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THE HIGHLAND BAGPIPE: THE IMPACT OF THE HIGHLAND SOCIETIES
OF LONDON AND SCOTLAND, 1781-1844

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the work of two influential bodies, the Highland Society of London (est. 1778) and its sister society the Highland Society of Scotland (est. 1784) in relation to the Highland Bagpipe. The parameters have been determined by the dates of the major piping competition run by the Highland Society of London in Edinburgh from 1781 to 1844. This was the first event of its kind, and came at a time when the fortunes of the Highland bagpipe, like many other facets of Gaelic culture, were at a low ebb. Ch. II delineates the precise nature of this competition. It explores the objectives, military and cultural, of the Highland Societies in patronising the bagpipe, and draws attention to the many aspects of modern competitive piping which had root in this event. Ch. III explores the fortunes of the piper in the early nineteenth century, on the estate, and in the army. Ch. IV tackles the critical issue of the Highland Societies' encouragement of pipe music notation, with its effects, beneficial and otherwise. Particular attention is paid to their involvement in the works of Joseph MacDonald (1760), Donald MacDonald (1820), Angus MacArthur (1820) and Angus Mackay (1838). By the mid-1840s the direct involvement of the Highland Societies in piping was on the wane, but their example and efforts had done much to secure a healthy future for the Highland bagpipe, in the Highlands, and in Scotland at large.

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SOURCES

Four major primary sources are consulted in the course of this work: the records of the Highland Society of London (HSL); the records of the Highland Society of Scotland (HSS); the notebooks of J.G. Dalrymple; and contemporary newspaper reports.

Highland Society of London Records [HSL, 268].

- (1) Lodged in the National Library of Scotland, MS. Deposit 268. The following units are relevant:
 1. Boxes 1-6. Correspondence (1820-1890).
 2. Boxes 15-19 Misc. records.
 3. Minutes Books 21-27 (1783-1829).
 4. Accounts Book 34 (1783-1816).
- (2) Several of the records were destroyed by fire in the late nineteenth century. [HSL 268, 38:387; Manson 1901: 388]. This means that crucial portions of the records are incomplete:
 1. Prior to 1783 no minutes are extant.
 2. Between 1816 and 1834 only incomplete draft minutes are extant. These are usefully supplemented by correspondence (Boxes 1-3), and by looseleaf accounts (Box 17).
 3. Between 1834 and 1855 no minutes are extant. However correspondence (Boxes 4-6) and looseleaf accounts (Boxes 18/20) are available.
 4. Between 1855 and 1870 no records are extant.
- (3) Several HSL records were consulted by the members of the Piobaireachd Society, which are no longer with the material in the NLS. Evidence of this is to be found in
 1. Bartholomew J. [NLS MS 2260].
 2. The Seton Gordon Papers [NLS Acc.7451, Box 19, File 3]. Contains original documents such as testimonial notes for the 1838 and 1841 competitions.
 3. Flett J. & T. [1956: 345]. Contains original HSL material communicated by J.P. Grant of Rothiemurchus and A. Campbell of Kilberry.
 4. A. Campbell of Kilberry's extensive writings on Piping (see Bibliography), and his contributions to the "Notices of Pipers" [Q.V.]

The most valuable material on any specific competition was contained in the annual "Accounts of Receipts and

Payments" prepared by the HSS, and forwarded to the HSL. Full accounts are extant in the HSL records for the years 1815, 1818 and 1821-44 (with the exception of 1825, 1832, 1841). James Campbell of Kilberry has been kind enough to allow me to consult his father's typescript notebooks, which contain additional full information from the Accounts of 1806-1814, 1816/17, 1819/20. As the original accounts for these years are now lost, Kilberry's notebooks constitute, and will be cited as, the major primary sources for these years. The notebooks are in two volumes, and will be designated "Kilberry I and II" to avoid confusion with Archibald Campbell's published writings (designated "Campbell A.").

Highland Society of Scotland Records.

Contained in the Society Library at the Royal Highland Showground, Ingliston.

