

Ashgate Popular and Folk Music Series



The Highland Bagpipe

Music, History, Tradition



Edited by
Joshua Dickson

THE HIGHLAND BAGPIPE

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Music, History, Tradition

Edited by

JOSHUA DICKSON

The Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama, UK

ASHGATE

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Notes on the Contributors

Peter Cooke (BA, MA, PhD, ARCM, DipEd)

Peter Cooke's musical researches began while teaching in East Africa during the 1960s. In 1969 he joined the staff of the School of Scottish Studies in the University of Edinburgh with the responsibility for heading the musical teaching and research there during the following 27 years until his retirement. His brief took him on musical fieldwork to all parts of Scotland and also led to his major research publication, *The Fiddle Tradition of the Shetland Isles* (Cambridge University Press, 1986), and a number of articles on piping. He currently teaches ethnomusicology at the University of Birmingham and lectures at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London and at Wolverhampton University.

Barnaby Brown (BA, MA)

Barnaby Brown grew up in Glasgow, Scotland, studying both Western and Gaelic classical music traditions. A graduate of Cambridge University and former principal flautist of the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain, he is the first Highland piper to enlist the principles of the early music movement to refresh contemporary pibroch performance. He lived for six years in Sardinia, working with *launeddas* players to inform the revival of the Northern Triplepipe, the 'organ' of the Celtic church and precursor to the bagpipe in Britain and Ireland. He currently produces CD-books introducing early Gaelic music to mainstream circles under the *Siubhal* label and lectures for the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama in Glasgow.

Barry W. Shears (BA, MA, CD)

Barry Shears was born at Glace Bay, Cape Breton in the Canadian Maritimes. He was taught to play the bagpipe by Angus MacIntyre, a retired coal miner and piper. Highlights of his performance career include a 1983 tour of Nova Scotia and Scotland with Stan Rogers and John Allan Cameron and a 1990 trip to France to record a live-to-air broadcast of Cape Breton music with fellow musicians Dave MacIsaac, Jerry Holland and John Morris Rankin. Barry arranged and performed the pipe music for the critically acclaimed Canadian movie 'Margaret's Museum'. In addition, he has researched and published three musical/historical books on the piping tradition of Cape Breton.

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J. Decker Forrest is a piper originally from San Diego, California. He is particularly interested in ‘research-based performance’ as it relates to Highland bagpipe music and has been active in recording early nineteenth-century music on period bagpipes. Decker has many solo piping competition awards to his name, including the Highlands and Islands Young Piper of the Year (2004) but has more recently tended to focus his playing on recitals and making recordings. He was Coordinator of Academic Studies/Deputy Head of Department for the BA Hons (Scottish Music) degree course at the Royal Scottish academy of Music and Drama in Glasgow between 2005 and 2007 and is now Programme Leader for the BA Hons (Gaelic and Traditional Music) degree course at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, Isle of Skye. He has recently submitted his PhD on changes in the performance-practice of *ceòl beag* (c.1820–1966) to the University of St Andrews/RSAMD.

Hugh Cheape (DL, MA, FSA, FSA Scot, FRSGS)

Hugh Cheape is one of Scotland’s foremost historians of music and material culture. He spent 33 years at the National Museums of Scotland, where he rose to the position of Principal Curator. Beginning in the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland, he was involved in the creation of the Scottish Agricultural Museum before moving into the Applied and Decorative Arts. Following the formation of the National Museums of Scotland in 1985, he began work on the Museum of Scotland, which opened in 1998. He created the Museum of Piping which opened in the National Piping Centre in 1995, and which has been a focus of research and the amassing of a national collection of the national instrument. He has published extensively both in book and article form, mainly in the field of Scottish history and culture, and their European context.

Keith Sanger

Keith Sanger’s research interests include bagpipes and harps in Scotland and Ireland. His various publications include *Tree of Strings*, a history of the Harp in Scotland co-authored with Alison Kinnaird, and also the chapter on the harp in the forthcoming volume 10 of the *Compendium of Scottish Ethnology*: ‘Scottish Life and Society; Oral Literature and Performance Culture’. More recently, he published with Roderick Cannon an edited version of the c.1820 publication of bagpipe music by Donald MacDonald. He is currently researching the MacIntyre and MacGregor Pipers in Atholl and Breadalbane, the sources of pre-1800 Highland bagpipe supply and the connection with the early Fencible and Militia Pipers.

Bridget Mackenzie (MA Oxon, MLitt)

Bridget Mackenzie comes from an academic background, both parents being mediaeval scholars. After graduating from Oxford, she did her MLitt at the University of Glasgow, where she became a lecturer in Old Norse. Married to Alex Mackenzie, an engineer and piper, she retired from the University to bring up her children, working at home on aspects of the historical background to pipe music. Her publications include *Piping Traditions of the North of Scotland* (1998), which won an award from the Saltire Society, and *Piping Traditions of Argyll* (2004), as well as a number of articles in the *Piping Times*. She is currently working on books on the piping traditions of the Inner Isles, Skye and the Outer Isles.

Iain MacInnes (MA, MLitt)

Iain MacInnes is a music producer with BBC Scotland with a remit which includes the weekly pipe music broadcast *Pipeline*. In 1988 he completed an MLitt thesis at the School of Scottish Studies in Edinburgh exploring the impact of the Highland Societies of London and Scotland on the evolution of Highland piping. Iain has played in a number of groups, including The Tannahill Weavers and Ossian, and in 1999 released a solo piping album, *Tryst*. He has been active since the early 1980s in the revival of bellows-blown pipes, sometimes known as ‘cauld wind’ pipes, in Scotland.

Joshua Dickson (MA, PhD)

Joshua Dickson is Head of Scottish Music at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama. Born and raised in Alaska, he arrived in Scotland in 1992 to study Scottish Gaelic at the University of Aberdeen (MA, 1996). He then undertook doctoral research in the history of the piping tradition of the southern Outer Hebrides at the School of Scottish Studies, University of Edinburgh (PhD, 2001), now published under the title *When Piping Was Strong: Tradition, Change and the Bagpipe in South Uist* (John Donald, 2006). He has performed publicly in the contemporary Gaelic music scene with *Na Tri Seudan* and Allan MacDonald’s award-winning 2004 Edinburgh Festival recital series ‘From Battlegrounds to Barlines’.

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As the provider of editorial services to the National Piping Centre in Glasgow for 10 years, Mike Paterson was largely responsible for establishing and producing the Centre's international publication, *Piping Today*. In this role he travelled widely to cover not only developments in Highland piping, but also the many revivals of other European piping traditions. New Zealand-born, Canada-based, Mike has seen five books published, his most recent being *Folk in Print: Scotland's Chapbook Heritage* (Birlinn, 2007) which he co-edited with Professor Ted Cowan. His first degree was a BA in anthropology and psychology at the University of Auckland, New Zealand. He completed his PhD in Scottish Studies at the University of Glasgow in 2001. He is a founding Council member of the Associazione Piper Italiani.

Roderick D. Cannon (BA, DPhil, DSc)

Born in 1938 in Manchester, UK, Roderick Cannon is a Professor and Honorary Fellow of the School of Chemical Sciences, University of East Anglia. He is also currently attached to the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama, Glasgow. He is a member of the Music Committee of the Piobaireachd Society and recently was appointed Honorary President of the Lowland and Border Pipers' Society. An amateur piper, Dr Cannon has nonetheless through his research over many years made an enormous contribution to current knowledge of pipe music and history. He has authored a number of seminal research sources, including *A Bibliography of Bagpipe Music* (1980), *The Highland Bagpipe and its Music* (1987), *Joseph MacDonald's Compleat Theory of the Highland Bagpipe* (1994) and most recently *Donald MacDonald's Collection of Piobaireachd Volume 1 (1820)* (2006), which he co-authored with Keith Sanger.

Simon McKerrell (BA, PhD)

Simon McKerrell plays the Highland, uilleann and Border bagpipes and is in regular demand as a session musician and recitalist. He was awarded a PhD in Ethnomusicology in 2005 for his thesis entitled 'Scottish competition bagpipe music: sound, mode and aesthetics'. He is a major prize-winner in piping competitions; some notable wins include the Dunvegan Medal (2004), Skye Clasp (2005, 2006, 2007) and first in the A-grade March, Strathspey and Reel at the Northern Meeting, Inverness (2006). His research interests focus on the complex meanings of music and in particular the modes and aesthetics of traditional music within the context of globalisation. He is currently Lecturer in Ethnomusicology at the University of Sheffield.

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Robinson McClellan is an American composer, scholar and concert presenter. His compositions have been heard internationally in settings such as the Oregon Bach Festival, Hungary's International Monteverdi Choir Festival, Windsor Castle and the Vatican with ensembles including the Albany and Fort Worth Symphonies. He has received awards from the American Academy of Arts and Letters and ASCAP, and recent commissions have come from the Albany Symphony, the Museum of Biblical Art in New York and Christ Church New Haven. He is currently a doctoral candidate in composition at the Yale School of Music and the Yale Institute of Sacred Music.

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General Editor's Preface

The upheaval that occurred in musicology during the last two decades of the twentieth century has created a new urgency for the study of popular music alongside the development of new critical and theoretical models. A relativistic outlook has replaced the universal perspective of modernism (the international ambitions of the 12-note style); the grand narrative of the evolution and dissolution of tonality has been challenged, and emphasis has shifted to cultural context, reception and subject position. Together, these have conspired to eat away at the status of canonical composers and categories of high and low in music. A need has arisen, also, to recognize and address the emergence of crossovers, mixed and new genres, to engage in debates concerning the vexed problem of what constitutes authenticity in music and to offer a critique of musical practice as the product of free, individual expression.

Popular musicology is now a vital and exciting area of scholarship, and the *Ashgate Popular and Folk Music Series* presents some of the best research in the field. Authors are concerned with locating musical practices, values and meanings in cultural context, and may draw upon methodologies and theories developed in cultural studies, semiotics, poststructuralism, psychology and sociology. The series focuses on popular musics of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. It is designed to embrace the world's popular musics from Acid Jazz to Zydeco, whether high tech or low tech, commercial or non-commercial, contemporary or traditional.

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To various peer reviewers of the work presented here, whose input was greatly valued and extremely helpful: Prof. Colm O. Baoill of The University of Aberdeen; Dr John G. Gibson, Cape Breton; Prof. William Gillies, The University of Edinburgh; Prof. Richard Blaustein, formerly of East Tennessee State University; Eliot Grasso, Faculty of Music, The University of Oregon; Dr Gary J. West, The University of Edinburgh; Dr Peter Cooke; and Dr Peter Greenhill.

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Lastly, to my family, for their patience and pride.

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Introduction

Joshua Dickson

The Highland bagpipe, widely considered ‘Scotland’s national instrument’, is one of the most recognised and celebrated icons of traditional music in the world. It is also among the least understood by Western musicians and ethnomusicologists alike. But this is beginning to change: Scottish bagpipe music and tradition – particularly, but not exclusively, the Highland bagpipe – has enjoyed an unprecedented surge in public visibility and scholarly attention over the past two decades. Founded mainly on the work of Robin Lorimer, Peter Cooke and Francis Collinson of the Edinburgh school in the 1960s and 1970s, an increasingly eclectic and practice-based corps of scholarship has emerged, bringing to light, as never before, a treatment of evidence subject to the performer’s own grasp of his craft.

Scholarship has also become increasingly international and reflexive in scope. Just as research has leaned toward the practice-based in recent years, so too has a greater interest in the *emic* led to a diverse picture of the meaning and image of the bagpipe in communities both in Scotland and throughout the Scottish diaspora. This interest in the *emic* has led, conversely, to the consideration of both the globalisation of Highland piping and piping as rooted in local culture. It has given rise to a reappraisal of sources which have hitherto formed the backbone of long-standing historical and performative assumptions. A concurrent strand of revivalist research which reassesses Highland piping’s cultural position relative to other Scottish piping traditions, such as that of the Lowlands and Borders, today effectively challenges the notion of the Highland bagpipe as ‘Scotland’s national instrument’.

To mark today’s climate of enquiry, the following studies, most of which were written specifically for this anthology, reflect the internationalism and multi-disciplinarity being brought to bear on the history, culture and musical iconicism of the Highland bagpipe. The present work encompasses 12 original contributions, prefaced by a reprint of Dr Peter Cooke’s seminal piece ‘Problems of notating pibroch: a study of “Maol Donn”’, which first appeared in *Scottish Studies* volume 16, part 1, in 1972. Dr Cooke’s article presaged the quality and diversity of today’s scholarship; seminal in its time to the corps of scholars who are expanding the boundaries of Highland bagpipe studies today, ‘Problems of notating pibroch’ inspired or set the intellectual foundations for a host of later research, including, it could be argued, that of Roderick Cannon, Allan MacDonald, Frans Buisman, Iain MacInnes and Barnaby Brown. Still eminently relevant, it is fitting to reintroduce Cooke’s piece to a new audience alongside the fruits, directly or indirectly, of his early and influential labours.

The Highland Bagpipe: Music, History, Tradition provides an unprecedented snapshot of the state of Scottish piping studies in our time. Contributors range from eminent scholars of long standing to an emerging corps of doctoral and postdoctoral researcher-musicians from Scotland, England, Canada and the United States. Their methodologies and resources pertain to the bagpipe in oral and written history, anthropology, ethnography, musicology, material culture and modal aesthetics, while their notes and combined bibliography form an invaluable resource for musicians and scholars of traditional music everywhere.

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Chapter 1

Problems of Notating Pibroch: A Study of ‘Maol Donn’

(First published in *Scottish Studies* 16/1, 1972)

Peter Cooke

Since pipers first attempted to set down on paper the music of pibrochs in the late eighteenth century, all who have tried readily admit the difficulty of the task. Early attempts were of two kinds. First, there were those made by musicians such as Patrick MacDonald, minister of Kilmore (1784); Alexander Campbell, editor of *Albyn's Anthology* (1816); and Elizabeth Jane Ross, later Baroness D'Oyly (who was brought up in the house of MacLeod of Raasay and whose manuscripts of ‘Original Highland Airs collected in Rasay [sic] in 1812’ is now in the library of the School of Scottish Studies).¹ Each transcribed a small number of pibrochs in a form that would enable them to be played on the piano, flute or violin; accordingly they did little more than suggest impressionistically the complicated cuttings and graces that the pipers played. Their efforts are valuable today in so far as they are among the very earliest attempts to write down pibrochs, and though they are of little value as performance scores for pipers, they at least give some clues to the rhythm, phrasing and structure of the melodies as they were performed in those days.

The other early type of transcription is the detailed one, often made by pipers themselves for other pipers to use, in which every note is recorded as it presumably was played. The earliest of this type is known as the ‘Highland Society of London’s MS’, which contains 44 pibrochs, at least 12 of which were notated for the Society by piper John MacGregor from the aged Angus MacArthur, probably during the last years of the eighteenth century. Donald MacDonald’s MS (c.1812)² and Peter Reid’s (1826) are other examples of this kind.³

All these transcribers must have found the process ‘tedious and exceedingly troublesome’,⁴ yet strangely enough the earlier transcribers were less apologetic

¹ School of Scottish Studies Library, University of Edinburgh, MS 3.

² National Library of Scotland (NLS) MS 1680.

³ See the preface to *Piobaireachd, a ... collection of ... tunes edited by Comunn na Piobaireachd* (15 vols, Glasgow: The Piobaireachd Society, 1925–1989), vol. 1 for a fuller list of other MS sources.

⁴ Alexander Campbell, *Albyn's Anthology* (2 vols, Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1816–18), vol. 1, p. 90.

about their efforts than those who followed. It could be that they were ignorant of the problems involved: however, it is equally possible that pibroch as it was played then presented fewer problems of rhythm and phrasing than it does today and was more easily understood. A century later at least one Gael complained:

Sir, – Can you, or any of your numerous readers of the *Oban Times*, inform me how it is that the ‘*Piobaireachd*’ is the only species of the music of the Gael that has neither time, tune, melody or rhythm in it? Did the composers intend to puzzle and annoy, or is it the performers who vie with each other in prolonging unconnected, meaningless sounds? I have recently listened to a champion playing, what he called, the ‘*Massacre of Glencoe*’, but really no one could make head or tail of it, and I am at a loss to understand how an intelligent being could call it a musical performance.

I am, etc.

CELT.

Edinburgh, 8 August 1893.

When quoting this letter in the *Oban Times* in his preface to *Ceol Mor* (1900), Major General Thomason admitted that this kind of criticism was not altogether new. It is a criticism which one can still hear today – even from native Gaelic pipers of considerable skill and musical ability.

In several modern publications one finds the method of notation qualified in terms like these: ‘It makes no pretense to be scientifically accurate, or even intelligible to the non-piper. Call it piper’s jargon and the writer will not complain.’⁵ Later still, MacNeill comments:

It may well be that the more incorrectly a *piobaireachd* is written the better it is for *piobaireachd* playing because the learner is forced to seek assistance from a piper who has been taught in the traditional manner ... I have tried to balance convenience with possibility and have written the tunes as nearly as I can to the way that I play them ... but I have not entirely abandoned ‘piper’s jargon’.⁶

Here we have the essence of the problem. The traditional manner of learning pibrochs was through the medium of *canntaireachd*, the pupil learning his music from the chanting of his master and by patterning it on a chanter. Over the past two centuries this type of oral instruction was gradually replaced as increasing use was made of the various published collections of pibroch. The teachers who work in the traditional manner today are few – and even they usually have a book with

⁵ Archibald Campbell, *The Kilberry Book of Ceol Mor* (Glasgow: The Piobaireachd Society, 1953), p. 17.

⁶ Seumas MacNeill, *Piobaireachd: Classical Music of the Highland Bagpipe* (Edinburgh: British Broadcasting Company, 1968), p. 31.

them which they use as an aide-memoire. Pibroch-playing today would seem to depend to a large extent on the success of the efforts of those who have notated pibroch music and of course on the ability of performers to reinterpret the notation. This paper attempts to highlight the problems that beset transcribers by comparing eight different renderings on paper of a part of one pibroch ground and then to assess the practical effects of the success or failure of these efforts on present day performances of the same pibroch.

The first problem for any would-be transcriber is one of perception, and arises from the particular acoustics of bagpipes. How does he perceive the phrase structure of a melody played on an instrument that produces an unbroken stream of sound when played and so cannot mark the ends of phrases with short silences? In other parts of Europe this problem is sometimes overcome by using the lowest note of the chanter as a resting note whose sound is absorbed into the rich harmonic spectrum of the drones so that one gets the aural impression of a break in the chanter melody. The playing of the Sardinian *launeddas* is an example of this kind of solution, the *launeddas* player taking great care to tune this lowest note with the aid of wax in order to reduce the size of the hole so that the note agrees exactly with a strong harmonic of the drone.⁷

Another problem in communicating and understanding the rhythm of pipe melodies is that there is no significant variation in the relative loudness of melody notes and so the player finds it impossible to give any dynamic accent to notes that should be rhythmically prominent.⁸ This is to some extent solved by the use of different grace notes. 'Some gracenotes are stronger to the mind of the piper than others, so he is able to introduce light and shade to his accents by the use of, for example, G gracenotes for strong beats, E or D gracenotes for medium and no gracenote for weak.'⁹ Not all piping schools choose to teach this, however, and although such a solution sounds good, the system does not appear to be consistently used in the pibroch repertoire. Rhythmical prominence is in any case achieved in more than one way; often a note which is higher or longer than surrounding notes is perceived as the accented one.¹⁰ These then are two acoustical reasons why listeners might misinterpret both the rhythm and phrase structure of a pibroch melody.

⁷ A.F.W. Bentzon, 'The Launeddas, vols 1 and 2', *Acta Ethnomusicologica Danica* 1 (Copenhagen, 1969), pp. 23–4.

⁸ I use the terms 'rhythm', 'accent', according to the useful definitions of I.B. Meyer, *Emotion and Meaning in Music* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1956), p. 103: 'The perception of rhythm involves a mental grouping of one or more unaccented beats in relation to an accented beat' and 'Rhythm is accented when it is marked for consciousness in some way.'

⁹ MacNeill, *Piobaireachd*, p. 23.

¹⁰ 'Maol Donn' (Example 2.1) gives a clear example of this. The ungraced note 6 (F) is heard as the rhythmically prominent note in spite of the fact that the C preceding it is given a G grace note.

In spite of this, anyone who has heard a good piper playing for dancing must have marvelled at the way he makes little of these two problems, for there can be hardly anything more rhythmically vital than a well-played jig or reel. The trouble with pibrochs, however, is that, these days at least, they are usually played at an exceedingly slow tempo, despite evidence in earlier treatises – Joseph MacDonald’s especially – that the tempo of Marches was quicker than that of Laments and that Gatherings ‘are the most animating of Pipe compositions ... full of life and Fire’.¹¹ It is a basic fact that as one slows down the tempo of music so one hinders the perception of its pulse.

It could be argued that over the centuries this music has evolved in a way that makes little use of the basic musical element of metrical rhythm and that pibroch grounds have a timeless and quasi-rhapsodic nature where only three musical elements are employed; namely, relative duration of a non-metric kind, melodic tension between successive notes and, lastly, harmonic tension between melody notes and drone notes. Some modern performances give this impression. There is a popular tradition that the clan piper rose in status at the expense of the clarsach player during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and perhaps a clue to the structure of pibroch melodies can be found by tracing a connection between the repertory of the pipes and that of the clarsach. In Bunting’s *Ancient Music of Ireland*¹² there is a list of technical terms for the different styles of ornamentation used by Irish harpers which includes some that compare closely with Scots Gaelic piping terms. However, the few extant Scottish clarsach melodies clearly belong to that class of regular-stressed four- or eight-phrase stanzaic songs known as *Amhran*. William Matheson discusses a number of such tunes in his recent study of Roderick Morison (Ruairidh Dall), MacLeod of Dunvegan’s blind harper who lived in the second half of the seventeenth century.¹³ While he allows that the households of chieftains ‘was the kind of milieu in which such musical borrowing could readily take place’, he points more to the absorption of harp music into the repertory of the fiddle than into that of the pipe. Only one of Ruairidh Dall’s songs can be linked to a pibroch with any certainty.¹⁴

¹¹ Joseph MacDonald, ‘A Compleat Theory of the Scots Highland Bagpipe’ (University of Edinburgh Library, MS La.III.804), p. 22. [Editor’s note: for a current published edition of MacDonald’s treatise see Roderick Cannon (ed.), *Joseph MacDonald’s Compleat Theory of the Scots Highland Bagpipe, c.1760* (Glasgow: The Piobaireachd Society, 1994).]

¹² Edward Bunting, *The Ancient Music of Ireland* (Dublin, 1840), pp. 23–8 for a list of Irish harp terms.

¹³ William Matheson (ed.), *The Blind Harper: the Songs of Roderick Morison and His Music* (Edinburgh: The Scottish Gaelic Texts Society, 1970), pp. 149–74.

¹⁴ Matheson’s discussion (ibid., pp. 154–6) of the relationship of ‘Cumha Craobh nan Teud’ [The Lament for the Harp Tree] to Morison’s poem ‘Feill nan Crann’ also centres on the same problems of accentuation as this present paper. Like ‘Maol Donn’, ‘Cumha Craobh nan Teud’ can also be found transcribed in a number of different settings. The setting of G.F. Ross in his *A Collection of MacCrimmon and other Piobaireachd* (Glasgow, 1929), p. 8, is

There is abundant evidence elsewhere, however, to suggest that most pibroch melodies consist of well-balanced phrases which have an underlying metrical structure – albeit a flexible one – that assigns prominence to certain notes of each phrase. Joseph MacDonald¹⁵ went to some length to explain what he understood by ‘Time’ in pibroch music and others since then have also done so. Furthermore, pipers have traditionally measured off their pibroch melodies by counting on their fingers and, when free to do so – that is when singing rather than playing the melodies – they will sometimes beat time or sway in time with what they conceive to be the underlying accents. It is a fundamental fact of human psychology that the mind normally attempts to group sound strands into culturally meaningful temporal patterns and is emotionally disturbed if such patterns as are initially established are not maintained.¹⁶

Only two of the transcriptions which follow later (see Example 1.1) avoid giving any idea of rhythm and metre. One of these is in any case based on a modern performance. Ideally the transcriber should be intimately acquainted with each pibroch he transcribes; if not, he should endeavour to get his piping informant to sing or whistle the melodies also – for this will often make the rhythmic accentuation clear. A practice chanter does not make a good substitute for the pipes for two reasons. First, the piper may change his way of playing the pibroch ground if no drones are being sounded. Second, many players tend to blow their chanters until their breath runs out and then recharge their lungs regardless of phrase endings, while others have learned the art shared by the Sardinian *launeddas* players – they can produce a continuous stream of sound, even while drawing air into their lungs, by using their distended cheeks as a wind reservoir. In either case one gets little clue as to where phrase endings lie!

These problems of understanding the rhythmic basis and phrase structure of pipe melodies are further compounded by the particular nature of Gaelic music which, from the point of view of time and metre, is not the mathematically organised scheme of stressed and unstressed note values which one associates with both European ‘art’ music and other types of piping (marches, strathspeys, reels and so on). Good native singers sing Gaelic songs with a flexibility of pulse and a delicate appreciation of the time and stress values of related syllables. The time values of the notes between the stressed notes vary continually. In most cases, however, transcribers have been content to adopt the notational system belonging to European ‘art’ music, one which developed out of a need to notate dance rhythms and vocal homophony of medieval courts. Few early collections of pipe music appeared without the usual academic instructions on ‘Time’ together

much closer to the accentuation needed if the pibroch melody is to fit Morison’s poem than the version Matheson quotes from Campbell, *The Kilberry Book of Ceol Mor*.

¹⁵ MacDonald, ‘A Compleat Theory’, pp. 17–19.

¹⁶ Cf. Meyer, *Emotion and Meaning in Music*, Chapter 3 for a discussion of the Gestalt theory of ‘spontaneous organisation of simple shapes’ and its musical implications within different cultures.

with one-bar illustrations of 4/4, 3/4, 2/4 and 6/8 metre, and the pipe melodies that followed were unfailingly moulded into one or other of these metrical schema whether they fitted well or not.

The use of *canntaireachd* as a traditional means of oral instruction has already been discussed. It has also been transcribed as a syllabic notation and the Nether Lorn MS (c. 1791)¹⁷, sometimes known as ‘Colin Campbell’s Canntaireachd’, is the classic example of the pipers’ practice of using the notated syllables as a mnemonic. The main drawback of *canntaireachd* on paper, however, is that it gives no clue to the rhythm and time values of the syllables. We cannot rule out the possibility that some of the pibroch transcriptions made during the nineteenth century were made in two stages. First the *canntaireachd* syllables were noted down as chanted by the informant and only later were they converted to staff notation, possibly by another person who had not heard the original informant singing. It is reported that Angus MacKay took down a large number of pibrochs from the *canntaireachd* singing of his father John,¹⁸ but whether or not he did it in two stages we do not know. In 1910 the late Pipe Major William MacLean set down on the music staff the 20 pibrochs published in *canntaireachd* notation some 80 years earlier by Captain Neil MacLeod of Gesto,¹⁹ while more recently the Piobaireachd Society has thought it fit to transcribe and publish some previously unknown pibrochs from the Nether Lorn MS.²⁰ Both authorities presumably invented time values for the *canntaireachd* syllables based on their study of the *canntaireachd* notation of other known pibrochs. This process is not without many pitfalls and can only be a valid exercise if one assumes that pibroch grounds are built from a very limited number of conventional melodo-rhythmic formulae. Whether they are or not will need to be discussed elsewhere.

If all along there had been no real break in piping traditions and if players had used pibroch transcriptions as an aide-memoire – the way that notated *canntaireachd* could be used – then the effects of misleading transcriptions would perhaps have been negligible. Many writers, among them Manson, Dalyell and Grant,²¹ suggest, however, that Culloden and the events following the Jacobite rebellion of 1745–46 gave a serious setback to the Gaelic piping tradition. Some pipers were reported killed during the rebellion (including one of the famous MacCrimmons), another was afterwards convicted of high treason for carrying

¹⁷ NLS MS 3714–15.

¹⁸ Campbell, *Kilberry Book of Ceol Mor*, p. 9.

¹⁹ Pipe Major MacLean’s MS, based on Neil MacLeod’s *Pibereach or pipe tunes, as taught verbally by the McCrimmen pipers in Skye to their apprentices* (Edinburgh, 1828), is now in the library of Celtic and Scottish Studies, University of Edinburgh.

²⁰ See the preface to *Piobaireachd, a ... collection of ... tunes edited by Comunn na Piobaireachd*, vol. 8.

²¹ W.L. Manson, *The Highland Bagpipe* (Paisley: A. Gardner, 1901); Sir John Graham Dalyell, *Musical Memoirs of Scotland* (Edinburgh: T.G. Stevenson, 1849); J.P. Grant, *Music and Letters* 6/1 (1925).

what was regarded as an instrument of war,²² while the general mood of depression that seems to have persisted throughout the Highlands for a generation was hardly conducive to such music-making. We know that the MacCrimmon school of piping closed down some time around 1772 when Donald Ruadh MacCrimmon left Dunvegan, after quarrelling with his patron MacLeod. Although Pennant was entertained with piping when he visited the home of MacArthur, hereditary piper to Lord MacDonald of the Isles, during his tour of the Hebrides in 1774, he writes afterwards of the MacArthur 'college' as a thing that once existed 'in feudal times'.²³ J.P. Grant summed it up thus:

Outside Scottish regiments and a few favoured individuals, the pipe and the playing of it were for a whole generation after the rising of 1745–6 made illegal, and without doubt much of this traditional music must have died out during that period.²⁴

This might be overstating the situation – but certainly the Edinburgh aristocracy and officers of the British Army, towards the end of the period of the Disarming Act which was repealed in 1782, found it fit to encourage piping by forming a Highland Society and holding piping competitions. Many of the Lowland gentry began engaging pipers to serve them in the way in which pipers had once served Highland lairds. The newly formed Highland Society also began to offer prizes to those who succeeded in setting down pibrochs 'scientifically' on the music staff. Did it do this because of a feeling that a great tradition needed to be rescued before it was too late, or was it to try and give an aura of respectability to what had sometimes been described as the music of untutored savages? One wonders what the music sounded like. Angus MacKay's account of them²⁵ shows that they were dominated by the MacGregors – the patriarch of that family was piper to Campbell of Glenlyon; the MacNabs, piper to MacNab; and the MacArthurs of the former MacArthur 'college' in Skye. John MacArthur had left his native island and was at that time a grocer in Edinburgh where he was widely known as 'professor' MacArthur. Surely at least those families knew what their music was and must have learned it in the traditional manner with no notation to help – or mislead – them. On the other hand, the judges seemed often to know very little about pibroch and its traditions. This situation seems to have persisted on and off into the twentieth century, and several pibroch players are reported to have played in one way to please themselves and in another very different and, to them, 'corrupt' way to please the judges.

²² D. Mitchell, *The History of the Highlands and Gaelic Scotland* (Paisley: A. Gardiner, 1900), p. 664.

²³ Thomas Pennant, *Tour in Scotland* (2nd edition, London, 1774), p. 347.

²⁴ Grant, *Music and Letters*, p. 55.

²⁵ Angus MacKay, *A Collection of Ancient Piobaireachd or Highland Pipe Music* (Edinburgh: MacLachlan and Stewart, 1838).

From this time on the British Army stepped up its recruitment of Scottish pipers to the regiments: it is hard to say what effect this must have had on a form of music that originally belonged to the Gael and which, some will say, was based on the rhythms of Gaelic vocal music. Certainly the playing of marches, strathspeys and reels later became fashionable for competition purposes and many pipers maintain that this has had an adverse effect on the performance of pibroch. One can only hazard the wildest guess as to how far during the nineteenth century pibroch was taught in the traditional manner and how far teachers relied on published collections.

Both Angus MacPherson and the late Pipe Major William MacLean have recorded for the School of Scottish Studies details of the thorough oral tuition they received from Angus's celebrated father Malcolm (Calum Piobaire) and many contemporary pipers say that they learned their music through personal instruction from older pipers. Yet even Calum Piobaire is said to have had Angus MacKay's book always at his elbow when teaching. We know, too, that at the beginning of the twentieth century the Piobaireachd Society fostered the tradition by sending accredited teachers to various parts of the Highlands and Islands to give short courses to small groups of pupils and many of the present pibroch players owe their knowledge of the repertoire to these efforts. We also know that although there was personal tuition by means of *canntaireachd*, students were taught to read staff notation as well and that considerable weight was placed on such reading ability. The term 'ear piper' came to signify contempt for those pipers who did not read music notation and it is still used in this way today. Presumably the Society taught musical literacy to enable pipers to learn new pibrochs as well as to help them remember those they had been taught personally. Today many pipers learn the notes of a pibroch from a page and go along to a teacher later 'to have the expression added' or as a Uist piper put it – 'to learn the song'. This presumably means that the pupil must learn to disregard some of the printed note values in favour of those suggested by his teacher. Clearly, considerable reliance is placed on the printed page today and especially on the publications of the Piobaireachd Society since nearly all of the earlier ones are now out of print. An analysis of the kind that follows may therefore be of use to pibroch devotees and to others interested in the tradition and it may cause pipers to give more critical regard to the publications they use.

Part of the opening of the ground of 'Maol Donn' – popularly known as 'MacCrimmon's Sweetheart' – provides a useful illustration of the problem discussed so far. Eight different settings made during the last 130 years are presented below for comparison. The section quoted is a self-contained one which is immediately repeated in the ground. All the graces are included and the melody notes are numbered along the top for ease of reference. Non-pipers should note that in the pipe scale the notes C and F are approximately a semitone sharp and that pipe music is traditionally written without any key signature (see Example 1.1).

Example 1.1 Eight published and manuscript settings of the opening of 'Maol Donn'.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Peter Reid's MS (c. 1826)												
Angus MacKay's MS vol. 1 (c. 1840)												
William Ross's MS (1869)												
Glen (1880-99)												
Thomason (1900)												
G. F. Ross (1929)												
P. S. 6 (1936) & Kilberry Book (1953)												
R. Ross (1959) vol. 3												

The following points are worth noting:

First, except for Reid (who gives a different gracing for note 3) and W. Ross (note 3 obviously a misprint but later corrected in his published setting), the settings all agree closely in pitch. This is probably due more to the fact that the earlier settings were often used as a basis for the later settings²⁶ than to the careful and exacting nature of the teaching of pibrochs.

Second, the main differences lie in the area of rhythmic and temporal organisation. In the six settings that employ bar lines three different time signatures are used and the placing of bar lines varies considerably. It is impossible to tell how far the arrangers used bar lines purely as a rough and ready means of dividing off the melody into more or less equal lengths or how far they regarded them – as they should do – as an indication of the position of metrically accented notes. If the

²⁶ Most of the editors give details of their sources and most of these can be traced back to the work or teachings of Angus MacKay. Thomason, however, quotes W. Ross as one of his sources.

bar lines do indicate that an accented note follows them then each of notes 6, 7, 8 and 9 are shown as accented by one or other of the transcribers. Of the notes 7, 8 and 9 the E (9) is favoured in three settings, the A (8) in two and the B (7) in one.

Third, Reid and R. Ross refrained from using any metric indications at all. Whether or not they were unsure of the structure of this particular pibroch cannot be said since Ross notated all his pibrochs in similar manner – even those where the structure and metre are quite unambiguous – and Reid tended to do the same.

Fourth, some of the barring differences have probably occurred because both MacKay and W. Ross incorporated the introductory E (note 1), usually described by pipers as a ‘cadence E’, into the bar structure. This procedure can and does create more serious problems in other pibrochs than ‘Maol Donn’.

And fifth, apart from these first two notes, only note 8 differs considerably in the value allotted to it by the different transcribers. This may well be because some – with perhaps good reason – considered it to be the last note of a first phrase and therefore a note that can be dwelt on a little longer before the performer moves on. One certainly gets this impression from a number of modern performances.

Though only the opening of this pibroch has been quoted, the differences analysed persist throughout the whole ground. The musical reader will appreciate them best by singing each setting while beating time according to the time signature quoted. It could be argued that these differences are of minor importance and reflect nothing more than the fact that various styles of playing have existed during the last 200 years – often attributed to the different ‘schools’ of instruction that flourished until the second half of the eighteenth century. But a difference in ‘expression’ or in gracing (usually cited as a major difference between so-called MacArthur and MacCrimmon ‘schools’) is of less import than what we have here – a total lack of agreement as to the phrase structure and metre of the melodies. The archives of the School of Scottish Studies contain abundant examples of different renderings of the same Gaelic tunes. Text, pitch, rhythm differ considerably in these variants but the melodic skeleton – the phrase structure – is nearly always preserved and clearly discernable; and, except for those written in syllabic verse, a regular musical metre, though a flexible one, underlies that structure.

Do these fundamental discrepancies exist because the early transcribers often lacked a real command over musical notation, or are they evidence of a greater collapse of the real *Ceòl Mòr* tradition than is generally thought? If pipers have always known their musical intimately and have taught in the traditional way – by chanting and patterning – surely the structure of pibroch melodies would not have become as open to doubt as is exemplified by these settings.

If, as one suspects, the answer lies in a combination of both factors, then the complaints of ‘Celt’ and others who are perplexed by modern performances are understandable. Furthermore, there would seem to be little point in attempting to produce yet another transcription which would have to be based on twentieth-century performances, even though the measuring tools for objective and accurate transcription are now available. There is, however, at least one good reason for the exercise. The bases for analyses of pibroch structure have always been the

use of the 'bar', and pibrochs since Thomason's time have been labelled as 6 6 4 or 4 4 4 4 structures according to the number of bars in each section of the ground. All of this is rendered suspect if one concludes that the barring may frequently have been wrongly deduced: in any case it would seem more sensible to attempt an analysis based on phrase structure rather than on arbitrary 'bars'. Example 1.2 is a transcription of the whole of the ground of 'Maol Donn' made from the recorded performance of a well-known and highly respected piper.²⁷ The results were compared with the playing of three other informants to check for idiosyncratic variations.²⁸ Apart from the notes 2 and 8 discussed earlier with reference to Example 1.1 (all four performances varied considerably at these points), the differences were too small to be worth indicating. The notes have not been linked up to suggest any groupings but have been arranged to indicate the similarity of motifs and phrases as perceived by the first performer as well as by the transcriber and two other musicians.²⁹ Graces and cuttings have been omitted. For completeness, one further source of information is added – the *canntaireachd* vocables as they appear in the Nether Lorn MS. Set out below the appropriate notes in each stave they expose certain discrepancies which were not mentioned in the Piobaireachd Society's source analysis,³⁰ but which we shall not discuss here.

On studying the transcription, the simple and logical ternary structure of the whole becomes clear. The central section contains a development of the two opening phrases and the whole could be described (using terms borrowed from European 'classical' music) as follows:

Exposition: a nicely proportioned musical sentence of A B A B A C structure with clear points of repose (the last notes of phrases B and C). Phrase C is closely related to phrase B and could be regarded as a modification of it. All three phrases have a very close rhythmical relationship which gives a strongly monothematic feeling to the whole. Note, however, the asymmetric relationship between phrase A and the other phrases.

Development: framed between phrases A B and A C is a development of the 'dotted crotchet – semi-quaver – quaver' rhythmic motif which unifies the exposition. Only the presence of crotchet rather than quaver As prevents the onward drive of this rhythm right up to the end of this section.

Recapitulation: a return to the exposition minus its repeated sub-section.

²⁷ [The late] Captain John MacLellan, Director of the Army School of Piping (School of Scottish Studies Sound Archives SA 1967.32). Note values were determined with the aid of a superimposed time signal giving pulses every 1/10th second and the whole played back at slow speeds during transcription.

²⁸ The late Pipe Major William MacLean (SA 1953.4), the late Calum MacPherson (SA 1959.34) and [the late] Mr Calum Johnston (SA 1967.69).

²⁹ Miss Morag MacLeod and Mrs Ailie Munro – both colleagues in the musicological section of the School of Scottish Studies [now retired].

³⁰ *Piobaireachd, a ... collection of ... tunes edited by Comunn na Piobaireachd*, vol. 7 (1938), p. 206.

Example 1.2 The ground of 'Maol Donn' from the playing of the late Capt. John MacLellan (CD track 1).

The musical score for 'Maol Donn' is presented in three systems, each consisting of a treble staff and a bass staff. The lyrics are written below the notes. Phrasing is indicated by letters A, B, and C above the notes, and 'Cadence E' is marked at the beginning of each system. The lyrics are as follows:

System 1:
 Treble: Hin - dro - o ho - ve - o hin - de - o ho - dro
 Bass: hio - dro - o ho - ve - o hin - de - o ho - da - ro - do

System 2:
 Treble: hin - dro - o ho - ve - o hin - de - o ho - dro
 Bass: hio - dro - o ho - ve - o hin -
 - do - o ho - e - ho hio -
 - dro - o ho - ve - o hin - de - o ho - da - ro - do

System 3:
 Treble: hin - dro - o ho - ve - o hin - de - o ho - dro
 Bass: hio - dro - o ho - ve - o he - che - o ho - da - ro - do

Each of the three parts is signalled by the use of a cadence E, which clearly should not be regarded as an integral part of the melodic structure. The inclusion of this E, when the opening line is repeated, could be considered unnecessary and it is significant that Reid omits it at this point and shows a G grace note instead. A few pipers maintain even today that the cadence E is a purely optional feature of pibroch playing and can be omitted if desired. Notice that the Nether Lorn *canntaireachd* vocables which have been added do not show these Es.

This overall tripartite structure is confirmed by most authorities and the ground has been labelled by General Thomason as a 'regular three line pibroch' which he denoted by the numbers 6 6 4 – being the number of bars in his transcription.

The Nether Lorn *canntaireachd* will be seen to consist of 32 words set out in the manuscript in three parts, which correspond exactly with the structure above (12 + 12 + 8). The other striking feature is the extremely economic use of the basic material.

While this transcription clearly illustrates the general structural features, it is equally obvious that the note values, as they stand, fit none of the time schemes used in earlier settings.

Repeated listening uncovered no regular pulse nor any discernibly regular accents apart from a brief period towards the end of the middle section when the 'dotted crotchet – semi-quaver – quaver' rhythm becomes temporarily established (lines 5 and 6). If pibroch grounds do not have a metrical basis, then to examine this performance any further is unprofitable and the difficulties facing the earlier transcribers are readily accountable. Presumably players can interpret the notation as they were taught, or as they choose, once they have learned the pibroch. But, as mentioned before, all the settings in Example 1.1 except the first and last use a time signature, and imply that there is a metre for the ground. Indeed one has only to shorten the note A at the end of each Phrase A in Example 1.2 to establish the 'dotted crotchet – semi-quaver – quaver' motif quite firmly and to give the whole ground a regular pulse which only slows up each time Phrase C is played (that is, to mark the ends of sections).

Of the two most recent settings in Example 1.1, that of the Piobaireachd Society purports to represent the playing of J. MacDougall Gillies and the Cameron school of piping – which is traceable back to the teaching of Angus MacKay and so ultimately the MacCrimmons. Roderick Ross's notation, however, like those of Angus MacKay and General Thomason, calls for a quaver A at this point in the melody. This notation, as was said earlier, was supposedly based on the recorded playing of the late Calum MacPherson of the MacPherson school of pipers, which can also be traced back to Angus Mackay's teaching. These pedigrees would seem to give each setting the stamp of authority, different as they are, but for one more piece of evidence that lends support to Roderick Ross's notation if not the performance that he actually transcribed, namely a 78 r.p.m. recording of 'Maol Donn' (CD track 2) by the celebrated John MacDonald of Inverness (1866–1953). He derived the bulk of his teaching from the doyen of the MacPherson family, Calum Piobaire, as well as from the Camerons, and was for many years an official instructor for the Piobaireachd Society. In his renderings there is no dwelling on the A in question and there is clearly a slow pulse throughout. The performance is more like that of Thomason's setting than any other, and it poses several questions relevant to our discussion. Does his playing reflect the teaching he himself received and is it the product of a mature musician who is prepared to ignore the prescriptive notations of his employers? If his rendering is indeed typical of the way he was taught, then we must presume the Piobaireachd Society's setting to be

inaccurate and if this is the case, we must ponder on the extent to which this setting has affected the performance of today's pipers.³¹

I can see no clear answer to any of these problems – I discuss them here because they represent the difficulties that faced transcribers of yesterday and still face the non-piper musician of today who wishes to understand and enjoy pibroch music. There is another avenue of investigation that may help, though it is one which pipers are unlikely to approve of for it relies on evidence provided by present-day Gaelic singers in the Hebrides. Field studies suggest that there is no present-day pibroch playing in the islands that does not stem from the teaching of visiting instructors sent by the Piobaireachd Society earlier this century. Is there any apparent reason to suppose that the singing of islanders can tell us any more about the ancient instrumental art of *Ceòl Mòr* than pipers themselves?

Pibroch Songs

In the archives of the School of Scottish Studies recordings, there are more than 75 different songs bearing close similarity to pipe melodies – many of them known pibrochs. Six different recordings are related to 'Maol Donn', both melodically and textually. While we do not know how far pibrochs are derived from vocal motifs, there is ample evidence to suggest that poets and singers liked to compose lines that could be sung to tunes based on pibroch melodies and even, as one piper said recently, 'make a four line *Amhran* out of a three line pibroch'. In either case, it is possible that the text and rendering of related songs will give a clue to the musical performance of pibroch. For whether the song was inspired by the pipe melody or the pipe melody was based on the song, it is likely that the rhythm patterns of the one will correspond to some extent to those of the other. There is, too, a considerable quantity of doggerel, probably composed by pipers themselves, which helps them to recall the opening of a pibroch.

Gaelic song is still a living, uninterrupted oral tradition and songs which are hundreds of years old can still be recorded in the Gaelic-speaking areas of Scotland. They will of course have been subjected to that constant process of modification, refinement and 'corruption' that is the hallmark of oral tradition. Notes may have been altered, texts forgotten, new ones grafted on, but the fundamental musical patterns of phrasing and rhythm are least likely to have changed. In this case one is justified in using evidence found in one tradition that is living, unbroken and purely oral to help evaluate another which has been subjected to the kind of debilitating pressures described earlier and which has relied for more than a century to an unknown extent on what may well be misleading transcriptions.

None of the informants whose versions are quoted below could say much about the historical background of their songs, and the origins of the pibroch are even

³¹ [Editor's note: the author has rewritten this paragraph, having corrected a notational error in the R. Ross entry in Example 1 of the original 1972 paper.]

more obscure.³² However, in 'Ceol Mor Legends' – a manuscript volume of notes compiled by General Thomason, which he obviously intended to have printed as a companion to *Ceol Mor* – there is a picturesque account which appears to have been supplied by a John Johnson of Coll. He was at that time piper to MacLean of Coll and trained in the tradition of the Rankin school of pipers mentioned in A. MacKay's published collection:³³

This is a tune composed by Clan Ranald's piper – of the day – to a cow lost in a bog by a widow in Benbecula, South Uist. The cow was a noted one and greatly admired by the widow, as her only one apparently. It got lost in the common moss one day, and ultimately the whole neighbourhood turned out to look for it, likely in compassion for the owner, the piper among the rest; but its finding defied them, after their best efforts, nor was the skeleton of it found till over a year afterwards, by a mere accident.

The whole circumstance therefore afforded the piper a good theme to begin, which he did as if the widow herself was the author, thus: –

'Gad iumdrain a tha mi, si mo ghradh a mhaol dounn,
Gad iarridh feadh fhraobhran, 's gad shladach a poul.'

This tune was also a great favourite with the old piper, though composed for a trifling matter, owing to its own merits and its plaintive air throughout ...³⁴

The extract is not quoted in order to suggest that this is the origin of the pibroch 'Maol Donn'. Pibrochs were not usually composed for lost cattle, but to provide ceremonial music for the Gaelic aristocracy in the form of Salutes and Laments or to foster clan spirit with Gatherings and Marches. Johnson's account helps to explain the textual content of the songs that follow, and lends weight to an old tradition one is constantly coming across: namely, that pipers often had words in mind when they composed their opening pibroch themes.

In Example 1.3 extracts from four variants give an idea of the process of the continuous modification that folk songs undergo in a living oral tradition. The first three extracts come from the middle of a song which refers to cattle rustling. Semi-bar lines indicate stressed notes and all the variants have been transposed so that they can easily be compared with each other and with the pipe melody.

In the first two the use of a dotted bar line suggests doubt in the mind of the transcriber as to whether the first or the second syllable of the word *t'fhaotainn* is

³² See *Piobaireachd, a ... collection of ... tunes edited by Comunn na Piobaireachd*, vol. 7 (1938), p. 206 for a discussion of the various titles given to this pibroch in the different sources.

³³ MacKay, *Collection of Ancient Piobaireachd*, p. 7.

³⁴ General Thomason, 'Ceol Mor Legends', NLS MS 3747–9.

regarded as the stressed one. In normal speech it would be the first. Mrs Munro's Skye variant – which is no longer pentatonic – suggests a connection with the 'thumb' variation rather than the ground – for in thumb variations a 'high A' replaces certain notes of the ground – in this case, the note F each time. The late Alasdair Boyd – who was himself a piper – gives a version which he heard and possibly once played. But he was doubtful of the accuracy with which he had recalled it.

Example 1.3 Four song variants corresponding to 'Maol Donn'.

Donald Macpherson

Log 201 (1949)



Cha bu shea-[ə]-bhach leam t'fhao-tainn, mo ghaol_ mo Mhaol Donn:

Kate Douglas

Log 1649 (1949)



Cha bu shea-[ə] - bhach dhomh t'fhao-tainn, mo ghaol mo Mhaol Donn:

Kirsty Munro

SA 1958/43



Thig an tòir_ oirnn_ fhin, 's air mo làimh ni thu lor-[ə]g:

Alasdair Boyd

SA 1970/2



'S mi gad ruith feadh an aon - aich, b'e mo ghaol thu Mhaol Donn:

The example that follows was provided by Mrs Kate MacDonald of Garryhellie, South Uist (1897–1977). It is a simple and lovely rendering which, as in all her performances, expresses with great subtlety the delicate interrelationship of language, rhythm and melody in Gaelic song, while highlighting the resulting problems of setting sounds on paper. The fact that the first phrase is more like the pibroch ground than any of the other quoted versions merely underlines the fact that for generations members of her family have been famous Uist pipers. It was transcribed with the aid of a time signal and the notes are arranged spatially according to their duration (18 mm = 1 second).

Here the metre of the poetry corresponds perfectly with the musical metre, and as a result the word *t'fhao-tainn* presents no problems. As with the earlier examples and, in fact, all songs that are not sung for dancing, the accents do not follow in rigidly timed succession. The singer takes time between phrases without destroying the gently onward flow of the melody. The duration values of the unstressed notes vary continuously, and do not fall into any of the simple time patterns used for European 'art' songs: neither 3/4 nor any other time signature will do it justice.

To return to the pibroch ground, the melodic relationship between it and the song is obvious and, what is more important, the notes which take verbal accents in the song correspond to notes in the pibroch which, because of length and pitch, can be considered the prominent or accented ones. This similarity should suggest to pipers a logical pattern of metrical accents. Of all the eight settings quoted, that of Thomason appears to be the most logical. He alone suggested that the pipe melody begins with an anacrusis just as the song does. Pipers could well revert to his setting if they have access to it – for it is unfortunately out of print³⁵ – providing that they take their cue from the renderings of traditional singers and do not make the pulse a rigid one.³⁶ Taking into account Thomason’s setting, John MacDonald’s performance and the song structures, the writer considers there is a musical metre to this ground, one which centres on the stress patterns implied in Thomason’s 6/8 setting and which the piper should strive to explicate without of course playing in strict 6/8 time. Support for Thomason’s setting will be found in the melodic skeleton of the variations that succeed the ground and thumb variation. There the theme notes in every setting are identical and correspond exactly with the ‘stressed’ notes of Thomason’s ground.

Example 1.4 ‘Maol Donn’ as sung by the late Mrs Kate MacDonald, South Uist (CD track 3).

Mrs. K. MacDonald

SA 1970/309/7

Cha bu sheal[a] bhachdhomh t'fhao - tainn, 'se mo ghaol am Maol. Donn;

Cha bu sheal[a] -bhachdhomh t'fhao - tainn, 'se mo ghaol am Maol. Donn.

Cha bu sheal[a] -bhachdhomh t'fhao - tainn, 'se moghaol am Maol. Donn;

Gad_ iar - raigh 's gad fhao - tainn, 's dha shla_ dadh_ a toll.

The modern performances quoted in Example 1.2 may all be criticized to the extent that neither Thomason’s pulse pattern, nor any other, underlies the music. Too often the cadence E is prolonged in a way that brings the flow to a

³⁵ [Editor’s note: high-quality facsimile copies of Thomason’s *Ceol Mor* are currently available on CD-ROM from Ceol Sean (www.ceolsean.com).]

³⁶ Often one hears from Gaels the statement, ‘You have to have Gaelic to be able to play pibroch music well’, when perhaps they really mean that one should have intimate knowledge of the language rhythms and performance styles of the traditional Gaelic singers – which of course implies a deep knowledge of Gaelic language and culture.

halt – possibly not in the mind of the performer, but at least as far as listeners are concerned. Similarly, the presence of the long A (note 8), which was discussed at length, tends to disrupt the melodic flow unnecessarily.

There is an obvious danger that the melody played in strict time might bore the listener because of the extreme economy of melodic material. The song has an A B A B structure, the first line of which contains all the basic material of the pibroch. Economy in this case involves repetition and the ground demands careful shaping by the player if interest is to be maintained, and it may well be that his desire to sustain interest tends to lead to rhythmic distortion. Constant reiteration of simple motifs need not be interpreted as a sign of the anonymous composers' paucity of invention. Repetition possibly had an important function in pibroch music, especially in those martial pibrochs that can be identified as Gatherings [*Cruinneachadh*]. They often consist of easily identified clan signals which, it is presumed, were continually sounded while marshalling men and encouraging them on the battlefields. In view of the repetitive content of pibrochs it must be no accident that many of the associated songs now survive as lullabies and dandling songs. It is only when one sits solemnly indoors at piping competitions and similar occasions to listen to this music, perhaps performed imperfectly and certainly divorced from its original setting, that repetition might sound wearisome.

This paper has attempted to illustrate some of the problems of transmitting pipe music both as it once was and as it is performed in this age. Implied in the argument is a criticism of present-day performance and understanding of pibroch music as well as a criticism of some of the more recent publications of the repertoire. It seems likely that the devotees of pibroch will continue to perform this music – albeit in different social settings from the original one. Most of them believe that through their performances they are preserving an authentic musical tradition. Their audiences have not always been convinced by their efforts and, judging by the lively and occasionally acrimonious arguments that dominated the correspondence columns of the *oban Times* and other publications at various periods during the last 70 years, neither have some pipers. This study of 'Maol Donn' suggests that it still may not be too late for a useful reassessment of our knowledge and understanding of this art.

DITHIS: MATERIALITY AND
THE HIGHLAND PIPE

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Chapter 2

The Iain Dall Chanter: Material Evidence for Intonation and Pitch in Gaelic Scotland, 1650–1800

Barnaby Brown¹

This investigation produced a disturbing result, one that raises awareness of changing fashion in intonation. It was conducted with the bagpipe maker Julian Goodacre, whose skills, experience, and approach to the reproduction of Highland piping's most precious relic increased the accuracy of the result considerably. It is thanks to him and our reed makers, Thomas Johnston, Ronald McShannon, Andrew Frater, Duncan Watson and Jorj Botuha, that my goal of playing pibroch on a critical reproduction of a period instrument has been achieved. We are indebted to the Sinclair family in Halifax, Nova Scotia, for allowing us to measure the Iain Dall chanter and giving permission for a fragment of wood to be removed for microscopic analysis. We are also grateful to Rory Sinclair for organizing the chanter's visit to Scotland in 2006 and setting up this investigation, the idea for which was planted by Peter Cooke in 1994. An account of our methodology and the challenges encountered during reproduction will be published jointly elsewhere, aimed at historical instrument makers. This chapter is directed to a general audience and concerns the chanter's history, physical characteristics and the cultural context essential to an appreciation of its intonation.

Popular scorn for the Highland bagpipe is to some extent the result of a scale that grates on the modern Western ear. In 2008 an advertisement in the *Piping Times* announced:

At last! A pipe chanter that other musicians will love. The NEW Shepherd 'Orchestral Chanter'. Pitch and tonality to work with the professionals. The musician's chanter.²

Since radio broadcasting began, the tuning ideals of more glamorous and profitable music traditions have eroded the non-conformity of the bagpipe scale, with the

¹ I am grateful to Peter Greenhill, Peter Cooke, Decker Forrest and Richard Hensold for their generous sharing of wisdom as this chapter evolved. Correspondence can be sent to barnaby@pibroch.net.

² *Piping Times* 66/10 (July 2008): 28.

result that young players no longer find the intonation of tracks 5, 6, 10, and 12 on the accompanying CD attractive. Specifically, the fourth (D) is too sharp. In 1885 Alexander Ellis drew a parallel between Highland bagpipe intonation and the scale of Zalzal, a ninth-century Persian theorist, and this view was developed by Alan Thrasher in 2003.³ The Iain Dall chanter does not support their findings; its intonation is closer to the traditional orthodoxy heard on the tracks above, recorded between 1899 and 1989 by some of the most influential pipers of the time. It indicates a preference in seventeenth-century Gaeldom, not for a neutral third, but a ‘colourful’ fourth, 20–30 cents sharper than a perfect fourth. By demonstrating that Gaelic preference for this colourful fourth endured for at least three centuries, and that a comparable preference still thrives in Norway – a region of close ethnic proximity whose traditional music has perhaps better resisted the tide of globalization – this chapter develops Thrasher’s hypothesis that these are marginal survivors of wider European practice. The explanations advanced for traditional Highland bagpipe intonation give reason to performers of any type of modal Western music, but particularly to harp and lyre players and performers of plainchant associated with centres of Scottish or Irish influence, to explore tunings more in sympathy with Britain’s earliest bagpipe and harp music: pibroch and *cerdd dant*, the ‘string music’ of medieval Wales.

The oscillation of adjacent triads in arcane pibrochs – those which fell out of oral transmission before 1900, like ‘The Fairy Flag’ (Illustration 2.1) – finds correspondence in the harp repertoire transcribed by Robert ap Huw in 1613. This mode of composition pervades early British bagpipe music and was developed with great elegance by Iain Dall MacKay in ‘The Monros’ Salute’ (track 4).



Illustration 2.1 Adjacent major triads in ‘*A’ Bhratach* – The Fairy Flag’, possibly dating to the sixteenth century. N.B. C is sharp and the omission of a key signature is conventional in Highland bagpipe notation. Angus MacKay’s manuscript (1830s to early 1940s).⁴

The domination of triadic sonorities in these two repertories of epic splendour suggests that Pythagorean tuning, in which all thirds are dissonant (sharp of pure by 22 cents), was not favoured by Celtic-speaking instrumentalists in the late Middle Ages. More likely are tuning procedures which give purity to the most

³ Alexander J. Ellis, ‘On the musical scales of various nations’, *Journal of the Society of Arts* 33 (1885): 485–527. Alan R. Thrasher, ‘Rethinking Highland bagpipe temperament: Preservation of the old European system?’, *Piping Today* 4 (2003): 14–18.

⁴ Angus MacKay’s manuscript (1830s–early 40s), vol. 1, p. 251, Var. 1st, bars 3–6. Facsimile at www.pipetunes.ca.

frequently used triads. Interestingly, one of the eight tunings proposed by Peter Greenhill for Robert ap Huw's repertoire, on this basis, is almost identical to traditional Highland bagpipe intonation.⁵

Evidence that this chanter belonged to Iain Dall MacKay (c.1656–c.1754), hereditary piper to the Mackenzies of Gairloch, is compelling. Its well-worn finger-holes, the absence of any modifications and a meticulous repair at an early date indicate that its sound was prized by a succession of owners. Its unique importance, however, rests on the reputation of Iain Dall as one of the finest composers in Highland history. One Gaelic proverb describes him as, '*An gille toirt bàrr air MacCruimein*' [the lad outstripping MacCrimmon].⁶ A similar proverb was published in 1841: '*Chaidh an fhòghluim os-ceann MhicCruimein*' [the apprentice outwits MacCrimmon].⁷ These relate to a story in which the most famous master of the day was struggling to compose a work in honour of Lady MacDonald of Clanranald. In the earliest version of this tale, found in Angus MacKay's book (1838), Patrick Og MacCrimmon retired to his private apartment:

He there commenced the urlar or ground-work, two parts of which he repeated many times without being able to please himself exactly with another; when [Iain Dall] MacKay, who had placed himself to listen, unobserved at the door, struck up a measure so well adapted to those which his master had been playing, that opening the door with delight, he exclaimed, 'Ah! you have done it; but it shall not bear the name I designed for it, but shall be called "the half-finished tune", as I made two parts, and you have made the other.' The door which opened to MacCrimmon's room is now closed, but the positions of the two parties are still pointed out.⁸

Iain Dall's reputation has never waned. Among the most venerated bagpipe compositions in currency today, more works are attributed to him than to any other individual. These include the laments for Patrick Og MacCrimmon and the Laird of Arnaboll, excerpts from which are included on the CD (tracks 6, 14 and 18). Iain Dall certainly played a significant role, carrying pibroch to the summit of nobility that still towers, spiritually and physically, over the subsequent landscape of Highland bagpipe music. While a broader investigation into the intonation and

⁵ Peter Greenhill, 'The Robert ap Huw Manuscript: An exploration of its possible solutions' (dissertation deposited in the archive of the Centre for Advanced Welsh Music Studies, University of Wales, Bangor, 2000), Part iii: Tuning, IX Intonation, pp. 74–81.

⁶ Henry Whyte (1852–1913) under the pen-name 'Fionn', *o ban Times*, 8 April 1905, p.3; quoted by William Donaldson in 'Lament for Patrick Og MacCrimmon', *Piper & Drummer Magazine* (2003): www.pipesdrums.com/fileLibrary/patrickog.pdf.

⁷ John Mackenzie, *Sar-o bar nam Bard Gaelach: or The Beauties of Gaelic Poetry* (Fifth edition: Edinburgh, 1882), p. 95.

⁸ Angus MacKay, *A Collection of Ancient Piobaireachd*: 'Historical and traditional notes on the Piobaireachds' no. LV, p. 13.

pitch of pibroch in its golden age might investigate other surviving chanterers, none has such a fine musical pedigree.

Lineage of Possession⁹

The chanter has been in Canada longer than it ever was in Scotland. Iain Dall's son, Angus (c.1723–c.1777), and grandson, John Roy (c.1753–1835) continued the line as hereditary pipers to Mackenzie of Gairloch, but by the end of the eighteenth century their profession was outdated and its social and economic benefits had evaporated. John Roy emigrated to Nova Scotia in 1805, leaving one daughter behind. The following report is based on information collected from her son, Iain Buidhe Taillear, at Strath in Gairloch in the 1880s:

[John Roy], grandson of the 'blind piper', was born about 1753, and became on his father's death family piper to Sir Hector Mackenzie of Gairloch. As a young man he went to the Reay Country, the native land of his great-grandfather Rorie, and there received tuition on the little pipes, which are often used for dance music. He lived in the latter part of his career in Gairloch at Slatadale, where he married and had numerous family, for whose advancement he emigrated to America with all his children except one daughter. She had previously married, but her father was so anxious that she should emigrate with the rest of the family, that she had to hide herself the night before the family left Gairloch in order to avoid being compelled to accompany them. John Mackay was a splendid piper; when he went to America, Sir Hector said he would never care to hear pipe music again.¹⁰

They settled in what became New Glasgow, where the younger of John Roy's two sons, 'Squire' John, (c.1793–1884) wrote his 'Reminiscences of a Long Life'. After meeting the Squire in 1879, the editor of *The Celtic Magazine* wrote this enthusiastic report:

... more interesting to me than all my other discoveries as yet on this Continent, was finding a representative of the famous pipers and poets of Gairloch, in the person of John MacKay, who occupies the most honourable and prominent position in this thriving town [New Glasgow] – that of Stipendiary Magistrate. His great-grandfather was the celebrated blind piper of Gairloch, a sketch of whose life, with specimens of his poetry, is given by the late John Mackenzie

⁹ Much of this section is drawn from: Rory Sinclair, 'Important piping artefacts in Canada', *Proceedings of the Piobaireachd Society Conference* 33 (2006): 19–30.

¹⁰ John H. Dixon, *Gairloch in North-west Ross-shire* (Edinburgh, 1886), p. 179. See also John Gibson, 'Genealogical and piping notes from "Squire" John MacKay's "Reminiscences of a Long Life" (c.1794–1884)', *The Scottish Genealogist* 30/3 (1983): 94.

in the ‘Beauties of Gaelic Poetry’. ... The only thing known about them was that one of them, the grandson of the famous Piobaire Dall, and the last male representative of the race in Gairloch, emigrated to some part of America, in 1805, and carried with him more Ceol mor or Piobaireachd, than he left behind him among all the pipers of Scotland.

At this time, John, who is now in his 86th year, was 12 years of age, and even now he remembers almost every prominent stone and tree in the parish, to say nothing of the lakes, rivers, mountains, and valleys. His father continued to play the national instrument all his life, and died a very old man. His elder brother, Angus, also played marches, reels, and strathspeys, but piobaireachd not being appreciated in the land of his adoption, he practiced that higher class of music but little, and was not, therefore, up to the family standard of excellence in that department. He died a few years ago, when nearly one hundred years of age. John himself also learned to play; but at the age of eighteen he finally gave it up, so that now not one of this celebrated family keeps up the name and reputation of the family.¹¹

The Squire had a son, Norman, whose daughter, Norma, married Donald C. Sinclair. The chanter enters the written record in 1934, in a reply from Judge Patterson of New Glasgow to a friend and piping enthusiast, Judge Calder of Caribou, British Columbia. Judge Calder promptly communicated his discovery to the Piobaireachd Society:

His reply informed me that ... Norma MacKay, the wife of Donald Sinclair, barrister, of New Glasgow – was in possession of Iain Dall’s pipe chanter. This summer, while on a visit to my birthplace in Cape Breton, I made a pilgrimage to see the MacKays and to view and examine this sacred relic, the photograph of which I now forward in the earnest hope that it may not be entirely without interest to the Society and its friends.

This letter, the photograph, and the Squire’s ‘Reminiscences’ were published in *The o ban Times* in January 1935, prefaced by a letter from the Honorary Secretary of the Society:

Iain Dall, the friend and pupil of Patrick Og MacCrimmon, and one of the most talented figures in the history Highland music, is stated by Osgood Mackenzie to have been born in 1656. The news that his chanter is in existence and well cared for is of the deepest interest.

Norma’s son, Lt Colonel John Sinclair (father of the current owner) was Piper to the Clan Sinclair Association until his death in 1987. He took the chanter to his Senior Pipe Major in the Canadian Forces, Archie Cairns. Rory Sinclair

¹¹ Alexander Mackenzie, ‘The editor in Canada – II’, *Celtic Magazine* 5/49 (1880): 71.

interviewed Major Cairns in January 2006, and as the original is no longer in playable condition, this interview is of great significance:

I think it was either 1976 or 1977. Col. Sinclair had called me to tell me of the chanter in his possession and, as one of the subjects I majored in on my Pipe Major's Course at Edinburgh Castle (1963–64) under Capt. John MacLellan was history, I knew exactly who and what he was speaking of. Needless to say, I was beside myself at the thought of just seeing this chanter 'in the flesh' and, at first, I had no thought of attempting to play it. So, John arrived at my office in our Pipes & Drums building in Rockcliffe and he and I began the adventure.

I asked John if he would consider removing the chanter from the case so that I could have a closer look at it, and this he did. It obviously had suffered some mishaps over the years and it was bound in a few places with some wire. The thing that struck me most of all was that the area around the High A hole was flat, not round as per the rest of the chanter. Mind you, that made it very comfortable to play and provided a great thumb rest. I then asked John if it would be OK if I tried a reed in it, and he eagerly said, 'Sure!' I reckoned that the chanter would have been made to produce a flatter pitch in those days, although NO ONE knows FOR SURE!! So, I brought out my silver-soled Robertson chanter that had been presented to me 20 years or so earlier, and used one of the reeds I play in that chanter. I think the pitch of the Low A on the Robertson would have been about 458–460 CPS and I thought this might work well in Iain Dall's chanter. I was correct.

John was not a piobaireachd player, but he really appreciated the music, so in honour of the composer and the significance of this classical work of art, I played the Urlar, Variation 1 and its Doubling of Patrick Og MacCrimmon's Lament. I couldn't get over the sound of that High G – and the balance between the top and bottom notes! Wonderful! John was just thrilled!!

The intonation sounded just fine to me. It did not feel cumbersome and perhaps the spacing of the holes was unfamiliar but not upsetting or difficult to finger.¹²

Physical Characteristics

Julian Goodacre and I first examined the chanter in December 2000 in the home of Colonel Sinclair's widow, Barbara. The support of the family made our two days of work, recording observations on paper and video camera, a pure delight. The chanter has a most graceful shape and the wood turning is of the highest order. It led a heavy working life and is completely broken in two at the sound holes. Two hairline cracks were repaired with hemp bindings, now loose, perhaps in the

¹² This is a precis of the full interview in Sinclair, 'Important piping artefacts', pp. 27–29.

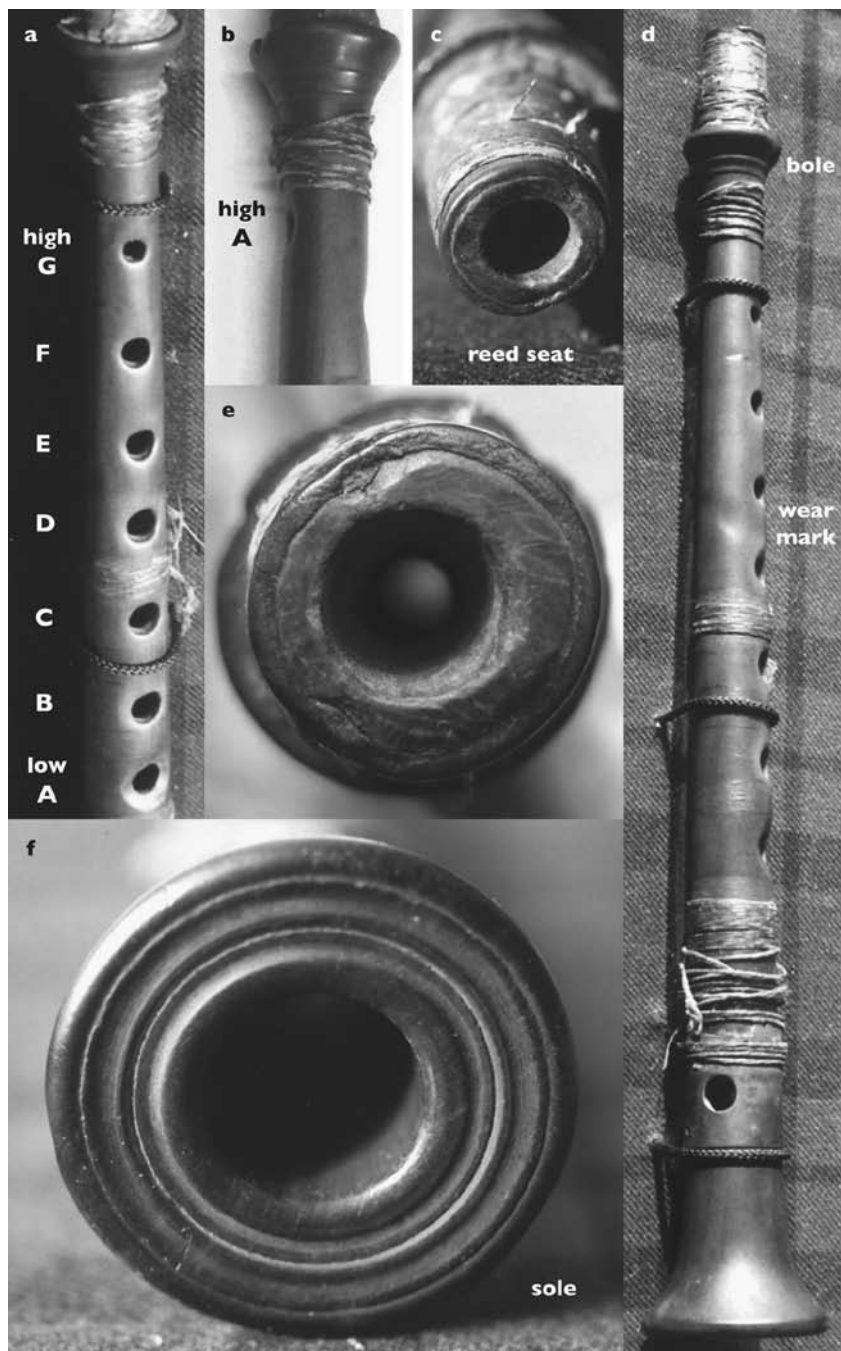


Illustration 2.2 The Iain Dall chanter.

nineteenth century; the crack on the front, which runs from the break up to the D hole, has closed up since the photograph of 1934. The broken foot was repaired with a metal collar, inset and fixed onto the chanter with very short nails; this repair is thought to pre-date its Atlantic crossing in 1805 as it shows considerable age and great care, suggesting that the chanter was valued as a professional instrument at the time. Due to subsequent wood contraction and a crack in the metal collar, the foot section is now loose. Serious restoration would therefore be required to play the chanter, but this looseness enabled us to remove a wood fragment from under the collar without compromising either the bore or the chanter's external appearance.

This fragment was sent to Jodrell Laboratories, Kew, where three planes of section were examined. Dr Peter Gasson identified the wood as *Guaiacum*, or *lignum vitae* ('wood of life'), so named on account of its success in the treatment of syphilis. This identification sheds light on the chanter's date and pristine condition, as *lignum vitae* is an exceptionally hard-wearing timber. *Guaiacum* was introduced to Europe by the Spaniards in 1508; in 1517 Nicolaus Poll stated that some three thousand persons in Spain had been cured by it;¹³ and in 1519 Ulrich von Hutten wrote that 'the physitions wolde not allowe it, perceyuyng that theyr profite wolde decay therby'.¹⁴ We cannot, therefore, rule out the possibility that the chanter was made for Iain Dall's father in the early sixteenth century. More likely, however, is that it was bought for Iain Dall by Sir Alexander MacKenzie, the laird who paid for his education in Skye, sometime before his death in 1693.

The chanter's bell-shaped foot and one-piece design set it apart from other early Highland chanters, with the exception of the Black Chanter of Clan Chattan in the Clan MacPherson Museum, Newtonmore. Its uneconomical use of timber suggests a date of manufacture earlier than 1760, when a Highland chanter with an ivory sole was painted by Joseph MacDonald – a design which allows the wooden column to be turned from a smaller billet. This might suggest that the Iain Dall chanter was turned at an early stage in the exploitation of *lignum vitae*, when supply was abundant. It certainly pre-dates the fashion for a horn or ivory sole, which had become a defining characteristic of Highland chanters by the end of the eighteenth century. Its greater proximity to the chanter in the portrait of the Laird of Grant's piper, 1714,¹⁵ and to early surviving continental chanters,¹⁶ are further indications that it represents the earliest stage on record in the evolution of the Highland pipe chanter.

¹³ A. Luisinus, *De morbo gallico* (1566), p. 210.

¹⁴ Thomas Paynel's translation (*of the Wood called Guaiacum*, 1540 edition, p. 8) of Ulrich von Hutten's treatise, *De morbi gallici curatione per administrationem ligni guaiaci* (1519).

¹⁵ National Gallery of Scotland; reproduced on the cover of Hugh Cheape, *Bagpipes – A National Collection of a National Instrument* (Edinburgh: National Museums of Scotland, 2008).

¹⁶ Italian, Spanish, Portuguese and Breton chanters are all more closely related to the Iain Dall chanter than that sketched by Joseph MacDonald c.1760. For example, see: Peter

The most widespread species of *lignum vitae*, *Guaiacum ofcinale*, is native to the West Indies and north coast of South America. Kew's identification, however, does not rule out *Guaiacum sanctum*, which grows in the Bahamas and Cuba. The heartwood was widely available to European wood turners because it was a by-product of the wood's use in medicine: in the treatment of syphilis, gout, the stone, palsy, leprosy, dropsy and epilepsy, it was a decoction of the bark that was administered. The heartwood became valued for the manufacture of ships' pulleys, mallet heads, bowls and turning on account of its outstanding strength, hardness and resistance to splitting. Although Julian Goodacre and I initially presumed the chanter's deep indentations over the finger-holes to be the result of generations of professional usage, the *lignum vitae* identification encourages us to interpret this as due, largely, to removal of wood by the maker, known as 'softening'. There is little softening of the finger-holes on modern Highland pipe chanters, but it is common on eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century chanters, although not to the extent found on the Iain Dall chanter, where it is almost as deep as the 'scalloping' of Balkan pipes. The Black Chanter of Clan Chattan shows no softening of the holes, but also no signs of usage, and we conclude that it cracked before it was finished.

Handling the original Iain Dall chanter in March 2006, the champion piper Donald MacPherson noted how superior the original's feel under the fingers was compared to an unsoftened reproduction. He formed the opinion that its deep softening, fitting the hand like a glove, was highly desirable. MacPherson, aged 83, also noted with delight the closer spacing of the low A hole. With advancing years, the aspect of pibroch which had caused him most bother was an elusive low G in movements like *hiharin* and *darid*, because the little finger no longer stretched to seal the hole as reliably as it had previously.

The only tradition concerning seventeenth-century Highland pipe manufacture of which I am aware suggests that the Iain Dall chanter was made in Gaelic Scotland, rather than Glasgow or Edinburgh. A famous dynasty of bagpipe makers is believed to have lived at Moleigh, a little south of Oban, in the seventeenth century. According to a local tradition collected in the early 1960s, these hereditary pipers to the MacDougall chief operated a piping school at Kilbride and, 'There was a house adjoining the school where the MacDougalls, reputed to be skilled woodturners, made their own bagpipes'.¹⁷ There were surely other Highland bagpipe makers, however, given the scale of patronage at that time.

The size of the reed seat indicates that this chanter possessed a reed of significantly longer staple and bulkier tying than any historical or modern Highland reed known to the investigation team. The reed seat also has a strange insert, possibly made of horn or some kind of putty, which might suggest that it was once larger still (Illustration 2.2, photos c and e).

Metzger, 'The revival of the Piva', *Anuario da Gaita* 21 (2006): 4–13.

¹⁷ Bridget Mackenzie, *Piping Traditions of Argyll* (Glasgow: The Piobaireachd Society, 2004), pp. 173–6.

The internal walls of the finger and sound holes appear to have been cut to size neatly with a knife. The high A hole is unusual in having been made at a slight angle towards the foot. It is slightly funnel-shaped, with a smaller diameter inside. Remarkably, no one ever touched this hole to cure a flat high A. The chanter's intonation could have been fine-tuned by applying beeswax to any hole – their walls, all significantly deeper than in a modern chanter, are barely undercut and quite rough, providing ample purchase for beeswax to stick to. However, no trace of any tuning substance was detected.

On the right-hand side, between the D and E holes, is a double wear mark (Illustration 2.2, photo d), possibly created by the little fingernail of the top hand striking the wood with each rise and fall of the ring finger. This would mean that the chanter was played right-hand-high, opposite to convention today. Photos a and d of Illustration 2.2 also show how the three top-hand finger-holes slope slightly to the piper's right, which might be judged to be poor workmanship, but we believe is an intentional refinement. If intended for a right-hand-high player, then these hole positions slope in sympathy with a good hand posture, avoiding tension from an angled wrist.

There is no evidence of pinching on the high A hole, which would be expected if the chanter had been overblown to sound notes in the second octave. As Major Cairns recalled, the surface around this hole is completely flat (Illustration 2.2, photo b). Decades of wear caused by the *hiharin* finger might explain why the low A hole has been so crudely scalloped with a knife (Illustration 2.2, photo a). If it had been worn on one side, this would make it difficult to cover if played with the other hand high. This modification appears to be of a later date, given its relative lack of surface wear.

Vital to this investigation, the finger-holes show no sign of alteration or undercutting: in three generations of professional use, the hereditary pipers to Gairloch never heard reason to alter its intonation by taking a knife to the holes. Fine-tuning was therefore only conducted by scraping the reed, by applying a substance into the finger-holes, or by inserting a rush (as pipers do in Ireland). The observation which poses ongoing challenges to the reproduction team is the size of the throat. This has a cylindrical section 10.4 mm (0.41 inches) long and 4.8 mm (0.19 or 3/16 inches) in diameter, considerably wider and longer than that of later Highland chanters. Major Cairns's praise for the original's response with a Robertson reed is surprising; we find a much longer staple is required.

Pitch and Intonation of the Reproduction

As no Highland chanter reeds or staples of the period have come to light, reed design has been guided by the reed seat and bore of the chanter, and by the demands of the

piibroch repertoire transcribed within a century of Iain Dall's death. In Table 2.1 the range of results for low A is compared with those of previous investigations.¹⁸

Table 2.1 Highland bagpipe pitch, late 1600s–1953.

Date	Pitch of A	Chanter(s)	Investigator(s)
late 1600s	450–61	'Iain Dall' (reproduction)	Brown & Goodacre, 2008
1700s	445–47	'Culloden' and 'Dunvegan'	General Thomason, 1906
early 1800s	460–66	Donald MacDonald (repro.)	Forrest & McCallum, 2008
early 1800s	441	Donald MacDonald (original)	Alexander J. Ellis, 1885
late 1800s	441–52	6 different chanters	General Thomason, 1906
1869–1919	446–63	Center, Lawrie, Henderson	George E. Allan, 1940
1953	448–69	18 different chanters	MacNeill & Lenihan, 1953

This table suggests that Highland bagpipe pitch experienced deviation of about a semitone, but no significant shift from that of the Iain Dall chanter for 250 years. The inconsistency between results for an original Donald MacDonald chanter in 1885 and a reproduction in 2008 may be the product of the players' choice of reed, and bore contraction caused by the fatigue of fluctuating moisture content. These frequencies for A all lie between those of church organs built at Hampton Court in 1690 (442 Hz) and in Durham in the 1680s (474 Hz). 450–54 Hz became standard in Britain during the nineteenth century, with the modern standard of A 440 Hz gradually replacing it from about 1896. A dramatic rise in the pitch of pipe bands since the 1960s drove the median pitch in solo piping up to 476 Hz in the 1990s, but there are signs that this trend has now peaked and that pitch is returning to the range of preceding centuries, owing to the renewed freshness of a mellower sound and possibly a greater historical sensitivity.¹⁹

¹⁸ *Piping Times* 13/3: 8–9 and 13/6: 8; Ellis, 'On the musical scales of various nations', p. 498; J. Decker Forrest, 'Ceòl Beag: the development and performance practice of the "small music" of the Highland bagpipe (1820–1966)', PhD thesis, University of St Andrews (2008).

¹⁹ Iain Hamilton McLean, 'When the sky's the limit, where do you stop? A study of the current Vienna effect in modern piping', *Piper & Drummer* 22/3 (June 2005): 20–21.



Illustration 2.3 Fingering chart from an anonymous pibroch manuscript, c.1815.

Crucial to the question of intonation is fingering, which has an effect that varies from reed to reed. Alternatives for D are found in the two earliest Highland fingering documents: the treatise by Joseph MacDonald (1739–63) and the anonymous chart reproduced in Illustration 2.3.²⁰

The fingerings given by Joseph MacDonald agree with those in this chart, save for high G and high A.²¹ Although the ‘closed’ fingering for C shown in both these documents fell out of general use in the nineteenth century, David Glen wrote in 1881 that, ‘when fingered in this way the C is sharpened and rendered more perfect’. Joseph MacDonald certainly perceived C as a major third; he typically includes a C sharp in his scores and regularly uses the eighteenth-century expression ‘A sharp’, meaning A major. Given his training on the baroque violin with Nicolo Pasquali in Edinburgh, and his acute perceptions regarding pibroch tonality, one might have expected him to comment if this interval was ambiguous, between major and minor. Instead, he writes:

There is no natural C or F in the Bagpipe Scale ... The Key for Laments excludes C altogether because it is sharp.²²

Joseph’s silence regarding the intonation of D is discomfoting, but perhaps is explained by an enculturation now unfamiliar. Joseph was an accomplished fiddler in the Gaelic tradition before going to Edinburgh; might Pasquali have criticized his Gaelic intonation? If we are correct in concluding that a colourful D was normal in pibroch, it is likely to have been an intonation dialect shared by fiddlers in ‘the Reay Country’, where Joseph grew up within Iain Dall’s lifetime. The only distinction Joseph draws with the scale of baroque music is that none of the notes in Gaelic piping is inflected by a semitone:

The few [flats, sharps and naturals] that might be playd woud be an entire Deviation from the genuine and Original Style of this Musick.²³

Using Joseph MacDonald’s fingerings, preliminary results for the intonation of the Iain Dall chanter are shown in Table 2.2, together with other measurements and possible influencing factors that set these in context. A tolerance of about 5 cents should be built in to each figure to avoid a false sense of accuracy.

²⁰ A facsimile of the ‘Hannay-MacAuslan’ manuscript is at www.piobaireachd.co.uk.

²¹ Roderick D. Cannon (ed.), *Joseph MacDonald’s Compleat Theory of the Scots Highland Bagpipe (c.1760)* (Glasgow: The Piobaireachd Society, 1994), p. 26. See footnote 1.1.

²² Joseph MacDonald, ‘A Compleat Theory of the Scots Highland Bagpipe’ (Edin. Uni. MS La.III.804), pp. 1 and 34.

²³ MacDonald, ‘A Compleat Theory of the Scots Highland Bagpipe’, pp. 1 and 34.

Table 2.2 Intonation values in cents deviation from equal temperament.²⁴

Possible Influencing Factors				Actual Measurements				
8 Trump	Trump / drone harmonic	7 Purity with the drones	9 Harp tuning 'Greenhill 2'		4 & 14 'Iain Dall' repro.	'Donald MacDonald' repro.	6 John MacDonald, 1927	Average of 18 pipers, 1953
0	16th	0	0	high A	-4	-3	-3	-4
-31	14th	-31, +18	+18	high G	-30, 0	+3, -27 ^a	+17	+20 ^b
-16	13th	-16	-16	F	-17	-15	-14	-13
+2	12th	+2	+2	E	+2	+2	+2	+4
+51	11th	-2, +51	+20	D	+20, +25	+14, +17	+20	+15
-14	10th	-14	-14	C	-17	-15	-19	-17
+4	9th	-18, +4	+4	B	0	-11	-8	-4
0	8th	0	0	low A	0	0	0	0
-31	7th	-31, +18	+18	low G	-18	-31	-8	+1

^a Remarkably, the light music fingering was flatter than the pibroch fingering

^b Players were given free choice which fingering to use

At the time of writing, the only significant difference between the intonation of the Iain Dall chanter and that of Highland piping 1800–1950 appears to be a subtly sharper B and (even with the ring finger closed) a noticeably sharper D. Its low G lies between the mean of MacNeill and Lenihan’s measurements in 1953 (+1) and the seventh harmonic (-31) common to the trumpet and early nineteenth-century chanters made by Donald MacDonald. This result is preliminary because we are not entirely satisfied that the reed and reproduction chanter are perfectly coupled; the residual preconceptions of modern reed design are not easily shed, and there is little evidence from the past to guide us.

²⁴ The Donald MacDonald reproduction was measured with Decker Forrest in July 2008. The figures for John MacDonald are calculated from: Alexander MacKenzie, ‘Some recent measurements on the scale of the great Highland bagpipe’, *Proceedings of the Piobaireachd Society Conference* (1995): Figures 12 and 13. The 1953 average is from: Seumas MacNeill and John Lenihan, ‘The scale of the Highland bagpipe’, *Piping Times* 13/6 (1961): 9.

Understanding Highland Bagpipe Intonation

The interaction of cultural and physical factors giving rise to the intonation ideals of an individual or a tradition is a complex and capricious subject. Alexander Ellis published a response from David Glen, the celebrated bagpipe maker and music publisher, indicating that purity with the drones was sought after in the 1880s:

Our opinion is that if a chaunter was made perfect in any [other] scale it would not go well with the drones.²⁵

This is the view prevailing today, but smoothness with the drones fails to explain the mean and range of measurements for low G, B, D and high G. Pure intervals are perceived in some indigenous cultures as insipid or infertile, and the actual measurements in Table 2.2 suggest that such an attitude once existed in Britain. It is also important to recognise that there are many more pure intervals than the human ear is comfortable categorizing. Those closest to the actual measurements in Table 2.2 are illustrated in track 7, which was produced using the Pitch Shift tool in ProTools from recorded samples of Goodacre's reproduction eighteenth-century drones and Iain Dall chanter. The intonation, in cents relative to low A, and lowest coinciding drone and chanter harmonics for this larger range of 'pure' intervals are shown in Table 2.3.

Table 2.3 Tuning for purity with the drones. These intervals can be heard in ascending sequence on CD track 7.

Interval	Cents		Lowest coinciding harmonics		
	from low A		Bass drone	Tenor drones	Chanter
octave	1200	high A	8	4	1
large minor 7th	1018	high G	36	18	5
septimal minor 7th	969		14	—	2
pure major 6th	884	F	20	10	3
overtone 6th	841		13	—	2
perfect 5th	702	E	6	3	1
11th harmonic	551	D	11	—	2
perfect 4th	498		16	8	3
pure major 3rd	386	C	5	—	1
median 3rd	347		44	22	9
major whole tone	204	B	9	—	2
minor whole tone	182		40	20	9
unison	0	low A	4	2	1
large minor 7th	-182	low G	18	9	5
septimal minor 7th	-231		7	—	2

²⁵ Ellis, 'On the musical scales of various nations', p. 499.

The quality of purity and difficulty of tuning depends on the extent to which all the harmonics interlock – not just the lowest pair – and on their relative amplitude. The loudest are chanter harmonics 2–5 and drone harmonics 1–18, and the easiest intervals to tune are marked in bold.²⁶ The minor whole tone and median third sound more dissonant because their coinciding harmonics are higher, fewer and quieter than for the other intervals. There are many more consonances within an octave; these are simply those closest to actual measurements of Highland bagpipe intonation.

