gorma*, which is simply the Gaelic for Blue Bonnets. Glenys Gray of Auckland, New Zealand, made notes on how Fearchar MacNeil taught her this dance in 1987–1988, which concur with this version. The **order of the steps was flexible**, and the steps were performed in a flat, low to the ground way at the time. No **arm movements** are given, as traditionally the arms were hanging loosely by the sides. Count 2 to each bar.¹⁸⁶

Fearchar thought Scotch Blue Bonnets, which was the name he used, and Scotch Measure were originally one dance with a large number of steps and that over time they became two separate dances. Scotch Measure would have been a slightly easier version. It seems that both the steps themselves and their order were fairly flexible in practice. As these dances existed in a kinaesthetic tradition, they were not written down in a set way, and different dancers and teachers have all made individual interpretations of the motifs over the years.

The **tune**, ‘Blue Bonnets,’ started out as a brisk 6/8 march known as ‘Leslie’s March.’ It was included in *Watts’ Musical Miscellany* in 1731 and *Oswald’s Second Collection* in 1755. A version of the tune known as ‘Duplin House’ was published in *Gow’s Second Collection*, and according to Emmerson this seems to be the prototype for later versions, one fitted to Sir Walter Scott’s rousing poem of Border romance. This version of General Leslie’s March acquired the name ‘Blue Bonnets over the Border’ from Scott’s words.¹⁸⁷ The first, third, and fifth steps are danced to the first part of the tune and the second, fourth, and sixth steps are danced to the second part. A good 6/8 pipe march version can be found in William Ross book *Ross’s Collection of Pipe Music* (1869:83 No. 63).¹⁸⁸

Blue Bonnets Half Break RF (Danced in place)

Bars Release RF towards diagonal aerial position
3 low (and); spring on to RF, bringing LF to rear-leg-position low off Right leg (not touching) (5); hop RF, extending LF to diagonal aerial position low (and); hop RF, pointing LF in 5th position (6);

4 Hop RF, extending LF to diagonal aerial position low (and); spring LF, bringing RF to rear-leg-position low off Left leg (not touching) (7); hop LF, extending RF to diagonal aerial position low (and); hop LF, pointing RF in 5th position (8).

Count: and 5 and 6, and 7 and 8

Blue Bonnets Half Break LF—As for RF, but danced contra.

Blue Bonnets Full Break RF (a)

Bars Spring on to the balls of both feet in inverted
7 1st position (and); swivel on balls of both, twisting heels inwards (5); twist heels in-out (and); twist heels in-out (6).

8 Spring on to both feet, RF in 5th position (7); execute a Change, landing with LF in 5th position (8).

Count: and 5 and 6, 7 8

Blue Bonnets Full Break LF (a)—As for RF, but danced contra.

Blue Bonnets Full Break RF (b)

Bars Spring on to balls of both feet in open inverted
7 1st position, and pivot on balls to 1st position (and); swivel on balls of both, twisting heels outward to open inverted 1st position (5); twist heels in to 1st position on ball (and); twist heels out to open inverted 1st position (a); twist heels in to 1st position on ball (6).

8 Spring on to both feet, RF in 5th position (7); execute a Change, landing with LF in 5th position (8).

Count: and 5 and 6, 7 8

Blue Bonnets Full Break LF (b)—As for RF, but danced contra.

First Step

- Bars** Chassé RF to right diagonal forward (1 and 2); Chassé to LF to left diagonal forward (3 and 4).
- 3–4 **Blue Bonnets Half Break RF.**
- 5–6 Hop LF to begin, repeat bars 1–2.
- 7–8 **Blue Bonnets Full Break RF.**
- 9–16 Repeat bars 1–8 contra.

Second Step

- Bars** Chassé RF to right diagonal forward (1 and 2).
- 2 Step LF (flat or on ball) diagonally backwards (3); step RF (flat or on ball) diagonally backwards (4) to regain starting position.
or
Hop RF (and); step LF (on ball) diagonally backwards (3); hop LF (and); step RF (on ball) diagonally backwards (4) to regain starting position.
- 3–4 **Blue Bonnets Half Break RF.**
- 5–6 Hop RF to begin, repeat bars 1–2 contra.
- 7–8 **Blue Bonnets Full Break RF.**
- 9–16 Repeat bars 1–8 contra.

Third Step

- Bars** Disassemble on to LF, pointing RF in inverted 5th position (i.e., foot turned in, placed in 5th position on point) (1); let heel drop to ground and pivot foot on heel to normal 45-degree turn-out in open 5th position (and); assemble RF to 5th rear position (2).
- 2 Repeat Bar 1 contra (3 and 4).
- 3–4 **Blue Bonnets Half Break RF.**
- 5–6 Repeat bars 1–2.
- 7–8 **Blue Bonnets Full Break RF.**
- 9–16 Repeat bars 1–8 contra.

Fourth Step

- Bars** Spring on to both feet with RF in 5th position on ball (1); spread both feet to side position (2); assemble RF in 5th position on ball (3); change LF to 5th position (and); change RF to 5th position (4).
- 3–4 **Blue Bonnets Half Break RF.**
- 5–6 Repeat bars 1–2.
- 7–8 **Blue Bonnets Full Break RF.**
- 9–16 Repeat bars 1–8 contra.

Fifth Step

- Bars** Travelling diagonally forward to the right, step-slide RF along ground towards 4th position (1); hop on RF, placing LF in rear-leg-position low (and); travelling in the same direction, repeat counts '1 and' contra. (2 and); step back on RF (3); hop on RF (and); step back on LF (4).
- 3–4 **Blue Bonnets Half Break RF.**
- 5–6 Repeat bars 1–2.
- 7–8 **Blue Bonnets Full Break RF.**
- 9–16 Repeat bars 1–8 contra.

Sixth Step

As for Step 5, except the slide hops while still travelled now make a complete circle, on bar 1, and on bar 5. Bars 2 and 6 are danced on the spot. Thus, the Half Break is done facing the rear and the Full Break facing the front. Circle clockwise on first half of step and anti-clockwise on the contra repeat.



Another version from John MacLeod

Tom Flett notated the following version from John / *Iain Ruadh* MacLeod in 1953. Eight steps were described out of an original ten and the tempo was given as 18 seconds per step. Arms were likely held akimbo throughout the dance.

Blue Bonnets Step R. Also done beginning LF

- Bars** Begin with RF in diagonal aerial position low; drop on to RF in place (flat/on ball), cutting LF to a loose rear-leg-position low (5); hop on RF, extend LF to diagonal aerial position low (and); hop on RF, bring LF to 5th position (6); hop on RF, extend LF to diagonal aerial position (and).
- 4 Repeat counts '5 and 6' contra (7 and 8).

Scotch Blue Bonnets Break R (LF is done contra)

- Bars** Small hop LF, place RF in side-aerial-position low with toes turned in (5); bring RF to flat 5th position turning the heel inwards as soon as it touches the ground (and); stand on LF, pivot RF on toe, heel outwards, inwards, outwards (6 and a).
- 4 Assemble with RF in 5th position (7); execute a change, landing with LF in 5th position (8).

First Step (MacLeod)

Bars Step RF to Forward side position (1); close LF to 5th rear position (and); small step RF to Forward side position (2); repeat counts ‘1 and 2’ contra, finishing with RF in diagonal aerial position (3 and 4).

Note—There is no swivel on balls of feet in between these travelling steps as in Fearchar MacNeil’s version.

3–4 **Blue Bonnets Step R.**

5–6 Repeat bars 1–2.

7–8 **Scotch Blue Bonnets Break R.**

9–16 Repeat bars 1–8 contra.

Second Step (MacLeod)

Bars Step RF to diagonal position (1); close LF to 5th rear position (and); small step RF to diagonal position and bring LF to rear-leg-position low (2);

2 Step on to LF to begin, dance 2 Hop-back-steps (*Ceum cùl dùbailte*) (and 3 and 4).

3–4 **Blue Bonnets Step L.**

5–6 Repeat bars 1–2 contra.

7–8 **Scotch Blue Bonnets Break R.**

9–16 Repeat bars 1–8 contra.

Third Step (MacLeod)

Bars Assemble (spring) RF in 5th position (1); step 1 straight backwards and flat on to RF (sole of RF against L leg as it passes backwards (and); step (beat) LF in 5th position (LF crossed over R toes), lifting RF to rear-leg-position low (2).

2 Step on to RF to begin, bringing LF round to the rear, dance 2 Hop-back-steps (*Ceum cùl dùbailte*) (and 3 and 4).

3–4 **Blue Bonnets Step R.**

5–6 Repeat bars 1–2.

7–8 **Scotch Blue Bonnets Break R.**

9–16 Repeat bars 1–8 contra.

Fourth Step (MacLeod)

As for Third Step, but with a slight pause on count ‘2’ (before turning), and then turning once round by the right on bar 2.

Fifth Step (MacLeod)

Bars Hop LF, extend RF to diagonal aerial position 1 low (1); stand still on LF and brush RF in, out, in, out, making a distinct sound

(1) RF in, out, in, out, making a distinct sound with the ball of the foot. Both feet are pointed straight forward, and RF moves by side of LF, brush being made as RF passes L toe (and a 2 and).

2 Repeat Bar 1 contra, dropping on to RF to begin (3 and a 4 and).

3–4 **Blue Bonnets Step L.**

5–6 Repeat bars 1–2 contra.

7–8 **Scotch Blue Bonnets Break R.**

9–16 Repeat bars 1–8 contra.

Sixth Step (MacLeod)

Bars Assemble with RF in 5th position (1); spread 1 both feet to side position (2).

2 Assemble with LF in 5th position and dance 2 changes with RF and LF in front in 5th position (3 and 4). Release working foot at end.

3–4 **Blue Bonnets Step L.**

5–6 Repeat bars 1–2 contra.

7–8 **Scotch Blue Bonnets Break R.**

9–16 Repeat bars 1–8 contra.

Seventh Step (MacLeod)

Bars Hop LF, placing RF in 5th position on toe 1 (1); hop LF, place RF on heel in 5th position (and); spring on to RF, placing LF on toe in loose 5th position (2).

2 Repeat Bar 1 contra (3 and 4). Release working foot at end.

3–4 **Blue Bonnets Step R.**

5–6 Repeat bars 1–2.

7–8 **Scotch Blue Bonnets Break R.**

9–16 Repeat bars 1–8 contra.

Eight Step (MacLeod) Note different structure

Bars Point-close-beat with RF (1 and a 2).

1

2 Hop LF (3), beat R heel in 5th position twice (and a); beat LF in 5th rear position (4).

3–4 Hopping twice on LF, dance a Shake-shake-round with RF, finish with RF in 5th rear position but with weight on LF (5 and 6). Repeat bar 3 (same working foot!) (7 and 8).

5–8 Repeat bars 1–4 contra.

9–16 Repeat bars 1–8.



3. Scotch Measure or Scotchmakers

This version of Scotch Measure or Scotchmakers, as it was named in the *Oban Times* reports and by Fearchar MacNeil, is as danced by Fearchar in his youth. The dance was never treated as anything special and the title merely suggests that it is a Scottish dance—a Scotch measure. It never had a Gaelic name so far as he knew. Fearchar said he always thought of the dance as a ‘girl’s’ dance. The more complex variations of the steps were to be used if performed by a man, according to Fearchar. There were no arm movements for this dance. Women would hold their skirts, or, like the men, let arms hang loosely by the sides, or with one or both hands on hips, or held behind the back. When Fearchar sang me the tune at dance speed it was roughly at 38 bars per minute. Noteworthy is the fluidity of movement content given by the same source but at different times. It becomes clear that the steps kept evolving in an ongoing process.

The dance is to be performed in a relaxed manner to the **tune** and song ‘Twa Bonnie Maidens,’ and as a pipe tune also known as the ‘Dornoch Links.’

There were twa bonnie maidens, and three bonnie maidens,
Cam’ owre the Minch, and cam’ owre the main,
Wi’ the wind for their way and the corry for their hame,
And they’re dearly welcome to Skye again.
Come alang, come alang, wi’ your boatie and your song,
My ain bonnie maidens, my twa bonnie maids!
For the nicht, it is dark, and the redcoat is gane,
And ye are dearly welcome to Skye again.

The English **song**, including the first verse and chorus provided above, to ‘Twa Bonnie Maidens’ were published by James Hogg in 1819 in *Jacobite Relics, Volume II* as ‘Prince Charles and Flora Macdonald’s Welcome to Sky.’ Hogg took the words down from Betty Cameron of Lochaber. The song was originally in Gaelic. The tune is ‘Planxty George Brabazon’ (Second Air), attributed to the blind Irish harper, Turlough O’Carolan (1670–1738). The song is also known as ‘Isle of Skye.’ The two maidens referred to are Bonnie Prince Charlie in disguise as a woman, an Irish maid, and Flora MacDonald. The **melody** as printed by Keith Norman MacDonald in the *Skye Collection* (1887:155) is more faithful to the original than the bagpipe march version printed by William Ross (1869, no.276) some fifteen years earlier. Another setting is from Gow’s 1802 *Second Repository* under the title the ‘Isle of Skye.’¹⁸⁹

Description below in 2/4 time so count 2 to the bar.

Scotch Measure Break RF (also danced LF) as recorded in 1990 and on the School of Scottish Studies video from 1982.

- Bars** With feet parallel; Step LF, then hop on it
- 5 (on ball), lifting R leg in front with lower leg vertical from knee to toe (and); tap/catch R ball backwards on the floor down from the position held previously (and); (a); step on to RF in place (1), repeat counts ‘and a 1’ with LF (and a 2).
- 6 Repeat Bar 5, begin with stepping on to LF and beating R ball. (and a 3 and a 4).
- 7 Jump LF in 1st position flat or with heel just off the ground, placing RF forward of side position on ball (with heel only slightly lifted off ground and twisted out) (and); twist R heel in (5); twist R heel out—in (and); twist R heel out—in (a); twist R heel out—in (6).

Slow, Slow, Quick, Quick, Quick

- 8 Spring on to both feet, RF in 5th position (7); change, landing with LF in 5th position (8).

Note 1—Bar 7 can be executed as in Blue Bonnets:

Spring on to balls of both feet in open inverted 1st position, and pivot on balls to 1st position (and); swivel on balls of both, twisting heels outward to open inverted 1st position (5); twist heels in to 1st position on ball (and); twist heels out to open inverted 1st position (a); twist heels in to 1st position on ball (6). [and 5 and a 6].

Note 2—The Break in this dance starts with RF apart from in the second step where it starts with LF.

First Step

Bars	With a slight Hop or Lift LF, lifting R leg to side with good splay and lower leg vertical from knee to toe (and); step on to RF (flat) to the right side (1); close LF (flat) in 3rd rear position (and); swivel on balls of both feet so LF lands in 3rd position (2).
1	
2	Slight Hop or Lift RF to begin, repeat bar 1 contra. (and 3 and 4).
3–4	Repeat bars 1–2.
5–8	Scotch Measure Break RF.
9–16	Repeat bars 1–8 contra.

Second Step

Bars	Hop LF, lifting RF up to front-leg-position (1); hop LF, passing RF with a round-the-leg action to rear-leg-position (2); assemble RF in 5th position (3); step RF towards side position on ball (and); close LF in to 5th rear position (4).
1–2	
	<i>Note</i> —as more complex version, double up bar 1: front-rear-front-rear leg position (1 and 2 and) with 4 <i>quick</i> hops on the supporting foot.
3–4	Spring RF to begin, repeat bars 1–2 contra.
5–8	Scotch Measure Break LF.
9–16	Repeat bars 1–8 contra.

Third Step (from MacNeil 1990)

Bars	Assemble with RF in 5th position (1); spread both feet towards side position on ball (and); assemble LF in 5th position (2); execute three changes in 5th position RF, LF, RF in front respectively (3 and 4).
1–2	
	<i>or (variation)</i> Assemble with RF in 5th position (1); spread both feet towards side position on ball (and); assemble LF in 5th position (2); change RF in 5th position (3); spread both feet towards side position on ball (and); assemble RF in 5th position (4).
3–4	Change to LF in front to begin, repeat bars 1–2 contra.
5–8	Scotch Measure Break RF.
9–16	Repeat bars 1–8 contra.

Fourth Step (a) (from MacNeil 1987)

Bars	Spring on to RF and LF, dance 2 Shuffles with LF and RF (1 and 2 and); spring RF and then 2 hops on RF, execute 3 <i>quick</i> Shuffles with LF (3 and 4). [LRLLL]
1–2	
3–4	Spring on to LF to begin, repeat bars 1–2 contra. [RLRRR]
5–8	Scotch Measure Break RF.
9–16	Repeat bars 1–8 contra.

Fourth Step (b) (from MacNeil 1987)

Bars	Rock, rolling on to RF, pointing LF in 3rd rear position (1); Rock, rolling on to LF, pointing RF in 5th position (and); dance 2 Shuffles, springing RF and LF (2 and).
1	
	<i>Note</i> —The counts ‘1 and’ are more of a rolling action as used in the modern Sailors’ Hornpipe, than the lifting to position action used in Highland Dancing.
2	Springing on to RF, repeat counts ‘1 and’ (3 and); dance 2 Shuffles, springing RF and hopping on RF (i.e., 2 Shuffles with LF) (4 and).
3–4	Repeat bars 1–2 contra but omitting the last Shuffle.
5–8	Scotch Measure Break RF.
9–16	Repeat bars 1–8 contra.

Fifth Step

Bars	Assemble RF in 5th position (1); step RF towards side position (and), close LF in to 5th rear position (2); hop LF to begin and dance 3 Hop-back-steps (<i>Ceum cùl dùbailte</i>) RF, LF, RF (and 3 and and a 4).
1–2	
3–4	Repeat bars 1–2 contra.
5–8	Scotch Measure Break RF.
9–16	Repeat bars 1–8 contra.

Sixth Step

Same as in Fifth Step but during counts ‘and 3 and and a 4’ a complete turn on the spot is made. When travelling to the right the turn is made clockwise and when travelling to the left the turn is anti-clockwise.

Frank Rhodes collected a similar version from Miss Harriet MacDonald or Miss Annie MacDonald, of Daliburgh, in 1955. Of interest is the percussive nature of bars 5–6 of the Break which went: Hop LF (and), bringing R knee up and tap RF twice (forward and back) on the ground, just forward of 1st position (similar to a flap) (1 and); bring RF down beside LF, transferring the weight to it (2). Repeat LF, RF and LF.



4. Miss Forbes or Miss Forbes' Farewell to Banff

Miss Forbes is known in several versions, coming from either the Hebrides or from the North-East of Scotland. The Fletts found seven steps and variations in South Uist, which they published in 1996 and which were said to have been taught by Ewen MacLachlan. A version was danced at the South Uist and Barra Highland Games in the 1920s. When I met both Fearchar MacNeil and Katie-Ann MacKinnon in Barra in 1990, both spoke about the dance, but were uncertain of the origin of the steps Katie-Ann showed me. Fearchar said he never learnt the steps but was aware of the dance.

The **steps presented** are how they have developed in my own dancing since 1990 and they have some similarities with the Fletts' collected South Uist steps, and also with the steps D.G. MacLennan published, but do also have some unique elements. I feel this dance reflects that sense of individuality within the dancing legacy allowing movement material to morph into new versions. A different version was noted down by Tom Flett in September 1954 from Cissie MacDonald, of Arisaig, with variations given by Mrs Isabella or 'Bella' MacDonald, widow of 'Roidein', and her daughter Harriet who were also present at the time. This version is described in the Fletts' *Traditional Step-dancing in Scotland* (1996).

The **tune** 'Miss Forbes' Farewell to Banff' was said to be used in Uist for the dance and can be found as a 2/4 march or quickstep. One setting is found in James Aird's *Selection of Scotch, English, Irish and Foreign Airs*, vol. 4 (1796, No. 3, p. 1).¹⁹⁰ In *Angus MacKay's Bagpipe Tutor* (1857) it appears as *Soiridh le Banbh*:



In the **dance** the first, third, fifth, and seventh steps are danced to the first part of the tune and the second, fourth, and sixth steps are danced to the second part. **No arm movements** are generally given, as traditionally, arms were hanging loosely by the sides; however, my notes do suggest arm movements for two steps. Count 2 to each bar.

First Step		Second Step	
Bars	Making a 1/2 circle forward and to the right (anti-clockwise) dance two Chassés RF and LF (and 1 and 2, and 3 and 4).	Bars	Dance two Hop-step-beats with RF (1 and 2, 3 and 4).
3–4	At the top of the circle, with R shoulder towards the front, Hop LF, then springing RF, LF, RF, execute 4 Shuffles or 2 Shuffles with RF and then with 2 Shuffles with LF (5 and 6 and, 7 and 8 and).	3–4	Step RF in 5th position (5); step LF towards diagonal rear position (and); close RF to 5th position (6); point LF to diagonal rear aerial low position (and); close LF in 5th rear position (7); step RF towards diagonal position (and); close LF to 5th rear position (8).
5–6	Hop RF, repeat bars 1–2 contra, continuing the circle back to place. Finish facing the front.	5–8	Repeat bars 1–4 contra.
7–8	Hop RF, then springing LF, RF, LF, execute 4 Shuffles or 2 Shuffles with RF and then with 2 Shuffles with LF (5 and 6 and, 7 and 8 and).	9–16	Repeat bars 1–8.
9–16	Repeat bars 1–8 contra, making a circle clockwise, starting forward and to the left.		
		Third Step	
Bars		Bars	Place RF on toe in inverted side position (heel turned outwards and upwards with knee turned inwards), beat LF in place (and 1); turning Right knee outwards, place heel of

(1–2) RF in side position and close LF to 3rd rear position (and 2); place RF on half-point in side position and close LF to 5th rear position (and 3); step RF on Heel in side position and close LF in 3rd rear position (and 4).

3–4 Hop LF to begin, dance three Hop-back-steps (*Ceum cùl dùbailte*), stepping on to RF, LF and RF (and 5 and 6 and 7); step LF to side position and close RF to 5th rear position (and 8).

Note—During the Hop-back-steps (*Ceum cùl dùbailte*) movements, right shoulder must be pulled back slightly, so that the backward movement involved will be towards the starting position. Dancer faces front during the step-close on counts ‘and 8.’

5–8 Repeat bars 1–4 contra.

9–16 Repeat bars 1–8.

Arms—Arm raised in opposition to working foot (bars 1–2); both arms raised for the 3 Hop-back-steps (*Ceum cùl dùbailte*) movements. Arm raised in opposition for step, close.

Fourth Step

Bars Disassemble on to LF, placing RF in front-leg-position (1); hop LF, bringing RF with a round-the-leg action to rear-leg-position (2); hop LF, bringing RF with a round-the-leg action to front-leg-position (3); quick hop LF, extending RF to diagonal aerial position (and); hop LF, placing RF in front-leg-position (4).

3–4 Hop LF to begin, execute two Hop-back-steps (*Ceum cùl dùbailte*) stepping on to RF and LF (and 5 and 6); With LF behind, execute a Change, landing with LF in 5th position (7); execute two Changes, RF and LF in front respectively (and 8).

5–8 Repeat bars 1–4 contra.

9–16 Repeat bars 1–8.

Fifth Step

Bars Dance two Hop-step-beats with RF, facing the front (1 and 2, 3 and 4).