- (1) Sederunt Books [HSS Sd. Bk.] (1-20).
- (2) Piping Minutes Book [HSS PMB] (1824-1844). Contains material specifically relating to the piping competitions, from 1824. Prior material is contained in the sederunt books.
- (3) Transactions [THSS]. Commenced 1799; concluded 1968.
- (4) Correspondence [Ingl: --] As Catalogued by Black [1986].

The Notebooks of John Graham Dalyell

John Graham Dalyell (1775-1851, knighted 1836), was an Edinburgh advocate, and a pre-eminent antiquary and naturalist. In 1797 he became vice-president of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, and his publications include Scottish Poems of the Sixteenth Century (1801), The Darker Superstitions of Scotland (1834), and the Musical Memoirs of Scotland (1849). [D.N.B.].

In 1807 he became a member of the HSS, and was soon heavily involved as a judge and committee member at the annual piping competitions. (In 1822 he recorded that he had been on the committee of judges for "about seven years". [Gen. 350D: 35]). In the 1830's he had overall responsibility for running the competition [Gen. 369D: 35], and was also the member responsible for examining pipe music MSS. submitted to the competition. (In 1841, for instance, he examined Angus MacKay's 4-volume collection - see Fig. 1. [Gen 374D: 19]).

These activities gave him a deep inside knowledge of the workings of the competition, and we are fortunate that he kept detailed notebooks on this and his many other interests. These are on deposit in the Edinburgh University Library [Laing Gen 350-516D]. They are broadly categorised by type: the notebooks containing valuable piping matter are Gen 350D-

385D, covering the period 1822-1850. Many of his piping observations, in condensed form, appear in the Musical Memoirs of 1849.

Newspaper Reports

From the outset the Edinburgh competition enjoyed good press coverage in local newspapers such as the Edinburgh Evening Courant [E.E.C.] and the Caledonian Mercury [Cal Merc.], and also in the Scots Magazine. (See Appendix II for annual sources). Advertisements were also taken out about a fortnight before the event in many papers to acquaint competitors and spectators with the arrangements: in 1838 for instance advertisements were placed in 23 regional newspapers. [HSS PMB: 139]. Newspaper reports were generally written by a member of the competition committee: in 1822, 1829, 1835 and 1838 by J.G. Dalryell; in 1832 by MacDonald of Dalness; in 1841 by W.F. Skene. [Dalryell Notebooks].

The "Notices of Pipers"

Occasional reference will be made to Lt. John McLennan's "Notices of Pipers", compiled c.1900, and later updated by Major I.F. Scobie and A. Campbell of Kilberry. This was published in the Piping Times between April 1967 and September 1975, and constitutes a series of short biographies of well-known pipers. Factual data should, on the whole, be double-checked, but the work is of particular value in terms of Lt. McLennan's personal recollections of nineteenth century pipers, and his documentation of piping lore relating to that period.

Abbreviations

NLS	-	National Library of Scotland
EUL	-	Edinburgh University Library
ECL	-	Edinburgh Central Library
SRO	-	Scottish Records Office, Edinburgh
PRO	-	Public Records Office, London

Source Data By Year

For this information see Appendix II.

pp 316-320

Recording a Conversation with Angus Mackay, 1841. [Gen 374D:19]

Manuscript books, among Mackay thinks the total 19
number of the British may approach 300: of which
he says he knows a few 220 and would not once
place at any of them selected.

At the first preliminary meeting I advised the
committee to want those by a Scotchman who
might be possessed of any MSS. Mackay thought
it desirable by John Mackay a paper brought
a manuscript well written in Latin & a few
fragments, but none except those sufficiently fami-
liar - brought from volumes you saw
and pieces - all in full of what he says & except
16 or 17. It is willing to be a volume any part of
the contents, but I have to point with this
collection. It contains frequent reference to
a list of Manuscript collection in possession of
the Highland Society of London.

Referring to a Manuscript collection in three
volumes written in language not in writing
which is brought to Edinburgh in 1818. by
John Campbell late of the Walter Campbell
of Glasgow. Mackay tells me that some of
them are now in possession of one Campbell
his brother - Campbell a master at Eisdale
the State quarries - There is another brother
John Campbell a teacher & another Angus Mackay
Glasgow.

