

Sir Walter Scott and the Sword Dance from Papa Stour, Shetland: Some Observations¹

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In December 1831 Sir Walter Scott published for the first time his account of the Sword Dance from Papa Stour, Shetland, as part of the notes to the Magnum Opus edition of his novel *The Pirate*.² While this was not the first description of the dance to be published it arguably became the most influential, if for no other reason than its general accessibility.

The focus of this essay is threefold: firstly, to examine what prompted Sir Walter to gather material on this topic; secondly, to explore where he obtained his information; thirdly, to investigate why he decided to include an account of the dance in the revised edition of the novel. Consequently, it is not the intention to present a complete history of the Papa Stour Sword Dance, but rather to look at the part Sir Walter played in its early documentary history.³

In the summer of 1814, at the invitation of the light-house engineer Robert Stevenson, Sir Walter took a six-week “vacation” in the company of several of the Commissioners of Northern Lights aboard their yacht, *Pharos*. As part of the annual inspections and surveys of light-houses, the party toured Orkney, Shetland, the Hebrides, and the coast of Northern Ireland.⁴ Humorously described by Sir Walter in his diary as the “Voyage in the Light-House Yacht to Nova Zembla, and the Lord Knows Where”,⁵ he saw it as an opportunity “... to discover some localities which might be useful in the Lord of the Isles’...”⁶ It has been suggested that his strong interest in Scandinavian literature, history and tradition were also contributory to him making the journey.⁷

Sir Walter kept a detailed diary of the voyage, recording what he saw, did, and thought⁸ and this document would subsequently prove to be probably the most important single source upon which he drew when writing his novel *The Pirate*.⁹ Regrettably, the whereabouts of the original diary is not known and, although it was reprinted in its “original state” by Lockhart,¹⁰ earlier comparison of the original with Lockhart’s edition shows that he made many editorial changes and omissions.¹¹

On the 17th August 1814, while visiting Stromness in Orkney, Bessie Millie,¹² who was at that time over ninety years old, told Sir Walter the tale of John Gow, the pirate.

She told us she remembered *Gow the pirate*, who was born near the House of Clestrom, and afterwards commenced bucanier. He came to his native country about 1725, with a *snow* which he commanded, carried off two women from one of the islands, and committed other enormities. At length, while he was dining in a house in the Island of Eda, the islanders, headed by Malcolm Laing’s grandfather, made him prisoner and sent him to London, where he was hanged. While at Stromness, he made love to

Miss Gordon, who pledged her faith to him by shaking hands, an engagement which, in her idea, could not be dissolved without her going to London to seek back again her 'faith and troth,' by shaking hands with him again after execution.¹³

This narrative of a real life incident,¹⁴ molded and shaped by Sir Walter, was to subsequently provide the basis for his somewhat romanticised novel, *The Pirate*.

More significantly for us, however, previously on the 7th of August 1814, while on a six day "excursion" to Shetland, Sir Walter dined with John Scott of Scalloway (1756-1833) and some of his family.¹⁵

We dined with Mr Scott of Scalloway, who, like several families of this name in Shetland, is derived from the house of Scotstarvet. They are very clannish, marry much among themselves, and are proud of their descent. Two young ladies, daughters of Mr Scott's, dined with us-they were both Mrs Scotts, having married brothers-the husband of one was lost in the unfortunate Doris. They were pleasant, intelligent women, and exceedingly obliging. Old Mr Scott seems a good country gentleman.¹⁶

The two daughters of Mr. Scott referred to by Sir Walter were Mary (b. 26th March 1788) and Catherine (b. 27th December 1786). Mary had married her cousin, John Scott the younger of Melby (1782-1813), and Catherine had also married her cousin, James Scott of Melby (1785-1860), John's brother. And it is James Scott who will prove to play a key part in this unfolding saga.¹⁷

The dinner conversation appears to have ranged over many topics, including the sighting of a "... kraken or some monstrous fish being seen off Scalloway" in 1812.¹⁸ Sometime during dinner, however, the conversation appears to have turned to the subject of sword dancing:

At Scalloway my curiosity was gratified by an account of the sword-dance, now almost lost, but still practiced in the Island of Papa, belonging to Mr. Scott. There are eight performers, seven of whom represent the Seven Champions of Christendom, who enter one by one with their swords drawn, and are presented to the eighth personage, who is not named. Some rude couplets are spoken (in *English*, not *Norse*), containing a sort of panegyric upon each champion as he is presented. They then dance a sort of cotillion, as the ladies described it, going through a number of evolutions with their swords. One of my three Mrs. Scotts readily promised to procure me the lines, the rhymes, and the form of the dance. I regret much that young Mr. Scott was absent during this visit; he is described as a reader and an enthusiast in poetry. Probably I might have interested him in preserving the dance, by causing young persons to learn it. A few years since, a party of Papa-men came to dance the sword-dance at Lerwick as a public exhibition with great applause. The warlike dances of the northern people, of which I conceive this to be the only remnant in the British dominions, are repeatedly alluded to by their poets and historians. The introduction of the Seven Champions savors of a later period, and was probably ingrafted upon the dance when *mysteries* and *moralities* (the first scenic representations) came into fashion. In a stall pamphlet, called the history of Buckshaven, it is said those fishers sprung from Danes, and brought

with them their *war-dance* or *sword-dance*, and a rude wooden cut of it is given.¹⁹

It perhaps would appear that sword dancing was an odd topic of conversation to present itself at a dinner party, particularly in early August. During the previous months, however, as part of an ongoing correspondence,²⁰ Sir Walter had been discussing with John Bell, jnr. (1783-1864), the Newcastle bookseller and antiquarian,²¹ the latter's proposal to publish

... a Ballad [sheet]... Containing the Rhymes of the Sword Dancers at Christmas might I beg your opinion on the subject also any information which you may be pleased to give.²²

Sir Walter replied:

I am very glad you go on with collecting your popular Rhimes. Years after Years are speedily obliterating such traces of antiquity as depend upon oral tradition and whoever labours with your zeal and assiduity to collect these fading traces is rendering no small service to posterity. *It would be highly desirable to secure the sword players rhimes they are I believe altogether unknown in Scotland and as the dance must be of great antiquity any rhimes belonging to it however corrupted must be peculiarly acceptable.* [my emphasis]²³

The last known surviving exchange on the subject is a letter from Bell which Sir Walter would have probably received about three weeks before he began his voyage to Shetland, etc. Here Bell simply remarks:

You flatter me into hopes respecting my intended fragment of the Sword Dancers or Morris Dancers When done I shall be proud of your acceptance of a Copy.²⁴

Regardless of the brevity of the exchange, it does show that the subject of sword dancing had been on Sir Walter's mind just prior to his arrival in Scalloway and, as a consequence, it may well have been he who raised the topic at the dinner table.

