

Introduction Dr Bill Wotherspoon

Our first speaker this morning is Dr John Frater who will be well known to most of you. John has been member of the Society for many years and is currently serving a second stint on the General Committee. He is also a member of the Royal Scottish Pipers Society and the Glasgow Highland Club. From my point of view he is an invaluable member of the Newcastle Pipers Club and can always be trusted to regale us with a piobaireachd sometimes obscure and sometimes of his own composition.

John's eagerly awaited talk has been incubating for a considerable time with some abridged snippets appearing over the past two years. Its title is the musical legacy of the Macleods of Raasay.

Musical Legacy of the MacKays of Raasay, part 4; PS Conference 2023

John K S Frater

I had a talk ready for the 2020 PS Conference; when Covid intervened, I prepared a version for the Society's website; parts 2 & 3 ditto 2021 & 22.

I'll open today as I planned three years ago:

One trigger for my interest in this topic was noticing that in our Society's catalogue of early piobaireachd manuscripts and books, 76 of the 323 tunes, almost a quarter, appear only in MacKay of Raasay sources, such as:

- Dispraise of MacLeod
- We will take the Highway
- MacDuff's Gathering
- The Sauntering
- Captain Wemyss Sutherland's Lament
- Young Allan's Lament

These are not well known, though We will take the Highway is an attractive wee tune and MacDuff's Gathering, presented in a typically attractive Angus MacKay score [slide 1], is excellent, with an interesting first variation.

Now a different half dozen of those 76 MacKay only tunes:

- Lament for Mary MacLeod
- Lament for the Earl of Antrim
- The King's Taxes
- Lament for Captain MacDougall
- Nameless, hiharin dro o dro
- Young MacLeod of Colbeck's Lament

Six of our finest piobaireachd, taking us into the heart of our mainstream repertoire. Hardly any old piobaireachd were added to our written records after the initial collecting phase of

Colin Campbell, MacArthur/MacGregor, Donald MacDonald and Angus MacKay, so perhaps some of these six classics, and other tunes, could have been lost without the MacKays' efforts.

In my series of papers, I have concentrated on the MacKays' Piobaireachd musical legacy, which includes:

- several surviving MacKay manuscripts;
- tunes not found in other old sources;
- amongst them MacKay of Raasay compositions;
- MacKay settings for a large number of tunes that are in other sources;
- Angus MacKay's published book of Piobaireachd, the first fully successful such venture, which became a major influence, though famously not without its flaws;
- their piobaireachd style

The relevant time period spans around 100 years from the late 18th Century onwards. The main figures are Angus MacKay, his father [John MacKay] and Donald MacKay, one of Angus's nephews.

For today's session, I've picked out a few aspects that I thought would benefit from a bit of chat and illustration, plus a wee bit of new material. I'll skip some of the detail - do ask me afterwards if anything hasn't quite added up. Please remember that I am an enthusiast rather than an expert.

Although I am an enthusiastic fan of the Piobaireachd Society [PS] Books, I am going to take issue with a few relevant aspects and I am going to suggest that modern piobaireachd performance does not map as well as I used to think to Angus MacKay.

For some elements, I don't currently have much to add to what is in my website papers and I won't cover them in today's talk; they include Angus MacKay's sources for the tunes in his collection, Angus MacKay and the HSLMS, pibroch networking in the early 19th Century, the piobaireachd compositions of John MacKay Senior, the contributions of Donald MacKay Jnr.

Angus MacKay's manuscript scores are attractive, as we've already seen with MacDuff's Gathering, and they are often both lucid and subtle, with tunes readily playable off the page. I am delighted that the Piobaireachd Society has procured a modern scan of Angus MacKay's main manuscript and made this available for members to view via the Society's website. I would like to pay tribute to the National Library of Scotland for purchasing and conserving Angus MacKay's main manuscripts, and I thank the Library for permission to show the scores today.

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In The Battle of Bealach nam Brog, another MacKay sourced tune, there are plenty of typical features of Angus MacKay's notation: symbols, as there are in HSLMS, easing the task of writing scores and simplifying their appearance, usually for the better; portrayal of

small notes, or gracenotes in traditional piping jargon, as three tailed demisemiquavers, as in Donald MacDonald, but note that Angus MacKay also has some as semiquavers, two tails, as with the low G in *odin*, indicating gracenotes that were given a bit more weight; as far as I have noticed in Angus MacKay's scores, the small notes are never full quavers, that being one of the differences between his notation & PS, particularly with regard to leading Es, typically a uniform series in PS score, while in Angus MacKay, we see variety - small semiquaver notes, large notes, semiquaver or quaver, in some tunes dotted quavers.

