

Flp. 002.

ROYAL SCOTTISH COUNTRY DANCE SOCIETY

An

*Investigation into the Origin and History  
of the Scottish Country Dances*

# QUESTIONNAIRE

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BY THE  
RESEARCH COMMITTEE  
OF THE EDINBURGH BRANCH

## INTRODUCTION

When we savour the music and the dances of a country we are privileged to enter its heart and hearth. In the study of a people these elements in its cultural and social pattern must be included. The survival of ancient customs and traditions are of vital interest, particularly at a time when a combination of forces, social, political and economic, are threatening to bring about a standardised existence from which all variety and interest will be eliminated. In common with other countries the rich material of the Scottish way of life is fast disappearing and this process is being accelerated by neglect and misunderstanding.

**Royal Scottish Country Dance Society.**—This Society has been engaged since 1923 in reviving the traditional Country dances of Scotland and ensuring that they can be practised and enjoyed in all their beauty and exhilaration in the ballrooms of today. The Society has published some 200 Scottish Country Dances, collected in various parts of the country, consisting of reels, jigs and strathspeys and a few dances with special social characteristics.

**Discovery or Rediscovery of the Dances.**—The information which led to their discovery came from many sources, such as books, manuscripts, the records of old established families and the recollections of old people. Despite the recovery of so many attractive dances, there is little that has come down the years about the origin of this form of dancing in Scotland, or about the particular circumstances surrounding each individual dance except, in some cases, the name of the Collection from which it was taken, or the district where it was popular, or a mere date when it was believed to have been danced.

**Origins of Dances.**—Whenever Scottish Country Dances are seen they arouse the greatest admiration and interest, and visitors to Scotland ask time and time again about their roots and about the influences which have helped to form such grace and beauty of movement and such elegance of performance. The Society has realised from its inception that it is not enough to be content with the aesthetic pleasure

which these dances give to performers and onlookers alike. It is essential that the dances should be presented in the fullest possible knowledge of their origin and understanding of their meaning and of their place in the life of the people. Unless this can be done, the significance of Scottish Country Dancing, and indeed, of many other treasures of traditional folk life, may, in the changing circumstances of the world today, disappear.

**Research.**—It is for this reason that the Edinburgh Branch of the Society, with the full approval and support of the National Executive, has set up a Committee whose task it will be “to inquire into the origins of Scottish Country Dances and the influences which have moulded them through the centuries and to trace, in particular, the circumstances surrounding each dance recorded by the Society, and, if possible, to discover any dance as yet unrecorded.” To furnish this Committee with the data upon which its work can commence, the following questionnaire has been drawn up and the co-operation and help of all who are interested will be welcomed. We feel that the discovery of essential information bearing upon the origins of our traditional dances is not altogether a matter for the expert. Anyone interested can help, even if it is only to provide a small piece of information, or an isolated fact, however trivial, which might be just that clue which is awaited by someone more knowledgeable in the traditions and practice of these dances.

We realise that the answering of such a questionnaire, even in part, means a good deal of time and trouble, but it is hoped that those who undertake it will feel recompensed by the knowledge that they are making a valuable contribution towards the history of one of the characteristic arts of Scotland.

If you feel interested and are willing to undertake a piece of research in some part of the country, or to follow up a line of thought, the Research Committee will be glad to advise on the exact lines which might be profitable.

Please send your answers on a separate paper to enable you to retain this questionnaire as a reminder should other information come your way. The Society will be glad, at all times, to receive any further information you can supply.

## QUESTIONNAIRE

We should be glad to have your answer to as many of the following questions as possible. If, however, you can answer only one question, or even part of a question, please do so. Please label each answer with the same number as given in the question.

1. Can you tell us anything about the origin of any of the dances published by the Royal Scottish Country Dance Society and in the Border Book? (If you do not have a list of these dances, one will be sent to you on request.)
2. Can you, in particular, tell us anything about any of these dances which might specially connect them with your locality or any locality known to you?
3. The music and the method of accompaniment are of great interest to us.
  - (a) Can you tell us anything about the tunes used for particular dances, or give us the name and address of any person who might be in a position to give us this information, or to record a tune if this were desired? Do you know of any unpublished tunes?
  - (b) Can you say how the music for Scottish Country Dances was supplied in any particular locality and at any particular period, *e.g.* by fiddle, mouth music, Jew's harp, bagpipes, accordion, etc.?
4. We are particularly anxious to trace sources of information about these dances.
  - (a) Do you know of any information of this kind contained in books, manuscripts, newspaper cuttings, letters, dance programmes, musical scores or source material of any kind?
  - (b) Can you loan or donate to the Research Committee material of the above nature? If so, would you please say where it could be seen and examined?



- (c) Have you information about any library, public or private, which contains or which might contain information bearing on Scottish Country Dances ?
  - (d) Do you know of any individuals who might have recollections or have been the recipients of " word of mouth lore " affecting Scottish Country Dancing, or who might have letters or family papers containing references to these dances ? If so, would you please give full particulars, including names and addresses, or, if these are not known, any details which might enable them to be traced ?
5. Have you any information about specialised traditional dances associated with some particular aspect of community life, *e.g.* occupational dances such as those associated with weaving, dances held on ceremonial occasions such as a wedding, or seasonal dances such as those danced at the harvest festivities ? Even general references to dances of this nature performed in particular localities about a particular period would be welcomed. If anything is known of the costumes or dress of the dancers or of any particular equipment used, this would be helpful.
6. We are anxious to have information regarding :
- (a) Schools of dancing ;
  - (b) Teachers of dancing ; *or*
  - (c) Teachers of music in your locality, or in any locality from the fifteenth and sixteenth century onwards. Information would also be welcomed regarding organised Scottish Country Dancing in any locality, *e.g.* dancing assemblies or regular social gatherings for the purpose of enjoying traditional dances such as were organised in early times by schoolmasters and others in the remoter parts of Scotland.
7. The technical terms used in Scottish Country Dances are a fruitful line of study. Have you any knowledge of the origin, usage, and meaning of any of these terms ? (If you

are unfamiliar with these terms, a complete list will be sent to you on request.)

8. We would be glad to know of anything, however slight or seemingly trivial, which might lead to the discovery of either (a) the origin and history of recorded Scottish Country Dances (of which a list can be supplied) or (b) Dances as yet unrecorded.
  
9. In the case of residents in countries other than Scotland :
  - (a) Is there an existing body of traditional dances in your own country? Is there an organisation which fosters their discovery and preservation? If so, please give the name and address of its Secretary.
  - (b) Is any attempt being made to discover their origin and history? Has anything been published and where could a copy be obtained?
  - (c) Are you in a position to compare any such dances with Scottish Country Dances, or would you be prepared to undertake such an examination provided the necessary information and material concerning Scottish traditional dances were given to you?

Answers to this questionnaire *or* enquiries of any kind should be addressed to one of the following :

Mrs M. M. TAIT,  
Hon. Secretary to the Research Committee,  
26 Morningside Park,  
Edinburgh, 10.

*or*

T. J. KING, Esq.,  
Secretary/Treasurer,  
Edinburgh Branch, R.S.C.D.S.,  
7 Comiston Road,  
Edinburgh, 10.

*or*

Miss M. F. HADDEN,  
Secretary, R.S.C.D.S.,  
Thornhill, Cairnmuir Road,  
Edinburgh, 12.

The Research Committee will gladly refund postage on any material which you care to send.

ROYAL SCOTTISH COUNTRY DANCE SOCIETY  
(Edinburgh Branch)

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