He says also that John McTear is a Kilmory
is in possession of some MSS. for the purpose
It would be important to secure these collections,
30thly. The few volumes brought by Mackay con-
tain some MSS. of well known MSS. of some
others whose names I have not seen. Some
are very short. It is impossible to judge of them
without seeing them. The most important
Vol. 1. contains 15 pieces, as announced in
an index prepared and also in the place. But
these are not yet named.

vol. II

(1) The Bagpipe In Clan Society

The Pìob Mhòr, a distinctively Gaelic instrument, undoubtedly had origin in a common root stock of Medieval European bagpipes. Although a relative late-comer to the Scottish Gaidhealtachd, where it was to supersede the long-established instrument of court, the harp, it was nevertheless swiftly absorbed into a pre-established cultural milieu. Both the musical repertoire of the Highland bagpipe, and its usage in the context of hereditary musical orders, strongly bear the imprint of Gaelic culture.

It is accepted that the harp was for long the music of the Gaelic court, used in association with the free-flowing syllabic verse of the filidh, the poet-historians of the clan. [Watson W.J. 1959: xvii]. Nothing, in fact, is known of the nature of this early harp music, and it was superseded in or before the seventeenth century by the strictly metrical discipline of the amhran, of which an Clàrsair Dall (Roderick Morrison, c.1656-1714), blind harper in the court of MacLeod of Dunvegan, was a noted exponent. [Matheson 1970: 153].

The bagpipe came to prominence in Gaelic society from the early to mid sixteenth century, and indeed there are no literary references to the instrument prior to that time. This was a period of social and cultural change within the

Gaidhealtachd : links with Ireland were gradually severed, and the downfall of the Lordship of the Isles in 1494 brought with it a protracted period of internal strife, (known as Linn nan Creach), as Gaeldom was brought slowly within the orbit of Central government. Early references attest to the instrument's utility in battle, and strongly suggest that this was an important factor in its displacement of the harp in popular esteem. Beague in 1547 remarked on its use at the Battle of Pinkie [Beague 1549: Fol.54]; Buchanan in 1582 noted the Highlander's preference for the bagpipe over the trumpet [Buchanan 1582: I]; and Alexander Hume, minister of Logie, commemorated the passing of the Spanish Armada in 1598 in most un-Godly verse:

"Caus michtelie the weirlie nottis
breike,
On hieland pipes, Scottes and
Hybernicke". [Hume A. 1801: 125].

In Ireland well documented sources attest to the parallel evolution of the so-called "warpipe" (essentially the same instrument), used by the Irish Kerne in service with Henry VIII in the 1540s, and against the forces of Elizabethan England in the 1590s. [Donnelly 1981/84; Timoney 1987].

With the Montrose Wars of the 1640s the scale of Gaelic warfare escalated: firearms and tactical changes were introduced from Ireland by Alasdair MacColla, and much larger bodies of men were now under arms than had formerly been the case. [Hill J.M. 1986: 48]. Where battle had traditionally been prefaced by the brosnacha catha, a set-

piece heroic recitation by harpist and bard, it was now found that the resonant bagpipe was best suited to sound the battle-stimulus. Certainly there is much evidence of the inspiring effect of the bagpipe in the charge:

"Mi eadar an talamh 's an t-athar
a'seòladh,
Air iteig le h-aighear, misg-chath',
agus sholais,
Us caismeachd phìob-móra bras-
shroiceadh am puirt."

(Between earth and heaven in the air I
am sailing,
On the wings of exultance, battle-
drunken, enraptured,
While the notes of the great pipes
shrilly sound out their tunes.)
Alexander MacDonald Tearlach
MacSheumais [Campbell J.L. 1984: 52].

The last professional harpist of Scottish birth was Murdoch MacDonald ("Murchadh Clarsair"), who retired from service with MacLean of Coll in 1734 [Gunn J. 1807: 101], and certainly most early historians viewed the demise of the harp in terms of it being ill suited to the demands of a strictly martial society. Ramsay of Ochtertyre expressed it thus in 1784:

"Though the harpers were retained for
hundreds of years after the
introduction of the bagpipe, yet the
favour of the chief, and his warriors,
was at length transferred to the
pipers, whose strains seconded so well
their ruling passion." [Ramsay in P.
MacDonald 1784: 14].

