



The Battle of Strome

This is a widely diffused tune under its various titles. There are settings in the following manuscript sources:

- **Nether Lorn**, ii, 34-6 (with the title "Argyle's March");
- **Donald MacDonald**, ff.25-7 (with the title "Alastair Charich's March");
- **Angus MacKay**, i, 158-60 (with the title "Batail an t-Sraim The Battle of Lochcarron Point");
- **Colin Cameron**, ff.81-2;
- **D. S. MacDonald**, ii, 28-9;
- **David Glen**, ff.324-6; (and with the title "Alastair Charich's March," ff.140-41);
- **Robert Meldrum**, ff.177-9; (and with the title "Alastair Charich's March, or The Red Brindled Bull," ff.198-9);

and in the following published sources:

- **Uilleam Ross's Collection**, pp.79-81;
- **C. S. Thomason's Ceol Mor**, p.63 (with the title "Alastair Charich's March"); p. 240 (with the title "The Battle of Castle Strone"); and pp.355-6 (with the title "The Battle of Loch Carron Point").

Archibald Campbell's note to his arrangement of this tune published in the *Piobaireachd Society Collection* (second series, v, 131-2) says "Angus MacKay's setting and Gaelic name have been adopted," but he makes a number of silent changes to style and structure, converting quavers into crotchets making the tune more square and unmusical, and removing MacKay's instruction to repeat the ground at the end of the taorluath fosgailte doubling and again at the end of the tune. In common with all of the older idiomatic settings, MacKay's score has no crunluath a mach.

Colin Mór Campbell sets the tune like this:

Called Argyles March

- 1st Hintra hodin hinodro hiodin hintracheodin hintrahodin hintrahotra hinodro hiodin
- 2^d Hintracheodin hintrahodin hinodro hiodin hintrahodin hintrahotra hinodro hiodin
- 3^d Hintracheodin hintra hodin hintra hodre hinodro hiodin.

S Taolive Gear

- 1st Hindaenda hodin hindaendo hiodin hindaenda cheodin hindaenda hodin hindaenda hoahoehoa hindaendo hiodin
- 2d Hindaenda cheodin hindaenda hodin hindaendo hiodin hindaenda hodin hindaenda hoahoehoa hindaendo hiodin
- 3d Hindaenda cheodin hindaenda hodin hindaende [hoahoehoa] hindaendo hiodin

- D 1st Hindaenda hindaendo hindaendo hindaento hindaenda hindaende hindaenda hindaendo hindaenda hindaendo hindaendo hindaento
- 2d Hindaenda hindaende hindaenda hindaendo hindaendo hindaento hindaenda hindaendo hindaenda hindaendo hindaendo hindaento



3d Hindaenda hindaende hindaenda hindaendo hindaenda hindaende hindaendo
hindaento

S Crulive Fosgait

1st Hindadre hodin hindodre hiodin hinda[d]re cheodin hindadre hodin hindadre hoadre
hindodre hiodin

2d Hindadre cheodin hindadre hodin hindodre hiodin hindadre hodin hindadre hoadre
hindodre hiodin

3d Hindadre cheodin hindadre hodin hindadre chebandre hindodre hiodin

D 1st Hindadre hindodre hindodre hintodre hindadre chebandre hindadre hindadre hindodre
hindadre hindodre hintodre

2d Hindadre chebandre hindadre hindodre hindodre hintodre hindadre hindodre hindadre
hindodre hindodre hintodre

3d Hindadre chebandre hindadre hindodre hindadre chebandre hindodre hintodre

This might suggest something along the following lines:

Argylls March, Nether Lorn, ground



Argylls March, Nether Lorn, taolive gear, line one



And so on.

The Nether Lorn system is usually considered not to show cadences, these being then at the disposal of the performer rather than the arranger of the written or published score. Just how heavily some contemporary pipers might have cadenced such a piece can be seen in **Donald MacDonald's** setting of the tune, contained in his manuscript collection, dated 1826. MacDonald treated the tune like this:

ALASTAIR CHARICH'S MARCH.

A handwritten musical score for 'Alastair Charich's March'. The score is written on ten staves of five-line music paper. It begins with a treble clef and a common time signature (C). The notation is dense, featuring many beamed eighth and sixteenth notes, often with grace notes. There are several dynamic markings, including 'f' (forte) and 'mf' (mezzo-forte), and some phrasing slurs. The handwriting is in black ink on aged, slightly yellowed paper. There are some dark smudges and ink bleed-through at the end of the final staff.