Although it has been suggested that much of *The Pirate* was written while Sir Walter was on the voyage,²⁵ during that period he was actually at work on his poem *The Lord of the Isles* (1815),²⁶ which even includes extracts from his diary of the journey.²⁷ Furthermore, the idea for *The Pirate* may not even have been Sir Walter's, for in December 1820 his publisher, Archibald Constable, had suggested to him that:

If you have not already resolved, might I presume to hint at a subject for the next, or for the Succeeding Work? The Bucanier' is I think unoccupied ground.²⁸

It was not until the early months of 1821 that the task of writing the original edition of *The Pirate* began, it being completed by 1st November 1821.²⁹ In spite of being imprinted 1822, it appears to have been anonymously published³⁰ at the beginning of December 1821³¹ and was subsequently reprinted numerous times in Britain, Europe and North America.³²

Andrew Lang commented in his introduction to *The Pirate* in the Border Edition of the Waverley Novels:

Sir Walter's *Diary*, read in company with '*The Pirate*', offers a most curious study of his art in composition. It may be said that he scarcely

noted a natural feature, a monument, a custom, a superstition, or a legend in Zetland and Orkney which he did not weave into the magic web of his romance. In the Diary all these matters appear as very ordinary; in *'The Pirate'* they are transfigured in the light of fancy.³³

Perhaps not surprisingly, therefore, in *The Pirate*, within the context of a party which consists of "... lavish hospitality, heavy eating and drinking, family feud and folk custom..."³⁴, we are presented with a rather romanticized description of the dance. As there is no evidence that Sir Walter ever saw a performance of the Papa Stour Sword Dance,³⁵ this fictional episode was probably based simply on what details Sir Walter had gleaned from the "... three Mrs. Scotts..." during his visit to Scalloway in the summer of 1814, balanced with needs of the plot of the novel which he set in 1689.³⁶

'Flog horses, and pickle beef,' said Magnus. 'Why, you have not the vanity to think, that, with all your quarter-deck airs, you will make poor old neighbour Haagen ashamed that he was not killed some scores of years since? You have looked on death yourself, my doughty young friend, but it was with the eyes of a young man who wishes to be thought of; but we are a peaceful people,--peaceful, that is, as long as any one should be peaceful, and that is till some one has the impudence to wrong us, or our neighbours; and then, perhaps, they may not find our northern blood much cooler in our veins than was that of the old Scandinavians that gave us our names and lineage. --Get ye along, get ye along to the sword-dance, that the strangers that are amongst us may see that our hands and our weapons are not altogether strangers.'

A dozen cutlasses, selected hastily from an old arm-chest, and whose rusted hue bespoke how seldom they left the sheath, armed the same number of young Zetlanders, with whom mingled six maidens, led by Minna Troil; and the minstrelsy instantly commenced a tune appropriate to the ancient Norwegian war-dance, the evolutions of which are perhaps still practiced in these remote islands.

The first movement was graceful and majestic, the youths holding their swords erect, and without much gesture; but the tune, and the corresponding motions of the dancers, became gradually more and more rapid,--they clashed their swords together, in measured time, with a spirit which gave the exercise a dangerous appearance in the eye of the spectator, though the firmness, justice, and accuracy, with which the dancers kept time with the stroke of their weapons, did, in truth, ensure its safety. The most singular part of the exhibition was the courage exhibited by the female performers, who now, surrounded by the swordsmen, seemed like the Sabine maidens in the hands of their Roman lovers; now, moving under the arch of steel which the young men had formed, by crossing their weapons over the heads of their fair partners, resembled the bank of Amazons when they first joined in the Pyrrhic dance with the followers of Theseus. But by far the most striking and appropriate figure was that of Minna Troil, whom Halcro had long since entitled the Queen of Swords, and who, indeed, moved amidst the swordsmen with an air which seemed to hold all the drawn blades as the proper accompaniment of her person, and the implements of her pleasure. And when the mazes of the dance became more intricate, when the close and continuous clash of the weapons made some of her companions

shrink, and shew signs of fear, her cheek, her lip, and her eye, seemed rather to announce, that, at the moment when the weapons flashed fastest, and rung sharpest around her, she was most completely self-possessed, and in her own element. Last of all, when the music had ceased, and she remained for an instant upon the floor by herself, as the rule of the dance required, the swordsmen and maidens, who departed from around her, seemed the guards and the train of some princess, who, dismissed by her signal, were leaving her for a time to solitude. Her own look and attitude, wrapped, as she probably was, in some vision of the imagination, corresponded admirably with the ideal dignity which the spectators ascribed to her; but, almost immediately recollecting herself, she blushed, as if conscious she had been, though but for an instant, the object of undivided attention, and gave her hand gracefully to Cleveland, who, though he had not joined in the dance, assumed the duty of conducting her to her seat.³⁷

A cursory comparison of Sir Walter's 1814 diary entry, and the related passages in *The Pirate* (1822), is sufficient to see the novelist at work. For example, in the diary he describes the dancers as:

*eight performers, seven of whom represent the Seven Champions of Christendom, who enter one by one with their swords drawn, and are presented to the eighth personage, who is not named [my emphasis].*³⁸

In *The Pirate* (1822), however, the dancers have suddenly become eighteen in number, "... dozen cutlasses,.. armed the same number of young Zetlanders, with whom mingled six maidens,... [my emphasis]."³⁹

The Pirate was not particularly well received by the critics, one reviewer even remarking that:

... it partakes more of the nature of an essay on the topography of the island of Zetland, and the manners and customs of the inhabitants, than of a tale written for the purpose either of engaging our sympathies or exciting our curiosity.⁴⁰

