Pillings or Scottish Country Dance Diagrams?

- Pillings and Scottish Country Dance diagrams are more or less the same thing.
- Pillings were first published by Mr F L Pilling in 1955.
- Taken over by a committee in 1967.
- In later years Keith Rose of the Bedford Scottish Dance Group has been the most prolific coder of diagrams, nearly 4000 dances coded as of October 2018 (and they keep coming).
- We will to a large extent be using Keith Rose's conventions and diagrams as these are the ones used by the Strathspey Server and the Scottish Country Dancing Dictionary.

We have made a “Key to the symbols” on a card in a handy format.

KEY TO THE SYMBOLS

○	Man □ Woman	1	Cast off one place
A	Allemande	1	Cast up one place
B	Balance in line	1	Lead or dance down one place
D	Pass back to back	1	Lead or dance up one place
DT	Double triangles	6	Six hands round and back
P	Poussette		Round to the left only
R	Repeat previous		Round to the right only
RA	Right hands across		Form arch
LA	Left hands across		Pass under arch
RL	Rights and lefts		Ladies’ chain
S	Set		Mens’ chain
T	Turn		First corner position
X	Cross		Second corner position
	Reel of three		Third corner position (Partner’s 1st corner)
	Reel of four		Fourth corner position (Partner’s 2nd corner)
	Clap	S	Set to corners

	Advance and retire	ST	Set and turn corners
	Retire and advance		Turn corner, partner, corner, partner
	Lead or dance down and back	HS	Highland Schottische Setting
	Petronella movement for eight bars	PROM	Promenade
T	Petronella turn (2 bars)	CHAIN	Grand Chain
D	Petronella in tandem (2 bars travelling)	HSP	Highland Schottische Poussette
	Slip steps with both hands joined	Other formations are indicated by their ususal names	

Suffixes to Symbols

R	with Right hand		Leading Man’s Reel
L	with Left hand	↑	Advancing
B	with Both hands	↓	Retiring
◇	Petronella		Rotating

Notes

Spaces between full vertical lines represent eight bars unless otherwise stated.		Broken vertical line halves space into four bar sections	
	Bracketed movements are danced at the same time		Dance movement with hands joined
1 2 RL	Number above symbols indicate couples dancing	RL	Horizontal line halves a figure
			Dancers follow route shown (full line for men, broken line for women)

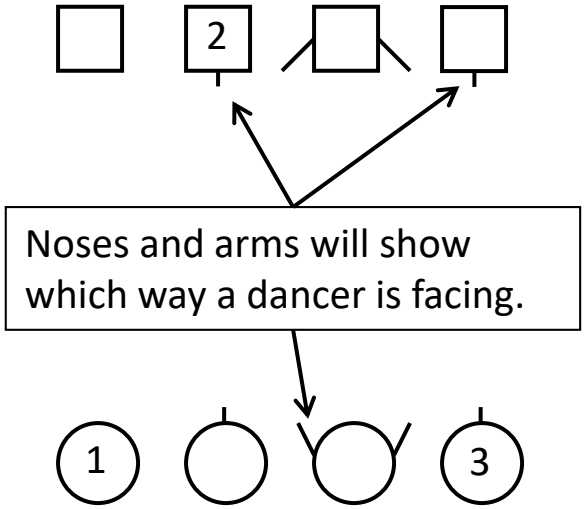
Not all the symbols are there but you will find the most common ones.

New symbols are added as the need arises. Print, cut and glue…

Who is who?

Ladies are represented by a square

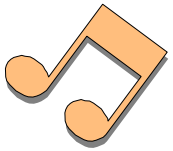
Men are represented by a circle



The number denotes which couple in the set the dancer is part of. Sometimes there will not be a number, not even a circle or square. Then it is either obvious which couple(s) is/are dancing or it will be indicated in some other way.

A diagram is divided into 8 bar chunks

Top of the set is here.



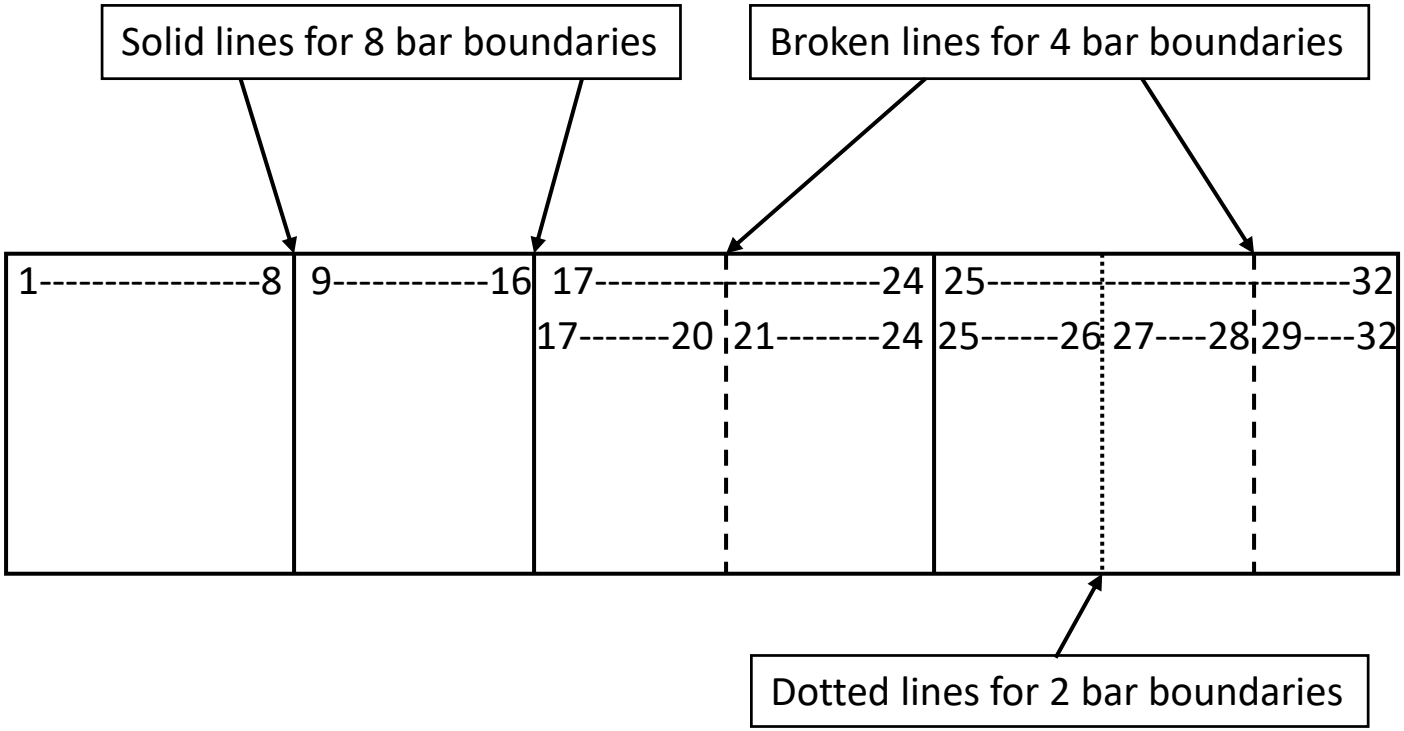
1----------8	9----------16	17----------24	25----------32

