

MacCrimmon's Sweetheart

Manuscripts

This tune is widely disseminated. There are MS settings in Colin Mór Campbell's Nether Lorn Canntaireachd, (i, 162-4, with the title 'Vuail Doan' ['Voal Doan' in the index]; in Peter Reid's MS (f.42, with the title 'Mhaol Donn Morar's March'); Angus MacKay's MS (i, 134-6, title 'Cumha Mhuil Duin Suposed to be a Lament for Muil Duin Son of Conol King of Cantyre'); Colin Cameron's MS (ff.86-7, title 'MacCrimmon's Sweetheart. Gaelic, A Mhuil Duin'); there are settings also in Donald MacKay (the younger's) MS, in C. S. Thomason's MSS (f.26), and in the MS book of John MacDougall Gillies (ff.50-1), with an additional copy in 'A Selection of piobaireachd Supplied by Pipe-Major John MacDougall Gillies to his pupil George Wilkie of Dundee, 1920-21' in the Wighton Collection at Dundee City Library).

Published settings

The earliest published setting is in William Ross's *Collection* (pp.77-9). Amongst pre-Great War sources there are settings also in C. S. Thomason's *Ceol Mor* (p.208), in David Glen, who prints two versions in *Ancient Piobaireachd*, (pp. 98-9; 164-6), which latter has echoes of Reid's setting, but is unlike anything else in the written record, and in Lt. John McLennan's *The Piobaireachd as MacCrimmon Played it* (p.2).

The MS and published settings are broadly similar in their development of the tune, the chief difference lying in whether the thumb variation is doubled or not.

The tune as it has come down to us may be a composite. The siubhal, taorluath and crunluath variations in all the surviving sources are listed as a separate tune with the title 'The Battle of the Red Hill' in the MacArthur/MacGregor (ff.24-5) and in Angus MacKay's MSS (i, 11-12), as 'The Black Plaid' in Colin Cameron's MS (f.53), and as 'Men of the Black Tartan' in David Glen's MS (ff.314-315).

Colin Campbell

Colin Campbell develops 'MacCrimmon's Sweetheart' as follows:

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1st Hindroo hovehio hindeo hodro Two times hiodro hovehio hindeo hodarodo

2^d Hindroo hovehio hindeo hodro hiodro hoveo hindoo hoeho hiodro hoveo
hindeo hodarodo

3^d Hindroo hoveo hindeo hodro hiodro hoveo hecheo hodarodo

D 1st Hindroo hoIo hindeo hodro Two times hiodro hoIo hindeo hodarodo [etc]

ffirst Motion

1st Hindo hindhe hinde hodin Two times hiodro hindhe hinde hioem

2nd Hindo hindhe hinde hodin hiodro hindhe hindo hinde hiodro hindhe hinde
hioem

3^d Hindo hindhe hinde hodin hiodro hindhe hinde hioem

D 1st Hindo hindhe hinde hindo Two times hiodro hindhe hinde himto [etc]

Taolive Gear

S 1st Hindaendo hindaendhe hindaende hodin Two times hiotrooho hindaendhe
hindaende hioem [etc]

D 1st hindaendo hindaendhe hindaende hindaendo Two times hiotrooho hindaendhe
hindaende himdaremto [etc]

Crulive Gear

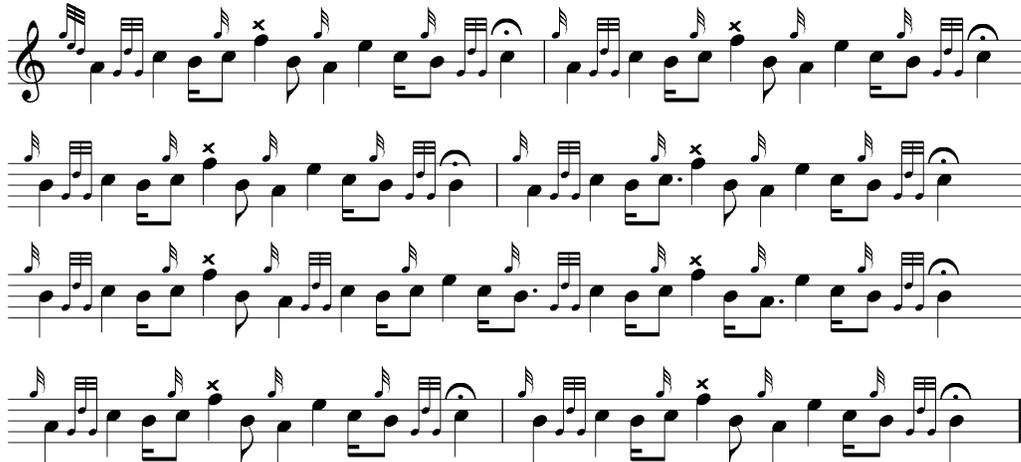
S 1st Hindodre hebandre chebandre hodin Two times hiohodre hebandre chebandre
hioem [etc]

