



## The Finger Lock

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'The Finger Lock' is found in the following published sources:

- Donald MacDonald's *Ancient Martial Music of Caledonia* (pp.7-12);
- Donald MacPhee's *Collection of Piobaireachd* (ii, 15-16);
- C. S. Thomason's, *Ceol Mor* (p. 6);
- and David Glen's *Collection of Ancient Piobaireachd* (pp.60-2).

The tune is preserved in the following manuscript sources:

- Colin Campbell's Nether Lorn Canntaireachd (ii, 108-9), with the title 'Glass Mhoir';
- Angus MacKay, (i,.61-63), which also strongly resembles MacDonald;
- John MacDougall Gillies, (ff.48-9), which is not dissimilar to the setting published by the Piobaireachd Society, except that Gillies does not have a crunluath a mach;
- and Robert Meldrum, (ff.89-91), which offers a very conventional treatment of the tune, with a mach movements timed in the MacKay manner.

'The Finger Lock' provides a useful example of the inadequate notes which so frequently accompany the scores in the *Piobaireachd Society Collection* (second series). A performance of this tune some time ago on B.B.C. Scotland's 'Pipeline' programme in what was described as 'Donald MacDonald's setting' illustrates these difficulties: what was played was not MacDonald as such, but the Society's score in volume 1, p.8, amended by the notes on page 10, which purported to give the details of where MacDonald differed from the Society score. Unfortunately the notes were not full enough to enable this to be done successfully without consulting the original score in *Ancient Martial Music of Caledonia*. As a result the performer played the a mach variations as written in the MacKay style adopted by the Society and not in MacDonald's, where the first note of the group generally receives the accent (the Society's textual notes are silent on this point). Nor was MacDonald's instruction to repeat the ground at the end of the siubhal and taorluath variations respected (naturally enough, as the Society's textual notes make no mention of this feature). MacDonald set the tune as follows:



WILASS MEHR  
(The Singer's Lark)

Composed by

RAONULL MAC AILEAIN (1811)

One of the  
Macdonalds

OF

M E R A R

VERY SLOW

AR: I. Slow.

The image displays a musical score for piano, consisting of eight systems of staves. Each system typically includes a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The music is written in a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 2/4 time signature. The score includes several annotations: "Doubling of VAR 1. a little Quicker." is written above the fourth system; "D.C." (Da Capo) is written at the end of the seventh system; and "VAR 2. brisk." is written above the eighth system. The notation includes various rhythmic values, including sixteenth and thirty-second notes, and rests.

Doubling of VAR: 2. Quo

D.C.

Cronluith begins here. Very Quick.



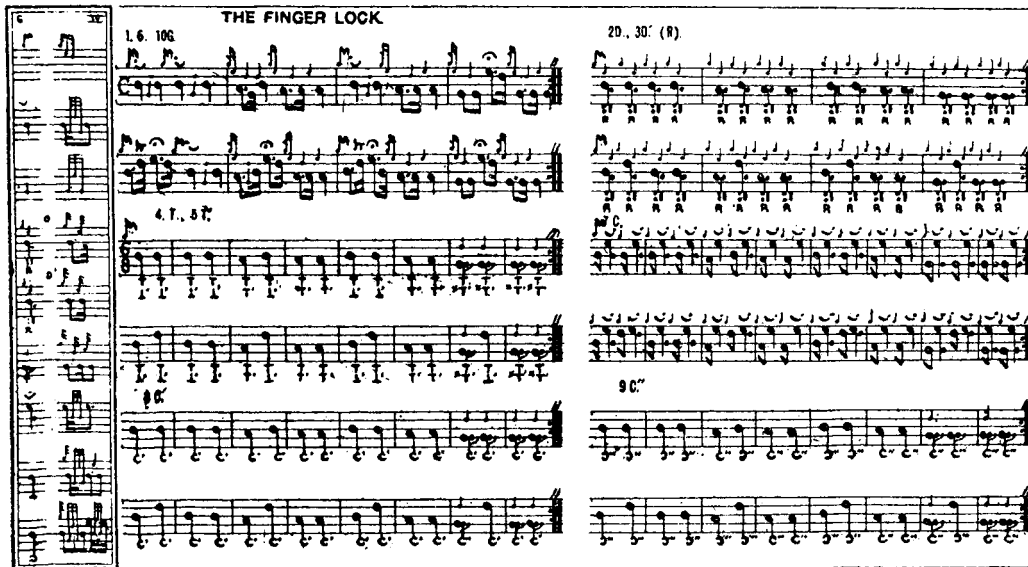
Doubling of Creanluith.



‘The Finger Lock’ is a very stable tune, and all the sources treat it in a broadly similar way, except for various little touches in the ground; Glen directs the siubhal singling to be played ‘Quick’, and the doubling ‘quicker’, and times the taorluath and crunluath a mach in the MacKay style. MacPhee largely follows MacDonald.



C. S. Thomason, who cites the manuscripts of MacDonald and MacKay and who also studied the tune with Donald MacKay and Keith Cameron shows an interesting timing of the grips on B in the ground:



THE FINGER LOCK

1. 6. 106

20. 30. (R)

4. 7. 57

90."

It is interesting to note that Thomason could get into half a page a tune that took Donald MacDonald six folio sheets to write out.

