

## The Red Hand in the MacDonalds' Arms

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

- **Angus MacKay**, *Collection of Ancient Piobaireachd*, pp.56-8;
- **C. S. Thomason**, *Ceol Mor*, pp.193-4;
- **David Glen**, *Collection of Ancient Piobaireachd*, pp.209-211.

There appears to be no surviving pre-twentieth century manuscript setting.

**Angus MacKay** sets the tune as follows:

LAMH DHEARG CHLANN DOMHNUILL.  
The Red Hand in the Mac Donald's Arms.

XXIII.

Variation 1.

Variation 2.

The musical score consists of 12 staves of music. The first three staves represent the main melody. The fourth staff is labeled 'Variation 1.' and shows a more complex rhythmic pattern. The final five staves are labeled 'Variation 2.' and feature a highly intricate and fast-paced rhythmic sequence. The notation includes various note values, rests, and dynamic markings typical of pipe and drum music.

Variation 3.



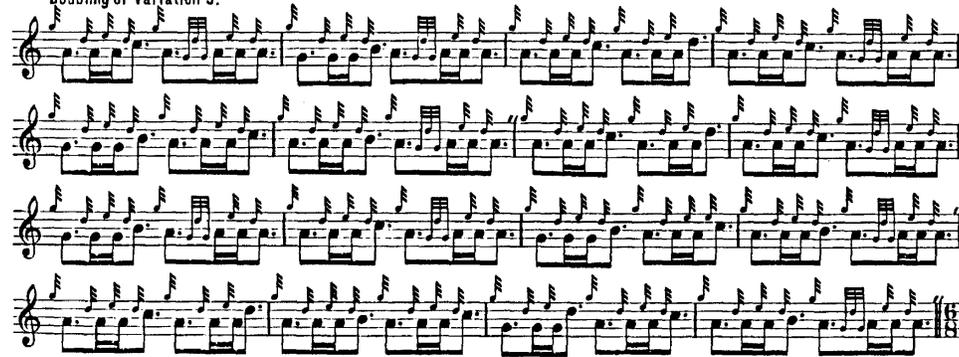
Variation 4.



Variation 5.



Doubling of Variation 5.



Variation 6.

Doubling of Variation 6.

Crun-luath. D. C. Thema

Doubling of Crun-luath.

*D. C. Thema al Fine*

Angus MacKay's score – the sole earlier source for the tune – presents us with a number of problems. There seems to be a significant mis-match between the structure of the ground and variations one and two, which are framed as three lines of six bars each, and the later movements following variation three, also three lines, but of a more orthodox (and musically more pleasing) six, six, four construction. It is not unusual in *piobaireachd* for the meter to be contracted as a

means of giving a greater emotional charge to later variations as we see in several cases in the Set Tunes series. But here we appear to be looking at structural dislocation rather than natural development. MacKay's *Ancient Piobaireachd* (1838) is an edition notorious for its typographical inaccuracies, and it seems likely that the final proofing was not done by MacKay himself. It looks as if whoever saw the volume through the press had to juggle with the barring to get even a semblance of regularity in the ground, and the second variation seems to drift so awkwardly between 3/4 and 4/4 that it is difficult to see how it could be played. The tune was published in volume ten of the *Piobaireachd Society Collection (Second Series)*, its single modern appearance in print. There, the editors – James Campbell and Archibald Kenneth – suggest that the tune be reduced to an overall six, six, four pattern by dropping two bars from the third line in the ground and in variations one and two, but although they adjust MacKay's barring, they leave the ground in 4/4, and it is difficult to see how a plausible rhythmical pattern could be deduced from this score. The MP3 file accompanying the present text suggests a possible, more highly cadenced, route through the ground and first variation that might address some at least of these problems.

C.S. Thomason sets the tune as follows:

THE RED HAND IN THE MACDONALD'S ARMS

1. 11. 11. 6

2 4

3 VII.

4 Pa.

5 Pa.

6 Pa.

C. K. & Co. Edin.

The image shows a musical score for pipes and drums, consisting of two columns of music. The left column is labeled '68' and the right column is labeled '78'. Each column contains six staves of music. The notation includes various rhythmic values and accidentals. The score is divided into two columns, 68 and 78, and contains six staves of music. The notation includes various rhythmic values and accidentals. The score is divided into two columns, 68 and 78, and contains six staves of music. The notation includes various rhythmic values and accidentals.