The bagpipe was now absorbed into a pre-established system of learned and musical orders, in which duties were often hereditary to particular families over several generations. Bards, harpers, poets, historians and

medical men were all professionals, trained to exacting standards in schools of their discipline, and receiving considerable emoluments in terms of land and other perquisites. Powerful chiefs, such as the MacDonalds of Sleat and Clanranald, and the MacLeods of Dunvegan, maintained large retinues of specialised office-bearers [vide Logan J. 1876 Edn. I: 180], amongst whom the literati and musicians enjoyed high standing.

Hereditary families of pipers were now established, amongst whom the MacCrimmons, pipers to the MacLeods in Skye and Harris, were undeniably pre-eminent. The most reputable of these families(1) conducted seminaries for instruction, in some cases attracting pupils from a great distance. Lachlan Shaw, minister of Calder described it thus in the 1750s:

"The office of piper was often hereditary, and had a small salary annexed to it. And the pipers of several clans had a chief piper who governed them; and schools in which they were instructed". [Shaw L. 1882 Edn. III: 136].

It is clear from reliable early sources that the nature of instruction in such "schools" involved a few months of live-in tuition in the instructor's dwelling, subsidised by the piper's employer or chief. The course might be repeated on one or more occasions, but romantic notions of a seven-year-long apprenticeship under conditions of monastic severity [e.g. Gordon S. 1929: 115; Ross N. 1910], should be treated with caution.

Although the pipe might have been of particular

martial utility, this should not obscure the fact that it contributed to many aspects of the Highland lifestyle - from the dance, to the wedding, to the funeral, to the accompaniment of labour in the fields.(2) It was a folk instrument with a repertoire ranging from the elevated Ceòl Mòr to the earthier Ceòl Beag. It would have been surprising, indeed, had the pipe not been put to a variety of uses in a society in which instrumental music was not common, and in which the trumpet and the human voice were the major accompaniments to the song and dance.(3)

The piper's duties lay in the constant attendance of the clan in warfare and peacetime. His remuneration lay in the form of land rights, and also duties levied on the tenantry, particularly in the form of meat, feeds and grain. Martin and Johnson recorded that the piper on the MacLeod estate had rights to a portion of any cow slaughtered for the household (the udder!) [Martin 1934 Edn: 171; Johnson 1924 Edn. 167], whilst the following reference to piping on the Glenmoriston lands in the seventeenth century clearly highlights the perceived value of the piper to the tenantry at large:

"There has always been a piper in Urquhart belonging to the family of Grant, whose salary has constantly been paid by a small portion of oats from each tenant. The tenants want to get free of this tax, but it is submitted whether or not it is not better to continue it, as the tax is small, and, being in use to be paid, it is not very sensibly felt. If you let it drop, the Highland Musick is lost, which would be a great loss in case of a civil or foreign war; and such music is part of the Appendages of the

dignity of the family." [MacKay W.
1893: 462, citing Lorimer].

This reference highlights a feature often overlooked by piping historians: that piping was not the preserve of a select group of families concentrated in the Western Isles - notably the MacCrimmons, the MacArthurs (pipers to the MacDonalds of Sleat)(4), and the Rankins (pipers to the MacLeans of Duart)(5). Throughout the Gaidhealtachd, from the Uists to Sutherland, to Kintyre and Perthshire, the piper was a major constituent of clan society. The records of any Highland clan from the sixteenth century will bear testimony to the presence of a piper in the ranks, (see for instance McKechnie's history of the Argyllshire Clan Lamont for an example of a little-known piping family [1938]), and it is significant that towards the end of the eighteenth century piping remained healthiest in a heartland of the Central Highlands and Perthshire, not in the Western Isles.

