

The Fiddle Tradition of the Shetland Isles
COOKE

CAMBRIDGE STUDIES IN
ETHNOMUSICOLOGY

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the Shetland Isles

PETER COOKE

Cambridge Studies in Ethnomusicology

General Editor: John Blacking

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This is the first comprehensive description of one of the liveliest fiddle-playing traditions in the world, based on Peter Cooke's intensive fieldwork among the Shetland musicians during the period 1970–80.

The opening chapters provide both historical background and biographical sketches of contemporary fiddlers. Dr Cooke then examines the fiddlers' repertory and considers the musical style and performance style of the different communities of fiddlers throughout the islands, tracing the stages by which a distinctive Nordic musical tradition has become more and more Scottish.

In the closing chapters Dr Cooke looks at the changes which have taken place in recent years, assessing the function and aesthetics of the tradition and, most importantly, discusses how it is that such a high proportion of menfolk in the islands become competent on what many music educators would class as a difficult instrument.

There are numerous illustrations and music examples in the text and an accompanying cassette provides extracts from contemporary performance.

Besides being of great value to scholars in the field of ethnomusicology the book also provides a useful case study for students and will appeal to all those who have a general interest in the life and culture of the Shetland Isles.

Cambridge Studies in Ethnomusicology

General Editor: John Blacking

Ethnomusicological research has shown that there are many different ingredients in musical systems. The core of this series will therefore be studies of the logics of different musics, analysed in the contexts of the societies in which they were composed and performed. The books will address specific problems related to potential musical ability and practice, such as how music is integrated with dance, theatre and the visual arts, how children develop musical perception and skills in different cultures and how musical activities affect the acquisition of other skills. Musical transcriptions will be included, sometimes introducing indigenous systems of notation. Cassettes will accompany most books.

Bonnie C. Wade, *Khyal*

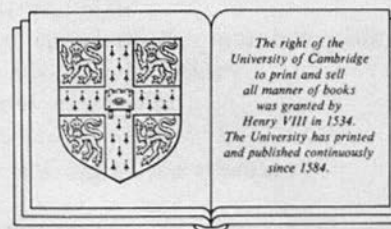
Regula Burckhardt Qureshi, *Sound, Context and Meaning in the Qawwali*

The Fiddle Tradition of the Shetland Isles

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Preface

One of my first steps on appointment to a research position at the School of Scottish Studies was to survey the contents of the School's tape archives in order to identify those areas of Scotland which had been least fully researched by earlier colleagues. Three areas came to notice: the Borders, the central urban belt and the Shetland Isles. In contrast with the Gaelic speaking areas of the western isles, the northern isles had received little attention. The School's own field-workers had paid just two visits to the islands around 1954 to carry out some general sampling of the oral tradition there, but the Shetland Folk Society, notably in the person of Dr Tom Anderson, had been carrying out some research in its own territory and Tom Anderson had already supplied the School with copies of his early recordings. These recordings alone were enough to stimulate my interest in the instrumental tradition of the Shetlands.

I had already become aware of the reputation of the Shetlanders for their lively musical culture in which the playing of the violin (or fiddle as it is mostly called in Shetland; the terms are used synonymously throughout this book) was a most important part. It seemed too that the means of transmission was primarily aural/oral and, having recently returned from a four-year sojourn in East Africa where vital and thriving musical traditions also survived entirely without the aid of musical literacy, I was interested to examine how this might work in the Shetland Isles, and furthermore to consider the possible value that a study of such a tradition might have for music education in this country.

This book, then, is an attempt at an ethnographic account of the fiddle tradition of the Shetland Isles. The first fieldwork visit was made in May 1970 and others followed during the next twelve years with an average of two field trips of approximately a fortnight each year to the islands. Ideally the fieldwork should have been compressed into two or three visits culminating in a long stay in the islands, but the demands of other work and other commitments made this impossible. Early visits were made with the purpose of sampling the repertory of a variety of fiddlers on tape, and on several occasions I added 8 mm and 16 mm cine film to the photographic record I had also been making. (These films have been copied onto video-cassette and archived at the School of Scottish Studies.) Later visits tended to focus on selected musicians, as I further explored their repertoires and the contextual background to their music-making. The fact that fieldwork continued up to March 1982 has meant that this study is also one of

musical change in Shetland, the essential features of which will be discussed in later chapters.

Not all islands in the Shetland archipelago were visited, nor all parts of the Mainland, so to some degree this survey is incomplete in geographical extent. For instance the island of Fair Isle was omitted — for reasons of weather on those two occasions when I had been able to include it in my schedule — though I later visited a member of the Stout family, who came from that island, and was satisfied from the answers given to my questions that I would find nothing strikingly different there from the situation existing elsewhere. Foula, some 40 miles to the west of Mainland Shetland, was also not visited (the population in 1979 was only 36), but I was able to sample the style and repertory of the island from Andrew Gear, a native of Foula now teaching at Mid Yell school and living at Gutcher in North Yell. He also kindly provided me with recordings of his father's fiddling. Papa Stour, a small island off the coast of Walls (west Mainland) was also not visited (population 38, 1970). This was the former home of the famous Papa Stour sword dance, a dance-drama in which the 'Seven Champions of Christendom' are introduced in turn to speak their part and then perform a danced routine similar to sword dances in England. But the main source of folkloric information on life in Papa Stour is the gifted musician and story-teller George P. S. Peterson, who was brought up in Papa Stour, and who learned and now teaches the Papa Stour sword dance as well as knowing the fiddle music repertory of the island. He moved from the island to complete his education and now teaches at Brae school nearby on the Mainland. I was able to visit him on several occasions to fill in details of the fiddle music tradition as it existed in earlier times on Papa Stour, for the island is now very depopulated and the native population is diluted considerably with incomers to the island.

Any work of music ethnography should endeavour to answer at least the following questions: Who are the music-makers and their audiences? When is music performed and why? What music is performed? How is it composed and performed? How are the performing skills learned and what aesthetic criteria are used by performers and listeners? These may seem obvious questions and simple to ask, but it has not proved so simple to answer them. Not all these questions can be answered in discrete sections; some are — for example the discussion of the repertory — but the answers to others only emerge in passing in the accounts given to me by musicians and others during my interviews with them.

As will be seen, little has been written about the fiddle tradition of the Shetland Isles and an early bibliographical search yielded little more than passing comments, apart from some small collections of fiddle tunes and notes in the Shetland Folk Society's books and a pair of essays by the pioneer collector Patrick Shuldham-Shaw, who visited the Shetland Isles during the period 1947–52 (see Shuldham-Shaw, 1947, 1962). Other writings are discussed in chapter 1. My efforts, therefore, were concentrated on the collection of information in the field and in any case it was the living tradition that I wished to study. This has yielded some 194

tapes of recorded information, including approximately 60 hours of musical performance. All recordings have been indexed and deposited in the archives of the School of Scottish Studies, where they are available for further study. Photographs and films have also been placed in the School's archives.

Note on music transcriptions and on Shetland orthography

The type of transcription varies according to the immediate purpose of the example. I have used standard western musical notation for most of the music examples but have introduced small modifications where necessary. In each case, unless they are quotations from other publications, the transcription is of the particular performance referred to, though not always is it an exact transcription of what was sounded: for instance when a tune is played more than once any hesitation at the opening is not shown, it being better to include what is heard on the repeat. The use of an upward pointing arrow (\uparrow) indicates that the note shown really sounds about a quarter tone sharp, a downward arrow indicates the converse. Where this happens consistently throughout a piece, these sharper or flatter notes are shown in the 'key signature' by the signs \sharp and \flat . Often I make no attempt to show the slight lengthening and shortening of notes which are written as semiquavers. However where necessary I add an extra bar (f) through the tail of a note to show that it is shorter than the value given and that the extra time is taken up by its neighbour. This is a convenient way of suggesting the equivalent of 'notes inégales', where the time proportion within pairs of semiquavers is not equally divided, nor is it so unequal that 'dotting and tailing' would be an appropriate way of showing the difference, for the proportion may often be 5:3, 4:3, 5:2 etc within the time-span of a quaver. Where I make a detailed discussion of such infra-rhythmic organisation, I have resorted to machine transcriptions made with the aid of the technical staff of the Linguistics Department of this university (music examples 4, 41, 58 and 59). 'Key signatures' should be regarded as little more than an indication of which notes are to be read as flat or sharp and not as a pointer to which is the tonic note of a melody.

I have used no particular convention in transcribing and quoting from numerous conversations held with Shetlanders during fieldwork. The dialect varies considerably from one district to the next and often I found that in any case some of my informants attempted to abandon their broader native dialect when they thought I might not understand their normal speech. I have, however, attempted to preserve some of the flavour of their dialect while anglicizing some words for reasons of comprehension. Captions to the music examples give in order the following information where available: title, type, area, performer, collector and (where applicable) the archive tape number and the transcriber. The collector and transcriber, however, are only named in those cases where it is not the author.

Note on sound recordings and the cassette example tape

In the archives of the School of Scottish Studies all original field recordings are archived with a numbering system that begins with the prefix SA followed by the year of the recording and then its unique tape number. Such reference numbers are used throughout this book. An example tape selected from the transcribed items is available on a cassette published simultaneously with the book. The items are for the most part copies of original field recordings made by the author since 1970 — such recordings were made on a Nagra III recorder (whole-track — mono, at 19 cm.p.s.) using Sennheiser microphones. A few examples date from before this time, most of them being copies of recordings made by Dr Tom Anderson during his own researches and presented to the School. He was a pioneer in the collection of traditional music in Shetland and this is an appropriate place to record our thanks for his unselfish and inspiring work over the years and for the generous help and hospitality which he gave to the School's fieldworkers whenever they visited Shetland.

Acknowledgements

Any work of ethnography such as this depends from outset to completion on the generous co-operation and hospitality of the 'folk' themselves. They are too numerous to list here, though the names of many of them appear within the chapters of this work. But to all I am grateful for the readiness with which they shared their knowledge with me and for their kindly hospitality. One of the greatest joys of this kind of research lies in the friendships one makes and in the greater awareness of oneself which one gains from such contacts.

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The following music examples are reproduced by kind permission of the English Folk Dance and Song Society — exx. 14, 22, 30, 31 and 32; exx. 4, 17, 18, 25, 28, 30, 46 and four reels in ex. 47 — by the Shetland Folk Society, Lerwick; twelve traditional reels from Haand Me Doon Da Fiddle by permission of the Department of Continuing Education, University of Stirling; and exx. 2, 29, 37 and 40 and other verbal material are transcribed from field recordings by kind permission of Dr Tom Anderson. I am grateful also to Dr Margaret MacKay, Dr Alan Bruford and Mrs Eliza Storey, past and present colleagues at the School of Scottish Studies, for the use of excerpts from recordings made during their field-work in Shetland.

John Hoseason's manuscript is reproduced in Appendix 5, and in parts elsewhere, by permission of the Director of the National Museums of Scotland.

I should also like to express my thanks to Professor Michael Tilmouth for his sustained interest and his skilful advice over the many years that this part-time study has extended. Lastly my thanks go to my wife, Diana, for her patient support and encouragement and for her expert typing of early drafts.

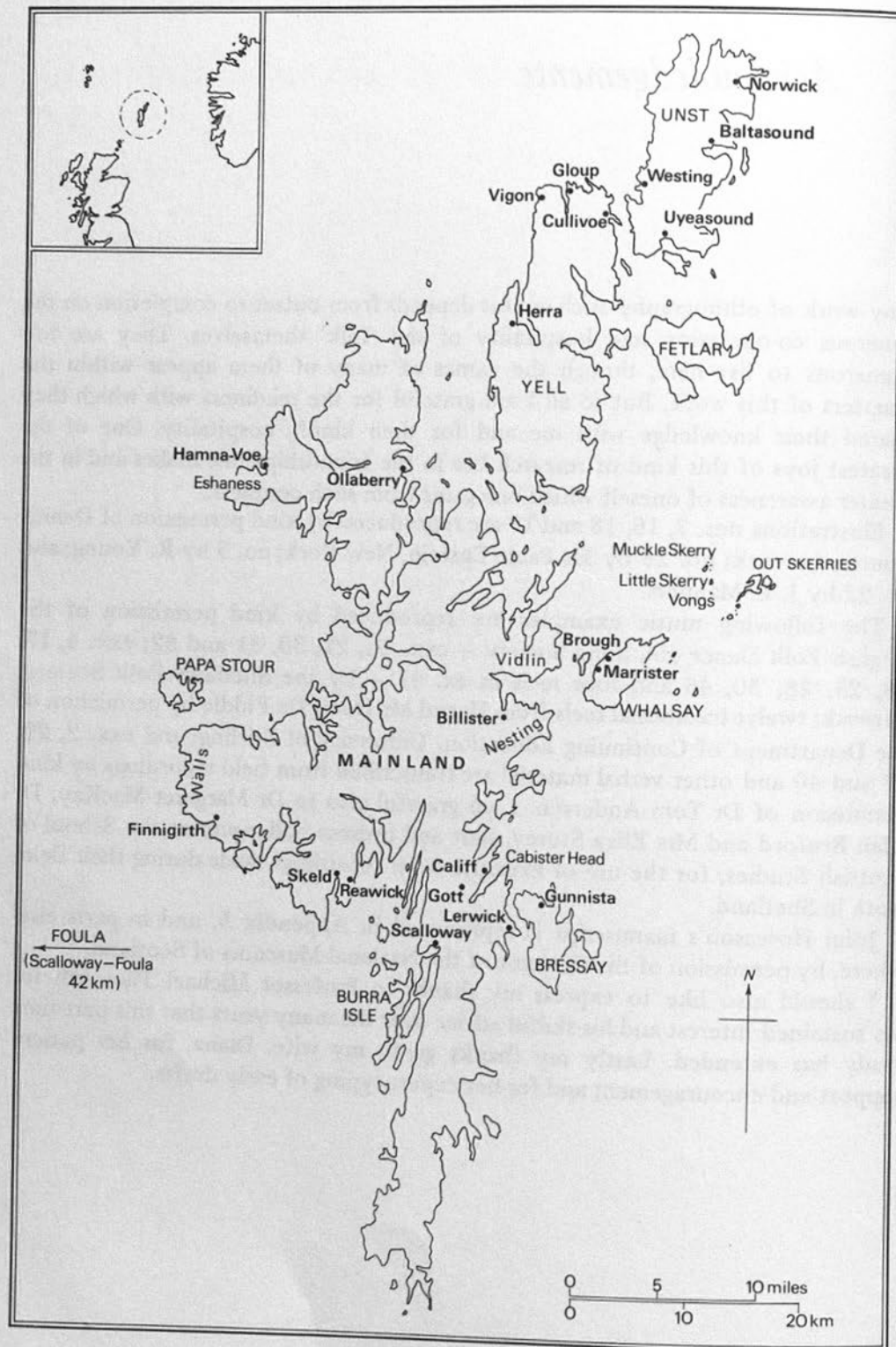
1 *Ethnographic and historical background*

Shetlanders are much addicted to fiddling

The Shetland islands, the most northerly region of the British Isles, number well over 100 isles and islets lying mostly north of the latitude 60° north and totalling approximately 551 square miles. Situated equidistantly between Bergen, Aberdeen and the Faroes, they are separated from the British mainland by some 105 miles of strongly tidal and often stormy seas. Before 1469 the islands formed part of a Scandinavian empire but they were pawned to Scotland in 1469 as part of a marriage arrangement involving Princess Margaret of Norway. Strong commercial and political links were maintained with Norway for at least another 200 years during which time a dialect of Anglo-Scots slowly replaced the older Norse tongue which, however, Low found still in use in more remote parts of Shetland during his visit in 1774. Thus if we take both geography and history into consideration it is not surprising that today many Shetlanders consider themselves more Scandinavian than British — or for that matter Scottish — a point of no mean political significance at times when Scots strive for greater political and economic autonomy for their country. Today the more obvious Scandinavian traits are to be observed in place names, in many features of dialect and, so far as this book is concerned, in the structure and style of certain older fiddle tunes, where one can find many features similar to those in the repertory of the *hardingfele* (Hardanger fiddle), that beautiful refinement of the violin in use in western and southern Norway.

The islands are low-lying and virtually treeless — eroded by glaciation in earlier times and by the attacks of winds, sea and rain since then. Much of the land is of generally poor agricultural quality, some of it blanketed in deep deposits of peat, and even in the more fertile areas the short growing season, coupled with the damaging effects of salt spray carried inland by frequent gales, tends to make agriculture a precarious and often profitless occupation. On the other hand, glacial erosion has produced numerous deep voes (long, narrow inlets) and many small islets and bays which combine to provide an abundance of small, sheltered harbours so necessary to Shetland's major industry, fishing. Though the waters around Shetland have been a plentiful source of fish, the average Shetlander — though often a brave seaman — has only recently been in a position to acquire wealth from his efforts. In earlier times the problem has been not only the distance from European markets but also the Shetlanders' dependence on entrepreneurs.

When the violin was first introduced to Shetland — which may have been



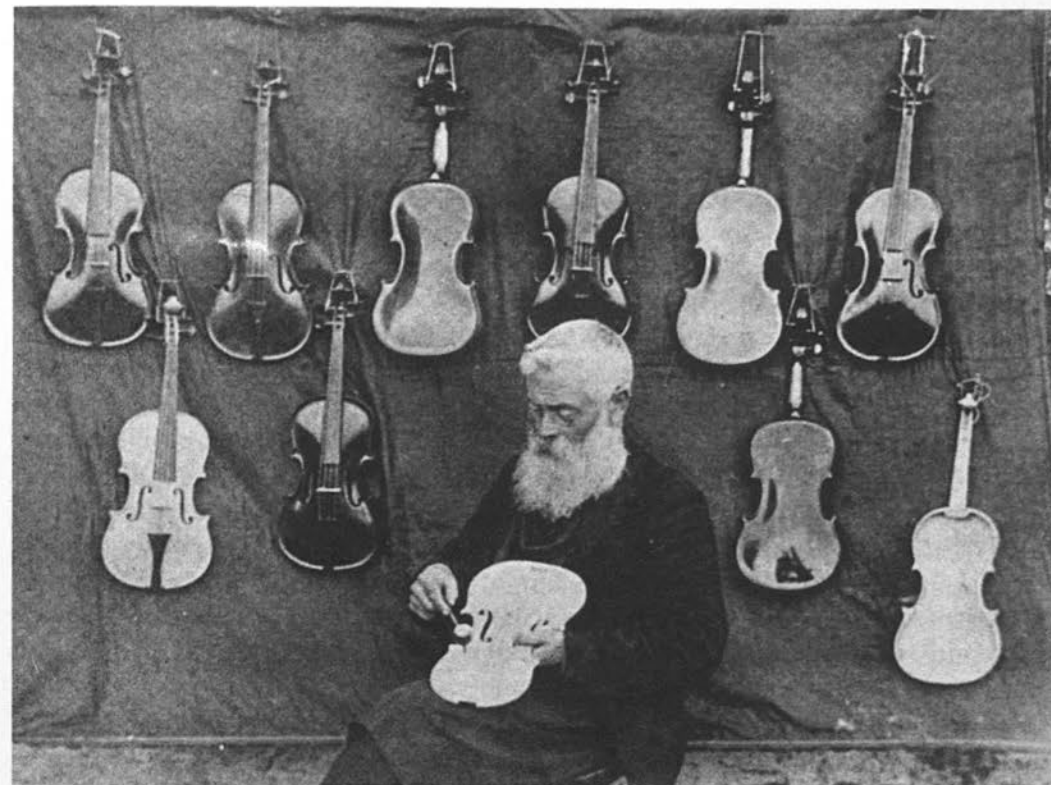
The Shetland Isles

around the year 1700 – the Shetland economy was undergoing a change. Before that time Shetlanders divided their time between farming and inshore fishing, which latter was practised mainly on a small scale during the period from May to August. Their surplus fish was sold to Hanseatic traders who came each year to re-open their stone-built trading booths and to supervise the salting and wind-drying of the fish. It is quite possible that these were the men initially responsible for the introduction of the violin. By 1712, however, a tax on salt brought this trading to an effective end, allowing Scottish merchants, mostly the local lairds, to fill the vacuum. The Shetland crofter found himself now having to fish for the landowner to pay rents for his land and, at the same time, having to go farther offshore to find the fish, which had become scarce inshore. This is the period of what is known as the Haf fishery. During the period from 20 May to 12 August each year the able-bodied males formed themselves into fishing teams of six, to man the large open sixereens (six-oared vessels) in which they set off whenever weather permitted for fishing grounds (Hafs) up to 40 miles from land.

They lived during this time in huts at shore stations conveniently sited to enable the men to reach the fishing grounds in the shortest possible time. As a result the stations were often at some distance from their own crofts, so that their womenfolk were expected to take over management of the crofts during this period. C.A. Goodlad in his detailed survey of the Shetland fishing industry estimates that, on average, about 18 visits were made to the Haf during each season and we may surmise that the men must have spent many days and nights ashore in semi-idleness waiting for better weather. This situation has some parallels with the bothy system of north-east Scotland, where young men were housed communally in farm bothies for their six-month period of fee'd labour. Hamish Henderson, in an essay on living conditions in the farm bothies, described them as amounting to a 'sort of folksong incubator' (see his disc notes in *Scottish Tradition 1: Bothy Ballads – Music from the North-East*, TNGM109, London, 1971) and it is possible that in the same kind of way the fishing huts at the shore stations also served as forcing houses for an instrumental music tradition in Shetland – not forgetting a lively song tradition, with sea ballads and shanties featuring prominently in it, and story-telling.

What little we know of the social life of Shetlanders during the 18th and early 19th centuries comes from travellers' accounts and from reports submitted as part of the Statistical Account of Scotland, and there is a good deal of variety in these accounts depending on the different experiences of the writers. Most, however, comment on the extremely hospitable nature of the Shetland peasant-fishermen of the time, a trait which clearly has persisted to the present, judging by the fieldwork experiences of this writer.

In the Statistical Account for the parish of Delting, compiled during 1791–9, is the remark 'the people are not disposed to industry: for which they cannot however be much blamed'. In contrast, George Low, who toured Shetland in 1774, obtained a different account of social life from a minister in Unst:



1 The Rev. J. Watson

Diversions obtain only in the winter and consist in dancing on some stated days about and after Christmas, when they meet in considerable numbers, men and women, and divert themselves in playing cards, etc. until the night is well spent. (Low, p. 163)

He makes no mention of musical instruments, but mentions however that in the island of Foula (one of the most isolated and hence probably conservative of the whole archipelago) at least three kinds of poetry were still recited or sung in the old Norn language: the Ballad or Romance, a long excerpt of one being quoted; the Visick or 'Vysie or Vyse, now commonly sung to dancers'; and the 'simple song' (Lowe, p. 107). But, judging by the attitudes of some 19th-century churchmen to fiddle music and to dancing throughout Scotland, it is possible that few ministers would choose to mention the fiddle or even be likely to see one, except at weddings. The Rev. J. Watson of South Yell was a notable late 19th-century exception. His hobby was making violins (see Plate 1) and I have met with several of his instruments. They are of excellent craftsmanship but are a trifle thin-walled and so lose their voice after a short period of playing.

In the Statistical Account for the same island 20 years later one finds:

Music and dancing are favourite amusements especially in winter. Many of the common people play with skill upon the violin. Gin is the spiritous liquor most generally in use; and although there are no alehouses, is often drunk by the lower classes in too great quantities.

(Reid Tait, 1925, p. 44)

From the several early 19th-century accounts a general picture emerges of a hard-working fishing and crofting peasantry eking out a bare subsistence from the dual labour of fishing and managing a small croft – for it suited the lairds to divide up crofts into almost useless small parcels so that the menfolk were forced to turn increasingly to fishing (for him) in order to survive. The period of the *vår* (spring) was a time of great activity, ploughing, sowing and tending crops and cutting winter fuel out on the peat moor. It was followed by the long days of a short summer spent fishing at the 'far Haf' using the boats and tackle belonging to the laird; there was then a rush to gather in the small harvest before the dark wild days of winter set in. These seasonal changes were usually marked with *foys* (feasts or celebrations) of one kind or another (see Saxby, 1915) and for a month following the winter solstice – a period known as the 'Helli-days of Yule' – the gloom of winter would be kept at bay with as much feasting and jollification, including dancing, as could be afforded.

Sir Arthur Edmondstone's *View of the Ancient and Present State of the Zetland Isles*, 1809, contains one of the most detailed and sympathetic accounts of the habits and attitudes of Shetlanders in the early 19th century. It is worth quoting part of it at length, particularly since so many later writers seem to have relied on it as a source for their own writings. After commenting on the general 'social and hospitable nature of the Shetlanders and of the fondness of the men for spirits and snuff, and the women for drinking tea', he continues:

Music is very generally cultivated, as an amusement, by the Zetlanders of all ranks, and some of them have at different times attained no inconsiderable degree of excellence in several of its departments. Many of the sexes have voices capable of great modulation, but they are seldom improved; and among the peasantry almost one in ten can play on the violin. There are still a few native airs to be met with in some parts of the country, which may be considered peculiar, and very much resemble the wild and plaintive strain of the Norwegian music. Before violins were introduced, the musicians performed on an instrument called a *gue*, which appears to have had some similarity to the violin, but had only two strings of horse hair, and was played upon in the same manner as a violoncello.

Although the Scottish be the prevailing music of the country the native musicians insensibly impart to it a character of their own, the smoothness and simplicity of which they seem to have derived from their Scandinavian ancestors, and which no intercourse with other countries has yet been able altogether to efface. Of those, however, who have had opportunities of cultivating, scientifically, the stile of the Scottish reel, a few has displayed a taste and originality in composition not inferior to the most celebrated musicians of Scotland. Dancing is a favourite amusement with the youth of both sexes, but they display neither the grace nor the agility of the Highlanders. The frequency of meeting for this purpose has been much abridged, since the late severe restrictions on the brewing of ale, and the abolition of smuggling. The former has been felt as a serious inconvenience, but the latter has had a beneficial effect on their moral character.

(Edmondstone, 1809, pp. 59–61)

In this passage one finds the first mention of what appears to have been the indigenous forerunner of the violin – the *gue*. Virtually nothing is known about this instrument. Otto Andersson considered the *gue* to have been a type of bowed lyre and a counterpart of the Welsh *crwth* or the early English *crowd*, to mention just two of the now obsolete north-European lyres (Andersson, 1956). He appeared to have discounted Edmondstone's footnote (p. 60) which compared the *gue* to

the two-stringed Icelandic *fiðla* – a rectangular bowed box-zither. Unfortunately no other accounts mention the *gue* other than those which are clearly based on Edmondstone's report (e.g. Hibbert and Tudor); but the quite recent independent investigations of E. Y. Arima and M. Einarsson (1976) into the distribution of the 'Eskimo violin' (known as the *tautiruut*) appear to support Edmondstone. This instrument is also a bowed box-zither similar to the *fiðla*, but its limited distribution in areas around the old established posts of the Hudson's Bay Trading Company suggest it was introduced not by Icelanders, but by seamen from Orkney and Shetland serving in the Company's ships.

In Shetland it appears likely therefore that the violin was rapidly absorbed into a pre-existing string-playing tradition. Few violins need to have been made locally, for there were direct trading links not only with the Hanseatic traders, but also with the crews and traders on board the Dutch herring fleets which visited Shetland waters each season throughout the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries. Furthermore, during years of poor fishing, there was a good deal of temporary migration – Shetland men choosing to enlist for a period in the British Navy, or more often, in the mercantile marine until news came to them that the fishing had improved. Returning seamen must have brought a great many violins back with them as homecoming presents – a practice which persists down to the present day.

Early 19th-century accounts suggest that the violin (or fiddle, as it will henceforth be called) played an essential role in a number of rituals. Edmondstone is the first to mention the tradition of playing a special tune on the morning of Yule day:

Long before daylight, the fiddlers present themselves at the doors of the houses, playing a tune called the Day-Dawn, the interesting association of which thrills every soul with delight . . . This tune has long been consecrated to Yule day, and is never played on any other occasion.

(Edmondstone, 1809, pp. 66–7)

Hibbert, no doubt rewriting and enlarging on Edmondstone, printed a setting of the tune made by a Miss Kemp of Edinburgh and styled it 'an ancient Norwegian tune' (p. 253). This tune is still in circulation today, more or less in the form first noted down, it having been revived by members of the Shetland Folk Society fiddle band (see Tom Anderson and others: *The Silver Bow*, disc 12TS281, 1976). Another use for the fiddle was in the performance of sword dances which, according to J. Catton, were 'a relick of the ancient Norwegian customs' and 'frequently performed at country weddings' (1838, p. 111). But the only sword dance of which we know anything is that from the small island of Papa Stour. Hibbert was the first to describe the dance in detail and to quote in full the texts spoken by the characters, St George and his Seven Champions of Christendom (1822, p. 252). According to Hibbert, Papa Stour was the only island in the country where the sword dance was preserved, but it is possible that by Catton's time of writing (1838) a team of dancers from Papa Stour was happy to be engaged to travel outside their own island to perform at weddings. This is partly true today, for a team of boys living in Brae and trained by a local schoolmaster,

George P. S. Peterson (himself a native of Papa Stour), will often perform the sword dance on request in other areas. But in the 1830s when there were few, if any, roads to ease overland travel in Shetland, this must have been unlikely, for Papa Stour lies in a notoriously exposed position off the north-west corner of the Walls district, and sea travel from there must have been fraught with uncertainty and sometimes danger.

The third ritual at which the fiddler came to play an increasingly important part was the wedding. No other instruments are mentioned in connection with dancing in 19th-century Shetland life and the fiddler came to be regarded as something more than a mere provider of music for dancing. His part in the wedding ritual outside the dance itself will be described later in this chapter – for now it is necessary to discuss briefly the kind of dances performed.

George Low's Unst informant described one type of dance current in the 1770s as

Peculiar to themselves, in which they do not proceed from one end of the floor to the other in a figure (as in many longways country dances), nor is it after the manner of a Scotch reel; but a dozen or so form themselves into a circle, and taking each other by the hand, perform a sort of circular dance, one of the company all the while singing a Norn Visick. This was formerly their only dance but now it has almost given entire way to the reel. (Low, p. 163)

This earlier type of dance persisted into the 20th century and was known around World War I as the Aald Reel or Muckle Reel, thus distinguishing it from the more common Shetland reel. The different versions of the Aald Reel are documented and described by Joan F. and Tom M. Flett in their study *Traditional Dancing in Scotland* and a number of unusually-structured fiddle tunes associated with it have survived orally to the present day. It is possible that the fiddle gradually took over sole musical responsibility for these older dances as the Norn texts fell into disuse, but also that for a time in the 18th century fiddles were used to support the singing by providing a harmonic accompaniment, for the Muckle Reels bear little resemblance to vocal melodies. The surviving pieces for this genre will be described in more detail in chapter 3.

The earliest description of the kind of 'Scotish' reels mentioned by Edmondstone, which gradually superseded the Aald Reel, appears in an article entitled 'Shetland Marriages' in *Chambers' Journal* (10 December 1859) from an anonymous writer. Part of it runs as follows:

In this art they are wonderful proficient, for they can dance hours without intermission. A row of men occupies one side of the house from end to end, and a row of women stands opposite. The fiddler strikes up some riotous and ranting tune; the dancers begin – they skip, they frisk, they fling, they leap with the utmost agility, assuming every posture and attitude. Some lean forward, and are intent in examining the skipping and frisking of their feet; some lean backward, and have their eyes fixed on the ceiling of the house for half an hour. One man is leaning sideways, and with sidelong glance is graciously admiring the frisking of one of his feet; every one, in short, has some peculiar and original dance of his own. In these different and peculiar postures they continue, without reeling, for half an hour, thumping and pelting at it, till perspiration streams to the ground and mist ascends in clouds, or, as Burns would have said, 'till ilka body swat and reekit'. During the half hour they thus dance without reeling... Whenever they intend to reel, one of them takes the lead, and all the rest follow; or perhaps the fiddler gives intimation that it is time for them to do so by making a discordant and hideous

sound on the bass-string of his fiddle. They do not reel for half an hour, but run twice or thrice round the house, and then set to the dance again with redoubled fury. Burns must have seen something similar to the Shetland mode of dancing before he described his dance of the witches. I never fully understood or saw the force of that till I witnessed Shetland weddings.

It is difficult to accept certain parts of this description. Later accounts suggest that the dances consisted of a much more formal and regular alternation between travelling (reeling) and dancing on the spot opposite one's partner (setting), and the structures of reel tunes of the period which have survived into this century, presumably without much change, suggest that one half of the tune was used for reeling and the other half for dancing, as is the case today. However, other details in the account, such as the contrasting postures and variety of steps exhibited by the male dancers, and their energy and vigour, are still true among those island communities where the Shetland reel has not yet become obsolete.

Another newspaper account written by a Shetlander around 1875 and entitled *Recollections of a Shetland wedding (by a bridegroom's man)* describes in much greater detail a wedding said to have been held in Scousburgh district (Mainland Shetland) in 1839 when the writer was still a boy (see Appendix 1). It endorses much of the earlier description and also, as far as the Shetland reel is concerned, present-day practice. The two types of setting described in the account are the two most common styles to be found today: the first is a simple back step combined with a hop forward on the ~~other~~ ^{same} foot and is today danced particularly among younger dancers; the second, where the dancer 'gives each leg an alternate shake', is now a speciality of men native to the island of Whalsay, where it is called the 'Whalsay shuffle'.

Judging by available records, few other dances were known and practised among the ordinary Shetlanders in the mid 19th century. The Foula reel has already been mentioned as being known to Hibbert in 1822 and it is still known today, but other dances were apparently not introduced until nearer the end of the 19th century. They were probably brought in by immigrant workers who came north during the summer months each year as the herring fishing industry expanded.

In the homes of lairds it must have been slightly different. Scottish dancing masters, who made handsome livings giving instruction around the countryside of Scotland in both the big houses and the country barns, rarely made the arduous sea voyage north from Orkney or the mainland. But lairds and ministers apparently sent their children south for their education. The Rev. John Mill recorded sending his daughter to Edinburgh in 1768 to learn 'sewing and working of stockings, writing, arithmetic, dancing, Church music, etc.' (Goudie, 1889, p. 32). There were occasional dances in the laird's homes, however. Another account from *Chambers' Journal*, 'Yule Time in Shetland by an old Shetlander', which was published appropriately enough on 24 December 1881, describes a Yule night dance in the house of an Unst laird during the 1830s, as recalled by the laird's young nephew, the son of his brother, the local doctor. It is the earliest known account that identifies the fiddler, and conveys so well the esteem which



2 Bride and groom lead the dancing of a Shetland reel

has been traditionally accorded to good fiddlers in Shetland, that it is worth quoting a lengthy part of it:

But the proceedings of the day were not yet over. A number of my uncle's tenants in our neighbourhood, and their wives and sons and daughters, having been invited to a dance in the

evening, began to drop in about six o'clock. When all were assembled, a goodly company of honest fishermen, buxom matrons, stalwart lads and blithe rosy-cheeked lasses, all dressed in their Sunday best, tea and cake were handed round. Fredamen Stickle, a very prince of fiddlers, summoned from over the hill for the occasion, was elevated on a chair on the top of the dresser in the ample kitchen, my uncle's splendid Stradivarius fiddle in his hand, and dancing began. Fredamen — or Fraedie as he was familiarly called — was a born musician, and handled the bow with admirable ease, grace, and spirit. His grandfather or great-grandfather was a shipwrecked German sailor, who had married and settled in the island. Probably Fraedie's German ancestry had something to do with his remarkable musical tastes and talents. I have a vivid memory of Fraedie sitting on his elevated perch, his head thrown back, his bright light-blue eyes sparkling, and his handsome, mobile, and expressive countenance beaming with smiles of delighted excitement, while his right hand swept the strings with well-rosined bow, and his right foot beat loudly the splendid time like a drumstick. The man's spare but lithe and sinewy body seemed to be transformed into a musical machine; and the music was the most inspiring of its kind I have ever listened to. It was irresistible. It compelled the dullest and the weariest to take the floor *nolens volens*. Quadrilles, waltzes, polkas, and the like were unknown and unheard-of dances in those remote regions. But reels and strathspeys, country-dances and jigs, followed each other in quick succession until eleven o'clock. Then a substantial supper was served, concluding with some rounds of potent punch. But there never was anything approaching to what may be termed excess. 'Health and goodnight' was drunk, the invited guests dispersed, and we tumbled into bed; and so Yule day ended.

This sounds a more formal occasion than the average croft dance and one wonders too how the local tenants coped with strathspeys and country dances. Jig tunes have survived to the present day — though no record of how they were danced in earlier times has survived, apart from the dance known as the 'Shaalds o' Foula'. The few strathspeys that came north are today played and danced in the style of ordinary Shetland reels — their staccato rhythms and 'Scotch snap' having vanished — or they are performed sometimes for the Schottische dance.

The late nineteenth century

As will have already been noted, fiddle and dance traditions during the late 18th and early 19th centuries were thinly documented. Several of the sources quoted read like nostalgic memories of an earlier age and possibly contain a good deal of exaggeration. As the century goes on there appear an increasing number of these, some of them couched picturesquely in Shetland dialect. But it becomes clear that the Shetland reel, the fiddler, croft dancing and the wedding are coming increasingly to be regarded as symbols of the best aspects of Shetland social life. One frequently comes across remarks such as:

So keenly does the Shetlander relish the fiddle, that he will dance for hours without tasting anything more exhilarating than water. Yule time without a ball would have been deemed no Yule; indeed there was a ball every weeknight for twelve nights after. (Reid, 1869, p. 58)

The blind writer J. Haldane Burgess (himself a self-taught fiddler) used Shetland dialect in many of his writings (c. 1886–1916), which mostly take the form of short stories. It is difficult to evaluate them: though crammed with interesting ethnographic detail they read like a record of an idyllic rural life gone by, if it were not for the fact that in certain communities — particularly in Yell, Unst

and Fetlar – such scenes and dialect are commonplace today nearly one hundred years later. As will be seen from the accounts of fiddlers interviewed in the 1970s such scenes as pictured in the two excerpts that follow were certainly not unknown to them:

Dan Mary raise ta wirk aboot gettin' ready da supper, an Tammy took his fiddle oot a' da kyist, ta gie wis twar-three springs till da taties wis boiled. Da doctir axed him fur da 'Floors o' Edinburgh' first, an' dan fur da 'Liverpool Hornpipe'. Tammy played dem fine, bit it wis whin he cam ta da 'Sailor ower da Rofftree' 'at he warmed up till it richt. Dat wis his favourit' spring, an' he used ta go fur da back strings laek wan o'clock. He played twar tree mair, an' dan da supper wis ready, – sillocks an' taties. . .

(from 'A Nicht in Tammy Scolla's But End' in *Shetland Sketches*, 1886, p. 77)

Dan da fluir wis cleared, in cam' Jermy Tarl wi' his posh [from 'poche' or 'pochette', the French term for the slender fiddle used by dancing masters: and known in English as the Kit], an' climmed up ipun a aald kyist o' Hendry's 'at wis standin' i' da coarner. He took aff his jacket and hung ipo da back o' da shair 'at we wir pitten up ipo da kyist fur him ta sit on. Dan he set him doon, screwed his pins, an' brook inta 'Da sailor ower da roff tree' laek hoora! Faith, he cud wiggle his elbie, no een i' da hael perrishin cud come near him. 'Juist gie him a dram o' da best; pit some o' da young eens ipo da fluir for a rael aald Shetlan' reel, an' dan wait you.'

(from 'Geordie Twatt's Bridal' in *Shetland Sketches*, 1886, p. 113)

At such times Haldane Burgess seems to be gently poking fun at the Shetland fiddler, but in his poem 'Rasmie's Smaa Murr' (*Shetland News*, 5 December 1916) he produces the line, 'Da young haert laeps at da plink o da posh', which sums up very neatly the deep-rooted affection which many Shetlanders had by his time for the fiddle and for dancing. The almost Bacchanalian fervour with which Shetlanders enjoyed the Yule season had to be balanced against the precarious existence most Shetland families endured for most of the year. Hardship was with them always and tragedy often just around the corner. The year 1881 for instance was the year of 'the great gale', when ten sixereens were lost at sea and 58 men drowned. The focus of fishing activity had by then swung over to cod fishing in even more distant waters around the Faroes and Rockall, with men at sea for longer periods than before. Many others were away in the Merchant Navy, or engaged (usually in Scandinavian vessels) in the Greenland whale fishery. For these men a short period of time spent back home in Shetland was a period to be cherished and enjoyed.

There is another possible reason for this kind of writing. Many of the more highly educated literate Shetlanders either had to find employment away from Shetland (a situation which still applies, in spite of the opportunities recently offered by North Sea oil developments) or else they lived in the mushrooming port of Lerwick (which between 1850 and 1900 nearly doubled its population to become 16% of the total Shetland population). If in the 1970s the lifestyle of the Lerwegians contrasted considerably with that of their country cousins, the same is likely to have been true for the 1880s, and the writings of Burgess and others may be interpreted as the townsman's self-consciousness mixed with a nostalgia for aspects of rural life.

The most common reason for a Lerwegian to visit a country community – especially if it is one of the more inaccessible islands – is to attend the wedding

of a relative, and it is not surprising that weddings come to be among the most relished memories of country life. Several writers have attempted to describe Shetland country weddings: they include Hibbert (1822, p. 253), Reid (1869, p. 60), Haldane Burgess (1886, p. 113), Hardy (1913, p. 223) and Venables (1956, chapter 3), in addition to the 'Recollections of a Shetland Wedding' mentioned earlier and included in full as Appendix 1.

Joan and Tom Flett built up a composite view of the wedding ritual as it was until around the outbreak of World War I, using the writings cited above and interviews with a large number of informants in various parts of Shetland (1964, pp. 65–74). The writer's own fieldwork has for the most part only verified their description. Dancing to the fiddle sealed the official contract made in the bride's home several days before the wedding itself; the groom visited a fiddler to invite him formally to be principal fiddler at the wedding and usually asked him to his own last bachelor party the night before. In the days before the arrival of motor transport the fiddler led the wedding party on the march to and from the church, playing appropriate melodies (the words and tunes of which are still in circulation) and, of course, played for the dancing each night. In places where the bride was ceremonially put to bed, the fiddler was also there to play. The principal fiddler formerly received his fiddler's money at the end of a sequence of bride's reels; later, however, he was paid by the groom personally.