**Thomason** proposes one minor emendation, replacing MacKay's final E in the first bar of line two of the third variation with a more plausible-sounding F on analogy with a similar movement in bar thirteen of the ground, and he repeats the first line of each part throughout, but otherwise his setting is substantially that of MacKay's.

**David Glen** sets the tune as follows:

THE RED HAND IN THE MACDONALD S' ARMS. <sup>209</sup>  
 LÀMH DHEARG CHLOINN DÒMHNUILL.

Ùrlar.

87.

The musical score is written in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a time signature of 2/4. It consists of three main sections: the 'Ùrlar' (main melody), 'Var. 1st', and 'Var. 2nd'. The 'Ùrlar' section is the first four staves, followed by 'Var. 1st' (staves 5-8) and 'Var. 2nd' (staves 9-12). The 'Var. 2nd' section features complex rhythmic patterns, including triplets and sixteenth-note runs. The score ends with a double bar line.

Var. 1<sup>st</sup>

Var. 2<sup>nd</sup>

Var 3<sup>rd</sup>

Three staves of musical notation for the third variation. The first staff begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The music consists of a series of eighth-note patterns with grace notes, typical of a pipe and drum tune.

Var 4<sup>th</sup>

Three staves of musical notation for the fourth variation. The notation continues with similar eighth-note patterns and grace notes as the previous variation.

Var. 5<sup>th</sup>

Three staves of musical notation for the fifth variation. This variation features a more complex rhythmic pattern with many sixteenth notes.

Doubling of Var. 5<sup>th</sup>

Three staves of musical notation for the doubling of the fifth variation. The notation is identical to the previous section but includes a second part for each staff, creating a two-part texture.

Var. 6<sup>th</sup> Taor - luath.

Doubling of Var. 6<sup>th</sup> Dùblachadh an Taor - luath.

Var. 7<sup>th</sup> Crùn - luath.

Repeat Urlar.

1<sup>st</sup> time only.

Doubling of Var. 7<sup>th</sup> Dùblachadh a' Chrùn - luath.

1<sup>st</sup> time only.

Repeat Urlar.

Glen seems clearly right to opt for 2/4 rather than 4/4 for the ground, making the piece a little less lumpish and square, and his is the pick of the available scores from a playing point of view, but he does little else of significance to the tune.

*Commentary:*

The fact that this is nowhere recorded in MS, and that neither Thomason nor Glen seriously attempted to amend it, suggests how narrowly "The Red Hand in the MacDonalds' Arms" was distributed. That it was never a favourite is further implied by the fact that not even an indefatigable antiquarian like James Logan could dig up material on it for the historical notes to Angus MacKay's published volume. Nor is there anything in Thomason's "Ceol Mor Legends" or in the *Oban Times* about the background to this tune.

Here, however, is what "Fionn" says about it in David Glen's *Collection of Ancient Piobaireachd*:

**The Red Hand in the MacDonalds' Arms**

**Lamh Dhearg Chloinn Dòmhuill**

How the MacDonalds got the Red Hand which is ever associated with them is well known. Somerled of the Isles had three sons - Dugald, Reginald, and Duncan - who disputed as to which of them should have the lands of Slate in Skye. At last it was decided that each of them should man his own birlinn and race for Skye from some of the other Western Isles, and that the land should belong to the son who first placed his hand on it. In this race Dugald's boat was soon left behind. Duncan's boat began to leak at the plug, which he withdrew, inserted his thumb to make it tight, and urging his men was on the point of winning. When Reginald saw this, he placed his left hand on the gunwale of his own boat, severed it at the wrist with a blow from the claymore in his right, threw it ashore, and as the red hand was the first to touch the land he got himself declared winner. ("Historic, Biographic, and Legendary Notes," p.19).

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