

# Re-discovering Scot

ROSS ANDERSON

**R**ELETE after their candle-lit dinners, the gathered gentlemen of the Highland Society of London in the early 19th century would lean back in reverie to enjoy the music of their native culture performed not only on the great Highland bagpipe but also on the now all-but-extinct pastoral pipes.

Some of the finest surviving examples of this instrument, precursor to Ireland's uilleann pipes, were made by Hugh Robertson, the Edinburgh-based master pipe maker who was chosen by the society to produce the prize pipes for its first competition in 1781 and most of the subsequent competitions until 1811, by which time Hugh Robertson was well into his 70s.

The pastoral chanter is made in two sections. The lower "foot joint" is detachable. With it on, it resembles a Border pipe chanter; with it removed, the instrument looks like a set of uilleann pipes. A handful of historically-minded contemporary piping enthusiasts have made often discouraging attempts to understand this enigmatic "other" instrument and explore its musical possibilities.

Amateur piper Ross Anderson is a regular player of the pastoral pipes: a scholar who has gone a long way towards unravelling its many complexities.

Said Ross Anderson: "I discovered through trying to reed my Robertson set that it's relatively easy to set them up so that they will play like a Highland pipe in the bottom register and, with the foot joint off, they'll play like an uilleann pipe in both registers. But it's very hard to reed them so that they will play consistently in the upper register with the foot joint on.

"What this tells me is that these particular sets were optimised for playing either as the Highland pipes with the foot joint on in one octave or, with the foot joint off, as union pipes in two octaves. And a number of manuscripts suggest that people played them in this way.



ROSS ANDERSON plays his late 18th century pastoral pipes made by Hugh Robertson, pipe maker to the Highland Society of London... "As time goes on, I think we'll see more and more people playing uilleann pipes and eventually pastoral pipes in Scotland. It's a very sweet instrument to play."

ROSS ANDERSON... “There appears to have been, in the late 18th century, a clear aesthetic that can be summarised by saying that, when you put the foot joint on, the instrument should play like a Border pipe... and, at the same time, if you take the foot joint off, it should play pretty much like modern uilleann pipe.”

# land's pastoral pipes

“It’s very difficult from the organological point of view to get an instrument that’s in tune both with the foot joint on and the foot joint off in the second octave. Uilleann pipers know this in that the E and the F, the fifth and fourth finger notes in the second octave, are flat if you take the chanter off your knee.”

“It then seems to follow that the efforts people have made to reed pastoral pipes so they are always in tune, open and closed through both octaves, have probably been a wasted effort,” he said. “Instead, what most likely happened is that the early pastoral pipes were played with the foot joint on, essentially like oboes, but, after people discovered that you could take the foot joint off and play them on the knee, with the greater dynamics that gives you, they started optimising the placement of the holes and the voicing of the instrument so that in the second octave they would play like a modern union pipe.

“And this means you have a progression during the second half of the 18th century — from pastoral chanters that played in tune open, to pastoral chanters that played in tune closed.”

ROSS Anderson learned to play the Highland pipes as a boy at Glasgow High School and became pipe major of the school band.

“I competed a bit as a teenager,” he said, “but Neil Dickie, who was in the year below me at school, usually beat me. From 14 or 15, I went to Donald MacLeod and got lessons in piobaireachd from him, and that was a great inspiration. One of the things he’d say was that, while he didn’t charge for lessons, he did hope we’d pass on what we knew. In a sense, what I’m doing now is just paying that back.”

As Professor of Security Engineering at Cambridge University, Ross Anderson has applied his skills and access to technology to scan many of Scotland’s early piping manuscripts and make them available through his own [www.piob.info](http://www.piob.info)

website and the Piobaireachd Society.

“It’s a very straightforward thing for me to do,” he said. “I’ve been helping Roderick Cannon scan a number of his old manuscripts and the Piobaireachd Society’s old manuscripts and, at the same time, there’s been some scanning going on in Canada with Jim MacGillivray. Between us, we’ve scanned all of the significant source materials for piobaireachd from before 1840, and we now have a backlog of secondary materials we’ll continue working through.

“I tend to feel that, although having museums has been a great way of preserving the old manuscripts in the pre-technological age, we now have things like web servers... and the natural place for a nation’s cultural treasures, especially if they’re in the form of music manuscripts, is to have them on a website from which everyone can download and enjoy them.”