Though it is stressed that this is a composite view built up from the accounts of customs in several different communities, elements of which fell into disuse at various times throughout the first half of this century, it is clear that the fiddler was regarded as a key figure at weddings with his music serving as a ritual marker at key points during the course of the complete event. Because the playing for the dancing was itself 'a hard night's work' (dances usually began around 8 or 9 p.m. and could continue until 5 a.m. or later), it was the custom for other fiddlers to take turns to 'spel' the principal fiddler, and so allow the dancing to continue while he took a break from playing.

In many of the accounts the visits of guisers are mentioned. They are uninvited visitors who turn up at some stage of the festivities, usually during the dance, in disguise and under the control of a leader known variously as the skaekler or skudler (scuddler), sometimes with their own fiddler in the party. Such visiting, known as guising, also took place during the New Year revels (Cowie, 1879, p. 127). In Lerwick the custom has become institutionalized with the festival known as 'Up Helly Aa' when the majority of the menfolk of the town go out as squads of guisers to visit each and every one of the dance halls after parading around the streets carrying flaming torches and burning their 'Viking' galley.

As this brief survey of available records moves into the 20th century, we reach a time of developing interest in folklore among the educated Shetlanders. The Viking Society for Northern Research was formed in 1892 and in its journal, the *Old Lore Miscellany*, which first appeared in 1907, one finds a variety of information, mostly relating to earlier times, including some notations of Shetland

and Orkney fiddle tunes and songs. These musical excerpts will be discussed in chapter 3.

Other useful articles are Jessie Saxby's 'Foyes and Fanteens' [Feasts and Fasts], *Old Lore Miscellany*, vol. 8 (1915), p. 22, where she surveys the various feasts of the Shetland calendar, and Arthur W. Johnston's description of the Papa Stour sword dance (1912, p. 175). Comments in other books and articles merely reinforce the by now accepted notion that 'The violin has always been their favourite instrument' (W. P. Livingstone, 1947, p. 80) and Laurence Williamson of Mid Yell sums up the whole situation concisely in his folklorist note entitled 'Fiddle Springs':

Shetlanders are much addicted to fiddling. Formerly there were large numbers of fiddlers in every parish. Weddings were usually in winter and lasted three days and usually there were several fiddlers to play. The chief amusement was music and dancing and fiddlers followed them to church, striking up tunes as they went along. Rants were balls open to every comer. They were held in winter and very frequent, and on almost every one of the 24 Hely nights of Yule, and old and young wended to the spot for miles and miles around. A whole family would even shut up the house and go miles away where their relations stayed. And in the long winter evenings the fiddler would play to the children around the fire. And each Greenland ship used to carry a fiddler, sometimes a Southerner, sometimes a Shetlander, to play to the men while at work to enliven them. And sometimes the fiddlers from several ships would meet and try their skill. And I think I have heard of a Shetland fiddler competing with the Dutch from a buss or ship. No wonder that tunes are so abundant. Several of them are fairy tunes, and are likely very old; many are of Norse origin and many Scotch; and many of them must have been learned from the sources indicated above. There is even a Yaki, i.e. Eskimo tune. The tunes had usually two turns, some had more. Some had different names in different parishes.

(L. G. Johnson, 1971, p. 125)

In fact, by the outbreak of the First World War Shetland was ceasing to be a single-instrument society (pianos, guitars and melodeons had arrived on the scene) and, though the Shetlanders' zest for dancing continued unabated apart from wartime interruptions, a new repertory of dances was being introduced and the Shetland reel was losing its popularity, especially among the young men returning from the war.

One important reason was the tremendous seasonal migration of gutters, packers and coopers who came north every August to cope with the enormous harvest of herring landed around Shetland's shores not only by Shetland and Scottish fishing boats but also Dutch herring busses and even Russian vessels. In 1905, the record year for Shetland's herring fishing industry, over one million barrels of herring were landed and packed at 174 different shore stations. There were large concentrations of such stations at Lerwick; and at Baltasund (Unst) 48 stations employed over 3,000 fishermen and 2,800 shore workers (Heineberg, 1969). Many of the shore workers (gutters, packers and coopers) came from the Scottish mainland and western isles as well as from Grimsby and other places on the English coast. They lived in huts at the stations and in the evenings there was a good deal of mixing with Shetland girls who also found work there, and with the crews of the herring drifters.

Joan and Tom Flett have documented this enlargement of the dance repertory

in some detail, so it need not be repeated here — though one should add that instruments such as the concertina and melodeon found their way into the islands in the same way. One or two of the incomers actually organized dancing classes. Joan Flett records for example a Mr Wiseman of Fraserburgh, who visited Uyeasound as a cooper and taught local youngsters free of charge, and that a professional dancing master, Ewan Clayton of Elgin, regularly visited Lerwick during this period and even journeyed to Uyeasound and Baltasound during 1911–13 when he discovered that there were community halls in those places (personal communication, 1978).

The building of such halls in many rural areas had a profound effect on the dancing habits of Shetlanders and on the role of fiddlers. For one thing, wedding celebrations could move from the croft to the halls, which latter could accommodate far more guests for both feasting and dancing. Village 'rants' and concerts and foyes were also now possible in the halls and under these conditions the single, unaccompanied fiddler could not produce enough sound for the dancers. Pianos came to be used to provide a rhythmic vamp and other available instruments were pressed into service — melodeons and (later) accordions being found much more suitable for the volume of sound needed. The larger floor space not only permitted more than one three-couple set to take the floor for Shetland reels, but also provided room for longways dances, round-the-room waltzes and square-set quadrilles, which would have been impossible to perform properly in the confines of the croft houses. So the fiddlers' repertory was quickly expanded. Finally, the provision of halls meant that dancing sessions tended to become more formal occasions and there was a decline in the frequency of informal croft dancing where the 'hoose fiddler' had been a much valued contributor to evening entertainment.

But we have now reached the period of living memory of many of the fiddlers visited during my own fieldwork, and the more recent history is best told through the words of these informants themselves, many of whom were boys just too young to serve in World War I.

2 *Recent history and biographical sketches of living fiddlers*

The previous chapter has provided a very generalized picture of Shetland life up to World War I and of the place of the fiddle, virtually the sole musical instrument played for entertainment in those islands. Such generalizations need to be qualified, for as Joan and Tom Flett pointed out in the introductory paragraphs to their chapter on dancing in Shetland (1964, chapter 3, pp. 59ff):

Before 1914, the lack of good roads on the islands and the relative difficulty of transport by sea in winter tended to make the social life in each crofting township more or less self-contained, and in consequence there were considerable variations in social customs from one township to another.

Later I will attempt to show that local variations, which the Fletts emphasized 'were greater in Shetland than in most other regions of Scotland', were reflected in the playing styles of fiddlers if one also allows for a varying degree of idiosyncrasy in the playing of each fiddler. Hence it seems sensible to take the biographies of individual fiddlers in turn at the risk of creating a rather confused picture overall: it is hoped that such confusion will be no more than a reflection of the different experiences of the fiddlers and of the differences between the communities they represent.

When I first undertook fieldwork in Shetland in 1970, early enquiries led me to the better-known, more skilful fiddlers, but it soon became apparent that, collectively, they represented only the apex of a pyramid consisting of countless men and a very few women who could play the fiddle to some standard or other. For as I moved around Shetland, finding lodgings usually in private homes, I rarely stayed in a house which did not have one or more fiddles (usually hanging from a nail on a parlour wall) and where the man of the house did not admit sooner or later to playing a little himself. It seems that virtually all men earlier this century attempted to acquire some skill on the instrument. Some readily admitted 'I could make naethin' oot o' it'. Others would class themselves as 'hoose fiddlers' — good enough to play at home for their own and their family's enjoyment, who could manage 'two-three springs [tunes]' but who would be most unlikely to take their fiddle out with them when going to visit friends. At the apex of the pyramid stand the concert fiddlers who often joined 'concert parties', being prepared to travel to play solo or in ensemble at foys and regatta concerts and to play for the dances that regularly rounded off such concerts. Their repertoire as often as not included Scottish slow airs and strathspeys as well as Shetland

pieces and the compositions of James Scott Skinner, the famous Scottish fiddler-composer who was active around the early years of this century.

Between the concert fiddlers and the 'hoose' fiddler lay a wide spectrum of others. Some were regularly invited to be the leading fiddler at weddings and were expected to take their fiddles with them if they went visiting: their homes were sometimes known as 'fiddlers' hooses' and in winter months would often be visited by friends hoping for a tune and perhaps an opportunity for dancing. Other fiddlers who might be less competent for a variety of reasons might be prepared to 'spel' (relieve) the leading fiddler, so that he could take a well-earned break during what was sure to be a long night of dancing. As young men, they often took their fiddles with them when going out on a spree 'aroond da hooses' with their friends and, as older men, they might often be asked to play a tune or two when themselves receiving visits from a new generation of young men.

Each of the fiddlers discussed below fits into a different place in this fiddler spectrum and it will be seen that their own backgrounds, themselves a reflection of the community in which they lived and made music, also show a considerable degree of variety.

Mainland Shetland

Fiddlers on Mainland Shetland have had more opportunity to learn Scottish music in addition to their Shetland repertory. In Lerwick there were several teachers of violin who often gave Scottish pieces (slow airs, slow strathspeys, pipe marches etc.) to their pupils. Furthermore, Mainland fiddlers were more often able to visit Lerwick to attend the occasional concert and often had more access to gramophone records of Scottish, light classical pieces and non-indigenous dance tunes. As will be seen, for several of them the visits of men like 'Da Blin' fiddler' — George Stark of Dundee — inspired them in their own musical efforts and influenced their repertory considerably.

Bobbie Peterson

Bobbie Peterson (b. 1916) works a small farm at South Califf, Tingwall, nine miles north of Lerwick. As a young man he went to the Antarctic whaling, taking with him his father's fiddle. About his father he said:

B.P. Me faither was a fiddler but I don't think that his father could do anything.

P.C. Where would your father have picked it up then?

B.P. Oh — well he picked it up when he was very young — but then you see — he was an old whaler. He went to the Davis Straits and — that sort of thing and a lot of the tunes that he played mebbe — came fae there, Tom. He was shipwrecked at there too . . . He was born in 1886 or something, he died when he was 88 — nearly 89.

T.A. [T.A. = Tom Anderson] And did any o' the rest of his family play?

- B.P. Yes Tom . . . both his brothers played but not much; that little that they never were heard playing — but they could turn a tune for their own amusement.
- P.C. And he used to take his fiddle with him to sea?
- B.P. Oh he — yes — he took his fiddle to sea yes, and he played at the weddings and went you keen — not all over Shetland, but quite a bit away — and the weddings was two or three days at that time. Playing — and just the fiddle, no vampin' . . . And I mind me working there with a tractor and them showing me the old house — the remains, and the man saying 'this was where dee faither sat up in that corner' and, he says, 'yackin at the fiddle' he says, 'for three solid nights'. (SA/1970/277/12)
- That's me faither's fiddle and his uncle before him. And he was a ship's captain and he carried it to sea — and she was back and forwards — he sailed to the States all the time, and Canada.
- P.C. Now did he have to work the ropes or was he just there as a fiddler?
- B.P. Oh no, no, he was just a deck hand, what we call a whaler.
- P.C. Did he get any special privileges though because he was the one with the tunes?
- B.P. No, no, no. But he carried the fiddle there, and of course there might be more fiddlers as him, just the same as when we were going to the whaling there were some good fiddlers — the like of Jacky Laurenson and his late brother, Bob. You see they were crack fiddlers — good fiddlers, and they would play and everybody played a tune and although they were good fiddlers they were just as keen to hear the like of me playing a tune — that couldna look at it you see. Well, there it was. Everybody — some likit to hear you playing and some likit to hear the next een playing. And this was how it was. (SA/1970/278/1)
- P.C. Did he ever tell you much about fiddling on board?
- B.P. No, he just used to speak about it having a sort of, you ken — in the mess room, playing, among themselves. Different men played, you see, there were so many different men on the whaler.
- P.C. Would they all be Shetlanders?
- B.P. Oh no, no, no, only some Shetlanders. A lot fae Dundee and around that quarter.
- P.C. And any from, say, England and Norway?
- B.P. Oh yes, yes. Different anes.
- P.C. Did he ever pick up any Norwegian tunes?
- B.P. No, but he picked up a lot of — fae further afield, you know, like away up when they were in the Davis Straits — and around that quarter you see. They used to — you ken — get tunes. A lot of them they reckon come, came fae there.
- P.C. Are there any that you mind?
- B.P. Ah, I can't say. As I say, he had so many, you understand, and of course this same tune that I played first — this Wullafjord, I think that was picked up . . . I never heard me father, you see, ever playing what we call a chord — he would never end up playing a chord.
- P.C. Did they use the open strings a lot?
- B.P. Oh a lot — and very often — the soond o' the two like. [plays d''—d' and g'—g and illustrates their use in 'The Flowers of Edinburgh'] . . . but no much chords . . . (SA/1970/279/4)
- P.C. How many fiddlers would your father play with?
- B.P. Oh — sometimes it was just the one fiddler. I remember being at the fiddle — being at a wedding in Gott Hall . . . and that was just the one fiddler — and he just died a few weeks ago. Abernethy fae — Tresta, just there sitting — and he wasna much of a fiddler, I doot he didna hae much o' a bow mind you. There were a big crowd and he was just there himself and he stuck at it oot the whole night. (SA/1970/279/179)
- About his family's Christmas morning tradition, he said:
- B.P. He [his father] took out the bottle first — everybody got a dram.
- T.A. What time would this have been?
- B.P. Oh, this would have been about half past five in the morning. Very early . . . and everybody got a dram, and he took a good one for himself, and then he would go out and do his morning work you keen, and cleared up everything. Then he would come — and the

- breakfast would be ready — and then he would just tak the fiddle. A few drams was in him already you see, and he was feeling like a tune and he would start. Everybody would come in — go around with the bottle you see, it was just — oh the fiddle every time.
- T.A. This would be the neighbours coming?
- B.P. The neighbours coming, yes — around with the bottle.
- P.C. Where did he keep the fiddle did you say?
- B.P. Just lying on top o' the bed — a bed in the kitchen — which every old Shetland house had. What we call a box bed. And he kept it lying on the top — the bed-clothes you know. The bed was made up properly — and then the fiddle lay there like that. And he just took a hold like that and just started to play. And some would come in and have a good drink and there'd be a dance on the floor — and more drams — and this went on the whole day and then it was done at night when the work was finished. Then she went steady right through till maybe two o'clock the next morning. And if there was a dance in the Hall then of course the young ones went, but there was always an old sailor comin' in along. And I'm telling you, we were playing, and then next day there were a very great drought on — everybody was crabbit!
- B.P. Every note that they played, the auld Shetland dancers had a step for it — you see — every one. And it was played slowly — and every note, Peter, had a slight different variation of the step. You mind that, the old Shetland reel. [He demonstrates on his fiddle and then plays faster.] You couldna possibly dance tae that. (SA/1974/2/6)
- B.P. Like my case, my father was a good old Shetland fiddler, played at the dances, played at the weddings, just himself you keen, just solo. And it was a hard job, mind you, just playing. But then there was so much noise and that, they reckoned for a while, sometimes he just used to reach the bow ower, keep the bow goin' — he never did the fingers at all. Then as soon as the heukin died down then he stuck in til her again.
- J.C. That's where this lang drawn bow on the back strings come fae. Oh yes. [J.C. = Jim Craigie, an Orkneyman living in Shetland, a good friend of Bobbie Peterson and an excellent fiddler himself.] (SA/1977/120/)
- He received no formal instruction in fiddling himself.
- B.P. Well, I started with sitting watching me faither playing, just sitting watching. Then I just used to tak it you ken and just sit and try . . . I pickit it up you keen, a bit. But I was very very keen, and awfu' quick o' the ear you keen. If I'd heard Jim playin' a tune, some o' yon fine tunes he's played tonight, tomorrow it would come to me mind, and I would get it man, it would be there just the same as he was playing into me lug. Quick as lightning. And I would go to the Haa, and the dancing would be goin' on, and the heukin' and the birlin' [spinning around with one's partner] and the carry-on you keen, and that barn would be goin' up. And man, maybe next day, I'll be maybe workin in the mud or in the hay you keen, and I'll maybe lie down on this hay, wi' a fine summer day. Heavens! You could hear that fiddle going' as if it'd been there. And you would lie and listen and that tune would just float — and you would have it. (SA/1977/120/6)
- B.P. I was very interested in it, Peter . . . I'd've gone miles . . . I was keen you see. When in wir young days that the Blin' Fiddler would come here — I think I told you all that afore — he would come up here, old Stark . . . an' then somebody would say, 'Boy, the Blin' Fiddler's come'. Well then, the first Saturday night, the boy next door to me, we're off to the toon — walkit there you see — and, we'll be goin' in ower and you'll hear the strains o' old George. He'll be playing something, wi' Frankie Duncan [a guitarist] . . . And I and, then of course, a group around him. And dan these days Lerwick in the summer time was packed you keen. O heavens! You could hardly move wi' folk. And he would have a great audience, you see, he was a good fiddler.
- P.C. Did he ever play for dancing?
- B.P. He did. He come up here and stayed some winters and played all the time. Goin' tae as many dances as du wanted, that he could manage. Oh yes.
- P.C. But they were more interested in listening?
- B.P. Yes you, well he stood in the street you see, and then he passed around the hat. Every Saturday night then we wer fur the toon . . . to listen to Stark playing. Ah well, it was



3 Da Blin' Fiddler, George Stark, with his accompanist

good. And then he would play yon up at the Market Cross. And then he would go to the head of the pier and then he would go over half along the street . . . and when he was leaving, the boat was turning and going, then he was playing 'Glen Grant' — standing right on the stern . . . Oh there were just fishermen . . . just the general public — for Shetland was just keen on music you see, and the fiddler appealed very much to them . . . and he made a lot o' money. (SA/1977/121/8)

P.C. When you first were learning then you would play it at your father's speed, you'd sit down one on either side of the fireplace?

B.P. Exactly. And then you see when we went to start to go to the Hall and we heard Tom [Anderson] comin' oot and giving right fiddling, we got completely sickened with this sort of thing — well it was no use at all . . . he was playing Skinner stuff you see and all these — lovely tunes — 'High Level', 'Banks Hornpipe' — and man we thought this was great . . . We had no more use for this old stuff at all — we were keen on pickin' up tunes that we were hearing Tom playing you see. (SA/1977/277/4)

P.C. Have you played at weddings too?

B.P. Yes, yes . . . But when we were playing at weddings it was more or less, you ken, a bit of a band playing — tae the dance after a wedding. (SA/1970/277/12)

B.P. And I remember playing at a wedding in Walls, just a cottage wedding, and there were some people at it from Voe direction up in a place they call Collafirth. And, through the night — this fellow come up to me and he says 'Could I play a Shetland reel?' 'Well' I says, 'Yes, what tune would you like?' 'Well' he says, 'any of the old ones . . . preferably "Soldiers' Joy".' And of course they announced the Shetland reel, that man and quite a few of them went up. Oh man, beautiful, beautiful dancers.

P.C. Did you have someone to vamp then?

B.P. Yes, there were an accordion there and they had a guitar — there were quite a few of those you see — two boys from Quarff that were pretty good guitarists — and accordion. And I was playing the fiddle. And of course, they come here sometimes and we'll have a tune.

P.C. Did you find that the accordion drowns the fiddle?

B.P. Oh I do, yes, it does, Peter. It helps a bit if you get out in the front a bit and keep them at the back. It all depends on the type of player.

P.C. Were there very many other folk playing the fiddle in your father's time or would you say there were more fiddlers after his time?

B.P. There were quite a few fiddlers around. Some of them, you know . . . didna jus', as you would say, come out in the open. They played the fiddle right enough. And if they got a . . . [dram]

P.C. What you call house fiddlers?

B.P. Exactly, yes, and, if you knew they played, you'd go in. You might have a bit of enticing to do before they did play. When they started away they were good. Sometimes it took a dram or two to get them started . . . but nevertheless there were always that fiddler or two that was coming til a concert giving selections and that sort of thing. Some fiddlers is very hard to get started to play. You'll have to wait quite a while. Once they start, away they go. And yet the next man will jest take up a fiddle and do what he can and lay it by and say 'Well, that's that'. (SA/1974/2/9)

P.C. And you still play pretty often yourself?

B.P. Oh yes, play pretty often. Yes, some days at dinner time I'll take it out to go in the back kitchen and have a tune or two, you ken. Sometimes it sounds fine and other times — ach — it doesn't seem right, and you put it away: yes, doesn't seem to sound right, you think you're goin' aback instead of ahead. (SA/1970/279/3)

Bobbie Peterson has composed a number of reels himself at various times. I questioned him about one of the most recent tunes, 'Cabister Head':

P.C. How long did it take you to make that up?

B.P. The tune? Well it took it mebbe took a couple o' weeks and then you see . . . me son-in-law hed a smaa recorder you see . . . then I got him to tak it doon because you see, no' having the music, I was apt to forget it you see.

- P.C. But how did you start off?
 B.P. Oh, I just started off — just with the first half, just try — just sitting' in the hoose just trying; and I thinks t'm'self I'll need to try and mak a tune, and see if I can mak some-thing. And I got going, and then I started on the second half you see. And it's a bit of a job if you don't know the music [notation] you see, because, as I say, you're apt to get it fine, 'n you say — 'Well that's a lovely ending now' — and you canna mind it, you see, next time. But I got going, and when I heard it on the tape you see, then I — I hed it.
 P.C. Now once you heard it on the tape, did you change it around a bit?
 B.P. A bit, yes, I altered it a bit.
 P.C. And it took you about —
 B.P. Oh, it took a few weeks to work on it you see.
 P.C. Each day, you did a bit?
 B.P. Oh no, just a day noo an' again, just when I hed time. (SA/1970/278/7)
 P.C. What about New Year's Day?
 B.P. Oh, it was just the same — next week come again. But mind you, we didn't have Christmas you know on the twenty-fifth. Oh no — it was on the fifth January.
 T.A. It was the fifth?
 B.P. Aye.
 T.A. It was the sixth in oor place.
 B.P. Fifth in Tingwall and it was fae Gott and sooth — you know where Gott is — was New Christmas you see. Fae Gott and north it was Old Christmas. And you see, what we did, we went guising and all that, and we took up a hand with them when they did Christmas and then when it came to our one, they came north you see. It was all right . . .
 P.C. Did the fiddlers play any special tunes for Guisers?
 B.P. Oh no, it just — a tune that they could dance to . . . old Shetland tunes you see — that was all that they knew to play. (SA/1970/278/1)

Fiddling today

Bobbie Peterson's daughters learned violin for a time from a Lerwick music teacher, Mr Geoffrey Di Mercardo, but a recent change has been the introduction of traditional fiddle instruction in local authority schools.

- P.C. And what about the fiddle today now in Shetland?
 B.P. Well, I would say, I would think Jim, will you agree, fiddlin' is comin' up.
 J.C. The fiddlers are comin' up this last while, mainly owing to Tommy [Anderson].
 B.P. This bairns is all being taught. (SA/1977/120/6)

Robert Bairnson (b. 1906)

A crofter at Dunrossness (south Mainland) and a local bard, he has been a member of the Shetland Folk Society fiddle band since 1960 but does not attend often, partly because of the distance between his home and Lerwick. Until joining the band he knew only Scottish tunes and the 'Shaalds o' Foula'. One reason for the absence of a more clearly indigenous repertory must have been religious attitudes in his district; another, that he was taught more or less formally by a local minister, learning notation at the same time.

J.T. Reid recorded that:

About the year 1840, a period of religious revival in Shetland, the Yule festivities began to

decline, the fiddle was proscribed, dancing prohibited, music (with the exception of hymn tunes) and all external manifestations of merriment, discouraged. There is an opinion in many country parishes, particularly among the old people, that every kind of music not sacred is sinful. (1869, p. 57)

Dunrossness was, apparently, one of the parishes severely affected by this attitude. Here Mr Bairnson recounts to the writer and to Tom Anderson a story from his grandmother's time:

- R.B. Old Nicol Sinclair was a fiddler . . . and he was just called Nicky, Nicky o' Voe, and he was a fiddler. Noo, they hed their rants down there, but hit was looked upon very . . . looked doon upon this rants.
 T.A. This was because of religion?
 R.B. Religion, yes, an' I can tell thee a story about that . . . There were one night that my uncle Robbie, he died in Australia, but he was a young fellow then, and my Auntie Katie, they were goin' to Nicky's rant . . . Anyway, old Robbie [his grandfather] he got some kind of a, something, he knew that there was something on, and this twa was goin' tae this rant, he was an elder o' the Kirk, a religious man. An' he never said a word, but he got a piece of paper, and he wrote on this paper, printed on this paper 'Shun evil companions' and he stuck it up on the [chimney] breast. Never was a word said, but they never göd to the rant. Mebbe they'd may have been afore, but they never göd after this.
 Anybody that was going tae Nicky's rants was going tae the devil. A rant was a dance.
 Mrs R.B. Well, we used to — the term 'rant' if we were just goin' oot to have some fun, we gaein' oot fir a rant.
 R.B. They stopped 'rants' long ago, before my time, I don't remember it. We used to have bits of dances here. Now there's nothing. (SA/1971/210/5)

In another amusing tale the fiddler won a temporary victory over the anti-dancing zealots using the fiddle itself to rescue what should have been a joyful social event from disaster.

- R.B. Now I'll tell you another story — an' I heard this — now me old grandmother, that's her picture o' her sittin' up there — that was my 'Ness grandmother — died within Yell in 1901 or something. Yonder was a very broad-minded old body, and I mind I've heard she were a fine old wife, boy — many a fun wi' her. And she likit to tell a funny story too. Anyhow, when my Uncle Willie married in 1892, he married a Baptist and she was very religious . . . and they hed their reception — they were likely married in the old Kirk, I don't know — but they had the reception here in wir old barn as is out yonder at the back. And dere were a sort of a mixed crowd o' family, half Baptists and half 'hobos' and what laek — something like mesel. Well now, there were to be no music and no dancing at this wedding.
 T.A. What were there going to be then?
 R.B. Well, jest du wait a bit. Er, in the old barn they were playin' a game 'at they called 'Kissin' ower da Windlin' [the Scottish name for this game is 'Bab at the bowster' or 'Bubbity bolster'. Now I'll tell you how this, now I never saw this done, but I've heard it explained be that old wife an' me father an' all. Me father thought this wes a great joke as well, I think. He was a bit broad-minded himself. Anyhow, a 'windlin', a bundle o' straw, was laid down on the barn floor, an' all the guests were sitten aroond on battens an' barrels around the barn, an', er, one was picked on to go doon first, an' he went doon on his knees on this windlin, maybe leaning on the windlin, I never saw it done. And he looked aroond the congregation, and some lass. And he pointed at her, and she hed to come doon and kneel at the ether side of the windlin, and they kissed ower the windlin — and the fellow that was doon first, he got up and the lass look aroond and she called on some fellow and he came down, and he kissed her ower da windlin and then she got up and the next fellow, he's here

and he points at the next one, next lass, and so on. This would be carried on for a while until they were getting tired o' it, and then they were hangin' aroond and there were no music, there were nothing; and old — my old grandmother yonder — she tow't that this was nae goin' to go on at all. Now there were a Johnny Jamieson that stayed over here at the village. My grandmother kent he hed a fiddle and kent he played some. She says 'Lord bless dee boy, gae hame and get dee fiddle and see if du can get some life with in this.' So he göd and he got up within the kiln door and he's playin' awa and they're dancin' Shetland Reels or something. But the Baptists, they cleared oot. Lord kens whar dey göd, I don't know. Then, this was cairried on for a while and then Johnny Jamieson either hed to ging oot for a little refreshment, or for a pee, I don't know; but he laid doon the fiddle and the music stopped. And then the Baptists cam in. Now, there was a Jimmy Irvine at lived down here at South Voe, just doon past this old hoose. He could play none on the fiddle, but when he was aware o' the Baptists comin' in, he got the fiddle and he scrüttit the bow ower the strings and made a deevil of a noise and the Baptists cleared oot again. Boy — I'm heard this telt be me old grandmother im me father's hoose and it's true as can be. And dan he says 'Keep wir hoose boys, keep wir hoose' and he scrüttit the bow ower da strings and oot göd the Baptists. And then when the music stoppit they come in again.

T.A. What objection did they have to the fiddle?

R.B. Well, du kens . . . the fiddle was the devil's instrument and so was the cairds — cos Robbie Burns speaks aboot that 'He drinks and swears an' plays at cairds but steals awa . . .'

(SA/1972/200/2)

Like many other fiddlers, Robert Bairnson remembers vividly the sight of fiddlers playing at a dance inspiring him to take up the fiddle.

R.B. The 2nd of January 1920 was a social evening and that was the first dance that ever was been at the Boddam Hall . . . and I was a member of this — a young fellow. There was a lot o' wir young fellows — goin' tae the school still — that was attending this . . . Well, I'd never been at anything there afore, and they were goin' at this dancing, I'd never seen any dancing. But, boy, dis fiddles upon da platform, I stood there, open mouthed, just watchin'. I wasna carin' about the dancing at all.

P.C. What dances were they dancing?

R.B. Oh, it was the Quadrilles and the Lancers, and mebbe Bostons and mebbe Shetland reels, yea.

(SA/1972/200/7)

A friend repaired his father's broken fiddle:

R.B. He was goin' to sea in a sixereen — and he got her fae — the boy that was on the sixereen, Geordie Black I think his name was. Well me father, he could play a tune or twa, but he was what we called 'semi-tummer', you could ken the tune but she wasn't accurate. Well, he was laid this fiddle by — he was lyin' up in the loft, all gone to pieces. Bobbie, he went up there, he got the fiddle doon and he got it glued together. But what a mess he made [o' it]. I didna ken nae better then, but I only kent afterward, it was all glue claackit everywhere.

(SA/1971/200/7)

Robbie Bairnson was about ten then and first learned 'Soldiers' Joy' from a friend and after that several tunes from his mother's playing on the 'peerie accordion' (concertina). They included 'Sailor Ower the Rough [or Roof] Trees' (the Shetland name for the Scottish strathspey 'Lady Mary Ramsay', played as a reel: see Ex. 60), 'The Wind that Shakes the Barley', 'My Love, She's but a Lassie Yet', and 'One, Two, Three-a-leery' (a children's play song). He bought *Honeyman's Tutor*, but 'could make nothing of it' until the local minister began teaching violin. He began winter classes in 1931 and taught for three years. At one time the class contained 32 fiddler novices:

R.B. And fiddles was come oot under beds, and from aff o' lofts, that never wis been played on, and they couldna bide in tune . . . it was all gut strings. And they were crackin' aff



4 Jock Youngclaus with a fiddle of his own making

and goin' wi a bang. He hed to get them aa tuned and they could never bide in tune. The fiddles was na right tuned, but that was all right and Mrs Anderson she hed the blackboard, and she drew the five lines and used that. You started off wi' that, an' we got a peerie tutor, it was very good — Allan's Violin Tutor or something . . . This göd on the whole winter once that we got the kind o' idea of music into wir heids. Well, I got it into me heid better 'n I could do it somehow. I understood the thing and yet I wasn't very good at it. I kent what it meant but yet I couldna do it — but that happens wi' some kind o' things. (SA/1972/200/4)

Despite the fact that the minister was teaching pieces like Handel's 'Largo' and Rubinstein's 'Melody in F', some of the local population were not pleased with this teaching, for religious objections to the fiddle still persisted.

Mr Bairnson is a skilled joiner and in his spare time he makes and repairs fiddles. He travels infrequently into Lerwick (25 miles north) to play with other fiddlers because winter nights are so rough.

Tom Anderson

Tom Anderson occupies a uniquely important place in Shetland fiddling for a number of reasons. He was born in 1910 into a crofter-fisherman family in Eshaness (north Mainland), a family which was very active musically. He inherited a fiddle from an uncle when he was three and began to learn from another uncle (his mother's brother, Willie) at the age of eight. While this uncle played much Scottish music for dancing, his grandfather, who lived nearby at Hamnavoe, played a traditional Shetland repertory. Tom remembers being taken to his first dance during World War I at the age of four or five and even earlier remembers his mother dancing in his croft house when a party of guisers arrived one Yuletide. His mother played the organ at the local church. His father played the button-key melodeon and, like the rest of his family, had learned to use sol-fa notation for use in the local kirk. All his brothers and sisters learned to play instruments and also to read staff notation, though, like Tom, they received little if any formal instruction. He recalls his uncle giving him one lesson in notation:

He gave me a page out of *Kerr's First [Collection of Merry Melodies . . . for the violin]* and he drew five lines and he says 'Your second space up is your open string and you can work in your fingering between that.' And I started from there and I sat upstairs and I worked it out and I couldn't work out the time and my mother would come up and say 'There's something wrong there, it can't be like that' and she'd say 'Now you have to learn timing.' That's how I started to read — the only lessons I ever had. (SA/1979/174)

Like most country boys he had only an elementary schooling, leaving at the age of fourteen and taking a £1 share in an open fishing boat for two winter fishing seasons while doing odd jobs in the summer, carting peats for crofters. By that time he was already playing for dances and years later, when his younger brothers and sisters were old enough, he formed a family band consisting of two fiddles (himself and a brother), guitar (another brother), auto-harp (a sister), accordion (a friend) and home-made drums (the sister's boy friend). Their reper-

tory included one-steps, the Fetlar Foxtrot, old-time waltzes (including the St Bernards and the Velita), polkas, Schottisches, Scotch reels, Shetland reels, The Lancers, eightsome reels and the Military Two-Step.

In 1926 he took a correspondence course in radio and soon after set up a small business building radios. He also invested in a silent 35mm film projector, built an amplifier, adapted an old gramophone and travelled the countryside showing silent films and bringing on his dance band for the second half of each evening's entertainment. He had, as a result, ample opportunity to hear Scottish and other music from radio and records and his band was obviously popular — 'I remember playing at 32 weddings one winter.'

World War II brought him into contact with many other styles of music when he joined the R.A.F. and became a radar mechanic, and it was perhaps a shock to find out that the repertory so popular in his own islands was considered out of date outside Shetland and that the fiddle was rarely to be found in urban dance bands.

T.A. Then I made up my mind in India that if I got back I would concentrate on Shetland music until I collected [died].

P.C. Why did you make up your mind about it?

T.A. Well, 'cos I heard the native music in India and I thought well, if I ever get back I'm not going to bother about this dance-band jazz. I'm going to start seeing about my own music. I saw that if they [Indians] had this thing going why shouldn't I collect ours. Well, I'd learned a lot of Shetland tunes but when I came back, it was '46, and I started to rehabilitate myself and the very first night home they came and asked me to come and play at a dance. And I hadn't touched the fiddle for a while — but I went over and I played. (SA/1979/174)

A friendship with Patrick Shuldham-Shaw, who visited Shetland during the late 1940s, had a powerful effect on him:

And then I really got obsessed with it, the Folk Society'd been formed then [1946] and I formed a young band to do Scottish dance music to bring them up to radio standard and at the same time I was collecting Shetland music and I was playing for a Scottish dance class — in Lerwick — but I was still collecting Shetland music and that was the major thing, so it was a very busy time — and the Insurance Company wasn't too pleased at times, when I wasn't giving them enough time. (SA/1979/174)

This involvement with the Scottish idiom caused him to study the intricacies of strathspey bowing seriously and he made several visits to Aberdeen to get advice from expert fiddlers there, such as Hector MacAndrew, Bill Hardie and John Murdoch Henderson. Like several other able Mainland Shetland fiddlers, Tom looked for technical challenges from the Scottish fiddle tradition, but at no time did he receive instruction other than

One or two tips in the Services from classical violinists, 'cos I was always roped into small orchestras — that's all it was. I wasn't really interested to be quite frank. I lost interest in classics after the war completely when I went into Scottish an' Shetland. (SA/1979/174)

The war had stimulated other men to take an interest in their indigenous traditions. The Shetland Folk Society had been formed by the time Tom Anderson returned home and in 1947 he was asked to lead the small folk fiddle band which began rehearsing. Its repertory consisted of traditional Shetland tunes collected from various areas, and many of them have since been published by the Folk



5 Tom Anderson and 'The Young Shetland Players'

Society in their folk books and in *Da Mirrie Dancers*. This band only rarely played for dances.

Tom Anderson's later career is better known. He founded the Shetland Fiddlers' Society in 1960 (the so-called Forty Fiddlers) and on his partial retirement from insurance work (1971) he became the first official teacher of traditional fiddling in Shetland schools. In 1977 he was awarded the M.B.E. for his services to Shetland music and in 1981 was further recognized with an honorary doctorate from the University of Stirling. His teaching work, though now shared with other fiddlers, continues with unabated vigour: early in 1983 he formed a new performing group of about a dozen young pupils calling themselves Shetland's Young Heritage who give frequent public performances and are dedicated to traditional styles of playing.

Tom Anderson's playing is featured on several records: *Shetland Folk Fiddling, volume 1: The Silver Bow* (Topic 12TS 281, 1976); *Shetland Folk Fiddling, volume 2* (Topic 12TS 379, 1978); and *Shetland Fiddlers* (LED 2052, 1971). In a co-operative effort with Pam Swing, an American music student, he produced *Haand Me Doon da Fiddle*, a collection of 55 tunes published in print and on cassette by the University of Stirling's Centre for Continuing Education. The tunes are mostly of Shetland origin and contain a few of the 600 tunes he himself



6 Tom Anderson with the Shetland Folk Society band

has composed as well as one or two melodies composed by school children. A further collection of 98 tunes appeared in 1983; entitled *Ringin' Strings: Traditional Shetland Music and Dance*, it includes 58 of his own compositions (*Shetland Times*, Lerwick).

Other Mainland fiddlers whom the writer has recorded include the late Henry Thomson and 'old' Willie Hunter. Both were older friends of Tom Anderson. Henry Thomson came from Vidlin but spent most of his life as a grocer in Ollaberry. Willie Hunter, by profession a blacksmith, was from Nesting and, like Tom Anderson, was one of the earliest members of the Shetland Folk Society band. Neither man was so eclectic musically as Tom Anderson, though, like other less well-known Mainland fiddlers, they would have had the chance to hear a good deal more Scottish fiddling, both live and on record, than fiddlers from other islands. They would have met and heard Geordie Stark for instance. Yet both are said to have preserved distinct regional styles representative of Vidlin and Nesting respectively, though it might be more accurate to say that their styles have since come to be regarded as representative of those districts (see chapter 4).

Henry Thomson pointed to the problem of identifying regional as opposed to idiosyncratic styles with his recollection of the period immediately following World War I:

H.T. Du sees, in Vidlin there were a hell of a lot of fiddlers. Every second chap played it. You jest played a set of Quadrilles — laid it doon — to hell wi' it. The next chap was there — tak it up — that many fiddlers.

P.C. Did they all play in the same way, or did they all have different styles?

H.T. Naw, they were all different styles, you know.

(SA/1970/259/11)

Today Vidlin is so depopulated that one can no longer research the problem there and the same is true of Nesting.

Henry Thomson also pointed out the hiatus in the fiddle tradition and the rapid change caused by World War I. Older fiddlers made way for younger men and boys with a more modern fiddle hold and with a 'better' technique altogether:

H.T. During the First World War there were no dances or weddings. Nothing.

T.A. Everybody was away of course.

H.T. So we were, as du would say, practising hame — and when the war was finished there were a lot of big weddings ... and of course we were young starters d'sees. And then they'd come and say — one wife said — 'Come on, play this' — we were shy — a bit shy du knowest. [But] we were comin' up. When we started of course, there were nae mair o' them [old fiddlers] at all.

(SA/1970/259/11)



7 Tom Anderson recording 'Old Willie Hunter'



8 'Having a tune' with Henry Thomson

Whalsay

The island of Whalsay is a mere eight square miles in area, but despite its size, its population (997 in 1976) is almost equal to that of Unst or Yell, the latter being ten times the size of Whalsay. Whalsay is today a prosperous fishing community with a fine natural harbour and more modern fishing vessels than any other community, including Lerwick. This prosperity is, however, comparatively recent and many older inhabitants can recall tales of harder days when their ancestors were forced to fish for the laird — the Bruce family, which was established at Symbister House.

Judging by tune titles in the repertoire of Whalsay fiddlers, there has been considerable influence from Scotland, probably before the present century, for many of these tunes belong to an 18th-century Scottish repertoire which is now rarely heard on the Scottish mainland. One Whalsay inhabitant, the late Robert Irvine (who was the local Registrar), believed the tunes may have been introduced by one John Newbigging, who came with his family to Whalsay some time prior to the 1861 census as farm grieve for the laird. He was apparently a good fiddler and some of the Whalsay repertoire is associated with his name (as Robert Irvine put it: 'that was one of old Bigging's tunes'). However, Newbigging, who came from the village of Broughton, near Peebles, may have been only one of a suc-

cession of Scots who came to work for the Bruces and brought Scottish music with them.

The island has had a lively fiddle playing tradition until comparatively recently, when accordions and guitars have become highly popular with younger men and boys. In 1977 only one boy was learning to play the fiddle and there were no young men or boys who could play. Of the two men of working age who played for dances and at concerts, one was an incomer. However, many older men played, mostly for their own amusement, and earlier this century a number of fiddlers were highly esteemed by the Whalsay people. Patrick Shuldham-Shaw, who visited the island in 1947, heard, but could not record, the playing of Magnus Hutchison of Brough, who was regarded by many as the best Whalsay fiddler of this century.

Both Shuldham-Shaw and Tom Anderson recorded the playing of John Irvine, or 'Old Glibey' as he was affectionately known, who was the most popular fiddler in the island during the 1950s. John Irvine was also interviewed fairly extensively by Joan and Tom Flett and it is from him that they obtained many of the details of the part ritually played by fiddlers at weddings in Whalsay. John Irvine was evidently a popular fiddler at weddings, which in Whalsay have been, and still are, major events, often involving everyone in the island. A comparison of his playing with that of a younger contemporary, Andrew Poleson, whose



9 Andrew Poleson

repertory and style I explored in depth during my research, suggests that Whalsay's social integration but comparative isolation from other communities produced a clearly recognizable Whalsay style of playing, which was shared by older fiddlers in spite of inevitable personal differences.

Among contemporaries of Andrew Poleson, whose playing I listened to and recorded, were John Anderson (Hillend), Robert D. Anderson (Symbister), William Williamson (Marrister) and William Robertson and John Hughson (both of Isbister). Common ingredients in their style are clearly recognizable though Andrew Poleson has illustrated small differences in playing style between his own and that of 'the Isbister fiddlers' whose small community lives on the east coast of the island, barely two miles across the moor from Symbister and Brough.

