



Piping Times

Vol. 41, No. 5 February 1989



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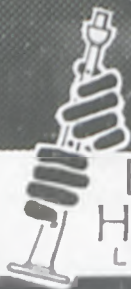
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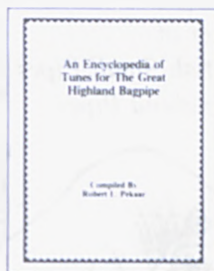
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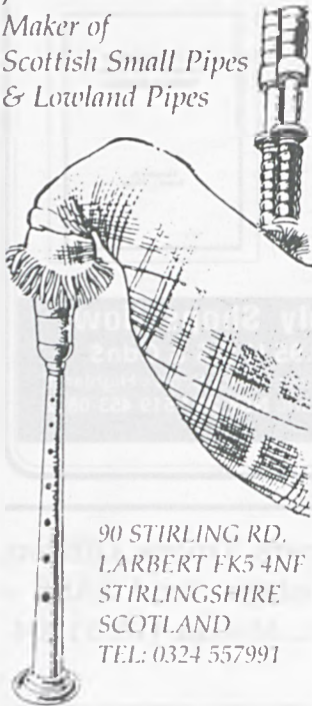
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Piping Times

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Editorial

With the springtime looming thankfully in the near distance, some of the more important activities of the piping year are beginning to demand our attention. In Scotland the professional competitors are starting to think about the Uist and Barra and the Scottish Pipers events, soon to be held in Glasgow. No doubt throughout the world, depending in which hemisphere you have your Highland home, the Spectre of competitions is raising her false beckoning smile.

There are however more important things in a piper's life than competitions – although it might be difficult to persuade those under 50 to believe this. One such is the annual seminar held at Ardsvar Hotel in Skye, sponsored by the Clan Donald Lands Trust and organised by the John MacFadyen Trust. The sixth of these will be held next month, bringing together some of the most knowledgeable pipers in a four day intensive get-together. These do a tremendous amount to correlate and stimulate knowledge in all aspects of the art.

Almost as important perhaps, because of its immediate wider application, is the annual John MacFadyen Memorial Lecture – this time, as in previous years, sponsored by the Royal Bank of Scotland – to be held in Stirling Castle on April 21st. Then immediately following that we will have the annual conference of the Piobaireachd Society, where again the cut and thrust of discussion and debate will elicit knowledge and conclusions which would otherwise remain the property, for ever, of but a few individuals.

Twenty years ago none of this would have happened. Piping functions consisted exclusively of competitions, or social gatherings where at best a few individuals displayed their talents. It is probably safe to say that, in the last two decades, piping in Scotland has taken a gigantic leap forward – due to the efforts of the various organisations aforementioned.

One of the major presentations at the 1982 Piobaireachd Society Conference was given by Richard Powell, assisted by John Murphy of the Scottish Arts Council and Patrick Caddell of the National Library. What they proposed in great detail was a centre for the traditional music of Scotland and although the ideas were sound in principle, absolutely nothing has come of it, at least so far as piping is concerned.

It is not in our nature to pass up a chance of saying "I told you so," – so let us repeat it: I told them so at the time.

The reason that piping has been ignored, by anything which has developed from these proposals, is simply that (as we pointed out) piping cannot be treated along with the rest of traditional music in Scotland. It can be treated in the same way, but not in the same place at the same time.

It is true however that a centre for piping in Scotland is not only desirable, but is inevitable. There are so few people available to put their talents and time into the organisation and administration of the whole piping scene that inevitably those people come to be wearing different hats in different societies. The treasurer of one may be secretary of another; the chairman of a third is a valued executive member of the second, and so it goes on. Inevitably and inexorably the whirling particles begin to come together. The day will surely arrive when one central organisation will look after all the interests of the solo pipers.

This is not to say that the various other organisations will cease to exist. They will certainly continue, but a joint effort by everybody can bring into existence facilities at present barely imagined.

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Judges' Seminar

One of the occasional seminars organised by the Piobaireachd Society was held in the Army School of Piping, Edinburgh Castle, on Saturday, 19th November last.

The arrangements had been made by Malcolm McRae, President of the Society, and the programme he had arranged proved to be both attractive and interesting.

Beginning at 10.15 am, the first session consisted of a discussion on the possible use of adjudication sheets by judges, with special reference to the experiment carried out in the Silver Medal event at the Northern Meeting last September.

There was considerable lively discussion on the subject, with comparisons and examples given of the use of sheets in pipe band competitions and in solo contests abroad. Many present felt that the writing of sheets during a performance must necessarily affect the concentration of the judge. Whether or not competitors would welcome such a move was also considered, but the evidence seemed to be that most players – especially those not in the top rank – could derive great benefit from such a system. Eventually it was left to a small sub-committee to examine the present sheets and produce one for consideration at the next meeting.

The meeting then went on to discuss the proposal which James Campbell had made in the Piping Times many years ago – that, of the three judges on a bench, the decision should be taken by one only, whilst the other two acted as advisors if required. Again there were many lively contributions on the topic, a further suggestion being that only one judge should be used except perhaps in the very top events. An interesting contribution came from a present day competing piper, who said that if he were competing he would prefer a bench of three, but if he were judging he would prefer to do it by himself.

The meeting was reminded that there had been one judge only for the Gold Medal event at the Northern Meeting a few years back. Apparently this had been introduced because the Northern Meeting committee had been dissatisfied with results in previous years, but the idea was abandoned when the Competing Pipers' Association objected on the grounds of possible bias.

A general meeting of judges then took place, at which many relevant points were raised. Fees and expenses for judges were discussed and the changes (not all of them to the benefit of the judges) which had taken place in the last 20 years were mentioned. The payments which in the past year had been made by the top competitions were reported.

Following an excellent lunch, a competition was staged to allow judges to try out the adjudication sheet idea. Murray Henderson, Gavin Stoddart and Robert Wallace had kindly agreed to play two piobaireachds each, of their own choice, and everyone else wrote out sheets as the performances were taking place, and at the end placed these in order of merit.

The experience was a salutary one for almost everybody concerned, particularly because the pipers had privately arranged to make deliberate mistakes – some serious, some very minor – in their performances. So, as well as being an experience in writing sheets, this was a test by the pipers of the judges.

Various individuals were invited to read out their comments from their sheets on selected tunes, and then the sheets were passed to John MacLellan to dispose of as he wished.

A total of 20 people attended the seminar, out of 51 who had been invited. A proposal that any judge who did not attend at least one seminar every two years should be removed from the panel was sympathetically received and remitted to the Judges' Committee for action.

At the end a vote of thanks was proposed to Malcolm McRae for his efforts and to Major John Allan and the Army School for their excellent hospitality.

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Angus MacKay's 'Specimens of Canntaireachd'

by Roderick D. Cannon

Part 1 – Introduction

This document, which is now in the National Library, Edinburgh¹, has been referred to occasionally by the Editors of the Piobaireachd Society series², and by other writers³⁻⁶, but it has not previously been translated or published in full. It consists of five foolscap sheets, all in the well known handwriting of Angus MacKay. The paper has a watermarked date, 1853, so it is one of the two latest surviving MSS of Angus', the other being his Seaforth MS, which is dated 1854.⁷

The sheets are numbered from 2 to 6, but this numbering is in more modern writing (and is also incorrect in one place, since Sheet 5 is numbered on the wrong side). Sheets 2, 3 and 4 contain the 48 short specimens of canntaireachd with which this article is concerned. Sheet 5 and the first side of Sheet 6 contain copies of parts of three tunes in the Colin Campbell style of canntaireachd. The other side of Sheet 6, headed "Copyright of Angus MacKay", has a poem entitled 'MacCrummen's Lament composed by his intended Bride in Dunvegan Castle 1745-6'.