The 8 bar chunks are not necessarily equal in size. It depends on what happens inside them.

Sometimes a dance will stretch across several lines.

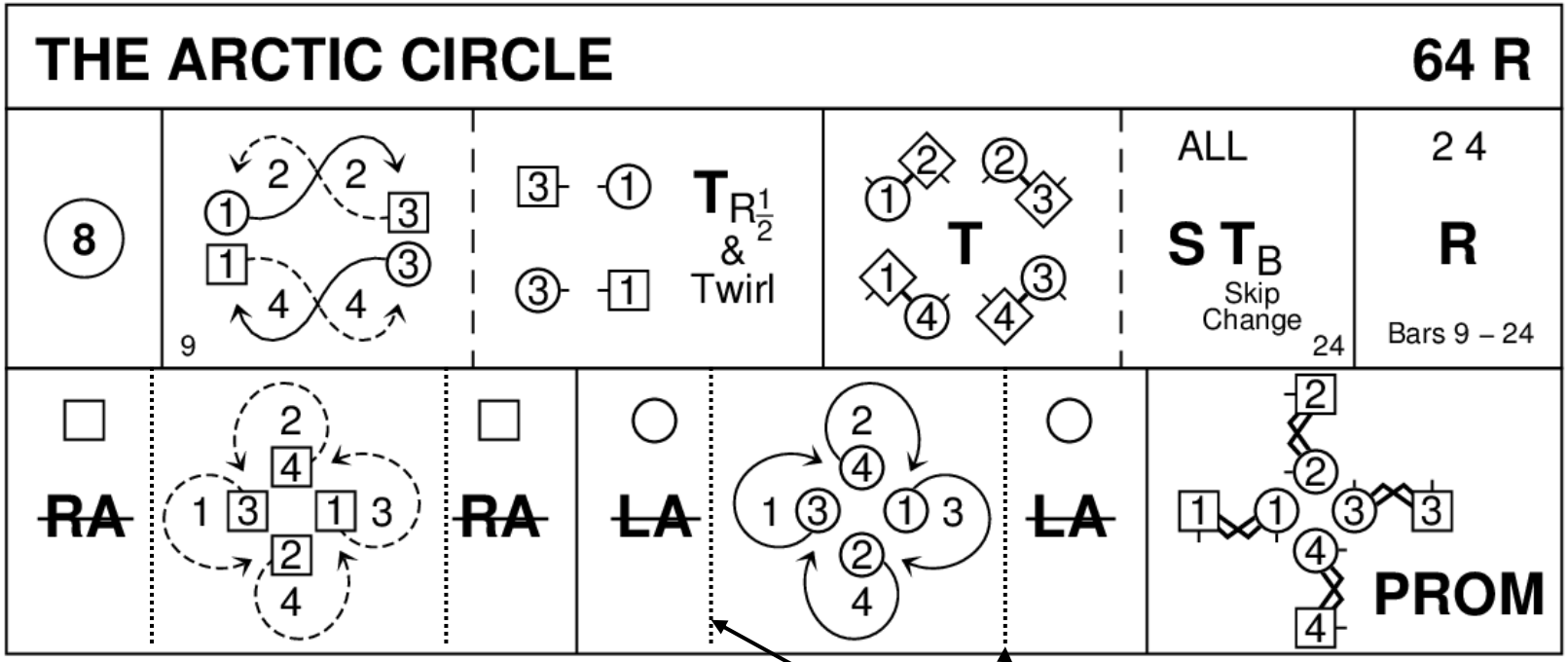
The top of the dance is always on/to the left.

An 8 bar chunk may be subdivided into 4 and/or 2 bar parts



This technique is used to make the phrasing clearer

Let us see how The Arctic Circle is divided up



John Drewry, 2004, New Dances by John Drewry

4C/4C square set

2 bar boundaries either side of a 4 bar formation. (They are not in the actual diagram for Arctic Circle but included here for the illustration.)

However, it is always an issue how much or how little information one should put into the diagrams.

You should never rely on diagrams for learning a dance. They never give the full picture.

The diagrams are only meant as an aide mémoire.

A quick glance, and we know how the dance starts!

So, how do we interpret them?

How is a dance presented?

Name of the dance

Type of dance, no of bars and times danced.

