The MacKay's Banner  this is part of a ‘family’ of tunes, and has close melodic links with ‘The Battle of the Pass of Crieff’, as  shown by the interchangeability of titles in this group. The earliest MS source, the Nether Lorn (i, 22-4), shows this affinity quite clearly, giving the ‘Pass of Crieff’ tune under the title ‘Bhratich Bhan’—[The White Banner]. The title in Donald MacDonald's MS (ff.201-6) is ‘The White Flag’, but this refers to the tune nowadays regarded as a separate one called ‘MacKay's Banner’. Peter Reid's title for this latter tune is ‘Piobaireachd na Braitch Baine Chlan Aodh  The Mackays White Flag’ (f.34). It is clear from the MS, however, that Reid had originally titled the tune ‘The Stewarts Salute’, but this is scored out--the slip possibly being caused by the fact that--as those familiar with the Jacobite movement will be aware--the Stewarts also had a white banner.

The Nether Lorn develops the tune as follows:

1st.  Hiharinodin hihodaro,do,ho Twice Over himhin hodin hiodrohodintro,
2d.  Hiharinodin hodaro,do,ho himhin hodin hiodrohodintro
3d.  Hiharinodin hodaro,do,ho himhin,hodin hiodrohodintro

D 1st.  Hiharinodin hodaro,do,ho Twice Over himhin hodin Ievehohio
2d.  Hiharinodin hodaro,do,ho himhin hodin Ievehohio
3d.  Hiharinodin hodaro,do,ho himhin hodin Ievehohio

DD 1st.  Hiharinodin hodarodin, Twice Over himhin hodin hiodrohodintro
2d.  Hiharinodin hodarohodin, himhinodin, hiodrohodintro Twice Over
3d.  Hiharinodin hodarodin, himhin hodin hiodrohodintro

S  the fffirst Motion

1st.  Hinen hioen hoeohoen, Twice Over, himen, hoen hoeohoen [etc.]

D 1st.  Hinen hioen hoen hoen Twice Over himen hoen hioen hioen [etc]

DD. 1st.  Hinen hiohio hoho hoho Twice Over, himen hoho hiohio [etc]

S  Taolive

1st.  Hindarid hiodarid hoaoehodin Twice Over himdarid hiodarid hioaeo hiodin [etc]

D 1st.  Hindarid hiodarid hoaoehodarid Twice Over himdarid hiodarid hioaeo hiodarid [etc]

DD 1st.  Hindarid hiodarid hiodarid hiodarid Twice Over himdarid hiodarid hiodarid hiodarid [etc]

DDD 1st.  Hindarid hiodarid hiodarid hiodarid three times Twice Over

2d.  Hindarid hiodarid hiodarid hiodarid three times hiodarid hiodarid
hodarid hiodarid, three times  Twice Over
3d.  Hindarid hiodarid hiodarid hodarid three times
himdarid hodarid [hodarid] hiodarid three times

There follows a crunluath (singling, doubling, trebling, quadrupling) on the pattern of the
taorluath above, including an a mach which follows the extravagant taorluath quadrupling
above. The expansiveness of this latter movement is echoed elsewhere in Colin Mor
Campbell's settings where certain figures are picked up and elaborated, unexpectedly
increasing the range or length of the tone row. For further examples, see his treatment of
‘The Rout of Glenfruin’ (i, 27-9) and ‘The Blind Piper's Obstinacy’ (ii, 166-8, with the title
‘Cor beg mhic Leain’).

The A phrase of Donald MacDonald's ‘White Flag’ is very close to the version in the Nether
Lorn, thereafter the melodies diverge:
'The White Flag', ground. Donald MacDonald's MS (ff.201-6)

'The White Flag', Thumb Variation, lines 1-2, Donald MacDonald's MS (ff.201-6)

'The White Flag', Thumb Variation Doubling, line 1. Donald MacDonald's MS (ff.201-6)
'The White Flag', siubhal singling, line 1-2, Donald MacDonald's MS (ff.201-6)

'The White Flag', siubhal doubling, line 1-2, Donald MacDonald's MS (ff.201-6)

'The White Flag', taorluath singling, line 1, Donald MacDonald's MS (ff.201-6)

'The White Flag', taorluath doubling, line 1, Donald MacDonald's MS (ff.201-6)