The Colin Campbell material has been discussed in some detail previously⁸. It comprises the ground and one variation of each of four tunes: 'One of Argyle's Marches', 'Leacran', 'Subbie Eskie' and a nameless one now known as the 'Lament for Alasdair Dearg MacDonell of Glengarry'. The point about them which has attracted most interest is that they are evidently copied, not from the Campbell canntaireachd MS which is still extant⁸, but from another version of it, very similar, which is now lost. The poem has not been discussed before. It is presumably Angus' own composition. It is not the same as the one which appears in the Historical Note to 'Cha Till MacCruimein' in Angus' published piobaireachd collection⁹.

The short Specimens were first discussed by Col. J.P. Grant of Rothiemurchus, in an article published in 1925³. Col. Grant drew up a table of note equivalences of the more important vocables, and compared them with other known forms of canntaireachd. He suggested, without any direct evidence, that the Mackay Specimens

actually represented the canntaireachd style of the MacArthur pipers; but he also concluded that they were "obviously corrupt". About 10 years ago, Dr. P.R. Cooke suggested to me that the Specimens might in fact be derived wholly from the MacKay family. In this article I hope to show that in fact this is the case, and that far from being corrupt, they are a remarkably accurate reflection of the original music.

In the MS the Specimens are numbered 1 to 48. Most of them have a title, and then follow one, two or at most three lines of canntaireachd. It seems clear that the titles were written first, since they are accurately spaced out, eight to each page, while the canntaireachd is sometimes squeezed in, but more often fails to fill properly the available space. The Specimens in fact tend to get shorter as the MS goes on. The tunes are roughly organised according to their types – or rather, their titles. Specimens 1 to 18 are all salutes beginning 'Failte...'; then come 'Battle of Glenshiel' and three other names; then a block of six nameless tunes. Several of the remaining tunes have 'March' titles, but the most striking feature is that there are none named as 'Laments'. The titles are given in full below.

The punctuation of the canntaireachd shows some progressive trends as we read through the MS. The first Specimen ends with a semicolon, a dash, and the sign "&c". None of the others have all of this, but semicolons are used in most of Specimens 2 to 23 – the exceptions being Specimens 13 and 21, which are also exceptionally short. Thereafter only Specimens 30 and 37 have semicolons. A fair number of Specimens are punctuated with commas in various places, and where this is done, the placing of the commas agrees with the musical phrasing. From Specimen 25 onwards, however, there are few commas. In each of the earlier Specimens, the first few vocables are enclosed by quotation marks, i.e. inverted commas. In most of the later, shorter Specimens the whole text is enclosed in this way. Only three Specimens (Specimens 13, 21 and 24) have no such marks, while four, towards the end, have the closing inverted commas but not the opening ones. There is nothing to suggest that the vocables not enclosed were added later. On the contrary, the writing always runs on smoothly, and it is clear in many places that the inverted commas were put in afterwards. (A possible exception is Specimen 16, referred to below.)

The titles are mostly in Gaelic. 'Battle of Glenshiel' is the only one which is wholly in English, though a few others are mixed, like 'Failte Lady Margaret', 'Failte Geaorge Oag', 'March Clan Lean'. The Gaelic is phonetically spelt, as in 'Bidagvoyach', 'Spatcharach

dolgruamach'. It is noticeable that there are no definite articles, and feminine nouns are unaspirated, such as 'Bolich' rather than 'A' Bhoilich', and 'Glas Mhir', not 'A' Ghlas Mheur'.

Part II – Translation

It is quite clear that the basic principle of the system of canntaireachd used in the Specimens is the same as in other known systems. Melody notes are represented by vowel sounds, or in the case of low A and low G, by sustained humming *m* or *n*. Grace notes are represented by various consonants, especially *b*, *d*, *t* and *r*. Certain common musical phrases are represented consistently by particular compound vocables, such as *hi anana*. Whether, and to what extent these compound vocables can be broken down into separate syllables it is not always easy to say.

Equally, we can identify most of the tunes, and match the canntaireachd with known versions in staff notation. Even the names are familiar, in many cases. With this in mind, the key to the system can be worked out, as is summarized here. It turns out to be very regular, and internally consistent, but it differs in several important ways from either the Campbell¹⁰ or the MacCrimmon^{11, 12} canntaireachd.

1. Single notes: B to high A

- (a) In stressed positions (e.g. at the beginning of a bar or half-bar), and/or when graced with a high G grace note, the notes B, C, D, E are respectively *ho*, *ho*, *ha*, *hi*. The note F is *hi* with the grace note, or *ve* (or *vee*) without. High G is *hi* or *he*; high A is *hi* or *ei*. Unfortunately the notes F, high G and high A occur only rarely in the Specimens.
- (b) In unstressed positions, with no grace note, B, C, D, E are *o*, *o*, *a*, *i*; or else *vo*, *vo*, *va*, *vi*. Alternatively, the consonant *d* occurs when the preceding sound is *n*: thus, *hin di* in Specimen 20.
- (c) When graced with a D grace note (and this occurs usually in an unstressed or moderately stressed position), B and C are *teo* after an *n*, or *peo* after an *m*. Less commonly, either note may be *to* or *po*.

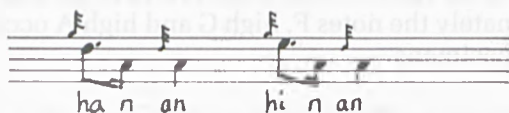
2. Single notes: low A and low G

- (a) In stressed positions, with a single grace note, which may be high G, or a D grace note if the preceding note is also a low A or low G, the spelling is *him* or *hin*. In many cases, though not always, the *m* spelling is used for low G and the *n* for low A.

It is well known, of course, that in most pibrochs low G and low A in stressed positions are preceded by a 'cadence E' rather than a simple high G grace note. Nevertheless, there are several examples among the Specimens where the context, and other known versions, make it clear that only the single grace note is played. See for example Specimens 23, 36, and 40, in which the low A or low G is short, and also Specimens 5, 10 and 20.

- (b) In unstressed positions, with E or D grace notes, forms with and without the letter *h* occur, but there are not enough examples to generalize.
- (c) In unstressed positions, with no grace note, there is usually no consonant other than *m* or *n* but also, and rather remarkably, there is often no vowel either. For example, in Specimen 1, line 1 ends with *hi om po*. This is a known tune, 'Sir James MacDonald of the Isles' Salute', and there is no doubt that *hi om po* has to be matched to four notes, E (a cadence), B, G, B. So it must be read as four syllables, and pronounced *hi o m po*, where the *m* is a sustained humming on the low G.

Another good example is Specimen 15, the well known 'MacLeod's Salute'. This contains the phrases *han an* and *hin an*, which at first sight look like two syllables each, but the music requires three syllables:



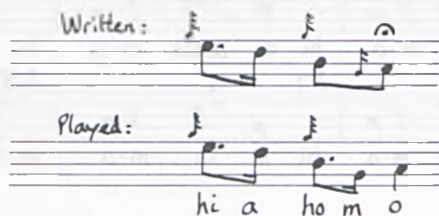
Equally clear are *himmam om*, in Specimen 23 – four syllables *him mam o m*; and *dallam* in Specimen 19, *dalla m*. In this last example, in the MS, the letter *m* is unusually far away from the previous letter, *a*, and it looks as though Angus wrote them separately at first, then decided to join them up.

