

Re-Publishing of Piobaireachd?

This is part of the paper read by Mr. A. G. Kenneth at the Piobaireachd Society conference at Minard Castle last March.

The subject on which I'm supposed to be talking is based on a premise which deserves a thorough examination, and any conclusions to be reached should only be reached after this proposition has been considered. The point is this—can we say that printed piobaireachd collections are now due for revision? If so, are they all due for this treatment, or only some? And what, if anything, are we sacrificing by pushing a revision, bearing in mind that funds are limited?

I would like to say right away that certain collections are not, in my opinion, suitable candidates for such treatment. These are the Kilberry book and Roddie Ross's collection. These purport to illustrate individual styles and the second named is already equipped with illustrative discs. It would perhaps be presumptuous to equip the Kilberry book with tapes as it is specifically intended to illustrate the playing of a school—tunes contained in both it and the Piobaireachd Society Collections could be dealt with in the latter context, and it might be borne in mind that most have been printed in the latter, and more will eventually be. This is no disrespect to the Kilberry collection; but inevitably it lacks the details which have always been the most valuable feature of the Piobaireachd Society books: anyone who buys the latter simply for the sake of the main texts is not getting his value for money. So there is a strong case for eventually including all the Kilberry book tunes in the Piobaireachd Society series.

One other collection is in my opinion not suitable for revision and this is the celebrated Ceol Mor. Here there is too much to be done; too much rubbish to be excised, and the music is probably better treated by the publication of tunes of known interest or considered to be of potential merit in the Piobaireachd Society or some other new collection.

The idea of publishing the Canntaireachd in full, with edited versions of all tunes in staff and verbatim Canntaireachd transcripts given exactly as each tune is given in the MSS. is obviously attractive. But here too there are a number of tunes "of lesser interest" to put it politely, and though from many points of view these are of considerable importance—historically and musicologically—yet from the point of view of the practical piper it is unreasonable to present him with a great number of such at the same time. And all this would presumably have to be financed by the Society? So, in my

view, this very attractive project must be off.

We are left with the conclusion that the one Collection which has a strong claim to revision is the current Piobaireachd Society collection. And it is realistic to ask exactly what we mean by revision. A revision of the main texts is neither necessary nor, in the context of this work, even desirable. But revision of the Editorial Notes—the most important part of the work—is very desirable, and it is possible to claim that another desirable refinement would be to supplement the series with tapes. This I shall shortly discuss in more detail. Just now I'll content myself with pointing out the cost factor, and mentioning the possibility that the pursuit of this objective might hamper the publication of further books in the series. This point is affected by what remains to be published, and I deal with this in detail later. Here I'll merely say that I envisage the possibility of putting out at least two more good books in the present series. Suggestions as to possible contents are on an appended sheet. Apart from a more accurate indication of timing, revision of Editorial Notes should lead to exact descriptions of alternative settings, and any other information omitted from the original.

The questions here vary according to which type of publication is envisaged. My personal interest in publication—at least, my direct interest—has so far centred on the Piobaireachd Society series and I propose to outline something of what I know still to be unpublished and to be possibly worthy of publication in this series.

We have a number of tunes in the Kilberry book which are not in any Piobaireachd Society book as yet. There is a strong case for publishing these eventually, if only for the sake of the Editorial Notes—the only serious lack in the Kilberry book. Then there are still some nice tunes in the Canntaireachd which I'd like to see printed. These present the usual problems but are mostly readily enough set. I could mention "Lochnell's Lament" for one—some of you know this one. Reid's MS. provides at least one good tune, "Staffa's Salute"; and after I've said that, what is left? One or two of lesser merit in MacKay's book and a number in his MS. But anyone must admit that the very greatest tunes have been published already in one collection or another.

The Piobaireachd Society collection, book 9, suffers the great defect of having no descriptions of alternative settings in Editorial Notes—this ought to be remedied. The reason for this unique and deplorable state of affairs is given by Kilberry—he says "as the MSS. are now on loan in the National Library, anyone interested can consult them there"—a line of argument which I can only describe

as specious. For very obvious reasons, we're not all in a position to trot along to the National Library to satisfy our curiosity on various points as they arise.