'The White Flag', taorluath trebling, line 1, Donald MacDonald's MS (ff.201-6)
MacDonald's neat and shapely arrangement shows many features typical of his style, including frequent use of reflexive cuttings in the ground, varied timings of double echo beats (three different styles in the ground alone), and the emphasis on the first pulse of a mach beats. MacDonald here times the introductory gesture on A as two even quavers followed by an A crotchet, perhaps implying a fairly staccato effect. This forms an interesting contrast to the style of Peter Reid, who in general tends to accentuate the first quaver of his echo beat groups on A, B and E. Reid introduces interesting rhythmical diversity in his thumb variation as well, in a style which is much less square than MacDonald and may possibly be preferred. The absence of cadencing also gives Reid's phrase endings a pleasantly uncluttered effect:
'The MacKay's White Flag', Peter Reid's MS (f.34)

'The MacKay's White Flag', First Variation, Peter Reid's MS (f.34)

'The MacKays White Flag', doubling of 1st Variation, Peter Reid's MS (f.34)
Thereafter the tune appears to be envisaged developing in accordance with the pattern illustrated by MacDonald. Reid’s score stops at the end of the siubhal singling which establishes the pattern for the later variations with the words ‘Doubling of 2d Variation, then, Taorluidh, Creanluidh &c.’

The earliest of the published settings is that of Angus MacKay in Ancient Piobaireachd (pp.119-121). The following examples give an idea of his characteristic timings:

'The Mackay's Banner', ground, Angus MacKay, Ancient Piobaireachd, pp.(119-21)

'The Mackay's Banner', thumb variation singling, line 1, Angus MacKay's Ancient Piobaireachd, (pp.119-21)

'The Mackay's Banner', thumb variation doubling, line 1, Angus MacKay's Ancient Piobaireachd, (pp.119-21)
The crunluath doubling and trebling follow the pattern of the taorluath variations. MacKay does not have a siubhal.

Of the later printed settings, MacPhee (ii, 20-22) reflects elements of both MacDonald and Reid in the ground and thumb variation:
From the taorluath onwards the tune proceeds in a manner broadly similar to MacKay, except in the treblings, thus:

C. S. Thomason (\textit{Ceol Mor} p.121) cites MacDonald's MS and Donald MacKay (the younger), but the score is virtually identical with that in Angus MacKay's \textit{Ancient Piobaireachd}, until the taorluath and crunluath variations, where Thomason follows MacDonald, albeit with MacKay-style pointing of the a mach movements.

The following note on the tune by John MacKay in the \textit{Celtic Monthly}, is transcribed in Thomason's 'Ceol Mor Legends':
‘A’ Bhratach Bhan (The white banner)

Little is known regarding the ancient banner of the MacKays. All that the clan History tells us on the subject is that Robert MacKay son of Neil of Achness (the chieftain who was killed in Thurso in 1649), was the custodian of the colours; that this Robert had a son Neil to whom the colours descended; that Neil in his turn, had a son Robert, who had the flag and that after him his son Hugh had the custody of it.

An old man in Thurso, Hugh MacKay, commonly known as Hugh “Hamar”, had the banner in his keeping for many years. It came to him in this way: Hugh MacKay, son of the second Robert above mentioned, had no family. On his death the flag was handed to his brother Angus; and this Angus left it to his son, the Hugh “Hamar” just referred to. On the death of Hugh about 10 years ago, Alexander, county assessor, Thurso, got the flag and in his possession it still remains. Whether Mr. MacKay is of the same family as Hugh, I do not know; but it seems only natural that the old banner should be in the keeping of a descendent of Neil the chieftain, or of the head of the Abrach family for the time being…

Accompanied by a friend, I called upon Hugh “Hamar” in 1875… in order to see the flag…and certainly it is a venerable and ancient looking relic. It seemed to be made of knitted silk, and was quite tattered; but whether it had originally been white, I could not tell, as through age and use it had become perfectly grey.

A figure in the centre was so faded and worn that it was difficult to guess what it was intended to represent; and the motto was illegible. Hugh said he believed the figure was a stag, though he was not sure; but he was certain as to the motto, which was “Bidh treun, Bidh treun” (Be valiant, be valiant,) because his father had often told him so…” (ff. 182 – 191)

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