

## The Clarsach's position among the Historical Instruments of Scotland

by Keith Sanger

When discussing the history of the Clarsach in Scotland the tendency is to focus narrowly just on the Clarsach leaving the wider context to more generalist works on Scotland's music. Unfortunately, such works, apart from often being dated, tend to concentrate more on the newer instruments which arrived from the continent and often had a limited initial geographical spread. Even in the case of Scotland's original gut strung harps they, if mentioned at all, tend to be even more marginalised than the clarsach.

Several early poems provide 'lists' of instruments but these lack context regarding how common they were in general use.<sup>1</sup> Likewise, when more reliable accounts, especially those for the Royal Treasurers appear, most of the musicians mentioned are performing to the Crown, either physically at court or while the King is on his travels. Although this does open a slightly wider view it is still restricted and as those sources are the ones available in published edited versions, are the ones primarily used by writers on music in Scotland.

When looking for context in the use of musical instruments in Scotland it is a case of aiming at a moving target. Rarely is the country's population and geographical spread considered, other than a generalist Highland/Lowland divide. This is surprising as in absolute terms the numbers of any instrument must relate to the size of the population, or that section likely to have supported their use. Before Webster's survey in 1755 of Scotland's population which gave a figure of 1.265 million, earlier figures are informed guesses, but it was not a case of continuous growth, with numerous pandemics and famines. Around the 15th century when references to musical instruments start to become more frequent in the records, the population may have been, as low as 500,000, and as any burghs were small, people were spread more evenly around the country.

Most of the population would have been directly connected to the land and so immediately affected by any form of harvest failure through poor weather, disease or warfare. For example, even as late as the 'ill years' of the late 1690's when a series of poor harvest led to a twenty percent drop in population through death or emigration (mostly to Ireland). Looking at the cultural demographic the Gaelic world was certainly on the retreat, but it was not a neat and even line which could be adjusted against time. At the point in the 15th century when the evidence for musical instruments starts to increase, Gaelic speakers still comprised around half the total population and covered an even larger part of the geographical area.<sup>2</sup>

Looking for early written evidence of musicians in Scotland runs into several problems. Apart from the normal production of written records during the period of the fight for independence being a casualty of that warfare, what records were produced on the 'home' side were lost to the English forces of Edward I.<sup>3</sup> Then what had survived along with later records which had suffered a similar fate during the Cromwellian period, were lost when the ships returning them to Scotland sank on route. However, the English records for that period survive and apart from minstrels serving the English crown, also include some payments to Scottish musicians. Rather than describing it as the 'English' crown the term Anglo-Norman would be a better description of both the musicians and the crown which would better reflect that monarchy's interests in France.<sup>4</sup>

The variety of instruments reflects that pan-Norman world. Trumpeters and players of the tabor or nakers are frequently noted while the harpers were the most common of the 'string' musicians which also included crowders and players of the vielle, guitar, citole, lute and psaltery. Some organs are mentioned, and the bagpipe makes an early appearance, possibly in more than one form. It appears in the treasurer's accounts of Edward I for 1285 and whereas they were kept in French the colloquial word 'bagepipa' stands out and suggests that one was an indigenous instrument. There is a similar reference in 1332 but at other times the entries refer to a player of 'le Estiuour', the estive which is now thought to have been a small bagpipe,<sup>5</sup> or 'le Cheueretter', a name derived from the bag of a bagpipe made of goatskin.

When the musicians who are clearly Scots, as opposed to those musicians who just receive payments in Scotland, are set against that general background an interesting picture emerges. Whether the Scots musicians were enthusiastic supporters of Edward I or just paying lip service is unclear, although the three Scottish trumpeters, Gilbert Bride, Nigel Seymour and Andrew Clydesdale who in 1303 accompanied the king from Stirling to Northam and received expenses for their return journey were probably simply taking employment where they could find it. It is probably the same reason that what are described as '5 harpers who met the king (Edward) on the sands between Durie and Sandford (in Fife), as he travelled north in March 1303/4, had turned up in hope of a reward.

This was followed in May by a payment to '7 women who met the king on the road between Uggeville and Gaskes and sang to him in the way in which they were wont to do in the time of the Lord Alexander, lately King of Scots'. 'Uggeville' is probably the parish of Orwell which would be in the right position for Edward's line of march. Unfortunately, the entry does not say which language the women were using although the qualification that they were following a precedent from the time of Alexander probably suggests they were singing in Gaelic. It was a practice still being performed among the Gaels when a laird left or arrived home as late as the mid seventeenth century.

Returning to harpers, in 1296 a harper of Lord John Comyn of Badenoch was paid for performing at a wedding<sup>6</sup> and that same year Elias described as the harper to the Earl of Fife (but previously harper to the King of Scots), was to have his lands restored. Likewise, Ughtred le Harpour was to have his lands and goods in Berwick on Tweed restored. When this action was first mentioned in 1296, he was apparently attached to William de Moravia, but the more extensive entry from 1297 makes it clear that he had held the lands before Edward I overcame John de Bailliol and took the town. The problems of being a musician living at one of the main military crossing points at the border between England and Scotland was probably the reason why five other harpers in a similar situation were signatories of the 1296 'Ragman Roll', in some cases using seals with a harp design.

There were two occasions when people were just identified as ‘minstrels’, one called Oysillet minstrel of the King of Scotland who had attended the wedding of Edward I’s daughter in 1290 and another described as ‘William, minstrel of the Earl of Sutherland’ in 1302. Only one other instrument is mentioned when in 1303 a John de Kinghorn appears. He was being provided with clothing at St Andrews and was described as *fistulator Regis* translated as ‘King’s piper’. His name clearly indicates he came from Kinghorn in Fife so definitely a Scot but whose ‘piper’ was he and what sort of pipe? The entry is a little ambiguous, the clothing had been authorised by Edward I but as John de Kinghorn only ever appears once and only in Scotland it is possible that like the harper Elias, he had formerly been piper to the late Alexander III King of Scots.