RAKES OF GLASGOW			8x32 S
1 2 RL	⇄	1 2 A	2 1 3 6

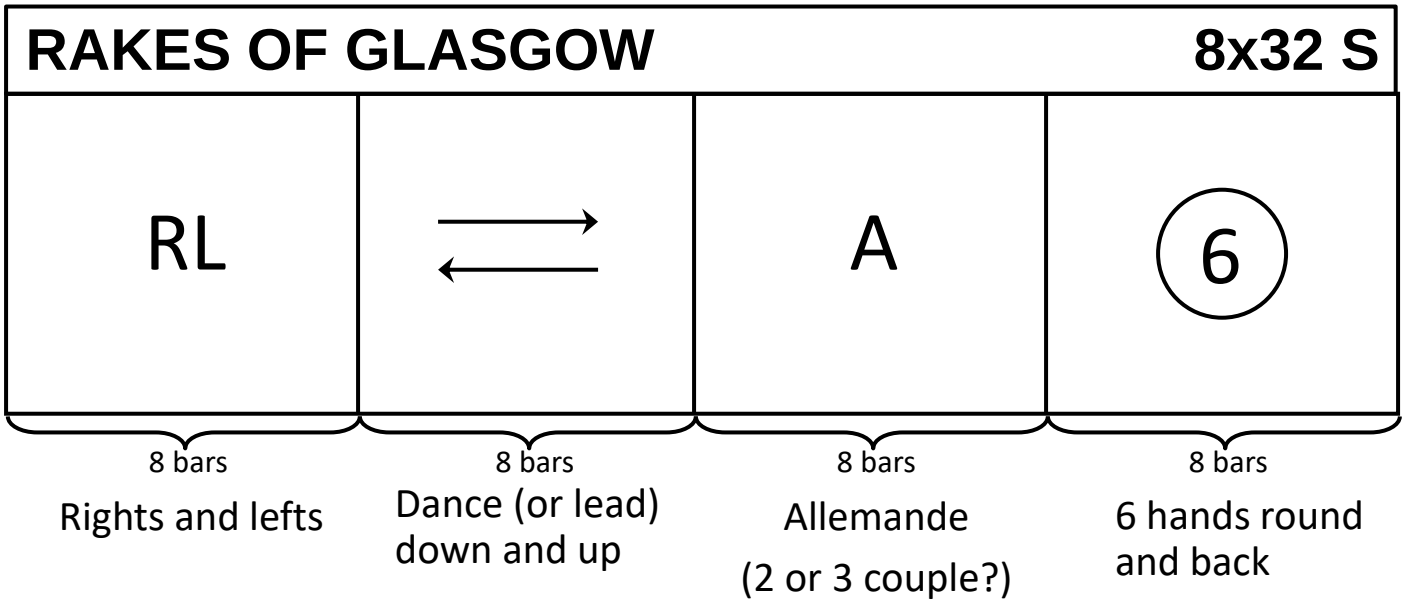
Preston, 1806, RSCDS Book XI, 11

3C/4C longwise set

Who devised it and where we can find the full description.

Type of set, no of couples in set and how many couples dance at any one time

Let's look at this relatively simple dance as Pilling originally coded it:



But, there are no ladies, no men! Who is dancing?

And what about that Allemande?

Who is dancing?

RAKES OF GLASGOW			8x32 S
RL	⇄	A	6

If, as in this original Pilling example, there is no explicit indication who is dancing a formation it is the ***dancing couple*** or the ***leading couple*** which is usually the ***1st couple*** *who will be dancing*.

They cannot do a Rights-and-Lefts all by themselves so there must be another couple involved. There is no couple above them so it <u>must be</u> ***2nd couple***.

In other words, the first 8 bars translated into Minicrib: 1s+2s dance R&L.

Who is dancing (2)?

RAKES OF GLASGOW			8x32 S
RL	⇄	A	6

Bars 9-16: Dancing (or leading?) down and up, 1st couple, obviously. Is it 'dance' or 'lead'? The diagram does not tell; we have to know. Since this formation is followed by an Allemande it is most likely a 'lead down and up'.

Bars 17-24: Allemande. Is it a two or three couple Allemande? It is a two couple Allemande. If it were a three couple Allemande it would be indicated.

Bars 25-32: Six hands circle round and back. In order to get the required number of hands we need to involve the next couple down the set, 3rd couple. (Which actually makes it **12 hands** but such is the convention…)

Explicitly who is dancing?

RAKES OF GLASGOW			8x32 S
1 2 RL	1 ⇄	1 2 A	2 1 3 6

To explicitly say who is dancing the number(s) of the couple(s) involved can be written above the symbol(s) for the figure(s). The numbers will also indicate in which order the couples are in the set (see bars 25-32).

This is redundant information which is superfluous in this dance. However, many modern dances are much more complex and so, for consistency, Keith Rose chooses to include the positional information more widely (all except bars 9-16 in this example). This also removes any doubt that bars 17-24 is a two couple Allemande.

Not all formations have a symbol or a one- or two-letter abbreviation. Some are described with an easy to understand word, and sometimes even a Minicrib-like explanation.

GOLDEN PHEASANT				8x40 J
1 2 3 **CHAIN**	1 2 **P**	2 1 3 **6**	**S T**	**DT**

Button and Whittaker, 1813, RSCDS Book 16.9 3C/4C longwise set.

Bars 1-8: CHAIN = 'Grand chain' is one of these formations. Others are CHASE, the KNOT, PROM(enade) and RONDEL.

