



THE ARGYLL BROADSWORDS

THE ORIGIN & HISTORY

as danced in

THE BLACK WATCH

1st Bn : 1920's & 30's, 10th Bn : 1940's

Sold in Aid of the Black Watch Association

Pipe Major J. W. Pirie M.S.M.

James Warden Pirie born in Dundee on 5th December 1904 enlisted in the Black Watch, reporting to Queen's Barracks, Perth on 9th June 1923.

After basic training, James was transferred to the 2nd Battalion in 1924 before going to India in 1925 to join the Pipes and Drums of the 1st Battalion at Quetta, where he served as a Piper and Dancer.

His Pipe Major at this time was Jimmy Young from Fife, who taught him Highland Dancing.

In 1936, James Pirie was posted to the Sudan before returning to the U.K. in 1938.

In 1940, he was sent from the Depot in Perth to the 10th Battalion as Company Sergeant Major, but was soon to become Pipe Major in that unit.

While Pipe Major in the 10th Battalion Black Watch, he not only built up a first class pipe band but inspired many very reluctant pipers and drummers to dance. Highland Dancing classes were frequently held in the mornings before breakfast! He was a first class dancer and an excellent teacher, and I will always be grateful for his teaching.

In 1946, he was admitted to hospital with double pneumonia and pleurisy, and later discharged from the army on medical grounds.

Today he lives with his wife in Dundee.

THE ARGYLL BROADSWORDS

A letter dated 1st July 1957 from the Scottish Official Board of Highland Dancing to Captain T. S. Davidson states:-

"The Argyll Broadswords in its present basic form is a MacLennan family conception. Its origin was in an ancient Pyrrhic or Group Dance in which four or more warriors danced with their broadswords. The exact form of the dance was in doubt when the elder brother (William) of the well-known D.G. MacLennan revived it at the end of the nineteenth century. The form and steps are described in D.G>(*MacLennan)'s Book on Highland and Traditional Scottish Dances, and the Dance was given its present title because the MacLennan family lived on the shores of Loch Fyne (*in Argyll).

The Dance was taken up by the Highland Regiments, and in the course of time and inter-Regimental rivalry new steps were introduced. The Dance has recently found its way into civilian favour and competition. If the Dance is to be adopted for recognised competition a standard form must be accepted by all concerned, including judges."

In The Red Hackle (The Chronicle of The Black Watch) Vol.1 No.2, reporting on the Battalion Sports held by the 2nd Battalion The Black Watch on the 10 - 12 May 1921, we read of a Highland Dancing Exhibition. Those taking part were C.S.M.Winchester, C.S.M.Swan, L/Cpl Ackroyd and Piper McIntosh.

These names were given to me many years ago by the late C.S.M.Swan when he was living in North Methven Street, Perth. Mr.Swan also said he had no recollection of ever dancing a sword dance for four men.

According to Pipe Major Pirie, "The Argyll Broadswords" was first danced in India by the Gordon Highlanders in 1925. He told me that Pipe Major Jimmy Young was teaching "The Argyll Broadswords" in the 1st Battalion The Black Watch from 1927 at Chakratta in India. In a letter which I received some years ago from Pipe Major Pirie, he wrote:-

"The Seaforths danced a very plain and regimental style, whilst the Gordons danced in a more flamboyant way with gay abandon. When I was taught dancing by Pipe Major Young we danced a very prim and proper version, but we soon altered that to let people who were watching us dance, see that we were enjoying every minute of it — and we were. Eventually this became The Black Watch style of the dance."

In a letter which I received from Lieut.Colonel T.B.G.Slessor, Stirling Castle, 11th July 1972, he said:-

"The Argyll Broadswords was devised by William McLennan in 1888 from an older version of the dance, William MacLennan was the elder brother of D.G.MacLennan, the famous Highland dancer. The MacLennan family at this time lived in Minard where their father worked on the Minard Castle Estate."

