EARLY DANCES: RSCDS BOOKS 6-12
Saturday 12 April 2025, St John's Church Hall, Johnsonville
Tutor Elaine Laidlaw with musicians Lynne Scott (fiddle) and Thomas Nikora (Piano).

The notes below are compiled by Rodney Downey. The images are all from the Internet, and hence the copyright is from collective commons. Rod notes that he is not an historian, so these notes are obtained from secondary materials, but hope that they will inform the dancing.

Elaine chose dances from books 6-12. It is noteworthy how many of the dances have tunes which were originally song tunes.

Knit the Pocky (32 R for 2couples. Book 11, Own tune) This dance is likely much older than the date in book 11, which is 1806 from the Turnbull Collection. But the lead tune is first recorded in Robert Bremner "A Collection of Scots Reels or Country Dances" 1757 p.84 #1. According to Sir Christopher MacRae as reported in the SCD Dictionary:

This seems to be a traditional old dance: for the music that goes with it dates back to 1757. But who devised it and when, I don't know. What the intriguing title means is much debated. "Pocky" in Scots can mean various things: fingerless gloves, a bag, a hat, a fishing-net, or a swindle! - So it might mean "Burst the bag", "Mend the fishing net" or "Turn out your pockets" to find a few little coins (e.g. to buy a wee dram!). Or various other things. Take your choice...

Here is the way that the music might have sounded in the 18th Century.

Girl Making Net At Port-Rhu, Douarnenez, Jules Breton (1827-1906), Oil On Canvas, c. 1878

The RSCDS takes the view that this dance is about fingerless gloves being knitted. In the early books most 2-hand turns were done with pas de Basque, but in this dance they are done with skip change. The 2005 version of the Manual of SCD claims that this was chosen as they represent the appearance of s stitch being made.

In Angus Cumming's collection set of tunes, this tune features a four-part strathspey called Lady McIntosh's Reel. According to Traditional Tune Archive: 'Pocky' commonly refers to a bag (esp. a beggar's bag for collecting meal), a hat or a hood, and has been used to mean a fishing net. According to Chamber's Scots Dictionary, knit was sometimes used to mean 'overfill' or 'burst', thus the title may mean 'burst the bag'. Paul Cranford notes that a more ornate strathspey version was played by early 20th century Cape Breton fiddlers.

The Duchess of Atholl's Slipper (32 S Book 9, no 3. Music by Neil Gow, 1788) According to the dance researchers, J.F. and T.M. Flett, Traditional Dancing in Scotland, 1964, 'It is perhaps not generally recognised that, among the Scottish Country Dances which survived in Scotland within living memory, dances in Strathspey tempo are relatively uncommon.' Thus, *The Duchess Of Atholl's Slipper* was one of only about 15 Strathspeys (almost all from the 18th century) which have remained popular up to the turn of the 20th century.

There is a long article about this dance in Emmerson's Scotland Through Her Country Dances, pages 74-75, the gist of which was the fact that the Dukedom of Atholl and the Atholl Highlanders were pro-Jacobite, and that the great fiddler Neil Gow was a retainer for three of the Dukes. We might guess that this was written for the Duchess in his role as a retainer. According to the Traditional Tune Archive, this is one of the most celebrated compositions of fiddler Niel Gow (1727-1807). Below is a nice picture from the SCD dictionary.

Women's Shoes By Hoppe, Stencilled Kid Leather, London, England, 1790-1805

The Moudiewort (32J Book 11, no 7. Own tune) This was collected from the Bowman MSS, 1755-1760. This great tune is very old, going back to at least 1752, in Oswald's collection. In the Traditional Tune Archive, it is also listed as a Quadrille.

A moudiewort (pronounced as in ‘cow’) is a Scottish word for a mole. According to Emmerson, this is sometimes used in Scotland for a short person or a child. It seems that it is a song tune, and you can find a set of bawdy verses to it collected by Robbie Burns in his *Merry Muses*. Burns wrote O for ane and twenty Tam, a song of love and marriage, to this tune, and here is the chorus:

An' O for ane an' twenty, Tam!
And hey, sweet ane an' twenty, am!
I'll learn my kin a rattlin' sang,
An' I saw ane an' twenty, Tam.

Emmerson speculates that the dance had Jacobite connections.

Tulloch Gorm (32 S book 8, no 1. Own tune) The RSCDS collected this from Campbell’s 1796 collection. The tune seems to go back to Bremner’s Reels of 1757, according to the RSCDS, but Emmerson points out that *The Reel of Tullochgorm* was known long before that and had verses set to it by Rev. John Skinner (1721-1807).