The question of what sort of pipe also presents problems. There is only one similar entry among the ‘English’ records who from his name appears to be Flemish and means that the description of just ‘piper’ is outnumbered by the bagpipe entries. Although probably not a bagpipe that description of this piper as well as John de Kinghorn could apply to a player of the triple pipe which was possibly still in use then.<sup>7</sup> Irrespective of the nature of the ‘piper’, the picture that emerges from these records is that the musicians who are clearly Scots play harps, some sort of pipe and sang. Even after 1413 when Scottish opponents to Robert Bruce were still living under the English Crown’s protection in England with their retainers, what little evidence there is follows that same picture. For example, in 1324 a harper called John Descoce (of Scotland) appears in a petition.<sup>8</sup>

This sets the baseline of the native Scottish instruments prior to the arrival of new and mostly courtly instruments led by the Scottish Crown’s foreign marriages and diplomatic connections. By the period after the wars of independence when the Scottish Court had settled into a more stable institution and the records of payments to musicians become more frequent it reflects the political connections especially those with France which was used as a counterbalance against England. Likewise, those musicians who appear at court reflect that wider international range of instruments mixed with those of more native origin. However, there is a tendency to simply assume that what happened at court was mirrored throughout the rest of the country. A prime example of that assumption can be shown with the question of the lute in Scotland.

During the latter half of the 15th century luters start to appear in the accounts, including the case of one native family named Wardlaw who first appear as royal harpers before switching instruments to become players of the lute. Apart from employing professional players some members of the royal family themselves took up the lute or in the case of Mary Queen of Scots had learnt to play both lute and virginals while in France and introduced more French music into the Scottish court. What held for the Royal court also spread to some of the aristocracy with evidence of them employing their own lute players, but outside of courtly circles there is little sign of a general use of lutes throughout the rest of the country.

In other words, the lute came to the Royal Court from abroad, was then patronised by some of the lowland aristocracy and was gone as a professional instrument by the end of the 16th C. Apart from the early 17th century ‘lute books’ most of the subsequent references to the lute were young aristocratic males on their continental journeys for schooling, but they seem to have dropped it on returning home. If you look at the records for the period up to the end of the 17th century while the lute was being played by professionals; Gaelic Scotland comprised more than half the population and well over half the geographical area and was a ‘lute free’ zone. Indeed, that zone was potentially even larger as the far northeast of Caithness and the Orkney and Shetland islands were still culturally close to their Scandinavian roots and show no signs of lutes being among the instruments they used either.

It is interesting to compare the position of the lute with another of the instruments to arrive in Scotland, the viol. When during the 16th century the viol first appeared at the royal court there was a very strong continental influence came with it. The evidence from payments suggests that it was played in a consort of between 3 or 4 violers, indeed the early players by their names were family groups. By the end of that century violers bearing Scottish names were appearing in the lowlands in increasingly larger numbers. By the start of the surviving Greyfriars burial records in 1656 and up to 1680 some eighteen violers are recorded in Edinburgh alone.

Those burials suggest a range of wealth and include one violer called James Johnston who was executed for murdering his wife. The register of testaments which covers a wider area and probably the richer performers records 10 violers between 1574 and 1684, and those testaments show that several could be described as relatively wealthy. For example, two of the earliest of whom we know, Thomas Devotie violer, who possibly has an Irish name although is never mentioned as being Irish,<sup>9</sup> was an 'indweller in the Canongate' at his death in 1623 and Robert Scott Elder violer, was described as indweller in Edinburgh in his testament at his death in 1656. In both cases although they were each based in a burgh, they also turn up attending various lairds. Scott was by far the wealthier of the two, he was made a burghess of Edinburgh and even loaned money to an Edinburgh lawyer. He left a son also called Robert and like the father also a professional violer.

One aspect of these violers is that they mostly seemed to perform alone, suggesting a change from the original royal court performances. It also seems likely from the fact that they also start to appear in the Kirk Session records that for at least some of their time they were playing for dancing. Furthermore, as they start to become assimilated into the wider group of Scottish musicians, they gained the colloquial description of 'Fiddler', not though to be confused with players of the early medieval 'fiddle'. The clear contrast between professional players of the viol and the lute, both instruments brought into Scotland from elsewhere raises the question of how much was due to the disappearance of the Scottish court along with its patronage when James VI went down to England in 1603.

Given the absence of any records of professional luters, that is musicians specifically referred to as such, from the end of the 16th century does suggest that the popularity of the two instruments was already diverging before 1603. Likewise, that the newer viol was more able to cope with a necessary adaption of both repertoire and status required after that date. The more conventional historical view is that after the loss of the Royal Court, music in Scotland went into a period of stagnation. This is indeed a valid viewpoint if only considering the art music patronised and developed at court. It is though, a case of two mutually acceptable but opposing viewpoints if turned around and looked at from the other direction.

Certainly the 'art music' along with the instruments patronised by the crown and the very top levels of society suffered an abrupt stop, but when looked at from the other direction the 'native' or traditional instruments and their music patronised by most of the population; both Scots and Gaelic, relegated out of sight and under pressure from the top could be said to have gained a resurgence. This is manifest in the declining lute, never having a very wide geographical Scottish playing base in the first place and like many other instruments falling out of professional use increasingly moving to greater use by women players. Finally reflecting that resurgence of traditional music by incorporating some native Scottish material into the wider lute 'art' repertoire.

How then do the Scottish harps, wire and gut fit into this background? Certainly, they can sometimes be found among court references contemporary with both the lute and viol, but the harps along with the bagpipe

had received their curtailment as court instruments following the demise of James IV in 1513. James V was a minor and when the court regained a full function the influences were biased towards France which was given a further push by the minority of his daughter (and her French mother). Although no longer so visible at court the instruments seem to have comfortably survived among the wider population. However, when after 1600 the popularity of the viol grew, it was at the expense of first the gut strung harp followed later by the wire strung harp or clarsach.

It was at this point that the history of the two harps begins to separate. The gut strung harp seems to have been more vulnerable to the rise of the viol and although it could still be found around the end of the 17th century, the numbers of players had entered a long slow decline.<sup>10</sup> In the case of the wire strung clarsach it too faced pressure from the viol but was initially able to retreat to hold a position of strength within Gaelic Scotland. But Gaelic Scotland was itself under pressure which had long term implications for both.