In places use of different forms probably reflects fitting notes to the perceived constraints of staff notation, while elsewhere they convey a difference in timing; there may be an element of inconsistency in some scores, reflecting work in progress as ideas were developed. In the early piobaireachd sources, variation in notation may reflect different solutions for writing the music rather than different performance. Nonetheless, I suspect that for most who, like myself, learnt piobaireachd in the second half of the 20th Century, playing from an Angus MacKay score is generally straightforward.

I'll touch briefly on the dreaded *hiharin* controversy, though it isn't clear to me why it became such a heated issue. In the *Urlar* of *The Battle of Bealach nam Brog*, *hiharin* is similar to the form typically played nowadays; Angus MacKay used the same form in the *Taorluath & Crunluath* doublings of this tune [slide 3], but not in the singlings, where the first A is long; this is not easily dismissed as a quirk of staff notation - in a similar context in the lovely John MacKay composition *The Highland Society of London's Salute*,

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the first low A is not long. Angus MacKay's scores show *hiharin* in more than one timing, as do the scores of Donald MacDonald, Peter Reid, John Smith, General Thomason and the Highland Society of London's MacArthur/MacGregor manuscript. The obvious explanation is that *hiharin* was played in a variety of ways.

Now I put my head above the parapet, maybe veering towards the wackier end of the spectrum...

AM's notation of double echoes

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is puzzling.

The Lament for the Departure of King James has the whole range of his typical echo beats; his top hand echoes are familiar to modern eyes; B & D, though, look awkward – not written as they are played nowadays and not as found in Donald MacDonald or MacArthur/MacGregor. Why are Angus MacKay's B&D echoes written this way? Perhaps surprisingly, and despite extensive reading, I came across no discussion of this issue; interestingly, there was a mention, but in a slightly different context, in Malcolm MacRae's *Talk Piobaireachd*.

The simple explanation for Angus MacKay's notation of B&D double echoes, and the approach presented at our conference by the late David Hester, is that this was how Angus MacKay played them, a bold challenge to the traditional narrative, as I have understood it.

Donald MacDonald's various versions include B&D echo beats similar to modern notation; for example, it's easy to believe his E&D echoes in MacLeod's Salute

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were played the same as nowadays or close to it. If Angus MacKay played B&D echoes as we do now, his notation is uncharacteristically clumsy; it would mean he played these two Bs

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almost the same length, but wrote one four times the length of the other, which does not make sense to me.

Mismatches between score and performance might stem from issues with staff notation, but, if Angus MacKay wanted to convey something akin to modern playing, he was well capable of producing a good solution himself, plus he had examples to follow from Donald MacDonald's book and MacArthur/MacGregor.

Not only was Angus MacKay aware of alternative ways of writing B&D double echoes, he used them, mainly for what General Thomason described as the broken form, where the middle theme note is long, as in

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the Lament for the Laird of Anapool and

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Lord Lovat's Lament; as far as I am aware, these Angus MacKay broken echoes are not found in MacArthur/MacGregor or Donald MacDonald, suggesting that Angus MacKay had thought carefully about his notation of B&D double echoes.

Viewing from another angle,

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Angus MacKay took the trouble to alter his notation to differentiate the timing of these E&F echoes in the Lament for the Earl of Antrim, so is it plausible that he would not bother portraying properly his timing of B&D double echoes? Taking yet another perspective, in, for example,

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Lament for MacSwan of Roaig, either Angus MacKay uses the same format to generate one timing for hiharin and a very different timing for B double echo or he did not play as we do now; in this tune, it is again Donald MacDonald

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whose notation matches modern presentation.

I was not convinced at Birnam by David Hester's suggestion that we should play the old scores exactly as written, but that approach would melt away the difficulties with Angus MacKay's notation of B&D double echoes. As I said, it's puzzling...

It is not straightforward to unravel the old sources, lacking, as we do, definitive contemporary information about performances. It seems that before the end of the 19th Century, mainstream piobaireachd playing had been homogenised.

You may recall Alistair Campsie recounting Robert Reid's view that piobaireachd had been "perfected in Glasgow at the end of the 19th Century", the agents for this being Alexander Cameron and John MacDougall Gillies; as with much else, of course, there is bound to be more to it than that, but Archibald Campbell [Kilberry], pupil of both Alexander Cameron and John MacDougall Gillies, described features of the Cameron approach, such as timing of cadences and breabach variations, that differ from Angus MacKay, and those Cameron features often appear in PS scores.