In spite of such adverse comments, almost immediately we see abridged chapbook versions of the novel appearing, such as Sarah Scudgell Wilkinson's, *The Pirate, or, the Sisters of Burgh Westra: A Tale of the Islands of Shetland and Orkney. Epitomized from the Celebrated Novel of the Same Title Written by the Author of Waverley* [1822],⁴¹ along with performance of dramatic versions, although most only had short runs.⁴² These dramatisations included, amongst others, Thomas Dibdin's *The Pirate: or, The Wild Woman of Zetland* which was in production in London by the 7th January 1822,⁴³ James Robinson Planché's *The Pirate* appearing by 14th January 1822 at the Olympic Theatre,⁴⁴ and William Dimond's *The Pirate* following on the 15th January 1822 at Drury Lane Theatre.⁴⁵

Almost simultaneously we find related published texts of these dramatizations appearing, such as Thomas Dibdin's, *The Pirate: A Melo Dramatic Romance, in three Acts. Taken from the Novel of that Name, and Performed with Universal Applause at the Surrey Theatre* (1822) and James Robinson Planché, *The Pirate: A Musical Drama in Three Acts. By J.R.Planché. Founded on the Popular Novel of That Name: As Performed at the Olympic Theatre* [1822]. While some of the notices,⁴⁶ playbills⁴⁷ and texts⁴⁸ for these productions indicate that a sword dance was presented, quite what was

danced is not known. As Sir Walter's 1822 edition of *The Pirate* gives few clues as to the nature of the dance, presumably the individual choreographers invented appropriate dances, possibly even drawing on already established traditions.

With mounting financial pressures during the 1820's, by November 1827 Sir Walter and his publisher, Robert Cadell, came up with a plan to reissue all of Sir Walter's novels, poetical works and miscellaneous prose, repackaging them with new introductions, textual revisions and added annotations.⁴⁹ Referred to as the "Magnum Opus," this forty-eight volume collected edition of *The Waverley Novels* was published at the rate of one volume a month between 1829 and 1833, with the revised edition of *The Pirate* appearing in two volumes in 1831.⁵⁰

Early in 1830 Sir Walter began work on the Magnum Opus edition of *The Pirate* but it soon became clear that it would fall somewhat short of the approximate "planned" length for each of the novels in the series.⁵¹ By his own calculations, Sir Walter considered that he would need to add about the equivalent of twenty-four pages to each of the three volumes of the 1822 edition of *The Pirate*.⁵² This shortfall was seen to be so great that Sir Walter even suggested that he write an additional chapter. In any event it was decided that, as this would change the novel considerably, from its original form, the shortfall would be made up instead with the addition of extensive notes,⁵³ over and above those brief scattered notes contained in the 1822 edition.

Fortuitously for Sir Walter, in May 1829 he met for the first time Dr. James Scott.⁵⁴ This was "... the young Mr. Scott..." referred to by the "... three Mrs Scotts..." whom he had met in Scalloway, Shetland, some fifteen years earlier on his visit in August 1814.⁵⁵ James Scott, M.D., (1785-1860), the son of Sir Walter's friend John Scott of Melby⁵⁶ lived at Vailla, Shetland, and built a town house in Lerwick in 1800.⁵⁷ He entered the navy in 1803 and saw extensive service. On 28th January 1810 he married his cousin Catherine, the eldest daughter of John Scott of Scalloway. They had three children. Around 1815 he became a graduate at the University of Paris where he acquired an A.B. and M.D. In 1826 he was appointed as Lecturer to the Royal Naval Hospital at Haslar in Gosport, Hampshire, where he lectured on the Principles and Practice of Medicine and Surgery. He was also curator of the hospitals museum. He resigned from Haslar in 1838. In 1846 he was made Honorary Deputy Inspector General of Hospitals and Fleets. He was a Licentiate of the Royal College of Physicians of London and a member of the Société Cuviénenne of Paris.⁵⁸ In spite of leading such a busy life, even when engaged on naval business, he periodically travelled back to Shetland.⁵⁹ Coincidentally, James Scott was "Right Worshipful Master of the Lerwick Morton Lodge of Freemasons",⁶⁰ although we perhaps should not read too much into this until we have evidence,⁶¹ as opposed to speculation,⁶² about a possible link between sword dancing and the Freemasons in the area.

The two individuals corresponded during the year and on 11th December 1829 James Scott wrote to Sir Walter:

I have, *very lately*, been informed by a Friend, that you wish to have a copy of the Sword Dance, as it is performed in Shetland. Had I known that you wished for such a thing, I would, long since, have ventured to offer it. But I knew that Dr. Hibbert had published a version of the Ballet in his excellent Description of the Shetland Islands; and I thought it more than probable that you had read his work- On hearing, however, that you wished to have a Copy, it immediately occurred to me that, as the Doctor had thought it necessary to expunge certain passages, which he

considered glaring interpolations, and to give a description of the evolutions of the Ballet, from his own pen, you were desirous of obtaining a verbatim et literatim Copy of the only authentic M.S. now extant. I, therefore, beg your acceptance of such a Copy, which I commenced as soon as I was informed of your desire to possess it... .⁶³

The accompanying manuscript, in James Scott's handwriting, was an account of The Sword Dance: a Danish or Norwegian Ballet, &c, as Performed in the Island of Papa Stour, Zetland⁶⁴ with the annotation that it contained the "Words used as a Prelude to the Sword-Dance, a Danish or Norwegian Ballet, composed some Centuries ago, and preserved in Papa Stour, Zetland".⁶⁵ On the final page of the document James Scott had added:

The Manuscript from which the above was copied was transcribed from a very old one, by Mr. Wm. Henderson, Junr, of Papa Stour, in Shetland. Mr. Henderson's Copy is not dated, but bears his own signature, and, from various circumstances, it is known to have been written about the year 1788.⁶⁶

This serendipitous gift must have proved a blessing for Sir Walter, faced as he was with the problem of extending the size of *The Pirate* for the Magnum Opus edition. Perhaps not surprisingly, therefore, without altering the description of the dance contained in the body of the novel, he decided to incorporate into the notes an annotated version of James Scott's manuscript of The Sword Dance... of Papa Stour..., this possibly being the largest note added to the novel.⁶⁷ The task was undertaken by Sir Walter and a number of amanuenses, including his daughter, Anne Scott who copied some of the introductory material for this note, and John Buchanan who transcribed James Scott's manuscript.⁶⁸