3–4 Making a clockwise turn on the spot. Spring RF, lifting LF up behind and off R leg. (5); Treble LF out-in, in diagonal position; step LF in 3rd position then beat RF in 3rd rear position (and and a 6); Treble LF out-in, in diagonal position; step LF in 3rd rear position then beat RF in 3rd position (and and a 7); Treble LF out-in, in diagonal position; beat LF in 3rd position then beat RF in 3rd rear position (and and a 8).

5–8 Repeat bars 1–4 contra, making a counter-clockwise turn on bars 7–8.

9–16 Repeat bars 1–8.

Arms—Arm raised in opposition to working foot.

Sixth Step

Bars Making 1/8 turn to the Right, Pas de Basque RF (1 and 2); hop RF, bringing LF to front-leg-position low, step LF, bringing RF to rear-leg-position low (and 3); hop LF and bring RF down to 5th rear position (and 4).

3–4 Making 1/4 turn to the Left, repeat bars 1–2 contra (5 and 6, and 7 and 8).

5–6 Repeat bars 1–2, making a complete turn to the right on the spot.

7–8 Facing front, execute four Shuffles springing LF, RF, LF, RF (5 and 6 and, 7 and 8 and).

9–16 Making 1/8 turn to the Left, repeat bars 1–8 contra.

Seventh Step

Bars Hop LF, pointing RF in 5th position (1); hop LF, execute a Shake movement with RF to diagonal aerial position (and 2); step RF in 3rd rear position on ball (3); step LF in 3rd rear position on ball (and); step (beat) RF in 3rd position on ball (4) (Step-Step-Step, no hops or springs!).

3–4 Step LF on ball to diagonal position (and); close RF to 5th rear position (5); step LF on ball to diagonal position (and); close RF to 5th rear position (6); point LF in diagonal position (and); hop RF to begin, execute two Hop-back-steps (*Ceum cùl dùbailte*), stepping on to LF and RF, moving diagonally backwards to starting position (a 7 and 8).

5–8 Hop RF to begin, repeat bars 1–4 contra.

9–16 Repeat bars 1–8.



5. Highland Laddie—*Mac Iain Ghasda*

The ‘Highland Laddie’ is known to have been taught by Ewen MacLachlan. Some steps involve movements similar to ones used in ‘Over the Water to Charlie.’ Fearchar MacNeil said that this dance was always performed to the tune *Mac Iain Ghasda* / Son of Noble John, which is the Gaelic equivalent of the song ‘Highland Laddie.’ When the dance was mentioned in Barra and South Uist in the 1990s, it was referred to as *Mac Iain Ghasda*.

The **tune** for the song ‘Highland Laddie’ is an excellent Scotch measure, and several different settings originate from this very old strain of music. In John Glen’s *Early Scottish Melodies*, the following chronological list of ‘Highland Laddies’ is found —

The first tune called ‘Highland Ladie’ is from the *Leyden MS.* 1692. The earliest in print appears in Henry Playford’s *Original Scotch Tunes*, 1700, entitled ‘The Lord of Cockpen’s Scotch Measure’ [...] from then on ‘Highland Laddie’ appears in Oswald’s *Curious Scots Tunes*, 1742; *The Orpheus Caledonius*, 1725; Watt’s *Musical Miscellany*, 1729. In later collections of Oswald’s *Curious Scots Tunes*, it is known as ‘The Black Highland Laddie.’¹⁹¹

Another setting can be found in David Young’s *Drummond Castle / Duke of Perth Manuscript* (1734, no. 29).¹⁹² ‘Highland Laddie’ is also a very common pipe tune, and often used as ‘Salute to the Chieftain.’ It is commonly set as a 2/4 march and can be found in many piping collections and online. In Angus MacKay’s *Bagpipe Tutor* (1857) it appears as *Mac Iain Ghasda*:



Verses to the tunes are similarly various, mostly of a Jacobite slant. Both Burns and Ramsay had a go at it, and Burns wrote:¹⁹³

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.

The bard Malcolm MacAskill described an old man dancing a sprightly reel in this extract from his 1820 poem *Slan Gun Till na Dh’Fhalbh*, published in *Orain Chalum*.¹⁹⁴

Nuair chuala Calum mac Lachlainn
Gu robh Padruig a’ tigh’nn dachaidh,
Theann e dhannsa “Mhic Iain Ghasda”
S a bhoineid paisgte ‘na dhorn.

Thug e leum as air an urlar,
“Hug horray” aige ‘s e tionndadh;
Chaidh a mhulad chur air chul,
‘S e bocail sunndach le port-beoil.

Bha Fionnghala nighean Dhomhnaill
Is Calum a’ dannsa comhla,
‘S Oighrig ni’ Phadruig gu stolda
Deanamh spors dh’an charaid oig

When Calum Lachlan’s son heard
That Patrick was coming home
He began to dance *Mhic Iain Ghasda*
With his bonnet folded in his fist

He jumped on the floor
Hug horray, he shouted as he turned
Gloomy thoughts behind him
And a happy skip/bounce to the mouth music

Flora Donald’s daughter
And Calum danced together
And Oighrig Patrick’s daughter soberly
Having fun with the young couple

Fearchar MacNeil told me in conversation in March 1990 that initially he had seven steps for Highland Laddie but only five for Over the Waters, so he simply took one of the easier ones from the former

and added it to the latter, as he felt they were so very similar in character, to make six steps for each.

The Fletts and Rhodes recorded a **few different versions** of the dance in 1953 and 1955–1956.¹⁹⁵ Rhodes noted eight steps from Angus John MacLellan, Hacklett, Benbecula in 1955. His Point-close-beat movement was described as ‘spring up, double beat RF, beat LF’ and ‘is very loose with hardly any brush in or lift of the back foot.’ The Shake-shake-round motif was described as a loose round, with low hops and not too much shaking of the working foot, with ‘the working leg as slightly bent, ankle loose, toe never more than 6 inches above floor, with a slight double shake’.

Ten similar steps were noted down from Roderick MacPherson, a relation of Archie MacPherson, by Frank Rhodes in April 1955 at Liniclett Muir. His Point-close-beat was the same Angus John MacLellan, while his Shuffles were made by placings of the feet with hardly any indication of scuffing of the floor. No arm actions were indicated for either version.

A further seven-step version was obtained from 35-year-old Donald Walker in Daliburgh in June 1956 by Rhodes. The notes indicate some confusion whether the steps were 8-bars or 16-bars long, in other words, with or without repeat. Rhodes described a ‘Toe Beat’ which was a three-beat step with no brush out, or catch in, the working foot would merely beat the ground twice in an open 5th position, then the back foot was beaten in place.

Another version noted consisted of eight out of ten original steps from John / *Iain Ruadh* MacLeod in April 1953. No arm movements were noted or indicated as being used. The Flett description corresponds in part with McConachie’s 1972 book. I give MacLeod’s step differences and additions to Fearchar’s at the end of the below notation.

The **structure** of this dance is a four Shuffle break on bars 7–8; with characteristic two-bar motifs of different repeat patterns in bars 1–6. As with the other dances, Highland Laddie, did not have arm movements originally, but hands were held loose by the sides, or akimbo on one or both hips. Notation below is given in 2/4 time, so count 2 to the bar.

First Step

Bars Disassemble on to LF, pointing RF in side position (1); (make a complete turn on the spot to the Left on the next two counts), hop LF, bringing RF to rear-leg-position (2); assemble RF in 5th position (3); step RF to side position (and); close LF to 5th rear position (4).

3–4 Change LF to 5th position (5); step to side position on LF (and); close RF to 5th rear position (6); change RF in 5th position (7); step to side position on RF (and); close LF to 5th rear position (8).

5–6 Repeat bars 1–2 contra.

7–8 Disassemble on to LF, dance 4 Shuffles—Single or Double, springing LF, RF, LF, RF. (5 and 6 and 7 and 8 and)

9–16 Hop RF, repeat bars 1–8 contra.

Arms—Arm raised in opposition to working foot (bars 1 and 5); both arms raised (bars 2–4 and 6); arms akimbo (bars 7–8).

Second Step

Bars Assemble with RF in 5th position (1); step RF to side position (and); close LF to 5th rear position (2); change LF to 5th position (3); step LF to side position (and); close RF to 5th rear position (4).

3–4 Disassemble on to RF, Shake-shake-round with LF (5 and 6); hop LF to begin, Shake-shake-round with RF (7 and 8).

5–6 Spring LF, Point-close-beat with RF (1 and a 2); spring RF, Point-close-beat with LF (3 and a 4).

7–8 Spring on to LF, dance 4 Shuffles—Single, or Double.

9–16 With an Assemble LF in 5th position, repeat bars 1–8 contra.

Arms—Both arms raised (bars 1–2); arm raised in opposition to working foot (bars 3–6); arms akimbo (bars 7–8).

Third Step

- Bars** Hop LF, Point-close-beat with RF, springing on to RF repeat with LF.
- 1–2
- 3–4 Travelling straight forward: Spring on to LF, taking RF to rear-leg-position (5); spring on to RF, taking LF to rear-leg-position (6). Travelling straight back to starting position: hop on RF with LF in rear-leg-position (7); hop on RF with LF in rear-leg-position (and); spring LF, taking RF to 3rd low aerial position (8).
- 5–6 Hop LF, repeat bars 1–2.
- 7–8 Spring on to LF, dance 4 Shuffles—Single, or Double.
- 9–16 Hop RF, repeat bars 1–8 contra.

Arms—Arm raised in opposition to working foot (bars 1–2, 5–6); both arms raised (bars 3–4); arms akimbo (bars 7–8).

Fourth Step—Side Heel and Toe

- Bars** Hop LF, lifting the right leg to the side with the lower leg vertical from knee to toe (1); step towards side position on *heel* of RF (and); close LF to 3rd rear position (2); step towards side position on ball of RF (and); close LF to 5th rear position (3); step towards side position on *heel* of RF (and); close LF to 3rd rear position (4).
- 1–2
- 3–4 Spring on to RF in 3rd crossed position, flicking up the L leg to the rear, knee being well turned out (5); step towards side position on *heel* of LF (and); close RF to 3rd rear position (6); step towards side position on ball of LF (and); close RF to 5th rear position (7); step towards side position on *heel* of LF (and); close RF to 3rd rear position (8).
- 5–6 Disassemble on to LF, dance Point-close-beat with RF, spring RF repeat with LF.
- 7–8 Spring on to LF, dance 4 Shuffles—Single, or Double.
- 9–16 Hop RF, repeat bars 1–8 contra.

Arms—Arm raised in opposition to working foot (bars 1–6); arms akimbo (bars 7–8).

Fifth Step—Double Heel Beat

- Bars** Hop LF, Point-close-beat with RF (1 and a 2); hop on LF (4); heel tap RF in 5th position (and); *heel* tap RF in 5th position leaving *heel* on the ground (a); beat LF (without exaggeration) in 5th rear position (4).
- 1–2
- 3–4 Hop on LF, extending RF with a Shake action to diagonal aerial position (5); hop LF, with a slight relaxation of the knee of R leg before, executing a Shake action to side-aerial-position (and);

- (3–4) spring RF in 5th rear position (6); step LF on *heel* towards side position (and); close RF in 3rd rear position (7); step LF on toe towards side position (and); close RF to 5th rear position (8).
- 5–8 Disassemble on to RF, repeat bars 1–4 contra.
- 9–16 Disassemble on to LF, repeat bars 1–8.

Arms—Arm raised in opposition to working foot throughout.

Sixth Step (also MacLeod's 7th step)

- Bars** Disassemble on to LF, Front-cut with RF in front-leg-position (1); hop LF, and Front-cut with RF in front-leg-position (and); Place RF in 3rd rear position (2); dance 2 Hop-back-steps (*Ceum cùl dùbailte*) RF, LF (and 3 and 4).
- 1–2
- 3–4 Spring RF, repeat bars 1–2 contra.
- 5–6 Hop LF, Point-close-beat with RF, spring RF, Point-close-beat with LF.
- 7–8 Spring LF, dance 4 Shuffles—Single, or Double.
- 9–16 Hop RF, repeat bars 1–8 contra.

Arms—Arm raised in opposition to working foot; both arms raised for Hop-back-steps (*Ceum cùl dùbailte*); arms akimbo (bars 7–8).

John MacLeod's version (only differences given)

Second Step (MacLeod)

- Bars** Repeat bars 1–2.
- 5–6

Third Step (MacLeod)

- Bars** Hop LF, Point-close-beat with RF, springing on to RF repeat with LF.
- 1–2
- 3–4 Assemble with RF in 5th position (5); step RF towards side position (and); close LF to 5th rear position (6); assemble with LF in 5th position (7); step LF towards side position (and); close RF to 5th rear position (8).
- 5–6 Repeat Bars 1–2 **contra** (LF and RF).
- 7–8 Hop LF, dance 4 Shuffles—Single, or Double.
- 9–16 Hop RF, repeat bars 1–8 contra.

Fourth Step (MacLeod)

- Bars** With slight syncopation, hop LF, bringing RF to front-leg-position (mid-calf height, with heel down) (1); placing *heel* of RF in 3rd position (and); beat LF in 3rd rear position (2); step towards forward side position on ball of RF (straight line from 5th position to the side) (and); close LF to 5th rear position (3); step towards side position on *heel* of RF (and); close LF to 3rd rear position (4).
- 1–2

- 3–4 Disassemble on to RF, repeat bars 1–2 contra.
5–6 Point-close-beat with RF and LF.
7–8 Spring LF, dance 4 Shuffles—Single, or Double.
9–16 Hop RF, repeat bars 1–8 contra.

Fifth Step (MacLeod)

- Bars**
1–2 Dance Point-close-beat with RF **twice**.
3–4 Moving diagonally forward right, spring on to LF, raising RF to 4th rear aerial position with bent knee. (5); spring on to RF, raising LF to 4th rear aerial position with bent knee (6); hop back on to RF, LF to a loose front-leg-position (7); bring LF round the back of R leg (close to the leg) LF hopping on RF (and); drop on LF cutting RF to diagonal aerial position (8).
5–6 Point-close-beat with RF and LF.
7–8 Spring LF, dance 4 Shuffles—Single, or Double.
9–16 Hop RF, repeat bars 1–8 contra.

Eighth Step—Fling Turns (MacLeod)

- Bars**
1–2 Dance a Fling Turn to the Left (1 2, 3 4).
3–4 Point-close-beat RF and LF.
5–6 Dance a Fling Turn to the Right (1 2, 3 4).
7–8 Spring LF, dance 4 Shuffles—Single, or Double.
9–16 Hop RF, repeat bars 1–8 contra.



6. Over the Waters (to Charlie)

The **dance** Over the Water/s, or Over the Water to Charlie is a solo jig with many versions and is recognised by the **prominent feature** of the many ‘Point-close-beat’ movements used. Fearchar MacNeil called the dance *Thairis air an Aiseag* in Gaelic, which in literal translation means ‘Over/across on the Ferry.’ In South Uist and Barra it is sometimes also called *Thairis an Aiseig gu Tearlach* / Across the ferry to Charlie. Both these translations could be recent, as indicated elsewhere, but Fearchar said he got the names from this grandfather.

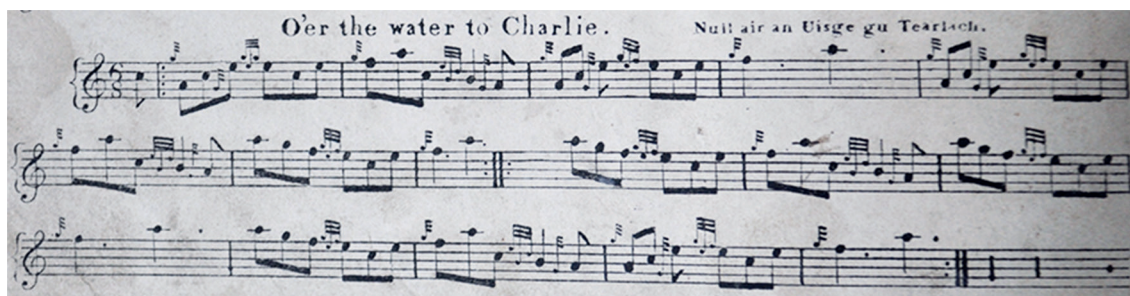
In **local tradition**, this dance is said to tell how Island clansmen travelled ‘over the waters’ to the mainland to fight for Bonnie Prince Charlie in the 1745 Jacobite Rising. The third step supposedly shows a hopping from island to island to reach the Prince on the mainland.

Fearchar was taught the dance by his grandfather Neil Buchanan. **Stylistically** there is a regular sink and rise action in many of the movements, especially in ‘assemble, step, close.’ Knees are generally kept relaxed. The Point-close-beat must be performed with ease and a ‘hop-sink’ body action. The names given to the steps are not original. Fearchar said the Fourth Step was also used in *Mac Iain Ghasda* / Highland Laddie. Another version, containing five out of an original ten steps were notated from John / Iain Ruadh MacLeod in 1953 by Tom Flett. They were danced to a variation of the tune ‘*Gilleann an Fheilidh*’ at a speed on about 56 bars per minute. Among the motifs MacLeod used, his Point-close-beat was described as ‘Hop on LF and lift RF up as far as it will go in diagonal position and bring it in; when it touches the ground, beat with it; then beat with RF in 5th position; and beat LF in 5th rear position, taking RF off to next position.’

Gilleann an Fheilidh or ‘Lads wi’ the Kilts,’ a 6/8 march or jig, first appeared in a tune collection around 1776 in Donald Dow’s *Collection of Ancient Scots Music* (p. 23). The Gaelic song of the same name dates from the 1790s from North Uist. William Matheson’s singing has the following refrain.¹⁹⁶

O Soiridh o slàn horó guma fallain dhuibh
Soiridh o slàn do ghilleann an fheilidh
Soiridh o slàn horó guma fallain dhuibh
Soiridh o slàn do ghilleann an fheilidh.
O Farewell, O health horo so that soundness to you
Farewell, o health to lads with the kilts

In the Scots Musical Museum, it is stated that in *Johnson’s 200 Country Dances*, published in London in 1748, there is a version of ‘Over the Waters’ under the title ‘The Pot Stick.’ It is similar to that given by Rutherford in 1750 and Oswald’s *Caledonian Pocket Companion* of 1752 as ‘Over the Water,’ and ‘Over the Water to Charlie’ respectively. The tune has a characteristic Scottish 6/8 march rhythm, including lots of triplets. Another version is from Gow’s *3rd Collection of Niel Gow’s Reels*, (orig. 1792, 3rd ed., p. 12) as ‘Original Set of O’er the Water to Charlie.’¹⁹⁷ Another setting is in *Angus MacKay’s Bagpipe Tutor* of 1857 (*Null air an Uisge gu Tearlach*):



Arm actions seem to have been fairly optional, so they may be held down by the sides, or one or both hands akimbo on hips would be appropriate; but today’s convention of raising opposite arm to working foot or what feels comfortable may of course also be used.

First Step—Side, Behind, Point-close-beat

Bars Disassemble on to LF, pointing RF in
1–2 side position (1); hop LF, bringing RF to
rear-leg-position (2); dance a Point-close-beat
with RF (3 and a 4).
3–4 Spring RF, repeat bars 1–2 contra.
5–6 Spring LF, repeat bars 1–2.
7–8 Spring RF, LF, RF, LF, execute 4 Shuffles.
9–16 Spring RF, repeat bars 1–8 contra.

Second Step—Inverted Toe and Heel

Bars Spring LF, placing RF on toe to the side
1–2 in side-inverted-position with knees
touching (1); hop LF, placing RF on Heel
in side position (2); hop LF, taking RF to
rear-leg-position (3); hop LF, holding RF in
rear-leg-position (and); spring RF, taking LF
to front-leg-position low (4).
On counts ‘3 and 4’ there is a sideways
movement to the left towards side position.
(MacLeod used a Shake-shake-
round movement for counts ‘3 and 4’
finishing with RF in 3rd rear position).
3–4 Hop RF, repeat bars 1–2 contra, travelling to
the right.
5–6 Hop LF, repeat bars 1–2, travelling to the left.
7–8 Spring LF, RF, LF, RF execute 4 Shuffles.
9–16 Hop RF, repeat bars 1–8 contra.

Third Step—Over the Water Step

Bars Hop LF, dance Point-close-beat with RF (1
1–2 and a 2); travelling straight forward, extend
RF and spring RF towards 4th position,
simultaneously on landing taking LF to
rear-leg-position (3); extend LF and spring
LF towards 4th position, simultaneously on
landing taking RF to rear-leg-position (4).
3–4 Hop LF, execute a Point-close-beat with
RF (5 and a 6); travelling backwards to
starting position: Hop LF twice Taking RF to
front-leg-position, passing it round-the-leg
to rear-leg-position during the two hops. (7
and); spring RF, taking LF to front-leg-posi-
tion low (8).
(MacLeod used a Shake-shake-round
movement for counts ‘7 and 8’).
5–8 Hop RF, repeat bars 1–4 contra.
9–16 Hop LF, repeat bars 1–8.

Fourth Step—Point-close-beat, Assemble-Step-Close

Bars Hop LF, Point-close-beat RF (1 and a 2);
1–2 spring RF, Point-close-beat LF (3 and a 4).
3–4 Assemble RF in 5th position (flexed knees)
(5); step (glide) RF towards side position
(and); close LF to 5th rear position (flexed

(3–4) knees) (6); assemble LF in 5th position
(flexed knees) (7); step (glide) LF towards
side position (and); close RF in 5th rear
position (flexed knees) (8).
Note—The dancer uses the knees to get a
sink and raise action, i.e., sink through the
knees on the assembles and a slight raise
when stepping sideways.
5–6 Disassemble on to LF, repeat bars 1–2.
7–8 Spring LF, RF, LF, RF execute 4 Shuffles.
9–16 Hop RF, repeat bars 1–8 contra.

Fifth Step—Front, Behind and Turn (MacLeod’s Fourth Step)

Bars Hop LF, Point-close-beat RF (1 and a 2); Hop
1–2 LF, bringing RF to front-leg-position (3);
hop LF, bringing RF with a round-the-leg
movement to rear-leg-position (4).
3–4 Hop LF, Point-close-beat RF (5 and a 6);
making a complete turn to the right on
the spot during counts ‘7 and 8’—hop LF,
bringing RF to front-leg-position (7); hop LF,
bringing RF with a round-the-leg action to
rear-leg-position (and); spring RF, taking LF
to front-leg-position low (8).
5–8 Hop RF, repeat bars 1–4 contra.
9–16 Hop LF, repeat bars 1–8.

Sixth Step—Point-close-beat

Bars Hopping on LF, Point-close-beat movement
1–2 twice with RF.
3–4 Spring then Hop RF, Point-close-beat twice
with LF.
5–6 Spring LF, Point-close-beat RF; spring RF,
Point-close-beat LF.
7–8 Spring LF, RF, LF, RF, execute 4 Shuffles.
9–16 Hop RF, repeat bars 1–8 contra.

Fifth Step (MacLeod)

Bars Step on RF in diagonal position (1); Hop
1–2 on RF, taking LF to rear-leg-position (and);
step on LF towards diagonal rear position
(2); execute a Shake action with RF to
side-aerial-position (and); step RF to 5th rear
position (3); LF to side position (and); close
RF to 5th rear position (4).
3–6 Repeat bars 1–2 contra, then repeat bars 1–2
again with RF. Or, bars 5–6 can be Point-
close-beat with RF and LF.
7–8 Spring LF, RF, LF, RF, execute 4 Shuffles.
9–16 Hop RF, repeat bars 1–8 contra.