Impure intervals may arise from pure tuning procedures and the difference between natural harmonics. Harp, fiddle and trump traditions are relevant to this discussion because they too enjoyed great popularity in the Highlands. According to Rev. James Kirkwood (1650–1709): ‘The Greatest Music is Harp, Pipe, Viol [fiddle], and Trump.’²⁷

Much of the art in making trumps or setting up drones lies in creating a full and well-balanced ‘orchestra’ of harmonics. As can be seen from Table 2.3, all notes save D and F can be related to bass drone harmonics 4–9, and the same harmonics are individually amplified on the Trump, forming the melody notes of Track 8. Since the 1960s there has been a decisive shift in fashion regarding the intonation of D, abandoning a more dissonant, colourful quality in favour of purity with the drones – the criterion by which F always seems to have been tuned. The near extinction of this fourth in Scotland contrasts with the positive cultivation of colourful thirds, fourths, sixths and sevenths in Norway, and of colourful thirds and sevenths in Cape Breton.

The following recordings demonstrate the persistence of a range of colourful fourths and sevenths throughout the twentieth century, and the fame of the artists within their respective cultures helps us to perceive the old intonation of the Highland bagpipe in a more sympathetic context:

Track 5 (1899)

John MacColl (1860–1943) won the Inverness Clasp in 1900 and made his living from prize money won at Highland Games. This track is included as evidence that the intonation ideal for C was never as flat as a neutral third, as proposed by Ellis in 1885 and Thrasher in 2003. The sharp D appears in the strathspey ‘Take your Gun to the Hill’.²⁸

²⁶ MacKenzie, ‘Some recent measurements’, Figures 7 and 8.

²⁷ John Lorne Campbell (ed.), *A Collection of Highland Rites and Customs, copied by Edward Lhuyd from the Manuscript of the Rev James Kirkwood (1650–1709) and annotated by him with the aid of Rev John Beaton* (London: The Folklore Society, 1975), p. 49.

²⁸ Berliner 7720 (3567) recorded Cockburn Hotel, Glasgow, 6 September 1899. For biographical details, see: William Donaldson, *The Highland Pipe and Scottish Society*

Track 6 (1927)

Most Highland pipers today trace their teaching back to John MacDonald, Inverness (1865–1953), who won the Clasp seven times. In his intonation, measurements for which are given in Figure 2.4, low G and high G differ by 25 cents.²⁹

Track 8 (2007)

On the trump, the fourth corresponds to the eleventh harmonic (+51), which is significantly sharper than the fourth on these piping tracks (about +20). Sigurd Brokke (b.1971) won the trump class at Norway's national competition in 2003 and 2004.³⁰

Track 10 (1967)

One of the greatest pipers of the twentieth century, Donald MacLeod (1916–82) won the Clasp eight times. His record was only beaten by Donald MacPherson, who can probably be credited with establishing the modern preference for a pure fourth.³¹

Track 11 (1958)

Born in Cape Breton, Angus Chisholm (1908–79) has legendary status in the Gaelic fiddle tradition. In these reels, his minor seventh is noticeably sharp, a quality widespread in the tradition and thought to be influenced by the intonation of Highland pipers. In this recording, his fourth is also variably sharp of pure, but this is unusual.³²

Track 12 (1989)

Iain MacFadyen (b.1935) won Highland piping's 'world title', the Grants Championship, four times. He is the last champion piper to customarily play a colourful fourth; this intonation is now extinct at a professional level.³³

1750–1950 (Scotland: Tuckwell Press, 2000); and Seumas MacNeill, *Masters of Piping* (Glasgow: The College of Piping, 2008).

²⁹ Columbia 4513 (WA-5019-1) recorded London, March 1927.

³⁰ From *Rammeslag* (Norway: Etnisk Musikkklubb EM29) released 2007.

³¹ From *Pipe Major Donald MacLeod M.B.E. – The New York Recordings 1967* (Glasgow: Lismor Recordings LCOM8004) re-released 1996.

³² Private recording made in the performer's kitchen, not previously released.

³³ From *Piobaireachd* (Glasgow: Lismor Recordings LCOM9016) released 1989.

Track 13 (2008)

Christian Borlaug (b.1973) qualified for the elite class in the Hardanger fiddle competition system at the age of 21. Like many young Norwegian players, he has devoted considerable energy to keeping the intonation dialect of his local region alive. The Hardanger fourth is considerably sharper than the Highland bagpipe fourth, lying variably between the eleventh harmonic of the D string (+51), and the fifteenth harmonic of the A string (+88), so is categorized as an augmented fourth rather than a perfect fourth.³⁴

The relish with which these artists enjoy their intonation suggests that the D of the Iain Dall chanter was perfectly normal and it is our perception that has changed. In a review of intonation studies in Norway, Hans-Hinrich Thedens reports two incidents that demonstrate the clash of cultures such a change precipitates. In the first, Ole Mørk Sandvik (1875–1976) was asked by Hardanger fiddle player Jens Maurset to play back a tune from his transcription. The classically trained violinist comments:

Maurset corrected me when I played the halling for him from my notation. First I played F# – that was wrong – then F, also wrong! When I placed my finger between the two he was satisfied.

The second incident concerns the *langeleik*, which like a dulcimer has several drone strings sounding against one melody string:

When Ola Brenno (1865–1957) from Valdres played for tourists in one of the new mountain hotels of the area he was approached by one of the listeners who introduced himself as an organist by profession. He stated his appreciation of Brenno's playing but commented that his instrument was not quite tuned right. He offered his help and then pried the frets of the langeleik loose and reglued them according to the major scale. Brenno stated later that 'all the old tunes were lost to him' on the new fretboard. He found it only worked for waltzes and schottisches.³⁵

There is no indication that professional Highland pipers were any less fastidious about tuning in the past than they are today. Archie MacNeill (1879–1962) said that the drones 'should play a tune with the chanter', which is the result of varying

³⁴ From *Austmannsspel – slåtter under Noreffjell* (Norway: Etnisk Musikkklubb EM33) released 2008.

³⁵ Hans-Hinrich Thedens, 'Intonation studies in Norwegian Folk Music research', *European Meetings in Ethnomusicology* 11 (2008).

interference with the drone harmonics.³⁶ Simon McKerrell, a successful competing piper, acknowledges that his sound aesthetic has changed through listening and playing. Rather than seeking maximum purity throughout the scale, he now looks for more dissonance on B (flatter) and D (sharper), encouraging the drones to ‘play a tune’. Subtle variety in intonation refreshes the ear, and as well as defining a culture, and each dialect within it, intonation determines a piper’s personal identity. This is equally true of fiddlers, and in their definitive study of Cape Breton fiddle music, David Greenberg and Kate Dunlay suggest a connection with the Highland bagpipe:

Some Cape Breton fiddlers make occasional use of notes which are sharp or flat of standard pitch. Some of the time they are true quarter-tones, but more frequently they are closer to one adjacent standard pitch than another. This practice may be due in part to the influence of the Highland bagpipe scale; oral history indicates that formerly the pipes were commonly played for dancing in Cape Breton, and that fiddlers and pipers freely exchanged tunes. A number of musicians played both instruments.³⁷

Greenberg believes that ‘color playing’ is intentional, but in a very unconscious way, and that it depends on the finger being used, and therefore on the specific mode, tonic and octave. Some fingers are also more accustomed to adjusting their placement than others.³⁸ In track 11, the oscillation of adjacent major triads corresponds with that observed in the pibroch ‘The Fairy Flag’ above (Illustration 2.1). Angus Chisholm’s seventh and fourth sound in the same harmonic unit, and the fact that both are raised may derive, to some extent, from the ideal of pure intonation when these notes sound simultaneously (forming a perfect fifth) on the fiddle and wire-strung harp.

The Scottish harp revival has so far overlooked traditional Gaelic intonation. In the shadow of imperialist attitudes to the Highland bagpipe, this is unsurprising: in 1940, George Allan wrote:

If the untunefulness of the scale in its present form were removed, so also would the irritation which it causes musical people.³⁹

This irritation is due to cultural conditioning. If harpers tuned their second to a pure major whole tone against the sister strings (*caomhluighe*) – which on early Gaelic harps sound in unison an octave above the ‘drone bass’ string (*crònan*), like the tenor drones of a Highland bagpipe – and the seventh and fourth were lifted to

³⁶ MacKenzie, ‘Some recent measurements’, p. 17

³⁷ Kate Dunlay and David Greenberg, *Traditional Celtic Violin Music of Cape Breton* (Toronto: DunGreen Music, 1996), p. 9.

³⁸ Email communication from Kate Dunlay, 29 August 2008.

³⁹ *Piping Times* 13/3: 10.

achieve a pure triad, then the result is similar to the intonation of John MacColl, John MacDonald, Donald MacLeod, Angus Chisholm and the Iain Dall chanter. In the interests of a cultural rapprochement and cultivation of something ‘special’, harpers and other musicians are encouraged to explore the potential beauty of this tuning, termed ‘Greenhill 2’ (outlined in Figure 2.1 and demonstrated in track 9). The purity of its triads provides a greater sweetness than any temperament built into digital tuners, except ‘Just’. To facilitate transposition, ‘1’ corresponds to low A in the pipe scale and might be tuned to G, the traditional pitch of the *crònan* string.⁴⁰

‘Greenhill 2’ contains four pure triads:

5	4	3	2
3	2	1	7
1	7	6	5

And two dissonant triads:

6	1
4	6
2	4

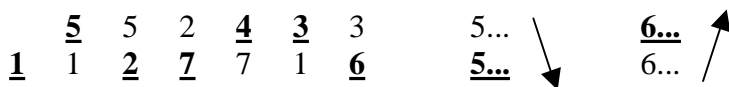


Figure 2.1 A tuning procedure for ‘Greenhill 2’, demonstrated in CD track 9. All intervals are tuned pure – none are tempered. For cents deviation from equal temperament, see Table 2.2.

This provides an intrinsic polarity of tension and release that could accentuate the beauty of many traditional melodies. The possibility that it is historical rests on the fact that it is easier than Meantone as no tempering is required, and its proximity to the intonation of the Iain Dall chanter.

⁴⁰ Early Gaelic harp terms are discussed by Colm Ò Baoill (2002) at www.earlygaelicharp.info/Irish_Terms/.

Conclusions

A family emigrating to Canada in 1805 would only have carried bare essentials, and it is remarkable that this chanter survived the hazards of house-moving over nine generations. Status in the family as a treasured heirloom is the best explanation of its survival, and although there is no written record of the chanter's existence before 1934, no reason has been found to doubt the family's claim that it was played by *Am Piobaire Dall*. This adds weight to the messages it carries from a remote past to musicians, bagpipe makers and musicologists today:

1. its intonation is characterized by a colourful fourth, possibly 10 cents sharper than the D orthodox in Highland piping 1800–1950, and 30 cents sharper than the pure fourth favoured today. This intonation may derive from a cultural savouring of dissonance, but it is also proposed that the eleventh harmonic of the trumpet and bass drone exerted some influence, and that the pure tuning 'Greenhill 2' may have been popular with Gaelic harpers in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.
2. its hole positions are more ergonomic, reducing tension in areas of stress in pibroch: the little finger is less stretched, facilitating *hiharin*, and the top-hand holes slant for better presentation to the hand, reducing tension in the wrist and promoting a good *crunnludh*.
3. its maker 'softened' the holes deeply, producing a luxurious feel under the fingers. This reduces the risk of an air leak, which can break the spell of pibroch, and allows the chanter to be held more lightly. One of the teaching mantras of Donald MacPherson's father was, 'Don't grip the chanter'.⁴¹
4. its pitch is in the region of A 450–461 Hz, which continued as the norm in Highland piping until the 1960s.

These are the conclusions reached so far on what Patrick Molard accurately described as 'a lifetime's adventure'.⁴² Pipers may be attracted by the idea of playing in the well-worn grooves of the Blind Piper's fingers, and many may aspire to a deeper cultural sensitivity for pibroch, but modern artists face an imperative: to win patronage from globally wired consumers. Would it do them or the tradition any good to reinstate historical intonation? Should it be encouraged in our competitions? This was the path chosen in Norway:

The judging forms at the contests specify that 'old style intonation' is something to be rewarded. To be able to use it properly is now considered an accomplishment. What used to be the standard – which is what the contests try to preserve – is now thought to be difficult for the average contestants, because few of them

⁴¹ Barnaby Brown, 'Donald MacPherson', *Piper & Drummer Magazine* 22/3 (June 2005): 37.

⁴² For updates on this project, see: www.pibroch.net/iaindall.

have grown up with traditional music, or it competes with other styles in their musical consciousness.⁴³

Perhaps a more creative way to enrich audience choice and stimulate musical distinction would be to explore the value of colourful notes, or the temperament ‘Greenhill 2’, in other instrumental and vocal traditions that may have exerted an influence on pibroch, or vice versa. With traditional musicians now immersed in equal temperament from birth, William Matheson’s response to the singing of Duncan MacDonald (1882–1954) holds a powerful significance:

His intonation was sometimes in doubt, but always there was the uneasy feeling that one’s own apprehension might be at fault, non-plussed by an archaic musical idiom unfamiliar to the modern ear.⁴⁴

The intonation of the Iain Dall chanter challenges not only pipers, but all performers of traditional and medieval Western music to investigate on their own instruments the unfamiliar tuning ideals relished by expert musicians in Scotland, Cape Breton and Norway. The questions now are: to which historical repertoires is this relevant; and how well will it be received by audiences?

⁴³ Thedens, ‘Intonation studies’.

⁴⁴ William Matheson, ‘Duncan MacDonald (1882–1954)’, *Tocher* 25 (Spring 1977): 1. Thanks to John Gibson, *Traditional Gaelic Bagpiping, 1745–1945* (Edinburgh & Montreal, 1998): Preface, p. ix.

Chapter 3

Wood, Horn and Bone: A Survey of Immigrant Bagpipes and Regional Pipe-making in Nova Scotia, 1820–1920

Barry W. Shears

The past few decades have seen an increased interest in the study of the origins, music and performance style of the Great Highland Bagpipe. Despite the importance of the bagpipes to the Scottish Highlander, there has been little available research into the makers, material and methods of bagpipe manufacture in Scotland and even less in those diverse areas settled predominantly by Scottish Gaels such as Australia, New Zealand and North America. The purpose of this chapter is therefore to present information and photographs of a selection of Highland bagpipes found in Nova Scotia and, by doing so, add to emerging academic areas such as the folk-life and diverse cultural geography of the Scottish Gael. This chapter is based on an extensive review of secondary sources, including works written on musical instrument-making and identification; the importance of preserving artefacts in today's society; materials and tools used in manufacture; and local traditions associated with the instruments, makers and players.

In addition to the home-made bagpipes noted below are a number of instruments or parts of instruments which are believed to date to late seventeenth-, eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Scotland. The Iain Dall pipe chanter, which was brought to Nova Scotia in 1805 by the famous MacKay family of Gairloch, is believed to date to about 1680 and may be the oldest example of a non-indigenous woodwind instrument in existence in North America.¹ Unfortunately, despite the importance of these instruments to the cultural history of the Gael in Nova Scotia, government and local museums have shown little interest in funding research into the manufacture of bagpipes in Nova Scotia in the nineteenth century or even cataloguing the immigrant bagpipes (and fiddles) which are currently held in private collections. This is regrettable since, as Jules David Prown, a strong proponent of preserving and studying artefacts and material culture, points out:

¹ See Chapter 2 in this anthology for further discussion of the Iain Dall chanter.

Objects created in the past are the only historical occurrences that continue to exist in the present. They provide an opportunity by which we encounter the past at first hand; we have direct sensory experience of surviving historical events.²

There are several difficulties with searching for information on antique bagpipes, not the least of which is finding suitable examples for comparison and study. As Hugh Cheape, formerly Curator of Scottish Culture for the National Museums of Scotland, points out, 'Pipe making in Scotland has a restricted literature. There are no books on the subject and apparently few sources of information. Old sets of bagpipes are few and far between ... [and] are by nature fragile and perishable.'³ Much of the more detailed information regarding bagpipe manufacture in Scotland is restricted to fairly recent studies by Hugh Cheape and Jeannie Campbell, the latter of The College of Piping.⁴

Outside Scotland, Geoff Hore of New Zealand has researched and published several informative articles on pipe makers and repairers in that country⁵. His list of bagpipe makers include brothers Roderick Duncan Campbell and Duncan Alexander Campbell of Waipu, whose parents came to New Zealand from Nova Scotia with Reverend Norman MacLeod in 1853.⁶

The Powerhouse Museum in Sydney, Australia has two sets of locally made bagpipes from the mid-nineteenth century in its collection. Both of these instruments were made by George Sherar, an 1832 immigrant to Sydney, Australia from Scotland.⁷ A set of bagpipes made of tulip wood in 1850 by Sherar was sent to London in 1851 for the Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of all Nations, held in the Crystal Palace. It was said that Queen Victoria's piper, Angus MacKay, played a few tunes on Sherar's bagpipe at the Exhibition and that the instrument received an Honourable Mention.⁸

² David Jules Prown, 'Mind in matter: an introduction to material culture theory and method', *Winterthur* 17/1 (Spring 1982), p. 3.

³ Hugh Cheape, 'The Making of Bagpipes in Scotland' in Annie O'Connor and D.V. Clark (eds), *From the Stone Age to the Forty-Five* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1983), p. 596.

⁴ Cheape, 'The Making of Bagpipes in Scotland' and *The Book of the Bagpipe* (Chicago: Contemporary Books, 2000); Jeannie Campbell, *Highland Bagpipe Makers* (Glasgow: Magnus Orr Publishing, 2001).

⁵ Geoff Hore, 'The bagpipe manufacturers and repairers of New Zealand,' *New Zealand Pipe Band Magazine*, Winter (1997): 2.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Belinda Nemec, 'Highlights from the Powerhouse Museum: some early Australian bagpipes', *Journal of the Australian Association of Musical Instrument Makers* 14/1 (March 1995): 7.

⁸ Ibid. The article does not mention Angus MacKay by name, but he was Queen Victoria's piper during this period.

Scottish pipe-maker and 1902 Inverness gold medallist James A. Centre (1875–1919) immigrated to Australia in 1908 with his family and, with his father, John, set up a bagpipe-making business in Victoria. Between 1908 and his early death in 1919 James Centre was reputed to have made 50 sets of bagpipes.⁹ Other pipe-makers in Australia included Ray Anderson and Jim Martin, a former apprentice with James Robertson, Scotland. Anderson made at least three sets in the 1950s and Martin made several sets of bagpipes during the years 1960–75.¹⁰

In recent years Nova Scotia has emerged as an area of interest not only for older styles of bagpipe performance, but also as a repository for approximately a dozen bagpipes which were brought to Nova Scotia during the Highland immigrant period (1773–1850) and a vibrant late nineteenth-century bagpipe-making tradition. Included in this study are four unique examples of bagpipes brought from Scotland to Nova Scotia during the immigration period. These instruments were selected because of their unique characteristics and represent only a small sampling of what has survived. Also included are several examples of local bagpipe manufacture in the province during the period 1820–1920. Primary sources and much of the material for this chapter are from personal examination of the instruments and interviews which included discussion of associated family lore. Some of these bagpipes are in remarkably good shape considering their age and frequent usage. They also illustrate various configurations such as two- and three-droned instruments. A few of these bagpipes have a significant amount of related folklore, including the dates when the instruments were brought from Scotland to Nova Scotia and genealogical information related to the original and subsequent owners. What follows is an examination of bagpipe-making with particular emphasis on, but not restricted to, pipe-making in Nova Scotia.

Early Bagpipe-making in Scotland

In Scotland bagpipes were usually made on a lathe. The early turning lathes consisted of two types: the pole or spring pole lathe, which required the material being turned to change direction intermittently causing backward jerks; and the foot-treadle lathe and great wheel lathe, which allowed the material being worked to revolve in one continuous direction.¹¹ It would appear that bagpipe-making in eighteenth-century Scotland was carried on by a few professional wood-turners. While early pipe-makers may have possessed the technical expertise and access to materials to turn and bore wood, they may have relied on the advice of an

⁹ Michael Atherton, *Australian Made ... Australian Played* (Sydney: New South Wales University Press, 1990), p. 139.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Henry C. Mercer, *Tools of the Nation Maker: A descriptive Catalogue of objects in the Museum of the Historical Society of Bucks County, Pennsylvania* (Doylestown: The Historical Society of Bucks County, 1897), pp. 220–21.

experienced piper in order to make the finished product. At first, local woods such as holly, laburnum and boxwood were used in the manufacture of bagpipes.¹² Dense tropical hardwoods such as cocus wood, ebony and African black wood were introduced to musical instrument-making in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and eventually displaced the native woods used in pipe-making.¹³

The overall shape and design of the Highland bagpipe has changed very little over the past few hundred years. Stylistic features such as the bells or terminals at the end of the drones, once almost pear-shaped, developed into a smaller, slightly square profile sometime in the late 1700s.¹⁴ These early instruments were mounted with a variety of materials such as pewter, cattle horn and bone. Mounting serves a practical as well as decorative purpose as mounts are placed at strategic locations on the wood to help prevent it from splitting.¹⁵ Another feature of the pipe-maker's craft which came to prominence in the eighteenth century was the addition of a decorative finish known as 'comb and bead', applied to the outside of each section of the bagpipe, except for the chanter and mouth piece.

The popularity of the bagpipe as a dance instrument,¹⁶ coupled with the demand from British army for instruments, expanded markets and centralized bagpipe-making in growing urban centres such as Edinburgh, Glasgow, Dundee and Forfar. The increase in the number of pipers in the army,¹⁷ aided in part by the continued recruitment of men for service in existing Highland regiments and the establishment of fencible battalions for home defence (1790–1802), was accompanied by a significant increase in demand for new instruments. The recruitment of pipers employed by wealthy patrons on estates¹⁸ also enlarged the market for bagpipes, a demand which over time was filled by full-time makers. Early bagpipe-makers included Hugh Robertson and Donald MacDonald, the Glen family, all of Edinburgh, the MacDougalls of Perth and Malcolm MacGregor, London.¹⁹ Three of these early firms, David Glen, J&R Glen and Donald MacDonald, went on to collect, edit and publish pipe music in staff notation, which, in turn, contributed to a standardization of fingering technique.

¹² Cheape, 'The Making of Bagpipes in Scotland', p. 606.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 610.

¹⁴ I.H. McKay Scobie, *Pipers and Pipe Music in a Highland Regiment – A record of Piping in the 1st Seaforth Highlanders, originally the Earl of Seaforth's or 78th (Highland) regiment, afterwards the 72nd or Duke of Albany's own Highlanders* (Dingwall: The Rosshire Publishing & Printing Co., 1924), p. 16.

¹⁵ Barry W. Shears, 'Bagpipe makers in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, 1807–1920', *Piper and Drummer* 13/4 (August 1996), p. 13.

¹⁶ Roderick D. Cannon, *The Highland Bagpipe and its Music* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1995) pp. 105–16.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 119–20.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 79–82.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 19–20. For further information on bagpipe makers, see Campbell, *Highland Bagpipe Makers*.

Historical Background to Pipe-making in Nova Scotia

Nova Scotia is a province situated on the east coast of Canada. Geographically it consists of a mainland portion, which is a large peninsula jutting out into the North Atlantic, and an archipelago of large and small islands known collectively as Cape Breton. In 1955 a permanent causeway was built joining Cape Breton to the mainland. Nova Scotia was originally inhabited by native tribes of Mi'kmaq and, in 1604, was settled by French colonists; Scottish colonists arrived in 1625. The Scottish settlements were eventually abandoned a few years later after being sacked by French soldiers and Scottish immigration ceased until almost two hundred Highlanders in search of a better life landed at Pictou, Nova Scotia on the ship *Hector* in September 1773. Their arrival heralded the beginning of large-scale Scottish immigration to Nova Scotia. Over the next 75 years approximately 50,000 Scottish settlers, mostly Gaelic-speaking Highlanders, settled in north-eastern Nova Scotia and Cape Breton. Recent research has identified the names of almost eighty immigrant pipers to Nova Scotia during this period (1773–1850).²⁰ This is a particularly rich stream of tradition, although piping was more prominent in some areas of the province settled by Scottish Gaels compared to others.

The Scottish Gaels who immigrated to Nova Scotia brought with them a rich and varied tradition of music, song and dance. While several aspects of Nova Scotia Gaelic culture, including collections of Gaelic songs, stories and some instrumental music, have already been the subject of considerable research, much less attention has been paid to the study of specific musical instruments or their manufacture. This is unfortunate, since in the nineteenth century Nova Scotia boasted several musical instrument-makers including pipe-makers, piano and reed organ manufacturers and violin-makers, as well as musical instruments from several immigrant groups. Until recently there have been few attempts to collect examples of the handiwork of these many artisans for display, research and study. Many of the early immigrants were pipers and, in addition to bringing Scottish-made bagpipes to Nova Scotia, they and their descendants constructed bagpipes for small localized markets using local materials. By examining surviving examples of local pipe-making in Nova Scotia, it would appear that, except for a few stylistic changes, the art of making bagpipes remained relatively unchanged for most of the nineteenth century.

The bagpipe is recognized as the national instrument of Scotland. It, and the love of its music, was omnipresent among the numerous Gaels who settled Nova Scotia. As Dr A. Gesner, a noted local scientist and inventor wrote: 'In a Highland settlement a set of bagpipes and a player should not be forgotten. I have known many a low-spirited emigrant to be aroused from his torpor by the sound of his

²⁰ Barry W. Shears, 'The changing role of the Highland piper in Nova Scotia society, 1773–1973' (M.A. thesis, Saint Mary's University, Halifax, Nova Scotia, 2005), pp. 143–7.

national music.’²¹ Where no instrument was available, Nova Scotia Gaels sought out the necessary materials to make a bagpipe as noted in the following English translation of a story published in the 14 March 1902 edition of the Cape Breton Gaelic newspaper *MacTalla* [The Echo]:

I will give a brief account of one or two families who came from Moidart sixty years ago and who settled at Giant’s Lake in Guysborough County, N.S. Angus MacIsaac was the first settler at the Lake. He was known as Angus Bàn of Smirisary in Moidart. In 1843, he and his family left Moidart for America. He took up much wood land at the Lake, enough to give each of his six sons a farm. His grandchildren now live on these farms and are doing very well. Three of Angus’ sons are living – Donald, Angus and Alexander, or Alasdair Bàn as we call him. Although Alasdair Bàn was only very young when he left Moidart, he did not forget all he saw and heard in Scotland. He loved pipe music and he remembered many of the tunes he used to hear from the pipers on board the vessels. He used to make [practice] chanters from ash sticks in which he would put an oaten reed, and he would play merrily on this instrument. Alexander wanted a bagpipe, but one could not be procured in the land and it would cost too much money to seek it in Scotland. So he decided to make one for himself; and that’s what he did. He got wood and an auger, a sheepskin and cobblers thread and he made a pipe and learned to play it. I might say that that was the first bagpipe I ever heard. It wasn’t long before word got around the country that the plaintive music of the pipes was to be heard at Giant’s Lake. And what happened was that no procession, election or picnic took place without Alasdair Bàn and his pipes. And of course he attended weddings, setting old folks a-dancing – thinking themselves young again!²²

As settlements became established and the population grew, so did the number of people who could play the bagpipe. The network for training new pipers in nineteenth-century Nova Scotia consisted of extended family members or older musicians in the community. During the second half of the nineteenth century the number of pipers and chanter players²³ among the second, third and fourth generation Gaels in Nova Scotia numbered in the hundreds.²⁴ This increase in the number of people who could play the bagpipe outstripped the number of available

²¹ R.C. MacDonald, *Sketches of Highlanders* (New Brunswick, 1843), Appendix, p. viii.

²² *MacTalla*, 14 March 1902, ‘A letter from Giant’s Lake’. *MacTalla* was the longest running Gaelic newspaper in the world. I am indebted to Effie Rankin of Mabou for the English translation.

²³ See J. Decker Forrest, ‘The making of bagpipe reeds and practice chanters in South Uist’ in this volume for further discussion of the practice chanter as an instrument on its own merits in a Gaelic-speaking community.

²⁴ Shears, ‘The changing role’, pp. 148–62.

instruments, and created a demand for new ones and repairs to existing bagpipes. Research shows that Nova Scotia not only has fine examples of locally made instruments, but also some excellent, and possibly unique, examples of Scottish-made bagpipes.

Immigrant Bagpipes in Nova Scotia

At one time there was a much more varied arrangement of drones than at present. Instruments which survived into the twentieth century reveal an assortment of configurations, from single-droned bagpipes (such as the ‘Bannockburn pipes’) to two tenor drones, a bass and a tenor, and the three-drone configuration so common today. Several immigrant bagpipes which were brought to Nova Scotia represent all four drone arrangements. The surviving examples of early bagpipes in Scotland are not uniform and it is not until the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century that standardization started to creep into the rather small bagpipe-making industry. The Highland Society of Scotland banned two-droned bagpipes from its pibroch competitions in Edinburgh in 1822²⁵ and these changes, if strictly enforced, would have no doubt restricted the number of competing pipers from the west coast of Scotland – although if a competitor was serious enough about competing, he could perhaps have borrowed a three-droned set. The awarding of three-droned ‘prize pipes’ to first-place winners by the Highland Society after 1781 and the prohibition of the two-droned model helped to standardize the instrument at a time when several professional bagpipe-makers were entering the field.

In the 1803 copy of Joseph MacDonald’s *Compleat Theory* there is mention of the practice of some pipers in the Western Isles of Scotland of ‘laying aside the use of the great drone’ and playing two tenors only.²⁶ This does not necessarily mean that all bagpipes used in these areas consisted of two tenor drones, but rather that the bass drone may merely have been used on rare occasions. A story collected in Cape Breton by Archibald MacKenzie and published in *MacKenzie’s History of Christmas Island Parish* supports this view. The narrative, which had been collected in an area settled by people from the Island of Barra in the first few decades of the nineteenth century, describes one instance where the bass drone was

²⁵ William Donaldson, *The Highland Pipe and Scottish Society, 1750–1950* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 2000), p. 88.

²⁶ Roderick D. Cannon, *Joseph MacDonald’s Compleat Theory of the Scots Highland Bagpipe* (Glasgow: The Piobaireachd Society, 1994), p. 97. The 1803 edition of the *Compleat Theory* is known to be a flawed printing of the original c.1760 manuscript; the passage discussing the use of the bass drone, for instance, was not part of the original manuscript and was presumably added by MacDonald’s brother Patrick, who edited and published the manuscript on his late brother’s behalf.

set up and played to sound a distress call by MacNeil of Barra's early eighteenth-century piper Rory MacNeil.²⁷

According to MacKenzie's local informants, the Laird of Barra and Lord MacDonald were returning in their boats from an exhibition or fair in the company of several attendants and followers when they were overtaken by a violent storm. The storm, which lasted for two days and was followed by a heavy thick fog, blew them far off their course where they managed to find shelter on a small deserted island.²⁸ The fog became so thick that they were unable to get their bearings. The party was not prepared for such an event and since it was late in the autumn, many had given up hopes of getting off the island alive.

Death stared them in the face; and everyone, but Rory MacNeil, gave up all hopes of getting out of that place alive. He said to his despairing companions: *'Na faighinn a lathadh a thoirt as mo mheoirean, chuirinn suas an dos mor fiach an cluinneadh iah air Tir More.'* [If I could get the numbness out of my fingers, I would set up the big drone in the bagpipes to try if they would hear it on the mainland.] He had a set of pipes for which the laird paid seventy pounds, and which he gave him as a present. He set up the pipes and played some tune or dirge which signified that the player was in distress. The sounds of the pibroch were heard and understood by the people on the mainland. A rescuing party went in the direction from which the music was coming, and took the half perished sufferers from their uncomfortable quarters.²⁹

This story indicates that while Rory's bagpipe was outfitted with a bass drone, it may not have been frequently used.

The number of surviving instruments in Nova Scotia is small when compared to the number of immigrant pipers who came to the province. There are several reasons for this. Since bagpipes were expensive to purchase, one instrument would be used by several family members and, over time, become worn out and eventually discarded. Others, such as John MacGillivray's bagpipe, purchased for him by his patron, MacDonald of Glenaladale for 13 guineas, along with several other sets from around Nova Scotia, were destroyed in various house fires over the years. Add to these factors a marked increase in population which strained many rural resources. This resulted in a substantial outward migration to the United States and Western Canada by descendants of immigrant pipers, who usually took the family instruments with them. One such case was the family of Robert MacIntyre.

Robert MacIntyre was descended from the celebrated family of pipers in Rannoch who hereditarily served Menzies of Weem. Before he immigrated to Cape Breton around 1813, he served as piper to MacDonald of Clanranald and

²⁷ Archibald A. MacKenzie, *The MacKenzie's History of Christmas Island Parish* (Sudbury: Mackenzie Roth, 1984), p. 113.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

later MacDonald of Kinlochmoidart.³⁰ Several decades after his death, his family immigrated to Saskatchewan and carried with them a bagpipe which had belonged to Robert's great-grandfather, John MacIntyre.³¹ This instrument, which appears to have originally consisted of two tenor drones and was reputedly played at the Battle of Culloden in 1746, is still in the family's possession in the Western United States.³²

The following bagpipes are of particular interest because of the various drone configurations and provenance surrounding the respective instruments. While it would be foolhardy to try and identify an exact date of manufacture, the family lore surrounding the examples discussed below can elucidate what we know of their arrival in Nova Scotia. This provides a fixed date in time in conjunction with several samples of rather unique instruments. The Scottish examples described below include a variety of drone configurations, both two- and three-droned. Since the Scottish-made instruments illustrated here bear no makers' marks, each bagpipe is identified by the surname of the immigrant piper who carried it to the New World.

Single-droned Bagpipes

The earliest Highland bagpipe in existence is probably the single-droned bagpipe, known as the 'Bannockburn' or 'Menzies' bagpipe which is currently on display in the West Highland Museum, Fort William, Scotland. This bagpipe consists of a single drone, chanter and blowpipe and originally belonged to the aforementioned family of MacIntyres from Rannoch. A second single-droned bagpipe was owned by another MacIntyre family in Cape Breton and used as a beginner set, but whether the instrument consisted as an original single drone or if the bagpipe was merely the remnants of an older set is uncertain. This bagpipe, as well as a two-droned relic from the Battle of Waterloo, was destroyed in separate house fires in Cape Breton in the late twentieth century. According to local folklore, both instruments were brought to Cape Breton from South Uist around 1828–29.

Two-droned Bagpipes

Since the Highland Society of Scotland banned two-droned bagpipes from competition, one can only assume that there must have been several or many sets

³⁰ Barry W. Shears, 'The fate of Clanranald piper Robert MacIntyre', *Piping Today* 11 (2004), pp. 36–8.

³¹ Colin MacRae, 'The Bells of Perth' (n.d., n. p.). Reverend Colin MacRae restored the bagpipe to playing condition in 1960 and later wrote a brief description the bagpipe and a bit of its history. The genealogical information in his typed description leaves out a generation of MacIntyre pipers. John MacIntyre was Robert's great grandfather, not his grandfather.

³² Ibid.

in existence at that time. A bagpipe which consists of only two tenor drones has several advantages over its three-droned counterpart. It can be played on either the right or left shoulder and, with one less drone to worry about, it might stay in tune longer. In addition, a two-droned instrument would require less materials and time to make, which would have reduced the overall cost of manufacture.

Most pipers today play with the pipe bag under the left arm, but this was not always the case. In the nineteenth century there was much less regimentation as to which arm held the pipe bag or which hand was uppermost on the chanter.³³ Some early portraits of pipers, such as the Laird of Grant's Piper (1714), Alan MacDonald, Piper to Archibald Montgomerie, Eleventh Earl of Eglinton (c.1790), and John MacGillivray, MacDonald of Glenaladale's piper (c.1814), all show a three-droned instrument held under the right arm. When the transition from the right shoulder to the left occurred is impossible to say with any certainty. After examining some older three-droned bagpipes in Nova Scotia, it would appear that at least one set was deliberately made with a significantly larger outside tenor drone stock to accommodate moving the position of the bass drone depending on which shoulder the pipe was to be held (see Illustration 3.7).



Illustration 3.1 Angus Ban MacDougall's bagpipe.

³³ Barry W. Shears, *The Gathering of the Clans Collection, Volume one* (Halifax, 2001). This book contains several photographs collected in Nova Scotia which depict both right- and left-shouldered pipers and a variety of hand positions.

One two-droned bagpipe which did survive to the present day was brought to Cape Breton from Moidart, Scotland around 1820 by a noted piper and step-dancer, Angus 'Ban' MacDougall. The MacDougall bagpipe (see Illustration 3.1), currently has three drones, but the bass drone appears to have been added at some time during the nineteenth century. The chanter is original to the set and the blow pipe is a crude replacement made from a North American hardwood.



Illustration 3.2 Roderick MacLean, c. 1880, from a charcoal etching.

There are no markings on the bagpipe to indicate who made it; a common characteristic for instruments of this age. Another two-droned set, tenors only, surfaced recently at an auction in the neighbouring province of Prince Edward Island. In the case of both two-droned sets a bass drone, made by another maker in a much different style, was added presumably at a later date.

The Irish war-pipe is said to have consisted of two drones, possibly a bass and tenor,³⁴ and a similarly configured bagpipe may have been brought to Cape Breton. The MacLean bagpipe was brought to Cape Breton by a family of MacLeans from Barra.

Lachlan MacLean was 18 years old at the Battle of Culloden in 1746 and family lore says that he immigrated to Cape Breton as an old man and died when he was 115 years old. Lachlan MacLean had two sons who were pipers and when the family left Barra for Cape Breton on the ship *Ann* in 1817, they stopped for a short time at Tobermory, Isle of Mull, before beginning the transatlantic crossing to North America.³⁵ While they waited for clearance to leave port, Lachlan acquired a set of pipes for his son, Peter, to play in the New World. Peter drowned in 1827 in Cape Breton and the pipes were passed on to his younger brother, Roderick MacLean. A charcoal etching of Roderick MacLean (Illustration 3.2) depicts a two-droned bagpipe consisting of what appears to be a bass and tenor drone.³⁶

³⁴ Cannon, *The Highland Bagpipe and its Music*, p. 22.

³⁵ Alex D. MacLean, 'The Pioneers of Washabuckt' (unpublished, typed manuscript history of Washabuck County, Cape Breton, dated 15 September 1940), p. 16.

³⁶ The charcoal etching is believed to be of Roderick MacLean, Lachlan's youngest son, but since these types of portraits were sometimes reproduced from tin-type photographs, which date from the late nineteenth century, the piper maybe a grandson of the pioneer, Lachlan MacLean. He is certainly too youthful-looking to be a son of a man born in 1728.

The MacLean bagpipe changed hands several times after Roderick's death and around 1901 it ended up in the possession of a stone mason from Inverness County. The whereabouts of this bagpipe are presently unknown.³⁷

Three-droned Bagpipes

The majority of the surviving immigrant bagpipes in Nova Scotia are three-droned instruments. Some examples are in reasonably good condition but most are severely cracked and unplayable in their present state. Still, the shape and design of the instruments offer a unique perspective of the eighteenth-century woodworkers' craft.

The area around Lake Ainslie, Inverness County, attracted numerous settlers from the west coast of Scotland in the early part of the nineteenth century. Protestant Gaels settled on the east side of the lake, while Catholic Gaels occupied the west side. In 1820 a family of MacKinnons left the Island of Muck and settled at East Lake Ainslie. Members of this particular family were known in Cape Breton as *Clann Fhionghuinn a' Chiùil* [MacKinnons of the Music] and the extended family included several pipers, fiddlers and step dancers.³⁸ One member of the family, Archibald MacKinnon (1784–1872), known in Gaelic as *Am Baitsealair Mor* or The Big Bachelor, was an accomplished piper and fiddler. He taught one of his nephews, 'Big' Farquhar MacKinnon, and a niece, Annie MacKinnon, to play both instruments.³⁹ 'Big' Farquhar is shown holding the family bagpipe in Illustration 3.3.



Illustration 3.3 'Big' Farquhar MacKinnon holding the family bagpipe, c.1910.

³⁷ A similarly configured bagpipe, bass and tenor, surfaced a few years ago but since it is not a complete set, it is impossible to positively identify the bagpipe as originally having only two drones.

³⁸ Hugh N. MacDonald, *MacDonald and MacKinnon Families (a Biographical Sketch)* (Truro, 1937), p. 18.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 19.



Illustration 3.4 Drone top sections of the three-droned MacKinnon bagpipe. Courtesy of Jim and Mary Lyons.

There was a local tradition that the bagpipe, which consists of three drones, had been played at the Battle of Waterloo,⁴⁰ and there is a chance that Archibald MacKinnon may have been a piper during the Napoleonic Wars. The MacKinnon bagpipe is distinguished by a plain metal ring on each of the drone tops, as shown in Illustration 3.4, the usual combing and beading on the wooden sections and ferrules which have a bead turned not quite on the end of the



Illustration 3.5 Pieces of the three-droned MacKinnon bagpipe. Courtesy of Jim and Mary Lyons.

mount. One tenor drone top and three of the four tuning pins have been shortened or broken off, as seen in Illustration 3.5.

In 1841 a family of MacMillan pipers came from Daliburgh, South Uist to Cape Breton. This family consisted of three piping brothers, Donald 'Mor', James and Neil.⁴¹ Neil was unsatisfied with life in Cape Breton and returned to Scotland but not before promising to play at his young niece's wedding if she ever decided to marry.⁴² On

Neil's return to Scotland he received a serious

head injury in a shipwreck off Stornoway which prevented him from playing the pipes, although he did teach piping to others.⁴³ Neil fulfilled his promise to pipe at

⁴⁰ John G. Gibson, *Old and New World Highland Bagpiping* (Montreal and Edinburgh: McGill-Queens University Press and National Museums of Scotland, 2002), p. 223.

⁴¹ Allan J. MacMillan, *A West Wind to East Bay* (Antigonish: The Casket Printing and Publishing Co., 2001), pp. 480–85.

⁴² Peter Morrison, interviewed by the writer in 1986.

⁴³ MacMillan, *A West Wind*, p. 485.

his niece's wedding when he returned to Cape Breton several years later. During the wedding reception he was handed a set of bagpipes, and within a few bars of his first tune he suffered a brain haemorrhage and died.⁴⁴

This family of MacMillans brought with them at least two sets of bagpipes which have survived into the twenty-first century. One set resembles the work of Malcolm MacGregor, an early nineteenth-century pipe maker in London, who, between the years 1813 to 1815, supplied the prize pipe for the Highland Society of London's competitions.⁴⁵ The second MacMillan set, shown in Illustration 3.6, appears to have a much older history and, judging from the shape of the bells and limited combing and beading, probably dates to the second half of the eighteenth century. Unfortunately one of the tenor drones is missing from this set.



Illustration 3.6 MacMillan bagpipe, tenor and bass drone tops, eighteenth century.

Another three-droned bagpipe which may possibly have its origins in the late eighteenth century was discovered a few years ago in Pictou County. The instrument is complete except for a replacement blow-pipe stock and two missing

⁴⁴ Morrison, interviewed by the writer in 1986.

⁴⁵ Campbell, *Highland Bagpipe Makers*, pp. 17–18.

ring caps on the drone bells. There are several possibilities for its origin, but the most plausible is that it is a relic of the American Revolutionary War. It was found in an area settled by veterans of the 84th Royal Highland Emigrants.⁴⁶ This unit, which consisted of two battalions, drew many of its recruits from disbanded Highland soldiers who had been given land grants in North America after the end of the Seven Years War.⁴⁷ After Britain's defeat the 84th was disbanded in 1783 at Windsor, Nova Scotia and additional land grants were offered to disbanded soldiers in Pictou County.⁴⁸ The pipe box resembles a chart box and is unusual in shape and size. In addition to the bagpipe, the pipe box also contained a rosewood fife, which suggests a military provenance.

The bagpipe itself, shown in Illustration 3.7, seems to have undergone a modernization of sorts sometime in the nineteenth century. This 'facelift' included a coat of black stain and stencilled rings of white paint to simulate bushings on the tops of the bells. It is fully mounted in horn and the form of the projecting mounts seems to straddle the small button mount style and the later appearance of the wider projecting mounts. The mounts are pressure-fitted and, in the case of the chanter sole, the end of the chanter is bevelled to receive the sole from one direction only.



Illustration 3.7 A horn-mounted set of bagpipes and fife c.1776. Notice the small size of the middle tenor drone stock relative to the outside tenor and bass stocks.

⁴⁶ See Keith Sanger, 'One piper or two: Neil MacLean of the 84th Highlanders', in this volume for further discussion of the bagpipe's role in the 84th Royal Highland Emigrants.

⁴⁷ Calvin Lee Craig, *The young Emigrants and the Craigs of Magaguadavic* (New Brunswick, 2005), pp. 6–8.

⁴⁸ James M. Cameron, *Pictonians in Arms* (New Brunswick, 1969), pp. 24–31.

Nova Scotia bagpipe-makers

In most cases the pipe-maker in Nova Scotia was also a wood-turner. This very old profession was indispensable to pioneer society. The manufacture of chair and table legs, spinning wheels, and repairs to various farming implements were all part of the woodworker's craft. Many nineteenth-century wood-turners made a profitable sideline of making and repairing bagpipes by offering a comparatively inexpensive alternative to importing new instruments from Scotland. Between the years 1820 and 1920, almost twenty individuals in Nova Scotia made bagpipes.⁴⁹ A few of these pipe-makers made less than half a dozen sets for local pipers in their respective communities while a handful of others, such as the abovementioned Alexander 'Ban' MacIsaac of Giants Lake, made single sets of pipes for their own use. Over the past 25 years, research on piping in Nova Scotia has uncovered several examples of home-made bagpipes from Pictou County, Inverness County and Cape Breton County.

The bagpipes made in Nova Scotia represent a functional device as well as a form of folk art. These instruments, fashioned from wood and decorated with fittings of horn, brass and bone, were both aesthetically pleasing and useful. Not only were these instruments the product of a woodworker's craft, but in the right hands they provided hours of music for both listening and dancing.

In Nova Scotia the most common hardwoods used in bagpipe manufacture were apple-wood and sometimes ash or pearwood; usually stained black. Occasionally, if the maker lived close to a shipbuilding centre, some tropical woods, such as *lignum vitae*, were available. In the nineteenth century Nova Scotia was known for its expertise in wooden shipbuilding and there were several craftsmen who had the necessary skills to make a set of bagpipes. Allan Gillis (b.1836) was known locally as Allan 'Turner' because of his skill with a lathe. He worked at the local shipyard in Fourchu, Cape Breton and constructed several sets of bagpipes over his lifetime. One of these instruments was made from *lignum vitae* and was reputed to have had a soft mellow tone, ideal for playing indoors. Many of the instruments made in Nova Scotia were turned on a lathe, usually powered by a foot treadle, and in some instances the various parts of the bagpipe were carved by hand. The conical shape of the pipe chanter was achieved by using an old three-sided French bayonet as a reamer. The local pipe-maker used whatever material was available for mounts, including cattle horn, bone, brass, sea ivory from walruses and whales or ivory from billiard balls.

Bagpipe-makers in Nova Scotia would undoubtedly copy sets brought from Scotland and this might explain why Nova Scotia bagpipes reflect the style and size of an earlier period. In Scotland larger, more ornate mounts of ivory and silver started to appear in the 1800s, reflecting Britain's position at the top of the food chain in world commerce.

⁴⁹ Shears, 'The changing role', pp. 163–4.

The most notable feature of the surviving home-made instruments are the number and size of the drones. One of the most successful pipe-makers in Nova Scotia, Duncan Gillis of Grand Mira, made only two-droned sets at first, adding a bass drone when requested to do so. Duncan Gillis was born in Margaree, Inverness County, around the middle of the nineteenth century and his family later relocated to the Gaelic settlement at Grand Mira to be closer to relatives. It is not known when he began making bagpipes or who he was apprenticed to as a turner. An advertisement in the *Pictou News* of 1886 claimed that Gillis was the only manufacturer of bagpipes in America, which might indicate that he was in business for a few years at least by this time. Unfortunately, no record books have survived to indicate just how many sets of bagpipes Gillis made. For many years it was thought that Duncan Gillis patterned his bagpipes after an old set of David Glen bagpipes, but the recent discovery of a much older immigrant set and its obvious similarities to Gillis's pipes, shown in Illustration 3.8, suggests an alternative influence. This particular immigrant bagpipe was reputedly played at the Battle of Waterloo in 1815; not an uncommon claim for many old sets of bagpipes in Nova Scotia. However, the instrument appears to have been made earlier – possibly during the 1700s.



Illustration 3.8 Two tenor drones. Top – immigrant drone. Bottom – Duncan Gillis drone.

A set of Duncan Gillis pipes won first prize at the Cape Breton County Exhibition of 1919 or 1920⁵⁰ and at least three sets were sold at the Mabou Exhibition in the 1890s, so even at a rate of two or three sets a year his output could have been very close to 100 sets of bagpipes over his lifetime. A set of Duncan Gillis bagpipes is on display at the College of Piping Museum in Glasgow, Scotland and several years ago a set of Gillis pipes surfaced at a yard sale in Ontario.



Illustration 3.9 A Duncan Gillis bagpipe, authors collection.

Duncan Gillis proved so successful in his pipe-making endeavours that he was celebrated in a Gaelic song composed by the Margaree Bard, Malcolm Gillis, a portion of which follows:

⁵⁰ Allister MacGillivray, *A Cape Breton Ceilidh* (Sydney: Sea-cape Music, 1988), p. 214.

Thainig sgeul oirnn o chionn bliadhna,
 Sgeul a riaraich mi neo-throm,
 Sgeul bha taitneach leis gach Gàidheal
 A chaidh àrach anns an fhonns':
 Donnchadh Tàillear bho an Bhràighe,
 Fear mo gràidh as aille com,
 A bhith dèanamh phìob am Mira:
 Beannachd air a làimh nach lom!

[We received news a year ago
 News which pleased and cheered me
 News delightful to every Gael;
 Who was brought up in this area:
 Duncan Tailor of Upper Margaree
 My dear handsome man
 Is now making pipes in Mira—
 Blessings on his bountiful hand!

Beannachd air a làmh neo-cheardaich
 A tha ainmeil air gach gnìomh,
 'S air an eanchainn anns 'n do chinnich
 Mórán grinnis 's am bi sgiamh!
 'N a chuid obair cha bhi fàillinn,
 Ach gu dealbhach, làidir, dìon—
 'S beag an t-ioghnadh 's gu 'n robh
 chàirdean Eòlach, talantach o chian.

Blessings on his skilful hand
 Noted for every task,
 And on his intellect which produced
 Much artistic beauty:
 There will be no defect in his work
 It will be shapely, firm and secure,
 Small wonder as his people were
 Adept and talented long ago

'S mór an onair do an Gàidheil
 A tha tàmh an Albainn Nuadh
 Donnchadh Tàillear bhith 's an tìr leo
 Cumail ciùil an sinnsreadh buan.
 'S tric a dh'ùraich fuaim nam pìoban
 Càileachd nam fear rioghail suas—
 Clann nan Gàidheal o na fraochan,
 Fir mo ghaoil-sa, laoiach nam buadh.

What great honour for the Gaels
 Who live in Nova Scotia
 That Duncan Tailor is in their land
 Keeping the music of their ancestors alive.
 Often did the sound of the pipes stimulate
 The disposition of these noble men,
 The Children of the Gael from the heaths
 My beloved ones, valiant heroes].

This song⁵¹ also alludes to a possible family tradition of bagpipe-making in the Gillis family in Scotland. Duncan's neighbour in Grand Mira was Allan Gillis but it has yet to be determined if he was the same Allan 'Turner' Gillis mentioned above, or just how closely they were related.

Another successful Nova Scotia pipe-maker was Robert Ross of Pictou County. From all available evidence, Robert Ross was the first person in Nova Scotia, and possibly North America, to make full sets of Highland bagpipes, pre-dating Duncan Gillis by over half a century.

Ross was born in Cuthill, Dornoch Parish, Scotland in 1769 and immigrated to Pictou around 1816.⁵² There is a family tradition that he was a veteran piper of the Battle of Waterloo, but this is unsubstantiated. Surviving documents indicate that he served a period of six months in the 75th Regiment and was discharged in 1809, six years before the Battle of Waterloo. The 75th Regiment was known as the 75th Stirlingshire Regiment, which was raised as a Highland unit in 1787. It is perhaps no coincidence that 1809 is the same year in which the 75th Highlanders were redesignated as the 75th Foot and deprived of its Highland dress. Changes to the regiment may have eliminated the position of company piper as well.⁵³

There is some evidence in Scotland to suggest Robert Ross was piper to George MacKay of Skibo (a son of Lord Reay), and that Robert's wife, Isabel MacKay, was a daughter of a MacKay piper.⁵⁴ In the Nova Scotia census of 1838 Robert Ross lists his occupation as Piper, a designation which was shared with only two others in the province. According to family tradition, Robert Ross applied for a land grant in Pictou County but due to a delay in processing his request, several adult members of his family decided to move to West Bay, Richmond County, to take advantage of the recent land availability in Cape Breton.⁵⁵ An examination of the surviving part of a bagpipe attributed to him indicates that Ross used tropical woods for his bagpipes (three-droned), and mounted them with sea ivory. Ross eventually received his land grant and continued to live in Bay View, Pictou County, until his death in 1843. His Will is registered as 'Robert Ross, Piper' and lists, among his many other possessions, 'two pares (*sic*) of bagpipes'. In his Will he bequeaths to his oldest son Alexander, then living in Cape Breton, 'all my tools for bagpipe making'.⁵⁶ Two of Robert Ross's children, Alexander (1801–61) and William, continued to work as wood-turners in Cape Breton and in all likelihood continued to make and repair bagpipes.

A set of bagpipes once owned by Robert Ross, possibly from his early army years, is still in the family's possession and is shown in Illustration 3.10. The

⁵¹ 'Song to Duncan Gillis of Mira, a Maker of Bagpipes' in Hector MacDougall (ed.), *The Songster of the Hills and Glens* (Glasgow: Alexander MacLaren & Sons, 1939), p. 13. This English translation was kindly sent to me by Effie Rankin, Mabou, NS.

⁵² Jean Ross, personal correspondence with the writer, dated 26 May 2003.

⁵³ Shears, 'The changing role', p. 79.

⁵⁴ Campbell, *Highland Bagpipe Makers*, p. 16.

⁵⁵ Shears, 'The changing role', p. 80.

⁵⁶ Ross, personal correspondence, 26 May 2003.



Illustration 3.10 The chalice-shaped drone tops of Robert Ross's bagpipe.

outside tenor is a nineteenth-century replacement and the chanter is a modern addition. The overall shape of this bagpipe, with button mounts and chalice-shaped drone bells, is reminiscent of the pipes played by Neil MacLean, former piper to the Highland Society of London, as seen in his portrait of 1784.⁵⁷

The self-reliance of colonial society in the nineteenth century and Nova Scotia's relative isolation from mainstream piping until early in the twentieth century enabled local craftsmen to continue making bagpipes in the traditional manner. In the first two decades of the twentieth century interest in piping began to wane in the rural areas and, as more and more people started to relocate to larger centres, the need for locally made instruments declined. The development of the significant coal deposits and a new steel plant in Sydney, Cape Breton, provided much-needed employment. Despite the economic opportunities created in the coal mines of Nova Scotia, outward migration continued to drain a large portion of the population to 'the Boston States' and Ontario. The lure of steady wages and a more modern lifestyle lured two pipe-makers to Boston from Nova Scotia in the late 1890s.

John MacDonald was a piper and pipe-maker from Pictou County. His father and grandfather were both pipers and he eventually set up a shop making and repairing bagpipes and violins on Tremont Street in Boston, Massachusetts. In addition, Ronald MacLean is reputed to have made a single set of bagpipes before he left Cape Breton for Boston around 1895. He was a skilled wood-carver and spent most of his life in the Boston area where his skills were much in demand.

More disposable income and the availability of imported bagpipes made it easier, and indeed preferable, to rely on Scotland for the production of new instruments. In Scotland tropical woods, with their superior tonal qualities, had virtually displaced local timber in the manufacture of bagpipes. The number of firms involved in pipe-making had increased significantly to accommodate the growing civilian pipe band movement which had spread throughout the world and these firms soon dominated the market.⁵⁸

During the First World War there was a small demand for Scottish-made bagpipes for the army pipe bands raised in Nova Scotia. In the case of the 185th Battalion Cape Breton Highlanders, bagpipes were purchased by various charitable organizations, civic groups and wealthy patrons, and these included Henderson and Glen bagpipes. A request by Pipe Major Kenneth MacKenzie Baillie resulted in 16 sets of Lawrie pipes being purchased for the 246th Battalion Nova Scotia Highlanders. Many pipers in the 25th Battalion brought their own pipes with them when they enlisted, although there was no official 25th pipe band at the beginning of the war. By the 1920s the local market for home-made bagpipes had dried up; a few hobbyists continued to make the occasional set of bagpipes during the

⁵⁷ See Sanger, 'One piper or two' in this volume for further discussion of Neil MacLean's career and instrument.

⁵⁸ See Campbell, *Highland Bagpipe Makers*.

twentieth century but, by the end of the First World War, the heyday of the local pipe-maker was quickly coming to a close.

Conclusion

Highland immigration to Nova Scotia from 1773 to 1850 coincided with changes in Scotland to the instrument and its manufacture. These changes were prompted by the banning of two-droned bagpipes from competition, the increasing prominence of tropical woods for musical instrument-making and the emergence of a small number of professional bagpipe makers. The Scottish Gaels who came to Nova Scotia brought with them not only examples of older instruments but the knowledge of how to manufacture bagpipes based on older techniques and materials. The move to a three-droned bagpipe and the heavier and thicker ‘army’ pattern influenced a generation of pipe-makers in Scotland. With an increased demand by the army for musical instruments, and the development of the pipe and drum band both in military and civilian circles, the small individual bagpipe-maker in Scotland was replaced by professional pipe-making firms like MacDonald, Glen, MacDougall, and later Gunn, MacPhee, Henderson and a host of others. These firms expanded their product line to include articles of Highland dress and accoutrements, and several printed collections of pipe music.

In Nova Scotia the situation was much different. The demand for locally produced bagpipes, while never large, peaked just prior to 1900 and actually declined as industrialization gripped the province. Continued outward migration after 1880 decreased the overall number of pipers in Nova Scotia. Improvements in transportation, outward migration, changes in entertainment preferences in the first half of the twentieth century, and the rise of a new class of urbanite with more disposable income to spend on luxuries such as Scottish-made bagpipes, all contributed to the decline of a local bagpipe-making industry. As the need for tradespeople such as turners declined in an increasingly industrial society, pipe-making in Nova Scotia was eventually reduced to a hobby status. Without sufficient local markets, the skill of turning wood, horn and bone into bagpipes gradually faded from memory. This survey of immigrant bagpipes and local pipe-makers is important inasmuch as the musical instruments which did survive continue to offer clues to bagpipe manufacture, not only in the musical world of the Nova Scotia Gael, but also in the pipe-making traditions of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Scotland.

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Chapter 4

The Making of Bagpipe Reeds and Practice Chanters in South Uist

J. Decker Forrest

The following chapter offers a detailed study of the indigenous manufacture of Highland bagpipe drone and chanter reeds, practice chanter reeds and practice chanters in South Uist. It offers unusual and now rare insights into a musical tradition and extraneous influences on Scottish piping (conventionally described as a monolithic tradition). It begins with an overview of how the research began and places home-made instrumentation in South Uist in wider contexts. This is followed by a discussion of the practice chanter's use and history in the Highland pipe tradition and examines how it was manufactured and used in ways that varied from the mainstream in South Uist. Practice chanter reeds are then discussed in a similar vein and a description of one method of manufacture carried out by the author with an informant is given in detail. The two sections which follow concern the experimental manufacture of two different types of home-made practice chanter based on informant descriptions. The wider implications of the preceding sections are examined in the conclusion, which concerns sound aesthetics, the role of the practice chanter in South Uist as a musical instrument as well as a learning and practising aid, ear-learned piping and the decline of home-made instrumentation.

Instigation

Research began about five years ago when a man who would later become my brother-in-law, Aonghas Iain MacKenzie, in Gerraidh Bhalteas, South Uist, mentioned to me that when he was learning to play the practice chanter in the mid-1980s, an elderly neighbour made a practice chanter reed for him out of a straw pulled from a corn-stack. Aonghas Iain described how his neighbour cut a small section of the straw and, after a few seconds of pulling it through his teeth, placed it in the practice chanter. He recalled that the sound produced was 'sweet' and not unlike that of a practice chanter fitted with a modern plastic practice chanter reed. Soon, however, the reed dried out and split and Aonghas Iain went back to playing his normal plastic reed – the kind which is now used by pipers the world over.

Aonghas Iain's testimony sparked research which led to a detailed study of not just home-made practice chanter reeds but of other piping articles as well. It also proved to be representative of numerous economizing practices that, until

relatively recently, were applied to all facets of everyday life in South Uist; from crofting to music-making.¹ The current work focuses mainly on practice chanter reeds and practice chanters and to a lesser extent pipe chanter reeds and drone reeds (of which less information appears to survive in the Hebridean community). Through the course of my research I discovered that many of the methods of reed and practice chanter manufacture in South Uist were also once common in other parts of Scotland, if not elsewhere in the world. However, due to the far-reaching economic and social changes that occurred later in South Uist than elsewhere, details concerning the manufacture of at least some of these items are still in living memory. South Uist was therefore an obvious point of focus for this research.

I have never seen a photo, let alone an actual physical example, of a home-made reed or practice chanter.² I have therefore had to rely on the recollections of informants for information pertaining to the materials and methods of manufacture. The making of drone and pipe chanter reeds and practice chanters had stopped in South Uist by the late 1940s. Within 20 years or so after that, the making of practice chanter reeds also dwindled. As a result, most of my informants were too young to make the first items mentioned, although some recall seeing or hearing details of how they were made. It is worth noting that many of my informants were not pipers themselves but had been passive observers who, throughout their lives, have maintained a keen interest in all things related to piping.

Interviews came from a variety of circumstances ranging from chance encounters and long-standing dialogues to more formal audio-recorded interviews.³ In addition to this type of fieldwork, participatory research in making reeds and practice chanters took place and offered invaluable insight that otherwise would not have been gained through spoken word alone.

Practice Chanters

Those learning to play the Highland bagpipe begin by mastering finger technique and a few simple tunes on a 'practice chanter' or, in Scottish Gaelic, *feadan* – a

¹ It is interesting to reflect that during many of the interviews, informants equated reed and practice chanter-making with other examples of ingenuity and self-reliance, such as the use of crab claws used as smoking pipes in which dried tea was smoked.

² Apparently, however, there was (and perhaps still is) such a photo taken by John MacDonald, Inverness, of his first piping class in South Uist in 1909. The photo was described in 1966 by Neil MacLennan, Loch Baghasdal, who said that the boys were barefoot and possessed home-made practice chanters; see Anon., 'The Flora MacDonald Cup', *Piping Times* 18/6 (March, 1966): 8.

³ Some of these interviews took place in November 2006 with me and Joshua Dickson and have been published as a journal in *Piping Today*. See J. Decker Forrest and Joshua Dickson, 'Piping in South Uist and Benbecula: a research journal, 21–27 November 2006', *Piping Today* 28 (2007): 25–9; 29 (2007): 13–16; 30 (2007): 27–31.

simple mouth-blown instrument based on the scale of the larger and louder bagpipe chanter.⁴ It comprises a miniature pipe chanter but with a cylindrical rather than conical bore, a top section that serves to protect the practice chanter reed and a mouthpiece. Practice chanters are made from polypenco plastic or tropical hardwood such as ebony [*Diospyrus spp.*] or African blackwood [*Dalbergia Melanoxylon*] and are often adorned with a sole at the base of the chanter [*bonn*], a ferrule at the bottom end of the top section [*bann*] and occasionally a mouthpiece [*gaothaiche*] fashioned from materials such as plastic, ivory, nickel and occasionally silver. They are quiet, portable and relatively inexpensive and therefore allow learners to reach a basic level of finger technique before deciding whether or not to progress to the bagpipe itself.

Practice chanters have been professionally manufactured since at least the early eighteenth century, the first reference occurring in the household accounts of Cameron of Locheil where a ‘feddan’ was recorded as being purchased in 1740 at a cost of five shillings. As Keith Sanger points out, the cost of this chanter was roughly half of that of a pipe chanter; approximately the same ratio exists for basic models of practice chanters and pipe chanters today.⁵ The earliest surviving examples date from the mid-to-late nineteenth century and were turned by bagpipe makers such as William Gunn and Peter Henderson in Glasgow and David Glen in Edinburgh.⁶ The general design of these older examples is the same as those made today.

The fact that practice chanters are so finely crafted reflects the fact that Highland pipers continue to learn new tunes and practice technique regularly on the practice chanter even after mastering the bagpipe. In this respect Highland piping today is different from other European piping traditions, where instruments equivalent to the practice chanter are far simpler in design, are made from local materials by the player (or more commonly by an older relation) and are more or less abandoned after the player has progressed to the bagpipe. This difference may reflect the high level of importance placed on musical literacy and consistent technique in the Highland piping tradition, particularly with regard to pipe band playing where uniformity in tune settings is essential, and in competition solo

⁴ In South Uist, *sionnsair* is usually used for the bagpipe chanter and *feadan* is used for the practice chanter.

⁵ National Archives of Scotland, Campbell of Dunstaffnage Papers, GD 202/42 (Household, estate and personal papers of Cameron of Lochiel, 1684 to 1792). Quoted in Keith Sanger, ‘Who were the eighteenth century Highland bagpipe makers: evidence from contemporary sources’, *Proceedings of the Piobaireachd Society Conference* (Glasgow: The Piobaireachd Society, 2008), p. 6.

⁶ The examples cited here are in the National Museums of Scotland. See Hugh Cheape, *A Check-list of Bagpipes in the Edinburgh University Collection of Historic Musical Instruments* (Edinburgh University Collection of Historic Musical Instruments, 1983). The practice chanter made by William Gunn from c.1850 (NMS.H.1995.786) is perhaps the oldest in the collection.

pipings where published settings of tunes must be played as written. Because of the effort involved in tuning, the limited playing time and considerable volume of the Highland bagpipe which restricts where, when and how often a piper can practice (particularly in urban areas), the practice chanter is indispensable for learning tunes slowly from the written page, practising ornaments repeatedly without irritating those within earshot, and for pipe majors to quickly identify individual faults and inconsistencies from within the pipe corps by quickly going ‘round the table’ at a pipe band ‘chanter practice’.

In Scotland, as elsewhere in Europe, various homemade chanters were once common. Angus MacKay made reference to his father who, at least at the initial stages of learning to play the pipes in Raasay, played a chanter made from the stalk of a yellow iris [*sealasdair*]:

Fir Eyre [Malcolm MacLeod] played the pipes and was teaching a young lad; my father used to overhear them and pick up his lesson and play the same on the moors while herding; and that on a fiadan Sialeasda he was overheard by Fir Aire, who taught him and afterwards sent him to the college of the MacCrummens and to the MacKays of Gearloch...” (MacKay A. MS 3756: ii-iv)

Similarly, the folklorist J.F. Campbell of Islay (1822–85) referred to the ‘oaten pipe’, (often referred to in pastoral literature) and suggests its use as a practice chanter: ‘Many a pipe did boys make of straws in the days of my youth, and much discord did we produce, in trying to play on the slender oaten pipe in emulation of ‘John Piper’ [i.e. John Campbell of Lorn]’⁷ In both examples the chanters described appear to have been simply made from readily available materials and suggest that their usage may have been a combination of musical ‘toy’ and learning aid to the bagpipes.

Similar homemade chanters were still being used in Scotland well into the twentieth century and consisted of a single cylindrical section with finger holes and central bore burned through with a red-hot piece of wire. There was no top section or mouthpiece to protect the reed; rather, the reed was fitted into the top end of the chanter, which was then placed directly into the mouth. The material used seems to have varied and depended on what was locally available. Willie MacPhee (1910–2002), a traveller from Perthshire, described making practice chanters out of ‘benwid’ [ragwort – *Senecio jacobaea*] that grew at the side of the road.⁸ Calum Campbell, from Griep near Dunvegan in Skye, told me that

⁷ John Francis Campbell, *Canntaireachd: Articulate Music* (Glasgow: Archibald Sinclair, 1880), p. 9. The oaten pipe seems to have died out sooner than other similar home-made instruments made from other materials. This may be due to the fact that oats and other grains were gradually modified to grow shorter and thinner, making them better for agricultural processes but less suited for making chanter-like instruments.

⁸ Sheila Douglas, *The Last of the Tinsmiths: The Life of Willie MacPhee* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2006), p. 95.



Illustration 4.1 *Cuilc* chanter (top), bamboo chanter (middle) and modern, professionally manufactured chanter (bottom). CD tracks 15–17 feature a comparison of the sound quality of each chanter with the tune ‘Am Muilleann Dubh’.

previous generations of pipers from the west of Skye used branches from elder trees.⁹ Another informant, Duncan MacInnes, recalled his father telling him that he had made elder chanters in Broadford at the southern end of Skye as a boy in the early 1930s.¹⁰ Elder is of course used for making similar instruments in other parts of Europe and, like ragwort, has a soft pith, allowing for a central bore to be easily burned through with a hot wire.

Practice Chanters in South Uist

In South Uist, where it is said that there once was a piper in every household, practice chanters were once very common. Katie Mary MacInnes, who grew up in Loch Carnain in the 1920s, recalled that practice chanters were displayed in a window in every second house.¹¹ According to her, a chanter sitting conspicuously in a window carried the message that visitors were welcome to enter at will for a

⁹ Interviewed 27 October 2007.

¹⁰ Duncan further recalled that his father said that once a branch was selected and cut, it was then soaked in water for a period of time before being tied tightly to a broomstick to straighten it. Interviewed 21 April 2008.

¹¹ Interviewed 3 January 2007.

ceilidh. Joan Martin from Dalabrog also recalled practice chanter sitting in window ledges of thatched cottages.¹² She explained that they were kept there because it was one of the only flat surfaces in the house where a practice chanter could be safely stored. Furthermore, because a long bench was placed below the window where the player would sit, the practice chanter was always close at hand.

While chanters made on the mainland became increasingly common in the early twentieth century, it is clear that in earlier times it was more basic, locally made practice chanters that were most common in South Uist. As with Katie Mary and Joan, Donald John MacDonald (1919–86) from Peighinn nan Aoirean recalled that practice chanters were once very common and cited, in particular, homemade practice chanters:

Bha barrachd ùidhe aig òigridh an là an dè an Uibhist ann an ceòl Gaidhlaig na tha aig òigridh ar latha-ne. Faodaidh gu bheil seo nàdurra gu leòr, le caochladh sheòrsachan cultuir air feadh an eilein an diugh, ach aig an àm ud bha gach gille is nighean a' dèanamh an dicheall gun a h-innealan ciùil air an robh eòlas aca a chluich aid fhèin. B'ainneamh tigh anns nach robh feadan ga chluich, agus tric 'sann air slait chaoil a bhiodh na feadain sin dèanta. Bhiodh bior-stocainn air a theasachadh deag 'sa ghriosaidh 's air obrachadh troimh mheadhon na slaithe air a faid o cheann gu ceann. Mar an ceudna rachadh na h-ochd tuill a thoirt innte airson nam meòirean, agus le ribheid air a dèanamh air cas an eòrna thigeadh an ceòl a b'aille gu d'chluasan.¹³

[There was more interest in Gaelic music in the previous generation of young people than there is with the same age-group today. This may be natural enough with the death of various cultural activities across the island today, but at that time each boy and girl would make every effort to play musical instruments that were around them. There was rarely a house where a chanter was not played and often the chanters were made from thin rods. A wire was heated red [hot] in the fire and then worked through the middle of the rod from end to end. Likewise, eight holes would be made for the fingers and with a reed made from the bottom [end] of a barley straw, music most pleasing to the ear would come from it.]

Home-made chanters in South Uist, like the one described above by Donald John, had no removable top or mouthpiece and consisted only of a chanter and a straw reed.¹⁴

¹² Interviewed 23 November 2006; 1 January 2007; 2 January 2008.

¹³ Dòmhnall Iain MacDhòmhnaill, *Uibhist a Deas: Beagan mu Eachdraidh is mu Bheul-aithris an Eilein* (Steòrnabhaig [Stornoway]: Acair, 1981), p. 30.

¹⁴ Two exceptions were made by a piper in Iochdar named Angus MacAulay, or 'Aonghas a' Dubha'. According to John MacLean, Angus was a skilled craftsman and was able to make a chanter with a top. He made one for himself and one for another piper in Iochdar named Iain MacKay. One other exceptional chanter was described by Neil MacMillan. This belonged to Angus MacDonald of Gerraidh Bhalteas (*Aonghas beag Dhòmhnaill 'ic Fheargais*), still remembered throughout South Uist as 'The King of Jigs'.

Calum Beaton (1931–)¹⁵ from Staoinebrig recalled that at one time pipers used to differentiate between store-bought practice chanters and home-made practice chanters by referring to store-bought chanters as *feadan stuic* [practice chanter with stock; i.e. removable top and mouthpiece] as opposed to simply *feadan* [practice chanter]. I have also heard it said that at least one South Uist piper referred to home-made chanters as *Feadan Gàidhealach* [Highland practice chanters] and store-bought practice chanters with tops and mouthpieces as *Feadan Gallda* [foreign practice chanters].

Donald John MacDonald did not elaborate on the material used for the practice chanters of his youth, using only the word *slaite* [rod]. However, *slaite* is most commonly used to refer to a fishing rod, and several informants recalled that bamboo fishing rods were in fact used for making practice chanters. Calum Beaton, for example, recalled his father, Archie, saying that he had owned one, and that in addition to bamboo, red pine [*Pinus resinosa*] was also used for making practice chanters. According to Calum, red pine was the most durable wood available and was used for numerous purposes, including roof joists and carts.

Calum noted that he was ‘at the tail-end’ of practice chanter-making and that by his generation store-bought practice chanters were common. As boys in Staoinebrig, Calum and his friend Neil MacDonald made a chanter out of a bamboo fishing rod, but Calum was quick to point out that this was done out of interest rather than necessity. This would have occurred around 1945.

Others of Calum’s generation recalled home-made chanters still being made for young children by a parent or other adult in the 1930s and 1940s. Anne MacMillan remembered her father Donald Allan MacLellan, an ear-learned piper from Baghasdal a Tuath, making one for her brother, Gilbert, using a piece of fencing wire heated in the stove. She noted that bamboo chanters were ideal for small children because they could be made smaller than those bought from the mainland. Her husband, Neil, remembered a man named Neil Campbell from Dalabrog who, as a child, played a bamboo practice chanter made by Murdo MacLellan, a piper from Baghasdal.¹⁶ Alec MacDonald from Loch Einort also played a practice chanter as a boy that was made by his father.¹⁷ Although he could not be certain, he strongly suspected it had been made of bamboo. Neil Johnstone recalled that he and several other local boys attended a chanter class in Dalabrog and that one boy had a practice chanter made from an old chair leg. Willie MacDonald

It was made to Angus’s specifications by a local carpenter. It had no top but was decorated with a simple pattern incised on a lathe at the top and bottom ends. Aside from this example and presumably the two made by Angus MacAulay, home-made chanters were not adorned with any sole or other decoration common with chanters bought from professional bagpipe manufacturers on the mainland.

¹⁵ Interviewed in April 2002 and on the following dates: 13 October 2005, 17 April 2005, 24 November 2006, 2 January 2007, 10 April 2007.

¹⁶ Anne and Neil MacMillan were interviewed on 24 November 2006 and 9 April 2007.

¹⁷ Interviewed on 26 November 2006.

from Benbecula mentioned that *cuilc dubh* [dark rushes – *Phragmites communis*] were once used in practice chanter-making and confirmed the usual method of heating a piece of fencing wire to burn through a central bore and finger holes.¹⁸ Practice chanters made from *cuilc* are mentioned in several Gaelic stories, usually involving fairies.¹⁹ One story gives a brief description of a *cuilc* chanter made by a piper from Mull:

Cha robh am Pàruig Mac Lùcas ach mac banntraich bho chd, air oighreachd Fir-Stafa, an ceann-a-tuath Mhuile. Mar bu ghnàths le balachain, anns an linn a bh'ann bhidh Paruig o mhoch gu dubh a' cluich feadain – feadan cuilc a rinn e fèin – agus le ribheid mhath chònlaich – cha robh idir an droch cheòl anns an inneal.²⁰

[Patrick MacLucas was the son of a poor widow, on the Laird of Stafa's estate in the north end of Mull. As was customary with boys in the past, Patrick would play a chanter from dawn til dusk – a *cuilc* chanter he made himself – with a good straw reed – there was not any bad music that came from the instrument.]

Cuilc, used also for reed-making, would seem to have been an obvious material for making practice chanters in South Uist due to its straightness, smooth surface, soft pith and because it was so common. However, only one other informant, Katie Mary MacInnes, had heard of *cuilc* being used to make some sort of musical instrument. She could only recall that her male classmates, who pulled them up at playtime at Loch Carnain School in the late 1920s, were able to play a tune on them after manipulating them in some way. It may be that *cuilc* had been more popular in earlier times or perhaps only in certain regions in South Uist where other materials were less available.

Methods

Calum Beaton was the only informant who had actually made a practice chanter. As noted above, he and a neighbour, Neil MacDonald, made one from an old bamboo fishing rod when they were boys.²¹ Calum described how he and Neil

¹⁸ Interviewed in January 2008.

¹⁹ See, for example, Anon., 'A mhaduinn àillidh earraich', *Cuairtear nan Gleann* 24 (1842): 325–31.

²⁰ Iain MacCormaic, 'A' Phiobaireachd Fhalaich', *o rain a' Mhoid: Gaelic Songs for Solo Singing, Poem and Prose for Recitation, Leabhar 2* (Glascho [Glasgow]: Alasdair MacLabhrainn 's a Mhic, 1925), p. 16.

²¹ Bamboo, in lengths of between 13 and 15 feet, was once readily available in South Uist and could be found lying around the pier in Loch Baghasdal.

had first measured an old, cracked, 'regular sized'²² store-bought practice chanter to acquire its length and spacing of the finger holes. They then cut the bamboo fishing pole with a saw and heated a length of fencing wire in a peat fire indoors to burn through the finger holes and central bore. Calum could not remember if they burned the central bore or finger holes first. Calum was also unsure whether or not there was a node towards the bottom of the chanter, but suspected there was not and that the internal bore gently tapered from just below the node/reed seat to the bottom of the chanter. He noted (as had Neil MacMillan) that a node in the bamboo served as a natural place for a reed seat as it was solid and allowed for the diameter to be controlled by the diameter of the wire. Calum recalled that burning the holes through was relatively easy because apart from the nodes, bamboo was naturally hollow. As with all practice chanters at that time, a straw reed was used (to be discussed below).

Calum believed that the practice chanters made from red pine described by his father had not been turned on a lathe, but had been shaped to size by a hand plane. Calum speculated that for ease and accuracy, the holes and central bore would have been burned through with a hot wire while the wood was still a block. It would then be planed to shape.

Calum was also the only informant to recall the sound of the bamboo practice chanter. Calum was critical of the chanter he and Neil MacDonald had made and described the sound as 'hollow' and 'loud'. And, when compared to a store-bought practice chanter, it 'did not sound right' and 'was far from perfect'. Calum suspected that the loud and hollow sound was a result of the large, slightly conical bore of the bamboo and speculated that practice chanters made from red pine would have been better because the bore would have been parallel and comparatively narrow; just as with a store-bought practice chanter. He also noted that the 'old pipers' would have had a better knack for making practice chanters than he and Neil had.

Practice Chanter Reed

Today, pipers use practice chanter reeds made primarily of plastic. They are durable, impervious to moisture and inexpensive. Plastic practice chanter reeds were developed to their current form by Alex MacNeill in Canada during the 1960s²³ and are now manufactured primarily in Great Britain and North America by a number of different makers. Before plastic practice chanter reeds became popular

²² Most 'regular' practice chanters are about 10.6 inches long from the sole to the top of the reed seat. These are different from 'long' practice chanters, which are about 1 inch to 2 inches longer. Some pipers maintain that the 'long' chanters feel more similar to actual bagpipe chanters and prefer them. 'Long' practice chanters seem to have become more common over time, but have always been less common than 'regular' ones.

²³ Andrew Berthoff (ed.), 'Alex MacNeill of Montreal: excerpts from a discussion with a living legend', *Piper & Drummer* 8/1 (1990): 26–7.

in the 1970s and 1980s, practice chanter reeds were made similarly to pipe chanter reeds; the blades were shaped from French or Spanish cane [*Arundo donax*] but were longer and thinner than that of a pipe chanter reed. The blades were bound to the staple with thread wrapped around the bottom half of the reed, which was then varnished with lacquer. Finally, the reed was fitted into the practice chanter reed seat using string ('hemp', as pipers call it) to secure the reed into place.

In South Uist, as in other agricultural areas where piping took place, pipers made practice chanter reeds, or *ribheidean*, out of either *eòrna* [barley – *Hordeum vulgare*] or *corca mòr* [large oats or 'sandy oats' – *Avena strigosa*] although the straw of *eòrna* was more supple and less likely to split than that of *corca mòr* and was therefore favoured for reed-making. Straw reeds were once very common throughout Scotland and in Nova Scotia. I have heard of traveller pipers using them in Perthshire and in the west of Skye where, according to Calum Campbell, they were referred to as *fideagan fodar* [straw whistles]. Seumas MacNeill recalled encountering straw reeds when teaching in Skye in the 1950s:

When we had the summer schools in Skye we used to advertise if any of the local boys wanted to come and learn to play the pipes we would teach them without charge. This boy came from several miles past Dunvegan Castle one year. He had a practice chanter and his reed was making a nice sweet sound and I said to him, 'where did you get that reed?' He said, 'I just picked it out of the field on the way down.' It was just a straw which he had pressed together at the top, with no staple, nothing at all. It was a perfectly good practice chanter reed, but every day he had to go and pick another one.²⁴

According to my informants, straw reeds were used by nearly every piper in South Uist until the 1950s or 1960s. According to Calum Beaton, store-bought practice chanter reeds were prohibitively expensive and before economic changes increased the spending power of crofters in the mid-twentieth century, there was not enough money to spend on such items.

Many in South Uist remember making or seeing practice chanter reeds being made from *eòrna* and *corca mòr*, which was once plentiful and available almost year-round. Calum recalled that straws could be taken directly from corn-stacks in winter, but in the spring and summer, when the corn-stacks were gone and the cattle were grazing in the fields, a supply of straw was sometimes kept aside for making reeds. Calum remembered that his father would set aside a bunch [*reic*] of *eòrna* in the rafters of their thatched cottage during this time to be used specifically for reed-making.

Informants varied in their opinion as to the longevity of straw reeds, although most agreed that they typically lasted around two weeks with regular playing. They would have to be moistened in the mouth after each time they were used and

²⁴ George Lumsden, 'Making reeds', *Proceedings of the Piobaireachd Society Conference* (Glasgow: The Piobaireachd Society, 1992), p. 11.



Illustration 4.2 Calum Beaton, right, making reeds from *corca mòr* with the author in Staoinebrig, South Uist.

this would eventually lead to them splitting down the middle and being discarded. Reeds played in chanters without top sections were more prone to damage.

In October 2005 I tried to find *eòrna* for reed-making with Calum Beaton. I quickly discovered that barley is now rarely grown in South Uist. Turning my

hopes to *corca mòr*, the less-favoured straw for reed-making, I found that although it is still grown in South Uist for cattle feed, it is no longer made into corn-stacks and, like hay, is now processed into tightly packed black plastic bales instead. Because this process renders straw useless for reed-making and the previous years' crop had been harvested, I thought I would have to wait another few months before the current year's crop had grown. Fortunately, Calum had foreseen my difficulty and managed to get some *corca mòr* from a neighbour in Staoinebrig – one of the few crofters in South Uist who still made corn-stacks.

Calum and I made several reeds together at his home (see Illustration 4.2). This was the first time in some 40 years that he had made a straw reed, but the process was still automatic to him. He began by taking a straw (or 'culm' in botanical terms) and stripped off its sheaths and blades. He then cut a section of about 0.5 in. from below one of the nodes. He used scissors, but said that he and other pipers used to use their teeth.²⁵ He then pulled one end of the reed through his teeth to flatten and soften it. To help the reed fit securely into the reed seat, Calum slotted the bottom end of the reed into another shorter but wider piece of straw (about 0.4 in. in length) that he had cut from lower down and split down one side. This was then placed in the reed seat of the practice chanter and could be 'tuned' by sliding it in and out of the shorter section of reed.

We had difficulty in making reeds that did not split when we pulled them through our teeth and Calum reminded me that *eòrna* was better than *corca mòr* in this respect. Soon, Calum had made a reed that he was happy with and blew it, making a high-pitched 'squeak' which sounded less mellow than a modern practice chanter reed when blown out with a practice chanter. Although trying to keep an open mind, I could not help but assume that once fitted into the practice chanter, it would sound totally different from the modern plastic practice chanter reeds with which I had been familiar my whole life. Calum placed the reed into the reed seat and, resting his lips on the top of the practice chanter, played a few notes. To my amazement, it sounded just like a practice chanter fitted with a modern plastic reed. It was a little hard to blow, and so Calum pulled the end of the reed through his teeth again, adjusted its position in the reed seat to balance the low A and high A and played it again, producing a more refined sound.

Later, my father-in-law in Gerraidh Bhalteas was able to obtain some *eòrna* [six-row barley, or *Hordeum vulgare*] from a crofter in Ormaclait and grew it with other types of grain for cattle feed. I began making reeds from it after it was harvested in August 2007 and quickly discovered that it was superior to *corca mòr* as it was indeed stronger and less prone to splitting. I also found that the straw tapered from above and below each node, which meant that a reed (which tapers from bottom to top) could be made from just above and below most nodes. One or two good reeds could be made from a number of areas on a single straw, although

²⁵ I later tried cutting the straw with my teeth. I was concerned that it caused the edges of the reed to be somewhat rough and uneven, but to my surprise it did not affect the sound in any way.

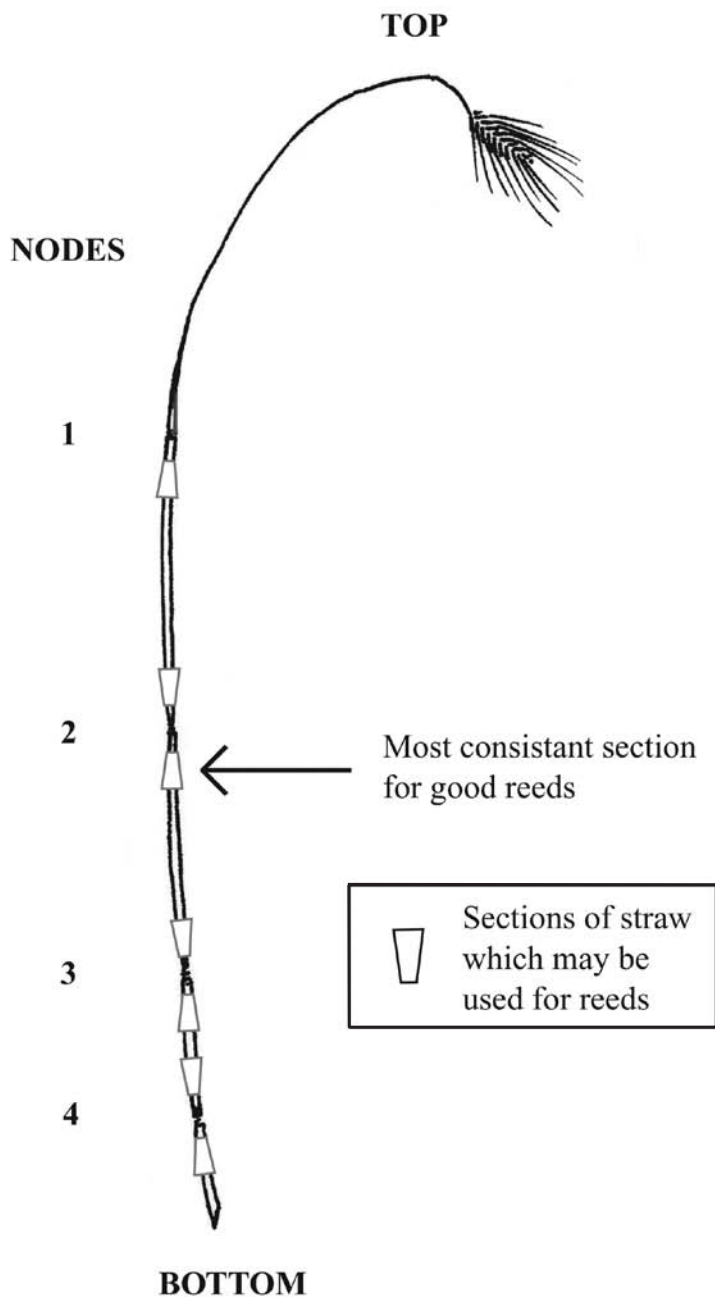


Figure 4.1 The best sections of *eòrna* [six-row barley] to be used for making practice chanter reeds.

the most consistent was located about 0.12 in. from below the second node (see Figure 4.1). Slight variation in reed length was fairly unimportant as they could be pulled in or out of the chanter a short way to adjust the pitch and intonation of the notes. In general, the reeds I made for my modern practice chanter (made by McCallum Bagpipes, Kilmarnock in 2001) and for other chanters made from *cuilc*, bamboo and other materials, were about 1.45 in. in length. I found that after a while, I was able to cut this length quite consistently to within a tolerance of 0.02 in. without prior measurement. The width of the best reeds was about 0.3 in. across the top of the reed (once flatted) and 0.16 in. at its base. The inner diameter at the base was about 0.14 in. Predictably, my overall success rate improved as I made more reeds, but I did find that sometimes the straws varied in brittleness and in wall thickness, causing some reeds to last longer than others.

Other Reeds

According to one source, bagpipe reeds were once commonly made by individual pipers and especially in the army where reeds were made within regiments at the beginning of the nineteenth century.²⁶ According to the same source, *cuilc* [rushes – *Phragmites communis*] that grow native in Scotland was used for reed-making before Spanish cane [*Arundo donax*] was introduced to Scotland in the nineteenth century.²⁷ Drone and chanter reeds made from French or Spanish cane (both *Arundo donax*) have been available from bagpipe-makers in Edinburgh and Glasgow since at least the mid-nineteenth century when they appear in adverts in bagpipe music publications. Since that time, most reeds played by pipers have been made by specialist reed makers.