A foretaste of what was to come can be seen from the lands of the Lairds of Grant, a family which straddled both highland and lowlands with a foot in each side. Following a business visit to Edinburgh by Sir John Grant in 1620 where he seems to have been impressed by the violer Robert Scott, within another twenty years there were violers being patronised by the Grant family across their highland and lowland estates. Not for the first time, like post 1513 political events intervened, and what would possibly have been a slower process had not the events from 1640 to the restoration of 1660 resulted as far as the records are concerned in a disappearance of the clarsach from the Grant of Grant lands.

Returning to instruments contemporary with the apparently native Scottish harps and ‘pipe’ there is one which has an even lower profile than the gut strung harp, it is known by various names but in Scotland was usually called the ‘trump’, (although more commonly today as a Jaws Harp). It’s origins probably lie in the far east and was made of bamboo or similar material, and it is not clear when the switch to metal was made but a metal trump dating to circa 1280 -1320 was found in an excavation on the river Thames and one of the musicians on the circa 1367 Crozier of William of Wykham is shown playing one.<sup>11</sup>

There is little evidence to indicate whether trumps were made in Britain, but they were certainly imported in large numbers. A 1612 Scottish customs account lists a charge based on a gross containing 12 dozen. It is the most common musical instrument to be found everywhere although it is usually well under the music historian’s radar. They turn up in many archaeological excavations and it is the largest section of metal detector finds of musical instruments recorded in the British Museum Portable Antiquities Scheme, (Scots Law regarding such finds is different and has a separate recording system).<sup>12</sup>

One of the most high-profile players appears in a witchcraft trial in Scotland in 1591 when it was confessed that “*Geillis Duncan... did goe before them playing this reill or daunce uppon a small trompe called a Jewes trump, until they entred into the Kirk of the North Barrick... The king... sent for the saide Geillis Duncan, who upon the trump did play the saide daunce before the kings majestie*”.<sup>13</sup> Curiously given the connections with dancing and the Devil, trump players rarely seem to appear among the musicians (usually pipers and fiddlers/violers), attracting censure in the Kirk Session records. One conclusion which can be drawn from the popularity of the trump especially during the late medieval to early modern period is that our ancestors had no problem with listening to music which exhibited a ‘buzzing’ timbre; something of course to consider when discussing the sound quality of those small medieval harps.

While the lute family has gained the most attention the keyboard family which also owe their origins to the continent coexisted along with the Scottish harps. One of the earliest performers on both instruments was Mary Queen of Scots and we know that she employed a French lute master but can only assume that she had also learned to play the virginals in France before coming back to Scotland. When travelling she took her instruments with her and as her personal accounts were kept in French the keyboard instrument was described as *Le spinette*, however Sir James Melville reported to Queen Elizabeth in 1564 that *the Queen of Scots somtymes wald play vpon lut and virginellis*.<sup>14</sup> Technically the spinet and virginals were slightly different instruments but a lack of exactness in early records is not uncommon.

Unlike the lute, virginals grew in popularity to the extent that apart from instruments imported through the port of Leith to Edinburgh, there were at least three indigenous virginal makers during the seventeenth century. The earliest was when in 1618 according to the council register of Aberdeen a John Davidson requested that having been apprenticed to his master Thomas Mylne Virginal Maker, he has served his time and asked for permission to practice as a burgess.<sup>15</sup> The second is later in the century when an Alexander Adam was living and practicing as a virginal maker in Edinburgh circa 1659 – 1694.<sup>16</sup>

Although expense dictated that virginals were an instrument for the landed gentry, unlike the lute, the playing of virginals spread throughout the country and included families whose estates included a large proportion of Gaelic speaking tenants. For example, in 1574 following the death of David Lord Drummond, a list of items inherited by his heir Patrick Lord Drummond and claimed from his mother Lady Lilius Ruthven included *Ane pair of Virginells, Ane pair of spinettes, ane pair of monicords, ane Luit, ane Cither*.<sup>17</sup> The Drummond estate comprised most of the former Celtic earldom of Strathearn which had fallen into the hands of the crown who bestowed it onto the Drummond family whose roots lay originally in the Lenox. The Drummond earls were heavily involved in Scottish politics and probably had little cultural contacts with their mostly Gaelic speaking tenants.

A different picture emerges from the highland estate of Sutherland, albeit that the Earldom of Sutherland was in the hands of the lowland family of Gordon. In 1615 the Earl of Sutherland requested his brother Sir Robert Gordon *‘to obtain and send him a pair of the finest virginals seeing my bearnis ar learning to play and sing’*.<sup>18</sup> The Earl died shortly after this request and Sir Robert was appointed tutor to the children. The tutor’s accounts present an interesting picture of the households at Dornoch and Dunrobin. Although the accounts only commence in 1615, they clearly show a continuity from what was already existing practice with the estate supporting the native Gaelic culture. The highest paid retainer was the gardener at Dunrobin, but this is understandable as he was a lowlander and would have required a ‘premium’ to induce him to move to the culturally foreign Gaelic north. Several pipers were employed including Donald MacCrimmon of the Skye family. There was also a Gaelic poet, described as ‘the bard Donald Macchlery’ and on the lowest payment a ‘Margaret Fiddler’.<sup>19</sup> ‘Macchlery’ or *Mac a Cheirich* (son of the clerk), suggests a member of a professional family and the description of ‘bard’ in its Scottish sense could indicate a poet self-accompanied on the harp.

It is possible that the ‘fiddler’ was providing an accompaniment to the poet, but it is a very early reference to a female musician and although the viol was spreading north there is no evidence it had reached as far as Sutherland. Hence it is not clear if the term ‘fiddle’ was being applied to the old medieval instrument or given the proximity of Caithness, it was an early form of the Scandinavian instrument which evolved into the hardanger fiddle. The continuing playing of virginals in that area is confirmed by a reference in 1653-4

when a military expedition led by the Earl of Gencairn being ‘probably at Kettle, a house four miles south of Dornoch, where he was returning with Colonel Blackadder and John Graham of Deuchrie, he became exceedingly merrie and caused the laird’s daughter to play on the virginals and the servants to dance’.<sup>20</sup>

Over the course of the seventeenth century virginals continued to spread throughout Scotland including into the Gaelic speaking areas. Initially, as the example of a ‘pair of virginals’ in a 1694 inventory of Inchtalla Castle, the home of the Earls of Menteith it was still the case of a predominantly Gaelic population under a family who in this case, the Grahams who had replaced the original earls. Typical of the ever-changing Gaelic/Scots interface where there was never a sharp dividing line it is not clear what degree of cultural assimilation occurred between the aristocratic families and their tenants; nor should it be assumed that it was only in one direction. However, it should be noted that the disparity of wealth meant that possession of a musical instrument by most of the population was dependent on sponsorship by their laird.