The MacCrimmons, of whom much has been written, but of whose early history little is known, well exemplify the hereditary order which through time came to occupy a position of status within the clan akin to that of the tacksman. The MacCrimmons first emerge in the Dunvegan land rentals in 1664, when Patrick Mòr MacCrimmon was occupying the tack of Galtrigill at a rental of £120 Scots p.a. [MacLeod R.C. 1927: 161]. We do, however, know of earlier representatives of this family through oral testimony, collected and set down by Angus MacKay in 1838

[MacKay 1838: 7-10], and also through the effusions of contemporary poets. The piper during the period of Sir Rory Mòr MacLeod, 15th Chief (c.1562-1626), for instance, was Donald Mòr, a prolific composer of pibroch [vide MacLeod R.H. 1973], who is known to have sojourned for some time in Sutherland,(6) and is believed to have attended a school of piping in Dundalgan, in County Louth, Ireland. [Scott J.E. 1966(a)].

Best-documented of the early MacCrimmons was Patrick Òg (Patrick Mòr's son), who between 1706 and his death in about 1730 occupied the land of Galtrigill on the Dunvegan estate.(7) MacLeod's patronage of Patrick Òg extended to items of clothing ("a bonnett" in 1685 and "livery cloathes" bought from Edinburgh in 1714); instruments ("two pypes bought to MacCrummen" in 1711); and even a marriage tocher of £152 Scots on the occasion of his second marriage in 1706. [Grant I.F. 1959: 376, 7; MacLeod J. 1966: 319-335]. His primary emolument, however, lay in the holding of the land of Galtrigill rent-free.(8) This, in many ways, was the high age of patronage of the piper in clan society. Iain Breac (1637-1693), chief during Patrick Òg's younger days, was one of the last Highland chiefs to maintain a full retinue of bard, harper, piper and fool. [Matheson 1970: 6]. Iain Breac patronised a musical coterie which included Patrick Òg the piper, James Glas the fiddler, Roderick Morrison the harper, O'Muirgheasáin the hereditary bard, and Mary MacLeod (Màiri Nighean Alasdair Ruaidh), a distant kinswoman who was

amongst the finest poets of her age. [MacLeod J. 1966: 310-348; Matheson 1970: 6, 150]. In this milieu, we can well imagine, there was a fertile interchange of musical ideas and creative energy: it was Iain Breac's household which Mary MacLeod extolled as

"... àros nach crìòn, am bi gàirich nam piob, is nan clàrsach a ris"; (the dwelling that is not niggardly, wherein is the roar of pipes, and anon the sound of harps). [An Crònán, Watson J.C. 1934: 62].

The relationship between pipe music and pre-existing musical idiom is one which deserves scrutiny, but which has as yet attracted little attention. In what way, if at all, was the "classical" music of the bagpipe, the Ceòl Mòr, related to the old music of the harp? Was there any parallel between the evolution of Ceòl Mòr, and the exactly coeval development of a vigorous vernacular poetry which reached its heights in the Orain Mhóra of Mary MacLeod (c.1615-1705) and Alexander Macdonald ("Mac Mhaighisteir Alasdair" c.1696-1770)? And to what extent was the subject matter of the pipe repertoire determined by the long-established bardic themes of eulogy, elegy, incitement to battle, and satire?

These are difficult issues which demand the attention of seasoned scholars, but it is clear that the Ceòl Mòr repertoire did encompass both Panegyric matter (the laments and salutes), and also martial pieces with distinct clan associations, such as the Marches, Gatherings and battle tunes, (pieces, in the words of Joseph MacDonald, designed

to "animate a sett of men approaching the enemy". [MacDonald J. 1760:19]). The fostering of ardent and partisan clan loyalty was doubtless a function and requirement of this music, although some pieces (such as certain of the Gatherings in which a simple motif was regularly repeated) perhaps also had a specific function in conveying battle signals. The further notion that in the music of Ceòl Mòr there was also history, was expressed in the following way by Angus MacKay:

"... although the duty of the pipers was not altogether to preserve the traditional history of the clan, yet their care was to hand down to posterity the music which was composed in commemoration of deeds, honourable and important to the appropriate families." [MacKay 1838: 22].

Several early commentators remarked on the historical import of the music, one of the most perceptive, perhaps, being the French geologist Faujas St. Fond, who found the pibroch "not essentially belonging to music, but to history ..." [St. Fond 1784 (1907 Edn II: 250)].