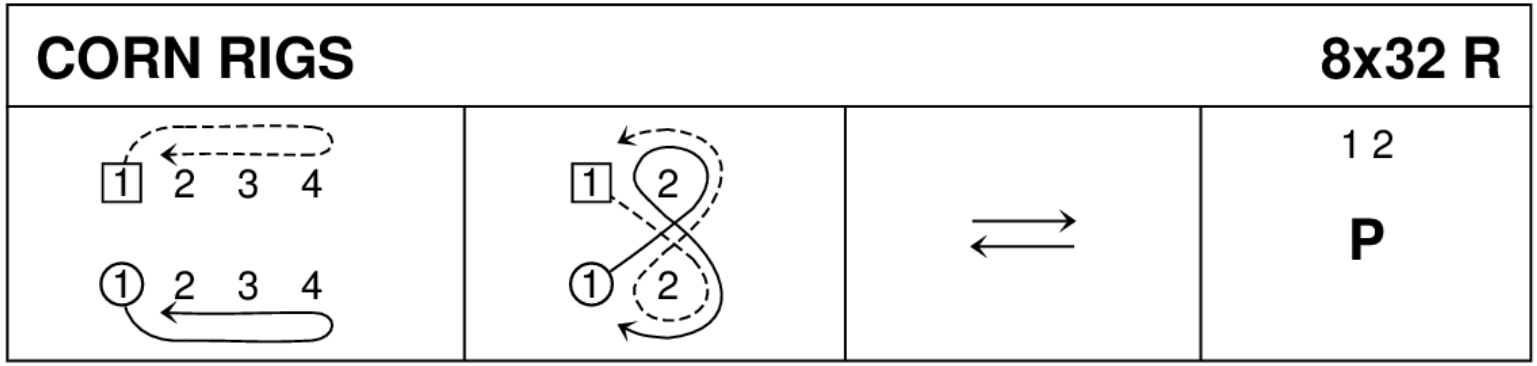
Bars 9-16: P = Poussette

Bars 17-24: Should be obvious.

Bars 25-32: The angles represent 2nd and 1st corner positions, as if you were looking into the corners (1st diagonally to the right and 2nd diagonally to the left). 'S = Set' and 'T = Turn'. This mnemonic says: Dancing couple 'Set and Turn corners', which also says something about the position of 1C at the end of bar 24 (the Circle).

Bars 33-40: DT = 'Double Triangles'. (Do not confuse this with 'Pass back to back' (Do-Si-Do) and 'Turn' which would be denoted D<space>T, similar to S T above!)

Some times words are not enough...



RSCDS Book 4.12 2C/4C longwise set.

Some times we must show exactly where a dancer is going. That is done by showing the actual path a dancer is taking. We do this by using lines: a solid line (———) for men and a broken line (- - - - -) for ladies.

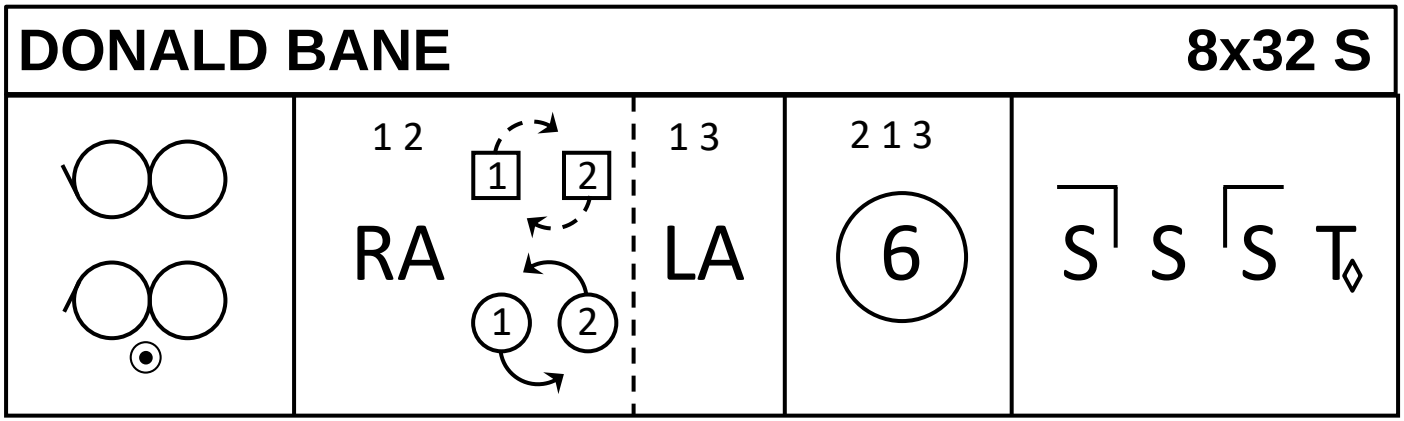
Bars 1-8: 1L and 1M cast behind their own lines down to 4th place, turn inwards and dance up to place. (A single line can say all this!)

Bars 9-16: 1C dance figure of 8 around 2C.

Bars 17-24: Obvious? Not quite! Reel time poussette, starting in the middle with both hands joined, could indicate 'dance' but the description says 'lead'!

Bars 25-32: Poussette

More symbols...



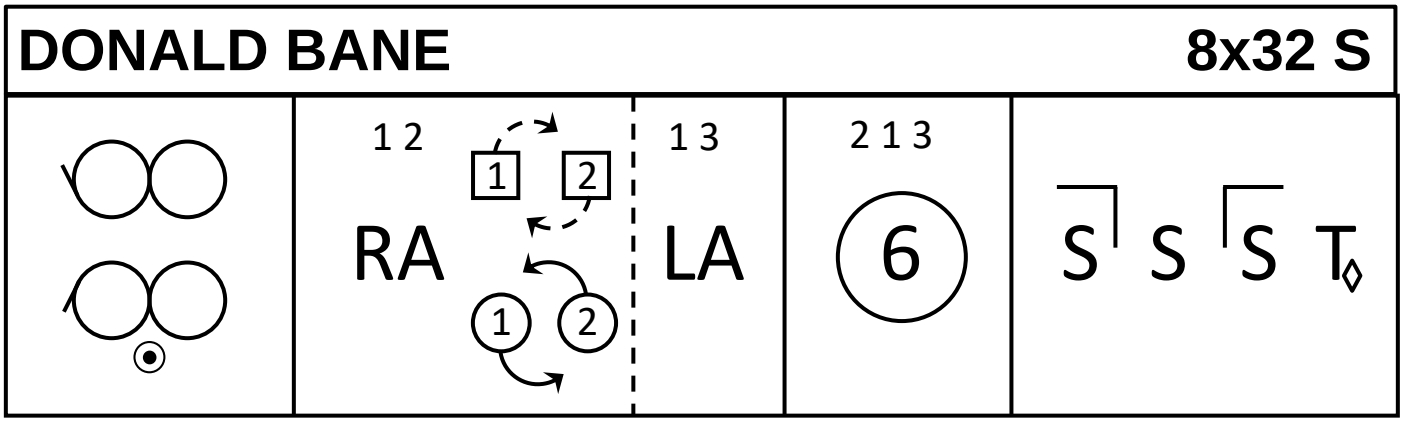
Thomas Wilson, 1816, RSCDS XVII 12

3C/4C longwise set

is the symbol for 'Reel of three'. If there is a need for clarification on how the reel starts a small line is added which shows which way the head dancer goes into the reel. In this dance it will be a left shoulder reel on the ladies' side and a right shoulder reel on the men's side, in other words mirror reels.