7. Tulloch Gorm

Tulloch Gorm in Gaelic is pronounced ‘tooluch gorum’ which explains the many spellings of the tune name as Tullochgorum. It translates as ‘Green Knoll’ and, according to Fearchar MacNeil, a **local legend** tells us that this was where Bonnie Prince Charlie and Flora MacDonald parted. The dance is often thought of as an alternate Highland Fling arrangement and is also sometimes said to be a forerunner of the Highland Fling.

The **tune** ‘Tulloch Gorm’ or ‘Tullochgorum’ is also known as the ‘The Corn Bunting’ or ‘The Green Hillock’ and is an old traditional tune, appearing in one of the oldest manuscript collections of Highland Reels, the *Drummond Castle MS.* of 1734, where it is called ‘The Reel of Tullochgorum,’ and is written as a rant. Later it is known as a strathspey. In the 1901 *Puirt-a-Beul* collection by K.N. MacDonald, the strathspey ‘Tulloch Gorm’ is described as a ‘princely’ tune.

Fifty years ago it was considered the king of Strathspeys.’ MacDonald continues—‘There are both English and Gaelic words to it. It was Niel Gow’s favourite strathspey, but few play it properly at the present day, except a few fiddlers in the Highlands who have got the old set. In the first bar of the first measure the accent should be on the first note, and all through the accent should be on the first note of each bar, and in the second measure the old players had a double high G at the commencement of each bar after the low G. Long practice enabled the old players to embellish their tunes very much for the better by adding grace notes and small touches here and there, not in any book; hence their playing always sounded more pleasant to the ear than that of one who played exactly as it is noted in books. The writer plays it as a reel also, and considers it fully as effective as in strathspey time.

These are the Gaelic words given in *Puirt-a-Beul* for **Tulach Gorm**¹⁹⁸ :

Brochan tioradh Anna Tholm,
Brochan tioradh, tioradh, tioradh,
Brochan tioradh Anna Tholm,
Brochan mòr is greim ann,
Dh’ith thu im sa Ghlinne Mhòr,
Dh’ith thu im, muc us im,
Sud ‘us im sa Ghlinne mhòr,
Dh’ith thu siud mun d’fhalbh thu.
Brochan tioradh, &c.

Anna Holm’s porridge of kiln-dried grain,
Porridge of kiln-dried grain, kiln-dried grain,
Anna Holm’s porridge of kiln-dried grain,
Big porridge you can get your teeth into,
You ate some butter in the Big Glen,
You ate some butter, pig and butter,
That and butter in the Big Glen,
You ate that before you went away.

In J. Scott Skinner’s 1904 *Harp and Claymore Collection*, ‘Tullochgorum’ is included as an ‘old Strathspey Reel,’ and his variations are based on the tune printed in Bremner’s Collection of 1757. In Angus MacKay’s *Bagpipe Tutor* of 1857 appears as *Tuloch Gorm*:



In the **dance**, count 4 to each bar in 4/4 strathspey time. The movements should be performed crisply to align with the character of the tune. I learned six of these steps in 1990 from Fearchar. Glenys Gray, who got them in 1987–1988, also recorded the first variation of the first step and the alternative last step. A couple of differences are noted from John / Iain Ruadh MacLeod as recorded by Flett in 1953. Arm movements specified are according to Fearchar MacNeil.

Arms—Opposite arm to the working foot is raised. During Shuffles, both arms are held akimbo. A special hand grip is explained in the fifth step.

Curved arm position—L: Left arm raised; Right arm curved, and hand held across in front of the body (palm inwards). The arm is about 1.5 inches away from the body and held at waist level with body leaning towards the side of the low arm. In this dance, arms change in front, not up the sides.
R: Same but contra.

First Step—*Side, Behind, Cut, (Cut)*

Bars Disassemble on to LF, pointing RF in side position (1); hop on LF bringing RF to rear-leg-position (2); hop on LF, bringing RF round-the-leg to front-leg-position (3); hop on LF, extending RF halfway to diagonal aerial position (and); bring RF to front-leg-position (4).

or alternatively

Disassemble on to LF, pointing RF in side position (1); hop on LF, bringing RF to rear-leg-position (2); hop on LF, extending RF halfway to diagonal aerial position (and); bring RF to front-leg-position (3); hop on LF, extending RF halfway to diagonal aerial position (and); bring RF to front-leg-position (4).

Note—When extending RF for the cuts in front-leg-position, the working leg should hang vertically on its outmost point. It is a short and crisp movement.
The alternative version was also J. MacLeods.

2 Spring RF, repeat bar 1 contra.
3 Spring LF, repeat bar 1.
4 Spring RF, LF, RF, LF, execute 4 Shuffles.
5–8 Spring RF, repeat bars 1–4 contra.

Second Step—*Front, Behind*

Bars Spring LF, bringing RF to front-leg-position (1); hop on LF, taking RF to rear-leg-position (2); assemble with bent knees RF in 5th position (3); step (glide) to side position on RF (and); close LF to 5th rear position, finish with knees bent (4). Hold counts as long as possible!

Note—John MacLeod would go to the left on counts ‘3 and 4’: Assemble with LF in 5th position (3); small step with LF to the Left side (and); close RF to 5th rear position (4).

2 Spring RF, repeat bar 1 contra.
3 Spring LF, repeat bar 1.
4 Spring RF, LF, RF, LF, execute 4 Shuffles.
5–8 Spring RF, repeat bars 1–4 contra.

Arms—Curved position in opposition; arms akimbo for shuffles.

Third Step—*Side In Front and Turn*

Bars Spring LF, pointing RF in side position (1);
1 hop on LF bringing RF to front-leg-position (2); spring on to RF, pointing LF in side position (3); hop on RF, bringing LF to front-leg-position (4).
2 Spring LF, pointing RF in side position (5); making a half turn to the Left, Hop LF bringing RF to rear-leg-position (6); facing the back, hop LF, pointing RF in side position (7); making another half turn to the Left to face the front, hop LF, bringing RF to front-leg-position (8).
3–4 Spring RF, repeat bars 1–2 contra.
5–8 Hop RF, repeat bars 1–4 contra.

Fourth Step—*Toe, Heel*

Bars Hop on LF, pointing RF in 5th position (1);
1 hop on LF, placing RF on Heel in 5th position (2), spring RF, pointing LF in 5th position (3); hop on RF, placing LF on Heel in 5th position (4).
2 Spring LF, dance Shuffle Break.
3–4 Hop RF, repeat bars 1–2 contra.
5–8 Hop LF, repeat bars 1–4.

Arms—Akimbo (bar 1); both hands raised (bar 2); or the opposite way around but be consistent through the step.

Fourth Step variation—*Heel, Toe*

This is the same step as above but substitute the Toe and Heel movement with a Heel and Toe movement before springing in to Shuffles. Fearchar MacNeil said that it was usual to use only one of the alternatives when performing the dance.

Fifth Step—*Rocks, Cuts and Shake*

Bars Spring on to RF, executing 4 Rocks in 5th position (springing RF, LF, RF, LF).
1
2 Spring RF, bring LF from slightly towards diagonal rear aerial position into rear-leg-position simultaneously on landing (L knee is bent) (5); hop RF, re-extend LF slightly towards diagonal rear aerial position and bring it back again to rear-leg-position simultaneously on landing (L knee bent) (6); hop RF, pointing LF in 5th position (7); hop RF, extending LF with a Shake to diagonal aerial position (and 8).
Note—In this movement the knee is held fairly still, with only the lower leg and foot

- (2) working, the leg is bent at the knee-joint and well turned out.
 3–4 Spring LF, repeat bars 1–2 contra.
 5–8 Spring RF to begin, repeat Bars 1–4.

Arms—Hands clasped together down in front of body with arms slightly bent. Palms together (bars 1). Arm raised in opposition to working foot (bar 2).

Sixth Step—Turning

- Bars** Hopping on LF, dance Bar 1 of First Step but a *complete* turn to the Left is made on counts ‘2–4.’
 1
 2 Spring RF, repeat bar 1 contra, turning to the Right.
 3 Spring LF, repeat bar 1.
 4 Spring on to RF, dance Shuffle Break.
 5–8 Spring RF, repeat bars 1–4 contra.

Sixth Step variation—Turning

- Bars** Repeat Bars 1–2 as in the Sixth Step (above).
 1–2
 3–4 Spring LF, repeat bars 1–2.
 5–8 Hop RF, repeat bars 1–4 contra.

A few variations were recorded by the Fletts in 1953 when they interviewed John / Iain Ruadh MacLeod. These, to a certain extent, correspond to Jack McConachie’s 1972 description, though only in part. The Fletts indicated the following variation among the 10 steps they recorded (1996).

Second Step variation

- Bars** Hop on LF, bringing RF to front-leg-position (1); hop on LF, bringing RF round-the-leg to rear-leg-position (2); assemble with LF in 5th Pos. (3); small step with LF to the **Left side** (and); close RF to 5th Rear Pos. (4).
 1
 2–8 Repeat bar 1 with LF, RF and 4 Shuffles, then repeat all contra.



The White Cockade An Chocàrd

March

Trad



South Uist pipe music setting of the White Cockade used for the dance First of August as per Rona Lightfoot 2010 (transcription courtesy of Iain MacDonald of Glenuig).

8. The First of August—*Latha Lùnasdail*

The First of August can be labelled as either a solo Scotch Measure or a quickstep. Sometimes it is also referred to as a hornpipe, depending on how one categorises the music to which it is danced. It has a very characteristic structure of having a two-bar ‘Half Break’ on bars 3–4 and a finishing motif or ‘Break’ on bars 7–8 for the eight-bar segment of every step. Like a number of other solo step dances found on mainland Scotland, such as the Flowers of Edinburgh, and the Earl of Erroll, the King of Sweden, and the Liverpool Hornpipe, it contains characteristic trebling and heel-and-toe beat motifs. Most of these routines are associated with tunes of the same name, apart from the King of Sweden and the First of August.

First of August—Latha Lùnasdail—Lammas

Fearchar MacNeil of Barra knew of several tales regarding the origin of this dance but did not give them any credence. He told me in conversation in 1990 that he had thought about the title of this dance a great deal and came to the conclusion that the name ‘First of August’ in this case might have been connected with the *August Lughnasadh*, the day sacred in Celtic folklore to the sun god Lug, which in time developed into the Lammas feast. He did not suggest that the dance was devised for this event, but perhaps that some sort of connection between the title, dance, and this event could be found. One of the most important commemorative days in the Celtic calendar was that dedicated to the god Lugos / Lug, known as *Lughnasa*. It was a feast to ensure that the god of prosperity would overcome the god of blight and secure a good harvest for his people. This was when the first new corn of the year, or bread made from it, used to be offered on an altar as a thanksgiving for the first fruits of the harvest. Before the coming of Christianity, people celebrated the sun god, Lug, with games, contests, marriages, fairs and feasts of many kinds.

This developed into *Lammas Day*, in Gaelic—*Lùnasdal* or *Latha Lùnasdail*, the first of August feast of the new food coming in which would keep the people alive through the hardship of winter. It marked the beginning of the harvest. The fishermen also celebrated the Harvest of the Sea on this day as it ended the white fishing season for the year. This festival was a time of great rejoicing, dance, music, and entertainment. One could, perhaps, think that a dance to commemorate this yearly, very important occasion, would be appropriate. The word Lammas is said to be derived from the Anglo-Saxon *hlafmæsse*, meaning ‘loaf-mass,’ the feast on which the bread of the Sacrament could first be made from the year’s newly ripened corn.¹⁹⁹

It is very tempting to see a connection between the dance name the First of August and the traditional quarter-day. In Scotland however, the first-fruits celebration came to be held much later, as the first day of August was far too early for any kind of meaningful first-fruits festival. The first-fruits celebrations came to be held in Scotland on *Latha Fheill Moire*, the Feast of the Assumption (15 or 26 August), and in the Western Isles on *Latha Fheill Micheil*, Michealmas (29 September or 10 October). So, the first day of August was mainly kept as a magic sort of day for superstitious practices connected with healing, such as making charms or pilgrimages to certain curative wells. Enormous numbers of young people used to visit the spring called *Tobar Creagag* or Craigie Well on Munlochy Bay (Black Isle, Ross and Cromarty) on the May quarter-day. On the evidence of many other such pilgrimages, many of those involved would have been young people bursting with health, and intent on staying that way by combining earnest devotions with healthy exercise, cheerful company, and a bit of fun. So, music and dancing would certainly have featured, and it would not be surprising if a tune or a dance called The First of August had come out of it, just as a pipe-tune called ‘*Creagag*’ seems to have derived out of the annual May-Day pilgrimage to *Tobar Creagag*.²⁰⁰

Fearchar recalled other stories, too. Firstly, there was a tale known locally in Barra and South Uist fitting in with a now familiar trope, that the dance commemorates Bonnie Prince Charlie’s landing in Scotland; however, that event, in fact, took place on the 23rd of July 1745, when he arrived in Eriskay

from France. He reached the mainland at Loch nam Uamh in Arisaig on 25th July. Prince Charlie lived between the shore at Borrodale and his ship until 4th August, then sent the ship away and stayed another week before moving on by Genuig, Kinlochmoidart, Dalilea, and Glenaladale to the raising of the standard at Glenfinnan on 19th August. On the first of August then, he was still at Borrodale. As Ronald Black suggested in his article 'The First of August' printed in the *West Highland Free Press* on 2 August 1991, perhaps the people did their best to make the prince welcome to their country and one could assume that some sort of entertainment was put on. No doubt an anxious glass or two were raised in the traditional manner to the prosperity of the coming harvest quarter, and no doubt a song or two were sung and a dance or two were danced. All this is close enough to suggest that the dance could have been composed at a later stage to celebrate the event and that the actual date might have been forgotten or generalised for simplicity.

Musical meanderings: 'The White Cockade' and An Tàillear Mòr

According to the Fletts' 1950s research, the tune was within living memory as 'The White Cockade,' or *An Chocàrd*. This excellent scotch measure was formerly called 'The Ranting Highlandman,' but it is also found as a march. In *Angus MacKay's Bagpipe Tutor* of 1857 appears as *An Suaithneas Bàn*:



The white rosette, or cockade, was chosen as the emblem of the Jacobites in contrast to the black rosette of the Hanoverians. Robert Burns penned a Jacobite song to the tune which included the line 'He takes the field wi' his White Cockade.' The tune also accompanies a Country dance, a three-couple reel, first published by Longman and Broderip in 1792, and later by Preston in *24 New Country Dances for the year 1797*.²⁰¹ Illustrated earlier is the South Uist pipe music setting of the White Cockade Rona Lightfoot shared with me in 2010 (transcription courtesy of Iain MacDonald of Genuig).

There is also a *port-a-beul* sung to the air 'The White Cockade.' It may have nothing to do with our dance, but as it was sung for dancing it is of interest. It can be found in K.N. MacDonald's 1901 book *Puirt-a-Beul* and was sung for *Dannsa na Boineid*, or the Bonnet Dance, which was something like an Everlasting Jig, or Eightsome Reel (not the famous country dance).²⁰² This is similar to Be-Ba-Babbity / Babbity Bowster or the cushion dance.²⁰³

A bonnet was thrown upon the floor, then a young man picked it up and danced with the girl of his choice, who in her turn, danced to another favourite partner, and so on until the whole company had a turn on the floor. The words sung, when no instrument was available to keep this fun going, were 'Mo thasdan bòidheach, mo thasdan geal.' In more recent times, the Bonnet Dance has been performed to instrumental music to the air of 'The White Cockade,' and generally for the last dance at a wedding or ball.²⁰⁴

Those words on the next page have something of the atmosphere of a *latha-féile* or Fair about them, and perhaps one can draw a parallel to the quarter-day festivities previously discussed.

In 1950, D.G. MacLennan stated that this hornpipe was also known as the 'Fisher's Hornpipe' but where he came by this information is not known. The tune is a well-known tune in hornpipe rhythm. MacLennan did not describe the dance in his book if he knew it.

Mo Thasdan Bhòidheach—The White Cockade

<i>Mo thasdan bòidheach, Mo thasdan geal, Mo thasdan bòidheach, Dhachaidh gu mo bhean: Sgillinn anns an òl dheth, Sgillinn anns an danns, 'S bheir mi deich sgillinn bhòidheach Dhachaidh gu mo bhean.</i>	My lovely shilling, my bright shilling, My lovely shilling, home to my wife: A penny in the drink of it, a penny in the dance And I'll taken ten lovely pence home to my wife.
<i>Mo dheich sgillinn bhòidheach, Mo dheich sgillinn mhaith, Mo dheich sgillinn bhòidheach, Dhachaidh gu mo bhean: Sgillinn anns an òl dheth, Sgillinn anns an danns, 'S bheir mi ochd sgillinn bhòidheach, Dhachaidh gu mo bhean.</i>	My ten lovely pence, my ten good pence, My ten lovely pence, home to my wife: A penny in the drink of it, a penny in the dance, And I'll take eight lovely pence home to my wife.
<i>M' ochd sgillinn bhòidheach, M' ochd sgillinn mhaith, M' ochd sgillinn bhòidheach, Dhachaidh gu mo bhean: Sgillinn anns an òl dheth, Sgillinn anns an danns, 'S bheir mi sèa sgillinn bhòidheach, Dhachaidh gu mo bhean.</i>	My eight lovely pence, ... And I'll take six lovely pence ...
<i>Mo shèa sgillinn bhòidheach, Mo shèa sgillinn gheal, Mo shèa sgillinn bhòidheach, Dhachaidh gu mo bhean: Sgillinn anns an òl dheth, Sgillinn anns an danns, 'S bheir mi ceithir sgillinn bhòidheach, Dhachaidh gu mo bhean.</i>	My six lovely pence, my six bright pence, ... And I'll take four lovely pence ...
<i>Mo ghròtan bòidheach, Mo ghròtan glan, Mo ghròtan bòidheach, Dhachaidh gu mo bhean: Sgillinn anns an òl dheth, Sgillinn anns an danns, 'S bheir mi dà sgillinn bhòidheach, Dhachaidh gu mo bhean.</i>	My lovely groatie, my fine groatie, ... And I'll take two lovely pence ...
<i>Mo dhà sgillinn bhòidheach, Mo dhà sgillinn mhaith, Mo dhà sgillinn bhòidheach, Dhachaidh gu mo bhean: Sgillinn anns an òl dheth, Sgillinn anns an danns, 'S théid mi fhéin 'nam aonar, Dhachaidh gu mo bhean.</i>	My two lovely pence, ... And I'll go myself alone home to my wife.

Translation by Ronald Black, 1991; another translation can be found in Lamb (2012:110).

The Fletts recall that an alternate tune for the dance the King of Sweden's March was named 'The First of August.' Commonly known as the King of Sweden, a solo dance found in the 1841 Hill manuscript. There are some similarities between the two dances as both use similar treble movement motifs. A tune titled 'First of August' was published by Daniel Wright in *Wright's Compleat Collection of Celebrated Country Dances* (1740:61) in a collection of Country dances, together with an accompanying description of a Country dance to go with the tune. The dance outlined in the collection has no connection with the Hebridean solo dance presented here.²⁰⁶

In 1996, I took part in the first *Ceòlas* Summer School²⁰⁷ held in Daliburgh, South Uist. I attended a ceilidh in Eriskay where Gaelic singer Wilma Kennedy, of the Campbells of Greepe family, sang *Nighean Dhòmhnaill 'ic Dhonnchaidh* / The Daughter of Donald son of Duncan, also known as *An Tàillear Mòr* / The Big Tailor as part of a *puirt-a-beul* set. Afterwards it occurred to step dancer colleague Frank McConnell and myself that this song was very similar in character to the 'White Cockade' and that it seemed to match the steps of First of August / *Latha Lùnasdail* very well. 'The White Cockade,' in my own experience, only worked well to dance to if it was sung in Gaelic with an appropriate word rhythm. I asked Wilma where the song came from and through her mother, Kenna Campbell MBE, we found out that the family had it from a great-grand-uncle from the Isle of Skye who had worked for some time in South Uist as a stonemason, and this was one of the *puirt* he had learnt and brought home. This would have been in the second half of the nineteenth century. As the tune is a version of the White Cockade it has become my own favourite tune to dance this dance to. A slightly different version of the song is given below while the version in the Campbell tradition, as mentioned above, is found in their book *Fonn*.²⁰⁸ I currently regularly teach the dance to Gillebrìde MacMillan's version of the song found on his album *Air Fòrladh* / On Leave.

An Tàillear Mòr

Chorus:

*Dh'fhalbhainn fhìn leis an tàillear mhòr,
Shiùbhlainn fhìn leis an tàillear mhòr;
Dh'fhalbhainn fhìn leis an tàillear fhìdhleir,
Rachainn fhìn a phòsadh lem òg nighinn duinn.*

Verse 1:

*Nighean Ruar''ac Dhonnchaidh bu chùl-chàineach tinn
S mor a bha chràdh ann an cnàmhan do chinn
Na faighinn dha'n ùir thus, 's do bhùig orra chinn
Rachainn fhìn a phòsadh no h-òig nighinn duinn*

Verse 2:

*'S mise bha gòrach a' posadh ri mnaoi
Air a mhutahs sòd agus breoighte san druim
Na faighinn air dòigh thu, 's do sheòl orra chinn
Rachainn fhìn a phòsadh no h-òig nighinn duinn*

Translation:

I would go with the big tailor
I would travel with the big tailor
I would go with the tailor fiddler
I would go to marry the young brown-haired girl.

Verse 1:

Daughter of Roderick son of Duncan, surly and sickly
There was much pain in the bones of your head
If I could put you in the grave
I would go to marry the young brown-haired girl.

Verse 2:

I was foolish to marry a woman
who is easily angered, and has a sore back
If I could get you 'sorted,' covered by a sheet
I would go to marry the young brown-haired girl.

The dance

The version of the dance the First of August presented here conforms primarily to how John / Iain Ruadh MacLeod showed the steps to Tom Flett in 1953 and, at the time, danced at a speed of about 44–48 bars per minute or about 20 seconds per step. These steps were shown to me by Chris Metherell in the 1980s who learned them directly from Tom Flett as mentioned earlier. In the following description, 16 steps are given. Included are some variations from McConachie and MacNab, some variations that have emerged in my own dancing over the years, and a small variation of a step from Sandra Bald Jones of Hamilton, Ontario, in Canada, which works very well with the dance.

Traditionally the First of August was performed in ordinary boots for the men and shoes for the girls. Sometimes it was also performed in stocking soles. According to MacLeod, the arms should be held at the sides or, alternately, held akimbo at the waist throughout the dance.

As different collectors have interpreted this dance in various ways, the positioning of feet varies between the descriptions available. MacLeod seems to have preferred what today is closest to 5th position, so in this description all closed positions are in 5th. Also, only six, or perhaps eight, of the described steps would have been chosen for performance. Many of the foot positions noted do not correspond to any of the positions currently used in Highland Games dancing. This is due to the relaxed and natural style this dance with which was performed. Flett collected 10 different steps, one Half Break and two Full Breaks.

The steps collected by Jack McConachie in 1949 also came from MacLeod. His 1972 description includes leaps, which were not introduced into Highland Games dancing before the turn of the twentieth century and were not even in common use in the early 1900s. Leaps were not included in any of the Island dances collected by the Fletts or by myself. McConachie noted down eight steps, of which the first and the last were the same, and he noted one Half Break and one Full Break. McConachie also added Highland dancing arm positions for the steps in his description.