Of the 36 tunes in the first three PS books, 14 are given in Cameron settings and 12 are MacKay settings adapted to Cameron timings, so over 70% of scores are Cameron versions. It is rare to find a PS score that fully reproduces what Angus MacKay gives us, even where it does purport to be Angus MacKay's setting, as with "The Laird of Coll's Barge" in Book 1; even the name is different, being called, without any explanation, The Battle of the Pass of Crieff.

Although we are told that Angus MacKay's setting has been adopted, most two bar phrases in the Urlar have only one note timed as Angus MacKay; in the T&C singlings the cadence timings are altered – a frequent finding, the change often being more marked,

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as in the Battle of Strome, where Angus MacKay's quaver low A becomes a crotchet; indeed, [slide 14] the opening bar of the Piobaireachd Society's Angus MacKay setting looks remarkably like Donald MacDonald!

Returning to the Laird of Coll's Barge, no mention was made in the accompanying text about changes to the unusual crunluath fosgailte turns, which are presented in the Cameron style, timed differently and with the edre component played off low A rather than a theme note.

So what, you might be thinking? Well, some of these differences are minor and the end results might be construed as not too far from Angus MacKay, but subtle nuances are an

important part of piobaireachd performance; the representation of a PS score as being the same as AM, when it isn't, has been raised by eminent members of the Piobaireachd Society, so it is not just fusspot me fretting over obscure details. I am not passing comment on the relative merits of the settings nor am I objecting to editing of tunes; I think we have tended to be too precious about authority in Piobaireachd and I am comfortable with amended or new settings, particularly for rarely played tunes that might benefit from a refresh.

What I am saying is that if you wish to see Angus MacKay's settings, you have to look at **his** scores. I used to wonder about the anxieties expressed by one of those late eminent members about "playing by the book", but I appreciate that phrase much more now, having taken on board the impact of concluding a cadence with a crotchet, when it used to be a quaver; doesn't sound much, but it can significantly affect the flow of the music.

There is a certain irony that, for Bk16, the Piobaireachd Society amended the Cameron composition Miss Mabel Thomason's Salute, making several significant changes despite the original score, published by General Thomason, being attractive, more interesting and readily playable.

An aspect that I don't have time to explore today, but would like to mention, is that time signatures are often silently changed when PS ostensibly presents an Angus MacKay setting; I realise that not everyone is enthused about time signatures in Piobaireachd, but, judging by the way he uses them, time signatures did matter to Angus MacKay.

Modern interpretations stem from what our past President, Dr Jack Taylor, memorably described as distillation and I expect most of us prefer the way we play now. We have, though, become used to exploration of Donald MacDonald and MacArthur settings and have recognised some gains from that - Am I right in thinking that Set Tune lists have occasionally mandated Donald MacDonald or MacArthur settings, but never Angus MacKay? For me, Angus MacKay's settings are often the most attractive.

It is interesting to note that Fair Honey, a set tune this year, will have the Angus MacKay setting as the main score in the new Book 9. There is a challenge, though, arising from Angus MacKay's portrayal of closed crunluaths.

Before looking at Fair Honey itself, I'll set the scene by considering Angus MacKay's notation of standard crunluaths, revisiting for this purpose The Highland Society of London's Salute

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dotted quaver theme note, followed by grip, shown by plain X symbol, then what is known as the redundant low A, closing with edre played off low A, as shown by X with a dot above; note that the B crunluath has the same format and that Angus MacKay also has the redundant low A in his taorluaths; [slide 16] Welcome Johnny Back Again gives us the opportunity to examine Angus MacKay's typical closed B crunluath, which has lost the

redundant low A and has the second low G of the grip as a large note, but, whereas the modern closed crunluath has edre played off low G, Angus MacKay has the edre component played off low A; effectively, Angus MacKay's closed B crunluath is the modern ordinary B crunluath.

We might expect that Angus MacKay's transition from standard to closed D crunluath would follow the same path as his B crunluaths. Let's look at this in Fair Honey [slide 17]: in the final line of the taorluath doubling, bar 3 has his usual D taorluath, bar 4 a closed D taorluath – it is crucial to observe, and this is a consistent finding in Angus MacKay's scores, that, unlike other theme notes, neither D taorluath has the redundant low A; both are the same as the modern versions.

In the equivalent bars in the Crunluath doubling, we see his ordinary D crunluath, with, like the D taorluath, no redundant low A, making his ordinary D crunluath the same as a modern D crunluath; then his closed D crunluath, also with no redundant low A and, like his closed B crunluath in Welcome Johnny Back Again, with edre played off low A; thus his ordinary D crunluath and his closed D crunluath are identical; this seems bizarre, but there it is - the same occurs in other tunes in his collection.