O Tullochgorum's my delight,
It gars us a' in ane unite
And ony sumph that keeps a spite,
In conscience I abhor him;
For blithe and cheery we'll be a',
Blythe and cheery, blythe and cheery,
Blythe and cheery we'll be a',
And make a happy quorum;
For blythe and cheery we'll be a',
As lang as we hae breath to draw,
And dance, till we be like to fa',
The Reel o Tullochgorum.

Tullochgorm is a highland district in Aberdeenshire. The SCD dictionary notes the following: ‘The title of this dance is a partial anglicization of the Gaelic, "Tulach gorm", which means Blue Hillock; it is the name of a farm by the River Spey near Boat of Garten.’

It has never been clear whether the crossover parallel reels were mistakes in the interpretation by the society of the original manuscript.

Red House (40R, Book 7, no 2, Own tune) This was collected from Walsh 1731. It is also known as *Where Would Bonnie Anne Lie?.* It is also associated with a song *Where Would our Gudeman Ly?* from a MSS dated 1694, in which Alan Ramsey collected verses, and published as the song *Where Would Bonnie Annie Lie* in 1724. Certainly, it can be found in the famous book of dances by Playford: The Dancing Master, 1695. The dance historian Hugh Thurston (see Scotland's Dances. Thurston, Hugh A. London) indicates that the dance might have been reconstructed wrongly, and it was likely a 48 bar dance. (In a 4C set, I wonder if the first couple would enjoy the extra 8 bars each time.) It is one of the oldest dances in the RSCDS Canon.

The dance has one of those tunes which would certainly have been played on strings and perhaps a recorder and is a delight. Burns later used the tune in one of his songs: O' wha my baby-clouts will buy,, concerning a 'young woman under a cloud'. One of the oldest dances in the RSCDS Canon.

Here are the lyrics of the first stanza.

O wha my babie clouts will buy?
Wha will tent me when I cry?
Wha will kiss me where I lie?
The rantin' dog, the daddie o't.

Kiss Me Quick My Mithers Coming (32R, Book 12, no 6, Own tune). This dance and tune were collected from Johnson 1748. According to the Traditional Tune Archives, the lead tune has an alternative title 'Bonny Jocky'.

Kiss Me Quick! Currier And Ives, Chromolithograph, c. 1850 to 1900

This is probably the most complex dance to be taught. Bowing during a dance was very common in early dances from the time of Playford, 1651. Sometimes the men needed to kneel to their partner who gave a curtsy in return.

There's Nae Luck Aboot the House (32S, Book 10, no 10, Own tune according to the RSCDS). The RSCDS collected this dance from Wilson's Companion to the Ballroom, 1816, and the music again older, adapted from the tune *Up and war a' Willie* from Oswald 1750 and adapted by Johnson 1788.

The other RSCDS tune is *Lady Mary Ramsey* by Gow. According to Emmerson this durable and well-loved song is due to Jean Adams (1710-65). Jean Adams was born in Greenock into a maritime family and was orphaned at a young age. Her most famous work is thought to be *There's Nae Luck Aboot The Hoose*, a tale of a sailor's wife and the safe return of her husband from the sea. In the SCDDB entry and in the SCD Dictionary entry you can find the whole song reproduced, but here is the chorus and the first stanza:

For there's nae luck about the house,
There's nae luck at a';
There's little pleasure in the house
When our guidman's awa'.

And are ye sure the news is true?
And are ye sure he's weel?
Is this a time to talk o' wark?
Ye jades fling by your wheel.
Is this a time to think o' wark,
When Colin's at the door;
Rax me my cloak, I'll to the quay,
And see him come ashore.
For there's, &c.

Here is a quick-time version of the song, which was certainly not originally a Strathspey tempo. Quite a lot of the old dances had first couple simultaneously turning the second beginning from starting places, and with first lady crossing in front, something we see far less often in modern dances.

The Lass o' Livingston (32 R, Book 8, no 6. Music is *The Bleu Ribbon*) This dance was collected from Lowe's 1844 collection. The music is much older and taken from Gow's second collection of around 1800. However, in *Scotland Dances* by Eugenia Sharp the following is noted (taken from the SCDDB note suggesting that this is an earlier song tune)

The bonny lass of Liviston,
Her name ye ken, her name ye ken;

These two opening lines to the old anonymous ballad are all that can be reprinted here.

William Stenhouse states that, although the tune was inserted in Mrs Crockat's *Music Book* of 1709, "in all probability it is fully a century earlier; for Ramsay, who was born in *1684*, gives it as an ancient tune". *The Lass of Leving-stone* is found in Henry Playford's *A Collection of Original Scots Tunes* of 1700. New, purified verses to the song were written by Allan Ramsay. The verses appeared in 1724 and they were included in William Thomson's *Orpheus Caledonius* of 1725. Ramsay's song also was included in James Johnson's *The Scots Musical Museum*, Volume 1, 1787, and so mediocre are they that one verse is sufficient.''