So I think there is certainly enough material to give us at least two further books in this series. You will have noticed that I've not referred to the question of including really modern tunes though I wouldn't mind including "Lament for Cluny Macpherson". The rest could stand under a rather different heading. I feel that there is a terrible risk of present or future editors including unworthy stuff out of natural kindness or deference to the composers—once the composer isn't around any more, his works can stand on their own merit. In Ceol Beag a proportion of rubbish doesn't matter so much (as long as it isn't too thick on the ground). Despite this, I'm keenly in favour of publishing mediocre tunes somewhere. I consider it ridiculous to have composing competitions and then fail to publish the prize-winners.

This only comprises a small part of the subject. There are other publication projects that might be desirable, such as the whole of the Canntaireachd, edited in staff, and verbatim in Canntaireachd notation. Then—to return to tunes that have already been published by the Piobaireachd Society, there are some that are straight transcriptions from a MS. source and no idea of timing and expression is given (at least, I would say this is fair comment). Given the specialised tradition behind this series I feel that we'd not be justified in altering main texts though we certainly could indicate interpretations in Editorial Notes: and this links up with the idea of tapes. Another type of publication is one such as Roddie Ross's which enshrines the playing of a master and it is in such a publication that the need for tapes is greatest.

Having said this, what is the function of tapes in supplementing a publication of the other type, whose avowed function as far as I am concerned is largely to make available to pipers tunes and settings they might otherwise have not had access to? Already we have a tyranny of the printed score—are we going to have a "received idea" about every tune we publish? I think there could be a disadvantage here though I'll admit very readily that tapes in illustration of points in Editorial Notes might be useful. Then there is the question of cost. Of course the tapes would be optional extras, but would this tempt a lazy editor to shirk his duty of clear statement and verbal explanation? It shouldn't, but it just might. And when the question arises, "Who is going to decide what interpretation is to be given?" this too will cause trouble. I suppose there are tunes for all of us where we have our particular ideas—yet we mightn't want to thrust these ideas down the piping public's throat.

Probably tapes to supplement any collection are capable of being a tremendous enhancement—but it certainly depends on precisely what is on them and they require at least as much editorial care and attention as the rest of the book. Granted, revision is easy, but to revise over-freely would be rather a confession of inadequacy in the first instance.

To revert for a moment to tunes already published. There is a case to be made for the inclusion of e.g. D. MacDonald's "Rout of Glenfruin" as an alternative 1st text when the book in which it appears is next reprinted. There are a few other cases like this. It is quite good enough to stand comparison with MacKay—indeed I prefer it.

What we all must hope for is that we may be lucky enough to come on MSS. containing new tunes, different settings. There just could be something of the sort still in existence and, if so, what a difference that would make! Did the MacDougalls leave any music? Did John Ban MacKenzie? What about the alleged MS. from which Gesto is supposed to have worked? I've been told that there was such a document, and I've also been told there was not. Is there any more Cameron music? What became of the scores written out "scientifically" for the Highland Society? Where is Donald MacKay's MS.? Duncan Campbell's? Lamont's? These last show that there has not been proper care taken even of the source material originally in the Piobaireachd Society's possession which should be a very sobering thought for us—it also shows just how much Angus MacKay eclipsed all else in earlier days, and we are now paying a price for this. The loss of Duncan Campbell's MS. is serious, though in "Skinner's" MS. we have fortunately a partial copy. Experience with Reid's MS. strongly suggests to me that these sources have not been properly used or evaluated, and my personal experience of Duncan Campbell's settings supports this view. Earlier editors were apt to write him off as a mere copyist of Angus MacKay, but he is certainly much more than that.

There are still a number of tunes in Angus MacKay's MS. which might well be worth publication—it might be useful to produce an index of his MSS. showing which tunes had been published and in what books they were to be found. An example of the sort of tune I have in mind is "Ewen of the Battles"—quite a good little tune and not found anywhere else as far as I know. There are others of this calibre even if the collection has been "creamed". A practical example of a tune that deserves publication is "Young Neil's Salute" (or as Reid calls it, "The Sound of the Waves"), although in this case Reid's setting is preferable. Even if we adopt Reid's version as the basis, we should certainly be very thankful that MacKay gives us a name—there are already too many Duntroon tunes for comfort.

