



I got a Kiss of the King's Hand

This tune appears in the following published sources:

- Angus MacKay's *Collection of Ancient Piobaireachd* (pp.14-16);
- C. S. Thomason's *Ceol Mor* (pp. 156-7, citing Donald MacKay, although Thomason assumed responsibility for the setting—see below);
- David Glen's *Collection of Ancient Piobaireachd* (pp.72-3);
- John McLennan's *The Piobaireachd as MacCrimmon Played it* (p.7);
- and G. F. Ross' *Collection of MacCrimmon and other Piobaireachd* (pp.40-1).

Manuscript sources include

- Peter Reid (f.41);
- and Robert Meldrum, (ff.102-5).

There was a problem with “The King’s Hand”, namely that Angus MacKay’s version—the earliest published source--had thirty two bars in the ground but only thirty one in the variations from the siubhal singling onwards. The missing bar (on analogy from the ground) was bar three in the first line in each case. A practice had arisen of playing MacKay’s score in competition as it stood, because this was what bookish benches of judges expected to hear. One correspondent of the *Oban Times* wrote

let us take “I got a kiss of the king's hand”--Angus MacKay’s book. The first part of the ground or *Urlar* has twelve bars, and in the same part in the variations there are only eleven bars. One naturally concludes that there is something wrong in this.

On comparing the variations with the ground, it is at once apparent that the third bar of the ground is left out in the variations. This little error is known to every leading piper in Scotland, and he plays it wrongly simply because it is in MacKay’s book, and if he did play it correctly, most of those who at present act as judges of piobaireachd would say that he was wrong. (“The Piobaireachd Society of Scotland”, *OT*, 19/09/1903, p.3).

In his epoch-making edition, *Ceol Mor*, Thomason wrote “The metre of ‘I got a kiss of the King’s hand’”, given in bars is 12, 12, 8, and in sections ABC-BDC-BE. The music of the ‘Urlar’ given by A.[ngus] MacKay is, I believe, quite correct, but when we come to the first variation we find the metre to be 11,12, 8. There is evidently a bar missing in the first line, but what is the bar? Analysing the first section of the ‘Urlar’ we can distinctly trace two phrases in it, each phrase consisting of two bars, the first of which bars is identical in both phrases, and it should be the same in the variation, but the third bar is wanting. If, therefore, at this point we insert the first bar, we shall get the metre correct...” (*Ceol Mor*, “Rhythm in Sections”, pp.2-3). Thomason amended the tune as follows:



Angus MacKay, 'I got a Kiss of the King's Hand', var.1, line 1, *Ancient Piobaireachd*. p.14



C. S. Thomason, 'I got a Kiss of the King's Hand', var.1, line 1, *Ceol Mor*. p.156



156 C.

I GOT A KISS OF THE KING'S HAND
1.5.9g.

2 D, 3 D' (Rapid and Accurate)

157

47. 7D.

in C. (A MacKay)

37. 8C'



Thomason's barring was a little eccentric, perhaps, but his emendation quickly won acceptance and was followed by all later editors and players.

In 1933 a copy of MacKay's book with mistakes corrected in MacKay's own hand was offered for sale to the Piobaireachd Society who, at Archibald Campbell's instigation, refused to buy it. What happened to the volume subsequently is unclear, but it seems to have joined the several significant *piobaireachd* sources which disappeared from view during the 20th century.

Amongst the older sources, many might think that David Glen's idiomatic and well-timed setting would be the one to go for. It gives a good idea of the phrasing of the ground and avoids the prolongation of passing notes and cadences at phrase endings which occurs in the Piobaireachd Society's scores:



I GOT A KISS OF THE KING'S HAND. (1651.)

FHUAIR MI PÒG 'O LAIMH MO RIGH.

Composed by
PATRICK MÒR MACCRIMMON.

Urlar. *Moderately slow.*

31.

Var. 1st Siubhal.

Doubling of Var. 1st

Taor-luath and its Doubling.

Written Played

Crùn-luath and its Doubling.

Repeat Ùrlar.

Repeat Ùrlar.

The musical score consists of ten staves of music. Each staff begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The music is written in a complex, rhythmic style characteristic of Scottish bagpipe tunes. The score includes various musical notations such as eighth and sixteenth notes, rests, and dynamic markings. Brackets above the staves indicate first and second endings, with '1st' and '2nd' labels. The piece concludes with a 'Repeat Ùrlar.' instruction.



In the ground we see Glen's normal usage of the slur to indicate smooth transition between the notes so joined. There has been an attempt by James Campbell, current Hon. President of the Piobaireachd Society, to justify his father Archibald Campbell's notational practice by suggesting that Glen meant this to indicate an appoggiatura, implying that the first note of the pair thus linked should borrow time from the second (James Campbell, "The Elusive Appoggiatura", *Piping Times*, 40/9, June 1988, pp.22-5). But applying this principle to Glen's normal practice in his extensive published and manuscript scores would make expressive nonsense in most cases, as we can see above.

