

The Battle of Waternish (2)

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

- **Peter Reid's MS**, f.60;
- **Angus MacKay's MS**, i, 46-48, with the title "Druim Thalasgair (na) Blàr Bhaterneish The Battle of Waternish";
- **Colin Cameron's MS**, f.50-51;
- **Donald MacKay's 'Ballindalloch MS'**, f.26;
- **John MacDougall Gillies's MS**, ff.56-7;
- **Robert Meldrum's MS**, ff.57-60;

and in the following published sources:

- **C. S. Thomason**, *Ceol Mor*, p.243;
- **David Glen**, *Collection of Ancient Piobaireachd*, pp.2-3;
- **G. F. Ross**, *Collection of MacCrimmon and Other Piobaireachd*, pp.10-11.

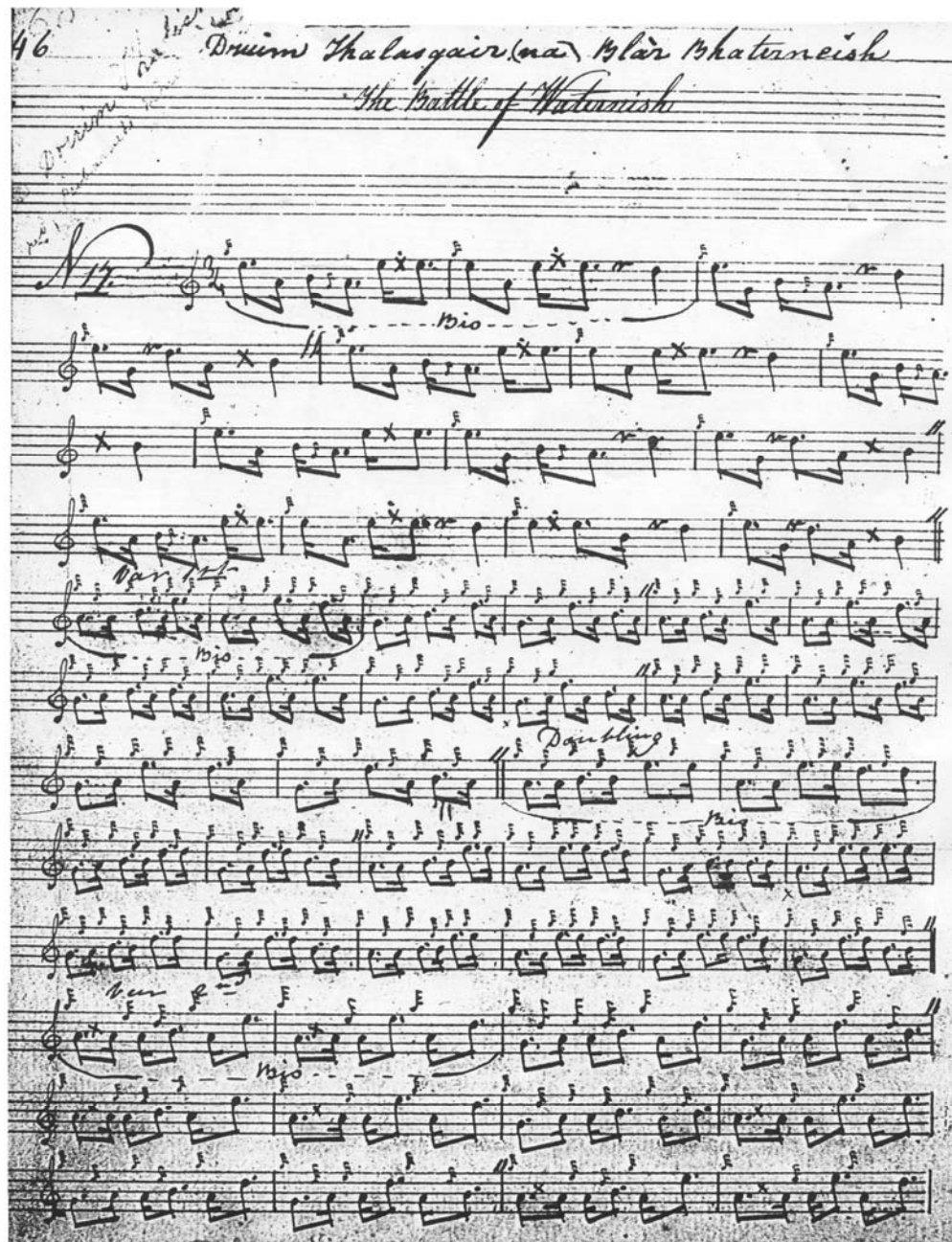
Peter Reid treats the tune as follows:

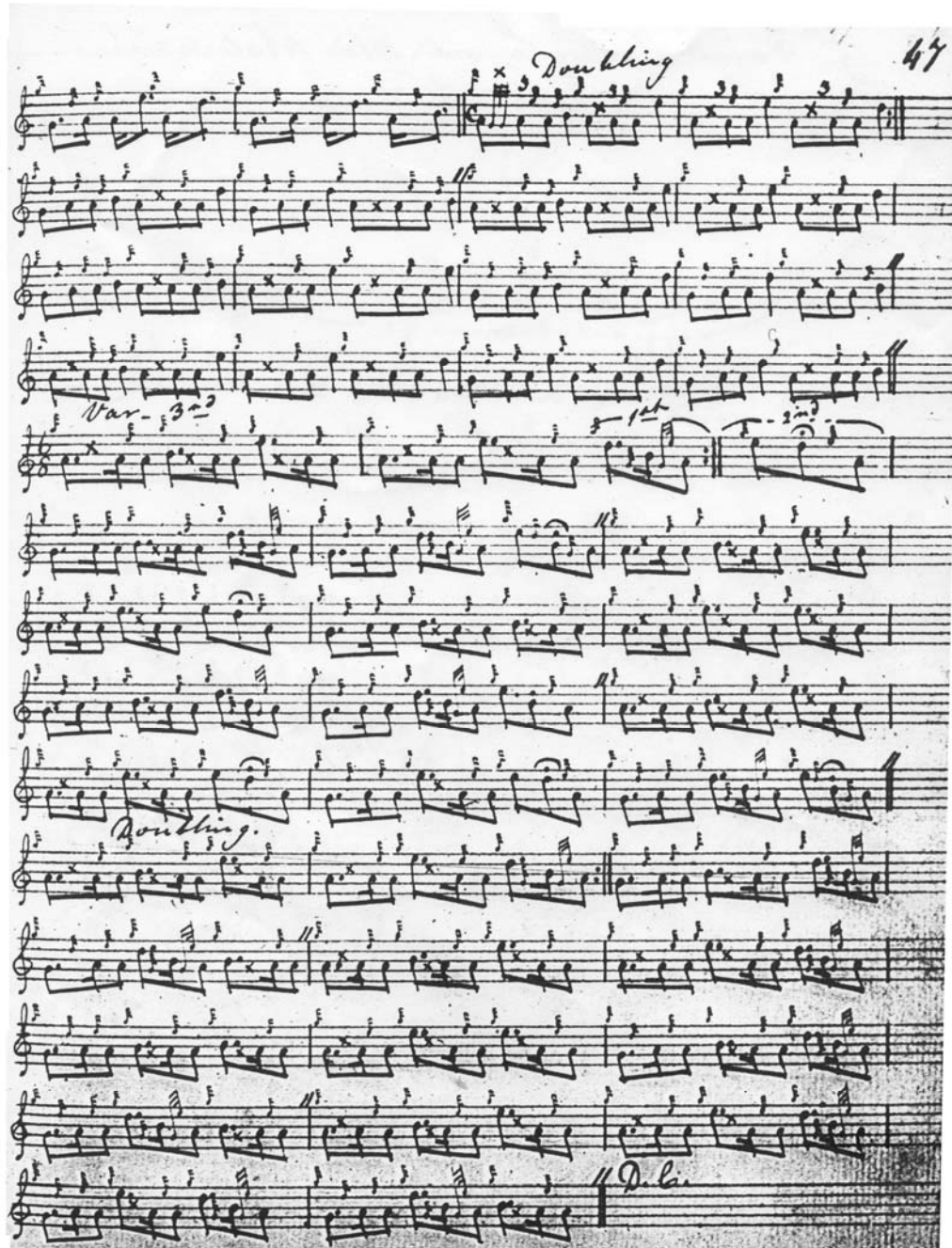


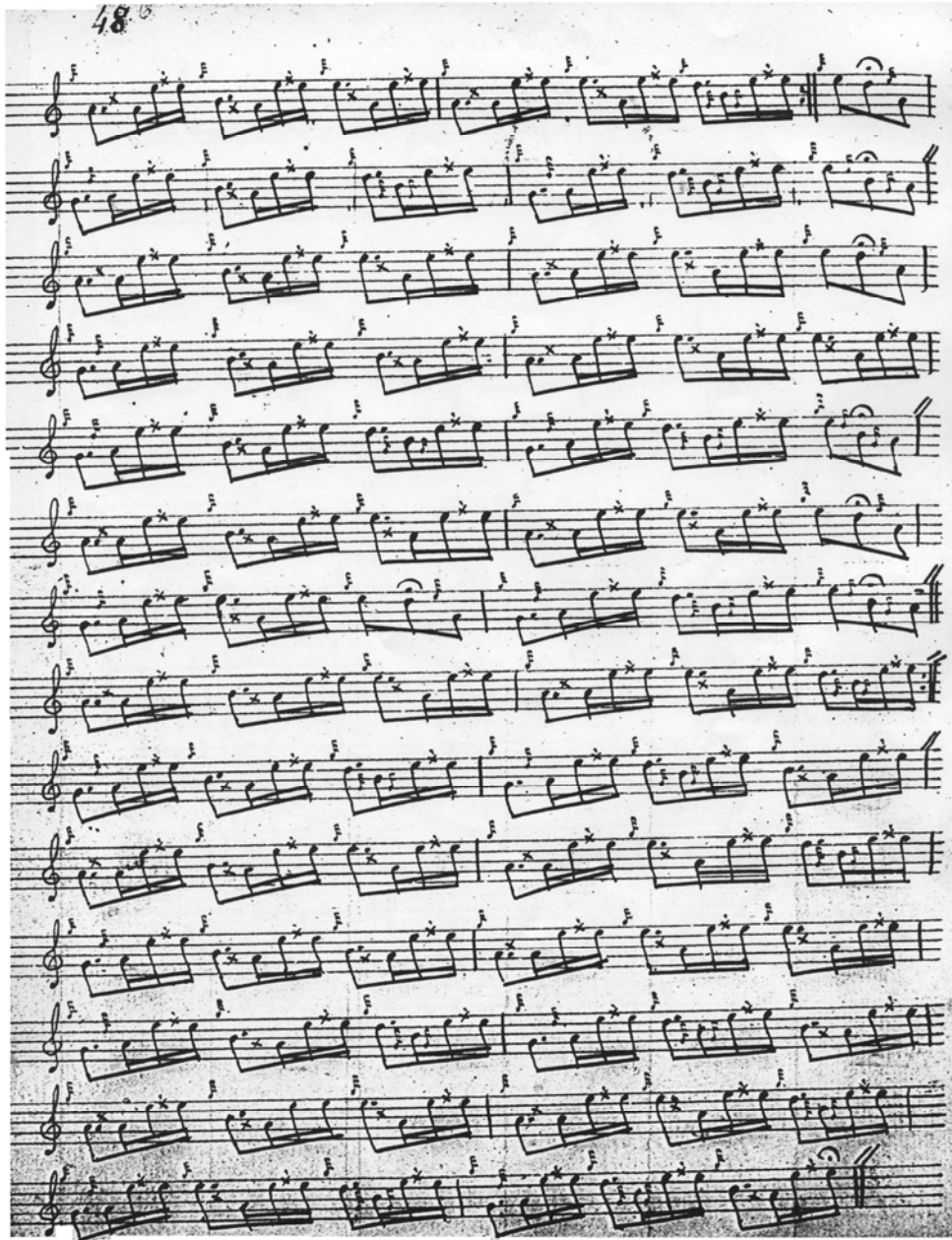
There are a number of interesting features about **Peter Reid**'s score, amongst them the rather square "down" pointing of the ground with the introductory movements played on to low A and low G crotchets and the presence of a low A semi-quaver as the second note of the final

