

**THE PIPING TRADITION OF SOUTH UIST**

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Ph.D., 2001

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I have composed this thesis myself. The work is my own, and has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

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## ABSTRACT

This is a history of piping in South Uist. Pipe music has formed part of the island's rich musical tradition for centuries, and although it remains just one piece of a much larger whole, South Uist has enjoyed a reputation in particular for its pipers. There are many reasons for this. Traditional Gaelic social culture is fundamentally musical, and folklorists from Alexander Carmichael to J.L. Campbell often portrayed South Uist as the Highlands' last storehouse of Gaelic tradition. South Uist remained largely untouched by the evangelical asceticism which swept away piping traditions elsewhere in the Hebrides following the Disruption. Clanranald's patronage of pipers survived longer into the nineteenth century than that of most other Highland families, South Uist being home to the bearers of the office. And the world of twentieth-century mainstream competition was enriched when the Piobaireachd Society brought literate instruction to the island's ear-learned pipers in 1909.

For these and other reasons, to study the island's piping is to study its religious life, its community life, its history of emigration, its oral tradition of singing and storytelling and its place in the wider framework of Clanranald and Highland custom. The first half of the thesis addresses local piping within the context of these issues: Chapter 1 introduces the overall goals of the work, the research methods used and the musical terms found throughout; Chapter 2 addresses the oral/aural tradition and looks at piping's place in local song, story and *céilidh*; Chapter 3 goes back to the seventeenth century and contrasts catholic and protestant influences in South Uist to explain how piping has been profoundly affected by religious considerations, both in Uist and throughout the Hebrides; Chapter 4 traces the island's major emigrations, forced and unforced, to call attention to emigrant pipers from Uist to the New World; and Chapter 5 addresses the place of South Uist pipers in the world of Clanranald and Highland culture: from eighteenth-century patronage and a strong martial tradition to the functions of the village piper and the survival of a pre-Piobaireachd Society style of *ceòl mór*.

The second half takes a broadly chronological look at the piping tradition as it

has developed through the twentieth century. Chapter 6 examines the state of piping at the turn of the century and the period of Piobaireachd Society instruction from 1909; Chapter 7 looks at various prominent piping families in Uist; Chapter 8 charts the development of the Askernish games from 1898 to the present day; Chapter 9 addresses the Great War and its effect on local tradition; and Chapter 10 looks at local aesthetics and musical transmission, focussing primarily on the island's aural tradition and how it survived as long as it did the twentieth century's era of mainstream literacy. The thesis concludes with general remarks on the state of piping in Uist today and suggestions for further research.

Above all, this is intended to be a record of the history, functions and implications of South Uist piping from the internal Gaelic perspective. Interviews with informants were conducted in Gaelic, lesser-used but important Gaelic manuscripts were consulted, and consideration is given to the context of traditional Gaelic social culture. It therefore fills a gap in Scottish ethnology and piping history often neglected through a lack of impetus among Gaelic-speaking scholars.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For continual and unerring guidance over the last three and a half years, my thanks go firstly to my principal supervisor, Dr. John Shaw. I also thank Dr. Mark Trewin for his help with the more ethnomusicological aspects of the present work; Ian MacKenzie for help with photograph and notation scanning; Ms. Anona Lyons of the Geography Department for producing the map on page ix; Dr. Roderick Cannon for his very helpful suggestions; the staffs of the Edinburgh University Library Special Collections, the National Library of Scotland, the National Archives of Scotland, and the Queen's Own Highlanders Regimental Museum at Fort George, near Inverness, for their co-operation; and the Faculty of Arts (Edinburgh University) and the Catherine McCaig Trust for their financial support.

Lastly I thank the pipers and other members of the South Uist community who have been so supportive of this thesis. To my informants, who gave of their time freely and patiently; to Angus Johnstone of Lochboisdale, current President of the South End Piping Club, who joined me in practice chanter sessions on the Cal-Mac ferries to wile away the hours; and to Tim Atkinson, factor of South Uist Estates (Inc.), for his advice and enthusiasm –

*Móran taing, a chàirdean.*

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Acc	Accession number for manuscripts at the National Library of Scotland
Adv	Advocates' Library manuscript, National Library of Scotland
CB	Calum Beaton, informant
HSL	Highland Society of London
JM	Jessie MacAulay, informant
LM	Louis Morrison, informant
NM	Neil MacDonald, informant
MSR	March, Strathspey and Reel (tunes played as a single set in competition)
<i>OT</i>	<i>Oban Times</i>
PS	Piobaireachd Society
<i>PT</i>	<i>Piping Times</i>
QOCH	Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders
RL	Rona Lightfoot, informant
RM	Ronald MacDonald, informant
SA	Sound Archives housed at the School of Scottish Studies
SC	Sound Cassette
SSS	School of Scottish Studies, Edinburgh University
<i>Stat Acc</i>	<i>Statistical Account of Scotland</i>
<i>TGSI</i>	<i>Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness</i>
<i>WHFP</i>	<i>West Highland Free Press</i>

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.a. Aims and Issues

This is a social history of piping in South Uist from as much of the ‘insider’ perspective as it is possible for the outside observer to apprehend. Some considerable obstacles confront such an approach: the most immediate is one of language, followed by the reluctance against open discussion which can often colour relations between an island community and an outsider. But I have enjoyed one or two advantages in my studies which make relations, and therefore research, easier. I learned Gaelic as an undergraduate student at Aberdeen University, and although my command is far from perfect, informants by and large have tended to appreciate the effort and communicate with more openness than may otherwise have been the case. Of course, the subject matter itself may have had something to do with it; piping is remarkably free from taboo in the Hebrides compared to, say, religion, where even the native Gaelic-speaking researcher has had problems uncovering local sentiments in the past. Equal to or even more relevant than my knowledge of Gaelic, however, was my acquaintance with the bagpipe. There is a fraternity to piping which often transcends social barriers; as Dr. Roderick Cannon once said, “The piping world is not small but it’s wonderfully interconnected”<sup>1</sup>, and this pertains to South Uist as surely as it does to mainland Scotland. My being a piper first, and a researcher later, has without question been my key entrée into the community because piping – perhaps more from the Gaelic perspective than the English – is a nation with few internal borders. I say more so from the Gaelic perspective because the English-speaking world of piping is mountainous with exalted institutions – the Piobaireachd Society, the competition system, quantifiable standards upon which to judge and be judged – while the landscape of old-world Hebridean piping is comparatively flat for all the grass roots. And within the



juxtaposition of these worlds lies the present work's primary importance: to explore the traditional Gaelic context of piping in relation to that of the mainstream community is to more fully understand why piping is the way it is.

The internal Gaelic aspect of the 'national music' has gone largely untouched by modern scholarship for reasons practical as well as political, since few are both inclined and qualified (linguistically and academically) to combine the necessary disciplines. On another level though, the Gaelic point of view simply doesn't matter very much in mainstream piping. Previous writers have tended to address institutional aspects like the involvement of the Highland Societies of London and Scotland and the rise of formal competition in the nineteenth century (MacInnes, 1988; Donaldson, 2000) or the oft-touted esoteric nature of *ceòl mór* and its supposed exclusivity to those within a select body of disciples, to whom alone the 'authentic' tradition has been passed down (Collinson, 1975; MacNeill and Richardson, 1987; for a response to this attitude, see Cheape, 1990). These are all valid topics. There is nothing inauthentic about mainstream piping as it has developed over the past two centuries; as with any tradition, it is authentic within its own context. But its emphasis in modern scholarship means that Highland piping is rarely considered with regard to the old-world Gaelic social culture which occasioned its development as an art form.

Of course, there are notable exceptions, particularly within the last decade. Cooke (1973) and MacDonald (1995) addressed the melodic and rhythmic relationship between *ceòl mór* and popular Gaelic song; Cannon (1994) produced a new edition of Joseph MacDonald's c. 1760 treatise on piping which supports Cooke's and MacDonald's work and contains a fund of lost Gaelic nomenclature; Shaw (1992/3) and Gibson (1998), meanwhile, have laid the groundwork on the internal Gaelic aesthetic by describing piping within Gaeldom's wider social framework. But this side of piping represents a cultural and functional environ far removed from that of the institutions mentioned above and, consequently, doesn't often enter the imagination of the performing and academic community. They simply find nothing to gain in that approach. The Gael, in the minds of many, is still possessed of that tribal character, or peripheral ethnicity, which is the normal pre-occupation of anthropologists but not of mainstream pipers or documentary historians; in short, the Highland pipes are no longer thought of as



a Gaelic instrument. To an extent, of course, this is true – they are not *purely* Gaelic but are imbued with a pan-Scottish identity in the eyes of the many nationalities who now play them, including the Scots themselves. But just as John Lorne Campbell once railed against historians of the Forty-Five who remained ignorant of the language and sentiments of the common Highlanders forming its bedrock (1933:xviii), cannot modern piping studies also benefit from an approach which considers the language and sentiments of those under whom Highland piping first evolved? Language, after all, is the door to culture, and in turn to the cultural compulsions which dictate tradition.

With this in view, the present work addresses the nature of piping in a Gaelic-speaking island community and how it has changed over the course of time. It is divided into two parts following a loose chronology. The first explores the contexts which underlay the South Uist tradition from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries: we locate piping's place in the community's oral traditions and social culture in chapter 2 so as to better grasp the complementarity which characterises the Gaelic arts; we then deal in chapter 3 with the conflicting elements of catholicism and protestantism against the backdrop of the turbulent seventeenth century, and how the religious context has since profoundly affected piping in Uist and throughout the Hebrides; chapter 4 traces the island's major emigrations, forced and unforced, to call attention to emigrant pipers from Uist to North America; and chapter 5 assesses what oral and documentary records can tell us of South Uist piping in relation to the patronage and martial affiliations of the old Clanranald aristocracy. I also take time in this chapter to look at tunes in the *ceòl mór* repertoire which carry traditional associations with Clanranald and/or South Uist, and to make the case for the survival of a pre-twentieth century style of *ceòl mór* performance in Uist up to the 1940s.

The second part of the thesis traces the latter-day influence of mainstream literacy and the modern competitive era on local transmission and aesthetics. Chapter 6 addresses the impact of piping societies geared toward 'improvement' on South Uist's non-literate dance-piping tradition from about 1900; chapter 7 gives biographies of various prominent piping families and individuals in South Uist, bringing to light many aspects of the culture of transmission and how it has changed over the course of the past century. In chapter 8 we deal with the history of the Highland games in South Uist and

their role as both a preserver of tradition and a leverage for mainstream influence. Chapter 9 addresses the effects of the 1914 – 1918 War on local traditional life and the piping community; as will be explained, the Second World War is given less of a priority here because the effects concerned were already long-established by then. Finally, chapter 10 analyses the nature of the aural idiom (see *ceòl cluais* under section 1.c. below) in South Uist, its survival in the era of staff notation and its implications for local aesthetics among Uist's piping community.

A priority given to the indigenous perspective throughout allows us to witness these influences through the eyes of those who felt them, and to hear the testimony of those whose opinions are a key element in understanding the nature of Gaelic music in traditional Highland society – an environ far removed from the mainstream aspects of piping and which, arguably, only South Uist and its adjacent isles are capable of reflecting even sporadically at this late date. In another generation, these memorates will be available only as archive recordings. The present work's real contribution to current scholarship, therefore, is the testimony of a Gaelic community for whom the transition from the old world to the new is still within living memory.

### 1.b. Methodology

In assessing the South Uist tradition and its influences, a balance has been sought wherever possible between the oral record and the written. This helps to create a more dynamic picture of local piping in the sense that first-hand oral accounts can add immediacy and cultural perspective to documentary evidence, while documents used to establish a basic thread of history can support the validity of the oral accounts. This approach is by no means novel – the Rev. William Matheson lectured on the legitimacy of oral tradition and its relevance to the study of Highland history in 1978<sup>2</sup> – but it does utilise to a greater extent a source of material heretofore rarely tapped in this field, i.e. the Gaelic-speakers themselves. Interviews with eight informants of South Uist origin were

conducted in all, seven of them pipers and only one not actually residing in Uist. A small amount of material dates back to a research trip in the summer of 1995, during my final year as an undergraduate at Aberdeen University, but the majority was produced during trips from 1998 to 2000 while a postgraduate in Edinburgh.