⦿ indicates 'leading man's reel' which is useful when there is more than one reel going on at the same time.

… and more…



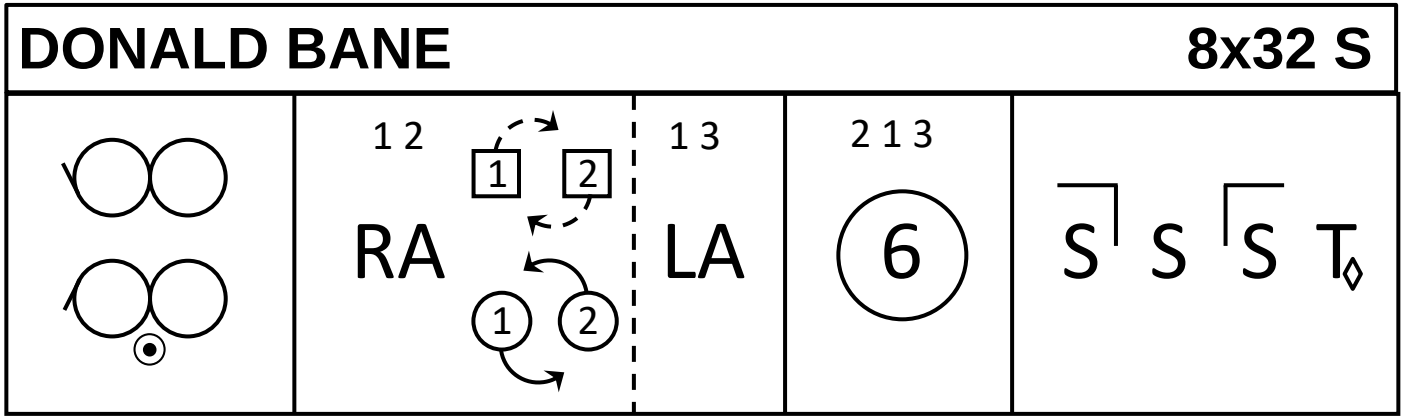
RA = right hands across all the way to places

LA = left hands across all the way to places

1 and 2 (and their partners) cast off/dance up, respectively.

('Cast off' will normally be shown as 1 . The number tells you how many places to cast. (Similarly 1 = cast <u>up</u> one place. The couples you are casting past will normally step up or down. Here we have to accomodate for the 2s dancing up (with nearer hands, not stepping up), hence the different annotation.)

… and even more…



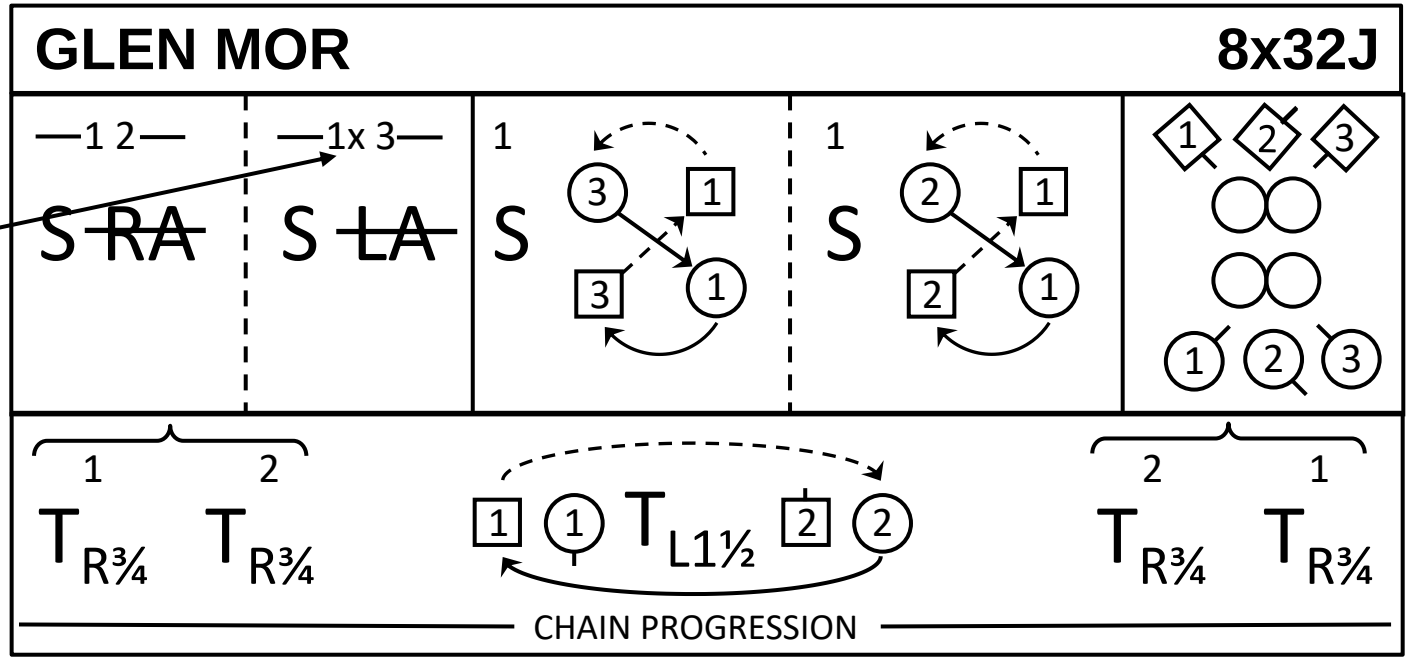
S S S T These are all well known symbols by now, but put together like this, what do they mean?

