

The Battle of Sheriffmuir

There are settings of this tune in the following manuscript sources:

- **Donald MacDonald's Manuscript**, ff.103-108 (with the title "Alba Bheadarach Cheerful Scotland");
- **Donald MacDonald jnr.'s Manuscript**, f.8; (with the title "The Battle of Sherriff Muir" an incomplete score giving the ground only);
- **Angus MacKay's Manuscript**, ii, ff.105-106 (the piece is also recorded in MacKay's so-called "Kintarbert" Manuscript, for a note on which see the Introduction to the 2004 Set Tunes Series);
- **David Glen's Manuscript**, ff.148-50 and again at 343-345;

and in the following published sources:

- **Angus MacKay's** *Ancient Piobaireachd*, pp. 63-5 (with a note "Composed by Finlay Dubh MacRae. 1715.");
- **C. S. Thomason's** *Ceol Mor*, pp. 89-90; 170;
- **William Stewart**, et.al., eds., *Piobaireachd Society Collection* (First Series), v, 7-9.

Donald MacDonald snr. sets the tune as follows in his manuscript:

CHEERFUL SCOTLAND... *Aiba Bheatharach* 103

The image shows a handwritten musical score for the tune 'Cheerful Scotland'. The title is written at the top, followed by the Gaelic name 'Aiba Bheatharach' and the page number '103'. The score is written on ten staves. It begins with a treble clef and a 3/4 time signature. The melody is characterized by a high density of triplets and slurs, creating a fast and intricate rhythmic pattern. The notation includes various note values, rests, and dynamic markings, typical of traditional Scottish pipe music.

104

Handwritten musical score for pipes and drums, page 105. The score consists of 12 staves of music, each containing a complex, rhythmic melody. The notation includes various note values, rests, and dynamic markings. The page number '105' is written in the top right corner. The music is written in a style characteristic of traditional Scottish pipe and drum notation.

106

The image shows a page of musical notation for pipes and drums, numbered 106. It consists of 12 staves of music. Each staff contains a complex, rhythmic melody with many beamed notes and slurs, characteristic of traditional Scottish pipe music. The notation is dense and intricate, with many notes beamed together in groups. The page is numbered 106 in the top left corner.

107



The curious-seeming timing of the first variation may perhaps indicate the movement being pointed "down" in the singling and expressed more evenly in the doubling. MacDonald includes a crunluath a mach, but gives weight to the initial quaver in his normal fashion, a pleasant alternative to the modern "cut" style. One notes too his interesting "open" a mach on D which is also featured in other tunes in his manuscript.

Donald MacDonald jnr.'s score is a partial one showing the ground of the tune only. It is similar in stylistic approach to his father's, but since it seems a mere outline (the notes are unaccented) it is not reproduced here.

The setting in **Angus MacKay**'s manuscript has a number of interesting features. In Variation 2, for example Mackay begins by pointing the movement "down" before switching in bar 3 to the "up" cut style, and it is interesting to reflect whether this is a simple change of mind or perhaps an indication that the movement could be cut either way, which we know

from elsewhere in the published and scribal tradition was an option open to the performer and governed simply by the surrounding musical context.

Angus MacKay's manuscript sets the tune as follows:

Blàr Slabh an t-siorraidh

105

The Battle of Sheriffmuir

The musical score is written on ten staves. It begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 3/4 time signature. The notation includes various rhythmic values, accidentals, and dynamic markings such as *f* and *ff*. There are several repeat signs and first/second endings. The score includes two variations: "var-1st" and "var-2nd". A section labeled "Doubling" appears on the sixth and ninth staves, indicating a more complex rhythmic pattern. The piece concludes with a double bar line and a final key signature change to one flat (F).

Thank

106

Bar- 3rd

Doubling

Cresc. - cu. att.

Doubling

MacKay's published score represents the tune in the following manner, including a thumb variation not present in the MS (a scribbled note at the bottom of f.105 seems to indicate that a thumb variation might be played, although it is not clear that it is in MacKay's hand):

BLAR SLIABH AN T-SHIRRA.
The Battle of Sheriffmuir.

63

Composed by

Finlay Dubh Mac Rae.

1715.

XXVI.

The musical score is written for pipes and drums and consists of several systems of staves. The first system shows a melodic line with eighth-note patterns. The second system is labeled "Doubling of Variation 2." and features a complex rhythmic pattern with many beamed eighth notes. The third system is labeled "Variation 3." and continues the complex rhythmic pattern. The fourth system includes first and second endings, marked "1st" and "2nd". The fifth system is labeled "Doubling of Variation 3." and repeats the complex rhythmic pattern. The score concludes with a final melodic line.

The image displays a musical score for a piece titled "D.C. Thema". The score is written in a single system with ten staves. The first two staves show a complex rhythmic pattern. The third staff is labeled "Crun - luath." and includes first and second endings. The fourth staff is labeled "Doubling of Crun - luath." and continues the rhythmic pattern. The score concludes with the text "D.C. Thema." at the bottom right.