Later, Sharp notes:

“The old original *The Lass o’ Liviston* was collected by Burns and is included in *The Merry Muses of Caledonia*. In his notes on the song Burns says, “The original set of verses to this tune is still extant, and have a very great deal of poetic merit, but are not quite ladies’ reading.” Perhaps not, but they are superior in their way to Ramsay’s stilted English-style posturing.”

Emmerson notes that the tune was described in 1684 by Ramsey as *ancient*, and again has bawdy lyrics set to the tune, so a song tune. Burns in his *Merry Muses*, offers the following version:

The bonnie lass o’Liviston
Her name ye ken, her name ye ken,
And aye the welcomer ye’ll be,
The father ben, the father ben,
And she has written in her contract,
To lie her lane, to line her lane

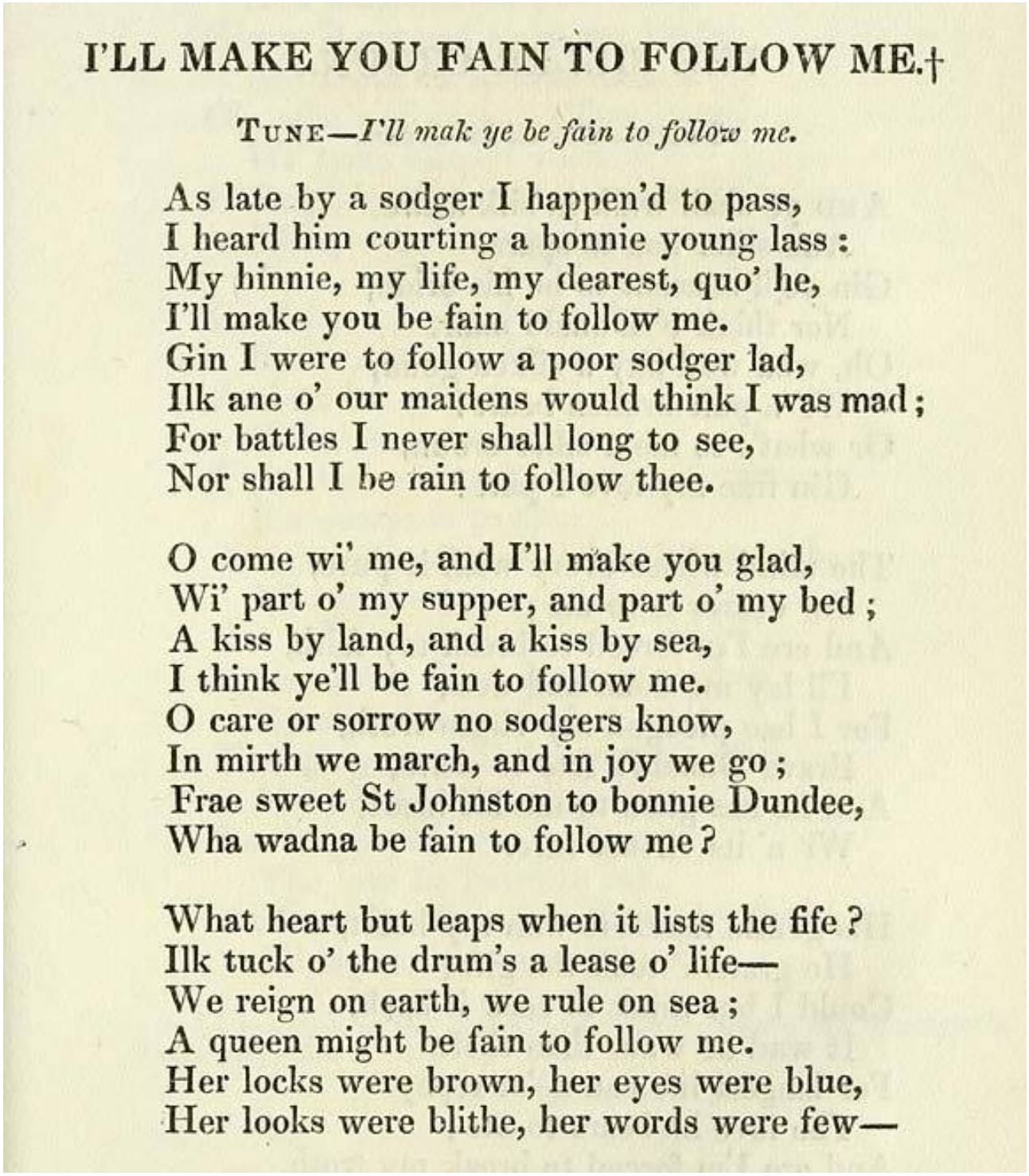
Here is a version of the song I could find online.