Modern performance practice for closed crunluaths, including D, is to play the edre component off low G, presumably based on Donald MacDonald*.

What should our editors do here? My view would be that PS should generally present tunes in line with modern performance practices, so where there is a closed D taorluath, there should be a modern closed D crunluath.

If someone says they're going to play the technically easier ordinary D crunluath instead coz that's what Angus MacKay has, then that's fine, provided they play **all** their taorluaths and crunluaths as Angus MacKay has them, i.e. with a redundant low A except when played from D! It's a tangled web; no wonder PS has often gone its own way and ignored what the old sources show! Btw, Angus MacKay does have fully closed crunluaths if his source does, as in Beloved Scotland from MacArthur/MacGregor and Ronald MacDonald of Morar's Lament from Donald MacDonald.

As is well known, key early 19th Century scores, MacArthur, MacDonald and MacKay, show differences. Modern commentaries often seem to imply that Angus MacKay's approach was something new; as far as I am aware, we don't know when each of the MacArthur, MacDonald or MacKay styles came into being nor do we know which, if any, was the dominant style in the late 18th Century.

Actually, we might take the view that MacArthur, MacDonald and MacKay were not radically different; variation in details rather than in fundamentals? In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, it appears MacArthur, MacDonald and MacKay were all accepted ways of playing, all three part of mainstream piping: MacArthurs were Highland Society of London [HSL] pipers, HSL commissioned MacArthur/MacGregor manuscript; Donald

MacDonald won the Edinburgh competition and a large prize for his piobaireachd scores; John MacKay and his sons & pupils were competition winners, Angus MacKay's scores were admired by HSL and so on.

One of the differences between MacKay, MacArthur & the MacDonalds is the frequency of crunluath a mach variations: MacArthur has them whenever possible, Donald MacDonald often, but not always, Angus Mackay has crunluath a mach in only twenty of the tunes in his large collection, including, ironically, his sole extant piobaireachd composition, Farewell to the Laird of Islay, John MacKay's compositions not at all, Joseph MacDonald makes no mention of crunluath a mach.

An oddity is that Eliza Ross, in her Raasay manuscript, has a crunluath trebling, in the form of crunluath a mach, in The Prince's Salute, suggesting John MacKay Snr played it, whereas neither Angus MacKay nor Donald MacDonald have crunluath a mach in their scores for The Prince's Salute. Of additional interest is that Eliza Ross shows the D crunluath a mach in Donald MacDonald's usual form not Angus MacKay's.

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To round off today's session, you'll be glad to learn that I have indulged in a bit of proper nerd activity, creating handy spreadsheets, like this one. I am not going to say too much about these, coz, while fascinating to me, they may well be endlessly tedious to most piobaireachd enthusiasts!

What I learnt here was that volume 2 of Angus's main manuscript falls into two parts, not the K2 & K3 of PS classification, but

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the first thirty 30 tunes on 12 stave paper, as shown in end column, then, [slide 20] looking at the middle part of the spreadsheet, starting with Tune Number 31, The Rout of Glenfruin, the remaining 41 tunes have 14 staves per page and, as well as their Volume 2 page numbers [column 4], have a separate sequence of page numbers [column 5], suggesting they were originally a separate volume. For example, The Rout of the MacPhies [slide 21], p89 in the current Volume 2, was on page 25 and was tune Number 14, in the process of being changed to N44, but the renumbering was not completed.

Again you may be thinking so what? I didn't start out planning number crunching and spreadsheets, it was one of those things that emerged as I gathered information about Angus MacKay's main manuscript, and, while they might go no further than a bit of academic interest, perhaps the spreadsheets might provide insights into Angus MacKay's music, via clues about the sequence in which he acquired tunes, which scores have been revised and so on? There is still plenty to figure out!

That concludes today's selection from my efforts. I have learnt a lot preparing for this presentation and thoroughly enjoyed myself in the process.

Thank you for listening.

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* This point was discussed in post-talk Q&A, regarding whether Campbell Canntaireachd provides earlier source for modern closed crunluath, but, of the early sources, only Donald MacDonald shows unequivocally fully closed ordinary crunluath.

Q&A

BW That was a stimulating lecture John. Thank you very much for that. We have some time for questions.

Jack Taylor

John thank you very much for such a fascinating presentation. I've got two observations I'd like to make.

Angus MacKay's manuscripts are I agree very illuminating. I would argue that you can play directly from them if you know Piobaireachd, but if you are a classical musician reading that it would sound quite different from how you would play it as a piobaireachd player. And one day I must put some of that stuff into my computer which will play it exactly according to the note values.

