



18 Tunes: an exploration of Piobaireachd

Gaining proper access to the classical music of the pipe is difficult because the main 20th century publications, namely the *Piobaireachd Society Collection* (second series) and *The Kilberry Book of Ceol Mor*, each edited wholly or substantially by Archibald Campbell, depart significantly from traditional idiom. The constraints of the competition circuit ensure that it is these versions which are largely heard in public and form the basis of the recorded repertoire. Since there is no line of oral transmission which has escaped major influence from these sources, it is to the older published books and manuscripts that the player must turn to realise something of what John MacDonald of Inverness, the greatest of early 20th century masters, meant when he spoke of our 'beautiful and melodious airs'. These sources have been unavailable to players for most of the 20th century. The Piobaireachd Society scores were for a long time the only ones available because their practice of publishing at below cost drove commercial publishers from the market, except for a brief period during the 1970s, when the English reprint firm EP of Wakefield in Yorkshire, taking advantage of a boom in demand for standard works created by the new plate-glass British universities, made the published collections of Angus MacKay, Donald MacDonald, Uilleam Ross, Donald MacPhee, and General C. S. Thomason briefly available. The main manuscript sources either passed into private hands and became inaccessible to the performer community or were consigned to the vaults of the National Library of Scotland. Even within Scotland, no library has the full range of piobaireachd sources. However, the University libraries of Aberdeen and Glasgow, the Mitchell Library in Glasgow and the National Library in Edinburgh have, between them, all the material used here. In addition the University of Aberdeen's Historic Collections department will loan microfilm copies of several of the major MSS for library-based study in the North of Scotland.

The manuscripts and books cited below indicate the stylistic range of piobaireachd available to the performer community (since there was much copying to and from manuscript collections while they remained in the hands of the players) into the early 20th century. The tunes chosen are those listed for the Senior and Gold Medal competitions in 2001 in order to make alternative settings more accessible to the player and all interested in the full richness of the tradition.

The following sources have been used:

Manuscripts:

Colin Campbell's Instrumental Book, 1797. Colin Mór Campbell was piper to John Campbell, 4th Earl of Breadalbane on the latter's western estates at Ardmaddy in Argyllshire, and compiled his manuscript (often called 'the Nether Lorn MS' after the district in which he lived) during the closing years of the 18th century. Colin Mór used a highly systematised version of written *canntaireachd* or syllabic notation. Two volumes survive from what may originally have been three, and they contain 169 tunes, some 70 of these not recorded in other sources. Features of Colin Campbell's very attractive and distinctive style are discussed in the



Notes to the tunes.

The Angus MacArthur Collection of Piobaireachd (also known as ‘The Highland Society of London’s MS’) contains 30 tunes from Angus MacArthur of the famous MacArthur piping dynasty of Skye, recorded in staff notation by John MacGregor III of *clann an sgeulaiche* (an almost equally distinguished piping family from Fortingall in Perthshire) in London in the spring of 1820. This is one of the earliest scores to be recorded on the staff and uses a transitional style of notation, in the transpositional key of D. The texts are rich and ornate and of outstanding musical quality.

Donald MacDonald’s MS is one of the most important early documents in the written music of the Highland pipe. It is dated 1826 and contains fifty tunes and an accompanying section of tales and legends. MacDonald was a Skyeman and is thought to have been taught by Angus and John MacArthur. He substantially revised the inherited notational conventions in a way that was to be adopted by all later writers, separating the ornament from the melody line typographically, with a considerable gain in ease of reading.

The Peter Reid MS, is dated Glasgow 1826, and shows Reid frequently dispensing with time signatures and bar lines, presumably so as not to interrupt the flow of the phrase, an approach which was to be advocated nearly a century later by John MacDonald of Inverness and was used by Dr. Roderick Ross, in his published collection *Binneas is Boreraig* (5 vols., Edinr., 1959-67). Although Reid was obviously influenced by Donald MacDonald’s notational conventions, he is stylistically independent; his settings often seem very fluent and musical in comparison with MacDonald’s ‘squarer’ style. The MS contains 43 tunes.

Angus MacKay’s MS, was compiled during the 1830’s and early ’40s by Angus MacKay, first piper to Queen Victoria from 1843 to 1854. It contains almost 200 tunes and is the largest MS collection assembled during the 19th century. The manuscript is written out in fair copy using shorthand conventions pioneered by John MacGregor in the MacArthur/MacGregor MS. The contents include transcripts from existing MS sources, and material collected from his father, John MacKay, and other tradition-bearers. MacKay was at the forefront of the movement to convert piobaireachd into a fixed form for purposes of competition, and as a notator his chief concern was to develop a simplified and standardised approach to ornament, and to reduce the rhythmical ambiguities of earlier scores by specifying note values with unprecedented precision.