The wholesale incorporation of material from correspondents into his writings was not unusual for Sir Walter. For example, in November 1827 Joseph Train (1779-1852), an antiquarian correspondent of Sir Walter's,⁶⁹ had sent him a description of a morrice-dance costume exhibited near Perth. Subsequently, Train's description was incorporated by Sir Walter's as a note into the Magnum Opus edition of *The Fair Maid of Perth*.⁷⁰

There may have also been another reason which spurred Sir Walter to incorporate James Scott's account of the sword dance into the Magnum Opus edition. When the 1822 edition of *The Pirate* first appeared, an anonymous critical reviewer in *The British Critic* concluded:

In the first place, we meant to add one instance more to the many already adduced by other critics, to establish against the author of the Scottish novels the charge of violating historical truth in his tales; and of mixing his fictions and his facts together so freely, and without any warning, as to confound all our notions of the events to which his stories bear even the remotest reference. Our second purpose was a more generous one; it was to show, but quoting from unquestionable authorities, that the views given in the *Pirate* of customs, manners, habits, and opinions, are true pictures of the character of the men, and of the general state of society in Shetland, at a period even more recent than that to which the fictitious narrative carries back the examination of the reader.⁷¹

Amongst the "unquestionable authorities" quoted by the reviewer was Samuel Hibbert (1782-1884).⁷² About to be reviewed in a subsequent issue of *The British Critic*

("[Review of] *A Description of the Shetland Isles...*" 1822),⁷³ Hibbert's just published *A Description of the Shetland Islands, Comprising an Account of Their Geology, Scenery, Antiquities, and Superstitions* (1822) featured heavily in the review of *The Pirate*,⁷⁴ which also included a description of Hibbert's detailed account and text of the Papa Stour Sword Dance.⁷⁵ This criticism, highlighting the work of another author, coupled with the reality that Sir Walter had not had available a detailed description of the sword dance upon which to base his fictional 1822 account, possibly irritated him to the extent that, when given the opportunity to redress the balance, he jumped at the chance. Regardless of the fact that Hibbert thought highly of Sir Walter,⁷⁶ when Sir Walter came to publish the account of the dance he had obtained from James Scott, he had no qualms about announcing its superiority when he disparagingly commented:

Mr. Hibbert has, in his Description of the Zetland Islands, given an account of the sword-dance, but somewhat less full than the following:....⁷⁷

In all events, by around 30th August 1830 Sir Walter had completed the draft for the Magnum Opus edition of *The Pirate*,⁷⁸ and it was eventually published towards the end of May 1831.⁷⁹

While Sir Walter apparently considered the account of the dance that he published to be more complete than Hibbert's, for a variety of reasons it is difficult to judge just how complete it is. The manuscript which Sir Walter received from James Scott gives only minimal information about the dance, the description being considered, by our standards, possibly inadequate for the purposes of reconstructing the performance.⁸⁰ Furthermore, the document is devoid of contextual information, in that we are not told who the performers were, when, where or why the dance was performed, and nothing of its history is related. In some respects Hibbert provides more contextual information than does Sir Walter,⁸¹ although by his own acknowledgement he has modified the text.⁸² Having said that, it is perhaps not altogether appropriate to use today's research methods as a standard against which to judge the efforts of past scholars, particularly as we do not know what would have been considered an appropriate description of such traditions in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Nor do we know the reasons why each of the early copies were made, necessary information if we are to understand why it was decided to include certain details and omit others. Each manuscript relating to the dance was fashioned for a specific purpose but, in the case of the "very old" manuscript and Henderson's copy thereof, we do not know what that purpose was. Either manuscript could conceivably have been created as a prompt book for the dancers in the community. If so, some information may have been omitted as the dancers would probably have been conversant with the performance through observation or participation, and material on the history and context of the tradition would probably not have been appropriate to include. Alternatively, either manuscript could perhaps have been prepared to document the dance for some enquiring outsider. Regardless, the reality is that each time a copy has been made it has allowed for mediation to take place, and for potential changes in the text to occur.

We, however, do know the purposes for which both James Scott's copy of Henderson's transcript and Sir Walter's annotated manuscript version thereof (upon which the text of the Magnum Opus edition was based), were created. And as we have these texts to hand, along with the published 1831 edition of *The Pirate*, it is possible to see that neither Sir Walter nor his amanuenses made any substantial alterations to the account of the dance as received from James Scott, although possibly as a result of the

need to extend the size of the novel, Sir Walter elected to “frame” the description with additional comments of his own and from other writers.

Sir Walter's experiences, readings, correspondence and conversations with others, like those of any author, would all have gone to shape his observations about the Papa Stour Sword Dance. When writing, Sir Walter drew on his extensive and ever growing, library for information. This contained a store house of material on such topics as chivalry, magic, archery, local traditions, beliefs, gypsies, music, proverbs, the supernatural, customs, dances, dialects, fairies, songs, ballads, foodways, witchcraft, apparitions, the occult, drama, Scotland, Orkney, and Shetland.⁸³

As part of his craft, Sir Walter also persistently incorporated into his writings descriptions of a broad range of traditions.⁸⁴ While some of the events he described he had personally observed, other descriptions he obtained during conversations with a wide spectrum of individuals and from his various “antiquarian correspondents”.⁸⁵ These included, amongst others, Alan Cunningham (1784-1842),⁸⁶ John Bell, jnr. (1783-1864),⁸⁷ James Hogg (1770-1835),⁸⁸ Thomas Sharp (1770-1841),⁸⁹ Charles Kirkpatrick Sharpe (c1781-1851),⁹⁰ and Joseph Train (1779-1852).⁹¹

While Sir Walter possibly had a limited exposure to dance traditions, with references to them being found in only a few of his works,⁹² it appears that he did have extensive personal experience, both from his own childhood and subsequently when teams visited his house at Abbotsford, of both guisers and of children performing Galations:

Yesterday [1st January 1825] being Hogmanay, there was a constant succession of Guisards-i.e., boys dressed up in fantastic caps, with their shirts over their jackets, and with wooden swords in their hands. These players acted a sort of Scene before us, of which the hero was one Goloshin, who gets killed in a 'battle for love,' but is presently brought to life again by a doctor of the party.