Andrew Poleson (d. 1979)

Andrew was born in Brough, a township two miles north of the harbour township of Symbister. He began to attempt the fiddle by the time he was twelve:

A.P. When I started first to play, I had the fiddle tuned to doh, me, soh, doh — and it didn't correspond you see — my ear told me that I was wrong. (SA/1971/269)

For the first few years he played on a borrowed fiddle, learning tunes from his mother and absorbing style and technique informally from a number of active fiddlers.

A.P. She used to sing, you see, and we used to dance, just young boys — and I think I picked them up faster when I was younger than I probably would do now, and I knew a lot of them and I never lost them.

P.C. And what about the style of playing you have?

A.P. Well, I picked that off me uncle and there's one fellow lost in the war that I used to stand and listen to him playing — Willie Hutchison, up there at Creadie Knowe. I could stand out behind the yard — what we called the yard dykes — and listen, if it was a fine night, listen to him playing you see. And I can remember William Aitchison, that was the old man, playing, and there was a man lived next door to us that used to play, Johnnie Williamson. So I always had the chance of learning . . . But I startit to learn how to play up at Houll beside the young chap by the name of Laurie Houston. He was very poor — you known — deformed. And we used to go up there, more so to keep him company and sometimes I would go up in the dark loft, sit and play in the darkness to myself so as I could annoy nobody . . . (SA/1971/217/14)

A.P. I knew a lot of tunes, just myself like, I could sing them, and I knew when I was wrong and when I was going on right.

P.C. Were they all dancing tunes?

A.P. Oh, they were all dancing tunes yes. (SA/1971/269/3)

For most Whalsay fiddlers, and indeed fiddlers in other communities, the time they were first invited to play at a dance was regarded as a milestone in their progress as, for example, in the case of Gilbert Hutchison, a native of Whalsay and one of the two active fiddlers mentioned earlier:

G.H. There were nae accordions or nothing then.

P.C. When did you first play?

G.H. The first wedding I played at I was fifteen. I mind Willie in here axing me to play, and I never kent whether I could play or [not].

P.C. Were you the only fiddler?

G.H. Well I was the kind o'...

P.C. The chief fiddler?

G.H. I don't know about the chief ane but I was the ane that was supposed to, kind of, keep it going you see.

P.C. And the others gave you relief every now and then?

G.H. Yes. It was just fiddles then — there were never any pianos there to accompany them. (SA/1971/215/8)
It was a hard night's work.

In the case of John Irvine (d. 1960s), Andrew Poleson's older contemporary, the first money he ever earned was for playing at a dance and this was before he reached school-leaving age (William Hutchison, SA/1972/100).

Andrew Poleson was between eighteen and twenty years old before he first played at a dance.

A.P. It would have been at the Isbister Hall I suppose, at a wedding, about the first time that ever I tried to play there for dancing. Sometimes they were stuck for fiddlers, then they, they would come and take a hold of you and you couldn't get out, you didn't want to play but they seized you and hauled you and — they only had the one fiddler you see probably, and nobody there could play so that's how I started. (SA/1971/217)

He played frequently after that and recalls:

A.P. I got as high as thirty bob at one time. Playing at the weddings, among the last lot of big weddings that I played at. (SA/1972/100)

Other instruments were introduced during Andrew's playing years but nevertheless the people of Whalsay have a special affection for the fiddle:

A.P. Well it was aa the fiddle and there's nothing that they approved o' like the fiddle. The fiddle was the only instrument that was in the island when I was young. There was nothing else, no guitars — no — but there might ha been accordion, a button-key, the old type accordion. There was none of this piano accordions in them days, no such thing, it was jest a fiddle. If there was a wedding on there was just one or two chaps 'at could play the fiddle, the one helped the other. They would take it hour about, like on the fiddle like. It was all Shetland reels generally. (SA/1977/104/16)

In 1979 the Whalsay dance-band consisted of several accordions and melodeons, guitars, fiddle and drums. However, even then at dances when a Shetland reel was announced, a fiddler was asked to play for it, usually either Gilbert Hutchison or Alan Tulloch, or both. The others took a rest. Andrew Poleson is convinced (like many) that a band isn't complete without a fiddle:

A.P. In that big hall [at Symbister] you would'na hear one fiddle — no, you would'na hear it at all, too much noise. [At a wedding] it's always bands.

P.C. And is there always a fiddler in the band?

A.P. Aye. A band is never as it should be withoot the fiddle... Its always best with having the fiddle like.

P.C. Yes. Even though you cannot hear it for the accordions?

A.P. Oh, you can always hear the fiddle — you'll hear the fiddle whatever band you're listening to, even on the wireless or the television. You can always pick out the fiddle from your ear like.

P.C. Yes.

A.P. Yea — there's nothing like [the fiddle]... (SA/1977/104/16)

This view is shared by others throughout the Shetland Isles.

Andrew Poleson was no longer playing for dancing when I began my fieldwork, but was always a welcome member of the team of 'cooks' who were invited to prepare food for 'big' weddings. This team consisted of older men who were



10 'The cooks' house', Whalsay

happy to miss the wedding dance itself and who met in the 'cooks' house' — a room on the end of John Irvine's family crofthouse at Saltness, close to Symbister Hall where wedding dances were held — to chop up and boil mutton, which was then taken up to the Hall throughout the night as the dancers ate in shifts. The cooks were well supplied with alcoholic refreshment and by the time the last cauldron of meat had been taken up (usually around 2.30 a.m.) they were ready for singing and fiddling and other merriment. Andrew was often among those specially invited and of course was expected to bring his fiddle.

Alan Tulloch

Alan Tulloch is not a native of Whalsay but comes from Cullivoe in North Yell. He married a Whalsay girl and came to live at Brough in Whalsay, joining the crew of a Whalsay fishing boat. When I met him in 1978 he was captain of the 'Floris', in which Andrew Poleson's son George also had a share. He is an enthusiastic fiddler, needing little encouragement to play for listeners. His musical tastes are reflected in his long-playing record collection which ranges widely over the fiddle repertory and includes American Country and Western, French Canadian, Scottish and Shetland fiddle music. In this his tastes exemplify the diversification of interest in music amongst the younger members of Shetland society.



11 Alan Tulloch

He frequently plays with a large ad hoc band of Whalsay men and boys, which includes several accordions, melodeons, guitars, drums and piano, as well as the previously mentioned fiddler, Gilbert Hutchison (Gibbie o' Burns). The band plays for many dances held in Symbister Hall throughout the year. In spite of the varied musical instruments found in Whalsay (accordions and guitars being especially popular among the younger men) the fiddle is still preferred when Shetland reels are danced. Alan Tulloch remarked,

[When] me and Gibbie, we are playing at the weddings, we always play the Shetland reels together, and — the band just takes a back seat and puts in a bit of ... [vamp]. Well they seem to like the Shetland reels here for the fiddle, I don't know why. (SA/1977/110)

At other times he is not too happy playing with accordions except when playing with an accordionist such as Magnus Leask who 'minds the scales [keys] that are suitable for the fiddle'. Despite the fact that few younger people in Whalsay are apparently attempting to learn the fiddle (and when this was written the itinerant fiddle teacher had not yet been able to include Whalsay in his itinerary), Alan Tulloch considers that the fiddle rates highly in the affections of Whalsay people. However, as the following conversation suggests, his own style of playing of Shetland reels is not as highly valued as his playing of other

material, possibly because his playing style is so different from that of native Whalsay fiddlers.

A.T. Well, I don't know, Peter. I would rather say that the fiddle is still the favourite. Because, I wasn't out last year at the New Year's Eve dance, and Gibbie wasn't; and Georgie and his wife was, and they said that the band was good but they missed the fiddles. And we played at a wedding recently in Whalsay, and there were some strangers — people from Scalloway — oh different places. And he said he thought that the band was good because he could hear the fiddles in the background all the way. So I think young people today, they don't seem to get interested enough to learn it. But I don't know how many'll want me to — if you come in here around sometimes, mebbe second day of a wedding — 'play this, play that'. But not the Shetland reels that they want, it's this Country and Western, catchy things like that version of 'The Mason's Apron' and all different sorts of things like that, all this Country waltzes, something of this type. That seems to be the only way I can capture the [interest], well — being Whalsay it has to be something sort of unusual like. I mind one night in Whalsay I played a Scottish reel, Scottish march and Scottish strathspey — and I thought, at that time I knew I was playin' it much better than I play some of the Country and Western stuff. There were only one Scotchman that seemed to applaud for it — one of the incomers! (SA/1977/110/2)

It is clear that Alan, as a fiddle player and as an incomer, feels somewhat apart from the other men of Whalsay. The reason for this may be more than a general lack of interest in fiddling compared with other instruments such as the accordion (which is very popular in Whalsay and played to a very high standard by some men). His skilful playing of Country and Western music is probably preferred to his playing of Shetland reels simply because his style of reel playing is so unlike the traditional Whalsay style. However, he is conscious of the present contrast between his adopted island and his island of birth, Yell, which he visited recently for a wedding; and when he stayed at Moarfield in Cullivoe (home of Bobbie Jamieson, a famous local fiddler) for a whole week making music with Cullivoe friends, Moarfield was for him 'a hoose of solid fiddling'. (SA/1977/109/4).

Out Skerries

These are a small group of inhabited islands further east of Whalsay. The people of Skerries are noted for their hospitality, for the energy of their dancing and for the fact that weddings there may still last for three days and nights. However, the population is small (93 in 1976 — *Shetland in Statistics*, no. 6, April 1977), which is probably why in recent decades, although there are two or three men there who play the fiddle, a distinct Skerries repertory has not survived. Indeed the people of Skerries frequently looked on the men of Whalsay to come across and provide the music at weddings. With a small population like that of Skerries on islands with an area of less than one square mile the attitude of the Kirk to fiddling could have a considerable influence on the fiddling tradition. Robert Irvine, the registrar in Whalsay, has recorded how a Whalsay fiddler, Thomas Arthur (fl.1860s), was asked to go to Skerries to play for dancing, but on arrival there found he had left his instrument behind. At that time there was only one

playable violin in Skerries. It belonged to the missionary-schoolteacher who, if he could play, probably played classical violin music; but he disapproved of dancing and refused to lend it. Arthur had to sail back to Whalsay again to get his own fiddle. When this writer visited Skerries during 1971 there were two men, Andrew and Davy Anderson, who could play a small repertoire of well-known reels. They regarded themselves as 'hoose fiddlers' and the Skerries folk still invited the Whalsay band across for any big dance. The playing style of these few fiddlers differed slightly from that of Whalsay, the tempo being somewhat faster and there was less use of open string harmonies. The style however was equally vigorous.

Fetlar

Though it is nearly twice the area of Whalsay, Fetlar, which lies some 15 miles further north, has a population of 99 (1976), ten times smaller than that of Whalsay. This fact alone highlights the contrast (during this century) between a fishing and a crofting community, for while Fetlar is fertile and known as 'the garden of Shetland', it has no natural harbour and so can support no fishing community dependent these days on vessels too large to be safely hauled up open beaches. An abundance of Norse place names points perhaps to the slowness with which Fetlar adopted Scottish culture, and two reels, apparently indigenous to Fetlar, bear Norse-sounding names — 'Winnyadepla' and 'Hjogrovoltar'. However, a third called 'Billiaclett' (or 'Baljaclett', after a place on Ronas Hill in Mainland Shetland) turns out to be a variant of the Scottish tune 'Robbie Thompson's Smithy'. All three are known to octogenarian John Robertson, who played the fiddle for most island dances in earlier times. During his boyhood there was no Hall and major dances for weddings and other events were held in the school room. From the age of fourteen he went to play there with an uncle:

We had two fiddles and we played the same. I was taught the tunes by him at least, listened to him playing and got them that way. And we played together and you would think it was only one violin.
(SA/1974/14/13)

Unlike some areas (Whalsay and North Yell for instance), pianos were available for use at dances from the early 1920s. John Robertson enjoys playing with a piano vamp more than an accordion because

It got out the time better. Miss Carson and I used to go down to the Manse and she was damn good on the piano, you know, and it was really good, it eased me a lot you see.

(SA/1974/14/13).

John remembers playing as a sixteen-year-old for dancing classes given by a mason, John Sinclair, from Lerwick. Sinclair introduced such classes as the Britannia Waltz, Velita, Hesitation Waltz, Leathern Wheel Polka, Jacky Tar and the Barn Dance; otherwise the dance and tune repertoire is rather small and changes only slowly. The late Sonny Bruce, formerly from Unst, remembers going to Fetlar as a teenage member of a band from Unst just after the end of



12 John Robertson of Fetlar

World War II. He recalled his amusement and astonishment on an occasion when his own band were given a rest by the Fetlar musicians who then announced that the next dance would be the Fetlar Foxtrot.

It was just after the war and the Foxtrot — the modern dances had just come to Unst for the reason that the R.A.F. were there [at Saxaford radar defence station] you see. Yell didn't have it, Fetlar didn't have it as far as we knew, neither did Whalsay. There were only Lerwick and Unst and places south of the Mainland. This was the tune and the old Shetland fiddler played it like this [see Ex. 1] ... We'd been used to the R.A.F. band playing foxtrots — saxophones — everything, you know. Harold Sutherland, he looks at me and says 'There's something not right about that!' And yet the folk on the hall floor were dancing some kind of dance and keeping time to it. And it was rather a smoochy dance, because the young couples

Ex. 1 'Fetlar Foxtrot', Fetlar. Sonny Bruce (of Scalloway). SA 1977/115



were getting together you see. But how they could dance a foxtrot! . . . And I only ever heard that tune once and I never forgot it! (SA/1977/115/7)

Obviously only the name and the grosser features of the dance had been incorporated into the local dance tradition: it had been thoroughly 'Fetlarized'.

Unst

This is the most northerly island in the British Isles and, with the possible exception of Foula and Fair Isle, the most isolated of the larger islands in former days. Yet, in spite of its location, its excellent natural harbour at Baltasund made it popular as a base for cod and herring fishing and, in the case of the latter, second only in importance to Lerwick.

Jim Craigie, an Orkney man serving as a lighthouse keeper in Bressay, earlier spent four-and-a-half years as a keeper on the Muckle Flugga, the lighthouse at the northern end of Unst. He compares Unst – for its fiddling tradition – very favourably with his native isles: 'Where you get one or two good fiddlers in Orkney, you get one or two dozen fiddlers up here.' This view was endorsed by Bobbie Peterson: 'Even in my young day, the best, the cream of the fiddlers was north in Unst, they reckoned.' And, according to Jim Craigie: 'The further away [from the Scottish mainland] the longer the old way lasts.' (SA/1977/120/6)

The Stickle family

Fredamond Stickle has already been mentioned in the description of a Yule-time dance at the laird's home in Unst (chapter 1). His grandson John (1875–1957) was still playing when Patrick Shuldham-Shaw visited Unst in 1946 and again in the 1950s. Shuldham-Shaw gives an account of John Stickle in the *Journal of the English Folk Dance and Song Society* (1962, p. 129) and publishes a number of

curious melodies known apparently only to John Stickle – curious because of their unusual phrase structures and rhythms. They are clearly a repertoire of tunes that pre-date the common Shetland reels and are comparable with certain Norwegian structures: some of them are discussed in chapter 3.

Gilbert Gray (b. 1909)

Gibbie, as he is affectionately known, had too small a croft to be able to support him and consequently spent most of his life at sea. At the age of fourteen he worked at inshore halibut fishing in fourereens – and when this fishing failed he joined the merchant service and travelled around the world. He lost his best fiddle when he was torpedoed while serving on *The Highlander* in World War II. On D-Day his vessel was blown up by a mine just outside Aberdeen. When war ended he worked for a time in salvage operations in England for five years before again trying his luck at fishing, this time for herring on board a seine-netter based on Burra Isle. After that he worked until retirement at the R.A.F. camp in Unst as a gardener. He now fills some of his spare time fishing for lobsters around the entrance to Baltasound. He learned his fiddling from his father, who also played, and from his mother who was among the few Shetland women who played the fiddle. If for most of his working life he was away from Unst, he nevertheless seems to have preserved a distinct Unst style from his boyhood days. His father played with his fiddle held low on his left arm but in 'just the same' style as his son. This is probably not quite true, for Gibbie tends to slur pairs of semiquavers together more than other Unst players. Unlike Gibbie, who was used to being accompanied by a piano (he has an old upright piano in his parlour), his father never played to accompaniments.

G.G. I mind him getting up to play at my cousin's wedding, that was me father's niece like, and he wasn't for goin' up, playin' at this hall you see, among all this fock and that, he was getting an old man now. I said I'd come up with him, an' I got him up, an' the bride she was wantin' him to come up, to play at the wedding. So he went up, an' of course it was Shetland reels we're playin'. I went up with him an' of course there were a girl vampin' on the piana. He did admit 'at the harmony along wi' him was – a bit better. But he wouldna give up the idea of what the fiddle was good enough on [its] self. (SA/1971/106/5)

Gibbie played for dancing in houses before the war with two or three fiddlers 'spieling one another' (taking it in turns) and whenever he was home on leave during the war he also played for dances in the local halls. He maintains that it was the improvement in furnishings that stopped dancing in the houses:

G.G. If you're dancing on a piece of linoleum it ruined it for good. You couldna hev a dance now in the house wi' this coverin' and that put a stop to that lot – once they got the hooses modernised. (SA/1971/106/5)

His cousin also played the fiddle 'aff o' the notts' (from written music) but he could not play by ear.

G.G. I could sit an' play the same way, but I felt it was goin' to spoil my Shetland way of

playing as I called it, an' so it would, right away. You can't get in that lilt. There's something that you can't get in if you play aff o' the notts — it seems to be too plain — some of those old Shetland tunes, you have to get in some kind of a lilt with them.
(SA/1971/106/5)

Gilbert Gray is not alone in stressing the importance of learning orally as opposed to learning from notation. Many fiddlers share this view and maintain that reliance on notation inhibits both a sense of style and the ability 'to make the tune your own', that is, to have your own personal version of that tune.

This view was put very clearly and forcefully by another fiddler, the late Sonny Bruce, who, though raised in Unst, became the postmaster in Scalloway in Mainland Shetland. Although he himself reads music and has learned a considerable part of the Scottish repertory, enjoying in particular the challenges posed by some of Scott Skinner's pieces, he is insistent on the primacy of the oral tradition and on the importance of the individual:

The real Shetland music, the Shetland versions of tunes . . . it's your own idea of how the tune should be played. Now, you'll get somebody like . . . that's coming along and saying 'Dat soonds no right, yon's no' how it's played, it's no written doon like that.' That's where they're wrong you see, that's where it loses all its . . . and that's what I'm telling Willie and wir Ian, 'Don't copy anybody, tak the tune and play un the way that you like to do it', and there's no such thing as 'thee being wrong and me being right'. Everybody has their own version. If there are two the same I'll guarantee that the one copied the other. There's absolutely no purpose in that whatsoever.
(SA/1977/115)

Possibly because pianos came early to the island (as in Fetlar) the fiddle performance style in Unst is less 'harmonic' than in other areas like Whalsay and



13 An ad hoc dance-band at Uyeasound, Unst

Yell, for the use of vamped harmonies inhibits the fiddlers' use of open string chords and drones. Mrs Sutherland of Uyeasound remembers piano and fiddle providing the dance music ever since she began dancing (around 1910).

During the winter of 1913–14 a dancing master, Ewan Clayton, came to teach dancing in both Baltasound and Uyeasound. He fiddled while demonstrating and introduced such dances as the Quadrille and Lancers, the Scotch Reel, Reel of Eight, Winter Cotillon, Velita, Spanish Waltz and some polkas and country



14 Gilbert Gray



15 Unst Fiddle Society

dances. There were no dance-bands as such in Unst until the NATO defence base was established there during the 1950s and, unlike Whalsay, there was no chief fiddler – there were so many who could play for dancing that they all ‘took turn about’. Since the 1950s the R.A.F. band at Saxaford has been a kind of trend-setter and such dances as the foxtrot became familiar to younger people in the island. Yet in this case familiarity with ‘foreign’ styles did not result in wholesale adoption. In fact it may be that the ‘threat’ to the island’s native tradition was the stimulus that led to the formation of the Unst Fiddle Society in 1967 under the leadership of Ian Deerness and, since about 1970, under Samuel Poleson.

Several members of the society are also members of the Uyeasound band, an informal group of musicians living in the south of the island who meet often for their own enjoyment as well as to play at weddings and concerts throughout the district.

Since the Shetland Isles Education Authority’s introduction of fiddle teaching began, a large number of youngsters have taken to the fiddle and a good deal of talent is displayed, notably by Stephen Spence, the fourteen-year-old son of John Spence, a descendant of the famous Stickle family. Stephen has already

composed a number of Shetland reels and airs in what other Shetlanders consider to be a very ‘Shetland’ style.

Yell

Laurence Williamson’s account of fiddling (see chapter 1, p. 12) must have been largely based on life in his native island of Yell. We get another glimpse of this life in the papers of Irvine of Midbreak (North Yell), which include three manuscript pages of fiddle music transcriptions by one J. D. Hoseason, headed ‘Shetland Tunes never before set to music, Dec. 1862’ (see Appendix 5). One of the tunes, ‘Miss Spence’s Reel’, has the following note:

‘Composed by John Anderson, Voe, and played by him in the late Mr. Neven of Windhouse’s family at Reafirth at a Christmas party, the majority of Ladies, Miss Spences, and the Reel got their name.’

Windhouse is a large ruin whose stone walls stand out starkly above the road a few miles from Laurence Williamson’s home in Mid Yell. Hoseason’s notations and remarks suggest that even in the homes of these very few wealthy families living in Yell, the 19th-century repertory and social customs were much the same as those of their poorer neighbours, in that the Shetland reels and jig-type tunes were common to both classes.

But this account should not be allowed to distort one’s view of life in Yell. It has always seen more poverty than other islands. Though it is the second largest island in Shetland, Yell has a population barely equal to that of Whalsay (one-tenth the size of Yell). Much of Yell is a huge peat moor with little townships scattered around its edges and at the sides of voes, for example Burravoe, West Yell, Gossabrough, and in the north, Cullivoe. Each of these townships preserved a fairly independent social existence until the last 20 years when the village of Mid Yell became increasingly a centre for social life by virtue of its being the location for a secondary school and for one or two industrial projects, for example a shellfish factory.

The north end of the island, comprising Gutcher, Cullivoe and, in the extreme north-west, the tiny hamlet of Gloup, still preserves a considerable degree of independent social life which is reflected in the distinctive playing style common to fiddlers in the area. Though many of the communities in Yell would repay close study in terms of their music-making, I chose for a variety of reasons to concentrate my research on North Yell and on the social and musical life of Cullivoe. Its independence and the extent of its ability to make its own entertainment is reflected in the results of a survey made for me in 1978 by a native of Cullivoe, Daniel Jamieson, of the 70 men aged sixteen or over belonging to the district. Of these, 21 were found to play or have played the fiddle to various degrees of expertise, another 5 the melodeon or accordion; 4 others played guitars, while 8 were known as ‘singers’. One other made up poetry and another,

the late Tom Tulloch of Gutcher, had a reputation as a fine historian and story teller. Clearly a great deal of instrumental music-making took place as part of domestic entertainment, though the number of men performing at public concerts and dances is comparatively small.

Two other men who died that same year deserve special mention for their role as fiddlers in the community. Bobbie Jamieson of Moarfield, Cullivoe, was born in 1892. He began learning the fiddle by ear from an old local man, Bruce Danielson, when he was eight. He played for his first dances when he was sixteen or seventeen years old. At first all dancing was done in houses but, shortly before 1910, a building which stands below Moarfield, formerly built as the Free Kirk, was converted for use as a community hall and Bobbie became one of the principal 'Hall fiddlers' for the next 20 years. During the 1930s the melodeon with piano and other younger fiddlers provided the music for dances and Bobbie became more an organiser, for weddings and such events, than a player. At some time he learned to read music and played in the Kirk band which consisted of fiddles and viola. Although he had retired from playing for dancing, he remained an active fiddler until his death. After World War II he became the bandmaster of a band of traditional fiddlers in Cullivoe which was revived again for several years in the 1970s, with younger men modelling their playing of Shetland reels on the style of Bobbie Jamieson and Willie Barclay Henderson of Gloup, his lifelong friend and companion fiddler at countless Hall dances.

Willie Barclay Henderson of Gloup was born in 1900.

W.H. I started to play on the fiddle when I was about five year old but I had no fiddle. I had to mak the — me own fiddle oot of a Fry's chocolate box . . . I didn't learn to play on that at all but it learned me a bow haund, you see. I would sing the — sing the tune and play it at the same time — but it developed me bow haund you see. And er . . . me name-faither cam home from Edinbury and — Willy Barclay Moar — and he cam home fae Edinbury, and he was beside us and he asked us, me father and mother, what I was interested in. And they said 'Well he's a horrid fellow for working wi' the fiddle.' 'And what did he — did he hae a fiddle?' 'No, no, he didn't hae no fiddle.' So they got me to show him this fiddle that was made oot o' a chocolate box. He was just square at the end you keen, and he laughed, oh, he laughed to see it. And I had terrem for the strings, that's sheep's gut spun on a wheel, and snödit, and then reeled on a reel and dried at the fire. And it made wonderful strings — you would'na believe what you could get out o' that. An — he said he would send me a fiddle. And he sent me a fiddle an — but she was a small fiddle, half-sized fiddle. But somehow or another I never could make a job of playing that fiddle right. But me brother, the older brother, he learned to play on it. And then he bought a big fiddle. And I wasn't long learning on that big fiddle.

(SA/1971/59: fieldworker Margaret Mackay)

While he was still very young his mother died and he stopped playing for three years until the same Bruce Danielson met him:

W.H. And he says 'I've been told that you er — left playing the fiddle — I'm heard you playing at the Hall' . . . and he says 'I'm thought a lot o' your playing', he says 'I think you'll tak your fiddle and come down ta me', he says, 'there's nobody coming to me'. And I went down, I could jest play a part — the first tune that I learned. And I was two year wi' him, and he learned me all about the Shetland reels. (SA/1971/59)

During World War I when the older men (including Bobbie Jamieson) were away, he began playing for dancing in the Hall and elsewhere. Mostly the reper-



16 Bobbie Jamieson and Willie B. Henderson

tory was Shetland reels, though while he was still at school he had played for the local schoolteacher at daily dancing classes in the school when she introduced Highland dances and the Quadrilles, the Lancers and other dances new to the community. Dancing was clearly popular, especially during the winter.

W.H. But they were fairly going at the Public Hall you know at Christmas time, they were fairly going at this — Shetland reels. And — they started at six o'clock at night, and they danced till seven in the mornings. And it was playing Shetland reels — you would play maybe about twenty Shetland reels and then you had a Highland Schottische. But there were so many men, connected wi' the fishing you see . . . you hed to ask anybody that was dancing, you hed to ask him for his place when he was finished dancing afore you could get a chance to get up. (SA/1971/59)

It was hard work playing for such enthusiastic dancers:

W.H. I mind me playing one night during the war, the 1918 war. I played the whole night from nine o'clock at night until seven in the morning. And you know, I never was so tired in me life. I absolutely slept on the rodd going home and I would go off o' the rodd and then I would waken up, you see, or go into this ditch, then I would waken up and travel a piece again. That was a fact, and I went to bed and I sleepit and got up at the second day about the morning. Never knew nothing, and I was right dead tired.

P.C. Where was that?

W.H. That was home beside meself.

P.C. In Gloup?

W.H. Yes.

P.C. But where did you play?

W.H. I played in this Hall, me brother Simpson — he was to play too, but he played at the first dance and then he went to see a friend and he never cam back more. [Laughs]
And Bobbie was away at the war you see. (SA/1970/263)

Communities like Cullivoe were not always so isolated and self-contained. During the decade or two before World War II, with the herring industry at its height and a large shore station at Cullivoe, Bruce Danielson and others had ample opportunity to mix with immigrants from other parts of Shetland and Scotland. At such times musicians became aware of differing styles. Willie Henderson said of Bruce Danielson:

W.H. That man could play the whole night, Shetland reels, and he could play the way 'at they played em in Lunnasting, the way 'at they played them in Whalsay, the way 'at they played them in Walls, the way't they played them in Unst, the way't they played them [in] Skerries. You see there were a big fishing in Cullivoe and he was going through the huts, and he was picking them aff o' these fellows, wi' a bad night when they were ashore and haein' dancing in the huts and he was pickin' these tunes aff o' them. (SA/1971/59)

Willie Barclay Henderson was one of many who left North Yell to work elsewhere. In his case he spent some time at a fishing station in Lerwick and recalls his surprise at being paid for playing on one occasion at an end-of-season foy:

W.H. Two pound sixteen. Well I didn't — it wasn't [expected] — the hat was put around you see and I'd played the whole night and — he was a Russian, Bulkov, and his wife and daughter and son was there — and — he put them up a platform — sent for wood ta Hay and Co., and they laid the platform out afore the door so that his wife could see . . . them dancing. And I played the Square dances, but no Shetland reels you see. It was all Scotch and Square dances . . . It was Scotch lasses, there were no Shetland lasses there.

P.C. Where was this then?

W.H. At Grimister, in Lerwick. And — the other morning the foreman cam down and said 'I want you up'. And I went up wi' him, and he give me this money. I never was so shocked in me life. I said 'I'm taking nothing'. He says 'Your takings, it's yours', he says, 'They passed around the hat after you were finished and', he says, 'that's what I got, so', he says, 'you're taking it all.'

P.C. How many lasses was that?

W.H. Well there were 48 crews of three . . . women, a packer and two gutters, he had 48. And 38 coopers. (SA/1970/276/3)

As Hall fiddlers until the 1930s, Willie Barclay Henderson and Bobbie Jamieson must have played together for countless hours and developed virtually identical economical styles of playing. They frequently used what was called the 'high bass tuning' (i.e. with low G tuned up a tone to A), which enabled them to use 'the long draa on the back string' — introduced into pieces in A and D as an occasional double drone. This enriched the texture of their playing.

W.H. I think the reason that theym usin the high bass — that they hed nobody then in those days to accompany . . . they played their own accompaniments as they played the tune. (SA/1970/266)

They even indulged in some simple harmonization of each other while playing reels at breakneck speed, 'to give a better flavour'.

Being a Hall fiddler required a stamina and dedication that caused few men to undertake the role for long. Many able fiddlers in any case were not at home long enough or regularly enough. For instance another able musician, 'old Nicky' Tulloch of Cullivoe, spent much of his active life at sea so did little playing at the

Hall. When Willie Henderson and Bobbie Jamieson retired from the role of 'Hall fiddlers', the task was taken up by some melodeon players, though there were always other fiddlers around who would play for a part of the time. As Ian Anderson (now in his late forties) explained:

I.A. When I was a nipper there was far more people that could play the fiddle. Another thing was that there were nothing like a band hired or anything like that, even Regatta dances like that, the biggest eens that was. I mean they just acksed eens around the place that was used to playing, to tak the fiddle. That was all that was till it. I mean there were's many as — five or six fiddles at the Hall and they —

D.J. All played together?

I.A. Well they would probably start off playing together, then they would split up, but I mean — there were men fae Sooth Yell and any other place and anybody that you kent would play the fiddle, they would just — somebody play for a while and then lay it doon. And whoever was M.C. would go and ax somebody else . . . It was very seldom that you had anybody refuse, I mean, even if they only göd up and played twa-three tunes.

(SA/1978/175, fieldworker Daniel Jamieson)

This sort of arrangement worked well providing there were always enough prepared to take turn and turn about. But in the 1960s a different practice evolved. 'The band', consisting of three fiddles, two 'vamping women' on accordions or melodeons, a pianist and guitarist, would play until midnight. The master of ceremonies then asked others to play for a couple of hours, but thereafter the task devolved on three enthusiastic youngsters who played until 6 a.m. Later these three (two of them grandchildren of Bobbie Jamieson) joined the band but soon found they would be deserted by others and left to provide music for virtually the whole night. These three, known as the Cullivoe Band (accordion, bass guitar and piano) played for most local events and also began to take other



17 Cullivoe traditional fiddle band

engagements around Shetland. They were able to charge a fee but did not do so for local weddings (when 'everyone contributes' something).

Cullivoe still has plenty of fiddlers — they only occasionally bring their fiddles along to dances to 'spell' the dance-band, but use them more for 'having a tune' with their friends in the houses. As elsewhere in Shetland, the fiddle has lost its place as the leading dance music instrument, though much of its repertory is still dance music. Attitudes to non-dance music (e.g. slow airs in the Scottish style) vary. For many younger fiddlers in Shetland the slow air is a challenge that introduces a new aesthetic, where legato phrasing and fine tone (including controlled use of vibrato) are important. In Cullivoe, however, and other conservative areas little interest is shown in them. As John, the son of Willie Henderson, put it:

Slow airs? Nobody plays slow airs around here — that's for funerals! (SA/1980/13)

This point will be discussed later when the aesthetics of fiddle playing are examined.

Conclusion

Whole communities remain unsurveyed, in particular those of Fair Isle, Foula and Papa Stour, three of the most inaccessible island communities, and other places such as the prosperous and industrious fishing community of Burra Isle. Tentative enquiries suggest that each has its own story to tell. Fair Isle, however, has had its small population (76 in 1976) considerably diluted by incomers and, in the case of the much smaller island populations of Foula (36) and Papa Stour (38) any fiddling tradition has depended very much on one or two individual fiddler families. Each of these islands has, to some extent, its own small repertory of indigenous tunes. Andy Gear, a native of Foula, now teaching at Mid Yell School, has recorded for me a number of tunes from his father's playing (see below) and George P. S. Peterson, another schoolmaster who teaches at Brae in North Mainland, has preserved in his own playing a number of tunes peculiar to his native island of Papa Stour as well as a performer's knowledge of the famous Papa Stour sword dance which he teaches to a team of young dancers from Brae School. Papa Stour's population is now too small, it seems, to maintain a distinctive musical culture of its own and George Peterson is almost certainly the main exponent of the musical and story-telling traditions of that island.

But despite the incompleteness of this account one can now provide answers to some of the questions posed in the preface. Who are the fiddlers who have maintained over the centuries this extraordinarily lively tradition in these northern isles? The answer is the ordinary menfolk of Shetland — crofters, fishermen, seamen — as and whenever required. In the past most men have attempted to play the instrument and a large proportion have succeeded. There is no special 'caste' of musicians, though some of the most strongly motivated and most talented

have acquired a rather special standing as concert fiddlers or as members of semi-professional dance bands. Even the latter group will often play for no reward, especially within their own community for special celebrations like weddings. For many of them their reward is the joy that they get from music-making as well as the feeling that they can contribute to the quality of life in their community (or in the case of the house fiddlers, who are found at the other end of the fiddler continuum, enrich the leisure hours of their friends and families in their own homes). Other questions such as when and where the fiddlers make their music have also been answered during the course of this chapter in the lively accounts of a number of fiddlers. Now we shall examine the question 'What do they play?'

3 *The fiddlers' repertory*

Shetlanders use a fairly small number of terms with which to classify in part their indigenous repertory. This they add to the general terminology used for pan-British dance music genres. The terms 'spring' and 'reel' have already been mentioned. They are interchangeable and are applied to duple-time tunes used for dancing Shetland reels and any similar type of dance, for example the Scottish eightsome and foursome reels. Both these latter dances were known in Shetland as 'Scotch reels' (see, for instance, p. 6) though the foursome reel does not seem to have been danced much by Shetlanders but more by the Scots lasses and others visiting the islands. The term 'spring' would seem to be the older Shetland name and is probably of Scandinavian origin, though it is also found in the old Scots dialect. During the 1970s it was rarely used by any other than older fiddlers such as Andrew Poleson, who often described his favourite tunes as 'fine dancing springs' and some of the rarer ones as 'aald springs'.

Another pair of terms used interchangeably are 'Muckle reel' and 'Aald reel'. Two examples were published in the Shetland Folk Society's collection called *Da Mirrie Dancers* (Shetland Folk Society, Lerwick, 1970), namely 'The Muckle Reel o' Finnigirth' and 'The Aald Reel o' Whalsay'. They are the music for an older type of dance, now obsolete. There are few of them and they form no part of any fiddler's active (as opposed to passive) repertory.

Da Mirrie Dancers also contains a number of tunes described as 'Trowie tunes' (trows = fairies), which refer usually to their supposed origin. Some are reels, others are in jig time, but the term 'jig' seems to have been rarely used for some twenty or more Shetland tunes in jig time. Two other categories of tune whose labels refer to their supposed origin are the 'Greenland' or 'whaling' tunes and 'Yakki' tunes. The latter no longer survive but the name 'Yakki' was apparently given to tunes supposed to have been learned from Eskimos (most probably in the Hudson Bay area) by Shetland and Orkney whaling men. One other category, 'wedding tunes', is found in the Folk Society's collection and refers to any tune traditionally associated with the wedding ritual of earlier times. Bridal marches are an example and will be discussed further below.

As has already been said and, as one might expect, such labels do not embrace the whole repertory, nor do they divide it up in any consistent manner. The Shetland Folk Society collection includes only what the authors considered to be indigenous tunes whereas the repertory of most fiddlers today contains much

else. I will discuss their repertory, dividing it for convenience into two categories: dance music and 'listening' music. This should not be taken to imply that dancers don't listen to music played for them, nor that dance tunes are not commonly played as listening pieces whenever fiddlers meet or entertain their friends and family. In any case, some of the tunes now classed as 'listening' pieces are possibly descendants of dance tunes whose dances are long forgotten and this is particularly true of the music in jig time.

In all cases the terms 'tune', 'piece', 'spring', etc. refer to a piece of music which is identifiable and nameable by Shetlanders, it being sufficiently different from others to be recognized as such. There is no tradition of improvisation in Shetland but, because the tradition is essentially oral and because there is no habit of strict teaching (unlike, for instance, the Scottish pibroch repertory for the highland bagpipe), each fiddler has his or her own version of a tune which will differ to a greater or lesser degree from other versions. Such differences evolve as the fiddler learns the tune, and its form becomes set through habit so that the basic features of any fiddler's version will not vary much whatever the context of the performance. Each player, however, is aware of the differences between his version and those of others and during the many informal evenings of music-making there is a good deal of interest shown in each other's versions — for on such occasions each player is usually invited to play a tune on his or her own and the performance is enjoyed as much for the individuality of the version as for anything else. When players perform together informally only a minimal attempt is made to alter one's own version to match that of others. This situation is now changing as more and more of the Shetland repertory is appearing in printed collections and since the advent of cassette recorders, but in spite of this there is some resistance to the acceptance of one standard version of a tune. For instance in the more recent publications of the Shetland Folk Society, the editors are usually careful to state the source of each version of the tunes they include. When any of the music transcriptions are consulted, then, it should be remembered that they are mostly derived from field recordings and that each transcription represents one musician's version of a tune as it was performed on one particular occasion.

Table 1 shows the fiddlers' dance music repertory arranged primarily according to rhythmic structure. It shows in one column an estimate of the size of the repertory and in another gives the dances with which they are nowadays associated. No such table could ever be complete, for any enterprising fiddler might attempt almost any new dance tune on his fiddle. For example, the 'Fetlar Foxtrot' has already been cited. No doubt other modern tunes have been played and I have observed fiddlers attempting such novelties as the 'Slosh', though, on the whole, most modern dances are associated with popular dance-band ensembles in which the fiddle's role is now secondary to that of the accordion.

I will discuss the distinctive features of each of the indigenous dance music categories before proceeding to survey the much smaller 'listening' tune repertory.

Table 1. *Shetland fiddle repertory: typology of dance tunes*

	Dance types	Number	Associated dances
Aald Reels	Muckle Reels Da Guisers' Reel (West Mainland and Papa Stour) Papa Stour sword dance	5 1	obsolete since World War I
Shetland reels	1. Traditional: 2. Shetland variants of reels, hornpipes and strathspeys from Scotland, Ireland etc. 3. Modern 4. Foreign reels and hornpipes	1 7+ 173+ many	danced by one team only obsolete Shetland reels, eightsome reels, barn dances, country dances, Dashing White Sergeant, quadrilles
Jig time tunes	1. Shetland: 2. Scottish, Irish etc.	many many	
March time tunes	1. Shetland: 2. Other	few many	Shaalds o' Foula quadrilles, Boston 2-step
Polkas	1. Shetland 2. British, Scandinavian	many many	not danced Boston 2-step, Gay Gordons, Lancers, Military 2-step
Waltzes	1. Scottish 2. British old-time 3. Norwegian 4. Modern Shetland	few few many many many many	polkas waltzes
Other	Foxtrots, quicksteps, novelties, strathspeys		Schottisches (obsolescent)



18 A double wedding at Skeld

Muckle or Aald Reels

What little is known of the dancing of these reels is documented by Joan and Tom Flett, who include some simple transcriptions of five examples (three tunes for the 'Aald Reel of Papa Stour', 'The Aald Reel o' Whalsay' and a fragment of an 'Aald Reel of Walls'). *Da Mirrie Dancers* includes another transcription of 'The Aald Reel o' Whalsay' (from the playing of the same John Irvine) as well as a version of 'The Muckle Reel o' Finnigirt'. The dancing of these reels died out during World War I and the only two fiddlers who include such tunes in their active repertory are Tom Anderson and George Peterson, both of whom are noted for their folkloric interests.