According to William MacDonald, Benbecula and Neil Johnstone of Dalabrog, previous generations of pipers in South Uist made both drone reeds [*gothaichean*] and pipe chanter reeds [*gleusan*] from *cuilc*.²⁸ Angus MacKenzie, Gerraidh Bhalteas, recalled that his uncle, Duncan Currie (1913–2002), made drone reeds from *cuilc* that grew near his home in Loch Baghasdal.²⁹ According to MacKenzie,

²⁶ I.H. MacKay Scobie, *Pipers and Pipe Music in a Highland Regiment – A record of Piping in the 1st Seaforth Highlanders, originally the Earl of Seaforth's or 78th (Highland) regiment, afterwards the 72nd or Duke of Albany's own Highlanders* (Dingwall: The Rosshire Publishing & Printing Co., 1924), p. 14.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 16. In the twentieth century, however, *Arundo donax* was collected from the docks in Glasgow by reed-makers like James Jeffray (1906–85). According to Jeffray, the cane had been used as packing in French ships; see Lumsden, 'Making reeds', sec. 5, p. 10. It seems likely that *Arundo donax* had also been used for packing in cargo ships sailing from France (and Spain) to the Western Isles in earlier times. If true, pipers in these regions would have had access to excellent cane from as early as the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

²⁸ Neil Johnstone was interviewed on 25 November 2006.

²⁹ Angus MacKenzie was interviewed on numerous dates between 2002 and 2008.

cuilc was strongest in the autumn, when it was traditionally harvested and put into small stacks [*adagan*] to be used as thatch.³⁰ Currie would cut the *cuilc* with a scythe, occasionally choosing a piece that was the right thickness and strength for making a drone reed which he would set aside.

None of the informants had actually made reeds from *cuilc* themselves and consequently little more is known about the process. Neil Johnstone did mention something rather mysterious: apparently before *cuilc* was made into a reed, it had to be soaked in some kind of solution, but he could not recall the reason for or nature of this treatment.

Many informants, including Calum Beaton and Louis Morrison, Ormaclait, recalled that practice chanter reeds were also occasionally made from the wooden sides of matchboxes. An old store-bought cane practice chanter reed was first disassembled and one of the blades was used to trace its shape onto one of the matchbox sides.³¹ The other matchbox side was then laid under it and the two were cut simultaneously with a knife. The blades were then whittled and shaped to size and fitted around the copper staple from the old store-bought reed. Calum tried this once but emphasized that it was done out of interest and not necessity. The reed, in his words, was 'not very good' as he lacked the skill of his father and others from his father's generation who were much more adept at making reeds this way. Calum recalled that his father had once made a pipe chanter reed in much the same way, although it would have required more skill than for a practice chanter reed. By his reckoning, the majority of pipe chanter and drone reeds from his father's generation were ordered from bagpipe manufacturers such as R.G. Lawrie and Peter Henderson in Glasgow.

Other reclaimed materials could also be used in reed-making. Calum recalled that his father once made a bass drone reed out of a section of an old fishing rod. He put wax on one end and made a bridle for it from string. Calum said that it sounded 'quite loud and rough' but that it lasted for many years due to the robustness of the bamboo. This was the only time Calum or I had heard of anyone making reeds out of bamboo in South Uist. There was, however, a family of MacIntyre pipers from Glace Bay, Cape Breton, who made drone reeds this way³² and so the practice was not totally unique to Calum's father.

³⁰ Many informants recalled that as with almost all aspects of crofting life, piping was seasonal and took place mainly in the winter when days were shorter and there was less croft work to be done. This extended to reed-making when the *cuilc* had been cut and when more straw was available for the making of practice chanter reeds. Louis Morrison and his wife Andrewina Morrison were interviewed on 24 November 2006.

³¹ This of course suggests that store-bought practice chanter reeds were at least occasionally used by some Uist pipers.

³² Barry Shears, *Pipe Making From Canada's East Coast [online]* [Accessed 17 March 2008], available from <http://www3.ns.sympatico.ca/caper/> (n.d.). It is possible that these pipers were of South Uist descent.



Illustration 4.3 Practice chanter reeds (from left: plastic; cane; two examples of *eòrna*) and match box.

Bamboo Practice Chanter Experiment

My first attempt at making a practice chanter as Calum had described took place in December 2006 in South Uist. Bamboo poles are no longer found at the pier in Loch Baghasdal but I managed to get two (both *Phyllostachys aurea*³³); one was a 14-foot fishing gaff that had washed ashore in Cill Donnain and the other was from a garden in Glasgow and was about half the length of the other. I took the poles to Calum Beaton to select a section from one of the poles that was, in his estimation, the same size as the one he and Neil MacDonald had made some 65 years earlier. Calum selected a section of bamboo from the shorter pole that had a similar outer diameter and taper as the bottom section of a store-bought practice chanter. Just as Calum and Neil had done, I then measured the length of the bottom section of my modern McCallum practice chanter, marked out the same length from just above a node on the bamboo pole, and cut it with a saw. I found that I could not avoid a node some 1.5 inches from the bottom end of the bamboo section. I then measured the spacing of the chanter holes on the McCallum practice chanter and marked out the same spacing on the bamboo section with a pencil.

Calum said that he had used ‘the old type’ of fencing wire (about 0.16 inches in diameter) as opposed to the more modern, and now most common, tensile-strength wire to make the central bore and finger-holes. The older type of fencing wire is now rare, but I managed to obtain some from my father-in-law in Gerraidh Bhalteas. I cut a section of wire approximately 20 inches long, made a loop at one end to use as a handle and heated the other end in a peat fire until it was red hot. I burned through the bore and the finger-holes, reheating the wire each time a new hole was to be bored.

Eager to test the chanter, I tried several practice chanter reeds made from *corca mòr* that fitted snugly into the reed seat. These initial tests yielded disappointing results; the practice chanter was prone to squealing and ‘double-toning’,³⁴ particularly on the bottom hand. Added to this, the sound was brash and the volume was quite loud – just as Calum had found with the practice chanter he and Neil MacDonald had made. I tried several more reeds made from *corca mòr* and even some modern, plastic ones with only minimal improvements with the squealing when using weaker (that is, that required less effort when blowing) *corca mòr* reeds.

Some weeks later, I showed the practice chanter and explained the problems to piper and scholar Barnaby Brown. He suggested that I burn completely through the node towards the end of the practice chanter to try and keep the internal bore taper consistent from top to bottom. This helped the squealing and double-toning considerably, but not completely.

³³ This is most likely the same type of bamboo found in Uist when home-made chanters were made. It is commonly known as ‘golden’ or ‘fish pole’ bamboo and has been available in Europe since the nineteenth century.

³⁴ This is a term widely used by pipers that means jumping up an octave. It often occurs with older, easy reeds when overblown and/or when transitioning from a top-hand note to a bottom-hand note in a cold or dry climate.

I then began to experiment with different diameters of bamboo, trying to find sections that were long enough between nodes to avoid having to burn through a second node towards the bottom end. As a rule, the thinner and therefore more conical the inner diameter, the better the results. The thinner practice chanterers were mellower in tone, quieter in volume and were less prone to squealing and double-toning. Additionally I found that weaker *eòrna* reeds worked better than easier ones, although the difference mattered less with the chanterers with smaller diameters.

I also began to adjust the hole positioning to compensate for the differences in the individual note pitches from the McCallum chanter (caused, presumably, by the differences in the diameters of the central bore and finger-holes). This was done by raising or lowering the finger holes with the hot wire according to what I felt sounded best. This caused the holes to become elongated, so I used cell tape to cover areas of the holes that were not needed. In the end I was left with a very distressed looking practice chanter covered with tape but which sounded, to my ear, balanced. I then carefully measured the distance between the holes and marked out the next chanter accordingly. The intonation of that chanter was better than the first but still not perfect, and so I again adjusted the positioning of the holes with the hot wire and with tape. After repeating this process with four more chanterers and using the same reed, I zeroed in on what I felt was the best hole positioning and was able to consistently make practice chanterers that I was satisfied with.

In the end, the inner diameter of the most stable bamboo practice chanter was about 0.17 inches at the bottom end – approximately 0.3 inches smaller than the first one I made. As the diameter of the wire was approximately 0.16 inches and burned a slightly larger hole diameter, the internal bore of this chanter was basically parallel throughout. The volume it produced was slightly louder than that of a store-bought practice chanter. The overall outer profile was narrower than a modern practice chanter and I was reminded of Ann MacMillian's remark that bamboo chanterers were especially good for children because they could be made smaller than those bought from bagpipe manufacturers on the mainland.


***Cuilc* Practice Chanter Experiment**

The other type of practice chanter I made was that made from *cuilc* as described by William MacDonald. By the time I decided to try and make one, it was early in spring 2007 – by which time *cuilc* in South Uist was weak and weathered. I would have to wait until the autumn when the *cuilc* had regenerated and was strongest. I was fortunate, however, that Barnaby Brown had harvested some *cuilc* several years before in Waternish, Skye intending to make bagpipe drone reeds and he agreed to give me a supply. Later experiments with *cuilc* from Cille Donnain showed that there was no difference between it and that which had come from Skye.

As with the bamboo chanterers, I used measurements from my McCallum practice chanter and cut out sections of the *cuilc* using a small hacksaw. As with the bamboo practice chanterers, I cut from just above a node so that I could use it

as a reed seat. The distance between the nodes was consistently shorter than the total length needed for the practice chanters and consequently there was always a node towards the bottom end of each chanter. I then marked out the finger-holes with a pencil and heated the same wire used for the bamboo practice chanters. I then began to burn the finger-holes and central bore and found that, unlike the larger pieces of bamboo I had used for practice chanters, *cuilc* had hardly any taper between the nodes, which meant that the internal bores were parallel like that of a store-bought practice chanter. This also meant that the bores were fairly consistent from chanter to chanter. Usually two practice chanters could be made from a single piece of *cuilc*.

Table 4.1 Practice chanter dimensions (in inches).

Finger hole spacing (from top of chanter)	McCallum chanter (made 2001)	Best bamboo chanter	Best <i>cuilc</i> chanter
	2.45	2.25	2.74
	2.97	2.8	3.38
	3.76	3.66	4.07
	4.65	4.5	4.85
	5.63	5.5	5.9
	6.63	6.56	6.69
	7.63	7.71	7.78
	8.79	8.86	8.95
Overall Length	10.5	10.25	10.5
Internal Diameter at Top	.16 (below reed seat)	.2	.17
Internal Diameter at Bottom	.16	.17	.2
Outer Diameter at Top (at High A hole)	.44	.3	.25
Outer Diameter at Bottom (at Low A hole)	.75	.43	.275

After completing the first *cuilc* practice chanter, I tried it with a reed made from *eòrna*. The tone was very mellow and the volume only slightly louder than that of a store-bought practice chanter. As with the bamboo chanters the intonation between the notes was off and again, I began to raise or lower the finger holes with the hot wire and tape. After about five practice chanters, I had narrowed down the spacing which produced the most balanced scale and began to make good practice chanters consistently (see Table 4.1). The *cuilc* chanters were similar to the bamboo chanters in volume but, to my ear, had a sweeter and softer tone.

Conclusions

One of the main realizations to come from the experience making straw reeds and practice chanters was that after some practice and experimentation, their sound quality rivalled that of store-bought, modern equivalents. As has been seen, those who heard them in the past often extolled their sound quality. Nevertheless, for me and for fellow pipers who have heard the recreated reeds and practice chanters, the quality of sound that could be produced relatively easily from a few simple materials and with few – if any – tools was truly remarkable.

On reflection, it is possible that pipers who made practice chanters did not follow the process I did of refining chanter after chanter in a single afternoon; perhaps the level of refinement I sought was not considered important, or other methods of producing a desired scale were employed. I have been told by many older South Uist pipers that previous generations of pipers did not consider tonal quality of bagpipes to be particularly important, and instead placed more value on other performance factors, especially rhythm. In the case of practice chanters, which are not played against drones, it is conceivable that chanter intonation would have been of very little importance to the player.

On the other hand, musically illiterate or ‘ear-learned’ South Uist pipers were often remembered by later generations of South Uist pipers using incorrect or ‘false’ fingering.³⁵ That is, their methods of covering or uncovering holes on the chanter to produce different notes did not conform to the more standardized method that evolved in the twentieth century.³⁶ Perhaps this ‘false fingering’ was a cause of young pipers devising their own fingering methods in trying to produce desired note pitches on home-made chanters. For what it is worth, this appears to have been the case in the Hungarian piping tradition where the more skilled players

³⁵ Joshua Dickson, *When Piping Was Strong: Tradition, Change and the Bagpipe in South Uist* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2006), pp. 226–7).

³⁶ Fingering technique had become standardized with Highland pipers by the mid-to-late twentieth century. This can be seen in a number of tutor books, including Seumas MacNeill and Thomas Pearston, *The College of Piping Tutor* (Glasgow: The College of Piping, 1953), pp. 15–26. The topic of fingering methods and their standardization is discussed in a PhD thesis recently submitted by the author for St Andrews University.

employ different fingering methods to achieve a desired sound on an instrument similar in design and function to the practice chanter:

Although some herdsmen had exceptional skill in playing and making these pipes, scarcely an instrument would play the individual notes of the scale in tune. A good player, however, still managed to keep in tune by modifying the sound with various fingering methods and positions.³⁷

While home-made practice chanters may have required a bit of flexibility with regard to fingering methods, it is also quite probable that those making practice chanters in South Uist would have gradually honed their ability to create balanced, refined chanters to suit preferred fingering methods as new practice chanters were needed for new learners or when chanters became damaged or lost. As well, just as I started to acquire an ‘eye’ for the length of straw practice chanter reeds, pipers could have gradually developed a knack for determining the length and finger-hole spacing without using measurement of existing chanters. Whatever the case historically, my experiments revealed that it would have been possible to make practice chanters designed for a specific fingering method and practice chanter reeds capable of producing excellent tone and balanced intonation.

Research for this work also raised the question of whether the role of the practice chanter in South Uist was different from elsewhere. As the name implies, practice chanters are used in the service of the Highland bagpipe and are not instruments on which one normally performs to an audience. This, however, appears to have been different in South Uist, where the practice chanter was often played at ceilidhs and regarded as a musical instrument in its own right. As well, the symbolic nature of a practice chanter sitting in a window suggests that it held more status in South Uist than elsewhere. Part of the practice chanter’s popularity may have been because it was often the most accessible means by which one could hear bagpipe music, with all its characteristic ornaments, when a set of pipes was not available. Indeed; practice chanters would have been grossly out of proportion to the number of available bagpipes that were usually owned by – or inherited from – someone who had acquired a set in the Army.³⁸

³⁷ János Manga, *Hungarian Folk Song and Folk Instruments* (Budapest: Corvina, 1969), p. 39.

³⁸ Certainly there was a lot of sharing of bagpipes: Peter Campbell, the son of a well-respected ear-learned piper in Iochdar, Angus Campbell (known as the *Gighat*), recalled that his father never owned a set of pipes in his life as he had never been in the Army and always managed to borrow a set from another piper in the community for playing at dances and other functions. Peter, also recalled that when a piping club was established in Iochdar in the 1950s, they arranged to buy his father a set of pipes. The *Gighat* disliked this set, however, and carried on borrowing sets from others in the community. Interviewed on 26 November 2006.

The function of the practice chanter as a ceildh instrument has endured. In recent years I have been at ceildhs in South Uist where a practice chanter has been passed around and played by those who could or could not play the actual pipes. This old practice is reflected in the recent proliferation of electronic practice chanters that simulate bagpipe drones and chanter in the homes of older South Uist pipers. Many such pipers have told me that electronic practice chanters are superior to ordinary practice chanters because they always offer visitors a good-sounding instrument that does not require any exertion through blowing. The driving force behind electronic practice chanters in South Uist seems, therefore, to have been its attributes as a ceildh instrument.

The fact that home-made practice chanters were abundant also informs us about the manner of learning and transmission that once existed in the South Uist piping tradition. Before the spread of musical literacy and standardized methods of playing in the early-to-mid-twentieth century, ear-learned pipers were common.³⁹ None of these pipers survives in South Uist today and few details have been recorded in the past about their learning methods. However, we may look to Bulgarian piping, where a similar sequence of learning without written music on a 'chanter' precedes (but by no means assumes) progression to the actual pipes. As ethnomusicologist Timothy Rice found in Bulgaria, young children were largely left to their own devices at the initial stages of learning. In this sense, piping was at first 'learned but not taught'.⁴⁰

If this was similar in South Uist, then there would appear to have been very little that could keep a child from at least beginning to play the practice chanter; the instrument was free and the child had only to depend on his or her ability to learn aurally from pipers, fellow practice chanter players and/or those who could communicate melodies suitable for the bagpipe vocally. This made it possible for many children, the majority of whom would probably never be in the position to own a set of pipes (if not the desire to play them), to acquire a level of proficiency by amusing themselves on winter nights trying to perfect their technique and reproduce tunes by ear. With the recognition of the practice chanter as not just a tool but as a musical instrument fit for entertainment, children could also contribute a tune or two at a ceildh. Over time, a myriad of other factors – including whether the child showed potential and sustained interest, had access to an advanced player for instruction (especially if he or she came from a piping family) or had access to a set of pipes – would determine whether he or she received more advanced tuition and progressed.

Why, then, did reed- and chanter-making die out completely in South Uist? First, as economic changes made such items affordable, the necessity to make reeds and chanters disappeared; as Calum Beaton said to me on a number of occasions when discussing home-made piping articles: 'poverty was the mother of

³⁹ Dickson, *When Piping Was Strong*, pp. 105–37.

⁴⁰ Timothy Rice, *May it Fill your Soul: Experiencing Bulgarian Music* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 65.

invention.' Second, store-bought reeds and practice chanters were more convenient due to their durability. This was especially the case with store-bought practice chanters which, unlike home-made chanters, had top sections which protected the reed. Third, as mainstream piping practices became more prevalent in South Uist – ranging from musical aesthetics to performance attire – store-bought reeds and practice chanters were probably also perceived as 'the done thing' and took root.

The disappearance of home-made practice chanters and practice chanter reeds corresponded with the gradual demise of ear-learned piping in South Uist as more mainstream practices replaced older indigenous ones. It is curious that as manufactured reeds and practice chanters became more affordable, fewer children learned to play. While these changes offered pipers the opportunity to be a part of an attractive international piping 'scene' (including solo competitions and pipe band playing), some of the more positive aspects of ear-learned piping disappeared. The greatest of these was the access that homemade practice chanters and practice chanter reeds afforded children in South Uist to a pastime in which they developed a strong understanding of – and appreciation for – piping and music generally.



Illustration 4.4 The author playing the *cuilc* chanter at home in Sleat, Isle of Skye.

SIUBHAL: HISTORICAL STUDIES

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Chapter 5

Traditional Origins of the Piping Dynasties

Hugh Cheape¹

The Learned Orders

The historical narrative of the Highland bagpipe conventionally includes mention or some account of the leading piping families, kin such as MacCrimmons, MacArthurs, Rankins, MacGregors and others who performed a role hereditarily in the service of clan chieftains. Their status is variously described in familiar secondary sources.² Conventional accounts have never ventured far beyond the autonomous development of the individual families, although their individual histories and traditions can yield significant details associating them with other groups and group structures and linking them to Ireland and the learned orders of medieval Scotland. This perspective has largely been lost in the face of a narrower historiography. The present account revisits this perspective and explores ‘bardic’ origins, links with Ireland and a context for the piping families’ own pursuit of excellence.

Forty years ago the paper delivered by Professor Derick Thomson at the Third International Congress of Celtic Studies in 1967, ‘Gaelic Learned Orders and Literati in Medieval Scotland’, dramatically opened a new dimension in Scottish cultural history. He explored the concept of a literary and professional class in medieval Gaelic society whose significance and links with Ireland had hitherto been little noticed by scholars outside Celtic Studies. He then concluded:

The Scottish evidence suggests that there was a close correspondence with Ireland in the organisation of society, and especially in the organisation of the learned and literary orders, but that Gaelic Scotland leaned heavily on Irish

¹ I am indebted to Professor William Gillies, University of Edinburgh, who read this chapter in draft and made a series of suggestions which have been incorporated into it. The chapter was originally included in a portfolio of work submitted to the University towards the degree of PhD by Research Publications.

² F.T. MacLeod, *The MacCrimmons of Skye: Hereditary Pipers to the MacLeods of Dunvegan* (Edinburgh, 1933); G.C.B. Poulter and C.P. Fisher, *The MacCrimmon Family 1500–1936* (Camberley, 1936); I.F. Grant, *The MacLeods: the History of a Clan, 1200–1956* (London: Faber & Faber, 1959); Seumas MacNeill and Frank Richardson, *Piobaireachd and its Interpretation: Classical Music of the Highland Bagpipe* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1987).

initiative, periodically and consistently importing literary, medical, scribal and musical professionals from the *maior Scotia*, and even when these immigrants became thoroughly naturalised, continuing to send them back to Ireland to the springs of the native learning.³

Derick Thomson's analysis concentrated on the leading professions of law, medicine and the church, all highly regarded in medieval Europe, but looked also at the other learned orders of historians, genealogists, poets and musicians, that is, the guardians of the fame and memory of clan and community. He described also how the piper usurped the place of the harper as the principal musician, but this might have been 'a fresh development which does not link up with the work of the other learned orders as the work of the harper does'.⁴ It is the contention of this chapter that deeper levels of evidence for the piping families suggest that the latter do indeed link up with the learned orders through descent, professional affiliation and emulation.

The Hereditary Pipers

Angus MacKay's 'Account of the Hereditary Pipers' of 1838 seemed to create the exemplar from which later descriptions have been drawn, especially with regard to the MacCrimmons and throughout the secondary literature on piping. Record evidence survives, particularly in the MacLeod muniments, to demonstrate their status and role, but Angus MacKay places them in an artistic context. His text infers a ranking of the respective families of MacCrimmon, MacArthur, MacKay, MacLean or Rankin, Campbell and Macintyre, with the first named earning a long account, the second a shorter one and the others a matter of a few sentences. Clearly this is a very partial picture but it offers important messages for a group dynamic. Points common to each account are that they were one of a number of leading families performing a service hereditarily for the families of clan chieftains and that they were endowed with land in return for their service, that they played the bagpipe and taught mainly *piobaireachd* – 'that particular class of music which cannot be acquired except by several years of assiduous study and practice' – and that they taught and transmitted their art and maintained schools for this purpose.⁵

³ Derick S. Thomson, 'Gaelic learned orders and literati in medieval Scotland', *Scottish Studies* 12 (1968): 75. References to links and associations had been made frequently within Celtic Studies; see for example William J. Watson, *Bardachd Ghàidhlig: Specimens of Gaelic Poetry, 1550–1900* (Third edition, Stirling: A Learmonth & Sons, 1959), pp. xxx.

⁴ Thomson, 'Gaelic learned orders', p. 70.

⁵ Angus MacKay, *A Collection of Ancient Piobaireachd or Highland Pipe Music* (Edinburgh: MacLachlan and Stewart, 1838), pp. 1–8.

Angus MacKay's 'Account' is full of story and incident in its opening sections and reads more as an exercise in storytelling than a history of piping. This makes more sense of the space given to the MacCrimmons and MacArthurs as the leading families nearest to Angus MacKay's own *dùthaich*, or homeland, of the Isle of Raasay. This is an exercise in the retelling of clan history from the teller's own district, with a series of interlinking vignettes of local hero figures, not only the chieftains but also their renowned and gifted followers. MacKay's narrative chimes with a wider storytelling genre identified by scholars that was largely about events of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and which might often assimilate historical fact to patterns of heroic legend.⁶ An evident richness of popular lore was further enriched in this context by the intimate association of person and event with song and pipe tune. The clan ingredient is a strong binding element in this material and would have fulfilled the expectations of the original audiences, among whom we might assume had been the young Angus MacKay. His own father, John MacKay (1767–1848), who had been a pupil of the MacCrimmons, may well have been the teller of the tales in Raasay and the original context could well have been the Raasay *taigh-cèilidh*. Angus MacKay's 'Account' is a good example of oral material passing from Gaelic, we can presume, into written form in English with more or less editorial shaping by others such as James Logan.⁷

A background of hero and international tales and episodes common to storytelling over the centuries in Ireland and Scotland (and beyond) can be sensed in the 'Account' which is, ironically perhaps, still more lively and spontaneous than, for example, the literary and high register storytelling issuing from the pen of Rev. Dr Norman MacLeod, *Caraid nan Gàidheal* or 'Friend of the Gaels' as he was known, in the same period of the 1830s and 1840s.⁸ When Norman MacLeod's prose retelling of MacCrimmon history in *Cuairtear nan Gleann* in 1841 has been drawn on as evidence, it has arguably diluted rather than enriched Angus MacKay's 'Account'.⁹ Some corroboration of a continuing vitality of oral tradition in Skye concerning the MacCrimmons can be drawn from the essays published by Dr Neil Ross (1873–1943) in *The Celtic Monthly* in 1910.¹⁰ A further significant genre in Highland history writing, germane to this account, has been identified: that is, a substantial but often neglected corpus of traditional genealogical histories

⁶ Alan Bruford, *Gaelic Folk-Tales and Medieval Romances: a Study of the Early Modern Irish 'Romantic Tales' and Their Oral Derivatives* (Dublin, Folklore of Ireland Society 1969); Alan Bruford, 'Legends long since localised or tales still travelling?', *Scottish Studies* 24 (1980): 44, 54–5.

⁷ Roderick D. Cannon, *A Bibliography of Bagpipe Music* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1980), p. 28.

⁸ [Rev. Dr Norman MacLeod] *Cuairtear nan Gleann* 6 (August 1840): 134–7.

⁹ Hugh Cheape, 'The MacCrimmon piping dynasty and its origins', *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness* LXII (2000–02): 16–17.

¹⁰ Neil Ross, 'Ceol-Mor agus Clann Mhic-Cruimein', *The Celtic Monthly* 18 (1910): 26–8, 45–7, 65–7.

compiled between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries and whose importance lies, at the very least, in the circumstances of an overall paucity of indigenous source material.¹¹ This genre emerges as the learned orders of the medieval *Gàidhealtachd* declined, but it drew to some extent on the classical tradition in terms of material, mindset and transmission and has acted in part as a conduit between elite and popular culture.

Angus MacKay's 'Account' is not of course the first written evidence in English for the hereditary piping families and their status. Samuel Johnson, whom Angus MacKay quotes on the Rankins and the Lairds of Coll, recalled that he had heard the Highland bagpipe in Armadale, Dunvegan and Coll in the autumn of 1773. His insights into Highland society and the impact of contemporary changes 'which the last Revolution introduced' included a more than adequate contemporary account from the pen of an outsider on Gaelic culture following the important observation, echoed by others, that 'the use of the bagpipe begins to be forgotten':

Some of the chief families still entertain a piper, whose office was anciently hereditary. *Macrimmon* was piper to *MacLeod*, and *Rankin* to *Maclean of Col* The tunes of the bagpipe are traditional. There has been in Sky, beyond all time of memory, a college of pipers, under the direction of *Macrimmon*, which is not quite extinct. There was another in Mull, superintended by *Rankin*, which expired about sixteen years ago. To these colleges, while the pipe retained its honour, the students of musick repaired for education.¹²

The quality of critique here well befits the great lexicographer and he no doubt would have stood by the accuracy of his observations and the erudition that he conveyed. A comment might be made on the use by Dr Johnson of the word 'college', in that the term would have been differently nuanced in the eighteenth century. He would probably draw on the Latin *collegium* with its academic inference of the class taught by a professor, whereas the term carried more of the meaning in Scotland of *praelectio* for public lecture or course of lectures. This and other references carry an inference of antiquity and continuity which is not necessarily borne out by the evidence as we have it. It may have been an impression put over by the respective piping families themselves, and is also implicit in Angus MacKay's account. A slighter but more telling observation is made in a collection of folklore made about 1700 by James Kirkwood, in response to the research instigated by the Welsh polymath Edward Lhuyd. The evidence gathered in this and other cognate sources of the same period is of a different order, not least because Lhuyd's contacts, such

¹¹ Martin MacGregor, 'The genealogical histories of Gaelic Scotland' in Adam Fox and Daniel Woolf (eds), *The Spoken Word: oral Culture in Britain, 1500–1850* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), pp. 196–7.

¹² R.W. Chapman (ed.), *Johnson's Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland and Boswell's Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides with Samuel Johnson LL.D* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1930), p. 93.

as Rev. John Beaton of Kilninian, Mull, and Rev. Robert Kirk of Aberfoyle, were connected with the old learned orders and had exemplary linguistic qualifications. Beaton himself commented extensively on Kirkwood's text for Lhuyd. The bagpipe here falls into place in an elite musical culture with the other instruments of the chieftain's hall:

The Greatest Music is Harp, Pipe, Viol and Trump. Most part of the Gentry play on the Harp. Pipers are held in great Request so that they are train'd up at the Expence of Grantees and have apportion of Land assigned and are design'd such a man's piper.¹³

The seventeenth-century context of these comments still places the harp first in a descending order of prestige and allows also that it was *uasal*, or high-born, to play the harp. The bagpipe occupies a lesser and more servile position in the scheme. The wire-strung harp or *clàrsach* was the musical instrument par excellence and some harpers were hereditary musicians and bards of relatively high status. We see that harpers, in tune with their high status, readily moved back and forth between Ireland and Scotland. The *turas in Albainn* was a commonplace in early Irish literature and the closeness of Antrim to the west coast islands made travel easy. Evidence for this is scattered but significant; Ruairi Dall O Catháin was an Irish harper who spent most of his life in Scotland in the course of the seventeenth century and seemed to have made his home among the big houses of Perthshire. Harpers sought out an aristocracy who patronized music and no distinction was made between Highlands and Lowlands.¹⁴ A pre-eminent example of the poet-harper is Roderick Morison, *An Clàrsair Dall* (c.1656–c.1714), serving MacLeod of Dunvegan.¹⁵ Silis na Ceapaich's 'Lament for Lachlan Mackinnon', the blind harper, alludes to the range and versatility of the trained musician, prefiguring perhaps the later range of the trained piper:

¹³ John Lorne Campbell (ed.), *A Collection of Highland Rites and Customes, copied by Edward Lhuyd from the Manuscript of the Rev James Kirkwood (1650–1709) and annotated by him with the aid of Rev John Beaton* (London: The Folklore Society, 1975), pp. 3–6, 7–8, 49.

¹⁴ William Matheson (ed.), *The Blind Harper: the Songs of Roderick Morison and His Music* (Edinburgh: The Scottish Gaelic Texts Society, 1970), pp. xxxv–xxxvi; Colm O Baoill, 'Some Irish harpers in Scotland', *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness* XLVII (1971–1972): 145.

¹⁵ Matheson, *The Blind Harper*.

Cha chluinn mi chaidh Socair Dhàna,
 Cumha no Fàilte no Oran ...
 [I will never more hear Verse,
 Lament nor Salute nor Song ...]¹⁶

Clan Panegyric

The musical and poetical allusions in the above lines describe clan panegyric, the public and celebratory composition and transmission of salutation, eulogy and elegy within the social structure of the clan by the hereditary poets and musicians. This is the substantial and crucial background to the emergence of Highland piping and without which, arguably, it cannot be adequately described or understood. There is in this sense nothing new about piping, its origins and meaning lying clearly and emphatically within a group and group structure with status and highly developed mores. All the imperatives of clan panegyric emerge with equal weight in *ceòl mòr*. Performance was within the cultural milieu of the chieftains' households, with families such as MacLeod of Dunvegan and MacLean of Duart, both of whom maintained successions of poets, harpers and pipers and were generous patrons of the arts.

Inter-clan politics and matters of diplomacy, such as marriage alliances, were also vital sparks for poetic composition, and visits to chiefly houses were important features of bardic practice. The theme of *Silis na Ceapaich's* 'Lament' of about 1725 is the ending of the harper's visits. The poem 'I spent six nights in Dunvegan', in the Book of Clanranald, recalled the lavish hospitality accompanying the diplomatic marriage of the daughter of Rory Mor MacLeod in 1613.¹⁷ Celebration in music and song was in turn the conventional response to the patrons' liberality, and consequently references to personal qualities, professional etiquette, reciprocal obligations and historical example suffuse the literature. Encomiastic verse tended to celebrate the main line of the clan, but the continuing composition and transmission of praise music and song spread out from the main areas of patronage so that the cadet families and other branches could celebrate the achievements of the group or clan and reinforce aristocratic identity.

Trade, Science and the Centrality of Ireland

This culture belonged to a context which embraced both Scotland and Ireland, while tacitly and consistently acknowledging that Ireland was the wellspring of this learned and literary tradition. Ireland also may have been a source and

¹⁶ Watson, *Bardachd Ghàidhlig*, p. 132.

¹⁷ Derick S. Thomson, 'Niall Mór MacMhuirich', *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness* XLIX (1974–1976): 12–13.

conduit by which European learning and musical traditions (such as hymn metres and ballads) reached the *Gàidhealtachd* of Scotland, although such a proposal needs more examination. Ireland was also the entrepôt for Scotland on the western European and Atlantic trade routes and an intellectual source for other significant areas of learning. The centrality of Ireland in a medieval western European context has been firmly and consistently written out of the Scottish historical tradition. Significantly, however, the status of piping in Ireland was never high, with pipes achieving prominence only as a military instrument in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Nevertheless, for the understanding of Highland piping, its historical context, as well as broader issues of cultural roots and mores, we ignore Ireland at our peril.¹⁸

Among the professional orders, Professor Derick Thomson gave prominence to the Beaton, who were conspicuous and well-established members of the professional learned orders both of Ireland and Scotland. Their example is relevant to our study of the piping families because, given surviving evidence, ingredients of their history throw a strong light on the group structure into which the piping families seem to fit. The Beaton were hereditary physicians in different parts of Scotland, in successive generations and different branches of the family, from the early fourteenth to the early eighteenth centuries. Surviving medical manuscripts are the most numerous and copious of the Gaelic manuscript corpus and it is strongly evident that manuscripts were highly valued, inferring the premium and status of 'classical' learning and the highest standards of literacy. Martin Martin described a substantial medical library in South Uist about 1695, comprising all the recognized authorities of European medicine of the late medieval period: 'Fergus Beaton hath the following ancient Irish manuscripts in the Irish character: to wit, Avicenna, Averroes, Joannes de Vigo, Bernardus Gordonus, and several volumes of Hippocrates.'¹⁹

The study of medicine was carried out in 'schools' maintained by the leading hereditary families, generally based on their respective landholdings in Islay, Mull, Skye and Uist, but they were also peripatetic and followed the itineraries of leading practitioners.²⁰ Beaton genealogy significantly claimed origins in Ireland in that the founder of the family was described as a descendant of Niall of the Nine Hostages, the eponymous ancestor of the most powerful kindred in early Ireland, the *Ui Néill*. Migration from Ireland to Scotland was linked prestigiously by the family historians to the marriage of an O Cathain to Angus Og, Lord of the Isles, in the late thirteenth century or about 1300. The Beaton (or MacBeths) were

¹⁸ See Seán Donnelly, *The Early History of Piping in Ireland* (Dublin: Na Píobairí Uilleann, 2001), pp. 13, 18.

¹⁹ Donald J. MacLeod (ed.), *A Description of the Western Islands of Scotland Circa 1695 by Martin Martin, Gent* (Stirling, 1934), p. 155. In terms of the written language of these manuscripts, the forms of 'Early Modern' Irish were used.

²⁰ John Bannerman, *The Beaton: a Medical Kindred in the Classical Gaelic Tradition* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1986), p. 98.

included in the prestigious *Tochradh Nighean a' Chathanaich* [The Dowry of the Daughter of O Cathain], her retinue consisting of 'seven score men out of every surname under O'Kain'.²¹

Other medical dynasties recognized similar origins and associations such as the O Conachers, later MacConachers, who came from Ireland and settled as physicians in Lorne. A rich source of information on this extraordinary historical saga is the manuscript corpus, testifying so vividly to their refinement, their learning, their intellectual networks and their internationalism. Notes and marginalia add piquancy to this wealth of information. A note added to a treatise on the 'humours', quoting a range of classical and Arabic authorities, was written in Ireland probably by one of the O Conachers about 1600 and alludes to a home in Scotland:

Mise fear na droch lítreach do graibh seo a baile thighearna Bheinne Edair/ Eoin Mac Dhomhnaill agus is fada om dhuthidh an diuigh mi [I am the man of the bad writing who scribed this in the homestead of the Lord of Ben Edar/ John son of Donald, and far from my country am I today].²²

Bards and Pipers

The legendary and historical reference in Gaelic literature was to Ireland and this well of learning continued to be comprehensively drawn on by the bards in Scotland, underlining also the importance of attendance at the schools in Ireland. Poets offered praise poems to patrons both in Ireland and Scotland and continued to go to Ireland for their training in institutional practice and bardic metrics. The evidence that we have to hand suggests that Scotland's role, particularly in the bardic literary tradition, was sustained from the thirteenth to the seventeenth centuries and is exemplified by the MacMhuirichs, localized on the West Coast and islands. The early sixteenth century Book of the Dean of Lismore from a Central Highland context also demonstrates the links with Ireland; it was compiled in a context in which the cultural and political links with Ireland were entirely implicit and the literary heritage shared. Ireland's centrality to the context of poetry is incontrovertible, and gives meaning to the references to Ireland within the history of Highland piping.

The MacMhuirichs are the outstanding Gaelic literary family, sustaining a long hereditary succession as poets between approximately the thirteenth and eighteenth centuries. They were descended from the O Dálaigh Irish bardic family, probably responsible for a bardic school and recalling appropriately a leading member of

²¹ J.R.N. Macphail (ed.), 'History of the MacDonalds', *Highland Papers Volume I* (Scottish History Society, 1914), p. 20.

²² Donald MacKinnon, *A Descriptive Catalogue of Gaelic Manuscripts* (Edinburgh, 1912), pp. 6–8.

their family as *ollamh ereann 7 albann* [chief poet of Ireland and of Scotland].²³ They were classically trained poets in the service of the Lords of the Isles, holding lands in Islay and Kintyre by virtue of their office, and later moving to serve the Clanranald chiefs by whom they were endowed with lands in South Uist. The lands of Driomasdal and Stadhlaigearraidh have been known by tradition in Uist as *baile nam bard* [the township of the bards], and these lands continued to be held on favourable terms into the middle and later eighteenth century.²⁴ A deposition taken from Lachlann MacMhuirich in August 1800 was printed in the Appendix of the Highland Society's 'Report on Ossian' and included his account of the family's literacy and the shared learned culture of Ireland and Scotland.²⁵ A letter in the same Report had been written in 1763 by Rev. John Macpherson, minister of Sleat, recollecting that, when he was in Uist about 20 years previously:

... there was an ancient little family, the head of which united the professions of the bard, genealogist and shennachy. The bard of that family, whom I had occasion to know, was a man of some letters, that is to say, he and his ancestors, for many ages, had received their education in Irish Colleges of poetry and history, and understood the Latin tolerably well.²⁶

Implicit in both these accounts is the change that had taken place in the family's status. The experience of the chieftains and leading families in the seventeenth century was of political and economic pressure which steadily undermined the old regime. The trained professional poets alluded to this time and again in this period. The early seventeenth century poet Cathal MacMhuirich composed a lament for four MacDonald chieftains who died in 1636; this is a stately bardic elegy of 40 stanzas with the expected allusions to a climate turned hostile and a land turned barren. The bard recalls his patrons' generosity ('their gifts of clothing were never refused to the poets') and spells out what their death means:

²³ John O' Donovan (ed.), *Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland by the Four Masters vol I* (Dublin, 1848), p. 66.

²⁴ Derick S. Thomson, 'The MacMhuirich bardic family', *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness* Vol XLIII (1966): 301. See also National Archives of Scotland, Exchequer Papers, for the latter-day status of the MacMhuirichs in South Uist.

²⁵ Henry Mackenzie, *Report of the Committee of the Highland Society of Scotland appointed to inquire into the nature and authenticity of the Poems of Ossian* (Edinburgh, 1805), Appendix No. 17, pp. 275–7. See also William J. Watson (ed.), *Rosg Gaidhlig: Specimens of Gaelic Prose* (Glasgow: An Comunn Gaidhealach, 1929), pp. 139–41.

²⁶ Mackenzie, *Report of the Committee of the Highland Society of Scotland*, Appendix No. 1, p. 6.

Because the Clan Ranald have gone from us
 We cannot pursue our learning;
 It is time for the chief poet [*ollamh*] to go after them
 Now that presents to poets will be abolished.²⁷

The social and political circle of the clan chief around the end of the seventeenth century was described in some detail by Martin Martin. Writing between about 1695 and 1703, he could still list physician, orator, poet, bard, musicians and craftsmen as among the chieftain's dependants within a framework of rights and obligations. More significantly, he described in some detail the change and decline in the position of the 'orator', or *file*, 'in their language called *Aos-dana*', as he saw this in his own time.²⁸ Change is axiomatic but it contributes an anxious and reiterated note in bardic verse of the seventeenth century. A changing world saw decline of the learned traditions of poetry and a more rapid and cataclysmic decline to extinction in Ireland. The complex of causes of this are beyond the present work, but included the Tudor conquest of Ireland, plantation, legislation and the breaking of the power of Irish chieftains. Scottish Gaelic poets held on longer to traditional tenets of bardic verse and used them to remind the chieftains of their duties of patronage, a convention which, as Martin Martin hints, had come to be regarded as 'insolent'; in other words, importunate. An earlier mock elegy for a harper, Lachlann MacBhreataich, preserved in the Book of the Dean of Lismore, castigates him for his excessive demands for reward.²⁹ A poem by Cathal MacMhuirich, 'Sona do cheird, a Chalbhaigh' [Blissful your trade, Calbhach], is heavy with irony and anger directed at the slovenly poet who had moved into his bardic domain, and holds a mirror to the genre of songs against pipers.³⁰

But the dynasties of professional poets had shrunk to one or two, with families such as MacLeod of Dunvegan, MacLean of Duart and Campbell of Argyll. The career of Niall MacMhuirich, between the early 1660s and about 1720, with MacDonald of Clanranald, spans and reflects these changes. He demonstrates his loyalty to traditional values, reiterating the place and privileges of the poet and the expected generosity of patrons. His elegy, for example, to the chief of Clanranald who died in 1686 praises him as 'guardian of our school of poets'.³¹ MacMhuirich

²⁷ Rev. Alexander Cameron, *Reliquiae Celticae* vol 2 (Inverness, 1894), pp. 238–41.

²⁸ MacLeod, *A Description of the Western Islands*, pp. 171, 176.

²⁹ William J. Watson (ed.), *Scottish Verse from the Book of the Dean of Lismore* (Glasgow: Scottish Gaelic Texts Society, 1937), pp. 14–20.

³⁰ David Greene, 'A satire by Cathal Mac Muireadhaigh' in James Carney and David Greene (eds), *Celtic Studies: Essays in Memory of Angus Matheson, 1912–1962* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968), pp. 51–5; Colm O Baoill and Meg Bateman (eds), *Gàir nan Clàrsach / The Harp's Cry: an Anthology of 17th Century Gaelic Poetry* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 1994), pp. 90–95.

³¹ Derick S. Thomson, 'The poetry of Niall MacMhuirich', *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness* 46 (1970): 289.

was composing both in the literary language and in the vernacular language and style. This cultural crossover and conservatism are traits which go far to explain the emergence of the *piobaireachd* form and the fact that it was predicated on schools.

The emergence of the bagpipe within the cultural ambit of the *Gàidhealtachd* can be observed in this period. It is seldom mentioned as a musical instrument in Gaelic sources before the mid-seventeenth century; the bagpipe does not figure in classical bardic poetry where there is only reference to the *clàrsach*.³² Early references to the bagpipe in a Highland context are to their being played by men in Argyll's forces at the Battle of Pinkie in 1547 and to the *piobaireachd* song, 'Piobaireachd Dhòmhnaill Duibh'. But a more obviously prestigious role developed for the bagpipe in Gaelic society, with the popularity of and need for a martial instrument in the military involvement of Highlanders in national and international warfare, and in the more prominent role of Highlanders within the state of post-Reformation and post-Union of the Crowns Scotland. Scottish Gaelic society, politically and culturally, was at its most successful, assertive and confident in the seventeenth century.

A distinction may be drawn between, on the one hand, the use of the bagpipe evolving *sui generis* as a military instrument and, on the other, its grafting onto earlier traditions. In the former case, examples proliferate over Europe of an often ephemeral role in armies of a low-caste bagpipe as musical instrument, as is suggested by the Irish evidence. In the latter case, it emerged within a cultural milieu of professional music-making and reflected something of a redistribution of the functions of the learned orders and a very clear rise in status of the pipers, or more specifically of those pipers within the ambit of the chieftains and leading families. There would be shifts from time to time in lines of demarcation between poets and historians, as we have seen, and an evident professional shift from harpers to pipers is one major feature of these seventeenth-century changes. The pipers (within the circumscribed social situation) appear to take over harpers' subject matter and they probably also take over their music. The learned orders and literary professions share in and connive at an increase in and acceptance of demotic practice and of a putative downsizing of status, although simultaneously these shifts offered new opportunity for bardic challenge and response; significantly, the pipers' voice is not evident in the *moladh* [praise] and *di-moladh* [dispraise] series which alternate elevation and ridicule of the bagpipe. John MacCodrum's 'Dispraise of Donald Ban's Pipes' recounts the pathetic career of the instrument before it was acquired by Donald MacAulay of Paible in North Uist, including its use by two possible harpers whose art had gone out of fashion and who were suffering loss of status:

³² J.L. Campbell (ed.), *Hebridean Folksongs III* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), pp. 27–8. See also Keith Sanger and Alison Kinnaird, *Tree of Strings / Crann nan Teud: a History of the Harp in Scotland* (Temple: Kinmor Music, 1992), pp. 111–28.

Bha i seal uair aig Maol-Ruanaidh O Dórnán ...
 [Malrooney O Dornan had her for a while,
 Who would put the tunes clumsily out of order;
 She was for a while with MacBheatrais
 Who would sing (*sheinneadh*) the songs (*dàin*),
 When the clarsach was forsaken
 And esteem for it failed.]³³

‘Seanchas Sloinnidh na Pìob o thùs’ [The history of the pipe from the beginning] is the poem ascribed to Niall Mór MacMhuirich (c.1550–c.1630), who describes the bagpipe as harsh and barbaric. According to John, the editor of *Sar o bair nam Bard Gàelach*, the poem was composed on returning from the bards’ college in Ireland and earned the poet extemporaneous congratulation from his father: ‘Math thu fhein a mhic, tha mi faicinn nach bu thuras caillt’ a thug thu dh’ Eirinn’ [Well done, son, I see your trip to Ireland has not been wasted]. The survival of this piece to be recorded and printed in the late eighteenth century is a tribute to its appeal and it is often quoted as reflecting the parvenu status of the bagpipe.³⁴ The poet refers to the antiquity of the instrument itself – ‘thàinig o thus na dilinn’ [it came from the time of the flood] – but finds a catalogue of distasteful, low-caste elements to fuel the satire. adds the editorial comment, dating to 1836, that ‘the bagpipe was never a favourite with the bards, but was rather regarded by them as trenching on their province’.³⁵ The sense of merciless mockery is heightened by the title depending on the key terms *seanchas* [lore or history] and *sloinneadh* [the tracing of pedigree and ancestry], the tracing of descent being the primary function of the professional poet. If the *moladh* and *di-moladh* songs fit into a bardic ‘flying’ series, the sense of the bagpipe being grafted firmly onto an ancient tradition is reinforced. As significant as the contempt for the instrument or its practitioners, who had seldom had status to boast of, is the bardic controversy, the *iomarbhaidh*, a term with a complex literary history, included but essentially obscured within the *piobaireachd* canon. Competitions between pipers, especially before and on behalf of their patrons and chieftains, are a commonplace of the traditional and recorded history of Highland piping. Intriguing also are the accounts of Highland pipers being put to the test against pipers from Ireland and England, the inference

³³ William Matheson (ed.), *The Songs of John MacCodrum* (Glasgow: Scottish Gaelic Texts Society, 1938), p. 68.

³⁴ Thomson, ‘Niall Mór MacMhuirich’, pp. 18–19. This could conceivably be a later composition as is suggested in Uist tradition; see for example William MacDonald, ‘Further reminiscences’, *Proceedings of the Piobaireachd Society Conference* 26 (1999): 1–13.

³⁵ John Mackenzie, *Sar-o bair nam Bard Gaelach: or The Beauties of Gaelic Poetry* (Fourth edition: Edinburgh, 1877), p. 67; cf. Colm O Baoill (ed.), *Eachann Bacach and other Maclean Poets* (Glasgow: Scottish Gaelic Texts Society, 1979), pp. 54, 221.

being that they were playing more or less the same sort of instrument or 'great pipe'.³⁶

Schools and Memory, Law and Poetry

Many of the features of the cultural and political changes of the seventeenth century may be partly interpreted, not as autonomous developments as has been the treatment of the Highland bagpipe, but as devolving elements of Irish literary history. The literary professions of Gaelic Scotland and Ireland included, as we have seen, musicians such as harpers who might also enjoy high status, and the evidence for their craft and literary context is remarkable.³⁷ There were, of course, many other musicians of perceived lower status and social and professional demarcation was strong.

Gaelic possesses the oldest vernacular literature in Europe and learned orders who taught and transmitted it. This is a far cry from the piper of the late medieval and modern period, but this provides some evidence to contextualize him. This learning, in its limited sense of the practice of the learned orders, is still evidenced in Scotland at a late date and depended on the Irish dimension, and classical Gaelic poetry frequently demonstrates familiarity with what were in effect very old and time-served ingredients; the menu is complex with, inter alia, origin legends and pseudo-history, schematized in written form between the eighth and eleventh centuries and composed in both prose and poetry (to be more easily remembered and handed on), Classical mythology (also through translation into Gaelic) as well as panegyric verse and song. Evidence running parallel describes the social and cultural framework which produced and sustained such learning, with features such as differing status of learned practitioners, the schools and their teaching and practitioners' duties and obligations. Such features later characterize the piper's profession and may be identified in early sources such as the law tracts. The Irish Law Tracts, as the so-designated *Corpus iuris hibernici*, consisted of a number of manuscript treatises devoted to special subjects, copied and recopied with glosses and commentaries from the seventh and eighth centuries down to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.³⁸ The range of subjects covered involved poets and historians as well as jurists, and reflects the old status quo of the *Aos Dána* as a professional caste and the custodians of learning in the broadest sense.

³⁶ See for example Fr Allan McDonald, 'Piobairean Smearcleit', *Celtic Review* 5 (1909): 345–7.

³⁷ Osborn Bergin, *Irish Bardic Poetry* (Dublin: The Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1970), pp. 3–22.

³⁸ D.A. Binchy, 'Corpus iuris hibernici – incipit or finit amen?' in Gearóid Mac Eoin (ed.), *Proceedings of the Sixth International Congress of Celtic Studies, Galway, 1979* (Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1983), pp. 151–4; Fergus Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law* (Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1988).

The early Irish laws form a complex of information to be used with some care, given the highly schematic and conventionalized view of early Gaelic society that emerges. The best known of the texts was the collection of Brehon Law tracts called the *Senchas Mór* [Great Tradition], originating in one of the Irish schools of learning, possibly in Munster, about the first half of the eighth century. The law tracts are the first written evidence of the learning of such schools and the custodians of the law-lore were the *filidh* or 'poets'. Law and poetry ran together in the courses of study of these schools where students were trained to commit texts to memory. Memory training was thus a consistent element and probably as important in the later 'schools of piping' as in the earliest schools of learning.

One part of the *Senchas Mór* was the *Uraicecht Becc* [Small Primer], judged to be possibly as early as the second half of the eighth century.³⁹ The 'Primer' is a treatise or manual on status, with the qualifications and privileges of the different grades of poet, ranking in a scheme of seven grades, imitating probably the seven grades of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Material on the grades and privileges of the poets circulated in Scotland and can be seen in a Gaelic manuscript of about 1400 which is part of the former Kilbride Collection.⁴⁰ Status and privileges were enshrined in the arrangement of the king's court and the early laws describe the seating protocol in the king's hall. The king was at its head with his wife on his left, and on her left the judge or lawman, termed the *brithem*, an office still recognized and described in the seventeenth century.⁴¹ Facing the king and his wife were the poets and the harpers, clearly enjoying precedence over most of the company and the placing of the musicians denoting their availability to accompany the poets. Even if this is no more than an evocation of an imagined past, it indicates the importance of hierarchy and strict lines of demarcation in Gaelic society.

Metrics and Music

As we have seen, the poets were defined as *Aos Dána*, the people of art or poetry, literally the 'folk of gifts', and were the providers and custodians of a culture common to Ireland and Scotland. *Aosdana* survived in Scottish Gaelic as a term for a 'high-class poet' but was used as a title for the non-literate poets composing eulogy and elegy in the vernacular and professing certain rights and duties. In a very limited sense, the seventeenth-century vernacular poets were heirs of the

³⁹ Robert Atkinson, *Uraicecht Becc and Certain other Selected Brehon Law Tracts* (Dublin, 1901), pp. viii–ix. See also Kenneth Nicholls, *Gaelic and Gaelicised Ireland in the Middle Ages* (Dublin: The Gill History of Ireland 4, 1972), and Nerys Patterson, 'Brehon law in late medieval Ireland: "antiquarian and obsolete" or "traditional and functional"?', *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* 17 (1989): 43–63.

⁴⁰ Mackinnon, *A Descriptive Catalogue of Gaelic Manuscripts*, pp. 84, 177–8.

⁴¹ Macphail, *Highland Papers Volume I*, pp. 24–5.

professional poets of earlier eras.⁴² The leading piping families may have aspired to these social and cultural echelons, as is suggested by aspects of their respective careers and a sense of nurturing musical technique. The use of what is described as ‘stressed metre’ in composition would probably have been most accessible to the musicians. In stressed metre verse, the stanza will consist of a number of lines of two stresses, concluding with a line of three stresses, the line being repeated as a form of cadence. The stanzas might be longer or shorter, the length of verse might vary and the effect was cumulative, heightened by a closing cadence. This music in words can be sensed, for example, in a closing cadence of the *Elegy to Sir Lachlan MacLean of Duart* of about 1649 by the MacLean bard Eachann Bacach [Hector the Lame]:

Gum bu mhath do dhìol freasdail
 An taigh mòr am beul feasgair;
 Uisge beatha nam feadan
 Ann am piosan ’ga leigeil,
 Sin is clàrsach ’ga spreigeadh ri ceòl.
 [The entertainment you provided was good
 In a big house at nightfall,
 Whisky of the still’s worm
 Being poured into goblets,
 All that and a harp being incited to music.]⁴³

As the MacLean inheritance of patronage of the arts and courtly poetry was particularly distinguished, so their role within the attributed *ceòl mòr* corpus is sufficiently distinctive to hint at a more complex and MacLean-aligned tradition. The remains of this tradition was gathered in by David Glen from sources such as John Johnston of Coll and published in 1900 in *The Music of the Clan MacLean*. Taking as an example one of the pieces of music specifically annotated by Glen to record the personal playing style of John Johnston, ‘Cas air amhich, a Thighearna Chola’ [which Glen translated rather spuriously as ‘MacLean of Coll putting his foot on the neck of his enemy’], the structure, phrasing and style of the tune in this instance may be compared speculatively to stressed metre composition in vocal music. There is an obvious congruency between musical and verbal phrase sequence. Here as elsewhere the phrasing of a ‘line’ of *ceòl mòr* reflects, perhaps mimics, the variations and complexities of verbal composition in poetry, moving from the dotted crotchet in one phrase to quavers and semi-quavers to accommodate words and syllables in the following phrases and moving on in a cumulative sense to the end of the ‘line’ with a repeat phrase to act as a closing cadence. Significantly, stressed metre composition in the vernacular, well suited to

⁴² Aonghus MacMhathain, ‘Aos Dàna’, *Gairm* 8 (1954): 343–7; Matheson, *The Blind Harper*, p. 150.

⁴³ Watson, *Bardachd Ghàidhlig*, p. 207.

oral transmission and preservation, seems to emerge into recorded history in pace with the bagpipe's *ceòl mòr* in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and within the ambit of the chiefly houses and patrons. There must have been an innate prestige of imitating or drawing on the stressed metre song of the poets. The panegyric role of *piobaireachd* could realistically draw on or be grafted onto the unlettered but not untutored vernacular eulogy and elegy of the bard. Given the evident low status of the bagpipe and the musician-minstrel, both in the greater *Gàidhealtachd* and in Europe, the piper could not graduate to the rank of 'court poet'.

Clan panegyric, the public and celebratory composition and transmission of eulogy and elegy of the clan by the hereditary poets and musicians, lay at the core of the bardic tradition and characterized the *piobaireachd* tradition. The musician is naturally eclectic and congruency in the *piobaireachd* form can perhaps be sought with the metres of the poets. Three categories of performers are evident in the courtly musical tradition of the Scottish Gaelic aristocracy: the *filidh*, the bard and the musician in descending order of prestige and performance; these would be the ready and extensive sources of inspiration and material. The first category, the *filidh*, composed in the literary language and in syllabic verse or *dàn*, examples of which survive in heroic or Ossianic ballads. The continuing popularity of the Ossianic ballads in the Scottish Gaelic tradition helped to keep the memory of *dàin* alive; they were of two sorts, the *duan* which was recitative and more of a chant, and the *laoidh* or 'lay' which was more of a tune. Within syllabic verse, a number of different metres were used and there may be examples of *ceòl mòr* which align with species and examples of *dàn dìreach* of the literary language. Here as elsewhere in the Gaelic tradition, there may be links with *piobaireachd* which further research would reveal. The apparently archaic 'Harlaw Brosnachadh' was current in the eighteenth century and manuscript versions survive. It was first published in a version in Ranaid MacDonald's 'Eigg Collection' of 1776.⁴⁴ There are unanswered questions on style and technique of construction as well as dating, but the formulaic and rhetorical techniques of the 'Brosnachadh' and the celebration of the kindred in a series of epithets may in fact imitate *ceòl mòr* as 'incitement to battle'. The alphabetical chant with phrases accumulating in quartettes and building effect on alliteration is an exercise in rhetoric whose musical equivalent may be sensed in *piobaireachd*.⁴⁵

Performance, as we have seen, was within the cultural milieu of the chieftains' households, with families such as MacLean of Duart and MacLeod of Dunvegan, both of whom maintained successions of poets and harpers and then pipers, and were generous patrons of the arts. At these levels of patronage, groups and

⁴⁴ Raonuill MacDomhnuill, *Comh-chruinneachidh o rannaigh Gaidhealach* (Duneidiunn [Edinburgh], 1776), pp. 5–6.

⁴⁵ Derick S. Thomson, 'The Harlaw Brosnachadh: an early fifteenth-century literary curio' in James Carney and David Greene (eds), *Celtic Studies: Essays in Memory of Angus Matheson, 1912–1962* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968), pp. 147–152; see also Watson, *Bardachd Ghàidhlig*, pp. xlii, 260.

successions of poets and musicians were maintained and there are poetic references which throw light on these fraternities and also their artistic relationships; these were well-defined roles to which able musicians might aspire.⁴⁶ *Piobaireachd*, significantly, described the role that developed with the use of the bagpipe in the Highlands and Islands. The question that has exercised those who have struggled to explain the origins of *piobaireachd* and of the Highland bagpipe is whether the instrument evolved *sui generis* or was grafted onto an earlier tradition or traditions. Metrics and music would suggest the latter and this is reinforced by subject matter, in which encomia predominate in the surviving corpus of bagpipe 'classical' music. This encompasses widely salutes to chieftains and leading men of the clans; laments on their passing in battle, or through accident and natural causes; the celebration of feats of arms; gatherings and incitement to war with rallying cries and slogans; the commemoration of human bonds and relationships in kin and clan; the reinforcement of group identity and the energizing of group consciousness.

The Piping Dynasties

The most prominent piping families in the historical narrative of the Highland bagpipe were MacCrimmon, MacArthur, MacKay and Rankin, as recounted by Angus MacKay, and most accounts add MacGregor to this roll of honour. Each of these kin demonstrates links with Ireland or with the bardic tradition in ways to demonstrate that this broader context supplies important evidence to explain their origins and cultural influences on their art.

Information on the origins of the MacCrimmons is found in the Bannatyne Manuscript, an eighteenth-century compilation of traditions of the MacLeods of Dunvegan. It is generally agreed to have been the work of Sir William MacLeod Bannatyne (1749–1838), Lord President of the Court of Session and great-great-grandson of the celebrated Sir Norman MacLeod of Berneray. He was said in his day to be the greatest authority on the history of the Highlands, although as chronicle and celebration of the ancestry of the MacLeods, the Bannatyne Manuscript is flawed history. Compared to others in the genre of Highland and Hebridean genealogical histories, the Bannatyne Manuscript itself may be said to be late in date and tainted in its description of the origins and ancestry of the MacLeods.⁴⁷ The thesis of longevity and particular blood connections was the vital imperative in telling the story of the kindred and therefore compellingly self-evident in the Bannatyne Manuscript.

The Bannatyne Manuscript supplies the tradition that the MacCrimmons were indigenous leaders in South Harris and that they also occupied islands in the

⁴⁶ J. Carmichael Watson (ed.), *Gaelic Songs of Mary MacLeod* (Glasgow: Scottish Gaelic Texts Society, 1965), pp. 34–5, 44–5; Matheson, *The Blind Harper*, pp. l–lii, 150–51.

⁴⁷ Matheson, *The Blind Harper*, p. xxxiv.

Sound of Harris. The version of events reflects significantly the Norse invasions, with the ancestors of 'Paul Balkason' conquering the district of Harris then in the possession of three aboriginal tribes; the north was held by the 'Clan Vic Eaich' (*Clann Mhic Eathaich?*), the central area by 'Clan Vic Vurichie' (*Clann Mhic Mhurchaidh?*), and the south and islands belonged to the MacCrimmons. This trio of names, in spite of anachronisms or misspellings, is important for a brief insight into early tribal structure which further research could well illuminate, particularly by comparison with information on tribal structures enshrined in the Irish law tracts. Although it has been argued that 'MacCrimmon' might derive from a Norse name, it is likely that we have evidence of pre-Norse people and tribal structure.

In a later section of this treatment, the Bannatyne Manuscript describes how according to tradition there were three brothers MacCrimmon in Harris in the late fifteenth century, Patrick, Angus and Finlay, one of whom was the father of Iain Odhar who was said to have been piper to Alasdair Crotach, the late fifteenth- and early-sixteenth century MacLeod chieftain. Alasdair Crotach was said to have been founder of the Skye 'school of piping' and it is furthermore stated that this chief gave the MacCrimmons the farm of Borerraig and lands on the south side of Loch Dunvegan free of rent. Traditions naturally cluster round such a figure of repute and his era which spans the years from around 1480 until 1547, but this, at least intuitively judged, seems to be one of the more persuasive pieces of information to derive from the Bannatyne Manuscript.

Other traditions also associate the MacCrimmons with the learned orders and literati of the medieval *Gàidhealtachd*. A North Uist tradition, for example, claimed that the first MacCrimmon was a harper.⁴⁸ The firm tradition of the MacCrimmons themselves was that they had received the first of their learning at a school in Ireland.⁴⁹ Alexander Nicolson refers in his *History of Skye* to the MacCrimmons being 'skilful players of the harp', inferring a close connection between harp music and pipe music when this begins to emerge about the beginning of the sixteenth century.

The survival of the apparently less than common name of MacCrimmon may also owe something to reputation and prestige, and a search for eponymous ancestor or ancestors throws up eponyms that suggest that the MacCrimmons were probably of Irish rather than Scots Gaelic origin. There are significant references which make the name *Cruimthein* a likely eponym or possibly a name such as *Aed Ua Crimthainn*, the learned compiler of the Book of Leinster in the late twelfth century.⁵⁰

The MacArthurs were pipers to the MacDonalds of Sleat, living at Hunglater and Peingown in the parish of Kilmuir and, about two miles south of Duntuilim,

⁴⁸ Rev. Duncan Campbell, 'Gaelic proverbs', *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness* XLV (1967–1968): 6.

⁴⁹ MacKay, *A Collection of Ancient Piobaireachd*, p. 2.

⁵⁰ James Carney, *The Irish Bardic Poet* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1967), p. 10; R.I. Best, Osborn Bergin and M.A. O'Brien (eds), *The Book of Leinster, formerly Lebor na Núachongbála*, 6 vols, (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1954–83). See also Cheape, 'The MacCrimmon piping dynasty and its origins', pp. 5–12.

close to the former head houses of the clan chiefs.⁵¹ There were other pipers serving the chiefs of Sleat in their separate territories, beside the MacArthurs in Trotternish in the north of Skye. Eighteenth-century sources show a piper in Sleat and a piper in North Uist. As the traditional account by Angus MacKay shows, the MacArthurs served the MacDonald chieftains hereditarily, they kept a teaching establishment or 'college' of piping and they composed and taught *ceòl mòr*. A particular detail of mutuality and reciprocity is added describing how a young MacCrimmon was sent to the MacArthurs for six months to study 'MacArthur's particular graces'.⁵² Skye tradition adds the detail that their name was rendered as *MacArtain*, a name form more familiar in Ireland, and that, though they were a family of master-pipers, they were descended from a clerical dynasty.⁵³

Compared to other dynasties, the service of the MacArthurs with the MacDonalds of Sleat was comparatively short, being little more than three generations. Angus MacKay describes them as 'Pipers to MacDonald of the Isles', a cachet which lends prestige to the family, and reference is made to MacArthurs in Proaig in Islay as 'for many generations' pipers and armourers to the MacDonalds of Islay. A further reference in the 'Notices of Pipers' to an Angus Dubh, who was said to have been piper to MacDonald of Islay in the seventeenth century, seems to be spurious and an attempt to link different families. The presence of MacArthurs in Islay in the seventeenth century may be linked to the Campbell of Cawdor occupancy. An Islay tradition recorded by Hector MacLean (1818–93) told of skill in piping being acquired by the 'Big Ploughman' from a supernatural source and how MacCrimmon secured *buaidh na piobaireachd* [the gift of piping] with the former's fairy 'black chanter'. He concluded: 'the people of Islay say that it was in this manner that the music went from Islay to the Isle of Skye', borrowing perhaps from the concept of a move in artistic centres of gravity consequent on the forfeiture of the Lordship of the Isles as exemplified by the MacMhuirichs.⁵⁴ Other piping traditions from Islay concern the motif of the piper and his dog in the cave and the *cluais-chiùil* [that is, the skill to take words from music] manifest in the piper's warning to his master associated with Dunyvaig. Another tradition chimes more strongly with a link with the Lords of the Isles when MacDonald offered MacArthur a reward for his superior performance: *làn boineid de dh'airgiod 's de dh'òr* [a bonnet full of silver and gold].⁵⁵

⁵¹ Frans Buisman, Andrew Wright and Roderick D. Cannon (eds), *The MacArthur-MacGregor Manuscript of Piobaireachd (1820)* (Universities of Aberdeen and Glasgow in association with the John MacFadyen Memorial Trust and The Piobaireachd Society, 2001), pp. xxii–xxix.

⁵² MacKay, *A Collection of Ancient Piobaireachd*, p. 6.

⁵³ Personal communication from Dr John MacInnes, 2005.

⁵⁴ Lord Archibald Campbell, *Records of Argyll* (Edinburgh, 1885), pp. 337–8.

⁵⁵ 'Fionn' [Henry Whyte], 'The martial music of the clans', *The Celtic Monthly* 11 (1903): 119. See also Seton Gordon, 'Hereditary pipers to MacDonald of the Isles: a MacArthur story', *SMT Magazine* (November 1935): 47.

The *Clann an Sgeulaiche* MacGregors from Glenlyon in Perthshire were notable as prize-winners of the Highland Society competitions.⁵⁶ Though they come to the historian's notice early as a family or dynasty, they are not accorded mention or status by Angus MacKay in his 'Account of the Hereditary Pipers'. Their cognomen is highly significant in terms of a link to the learned orders. MacGregor genealogy is briefly recorded in the Book of the Dean of Lismore. A prose colophon includes the traditional genealogy of the MacGregor chiefs and descent from Kenneth mac Alpin, giving them a royal pedigree and placing them at the centre of the Gaelic kingdom of Scotland.⁵⁷ Significantly for our purposes, the writer Duncan MacGregor added that he drew on the 'history books of the kings and great men' [*'do sgrìobh seo a leabhraibh seanachaidh nan rìgh agus ro-dhaoine'*].⁵⁸

The early history of the MacGregors shows that they had established themselves as a clan in the late fourteenth century and, as the dominant family in Glen Orchy, held the lands of Glenstrae and acted as a client kindred and vassals of the Campbells. The MacGregors then collided with and were displaced by the Campbells in the vigorous expansionist phase of Clan Campbell in the late sixteenth century.⁵⁹ The Register of the Privy Council records attempts to punish and restrict the clan, and unrelenting political pressure brought a reaction in the slaughter of the Colquhouns in Glenfruin in 1603. The MacGregors went on in the pursuit to threaten Dumbarton, whose citizens – the 'black-hatted folk' – had gone out to support the Colquhouns. The stark consequence of this tactical triumph was the proscription of the name and outlawing of the clan. The precarious existence of the MacGregor territorial kindred thereafter left the professional kindred in uncertain circumstances. This and the conventional recall of traditional values was the refrain in a song on the Battle of Glen Fruin preserved in the MacLagan Manuscript:

Tha mi 'g iargain mun fhineadh
 Gus an trialladh gach filidh ...
 [I am lamenting the kindred
 To whom every poet would be journeying.]⁶⁰

⁵⁶ 'Fionn' [Henry Whyte], 'Clann an Sgeulaiche', *The Celtic Monthly* 20 (1912): 207–208.

⁵⁷ Rev. Thomas McLauchlan (ed.), *The Dean of Lismore's Book: a Selection of Ancient Gaelic Poetry* (Edinburgh, 1862), pp. 126–7.

⁵⁸ Watson, *Scottish Verse from the Book of the Dean of Lismore*, p. xi.

⁵⁹ Martin MacGregor, "'Surely one of the greatest poems ever made in Britain": the Lament for Griogair Ruadh MacGregor of Glen Strae and its historical background' in Edward J. Cowan and Douglas Gifford (eds), *The Polar Twins* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1999), p. 119.

⁶⁰ Derick S. Thomson, 'Scottish Gaelic folk-poetry ante 1650', *Scottish Gaelic Studies* 8/1 (1955): 17.

The patronage of literature and learning was as much part of MacGregor culture as of the other leading kin, as is clearly shown in the concentration of MacGregor poems in the Book of the Dean of Lismore. The chief had a family bard at the time of the compilation of the Book of the Dean and an early fifteenth-century poem to the MacGregor chieftain refers to poets [*fili*], bards and harpers, and poet-bands [*na cliara*]. The earliest Scottish reference to *clàrsach* or *clàrsaich* is in an early fifteenth-century eulogy to a Clan Gregor chieftain.⁶¹ At a later date, within their own kindred and further afield, the MacGregor pipers were of the family known as of the *Sgeulaiche*. At this stage of research, their longer-term pedigree is not known with any certainty. Their family cachet is conventionally translated as 'Storyteller', with a deeper and possibly more specific meaning of chronicler or historian and, as such, we suggest, descended from a family of the learned orders. Their function might be distinct from the poet as is made clear in an account of the bardic organization written in 1692 by a divinity student from Strathspey on behalf of Professor Garden of Aberdeen University; the writer described the first in rank as the poets or 'philies', and 'the second degree' as 'Skealichin' [*sgeulaichean*] or 'Sheanachin' [*seanchaidhean*], being 'narrators of antiquitie and old historie especialie geneologies of great persons and families'. The writer further glossed *Sgeulaiche* as 'properlie signifying ane historian'.⁶² While the 'historian' appears here to be operating at a secondary level, the range of uses of words such as *scél* in Irish sources is not as potentially disparaging as English usages might seem to be and implies a high rank in the learned orders. In placing them next to the *File* in this description, the *Sgeulaiche* may have more to impart on professional roles in the attenuated or declining classical tradition in Scotland.

Some corroboration of the status and role of the 'historian' is contained in the information on poets, historians and physicians gathered by Edward Lhuyd and Robert Wodrow at the turn of the eighteenth century. The relatively high social rank and influence of the 'historian' was built on history being in some circumstances synonymous with genealogy. Rev. John Fraser of Coll described the 'Bardi, poetici and Seneciones, peculiaire to every family ... The Seneciones were such as meddled with history, and the true stateing of genealogys, and descents of familys, whose records were so sacredly kept, that it's admirable how farr back they could recurr.' Rev. John MacLean, the poet *Maighstir Seathan*, places the historians firmly in the learned orders with his reference to historians who served the MacLean chieftains hereditarily until about 1660 when the last of them died and the office lapsed as the Campbells of Argyll subverted MacLean control: 'The last of them that was eminent in that office, called Muldonich McEoin, was 34 years at the schools in Ireland'.⁶³ Separation of function between poet and historian was not necessarily a rule. The MacMhuirich bards held their lands in Uist hereditarily

⁶¹ John Bannerman, 'The Clàrsach and the Clàrsair', *Scottish Studies* 30 (1991): 3.

⁶² Cosmo A. Gordon, 'Letter to John Aubrey from Professor James Garden', *Scottish Gaelic Studies* 8/1 (1955): 22.

⁶³ J. Maidment (ed.), *Analecta Scotica* 1 (1834), pp. 118, 124.

– *mar dhuais bardachd* [as the prize of, or remuneration for, poetry] – so long as they maintained historical and genealogical records for Clanranald – *a chumadh suas sloinne agus seanchas chlann Dònaill* [that they would sustain the genealogy and history of Clan Donald].⁶⁴

In his ‘Dìomoladh Pioba Dhòmhnaill Bhàin’, John MacCodrum bracketed the Rankins, personified in *Con-duiligh*, with the MacCrimmons and MacArthurs as the leading piping families. The point is made as a matter of general knowledge to heighten the sense of ridicule of a North Uist piper of the poet’s own day.⁶⁵ The Rankins’ traditional claim seems to have been principally of aristocratic descent rather than membership of the learned orders; their family histories maintained that they were of the same stock as the MacLean chieftains [‘*bho ’n aon fhreumh*’], and that Cù-duiligh mac Raing was the great-great-grandfather of Gill’-Eathain na Tuaighe from whom the MacLeans are descended. The MacLeans came to prominence in the late fourteenth century within the ambit of the Lordship of the Isles and in a client relationship to the Lordship.⁶⁶ They established their own power bases in the sixteenth century as the dominant family in Mull, Morvern, Ardgour, Coll and Tiree. The Rankins’ claim to superiority and their highly distinctive historical name give them a particular significance.

The Rankins have been described as hereditary pipers to the MacLeans of Duart and also to the MacLeans of Coll.⁶⁷ Their status in Coll seemed to be secure in the late eighteenth century when Johnson and Boswell stayed in the island and when the two travellers were also shown *Taigh Raingich* hard against Breacachadh Castle.⁶⁸ The first Rankin to hold office was *Cù-duiligh mac Raing*, who was claimed as one of the noted ancestors of the MacLeans and contemporary with the first MacLeans to have possession of lands in Mull. Rankin history exemplifies the persistent and besetting problem of evidence and discrimination in handling sources. Conventional record sources corroborate that the Rankin ‘dynasty’ served MacLean chieftains or gentry for about four generations only.⁶⁹ Family and oral tradition goes deeper, but must pose questions as to reliability or historical veracity. Not surprisingly perhaps, a fount of information about the Rankins emerged with descendants of Neil Rankin, piper to MacLean of Coll. Counnduillie Rankin Morison of Dervaig in Mull was the principal informant of Henry Whyte, whose essay on the Rankins, written at the beginning of the twentieth century, demonstrates at the least how pervasive stock motifs in piping history could be; anecdotes on musical skills deriving from supernatural sources, tests of mastery, the master-player’s ‘hidden tune’ [*port-falaich*], and schooling

⁶⁴ *Report of the Committee of the Highland Society of Scotland*, pp. 275–9.

⁶⁵ Matheson, *The Songs of John MacCodrum*, p. 62.

⁶⁶ Macphail, *Highland Papers Volume I*, pp. 21–3.

⁶⁷ MacKay, *A Collection of Ancient Piobaireachd*, p. 7.

⁶⁸ Chapman, *Johnson’s Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland*, pp. 356–7.

⁶⁹ Keith Sanger, ‘Mull and the MacLean pipers’, *Piping Times* 42/9 (1990): 38–43.

with the MacCrimmons fulfil our expectations about piping history.⁷⁰ The essay, however, also contains important historical material for our purpose, particularly relating to the nineteenth century, with verifiable fact and also more or less reliable family memory.

Counnduillie's son, Neil Rankin Morrison, of Kengharar in Mull, delivered a paper at the Annual General Meeting of the Gaelic Society of Inverness in February 1934. He described how he drew on the oral tradition of the area of Mull where the Rankins were pipers, although he names none of his sources. He commented that so little of their history was written down that he was reliant on the oral tradition of the old folk (*beul-aithris nan seann daoine*) and that it was, for him, clearer and surer than any written history.⁷¹ This is tendentious argument which may not reassure us, but in another context Neil Rankin Morrison supplies from family tradition a vital account of Eachann Bacach, the seventeenth-century 'court poet' of MacLean of Duart.⁷² Within the assumed limits of family tradition, therefore, with all that this implies, there is a strong element of sincerity, integrity and coherence in the Morrison accounts. The essential details were briefly delivered: that *Cù-duiligh mac Raing* was the first piper who was in Mull; that he was taught music and trained in Ireland; that he came to Mull with the early MacLean chieftains; that he began to teach music in Mull; and founded what the family considered to be the first school or college of piping in Scotland. The school, here using the term *o il-thigh* as back-translation from 'college', was at Kilbrennan in Mull and was kept up until about 1758 when it is said that they had 16 pupils.⁷³ This brief account notionally extends over a greater period than the historical four generations and unequivocally links the family learning with Ireland. A very distinctive naming pattern may serve to abbreviate a historical pedigree to suggest, in this case, that the eponymous *Cù-duiligh* lived in the late seventeenth century. The claim of shared descent with the chiefs, contest skills and the schools in Ireland hint at a longer pedigree which seems to have been dislocated with the much-described political and economic decline of MacLean fortunes in the 1670s and 1680s.⁷⁴

Another version of the shared descent of the Rankins and the MacLeans may be inferred from the folio Highland genealogies referred to as MS 1467. This is a vital document for medieval Scotland that awaits fuller scholarly treatment. Authoritative suggestions have been made as to authorship, dating and purpose which commend the document as evidence in the present context. The scribe of the genealogical sections may credibly have been a MacMhuirich, *Dubhghall*

⁷⁰ 'Fionn' [Henry Whyte], 'History of the Rankins', *The Celtic Monthly* 19 (1911): 195–8; see also Ó Baoill, *Eachann Bacach and other Maclean Poets*, pp. xxvi–xxvii.

⁷¹ Neil Rankin Morrison, 'Clann Duiligh: Piobairean Chloinn Ghill-Eathain', *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness* XXXVII (1934–36): 61.

⁷² Eoghan Mac a Phi, *Am Measg nam Bodach* (Glasgow: An Comunn Gaidhealach, 1938), p. 51.

⁷³ Morrison, 'Clann Duiligh', pp. 61–2.

⁷⁴ See for example Ó Baoill, *Eachann Bacach and other Maclean Poets*, pp. 90–99.

Albanach mac mhic Cathail, writing in Ireland about 1400, and recording genealogies of those important families that recognized the authority of the Lords of the Isles.⁷⁵ The MacLean section begins with Lachlan and Eachann, who can be dated from infestments by Donald, Lord of the Isles, to the 1390s. The descent includes important naming patterns and includes Cuduilig mac Raingce who, uncharacteristically in this source since there is little additional information on proper names, is qualified as Abbot of Lismore, an early church foundation, putatively of the sixth or seventh century and with links to Ireland. The name Lismore is also familiar in Ireland, not least in the prestigious monastic site and early foundation in Waterford, offering a more likely link given the date of compilation. The genealogies of MS 1467 suggest compilation of materials from different sources and a relative reliability. Recent research also has suggested that the background and descent of the main line of the MacLeans might have derived status from the medieval learned orders, especially ecclesiastics and a possible *Judex*.⁷⁶ In the case of the MacMhuirichs, there is extensive evidence linking the poets to clerics, for example in a number of church appointments in the fifteenth century.⁷⁷ The Book of the Dean of Lismore was the scribal work of clerics and the Rev. John MacLean (c.1680–1756), minister of Kilninian, was also the learned poet, *Maighstir Seathan*, whose verses in praise of Edward Lhuyd set perceived professional parameters for the learned orders:

Gach Fili's Bard, gach Leigh, Aoisdáin, is Draoi ...
 [Every Poet and Bard, every Physician, Eulogist and Druid,
 Every Craftsman and Historian too; every noble art,
 That Gathelus brought with him over from Egypt,
 It was in Gaelic that they wrote when working with the pen.]⁷⁸

Angus MacKay's account of the MacKays of Gairloch as hereditary pipers includes four generations and spans a period of nearly two hundred years, but concentrates on the life and achievements of Iain Dall MacKay.⁷⁹ *Am Piobaire Dall*, or 'The Blind Piper' as he was known, was remarkably long-lived, being born in 1656 and dying in 1754. He was the son of a piper to the Mackenzies of Gairloch and was sent to the MacCrimmon piping school. His apprenticeship lasted seven years and has given rise to a number of anecdotes and proverbial lore. He is said to

⁷⁵ Mackinnon, *A Descriptive Catalogue of Gaelic Manuscripts*, pp. 72, 106; Colm O Baoill, 'Scotticisms in a manuscript of 1467', *Scottish Gaelic Studies* 15 (1988): 124–5.

⁷⁶ [W F Skene ed.] *Collectanea de Rebus Albanicis* (Edinburgh, 1847), p. 358; William F. Skene, *Celtic Scotland: a History of Ancient Alban. Volume III: Land and People* (Edinburgh, 1880), p. 481; Nicholas Maclean-Bristol, *Warriors and Priests: History of the Clan Maclean, 1300 – 1570* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 1995), pp. 4, 158–61.

⁷⁷ Thomson, 'The MacMhuirich bardic family', pp. 288–9.

⁷⁸ O Baoill, *Eachann Bacach and other Maclean Poets*, pp. 100–101.

⁷⁹ See Barnaby Brown, 'The Iain Dall Chanter' in this volume.

have composed 24 pieces of *piobaireachd*, some of which have survived.⁸⁰ This interesting aperçu even offers a challenge to the understanding of what sort of music might be inferred by the application of the word *piobaireachd*. Significantly, Iain Dall's countryman, John (1806–48), included him in the anthology *Sàr-o bair nam Bard Gaelach*, and his career travelling round the big houses and composing songs to patrons would seem to mark him out as a poet. A subtle distinction might be indicated for his status as a poet by his preference for travelling between different patrons and his avoidance of exclusive attachment to a single family. His music also is addressed to different patrons. His surviving songs include, for example, his 'Beannachadh Bàird' [Bard's Blessing] in honour of of Gairloch and is a classic of the genre with the expected literary norms, tropes and allusions.⁸¹ As the poet *air chuairt*, on circuit widely between the Reay country and Skye, he has been considered as a significant member of the 'Talisker circle' of poets and musicians and, in Skye, particularly addressed his attentions to the MacDonalds of Sleat in significant panegyric terms. Another patron, a son of Lord Reay, was the object of the famous lament of about 1696, 'Cumha Choire 'n Easa', in which the personified Corrie converses with the poet. This is a highly sophisticated composition and the poetic device of the conversation occurs in one or two other celebrated instances, in 'Oran na Comhachaig' of about 1600 where the poet converses with the allegorical owl, and in Roderick Morison's 'Oran Mòr Mhic Leòid' of 1693, using the Echo as one side of the dialogue.⁸² Iain Dall includes a reference to Roderick Morison composing a *fàilte* or 'salute' to 'Coire 'n Easa', and, as members of the 'Talisker circle', it would be surprising if these two 'echo' songs were not related in some way or that the pipers might not be imitative.⁸³

A further strong though unconfirmed bardic reference may lie in the *piobaireachd* attributed to Iain Dall, 'Crosanachd an Doill', unambiguously and conventionally translated as 'The Blind Piper's Obstinacy' but capable of further interpretation. In the first place, 'obstinacy' seems the least likely behavioural epithet to attach to Iain Dall in any context. The word *crosanachd* had allegedly two different meanings: first, peevishness and perverseness, and, second, a literary style of alternating verse and prose, or verse constructed on two or more people conversing. The sense of perverseness may derive latterly from the literary usages of *crosanachd* in

⁸⁰ John Maclean, 'Am Piobaire Dall', *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness* XLI (1951–52): 302–304; see also Bridget , *Piping Traditions of the North of Scotland* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1998), pp. 147–55.

⁸¹ Maclean, 'Am Piobaire Dall', p. 299; Ronald Black (ed.), *An Lasair: Anthology of 18th Century Scottish Gaelic Verse* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2001), pp. 122–5; see also William Matheson, 'Aonghus nan Aoir: a case of mistaken identity', *Scottish Studies* 21 (1977): 105–108, for a good example of the peripatetic poet.

⁸² *Sàr-o bair nam Bard Gaelach*, pp. 94–9; Matheson, *The Blind Harper*, pp. 58–73.

⁸³ Anja Gunderloch, 'Imagery and the blind poet' in Michael Byrne, Thomas Owen Clancy and Sheila Kidd (eds), *Litreachas agus Eachdraidh: Rannsachadh na Gàidhlig 2: Glaschu 2002* (Glasgow: University of Glasgow, 2006), p. 67.

prompting critical reaction and counterclaim from the object of this versifying. It was a verse style which was associated with the ‘poet-band’ or *cliar chrosan* who used it for their brand of mockery and satire. Given the bardic circles in which Iain Dall moved and the contemporaneity of the Fernaig Manuscript, for example, his ‘Crosanachd’ may be the music for a lost composition in syllabic verse with changes of rhythm to mark a dialogue style.⁸⁴ Iain Dall seemed to favour, perhaps delight in, the *crosanachd* form or, alternatively, the piece may be a crafted musical reworking of the literary form with the very clear changes of rhythm through the variations representing the challenge and response of satirical dialogue; in this sense, too, it could signify simply ‘composition in the style (or mood) of a *crosan*’, in other words, mischievous or satirical. However this piece may be interpreted, its significance has been lost in the conventional literature of *piobaireachd* and the first correction to make would be to adjust the title to reflect the piece’s bardic significance: for example, ‘The *crosanachd* [or contention] of the blind poet’.

The Fernaig Manuscript, compiled between about 1688 and 1693, is associated with patrons and poets of Iain Dall’s own country and includes several *crosanachd* pieces, suggesting that this literary style may have had significant currency in Wester Ross.⁸⁵ In reviewing Iain Dall’s reputation and poetry, it is worth considering that he would have regarded himself as one of the learned order of poets, even of the *Aos Dàna*, since by his day the *crosanachd* was part of their stock in trade, but he had been condemned by blindness to the role of musician.⁸⁶ There are allusions to Fionn texts in his songs and in classic bardic fashion he represents himself as *mar o isean an dèigh nam Fiann* [‘as Ossian after the Feinne’, that is, the last of the race]. He uses *fear ealain* [‘man of art’ or ‘artist’] as the Corrie’s form of address to him and opens the lament for the loss of a patron in classic terms:

Mi an diu a’ fàgail na tire ...
 [Today I am leaving the land,
 Travelling across the slope of the forest,
 What has left my pocket empty of silver
 Is that my patron is in the grave.]⁸⁷

⁸⁴ See for example O Baoill, *Gàir nan Clàrsach / The Harp’s Cry*, pp. 23–4.

⁸⁵ Calum Mac Phàrlain, *Lamh-Sgrìobhainn Mhic Rath: Dòrlach Laoidhean do sgrìobhadh le Donnchadh Mac Rath, 1688 [The Fernaig MS]* (Dundee, 1924), pp. 3, 7, 99, 111, 119; Alexander and Donald Stewart, *Cochruinneacha Taoghta de Shaothair nam Bard Gaelach* (Duneidin, 1804), pp. 430–432; Donald Mackinnon, ‘The Fernaig Manuscript’, *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness* XI (1884–85): 324.

⁸⁶ MacMhathain, ‘Aos Dàna’, pp. 345–6.

⁸⁷ *Sar-o bair nam Bard Gaelach*, p. 98.

Brothers in Music and Economics

In his extempore verses on ‘The Court at Tongue’, Rob Donn commented on the disregard, even disdain and ignorance, by then shown to both piper and poet: ‘Oir ’s bràithrean ann an ceòl sinn, an còmhraidh beòil ’s am feadaireachd ...’ [Since we are brothers in music, both in conversation and in piping], recalling a shared inheritance of a guild or fraternity of the learned orders.⁸⁸ For the artists and performers the sharpest consequence of change was the failure of patronage. By the late eighteenth century this was an economic issue as well as a social anxiety. A beautifully crafted dialogue song from Ulster in bardic *rannagheacht mór* metre, dated by O’Rahilly to the 1740s, argues for the merits of music against the harsh imperatives of modern economics. The blind harper, Giollamhuire Mac Artáin, laments the loss of patronage and despairs, as Oisean after the Fianna, for his profession. In one of the manuscript versions an additional verse encapsulates the bard’s frustration and bitterness against cattle and crops:

Ní ar mo cheól-sa atá locht
 (truagh nach bhfuil mo chorp i gcré)
 acht ortsa, a Dhonnchadh na mbó,
 ós binne leat bró na mé.
 [It is not my music that is at fault
 (pity that my body is not in the clay),
 but it is you at fault, Donncha of the Cows,
 since you find the sound of a quern sweeter than me.]⁸⁹

Awareness of change and its implications for the arts was universal throughout the *Gàidhealtachd* and the closure of the schools of piping was a clear symptom. There is more than a hint of disgust or despair evident in MacCrimmon and Rankin history that their status – or what remained of it – no longer depended on their inherited learning, so that genealogy, history or even pseudo-history had no value in the new era of the economic imperative. A poignant and telling note is offered from Rankin tradition; Counnduillie, younger son of Neil, last piper to MacLean of Coll, was seen practising his chanter by the Coll factor, *Bàilidh Threaslan*, who warned him: ‘Cuir bhuait sin! Nuair bhios cach comhla ris na h-uaislean, bithidh tusa comhla ris na coin’ [Put that away! When the rest are in the company of the gentry, you’ll be with the dogs].⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Hew Morrison (ed.), *Songs and Poems in the Gaelic Language by Rob Donn* (Edinburgh, 1899), p. 426.