The only one of the editors to take a significantly different route through the tune is Colin Campbell in the Nether Lorn, who develops the tune as follows:

- Ground;
- doubling of ground;
- siubhal singling and doubling;
- taorluath singling;
- crunluath singling;
- (no crunluath a mach).

His ground resembles other people's, but his doubling of it is like MacDonald's taorluath a mach movement. It goes like this:

- 1<sup>st</sup> Hiotrotro hiotrotro hinemto hindaendan hiotrotro hindaendan himbambe himbabem 2 times
- 2<sup>d</sup>. Hiotraea hiotrotro hintroea hindaendan hiotraeo hindaendan himbambea himbabem 2 times





D. 1<sup>st</sup> Hiotroeo ffour times hindarid hiotroeo hindarid hindarid hiotroeo hiotroeo hindarid hindarid himdarid ffour times, Two times Over

2<sup>d</sup>. Hiotroeo hiotraha hiotroeo hiotroeo hindarid hiotraha hindarid hindarid hiotroeo hiotraha hindarid hindarid himdarid hiotraha himdarid himdarid, Two times Over

And so on. As always with Colin Mór this makes considerable musical sense, and some might think that it would produce a more varied and interesting reading of the tune than some of the other settings offered. The Nether Lorn score differs from the canntaireachd version published by the Piobaireachd Society (PS i, 9) which is simply a rendering of the staff notation score on the facing page.

### *Commentary*

‘Fionn’ notes, in his ‘Historic, Biographic, and Legendary Notes to the Tunes’ in Glen’s *Collection of Ancient Piobaireachd*, that ‘This tune is the composition of *Raonull, mhic Ailein òig*, Ronald, son of Allan Og of Morar, a man of wonderful strength of arm and body, and the composer of several well-known pipe tunes. It is said that when MacDonald, Boisdale, renounced the Catholic faith, he resolved to coerce his clansmen to follow his example. He fixed on a certain Sunday to carry out his purpose. When this came to the ears of Ronald, son of Allan Og, he resolved to frustrate the scheme. Taking with him a dozen of chosen clansmen and a piper, he sailed for Uist early on the Sunday morning. He and a trusty henchman went ashore and called on the minister, who treated them hospitably—the “shell” [i.e. drinking vessel] circulating freely. When Ronald saw the parson getting hearty, he suggested that he should accompany him to the birlinn, where he said he had a fine keg of brandy. The parson, nothing loath, accompanied Ronald. After sampling the brandy, the Laird of Morar, to gain time, suggested that they would sail a short distance from the shore, and that he would play his reverence his latest composition, “*An tarbh breac dearg*,” the brindled red bull. To this the parson was agreeable, and, while engaged in this performance, the minister forgot all about his duties to his congregation. They noticed Boisdale with a large congregation at the church. They immediately landed the parson, but the brandy had taken effect, and he walked with difficulty, and was in no mood for preaching. There was nothing for Boisdale but to return home. On Monday, Ronald of Morar went to Boisdale, and told him, if ever he heard of him trying the same trick again, he would double him up like an old pair of pipes. Boisdale desisted, and allowed his followers to follow their own convictions.

The Gaelic words associated with this tune, and in conformity with the incident recorded, will be found in *The Gael*, vol.III., page 74.’ (pp.9-10).

A quite different tale is given by Donald MacFarlane of Oban, who wrote under the pseudonym of ‘Loch Sloy’ and was a frequent correspondent on piping subjects to the *Oban Times*. MacFarlane says it ‘was copied from a very old and valuable M.S. and given to me by one passionately fond of Piobaireachd and pipe playing in general.

### Story of the Glas Mheur or Fingerlock



Two men named David and Robert were brought from Ireland by the Earl of Cawdor when he was proprietor of Muckairn [located 8 miles north east of Oban on the southern shores of Loch Etive], and they had from him the farm of Scuil in return for their services. David was a superior harper, and Robert was armourer. Malcolm, the son of Robert, had a splendid musical ear, and he was sent by the Earl to Mull to learn the music of the pipes from MacDuillidh. Malcolm, or Calum Mac Raibeart as he was called, was rather young and careless and was not attending to his master's instructions, and he was rather stiff-fingered. He and his master were at a wedding he went wrong (had too much) and his master lashed him out of the wedding house in the dead of night, and he went with his pipes in his oxters.

The night was dark, but he saw a light at a distance and made for it. There was an old man in the house where the light was and a good fire on: and when the old man opened the door he told Calum to come in, and sit at the fire. After a while the old man asked him if he had the pipes. He said he had. The old man then told him that his master MacDuillidh was studying a tune and that he had it all finished but one part. The old man then taught Calum MacRaibeart the whole tune that his master was studying with the last part complete. Calum stopped in the house till daybreak, when the old man then sent him away and told him to play the tune when he would be near the wedding house. He accordingly did as the old man desired him.

His master on hearing the music knew Calum's fingering and said that that was Calum coming back playing the very tune that he was studying himself. After that time Calum paid more attention to the pipes than he did before, and there was not a tune that he would hear but what he would pick up at once. His master declared that the lock or "glas" had come off Calum's fingers, and from that he called the tune the "glas mheur", or fingerlock.' ('The Playing of Piobaireachd', *Oban Times*, 01/11/1919, p.3)

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