My interviews generally took the form of open-ended discussions and participant observation, assuming in most cases a teacher-pupil relationship common among pipers. This is a method not without precedent in ethnomusicological research: Timothy Rice's study of the Bulgarian *gaida* tradition, for example, hinged on his apprenticeship under a highly-regarded master player, from which vantage point he was able to assess the role of piper and singer within the settings of family, village, and wider Bulgarian society (1994). The subject of piping proved a similar advantage to my own studies as it allowed for the adoption of clearly defined roles between observer and observed. My South Uist informants would often slip into the role of tutor when discussing performance style or related local customs, reach for the practice chanter or the pipes and give examples as one would to a student; they might also have felt more at ease discussing their memories and opinions with a fellow piper rather than with one who does not share, at least to some extent, a musical tradition with which they readily identify themselves. In either case, I believe that the teacher-pupil model created a template in which the interaction, musical or otherwise, more naturally reflected the environment under scrutiny.

Although such participant observation has tended to prioritise the subjects' own point of view, that is not to say that their word is regarded as final. The trap of foregoing all analysis of ethnographic material due to the inherent 'truth' of an informant's perspective – a tenet, more or less, of the naturalist approach to ethnographic research – has been criticised elsewhere as lacking in academic rigour (Blacking, 1971; Nattiez, 1990). Neither, however, can I entirely espouse the positivist approach, which in many ways mirrors the methods of the physical sciences and demands a controlled and standardised environment for research in order to reach quantitative conclusions (for more on these opposing methods, see Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995:1-22). Aside from the fact that this approach goes against the spirit of my stated aims, it is simply unfeasible under present conditions in South Uist. It is universally acknowledged both in and beyond the island that piping there is not what it once was; reports in 1910 that every

father and two or more sons were “able to discourse on the national instrument” (see ch. 6a) paint a very different picture from what can be observed today, as popular media and entertainment continue to erode hitherto traditional pastimes. South Uist is certainly not lacking in pipers, but a sense of past glories and future misgivings pervades the community. Piping is simply no longer as universal a part of daily life as it used to be. A collective memory still exists among those of the elder generation however, and the best informants available on the local tradition, past and present – those recognised by their neighbours as skilled and experienced pipers and as sensitive observers of the cultural ebb and flow – tend to come from their ranks. So the relatively small number of informants featured in the present work reflects a consolidation, as it were, of the most qualified sources that the community has to offer. Their emphasis ensures that the present work is largely qualitative; but this being a combination of oral and written records and an analysis of contexts, the ‘truth’ contained in their views is never left unassessed.

Two among these sources have made particularly rich contributions and warrant special note here. Calum Beaton (*Calum Eairdsidh Choinnich*) of Stoneybridge gave freely of his time and was always eager to pass on the music he’d learned and the observations he’d made of life as a piper in his community. Jessie MacAulay (*Seonaid Dhòmhnaiill Chorodail*) of Smerclate, retired schoolteacher, was similarly generous and could recall vivid scenes of local piping from as early as the 1920s. Their perspectives are of immense value when assessing the changing character of musical transmission over the past century.

A word may be necessary on some aspects of text and translation. Words in Gaelic are everywhere italicised, such as *ceòl mór*, *canntaireachd* and *piobaireachd*, except where they occur as proper names in mainstream usage, such as Patrick Mór, the Campbell Canntaireachd or the Piobaireachd Society, or when quoting a written source that does not italicise them. Gaelic place-names within otherwise English text are also left in regular font and are spelled according to anglicised convention, e.g. Eochair for *Iochdar* and Ardvachar for *Aird a’ Mhachair*. Translations of informants’ material are entirely my own. As for quotes from Gaelic publications, archive transcriptions or manuscripts, translations are mine except where quotation marks encompass both the Gaelic and the English text. Notes to the text are found at the end of each chapter.



As this thesis is not primarily concerned with musicological analysis, staff notation examples will be found only in chapters 2a and 5c in order to illustrate stylistic points made in the text; tunes otherwise mentioned are widely-known among piping circles and are referenced for source. The notation itself was produced using Piobmaster 2.2 by Ceol Mor Software Ltd.

### 1.c. Guide to Musical Terms

The reader unfamiliar with piping or its Gaelic nomenclature may appreciate a brief guide to the terms used throughout this thesis. Fuller descriptions of the Highland bagpipe itself, and the various aspects of its music, will be found in Collinson, 1975; MacNeill and Richardson, 1987; Cannon, 1988; and Cheape, 1999.

- *Ceòl mór*. This translates literally as ‘big music’ and consists of a theme, called the *ùrlar* or ‘ground’, followed by variations embellished with increasingly complex gracenote patterns; the most standard in the current repertoire being a *siubhal*, or ‘travelling’ variation (so-called to reflect its rhythmically fluid character) followed by *taorluath* and *crunluath* variations (for more on these, see ch. 10c). Generally considered the classical music of the pipes due to its ceremonial and courtly associations, *ceòl mór* came to fruition in the sixteenth-century west Highlands as the preferred music of the Gaelic aristocracy until their dissolution in the aftermath of the 1745 Jacobite Rising. With its cultural *raison d’être* obsolete, this class of music fell into decay until the Highland Society of London established competitions in 1781 for the expressed purpose of preserving it from oblivion. Whether affairs then were really so dire is debatable, but such was the conventional wisdom of the time (see ch. 5). Many consider its composition to have been a lost art since approximately the mid-nineteenth century; an indication in itself of the distance which has grown between the

music's cultural origins and those who now perform it. The tunes which form the surviving repertoire fall under a range of categories – 'laments', 'salutes', 'gatherings' and 'battle-tunes', among others – which reflect the pipes' functions in Gaelic society during the turbulent sixteenth to eighteenth centuries.

- ***Ceòl beag***. Literally 'small music', the term is meant relative to *ceòl mór*. It is most often referred to as the 'light music' of the pipes and encompasses the marches, strathspeys and reels played for competition as well as less-embellished strathspeys, reels, jigs and hornpipes played for dancing. It also refers to marches played for military function. Some pipers or enthusiasts would stress that a third term, *ceòl meadhonach* or 'middle music' exists to describe slow airs and funeral dirges, but since the term is generally paid little heed and is of smaller scope than the classical music, for all practical purposes Highland piping today can be neatly divided between *ceòl mór* and *ceòl beag*.
- ***Piobaireachd***. This word simply means 'piping' in its original Gaelic usage, but in mainstream convention it has come to be regarded as synonymous with *ceòl mór*. The spelling is often anglicised as 'pibroch', and this latter term is used occasionally in the present work, usually in the context of competition records and the Gaelic 'pibroch song' tradition (see ch. 2).
- ***Ceòl cluais***. Literally translated as 'ear-music'. This term, which I have encountered in living use only among the South Uist community, refers to piping learned aurally as opposed to literately; it also carries a fundamental association with the function of dance-playing. It most often connotes the style of dance-piping which characterises the Cape Breton tradition, where literacy rarely entered the musical equation until the mainstream influences of the post- Second World War era. That the term is used in South Uist, and that such an aural idiom of transmission and performance is still within living memory there, suggests the extent to which an indigenous Hebridean musical aesthetic has survived there in the modern age of staff notation and competition. In the present work the term is

introduced in chapter 2, is mentioned occasionally in subsequent chapters and receives a fuller analysis in chapter 10.

- ***Canntaireachd***. This means ‘chanting’ and refers to the syllabic notation system used by pipers to transmit tunes vocally. It is associated primarily with *ceòl mór* and was the traditional method for all pipers until pipe music began to be written on the stave in the late eighteenth century, and literacy became increasingly prioritised through the nineteenth. Today it takes a definite back seat to staff notation and exists in a less structured and formal state than some believe it to have been in the pre-literate age. It is commonly maintained, however, that the use of *canntaireachd* in transmitting *ceòl mór* is still the most authentic means of interpreting the music, a direct (if somewhat romanticised) nod to piping’s Gaelic roots.
  
- ***Puirt-à-beul***. Meaning ‘mouth-tunes’. These are short Gaelic songs<sup>3</sup> variously timed as strathspeys, reels or jigs and meant to provide rhythm for traditional Highland dancing, such as the Scotch Reel or Cape Breton step-dancing, in lieu of instruments. Their melodies can exist also as pipe- and fiddle-tunes, and it is really just the mode of performance – i.e., the use of the voice – that distinguishes *puirt-à-beul* from traditional Cape Breton fiddling or *ceòl chuais* piping as a musical idiom; they are all of a common cultural stock.

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1. From a personal communication dated 20 January 1995.

2. Speaking on the character of historical information preserved in oral tradition, Rev. Matheson stated: “Subtract this element from the materials to be used for the writing of Highland history, and you take away much of its human interest. The question now arises whether this is what the serious historian must do. Many who regard themselves as serious historians would say that it is. They would contrast this kind of material, the credibility of which they would rate very low, with contemporary evidence and the confidence that can be placed in it. But it is not as simple as that. Historical traditions orally preserved are far from being free from error, but the contemporary document also can err ... What we are offered, in fact, is not certainty from one kind of source and uncertainty from the other, but varying degrees of probability. Therefore I would hold that we cannot exclude historical traditions orally

preserved from the material to be used for the study of history. But, naturally, techniques appropriate to the nature of such traditions must be used, in the same way that the study of MS sources has its own appropriate techniques.” (Acc 9711, box 13/13: pp. 9-11) Of course, the present work is not concerned purely with history, but the principle of relevance and the agenda of the internal Gaelic point of view is the same.

3. Dr. John Shaw of the School of Scottish Studies has suggested in conversation that *puirt-à-beul* may not really be classified as ‘songs’ under the traditional Gaelic system; that a ‘song’, in Gaelic culture, is meant primarily to tell a story (cf. chapter 2a) whereas *puirt-à-beul* are sung to provide music for step-dancing and thus any narrative component is minimal. For brevity’s sake, however, I have opted for the English-speaker’s point of view of a ‘song’ in the description above.



**PART ONE**  
**CONTEXT AND INFLUENCE**

## CHAPTER TWO

### *“Thòisich an gille air seinn na pìobadh”:*

### **Piping and the Oral/Aural Tradition in South Uist**

The late Sorley MacLean once referred to words and music in traditional Gaelic culture as products of a “simultaneous creation”<sup>1</sup>; by which he meant that melodic, stylistic and lyrical overlapping can and does occur between these two sides of the Gaelic oral coin. Each supports and complements the other within an overall framework wherein music and language share the same space; as a result, interdependent links are formed between songs, poetry, storytelling, and instrumental music. A Gaelic poem, for instance, up until approximately the Second World War and the advent of the post-modern literary age, was rarely performed without being sung to an accompanying air. Likewise, as will be seen below, many traditional Gaelic songs reflect, in their melodies, particular grounds or variations of *ceòl mór*.

This overlapping calls to mind an “interrelationship of the arts”, as Merriam put it, that “refers to the point of view that the arts stem from the same sources; that all the arts are really just one Art differently expressed because the materials are different” (1964:273).<sup>2</sup> This holistic image has its analogue within piping: compare it with Gibson’s remark on Joseph MacDonald’s *Compleat Theory of the Scots Highland Bagpipe* (c. 1760) –

“The manuscript dealt primarily with *ceòl mór* for the simple reason that, according to MacDonald, it provided the most comprehensive and rational overview of Highland piping. All the fingerings for dance music fell automatically into the wider study, the *ceòl beag* grace-note clusters being but fractional parts of, if not identical to, the longer *ceòl mór* ones. Obviously, all Highland pipers saw both forms as part of a larger whole.” (1998:110)

– and one can imagine the affinity which connects the ‘different materials’ of the Gaelic musical ‘Art’.

For centuries, scholars have noted the importance of this complementarity of folk arts to traditional Gaelic culture generally, and to South Uist particularly. Martin Martin, in his *Description of the Western Isles of Scotland* (c. 1695), described the innate musicality of the people of Skye in terms which would have applied to many a community in the *Gàidhealtachd* at the time:

“They have a great genius for music and mechanics. I have observed several of their children that before they could speak were capable to distinguish and make choice of one tune before another on the violin; for they appeared always uneasy until the tune which they fancied best was played, and then they expressed their satisfaction by the motion of their head and hands...

“Several of both sexes have a quick vein of poesy, and in their language (which is very emphatic) they compose rhyme and verse, both which powerfully affect the fancy...