Colin Cameron’s Piobaireachd Manuscript contains 84 tunes and is one of the most important Victorian sources. The first three tunes are notated by Donald Cameron in a rather tentative hand, the remainder in a bold and fluent script by his eldest son Colin, piper to the Duke of Fife. The last tune in the book is dated ‘Nov.22nd 1869.’ The collection offers a fascinating record of a distinctive family style drawing eclectically upon earlier notational systems and showing the influence of a number of identifiable written sources, including the MSS of Angus MacKay and Duncan Campbell of Foss.

William Ross, Collection of Pipe Music contains 80 tunes. This was compiled by Angus MacKay’s successor as first piper to Queen Victoria. Ross clearly enjoyed access to



MacKay's papers since the MS contains many transcripts from this source but a number of tunes reveal his stylistic independence of MacKay.

C. S. Thomason, 'Ceol Mor Legends': a collection of piping folklore, from a number of printed, manuscript and oral sources, including Donald MacDonald and John Johnston of Coll. This was assembled around the turn of the 20th century by Major General C. S. Thomason, R. E., first President of the Piobaireachd Society, and editor of *Ceol Mor* (privately printed 1900). 'Ceol Mor Legends' was intended to be a companion volume to the piobaireachd collection but Thomason died in 1911 and the work remains unpublished.

John MacDougall Gillies's MS book was begun in the winter of 1879 and was still being added to well into the 20th century. It contains more than 70 tunes. The settings show clear influence of the Cameron family, but have many delightful individual touches. It is clear that, as contemporaries attested, John MacDougall Gillies possessed outstanding refinement and subtlety as an interpreter of piobaireachd. The MS is currently deposited in the library of the University of Glasgow. There is a further Gillies MS containing some 20 tunes in the Wighton Collection at Dundee City Library: 'A Selection of piobaireachd Supplied by Pipe-Major John MacDougall Gillies to his pupil George Wilkie of Dundee, 1920-21'.

David Glen's Manuscript: was completed around 1907. It contains 191 tunes, including several interesting contemporary compositions. David Glen's published *Collection of Ancient Piobaireachd* (Edinr., 1880-1907) was described by John MacDonald of Inverness in 1940 as 'the most reliable we have today'. By 1940 eight volumes of the Piobaireachd Society's second series had been published.

Piobaireachd Research Papers of Archibald Campbell have also been consulted, but they are not cited here. Archibald Campbell, was the youngest son of John Campbell, laird of Kilberry in Knapdale in southern Argyll. Campbell was educated at Harrow and Cambridge, became a judge in India, and on his return during the later 1920s became sole editor of the Piobaireachd Society's second series from volumes 2-9, which contain the core of the competition repertoire. His papers contain details of some three hundred tunes, including copies of the scores of Donald MacDonald, Angus MacKay, Uilleam Ross, Donald MacPhee, David Glen, and John MacDougall Gillies. In his editing, however, Campbell frequently altered note values he found in his sources, with the effect of coarsening expression and disrupting the rhythmical flow of the melody. This was done silently: his extensive editorial notes gave no indication that this had taken place. Indeed, although his scores differed significantly from, and from a musical point of view were greatly inferior to, the sources he claimed to be using, Archibald Campbell's arrangements were published in the Piobaireachd Society's second series as the authentic stylings of traditional masters. This process was carried still further in the *Kilberry Book of Ceol Mor*. Despite the passionate protest of many pipers, however, the Society's chief instructors, John MacDonald and Willie Ross, were obliged to use Campbell's scores as the basis of their teaching from 1928 onwards. Between them, they trained two generations of leading players, with serious implications for the coherent transmission of the music from 1930s onwards.



Published sources:

Donald MacDonald's *Ancient Martial Music of Caledonia* was published in Edinburgh in 1818/19. It contained 23 tunes written in MacDonald's new notational style which was to set the parameters for most subsequent attempts to represent this music on the page. Failure of the Highland Societies of London and Scotland to subscribe to the venture led to MacDonald incurring serious financial loss, although once he disposed of the copyright the collection enjoyed a degree of success, going through six subsequent editions. The Preface to the first edition was contributed by an anonymous third party, and although very superficial and sometimes plain wrong, was frequently cited by later writers in the belief that it stemmed from MacDonald himself.

Angus MacKay's *Ancient Piobaireachd or Highland Pipe Music* was published in Edinburgh in 1838. It contained 61 tunes in a notation which sought to eliminate potential ambiguities in MacDonald's style by assigning specific duration to anything in the tune which possessed time value. MacKay was also at the forefront of the move to simplify and standardise the music with the aim of producing a fixed text for the purposes of competition. MacKay's book became the leading 19th century collection, going through five later editions. The letterpress portions were compiled by James Logan, an Aberdonian journalist whom MacKay had met at The Club of True Highlanders in London. Although possessing rather limited personal knowledge of the pipe and its culture, Logan was an enthusiast for all things 'Celtic', publishing in 1831 a substantial work called *The Scottish Gael*. Logan was, for a brief period, under-secretary to the Highland Society of London before being dismissed for drunkenness.

