

Abercairny's Salute

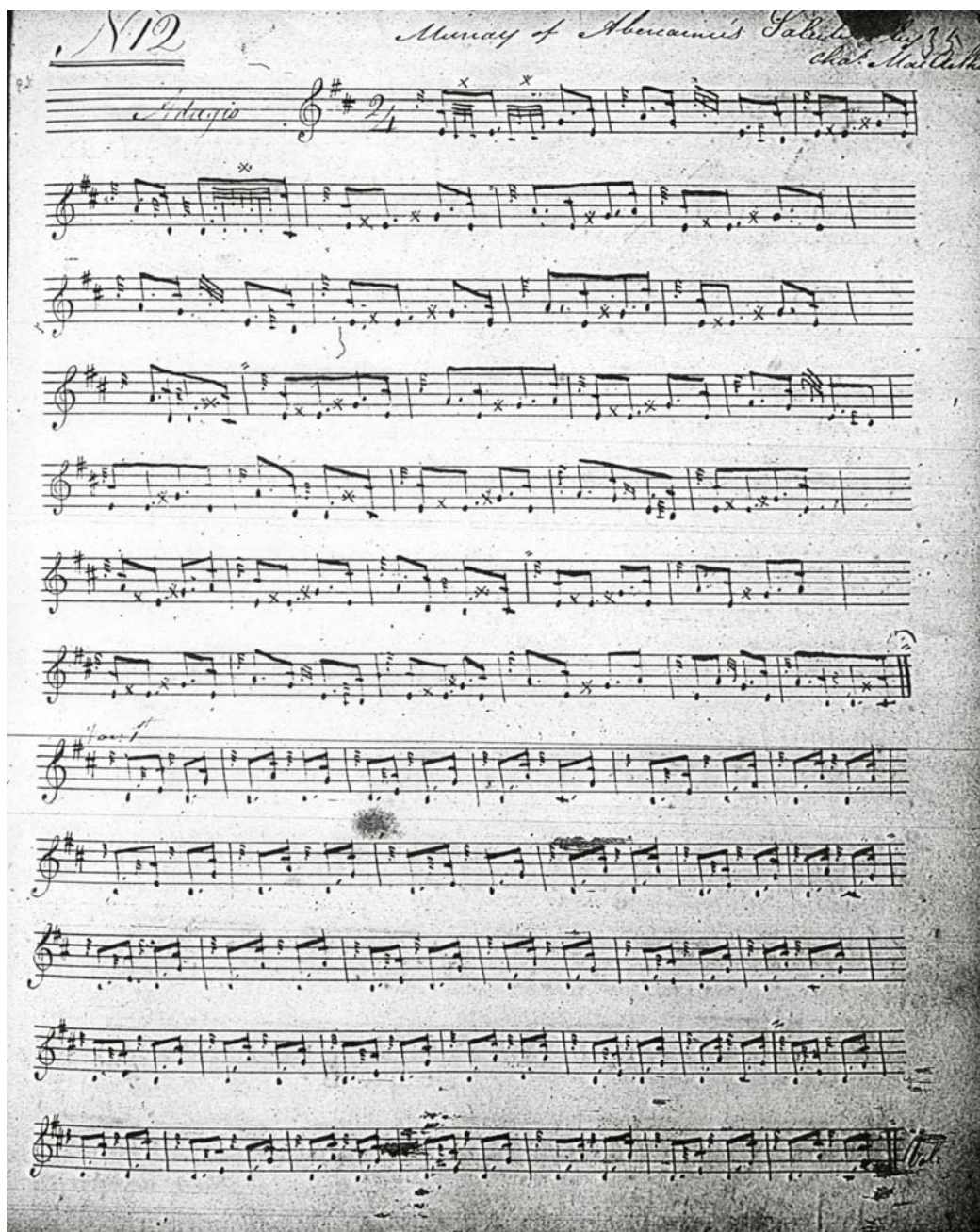
There are settings of this tune in the following manuscript sources:

- **MacArthur/MacGregor MS**, ff.35-37;
- **David Glen MS**, ff.200-202;

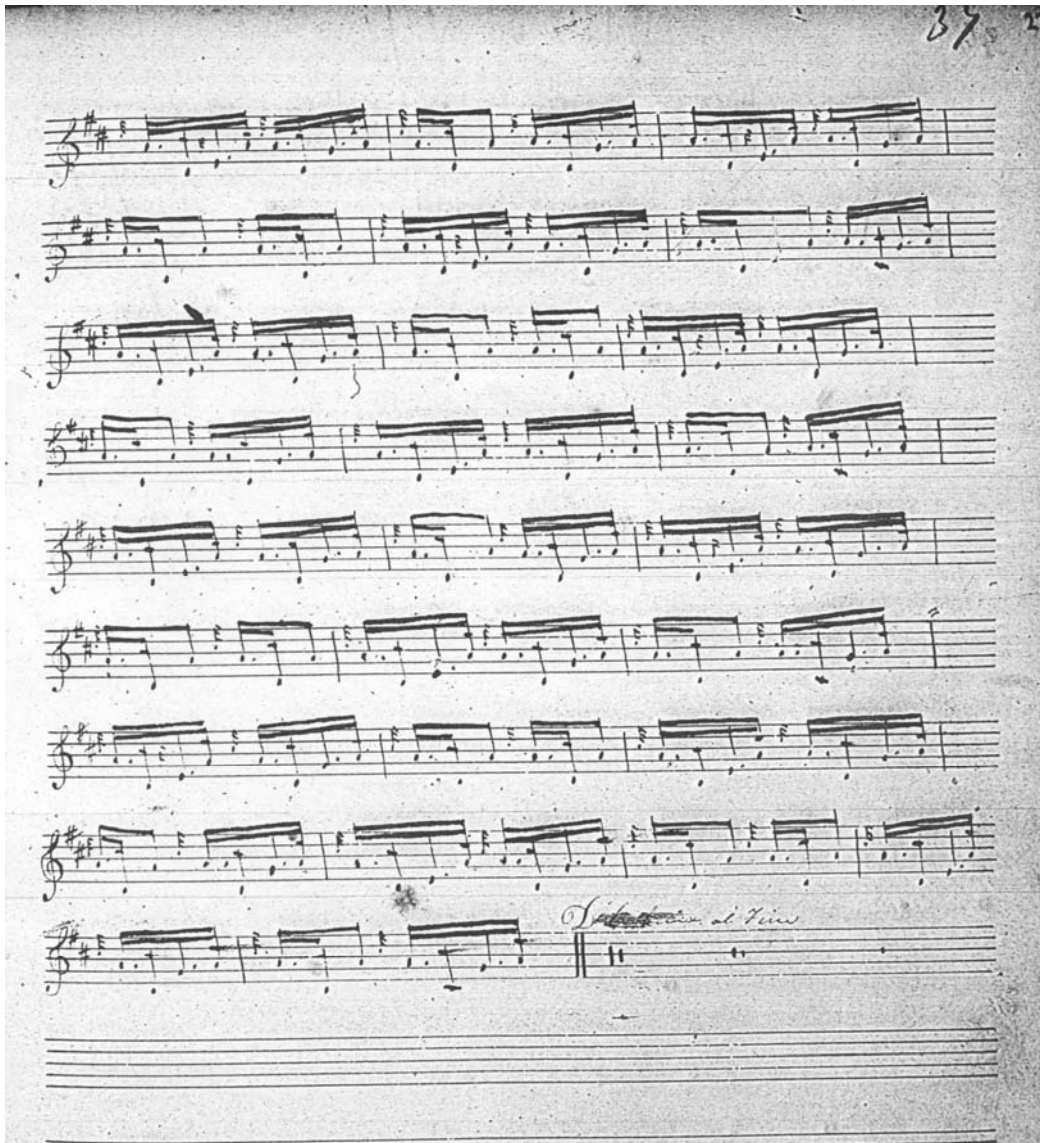
and in the following published sources:

- **Angus MacKay**, *Collection of Ancient Piobaireachd*, pp.76-8;
- **C. S. Thomason**, *Ceol Mor*, pp. 145-6;
- **Frans Buisman and Andrew Wright**, eds., *The MacArthur-MacGregor Manuscript of Piobaireachd (1820)*, p.140.