The structure is very different from that of the common Shetland reel. They were associated with dances where continuous reeling has been the dominant feature. Consequently there is no need for the balanced bipartite structure that corresponds with the two halves of the Shetland reel, with its alternation between stepping and reeling sections. Fraser Hughson, a native of Papa Stour who was recorded by Tom Anderson in the 1950s when he was over eighty years old, said of it: 'Well, he [the Muckle Reel of Papa] just began and never ended, just one thing all the time . . . just keepit reeling all the time, bumping and carrying on.' (SA/1959/91)

basic
seems to have

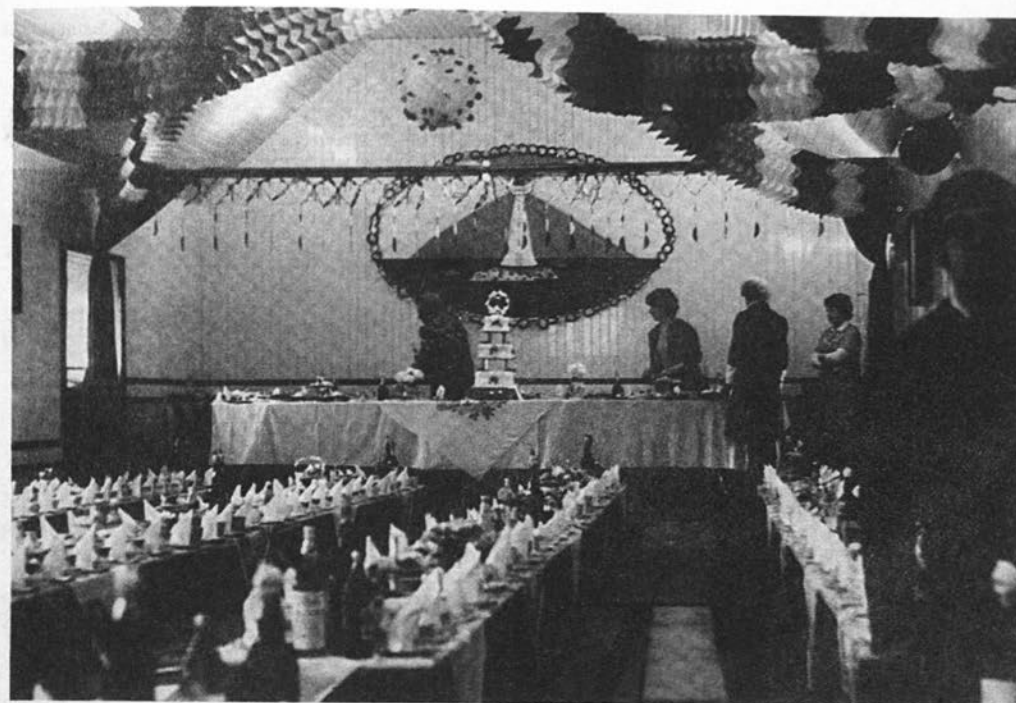
The Fletts remarked on how, by the early part of this century, the Aald Reels were generally performed only at special points in the wedding feast, usually for the ritual of the Bride's Reels. Now seventy years later, the ordinary Shetland reel – which is falling into disuse – occupies the same place at weddings as that once held by the Aald Reels. In both instances just before their demise the oldest dances in the community have come to occupy a place of ritual importance, being cherished for their age and as symbols of Shetland culture.

Nowadays fiddlers regard the musical phrasing of Aald Reels as lacking in sense. John Irvine (b.1882) frequently had to play the 'Aald Reel o' Whalsay' as the chief fiddler at Whalsay weddings but: 'I just detested playing it, it were naethin' but a load o' trash. There were naethin' in it ava.' (SA/1959/91; field-worker Tom Anderson). This can probably be construed as more a musical judgement than a social one, for it was during the dancing of the Muckle Reel in his young days that the hat was passed around for the 'fiddler's money'!

The surviving reels share the following distinctive characteristics: sharply pointed and strongly accented rhythmic patterns, accents often being achieved by using the bow strongly enough to sound two or three strings simultaneously; short phrases repeated three or four times, each phrase based almost entirely on one triad or two alternating triads. The tonality of all extant Muckle Reels is based on D but they contain unexpectedly abrupt changes of tonality, for example



19 John Irvine



20 Cullivoe Hall

when D triads alternate with C triads. Many Shetlanders say that such pieces have no tune, and I have already suggested (when discussing the 18th-century account from Unst concerning the dancing and singing of Norn 'Visicks') that these instrumental reels could have been the survival of rhythmic and harmonic accompaniments to such singing. Such a survival spanning nearly two centuries is a pointer to the tenacity with which Shetlanders held on to their traditional music, for, according to Low's informant, the older sung reel had already, in 1774, 'almost given entire way to the [Scottish] reel' (Low, 1879, p. 163). On the other hand, these tunes may be remnants of an instrumental genre which was enjoyed, but not reported on, for centuries before 1900. If one compares them with the Norwegian 'Halling', the similarity between the two is striking. Examples 2, 3, 4 and 5 are of Muckle Reels. Example 6 is a fragment of a halling. Hallings belong to the oldest repertory of duple-time dance tunes in the Hardanger fiddle tradition of western Norway. Of such dances Reidar Sevåg writes:

Hardanger fiddle tunes are based on the repetition and variation of small, usually two-bar motifs ... In the duple-time dances the borderline between 6/8 and 2/4 is sometimes difficult to determine ... One purpose of the many different drone patterns in Hardanger fiddle playing is to enable drone effects based on the 1st, 5th (and occasionally even the 3rd) degrees of the scale to be used ... However, all four open strings are frequently used as variable drones below and above the melody. (The New Grove Dictionary, vol. 13, p. 327)

If, when one examines the music of the Aald Reels, one remembers that these are the last remnants of an earlier tradition and that the use of variable drones is

Ex. 2. 'Muckle Reel o' Papa', Papa Stour. Fraser Hughson. Aald Reel, SA 1960/215, collector Tom Anderson

explain H

D.C. as often as needed
Fine

* as in bar 2 in later repeats

Ex. 3 'Muckle Reel o' Papa' (J. Umphray's version), Papa Stour. John Fraser. Aald Reel, SA 1970/254

Fine Dal Segno

Ex. 4 'Da Muckle Reel o' Finnigirth', Walls, West Mainland. Peter Fraser. Aald Reel

(a) from *Da Mirrie Dancers* (transcribed by T. Anderson)

(b) from P. S. Shuldham-Shaw MS

(c) continuation of (b) transcribed from tape SA 1954/119/4

sic

sic

Ex. 5 'Muckle Reel o' Papa' (older version), Papa Stour. John Fraser. Aald Reel, SA 1970/254

D.C. as often as needed
Fine

Ex. 6 'Rull' (Twirl), Nordhordland, Norway. A halling dance tune. From *Norwegian Folkmusic*, vol. 1, p. 99

Felestyle Tuning Understrenger Sympathetic strings

D.C. as often as needed
Fine

a diminishing practice, one can deduce (from the sudden shifts of pitch and the amount of string crossing involved, as well as the frequent use of chords) that the use of variable drone effects must also have been a feature of these Shetland tunes in earlier days. Sevåg's reference to 6/8 and 2/4 time is interesting for one

meets just the same problem when attempting to transcribe many Shetland tunes, especially the Aald Reels. The transcription of the 'Muckle Reel o' Finnigirth' in *Da Mirrie Dancers* (Ex. 4a) gives many half bars as three triplet quavers whereas I have preferred to write two semiquavers and a quaver — a solution favoured also by Patrick Shuldham-Shaw, who notated the tune (Ex. 4b) from the playing of Peter Fraser in 1947 (P. S. Shuldham-Shaw MS, School of Scottish Studies archives). Example 4 also gives a machine transcription of a relevant bar showing the precise timing, with vertical lines added to divide off each note, so that the different durations are easily compared. It is clear from this that no sufficiently accurate standard notation would be available. This problem of the borderline between 2/4 and 6/8 is discussed later in connection with 'jig time' tunes.

One other item, not classed as a Muckle Reel but having the same features, is 'The Guisers' Reel' as played by Peter Fraser in Walls and by two Papa Stour fiddlers, Fraser Hughson and John Fraser. It was said to be played at weddings for the dancing of the guisers, the group of uninvited masked men who paid a brief visit to the wedding dance.

The few remaining Muckle Reels, together with the music of the Papa Stour sword dance and 'The Guisers' Reel', are striking evidence of the persistence of Scandinavian stylistic traits in the music of the Shetland Isles. But their music is so different from that of the rest of the repertory, it seems unlikely that they will be revived. Rather, those fiddlers who attempt in their playing to emphasize Shetland's historic Scandinavian connections do so by selecting pieces from elsewhere in the Shetland repertory (bridal marches, for instance), modifying the tuning of the fiddle and indulging in extensive use of chording and variable drones.

Papa Stour sword dance

The history of this dance is discussed in detail by A. W. Johnston in *The Sword Dance of Papa Stour, Shetland: a Surviving Norse Drama* (Lerwick, 1926). A small number of determined men have ensured its survival through the last 100 years. Papa Stour had its own team of dancers performing throughout the 19th century up until 1892. Latterly the fiddler for the dance had been one John Umphray (d.1907), an incomer to the island from Lunnasting on the Mainland. The dance was revived in 1922 and a team of Papa dancers continued to keep it alive until 1968–9. The present teacher of the dance and fiddler for it, George Peterson, had joined the team as a dancer in 1950 and, though spending much of his working time away from the island, he continued to take an active part in the team until 1965. Though performances of the dance by an island team ceased c.1968–9, George Peterson taught the dance to a team of boys at Brae School on the Mainland where he taught, and it is this team which functions today under George Peterson's direction.

Ex. 7 'Papa Stour sword dance', Papa Stour. John Fraser. SA 1970/254

(a) 'The Trip'

(b) The Dance

Played once only for each character.

Dal Segno

(shivers)

As a fiddler, Mr Peterson provides the necessary music, which consists of two items. The first, called 'The Trip', is a short snatch of melody played as each of the seven dancers — the Seven Champions of Christendom — is introduced in turn to the audience by the leader (St George), reciting the traditional text (which was recorded in full by S. Hibbert in 1822). The second piece is for the dance proper (Ex. 7). It should perhaps be classed as a Muckle Reel, so similar is its structure and its function, for it is repeated continuously for as long as the dancers are 'running' the dance. Great use is made in this piece of what Shetlanders call 'the shivers', i.e. the rapid reiteration of a note or chord to strengthen the accent and enliven the general effect.

Reels

It has already been remarked that Scottish-type reels with their generally binary and isometric forms were becoming popular in Shetland during the 18th century. As the fashion for these new reels gained ground, two creative processes occurred. One was the adoption and 'Shetlandizing' of Scottish tunes, many of which are still popular. Some of these have lost their original names, others are barely recognizable as being of Scottish derivation but other yet more popular tunes have preserved both their titles and identity. They will be discussed later. The other process was, of course, the composition of new tunes to fit the new dance. The archives of the School of Scottish Studies contain approximately 140 Shetland reels (see Appendix 3), not counting modern compositions (appearing since World

War II), which will be discussed separately. No doubt some of these traditional 'Shetland' reels will yet turn out to be more Shetland variants of Scottish or Irish tunes.

1. Traditional Shetland reels

(a) Asymmetrical reels

A small number of these tunes I have labelled 'asymmetrical' in Table 1 because their phrase structure does not consist of multiples of two bars (making up eight bars per section). Shetlanders have no special term for these tunes, which, probably because of their asymmetry, are no longer danced, but a small number were still in the repertory of several fiddlers, especially those from the island of Whalsay. John Irvine remarked once to Tom Anderson how he often counted beats on his fingers and found some of his reels were composed of three- plus five-beat phrases, but that the complete turning usually worked out to eight (SA/1959/91). In most cases, such asymmetry is confined to one turning only, and in Whalsay this is usually the first turning when dancers would be reeling a figure-of-eight before returning to their lines to step-dance the second turning.

Andrew Poleson, somewhat younger than John Irvine, recorded several such reels: for two of them he could remember no name (Exx. 8 and 9). The first

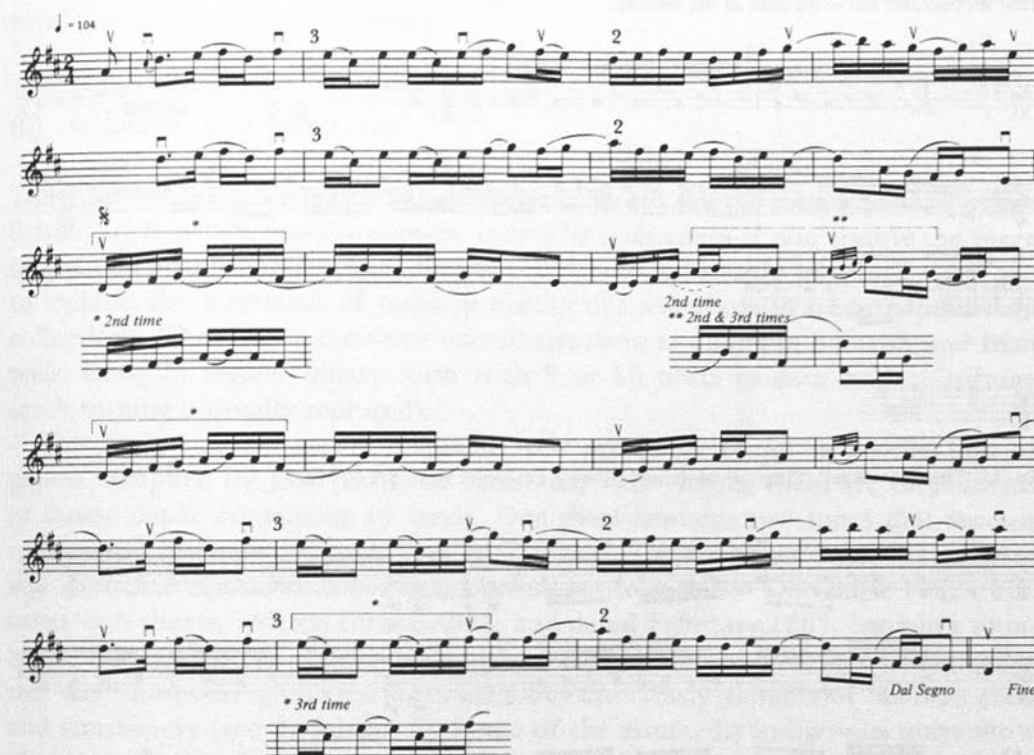
Ex. 8 Nameless, Whalsay. Andrew Poleson. Asymmetrical Reel, SA 1972/97/13



Ex. 9 Nameless Reel, Whalsay. Andrew Poleson. Asymmetrical Reel, SA 1972/97/14



Ex. 10 'Hjogrovoltar', Fetlar. Joe Jamieson. Shetland Reel, SA 1974/14/8



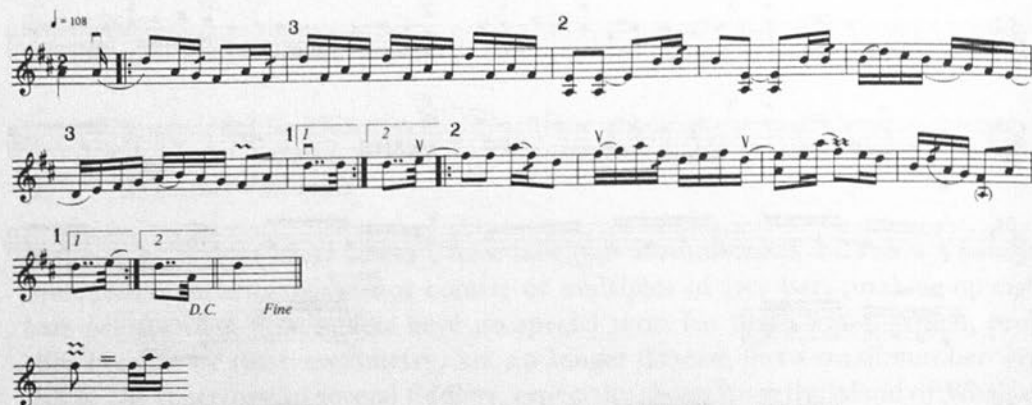
shows irregularity in both turnings whereas the second half of Example 9 is more typical of second turnings of many Whalsay versions of reels. On one occasion (SA/1972/97/14) he named this piece 'Da Foreheid of the Sixteen' – a typically picturesque Shetland title suggested possibly by the lively upward leaps in the first section paralleling the motion experienced in the bows of a small boat in the confused seas that are often found around Shetland.

Two other examples of this class of reel are the Fetlar tune, 'Hjogrovoltar' (Ex. 10), which was still used for dancing in Fetlar in the 1970s and a tune from Cullivoe which contains phrases resembling parts of 'Hjogrovoltar'.

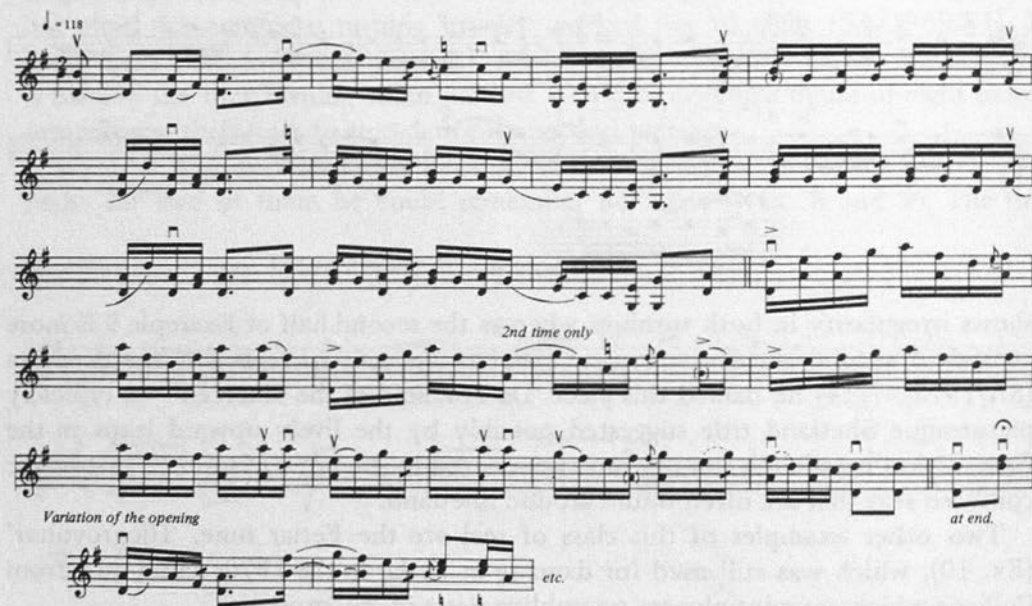
The name of the Cullivoe tune – 'Milly Goodger' (Ex. 11) – has provoked some discussion among Cullivoe fiddlers, some of whom think it is a corruption of 'the Mill of Gutcher', the neighbouring township to Cullivoe. It is occasionally played in Cullivoe as a curiosity but not for dancing.

Virtually nothing is known of the history of these asymmetrical tunes. One can only conjecture that they must represent some halfway stage between the Aald Reels and the common Shetland reels and that in the days when the tunes were better known, dancers would have had no problem dancing to them. One last example, called the 'Cross Reel' or 'Cross Rig' (in Whalsay Andrew Poleson called it 'General Howe'), presents an additional problem, for it is obviously a

Ex. 11 'Milly Goodger', North Yell. Bobbie Jamieson. Shetland Reel, SA 1971/227. N.B. phrase lengths in first section and the extra beat in the second.



Ex. 12 'The Cross Reel', Tingwall Mainland. Bobbie Peterson. Reel, SA 1971/273



cousin to a strathspey reel published in Gow's *First Repository* (part 1, 2nd edn), as well as in numerous other collections published from 1775 onwards, under the title 'The Lasses of Stewarton' (Stewartown, Stewington). The Scottish tune has four sections each of four bars repeated, and presumably fits the country dance of the same name (first published in Campbell's *9th Book of New and Favourite Country Dances and Strathspey Reels* (c.1794)). One Shetland version is shown in Example 12 and it is likely that it is derived from the Scottish tune but that fiddlers and dancers modified it in early days so that it fitted their preference for asymmetrical structures. The tune was danced in Whalsay during

this century, where I was told that to perform it they had to do a 'double dancing turn' (i.e. dance for twice as long).

(b) *Common Shetland reels*

These are by far the largest class of Shetland music and the sound archives of the School of Scottish Studies contain over 170 such tunes if one counts the more recent compositions also. The number could be considerably increased were one to include also a number of tunes in manuscript and those in recently published collections. They share the same overall structure as common Scottish and Irish reels, being in regular binary form with 8 or 16 beats to each half or 'turning' (each turning is usually repeated).

The earliest notations of Shetland reels are to be found in a collection of papers compiled by J. T. Irvine of Midbreak, Yell. Among them are three sheets of music paper containing 14 tunes. One sheet contains two tunes that are not reels – 'Garster's Dream' and 'The Day Daywen' – and is signed by J. T. Hoseason and subtitled 'Shetland Tunes never before set to music – December 1862'. The other two sheets, written consecutively and dated February 1863, contain a number of tunes that are clearly reels, others are similar to Auld Reels, and other reel time tunes are given Shetland titles but are clearly variants of Scottish reels and strathspeys (see Appendix 2). Some of the assumedly indigenous tunes show Hoseason attempting to grapple with the problem of notating music that is neither clearly in 2/4 nor 6/8 time but something in between.

An interesting example is 'Da Shaalds o' Foula' (Ex. 13), also called 'Da Foula Reel'. It is still popular today and is occasionally still danced, but as a country dance in jig time, not as a Shetland reel. An earlier version of this tune appears in Hibbert (1822), but in the key of G and in 6/8 time throughout. Hibbert also gives words associated with the tune. Today it is Hibbert's version which is most commonly played and it is this version which appears in the Folk Society's collection, *Da Mirrie Dancers*. However, in the district known as the Herra in Yell it is still played by members of the Robertson family in the key of A and with the A–E–A–E tuning. One Herra fiddler, Laury Davy Robertson (in his

Ex. 13 'Da Shaalds o' Foula', Yell. Shetland Jig type tune. From J. Hoseason's MS. Key signature probably omitted because of the problems it would create on lower strings. Probably in 'key' of A, and Cs and Fs on upper strings probably would be sharp. No time signature given. Scordatura tunings are still used in parts of Yell when this tune is played.



seventies), plays it halfway between a reel and a jig (though Patrick Shuldham-Shaw, who noted it down from him in 1947, wrote it unambiguously in 6/8 time). His son, Lell, plays it slightly quicker but more clearly in reel time. The father is, understandably, more aware of the difference than the son. (In the Herra three tunes were traditionally used for this dance, the other two following on, and judging by today's evidence, they were in reel time; the second of the three, called 'Tilly Plump', is a Shetland variant of a Scottish strathspey.) Elsewhere in Shetland, Shuldham-Shaw collected both reel time and jig time variants of 'Da Foula Reel'. In addition to the words printed by Hibbert, a well-known Shetland song, 'Boanie Tammie Scollay', is sung to essentially the same tune and it is occasionally played by fiddlers under that name as a reel.

What is one to make of such confusion? Two explanations are possible. First, that it is common practice for dance-band musicians to make metrical changes to tunes so that they can be used for different dances: so reel time tunes are readily converted into jig time and vice versa. The second explanation is that in earlier days the rhythm of the Shetland reel was something more akin to compound duple (jig) time, but that there has been a gradual change (possibly owing to the increased contact with Scottish and Irish music), with the Shetland reel coming to be danced in modern reel time while other dances are performed in jig time. The differences between the performances of the Robertsons illustrate such change occurring between one generation and the next. The second hypothesis seems the more acceptable and, if it were true, it would be another pointer to stylistic similarities within western Norway (see Sevåg, 1974, whose comments are quoted earlier in this chapter). I have already argued this hypothesis in 'The Fiddle in Shetland Society' (Cooke, 1978, pp. 77-8), using in addition to this tune another piece from Hoseason's manuscript, there entitled 'Qualsay', but commonly known today as 'Da Boanie Isle o' Whalsay'.

More typical of the indigenous Shetland reel, however, are two popular tunes called 'The Galley Watch' (Ex. 14) and 'Aandowin at da Bow' (Ex. 15). The first turning of 'Da Galley Watch' contains typical triadic motifs used in alternation while the second tune illustrates well the pentatonic nature of many Shetland tunes and the economical use of musical ideas. 'The Merry Boys of Greenland' is another popular reel, described by many Shetlanders as a 'whaling reel' because it was said to have been brought back by the crews of whaling ships in an earlier century. Interestingly its second turning, somewhat similar in its alternating

Ex. 14 'Da Galley Watch', Unst. John Stickle. Shetland Reel. From P. S. Shuldham-Shaw MS, p. 145



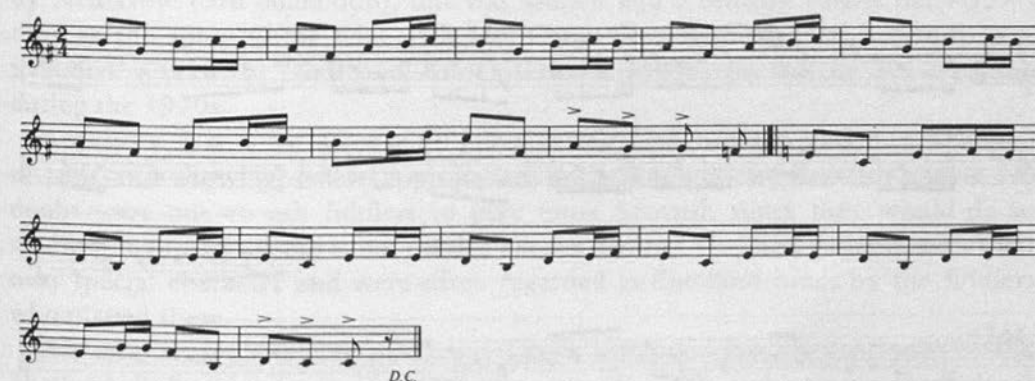
Ex. 15 'Aandowin at da Bow', North Mavine/Lerwick. Tom Anderson. Shetland Reel. From *Haand Me Doon da Fiddle*. Bowing noted from accompanying cassette



motifs to the opening of 'Da Galley Watch', may well have travelled to the Frisian islands where, on Terschelling island, a tune known as 'Rielen' was noted down by Jaap Kunst, the celebrated Dutch folklorist and father of ethnomusicology. Sunday dancing seems to have been a popular tradition in Terschelling and Kunst made some fascinating early film of Sunday dancing in which this dance is recorded – the dance appears identical to the 'backstep' version of the Shetland reel, which is the most commonly known version in Shetland today. Presumably the Dutch fishermen took more than just herrings back with them from Shetland waters – happy memories of dances on the quaysides and in the huts of the Shetland herring stations. In a note to this tune, in *Terschellinger Volksleven*, first published in 1915, Kunst remarked

This dance, no other than the Old-English 'Reel', is danced everywhere [on the island] with much pleasure by sailors. Visitors to the sea-dyke will remember it no doubt. The dance consists of putting one foot behind the other in quick succession, combined with a little jump forward of each foot, while the dancer remains on the same spot and keeps head and body on the same level. Every close of a musical phrase is ended with three firm stampings. Between

Ex. 16 'Rielen', Terschelling, Frisian Islands, Netherlands. From J. Kunst, *Terschellinger Volksleven* (The Hague, 1915, 3/1950), p. 236



this, the 'chaine Anglaise' is all the time executed . . . A dance tune which is melodically somewhat more elaborate but otherwise noticeably related, called 'Fire Mands Reel' (Reel for four persons), is found in South-Jutland. Cf. 'Gamle Danse fra Vejle Vesteregn', p. 24.

(*Terschellinger Volksleven*, The Hague (1915; 3/1950), p. 236)

Kunst's tune is given in Example 16; it is clearly closely related to the two Shetland tunes. (I am grateful to Dr Ernst Heins of the Etnomusicologisch Centrum Jaap Kunst in the University of Amsterdam for drawing my attention to Kunst's note and for providing the translation.) The music for 'The Merry Boys of Greenland' is given in Example 45. Further discussion of musical style of Shetland reels will be left until the indigenous repertory has been discussed (see chapter 4).

2. Modern Shetland reels

Though the Shetland reel as a dance has long been in a state of obsolescence in most parts of Shetland, the playing of Shetland reels is not, neither is the composing of new reels. The sound archives of the School of Scottish Studies contain 52 titles of newly composed tunes, but this must represent only a small fraction of the tunes that have been composed during the last 20 years and the number increases week by week. Many tunes are taken up promptly into the repertory of Scottish dance bands and ensembles of the 'folk' revival and become popular far outside the islands themselves. The last section of *Da Mirrie Dancers* is given over to modern Shetland compositions, including 14 reels by composers such as Tom Anderson, Frank Jamieson, Willie Hunter and Ronny Cooper. The last named, who died in 1982, was an accomplished accordionist and piano accompanist

Ex. 17 'Levenep Head' (F. Jamieson), Lerwick. From *Da Mirrie Dancers*, p. 37. Modern Shetland Reel



ist and was regarded with affection by most Shetlanders. He published several volumes of his own music and though never a fiddler himself, many of his tunes such as 'Da Tushkar', 'Miss Susan Cooper', 'Old Willie Hunter' and 'Calum Donaldson' are popular with fiddlers throughout Britain and especially among Scottish dance bands. 'Levenep Head', one of the late Frank Jamieson's reels, is a good example of the 'modern Shetland reel' (a term used by fiddlers themselves) (Ex. 17). The melodies span the first position on all four strings, and include well accented use of the G string. The triadic passage work is still present but spreads itself more too, in contrast to the compressed (in range) and repetitive passage work of older reels. The tunes tend also to be more thoroughly diatonic than earlier tunes, in which generally pentatonic patterns predominate. Some of them also modulate briefly into closely related keys. Though many of these newer reels resemble their Scottish brethren, there is nevertheless, as one fiddler put it, 'a Shetland dialect' to them which is however more readily perceivable in performance than on paper.

3. Shetland variants of Scottish and Irish tunes

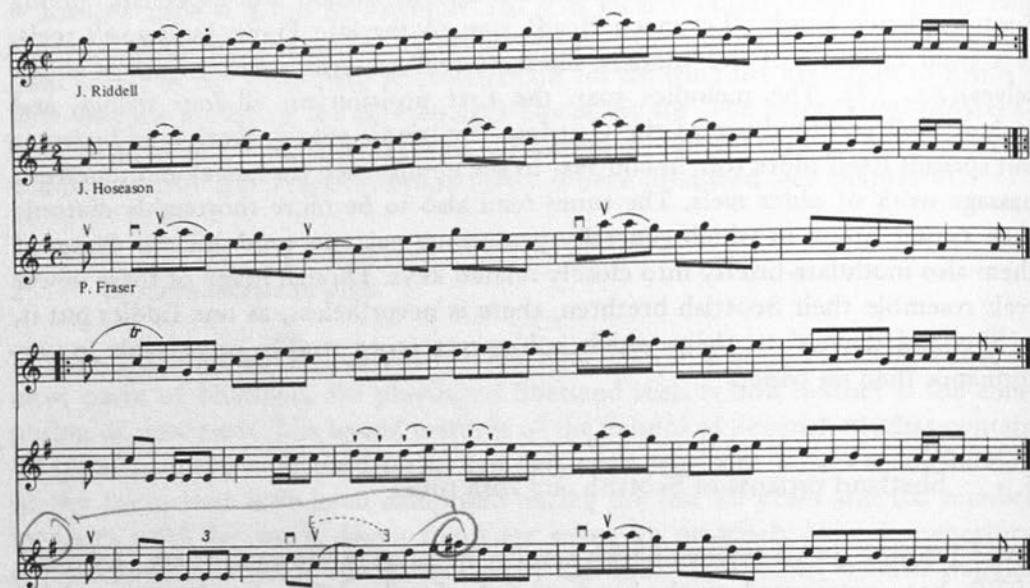
David Johnson, in his survey of 18th-century Scottish music and society (Johnson, 1972), has commented on the passion of the Lowland Scot for dancing and for dance music, and the vast number of published collections that appeared during the latter part of the 18th century and the early 19th century support this view. It would not be surprising if many Scottish tunes came to Shetland during this period, nor if the best were quickly adopted to swell the repertory, since they were well suited to the dancing of the Shetland reel. Some of the most popular tunes in Shetland have been 'The Flowers of Edinburgh', 'Soldiers' Joy', 'The East Neuk of Fife' and 'MacDonald's Reel'. These retained their Scottish names; others acquired Shetland titles. One example is the tune popular everywhere in Shetland known as 'Kail and Knockit Corn' ('kail and bruised oats'). It is most often known in Scotland as the reel 'The Bob of Fettercairn', the name provided by Neil Gow (3rd collection), but was known half a century earlier than Gow's time as the song 'Come Kiss with Me, Come Clap with Me'. In Appendix 4 is included a text for 'Kail and Knockit Corn' which was still in oral tradition during the 1970s.

Appendix 2 is a list of over 60 Scottish and Irish tunes recorded in Shetland as reels and showing, where appropriate, both Shetland and Scottish names. No doubt were one to ask fiddlers to play more Scottish tunes they would do so readily, but many of the tunes on this list are distinct Shetland variants with their own special character and were often regarded as Shetland tunes by the fiddlers who played them.

A classic example is 'The Scalloway Lasses', included as a Shetland tune by the Shetland Folk Society in *Da Mirrie Dancers* (Ex. 18) and popular throughout

Ex. 18 'Da Scalloway Lassies' or 'Fair Field House'

- (a) from J. Riddell's *Collection*... (1st edn. c. 1766)
 (b) 'The Scalloway Lassies', from J. Hoseason's MS
 (c) 'Da Scalloway Lassies', from *Da Mirrie Dancers*, p. 20, 'Traditional — as played by Peter Fraser' (c.1960)



Shetland. It is also found in Hoseason's small collection of 1862. I have juxtaposed both versions with the Scottish tune 'Fair Field House', as published in Riddell's *Collection* (1st edition, c.1766). A comparison of the three will help illustrate some of the changes that occur in the process of 'Shetlandizing' Scottish tunes. In Scotland in Riddell's time many A-mode fiddle tunes (with A as the tonic) were in current use, so we must assume that Riddell's inclusion of F natural on the E string represented what fiddlers (at least those who were musically literate) actually played. He harmonizes it, furthermore, in the key of A minor. In Shetland, however, 'fiddle modality' remains paramount so that traditionally f" (first finger on the E string) is played as f" sharp (as in Hoseason's version). In bar 2 of Peter Fraser's version one notes the use of a C triad, easily played by rocking across the two upper strings (with down bows on the E string), which is typically preferred to the scalic passage of earlier versions.

Strathspey reels (the earlier name for what are known today simply as strathspeys) were also pressed into service, as in the case of the popular strathspey 'Lady Mary Ramsay'. This is found in the Shetland repertory as a reel commonly called 'Sailor Ower da Raft Trees' (Ex. 19). Like Andrew Poleson, several other fiddlers use a 'high bass' tuning for this reel, enabling them to make the most of the initial broad down bow. In every case the delicate pointing of strathspey playing has been replaced by the faster vigorous and choppy bowing action common to Shetland reel playing.

In making comparisons of this kind, however, we must always be aware of

Ex. 19

- (a) 'Lady Mary Ramsay', from Lowe's *First Collection* (1844). Scottish Strathspey
 (b) 'Sailor Ower da Raft trees', Whalsay. Andrew Poleson. Shetland Reel, SA 1977/107. Note G on E string and note F on D string tend also to be nearly a quarter tone sharp



certain inherent problems. The first is that one is comparing a fairly detailed descriptive transcription of one player's performance (in this case, Andrew Poleson) with a generalized prescriptive notation made over a century earlier. Secondly, Andrew Poleson was an exponent of an unaccompanied playing tradition, whereas Lowe provided a bass, as in most other 18th- and 19th-century collections. One gets little idea of how unaccompanied players might have treated the reel in his day. It may well be that village players in mainland Scotland had a style much closer to the unaccompanied Shetland style of recent years. Early collections like Oswald's (1745–60) and the MacFarlan manuscript (c.1740, National Library of Scotland MS 2084–5) contain a number of melodies with scordatura tunings prescribed. This suggests that at that time Scottish players were making use of open strings as variable drones just as is still the practice in Shetland and western Norway. The point of this brief digression into a discussion of performance style is to remind one that, although Poleson's 'Sailor Ower da Raft Trees' sounds fairly remote from 'Lady Mary Ramsay', as it is shown in Low and as it is played today, the transcriptions exaggerate such differences and one is not really comparing like with like. Nevertheless, such comparisons do help to isolate certain features in traditional Shetland playing style.

Another useful example is the reel known in Whalsay as 'Jumping John' (Ex. 20). It is not known outside Whalsay but both tune and title may be found in Playford's *Dancing Master* (1674), where the country dance 'Jumping Joan' is

Ex. 20

(a) 'Jumping Joan', from Oswald, vol. 10 (c. 1758), p. 10. Jig time country dance (transposed up one tone)
 (b) 'Jumping John', Whalsay. Andrew Poleson. Shetland Reel, SA 1971/212. Notes C and G are sharp on upper strings only

described. This tune is widely travelled; it was published by Oswald in his tenth collection in Scotland and by Feuillet in his *Recueil de Contredanses* (1706) in Paris. It was also prescribed by Burns for the song 'Her Daddie forbad and her Minnie forbad' in Johnson's *Musical Museum* and under another name, 'Cock o' the North', it is a popular Scottish jig or 6/8 march. It is difficult to hear the connection when listening to Andrew Poleson's Whalsay reel time version but, this time, the connection becomes a little more obvious when the two notations are compared. In the first turning (low turning) the resemblance is at first glance difficult to see. If, however, one were to accept that in earlier times unaccompanied fiddlers aimed more at the creation of patterns of rhythmic harmony than pure melody the Shetlandising of this piece becomes easier to follow. If, for instance, unaccompanied fiddlers rendered the phrases given in Example 21a as shown in Example 21b or even as in Example 21c (which is achieved by placing the second finger over both A and E strings simultaneously – a common practice as late as the 1970s among older Shetland fiddlers) then the Whalsay reel time variant becomes more comprehensible. In the second turning there has been more radical change. The structure of the whole tune has been altered from ||:A A B A:|| to the more common reel structure ||:A A B1 B2:|| (as in 'Cock o' the North' also), but the rhythmic structure of the second turning has been compressed

Ex. 21 (no title)

into the first two bars followed by some repetition and filling-in for the other two bars.

Rarely, however, are such changes as radical as in this case; more often it is simply a case of imparting a special 'flavour' to a tune, a flavour that varies from district to district; but this will be discussed further in the next chapter. Other traces of Scottish influences on the Shetland tradition are evident in the number of reels for which words are known. In Scotland traditional texts associated with dancing tunes are rarely today found in oral circulation (always excepting the more conservative Gaelic-speaking areas) and survive only in 18th- and early 19th-century collections such as Herd and Johnson. In Shetland many of the older islanders knew them well into the second half of this century.

This was particularly true of Whalsay, where the repertory of reels contains a higher proportion of Scottish tunes than elsewhere. John Irvine mentioned one Whalsay fiddler, Gilbert Gilbertson, who was 'a crack hand at converting Scottish tunes into a reel' and hinting at the sources for many Whalsay reels he continued:

There were words for every one of them you know . . . I mind when I began to learn to play first, I played that fast and I was playing in me grandmother's home, an' [she said] 'Johnnie, Johnnie, du's playing dee far ower fast', she says, 'there can naeboddy ever sing the words to yon.' And I says, 'Well', I says, has she the words? 'Draw aff dee day!' she says, 'They hed words, and some of them wisna very boanie!' (SA/1959/1, collector Tom Anderson)

The texts of a number of reels are given in Appendix 4. Some of them remain very close to the Scots version; in others Shetland dialect is more in evidence. Their existence points to the conservatism of the older tradition in Shetland. If, however, it does not help much with the 'hen and egg' question of which came first in Scotland – the dance-songs or the instrumental 'setting' – it does at least suggest that dancers (if not always the fiddlers) often had words in mind for the tunes they danced to and that the 'blue' nature of many of them must have created a lot of mirth at times.

4. 'Foreign' reels and hornpipes

As communications have improved, particularly during this century, so has the repertory of Shetland musicians expanded to absorb any tune that attracted them.

Shetland men, as has become clear, travelled widely as seamen and the visits of 'Da Blin' Fiddler', George Stark of Dundee, introduced a number of Scottish and Irish tunes to the islands during the period between the two World Wars. But since the time of the earliest phonographs fiddlers have been able to use recordings (or repeat performances in the case of tunes popular in radio programmes) to provide an accurate reminder of the tunes they were learning. This practice has grown even more widespread since the cassette recorder became available. Consequently the process of re-working and re-creation that gave an individual Shetland flavour to Scottish and Irish tunes that were learned before fiddlers had anything but their memories to help them has virtually ceased.

Players nowadays tend to learn tunes as accurately as possible, often making their own recordings of broadcasts and buying, or making their own copies of, commercially available records and cassettes. Their creative urges find outlet more in the composition of new melodies and, while many would accept Sonny Bruce's advice to his son, 'Don't copy anybody, tak the tune and play un the way that you like to play it', the ready availability of the original tends to inhibit radical departures from these sources.

The current repertoire then contains American country music, Cape Breton and other Scottish Canadian tunes, as well as the latest Scottish and Irish compositions. The compositions of Sean MacGuire, the famous Irish fiddler (who toured Shetland in 1977, giving a number of concerts to packed halls), as well as his virtuoso settings of other Irish reels, are currently popular with many younger fiddlers. They find in the playing of such virtuosi a lively stimulus to their own fiddling. But this is dealt with in more detail in chapter 5.

Jig time tunes

At this point in the survey of the Shetland fiddle repertoire any attempt at establishing a consistent taxonomy meets serious problems if one, at the same time, attempts to preserve some sense of historical depth. Here four classes of tune deserve to be discussed, but it is arguable whether they should be discussed as dancing tunes or as part of the listening repertoire. Table 2 shows the total range of jig time music organized into four categories, but I shall discuss only the first three in this section, leaving the other class for the survey of 'listening' music.

(i) Many of the currently popular 'round-the-room' dances, such as the Boston Two-Step, the Lancers and the Gay Gordons, use tunes in jig time. Since the dances themselves came in from the south, a number of Scottish and English tunes came with them. But new tunes are constantly appearing and it is not surprising that a number of fiddlers have tried their hands at adding to this repertoire, especially for the Boston Two-Step dance. One of the best known is William Hunter jun.'s jig, 'Da Sooth End' (published in *Da Mirrie Dancers* and elsewhere).