D 1st Hindodre hebandre chebandre hindodre Two times hiohodre hebandre
chebandre himtodre [etc]

Peter Reid

Peter Reid's setting is only partially graced (although the musical intention seems broadly clear), and the variations continue through to a taorluath fosgailte singling, ending with the words, 'Then the Doubling then Creanluidh DC':

Mhaol Donn Morars March, Peter Reid's MS, f.42



Thumb Variation to be played on
the notes with the crosses on them



Then the Doubling then Creanluidh
DC

Opening Sequences

One difficulty for the modern player lies in the timing of the opening sequence in the ground.

Angus MacKay treats it as follows:

Angus MacKay, ground line 1

Bis

Colin Cameron times it like this:

MacCrummin's Sweetheart. A Mhuil Duin. Colin Cameron's MS., f.86

Bis

And John MacDougall Gillies like this:

MacCrummen's Sweetheart. John MacDougall Gillies's MS., version 1, f.50



MacCrummen's Sweetheart. John MacDougall Gillies's MS., version 2, f.50



John MacDougall Gillies, ground line 1, Wighton Collection, Dundee



John MacDougall Gillies, ground doubling, line 1, Wighton Collection, Dundee



However, Archibald Campbell's arrangements in the *Piobaireachd Society Collection* (vii, 205-6), and *Kilberry Book of Ceol Mor* (p.28) time the piece with an E cadence played on to an accented low A crotchet. The following example shows the difference between the setting given by Archibald Campbell and those of Gillies and the Cameron family whose stylings he claimed to reflect:

Archibald Campbell, ground line 1



Although Campbell stated that 'The setting printed was taught by Alexander Cameron and J. MacDougall Gillies', and that 'Angus MacKay's Urlar is the same as the text, except for slight differences in timing some of the notes', few of the older MS settings support such an interpretation, especially the three surviving versions in the hand of John MacDougall Gillies. In none of these settings is Campbell's initial A crotchet more than a quaver. In the final MacDougall Gillies example, the A is timed as a demisemiquaver, and the movement of

which it forms part is placed before the bar line. The implication would seem to be that the E/A opening gesture is to be considered an anacrusis played on to an expressed C.

Uilleam Ross

Uilleam Ross's *Collection* of 1869 contains the first published setting of 'MacCrimmon's Sweetheart', and is amongst the most attractive. It is given below:

MAOL DONN.

Mac.CRUIMMON'S SWEETHEART.

The musical score is written in treble clef with a 2/4 time signature. It begins with the tempo marking 'Very Slow.' and a '7.' indicating the starting measure. The main melody is marked with 'biss' (breeches) and consists of a series of eighth and sixteenth notes. The score includes three variations: 'Thumb var:', 'biss', and 'Doubling Thumb var:'. The 'Doubling Thumb var:' section features a more complex rhythmic pattern with many beamed notes. The score concludes with a double bar line.

The image displays a musical score for a piece titled "Entirely at the pleasure of the performer". The score is written in treble clef and common time (C). It consists of several systems of music, each with multiple staves. The first system includes a "1st var." (first variation) and a "biss" (breathe) marking. The second system is labeled "Doubling 1st var." and also includes a "biss" marking. The third system is labeled "Doubling 2nd var." and features a "2nd" marking. The score is heavily annotated with technical markings, including numerous slurs, accents, and dynamic markings. The piece concludes with the instruction "D.C." (Da Capo).

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D.C.