MARCHING ON & OFF

Marching On:

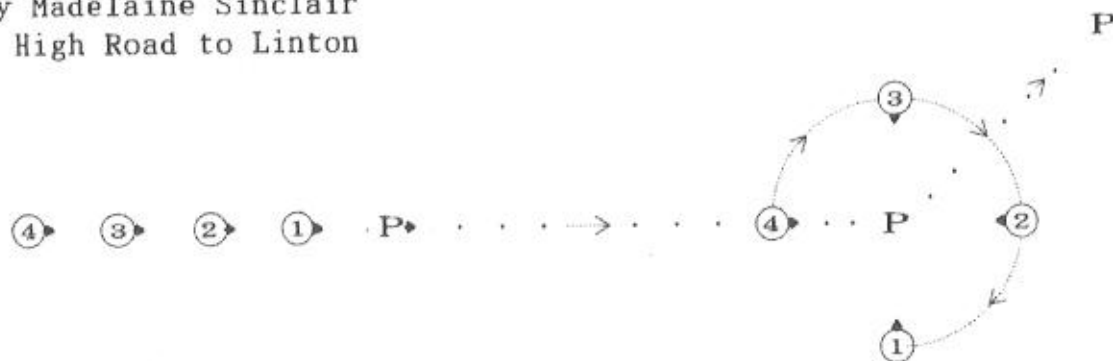
The four dancers follow the piper to the centre of the stage, as diagram. The dancers march round the piper in a circle to position shown. As the piper, marches off to one side, the dancers turn to face in, raising their swords pointing diagonally upwards to the full extension of the right arm, so that sword points almost meet. The swords are then lowered to the floor, dancers bending the right knee and keeping the left foot on the floor slide it out to the rear while keeping the left leg straight, and left arm by their side. The dancers then return to standing position and wait the end of the tune which is followed by a two bar Strathspey introduction.

Marching Off:

At the end of the dance, the piper plays the last two bars of Highland Laddie as an introduction, after which the dancers pick up their swords, in the reverse manner in which they were laid down. When the dancers return to standing position the swords are again pointed upwards, then lowered to carrying position. The piper then marches off followed by the dancers.

Pipe Tunes

Marching on & off	—	Highland Laddie
Strathspey	—	Lady Madelaine Sinclair
Reel	—	The High Road to Linton



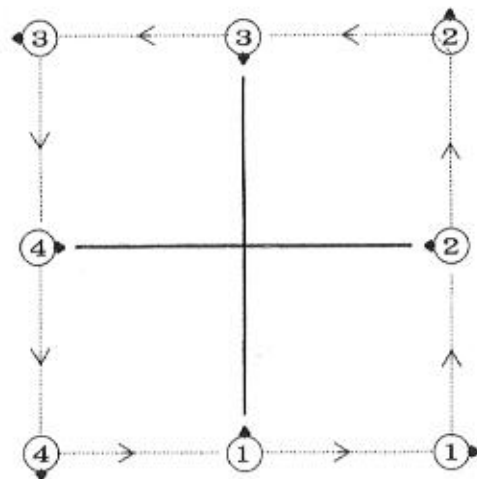
* P : Piper

Note : When carrying swords, the right fore-arm should be horizontal and the sword vertical with the elbow tucked into one's side, while swinging the left arm in the normal marching manner.

Strathspey - First Step

<u>Bars</u>	<u>Instruction</u>	<u>Notes</u>
1-2	Dance two Highland Travel Steps R-L counter-clockwise (BAR)	First step facing & parallel to new sword Second step back to & parallel with old sword Finish by turning to Left to face new sword hilt
3	Two p.de b. R-L facing new sword hilt (AA)	
4	Highland Fling turn to Left (AA) Shedding with Right foot	Begin by springing Right foot into 2nd position Finish with Right foot in 3rd rear aerial position ready to repeat step
	Repeat the step three more times	Finish at hilt of own sword

1st Step — All dancers travel counter-clockwise to next sword hilt, bars 1 - 2.



