



**WELCOME
TO THE 2026
PIOB SOC
CONFERENCE**

Timetable

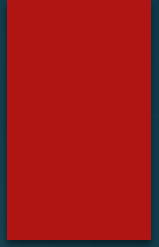
- ▶ 0930 – Intro and 1st presentation: The Origins of Piobaireachd
- ▶ 1030 – coffee
- ▶ 1045 – 2nd presentation: The life and music of Bill Livingstone
- ▶ 1200 – lunch
- ▶ 1330 – 3rd presentation: Let Piobaireachd Flourish
- ▶ 1415 – coffee
- ▶ 1445 – 4th presentation: 100 years of the Piobaireachd Society Collection
- ▶ 1600 – Piper's Ceilidh
- ▶ 1900 – meet in the bar for pre-dinner drinks
- ▶ 1930 – dinner followed by entertainment provided by 3 invited pipers



The Origins of Piobaireachd

PETER MCCALISTER AND HUGH CHEAPE

What we are going to say ...



- ▶ What is a “theme and variation” structure and how/where did it originate
- ▶ How did the “theme and variation” find its way to the piping schools on edge of the known world (e.g., Skye)
- ▶ Hugh will take over shortly to tell you what the Gaels of that period were (probably) thinking, about their position in the world
- ▶ Finally, some conclusions (noting that we are not going to proudly proclaim that we have discovered the origin of Piobaireachd)