bar of the B phrase (where most other scores go down to low G). Reid approaches the final D crotchet with a throw at the end of the A phrase off a low A semi-quaver, a feature we shall see again. Also notable is Reid's placing of the pendulum movement (singling and doubling) before the siubhal.

Angus MacKay treats the tune thus:







MacKay points the ground differently from Reid giving his low As and low Gs quaver rather than crotchet values and implying a pleasant alternation in the timing of the E/low A figures in the first phrase of the tune. The B phrase in the ground likewise has an interesting timing, the leading notes being E D B, rather than low G D B. His siubhal follows the ground with the pendulum movement thereafter unlike Reid's more unorthodox arrangement. MacKay also repeats the ground between the taorluath and crunluath variations, but not at the end of the tune. There is no a mach.

Colin Cameron favours a rather subtler timing in the ground, like so:

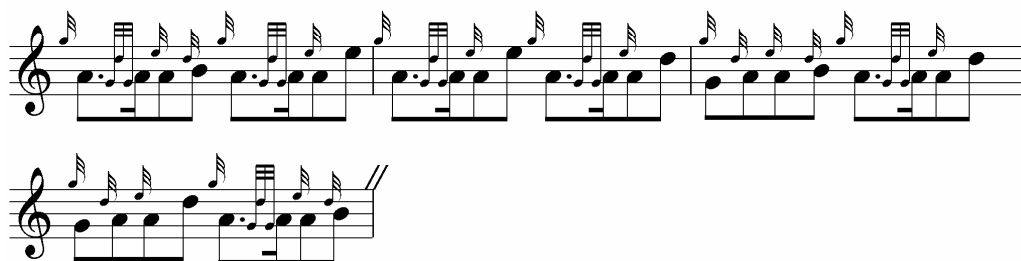
'The Battle of Waternish', ground, Colin Cameron's MS, (ff.50-51)



'The Battle of Waternish', pendulum movement, singling, line1, Colin Cameron's MS, (ff.50-51)



'The Battle of Waternish', pendulum movement, doubling, line1, Colin Cameron's MS, (ff.50-51)



and so on.

Cameron develops the tune overall in a similar manner to MacKay: ground siubhal singling/doubling, pendulum movement singling/doubling/ taorluath singling/doubling and crunluath singling/doubling. His pendulum movement is pointed "down" unlike the "up" cut style of Angus MacKay.

Donald MacKay's "Ballindalloch MS" sets the ground as even crotchets and appears to be unfinished, proceeding no further than the pendulum movement singling. It is not reproduced here.

MacDougall Gillies differs interestingly from Colin Cameron in various nuances of expression in the ground and in the even quaver timing of his pendulum movement:

'The Battle of Waternish', ground, lines 1/3, John MacDougall Gillies's MS, (ff.56-7)