(ii) There is also a repertoire of more than 20 indigenous older tunes (some of

Table 2. *Repertory of tunes in jig time (compound time)*

Title	Provenance
(1) <i>Modern jigs and 6/8 marches</i>	
e.g. Da Sooth End	jig composed by W. Hunter <i>sen. Jun.</i>
Norwen House	jig R. Jamieson
Janet Donaldson	jig F. Jamieson <i>Ronnie Cooper</i>
Major J. W. Angus	6/8 march F. Jamieson
Ronald Cooper	6/8 march R. Cooper
Frank Jamieson	6/8 march T. Anderson <i>Peter Scollay</i>
Scollay Boys Jig	jig F. Jamieson
The Shetland Boston	6/8 march
(2) <i>Older indigenous tunes</i>	
a. For older dances	
Da Shaalds o' Foula	known in all districts
Da Flugga (several tunes)	Delting
'Kibby dance'	Unst
b. Tunes for unspecified dances or for listening	
Da Auld Hill Grind	all from John Stickle, Unst
Da Brig	
Fram Upon Him	
Garster's Dream	
Naked and Bare	
Christmas Day in the Morning	
Da Knot upon da Hummliband	<i>? whall dance wile wathie</i>
Doon da Rooth	(21/8 time)
Da Maut Man	(21/8 time)
Captain White	
Cutty	
Sister Jean	<i>? English tune</i>
Vallafeld	from Unst
Da Greenland Man's Tune	J. Laurenson, Fetlar
Cataroni	A. Peterson
Aith Rant	Cunningsburgh
Da Full Rigged Ship	Peter Fraser, Walls
c. Problematic tunes from written records	
Midnight and Da Puir Man is Dead	Hoseason MS
Da Boanie Isle o' Whalsay	Johnston (<i>Old Lore Miscellany</i>)
(3) <i>Imported jigs</i>	
e.g. The Irish Washerwoman, Drops of Brandy etc.	
(4) <i>Wedding marches and songs</i>	
Now Must I leave Father and Mother	Origin Scottish
Woo'd and Married and Aa	Scottish
Black Jock (The Black Joke)	Scottish
Da Bride's a Boanie Thing	Scottish
Kiss her and Clap Her	Scottish?
A Bride's Reel from Papa Stour	unknown
The Westside Bride's March	unknown

Additions acc. to Davy Tulloch

which may also be used for the above dances but which are equally often played as listening pieces). They are often referred to as Shetland jigs and are customarily grouped into sets for playing and dancing purposes, though they were collected as single tunes from various districts by members of the Shetland Folk Society and by Patrick Shuldham-Shaw, and re-introduced to the repertory. But was there ever a dance known as a Shetland jig? Very little is known of the dances to which these tunes originally belonged. They may not even have been danced at all. By all accounts, Shetland reels and Auld Reels were about the only dances known to be danced in Shetland throughout most of the 19th century, if one leaves aside for one moment the country dance known as the 'Shaalds o' Foula'.

(iii) Some jig time dances were introduced from Scotland, such as the 'Haymakers Jig' and the 'Irish Washerwoman', but only during the last decade of the 19th century. They were introduced by Scots girls who came up in their hundreds during the herring season to live and work as gutters and packers at the numerous fishing stations which mushroomed each year around the Shetland shoreline. The Shetland jigs, however, appear to pre-date this period.

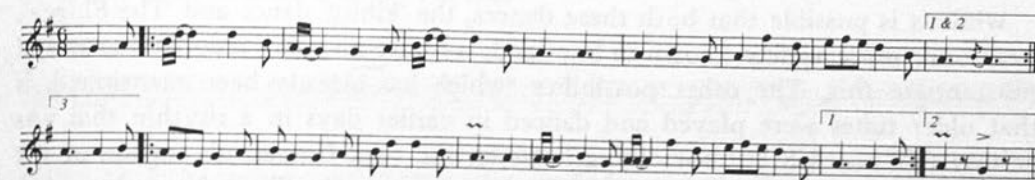
The best known of the Shetland jigs is 'Da Shaalds o' Foula'. It has already been discussed because of the fact that its tune is frequently played and notated in either jig or reel time as well as something between the two. The dance itself is discussed by Tom Flett in an article in *The Shetland Folk Book*, vol. 6 (1976, pp. 22–31), where he concludes that it was possibly brought to Shetland from Sweden via England, for it is very similar to the Swedish folk dance, 'Väva Vadmal', which was introduced to Britain under the name 'Norwegian Country Dance.'

Two other dances were supposedly danced in jig time. One is mentioned by Shuldham-Shaw in connection with the tune 'Cutty' (Ex. 22) which the Unst fiddler, John Stickle, maintained was 'a kind of kibby dance', performed 'entirely in a sitting-on-the-heels position', (Shuldham-Shaw, 1947, p. 76 and 1962, p. 136).

Ex. 22 'Cutty', Unst. John Stickle. 6/8 Jig. From P. S. Shuldham-Shaw (1962, p. 138). Marked 'Fairly steady (crotchet = 108), 11.4.1947 – this tune, so John Stickle informed me, was used for a kind of kibby dance (see ref. in my article in *Journal E.F.D.S.S. [English Folk Dance and Song Society] 1947*)'



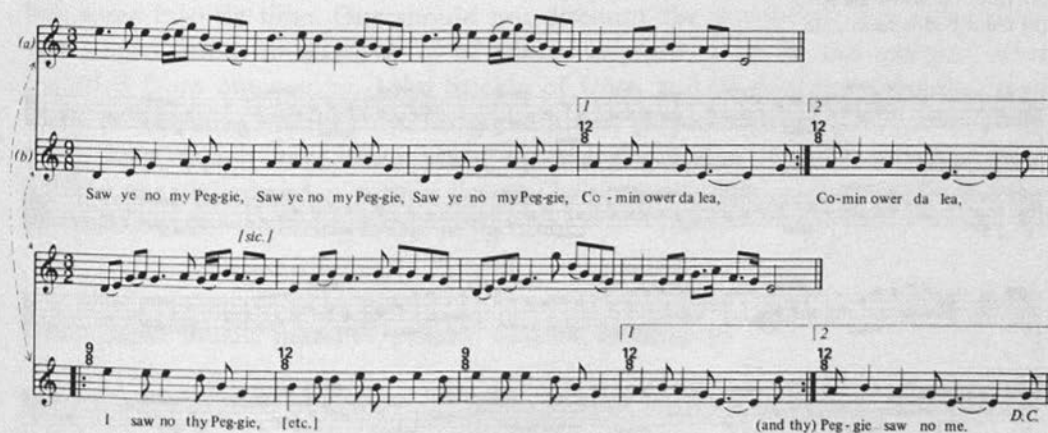
Ex. 23 'Doon the Burn Davie', Delting. Tom Robertson. Flugga dance tune, SA 1974/196/7, collector Alan Bruford



The second dance, The Flugga, appears to have been known only in the Delting district, where it was performed within living memory as a kind of *Nachttanz* to the Shetland reel, with the rhythm changing smartly into jig time from reel time. Four tunes for this dance have been collected. Tom Robertson of Delting provided two tunes and two further titles. The first tune, for which he also sang words, is a variant of a Scottish song, well known during the early 18th century and included in Johnson's *Musical Museum* in a rather ornate setting that contrasts with the simplicity and strength of the Shetland version (Ex. 21). The title of Mr Robertson's second tune, 'Doon the Burn Davie', also belongs to an old Scottish song, but his tune (Ex. 23) is quite unlike any of the printed settings of that name which I have examined (e.g. in *Orpheus Caledonius* or the *Musical Museum*). Three other tunes, named 'The Flugga' by the musicians who played them, are similar to 'Doon the Burn Davie' (cf. P. S. Shuldham-Shaw's MS and Tom Anderson's version on tape SA/1958/62: both Shuldham-Shaw and Anderson collected them in the Delting area). The fact that 'Saw Ye Nae My Peggie' (which Shuldham-Shaw also collected in Fetlar as a song) is in a mixture of 9/8 and

Ex. 24 'Saw Ye Nae My Peggie', Delting. Dance/Song

(a) from A. Stuart: *Musick for the Scots Songs in the Tea Table Miscellany*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh, 1724). Transposed a tone higher
(b) Delting. Tom Robertson. SA 1974/196/5 & 6, collector Alan Bruford. Tune transcribed from his fiddling, words from his singing. Note that the fiddle tune gives the low turning first



12/8 (Ex. 24) and that the other tune is in 6/8 time suggests that the dance was not of the kind requiring a strict number of beats to each section.

While it is possible that both these dances, the 'kibby' dance and 'The Flugga', were once more widely known in Shetland, we have no other records that would substantiate this. The other possibility, which has already been mentioned, is that older tunes were played and danced in earlier days in a rhythm that was neither 2/4 nor 6/8 but something between the two. Hoseason's version of the 'Shaalds o' Foula' has already been cited as an example. Two other tunes with similar rhythm are to be found in Hoseason's manuscript, called 'Midnight' (Ex. 25) and 'Garster's Dream'. The second tune is still popular today but is played in strict jig time throughout, without the intriguing 'hesitations' shown in Hoseason's version (Ex. 26a and b). Further evidence for the hypothesis is

Ex. 25 'Midnight', Yell? Shetland Reel/Jig? From J. Hoseason's MS



Ex. 26 'Garster's Dream', Shetland Jig

(a) from *Da Mirrie Dancers*
(b) from J. Hoseason's MS



Ex. 27 'Da Boanie Isle o' Whalsay'. Shetland Reel

(a) 'Whalsey' from A. W. Johnston: 'Four Shetland Airs' in *Old Lore Miscellany*, vol. 5, no. 2, 1912, p. 80
(b) 'Qualsay' from J. Hoseason's MS, Mid Yell, 1863



to be seen in the tune which Hoseason called 'Qualsay' and which today is known as 'Da Boanie Isle o' Whalsay'. Hoseason wrote the tune in reel time: another version was published half a century later, but in 6/8 time (see Ex. 27). Today the tune is generally played in reel time, though in the 1950s at least one fiddler, the late Jimmy Scollay of Burravoe, played it in 6/8 time, his version being noted down by Shuldham-Shaw in the key of G. These three examples, together with the 'Foula Reel', suggest that despite the popularity of jig time dances in Scotland such dances did not become part of the Shetland dance repertory until comparatively recently. There may once have been a dance genre of which only the tunes have survived – in the 'ambiguous' rhythm which is neither 2/4 nor 6/8 – and this finds parallels in the dance repertory of western Norway, but during the past 100 years their tunes have been modernized or 'rationalized', most into reel time, but some into jig time. One should not discount the possibility that some never were dance tunes at all. Twelve of the twenty-one tunes in this category were recorded from one source, John Stickle of Unst, and he, having received most of them as 'listening' tunes from his grandfather, played them rather slowly. However, those which have been taken up and popularized by the Shetland Folk Society are played today as true jigs at a brisk tempo and are frequently used for any dance today requiring music in jig time.

Other dance music: marches, polkas, waltzes, strathspeys

In any society the repertory of social dances changes fairly rapidly since the trend-setters in social dancing are usually successive age-groups of young un-

married men and women. A new dance comes into vogue, is popular for a time with a certain age-group and then passes into obsolescence as that age-group marries and its interest in social dance wanes. Nevertheless certain pieces associated with those dance genres live on as attractive miniatures. In Shetland the polka is a case in point. When the dance came into vogue a repertory of polka melodies was imported also. A few have survived, though one seldom sees a polka danced in Shetland today, and three tunes are today regarded as traditional Shetland polkas – 'The Boanie Polka', 'The Seven Step Polka' and 'Sister Jean' (possibly taking its name from a 6/8 tune known to John Stickle). A fourth tune, recently named 'The Hamnavoe Polka' by Tom Anderson, was part of the repertory of his grandfather who lived in Hamnavoe in North Mavine. All four of the above tunes are published in *Haand Me Doon da Fiddle*, the collection of 55 pieces (mostly reels) made for teaching purposes by Tom Anderson and Pamela Swing (Stirling, 1979).

Apart from those common Highland tunes used everywhere for dancing Schottisches, the strathspey has only very recently proved of any real attraction to Shetland musicians. In earlier times strathspeys were as often as not, as we have seen, quickly converted into reels. Recently, however, a few musicians, notably the late Frank Jamieson and his son, Ronald, have tried their hands at composing strathspeys, but more as listening pieces, and more as a challenge to those Shetland fiddlers interested in playing the sharply pointed rhythms characteristic of the fiddle style of Strathspey and north-east Scotland and for which some skilful and strongly accented bowing is needed.

Marches and waltzes are a different case, however, since both are frequently required for currently popular social dances. Before the 1950s the march repertory consisted of well-known Scottish tunes such as 'The Balkan Hills', 'The Cameron Highlanders' and 'Scotland the Brave'. Since then, however, numerous lively marches have been composed, though somewhat fewer waltzes. 'Fort Charlotte' and 'Da Guizers March' (both composed by Gideon Stove and published in *Da Mirrie Dancers*) are typical examples of Shetland marches used in Shetland for dancing Two-steps. Many new Shetland tunes rapidly become known around Scotland and further afield. Ian Burns received reports of his tune 'Spootiskerry' being heard on a commercial Swedish LP and being whistled in the streets of Wellington, New Zealand (SA/1980/19/18).

In recent years Scottish dance-band musicians have visited Shetland during their vacations (often being invited to play at the Lerwick Accordion and Fiddle Club and for the Up Helly Aa dances) and have taken away with them new Shetland tunes that have caught their fancy, promptly making use of them in their next LP or radio broadcast. Several Shetland composers arrange to have their tunes transcribed for them (for few are musically literate) and photocopied for private distribution, or printed for wider dissemination (as well as to safeguard copyright). Examples are to be found in a volume of 15 tunes entitled *Dance Music from Shetland and the North East*, vol. 1 (Lerwick, 1975): it includes

Frank Jamieson's 'Young Willie Hunter' (march) and his reel 'Levenep Head', as well as Willie Hunter jun.'s jig, 'Da Sooth End'. But these and other published tunes (see the bibliography) must represent only a small fraction of the number of lively pieces that have come into the repertory during the last 30 years.

This completes our survey of the fiddlers' dance tune repertory. It has ranged from pieces long obsolete to those composed within the past few years. Needless to say, it can never be complete, for the repertory is growing and changing constantly. It is inevitably becoming less a specifically Shetland repertory: the growth of the mass media and of other forms of communication have facilitated this change. Most Shetland musicians would admit that new Shetland tunes are sounding more Scottish – perhaps 'pan-British' or 'international' would be better adjectives. This is the result of a mutual interchange of musical ideas. For instance, in 1981 the march 'Donald Ian Rankin' was one of the most popular tunes in Shetland – it was composed by a Scottish dance-band leader who lives and works in Liverpool.

The listening repertory

It has already been suggested that the title of this category is really little more than a convenience, a catch-all that includes, in addition to song airs and other pieces, tunes that are no longer danced nor have been for several generations. It was earlier suggested that social dances are particularly subject to rapid change. This is particularly true in western Europe and America during this century where, in many cases, it is in the interest of the mass-producers of dance fashions and dance music to ensure, if possible, a rapid succession of different dance styles. The result is that the dances of one age-group are considered old-fashioned by the next age-group. However, the best tunes of any dance vogue live on in the repertory of the musicians who learned them long after the dances themselves have been outmoded, and, if they are attractive enough, they may survive for generations as 'listening pieces', as in the case of the polkas cited earlier and the hornpipe (see below).

Furthermore, even in places where country dance-bands still flourish, the fiddler himself is no longer the prime provider of dance music, his place having been taken over by accordionists or guitarists. The fiddlers today, therefore, play as much for their own enjoyment and that of their friends as they do for others to dance to and this stimulates the creation of a listening repertory of its own, in addition to that which might be based on dance genres, new or old.

Two other factors must be borne in mind as we discuss the traditional listening repertory as such. The first is that few of the older so-called 'listening pieces' are played today other than by Tom Anderson, a leading figure in the Shetland folklore movement, and by his many pupils or former pupils; they belong now to a folkloristic rather than a general repertory. The second point worth noting is

Table 3. *Listening tunes: listed from the archives of the School of Scottish Studies*

Title	Provenance
(1) <i>Ceremonial music</i>	
a. <i>Wedding tunes</i>	
The Bride's March from Unst	John Stickle, Unst
The Bride's a Boanie Thing	John Stickle, Unst
Du's Bon Lang Awa and A'm Tocht Lang to See Dee	Peter Fraser, Walls
Da Farder Ben da Welcomer	Peter Fraser, Walls
Mak me Fain ta Follow Dee	Peter Fraser, Walls
plus tunes in jig time listed in Table 2	
Norwick wedding march	Composed by Tom Anderson
Hillswick Wedding	Composed by Tom Anderson
A Yell wedding march	Bobbie Jamieson, Yell
b. <i>Yule-time tunes</i>	
The Day Dawn	Peter Fraser, Walls
The Day o' Dawie	John Irvine, Whalsay
(2) <i>Non-ritual music</i>	
a. <i>Slow airs and song airs etc.</i>	
Auld Swarra	Peter Fraser, Walls
The Mill o' Finnigirth	Peter Fraser, Walls
The Yairds o' Finnigirth	Peter Fraser, Walls
The Full Rigged Ship	Peter Fraser, Walls
The Silver Bow and variations	Peter Fraser, Walls
Slow air from Unst	John Stickle, Unst
Doon da Rooth	John Stickle, Unst
Unst Boat song (fiddle version of song)	John Stickle, Unst
Waterman's Hornpipe	John Stickle, Unst
The Delting Spinning Song	Tom Anderson, Delting
The Fetlar Lullaby	Fetlar
Shetland Dandling song	Peter Scollay, S. Yell
Shetland Lullaby	Peter Scollay, S. Yell
b. <i>Modern compositions</i>	
Da Slokket Lights	slow air Tom Anderson
Dee Side	slow air Tom Anderson
Da Auld Resting Chair	slow air Tom Anderson
Linga Soond	slow air Frank Jamieson
Margaret Anne Robertson	slow air Frank Jamieson
Da Auld Noost	slow air Ronald Jamieson
Maggie Anne's Lament	slow air Peter Scollay
Kail Blades and Capsie	air John Fraser
Sandie, Scott and Paddy	air John Fraser
Ul day in Papa	air George Peterson
The Yogie Din	air George Peterson
c. <i>Novelties</i>	
The Four Posts of the Bed, The Hen's March oer the Midden, The Soo's Lament for Raw Tatties	
d. <i>Strathspeys</i>	
The Sands of Muness and Da Sooth Lea	both composed by Frank Jamieson

Table 3 (continued)

Title	Provenance
e. <i>Hornpipes</i>	
The Londonderry, The Liverpool, The Miller's, The Orkney Isles, The Shetland Isles, Young Willie Hunter and other modern tunes	
f. <i>Miscellaneous</i>	
Hylta dance	from Fetlar
Goodnight, goodnight be wi you aa	from Papa Stour (not like Scottish tune of same name)
plus tunes in Table 2, popular song airs and jazz tunes etc.	

that the above list of 'listening tunes' (Table 3) has been collected from very few sources, the major source being the playing of John Stickle, whose repertory was collected and reported on by Patrick Shuldham-Shaw (1962, pp. 129-47). Other sources have been the playing of Peter Fraser of Finnigirth in the Walls area on the west side of Mainland Shetland, and a group of older fiddlers from the island of Papa Stour (Fraser Hughson, Laurie Fraser and John Fraser). Even the legacy of tunes associated with the different stages of the wedding ritual come from only very few sources, primarily John Stickle of Unst, Peter Fraser of Finnigirth, Walls (Mainland) and two Whalsay fiddlers, John Irvine and Andrew Poleson.

Ceremonial music

1. Wedding tunes

Come fy let us aa to the wedding
For there will be liting there.

(The Musical Museum, vol. 1, no. 58)

The traditional role of the fiddler at weddings in Shetland has already been mentioned. In addition to dance music, including that for the ritually important Bride's Reels, the fiddler was required to provide music at several other points in the rite. Peter Fraser, in his dialect account of an 'Old Time Shetland Wedding', a description of the last old style wedding in his parish over 50 years ago (*Shetland Folk Book*, vol. 2, 1957), mentioned five tunes that were required for the ritual in his district. As a fiddler himself, he knew all the tunes and communicated them to the Swedish researcher, Otto Andersson, in the 1930s (see O. Andersson, 1938, for a discussion of these tunes and for some rather unreliable transcriptions). As a member of the Shetland Folk Society, Peter Fraser also introduced them to members of the Shetland fiddle band and recorded them for their principal collector, Tom Anderson.

In his account the fiddler accompanied the groom's party during their trek to

The Bings o' Rutterdams

Ex. 28 'Du's Bön Lang Awa an A'm Tocht Lang ta See Dee', Walls. P. Fraser. Wedding Tune from *Da Mirrie Dancers*, p. 11



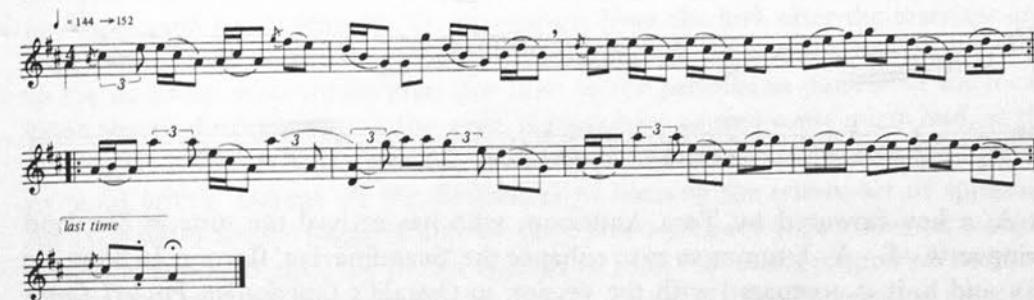
the bride's home, playing for some light-hearted dancing en route and striking up on arrival with the tune 'Du's Bön Lang Awa and A'm Tocht Lang ta See Dee' (Ex. 28). The alternations between C and D tonality in the tune could belong equally to Scandinavian or Scottish musical styles, though the large skips involving rapid string crossing is somewhat suggestive of the Aald Reel structures. The tune was known nowhere else in Shetland. The second melody played almost immediately afterwards was a cue for the groom's party to kiss the bridesmaids ceremonially and was called 'Kiss Her and Clap Her' (Fraser, 1957, p. 60). This title is reminiscent of a first line that Burns once noted for the song 'Here Awa, There Awa, Wandering Willie', 'Gin ye meet my love, kiss her and clap her', and its three verses, presumably traditional, which were collected by Herd, contained sentiments that make them suitable for bridal rites. The first verse runs:

Here awa, there awa, wandering Willie
Here awa, there awa, wandering Willie
Lang have I sought thee,
Dear have I bought thee
Now I have gotten my Willie again

(J. C. Dick, 1962, pp. 128 and 398–9)

Peter Fraser's tune (Ex. 29) could fit Burns' words quite neatly but the tune bears no resemblance to any published melodies for this song. Again, however, the alternation between A and G tonality is a well-known feature of Scottish melody and, if played in strict 6/8 tempo, the tune sounds very like many Highland jigs or pipe marches. The same could not be said of the third of Peter Fraser's five tunes, 'The Bride's March', traditionally played during the walk to wherever the minister was intending to marry the couple (in *Da Mirrie Dancers*, p. 11). The other march, played on the way back from the religious ceremony, was well known all over Shetland, Scotland, and possibly England also, under its name, 'Woo'd and Married and Aa'. It is one of the tunes which pipers may commonly play at Scottish weddings as the bridal pair emerge from the kirk. Peter Fraser's fifth tune, aptly called 'Da Farder Ben da Welcomer' (Ex. 30) was played as a welcome on the return of the bridal party at the bride's home. It appears to have no Scottish antecedents and was known also to John Stickle of Unst, whose slightly different version was published by Shuldham-Shaw (1947, p. 80). It must once have been known elsewhere in Shetland for it is also listed (but not notated) in Hoseason's manuscript (1863). Neither Stickle nor Fraser gave any hint that it may have been danced, but the title appears in a list of 'Names of Reels or Dance Music collected in the Island of Unst' in the Notes section of the

Ex. 29 'Kiss Her and Clap Her', Finnigirth, Walls. P. Fraser. Wedding Tune, SA 1962/58. Divisions of the crotchet pulse are often difficult to determine. Otto Andersson (1938, p. 94) gives it wrongly barred and in 2/4 throughout. The version in *Da Mirrie Dancers* is given in 6/8 throughout



♩ = ♩ or ♩ or ♩ or ♩ etc.

Old Lore Miscellany (vol. 4, 1913). Its asymmetrical phrasing and internal repetitions lead one to think that it is not of Scottish derivation.

Of the three wedding tunes collected from John Stickle in Unst the second and third are definitely Scottish. Both were played in Unst as marches. 'The Bride's a Boanie Thing' is a variant of a tune of the same name published in early Scottish collections. Stickle played the tune in G but Scottish variants are given

Ex. 30 'Da Farder Ben da Welcomer'. Wedding tune

- (a) 'Da farder ben da wylcomer', 'as played by Peter Fraser', from *Da Mirrie Dancers*
(b) 'Da farder bein, da welcomer', from P. S. Shuldham-Shaw (1947, p. 80)



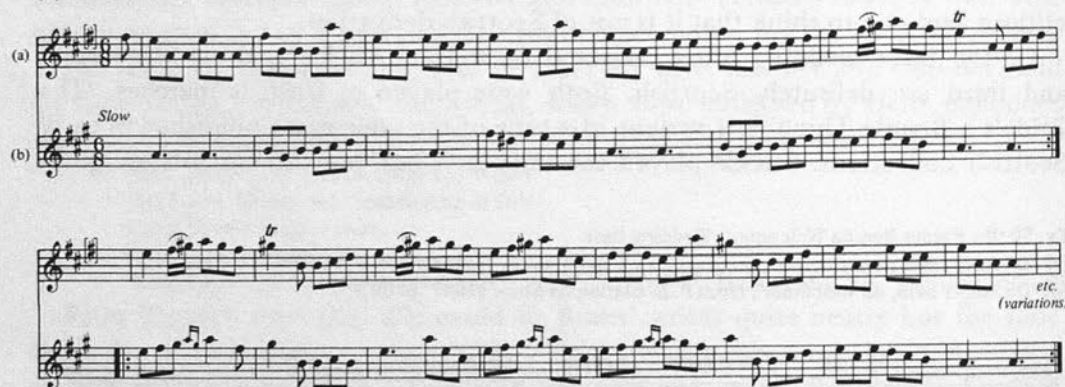


in A, a key favoured by Tom Anderson, who has revived the tune in Shetland using an A–E–A–E tuning so as to enhance the 'Scandinavian' flavour. In Example 31a and b, it is compared with the version in Oswald's *Caledonian Pocket Companion* (vol. 8, p. 21).

Ex. 31 'The Bride's a Boanie Thing'. Bridal March

(a) 'Scotland', from Oswald, vol. 8, p. 21

(b) from Unst. J. Stickle, from P. S. Shuldham-Shaw (1947, p. 80). Transposed up a tone to aid comparison



Ex. 32

(a) 'A Scottish March', from *The First Part of Musick's Handmaid*, J. Playford, 1678. Transcribed by T. Dart, London, 1969

(b) 'The Bride's March', Unst. John Stickle. From P. S. Shuldham-Shaw (1947, p. 79)



The third Unst melody is likewise a variant of an old Scottish tune. Stickle's version of 'The Bride's March' is very similar to the song air called 'The Rock and the Wee Pickle Tow'. Stickle told Shuldham-Shaw, the collector, that this tune was used to accompany the procession from the kirk after the marriage and that 'from almost every house passed on the way there would come a fiddler on to the doorstep who would play this tune as the procession passed'. If the locals knew the traditional text of the song, it must have caused some mirth and, at the same time, could serve as a warning to future young wives, for it takes the form of an 'auld wife's' lament on the difficulties of learning the wifely art of spinning. An even older source suggests that the tune may well have been known as a bridal march in Scotland also, for it first appears in John Playford's *Musick's Handmaid* (1678), entitled 'A Scottish March'. Stickle's and Playford's versions are compared in Example 32. Peter Fraser's 'Bride's March' (to the minister) seems to have been known only in his district of Walls and it does not fit a text usually associated with the march to the minister. This text was quoted in 'Recollections of a Shetland Wedding' (Appendix 1) and was known in many parts of Shetland.

Its words run:

Now must I* leave father and mother?
Now must I leave sister and brother?
Now must I leave both kith and kin
And follow the back of** a fremd man's son?

* 'How can I . . .' in some versions

** 'And follow after . . .' in some versions

This is one of the several tunes also associated with weddings in Whalsay and known to both John Irvine and Andrew Poleson. A different tune sung to the same text was recorded in Delting and is included for comparison with the Whalsay tune in Example 33. The Delting tune does not fit the words quite so well as the Whalsay tune unless the last line of text is shortened.

In Whalsay the well-known march 'Woo'd and Married and Aa' was played for the march home after the minister's ceremony, as in Walls and elsewhere. John Irvine recalled that in his youth it was also played by fiddlers during the signing of the register. The tune and text is almost exactly as published in early Scottish collections and was known to most older Whalsay people during my period of fieldwork.

In Whalsay, music was also required for the ritual of 'bedding the bride', a custom which ended, according to John Irvine, around 1910.

J.I. The bride was put to bed, and the whole lasses, the whole women went into the bride's hoose and they put her to bed. And there was no man allowed in there at all – unless the fiddler – and I was always it so, I – [laughs]

E.S. So you actually played there?

J.I. Yes, yes, O yes, I had to step up and play the fiddle.

E.S. Were there any special tunes?

J.I. Yes, there were special tunes, but, oh mun, I've lost the most of them now . . . That was

Ex. 33 'Noo Mun I Leave my Father and Mother' or 'But the House and Ben the House'. Wedding tune
 (a) Whalsay. Andrew Poleson. SA 1971/211/18. Additions in [] are taken from another performance, SA 1974/104. Words from SA 1977/104, those in [] from the singing of his wife, Annie, SA 1977/104
 (b) Delting. Tom Robertson. SA 1974/96/7, collector Alan Bruford. Player afterwards commented 'I think I made a few mistakes': he had never heard it played at a wedding

(a) *How can I leave fath-er and mother and How can I leave sis-ter or broth-er and how can I leave kith and kin and fol-low after a fremd man's son? Did-dle a dow - dle - id - dle a day. D.C.*

(b) *[Noo must I leave father and mother and, Noo]*

*DBG in later repeats (later repeats) ** 2nd time BD, 3rd time AD D.C.

my job. And there were — it's a lilt — you see, there were no dancing, more as a lilt. There were no room to dance you see, the hoose was aa full as she could ha'd you see, there were fifty or sixty lasses'd be within. Then after they got her in, aa the men cam in wi the bridegroom. [laughs] Oh, it were a great thing.

(SA/1961/27; fieldworker Elizabeth Sinclair)

John Irvine remembered a suite of three tunes which he played at this ritual. They were also known to Andrew Poleson. All three were played with A-E-A-E tuning. Sandwiched between two reels ('Grieg's Pipes' and 'The Black and The Brown' — only the first being known in Scottish collections) was a slower tune called in Whalsay 'But the House and Ben the House' or 'Black Jock' (Ex. 34). According to some informants the first two lines were:

But your house and ben your house
 This house is like a bridal house.

But the tune played was, in fact, known throughout Britain and Ireland during the 18th century as 'The Black Joke' (or Joak) and is linked to a variety of texts, all of them bawdy and all concerned with sexual intercourse. Some of the texts are the creations of music-hall hacks, such as the earliest published verses, entitled 'The Original Black Joke, Sent from Dublin', which begin: 'No mortal sure can blame ye man/Who prompted by nature will act as he can' . . . (song sheet, c.1720 Mitchell Library, Glasgow). Simple and more direct 'folk' versions were known in Scotland. Burns wrote a parody beginning 'My girl she's airy . . .'

Ex. 34 'Black Jock' or 'But the House and Ben the House', Whalsay. Song Air played at bedding of bride
 (a) John Irvine. SA 1961/27, collector Eliza Sinclair. Written as it sounds, not as it is fingered. Open string use not shown
 (b) Andrew Poleson. SA 1971/269. Bowing not consistent

(a) *[wi her Black Joke . . .]*
... bel-ly so white]
[Fine]

(b)

(Kinsley, 1964), and the text that follows is taken from Andrew Crawford's *Collection of Ballads and Songs*, compiled during the years 1826–8:

A wee black thing sat on a cushion
 Was hairy without and toothless within
 Wi her black Jock and her belley so white

A piper and twa little drummers came there
 to play wi the wee thing well covered o'er wi hair

The piper went in and he jigg'd about
 The twa little drummers stood ruffling without

But when he came out he hang doon his head
 He look'd like a snail that was trodden to dead

Say's he thay wa'd need to hae something to spare
 That meddle wi you or your wee pickle hair

(Lyle, 1975, p. 167)

Despite or perhaps because of texts like this the tune itself is printed in a number of collections of instrumental music, usually with sets of variations attached. The late Robert Irvine of Whalsay knew just one line of text from the song ('Black Jock wi' his belley so white'), which he thought (probably mistakenly) was a pipe march introduced by a Scottish fiddler, John Newbigging,

during the period 1840–50. Newbigging came to Whalsay from near Peebles in the Scottish borders to serve as farm grieve on the estate of Bruce, the laird of Whalsay. It is possible that Mr Irvine was confusing this tune with the Scottish jig 'John Paterson's Mare', which was also known in the form of a reel in Whalsay. Its text begins with the words 'The black and the brown . . .', the title of the third tune in the suite of three.

The use of the 'Black Joke' in this context is intriguing. Robert Irvine's knowledge of part of the chorus suggests that in earlier days the whole song might have been known and, unless the fiddler was having his own private joke by playing this piece, possibly even sung by the bride's attendants. Genuine bawdry is often found in such situations elsewhere in the world. According to Legman (1964), 'the purpose of such songs . . . was and is evidently apotropaic, being intended to ward off the evil eye . . . dangerously present at all moments of happiness, or of success and victory' (*The Horn Book*, 1964, p. 388). It is likely, too, that such humour served to release anxiety on the part of the young initiate. Finally, if the text were anything like the Crawford text, the explicit detail could have served also as a piece of last-minute sex education – an example of how music is sometimes used in a situation that allows one to sing what might be too embarrassing to say.

One other tune requires mention in the context of wedding tunes. It was recorded from John Fraser, a native of Papa Stour, who remembered his father playing it but did not know its name. He was told later by friends in Lerwick that it could have been a bride's reel. Presumably, his friends (possibly members of the Shetland Folk Society) identified it as such because of its slow '9/8' time (Ex. 35) and it is interesting that so many of the Shetland and Scottish wedding tunes are in slow jig time. One could hazard the guess that such tunes derive from old Scottish dance-songs used for circle dances (or possibly dances of the Faroese chain type) and that, as in the case of bride's reels today, their close attachment to the wedding rite ensured their survival into the present century.

Unless they are consciously revived (as only occasionally happens today in Shetland), these wedding tunes are no longer played in the wedding context and, indeed, even those few older fiddlers who kept them as part of their repertory as late as World War II have, with the death of Andrew Poleson in 1979, all passed on. The tunes survive now as a historical record of the much valued musical role

Ex. 35 'A Bride's Reel', Papa Stour. John Fraser. Asymmetrical 'jig', SA 1970/254/12. Note the asymmetry at the start of the 2nd line



of fiddlers at weddings, who, with their playing, lent dignity, charm and sometimes humour to the various stages of the ritual.

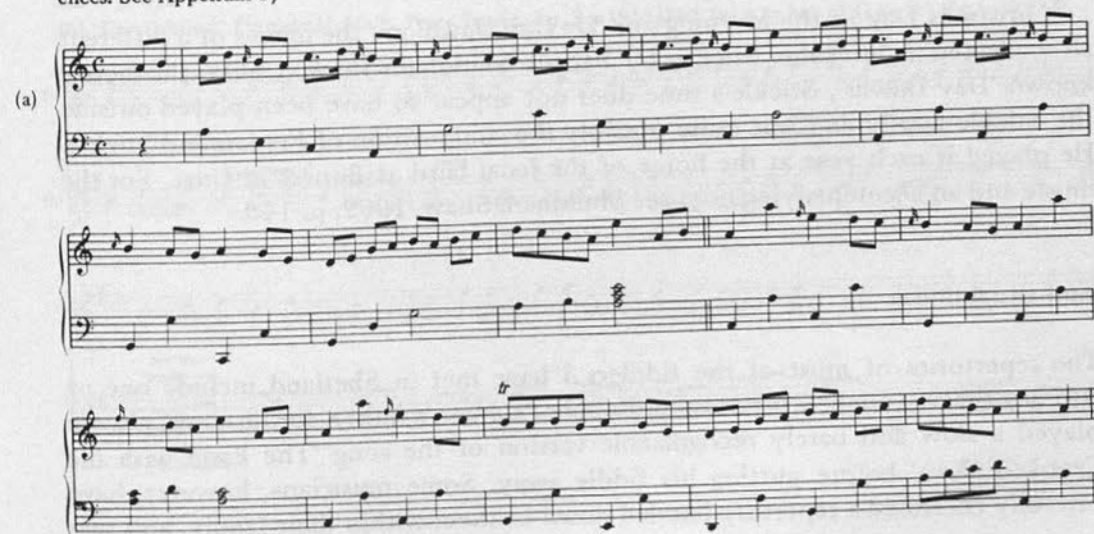
2. New Year or Christmas tunes

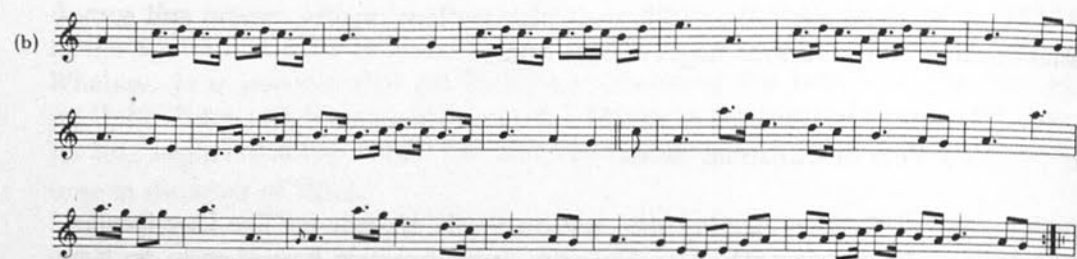
The custom of fiddlers playing the tune variously known as 'The Day Dawns', 'The Day o' Dawie', or 'The Day Daywen' around certain houses early on New Year's morning has already been mentioned in connection with Edmondstone's account of social life (chapter 1, p. 5). Records of tunes with such a name go back to the beginning of the 16th century in Scotland with Dunbar's mention of 'Now the Day Dawis' in his poem 'To the Merchants of Edinburgh' (see Dick, 1962, p. 450 for notes on early records of this tune). The setting published in 1822 by Hibbert (Ex. 36a) has been the source for a number of printed versions since then, and Hoseason includes a similar version in his manuscript (Ex. 36b). But it is likely that tunes of this name would have survived in oral tradition without the aid of notation. John Irvine has recounted how he learned 'The Day o' Dawie' from the singing of an old friend and he remarked then that it was the custom for parties of men to go around the island singing the tune (though he never heard words to it – presumably his informant 'diddled' it over to him). This custom of singing around the houses is still strong in Whalsay and the writer has himself experienced some of the musical merrymaking that traditionally takes place in Cullivoe (Yell) on the night of Old New Year. But the custom of

Ex. 36

(a) 'The Day Dawn', from Hibbert (1822/1871). 'An ancient Scandinavian air preserved in Shetland, set by Miss Kemp of Edinburgh.'

(b) 'The Day Daywen', from J. Hoseason's MS (original notation not the fair copy which has slight differences. See Appendix 5)





playing a melody of this name as part of a winter solstice ritual seems to have passed long ago. Unlike the notated versions of 'The Day Dawns', John Irvine's half-remembered version (Ex. 37) is partly in the major key.

Ex. 37 'The Day o' Dawie', Whalsay. John Irvine. New Year tune, SA 1959/95, collector Tom Anderson; and SA 1961/27. Notes: Conflation of two recordings both substantially the same, but signs and notes in [] not always performed. Tempo fluctuates, no regular metric structure. Semi-bar lines suggest position of stressed 'beats'



'Christmas Day in the Morning', or 'Da Day Dawn' are the names of a different air collected from John Stickle by Patrick Shuldham-Shaw. Unlike the better known 'Day Dawns', Stickle's tune does not appear to have been played outside the Stickle family and was quite possibly the composition of Fredamond Stickle. He played it each year at the home of the local laird at Bunes in Unst. For the music and an accompanying note see Shuldham-Shaw, 1962, p. 140.

Non-ritual music

The repertoires of most of the fiddlers I have met in Shetland include one or two airs that have taken their fancy. Bobbie Peterson's father, for instance, always played a slow and barely recognizable version of the song 'The Ewie with the Crooked Horn' before putting his fiddle away. Some musicians, however, have carefully cherished a repertory handed down to them within their family, and two

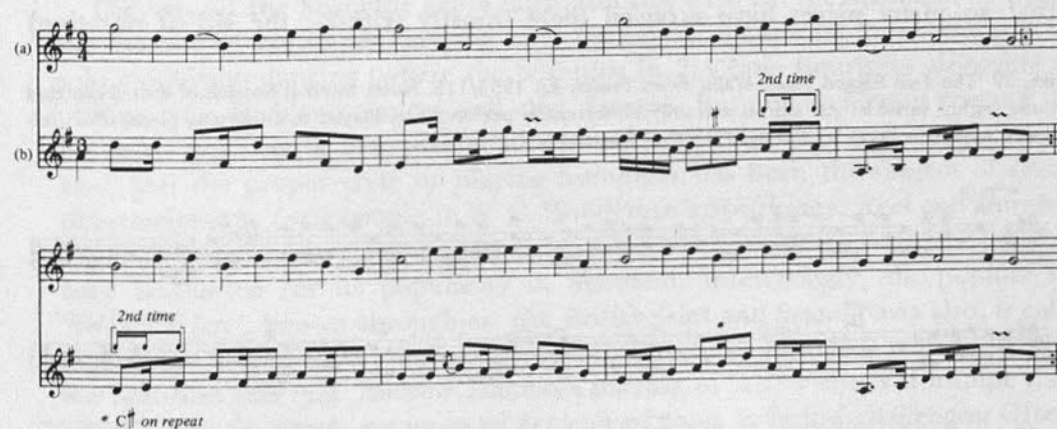
such sources for some of the most intriguing and probably oldest 'listening' tunes in Shetland have been John Stickle and Peter Fraser.