In addition, Scottish dance teacher Mary Isdale MacNab of Vancouver had a version of First of August:

She [MacNab] probably obtained it from William (Hector?) MacPherson in Glasgow in 1952. MacPherson learned the dance from a John MacDonald who in turn acquired it from Archie[bald] MacPherson. She was offered the dance by Mrs Fassiefern Bain, one of her sources in Canada, in c. 1914, but did not learn it. Only fragments of her dance have been discovered [...] Mrs MacNab always insisted that her dances should tell a story and her First of August is the feast of St Peter in Chains. She explains that each of the chains had 16 links and that the steps represent the links in the chain. Her last step (which we do not have) is known to represent a cross! Her version is at any event rather different from that collected by others. Only one step together with a Half Break and her Full Break are currently known.²⁰⁹

Frank Rhodes collected four steps, a Half Break, and a Full Break from Roderick MacLean in Iochdar in 1954, which are very similar to MacLeod's versions. Frank Rhodes's notations read—'His catch in was a hardly visible flicker and his treble was performed very close to the foot.' Frank Rhodes also collected five steps and a Half Break and Break from Donald Walker in 1954. Donald Walker learned the dance from Donald 'Roidein' MacDonald, and Walker's steps differ from those collected from MacLeod. Rhodes wrote that 'his treble is a wide swinging step with the knee well bent.'²¹⁰

Dance structure

The dance structure of this dance follows this recurring pattern. Each half step has a characteristic motif on bars 1–2; a **Half Break** on bars 3–4; repeat bars 1–2 (either identically or contra); and a **Full Break** on bars 7–8. All this gets repeated on the other side contra for bars 9–16 to complete the step. The order of the steps seems to have been flexible, but commonly Steps 1 and 2 began the dance. Note that some motifs start with a catch-in movement of the working foot on the *anacrusis* of the initial bar.

When crossing a foot in front or behind, as in the Half Break and in the second step, the body may turn slightly. This also applies to other similar movements in other steps. The steps may be executed in any order, but it is customary to start with the first step, as it is a 'Lead On' or 'Lead Round' sort of step. The names for motifs given were not traditionally used but are given here to help with memorisation of steps. **Count** 2 to the bar (2/4 music); but if counting in 4 is easier (4/4 music) the counting structure will be different. 'and a 1 and and a 2' becomes '4 and 1 and 2 and 3.'

Half Break RF (John MacLeod, and Mary Isdale MacNab)

Bars Hop on LF, extending RF to diagonal aerial position low (and); catch RF firmly on the floor in diagonal position, bringing it towards LF and lift RF slightly off ground to (a);

3 Step RF in place (5); shuffle LF out-in towards diagonal position (and and); step on LF in 1st position or alternatively 5th position (a); step RF in 1st position or alternatively 5th rear position (6).

Note – The step/beat of the rear foot is always accented.

4 Hop on RF, extending LF to diagonal aerial position low, to begin, repeat Bar 3 contra.

Half Break LF. Same as for RF, but danced contra.

Break RF (John MacLeod)

Bars Hop on LF, extending RF to diagonal aerial position low (and); brush-tap/catch RF firmly on the floor in diagonal position, bringing/catching it towards LF and lift RF slightly off ground to (a);

7 Step RF in place (5); shuffle LF out-in towards diagonal position (and and); step on LF in 5th position (a); step RF in 5th rear position (6). shuffle LF out-in (and and); hop on RF (a);

8 Step LF straight back (7); step RF straight back (and); jump onto LF with body leaning slightly forward, bringing RF to 5th rear aerial position low (8).

Break LF. Same as for RF, but danced contra.

Alternative Break ending—bar 8 (John MacLeod)

Bars Hop RF, lifting LF up between 5th position and 4th position low (and);

8 Step LF towards 4th rear position, lifting RF up between 5th position and 4th position low (7); step RF towards 4th rear position, lifting LF up between 5th position and 4th position low (and); spring L ball in 3rd position pointing RF in 3rd rear position Open (8).

Alternative Break ending—bar 8 (Mary I. MacNab)

Bars Shuffle LF out-in (and and); hop on RF (a);

8 Step LF in open 3rd rear position (7); tap-Step RF forward (and); close LF pointed to 5th rear position (toe off ground), simultaneously dropping heel of RF on the floor (8).

Tom Flett and Frank Rhodes made many illustrations in their notebooks of body positions, foot placings and arm actions. On the next page is a diagonal aerial or floor position for the First of August as per Tom Flett's notes taken in 1953.



First Step—Lead Round or Circle

The dancer describes a complete circle *clockwise* forward during the first half of this step, the circle being interrupted at each half by Half Break RF, Break RF (facing the front). Then repeat the circle during the second half but moving *counter-clockwise* round using Half Break LF, and Break LF. Finish facing the front.

Or, dance round in *one circle clockwise* only, making the half and full breaks at every quarter.

- Bars** Extending RF towards diagonal aerial position, but with lower leg hanging vertical (and), hop LF and bring RF to front-leg-position very low (1); Repeat counts 'and 1' (and a); spring RF, bring LF to back-leg-position very low (2).
- 2 Extend LF and hop on RF, repeat bar 1 contra (and 3 and a 4).
- 3–4 **Half Break RF.**
- 5–6 Repeat bars 1–2.
- 7–8 **Break RF.**
- 9–16 Repeat bars 1–8 contra.

Second Step—Trebling / Treepling

- Bars** Hop on LF, extending RF to diagonal aerial position low (and); brush-tap (catch) RF firmly on the floor in diagonal position, bringing (catching) it towards LF and lift RF slightly off ground to (a);
- 1 Step RF in place (1); shuffle LF out-in towards diagonal position (and and); step on LF in 1st position or alternatively 5th position (a); **step RF in 5th rear position** (2).
- 2 Shuffle LF out-in towards diagonal position (and and); step LF in 5th rear position (a); **step RF in 5th position** (3); shuffle LF out-in towards diagonal position (and and); step LF in 5th position (a); **step RF in 5th rear position** (4).
- 3–4 **Half Break LF.**
- 5–6 Repeat bars 1–2 contra.
- 7–8 **Break RF.**
- 9–16 Repeat bars 1–8 contra.

Third Step—Toe-Heel-Toe

- Bars** Hop on LF, pointing RF in an open 5th position (1); hop on LF, placing RF on heel in the open 5th position (and); spring on to RF, placing LF in open 5th position (2); *Quick, quick, slow*
- 2 Hop on RF, repeat bar 1 contra (3 and 4). *Quick, quick, slow*
- 3–4 **Half Break RF.**
- 5–6 Repeat bars 1–2.
- 7–8 **Break RF.**
- 9–16 Repeat bars 1–8 contra.

Third Step variation—Heel-Toe-Heel

- Bars** Hop on LF, placing RF on heel in open 5th position (1); hop on LF, pointing RF in open 5th position (and); spring on to RF, placing LF on heel in open 5th position (2); *Quick, quick, slow*
- 2 Hop on RF, repeat bar 1 contra (3 and 4). *Quick, quick, slow*
- 3–4 **Half Break RF.**
- 5–6 Repeat bars 1–2.
- 7–8 **Break RF.**
- 9–16 Repeat bars 1–8 contra.

Third Step variation—Toe-Heel (McConachie)

- Bars** Hop on LF, pointing RF in inverted-side-position (knee turned in) (1); hop on LF, placing RF on heel in side position (knee turned out) (and); spring slightly forward on to both feet with RF (or LF) in 5th position (2); *Quick, quick, slow*
- 2 Repeat bar 1 contra (3 and 4). *Quick, quick, slow*
- 3–4 **Half Break RF.**
- 5–6 Repeat bars 1–2.
- 7–8 **Break RF.**
- 9–16 Repeat bars 1–8 contra.

Fourth Step—Heel Swivel

- Bars** Spring (slightly forward), land with both feet together (almost flat, heels off floor) in 1st position (1); pivoting on the balls of the feet, spread heels apart (and); pivot on heels, spread toes outward (now astride towards side position) (2);
- 2 Assemble (good knee bend) with LF in 5th position (3); spread both feet towards side position (and); assemble (good knee bend) with RF to 5th position (4). *Quick, quick, slow, quick, quick, slow*

3–4 **Half Break RF.**

5–6 Repeat bars 1–2.

7–8 **Break RF.**

9–16 Repeat bars 1–8 contra.

Note—Over the years when dancing this step, I have developed an alternative version, where, *in bar 2, the feet change position after the spread* (i.e., finishing with LF in front); so, the step would be:

Bars 1–2 RF, Half Break LF; bars 5–6 LF; Break RF; bars 9–10 LF; Half Break RF; bars 13–14 RF; Break LF.

This makes for a nice visually changing pattern for the step.

Fifth Step—Crab Step

The dancer describes a complete circle clockwise behind him to the right, with back to centre in four quarters. Alternately, it can be done as a circle clockwise during Bars 1–8 and a circle counter-clockwise during Bars 9–16; in this case, each circle would be danced in halves with Breaks in between. A third alternative is to move straight and sideways on bars 1–8 and then back to the starting point to the left on bars 9–16.

Bars Spring slightly forward on to both feet in an inverted 1st position with toes in (1); moving to Right swivel in R heel and L toe to 1st position (and); swivel on R toe and L heel to inverted 1st position (2);

2 Swivel on R heel and L toe to 1st position (3); swivel on R toe and L heel to inverted 1st position (and); swivel on R heel and L toe to 1st position (4).
Quick, Quick, Slow, Quick, Quick, Slow.

3–4 **Half Break RF (on the spot).**

5–6 Repeat bars 1–2 completing a half circle.

7–8 **Break RF (on the spot).**

9–16 Repeat bars 1–8 but Breaks are on the LF.

Note 1—If the circle is being done counter-clockwise or travelled from side-to-side, bars 9–16 would be executed contra.

Note 2—McConachie's 1972 version is performed in one clockwise circle with the back to centre of the circle in four quarters. It has the same structure otherwise as the above description, except that five (5) 'crab' movements in Bars 1–2 are done instead of the six described above in a slightly different rhythm—inverted 1st position (1); 1st position (2); inverted 1st position (3); 1st position (and); inverted 1st position (4); making it *Slow, Slow, Quick, Quick, Slow*. Thus, the Half Break and Break are entered from an inverted position. It is not known if this is what he was shown by John Macleod or if it was his own interpretation.



Fourth step: Feet swivel illustration. Flett notes, 1975.

Sixth Step—Forward Heel Step

Bars Hop LF (and); step RF on *heel* slightly forward, toes raised and turned slightly out (1); step LF on *heel* next to RF, both feet now on *heels* with toes turned slightly outwards and feet more parallel than a 1st position, with toes in the air (and); step RF back to 1st position (2);
Quick, Quick, Quick, Slow,

2 Spring LF in 1st position (and); step RF on *heel* slightly forward, toes raised and turned slightly out (3); step LF on *heel* next to RF, both feet now on *heels* with toes turned slightly outwards (and); step RF back to 1st position (4).
Quick, Quick, Quick, Slow.

3–4 **Half Break LF.**

5–6 Repeat bars 1–2 contra.

7–8 **Break RF.**

9–16 Repeat bars 1–8 contra.

Sixth Step variation (McConachie)

Bars Hop LF, step RF on *heel* with toes raised and turned out towards 4th position (and 1); place LF in line with RF on *heel* with toes raised and turned out so both feet are now on *heels* with toes raised and turned out (and); twist toes in-out quickly (a); step RF back to 4th rear position (2);

2 Spring LF, step RF on *heel* with toes raised and turned out towards 4th position (and 3); place LF in line with RF on *heel* with toes raised and turned out so both feet are now on *heels* with toes raised and turned out (and); *twist toes in-out quickly* (a); step RF back to 4th rear position (4).

Sixth Step variation (Bald-Jones)

I got this step variation from Highland dance teacher Sandra Bald-Jones, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada in the 1990s. It makes a nice addition.

Bars Hop LF, step RF on *heel* with toes raised and turned inwards (and 1); place LF in line with RF on *heel* with toes raised and turned in so both feet are now on *heels* with toes raised and turned in towards each other (and); twist toes out (and); step RF back to 4th rear position (2);

2 Spring LF, repeat bar 1.

Seventh Step—*Twists or Barra Walk*

Start with LF in 1st position and RF in 3rd or 5th position, depending on what Break has been used. The step is performed on the ball of the foot all the way through bars 1–2 and 5–6, and there is a slight forward movement. In Flett's original field notes of 1953 it is suggested the step might be known as the 'Barra Walk'.

Bars RF: Swivel on L Toe, twisting the heel out, simultaneously lifting RF to the side, heel leading, toe pointing down and knee pushed in towards L knee (and); swivel LF back to 1st position, simultaneously step RF down slightly forward of 1st position, still inverted and swivel it into 3rd position on Ball (1). These two counts are similar to a 'Charleston' movement!

LF: Swivel on R toe, twisting the heel out, simultaneously lifting LF to the side, heel leading, toe pointing down and knee pushed in towards R knee (and); swivel RF back to 1st position, simultaneously step LF down slightly forward of 1st position, still inverted and swivel it into 3rd position on Ball (2).

2 Repeat again, twisting and lifting RF out to side (and 3); repeat LF (and and); Repeat RF (a 4). Finish with RF in 3rd position.

Slow, Slow, Quick, Quick, Quick.

3–4 **Half Break LF.**

5–6 Repeat bars 1–2 contra.

7–8 **Break RF.**

9–16 Repeat bars 1–8 contra.

Seventh Step variation—*Flicker* (McConachie)

This is similar to the above step but with a different rhythm.

Flicker—A short step forward, taken high on the ball of the foot with the toes of both feet turned in. As the step is taken, the heels are twisted quickly inwards and out again. Knees must be kept relaxed. Count '1'

Bars Step a short step forward to 4th position and 1–2 Flicker RF (1); step forward Flicker LF (2); step forward Flicker RF (3); step forward Flicker LF (and), step forward Flicker RF (4).

Slow, Slow, Quick, Quick, Slow.

3–4 **Half Break LF.**

5–6 Repeat bars 1–2 contra.

7–8 **Break RF.**

9–16 Repeat bars 1–8 contra.

Seventh Step variation—*Flicker & Heel clicks* (Melin)

This version is based on McConachie's step but emerged in my own dancing over the years.

Bars Step forward (short step to 4th position) and 1–2 Flicker RF (1); step forward Flicker LF (2); place feet parallel and on balls of both feet, and click heels together 3 times (3 and 4).

Slow, Slow, Quick, Quick, Slow.

3–4 **Half Break LF.**

5–6 Repeat bars 1–2 contra.

7–8 **Break RF.**

9–16 Repeat bars 1–8 contra.

Eighth Step—*Changes and Spread*

Bars Assemble with RF in 5th position (1); 1–2 change and land with LF in 5th position (2); change and land with RF in 5th position (3); spread both feet towards side position (and); assemble LF in 5th position (4), (use good knee bend in the Assemble and Changes).

Slow, Slow, Quick, Quick, Slow.

3–4 **Half Break LF.**

5–6 Repeat bars 1–2 contra.

7–8 **Break RF.**

9–16 Repeat bars 1–8 contra.

Ninth Step—*Side Travel & Hop-back-steps Turning*

Bars Hop on LF, bring RF to front-leg-position 1–2 low (1); step RF on ball towards side position (and); close LF to 5th rear position (2); make three quick Hop-back-steps (*Ceum cùl dùbail-te*) RF, LF, RF, making a complete turn on the spot to the right (clockwise) (and 3 and and a 4). Or, three ordinary back-steps quickly.

3–4 **Half Break LF.**

5–6 Repeat bars 1–2 contra.

7–8 **Break RF.**

9–16 Repeat bars 1–8 contra.

Tenth Step—*Crab-Heel-Toe-Walk Sideways* (MacNab)

- Bars** Hop on LF, lifting RF to a forward inverted side position with toes down, heel up, knee pointing to the left;
- and** Tap-step RF in open 3rd position twisting the heel straight backwards and inwards during the movement, an inverted catch in with twist;
- a** Drop R heel in place, while twisting the toes outwards;
- (1) 1** Drop L heel on floor so that feet are in 1st position with heels touching;
- and** Step on to ball of RF in inverted 1st position towards side position;
- and** Place LF on ball in inverted 1st position with toes touching those of RF;
- a** Step on heel of RF with toes turned out towards side position;
- 2** Place LF on heel with toes turned out in 1st position;
- and** Step on to ball of RF in inverted 1st position towards side position;
- and** Place LF on ball in inverted 1st position with toes touching those of RF;
- a** Step on heel of RF with toes turned out towards side position;
- (2) 3** Place LF on heel with toes turned out in 1st position;
- and** Step on to RF flat with toes pointed forward in place;
- 4** Step on to LF flat with toes pointed forward in place.
- Both feet are now flat and parallel.
- Count:*
and and a 1 and and a 2, and and a 3 **and 4** (in 2/4 time);
or
4 and a 1 and 2 and 3 and 4 and **1 2 3** (in 4/4 time)
- 3–4** **Half Break RF.**
- 5–6** Repeat bars 1–2.
- 7–8** **Break RF.**
- 9–16** Repeat bars 1–8 contra.



9. The Flowers of Edinburgh

The exact origin of this particular version of the Flowers of Edinburgh is rather obscure. In 1950, D.G. MacLennan wrote that Ewen MacLachlan taught a Flowers of Edinburgh, but he did not describe it. MacLachlan's version seems, however, to have been a percussive step dance, closer to the First of August in character, rather than the dance of a soft shoe character presented in this publication.

The Flett research²¹¹ shows that Archibald MacPherson knew a version that Ewen MacLachlan taught, which contained double trebles done simultaneously with both feet and a step in which the dancer drops to one knee, a motif that has essentially disappeared in the Highland and Hebridean traditions. The few steps of *Carraig Fhearghais* / *Màili a Chrandonn* found by the Fletts and Rhodes in the islands in 1953, from what their informants told them, suggested that this could have been the same dance as the older Flowers of Edinburgh performed to a different tune. *Carraig Fhearghais* included a step that drops to one knee indicating it is perhaps the same dance. According to Donald Walker, this solo dance had complicated arm movements when performed by Donald 'Roidein' MacDonald.

The song '*Carraig Fhearghais*' / '*Màili a Chrandonn*' is very slow, so when played for dancing the tune may have been accelerated into reel or jig tempo. The 6/8 tune 'Carrickfergus' also appears as 'Haste to the Wedding' (1870) and as the jig 'Patrick's Pot' (1925).²¹² Rhodes was told that the song, depending on the source speaking, was either: in praise of a rock, *Carraig Fhearghais*, which a man who is lost remembers and then is able to navigate his way; or was composed in praise of a girl, Mary, with a round face and brown hair, who provided shelter for the composer of the song for a night when he was lost, and set him on his way again the next day.²¹³ The late-seventeenth / early-eighteenth century Irish Gaelic song on which the English version of the popular song Carrickfergus is based on is called '*Do Bhí Bean Uasal*' / There Was a Noblewoman, though the lyrics may have little to do with MacLachlan's dance. In 2017, I received a recorded copy of the song from Cailean MacLean, Dr MacLean's son, with the original notes. Dr MacLean²¹⁴ was the Island doctor in the 1950s and guided Frank Rhodes around South Uist in search of dance information. The song is here called '*Si Maili si Maili*' or '*Óran a' Phosta*', composed by the bard Seonaidh Campbell, 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 the bard Seonaidh Campbell composed a skit telling how the postman was getting lost getting there.²¹⁵

Other searches for this song and tune in 2017 proved difficult, but the online resource *Tobar an Dualchas* hosts a song named '*Màili Chruinn Donn*' sung by John MacLennan from Letters near Lochbroom and recorded by Dr John MacInnes in 1961. It is a love song composed by William MacKenzie, *an Ceistear Crùbach* / The Bent or Crippled Keeper, in praise of brown-haired Màili.²¹⁶ Both songs are slow, so dance to it you would have to play it as a jig or reel. A Country dance named Carrickfergus also appears in the 1841 Aberdeenshire Hill manuscript. It seems the tune Carrickfergus in its various guises was a popular melody.

Niel Gow, among others, credits composition of the **melody** 'The Flowers of Edinburgh' to James Oswald in Gow's *Complete Repository, Part 4* (1817:16). The tune first appears in print in Part 2 of Oswald's circa 1742 collection of *Curious Collection of Scots Tunes*, which appeared in London and contained the 'Flowers' tune as a 'crude' song titled 'My Love's bonny when she smiles on me.' He printed the melody again in 1750 with the words 'My love was once a bonny lad.' The first version of the song and tune with the title 'The Flower of Edinburgh' appeared in *The Universal Magazine* in April 1749. That same year it was printed in John Johnson's *Twelve Country Dances for the Harpsichord*. Oswald himself republished it in 1751 in his volume *Caledonian Pocket Companion* under the title 'The Flower of Edinburgh.'²¹⁷

The dance

This version Glenys Gray and I learned from Fearchar MacNeil in 1987 and 1990 respectively, stands out as being a bit different from the other dances in this book. It singularly involves a pivot turn break and high cutting movement while none of the other dances do.

Fearchar MacNeil told me in conversation in March 1990 that he did not learn this dance when he was young, but that it came to him much later in life when he was living on the mainland in Ayr. In fact, he said he learnt it through Jack McConachie's 1972 book and was never shown it in person. He said that this version only acquired its Gaelic name, *Lusan Dhun Èideann*, after *Comhlan Dannsa nan Eileanach* was set up in Barra in the mid-1980s.

Comparing these steps with other dances from the mainland, I find that they closely resemble instructions for a dance published in 1929 by G. Douglas Taylor in *Some Traditional Scottish Dances* under the name Highland Laddie. Also, some undated notes made by Tom Flett, with no source given, list seven steps of a Highland Laddie, of which the first six closely resemble Taylor's and Fearchar's version. Jack McConachie's version was first published in the Imperial Society of Teachers' of Dancing Bulletin in 1961 and later in 1972, posthumously, by Peter A. White in *Hebridean Solo Dances*. McConachie's notes do not say that he learned it from John / Iain Ruadh MacLeod, who was his only source in 1949, but merely that it 'was also Hebridean.' There is no indication MacLeod knew this version. Perhaps McConachie got that notion from MacLennan's book? Earlier, McConachie had rearranged yet a different version of Highland Laddie originally taught by David Anderson of Dundee, and in 1952, McConachie presented it with the title Bonnie Dundee. In this process, the dance time signature was changed from 4/4 to 6/8. Could it not be equally possible that McConachie took Taylor's version of Highland Laddie, or another similar one, adapted it to the tune 'Flowers of Edinburgh,' and placed this particular version in the Hebrides to make it stand out as different? Or possibly Peter White found it among McConachie's papers and assumed the connection? The similarities between these different dances are too close to allow for much coincidence at all! It may not be possible to ascertain with certainty who passed on what to whom, and who devised the routine in the first place. It seems *clear* to me that this version was not part of Ewen MacLachlan's legacy. This also suggests that the dance of the name Flowers of Edinburgh featured at the Uist and Barra Games in 1925 (see appendix) was likely of the hard shoe percussive nature rather than the version presented here.

In Fearchar MacNeil's version below, the **arm movements** are given as he gave them to me. A male dancer would raise opposite arm to working foot; both arms would be raised when travelling sideways and when executing back-steps and highcuts. This is the only dance in the Hebridean repertoire that includes highcuts. When danced by a female dancer, the skirt should be held lightly between the thumb and forefinger of each hand throughout the dance, he said.