⁸⁹ Tomás Ó Rathile, *Measgra Dánta I* (Cork: Cló Ollscoile Chorcaí, 1972), p. 68.

⁹⁰ ‘Fionn’, ‘History of the Rankins’, p. 197.

Conclusions

Looking at the individual and celebrated piping families within their own terms of attainment, survival and longevity, and striving to fix genealogical detail such as succession over generations and dates of service, may limit our view. There must still be doubt and ambivalence in the historical and traditional record; for example, in variations in MacCrimmon succession between 6 and 12 generations. This distracts us from further analysis of the MacCrimmon record and consideration of context. The study of specific texts for the illumination of specific topics also may lead to them being laid aside where they fail to agree with a conventional wisdom, whereas even contradictions may corroborate rather than challenge some aspects of the tradition.

Although the secondary literature and narrative histories of piping allude to some of these details, with due respect they fail to supply an adequate understanding of contemporary society compared with the insights that can be derived from Gaelic sources. The narrative in parts, for example, seems to have been overdependent on translations which have never been questioned, thus denying a richness and variety in Gaelic. In addition to *crosanachd* discussed above, a slight example might suffice: ‘Lasan Phadraig Chaogaich’, attributed in part to Iain Dall, has been acknowledged by the Piobaireachd Society editors as in error in their translation as ‘squinting’, in favour of ‘blinking’ or ‘winking’. The word *caogach* can indeed mean ‘squint-eyed’, as Angus MacKay retails, but arguably a figurative, even proverbial sense must be more significant than the literal, the nuanced rather than the direct.

It is still difficult to build a clear picture of the emergence of the piping families and their possible association with group structures such as the learned orders of the medieval *Gàidhealtachd*. In this context, greater emphasis could be placed on the group as opposed to the individual or the succession of individuals which has been an over-simple way of presenting the piping families. This is not to disregard or underestimate the importance of the individual or the individual skill or brilliance of Patrick Mòr MacCrimmon or Charles MacArthur, as is represented by the traditional narratives, but it tends to elide and lose, underestimate or even misrepresent human bonds and relationships that supplied the essential glue in clan and kin structures and gave such groups their status and longevity. Arguably group structure and group consciousness may be as important, and sometimes more important, than musicality in the interpretation of *piobaireachd* and in turn, this broader, almost ‘anthropological’ interpretation of *piobaireachd* may add insights to an understanding of the group and its dynamic in different or archaic societies as well as of the music itself.

The interpretation of early history and genealogies depends heavily on issues of perception and identity. Factors such as links with Ireland, bardic or other status-conferring origins, the pursuit of excellence and the maintaining of schools become clearer within the model of a unified *Gàidhealtachd* and a medieval Gaelic culture-province. The homogeneity of the *Gàidhealtachd* within the period c.1200–1650

and easy assumptions of commonality have now been challenged, and the 'Sea of Moyle' [*Sruth na Maoile*] has been presented as both a real and a psychological barrier rather than a 'bridge'.⁹¹ Wilson McLeod's analysis of Classical Gaelic bardic poetry shows that Gaelic Scotland played a secondary and marginal role in a culture-province, the unity of which, he suggests, has been overstated. In view of the Tudor conquest and English military subjugation of Ireland on the one side, and the emergence of a Scottish state and the Reformation on the other, cracks were bound to appear in the Gaelic culture-province, although Ireland's domination of the imagination in the Scottish *Gàidhealtachd* could remain unimpaired. Most of the surviving bardic poetry belongs to Ireland, and Scotland's contribution both in terms of locus and corpus was peripheral. Ironically perhaps, the piping families contribute a significant footnote to the redistribution of cultural assets in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. When the arts of poetry and music continued to flourish in Gaelic Scotland, albeit at a perceived lower level, the pipers could more profitably aspire and function by aligning themselves and associating themselves with Scottish families with Irish links and origins. The emergence and short-lived success of the piping dynasties can be seen as a significant facet of the divided cultures of this *Gàidhealtachd*. Equally, the centrality of Ireland in cultural expectations in the classical period emerges, as we have shown, from the deeper levels of evidence for the piping dynasties.

In considering traditional origins for the piping dynasties, it might fairly be claimed that the links with Ireland are less than explicit or lack more substantial evidence than other features. Adopting Wilson McLeod's stern admonition and conclusion as a guiding principle – 'assumptions should be challenged, hypotheses advanced with caution and romanticism excised' – we might usefully hypothesize by moving firmly away from accepting narratives of autonomous development for the individual families. The argument has been offered here of clear analogies to be found in the learned orders and literati, features such as resemblances in social structure, demarcation and mores, response to patronage, possible metric styles, and cultural idea and mood between the bardic orders and the piping families, and between historical phenomena which may have no other connection. It is argued above that these cultural substrata were more than sufficient to create the phenomenon of Highland piping and to present criteria to which certain families, as for example those identified by Angus MacKay, could conform. The other side of a hypothetical coin is that the emergence of the piping families was part and parcel of the emergence of vernacular literature in Scottish Gaelic in the seventeenth century. Predicated on both arguments are a fresh understanding of the Highland bagpipe and *piobaireachd*, and insights into preconceptions and stylistic tenets of the pipers. These include a shared outlook and *Weltanschauung* with the professional poet and seanchaidh; a shared outlook intensely conservative in nature and whose relevance was eroded by changing social and political mores, isolation and then

⁹¹ Wilson McLeod, *Gaelic Cultural Identities in Scotland and Ireland, c.1200–c.1650* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 7–8, 171–2, 193.

by economic circumstances, reflected finally in the disappearance of the schools of piping in the 1760s and 1770s, a short while after the end of the Jacobite wars. The concomitant of change, both cause and effect, were decline of patronage, loss of status and loss of privileges, so that the old assumptions – *saor bho chàin sa bith* – dwindled into fossilized and proverbial phrases preserving old values. The words of Mahon O’Heffernan in the early seventeenth century are crisply matched by the MacCrimmon’s disavowal of the approaches of new patrons for teaching and performance in the early nineteenth century:

‘Such an art as this is no profit to me,
Though it is a misfortune that it should fall to the ground ...’⁹²

⁹² Bergin, *Irish Bardic Poetry*, p. 279.

Chapter 6

One Piper or Two: Neil MacLean of the 84th Highlanders

Keith Sanger

The following study sets out to determine whether a piper called Neil MacLean, who appears in a number of letters among the MacLean of Lochbuie papers, is actually one piper or two, with both having the additional coincidence of having an eldest son called Hector. Although the result of this study is as yet less than conclusive, the exercise provides the opportunity to examine the rise of the military piper during the eighteenth century and the life of one piper in particular who is otherwise notable on two counts: he appears to have inherited a bagpipe originally possessed by the Rankin family, one of the early eighteenth century's most celebrated piping families; and he may have been the Neil MacLean who was famously awarded first prize in possibly dubious circumstances at the Highland Society of London's piping competition at the Falkirk Tryst in 1783 – a result which contributed to the establishment of the Highland Society of Scotland and the moving of this most eminent of piping competitions to Edinburgh for generations thereafter.

From Clan to Regiment

The process by which pipers moved from clan musician to a regular component of a Highland regiment of the British Army has been the subject of much speculation and myth, usually revolving around the changes brought by the after-effects of the 1745 Jacobite Rebellion. Indeed the whole subject has been coloured by the erroneous, but still widely held belief that following that Rebellion the bagpipes were in some way 'banned' with the only option left to pursue a piping career being to join the army.¹ This scenario also tends to ignore the fact that of the eighteenth century's leading piping families, who irrespective of their own views would mostly have followed their employers' policy, the MacCrimmon, MacArthur and MacGregor pipers were nominally on the Government side, while

¹ A misperception addressed comprehensively by John G. Gibson in his *Traditional Gaelic Bagpiping, 1745–1945* (Montreal and Edinburgh: McGill-Queens University Press and National Museums of Scotland, 1998).

Menzies of Weem, the patron of the MacIntyre pipers of Rannoch, did his best to stay neutral.

Certainly these pipers would not have been immune from the economic repercussions of the rising, which probably accelerated changes that were already underway. But the rise of the military or regimental piper was a result of the ongoing evolution of the British Army of which the newly formed Highland regiments were now part, and pre-dates the 1745 rebellion. The raising of the Independent Companies in 1725 and the formation from their ranks of the 43rd (later to be renumbered to 42nd) Regiment in 1739 marked the start of the process, and another 'new Highland Regiment' to be commanded by the Earl of Loudoun was in the throws of formation in 1745, only to be overtaken by the outbreak of the rebellion. Both of these regiments had pipers who appear to have been listed as drummers. The drumbeat was still the main method of organizing the troops while the piper seems to have been regarded as more essential for recruiting purposes, a function that continued to be a major part of the piper's role throughout the rest of that century.

References to pipers in the ranks of Scottish regiments generally can be traced from as early as the seventeenth century and were therefore not specifically associated with one particular population group, but the formation of these two Highland regiments provides the first evidence for the Gaelic-speaking regimental 'highland piper' and the picture it makes is somewhat mixed. Recruitment of pipers, and to a certain extent drummers as well, was a problem and there was evidence of pipers being 'borrowed' from company to company or enlisted on a temporary basis. This should not be too surprising, since the regiments represented an increase in demand and existing pipers who were mostly comfortably employed as family retainers, and in many cases enjoying tacksman status, would have little incentive to move. When further Highland regiments were raised for service in America, the requirement for pipers would have risen again, but it is difficult to fully assess how many pipers were available due to the sporadic survival of the regimental muster rolls.²

The continuing practice of substituting the piper in place of a drummer, for which the normal establishment was two to a company, also makes identification more difficult. Some wildly extravagant claims have been made, especially in respect to the formation of Montgomery's Highlanders first raised in 1757. It is true that the initial tendering process for uniforms seems to have been anticipating almost as many pipers as there were drummers, but the records show that as far as the uniforms actually bought were concerned, there were nothing like those sort of figures. The Montgomery pipers had a number of uniform items in common with

² Charles Dalton, *The Scots Army, 1661–1688* (Newbury: Greenhill, 1989), pp. 78, 128 and 134; Ruairidh H. MacLeod, 'Drums and pipes in the Royal Army, 1745', *Piping Times* 32/10, 12 (1980): 13–17 and 33/5 (1980): 14–21; Sean O'Donnghaile, 'Highland Pipers in Ireland', *Piping Times* 34/1 (1981): 43; National Archives of Scotland (hereafter referred to as NAS) RPS 1643/6/85.

the sergeants, and the figures for the number of sergeants' and pipers' plaids paid for were 39 compared to 1,017 privates' and drummers' plaids.³

Most of the regiments raised over the period 1757–59 were subsequently stood down in 1763, but by the time of piper Neil MacLean, the subject of this study, the position of the piper had changed to become part of the formal establishment of the regiment. This does not seem to have been brought about specifically for the Highland regiments, but a Highland regiment adaptation of what seems to have been a recognition by the government of a change in the structure of infantry regiments. There had for some time been a degree of specialization within the regiments and accounts of actions during the American war of 1757–63 mention grenadiers. These were initially the strongest soldiers whose job was to hurl the grenades. Almost by definition these were the larger and more imposing soldiers and over time the grenadier company had become the 'show company' of the regiment.

When this was finally recognized, the Royal Warrants issued to authorize raising a new regiment started to specify not just total numbers of soldiers per company along with the non-commissioned officers and drummers, but also included a grenadier company with, apart from the usual two drummers, the additional establishment of two fifiers. In the case of the Highland regiments, instead of the fifiers the grenadier companies were authorized to have two pipers. This was certainly the position for the warrant to raise the Fraser Highlanders in 1775, and for all subsequent regiments, including the 79th Cameron Highlanders and the fencible regiments raised during the Napoleonic wars.

However, having an establishment was one thing; filling it was another. The warrant to raise the Atholl Highlanders was authorized by King George III on 25 December 1777 and included an establishment of two pipers to the grenadier company. The regiment was formally reviewed on 29 April 1778 before being placed on the army's establishment. According to the muster roll for that review, the positions of the two pipers were listed as 'wanting'. The position did not improve, and an attempt was made in 1781 to approach a minister in Skye to find pipers, which produced the reply that 'the M'Arthurs and M'Crimons are all gone, excepting one old man of the latter, who has something from M'Leod, and no others have succeeded them. He mentions one boy, but says he is good for nothing. A Gentleman from North Uist tells me that a few pipers still remain among them, but they are so saucy that there is no speaking to them on those terms. Mr McNicol in Lismore assures me that there are none such to be had among them'.⁴

Having failed to recruit any pipers, correspondence among the Atholl papers shows that the next move was to arrange to have some trained. A letter dated at Garth in July 1782 states that 'he has now got four promising boys in training for Pipers. The master resides in the next village and the boys are boarded at the back of this House'.⁵ The regiment was disbanded the following year, so even if any of

³ NAS GD 494/1/48.

⁴ Atholl, J., 7th Duke of, *Chronicles of the Atholl and Tullibardine Families* (1908).

⁵ The instructor was presumably John Macgregor.

the young pipers made it onto the establishment, the positions of regimental pipers would seem to have been vacant for most of the regiment's existence.

This example was, of course, exceptional, but surviving muster rolls and the contemporary correspondence continually show difficulties in obtaining the full establishment of two pipers. There are several references to pipers being hired or borrowed locally solely for use in recruiting parties. In the case of Sir James Grant's piper, John Cumming, he seems to have been in considerable demand when not needed by Sir James himself.⁶ This piper would certainly have been safe from any attempts by the recruiting party to bring pressure on him to enlist, but in more humble circumstances, like that of a young piper in Mull, some reassurance was requested by his father, which produced the following response from the recruiting officer:

Letter to John Gillies workman at Laggan

As you have agreed to allow your son to go along with me as piper upon recruiting service thro this country I bind and oblige myself that I shall use no unlawfull means to enlist him further than his own pleasure and that I shall satisfy him for his troubles during the times he shall serve me.

Dug Campbell

Lagan 22 Dec 1775⁷

Another letter written the following year takes the story further forward. Dated London 16 April 1776, it was written by Archibald MacLean of Lochbuie⁸ and addressed to John MacLean, tacksman of Gruline, who managed Lochbuie's remaining Mull interests. The part of the letter dealing with the young piper is relatively short but clearly refers to the young Gillies and also adds his alias:

I met with my cousin Capt Murdock here who is very anxious to have some highland Piper for their Regiment. Upon receipt of this youle order the boy Gillies alias McLain whom Dugald Achnacroish pretended to have enlisted with him and who afterwards enlisted with me, youle order him to Edinburgh immediately upon receipt of this and let you give him the Pipe that belonged to John Ranken and give him money to bring him to Edinburgh ... if you can meet with any other Piper no worse than Gillies youle write by Gillies what terms they'll take.⁹

⁶ NAS GD 248/53/4/65 and GD 248/55/3/5/1-2.

⁷ NAS GD 174/2094.

⁸ This and other letters from the Lochbuie papers appears here with the kind permission of Lorne MacLaine of Lochbuie.

⁹ NAS GD 174/1274/2; for the Piper John Rankin see Keith Sanger 'Mull pipers', *Piping Times* 42/9 (1990): 38–43. The payment of £1 2s. to 'Neil M'lean piper for going

Clearly these events are taking place against the background of the commencement of the War of American Independence and the efforts to raise regiments for service there. Archibald MacLean of Lochbuie had already been contemplating a career in the army as a means of getting to America and had produced a list of 88 potential recruits, which judging by the letter would have included the piper. But when the immediate commission offered was not good enough, Lochbuie decided to simply go as a private person.¹⁰ Therefore the statement in the letter that the young piper had ‘enlisted’ probably indicated intent rather than actually having signed up for a particular regiment and would explain how he could be simply transferred to Lochbuie’s cousin, ‘Capt Murdock’.

Enter, Captain Murdoch MacLean

Born circa 1730, Murdoch MacLean at the age of 14 had been apprenticed with a linen manufacturer in Edinburgh. He became a lieutenant in the 114th Regiment in 1761,¹¹ and may have served in America towards the end of the Seven Years War. At the end of the war he became a general merchant in Edinburgh. As a merchant he was patronized by most of the lairds and tacksmen from Mull, Lorn and Morven. He was fairly successful, but around 1772 was suffering from the inability of many of his MacLean customers to pay their bills, their general shortage of money being compounded through the loss of cattle through the ‘black winter of 1771–72’ and the failure of the Ayr Bank.

Murdoch struggled on for the next few years, but with most of his MacLean customers locked into a circle of debt, life for Murdoch, who was one of their major creditors, was difficult. So, when events across the Atlantic led to increases in the strength of the military, Murdoch was happy to swap his merchant’s life for a commission as a captain in the 2nd Battalion of the 84th Regiment of Royal Highland Emigrants being raised in America by his kinsman Colonel Allan MacLean of Torloisk.

Murdoch’s commission was dated 14 June 1775 and he joined his new regiment sometime in the late summer in Boston. His first six months of service are unclear, but he seems to have impressed the commanding officers with the qualities that he had brought to the merchant business, and he was ordered to return to the UK to organize the equipment and clothing for the 2nd Battalion.

Although Murdoch had been given his original commission from the Court of St James, the 84th or Royal Highland Emigrants were an unusual regiment, being the first Highland Regiment raised entirely in the Americas. It was also one of the

to Edin by young Lochbuie’s orders’ can be found in the factor’s account at GD 174/784/5 for the years 1774 to 1776.

¹⁰ Jo Currie, *Mull: the Island and its People* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2000), p. 69.

¹¹ NAS GD 174/2405/2.

few regiments raised on the Provincial Establishment and subsequently transferred to the Regular Establishment (in 1778).

The fact that it was on the Provincial Establishment probably accounts for Murdoch receiving a confirmation commission as a captain from the Hon. William Howe, Major General and Commander in Chief of all his Majesty's Forces within the Colonies from Nova Scotia to West Florida, on 27 January 1776, just before his departure from Boston on 1 February. He reached London in the remarkably quick time of three weeks.

Murdoch then travelled between London and Scotland, organizing the regiment's equipment, before embarking at Glasgow in the autumn of 1776 on the *Newcastle Jean*, which was laden with the cargo of guns, ammunition, camp equipment, tents and uniforms. The vessel also conveyed his nephew, Ensign Lachlan MacQuarry, for whom he had obtained a commission, plus some other recruits, presumably including the piper Neil Gillies alias MacLean. On 24 October the vessel was attacked by an American Privateer and Murdoch, as senior officer, was responsible for organizing the successful defence. So having saved a government cargo worth some £20,000, they arrived in Halifax to a rapturous welcome.¹²

Although Murdoch and his company were sent to most of the engagements of the northern and southern campaigns of the War of American Independence, Murdoch still seems to have often been used by his senior officers as a 'sensible' messenger and fixer, and exactly how much time he actually spent with his men is hard to determine. In 1779 he was back in England on military duties and as his permission from the War Office to return to Halifax only came through on 11 July 1780,¹³ it is clear that his company must often have been under the actual command of another officer.

The Ledger Evidence, 1776–1783

The 84th comprised companies of 50 men. However, the only list of what appears to be a full strength company among Murdoch's papers bears no date or sign of Murdoch, but lists a Captain Allan MacLean as the officer. To add to the confusion, it includes three Neil MacLeans.¹⁴ A series of seven of Captain Murdoch's ledger account books survive covering the period from 25 June 1776 to 24 October 1783.¹⁵ While it is possible to identify the piper among the entries, the ledgers are inconsistent and at times show signs of having been written retrospectively.¹⁶

¹² Currie, *Mull: the Island and its People*.

¹³ NAS GD 174/2146.

¹⁴ NAS GD 174/2153.

¹⁵ NAS GD 174/2106.

¹⁶ For example, the first mention of piper Neil MacLean appears in the second volume (24 December 1776 to 24 April 1777) and not as would be expected in the first volume (25 June 1776 to 24 December 1776). But the entry for 'Neil McLaine Pyper' on page 3, which

Actual references to the piper are few. On page 63 there is a list headed 'Sundries of the Grenadier Co' and on the facing page a list of names headed 'Acct with Capt Murdoch MacLaine', neither of which have dates but which might support the belief that he commanded the Grenadier Company. The list of names starts with three sergeants, three corporals, two drummers and (presumably) 38 privates. The payments vary. Of the two drummers listed, one gets 7s. 6d and the other £1 8s. 7d. All of the privates listed received under £1, but there is a Neil McLean among them who received £2 10s. 83/4d. – more than the NCOs, of whom the three sergeants received £2. 9s. 11 1/2d. each. This would suggest that although receiving his additional pay as the piper, which according to his first appearance in the accounts was allowed by the Commanding Officer, his actual rank was that of a private; he was not classed as a piper or an extra drummer. It might also explain a degree of confusion evident in his first appearance in the accounts, which included the amended entry: 'To your Pype and other Furnishings till allowed by the Commanding Officer £4–13sh–4d'.

If, as the 16 April 1776 letter indicates, Neil MacLean had been given the set of pipes previously belonging to John Rankin, whose lineage performed the hereditary office of piper to the MacLeans of Mull and Duart, it is possible that they may have needed some work to put them into playing order; perhaps the clue is in the word 'furnishings'. At some point a very elaborate pipe banner was made. It has survived in the regimental museum of the York and Lancasters, who after the Royal Highland Emigrants were disbanded became the next regiment to inherit the number 84. Since the ultimate paymasters for the 84th Royal Highlanders would have been the War Department in London, it can be safely assumed that all these accounts were being kept in pounds sterling rather than pounds Scots. The workmanship on the pipe banner was more likely to have been undertaken in the UK rather than America at that period, so a price somewhere in the region of £4 is quite close to a personal pipe banner bought by the Marquis of Huntly in 1712, which cost £41 14s. Scots or roughly about £3 8s. sterling, or allowing for the effects of the Napoleonic war on imported materials for some degree of inflation,

starts with a payment for shoes and a cash advance on 16 May 1776, follows entries for the two drummers under dates for the year 1777. The payments are carried forward twice, first to page 23 and then to page 59 of the next volume (24 April 1777 to 4 January 1781). This entry, which starts with the payments for shoes in 1776, covers two pages and initially ends with Neil McLean signing with his 'mark' on 30 June 1777. This is followed by another short entry and a further 'mark' dated at Halifax, 26 October 1777. Although the earlier records in the previous volume described Neil as piper, this aggregated account is simply headed 'Neil MacLaine'. The initial payments match the payments on the piper's first appearance and also add the information that the purchase of shoes along with the cash advance was in Edinburgh, which given the date fits with Lochbuie's letter requesting that the 'boy Gillies alias McLain' be sent to Edinburgh to join his cousin Captain Murdoch MacLean.

is not too far from the price of 11 guineas each paid by the Breadalbane Fencibles for their pipe banners about seventeen years later.¹⁷

The only other certain appearance of Neil in the ledgers occurs in volume six, which nominally runs from 24 June 1782 to 24 December 1782, although it also contains a merchant's cash account for the years 1779 to 1780. The entry reads:

Neil MacLaine Pyper

To Cash paid your father at different times by the hand of Mr G MacLaine of scalisdale mull 6 guineas	£7
To Raisins Payment & surgeons from 24 December 82 to 24 April 1783	£1–10–5
To making your soldiers cloathing	£ – 3 –

It has the date of 24 October written in the margin, and seems to have been jotted down in space left on what was originally going to be two pages headed 'Allan McLeod' and the date 1782, but of which only three lines were ever used, including McLeod's pay to 24 August. It is notable that while the piper seems to have received rations subsistence, there is no mention of his soldier's pay. If it does fall under the year 1782, then he was receiving the rations payment in advance.

However, in two pages simply headed 'Neil MacLaine' and the year 1783 in volume seven, those payments reoccur along with more payments for rations and his pay from 25 December 1782 to 24 April 1783. In this record, the sum of £7 accompanies the comment 'To paid your father by my orders & y^r Deasire'. Although this record is again signed as correct with Neil MacLean's 'mark', there is no clear indication of where he would have been during the payment periods and the writing and pen show clearly that the entries have been made on at least two different occasions. The same volume was used as a paybook from 1802 to 1804 for estate workmen and servants formerly in the 84th Regiment, including a Neil MacLean described as 'servant' and an Allan McLean 'pyper'.¹⁸

Other Evidence, 1778–1794

The question of where Neil actually was is further complicated by another five pay-related documents covering the period 1778 to 1783. They have been catalogued as abstract pay accounts for Captain Murdoch's company; however, two of them, covering the years 1780 to 1782, also contain the names of all the NCOs and privates but with no sign of a Neil MacLean.¹⁹ The War of American Independence had effectively ended with the British surrender at Yorktown in October 1781,

¹⁷ The York and Lancaster Regimental Museum, Rotherham.

¹⁸ NAS GD 174/2106/7/28.

¹⁹ NAS GD 174/2125/2 and GD 174/2125/4.

although the final peace negotiations continued until January 1783. Having been the first Highland Regiment raised and recruited in America, by 1782, less than a quarter of the enlisted men were Scots.

The men had originally been recruited on the promise of land grants at the end of the war, but these were slow to materialize and some of those who had joined directly from Scotland started to drift back. The only firm evidence for Neil's location during this period comes from a letter written for him at Halifax, Nova Scotia:

Neil McLean piper in 84th, 2 September 1782

Dear Father

I tack this opportunity of writing these few lines to you to let you know that I and my Family Enjoys a good State of Health at present Thanks be to god for it and hoping these few lines will find you all in the same state of Health dear father, I hope you will keep Lachlan my brother in the school for it is the Best Fortune that you can give him, I would be glad to know what place of the country that you are in now, I wish to know hoow is dead and alive of my Friends since I left the country, I have two children a boy and a girl I called the girl after my mother name and the boy after my friend Hector, This is the six letter I sent you, I think strange that I never got any letter but one about two years ago from you, my Cousin John bugbly (?) was in Argyle Regt he was wounded in his feet and lost one of his little Toes and last is that he is discharged about Two years ago he know ten miles above New York and keeps six or seven journeymen Doing very well his wife brother is with him there, he was wounded to and discharged from the 42nd Regt remember my kind compliments to all Enquiring I remain your dutiful Son till death

This next part was obviously written upon receiving a communication from Mull before he had a chance to send the first:

I absolve from yours that if I was to help you with some cash you would keep the stock for my own behove and upon my showing your letter to Capt McLean who arrived hear lately from Carolina he gave me his advice to let you have what I could spare and he undertook to send it to you by the hands of Mr McLean of Scallastle who will give you the former Five guineas Send you let me know how you do it and if I find that your leaving is increased and that the Stock can be saved for me I will send you Five pounds yearly as long as I stay here but as I am noe getting a family of my own would wish to have whatever I send you for the coming I have no news only much is said about Peace when it comes I will see you at any rate I mean to keep by Capt McLean here after

Neil McLean piper in the 84th regiment at Halifax Nova Scotia²⁰

²⁰ NAS GD 174/1348.

The fact that he was married probably identifies him as the Neil McLean, Soldier in the Young Royal Highland Regiment of Foot who married an Ann MacDonald in Halifax on 20 October 1777.²¹ It would seem from the codicil to the letter that he intended to transfer money to his father to take over and keep his animals to form a stock for himself and that he clearly intended to return to Mull.

Two more letters survive among the Lochbuie papers from pipers called Neil MacLean, one of which is certainly from the same man who served with Captain Murdoch and was written from Nova Scotia:

Neil McLean, 22 December 1794

Hon Sir

I was very glad to have by a man from Mull that you and the family were well last summer and that you was a Major in the Western Fencibles, God be thanks that you have a promising heir to your Estate which I hope you shall Enjoy for many years to come I am glad that my friend & your own nephew is a Capt in your Regt & that he is a very fine Gentleman, I was told that he listed two cousins of mine Lachlan and Murdoch, I hope that you will be kind to them, Your friend Luit & Adj Hector McLean is a Captain in a Regt that is now raising by the Gov here he and some other Highland Officers that belong to the Regt wanted me to join them in case I thought it would be to my advantage but not otherwise I was offered a shilling a day but I could not think of the long dress – but if I had been in the Highlands I certainly would be with yourself, I have now Five promising Boys and a Girl, the boys will soon (3 of them) be as tool as myself, I beg to inform you that my oldest son Hector is with your old acquaintance Peter McNab Shoemaker and my second John is with Mess Kanty Tallow Chandlers. wed have been fortably thanks to God but if you desire it Sir and that you can point out a tolerable livelihood for myself and family I then are at your service, I shall expect to be honoured with an answer, I hope your Honour will write me respecting the above, And particularly that you will be pleased to acquaint me what has become of Captain Lachlan McQuarrie there is no news that I can send you but that on St Andrews last meeting there was a very [the seal wax is over this word] meeting and that I had the Honour of receiving a Glass of Wine from His Royal Highness Prince Edward who is very fond of the Bagpipes

I have the Honour to be
with the Greatest Respect
Neil McLean
Piper late 84th Regt²²

²¹ Nova Scotia Archives, Marriage Bonds microfilm 15926, information from Barry W. Shears.

²² NAS GD 174/1501.

The recipient of this letter was clearly intended to be the former Captain Murdoch MacLean, who on the death of his cousin Archibald MacLean in 1784 had become the new MacLean of Lochbuie. In June 1793 he had been appointed Major in the newly raised Argyle Fencibles, which Neil MacLean seems to have confused with an earlier regiment known as the Western or Argyle Fencibles which was in existence between 1778 and 1783. By the date of this letter Murdoch had already moved on, having received a commission as Lieutenant Colonel of the Dumbartonshire Regiment of Fencibles on 11 October 1794.

The Peter McNab referred to is the man who gave his name to McNab's Island just off Halifax Harbour in Nova Scotia. He had purchased the island from the Cornwallis family on 25 December 1782, having prospered since first arriving in Halifax (although his background is a little vague). He has been variously described as a shoemaker, a Royal Navy Lieutenant on the staff of Governor Cornwallis and also a veteran of the British Army, having served in the War of American Independence. He is purported to have settled in Halifax in 1754, 1758 or after the peace of 1763, this latter date being supported by an advert which appeared in the 5 July 1796 edition of the Royal Gazette where he advises the public that he is closing his business and thanks the gentlemen of the navy and army for their encouragement during the 33 years he had followed his business in Halifax.

There are no signs of any McLeans on the Island in the poll tax rolls of 1793 and 1798/1800, but an 1808 map of the Peninsula and Harbour of Halifax made by John G Toler of the Royal Engineers marks a MacLean farm on the eastern side of McNabs Island (the only Neil MacLean around in the 1791–1793 poll tax rolls is described as a labourer in Dutch town, Halifax).²³

The second letter is far more problematic and leads directly to the question of whether there were two pipers called Neil MacLean with strong connections to Murdoch MacLean of Lochbuie, or if it was the same piper who had served in the 84th regiment and had also been a competitor in the early piping competitions. The letter is undated and very poorly written, which adds to the difficulty of interpreting the internal evidence:

Dear Sir

I take the Liberty of informing your hon that I have Been very ill for a long time in favers. and tree doctors was attening me which come to great expense no less nor a guinea a time. and a guinea a week in the house where I was ill for my trouble. I was not Able to play to the high land society for twelve months but twice but thank God I am now as well as ever. suppose all the doctors give me up for a deadman. I have desire them for once. and as for John Mackenzie he was like my last Master. airds ha was the only friend I had in this place – for all

²³ *McNabs Island: an Historical o verview*, (eds) Friends of McNabs Island Society, Parks and Recreation Division, Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources (April 1995).

the time I had `of illness He was sure to come to See me or send to me every day and night for the six months I been ill and Lord fife sent is servant tree times to see me – now Sir. I am at present scirse of money ... but Sir you have Guineas of mine since the year 1786 And youl pay yourself and will remmit £3 or 4 pounds interest or there about yourl see it Right yourself and the next year I will I sent you the rest but I hope that your hon Will Let me know from you as`soon as this comes to your hand I have wrote to you some time ago but Never had answer nor from John Campbell He is not like is father x General Maclean told me that you have build the best house in the west of Scotland but he is afraid that you will be Like him if you do look sharp you don have no sons but all Girls – there is noth new going on here at present – but will be plenty of work in Both houses this year the house of Lords open on thursday and the hous of commons on friday and Mr fox sivers that he will play the divel with Mr pitt for making peace with the king of spain, and every body takes foxs part already – your friend John small was to have a reg: if the war to go on – which I was expecting to see you in London but you may stay at home which it is the best M^r Macfard sent to me in the time I was ill which it was not in my poor to go to see him I have been at is house since I come to London but he was not at home I been in the country for my health – I have no more but my kind Compliments to all At airds and to M^{rs} MacLean of Lochbuie And hopes the young Ladies is well you told me Sir that you have got doncan my Brother with you I hope you will be so good as to send him [paper torn] trade or another it will be better for him nor to be in service my father wrote to me – but he did not say that the farm would be for any service to me but all to himself

I believe x yourl [possibly two words illegible due to fold in paper]

N20

South audley street Grosvenor square

I am Sir your most obedient and most Humble Servant

Niel M^rLean

yourl be so kind as to Let me know whether you have got my Master to Lockbuy or not Donald Macdonald your piper. I am told that he is a old man already – and Sir yourl Remember me to my father – and donald macdonald your piper

I am in hurry Sir which I hope yourl Excuse me ²⁴

The letter, or at least the first part, seems to have been intended for Murdoch MacLean of Lochbuie, who had married Jane Campbell, the daughter of Major

²⁴ NAS GD 174/1451.

John Campbell of Airds (and formerly of the Western or Argyle Fencibles) in 1786. They started building a new house on Mull in 1788 and the couple stayed at Airds until it was completed in 1791.²⁵ The final part of the letter at first reading seems even more confusing than the rest, but can be interpreted in a way that does make some sense. Among Murdoch MacLean's accounts from his merchant days there are two references in 1769 to a Donald MacDonald, described as 'Lochbuie's piper'.²⁶ The Lochbuie at that point was John MacLean (c.1700–78) the father of Murdoch's cousin and predecessor Archibald (c.1749–84). So what Neil MacLean would appear to be asking was whether Donald MacDonald, his 'master' in the sense of having been his piping tutor, was still acting as the Lochbuie piper but now serving Murdoch there.

Neil MacLean of the Highland Society of London

Setting the above undated letter against the references among the Highland Society of London's archives relating to their piper Neil MacLean, including the piper's illness and doctors' bills, clearly identifies it as being from the same piper. It is also clear from the Highland Society accounts that their piper was remitting some of his income to his father through the hands of MacLean of Lochbuie.²⁷ The background to this Neil MacLean before he became piper to the Highland Society at the beginning of 1785 is closely linked to the early piping competitions held under the auspices of the Highland Society of London, first in Falkirk and then in Edinburgh. The political manoeuvring that led to the setting up of the Highland Society of Scotland in Edinburgh and their running of the piping competitions has been well covered by William Donaldson and it is mainly the firm references to Neil MacLean that are relevant here.²⁸

The details of this Neil MacLean's life before he appears in the records of the piping competitions are limited to what can be surmised from these later references. His connections to Lochbuie and the piper Donald MacDonald point to Neil having come from Mull. The first firm reference to him comes from the minute of the Proceedings of the Highland Society Competition held at Falkirk on 15 October 1782 when, as second piper to the West Fencibles, he was awarded one guinea. The winner that year was John McAlister, first piper to the West Fencibles, and so it can be surmised that Neil as the junior of the two pipers had replaced Colin Campbell of the Netherlorn family, who, having enlisted with Major Campbell of

²⁵ Currie, *Mull: the Island and its People*, pp. 153–4.

²⁶ NAS GD 174/562.

²⁷ Information from Iain MacInnes, June 2007.

²⁸ William Donaldson, *The Highland Pipe and Scottish Society, 1750–1950* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 2000), pp. 67–8.

Airds as piper to the West Fencible Regiment in 1778, had been invalided out at Whitsunday 1781.²⁹

In the following year's Highland Society of London competition, run at Falkirk on 15 October 1783, Neil MacLean, now described as piper to Major Campbell of Airds, received the first prize. This was the year in which a second competition was arranged in Edinburgh for the following week and was the forerunner of the switch of the next and all following years' competitions being held in that city. In an internal letter to the Highland Society of London on behalf of the organizers of the Edinburgh competition, it was suggested that Neil had also previously competed in the first competition held 1781, and that he was less than 19 years of age.³⁰ Indeed the letter goes on to imply his first prize was a fix, but viewed against what seems to have been a political tug of war between the establishments of Edinburgh and Glasgow, it is interesting to note that the letter, when received by the Highland Society in London, was only minuted as 'purporting to speak on behalf of the organizers'. It also seems rather odd that if Neil MacLean's prize was believed to have been the result of irregular judging that they would have then appointed him as the official piper to the society. It has also been noted that he looks older than 20 years in the portrait of him made in 1784.³¹

The public reports of the two competitions gave no hint to whatever was going on behind the scenes, although an extensive printed report of what was described as a 'Circumstantial Account of the Exhibition on the Highland Great Pipes in Dunn's Assembly Rooms [in Edinburgh] on Wednesday October 22, 1783' does provide one indication of the organizers' motives. After the description of the 'competition', it moves on to describe the presentation of another set of pipes to:

Professor M'Arthur, as a mark of ... their approbation of so great a performer's merit, who is immediately, with the assistance of the public, to establish a college for the instruction of such young men as may be sent him to be bred to that ancient music, the utility of which in recruiting his Majesty's army, and the military ardour with which it inspires the highland regiments are too well known to say any further. It is therefore hoped that those at the head of the army will in particular encourage so laudable an undertaking, that the highland corps may be better and more easily furnished with pipers than they have hitherto been.³²

Written at a time when the War of American Independence was over and many regiments were being stood down and disbanded, it clearly must reflect the

²⁹ National Library of Scotland (hereafter referred to as NLS) Dep 268/15; Keith Sanger, 'Colin Campbell's Canntaireachd— the history of [the] Netherlorn family', *Piping Times* 58/1 (2005): pp 37–43.

³⁰ Donaldson, *The Highland Pipe and Scottish Society*, pp. 67–8.

³¹ Bridget Mackenzie, *Piping Traditions of Argyll* (Glasgow The Piobaireachd Society, 2004), p. 223.

³² NAS GD 248/27/2, item 49.



Illustration 6.1 Neil MacLean, Piper to the Highland Society of London, 1784.

previous difficulties of finding Highland pipers, a problem that was still evident at the commencement of the Napoleonic Wars a decade later.³³

The references to Neil MacLean in the Highland Society of London accounts continue through to 1791. Apart from his duties to the Highland Society, he also on at least one occasion performed on stage as part of a production at Sadler's Wells.³⁴ The first indication that he had been ill were payments for doctors' bills and medicines in December 1789, which continued through until the following March. Although he seems to have recovered his health, signs that he and the society were about to part company were evident and the last record of him in the society's accounts was 'A final payment of a quarter's wages was made to MacLean in June 1791, previous to his going off to India'.³⁵

One Piper or Two?

The suggestion that the Highland Society of London's piper was going to India provides a suitable starting point for discussing whether he and the piper to the 84th regiment in Canada were one and the same. Although his letter to Murdoch Maclean of Lochbuie was undated, the internal evidence does give some clues. It was clearly written after his illness and the reference to General MacLean's³⁶ information points to a situation that pertained in 1791 – when the new Lochbuie home had been completed but before Murdoch's son, also a Murdoch, was born – which makes it strange that no mention of going to India is made. However, the political reference to the opening of parliament seems to suggest the letter could be as late as 1793, the year that Prime Minister William Pitt entered into a coalition with Spain, among others, against France.

If that is the case, then clearly Neil did not go to India, but a possible explanation behind the piper's original intention again links to another possible common factor between the 'two Neils'. The young ensign Lachlan MacQuarry, who had also travelled out with Captain Murdoch MacLean to Halifax to join the 84th regiment in the Autumn of 1776, had, after a period spent lingering on half pay, gained a Lieutenant's commission in the 77th Regiment raised in 1787 and bound for India. He was gazetted to Captain on 9 November 1788, although it was not until March the following year that the news of his promotion actually reached him. He received a local promotion to Major from the Commander of Forces in India

³³ See footnote 2.

³⁴ *World*, 9 September 1788: 'Mr Neil M'Lean, Piper to the Highland Society in London, will, in the ancient garb of his country, entertain the Audience with a Pibroch on the Prize Pipes, Descriptive of a Highland Battle.'

³⁵ Information from Iain MacInnes, June 2007.

³⁶ Almost certainly Brigadier General Allan MacLean of Torloisk, the former commanding officer of the 1st Battalion of the 84th Royal Highland Regiment, who had sold his commission and retired to London.

in August 1793, which given the usual travel time lag for news from India of around five months or so, means that the reference to Captain Lachlan MacQuarrie in the letter from the piper Neil MacLean in Halifax is consistent with what the Highland Society piper Neil would have known if he had decided to head for Canada sometime shortly after his letter to Lochbuie.

There are in fact very few points at which the known locations of the pipers actually overlap, let alone clash, which brings us back to the period between 1781 and 1782 and the piping competitions. If the claim that the winner of the 1783 competition had also taken part in the first competition in 1781 was correct, it would have required the 84th's piper to have been in Scotland at Falkirk, and then, without visiting his Father on Mull, return to his regiment at Halifax before his letter to his Father in September of the following year. He would then have had to make a return journey from Halifax to Scotland between the date of that letter of 2 September and the piping competition held on 15 October some six weeks later. It is on those six weeks that the balance of probability rests, since it is possible to rationalize the other details of that period.

In the letter to his father, Neil of the 84th was clearly intending to return home; otherwise, there would not have been much point in arranging to send money for his father to keep the stock for him, and the fact that the letter itself remained in with Captain Murdoch MacLean's papers may suggest that it was never actually sent, because Neil himself had in fact returned home. Since there is hard evidence that Captain Murdoch himself had completed a journey from America to Britain in three weeks during the winter of 1776, even the six weeks between the date of the letter at Halifax and the Falkirk competition would fall within the bounds of possibility.

As a direct recruit from Scotland, the Neil MacLean of the 84th would have been in a different position to the main body of the regiment, which was meant to have been raised entirely in America; by 1782 less than a quarter of its enlisted men were Scots. The surviving regimental papers provide little firm evidence for Neil's deployment during the war, especially for the protracted period during the peace negotiations. A visit to Scotland during the time of the first competition in 1781, before returning to Halifax but without visiting his home in Mull, might seem a little unlikely, but not impossible, and in any case the evidence that the Neil MacLean who competed in 1782 and 1783 was at the first competition rests purely on a politicized account which had its own agenda.

If it was Neil from the 84th who competed in the 1782 Highland Society competition, it is quite within context that, having adapted to a military life, he would on return from America have enlisted or transferred into the Western Fencibles, only to be stood down again and then temporarily been taken under the wing of Major Campbell of Airds by the time of the 1783 competition. Certainly the Neil MacLean who won the first prize at that competition and later became the Highland Society of London's honorary piper shows no long-standing attachment to the Airds family; nor is there any evidence either immediately before or after of the Campbells' normally retaining a family piper.

So we return to that crucial six-week period between America and Falkirk. Halifax, especially after the Yorktown surrender, was at that time the most important station on the Atlantic seaboard with regular sailings to Britain,³⁷ so the possibility that Neil MacLean of the 84th could have had a change of mind and decided to go home rather than send the letter is possible. However, it would need some further supporting evidence before it could be convincingly claimed that he and the Highland Society of London's piper were one and the same. Whether we are looking at one man or two, their backgrounds demonstrate the impact that Britain's wars and the military requirements imposed through the last decades of the eighteenth century had on that generation of pipers. It is also one further stage in documenting the history of piping in Mull and extending our knowledge beyond just the reaches of the celebrated Rankin family.³⁸

³⁷ Information from Barry W. Shears.

³⁸ Keith Sanger, 'Mull and the MacLean Pipers', *Piping Times* 42/9 (1990): 38–43.

Chapter 7

Simon Fraser Reconsidered

Bridget Mackenzie

In 1910 Simon Fraser in Australia began to write letters to the *o ban Times*, in which he outlined his ideas about the origins of *piobaireachd*. His wild theories and lack of proof created an unfortunate impression, so that minds were set against him long before his settings were made public. Copies of his music were not deposited in the National Library of Scotland until 1951, and tapes were given to the School of Scottish Studies, University of Edinburgh, in 1961; copyright restrictions prevented general access, even then.

In 1979 Dr Barrie J. MacLachlan Orme, a pupil of Simon's son, Hugh Fraser, published a selection of the settings. The Piobaireachd Society was happy enough largely to ignore them; add the reluctance of the establishment to accept guidance from the 'colonies', and it is easy to understand the antagonism towards Simon Fraser. The settings were not completely unknown: some pipers wrote to Australia requesting copies, and Fraser had correspondents in India, South Africa and the USA – but they were on the fringes of the piping world and were regarded as cranks. In Scotland his greatest supporter was William Gray, who made an extensive collection of Fraser manuscript settings, mainly sent to him by G.F. Ross after Fraser's death. Gray published a few Fraser settings in *Piping and Dancing* in the late 1930s and early 1940s,¹ but these reached only a limited public.

In 1957 Archibald Campbell, editing Book 9 of the Piobaireachd Society's second series of *piobaireachd* repertoire, presented a ground of 'Lord Lovat's Lament' given by Simon Fraser in *canntaireachd* in a letter to the *o ban Times* on 10 May 1910. Campbell grudgingly admitted that the ground was 'perhaps more satisfactory' in setting than Angus MacKay's, but added 'there may be different opinions'.² Campbell's successor, Archie Kenneth, was more generous. Editing the 'Lament for Donald Duaghal MacKay' for Book 13, he referred to Simon Fraser's setting as 'excellent', 'very musical', and 'much the most satisfactory' of the available versions.³

¹ P.M. Willie Gray's personal notes, typescript, held in the College of Piping, Glasgow, MS 49 (undated), pp. 59–70.

² *Piobaireachd, a ... collection of ... tunes edited by Comunn na Piobaireachd* (15 vols, Glasgow, 1925–89), vol. 9, pp. 248–9.

³ *Piobaireachd, a ... collection of ... tunes edited by Comunn na Piobaireachd*, vol. 13, p. 431–8.

Aiming to gain recognition for Simon Fraser, Dr Orme not only transcribed many Fraser settings into staff notation for publication in 1979, but also made recordings of his own playing in the Fraser style. On hearing these, a Hebridean piper of the old school commented ‘That’s *real* music – that’s how Lachie Ban MacCormick used to play.’ And Willie Gray wrote of Simon Fraser: ‘He has to be considered as an authority on the subject [*piobaireachd* music], both by his superior settings and skill in noting.’⁴ Fraser’s setting of the ground and doubling of ‘The Lament for Patrick Og MacCrimmon’ offers a good example of his approach to rhythmic and ornamental motifs commonly found in *piobaireachd*. The setting featured below is transcribed from Dr Orme’s playing, having been taught by Simon Fraser’s son Hugh.

Others were less enthusiastic. William Donaldson said that Fraser’s ideas ‘were accepted by a number of otherwise sensible people ... conditioned to accept the possibility of a lost realm of Celtic lore, a part of whose appeal lay in its magical exemption from the constraints of logic or proof.’⁵

In 2004, when he was satisfied that Simon Fraser would not be further ridiculed, Dr Orme lifted his copyright restrictions on the material in Edinburgh. Today, pipers no longer take their opinions from their ‘betters’ in the gentry, but have the confidence to form their own views; they will judge Simon Fraser on the quality of his music. Perhaps this is the time, then, to look more closely at the Frasers’ claims. This chapter attempts to reconsider the facts available regarding the family’s origins in Scotland; Simon’s own upbringing in Australia; his professed religious beliefs and their role in his interpretation of *piobaireachd*; the influence of Niel MacLeod of Gesto; his alleged connections with the Brunos of sixteenth-century Italy and, later, the MacCrimmon and MacArthur families of Skye and Mull.

Hugh Archibald Fraser, Niel MacLeod of Gesto and Freemasonry

Simon’s father was Hugh Archibald Fraser, who had emigrated to Australia in 1828 from the Inverness area of the Scottish Highlands. Dr Orme tells us that Hugh Archibald learned his *canntaireachd* from Iain Dubh MacCrimmon and Captain Niel MacLeod, eleventh laird of Gesto, whose cousin was Hugh Archibald’s mother.⁶

The family tradition is that Hugh Archibald emigrated with a substantial amount, £30,000 or more, which he lost within the first 15 years of his life in Australia, partly through poor farming, partly from gambling on horses. If he took

⁴ *o ban Times*, February 1951.

⁵ William Donaldson, *The Highland Pipe and Scottish Society, 1750–1950* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 2000), p. 413.

⁶ Barrie J. MacLachlan Orme, *The Piobaireachd of Simon Fraser with Canntaireachd* (Victoria, Australia: privately published, 1979, 2nd edn 1985), pp. 7, 11, quoting National Library of Scotland MS 9619.

Example 7.1 The ground and doubling of ‘The Lament for Patrick Og MacCrimmon’, with Simon Fraser’s *canntaireachd*, from the playing of Dr Barry MacLachlan Orme (CD track 18). Courtesy of Mrs Mary Orme.

Ground

he vun bodro he vin bodro he vun betru hu ru ru he vitru he a betre he vun bodro he ir ir in

he vun bodro he vin bodro he vun vitru hu ru ru he vitru he a betre he vin bodra he o ro ro

he vin bodro he re re he vun bodro he a varla he vun betru he vitru he re re he re re

he vun betru he vitru he a varla he a varia he vitru he a betre he vun bodro he ir ir in

Double

he vun bodro he vin bodro he vun betru hu ha he vitru he a betre he vun bodro he in hun

he vun bodro he vin bodro he vun betru hu ha he vitru he a betre he vin bodra he o rin

he un bodro he ha he vun bodro he a ho he vun betru he vitru he re re he ha

he vun betru he vitru he a varla he a ho he vitru he a betre he vun bodro he in hun

so much, it is perhaps surprising that his departure was not noted in the local newspaper, especially at a time when debt was forcing many of the old Fraser families to sell their estates, transactions duly reported. Dr Orme was convinced of the accuracy of the tradition; he said (in personal correspondence) that Hugh Archibald would have needed such a sum to buy and develop the large tract of land at Hunter River Valley, where he first settled in Australia.

Hugh Archibald's exact lineage is unclear,⁷ but descendants in Australia claimed that his father 'knew Campbell of Lorn who wrote the Netherlorn Manuscripts'.⁸ Simon wrote in 1920: 'My grandfather on my father's side knew Campbell personally, and he advised him to keep to what he was taught – the MacCrimmon notation'.⁹ This alleged link to Netherlorn could be an attempt by Simon to establish his own family's piping credentials, based partly on Logan's Preface to Angus MacKay's *Collection*.¹⁰

In 1812, we are told, Hugh Archibald became acquainted with his mother's kinsman, Niel MacLeod eleventh laird of Gesto, and that four years later Gesto introduced him to Iain Dubh MacCrimmon. Hugh Archibald is said to have learned to sing *piobaireachd* in *canntaireachd* vocables taught by Iain Dubh himself. He was also able to transcribe these vocables on paper. Not himself a piper, he is said to have played *piobaireachd* on the Jew's harp. Simon said in 1929 that his father never learned to play the pipes because 'having to travel so much, he had no time to do so'.¹¹ It is not clear, however, where he had travelled to, or why.

This combination of Iain Dubh, Gesto and, reportedly, Hugh Archibald, led to the writing of the Gesto manuscript(s); all copies are now apparently lost. The manuscripts were seen by the Rev. Alexander MacGregor in Edinburgh in 1835; in a letter dated 1880 he wrote: 'He [Gesto, in Edinburgh in the 1830s] had a large manuscript collection of the MacCrimmon "piobaireachds" as noted by themselves and part of it was very old and yellow in the paper from age, with some writing getting dim. Other parts were evidently more modern and on different paper.'¹²

Simon Fraser always referred to Gesto's written transcripts as 'MSS', a plural which seems to accord with the 1835 description, although Simon used it as a singular. He described the recording of some 200 *piobaireachd* compositions on paper. Hugh Archibald wrote down the music in *canntaireachd* syllables 'for John' (Iain Dubh), who would have been singing rather than playing, as he was described

⁷ A great deal of documentary evidence, not presented in this chapter, links Hugh Archibald Fraser to the Frasers in Dalcrombie and Dalcrag and to Sir William Fraser, first Baronet of Leadclune. Much of this material corroborates the oral traditions preserved by the descendents of the Australian Fraser family.

⁸ Orme, *The Piobaireachd of Simon Fraser*, p. 11; see also Roderick D. Cannon, 'The Campbell Canntaireachd Manuscript' in this book.

⁹ Barry J. MacLachlan Orme, *Extracts From Letters From and About Simon Fraser* (Victoria, Australia: privately published, 1978), p. 27.

¹⁰ Angus MacKay, *A Collection of Ancient Piobaireachd or Highland Pipe Music* (Edinburgh: MacLachlan and Stewart, 1838), p. 13.

¹¹ Orme, *Extracts*, p. 31.

¹² Quoted by William Donaldson, *Pipers* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2005) p. 88, based on the article 'Canntaireachd, or Articulate Music', *The Celtic Magazine* 5 (1880), pp. 483–4.

in 1815 as being too old to play.¹³ These sessions of writing out the vocables must have been before 1822, the year Iain died.

The writing is attributed solely to Hugh Archibald, even though Gesto was present and fully literate and MacGregor's testimony makes it clear the manuscripts were in several different hands. Perhaps the term 'writer' was misunderstood: if Hugh Archibald was a writer (that is, a lawyer or other legal professional), someone unfamiliar with Scottish legal terms may have later assumed it meant he wrote down the vocables. Hugh Archibald's family often referred to him as 'Gesto's writer' or 'writer for Gesto', which might suggest he acted as a legal adviser to Gesto (although Gesto's solicitor, dealing with his court cases, was Alexander MacDonald – many of whose clients were Fraser gentry around Inverness. They would have different lawyers for court cases and for local matters).

Into a selection of works from this manuscript of *piobaireachd* music in *canntaireachd* syllables, Gesto is said to have put an unknown amount of material (Simon said 100 pages) relating to 'MacCrimmon secrets'. He made two proof copies of his first book, known as 'The History of the MacCrimmons and the Great Pipe', or 'Gesto 1826', one of which he gave to Hugh Archibald. He took it to Australia, and later passed it on to his son Simon, who lost it. The other copy also seems to have ended up in Australia, taken there later by one of Gesto's sons, and lost when he died.

The loss of the only two copies of this book is regarded with suspicion by the sceptics, but these things do happen, especially in a society which neither valued nor understood what was in the books. Simon himself wrote:

I happened to leave Gesto's Book of 1826 behind on the wall plate of the shop I used to work in. Not thinking it was valuable, I did not bother about the book, till I got corresponding with Dr Bannatyne, who informed me [mistakenly] that he was the only one in Scotland who knew anything about the MacCrimmon Notation. So, I went to enquire of the man who rented our place at Benalla, he told me that his children have got a hold of the book and destroyed it. The most of the 50 tunes that were in it, are in Angus MacKay's and D. MacDonald's Books.¹⁴

The manuscript itself was also lost. It, too, was taken to Australia, and later passed to Simon Fraser, who allegedly sold it to a MacCrimmon in Canada, but the evidence for this is unsatisfactory. In a somewhat confused letter in 1924, Simon wrote: 'The MSS I sold was the one owned by Niel MacLeod of Gesto. It was the MSS that he wrote his books from, to a man in Canada, who is related to John Dubh MacCrimmon, and he will not publish the MSS.' To this he added, at the end of the letter, 'The sold MSS was the one Niel MacLeod of Gesto took the tunes from, that

¹³ I.F. Grant, *The MacLeods: The History of a Clan, 1200–1956* (London: Faber & Faber, 1959), p. 561.

¹⁴ Orme, *Extracts*, p. 29.

are in his books of 1826 and 1828'.¹⁵ The Canadian purchaser has not been traced, and the MacCrimmons in Canada denied all knowledge of the transaction.

Gesto 1826 was never published, the tradition being that Gesto's friends persuaded him not to go ahead with it because of those 'secrets', said by Dr Orme to have amounted to various unorthodox religious doctrines. In 1828, the year that Hugh Archibald left for Australia, Gesto published a slim book called *Pibereach or pipe tunes, as taught verbally by the McCrimmen pipers in Skye to their apprentices*, or 'Gesto 1828', which was later printed by J. & R. Glen of Edinburgh. It contains 20 works written out in *canntaireachd*, with no theories or 'secrets' about the MacCrimmons. Hugh Archibald took a copy with him to Australia.

The 'secrets' said to have been contained in Gesto 1826 may have been the mysteries of the Freemasons, known to have been active in Inverness in the early nineteenth century.¹⁶ Although the Inverness Freemasons are on record from 1678, only the most important office-bearers are named. Writing of the early nineteenth century, Joseph Mitchell said the St John's Lodge was 'a centre for social meetings of the gentlemen of Inverness and its neighbourhood'. These gentlemen held an annual dinner, but in addition they 'used to meet in Masonic array once a month, generally about thirty in number, spending a very agreeable evening in social intercourse and song'. In 1825 the Freemasons became the proprietors of the Caledonian Hotel, previously known as the Masonic Lodge, in the centre of the town.¹⁷ It is clear that they were closely involved in the social life of the Inverness gentry.

Hugh Archibald and Gesto may well have been among these gentlemen, but we cannot be certain. Some of Gesto's many court cases, in his prolonged litigation with his MacLeod chief, were heard in the Masonic Lodge in Inverness in 1816.¹⁸ It was recorded in 1813 that Lord Lovat, the chief of clan Fraser, gave St Andrew's Lodge five guineas every year, and both of the Inverness Lodges, St Andrew's and St John's, had many Frasers on their books.¹⁹

It is not clear whether Simon Fraser himself was a Freemason, but his statement that his sons were Freemasons and his expressed dislike of mysteries and rituals in that context suggest that he was not.²⁰ Probably the Masonic movement was undeveloped in the remoter parts of Australia at the time of Hugh Archibald's emigration, making it unlikely that he could continue active membership. He may have retained the unorthodox beliefs as his own personal faith, with its simplistic doctrines well suited to the pioneer life. When Simon's sons grew up, they were in

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Alexander Ross, *Freemasonry in Inverness* (Inverness, 1877); Joseph Mitchell, *Reminiscences of my Life in the Highlands* (2 vols, privately published, 1883–84), vol. 2, p. 72. Reprint edited by Ian Robertson (Devon: David and Charles, 1971).

¹⁷ Mitchell, *ibid.*

¹⁸ Scottish National Archives CD 128/43/6/2 (letter from MacLeod's solicitor to Gesto's).

¹⁹ Ross, *Freemasonry in Inverness*.

²⁰ Orme, *Extracts*, p. 26.

a more urban environment, and all three became Freemasons. Simon did not claim that the earlier MacCrimmons belonged, but he did maintain that they followed a heretical form of Christianity, Patrick Mòr believing in 'Perfect Love', by which Christians love their enemies but reject the clergy and all organized creeds and ceremonies. According to Simon, this 'primitive Christianity' retained a passionate belief in the Holy Trinity.²¹

Mary Anderson and the Alleged MacArthur Connection

Hugh Archibald Fraser had moved from Hunter River Valley in New South Wales, when he married Mary Anderson in 1844. Family tradition is that Mary's mother was a MacArthur, but there is no documentary proof.

Their eldest son Simon was emphatic that his mother's grandfather was Charles MacArthur, known as Charles I, the Skye piper to the MacDonald chief, and an excellent composer of *piobaireachd*. The claim cannot be proven, however. Charles had two known piping sons, Donald and Alexander; there may have been other sons and daughters, but we know nothing of them.

Simon Fraser wrote of Charles MacArthur that he:

... was taught by Patrick Og MacCrimmon at Dunvegan for eleven years. He was a favourite pupil and Patrick Og took great pains to teach him all he knew. When Charles had finished his tuition, he returned to his farm at Peingowan, where he was the last of the hereditary pipers to the MacDonalds of the Isles.²²

This inaccurate statement may be a garbled version of part of the preface to Angus MacKay's *Collection*,²³ written by James Logan for the Highland Society of London. We know that Simon had access to Angus MacKay's book, as he annotated a copy for A.K. Cameron. Simon may have been trying to produce evidence in support of a claim made by his mother.

The family tradition was that Mary Anderson came from Kinlochailort, living at Irine, a house beside the Irine Burn. This preserves the old name, Irine, for the settlement now known as Roshven (House and Farm), which does lie beside the Irine Burn. In the census of 1841, a Mary Anderson is found at Irine House, on the west coast, a few miles south-west of Kinlochailort village, in the parish of Ardnamurchan, Argyll.

This Mary Anderson was aged between 30 and 34 in 1841, one of two female servants employed by Jessie Martin, the other being Anne MacArthur, aged about 20 (the 1841 census rounds adult ages down to the nearest five). Mary was born within the county of Argyll, but Anne was not. They may have been related, but the

²¹ Orme, *The Piobaireachd of Simon Fraser* (2nd edn), p. 32.

²² Orme, *The Piobaireachd of Simon Fraser* (2nd edn), p. 13.

²³ MacKay, *A Collection of Ancient Piobaireachd*.

1841 census does not give relationships or marital status. Mary could have been the mother of Simon Fraser's mother, Mary junior, who was 14 at this time, but she could not have been a daughter of Charles I MacArthur, dead by 1780. She could possibly have been the daughter of Charles's nephew, Charles II (see below).

Mary Anderson junior was a few miles from Irine when the census was taken in June 1841: she was a servant, aged 14, in the hotel at Kinlochailort, one of four staff in the employ of Donald MacDonald, 45, publican. Her birth was 'in this county' [Argyll] in 1827; the birth was not recorded, however, indicating that she was not baptized. In October 1841 she left for Australia.

The father of Mary junior, said to be Norman Anderson, presents a puzzle. The Frasers claimed that he was intimate with the MacArthur pipers, so close that the great Charles imparted his 'secrets' to him, and he passed them on to his daughter. Simon's account of this varies: he wrote that she 'took such an interest in the Piob. that my grandfather [Norman] taught her the notation and secrets',²⁴ but elsewhere he said she learned them from listening to her father telling his friends.²⁵ The implication is that Mary was brought up with close access to her father, and that he had been living near to Charles MacArthur, but it is not clear where.

Norman was not at Kinlochailort in 1841. The only Andersons then in the parish, apart from the two Marys, were two summer itinerants, both called Alexander, one a tinsmith, the other a salmon fisher. Neither lived in Kinlochailort; neither was born in Argyll.

The only recorded Norman Anderson in Scotland at that time was in Tarskavaig, Sleat, in the south of Skye; in 1817 he married Isabel Anderson, from Aird of Sleat, probably his cousin, and they had a large family, which included another Mary, born in 1825. He cannot have been married to the Mary (senior) who was at Irine in 1841, as Isabel was still living then.

In a letter written around 1914, Simon Fraser said one of his mother's brothers lived to be over 100, the implication being that there was a family who kept in touch with Mary.²⁶ This might be a reference to the family of Norman and Isabel Anderson in Sleat, with Mary junior a half-sister, born around 1827 outside the marriage. This Norman Anderson, aged about 40 in 1841, cannot have been an intimate of Charles I MacArthur, who had been dead some twenty years before Norman was born.

Willie Gray, interviewed by John MacInnes in 1961, said that Charles MacArthur and Iain Dubh MacCrimmon were 'great friends', though on what evidence is unclear. He was referring to the nephew, the MacArthur known as Charles II, who became piper to the Eglintons in Ayrshire – but even he would have been too early to have been a confidant of Norman Anderson, as he seems to

²⁴ Orme, *Extracts*, p. 7.

²⁵ Orme, *The Piobaireachd of Simon Fraser* (2nd edn), p. 13.

²⁶ Orme, *Extracts*, p. 20.

have died between 1805 and 1807 or possibly a little later.²⁷ He is known to have been in Skye in 1778 as Lady MacDonald's piper, being given two pecks of meal 'as maintenance till he had the opportunity of going out of the country' [that is, leaving Skye];²⁸ soon afterwards he went to Abercairney as piper, before taking up a post in Ayrshire as piper to Lady MacDonald's brother, the Earl of Eglinton. Charles's cousin Donald was the tenant of Hunglader in 1774,²⁹ so perhaps Charles II was at Tarskavaig Mòr, as the Sleat piper, in the 1770s – close to the home of Norman Anderson's father, Donald.

The MacDonald chiefs maintained a piper in each of their baronies: Sleat, Trotternish and North Uist. The main MacArthur piping family had their home at Hunglader, the tenancy granted to them when the chief's main residence was Duntulm, in Trotternish. The chiefs used their new house at Monkstat, Trotternish, in the eighteenth century, and the MacArthurs were their pipers, resident at Hunglader until 1800.

A house at Armadale, in Sleat, had long been one of the chiefs' secondary homes, and their piper there in 1733 was Malcolm MacIntyre, whose home at Tarskavaig Mòr appears in a Rent Roll of that year.³⁰ Johnson and Boswell mentioned having heard the chief's piper play when they were staying with Sir Alexander MacDonald at Armadale in 1773; this was probably Charles II MacArthur.³¹ By Norman Anderson's time, in the early nineteenth century, the MacArthur pipers were living in Edinburgh.

In 1815 Lord MacDonald, mostly an absentee in the south, built Armadale Castle as his main residence in Skye.³² It is not clear whether his Sleat piper lived in Tarskavaig Mòr, which was the official home of the Sleat estate piper, according to local tradition. Norman Anderson could have picked up a knowledge of piping from any piper there. Tarskavaig appears to be the only link between this Norman Anderson and *piobaireachd* – but was he the father of Mary junior? If so, she would have been a 'by-blow', born to him and Mary senior during his marriage to Isabel. The child may have been accepted as his, taking his name and living in his household until she was old enough to be employed. Such an arrangement was not unusual; Isabel MacKay, for example, accepted her husband's illegitimate daughter into her household in Sutherland when she married John Sutherland in 1747.³³

²⁷ Frans Buisman, (ed.), *The MacArthur – MacGregor Manuscript of Piobaireachd (1820)* (Glasgow and Aberdeen: The Universities of Glasgow and Aberdeen in association with the John MacFadyen Memorial Trust and The Piobaireachd Society, 2001), p. xxvi.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. xxv.

²⁹ National Archives of Scotland GD 248/168/13 (Seafeld papers).

³⁰ Alexander Nicolson, *History of Skye* (Glasgow: MacLaren and Sons, 1930), revised and edited by Alasdair MacLean (Skye: MacLean Press, 1994), p. 187.

³¹ R. W. Chapman (ed.), *A Tour to the Hebrides* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1930), p. 44.

³² Nicolson (ed. MacLean), *History of Skye*, p. 239.

³³ Ian Grimble, *The World of Rob Donn* (Edinburgh: Saltire Society, 1999), p. 103.

Norman, Isabel and all their eight lawful children were born 'in the county' [Inverness-shire], and appear to have had no links with Lochailort. They were at Gillen, Tarskavaig, where in 1841 they lived beside Norman's brother and father. All, including the wives, were born in Sleat.

By 1851 Norman and his family were gone from Tarskavaig, though his mother, aged 85, was still there, as was his brother. Isabel's brothers, all with large families, were living at Aird of Sleat. The disappearance of Norman's family from the records, with seven surviving children, three of them boys (David, born in 1818, Donald, 1827 and Alexander, 1829), suggests that they emigrated during the 1840s. The brother of Mary who lived to be over 100 may have done so in Australia. Simon Fraser said that his mother 'loved all the old Skye songs'.³⁴

If the mother of Mary junior was, as claimed, a MacArthur, it is possible that she was Mary, born in June 1810 to Charles MacArthur and his wife Catherine at Ardlanish, in the Argyll island of Mull. These MacArthurs were pipers, related to the family of Willie Gray, and he linked them to the piping MacArthurs of Ulva, off the west coast of Mull – and to the Skye MacArthurs. Even if Mary was not of this family in Mull, it seems that the Fraser family believed she was, possibly from information given to them by Willie Gray.³⁵ It is not clear if there was a link with Norman Anderson.

According to oral tradition in Mull, as reported by Neil Rankin Morrison, both branches of piping MacArthurs originated in Proaig, Islay, coming to Ulva and Skye around 1700. The first of the Ulva MacArthurs is thought to have been a brother of the first MacArthur piper in Skye.³⁶ Their father was Charles MacArthur, who died in 1696 and is buried at Kildalton Church, Islay.

Archibald and John, the best known of the Ulva pipers, were previously believed to have been born and married in Ulva, a claim supported by entries in the Parish Register, but recent evidence suggests that they were the sons of John ('the

³⁴ Orme, *The Piobaireachd of Simon Fraser* (2nd edn), p. 13.

³⁵ Letter from Willie Gray to Hugh Fraser, 1961 (Orme, *Extracts*, p. 61); notes and letters by Willie Gray, held in the College of Piping, Glasgow, 49.1–2. To Simon Fraser's son Hugh, Willie Gray wrote (12 November 1956): 'Did you ever come across in Australia any MacArthurs from the Isle of Mull. They were all pipers and made their own pipes. They were of Skye extraction and related to my mother who was a MacKinnon – Mull. I think these MacArthurs I refer to were descendants of Charles MacArthur's nephews. If so, they must have been near relations of your Grand-mother, Mrs Hugh Fraser. The famous Charles MacArthur was piper to Lady Margaret MacDonald and she married Lord Eglinton in Ayrshire.' 3 June 1961, Willie Gray to Hugh: 'I know your grannie was a daughter of Charles MacArthur. One of MacArthur's nephews in the Isle of Mull married a Miss MacKinnon and was closely related to my mother – a MacKinnon'. Gray seems to have compressed the generations in the families of both the Skye MacArthurs and the Australian Frasers, and the exact connections of the Eglintons are not clear in his mind.

³⁶ Neil Rankin Morrison, 'Clann Duiligh, piobairean Chloinn Ghill-eathan', *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness* XXXVII (1934).

Professor') MacArthur, in Edinburgh.³⁷ They would therefore be great-nephews of Charles I. Neither connection, however, is proven.

Archibald MacArthur, living in Ulva as piper to MacDonald of Staffa from 1801 to the 1840s, was a pupil of Donald Ruadh MacCrimmon, in Skye.³⁸ A distant relationship to the Skye MacArthurs might well have been claimed by Mary junior, a claim later developed by her son Simon, influenced by Willie Gray and John MacArthur in Ayr (both of whom made some erroneous claims about the MacArthur descent).

The blood link with 'MacCrimmon' is unconvincing. Simon said his great-grandfather on his mother's side was related to the MacCrimmons, and it was later asserted that Charles MacArthur's nephew John in Edinburgh was also a MacCrimmon nephew.³⁹ One of Simon's grandsons maintained that his grandmother's (that is, Mary junior's) mother was a niece of MacCrimmon. Miss Blanche Jebb, a granddaughter of Hugh Archibald Fraser, said that Mary was a MacCrimmon descendant. Nobody attempted to date the alleged marriage or liaison. If the link to Charles MacArthur has been distorted, perhaps the MacCrimmon link is a leap of the imagination. Indeed, sometimes a pupil-teacher relationship was converted into a blood link in oral transmission.

There were plenty of MacCrimmons who were not directly of the Skye piping family, and Mary senior's aunt or uncle could have been one of these, perhaps a MacCrimmon elsewhere in Skye, or in Glenelg – or one of the McGuirmans in Inverness.

The *piobaireachd* of Simon Fraser came to him from at least two MacCrimmon sources: from Iain Dubh via Gesto and Hugh Archibald, and from the teaching of Peter Bruce who had it from his father, Alexander, and Iain Dubh's brother, Donald Ruadh. There is no reason why this should not be accepted. If the claim of Simon's mother to be related to the MacCrimmons is authentic, which must be doubtful, she and her sung *piobaireachd* also contributed to Simon's MacCrimmon heritage. She may have inherited it from an Ulva connection, influenced by the teaching of Donald Ruadh MacCrimmon.

Dr Orme was told that Mary was 15 when she emigrated in October 1841, leaving from 'the port of Glasgow', which was the former name of the town of Port Glasgow in Renfrewshire, on the Clyde estuary. Mary may not have gone voluntarily: she was with Charles MacLean and his family, possibly in a serving capacity, to look after their children or themselves. The Fraser family said she was 'in the care of' the MacLeans, which could be a euphemism for 'in service to'. The origin of these MacLeans is unknown. It is a common enough name, but

³⁷ Keith Sanger, 'From the family of the MacArthurs to P/M Willie Gray, Glasgow Police', *Piping Times* 59/6 (March 2007); see also the Old Parish Register, Kilninian and Kilmore, in the Scottish National Archives, Edinburgh.

³⁸ Alexander Campbell, 'A Slight Sketch of a Journey ...', notes for the preparation of *Albyn's Anthology* (1815); MacKay, *A Collection of Ancient Piobaireachd*.

³⁹ Letter from 'Lochgorm', *o ban Times*, 29 November 1919.

it may be worth noting that in a house, Arieniskill, at the foot of Loch Eilt, close to Kinlochailort, there was in 1841 an old tailor, John MacLean, aged 80, with Catherine, 30, both born in Argyll. It is possible that Charles MacLean was John's son or grandson.

It seems, then, that claims that Mary Anderson was a grandchild of the famous piper, Charles I MacArthur from Skye, are a distortion, and this would invalidate her claim to have MacCrimmon blood. She may have been from Andersons in Skye, or from piping MacArthurs in Mull and Ulva, distantly related to those of Skye and said by other descendants to have been closer to the great Charles than perhaps they really were. Details such as contemporary place names (such as Irine and Port of Glasgow) have been preserved accurately. The evidence points to some distortion by Mary herself, further developed by her son Simon, when he added to it later from written sources in Scotland, presumably attempting to corroborate his mother's account and to strengthen his own piping credentials.

The Frasers in Australia

Within three years of her arrival in Australia, Mary met Hugh Archibald Fraser, aged 48, who had just had to give up his farm, having squandered his fortune. At 17 she married him (1844), and they moved to Tasmania, where Hugh was in charge of a penal settlement. Dr Orme has told of their life there, and the birth of the first of their 12 children, Simon Alexander, on a boat off the Tasmanian coast, in February 1845.

In 1847 they moved to a place near Mansfield, Victoria, 140 miles north-east of Melbourne. Hugh Archibald died there in 1893, aged 97. None of his children was called Norman as might be expected in the Highland naming tradition, using the name of the maternal grandfather – but possibly not if there had been an illegitimacy.

In 1872 Simon married Florence MacMillan, and they had five children. The two eldest sons, Jack and Hugh, both became good pipers. Simon himself did not play the pipes seriously until he was 40. He said he was then the only pupil of Peter Bruce, son of the great piper Alexander Bruce, who had been taught by both Gesto and Donald Ruadh MacCrimmon. Peter left his pipes to Simon in his will, an indication of a close teacher–pupil bond.

In 1884 Simon composed a *piobaireachd*, 'Gilmore's Lament', in memory of piper Richard Gilmore from Melbourne. Simon said he started his tuition with Peter Bruce in 1885, so he composed this lament before he was himself a competent piper. The work, of a four-line construction, is a pleasing example of a first composition – and it conforms to the 'rules' with the customary patterns of phrase and line. It shows he had an understanding of the form, and of the idiom, before he went to Peter Bruce.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Orme, *The Piobaireachd of Simon Fraser* (2nd edn), pp. 340–41.



Illustration 7.1 Simon Fraser of Australia. Courtesy of Mrs Mary Orme.

It is clear from the excellence of the settings which Simon wrote down that he had a good understanding of the music, as well as mastery of the *canntaireachd* system. When Dr Donaldson stated that ‘the surviving Fraser settings contain virtually nothing which had not appeared previously in written or printed sources’,⁴¹ he did not explain how Simon Fraser came to have so many first-class settings, dissimilar to those in the printed sources, some of them with variations not heard in this country. Could Fraser, using only existing written and printed sources, have transposed them into *canntaireachd*, changing the style and adding his own embellishments, as well as unusual variations? Even that would require a detailed knowledge of both *piobaireachd* form and *canntaireachd*. However much he owed to Gesto’s written *canntaireachd*, there is little evidence that he was influenced by later printed sources.

Simon Fraser did have access to some of the ‘classic’ collections. The full extent of his library is not known, but from his letters we gather that he possessed, or had seen at some time, copies of Donald MacDonald, Angus MacKay, William Ross (the Queen’s piper), David Glen, Thomason (of whom he disapproved), Patrick MacDonald, Grattan Flood, Manson – and he sold ‘other books’⁴² to pay for his wife’s medical treatment.

The Brunos of Italy and the Question of MacCrimmon Descent

Simon Fraser, following Gesto, believed that the MacCrimmons were descended from an Italian family called Bruno.⁴³ The best known of this line was Giordano Bruno, burned at the stake in 1600 for his scientific heresies. The theories of Giordano about the cosmos and the nature of God became the basis for such doctrines as those of the Rosicrucians, and are thought to have influenced the early development of the Masonic movement in the late sixteenth century.⁴⁴

The Rev. Dr Norman MacLeod wrote that the name MacCrimmon was derived from that of the Italian town Cremona, when a MacLeod chief brought a harper from Italy, who took the name MacCrimmon from his birthplace. The article was

⁴¹ Donaldson, *The Highland Pipe and Scottish Society*, p. 413.

⁴² Private correspondence between Dr Barrie Orme and Alexander Mackenzie, March 2002.

⁴³ Orme, *The Piobaireachd of Simon Fraser* (2nd edn), pp. 25–6, 43; *Extracts*, pp. 3, 16. Information on the Brunos in this section is taken from various sources; where not otherwise referenced, see correspondence between Dr K.N. MacDonald and Dr Barrie Orme, quoted in Orme, *Extracts*, p. 13; K.N. MacDonald, ‘The early history of the MacCrimmons, related by themselves to Captain MacLeod of Gesto’, printed in *o ban Times*, 5 April 1913; see also *Colliers Encyclopaedia* vol. 4, *World Book Encyclopaedia* and *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, all under ‘Bruno’.

⁴⁴ Margaret C. Jacob, *The Newtonians and the English Revolution, 1689–1720* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1976), p. 207.

published in 1840, but the story was probably current long before that. There is no mention of the Brunos.⁴⁵

This tale was taken up and developed with the introduction of the Bruno family and an emphasis on the teachings of Giordano, famous (especially in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries) as a free-thinker, philosopher, cosmologist and occultist. This appears not to be a purely oral tradition within Gaelic Scotland, but a learned association made by someone with access to libraries, who must have been Gesto. He is reported by Simon Fraser to have described the death of Giordano Bruno in his ('lost') book of 1826.⁴⁶

The story was that Giordano had a nephew, Petrus, who settled in Ireland: he changed his name from Bruno to Cremmona, conveniently doubling the 'm' for no apparent reason. Then, having married a girl called MacKinnon, he added Mac- ('as was the fashion'), and emended MacCremman to MacCrimmon, to please his wife. This ludicrous tale disregards all we know of the name MacCrimmon, which before about 1750 was not spelled with a stressed 'i', but always with 'u' – and the 'm' was not usually double unless the spelling was anglicized. The alleged process of emendation reveals ignorance of Celtic nomenclature, underlined by Simon Fraser's declaration that the 'u' spellings were 'devices to hide the real origin'.⁴⁷ The derivation from Cremona is clearly folk-etymology, and this cannot have been the origin of the name. In any case, the name MacCruimen (and other variants accepted as early forms of MacCrimmon) existed in Scotland long before Petrus was (allegedly) in Ireland.⁴⁸

There were several families called McGu(i)rman living in Inverness, established there by 1557; they were a branch of the MacCrimmons who had close links with the Frasers. They often acted as witnesses to each others' marriages and baptisms.⁴⁹ McGurman and such spellings as McGuirman, McCurmen and McGuruman are accepted variants of the name MacCrimmon, clearly the urban forms, always preserving the stressed vowel 'u' and the single 'm'. The earliest MacCrimmon on record in Scotland was in Inverness in 1533, but may not have lived there (see below).

Petrus Bruno's uncle, Giordano, birth name Filippo, was a scientific thinker whose theories clashed with the doctrines of the Churches, both Roman Catholic and Reformed (Protestant). Born at Nola, near Naples, in 1548, his by-name was

⁴⁵ Rev. Dr Norman MacLeod, *Caraid nan Gaidheal (The Friend of the Gael): a Choice Selection of the Gaelic Writings of Norman MacLeod*, DD (Edinburgh, 1899), pp. 378–82. For Gaelic text and translation, see Alistair Campsie, *The MacCrimmon Legend* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1980), pp. 58–71.

⁴⁶ Orme, *The Piobaireachd of Simon Fraser* (2nd edn), p. 25.

⁴⁷ Orme, *Extracts*, p. 14.

⁴⁸ Cf. Hugh Cheape, 'Traditional Origins of the Piping Dynasties' in this book.

⁴⁹ Old Parish Register and Minutes of the Burgh Court, Inverness, held at the Scottish National Archives, Edinburgh. See also *The Records of Inverness* (2 vols, Edinburgh: New Spalding Club, 1911).

Nolano, and there is no suggestion that he originated in Cremona. His father was a professional soldier. Filippo was ordained as a priest in 1572, taking the name Giordano.

Facing charges of heresy, he fled to Geneva, where he embraced Calvinism. He published works critical of Protestant doctrines and left for France to become a lecturer in philosophy. The French king wanted access to his mnemonic system, with elaborate symbols as memory aids, which gave Giordano a reputation for practising witchcraft. Giordano's system of memory training was taken up and developed by the Freemasons in Scotland, around 1600, when it became an obsession with those seeking lost wisdom.⁵⁰

In 1583 Giordano reached England. After a hostile reception in Oxford, he retired to London to live in the French ambassador's house for two years. He was recruited into the espionage network of Queen Elizabeth I, run by her spymaster, Walsingham. Using the name Henry Fagot, Giordano supplied Elizabeth with information about the Catholics in France. The Elizabethans had established a complex network of informants; the Queen was herself said to be skilled at decoding messages and reading obscure symbols used throughout Europe as an elaborate and esoteric language. The whole spying network was known as the 'Rainbow Scheme'. It is thought that it underlay the development of symbolism and ritual in the early Masonic lodges of both England and Scotland.⁵¹ Portraits of Queen Elizabeth had pictorial symbols incorporated into the background,⁵² and similarly in some portraits of Scottish Freemasons, dating from the early eighteenth century, symbols such as pillars appear with biblical names important in the rituals of the Masonic Word.⁵³

Symbolism in Simon Fraser's beliefs is of a different nature; not visual, but aural. He gave meanings to the vocables of his chanting, such as *i trien* [mystery], *horodin* [selfishness] and *bo* [I hear].⁵⁴ The origins of this system are not known. Gesto may have invented it, basing it on biblical texts.

In 1585 Giordano returned to France, then Germany, wandering from one university to another, advocating religious tolerance. Eventually, in 1591, he moved to Venice, hoping to be appointed to the vacant chair of mathematics at Padua University. It was not offered, however, and the Venetian leader denounced him to the Inquisition. In his trial he refused to retract his theories and was sentenced to

⁵⁰ David Stevenson, *The First Freemasons: Scotland's Early Lodges and their Members* (Edinburgh: Grand Lodge of Scotland, 1988; 2nd edn 2001), p. 7.

⁵¹ Stevan Dedijer, 'The Rainbow Scheme: British Secret Service and Pax Britannica' in Wilhelm Agnell and Bo Huldt (eds), *Clio Goes Spying: Eight Essays on the History of Intelligence* (Lund: University of Lund, Sweden, 1983); John Bossy, *Giordano Bruno and the Embassy Affair* (2nd edn, London: Yale University Press, 2002); Jacob, *The Newtonians and the English Revolution*.

⁵² Dedijer, 'The Rainbow Scheme'.

⁵³ Stevenson, *The First Freemasons*, p. 142.

⁵⁴ Orme, *The Piobaireachd of Simon Fraser* (2nd edn), p. 27.

death. He was burned alive at the stake in Rome on 17 February 1600, his tongue nailed to his jaw to prevent his addressing the onlookers.

Bruno was revered throughout Europe as a symbol of freedom of thought and scientific theory, especially during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In his religious beliefs he is described as a pantheistic hylozoist; that is, he believed that the deity is in everything, and that all matter, however small, contains divine life. He rejected biblical accounts of the Creation, the Fall of Man, the Crucifixion and the Holy Trinity, and followed Copernicus in perceiving the world as made up of the four elements of earth, air, fire and water. His religion was bound up with his cosmology, and appears to have little in common with that of Simon Fraser. The main resemblance is in the lack of orthodoxy in their beliefs, both doctrines rejecting the clergy and church ceremony. A fundamental difference is that Giordano denied the Trinity, which was much emphasized by Simon Fraser. Simon's beliefs also included the Creation and the Crucifixion.⁵⁵

Simon Fraser said that Giordano had a brother, Giuseppe, and that he and his son Petrus were ancestors of the MacCrimmons. This Petrus, supposedly born in Cremona and embracing his uncle's religious heresies, wandered through Europe, until eventually he arrived in Ireland. He was, it seems, a renowned harper, who started a college for musicians in Ireland, some say in Dublin, others in Ulster.

According to this tale, Petrus had a son, John, and the family was discovered in Ireland by MacLeod of Dunvegan, who brought John and his son to Skye. (The story here deviates from Norman MacLeod's version, that MacLeod brought the harper direct from Cremona.) The chief was said to be Alasdair Crotach, who died in 1547; he is supposed to have given Petrus's family the tenancy of Boraig. There is no record of MacCrimmons in Boraig before 1710, however, and the date of Alasdair is much too early for a nephew of Giordano. Simon Fraser wrote that Petrus came to Ireland 'shortly before his uncle was burnt', that is, in the 1590s, but elsewhere gave a date in the 1400s.⁵⁶ The dating of this whole episode is somewhat fluid.

If Petrus was not an authentic historical figure, why was he introduced into the story? His function was to provide a connection between Giordano's heretical religious views and those attributed to the later MacCrimmon family. There is no suggestion that Giordano was ever in Scotland, let alone Skye, so a conduit for his doctrines had to be found: by leading the alleged Petrus into Skye by way of Ireland, someone, probably Gesto, was reflecting the progression of Italian musical form from the continent to the Hebrides by way of Dublin. This was probably the time when the theme-and-variations form was introduced into pipe music, and as it came from Italy via Ireland, a link was needed. This link was emphasized by the translation of the Italian name Petrus Bruno into Gaelic as Padraig Donn.

According to Simon Fraser, the doctrines brought to Ireland by Petrus Bruno were passed to the MacCrimmon line in Skye, and Fraser insisted that this was

⁵⁵ Orme, *Extracts*, p. 12.

⁵⁶ Orme, *The Piobaireachd of Simon Fraser* (2nd edn), p. 25.

the religion of Patrick Mòr MacCrimmon in the mid-seventeenth century, known as 'primitive Christianity'. It was based on the teachings of the New Testament, rejecting not only the clergy and church ceremony, but also such stories as the Fall of Man. Fraser's account of 'primitive Christianity' seems to have less in common with the beliefs of the Bruno family, as represented in the writings of Giordano, and more with the Masonic belief in morality outside religion, without commitment to any denomination.⁵⁷

The rituals of Freemasonry crop up frequently as background to Gesto and Fraser, often linked to the theories of Giordano Bruno. Are they relevant to the MacCrimmon tradition? The well-known description written in 1815 by Alexander Campbell, when he visited Donald Ruadh in Glenelg, may point to Masonic ritual among the MacCrimmons. Armed with a letter of introduction from Gesto himself, Campbell called on Donald, who sent for his pupil, Alexander Bruce (father of Peter), to play for him. Campbell wrote: 'After a few glasses of his own good toddy, MacCrummin seized the pipe – put on his hat (his usual custom) – breathed into the bag – tuned the drones to the chanter ... and commenced FAILTE PHRIONNSA ...'.⁵⁸

Dr Donaldson's footnote to the above extract says that Donald Ruadh put on his bonnet 'as an assertion of his standing as a gentleman: he would not play uncovered before people he regarded as social equals'.⁵⁹ This echoes the Masonic tenet that all members were of equal social status. Willie Gray, himself a master Freemason, said in an interview in 1961 that this donning of the hat had 'emblematic significance, allied to masonry' and that 'The Prince's Salute' was a work beloved by the Freemasons, played with a 'wee shuffle' of the feet. He was careful, however, not to record any comments concerning the Freemasons in his written notes. It seems that he believed Donald Ruadh was a Freemason.

Walter Scott, visiting Dunvegan in 1814, also noted that Donald Ruadh had played indoors with his bonnet on, in front of his MacLeod laird.⁶⁰ The privilege, however, went back much further: the elderly piper John MacCrimmon, when in the presence of King Charles II in 1651, did not remove his hat. James Fraser, writing the Wardlaw manuscript, used an interesting phrase: 'He [the king] saw no less then 80 pipers in a croud bareheaded, and John McGyurmen in the middle covered. He asked What society that was?'⁶¹

The king did not ask 'Why is that man keeping his bonnet on?' but recognized a society ritual. In the mid-seventeenth century, the word 'society' was used of the

⁵⁷ Stevenson, *The First Freemasons*, p. 9.

⁵⁸ Campbell, 'A Slight Sketch', p. 63.

⁵⁹ Donaldson, *The Highland Pipe and Scottish Society*, p. 183.

⁶⁰ J.G. Lockhart, *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Walter Scott* (7 vols, Edinburgh, 1837–1838; reprinted 1903), vol. 4, p. 283.

⁶¹ Rev. James Fraser, *Chronicles of the Frasers: the Wardlaw MS* (ed. W. MacKay) (1905), p. 379.

Freemasons, and might here be taken to imply that the MacCrimmons were indeed into Freemasonry in the time of Patrick Mòr MacCrimmon.

Religious beliefs will seem weird to those who do not embrace them. It is difficult to stomach, for example, Simon Fraser's derivation of the phrase *thorodin* from the names of the Scandinavian gods Thor, god of Thunder and Odin, god of All Goodness, or his claim that the vocable *dru*, the top G note with grip, means 'oak or Druid' – yet a sane and intelligent Freemason said he had no problem there. After all, he could accept the three gods of Masonic ritual, Jahveh, Osiris and Ba'al, and other deities drawn by the Freemasons from various world religions, such as Jahbuton, Boaz, Magog and Hvitserk. David Stevenson wrote of Freemasonry, '... there is nothing inherently more ridiculous in Masonic ritual than in many religious practices ... Moreover, initiations of various types were commonplace in organisations and occupational groups throughout society in the seventeenth century'.⁶² As late as the 1790s, Mozart's opera *The Magic Flute*, with its Masonic setting, became high fashion throughout Europe, the exotic rituals apparently part of the appeal.