As may be imagined, the taste of [Sir Walter] our host is to keep up these old ceremonies. Thus, in the morning, yesterday, I observed crowds of boys and girls coming to the back door, where each one got a penny and an oaten-cake. No less than 70 pennies were thus distributed-and very happy the little bodies looked, with their well-stored bags.⁹³

Sir Walter even appears to have found their activities of sufficient interest to mention their visits in his correspondence with family⁹⁴ and friends.⁹⁵ For example, he wrote to Maria Edgeworth in January 1824.

Wishd you here yesterday to see about two hundred brats dressd up fantastically with wooden swords and white shirts over their clothes come for their little dole of an oaten cake and a penny to each. You never saw so many happy little faces... My library has been so far finished that they have been dancing in it.⁹⁶

Likewise, Sir Walter corresponded at length with Thomas Sharp, author of *A Dissertations on the Pageants or Dramatic Mysteries Anciently Performed at Coventry...* (1825),⁹⁷ about these very traditions.⁹⁸

In December 1812 Sir Walter had also acquired a copy of the chapbook *Alexander and the King of Egypt. A Mock Play, as it is Acted by the Mummings Every Christmas* (c.1746-69)⁹⁹ from John Bell, jun., the Newcastle bookseller and antiquarian.

... you mention some Christmas Carol, which you had seen, printed by White of this Town. I have a copy of nearly all of the original Ballads that were printed by him [John White of Newcastle] and *as you mention that sung by the Mummers at Christmas, I herewith send it to you*, with one or two things more, which I hope will be worth your acceptance [my emphasis].¹⁰⁰

It is also worth noting that Sir Walter had in his library a number of volumes which could have directly contributed to his knowledge of these topics. These included, amongst others, Francis Douce's *Illustrations of Shakspeare and of the Ancient Manners; With a Dissertation on... the English Morris Dance* (1807),¹⁰¹ Richard Johnson's *The Famous History of the Seven Champions of Christendom...* (1670), John Kirke's *The Seven Champions of Christendome...* (1638) and Joseph Ritson's *Remarks, Critical and Illustrative, on the Text and Notes of the Last Edition of Shakspeare* (1783).¹⁰²

Given his knowledge of the subject, and the fact that he had already produced a number of works with a focus on traditional culture, it is perhaps not surprising that Sir Walter makes reference to mumming and guising traditions in his published writings.¹⁰³ For example, in his poem *Marmion: A Tale of Flodden Field* (1808), he refers to mumming both in the text¹⁰⁴ and in the notes.

It seems certain, that the Mummers of England, who (in Northumberland at least) used to go about in disguise to the neighbouring houses, bearing the then useless ploughshare, and the *Guisards* of Scotland, not yet in total disuse, present, in some indistinct degree, a shadow of the old mysteries, which were the origin of the English drama. In Scotland, (*me ipso teste*,) we were wont, during my boyhood, to take the characters of the apostles, at least of Peter, Paul, and Judas Iscariot, which last carried the bag, in which the dole of our neighbours' plumb-cake was deposited. One played a Champion, and recited some traditional rhymes; another was

.....Alexander, king of Macedon,
Who conquered all the world but Scotland alone;
When he came to Scotland his courage grew cold,
To see a little nation courageous and bold.

These, and many such verses, were repeated, but by rote, and unconnectedly. There was also occasionally, I believe, a Saint George. In all, there was a confused resemblance of the ancient mysteries in which the characters of scripture, the Nine Worthies, and other popular personages, were usually exhibited. It were much to be wished, that the Chester Mysteries were published from the MS. in the Museum, with the annotations which a diligent investigator of popular antiquities might still supply. The late acute and valuable antiquary, Mr. Ritson, showed me several memoranda towards such a task, which are probably now dispersed or lost. See, however, his *Remarks on Shakespeare*, 1783, p. 38.¹⁰⁵

More specifically, however, if we look at Sir Walter's 1814 diary entry, when he first hears of the dance over dinner with the Scott family in Scalloway, he interjects the following interpretive note:

In a stall pamphlet, called the history of Buckshaven, it is said those fishers sprung from Danes, and brought with them their *war-dance or sword-dance*, and a rude wooden cut of it is given.¹⁰⁶

It is probable that Sir Walter wrote this with reference to the chapbook [*The History of Buck-Haven in Fifeshire. Wherein is contained the Antiquities of their dress. The Bucky boat, with a flag of a greentree, with their dancing. Willie and his trusty rapper. The Burgess Ticket, with a plan their New College, with the noted sayings and exploits of Wife Willie in the brae, and Witty Eppie the ale-wife, and Lingle tail'd Nancy*] [c.1780].

Contained in a collection of chapbooks bound in six volumes, in volume one Sir Walter wrote:

This little collection of stall tracts and ballads was formed by me when a boy from the basket of the travelling pedlars. Until put into its present decent binding it had such charms for the servants that it was repeatedly and with difficulty rescued from their clutches. It contains most of the pieces that were popular about 30 years since [c.1780] and I dare say many that could not now be purchased for any price.

W.S.

1810¹⁰⁷

The original *History of Buckhaven...* chapbook was allegedly written by Dougal Graham, the Glasgow Chapman, prior to his death on 20th July 1779. The earliest recorded publication is from 1784, although a copy appears not to have survived. The earliest surviving copy was printed in Glasgow in 1786 and numerous editions followed.¹⁰⁸ Sir Walter's copy possibly pre-dates all of these and contains several passages which do not appear in other surviving editions. At some level, this chapbook could well have informed Sir Walter's views as to the nature of Euro/Scottish cultural exchange, as well as the character of dances which might have been imported from Europe. For example, it is observed of one family's arrival in the community:

Again, these people is said to be one Tom and his two sons who were fishers on the coast of Norway, and in a violent storm was blown over, and got ashore at Bucky Harbour where they settled, and the whole of his children were called Thomsons, this is a historical saying, handed down from one generation to another, so in course of time they grew up and multiplied [spelling regularized].¹⁰⁹

Perhaps more important, however, a woodcut of "The Naked Dancers," dancing in a circle, is included in the chapbook¹¹⁰ as well as a brief description of the dancers.