Lt. John McLennan (father and teacher of G. S. McLennan) takes an interestingly different route through the tune. Although excluded from the "official" accounts during the 20th century, the McLennans were an influential and extended piping family who traced their musical roots back to the early sixteenth century. Leading representatives during the 19th century included G. S. McLennan's great-uncle Donald Mór MacLennan of Moy (born c.1783) who taught a whole generation of Victorian master players. Two of Donald of Moy's sons, Sandy (1811—1896, prize pipe Inverness 1857, gold medal 1860) and John (1817-1906, prize pipe Inverness, 1848, gold medal 1854), were also important players and teachers, Sandy being taught by Donald Cameron, and John by his father and John Bàn Mackenzie. G. S.'s cousin, William MacLennan (1860-1892) was also a champion piper and dancer (Inverness prize pipe, 1878, Gold medal 1879) and a pioneer of the new more technically elaborate style of play in competition light music. Following the death of his parents, William was brought up by G. S.'s father, Lt. John McLennan, whose pupil he became. Lt. John was heir of a rich and complex family tradition. Although his approach was later quite arbitrarily dismissed as "not authentic", this probably owed more to his public criticisms of the Piobaireachd Society during the first three decades of the 20th century than to any discernible flaw in his work as an editor. His interesting treatment of the tone row in line one of the variations from the siubhal onwards may be historically well rooted, and is certainly not unpleasing in playing:



I got a kiss of the King's hand.

Variations 1-2-3-4-5-6
1-4-3-4-5-8
1-4-5-8

Commentary

Archibald Campbell, editing the tune in the *Piobaireachd Society Collection* (second series, vii, 216, 8), followed Glen in setting it in common time rather than the 6/8 preferred by MacKay and Thomason. He also arbitrarily lengthened passing notes by placing fermatas over them. In the *Kilberry Book of Ceol Mor* (p.100), this fondness for inappropriate lengthening of passing notes can be seen again in his introducing the strings of fermatas (four in a row) attached to cadence notes from the taorluath singling onwards. It is also interesting to note that none of the earlier published or manuscript sources includes a crunluath a mach.

In MacKay's *Ancient Piobaireachd*, James Logan states that the tune was "Composed by Patrick Mor MacCrummen. 1651" and gives words to the ground, as follows:

Thuair mi Pòg s' Pòg s' Pòg
ga'n d' thuair mi Pòg o' Laimh an Rìgh...
cha'd chur seid a n Croicìon Caorach
a thuair an turram a thuair mi.

He adds in a note:

Norman MacLeod of Macleod, and Roderick MacLeod of Talisker joined the army of king Charles II, and were knighted before the battle of Worcester, in 1651. Patrick Mòr MacCrummen having played his Pipes in presence of the king, his majesty was so much pleased with his performance and fine appearance, that he graciously condescended to allow him the honour of kissing hands. It was on this occasion that he composed the Piobaireachd, which to those acquainted with the Gaelic language, and enthusiastic in Pipe music, seems to speak forth the pride and gratitude of the performer; the words adapted to the opening measure inserted with the music, and thus translated:--

I have had a kiss, a kiss, a kiss,



I have had a kiss of the king's hand:--
No one who blew in a sheep's skin,
Has received such honour as I have.
(“Historical and Traditional Notes on the Piobaireachds”, p.4)

However, a seventeenth century account places this event at the royal camp near Stirling in 1651:

Never was Prince more taken up with an army as our King was, especially with the Scotch Highlanders, whom he teamed the flour of his forces... There was great competition betwixt the trumpets in the army: one Axell, the Earl of Hoomes trumpeter, carried it by the King's own decision! The next was anent the pipers; but the Earle of Sutherlands domestick carried it of all the camp, for non contended with him. All the pipers in the army gave John Macgurmen [MacCrimmon] the van, and acknowledged him for their patron in chiefe. It was pretty in a morning [the King] in parad viewing the regiments and bragads. He saw no less then 80 pipers in a crould bareheaded, and John M'gyurmen in the middle, covered. He asked What society that was? It was told his Majesty: Sir, yow are our King, and yonder old man in the midle is the Prince of Pipers. He cald him by name, and comeing to the King, kneeling, his Majesty reacht him his hand to kiss; and instantly played an extemporanian port, Fuoris Pòòge i spoge i Rhi', I got a kiss of the Kings hand; of which he and they all were vain. (James Fraser, *Chronicles of the Frasers*, ed., William MacKay, Edinr., 1905, pp.379-80).

A leading Highland antiquary, Dr. Alexander Stewart (1829-1901), who wrote under the pen name of “Nether Lochaber”, noted that ““Fuair mi pòg o lamh mo Rìgh,” [was] composed at Holyrood in 1745 by ‘Ewen MacDhomhnuill Bhuidhe’, a Macmillan from Glendessary and piper to Lochiel, on seeing his chief kiss Charles Edward’s hand at a levee held in the palace of his ancestors by that Prince a day or two after the victory at Gladsmuir.” (quoted in “An Old Pipe Tune”, by “Fionn”, *Oban Times*, 23/05/1908, p.3).

John MacDonald of Inverness played “I got a Kiss of the King’s Hand” at the dedication of the MacCrimmon cairn at Boreraig in August 1933.

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