A handwritten musical score for piobaireachd, consisting of 12 staves of music. The notation is dense and complex, featuring many beamed notes and rests, characteristic of traditional Scottish bagpipe music. The score is written in black ink on white paper.



This, of course, raises interesting questions about how MacDonald intended his "introductory notes" to be timed. For a discussion of this see the "Conclusion" to the Set Tunes series, 2004. The reader will also note MacDonald's characteristic treatment of "Taolive Gear" movements, varying from the open GDE treblings played nowadays. I have heard Bob Brown play the movement in this style (he had a copy of Donald MacDonald's published book, then very scarce). One also notes the lovely little run up from C to E in the crunluath singling. Scores vary in the frequency with which they invoke this device, which some may think are amongst the most attractive features of this tune.

There are basically two routes through "The Battle of Castle Strome," the first adopted by the Nether Lorn and Donald MacDonald, the second by **Angus MacKay**. The major difference between the sets of texts is that MacKay has a first variation singling and doubling which the others do not, except for Uilleam Ross who gives it as a singling only.

MacKay sets the tune as follows:

158

Batail an t. Sraim * same
The Battle of Lochmoran Point.

circa 1602.

A handwritten musical score for a piper's piece. The score is written on ten staves of five-line music paper. It begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a common time signature (C). The first staff is marked with a large 'N' and the number '69'. The music consists of a series of eighth and sixteenth notes, often beamed together in groups. There are several dynamic markings, including 'f' (forte) and 'ff' (fortissimo), scattered throughout the piece. A 'Bar. 1st' marking is visible on the sixth staff. The piece concludes with a double bar line and repeat dots.

Doubling

The musical score consists of two systems of three staves each. The first system is titled "Doubling" and contains a main melody. The second system is titled "Var 2?" and contains a variation of the melody. The notation includes treble clefs, a key signature of one flat (B-flat), and a 2/4 time signature. The music is written in a style typical of Scottish bagpipe notation, with many notes beamed together to represent rapid passages. The piece concludes with a double bar line and a fermata.

Var 2?

Doubling.

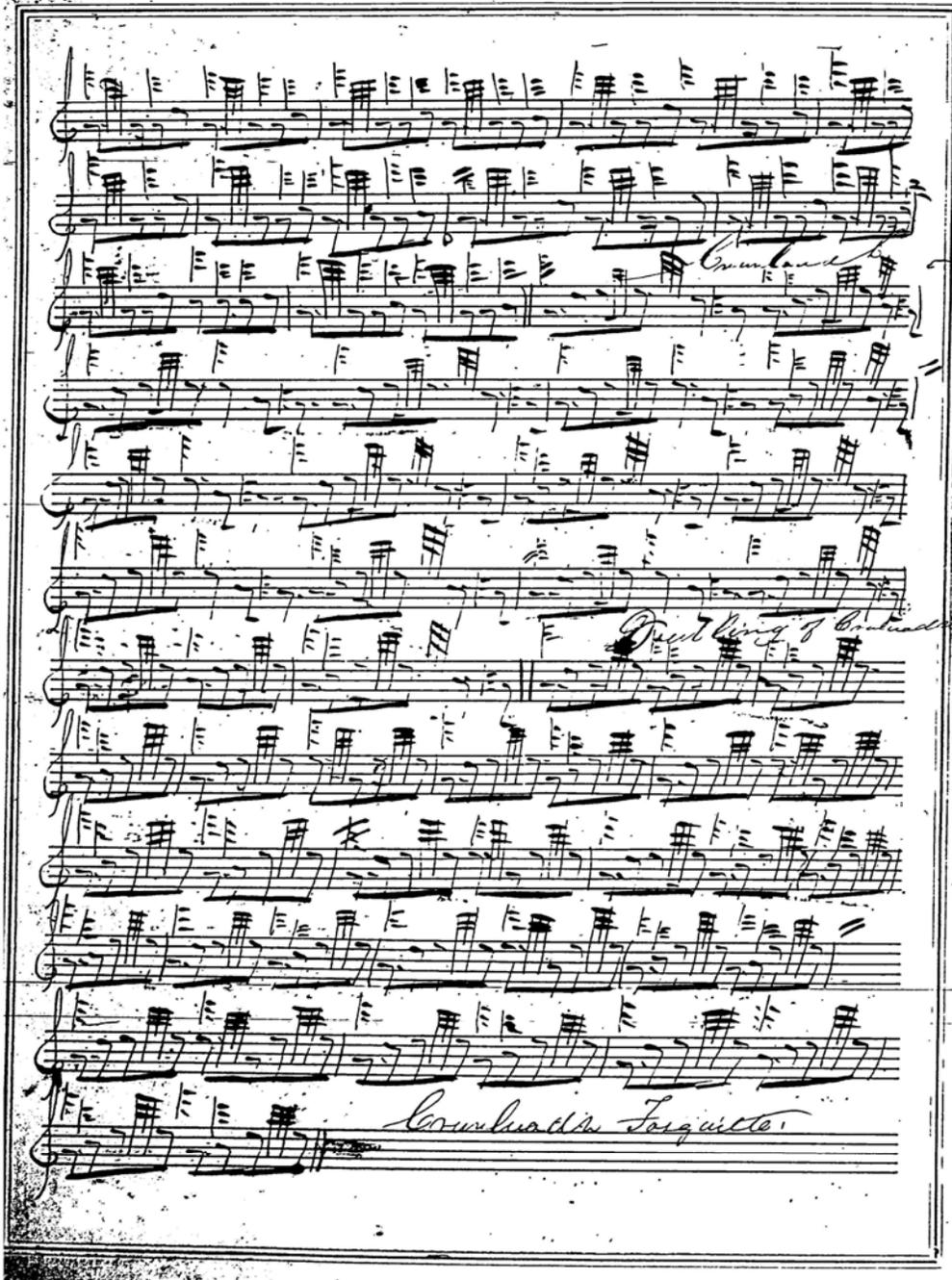
f. s.