Evidence for at least one virginal in the heart of Gaeldom can be found as a result of the subsequent legal action for its recovery or compensation. Its owner was Julia MacLeod daughter of John MacLeod of Dunvegan, widow of Sir Allan Maclean of Duart and by the time of the legal action, wife of James Campbell of Glendaruel. Listed as one of a number of items stolen from her by a number of other Macleans sometime between 1670-74, it was listed as ‘*ane pair of Virginells worth Six-pound ten Shillings Sterling money*’. The fact that the value was given in Sterling while all the other items were in pounds Scots or merks suggests that the instrument had originally been imported from England.<sup>21</sup>

Although there was a loss of some Jacobite family papers during the 45’ sufficient archival evidence remains to demonstrate an increasing take up of virginals and spinets among the daughters of Gaelic lairds over the early years of the 18th century. This can be attributed to the young highland ladies being sent to relatives in the lowlands for education, including music, then returning home either with or requiring the purchase of instruments.<sup>22</sup> These are variously described as virginals or spinets, but it is not always clear how accurately those terms were being applied. For example, in 1715 the Breadalbane accounts show there were ‘11 virginal strings’ bought in 1715, which appear to have been for ‘Miss Campbell’s spinet’ which is listed in an inventory of the contents of Finlarig in January 1716.<sup>23</sup>

Even transporting instruments into those more remote areas, given the lack of roads or proper pack horse paths represented a major problem. In the case of the spinet at Finlarig the bill shows that the cost of sending ‘Mellechrist’ to Edinburgh with a horse to fetch the spinet was £3 -18sh, quite a large sum at that period.<sup>24</sup> Technically if the destination was close to water transport by ship was easier than going by land, but finding a suitable vessel heading in the right direction was not that simple as shown by the efforts of Fraser of Lovat in 1744 to bring his daughter’s spinet up to Beaufort from Edinburgh. After attempting to find suitable ships sailing from Leith to Inverness or Cromarty he gave up and instead wrote to his Edinburgh agent that ‘*I have fallen upon an excellent method for bringing north the spinet. I have a strong fellow, a servant in my labourings that speaks the language and I resolve to send him south to carry the spinet north on his back. He will buckle it across his shoulders and tye it on with ropes like a pedlar’s pack*’. The servant, clearly a native Gaelic speaker who also spoke Scots, would have walked over 160 miles each way with the addition of the spinet on the return leg. He clearly was ‘a strong fellow’.<sup>25</sup>

While it is possible to argue that due to record loss there may be an under recording of how many virginals/spinet found their way across the ‘highland line’, those that we do know about during the period when

the harp was still around means that the players of both harps and keyboard instruments must have been aware of each other's repertoire. Unfortunately, there is little evidence from that period about what those predominantly young ladies, were playing on their instruments once they were competent to select their own repertoire. About the earliest information we have comes from the accounts for Mary Campbell, daughter of Campbell of Achalader when she was at school in Edinburgh in 1776. The payments included the hire of a spinet and a tutor, Mr McGlasghan, to teach her how to tune it and play Scotch tunes.<sup>26</sup>

After stringed instruments it is necessary to also consider those wind instruments that were in contemporary use during the time when harps were still around. On that basis it is possible to exclude the flute, often called the German flute which was a late 18th century import usually by young aristocratic males having been taught to play while on their European tours. Of course, in Scotland the major contemporary wind instrument apart from trumpets were the bagpipes whose popular history was also subject to many misunderstandings. Whether the earlier mouth blown triple pipes using circular breathing for a continuous flow of sound were directly replaced by the bag pipe is still a matter for discussion but what is known is that a bagpipe of some sort was known in Britain by 1286.<sup>27</sup>

Unfortunately, we do not know what the early bagpipes looked like but contemporary evidence indicates that by the end of the 16th century they existed in the form of a 'large bagpipe' and a 'small bagpipe', with some pipers clearly having both. The 'large' or as it was called in Scots a 'great' pipe would have been the same mouth blown instrument known by its equivalent name in Gaelic as a *piob mhor*. By the early 17th century, a bellows was being used and the bellows blown pipes became the common pipe predominantly used in lowland Scotland while the pipers in the Gaelic areas seem to have retained the use of the large mouthblown instrument.

The bagpipe in Scotland has assumed an almost mythical status well distanced from the historical evidence. The rise of the 'highland pipe' along with a lot of its modern baggage stems from its post 1745 adoption by the British Army. Prior to that point there were numerically more lowland pipers than highland ones, a fact which reflects both the respective populations and use. From as far back as the early 17th century the burghs had paid for both a piper and drummer along with providing them with clothes and in many cases accommodation. In addition, from around 1643 when the Scottish Parliament laid down the establishment of Scottish Regiments it included a piper to each company. Furthermore, the records show that for most of that century the pipers in those regiments plus other regiments raised simply for service abroad were all lowlanders (probably playing the same large bellows blown instrument used by the burgh pipers).

The question of course arises, given that the lowland bagpipe and both the wire-strung and gut strung Scottish harps were around at the same time, albeit that the harps, especially the gut strung ones were falling out of use over the latter part of the seventeenth century, was there any overlap of repertoire? The problem is that very little is known about what was played on the two harps, although it can be assumed that they would have been used to accompany songs and therefore any song old enough to have been accompanied probably was. Some conclusions can also be drawn regarding the common or Lowland bagpipe. A study of the tunes mentioned in early sources suggests that 'It is clear that rather than playing a fixed 'pipe music' repertoire a musician might be asked to play any kind of music'.<sup>28</sup> It is also clear that the Burgh pipers worked along with the Burgh drummer, and also spent a lot of time playing for dancing, (much to the irritation of the Kirk Sessions), therefore would have been used to playing to a regular beat.