MacKay and MacDonald develop the tune in interestingly different ways: after the ground, MacDonald moves straight to a pendulum movement singling and doubling, going directly on from there to duinte taorluath and crunluath variations. MacKay is more spacious in his architecture. After his ground, he has a thumb variation and an attractive siubhal, followed by a taorluath fosgailte, which produces a pleasing variety, and many might think that from a musical point of view MacKay's might be the superior setting here:

MacDonald	MacKay
Ground	Ground
	Thumb variation
	Siubhal (singling)
	Siubhal (doubling)
Pendulum movement (singling)	Pendulum movement (singling)
Pendulum movement (doubling)	
	Taorluath fogsailte (doubling)
Taorluath (singling)	Taorluath (singling)
Taorluath (doubling)	Taorluath (doubling)
	Ground
Crunluath (singling)	Crunluath (singling)
Crunluath (doubling)	Crunluath (doubling)
Crunluath (a mach)	
	Ground

David Glen has two settings of this tune, the first (ff.148-50) is based on Donald MacDonald's MS, and shows an interesting timing of MacDonald's pendulum movement and the crunluath a mach played in the modern "cut" manner:

pipes | drums

The image displays a handwritten musical score for pipes and drums, consisting of ten systems of notation. Each system is written on a single staff and includes various performance instructions and musical notations. The instructions include "omit 2nd time", "Saorluath", "Bis", "Doubling", and "omit 2nd time". The notation features complex rhythmic patterns, including sixteenth and thirty-second notes, and rests. The score is written in black ink on aged paper. The final system ends with the handwritten text "cont'd over".



David Glen's second setting (ff.343-5) follows Angus MacKay's published book and is not reproduced here.

C. S. Thomason includes both MacDonald and MacKay's settings in *Ceol Mor*, but since he adds little that is distinctive stylistically, his versions are not reproduced here.

The Piobaireachd Society Collection (First Series) follows the setting of Angus MacKay in his published book, except for timing the taorluath fosgailte in the "modern" manner which had become current throughout the piping world by the end of the 19th century. It is not reproduced here.

Commentary:

This pleasant tune – a fine example of symmetrically arched phrases based on the triads ABE/BDF – is obviously cognate with "The Battle of Waternish", although it may perhaps lack "Waternish's" power. MacKay and MacDonald's scores present fascinating contrasts and might almost perhaps be considered as a set piece demonstration of the degree of piper choice once upon a time available in a tune of this type.

In his notes on this tune, Donald MacDonald says

This fine short Piobaireachd was the favourite march of Donald Gorm of Slate, Isle of Skye, when going to the battle of Sheriffmuir. The air is supposed to be very old, but when composed is unknown.

In his "Historical and Traditional Notes on the Piobaireachds" attached to Angus MacKay's printed book James Logan says

This Piobaireachd was composed by John MacIntyre one of the brae Rannoch family, who was then Piper to Menzies of Menzies, upon this well-fought but indecisive battle for the Stuarts, 1715. (p.8).

The tune was evidently a favourite, being entered by several pipers in the Edinburgh Competitions of the 1820s and 30s, including—in 1838—John Bruce and Donald Cameron.

John Pearson draws attention in a private communication to a Piobaireachd Society advertisement from the *Inverness Courier* of 4 June 1912, for the forthcoming competitions at Inverness and Oban, issued in the name of Captain Colin Macrae:

The following are the piobaireachds selected for this year's competitions:
Inverness.

1. The Battle of Sheriffmuir.
2. Kinlochmoidart's Salute
3. Blind Piper's Obstinacy

Oban Senior Competition.

1. Lament for Macleod of Colbecks
2. Battle of Auldearn
3. Rout of Glenfruin

Oban Junior Competition

1. Battle of Sheriffmuir
2. Lament for Macdonald of Glengarry
3. Lament for Catherine

The music is printed by Mr Henderson 24 Renfield Street, Glasgow, and any information will be given by the secretary, Captain Colin Macrae, the Garrison, Millport. Only the settings issued by the Society are eligible for the competitions.

(p.3)

The battle of Sheriffmuir was fought during the Rising of 1715 between the Jacobite forces of the Old Chevalier under the command of the Earl of Mar, and government forces under the Duke of Argyll. Military historians tend to describe it as "drawn"; but contemporaries seem to have regarded it as an absurd mutual rout, in which elements of both armies were forced to retire in confusion. As the old song says:

There's some say that we wan,
And some say that they wan;
And some say that nane wan at a', man;
But one thing I'm sure,
That at Sheriffmuir,
A battle there was that I saw, man;
And we ran, and they ran
And they ran and we ran;
And they ran and we ran awa', man.

* * *

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