Most of John Stickle's listening repertory has been published and commented on by Shuldham-Shaw (1947 and 1962) or by the Shetland Folk Society in their volumes of the *Shetland Folk Book* and *Da Mirrie Dancers*. These pieces comprise an interesting mixture of tunes of supposedly Norse and Scottish origin. Their rhythmic structure is often problematic. Shuldham-Shaw notated 'The Waterman's Hornpipe' in 5/2 time (1962, p. 133), 'Doon da Rooth' in 21/8 (*Da Mirrie Dancers*, p. 17) and others show abrupt changes of metre.

Fewer of Peter Fraser's tunes have been published, possibly owing to the difficulty of notating their unusual rhythms. His version of the 'lament' 'Auld Swarra', published recently in *Haand Me Doon da Fiddle* (Anderson and Swing, 1979) is somewhat similar to Stickle's published tune. Like Stickle's version, the abrupt pitch changes suggest Norse origins and the name 'Swarra' is Norse. Three other slow airs were known to Peter Fraser. 'The Silver Bow' has a set of variations attached to it. The other two tunes are given local names – 'The Mill o' Finnigirth' (printed in *Haand Me Doon da Fiddle*, p. 36) and 'The Yairds o' Finnigirth'. This would suggest local origins, as is the case with two of Peter Fraser's own compositions – reels called 'Da Hill of Finnigirth' and 'Da Burn o' Finnigirth' (*Da Mirrie Dancers*, p. 28). The home of the Frasers was known as the house of Finnigirth, now a ruin. 'The Yairds o' Finnigirth' in fact turns out to be a beautiful ornamental slow version of a longways country dance called 'Scotland' in Playford's *Dancing Master* (14th edn, 1709, p. 19; given in Ex. 38) and later published in *The Athole Collection of the Dance Music of Scotland* (Stewart-Robertson, 1884, p. 138) as a 9/8 jig in D major called 'Andrew Carr'. A possible explanation

Ex. 38

(a) 'Scotland'. Jig-time country dance, from *The Dancing Master* (14 edn, 1709), p. 19. 'Longways for as many as will'
(b) 'The Yairds o' Finnigirth', Walls. Peter Fraser. Air, SA 1955/114. (a) is in key of G, in (b) the tonic is D.



In (b) ♯ =  or  or  etc.

is that the sept of the clan Fraser which came to Shetland brought some of their country dances with them, but that long ago the dance and its name were forgotten and only the tune survived, acquiring a distinctively local flavour over the years.

One more listening tune of Peter Fraser's deserves a mention because it was popularized during the late 1970s (through the teaching and playing of Tom Anderson). Many Shetland tunes are enjoyed because of their programmatic content – some feature in the melody being associated with its picturesque title. In this case the opening of Peter Fraser's tune 'The Full Rigged Ship' conjures up the image of a fine sailing ship and the little hesitations and sudden melodic turns are explained by Tom Anderson as the motion experienced when such a vessel mounts the ocean swell, pauses and dips its bow again (Ex. 39).

1. Novelties

Three novelty pieces have long been popular in Shetland though they are probably not of Shetland origin. They should perhaps also be classed as programme music. In 'The Four Posts of the Bed', a lively reel time tune, the fiddler is required to give four rhythmic taps with the base of the bow, one on each of the four quarters of the belly of his instrument between left-hand pizzicato chords. The other two novelties, 'The Hen's March oer the Midden' and 'The Soo's Lament for Raw Tatties' exploit the humour that is produced when non-musical, animal noises are incorporated into musical pieces. Both feature in the repertoires of a number of fiddlers and both have been printed among British collections from as early as the mid 18th century.

As is becoming apparent, the more closely we examine much of the Shetland repertoire the more we find it has entered Shetland from further south, Scotland mostly, but it is a pointer to the conservative strength of the Shetland tradition that so many pieces have survived there (mostly without the aid of notation)

Ex. 39 'The Full Rigged Ship', Walls. Peter Fraser. SA 1955/115. Note: internal division of dotted-crotchet pulse highly variable. An almost certainly idiosyncratic performance. Played as a listening piece, often followed without a break by the reel 'The New Rigged Ship'



Ex. 40 'The Hen's March oer the Midden', Mainland. Jean Pole. Novelty tune, SA 1960/214/1, collector Tom Anderson



where elsewhere they have long been forgotten. 'The Hen's March', for example, has been re-introduced into the Scottish musical scene as much by the playing of Tom Anderson as by anyone else. His setting is close to that published by Walsh in his *Third Book* ([1730], p. 19, where it is called 'The Cackling of the Hens'), though not as close as another variant recorded by Tom Anderson from Miss Jean Pole (Ex. 40).

2. The newer listening repertoire

As the fiddler has increasingly given his place in the dance hall over to the accordionist and 'retired to his den', so the repertoire is changing in response to this move. His playing style is changing also, but that will be discussed in the following chapter. We have seen that new dance tunes continue to be made and are often taken up by dance-bands, but younger fiddlers are more interested in them for the greater technical challenges they often present.

The case of the hornpipe genre illustrates this well. On the mainland of Britain the dancing of hornpipes has long since ceased except among those who practise solo exhibition dancing (where the hornpipe in 2/4 time flourishes alongside the various solo Highland dances and clog dances). But for at least a century the hornpipe has been a favourite genre among fiddlers in Scotland and in Ireland also, and the proper style of playing hornpipes has been the subject of several dissertations, as for example in W. C. Honeyman's *Strathspey, Reel and Hornpipe Tutor* (Dundee, n.d., c.190?). The nautical connections of the hornpipe may also have accounted for its popularity in Shetland. Interestingly, the popular reel 'Soldier's Joy', known throughout the British Isles and Scandinavia also, is called a hornpipe in Denmark. Many of these pieces have been played as reels for dancing the Shetland reel (e.g. Andrew Poleson's playing of 'The Fisher's Hornpipe'), but others, as in Scotland, are enjoyed because of their technical challenges. Often a concert fiddler is asked to play the well-known 'Banks' or 'The Bee's Wing' hornpipes, for apart from their attractiveness, these hornpipes are in E flat and B flat

respectively and anything composed in a flat key is considered to be a real test of a fiddler's ability. Several Irish hornpipes have become popular since visits to the islands in the late 1970s by Sean MacGuire, the celebrated Irish fiddler. Lastly, a number of Shetlanders have made their own hornpipes. They include: 'Young Willie Hunter', composed by William Hunter jun. on the birth of his first son; 'The Foradale Hornpipe' (Ronald Jamieson); 'Sandy Bell's Hornpipe' (J. Smith of Burra Isle); 'The Tailor's Hornpipe' (Bobbie Peterson); and 'The Sixern' (sometimes called 'Yock her in Dee Bight, Boy', one of Tom Anderson's many compositions). These few examples are taken from the archives of the School of Scottish Studies.

The other genre which has become increasingly popular during the 1970s is the slow air in the style of Scottish slow airs (by such fiddle composers as William Marshall, Neil Gow and sons, Simon Fraser and James Scott Skinner). As yet however the popularity of such tunes tends to be restricted to Lerwick musicians and their audiences, for as the capital and main port it has been the place where new fashions first arrive. Thus while we find Lerwick musicians such as the late Frank Jamieson, his son Ronald, William Hunter and Tom Anderson playing Scottish slow airs and composing others in more or less the same style, we find less interest elsewhere; for in the other islands the concept of the fiddle as the instrument for dancing is still paramount. The remark of one Cullivoe fiddler has already been noted — 'Nobody plays slow airs around here — that's for funerals!' (SA/1980/13). This must explain why there are so few slow airs in the older Shetland repertory. However, such changes as this are discussed more fully in chapter 5.

The making of the repertory

We have seen that the whole repertory consists of a mixture of indigenous tunes and others from outside Shetland, Scotland mostly. Since so many Shetlanders are making new tunes at present, it is possible to discuss the creation of such tunes. Laurence Williamson's folkloric note cited in chapter 1 includes a reference to tunes which were reputed to be of fairy origin. Such tales abound: often a fiddler is returning from a dance and is so tired that he takes a rest by the roadside, falling asleep at the side of a fairy mound and when he awakes later and goes on his way, his head is ringing with a tune which 'the fairies have taught him', or which he has heard coming from the mound. The other source of inspiration has been some monotonous rhythm, for example running machinery. Harry Tulloch's testimony combines elements of both situations:

I mind being playing at a wedding in the Hall here and the next day I wasn't feeling too good of course. But — I was needing some sheaves of corn and hay down from the Wart Hill. So I got the old BMB single cylinder six-horse engine going . . . and as soon as that engine started here was all the tunes flying through my mind. (SA/1972/115)

It seems that tiredness after a night of music-making is a condition that allows

the mind to generate new melodies unconsciously from the stock of themes and formulae that are still whirling around. Often a new tune, or at least a part of it, takes shape 'in a flash'. This was frequently true for the late Frank Jamieson:

F.J. I might only get the first part — but if I get the first part, the second part is no bother.

P.C. It comes when you're not thinking about it?

F.J. That's right, or I might be fooling around on the fiddle you see, and suddenly play a phrase which I like, and then I'll build around it. But sometimes I get one part you see, and the second part will beat me — but what I did was I just left it and maybe a week or a fortnight later this would come in my mind. And I'll pick up the fiddle and play a second piece to it right away. It might come in a flash just like that. 'Margaret Ann Robertson' was composed like that.

Alan Tulloch's remarks on his composing also lend weight to the idea that many tunes are created as a result of some unconscious structuring process that can be going on in the brain, and is brought to the level of the conscious by some external stimulation, often of a rhythmic nature. Many of his tunes were composed while at the boring task of gutting fish while on board the 'Floris' at sea, with the rhythm of the boat's diesel engine thumping away in the background. For him too the process of conscious realization seems to take place only at the very last moment:

There'd been something going on in my head on the line of a tune all day that must have been fighting to come out. The strange thing was [that when he picked up the fiddle] that when I started to play it I had no idea what it was going to be — it could have been a waltz, it could have been anything. (SA/1977/109)

Several fiddlers have mentioned the anguish they feel when they become conscious of an attractive tune that has formed in their heads but, having no fiddle near them, nor that other aid to composition, the tape recorder, they are unable to remember it later. Bobbie Peterson's explanation of how he composed 'Cabister Head' was given in chapter 2 and other accounts are given in the notes to the disc *Shetland Fiddle Music* (TNGM117). Taken all together, these accounts match very closely the findings of S. C. Jardine, who carried out an investigation of composition processes among traditional Irish fiddlers (Jardine, 1981).

4 Musical style and performance style

Much descriptive musicology is necessarily comparative, in that we are continually having to make comparisons between that which is familiar to us and that which is not. So in answer to the question 'What is "x" music like?', one usually finds it necessary to begin by saying that it is like 'y' but different from it in certain respects. Such an answer presupposes that the informer already knows something about the music 'y' and that he knows that the questioner also knows something about the same music. In the case of Shetland fiddle music the most obvious comparison would seem to be with other British and Irish music. But clearly also the evidence of the Aald Reels (chapter 3) points to the impingement of a Scottish (British) musical culture on an earlier Norse culture. So to isolate the distinctive features of Shetland fiddle music one would need to study Scottish, Irish and Scandinavian instrumental music and make comparisons with that of Shetland. In such a general survey as this there is hardly room for that kind of approach, though it must be admitted that the results of such an enquiry would interest most Shetlanders, who are very conscious of their Scandinavian past and often ready to emphasize how different their culture is from that of their Scottish neighbours.

Such an answer is also essentially historical and it would not suffice to assume that all non-Scottish or non-Irish features in the present-day music of Shetland must be remnant features from an older Scandinavian tradition — they might just as well be remnants of an earlier Scottish tradition, for it is probably true to say that the communities of rural Shetland, like those of the western isles, have been more highly resistant to change and more insulated from the more recent non-indigenous influences than mainland Scotland. We have already seen that many reels in the repertory are variants of vocal and instrumental tunes popular in mainland Scotland during the earlier part of the 18th century but now rarely heard outside Shetland. Might not also Shetland performance style be a similar survival?

One can do little more than speculate on such matters because of the dearth of useful data on the early 18th-century playing style of either Scotland or Scandinavia. But before leaving historical questions one other aspect needs consideration. Virtually all the musical data on which this study of the repertory is based was collected on tape between 1951 and 1980. That in itself was a period of rapid change. Many of the older informants, fine fiddlers, belonging

to a tradition of unaccompanied playing for dancing, have since died. They were prime examples of what Shetlanders affectionately call 'da aald Shetland fiddler': this term in itself points to changed notions about fiddling and implies that there is now a newer kind of fiddler. During my fieldwork period both kinds of fiddler were active, but in different contexts, and it makes sense to discuss the performance styles of both quite separately.

The general musical characteristics of the repertory will first be considered: taken together they define the musical style of the repertory. Convenient sources for a discussion of general musical style are to be found in the printed and manuscript collections of the Shetland Folk Society (e.g. *Da Mirrie Dancers*) and in *Haand Me Doon da Fiddle* (Anderson and Swing, 1979), for with few exceptions these may be regarded as generalized prescriptive versions of tunes known and performed in most areas of Shetland and may usefully be used for trait analysis. The second part of this chapter makes use of detailed descriptive transcriptions, which are records of the particular performances of selected fiddlers and which form useful starting points for a discussion of performance style. By this term I mean the different ways in which individual fiddlers or communities of fiddlers in different parts of Shetland perform the shared repertory.

Musical style

Two sets of non-musical factors combine to have a powerful effect on the musical style of any fiddle repertory. The first is social; the second might be called bio-mechanical or motoric and arises from the potential and restrictions of the instrument itself. Taking social factors first of all, I have already stressed that the fiddle in Shetland was, above all, an instrument for dance, and dance even today has an importance in Shetland social life that far outweighs the frequency of its occurrence. In dance music the prime ingredient is rhythm. So far as the Shetland reel is concerned, as it is danced today, one performance rarely lasts for more than two or three minutes, for it is so energetic that the dancers are quickly exhausted. So a suite of two or at most three musical items in the same or related tonality is entirely adequate for each dance. The essential binary structure of each serves as a musical parallel to the alternations between reeling in pairs in a figure-of-eight pattern and dancing on the spot facing one's partner. In Cullivoe in 1973 the tempo of the reel when danced was MM crotchet = 114, each crotchet representing the tempo of weight transference from one foot to the other during the reeling. During the dancing turnings those dancers who performed the back step (i.e. placing one foot behind the other and hopping on it once before repeating the process with the other foot) did it in time to the quaver pulse and all dancers marked the end of the dancing turning with three quaver stamps beginning on the first beat of the last bar of the turning (RLR) before either repeating the dancing or moving off again in crotchet tempo into the 'reeling turn'. Many older infor-

ments have commented on how well old men used to dance Shetland reels, each man often having his favourite tune for dancing and each marking the individual rhythms of the dancing turning with his own individual pattern of dance steps.

Such dancing is clearly related to step-, tap- and clog-dancing styles of other parts of the British Isles and (in particular) Cape Breton and those other parts of the Americas where the immigrants were mostly of north British origin. But outside Shetland these styles mostly survive as solo spectacles (e.g. Highland dancing) rather than as part of social dance; for feats of athleticism, shown in this case through the lively footwork, are no longer an important feature of social dancing in the U.K. outside Shetland.

Rhythm

Rhythm is all-important to both fiddlers and dancers. The internal rhythm of a tune is contained both in its metrical duration patterns and its melodic accent. Such differences are enhanced by the best fiddlers and realized in varied movement and accentual gestures by the best dancers. John Henderson (son of the late Willie B. Henderson of Gloup) emphasized the importance of the bow arm in producing the desired rhythmic effect: 'Unless you can play the fiddle wi' a lilt in til it, then that was no use even grappling a bow – it's the bowing and lilt that [makes] you feel like dancing.' (Quoting from a relative, SA/1980/10)

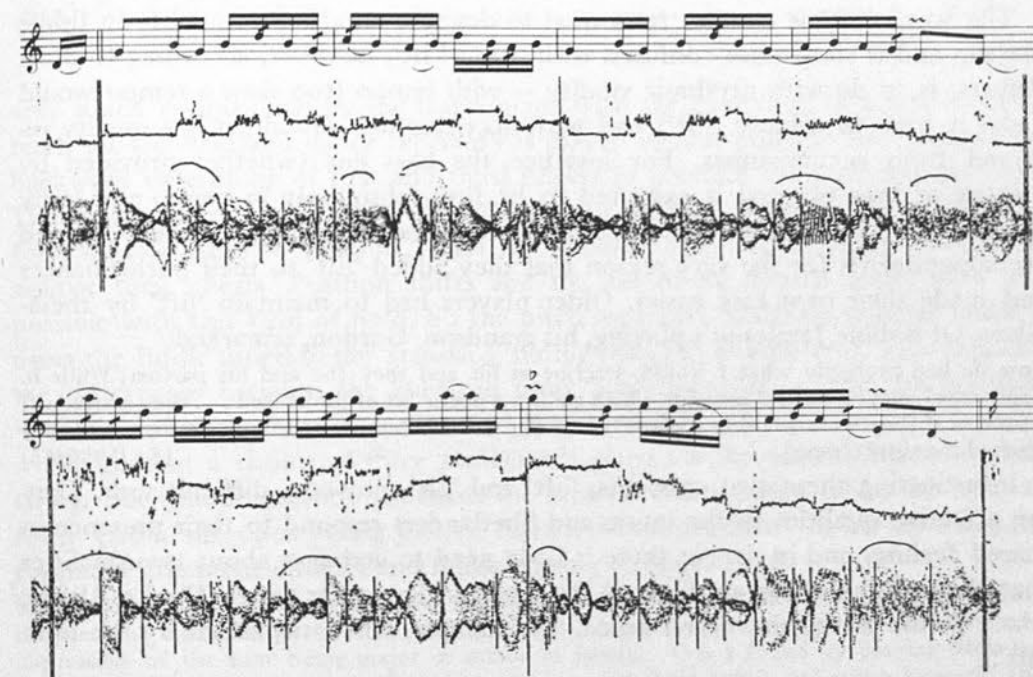
Other recorded accounts point out the attitude of older dancers also to the desired rhythmic quality. In the words of Harry Tulloch (late of Bressay Island):

I remember me playing one night and I had another fellow accompanying me on the guitar. Old Willy Robertson ... was doing a bit of dancing on his own. But we played one tune. 'No no mun!' he says, 'Stop, stop – I canna hear the fiddle.' You see, he couldna hear the tune for this – thump thump. He wis wanting jest the straight tune of the fiddle and he hed this vamping at the back o' him and it put him off. He's been used to the true rhythm of the tune. That's why there wis so much needit in the bowin o' da Shetland tune – because they were listening to that you see – to get the stepping. (SA/1972/116/5)

Nowadays, Harry complained, the accompaniments provided all 'the beat' and the rhythm of the tune does not matter any more.

John Henderson's use of the term 'lilt' deserves some discussion. It seems to have a specialized meaning in Shetland and, for many informants, it pertains to the rhythmic flow of the melody. Though the running notes in reels may frequently be notated as equal quavers or (as with the examples in this book) in semiquavers, in performance they are rarely equal in duration. Relative proportions between pairs of notes are often 4:3 or 5:3, occasionally even 2:1. Most frequently, as in bars 5 and 6 of Example 41, the first of each pair is the longer, though when three notes are played with one bow the middle note – and the first of a pair – is often shortened, though accented also. It is such variation in the infra-rhythmic structure of the tune, combined with variation in dynamic accents achieved with the bow, that make for good performances – playing that makes Shetlanders 'feel like dancing'.

Ex. 41 'Jack Broke the Prison Door'. Willie Hunter sen. Shetland Reel, SA 1972/112/1A (repeat of first turning and second turning (first time) only)



The particular type of lilt used in Shetland is one of the ingredients that mark it out from Scottish and Irish fiddling, for today at least the infra-rhythmic structure of reels in Scottish music is far more even, and in Irish fiddling more consistently composed of long-short (4:3 or 5:3) combinations. In the best Shetland fiddling it is more varied than either of these and this is well illustrated by William Hunter sen., who was highly regarded for the lilting quality of his playing, and for his 'fine bow haund'.

Example 41 is a transcription of his playing of the reel 'Jack Broke the Prison Door'. The music stave gives the tune as it might be transcribed with some of the shorter semiquavers indicated by an extra slash through the tails. But the time values are more precisely indicated in the second line (a pitch graph) and also in the bottom line (the spectral envelope), with vertical lines being added to show the approximate boundaries between notes. (These graphs were produced with the help of electro-chymography carried out in the laboratory of the Department of Linguistics of Edinburgh University.) Note that the pitch graph is offset slightly to the right of the spectral envelope due to a delay unavoidably built into the electronic process. The great variety in note length that gives his playing such 'lilt' is more clearly and precisely indicated than is possible in any standard musical transcription. Like most traditional Shetland fiddlers, Willie Hunter learned the older repertory orally, absorbing infra-rhythmic details at the same time. When younger fiddlers learn such tunes from notations the information on

infra-rhythmic variety is missing and as a result the performance often lacks rhythmic interest – lilt.

The word 'lift' is another term used to describe an affective quality in fiddle playing and is sometimes confused with 'lilt'. 'Lift', however, according to most players, is to do with rhythmic vitality – with tempo (too slow a tempo would make it hard to achieve 'lift') and with accentuation. Good lift is a quality required from accompanists. For instance the bass line (whether provided by pianists or bass players) is expected to be firm, absolutely in tempo and fairly staccato. As we have seen in some earlier testimonies, younger fiddlers enjoyed accompaniments for the very reason that they added 'lift' to their performances and made their own task easier. Older players had to maintain 'lift' by themselves. Of Bobbie Jamieson's playing, his grandson, Gordon, remarked:

Now he had probably what I would describe as lilt and they [he and his partner, Willie B. Henderson] played on the fast side which gie'd it a peerie bit of lift as well . . . they started off a tune as if they were winding themselves up [i.e. accelerated over a couple of bars until they reached the right tempo].
(SA/1980/15)

Investigating these two concepts, 'lift' and 'lilt', proved a difficult task. They are affective qualities in the music and Shetlanders respond to their presence in shared feelings and in dance: there is little need to verbalise about two qualities that they all feel. This problem is discussed in an earlier paper (Cooke, 1981),⁶ where I have noted that when asked, for example, what was meant by the term 'lift',

Informants either referred to the examples on my tape and said 'that has a good lift' or they referred to the playing style of a particular fiddler known to me and said 'he plays with good lift' or they resorted to gestures, commonly beginning, after a long pause, with 'well, it's very difficult to explain, it's a kind of . . . [gesture].'
(Cooke, 1981, pp. 49–50)

Many fiddlers took the sensible way out and simply picked up their fiddles to demonstrate the difference between playing with and without 'lilt'.

Most older fiddlers remarked on the need to play not only rhythmically but also strongly because of the noise that the dancers made with their heavy footwear, their 'heuching' and the general chatter of the non-dancing participants. This was one reason why they frequently sound two strings simultaneously, making the fiddle ring out with maximum sound for as long as possible. The dancing turnings always produced more noise from the dancers than the reeling turns and this possibly is one reason why the second turning of most reels is usually in a higher register than the first turning, making greatest use of the highest string. But it should also be added that the dancing turning is the more exciting section of the dance and one would expect this to be reflected in a correspondingly higher level of musical excitement – hence possibly a higher register.

Tonality

Turning now from the dance context of the music to the constraints and potential of the instrument itself, it appears that in Shetland the tonality of the music is

Ex. 42 Repertory of pitches traditionally used by Shetland fiddlers



very much conditioned by the instrument. With the exception of a few modern reels, all the Shetland dance repertory is played in first position and forward or backward extensions of first and third fingers to produce extra pitches are rare. The fourth finger was also never used by older fiddlers; indeed many of them – for example Andrew Poleson (Plate 9) – held their fiddles along their arms against their chests. Position shifts and the use of the fourth finger were impossible with this kind of hold. So the pitch repertory available to older fiddlers using the fiddle tuned to the 'standard' tuning was as in Example 42. This explains the differences between the Shetland tune 'Scalloway Lasses' and the Scottish 'Fair Field House' which were discussed in chapter 3.

Notice that a choice of three positions is given for the second finger on each string. The middle position produces the interval that is often called the 'neutral third' (from the open string pitch). Patrick Shuldham-Shaw in his brief but informative comment on Shetland fiddle playing style observed:

The third and seventh degrees of the scale are often neither flat nor sharp but somewhere between the two, though in these cases I usually found that the player had a very definite impression of the tune being major or minor in flavour. This I found by playing back the tunes after noting them, on a keyboard instrument, with both major and minor intervals, and the player invariably decided that one version was right and the other wrong.

(Shuldham-Shaw, 1947, p. 76)

This explanation implies that there was a difference between the musical intentions of the fiddlers and what they actually performed. But, in giving his musicians an 'either/or' choice, Shuldham-Shaw was apparently turning his back on the possibility that the players meant what they played and that 'neutral' intervals could feature in the Shetland modal system.

The question of a neutral mode has for long fascinated and baffled British and Scandinavian musicologists, at least from the time when Percy Grainger suggested the existence of 'one single loosely-knit modal folk-song scale' that was neither mixolydian, dorian nor aeolian (Grainger, 1908–9, p. 158). It is interesting (because of Shetland's cultural contacts with Norway) that the most recent and thorough investigation into neutral tones comes from a Norwegian scholar, Reidar Sevåg, an organologist specializing in the study of Scandinavian instruments. In his article 'Neutral Tones and the Problem of Mode in Norwegian Folk Music' he summarizes past theories and, as a result of his work with old langeleiks (narrow zithers with fretted fingerboards), proposes that an older modal system once existed in rural Norway based on a quality which he calls 'anhemitonic heptatonism' (Sevåg, 1974, pp. 207–13). The positioning of the frets on old langeleiks were vital evidence in Sevåg's research and, unlike those on more modern instruments, none of them allowed for semitone steps. He found instead

Ex. 43

- (a) 'Hadd dee Tongue, Bonnie Lass', Unst. Gilbert Gray. Shetland (?) Reel, SA 1971/273 (known also as 'Da Tief on da Lum' in Unst — but this is another tune in other districts of Shetland)
 (b) 'The Reel of Tulloch' (Miss Stuart's set) from *The Gesto Collection of Highland Music* (1895, p. 152)

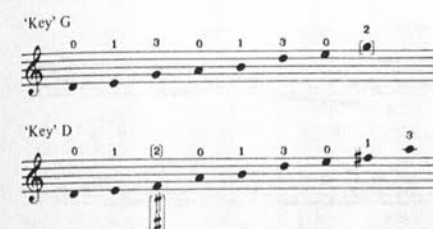


a variety of combinations of whole tones and smaller intervals — none smaller than 'a somewhat short three-quarter tone' — within a fixed framework of tonic fifth and octave. Such intervals certainly feature in the fiddle music of Shetland, but only in the case of the older fiddlers and, even then, it appears that during this century fiddle intonation has been changing fast. Thus some fiddlers, notably Andrew Poleson of Whalsay, made use of C natural, C sharp and neutral Cs, depending on the tonality of the reel, while others use only diatonic intonation.

Of the possible 'keys' usable from such a set of available pitches, the 'fiddle keys' of D (37%) and G (26%) are most common for the Shetland reels listed in Appendix 3. Of the reels with a subjective tonic of A (25%) some are clearly in a major tonality, often with alternating sections in G, which suggests Scottish (possibly bagpipe) influences. For instance, the Unst tune, 'Hadd dee Tongue, Bonnie Lass' (Ex. 43a) is very reminiscent in its tonal structure of the well-known Scottish 'Reel of Tulloch' (Ex. 43b). Other A-mode tunes are more problematic and it is here that neutral tones commonly occur, especially in the case of a number of A-mode tunes collected in Whalsay.

The strongly pentatonic nature of many of the tunes has already been mentioned. This may be one reason why writers have suggested that Shetland music has an Irish flavour (see for example Shuldham-Shaw, 1947, p. 79). But, as Example 44 shows, the frequent occurrence of pentatonic phrases may be as much a result of preferred finger patterns as anything else. In terms of ergonomics, fingers 1 and 3 operate easily in succession; fingers 1 and 2 possibly less well, and fingers 2 and 3 least well (we can ignore the fourth finger which in the older tradition was almost never used). Motifs using fingers 1 and 3 in conjunction with open strings abound throughout the repertory. Often, as in the case of 'The Merry Boys of Greenland' (Ex. 45), such pentatonic patterns (involving 0–1–3

Ex. 44 Pentatonic fingering patterns



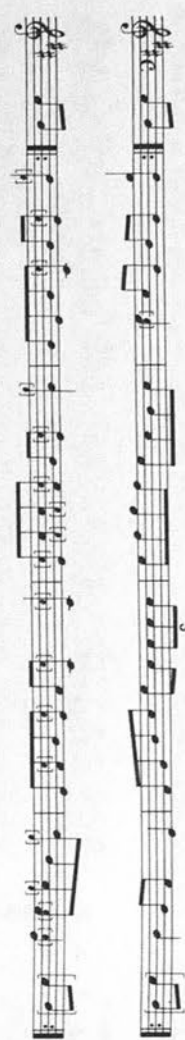
Ex. 45 'Da Mirrie Boys o' Greenland', Unst. Gilbert Gray. Shetland (Whaling) Reel, SA 1971/273



fingering) alternate with motifs employing the second finger and open strings to produce tunes analysable as hexatonic or heptatonic (in bar 4, older fiddlers invariably play neutral g" and c"). We are left speculating whether or not such finger patterns result from a deep-rooted affinity for pentatonic structures or whether bio-mechanical factors are stronger.

A possible explanation may be found through an examination of the essential 'harmonicity' of the tunes, remembering that older fiddlers made much greater use of double string sounds than today's players. Assuming that Shetlanders traditionally have concepts of consonance and dissonance similar to those of other western Europeans in (for instance) the 18th century, one might expect melodic structures to be composed with an ear for the harmonies that arise (on accented beats) from the combination of melody notes and different drone pitches. This often seems to be the case as, for instance, in the second turning of 'Da Forefit o' da Ship' (Ex. 46). There are problems in examining this theory in detail, however. First, the fiddler has always a choice of drones (either above or below the melody notes), which greatly increases his choice of 'chords' and, secondly, we do not always know what the open strings may have been tuned to when a particular variant took shape. For instance, in North Yell the 'high bass' tuning (a–d'–a'–e") is used more frequently than elsewhere, so that low A rather than low G is used as the lowest drone. Yet many items in the North Yell repertory of 'high bass' tunes are played with 'low bass' elsewhere in Shetland. Naturally players dislike retuning their fiddles to different tunings and tend to stay in one tuning pattern for as long as possible and so make their repertory fit the tuning. One is quite likely then to find examples where tunes more suitable to one tuning are played in another.

Ex. 46 'Da Forefit o' da Ship', Shetland Reel. From *Da Mirrie Dancers*, p. 24 (notes added in brackets are possible open string harmonics)



Phrase structure

An examination of 43 of the most popular Shetland reels (all the reels published in *Da Mirrie Dancers* and *Haand Me Doon da Fiddle*) showed that in general they were very economical in the use of musical ideas. Examples 47a and b give a representative sample of reels showing the phrase structure of each. The melodies are mostly analysable into one-bar phrases (allowing for frequent use of anacrusis) with rarely more than four or five different phrases in each tune. In the 16-bar tunes, which consist of two halves each of four bars which are repeated, and which are the most common type of reel, one finds the following common structures:

||: a b a c :||: d d' d c :|| (e.g. no. 2)
and
||: a a' a b :||: c c d b :|| (e.g. no. 7)

The ends of both halves 'rhyme' in over 90% of the tunes – a feature which is however not restricted to the Shetland repertory but is found in the dance music of other parts of the British Isles. In many tunes the one-bar phrases contrast alternately in terms of 'harmonic' structure. Thus in tunes in the 'key' of D one finds broken arpeggio motifs based on the chord in Example 48a, alternating with others based on those shown in Ex. 48b (e.g. in nos. 5, 6 and – at half-bar intervals – in no. 7). Earlier I suggested that these contrasts may arise from the fact that they are easily fingered harmonic patterns where playing on two strings simultaneously is a common practice, and this feature suggests links with the Muckle or Ald Reels whose structure was examined briefly in chapter 3.

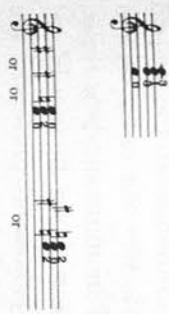
Often all or part of the first phrase (a) is developed by repetition of a motif, or by inverting parts of it (see nos. 3 and 4). A few reels have a more song-like quality and dividing them into one-bar sections makes less sense (e.g. nos. 10 and 11). Shetland jigs, a much smaller part of the indigenous repertory, tend to show the same degree of rhyme at the ends of turnings.

Performance style and regional variation

Though the title of this chapter suggests that it should be possible to discuss and describe basic musical style apart from performance style, it must already be clear

Ex. 47
(a) Common phrase structures in Shetland reels. Tunes from *Da Mirrie Dancers* and *Haand Me Doon da Fiddle*

Ex. 48a&b Common chordal patterns



Ex. 49 'Sleep Soond in da Moarmin', Shetland Reel

- (a) From *Haand Me Doon da Fiddle*, no. 14. Time values are halved to aid comparison
 (b) N. Yell. W. B. Henderson & R. Jamieson. SA 1971/273

* Two players playing different upper A string notes

a, b, c, x etc. = identifiable phrases
 s = sequential modification
 ^ = inversion of a motif or phrase

HMD = Haand me doon da fiddle
 DMD = Da Mirrie Dancers

(b) Double length reels

that this is not very feasible, for individual performance style can affect musical structure considerably. A striking example of this is found in comparing the opening part of two variants of the reel known most commonly as 'Sleep Soond in da Moarmin'. In Example 49 Tom Anderson's setting (*Haand Me Doon da Fiddle*, no. 14), favoured by most young fiddlers possibly because it was popularized by the Shetland Fiddle Society band, is shown alongside the version played by two older fiddlers from Cullivoe, North Yell. The differences are marked, but suggest that similarity of rhythmic and general harmonic structure are more important than tonality and melodic identity. In the second bar of the first turning the differences arise possibly because the Cullivoe players favour the E string as a drone and the progression f''-e''-c''-a'-b'-c'' accords well with this drone. Older players in other districts (for example Andrew Poleson of Whalsay) have versions more like the Anderson setting at this point and sometimes touch the open G string on the second beat of bar 2. This neatly underlines the problem mentioned earlier – that of deciding how far the use of drones affects melodic structure. In the second turning the Anderson setting uses the 'darker' minor third (c'' natural)

as opposed to the Cullivoe 'lighter' version with the major third (c" sharp). However, a version by Andrew Poleson uses the neutral c" throughout the second turning. It seems likely that in this case the neutral mode was the older version but that the two versions shown here have crystallized in more modern times, one major and the other minor. A similar example is the reel 'Da Boanie Isle o' Whalsay'. The two early written sources (Hoseason and Johnston) presented the tune in A minor (see Ex. 27). Older players in Whalsay played it in a neutral tonality while elsewhere it is played unambiguously in A major.

Fiddlers' biographies (chapter 2) suggested that unaccompanied fiddling persisted longer in Whalsay than elsewhere, where it seems that the introduction of diatonic accompanying instruments has only recently forced the players to avoid neutral tones as being 'out of tune' and to opt for major or minor – just as in the case of those informants tested by Shuldham-Shaw.

Regional styles

The differences pointed to in the case of 'Sleep Soond in da Moarnin' are not, however, just the result of purely idiosyncratic variation within a thriving oral tradition, for Shetlanders themselves perceive traditional differences in performance style between the different communities. Aly Bain (a Shetlander who is the fiddler in the professional folk group 'The Boys of the Lough') has drawn a parallel between the different speech dialects observable in Shetland and different fiddle styles (BBC broadcast, 11 November 1981). Earlier the testimony of Willie B. Henderson of Gloup was quoted concerning his teacher, Bruce Danielson, who could play in so many different styles (p. 46). Illustrating the differences between such styles on paper is not easy. Even fairly detailed music transcriptions throw up only the more obvious details, such as variations in the degree to which two or more strings are played on simultaneously, differences in bowing and differences in tempo and preferred tunings. A fourth difference – in rhythmic details, including accentuation – is possibly one of the most important differences, but is not exposed in the normal transcription. Here I have had to resort to machine transcription to expose such differences, as already in the case of Willie Hunter sen.'s performance of 'Jack Broke the Prison Door' (Ex. 41).

(1) *Mainland Shetland*

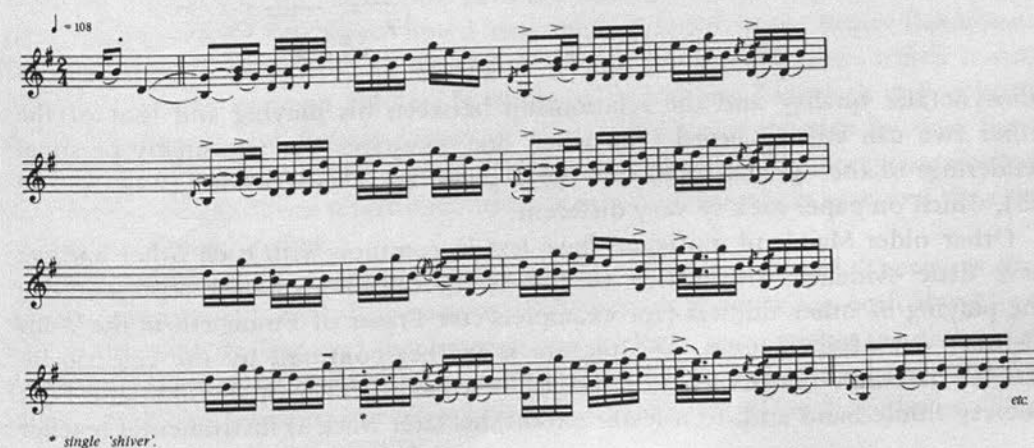
Unlike the smaller islands where there has been considerable homogeneity of style within each community, Mainland Shetland presents a different picture. Improvement in roads has enabled Shetlanders to visit Lerwick more frequently and, since the 1950s, enabled fiddlers to play together in the Shetland Folk Society band; this, combined with considerable depopulation in areas such as

Delting and North Mavine, for example, has radically weakened what distinctive homogeneity there may have been within different communities. Shetlanders have pointed to Henry Thomson (formerly of Vidlin) as a prime exponent of what they have described as the Vidlin style. However, during the period of my fieldwork he was the only fiddler whom I met from Vidlin. He himself remarked that in his young days there were many fiddlers in the area but that they all played in different styles (SA/1970/279), but he was probably commenting on idiosyncratic variation and possibly also including fiddlers who spent their formative years outside his home district.

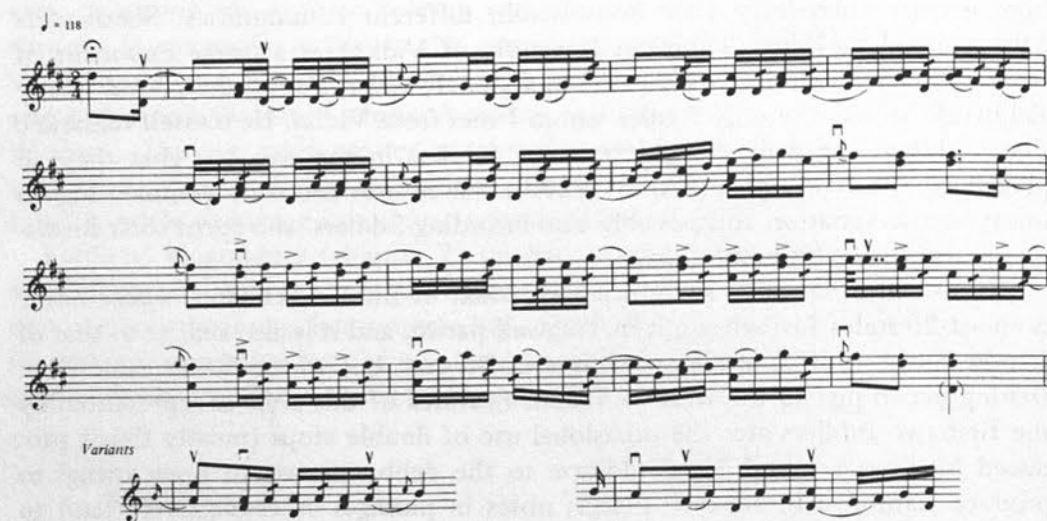
His own playing shows similarities with that of Bobbie Peterson, whose home is about 20 miles further south in Tingwall parish, and it is also similar to that of George Sutherland, a fiddler who lives in Bressay, but whose father came from Delting parish just to the west of Vidlin. Features of this style as represented by the first two fiddlers are: the occasional use of double stops (mostly thirds produced by fingers 1 and 3) in addition to the deliberate use of open strings to produce harmony in selected places; notes in passages of semiquavers tend to be more equal in duration than is the case in islands further north; and a relatively fast tempo (in the case of Bobbie Peterson, crotchet = 108), which, together with semiquaver scrubbing at points where other fiddlers might use a long 'draa', contributes to a busy and energetic sound.

Players tend to use the middle to upper half of the bow and to play with a flexible wrist and a mixture of both upper and lower arm movement. The use of clean accents (especially on the lower strings) combined with the bowing on two strings often creates the effect of two voice parts (e.g. the opening of Henry Thomson's 'Pit Hame da Borraed Claes' and Bobbie Peterson's 'Wullafjord', bars 9, 11, 12 and 13 (see Exx. 50 and 51)). George Sutherland's playing, while rhythmically very similar, is more relaxed in that his tempi are marginally slower (crotchet = 106–108) and he tends to slur more. However, this is probably an

Ex. 50 'Pit Hame da Borraed Claes', Vidlin, Mainland. Henry Thomson. Shetland Reel, SA 1970/279



Ex. 51 'Wullafjord', Tingwall. Bobbie Peterson. Shetland Reel, SA 1971/273



Ex. 52 'The East Neuk o' Fife', Vidlin, Mainland. Henry Thomson. Reel, SA 1970/279



idiosyncratic quality and the relationship between his playing and that of the other two can still be heard even when one compares the two highly personal renderings of the opening section of the popular 'East Neuk of Fife' (Exx. 52 and 53), which on paper look so very different.

Other older Mainland musicians have less in common with each other and we have little evidence with which to answer the question of how representative the playing of other fiddlers (for example Peter Fraser of Finngirth in the Walls district) was of their areas. The picture is further confused by the eclectic influence of Tom Anderson, who through his work as leader of the Shetland Folk Society fiddle band and, to a lesser extent, his later work as instrumental teacher

Ex. 53 'The East Neuk of Fife', Bressay. George Sutherland. Reel, SA 1972/115



in local authority schools throughout Shetland, must have contributed towards the mingling of Mainland styles into one general style. In other islands the picture is different: North Yell, Unst and Whalsay will each be considered in turn.