The image shows a handwritten musical score for a bagpipe piece. It consists of ten staves of music. The notation includes treble clefs, a key signature of one flat (B-flat), and a 6/8 time signature. The music features a complex rhythmic pattern with many dotted and cut notes. Handwritten annotations include 'D. G. Thema' at the end of the second staff, 'Cama-lyath.' on the third staff, 'Doubling' on the seventh staff, and 'D. G. Thema' at the end of the tenth staff. The score is written in black ink on aged paper.

Colin Cameron's score is interesting because his ground is more precisely dotted and cut than MacKay's, showing an interesting alternation between held and cut ECA/EBA cadences. Colin Cameron omits MacKay's first variation doubling and he has a MacDonald-style taorluath fogsailte, indicating multiple sources for this setting:

Gaulie 8.

A handwritten musical score for the piece "Gaulie" by Robert Bell Nicol. The score is written on ten staves, each with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The music is characterized by a rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes, often grouped in pairs or fours. There are several dynamic markings, including "v" (forte) and "mf" (mezzo-forte). The score is enclosed in a double-line border. The word "Gaulie" is written in cursive at the top right, followed by the number "8.". The handwriting is dense and somewhat cluttered, typical of a working draft or a composer's manuscript.



The reader will note that the crunluath doubling, played in the "closed" MacKay style, is followed by the words "Crunluadh Fosgailte," perhaps suggesting a modern-style fosgailte a mach.



D. S. MacDonald's score follows that of Angus MacKay and is not reproduced here.

David Glen's first setting (ff.140-141) is discussed below. His second setting (ff.324-6) probably has its source in Colin Cameron, and is not reproduced here.

Robert Meldrum follows General Thomason's score ("Alistair Charich's March," *Ceol Mor*, p.63), and therefore, ultimately, Donald MacDonald, although he does substitute an open tripling-type fosgailte movement in the doubling of variation one. His score is not reproduced here.

Uilleam Ross's published score follows Colin Cameron's style. Ross was at the centre of a key group of Victorian master players migrating periodically between great houses in Aberdeenshire and London and including such figures as Colin Cameron, Duncan Campbell of Foss and John MacDonald of Inverness's father and uncle, Alexander and William MacDonald. There was much mutual influence. Since "Castle Strome" was not one of the tunes included in Ross's first edition in 1869 and Colin Cameron's manuscript was complete by this date, the latter may be assumed to have priority. Ross's score is not reproduced here.

C. S. Thomason has three settings of this tune. The first, "Alastair Charich's March" (p.63) is a transcript of Donald MacDonald's setting above. There is an error in the first variation line one bar two (D quaver instead of C quaver) and this is reproduced in David Glen's manuscript (ff.140-141) indicating that Thomason was probably his source here; Thomason's second setting, entitled "The Battle of Castle Strone" (p.240) is a transcript of Uilleam Ross's setting; his third "The Battle of Lochcarron Point" (pp.355-6) is a transcript of MacKay. None of these is reproduced here.