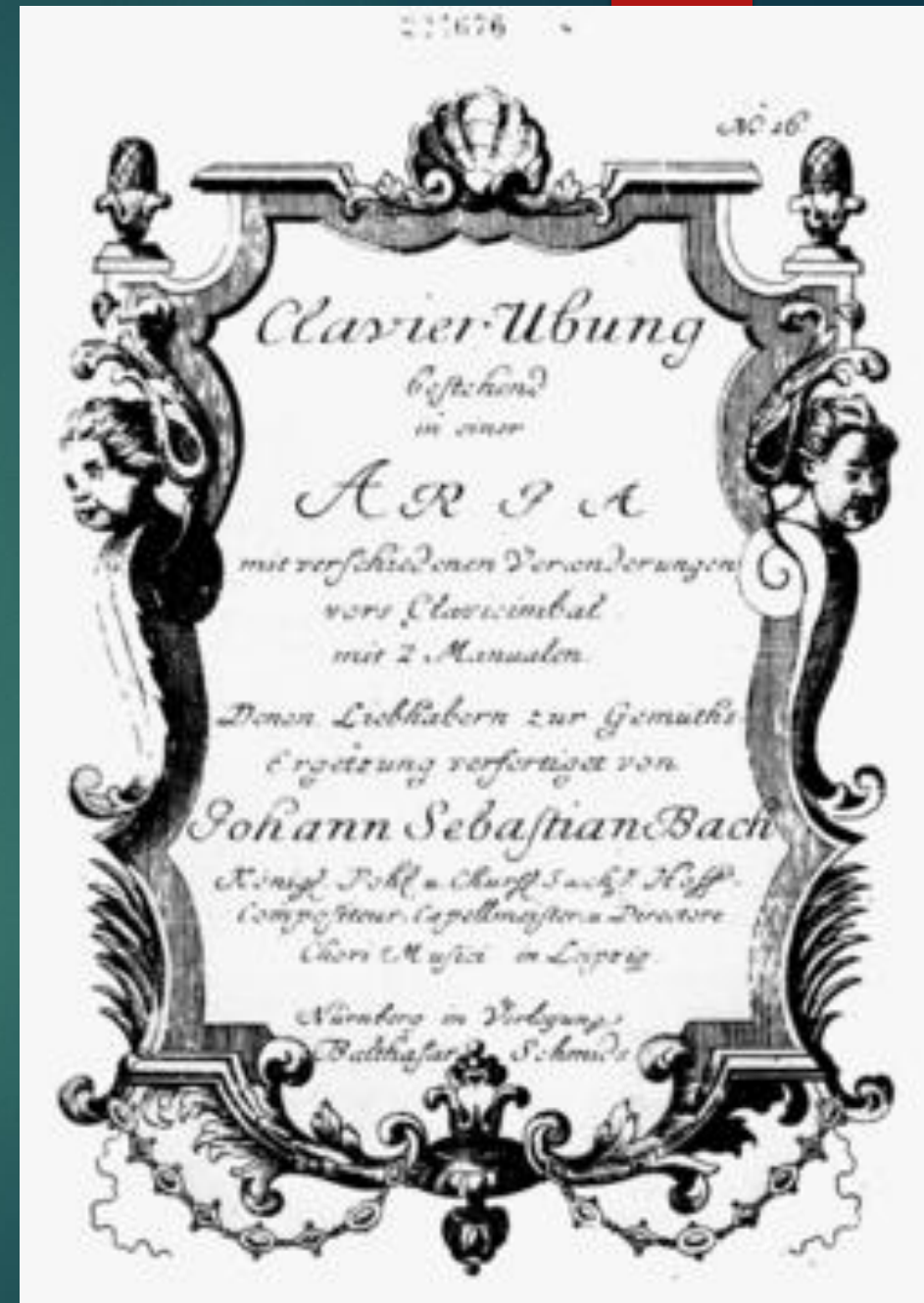


The earliest “theme and variations” were the Follia (1577)

- ▶ started and ended with the theme
- ▶ used by peasants and shepherds for dancing
- ▶ came from the Iberian peninsula (Ron Smith)
- ▶ lasted 300 years, during which 150 composers wrote variations on the same theme: later Follia came from Italy and France, where the theme was called a “ground”
- ▶ Vivaldi (1703) is one example

Development of “theme and variations”

- ▶ Theme began to be developed using:
 - ▶ Melody
 - ▶ Harmony
 - ▶ Time Signature
- ▶ Bach (1741) Goldberg Variations
- ▶ Beethoven (1823) Diabelli Variations
- ▶ Rachmaninoff (1934) Rhapsody on a theme of Paganini





Timelines



- ▶ Follia (1577) -----▶ Donald Mor (b.1570)
- ▶ Vivaldi (1703) -----▶ Patrick Og (b. 1645)
- ▶ Bach (1741) -----▶ Donald Ban (b. 1710)
- ▶ Beethoven (1823) -----▶ John MacKay (b. 1780)
- ▶ Rachmaninoff (1934) --▶ ??

Examples

▶ Vivaldi's Follia (1703)

▶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=an5fcOkA>

▶ Beethoven (1823)

▶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U4jEgJw&t=47s>

▶ Rachmaninoff (1934)

▶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8hbw>



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The Harp

- ▶ Patrick MacDonald (1784) “Such of [the harpers], as were men of abilities, attempted to adorn [the theme], with graces and variations, or to produce what were called good sets of them.”
- ▶ Joseph MacDonald (1760) “Thus [the pipers] proceed, diversifying the Adagio with all their various Cuttings, which from one to another plays upon the ear with an agreeable surprise”