(Hint: An S without 'adornment' means 'Set to partner'.)

Answer: 'Hello-Goodbye' setting ending with petronella turn to 2nd places

Hmm, getting trickier? Not really.

The ‘x’ means that this couple are on the opposite sides (crossed over).



Eric Forbes, Birmingham 1973

3C/4C longwise set

Bars 1-8: RA = ’Right hands across’ as we saw on the previous page. The horizontal line through ~~RA~~ means that you do half the formation. THIS GOES FOR ALL FORMATIONS. In other words, ~~LA~~ is half ’Left hands across’. **Other examples**:

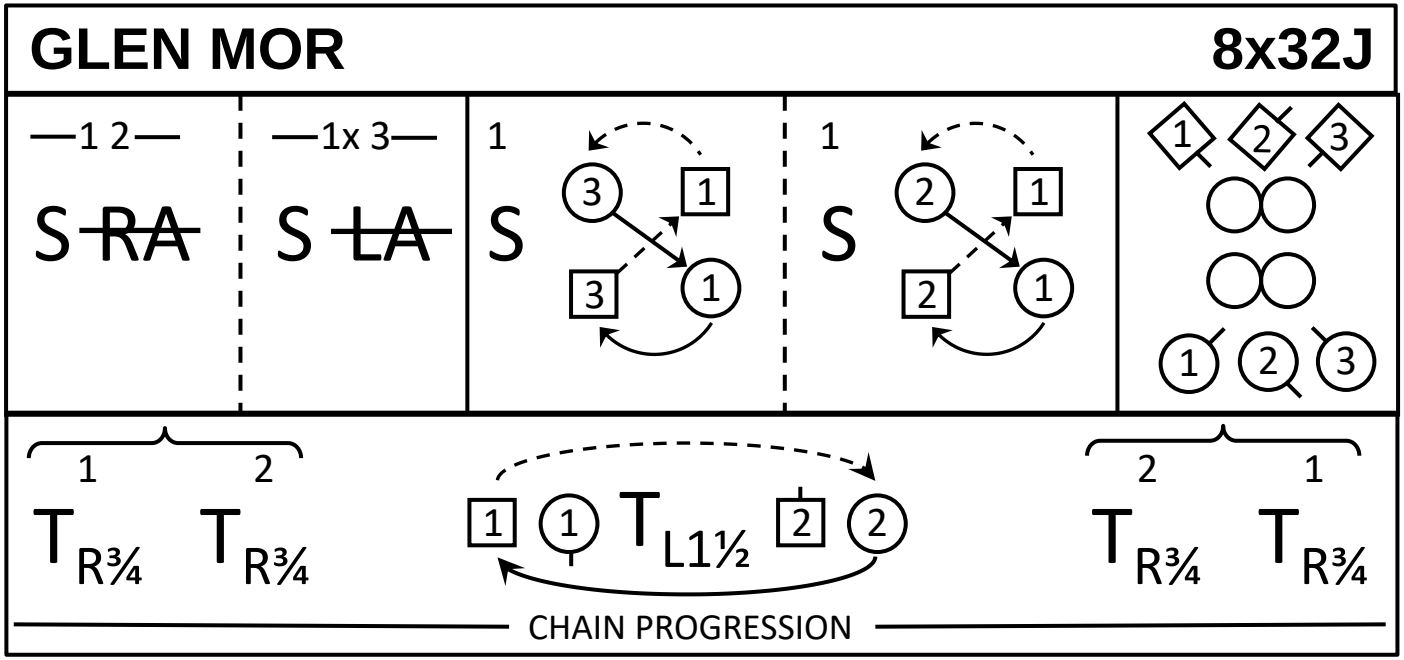
half reel of three

~~CHASE~~ half chase

~~RL~~ half rights and lefts

~~CHAIN~~ half grand chain

Bars 9-16: 1C set and then cast up while 3C cross down. And then the same again with 2C.



Bars 17-24: Here we have two reels on the sides and it is shown explicitly who goes where. (Mirror reels where 3C are the head of the reel and dancing in and up.)

Bars 25-32: The friendly person who has diagrammed this dance could have written 'CHAIN PROGRESSION' and been done with it. However, she/he has gone to the trouble to explain how the formation goes. 'T = Turn', and the additional subscript R¾ means 'Right hands three quarter round'. Then we are shown the actual progression, with the 1L & 2M dancing a half chase while 1M & 2L turn left hand one and a half time.

The horizontal brackets show formations which are danced at the same time.

We have seen how the system works. Let us do some summing up:

- The diagram is split into 8-bar parts by solid vertical lines.
- An 8-bar part may be subdivided into two 4-bar parts using a broken line and sometimes (but very rarely) into 2-bar parts using a dotted line.
- The top of the set is always at the left end of the diagram.
- The name and type of dance are always stated above the diagram, the deviser, where to find the full description and type of set below the diagram.
- A lady is represented by a square; a man by a circle.
- They may have a 'nose' or 'arms' to indicate which way they are facing or if/how they are holding hands.
- The formations of the dance are shown using simple codes (called mnemonics) in the order they are danced.
- Unless obvious, the dancers involved in a formation are shown by numbers inside the symbols in the formation or above the code for the formation.
- We have seen that some of the symbols, like T and S, can have a suffix like T_B or S_2 which gives further information about how to execute the formation.

Which suffixes are there?

R = ’right hand’. Usually used with T (turn): T_R and X (cross): X_R

L = ’left hand’. Usually used with T (turn): T_L and X (cross): X_L

N = ‘nearer’ hand. Used to indicate dancing down/up as opposed to leading.