Along the way, Ross Anderson took up Northumbrian pipes. “And, about five years ago, I got interested in playing uilleann pipes as well, and that led me to the pastoral pipes because, if you can play both the Highland pipes and the uilleann pipes, you have the skills you need to master a pastoral set. So the pastoral set is now one of my main playing instruments.”

It has not been a straightforward or ‘off the shelf’ endeavour. Rather, it has involved tracking the instrument’s history and development through the early sources, through its shifting repertoire and from the evidence offered by surviving examples in museum collections.

The best known written source is *The Compleat Tutor for the Pastoral or New Bagpipe* by the Rev. John Geoghegan, published in London in 1746. It was a product of its times.

“Clearly, at some time during the second quarter of the 18th century, people began improving the range of the bellows-blown pipes that were available,” said Ross Anderson.

“Previously, pipes would play an octave plus

three or four notes, like the cornemuse or the gaita today, then suddenly, by 1743, you find a pipe that will play two full octaves.

“John Geoghegan refers the reader to his friend, ‘Mr Simpson of The Strand’, whose shop sold these instruments and the obvious conclusion, given that the repertoire in his book was relatively eclectic, is that the instrument was, in fact, a new invention at the time. But he clearly didn’t have a monopoly over it because he mentions that somebody has produced chanters with keys that would get the sharps and flats a little more accurately but he hadn’t actually tried one of these instruments.

“In the absence of further evidence, the best thing to do is to take Geoghegan at face value and assume that, at some time during the previous 10 or 15 years, this pastoral chanter had been invented and used for the first time, possibly in London, possibly by ‘Mr Simpson of The Strand’, possibly by an émigré Huguenot oboe maker... who knows?

“But it was beginning to catch on and was the exciting new thing that went with the new genre of pastoral music, and with people taking these rustic instruments, tidying them up starting to play them in their country houses.

“There was a whole pastoral movement. As people moved into the towns, they started to feel nostalgic and romantic about the countryside they’d left and tended to forget all the bad things that happened in the countryside.

“John Geoghegan said he was addressing the ‘gentleman’ market and, with book publication in those days, you had to do that. The age of mass book ownership came later with the rise of the novel and, later, of lending libraries. At the time, books were luxury objects and, when people produced books, they generally tried to sell them in advance. If you were producing a music book, you had to aim it at ‘gentlemen’ and, if you wanted to market a new instrument,

you wanted to give it the cachet that comes from aiming it at ‘gentlemen’ although, clearly, the markets were wider than that.

“Highland pipes of the time, in the late 17th and early 18th century cost about a pound and, in those days, the net worth of a typical Highland family was two pounds: their roof timbers were worth a pound and their cow was worth another pound. In terms of today’s values, that might mean a set of Highland pipes cost the equivalent of tens of thousands of pounds. The pastoral pipe involves roughly the same amount of work as a Highland pipe, so one might assume that these instruments also cost a pound or two.

“At the 2007 Piobaireachd Society Conference, Keith Sanger suggested that there might have been only 100-200 sets of Highland pipes in play in the Highlands in 1700. That doesn’t mean that there were not more pipers: you might have had a whole family, like the Mac-Crimmons or Rankines, who were essentially sharing one or two instruments among a dozen people.

“So to talk about the costs of instruments, the gentility of instruments... those are difficult questions. At least one pastoral chanter in Hamish Moore’s possession survives that was clearly of rough manufacture but sounds pretty much the same as the more polished production of Hugh Robertson.”

Ross Anderson points out that the baroque oboe was traditionally always made in three pieces — “and one of the interesting points here is that, if you take the foot joint off a baroque oboe, it then plays C sharp rather than having C as the bell note.

“One of the other people who’s worked on pastoral pipe reconstruction, Sean Folsom in the United States, made a replica of a chanter in the Chantry Museum in Morpeth, Northumberland. This turned out to play C-sharp with the foot joint off, and it plays an in-tune second octave with the foot joint on.