JF I agree to an extent. What I would say is that you don't need to be an expert player to interpret his scores. Whereas if you look at some of the other scores, and I regret to say I'd include some of the Piobaireachd Society score, you need someone who knows the tune already to tell you what you are supposed to play. Whereas his, if you understand something about Piobaireachd, you can go into the score and you can just play it off the score, or pretty close to it.

JT I do take that point. There are all sorts of nuances in Angus MacKay that are not in other scores.

JF I am pretty sure that is how he played it.

JT The other point refers to the low G crunluath from D. You said that Donald MacDonald you think was the man who was first to write that. He was probably the first to write it in staff notation, but Colin Campbell wrote it frequently.

JF You say that. Where does it say in the Campbell Canntaireachd that the *edre* element is played off low G?

JT Because it is *bababem* as opposed to whatever the low A vocable is. And actually...

JF But it says *dre*

JT In the tune White Wedder Black Tail in the CC there are loads of crunlauths from D which finish on the low G. But we can look at it.

JF I had a look at it and I couldn't find it.

Robert Wallace

What age was Angus MacKay when he was writing the manuscript? And how do you think he learned? Last year at the summer school we went up to John MacKay's croft where presumably Angus learned his first piping. And then they went to Drummond Castle. So how did this boy with, presumably, not much education, learn to do that?

JF From the information we have, when he left Raasay he was about 10. And when he was either 12 or 13, at the competitions sponsored by the Highland Society of London, in Edinburgh, he had a prize for his scores. The comment was made in their minutes was that these were the best scores they had seen. So somewhere between 1823 and 1825 he learnt to write music, and the obvious explanation would be that it was at Drummond Castle. There was a teacher, possibly even a music teacher for the children in the big house. And if you were the music teacher in a house like that with Angus MacKay on the premises you would be remiss if you hadn't made some effort to teach him about music.

So I think that is where he would have got it. The point is that, at the age of 12 or 13, he would appear to have been producing well regarded scores.

Barnaby Brown

Thank you John for a very illuminating talk. I completely agree with you that the subtleties in Angus's scores are there, and cannot be explained by staff notation or automative, or mechanical means – doing things on autopilot. He was a highly sensitive, a highly nuanced musician. To return to Rab's question, I think that there is a strong indication that he did pick up his music-writing ability early at Raasay House with Eliza Ross. So he might have arrived at Drummond already with quite a bit of knowledge. Mozart was writing symphonies at the age that Angus MacKay was walking to Drummond Castle, so it is perfectly possible that he was writing scores by then.

One thing I can't help thinking when dealing with puzzling aspects of these manuscripts is that during the 19th century there was fundamental change which affected all modalities, not just pìobaireachd. That is the arrival of photography, and the arrival of sound recording. In fields across the board, it is part of the industrial revolution, the idea that you have a mechanical capturing of sound, or of visual field, and the idea that notation should document mechanically what people do didn't exist when Angus MacKay was writing these things down. We assume it, but it is really a post 1860 phenomenon.

In this period you just look at their handwriting. They spontaneously change how they spell. Angus MacKay will use two, three, four different capital Ms randomly on a page. There is a wonderful article on the ethnomusicology of musical notation which looks at this problem, not dealing with piping at all. Basically notation is, at this era, as I think Jack profoundly remarks, is mobilising what is already in the reader.

Just like the English language. Our English spelling is not phonetic. It is not a mechanical representation of our sounds. It mobilises in the trained reader what to do. So that unfortunately opens up a wider scope. Or perhaps it is not unfortunate, it is probably a good thing, but it increases puzzlement sometimes.

JF I still think that, in general terms, in most of what Angus MacKay writes, that is a reasonable representation of what he was playing.

BB He, and Peter Reid, took a lot of trouble to capture on paper nuances, but then, for maybe good reasons, the Piobaireachd Society, and in fact Donald MacDonald, levelled what they wrote, because it wasn't part of their performance culture to do things the same every time.

JF To a certain extent I have always assumed that those writing the original Piobaireachd Society books should avoid making things dogmatic. They can appear to be making things very bland, so allowing the player to put their own interpretation on it. But I think, unfortunately, in some cases that has been misleading.

So when you get people like our esteemed late member who railed against playing things by the book, you see that that happens. When you hear some people playing nowadays, they are playing from the book. They are not playing....even when Angus MacKay had written it out – they are not playing what he wrote.

BB I think that the important point from my perspective is that those three styles, MacDonald, MacArthur, and Angus MacKay, were all mainstream. Angus MacKay didn't actually do anything new. I suspect that you are right.

BW A big show of thanks again to John.