“They have generally very retentive memories...” (1994:240-1)

He went on to set South Uist quite apart in its conservation of language, and all that that implies as regards traditional culture:

“The natives speak the Irish tongue more perfectly here than in most other islands; partly because of the remoteness and the small number of those that speak English, and partly because some of them are scholars, and versed in the Irish language.” (1994:154)

“Scholars versed [i.e. literate] in the Irish language” was a reference to two dynastic families under Clanranald patronage who kept and composed Gaelic documents relevant to their professions – the Beatons, who were learned physicians<sup>3</sup>, and the MacMhuirichs, who, as bards and *seanchaidhean* (a combination of genealogist and historian) to Clanranald, were active in Uist from the sixteenth century to the mid-eighteenth.<sup>4</sup> Literacy was an indication of these families’ élite professional and social status. Such was the MacMhuirichs’ status in South Uist, in fact, that their hereditary lands in Stilligarry and Drimsdale were generally regarded as lawful sanctuary; at least, so we are led to believe by the storytellers (see MacLellan, 1961:83).

In 1860, South Uist's value to the study of traditional Gaelic culture was again referred to when folklorist John Francis Campbell, in compiling his *Popular Tales of the West Highlands*, discussed Ossianic tales. "This is now the rarest of any [class of tale]," he wrote, "and is commonest, so far as I know, in Barra and South Uist" (1994, i:17). Alexander Carmichael was in Uist around the same time in pursuit of Gaelic oral literature which had hitherto decayed in many other areas; literature which he claimed was previously "widely diffused, greatly abundant, and excellent in quality – in the opinion of scholars, unsurpassed by anything similar in the ancient classics of Greece and Rome" (1928, i:xxii). He mentions in particular the great fund of lore provided by one Hector MacIsaac and his wife:

"In September 1871, Iain F. (John Francis) Campbell and I went to see them ... The wife knew many secular runes, sacred hymns, and fairy songs; while the husband had numerous heroic tales, poems, and ballads ... The stories [he] went over during our visits to him would have filled several volumes. Mr. Campbell now and then put a leading question which brought out the storyteller's marvellous memory and extensive knowledge of folklore." (1928, i:xxiv)

The hymns, incantations and proverbs he collected in Uist and Benbecula during the 1860s and 70s would form the bulk of his influential six-volume *Carmina Gadelica* (1928 – 1971).

South Uist's remoteness and conservation of tradition continued to attract folklorists well into the twentieth century. The work of Margaret Fay Shaw and her late husband John Lorne Campbell has proved most influential; Campbell in particular is noted for pioneering field recording techniques while collecting there, and in 1964 he commented on the area's continuing value in his introduction to Frederick Rea's *A School in South Uist: Reminiscences of a Hebridean Schoolmaster, 1890 – 1913*:

"Impoverished though many of the people then were, their lives contained many elements of interest to the folklorist and the general historian: in many ways Uist was still a microcosm of the Highlands of the eighteenth century: even today it preserves a greater amount of Gaelic tradition than any other part of Scotland." (1964:xiii)

This chapter aims to illustrate how pipe music was located, until recent times, within Uist's oral traditions of singing and storytelling. In section 2a I discuss 'pibroch songs' and the affinity between pipe music and language as exemplified by interviews with local informants; section 2b looks at stories involving pipers both earthly and supernatural, focusing primarily on the great fund of local *Piobairean Smearclait* (Pipers of Smerclate) tales; and in section 2c I discuss the *céilidh*, "Gaeldom's chief cultural institution over recent centuries" (Shaw, 1992/3:38), which formed the primary social context to these oral traditions in South Uist before warfare (see ch. 9) and modern popular entertainment eroded its cultural importance to the community.

## 2.a. Between Words and Music

The interrelationship between words and music in Gaelic tradition is a result of their serving very much the same function; to the point that they are at times entirely interchangeable. For example, eighteenth-century writers such as Knox and Burt observed singers as well as pipers providing rhythm for group labour on the western coast and the Isle of Skye (see ch. 5d), and Alexander Campbell, in 1815, was bemused to discover *port-à-beul* singers in North Uist providing the precise rhythmic requirements for dancing that he had previously associated only with instrumentalists:

"While at Lochmaddie I writ down four original airs with part of the words from the mouth of Mrs. Campbell, daughter of Capt. Cameron. While here, I witnessed for the first time, persons singing at the same time they dance: and this is called dancing to port-na-beul, being a succedaneous contrivance to supply the want of a musical instrument. This effect is droll enough; and gives an idea of what one might conceive to be customary among tribes but little removed from a state of Nature. What renders the illusion more probably is the modem (sic) which these merry Islanders perform the double exercise of singing and dancing: – thus the men and women sing a bar of the tune alternately; by which they preserve the accent and *rhythms* (sic) quite accurately – the effect is animating: and having words correspondent to the characters of the measure – there seems to be a 3-fold species of gratification arising from the union of

song and dance – rude, it is confessed – but such as pleases the vulgar; and not displeasing to one who feels disposed to join in rustic pleasures, or innocent amusement.” (1815:35-6)

Vowel lengths and other elements of the Gaelic language corresponded with the dance-step rhythms (or in the case of group labour, with the repetitive motions of tasks such as waulking cloth or rowing) in the same way as a piper or a fiddler would articulate the rhythms of a strathspey or reel.<sup>5</sup> This scene mirrors the reminiscences of informant Jessie MacAulay of Smerclate, South Uist on dancing to *puirt-à-beul* and the nature of aural transmission in the *céilidhs* of her youth:

JM: *Bhiodh iad a' dannsa leis a' phìob ... is puirt-à-beul nuair nach biodh pìob aca; bha iad a' dèanamh dannsa leis an òran ... Gu leòr dhen a' cheòl cluais, 's e òrain a bh' ann originally, fhios agaibh. Cluinneadh tu strathspey no reel, bha iadsan 'nan ceòl cluais, a chionn 's e òrain a bh' ann. Bhiodh iad a' dannsa leis a sin, nuair nach robh pìob aca no sian, bhiodh iad a' dannsa leis na h-òrain. Mouth-tunes, puirt-à-beul. (SA 1998.71)*

JM: They would dance to the pipes ... and to mouth-music when they didn't have pipes; they would dance to the song ... Much of the ear-music was songs originally, you know. You would hear a strathspey or a reel, they were ear-music, because they were songs. They would dance to them, when they hadn't the pipes or anything, they would dance to the songs. Mouth-tunes, *puirt-à-beul*.

MacAulay's testimony, and the examples collected from local singers like Alasdair Boyd (who was also a piper) and Kate MacDonald,<sup>6</sup> put the *port-à-beul* tradition's survival in South Uist well into the twentieth century. Further discussion of the relationship between traditional dance and the aural transmission of piping in South Uist will be found in chapter 10.

Mention was made earlier of Gaelic songs which correspond melodically to pieces in the *ceòl mór* repertoire. These are by custom called 'pibroch songs'<sup>7</sup> and are another example of the verbal/melodic (or vocal/instrumental) affinity in Gaelic music. Sometimes *ceòl mór*'s Gaelic origins are fossilised in the English-language rhetoric of mainstream piping circles; the phrase 'get the song out of the tune', for example, is a by-



now clichéd piece of advice from master to pupil which Allan MacDonald believes to be an anachronism from the days when *ceòl mór* was taught solely through *canntaireachd*, “when the song and the pibroch idiom were closer” (1995:39-40), and so is meant to help one attain an ‘authentic’ interpretation of the tune despite having learned it from staff notation. Jessie MacAulay recalled that the well-known South Uist piper Angus Campbell of Frobost, a local authority on *ceòl mór*, used to give this advice in his playing and teaching days; no doubt he’d been told the same thing by his own teacher, John MacDonald of Inverness:

JM: *Fhios agad, sin agad Aonghus Caimbeul à seo, chanadh e daonnan*, “First learn the song, then you can start the pibroch!” *‘S ann mar sin a bha daoine a’ cluichd aig an àm sin*. Like a traditional music. (SA 1998.68)

JM: You know, you have Angus Campbell from here, he would always say, “First learn the song, then you can start the pibroch!”. That’s how people played at that time. Like a traditional music.

Two pibroch songs commonly known throughout the west Highlands, *Cholla Mo Rùn* (Colla, My Beloved) and *Dà Làimh ‘sa Phìob* (Two Hands on the Pipes) were recorded by Margaret Fay Shaw from South Uist informants in 1948.<sup>8</sup> The story behind *Cholla* is well-known: Colla Ciotach, a seventeenth-century MacDonald chieftain, led an expedition to capture Castle Dunniveg (the castle varies with the many different versions of the story) which was being held by a garrison of Campbells. The advance party was captured, but the piper was permitted by the garrison’s commander to play a tune before being hanged. Illustrating the verbal/melodic affinity in Gaelic tradition, it is said that the very notes of the tune he played formed the words of a warning to Colla, which allowed the rest of the MacDonalds to escape. Collector Donald John MacDonald of Pininerine, a valued tradition-bearer in his own right, recorded different lyrics to *Cholla* than those found in Shaw’s publication from his uncle Neil MacDonald in 1953:

“*A Cholla, cuir umad*

Colla, push away

<i>Bi ullamh gu falbh</i>	Be ready to flee
<i>A Cholla, cuir umad</i>	Colla, push away
<i>Bi ullamh gu falbh</i>	Be ready to flee
<i>O fàg Dùn Naomhaig</i>	Oh leave Dunniveg
<i>Ràmh is taoman</i>	With oar and baler
<i>Fàg Dùn Naomhaig</i>	Leave Dunniveg
<i>Ràmh is taoman</i>	With oar and baler
<i>A Cholla nan cleas (x 3)</i>	Colla of the war-feats (x 3)
<i>Gabh an taobh deas</i>	Take the south side
<i>Tha mise làimh [sic].</i>	I'm in their hands.
<i>A Cholla na rùin [sic] (x 3)</i>	Colla of the loved ones (x 3)
<i>Seachainn na caoil</i>	Avoid the strait
<i>Tha mise làimh.</i>	I'm in their hands.
<i>A bhrathair ghaolaich ghabh iad mi (x 3)</i>	Loving brother, they caught me (x 3)
<i>Chan ann nam aonar ghabh iad mi.</i>	I'm not alone, they caught me.
<i>A bhrathair ghaolaich ghabh iad mi (x 3)</i>	Loving brother, they caught me (x 3)
<i>Am beul an aonaich ghabh iad mi.</i> <sup>9</sup>	In the lee of the hill, they caught me.

A lesser-known song is *Fhir a' Chinn Duibh*, or The Black-haired Lad, which was recorded for the School of Scottish Studies by the aforementioned piper Alasdair Boyd. Boyd was born in Eochar, South Uist in 1889 and piped during the First World War with the 5<sup>th</sup> Cameron Highlanders (see ch. 9). He had a tremendous knowledge of local songs and folklore, as well as having been an excellent player of dance and military tunes. Between 1953 and his death in 1970 he recorded over seventy songs for the School's sound archives.<sup>10</sup>



Figure 1. *Fhir a' Chinn Duibh* (sung by Alasdair Boyd, SA 1970/7/1)



The song tells of the lamentations of Patrick Mór MacCrimmon, piper to MacLeod of Dunvegan in the seventeenth century, who is said to have lost seven of his eight sons to fever in a single year; one in particular supposedly loved more dearly than the rest:

<i>Fhir a' chinn duibh, thug mi gaol dhuit</i>	Lad of the black hair, I gave you love
<i>Fhir a' chinn duibh, thug mi gràdh dhuit</i>	Lad of the black hair, I held you dear
<i>Thug mi gaol, is thug mi gràdh dhuit</i>	I loved you, I adored you
<i>Thug mi gaol nach tug mi 'chàch dhuit</i>	I gave you love that I didn't give to the rest
<i>Fhir a' chinn duibh, thug mi gràdh dhuit.</i>	Lad of the black hair, I adored you.

As researchers Morag MacLeod and Peter Cooke, who recorded Boyd, point out in the School's archive journal *Tocher* (vol. I, nos. 1-8, 1971-72 p. 86), *Fhir a' Chinn Duibh* corresponds melodically to Variation 2 of the pibroch *Cumha na Cloinne*, or The Lament for the Children.<sup>11</sup> The tune, like the song, is attributed to Patrick Mór over the death of his sons, which in itself represents the complementarity which characterises the Gaelic arts. Variation 2 is usually played today as it was notated by Archibald Campbell, a founder of the Piobaireachd Society (see ch. 6), in his *Kilberry Book of Ceòl Mór* (1948:50):

Figure 2. The Lament for the Children (Line 1, 2<sup>nd</sup> Variation)



Mr. Boyd claimed to have learned the “pibroch words and tunes” as childhood lullabies from his mother and his uncle’s wife Annie MacDonald who, significantly, was known as *Anna nighean a’ Phìobaire* (Ann daughter of the Piper) and who would often sing pibroch songs while sewing. After singing the song for MacLeod and Cooke, he sang the *canntaireachd* vocables of the same melody; in light of this, it may surprise some to note that he never played much *ceòl mòr* himself.