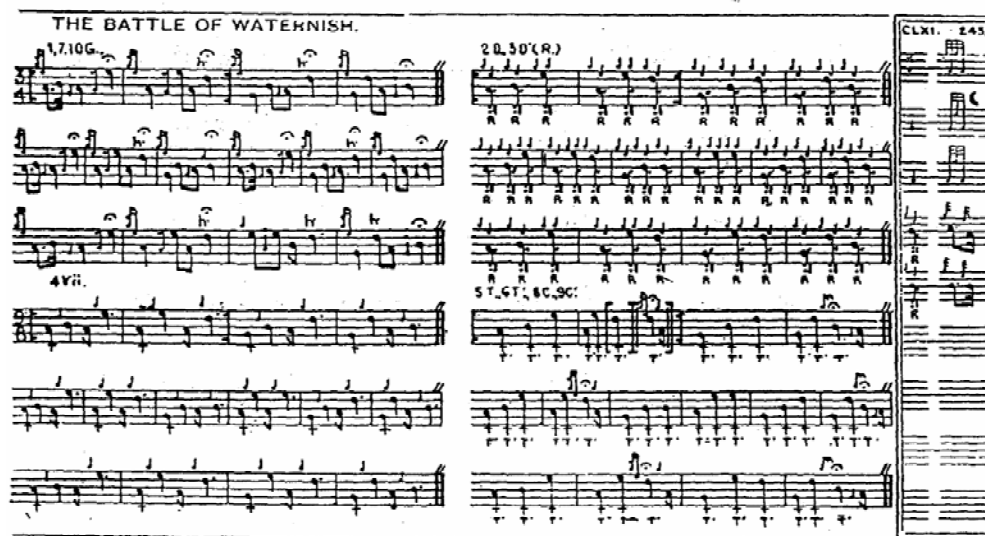
'The Battle of Waternish', pendulum movement, singling, line 1, John MacDougall Gillies's MS, (ff.56-7)



Robert Meldrum's setting adds nothing to the stylistic possibilities of the tune and is not reproduced here.

The earliest published setting of the tune is to be found in **General Thomason's** *Ceol Mor*. It offers the fullest development of the tune, with the ground being repeated between the taorluath and crunluath variations and also at the end of the crunluath doubling. The general gives Angus MacKay's manuscript and the teaching of Keith Cameron, Donald Cameron's youngest son, as his sources. It is interesting to see that rather like Peter Reid he approaches the throw on the D at the end of the A phrase in the ground off an expressed low A. Thomason sets the tune as follows:

pipes | drums



David Glen's setting in his *Collection of Ancient Piobaireachd* shows a number of minor stylistic touches which make it worth reproducing here, including thinning out the cadences in the siubhal and timing the doubling of the pendulum movement in the "modern" manner. He also offers two alternative routes through the tune/ Glen set the piece in the following fashion:

THE BATTLE OF VATERNISH.

LÀ BLÀR DHRUIM THALASGAIR.

Ùrlar. *Slow.*

1.

1st *2nd*

Var. 1st *Quick.*

twice

1st time only. *2nd*

Doubling of Var. 1st *Quicker.*

twice *1st* *2nd*

Var. 2nd

twice *1st time only.* *2nd* *1st*

Var. 3rd

twice *1st time only.* *2nd* *1st*

Taor-luath.

twice *1st* *2nd*

* Play the "Themal Grace Note" E, when starting only.

Two versions of this tune are here given. All the superposed notes belong to the newer version.

1st time only.

2nd

1st

Dùblachadh an Taor-luaith.

twice

1st time only.

2nd

1st

2nd

Crùn-luaith.

twice

1st

2nd

Repeat the Ùrlar.

1st time only.

2nd

1st

Dùblachadh a' Chrùn-luaith.

twice

1st time only.

2nd

1st

Play Thematic E Grace Note 1st time, "G cut" 2nd time.

Repeat the Ùrlar.

G. F. Ross takes a similar route to Glen through the tune, but has an interesting pendulum variation doubling, thus:

pipes | drums

BATTLE OF VATERNISH. (About 1583).

Bar Nos.	$\frac{1}{7}$ 13	$\frac{2}{8}$ 14	$\frac{3}{9}$ 9	$\frac{4}{10}$ 10	$\frac{5}{11}$ 15	$\frac{6}{12}$ 16
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(1) Ground

(2) Siubhal

(3) Doubling

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Probably by Donald Mor MacCrimmon.