(to be concluded.)

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I've mentioned two tyrannies so far—the tyranny of the printed score and the tyranny of the tape (which may be called a part of a larger tyranny—the tyranny of the “received idea”). I would like to touch on another tyranny which affects anyone who takes over an editorship in mid-series. This is very obviously the tyranny of the past. You are bound to a certain format and standard of presentation and if your publication is to continue as serial with what has gone before, you ought to continue the actual technique of presentation. There will come a day when a new series could be thought of, and then it would be much easier to introduce new ideas. In the meantime, I would say that if a new book in the current Piobaireachd Society series were to be printed, the earlier books would have an equally strong claim to be supplemented by tapes so as to secure uniformity. This would be a mammoth task. But there is yet one more consideration—use of tapes might do a great deal, both to perpetuate the playing of present-day masters, and to raise the general standard. Put it this way—how glad we would be if we had the actual playing of MacDougall Gillies, the Camerons, etc., available to us. We are in a position to secure this, with today's masters, by tapes; though, admittedly, that would certainly not be the function of tapes supplemental to a published book—their function as I see it would be merely explanatory. And then—how much ought to be taped? If a complete play-through of every tune is envisaged, this means a playing-time of c. 4 hours altogether, exclusive of alternatives, points in Editorial Notes, etc. I would think this would hardly be realistic in the context of a collection for sale, and the time estimate is very conservative. Of course, this goes far beyond the merely explanatory use of tapes that I've suggested. (The time of 4 hours given above is the time for a single book. For the entire series you can multiply by 12). I suppose the best use of tapes is as an end in themselves, not tied to a written text, to which they would be ancillary: but that has nothing to do with the use of them under present discussion.

Are there any other modifications in technique of presentation that we can consider? Here the answer must be an emphatic yes. For R. Ross has introduced several neologisms which may or may not appeal. Equally important, I think, has been Seumas MacNeill's attempt to harness the traditional method of presentation to represent

much more accurately how we time our music, by use of varying time-signatures inside a single variation. This may be a very real advance—I think it is. But it can't have reference to main texts in the Piobaireachd Society series where there must—I think—be a continuity of format and presentation. Some such technique might be adopted however for use in Editorial Notes to indicate methods of timing. I can't see any particular advantage in R. Ross' reduction of the stave to 3 lines, nor do I see force in his colouring the different parts of the tune differently. It hardly seems worthwhile, to me. I suppose one of the great blocks and one of the great questions is—cadences. How best should we write them? By writing them as we have, have we made the music harder for the uninitiated to reach? It is easy to treat a 2-note cadence as ordinary notes; not quite so easy to deal with a 3-note cadence, because the D grace note after E is apparently always (in the notation to which we are accustomed) **part of a 3-note cadence**: it doesn't occur otherwise and we may have a mental block about seeing it in any other context. Then by writing the cadence Es as cadences have we not led some into the habit of clipping their cadences? These are all aspects of publication and editorial policy which are worth a little thought; though I confess that I find the question of “What tunes” the one which most interests and excites me.

There is a point which has been becoming more pressing with each of the later Piobaireachd Society books—isn't it a great inconvenience to have so many tunes nameless? Here the short answer is “Yes”, but what we do about it I don't know. Presumably we just sit and suffer. In the future there is liable to occur an even more awkward development. In the Canntaireachd there are two good tunes called “Finlay's Lament” and the “Brothers' Lament” which we may well publish some time. But these tunes have nothing whatsoever to do with the better known tunes of the same names in the other records, nor is there an alternative for either. Here the prescription must, I suppose, be the same, we have to call them by the only names they have, and be careful to distinguish them by giving the source as well as the tune name. “Campbell Finlay's Lament”—“Campbell's Brother's” Lament, perhaps!

I'm appending a sheet with a list containing some of the tunes we might publish. It must be understood that this is not in any way comprehensive—there are many more—but these are tunes which I have thought about, and which I think ought to have a reasonable claim.

