



“The Lament for MacLeod of Colbecks” – John MacKay, Raasay

Sources: Angus MacKay 1838 p149, Ceol Mor 1893 P163, David Glen MS, Piobaireachd Society Collection, Book 10, p 292, Binneas is Borerraig . All of these settings are very similar, with minor differences.

Angus MacKay has an error in the 10th bar of the first line of the ground, first note D, which should be B. Ceol Mor has a similar error in the same place, except here it is a C which should be a B, and this is repeated in the corresponding places where the phrase re-occurs in the ground. Binneas has no G gracenote on the second C in bar one of the ground. This gracenote appears in Angus MacKay and the PS.

There are differences in time signatures (2/4, 4/4) in the triplet variations amongst these settings, although this would not affect the style in which these would be presented.

It is unlikely that competitors would present anything else other than the published Piobaireachd Society setting. The other settings are essentially the same with minor notation errors.

Stylistically, interpretations are likely to be quite similar. The ground is fairly straightforward, although it is quite possible that players will experiment with the timing of the B and C quavers in bar nine, they are written the same but could easily be played with emphasis on either the B or the C or even as written. Most likely, players will play the cadences in the ground and also the variations with the emphasis on the first note, although some would play these as even, which would be perfectly acceptable.

It is quite possible that more significant stylistic differences may be heard in the presentations of variation one. Most players now copy the style attributed (I believe) to Malcolm R MacPherson of Invershin, that is treating the first two notes of the second bar of each phrase as even, thus creating a run-up effect to end each phrase. It would be quite acceptable to hear the variation as it is written, although in the present day this would be the exception rather than the rule. I have heard Malcolm MacRae, P/M Brian Donaldson, and P/M Donald MacLeod all play it this way written in the PS setting.

The tune is usually played without a Crunluath a Mach variation, although it would be quite acceptable to add this if it were the taste of the player. It is a long tune, of some 18 minutes, with the variations being identical in note structure and phrasing. I would imagine that judges would be looking for interpretations which feature contrasting tempo changes and well-presented transitions between variations.

The tune was composed by John MacKay, Raasay. It was composed for John MacLeod whose father, also John, emigrated to Colbecks in Jamaica in the mid 1700's, and who made his fortune as a planter, having an estate at Colbecks. (The MacLeod's – Genealogy of a Clan, pp 15-16). Colbecks is a small community situated some 30 kms east of the capital city, Kingston. Colbecks Castle was built in 1680 by the English as a defence against Spain and now stands as a ruin. It is interesting to note that it appears that the place was actually called Colbecks, and not Colbeck, so the more correct title for the tune might be “The Lament for MacLeod of Colbecks”.