There was in Bucky Harbour a method when they got hearty drink that they went down to dance among the boats, ane two, or three of the oldest, went into a boat to see the rest dance; when ever they admitted a burger, there was always a dance. One day they admitted gly'd Rob Thomson, from the island of May, and after he was admitted, they got account from Wife Willie that gly'd Rob was a witch, which made them all stop their dancing, and Rob was cried on to make answer to this weighty matter. Gly'd Rob cried none of you shall stur one fit for two hours I'se warrand you; so Rob sprang'd and jump'd over the boat several times, and put them to great terror; Some cried O tis ith air. And then they all cried that they saw im itha air hinging: So Rob was obliged to go back to the May and carry coals to the Light-house.

It was repeated that gly'd Rob was born in Bucky, and that his fadder was Willie Tamsons son who was banished for a slave to the May to carry coals; he would not take him on account he had but ae eye. After that no more dancing was admitted of a burger; but the old usual way of the fcate rupaple [?] and then drink until they are almost blind.¹¹¹

Furthermore, in his introductory remarks to James Scott's account of the dance in the Magnum Opus edition, Sir Walter draws on Olaus Magnus's *A Compendious History of the Goths, Swedes, & Vandals and other Northern Nations...* (1658)¹¹², which he was probably given by James Scott in November 1829.¹¹³ Sir Walter may well have borrowed the idea to introduce the Papa Stour Sword Dance in this way from Samuel Hibbert, who had earlier used this strategy.¹¹⁴ Based on his reading of Olaus Magnus's volume, Sir Walter observed:

The Sword-Dance is celebrated in general terms by Olaus Magnus. He seems to have considered it as peculiar to the Norwegians, from whom it may have passed to the Orkneymen and Zetlanders, with other northern customs.¹¹⁵

He then goes on to quote from Magnus's description "Of Their Dancing in Arms",¹¹⁶ and then concludes:

To the Primate's account of the sword-dance, I am able to add the words sung or chanted, on occasion of this dance, as it is still performed in Papa Stour, a remote island of Zetland, where alone the custom keeps its ground. It is, it will be observed by antiquaries, a species of play or mystery, in which the Seven Champions of Christendom make their appearance, as in the interlude presented in "All's Well that Ends Well"....¹¹⁷

But the story of Sir Walter Scott and the Sword Dance from Papa Stour is not yet ended, in that a number of questions are outstanding. For example, where is the "very old" manuscript from which William Henderson "transcribed" his copy, and where is William Henderson's copy?¹¹⁸ In the case of the latter we do at least have some clues. In his 1814 diary Sir Walter observed of the dinner conversation with the Scott family in Scalloway:

One of my three Mrs. Scotts readily promised to procure me the lines, the rhymes, and the form of the dance. I regret much that young Mr. Scott was absent during this visit.¹¹⁹

The juxtaposition of the "... promise to procure me the lines..." and the name of James Scott in the next sentence leads to the belief that, of the "... three Mrs. Scotts..." who were present, it was Catherine, the wife of James Scott, who knew exactly where an account of the dance could be obtained. Her husband already had one to hand. This view is later supported in a letter of 11th December 1829 where James Scott writes to Sir Walter that "I, therefore, beg your acceptance of such a Copy, which I commenced as soon as I was informed of your desire to possess it..."¹²⁰ the implication being that William Henderson's manuscript of the Papa Stour Sword Dance was already in his possession.

And for that matter we also have the question why James Scott's account of the dance is primarily in English, exhibiting no elements of Shetland vernacular language.¹²¹ Without being totally speculative, the simple answer may be that he was copying from an English text. James Scott's added note explains that the account he

sent to Sir Walter was “copied” from William Henderson's manuscript,¹²² the implication being that he is simply reproducing the manuscript which he had before him, rather than translating it. This leads to the conclusion that William Henderson's manuscript was in English. In fact, in his 1814 diary, prior to his ever having seen a written account or a performance of the dance, Sir Walter tell us that “Some rude couplets are spoken (in *English*, not *Norse*), containing a sort of panegyric upon each champion as he is presented”.¹²³ Presumably this description was based on his conversation with the Scott family, what they knew of the dance conceivably being derived from William Henderson's account which was possibly already in James Scott's possession. Likewise, James Scott's observation that William Henderson's manuscript was “transcribed from a very old one...”¹²⁴ indicates that it too was simply a copy of an earlier manuscript, rather than being a translation. This leads to the conclusion that even the earliest manuscript to which James Scott alluded was also in English.

Much of the research on the Papa Stour Sword Dance which has been undertaken over the years has been based on Sir Walter's annotation in the 1831 Magnum Opus edition of *The Pirate*, or on subsequent editions based thereon. The discovery in the National Library of Scotland of this forgotten manuscript of the Papa Stour Sword Dance which James Scott sent to Sir Walter in 1829, along with the accompanying correspondence, is highly important for a number of reasons. First, James Scott's manuscript, being a copy of William Henderson's transcript, provides us with a closer link than we previously had to the “very old” manuscript that James Scott point to. Secondly, its existence also allows us to distinguish between the material which was contributed by James Scott and that which was modified or added by Sir Walter or his amanuenses for his 1831 edition. Third, the letters and the manuscript together allow us to better understand the relationship amongst the individuals involved in documenting the early history of the dance, the motivations that lead to the creation of the copy by James Scott and Sir Walter's subsequent interest in the tradition and his inclusion of it in his 1831 edition. Finally, examination of James Scott's manuscript of the Papa Stour Sword Dance provides us with an opportunity for a reassessment of the early history of this tradition and of the subsequent comments and interpretations which have been made by researchers and others about it over the past one-hundred and seventy-four years. As Sir Walter himself observed:

The real use of the antiquarian's studies is, to bring the minute information which he collects to bear upon points of history.¹²⁵

Notes

¹ I would like to take this opportunity to thank the following individuals who have contributed in various ways to this essay. Firstly I must thank Michael J. Preston who first brought James Scott's manuscript of the Papa Stour Sword Dance to my attention, and Charles Zug who had brought it to Michael's attention back in 1973. In addition I would like to thank Ivor Allsop, Andrew Bennett, Iain Gordon Brown, Eddie Cass, Christopher Cawte, Steve Corrsin, Joy Fraser, Terry Gunnell, Hanne Pico Larsen, Emily Lyle, Andrew Martin of the National Museum of Scotland, Peter Millington, Bill Nicolaisen, Ron Shuttleworth, Brian Smith of The Shetland Archives, and Angus Stewart, Q.C., Keeper of the Advocates Library, for their numerous contributions. In addition, thanks must go to the staffs of The Advocates Library, The Bodleian Library, The British Library and The National Library of Scotland. Last, but not least, a big thanks goes Liz Stanford and the ever cheery and helpful staff of the Interlibrary Loans section of the Memorial University of Newfoundland Queen Elizabeth II Library. Without them I could not function.