B = ’both hands’. Usually used with T (turn): T_B

◊ = ’Petronella’. Used with T (turn): $T_◊$

⦿ = ’leading man’s reel’. Used with reels

↑ = ’advancing’. Used with S (set): $S_↑$

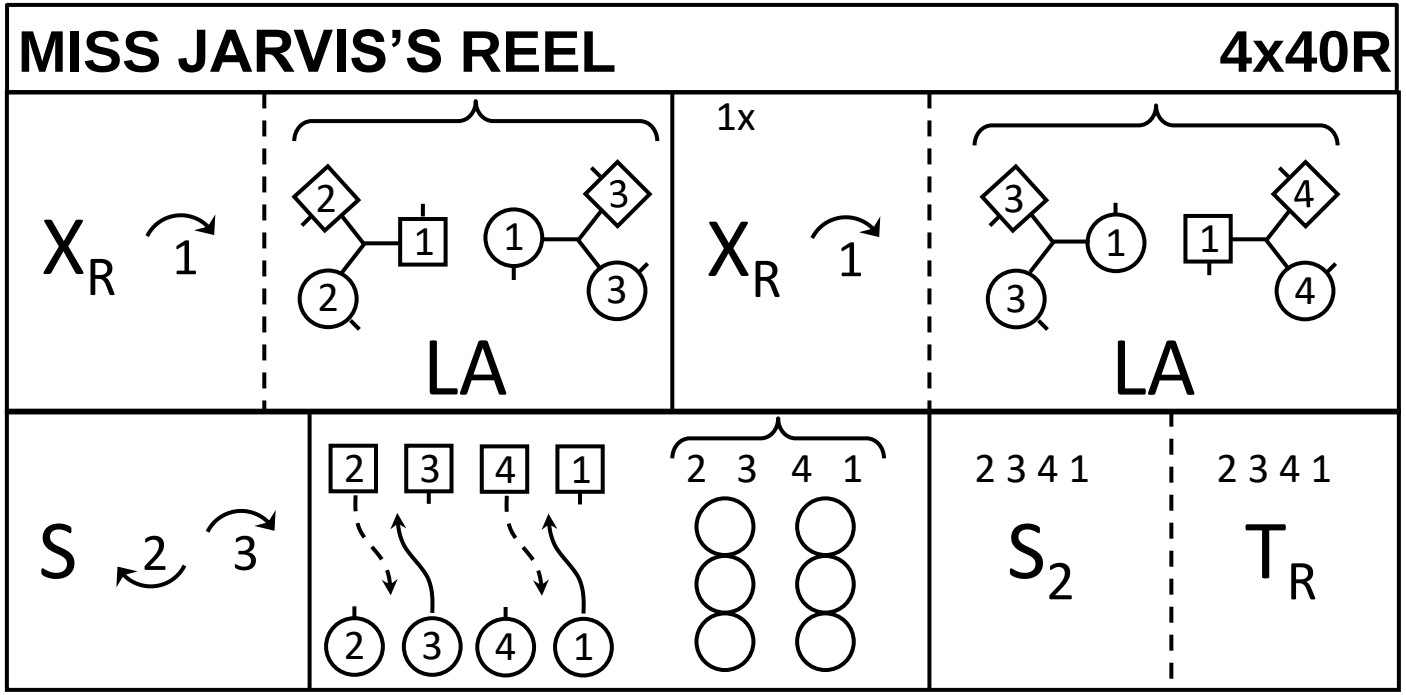
↓ = ’retiring’. Used with S (set): $S_↓$

↷ = ‘rotating’. Used with S (set): $S_↷$

(Note: The formation ’Advance and retire’ has its own mnemonic: ↕ and ’Retire and advance’ is denoted: ⧗.)

Sometimes we will see a number as a suffix, e.g. $T_{R¾}$ or $T_{B1½}$ or S_2. This tells us how many times to perform the action, like ‘turn right hand three quarter’, ‘turn both hands one and a half’ or ’set twice’.

A couple of new symbols here:



Stirlingshire Branch

4C/4C longwise set

Bars 1-8: **Cross right hand**, cast off one place (four bars) and two simultanous 'three left hands across' (four bars) where the dancers are specified.

Bars 9-16: Spot the differences from bars 1-8... (Who is dancing where?)

Bars 17-24: 1C set, **dance (or lead) up two places** and cast off three places.

Bars 25-32: Two **reels of four** across (dancers specified). As the start of this reel is a bit unusual special instructions have been inserted.

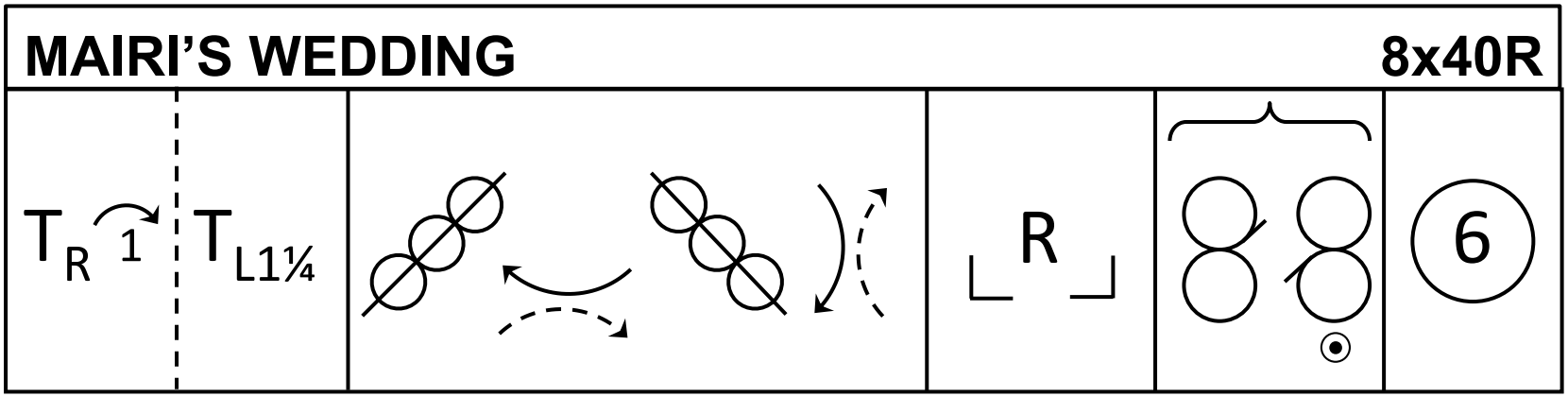
Bars 33-40: All couples **set twice** and turn right hand.