When the canntaireachd was originally sung, these *m* and *n* sounds were probably preceded by short, obscure vowel sounds; that is, they would be pronounced "ummm..." and "unnn...". In Colin Campbell's canntaireachd, this preceding vowel is usually written as an *e*. In MacLeod of Gesto's

transcription of MacCrimmon canntaireachd, various vowel letters are used, apparently at random¹². In the Specimens, Angus MacKay also sometimes puts in the vowel, as for example in Specimen 7, where *hi aum* is best interpreted as *hi a um*. But the previous examples are enough to prove that, sometimes at least, a letter *m* or *n* must be read as a full syllable.

3. Low A with low G grace note

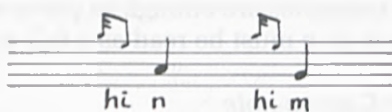
This occurs in unstressed positions, usually forming the last note of a descending musical phrase. In Campbell and Gesto canntaireachd it is written *din*. Here, however, we have another striking peculiarity of Angus' Specimens, as these notes are usually written *ma* or *mo*. In his writings in staff notation Angus always wrote the low G grace note with two tails, unlike previous writers who used three tails. Evidently he went out of his way to emphasize that the low G grace note was meant to be fairly long. How long it is hard to say, but at least he wanted it to be 'well sounded'. Evidently the canntaireachd is making the same point. The *m* is the low G, and is presumably a short syllable leading into the main note A. This example is from Specimen 8.



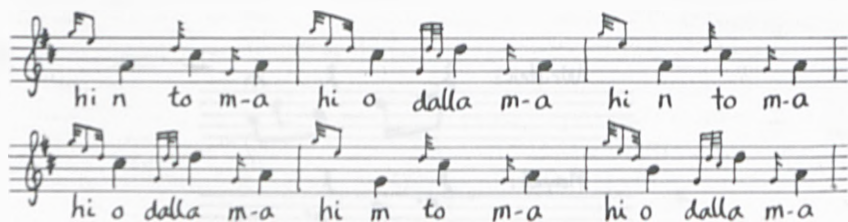
4. Cadence E

- (a) The cadence E before the notes B, C or D is written *hi*, and the melody note is represented by the appropriate vowel with no other letter: thus, on B or C, *hi o*; on D, *hi a*. Nearly always, the *hi* is written separately from the letters which follow.
- (b) As regards cadence E on the notes low A or low G, however, we are faced with the fact that it is written either differently or not at all. In places where we expect such a cadence, the canntaireachd is written simply *hin* or *him*. I propose that in fact

the cadence is intended, and that these vocables again should be read as two syllables:



We have already seen that the single letters *m* and *n* can stand for long notes. As a further justification for this reading of the cadences, we can note that cadences are used so extensively, in the Specimens, on the notes B, C and D, that it seems unreasonable to suppose that they were equally systematically *not* played on low G and low A. We can also point to particular tunes where notes low A and low G, together with other notes of the bottom hand, make up the basic pattern of the melody, and must surely, have been treated alike. Specimen 6 is a good example, and Specimen 18 is another:



There are two cases in which the cadence to low A is written separately from the rest of the vocable which follows. One is the echoing beat on low A, which is almost always written as two words, *hi anana*. The *hi* syllable is clearly the E cadence. The other is an isolated case, in Specimen 15, bars 2 and 4. Here the cadence is written, exceptionally, *hu*, and the *n* which follows is joined to the next vocable, thus: *hu no*. These were evidently pronounced as three syllables, *hu n o*.

5. Throws

The throws on B and C are *dro*; on D, *dalla*; on E, *didri*. These spellings are very consistent. The throws can be combined with

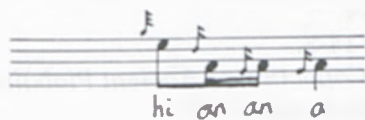
other syllables, as for example *hudalla*, *didria*, or *dallam* (to be read as *dalla m*); but these combinations are not common, except for *odro*. The throw on F occurs in only one tune in the Specimens, and the canntaireachd is something of a puzzle. It seems to read 'thir', though the letter *i* is not dotted; but before and after the vocable two signs seem to have been inserted which look like the capital letters 'AE'. I cannot explain this, and can only suggest that when Angus wrote out this Specimen he was not sure what the vocable should be. The throws on high G (Campbell canntaireachd *chedari* and *embari*), and on high A (*dili*), do not occur in the Specimens.

Two other well known piobaireachd movements are easily recognized when they occur, though the spellings vary: *rodin*, *rohin*, *rouhim*; and *haroho*, *barabo*.

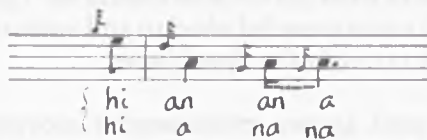
6. Echoing beats

The beat on E is *hiridi* (Specimen 42). This can only be read as three syllables, *hi ri di*, which are evidently the three E notes. In all staff notation sources, and in traditional playing, the E's are separated by low A grace notes. It is well known that in his own staff notation, Angus writes the second of these low A's longer than the first, but there is nothing in his canntaireachd to show this. The beat on D is spelled *hiaradalla* (Specimen 23) and *hi aradla* (Specimen 24). The second form confirms that the *hi* part is a cadence E, and both forms fit in with Angus' staff notation and with present day playing. The beat on B occurs in four tunes, always as *hi orodo*. Again the cadence E is separated. The three B notes have to be divided by low G grace notes. In staff notation Angus wrote the second low G grace note longer than the first, but, as in the case of the beat on E, this is not shown in his canntaireachd. This seems significant. If Angus, or his father, had sung the low G particularly long, he would surely have sounded it with a letter *m*, as *hi oro m o*, or *hi oro m peo*.

Finally, the beat on A is very common, and is almost always written *hi anana*. The last letter, *a*, is another case of a vowel sound being used for a sustained low A. Angus practically always writes this phrase in the same way, and it matches perfectly to his usual staff notation, with four syllables:



In modern playing, the first and last syllables are long, and the middle two are extremely short. An alternative timing, which has been extensively discussed¹³, would make the first low A long. There is nothing in the spelling to exclude this. The vocable could be interpreted with a long *n* for the first low A, or with a long *a*:



There is one variant spelling which supports the latter theory: *hiaanana*, in Specimen 1. Is this just a slip of the pen on Angus' part? Is it significant that this spelling occurs the very first time the vocable is used? With only one occurrence, it is difficult to come to any conclusion.

All the principles stated here have been deduced by taking Specimens which can be clearly identified with well known tunes, and matching them to Angus MacKay's own notations in his published book and MSS. With the aid of these principles it has been possible to transcribe nearly all of the Specimens with confidence. There are a few more grace note movements, not mentioned so far, which occur only once each, and a few variant spellings or exceptions to the above rules, but only a few.

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Piobaireachd

As has been the case for many years now, ten pipers were invited to compete and each of them was required to submit six tunes. As a result there could have been 60 different piobaireachds listed but in fact a total of just 38 were offered. Last year we did not do the survey, but in 1986 42 tunes had been put forward and in the previous year 35, so the total this time seems to be about normal.