(2) *Fiddle style in Yell*

The comments that follow are based on features in the fiddling of Willie B. Henderson and Bobbie Jamieson, who were the 'Hall' fiddlers in Cullivoe, North Yell, for a good part of the period between the two World Wars and for a short time afterwards. It has been noted that both learned from Bruce Danielson. Their playing is considered to be typical of the community style, which is still prevalent among younger fiddlers in Cullivoe. During my fieldwork period both Willie Henderson and Bobbie Jamieson were still playing, though by then they were in their 70s and 80s respectively. My own interest in their playing contributed to a revival of a Cullivoe traditional fiddle band whose members accepted the two older men as their leaders.

Certain features of their style have already been mentioned. These are the almost continuous use of drone accompaniments on open strings both above and below the melody line and the frequent use of 'high bass' tuning (a-d'-a'-e"). They used fairly short strokes in the middle of the upper half of the bow, working mostly with the forearm, and played mostly over the end of the fingerboard. This

Ex. 54 'Soldier's Joy', Cullivoe, Yell. Bobbie Jamieson. Reel, SA 1970/273. Cs and Gs slightly sharp throughout, almost neutral. High bass used

♩ = MM 108 after accelerando in first 2 bars

** At this point in other performances bottom drone strings are also sounded with the down bow 'draa' etc.*

meant that accents were not as bold as those of the Mainland fiddlers. The two distinctive exceptions to the above are firstly when players employ the 'long draa' on open strings at the ends of phrases (from the middle of the bow to the point) and the occasional down-bow accents (on off-beat quavers) that follow three slurred semiquavers (or the equivalent) with the up bow. The draa is invariably made on the two bottom strings and both are left ringing away as the next section is attacked. Example 54 shows this clearly in Bobbie Jamieson's treatment of the reel 'Soldier's Joy'. Notice also in this example how the player's frequent habit of sounding the upper open string leads to his beginning the tune a perfect fifth higher as he fingers both E and A strings simultaneously before descending to the register of the A and D strings. His companion, Willie Henderson, also did this regularly and one is less conscious of the melody than of driving drone harmonies.

Some fiddlers maintain that the 'long draa' was once common in other parts of Shetland and that its function, apart from cueing the ends of sections, was to give the left-hand fingers and the bow arm a brief chance to relax. Many 'Hall' fiddlers found themselves being required to play strongly and rhythmically for many hours at a stretch, and so any device that allowed for a temporary relaxation during a dance would have been welcomed. The long draa is now less commonly used outside Yell, though it is evident, for example, in the playing of George Sutherland (see Ex. 55). Though the transcription of Bobbie Jamieson's

Ex. 55 'Soldier's Joy', Bressay/Vidlin. George Sutherland. Reel, SA 1972/114

Ex. 56 'More Grog Coming', Unst. Gilbert Gray. Shetland Reel, SA 1971/271

♩ = 112

'Soldier's Joy' conveys a number of the stylistic features that make the North Yell style so different from others it cannot adequately show, however, the extent to which the players make use of 'notes inégales': semiquavers in this style are more unequal than anywhere else in Shetland, the continuously lilting flow of melody being a conspicuous feature of their style in spite of the rather fast tempo (average, crotchet = 110–112).

(3) *Unst and Fetlar*

These two islands have seen the use of vamping instruments for longer than in Yell and consequently players in both these islands make less use of fiddle harmony. Older players in Unst tend to slur fewer notes together in one bow. A sturdy, heavier style is enhanced by a tendency to accent both up-beat and down-beat quavers and by the fact that one or other turning of many tunes indigenous to Unst exploit the lower strings (Ex. 56). Gilbert Gray's style is possibly not typical of the Unst style, though he was that island's best known

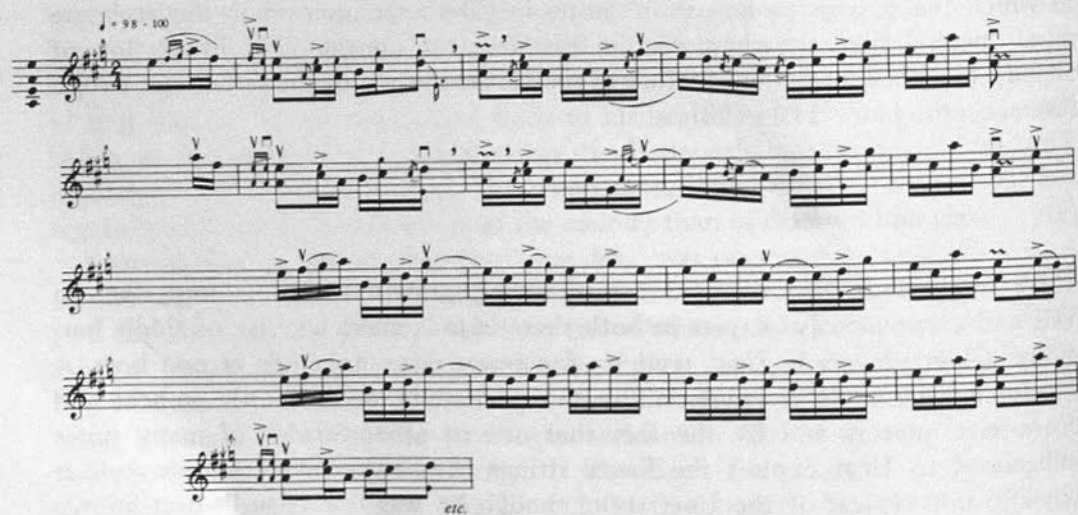
exponent of traditional fiddling during my period of fieldwork. Film record shows him using a more flexible wrist, using the middle of the upper half of the bow and only returning to the middle of the bow for occasional strong down bows. He tends to slur pairs of semiquavers more than other Unst fiddlers (the playing of Jimmy Johnston, from Westing in South Unst, and John Stickle of Baltasound were used for comparison) but, like them all, he manages equally strong accents on up bows as on down strokes.

Fetlar playing has not been examined in much detail as only two fiddlers have been recorded. It gives the impression of being less strongly accented than that of Unst and more flowing like the North Yell style, but without the ringing harmonies of the latter and with a lesser degree of 'lilt'.

(4) *Whalsay*

There is remarkable homogeneity of style among the older fiddlers of this island, despite the fact that Andrew Poleson of Symbister, my principal informant, could perceive differences between the style of players from the west side of the island (which is only three miles wide) and those from the small community at Isbister on the east coast. Example 57 typifies the older Whalsay style. Tempo is generally fast (though Andrew Poleson was playing more slowly when I was working in the island) and the music sounds vigorous and strongly accented, the latter being produced by a mixture of down-bow jerks and sharp staccato up bows spiced with frequent use of 'shivers' (one or two rapid repetitions of a note produced by a succession of very short bow changes, in effect 'rebound' notes after a stopped accent: e.g. in bar 1). The almost complete absence of slurring in many

Ex. 57 'Walking Ower da River', Whalsay. Andrew Poleson. Reel, SA 1971/273/3a



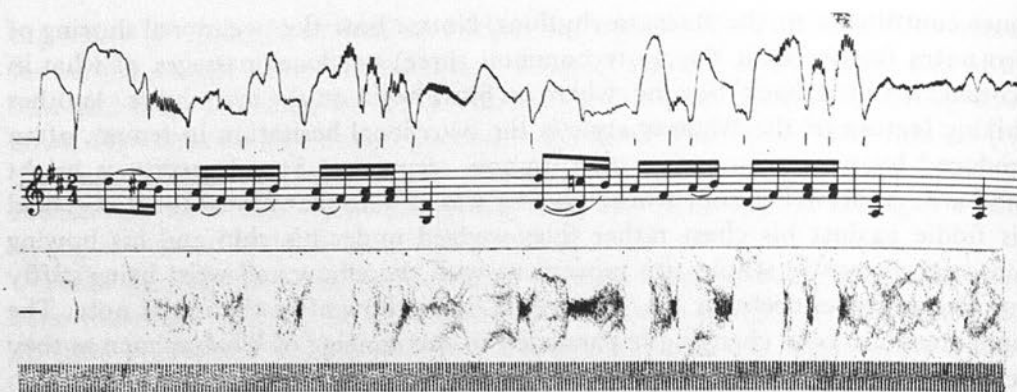
tunes contributes to the staccato rhythms. Notice how the occasional slurring of two notes (rather than the more common three) produces passages of what in Scotland is called 'back' bowing, where up bows begin on the main beats. Another striking feature of the Whalsay style is the occasional hesitation in tempo, often produced by pauses on open string up-bow recoveries. Sound quality is bright and hard. Andrew Poleson, whose playing was among that filmed for study, held his fiddle against his chest rather than wedged under his chin and his bowing consisted of mostly whole arm movement with the elbow and wrist being stiffly set. He played entirely in the upper half of his bow after the initial note. The rapid energetic bow changing is paralleled in the dancing of Whalsay men as they perform the rapid 'shuffle' steps in the dancing turning of Shetland reels.

Whalsay fiddlers had a large repertory of reels (Andrew Poleson recorded more than 80 for me during the period 1970-6) and though many of them were rarely known elsewhere in Shetland a large number appear to be of Scottish origin. Very many of the titles and some of the tunes are the same as Scottish song airs and reels popular in the early 18th century in mainland Scotland (e.g. 'Sandie o'er the Lea', 'Up and Waur Them Aa', 'Jumping Joan', 'Ladies Briest Knots', 'Timber Stairs', 'The Sailor's Wife', 'Gold for the Bonnie Lassies', 'Fairly Shot of Her', 'Jenny Nettles', 'I Hae a Wife o my Ain', etc.).

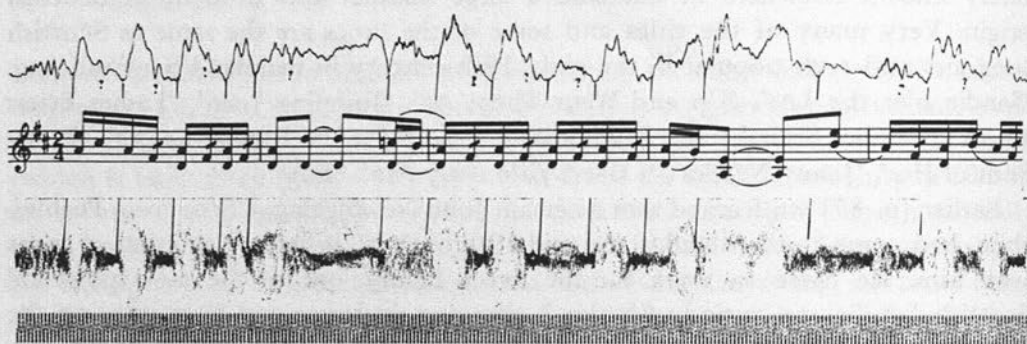
Earlier (p. 87) we learned that a certain John Newbigging, a Scot from Peeblesshire, had come to the island in the mid 19th century, bringing a number of tunes with him. He came to work for the Bruce family, one of the most powerful Scottish families to come to Shetland, whose main house and farm were on the hill overlooking Symbister harbour in Whalsay. The distinctive features of Whalsay fiddle style possibly owe something to an early Scottish influence that must have been stronger there than elsewhere in Shetland. But since we know so little about social — as opposed to economic — relationships between lairds, their officials and the Shetland peasantry, it is difficult to follow this line of enquiry further. Whalsay, because it is so small and relatively compact, favours a situation where a small number of incoming musicians could affect the fiddle repertory and style of the men of the island. Certainly the style of older fiddlers there is less like that of any other part of Shetland. But it is also very unlike the common present-day fiddle style of mainland Scotland.

Conclusion

Words are, of course, an inadequate medium for describing details of musical style, especially details of performance style; they lack the necessary precision. Nor do transcriptions always serve the purpose adequately. All the above styles are exemplified on the accompanying cassette and on the disc *Shetland Fiddle Music* (TNGM117); the differences alluded to are more easily perceived there. The hardest problem has been to point to differences in the degree of 'lilt' used



Ex. 58 'Soldier's Joy', Bressay/Vidlin. George Sutherland. Reel, SA 1971/225 (first four bars)



Ex. 59 'Soldier's Joy', Cullivoe, Yell. W. B. Henderson. Reel, SA 1970/266 (first five bars)

In Ex. 58, played by George Sutherland, the abrupt changes in amplitude make the bow changes clearly visible. In Ex. 59, played by Willie B. Henderson, the continuously ringing bass strings mask any clear indication of many bow changes. N.B. The line above the music notation is an amplitude line. Below the music is the spectral envelope and at the bottom a 50-cycle sine wave.

by fiddlers, that is, to display details of the infra-rhythmic structure of performances. The electro-mechanically produced melograph shown earlier (Ex. 41) was useful in illustrating this quality in the cleanly bowed playing of Willie Hunter sen., but this technique of analysis is not a great help when some other styles are examined. In the case of the Cullivoe fiddlers for example, the continuous ringing of open strings tends in the melograph to mask bow changes and accents, making it very difficult to delimit the boundaries between notes. This is seen in Examples 58 and 59, where the playing of Willie B. Henderson of Cullivoe is contrasted with that of George Sutherland.

In the absence of more sophisticated techniques one has to fall back on aural perception, which appears to be no problem for the Shetlanders themselves. One piece of fieldwork involved playing over a variety of recorded examples of fiddling to Shetlanders for their comments. They usually identified examples of Shetland fiddling because of what they called their Shetland flavour, even if they were un-

familiar with the style of the specific communities the examples were drawn from.

What then is this Shetland flavour? In the older tunes themselves there is the economy of musical material; short, well balanced phrases; the absence of diatonic scalar passages which one often finds in Scottish tunes, in preference for the frequent use of pentatonic motifs (derived from apparently convenient finger patterns) alternating with other motifs derived from string-crossing techniques. In playing style, despite the considerable regional variety, one can point to the rich harmonic texture produced by the older fiddlers used to playing unaccompanied, playing that results from the use of rhythmic drones above and below the melody; the lively but not over-fast tempi, allowing for neatly placed accents that give 'lift' to the reels; and above all a greater variety of infra-rhythmic 'lilt' than is found in the other traditional British fiddle styles. Some Shetlanders have commented that their local fiddling resembles Irish fiddling with its lilting rhythms to some extent, but the particular modal quality of Irish tunes (often marked by the use of the flat seventh degree in prominent positions) and an Irish predilection for using grace notes in order to articulate repeated notes in phrases taken in one bow are two features that serve to distinguish the two styles.

Among the better younger players who often do not incorporate into their playing the same variety of 'lilt' that their fathers used, one often finds instead a smooth, *détaché* style of bowing, which is frequently the envy of classically trained players. However, any further discussion of their playing belongs more properly to our final chapter.

5 *Change in recent years: function and aesthetics*

Oh man, Tammy, dis is vexin
Hearing whit du has to say
Boy, I tink du'll tak da fiddle —
I wid lack to hear dee play
As du played at rants and haemfirs
Mony a time afore dis day

Yon's 'Da Mirrie Boys o Greenland',
Bit da Greenland men is green;
'Underhill' fae first I heard him,
Mony a heavy day A'm seen.
Whin du plays 'Auld Swarra' ta me
Boy, da taers comes ta me een.

Mind's du, whin we baith wir younger,
Fou I used to sit and look
At da muckle yatlin kyettle
Hingin rampin ida crook.
And du played dy lightsome skyinbows
Inbee at da Chimnley-neuk.

Dat's aa geen noo . . . *geen [gone]*
from 'A Skyinbow o Tammy's', *The Collected Poems of Vagaland* [T. A. Robertson],
Lerwick, 1975

Many of the early accounts quoted in chapter 1 suggest that the fiddlers' music was prized not only for dancing but also as 'chamber music' that was enjoyed by all. The listening music of the fiddlers consisted for the main part of the same diminutive dance forms, but Shetlanders with a keen ear for detail relished the finer points of such performances as much as city audiences might enjoy the string quartets of Haydn. One man whose playing always moved those who heard him was William Hunter, sen., who was a native of Bellister in the Nesting district of Mainland Shetland, but who moved to Lerwick and became one of the founder members of the Shetland Folk Society fiddle band. His name came often to the lips of Mainland Shetlanders when asked whose playing among that of the older generation of fiddlers they enjoyed in particular. They gave as their reasons the way he could shape phrases with his bow, making them lilt along so sweetly, and it was clear that for many the whole art lay in the fiddlers' individual phrasing of their versions of these short pieces, even though they were rendered at a sprightly dance tempo. Two fiddler friends from Bressay explained:

And the Shetland reel of course, it's the same; the reel was built for the balance of the dance.

The secret was the rhythm you see — the life that the bowin' could put into it.

(George Sutherland and Harry Tulloch, SA/1972/115)

Later in the same evening Harry Tulloch added:

There were no other amusements then in the winter nights you see. We hed an old fellow comin' along playing twa-three old Shetland tunes. We wis jest bairns, we just sat and listened to that as it'd been the very finest music. There were nothing else you see; no wireless, no TV, no records . . . or very few records.

Such statements remind one of those notes that Laurence Williamson made in his diary some 50 years earlier:

A whole family would even shut up the house and go miles away where their relations stayed. And in the long winter evenings the fiddler would play to the children around the fire.

(L. G. Johnson, 1971, p. 125)

Some of the tunes were said earlier to have programmatic content. A glance at the titles in Appendix 3 shows a good number of references to fishing and sailing situations ('Da Forefit o' da Ship', 'Aandowin at da Bow', 'Head Her in for Bastavoe', 'Square da Mizzen', 'Muckle a Skerry in Three' (a fishing mead) etc.), and references to the fair sex. Several informants have pointed out features in tunes that to them represent ideas suggested by the titles. 'Sail Her Ower da Raft Trees' is a good example, on which Tom Anderson comments in his *Haand Me Doon da Fiddle* (see Ex. 60); and other fiddlers have also commented on how the upward surge of melody from the low G in bar 4 conveys the feeling of a boat's hull being lifted from astern as a big swell overtakes the vessel. But in many cases no meaning may be ascribed to the musical content of the tune — the title merely serving to trigger off appropriate images or to cause one to recollect situations familiar to the listeners present.

When dance tunes are played as listening music the urge to dance — the usual affective response — is internalized by the audience. Nevertheless the playing, as John Henderson pointed out, must still make one 'feel like dancing'; in this respect the same criteria would seem to apply whether one is actually dancing to the music or sitting down at the fireside listening to it — for one is still dancing, internally. There is the difference however that the fiddler no longer has to play as strongly as when numerous dancers are on the floor of a village hall; his tone is easily heard and accordingly listeners now have the opportunity to listen to the quality of sound produced.

Ex. 60 'Sail Her Ower da Raft Trees'. From *Haand me Doon da Fiddle*, no. 41



Though in the past then the fiddler had a dual role to play, there was a great difference between the two roles, those of providing music for friends to dance to and providing music for listening. As long as the fiddler himself fulfilled both roles, there would be little difference in the kind of sound he produced or in the expectations of his audience. But the situation now has changed. Dance-bands provide the music for dancing and the accordionist is the leader in both social and musical roles within the band. Though a number of more able young fiddlers still play for dancing in bands, the kind of musical satisfaction obtained from playing with an accordionist in his ensemble is different from that gained as one plays solo or to discreet piano or guitar accompaniment. Playing in the band gives a degree of social satisfaction ('having a tune with the boys') as well as monetary reward, and it constantly extends the fiddlers' fingering technique, since many accordionists are partial to 'the flat keys' and fast intricate passage work, and are constantly expanding their repertory. However, most band fiddlers of today are aware that their own sound is largely masked by the accordionist.

If the accordionist has ousted the fiddler from his primary role in the dance situation, so also has the availability of radio, television, records and cassettes made the fiddler less necessary in the domestic context. Apart from the band fiddlers then, the majority of fiddlers play now almost solely for domestic entertainment — the balance between the two roles they traditionally played has changed. It follows that their playing style is likely to change also. Furthermore, the music heard through the mass media is so often not of Shetland and this is yet another factor that contributes to a new set of aesthetic values. The strong, hard sound of many older traditional fiddlers is often no longer enjoyed by younger Shetlanders because of its 'scratchy' tone and because of the fiddlers' use of so much open string and variable-drone harmony. Younger Shetlanders have probably rarely danced to the music of unaccompanied fiddlers and so have had no appreciation of the situation that made that type of tone so desirable and necessary. In the confines of the home such a strong sound is undesirable in any case.

Just as Da Blin' Fiddler, George Stark, made a great impression on those fiddlers who had the chance to hear him playing in the Lerwick streets during the period between the two World Wars, so in the 70s the playing of Scottish fiddlers like the late Hector MacAndrew (the doyen of Scots fiddlers, who had received a classical violinist's training in addition to the traditional style of his father), Angus Cameron (of Kirriemuir) and Angus Fitchett (of Dundee), as well as Irish musicians like Sean MacGuire, became available to Shetlanders at the push of a button.

It is not surprising then that many Shetlanders refer to William Hunter jun. as an example of the supreme Shetland fiddler of the day. Still affectionately called 'Young Willie' in his late forties, he learned initially from the fiddling of his father, later from two classically trained violinists, Gideon Stove and Mr Geoffrey Di Mercardo. But according to one Shetlander (his fiddler and composer

friend, Frank Jamieson), he always preferred to 'have a tune with the boys' and turned his back on the opportunity for a professional violinist's training. His favourite fiddler (for playing) is the Dundee musician Angus Fitchett. He himself combines with great talent his father's flair for bowing and his virile yet finely shaped phrasing with the tone production, including the use of vibrato, of a classical violinist. He makes expert use of higher positions, especially when playing slow airs, for to a small repertory of traditional Shetland dance tunes he has added slow airs in Scottish style, strathspeys, pipe marches, Irish and North American fiddle pieces and even light classical pieces such as Mont's 'Czardas'. His playing is taken as a model by many younger Shetland musicians and his brief appearances at meetings of the recently formed Lerwick Accordion and Fiddle Club are usually regarded as high spots of the evening.

Another Shetland musician who has successfully absorbed and combined violinistic and Scottish styles is Arthur Robertson, who in 1969 won the BBC National Scottish Fiddle Competition. He frequently visited the late Hector MacAndrew in Aberdeen in order to put the finishing touches to his playing of Scottish strathspeys, pipe marches and slow airs. Along with Tom Anderson, who is more determinedly traditional in outlook and style, these two players are exerting a considerable influence on the development of younger players, though Arthur Robertson is less influential because of his apparent lack of interest in the traditional Shetland repertory.

Among the younger players is Trevor Hunter, a former pupil of Tom Anderson. He has taken over some of the work from his teacher as the itinerant fiddle teacher working for the Shetland Education Authority around the island schools. He reads music fluently, has an excellent grasp of Scottish tunes and styles, as well as traditional and modern Shetland pieces, and plays with a 'classical' tone when needed and with well-controlled vibrato. His intonation, like that of 'young' Willie Hunter, might be described as 'modern diatonic' in so far as none of the older 'neutral' intervals are to be heard in his playing.

This absence was commented on by a visiting Norwegian traditional musician, Knut Buen, an acknowledged exponent of the *hardingfele* style and a staunch traditionalist, who lives in Telemark. In his tradition older intonations are regarded as important and fiddlers make every effort to preserve them. The *hardingfele* tradition is a solo style and deliberately conservative; in such an environment it is easier to preserve an older style than in one where fiddlers play to the accompaniment of equal-tempered instruments such as guitar and piano. Having heard recordings of old-style Shetlanders, Knut Buen expected Shetland Folk Society musicians to share his concern for the preservation of older intonation.

In 1980 Trevor Hunter took over from Tom Anderson as leader of the Fiddlers' Society. Both here and in his teaching work he is contributing greatly to the production of a new and very different generation of Shetland fiddlers. Interestingly, some 60% of his pupils are girls, while in Tom Anderson's case the proportion is 90%. Prior to this, women fiddlers were comparatively rare in

Shetland. Presumably women in Shetland have traditionally been too busy with domestic tasks to be able to find the time to become good fiddlers. Fiddle-playing was considered the prerogative of the male; as one informant put it, 'Fiddle-playing was somehow bound up with the sexual superiority of the male . . . and a woman's "masculine" use of the fiddle and bow was almost resented as being an inappropriate and slightly embarrassing penetration into an all-male world'. In the early 1970s the only women in the Folk Society band were the accompanist and the string bass player. Earlier in the century a Miss Jean Pole was reputedly a capable fiddler, but during my early fieldwork years I met only one woman who played. All this has changed during the past ten years and it is possible that within the next decade women fiddlers will outnumber men in Shetland unless the traditional domestic division of labour persists, causing young women to give up playing once they become housewives.

Virtually all fiddlers today prefer to have an accompanist – the piano or acoustic guitar being preferred to electronic instruments. Consequently they are inhibited from using variable drones and other types of harmony favoured by 'aald Shetland' fiddlers, but occasionally include double stops at cadences and other structurally important points in the pieces. Furthermore most young players are conscious of and strive to make use of vibrato.

Looking again at some of the newly composed material – often labelled as being in 'new Shetland' style by Shetlanders themselves – one notes some important innovations, the most important being in the relationship between melody and accompaniment. Some pieces, particularly those of Tom Anderson, contain modulations (usually only in the second turning of the tunes, which take one briefly into the dominant, or relative major in the case of minor-key tunes). Whether tunes modulate or not, it is clear from their content that players and composers now think in terms of functional triadic harmonies. Frank Jamieson's 'Leveneep Head' (Ex. 17), composed in the late 1960s, illustrates this well. For some this harmonic consideration is conscious and deliberate, but for most fiddler-composers it is probably unconscious. Most fiddlers are content to prescribe the tune only and leave it to accompanists to select appropriate harmonies, for, as Frank Jamieson put it, 'I don't know anything about chords.' (SA/1980/18). On the other hand, accordionist-composers, whose tunes are also played by fiddlers, tend to specify harmonies for their tunes even if performers may not follow their direction.

ready made
The nature of the accordion – with its ranks of buttons under the left hand for providing chords and bass notes – causes accordionists to think continually in terms of harmony as well as melody. As a result, in recent years there has been a radical change in attitude to harmony in that some accordionists now consider that the choice of harmony can be crucial to the success of a tune. Gordon Jamieson, who in 1980 was leader of a trio known as the Cullivoe Band, expressed it this way:

The thing that annoys me is – on a couple of records . . . I've got a couple of tunes which



21 Jean Pole with Betty Henderson

— now living in Ayr
I composed. Now on one of these records which is just coming out one is a tune which I composed after Anne – 'Mistress Anne Jamieson'. Now the chords in that tune makes that tune. That's how we decided it – because when you decide to write a tune you don't just write the notes, you write the backing as well – that's how I think about it . . .

P.C. The harmony is an essential part of the tune is it?

G.J. Definitely! If we're doing a tune on B flat and we can put in a D chord into G minor that makes the tune a wee bit more sparky . . . that's a wee bit brighter. (SA/1980/13)



22 Alec Leask, fiddle maker

This regard for harmony, which is developing similarly in mainland Scotland, is a new development. Accordionist-composers in particular have tended to move ahead of the tastes of their audiences and feel some degree of alienation as a result. If audiences in the more traditional Shetland communities consider harmony at all, they are content with the simpler triadic schemes (chords I, IV and V) or even the older variable drones. Harmonic innovations meet with little positive response, which often disappoints the innovator. Gordon Jamieson, for example, felt that he was addressing two different audiences; the 'punters', who most enjoy dancing to the music and who have little interest in harmonic content and new tunes as long as the rhythm is good; and the 'musicians', who are interested in hearing and learning new tunes and particularly in how they are 'arranged'.

Nowhere is this new attitude more in evidence than at meetings of the accordion and fiddle club in Lerwick, when one contrasts its meetings with the average village concert. The regular evening meetings of the Lerwick club follow the pattern of similar clubs in Scotland: a visiting guest artist, duo or ensemble contributes two major 'spots' in the evening and local club members fill up the rest of the programme. Compared with the traditional and positively conservative interests of the Shetland Fiddlers' Society, the club is musically progressive, though a number of musicians are members of both organizations. The club



23 Trevor Hunter and the Forty Fiddlers

provides a platform for young instrumentalists who otherwise might not be heard outside their own homes. At these meetings the playing of better fiddlers and accordionists is carefully studied by an informed and critical, if outwardly kindly, audience. The playing of bands too receives a critical audience from other musicians interested in the 'arrangements' (i.e. their choices of harmony). Such studied attention makes some performers nervous — 'it's no a nice feeling at all'. Yet the acclaim of musicians is important to the musicians themselves, be they fiddlers or accordionists. Gordon Jamieson put it thus:

Now when we go to a concert, a normal concert like a regatta concert, it's a night out. They're going there for entertainment and accepting everything that comes. So you play something like 'Cock o' the North', for instance, and they're quite prepared to accept that as a tune — you've played a tune and that's O.K. You've done your turn. But when we go to the accordion clubs [we go] with a completely different frame of mind because the people who go to accordion clubs are people who know there will be nothing but accordion playing or fiddle playing, it's going to be music ... solely music ... and there's nothing that gives a greater thrill as there's somebody you appreciate as being a good musician coming up at the end and saying 'I liked what you did'.

(SA/1981/13)

In addition to the rise of the 'club', another strong influence on dance-band musicians has been the radio broadcasts of Scottish dance music. Most fiddlers and accordionists make a point of listening to the regular Saturday evening programme 'Take the Floor', which features, among other things, the music of individual bands and instrumentalists and includes also discussions with musicians about their music. The reactions of Shetlanders vary towards what they hear in

such programmes. Some traditionally-minded fiddlers will praise certain Scottish bands which accordionists and others might consider outdated particularly because of their rudimentary harmonic 'arrangements'. The same fiddlers are likely to find the syncopating rhythmic devices (of second accordionists and drummers) in the more innovative bands too 'jazzy' for their tastes. Clearly there is no longer a single homogeneous musical culture in Shetland, if there was ever such a thing.

It is tempting to draw a parallel between what is happening in Shetland today with what occurred in Edinburgh and other Scottish towns in the late 18th century, a period which saw the introduction of harmonic concepts along with the composing, arranging and publication of a vast amount of new music. Almost all these early publications provided bass lines for the tunes so that they could be played by the typical assembly-hall ensemble of fiddle, keyboard and cello. But there is an important difference. In the 18th century the only ways of disseminating new styles, new repertoires and novel ideas of harmony were, apart from live performances, mainly through the medium of printed books and fiddlers' tune books. Outside the few large towns and cities and the country homes of the wealthy, such developments passed unheeded by the vast majority of traditional fiddlers. They belonged to an essentially oral tradition where a basic monophonic tradition was at most complemented by rhythmic variable-drone harmony, with its essentially static harmonic quality.

Now it is true that a number of dance music collections have also been published in Shetland in recent years. In addition to Tom Anderson's teaching collections and the Shetland Folk Society's book (*Da Mirrie Dancers*), a handful of other composers have seen their works in print. Ronald Cooper has produced five books under the title *Shetland Music*, Ian Burns' collection *Spoostiskerry* appeared in 1980 and some of Frank Jamieson's pieces have appeared in *Dance Music from Shetland and the North-East* (1975). Arthur Scott Robertson is among the latest to begin publishing his own compositions, having recently produced three anthologies entitled *Musical Reflections*. All these collections may be found in the bibliography.

Furthermore, as in 18th-century mainland Scotland, the tradition in Shetland is also still principally oral (though the teaching of traditional fiddling in schools now includes the teaching of notation). The important difference is that the personal cassette recorder and the availability of discs and broadcast music (frequently recorded onto cassette at home for repeated listening) greatly facilitate the rapid spread of new styles and tunes. Ian Burns and Tom Anderson, both mindful of the importance of the oral tradition, produced cassettes to accompany their books. Significantly also, several composers are not sufficiently musically literate to write out their own works but record their tunes onto cassettes and send them to friends who transcribe the tunes for them. This is done not so much because the composers think that their tunes will reach a wider audience by having them printed, but because their copyright is safeguarded — a consideration

that had no relevance at all in earlier times but is important now that so many new tunes are appearing on cassette and disc.

In chapter 3 it was shown that the repertoire was expanding considerably though Scottish-style strathspeys, pipe marches and slow airs are still not as popular as reels, jigs, hornpipes and march-time tunes (for example the Boston Two-Step — now regarded by some as 'Shetland's national dance'). By way of example, Ian Burns' *Spoostiskerry* contains 9 reels, 10 jigs, 5 marches, 3 waltzes, 1 hornpipe and 2 Schottisches. Of the slow airs, Frank Jamieson's 'Margaret Ann Robertson' has enjoyed wide popularity since it was published as the sole slow air among the modern Shetland pieces included in *Da Mirrie Dancers* and William Hunter jun.'s 'Leaving Lerwick Harbour' (recorded on *Scottish Tradition 4: Shetland Fiddle Music*, TNGM117) is also well known to all Shetlanders, having reached a wide audience through its inclusion on disc. But Frank Jamieson remarked: 'My father would never have thought of composing a slow air, they wouldn't understand a slow air — well they'd mebbe understand it but it wasn't a trend at that time at all, it was all reels and jigs.' (SA/1980/13)

This is an indication of contrasting rates of change between different communities. Few slow airs have been composed outside Lerwick, where most innovation naturally occurs. Tom Anderson has probably composed more slow airs than any other Shetlander. Many other fiddlers may play slow airs, however, but choose them from the repertoire of Scottish airs, those of James Scott Skinner being particularly popular. William Hunter's slow air 'Leaving Lerwick Harbour' was composed as a deliberate exercise in writing in the Scottish style and was evidently considered successful, for it won second prize in the composition section of the Banchory Strathspey and Reel Society's annual competitive festival in 1973.

However, one might predict that as years go by differences between the various communities in musical taste and rate of change will tend to disappear, since the transmission of new repertoires and styles no longer depends on movements of musicians from one community to another (which is in any case now greatly facilitated) but rather on the use of radio and cassette and disc recordings.

To sum up, then, we have seen how the role of the fiddler has changed radically during the last 20 or more years, how musical tastes have changed also and consequently how this has affected performing style. Another important change that cannot be ignored is that Shetland is no longer a 'one-instrument' society, nor a homogeneous musical sub-culture. Guitars, accordions, and electronic keyboards have been added to the inventory of musical instruments, and as many young persons are learning these instruments as attempt to play the fiddle. The presence too of the whole paraphernalia of 'Orff' instruments in the music classrooms of the islands' schools and availability of training in orchestral instruments must also contribute to widening musical tastes.

Several different musical sub-cultures now flourish in Shetland. In Lerwick the dance music tradition continues with unabated vigour as well as its associated

listening tradition (encouraged by such organizations as the Lerwick Accordion and Fiddle Club) but there is also a Country and Western Club which meets regularly in Lerwick, concerts by visiting chamber orchestras and recitalists are well attended and, of course, the younger members of Lerwick society hold their own discos where the latest popular music can be heard.

Lastly, the incorporating of fiddle teaching into the education system must inevitably produce further change. Regional stylistic differences belong today to the older fiddlers. The young students tend to learn the style of their teachers. But while some Shetlanders regard the loss of regional style with some sorrow – for it was another indicator for them of ‘good old days’ – others are less worried, for they see the compensatory boost which, they hope, institutionalized teaching will give to the tradition as a whole.

But this change in the mode of learning could have more radical unwanted effects. Several fiddlers commented that their way of learning was to take their father's (or someone else's) fiddle while the owner was occupied, go off to a quiet place and practise away ‘where I wouldn't annoy anybody’. Their comments seem true for the tradition throughout the islands, and Andrew Poleson's account of how he learned is fairly typical (see chapter 2). He already knew the repertory from hearing it sung and played so often, and he had watched many other fiddlers playing in his own parlour and in the homes of friends for night after night from early childhood. It only remained for him to learn to manipulate the instrument. He took his own time about it, had no one else learning alongside him who might be making faster progress and so make him discouraged, nor anyone around to criticize him and similarly put him off. Furthermore he was not required to pass any prognostic test of musical ability (*pace* Bentley, Wing and others) before he began trying to play. If his parents had learned of this interest they would probably have encouraged him and might even have obtained a small-sized fiddle for him to play – but would do little more than that, other than showing pleasure at his first attempts at making music on the instrument. But the traditional cultural environment was as encouraging to any would-be fiddler. The fiddle was not regarded as a specially difficult instrument to learn, so many others around him played the fiddle and all were regarded with favour for the contribution they could make to the cultural and social life of the community. Furthermore, the learner did not complicate matters by struggling to read notation while in the early stages of learning his instrument, for the tradition was essentially oral; in any case since he already knew the tunes he was attempting to play he had no need of notation and merely needed to learn the ‘geography’ of his instrument and train his fingers. Lastly, any kind of grading of progress was unknown in the traditional setting and competitions were unheard of. Certainly audiences made informal comparisons, but the main interest of the listeners lay in enjoying how the player's individuality, his character, shone through in his own versions of well-known tunes – for he was almost as much composer as player.

If the institutionalized teaching of the fiddle in Shetland could operate with

due regard for the advantages inherent in the traditional way of learning, then little but good could come from the experiment. Unfortunately evidence in 1982 suggested that this might not be the case. For example, four years earlier some 20 children attending Cullivoe Primary School were taken on by the visiting teacher. In February 1982 only one child was still receiving lessons – and this in a community where an earlier survey showed that approximately one-third of the men and youths of the village could ‘take a tune out of the fiddle’. Facts like these should warn the authorities that the project may not be working out as it should, that teaching methods may need to be carefully reformulated, making best use of traditional methods of skill acquisition.

Another event the same year was the holding of the first competition in traditional fiddling. It was sponsored by the Shetland Folk Society, which awarded the prize of a locally made violin to the winner. The competition generated some controversy. For one thing some of the tests included playing Scottish pieces and some Shetlanders argued that this was inappropriate to a competition in traditional Shetland fiddling. But others opposed the whole notion of turning fiddling into a competitive activity – for them the fiddle had traditionally expressed the togetherness of communities and they felt it was wrong to encourage an activity which singled out (literally) a winner. It smacked too much of the whole character of the classical tradition, with its competitions, professional soloists and cadres of critics. Furthermore, many Shetlanders have remarked that for them one of the great joys in hearing the fiddle played was to note how the personality of the player was built into not only his performance but his version of the piece. They endorse Sonny Bruce's advice to his son, ‘Don't copy anybody ...’, and would not like to see such individual creativity being endangered by the unconscious (or even conscious) pressures of a performer-judge relationship. In any case, as Vaughan Williams has already pointed out, the wider the base of the pyramid of practical music-making the higher will be the apex – excellence will come without the need for artificial support (R. Vaughan Williams, *National Music and Other Essays* (London, 1963), p. 239).

But to analyse the problems and possibilities of the whole process of institutionalization of traditional fiddling in Shetland needs a book in itself. At this stage one can only point out that here is a problem which needs further study, and that an ethnomusicological approach can help provide the necessary background for a truer understanding of the problems and possibilities for the future.

change?
issues?

APPENDIX 1

Recollections of a Shetland wedding (by a bridegroom's man) [1875]

Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it.

(Solomon's Song, VIII.7)

Never since the altar of Hymen was first erected did the presiding genius of the weather behave in such an extraordinary and ungallant manner: he not only poured down the rain in torrents as if he were busy at another deluge, but blew such a gale as if Mr Bain and old Nick had been at the raising of it. It came in such fitful, terrific, gusts, driving the rain against the earth with a force that made it rebound again in drifting clouds of spray. Newly formed pools of water had a stress of weather on them, miniature waves following each other and breaking furiously on a lee shore as if each little pool imagined itself an inland sea of considerable importance. The smallest 'stripe' was a burn, and every burn a river roaring brown from bank to brae.

Such was the weather on the morning of the happy day when Jock Gaddie was to claim the hand of his fair Ellen. It was my first invitation to a wedding, and for a whole fortnight had kept me in a state of mind bordering on the sublime. Getting up early, I was soon dressed in my suit of fine dark corduroy with bright buttons, every one reflecting the light like a mirror. This was a braw new suit got for the occasion, and with a new Kilmarnock bonnet on my head, I felt convinced, though only turning twelve, that I was several years in advance of that on the road to manhood. Before starting in procession to the manse, which lay at a distance of nearly six miles, some one had the temerity to suggest that I should stay at home, which I answered by a look which might have annihilated the individual for ever, if he had not been made of unusually tough material, — I seized the arm of my partner and waited the word of command to march.

Every one had been preparing for the tempest outside. The young men buttoned up their thick pea jackets to the throat, and tied on their hats by a handkerchief brought over the crown and the ends tied under the chin. This was a wise precaution, as with a buxom lass in the one arm and the other elevated for keeping hold of the brim of his hat would not have been the most comfortable attitude for a six miles march in such a day. The bridesmaids pinned their shawls close about them, protecting the finery of their head gear as well as they could by shawls, handkerchiefs, etc., placed over their heads and fixed under the chin. The skirts of their gowns being tucked up in fishwife fashion; all being ready, we sallied out in couples: first, the 'married folk', next the bride and bridegroom, and last of all the 'tailsweep' i.e., the last couple in the procession, who must also be related according to sex to the bride and bridegroom.

The fiddler a few yards in advance headed the procession, and the gunner brought up the rear; but, alas! for their performances in that celebrated march. The fiddler cased in an oilskin coat down to his feet, with a Russian cap on his head, the lappets over his ears and tied under his chin. His organ of music in a strong wooden case slung at his back, he looked more like a woe-begone pilgrim carrying his coffin, than a merry knight of the bow. The gunner with his firelock in an oilskin coat under his arm, seemed on surveying the clouds overhead to have felt the importance of Cromwell's maxim, 'Fear God and keep the powder dry.'

The most of the young men were provided with umbrellas, but with that native economy which you see sometimes so strikingly illustrated in meeting a 'Ness' man on the road skipping along with his bare feet on the hard stones, while his 'socks' and rivellings are affectionately tied up on the top of his 'boddie', they all kept their umbrellas close reefed in their hands. The Bridegroom, however, with that affection and gallantry which became him so well, on passing the end of the house, expanded over the bride's head a bran new, blue cotton umbrella, with whalebone spokes but the wind, in order to show him how completely his 'weather protector' was *reversible*, performed the operation in an instant, converting the cover at the same moment into blue flags which waved beautifully round his head in honour of the occasion.