The **structure** of the dance returns to a recurring finishing Pivot Break on bars 7–8; with a characteristic motif appearing in bars 1–2 and then repeated on alternate feet in bars 1–6, or with a characteristic motif for bars 1–2 and 5–6, with another motif sandwiched between them in bars 3–4. In the sixth step, however, three characteristic 2-bar motifs are used in succession. Count 8 to four bars.

Flowers of Edinburgh Pivot Break on bars 7–8 of each half step

Bars 7–8 **Pivot L:** Spring or step LF in place, extending RF to diagonal aerial position (5); execute a Shake action with RF to diagonal aerial position (and 6); Bringing RF to 3rd crossed position, Pivot to Left on balls of both feet, finishing with LF in 5th position (7 8).

Pivot R—As Pivot L, but danced contra.

Note that the Break may either be R or L starting, depending on the step.

First Step

Bars 1–2 Disassemble on to LF, pointing RF in 5th position and immediately extending it to diagonal aerial position (1 and); hop LF, execute a Shake action with the RF. (a 2); spring RF, repeat Counts '1 and a 2' with LF (3 and a 4).

3–4 Dance a Shake-shake-round LF (5 and 6); then Shake-shake-round RF (7 and 8).

5–6 Repeat bars 1–2.

7–8 **Pivot L.**

9–16 Repeat bars 1–8 contra.

Second Step

- Bars** Raise RF to front-leg-position (and), dance 3 back-steps, springing on to RF to begin. (1, 2, 3); step LF to diagonal position and close RF to 5th rear position (and 4).
- 3–4 Repeat bars 1–2 contra.
- 5–6 Repeat bars 1–2.
- 7–8 **Pivot L.**
- 9–16 Repeat bars 1–8 contra.

Note—The Back-steps and the diagonal travel must be smooth and flowing. Knees must be relaxed according to MacNeil.

Third Step

- Bars** Spring on to LF to begin, dance a Fling Turn to the Left (1, 2, 3, 4).
- 3–4 Hop LF, bringing RF with a round-the-leg movement to front-leg-position, step RF to diagonal position, close LF to 5th rear position (5 and 6); spring on to RF, bringing LF to front-leg-position, step LF to diagonal position, close RF in 5th rear position (7 and 8).
- 5–6 Spring back on to LF in diagonal rear position, dance a Point-close-beat with RF (1 and a 2); spring back on to RF in diagonal rear position, dance a Point-close-beat with LF (3 and a 4).
- 7–8 **Pivot L.**
- 9–16 Repeat bars 1–8 contra.

Fourth Step

- Bars** Disassemble on to LF, pointing RF in 5th position, and immediately extending it to diagonal aerial position (1); Hop LF, Shake RF (and 2). Spring RF and repeat counts ‘1 and 2’ contra (3 and 4).
- 3–4 Moving sideways to the left, step LF towards side position on ball and close RF in 5th rear position (and 5); step LF towards side position and close RF in 5th position (and 6); step LF towards side position on ball and close RF in 5th rear position (and 7); step LF towards side position and close RF in 5th position (and 8).
- 5–6 Repeat bars 1–2 contra.
- 7–8 **Pivot R.**
- 9–16 Repeat bars 1–8 contra.

Fifth Step

- Bars** Hop on LF, Place RF on toe sideways in side-inverted-position with R knee turned in and touching L knee, Hop on LF, place RF on *heel* in side position (1, 2).
- Repeat once more (3, 4).
- 3–4 Spring on to RF, taking LF to front-leg-position (alternatively to the rear-leg-position) (5); step LF on ball towards diagonal position (and); close RF in 3rd rear position (6); extend LF to diagonal position on point; spring on to LF, taking RF to front-leg-position (alternatively to the rear-leg-position) (7); step RF on ball towards diagonal position (and); close LF in 3rd rear position (8); extend RF to diagonal position on point (and).
- 5–6 Repeat bars 1–2 contra.
- 7–8 **Pivot L.**
- 9–16 Repeat bars 1–8 contra.

Sixth Step

- Bars** Disassemble on to LF, then springing RF, LF, RF, execute 4 highcuts (1, 2, 3, 4).
- 3–4 Spring LF, pointing RF to side position (5); hop LF, bringing RF to rear-leg-position (6); hop LF, execute a round-the-leg movement with RF to front-leg-position (7); spring RF, simultaneously extending LF to diagonal aerial position (8).
- 5–6 Spring LF, pointing RF to side position, dance a Fling Turn to the Left (1, 2, 3, 4).
- 7–8 **Pivot R.**
- 9–16 Repeat bars 1–8 contra.

Note—That in 4th and 6th steps the Pivot turn is to **Right**.



10. *Caisteal Chiosamul*

Caisteal Chiosamul / Kisimul or Kishmul Castle was choreographed by Fearchar MacNeil as a tribute to, and in memory of Father John MacMillan of Barra. Father MacMillan was very much a purist in everything concerning the Gaelic traditions of the island; its music, songs, dance, and language. Fearchar MacNeil started devising this dance many years ago when he was still living in Ayr. As time passed, he added more and more to it, until it developed to its present form. Moving back to Barra in the mid-1980s, he had it performed first at the *Feis Bharraigh* in 1986. It was devised specifically not to be a competitive dance and was for performance only. No special costume was in mind, but he felt a kilt or dress was not suitable. Also, it involves arm actions raising the same hand as working foot, which is the opposite to the norm for most Highland dances, but which appears in character dances such as the Sailors' Hornpipe or the Irish Jig. Initially it was not supposed to be called *Caisteal Chiosamul*, but rather named after the tune 'Fr John MacMillan of Barra.' Only about when he had finished choreographing movements for his dance, and before he had thought anything about boat motifs, he heard news that there was another dance named after this tune. However, somebody encouraged him to carry on with his dance and just give it another name, but still dedicate it to Fr John. Then someone else suggested the name Kishmul Castle, a strong Barra symbol. Other people suggested the rowing themes, and pushing the boat into the water, and the story began to take shape.²¹⁸

The finished dance tells a **story** about visitors rowing out to the castle in the bay to attend a ball held by the Chief of Clan MacNeil. They knock on the door and are let in. They eat, drink, and play music all evening. The Clan Chief's herald climbs the ramparts and proclaims: 'Hear all you people, listen all you nations! The great MacNeil of Barra has finished his meal. The Princes of the earth may now dine.' There is great feasting and dancing. Waving goodbye, the visitors finally leave the castle, rowing back to the shore.

A year or so later, after Fearchar had finished choreographing his dance, he attended a ceilidh in Oban and saw four girls performing a set Country dance called Father John MacMillan of Barra. He then realised he could have named his original solo dance Father John MacMillan of Barra after all.

This version is what Fearchar described to me in 1990 and what he taught to Glenys Gray in the summers of 1987 and 1988. The following description also corresponds to a TV recording of the dance from the 1986 *Feis Bharraigh* broadcast by BBC Scotland in 1987 as part of the programme *The Need to Dance—Footing It*. A slight variation of the dance was taught to me at *Sabhal Mòr Ostaig* in 1989 by Katie-Ann MacKinnon, and can be found in the 1995 *Hebridean Dances* book.

Caisteal Chiosamul is designed to be performed by any number of persons, be it as a solo, twosome, or threesome, or 'more'some. The configuration given below was clearly explained to me by Fearchar MacNeil in March 1990. Therefore, I have chosen to present the dance as a twosome. If performed with uneven numbers of dancers, i.e., 1, 3, 5 and so on, during the parts involving two dancers cooperating in the second and fourth steps, the sole dancer performs the movements as if dancing with a partner.

The 2/4 march 'Father John MacMillan of Barra' composed by Norman MacDonald, to which the dance was devised, should be played at 34 bars per minute (Crotchet 68 p/m). Count 2 to each bar.

Kishmul Break RF (Bars 5–8)

Bars 5 Jump, landing with LF in 3rd inverted position (flat) (1); swivel on R heel, bringing toes outward, while lifting LF to 3rd rear position (Flat) (and); swivel on R heel, finish with RF in 3rd inverted position (flat) (2); swivel on L heel, bringing toes outward, while lifting RF to 3rd rear position (flat) (and).

Finish with both feet flat on the ground. This should be a smooth and easy movement. There is a slight sideways movement during the swivel.

6 Assemble RF in 3rd position (3); spread both feet towards side position with slightly bent knees (and); assemble RF in 3rd position again (4). A slight pause may occur during the spread. Finish with RF extended to 4th midway position low.

7 Spring RF, Shuffle LF (5 and); Spring LF, half Shuffle RF, end with RF in front-leg-position (6 and).

8 Spring RF taking LF to front-leg-position; spring LF, RF, execute three back-steps, finishing with LF in front-leg-position (7 and 8).

Arm actions—Hands clasped together behind body in all steps.

Kishmul Break LF: Same as above, but danced contra.

First Step—Rowing Out to the Castle

Bars 1 Travel directly forward and then back during the first 4 bars.

Step RF forward in 4th position (1); close LF behind in 3rd rear position (and); step RF forward in 4th position (2); make a lift or slight hop on RF when passing LF through from rear to 4th position lifting the foot slightly off the ground and with a developpé action bringing it forward. The LF should ‘almost’ touch the R leg at the inner side in a low rear-leg-position (and).

Note—This is almost like a Scottish Country Dance Strathspey Travelling Step but more stepping forward than gliding.

2 Repeat bar 1 with LF. Finish with RF in a very low rear-leg-position off the leg. (and).

Arm actions—Both hands clenched. Place LH over RH and make a paddling action on the right during Bar 1. Change placement of hands to RH over LH and make a paddling action to the left during bar 2.

3–4 Step RF back in 4th rear position to begin, move backwards with the Travel Step described above, back to the starting position. Finish with RF closed in 3rd position.

(3–4) **Arm actions**—Both hands are clenched and held together, thumbs and forefingers touching. Make rowing actions bringing hands down and forward, up and backwards towards body and then again. One rowing action coordinates with each step travelling backwards. The movement mimes rowing a boat.

5–8 **Kishmul Break RF.**

9–16 Repeat bars 1–8 contra.

Second Step—Knock on the Door, Open the Door and Welcome in!

Bars 1 Hop LF, lifting RF up behind off L leg (1); Treble RF, i.e., catch RF out-in, in diagonal position; step RF in 3rd position (and and a), then beat LF in 3rd rear position (2); slight pause that goes with the music (-); catch RF out-in in diagonal position (and a);

2 Spring RF in place and lifting LF up behind off L leg, repeat bar 1 contra (3 and and a 4 – and a).

Arm actions—R Hand is clenched into a fist, with L arm hanging by the side; make 3 knocks on the door action with R Hand during Bar 1. Open L Hand and bring from the side in a sweeping gesture forward, hand coming towards body (as a door being opened). R arm is hanging by the side during this movement on the 2nd Bar.

3–4 Spring LF in place. lifting RF up behind off L leg. (5); Treble RF (and and a 6); Treble RF out-in, in diagonal position; Step RF in 3rd rear position then beat LF in 3rd position (and and a 7); Treble RF out-in, in diagonal position; beat RF in 3rd position then beat LF in 3rd rear position (and and a 8); catch RF out-in, in diagonal position (RF finishes on floor in diagonal position) (and and).

Arm actions—L arm is hanging by the side, while R hand is open and is brought in front of body to the side and behind in a ‘Welcome in’ gesture. The movement should be slow and even and last through the 2 bars.

Note—In this step, it is essential for dancers to listen to the music and dance with it. The music tells when to make slight pauses and when to sustain motions longer.

5–8 **Kishmul Break RF.**

9–16 Repeat bars 1–8 contra, moving forward as dancers now enter the castle; then retire back to place during the LF Break.

Arm actions—Couple puts their arms about their partners near the shoulders. They stay close until having to part for the Break.

Third Step—*The Drinking Step*

- Bars** Hopping on LF twice, making a Toe and Heel movement with RF in 5th position, or alternatively diagonal position, with bent knee and foot well turned out (1 and); hop LF, bringing RF to front-leg-position (2); spring RF in place, as a Back-step, bringing LF to front-leg-position (and);
- 1
- 2 Hopping on RF 4 times, extend LF to diagonal aerial position (3); bring LF in to front-leg-position making two cuts (and a); extend LF again to diagonal aerial position (4); bring LF again in to front-leg-position making two cuts (and a).
- The extensions should be with intention and the body is leaning slightly backward. The double cuts are optional, and could be danced as single cuts, i.e., bring the foot to front-leg-position, then re-extend to diagonal aerial position.
- 3–4 Hop on RF to begin, repeat bars 1–2 contra.
- 5–8 **Kishmul Break RF.**
- 9–16 Repeat bars 1–8 contra.
- Arm actions**—On Bars 1–4—Hold an imaginary drinking horn in front of the body approximately at chest height. Bar 9—Same position as above. Bar 10—Lift horn up and forward to mime making a toast. Bars 11–12—Head is tilted backwards to look up. With palms towards the face, hold them as if drinking out of a horn. RH is closer to the mouth and LH farther out in the air. As if emptying a real drinking horn, the head must lean further back as the drinking progresses.

Fourth Step—*Announcing Step*

- Bars** During bars 1–4, dancers make a complete turn clockwise on the spot.
- 1–2
- Hop on LF, placing RF in inverted side position (1); place RF on heel 5th position (No Hop) (and); beat LF in place (3rd rear position) (2); step RF on ball in 5th position (and); place LF on heel in 5th position (3); step RF in place (3rd rear position) (and); step LF in 5th position on ball. (4).
- Hop—heel—beat—step—step—step*
- 3–4 Continuing turning clockwise. With a Hop on RF to begin, repeat bars 1–2 contra.
- Arm actions**—Head is tilted back to look up. Both hands are curved and held in front of the mouth as if announcing.
- 5–8 **Kishmul Break RF.**
- 9–16 Turning counter-clockwise on the spot, repeat bars 1–8 contra.

Fifth Step—*The Polka*

- Bars** With 4 Travelling Steps as described in the
- 1–4 First Step but moving towards side position and turning to change direction on each hop. (Man, or leader, starts with LF; woman, or follower, starts with RF); dance around forward and round counter-clockwise to the left. Open up to face front at end of 4th step.
- 5–8 **Kishmul Break RF.**
- 9–16 Repeat bars 1–8 contra.
- Arm actions**—Couple facing one another. Either take Waltz hold or hold both arms in front and hold partners elbows. Open up to face front at end of bar 4. Woman, or follower, is on man's, or the leader's, right.

Sixth Step—*Waving Goodbye*

- Bars** Dance 2 Rocks: Spring on to RF, placing LF in 5th rear position (1); spring on to LF, placing RF in 5th position (and); lift RF up to front-leg-position (a); spring RF and LF execute 2 Back-steps (2 and). Finish with RF in front-leg-position.
- 1
- 2 Done moving sideways slightly to the right: Spring on to RF, point LF in 5th position (3); hop RF, extending LF with a Shake to diagonal aerial position (and a); hop RF, pointing LF in 5th position (4); hop RF, extending LF with a Shake to diagonal aerial position (and a).
- Arm actions**—Hands are clasped together behind the body on bar 1. On the 2nd bar, right arm hangs by the side or is kept to the back while, in unison with the Shakes, L hand mimes waving Goodbye diagonally out to the right.
- 3–4 Spring on to LF, placing RF in 5th rear position, to begin, repeat bars 1–2 contra, moving slightly to the left.
- 5–8 **Kishmul Break RF.**
- 9–16 Repeat bars 1–8 contra.

Seventh Step—*Rowing back to the shore*

- Bars** Repeat the First Step once more.
- 1–16





Caisteal Chiosamul (Kisimul or Kishmul Castle) in Castlebay, July 1997 © Mats Melin.

...final reflections

This publication reflects a group of dances that has been part of my own repertoire since the mid-1980s, when I first learned the First of August steps from Chris Metherell of Newcastle and found Jack McConachie's 1972 descriptions. In the summer of 1989, I learnt some versions of these dances during a summer school at *Sabhal Mòr Ostaig*. In March 1990 I ventured on my own from Sweden to Barra and met with Fearchar MacNeil and learnt the dances first hand from him. Later I compared my notes with New Zealand dancer Glenys Gray. I continued to dance and teach the material in Sweden, and many other places, and later again at workshops in Scotland when I went to live there in 1995. I helped transcribe the dances for the 1995 *Hebridean Dances* book in collaboration with Barra dancers. I made further enquiries about the dances in South Uist from the early 2000s until now and kept building a picture of the dance tradition's stylistic parameters and how they fit in culturally in the Western Isles. In the last 14 years I have predominantly taught the First of August, Aberdonian Lassie, and Miss Forbes to the BA and MA dance students attending courses at the Irish World Academy at the University of Limerick, Ireland. I did this research mainly for my own curiosity and satisfaction but also to help me embody the dances in a way that was comfortably close to how they were described and shown to me as danced in the islands style. I hope in a small way that this book may inspire more people to dance them. In 2015–2016 I started to collaborate with Canadian Highland and step dancer Sabra MacGillivray, originally from Antigonish, Nova Scotia, and now living in Cape Breton Island, who successfully completed her Master's in Traditional Dance Performance with first class honours at the Irish World Academy. In our project I began teaching her these dances including adding my understanding of their cultural place and style. Her brother, fiddler Troy MacGillivray, recorded suitable tracks for the various dances that we could use for our project. The end result is that Sabra has recorded all the dances found in this publication. These can now be found as an additional visual online resource on her own website (see inside cover for web address). I am greatly indebted to Sabra's diligence and interest in these dances. In fact, the first time we met was in 1995, when I taught her the First of August at the Gaelic College at St Ann's in Cape Breton, so maybe our journey started way back then. — Mats Melin

Appendices

Inverness Courier, 9 October, 1862.

Extracts from an article about two gatherings: one in Askernish and the other at Crogarry. Mr Birnie representing the proprietor [Gordon of Cluny] in his unavoidable absence, at Askernish, and Mr Rule at Crogarry [...] crowds of people appeared, headed by pipers, streaming along and converging towards their centres of attraction. By one o'clock, five or six hundred people had congregated at Askernish, and four or five hundred at Crogarry. After abundant refreshments of bread, beef, whisky, &c, prizes were offered for games and athletic exercises and were keenly contested. [...] Askernish prize takers [...] Dancing Highland Fling—Ranald Morrison, Kilpheder, [...], at Crogarry [...] Dancing Highland Fling—John Macmillan, Iochdar [...] Excellent dinners were provided at Askernish and Crogarry. There were seventy-five guests, ladies and gentlemen between the two places [...] the evening was wound up by a hearty round of Scotch Reels, after which the companies dispersed [...]

Further rejoicings in Barra [...] In acknowledgement of all that was said and done in honour of the laird on occasion of his recent marriage, Mr Gordon of Cluny invited his tenantry to a banquet which was provided on the Green, Machair, near Craigston on the 21 inst. [...] some nine hundred of the tenants and crofters were present, and they seemed to enjoy the proceedings very heartily. Athletic games were instituted in the course of the evening and prizes awarded to the winners [...] Dancing Highland Fling—Arch. Macdonald, Tangusdale [...]

[Note that Ewen MacLachlan is not mentioned in this report.]



Extracts from *The Oban Times* and *The Scotsman* concerning Hebridean dances featuring at the South Uist and Barra Highland Gathering at Askernish from 1922–1928.

The Oban Times (1922, August).

Results from the gathering in South Uist.

Highland Fling—

1. Rod MacAulay, Craegorry; 2. Mary O'Henly, Kilphedar; 3. Louis MacEachen, Iochdar.

Scotch Reel —

1. Rod MacDonald, John MacIntyre, Rod MacLean, Louis MacEachen, Iochdar.

2. Mary MacAulay, Maggie MacAulay, Rod MacAulay, Louis MacEachen, Benbecula.

3. Harriet MacDonald, Bella MacDonald, Anne Walker, Mary MacInnes, Daliburgh Public School.

Sword Dance —

1. Donald MacIntyre, Kildonan; 2. Rod MacLean, Iochdar; 3. Mary O'Henley, Kilpheder.

The Oban Times (4 August 1923, p. 7 col. 4).

South Uist and Barra Highland Gathering

This well-known piping, dancing and athletic gathering was held on the machair at Askernish, South Uist, on 17th July. The attendance was good under the circumstances. [...] Patrons: Royal Celtic Society, Edinburgh, [...] A novel feature was a competitive exhibition of old Highland dances which are remembered in South Uist and Barra, but which are almost forgotten in other parts of the Highlands. There were two competitors. Mr Archibald MacPherson, Iochdar, South Uist, who is over 75 years of age, and Mr Donald MacDonald, Daliburgh. This event was much appreciated by the judges and spectators, and will be suitably developed at future gatherings.

Results:

Highland Fling—1. Rod MacAulay; 2. Mary MacAulay; 3. J. Steele

Sword Dance—Donald MacIntyre, Kildonan; 2. J. Steele; 3. Louis MacEachen, Iochdar

Scotch Reel—1. D. MacIntyre; 2. L. MacEachen; 3. R. MacAulay.

Old Highland Dances (prizes presented by the Royal Celtic Society)—

'The First of August,'—Archibald MacPherson, Iochdar, £2, Donald MacDonald, Daliburgh.

'Over the Water to Charlie,'—Donald MacDonald, £2, Archibald MacPherson.

'Scotch Blue Bonnets Over the Border,'—Donald MacDonald, £2, Archibald MacPherson.

The Oban Times (9 August 1924, p. 5, col. 3–6).

**South Uist and Barra Highland Gathering
REVIVAL OF ANCIENT CELTIC DANCING**

The annual Highland Gathering organised by the South Uist and Barra Sports Committee was held on the Machair at Askernish, South Uist, on Tuesday, 29th July. The weather was perfect and the games were thoroughly enjoyed by the large concourse of spectators.

The signs given last year of a great improvement in the local gathering were more than realised, and the results reflect great credit on the Committee in charge. A unique feature of the programme was the dancing of old Highland dances still remembered in South Uist and Barra, but not now practised elsewhere in the Highlands. Special prizes were offered by the Royal Celtic Society for competitions in these dances and for the teachers of learners who made meritorious performances. The teachers' prizes were won by Mr Arch. MacPherson, Iochdar, who is now 76 years of age, and Mr Donald MacDonald, Daliburgh, who is over 60 years of age. They also won a prize each in the competitions, and the third prize was awarded to Miss Annie Walker, Daliburgh. In order to encourage the learning of these dances Mr William Donald, Glasgow, had offered a prize of two guineas to the best dancer of these dances under the age of 30 years and a second prize of one guinea. Similar prizes were also offered to the teachers of these prize-winners. The learners' prizes were won by Mr Louis MacEachen, Iochdar, and Miss Annie Walker, Daliburgh, whose teachers were respectively Mr Arch. MacPherson and Mr Donald MacDonald.

These dances were first taught in Uist over eighty years ago by Mr Ewen MacLachlan, a native of Moidart, and seem to indicate some of the dances which were in common use a century ago from which the reels were evolved and which were danced by solo dancers when parties could not be got together to do them. A quartette of four dancers from Daliburgh—Miss Annie Walker [*Annag Dhòmhnaill 'ic Iain 'ac Ruairidh*], Miss Bella MacDonald [*Beileag a' Ghrèidheir*], Miss Sarah MacDonald [*Sèireag a' Ghrèidheir*], and Miss Harriet MacDonald [*Harriet Roidein*]²¹⁹—gave an exhibition of two old dances called "Miss Forbes" and "The Scotchmakers." This so pleased the gathering that Captain Cattanach, Lochmaddy, and Captain Ranald Carswell, North Berwick, rewarded their efforts by special prizes.