“Without going and doing acoustic tests on the original chanter, one can’t be sure because as a pipe maker makes a replica, he will voice it as a part of that process. One of the things I still have to do is go to the Chantry Museum and do acoustic testing on these old instruments and that, I believe, will confirm the hypothesis that you have a steady development of the instrument from something that was almost an oboe to something that was almost an uilleann chanter, and that this happened during the



second half of the 18th century.

“I believe this development was most likely driven by competition between musical instrument makers in Edinburgh, Aberdeen, Newcastle, Armagh and Belfast. There was certainly a lot of experimentation and variation.

“The most common type of pastoral pipes that survive in museum collections is the standard Robertson design; he made quite a few of these instruments and more than a dozen of them survive. Then there are a number of instruments that play exactly the same but have a different external appearance.

“So there’s evidence that there was a shared idea at the time of what a pastoral chanter should sound like,” said Ross Anderson, “even if different makers achieved this using different approaches to bores and finger holes.

“There appears to have been, in the late 18th century, a clear aesthetic that can be summarised by saying that, when you put the foot joint on, the instrument should play like a Border pipe: you should be able to use more or less standard Highland fingering although with some of these instruments you can’t keep all three of your right-hand fingers down while you’re playing you’re the left-hand notes or they may be slightly flat.

“And, at the same time, if you take the foot joint off, it should play pretty much like modern uilleann pipes except that the fingering of the C-natural and C-sharp are different.”

Ross Anderson...

*“Personally, I prefer playing my pastoral set to playing a set of Border pipes when it comes to playing Highland tunes: it has a lovely rich tone and you can get the incidentals so you can play Andy Renwick’s Ferret and all these tunes that have become fashionable.”*

Ross Anderson believes John Geoghegan has been unfairly criticised for not having been knowledgeable about the instrument.

“I don’t believe that at all,” he said. “He published a number of tunes in flat keys, in F and in B-flat, but what I’ve found with my Hugh Robertson chanter is that you can perfectly easily play in F; the instrument fingers very much like a recorder and recorders are played in F all the time.

“During the 17th century, the main woodwind instrument played in both Scotland and Ireland was the recorder. This is what we came out of the Renaissance with, with a fairly standard fingering scheme. For most people it’s important that, when you learn an instrument and you’ve put in your 1,000 hours or 10,000 hours of practice, you’re thereafter pretty much committed to that fingering chart. So somebody who’s learned the recorder wants an instrument that fingers the same way, which would explain why pastoral pipes were initially voiced to finger the way they do. It also explains why, once you have this fingering chart established in Geoghegan, you find the same fingering chart in the Advocates’ manuscript 20 years later and the John Sutherland manuscript that was written another 20 years after that.

“Quite simply, if you’re a musical instrument maker and you want to make a different instrument, with a richer tone or whatever, you have to see to it that the player isn’t going to have to

learn a lot of new fingering or he just won't buy it. At the same time, you do see a significant evolution of the repertoire."

Manuscripts subsequent to Geoghegan's *Compleat Tutor* make the point.

Ross Anderson's interest was kindled after he received a photocopy of Geoghegan's *Tutor* from Roderick Cannon who expressed interest in the possibility of other pastoral tunes being around somewhere. "About four or five years ago, I was in the National Library of Scotland with a wet afternoon to kill, so I summoned the late 18th century music books to see if there was anything of interest there and I found the Advocates' manuscript of 1765. It was catalogued as 'union pipe' music but a number of tunes in it had a low C, which indicated that it was pastoral pipe music.

"I persuaded the trustees to let me get a photocopy, scan it and put it on my web page. And then I heard from Charles Fowler, a piper in America, that he'd seen a similar thing in the Mitchell Library in Glasgow some years previously. So I went along to the Mitchell and found a manuscript collection by a John Sutherland: an even bigger book — 262 pages — from 1785 or so."

A later manuscript, the 'Mackie manuscript' from around 1820, was acquired along with a set of pastoral pipes for the National Museum of Scotland by Hugh Cheape.

"In John Geoghegan's book, you have what seems to me to be a relatively fresh approach to a new-ish instrument: a mixture of Scottish and Irish tunes, popular songs of the time, oboe pieces and bits and pieces of stage and light music. When you go on to the Advocates' and Sutherland's manuscripts and then to later manuscripts, you find a repertoire that has been worked down and consolidated. You can see that people were selecting tunes that ran particularly well on the pipes, mostly in their most natural keys of G and D, and tunes that can be played fast and with all sorts of appropriate ornamentation."