No single tune was outstanding in its popularity but two did receive four submissions out of a possible ten and three more were presented three times. A further ten got two votes from the pipers and the remaining 23 tunes were put forward by one piper only each time.

Tunes offered by more than one piper were as follows:-

- | | |
|------------------------|--|
| Submitted four times, | Lament for the Children Beloved Scotland |
| Submitted three times, | The Battle of the Pass of Crieff MacLeods' Salute The Old Men of the Shells |
| Submitted twice, | My King has landed in Moidart Donald Duaghall MacKay Mrs MacLeod of Talisker His Father's Lament for Donald MacKenzie Rory MacLeod's Lament Ronald MacDonald of Morar The Unjust Incarceration |

Lament for the Earl of Antrim
Lament for MacSwan of Roaig
Lament for the Viscount of Dundee

Pipers' choice is obviously influenced considerably by the tunes which have been set in recent years. Competitors are also well aware that in a big competition there is little point in submitting the small tunes, so whilst almost all the really big tunes appeared somewhere, there were practically none of the lighter or shorter pieces in evidence. Even the old pot-boiler, Lament for Mary MacLeod, was not put forward by anyone.

Marches

There was some slight increase in the number of marches in 1988. A total of 43, as compared to 34 in 1986 and 37 in 1985, were offered by the pipers. The four most popular were submitted three times each, followed by a list of nine with two submissions.

In the top flight once again were Mrs John MacColl and Abercairney Highlanders. The top four were:-

Three submissions, Mrs John MacColl
 Abercairney Highlanders
 Inveran
 The Braes of Castle Grant

Two submissions, Donald MacLean's Farewell to Oban
 John MacFadyen of Melfort
 The 74th's Farewell to Edinburgh
 Leaving Lunga
 Brigadier Cheap of Tiroran
 The Highland Wedding
 John MacColl's March to Kilbowie Cottage
 The Pap of Glencoe
 Lonach Gathering

Strathspeys

As always this is the most restricted branch of pipe music, at least so far as competitions are concerned. Twenty different tunes were put forward, the same as two years ago. With smaller numbers the popularity rating is perhaps more evident, and it turned out as follows:-

- Submitted eight times, Maggie Cameron
- Submitted five times, Arniston Castle
The Ewe with the Crooked Horn
Caber Feidh
- Submitted four times, The Shepherd's Crook
Atholl Cumers
Susan MacLeod
The Caledonian Society of London
Blair Drummond
- Submitted three times, Tulloch Castle
Inveraray Castle
- Submitted twice, The Piper's Bonnet
John Roy Stewart

Reels

The number of reels considered worthy for competition is always something in excess of the strathspeys but less than the other two categories. A total of 14 tunes were submitted once only each and the remainder were as follows:-

- Submitted five times, Bessie MacIntyre
Mrs Macpherson of Inveran
- Submitted four times, Lieutenant Colonel D.J.S. Murray
- Submitted three times, The Smith of Chilliechassie
Lohcarron
The Brown Haired Maid
The Grey Bob
Lochiel's away to France
Thomson's Dirk
- Submitted twice, Lexie MacAskill
Miss Proud
Broadford Bay
The Sheepwife
The Rejected Suitor
Lord MacDonald
John Morrison of Assynt House



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Scottish Pipers' Quiz

Deaved perhaps by the many pipers' quizzes in overseas magazines, where to be successful it is necessary to have a personal acquaintance with all the streets in New Westminster and a knowledge of alternative spellings of this editor's name, the S.P.A. has inaugurated its own test of piping knowledge at its weekly meetings.

Through the kindness of President Ronnie MacShannon, and the various committee members who have taken turns to invent the questions, we are being permitted – nay, encouraged – to publish these tests.

No prizes are offered since so many know the answers. Solutions will appear next month.

- 1) State the full names of the following famous pipers: G.S. MacLennan, A.J. MacLellan.
- 2) The MacCrimmons are popularly reputed to have had a college of piping, located near Dunvegan, on the Isle of Skye. Name its exact location.
- 3) Unscramble the following anagrams of pipe tunes:
 - a) SLICON TACLET
 - b) ABLIR MONDDRUM
 - c) NADSY FFUD
 - d) EHT ODAR OT HAMS-HUSI-OP
- 4) What title does the winner of the Scotway piobaireachd competition hold for the following year?
- 5) Who is currently the Queen's Piper?
- 6) The Northern Meeting Piping Competitions are held in which theatre in Inverness?
- 7) Which of the following piobaireachds is the odd one out and why?
 - a) Lament for the Children
 - b) Patrick Og MacCrimmon's Lament
 - c) Lament for Donald Ban MacCrimmon
 - d) I got a kiss of the King's hand
 - e) Lament for Donald Duaghal MacKay

- 8) Who composed the 2/4 March "The Pap of Glencoe"?
- 9) Which well-known piping body has the Gaelic name "Comunn nam Piobairean Albannach"?
- 10) What was significant about the 1987 World Pipe Band Championships?
- 11) What do the following pipe tunes have in common?
 - a) Dalnahassaig
 - b) Mrs Macpherson of Inveran
 - c) Bidy from Sligo
 - d) Donald MacLennan's Exercise
- 12) Which British army regiment's pipes and drums featured in the hit record "Amazing Grace"?
- 13) In the pipe tune, who wears the "leather breeches"?
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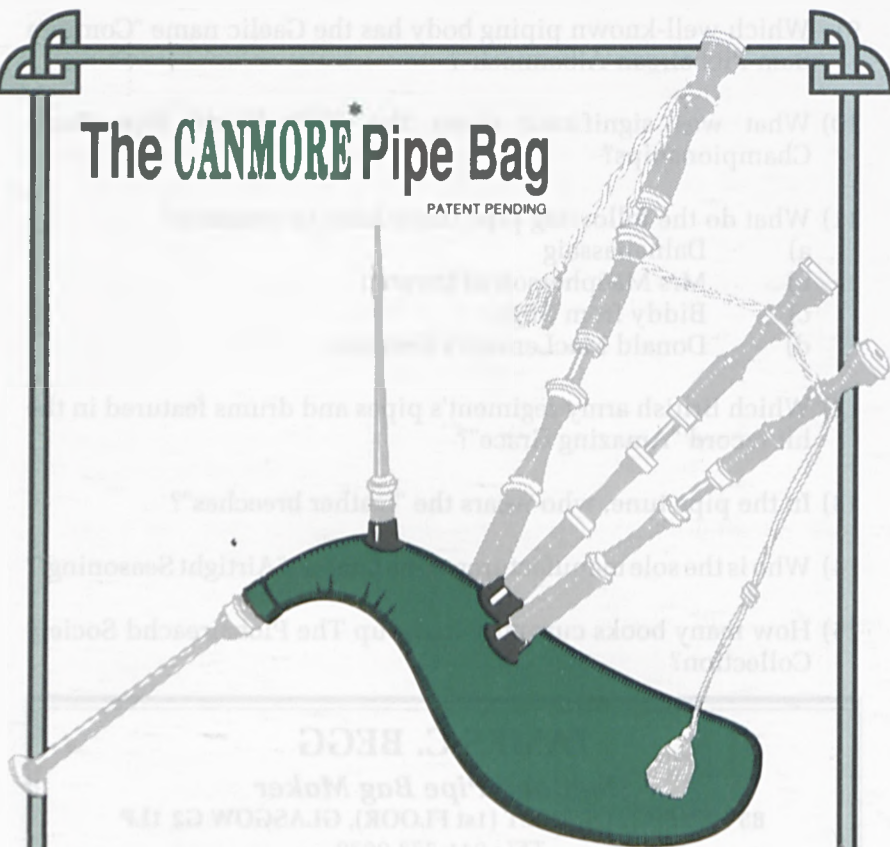
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Deuchainn-ghleusda, 'a tuning-prelude'

