Published and Unpublished Research on Scottish Dance Traditions

Mats Melin, January 2015

I will outline from my own archive and knowledgebase what research has been conducted on Scottish dance traditions and when subsequent material was published or where it can be accessed (if known). With some authors only the most significant publications are listed. List provided is in a loosely chronological order rather than being alphabetical.

Canadian based scholar and dancer Hugh Thurston:


Tom and Joan Flett with Frank Rhodes researched in the 1950s, Shetland, Orkney, Highlands and Islands, Angus, Fife, Perthshire, Borders and Wigtownshire mainly. Their archive of some 10000 pages and it has recently been suggested that it should be digitised and made available online. Copies of most of the material are currently held by the family and in Mats Melin and Chris Metherell private archives.


Scottish scholar based in Canada George Emmerson wrote:


Scottish writer and former chairperson of STDT:


New Zealand dancer:


Canadian dancer and musician based in Scotland:


Former Chair and Archivist of the RSCDS and former Board member of the STDT:


Scottish scholar and former Board member of the STDT


**Independent Researchers:**

Between 1995 – 2005 Mats Melin conducted research (interviewed, filmed etc) and taught and developed dancing in communities and 1st-3rd level educational institutions in Shetland, Orkney, Sutherland, Western Isles, Isle of Skye, Islay, Aberdeenshire, Angus, Perthshire. Some initiatives were individually funded and organised while others were funded by the Scottish Arts Council and run by Scottish Traditions of Dance Trust (STDT) and Local District Councils.


**Melin, M. (2005).** "Putting the dirt back in" - an investigation of step dancing in Scotland. Master of Arts in Ethnochoreology Dissertation, University of Limerick. [https://limerick.academia.edu/MatsMelin/Theses]

**Melin, M. (2008).** 'Putting the Dirt Back In’ - an investigation into step dancing in Scotland. *North Atlantic Fiddle Convention.* Memorial University, St John’s, Newfoundland, Canada.

Other independent researchers:

**Leask, Maria (Shetland 1994-) see Melin and STDT.**


**Newton, M. S. (2009).** *Warriors of the word : the world of the Scottish Highlanders.* Edinburgh, Birlinn.


**Newton, M. S. (2013).** "‘Dànsair air ùrlar-déile thu’: Gaelic evidence about dance from the mid-17th to late-18th century Highlands.” *International Review of Scottish Studies* 38: 49-78.

Apart from Leask, Moore and Scott all the researchers above are from and based outside of Scotland.
A number of researchers mention Scottish dance in their work, including Dr Margaret Bennett (Scotland) and Dr Heather Sparling (Canada) but their general focus in their output may be on general folklore or song as in these two examples.

**Scottish Traditions of Dance Trust (STDT) research projects:**

Karin Ingram conducted research in the Borders area 1998-2001 on behalf of the STDT. Do not know of any published findings from this time.

Before 1995 Joyce Anderson ran a STDT project in Fife but I am not aware of any published findings from this or if research took place. The STDT Archive may hold answers to this.

- **Fife** (ca 1994) – Joyce Anderson
- **Shetland** (1995-6) Mats Melin and Maria Leask (research)
- **Angus** (1998-2001) – Mats Melin (research)
- **Borders** (1998-2000) – Karin Ingram (research)
- **Perth and Kinross** (2002-3) Heather Benes-McGadie & Mats Melin (research)
  Stirling (2004) from this period onwards the Trust seems to have focused on teaching, workshops and choreography activities while research seems to have taken less prominence. An Archivist was for a period hired to catalogue the STDT archive material. List of items is currently unavailable.
  Little, if any material has been published. M Melin is currently working on making some of his own material available.

**Reports:**


**Melin, M** (2001) see above

  [http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2010/12/03105348/1]

**Archives:**
RSCDS Headquarters, Edinburgh
STDT Archive – I storage in an unknown location.
Melin, Mats (Personal archive in Ireland)
Metherell, Chris (Personal archive in England)
Her D.Phil. research was published by Tuckwell Press as The Scottish Exile Community in the Netherlands, 1660–1690 (2004). She has also contributed to the New Dictionary of National Biography (2004) and is currently a civil servant with the Scottish Executive. Dr Alexia Grosjean is Research Fellow in the University of St Andrews Scottish Parliament Project. Her main publications include: An Unofficial Alliance: Scotland and Sweden 1569–1654 (2003) and a coauthored volume with Steve Murdoch, Belhelvie: A Millennium of History (2001). She has also published numerous a Scottish traditions have their roots deep-set in history, and the Highland Games have been around for over a thousand years, perhaps even longer. Today’s games are at the same time, both similar and dissimilar, from the original Clan contests which are at the roots of these games. As Scots emigrated around the world they took their Scottish traditions and customs with them, and there are Highland Games held in countries all around the world, including countries as diverse as the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Brazil, Japan.. and more. Highland Games, Isle of Skye, 1934. Holiday Traditions. Scotland has some holidays that are unique to the country, as well as some that are shared with the rest of the world. This holiday is celebrated with traditional Scottish food, music, and dancing. St. Andrew’s Day is the start of the winter season, which also includes the holidays of Christmas, Boxing Day, Hogmanay and Burns Night. Hogmanay. Hogmanay means New Year’s Eve and is more important to some Scottish people than even Christmas. As having a dirty house at midnight on Hogmanay is considered bad luck, it is common to spend the day cleaning. At midnight, people stand in a circle, cross their arms, hold hands with the people next to them and sing Auld Lang Syne, an original Scottish song. Another The Scottish solo dance tradition is peppered with stories attached to specific dances which appear in Highland Games and performance programmes, and today commonly also on the internet. Many of these stories suggest an origin for a dance anchored in a distant past, but they may also form some level of meaning-making. Are they even true? In many cases not at all. It could be. The Scottish solo dance tradition is peppered with stories attached to specific dances which appear in Highland Games and performance programmes, and today commonly also on the internet. These, range in content from: The sword dance more. The Scottish solo dance tradition is peppered with stories attached to specific dances which appear in Highland Games and performance programmes, and today commonly also on the internet. These, range in content from: The sword dance more.