What is the diagram NOT telling you?

- What kind of step to use: travelling or setting step
- Dancing (nearer hands) or leading (same hands, left or right)
- Stepping up or down when a couple is casting down or up
- Whether and how the dancing couple should drop to bottom when they finish their turn as dancing couple.

Neither Diagram nor Minicrib will say anything about these and a host of other minor details.

Finally a dance we all know and love...



James Cosh, 1959, 22 SCD & 1 other

3C/4C longwise set

Anything new in here?

Diagonal half reels. R = Repeat. Third and fourth corners.

As we can see there are some explanatory symbols (arrows) with the half reels, and they are telling us that when the dancing couple meet in the middle between and after the reels they should pass without crossing paths (pass left shoulder).

Testing your understanding of diagrams

Here is the Minicrib for «The Duke of Perth». Create a Diagram for the dance.

1- 8 1s turn RH, cast to 2nd place, turn LH to face 1st corners

9-16 1s turn 1st corner, partner, 2nd corner, & partner to face 1st corners

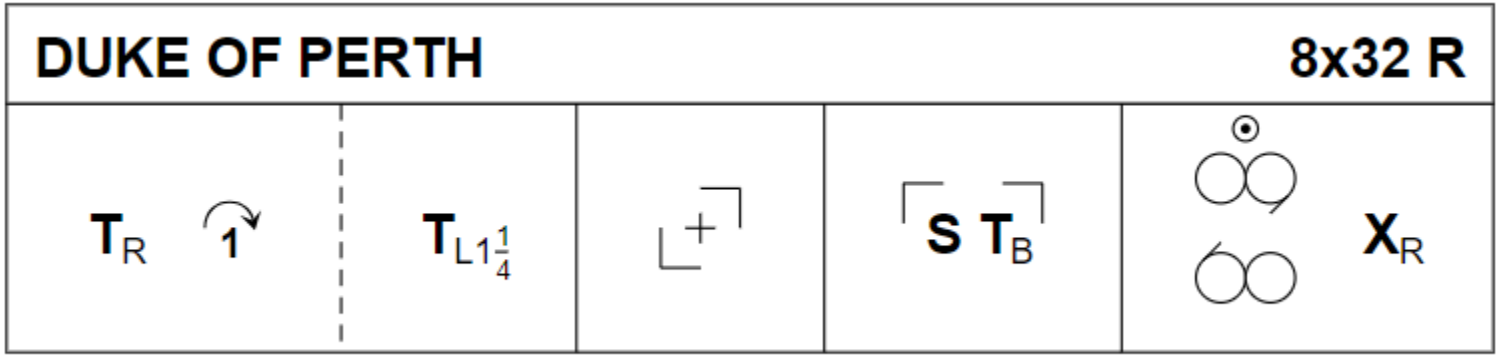
17-24 1s set to & turn 1st corner 2H, set to & turn 2nd corner

25-32 1s dance Reel of 3 on opposite sides giving LSh to 1st corner & cross back to own sides

The diagram will include one symbol we have not explained but you will find it on the "Key to the symbols" card (page 2).

Keith Rose's diagram is on the next page but DON'T LOOK until you have tried making your own!

Keith Rose's diagram

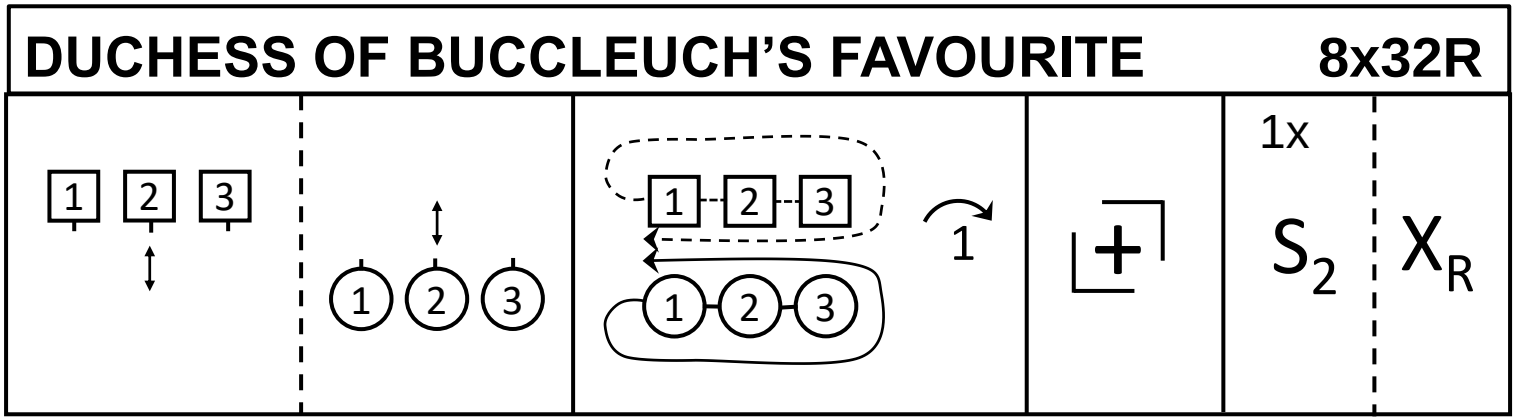


The Ballroom, 1827, RSCDS Book 1.8

3C/4C longwise set.

How does it compare with yours?

And now – a practical test



Border Dance Book

3C/4C longwise set

Make a set (if you can) and try to dance it.

Thank you, good luck and good night.