A number of these are in Ceol Mor, but this is now a very scarce book, and furthermore, the settings are very far from reliable. In the past we have never been inhibited from printing a tune by the fact that it appeared in this record or others, and I think this was always

the correct approach.

One problem I seem to have dodged earlier is the question of cost and practicability. These practical questions are linked up with the Society's priorities and we may feel that tape production would defer the production of further books. This would be, I think, a great misfortune. It may be reasonable to postulate a much greater sale for the tapes of the more "popular" books than of the later ones—though I may be quite wrong here. If we envisaged doing anything, a pilot scheme to test reaction before undertaking any really massive commitment is a possibility; but I feel there ought to be no hasty rush to the easy and attractive conclusion that because tapes can be of advantage, then we must have tapes regardless. Great caution is called for.

A summary of what I've said in all the foregoing may be useful. The only collection to have any claim to revision is the current Piobaireachd Society collection. Apart from the question of tapes, revision of the Editorial Notes, and perhaps their expansion to include a more detailed indication of timing, is possible and ideally desirable. The main texts should as a rule be left intact. Tapes could be provided as ancillary to the collection, but their production—inevitably costly—should not interfere with (rather, should not be allowed to interfere with) the publication of further books in the series, which, in my view, still has priority. The production of tapes could be done piecemeal—a book at a time. The problems of editing tapes should be borne in mind, as they do not necessarily coincide with those of an ordinary editor.

An outline is given of what remains to be published, and once again I stress that this is not exhaustive and there are yet more. The hope is expressed yet again that there may be some valuable manuscript sources still in existence, and I would like to stress the great potential importance of this.

TUNES WHICH MIGHT BE CONSIDERED FOR PUBLICATION IN THE PIBAIREACHD SOCIETY SERIES.

Source

A. MacKay Collection : "King George III's Lament", "Davidson of Tulloch", "Half-Finished Tune".

A. MacKay MSS.: "Lord MacDonald's Lament", "Dispraise of the MacLeods", "Inverness Piobaireachd (=MacDuff's Gathering)", "Melbank", "Fare Thee Well, Donald", "Fairy Flag", "Hen's March", "Boisdale Salute".

Kilberry Collection : "Donald Duaghal MacKay", "March for a Beginner", "Alasdair Dearg", "Chisholm's Salute", "Struan Robertson", "MacCrimmon Will Never Return", "Lady Doyle", "Glengarry's Lament", "MacNab's Salute".

"Menzies' Salute", "MacLeod of MacLeod's Lament", "Sheriffmuir".

Campbell Canntaireachd : "Finlay's Lament", "Lochnell's Lament", "Hugh's Lament", "Duntroon's March", "Brother's Lament", "Gu my Slan dhuit Donail", "Aird's Lament", "Brian O'Duff (=Frenzy of Meeting)"—which setting?, "Sutherland's Gathering"—which setting?, "MacIver's March" 1.29, 1.39, Left Hand, "Fraser's March", "Prinsah Beg".

Reid MS.: "Staffa's Salute", "Sound of the Waves" (=Young Neill).

D. MacDonald : "MacDonald's March".

Other sources : "Coll's Broadsword", "MacKintosh's Banner", "Lament for Cluny", "Gunn's Salute"? "Ceol Mor nameless 8", "Sir J. MacDonald of the Isles Lament" (C. MacArthur's tune), "Athole Salute".

This is an incomplete list—there are several others I'd like to include. Some of the above may seem of slight merit, but in fact they are played, and on this ground it may be as well to place on record all that is known about them. The list is particularly incomplete as regards the Canntaireachd.

A final word on the possible function of tapes as a factor in the dissemination of different styles of playing. We have already adopted a card-index system as an informal method of collating all available knowledge about any particular tune: would it be possible to have a card-index of tapes illustrative of the various styles of playing any particular tune? This idea has no particular reference to tapes ancillary to a publication of written music—it is simply a suggestion as to how tapes could enshrine present-day knowledge and methods. If we don't make use of the easy techniques of reproduction we now possess we may sacrifice much of the knowledge at present available to us.

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