by Seán Donnelly

Tuning-preludes, *tasturas*, short improvisations played to check the tone and tuning of an instrument before an extended performance, are well-attested in early music. In a twelfth-century romance, written in Norman-French, a highly-technical passage describing a harper's performance adverts to his checking his instrument with a tuning-prelude before commencing to sing his *lai*.¹ Writing in 1716 Francois Couperin gives 'measured' and 'unmeasured' preludes for the harpsichord.² Early collections of Highland bagpipe music also give tuning-preludes, for which *deuchainn-ghleusda* (spelt variously), or a variant, was the Gaelic term. This is a learned technical term that can be traced back, in slightly varying forms but with the same precise meaning, over five hundred years. Its primary meaning was a preliminary trial before an operation commenced, a check that potential variables were stable. In this sense not only did pipers use it; and before them harpers; but the earliest evidence shows Irish scribes using it when testing their pens.

Féchain-gléasa

This is the earliest form of the phrase. *Féchain* has 'test' or 'trial' as one of its many meanings in Irish. The second word is the genitive singular of *glés*, later Irish *gléas*, Scot. Gael. *gleus*. (The inconsistencies of spelling down through this piece are due to the differences between Irish and Scottish Gaelic, and to the variations in the spelling of Early Modern Irish.) *Glés* has a wide range of meanings in Irish. Here it means 'order, adjustment, arrangement', in music 'tuning'; but in a concrete sense it can mean an 'implement' or 'appliance'.

As he worked on a manuscript a professional scribe had to frequently trim his pen. Having trimmed it he would write a few lines in the margin of his manuscript to ensure that it would produce a script consistent with that which went before. Many of these marginalia are of extreme interest in that they illuminate some personal aspects of the scribe's life; others, anatrains and snatches of poetry, and complaints about the difficulties he was labouring under,



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vary little from one manuscript to another. But as his equivalent of the typist's 'the quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog', or a musician's running up and down the scale, a scribe would use one of a number of set-phrases. One was *promhadh pinn* 'a test of pen' (a borrowing of the Latin *probatio pennae*). Another was the phrase under discussion, *féchain-glésa*. The second word means the pen's 'trimming', or 'set', in most examples; but it occasionally means simply the pen itself. Both uses are illustrated in the five representative samples which follow.

Fechain glésa pind andso o Chairbre Chorrach

'a test of the pen's trimming here by Cairbre Corrach'

Fechain glésa pind andso

'a test of the pen's trimming here'

Fechuin glésa Sidraigh

'a test of Sighraidh's pen'³

Misi Giollapatraic ac fechain mo glésa ar barc Donnchadha

'I am Giollapatraic testing my pen on Donnchadha's book'⁴

Dfheachuin ghleassa in phinn anso et in duibh ní beag de

'a test of the pen's trimming here and of the ink – that is sufficient.'⁵

Occasionally, a scribe would use a variant of the phrase: *feuchain phind sin* 'a pen-test there';⁶ *fechain duibh* 'a test of ink'.⁷ In some medical manuscripts *sellad* 'looking, examining' (Scot. Gael. *selladh*) replaces *féchain*.⁸

Of the examples quoted, the first is from *Liber Flavus Fergusiorum*, a manuscript written in the 1430s, now in the library of the Royal Irish Academy, Dublin;⁹ the second is from MS H.2,7 (second half of fifteenth century) and the fourth from MS H.3,18 (mainly sixteenth century) – two manuscripts in the library of Trinity College, Dublin.¹⁰ Between 1487 and 1520 Sighraidh Ua Mail Chonaire wrote the third example while restoring faded writing in part of *Laud Misc. 610*, now in the Bodleian Library, Oxford.¹¹ The source of the fifth example is a fragment of a catechism, tentatively dated to the reign of Elizabeth I (1558-1603). *Dfheachuin* here, the form later found in the Scottish examples, is a Middle Irish variant of *féchain*.

Féachain-ghléis

Except that the second word has changed its declension, having *gléis* instead of *glésa* for its genitive, this form is identical with the previous one. It appears as the title of an Irish harp-tune. In 1792 at Magilligan, co. Derry, Edward Bunting took down 'Feaghan geleash', 'Try if it be in tune' – 'an ancient Irish prelude', from Denis Hempson

(1695-1808), the last Irish harper to play with the fingernails. During his eighty years as a professional harper (he had commenced learning in 1707) Hempson had seen the style and repertory of the Irish harp change radically – a change that he continually deplored to Bunting. He remained himself faithful to the training he had received from seventeenth-century harpers. Though he was 97 when he met Bunting his technical and musical mastery of the Irish harp astonished the latter, a talented and trained musician himself. His obstinate clinging to a style and repertory no longer understood had made Hempson highly sensitive about the 'strange' pieces in his repertory; and Bunting left an interesting note about this 'ancient prelude':

This extremely curious piece was taken down from Hempson's performance in the year 1792, and is given as he played it. This relic is but one half of the prelude, as he solemnly averred that he had forgotten the remainder. ... It was with great reluctance that the old harper was prevailed on to play even the fragment of it here preserved, to gratify the Editor, to whom he acknowledged he was under obligations. He would rather, he asserted, have played any other air, as this awakened recollections of the days of his youth, of friends whom he had outlived, and of times long past, when harpers were accustomed to play the ancient caoinans or lamentations, with their corresponding preludes. When pressed to play, notwithstanding, his peevish answer uniformly was, "What's the use of doing so? no one can understand it now, not even any of the harpers now living."¹²

Whoever translated this phrase for Bunting assumed that it was an ordinary tune-title, and not a term defining the music. He understood it to be *Féach an gléas* 'try the tuning', as in the Irish *féach mé* 'try me', or *d'fhéach an dochtúir a cuisle* 'the doctor tested her pulse'. He was very close to the correct interpretation of this phrase, much closer than modern writers who attempted to explain it as *Faigh an gléas* 'find the key'.¹³

Deuchainn-ghleusda

This is the form the phrase takes in Scottish Gaelic. The first word is the modern spelling of *déchain* (see above). The second word is the genitive of the verbal-noun *gleusadh* '(act of) arranging, adjusting, tuning' etc. In Scottish Gaelic the genitive would now be *gleusaidh*; but in Irish it is still *gléasta*. The genitives *gléasa* and *glésta* are so alike in form and meaning that the substitution of the latter for the former is perfectly understandable. It also happened in the Irish phrase for

a harper's tuning-key *crann-glèsa*, which is also found as *crann-ghléasta*.