The use of MacKay type closed fogsailte movement will be noted, and the interesting cut down from E to A at the beginning of bar nine (and in corresponding positions elsewhere) which is a feature also of Colin Cameron's score. The title 'MacCrimmon's Sweetheart' is first used in Colin Cameron's MS, which, since it was completed in 1869, probably predates Ross. The latter knew Colin Cameron, as we see from settings included in *Ross's Collection*, and they probably met regularly during the summer months, since one was based at Balmoral, and the other with the Duke of Fife at Mar Lodge near Braemar. Apparently the numerous pipers on upper Deeside, including William MacDonald, piper to the Prince of Wales at Abergeldie (brother of Sandy MacDonald, and uncle of John of Inverness) used to meet at Peter Coutt's place at Tullochmacarrick in Glengairn. Coutts had been a piper to the Queen at Balmoral and later to Farquharson of Invercauld; at the Ballater games, his 'venerable figure with its patriarchal mien was ever a conspicuous feature' ('Leaving Glenurquhart', *Piping Times* vol.12, no.11, Aug. 1960, pp.12-14).

C.S. Thomason

C. S. Thomason in *Ceol Mor* times the opening sequences like this:

C. S. Thomason, ground and thumb variation, line 1



C. S. Thomason, thumb variation doubling, line 1



John McLennan

This is similar to the timing favoured by Lt. John McLennan in his book *The Piobaireachd as MacCrimmon Played it* (1907), the letterpress portions of which are in epistolary form and addressed to his son, the famous G. S. McLennan. Lt. John thought that generations of dubious theorising about piobaireachd which stressed its remoteness from other forms of music, its wildness and irregularity, had led many contemporary players to present the music in an exaggeratedly slow and unmusical fashion. He adopted the minim as his basic unit of duration rather than the crotchet, reasoning that it was more in keeping with the spirit of the music, and provided a more varied rhythmical palette. By this means relative time values between the notes could be more precisely expressed. It also enabled him to dispense with the fermata, declaring 'It has done a great deal of harm to Pibroch, but pipe music when properly written has no use for this back door.' (p.5). Here is the opening sequence of his setting of 'McCrimmon's Sweetheart':

Lt. John McLennan, ground line 1



It is notable that McLennan dispenses here with bar lines in order to emphasise the flow of the phrase. Perhaps it was things like these that led the Piobaireachd Society to refuse to appoint G. S. McLennan as an instructor in Aberdeen because he would not teach their scores as written and abandon his own style.

David Glen

David Glen in *Ancient Piobaireachd*, publishes two settings, and the second of them is given below. (pp.164-6) The ground has similarities with Peter Reid's setting, but the duinte conclusion to which the tune is developed does not seem to be paralleled elsewhere in the written record:

MAC CRIMMON'S SWEETHEART. (2nd Setting)

MAOL DONN, NO LEANNAN MHIC CRUIMEIN.

70. Urlar and Var. 1st

twice.

† Where the Notes are superposed, The lower one is the note of the Urlar. And the higher one is the note of the Var.

Var. 2nd

Var. 3rd

twice. *

1st

2nd

*May be "var" with D and G. at pleasure.

Doubling of Var. 3rd

Var. 4th (Taor-luath.)

Taor luath Dùbailt'

Repeat the Urlar

Commentary

This is one of the best-loved piobaireachds, an old favourite frequently offered in competition from the later 18th century onwards, and one of the tunes recorded by John MacDonald of Inverness on the Columbia label in 1927.

There are a number of stories attached to the tune, this one given by John Johnston of Coll in C. S. Thomason's 'Ceol Mor Legends', ff.364-5:

This is a tune composed by Clanranald's piper--of the day--to a cow lost in a bog by a widow in Benbecula, South Uist.

The cow was a noted one, & was greatly admired by the widow, as her only one apparently. It got lost in the common moss one day, & ultimately the whole neighbourhood turned out to look for it, likely in compassion for the owner, the piper among the rest; but its finding defied them, after their best efforts, nor was the skeleton of it found till over a year afterwards, by a mere accident.

The whole circumstances therefore afforded the piper a good theme to begin, which he did as if the widow herself was the author, thus:-

“Gad iunndrain a tha me, si mo ghradh a mhaol dounn,
Gad iarreidh feadh fhraochan, s' gad shlaodadh a poul”

This tune was also a great favourite with the old pipers, though composed for a trifling matter, owing to its own merits & its plaintive air throughout. It is very old...

The Gaelic scholar and journalist Henry White of Easdale who wrote under the pen name 'Fionn' stated in his historical notes to Glen's *Ancient Piobaireachd* that the tune was a composition of Donald Roy MacCrimmon, and that 'Maol Donn' was a common name for a Highland cow, op.cit., pp.13, 17.

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