Although there are many references to musicians being paid among the surviving contemporary accounts, they are mostly payments to single musicians therefore give no indication if the musicians supported each other, let alone what they played. One rare exception occurs among the Buccleuch archives for October 1661 when payments are made to ‘the harper who attended the friends to dinner’ followed by ‘given to Thomas Anderson violer who likewise attended them at dinner’ and a payment to the town piper and drummer’. The musicians were paid in ‘dollars’, a silver coin which was a universal Europe wide currency of the time, and the record is noted in the accounts of mostly legal disbursements kept by Patrick Scott of Langshaws.<sup>29</sup>

Patrick Scott acted as both legal agent and factor for the Buccleuch family and the fact that he appears to be the ‘host’ of the meeting of ‘friends’ points to the wider background of the event. When Francis Scott the 2nd Earl of Buccleuch died in 1651, he left two young children. Mary, the eldest had inherited the title but she had died earlier that year and that meant that the title passed to her younger sister Ann. Due to the importance of the Earldom even James VI in London had taken an interest in the two girls and their potential marriages. The timing of the meeting suggests that it involved the tutors who had been appointed to supervise the two minors and with Ann now holding the title, to consider her marriage prospects. One of the major ‘tutors’ involved would have been the girl’s mother, Lady Margaret Leslie, daughter of the Earl of Rothes, widow of the Earl of Buccleuch and having remarried, now the Countess of Wemyss.

The ‘town’ piper and drummer would probably have been those of Dalkeith which is where Patrick Scott was normally based. It is curious that the violer Thomas Anderson is named while the harper who is first in the list is not. It is probably a reflection of the fact that violer was playing the ‘coming instrument’ and as he lived in Edinburgh must have been specially engaged to make the journey to Dalkeith. This reference to a Lowland Burgh piper leads to the question of ‘highland pipers’, which must start with a considerable demythologising of that subject.

While the lowland pipes have undergone a revival over the last forty years the popular image of a Scottish piper is still a tartan clad figure often connected to a pipe band. Nearly everything associated with this image can be attributed to the militarisation of the ‘clan’ piper by the post 1707 United Kingdom government. For example, the concept of a pipe band evolved as a nineteenth century military institution comprising a combination of a number of pipers with a drum corp. Historically there is nothing ‘highland or Gaelic’ about drums.<sup>30</sup>

It may be difficult to accept that unlike today where drummers are everywhere from dance bands to pop groups, in the past civilian drummers hardly existed at all. The drum as we now know it was first developed as a military instrument by the Swiss, indeed when it first appears in Scotland with the appointment of Burgh drummers it was still known as a ‘swesche’ and its players were ‘swescheouris’. One of the main functions of the Burgh drummer was to attract attention when public proclamations had to be made. The Scottish alternative to the ‘Bell ringers’ more commonly used on the other side of the border in England. Outside of those burghs who maintained a burgh drummer there were no other civilian uses for a drummer and since the nature of settlement in the ‘Highlands’ did not follow the same urban pattern of the Lowland Burghs there were in fact no ‘highland’ drummers at all.

This lack of urban centres in the ‘Highland’ area was also a factor in the way the nature of employment of pipers diverged between highland and lowland musicians. While the lowland communities could, through their local Burgh fund and employ a ‘Burgh piper’, in the more dispersed nature of highland settlement

the local laird was the only one in a position to ‘employ’ a piper and given the usual shortage of hard cash, was most likely to instead provide a ‘tak’ of land and therefore elevating the piper to the status of ‘Tacksman’. Although pipers appear all over Scotland at the same time, numerically and partly a reflection of the population spread, until the second half of the 18th century ‘highland’ pipers were very much in the minority. As the bagpipe developed a divergence seems to have occurred with an increasing use in lowland Scotland of the bellows to fill the bag, while those in the Gaelic heartland stuck with mouthblown instruments.

The differing cultural back grounds also appear to have influenced the nature of the music played on the instruments. Suggestions have been made that the ‘highland pipe’ repertoire was influenced by, if not borrowed from the harpers. There are several reasons why the claim does not stand up when placed in the real historical context. The main function of the harp and tiompan in the classical Irish context was to support the declamation of the Gaelic verse composed by the File. It was the high status of the File which also raised that of the other members of his performing team, but that structure only had a limited role in Scotland; at best mostly restricted to Argyle with its closer proximity to Ireland. The rest of Gaelic Scotland went its own way with a ‘bard’ in its Scottish form being both poet and harper.

A large part of the suggestion that the ‘highland’ bagpipes took over the harps repertoire rests on the assumption that the harp, or more specifically the wire strung clarsach, preceded the bagpipe in Gaelic Scotland. This assumption however ignores the actual position of both the clarsach and poets in late medieval Scotland. Neither the Irish poetic structure or the clarsach had much of a presence north of Ardnamurchan, indeed at that point the poets were mostly confined to Argyle while the clarsach had a greater presence in lowland Scotland than the far northwest highlands and Islands.<sup>31</sup>

At the point when the bagpipe first appears in the northwest Islands and some adjacent parts of the mainland, that area was very much peripheral to the heartland of Gaelic Scotland and had only begun emerging from under Norse control about two hundred years prior to the arrival of the bagpipe. Or to put it another way, the bagpipes were already established before some representatives of the Irish connected Bardic families later moved north. In terms of musical connections between the two instruments there is also a problem in that we know that in the classical Gaelic world the harps main use was to support the declamation of the Poets verse composed in syllabic metres.

While that format is secure exactly how the harp fitted in and what it played is unknown and simply extending that Irish format to Scotland has been criticised on several occasions. For example, in a paper given by Virginia Blankenhorn to a conference in 2010 on the subject of the differences between Scottish and Irish verse structure and performance in conclusion she suggests that the differences were due to a much greater Scandinavian influence on Scottish practice.<sup>32</sup> Therefore it is not surprising that the origins of ‘highland piping’ seem to come from a geographical area which was not rigidly Gaelic and was open to many other influences.