² Scott, Walter. *Waverley Novels... The Pirate...* Magnum Opus Edition (Vols. 24, 25). Edinburgh: Robert Cadell. London: Whittaker & Co., 1831. Vol. 1, pp. 266-271. Sir Walter's notes on the Papa Stour Sword Dance are available at www.shef.ac.uk/uni/projects/tdrg/Texts.

³ For further aspects of our research on this topic see Preston, Michael J. and Paul Smith. Sir Walter Scott and *The Sword Dance: a Danish or Norwegian Ballet, &c, as Performed in the Island of Papa Stour, Zetland*. London: The Folklore Society, Forthcoming 2003 and Preston, Michael J. and Paul Smith. "Samuel Hibbert and the Sword Dance from Papa Stour, Shetland: Some Observations." (Forthcoming).

⁴ Clark, W. Fordyce. "Sir Walter Scott in Shetland." In *The Shetland Sketch Book: Folk-lore, Legend, Humour, Incident*. Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1930, pp. 89-102; Flinn, Derek. *Travellers in a Bygone Shetland: An Anthology*. Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1989, pp. 82-89; Grierson, H.J.C. ed. *The Letters of Sir Walter Scott: 1787-1832*. 12 Vols. London: Constable, 1932-1937, Vol. 12, pp. 117-133; Lockhart, John Gibson. *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Walter Scott*. 7 Vols. Edinburgh: Robert Cadell. London: John Murray and Whittaker and Co., 1837, Vol. 3, pp. 136-277; Mair, Craig. *A Star for Seamen: The Stevenson Family of Engineers*. London: John Murray, 1978, pp. 100-103; Scott, Walter. "Extracts From a Journal Kept During a Coasting Voyage Through The Scottish Islands." *Edinburgh Annual Register*. 5.2 (December 1814), pp. 432-446; Scott, Walter. *Waverley Novels... The Pirate....* Vol.1 pp. iii-vii; Stevenson, David. *The Life of Robert Stevenson, Civil Engineer*. Edinburgh: A. & C. Black. London, New York: E. and F.N. Spon, 1878; Stevenson, Robert [Civil Engineer]. *Reminiscences of 1814 of Sir Walter Scott Bart...* Edinburgh March 1850. Two versions-a draft and a fair copy. National Library of Scotland, Mss 3831; Mss 3832. An edited version of these manuscripts is contained in Robert Louis Stevenson, "Scott's Voyage in the Lighthouse Yacht." *Scribner's Magazine*. 14 (July-December 1893): 492-502, which was in turn reprinted in Laughlan, William F. ed. *Northern Lights, or a Voyage in the Lighthouse Yacht to Nova Zembla and the Lord Knows Where in the Summer of 1814. Sir Walter Scott*. Hawick: Byway Books, 1982, 140-156.

⁵ Lockhart, J.G., *op cit*, Vol. 3, p. 136.

⁶ Scott, Walter. *Waverley Novels... The Pirate....* Magnum Opus Edition, Vol.1 p. vii.

⁷ Ash, Marinell. "So Much That Was New to Us: Scott and Shetland." In *Essays in Shetland History*. Barbara E. Crawford. ed. Lerwick: Shetland Times, 1984, p.193.

⁸ Ash, M. *op cit*, p. 195; Lockhart, J.G., *op cit*, Vol. 3, p. 136-277.

⁹ Scott, Walter. *The Pirate*. 3 Vols. Edinburgh: Printed for Archibald Constable and Co.. London: Hurst, Robinson, and Co., 1822. See Weinstein, Mark and Alison Lumsden. eds. Walter Scott, *The Pirate* [1922]. Edinburgh Edition of the Waverley Novels. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001, pp. 488-489.

¹⁰ Lockhart, J.G., *op cit*, Vol. 3, pp. 136-277. 3: At least two other published versions of Sir Walter's 1814 diary have appeared, both based on Lockhart's 1837 edition (Laughlan, William F. *op cit*; Scott, Walter (With an "Introduction" by Brian D. Osbourne). *The Voyage of The Pharos. Walter Scott's Cruise Around Scotland in 1814*. Edinburgh: Scottish Library Association, 1998.). An alternative account of the voyage is also available, although this makes no reference to the Papa Stour Sword Dance (Robert Stevenson, *op cit*).

¹¹ Cook, Davidson. "Correspondence. Scott's 1814 Diary. To the Editor of the Times." *The Times Literary Supplement*. (22 August 1936), p. 680.

¹² Ash, M. *op cit*, p. 203.

¹³ Lockhart, J.G., *op cit*, Vol. 3, p. 204

¹⁴ Defoe, Daniel. *The History and Lives of all the most Notorious Pirates and their Crews, from Captain Avery, who first settled at Madagascar, to Captain John Gow...* Glasgow: Robert Duncan, 1769; Peterkin, Alexander. *Notes on Orkney and Zetland Illustrative of the History, Antiquities, Scenery, and Customs of Those Islands*. Edinburgh: MacCredie, Skelly and Co.. London: T. & G. Underwood, 1822, pp. 212-224; "[Review of] *The Pirate*. By the Author of *Waverley...*" *The British Critic*. ns. 17 (January 1822): 93-109.

¹⁵ Grant, Francis J. *Zetland Family Histories Compiled from Public Records and Other Sources*. Lerwick: T. & J. Mason, 1907, pp. 261-267; "Manners, Traditions and Superstitions of the Shetlanders [Part 1]." *Fraser's Magazine*. 33 (June 1846), p.648.

¹⁶ Lockhart, J.G., *op cit*, pp. 160-162.