The old Highland dances are undoubtedly of great interest and it is understood that endeavour will be made to send a team of dancers to exhibit them on the mainland.

The Judges of the Piping

The judges of piping were Mr John Bartholomew, Major Christie, Mr Alasdair Anderson, and Pipe-Major John MacDonald. In the dancing competitions the judges were assisted by Mr Angus MacAuley, Greenock, president of the Uist and Barra Association. The arrangements for the piping and dancing were in the capable hands of Mr F.S. MacKenzie, Hon. Secretary of the South Uist Piobaireachd Society, assisted by Rev A.J. Gillies, Daliburgh, and the athletic events were conducted briskly and without hitch by Mrs Donald Ferguson, Boisdale House, and Mr Borland, Garrynamonie.

At the close of the day the prizes were presented by Mr John Bartholomew, who congratulated the Committee on the result of their efforts and the competitors on the high standard of the piping and dancing. The other judges also spoke, and were awarded hearty cheers for their presence and assistance.

Among the results are found:

Learners Prizes—Louis MacEachan, Iochdar; Annie Walker, Daliburgh.²²⁰

Highland Fling—1. John MacDonald; 2. D.A. Morrison; 3. R. MacAulay.

Scotch Reel—1. Donald Morrison; 2. R. MacDonald; 3. R. MacAulay.

Sword Dance—1. D. MacIntyre; 2. D. Morrison; 3. M. Hughes.

Old Highland Dances (Royal Celtic Society Prizes) —

A. (£2) 'First of August'—Archibald MacPherson.

B. (£2) 'Over the Water to Charlie'—Miss Annie Walker.

C. (£2) 'Scotch Blue Bonnets'—Donald MacDonald.

Royal Celtic Society Prizes for Teachers —

A. (£2) Archibald MacPherson, Iochdar. B. (£2) Donald MacDonald, Daliburgh.

Mr William Donald's Prizes for Learners under 30 years —

A. (£2 2/-) Louis MacEachan, Iochdar. B. (£1 1/-) Annie Walker, Daliburgh.

Mr William Donald's Prizes for Teachers —

A. (£2 2/-) Archibald MacPherson. B. (£1 1/-) Donald MacDonald.

Prizes by Captain Cattnach and Captain Ranald Causewell —

A. 'Miss Forbes'—1. Annie MacDonald; 2. Sarah MacDonald; 3. Bella MacDonald; 4. Harriet MacDonald.

B. 'Scotchmakers'—1. Sarah MacDonald; 2. Annie Walker; 3. Bella MacDonald; 4. Harriet MacDonald.

The Scotsman (13 August 1925)

South Uist Games—This gathering was held last week in fine weather. The piping was judged by Mr John Bartholomew, Kilmarnock, and the dancing was judged by Mr D. G. MacLennan, Edinburgh. Great interest was taken in the competitions exhibiting old Highland dances, for which prizes were offered by the Royal Celtic Society, Edinburgh. Dr W. A. Blaikie, Colinton, president of the Royal Celtic Society, presented the prizes at the close.

The Oban Times (15 August 1925, p. 7, col. 6).

D.G. MacLennan adjudicated:

Highland Fling—1. Donald Allan Morrison; 2. Archibald MacDonald; 3. John Steele.

Scotch Reel—1. Archibald MacDonald; 2. D.A. Morrison; 3. J. Steele.

Sword Dance—1. D.A. Morrison; 2. John Steele.

Old Highland Dances (Prizes by the Royal Celtic Society, Mr William Donald and Mr Cattnach)—

Over the Water to Charlie —

1. Annie Walker; 2. Sarah MacDonald; 3. Harriet MacDonald

First of August —

1. John [Iain Ruadh] MacLeod; 2. Donald MacDonald; 3. Archibald MacPherson

Scotch Blue Bonnets —

1. Annie Walker; 2. John MacLeod; 3. Kate MacPhee

Miss Forbes —

1. Sarah MacDonald; 2. Annie Walker; 3. Cecilia MacDonald

Scotch Measure —

1. Cecilia MacDonald; 2. Sarah MacDonald; 3. Annie MacPhee

Flowers of Edinburgh —

1. Archibald MacPherson; 2. Donald MacDonald

Tullochgorm —

1. Sarah MacDonald; 2. Cecilia MacDonald; 3. Harriet MacDonald

Royal Celtic Society Prizes for Teachers of these Dances —

1. Donald MacDonald; 2. Archibald MacPherson

The Oban Times (14 August 1926, p. 2, col. 5).

The Games were held on the August 3rd—[...] The old-world Hebridean dances which have been rescued from oblivion by the work of the Royal Celtic Society and fostered by Mr William Donald, Glasgow, and Mr Duncan MacLeod, Sheabost, are a special feature of this gathering [...] No results were given this year.

The Oban Times (13 August 1927).

The results for the Gathering held on August 2nd. D.G. MacLennan judged the dancing. 'Full report' to be published in next issue it is stated.

Old Hebridean Dances

Teacher Prizes—1. Donald MacDonald; 2. Archibald MacPherson

Championship Prize—Annie Walker

Over the Water to Charlie —

1. Annie Walker; 2. Sarah MacDonald; 3. Cissie MacDonald; 4. Katie Morrison

Scotch Blue Bonnets —

1. John MacLeod; 2. Annie Walker; 3. Cissie MacDonald; 4. Sarah MacDonald; 5. Katie Morrison

Miss Forbes —

1. Cissie MacDonald; 2. Annie Walker; 3. Katie Morrison; 4. Sarah MacDonald

Scotch Measure —

1. Annie Walker; 2. Cissie MacDonald; 3. Sarah MacDonald; 4. Katie Morrison

Highland Laddie —

1. John MacLeod; 2. Annie Walker; 3. Sarah MacDonald; 4. Cissie MacDonald; 5. Katie Morrison

Tulloch Gorm —

1. John MacLeod; 2. Sarah MacDonald; 3. Annie Walker; 4. Cissie MacDonald

First of August (Exhibition dance)—John MacLeod.

Highland Fling—1. D.A. Morrison; 2. Mary MacLean; 3. Sissy MacDonald.

Sword Dance—1. D.A. Morrison; 2. John MacLeod; 3. Donald MacDonald.

Scotch Reel—1. D.A. Morrison; 2. Roderick MacDonald²²¹; 3. Sissy MacDonald.

The Oban Times, (4 August 1928).

Special Prize offered by Captain Ian M. Moffat Pender—Miss Mary MacLean, Borge, Barra (for **Over the Water Charlie**).

Highland Fling—1. Donald A. Morrison; 2. Jemima Fraser; 3. Cecilia MacDonald.

Sword Dance—1. Donald A. Morrison; 2. John MacLeod; 3. Archie MacDonald.

Scotch Reel—1. Donald A. Morrison; 2. Mary MacLean; 3. Archie MacDonald.

Old Hebridean Dances Senior Section —

Over the Water to Charlie—1. Mary MacLean; 2. John MacLeod; 3. Sarah MacDonald.

Scotch Blue Bonnets—1. John MacLeod; 2. Sarah MacDonald; 3. Annie MacPhee.

Miss Forbes—1. Sissy MacDonald; 2. Annie MacPhee; 3. Sarah MacDonald.

Scotch Measure—1. John MacLeod & Annie MacPhee (equal); 2. Sissy MacDonald & Harriet MacDonald (equal).

Highland Laddie—1. John MacLeod; 2. Sarah MacDonald; 3. Kate Morrison & Bella MacDonald (equal).

Tulloch Gorm—1. John Macleod; 2. Sissy MacDonald; 3. Annie MacPhee.

Teacher Prize—Mr Donald MacDonald.

Junior Section —

Over the Water Charlie—1. Donald Walker; 2. Kate M. MacLellan; 3. Marion MacAuley.

Miss Forbes—1. Marion MacAulay; 2. Kate M. MacLellan.

Highland Laddie—1. Donald Walker; 2. Marion MacAulay; 3. Rena Bennett.

Extract from Royal Celtic Society—Scheme of Prizes for 1927.

3. A sum of £7 for competitions in dancing old Highland dances (excluding Highland Fling, Sword Dance, Sean Triubhas and Sailor's Hornpipe) at the South Uist and Barra Highland Gathering; to be allocated as the Local Committee may decide, having in their view prizes that may be received from other sources. Recommendation to be made (1) that competitions in as many different dances as possible shall be arranged, and (2) that while no competitor shall be disqualified by reason of having won a prize in one competition from taking the place in a subsequent competition to which the judges consider his performance entitles him, no competitor shall be entitled to receive as prize or prizes a larger amount than the value of one first prize, any sums thus set free being payable to other competitors.

4. A sum not exceeding £3 to be given as a bonus to the teachers of competitors in dancing old Highland dances at the South Uist and Barra Highland Gathering. This sum to be allocated among the teachers by the judges, having in view the number of pupils of each teacher and the quality of their performance.

[NLS (National Library of Scotland) mark HP3.86.480].



Twelve more Islanders who recalled some of these dances in the 1950s

The following people were interviewed by Tom Flett and Frank Rhodes at different points between 1953 and 1956. They have all provided some information used in this book. The Flett and Rhodes notes on the meetings with these people are now available online at insteptr.co.uk as part of the Flett manuscript archive.

John MacMillan and Peter MacKay, South Uist

Little is known about Ewen's pupil John MacMillan / *Iain Mac Coinnich Mac Iain Dhonnchaidh* of 40/41 Lionacuidhe, but he is said to have taught dancing at Iochdar, South Uist. John was born in 1858 in Lionacuidhe, Iochdar, and his father was Kenneth MacMillan / *Mac Iain Dhonnchaidh*. One of John MacMillan's pupils at Iochdar, Peter MacKay, also known as *Padraig a' Roe* / Peter of the Roe,²²² interviewed by Tom Flett in 1953, also knew Archie MacPherson, and had seen Archie and John perform the following dances: Over the Water to Charlie, Tulloch Gorm, Highland Laddie, The First of August, Blue Bonnets, Over the Hills and Far Away, Miss Forbes, and Bonnie Anne. He thought the last was "a country dance." Peter could also remember some Highland Fling and Strathspey setting steps as taught by John MacMillan.

Archibald 'Archie' MacPherson of Iochdar, South Uist

The best known of Ewen's pupils appears to be Archibald 'Archie' MacPherson of Iochdar (1849–1933). He lived in Buaile Dubh, Iochdar, in South Uist and was the son of Angus MacPherson or *Aonghas Saor* / Joiner Angus, a carpenter and joiner who lived for a time in Barra.²²³ His father died around 1853–1855 and his mother, Janet Montgomery, later married Donald MacKay of Buaile Dubh. Archibald was brought up there. Archibald was a joiner like his father and was known as *Gilleasbuig Saor* / Joiner Archibald²²⁴ in South Uist.

He was remembered as a good dancing teacher and is the source, through his student John / *Iain Ruadh* MacLeod, from whom most of Flett's information about dances (such as the First of August, danced to the tune *White Cockade*) was gained. Archie also knew The Flowers of Edinburgh, which included a double treble, done simultaneously with both feet, and a step in which the dancer drops on to one knee.²²⁵

Archibald came by the dances in a roundabout way, again according to the reminiscences of John / *Iain Ruadh* MacLeod.²²⁶ Ewen MacLachlan, although he taught the dances to both men and women, would not teach children, meaning anyone under 15 or 16. Archie was only 11 at the time Ewen was

holding his last classes in the 1860s, when Ewen would have been about 61 years old, but Archie hid and watched the dances and went away and practised them. Ewen got to hear of this, however, and at his ‘finishing ball’ made Archie perform one or two of the solos.²²⁷ A ‘finishing-ball’ was a customary last class of a session for the students of a dancing-master, when they would display their newly acquired dancing knowledge to parents and friends. Note that this is the only mention I have come across of a dancing master’s ‘finishing ball’ held in South Uist. It is not clear from Fletts notes if this was John / *Iain Ruadh* MacLeod’s term or one used by the Fletts in this instance. Archie was later also taught by John MacMillan.

At 76 years of age, MacPherson was one of the two contestants in the South Uist Games in 1925, when D.G. MacLennan met him. He was the source from whom D.G. MacLennan drew information about Ewen and the dances. It should be noted that MacLennan made only one visit to Archie. According to Hugh Thurston in his 1954 book *Scotland’s Dances*, Archie also demonstrated some of his dances to members of the Royal Celtic Society in 1921.

Archibald MacPherson also taught his son Malcolm / *Calum*, and a daughter, Margaret, referred to as Mrs Smith in Flett’s notes, both from Iochdar, South Uist. According to Tom Flett’s interview with Calum and Margaret on 14 April 1953, they had both heard of The First of August, Over the Water, Highland Laddie, Blue Bonnets, Tulloch Gorm, Jacky Tar, and *Gilleann an Fhèilidh*. Calum used to dance this last one himself. He thought he had heard of a dance titled Bonnie Anne danced at the Uist and Barra Association in Glasgow in about 1933. Bonnie Anne was danced by four people who turned each other round. Mrs Smith / Margaret had heard of Miss Forbes and Over the Hills. Neither had heard of Flowers of Edinburgh or Aberdonian Lassie. Calum told Tom Flett that his father used to dance round the room with a ‘*lùgh* (knee) step’, something like ‘chassé and spring down on one knee’. He also taught some dances to John / *Iain Ruadh* MacLeod, from about 1923 onwards. MacLeod became his best pupil. Another of Archie’s pupils, who has survived only in name, was Ronald MacKenzie / *Raghnaill Clachair*, from Sniseabhal, South Uist, and who was probably a stonemason according to his Gaelic name *Clachair*.²²⁸ Archibald died in 1933, aged 84.

Ronald Morrison, South Uist

Ewen’s pupil Ronald Morrison (1836–c. 1916), also known as *Raghnaill Dannsair* / Ronald the Dancer, came from South Uist. He married twice, his first wife coming from Barra, where he lived and worked for some time, teaching dancing in Castlebay. He taught solo dances as well as social dance classes. Together with Ewen MacLachlan, Ronald was responsible for bringing these dances across to Barra. He taught Fearchar MacNeil’s grandfather Neil Buchanan some solo dances.²²⁹ He died during the 1914–1918 war, aged about 80. Ronald is also credited to have taught Donald ‘*Roidein*’ MacDonald some of Ewen’s dances, among them, the First of August. He may well be the originator of Aberdonian Lassie.

Archie Munro and Donald Steele, South Uist

Another pupil of Ewen’s was Donald Steele, uncle to Frank Rhodes’ informant Archie Munro (spelled Monrowe in the Flett/Rhodes notes as mentioned earlier), of Lochboisdale, South Uist, who was about 70 years old in 26 April 1955. Donald Steele learned the following dances from Ewen: a ten-step Highland Fling, a ten-step Jack-a-Tar, Highland Laddie, Over the Water to Charlie, Scotch Blue Bonnets, Strathspey and Reel with 10 steps for each; *Gilleann an Fhèilidh*, *Seann Triubhas*, Paddy O’Rafferty, and *Màili a Chrandonn*, a dance in which one went down on one knee. Steele in turn passed them on to Archie Munro, who also learnt some dances from a MacLeod from Inverness in 1904 and who taught for a while in Lochboisdale. Frank Rhodes noted from Archie Munro that no special shoes were worn for dancing. The hands hung naturally by the sides or were placed on the hips. The dancer did not jump up; his body was absolutely still, and had he been dancing in a crowd with his feet obscured he would not have stood out with any up-and-down movement of his body. The style was the same for men and women.

Mrs Margaret MacAskill, South Uist

Mrs Margaret MacAskill, of South Boisdale, was aged 80 when interviewed on 8 July 1956 by Frank Rhodes. Her grandmother was Ewen’s MacLachlan’s sister Isabella. Margaret did not see much of

Ewen's dances, but she did learn some dances done in her mother's croft at Smerclate. These included Highland Fling and *Seann Triubhas*. From Donald *Roidein* MacDonald she learned Over the Water to Charlie, and The First of August. She showed Frank Rhodes three steps of Over the Hills and Far Away, which she implied she had learned at Smerclate.

Roderick MacLean, South Uist

Roderick MacLean, born in 1889, also known as *Ruairidh Sheonaidh Ghobha* / Roderick, Son of Johnny the Smith, of Cill Amhlaidh / Kilauley, Iochdar, showed Frank Rhodes four steps of First of August, in 1956. It is not known who taught him, but he frequently quoted John / Iain Ruadh MacLeod as an authority on this dance.

Angus John MacLellan, Benbecula

Angus John MacLellan, also known as *Aonghas Mac-Dhomhnaill mhic Iain Bhàin* / Angus, son of Donald, son of Fair Ian, who was born around 1882, of Hacklett, Benbecula, informed Frank Rhodes on 27 April 1955 that the tune for First of August was the White Cockade. He knew the song *Màili a Chhrandonn* but knew nothing of a dance called *Carraig Fhearghais*. He showed Rhodes eight steps of Highland Laddie. The notes taken by Flett and Rhodes do not reveal who taught Angus.

Roderick MacPherson, Benbecula

Roderick MacPherson, also known as *Ruairidh Alasdair Bhàin* / Roderick, Son of Fair Alexander, of 30 Liniclett, Benbecula, was born around 1880 and around the age of 73 when interviewed by Tom Flett on 13 April 1953. He said that his father, Alexander MacPherson, could do a number of solo dances: Over the Water, The First of August, Highland Laddie, Jacky Tar, Miss Forbes, Flowers of Edinburgh, and *Gilleán an Fhèilidh*. Roderick had only heard of Tulloch Gorm, Blue Bonnets, and Over the Hills and Far Away, and he also said that these dances were always performed to the pipes. Roderick could at one time dance Highland Laddie and remembered a couple of steps of *Gilleán an Fhèilidh*.²³⁰ Frank Rhodes interviewed Roderick in 1955 and learned that he was never taught any of the dances formally but had picked some up after seeing them performed by his father and also by his mother, a MacIntosh of Garrynamonie. These MacPhersons were related to *Gilleasbuig Saor*, but it is uncertain how close the relationship was.²³¹

Angus O'Henley, South Uist

When Frank Rhodes met Angus O'Henley in Lochboisdale on 11 July 1956, Angus was then about 76 years of age. He recalled that he was not able to learn the solo dances when Morrison taught them to *Roidein*, as O'Henley had a foot injury at the time, but he picked up the dances informally later. His strong opinion was that steps could be improvised, and that, if one forgot a sequence in the moment, one should keep going to maintain the flow of dancing. He thought of Scotch Blue Bonnets and *Gilleán an Fhèilidh* as the same dance,²³² which fits in with John / Iain Ruadh MacLeod dancing the former to the latter tune.

Donald Walker, South Uist

One of Donald *Roidein* MacDonald's pupils was Donald 'Beag' Walker, *Domhnall beag Fhearghais* / Little Donald, son of Fergus,²³³ who was born around 1920 and died 20 October 1999, aged 80, in Daliburgh, South Uist, From *Domhnall beag*, Rhodes collected steps for the First of August and Over the Water to Charlie in 1956, and these steps, again, were different from steps collected from John / Iain Ruadh MacLeod. Mr. Walker also told Rhodes about a solo dance named *Carraig Fhearghais* which had complicated arm actions, and which had been danced by Donald 'Roidein' MacDonald. Other dances Donald Walker knew were Scotch Blue Bonnets, Highland Laddie, Scotch Measure, and Miss Forbes.



Endnotes

Lorg Press

¹ Glassie, 2003:176.

Chapter 1

² Archive available at www.insteprt.co.uk.

³ Ankiewicz, 2012:97.

⁴ Ankiewicz, 2012:86.

⁵ Spalding and Woodside, 1995:249.

⁶ Scottish Dance Teachers' Alliance and United Kingdom Alliance of Professional Teachers' of Dancing. See bibliography for their 'National Dances' booklets.

⁷ The Deep Sea Range is an RAF missile range built in 1957.

Chapter 2

⁸ Dickson, 2006:39–41.

⁹ *Carraig Fhearghais* is Scottish Gaelic for Carrickfergus, a town situated north of Belfast in Northern Ireland.

¹⁰ Dickson, 2006:47.

¹¹ Ronald Black, correspondence, 15 July 1991. SSPCK, short for The Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge, was established by Royal Charter in Edinburgh in 1710. Its purpose, as stated in the proclamation, was 'to erect and maintain schools to teach to read, especially the Holy Scriptures and other good and pious books: as also to teach writing, arithmetic and such like degrees of knowledge in the Highlands, Islands, and remote corners of Scotland.' These schools in their earliest regulations forbade the speaking of Gaelic, as well as Latin. This changed in 1767 when this policy was officially and completely reversed (Thomson 1983:262).

^{12a-b} MacDonald, 2017:2.

¹³ Hunter, 2010:67.

¹⁴ Hunter, 2010:74–78.

¹⁵ Hunter, 2010:91.

¹⁶ Hunter, 2010:103–104.

¹⁷ Hunter, 2010:127; Dickson, 2006:60.

¹⁸ Thompson 1974:32

¹⁹ Hunter, 2010:163–164.

²⁰ Rea, 1997:7.

²¹ Smout, 1987:11.

²² Divine, 2011:116–118.

²³ Those interested should read Divine (2011) and Hunter (2010) among others for more about this topic.

²⁴ Dickson 2006, Hunter 2010.

²⁵ Dickson, 2006:107.

Chapter 3

²⁶ Census extracts regarding Ewen MacLachlan were kindly provided by Bill Lawson of Co Leis Thu? Genealogy Research Service for the Western Isles of Scotland. Northon, Isle of Harris (26 October 1992), and Ancestry.com online census records. The extract from an entry in a Register of Deaths from the General Register Office, Edinburgh, was provided by Bill Lawson (19 January 1993). Also copies of census extracts exist in the Flett collection, for 1851, 1861, and 1871, as well as the death certificate of 1879.

²⁷ Spelled *An Dannsair Ciotach* in [http://carmichaelwatson.](http://carmichaelwatson.blogspot.co.uk/2009/11/ewen-maclachlan-dance-master-catechist.html)

[blogspot.co.uk/2009/11/ewen-maclachlan-dance-master-catechist.html](http://carmichaelwatson.blogspot.co.uk/2009/11/ewen-maclachlan-dance-master-catechist.html) (accessed 12 February 2014).

²⁸ This is located near Lochan Dubh, North Locheynort (<http://maps.nls.uk/view/74427004>). Strom Dubh in the vicinity of Lochan Dubh, North Locheynort).

²⁹ Cumhang, Ormiclate (<http://maps.nls.uk/view/82886367> Clachan Cumhang north east of Ormiclate Castle).

³⁰ Ewen's sister Isabella married Donald MacDonald, also known as *Domhnall MacDhomhnaill 'Ic Iain* / Donald, son of Donald, son of Ian, in about 1830 and settled with him in Loch Eynort. They had six children and their last child was baptised there in 1844. The first of these, Malcolm, was born on 20th September 1839. Iseabail died sometime after the death of her final child, Penelope, born on 25th October 1844. This is known because Isabella's husband, Donald later married Sorcha MacPhie on 1st October 1848. Isabella appeared only in the 1841 census. This census did not ask for the parish of birth of persons, but only whether they were born within the same county, in this case, Inverness-shire, and very often the census taker did not appear to have bothered to check on this item. However, in Isabella's case, the answer was yes, whereas for Ewen it was no, suggesting that the entry is probably accurate, and that Isabella, who was slightly younger, was indeed born in Inverness-shire, whereas Ewen was born in Greenock. Descendants of Isabella and Donald still live in South Uist.