The music played on the ‘highland pipe’ is usually described as being a ground followed by variations and at the time when the bagpipe was appearing in that area the variation form of music, having first appeared around the 14th century was by the 16th century becoming a common form of musical composition. However, as a description of ‘piobaireachd’, a term which simply means ‘piping’, that is what a piper does; ground and variations is not the best description of what is played. The ‘ground’ does not vary but is repeated with increasingly complex decorations applied to some of the notes. This was probably not a

musical choice as the limited number of notes on the chanter would have made more conventional variations an unlikely choice by the piper. It does though exploit the one advantage the bagpipe has over other instruments in its ability of delivering very fast but discrete clusters of short notes or embellishments.<sup>33</sup>

The piobaireachd grounds are based on the Gaelic form known as *Amhran* (translated as ‘song’), whose origins can be traced back to the troubadours of Provence and spread through the international Norman French world. In Ireland this was especially associated with the *Dánta Grádha* said to have been composed by the fourteenth century Gerald the Rhymer, the Fourth Earl of Desmond.<sup>34</sup> Although Amhran was probably accompanied by harps, both wire and gut and viols when available, it was vocal in origin and so places the origin of piobaireachd grounds within that ‘international’ Norman musical world. A world in which the former Scandinavian but increasingly Gaelicised territory where the ‘highland’ pipe, or at least its music was far from insular. Many of the chiefs of the Northern ‘clans’, like the Chisholms, Frasers and Grants were of Norman origin or that other route for spreading ideas, the pre reformation church where the Bishopric of the Isles had its cathedral church on Skye at Skeabost on Loch Snizort.<sup>35</sup>

It may be more than a coincidence that the earliest ‘named’ member of the MacCrimmon family was a priest Sir John McChrummen (died before 1552), who held the vicarage of Uig in Trotternish and was also on record witnessing a bond of mutual protection by Alexander MacLeod of Dunvegan in 1533 and who would have flourished at the same time as the earliest evidence of a piper at Dunvegan in 1541. The next priest to hold Uig was a Sir Donald Munro who was presented in 1552 and subsequently in 1587 a piper called Donald appears among the Munros of Foulis.<sup>36</sup>

One problem with trying to define ‘piping’ in Scotland is like trying to define ‘harping’ in that the usage of those categories of instruments were changing over time and place. Nor do they fit within the generalisations which are usually applied to them. For example, the claim that the clarsach was the harp played in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland which is then used to suggest that the music played on the ‘highland’ pipe came from the clarsach. This continues to be repeated despite evidence to the contrary and for example the questions raised by why most of the older placenames in the southeastern lowland county of Fife are of Gaelic origin while those on the Isle of Lewis, Skye and adjacent northwest mainland where ‘highland piping’ originated; are mostly old Norse?

Although we can be certain that the players of harps, bagpipes, viols and keyboard instruments would have been aware of each other both with geographical overlap and individual repertoire, how much mutual assimilation of that repertoire occurred is more speculative. The primary use of either of the two types of harps would have been to accompany the voice and vocal melodies easily moved across the various Scottish cultural boundaries. They would though have been adapted to the nature of both the instrument and the style adopted by the performer, which in turn would reflect their cultural background. Oddly the biggest question mark is not what musical exchanges may have occurred between the different types of musical instruments, but what crossovers occurred within the bagpipe world of ‘highland’ and ‘lowland’ pipers.

What we know of the ‘lowland’ piper implies they were used to playing music with a regular beat, whether working with the burgh drummer or playing for dancing, the latter practice probably accounting for a large part of their income (including that of the burgh pipers). Playing for dancing regularly brought down the wrath of the Kirk, although to be fair while the Kirk had a jaundiced view of the merits of ‘dancing’ and its morality, the real problem was that the only day of rest during which the populus could hold dances was the

sabbath when the ministers wanted the people in church. This was a contrast with the Kirk Session records from the firmly 'highland' parishes which rarely, if ever censer pipers or dancing. This may have reflected those more sparsely populated parishes making it harder for the Ministers to exert the same levels of local control.

However, there is little evidence that 'highland' pipers in their core heartlands did accompany dancing, at least not until the late 18th century by which time they were undergoing change. The only contemporary evidence to what they played on the large mouthblown pipes was what is now generally referred to as 'piobaireachd' (a word which simply means 'piping' ie. What a piper did). Judging by how it has come down to us it was played in 'free rhythm', not surprising as it was linked to the amhran form. Like the lowland Scots use of the terms 'large' or 'great' pipe to differentiate between two sizes of bagpipe the continued use in Gaelic of 'piob mhor' might also imply that some small pipes were in use by highland pipers possibly to play for dancing, but contemporary written evidence for a small pipe is rare and that it could be used for dancing even rarer.<sup>37</sup> In any case this may be explained by the argument that music accompanied dance was a late arrival in the Gaeltacht and coincided with the introduction of bowed stringed instruments, although it has also been argued that the dances called 'reels' were initially accompanied by mouth music before the viols and violins took over.<sup>38</sup>

Trying to investigate the interaction of musical instruments in Scotland during the period when the wire and gut strung harps were being used is made more difficult by the paucity of information from that period. Although the surviving contemporary evidence is more extensive than just the references cited here, for the period covered it still cannot be described as plentiful. In addition, many of the references which have been quoted in works on Scotland's musical instruments are what might be described as 'literary' sources, that is taken from contemporary songs or general descriptions of life rather than actual factual evidence in the accounts, rentals, testaments and similar archival sources.<sup>39</sup> Although it can sometimes be difficult to reconcile the two different types of evidence, allowing for the relatively small amount of such fact based evidence there do seem to be some consistent conclusions to be drawn.

The multicultural nature of Scotland, including not just the Gael/lowland Scots divide but also the lingering aspects of Scandinavian influence, aided by the geography of the country, slowed the adoption of new customs. Prior to 1603 while the wearers of the Scottish crown were domiciled in Scotland, their connections to other European Courts did introduce non-native instruments to the Scottish court but in most cases, the instruments did not have much impact beyond the court and its immediate aristocratic circles. In fact, the only new instrument introduced from outside of Scotland which can be said to have directly acquired a common use and then only in lowland Scotland was the military drum. First used by the Swiss for marshalling infantry, it was brought back by Scots who had been fighting abroad and then adopted by the Scottish burghs. Its origin was clear as it was known in Scots as a 'Swesche' and the early burgh drummers were called 'swescheouris'.