Simon Fraser's system of syllabic notation and professed religious theories suggests that they were inherited and embroidered by someone who spoke English and had no Gaelic, but was familiar with the Gaelic terminology of piping. This is exemplified by his use of the word *sheantaireachd*, said to be Petrus's name for what is ordinarily called *canntaireachd* [chanting or singing]. We are told that Petrus and his followers (or Gesto?) invented the term *sheantaireachd* because it contains all the letters of the name *Christ* (in its English spelling), while *canntaireachd* does not. *Sheantaireachd*, however spelled, is a pseudo-Gaelic word with no meaning, an invention clearly modelled on the more orthodox term. The conclusion might be Fraser himself coined the word, since Gesto, Iain Dubh and Hugh Archibald all had Gaelic. Gesto, however, may have been playing with his Gaelic to create the new term. Simon covered himself by declaring the word was 'so secret it appeared in no dictionary'.⁶³

Furthermore, Fraser's religious theories are based on the Bible in English.⁶⁴ He asserted that a verse in the Bible, Genesis 3:24, is made up of all the *sheantaireachd* vocables. Surely it was the other way round – enthusiasts searched the scriptures for verses which contain the syllables and letters of *canntaireachd*. They read religious significance into the well-known 'theory of threes' in *piobaireachd*, which underlies the music but has a structural rather than theological function.

Fraser goes on to imply that Patrick Mòr and the early MacCrimmons were not only English speakers, but fully literate as well. The evidence is thin, but the title of Sir Jhone McChrummen in 1533, the first MacCrimmon recorded in his own time, suggests English-speaking literacy in at least one early member of the family. His

⁶² Stevenson, *The First Freemasons*, p. 157.

⁶³ Orme, *Extracts*, p. 42.

⁶⁴ For the development of Bible translations into Gaelic, see under 'Bible' in Derick Thomson (ed.), *The Companion to Gaelic Scotland* (Oxford: Blackwell 1983).

title 'Sir' tells us he was a graduate, probably a clergyman.⁶⁵ This MacCrimmon was in the company of Alasdair Crotach, the MacLeod chief; they were both in Inverness when Sir Jhone was witness to Alasdair's signature, but we do not know whether he lived in Inverness or had travelled with his chief from Skye.

In the 1730s Donald Bàn MacCrimmon twice witnessed the signing of the Harris accounts⁶⁶ – does this mean he was literate in English? Described as 'Donald MacCrummen Pyper at Harris', he signed, both times, as 'Donald McCrummen', using anglicized spellings. He could at least write his own name, which is more than his nephew could do: in 1791 Iain Dubh had to make his mark instead of signing for his wages.⁶⁷

Donald Ruadh learned to write late in his adult life, not achieving an assured hand until about 1800. Were his father, grandfather and great-grandfather literate? It seems doubtful.

Conclusion

Simon Fraser has taken much criticism for ideas which were not his. He must have inherited most of the material, and even though he accepted it, having been brought up with it, he merely embroidered the theories, adding his own details. It surely cannot be possible that Simon either amassed or invented so much esoteric historical and traditional detail. Although clearly an intelligent man, he had neither the education nor the resources to create the whole concoction – but Niel MacLeod of Gesto had.

Perhaps, as was often the way in Gaelic story and song, the introduction of the Italian Petrus Bruno into the pseudo-historical MacCrimmon narrative was symbolic, a means of expressing an abstract cultural idea in concrete terms; similarly, the tradition of a MacCrimmon girl marrying an Italian musician from Cremona could be a symbol of the meeting of Celtic and Italian music. In terms of cultural progression, the tales reflect the introduction at an early stage, around the late thirteenth century, of a musical form from Ireland, which was later modified and developed under Italian influence also coming in from Ireland, and later, towards the end of the fifteenth century, took the form of theme-and-variations, again from Italian music. Somewhere this must have embraced the transition from harp to pipe music, and that is why it was absorbed into the MacCrimmon family tradition.

It is likely that the religious beliefs expressed by Simon were his father's; a theory of universal goodness, a morality as much as a religion, possibly influenced

⁶⁵ Cosmo Innes (ed.), *The Book of the Thanes of Cawdor, 1236 – 1702* (Edinburgh: The Spalding Club, 1859), p. 159.

⁶⁶ Alick Morrison, 'Harris Estate Papers', *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness* XLV (1967): 70.

⁶⁷ R.C. MacLeod, *The Book of Dunvegan* (2 vols, Aberdeen, 1938–39), vol. 2, p. 92.

by the doctrines of Freemasonry. The pantheistic tenets of Giordano, with his rejection of Christianity, differ sharply from Simon's belief in the Trinity, in which his *piobaireachd* theory is rooted. The Masonic Trinity is not that of Simon Fraser, but the motif of three godheads is present, and both would tie in with the 'theory of threes' in *piobaireachd* composition. The main weakness seems to be the name *sheantaireachd*, probably invented by Gesto, and the claim that biblical texts were the source of the vocables, with their absurd symbolism.

Whether or not we accept the theories, they leave Simon Fraser's *piobaireachd* settings untouched – and it is his excellent settings which matter.

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TAo RLUDH: REVIVALISM AND TRANSFORMATION

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Chapter 8

Taking Stock: Lowland and Border Piping in a Highland World

Iain MacInnes

It seems hard to believe that just 30 years ago bellows pipes in Scotland were a rarity. We were treated to fleeting visits by Irish piping superstars such as Paddy Keenan and his group The Bothy Band, and we caught the occasional waft of Northumbrian piping virtuosity in the cross-border forays of Joe Hutton and Colin Ross, but our own piping culture remained firmly rooted in the music of the Highland bagpipe. Old bellows pipes did exist, of course, in museums and in Edinburgh's Victoria Street antique shops, but the culture of bellows piping in Scotland was very much in abeyance.

Hamish Henderson had captured the last glimpses of the old tradition in interviews he conducted in Turriff in Aberdeenshire in the early 1950s. 'He was a queer traiveller man', said Geordie Robertson of Francis Jamieson from New Byth (widely known as 'Francie Markis'), player of what Geordie described as 'cauld wind' pipes. 'Twa bags, you see; they lay over his arms like this, you see; and I'll tell you, he had them in tune, aye.' Dr James Hunter also remembered Francie Markis playing at Porter Fair in Turriff in his youth (the 1890s):

Being rather short of breath he had an ingenious set of bagpipes. He pumped the air into the bag by means of a bellows with one arm, and then he compressed the bag with the other arm, and that gave him his music. He sat on a small low dyke there down beside the Commercial bank, and played his pipes there. I can remember him quite clearly.¹

¹ School of Scottish Studies Sound Archive SA 1952/9/B (Dr James Hunter) and SA 1954/94/A9 (Geordie Robertson). Francis Jamieson (1823–1904) was a farm labourer and champion athlete who played bellows pipes, fiddle and cello. In 1891 William McCombie Smith recorded: 'Although the great Highland bagpipe, the wind for which is supplied from the mouth of the player, has superseded the Lowland bagpipe, the wind for which is supplied by a bellows, the latter is not altogether extinct. In Aberdeenshire there are still to the fore two performers on the bellows bagpipe – Francis Jamieson, King Edward, a celebrated athlete in his younger days, and Peter Mackie, Skene.' (*The Athletes and Athletic Sports of Scotland*, [Paisley, 1891], p. 97.) There is a fine description of Francie Markis in Herbert Duffus's *History of Marquitter*, reproduced in *Common Stock* (March 1990): 21–4.

We have no mention of Francie's repertoire, though, and after his death in 1904 the bellows bagpipe in Scotland was largely silent. The Edinburgh pipe maker James Robertson made sets of bellows-blown 'half-long' pipes for William Cocks and George Charlton in the 1920s, which were mainly destined for use in Northumbrian Scout troops, and ex-serviceman Jimmy Wilson kept an old set of Lowland pipes in good working order for use in theatrical productions in the 1950s and 1960s. In 1976 Robert Wallace fitted out a half-size set of MacDougall bagpipes with a common stock and Northumbrian pipe bellows, to produce a sweet-sounding instrument for his group the Whistlebinkies, and in Larbert, Jimmy Anderson put his wood-turning skills to good use in producing mouth-blown smallpipes in user-friendly keys. By and large, though, knowledge of such instruments was minimal.

Revival, when it came, was sparked by an accumulation of interests and enthusiasms: Hugh Cheape trying to make sense of the specimens in the National Museum of Antiquities; Gordon Mooney following his instincts towards a distinctive Border repertoire; Mike Rowan championing the alternative culture, in piping as in much else, his interest aroused by the chance discovery of an old half-size instrument in a Boys Brigade hall in Stockbridge.

The Lowland and Border Pipers' Society was founded in 1981, and was to provide a focal point and catalyst for the various and diverse strands of the revival. Players needed instruments. Pipe-makers needed to get a feel for the market. Everyone was looking for repertoire. Was this revival or reinvention?

I recall my own excitement as a Highland piper in hearing Scottish smallpipes for the first time in about 1982. Colin Ross and Hamish Moore had come together to produce an instrument with many of the attributes of a Northumbrian smallpipe (Colin's stock-in-trade), but with an elongated chanter designed to replicate the scale and finger spacing of a Highland pipe chanter.

I was attracted by the mellowness of the instrument, the ease of playing, and the wonderful drone-to-chanter harmonics when heard at close quarters. This was very different from the Highland bagpipe, and infinitely superior to the various mouth-blown parlour and chamber pipes which occasionally surfaced at ceilidhs, rarely to good effect. The instrument was well balanced and sufficiently loud to play comfortably with harps and fiddles. Other musicians looked on with interest: here was a new repertoire to be explored, much of it relatively unknown. Inexorably and wonderfully, the bellows bagpipe was drawn back into the body of the musical kirk.

A Distinctive Tradition?

If it is valid to talk of separate and distinctive Highland and Lowland piping traditions, as I believe is the case, it is important to understand that the instruments in themselves do not define these traditions. The temptation has been to describe

Lowland piping as music performed on bellows-blown bagpipes, and Highland piping as music played on the mouth-blown *piob mhòr*.

In fact, such instrumental polarity did not exist. The *piob mhòr* was certainly the predominant instrument in the Highlands, but there is ample evidence to suggest that other pipes were played as required, and as available, from the simple home-made *feadan* to the bellows-blown *piob shionnaich* favoured by Sandy Bruce when playing for dancing in Skye and Glenelg in the 1840s, and Calum MacPherson in Badenoch in the 1880s.²

Likewise, mouth-blown instruments were commonplace in the Lowlands, and indeed the whole culture of Scottish piping arguably rests on the late medieval absorption of wider European piping influences and instruments. Pete Stewart makes this point forcibly in his book *The Day it Daws*³, pointing to the earliest representations of bagpipes in Scotland as being of the mouth-blown, single-drone variety (the sort of instrument familiar from Chaucer's *Miller's Tale*), seen for instance in the Roslyn Chapel pillar carvings and the late sixteenth-century panel carving of a bagpiper from Greenlaw in Kirkcudbrightshire.⁴

It is reasonable to assume that it is these simple mouth-blown instruments which feature in the earliest literary references to bagpipes and pipers in Scotland,

² Dr K.N. MacDonald describes Sandy (Alexander) Bruce as follows: 'I must first have heard old Sandy in the early forties [1840s], and I remember him quite well. He was a man about 5 feet 7 inches, sturdy and well set, of a ruddy complexion, clean shaven – not unlike Niel Gow in appearance. He wore a tartan coat, with flaps embellished with silver-gilt bullet-shaped buttons, and trews.' ... 'Pibrochs were his forte, but he also played marches, salutes, and dance music when necessary. He would scorn to play the latter – the dance music – on the *piob mhor*, or large pipe. He reserved it for the *piob shionnaich*, or bellows pipe, which he generally carried about with him on periodical visits to our place.' ... 'His usual routine was to begin playing in the morning about 8 o'clock, without ever being asked, and again during dinner, pibrochs and salutes, and when there was any dancing he played the bellows pipe. He was a very amiable and agreeable man – one of nature's gentlemen – with a considerable sense of humour, and possessed a large repertoire of old stories of by-gone days'. K.N. MacDonald, *o ban Times* 4 January 1913. Likewise, Seton Gordon described the use of a bellows-blown *piob shionnaich* by Calum MacPherson in Badenoch in the late 1800s (on the basis of information supplied to him by Calum's son Angus): 'In those days dances would be continued for several nights in succession, and the piper, having opened the proceedings with the Great Pipe, would then sit at his ease on a stool or bench, and play dance music on the Bellows Pipe hour after hour, the fingering and scale in both *Piob Mhòr* and *Piob Shionnaich* being the same.' Seton Gordon, 'The Bagpipe' in John Hadfield (ed.), *The Saturday 15 Book* (1955), pp. 188, 193. The MacPhersons were descendants of the Bruces, so *piob shionnaich* might be considered a family name for the bellows-blown pipe.

³ Pete Stewart, *The Day it Daws: The Lowland Scots Bagpipe and its Music, 1400 to 1715* (Pencaitland: Hornpipe Music, 2005).

⁴ This oak panel carving is described by Stewart Maxwell in *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries* 82 (1947–8): 290 and plate LIII.

such as ‘Clarus the lang clype’ who ‘playit on a bag pype’ in the splendidly ribald *Colkelbie’s Sow* (c.1460–70), or the shepherd with ‘ane drone bag pipe’ who forms part of the musical coterie in *The Complaynt of Scotland* (c.1550). The *Complaynt* is essentially a political tract produced during the minority of Mary Queen of Scots, in which the author briefly breaks from political discourse and weighty polemic to produce a charming account of folk customs and beliefs. Meteorology, medicine and music are all touched upon through the medium of a group of shepherds and their wives, met on a hillside by an ‘actor’. This is a descriptive account, and includes a list of 35 ‘sueit sangis’ and several dances, performed to the music of the shepherds:

Ther was viij [eight] scheiphyrdis, and ilk ane of them hed ane syndry instrument to play to the laif. the fyrst hed ane drone bag pipe, the nyxt hed ane pipe maid of ane bleddir and of ane reid, the thrid playit on ane trump, the feyrd on ane corne pipe, the fyft playit on ane pipe maid of ane gait horne, the sext playt on ane recorder, the seuint plait on ane fiddil, and the last plait on ane quhissil.⁵

This list of instruments includes its share of reed pipes, hornpipes and bagpipes; core instruments, clearly, in the sixteenth-century musical arsenal. What is lacking at this time, though, is any reference to bellows. Julian Goodacre points to the 1619 volume of *Syntagma Musicum* by Michael Praetorius, published in Wolfenbüttel in Lower Saxony, as containing the earliest known depiction of a bellows-blown bagpipe (in this case a musette-type instrument which Praetorius calls a *hümmelchen*), and it was from this time onwards that we might assume the gradual absorption of bellows technique into the piping traditions of the British Isles.⁶

Thus when it is said of Habbie Simson, archetypal Lowland piper, that he ‘made his cheeks as red as crimson ... when he blew the bags’⁷, this needn’t be taken as a misrepresentation of his playing technique, but rather a perfectly valid description of his exertions in blowing the instrument. There is no reason to assume that a piper of Habbie’s vintage (he features in the Paisley burgh records in 1603 and 1605 under his proper name of ‘Robert Simpsonne’⁸), would have been playing bellows-blown bagpipes.

⁵ John Leyden, *The Complaynt of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1801), p. 101.

⁶ Julian Goodacre, ‘Bagpipes in the Scottish Borders – an emerging jigsaw’, *Common Stock* 17/2 (December 2002), p. 24. See also Anthony Baines, *Bagpipes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960), p. 125.

⁷ Robert Sempill, ‘The Life and Death of the Piper of Kilbarchan’ in James Watson (ed.), *A Choice Collection of Comic and Serious Scots Poems both Ancient and Modern*, Part 1 (Edinburgh, 1706), pp. 32–5.

⁸ W.M. Metcalfe (ed.), *Charters and Documents Relating to the Burgh of Paisley* (1163–1665) (Paisley, 1902), pp. 256, 276.

Instruments

When bellows were finally adopted in Scotland, presumably in the mid-to-late 1600s, they were appropriated by two distinct bagpipe groups. 'Lowland' pipes share much in common with the great pipe of the Highland tradition: chanter are conically bored, meaning that they sound in the higher octave, and eight finger holes produce a scale of nine notes which can be modified by judicious cross-fingering when required. A number of commentators have pointed out that surviving specimens of Lowland chanters (most notably in the Chantry Bagpipe Museum in Morpeth) often incorporate a sharpened top seventh, producing a G sharp on an A chanter where a Highland bagpipe would have a G natural.⁹ Other than that, the broad principles of fingering seem to have been similar to the Highland bagpipe (a 'half-covered' system), and the instrument occupied a comparable niche as a robust and penetrating bagpipe suitable for outdoor use.

'Smallpipes' were aptly named, being small and compact indoor instruments making use of cylindrically bored chanters measuring about 21 cm. These were often pitched in or around F, with tonal qualities similar to the modern Northumbrian smallpipe. The fingering system on the nine note scale (again with a sharpened top seventh) is described as 'covered', meaning that a single finger raised from the chanter produces the desired note (with variable 'pinkie on' and 'pinkie off' permutations), which again has much in common with modern Northumbrian piping. These instruments were played on both sides of the Border, and it would appear that by the 1690s chanters were being modified in a manner that was to lead, in time, to the creation of the modern Northumbrian instrument.¹⁰ (Northumbrian pipes have a closed-end chanter, allowing for the introduction of metal keys, increased chromaticism, and a distinctive staccato style of playing.)

Both Lowland pipes and smallpipes operate on a dry air system, with the reeds remaining relatively moisture-free and less prone to pitch fluctuation than is the case with mouth-blown instruments. The thinness of the reeds meant that players of the Lowland bagpipe could experiment with overblowing into the higher octave, a process seemingly achieved by half-covering the thumb hole and increasing the air pressure, similar to 'pinching' in contemporary recorder playing. The colloquial term for this was 'schivering the back lill' (literally splitting the back hole), a technique which allowed players to produce two or three extra notes and tackle

⁹ See, for instance, Ray Sloan, 'What's in a Name?', *Common Stock* (June 1992), p. 15, and Colin Ross, 'The Border pipe chanter', *Northumbrian Pipers' Society Magazine* 28 (December 2007).

¹⁰ James Talbot for instance depicts a 'Scotch' bagpipe (c.1696) which has characteristics of the modern Northumbrian instrument, including what appears to be a closed-end chanter. John Goodacre discusses this in 'A Closed-end Smallpipe Chanter from the 17th Century', *Northumbrian Pipers' Society Magazine* 9 (1998): 13–15. See also William A. Cocks, 'James Talbot's Manuscript: III. Bagpipes', *The Galpin Society Journal* 5 (1952): 44–7. Talbot's manuscripts are in the Christ Church Library, Oxford.

tunes which otherwise lay outwith the range of the chanter, including classics of the Lowland repertoire such as 'Go to Berwick Johnnie' and 'Maggie Lauder'.

The art of pinching, though, was not without its critics. The 1778 edition of the Edinburgh-based *Encyclopedia Britannica* felt that the process 'disorders the whole instrument in such a manner as to produce the most horrid discords'¹¹, and it seems to have been a rather hit-or-miss affair to the extent that players who were proficient at it were specifically commended. One such was Donald Maclean, piper in Galashiels, 'the only one that could play on the pipe the old popular tune of Sour plumbs of Gallashiels – it requiring a peculiar art of pinching the back hole of the chanter with the thumb in order to produce the higher notes'.¹²

The perfectly understandable desire to extend the melodic range of the bagpipe was to lead in time to a sea-change in design, and the creation of the first pastoral and union instruments with sophisticated two-octave chanters and improved drones and regulators. Such bagpipes were certainly being played and indeed manufactured in Scotland in the eighteenth century, but the story of their development is more properly told in a pan-British and Irish context, with centres of development in northern England and London, as well as in Belfast, Armagh and Dublin.

For Lowland pipes and smallpipes the evolutionary process should perhaps be seen as more incremental: the introduction of bellows; the bundling of the drones or 'burdens' together in a common stock; the experimentation with closed-end chanters; the introduction of keys; improved treadle and lathe designs; and the importation of quality hardwoods. These were all factors which affected the instruments, but in the meantime the practitioners of the art, the pipers themselves, got on with their lives, nurtured their music, and advanced their tradition.

Our understanding of Lowland piping has not been assisted by a certain opaqueness in terminology. 'Lowland' pipes for instance have been described variously as Border pipes, half-long pipes, reel pipes and in the north-east of Scotland 'cauld wind pipes'. In all these we are to understand essentially the same instrument: a conically-bored chanter, with drones mounted in a common stock and the use of bellows as the means of inflation. The use of the term 'Lowland' possibly isn't the most helpful, because it suggests that the instrument is synonymous with the wider tradition of Lowland piping.

This is a reasonable assumption, but it seems to me that it tells only part of the story. More useful, perhaps, is to define Lowland piping in terms of the context in which it occurred, and the music it produced. It was possible to be a Lowland piper while playing a mouth-blown bagpipe, like Habbie Simson; it was equally possible to be a fully accredited Highland piper, with direct links to the MacCrimmons in Skye (such as Sandy Bruce or Calum MacPherson), while playing a bellows-blown instrument.

¹¹ *Encyclopedia Britannica* (2nd edition, Edinburgh, 1778). Entry for Bagpipes.

¹² Alexander Campbell reporting the views of Thomas Scott in 'Notes of My Third Journey to the Borders, October 1816' (Edinburgh University Library MS La.II.378).

Town Piper and Musicanto

In 1762 the Edinburgh music publisher Robert Bremner was wrestling with the question of how to teach four-part harmony singing to church choirs and congregations. Previous exposure to music, he felt, had its part to play, and he had an interesting comment to make on the potency of local musicians:

It is an undeniable fact, that the musical Genius of the People in some Towns is much stronger than that of others; and this may be owing to the having or wanting a Town-piper, or some such Musicanto, to buz a few little Tunes in the Childrens Ears ... I am credibly informed that there is a Piper in a neighbouring Town that can only play one Tune; and was you to walk through every Corner of that Town, you would hear that Tune, and no other, in the Mouth of every Child and Servant there.¹³

This remark encapsulates two strands in our understanding of Lowland piping: one, that many towns had a piper; the other, that the piper was the bearer of a distinctive repertoire.

Work has still to be done in fully documenting the role and lifestyle of the town pipers. The picture which emerges is of part-time or occasional employment, with payment in kind through grants of land or occupation of the ‘piper’s croft’, or by way of a small salary. The pipers were often handsomely clothed in livery comprising shoes, stockings, belts, buckles, cocked hat and plush coat, and were allowed to collect food and gifts at set times, generally following harvest and at Yuletide and Pasch (Easter).

Their duties included playing the daily rounds of the town at dawn and dusk, to mark the start and end of the working day, and attendance at civic ceremonies. Scrutiny of burgh records reveals that pipers formed part of the municipal establishment in some, although by no means all, Lowland towns, taking their place alongside the crier, the drummer (or swascher) and the liveried officers. In this regard they were the equivalent of English watchmen and waits, and, as in England, the Scottish tradition flourished from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries. Nor was town piping exclusively confined to southern Scottish towns, with evidence of town pipers in many eastern seaboard communities from Angus to Orkney, with a particularly strong presence in Banffshire and Aberdeenshire.

The Reverend W.A.P. Johnman’s study of the Hawick town pipers remains the most comprehensive published to date, chronicling the holders of the post between 1674 and 1802.¹⁴ The pipers’ names are predominantly local – William Turnbull, Thomas Beattie, James Olifer, Robert Foulter, James Mather, William Brown and Walter Bellingan – suggesting that this was an indigenous tradition distinct

¹³ Robert Bremner, *The Rudiments of Music, or, A Short and Easy Treatise on that Subject* (2nd edition, Edinburgh, 1762), p. 50.

¹⁴ Rev. W.A.P. Johnman, ‘Border pipes and pipers’, *Transactions of the Hawick Archaeological Society* 24 (November 1913): 50–55.

from the prevailing piping culture in the Highlands. The sequence in Hawick was finally broken in 1802 with the brief appointment of John Kennedy, pipe major of the 75th Highlanders, as town piper, prior to the abandonment of the post. (A similar development can be observed in other Lowland towns such as Haddington, which appointed Donald MacGregor as piper in 1824. MacGregor was a well-known Highland piper, as well as being an East Lothian sheriff's officer, and his appointment might be regarded as an early attempt at conscious revival.)

Johnman's study in Hawick paints a useful picture of the piper's role, outlining duties and payments, and describing the precise route followed in playing the daily rounds, from the Auld Brig to the East Port. In Hawick, as in many Border towns, pride of place in the civic calendar went to the twin festivities of 'setting the fair' and 'riding the marches', the ancient practice of reinforcing the town's common land by riding the boundaries. The town drummer and piper played their part. In 1672, for instance:

The roll having been called ... a procession was then formed, and the Baron Bailie proceeded to 'set the fair', attended by the procurator-fiscal, James Leithen, and his tacksman, William Hardy, with the two burgh officers in livery carrying their halberds, the drummer and the piper heading them, the burgh magistrates, accompanied by the members of the Council, the burgesses and others, proceeded to 'ryde the fair'.¹⁵

Such occasions were accompanied by merry-making and conviviality, and it is in this context that the piper came into his own. The most vivid descriptions of the piper as music-maker and entertainer come not from the burgh and kirk records (which concentrate on transgressions), but rather from a beguiling body of seriocomic verse which commenced with Robert Sempill's 'The Life and Death of the Piper of Kilbarchan or The Epitaph of Habbie Simson', written in the 1640s or 1650s. Sempill was laird of Beltrees in Renfrewshire, and he used the poem to commemorate Habbie Simson, piper in the local kirk-town of Kilbarchan. Here Habbie was to be found playing for bridals and dances, feast days and clark-plays, military musters and horse races; for shearing in the fields and, above all, for the morning call and the evening curfew.

The distinctive form employed by Robert Sempill soon found favour as a vehicle for comic verse (Allan Ramsay dubbed the metre 'standart Habbie'), and spawned a small industry of humorous poetry covering topics as diverse as deceased greyhounds, Edinburgh brothels and tasty stuffed puddings, deployed with relish by poets such as Robert Ferguson and Robert Burns. The form found favour, too, as a fitting memorial to other departed pipers, such as John Pringle, town piper of Lauder:

¹⁵ Johnman, 'Border pipes and pipers', p. 52.

O Gosh! what will come o'us now?

John Pringle's dead, and that I rew:

Had ye but kend him sae wad you,

Your Heart wad bleed.

He couthsome, trusty was and true;

But, Sirs, he's dead!

To gi'e a Tune he was nae sweir

At *Pasch*, or ony Time a Year,

Gi'e him a Waught of Ale or Bear,

He made nae Doubt,

He green'd for nae mair of your Gear

But Soup about.

At Banquets, Bridels, Feasts and Fairs,

His Chanterlill dang down aa Cares,

He gart the Carles loup in Pairs,

And gape an sing:

The Littleanes spang'd upo' the Stairs

Like ony Thing.¹⁶

The 'Elegie on John Pringle, Town-Piper of Lauder' (which runs to 15 stanzas in total) dates from the 1720s, and was followed by the rather more elegant 'Elegy on John Hastie, Town-Piper of Jedburgh' (1730s) and a number of later parodies. The tone is gently mocking but affectionate, pointing to the piper as a local worthy, colourful and larger-than-life: a teller of tall tales and droll stories, and a carrier of lore. Indeed John Leyden, writing in the dying days of the Lowland piping tradition, saw the town pipers as exhibiting 'the last remains of minstrelsy among the Borderers', particularly with regard to the custom of travelling through outlying districts in Spring and Autumn collecting seedcorn and dispensing music and gossip.¹⁷ Walter Scott also described this practice, and commended the pipers as 'great depositories of oral, and particularly of poetical, tradition'.¹⁸ For John Pringle, Lauder piper, his country excursions brought reward in the form of oatmeal for himself and 'baits' (feed) for his pony:

¹⁶ *Elegie on John Pringle, Town-Piper of Lauder*. This is from a single-sheet broadside bound into a volume labelled 'Last Speeches & Confessions of Criminals, Elegies etc 1688 to 1720' in the National Library of Scotland (NLS)'s Rosebury Collection (MS Ry III.c.36 (114)).

¹⁷ Leyden, *The Complaynt of Scotland*, p. 143.

¹⁸ Walter Scott, *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* vol. 1 (Kelso, 1802), p. ci.

Farmers ne'r loot him be in Straits,
 For ilka Spring be sure he gets
 A heaped Riddle fow o' Yets,
 To be a Melder;
 The Sheltie never wanted Baits
 Frae every Elder.¹⁹

Common Pipers

The records suggest that town pipers were sometimes referred to as 'common' pipers, in the sense of 'communal' or 'municipal'. As early as 1487 there is mention of "the commoun pyperis of the Toune" in the Canongate burgh records.²⁰ (although these needn't necessarily have been bagpipers), and in 1672 John Inneis was appointed "common pyper" to the Royal Burgh of Stirling, with the expectation that he would "accompany the drum every evening and morning as the custome was formerly". This job was worth having: "for his service they allow him twentie foure pounds Scotts yearlie for fie and cloathes, and ane house to dwell in or the meale of an hous; and grantis him the priviledge of playing to all penny brydellis within the said burgh."²¹

In 1691 James Waugh, "common town piper" of Musselburgh, features in The Register of the Privy Council of Scotland as having been press-ganged by the officers of a foot regiment destined for Flanders,²² and as late as 1821 James Budge from Caithness is recorded as having attended the famous competition for pipers in Edinburgh with a 'common bagpipe', and his expense payments indicate that his instrument was a bellows-blown bagpipe. (He was not allowed to compete on this or on the two other occasions on which he attended.)²³

The few authentic illustrations we have of town pipers date from the late eighteenth century, and include a fine portrait of James Livingston, Haddington town piper in the 1760s. He is depicted in bonnet and long-coat playing a set of bellows-blown smallpipes, an instrument which he also appears to be using in a witty sketch by the artist R(obert) Mabon which shows him processing through the town in the company of the town drummer Andrew Simpson and a 'silly

¹⁹ NLS MS Ry III.c.36 (114). Note that a 'riddle fow o' yets to be a melder' refers to a container of oats to be made into meal, a common country gift.

²⁰ John MacKay, *History of the Burgh of the Canongate* (Edinburgh, 1900), p. 73.

²¹ Extracts from the Records of the Royal Burgh of Stirling 1667–1752 (Glasgow, 1889), p. 12.

²² *The Register of the Privy Council of Scotland* 3rd series, XVI (Edinburgh, 1970), pp. 126, 127.

²³ In 1821 the list of entrants records that James Budge 'played the common bagpipe', and expense payments indicate that Budge 'came forward to play the bellows pipes'. Highland Society of London papers, 'Accounts of Receipts and Payments, 1821', NLS Dep. 268 / Box 19.



Illustration 8.1 Piper James Livingston, drummer Andrew Simpson and ‘silly lad’ Harry Barrie of Haddington in an engraving by Robert Mabon. Courtesy of the Trustees of the National Museums Scotland.

lad’ named Harry Barrie (see Illustration 8.1). The local historian John Martine describes their dress as ‘the burgh’s ancient gray-plaided garb, with short knee-breeches, long coats, and buckles on the shoes’.²⁴

Similarly, John Kay’s famous portrait of Geordie Syme, piper in Dalkeith, depicts a splendid individual in full livery playing an elegant bellows-blown bagpipe (see Illustration 8.2). Syme was unusual among town pipers in having direct connections with the local nobility:

²⁴ John Martine, *Reminiscences of the Royal Burgh of Haddington* (Edinburgh, 1883), p. 161. James Livingstone appears in the burgh records in 1768, when his annual salary was 40 pounds Scots; see James Miller, *The Lamp of Lothian or The History of Haddington* (Haddington, 1844), p. 509. The portrait of James Livingstone is catalogued as 2000.293 by the East Lothian Museums Service.



Illustration 8.2 Geordie Syme. Courtesy of the Trustees of the National Museums Scotland.

The piper of Dalkeith is a retainer of the noble house of Buccleuch; and there is a small salary attached to the office, for which, in the days of old Geordie, he had to attend the family on all particular occasions, and make the round of the town twice daily, at eight o'clock evening, and five in the morning. Besides his salary he had a suit of clothes allowed him annually. It consisted of a long yellow coat, lined with red; red plush breeches; white stockings, and buckles in his shoes.²⁵

In the case of Geordie Syme we have one other useful piece of information, in Thomas Scott's recollection of him as a piper who 'knew the art of producing the high octave by pinching the back hole of the chanter'.²⁶ Thomas Scott from Monklaw near Jedburgh was a gentleman piper (he was Walter Scott's uncle) who was able to furnish the musicologist and collector Alexander Campbell with a list of famous Border pipers who had lived between about 1700 and 1800. Unsurprisingly, the list includes renowned piping families such as the Andersons in Kelso, the Hasties in Jedburgh, the Forsyths in Littledean and 'the earliest pipers of the *Scottish Border* properly speaking', the Allans of Kirk Yetholm, a well-known Gypsy family with ties to both Roxburghshire and Northumberland.

Clearly piping ran in some families, although this was by no means unusual in an age in which trades frequently passed from father to son. In the Highlands, promising young pipers were sometimes sent away for tuition at the expense of their patron (as was the case with John MacIntyre, sent to study in Mull and Skye from his home in Breadalbane in 1696²⁷), but there is no indication of a similar network of formal instruction operating in the Lowlands. This is perhaps what John Leyden alluded to when he wrote in 1801:

The pipers of the Border, though not known to have been formed by any regular institution, rivalled the fame even of the Highlanders; and, at least in the opinion of their countrymen, were supposed to excel them in musical skill, as well as graceful execution.²⁸

Graceful Execution

Jack Campin has recently drawn attention to a tune in the Dalhousie Castle collection which is simply called 'The Bagpipe Tune', contained in a fiddle music manuscript of about 1675.²⁹ Having been disentangled from its scordatura fiddle

²⁵ John Kay, *original Portraits and Caricature Etchings* vol 2 (1st edition, Edinburgh, 1837–8), p. 137.

²⁶ Campbell, 'Notes of My Third Journey to the Borders, October 1816', MS La.II.378.

²⁷ Campbell of Breadalbane papers, National Archives of Scotland (NAS) GD 112/29/51/6.

²⁸ Leyden, *The Complaynt of Scotland*, p. 142.

²⁹ Jack Campin, 'Dalkeith's town anthem?', *Common Stock* (December 2001): 30. The manuscript in question is in the National Library of Scotland, MS 9454.

notation, and transposed up an octave, the tune is revealed as an old-style hornpipe in 6/4 time of the type popular in northern England and southern Scotland (see Example 8.1). Indeed this is the sort of tune which must have been central to the town piper's repertoire: simple, melodic and repetitive, and often associated with a song or ditty. In this case Campin believes that the tune was linked with the Scotts of Buccleuch and, in turn, with their home town of Dalkeith.

Example 8.1 'The Bagpipe Tune', Dalhousie Castle collection, c.1675.



Scrutiny of old song and fiddle collections reveals many such tunes with strong local associations: 'Duns Dings A', 'The Souters of Selkirk', 'Go to Berwick Johnny', 'St Johnstone's Hunts Up', 'The Braw Lads o' Jeddart' and the Hawick town anthem, 'Teribus'. These are often characterized by straightforward rhythms, and melodies which fit comfortably on the bagpipe scale; the sort of tunes, in fact, which might readily have been found 'in the mouth of every child and servant'.

Mind you, after two centuries of fractured tradition it has not always been easy to reunite tune titles with their melodies, a task which Pete Stewart has undertaken very effectively in his book *The Day it Daws*. Here he introduces us to early dance tunes, as well as to everyday music of love, labour, sport and marriage, all notated with the Lowland piper in mind. Many Lowland tunes are also associated with songs ('Hey Ca' Thru' and 'Woo'd and Married and A', for instance), reflecting an essential compatibility between the bagpipe and the human voice: tunes built on a nine-note scale are often pleasing and straightforward to sing.

It would be wrong, though, to give the impression that Lowland pipe music was exclusively functional. If piping for weddings and dances, and for the daily rounds of the town, were the meat-and-drink of the Lowland piper, there was room, too, for occasional indulgence; for the creation of a more demanding musical form built on complex variations and stylized fingerwork.

This was music for listening to, and it has survived most impressively in the manuscript of William Dixon, piper in Fenwick in Northumberland. Matt Seattle has examined the 40 tunes in this collection in great detail, and has concluded that the manuscript represents 'not so much the missing link in Border piping as the missing chain'.³⁰ The music was written in the 1730s, and takes the form of 'variation sets' in which the tune is developed through the introduction of embellished variations on a melodic theme. The form was already well established

³⁰ Matt Seattle (ed.), *The Master Piper: Nine Notes That Shook the World* (Newbiggin-by-the-Sea: Dragonfly Music, 1995), p. 5. This incorporates a transcription of the William Dixon manuscript of 1733.

in fiddle music (and indeed in the wider field of Baroque ‘ground and division’ music), but in the case of the bagpipe posed a number of challenges. Chief among these was the restricted scale of the instrument, meaning that tune development had to be achieved within a very limited compass. Dixon’s solution lay in the introduction of runs and half-runs of quavers, generally following the underlying melodic structure quite closely, giving the impression of a quickening in tempo and complexity while not affecting the underlying rhythm.

That Dixon was not working in isolation is suggested by the existence of a slightly older manuscript from Skene in Aberdeenshire which contains a very similar style of music, though based on a different repertoire. This collection was put together in 1717 by the local laird, George Skene, who we know to have been a player of both the fiddle and the bellows bagpipe.³¹ The material does not overlap with Dixon, but contains four bagpipe tunes (clearly labelled as such) which have similar characteristics: multiple variations of between eight and ten measures; embellishment through short semiquaver runs; a distinct sense of structured tune development (see Examples 8.2 and 8.3). There are differences, too; for instance, in the use of same-note triplets in the Skene manuscript, and the employment of a gathering (*gr*) symbol to indicate unspecified grace note embellishments which, judging from their placing, might have been equivalent to grips and birls in modern Highland piping. These discrepancies might reflect a different regional accent in the music, but do not disguise an underlying unity of approach.

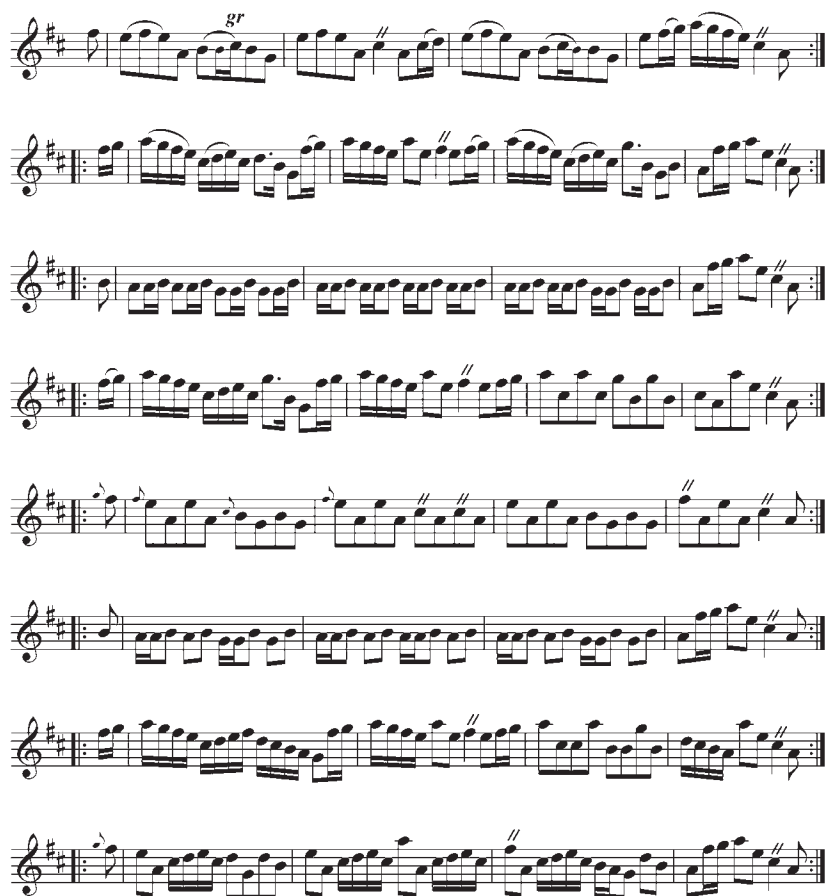
This type of music found its way into print in 1794 in Robert Riddell’s *Collection of Scotch Galwegian & Border Tunes for the Violin and Pianoforte*,³² and survived too in the culture of playing variation sets within the Northumbrian piping tradition. In Scotland, though, it appears to have died out in the early nineteenth century, a victim of cultural shifts and the gradual displacement of the Lowland bagpipe in popular esteem, not least by the forward march of the Highland bagpipe as the instrument of choice in the Scottish regiments.

Although it might seem overblown to describe the music of Dixon and Skene as art music, we can at least recognize in it something different and distinctive from the workaday tunes of the village green and dance floor. The Highland bagpipe tradition has its *ceòl mòr*; the Lowland tradition has its distinctive performance pieces made in the ‘bagpipe humour’. The celebrated Border piper James Allan was once described as having played a ‘port pibroch’ at Elsdon Court Baron in

³¹ ‘George Skene His Book’ (1717), NLS MS 5–2–21. Skene’s interest in fiddling and piping is made clear in ‘An Account of a Journey to London with the Particular Rout by Thomas Burnett of Kirkhill, George Skene of that Ilk, and David Skene, his Brother-German, with one Servant and our own Horses’, NLS MS 3806. This has been transcribed (with some errors) by G.D. Henderson in *Miscellany of the Third Spalding Club* vol. 2 (Aberdeen, 1940).

³² Robert Riddell, ‘A collection of Scotch Galwegian and Border Tunes for the Violin and Pianoforte ...’ (Edinburgh, c.1794), NLS Ing. 232.

Example 8.2 'Gird the Cogie'.



Example 8.3 'Cauld Kail in Aberdeen – Bagpipe Humour'.

The musical score is written in G major (one sharp) and 2/4 time. It consists of eight staves of music. The notation includes various bagpipe ornaments: grace notes (gr), slurs, and triplets (3). The melody is written in treble clef. The first staff begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp. The music is a single melodic line.

"A Way instead of the gatherings in the second measure"

This musical notation shows a variation of the second measure of the original piece. It is written in G major and 2/4 time, featuring a single melodic line in treble clef with bagpipe ornaments.

"Anoy'r way of the 2d measure wt. gatherings"

This musical notation shows another variation of the second measure, including grace notes (gr). It is written in G major and 2/4 time, featuring a single melodic line in treble clef with bagpipe ornaments.

Northumberland (in about 1797); this designation might seem fanciful, but the sentiment is understandable; some of the Border music is indeed 'big music'.³³

Revival or Reinvention?

The nineteenth century witnessed a gradual withering of a distinctive Lowland piping culture as town pipers vanished and the old music was forgotten or subsumed within other traditions. Town clocks were introduced in the late 1700s, and industrialization led to rapid change in the urban landscape. Town musicians were no longer regarded as necessary or desirable, and indeed were actively discouraged in England and Wales in the 1835 Municipal Corporations Act.

It is clear, though, that bellows-blown bagpipes continued to be manufactured in Scotland, with pipe-makers such as Alexander Glen in Edinburgh (1860) advertising a variety of conically-bored Reel pipes and Lovat pipes (either mouth- or bellows-blown), as well as 'Union or Lowcountry pipes of all descriptions made to order'.³⁴ These were presumably the instruments which found their way into the hands of pipers such as Sandy Bruce and Calum MacPherson, and did good service in the village dance halls in the Highlands. In Northumberland there were short-lived attempts to revive Border pipes in the 1920s and 1950s, when Officer Training Corps and Scout pipe bands were supplied with 'half-long' instruments manufactured by James Robertson in Edinburgh.

The recent revival of interest in bellows pipes in Scotland has been marked by the creation of a solid manufacturing base (there are at least a dozen specialist makers operating in the UK and abroad), and the attraction of untold numbers of Highland pipers to the bellows-blown instrument. For many, bellows pipes are simply a pleasant diversion, a means of practising indoors and playing with other musicians in useful keys. The focus on the manufacture of smallpipe chanters pitched in A or B flat, incorporating standard Highland tuning, has meant that players have been able to transfer their Highland repertoire and technique to these instruments with little modification.

This possibly was not what the Lowland and Border Pipers' Society had in mind when it embarked on its quest in 1981. At the time there was a hope and expectation that conically-bored Lowland pipes would come back into their own, providing a vehicle for the exploration of authentic Lowland repertoire and

³³ A letter from William Richardson of North Shields, written in 1817, states: 'It is twenty years this Autumn since James Allan played to me, at Elsdon Court Baron, a port pibroch on the regimental Northumberland bagpipes, to the astonishment and terror of some of the spectators.' Footnote in James Thompson, *A New, Improved and Authentic Life of James Allan, the Celebrated Northumbrian Piper* (Newcastle, 1828), p. 53.

³⁴ This price list appears in a copy of Alexander Glen's *Caledonian Repository* (Edinburgh, 1860), and is reproduced in Jeannie Campbell, *Highland Bagpipe Makers* (Glasgow: Magnus Orr Publishing, 2001), p. 24.

distinctive Lowland technique. Determined efforts were made by players such as Paul Roberts and Gordon Mooney to achieve this goal, but it was to take another 20 years and a marked improvement in instrument design for the reality to match the early expectation.

A number of manufacturers now make high-quality Lowland pipes which are stable and reliable, and players are once again turning their attention to the repertoire. Matt Seattle has led the way with his meticulous examination of the William Dixon manuscript, and his exploration of Northumbrian tune collections such as William Vickers (1770) and John Peacock (1800).³⁵ These contain fine specimens of variations sets, some of which are still current in Northumbrian piping, and provide a potentially rich source of material. (Northumbrian pipe music is notated a tone lower than Highland pipe music, which might explain why it has largely been ignored in Scotland.) Eighteenth-century fiddle music collections also provide potentially rich pickings, especially where original tunes can be distinguished from later variations which go beyond the range of the bagpipe.

Methods of gracing and embellishment have proved to be a thorny issue. Lowland piping lacks any authentic guide to fingering technique which pre-dates the revival, and this has been both an encumbrance and a blessing. (Players have felt at liberty to experiment and improvise, which has been refreshing, but have occasionally fallen short on basic technique.) From the outset, Highland pipe music collections contained fingering charts and tutors which furnished clear playing guidelines, and as early as 1746 John Geoghegan published his *Compleat Tutor for the Pastoral or New Bagpipe*, which contains admirably concise instructions, many of which are still applicable, especially to the uilleann bagpipe. For instance:

The first and chiefest Curl is perform'd by the little Finger of the lower hand on the Chanter which is done by a doubling the little finger on the lower hole, this Double is done by a moveing the finger to and fro on the lower hole it performs the sound of two Quavers which when a Man is Master of doing and playing a few Tunes he will be able to Give several graces therewith.³⁶

In the absence of any comparable, clear-cut instructions for playing Lowland bagpipes, players have largely been left to find their own fingering solutions. One dilemma, not always fully appreciated, is that cylindrically-bored and conically-bored chanters react differently to the application of the same technique. Cylindrically-bored smallpipes are quite forgiving, in the sense that a note can

³⁵ William Vickers 'Country Dances' (Manuscript, 1770), published by Matt Seattle as *The Great North Tune Book* (Newbiggin-by-the-Sea: Dragonfly Music, 1996). John Peacock, *A Favourite Collection of Tunes with Variations Adapted for the Northumberland Small Pipes Violin or Flute* (Newcastle, 1800). Facsimile edition published by the Northumbrian Pipers' Society (Newcastle, 1980), and with modern typeset (Newcastle, 1999).

³⁶ John Geoghegan, *The Compleat Tutor for the Pastoral or New Bagpipe* (London, 1746), p. 7.

be produced in a variety of ways and will sound reasonably pleasant however fingered (within broad parameters). Conically-bored Lowland chanterers have much in common with Highland bagpipers in that they demand a high degree of fingering precision, and a note that is incorrectly formed will generally sound wrong. In this case, clearly, it is essential to have good technique.

A sensible approach in choosing embellishments is to be guided by the music itself. Some techniques of Highland piping are applicable (single grace notes and strikes, for instance), while others might sensibly be modified or omitted. Heavy clusters of Highland grace notes of the 'grip' and 'throw' variety sometimes seem intrusive, and indeed are impossible in the sort of quaver runs that are a feature of the music of William Dixon and others. Shakes, rolls and vibrato, alien to Highland piping, can also be usefully incorporated into Lowland piping technique.³⁷

There are, however, no hard and fast rules, and players have seen fit to express themselves in all manner of ways, and to look beyond the manuscript collections for inspiration. Where 20 years ago Highland pipes were commonplace in Scottish folk groups, the pendulum has now swung in favour of bellows-blown instruments, which play in convenient keys and tend to be more acoustically balanced within the group context. Indeed, it is often said that Lowland pipes sound at their best when played with other instruments.

Young players such as Ross Ainslie and Rory Campbell are creating exciting new repertoire for the instrument, while others are using Lowland pipes very effectively to explore the rhythms and cadences of Cape Breton and Highland music. Still others are steering a determined course towards the music of William Dixon and the variation sets of the Scottish Borders.

In this, then, we have genuine revival, mixed with more than a hint of reinvention. No one would claim that the low-pitch smallpipes which dominated the early years of the revival have much in common with eighteenth-century instruments, but they have nonetheless helped foster a climate in which Highland pipers can take to the bellows with ease, and enjoy the instrument without totally relearning technique and repertoire. Similarly, the burgeoning of interest in conically-bored Lowland pipes in the past 10 years has been fuelled to a significant extent by players who have come from a Highland piping background. Pipe-makers have responded positively, making ever more refined instruments that are reliable and comfortable to play. Whatever a piper's musical tastes, the basic tools of the trade, the instruments themselves, are now firmly in place.

³⁷ Suitable forms of embellishment and expression are discussed by Jock Agnew in *More Power to your Elbow* (Edinburgh: The Lowland and Border Pipers' Society, 2003); and also by Dick Hensold, 'Interpretation and Musical Expression in the Tunes from the Dixon Manuscript' in *out of the Flames: Studies on the William Dixon Music Manuscript* (Edinburgh: The Lowland and Border Pipers' Society, 2004), pp. 13–18. Paul Roberts suggests the use of standard baroque techniques such as shakes, trills and turns in 'Decoration', *Common Stock* (June 2001): 20.

The revival is perhaps reaching an end-point, in the sense that bellows pipes are once again an established feature of the Scottish musical landscape, but there are still elements of the old tradition which remain to be explored. One such is the music of the old smallpipes, the tiny indoor instruments pitched in about F that we once had in common with the piping culture of northern England. These pose a new set of challenges – the fingering technique is different, and the scale incorporates a sharpened top seventh – but the potential rewards are immense. Such smallpipes are delightful to play, they go well with the human voice, and they have the potential to open up a new repertoire of distinctively Scottish pipe music which is neither wholly Highland nor Lowland; a third way, perhaps, to be explored by the next generation of bellows pipers and musicantos.



Illustration 8.3 Unnamed lowland piper, likely by Sir William Allan, *c.*1820s.
Courtesy of the Trustees of the National Museums Scotland.

Chapter 9

‘Tullochgorm’ Transformed: A Case Study in Revivalism and the Highland Pipe¹

Joshua Dickson

In this chapter I pose questions on the nature of tradition and revival in Scottish music. A cursory discussion of current thinking on the nature of tradition prefaces a review of episodes of revivalism in Scottish traditional music, both historically and in the context of current ethnological theories of revivalism as *transformation* rather than simple popularization or renewal. On this basis, I proceed to a case study involving a folk ensemble’s 2003 performance of Scottish Gaelic bagpipe music, in which aspects of transformation from the music’s ‘original’ performance context can be discerned through comparative ethnography and transcription. Employing a methodology first outlined by Dr Gary West of Edinburgh University as the basis of his *Survivals and Revivals* project, in which I was involved as a researcher, I make use of the Hornbostel paradigm of transcriptive technique to clarify the musical and ethnographic reality distinguishing the 2003 performance from the performance on which it was based. It is hoped that the present work may in such a way contribute to the formation of an ‘ethnomusicology of piping’ as first described by Hugh Cheape in his review of William Donaldson’s *Pipers*.²

Revivalism and the Nature of Tradition

Defining tradition in terms useful to the musical or cultural anthropologist has always been difficult, and often at the peril of the definer. For our purposes we may

¹ This chapter is based on a paper presented to the Folklore and Identity in Celtic Studies Conference at the School of Welsh, University of Cardiff in 2005. My thanks go to Mr Hamish Moore for participating in this study and for permission to publish excerpts of interview material recorded in 2007; to Drs Peggy Duesenberry and Oliver Searle of the RSAMD for their valued assistance on transcription matters; and to Drs Hugh Cheape of Sabhal Mòr Ostaig and Gary West of The University of Edinburgh and the editorial board of Scottish Music Review for reviewing drafts of the present work.

² Hugh Cheape, ‘*Pipers. A Guide to the Players and Music of the Highland Bagpipe* by William Donaldson’, *Review of Scottish Culture* 18 (2006): 169. William Donaldson, *Pipers: A Guide to the Players and Music of the Highland Bagpipe* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2005).

follow Seeger, Ben-Amos and Glassie, among others, who reveal an understanding of tradition as constant, but mutable; as incorporating knowledge, performance and the process of accumulation, inheritance and variation in which tradition can be understood as 'the creation of the future out of the past',³ both consciously and otherwise.

This view stands in direct contrast to the thinking of British or Scottish literati in the late eighteenth century who, as patrons of traditional Scottish music, viewed tradition as fixed and in a constant state of diminishment. Tradition was knowledge, so the thinking went, equated with non- or semi-literate societies and whose authenticity was temporal and linear: it began in a state of purity and ended, inevitably, in dissolution with the advance of civilization. More recent advances in thought on the nature of tradition in Europe have been characterized by a more dispassionate objectivity, however, and the dilemma of conscious versus unconscious 'traditionalism'. The Hungarian ethnologist Hofer has illustrated that in the 1960s it was even proposed to limit the use of the term *tradition* to 'the conscious transmission of respected symbols of social groups' and *continuity* to the transmission of 'experiences and achievements without a consciously registered past and symbolic value'.⁴ But this was made problematic by the emergence of research into cultural revivalism both in Europe and in North America, which led to the view that continuity and variation are not mutually exclusive; particularly where performance is concerned. The earlier notions of tradition as necessarily rooted in history but spontaneously created and unselfconsciously maintained (such as in English folk song collector Cecil Sharp's way of thinking⁵) had led naturally to the view of 'revived' traditions as inauthentic. These days, as Hofer put it, 'it is generally understood that traditions are continuously created and recreated in the life of any modern society and that it is difficult to draw a dividing line between the "invention" of a new tradition and the creation of a new "tradition awareness" for an old one.'⁶ This line of thinking prefaces current theories on the nature of revivalism in music.

Revivalism was a term first coined in Britain for our purposes – that is, with regard to music and to folk culture – by Sharp in 1907 in the context of his studies

³ H. Glassie, 'Tradition', *Journal of American Folklore* 108/430 (1995): 395. See also Dan Ben-Amos, 'The seven strands of tradition: varieties in its meaning in American folklore studies', *Journal of Folklore Research* 21 (1984): 97–131, whose identification of seven strands of usage of the term incorporates Seeger's influential three-fold definition of 'tradition' as the accumulation of material, the process of inheritance and transmission and the technical means employed (p. 99).

⁴ Walter Hävernicks, 'Tradition und Kontinuation', *Zeitschrift für Volkskunde* 64 (1968): 22–4, quoted in Tamás Hofer, 'The perception of tradition in European ethnology', *Journal of Folklore Research* 21 (1984): 135.

⁵ Cecil J. Sharp, *English Folksong: Some Conclusions* (4th edn, London: Novello, 1965).

⁶ Hofer, 'The perception of tradition in European ethnology', pp. 135–6.

of English folk song, before which it was mainly used in the context of religious communal gatherings.⁷ For present terms, it refers to a social movement that self-consciously popularizes, re-establishes or in other ways preserves music (or any other folk phenomenon) whose tradition is broken or seen to be in a precarious state, whether or not that is in fact the case. Such popular movements have been widespread and are often exercised on the basis of a belief that the music or custom in question is in danger of dying out completely if it is not set down in writing or recorded in some other fashion as thoroughly and as quickly as possible. For this reason, revival movements are predominantly literate and interventionist in nature.

Slobin was among the first to pose a tentative categorization of the actors involved in reviving music;⁸ a subject later taken up in more systematic fashion by the likes of Skekert⁹ and Livingston. Based on a broad survey, Livingston defined the purposes of a typical music revival as a) 'to serve as cultural opposition and as an alternative to mainstream culture'; and b) 'to improve existing culture through the values based on historical value and authenticity expressed by revivalists'.¹⁰ She supported this with a list of the components she felt formed the basis of her model:

- a. an individual or small group or 'core revivalists';
- b. revival informants and sources (e.g. historical sound recordings);
- c. a revivalist ideology and discourse;
- d. a group of followers who form the basis of a revivalist community;
- e. revivalist activities (organizations, festivals, competitions); and
- f. non-profit and/or commercial enterprises catering to the revivalist market.

Livingston's categorization¹¹ provides a useful analytical framework for our case study in Scottish music, so we shall return to it. First, though, let us take a short look at some revival movements in Scottish music historically.

⁷ Neil V. Rosenberg, (ed.), *Transforming Tradition: Folk Music Revivals Examined* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), p. 18.

⁸ Mark Slobin, 'Rethinking "Revival" of American Ethnic Music' in *New York Folklore* (New York: University of New York Press, 1983), pp. 39, 43. Slobin described the 'historians', 'sainted repositories' and 'performance acolytes' who made up the infrastructure of several immigrant American music revivals since the 1880s.

⁹ Ellen J. Skekert, 'Cents and Nonsense in the Urban Folk Song Movement: 1930–66' in Neil V. Rosenberg (ed.), *Transforming Tradition: Folk Music Revivals Examined* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), pp. 96–9. Skekert categorized four distinct groups making up the North American urban folk revival in the 1960s, from 'traditional singers' to 'imitators', 'utilizers' and, reflecting the emerging scholarship of revivalist ethnographies, 'the new aesthetic'.

¹⁰ Tamara Livingston, 'Music revivals – toward a general theory', *Ethnomusicology* 43/1 (Winter 1999): 68.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

Past Revivals in Scottish Music

Rosenberg, in 1993, identified the American folk song revival of the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s as not one single movement, but a movement made up of many small, more or less isolated but similar cultural phenomena, founded upon prior revival movements and in turn paving the way for the current appreciation of bluegrass, blues, country western and Americana that we find today.¹²

One can point to similar things happening in Scotland – in particular with regard to the collecting of Scots ballads in the Borders or the north-east of Scotland; the popular development of vernacular Scottish Gaelic song; and initiatives aimed historically at the preservation of the music of the Highland bagpipe.

The late Hamish Henderson was of the opinion that the Scottish folk tradition since the early eighteenth century, with particular reference to Scots song, ‘has been nothing other than the sum total of a succession of revivals’.¹³ Looking at the collection of material which took place in regions of Scotland such as Ayrshire and the north-east over the past three centuries, one readily concedes the point. From Allan Ramsay’s *Evergreen* to Robert Burns’s *Scots Musical Museum* and the *Merry Muses of Caledonia*; from Sir Walter Scott’s appropriation and popularization of lore and balladry in the nineteenth century to the collecting of ballads by Greig and Duncan in Aberdeenshire in the early decades of the twentieth; from the part which Henderson himself played in the founding of the Scottish folk song revival of the 1950s to his colleague Patrick Shuldham-Shaw’s editing of Greig and Duncan’s collection in the 1970s; the Scots song tradition has been subject to constant reappréhension by collectors, scholars and performers since the eighteenth century.

Piping is also a prime example. It became very popular among the upper class in the late eighteenth century to view the Gael as the archetype noble savage whose music was destined for oblivion due to social upheavals besetting Highland society at the time. The economy was changing rapidly; old social bonds between landowner and peasant were being severed and emigration to Lowland towns or a new life overseas was taking a heavy toll on Highland traditional community life. As a response to a perceived threat to Highland agriculture, industry and customs of perceived impeccable antiquity, the Highland Society of London was formed in 1778 for the purpose of, among other things, preserving the music of the Highland pipe – in particular *ceòl mòr*, the sophisticated ceremonial music developed among Highland pipers and performed for Gaelic aristocracy, at least in the form recognized today, since probably the seventeenth century. The Society started organizing *ceòl mòr* competitions in 1781, and this became the basis for today’s annual gold medal competitions at the Northern Meeting in Inverness or

¹² Rosenberg, *Transforming Tradition*, p. 2.

¹³ Ailie Munro and Morag MacLeod, *The Democratic Music: Folk Music Revival in Scotland* (Edinburgh: Scottish Cultural Press, 1996), p. x.

Aviemore and the Argyllshire Gathering in Oban every year. It also led directly to revivalist movements in the twentieth century, as we shall soon see.

In Gaelic song, too, one can view its evolution through the past two to three centuries as comprising a series of revivals among several communities, taking place since the era of collecting began in the late eighteenth to early nineteenth century.

Patrick MacDonald's *Highland Vocal Airs* in 1784, Alexander Campbell's *Albyn's Anthology* of 1815 and Capt. Simon Fraser's *Airs and Melodies Peculiar to the Highlands of Scotland* in 1816 represented the beginnings of an age when the wider British public, their appetites whetted following the controversy surrounding the publication of Ossianic ballads by James MacPherson,¹⁴ took an interest in Scottish Highland musical material collected first-hand in the field. The introduction to MacDonald's *Highland Vocal Airs* was written by John Ramsay of Ochertyre, an Edinburgh diarist, who cast doom on the precarious fate and imminent demise of the Gaelic song and instrumental traditions of bagpipe and harp: 'In less than twenty years it would be in vain to attempt a collection of Highland music ... the harpers have predeceased their brethren (the pipers) by about a century ... Perhaps it is rather late at present; but enough may still be got to point out its genius and spirit.'¹⁵ Ironically, the material presented in the very volume he introduced in 1784, and Campbell's and Fraser's efforts in 1815 and 1816, proved him quite wrong and demonstrated even then what could be unearthed by personal fieldwork.

The collecting of songs by Frances Tolmie in Skye followed in the 1850s, and we may see her work and that of others, including Carmichael in the 1860s all the way up to the field recordings made by John Lorne Campbell in the 1930s and Calum Maclean in the 1940s and 1950s, as sowing the seeds of popularization of Gaelic music in large circles and among non-Gaelic audiences.

Of course, for piping and for Gaelic song, a great deal of transformative reinterpretation took place in the process of reviving tradition perceived to be facing oblivion. For piping, the competition system that the Highland Society of London started in 1781 became a fixed and central part of the experience of a patronized piper, but was, in the eyes of some, becoming stale by the turn of the twentieth century. 'Today there are thousands of players on the pipes, but of true pipers, how many?' wailed one anonymous gentleman in the *Oban Times* in September, 1903. 'The present writer knows of six who are worthy of the name. There are probably not more than ten in the whole world. Three hundred years ago ten as good, if not better, could have been mustered in Skye alone ... Men are dying, tunes are

¹⁴ Malcolm Chapman, *The Gaelic Vision in Scottish Culture* (London: Croom Helm, 1978).

¹⁵ Patrick MacDonald, *A Collection of Highland Vocal Airs Never Hitherto Published; to which are Added a Few of the Most Lively Country Dances or Reels of the North Highland and Western Isles: and Some Specimens of Bagpipe Music* (Edinburgh, 1784, reprinted Skye: Taigh na Teud, 2000), p. 15.

vanishing, knowledge is waning.’¹⁶ The idea grew, thanks to his and others’ entreaties in public fora such as the *o ban Times*, that unless action was taken, the extant *ceòl mòr* repertoire would be lost forever. For this reason, Archibald Campbell of Kilberry, senior jurist, amateur piper and extremely influential figure in Highland piping, and a group of like-minded fellows formed The Piobaireachd Society in 1903. The Piobaireachd Society proceeded to take control of the premier competitions, establishing ‘correct’ settings of tunes and diffusing these versions across Scotland through classes taught by the top professional pipers of the day. The Society’s own qualifications for doing so, with regard to musicianship and cultural and contextual knowledge of the music being ‘rescued’, have been hotly contested ever since. In essence the Piobaireachd Society was, as an entity in a position of power imposing an aspect of culture upon others, what the anthropologist Skekert referred to as an *intervener*.¹⁷ He balanced this against the term *advocate*, which he described as one who supports a given culture in order to preserve it (see remarks on the Highland Society of London above as an example of Skekert’s *advocacy* in a Scottish context). Neither is a particularly benign activity: the one can turn preservation easily into petrification, while the other imposes notions of authenticity from outwith the culture in question.¹⁸

We have perhaps the ‘MacPherson paradigm’ to thank for their intervenership, as William Donaldson put it. Donaldson has argued in recent years that The Piobaireachd Society’s actions, and the advocacy of the Highland Society of London before them, stemmed from a view of tradition which was largely determined in the wake of the Ossianic controversy in the late eighteenth century, in which tradition, as was discussed earlier, was considered a fixed and constantly diminishing breadth of unlettered knowledge.

The Piobaireachd Society’s innovation in 1903 lay in the rule that they would issue revolving lists of tunes every year, thereby forcing pipers to continue to develop their repertoire throughout their competing careers (competition had become, by this time, the lifeblood of the mainstream piping tradition). Unfortunately, the sentiments expressed at the time by Society members, among whom not a single professional piper was to be found, contrasted quite a bit with those of many

¹⁶ *o ban Times*, 19 September 1903, p. 3. William Donaldson, *The Highland Pipe and Scottish Society, 1750–1950* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 2000), p. 281. Donaldson has argued convincingly that this anonymous writer was a brother of Archibald Campbell of Kilberry, the Piobaireachd Society’s co-founder.

¹⁷ Skekert, ‘Cents and Nonsense in the Urban Folk Song Movement’, p. 87. See also Rosenberg’s similar conclusions on the 1940s American collector Alan Lomax, who coached performers on his records to shape their repertoires and styles to fit his own criteria of authenticity (*Transforming Tradition*, p. 14).

¹⁸ Skekert, ‘Cents and Nonsense in the Urban Folk Song Movement’, p. 87; cf. Donaldson, *The Highland Pipe and Scottish Society* and Gary J. West, ‘Land and lyrics: the dynamics of music and song in rural society’, *Review of Scottish Culture* 15 (2003): 60–61.

pipers themselves, who felt that the quality, and indeed accuracy, of the hitherto traditional material being imposed upon them was lacking. While the availability of the printed music in cheaper and cheaper form was to be applauded, the settings were fettered, and did not accord with many pipers' adherence to traditional oral and manuscript sources. One of Highland piping's most celebrated performers and teachers, John MacDonald of Inverness (1865–1953), was so up in arms over the settings laid down by the Society's revered music editor, the aforementioned arch-interventionist Kilberry, that he declared their publication the death of *ceòl mòr* in no uncertain terms¹⁹.

Looking at Gaelic song, we have Marjory Kennedy-Fraser's appropriation of Hebridean work songs and love airs, suitably doctored (Hamish Henderson once referred to her settings as 'mummy-wrappings'²⁰) for rhythm, tempi and textual content, in her well-known three-volume collection *Songs of the Hebrides* (1909–22). This is another good example of Skekert's intervenership, in which the reinterpretation of material to fit the sensibilities of an appreciative Victorian audience was overt, extreme and couched – inaccurately, if not disingenuously – to assure the public of the material's fragility. But this was merely one event in a series of recurrent phenomena comprising a larger, extended popular revival of Gaelic song up to the present age. In the 1890s we saw the rise of the competitive Gaelic Mod, in which the aesthetics of 'art music', involving choirs and vocal harmonies, so alien a concept to Gaelic song until then, took precedence over the rough and uncouth reality of the grass-roots tradition from whence the songs came. Kennedy-Fraser and her supporters were not shy in believing that she had rescued the songs from certain oblivion – simply because the larger, Victorian, English-speaking audience had not until then heard them.²¹

Gaelic music and song played their part in the modern Scottish folk song revival with the establishment of the Edinburgh People's Festival Ceilidh in 1951. This was an event established primarily by Hamish Henderson and Alan Lomax in cultural opposition, to use Livingston's phrase, to the more mainstream focus of the Edinburgh International Festival, which had been founded four years earlier.²² The Edinburgh People's Festival Ceilidh would later become the Edinburgh Fringe. Gaelic song was also a focus of the University of Edinburgh's School of Scottish Studies, established the same year as the Ceilidh and itself a strand of the wider Scottish folk song revival.

And in the present day we have seen the establishment of *fèisean*, or community-based Gaelic performing arts tuition festivals. A *fèis* is, by definition, rooted in the

¹⁹ Donaldson, *The Highland Pipe and Scottish Society*, p. 445.

²⁰ West, 'Land and lyrics', p. 64.

²¹ Greater analysis of Kennedy-Fraser's and other's role in the Gaelic song revival up to the present age can be found in Munro and MacLeod, *The Democratic Music*, pp. 128–36.

²² Hamish Henderson, *Alias MacAlias: Writings on Songs, Folk and Literature* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1992), p. 9; cf. West, 'Land and lyrics', pp. 57–60.

community in its local sense, but for the purposes of the present popular movement is ostensibly oriented toward young people and the self-conscious preservation of Gaelic language and culture on a broad scale.²³ *Fèisean* cater mainly, unsurprisingly, to non-Gaels, seeking consciously to instil young people with a knowledge and appreciation of traditional Gaelic culture as an integral element of the tuition itself. The movement's goals, therefore, are educational as well as conservative, and in the context of a largely non-Gaelic constituency.

The sum total of the twentieth century, as regards Gaelic music and song, has been continual, self-conscious adaptation to different tastes, different expectations and different contexts of performance. Could one say, then, that revivalism is a recurrent and important part of the greater cultural process? Can it be considered an authentic part of the cultural process at all?

'Ethnographic Realities'

Do the dynamics of revivalism provide a function essential to the process of folk tradition overtime? That is, does revivalism constitute short bursts of reinterpretation or outright transformation of a tradition perceived to be in a precarious state by those outside the community within which the idiom first emerged? Does this in turn contribute to the tradition's long-term survival and development? Can revivalism be considered an authentic part of tradition in its own right, or does it constitute a transformation of tradition into something altogether new?

Many of these questions were being asked at a time when most North American academics were reacting to the American folk song revival of the 1940s and 1950s with disdain, rejecting the notion that a 'revived' tradition in a musical sense was at all akin, in any meaningful way, to its progenitor. The North American folk song movement which gathered steam in the 1940s, for instance, was considered by many eminent scholars to be entirely inauthentic – a market in which a non-professional musical tradition was being professionalized amid such crass elements as stage lighting, commercial recordings and urban notions of passive audience participation.²⁴

The main argument in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s seemed to revolve around the idea that such things were not characteristic of, for instance, unselfconscious, aurally learned blues singers of the Mississippi Delta in the 1930s, any more than they were to the shepherd-pipers in Northumberland in the 1830s. The latter point is complicated, however, by the fact that the Northumbrian piping tradition is reckoned to have undergone about four different revivals of popularity in the last 200 to 250

²³ Further commentary on the *fèis* movement is offered by Munro and MacLeod, *The Democratic Music*, pp. 134–6; see also www.feisean.org.

²⁴ See, for instance, Jeff Tod Titon, 'Reconstructing the Blues: Reflections on the 1960s Blues Revival' in Neil V. Rosenberg (ed.), *Transforming Tradition: Folk Music Revivals Examined* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), pp. 221.

years.²⁵ Indeed, blues historian Jeff Tod Tilton has concluded that revivalist musicians or scholars, instead of *finding* the blues, or bluegrass fiddle music, or whatever 'pure' traditional material was being unearthed through manuscripts, or sound archive recordings, or by searching for living exponents who could guide them, were instead *constructing* what they found by the very act of reinterpretation.²⁶

As recently as 1979, some, such as Jan Brunvand, proclaimed revivalism to be irrelevant to the study of folk music and folklore; it was regarded as simply an act of artifice bearing little relation, beyond the superficial, to the 'original' traditions claimed to be being passed on untarnished.²⁷ But what objective parameters dictate authenticity? Or cultural or musical identity? What does 'original' mean vis-à-vis 'revived' under present terms? Brave souls have since begun to ask these questions and ask why revivals might not constitute what Livingston has referred to as 'ethnographic realities'²⁸ in their own right: that is, part of the whole cultural process and integral to the survival and evolution of tradition, subject to its own unique aesthetic parameters and contexts of authenticity. Musical or folk revivalism might then constitute a type of *community* in which identity is fashioned from older symbols and meanings into something different, yet equally valid. This is what Jackson had in mind when commenting on the American movement of the 1950s and 1960s:

The revival ... developed aesthetics clear enough to influence performers from tradition ... I doubt that many performers, organisers and audience-members were simple-minded enough to think that they were seeing and hearing folk music performed in an original context. But they *were* seeing and hearing folk music performed in a real context, a real community: that of the folk revival.²⁹

²⁵ Burt Feintuch, 'Musical Revival as Musical Transformation' in Neil V. Rosenberg (ed.), *Transforming Tradition: Folk Music Revivals Examined* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), pp. 185, 188. Feintuch found that the Northumbrian bellows-blown pipe revival of the 1970s and 1980s ascribed significance to a corps of individuals (Livingston's 'informants', Slobin's 'sainted repositories') who did not possess the socio-cultural traits normally associated with the paradigm of the rural, unlettered shepherd piper whose music was diffused to him organically, but were held nonetheless as the embodiment of idealized Northumbrian-ness by others.

²⁶ Tilton, 'Reconstructing the Blues', p. 223.

²⁷ Jan Brunvand, *Folklore: a Study and Research Guide* (1979), quoted in Rosenberg, *Transforming Tradition*, p. 18.

²⁸ Livingston, 'Musical Revivals', p. 67. Similarly, Kay Kaufman Shelemay argues for a closer link between ethnographic method, historical musicology and anthropology in 'Toward an ethnomusicology of the early music movement: thoughts on bridging disciplines and musical worlds', *Ethnomusicology* 45 no. 1 (Winter 2001): 1–29. Like Livingston, Shelemay offers a descriptive categorization of the movement in question, providing useful parameters for the analysis of socio-musical aesthetics in the wider sense.

²⁹ Bruce Jackson, 'The Folksong Revival' in Neil V. Rosenberg (ed.), *Transforming Tradition: Folk Music Revivals Examined* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), p. 81.

Having presented these latter considerations, one is compelled to revisit the historical revival movements described above in relation to piping and Gaelic song in Scotland: is it fair, for instance, to call settings of tunes by The Piobaireachd Society inauthentic? It could be seen rather that The Piobaireachd Society were 'in search of a personal authenticity in historical forms',³⁰ *constructing* rather than *finding* tradition; a tradition in which the performance of *ceòl mòr* was fashioned and interpreted for markedly different functions and audiences than that which had hitherto prevailed. Similarly, is it right to call Kennedy-Fraser's settings of Gaelic songs 'mummy-wrappings'? An emotive term certainly, reflecting the plodding and deliberate approach of the songs' reinterpreters for the appreciation of far different audiences than the community in which Kennedy-Fraser found the material. But in essence she and her colleagues were constructing something different for the tastes of a different community. Transformed, the songs inspired by one tradition became the touchstone of another.

Survivals and Revivals

These questions concerning tradition and renewal were raised in recent years by Dr Gary West of Edinburgh University's Department of Celtic and Scottish Studies, who has called for the establishment of a unique series of investigations collectively entitled *Survivals and Revivals*.

'Survival' and 'revival' were terms first contrasted with each other in the context of the folk music tradition by North American musicologist Charles Seeger in an article in the *Journal of the International Folk Music Council* in 1953.³¹ Seeger was a pioneer of innovative and culturally non-Eurocentric theories and methods of the transcription of folk music in the 1950s and was a tireless proponent of the relevance of ethnomusicology to the study of music as a whole. Seeger's pioneering work on transcriptive theory and method and his reference to 'survival' as contrasted with 'revival' came at a time when, as we have seen, most musicologists were reacting with scepticism to the American folk song revival of that era and the newly discovered contexts of authenticity which it, and the coincident development of recording technology,³² had engendered.

³⁰ Livingston, 'Musical revivals', p. 74.

³¹ 'Folk music in the schools of a highly industrialised society' (sic), *Journal of the International Folk Music Council* 5 (1953), pp. 40–44.

³² Lomax, for instance, redefined authenticity in America in the 1940s to include the consideration of performance style, where score and text alone had earlier predominated. This was a consequence of the burgeoning medium of field recordings, making hitherto ephemeral and trivialized aspects of performance permanent aural records (Rosenberg, *Transforming Tradition*, p. 12).

In time it fell to Skekert to argue that the folklorist must start writing about the present day, not just the past.³³ West revisited his and Seeger's ideas in a Scottish context when, in 2003, he stated that 'the temporal progress of tradition is seldom uneventful and smooth, but rather tends to ebb and flow, wither and thrive, according to a whole range of internal and external pressures and influences. Many of Scotland's vocal and instrumental traditions', he concluded, 'are perhaps best understood in this way'.³⁴ West was responding to the need to recognize the collaborative nature of the relationship, historically and currently, between tradition *bearers* and tradition *seekers* – the Alexander Campbells, the Frances Tolmies and the Hamish Hendersons of the world – and to explore the significance of the reflexivity implicit in that relationship today. This dynamic between old and new – survival and revival – had never been treated directly as a living, ethnographic reality in a Scottish context, though, as the present work and its referenced sources suggest, there are many examples of this dynamic at work in Scottish music historically. In calling for the devotion of resources toward this ultimately anthropological question into the workings of the cultural process in Scotland, West was, in essence, listening for what Angus Calder described as the 'distinctive voices arising within ... a continuous strong flow of language and music in which labourers and scholars have swum together'.³⁵

Making the case publicly for such an initiative in 2003, West concluded:

There is no point in just studying texts or scores: it is not only the songs, but also the singers who are important, and in turn it is not just the singers but the places they inhabit which we have to look to if we are to try to understand any tradition in context. And it is not just the performers, but the role of the collectors that we need to examine too; for there is no doubt that they have been extremely influential, for good or for bad, in the whole cultural process. Scotland's creative folk arts have developed through a process of survival and revival, and there has never been more revival than now.³⁶

In drawing up a theoretical and methodological framework for the exploration of the dynamic between survival and revival in modern Scotland, West drew on the virtues of participant observation and analysis through the lens of three main research themes:

³³ Skekert, 'Cents and Nonsense in the Urban Folk Movement', p. 93.

³⁴ West, 'Land and lyrics', p. 57.

³⁵ Angus Calder, 'Introduction' in Henderson, *Alias MacAlias*, p. 2. See also Shelemay, 'Toward an ethnomusicology of the early music movement' for a useful parallel on the blurred dynamics between researchers and performers in the early music movement in Boston in the 1980s and 1990s.

³⁶ West, 'Land and lyrics', p. 64

1. *Motivations and aspirations.* This theme concerns concepts such as authenticity, cultural identity and the relativism that these issues engender; the economic or cultural objectives of the revivalists; and the overall ethos of the community defined in connection with the revival in question;
2. *Teaching, learning and transmission.* This theme refers to the difficulties and solutions of teaching and learning the idiom when the social context surrounding the ‘original’ tradition, for lack of a better term, has been severed. We can view this theme mainly in the context of literacy and aurality as competing or complementary idioms of transmission, but the revival of lost technique can be equally problematic, as will be seen below in reference to Lowland and Border piping; and finally,
3. *Performance contexts.* This theme addresses the social environment in which the music is performed, the music’s functions and aesthetics, and ultimately the relationship between repertoire and style.

In late 2003 I was appointed a research assistant in Celtic and Scottish Studies, University of Edinburgh, for a term of about three months in order to explore, under West’s supervision, the feasibility of an Arts and Humanities Research Council (then Board) Creative and Performing Arts Fellowship on an aspect of revivalism in traditional Scottish music today. Funds had been awarded from the University’s Development Trust Research Fund on the understanding that the feasibility study would culminate in a viable submission.

Our musical expertise and experiences led us naturally to the bagpipe. We turned our attention to three idioms of pipe music experiencing varying degrees of ‘revival’ in Scotland today: the Lowland and Border tradition; eighteenth- and nineteenth-century *ceòl mòr* performance style; and Gaelic step-dance piping.

Of these, the Lowland and Border tradition probably had the most potential for observation as a revival. There is little dispute that the tradition was truly severed by the late nineteenth century, and the resulting lack of inheritance, with the exception of recent noteworthy source discoveries, between the previous tradition and its re-emergence compels its participants to make conscious choices in forming such things as repertoire and style. What kind of fingering, for instance, and/or other stylistic and technical points are consciously employed and developed to distinguish it from Highland tradition? The current revival is heavily dependent on Highland notions of ornamentation and finger positions, despite the recent high-profile discovery and reissue of manuscript evidence illustrating the repertoire of the early eighteenth-century Borders piper.³⁷ This is itself an indication of the national or iconic status

³⁷ Cf. Matt Seattle’s edition of the William Dixon manuscript dating from 1733, *The Master Piper: Nine Notes That Shook the World* (Newbiggin-by-the-Sea: Dragonfly Music, 1995). Of this collection, he later stated: ‘I have heard virtuoso Highland players give entirely inappropriate renditions of Dixon because they didn’t have the necessary background. This is the “Star Trek” approach – whatever music you play, it all has Highland ornamentation, just as wherever you go in the galaxy, the locals all speak English. No less than any tradition,

of the Highland idiom historically; a status which the Lowlands and Borders piping revival, in the opinion of some participants, has served increasingly to undermine.

The re-emergence of perceived eighteenth- and nineteenth-century styles of *ceòl mòr* performance may not be counted so much as a tradition under revival, but rather a growth of interest among competing and non-competing pipers due to recent studies and experimentation, such as the ongoing work of Allan MacDonald and Barnaby Brown since the early 1990s³⁸ and the recent setting of nineteenth-century manuscript tunes in the premier competitions. The questions that arise from this growth of interest were directly relevant to the proposal being constructed: questions concerning the conscious choices to be made when interpreting the older manuscript tunes, the acceptance or reluctance of the wider piping community, and the effects of this growth of interest on repertoire and style.

We came finally to consider the current growth of interest in the style of Highland pipe music associated with the step-dances of Scottish Gaeldom up to the eighteenth to early nineteenth centuries; that is to say, what many consider to be the piping of the common Gael before empire and emigration occasioned radical social changes in Highland life.³⁹ This type of piping has survived in the Gaelic emigrant communities of Nova Scotia and is yet within living memory in the Gaelic-speaking southern Outer Hebrides. Unlike now, however, the tradition was once almost universally an aural one. Its revival in Scotland at the hands of literate, non-Gaelic-speaking (or at best semi-fluent) pipers and other musicians may consequently be causing the tradition to re-emerge along a different cultural tack than in earlier times, as the practitioners of the current revival do not think the same way, nor is the performance/repertoire/cultural milieu as homogenous, as it was when it was indigenous to historical Gaelic-speaking communities. Nor can

this music commands respect and should be approached on its own terms.' Quoted from 'A short introduction to Border piping' in the programme booklet of Pipers' Gathering 2002, held in North Hero, Vermont, USA (published at www.pipersgathering.org/PB2002.shtml, 2002). See also West, 'Land and lyrics', p. 61.

³⁸ Allan MacDonald, 'The relationship between pibroch and Gaelic song: its implications on the performance style of the pibroch ùrlar' (M. Litt thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1995); Mike Paterson, 'The playful essence of *ceòl mòr*: assonance and consonance', *Piping Today* 22 (2006): 20–21; Barnaby Brown and Allan MacDonald, 'The Red Speckled Bull', *Piping Today* 26 (2007): 44–5. See also MacDonald's recently released album of pibroch, *Dastirum*, which incorporates into practice many of his theories on early pibroch performance style (released on the www.siubhal.com label).

³⁹ John G. Gibson, *Traditional Gaelic Bagpiping: 1745–1945* (Montreal and Edinburgh: McGill-Queens University Press and National Museums of Scotland, 1998) and *Old and New World Highland Bagpiping* (Montreal and Edinburgh: McGill-Queens University Press and National Museums of Scotland, 2002); J.M. Bumsted, *The People's Clearance: Highland Emigration to British North America, 1770 – 1815* (Edinburgh and Winnipeg: Edinburgh University Press and University of Manitoba, 1982); Joshua Dickson, *When Piping Was Strong: Tradition, Change and the Bagpipe in South Uist* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2006), pp. 57–72.

the technical style of the previous tradition be precisely revived, owing to near-universally literate teaching and learning conventions among pipers today. So even here there is a vacuum in which conscious aesthetic and technical choices must be made: how, for instance, does the ‘revived’ tradition differ in performance and transmission contexts from its predecessor, judging by Nova Scotia and Scottish Gaelic communities who retain living memory of it? How is the ‘revived’ tradition presented to the piping public by its organizers and protagonists, and what are its touchstones? Does its presentation leave room for pluralistic or ephemeral technique in keeping with the aurality of its past? Is it a revival of eighteenth-century Gaelic step-dance piping or, by its very nature, a transformation of it? Is Gaelic step-dance piping in Scotland today an example of a community constructing its own version of the tradition it revives?

On this basis, we decided that the Gaelic step-dance piping idiom would make a promising topic for the Fellowship submission. As an investigation of revival in progress, West’s three main research themes (motivations and aspirations; teaching, learning and transmission; and performance contexts) could be readily observed in this current movement. Its focal point was an ensemble called *Na Tri Seudan*.

The Case Study

Na Tri Seudan was an ensemble performance group active between 2003 and 2005, created and directed by leading pipe-maker Hamish Moore of Dunkeld, Perthshire. Meaning ‘the three treasures’ (or ‘jewels’) in reference to music, song and dance in Gaelic tradition, the group featured mainly pipers but included also a single drummer and occasional dancers and singers. Moore trained originally as a veterinarian before setting up business full-time as a maker primarily of bellows-blown Lowland smallpipes and reeds in the late 1980s. In 1996 he founded the *Ceòlas* summer school in South Uist, which offers tuition in piping, fiddling, singing and dancing in a Gaelic context.⁴⁰ *Na Tri Seudan* was formed to some acclaim around 2002.⁴¹ Moore’s son Fin, a well-known piper, pipe-maker and step-dancer in his own right, assisted his father in the group’s repertoire development and was often involved in decision-making with regard to tempo, phrasing and step rhythms during rehearsals for public performances.

By presenting the disparate, though related, elements of music, song and dance in Gaelic tradition as an interlinked and interdependent whole within the supportive framework of language and culture – the framework within which Moore founded the *Ceòlas* school – the group attempted to recreate, for non-Gaelic audiences, the kind of piping and singing performed for dances in the grass-roots

⁴⁰ www.ceolas.co.uk.

⁴¹ See Mike Paterson, ‘Pipes signal a good time for Scotland’, *Piping Today* 1 (2002): 15–16 and ‘Old tunes swinging to a rhythmic revival: Na Tri Seudan’, *Piping Today* 3 (2003): 26–7.

Gaelic townships of the eighteenth century. That is, to educate the masses as to the performance contexts of essentially a foreign culture on the understanding that it was not always so. One can discern here an obvious affinity with the aspirations of today's *féisean* movement.

The chief musical material underpinning the group's interpretation was drawn from amateur and professional field recordings of performances by pipers (and fiddlers) in the Gaelic emigrant communities of Nova Scotia, particularly Cape Breton, on Canada's eastern seaboard. The connection between Cape Breton and Scotland, historically and musically, is the driving force behind the current revival. One of the chief effects of the increasing public regard with which scholars and revivalists hold the Cape Breton piping tradition is that many assume it to be an unblemished living window to Scotland's piping past; that its field recordings of step-dance piping, stripped of the competitive, literate aesthetic and technical qualities we know today, illustrate the style, technique, transmission and performance contexts of the Highland pipe exactly as it was played in the Scottish *Gàidhealtachd* 250 years ago.⁴² Of course that compounds another assumption – that the Cape Breton Gaelic community has entirely avoided the exertions of acculturation and innovation since the settlers last reached land in the 1850s. This is unlikely. Cultural integrity is never as static as that assumption implies. There is no indication, for instance, that the Cape Breton Gaelic piper's own sophisticated foot-stepping was ever known to their Scottish forebears, and indeed there are oral historical sources which suggest otherwise.⁴³ It must also be borne in mind that the music discernable in the wealth of recordings from Cape Breton sources in modern times does not represent all that Highland piping once was. Although composers and performers of *ceòl mòr* emigrated to the New World – some returning, some staying – the formal, largely ceremonial music of the Highland pipe did not survive there as it did in Scotland. It was, perhaps, too middle class; the pipe music of the Cape Breton Gael today is descended from the music of the masses, the huddled and poor, who arrived in the New World either willingly or by force. The assumption that the Cape Breton tradition somehow represents 'pure' Highland music, unsullied by modernity and the inexorable process of change, is also a disservice to scholars like Shears and Gibson, who have striven

⁴² For Cape Breton piping in an academic context, see Gibson, *Traditional Gaelic Bagpiping and old and New World Highland Bagpiping*; Barry W. Shears, *The Gathering of the Clans Collection; A Collection of Music, Photographs and Historical Sketches: Volume one* (Halifax, 1991) and *The Gathering of the Clans Collection; A Collection of Music, Photographs and Historical Essays: Volume Two* (Halifax, 2001). For personal reminiscences on transmission and performance in Cape Breton, see Anon, 'With piper Alex Currie, Frenchvale', *Cape Breton's Magazine* 73 (1998): 29–45 and 'The bagpipe in Cape Breton: from a conversation with Barry Shears, piper', *Cape Breton's Magazine* 52 (1989): 37–52.

⁴³ See Anon, 'With piper Alex Currie ...', p. 34; Dickson, *When Piping Was Strong*, pp. 172–3.

to place Cape Breton piping in its proper context. But the recordings and living reminiscences of the Cape Breton piping community, when compared to those of the southern Outer Hebrides such as South Uist and Barra, do provide a powerful indication of a common repertoire and a shared, unselfconscious auralty, on the basis of which ornamentation is spontaneous and fine-tuning at a minimum. There can be no doubt that the oral and archived sources predicating *Na Tri Seudan*'s performances point toward something quintessentially folk, and uniquely Gaelic.