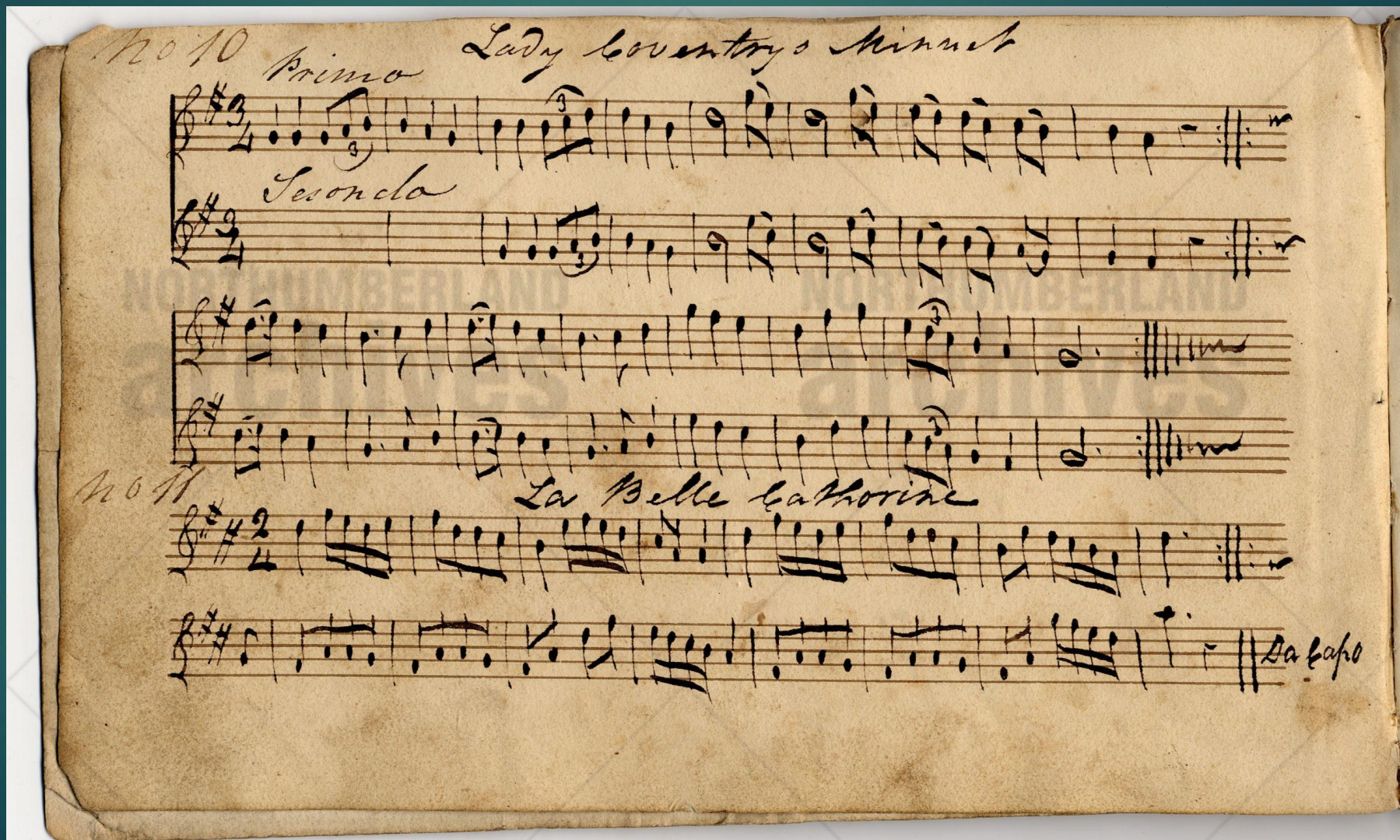
War or Peace, on the Harp



► <https://youtu.be/eXZDTefKrFI>

The Dixon Manuscript (1733)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hSZcxAEMCCI> 7 mins 15 secs



The MacCrimmons





- Preparing new course materials for the new university led to a different perspective on Highland and Island history.
- The Hebrides have always been viewed from East to West, rather than the Gaels' view (from West to East)
- 'Highland History' has conventionally been offered in English, and conceived and compiled by those outside the Highlands and the Hebrides
- But Scottish Gaelic is now more mainstream in teaching, with opportunities, and needs for new narratives and research.



Caibeal Dhiarmaid
An Tobha Mòr
Uibhist a Deas

One of five surviving churches or chapels in Howmore. Uist tradition is firm about this as the site of an ancient 'university', with students coming from all over the known world to it.