Instruments were expensive and beyond the reach of the bulk of the population, therefore most musicians were professionals and always dependent on patronage of some sort, including the initial purchase of their instrument. By today's standards the absolute numbers of both musicians and instruments were quite small. For example, the total population of Scotland circa 1500 is thought to have been around 500,000 people: a little less than the population of just Edinburgh today. It is therefore quite safe to claim that in terms of harps, both wire and gut strung, there are in absolute terms more instruments and players in Edinburgh today than there were in the whole of Scotland around 1500.

Once the question of Scotland's musical instruments is set against this background it is possible to draw some general conclusions. The only 'introduced' classical instrument which could claim to have crossed into general use was the viol which moved from an instrument of the 16th century court to a wider and more local use until superseded by the violin. This took over two centuries and was still mostly confined to lowland Scotland or those parts of Gaeldom closest to the 'highland line'. Over the course of the eighteenth century the violin spread throughout the Gaelic speaking 'Highlands and Islands', but what today is regarded as the 'West Highland Style' of playing is modern and clearly imitates the bagpipes.<sup>40</sup>

Since the bagpipe music the West Highland fiddle style is modelled on, especially the pipe marches, is also relatively modern, a product of the changes which occurred after the 'Highland Bagpipe' was absorbed into the British army; neither have much historical relevance to the harps and their music. Although in some parts the clarsach overlaps with the earlier viol, it is doubtful if the viol had much musical influence on either the wire or gut strung harps, although over time the viol seems to have replaced both wire and gut strung harps. It is therefore possible that the harps influenced the viola and the account in the letter to John Aubrey in 1692 suggests that in Strathspey the viol may have replaced the harp to accompany song, but this neatly raises the question of how we define 'influence'.

The basis of all music is a melody (or tune), the origins of which in traditional music are usually vocal, even when later instrumentalised. It follows that many of the oldest traditional melodies will have been passed down through later instrumental musicians, albeit adapted to suit the instrument being used. By that definition any tune whose origins can be dated to a much period earlier period can be said to have 'influenced' those other instruments if played on them. However, what is usually the subject of discussion is whether any cross fertilisation occurs when the newer and older instruments overlap, or going even further back, coexisted at the same time.

The further back you go disentangling that last question becomes harder and harder because it must separate the individual instruments performances from each other, and the more general musical background of the period involved. This becomes even more problematic when considering the harps, especially the wire strung clarsach whose main function was to support the performance of Gaelic verse. Despite much academic speculation we still do not have any clear evidence on how that relationship between voice and clarsach actually worked. Given current knowledge which is governed by the fact that the music of both harps and the 'highland' bagpipe was aural rather than written and before the late invention of recording devices, the performance is therefore not recoverable.<sup>41</sup> Therefore the most that can be said is that there may have been some common aspects of musical performance reflecting their background in the Gaelic world in which they flourished.

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<sup>1</sup> Farmer H G. *A History of Music in Scotland*. (1947). pp 87-88. Where the relevant sections of both Richard Holland and Gavin Douglas's poems are quoted.

<sup>2</sup> Pons-Sanz, S. and MacCoinnich, A. (2018) 'The Languages of Scotland'. In: Royan, N. (ed.) *The International Companion to Scottish Literature, 1400-1650*. Series: International companions to Scottish literature. Scottish Literature International: Glasgow, pp. 19-37.

<sup>3</sup> After Edward I captured Edinburgh Castle in 1296, the Scottish Records described as contained in ‘two leather forcers bound with iron, four hampers covered with black leather, nine wooden forcers, eighteen hampers of wicker and thirty-two boxes’ were loaded onto a baggage train and taken down to the Tower of London.

<sup>4</sup> Unless otherwise indicated these references are taken from *Constance Bullock-Davies A Register of Royal and Baronial Domestic Minstrels 1272 – 1327*. (1986). Unfortunately, it does not have an index. The specific references to the Scots musicians mentioned above are on pages. 51, 67, 68, 91, 118, 138, 191, 212 and 218.

<sup>5</sup> Bullock-Davies C. *Menestrellorum Multitudo* (1978). pp 37 and 89.

<sup>6</sup> Wodderspoon J. *Memorials of the Ancient Town of Ipswich* (1850). pp. 253-4

<sup>7</sup> [https://www.academia.edu/28905452/Lifting\\_the\\_kilt\\_triplepipes\\_in\\_Sardinia\\_Ireland\\_and\\_Great\\_Britain](https://www.academia.edu/28905452/Lifting_the_kilt_triplepipes_in_Sardinia_Ireland_and_Great_Britain)

<sup>8</sup> National Archives, Kew. SC 8/71/3544

<sup>9</sup> Possibly a corruption of ‘O’Docharty’. For discussion of a harper of that name in Scotland see. K Sanger. The 1692 Letter to John Aubrey Revisited. *West Highland Notes and Queries*. Series 5. No. 6. p 12. The name is first connected with Scotland when an ‘O’Dochartaigh’ was a witness to a mutual bond between the Earl of Argyle and Calvagh O’Donnell in 1560. See. Macphail, J. R. N ed. *Highland Papers* vol iv. (1934). p. 216.

<sup>10</sup> Initially those scribes who kept the financial accounts in Scotland kept a clear distinction between players of the Clarsach (or wire strung harp) and the gut strung harp. During the latter part of the 17th C. as the numbers, particularly of gut harpers declined that distinction was lost therefore the players name and context became more important in deciding what sort of harp was being played.