The **MacArthur/MacGregor MS**, the earliest of the scores, sets the tune like this:







In the **MacArthur/MacGregor** MS the tune is developed as follows: ground (a little more heavily cadenced than Angus MacKay's), and single siubhal, taorluath fosgailte and crunluath variations with the ground returning at the end of the taorluath fosgailte and again at the end of the tune. The ground is divided into three lines of twelve, twelve and eight bars and this arrangement is reflected consistently throughout the piece.

Angus MacKay sets the tune like this:

FAILTE OBACHARNAG. Abercairney's Salute.

Composed by

Charles Mac Arthur.

XXXI.

Suibhal.

Dublachadh an t Suibhal.

The musical score is written for pipes and drums, featuring three distinct sections. Each section is composed of multiple staves, with the first staff of each section containing a treble clef and a common time signature (C). The notation includes various rhythmic patterns, such as eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests, which are typical for pipe music. The sections are labeled as follows:

- Taor-luath.**: The first section, consisting of 10 staves.
- Dublachadh an Taor-luath**: The second section, consisting of 10 staves.
- Crun-luath Fosgailte.**: The third section, consisting of 5 staves.

The score is presented in a clear, professional layout, with the section titles placed above their respective staves. The overall style is that of a traditional musical manuscript, adapted for modern publication.

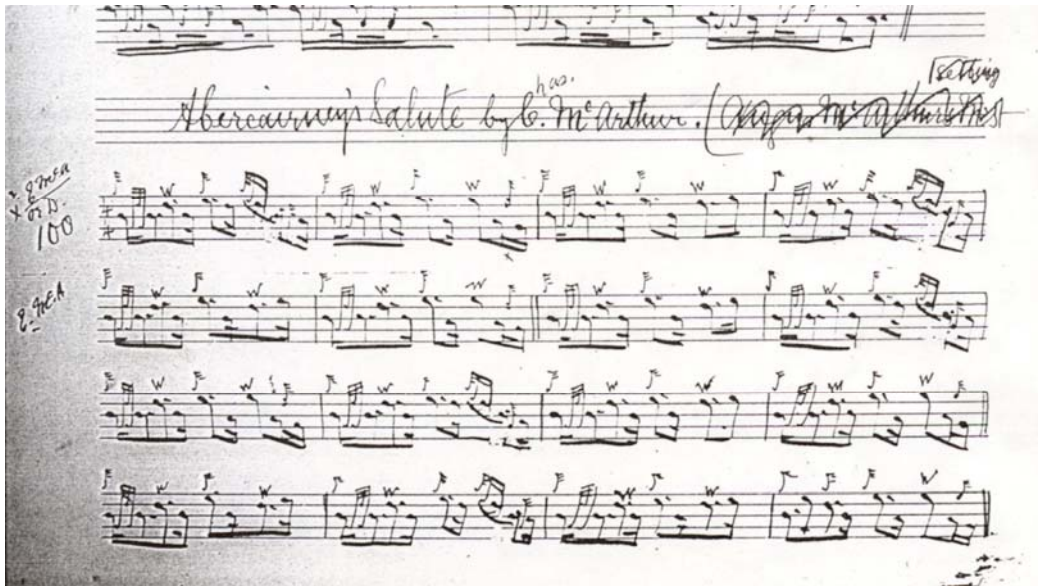
Dublachadh a Crun-luath.

D.C. Thema.