The dance itself is a straightforward on of the 18th century style, consisting of 4 basic formations and containing a poussette; which was almost mandatory in early Scottish Country Dances, taking the same role as rotary waltz in ballroom dances (whatever a poussette actually was at the time).

The Scots Bonnet (32J Book 10, no. 9, music Bonnets o’ Blue). According to the RSCDS this was collected in Roxburgshire. The music is attributed by them to James Spiers Kerr (1841-1893), in *Merrie Melodies vol. 2*, but likely that was the first book it was collected from. The tune is traditional. The Blue Bonnets were the ones used for the Jacobite rebellion. Here is a Scots piper talking about this and playing a famous related tune (“Blue Bonnets”). He also explains the significance of the *white cockade* on the bonnet, representing bonnie Prince Charlie. I found a long article about the history and making of the Blue Bonnet, and its Jacobite connection. Many of the early country dances were protest dances.

The dance itself is reasonably unusual to modern eyes with many quick little transitions from bar 24 onwards. Leading down the middle and up was ubiquitous then.

I'll mak' ye fain to follow me (32J, Book 6, no. 10, Own tune) The RSCDS collected this from a book in 1797. There is a nearly identical dance called *The Braes of Auchtertyne* to a tune of the same name. The dance seems much older as the tune is at least from Oswald in 1756. There are several versions of this tune on the Traditional Tune Archives. According to the SCD dictionary, the dance comes from the song of the same title, which I will put below; taken from the Glen collection, in the National Library of Scotland.



I'LL MAKE YOU FAIN TO FOLLOW ME.†

TUNE—*I'll mak ye be fain to follow me.*

As late by a sodger I happen'd to pass,
I heard him courting a bonnie young lass:
My hinnie, my life, my dearest, quo' he,
I'll make you be fain to follow me.
Gin I were to follow a poor sodger lad,
Ilk ane o' our maidens would think I was mad;
For battles I never shall long to see,
Nor shall I be fain to follow thee.

O come wi' me, and I'll make you glad,
Wi' part o' my supper, and part o' my bed;
A kiss by land, and a kiss by sea,
I think ye'll be fain to follow me.
O care or sorrow no sodgers know,
In mirth we march, and in joy we go;
Frae sweet St Johnston to bonnie Dundee,
Wha wadna be fain to follow me?

What heart but leaps when it lists the fife?
Ilk tuck o' the drum's a lease o' life—
We reign on earth, we rule on sea;
A queen might be fain to follow me.
Her locks were brown, her eyes were blue,
Her looks were blithe, her words were few—

However, Eugenia Sharp, the historian notes the following (taken from the SCDDB entry)

"William Stenhouse says in reference to "I'll Mak' Ye Fain to Follow Me", "Ramsay inserted a song, by an anonymous hand, to this lively old tune, beginning 'Adieu, for a while, my native green plains' in the second volume of his *Tea Table Miscellany*; but he omitted the original song, beginning 'As late by a soldier I chanced to pass', now inserted in the Museum. The tune appears in Oswald's Collection, and in many others."

Although James Johnson did include "I'll Mak' You Be Fain to Follow Me" in his *The Scots Musical Museum*, Volume 3, 1790, and he gave no credit in the index as was usual, the song is not the original as Stenhouse states. The song published by Johnson was by

Robert Burns and is called “As Late by a Sodger I Chanced to Pass” to the tune “I’ll Mak’ You Fain to Follow Me”.”

This Robbie Burns version seems to be the version which is attributed to the title of the dance. I am glad I am not a historian.

Set to and turn corners followed by reels of three on the side appear in many, many of the early dances. I have heard that in the early days of the formation of the Society, there was quite a debate as to what steps to use for set to and turn corners, or, indeed, two hand turns in general, pas de Basque, or skip change (the so-called ``Edinburgh Style''). The latter was method used in, for example, the Duke and Duchess of Edinburgh, as it was the style advocated by one of the important figures in the formation of the RSCDS, Miss Allie Anderson. A Complete Guide to Scottish Country Dancing she co-authored with John Duthie is a very good read, with lots of history. She was a friend of Miss Milligan, and apparently this was an argument they had. Personally, I think it is a wee bit unfortunate that the choice of pas de Basque was made when the dances were reconstructed and systematized, beginning in 1924.

Some References:

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