A poem attacking Roderick Morison, harper to Iain Breac MacLeod at Dunvegan during the 1680s, contains the earliest Scottish example of the phrase. The poet reminds MacLeod that Roderick's family, the Morisons of Ness in Lewis, had been notoriously treacherous to the MacLeods in the past, particularly in connection with the MacKenzie take-over of Lewis; and much as MacLeod might like harp-music, he might never know when Roderick would decide to play *Deuchainn-ghleusda Mhic O Charmaig* 'The Tuning-trial of Mac O Charmaig'. Legend had it that this was a magic-tune played by Mac O Charmaig, an Irish harper making a tour of Scotland, to lull the household of MacLeod of Lewis to sleep, so that he could murder MacLeod and elope with his daughter, whom he had fallen in love with. At the last moment, however, one of MacLeod's sons dissuaded him. This story would seem to have arisen as an explanation of a saying about the *deuchainn-ghleusda*. Doubtless it was based on the murder of Angus Og MacDonald, son of John, Lord of the Isles, at Inverness during Christmas 1490, by Diarmaid 'O Cairbre, 'Mac 'I Chairbre', an Irish harper.¹⁴ Traditions current in the seventeenth century claimed that 'O Cairbre had fallen in love with a daughter of MacKenzie of Kintail, and that MacKenzie promised her to him if he would assassinate Angus 'Og.¹⁵

In his book, *A compleat theory of the Scots Highland bagpipe* (Edinburgh, 1803/R 1971), pp. 19-20, Joseph MacDonald gives two forms of the phrase – *Deachain ghleusih*, which seems to be *deuchainn-ghleusaidh*, and *deachain ghleust*, in which the second word is a shortened form of *gleust(a)*. Angus MacKay, *A collection of ancient piobaireachd* (Edinburgh, 1838/R 1972), gives *deuchan gleus* in his list of technical terms, and again (iii) *deuchainn ghleus*. On first sight, the second word appears to be the uninflected word *gleus*; but possibly it is a shortened form of the old genitive *gleusa*. (A further possibility is that the *t* in *gleust* was no longer clearly sounded in MacKay's dialect of Gaelic.)

James Logan, *The Scottish Gael* (2 vols., Edinburgh, 1831), ii, p. 296, gives the phrase as *deachin ghleust*, which is the same form as one of Joseph MacDonald's, from whose work he may have taken it. Of the preludes themselves he writes:

I am afraid that some pipers think there is a great deal of grace in those flourishes called "preludes of tuning", forms of which are

actually taught: but I can say that although Scotsmen may bear with them, to Englishmen they have no charms.

Conclusion

To sum up: practitioners in three important professions in Gaelic society used the same technical term for a preliminary trial or test. (I have never come across an example of its use outside these professions.) That harpers and scribes should use the same term to express the same concept is no surprise. Professional harpers, with the exception of some well-born amateurs (often blind), who turned professional, were drawn from the stratum of Gaelic society that supplied poets, scribes, chroniclers, physicians – the literate professions. In certain families these professions were hereditary; and while history or poetry might be the primary profession of a particular family it would often have branches in other professions. To judge from their surnames, many Irish harpers belonged to important literary families. They would have had, therefore, a common technical vocabulary to express the same concept.

Pipers did not belong to this stratum, however. In fact, the old order was collapsing and harpers becoming scarce in the Highlands when the pipers attained the high status they eventually held. The antagonism of some poets towards the bagpipe was not rooted in a particular dislike of the instrument; rather it stemmed from an aristocratic contempt for the upstart; and it should be remembered, too, that though the bagpipe was well-established as a military-instrument in Ireland and Scotland, it still had, to a certain extent, vulgar and immoral connotations throughout most of Europe. Given this relatively-late arrival of pipers in Gaelic society, the custom of playing tuning-preludes, as well as the technical term for them, is highly likely to have passed into the piping tradition from that of the harp.

1. Mildred K. Pope, *The romance of Horn, by Thomas* (vol. 1, Oxford, 1955; vol. 2, revised and completed by T.B.W. Reid, Oxford, 1964), ii, pp. 155-6.
2. Arnold Dolmetsch, *The interpretation of the music of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries* (London, 1915; University of Washington pbk. edn., with intro. by R. Alec Harman, Seattle, 1969), pp. 21-2.
3. Charles Plummer, 'On the colophons and marginalia of Irish

scribers', *Proceedings of the British Academy* xii (1926), 24, n. 8. (Plummer, misunderstanding *glésa*, translates the first example as 'a test of the pen-instrument of Cairbre Corrach'.)

4. T.K. Abbott and E.J. Gwynn, eds., *Catalogue of the Irish manuscripts in the library of Trinity College, Dublin* (Dublin, 1921), p. 359.

5. Pádraig de Brún, 'Dhá bhlogh de theagasc críostaí – ó ré Éilíse I', *Celtica* xix (1987), 55.

6. Paul Walsh, *Irish men of learning*, ed. by Colm 'O Lochlainn, (Dublin, 1947), p. 30.

7. Myles Dillon, 'Laud Misc. 610', *Celtica* vi (1963), 139.

8. Nessa ní Sheaghdha, 'Notes on some scribal terms', in James Carney and David Greene, eds., *Celtic studies – essays in memory of Angus Matheson 1912-1962* (London, 1968), p. 88.

9. Edward Gwynn, 'On the manuscript known as Liber Flavus Fergusiorum', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* xxxvi C (1906-7), 16-17.

10. Abbott and Gwynn, op. cit., pp. 78, 336.

11. Anne O'Sullivan and William O'Sullivan, 'Three notes on Laud Misc. 610', *Celtica* ix (1971), 141, n. 23.

12. Edward Bunting, *The ancient music of Ireland arranged for the piano-forte* (Dublin, 1840), pp. 82-3.

13. Gráinne Yeats, 'Some thoughts on Irish harp-music', *Ceol* iv (2), (December 1973), 43; Donal O'Sullivan, ed., with Micheál 'O Súilleabháin, *Bunting's Ancient Music of Ireland ...* (Cork, 1983), p. 213.

14. William Matheson, ed., *The blind harper – the songs of Roderick Morison and his music* (Edinburgh, 1970), liii-lvi.

15. J.R.N. MacPhail, ed., *Highland papers* (4 vols., Edinburgh, 1914-34), i, p. 52.

(An earlier version of this material appeared under the title 'Feaghan geleash', in *Ceol tíre* xxv (February 1984), 5-6, 11-12.)

Ardvasar Seminar 1987

Part 4

Continuing some abstracts from the Proceedings of the John MacFadyen Seminar sponsored by the Clan Donald Lands Trust.

The value of tradition, the use of tapes rather than books, dependability of memory proved engrossing topics.

S. MacNeill Well fifty years ago I remember, when you listened to pipers discussing how to play a tune there was nothing said about where it was written or the musical value of it. It was all about how somebody else in an older generation played it. That was the only thing, and that was good in a way. They weren't concerned with how it appeared in the book because a lot of the books weren't written fifty years ago. Most of the Piobaireachd Society books hadn't been written at that time so people were operating from Glen's Collection if they needed a book at all.

I think that there's always been a strong look back to what people played rather than to what people have written. I don't think written music has concerned the pipers in the past much at all.

A. MacNeill But I don't think that they played what was written. If you take Gillies's manuscript at Glasgow University, he certainly didn't play what was written down in there. He played maybe what he got. If he got one from say old Meldrum it was written as he got the tune from him, but that didn't mean he was going to play it that way.

S. MacNeill I don't know that Gillies was an expert – obviously he could write music but...

A. MacNeill I think he was a master of writing, because he used a lot of different time signatures. In Reid's manuscript that he had from him it was all written in different time signatures.