Moore's own testimony, in a piece written for the newsletter of popular Celtic-American radio programme *The Thistle & Shamrock*, reveals the importance of the transatlantic connection in the formation of both his thoughts on authenticity and his creative process:

It was 1992 while teaching at the Gaelic College in Cape Breton that I first met Alex Currie. He was unique – the last one left of the old style players. When Alex died, it was the end of an era. He came back to the old country with his daughter Mary on what was for him a journey home. Home to South Uist to Iochdar, where at the beginning of the 19th century his great great grandparents had set off on a voyage filled with fear. And so it was to South Uist in 1996 that I went to host my summer school 'Ceolas'. It's at this school that we teach the piping like Alex used to play it, and step dancing, puiirt and fiddle in the old way and reconnect all the broken links between these three strands – and when they do reconnect the effect is extraordinary ... 'Na Tri Seudan', the three treasures, that's what it is. That's as close as it gets with words. Almost sacred.⁴⁴

Moore later elaborated on the significance of the Cape Breton connection in interview in 2007:

I suppose the refinement of my playing, and feeling completely justified in the way that I played and taught – and promote to this day – was Cape Breton and the piping of Cape Breton. Because it's so closely related to the dance. The dance came from Scotland – we found step-dancers here who know the Cape Breton steps but who had never heard of Cape Breton, never been there, never heard them; that was the corroborative evidence we needed. And we know that Joe Hughie [MacIntyre], all those MacKinnons in Inverness County, Alec Currie – they all played for step-dancing. That was their main reason for playing ... That connection with the dance, as long as it remained, dictated how the tunes were played, both in tempo and in rhythm. And that's what I tried to replicate with *Na Tri Seudan*.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Excerpt from 'A letter From Scotland: Unbroken Lines' by Hamish Moore, *Clecken Press*, March 2002.

⁴⁵ Hamish Moore in interview with the author, Birnam, March 2007.

Dance was the rhythmic anchor of Highland piping in eighteenth-century social life, and remained so in Cape Breton into the modern age. Even in modern South Uist, Benbecula and Barra, the expectation that the bagpipe's repertoire, rhythm and tempo in a social gathering would be dictated at the whim of the dancers is still within living memory. Moore was motivated in part by an ambition to make these performative connections evident to a new generation of Scots. He was also motivated, however, by a personal quest for some alternative to the modern competition system, whose perceived emphasis on ornamentation at the expense of rhythm left him 'emotionally cold'. This quest was rooted in Moore's first encounter in the early 1980s with, ironically enough, a set of bellows-blown Lowland smallpipes – iconic of a lost tradition wholly devoid of the cultural baggage of modern Highland piping:

I think what really fascinated me about these pipes was that they didn't have a military context, or they weren't part of any competition scene. What I have understood since then, and in particular from going to Cape Breton, is that the Highland pipes ... used to have a non-military and non-competitive side before the Highland regiments were raised. But of course it's difficult to realise that because it just always seems to have been there, everything seems to be so accepted that this the way you do it ... Part of that thinking is that you don't question it either. But I think that these pipes allowed a door to open into another world – the true folk tradition.⁴⁶

Moore perhaps oversimplifies: dance and its emphasis on timing has always remained an important consideration in a piper's approach to style, regardless of Highland military life. But he is correct in the sense that literate and competitive contexts have somewhat displaced dance from the central position in a piper's priorities. Redressing this perceived imbalance was a prime motivation. But he also spoke of commercial motivations underpinning the entire endeavour:

It went from that, realising that I was absolutely besotted by the sound of [the smallpipes], [to] the thought that I could make a living immersed in music and pipes and playing, which I love so much ... I saw that there would be a definite commercial potential for these pipes and envisaged a situation when almost every Highland piper in the world would also have a set of smallpipes. Which I think has almost happened!⁴⁷

In Hamish Moore, and to a legitimate extent Fin Moore, we see Livingston's 'core revivalists'; in the late Alex Currie, Livingston's 'informant' or 'historical source',

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

one whom Slobin would have referred to as the ‘sainted repository’.⁴⁸ Whether it was entirely representative of eighteenth-century Highland piping or not, the Cape Breton tradition was in many respects in a healthy state of affairs until a decline took place coincident with the decline of the Gaelic language in Nova Scotia from about the post-Second World War era. The music never entirely died out, however. The pipe music of the area could be classed as a *survival*, to which the current *revival* in Scotland has staked a conscious shared identity and authenticity.

I approached Moore with the idea of joining the ensemble as a participant observer of its creative process over the three-year period of the anticipated Fellowship. He kindly agreed, and although the submission to the Arts and Humanities Research Board’s Creative and Performing Arts Fellowship was not successful in that instance, I remained a playing and practising member of *Na Tri Seudan* for about a year. Based on my experience performing with the group in 2003, let us pinpoint one representative moment in the revival in question and compare it ethnographically and transcriptively with the historical source – a performance recorded in Cape Breton in 1965 – that inspired it. Seeing first-hand the performative realities that distinguish them, we can then determine to what extent the revival of Gaelic step-dance piping in Scotland conforms to current thinking to do with the transformation of tradition.

First, a word on supporting transcriptive theory and conventional Highland bagpipe notation. I have chosen to transcribe the two performances for comparative purposes in the spirit, if not the letter, of the ‘Hornbostel paradigm’.⁴⁹ As a response to the emerging debate over the transcription of non-Western music by ethnomusicologists at a time when objective description was being accused of obscuring any sense of legibility, musicologists Erich von Hornbostel and his colleague, Otto Abraham, published their *Proposals for the Transcription of Exotic Melodies* in 1909. Hornbostel and Abraham championed a solution that preserves the familiarity of conventional European notation in the objective description of the facts of performance, supported by a minimum of symbols placed above or below the stave to depict keys, pitches, percussive effects, harmonies or other aspects of performance unique to the music in question, and by textual, ethnographic descriptions of performance wherever appropriate. In the spirit of this approach, I have transcribed the 1965 and 2003 performances using conventional Highland bagpipe notation to describe the melodic and ornamental aspects of performance but have included descriptions of percussive effect, multiple chanters, drone resonance and voice.

⁴⁸ Livingston, ‘Musical revivals’, p. 69; Slobin, ‘Rethinking “Revival” of American Ethnic Music’, p. 39.

⁴⁹ See Ter Ellingson, ‘Transcription’ in Helen Myers (ed.), *Ethnomusicology: an Introduction* (London: MacMillan, 1992), pp. 121–31.

In a system dating back to Donald MacDonald's publication of light and classical pipe music in 1820,⁵⁰ Highland pipe notation employs the five-line European treble clef but does not normally represent drone sound in any way; it is simply understood and fixed. Notes are divided on the stave into two types: main melody notes, whose stems always point downward, and grace notes, which appear as small note heads with stems pointing upward. I have followed all these conventions here, particularly with regard to the 1965 performance, but I have added drone sound to the transcription of the 2003 performance, in which the phased introduction of drone-sounding among players was integral in a way not relevant to that of 1965.

The 1965 Performance

A reel-to-reel recording, made in 1965, features the piping of Joe Hughie MacIntyre (1891–1968) at the inaugural Big Pond Scottish Concert in Big Pond, Cape Breton and is now in the private possession of his descendents. MacIntyre is one of Moore the revivalist's named historical sources. His family emigrated from South Uist in the Outer Hebrides around the year 1826,⁵¹ and their piping had since been handed down by ear in an unbroken stream for generations in a traditional Gaelic social milieu of ceilidhs, step-dancing and aural transmission. MacIntyre's life and piping are discussed in some detail by Barry Shears in his recent monograph,⁵² and several recordings of MacIntyre's performances are included on a CD accompanying this work.

MacIntyre was aged 74 at the time and was entirely ear-learned, having developed his repertoire and style at the knee of his father and by the example set by other, older pipers at ceilidhs, weddings and other social gatherings in the French Road community. On the occasion in question, he was recorded playing a number of different tune idioms central to the piper's canon, including marches and sets of strathspeys and reels. Although the recording does not make it clear, his audience would have been made up of men, women and children of all ages and interests, mostly Gaelic-speaking, and probably indulging in an impromptu Scotch reel to MacIntyre's playing. Although not represented in the transcription, he was accompanied by a pianist. This had become quite customary in Cape Breton

⁵⁰ See Donald MacDonald, *A Collection of the Ancient Martial Music of Caledonia, Called Piobaireachd* (Edinburgh, c.1820) and, for commentary on its pioneering notation, Roderick D. Cannon and Keith Sanger (eds), *Donald MacDonald's collection of Piobaireachd, Volume 1: The Ancient Martial Music of Caledonia (c.1820)* (Glasgow: The Piobaireachd Society, 2006). I am grateful to Barry Shears for providing the information surrounding the origins of the 1965 recording. The performance was recorded by Joe Hughie's son, Duncan Patrick Macintyre, who has since passed away.

⁵¹ Shears, *The Gathering of the Clans Collection, Volume one*, p. 12.

⁵² Barry W. Shears, *Dance to the Piper* (Halifax: Cape Breton University Press, 2008).

Example 9.1 'Tolluchgorm' as performed by Joe Hughie MacIntyre, Cape Breton, c.1965 (CD track 19).

The musical score for 'Tolluchgorm' is written in 4/4 time and consists of ten staves of music. The melody is characterized by frequent triplets and grace notes, typical of bagpipe music. The notation includes various accidentals (sharps, flats, naturals) and rests. The piece begins with a double bar line and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The first staff contains four measures. The second staff contains four measures, with a triplet of eighth notes in the third measure. The third staff contains four measures. The fourth staff contains four measures. The fifth staff contains four measures, with a triplet of eighth notes in the third measure and a triplet of eighth notes in the fourth measure. The sixth staff contains four measures, with a triplet of eighth notes in the first measure and a triplet of eighth notes in the second measure. The seventh staff contains four measures, with a triplet of eighth notes in the first measure and a triplet of eighth notes in the second measure. The eighth staff contains four measures, with a triplet of eighth notes in the first measure and a triplet of eighth notes in the second measure. The ninth staff contains four measures, with a triplet of eighth notes in the first measure and a triplet of eighth notes in the second measure. The tenth staff contains four measures, with a triplet of eighth notes in the first measure and a triplet of eighth notes in the second measure. The piece concludes with a double bar line.

tradition by then, but is musically peripheral to the needs of our comparison. The tune in question is the strathspey 'Tullochgorm'.

As can be seen in Example 9.1, we leave the piano accompaniment aside and look solely at melody and ornamentation. There are four distinct parts to the tune as played, and he employed a number of ornamental techniques standard to the piping canon as he himself learned them, such as the run of grace notes on A known as the 'birl' in the second part and the striking of the bottom-hand notes in the third and fourth parts. These elements would become integral to Moore's arrangement of the same tune in 2003.

The 2003 Performance

In late July of 2003 *Na Tri Seudan* was booked to perform at the National Piping Centre, Glasgow, as part of the city's Piping Hot! festival (since re-named Piping Live!), which takes advantage of the fact that throngs of pipers and piping enthusiasts flock to Glasgow every year for the World Pipe Band Championships held in early August.

About eight pipers, including myself, took part in the rehearsals and eventual performance. The members of *Na Tri Seudan* were entirely literate and most were



Illustration 9.1 Hamish Moore (second from left) and Fin Moore (far right) in rehearsal with *Na Tri Seudan*. The pipers are consulting Hamish's written score. Courtesy of Mike Paterson.

experienced, professional-level pipe band or solo competitors, head-hunted for their musicality and their openness to Moore's aesthetic. Rehearsals focused, like that of any top pipe band, on the printed score – Moore's own arrangement, based on MacIntyre's recorded setting – and coalesced around a *de facto* Pipe Major whose band experience and insistence on melodic and harmonic unison among players led him naturally to the role.

We performed at the National Piping Centre's auditorium. The space was acoustically purpose-built for piping and boasted a raised stage, a bar to one side and a seating capacity of about 150. About two thirds of the seats were taken for our performance. Roddy MacLeod, Principal of the National Piping Centre, introduced us. We then opened by striking up the pipes in the main corridor outside the auditorium and marched, single file, past the audience and up to the stage playing the 2/4 march 'Horsburgh Castle'. Hamish Moore then took the stage (he was not among the pipers himself, though Fin was), and over the course of ten minutes explained to the audience the significance of the repertoire they were hearing and the Gaelic origins of the group's performance style, with reference to both the Hebrides and Cape Breton.

The audience that day was made up mainly of Scottish and North American members of pipe bands soon to be competing at the World Championships. They were not Gaelic-speaking as far as any of us were aware, nor accustomed to hearing or playing pipe music strictly by ear in the context of Hebridean dance rhythms. They were literate, competition-oriented players or enthusiasts (as indeed were we), eager for what in piping terms may be called 'easy listening', or perhaps compelled by curiosity to come and hear something new. No dancing took place, though Moore was careful to explain to the audience the importance of dance contextually to the performance.

We then came to the 'Tullochgorm' set, which commenced as follows. Our aforementioned Pipe Major double-toned his drones as a resonant backdrop to Moore himself, who recited loudly for the audience six lines from Robert Fergusson's 'The Daft-Days'. At the culmination of the stanza, the Pipe Major increased pressure to the bag enough to sound his chanter and launched, alone, into the first part of 'Tullochgorm'. Two bars before the end of the first part, the rest of us double-toned our drones, adding harmonic depth to the single chanter's melody. As the Pipe Major continued into the second part, the group as one sounded our chanters, and with that the rest of the 'Tullochgorm' set was carried by the full wall of sound produced by, and expected of, a modern pipe band. Although a single snare drummer was present at rehearsals to provide a compass for tempo, he could not join us on this occasion, and instead we all tapped our feet in unison to produce the same percussive effect.

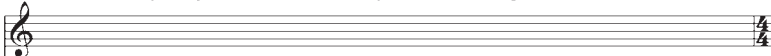
It is clear from even the most cursory comparison of the transcriptions that the two performances, although based on the same piece and in many respects the same style, were very different beasts. But first, the similarities. In particular, the quickness of tempo (*c.*145 bpm in 1965; in 2003, slightly faster at *c.*155) and the rhythmically even flow of the 2003 rendition were more or less carried on faithfully

Example 9.2 'Tolluchgorm' as performed by *Na Tri Seudan*, Glasgow, 2003
(CD track 20).

Stanza, as read by Hamish Moore:

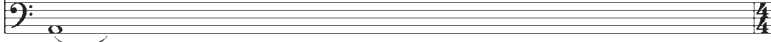
"Fiddlers! Your pins in temper fix / and roset weel your fiddle-sticks / and gie us nae vile Italian
tricks / From out your quorum / Nae fortes wi' pianos mix / But gie us Tulloch Gorum!"

Stanza



Drones only

Piper 1



♩ = 155

with chanter

Piper 1



Piper 1



Piper 1



drone only

Piper 2



drone only

Piper 3



drone only

Piper 4



drone only

Piper 5



drone only

Piper 6



drone only

Piper 7



drone only

Piper 8



X = tap foot

Piper 1

Piper 2

Piper 3

Piper 4

Piper 5

Piper 6

Piper 7

Piper 8

(all together)

Pipers

Pipers

Pipers

Pipers



from the 1965 recording. This was in itself a telltale sign of the oppositional character of *Na Tri Seudan* and its aesthetic. The strathspey is a uniquely Scottish and much cherished form of reel, and definite opinions exist in mainstream piping circles as to its proper expression.⁵³ By adopting the performance style of the Cape Breton step-dance tradition, the group staked out a position unmistakably at odds with mainstream circles.

Na Tri Seudan's rendition also followed, to a degree, the spirit of extemporaneous ornamentation inspired by the Cape Breton tradition in general. Being primarily a solo aural tradition in which technique took a back seat to timing, Moore's historical source musicians did not follow settings of tunes with absolute consistency; nor were they expected to. This creative freedom is seen by many in the revivalist community as a virtue in comparison with mainstream Highland piping. I asked Moore about the relationship, in his point of view, between the two performances, with particular reference to his arrangement of the ornamentation in the latter half of 'Tullochgorm', which differed from MacIntyre's. Where MacIntyre had played a series of reflexive striking movements on C and B in the third part (in Example 9.1), Moore's arrangement included a series of *taorluaths* and grips (see * in Example 9.2), which offered a subtly different texture to the melody without distorting MacIntyre's own rhythmic scansion. Moore's response reveals that the ability to innovate within accepted traditional boundaries, and its historical continuity with the aesthetic of the old world Gael, is key to the aesthetic of today's revival. I began by asking him about the 'Tullochgorm' set:

⁵³ 'Another hindrance [to good strathspey presentation] is the current fad for step dancing with the piper accompanying this type of multi-influence jigging tending to play all beats equally and at a quick tempo. We must eschew both these influences if we want to become good exponents of the strathspey.' Robert Wallace, 'Strathspeys: how to get lift into this elusive dance form', *Piping Times* 55/5 (2003): 15.

What I was looking at particularly was the set comprising 'Tullochgorm', into 'Calum Crubach' and then 'Sandy Cameron' which we played as Na Trì Seudan at the National Piping Centre back in 2003 ... and the fact that it was quite consciously based on Joe Hughie MacIntyre's set, or the recording of his performance back in 1965, playing 'Tullochgorm' and then into 'Sandy Cameron'. And just comparing your arrangement of 'Tullochgorm', we see [that] the main differences are in the third and fourth part where you have the taorluaths and the grips, but in MacIntyre's there are more strikes ... I just wonder what your process was in arranging the third and fourth parts to be a little different. What were you trying to accomplish?

I think I was using these *taorluaths* knowing fine that they weren't used by Alec [Currie] or Joe Hughie, but trying to play them very, very evenly and with big, fat grace notes to produce a sort of bubbly sound ... That bubbly C to A *taorluath*, and then C to E with the grip; if you run those together – habbidum, habbidee – with big, fat grace notes, you get sort of a bubbling of oil on the surface, these fat bubbles in slow motion.

Which in itself preserves the rhythm.

It does, it enhances, it doesn't just preserve, it enhances the rhythm ... It was very much an original idea of mine.

For artistic purposes?

Yes. Individual styles are still celebrated in Cape Breton, and that would be my individual input into this tune.

I see what you mean. It's being confident enough within the traditional parameters as it's been preserved and conserved and passed on, to be able to toy with it a little bit, experiment a little bit, introduce things here and there –

Without changing the inherent rhythm and tempo, so that it's still within the original context. And that's something you can't do within competition.⁵⁴

But Moore's adherence to the Cape Breton spirit of extemporaneous ornamentation, of ephemerality within accepted parameters, was undermined from the outset by its self-consciousness; by the fact of his arrangement of a printed score and the adherence of *Na Trì Seudan's* pipers to it; and by the unison execution necessary among pipers in fulfilment of today's pipe band paradigm. This paradox, and the innovation that it represents, goes some way in distinguishing today's revival as a tradition authentic within its own context. As Moore himself admitted in interview,

⁵⁴ Hamish Moore in interview with the author, Birnam, March 2007

'it wasn't ever a tradition – an eighteenth-century pipe band, non-military pipe band. It was unheard of, I think.'

In other respects too, the music and performance context of *Na Tri Seudan* in 2003 betray clear differences from what we know of Gaelic step-dance piping as conceived and practised in the Hebridean community of the eighteenth century:

First, the group was made up of a number of top, professional-standard pipers accustomed to the discipline and tight-knit sound of today's competitive pipe band, an environment far removed from pre-competition piping heard in Gaelic townships of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Second, in rehearsals leading up to the performance, players were required to learn, or adapt, fingering techniques or rhythms which Moore himself devised based deliberately on or inspired by the techniques demonstrated by ear-learned Cape Breton pipers such as Joe Hughie, but written into staff notation for the benefit of the ensemble. Third, the pipers were all literately taught – that is, by staff notation as opposed to aural transmission, and rehearsals leading up to the performance were all conducted according to notation prescribed by Moore himself, albeit modelled on Hebridean performances of the past. Fourth, Moore acted as a Master of Ceremonies for the performance and took a great deal of time before this set to explain the context, the idiom and the tunes to a seated, non-Gaelic audience of modern, competitive, literate pipers and enthusiasts; perhaps in the belief that only with the correct contextual information could the audience adequately appreciate the music. Supporting this, Moore commented in interview:

There's nothing like convincing a public of the relevance of something if you can produce an emotional response. And I felt, well, if you can extend this from the solo piper concept and have eight pipers all playing in this old style, and allow people to sit back and really enjoy this music, and investigate the links rhythmically with the dance and Gaelic song – it's a sort of stage performance version of Ceòlas.

Was it important to assemble the group as a way of educating existing and perhaps future audiences?

It sounds a bit patronizing, 'educating'; just allowing people to enjoy it. But I suppose education comes into it. I was lucky – I had the chances to go to Cape Breton, and hear the stuff. I think you've got to be open to it, not hostile to it.⁵⁵

So there was an acutely self-conscious traditionalism and educational overtone evident in the 2003 performance which was wholly absent in the context of its Cape Breton antecedent.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

Conclusion

All in all, the current movement is certainly identifiable as a revival from the point of view of Livingston's 1999 framework. Moore can be identified as a 'core revivalist' whose 'informants' or 'historical sources' include the late Alex Currie, Joe Hugh MacIntyre, the MacKinnons of Inverness County and others, including a significant corpus of field recordings. Moore articulates a cogent ideology rooted in historical continuity with a musical culture made esoteric by subsequent social developments. A revivalist community in general agreement with Moore's personal quest for historical authenticity can be discerned in the students of the annual *Ceòlas* school, purchasers of his bagpipes and a handful of well-known professional performers whose recordings reflect this ideology. Revivalist activities include *Ceòlas* and *Na Tri Seudan* itself, but the movement is furthered by other festivals and events in which Moore and others take part. And Hamish and Fin Moore's livelihood is testament to the movement's commercial aspect.

The elder Moore's testimony suggests that the revival in question is grounded mainly in what Livingston termed 'cultural opposition' and 'an alternative to mainstream culture'; that is to say, an alternative to the competition culture which has superseded both dance and courtly ceremony as the de facto anchor of Highland piping today. His comments elicit a great many issues, in fact, that cannot be discussed in detail here. The present task was instead to establish the theoretical and empirical underpinnings of the present revival, pinpoint one representative moment in it and compare it graphically with the historical source that inspired it. Seeing first-hand the performative realities that distinguish them allows us to determine to what extent the revival of Gaelic step-dance piping in Scotland conforms to current thinking to do with the transformation of tradition.

Significant similarities can be observed between the two performances transcribed here, as was no doubt intended by Moore as the revival's founder and *Na Tri Seudan*'s director. But significant differences appear as well. Ultimately, the 2003 performance, and *Na Tri Seudan* as an ensemble, seems to have more in common with the modern competitive pipe band paradigm than with the world of Gaelic oral and instrumental tradition of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. *Na Tri Seudan* bears the hallmarks of a tradition transformed: *motivated* by a self-conscious conservatism and an *aspiration* to present for modern audiences various disparate, though related, aspects of Gaelic music in one composite ensemble; *transmitted* through printed music and tight, disciplined pipe band rehearsals – very different means than were employed by unlettered Gaels of the past; and *performed* as a stage show for a sitting audience of listeners with little or no knowledge of Gaelic – an entirely different context than that of the aurally-learned Hebridean dance musicians of the past, who played for social dancing.

On the occasion of the 2003 performance, I could see how difficult it was to present an idiom of music in a way that can be effectively transmitted to a modern audience with their own preconceptions of a good-sounding bagpipe performance. In such a reconstruction, a degree of artifice, of synthesis, was inevitable. Moore

was taking the model, technically speaking, of a modern pipe band and trying to produce a wholly different idiom of music from it, but on the understanding that that particular model demanded unison and conformity among players – something alien to the tradition being revived – in order to produce a pleasing performance. It seemed to me to be an innovation blending the technical qualities of today's top-level pipe band and the rhythmic qualities of what was once traditional among old and new world Gaels.

Lederman, in 1993, wrote of the North American bluegrass revival of the twentieth century:

The folk revival is a new culture, not an extension of older ones. It looks to older folk cultures for its inspiration, but ultimately it translates old music into its own context and its own aesthetic values.⁵⁶

Lederman's comment may well apply to the question of revivalism of music and folk in Scotland today, and certainly to our case study of Gaelic step-dance piping by *Na Tri Seudan*. We can see Moore's revival as something new, but no less a part of tradition itself; as one further step in 'the creation of the future out of the past'.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Anne Lederman, "'Barrett's Privateers": Performance and Participation in the Folk Revival' in Neil V. Rosenberg (ed.), *Transforming Tradition: Folk Music Revivals Examined* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), p. 172.

⁵⁷ Glassie, p. 395.

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Chapter 10

Return of the Drone: A ‘Folk’ Thing?

Mike Paterson

Highland piping is irreversibly embarked on a multi-faceted revolution. It has never been more widely dispersed. Nor has it previously seen a comparable diversity of musical experimentation and new composition. Playing standards are widely said to have never been higher, and never before have there been as many learners in so many parts of the world. Over the past 30 years or so, the instrument has been the object of considerable technical innovation. Teaching, resourced by qualifications systems, new technologies, new publications and recent research, is becoming increasingly professionalized and more accessible.

In the wider context of things, of course, Highland piping remains a minority pursuit and a ‘niche’ market, although it supports a growing commercial base and shows signs of capturing wider audiences.

What’s driving this development? To address that question, and to understand the instrument’s potential in shifting wider musical tastes, we have to see Highland piping, not as a discrete form dissociated from other music and other bagpiping traditions, but as part of a greater family of related instruments, many of which are also being swept into brighter futures than they have long known.

This chapter suggests that we may be witnessing a rediscovery of a taste for drone-based music, and discusses some of the issues that suggested this question to the author.

The Issue

The author has had the privilege of visiting a number of Europe’s piping communities in recent years and has been fascinated time and time again by sometimes perplexing diversities and contrasts. Across scores of cultures, bagpiping is finding expression in ways and contexts that are more kaleidoscopic than concerted, yet seem to speak of some shared impulse. In a few places, such as the mountain villages of the Cycladic island of Naxos (an almost textbook setting for ‘traditional music’), bagpipes seem on the edge of abandonment by cultures that in all sorts of other ways appear keen to preserve their traditions. In Hungary a keen bagpipes revival has been urban-based. Alongside this, we have to consider the German neo-medieval piping scene: the theatrical creation by a named individual, Roman Streisand, that burst out of East Germany when the Berlin Wall fell to become standard festival day fare in the reunited Federal

Republic of Germany.¹ In Galician Spain, uniquely, provincial government funding supports a teaching structure for the *gaita* that provides tuition to 16,000 learners and sustains the *bandas de gaitas* movement – a development that has been bitterly criticized by some ‘traditionalists’ as inauthentic.² Then, in Latvia, one finds pipers casting about for the best instrument configuration and saying that the pipes, once implicitly anti-Soviet, are now implicitly ‘anti-globalization’ and a national symbol.³ Bagpipes turn up in early music consorts and chamber ensembles, in rock bands and jazz groups, and accompanying costumed dancers on the stages of folkloric festivals in Eastern Europe. Various cross-cultural fusions are being explored, and repertoire can be seen moving from one culture to another. The great Highland bagpipes have toured with Madonna, been used to market ice cream in Korea, been played on the thinning ice of the Antarctic and by American troops in the Republican Palace of the late president of Iraq, Saddam Hussein.

One of the relative consistencies the author has found is that, whatever kind of bagpipe is played, feelings about it are unequivocally held: bagpipes produce sounds and music that is detested or adored: an ‘uh-huh, whatever’ response is rare. The author has long made a point of asking as many pipers as possible, ‘Why the pipes? Why not an easier, more widely appreciated, more lucrative, more “mainstream” instrument, such as a guitar?’

The answer, almost invariably, has come down to ‘the sound’, and the consistent component of the sound is the presence of a drone or drones.

The question begins forming itself: could some kind of a rediscovery of a drone-based musical taste be taking place? After all, this was a dominant musical aesthetic of medieval Europe and it continues to be central to the music of northern India, which also has been gaining popularity in the West.

Background

The late Seumas MacNeill was still working on his book, *Masters of Piping*, at the time of his death in 1996. Its basis was a series of broadcasts he had made for the BBC under the same title, an initiative intended to help redress the ‘lack of written evidence’ relating to Highland piping. In 2008 the Piobaireachd Society funded publication by the College of Piping of the manuscript, after tidying and completion by Jeannie Campbell, curator of the College’s Museum of Piping.

Seumas MacNeill, as the College’s founder, a teacher, a player, an adjudicator, a researcher and writer, editor, broadcaster and long-serving honorary secretary of

¹ Mike Paterson, ‘The wild side of German piping: Neo-Medieval German piping’, *Piping Today* 32 (2008): 42–7.

² Mike Paterson, ‘Sixty piping teachers – 16,000 learners: Escola de Gaitas, Ourense’, *Piping Today* 24 (2006): 16–17.

³ Mike Paterson, ‘Latvians rekindle a piping heritage: Republic of Latvia’, *Piping Today* 18 (2005): 31–7.

the Piobaireachd Society was an outstandingly influential figure – a scene-setter, you might say – among his generation of great Highland bagpipers in Scotland. He was also a prominent proselytizer for Highland piping internationally. Highland pipers may not always have agreed with him but his views, often uncompromising, were never to be taken lightly.

It is fitting that his historical assessment of piping in Scotland, published posthumously in 2008, should set the scene for this paper:

One thing we can be sure of is that in all these centuries (since the days of Kings David II and James I) there did not exist one single 'master piper' for the Lowland form of the instrument ... Piping in Lowland Scotland was a pastime, or at best a country craft, and the more 'full time' and professional he was, the more likely it was that the piper had neither the ambition nor the ability to do anything else. There were exceptions, but there were not enough of these to raise the overall status or prestige of their calling. At this same period of time, in the same country, separated in places by a bare 20 or 30 miles, there lived other pipers of an entirely different calibre. About them we know very little – except that the instrument they played was eventually to displace all other forms of the bagpipe on the face of the earth. We do know however that their position in society was very much better than that of their Lowland counterparts, and we can deduce from what came afterwards that their music was on a very much higher level too.⁴

Paradoxically, the tone of disdainful self-aggrandizement expressed here has accompanied almost obsessive concerns to assert the bagpipes' significance on the grounds of their antiquity and gloried past, rather than their current musicality. For two and a half centuries Highland piping was feared to be facing possible extinction, and solo competition was held to be the best way to ensure the ongoing purity of its lineage. This led to a particularly keen (some would say 'single-minded') emphasis on competition and formally agreed niceties of technique and musical interpretation.

Solo piping has, by and large, been administered and regulated in self-referential ways by insiders. Its stage became the competition platform. While a performance musician faces an audience of people there to enjoy themselves, the competitor faces a panel of judges obliged to find fault and draw comparisons. While an audience seeks subjective satisfactions arising from musical exploration and development, personality and expression, judges find their job made easier if there are few surprises, and they can base decisions on objectively defensible observations of deviation from technical perfection.

On the competition boards at Highland games, for example, solo pipers have found themselves playing under conditions that shelter them from popular public

⁴ Seumas MacNeill, *Masters of Piping* (Glasgow: The College of Piping, 2008), p. 1–2.

attention. Elite venues, such as Dunvegan Castle on Skye, the Glaziers' Halls on the banks of the Thames in London and Blair Castle in Perthshire, are remote (emotionally as well as geographically) from main Scottish population centres and make limited provision for audiences of any great size. These events have rarely promoted themselves beyond piping circles, and few people outside of those circles ever hear solo Highland piping at its purported best.

Revealing his (and the general public's) sublime disengagement with solo Highland piping, Douglas Fraser described *piobaireachd*, the classical music of the great Highland bagpipe, in *The Scotsman* of 3 September 1994, in the following way:

... you can sit there for hours and still not find the words to describe what it's all about. Perhaps they exist in Gaelic, but to the uninitiated non-Gael, the pibroch is a musical form of supreme impenetrability. It is like Schoenberg with drones ... A sound sensation which sears right to the depths of the soul, and into those furthest recesses of the head which aspirin can barely touch.⁵

Piping in Scotland – though thriving – has survived a cultural trial-by-ordeal as a competitive 'in-group' activity pursued by amateurs. In many contexts in Scotland, piping acquired a kind of invisibility, and many pipers have seemed content with that, so that piping's divorce from Scottish musical mainstreams, its alienation from the media and from the Scottish public at large, came to exist in stark contrast to the vigour that existed and was gathering strength within piping circles, the vibrancy of piping's cross-cultural appeal and its distinctive musicality.

Administration

More than other forms of Scottish 'traditional'⁶ music, piping has had the benefit of some long-established infrastructures, ranging from pipe bands and solo and pipe band competition structures and events, all with clear performance criteria and conventions, to umbrella bodies such as the Royal Scottish Pipe Band Association, with its regional branches and sister organizations in a number of other countries. Its website in 2007 recorded 3.28 million visits from 96 countries.

There is the Piobaireachd Society established in 1903, the Piping and Drumming Qualifications Board and, previously, the Institute of Piping, numerous piping clubs, associations and societies, the Competing Pipers Association, the Lowland and Border Pipers' Society and the John MacFadyen Trust.

⁵ Douglas Fraser, 'Sound and Fury', *The Scotsman*, 3 September 1994, reprinted in *The Best of The Scotsman*, (ed.) Ruth Wishart (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1994), p. 109.

⁶ The author acknowledges the difficulties of defining 'traditional', particularly in current contexts, but uses the term here to refer to the forms of music that are popularly considered 'traditional' in Scotland today. Further discussion occurs later.

The College of Piping in Glasgow has provided tuition since 1944, publishes a monthly piping magazine (*Piping Times*), and has a library and museum. The National Piping Centre in Glasgow – the result of a £4.5 million makeover of a Grade II listed former church on McPhater Street, Cowcaddens – was opened in 1996. As well as providing tuition, running competitions and holding recitals, it houses the bagpipes collection of the National Museums of Scotland. It maintains archives and a library, established a National Youth Pipe Band of Scotland in 2001, publishes a magazine (*Piping Today*) every two months and is a partner with the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama in providing a BA (Scottish Music – Piping) degree.

A lack of cohesion within the wide Scottish piping community has made it difficult at times for piping as a whole to derive optimal benefit from the developments that came to bear on piping during the later decades of the twentieth century. But the establishment of the Piping and Drumming Qualifications Board in 2006 (replacing and broadening the Institute of Piping) laid a basis for far closer working relationships involving, as it does, the Royal Scottish Pipe Band Association, the National Piping Centre, the College of Piping, the Army School of Bagpipe Music and the Piobaireachd Society.

Writing in 1987, Roderick Cannon said:

... it is impossible to say how many (Highland) pipers there are in the world today, but a few published figures show clearly enough that piping is a thriving culture ... There must, at least, be tens of thousands of active players, ranging from novices to master players of international repute.⁷

He updated that view in his programme notes for the 1999 Edinburgh International Festival's *Music of the Pipes – Ceòl Na Pioba* series:

Outstanding over the past few decades is the dramatic improvement in the general standard of musicianship. There have never been more good players than now, and never so many good teachers and good instruments.⁸

Today

The trajectory of growth evident at the end of the twentieth century continues, and not only in Scotland. Cultural vigour in Scottish descendant and expatriate communities overseas persists, and continues to lift Highland piping standards, expand the repertoire and exercise creativity. Surprisingly, perhaps, Highland

⁷ Roderick D. Cannon, *The Highland Bagpipe and its Music* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1995), p. 164.

⁸ Roderick D. Cannon, 'Changing Rhythms – Ceòl Beag' programme notes for *Music of the Pipes – Ceòl Na Pioba* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh International Festival, 1999), p. 26c.

pipings' persistence in post-colonial nations (including Hong Kong, South Asia and the Middle East) is similarly evident. The bases are laid here for the emergence of new, distinctive piping cultures as these countries move beyond colonial contexts, taking piping with them. There is evidence that the Highland bagpipe is beginning to be more or less strongly indigenized into other cultures in several parts of the world, in South Asia and Brazil, and in Hong Kong. It need not stop at this, and we are seeing opportunities beginning to emerge in other parts of the world, including mainland China.⁹

Even where the British Empire did not reach, interest in Highland piping, particularly in pipe bands, appears to be growing, for example Germany, Scandinavia, Belgium, the Netherlands, Italy, the Czech Republic, South America and other non-British cultures: a still-widening internationalization of piping.

Revolution

While recent piping literature has generally presented a settled, heritage-oriented picture of piping in Scotland,¹⁰ it has, over the past few decades, in fact been experiencing an intensifying onslaught of internally and externally generated forces of change. Although many of the real and potential energies have yet to radiate across the piping interests that exist within Scotland and worldwide, changes afoot are radically reshaping the musical experience of most of today's young pipers, and their combined impact will strengthen for many years to come.

For one thing, instruments are better than they used to be. Widely acknowledged improvements made over the past 30 years to reeds, bags and instruments generally have helped players of good ability to attain more consistently high standards of performance, and have made piping easier for learners.¹¹ Alongside this, concerns to maintain Gaelic and Scots languages have strengthened, which help to provide more positive contexts for traditional music and piping.

Piping tuition has been available to interested students at a varying number of Scottish state schools since 1976. But the implementation of the Scottish Arts Council's *Traditional Music in Scotland* report (1999) and subsequent policy developments began widening the awareness of piping and traditional music in Scotland's schools. Piping instructors in schools are experiencing considerable demand in most areas and the availability of piping instruction is widening rather than contracting. While learning opportunities have proliferated, provision also is

⁹ Mike Paterson, 'Pipes gain ground in Hong Kong: the "post-Handover decade" in *Piping Today* 26 (2007): 28–31; Libby O'Brien, 'A learning curve in Changsha: crossing cultural divides', *Piping Today* 26 (2007): 32–5.

¹⁰ See, for example, Cannon, *The Highland Bagpipe and its Music*; Hugh Cheape, *The Book of the Bagpipe* (Chicago: Contemporary Books, 2000).

¹¹ Mike Paterson, 'It only gets better...', *Notes* 12 (2000): 15.

changing qualitatively with clear paths for progression and accreditation having opened that can lead on to university degrees and professional music careers.

Fèisan nan Gàidheal, formed in 1988, now has 40 or so member groups that are all bringing numbers of young Highlanders into a closer awareness of their culture and its performing arts, and providing an impetus that moves beyond the National Mod.

The National Centre of Excellence for Traditional Music was established at Plockton High School, near Loch Carron, and took its first intake of students in 2000. Its founding director, Dougie Pincock, is a broadly experienced piper and traditional musician. His approach reflects that breadth, and is likely to be influential:

This is a big step: the first time that traditional music has been raised to this level of acceptance in the mainstream formal education sector ... From the piper's point of view, there's so much to be gained and so much to be enjoyed when you look beyond your own confines, but you also have a tremendous amount to offer. People in the traditional music world are always keen to welcome pipers in because they know there's this huge breadth of repertoire, there's generally speaking more formal tuition in piping than any other traditional instrument, and standards are high.¹²

The Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama's BA (Scottish Music) degree produced its first graduates in 1999 and the National Piping Centre – RSAMD BA (Scottish Music – Piping) degree produced its first graduates in 2004. They are among the first to have had ready access to learning in the context of wider musical studies provided by a conservatory. For these students, competence on a second instrument is a requirement. The qualification is one that opens the way for pipers to qualify as fully certificated teachers of music as pipers, and promises in the longer term to raise the standing of piping throughout Scotland. A 'Study Abroad' semester programme is introducing student players from overseas to this conservatory style of piping education.

Most older instructors have located their background within the oral tradition, the competitions and pipe bands contexts and the structures of what might be called the 'traditional' piping establishment. Increasingly, however, as more instructors are recruited into the school system and retiring instructors are replaced, posts are increasingly likely to be filled by conservatory graduates whose approach will be different. The longer term implications of this for piping are considerable.

Important and complementary to, if not always in accordance with the received oral tradition, is a growing body of scholarly research and the publication of a number of significant books.¹³ Scholarly research and publication relating to

¹² Dougie Pincock, interviewed 20 April 2000.

¹³ These include (from 2000 only): Frans Buisman, Roderick Cannon, and Andrew Wright (eds), *The MacArthur–MacGregor Manuscript of Piobaireachd (1820)* (Glasgow

Scottish piping are at last picking up some momentum. This has been producing some healthy creative tensions in some parts of the international piping community and is helping to make piping 'ideas rich', although considerable needs exist for ongoing research. Inevitably, scholarly work will come to inform teaching, contributing to a deeper popular understanding and appreciation of Scotland's piping heritage.

At the same time, an influence that has been potent in piping for generations has been waning. A shift in military priorities and the exigencies of protracted commitments in Iraq and Afghanistan are factors that, along with the relative vigour of leading civilian pipe bands, have led to a diminution of the relative influence of military piping and drumming. But, even in 2000, the direction was clearly seen. Major Gavin Stoddart, then Director of Army Bagpipe Music, reported in *The New Reed*, a publication of the National Schools Piping Project:

The emphasis has changed, purely for career management, onto the military role ... When I joined, piping and drumming came first and the military side took the back seat ... My memory goes back to a time when it was great to sit all day playing pipes and drums. We don't get a chance to do that now. Every piper and drummer has to have a career structure ... and has to do serious career courses.¹⁴

The 'civilianizing' of pipe bands is continuing.

A strengthening interest among pipe bands to produce and present stage concerts arose from concerts held from the early 1980s in Ballymena, Northern Ireland, each year in the lead-up to the World Pipe Band Championships. These concerts have ceased, but their place has been taken by annual 'World's Week' concerts organized by the Glasgow Skye Association Pipe Band in Glasgow. Concerts in a distinctively modern idiom have become increasingly popular. On 20 February 1998, for

and Aberdeen: The Universities of Glasgow and Aberdeen in association with the John MacFadyen Memorial Trust and The Piobaireachd Society, 2000); Hugh Cheape, *Bagpipes: a National Collection of a National Instrument* (Edinburgh: National Museums of Scotland, 2008); William Donaldson, *The Highland Pipe and Scottish Society 1750–1950* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 2000) and *Pipers: A Guide to the Players and Music of the Highland Bagpipe* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2005); Joshua Dickson, *When Piping was Strong: Tradition, Change and the Bagpipe in South Uist* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2006); John G. Gibson, *Old and New World Highland Bagpiping* (Montreal and Edinburgh: McGill-Queens University Press and National Museums of Scotland, 2002); Patrick MacDonald, *A Collection of Highland Vocal Airs Never Hitherto Published; To Which Are Added a Few of the Most Lively Country Dances or Reels of the North Highland and Western Isles: And Some Specimens of Bagpipe Music* (Edinburgh, 1784; reprinted Skye: Taigh na Teud, 2000); Bridget Mackenzie, *Piping Traditions of Argyll* (Glasgow: The Piobaireachd Society, 2004); Pete Stewart, *The Day it Daws: the Lowland Scots Bagpipe and its Music, 1400 to 1715* (Pencaitland: Hornpipe Music, 2005).

¹⁴ Mike Paterson, 'Pipers soldier on', *The New Reed* 5 (2000): 3.

example, the Simon Fraser University Pipe Band became the first pipe band to headline a concert at Carnegie Hall, New York:

A thundering wall of sound, mixing precise rhythms and intricate melodies, brought a near sell-out Carnegie Hall crowd to a roar of its own in enthusiastic appreciation.¹⁵

On 9 August 2000 the 78th Fraser Highlanders (Canada), Field Marshal Montgomery (Northern Ireland), Vale of Atholl (Scotland) and Shotts and Dykehead (Scotland) Pipe Bands performed at the Glasgow Royal Concert Hall in the seventh annual pipe band concert to be organized by the Glasgow Skye Association Pipe Band:

It's a natural progression for the pipe band world. You've got the competitive stuff that everyone's aiming for and that's got its own pressures, but to be able to come away from that, let loose on a stage and do your own thing for two hours is quite something. And I think the bands love it.¹⁶

Band repertoire has made some remarkable shifts in recent years, but even wider varieties of repertoire and style are likely to be explored in the years ahead. Some are bound to be accepted, particularly by younger players and new audiences. The appearance of Irish tunes in Scottish competitions was controversial in the 1980s. Now, Breton, Galician and Bulgarian-sourced tunes are frequently played, and musicality has been strengthened as a key object of performance, formalized by the incorporation of 'ensemble' into pipe band competition judging criteria.

At the same time, the experiences and perceptions young people have of the wider music industry, and the increasing likelihood of their being taught in non-traditional contexts, are encouraging them to pursue aspirations that have not hitherto figured strongly or widely in the piping community, but which are likely to strengthen and become more general. A growing number of young players are keen to play in public and in sessions and ensembles with other musicians. These expectations are generating demands for wider performance opportunities and heightened professionalism within piping.

For many years, audience development languished in piping,¹⁷ and presentation skills have typically been poor. This has been fairly widely recognized,¹⁸ and attempts, such as the establishment of the 'show'-centred National Youth Pipe Band of Scotland, are being made to alter this situation. More and more bands are putting together a 'concert' repertoire in addition to their competition sets.

¹⁵ *The Vancouver Sun*, 24 February 1998, cited by Simon Fraser University at the university website: http://virtual-u.sfu.ca/mediapr/sfnews/1998/July_2/carnegie.html.

¹⁶ Jim Cooper, secretary-treasurer of the Glasgow Skye Association Pipe Band, interviewed 6 June 2000.

¹⁷ Cannon, *The Highland Bagpipe and its Music*, p. 167.

¹⁸ See, for example, Robert Wallace, 'Editorial', *Piping Times* (January, 2000): 3.

As pipers seek to reach new and wider audiences, ‘musicality’ may well become increasingly defined by non-pipers. Performance, as opposed to competition, is a strengthening priority.

This may well prove to be where Scotland’s wider traditional music revival, that originated in the 1950s, ultimately finds its most mutually productive relationship with piping: the revival has diversified performance and income-earning opportunities for pipers, on the concert stage and elsewhere. It also had the effect of intensifying discussion within piping and drumming circles about the validity of different styles and techniques, leading to greater stylistic breadth.

At first, the ‘folk revival’ in Scotland had slight direct relevance to piping¹⁹ but, in more recent years, impacts have undoubtedly been felt. And those impacts came about thanks in part, at least, to new technology.

Technology

Amplification technology enabled Highland pipes to be incorporated into onstage ensembles, before the smallpipes and Border pipes revivals made the integration of bagpipes into folk line-ups much easier. From the 1970s pipes began to be enlisted into the line-ups of internationally touring bands such as Ossian, Alba, Battlefield Band, Tannahill Weavers, Ceolbeg, and so on. A part of the impulse to include pipes seems to have been generated by expectations of overseas audiences. Gary West, a former member of the grade 1 Vale of Atholl Pipe Band, leading member of the Lowland and Border Pipers’ Society and piper for the traditional music group Ceolbeg, said:

When [internationally touring Scottish band] Wolfstone went without a piper, their overseas gigs dried up. But most of these bands, their big audiences are not here, they’re overseas, mostly in northern Europe. In Portugal at Easter time we [Ceolbeg] played in this wonderful festival in Oporto where you’re playing in front of 2,000 people and they’re all cheering and everything. Then the next week you come back and play at Stirling Folk Club for 20 people ... well, more than 20, but that’s the way it was.²⁰

This kind of exposure helped to bring forward a few ‘microstar’ pipers: Gordon Duncan, Iain MacDonald, Fred Morrison, Rory Campbell, Martyn Bennett and others. While these pipers all received their grounding in oral and competitive environments, the modicum of public recognition they attained came only after they moved into other contexts.

¹⁹ Ailie Munro and Morag MacLeod, *The Democratic Muse: Folk Music Revival in Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1996).

²⁰ Gary West, cited in Mike Paterson, *A Scottish National youth Pipe Band: a Feasibility Study* (Glasgow: The National Piping Centre, 2000).

The improvement and ready availability of digital recording technology and production software has also made it easy, fast and inexpensive for artists – pipers along with everyone else – to produce, distribute and sell recordings of their work. The sheer volume of piping recordings released commercially each year, and the growth of information and multimedia technology and musical notation software, separately and together with email, blog and website facilities, have rapidly extended opportunities for the quick, wide dispersal of new composition, have widened spheres of dialogue and influence, and have opened a wide door to distance education, which is already in its early stages of development. In 2007 the National Piping Centre began using Skype links to provide online teaching internationally. In many ways, these are still fledgling technologies and new opportunities are certain to emerge in years to come.

Still, through the marketing constructs of 'World' and 'Celtic' music, commercialism and commoditization have recently had impacts on drone-based music and, along with the burgeoning of bagpipe festivals, these have helped to provide contexts in which bagpipe traditions have become increasingly interactive cross-culturally.²¹ Thus the itinerant beggar piper of yore, who swapped musical ideas with his peers in foreign lands, finds his successor in the festival-going modern piper who trades sound files on mobile phones, iPods and MP3 players, and burns CDs on his or her laptop.

Contexts

When we look for influences that have affected Highland piping, it is important to also look beyond Scotland's borders. While piping brings many overseas players briefly or for extended periods to Scotland to compete or to learn and study, these people inevitably bring influences. Thus, for example, a South African recently handed over the position of secretary of the Competing Pipers Association to a New Zealander.

The 20-year-old Scottish small and bellows pipes revival is undoubtedly helping to diversify styles and repertoire through, for example, the activities of the Lowland and Border Pipers' Society. As instruments that are more ensemble-friendly than the Highland pipes, bellows pipes have given Highland pipers an alternative but not unfamiliar instrument that enables them, potentially at least, to participate more fully in the Scottish and wider 'Celtic' musical revival, participate in sessions, and form new, wider links and broaden experience and outlooks: Scottish pipe-maker Hamish Moore, who has made a major contribution to this revival was, in 2008, artist in residence in the small Italian city of Barga.

²¹ Mike Paterson, 'The Cheshire Cat's miaow: the substance and chimera of Scottish bagpiping' (paper delivered to the *Scotland Abroad* conference, University of Glasgow, 20 November 1999).

The 'Celtic' music boom, though Irish-led, has undoubtedly benefited Scottish and other traditional musics, including some which are 'Celtic' rather more by inclination than by virtue of their cultural characteristics. New patterns of relationship and influence are in place and give every indication of growing and further diversifying.

Another impetus to piping has been less direct: numerous pipe tunes have been adopted and arranged by other musicians, especially fiddlers. This exposure is likely to be helping to orient people towards the aesthetic conventions of piping.

But the widest forums for potential development in relation to Scottish piping exist in engagement with the Europe-wide bagpiping revivals that have pretty much restored bagpiping to its medieval range and wider, mainstream musical developments internationally. Bagpipe revivals are actively being pursued in Galician and Asturian Spain, Brittany and Central France, England, Ireland, Italy, Scandinavia, the Baltic region, Central Europe, the Balkans and elsewhere. Various Greek, Turkish, North African and Middle Eastern traditions also survive. This is generating new interactions among the various piping traditions in new contexts and – as traditions mature, develop and attain higher mutual visibility – new understandings of piping and piping's creative possibilities emerge. Scottish pipers have been relatively slow to recognize and join this party, influenced too often by attitudes such as that the great Highland bagpipes are really 'the greatest' and other traditions clearly have little to offer them. Meanwhile, the scope for even wider interactions is growing: the bagpipe traditions of North Africa and the Middle East are only starting to be drawn into the widening exchange of ideas: the stars of the twelfth William Kennedy International Piping Festival in Armagh, Northern Ireland in 2005, for example, were the members of Algerian pipes-led group Marzoug. The proliferation of international festivals and the growth in their popularity has been striking. Le Festival Interceltique de Lorient en Bretagne; the Festival Internazionale della Zampogna (bagpipes) in Scapoli, Italy; the biennial Strakonice International Piping Festival in the Czech Republic; the *Celtic Connections* and *Piping Live!* festivals in Glasgow, Scotland; the William Kennedy International Piping Festival in Armagh, Northern Ireland; the St Chartier Festival in France; along with numerous events associated with Tartan Day and St Patrick's Day in the United States and Canada; the annual Galician *gaita* (bagpipes) competitions; games and concerts in Scandinavia, Germany and elsewhere; all have generated performance opportunities outside the 'traditional' Highland games circuits.

Diversities

Bagpipes come in many forms in many cultures. Many of these instruments are being deliberately revived and are gathering growing circles of players and listeners, not all of whom come from within their own cultural provenance.

Obtaining and learning to play almost any instrument that takes one's fancy has become relatively easy. At the annual Ilinden festival near Gela, Bulgaria, for example, where the programme includes a piping competition that formerly drew its entrants from within the region – a region rugged enough to have kept invading armies at bay – *kaba gaida* players from Australia and Japan made the 2005 competition's prize list. Bulgaria's Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts in Plovdiv offers annual Bulgarian dance and music summer schools that are specifically addressed to foreign learners.²²

Most existing bagpipe traditions are expressed as regenerations that, after a universal decline of bagpiping during the earlier modern period, have taken place over the past 50 to 60 years: the energetic if often small-scale revival of obscure or temporarily lost traditions, as well as the greater flourishing of a number of more strongly surviving instruments.²³ What seems odd about all this is the apparently uncoordinated and self-referential but loosely simultaneous ways in which these regenerations have occurred.

Along with the recovery of historical repertoires, these regenerations typically include the rekindling of composition and innovations in instrument-making and performance conventions. And the contexts of the revival can be very different from those of the tradition.

Hungarian bagpipers, for example, once played at Christmas midnight masses and other village celebrations. A decline set in after the failure of the 1848–49 war of Hungarian independence and the brutal reprisals exacted by the Hapsburg dynasty. Economic change further eroded the tradition that had been maintained by shepherds and swineherds in the rural villages of north Hungary. The *duda* was on the brink of extinction when a few young students from Budapest, part of a far wider Hungarian folk music revival in the late 1960s, began to seek out and start learning from a few traditional players who lived on to inform the revival and the rural tradition's legacy began to blossom in the city. But there were no instrument-makers. Zoltan Karakas, a middle-class Budapest-based company manager who directs the Hungarian Bagpipe Heritage Foundation, in 1976 made his own first instruments with indifferent success. Subsequently, some of the new pipers began to specialize in pipe-making and only then did good instruments start becoming available, and things were able to move forward. Certainly until 2004, players and Hungary's five or six bagpipe makers were getting together at regular piping camps for workshops with the elderly Pista Bacsí, an old-style Hungarian piper and the revivalists' principle source of information about the tradition.

²² Mike Paterson, 'The music of the mountains: the kaba gaida', *Piping Today* 25 (2006): 36–40.

²³ See, for example, Jan Ling, *A History of European Folk Music* (New York: University of Rochester Press, 1997, p. 140.

A 'Folk' Thing?

Knowing what has engendered the passionate commitment to bagpiping that has seen it flourish and proliferate despite the low conventional rewards it brings, should be able to tell us quite a lot about the instrument and its players.

Karoly Vldar, a physicist with Hungary's Research Institute for Solid State Physics and Optics by profession, is a leading Hungarian piper. He was a university student in Germany when he first heard the *duda*:

A Hungarian folk dance group came to Germany one Christmas and performed Christmas songs and dances with bagpipes, and I wondered what the instrument was. Okay ... the Scottish have bagpipes, the Hungarians too! After that I wanted only to play our own Hungarian bagpipe. The bagpipe is magic.²⁴

His statement bears reflection.

To this author, Jan Ling's reference to piping's 'societal origins, and its life amongst rural peasants and itinerant beggars'²⁵ seems to overlook too many significant details.

The concept of 'folk' or 'traditional' music has, anyway, become problematic: in Europe, true folk contexts, essentially pre-modern, have been almost wholly swept away by the disruptions inflicted by two cataclysmic world wars, a 'cold war', periods of radical economic and social restructuring, and rural and urban development accompanied by increased mobility and periods of massive migration. The role of olden 'folk' music has been almost entirely relocated from contexts of community celebration into those of performance art and entertainment. It has also, to varying extents, been commoditized. Hermann Bausinger has recognized and made a cogent analysis of this contextual relocation²⁶ that suggests some clear lines of evidence for drawing distinctions, however, between 'folk culture' and bagpiping. Bagpiping undoubtedly has its 'folk' characteristics but bagpipers have seldom kept in consistent step with wider folk and traditional music revivals. Rather, they seem to step in and out of 'folk' music, almost on a whim.

So, in Hungary, where the pipes are commonly enough heard in costumed folk ensembles, pipers have formed their own, separate organization, have assembled their own non-folk ensembles and have produced their own teaching resources. Bagpiping is supported and promoted by the Hungarian Bagpipe Heritage Foundation, formed in 1992. In 2000 it published a handbook of the Hungarian bagpipe that includes chapters and summaries in English and sets out a basis for the instrument's heritage and its revival. The Hungarian Bagpipe Band (A Magyar

²⁴ Mike Paterson, 'A celebration of piping in Bohemia: the Strakonice International Bagpipe Festival', *Piping Today* 1 (2004): 30.

²⁵ Ling, *A History of European Folk Music*, p. 140.

²⁶ H. Bausinger, *Folk Culture in a World of Technology – Folklore Studies in Translation* (trans. E. Dettmer, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).

Dudazenekar) in 2003 released a bagpipes-dominant album, *Dudasom, Dudasom, Kedves Muzikasom*, with a very different sound from that of the typical folk ensemble. The band – which, at that time, could muster up to 23 pipers and five singers – was formed in 1989 at a small pub in Buda and has represented Hungary at a number of European festivals.²⁷

Hugh Cheape argues cogently against the utility of the term 'folk' in relation to bagpipes:

In the selection of instruments observable in the 13th-century *Cantigas de Santa Maria*, generally representative of medieval European music-making, some have survived in recognizable form, some have disappeared, and others have metamorphosed into different forms or have risen or fallen in status, thus accounting for their presence or absence in conventional sources. This in turn leads to too-ready classification of instruments as 'classical' or 'folk', thus potentially losing them to respective discourses. On the basis alone of the evidence, for example, of the *Cantigas* and of the later rural idylls of the French Court, it would pose difficulties to define the bagpipe as an archetype of 'folk music' performance. And instruments used today in 'folk music' performance may belong to archetypes perceived as 'classical'; for example, the *vielle* (a *roue*) or 'hurdygurdy' derived from the 13th-century *organistrum*, the *Zampogna* derived from Renaissance wind instruments in the 15th or 16th centuries, and the *Uilleann* pipe derived from Baroque instrumentation in the eighteenth century. The folk/classical dichotomy of the modern mindset makes it more difficult to discern how historically instruments might be adapted for new sound or changing aesthetic or, alternatively, the concept of 'popular culture' can be divisive.²⁸

Considering the player, we have a not dissimilar problem. Karoly Vladar's day-to-day preoccupations and experience have nothing in common with those of the 'folk' practitioners, the swineherds and shepherds who were the previous proprietors of the music he loves and enjoys. The resonances are deeply but possibly unidentifiably cultural. What brings some affinities forward and leaves others dormant in such cases would be a fascinating topic for study, but the truth is, we just don't know. The bagpipe, Karoly Vladar says, is 'magic' and the *duda* gives him access to that 'magic' in a form that resonates with his Hungarian identity. And his seems to be an instrument-centred fascination, rather than the taste for a particular musical genre.

We should remember a number of things in the context of 'folk':

²⁷ S. Csóóri, Z. Karakas and Kozák (eds), *A Magyar Bórduda: the Book of the Hungarian Bagpipe* (Budapest: Dudaszó Hallatszík Alapítvány, 2000); and *A Magyar Bórduda: the Book of the Hungarian Bagpipe* (var. authors, Budapest: Dudaszó Hallatszík Alapítvány [Hungarian Bagpipe Heritage Foundaton], 2000).

²⁸ Cheape, *Bagpipes*, pp. 144–5.

First, most of Europe's folk traditions marginalized bagpipes in favour of fiddles and/or free-reed accordion-type instruments, particularly during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In Scotland, Ireland and many parts of the European Continent, the fiddle and later the 'box' very largely displaced the pipes as a provider of dance music, and in other popular contexts.²⁹

Second, clinging to genuine folk traditions has seldom served bagpipe traditions well: few are left. The *tsambouna* of Naxos, for example, has remained a simple instrument (with two cane-tube chanters mounted side by side, and no drone. The half-dozen or so players on the island have made their own instruments. They are heard in public only once a year, during the Apokries festival, and the few players mostly agree it will die out because there are too few young learners.³⁰ In Italy the 'folk' *zampogna pugliese* [*di Panni*] survives in a few religious contexts and the tradition is in 'grave crisis', according to author and musician Mauro Gioelli.³¹ The *zampogna molisana*, on the other hand, is reviving through its 'improvement' – most influentially by Piero Ricci – and his use of it to present new music in ensemble with non-'folk' instruments and conservatory-trained musicians. His composition, 'Mainarde', with its soaring cadences, wide acoustic contrasts and pastoral rhythmic structures, has become a popular de facto regional anthem. His group, Ecletnica Pagus, recorded its 2005 album live in the Cathédrale St Michel in Brussels and markets it as 'World Music'. The *zampogna molisana* had previously survived only through its association with a Christmastime tradition of playing in the coastal towns, having been discarded in favour of the accordion in its local folk contexts in the nineteenth century. It has been the object of a locally promoted revival since the 1970s when Scapoli's International Bagpipe Festival was established for economic as well as cultural reasons.³²

Third, historically, a number of bagpipes have clearly existed outside of the 'folk' tradition: the French Baroque *musette*, or *musette de cour*, is perhaps the best known. Marin Mersenne (in 1636) described the very complex Italian *sordellina a mantice*, and clearly distinguished between the *cornemuse de bergers* [the shepherds' pipes] and the courtly *cornemuse de Poitou*, while the more recent the Parisian *cabrette* and the *cornemuse a miroirs* of Limousin also lie

²⁹ See, for example, George S. Emmerson, *Rantin' Pipe and Tremblin' String* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1971), pp. 113–14; and S. Eydmann, 'The life and times of the concertina: the adoption and usage of a novel musical instrument with particular reference to Scotland' (thesis, The Open University, 1995; online version can be found at <http://www.concertina.com/eydmann>).

³⁰ Mike Paterson, 'The tsambouna of the Cyclades', *Piping Today* 27 (2007): 30–36.

³¹ M. Gioelli, *La Zampogna: Gli Aerofoni a Sacco in Italia* (2 vols, Isernia: Cosmo Iannone Editore, 2005), vol. 2, p. 52.

³² Mike Paterson, 'Mountain bagpipe blooms: The Zampogna Molisana', *Piping Today* 29 (2007): 32–6.



Illustration 10.1 Piero Ricci of Isernia, Molise, Italy, a maker and improver of the *zampogna molisana* of central Italy, performing with his group Eclectic Pagus.

outside the folk tradition.³³ The *xeremia* of Mallorca is said to have originated as a Catalanian court instrument. The pastoral pipes in Britain were, Hugh Cheape has demonstrated, instruments closely associated with the European baroque and neo-baroque.³⁴ Aristocratic patronage of the great Highland bagpipe in Scotland, both in its earlier (pre-eighteenth century) era and again, in its promotion, in the eighteenth to nineteenth centuries, also needs to be evaluated more closely.

In a passing mention of the bagpipe as 'the most universal folk instrument' of the Renaissance, Donald Grout and Claude Paisca imply (a) that 'folk' instruments existed at that time as a distinct class of instruments; and (b) the historical popularity of a drone-based musical aesthetic.³⁵ An example of the second would be the popularity in its time of Leonardo da Vinci's first instrument of choice: the seven-string *lira da braccio*, with its two drone strings.³⁶ But whether da Vinci or his contemporaries considered these to be 'folk' instruments is a different issue.

A fourth issue is that bagpipe repertoire is frequently distinct from folk repertoire in its idiom and interpretation: the Highland *piobaireachd* tradition may have roots in Gaelic song and may have been rendered more or less adequately on other instruments, but it has, for some centuries, been uniquely associated with the great Highland bagpipe. Most piping traditions have their own corpus of 'bagpipe' music that is at least partly distinctive to the instrument.

Fifth, it is typical for pipers to take repertoire from local folk traditions, but it is 'bagpipe tunes' that are most keenly sought out. And in Scotland especially, but far from uniquely, pipe tunes have often been adapted to other instruments, and vice versa. This is evidence of a process of exchange and, once a revival has gathered momentum, new composition becomes a major source of repertoire, and players begin exploring the repertoires of other piping traditions.

Sixth, if 'folk' costumes have played a role in performance, they begin to be doffed as expert players reach widening audiences beyond a particular cultural identity in genres that include 'Celtic' music, various fusion forms, jazz, rock, New Age, hip hop and classical. In what have, so far, been small ways, bagpipes are exploring a diversity of new contexts. When bagpipes are played in 'folk' contexts, it is not uncommon for their drones to be damped down or turned off and for their tuning to be adjusted. Nor it is unusual for pipers to also be involved in other genres.

'Folk' music looks more like an option that is (conditionally) open to bagpipes, along with a number of other genres. And, when one looks at bagpiping cross-culturally, it becomes impossible to sustain a notion that 'folk music' possesses

³³ Mike Paterson, 'Pipes reflect their Renaissance roots: the Mirror Pipes of Limousin', *Piping Today* 32 (2008): 18–20.

³⁴ Cheape, *Bagpipes*.

³⁵ D.J. Grout and C.V. Palisca, *A History of Western Music* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 2001), p. 66.

³⁶ S. Isacof, *Temperament: How Music Became a Battleground for the Great Minds of Western Civilisation* (New York: Vintage Books, 2001), p. 87–90.

bagpipes in any exclusive, necessary or confining way. As noted above, Scottish piping long had little to do with the Scottish folk revival.³⁷ Scotland's 'sessions' scene is a new phenomenon and participation by pipers is generally restricted to Scottish smallpipes and Border pipes and Irish uilleann pipes. Many bagpipes simply do not lend themselves to 'folk' ensemble-playing (the Italian *zampogna molisana*, for example is traditionally played with an oboe-like *chiaramezza* that is made at the same time as the bagpipe by the same maker specifically to accompany that particular bagpipe).

Seventh, bagpipes have been promoted as 'national', 'cultural' or 'regional' instruments – in Scotland, Galician Spain, Brittany, Bulgaria and Ruthenia – and the meanings and political overtones of this need to be more deeply explored. Folk music scholar and Swedish musicologist Jan Ling makes the interesting observation that: 'in order to retain the Highland pipe as a national symbol it was necessary to train pipers, as well as to resist all temptation to play Scottish national melodies on other instruments.'³⁸

Eighth and finally, bagpipe revivals, where an instrument has become extinct, have come less from 'folk' initiatives than from musical historical inquiry that is followed up by the curiosity, interest and enthusiasm of instrument-makers. The role of the specialist instrument-maker seems almost always to be a crucial one.

The Attraction

The author has routinely asked players from the piping cultures he has featured in *Piping Today* why they chose to play bagpipes over other instruments. The most commonly expressed motivation, by far, has been to do with the sound, usually with reference made to the drone, and the 'uniqueness' of the sound. The saving of a tradition will frequently come up, particularly in smaller, more vulnerable piping traditions, but typically as an intellectual explanation rather than an emotional response.

In relation to their initial attraction to the great Highland bagpipe, people around the world often refer to the 'spectacle' of a pipe band but, when people of other cultures have taken the next step, and begin learning and playing Highland piping, it is 'the sound' that is usually mentioned first.

In Latin America, for example, there is a small but growing interest in Highland piping. Latino players at the First South American Pipe Band Gathering in April 2004 found it difficult to articulate the root of their cross-cultural attraction to the pipes. Andrés Bentancourt, a piper with the Riverside Pipe Band of Uruguay, stated:

³⁷ Munro and MacLeod, *The Democratic Muse*.

³⁸ Ling, *A History of European Folk Music*, p. 144.

I fell in love with the instrument. Words cannot explain it. The love for an instrument is not something you can explain rationally.³⁹

Uilleann piper Francisco Azagra plays tenor drum with the same band:

It's very difficult to describe how I feel about it, but all my body and soul changes when I hear this music. I like Celtic music in general but since I was a boy I have heard bagpipes: the sound is magnificent.⁴⁰

Half the world away, Alberto Massi is the leading figure and principal teacher of the great Highland bagpipe for the Bagpipe Italian Group. Describing the group's 2004 Gathering, he said:

This was only our second gathering (2004) and, in my view, a step forward. We had a lot of newcomers this year and this was a demonstration that our work is going well and people are trying to approach this instrument the right way. Here we had no kilts, no fairies, no tales or fantasies – simply principles of technique, history, instrument maintenance and music. I think we had the right emotions, atmosphere, attitudes and enthusiasm.⁴¹

Alessandro Patalani, from Ivrea, Italy:

I am Italian, truly Italian. I don't feel Scottish, even in a kilt. I just like the bagpipe. If you play classical Italian music on the piano, do you feel Italian? I think not. And I don't feel Scottish or Celtic.⁴²

The bagpipe is a difficult instrument to make and to play well, and pipers often have repertoires, priorities and activities that are only partly shared by other musicians in their parent culture.⁴³ Evidence of a distinct aesthetic judgement is often to be found in the way pipers describe the source of their attraction to their instrument of choice. In September 2004, for example, the Bagpipe Italian Group held a gathering of pipers at Rignano sull'Arno as a part of the area's small *Sounds and Colours of Tuscany Festival*. Several novice pipers there expressed particular

³⁹ Quoted in Mike Paterson, 'Highland piping blossoms in Latin America', *Piping Today* 10 (2004): 12–15.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Quoted in Mike Paterson, "'BIG" work for piping in Italy', *Piping Today* 12 (2004): 36–8.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ See, for example, Hugh Cheape, 'The Pipes and Folk Music' in Edward J. Cowan (ed.), *The People's Past* (Edinburgh: Polygon Books, 1980, pp. 145–64; new edn Edinburgh: Polygon, 1991, pp. 137–55); and Munro and MacLeod, *The Democratic Muse*, p. 7.

interest in *piobaireachd*. Dr Daniella Ballardini, from Reggio Emilia, for instance, stated:

The sound sustains my soul. This is why I like to learn *piobaireachd*. I like the music, the spirit of the music ... I feel the universe in a *piobaireachd*. The first time I heard *piobaireachd* played by [leading Italian Highland piper] Alberto Massi, I was crying and crying. It was wonderful. It gave me a feeling I sometimes have from sacred music. ... I think if you don't want to listen to your soul, if you are afraid of your deep side, you hate *piobaireachd*. I think it can take you into your true self.⁴⁴

Audiences are around for bagpipes; that is becoming increasingly clear.

In 1996 Breton musician Patrick Molard organized a *piobaireachd* concert in Brest's Le Quartz theatre. Four Scottish and two Breton pipers each played a *piobaireachd* to an audience of 1,000 people. The following week, they presented the same concert to almost as many people at the Theatre de la Ville on the Place du Châtelet, Paris. And Patrick Molard has been engaged to work on musical, theatrical and contemporary dance projects by Parisian composers who have discovered and become interested in the form.

Then there is the German professional musician and piper Thomas Zöller, a piper with trio *As a' Phìob* [Out of the Pipes] with Clemens Bieger (guitar and bouzouki) and singer Michael Klevenhaus, presenting music of the Highlands and Western Islands of Scotland, including songs in Scottish Gaelic. Its first concerts in September 2003 were sold out.

Australian Mark Saul has presented the great Highland bagpipe as a lead instrument in electronic musical contexts (as, using the Asturian bagpipe, has José Angel Hevia Velasco – Hevia). Luxembourgian multi-instrumentalist Pit Vanady performs electronic piping shows in a futuristic silver fantasy costume and mask as 'Cyberpiper'.

A strongly established genre in which bagpipes turn up, particularly in Germany but also elsewhere in central Europe, is early music. The instrument played is usually based on medieval depictions. The early music group Piffaro in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, is one of the few United States groups to incorporate bagpipes. Joan Kimball is co-artistic director of the ensemble:

I think that when people take a liking to the bagpipes, they really are drawn to the drone. In many people's minds, it's more earthly, more primal. What the bagpipes add with the drone element is a sort of surround-sound and a dissonance that will come in and out, and that somehow is a part of the pleasure and part of the joy of this kind of music. We chose music that works with the bagpipe that

⁴⁴ Quoted in Mike Paterson, "'BIG" work for piping in Italy'.

is appropriate in terms of range, melodic structure and so on ... The drone brings out an almost visceral reaction from some people.⁴⁵

Scottish-born piper Lindsay Davidson has spent much of the past decade or so in Poland where he has discovered a receptive classical musical community and has been playing, arranging and composing, and exploring ways to integrate bagpiping with classical orchestral traditions. With his wife, Krakow Academy of Music graduate Irena Czubek, principal harpist with the Krakow Philharmonic and assistant professor of harp at the Academy of Music, he has been playing great Highland bagpipes, Border pipes and Scottish smallpipes on tours in Poland and beyond.

There's an established circuit of organ and chamber music festivals in Poland that are very well supported and very popular. We're almost guaranteed full houses ... In Poland, classical musical culture is a big thing and popular stereotypes of bagpipes, or of Scotland, are weak, so the preconceptions aren't as strong or prescriptive as they can be in other places.⁴⁶

In 2007 the University of Edinburgh conferred a PhD in Musical Composition on Lindsay Davidson for his dissertation, 'Towards a fusion of Western classical/contemporary and traditional Scots bagpipe composition techniques: "Manntaireachd"' and a large body of compositions.

Meanwhile, international bagpiping events in Scapoli and Isernia in Italy have opened with concerts presenting the *zampogna* as a lead instrument in classical ensembles, performing specially commissioned original compositions. In 2007 the Associazione Piper Italiani (the formally established business and administrative arm of the Bagpipe Italian Group) held its inaugural Italian Spring Piping School in association with the Glasgow-based National Piping Centre and the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama. A local audience of more than 400 people turned out for a public concert of piping that featured local *zampognari*, the *zampogna*-led Ecletnica Pagus ensemble of Piero Ricci, piping students from the RSAMD and other teaching staff, along with the Orchestra Regionale del Molise.

That drone-based polyphony found itself confined very largely to what have been characterized as 'folk' contexts by the nineteenth century, perhaps says more about the detachment from it of 'classical' music – driven by such things as the ascendancy of equal temperament over just intonation; of multi-octave keyboard instruments over narrower-range woodwind, trumpet and percussion instruments; the development of large, expensive and fragile instruments incapable of accommodation in peasant huts; the development and refinement (from the wider

⁴⁵ Mike Paterson, 'Period piping in the United States: Piffaro', *Piping Today* 14 (2005): 29–31.

⁴⁶ Mike Paterson, 'Classical explorations in Poland: classical fusion', *Piping Today* 17 (2005): 26–9.

parameters of olden, popular European musical forms) of formalized principles of harmony; and 'rules' of composition and orchestration. European 'music' became a property of the literate, wealthy elite that, taken to the concert hall, could readily be commodified.

Drone-based music was all but excluded from this by the strengthening compositional conventions of the music and the instruments they called for. 'Popular' music, meanwhile, went on to become a capital-intensive activity, so we now have an urbanized, centralized 'music industry' that derived its mass-market tonal tastes very largely from the elite forms and further ingrained a 'tonal' taste in music.

That said, drone polyphony has never been wholly absent from classical music (there are well-known drone passages in Wagner's overture to *Das Rheingold*, for example, in the first part of the finale of Haydn's London Symphony 104 and in Berlioz's *Harold in Italy*). Béla Bartók and Scottish composer Erik Chisholm were inspired to compose in the styles of their nations' bagpipes.⁴⁷ A few composers have in recent times experimented with drones, particularly in electronic compositions but, compared with bagpipes, the timbre and sound have not been especially compelling, nor has this taste reached a wide audience.

The Maker's Role

When it comes to bagpipes, revivals these days are frequently represented as much by university-based ethnomusicologists and researchers as they are by the practitioners of living oral traditions. But the crucial, pivotal player is the pipe-maker.

The great maker produces an instrument that players love to play, an instrument that exemplifies the sound the player longs to own as his or her own 'voice', an instrument that is comfortable to play and aesthetically suits its intention. It needs to help spark the player's imagination, and it has to attract an audience. The research is just the maker's resource, not a list of specifications.

By way of example, the revival of the *piva emiliana* of northern Italy is modest in many ways but sufficiently secure to be considered a 'revival'. The instrument was all but extinct by the 1960s. By 2004 there were several teachers, a couple of makers and about 150 players, interest was steadily growing and several professional ensembles had incorporated the *piva emiliana* into their line-ups. And, like many of the 'revived' bagpipes of Europe, the instrument that is made and played today is much more useful and playable than its forebear – in this case, the *piva del carne* of the Emilian Apennine hill country to the north and east of Florence: an instrument that had been laid aside in favour of the fiddle and accordion.

⁴⁷ See, for example, John Purser, 'Eric Chisholm and piobaireachd: cèol mór in classical composition', *Piping Today* 10 (2004): 46–9.

In the 1960s an amateur ethnomusicologist, Bruno Grulli, basing his description on six recovered instruments and several fragments, was able to broadly define the *piva emiliana*'s configuration. But he had to concede that 'the bad state of conservation of discovered pivas and the difficulty in making original reeds has not yet allowed us to establish the exact tuning'. Professional scholars like Febo Guizzi and Roberto Leydi at Bologna University, like Bruno Grulli, essentially saw their research in the high country of Parma, Reggio Emilia and Piacenza as efforts to document the last remnants of a lost art.

In 1981 a young instrument maker from Bologna, Franco Calanca, began taking an interest in the bagpipes of his own culture. He established a network of people who had knowledge of north Italian piping. A key source was Lorenzo Rossione who had collected a number of mostly damaged or incomplete instruments. Bruno Grulli had met and interviewed an old player, Lorenzo Ferrari. He had even been given some old instruments and taken measurements that, together with Lorenzo Rossione's knowledge, enabled Franco Calanca to begin reconstructing an instrument.

There were hints in Lorenzo Ferrari's tape-recorded interviews of details of playing technique. Said Franco Calanca:

He used to say that, when he was playing his piva, some notes, mostly in polka tunes, the ones to stress the melody, were 'snap', which indicated that he used some sort of gracing. The main feature of the piva that makes it unique among other northern Italian pipes is the chanter, the number of holes and their placement. The old piva emiliana chanter had seven finger holes on the front and no thumb hole on the back. Probably the old instrument had only eight notes: an octave, in one key.⁴⁸

Both drones are cylindrically bored and fitted with compound reeds. The larger drone, with a flared bell, rests on the shoulder and the smaller drone hangs over the player's arm. Franco Calanca based his early work on three experimental chanters made by Lorenzo Rossione and all of the old chanters he could gain access to. As a musician and instrument-maker, he was concerned to arrive at a standard pitch for the instrument – an issue that had never much bothered the olden players:

In the research, there is a lot of evidence that piva players played mainly as soloists, and some sources said that, when they tried to play duets with another piva player, it was very difficult since the instruments were never completely in tune. So, to optimise the playability of the piva as a solo instrument, keep it stable on one scale, and to allow it to play with other instruments, I established a pitch of G for all my chanters. It is an innovation, but really it is a necessary standardisation of the instrument. Another innovation I have made is putting

⁴⁸ Mike Paterson, trans. Mario Tomasone and Duilio Vigliotti, 'New life for a north Italian bagpipe: piva emiliana', *Piping Today* 14 (2004): 26–7.



Illustration 10.2 Franco Calanca, Bologna, Italy, the instrument-maker who was largely responsible for the revival of the *piva emiliana*.

an extra hole on the back of the chanter to give the player a high note over the octave of the original instrument. It was a serious innovation, but one I made to give more versatility and breadth to the instrument.⁴⁹

In 1988 he had his bagpipe. Another problem was to establish a credible repertoire:

Some tunes were still available. Mr Ferrari had sung some of the tunes he used to play on the piva during his interviews with Bruno Grulli, so I was able to reconstruct the body of the tune. Other music was able to be picked up from fiddlers who were still playing traditional tunes. It was evident that those tunes were bagpipe tunes because they were based on a very limited scale, often using the tonic and the fifth as the maximum range of the tune ... five notes only.⁵⁰

Franco Calanca adapted some basic Scottish-type grace note techniques to the chanter he had made and found he was able to give more depth and richness to traditional melodies that were still being played in the region, but on other instruments. He then began taking the music back to the people of the *piva*'s former domain. It was taken into the repertoire of his group, *Lanterna Magica*; it has been played in concerts, presented at festivals and promulgated through lessons in the schools in sessions offered by Franco Calanca and another musician-researcher from Bologna, Teresio Testa. In 2000 Franco Calanca and guitarist Piero Negrone produced an album of *piva emiliana* music, *Al ballo con la piva*. It presents a selection of lively traditional dance music from Apennine Emilia: music adapted for the *piva* from a repertoire that had become associated with fiddles, accordions and clarinets.⁵¹

Franco Calanca began offering courses. Two other players also became teachers: Marco Taddolini and Dante Bernardi. And night classes were made regularly available at a school of traditional music in Popoli, a small town near Forlì. Said Franco Calanca:

We now have around 150 people playing the piva. Interest in it has been increasing in recent years, drawing in people who are involved with the traditional music of northern Italy in various ways and who are now aware that they have a real new opportunity to play traditional music with traditional instruments. I would say that the instrument is almost secure now since the number of people playing it is growing and growing ... Most players play solo. But, since the repertoire has been known to older traditional musicians of the area, it is not uncommon today to have groups, mostly of duos: of guitar and piva, violin and piva, or accordion and piva.⁵²

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

When we look at the inputs involved in the European revivals, time and again we find genuine 'folk' elements appearing as artefacts and as primary sources for academics and instrument-makers.

Though crucial to an understanding of the past, 'tradition' is held subject to musicality: players and instrument-makers drawn to bagpipes soon begin to make decisions about the instrument, its configuration, construction materials, musical capacities, playing technique and repertoire that are far more fastidious about musical values than about historical or 'traditional' authenticity. Moreover, it is the new version of instrument that is played, made, composed for and taught, and that is promoted to non-traditional audiences in non-traditional contexts. So – while 'heritage' and identity aspects may encourage and provide an intellectualized justification for a revival – knowledge of the weak or extinct historical tradition is rarely adopted as a set of governing principles.

Bagpipes, perhaps the Baltic region's most popular instruments in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, were extinct in Latvia by the mid-twentieth century, their place having been taken by the fiddle. But a piping tradition was documented and often referred to in folk song. Moreover, forms of drone polyphony occur in traditional Latvian song and *kokle* music. Aspiring Latvian pipers first borrowed the bagpipe that had survived in neighbouring Estonia, and experimented with various configurations. Bagpipe maker Maris Jansons cites a seventeenth-century illustration of a piper on horseback leading a wedding procession and playing an instrument with two drones and a long conical chanter as evidence that Latvia may once have had a double-reed chanter. He began making pipes with one or two drones and conical-bore chanters fitted with double-bladed reeds, very different from the Estonian pipes. He rationalized his approach with an appeal to 'tradition':

I have met old instrument makers – not bagpipe makers – who, if they had an idea, would immediately put it into their instruments without worrying whether it was 'traditional' or not – and these were 'traditional' men ... People in Europe have never been isolated from each other and traditions travel. My instruments are each a little different ... I want an instrument that makes a sound pleasing for me and for my friends and that is comfortable to play. I am trying to understand tradition, continue it and develop it; tradition is not in the museum. What is in the museum is dead and 'dead' is not traditional.⁵³

Many of the instruments he makes today, mostly of maple wood, are based on this form, with a double-bladed reed in the chanter and single-bladed compound reeds in one or two drones. They are usually pitched to D with a one-octave, tempered scale. They are being played by 'folk' and 'contemporary' groups.

In the context of narratives like Pierro Ricci's development of the 'modern' *zampogna*, Roman Streisand's creation of Germany's 'medieval bagpipe', the Comunidad Autónoma de Galicia's support strategy for the *gaita*, Franco

⁵³ Paterson, 'Latvians rekindle a piping heritage: Republic of Latvia'.



Illustration 10.3 Maris Jansons, the Latvian instrument-maker who developed a 'Latvian' bagpipe from a seventeenth-century illustration of a piper on horseback.

Calanca's rebirthing of the *piva emiliana*, Maris Janson's work on producing an optimal 'Estonian bagpipe' – and the challenge to create an improved or superior instrument that underlies bagpipe revivals – Hugh Cheape's 2008 conclusion that the great Highland bagpipe in its modern form was created in Edinburgh by Hugh Robertson and Donald MacDonald, and possibly others, for the Highland Society of London in the later years of the eighteenth century seems an almost 'typical' situation. The most surprising aspects of the narrative Hugh Cheape offers are the wealth-backed zeal of the sponsors, the elan and romance of the accompanying mythology, and the worldwide distribution system that was available. Hugh Robertson and Donald MacDonald did a great job, the sponsors held their course, it succeeded spectacularly, and congratulations are in order.⁵⁴

The great Highland bagpipe has now outgrown the parameters imagined by the Highland Society of London so that, in many parts of the world where the great Highland bagpipe is played, 'Scottishness' is weak. In 2000 Mark Trewin held a joint appointment with the University of Edinburgh's Music Department and School of Scottish Studies. He had recently been working in South Asia where one of his interests has been the way pipe bands have been adopted and adapted:

... Not a lot of attention has been paid to performers, what they are doing and what actually happens when piping is performed in various contexts ... One thing that really struck me in the case of Pakistan (which summarises in a way what happens when things get transplanted) is that, as far as the Army pipers themselves were concerned, most were unaware that the bagpipe was a Scottish instrument. Their perception of what they were doing was completely different. It raises some interesting issues that are relevant for pipe bands in Scotland.⁵⁵

Drone

The most consistently apparent element in all of the revivals and resurgences of bagpipe traditions is the allure of a drone aesthetic. The drone is typically of central importance to players. *Kaba gaida* master Dafo Trendafilov of Gela, the mythic birthplace of Orpheus in Bulgaria's Rhodopi Mountains, describes his instrument as his 'voice'. He told the author in 2006 that the drone is essential. Dafo Trendafilov bluntly dismissed as 'emasculatation' the willingness of many players of the neighbouring *dura gaida* tradition to stop their drones when playing in ensemble with other instruments. The drone, to him, was crucial.⁵⁶

Lorne Cousin piped for Madonna's international *Re-Invention* tour, 24 May–14 September 2004. Madonna's fifth world tour, it played to more than 900,000 fans in 20 cities: 39 shows in North America and 17 in Europe. For Lorne Cousin,

⁵⁴ Cheape, *Bagpipes*, p. 125 *et seq.*

⁵⁵ Mark Trewin, interviewed 4 July 2000.

⁵⁶ Mike Paterson, 'The music of the mountains: the kaba gaida': 36–40.

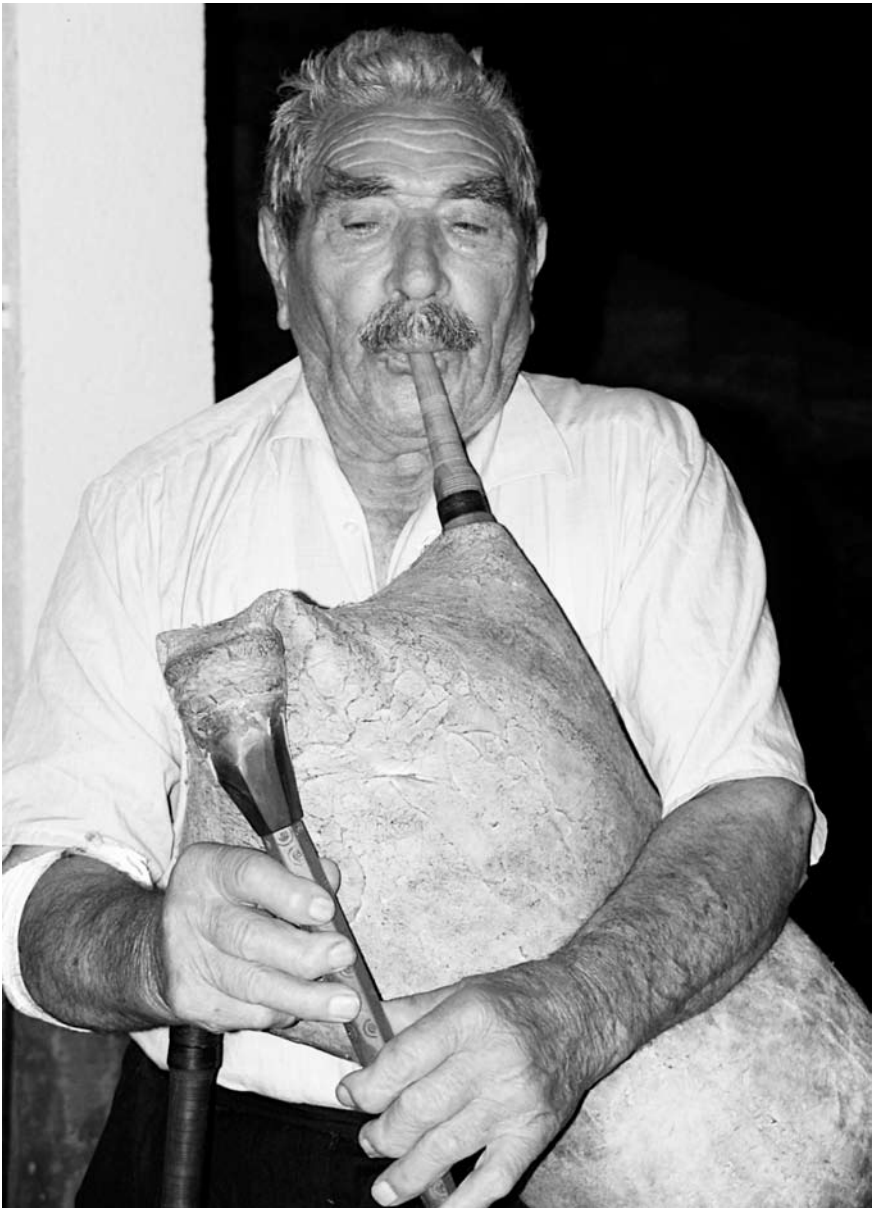


Illustration 10.4 'Bai' Dafo Trendafilov, *kaba gaida*-maker and master player, of Gela, Bulgaria. He describes his instrument as his 'voice'.

the tour's immense success opened new opportunities. The drones, he said, were a significant part of the pipes' attraction.

The drones sound has never been successfully created electronically. People on the tour, Madonna's sound engineers and producer, they loved the drones because they can't be recreated. It's the sound a lot of non-pipers relate to; it's the sound that makes the hairs stand up on the backs of their necks. It may be there in the background but it's fundamental to the instrument.⁵⁷

If we are, in fact, looking at some return to a taste for drone-based music, then we should glance sideways at hurdy-gurdies. With their buzzing drone strings, they too, in their own quieter way, are making a comeback, particularly in France, Hungary, Germany and North America, and featuring more strongly in north Italian, Swiss and other European folk revivals. The UK Hurdy-gurdy Forum held the first British hurdy-gurdy festival in April 2007. A number of enhancements and improvements have been made to the instrument – more melody strings and trumpet bridges have been added, and sliding bridge systems have been devised to broaden the instrument's tonal range – and hurdy-gurdies wired for amplification turn up in rock and jazz ensembles as well as in folk and early music groups.