"These sources give you a later stage in the evolution of the music," said Ross Anderson.

"I ended up writing learned articles on both the Advocates' and the Sutherland manuscripts and I experimented with turning an uilleann set into a pastoral set by adding a home-made foot joint. That sort-of worked, but not very well because there are issues with details of the chanter bore, for example."

Ross Anderson then borrowed a set of pas-

toral pipes made by the English pipe maker John Swayne.

"The chanter was a copy of one of the old chanters I now own. I played that for a few months and got to know how the instrument works and how the repertoire and instrument fit together.

"After that, a pastoral set came up for sale on e-bay and I bought it, but it turned out that the chanter wasn't original — it was a copy pipe maker Colin Ross had made in the 1970s.

"Then, about two years ago, Ken MacLeod, who owned a Robertson set that had been sold at Sotheby's in 1994, offered me the opportunity of buying his set. He's primarily interested in uilleann pipes and hadn't managed to get a reed working particularly well for the pastoral pipes.

"I bought it.

"It turned out that this was one of two sets that had been sold at that particular sale — and the other set belonged to John Hughes, so I made an offer to John for his set too and reunited the pair," he said.

"Sotheby's told me the two sets had been sent to them by a dealer... there was no provenance beyond that. There are no dates on either of them but one has 'Robertson' stamped on the main stock and the chanter. The other is almost identical but has no stamp, so it may have been made by Robertson or by his daughter who we believe carried on his business for a while after his death. I'd guess, from locating the instruments in relation to the history as we understand it, that they're from around 1780-1800, but I don't really know."

With these pipes in hand, Ross Anderson visited John Swayne. "We compared my two pastoral chanters with his copy, and the reeds I'd got hold of with the reeds he'd made, and we basically set about figuring out how the thing worked... and I've had my pastoral set working reasonably well since last summer," he said. "Reeds have been a big problem for pastoral pipes but I think we now understand what's going on there and we know how to produce reasonable reeds.

"The critical thing was understanding that the fingering of the pastoral chanter is actually different from that of the modern uilleann chanter and, once you understand that, it becomes relatively straightforward. But, if you try to make a reed for it that will make it voice exactly as a modern uilleann chanter with modern uilleann fingering, I think you'll be working at

it for a very long time indeed because the finger holes just aren't in the right place.

"Once somebody who's more experienced at reed-making than I am tackles this problem, I think we'll get there 100 per cent. We've got the principles. The big realisation is that many of these chanters were voiced to play like Highland pipes in the bottom octave and uilleann pipes on the knee in both octaves.

"Now that we understand how to reed such instruments, we can go to the various examples we have in the National Museum of Scotland, the Chantry Museum and elsewhere, and do acoustic testing on them and that way we'll be able to confirm or deny my hypothesis that there was a steady evolution from the Baroque oboe of 1740 to the modern uilleann chanter of 1820.

"You can see this through the repertoire, through the fingering charts to some extent, and — if we can construct that timeline — we should be able to give more accurate dates to the various instruments we have by reference to each other and to the surviving repertoire."

Ross Anderson believes the pastoral pipes could catch on again — "and they are an integral part of our heritage," he said.

"Personally, I prefer playing my pastoral set to playing a set of Border pipes when it comes to playing Highland tunes: it has a lovely rich tone and you can get the incidentals so you can play *Andy Renwick's Ferret* and all these tunes that have become fashionable. Playing it as an uilleann pipe is harder because of the different fingerings for C and C-sharp, which take some getting used to but, certainly, tunes in G aren't so much of a problem.

"It'd be more likely to catch on if a maker was to start making pastoral chanters, let's say, in the key of D, but that used modern fingerings for C and C sharp. People who already own a set of uilleann pipes could then just go and buy themselves an extra pastoral chanter and use that.

"Once you get people playing pastoral sets, you can get people used to the idea that a piper should master both Highland fingerings and uilleann fingerings because they are both aspects of the same instrument — and this is how things were in the 18th century and early 19th century.

"As time goes on, I think we'll see more and more people playing uilleann pipes and eventually pastoral pipes in Scotland.

"It's a very sweet instrument to play." ●