S. MacNeill But the ability to read music, I remember (the two words old pipers use most). In 1948 and 1949 I did a series of programmes, it was the first time I wrote any scripts for the B.B.C. Hugh MacPhee was the producer then and the series was on the music of famous pipers. Tommy played the music of William Ross and somebody else played the music of Peter MacLeod and so on. I had to write a script that went along with it, and we had a meeting beforehand of the composer (if he was alive), the piper who was going to do the stuff, me and Hugh MacPhee. I remember on two occasions the pipers, who were very good prize winners of that time, were told by the composer, "I want you to play this tune," and he produced a tune that wasn't published. And after everyone went away the two guys got a hold of me and said, "How does that tune go?" They couldn't have played that march off the sheet of music.

A. Wright That applies to quite a lot of pipers today Seumas.

M. McRae I'm wondering whether something can't be done to make traditional oral teaching more accessible. At the moment there's very little of it. There are the cassettes that the School of Scottish Studies produced – what are they, William MacLean, Brown and Nicol and George Moss. Now it seems to me that there's a lot of traditional teaching still available in the likes of Seumas, Ronald, Andrew and countless others who can say, "So far as I can remember this is the way Reid played the tune," or "This is the way so-and-so told me to play this," and "This particular phrase went such and such." You don't get this from the books, and no matter how accurately you represent particular ways of tunes in Staff notation it's going to be virtually impossible to represent accurately all the different ways of even one particular phrase in a controversial tune.

There's a case for somebody somewhere to do more work in terms of collecting on tape what's still available in the way of oral tradition.

A. MacNeill But they are there – MacLean's tapes are there already. The only thing the Scottish School of Studies wanted to do was to publish the ground. They did this for *The Big Spree*, but then when you come to MacLean's crunluath he's got an entirely different thing – nobody plays it today. It's a wonderful thing which should have been kept.

M. McRae What you are saying is the tapes are there already? But they've got to be made accessible.

A. MacNeill Yes I agree. It's up to us to get these things collected.

M. McRae This is something that the MacFadyen Trust could maybe take on board. There is stuff available but there is a lot more that could be collected from the likes of yourselves. This could be something for the MacFadyen Trust, with a view to paying whatever it costs to have the available material edited and made accessible in the sense that a series of cassettes could be produced, and also to pay whatever it costs to have someone collect more of this material.

The School of Scottish Studies is short of money. They are not doing much so far as I am aware in the way of collecting oral piobaireachd tradition now. They did a lot of work in the forties and fifties but there's been very little done over the last twenty, thirty years. They've got an appeal on the go to try and save themselves as a separate part of the university so you can't expect them to be doing a great deal more.

A. MacNeill Well, you see the Piobaireachd Society started a library thing two or three years ago. They had a great gathering of all the different experts around there, to get these tapes and put them in and we could maybe give them help. I think it's better to have somebody of the previous generation. If our crowd are going to do these things it will be "Ach well, that's not the way he did it at all." You know if you take your *Cille Chrìosd* for instance, the way a lot of the Glasgow boys are playing it at present, if you play it the way MacLean played it and old Angus they would say "Oh, that's a load of rubbish."

- S. MacNeill Who of the previous generation could you get?
- A. MacNeill Angus Macpherson, I've got his tapes.
- S. MacNeill Oh yes the tapes, I thought you meant various individuals.
- A. MacNeill Then there's Willie MacLean's, and unfortunately Reid's tapes are not available yet. Robbie seems to be holding on to them, but if we could get them all there, that would be three.
- S. MacNeill There's all the Malcolm Macpherson stuff too, although he never plays a complete tune.
- M. McRae The same argument came up in relation to the Highland Society Manuscript when that was raised with the Piobaireachd Society. David Murray's attitude was, "But it's there. It's in the National Library." But the National Library is not easily accessible.
- S. MacNeill David Murray's attitude was, "It's ours. Nobody is going to get it."
- R. Morrison It's almost impossible to get material from the School of Scottish Studies. I've been in touch with them about the Oran Mor and all the rest of it. Yes, John MacInnes has finally agreed, but beforehand it was very, very difficult. They don't like to enquire or do any kind of research, for some reason unknown to me.
- S. MacNeill They have the Jackdaw mentality. They have got it and they are going to sit on it. It's been like that for years.
- M. McRae I think part of their problem is making staff available to actually look it out Ronald, and say to you, "Here it is, come and have a listen to it." This is the justification they give for having produced the tapes of Brown and Nicol and Willie MacLean and so on. They wanted to be able to make some of it accessible to stop people coming to them, because they haven't got the staff resources to cater for the demand. We

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should be able to say to them, "Look, the MacFadyen Trust will take this from you, copy it or edit it, release it and give you back the original."

A. MacNeill As far as the MacLean tapes are concerned we don't need the Scottish School of Studies, because Dr Alastair MacLean, a brother of the person who collected them, Calum MacLean, has got the master tapes of these and he told me he would give me a copy of any of them and I intend to get it personally.

R. Morrison Of the piobaireachd?

A. MacNeill Of the piobaireachd, and his talks and everything.

M. McRae Well you see this is one avenue where there is a lot of material already in existence that simply requires collected, edited and made available more widely.

S. MacNeill Who has got time to do it, Malcolm?

A. MacNeill Alasdair Milne suggested that it could be done through the John MacFadyen Trust.

T. Pearston Put it all on a computer, then pull out all the references. That's what we need to do.

A. MacNeill Oh I think you need that. We are all talking and complaining but it's our own fault. I went to the National Library to see the Kilberry papers after they were put in. They had lain there for a year, and I think Ed Neigh and Murray were the only two names that were in the book there.

It is most amusing to see the way it was worded, the letters to Kilberry from old Angus and what not. Most servile and you can feel the forelock being tugged.

R. Morrison Well I've got very little time for the School of Scottish Studies as far as the giving of material is concerned. It is only recently very, very recently that I had occasion to ask them to do something for me, which I needed. And they wouldn't give it to me without pressure being put on them from elsewhere, I'm not going to mention any names.

S. MacNeill Well many years ago they wrote to us in the College and asked for the copy of a tape of something we had – I can't remember what it was. I made a copy and sent it to them. A few years later Willie MacLean was in my house and he was telling me about how he had made these recordings for the School of Scottish Studies and I wrote to the School of Scottish Studies and said can I get one or two of the piobaireachds, and they wrote back and said, "We have no time to be bothered with individual inquiries of this nature, and they are not available to you." So I said hell's bells it's the last you get from me.

But to my great horror I got an interview done for our Oral History department (I'm talking about the College of Piping Oral History department as if it was a great big thing, but at least we try) and I got this interview done of D.R. MacLennan just before he died, and Richard Powell was talking away about how the Historical Committee of the Piobaireachd Society wanted to do all this and what a pity it was he hadn't got D.R. Well I said, "I've got D.R. – I've got two hours of tapes of D.R. I'll give you a copy of that," and I gave him a copy of it and hell's bells did he not go and make a copy and give it to the School of Scottish Studies.