The overlapping of speech and song can not only present itself in a musical performance, but can be implied in the everyday language of its supporting community. Lambert pointed out the importance placed on vowel length in the storytelling tradition of Donegal, noting that “with this emphasis on saying the story properly, the northern request for a song is *Abair amhran*. This is translated in English as ‘say a song’...”.<sup>12</sup> The phenomenon has parallels among the Gaelic-speaking pipers of South Uist, as Neil MacDonald of Garryhellie demonstrated in our discussions in 1998:

JD: *Carson a tha difir ann am pìobair le Gàidhlig is pìobair gun Ghàidhlig idir? A bheil difir sam bith ann?*

NM: *Chan eil sian a dh’fhios ‘am ach chanainn gun toir iad barrachd blas bhon a’ phìobaireachd. Chan eil mi a’ cantail gu bheil dona idir duine sam bith nach **cluichd a’ Ghàidhlig** [sic], ach ‘s ann ‘ga h-ionnsachadh – tha thusa ag ionnsachadh pìobaireachd, tha mi smaointinn ma tha Gàidhlig a’ tighinn a-staigh ... car math airson ... thu ‘ga seinn ann an òran Gàidhlig. Agus tha thu ‘ga canntaireachd, is tha a’ channtaireachd na’s fhas’ a dhèanamh anns a’ Ghàidhlig ... Mar a tha mi fhìn a’ dèanamh a-mach, gu bheil cuideachadh mòr ann a bhith bruidhinn Gàidhlig leis a’ phìob. (SA 1998.69)*

JD: Why is there a difference between a piper who speaks Gaelic and a piper who doesn't? Is there any difference?

NM: I haven't a clue, but I would say that they take more flavour from the piping. I'm not saying that anyone who doesn't **play Gaelic** is necessarily bad, but it's in the learning of it – you're learning piping, I think it is good if Gaelic is involved because you are singing it in the manner of a Gaelic song. And you are chanting it, and the *canntaireachd* is easier to do in Gaelic ... As I myself see it, it's a big help to be **speaking Gaelic with the pipes**.

This point of view that the Gaelic language is a fundamental property of *canntaireachd* is reinforced by MacDonald's sister and fellow piper, Rona Lightfoot:

RL: *Fhios agad mar a' channtaireachd a th' ann an leabhar a' Phiobaireachd Society? ... Cha dèan mise ceann no casan dheth ... Cha ruig mi leas siud. Cumaidh mi canntaireachd agam fhéin. Thuigeadh Aonghus e, thuigeadh mo bhràthair e, thuigeadh a h-uile duine ann an Uibhist e. Thuigeadh a h-uile duine am Barraigh no àite sam bith, ma tha Gàidhlig aca. Tha e mar gun dèanadh tu facal dha note. (SC 2001.024)*

RL: You know how the *canntaireachd* is in the Piobaireachd Society books? ... I can't make head nor tail of it ... I have no need of it. I keep my own *canntaireachd*. [My teacher] Angus would understand it, my brother would understand it, everyone in Uist would understand it. Everyone in Barra or anywhere else would understand it, so long as they speak Gaelic. It's as if you make a word of the note.

## 2.b. Piobairean Smearclait and Other Tales

In 1955, Donald John MacDonald recorded a story from his neighbour, Mary Ann MacInnes of Stoneybridge. It concerned a baby in a cradle who would cry all day and all night and would appear not to grow or be satiated no matter how much his mother gave him to eat. A tailor who was busy making clothes in the house suspected that the child was a changeling – a mischievous, shape-shifting fairy – and asked the

mother to go out harvesting for the day so that he could deal with the problem alone. While she was away, he took a menacing tone to the noisy child in the cradle and threatened to put a pair of scissors in the little one's throat if he continued to cry. This promptly shut him up, but not for long:

*“Bha an tàillear ag obair air fuaigheal agus e-fhéin a’ gabhail port, agus ann am meadhon gnothaich, có a thogadh a ghuth ach am fear a bh’ anns a’ chreathail. Thug an tàillear leum a-nùll ga dh’ ionnsaigh.*

*‘Feuch a-nis dhuinn pàirt dhe d’ cheòl sìthe fhéin,’ ars’ esan, ‘air neo bidh an siosar ud anns a’ mhionach agad.’*

*Leis an eagal a ghabh am fear eile roimh ’n tàillear, agus fios aige gum marbhadh an tàillear e, thog e piob a bh’ aige anns a’ chreathail, agus thòisich e air chuichd. Cha robh duine timcheall nach cuala an ceòl a b’ àille ‘s bu bhinne a chuala chuas riamh; agus cha robh fios aca bho ’n t-saoghal có as a bha e tighinn neo có a bha ga chluichd.”*

The tailor was busily sewing and was humming a tune to himself when, all of a sudden, who should raise his voice but the one in the cradle. The tailor leaped over toward him.

“Try part of your fairy music for us now,” he said, “or these scissors will be in your throat.”

With the fear he had of the tailor, and knowing that the tailor would kill him, he took a bagpipe he had in the cradle and began to play. There wasn't anyone around who didn't hear the sweetest and most wonderful music that ever reached an ear, and they had no idea where in the world it was coming from or who was playing it.

When the mother returned home that evening, the tailor told her what had happened and advised her to take the changeling to the loch and fling him in. This she did, and when the child hit the water he became a gray-haired old man who swam to the far end and slinked away; she returned to find her own baby safe in the cradle.<sup>13</sup>

Variants of this ‘Tailor and the Changeling’ story have been collected from as far afield from Uist as Kintalen and Kirkcudbright,<sup>14</sup> and as it suggests, the predominating theme that characterises Gaelic piping tales is an intervention into human affairs by fairies, or *na sìthichean*. This reflects an association between music and the

otherworldly realm of magic in Gaelic folklore. We find it in the tale surrounding *Dà Làimh 'sa Phìob* mentioned above, which, like *Uamh an Òir* ('the Cave of Gold'), sees a piper descend into a cavern to find treasure and is never heard from again, though to this day one hears him playing his music from underground; we find it in the traditional belief that the *caoineadh* (funerary chanting), or its instrumental equivalent on the pipes, originated from the chirping of birds;<sup>15</sup> and we find it in the many tales in which pipe music is a gift bestowed to mortals by the fairies in subterranean hills. The famed MacCrimmon genius, for example, is said to have been given to their progenitor by a fairy as a gift in the form of a magic reed or chanter that carried with it *Buaidh na Piobaireachd*, or the Gift of Piping.<sup>16</sup>

South Uist too has its indigenous body of tales surrounding a family whose pipe music was bestowed to them by the fairies. These were the Pipers of Smerclate, or *Piobairean Smearclait*, to whom most sources attribute the name MacIntyre. The name is significant, for it ties the *Smearclait* story to a family of MacIntyres who are known to have served as hereditary pipers to Clanranald until the beginning of the nineteenth century (see ch. 5a and b). The name MacIntyre was not attributed universally: Roderick Bowie (SA 1953/36/A1) called them MacRaes – "*Clann 'ic Rath Smearclait, daoine eireachdail foghainnteach sgairteil*" ("the MacRaes of Smerclate, a beautiful, enduring, vigorous people") and Duncan MacDonald of Pininerine (SA 1953/274/B9) contended that a family of Johnstones in Loch Carnan were descended from that ilk;<sup>17</sup> but these instances contrast with most accounts.

Jessie MacAulay, who is herself from Smerclate and who belongs to a MacIntyre piping family (see ch. 7), claimed that the folk of that township had their own name for the legendary pipers – *Piobairean a' Chlaiginn*, or the Pipers of the Skull<sup>18</sup> – which is derived from the name of the hill upon which, according to Smerclate tradition, they lived; and that the pipers themselves may have been a family of MacNeils from Barra:

JM: *Bha an t-ainm aca a' dol fada is farsaing, fhios agaibh. Tha feadhainn ag ràdh gur e MacNeils a bh' unnta, gur ann à Barraigh a thàinig iad ... 's gur iad a bha 'Piobairean a' Chlaiginn'. Chan eil fhios 'am, 's e rud cho sean, chan eil sian a dh' fhios againn an fhirinn có bh' ann. 'S e 'an Claigeann' cnoc mór far a robh na piobairean sin a' fuireachd, far a robh an*



*taigh aca – ‘Claigeann’, a skull, a chanadh iad ris. ‘Piobairean a’ Chlaiginn’ a chanadh iad riubha. Chan eil ‘Piobairean Smerclait’ ceart idir; ‘s e ‘Piobairean a’ Chlaiginn’ ann an Smerclait!*

JD: *Am b’ iad MacIntyres?*

JM: *Chan eil fhios ‘am. (SA 1998.68)*

JM: Their name went far and wide, you know. There are those who say that they were MacNeils, who came from Barra, and that they were the ‘Pipers of the Skull’. I don’t know, it’s such an old thing, we have no idea who they really were. The ‘Skull’ is a big hill where those pipers stayed, where their house was – ‘*Claigeann*’, a skull, is what they would call it. ‘The Pipers of the Skull’ is what they’d call them. ‘The Pipers of Smerclate’ isn’t right at all; it was ‘the Pipers of the Skull’ in Smerclate!

JD: Were they MacIntyres?

JM: I don’t know.

The legend’s frequent association with Clanranald patronage suggests that it was indeed based on the MacIntyre pipers of the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries.<sup>19</sup> This was further suggested when a much-valued informant, piper Calum Beaton of Stoneybridge, declared of the legendary Smerclate family: “*Bha am foghlum os cionn Mhic Cruimein*” (“Their education, or musical instruction, was over and above that of the MacCrimmons”); Somerled MacMillan (1968:xvii) stated the same phrase concerning the poet Donald Ruadh MacIntyre’s paternal forebears who, in the opinion of Donald Ruadh, came to Uist from Skye to become archers to Clanranald but who also, according to MacMillan, were excellent pipers.<sup>20</sup>

Through the natural course of oral narrative, about as many versions of their story are on record as there have been tellers of the tale.<sup>21</sup> The most commonly depicted setting is that at some point in the distant past, a father and his three or four sons lived in Smerclate and all were excellent pipers except the youngest boy, who was regarded as something of a simpleton and who, instead of piping, spent his time tending cattle. E.C. Carmichael (1905:82-84) maintained that the father held “the farm of Smerclaid” as Clanranald’s personal musician, but did not name her sources. The late Archie MacDonald of Garryhellie (*Eairdsidh Raghnaill*), a prominent local piper in his day,

told the story to collector Calum Maclean in 1953 and, unlike Beaton, began by conceding that the MacCrimmons were the most famous of all pipers at the time:

*“Tha naigheachd ri innse air pìobairean Uibhist a’ Chinn a Deas. Tha Uibhist a’ Chinn a Deas, tha e ainmeil airson pìobairean o chionn ùine mhór. Ach chan eil mi smaoineachadh a’s an t-seann aimsir nach robh an t-Eilean Sgitheanach le Clann ‘ac Cruimein na b’ ainmeile na pìobairean eile bha air an t-saoghal aig an àm. Agus thachair seo an naigheachd a tha mi dol a dh’ innis.*

*O chionn ciad no dhà bliadhna bha pìobairean ann an Uibhist a’ Chinn a Deas ris an canadh iad Pìobairean Smerclait. Bha an t-athair ‘s a cheathrar mhac bha iad math air fad go pìobaireachd. Ach bha aon fhear dhe ‘n cheathrair nach robh cho glic ri càch – cha robh ann ach leth-amadan, agus gu dé bha à ach a’ buachailleachd cruidh an latha bh’ ann a sheo.”* (SA 1953/36/B1)

There’s an account to tell about the pipers of Uist’s south end. The south end of Uist has been famous for its pipers for a long time. But I don’t think in the old days that the MacCrimmons of the Isle of Skye were not more famous than other pipers of the world at the time. And this is how the story goes.