We now began to march in close file, bending our heads against the blast as to protect our

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faces as far as possible from the lashing rain; but though this advantage was so far gained we could not so easily prevent the rain from finding an entrance at our necks, and before I was two miles on the road I felt small streams stealing down my back and emptying themselves into my shoes; but what was that? I had a dear blue-eyed, rosy-cheeked Scandinavian beauty of seventeen summers in my arm, and I felt that I was a man amongst men, and therefore prepared to cross

'Roarin' lyun or warlock craigie;'

and this I had to do sooner than I expected, as will shortly appear.

Our way lay along the sea coast. On our left lay a range of hills extending from the Wart of Scousburgh to the Earin's Knowe; on our right lay St Ringan's Isle, and the Atlantic Ocean now rolling itself in huge waves against the rocky shore. Roads were not yet dreamed of, and therefore our march was up hill and down dale, through mosses and meadows, and across burns — now rivers 'where ford there was none'. None of us, however, being young Lochinvars in the art of swimming, we had to content ourselves with the more ignoble means of getting across as we could.

The last burn we crossed had a dam dyke built across it, and over the top of this dyke was our only way. The dyke was composed of turf below, and rough unshapely stones on the top, all of which were under water, the brown flood rushing over them and down the embankment in great force. The foremost knight now raising his partner in his arms began to ford the dangerous passage; now balancing himself on an ugly unsteady boulder with twelve stone of dear womankind in his arms, the strength of the wind every moment threatening to force him over into the deep pool on the one hand or down the embankment on the other, — again floundering almost up to the waist in the roaring flood. Was there ever such a trial of gallantry and heroism? What would your spindle-shanked Edinburgh dandy have done there? Well, at last all got across safely except myself and my partner, at which I felt deeply mortified. But what could I do? I could not carry her across, as she was more able to carry me, and to go alone would have been ungallant if not certain death to myself as I had not weight to bear against the strength of the flood. The difficulty, however, was ended by a stalwart fellow coming across for my partner and then turning for me whom he tucked up under his arm like a kitten and bore me safely over. I certainly felt that my dignity of manhood had been very seriously compromised, but consoled myself with the thought that it was no fault of mine, and that in a few years more neither he or any one would dare to carry me across a burn.

Forming again into marching order, we began to get upon safer and smoother ground, and in a short time reached a house near the manse, where it had been previously arranged that we should halt. The good folks were therefore prepared for us, and an enormous peat fire blazed upon the hearth, and it being a 'round about' fireplace, we literally got round the fire. Every one now got a glass of strong whisky, so that with the heat of the whisky within and the heat of the fire without our wet garments dried in a much shorter time than one would suppose who has never tried the experiment. We had now so far recovered the natural elasticity of our spirits that the fiddler drew his fiddle from his case, and screwing 'her' up to the proper tune, gave us the 'Bride's March', the words being as we all know —

'Now must I leave both father and mother?

Now must I leave both sister and brother?

Now must I leave both kith and kin

And follow the back of a fremd man's son?'

He also played a number of other favourite reels, omitting 'Deil Stick the Minister', this was done in courtesy to the reverend gentleman whose services were of such importance to us, and to obtain which we had undergone so many privations.

We now repaired to the manse. Assembling in the kitchen, which was large enough to hold us all, after waiting a few minutes, the minister entered, his round, rosy, smooth face contrasting strongly with our pinched, weather-beaten countenances, for even the short distance between the house and the manse — coming out of the heat — chilled us fearfully. A few words of prayer, and the knot was tied. A glass of whisky all round, and we were again ourselves in marching order. In the meantime the fiddler, under the shelter of the manse, had struck up the 'Bride's Return' —

'Woed and married an' a',

Kissed and carried awa';
 And is no the bride well off
 That's wooed and married an' a'?

The gunner also fired off a few shots just to let the 'hill-folk', i.e., the fairies, know that we were all alive, and that they had better not try any of their fairy cantrips on us on the way home. The rain still descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, but now being in our backs we made better progress; sudden blasts sometimes, indeed, making us run faster than our legs could carry us, and interfering seriously with the discipline of our marching order, but we nevertheless made wonderful progress fording rivers and getting over obstacles of all kinds with even more alacrity than on our outward march. Arriving home at last — that was at the bridegroom's father's house — we found great preparations had been made for us. Large peat fires 'but and ben' were blazing on the hearth, whole quarters of dried mutton, smoked geese, and pork-hams were served up; but first of all on our arrival each got a glass of whisky and piece of oat cake; and while the bride and bridegroom's healths were being drunk, the mistress of ceremonies came with a skin sieve with a large oat cake broken into fragments in it which she threw over the bride's head, and falling on the floor were eagerly picked up by the lads and lasses to place under their pillows to dream on during the night.

Those who were near their own houses went home to get their clothes changed; but those from a distance got partly changed and partly dried the best way they could so that in a few hours, and when seated round the festive board, no one appeared anything the worse of the day's adventures.

About 12 o'clock the dancing commenced, and all the young folk retired to the barn, the fiddler taking his seat in the kiln door, and thus obtaining a convenient elevation above the rest of the company with a good bow hand, enlivened by repeated glasses of whisky he played and repeated with untiring vigour — 'The Scalloway Lasses', 'Mally put the Kettle on', 'Saw ye my pot-ladle?', 'Deil Stick the minister', 'Some loves the girl when she's neatly dressed', 'Drowsy Maggy', 'The auld wife ahint the fire', 'The Soldier's Joy', 'The fairie's dance', and a number of original Shetland tunes the names of which I have forgotten. All the reels were the same, — a sort of a country dance, the dancing or stepping part of it being the most interesting as every dancer had an entirely new step of his own. Here was indeed a field for a dancing master who wished to get his ideas expanded and his profession emancipated from the tyranny of fashion. Waltzes, Schottishes, Polkas, &c. — Bah! mere human inventions for laying unnatural restrictions upon muscular effort and freedom of action. Under the magic influence of the fiddle you find it a physical impossibility to keep your feet at rest even when seated, they keep time to the music in spite of you, and when once again on the floor with a consciousness that the laws of gravitation are nearly suspended and that it is quite as much in your line to go up to the roof as come down to the ground. Would you not feel it a piece of gross presumption for any one to say that the hilarity of your spirits or the elasticity of your legs and arms should be confined within any known set of rules or any limit of space? Certainly you would. Yes; talk of the blessings of freedom; did you ever see a finer illustration of this than in the movements of the eight dancers now on the floor? But come and sit down on the sheaves here beside me, until I point them out more particularly to you. That's the 'Scalloway Lasses' the fiddler is now playing, and this is a foursome reel — four lads and four lasses, you see; now they reel; every one skipping through a figure of 8, snapping their fingers and crying 'houch!' Back to their places, that's the reel, and now here's the dance.

Just look at that fine looking fellow on the right with his bare head and shirt sleeves. There's a step for you! He discovered that step some years ago and has practised it ever since. You see when the reeling ends he instantly springs in the air coming down with both his feet as far apart as possible, when like India-rubber he starts up again, but not so high as before; and so each leap is lessened and each step is narrowed until his two feet remain at rest and close together, when quick as thought he throws the one foot behind the other, and the other behind that again as if he were running a race backwards but making no progress; besides the originality in this step it has the great advantage of suiting every kind of music, as never varying it is the business of the music to suit the step if it chooses but not the step to suit the music.

Now look at the second young man in the reel. Here is an entirely different step and quite

new, for this is the first time he ever tried it. You observe he gives each leg an alternate shake as if he felt a distemper in his knees and would find relief by his legs falling off. But it is too bad to laugh at him. 'Fools and bairns should not see work half done', that step may do him credit yet.

Next observe that tall young man with the hairy cap, who on rising for the dance threw off his jacket and vest. What marvellous muscular elasticity he possesses. What a suitable partner he would have made for Cutty Sark in the well-known dance in Alloway Kirk. He seems to be more strongly attracted to the roof of the barn than to the floor, and that all his efforts lie in the direction of preventing his exit through the roof. You say he wants ballast; nothing of the kind. You see that plump, smirking lass dancing opposite him; that's his sweetheart; do you understand it now? that tendency to perform summersaults [sic] in the air is entirely caused by her. He does not know what tune the fiddler is playing just now, his thoughts are soaring in another direction; he is thinking on his own wedding day not far off, and the thought sends him up to the roof as if he were performing at a match of high leap.

The young man on the left is dancing 'Jacky Tar', and very well he does it; but he learned that in Lerwick, and very proud he seems to be of the accomplishment.

The lasses by their movements seem to be keeping good time to the music, but as their step can only be imagined — not seen, as I am writing a history and not a novel — I will say nothing more on the subject.

Now the reel ends. 'Kiss the lasses', exclaims the lad with the hairy bonnet, and four loud smacks are instantly heard, the lasses giving a twist or two in the arms of their partners, just for appearance sake; and this piece of hypocrisy is no fault of theirs, but arises from the tyranny of fashion. Poor things, why should they not like a kiss as well as the other sex? and when we all know so well that they do, how absurd that fashion should force them to appear as if they didn't.

But here is the old story again; all the good-looking lasses taken out to dance and the plain-looking ones (observe, I say *plain*, I would not call any daughter of Eve *ugly* in the world) left perfectly bursting with grief. There's the three Brake lasses: Ellie o' Mawick, Jenny and Bawby o' Clavel, and Eddie Lowrie's youngest dochter, Peggy, never scarcely off the floor, while Lowrie Low o' Lingall's dochter, Merrin o' Clavel and Girsie o' the Blate, have never danced a reel yet, what a shame! Can they help it whether they're bonny or no? and as if beauty had any thing to do with their feet — my word! maybe the best dancers o' the lot. But never mind, here come Georgie Sudderland, though an auld married man is better than naebody; aye, and here is Tammy Ruttie an' a' the married men cummin' in the barn. So haud your tongues, ye'll a' get plenty o' dancing yet.

The report of a gun was now heard, and some one came running into the barn, exclaiming, the Guisers! the Guisers! and all eyes being turned towards the door, the guisers entered, headed by the 'scuddler' or captain. He was dressed in a suit made entirely of straw or rather 'gloy' put together by 'bent simments' the same way as cashies are made. The dress consisted of jacket, kilt, and cap, the latter being very high and tapering to a point which was adorned with a knot of blue ribbons, and his face covered by a thick blue veil. In his hands he carried a 'bent' besom, which he held by the handle, and twirled [sic] about with great velocity so as to produce a kind of *birring* noise, the other five that followed him were all dressed alike, and only differed from the captain in having no ribbons at their hats and no besom. The floor being cleared, the 'scuddler' led out the bride, and three of the other guisers choosing their partners, dancing went on with great vigour until all the lads had been patronised, each guiser then got a glass of whisky which he drank through his veil and then made his exit. When all out, they fired another shot as a parting salute, and disappeared in the darkness without it being known who they were.

The dancing now being over, a collection was made for the fiddler, the young men giving from a shilling to a half-crown, and the young women being exempt, all now returned home who could do so; but some of us from the east side of the island had to remain until the morning; and hence arose the difficult problem to be solved how we were to find sleeping accommodation for what remained of the night. The difficulty, however, was soon overcome. A large quantity of sheaves of native oats was built in one end of the barn, and these we spread out and formed into couches and lay down in our wedding attire. What a scene of rural simplicity and native

innocence! The inimitable story of Boaz and Ruth reproduced — Ceres smiling upon her sleeping nymphs as they nestled amongst the sheaves. And then how appropriate! how beautiful! each sleeper with a bit of the dreaming cake concealed in a sheaf which formed a pillow for the dreamer's head. No wonder that the excursion through dreamland was enchanting, and that scenes of future domestic bliss succeeded each other like as many dissolving views, all as dazzling and wonderful as the great transformation scene in the pantomime. But I fancy I hear some elderly maiden reader exclaim, how rude! how indelicate! Take care, my friend, how you speak of the most virtuous people upon the face of the earth — according to the Registrar General Returns, exactly eight times more virtuous than the people who inhabit Aberdeenshire; and if that does not satisfy you, I don't know what will. Virtue is a thing of the heart, and does not consist of fine phrases or strait-laced proprieties, for beneath these often run the dark stream of pollution. History has proved that amongst a people whose freedom of manners show that they are too pure to suspect evil, here will be found the very highest standard of moral purity; but this is a digression, and therefore to my story which is now at a close.

Next morning the weather was fine. I crossed the hills with a very lively impression of the events of the previous day; which now thirty-six years after has not greatly diminished, as I hope the foregoing narrative has shown.

(From *The Orkney and Shetland Guide, Directory and Almanac for 1891*, ed. J. Anderson, Kirkwall, 1890)

APPENDIX 2

89 *Shetland variants of Scottish and Irish tunes*

Key to abbreviations showing location of Shetland variants:

A = all districts
S = several districts
M = Mainland
F = Fetlar
U = Unst
W = Whalsay
Y = Yell

Shetland title	Scottish or Irish title	District
Auld Clett on Roe	I Went to the Well	(M)
The Auld Wife Ahunt the Fire	The Old Wife Ahunt the Fire	(A)
Because He Was a Bonny Lad	Because he was . . .	(W)
Da Bere Meal is Cheap Again	Through the Wood of Fyvie	(W)
Billjaclett	Robbie Tampuson's Smithy	(F)
Black Jock	The Black Joke	(W)
The Bottom of the Punch Bowl	The Fairy Reel	(W)
The Burra Isle War Dance	Marchioness of Tullibardine	(S)
The Bush Below the Garden	Behind the Bush in the Garden	(M)
Caber Fey	Caber Feidh	(A)
The Canny Little Lad	The Morning Star	(A)
Clean Pease Strae	Clean Pease Straw	(A)
Coming Through the Rye	Coming Through the Rye	(A)
The Cross Reel	The Lasses of Stewarton	(S)
The Cuckoo's Nest	Jacky Tar Hornpipe	(A)
Cuddle in a Boasie	The High Road to Linton	(W)
Dainty Davie	? Dainty Davy	(W)
Davy Nick Nack	Davy Davy Nick Nack	(U&M)
Deil Among the Tailors	The Deil Among the Tailors	(A)
Deltingside	Delvinside	(U&M)
Devil in the Kitchen	The Devil in the Kitchen	(A)
Donald's Spring	? Bonnie Ower the Hills at Night	(W)
The Drunken Skipper	? The Dutch Skipper	(W)
The East Neuk of Fife	The East Neuk of Fife	(A)
The Fairy Reel	The Fairy Reel	(A)
Far from Home	Far from Home	(S)
Da Fashion o da Delting Lasses	The Duke of Perth	(M)
The Fishers	The Fishers Hornpipe	(S)
Fit da Gutters (Whalsay)	Appin House (1st turning)	(W)
Fit da Gutters (Shetland Fiddle Band version)	Appin House (2nd turning)	(M)
The Flowers of Edinburgh	The Flowers of Edinburgh	(A)
The Forth Brig	? Captain Hay	(M)
Freely Shot Ower	? Fairly Shot of Her	(W)
Gaen tae da Well	I Went to the Well	(S)
The Gill Can	Loch Leven Castle or Miss Lyle's Reel	(Y)
Gold for the Bonnie Lasses	Gold for the Bonnie Lasses	(W)
Grieg's Pipes	Grieg's Pipes	(W)

Shetland title	Scottish or Irish title	District
Hae You Ony More Ado	The Downfall of Paris	(A)
The Heids o Vigon	The Atholl Highlanders Farewell to Loch Katrine	(Y)
The High Road to Linton	The High Road to Linton	(A)
If I Get a Bonnie Lass	Gin you Meet a Bonny Lass	(M&W)
Irish jig	Neil Gow	(W)
Jack at the Helm	Neil Gow (strathspey)	(W)
Jack is Yet Alive	Jack is Yet Alive	(M)
Jenny Dang the Weaver	Jenny Dang the Weaver	(A)
Jimmy at the Helm	? All Hands on Deck . . .	(W&F)
Jumping John	Jumping Joan (Jean qui saut)	(W)
Kail and Knockit Corn	Had I the Wyte or The Bob of Fettercairn	(A)
Keep Your Country Bonnie Lasses	Neil Gow (see Irish Jig)	(M)
Kiss and Come Again	? Cam You Here to Kiss and Clap	(U)
Lady Mary Ramsay	Lady Mary Ramsay	(A)
The Lass That Made the Bed tae Me	? The Bonnie Lass That Made the Bed to Me	(U)
Lowrie Tarrel	The Mason's Apron	(A)
Lucky Can you Link Ony	Ca the Stirks	(U)
MacDonald's Reel	Lord MacDonald's Reel	(A)
Mrs MacLeod of Raasay	Mrs MacLeod of Raasay	(A)
Mak You Fain to Follow Me	I'll Make You Fain to Follow Me	(W)
The Marchioness of Tullibardine	The Marchioness . . .	(S)
The Mason's Apron	The Mason's Apron	(A)
Meg Merrilies	Meg Merrilies	(A)
Miller's Hornpipe	The Miller's Hornpipe	(W)
Mind What You Do	Up and Waur Them Aa	(M&W)
Mither Put Me to the Well	Ca the Stirks or Wat Ye Wha I Saw Yestreen	(W)
Mither Put Me to the Well	Whistle Oer the Lave o It	(U)
The New Ground	?	(M)
Old Buttie Was a Bonnie Lad	Clean Pease Strae	(M)
Orange and Blue	The Orange and Blue	(A)
Ower Bogie	Ower Bogie	(A)
Da Peerie Hoose Ahunt the Burn	Fey's Hornpipe (English)	(A)
Sailor Ower the Raft Trees	Lady Mary Ramsay	(W)
Sailor's Hornpipe	The Sailor's Hornpipe	(A)
Sailor's Wife	? The Sailor's Wife	(W)
Sandie Ower da Lea	Sandy Oer the Lea	(M)
The Scalloway Lasses	Fair Field House	(A)
Sean Trews	Sean Triubhas	(A)
Shakkin Trews	Duncan Davidson	(W)
Sinclair's Fancy	?	(Y&U)
Smash the Windlass	Smash the Windows	(W)
Soldier's Joy	Soldier's Joy	(A)
Speed da Plough	Speed the Plough	(A)
Swallow's Tail	The Swallow's Tail	(Y)
Robbie Tampson's Smithy	Robbie Tampson's Smithy	(A)
This Is No My Ain House	This Is No My Ain House	(W)
The Three Sisters	The Atholl Highlanders . . .	(Y)
Tilly Plump	Antony Murray's Reel	(Y)
Reel o Tulloch	The Reel of Tulloch	(A)
Up and Down the Harbour	? Captain Campbell or The Templehouse Reel	(W)
Up and Waur Them Aa	Up and Waur Them Aa	(S)

The Wind That Shakes the Barley Duncan Davidson (W)

This list includes only variants that have a distinct character that distinguishes them from the non-Shetland sources. It gives a clue to the degree of absorption of tunes from outside Shetland, from Scotland in particular.

APPENDIX 3

List of traditional Shetland reels in the archives of the School of Scottish Studies (1981)

Key to abbreviations:

TA = collected by Tom Anderson, source not known

A = known in all areas

SFB = in repertoire of Shetland fiddle band, therefore widely known

Not listed are a number of nameless tunes:

9 recorded from Andrew Poleson (Whalsay)

3 recorded from Gilbert Gray and Jimmy Johnson (Unst)

Title	District	Comments
Aa the Ships are Sailing	Nesting	
Da Aald Wife o Niddister	?	= Taste da Green
Aandowin at da Bow	SFB	
Back Reel	Walls	
Benort da Daecks o Voe	Unst	
Da Bere Meal is Cheap Again	Whalsay	
Da Black and da Brown	Whalsay	
Da Black Hat	TA & Unst	
Da Blue Yowe	Unst	
Da Boanie Isle o Whalsay	A	
Boots and Aa	Whalsay	
Da Bothy Burn	Yell	
Breakdown	Unst	? improvised name
Caald Nights o Winter	Nesting	
Cam you Here to Kiss and Clap	Whalsay	Scots song text?
Cauld Rain	Unst	
Auld Clett on Roe	Mainland?	I Went to the Well?
Clever Katie (Crippled Kitty)	Whalsay	= Who'll Dance wi Wattie
Coil Away the Hawser	Whalsay	
Come Again You're Welcome	Unst	= You're Welcome Johnnie Stewart?
Corbie and da Crow	A	
Crab and the Capstan	N Yell and Unst	
Da Craw Dang Pussy	SFB	
Deil Stick da Minister	A	name of Scottish tune
Donald Blue	Mainland	name of Scottish tune
Donald's Spring	Whalsay	
Drunken Skipper	Whalsay	? Scottish Dutch Skipper
Eenie's Spring	Whalsay	
Ellenora	Unst	
Faroe Rum	SFB	
Fast to the Moorings	Unst	Like the Morris Rant
Flowers of May	Delting?	Fields of Foula
Da Foostra	SFB	
Forefit o da Ship	SFB	
Foreheid o da Sixereen	Whalsay?	Andrew's Spring
Sneug o Foula	TA	

Title	District	Comments
Foula Reel	A	Linked to Shaalds of Foula
Freely Shot Ower	Whalsay?	Scottish Fairly Shot of Her
Galley Watch	A	
Gold for the Boanie Lasses	Whalsay & Papa Stour	? Scottish title
Milly Goodger	SFB	
Greasy Webster	Unst	Not like the pipe tune
Grey Mare's Gone to Snarravoe	SFB	
Gutters o Skeld	A	Same as Sleep Soond . . .
Ha'd the Ting tae Gibby	Yell	
Haand Me Doon da Tackle	Tingwall	
Head Her in for Bastavoe	Unst	
Hirple tae Ma Mary Gray	Whalsay	Scottish title
Hjogrovoltar	Fetlar	
Da Hoolahan	Unst	
General Howe	Whalsay	
Huxter in da Soond	Papa Stour	
If I Get a Bonny Lass	Mainland	
Irish Shilling	Whalsay	
Jack Broke tne Prison Door	SFB & Whalsay	
Jeannie Chock da Bairn	Unst & N. Mainland	
Jimmy at the Helm	Whalsay	? Northumbrian — All Hands on Deck and Jimmy at the Helm
Kiss Her Sweetly	Unst	
Ladies Briest Knots	Whalsay	Scottish title
Land to Lea	Unst	? pipe march tune
Lass That Made the Bed for Me	Unst	
Lasses Look Before You	TA and Unst	
Lasses o da Mill	Delting	
Lasses Trust in Providence	SFB	
Lay Dee at Dee	N. Yell	
Da Lerwick Lasses	SFB	
Loddie	SFB	Also called The Fairy Reel
Mak a Kishie Needle Die	SFB	
Da Mirrie Boys o Greenland	A	'Whaling Reel'
Molly Put the kettle on	Papa Stour	Like English tune?
More Grog Coming	Unst	
The Morris Rant	Whalsay and Fetlar	
Muckle a Skerry in three	Whalsay and Nesting	
Nanny and Betty	Whalsay	
The New Rigged Ship	Walls	
Da Nipping Ground	Unst and Yell	
Ollefjord Jack	SFB	
Oot B'aist da Vong	Mainland	
The Orange Flower	Whalsay	
Out and In the Harbour	A	Same as Muckle a Skerry . . .
Ower da Highland Hills	Whalsay	
Ower da Hills tae America	Whalsay	Same as previous tune?
Oyster (Da Oye Stuir?)	Whalsay	
Peerie Hoose under da Hill	Nesting	
Piddle and Craigie	Whalsay	

Title	District	Comments
Primrose Maid	Delting	
Put Hame da Borraed Claes	Mainland, Unst and Whalsay	
The Queenoburn (Wheenaburn)	Unst	
The Ring	Whalsay	
Rise Early in da Moarning	Unst	? Fair Field House
Sail Her Ower da Raft Trees	A	More than one of this name
Sailor's Wife	Whalsay	
Sandwick Lasses	Mainland?	
Saturday Night	Whalsay	
Shalder Geo	Nesting	
Shiels Ower da Bar	?	? English song title
Shiver the Topsails	Whalsay	
Sillocks and Tatties	Nesting	
Skerry Foalie	Whalsay	
Sleep Sound in the Morning	A	
Souters of Saltry	Whalsay	
Da Spirit o Whisky	Unst	
Da Spoon o Whisky	Unst	
Square da Mizzen	Yell and Unst	
Supple Sandie	Whalsay	
Taste da Green	A	Same as Da Aald Wife...
Thief on the Lum (1)	Whalsay	
Thief on the Lum (2)	Unst	Scottish?
Three Drunken Fiddlers (Sailors)	Unst	
Timber Stairs	Whalsay	Scottish song text
The Trig Bag	Whalsay	
Da Trip	Whalsay?	from Sleep sound...?
Trowie Reel (1)	Unst	
Trowie Reel (2)	Fetlar	
Turn of da Burn	Yell	= Benort da Daecks... (Unst)
Underhill	SFB	
Up Stairs and Into Bed	Delting	
Up da Stroods da Sailors Go	Whalsay, Bressay and Tingwall	
Walkin Ower da River	Whalsay	
Weindialittle (Da Burn o)	SFB	
Who'll Dance wi Wattie	Nesting	= Cripple Kitty
Winyadepla	Fetlar	
Wullafjord	A	'Whaling Reel'
The Yellow Haired Lassie	Yell and Unst	
A Yowe Cam to Wir Door	Whalsay	

Also not included are more than 60 newer reels with known composers.

APPENDIX 4

Texts associated with dancing tunes in oral tradition in Shetland during the 1970s

The Aald Wife Ahunt the Fire

The aald wife behunt the fire,
The aald wife behunt the fire,
The aald wife behunt the fire,
She deed for want of sneezing
She neether deed for kale or salt
She deed for a werrer fault
She deed for want of sneezing

T. Tulloch SA/1972/192

Aandowin at da Bow

No gaen forward, no gaen trow
Bidin aboot ae place,
Aandowin at da bow

Haand Me Doon Da Fiddle, no. 25

The Bere Meal is Cheap again

Da bere meal is cheap again,
Eight pence a peck again

Andrew Poleson SA/1977/107

The Black and the Brown

The black and the brown gaed oot o the town
and John Paterson's mare gaed foremost

A. Poleson SA/1977/16

The Boanie Lass o' Bekkahill

If I had another tuppence I would buy another gill
I would let the fiddler play the boanie lass o' Bekkahill.

A. Poleson SA/1971/16

Boanie Tammie Scollay

Where has due been aa the day, boanie Tammie, pretty Tammie
Where has du been aa the day, boanie Tammie Scollay?
I'm been a coortin, bonnie maiden, minnie maiden
I'm been a coortin, bonnie minnie maiden
What's due gaan to gie tae us, bonnie maiden etc.
Bread and cheese upon a plate ... etc

Mrs A. Clark SA/1970/271

Da Broon Coo (Mrs MacLeod of Raasay)

Da broon coo's broken oot and gaen among da coarn
 If someone doesn't take her oot De'll be nane left de moarn
 So go du in me peerie boy and grab her be da tedder,
 For du's a peerie supple ting No lake de auld don faider.

Haand Me Doon da Fiddle, no. 4

Caber Feidh

Mary made away being good luck wi Teddie
 All grown doss [toss?] makin me a dock an piddie

Mrs A. Tulloch SA/1973/116

Cam You Here to Kiss and Clap (Kiss and Come Again)

Cam you here to kiss and clap or cam you here to scorn,
 Or cam you here to kiss a lass and marry in the morn

A. Poleson SA/1971/261

Coming Through the Rye

Jaanie she's a poor body,
 Jaanie she's no dry
 Drinkin o' a pirrie cups
 Coming through the rye

R. Irvine SA/1977/107

The Cuckoo's Nest

Here's to the lass that I loo the best,
 She showed me the way to the cuckoo's nest

G. Gray SA/1971/272

Cuddle in a Boasie (The High Road to Linton)

Rest the fire and come to bed, and cuddle in a boasie
 My heid to dy heid and we'll lie cosy

(Whalsay)

also

Lassie get the bed made, the bed made, the bed made,
 Lassie get the bed made and I gang in aside dee

(Many districts)

Daintie Davie

Wis du what I'm telling dee
 Boanie Davie, daintie Davie
 Wis du what I'm telling dee,
 Boanie daintie Davie

(Whalsay)

Goodnight, Goodnight

Goodnight goodnight be wi you aa
 The night is spent and I'm awa

G. Peterson SA/1971/267

The Guinea and the One Pound Note

For the note it was wrought [?]
 And the guinea it was [sent?]
 So I'd rather have the guinea than the one pound note

H. Cumming SA/1970/257

Fit the Gutters

Wis du at me bridal, fit the gutters, fit the gutters
 Wis du at me bridal, fit the gutters brawly
 Dat I wis and 'Be me deid', Dat I wis and 'Be me deid'
 Dat I wis and 'Be me deid', Me and pirrie Mallie

Mrs R. Hutcheson SA/1971/217

Wis du at me wedding, Jaanie Nittle, Jaanie Nittle . . .
 Dat I wis and 'Be me deid' and got a chunk o lairvin

Mrs A. Poleson SA/1971/212

. . . Dat I wis an 'Be me soul' . . .

J. Anderson SA/1971/212

Jenny Nettles (Johnnie Nittle)

O saw du me Johnnie, Johnnie Nittle, Johnnie Nittle,
 Saw you me Jaanie, gain til the market,
 A peck o meal upon her back, a peck o meal upon her back
 A peck o meal upon her back, a baby in her blanket

A. Poleson SA/1971/212

[another verse]

Red socks, red sheen and red camel hair
 A bunch o ribbons on her back and all the rest was bare.

Mrs A. Tulloch SA/1973/116

Kail and Knockit Corn (earlier called Had I the Wyte)

I'll be kissed and du'll be kissed
 We'll all be kissed the morn
 The best maet that's in the hoose
 Is kail and knockit corn

Mrs A. Tulloch SA/1973/116

Lowrie Tarrel (variant of The Mason's Apron)

O pirrie Lowrie, muckle Lowrie,
 Babbit Lowrie Tarrel
 The sheep's heid is in the pot
 And du sall get the sparrel

Mrs A. Tulloch SA/1973/116

Mind What You Do (Up and Waur Them Aa)

Mind what you do, mind what you do,
 Never let the old men come ta bed with you
 They kiss you and cuddle you and say they'll be true,
 And then in the morning they bid you adieu

A. Poleson SA/1972/18

Mither Pit Me to the Well

My mither pit me to the well
Rather she would ging hersel
The bottom o the pitcher fell
Whistle oer the lave o it

A. Poleson SA/1971/269

Piddle and Craigie

They caa'd me this, they caa'd me that,
They caa'd my wife the staigie,
An every een that I cam by
They caa'd me Piddling Craigie

Mrs A. Poleson SA/1972/196

Robbie Tampson's Smiddie

My mother made me grey breeks . . .
[etc.: the well-known Scots version]

W. Williamson SA/1971/214

This Is No My Ain Hoose

This is no me ain hoose
I ken by the tickin o it
Bread and butter were my door's cheeks
And pancakes were the tickin o it

A. Poleson SA/1972/98

What'll All the Lasses Do (Clean Pease Strae)

What'll all the lasses do when the lads gings awa,
Some will pee their petticots,
and some will burst their gaa'

R. Peterson SA/1971/268

APPENDIX 5

John Hoseason's music notations

(By kind permission of the National Museums of Scotland)

The first two pages shown are Hoseason's own 'fair copy' pages. The third page, which includes some of the music from page two of the fair copy, is taken from the original transcriptions by Hoseason.

Native ancient Shetland Music for the Violin set by Mr. J. D. Roseason.

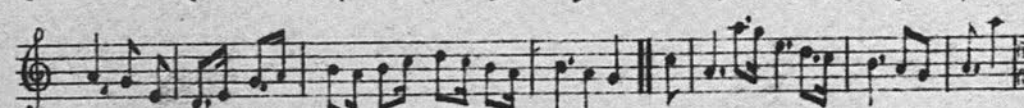
The Scalloway Lessons.



Midnight



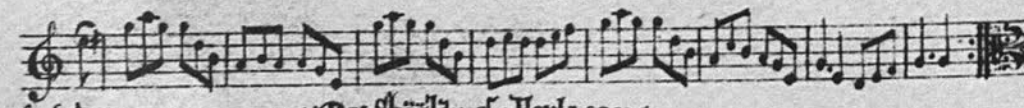
Mr Day Däywen.



24



Garster's Dream 32



Scordatura

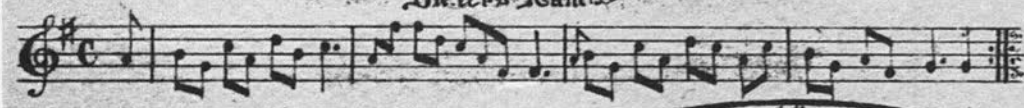
Das Schilde von Foula 1794.



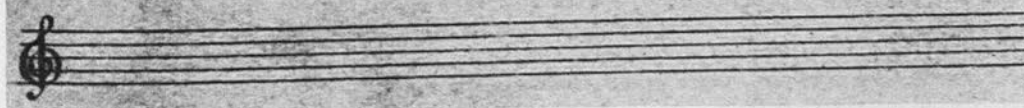
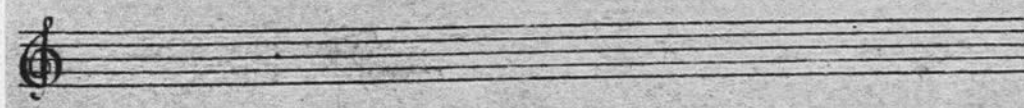
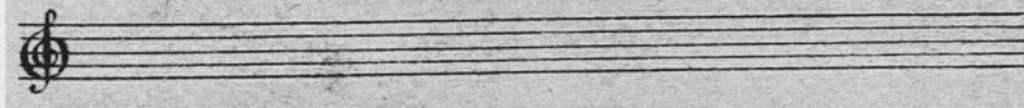
Da Speakers on Guards Ing.

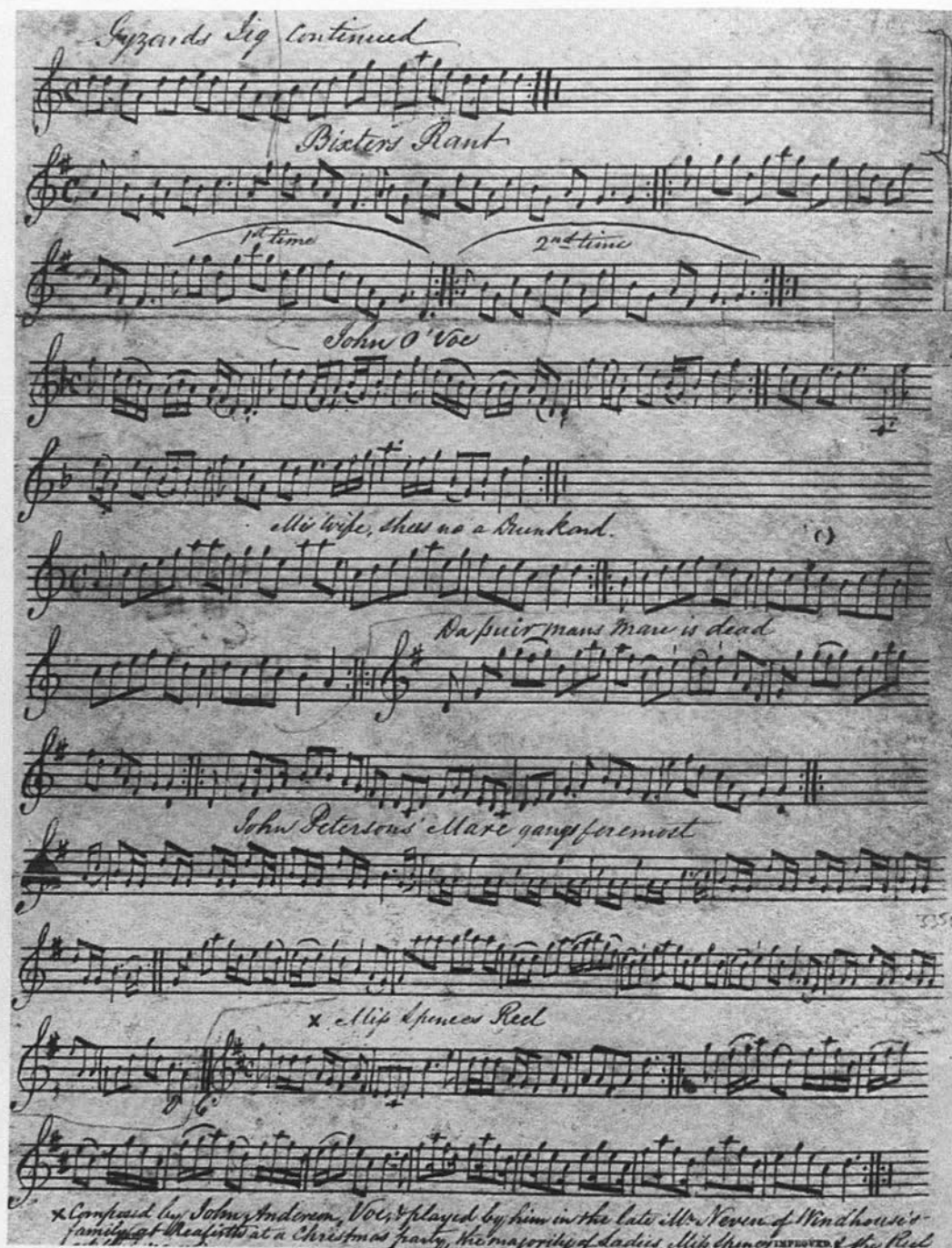


Baxter's Rant



Bemorth in Debs of Voe





APPENDIX 6

Selections on the cassette

NB. Asterisks by music examples in the text denote that the items are included on the cassette

Information on each item contains the following in order: Name of piece, performer, place, Scottish Archives tape number, fieldworker, number of music example in the book.

Side A

- Item 1: Fetlar Foxtrot, Sonny Bruce, Scalloway, SA 1977/115, Peter Cooke (Ex. 1)
 2: The Muckle Reel o' Papa, Fraser Hughson, SA 1960/215 Tom Anderson (Ex. 2)
 3: Muckle Reel o' Papa, John Fraser, Papa Stour, SA 1970/254 Peter Cooke (Ex. 3)
 4: Da Muckle Reel o' Finnigirth, Peter Fraser, Walls, SA 1954/119/4, Calum MacLean (Ex. 4)
 5: Muckle Reel o' Papa, John Fraser, Papa Stour, SA 1970/254, Peter Cooke (Ex. 5)
 6: Papa Stour sword dance, John Fraser, Papa Stour, SA 1970/254, Peter Cooke (Ex. 7)
 7: Nameless Reel, Andrew Poleson, Whalsay, SA 1972/97/13, Peter Cooke (Ex. 8)
 8: Nameless Reel, Andrew Poleson, Whalsay, SA 1972/97/14, Peter Cooke (Ex. 9)
 9: Hjo grovolar, Joe Jamieson, Fetlar, SA 1974/14/8, Peter Cooke (Ex. 10)
 10: Milly Goodger, Bobbie Jamieson, North Yell, SA 1971/227, Peter Cooke (Ex. 11)
 11: The Cross Reel, Bobbie Peterson, Tingwall, SA 1971/273, Peter Cooke (Ex. 12)
 12: Sailor Ower da Raft Trees, Andrew Poleson, Whalsay, SA 1977/107, Peter Cooke (Ex. 19b)
 13: Saw Ye Nae My Peggie, Tom Robertson, Delting, SA 1974/195/5, Alan Bruford (Ex. 24b)
 14: Doon the Burn Davie, Tom Robertson, Delting, SA 1974/196/7, Alan Bruford (Ex. 23)
 15: Du's Bön Lang Awa and A'm Tocht Lang ta See Dee, Peter Fraser, Walls, SA 1955/114, Calum MacLean (Ex. 28)
 16: Kiss Her and Clap Her, Peter Fraser, Walls, SA 1962/58, Tom Anderson (Ex. 29)
 17: The Bride's March from Unst, John Stickle, Unst, SA 1955/103, Calum MacLean (Ex. 31b)
 18: Noo Mun I Leave my Father and Mother, Andrew Poleson, Whalsay, SA 1971/211, Peter Cooke (Ex. 33a)
 19: Noo Mun I Leave my Father and Mother, Tom Robertson, Delting, SA 1974/96/7, Alan Bruford (Ex. 33b)

Side B

- 20: Black Jock, Andrew Poleson, Whalsay, SA 1971/269, Peter Cooke (Ex. 34b)
 21: The Yairds of Finnigirth, Peter Fraser, Walls, SA 1955/114, Calum MacLean (Ex. 33b)
 22: The Full Rigged Ship, Peter Fraser, Walls, SA 1955/115, Calum MacLean (Ex. 39)
 23: Jack Broke the Prison Door, William Hunter, Nesting, SA 1972/112/1, Peter Cooke (Ex. 41)
 24: Hadd Dee Tongue Bonnie Lass, Gilbert Gray, Unst, SA 1971/273, Peter Cooke (Ex. 43a)
 25: Da Mirrie Boys o Greenland, Gilbert Gray, Unst, SA 1971/273 Peter Cooke (Ex. 45)

- 26: Sleep Soond in da Moarnin, Willie B. Henderson and Bobbie Jamieson, North Yell, SA 1971/273 (Ex. 49b)
- 27: Pit Hame da Borraed Claes, Henry Thomson, Vidlin, SA 1970/279, Peter Cooke (Ex. 50)
- 28: Wullafjord, Bobbie Peterson, Tingwall, SA 1971/273, Peter Cooke (Ex. 51)
- 29: The East Neuk of Fife, Henry Thomson, Vidlin, SA 1970/279, Peter Cooke (Ex. 52)
- 30: The East Neuk of Fife, George Sutherland, Bressay, SA 1972/115, Peter Cooke (Ex. 53)
- 31: Soldier's Joy, Bobbie Jamieson and Gordon Jamieson, SA 1970/273, Peter Cooke (Ex. 54)
- 32: Soldier's Joy, George Sutherland, Bressay/Vidlin, SA 1972/114, Peter Cooke (Ex. 55)
- 33: More Grog Coming, Gilbert Gray, Unst, SA 1971/271, Peter Cooke (Ex. 56)
- 34: Walkin Ower da River and Grieg's Pipes, Andrew Poleson, Whalsay, SA 1971/273/3, Peter Cooke (Ex. 57)

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