<sup>11</sup> Montagu, J. The Crozier of William of Wykham. *Early Music* Vol. 30. No. 4 (Nov 2002). pp. 544 and 554. For a discussion on the origins and names for the ‘trump’ see <https://jewsharper.files.wordpress.com/2012/09/penning-the-air3.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> Wright, M. The Jew’s harp in the Law, 1590–1825, in *Folk Music Journal*. Vol 9, No 3 (2008) pp 349–371

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/witchcraft-pamphlet-news-from-scotland-1591>

<sup>14</sup> National Records of Scotland E33/8/f. 21r; Robertson, J ed. *Innuntaires de la royne descosse douairiere de France. Catalogues of the jewels, dresses, furniture, books and paintings of Mary Queen of Scots 1556-1569*. Bannatyne Club (1863). P cxxi. Footnote number 2.

<sup>15</sup> Stuart, J ed. Extracts from the council records of the burgh of Aberdeen. Vol ii; 1570-1625, Spalding Club 1848. p. 355.

<sup>16</sup> Farmer, H. G. *A History of Music in Scotland*. (1947). p. 200; Poll Tax Records NRS E70/4/1/23.

<sup>17</sup> NRS GD160/528/33/69

- <sup>18</sup> Fraser, W. *The Sutherland Book*. (1892). vol 1, p 209. Vol 2. p 121
- <sup>19</sup> National Library of Scotland Acc. 10824/3. An unfoliate box of mixed accounts.
- <sup>20</sup> Dayell J G. *Musical Memoirs of Scotland*. (1849). p. 264: ‘Kettle’ is a phonetic spelling of the placename ‘Cuthill’
- <sup>21</sup> Sanger K. MacLean of Broilass and a ‘Pair of Virginals’. *West Highland Notes & Queries*. Series 4 No. 13. (June 2020).
- <sup>22</sup> For example while the Earl of Seafield and family were in Edinburgh in 1704 Hendrich Krumbein was paid to teach Lady Janet on the spinet (GD248/580/9) while further payments were made in 1710 (GD248/574/8); In 1707/08 Sir Donald MacDonalds daughters were studying in Edinburgh where the tuition included both virginals and viol de gamba along with a charge by William MacLean, the ‘master of revels’\*, of £ 120 for teaching the girls to dance and for a pair of castanets (NRAS3273/3874-5).\* this was the man who had a legal dispute with the Mr Beck of the Balcarres manuscript.
- <sup>23</sup> NRS GD112/35/23 and GD112/43/25/5
- <sup>24</sup> NRS GD112/15/151/40.
- <sup>25</sup> The Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts. *The Laing Manuscripts in the University of Edinburgh*. Volume 2 (1925). pp. 271, 285, 289 and 290.
- <sup>26</sup> National Register of Archives for Scotland. NRAS4355/2/2; ‘Mr Mcglasghan’ was probably the Edinburgh piano teacher John McGlashan circa 1796-7 who also published collections of Scots music. Less likely to be Alexander McGlashan c1740-1797, thought to be a relative who also published collections of music but was only known to be a violinist.
- <sup>27</sup> Sanger K. The Origins of Highland Piping. *Piping Times*. Vol 41. No. 11 (August 1989).
- <sup>28</sup> Stewart, P. *The Day It Daws- The Lowland Scots Bagpipe and its Music 1400 to 1715*. (2005).
- <sup>29</sup> NRS GD224/935/8
- <sup>30</sup> Sanger K, Highland Piping from 1775 to 1850; a period of change. *Proceedings of the Piobaireachd Society Conference*. (2015). Also online here [https://www.academia.edu/12191614/Highland\\_Piping\\_from\\_1775\\_to\\_1850\\_A\\_period\\_of\\_change](https://www.academia.edu/12191614/Highland_Piping_from_1775_to_1850_A_period_of_change)  
It is noticeable that the only two burghs with highland connections, Inverary and Inverness, both had records of burgh pipers but no drummers.
- <sup>31</sup> Sanger K, *Mapping the Clarsach in Scotland* (2017). <https://www.wirestrungharp.com/harps/harpers/mapping-clarsach/>
- <sup>32</sup> Blankenhorn, V. *Verse structure and performance in Scottish Gaelic vernacular poetry*. Rannsachadh na Gàidhlig 6: Papers read at Rannsachadh na Gàidhlig 6 held at the University of Aberdeen 23-26 August 2010. pp. 53-92.

- <sup>33</sup> Sanger K. What is Piobaireachd. Pibroch Network (Jan 2016).  
<https://pibroch.net/learning/what-is-piobaireachd/>
- <sup>34</sup> Ó Rathile, T. *Dánta Grádha*. (1976).
- <sup>35</sup> Thomas, S. From Cathedral of the Isles to Obscurity. *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* vol 144. pp 245-264
- <sup>36</sup> Sanger, K. The MacCrimmon Pipers, *West Highland Notes and Queries*. Series 2. No. 14 (July 1995) pp. 17-20
- <sup>37</sup> Sanger K. Ranaid MacAilean Oig; Fact and Fiction. *West Highland Notes & Queries*. Series 4. No. 1 (August 2016) or online  
[https://www.academia.edu/27920636/Ranaid\\_MacAilean\\_Oig\\_fact\\_and\\_fiction\\_West\\_Highland\\_Notes\\_and\\_Queries\\_Series\\_4\\_No\\_1\\_August\\_2016\\_](https://www.academia.edu/27920636/Ranaid_MacAilean_Oig_fact_and_fiction_West_Highland_Notes_and_Queries_Series_4_No_1_August_2016_)
- <sup>38</sup> Newton, M. Dannsair air ùrlar-déile thu”: Gaelic evidence about dance from the mid-17th to late-18th century Highlands. *International Review of Scottish Studies* 38. (2013); Lamb, W. Reeling in the Strathspey: The Origins of Scotland’s National Music. *Scottish Studies* Vol 36, (2013), pp 66-102
- <sup>39</sup> <https://nafcoblog.wordpress.com/2017/03/05/on-the-introduction-of-the-baroque-violin-into-the-gaidhealtachd-michael-newton/>
- <sup>40</sup> Bruford, Alan. ‘Fiddle music’, in *The Companion to Gaelic Scotland* ed. Derick Thomson (1994). p 75.
- <sup>41</sup> Sanger, Keith ‘Harping on the Past’, *Harp Perspectives* (January 2023)  
<https://www.harpireland.ie/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/CEHI-HARP-PERSPECTIVES-Keith-Sanger-2023.pdf>

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