One or two hundred years ago there were pipers in the Uist’s south end whom they called the Pipers of Smerclate. The father and his four sons were all good at piping. But there was one of the four who wasn’t as clever as the others – he was nothing but a half-wit, and what was he doing but herding cattle on this particular day.

Another tradition-bearer, John Campbell, similarly described the youngest boy as “*an gille luideach*” (SA 1960/8/9) or “the bumpkin”. According to Duncan MacDonald, the boy’s father evidently thought so little of him that he wasn’t allowed to go near a chanter, and the ‘Paisley Bard’ Donald MacIntyre’s rendering of the scene agrees:

*“Well a-nis mar a chuala mise, tha mi tuigsinn, bha ‘ad uile gu léir ‘nam pìobairean matha, Pìobairean Smerclait. Thàinig an gille bha seo dhachaidh an oidhch’ ud, gille beag, fear a b’ òige dhe ‘n chloinn. Agus cha robh e ‘na pìobaire ro mhath, cha robh mòran aig athair ma dheoghainn, cha robh e saòilsinn sian ma dheoghainn idir.”* (SA 1952/146.A/2)

Well now as I heard it and understand it, they were all good pipers, the Pipers of Smerclate. This boy came home that night, the little boy, the youngest of the children. And he wasn't too good a piper, his father didn't have much regard for him, he didn't think anything of him at all.

While out tending cattle, or walking along the machair, or in some like circumstance, the boy receives the gift of piping from a fairy. This can take several forms: in E.C. Carmichael's account, the boy happens to be romantically involved with a fairy woman and she gives him a magic reed to put in his father's pipes; according to Duncan MacDonald, he encounters a fairy woman with light-coloured clothing and a white chanter – "*aodach liath oirre agus feadan gheal aice*" – who gives him not only the chanter but magic tunes to play on it. In most cases, however, the boy finds a *sithean*, or fairy hill, with an open door in its lee and unearthly music pouring through; attracted by the sounds, and investigating, he is confronted by one or more gray-haired old men.

The boy's encounter with the fairy in the hill is a key point in the tale, for here the mythological archetypes converge to symbolise the importance of orality in Gaelic tradition. The fairy must grant the boy a wish before he quits the hill, and of course that wish is to become a good piper. To receive the gift of music, many variants of the tale maintain that the boy must lay his fingers on the fingers of the fairy, and the boy's tongue must touch the fairy's tongue. Calum Beaton described the encounter along similar lines in 1995: the gray-haired man instructed the boy to put his tongue in the former's mouth and swish it around three times clockwise, or *deiseal*, in order to receive the musical gift.<sup>22</sup> "The boy," said Beaton with a smile, "was understandably hesitant to do this." Donald MacIntyre named the *sithean* specifically and portrayed the ritual as involving not fingers, but feet:

*"Mar a chuala mise tha sithean a-muigh ann am mòinteach Smearclait ris an can 'ad Sithean Mór a' Chreamailein ... Chaidh an gille beag a-mach an oidhche bh' ann a sheo 's chaidh e chun an t-sithein 's chual' e an ceòl a b' àille a's an t-sithean, chual' e ceòl uamhasach fhéin breagha tighinn a-mach as an t-sithean. Chunnaic e sin seann bhodach, o seann bhodach, sean, sean.*



*Dh' fhoighneachd am bodach dheth, 'Dé bha thu 'g iarraidh?'*

*'Ah, Dhia Mhór,' ars [esan] ris, 'chan eil mis' ag iarraidh sìan,' ars esan, 'ach a bhith 'g éisdeachd ris a' cheòl.'*

*'Ciamar a chòrdadh e riut,' ars am bodach, 'nan dèanadh tu fhéin ceòl cho breagha ri sin?'*

*'Ah uill,' ars an gille, 'nach mis' a dhèanadh sin.'*

*'Well ma tà,' ars am bodach, 'cuir,' ars esan, 'snàthad mhór ann am beul an dorais ud thall,' ars esan, 'snàthad.' Chuir a-nis an gille snàthad no bior cruaidh air choireiginn.*

*'Trohad,' ars esan, 'trohad a-nise,' ars am bodach, 'agus cuir do chas,' ars esan, 'air muin mo choise-sa agus cuir do theanga 'nam bheul. Cuir do chas air muin mo choise,' ars esan, 'agus cuir do theanga 'nam bheul. Chan eil an diabhal sìan a chluinneas tu a-staigh ann a shin nach dèan thu fhéin a cheart cho math ris.'*

*Rinn an gille sin. Sin ag' a-nis fear a' Phìobairean Smearclait a chuala mise ... Ma bha e breugach a' tighinn ugam-sa tha e 'cheart cho breugach a' falbh bhuan ach siod mar a chuala mis' e.' (op. cit.)*

As I heard it there is a fairy hill out on the Smerclate moorland that they call the Big Fairy Hill of the Creamailein ... the little boy went out this night and he went to the hill and he heard the most beautiful music in the hill, the most lovely music coming out of it. He saw there an old man, oh an old, old man.

The old man asked him, "What do you want?"

"Ah, goodness," he said to him, "I don't want a thing except to be listening to the music."

"How would you like it," said the old man, "if you yourself could make music as sweet as that?"

"Ah well," said the boy, "if only I could."

"Well then," said the old man, "prop open the door there with a big needle," he said, "a needle." Now the boy put a needle or hard point of something there. "Come here," he said, "come here now," said the old man, "and put your feet on my feet and your tongue in my mouth. Put your feet on my feet," he said, "and your tongue in my mouth. There's nothing you'll hear inside there that you yourself won't make just as good."

The boy did that. There you have now one of the Pipers of Smerclate that I heard about ... If it was a lie coming to me, then it's just as much a lie going from me, but that's how I heard it.

The details of the encounter vary slightly with each teller, as is natural in oral narrative, but the symbolism remains constant.<sup>23</sup> The *gille luideach*, gifted now with music from the ‘otherworld’ and able, as in the case of MacCrimmon lore, to command the emotions of others with his playing,<sup>24</sup> returns home. Fr. Allan McDonald of Eriskay, a pioneer in the collection of folklore in South Uist, noted a variant in which the boy, a Macintyre, returns home at night while his brothers are asleep, takes one brother’s set of pipes to the barn and begins to play; woken by such ethereal tones, the brother exclaims “*S e glaoth amhaich mo phiob fhéin a th’ ann!*” (“That’s the throat’s cry of my own pipes!”) and the boy’s supernatural prowess is revealed.<sup>25</sup>

In most other cases, the homecoming is the scene for what appears to be, if the legend is indeed based on the MacIntyres, a grass roots comparison between the pipers of Clanranald and the pipers of MacLeod. Most variants of the tale describe a party of MacCrimmons travelling to South Uist to test the MacIntyres’ skill, so as to see for themselves if the reputation that Clanranald’s Smerclate pipers enjoy is justified. They are usually at the boy’s house being entertained by his father when he arrives home.<sup>26</sup> The brothers are out, in many cases kelping on the shore – a detail that possibly dates the tale, or those versions of it, to the late 18<sup>th</sup> or early 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>27</sup> – and the boy offers to play for the esteemed guests until the brothers return, a suggestion at which the father scoffs. However, he has his way and everyone is astounded by his playing. Roderick Bowie illustrated the affinity between words and instrumental music in Gaelic tradition by singing words that were heard in the boy’s tune, words that are these days sung as a milking song:

*“Ach co-dhiùbh n’ air a thòisich an gille air seinn<sup>28</sup> na piobadh – sin ‘s gu do dh’ iarr iad air tòiseachadh ‘s e am port a chuir e air a’ phiob:*

*‘Till an crodh, far an crodh*

*Till an crodh Dhòmhnail*

*Till an crodh, far an crodh*

*Till an crodh Dhòmhnail*

*‘S gheibh thu bean bhòidheach*

*Till an crodh, far an crodh*

*Till an crodh Dhòmhnail*

*'S gheibh thu bean ghaolach.'*

*Bha trì no ceithir a thionndaidhean air ... Cha chual' iad fhéin a leithid a' cheòl riamh."* (op. cit.)

But anyway when the boy began to play the pipes – as they'd asked him to begin, this is the tune he put on the pipes:

“Bring in the cattle, look after the cattle  
Bring them in Donald  
Bring in the cattle, look after the cattle  
Bring them in Donald  
And you'll get a lovely wife  
Bring in the cattle, look after the cattle  
Bring them in Donald  
And you'll get a loving wife.”

There were three or four turns to it ... They'd never heard the likes of such music before.

The tale comes to an end with the MacCrimmon pipers mortified by such skill and what it implies if the boy is indeed the worst of the lot; they hurriedly take their leave of the Smerclate pipers' home before the latter have a chance to ask them to play, since it would have been rude to refuse. According to Archie MacDonald's rendering they lost no time:

*“ 'A bheil thu ràdha,' ors fear dhiubh ris a' bhodach, 'gur e seo am pìobaire as miosa dhe na gillean agad?'*

*'O chan eil a-seo,' ors am bodach, 'ach leth-amadan. Tha na pìobairean cearta, tha iad 'sa chladach. Cluinnidh sibh pìobaireachd n' air a thig iad.'*

*'O ma tha,' ors pìobairean Dhun Bheagain, 'cha bhi sinne na's fhaide a-seo. Latha math leibh.' Is cha do dh' fhuirich iad gu d' thàinig na pìobairean cearta; thug iad an casan leotha ... Cha robh gin aca a thigeadh suas ris an amadan."* (op. cit.)

“Are you telling me,” said one of them to the father, “that this is the worst piper among your sons?”

“Oh this is nothing,” said the father, “but a half-wit. The true pipers are on the shore. You’ll hear real piping when they come back.”

“Oh well then,” said the pipers of Dunvegan, “we’ll stay no longer. Good day to you.” And they didn’t stick around until the true pipers returned; they quickly made tracks ... They had nothing that would match the bumpkin.

From the above broad look at the place of piping in South Uist’s folktales, the student of Gaelic fairy lore will have immediately recognised the constituent motifs as quite common in wider Highland tradition; E.C. Carmichael described the same basic framework in her treatment of MacCrimmon tales, for instance (*op. cit.*). As MacAulay’s testimony suggests, the *Piobairean Smearclait* tale is probably the surviving remnant of a basic storyline whose details were in the past adapted to whatever township it was being told in; one version, for instance, has been collected which is set in Bornish, not Smerclate, and the place-names throughout reflect that area.<sup>29</sup> Whatever else it is, the *Smearclait* tale is a reflection of orality in Gaelic music and its survival into modern times in the South Uist tradition.

## 2.c. The C eilidh

The *c eilidh* is recognised as Gaelic tradition’s ‘trading post’ of sorts. It means literally a ‘visit’ or ‘gathering’ and, until the depression begun by the Great War (see ch. 8), served as the primary social occasion wherein members of a community would meet at a designated house (the *taigh-c eilidh*) to pass the winter evenings. The house would typically alternate through the week. This was the time and place when the songs, dancing and stories thus far illustrated were performed and all present were generally encouraged to contribute what they could within the tradition. They were known to last well into morning, occasionally four or five a.m., when there was a good story being told or a particularly heated bout of dancing.<sup>30</sup> Today the *c eilidh* has been largely superseded as evening entertainment in the Hebrides by discos and the television, or at

times by the modern development of a formal, paid-admission ‘*céilidh*’ in the local community hall where a band will play Scottish Country dance music and be finished by one or two in the morning; a far cry from the spirit of the earlier house-visits.

Folklorists describing Highland *céilidhs* over the past hundred and fifty years reveal a cultural institution of remarkable consistency through space and time. Storytelling, singing and the playing of instrumental music, invariably for dancing, are always the main features but the similarity of peripheral activities is equally striking: the initial small-talk and catching up of the latest news; the discussion of current events and politics; the men quietly playing cards or twining rope or fishnets while listening to the story, or the women knitting and sewing as a song is given; it suggests a tacitly formulaic rituality.