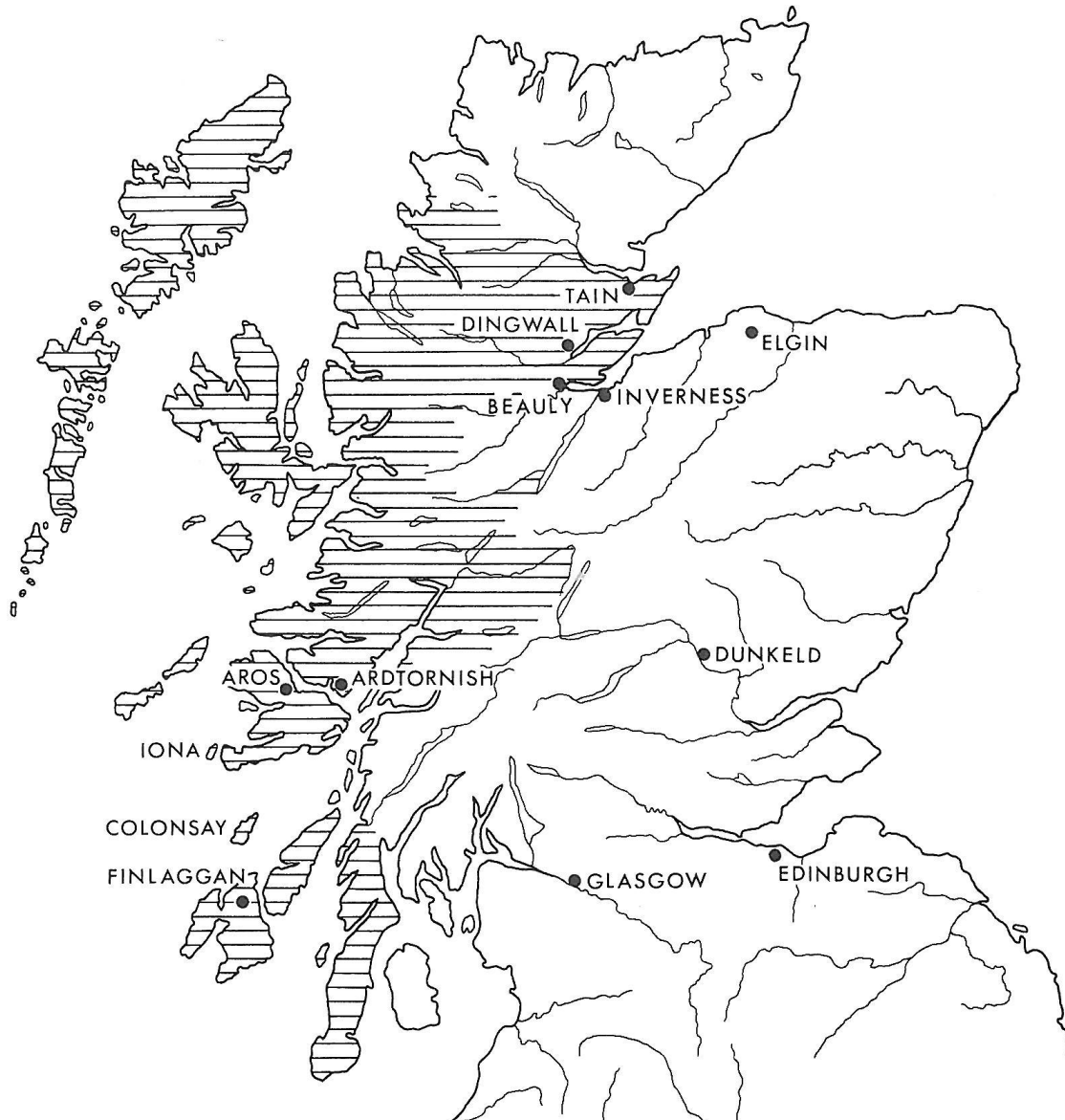
This institution was created by missionaries and scholars, and its identity was carried forward in Hebridean tradition as *Oilthgh* (literally 'Great House').



Boat model, 1st century BC, representing a large ocean-going boat, with 8 rowing benches and 16 oars, and large square sail, reflecting the skills of prehistoric boat-builders (National Museum of Ireland).



POWER IN THE HIGHLANDS IN THE MID-FIFTEENTH CENTURY



Tighearnas nan Eilean 'The Lordship of the Isles'

This is an important era in Highland and Island history, and a significant and lasting focus of Gaelic culture. Beginning in the 12th century with the weakening of Norse rule in the Hebrides, Somerled was able to establish a 'dynasty' whose rule continued for more than three centuries. Based on control of the seas and a 'Council of the Isles' at Finlaggan in Islay and elsewhere, memories of the Lordship survive in sculptured monuments, castellated strongholds and buildings - and in the language.

Caisteal Tioram, Moidart ... 'stronghold' or 'palace'





Anonymous report for the government in 1750, probably written by Rev Alexander Macbean (c. 1686-1762), minister of Inverness.



‘All these Countries viz. Knoydart, the two Morars, Moydart and Arasaig, are the most rough mountainous and impassable parts in all the Highlands of Scotland, and are commonly called by the inhabitants of the neighbouring Countries “the Highlands of the Highlands” the People in general of all ranks in this barbarous place are much better acquainted with Rome, Madrid and Paris than they are with London or Edinburgh.’

- ▶ Links to the music of Ireland were probably there initially, then diminished as schools grew up in the West of Scotland
- ▶ Harpers tried to outdo each other in the development of variations, then they gradually died out, to be replaced by the pipers
- ▶ Links to the continent (where “theme and variations” flourished) were strong, and continued from Scotland to France for centuries

- ▶ Patrick/Joseph MacDonald were from Sutherland, but ...
- ▶ The history of our instrument and this music has been written by Anglo-centric historians. The Gaelic history of Ceol Mor is yet to be written
- ▶ The road to Borreiraig is difficult now, and it's a wild and wooly place. But that was not the case at the time of the MacCrimmons, and they would have gone to Dunvegan (and in fact, everywhere) by boat.
- ▶ It's time to think again



Any questions?





Dudley Moore plays a parody of Beethoven

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SIKzLE6bHU&t=23s>