Commentary:

The events which led to the siege and destruction of Castle Strome are labyrinthine in their tortuousness, bloodshed and treachery, but it came as the climax of a long struggle for control of large tranches of the north west mainland between the MacDonalds of Glengarry and the MacKenzies of Kintail whose lands adjoined in Lochalsh and Lochcarron. Alexander MacKenzie's *History of the Clan MacKenzie* (Inverness, 1879) quotes from the Ardintoul MS as follows:

The castle of Strome, still in possession of Glengarry [...] was a good and convenient asylum for the Macdonalds when pursued by Mackenzie and his followers; but he ultimately succeeded in wresting it from them.

We give the following account of how it was taken from the Ancient MS., slightly modernising the spelling:-"In the spring of the following year, [1602] Lord Kintail gathered together considerable forces and besieged the castle of Strome in Lochcarron, which at first held out very manfully, and would not surrender, though several terms were offered, which he (Mackenzie) finding, not willing to lose his men, resolved to raise the siege for a time; but the defenders were so unfortunate as to have their powder damaged by the women they had within. Having sent them out by silence of night to draw in water, out of a well that lay just at the entrance of the castle, the silly women were in such fear, and the room they brought the water into being so dark for want of light, when they came in they poured the water into a vat, missing the right one,



wherein the few barrels of powder they had lay. And in the morning, when the men came for more powder, having exhausted the supply of the previous day, they found the barrels of powder floating in the vat; so they began to rail and abuse the poor women, which the fore-mentioned Duncan Mac Ian Mhic Gilliechallum, [A MacKenzie prisoner, captured earlier], hearing, as he was at liberty through the house, having promised and made solemn oath that he would never come out of the door until he was ransomed or otherwise relieved. This he was obliged to do to save his life. But having discovered the accident which befell the powder, he accompanied his keepers to the ramparts of the castle, when he noticed his countrymen packing up their baggage as if intending to raise the siege. Duncan instantly threw his plaid over the head of the man that stood next to him, and jumped over the wall on to a large dung heap that stood immediately below. He was a little stunned, but instantly recovered himself, flew with the fleetness of a deer to Mackenzie's camp, and informed his chief of the state of matters within the stronghold. Kintail renewed the siege and brought his scaling ladders nearer the castle. The defenders seeing this, and knowing that their mishap and consequent plight had been disclosed by Duncan to the enemy, they offered to yield up the castle on condition that their lives would be spared, and that they be allowed to carry away their baggage. This was readily granted them, and "my lord caused presently blow up the house with powder, which remains there in heaps to this day. He lost only but two Kenlochewe men at the siege. Andrew Munro of Teannouher (Novar) was wounded, with two or three others, and so dissolved the camp." Another writer says :-"The rooms are to be seen yet. It stood on a high rock, which extended in the midst of a little bay of the sea westward, which made a harbour or safe port for great boats or vessels of no great burden, on either side of the castle. It was a very convenient place for Alexander MacGillespick to dwell in when he had both the countries of Lochalsh and Lochcarron, standing on the very march between both."

A considerable portion of the walls is still (1879) standing, but no trace of the apartments. The sea must have receded many feet since it was in its glory; for now it barely touches the base of the rock on which the ruin stands. We have repeatedly examined it, and with mixed feelings ruminated upon its past history, and what its ruined walls, could they only speak, might bear witness to. (pp.155-6).

With regard to the "Alastair Charich" title, this may refer to the founder of the house of Keppoch, some centuries before the destruction of Castle Strome. General Thomason has a note in "Ceol Mor Legends" on the tune "Black Donald's March" as follows: "The End of the Great Bridge (Inverlochy 1427)

...Cann na Drochaid Mor

In this battle the Govt. forces under the Earl of Mar were severely defeated by the Islesmen and Lochaber men under Black Donald of the Isles [...]

Alasdair Carrach (Alastair Charich) fought here on Donald's side, and for his participation in this rebellion, he was, in 1431, deprived of the lordship of Lochaber, which he had received from his father, in accordance with a deed of settlement agreed upon between the latter and his father-in-law King Robert 11, about 1379. Alastair Carrach was the 3rd son of Lady Margaret Stewart, daughter of Robert, High Steward of Scotland afterwards Robert 11, who was the second wife of John the first Lord of the Isles who admitted the superiority of the Scottish Crown [...]"

Dwelly glosses "carach" as cunning or wily; and "carrach" as mangy, scorbutic, or cross-tempered.

* * *

Electronic text © Dr. William Donaldson, Aberdeen, Scotland, June 2005