Bar Nos.	$\frac{1}{7}$ 13	$\frac{2}{8}$ 14	$\frac{3}{9}$ 9	$\frac{4}{10}$ 10	$\frac{5}{11}$ 15	$\frac{6}{12}$ 16
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(4) Variation *

(5) Taobhludh (7) Creanludh

(6) Taobhludh Doubling (8) Creanludh Doubling (A Creanludh a-mach may be played if desired)

* A Doubling of the Variation may be played by substituting a Taobhludh beat (based on the accented note) for the middle beat in each bar.

Commentary:

In his "Historic, Biographic, and Legendary Notes to the Tunes" in Glen's *Collection of Ancient Piobaireachd*, "Fionn" gives the background of the tune as follows:

This battle was fought between the MacDonalds and Macleods about the end of the sixteenth century, a few years after the Battle of "*Milleadh Gàraidh*," at which it is said the Fairy Flag of Macleod was unfurled. It would appear that a body of the MacDonalds came at night through the hills to Waternish to surprise the Macleods and avenge the slaughter of "*Milleadh Gàraidh*," but finding the Macleods prepared and on the lookout for them they changed their purpose, gathered all the sheep and cattle they could find, and moved away with them; but the Macleods, having been apprised of their conduct, followed them, came up to them at daybreak two miles from the township, and a bloody battle was fought in which the MacDonalds suffered severely. Two of the Macleod leaders fell - John, son of Alexander Macleod of Trumpan who was in full armour, and did great execution, and Roderick Macleod of Unish, a place situated at the point of Waternish, Skye. A large cross was erected to the memory of the former on the spot where he fell, and the place is called "*Crois Mhic Alastair*" to this day. The knoll on which "*Ruairidh Mac Iain Bhatornis*" (Roderick, son of John of Waternish) fell is called by two names to this day, viz. - "*Cnocan Mhic Iain*," the Knoll of John's Son, and "*A' Chrois Bhàn*," or the White Cross, from a high wooden cross which was erected to Roderick's memory.

(p.5)

The historical background is the usual gruesome tangle of bloodshed and treachery springing from the struggle of the MacDonalds of Sleat and the MacLeods of Dunvegan for control of Skye and the Uists. The historian of Skye, Alexander Nicolson (*History of Skye*, Glasg. 1930) concluded that the Battle of the Spoiled Dyke, *Blar Milleadh Gàraidh*, and the Battle of Waternish were in fact one and the same event. The story of the wider conflict is given in the "Commentary" to "MacLeod's Controversy" in the 2003 Set Tunes Series.

In his published version of "The Battle of Waternish" in *The Piobaireachd Society Collection* (second series, ii,50) Archibald Campbell attributed his arrangement of this tune to Angus MacKay "with some few alterations in the pointing based on the teaching of Alexander Cameron and J. MacDougall Gillies," but the rhythmical pattern of the ground is different from that in MacKay's or MacDougall Gillies's manuscripts. The copy-text seems likely to have been David Glen's published version with a scattering of additional fermatas added by Campbell. There was obviously an earlier issue prior to the main series of the Society's publications, as we see from complaints about their editing in the *Oban Times* when a correspondent calling him or herself "Hold Fast" claimed that

Old tunes have become so altered as to have become degraded [...] any novice who has been properly taught the principles of Piobaireachd work knows that to take "liberties and departures" such as done in the "Battle of Waternish," is sacrilege and an insult to its composer.

The senior tunes are even more severely "massacred" than the junior ones. ("Piobaireachd Playing" from "Hold Fast," 07/06/1924, p.3)

There is an interesting cognate tune, "The Battle of Sheriffmuir" (Angus MacKay's, *Ancient Piobaireachd*, pp.63-5; C. S. Thomason's *Ceol Mor*, p.170; Donald MacDonald's MS with the title "Cheerful Scotland, *Alba Bheadarach*," ff. 103-108) which has a slightly wider tonal range but is of similar character; a good example of a tune based on the contrasting arched triads ABE/BDF

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