Nineteenth-century folklorists waxed typically romantic. Take J.F. Campbell’s record of a *céilidh* in Barra in 1860, for instance, which depicts the atmosphere surrounding a recitation of Ossianic song-poetry. “The audience was a numerous one on 10<sup>th</sup> September,” he writes, “and we were highly attentive. One woman was industriously weaving in the corner, another was carding wool, and a girl was spinning dexterously with a distaff made of a rough forked birch-branch and a spindle which was little better than a splinter of fir ... Old men and young lads, newly returned from the eastern fishing, sat about on benches fixed to the wall, and smoked and listened; and MacDonald sat on a low stool in the midst, and chanted forth his lays amidst suitable remarks and ejaculations of praise and sympathy.” (1994, iii:158-9) Compare this with Carmichael’s reconstruction of the *céilidhs* he’d attended in his travels across the west Highland seaboard, which conveys the typical ‘formula’ over the course of the evening:

“The houseman is twisting twigs of heather into ropes to hold down thatch, a neighbour is twining quicken roots into cords to tie cows, while another is plaiting bent grass into baskets to hold meal. The housewife is spinning, a daughter is carding, another daughter is teasing, while a third daughter, supposed to be working, is away in the background conversing in low whispers with the son of a neighbouring crofter ... The conversation is general: the local news, the weather, the price of cattle, these leading up to higher themes – the clearing of the glens, the war, the parliament, the effects of the sun upon the earth and the moon upon the tides ... The stranger (i.e. Carmichael) asks the houseman to tell a story, and after a pause the man complies.



The tale is full of incident, action and pathos ... When the story is ended it is discussed and commented upon, and the different characters praised or blamed according to their merits and the views of the critics ... If not late, proverbs, riddles, conundrums and songs follow.” (1928, i:xxii-xxiii)

*Céilidhs* in the Gaelic-speaking emigrant communities in eastern Canada followed the same overall pattern, and it is noteworthy how their descriptions bear witness to the cultural connection to the Scottish *Gàidhealtachd* maintained since the years of major emigration (see ch. 4). At a gathering in Newfoundland in the late 1960s – a good hundred years or so after Carmichael’s and Campbell’s accounts – we find that “the first half hour or so was usually spent in conversation with friends and neighbours, catching up with each other’s news or telling amusing anecdotes they had heard since they last met. Before long, and usually with very little persuasion, someone would strike up a tune on one of the musical instruments. In no time at all then, the entertainment would be in full swing” (Bennett, 1989:55). Although it may be that instrumental music and dancing were a more prominent feature of this *céilidh* than those of the west Highlands in the 1860s (judging by the above descriptions), the similarity in the order of events is significant. We see the same in the reminiscences of storytelling in the early twentieth century by Joe Neil MacNeil of Big Pond, Cape Breton, a community founded specifically by emigrants from Barra and South Uist:

“Long tales were most often recited on occasions when people called in at the houses and there was some encouragement... It was mostly during the long winter months that people engaged in this kind of activity... People didn’t come just from one house or two houses for a house-visit; people would come from perhaps three or four houses, and some people would come over a distance as great as three miles... People would make small conversation at first, enquiring about happening in the vicinity and whether there was any news... [During the *céilidh*,] things were going on but nothing was happening that would hinder or interfere with the storyteller. Perhaps the woman of the house would be knitting socks or mittens; people would be working with knitting needles at the same time and twisting yarn, and the story was in no way interfered with by that.” (MacNeil and Shaw, 1987:25-33)



Personal accounts of the traditional *céilidh* in South Uist follow the same tone so far depicted, pointing to a common conservatism among the Cape Breton and Hebridean *Gàidhealtachds* up to at least the first half of the twentieth century. Consider Jessie MacAulay's account of the typical house-visits to have occurred in her youth in Smerclate:

JD: *Dé mar a bha céilidhean air oidhche gheamhraidh; an robh [daoine] a' tighinn cruinn?*

JM: *Bha iad a' cruinneachadh ann an aon taigh, fhios agaibh, ma dh' fhaoidte taigh mu seach – an taigh seo a-nochd, is an taigh eile an ath-oidhch' ... Bha sgeulachdan is naigheachdan is local gossip, a h-uile sìan. Cuideachd, tha cuimhn' am fhéin na bodaich a' bruidhinn mu'n Phàrlamaid. Away in London, you know. Especially the time when they were getting a pension for the first time. There was a lot of discussion. They got a paper a week old, you know, and it gave them a lot of topics ... Bhiodh iad ag innseadh na sgeulachdan, is rud eile a bh'againn: toimhseachan, puzzles. That was very popular too. (SA 1998.71)*

JD: What were *céilidhs* like on a winter night; did [people] come together?

JM: They gathered in one house, you see, perhaps in turns – in this house tonight, and in another house the next night ... There were stories, and news, and local gossip, everything. Away in London, you know. Especially the time when they were getting a pension for the first time. There was a lot of discussion. They got a paper a week old, you know, and it gave them a lot of topics ... They would tell stories, and another thing we had: puzzles. That was very popular too.

As long as the *céilidh* remained in its traditional format in South Uist, so also would *ceòl chuais* (ear-music), music learned and played solely through aural transmission and fundamentally associated with dance, remain a feature of local piping; one was the primary functional context for the other (see chs. 9 and 10). MacAulay has already mentioned how *puirt-à-beul* would often be sung to provide music for *céilidh*-dancing in the early years of the twentieth century when a bagpipe was not at hand; John Shaw has noted a parallel custom within the Cape Breton Gaelic fiddle tradition that was once widespread, pointing out also that “[*puirt-à-beul*] have often served as a device for musical instruction, recalling the earlier *canntaireachd* of the piping schools” (1992/3:44). Learning instrumental dance-tunes by the singing of *puirt-à-beul* has also

been documented among the *céilidhs* of the Newfoundland Gaidhealtachd (Bennett, 1989:80) and, according to MacAulay, was a feature of piping transmission in the *céilidhs* of her youth in South Uist:

JM: *Bha iad a' cluichd an fheadain, is cluichd na pìoba, is a' gabhail òrain ... Bhiodh iad a' dannsa leis a' phìob ... is puirt-à-beul nuair nach biodh pìob aca; bha iad a' dèanamh dannsa leis an òran ... Bhiodh tu ag ionnsachadh port aig an aon àm.*

JD: *An e sin dòigh a bh' aca airson na puirt a dh' ionnsachadh? Anns a' chéilidh, ag ionnsachadh puirt ùr' air a' phìob?*

JM: 'S e, 's e. (SA 1998.71)

JM: They were playing the chanter, and the pipes, and giving songs. They would dance to the pipes ... and mouth-music if they didn't have pipes; they would dance to the song. You'd be learning a tune at the same time.

JD: Is that a way they had to learn the tunes? In the *céilidh*, learning new tunes for the pipes?

JM: Yes, it is.

This form of transmission was inevitably affected by the decline of the old-style *céilidh* in South Uist during the era framed between the World Wars. By the time Calum Beaton came of age in the late 1940s and early 50s, the *céilidh* was giving way to the *bàl*, or 'ball', as today's Scottish Country dance-gatherings in the church or community hall are referred to in South Uist; an event whose most immediate origins go back to the 'high society' of nineteenth-century mainland Britain (see Flett and Flett, 1964 and Emmerson, 1972) and which had evidently trickled down to grass-roots Hebridean custom by the mid-twentieth. The change in setting meant that the vocal resource of *puirt-à-beul* was much less common; however, aural transmission was apparently as strong as ever as Beaton recalls the playing of older pipers and their influence:

CB: *Cha bhithinn a' bodrachadh ris an fheadhainn a bhiodh a' dannsa 'sna bàltaichean [ach] ag èisdeachd ri có bha pìobadh, agus bha thu a' togail, a' togail an time, mar a bha iad-san a' cluichd. Bha beagan do dhifir seach mar a chluinneadh tu gu leòr ann an Glaschu ... 's ann*

*mar a bha e tighinn nàdar riut fhéin, mar a bha thu a' cluintinn nan seann phiobairean eile, na bu shine na bha thu fhéin, a chluichdeas mar a bha iad an uair ud airson dannsaichean no bàltaichean.* (SA 1998.70)

CB: I wouldn't bother with those who danced at the balls, [but would be] listening to who was piping, and you would pick up, pick up the time, like the way they were playing. It was a little different from what you'd hear often in Glasgow ... It was as if it came natural to you, like you would hear the old pipers, older than yourself, who would play as they did then for dances or balls.

All in all, the *céilidh* as a social institution is probably what most facilitated the interrelationships we have so far seen making up the Gaelic musical 'Art'. Pipers like Alasdair Boyd sang songs associated with the tunes, not knowing which came first; storytellers like Neil MacDonald of Pininerine sang words conveyed by the very notes of the bagpipe; and Donald Ruadh MacIntyre, piper and poet, told the tale of the fairy's gift long ago. The Highland *céilidh* is certainly not now what it once was, even in Uist, but in its day it contributed to the versatility of Gaelic oral/aural tradition by its very nature as an inclusive social gathering, and as it changed, local piping could not help but change with it. Chapters 9 and 10 explore this development in more detail; but there are other influences holding our attention before then.

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1. Quoted in Shaw, 1992/3:39 from MacGhilleain, Somhairle, *Ris a' Bhruthaich*, ed. William Gillies, Stornaway, 1985, p. 106.

2. Merriam refers here to 'arts' as music, literature, drama, etc., with all categories or classifications aside; presumably allowing scope for the reader to apply his or her own scholarly directions, whether 'high culture art' or 'folk art'. 'Literature', for instance, could be approached here as either oral or written, and 'drama' could be as easily applied to the old Hebridean pantomimic dances (see ch. 9) as it could to Wagnerian opera.

3. Martin, himself a Skye-born and Edinburgh-educated doctor, remarked: "Fergus Beaton hath the following ancient Irish manuscripts in the Irish character; to wit, Avicenna, Averroes, Joannes de Vigo, Bernardus Gordanus, and several volumes of Hippocrates." (1994:155) The Beaton family was widespread; a contemporary relation of his, the "illiterate empiric" Neil Beaton of Skye, was considered such a successful practitioner of herbal remedies that several islanders, according to Martin, thought he'd been in league with the devil (1994:238-240). Fergus Beaton's Gaelic medical library is discussed by

Thomson (1968:62) and by Stewart (1982). See also John Bannerman's *The Beatons: a medical kindred in the classical Gaelic tradition*, Edinburgh: John Donald, 1998.

4. The MacMhuirichs were originally an Irish family whose earliest appearance in Scotland is dated to the early thirteenth century in Islay and Kintyre (Thomson, 1968:73). They are well-known to have produced the Red and Black Books of Clanranald, a compilation of genealogy, history and poetry which chronicles the Clanranald line up to the early eighteenth century (see Cameron's *Reliquiae Celticae*, 1894, ii:139). Alexander Campbell, travelling through South Uist, enquired after the whereabouts of the Red Book to a MacMhuirich descendent in 1815, but was told it had been taken many years earlier by Clanranald and never returned; it is a telling note on the post-Jacobite decline of the bardic family's fortunes that the descendant, who proclaimed himself to Campbell as the twenty-second male MacMhuirich in succession and recited examples of his forebears' song-poetry, was in the end dismissed as nothing more than a "clumsy, elderly lout" (1815:47-49).
5. John Shaw's study of aesthetics in the Cape Breton fiddle tradition (1992/3) discusses these rhythmic elements in depth, as does Chambers's Ph.D. thesis (1983) on non-lexical vocables in Scottish music.
6. See Sound Archives, School of Scottish Studies, section R1 for recorded examples from these and other local tradition-bearers of *puirt-à-beul*; Kate MacDonald is discussed in detail in chapter 7a.
7. See Peter Cooke's study of the relationship between the pibroch song *Maol Donn* and recorded versions of its *ceòl mòr* counterpart, also known as MacCrimmon's Sweetheart (1972:41-59); and V.S. Blankenhorn's look at the Victorian-era song MacCrimmon Will Never Return, which was based on the pibroch song *Cha Till Mac Cruimein*, which in turn has its *ceòl mòr* counterpart (1978:45-67). Both songs were recorded for the School of Scottish Studies by Kate MacDonald (SA 1970/309) and the *ceòl mòr* versions will be found in the *Kilberry Book* (Campbell, 1948). Allan MacDonald used pibroch songs as the basis for reconstructing eighteenth-century *ceòl mòr* performance styles in his M.Litt. thesis at Edinburgh University (1995).
8. Shaw, 1955:130-2. *Dà Làimh* has no known equivalent in the surviving *ceòl mòr* repertoire; it shares the same story background with one tune, *Uamh an Òir* (The Cave of Gold), but they do not seem melodically related. *Cholla Mo Ruin*'s cognate tune will be found in the *Kilberry Book* (Campbell, 1948) under the title The Piper's Warning To His Master.
9. DJ MacDonald MSS, Book 7, pp. 594-5.
10. See Sound Archives, School of Scottish Studies, section R1; and *Tocher*, vol i, 1971-2, pp. 84-7.
11. See also Angus MacKay's setting of the Earl of Seaforth's Salute (1838:116), for which he includes Gaelic song lyrics beginning "*Slàn gu'n till fear chinn duibh...*" ("May the black-haired one return safely..."). The melody is entirely unrelated to *Fhir a' Chinn Duibh* as sung by Alasdair Boyd, but the common reference is indicative of Gaelic oral tradition.
12. Quoted in Shaw, 1992/3:40 from Lambert, Kathleen, *The Spoken Web: An Ethnography of Storytelling in Rannafast, Ireland*, PhD thesis, Boston University, 1985, p. 112.
13. D.J. MacDonald MSS, book 48, pp. 4509-451.
14. Compare this tale with "The Kintalen Changeling" in Rev. James MacDougall's *Highland Fairy Legends* (1978:8-10) which was originally published in 1910 as *Folktales and Fairy Lore in Gaelic and English*. The story is almost identical in the order of events – even the phrasing at times, and in translation – to MacInnes's version. It is also worth looking at a tale taken down in Kirkcudbright for J.F. Campbell and published in *Popular Tales* (i:426-7) which is similar, though by no means identical, to MacInnes's. The motif of the fairy playing the pipes in a cradle is the same, though the tailor is not at all threatening and the fairy leaves of his own accord upon hearing through the window 'his folk wanting him'.