- ¹⁷ Grant, F. J. *op cit* pp. 261-262, 267-269; Robertson, Margaret. *Sons and Daughters of Shetland 1800-1900*. Lerwick: The Shetland Publishing Company, 1991, pp. 170-171.
- ¹⁸ Lockhart, J.G., *op cit*, pp. 162-163.
- ¹⁹ *ibid.*
- ²⁰ Robinson, K.E. and Philip Roberts. "Sir Walter Scott and John Bell of Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Some Unpublished Correspondence." *Yearbook of English Studies*. 2 (1972), pp. 130-138.
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- ²² Bell, John, jnr. "Letter to Walter Scott, 30th April 1814." Newcastle University Library, B/W 37(4). Reprinted in Robinson and Roberts, *op cit*, p.135.
- ²³ Scott, Walter. "Letter to John Bell, jnr., 20th May 1814." National Library of Scotland, MS 23141. ff.26-27. Reprinted in Robinson and Roberts, *op cit*, pp. 135-136.
- ²⁴ Bell, John, jnr. "Letter to Walter Scott, 24th June 1814." National Library of Scotland, MS 3885. f. 112. Reprinted in Robinson and Roberts, *op cit*, pp. 136-137.
- ²⁵ Mair, C., *op cit*, p. 102; Stevenson, R. L., *op cit*, p. 501.
- ²⁶ Ash, M., *op cit*, p. 193.
- ²⁷ Scott, Walter. *The Lord of the Isles, A Poem*. Edinburgh: Archibald Constable and Co.. London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme and Brown, 1815, pp. xcvcxcviii.
- ²⁸ Constable, Archibald. "Letter to Walter Scott, 25th December 1820." National Library of Scotland, Mss 867. f. 124.
- ²⁹ Weinstein, M. and Lumsden, A., *op cit*, p. 395.
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- ³¹ McMullin, B.J. "The Publication of Scott's *The Pirate*, 1822." *The Bibliothek*. 16.1-3 (1989), pp. 1-29. Although imprinted, 1822, the "Introduction" is dated "1st November, 1821". Similarly, Lockhart observes that "The splendid romance of *The Pirate* was published in the beginning of December, 1821..." (Lockhart, J.G., *op cit*, Vol. 5, p. 150) and certainly reviews of the novel appeared in December "Review of New Publications: *The Pirate*..." *The Gentleman's Magazine*. 91.2 (December 1821), pp. 541-542, 607-613.
- ³² *Sir Walter Scott: A Bibliographical History 1796-1832*. New Castle: Oak Knoll Press, 1998, pp. 549-559, 805-812.
- ³³ Lang, Andrew. "Editor's Introduction to *The Pirate*." In *The Pirate by Sir Walter Scott, Bart. With Introductory Essay and Notes by Andrew Lang*. The Border Edition of the *Waverley Novels*. London: John C. Nimmo, 1893. Vol. 1, p.ix.
- ³⁴ Reed, James. "The *Pirate* (1821)." In *Sir Walter Scott: Landscape and Locality*. London: Athlone Press, 1980, p. 144.
- ³⁵ Lang, A., *op cit*, p. xiii.
- ³⁶ Weinstein, M. and Lumsden, A., *op cit*, p. 487.
- ³⁷ Scott, Walter, *The Pirate* (1822), Vol. 2, pp. 35-38.
- ³⁸ Lockhart, J.G., *op cit*, p. 162.
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- ⁴⁰ “Review of New Publications: The Pirate....” *The Gentleman's Magazine*. 91.2 (December 1821), p. 607.
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- ⁴³ “Surrey Theatre....” *The Times*. (7th January 1822), p. 2.
- ⁴⁴ “Olympic Theatre....” *The Times*. (14th January 1822), p. 2.
- ⁴⁵ “Theatre Royal, Drury Lane....” *The Times*. (15 January 1822), p.2.
- ⁴⁶ “Surrey Theatre....” *The Times*. (15th January 1822): 2; “Drury-Lane Theatre. Journal of Performances with Remarks.” *The Drama; or, Theatrical Pocket Magazine*. 2 (1822), p. 148.
- ⁴⁷ “[Surrey Theatre Playbill]. On Thursday, the 14th of February, 1822, Will be Acted for the 25th Time, with New Music, Scenes and Dresses, THE PIRATE, Or, the Wild Woman of Zetland... In Act II.-A ZETLAND SWORD DANCE... Entire New Scenery... Tickets to be had at Mr. John's, Phenix, Phenix Street, and of Sheppard, at the Box Office of the Theatre. [my emphasis] National Library of Scotland, Annotated First Edition of The Pirate. Mss 5024. f282.
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- ⁵¹ Millgate, Jane, *op cit*, p. 24; Millgate, Jane. “Adding More Buckram: Scott and the Amplification of Peveril of the Peak.” *English Studies in Canada*. 13.2 (1987), p. 174.
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- ⁵⁸ Robertson, M., *op cit*, pp. 170-171.

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- ⁶² Spears, J.E. “A Note on the Shetland Sword Dance.” *Southern Folklore Quarterly*. 33.4 (1969), pp. 347-349.
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- ⁶⁴ Scott, James. The Sword Dance: a Danish or Norwegian Ballet, &c. as Performed in the Island of Papa Stour, Zetland. [1829]. National Library of Scotland, MSS 907. ff. 1-7. Enclosed with James Scott's “Letter to Walter Scott, 11th December 1829.”
- ⁶⁵ *ibid*, f. 3.
- ⁶⁶ *ibid*, f. 10. The William Henderson, junior, of Papa Stour referred to here was part of the family of Henderson's of Springfield (Grant, F.J., *op cit*, pp. 140, 145), not to be confused with William Henderson of Bardister (Grant, F.J., *op cit*, pp.140) who was the friend, and main consultant on Shetland matters, of Samuel Hibbert (Flinn, Derek, *op cit*, pp. 90-103; Hibbert Ware, Mrs. [Samuel]. *The Life and Correspondence of the Late Samuel Hibbert Ware....* Manchester: J.E. Cornish, 1882, pp. 265-270, 280-287, 317-334).
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- ⁷⁸ Weinstein, M. and Lumsden, A., *op cit*, pp. 430-431.
- ⁷⁹ Todd, W.B. and Bowden, A., *op cit*, p. 899; Weinstein, M. and Lumsden, A., *op cit*, p. 430.
- ⁸⁰ Allsop, Ivor. “The Sword Dance of Papa Stour-Shetland.” *Folk Music Journal*. 3.4 (1978), pp.333-334.

- ⁸¹ *ibid*, pp.324-342.
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