Also, we are also seeing drone-based South Asian music rising in popularity in the West.

Tom Richardson is a Glasgow-based guitarist who has accompanied the pipe music of Simon McKerrell. In this role, he told the author that, when he plays accompaniment to the pipes, his focus is on the drones.

When you're listening to the sea, for example – that's the drone. If I'm in a forest hearing birds and a river, I hear the drone and a melodic line over the top of it. The drone is somehow made up of all the notes, the idea of the one, the universal, and the diversity that makes it up coming together into that one whole. In drone music, different melodic notes have a greater focus. I think it's really universal, the idea of it. Playing with pipe music, I don't think that doing a lot of harmonic progressions works for me. Sometimes I try it but it doesn't feel appropriate, so I keep the progressions as simple as possible. You have an open A string and an open D string, which can be rhythmically played throughout each pipe tune depending whether it's in D or in A and, if you keep the harmonic changes as simple as possible, to two or three chords, but increase the rhythmic intensity – that's a more powerful effect than coming up with more complex harmonic changes, although I know there are groups that do that kind of thing. But I think it's really good to play with the drones.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Mike Paterson, 'Pipe-trekking among the stars: Lorne Cousin', *Piping Today* 33 (2008): 8–11.

⁵⁸ Paterson, 'The music of the mountains: the kaba gaida'.

The capacity of any bagpipe to separate the player's need to take a breath from the need to interrupt the sound produced, while playing one or several reeds simultaneously, may hold an essential clue to significance of the drone.

It was in a three-way conversation with Italian piper Alberto Massi and the author that the scholar and author of the in-depth two-volume study of the Italian bagpiping traditions, *La Zampogna: Gli Aerofoni a Sacco in Italia*, Mauro Gioielli, made the following observation:

If you don't need a drone, you don't need a bag. Not exactly, of course, because you could simply play a flute continuously in order to have people dance without interruption. But the drone creates a much more dynamic environment. The complexity of the sound you can obtain using the bag [means] you can have the drone, a single or double chanter, and so on, so this complexity has had a real success in the past and still has today. It's a different aesthetic.⁵⁹

Conclusions

The picture is one of drone instruments and folk music existing in often symbiotic relationships, but acting independently, and the same might be said in relation to other instruments. In many cases, more pertinently perhaps, a 'folk' movement may affirm and interact with a bagpipe revival, but seldom has managed to contain it.

A drone-based musical aesthetic may well be on the rise; certainly it has been strongly present in the past and has a largely overlooked role in the story of Western musical development.

Bagpipes need to be more clearly understood in wider musicological and music psychology terms. 'What are they for?' is the question. For this to happen, they need to be conceptually reunited with musical issues as a family of musical instruments, with particular sets of musical attributes. They have become cluttered with inadequate historiography, wishful thinking, cherished misconceptions and irrelevant adornments that, far from elevating their esteem, mask their core attributes.

And we cannot continue to ignore wider, multicultural dimensions: bagpipes are undergoing a dynamic period of their history, and the changes we see around us provide rich opportunities to engage in research that can better enable us to appreciate the musical realities that this family of instruments represents, and make the most of them in the musical futures that emerge.

Do bagpipes address an aesthetic gap? If they do, and the nature of such a gap can be delineated in musical terms, might we see bagpipes re-enter the musical mainstream in ways we do not currently anticipate? Their scope is possibly more far-reaching than has thus far been realized. In any case, the bagpipes' future is bound to be interesting.

⁵⁹ Mauro Gioielli. Personal communication, trans. Alberto Massi, Isernia, Italy, 29 March 2007.

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Chapter 11

The Campbell Canntaireachd Manuscript: The Case for a Lost Volume

Roderick D. Cannon

The two manuscript volumes known as the ‘Nether Lorn Canntaireachd’ or ‘Campbell Canntaireachd’ contain 168 pieces of *piobaireachd* in a verbal or syllabic notation apparently devised by the writer, Colin Campbell, piper in Nether Lorn, Argyll, in the late eighteenth century. In 1816 they briefly came to the attention of the wider world of piping, then disappeared again, or rather remained with their owner. In 1909 they were purchased by Sheriff John Bartholomew, an early member of the Piobaireachd Society. Careful copies were made available to the Society, and in 1950 Miss Phillis Bartholomew, daughter of John, deposited the originals in the National Library of Scotland, where they remain as MSS 3714 and 3715. Since 1925 a considerable number of the tunes have been published in staff notation, and are now part of the mainstream repertoire of piping.

The aim of this chapter is to reconsider the question whether the existing manuscripts represent the whole of Colin Campbell’s collection. It will be convenient first to note the family history of its author, and the relationships between the texts of the documents.

The Campbell Family¹

Three generations of pipers are known: Donald, his son Colin, and Colin’s son John. Donald, born around 1727, became in 1742 piper to MacDonald of Glenalladale. He had been given an education paid for by Glenalladale, presumably with a view to employing him in some administrative role. But this came to nothing because he served Glenalladale in the 1745 rebellion on what proved to be the losing side.

¹ Keith Sanger, ‘Colin Campbell’s Canntaireachd – the history of [the] Netherlorn family’, *Piping Times* 58/1 (October 2005): 37–43 and ‘Admiralty charts help pinpoint family home of Colin Campbell’, *Piping Times* 58/2 (November 2005): 39–45. A brief account prefixed to Angus MacKay’s *A Collection of Ancient Piobaireachd or Highland Pipe Music* (Edinburgh: MacLachlan and Stewart, 1838) claims that prior to Donald Campbell, the family were hereditary pipers to the Campbells of Mochaster, in Argyll, and that Donald himself had been taught by Patrick Og MacCrimmon, but there is no confirmation of these points.

He ended up under the patronage of a different laird, Campbell of Carwhin, who settled him on a farm near his house at Ardmaddy, at the western extremity of the Breadalbane estate (the Earls of Breadalbane had their seat at Taymouth).

Donald's son Colin evidently also had a clerkly training as we see from his later writing skills. In 1778 Colin joined the newly raised Western (Argyll) Fencible Regiment, and served under major Campbell of Airds, presumably as a piper. But he was invalided out in 1781, after which he had a croft at Ardrìoch, close to Ardmaddy. We do not know what his illness was, but it was serious enough that in 1795 he was able to resist being enlisted in the Breadalbane Fencibles. Colin lived at least until 1814, but he seems to have died by 1824.²

We have no record of Colin's ability as a piper,³ but his son John certainly became a first-class player. John was born in 1795. He attended the piping competitions in Edinburgh at least from 1815, and won the prize pipes in 1819.⁴ He was paid for writing music – in staff notation – in 1816, 1817 and 1818.⁵ He became an employee of Walter F. Campbell of Shawfield and Islay, and by the 1820s he had charge of the upbringing of Islay's son, John Francis.

The Documents

The Smaller Manuscripts

Before we come to the two famous volumes, we have two other small but important documents.

One contains a single tune, particularly carefully written, entitled 'Earl of Breadalbin's Gathering', otherwise known as 'Bodaich nam Briogais', signed by 'Colin Campbell, Piper to the Earl of Bredalbin at Neither Lorn Argyle Shire'.⁶ The

² Based on the appearance of a 'widow Campbell' under Ardmaddy in a rental of 1824 (Keith Sanger, recent research, privately communicated).

³ But some visitors who met a son of his in 1834 stated that Colin had 'succeeded to his [father's] calling, and in his turn, trained his own sons to be pipers'. The source is an article in the *Glasgow Herald*, 12 September 1834, quoted by J. Bartholomew, 'Account of the Campbells of Nether Lorn and their system of canntaireachd'. Typescript. (n.d.), NLS MS 2260. It is also reprinted as an appendix in Frans Buisman, 'More evidence on Colin Campbell and the development of the Campbell Notation: MS SRO 112/1/803', *Piping Times* 47/11 (August 1995): 21–8 and 47/12 (September 1995): 26–34.

⁴ 'A Circumstantial Account ...' in MacKay, *A Collection of Ancient Piobaireachd*, p. 18.

⁵ Iain I. MacInnes, 'The Highland bagpipe: the impact of the Highland Societies of London and Scotland, 1781–1844' (M. Litt thesis, Edinburgh University, 1988).

⁶ National Archives of Scotland (NAS) GRO 112/1/803. The document was discovered and first reported by Keith Sanger in 'MacCrimmon's Prentise – a post graduate student perhaps?', *Piping Times* 44/6 (March 1992), pp. 16–19.

paper has a watermark design, apparently dateable to 1779.⁷ The document itself is not dated, but a possible context would put it at 1782.⁸ Campbell of Carwhin, who had been Colin's patron since 1746, had died in 1772, and he was succeeded at Ardmaddy by Captain Archibald Campbell of Glenlyon. In 1782 the Earl of Breadalbane also died. He had no son and his successor turned out to be the son of the late Campbell of Carwhin. Colin may have felt it particularly expedient to mark the occasion with a special presentation copy of this significant tune. The concluding words of his dedication may be a diplomatic reminder that although Breadalbane's principal pipers served him at Taymouth, Colin hoped to continue doing so at Ardmaddy.

The other small document has four tunes, in a copy made by Angus MacKay.⁹ They are the same as four consecutive tunes in volume 2 of the large manuscript,¹⁰ in the same order. Titles are similar but not identical, and they cannot have been copied from the large manuscript because MacKay copied the original page and tune numbers, and they are different:

Table 11.1 Consecutive tunes in Angus MacKay's Transcript and in the Campbell Canntaireachd, vol. 2.

MacKay's Transcript	CC Vol. 2
P 33 53 rd Called one of Argyle's Marches	13 Called Argyle's March
54 th Called Leacran	14 Called Leacran
34 th 55 Called Subbie Eskie	15 Called Sophia Eskie
<i>no number or title</i>	16 Called Glengearrie's March

In the transcript each tune consists only of the *ùrlar* and one or two variations. Tunes in the large volumes go to full length and few of them could have been fitted into a single page. The fact that a new page number 34(th) comes at the beginning of a new tune suggests that the tunes in the original were also short. It seems evident that the first two tunes filled one page and the second two tunes filled the next.¹¹ It seems clear that the document, from which MacKay copied, was a fragment of another collection. That collection may have been smaller than the one we have, since the four tunes would have been numbered 96–9 if everything was present in the same order as we have now in volumes 1–2. Or perhaps it was simply arranged in a different way.

⁷ W.A. Churchill, *Watermarks in Paper, in Holland, England, France, etc., in the XVII and XVIII Centuries* (Amsterdam, 1935). Watermark No. 93 on Plate LXIII.

⁸ The rest of this paragraph is based on recent research by Keith Sanger, communicated privately.

⁹ Angus MacKay's 'Transcript' (NLS MS 3743, ff. 5–6).

¹⁰ Tunes 13–16, NLS MS 3715, pp 34–48.

¹¹ Admittedly in their present form the transcripts run to two pages and part of a third, but the third page is not numbered.

It is also possible that the original sheets, pages 33 and 34, were written at different times, or at least not both in one go. This would account for the different styles of numbering, 'page 33, tune 53rd' but 'page 34th, tune 55', and for the fact that on page 34 the first part of Tune 55 has the word 'Single' written against it in the left-hand margin, while the tunes on page 33 do not. (In the other Campbell manuscripts, the words 'Single' and 'Double', or letters S and D, were usually written against sections of music which we now call singlings and doublings.)

The Two Large Volumes

The two books are on slightly different sizes of paper, bound in different ways, and it has been known for a long time that they were written at different times. Volume 1 has a somewhat home-made look. The body of it consists of two quires, each of 24 sheets, folded, and one quire placed inside the other to give a total of 48 leaves, 96 pages. The two quires are from different manufacturers and are of slightly different dimensions. Neither of them can be dated, as yet. The original outer cover seems to have been from a large piece of cardboard folded in four, with an inner cover of paper which was actually cut from an old map. Efforts to date this map have also been unsuccessful so far. The whole was secured with just one row of stitches through all the layers. The title is written on the first page of the main volume and the text begins immediately on the other side of the page. It runs continuously, with no breaks from one quire to the next, and no sign of any leaves being missing. Evidently the whole text was written in one continuous operation, perhaps not taking very long, though whether the date 1797 was the beginning or the end of the work is not clear. There is an index evidently added later, on paper watermarked 1810.

Volume 2 does not have quite such a home-made look. The paper is uniform, with watermarked date 1814. It consists of two quires, each of 24 sheets, folded and stitched and placed consecutively. There is no title page as such and evidently at least one preliminary leaf is missing. The first page has the concluding part of the index, with a title written in a small space at the bottom,¹² and again the text begins on the opposite side. Again it runs without a break from one quire to the other, and the only hiatus is at page 45, where the last few lines have been crossed out, and the next leaf has been cut out. Enough marks remain on the stub to show that page 46 was filled up, but then the writer must have decided that he had made a mistake, cut out the leaf, and started again on the next page, to which he gave the same number 46.¹³ The physical make-up is consistent with this volume having been a ready-made book of 96 leaves, bought in 1814 or later, and the text again

¹² 'Colin Campbell Second / Volum[e] Conta[in]ing 86 Tun[e]s'. The omitted letters 'in' are inserted over a caret.

¹³ For a fuller description, see Appendix 2 of this chapter. Among the annotations which are not part of the main text is one in which apparently John Campbell states his ownership of the book in 1830, but this is thought to be not John Campbell the piper, but

seems to have been written in one continuous operation. In fact the pages are filled even more efficiently than in volume 1, with the result that volume 2 contains slightly more material even though it has one leaf less. It is evidently complete, and the last tune is numbered 86 as implied by the title.¹⁴

The Sequence of the Manuscripts

The Transcript and the two main volumes were carefully examined by Archibald Campbell¹⁵ and by Frans Buisman,¹⁶ and the presentation tune, which was first described by Keith Sanger¹⁷ has been compared with all three in a further study by Frans Buisman.¹⁸ There are textual differences which show a process of development as the notation was revised.¹⁹ On that basis, the four documents come in chronological order as (1) the lost version of the collection from which MacKay copied; (2) the presentation tune; (3) the extant Volume 1, except for its index added later; (4) the extant Volume 2.

John F. Campbell, the son of his employer. Among the other names mentioned, Angus and William Campbell are assumed to be brothers of John the piper.

¹⁴ It is in fact a repetition of Tune 52 in the same volume. It breaks off before the end of the tune, but at the end of the page with ‘& c’ squeezed in. It has been suggested (Archibald Campbell, ‘The Campbell Canntaireachd MS’ in vol. 10 of *Piobaireachd, a .. collection of .. tunes edited by Comunn na Piobaireachd* (Glasgow: The Piobaireachd Society, reprinted by Aird & Coghill, 1961), pp. v–vi) that the writer broke off because he suddenly realized that he had written the tune before. If so, we have to suppose that the realization came just as he had filled the book. Is this a further clue that a volume is missing; i.e. that he knew that the tune was going to run over and intended to continue in the next book, but then thought better of it?

¹⁵ National Library of Scotland (NLS) MS 3716, ‘Note by Archibald Campbell on the Campbell Canntaireachd MS and on Angus MacKay’s “Specimens of Canntaireachd”’. Typescript dated 9 October 1950.

¹⁶ Frans Buisman, ‘From chant to script: some evidences of chronology in Colin Campbell’s adaptation of canntaireachd’, *Piping Times* 39/7 (April 1987): 44–9.

¹⁷ Sanger, ‘MacCrimmon’s Prentise – a post graduate student perhaps?’.

¹⁸ Buisman, ‘More evidence on Colin Campbell and the development of the Campbell Notation: MS SRO 112/1/803’.

¹⁹ Among various differences is one that Archibald Campbell of Kilberry pointed out. The MacKay transcript has *hihara* where others have *hiharara*. Kilberry thought that *hihara* was an abbreviation, and suggested that the well-known *hiharin* might be an abbreviation too, presumably for *hiharirin*, which could be thought to agree more closely with other sources; see Archibald Campbell, footnote in vol. 7 of *Piobaireachd, a .. collection of .. tunes edited by Comunn na Piobaireachd* (Glasgow: The Piobaireachd Society, reprinted by Aird & Coghill, 1961), p. [iv].

The Ordering of the Tunes

Leaving aside the presentation tune, there are several other features of the manuscripts which allow us to add to their history, and we will return to these below. The most important of them, however, although noticed previously,²⁰ does not seem to have been analysed before. The tunes are arranged in groups according to their opening vocables: first a group beginning *hiharin*, then *hioen* and then other groups. At the end of the first group there is a footnote, ‘There is ffourty four Coming out on the little finger’.²¹ No other early collection is known to have been ordered in this way, nor in any other way based on the melodic content of the tunes.²² Apart from the remark just quoted, the groups are not separated off in any way, but most of them seem clear enough as the following Table shows.

Some vocables are obviously commoner as openers than others, and *hiharin* is by far the commonest. It might be better to speak of opening formulas than opening vocables, and in some cases it is clear that different formulas have been grouped together on the basis of some prominent element that is common to all. Proceeding in the order in which Colin Campbell took them, the next after *hiharin* are five tunes beginning with *hio*–, three of them with *hioen*, two with *hioem*. The syllable *hio* here stands for the note B, the next up from low A, but other tunes beginning with this syllable are left till later, such as *hiotro*, *hiodro* and *hihotra*; one with *hioem* which continues *hioemtra* is also left. Evidently it is not the note as such that counts so much as the phrase or finger execution. Next comes a whole phrase *hindorōdin*. We find more of *ōdin* later on but *rōdin* was evidently a distinct recognized motif, as it still is today (the short B, letter *ō*, being fingered differently in this expression than in others). With our fourth group the defining characteristic is the throw on E, *dre*, which is a strong feature of many *piobaireachd* expressions, though usually not the very first element in a beat. We get *hindre*, *hodre*, *hintodre* sixteen times in total, but *dre* at the start only once. The same applies to *dro*, the throw on C which occurs in *hindro*– and *hindodro* in our group 5. The expression *hoodro*, to be read as three syllables *ho–o–dro*, comes at the end of this group. It is followed by two others with *dro*, and it is here that the writer seems to be showing some signs of uncertainty, as the first of these final two actually begins with *ha*–, the syllable for D, that is *harōdintra hihodrorōdin*, and the next tune has the expression *hinodrōdin*, which occurs in two more places in the next volume.

²⁰ Buisman, ‘From chant to script’.

²¹ NLS MS 3714, p.92.

²² Angus MacKay’s ‘Specimens of Canntaireachd’ appear to be grouped by title: the first 18 of the 48 specimens have titles beginning with *Fàilte*. If, as I have suggested, they are copied from some previous document, the source may have had discrete sections of Laments, Salutes, Gatherings, etc. See Roderick D. Cannon, ‘Angus MacKay’s “Specimens of Canntaireachd”’, *Piping Times* 41/5 (February 1989): 17–25; 41/6 (March 1989): 20–31, 38; 41/7 (April 1989): 41–7.

Table 11.2 Tunes in the Campbell Canntaireachd MSS, grouped by opening vocables.

Group		Vol.	Tunes	No. in group
1	hiharin	1	1–44	44
2	hioen, hioem	1	45–49	5
3	hindorōdin	1	50–53	4
4	hindre, dre, hodre, hintodre	1	54–70	17
5	hindro, hindodro	1	71–80	10
6	hoodro	1	81	1
7	harōdintra hihodrorōdin	1	82	1
8	hinodrōdin	1	83	1
9	cherede	2	1–8	8
10	hintra	2	9–13	5
11	tra, himotradin, hinotra, hiharara, hindahiotra, himotraho, himbanhiotra, cheenōdintra, hiotra, hioem tra, hinotradin, himotraen, hintra, himotra, hiohotradin, hiotrotraho, chehotraho, hinotrao, hihararao, hinotrao, hiotradreo, hinotrao, hinotradin	2	14–39	26
12	hihorodo	2	40–47	8
13	hiotro, hohiodro, hinodrōdin, hiodro, himotro	2	48–53	6
14	hinde, himde	2	54–61	8
15	hōdinbain	2	62–66	5
16	hoohōdin, hōdin, hiōdin, hinōdin, himōdin, hinādin	2	67–76	10
17	hindariddo, hindaendo, hindaendeho, himbabemba, hiamtoem, himbabemto	2	77–85	9
	hinodrōdin	2	86	1

These anomalous placings perhaps should not detain us, except to note that they occur at the end of a section, and indeed the end of the volume.

Volume 2 opens with a particularly well-defined motif, *cherede*, the ‘echoing beat’ on E, which is actually the commonest opening beat after *hiharin*. Echoing beats occur on every note of the chanter, and they often occur at parallel points within a melody. It is natural that a piper working out a system such as we have here would give *cherede* a prominent place. Next comes a very diverse selection of tunes, but all linked by the syllable *tra*, the throw on D. Like *dre* and *dro*, this rarely occurs as an actual opener and like those two it is found most often following on from low A, as *hintra*. Five tunes with *hintra* come together (our section 10), but one was apparently missed and put in the section (Tune 29). The remaining tunes with *tra*, 26 of them, show little sign of ordering among themselves. They begin

with the only one that actually opens with *tra-*, and continue with a fairly random mixture with *hinotra-*, *himotra-* and others dispersed among them, including the two with *hiharara*. This is the echoing beat on D, and perhaps its placing is a sign that its execution involved something similar to the throw, as it does in most other traditional sources. It rather looks as though the writer gave up any attempt to subdivide this large group rationally, but simply put together all the tunes which had the throw on D anywhere in the opening phrase. The echoing beat on B, *hihorodo* is another invariant form, common enough as an opener, hence our group 12, and this leads naturally into other expressions with the note B, expressed when played with a throw as *tro*, and without a throw as *o* or *hio* (group 13).

The remaining groups in volume 2 are based not so much on opening syllables as on structural features. In groups 15 and 16, *ôdin*, *hôdin*, *âdin* denote the phrases B–A, C–A, D–A in which the notes B, C or D are cut short and fall into the low A by way of a strike with the little finger. In group 17 phrases such as *hindariddo* and *himbabemto* involve what pipers call triplings and when they occur in the *ùrlar* they are typical of gathering tunes. But here again we find a couple of anomalies. Tune 82 beginning *hindandeho* is of different character though the written syllables bear some resemblance. Tune 84 beginning *hihamtoem* is not one of this type, and tune 86 is certainly out of place, being a repetition of tune 52, as noted above. Once again the oddities occur at the end of a section, and the end of a book.

The arrangement is not thematic in the modern sense of a thematic catalogue. Certainly the tunes are not arranged simply in ascending order of pitch of their opening notes. The few that begin on low G, *him*, occur late on; four in the *tra* group, one beginning *himde* in with the *hinde* group, three in the ‘tripling’ group. After the first 44 tunes that start strongly on low A, there is something of a rising tendency, with groups 2–3 on B, C, then E and down again to C at group 5, then up again to D. But after that come eight tunes starting on the echoing beat on B *hihorodo*, six with various combinations of *hio*, *tro* and *dro*, and then *hodin* and the triplings. In general it may be suggested that the arrangement is based mainly on verbal formulas and finger executions, with some slight tendency to proceed up the scale. Another tendency is to place simpler motifs first and more complex ones later, hence *hodinbain* and the triplings at the end.

Within the groups of tunes there is some sign of further ordering. Most obviously the large *hiharin* group concludes with the group of five tunes which previous commentators have recognized as being probably compositions of Colin Campbell himself. They are not known from any other sources, they have a certain resemblance, and they are rather irregular in composition, as if the maker had not understood the techniques used by earlier composers.²³ Moreover, Keith Sanger has pointed out that the first four tunes are in honour of members of the Campbell gentry who were Colin’s patrons or employers, and all five tunes fit

²³ This seems to have been pointed out first by A.G. Kenneth, ‘Unpublished tunes in the Campbell Canntaireachd MS’, *Proceedings of the Piobaireachd Society Conference* (March 1973).

into a chronological sequence.²⁴ One other tune has been recognized as belonging with these, and sure enough it comes at the end of its group. It is called ‘Lord Breadalbane’s Welcome to Scotland’ and is the last of the eight tunes beginning with *cherede*. Also in the *tra* group the last four tunes (vol. 2, tunes 36–9) are noticeable, ‘Airds’ March’, ‘Harrow’s March’, nameless, and ‘Kingerloch’s March’. Campbell of Airds, already mentioned, and MacLean of Kingerloch, were two more of the local gentry.²⁵ Perhaps these four could be added to the list of Campbell compositions.²⁶

With this clue we can look at other possible orderings within the groups. Table 2 points out the distribution of tunes that are nameless, and/or not found in any other source. There is some tendency for such tunes to occur towards the ends of their respective groups. There is also a tendency for Gaelic names to occur in the first half, and English in the second; and for the few tunes called ‘One of the Cragich’ to occur in the second half as well, as seen below in Table 11.3:²⁷

Table 11.3 Ordering of Campbell Canntaireachd MSS tunes within groups.

	1st half of group	2nd half of group
Gaelic name	35.5	19.5
English name	25.5	30.5
No name	8	21
‘Cragich’	1	5

All this simply suggests that in each new group Colin tended to start with the most familiar tunes.

²⁴ Keith Sanger, “‘Pipers Meeting’ clues show possible link between tunes’, *Piping Times* 58/10 (July 2006): 29–43. The tunes are vol. 1, Nos 40–44, ‘Carwhin’s Lament’, ‘Lochend’s March’, ‘Melford’s March’, ‘Capt Arch’d Camp’ Glenlyon Lament’, ‘Pipers Meeting’. Keith puts them in the order 40, 43, 41/2, 44, with dates 1772, 1779, c.1780, c.1780, 1781, and he explains the last title as a reference to the first piping competition organized by the Highland Society in 1782.

²⁵ The explanation of ‘Harrow’s March’ is not obvious, but Keith Sanger points out that several of the sons of Campbell lairds were sent to school at Harrow, in England. The supposition would be that the composer, with limited understanding of English, assumed that Harrow was the name of a family who took the boys in, in the way that had long been customary in the Highlands.

²⁶ They could alternatively be attributed to Colin’s father Donald.

²⁷ A tune which comes exactly halfway through a group is assigned half to the first half, half to the second half.

Have We Got the Whole Collection?

We can now do something that was not possible before, that is, look at the tunes known to us which are not included in the Campbell collection, and see where they might have fitted in. A published list of preserved authentic traditional *piobaireachd* amounts to 323 items.²⁸ Of these, 168 tunes are in the Campbell volumes and 155 are not. From the latter we can deduct another 18 tunes which were composed too late to have been known to the Campbells,²⁹ and further, we should probably deduct tunes which could be regarded as alternative versions of tunes which Campbell did include. Deciding on these has to be a matter of judgement, but the ones decided on here amount to 16.³⁰ This leaves a net total of 121 distinct non-Campbell tunes, and these are listed in Appendices 3a and 3b. They are grouped by their opening notes, translated into the Campbell Canntaireachd notation. This, too, needs a comment. A strong feature of *piobaireachd* music, both in early staff notation and in modern playing tradition, is the use of a long ornamental E (nowadays called ‘cadence E’³¹). In Campbell notation, this note is hardly ever indicated, except in one set of melodic formulas (nowadays called ‘echoing beats’), in which by contrast it is hardly ever omitted. An example of omitted E is in the tune ‘Craigellachie’. In Campbell’s notation (vol. 1, tune 52) it starts with *hindoròdin*, the first syllable indicating low A, whereas traditional performance begins with E, as if it were *hi-endoròdin*. Examples of notated E include the *hi-* of *hiharin* in the large group already discussed. For these reasons, in the present table ‘The Battle of Waternish’ (PSC 221) is considered to start on low A, *hinodin dre...*, while ‘The Daughter’s Lament’ (PSC 190) is considered as starting with the ornamental E, *hi-hambam barie*.

The list in Appendix 3a consists of the non-Campbell tunes which seem to fit easily into Colin Campbell’s scheme, and Appendix 3b consists of those which do not. Obviously, the decision how to place a given tune is easier in some cases than in others. Tunes beginning with *hiharin*, *hindorodin*, *cherede*, *hihorodo*, *hinodin*, and the tripling *himbabemto* are unproblematic, and will go with the groups numbered 1, 3, 9, 12, 16 and 17 respectively. The large group based on *dre* (our group 4) is also clear enough, as we have only to extend it to include a few words of more than two syllables, *hindandre*, *hindreo* and *hindrevea*. Our group 14 was defined by *hinde* and *himde*, which are two-note motifs low A–E and low G–E. Analogous

²⁸ *Piobaireachd Society Catalogue* (PSC), published on www.piobaireachd.co.uk.

²⁹ Tunes considered to have been composed after c.1790, are PSC 184, 186, 189, 194, 249, 250, 251, 253, 257, 258, 265, 269, 276, 280, 283, 316, 318, 319.

³⁰ Tunes excluded for this reason are PSC 238, similar to 021; 180, 205, 213, 226, 244, 270, all similar to 034; 305, similar to 062; 214, 303, similar to 068; 323, similar to 070; 183, similar to 075; 322, similar to 124; 202, 320, similar to 148; 268, similar to 212. There are a few tunes within the Campbell MSS which could be considered variants of each other, but these have not been excluded.

³¹ See Peter Cooke, ‘Problems of Notating Pibroch: A Study of ‘Maol Donn’ in this book for a discussion of the cadence E in pibroch.

motifs with the notes B, C and D in place of E are found in a great many tunes, thus *hinto/himto*, *hindo*, *hinda/himda*, and it seems that Colin Campbell would have placed these in separately, as the groups which he does place before and after *hinde/himde* are quite different. There is also one tune with *hindhe* which stands for low A–F. It is hard to be sure whether Colin would have placed it with *hinde* or separately, but in any case it is only one tune.

Our group 8, based on *dro*, was necessarily rather diverse, since no tune can actually begin with a throw on C. In Appendix 3a we have included five tunes with *hinodro* or *hinhodro*. Also debatable is our group 11, based on *tra*. In Appendix 3a we have included three tunes beginning *haotro* which continue with a *tra* phrase, while other tunes beginning with *ha*– are placed separately in Appendix 3b.

In all we have 68 tunes in Appendix 3a and 53 in Appendix 3b. That is, we know of 68 tunes which are not in the *canntaireachd* volumes but which apparently would have fitted into Colin Campbell's scheme if he had known them,³² and 53 which would not fit into the volumes in any obvious places. The suggestion is that in fact Colin did not know the 68 tunes, but that he did know some of the 53, even though we do not find them in his extant manuscripts. In the extant volumes there are 168 items, of which 61 are found only in those volumes, leaving 107 which are found in other sources as well. If we divide the number 53 in the proportion of 107 to 68, the conclusion is that about 32 of the 53 would have been known to Colin Campbell, and 21 of them would not. And if we calculate $32 \times (61/107)$, this gives the estimate that the lost material included another 18 tunes which were known only to the Campbells themselves. The sum of 32 and 18 makes 50 tunes missing: a third volume?

These calculations may be easier to follow if set out in the form of Venn diagrams. Figure 11.1 refers to tunes whose opening vocables conform to the ones in the extant two volumes:

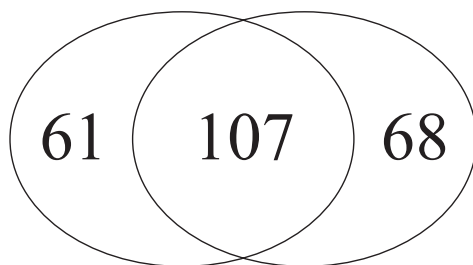


Figure 11.1 The number of tunes whose opening vocables conform to those in the extant two volumes of the Campbell Canntaireachd.

³² An objection that could be raised here is that the 68 tunes could not have been fitted in anyway because the volumes are not big enough. The point is, however, that in the volumes the tunes are arranged in groups and when a group comes to an end, the reason is that there no more tunes to go into it.

The oval on the left encloses 168 tunes present in the Campbell volumes. The oval on the right encloses 175 tunes present in the collections of Angus MacArthur, Donald MacDonald, Angus MacKay and others (after excluding duplicates and late compositions as mentioned above). The intersecting area in the middle encloses the 107 tunes that are common to Campbell and to the other group. Figure 11.2 refers to tunes whose opening vocables do not conform to the ones in the extant two volumes, and the numbers are distributed in the same proportions:

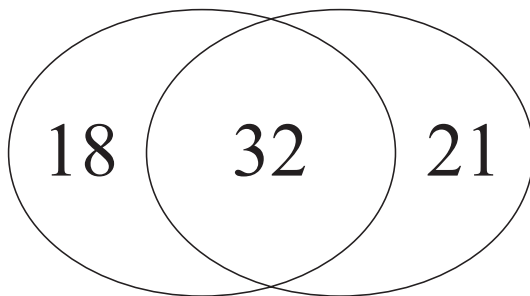


Figure 11.2 The number of tunes whose opening vocables do not conform to those in the extant two volumes of the Campbell Canntaireachd.

The total of 53 in the right-hand oval here is the result of our direct count. The three numbers are calculated in the same proportions as in the previous diagram and they give us our total of 50 in the left-hand oval.

Of course these figures are not to be taken too literally, and a more sensible conclusion is simply that something like a quarter to a third of the whole collection has been lost.

Before going further we need to recognize that a case might be made the other way. Some of the tunes not found in the Campbell manuscripts might be felt to be alien to the Campbell style.³³ Different schools, or families, of pipers might have had significantly different tastes. Also composers of later generations might be less

³³ It is possible to get this impression when we examine the compositions of those whom we might call the 'late classical' composers. We have nine tunes composed by John MacKay of Raasay (PSC 251, 253, 257, 258, 262, 265, 269, 276, 284), and taken together they have a considerable family resemblance. Only one of them begins with *hiharin*, and only one (the same one) uses the mode which stresses the notes D and F. (Significantly, perhaps, it is one of his few laments.) The compositions of the MacArthur family do not seem so limited. An earlier composer who made effective use of the upper hand was the blind piper of Gairloch, Iain MacKay. He is credited with the laments for Donald Duaghal MacKay, for the Laird of Anapool, and for Patrick Og MacCrimmon. The latter two are noted for their dramatic use of executions on high G, and it is interesting that recent work on his surviving chanter has suggested that it was particularly powerful and true on that note (see Barnaby Brown, 'The Iain Dall Chanter: material evidence for intonation and pitch in the Scottish Highlands, 1650–1800' in this book).

original than their forefathers, tending to follow the lines of what they had already learned, so that repertoires of tunes could come to have a family resemblance. This argument could be taken further, but a simpler view is that the existing Campbell manuscripts do not represent the whole of the family tradition. Rather, something like a quarter of it has been lost, in a third volume which has not survived.

Still there are other possibilities. One is that Colin *intended* to write a third volume but never did so. Or he might have written three volumes around 1797, and proceeded to make duplicates in 1814, in which case he might not have got as far a duplicate of volume 3. The missing material would remain in the older collection from which he was working. We have argued that the older collection was probably written in some sort of order, and that it may have been smaller than the collection we now have. But that may not be exactly true – even if smaller in the sense that material was still to be added later, it could still have included some of the tunes that are now missing.

All this is speculation, but one argument from particular cases is worth adding. In 1784 Patrick MacDonald published four *piobaireachd* which he had written out from the playing of a piper in ‘the country of Lochaber’.³⁴ Patrick does not identify the piper except that he was ‘retained in the family of a gentleman, with whom he was nearly connected’.³⁵ But one of the tunes, ‘A’ Ghlas Mheur’, has a musical feature which it shares with the Campbell version and with no other: the Taorluath a-mach comes immediately after the *ùrlar* instead of after the regular Taorluath.³⁶ The locality and this feature might support an association with the Campbell family of pipers. The other three tunes printed by Patrick are ‘Cha Till Mi Tuille’, ‘Cogadh no Sith’, and ‘MacIntosh’s Lament’. The latter two are not in the Campbell MS, yet (like the other two) they were among the best known of all *piobaireachd*. It is hard to believe that any Highlander, whether piper or not, had failed to come in contact at least with one of the sung versions of ‘MacIntosh’s Lament’, and as for ‘Cogadh no Sith’, ‘War or Peace’, that is on record as one of the duty tunes in the Fencible regiment in which Colin Campbell himself had served. ‘Cogadh no Sith’ begins on C (syllable *ho*–), and ‘MacIntosh’ on F (syllable *he*–). Were they in volume 3?

³⁴ Patrick MacDonald, *A Collection of Highland Vocal Airs Never Hitherto Published; To Which Are Added a Few of the Most Lively Country Dances or Reels of the North Highland and Western Isles: And Some Specimens of Bagpipe Music* (Edinburgh, 1784; reprinted Skye: Taigh na Teud, 2000).

³⁵ Keith Sanger points out that Patrick MacDonald’s wife was a daughter of MacDonald of Keppoch, whose estate was in Arnamurchan and would in those days have been considered to be in the district of Lochaber. This was the same Keppoch who came out in support of Prince Charles in 1745 and it is on record that at that time the piper to Keppoch was one of the MacGlasraichs whose family roots were in South Argyll.

³⁶ The late James Campbell pointed out in conversation the significance of this feature.

An Old Argument Revisited

In 1816 Colin Campbell's son John brought a volume to the Highland Society competition, but the judges refused to accept it. The minute written shortly afterwards says:

paid John Campbell, the piper who gained the 3rd prize on account of a collection of ancient music produced by him set in the syllabic form understood by some pipers, the volume being now purchased of Campbell by Sir John MacGregor Murray the Preses for the purpose of having the tunes set to music by a scientific person for publication. £1 – 1 – 0.³⁷

Sir John Graham Dalyell gave an account of this matter in a private diary. In 1841, when he had just been visited by Angus MacKay, he mentioned what MacKay had told him about 'a manuscript collection in three volumes written in language not in notation', and went on to note what MacKay had told him about the later whereabouts of the volumes.³⁸ Then in his book published in 1849 he gave a longer account. He tells us that John Campbell brought 'a folio volume in manuscript, said to contain numerous compositions' but to his regret the judges refused to accept it; and moreover that John Campbell 'spoke of two more volumes belonging to his father besides that exhibited.'³⁹

The plain meaning of these statements is that the full collection consisted of three volumes, of which Dalyell saw only one. According to Campbell of Kilberry other people subsequently understood it that way (though Kilberry does not say

³⁷ Kilberry Notebook, f. 44.

³⁸ 'Referring to a manuscript collection in three volumes written in language not in notation which was brought to Edinburgh in 1818 [*recte* 1816] by John Campbell later piper to Walter Campbell of Islay – MacKay tells me that some of them are now in possession of his brother – Campbell a mason at Eisdale the slate quarries – There is another brother Wm. Campbell a tailor and clothier Argyle St. Glasgow.' The personal diaries of Sir John Graham Dalyell, Edinburgh University Library, MS Gen 374D, p.19. On the opposite page is added the following: '1841. Oct 27. I got the following address which may assist the recovery of the bagpipe music. William Campbell tailor and clothier Argyle St Glasgow, brother of John Campbell, late piper to Campbell of Islay – one Campbell a mason in Eisdale is another brother.' Both quotations here supplied by Iain MacInnes.

³⁹ Sir John Graham Dalyell, *Musical Memoirs of Scotland* (Edinburgh: T.G. Stevenson, 1849), pp 12–13. But Dalyell again gave the wrong date, 1818, corrected here. Dalyell went on to say that in 1845 (should this read 1841?) he tried to trace the remaining volumes through the Campbell brothers, but without success. Also that he tried to find out what became of the volume bought by Sir John Murray MacGregor, after the latter's decease, which was in 1822, but likewise without success; see John S. Keltie, *History of the Scottish Highlands .. new edition.. by William Melven* (2 vols, London: W.MacKenzie, n.d.), vol 2, p. 250.

who the other people were).⁴⁰ It also seems to have been conjectured that, since two volumes survived and a third was apparently missing, the third one must have been the one bought by Sir John Murray MacGregor. But Kilberry himself was not convinced of this. He was the first person to realize that the extant manuscript volumes 1 and 2 belonged to, as he put it, different 'editions' of the same work, hence he saw no need to conclude that a third volume would contain different material. He also argued that when John Campbell brought one volume to show to the judges, he would be more likely to have brought volume 1 than volume 3. In a further essay Kilberry said nothing for or against a third volume, but he put forward his scenario for volumes 1 and 2 very clearly as follows:

Colin Campbell wrote at least two volumes by 1797, for he writes 'the ffirst volume' and dates it that year.

By 1815 ... the writer may have conceived the idea of making copies of his 1797 volumes for exhibition in Edinburgh, and proceeded to carry it out, incidentally indexing Volume 1 on paper watermarked 1810.

In 1816 ... John took [the] fair copy of Volume 1 to Edinburgh, but it met with a lukewarm reception, and, though sold, gained no premium. Thereafter John used to take to Edinburgh annually piobaireachd music 'written scientifically' [i.e. in staff notation, see above, note 5].

Therefore, nothing was done with the fair copy of Vol 2, written in or after 1814, and it remained in the family. It was not 'old' by the time (between 1822 and 1831) J.F. Campbell used to see John Campbell practising from an 'old' MS. That must have been the original Vol. 1, or the original Vol 2.⁴¹

Clearly Kilberry was of the view that the volume brought to Edinburgh and sold was the later copy of volume 1, and in this he was surely correct. His reasoning, however, would imply that at that time the Campbells had three other volumes still at home, not two as stated by John. If Kilberry attached full weight to John's statement, he might have rationalized it by supposing that the later copy of volume 2 had not been made by that time, so the two volumes at home were simply the original volumes 1 and 2. But we know that the second copy of volume 2 was eventually made, because we still have it.

Kilberry perhaps was being over-cautious, understandably in view of the rumours and wild speculations that were the norm among piping scholar-enthusiasts

⁴⁰ 'It is generally supposed that the volume sold by John Campbell to Sir John MacGregor Murray in 1816 ... and subsequently lost sight of, was a third volume containing a further selection of tunes' (NLS MS 3716, 'Note by Archibald Campbell ...'). Dalrymple did not specify the date of this transaction, nor did he call it a sale, nor did he say that the volume sold was the one that was brought to Edinburgh. This information is, however, contained in the unpublished record of the Highland Society.

⁴¹ Campbell, 'The Campbell Canntaireachd MS', p. vi. The word 'the' bracketed in the third paragraph was originally 'this'.

in his day. But the data put forward in his paper, it is suggested, turn the balance of probability back to the original view. The Campbells had three volumes. They made copies of them. The copy of volume 1 came to Edinburgh. It was bought by Sir John MacGregor Murray. The upshot is that today we have the old version of volume 1, and the new version of volume 2, and volume 3 is missing.

The Making of the Manuscript

The arrangement by opening vocables was an ingenious way to bring order into such a large collection, and a strong indication of the writer's orderly mind, of which there is other evidence besides.⁴² The arrangement also surely tells us that the collection as we have it is not in its original form. It must be a fair copy from a previous work. It is hard to believe that the writer assembled the material in his head and did not start writing a new group until he was sure he had remembered all the tunes of the previous group. If he did remember one later, he would have had to insert in the wrong place, and there are few if any apparent errors of that kind.⁴³ It seems clear that Colin Campbell had an earlier compilation to work from.

It also seems clear that the collection was made over a considerable period of time. Colin was piping at least from the 1770s and writing at least until 1814, even if in later years he was mainly making copies. He had plenty of time to think through problems and experiment with systems of writing. Gradually he would accumulate a pile of drafts of tunes, and eventually when he decided he had got all he could (and had given up the idea of composing any more himself), he would be able to set to work on the grand compilation. The MacKay transcripts imply that there was more than one attempt at the actual compilation, since the four transcribed tunes occur together in the MS in the same order as in the transcripts, but, as noted above, the serial numbers are different.

This explains how he could be so definite about the number of *hiharin* tunes. Notice the present tense in the words quoted above, 'There *is* ffourty four tunes ...'. He cannot seriously have thought there were no more in existence anywhere. But he could have been sure there were no more in his source. Why would the source be finite? Would it simply be that his father had died?⁴⁴

⁴² His strong and uniform handwriting and the layout of the document as a whole show a good clerical training. Note also the phrase 'errors excepted' in the presentation copy, which sounds like a piece of legal or clerical jargon.

⁴³ In fact the only obvious error concerns the two tunes *hinodrogin*, Nos 183 and 252, which presumably should have been together. (Curiously, no. 252 is actually repeated as the last tune in the volume, no. 286, which is also the only case of repetition.)

⁴⁴ Donald seems to have died by 1794, if not by 1781 or 1782, when his son Colin got the croft at Ardriach. See Sanger, 'Colin Campbell's Canntaireachd – the history of [the] Netherlorn family'.

But it is equally clear that in writing out the collection we have, Colin was still to some extent working out his system. Frans Buisman⁴⁵ has shown that he changed his mind about how to write certain vocables and that a change introduced partway through the collection would then be maintained to the end. (He also sometimes went back and altered earlier versions to conform.) A closer study of the text might throw up some anomalies that do not in fact come neatly in sequence and could be assumed to have occurred at earlier stages. Meanwhile the conclusion must be that while writing his final ordered version, Colin was revising it, and that the inconsistencies we see now were introduced in that final editing stage.⁴⁶

Who Invented the Notation?

The general assumption is that the invention and the writing of the notation were all Colin's, recording mainly music learned from his father. This would explain the large number of nameless tunes, if Colin had learned some simply by hearing his father play.⁴⁷ This may include a very strange tune title which has been understood as 'some of them play it that way'; that is, not a name at all, but just a comment by an informant.⁴⁸

But another possibility not be overlooked is that the invention and, initially, the execution were actually Donald's, after which Colin took over the collection and arranged it. Donald would have been literate and quite possibly better educated than Colin. Keith Sanger has suggested to the writer that, perhaps having curtailed

⁴⁵ 'From chant to script some evidences of chronology in Colin Campbell's adaptation of canntaireachd', *Piping Times* 39/7 (April 1987): 44–9, and 'More evidence on Colin Campbell and the development of the Campbell Notation: MS SRO 112/1/803', *Piping Times* 47/11 (August 1995): 21–8 and 47/12 (September 1995): 26–34.

⁴⁶ As already mentioned, the MacKay transcripts contain only the opening parts of four tunes, whereas in the two main volumes the tunes are written out at full. In many places in the latter we can see that a variation was generated by reading along a previous one and making systematic changes. Certain types of mistake are explicable in that way. Frans Buisman also pointed out that the continual revisions tend to confirm that Colin himself did continue write all of the extant volumes, and did not hand over the copying to his son John. Buisman also considered that this was conclusively proved by the consistency of the handwriting, though we should bear in mind that it is a standard clerical hand of the period and the differences between writers trained in the same way might not be great.

⁴⁷ Eighteen in Volume 1, 11 in Volume 2, not counting those merely called 'one of the Cragich', 'one of the Dead's lament', etc.

⁴⁸ Vol. 1, tune 59, 'Euan aka char Shein mi Shudda'. The noted Scottish Gaelic singer Margaret Stewart suggested interpreting this as 'some of them sing/play it like that'. In a further discussion with Dr Ronald Black (23 May 2007), the following was considered as a reading of the Gaelic *Tha feadhainn aca ga/dha seinn mar siud*. Also, Dr Black pointed out that *mar siud* in this context can mean 'as follows'. On that basis, the title could be a remark made before singing or playing the tune, rather than afterwards.

his ambition and accepted his original and more lowly career as a piper, Donald decided to try and do what he could with the education he was otherwise not going to use.

This view could put the invention back in time by a generation and could also explain some features of the music which to us seem archaic, like *hihorodo* with no apparent dwelling on the low G grace note (the one symbolized by the letter d). It would also explain why the Campbell manuscripts give us such complete and high-quality texts, compared with collections made in the early nineteenth century. But there could be other explanations for both those things.

And finally, we might note that whichever of the two was responsible, the Campbells of Nether Lorn are the earliest traditional, professional pipers known to have committed their music to writing. They were preceded by Joseph MacDonald, but his standpoint was that of an observer. They were fitted for the task by their education, which was probably unusual among pipers of their day, and also, though not coincidentally, by the tradition of administrative and legal documentation which developed in the Clan Campbell as modern ideas of land tenure and management took hold.

Appendix 1: Description of the Campbell Canntaireachd, Volume 1

The main part consists of a single gathering, made up from two quires of paper each consisting of 24 folded sheets, one quire [A] placed inside the other [B], and the whole placed inside one more folded sheet of paper [C], a total of 98 leaves. Preceding these are two leaves, probably formed from one folded sheet [D]. The original binding is now detached but has been preserved, and in recent conservation work the sheets have been placed at the back. They comprise [E] a folded sheet formed from an old map (actually a sea chart of the southern coast of Ireland), printed on one side, blank on the other, and [F] a sheet of cardboard folded in four – that is, the first fold forming the two top edges, the second fold forming the spine. The quires measure [A] $328 \times c.195$ mm, [B] $325 \times c.195$ mm. They have evidently not been trimmed as appears from the way the writing approaches the edges.

Watermarks

Sections [A] and [B] have watermarks, different designs in each, but no dates. In section [A] one half of each folded leaf has the image of a lion and the other half has the initials JB&Co or IB&Co with some variants due to damage or faulty workmanship. The lion is a version of the ‘Lion of the Seven Provinces’, a Dutch heraldic image,⁴⁹ but probably an imitation rather than indicating actual Dutch

⁴⁹ See Churchill, *Watermarks in Paper*, p. 29 and Figures LIII, LIV; and the British Association of Paper Historians (BAPH), www.baph.org.uk.

manufacture. In section [B] one half of each folded leaf has the image of Britannia and the other half has the initials JA in two variant forms. The index pages [D] are watermarked R COLLINS 1810.

Numbering

Folio numbers i–iii have been written recently in pencil. The top corners of the first few pages have been worn away but from page 6 onwards they are numbered in ink, apparently in the original handwriting. Counting back, page 1 would have been f. iib (a = recto, b = verso). Thus the numbering of pages can be represented as follows: section [D], f. ia, f. ib, f. iia, f. iib; sheet [C] unnumbered; section [B], f. iia, f. iib = p. [1], pp. [3–5], 6–47; section [A], pp. 48–143; section [B (continued)], pp 140–90, [191]; section [C(continued)], pp [192–3].

Annotations

There are various writings on the blank pages which look like pen trials. The more legible are:

- f. iib (upside down) Colin Campbell / piper
- sheet [C] this [in old ink and like the hand of the main text]
- p. [192] John Campbell's Book / in the year of our / Lord ? 1815 / in the year [illegible] / 1815
- pp. [191–192] various calculations
- p. [193] upside down Donald Cam
- p. [194] Colin C / Dr Daugh..[?] / Dr brother / 6 Nov^r / Colin Campbell
- on what was until recently the inside front cover, a list of entries which appear to read Ari.. wt.. I.. (Quota) / 109 pints shy / 103 D^o / 103 D^o 16th August / 104 D^o 23^[rd]
- on what was until recently the inside back cover, two calculations:

$$\begin{array}{r} 1791 \\ 15 \\ \hline 76 \end{array} \quad \begin{array}{r} 1?15 \\ 91 \\ \hline \end{array}$$

Appendix 2: Description of the Campbell Canntaireachd, Volume 2

The volume consists of two quires of paper placed to form two gatherings [A] and [B], each of which probably originally consisted of 24 folded sheets, that is 48 leaves. The stitching is visible in two places, between pages numbered 45 and 46, and between 139 and 140. The break from [A] to [B] comes between pages 91 and 92. Gathering [A] now has 23 folded sheets, which would give 46 leaves, but

one of these has been cut away, leaving 45 leaves, as described above. Gathering [B] has 24 folded sheets, 48 leaves. All the leaves are of the same kind of paper, watermarked H SALMON / 1814. They are of uniform size, 302 × 185 mm.

At the end are preserved three sheets of the old binding or bindings. In order these are [C] a piece of stiff paper, white on one side, marbled on the other; [D1], [D2], two stiff sheets, shiny and brown coloured on one side. Whether or not these were once glazed is not clear.

Annotations

Sheet C, a large number of names and some dates, including the following:

- John Campbell (several times, including John Campbell / Shawfield possibly in different handwriting)
- Angus Campbell
- John Campbell's Book 6th June 1830 [this is in a different hand from the other John Campbell signatures].
- Colin Campbell
- William Campbell
- Angus Campbell his book / 1820 [these two may belong together but it is not completely obvious]
- I received / your letter / by the / Bearer
- [upside down] Febry the 20 1823

Appendix 3a: Tunes Found Only in Non-Campbell Sources, which Presumably Would Have Been Included in the Campbell MSS if Known to their Author(s)

Numbers appearing in the left column refer to the tunes' Piobaireachd Society Catalogue (PSC) numbers published on the Piobaireachd Society website (www.piobaireachd.co.uk).

Group 1: hiharin

001	hiharin
182	hiharin
209	hiharin òdin
215	hiharin
220	hiharin
223	hiharin
231	hiharin
232	hiharin hiodin
266	hiharin horòdin
267	hiharin hioen

273	hiharin
277	hiharin
278	hiharin òdin
279	hiharin
286	hiharin haròdin
287	hiharin chehindo
288	hiharin cherede
293	hiharin
294	hiharin
298	hiharin hiodre
300	hiharin dilieheho
317	hiharin droo dro

Group 3: hindoròdin

272	hindoròdin
274	hindoròdin
313	hindoròdin cherede

Group 4: dre

173	hindandre haotroa
195	hindreo hodreve
208	hindre haròdin
212	hindre hindre
224	dre
227	(hin)dredan drea
233	hindre hindre
260	hindre haròdin
292	hindreve
297	hindre hindo

Group 8: dro

217	hinodro cheodro
225	hin(h)odro hiodin
237	hinodro hiohodro
242	hinodro vea cheem
245	horodindro (<i>or</i> tro)
247	hodro darodo hindo dre
306	hinodro haodro
307	hinodrodin hihorodo (<i>or</i> hinodroo hiharin)

Group 9: cherede

198	cherede
261	cherede
299	cherede

Group 11: tra

179	hinotrao
188	hararao haen
199	hiotra hioem
210	haotro hinotra
219	haotro tra
291	haotroa himtotraen

Group 12: hihorodo

175	hihorodo
176	hihorodo
191	hihorodo

Group 14: hinde

187	hinde hoache
241	hinde hiotra
263	hinde hoae
301	hinde hindo hootro
216	hindeo hodrodin
236	hindeo haeo hadin
308	hindeodro cheodroo

Group 16: òdin

221	hinòdin dre
229	hinòdin dare
246	hinòdintra
282	himòdin

Group 17: triplings

174	himbabemto
309	himbabemto

Appendix 3b: Tunes in Non-Campbell Sources which Do Not Fit into Groupings in the Campbell Canntaireachd MSS.

him–

185	himban haeveen
201	himban dre harodin tra
235	himban hihorodinem

243 himbanhi heiI

hihambam

190 hihambam barie
207 hihambam dan
228 hihambam hiedre
285 hihambam hiharin

Hinto/himto, hindo, hinda/himda

218 hinto hin (h)otra
259 hinto dre hio trodin
240 hinto hiharin
170 himto hiotro hinto hiotro
171 himto hiharara
172 himto hintro dreo
181 himto tro tro
264 himtodin hintrodin
312 himto cherede
321 himto hiodin hiharin
178 hindo darodo hodin
252 hindo hiharin
284 hindo cherede
290 hindo hinde hiodro
304 hindodin hotradin
314 hindo hindo hindo rodin
230 hinda hodro hioho otro
196 himda hodro hihorodo

hindhe

222 hindhee hoeem

hintro

203 hintro chehin
234 hintro dilii chehin
310 hintro hinde hintro hinem

hio—

275 hiodin hioe hao hae

ho—

193 hoohindhe

256	hoohindo
262	hoohinde
295	ho hindaen hoen do

ha—

211	haotro hioem
248	haem hioem
289	haendre cheōdin
296	ādin hiotro
315	haen harōdin

che—

177	chehodro hodin
254	cheoa hinotra
271	cheen cheodro
281	cheende haende
302	cheen cheve cheen cheo

he—

239	herereIe hererehe
200	hererehe heetraha

hi—

192	hi ...
197	hidariIe hiriri hi

leumluath, taorluath, crunluath

204	hodroho hiotroeo
206	hinbareo <i>or</i> hinendeo
255	hindariddan himbamoem
311	hinbandreembam

Chapter 12

The Concept of Mode in Scottish Bagpipe Music

Simon McKerrell

This chapter uses modal analysis in order to understand the motivic structure within a canon of marches played by Highland bagpipers in solo competition performance. Rather than using mode as a categorizing tool, my research uses mode as a tool for analysis demonstrating that *mode as defined by motif* reflects the aurally developed tradition of bagpipe music. These modes are defined by pitch set and hierarchy, structural tones and, most significantly, by motif. My subject material is based upon a clearly defined canon of bagpipe marches discussed below and recent scholarship from ethnomusicology. I identify nine modes within this canon of marches, the most common of which fall into two broad categories. I call each of these two categories a *modal complex* which provides the overall rubric for closely related individual modes that share sophisticated motivic characteristics. When ‘mode’ has traditionally been discussed in Western traditional music, it has invariably been as a categorizing tool based upon the scale-types of the church modes. The importance of the ethnomusicological approach to modal analysis is that it deals in *motifs*, the building blocks of traditional bagpipe music in Scotland, and is therefore an approach that allows understanding of the music from the performer’s perspective. As Qureshi has argued,¹ ethnomusicological analysis should stem from the music-culture under study and not be imposed from another system imposing its own concepts: this analysis of mode was arrived at through a practice-based method where the analysis answers the musical understanding I have of bagpipe repertoire as a performer and composer.² I offer this chapter on modal analysis which I hope will provide not only analytical approaches to explore the motivic content of traditional music, but hopefully a starting point for new understandings of the aesthetic meaning of modal analysis.

There has been little modal analysis of instrumental traditional music among Anglo-American scholars, as most studies in the twentieth century focused upon song. Ethnomusicological modal analysis has largely been conducted in the pan-Asian, Oriental, and Pacific traditions, and it is this scholarship that I have drawn

¹ Regula B. Qureshi, ‘Musical sound and contextual input: a performance model for musical analysis’, *Ethnomusicology* 31/1 (Winter 1987).

² The author is a well-known piper himself.

on in the modal analysis of Scottish bagpipe music.³ The process of motivic analysis is complementary to piping as a traditional idiom. This research shows that the music of the bagpipes is founded upon motifs learnt by players, both aurally and through notation, and therefore constitutes the musical basis of the tradition. In this way, the research is tailored to fit the performance tradition in Scotland.

The piping tradition today falls into three main contexts for performance: solo competition piping; pipe band competitions; and piping with other instruments. This study focuses entirely on the first of these musical worlds, as it is considered the most traditional, has the longest musical past and is at the heart of the contemporary playing tradition. Competition standardizes music and creates a conservative music-culture as Goertzen and others have shown.⁴ Although the tunes and ornamentation have been standardized, performance practice has continued to develop and individual styles, as expressed through musical phrasing and individual sound, offer a fascinating method for stylistic expression in bagpipe performance (and for rich contextual analysis).⁵ This competitive context for performance has resulted in a clearly defined canonical repertoire that exists in print and upon which this paper is based. As such, it is controlled by many factors, such as technical demand, age of composition and length of piece, among others discussed in more detail below.

Notation and Intonation

It is worth making a brief note on the notation and intonation used in this paper to assist the reader in properly understanding the musical examples and their relevance to modal research. Importantly, bagpipe music can be described as

³ An excellent account of the history of this scholarship is given by Harold S. Powers and Richard Widdess, 'Mode (V, 1): Middle East and Asia: Introduction: 'Mode' as a Musicological Concept' in L. Macy (ed.), *Grove Dictionary online*, (accessed online at www.grovemusic.com, 2001). See also Powers, 'Mode and raga', *Musical Quarterly* 44 (1958); Judith Becker, 'The anatomy of a mode', *Ethnomusicology* (May 1969); K. Mantle Hood, *The Ethnomusicologist* (Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1971); Karl L. Signell, *Makam: Modal Practice in Turkish Art Music* (Florida: Usual editions, 1977); and, in particular, Anne Dhu Shapiro, 'The tune-family concept in British-American folk-song scholarship' (Ph.D thesis: Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, 1975), upon whose work I have drawn heavily.

⁴ Chris Goertzen, *Fiddling for Norway: Revival and Identity* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997); 'Galax, Virginia's "Old Fiddlers" convention: the virtues and flaws of a giant fiddle contest', *The World of Music* 45/1 (2003).

⁵ For further research into competitive performance practice in Highland piping, see Simon McKerrell, 'Scottish competition bagpipe music: sound, mode and aesthetics' (PhD thesis: Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama and Saint Andrews University, 2005).

‘aurally developed’, as today the tradition is largely taught through notation. The introduction of the first written sources of bagpipe music came relatively late for Western Europe (in relation to song, for example) at the start of the nineteenth century⁶ and piping notation uses a number of non-standard conventions. In the figures throughout this chapter I employ standard bagpipe notation with all the melody note stems down and the embellishment stems going up. Also, all embellishments are written as demisemiquavers but are not counted for rhythmical value as they are played so quickly by pipers. No key signature appears in pipe music and the instrument is notated from G’ to A’’ on the treble clef but does not play at concert pitch, since its scale developed outside the rubric of equal temperament. In general most solo pipers today have their ‘low A’, which is the tonal foundation of the instrument, usually pitched between 470 to 480 Hertz – somewhere just above B flat – and use a scale that is determined by *consonance with the drones* and hence as small frequency ratios for each note sounded against the A.⁷

For the purposes of understanding the music diatonically, one must read it with a sharp F and C, as though in D major (or more appropriately in A major with a natural G). I have purposely avoided using the church mode description of ‘mixolydian’ scale in A, as this nomenclature has so unsuitably been imported into traditional music throughout the twentieth century, and is at odds with the ethnomusicological approach taken throughout this research, having little relevance to performance practice (this issue is explored further below in a discussion of modal scholarship). Furthermore, because of the intonation of small frequency ratios in the bagpipe scale, and for the hierarchical relationships that church mode theory (and diatonicism) implies between scale degrees, I will avoid using the language of diatonicism such as ‘tonic’, ‘scale’, ‘dominant’, ‘key’, and so on. I find it more appropriate to use simpler descriptive language which is less historically confused, such as ‘pitch set’, ‘pitch hierarchy’, ‘tonal centre’ and ‘mode’ after Mantle Hood in describing bagpipe notation and intonation.⁸ For a typical example of notation, see Example 12.1.

⁶ With the exception of Joseph MacDonald circa 1760 (but first published in 1803), Donald MacDonald’s *A Collection of the Ancient Martial Music of Caledonia, called Piobaireachd* (c.1820) is credited as the first published collection of bagpipe music sponsored by the Highland Society of London. Thereafter, notation was standardized through continuing publication.

⁷ See Alexander C. MacKenzie, ‘Some recent measurements on the scale of the great Highland bagpipe’, *Proceedings of the Piobaireachd Society Conference* (April 1995) for a detailed analysis and McKerrell, ‘Scottish competition bagpipe music’ for a complete review of the acoustic scholarship on bagpipes.

⁸ Mantle Hood, *The Ethnomusicologist*.

The Repertoire

The repertoire examined in this study was derived from interviews between 2000 and 2004 during my PhD study and relies on the opinions of some of the world's foremost Highland pipers. Within solo competition piping, the two most common musical formats are the march, strathspey and reel, forming a set of three tunes and pibroch (anglicized from Gaelic *piobaireachd* lit. 'piping'). Focusing on the march repertoire allows me to examine the *ceòl beag* (lit. 'small music' or 'light music') repertoire which is shared with non-piper traditional musicians and allows the research to have relevance for them. The *piobaireachd* repertoire is not shared with other musicians and is a form exclusive to Highland pipers. Using the *ceòl beag* repertoire also enables analysts to see how modal analysis may have relevance beyond the piping tradition.

A canon of marches exists in solo competition piping because of the requirements of competition and because of the conservative nature of the competitive musical tradition which encourages canonization of suitable tunes. Pipers themselves control this changing canon for many reasons beyond simply the musical merits of a tune, as Bohlman points out: 'As socially motivated choices, a community's canons bear witness to its values and provide a critical construct for understanding the ways the community sorts out its own musical activities and repertoires.'⁹ I began compiling my own list of tunes and then took this as an area for discussion in fieldwork, which led to comprehensive agreement about the existence and content of these canons. I revised this list of tunes on a consensual basis so that the analysis that follows can be considered valid in relation to the contemporary repertoire of competing pipers. This fieldwork eventually led to a list of 64 canonical 2/4 marches that form the core of contemporary competition repertoire for today's leading performers.

Some of the basic attributes of the competition pipe march include a length of four parts (A, B, C and D, each of eight bars length, which are each repeated in performance), four equal phrases per part, each phrase being usually two bars in length. The progression of phrases in each part usually takes the form of A (question), B (unresolving answer), A' (question) and C (resolving answer).

This form of phrasing is crucial to musical expression, as is the accentuation of the on- and off-beats, the combination of which in a unique style can immediately identify an individual player. Tension and resolution are defined by the interrelationship between the melody and the drones of the instrument, of which there are three: two 'tenor drones' sounding an octave below the tonal centre (A) of the chanter, and one bass drone sounding two octaves below it. Almost all of the tunes in the canon of marches (and in most competition strathspeys and reels as well) adhere to a distinct melodic range in each part that focuses on higher or

⁹ Philip V. Bohlman, *The Study of Folk Music in the Modern World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), pp. 104–105.

lower, and hence ‘top-hand’ or ‘bottom-hand’ compass. The general pattern can be described as in Figure 12.1:

Part	Range
A	Central to low compass on the chanter
B	Higher compass, involving more top-hand work
C	Lower compass, involving more bottom-hand work
D	Higher compass, involving more top-hand work

Figure 12.1 Typical melodic range of the 2/4 competition pipe march.

This eventual canon of tunes deemed aesthetically suitable for solo competition in this research is shown in Table 12.2 at the conclusion of this chapter.

The most popular tune submitted by pipers is ‘The Clan MacColl’ (by John MacColl), closely followed by tunes such as ‘Mrs John MacColl’ (John MacColl) and ‘John MacColl’s March to Kilbowie Cottage’ (by Willie Lawrie). As well as all being archetypal tunes, other factors that influence the choice of repertoire include judges’ conservatism and the age of composition; for instance, the older the tune is, the greater its symbolic link with the past and the more widely known it is. This aesthetic of the *oldness* of a tune is another yardstick by which to ensure a continuity of tradition, as Willie McCallum, one of the world’s leading pipers explains:

I mean you could go to any competition and you’ll definitely hear ‘The Shepherd’s Crook’, ‘Maggie Cameron’ ... ‘Susan MacLeod’¹⁰ probably is one that’s got into the repertoire and it’s relatively recent you know ... but you’ll always hear ... that kind stuff.

Because they’re good?

Aye, because they’re good, but nobody’s written anything better or not many people have written anything better; the other thing is that sometimes people are not brave enough to put them in. You know there might be some good tunes out there and they’ll say, ‘Och, I’ll not play that ‘cause they’ll not know it’ [i.e. the judges]. Sometimes it needs somebody to actually be brave enough to do it you know.¹¹

Furthermore, the nature of competition encourages the selection of technically difficult tunes. Tunes that are not challenging enough cannot be played as they are not competitive against other more technical performances. Interestingly, there

¹⁰ ‘Susan MacLeod’, composed by Donald MacLeod, was written in the 1960s, first published in 1967, and several tunes of this vintage are generally the most recent additions to the canon of competition tunes.

¹¹ Fieldwork discussions, Willie McCallum 27 February 2002.

were a number of tunes excluded from the canon of tunes during fieldwork directly because they were either too easy technically, or contained non-traditional modal attributes that were too great a departure from the melodic tradition that the canon serves. The canon of tunes that this research is based upon is a conservative and slow-changing canon that has been arrived at through consensus by competition pipers and judges (usually former elite performers). This consensus is determined through the aesthetic judgements of the leading pipers and judges, and hence new tunes will only enter the canon of tunes after widespread acceptance by the elite of the performing community. This has produced a very slow-changing canon of music, where the idea of tradition is actively informed and policed by a small number of competitively successful performers at the top level who control aesthetic notions. In other words, a tune has to be more than simply a good tune to be accepted; it has to reflect the aesthetic norms of the competition tradition and win prizes in competitions.

Competition as Context

Competition greatly influences pipers' aesthetics and performance because it is the primary performance context for solo pipers. Solo piping competitions are now common in Scotland, Canada, New Zealand, the USA, and South Africa in the main. This is largely the result of British imperialism and Scottish emigration throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. There are a strict hierarchy of competitors and long pedigrees of teaching lineages that demarcate the stylistic boundaries between players. These stylistic differences are distinct, yet exist within very narrow boundaries that have been standardized through competition. Today, these stylistic boundaries cross international borders depending on the teaching lineages. For example, many players in New Zealand are associated with the 'Bobs of Balmoral' style of *piobaireachd*¹² stemming from the north-east of Scotland and derived from John MacDonald of Inverness. Light music performance, which includes the march, strathspey and reel format, is also stylistically uniform through standardization of performance practice¹³ in competition, but elite individual pipers manage to stamp their own identity on performance. Globalization, and in particular the availability of key recordings and performances, has not only led to further standardization of certain fundamental aspects of performance such as sound aesthetics and technique, but I suggest it

¹² Named after Robert Brown and Robert Nicol, who were major figures in twentieth-century piping tuition and regarded as master-player-teachers themselves. They were employed as ghillies on the British Royal estate at Balmoral in the Highlands of Scotland. This style of playing is sometimes referred to as a 'North-East' style, as it is associated with that area of Scotland.

¹³ See Robinson McClellan, 'Rhythm in pibroch: a return to 'Maol Donn' in this book for further discussion of the term 'performance practice' in piping and other traditions.

may also encourage *stylistic* diversity as players all over the world benefit from easier access to recordings. Further research is needed in this area to establish trends. Competition also has had its effect on the repertoire; in considering the composers of the canon of marches used in this study, the vast majority of the composers are late nineteenth-century or early twentieth-century piper-composers dominated by individuals such as John MacColl, Willie Fergusson, Willie Ross and G.S. MacLennan.

Mode Scholarship

Mode scholarship within Anglo-American traditional music has essentially shifted from the categorizing of tunes based on church mode scale-type (such as Mixolydian, Aeolian, Locrian and so on) at the turn of the twentieth century to an emphasis of motif and other modal traits through ethnomusicological scholarship in the latter decades of the twentieth century. From the turn of the twentieth century, the term ‘mode’ became associated with the study of Anglo-American folk song. As time passed, the conception of pentatonic and hexatonic scales changed. In the opening decades of the twentieth century, these scales were seen as gapped scales; scales that were lacking the extra notes that would make them ‘normal’ seven-note scales. They were viewed as primitive and were indications of a supposedly evolutionary development from a pentatonic to hexatonic, and eventually, a heptatonic scale, which is the basis of the major and minor scales in much of Western music. Much of the early scholarship displays this evolutionary thesis.¹⁴ The scholarship of mode, as applied to British folk song, began at the turn of the twentieth century with the work of Gilchrist and Jacques.¹⁵ These early writings are the beginning of a scholarly approach to folk music and could be seen as one ‘outgrowth of revived interest in early music’.¹⁶ There was, and still is, a huge repertoire of traditional music and these early scholars were trying to make sense of it and elevate its status in society. The ready-made system of church modes gave them a preformed nomenclature and established theory with which to explain the musical organization of this music. It also lent a welcome air of institutional authority to their work at the start of a field of scholarship which had no academic precedents.

However, these early scholars established church mode nomenclature and the importance of scale-types within traditional music, which have little relevance to

¹⁴ See Cecil Sharp, *English Folk-Song: Some Conclusions* (London: Simpkin, 1907; 2nd edn 1936), and in particular the preface to the second edition by Maud Karpeles.

¹⁵ Annie G. Gilchrist, ‘Note on the modal system of Gaelic tunes’, *Journal of the Folk Song Society* 4/16 (1911): 150–53; and E.F. Jacques, ‘Modal survivals in folk song’, *Journal of the Folk Song Society* 1 (1899): 4–6.

¹⁶ Shapiro, ‘The tune-family concept in British–American folk-song scholarship’, Appendix 2, p. 1.

performance practice. Collinson demonstrates the type of contradictions that arise when traditional Scottish music is classified by church mode.¹⁷ He shows this with his example of 'The Souters of Selkirk', where he classifies the melody as Locrian but says that the majority of the melody is actually in C major. Therefore, the final cadence feels as though it finishes on the seventh degree of the scale. There are many cyclical tunes in Scottish music that are composed to lead back to the start of the tune and do not end on the tonic. This is just one of the more obvious problems arising from the emphasis of scale-type. In the mid-twentieth century, church mode theory was being distorted to try and provide a classificatory system for Anglo-American folksong. Bertrand Bronson developed a star-shaped diagram to account for and explain tune variants, and how their tonality shifts.¹⁸ Cadzen, in his scathing condemnation of mid/early-twentieth century folk song scholars, bemoans the use of church mode theory:

Bronson places modes differing by one term in adjacent positions in a star-shaped diagram ... Yet the many instances in which tunes straddle more than one arm of the star, not only as between related variants but also within one verse of a single rendering, suggests that looking at stars that lack twinkle may not guide us readily to the harmony of the spheres . . .

Thus my quarrel is not mainly with this or that difficulty, but with the whole concept that folksong tunes are cast in modes of such historically shaky origin, or that their musical qualities and interrelations can be encompassed or usefully described by first supposing just such a set of pre-existing guidelines ... Historically, the terms do not correctly describe what is known of the ancient Greek musical practice from which they are supposed to derive. Their flagrantly erroneous refurbishing does not fit the medieval plainchant practice for which it was adapted. Their further reinterpretation, by which strictly melodic criteria were forced to appear applicable to the incommensurable procedures of early church polyphony could not and did not measure up to the task. Finally, their eventual revision in present form, designed as an apology for tonal harmonic practice, notoriously does not succeed either in explaining that practice or in justifying the retention of the hypothetical scheme.¹⁹

Cadzen makes a convincing case in this article for the termination of church mode theory in Anglo-American tune studies. He goes on to suggest that:

¹⁷ Francis Collinson, *The Traditional and National Music of Scotland* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), pp. 19–21.

¹⁸ Bertrand H. Bronson, 'Folksong and the modes', *The Musical Quarterly* 32 (1946): 37–49.

¹⁹ Norman Cadzen, 'A simplified mode classification for traditional Anglo-American song tunes', *yearbook of the International Folk Music Council* (1971): 58–62.

let us begin the examination of tunes and tune families in the framework of the larger systemic structures termed genera, then ... observe first whether and how the 3rd is treated as regards major or minor, and proceed to examine the regular or the fluctuating behaviour of the remaining variables in the formation of *melodic motifs and phrases* [emphasis added].²⁰

What followed the scholars such as Bronson and Cadzen was the reassessment of the entire concept of mode, and a significant re-examination and acknowledgement of other musical cultures, especially within ethnomusicology. In effect Cadzen's suggestions were taken up and in combination with other ideas in the work of scholars of British, Irish and American traditional music, particularly Harold Powers,²¹ Mantle Hood,²² Shapiro,²³ Becker²⁴ and Cowdery,²⁵ there has been a reinvention and expansion of the concept of mode.

Beginning with the work of Mantle Hood²⁶ and others, motif has become central to the ethnomusicological understanding of various global musical traditions, in particular Anne-Dhu Shapiro's analysis of tune families:

Modal nomenclature is largely irrelevant to scholarly research on folk-tunes ... modality is the most variable element of a tune's identity ... The most useful concept is melodic formulae ... the discovery of a few tonal shapes basic to Anglo-American song could then be termed the 'modes' of our oral tradition. These would not really correspond to the modes of Sharp/Bronson because their outlines would be more relevant to actual folk-tunes, than a series of notes arranged in a scale.²⁷

This statement moved thinking on mode away from the scale-type, which was fundamental before her study, and puts the motif (melodic formula) firmly within the rubric of a mode. Most scholars' views of what constitutes a motif generally agree that it has a fundamental *syntactic* function in music; for example, Bayard's²⁸ or Schoenberg's classic definition:

²⁰ Ibid., p. 70.

²¹ Powers and Widdess, 'Mode (V, 1): Middle East and Asia'.

²² Mantle Hood, *The Ethnomusicologist*.

²³ Shapiro, 'The tune-family concept in British-American folk-song scholarship'.

²⁴ Becker, 'The anatomy of a mode'.

²⁵ James Cowdery, *The Melodic Tradition of Ireland* (Ohio: Kent State University, 1990).

²⁶ Mantle Hood, *The Ethnomusicologist*.

²⁷ Shapiro, 'The tune-family concept in British-American folk-song scholarship', Appendix 2.

²⁸ Samuel Bayard, 'Prolegomena to a study of the principal melodic families of British-American folksong', *Journal of American Folklore* 63 (1950): 1-44.

Motive is at any one time the smallest part of a piece or section of a piece that, despite change and variation is recognisable as present throughout ... More specifically motives consist of intervals and rhythmic patterns combined to produce a shape or contour that once recognised, can be easily remembered.²⁹

Schoenberg regarded the motif as primarily rhythmic and contouric, feeling that the potential connection to other motifs (that the listener can hear) is what defines the motif. Bayard thought that the motif was primarily useful for categorization and grouping material. I follow Schoenberg's suggestions and isolate the rhythm and contour of motifs below in my analysis of the 2/4 march repertoire of pipe music. In fact, I suggest that pipers depend upon common motifs for their understanding of the concept of musical *tradition*. If motivic analysis is the most significant aspect of an ethnomusicological approach to modal analysis, then modal analysis can become an analytical approach that helps us to understand musical *tradition*.

Modal Analysis

Like languages, musical systems are learned subliminally and reproduced without effort. The complex structure underlying both language systems and music systems is apparent only to the analyst ... In Burma, it is the modal system which, while seeming to put great restraints upon the artist, actually frees him to practice his art.³⁰

In Becker's analysis, the Burmese modal system and its necessity for artists supports the idea of an underlying syntactic musical system that underlies what is often called the musical tradition. By exploring the modal system of Scottish competition piping, the present work will show how this 'subliminal' music system has shaped the characteristic sound of bagpipe marches.

In the canon of tunes I have identified nine different modes with different pitch sets: A pentatonic, A hexatonic, A heptatonic, A minor mode, A/G mode, A/G heptatonic, B/A mode, D/A mode and E minor mode. The A pentatonic, A hexatonic and A heptatonic modes all share largely the same motivic attributes; I label them the A modes, making up one of two *modal complexes*. The A minor mode and the A/G mode share other characteristics and make up a different modal complex; I have labelled this the double-tonic modal complex. The other modes are distinctly different, having different tonal centres and motifs. The player-analyst recognizes that the essential personality of a tune lies in its motivic usage,

²⁹ Quoted in Lawrence M. Zbikowski, 'Musical coherence, motive and categorization', *Journal of Music Perception* 17/1 (Fall 1999): 6-8.

³⁰ Becker, 'The anatomy of a mode', p. 278.

because motifs emerge from the fingers, whereas the pitch hierarchy results from a visual analysis.

Bagpipe music enjoys a limited number of pitch sets. Many tunes use a single pitch set for the entire tune. Most tunes are hexatonic, a smaller number are pentatonic and fewer still are heptatonic.³¹ Some tunes use two pitch sets that are played against each other; these are sometimes labelled ‘double-tonic’³² or ‘bi-tonal’.³³ Double-tonic tunes use primary and subsidiary (or secondary) pitch sets and one third of all the tunes in the canon are double tonic tunes.³⁴ The two pitch sets are centred around two different tonal-centres, usually one tone apart: A and G, for example.

Analysis of pitch hierarchies of related tunes exposes the musical diversity in the canonical repertoire because it shows that many tunes can be in the same mode and share a body of core motifs, yet at the same time be different in their musical nature through the emphasis of different notes in a common pitch set. The establishment of the pitch hierarchy of each tune involved more than simply counting notes and their relative durations. This analysis involved the use of my own musical experience and judgement in order to determine the specific hierarchy of each tune (shown generally in Table 12.1, and individually in Table 12.2).

The importance of the pitch hierarchy is not as significant to mode as the motivic usage in a tune, because hierarchies only offer an abstract reduction of a tune – useful for categorization, but which do not tell us much about the music. For example, in the tune ‘The 74th Highlanders Farewell to Edinburgh’ (Example 12.1), the tune is an A pentatonic tune, although the tune uses seven notes in total. In this tune I suggest a hierarchy of ABCEF(DG), where A is the most important note and F the least significant in the hierarchy. The D and G notes are shown in brackets because they are only ever used as inconsequential passing notes and do not form part of the pitch hierarchy of this tune.

³¹ Three tunes in this canon are genuinely heptatonic.

³² This term appears to have been coined by a piping friend of Francis Collinson (*Traditional and National Music of Scotland*, p. 26).

³³ Frans Buisman, ‘The system of modes in ceòl mòr: some of its applications and consequences’, *Proceedings of the Piobaireachd Society Conference* (Glasgow: The College of Piping, 1992): 2, and ‘Melodic relationships in pibroch’, *British Journal of Ethnomusicology* 4 (1995), pp. 17–39. For further research into the double-tonic structure, see also Roderick D. Cannon, ‘English bagpipe music’, *Folk Music Journal* 2/3 (1972): 176–219 and ‘A note on the construction of even-lined piobaireachd’, *Piping Times* 48/1 (1995): 29–35; R.L.C. Lorimer, ‘Studies in pibroch, 1’, *Scottish Studies* 6 (1962): pp. 1–21 and ‘Studies in pibroch, 2’, *Scottish Studies* 7 (1964): pp. 45–79; Peter Cooke, ‘The pibroch repertory: some research problems’, *Proceedings of the Royal Music Association* 102 (1976): 93–102; and John M. Ward, ‘The Lancashire Hornpipe’ in L. Lockwood and E. Rosner (eds), *Essays in Musicology: a Tribute to Alvin Johnson* (Brunswick, ME: American Musicological Society, Inc., 1990), pp. 140–73.

³⁴ 21 of the 64 tunes use double-tonic structures.

Example 12.1 First part of ‘The 74th Highlanders Farewell to Edinburgh’
(CD track 21).



Examples can be seen in different modes. For instance, the pitch hierarchy of ‘The Abercairney Highlanders’ is ACEF(BD) and GBD(AC), contrasted with Angus Campbell’s ‘Farewell to Stirling’, which is ACEB(DF) and GBD(EA). Both tunes are in the A/G mode (Example 12.2) but are contrasted largely through melodic movement.

Example 12.2 Contrasting pitch hierarchies showing compositional emphasis of different notes to produce different effects in the same mode: ‘The Abercairney Highlanders’ and ‘Angus Campbell’s Farewell to Stirling’ (the latter CD track 22).

The Abercairney Highlanders (first 8 bars)



Angus Campbell's Farewell to Stirling



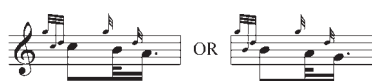
Analysis of the entire canon of tunes shows that hierarchies are by no means concrete in each mode. It is the lesser notes of the hierarchy that are variable, while the more central notes of each are always present. This further emphasizes the unsuitability of using key signatures in bagpipe music because of the hierarchical relationships implied by the diatonicism. The accepted importance of the tonic, dominant and subdominant in diatonic music does not match the pitch hierarchies

in the canon of tunes discussed here and shown in full in Table 12.2 at the conclusion of this paper.

The motif is the smallest level at which pipers' musical comprehension and composition begin. In examining the motifs that exist in the canon of competition marches, it becomes clear that they are tightly controlled by the temporal and performance conventions of the march form. Normally, each phrase is two bars long and the time signature is 2/4; therefore each phrase contains four beats. The function of each phrase in providing the musical format for question and resolution, combined with the physical tradition of marching while playing the tune, has imposed strict rhythmical patterns that are rarely deviated from. This involves a concentration on the on-beat in performance as this is when the foot hits the floor, and the crotchet as the normal length for each distinct motif. Pipers still march up and down during a performance of a march, so that the musical emphasis is physically reinforced by the foot falling. Evidence for this emphatic on-beat can be seen and heard in competition performance where the on-beat is particularly stressed, typical motivic rhythms are simple, and there is rarely (if ever) deviation from these archetypal rhythms. There are no occurrences in the solo canon of triplets, for example, or of subdivisions of the crotchet beyond demisemiquavers.

The first motif I researched was the three-note motif, which I labelled the CBA motif, which also occurs around a tonic of G as the BAG motif (Example 12.3). It is the most widespread motif in the canon, undoubtedly because it is so obvious a motif and sits so well on the fingers:

Example 12.3 CBA and BAG motifs.



The CBA or BAG motif illustrates well the typical behaviour of these motifs that occur around the tonics of A and G, and thus pitch can be abstracted, leaving the motif with identical rhythm and contour as a 3–2–1 falling motif (Example 12.4).

Example 12.4 Pitch removed from the CBA and BAG motifs to leave rhythm and contour abstracted as the 3–2–1 falling motif.



This *rhythm-contour* motif is the most common of all the modes I investigated, and is found in 27 of the 64 marches in the canon, sometimes up to four or five times in each tune. Some motifs, such as this one, can be found in many tunes and are therefore common or shared. These add to the sense of a melodic tradition in

a tune and signal to the performer that the march is based upon other tunes in a tradition. In other words, pipers subliminally learn the motivic content of various modes through their training in the canonical repertoire and this underpins their aesthetic conception of the musical tradition. This research shows that certain motifs are exclusive to individual modes, and can be said to define the mode. The motifs are given real musical meaning by their function in the tune, and the 3–2–1 motif is used to *emphasize* or *link* musical phrases. This can be illustrated with the famous G.S. MacLennan tune, ‘The Lochaber Gathering’:

Example 12.5 First part of ‘The Lochaber Gathering’.



Here it can be seen to occur on the first beat of the tune, on the most accented down beat of the phrase, and in practice this note is particularly emphasized, much more so than is shown in the above example, almost to a crotchet length in some performances. Here the motif is acting as an *emphatic* motif. In all tunes, the important note in this motif is the first note (either C or B depending upon the tonic of the section) and this is stressed. In the case of ‘The Lochaber Gathering’, this helps the rising (and thus questioning) contour of the first phrase. This emphatic function, like the other functions of the motifs, is crucial to the experience of playing and hearing these pipe tunes. The emphatic nature of that beat is part of the overarching effect of the tune that players construct differently in every performance, and it is this *meaning* of the motivic content that offers a possible way forward for more nuanced understandings of the performance of traditional music. Meaning is constructed by the listener and motivic content, and how it is performed, will mean more to a more experienced (emic) listener whose semantic understanding of music grows in tandem with their aural experience.

Another of the most common motifs in traditional bagpipe music is the emphatic rising and falling motif that follows the rhythm and contour shown in Example 12.6:

Example 12.6 The rising and falling emphatic motif.



Most commonly this motif occurs around the notes A or G and it is used to emphasize these notes in nine tunes around A and in three tunes around G. This is a common building-block motif as it occurs in different modes and is used to

emphasize the key notes of A or G and sometimes E. It agrees strongly with the drones by reinforcing the note A and lends a feeling of strength to many tunes. We can see its use in the seventh bar of ‘The Braes of Brecklet’:

Example 12.7 First part of ‘The Braes of Brecklet’ (CD track 23).



In this case the motif is being used to emphasize the A structural tone at the beginning of the last phrase of each part of the tune, but more ingenious is how its composer, Willie Lawrie, produced a reflection of the motif in the structural tones of the tune. Abstracting the structural tones of this part gives the skeleton of the tune:

Example 12.8 The structural tones of the first part of ‘The Braes of Brecklet’.



Looking at these structural tones for the first part of ‘The Braes of Brecklet’, we can see how in an aurally developed tradition the motivic content is manipulated on two levels to produce tunes that have complex structures that reinforce the melodic identity of the tradition: in the last two bars of Example 12.8 the structural tones show the same motif underlying the last two bars and on the surface of the tune on the first beat of bar 7 (in Example 12.7). This is one of many examples of this type of interrelationship in the piping tradition that, for me, reflect the genius of the individual composers of pipe music and their complex, often non-verbalized, understandings of the tradition.

One more readily found emphatic motif embedded in the bagpipe repertoire is the 5–1–3–1 motif, which is in fact common to much Scottish traditional music:

Example 12.9 The 5–1–3–1 emphatic motif.



This motif is used in 19 of the total 64 tunes in the form EACA in the canon, often repeatedly to emphasize the note E, which is often stressed by pipers. When it is played as the DGBG motif, it appears in eight different tunes.

An important feature of competition pipe marches is the increasing melodic density of the tune as it develops; this motif is often used in the third and fourth parts in this way. For example, in the tune ‘Leaving Glenurquhart’ (Example 12.10), the motif has the same function as the ECA motif used in bar 1 of the second part, but in the fourth part the EACA motif is used in the identical position to emphasize the note E. However, it lends a greater melodic density than in the second part, which adds to the sense of melodic development throughout the tune. When the motif is realized as the DGBG motif, it is *exclusively* used in the double tonic modal complex, appearing in 8 of the 18 double-tonic tunes in the canon of marches. It has the same function of emphasizing the fifth degree of the pitch set and it can be seen in tunes such as ‘The Duchess of Edinburgh’, ‘The Rosshire Volunteers’, ‘Colin Thompson’ and ‘The Pap of Glencoe’.

Example 12.10 ‘Leaving Glenurquhart’, second and fourth parts.

Second part

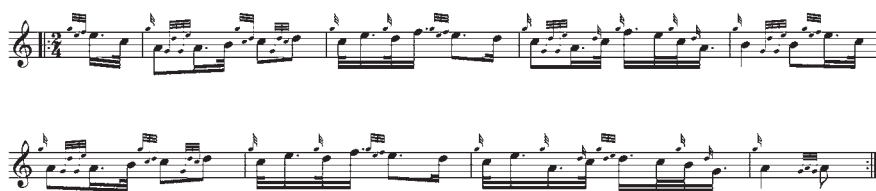


Fourth part



Another common motivic function is to link together two musical phrases, therefore musically holding the tune together. I term these motifs *linking motifs*, and they do this by sounding unresolved against the drone and thereby emphasizing more dissonant intervals in order to fulfil their function. For example, the FECA linking motif is characteristic of the A modal complex and is used in 12 of the tunes in the canon of marches to link the second phrase of the tune into the structural tone of B at the end of bar 4, such as in ‘The Laird of Luss’:

Example 12.11 ‘The Laird of Luss’, first part.