A very interesting corpus of satirical poetry in "praise" (moladh) and "dispraise" (dimoladh) of the pipe, (9) attests to the resentment felt in some quarters to the rise of the instrument to prominence, (whilst providing a forum for some of the most damning and uncomplimentary verse known to Gaelic). There is ample evidence, however, to suggest that the relationship between bard and piper was often closer than assumed. Many pipers, indeed, were themselves of bardic stock, or were renowned poets in their

own right. One such was Uilleam MacBeathaig, piper and bard to MacDonald of Sleat in the mid-seventeenth century [Matheson 1938: 256]; another was the famous Iain Dall MacKay, composer of Cumha Choire an Easan, whose family acted as hereditary pipers to the MacKenzies of Gairloch;(10) a third was William MacMurchy (c.1700-1778), a Kintyre poet and musician, who was piper to MacDonald of Largie during the '45, and later possibly served in Montgomerie's 77th Highlanders. [Sanger 1981: 28]. Other noted piping families were believed to have maintained a dual function as bards and pipers. One theory relating to the MacIntyres, pipers to Menzies of Menzies, for instance, was that they were of a family of bards to clan Chattan, who had migrated south from Badenoch to the Rannoch area. [Whyte 1904: 145].(11) Another piping family whose very name bespeaks bardic origins was the Clann an Sgeulaiche, an extended family of MacGregor pipers from the Glenlyon region of Perthshire.(12)

James Logan remarked of the MacGregors:

"This tribe, from their extensive knowledge of history, were termed Clan an Sgeulaich, or tellers of tales, which proves that pipers were anciently qualified in that part of the bardic duties". [Logan J. (1831). 1876 Edn. II:289].

The MacGregors feature strongly in the history of the Highland Societies in the following pages.

Another interesting possibility is that certain of the piping orders evolved from pre-existing musical families who had turned their hand to the pipe in order to maintain

a livelihood. One of the most interesting theories relating to the MacCrimmons, for instance, is that they in fact originated from a family of harpers in the service of MacLeod. [Campbell Rev. D. 1967: 6]. Perhaps the most versatile of musical families were the Cummings, "pipers and violers" to the Lairds of Grant at Castle Freuchie. The earliest member of this family as yet identified was Alexander Cumming, musician to Grant in 1653. [Fraser W. 1883 III: 462]. A direct descendant of his was William Cumming, who features in Waitt's magnificent portrait of 1714. [Fig. II]. This well illustrates the quality of the piper's finery, and is testimony to his status within clan society. A descendent of his was John Cumming, who attended the 1784 and 1785 piping competitions as Piper to Sir James Grant of Grant. [E.E.C. 20/10/1784; Cal Merc 3/9/1785].

The Cummings, however, were if anything better known as fiddle players. Thomas Newte recorded in 1791 that:

"The Cummings of Freuchie ... were in the highest estimation for their knowledge and execution of Strathspey music, and most of the tunes handed down to us are certainly of their composing. A successive race of musicians ... succeeded each other for many generations." [Newte T., 1791: 164].

Proof of their musical attainments is to be found in two fiddle collections produced by members of the family - one a manuscript written by "Patrick Cuming" in 1724 [NLS MS 1667]; the other a collection of 60 tunes published in 1780 by Angus Cumming, Grantown, whose forebears were "for

many generations musicians in Strathspey". [Cumming 1780].

Here is proof that musical dynasties were by no means the monopoly of the Hebridean families.

Another musical polymath was the redoubtable Ragnall Mac Ailein Oig of Cross, third son of Allan MacDonald of Morar. He is remembered for his excellent and unusual tunes,(13) and also as a first-class pipe, fiddle and clarsach player. [MacDonald A & A III: 254; "Abrach" 1874; MacLean C. 1959: 86-91]. He was not, however, of the conventional mould of hereditary pipers, for he himself was of the landed classes - and this perhaps explains the unusual subject matter of his compositions, which are certainly not in the traditional vein of eulogy and elegy.

Fig. II

WILLIAM CUMMING, piper to the Laird of Grant. Painted by Richard Waitt (1714), Castle Freuchie in the background. [National Museums of Scotland]

