

## Tartan and Plaid

'Tartan' and 'plaid' have been used as more or less interchangeable terms, especially in North America. After all, wasn't a tartan a plaid pattern? I must confess to being unaware myself until recently that 'plaid' is one of those words demonstrating that old comment about a single people divided by language – according to Wikipedia, “Tartan is also known as plaid in North America, but in Scotland, a plaid is a tartan cloth slung over the shoulder or a blanket.”

Tartan actually refers to a very wide range of weaving patterns in which the weaving itself is a simple twill (two over and two under; advancing by one each time) using different coloured threads, which emphasises the diagonal pattern found in all twills. Threads of two colours produce fabric in three (the two originals and a blend in which the diagonal twill pattern is emphasized. The complexity of the pattern increases rapidly as the colours of the threads increase, and the numbers of threads of each colour also adds to the pattern's complexity.



Women in Madeira, 2008. J  
Bridson

People tend to associate tartan cloth with Scotland, where it was reported in the sixteenth century, but in fact tartan fabric has been found much earlier and in many other places, from prehistoric Europe and China to present-day Portugal, where some fishermen wear plaid shirts

and their wives wear plaid skirts.

Although tartans were produced independently around the world, their role in Scotland and the explosion of popularity of them in England during the Victorian period are of most interest to Scottish country dancers.

## Helpful Hints

Don't say you are too tired to dance because you have had a tiring day. Your mind and your muscles need change of exercise, and dancing gives you this in a happy atmosphere.



## Royal Scottish Country Dance Society St. John's (Newfoundland) Branch

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NEWSLETTER

March 2009

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### Spring at Last

It is hard to believe that the dancing year is nearly over! Although it appears that March is leaving in a very reluctant and lion-like fashion, it is finally almost over and we have barely a month of dancing left. It will be a very busy and active month, of course, with our Spring Social and our Annual General Meeting along with the regular dancing sessions. We will then be taking a break until summer dancing at St. David's begins.

We said good-bye to Martina this spring. She has finished her studies here in St. John's, and will be travelling across Canada before returning to Europe. We sent her off with all our best wishes for a great vacation and safe trip home, as well as our book of dances.

Unfortunately, the dancers from the National Ballet School had to cancel their visit due to a scheduling conflict, but they will return during their trip next year.

Let's make the most of our dancing sessions this spring! And, as the author of *Don'ts for Dancers* says:

Don't look worried to death over the dance. Dancing is, and has been from time imemorial, an expression of joy. Even if you are English, don't take your pleasures *too* sadly.



Website: <http://www.infonet.st-johns.nf.ca/providers/rs cds/>

Please send newsletter contributions to the editor, Cheryl Perkins, [cperkins@mun.ca](mailto:cperkins@mun.ca)

## News

### *Annual General Meeting*

Our Annual General Meeting is scheduled for April 27, 2009 at 6:30 PM. As usual, the AGM will start early with a potluck, but all business will be finished quickly so that there will be plenty of time left for dancing. This will be the last dance of the winter. Summer dancing will be going ahead as usual, although the starting date is not yet available. Please volunteer to participate in the organization of our group.

### *Spring Social*

Our Spring Social will take place on April 4, at 8:00 PM at Vanier School, Ennis Avenue. We should have good weather, now that Sheila's Brush has been and gone, and look forward to a great turn-out for our last social of the year

### *Wedding Congratulations*

Elizabeth Green and Glenn Hamlyn were married in December. We extend our congratulations and hope to see them both dancing again soon.



### *Translation Woes*

Some of us are not as familiar as we might be with the intricacies of the Scottish language, and as a result, dance names can be a little baffling. We had a prime example of this at the Mid-Winter Social, when we danced 'The Deuks Dang Ower My Daddie' and could not agree on what the name meant. Some were convinced that dukes were involved; others, ducks. Thanks to Bruce Shawyer, who has traced the name to a Burns poem, we now know that the line is about ducks and not dukes, and may be translated as 'The duck has knocked over my daddy', and daddy is clearly very unsteady on his feet. Perhaps someone has written a list of such helpful translations. There are a number of dance titles which are rather obscure, especially to the non-Scottish beginner!

Such a list could be expanded to include 'Seann Triubhas Willichan', which has nothing to do with chartreuse and everything to do with Old William's Trousers, and the 'Quaich', which is a special type of cup found only in Scotland for which there doesn't appear to be a name in English.



In addition, there appear to be other common naming patterns. There are geographic names, some of them obscure to us – the Lammermuir Hills are in Scotland, setting for *Lucia di Lammermoor*, and their namesakes are in New Zealand. 'Corryvreckan' is not only the name of our band, but the name of a dance and the name of the third largest whirlpool in the world located between the islands of Jura and Scarba, off the west coast of Scotland. The name comes from the Gaelic for “cauldron of the speckled seas” or “cauldron of the plaid”. Monymusk is a comparatively modern village on an ancient site near Aberdeen.

Dances are named for individuals, as well, such as Anna Holden's Strathspey and the numerous dances named for Miss Milligan. Some of these people we know, or know about – others are completely unknown.

Even political references sneak in – 'The White Cockade' was undoubtedly a perfectly clear name when everyone knew that a 'cockade' was the knot of ribbon pinned to a hat for fashion – or, if white, to indicate political affiliation with the Jacobites.

Finally we have the titles describing trips, like 'Journey to Bavaria', the 'Saint John River', and our own 'Trip to St. John's' from our last workshop. Possibly the Piper and the Penguin belongs in this category as well. The mental vision of a piper on an Antarctic expedition leading penguins in a Scottish Country Dance is irresistible.