There are significant differences between the MacArthur-MacGregor MS and the published score of **Angus MacKay** which suggest that the latter derived his account from more than one source. The tune receives much fuller development in MacKay, with singlings and doublings of all the variations from the siubhal onwards: players will have their own views on the wisdom of so extended a development of a tune of this character. On the other hand, MacKay only requires the ground to be restated twice, as opposed to MacArthur's three times, its peculiar tonality heavily reinforced in the crunluath variation where each movement is played off an initial E. This seems to have been an established feature of the MacArthur

style (see my book *The Highland Pipe and Scottish Society*, pp.128-9). It would seem, too, that to make the crunluath movement rhythmically consistent, one would need to sound the so-called "redundant low A" rather distinctly.

David Glen's score is derived from the MacArthur/MacGregor to which he had access through his friend Charles Bannatyne who then owned the MS, but it has a number of interesting features nonetheless, including a MacKay-style rationalisation of the crunluath variation and a little run-down from low A > low G at phrase endings in the ground:



201.

GWV 1.

GWV 2.

count over



C. S. Thomason gives Angus MacKay as his source. He adds little to the interpretational possibilities of the tune and his score is not reproduced here.

Commentary

James Logan's note to the tune in Angus MacKay's *Collection of Ancient Piobaireachd*, says:

This piobaireachd was composed by Charles MacArthur [...] on the following occasion. James Murray, Esq. of Abercairny, a delightful property about four miles from Crieff, in the county of Perth, married Lady Christian Montgomery, daughter of the Earl of Eglinton; and Sir Alexander MacDonald of the Isles married her sister Lady Margaret. This connexion produced a friendship and many reciprocal visits, and Abercairny became very fond of the Pipes, and had MacArthur, his brother-in-law's Piper, a frequent guest at his own seat. Having enlarged, and much improved the mansion, a grand dinner was given, when every one praised the elegance of the new buildings, particularly the dining-room, which was allowed to be in every respect perfect. 'The room and entertainment are not,'

observed the hospitable proprietor, 'altogether complete; one thing is wanting to render them so, to some of us perhaps—and Charles MacArthur, to animate the feast with his presence, and with the stirring notes of his great Pipe.' ("Historical and Traditional Notes on the Piobaireachds," p.9)

This salute is generally supposed to have been made for James Moray of Abercairny (1705-1777), a patron of Niel Gow, who commemorated him in a famous fiddle lament, and that the composer was the celebrated Charles MacArthur. The tune appears to have been one of those played by Charles's nephew John, "Professor" MacArthur, to inaugurate the Highland Societies' first Edinburgh competition in 1783. Although Charles MacArthur was a player of the highest reputation, this tune has never been a favourite. The scale is pentatonic, G-A-B-D-E, but the effective tonal range is narrowed still further, centring on a series of reiterated rising motifs B-D-E, which require to be played with a good deal of guile to avoid becoming wearisome, since there is no alternative scale to provide dialogue or tension. The tune has a further very rare feature: the melody finds its points of rest on E rather than the more usual low A or G. In terms of structure, the basic motifs are set out in line one in the first four bars, and these form the basis of three lines of twelve, twelve and eight bars apiece, which pattern is maintained throughout the tune. Some might consider this a dull tune, showing insufficient variety, and containing too many reminders of an altogether greater composition, namely "My King has Landed in Moidart." The hypnotic reiteration of a simple four note gapped phrase BDED seems scarcely enough to sustain a thirty-two bar line. Its charms may have escaped the present writer; but it is difficult to see anybody playing this for love. It is possible to argue, on the other hand, that this is a bold attempt to strike out new musical pathways through the glens by a piper of high lineage, speaking from the heart of the tradition—the kind of thing that was soon going to be knocked on the head by the Highland Societies of London and Scotland who considered piping "tradition" as a thing over and done with, and that modern pipers should have no role but to pass on an existing repertory exactly as they had received it.

The mansion house of Abercairny, later called "Abercairny Abbey," was refashioned on an extensive scale in the fashionable neo-Gothic style in the early 19th century, though the dining room seems to have been completed in the mid 1750s.



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