15. The late Calum Johnston of Barra told a tale in which he imitated a piper's playing at a funeral, and what he sang corresponds with traditional *caoineadh* vocal chanting, which in turn is said by some to derive from birdsong (see Scottish Tradition Cassette Series vol xiii: *Calum and Annie Johnston: Songs, Stories and Piping from Barra*; and Purser, 1992:24-30).

16. E.C. Carmichael (1905:76-82) gives two examples of MacCrimmon musical origin tales, which follow along the same basic framework as the *Piobairean Smerclait* tales (with the exception, as will be seen below, of the 'test'); other examples can be found in Robertson's *Selected Highland Folktales* (1961:5-7) and MacLeod's *Tales of Dunvegan* (1950:18-23), both of which depict a fairy woman bestowing the gift of music to MacCrimmon in the form of a silver chanter.

17. The most notable of this family, George Johnstone, was a Pipe Major in the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders in the post- Second World War period and composed the popular competition jig "Donella Beaton" (*Cabar Feidh Collection*, 1983:216).

18. The name *Piobairean a' Chlaiginn* has been encountered before by collectors for the School of Scottish Studies; see SA 1960/24/A7 for a version of the tale using this name, told by D. MacDonald, South Uist.

19. See, for example, Fr. Allan MacDonald's notes in the Carmichael-Watson MS (58[A]57); E.C. Carmichael, 1905:83; F.G. Rea's memoirs, 1964:94; and Calum Beaton interview, SA 1998.70.

20. Interview with Calum Beaton, 30/8/1995; Jessie MacAulay (née MacIntyre) also asserted that her ancestors were "pipers and archers to the MacDonalds of Clanranald" – see chapters 5a and 7.

21. I use nine different versions from nine different sources in illustrating the *Smerclait* tales: two of my own informants, Jesse MacAulay and Calum Beaton; five from the School of Scottish Studies archives (Archie MacDonald of Garryhellie, Duncan MacDonald of Pininerine, the 'Paisley Bard' Donald Ruadh MacIntyre, John Campbell and Roderick Bowie); E.C. Carmichael in the *Celtic Review*; and the collected notes of Fr. Allan McDonald of Eriskay in the Carmichael-Watson MS.

22. The *deiseal*, or the encircling of something in a clockwise or sunward direction, was a well-known superstitious ritual in the Highlands before it was stamped out in most Protestant areas; predominantly Catholic areas however, such as South Uist and Eigg, retained the custom to a considerable extent until modern times; see ch. 3.

23. In Archie MacDonald's account the old man laid a bone across the boy's fingers before touching the boy's tongue with his own (SA 1953/36/B1); according to Roderick Bowie the old man instructed the boy to put his fingers on his fingers and to put his tongue on his tongue (SA 1953/36/A1); Fr. Allan McDonald wrote that the boy encountered the *Sithean Ruadh*, or Red Fairy Hill, between Poll a' Chara and Smerclate, saw the hill, and propped open the door with a knife instead of a needle (Carmichael-Watson MS, 58[A]57); and in John Campbell's version, when asked what he wished for, the boy replies in a chant of sorts, "*ealdhain is rath, ealdhain is rath*" ("art and good fortune, art and good fortune") and is told to lay his fingers on those of the old man (SA 1960/8/9); the variations continue along these lines.

24. E.C. Carmichael (1905:78-9) wrote in a latter-day Victorian style that as a result of the fairy's gift: "MacCrimmon could make his pipe move the hearts of his hearers so that they had no will but as it impelled them. Did he play 'Geantraighe' they danced and sang for joy and pure happiness of mind and body. Did he play 'Suaintraighe' they slumbered peacefully and with a happy smile dreamt of their dear ones and of pleasant days with their comrades. Did he play 'Gultraighe' a wild passionate longing and a great sorrowful lamenting came into every heart ... MacCrimmon's music played with their souls as the north wind plays with the leaves of the birch tree on the brown mountain side." The Gaelic terms used correspond to the technical vocabulary of eighteenth century Irish harpers as recorded by Bunting (1840) and reflect the connection between Irish and Scottish Gaelic musical traditions; Ralls-MacLeod (2000:81-6) discusses the terms' use in early Irish Gaelic literature.

25. Carmichael-Watson MS, 58(A)57. Fr. Allan noted the tale in English except for the brother's exclamation, and its translation is my own.

26. Beaton gave a version in which the boy meets two MacCrimmon pipers on the way back from the *sithean* and, after assuring them that he is the worst in his family, plays mind-bending music; Beaton recited the MacCrimmons' response in lyrical, rhythmic Gaelic: "*Ma's tu-sa tha na's miosa, chan eil sinne 'dol na's fhàide.'* Agus thig iad dhachaidh. *Cha deach iad na b' fhàide na sin fhéin ... Chan eil mi a' creidsinn facal dheth*" ("If you are the worst, we're not going any farther.' And they went home. They ventured no farther than that ... I don't believe a word of it"). (SA 1998.70)

27. The kelping industry in the Outer Hebrides had its beginnings in the 1730s but it was not truly remunerative in South Uist, and therefore relied on as the main source of income, until the late 1700s – early 1800s; see chapter 4 for more detail and references on this subject. The mention of kelping in some variants does not mean that the tale itself is entirely derived from this period; one variant at least describes *Piobairean Smerclait* in the time of the Age of Forays (see chapter 5b) so the body of tales as a whole probably goes back to at least the seventeenth century. Clanranald is known to have patronised pipers as early as 1636 (see chapter 5a).

28. *Seinn* has come in modern times to mean 'sing', so at first glance such a construction as *seinn na piobadh* is often interpreted as 'singing the pipes' and regarded as an allusion to the Gaelic speech/music affinity mentioned in section 2a. However, the verb's original sense was of performing music on an instrument, and its use as such in the South Uist community today underlines the conservative nature of their oral tradition.

29. SA 1975/32/A1, told by D.S. Stewart to collector Donald Archie MacDonald.

30. Jessie MacAulay recalled *céilidhs* in her youth in Smerclate lasting typically until five in the morning due to all the Reel-dancing; see chs. 5d and 10.



## CHAPTER THREE

### *“A multitude of papists”:*

#### **Catholicism and the Preservation of Tradition in South Uist**

“Popery is favourable to ceremony; and among ignorant nations, ceremony is the only preservative to tradition.” So wrote Samuel Johnson in 1773 (1924:115). The post-Jacobite era was then just gaining steam: hopes of a Stewart monarchy had become safely unrealistic, political and ecclesiastical action was doing away with the old Highland order, and Gaelic society was renewing itself under the influence of British modernity. Johnson and Boswell had been concerned that under these conditions the old way of life in the Highlands would ere long disappear, and even at that early date their journey often proved their concerns well-founded. Johnson reflected that the few remaining catholic islands, had they bothered to visit them, would have revealed more of that vanishing world: “Since Protestantism was extended to the savage parts of Scotland, it has perhaps been one of the chief labours of the ministers to abolish stated observances, because they continued the remembrance of the former religion. We therefore who came to hear old traditions, and see antiquated manners, should probably have found them amongst the Papists.”

By and large, the catholic faith has a record of incorporating and encouraging indigenous tradition among Gaels (for reasons noble and not so noble) as will be seen below, while the protestant or presbyterian faith has a reputation for stamping it out from acceptable social behaviour in deference to a more ascetic spirituality. Samuel Johnson understood this; it allowed piping to continue in South Uist at a time when other communities, wholly engaged in the dos-and-don'ts of the evangelical constitution, were compelled to shun such earthly matters. This continuity in turn allowed piping in Uist to flourish and gain a reputation for distinctiveness in the twentieth century (see chs. 6 and 8). Indeed it *was* distinctive – but only because it was part of a social culture accepted, even celebrated, in catholic South Uist and eschewed wherever presbyterianism ascended.

This chapter will explore the background to catholicism in Uist, looking to the wider framework of Clanranald, Ireland, and the counter-Reformation movement amid the turmoil of the seventeenth century. We then look briefly at the inroads made by the Society in Scotland for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge in the eighteenth century and the protestant minority that has since become established there. Finally, we explore the widely divergent philosophies between the two faiths which, in the popular mind today, have meant the difference between preservation and extinction for Gaelic folklore throughout the Highlands, and for piping in the South Uist community.

### 3.a. Catholic Beginnings

South Uist is a predominantly catholic island, having been so according to local lore “since the time of St. Columba” (Rea, 1964:xiii). This majority overshadows a protestant presence which makes up about twenty to twenty-five percent of the whole. The figure has changed with time: in 1755, the Society in Scotland for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge (SSPCK) received word from their appointed parish minister in South Uist that he “went to every farm and took as exact a list as we could, and found of popists some scores more than two thousand souls – as for the protestant Inhabitants I had an exact list of them I had taken in the year 1752, amounting to 165 souls” (GD 95/11/5/19 [2]). The population gap between catholics and protestants decreased over time as the island’s population increased; by 1837, we find that “out of a population of 6890 ... the number of ... individuals ... attending the Established Church [is] 980” (*New Stat Acc*, 1845:195-6). By 1985, “about 75 to 80 percent of the population in the island of South Uist ... belong to the Roman Catholic faith” (*Third Stat Acc*, 1985:619), and this observation has applied since at least the turn of the twentieth century.

South Uist’s catholic majority, and the survival of the faith there in at least a

nominal form after the Reformation of 1560, largely reflects the conservatism and traditionalism of the greater Clanranald, of whose territories Uist formed a part until its sale to Gordon of Cluny in 1838. Clanranald has been described as a “solidly Catholic clan” (Stewart, 1982:338) whose extensive lands along the west coast and islands formed the bedrock of Highland catholicism in the seventeenth century. They encompassed Moidart, Ardnamurchan, Arisaig, North and South Morar and Knoydart – known collectively as *na garbh-chrìochan*, or the ‘rough bounds’ – as well as the islands of Eigg, Canna and the southern half of the Outer Isles. The harsh and rocky terrain naturally encloses the mainland territory which made access and communication with surrounding lands difficult at that time (hence its name), and this isolation goes some way in explaining the conservativeness of language, social culture and religion found within. This at least was the opinion of Fr. Charles MacDonald, a priest who lived and worked in Moidart for thirty years before his death in 1894. “It is no doubt partly owing to this difficulty of access,” he wrote in his memoirs in the 1880s, “that the inhabitants of these districts are about the most conservative in the kingdom – conservative in religion, conservative in those old-fashioned notions of loyalty to the crown and of respect for their landlords ... When the old faith went down under the Revolution which swept over Scotland in the sixteenth century, the changes which were brought about can scarcely be said to have acquired a footing north of the river Shiel” (1997:4). Because of Clanranald’s associations with the old faith, the ‘rough bounds’ were seen as a place of relative safety by priests and travelling missionaries throughout the turbulent seventeenth century, from the Irish Franciscans in the 1620s to the visitations of Bishop Gordon in 1707;<sup>1</sup> it wasn’t until the aftermath of Culloden that the Clanranald line espoused for good, under duress, the protestant doctrine of the national church (MacDonald, A and A, 1900:365) – bringing the days of *na garbh-chrìochan* as a safe harbour to a close.