William Ross, *Ross's Collection/Pipe Music* was published in London in 1869. It contains 41 tunes, none of which had appeared in print before. It went to six subsequent editions. *Ross's Collection* marks the first publication of classic tunes like 'The Battle of the Pass of Crieff', 'The Blue Ribbon', 'The Lament for the Children', 'The Lament for Donald Bàn MacCrimmon', 'Scarce of Fishing', 'Praise for Marion', and 'MacCrimmon's Sweetheart'. Ross's often very musical settings were enriched by arrangements from leading Victorian master players like Colin Cameron, and Sandy MacDonald, father of John of Inverness. We can see what this might imply by comparing the fine version of 'The Desperate Battle' from Colin Cameron with the sketchy account of the tune in Angus MacKay's MS (ii, 72). Ross's book also contained a large selection of *ceòl beag* giving valuable insight into the rapidly-developing new competition repertoire. The Preface came from the pen of Dr. Norman MacLeod of the Barony, Dean of the Chapel Royal, and though finely written, reveals a highly conventional attitude towards the pipe and its music.

Donald MacPhee, *A Collection of Piobaireachd newly arranged and revised* was issued in two volumes, the first being published in Glasgow in 1879. Altogether it contained 37 tunes and was the first collection of piobaireachd in modern staff notation to be published in the open market, and not by subscription. Donald MacPhee came from Coatbridge and was probably taught by Donald Galbraith. He gained a considerable reputation as a player, and set up as a bagpipe maker in Glasgow about 1873. When he died, prematurely, in 1880, his business was taken over by Peter Henderson. Attractive because of their cheapness, the fact



that they contained many of the classic tunes, and the generally reliable quality of the editing, MacPhee's books were widely used in the later 19th and early 20th century.

C. S. Thomason's *Ceol Mor* was privately printed and issued in 1900. It is the largest collection of piobaireachd ever published. Thomason was born in India but brought up on Speyside by his grandfather, J. W. Grant of Elchies. The latter being a pupil of Donald MacDonald and a man of substance, MacDonald gave him the MS of his unpublished second volume, and this formed the basis of Thomason's work. His main contribution was to devise an ingenious system of musical shorthand which enabled quite lengthy tunes to be contained on a single page, thus making possible Thomason's ambitious attempt to have the whole tradition available to the performer community in printed form at a price they could afford. First President of the Piobaireachd Society, General Thomason was an able and musically gifted man, whose writings make a significant contribution to the theory of the subject, while many regard his tune 'Hail to my Country' as amongst the loveliest of 19th century piobaireachds.

William Stewart of Ensay, *Piobaireachd Society Collection* (first series). This was published in five volumes (1905-1912) and contains 35 tunes, along with miscellaneous prefaces and notes by the editor. Stewart was a laird with an estate in Harris and was a typical product of the Celtic Twilight. An opinionated and abrasive man, he was the leading spirit in the anti-Thomason faction inside the Piobaireachd Society and master-minded the coup in which the General was overthrown in the 'night of the long dirks' at Oban in 1904, following which Stewart emerged as Secretary to the Society and editor of its publications. There does seem to have been a genuine dislike of Thomason's notation amongst certain conservative elements in the piping world (led by John MacColl and Angus MacRae amongst the players); there may also have been a desire on the part of people whose primary loyalty was to the Northern Meeting, to check the tightly-knit group of Argyllshire gentry who had founded the Piobaireachd Society and might wish to boost Oban at the expense of Inverness. Whatever the case, Ensay was never forgiven. As successive volumes of the first series were issued, they were reviewed with savage hostility by Dr. Charles Bannatyne, Lt. John McLennan, David Glen, and Henry Whyte of the *Oban Times*. As a notator, Ensay tended towards caution, following MacKay's style with material from *Ancient Piobaireachd*, or Donald MacDonald's with material from *Ancient Martial Music*. His tendency to stick close to the original sources does mean, however, that his settings often contrast rather favourably with those of the second series.

Finally, a note on references and conventions: the grids showing the organisation of the tunes are fairly approximate: different editors divide up tunes slightly differently on occasion and use different terms for the same thing. But I have tried to reflect the essential character of the movement concerned; between various kinds of siubhal and pendulum movement, for example, there is a fairly fluid divide. Also folio numbers for Peter Reid are not always easy to establish accurately owing to a number of earlier schemes of pagination which do not reflect the current arrangement of contents.



Further discussion of all the issues above will be found in my book, *The Highland Pipe and Scottish Society, 1750-1950* (Tuckwell Press, East Linton, 2000).

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