Note : When the step is preceded by the word "da" this signifies movement from that position:

- : p.de b. — pas de basque
- R-L — Right and Left
- L-R-L-R — Left Right Left Right
- (LAR) — Left arm raised
- (RAR) — Right arm raised
- (BAR) — Both arms raised
- (AA) — arms akimbo; both hands rest on the hips, with backs of the hands to the front and wrists straight

Strathspey - Second Step

Bars Instruction

1-2 Dancers 1 & 3 dance two Highland Travel Steps R-L (BAR), dancing into Left of own sword & out to new sword hilt - clockwise

While;-

Dancers 2 & 4 dance two Highland Travel steps counter-clockwise as in first step

3 Two p.de b. R-L facing new sword hilt (AA)

4 Four spring points L-R-L-R (BAR)

Repeat the step three more times

Notes

Dancers 1 & 3 face to their Left to begin dancing toward centre of swords

First step back to & parallel with own sword

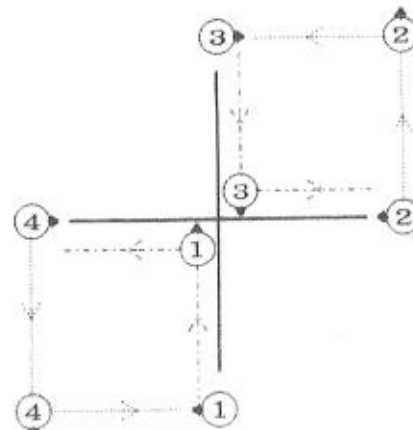
Second step facing & parallel with new sword

Finish by turning to Right to face new sword hilt

At hilt of new sword.

Finish at hilt of own sword

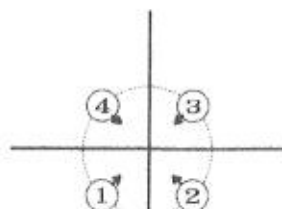
2nd Step — Diagram shows direction of travel for dancers 1 & 3, and dancers 2 & 4, bars 1 - 2.



Strathspey - Third Step

<u>Bars</u>	<u>Instruction</u>	<u>Notes</u>
1	Dance two p.de b. into Left square R-L (AA) joining hands on second p.de b. to make a circle	Carrying the Right foot over own sword, spring forward into Left square on first p.de b (AA), facing diagonally and joining hands shoulder high in a circle on second p.de b.
2	Retaining hands joined in a circle, dance two p.de b. R-L over own sword & back again	On first p.de b. dance counter-clockwise to Right on second p.de b. clockwise to Left
3	With hands still joined, dance two p.de b. R-L into next square on Right	On first p.de b. dance over own sword - counter-clockwise changing hands to (AA) on second p.de b., facing diagonally
4	Highland Fling turn to Left (AA) pointing Right foot to centre of swords and Shedding with Right foot	Dancing within the swords. On repeating the step begin with two p.de b. in this square
	Repeat the step three more times	Finish in the square to Left of, and facing own sword

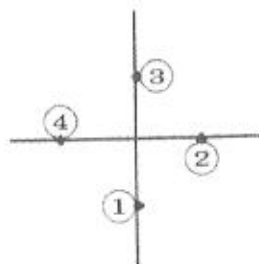
3rd Step — Diagram shows dancers position on bar 2



Strathspey - Fourth Step

<u>Bars</u>	<u>Instruction</u>	<u>Notes</u>
1	Facing own sword, two open p.de b. R-L over own sword (AA)	In square to Left of own sword and close to own sword, begin by springing on to Right foot with Left foot over own sword on first open p.de b., and Right foot over own sword on second open p.de b.
2	Dance two p.de b. R-L into next square counter-clockwise, turning Right about (BAR)	Begin by springing forward on to the Right foot, and turning to Right. Complete turning Right about on second p.de.b.
3	Two p.de b. R-L (AA)	Facing diagonally to centre
4	Four spring points L-R-L-R Facing diagonally to centre (BAR)	On last spring point turn to face new sword with Right foot in second position and Left supporting foot close to sword.
	Repeat the step three more times.	On forth repetition omit last spring point with Right foot, and finishing with Right foot in 4th intermediate aerial position, ready for first Reel Step.

4th Step — Diagram shows dancers on bar 1.





The Argyll Broadswords Danced by
Pipers & Drummers of the 1st Battalion The Black Watch
Chakrata, India - about 1931

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