In performance, the initial F is often heavily stressed, enabling the player to demonstrate the descending cadential feeling that arises from the falling fifth. Other motifs used in this way in the canon of marches include the EDCA and ECBA linking motifs. For examples of their use in tunes, see ‘The 74ths Farewell to Edinburgh’ and ‘Kantara to El Arish’, which display well this characteristic cadential use of the linking motifs.

Conclusion

Table 12.1 gives a summary of the modal analysis of the canon of 2/4 competition pipe marches. The nine individual modes fall into two modal complexes that share sophisticated modal characteristics and three other modes which are rare, and do not have interrelated attributes with other modes. The key concept to arise in this research is that both of the modal complexes outlined have unique and distinct motifs that define them. This shows that composers consciously, or unconsciously, employ a complex framework (based on their understanding of the tradition acquired through years of exposure) on which to develop their creative ideas. Thus, the notion of an aurally developed musical tradition can be analysed and discussed to reveal the building blocks of the tradition. That these building blocks are motifs places this musical tradition into a wider context of aural traditions ranging from epic poetry to the varied modal traditions of South-East Asia, and for me, places Scottish piping into a global musical context of related modal traditions.

The further usefulness of this modal analysis as an analytical tool is in the relationship of motivic content to the aesthetic meaning of a performance. Importantly, this type of analysis is a rejection of older analytical concepts such as the church mode theory, or analyses of scale types or structures. Motivic analysis has far more relevance to the performers and musical understandings of bagpipe music, which makes it a much more useful tool for understanding traditional music. Furthermore, motivic analysis could allow further assessment of the relatedness of modal traditions (such as the Irish and Scottish piping traditions) and, motivically, how this is reflected in the meaning of the tunes to performers. This type of modal analysis, which is enriched and confirmed by field research, can provide more profound understandings about what it means to be a traditional musician and what it means to perform this music.

Table 12.1 A summary of the modal analysis of the canon of 2/4 competition pipe marches.

Modal complex	Modes	Typical pitch sets (with first two significant structural tones)	Motifs exclusive to particular modes	Tune example
'A' modal Complex	A pentatonic	A B C E F (GD)	F E C A; E C B A;	<i>Captain Campbell of Drumavolsk</i>
	A hexatonic	A B C E D F (G)	hA E C E; F E C E	<i>The 71st Highlanders</i>
	A heptatonic	A B C E D F G		<i>The young MacGregor</i>
Double tonic modal complex	A minor mode	AEGBD(F) ³⁶	D G B G; E F hG E;	<i>Colin Thompson</i>
	A/G mode ³⁷	ACEBFD(BDFG) & GBDEA(ACEF) N.B. This body of double tonic tunes has no fixed pattern of structural tones.	E D C A; A B grip C D; B A G; D B G; D G B D	<i>Abercairney Highlanders</i>
--	B/A mode	BFCEA & AECFB(BG)	insufficient number of tunes in canon of marches.	<i>The 91st at Modder River</i>
--	D mode	DAFBG & ABCEG(DF)	(as above)	<i>Mrs MacDonald of Dunach</i>
--	E minor mode	EDGABF	(as above)	<i>The Royal Scottish Piper's Society</i>

³⁵ The A minor mode is very similar to the A/G mode as they are both double tonic modes, the main difference being the absence of the note C in the A minor mode. However, *The Edinburgh City Police Pipe Band* and *The Renfrewshire Militia* do use the note C; the former tune employing it once almost as an accidental to highlight the finishing of the tune and the latter tune uses it as a passing note in the first and last parts. I still feel that these tunes because of their character can be classed as A minor mode tunes.

³⁶ There is also one tune which I feel is genuinely in an A/G heptatonic mode. This is *Mrs John MacColl* a very popular march, perhaps there are other tunes in other genres, which are in this double tonic arrangement but use the full scalar potential?

Table 12.2 Canon of 2/4 competition marches, including mode and pitch hierarchy.

MARCH	COMPOSER	BOOK	MODE	PITCH HIERARCHY
71st Highlanders	Hugh MacKay	Scots Guards Bk 1	A hexatonic	ABCDEF(G)
74ths Farewell to Edinburgh	Major W. MacKinnon	Donald MacLeod Bk 2	A pentatonic	ABCEF (DhG)
91st at Modder River, The	Archie MacNab/ W. Robb	P/M A.MacDonald's coll. Vol. 2	B/A mode	BFCEA & AFECB(G)
Abercairney Highlanders, The	A. MacKay	Scots Guards vol. 1	A/G mode	ACEF(BD) & GBD(AC)
Angus Campbell's Farewell to Stirling	Hugh MacKay	Donald MacLeod Bk 1	A/G mode	ACEB(DF) & GBD(EA)
Angus Morrison of Locheynort	Donald Morrison, Aberdeen	Piping Times vol. 39 no. 6	A hexatonic	ABCED(F)
Argyllshire Gathering, The	John MacColl	(from aural memory of author)	A/G mode	ACEB(FDG) & GBDE(CA)
Arthur Bignold of Lochrosque	John MacColl	Willie Ross Bk 4	A/G mode	ACEB(FD) & GBDE(C)
Bonnie Ann	traditional	Willie Ross Bk 1	A/G mode	ACEF(DB) & GBD(ACEF)
Braes of Brecklett, The.	Willie Lawrie	Willie Ross Bk 4	A pentatonic	ABCEF(DG)
Braes of Castle Grant, The.	D. Macdonald and G.S. MacLennan	Scots Guards Bk 2	A hexatonic	ABCEFD(G)
Brigadier-General Cheape of Tioran	D. Galbraith	Willie Ross Bk 1	A/G mode	ACE(BDF) & GBD(C)
Captain Campbell of Drumavoisk	Willie Ross	Willie Ross Bk 3	A pentatonic	ABECFG
Captain Carswell	Willie Lawrie	Scots Guards vol. 2	A minor mode	AGEBDF
Clan MacColl, The	John MacColl	Willie Ross Bk 2	A/G mode	ACEDF(GB) & GBDE(C)
Clan MacRae Society, The	Willie Fergusson	Archie Cairns Bk 1	A pentatonic	ABECF(G)
Colin Thomson	R Campbell	Willie Ross Bk 3	A minor mode	AGEDB(F)
Conundrum, The	P/M P.R.MacLeod	Scots Guards Bk 2	A pentatonic	ABCEF(GD)
Crag of Stirling, The	Hugh MacKay	Willie Ross Bk 2	A/G mode	ACED(BF) & GBDE(CA)
Doctor E.G. MacKinnon	P/M P.R.MacLeod	Edcath Collection Bk 2	A hexatonic	ABCEFD(G)
Donald MacLean's Farewell to Oban	Archibald MacNeill	Cairngorm Collection Bk 2	A hexatonic	ABCEFD(G)

MARCH	COMPOSER	BOOK	MODE	PITCH HIERARCHY
Donald MacLellan of Rothesay	Donald MacLeod	Donald MacLeod Bk 6	B/A mode	BFCAE & AFEC(B)
Duchess of Edinburgh, The	trad? (arr. Willie Ross?)	Willie Ross Bk 3	A/G mode	ACEBF(D) & GBD(AF)
Dugald MacColl's Farewell to France	John MacColl	Cairngorm Collection Bk 2	A/G mode	ACEDF(BG)&GBDA(FC)
Duke of Roxburgh's Farewell, The	Angus Mackay	Donald MacLeod Bk 2	A pentatonic	ACGEB(F)
Edinburgh City Police Pipe Band, The	R Campbell	John Wilson Bk 1	A minor mode	AGEBD(CF)
Glenfinnan Highland Gathering, The	Ronald Lawrie	John MacFadyen Bk 1	A hexatonic	AECFBD(G)
Highland Wedding, The	traditional	Willie Ross Bk 1	A hexatonic	ABCEFD
Hills of Kintail, The	Donald MacLeod	Donald MacLeod Bk 6	A minor mode	AGBDEF
Hugh Kennedy M.A., B.Sc.	P/M P.R.MacLeod	Edcath Collection Bk 1	A/G mode	ACEBF(D) & GBDE(CA)
Inveran	George S. McLennan	George McLennan's coll.	A pentatonic	ABCEF(DG)
Jeannie Caruthers	John MacColl	Seumas MacNeill Part 1	A/G mode	ACEFB(DG) & GEDB(C)
John MacColl's March to Kilbowie Cottage	Willie Lawrie	Cairngorm Collection Bk 2	A pentatonic	ABCEF(G)
John MacDonald of Glencoe	Willie Lawrie	Seumas MacNeill Part 1	A/G mode	ACEF(DG) & GBDE(C)
John MacDonald's Welcome to South Uist	D. MacMillan	John MacFadyen Bk 1	A hexatonic	ABCEFD
John MacFadyen of Melfort	John MacColl	Seumas MacNeill Part 1	A hexatonic	ABCDEF(G)
John MacMillan of Barra	Norman MacDonald	Donald MacLeod Bk 1	A pentatonic	ABCEF(D)
Kantara to El Arish	Willie Fergusson	Willie Ross Bk 1	A hexatonic	ABCDEF(G)
Knightswood Ceilidh, The	Donald MacLeod	Donald MacLeod Bk 4	A minor mode	AGBDE(F)
Laird of Luss, The	A.M. Ross	Willie Ross Bk 3	A hexatonic	ACEDFB(G)
Leaving Glenurquhart	W. MacDonald	Willie Ross Bk 5	A hexatonic	ABCDEF(G)
Leaving Lunga	J. Gordon	Willie Ross Bk 5	A hexatonic	ABCDEF(G)
Lonach Gathering, The	W. Grant	Willie Ross Bk 2	A hexatonic	ABCDEF(G)
Lord Alexander Kennedy	John Honeyman	Willie Ross Bk 2	A hexatonic	ADB FEC(CG)
MacLean of Pennycross	P/M A Fergusson	Willie Ross Bk 4	A hexatonic	ABCDEF(G)

MARCH	COMPOSER	BOOK	MODE	PITCH HIERARCHY
Major Manson's Farewell to Clachantrushal	P/M D. MacLean	Scots Guards Vol. 2	A pentatonic	ABCEF(DG)
Millbank Cottage	W.D. Dumbreck	Willie Ross Bk 4	A hexatonic	ABCEFG
Miss Elspeth Campbell	T. Douglas	Willie Ross Bk 5	A/G mode	ACEF(DG) & GBDE(A)
Mrs John MacColl	John MacColl	Seumas MacNeill Part 2	A/G heptatonic	ACDEF(G) & GBDEF(C)
Mrs MacDonald of Dunach	Willie Lawrie	Scots Guards Vol. 2	D/A mode	DAFBG() & ABCEG(DF)
P/M John Stewart	George S. McLennan	John MacFadyen Bk 2	A hexatonic	ABCDEF(G)
P/M Wm MacLean	P/M P.R. MacLeod	John Wilson Bk 1	A hexatonic	ACEFBD(G)
Pap of Glencoe, The	Willie Lawrie	John MacFadyen Bk 1	A/G mode	ACED(FG) & DGBEF(C)
Renfrewshire Militia, The.	P/M J. MacKay	Willie Ross Bk 5	A minor mode	AGBDEF(C)
Ross-shire Volunteers, The	John Connon	Willie Ross Bk 3	A/G mode	ACEFB(D) & DBGA
Royal Scottish Piper's Society	R. Campbell	Willie Ross Bk 4	E minor mode	EAGDBF
South Hall	P/M John MacLellan D.C.M.	John MacFadyen Bk 1	A hexatonic	ACEDBF(G)
Stirlingshire Militia, The	Hugh MacKay	Willie Ross Bk 1	A pentatonic	ABECF(G)
Stornoway Highland Gathering	The Competing Pipers	Donald MacLeod Bk 2	A hexatonic	ABCDEF(G)
Taking of Beaumont Hamel, The.	P/M J. MacLellan D.C.M.	Scots Guards Vol. 2	A pentatonic	ABCEF(DG)
Urquhart Castle	Donald MacLeod	Gordon Highlanders Vol. 1	A/G mode	ACEF(B) & GBDEF(A)
William MacDonald	N. MacPherson	Donald MacLeod Bk 5	A heptatonic	ABCDEFG
Willie Gray's Farewell to the Glasgow Police	John MacDonald?	College of Piping Tutor part 3	A pentatonic	ABCEF(DG)
Young MacGregor, The	John MacGregor Murray	Willie Ross Bk 3	A heptatonic	ABCDEFG

In conclusion I would like to pay tribute to Dr Peggy Duesenberry (my PhD supervisor) who, through a considerable period of illness, supervised me and enabled me to see my own musical tradition in new and exciting ways previously unimagined. Peggy, along with Jo Miller and Dr Rita McAllister, were directly responsible for the introduction of an undergraduate degree in Scottish traditional music at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama which I (and others) have benefited hugely from, and which represents a major step forward in Scottish cultural life. Dr Gary West and Dr James Porter also made an invaluable contribution to this study and helped shape my thinking. I would also like to thank my teachers and fellow pipers who share in and teach me about this fantastic music. The time needed for this study would not have been possible without the considerable financial generosity of many trusts, grants and individuals, principal among whom I would like to acknowledge: The Musician's Benevolent Fund Education Awards, Mr Robin Fleming and the RSAMD Trust. Finally, I would like to thank my family and friends for their patience and endurance. Correspondence can be addressed to the author at smckerrell@gmail.com.

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Chapter 13

Rhythm in Pibroch: A Return to ‘Maol Donn’

Robinson McClellan

The first time I heard pibroch, I was transfixed. Its peculiar mix of power and vulnerability moved me, and its elusive sense of forward suspension in time fascinated me. Apart from these reactions, I was simply surprised that I had never heard this music before. As a classical composer in today’s multicultural musical environment, I knew creative musicians who cited every kind of influence, from Elizabethan lute music to German heavy metal to Tuvan throat singing. Meanwhile, Hindustani raga and Indonesian gamelan have been formative for several generations of Western musicians. Surely, I thought, pibroch is every bit as compelling as all of these others? Why had only a handful of people, in a musical community always seeking new sources of creative stimulation, ever heard of it? Looking beyond classical music circles as well, I found that within the larger global music community pibroch remains obscure, rarely appearing on world music or even Celtic traditional music charts.

Perhaps some fault lies with Highland bagpiping competitions, the main venue for live pibroch performance during the past 200 years: these barely publicized and sparsely attended events, lasting six hours or more with twenty minutes of ear-wrenching tuning before each performance, are hardly inviting. Or one could blame the fact that pibroch sits uncomfortably between worlds: many traditional Scottish musicians and fans find it too austere or pompous, while ‘serious’ musicians, if they have heard of pibroch at all, tend to dismiss it as a quirky extension of Celtic folk music.

I believe that another important factor has been pipers’ tendency to mythologize pibroch, especially with regard to rhythm. It is common to hear the suggestion that only a properly initiated few can truly appreciate pibroch, and pipers often cite rhythm as the heart of that mystery. A writer in the late nineteenth century felt that pibroch had ‘no rhythm known to European music. It has a prose rhythm – a recitational rhythm – which cannot be expressed by any “time” mark.’¹ While some piping commentators have objected to this view, the idea that pibroch was

¹ Quoted in William Donaldson, *The Highland Pipe and Scottish Society 1750–1950* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 2000), p. 257. Apparently this person was unaware of the many kinds of European music, from Gregorian chant to opera recitativo, with ‘prose’ rhythm.

fundamentally different from other kinds of music had become a basic part of pibroch's 'creation myth' by the early twentieth century.

There were and are reasons for this belief. Since the late eighteenth century, many have feared pibroch to be under continual threat of extinction. Perhaps by placing the music on a pedestal of differentness and inaccessibility, the piping community has sought to protect it. But this view underestimates pibroch's vitality as a musical tradition, which is amply demonstrated in the dedication and skill of a growing worldwide community of pipers. Rather than helping to preserve pibroch, I believe an over-protective attitude has hurt the music, and has limited its influence by isolating it from the wider conversation of world musical cultures.

Peter Cooke's 1972 article 'Problems of Notating Pibroch: a Study of "Maol Donn"' (reprinted as Chapter One of this anthology) clearly laid out the problems of rhythm in pibroch by opening the field to a broader study of pibroch's origins, and by highlighting its relationship to Gaelic song. To me, one of his main accomplishments was to reveal and challenge pipers' tendency to surround pibroch with an air of esotericism and mystery. Cooke's article helped to pave the way for subsequent work by Roderick Cannon, Frans Buisman, William Donaldson, Allan MacDonald, Barnaby Brown and others who have worked to demystify the tradition. Some of these scholars, seeking to combat the prevailing mystification of pibroch, have borrowed aspects of their approach from the HIP (historically informed performance) movement within the classical music tradition, bringing valuable new evidence to bear on the question of pibroch's early rhythmic practices.²

In a similar spirit, the mainstream piping community has sought to make pibroch more approachable for the general listening public: concerts have become more common as an alternative to competitions, making the music more widely available, and commercially recorded teaching sessions by acknowledged masters have helped to reveal pibroch's inner workings for the benefit of a larger audience.³ Again, a large part of this effort has involved clarifying questions of rhythm.

This chapter joins in the effort to present pibroch more accessibly by addressing rhythm in a new way. My approach comes from a kind of dual perspective: while my primary musical training is in Western classical music, I have devoted the past five years to an intensive study of pibroch. Though I have gained some reliable

² Allan MacDonald and Barnaby Brown, on recordings such as *Ceòl na Pìoba – Pìob Mhòr: a Concert of Piobaireachd from the 1999 Edinburgh International Festival* (Greentrax Recordings, 2000); Allan MacDonald, *Dastirum* (Siubhal, 2007); Margaret Stewart and Allan MacDonald, *Colla Mo Rùn* (Greentrax Recordings, 2001) and *Fhuair Mi Pòg* (Greentrax Recordings, 1998).

³ Robert U. Brown and Robert B. Nicol, *Masters of Piobaireachd*, vol. 3 (Greentrax Recordings, 2001); Pipe Major Donald MacLeod, 'The Classic Collection of Piobaireachd Tutorials': in *Canntaireachd, on Practice Chanter and Spoken Word*, vol. 2 (Lismor Recordings, 2001 – present); William Livingstone, *Bill Livingstone: A Piobaireachd Diary*, vol. 1 (Doug Stronach and William Livingstone, 2005); and others.

knowledge of pibroch in the process (for which I am indebted to many experts in the field), I am still new enough to retain a fresh sense of the kinds of confusions a beginner can encounter. Raised in the Western rhythmic idiom of Beethoven, the Beatles and Scotland the Brave, my own assumptions about rhythm have often proved misleading when dealing with pibroch. However, I am far from alone in these faulty assumptions.

In fact, one of the main problems I have found in the study of pibroch is that many of its most influential transcribers and interpreters since the early nineteenth century came to it, as I have done, from outside the pre-nineteenth-century Highland culture in which it first developed (in many cases simply because the cultural-musical context had faded). Sharing my mainstream Western musical background, they have likewise shared many of the same misleading assumptions about pibroch rhythm with which I myself came to the table. As the original knowledge of those who first created the music has grown fainter with history, newer conceptions of rhythm, derived from the mainstream European culture into which pibroch was absorbed, have come to operate in parallel with the older ones. Meanwhile, differences between newer and older perspectives have been ignored or misunderstood. This has led to a tradition in conflict with itself – a conflict, however, that is not always understood or acknowledged in mainstream piping.

Perhaps the biggest challenge facing any newcomer is that an expectation of pibroch's differences, fed by a belief in its exoticism and mystery, has caused many of its practitioners and transcribers to miss basic attributes of rhythm that pibroch actually shares with other musical traditions. At the same time, qualities that make pibroch truly distinctive have sometimes been overlooked.

I hope, therefore, that an account of the problems I have encountered as a student of pibroch rhythm might serve to illustrate difficulties that have long beset the tradition as a whole, and that the solutions I have found might prove helpful to pipers, classical, folk or other musicians, or simply interested listeners, who share my general musical background. Much of what I present may be familiar to experienced pipers, but in the course of my arguments I will build a unified view of pibroch rhythm as I have come to understand it that will, I hope, offer fresh insights for knowledgeable practitioners and newcomers alike.

My arguments assume a basic knowledge of pibroch's history as Cooke presented it, and a familiarity with the tune he examined and to which I bring fresh analysis here, called 'Maol Donn' or alternatively 'MacCrimmon's Sweetheart'. This pibroch makes an ideal representative for study: it is popular among pipers, it represents the best of the tradition, and the problems of rhythm in its sources exemplify those found throughout the tradition. Like Cooke, I focus on the main melodic theme, called the *ùrlar* or 'ground', leaving aside the variations that follow it.

With 'Maol Donn' as a stand-in for the tradition as a whole, I hope to show that pibroch is not the cultish mystery it may at first appear, but that it is like every other great music tradition: fully available for anyone to understand and appreciate, yet also bearing its own profound, compelling and inimitable character.

Two Aspects of Rhythm

To get at the essence of pibroch's rhythmic language, I draw a simple distinction between two components of rhythm in general.

First, to perform and understand music we rely on mental maps of rhythm: beats, events between beats, and the ways they group together. Metre is the conventional way of expressing these maps. For example, 6/8 metre is a hierarchy of rhythmic impulses: borrowing terms from Grosvenor Cooper and Leonard Meyer's book *The Rhythmic Structure of Music*, we can say that a bar of 6/8 is one *rhythmic grouping* divided into two smaller groupings, each of which contains an *accent* followed by two *unaccents*.⁴ Musicians around the world, in oral and literate music traditions alike, can describe these attributes of 6/8 metre (perhaps in different words) and composers can express them in the written symbols of musical notation – bar lines, time signatures, and note values – for performers to interpret. Following Cooper and Meyer, I will call this kind of conceptual abstraction the *rhythmic structure* of music.

Second, every performance brings a particular set of actual sounding durations to that underlying conceptual structure. Taking a given rhythmic structure like 6/8 as a basis, performers have limitless options: they can play with a steady, foot-tapping pulse, or they can stretch some pulses longer while cutting others short. Whatever the performer chooses to do, I call that real-time manifestation the *rhythmic practice* of music.⁵

To make sense of rhythm in pibroch we must begin by identifying its underlying structure of rhythmic accents and groupings. With that conceptual map as a basis, we can then explore how performers interpret that structure to create the actual sound we hear.

⁴ Grosvenor Cooper and Leonard Meyer, *The Rhythmic Structure of Music* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1960), p. 6. According to Cooper and Meyer an *accent* is a 'stimulus (in a series of stimuli) which is *marked for consciousness* in some way'; the perception of accent is influenced by 'duration, intensity, melodic contour, regularity, and so forth' (p. 8); we cannot demonstrate scientifically why a note feels accented – it is a matter of perception and interpretation (p. 9); groupings are either *beginning-accented* or *end-accented* (p. 6), and groupings can overlap in the mind. Although the word *accent* in common usage often refers to emphasis placed on a note via volume or articulation, for Cooper and Meyer it refers specifically to any rhythmically defining moment (a beat), which can occur on any note, loud or soft, or even on a rest. They also distinguish accent from 'stress', a word pipers often use to mean the same thing (p. 8).

⁵ Composer and piper Matthew Welch suggests a division of *rhythmic practice* into two subcategories, wherein 'rhythmic practice' refers only to the conceptual, not the actual treatment of a particular musical moment – how the performer *thinks* of what he or she is doing with the underlying structure (that is, a piper learns to pause on a certain note or to cut another short); the 'rhythmic artifact' is then the actual recorded result in an individual performance of a tune (which may or may not precisely match either the 'structure' or the 'practice').

Uncertain Rhythmic Structure

In tackling the first half of this process – describing the rhythmic structure of any particular pibroch – I have usually encountered two main obstacles. The first is the problem of authority: we must ask, ‘rhythmic structure according to whom?’ In a tradition like Western classical music where literacy is a guiding value, we can usually answer with ‘according to the composer’s score’ (though not always, as music theorists can tell you). In many purely oral traditions, ‘according to the performer’ or ‘according to tradition’ is enough (though again, not always). Of course, every kind of music presents its own conundrums of rhythmic interpretation. But in pibroch the problem runs especially deep.

As Cooke’s Example 1.1 shows so strikingly, any definite knowledge about the intentions of those who first created the tune ‘Maol Donn’ – and by extension, most of the canonical pibroch repertoire – has been lost in its subsequent history of intertwined oral and written transmission.⁶ Of the various versions of ‘Maol Donn’ Cooke presents, two are most accepted by pipers today. First, Archibald Campbell’s widely used collection *The Kilberry Book of Ceol Mor* (Example 13.1a) gives the tune in common time (4/4 metre).⁷ This score is the written basis from which most pipers today will first learn ‘Maol Donn’ (as I can attest). Second, Cooke cites Thomason’s 6/8 version as the ‘most logical’ (of the eight in Example 1.1), judging from evidence in the earlier tradition.⁸ Though Thomason’s score

⁶ Peter Cooke, ‘Problems of notating pibroch: a study of “Maol Donn”’ *Scottish Studies* 16/1 (1972), p. 48. For a detailed history of each transcription in Cooke’s Example 1 (Example 1.1 in the present volume), see Donaldson, *The Highland Pipe and Scottish Society*.

⁷ Archibald Campbell (ed.), *The Kilberry Book of Ceol Mor* (Glasgow: The Piobaireachd Society, 1948), p. 28. Two pieces of earlier evidence confirm Campbell’s metric interpretation: Nether Lorn canntaireachd (a solfège-like system of sung teaching syllables – see Cannon, Chapter 11 in this anthology) shown in Example 13.1a, and the fact that a preceding high G grace note is commonly understood to indicate a rhythmic accent; see Peter Cooke, ‘The Pibroch Tradition and Staff Notation’ in Tokumaru Yoshiko and Yamaguti Osamu (eds.), *The oral and the Literate in Music* (Tokyo: Academia Music, 1986), p. 404.

⁸ Cooke, ‘Problems of notating pibroch’, p. 56. As evidence it is worth emphasizing that, as Cooke points out, accented notes in the variations of ‘Maol Donn’ match those in the 6/8 version of the *ùrlar* (see Example 13.4). The variations, while often presenting their own rhythmic puzzles, can provide vital clues about the rhythmic structure of the *ùrlar*. Cooke’s work with the late piper George Moss also confirms this view, though indirectly: most of Moss’s transcriptions of other pibrochs (Cooke’s work with him did not include ‘Maol Donn’) were written in 6/8 metre. See Peter Cooke (ed.), *Scottish Tradition Series No. 6: Pibroch: George Moss* (Tangent Records and School of Scottish Studies, University of Edinburgh, 1982). As additional indirect evidence, many of the early eighteenth-century pibrochs written for fiddle were notated in 6/8 or 6/4 (see David Johnson, *Scottish Fiddle*

was out of print for much of the twentieth century,⁹ his version is still current in the oral teaching tradition despite the dominance of *The Kilberry Book*: in a teaching session recorded in the late twentieth century, the late Pipe Major Donald MacLeod – one of the most influential pibroch teachers in recent times – offers a 6/8 version that closely resembles Thomason's score (Example 13.1c and CD track 24).¹⁰

Because these 4/4 and 6/8 versions of 'Maol Donn' each have historical evidence in their favour, we can consider them both to be viable within the tradition as a whole. Similar confusion between simple and compound metrical interpretations occurs throughout the repertoire. Therefore the disagreements between just these two metric interpretations – let alone the myriad others in the tradition – make it difficult to avoid Cooke's conclusion that for this and many tunes, an original knowledge about rhythmic structure must have been lost.¹¹

The second obstacle to understanding pibroch's rhythmic structure lies in its sound as performed on the Highland Bagpipe: if the oral and written sources do not give us clear answers about pibroch's underlying accentuation and grouping patterns, its performed durations do little better. This is partly due to the instrument itself: here again, Cooke presents the problem in full, citing the inability of the piper either to break the sound or to add dynamic accentuation to individual notes.¹² But as Cooke rightly points out, bagpipe music for dancing or marching 'makes little' of such problems: by listening alone, one can quickly identify the metre of a march or reel.¹³ So the difficulty in identifying rhythmic structure in pibroch clearly goes beyond the bagpipe. In fact, it must have something specifically to do with the sounding rhythms themselves: pibroch's rhythmic practice.

Music in the Eighteenth Century: A Music Collection and Historical Study (Edinburgh: Mercat Press, 2005), pp. 135–7).

⁹ It has recently become available again, along with other important collections, sold in PDF format by Ceol Sean (ceolsean.com) and Unicorn Limited (scotpress.com).

¹⁰ For the full recording see MacLeod, *The Classic Collection of Piobaireachd Tutorials*, vol. 2. MacLeod's former student Bill Livingstone confirms my 6/8 interpretation of his singing (see below). Whether MacLeod's version derives from Thomason, or whether they both derive from a common earlier source, is open to question. Although MacLeod's sung 'twos' match accents in 6/8, his 'ones' match those in 4/4 (Example 13.1); although this may reflect an influence of *The Kilberry Book*, it is probably just his way of naming the number of pulses in each note.

¹¹ Cooke, 'Problems of notating pibroch', p. 49.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 43. Ornament clusters like those shown via 'tr' or the one preceding the final note in Example 13.1a can simulate dynamic emphasis – though as Cooper and Meyer point out, such emphasis does not automatically correspond to accentuation (*The Rhythmic Structure of Music*, p. 8).

¹³ Cooke, 'Problems of notating pibroch', p. 43.

Normative Rhythmic Practice

In contrast to the diverse conceptions of rhythmic structure in the written sources, pibroch's performed rhythms display remarkable uniformity (though as we will see below, they are not as uniform as they seem at first): in most tunes the duration of any particular note is nearly the same from one performer to the next. Cooke noted this phenomenon in 'Maol Donn', comparing four different performances 'to check for idiosyncratic variations. Apart from notes 2 and 8 [see Example 1.1] ... the differences [in duration] were too small to be worth indicating.'¹⁴ According to piping orthodoxy, this uniformity goes back to pibroch's beginnings, with every nuance of timing having been carried across the centuries from teacher to student via meticulous aural memorization.¹⁵

Though we cannot prove this claim, the consistency of performed rhythm does seem to reach at least to the beginnings of pibroch's audio recording history. Cooke cites a 1927 recording of 'Maol Donn' by an influential pibroch tutor of the time, John MacDonald of Inverness (CD track 2); judging from Cooke's description, MacDonald's version closely resembles those of three subsequent generations of highly regarded pipers (assuming accuracy of transcription in all cases): a transcription made in the 1950s from the playing of Malcolm R. MacPherson,¹⁶ Cooke's 1972 transcription of John MacLellan's rendition¹⁷ and my transcription of a 2004 recording by Donald MacPherson (Example 13.1b).¹⁸ Because these separate performances of 'Maol Donn' are so consistent across 70 years, the durations in any of them can reasonably be said to represent what I will call the tune's *normative* rhythmic practice.

The problem is that these normative durations, by themselves, do not give us enough information to make reliable decisions about the tune's rhythmic structure. In the absence of any previous knowledge, there are many plausible interpretations. I have shown some of them in Example 13.1b above and below the staff. My interpretive marks show the experience of a hypothetical first-time listener who, knowing little or nothing about pibroch, must base impressions of

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 50.

¹⁵ As described in Brown and Nicol, *Masters of Piobaireachd*, vol. 3, track 1 (spoken word).

¹⁶ Roderick Ross (ed.), *Binneas is Borerraig: The Complete Collection* (Glasgow: The Piobaireachd Society, 2003), p. 105.

¹⁷ Cooke, 'Problems of notating pibroch', Example 1.2, p. 48.

¹⁸ Donald MacPherson, *A Living Legend* (Siubhal, 2004). Liner notes with articles by Barnaby Brown, Donald MacPherson, and others. Also see my thesis 'Pibroch rhythm: translating early Gaelic bagpipe music in the twenty-first century' (New Haven: Yale School of Music, 2007). Despite their similar appearance and means of creation, *Binneas* and the other transcriptions cited in Cooke's Example 1.1 differ in a crucial way from both Cooke's and my transcriptions: the former are intended as prescriptive performance scores, while the latter are purely descriptive, created only to aid in listening and analysis.

accentuation and grouping on such immediately audible factors as melodic contour and relative duration rather than on any background knowledge. To show these imagined groupings and accents, I borrow symbols and terms from Cooper and Meyer – in particular their term *primary grouping*, which they define as one accent surrounded by a small number of unaccents.¹⁹ Listening to CD tracks 27, 29, or 30 while reading along with Example 13.1b may give a sense of the many interpretive options open to the listener.

So with ‘Maol Donn’ as a representative example of the tradition, we can summarize by saying that pibroch exhibits a normative rhythmic practice (all pipers use nearly the same durations) laid over an uncertain rhythmic structure (there is little agreement about metre within the tradition as a whole, even if an individual piper may have definite opinions). Together, the three staves in Example 13.1 show this situation as it manifests in the first few phrases of ‘Maol Donn.’ Comparing the tune’s normative performed durations (13.1b) to the two most common ways of conceiving its rhythmic structure (13.1a and 13.1c), we can see the kinds of problems the student of pibroch rhythm will encounter. Scanning vertically in the example for the accentuation and grouping of any individual note shows that each metric interpretation, taken by itself as a guide, resolves many of the uncertainties shown in Example 13.1b. But taken altogether, the various interpretations of the music’s rhythmic structure betray a situation rife with uncertainty.²⁰

About Example 13.1: The analyses below 13.1a and 13.1c reiterate the rhythmic structure already shown by the time signatures and bar lines (structure in the fifth bar of Kilberry is unclear due to unconventional beat divisions). Vertical arrows show points where interpretations of accentuation match. 13.1a is prescriptive performing score, whereas 13.1b and 13.1c are descriptive transcriptions of single recorded performances.

In 13.1c, my notation reflects the following: ‘x’ marks wrong pitches; MacLeod subsequently plays the correct notes on the practice chanter (see 13.2a). In the second full bar he beats two quavers in each of the fourth and fifth quaver positions. Finally, his second-to-last bar has only four pulses, and his sung low G corresponds to the ornament cluster in 13.1a.

Pibroch Without Rhythmic Structure?

Many pipers take that uncertainty as reason to conclude that pibroch lacks rhythmic structure altogether.²¹ This view relies on two of the assumptions that caused me

¹⁹ Cooper and Meyer, *The Rhythmic Structure of Music*, p. 2.

²⁰ In Example 13.1b accent and grouping symbols show two types of uncertainty: that of grouping (brackets overlapping) and that of accent (accent marks overlap vertically with unaccent marks).

²¹ Elsewhere Cooke has also noted this view among some pipers (‘The Pibroch Tradition and Staff Notation’, p. 406).

Example 13.1 'Maol Donn', first three phrases: comparing two metric interpretations (13.1a and 13.1c) with a fixed rhythmic performance practice (13.1b) and its possible interpretations.

- = accent, ~ = unaccent
 tr, ✱ = ornament cluster
 [] = primary grouping

13.1a Copied from *The Kilberry Book of Ceol Mor*

Nether Lorn
 Canntaireachd: 'Hin-dro-o ho-ve-o hin-de-o ho-dro' (etc.)

13.1b Donald MacPherson, pipes, precise transcription

13.1c Donald MacLeod, sung, rough transcription (CD track 24)

MacLeod: 'two one two and 1 2 + 1 2 + 1 2 2 1 2 + 1 2 + 1 2 + 1 2 + 2 + 1 2 + 1 2 + 2 + 2'

'two bars to a phrase': (etc.)

the most confusion as a newcomer: first, that a tune's normative rhythmic practice is a kind of holy grail representing its 'pure' original form, which the oral tradition has accurately preserved since pibroch's beginnings;²² second, that 'normal' music, along with the standard written notation that conveys it, automatically has a regular pulse. Cooper and Meyer echo the latter idea. In their definition, *pulse* is, at least in the abstract, 'a series of regularly recurring, precisely equivalent stimuli,'²³ and *metre* is 'the measurement of the number of pulses between more or less regularly recurring accents ... there can be no meter without an underlying pulse'.²⁴ These definitions fit the experience of many pipers, since 'precisely equivalent stimuli' are so tangibly present in the foot-stomping bagpipe marches and pop music most pipers know from their non-pibroch musical experience. Yet for the same reason, such 'precise equivalence' seems strikingly absent in pibroch.

The problem is that the normative durations of pibroch's rhythmic practice usually do not fit a regular pulse or metre.²⁵ For example, the normative performed duration of the first F sharp²⁶ in 'Maol Donn' – represented in my transcription (Example 13.1b) as a dotted crotchet – conflicts with *Kilberry's* written crotchet in that position in 4/4 metre (13.1a), and MacLeod's sung dotted quaver in 6/8 (13.1c). Confronted everywhere with this type of discrepancy, many pipers conclude that written notation simply cannot capture the irregular, freely floating durations they have so carefully memorized, and therefore that metre – the rhythmic structure implied by bar lines and time signatures – is irrelevant to pibroch.²⁷

The foreword to a 2003 reprint of the score collection *Binneas is Boreraig* articulates this conception, explaining that *Binneas* was, upon its release in 1959,

²² Robert Brown (see Brown and Nicol, *Masters of Piobaireachd*) used the word 'pure' – though he did not necessarily share the view that pibroch lacks rhythmic structure.

²³ Cooper and Meyer, *The Rhythmic Structure of Music*, p. 3.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 4. Although there is rarely a truly 'precisely equivalent' pulse in performances of classical concert music, I believe that first, a regular pulse does act as an abstract guiding principle in the minds of most classical musicians, and second, that conventional notation implies an a priori regularity from which performers may then depart in performance. While this conception of notation may not always have been true in classical music, it is evident at least in twentieth-century practice.

²⁵ Though Allan MacDonald hears a nearly regular, though very slow, beat in most pibroch performance today; see 'The relationship between pibroch and Gaelic song: its implications on the performance style of the pibroch *ùrlar* (with twelve case studies)' (M. Litt thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1995), p. 63. But as Cooke says, even when such a regular pulse *is* arguably present, pibroch's extremely slow tempo obscures the impression of regularity ('Problems of notating pibroch', p. 43).

²⁶ Pipers customarily call F sharp and C sharp simply 'F' and 'C'.

²⁷ Archibald Campbell, the creator of *The Kilberry Book*, used conventional metres but believed that his notation inadequately conveyed rhythm, calling his own scores 'piper's jargon' that require expert tuition to interpret properly (Campbell, *The Kilberry Book*, p. 17). His editorial and notational methods have been called into question by many pipers and scholars, notably by William Donaldson in *The Highland Pipe and Scottish Society*.

'one of the most significant advances in the scoring of piobaireachd', thanks to its 'dropping of bar lines and using a phrase structure in which the duration of the notes is indicated in the usual way without the constraint of "bar" arithmetic.'²⁸ A beginner's tutor booklet by the late Seamus MacNeill (an influential but controversial figure in twentieth-century pibroch), which is still in use (published in 1990 and reprinted in 2002), offers the same outlook and a similar notation method to go with it. The booklet explains that it writes pibroch 'without any bar lines, which makes it look at first just a bit peculiar. [Pibroch] however is what is called "non-mensural" music, which means that it is not played with a regular rhythmic beat such as we use in the light music [marches, reels, etc.].'²⁹

To me this conception of pibroch (echoed by the writer quoted in my introduction, who said that pibroch 'cannot be expressed by any "time" mark') is probably inaccurate, given the abundant evidence in pibroch's historical record for metre of one kind or another, and it is certainly unfruitful for performers and listeners, who are left with a meaningless string of unrelated durations. This view also seems to reinforce pibroch's aura of arcane mystery, which in my opinion has contributed to its obscurity: if pibroch lacks metre, and thus differs from most other music in a fundamental way, then only those who have been properly initiated into its mysteries can genuinely understand it. This attitude can alienate many who might otherwise become appreciative performers and listeners.³⁰

Of course, I should not discount those who, like me, have been attracted by this very same mystique. But the more I have learned, the more convinced I have become that pibroch shares basic aspects of rhythm with most other music. To show how straightforward pibroch can be, while also revealing the qualities that make it idiosyncratic, we must find a better way to make sense of a situation where rhythmic practice is relatively fixed but rhythmic structure, expressed as metre, is present yet open to debate. For me, the solution lies in re-examining the words 'pulse' and 'metre'.

Pulse and Metre in Pibroch

Rather than rejecting all notions of pulse and metre in pibroch, we can simply broaden our definitions of the terms by removing their implication of regularity.

²⁸ Ross (ed.), *Binneas is Borerraig*, p. 1.

²⁹ Seumas MacNeill, *Tutor for the Highland Bagpipe, Part 4: Piobaireachd* (Glasgow: College of Piping, 2002), p. 8. The tune discussed here is 'The Company's Lament'.

³⁰ Two caveats are in order: First, one could defend *Binneas is Borerraig* on the basis of a presumed pragmatic realism: perhaps its creator sought to acknowledge the very real loss of definite knowledge about pibroch's early rhythm structures, and to rescue what he viewed as an authentic normative rhythmic practice from a flawed written tradition. Second, MacNeill's *Tutor* does not wholly reject metre, saying that pibroch 'can be written with bar lines', and that this will be 'misleading' only for beginners, not for experts (*Tutor for the Highland Bagpipe, Part 4*, p. 8).

Cooper and Meyer account for this idea (though they do not discuss it in depth), arguing that ‘rhythm [accentuation and grouping] can exist without there being a regular metre, as it does in the case of Gregorian chant or *recitativo secco* [sung recitation in free speech-rhythm] ... indeed, rhythm is at least theoretically independent of pulse.’³¹ In other words, if we remove the regularity in their definition of pulse (a regularity implicit in notation, even if not always manifest in the performances of those reading from notation), the underlying patterns of grouping and accent remain: rhythmic structure by itself.

We can then see the crucial point: a regular pulse, rather than being inherent in all music, is merely one particular rhythmic practice we can apply to a given metre. Play a tune in 6/8, or any other metre, but with an *irregular* pulse, and you can still call it 6/8.³² Of course, musicians everywhere grasp this point – especially those in solo performance traditions,³³ including many great pipers. Both Donald MacLeod and his student Bill Livingstone (a widely admired piper today) provide beautiful demonstrations of it in ‘Maol Donn.’ Following his sung rendition (Example 13.1c and CD track 24), MacLeod plays the same passage on his practice chanter³⁴ (Example 13.2a and CD track 25). Freed from the steady tapping he applied to his singing (Cooper’s and Meyer’s ‘precisely equivalent pulse’), he now lengthens some notes (marked with square fermatas). The same transformation occurs between Livingstone’s sung and played versions (Examples 13.2b and 13.2c, and CD tracks 28 and 29). The music retains its groupings, accent patterns, and relative durations, but the pulses are no longer precisely equivalent.

About Example 13.2: Horizontal lines in the computer-generated pitch graphs above 13.2a and 13.2c show the exact durations of notes; the lowest line is A, and the highest is F sharp. I have included the durations of ornaments within the durations of the notes they precede (marked in seconds).

A free treatment of rhythmic practice is common in traditions worldwide, and rubato is a well-known form of it in classical music. What can cause confusion for classically trained musicians like me is that in pibroch the irregularity often goes

³¹ Cooper and Meyer, *The Rhythmic Structure of Music*, p. 6.

³² This broad definition of pulse allows us to see that some early pibroch scores with differing metres may actually have been describing the same rhythmic structure: for example, an early eighteenth-century fiddle version of ‘The Battle of Harlaw’ is written in 4/4 with alternating dotted crotchets and quavers (see Johnson, *Scottish Fiddle Music in the Eighteenth Century*, pp. 135–7); without a fixed pulse, this pattern has the same rhythmic structure as a pattern of alternating crotchets and quavers in 6/8: both patterns alternate between *long/accented* and *short/unaccented* notes, and the differences in duration can be a matter of practice rather than structure.

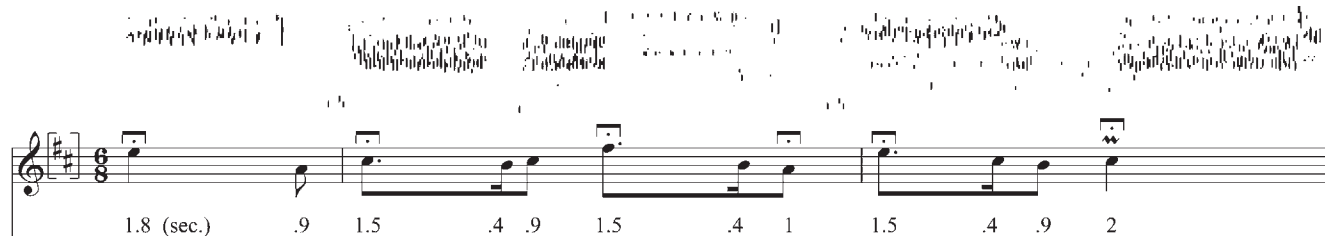
³³ Generally speaking the need for a regular pulse is greatest in two situations: in ensemble music a steady beat helps coordination between performers; and in any sort of music, including solo performance, a regular pulse is useful for accompanying bodily movement such as dance or marching.

³⁴ A bagless version of the melody pipe, used for practice.

Example 13.2 'Maol Donn', first phrase: comparing 6/8 renditions of Donald MacLeod and Bill Livingstone.

13.2a Donald MacLeod, practice chanter, precise transcription (CD track 25)

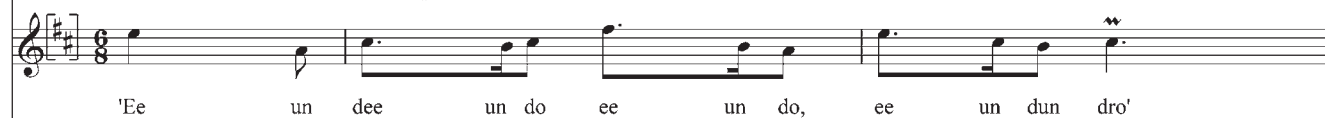
■ = note held longer than notated



1.8 (sec.) .9 1.5 .4 .9 1.5 .4 1 1.5 .4 .9 2

This block contains a precise transcription of Donald MacLeod's practice chanter rendition of the first phrase of 'Maol Donn'. The notation is in 6/8 time, featuring a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a common time signature of 6/8. The melody is written on a five-line staff. Above the staff, there are two rows of waveform-like representations of the sound. Below the staff, a series of numbers indicates the duration of each note in seconds: 1.8 (sec.), .9, 1.5, .4, .9, 1.5, .4, 1, 1.5, .4, .9, and 2. A legend box in the upper right corner indicates that a solid black rectangle represents a note held longer than notated.

13.2b Bill Livingstone, sung, rough transcription (CD track 26)



'Ee un dee un do ee un do, ee un dun dro'

This block contains a rough transcription of Bill Livingstone's sung rendition of the first phrase of 'Maol Donn'. The notation is in 6/8 time, featuring a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a common time signature of 6/8. The melody is written on a five-line staff. Below the staff, the lyrics are written: 'Ee un dee un do ee un do, ee un dun dro'.

13.2c Bill Livingstone, pipes, precise transcription (CD track 27, includes whole ùrlar)



2 (sec.) .7 1.6 .3 .8 1.8 .3 1.5 1.4 .3 .7 2.6

This block contains a precise transcription of Bill Livingstone's pipe rendition of the first phrase of 'Maol Donn'. The notation is in 6/8 time, featuring a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a common time signature of 6/8. The melody is written on a five-line staff. Above the staff, there are two rows of waveform-like representations of the sound. Below the staff, a series of numbers indicates the duration of each note in seconds: 2 (sec.), .7, 1.6, .3, .8, 1.8, .3, 1.5, 1.4, .3, .7, and 2.6.

well beyond what one might ordinarily expect from rubato. In pibroch, one pulse may have two, three or four times the duration of the next – to the extent that, as Barnaby Brown points out, where a seasoned pibroch player might hear 3/4 metre, a musician outside the tradition (or a confused one within it) might hear 4/4.³⁵

For our purposes, then, ‘rhythmic structure’ is merely a way of talking about metre without the implication of metronomic regularity, and ‘rhythmic practice’ is a way of describing what a performer is doing with the pulse. Using these less familiar terms encourages our brains to get away from the problematic and often unconscious assumptions that come with common words like pulse and metre and the written notation to which they are so closely tied. Alternative terminology also lets us discuss the way rhythm functions in pibroch apart from the written tradition by helping us to reimagine the pre-literate conditions in which this music first came into being. But by the same token, these terms permit the use of staff notation in pibroch analysis and teaching with less danger of confusion, because they liberate notation from the misleading implications about pulse that it might otherwise carry (of course, many thoughtful musicians are well aware of such dangers in notation). For me, this simple clarification of familiar words has been the key to my ability to navigate the whole question of rhythm in pibroch.

Rhythmic Ambiguity: Pleasures and Problems

Armed with these expanded definitions of pulse and metre, we can examine another common way in which pipers have come to understand rhythm in pibroch. Many not only accept the presence of metre, but are also quite comfortable with the uncertainty surrounding it. Beneath a relatively rigid surface of performed durations, different interpretations of rhythmic structure can freely overlap in pipers’ minds without changing the sound of the music much, if at all. This is of course abetted by the bagpipe’s uniform timbre and articulation. In such a sonic environment, tiny differences in duration can drastically affect our interpretation of metre. This kind of delicate interplay, between subtle differences in rhythmic practice and the interpretation of rhythmic structure, is the essence of rhythmic ambiguity in pibroch.

For such ambiguity to be possible, pipers must have a fairly relaxed conception of the relationship between written and played durations – relaxed, at least, compared to what most classically trained musicians (speaking as one) might expect.³⁶ Donald MacPherson (Example 13.1b) agrees to the use of 6/8 as a written

³⁵ Barnaby Brown, liner notes to Donald MacPherson, *A Living Legend* (Siubhal, 2004), p. 20. See ‘The Blue Ribbon’ and footnote 75 below. In many cases the lengthening takes place on the final note of a grouping, perhaps reflecting a ‘breath’ or phrase break taking place in the piper’s mind which is of course not heard, given the pipes’ continuous sound. See Livingstone’s comment below regarding the second low A in ‘Maol Donn’.

³⁶ A loose relationship between written and played rhythms is common outside modern classical music. Jazz lead sheets provide a general guide from which performers

listening guide for his recording, but like most pipers today cites the *Kilberry Book's* 4/4 score as his written reference.³⁷ Only a bewildered outsider will find any conflict here: for a great piper like MacPherson, the discrepancy simply does not affect his ability to convey the music successfully. Bill Livingstone offers a perspective he learned from Donald MacLeod that neatly bypasses all of the problems of interpretation I have discussed. As Livingstone puts it, 'many tunes have both simple [4/4 or 2/4] and compound [6/8 and similar] rhythms in them, sometimes within the same line of music.'³⁸

Such comfort with ambiguity often extends to a genuine appreciation of it. Piping historian and Piobaireachd Society editor Roderick Cannon describes playing tunes 'in the full consciousness of both [rhythmic interpretations]', and calls such ambiguity 'part of the pleasure of listening'.³⁹ Even the listener with little or no previous knowledge of pibroch can revel in kaleidoscopic, overlapping interpretations of its rhythmic structure. On a recent piping blog, an enthusiastic listener called pibroch a 'puzzle for your ears ... rich and powerful, inspirational, emotional, and mind-altering'.⁴⁰

A close look at pibroch's rhythmic ambiguity reveals many of the quirks that give this music its rhythmic character. To begin with, the uniformity I have cited in pibroch's normative rhythmic practice is not absolute. As Cooke points out, the first two pitches 'A' in 'Maol Donn' ('notes 2 and 8') vary significantly in the four performances he describes.⁴¹ This phenomenon is neither accidental nor unusual; pipers will often argue that a particular note should differ in length from what a certain score dictates, or from other pipers' interpretations. Donald MacLeod's and Bill Livingstone's durations on the second A are both noticeably longer than either Donald MacPherson's (Example 13.1.b) or John MacDonald's (as Cooke describes it). MacLeod's practice chanter version of this A (Example 13.2a and CD track 25) is slightly longer than other notes in corresponding metrical positions, such as the first A and the second C sharp.⁴² Livingstone bears out his teacher's subtle suggestion: as he explains it, the 'compound rhythm of the tune ... is really broken

are expected to depart, often dramatically. Baroque-era classical musicians probably took a similar approach (see Bruce Haynes's discussion of descriptive and prescriptive notation in *The End of Early Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 106).

³⁷ Barnaby Brown, liner notes to *A Living Legend*, pp. 158–60.

³⁸ Livingstone, *Bill Livingstone: A Piobaireachd Diary*, vol. 1, track 1 (transcription of spoken word).

³⁹ In conversation during a Glasgow conference, 31 May 2007.

⁴⁰ Fred Coulson, blog entry dated 22 June 2006. (<http://www.phlonx.com/blog/fred/index.php/2006/06/22/jacobite-piobaireachd>).

⁴¹ Cooke, 'Problems of notating pibroch', p. 50.

⁴² To my ear, this lengthening includes the quick breath he takes at that point in his sung version (Example 13.1c and CD track 24).

only by an elongated low A which sort of separates the phrases;⁴³ in his sung version (Example 13.2b and CD track 26) he, like MacLeod, breathes after the second A, and elongates the note itself. We hear this lengthening in his rendition on the pipes (Example 13.2c and CD track 27).⁴⁴

Such small differences in timing point to the delicate way in which written and oral modes have intertwined over the course of pibroch's history. For example, if an influential teacher a few generations ago such as Calum MacPherson taught the tune in 6/8 (according to Cooke, this interpretation can be traced to this famous late nineteenth century teacher⁴⁵), and if he (hypothetically) added a slight pause on that A (as Donald MacLeod did), its longer duration may have led future transcribers to assume that the note should receive an accent (since the mind tends to assign accent to notes of longer duration). The note being perceived as an accent might in turn have led to the perception of it as the downbeat of a bar, which became crystallized in print in *The Kilberry Book* (Example 13.1a). Then, perhaps many more pipers, encouraged by widespread use of *The Kilberry Book* and the full crotchet it gives that note, lengthened it slightly more. Although parts of this example are hypothetical, the same kind of circular problem of influence between oral and written transmission, where performed durations lead to changes in the transcriptions from which pipers play and scores in turn influence playing styles, occurs throughout the repertoire.

The most often-discussed problem of this type involves the initial long E, a feature of many tunes including 'Maol Donn'.⁴⁶ Whereas many early scores write the E as a grace note ornament (see Cooke's Example 1.1), more recent scores make it the first rhythmic accent in some tunes. This process creates a reversal in accentuation, where a note formerly understood as a brief, unaccented introductory ornament becomes elongated to twice or more the length of the accented downbeat that follows it (for the early composers, some tunes probably did begin with a long, rhythmically accented E acting as a true melody note rather than as an ornament; but today we cannot always tell which kind of E it is 'supposed' to be). Such reversals are not uncommon in music generally speaking, but usually some other aspect of the music allows the listener to perceive the intended accentuation; the

⁴³ Livingstone, *Bill Livingstone: A Piobaireachd Diary*, vol. 1, track 1. His phrase division agrees with Cooke's Example 1.2.

⁴⁴ Livingstone sheds light on what I describe as pibroch's normative rhythmic practice over uncertain metre. He describes learning 'Maol Donn': 'basically the notion I got from John [Wilson, in 1969] is what I continue to play today [2005]' (ibid.). But he found himself tapping his foot to 'a rhythm I perceived in the piece', which turned out to be the 6/8 Donald MacLeod favours. When Livingstone later studied with MacLeod, his earlier sense of the tune's underlying rhythmic structure was confirmed, but that did not require him to change the note durations he had learned from Wilson much, if at all.

⁴⁵ Cooke, 'Problems of notating pibroch', p. 52.

⁴⁶ For further discussion see Cooke, 'Problems of notating pibroch', p. 49; MacDonald, 'The relationship between pibroch and Gaelic song', p. 79 and elsewhere.

uniform timbre of the bagpipe, however, erases any such context clues (except for ornaments which, as discussed above in footnote 12, can mimic dynamic accentuation).

Reversals in our perception of accent can affect our sense of pibroch's basic rhythmic 'feel.' Heard in 4/4, 'Maol Donn' is a series of *short*-long 'Scotch snaps'. Roderick Cannon points out that historically the accent probably fell on 'the first note of the three note motif of [sung syllables] "hin-de-o", ['hin' is the infamous second A on the downbeat of *Kilberry's* second bar; see Example 13.1a] and not the last note of a preceding motif [as in 6/8]. This accentuation of three-note motifs, *short*-long-short [italics mine], is found in many tunes, and is clearer in some than in "Maol Donn" because it's sustained in longer passages.⁴⁷ Conversely, the *long*-short pattern of 6/8 gives a very different musical effect.⁴⁸

Beginning-accented 'Scotch-snap' rhythms – for example, a crotchet beat containing a semiquaver followed by a dotted quaver – are common in written pibroch scores, as they are in a great deal of other Celtic music and in the speech-rhythms of the Gaelic language and its vocal music. But if the end-accented groupings of 6/8 metre – five-six-*one*, two-three-*four* – are in fact more 'authentic' (as sources such as George Moss, claiming to represent an authentic Gaelic tradition, suggest – see footnote 8), then that would have implications not only for rhythmic interpretation at a local level but also for phrase division points (see in Example 13.1 the uncertain bar division points – which in turn determines phrase division points – depending on the choice between 4/4 or 6/8) and thus, as we will see below, questions of larger formal structure. Of course, as Joseph MacDonald's 1760 treatise suggests, it may be that many different metres and their corresponding accentuation patterns have always coexisted in pibroch as they do today.⁴⁹ This question is important and deserves deeper analysis across a wider range of the repertoire than I can offer here.

As I have become more familiar with all of these intricacies of rhythmic ambiguity in pibroch, the 'remarkable uniformity of performed rhythm' I describe has come to appear much less uniform. For experienced pipers the differences between any two performances, and between the styles of any two pipers, are actually rather dramatic – it is just that they occur on a more minute scale than the newcomer might expect. In fact, the small differences in timing of the second A in 'Maol Donn' turn out to be of the grosser variety: much subtler shades can make all the difference in the listener's impression of rhythmic structure in a tune,

⁴⁷ Cannon cites tunes 'such as "Scarce of Fishing", "Sir Ewen Cameron of Lochiel's Salute", "MacLeod of Raasay's Salute" (significantly called "Lament" in some sources), and above all, variation one of "Lament for Mary MacLeod"' (email message to the writer, 2 April 2008).

⁴⁸ Keeping in mind that these two interpretations represent different ways of hearing the same relatively fixed set of durations.

⁴⁹ Roderick D. Cannon (ed.), *Joseph MacDonald's Compleat Theory of the Scots Highland Bagpipe (c.1760)* (Glasgow: The Piobaireachd Society, 1994), MS pp. 29–31.

whether 6/8, 4/4, some other metre – or as Livingstone suggests, a simultaneous mixture of several different metric interpretations.

Early Pibroch: Clear Metre and Flexible Pulse?

The rhythmic environment I have described, where small differences in timing match big discrepancies between different pipers' styles and conceptions, has dominated mainstream discussion of pibroch interpretation since the nineteenth century. But according to piper and scholar Allan MacDonald, it may not always have been so. In his 1995 study, inspired in part by Cooke's 1972 article, he proposed that during pibroch's early development as a purely oral tradition (before the increasing use of written notation beginning in the late eighteenth century), the inverse situation may have prevailed: the early performer-composers may have shared a more unified conception of metre for a given tune, and this clearer sense of rhythmic structure may have provided a foundation for a more flexible approach to pulse.

For clues to pibroch's early rhythmic practice, MacDonald looks to the Gaelic song tradition and its speech-based rhythms. As he explains with reference to early Gaelic vocal music, 'the very existence of words dictates the rhythmic character of the piece. The melody is the passenger of the language rhythms, rather than the carrier.'⁵⁰ Cooke notes the same quality in some Gaelic song, describing a rendition of the song also called 'Maol Donn' (which closely resembles the pibroch) by the late Kate MacDonald of South Uist⁵¹ (a Gaelic-speaking island in the Outer Hebrides) in which she 'takes time between phrases without destroying the gently onward flow of the melody'.⁵² A recent recording of the same song by Mrs MacDonald's daughter, the influential piper and singer Rona Lightfoot, beautifully demonstrates this style (Example 13.3a and CD track 28).⁵³ Comparing her performance of the pibroch 'Maol Donn' to her version of the song, we can hear the clear relationship to which Cooke refers (Example 13.3b and CD track 29).

Example 13.3: The vertical alignment shows elements of the relationship between song and pibroch. Accents (speech 'stresses') in the song (13.3a) are Allan MacDonald's interpretation. At bottom are the durations from recordings by

⁵⁰ Stewart and MacDonald, *Fhuair Mi Pòg*, liner notes for track 11.

⁵¹ SA 1970.309.7.

⁵² Cooke, 'Problems of notating pibroch', p. 56. W.B. Yeats noted a similar phenomenon in *sean-nós* (old-style) singing in Irish, a language closely related to Scottish Gaelic: 'Every word was audible and expressive, as the words in a song were always, as I think, before music grew too proud to be the garment of words, flowing and changing with the flowing and changing of their energies.' See W.B. Yeats, *Mythologies* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998), pp. 23–4.

⁵³ Rona Lightfoot, *Eadarainn* (Macmeanmna, 2004). Lightfoot, like Allan MacDonald, takes a keen interest in the connections between pibroch and Gaelic song.

Example 13.3 'Maol Donn', first phrase: comparing the Gaelic song with renditions of the pibroch by Rona Lightfoot and Allan MacDonald.

13.3a Rona Lightfoot, sung, rough transcription (CD track 28)

Cha bu sheal - bhach dhomh d'fhaò - tainn 'S e mo ghaol a Maol Donn,

13.3b Rona Lightfoot, pipes, precise transcription (CD track 29, includes whole *ùrlar*)

1.1 (sec.) .7 1.3 .4 .8 1.6 .4 .9 1.5 .4 .8 1.9

13.3c Allan MacDonald, pipes, precise transcription (CD track 30, includes whole *ùrlar*)

.9 (sec.) .8 1.6 .3 .7 1.6 .3 1.1 1.5 .3 .4 2

MacPherson:
1.6 (sec.) .8 1.5 .4 .6 1.7 .3 .8 1.7 .3 .6 1.8

Livingstone:
2 (sec.) .7 1.6 .3 .8 1.8 .3 1.5 1.4 .3 .7 2.6

Donald MacPherson (see 13.1b) and Bill Livingstone (see 13.2c). Boxes highlight the most noticeable differences in duration between players on certain notes.

According to MacDonald, this was the rhythmic universe in which pibroch first developed. Here, rhythmic practice was intrinsically flexible. According to MacDonald, the pulse in early pibroch performance may have been regular at times, or irregular – but either way, it was probably variable rather than rigid. Pulse could unfold at the performer's discretion, informed in a general way (though not rigidly determined) by Gaelic speech rhythms, rather than following the kind of strict memorization favoured in mainstream teaching today.⁵⁴ Interestingly, MacDonald believes that a regular pulse may have served as a basis for the flexible one – a process he calls *rubato*;⁵⁵ classically trained musicians might agree with his definition of this term: he presupposes regular metric intervals (in Cooper and Meyer's sense of 'precise equivalence'), within which the performer can add or take away time at will, eventually returning to land back on the recurrence of the 'beat' at the end of a regular interval.

As a basis for such freedom, the performer must have a clear sense of the underlying rhythmic structure.⁵⁶ Seeking evidence about early conceptions of pibroch's metre, MacDonald argues that there was probably more consensus among early composer-performers about the metric structures of individual tunes than there is today. Again, he looks to the song tradition: 'the Gaelic language, being stress based, is crucial as a guide for stressing [assigning accentuation], and a note can usually be found in the pibroch version that corresponds to the stress position [accented note] of the song.'⁵⁷

For additional evidence he compares Gaelic songs like 'Maol Donn' with early transcriptions of their corresponding pibrochs. The first few generations of transcriptions, in his view, may show early conceptions of pibroch's rhythmic structure more accurately than modern scores, since they predate subsequent corruptions (such as the elongation of introductory Es found in Angus MacKay's

⁵⁴ Three clarifications are needed: First, MacDonald does not claim that pipers must speak Gaelic in order to successfully apply this approach in their playing – any sensitive musician who has heard Gaelic song can grasp it intuitively. Second, neither Cooke nor MacDonald claim that pibroch grew directly out of Gaelic song (I do not know Lightfoot's exact views on this question); rather, they argue that because the song and piping traditions developed within the same musical culture, and because we find many specific pibrochs like 'Maol Donn' with close counterparts in the song tradition, there is probably an intimate, if not precise, relationship. Finally, the difference between a 'flexible pulse' and a 'normative rhythmic practice' is a matter of degree more than of type – as noted above, great players who follow a learned rhythmic practice for a given tune still lend it their own unique stamp through minute but crucial shades of timing.

⁵⁵ MacDonald, 'The relationship between pibroch and Gaelic song', p. 43.

⁵⁶ A point C.S. Thomason also made (Donaldson, *The Highland Pipe and Scottish Society*, p. 262).

⁵⁷ MacDonald, 'The relationship between pibroch and Gaelic song', p. 61.

scores). But crucially, the early scores are only useful if we understand them within a flexible rhythmic context informed by Gaelic vocal music – this is, as far as we know, the context in which their creators understood them.⁵⁸ There is little need to dispense with metre to avoid the 'constraint of bar arithmetic' (recalling *Binneas* as quoted above) when bar lines, in the absence of a 'precisely equivalent' pulse, place no constraint in the first place.

Like any other reasonable modern investigator, MacDonald does not claim any certainty about the degree of ambiguity early piper-composers perceived in the rhythmic structure of their music,⁵⁹ either in general or for a specific pibroch like 'Maol Donn'. But through his knowledge of Gaelic as a first language and his familiarity with the song 'Maol Donn', he can make an educated guess by matching the four speech stresses (accents) in the song phrase to four corresponding notes in the first phrase of the pibroch (compare Examples 13.3a and 13.3c).⁶⁰ Listening to MacDonald's recording of the pibroch (Example 13.3c and CD track 30) with his interpretation of the song's speech stresses in mind (Example 13.3a and CD track 28), we hear a rhythmic structure much like that of the 6/8 metre promoted by MacLeod and Thomason (Example 13.1c).⁶¹ With a clear conception of metre underpinning a more flexible pulse, most of the ambiguities we encountered earlier simply vanish. The second low A in 'Maol Donn', or any introductory E, can be played long or short without obscuring the listener's sense of the underlying structure.

As CD track 30 shows, MacDonald applies these ideas in his own performances (amply demonstrated on albums such as *Dasturum*).⁶² His work has been controversial, drawing admiration from many but criticism from those who perceive it as an attempt to revise an already fully authentic tradition that is in

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 82. Unfortunately, we do not have such a resource for 'Maol Donn'. Since Reid's 1826 score lacks bar lines and time signatures, it cannot show metre; for other reasons, MacKay's manuscript (c. 1840) is not a reliable guide either (see Cooke's Example 1.1).

⁵⁹ Some ambiguity probably always existed, as Barnaby Brown shows in his transcription of 'An Tarbh Breac Dearg' in the liner notes to MacDonald's album *Dasturum* (p. 27).

⁶⁰ As sung to me in a discussion of the tune (1 June 2007). He indicated only the first four accents; the rest shown in Example 13.4 are my own extrapolation. MacDonald's accentuation matches that of two master pipers whom Archibald Campbell cited as sources for *The Kilberry Book* (Donaldson, *The Highland Pipe and Scottish Society*, p. 385) – though Campbell clearly departed from his sources in this case, as comparison between Example 13.1a and 13.3c shows.

⁶¹ It is worth noting that in CD track 30 MacDonald takes a slightly freer approach than the others, matching his stated ethic of freedom for the performer – for example, he omits the 'introductory E' in the repetition of the first phrase (not shown in 13.3c), treating it as he believes early pipers understood it: as an expendable ornament.

⁶² On the Siubhal.com label.

no need of revision.⁶³ But the question is not what style – MacDonald’s or the mainstream one or any other – comes closest to the way pibroch sounded as a pure oral tradition in the eighteenth century; of course we can never know.

What matters is that MacDonald’s approach suggests a shift in pibroch’s underlying ethos from one of overprotectiveness and sometimes mechanical imitation by under-informed students to one of openness and creative control on the part of the performer.⁶⁴ MacDonald’s views do not have to diminish the value or beauty of modern pibroch playing, where master pipers like MacPherson and Livingstone make wonderful use of the subtle interplay of ambiguous possibilities; but I believe careful inquiry into the practices of earlier times can only add depth to our modern way of understanding this music.

For my purposes the main value of MacDonald’s approach is simply that it helps to break down the barrier between pibroch and the rest of the musical world, revealing the possibility of pibroch’s natural kinship, at least in the realm of rhythm, with other music traditions. I agree with MacDonald that like many other traditions worldwide, especially those in which solo performance features heavily, pibroch uses metres that are often straightforward, underpinning a sense of pulse that can be wonderfully flexible.

Beyond Phrase One: Rhythm as Form

I have found a lot to say about the first few notes of ‘Maol Donn.’ But how does rhythm extend over the course of the whole *ùrlar*? Pibroch’s formal structures can be understood as rhythm at longer intervals of time: rhythmic groupings simply

⁶³ MacDonald’s recording of ‘Maol Donn’ (CD track 30) does not convey the controversial nature of his style as well as some of his other recordings do, because it does not depart as dramatically from mainstream rhythmic practice. For a better sense of what has raised some eyebrows, compare his recordings of ‘I Got a Kiss of the King’s Hand’, ‘The Piper’s Warning to His Master’ or ‘Glengarry’s March’ (as heard on *Fhuair Mi Pòg, Colla Mo Rùn*, and *Ceòl na Pioba* respectively) with mainstream versions of the same tunes (as heard on the *Masters of Piobaireachd* series, for example). But MacDonald is not the most radical piper to reinterpret pibroch in recent decades: James MacColl offers a startling and compelling performance style for pibroch, playing both the *ùrlar* and the variations in a single fast, steady 6/8, departing drastically from any written sources or semblance of mainstream style.

⁶⁴ Performers’ creative control is hardly foreign to mainstream piping, of course; the *Tutor for the Highland Bagpipe* quoted above points out that ‘expression in music is a very personal matter, and what pleases one need not necessarily sound so wonderful to another’. But in my experience of piping, MacDonald’s critique of the mainstream remains valid. For example, the view expressed in the *Tutor* admits some freedom, but relatively little of it: ‘for a long time you are going to have to accept somebody else’s interpretations ... until the feeling for piobaireachd enters your soul’ (p. 4). When or how that happens is rarely defined.

get larger, from bar to phrase to section up to the level of overall form.⁶⁵ With regard to pibroch form, scholars such as Robin Lorimer, Roderick Cannon and Barnaby Brown have built on the lucid insights found in Joseph MacDonald's 1760 *Compleat Theory of the Scots Highland Bagpipe*, the first extant theoretical treatise on pibroch.⁶⁶

The simple idea at the heart of these scholars' work is that pibroch's early composer-performers may have conceptually divided nearly every *ùrlar* (and each of its variations) into quarters. Joseph MacDonald describes what was apparently in 1760 already an 'Antient Rule' by which pipers in pibroch's pre-notation oral tradition kept their music conceptually clear: 'They Counted upon their 4 Fingers & measured by their Ear, & when the Finger & Ear Corresponded all was well. The ordinary Length of a Pipe Adagio [i.e. *ùrlar*] being 16 Fingers, computed about 16 Bars, 4 in each Quarter, The regularity preservd (only by the Help of this Rule) in all the Compositions, being truly Surprising.'⁶⁷ Example 13.4 shows, via line breaks, this foursquare division as it might apply in 'Maol Donn'.⁶⁸

Recently, piper and scholar Barnaby Brown has drawn many of these ideas together, along with fresh evidence from his own research, into a broad theory of pibroch's large-scale structure that will help us to hear 'Maol Donn' as a cohesive rhythmic whole.⁶⁹ In Example 13.4, 'A' and 'B' phrases follow Brown's method of distinguishing phrases by their sonority against the A drone: 'A' phrases are consonant, while 'B' phrases are dissonant. Two pitches of contrasting sonority, often just a tone apart, serve to define the difference in sonority; in the case of 'Maol Donn,' these defining notes are C (consonant) and B (dissonant), the final notes of phrases 'A' and 'B' respectively. This system has allowed Brown to identify nine categories of formal design across the pibroch repertoire as a whole (see 'The Design of It'). According to Brown's scheme, in 'Maol Donn's' formal design the second half inverts the first: AABA, B'BAB. This is one of the most

⁶⁵ Including large-scale form in the study of rhythm follows Cooper and Meyer's lead; applying the same approach to pibroch is my own extrapolation. The formal structure of a whole pibroch is always *ùrlar* (theme)-plus-variations, though before the early nineteenth century the *ùrlar* was often repeated between variations, making early pibroch more of a rondo form. Usually each variation simply repeats the melodic contour and formal design of the *ùrlar*, so the basic form of a whole pibroch can be summed up in that of the *ùrlar* alone.

⁶⁶ See Roderick D. Cannon, 'Tune of the Month – The Old Woman's Lullaby', *Piping Times* 34/5 (1982) and 'A note on the construction of even-lined piobaireachd', *Piping Times* 48/1–2 (1995) and other work; and R.C. Lorimer, 'Studies in Pibroch I', *Scottish Studies* 6 (1962) and 'Studies in Pibroch II', *Scottish Studies* 8 (1964).

⁶⁷ Cannon (ed.), *Joseph MacDonald's Compleat Theory of the Scots Highland Bagpipe* (c. 1760), MS p. 32.

⁶⁸ The analysis in Example 13.4 is of course only one possible interpretation; it does not represent a 'true' or 'authentic' version of 'Maol Donn'.

⁶⁹ See Barnaby Brown, 'The design of it: part one', *The Voice* 33/4 (2004), pp. 50–53; 'part two' 34/1 (2005), pp. 44–9; and 'part three' in 34/2 (2005), pp. 41–8; see also Barnaby Brown and Allan MacDonald, 'The Red Speckled Bull', *Piping Today* 26 (2007).

common designs, which Brown calls ‘Woven’ (as in many tunes, the fifth phrase B’ differs slightly from the other B phrases).

For confirmation of this analysis Brown, like Allan MacDonald, looks to the musical environment that surrounded pibroch during its early development; whereas MacDonald focuses on Gaelic vocal music, Brown looks to the wider Celtic world, in the form of late medieval Welsh harp music, and the Classical Gaelic poetry (c.1200–1650) that was active in the Highland culture that gave birth to pibroch. Both of these traditions share patterns of sonority and accentuation with pibroch.⁷⁰

For simplicity, unaccented marks in Example 13.4 are omitted. ‘Introductory Es’ have smaller noteheads to show their ornamental function. Spacing shows approximate normative performed durations. Accentuation follows Allan MacDonald (see 13.3c). Nearly all sources, oral and written, agree on the main pitches of the variations, shown at bottom, which match accented notes in the *ùrlar* for Variations 3, 4, and 5 (the first two variations repeat the *ùrlar*, replacing each F sharp with a high A).

At first glance, the foursquare division Lorimer, Brown and others favour does not seem much different than the modern mainstream method of analysis. For comparison between the two, the bottom row of brackets in Example 13.4 shows the ‘uneven-line’ division most modern pipers favour: lines of six, six and four bars, or ‘6,6,4’.⁷¹ Both ways of dividing pibroch *ùrlars* agree in some obvious respects: for example, in both divisions nearly all tunes have 16 basic groupings. And although mainstream theory divides many tunes as 6,6,4, it identifies many others as ‘even-lined’ pibrochs, or ‘4,4,4,4’ – which is identical to the foursquare division. So there is little audible difference between 4,4,4,4 and 6,6,4, and the issue may seem to have little direct relevance to the listener.

But the difference is important for our understanding and experience of pibroch. The crucial analytical distinction, in Brown’s view, is that during pibroch’s initial development the foursquare structure acted as an underlying compositional basis for nearly every tune, unifying the whole repertoire. This universal, basic

⁷⁰ For example: first, inverted structures like AABA, BBAB appear as compositional formulae in Robert ap Huw’s 1613 manuscript of Welsh harp music (British Museum Addl. MS 14905); second, the ornamented B in the middle of the second quarter in Example 13.4 is what Brown calls an ‘internal rhyme,’ since it comes in the middle of a ‘line’ – analogous rhymes are found in the intricate Classical Gaelic verse of the period in which pibroch first developed; see Colm O Baoill and Meg Bateman (eds), *Gàir nan Clàrsach / The Harp’s Cry: an Anthology of 17th Century Gaelic Poetry* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 1994).

⁷¹ Alexander J. Haddow, in his *The History and Structure of Ceol Mor: a Guide to Piobaireachd, the Classical Music of the Great Highland Bagpipe* (Glasgow: The Piobaireachd Society, 2003), identifies ‘Maol Donn’ as an ‘uneven-line’ 6,6,4 tune (pp. 166 and 200). This three-part division was first identified by C.S. Thomason, and accords with the ‘ternary structure’ in Cooke’s Example 1.2 (‘Problems of notating pibroch’, p. 51), and with what Cooke cites as ‘most authorities’ (p. 50).

Example 13.4 'Maol Donn': complete *ùrlar* and pitch sequence of the variations, with an interpretation of rhythmic structure at all levels.

Urlar

Primary groupings (end-accented) →

Sixteenths (bars) →

Eighths (phrases) → A

6,6,4 division → 'Line' one: 6 sixteenths

Quarters = line breaks →

(Eighths:) B (etc.)

A

'Line' two: 6 sixteenths

B' (slightly different than other Bs)

B

A

B

'Line' three: 4 sixteenths

Variations: pitch sequence

Eighths: A A B A B' B A B

The image displays a musical score for 'Maol Donn'. The top section, titled 'Urlar', consists of four staves of music in G major (one sharp). The first staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp. Below the first staff, there are four horizontal lines with arrows pointing to specific rhythmic groupings: 'Primary groupings (end-accented)', 'Sixteenths (bars)', 'Eighths (phrases)', and '6,6,4 division'. The second staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp. Below it, there are two horizontal lines with arrows pointing to specific rhythmic groupings: '(Eighths:) B (etc.)' and 'A'. The third staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp. Below it, there are two horizontal lines with arrows pointing to specific rhythmic groupings: 'B' and 'A'. The fourth staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp. Below it, there are two horizontal lines with arrows pointing to specific rhythmic groupings: 'B' and 'A'. The bottom section, titled 'Variations: pitch sequence', consists of a single staff of music in G major. Below it, there is a horizontal line with arrows pointing to specific rhythmic groupings: 'A A B A B' B A B'.

foursquare division in pibroch sets the stage for Brown's main argument: that a large part of pibroch's sophistication lies in its multiple layers of structure, where an underlying, ubiquitous foursquare division, present though perhaps not always articulated audibly on the surface, is overlaid with other more obvious divisions, such as 6,6,4 (as in 'Maol Donn'). As Brown explains, the early composers 'turned their genius to subverting that fourfold regularity. By superimposing an alternative structure of musical rhymes [in 'Maol Donn' these 'rhymes' are the three ornamented Bs that end the three 'lines' of six, six, and four sixteenths – see Example 13.4], the composition is rendered more sophisticated and pleasing.'⁷²

Of course, as with MacDonald's work we cannot know how closely Brown's conception matches that of pibroch's early composer-performers. But again, the value of his analysis for our purposes is that it reveals another way in which pibroch may resemble other music. As he points out, the seventeenth-century English composer Henry Purcell 'was doing much the same thing in his compositions [at around the same time many pibrochs were composed] where he built upon repeated grounds'.⁷³

Translating Pibroch

We have seen that most of the problems confronting the student of pibroch rhythm – whether performer, analytically minded theorist, casual listener, or all three – lie in the delicate interactions between oral and written modes of transmission and the different things each mode implies about the nature of rhythm. We might hope to discover some mysterious, 'authentic' essence of pibroch rhythm, but we soon find that this mythical beast has been irretrievably lost amid all of the conflicting scores, performances, and explanations. If the oral tradition has in fact retained pibroch's 'pure' normative performed rhythms, as many pipers claim, that gain is counterbalanced by the loss of vital knowledge about how the music's first creators conceived accentuation and grouping – and this loss has even led to the strange idea that pibroch is a 'non-mensural' music with no metre at all. But even if a particular score has in fact preserved a vestige of the tune's original rhythmic structure (though we can never know for certain), we find another loss when we realize that its notation has come to imply a 'precisely equivalent' pulse that was probably foreign to the music in the beginning. So the problem is not only that separate sources say different things about rhythm; it is that pibroch speaks its own language with its own peculiar assumptions about basic notions of rhythm like pulse, metre, and formal structure.

My purpose has been to interpret pibroch's rhythmic language for those who come to it from the mainstream Western musical culture that includes everything

⁷² Brown, 'The design of it: part one', p. 51.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 51 (Purcell's use of ground bass is comparable to pibroch's foursquare underlying structure, though with the difference that in the latter case the underlying structure may not always be as immediately audible.)

from Brahms to the Beach Boys. Such a translation is especially difficult because pibroch tuition has so thoroughly absorbed the assumptions about rhythm implicit both in its earlier oral tradition and in its later written one that we frequently cannot tell where one ends and the other begins.⁷⁴ Pibroch shares an identical notation system, and a nearly identical musical terminology, with music that comes from a rhythmic universe with slightly, but importantly, different rules. The gap I have tried to bridge, therefore, is not between completely distinct rhythmic languages, but between dialects so closely related, and so intertwined, that the overlooked or unexpected similarities can cause as much confusion as the known or anticipated differences.

Success in bridging such a small but treacherous chasm is only possible, I believe, through the very careful use of words and an extreme caution when dealing with conventional rhythm notation. My own rethinking of terms like 'metre' and 'pulse' helped to clear up much of my confusion (not that I am the first to define them this way). Removing the implication of 'precise equivalence' from my conception of pulse showed me that metre actually describes pibroch's rhythmic structure very well, and that scores (if understood in this light) can be successfully used in teaching and performance – both of which points many pipers know.

Extending my rethinking of 'pulse' and 'metre', I believe we can productively replace other common terms such as 'bar' and 'phrase' with language that describes pibroch's rhythmic structure more precisely. If we accept the idea that a foursquare structure underlies most pibrochs, then a 'line' of a pibroch *ùrlar* is always a *quarter*, whether or not it is written down anywhere in 'lines' of staff notation, or whether other superimposed structures, such as divisions of six, six, and four sixteenths, are also present. Quarters break down further: a 'phrase', as pipers like MacLeod use the word (Example 13.1c), can be called an *eighth*, and a 'bar' (Examples 13.1a and 13.1c) is simply a *sixteenth*.

At smaller levels of rhythmic structure – individual beats and events between them – Cooper and Meyer's terminology is useful: each sixteenth contains a given number of *primary groupings* (Example 13.1), each of which contains one *accent* (a 'beat') surrounded by a small number of *unaccents* serving as upbeats or after-beats. As Example 13.4 shows, each sixteenth of 'Maol Donn' contains two primary groupings, and each primary grouping contains an accent with either one or two unaccents. As we have seen, this simple structure can be represented in written staff notation as 4/4, 2/4, or 6/8 metre (see Cooke's Example 1.1). In other

⁷⁴ In this respect pibroch is not unusual: historians of medieval culture note that differences between oral and literate cultures are less stark than we sometimes assume: see Leo Treitler, 'Homer and Gregory: the transmission of epic poetry and plainchant', *The Musical Quarterly* 60/3 (July 1974), pp. 333–72; and Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: a Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). And of course even fully 'literate' cultures like ours make ample use of both modes.

tunes, a sixteenth can include three primary groupings (each with its accent and attendant unaccents), often written as 3/4 metre,⁷⁵ or even ‘mixed metres’, where the number of primary groupings changes in successive sixteenths.⁷⁶

Like ‘rhythmic structure’ and ‘rhythmic practice’, admittedly unfriendly terms like ‘primary grouping’ and ‘unaccent’ can justify their existence by serving a practical purpose: they allow us to describe nearly all tunes in a uniform way, regardless of how different written or spoken sources happen to convey them.⁷⁷ Though scores divide most tunes into 16 bars, others have 8 bars, or 32, or irregular divisions such as 15,⁷⁸ or no bars at all as in *Binneas is Borerraig*. All such notation-based divisions seem arbitrary when we remember that they were applied to the music long after it was created within an oral tradition that never used bar lines. So ‘bar’ can mean several things, but ‘sixteenth’ means only one. Knowing that nearly every tune divides into sixteen parts (though some shorter tunes divide more easily into eighths, and a few are irregular) helps us to see more easily past discrepancies in notation and description to the uncomplicated structure underneath. This in turn allows us to better appreciate the sophistication unfolding over that simple frame.⁷⁹

Of course, the analytical terms I offer here are not necessarily the only options; my point is simply that alternative language, whatever specific words may best suit a given purpose, can help us to move past our often-unconscious assumptions

⁷⁵ For example, ‘The Blue Ribbon’. *The Kilberry Book* gives this tune in 4/4, but this is only because, as Moss noted, accepted rhythmic practice for the tune dictates that the third accent in each bar is elongated, so that each bar contains a crotchet-crotchet-minim pattern (Cooke (ed.), *Scottish Tradition Series No. 6: Pibroch: George Moss*, p. 10).

⁷⁶ Brown calls this ‘phrase elongation’, citing Reid’s 1826 score for the tune ‘The Piper’s Warning to His Master’ (also called ‘Colla Mo Rùn’) as an example (‘The design of it: part two’, Ex. 7). Margaret Stewart and Allan MacDonald’s recording of the same tune (on their album *Colla Mo Rùn*), however, uses an audibly regular metre.

⁷⁷ As Cooper and Meyer’s terminology is helpful, so are their analytical symbols – the brackets and accentual markings I have used here – offering a useful alternative to conventional time signatures and bar lines for the analysis of pibroch rhythm (though not necessarily as prescriptive performance notation), since they free us from the confusing implications of such conventions.

⁷⁸ In *The Kilberry Book* and David Glen’s manuscript (*A Collection of Ancient Piobaireachd*, Edinburgh: David Glen, 1880–99), the tune ‘I Am Proud to Play a Pipe’ has 15 bars. Allan MacDonald’s version of the tune, written by Barnaby Brown in 16 bars, reveals a simpler foursquare structure – which divides neatly into eighths and sixteenths (*Dastirum* liner notes, p. 40).

⁷⁹ As Joseph MacDonald’s mention of counting by ‘fingers’ suggests, an effort to define the music apart from written notation can also be useful to performing pipers who to this day, as always, perform without scores in front of them. Relying on an internal mental structure common to all tunes, rather than myriad written metres, can simplify the memorization process.

and common confusions. We can then tackle delicate questions of rhythm in a more meaningful way.

Hopefully, such caution with musical terminology can ultimately help us to see what pibroch has in common with other kinds of music, and can also show more clearly where it truly differs. Comparing pibroch rhythm with that of all other music is of course impossible, and a detailed comparison with even a few other traditions would fill volumes. But some general comments are due nonetheless.

It seems evident to me that pibroch shares with nearly all music the basic patterns of accent and grouping we call metre – though the metre of a particular pibroch as its creators intended it may be lost. Likewise, the various conceptions of pulse we have observed among pibroch players – Donald MacLeod's subtle stretching of the pulse (Example 13.1c and 13.2a, CD tracks 24 and 25), or Allan MacDonald's flexible pulse with a hint of rubato (Example 13.3c and CD track 30) – resemble other traditions such as the Solesmes interpretation of Gregorian chant, the rhapsodic nocturnes of Chopin or the free improvisatory sound of the Armenian *duduk*. Even pibroch's rigorously taught normative rhythmic practice is not unlike that of other traditions in which students carefully memorize the demonstrations of a teacher in order to capture the nuances of a particular rhythmic idiom – as with, for example, opera and musical theatre where singers learn a particular interpretation or style by rote from their coaches, often with little or no assistance from a written score.

But such affinities do not have to take away from what so many pipers and listeners feel: there is something special about pibroch. Like many others who love this music, I find an intellectual satisfaction and emotional power in it that is not quite like anything else I know. I believe that the difference is not, as some recent sources suggest, that pibroch mysteriously, and almost uniquely in world music, lacks metre altogether. And of course the precise nature of the difference includes many factors beyond rhythm, such as melody, timbre, and harmonic structure.

But even limiting ourselves to questions of rhythm, we can make some claims. Pibroch's inimitable sound certainly has something to do with the peculiar rhythmic ambiguities we have explored, made all the more subtle by the uniform timbre and articulation of the Highland bagpipe. And perhaps part of pibroch's distinctiveness lies in the remnants of Gaelic speech that linger in its rhythms. As Roderick Cannon points out, getting to know the old Gaelic song tradition certainly goes a long way toward an appreciation of pibroch's distinctive rhythmic universe.⁸⁰ A large part of

⁸⁰ Roderick Cannon, *The Highland Bagpipe and its Music* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2002), p. 71. For listening, I recommend the following as a start: Stewart and MacDonald, *Colla Mo Rùn and Fhuair Mi Pòg*; Flora MacNeil, *o rain Floraidh: the Songs of Flora Macneil* (Temple Records, COMD 2081) and *Craobh nan Ubhal: Traditional Gaelic Songs from the Western Isles* (Temple Records, COMD 1002); Calum Martin, *Salm: Gaelic Psalms from the Hebrides of Scotland* vols. 1 and 2 (www.gaelicpsalmsinging.com, 2003); and William Matheson, *Scottish Tradition 16: Gaelic Bards & Minstrels* (Greentrax Recordings, CDTRAX 9016D, 1993).

pibroch's rhythmic interest may lie in an area I have not discussed here: the small-scale rhythms within individual standardized ornaments and finger movements that are peculiar to the pipes (such as the one that precedes the final B in Example 13.1). Their notation and rhythmic practice has been the subject of a great deal of impassioned discussion in piping, and their characteristic rhythms – both individually and when combined – go a long way toward giving pibroch its unique sound.

Whatever aspects of pibroch happen to grip a particular listener, I hope that this brief exploration of rhythm in pibroch may help those who are new to pibroch to find as much satisfaction in it as I have. For musicians in all traditions, whether performers, composers or concert planners, I hope pibroch can become a new source of creative inspiration.⁸¹ And I hope that pipers who want their music to achieve the wider admiration and influence it deserves will continue to make it friendlier by clarifying the terms in which they describe and teach it.

⁸¹ Despite my comments about pibroch's obscurity, some cross-fertilization is already taking place. For example, composers as diverse as Erik Chisholm, Pierre Boulez, Judith Weir, Sally Beamish, John Purser, Melinda Maxwell, Matthew Welch and myself have used pibroch as an inspiration in new classical works.

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