DONALD DRONE




- A. MacNeill The School of Scottish Studies they didn't pay for these Willie MacLean tapes. That was Calum MacLean when he was working for the Irish oral tradition people.
- S. MacNeill They gave Willie MacLean a tape recorder and left it with him one winter and he just recorded tunes when he felt like it.
- M. McRae Well it does seem to me that the likes of the tapes that the School of Scottish Studies produced have done piping a great service, the Willie MacLean tape for instance I found fascinating.
- A. MacNeill But you see it's only the ground. The significant part of the tune they have missed out. They had no business to publish that – they should have done the whole thing.
- M. McRae The point is what has been made available is of inestimable value and the point I'm trying to make is that there is other stuff available but not readily available. It's in existence and this is something that I think the MacFadyen Trust could well consider taking on.

by SEORAS




- A. MacNeill Very much so. That's the biggest factor in it I think.
- M. McRae That's possibly where the Piobaireachd Society Collection has fallen between two stools. It seems to me that over the last twenty years or so the books have represented a nondescript style of playing. For example the MacDonalds' Salute – "Write it all crotchets and quavers and you can't go too far wrong, boys – take out of this whatever you like." They are playing safe, they're not opting for one way or the other, and they're doing piping a disservice as a result.
- A. MacNeill Well as long as the traditional things are kept alive and people can interpret the different ways, that's all right. But if they're not capable of interpreting in the fashion that they were taught then one would need to write it in different styles.
- S. MacNeill Is there anything else we should recommend the Society to do, as a result of this morning's discussion?
- R. Morrison Would it be possible, Seumas, to set up a resource centre for pipers and piping, maybe in the College of Piping, or somewhere, where we can go and find things?
- S. MacNeill We could certainly do it. We have the books and the tapes and the records, but we would need a room fitted up for this and another member of staff.
- M. McRae The logical step towards collecting what's already available on tape, and making it more accessible, is to go to men like John MacDonald or Andrew MacNeill and say, "Andrew, how did you get this tune from Bob Reid? What can you remember about this tune?" and record it all. Not with a view to immediately publishing it in cassettes or anything else, but just so that it's there. So that maybe in ten or fifteen years time the MacFadyen Trust or the Piobaireachd Society will get around to employing somebody to edit the tape and produce a cassette and make it more widely available.

- A. MacNeill And then keep it as a surprise for a Piobaireachd Society Conference.
- S. MacNeill But you've got to be wary of memory, you know. I think I've got a good memory, but I remembered something quite wrongly in a tune a number of years ago. Fred Morrison asked me how I played Southall because he was teaching it to a boy in the College. I didn't play the tune at the time and he said "I wish I could remember whether John MacDonald (of South Uist) rested on the E at the start of the third bar, or whether he cut up quickly to the high A." I said "Oh, he played the first way. I can sit and just close my eyes and I can hear John MacDonald playing that tune any time." So Fred went away and taught it that way to this boy. Years later when we were at South Uist Games Jimmy Young asked me if I could get John MacDonald to play a tune, and I persuaded John to play Southall, and he played it the opposite way from I had remembered it.
- M. McRae Maybe he had changed.
- S. MacNeill No – well I'm not sure. It's not likely. I think I play marches the same way as I played them thirty years ago.
- R. Morrison No, I mean John MacDonald might have changed.
- S. MacNeill I know, but I don't think so. I think it was just that I had remembered it wrongly.



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Scotway Contest

The annual invitation professional competition financed by the Scotway group was held in the banqueting hall of Glasgow City Chambers on Saturday 3rd December. The acoustics as always proved an insurmountable problem and as a result the attendance was disappointing.

The results were as follows –

Piobaireachd: 1. Robert Wallace, 2. Murray Henderson, 3. William MacCallum, 4. Iain MacFadyen, 5. Roderick MacLeod.

March, strathspey and reel: 1. Roderick MacLeod, 2. William Morrison, 3. Murray Henderson, 4. Hugh MacInnes, 5. Robert Wallace.

The judges for piobaireachd were John Burgess, Dr Leslie Craig, David J.S. Murray, and for the other event Dr. John MacAskill, Evan MacRae, Ronald Morrison. The tunes were chosen for them by the Scotway Music Committee which consists of Angus MacDonald (formerly Pipe Major of the Glasgow Police Pipe Band) and Ronald Morrison.

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Bayport,
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Dear Seumas,

We in New York, at the 14th Annual General Meeting of the T.M.B.L.T. Piping Society were much strengthened and uplifted by the succinct report of I.K.M. regarding the recital by Roderick MacLeod, in the November issue of the Times.

The members of the T.M.B.L.T. though have expressed some concern and worry over the possibility that since I.K.M. admitted to guessing the title of one tune and did not know a second, (the piobaireachd) a third or fourth and therefore perhaps one of offending provenance, may have possibly escaped his eager attention.

We at T.M.B.L.T. are utterly devoted to the preservation of the true Highland bagpipe and its pure culture. A culture we, at T.M.B.L.T., feel to be untouched for countless millennia as apparently so does I.K.M.

We will therefore arm ourselves and ruthlessly pursue our goals knowing we are backed by such a resolute savant, I.K.M.

Very Truly Yours,

F.J. Timoney

President and Head Screw;
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Pipers are not always keen to announce in advance what they intend to play – perhaps because often the fingers decide for themselves. But we can always back-announce the programme.

Hindsight is the only exact science.

Stephen M. Brittain, M.D., Neurology,
Vermont,
U.S.A.

Dear Mr MacNeill,

I was disappointed to see the reprint of the Wall St. Journal article by Alexandra Peers and accompanying note from Mr. McFarland. The former gives a distorted presentation of our study and the latter

Bill McGennis

A stalwart of the piping scene in the Canadian Maritime provinces passed away at the end of November. Pipe Major William McGennis was born in Guelph, Ontario but for much of his life he lived and taught in Nova Scotia.

During the second world war he served with the British Commandos and afterwards joined the first battalion of the Canadian Black Watch and was Pipe Major of the band at the time of the regiment's disbandment.

He is survived by a son and a daughter to whom sympathy is extended at this time.

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reflects a lack of understanding of what Bob Hartenstein and I did.

The one (and only) thing which we did was to measure "the actual decibel output...for the Great Highland Bagpipe." The purpose of our experiment was not to prove that bagpipes cause hearing loss, but rather to quantitate the risk for noise induced hearing loss in pipers and those listening to performances on the bagpipe. The most relevant measurement for a performer is the 105 dB noted at the piper's left ear. Based on this measurement and well-established guidelines for acceptable noise exposure (OSHA) we recommended the use of ear protection while practicing. This seemed preferable to limiting practice time.

I am unaware of anybody having carefully and systematically investigated the question of whether bagpipes do actually produce hearing loss. This would be an interesting study. Anecdotal comments which are not substantiated by proper hearing tests, whether made by a physician or lay person, are not a valid substitute. Until then it makes sense to be aware of potential risks and take steps to avoid problems. I do not feel this is a matter of being either for or "against" bagpipes. It is a matter of common sense and prudence. By taking this simple precaution one can minimize the risk of diminishing one's ability to enjoy the full richness of pipe music, crunluaths and all.

Best Wishes,
Steve Brittain.

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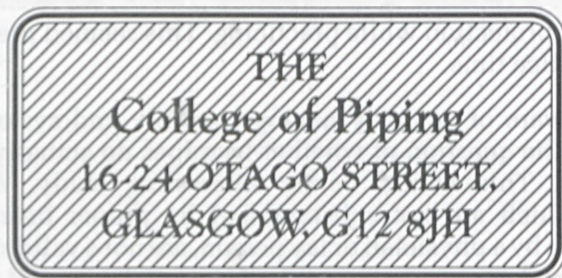
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