³¹ MacDonald, 2017:2–3.

³² Neil Walker, of Bornish, South Uist, was around 83 when interviewed by F. Rhodes on 29 April 1955. Flett Collection. 1955.

³³ *Morar and Moidart; 5th–11th April 1956*, T.M. Flett and F. Rhodes; Flett Collection pp. 1–2. Source local parish records.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Archie Munro (Rhodes spelling is Monrowe), of Loch Boisdale, South Uist, (c. 70) was interviewed by F. Rhodes, 26 April 1955. He suggested that Ewen came from Arisaig.

³⁶ T.M. Flett Collection, mentioned in the Newcastle series First of August booklet, C. Metherell, 1982.

³⁷ John MacInnes or *Iain MacAonghais*. Known by his patronymic: *Iain Pheadair 'ic Sheumais*, (1907–1991), local government officer, of South Lochboisdale and Daliburgh, South Uist. Notes were based on information from his grandmother Flora Morrison.

³⁸ Angus James MacIntyre, (c. 75). Interviewed by Flett and Rhodes, 8 July 1956, in Loch Eynort, South Uist.

³⁹ Roberts, 2016, unpublished.

⁴⁰ A comment on this by Dr Alasdair Mearns (correspondence 20 January 1994) – “if the father was not local or Highland then the naming can proceed on the female line. [...] The word ‘illegitimate’ has connotations in English which do not apply in Gaelic Society. If Ewen were really born outside of a marriage he would possibly have his mother's surname. Also, if the land at Reitealain was substantial he may have taken his mother's name to show the connection with the property.”

⁴¹ Ronald I. Black, MA, Edinburgh, correspondence 15 July 1991.

⁴² Roberts, 2016, unpublished.

⁴³ Mrs Kate Morrison was taught dancing by a man from Perth at the age of 15. Dr MacLean, the island doctor, suggested to Frank Rhodes that this man might be 'Feldie,' a man from Aberfeldy with whom Ewen MacLachlan stayed for some time.

⁴⁴ Hache. (2010). *The French MacDonald, Journey of a Marshal of Napoléon in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland in 1825*.

⁴⁵ F. Rhodes, 29 April 1955, from Mrs MacLeod who had very

little English, wherefore Dr MacLean translated. She was about 93 years of age at the time. Neil Walker was aged around 83 when met on 29 April 1955.

⁴⁶ J.F., T.M. Flett, and F. Rhodes, April 1955, from informants Donald Allan Morrison, of Greybridge, South Uist, and Msgr MacKellaig, of Daliburgh, also South Uist.

⁴⁷ MacLennan, 1950:28.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Consulting three letters written in July and August 1956 between T.M. Flett, Dr F. Rhodes. and Rev W.J. Anderson, M.A., Aberdeen, the latter stated that no man born in about 1799 could have been at Douai Scots College, because it was not functioning after the French Revolution. Like all the colleges abroad it was closed in April 1793 (about six years prior to Ewen's birth), and was never reopened as a college. The Scots College in Paris did not reopen either and it was not until 1824 that students began to be sent to French seminaries again. J.F. and T.M. Flett drew the information about Scots Colleges and seminaries from the Rev. W.J. Anderson, then of St Mary's College, Blairs, Aberdeenshire. Blairs is just outside the City borders of Aberdeen. The college is now closed. The three letters consulted are dated 21 July 1956 from F. Rhodes to Rev Anderson, the other two are from Rev Anderson to T.M. Flett and dated 28 July 1956 and 2 August 1956.

⁵⁰ [http://carmichaelwatson.blogspot.ca/2009/ Calum Maclean's manuscripts, IFC MSS 1299, pp. 433–34.](http://carmichaelwatson.blogspot.ca/2009/Calum%20Maclean's%20manuscripts,%20IFC%20MSS%201299,%20pp.%20433-34.%20(accessed%207%20September%202017).) (accessed 7 September 2017).

⁵¹ [http://carmichaelwatson.blogspot.ca/2009/ Calum Maclean's manuscripts, IFC MSS 1299, 1300.](http://carmichaelwatson.blogspot.ca/2009/Calum%20Maclean's%20manuscripts,%20IFC%20MSS%201299,%201300.%20(accessed%207%20September%202017).) (accessed 7 September 2017).

⁵² MacInnes, 1992. Further, reading the correspondence between Rev Anderson and T.M. Flett (2 August 1956), there is no trace of Ewen in the complete register of Valladolid between 1768 and 1900 recording all students, not only those who successfully completed the course and were ordained there or elsewhere, but of all students as published in 'Records of the Scots Colleges' (New Spalding Club, Aberdeen, 1906). The College of Valladolid had to close on 22nd November 1808 and all students were sent home. Other colleges are covered in this register, including Rome, but again no Ewen MacLachlan could be found.

⁵³ Quering the Archivist of the Archives of Évêché de Coutances et Avranches, Cedex, France, the St Lô or Coutances connection also proved negative. Archives of Évêché de Coutances et Avranches, Cedex, France. (Correspondence 6 March 1991 to Melin). A letter (8 April 1992 to Melin) from Canon Angus MacQueen, then of St Mary's, of Bornish, South Uist, confirms that Ewen MacLachlan's name cannot be found in Douai, Rome, Valladolid or Ratisba Colleges. He was too young for the Scots College in Paris and too old for Blairs. He is not in the published register for Aquhorties. In the 1950s, the Rev Father Campbell, then of Mingary, Moidart, suggested to the Fletts a possible alternative for Ewen's education. Although there is no evidence for possible studies in Scotland because no records have been found of him attending either of the two Catholic colleges, Aquhorties and Lismore or France, it is still possible that he was a 'mass companion,' an assistant to a priest. A mass companion looked after the priest's vestments and assisted him at the mass. It was not unknown for priests to educate their assistants themselves and that may account for Ewen's education. At that time the Catholic Church was not divided into parishes as it is today, and a priest would have travelled widely. Lismore's records are not complete, according to Rev W.J. Anderson. Canon Angus MacQueen states that Lismore's records only reflect some who were ordained priests. (Cor-

respondence 8 April 1992 with Melin). Lismore refers to the seminary at Kilkerran in Lismore. Lismore is an island east of the Island of Mull in the mouth of Loch Linnhe. Aquhorties is today spelt 'Auquhorthies,' and is a village situated a couple of miles North-East of Oldmeldrum in the Formartine District of Aberdeenshire. In the letters from Rev Anderson to T.M. Flett (28 July 1956 and 2 August 1956) it is stated that training for priesthood started around the age of 10 and was not at a college, and in Ewen's case that would have been around 1809–1910. The two Catholic colleges in Scotland were at that time, as mentioned above, Aquhorties, covering the Lowland District (between 1799–1829) and Lismore, covering the Highland District (between 1803–1829). In 1829 both were replaced by St Mary's College, Blairs, Aberdeen. No Ewen MacLachlan was found in the records in any of these places. Rev Anderson is also doubtful about the 'mass companion' theory, but he states that there is no way of checking it. He writes that the 'only slight chance would be a chance allusion in a letter.' At Blairs there are some 30,000 letters, and careers of priests have been much investigated, but, no Ewen MacLachlan has been found.

⁵⁴ MacDonald, 2017:3.

⁵⁵ MacDonald, 2017:2.

⁵⁶ Ishabel T MacDonald (2018). Correspondence with author. May 30.

⁵⁷ Fr Allan MacDonald, 1898, page 55, entry 56. Father Michael MacDonald added in conversation (2017) that MacLachlan's Gaelic knowledge did not include Gaelic grammar, nor would he have been able to read and write Gaelic. His Gaelic was not classic in that sense but was more '*la langue maternelle*'.

⁵⁸ MacDonald, 2017:4.

⁵⁹ According to a typed sheet of uncertain date, copied in September 1983, and given to me on 17 February 1991 by the late Dr Alastair MacFadyen (then Archivist of the RSCDS) a John MacDonald / *Iain Mac Aonghais Mhòir*, worked in a similar capacity as Ewen did in South Lochboisdale. This typed sheet is in many of its paragraphs identical to sections of the handwritten sheets by John / *Iain Pheadair MacInnes*.

⁶⁰ <http://carmichaelwatson.blogspot.co.uk/2009/11/ewen-maclachlan-dance-master-catechist.html> (accessed 12 February 2014).

⁶¹ These stories were told by Angus MacMillan of Griminish also known as *Aonghas Barrach* / Angus the Barraman, Benbecula, (1874–1954), whose father learnt them from Ewen; this is courtesy of J.F. Flett's manuscript. Angus MacMillan was one of the greatest storytellers of his generation according to R.I. Black (correspondence 15 July 1991 to Melin).—

The term '*Seanchaidh*' may also be spelled '*seanachaidh*' in Gaelic, and in Scots it is either '*shenachie*' or '*sennachie*,' and refers to a teller of traditional Gaelic heroic tales. In the past, it would have meant a professional recorder and reciter of family history and genealogy, too. (*The Concise Scots Dictionary*).

⁶² The Carmichael Watson Project, 2009. <http://carmichaelwatson.blogspot.co.uk/2009/11/ewen-maclachlan-dance-master-catechist.html> (accessed 12 February 2014).

⁶³ Quoted from Frank Rhodes's typescript of his notes of 29 April 1955.

⁶⁴ Rhodes, 1955. Interview with Mrs Campbell, Garryheillie Friday 29th April. Weblink: https://insteptr.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/JTF_TRAD2.pdf (accessed 20 May 2019).

⁶⁵ Ishabel T MacDonald (2018). Correspondence with author. May 30.

⁶⁶ Holt-Oram Syndrome <https://ghr.nlm.nih.gov/condition/holt-oram-syndrome> (accessed 19 August 2017).

⁶⁷ Dorland's Illustrated Medical Dictionary, 27th Edition, Phil-

adelphia, 1988, p. 1281 (phocomelia).

⁶⁸ James MacDonald Reid – Personal visit, Edinburgh, March 1990.

⁶⁹ Gibson, 2005:163.

⁷⁰ For further reading regarding itinerant storytellers, travelling tailors, and shoemakers, see Joe Neil MacNeil's *Sgeul gu Latha, Tales until Dawn*, ed. by John Shaw, Edinburgh University Press, 1987, p. xxxi (Introduction).

⁷¹ F. Rhodes, *South Uist and Benbecula, April 1955*, p. 19; informants Mr Archie MacDonald, Garryheillie, Dalibrog, 29 April 1955; and Mrs MacLeod, Ormiclate aged around 93, translated from Gaelic by Dr MacLean, 29 April 1955.

⁷² F. Rhodes, *South Uist and Benbecula, April 1955*, p. 20; informant Neil Walker, Bornish, aged around 83, (29 April 1955). F. Rhodes, *South Uist and Benbecula, July 1956*, p. 1; informant Mrs Kate Morrison, Greybridge, Daliburgh., aged around 89. (7 July 1956).

⁷³ F. Rhodes, *South Uist and Benbecula, April 1955*, p. 21; informant Mrs K. Morrison, Greybridge, Daliburgh. Second visit, (29 April 1955).

⁷⁴ F. Rhodes, *South Uist and Benbecula, April 1955*, p. 7; informant Roderick MacPherson, Liniclett Muir, aged around 75. (27 April 1955).

⁷⁵ F. Rhodes, *South Uist and Benbecula, July 1956*, p. 16; informant Angus James MacIntyre, Loch Eynort, aged around 75. (8 July 1956).

⁷⁶ *Smàladh na Coinnle* – smoooring the candle. *The Concise Scots Dictionary*, AUP, 1985 (87); page 637 reads: “smoooring (the fire); a ritual damping down of the domestic fire at night, once common in Highland Catholic districts”. *Dwelly's Illustrated Gaelic to English Dictionary*, Gairm, 1988, page 867, reads: “*smàladh*, -*aidh*, Snuffing, act of snuffing a candle. *smàladaire-achd*, Act of candle-snuffing. *cnap-smàlaidh*, a gathering coal, to keep the fire alive overnight.” This dancing feat was also known in Nova Scotia.

⁷⁷ Correspondence 8 April 1992, Canon Angus MacQueen, of Bornish, South Uist.

⁷⁸ Calum MacLean's manuscripts, IFC MS 1299, p. 431.

⁷⁹ The Carmichael Watson Project, 2009. http://carmichaelwatson.blogspot.co.uk/2009/11/ewen-maclachlan-dance-master-catechist_27.html. Calum MacLean's manuscripts, IFC MSS 1299, 1300 (accessed 12 February 2014).

⁸⁰ Campbell MS 1299:431.

⁸¹ Rhodes in Flett, 1996:192.

⁸² The Edinburgh connection and the Edinburgh Ball Programme reference comes from Angus James MacIntyre, [F. Rhodes, *South Uist and Benbecula, July 1956*, informant A.J. MacIntyre, Loch Eynort. 8 July 1956]; and the Glasgow suggestion was provided by Kate Morrison, Greybridge, Daliburgh 26 April 1955.

⁸³ MacLennan, 1950:29.

⁸⁴ MacLennan, 1950:31.

⁸⁵ Rhodes, 1985, 1996.

⁸⁶ Mr Ronald Kennedy, in Broad Cove, 1957, whose grandfather emigrated from Canna in 1790; the last three dance titles from Mr John Gillis and Miss Margaret Gillis, of Gillisdale, S.W. Margaree, a father and daughter. Mr Gillis's grandfather came from Morar (Flett 1985, 1996).

⁸⁷ MacGillivray, 1988:60–61.

⁸⁸ Flett, J.F. and T.M. According to F. Rhodes's informant Kate Morrison, of Greybridge, Daliburgh, South Uist (around 87

29 April 1955 Ewen came to Bornish, South Uist, and John MacInnes' grandmother Flora Morrison is said to have attended classes by Ewen in Bornish around 1840. As Bornish was cleared of its inhabitants in 1840, he is likely to have taught there before this date.

⁸⁹ It is not known where D.G. MacLennan came by this alternative name, but he mentions his opinion on the name Fisher's Hornpipe as the original name in correspondence to Flett, 4 April 1953.

⁹⁰ One can point to a three-stage circular development here: 1) Teachers/dancers change dances they have learned; 2) They pass these on to other people; 3) they in turn alter the material they have learnt, and they pass it on...

⁹¹ Newton, 2013:38, 49–78.

⁹² See *The French MacDonald*, 2010.

⁹³ Guillard 1987, 1989, 1990, 1991a, 1991b, and 1991c.

⁹⁴ See the following clips: Baptiste Guillard dancing La gavotte steps <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2UweFQaIrw> ; Baptiste Guillard dancing Pas d'Été: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D7FMj9lSk10>; Danse provençale: Gigue anglaise <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-NNBqufQA7Q> ; a twosome Pas d'Été from 2009: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iDfE_dvZTZA ; Pas d'été par Jean Bernard et Laurence Liotier: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sMzEnn5s-BCY> ; Gigue (Anglaise) Anaïs Applanat <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KFLbFCfrSFs> ; Danse provençale : l'Anglaise (version Rode de Basse Provence): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9ulxUK1NDwc> (all accessed 19 August 2017).

⁹⁵ <https://canmore.org.uk/site/171988/south-uist-daliburgh-parish-church> (accessed 11 September 2017).

⁹⁶ Flett, 1985, 1996.

⁹⁷ See Melin, 2018, *A Story to Every Dance*.

⁹⁸ I recall that in 1996, Father Angus Morris of Mabou Parish in Cape Breton performed on the fiddle at a *Cèolas* Summer School concert in South Uist, where some people from North Uist had travelled an hour or more to attend only to inform him afterwards that he played the 'devil's music on the devil's instrument.' The anti-music and dance standpoint can, even at the end of the twentieth century, be seen as remaining strong among some Protestant congregations.

Chapter 4

⁹⁹ Dickson, 2006:38.

¹⁰⁰ Hunter, 2010:140–141.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Carmichael, 1941:200.

¹⁰³ Dickson, 2006:14.

¹⁰⁴ See Kissling (1943: 87); J. F. Campbell (1994 [1860]); and Carmichael (1900 [1898]).

¹⁰⁵ Campbell, 1890, xxiii.

¹⁰⁶ Thomson, 1983:281.

¹⁰⁷ Shaw, 1992–1993:38.

¹⁰⁸ Kennedy, 2002:120; emphasis added.

¹⁰⁹ Dickson, 2006:211–235.

¹¹⁰ Merriam 2000:261.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Melin, 2008, 2015.

¹¹³ Melin, 2015.

¹¹⁴ Dickson, 2006:98.

¹¹⁵ Ishabel T MacDonald, 2018. Correspondence with author. May 30.

¹¹⁶ Eydmann, 1999.

¹¹⁷ Translation by Dickson, 2006:98.

¹¹⁸ Dickson, 2006:99.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

Chapter 5

¹²⁰ *Machair* means low-lying arable or grazing land formed near the coast by the deposition of sand and shell fragments by the wind. *Machair* is a late seventeenth-century Gaelic word and predominantly used in the Western Isles. *The Concise Scots Dictionary*. Ed. Mairi Robinson, Aberdeen, 1985.

¹²¹ Dickson, 2006:183–187.

¹²² Dickson, 2006:188.

¹²³ The Oban Times, 4 August 1923, p. 7, col. 4.

¹²⁴ Rea, 1964:vi, 163–164.

¹²⁵ John / Iain Pheadair MacInnes papers (Melin Archive).

¹²⁶ It is unlikely that this version of the Flowers of Edinburgh was similar to the version Jack McConachie described in 1972. The evidence suggest McConachie did not get his version from John / Iain Ruadh MacLeod in 1949. The Fletts and Rhodes only encountered fragments of memories of a dance of that name, but what they found suggest something quite different to what McConachie describes.

¹²⁷ See the Appendix for 1920s clipping transcriptions from the Oban Times regarding these Games.

¹²⁸ Iochdar lies at the north end of South Uist. The place-name comes from the Gaelic *An t-Iochdar* meaning ‘the Bottom End.’

¹²⁹ John / Iain Pheadair MacInnes papers (Melin Archive) and D.G. MacLennan, Highland and Traditional Scottish Dances, Edinburgh, 1950:31.

¹³⁰ Metherell, C., First of August, Newcastle Series, 1982.

¹³¹ https://insteptt.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/JTF_Correspondence_Folder-X_1_MacLennan-TMF-1952-55.pdf (accessed 22 March 2019).

¹³² https://insteptt.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/JTF_Correspondence_Folder-X_1_MacLennan-TMF-1952-55.pdf (accessed 22 March 2019).

¹³³ Dickson, 2006:190.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Born in 1920 on Eriskay. (Henderson, 1995:52).

¹³⁶ SOBHD, 2010:138.

¹³⁷ Bonnie Dundee (couple dance); Boston Two Step; Canadian Barn Dance; Circassian Circle (two circles); Duke & Duchess of Edinburgh; Duke of Perth; Eightsome Reel (with chain and wheel); Hamilton House; Haymakers; Highland Schottische; Lancers; Military Two Step; Patronella [sic.]; Pride of Erin Waltz; Quadrilles; Scotch Reform; and St Bernard’s Waltz.

¹³⁸ Henderson 1995:40–41.

¹³⁹ At some point in time these teachers were Morag MacSween, Patricia MacDonald, Kitty Ann MacRury (nee MacDonald), and Jean and Mary Ann Maclean.

¹⁴⁰ SDTALK, September 1980.

¹⁴¹ *Comhlan Dannsa nan Eileanach*, 1984.

¹⁴² Information based on the Minutes of the Meeting held in Castlebay Community School, 7 July 1994. Among those present at the meeting were Fearchar MacNeil, Fr C. MacInnes, Katie-Ann Mackinnon, Ishabel T. MacDonald, Flora Steele,

Morag MacSween, and Sandra Robertson.

¹⁴³ Henderson 1995:39–40. ‘Uistochs’ refer to people born on Uist while ‘Bharrachs’ refer to people born on Barra.

¹⁴⁴ Personal conversation with Morag MacSween, 27 May 2019.

Chapter 6

¹⁴⁵ MacNeil correspondence with Mary Janet MacDonald, 1985.

¹⁴⁶ MacNeil correspondence to Gibson 14 March 1984; Gibson, 2017:239

¹⁴⁷ MacNeil correspondence to Gibson 14 March 1984; Gibson, 2017:240–241.

¹⁴⁸ Information courtesy of the letter from Fearchar to Mrs J.F. Flett in October 1990. Fearchar was not certain whether the MacLeod from Skye ever taught solo dances, or only social dances, though Fearchar believes he did.

¹⁴⁹ Henderson 1995:38. Note that in other interviews Fearchar said he did not know First of August well.

¹⁵⁰ Henderson 1995:39.

¹⁵¹ Henderson describes modes of transmission in her 1995 (pp 38–39) publication as does Melin (2015).

¹⁵² MacNeil, correspondence to Joan Flett, c. 1989.

¹⁵³ In Henderson (1995:64) Fearchar says he knew and could still perform 25–30 steps in the early 1980s.

¹⁵⁴ MacNeil, interview with author, March 1990.

¹⁵⁵ MacNeil, interview with author, March 1990.

¹⁵⁶ Information from Fearchar MacNeil in person, Barra, March 1990.

¹⁵⁷ *The Clansman*. December/January issue 1993, p. 7. *Memories of the Barra women step-dancing*, article by Frances MacEachen. Mary Janet MacDonald, a Cape Breton step dancer, visited and taught dancing in Barra at the Barra feis in 1984.

¹⁵⁸ MacNeil, School of Scottish Studies interview 1982; and interview with author, March 1990.

¹⁵⁹ Iain Ruadh Phàdraig—‘Red-haired John of Patrick.’

¹⁶⁰ ‘S ann às an ath bhaile, a’ Bhuaile Dhubh, a bha a mhàthair, Màiri Anna NicDhòmhnaill, Màiri Anna Dhòmhnaill Aong-hais, agus b’ e Pàdraig, mac Iain Ruaidh Thormoid a b’ athair dha. His mother, Mary Anne MacDonald (Mary Anne Donald Angus) was born in the next town, a’ Bhuaile Dhubh [the black cattle fold] and his father was Red-haired John Norman. http://www.bbc.co.uk/alba/oran/people/iain_macleoid_iain_ruadh_phadraig/ [Accessed 20 September 2017].

¹⁶¹ Among John MacLeod’s poetry and song output, a beautiful lament for the folklorist, Calum MacLean can be found. It was published and is sung on *Tobar an Dualchas*.

¹⁶² *A bharrachd air a bhith ri obair croite, bha bùth aig an teaghlach a bha iad a’ ruith eatorra agus tha an togalach sin fhathast na sheasamh faisg air an t-seann taigh-sgoile, ach air an taobh eile dhen rathad. Bhiodh iad a’ reic bainne, gruth, uachdar is càise, agus càil sam bith eile a b’ urrainn dhaibh fhaighinn bhon chroit. An dèidh do na bùithtean-charbad fàs bitheanta cha do shoirbheach cho math dhan bhùth agus leig iad seachad i.* (In addition to croft work, the family had a shop that they ran between them. The building is still standing next to the old school house, but on the other side of the road. They sold milk, crowdie, cream and cheese, and anything else that they could source from the croft. After mobile shops grew more common, however, their own shop was not so successful and they closed it.)

