

Piobaireachd Society Conference - March 2015: Book 16

At present there are fifteen books in the Piobaireachd Society's collection. Book 15 was published in 1990 and, at that time, it was expected to be the last one.

Since then, however, it has become clear that there is lots more material worthy of attention including some ancient compositions from sources not previously studied in detail and some nineteenth century compositions well worth bringing back into the playing repertoire.

So, about five years ago, Andrew Wright, Ronnie Clark and I started work on compiling a new book of tunes to extend the series. Roderick Cannon had done so also a number of years earlier but his work on it had been overtaken by other projects. We soon discovered that we had a number of tunes in common so we decided to merge the two and it has become Book 16.

The book is about to go to the printers, so should be available very soon. We had hoped to have it ready for this conference, but the proof reading and correction of errors is a slow process and we just failed to make it.

At this stage I am working on the finishing touches with Stuart Letford, whose publishing experience is proving invaluable. We have also had help and advice along the way from all of the other members of the Music Committee, so, unlike earlier publications which have been pretty much the work of one person, this has genuinely been a team effort, and we would like to express our grateful thanks to all of them. Nevertheless, Andrew, Ronnie and I, as joint editors, take full responsibility for the final product as we have had to take editorial decisions all the way along.

The sources explored for the new book include unpublished manuscripts by Pipe Major John Smith, 93rd Highlanders, Pipe Major John MacDougall Gillies, Highland Light Infantry and Pipe Major Ronald Mackenzie, Seaforth Highlanders.

Material has also been taken from General Thomason's *Ceol Mor* and the out-of-print works of G.F. Ross and William Ross, Piper to Queen Victoria, as well as from the manuscripts of Angus MacKay.

We included a number of tunes which, although well known by name, are seldom performed, possibly due to the fact that the scores that we have for them appear deficient in structure or lacking in clarity. In preparing these for publication we have attempted to correct deficiencies by rearranging and editing as necessary.

Book 16 also includes a few tunes already included in the Piobaireachd Society collection in different form. 'Hector Roy MacLean's Lament' appears in Book 4 and Kilberry under the title 'Lament for Red Hector of the Battles' and 'Colin MacRae of Invereenat's Lament' in the same publications as 'Duncan MacRae of Kintail's Lament'. In both cases the grounds are similar to those in the earlier publications, but the addition of further variations from William Ross's book gives them added dimension and interest.

The book contains tunes with a wide range of length and degree of difficulty. The Nameless tune from Angus Mackay's manuscript 'hindo hindo hindo rodin' is incredibly simple and repetitive but when well expressed can produce a mesmeric effect similar to a religious chant. At the other extreme 'The Piper's Salute to his Master' is a very long tune with five challenging grounds and

fourteen variations in all, unlikely to be played in its entirety by any but the most dedicated enthusiast.

In the main, however, the tunes are of medium length and difficulty and we hope that their publication will bring them back into popularity with pipers.

We are now going to hear excerpts from seven of the tunes, played by Andrew Wright, John Frater & Bill Wotherspoon. Neither John nor Bill had seen any of this material before volunteering to play some of the pieces but I am delighted to say that they were immediately enthusiastic and had no difficulty choosing tunes which appealed to them. They will play the ground and one or two variations of each of the following tunes:

Andrew: The Brother's Lament; Lord Berisdale's Salute; Nameless 'Hindo
hindo' (whole tune);

John: Lament for Colonel Forbes; Nameless (from John MacDougall
Gillies's MS);

Bill: The Fairy Flag; The Sword's Lament.

The Brothers Lament

This tune is taken from the manuscript of P/M John Smith (1840 -1877). In 1928 the Piobaireachd Society were given a leather bound manuscript book of 268 pages with 79 Piobaireachd written out in full. Inside is the statement "Written by the late John Smith handed over by his son Donald Smith". The book is now in the National Library of Scotland.

This is one of the tunes, thought likely to be a nineteenth century composition. Interestingly, there are three other entirely different tunes that we know of with the same name!

Lord Berisdale's Salute

This tune is in the collection published by William Ross, Piper to Queen Victoria. General Thomason also published a version in *Ceol Mor*, where he gives the composer as Alexander MacLennan, whose photograph appears at the front of the book in a gallery of some leading pipers of the day. Berisdale, or Berriedale as it is more commonly known nowadays, is in Caithness. Lord Berisdale is the eldest son of the Earl of Caithness and the title still exists today.

The tune is irregular. William Ross and Glen give the metre as 10,10,6 which is unusual but not unattractive, so it has been retained.

Nameless 'hindo hindo' from Angus MacKay's Manuscript

A simple tune reminiscent of an old Gaelic monastic chant.

Lament for Colonel Forbes

General Thomason's *Ceol Mor* is the only known source of this tune and he gives the composer's name as D. Fraser. Donald Fraser was a Pipe Sergeant in the Seaforth Highlanders who, when he retired from the army, moved to Manchester and taught many young pipers including Roderick Cannon's uncle!

In the score as given in *Ceol Mor*, variation 1 is almost identical with the ground, so we took the liberty of converting it into a thumb variation which we hope you will find attractive.

Nameless from John MacDougall Gillies's Manuscript

This tune is from the manuscript of Pipe Major John MacDougall Gillies (1854-1925) which is in the library of Glasgow University along with a handwritten copy made by Pipe Major William Gray in 1916. It contains 69 tunes of which this is one which we feel will be well received by pipers.

The Fairy Flag

Although well known by name due to frequent mention in history and folklore, the editors have never heard of this tune being played. It is in Angus MacKay's manuscripts, where the metre is given as two lines each of 10 and 12 bars, and in General Thomason's *Ceol Mor* where it is written in three lines of 12,12,and 8 bars.

As it appears in these sources this is a long piece which, after the ground consists of only three phrases. We have shortened the tune considerably so that the melody becomes more apparent to the listener and, hopefully, more attractive to the performer.

The Sword's Lament

There is no relationship between this tune and the 'Lament for the Old Sword' which is in Book 3 of the current series. It is from the manuscript of Pipe Major John Smith where the composer is given as 'MacCrummen', as are other tunes in the book which we know not to be the case. The tune is in no other source and is probably is a nineteenth century composition, possibly by John Smith himself. Some clerical corrections have been made to the original text.

The three pipers were thanked for their sensitive performances of the tunes on excellent bagpipes.

Alan Forbes
March 2015

Note: In the discussion that followed Hamish Nicholson advised that he had an old recording of 'The Fairy Flag' played by John MacFadyen. Hopefully this will be of suitable quality to be placed on the Piobaireachd Society's website.