Anns na leth-cheudan bha Iain Ruadh ag obair na iar-mhainidsear air Taigh-Òsta Duke Street ann an ceann an ear

Ghlaschu, agus bha e a' ruith café air Sràid Sauchiehall. Bha e ag obair ann an taighean-òsta anns an Òban agus ann an Tobar Mhoire fad seusan an turasachd agus a tilleadh dhachaigh airson a' gheamhraidh. (In the 1950s Red John was working as the deputy manager of the Duke Street Hotel in the east end of Glasgow, and he was also running a café on Sauchiehall Street. He was working in hotels in Oban and in Tobermory throughout the tourist season and returning home for the winter.)

A bharrachd air a bhith na dheagh sheinneadair, b' e dannsair comasach a bh' ann an Iain Phàdraig agus bha e fhèin agus Pàdraig 'Beag' pàighte leis a' Chomhairle airson dannsa agus piobaireachd a theagasg air feadh Uibhist is Bharraigh. (In addition to being a good singer, John Patrick was a skilful dancer and himself and 'Little' Patrick were paid by the Council to teach dancing and piping throughout the Uists and Barra.)

Nuair a bhiodh e aig baile, bhiodh Iain Ruadh glè thrìc a' cur air dòigh dannsan agus cèilidhean ann an seann taigh-sgoile an Ìochdair. Bhiodh e tric a' seinn còmhla ri Iain MacAonghais (Iain Pheadair), agus aig cèilidhean agus ann an taighean a chèile... (When he was at home, Red John would very often organise dances and cèilidhs in an old school house in Ìochdair. He would often sing with John / Iain Pheadair MacInnes, at cèilidhs and at each other's houses.)

Translation by Màiri Britton. http://www.bbc.co.uk/alba/oran/people/ian_macleoid_ian_ruadh_phadraig/ [Accessed 20 September 2017].

¹⁶³ Correspondence 8 April 1994, Canon Angus MacQueen. Note the similarity to the story told about Archie MacPherson by John / Iain Ruadh MacLeod!

¹⁶⁴ From the preface in 'Hebridean Solo Dances,' Caber Feidh Publications, 1972. According to the research of Mr Chris Metherell, of Newcastle, these original notes made by Jack McConachie do not survive. This is according to correspondence between Mr Metherell and Mr Peter White (of the Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing Highland Branch) who published most of McConachie's material.

¹⁶⁵ The Gaelic word 'Roidein' may mean 'wildfire,' but in this case, his mother gave Donald this nickname 'o na bhiodh e daonnan a' gearradh roidean' (since he was always leaping around) according to Ishabel T. MacDonald (correspondence, May 2018). Donald's sons were known as *Seonaidh Roidein* and *Ruaraidh Roidein* respectively.

¹⁶⁶ Rea, 1964:vi, 133–134.

¹⁶⁷ Dickson, 2006:167.

¹⁶⁸ Ishabel T. MacDonald (2018). Correspondence with author. May 30.

¹⁶⁹ Frank McConnell, Isle of Skye notes, July 1994. Information from Uilleam MacDonald, relative of *Roidein*.

¹⁷⁰ Ishabel T. MacDonald (2018). Correspondence with author. May 30.

¹⁷¹ Ishabel T. MacDonald (2018). Correspondence with author. May 30.

¹⁷² A. MacDonald knew Over the Water to Charlie, Scotch Blue Bonnets, Highland Laddie, Scotch Measure, Miss Forbes, and Tulloch Gorm.

¹⁷³ Ishabel T. MacDonald (2018). Correspondence with author. May 30.

Chapter 7

¹⁷⁴ Henderson 1995:38.

¹⁷⁵ *Hebridean Dancing*, 1995:117.

¹⁷⁶ Grant, I.F., *Highland Folk Ways*, 1961:326–331. Observations

have also been made from various photographs in Bob Charnley's *The Summer of '89*, Dualchas, 1991; and *George Washington Wilson in the Hebrides*, by Donald Macauley, AUP, 1984.

¹⁷⁷ Melin notes from F. MacNeil meeting, Castlebay, March 1990.

¹⁷⁸ Henderson 1995:39.

¹⁷⁹ Henderson 1995:39–41.

¹⁸⁰ Henderson 1995:48.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Flett, 1996:65.

Chapter 8

¹⁸³ *Till a Rithisd* – in modern Gaelic spelling it is *Till a-Rithist*.

Aberdonian Lassie

¹⁸⁴ Source of this story was Katie-Ann Mackinnon, Isle of Barra, March 1990.

Scotch Blue Bonnets

¹⁸⁵ http://www.tunearch.org/wiki/Merrily_Danced_the_Quaker. (accessed 16 September 2017).

¹⁸⁶ The Fletts noted down more steps from Fearchar MacNeil that agree with the above description; from Mrs Isabella MacDonald (widow of Donald 'Roidein') and her daughter Harriet MacDonald, both from Daliburgh, and Cissie MacDonald (Mrs John MacKinnon), of Arisaig, six steps were notated in September 1954 by Tom Flett. Mrs MacDonald, Roidein's widow, Isabella (known as 'Bella') would have been 86 at the time (she died aged 90 in 1958), and she had no, or very little English at all. Her grand-daughter Ishabel T. tells me she never heard her speak English. It would be surprising if she would have been able to show the Fletts any steps at the time. It is more likely that she agreed or disagreed with what Harriet said or showed. Five further steps were notated from Donald Walker, of Daliburgh in July 1956 by Frank Rhodes. These step notations are all available in the online Flett Archive.

¹⁸⁷ Emmerson, 1967:42–43.

¹⁸⁸ [http://www.tunearch.org/wiki/Blue_Bonnets_Over_the_Border_\(1\)](http://www.tunearch.org/wiki/Blue_Bonnets_Over_the_Border_(1)) (accessed 16 September 2017).

Scotch Measure

¹⁸⁹ [http://www.tunearch.org/wiki/Isle_of_Skye_\(2\)](http://www.tunearch.org/wiki/Isle_of_Skye_(2)) (accessed 16 September 2017).

Miss Forbes Farewell to Banff

¹⁹⁰ http://www.tunearch.org/wiki/Annotation:Miss_Forbes%E2%80%99Farewell_to_Banff (accessed 16 September 2017).

Highland Laddie

¹⁹¹ Glen, 1900:241–243.

¹⁹² [http://www.tunearch.org/wiki/Highland_Laddie_\(5\)](http://www.tunearch.org/wiki/Highland_Laddie_(5)) (accessed 16 September 2017).

¹⁹³ Emmerson, 1967:88–89.

¹⁹⁴ MacAskill, 1820.

¹⁹⁵ https://insteptr.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/JTF_TRAD2.pdf (accessed 20 May 2019).

Over the Waters

¹⁹⁶ [http://www.tunearch.org/wiki/Annotation:Lads_wi%27_the_Kilts_\(The\)](http://www.tunearch.org/wiki/Annotation:Lads_wi%27_the_Kilts_(The)) (accessed 16 September 2017). The song 'Gilleann an

fheilidh’ sung by Rev. William Matheson is available on *Tobar An Dualchas*: Track ID: 23022—Original Tape ID: SA1956.164

¹⁹⁷ [http://www.tunearch.org/wiki/Over_the_Water_to_Charlie_\(1\)](http://www.tunearch.org/wiki/Over_the_Water_to_Charlie_(1)). (accessed 16 September 2017).

Tulloch Gorm

¹⁹⁸ MacDonald 2012:42.

First of August

¹⁹⁹ Crofts and Crofting by Katharine Stewart, Scottish Connection 1980; *The Companion to Gaelic Scotland*, Blackwell 1983; *The Fairy-Faith in Celtic Countries* by W.Y. Evans Wentz 1977 (1911). *A Dictionary of British Folk Customs* by Christina Hole, 1976.

²⁰⁰ Ronald Black, correspondence 15 July 1991, and articles in the *West Highland Free Press*, “The Quern-Dust Calendar”, “What did you leave behind you?” 17 May 1991, and “The First of August”, 2 August 1991.

²⁰¹ Emerson, 1967:181.

²⁰² Lamb, 2012:109–110.

²⁰³ Emerson 1972:76, 133–134.

²⁰⁴ Lamb, 2012:109.

²⁰⁵ Song translated and Gaelic text changed into modern Gaelic by Ronald Black (correspondence 15 July 1991).

²⁰⁶ [http://www.tunearch.org/wiki/First_of_August_\(The\)](http://www.tunearch.org/wiki/First_of_August_(The)). (accessed 16 September 2017).

The dance fits this tune very well, although this may be pure coincidence. The tune itself first appeared in the second volume of Playford’s *Dancing Master*, 3rd ed. 1718:337, where it is given the title ‘Frisky Jenny,’ or the ‘Tenth of June.’ The latter seems to signify the birthday of James, the Old Pretender. The tune appears under the same title in Walsh’s collection of 1719, but in the third volume of the *Dancing Master* dated about 1728 it had acquired the title of the ‘Constant Lover.’ The same tune under the title of the ‘First of August’ or ‘Glorious first of August’ appears in playwright Charles Coffey’s 1729 ballad opera *The Beggar’s Wedding*, a 1729 production *Chuck*, and a 1740 play *The Sharpers*. Later in the eighteenth century, it was fairly commonly used as a ballad tune.’ (Metherell, C., *First of August*, Newcastle Series, 1982, and Ronald Black (15/7/91). Walsh: *Dancing Master*, 1718; *Complete Country Dancing Master*, 1719; *Dancing Master*, c. 1728; D. Wright: *Complete Collection of Celebrated Country Dances* ..., c. 1734). By 1731, the same tune acquired a second name, ‘Charles of Sweden,’ used by Coffey in the popular 1731 ballad opera *The Devil to Pay*, and was in Robert Drury’s 1737 *The Rival Milliners* and the 1745 *The Sailor’s Opera*. By the mid-eighteenth century, the tune was also known as ‘Tenth of June,’ or ‘King of Sweed-land’ (Simpson, Claude M. (1966), *The British Broadside Ballad and its Music*). (See: [http://www.tunearch.org/wiki/Annotation:First_of_August_\(The\)](http://www.tunearch.org/wiki/Annotation:First_of_August_(The)). (accessed 16 September 2017).

There are several songs known with the title ‘The First of August,’ and this day seems to have been a prominent date on the Whig calendar as well. These songs were widely known on the mainland of Scotland in the 1700s, but again, no direct connection to this dance is known. These songs and their titles in these cases commemorate the accession to the throne of the Protestant King George I in 1714. The Protestant Scots rejoiced, as this finally dashed the hopes of the Jacobites. Four of these songs were printed by James Hogg in 1819. Of these, two are set to tunes of different names and the other two have no tunes attached. This example of the first verse of one of his songs sets the tenor of the rest of these anti-Catholic songs:

Let those that detest all Popish priests

Remember the First of August

And those that abhor to be yok’d like beasts

Give thanks for the First of August. (Metherell 1982).

The title commemorates the accession of King George I in 1714, who reigned until 1727, according to English folk-song collector Frank Kidson (1855–1926), who noted in *The Musical Times* (Feb. 1, 1911:94) that it

[...] originally came into notice about the beginning of the 18th century by reason of a party of Swedish tumblers or dancers using it. It then appeared as ‘The New Sweedish Dance’ and after a varied career took the title ‘The First of August’ or ‘The Glorious First of August’ from a song in praise of the Hanoverian succession.

No doubt the Whig associations faded after that year, especially as the day had been a legal quarter-day for hundreds of years and a popular one for thousands (Black 1990–‘The First of August’).

That these songs should have anything to do with the dance is highly unlikely, particularly in light of the fact that the Islanders of Barra and Uist were mainly Catholics, making it hard to imagine that this would be a reason for them to rejoice for the reasons given above. However, it may be, as Ronald Black suggested in 1991, that perhaps the name stuck, though its Hanoverian associations had been forgotten by the time the dance came to the Islands. The *Lùnasdal* association of the date would have given it respectability even in Catholic areas (Black, correspondence 1991).

²⁰⁷ *Ceòlas* is a summer school held annually in July in South Uist since 1996 celebration Gaelic music, song and dance. It focuses on the fundamental links between language, music, song, and dance.

²⁰⁸ Campbell, 2013:276–277.

²⁰⁹ Metherell, 1982.

²¹⁰ See the Flett archive collection on www.insteprt.co.uk for further details.

Flowers of Edinburgh

²¹¹ John / Iain Ruadh MacLeod, Iochdar, South Uist, 5 April 1953 interviewed by T.M. Flett.

²¹² [http://www.tunearch.org/wiki/Annotation:Carrickfergus_\(3\)](http://www.tunearch.org/wiki/Annotation:Carrickfergus_(3)). (accessed 3 September 2017).

²¹³ Rhodes, April 1955.

²¹⁴ Dr MacLean (brother of the Gaelic poet Somhairle MacLean), of Daliburgh, informant to Frank Rhodes in April 1955, was the only doctor in the bottom 14 miles of South Uist and Eriskay at the time. He collected folk songs with tape recorder and was a much-valued help to Frank Rhodes in his research in the area.

²¹⁵ Tobar an Dualchas. Track ID: 100185—Original Tape ID: SA1965.111.

²¹⁶ <http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/fullrecord/81599/1> (accessed 16 September 2017).

²¹⁷ Information found on <http://www.tunearch.org> (accessed 3 September 2017). http://www.tunearch.org/wiki/My_love%27s_bonny_when_she_smiles_on_me (accessed 16 September 2017).

Caisteal Chiosamul

²¹⁸ MacNeil, interview with author, March 1990.

Appendices

²¹⁹ Ishabel T. MacDonald tells me that these four were all rela-

tions of the family. Ishabel T think Sarah* and Bella were twins. They were the aunts of Canon John Angus MacDonald, and were first cousins of Harriet, Uncle John and her dad (*Ruaraidh Roidein*). Ishabel T. continues: ‘The name Sarah, used in speech with the Gaelic diminutive ending added to the English name, cannot actually be written in Gaelic. It could be translated, but the translated version of the name was not what was used by people when referring to her. Because of this, I have had to resort to inventing a phonetic Gaelic spelling of her name. Also, Bella is often written in Gaelic as “Bealag” with a thick “l” in the middle. This would not be correct in S. Uist. I have written it with a thin “l”’ (Ishabel T. MacDonald (2018). Correspondence with author. May 30.)

²²⁰ Annie Walker, married name—Annie MacDonald—*Annag Dhòmhail ‘ic Iain ‘ac Ruairidh*. Both an Annie Walker and an Annie MacDonald appears in the prizelist. They are different people, but the names can be confusing as Annie Walker became Annie MacDonald when she married.

²²¹ Roderick—*Ruaraidh Roidein*—MacDonald (1901–1981).

²²² The Roe being the flat low strip of land between Lionaeuidhe (Linique) and Cill-amhlaidh (Kilaulay).

²²³ Angus MacPherson, also known as *Aonghas Saor* / Joiner Angus was the great-grandfather of the ‘Coddy’. ‘The Coddy’ was John MacPherson (1876–1955). A great character, was the celebrated storyteller of Barra, whose legends, anecdotes, and memoirs were collected and edited by John Lorne Campbell of Canna in the book *Told by the Coddy*, 1960. (*The Companion to Gaelic Scotland*, Ed. D.S. Thomson; *On the Crofters’ Trail*, David Craig, London, 1990:261).

²²⁴ ‘*Gilleasbuig Saor*’ means ‘Archie the Joiner.’ *Gilleasbuig* is nowadays spelt *Gilleasbaig*.

²²⁵ John / *Iain Ruadh* MacLeod, Iochdar—Flett 5 April 1953.

²²⁶ Flett interview 5 April 1953.

²²⁷ J.F. and T.M. Flett. One of the Fletts’ informants, a Mrs Buchanan of Liniclett, Benbecula, told that young men and women attended Ewen’s classes, but this is the only mention of youngsters as far as the Flett manuscripts are concerned.

²²⁸ Correspondence 8 April 1992, Canon Angus MacQueen, then of St Mary’s, Bornish, South Uist.

²²⁹ Letter, Fearchar MacNeil to Mrs J.F. Flett, October 1990. Which dances he taught to Neil Buchanan were not mentioned.

²³⁰ <https://insteptr.co.uk/gillial-an-fheilidh-steps/> (accessed 25 March 2019).

²³¹ Bill Lawson, correspondence 26 October 1992.

²³² <https://insteptr.co.uk/gillial-an-fheilidh-steps/> (accessed 25 March 2019).

²³³ Donald Walker’s *sloinneadh* (ancestry) means, in translation from Gaelic, ‘Little Donald son of Fergus.’

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Weblinks

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Sabra MacGillivray’s website for accessing the video clips for the dances: <http://www.sabramacgillivray.com/store/>

Tobar an Dualchais: www.tobarandualchais

Traditional Dance Forum of Scotland: <https://www.tdfs.org/>



Abbreviations used in the text

EFDSS—English Folk Dance and Song Society

SOBHD—Scottish Official Board of Highland Dancing

SOHDA—Scottish Official Highland Dancing Association

SNDC—Scottish National Dance Company

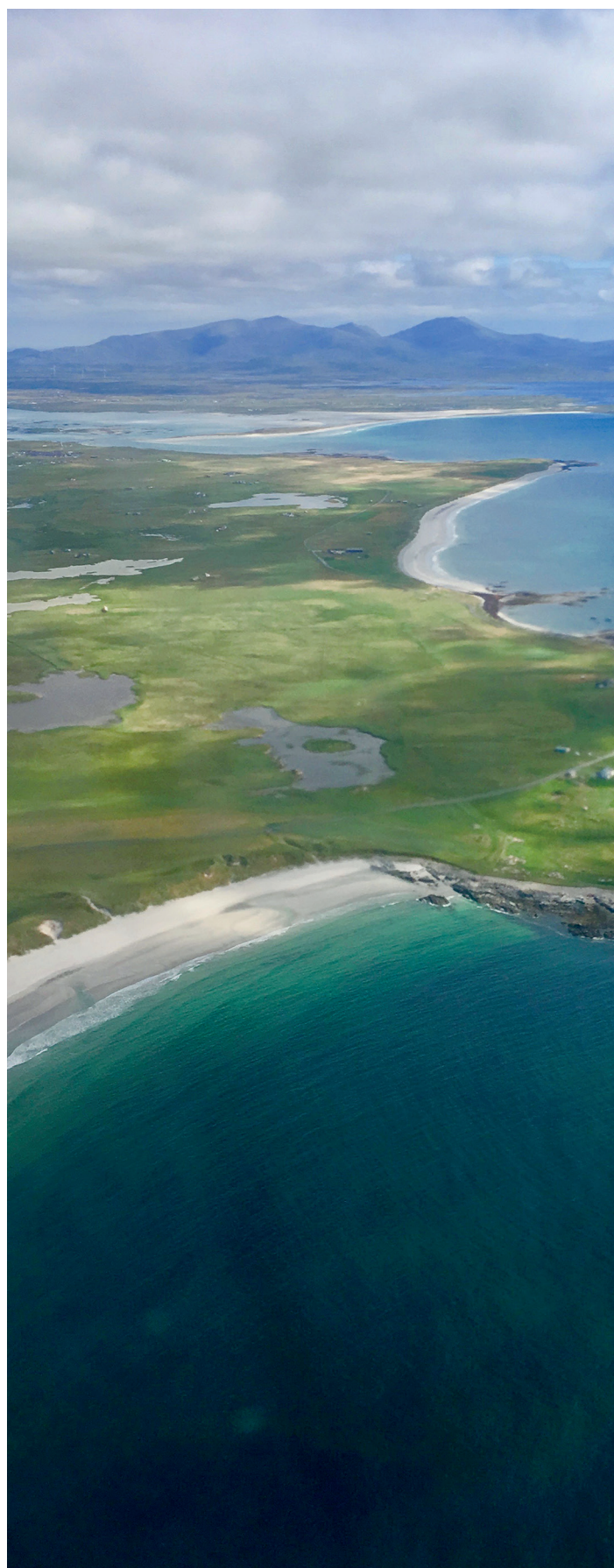
STDA—Scottish Dance Teachers’ Association

SSPCK—Society in Scotland for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge

UKA—United Kingdom Alliance of Professional Teachers of Dancing



Donald Iain MacKinnon in full flight dancing at a ceilidh in Southend Hall, Daliburgh, South Uist, July 1996. He danced in his socks. The piper is Dr Angus MacDonald of Genuig. Photo © Mats Melin.



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 the Scottish Government Working Group on Traditional Arts, and was until 2020 an office bearer for the Traditional Dance Forum of Scotland.

He teaches Cape Breton and Scottish step dancing, Hebridean solo dancing, and various genres of Scottish, Cape Breton and Irish social and figure dancing. He has devised a number of dances including the couple dances: The Pipers Schottische, QM2-step, Shapinsay Polka, Loch Ainort Two Step, and Lena of Boisdale's Waltz; and the solo step dance *Ruidhle an Eilien* which combined Hebridean and Cape Breton step dance ideas.

Mats was, from 2005-2021, a Lecturer in Dance and Course Director for the MA in Irish Dance Studies at the Irish World Academy of Music and Dance, University of Limerick, Ireland. Due to ongoing long covid, Mats took early retirement on medical grounds from UL in 2021.

He authored *One with the Music: Cape Breton step dancing tradition and transmission* published by Cape Breton University Press in 2015. On his own *Lorg Press* he released *A Story to Every Dance: The Role of lore in enhancing the Scottish solo dance tradition* in 2018. In December 2020, Mats and Jennifer Schoonover released *Dance Legacies of Scotland: The True Glen Orchy Kick* published by Routledge.

www.matsmelin.com

<https://limerick.academia.edu/MatsMelin>

Hebridean Step Dancing

The legacy of nineteenth-century dancing master Ewen MacLachlan

This book describes steps from nine Hebridean solo step dances, from the legacy of nineteenth-century dancing master, storyteller, and catechist Ewen MacLachlan who lived and worked in South Uist and Barra. A dance devised by Fearchar MacNeil is also included.

The legacy of Ewen MacLachlan's dance repertoire remained with the people who kept dancing and passing them on. The steps remembered by the late Fearchar MacNeil of Barra, and John 'Iain Ruadh' MacLeod and Donald 'Roidean' MacDonald, both of South Uist, are presented in these pages.

Each of the nine dances are contextualised with notes on their style, associated music, and folklore: Scotch Blue Bonnets, Scotch Measure, Miss Forbes' Farewell to Banff, *Mac Iain Ghasda* (Highland Laddie), Over the Waters, Tulloch Gorm, First of August, Flowers of Edinburgh, and, in addition, the solo jig Aberdonian Lassie, and Fearchar MacNeil's dance *Caisteal Chiosamul*.

This book also traces how the dances were kept alive through local Island traditions, local teachings, and the ways observers of this tradition have notated and published their findings since the 1950s. The social and economic conditions of nineteenth-century South Uist and Barra are outlined to help contextualise the circumstances under which Ewen MacLachlan operated. A biography detailing what we know about Ewen attempts to sort the few facts we have from the many myths persisting about him. Further biographies of some Islanders who recalled these dances in the 1950s and newspaper entries from the Uist and Barra Games in the 1920s are also featured.

An independent project presenting videos of these dances ties in with this publication. Links to these videos are provided within this book.

It is my sincere hope that this book helps keep these dances alive for future generations to enjoy.