Clanranald’s catholic associations in Scotland can be traced back to at least 1337, when John, Lord of the Isles, from whose son the clan descended, applied to the Papal Court for permission to marry his kinswoman Amie MacRurie (MacDonald, 1997:19). This does not tell the whole story, however, and to really explore the

catholicism of Clanranald – and thereby South Uist – we must look to their fundamental connection to Ireland.

The Clanranalds had always maintained close cultural links to the Irish northeast, through, among other things, their relations by marriage to the MacDonells of Antrim<sup>2</sup>; their ties to the O' Cathan family of Derry<sup>3</sup>; and in the subject matter of their hereditary bards the MacMhuirichs, who were themselves descended from an Irish bard who migrated to Kintyre in the thirteenth century (see Thomson, 1968). Of all the celebrated bards in Scottish Gaeldom, the MacMhuirichs of Clanranald were uncommonly conservative of catholic symbolism and Irish tradition. Among their elegies and histories contained in the Red Book of Clanranald, we find a chronology where the age of the world at the birth of Christ (“5,199”) is the same as that given in the Irish *Annals of the Four Masters*; a genealogy of the Clanranald line going back to the Lords of the Isles and their descent from Irish nobility; and a storehouse of song-poetry exhibiting all the mythical themes of Ossianic narrative. The stuff of Irish Gaelic lore – the Finn Cycle, Red Branch, Cuchulainn, Conn and the extension of the *Dal Riada* kingdom from Antrim to Argyll – lived in the repertoire of Clanranald's bards, and this can only be a reflection of their chiefs' own cultural leanings.<sup>4</sup>

Steady traffic between Clanranald's Hebridean territories and the north of Ireland in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries would have continually renewed these cultural ties and, by extension, the people's attachment to the old faith after the Reformation. Men from Barra, for instance, were making pilgrimages to Croagh Phadruig in Mayo in 1593.<sup>5</sup> Another crossing occurred in 1649, when Donald, son of Clanranald, set off from South Uist to Ireland at the head of 300 soldiers and gentry, many of whom were Irish, in order to support MacDonell of Antrim and in turn to secure Antrim's help in Scotland against the Covenanters; by then, Clanranald stood alone among the Hebridean chiefs in his resistance to presbyterian government (Stevenson, 1980:257; see chapter 5b). Eighteenth-century poet Alasdair MacMhaighstir Alasdair's well-known composition, *Birlinn Chlann Raghnaill*, depicts a war party shoving off from Loch Eynort, South Uist for the port of Carrickfergus in Antrim (Thomson, 1996:132-165; MacLeod, 1933:23-129), and this

could easily have been based on an actual voyage. The crew in this poem made a ritual blessing of their boat and weapons before setting sail; one wonders if the Uist soldiers in 1649 or the Barra pilgrims in 1593 began their journey with a similar sea-prayer, such as this catholic verse which invokes the Virgin and Christ for a safe return to the bosom of Clanranald:

<p><i>Oigh chùbhr' na mara,</i>  <i>Thu làn de na gràsan,</i>  <i>'S an Rìgh mór-gheal maille riut,</i>  <i>Beannaicht' thu, beannaicht' thu,</i>  <i>Beannaicht' thu a' measg nam ban.</i>  <i>O guidh'! mo ghuidhe do Mhac Iosa,</i>          <i>E bhi mar rium,</i>          <i>E bhi ri faire,</i>          <i>E bhi 'gar caithris,</i>  <i>E sgaoileadh tharuinn a chochuill bheannaicht</i>  <i>O rà-soluis gu rà-soluis,</i>  <i>O shoills' òg-ghil a' chomhanaich</i>  <i>Gu soills' òr-buidh' an anamaich,</i>  <i>'S ré na h-oidhche dùbhra do bhaidh,</i>          <i>E bhi 'gar còmhnadh,</i>          <i>E bhi 'gar seòladh,</i>          <i>E bhi 'gar steòrnadh,</i>  <i>Le iuil agus glòir nan naoi gathanan gréine,</i>  <i>Tro mhuir, tro chaol, tro chùmhlaith,</i>          <i>Gus an ruig sinn Mùideart,</i>          <i>O gus an ruig sinn Mùideart,</i>          <i>'S deagh Mhac 'ic Ailein.<sup>6</sup></i></p>	<p>Perfumed Virgin of the sea,      Full of graces,      And the great white King by your side,      You are blessed, you are blessed,      You are blessed among women.      Oh I beseech your Son Jesus,          He who is with us          He who is on the horizon          He who watches over us,      Who spreads over us his blessed mantle      From ray of light to ray of light,      From the young white light of dawn      To the yellow-gold of dusk      And through tempestuous night,          He who helps us,          He who sails us,          He who guides us,      With the course and glory of the nine rays      Through sea, strait and channel,          Till we reach Moidart,          Oh till we reach Moidart,          And the good <i>Mac 'ic Ailein.</i></p>
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In the shadow of the episcopalian-presbyterian conflicts within the Scottish Church that characterised the whole of the seventeenth century,<sup>7</sup> Ireland contributed in significant ways to the survival of Highland catholicism, not least in Clanranald's



Hebridean lands and particularly in South Uist. The most widely recognised of these efforts was the Franciscan mission to the west Highlands and Isles that began in 1619, lasted 27 years and was reportedly responsible for 10,000 conversions and baptisms by 1633 alone<sup>8</sup> – all the more remarkable for the mere handful of missionaries involved. Following an initial observation of the area, four young priests were approved for the mission and in 1623 were sent off to win back the faithful: Frs. Edmund McCann, Patrick Hegarty, Paul O' Neill and Cornelius Ward. We are concerned most with Ward and his travels through Moidart, Eigg, Canna, South Uist and Barra. His reports to Louvain, translated and summarised from Latin, shed a great deal of light on religious life in Clanranald's islands between the Reformation and its counter-movement and the natural predilection of the people toward catholic ceremony, which was to work so much to the priests' advantage.

Cornelius Ward was in fact *Conchobhar Mac an Bhàird* ('Conor Son of the Bard'), a member of a prominent bardic family from Donegal (Black, 1972-4:221) and a skilled song-poet in his own right. This proved useful in his dealings with the laird of Muckairn when Ward's mission was still in its infancy: Campbell of Calder was notoriously difficult to gain an audience with, and knowing his weakness for flattery, Ward composed a poem in Campbell's honour and sang it in his presence disguised as an itinerant bard. Ward spent three days in the guise before revealing himself to Campbell and convincing him to adopt catholicism (Giblin, 1964:53). Matters were easier in Moidart, where he met Clanranald chief *Iain Mùideartach*. Iain was one of nine Hebridean chiefs who, under pressure from James VI, submitted to the discipline of the Church of Scotland as per the Statutes of Iona in 1609; this proved impossible to enforce, however, and he was happily 'reconciled' to the old faith by Paul O' Neill in 1624, the year before Ward's visit. Iain thereafter became so ardent a protagonist (some would say so skillful a strategist) that in 1626 he wrote to Pope Urban VIII offering to initiate a crusade to subdue all of Scotland in defence of catholicism. Nothing came of it, but Clanranald made clear in his letter that the Irish were to be considered spiritual, political and military allies (Stevenson, 1980:54; Stewart, 1982:73-6).



We can glean from Ward's reports that the folk he encountered in Clanranald's islands retained strong elements of catholic veneration despite generations of institutional neglect. This was not the fault of the Reformation: "There were such long vacancies in the sees of Argyll and the Isles," writes Donaldson, "that, as we are told in 1529, those born in the more remote islands had not had baptism or other sacrament, not to speak of Christian teaching" (1972:47). By Ward's time, Eigg had not seen a priest in seventy years, and South Uist not in a hundred. But however blurred in memory and befuddled in pagan superstition they had become,<sup>9</sup> the elements of catholicism were there. In Eigg, a church dedicated to St. Donnan was still standing, though roofless, and in addition the saints Mary and Martin were still venerated (Giblin, 1964:63; Dressler, 1998:23). In Canna, Ward found that St. Columba was held in local esteem like "a second God" and had entered into the realm of oral tradition: he was told that no frog or poisonous animal could exist there since Columba blessed the island, and that a toad which had wandered over from Rum not long after had instantly turned to stone upon the shore (Giblin, 1964:68; Campbell, 1984:1). Once word of his travels had got around, Ward was invited to Uist's southern neighbour Barra by one of the MacNeill gentry who wished his child baptised – an indication that catholicism had remained among the island's upper class as well as the lower – and there he found a roofless chapel dedicated to St. Barr, a statue inside still venerated, and a grave nearby which the islanders believed to be the saint's (Giblin, 1964:73). Throughout these islands Ward continually encountered the remnants of strong catholic practice which the long lapse in formalities had failed to dispel; the veneration of saints and the pilgrimages to holy sites in Ireland were evidence enough to suggest that the old faith had never entirely broken down in this quarter of Clanranald territory.

Ward reached South Uist in late October, 1625:

"From Canna Ward went to South Uist, which he reached at night after a rough crossing; there are no venomous animals there since St. Columba blessed the place; very early in the morning after his arrival Ward set out on his labours, accompanied by one of the

leading men on the island; immediately rumour spread that a popish priest had arrived with the intention of winning over the people to his beliefs; as a result, next day, 28 October, a large crowd gathered, some anxious to learn about the faith, some merely curious; Ward was overjoyed; he sent a messenger to the leading men of the island to come and listen to him, and give an example to the people; they agreed to do so, and promised to accept the faith if they found Ward's arguments more convincing than those put forward by the ministers; Ward then preached on some of the fundamental truths of Catholicism; the people were in a dilemma; unless they accepted the faith they would find it difficult to be saved, and yet if they professed it, imprisonment and ruin would be their lot; they could flee to a foreign land and avoid persecution, but it would be impossible to bring their children; the gentry... said it was difficult to embrace Catholicism, seeing that no Catholic priest had visited them for about one hundred years, and that there was nobody to instruct the ignorant even if the people decided to become Catholics; Ward answered their objections and promised that he or some other priest would visit them every year; on that condition, they accepted the faith, and asked for absolution; they said that bad fortune has been their lot since the tenets of the new faith were spread amongst them." (Giblin, 1964:68)

From 30 October to 1 November, Ward claimed to have converted forty-one and baptised twelve out in the open among great crowds, and to have made a further 516 conversions and baptisms in South Uist by January, 1626 (Giblin, 1964:69, 73). From his report we can cautiously infer several things: the first regards Ward's claim that, as in Canna, no venomous animals existed on the island "since St. Columba blessed the place." It is quite possible that Ward was told this by an islander during his stay, perhaps by one of the "leading men" (probably Clanranald gentry) who accompanied him after his arrival; if so, it suggests a catholic veneration among the rank and file of the Uist community which had continued, as in Clanranald's other islands, long after formalities lapsed. The second is that, judging by the tone of the report, Ward had found in South Uist an accomodating audience who had 'gone through the motions' of protestant worship since 1560 out of fear of persecution by the protestant bishop, his ministers, and those they influenced. This again is identical to what Ward encountered in Eigg and in Colonsay, where the Bishop of the Isles was

active despite the ‘catholic zeal’ of Colla Ciotach MacDonald.<sup>10</sup> Third, it would appear that the majority of islanders in South Uist were quite willing to be reconciled back to catholicism so long as they received some overdue acknowledgement – perhaps even something in the way of protection (though this is conjecture) – from Dublin and Rome.

The connection between Irish catholicism and the west Highlands and Isles, particular Clanranald territory, can be observed throughout the remainder of the seventeenth century as missionary priests were periodically found at work in South Uist. This often involved great personal risk from the protestant establishment. Fr. Patrick Hegarty, for instance, one of the four original Franciscan missionaries, was conducting mass in South Uist in 1630 when he was arrested by John Leslie, Bishop of the Isles, who had followed him to Uist from Iona earlier that year. Hegarty was rescued, however, by Ranald MacDonald of Benbecula, uncle and tutor to Donald MacDonald of Clanranald, at the head of thirty armed clansmen.<sup>11</sup> Ranald was rightly logged in mission reports as a “staunch defender of catholicism” (Giblin, 1964:72).

Hegarty was not the only one exposed to hazards: others include a priest named Donald MacDonald, who actively preached in South Uist and the surrounding isles in 1650 despite having been captured and imprisoned in Edinburgh by presbyterian authorities some time before (Stewart, 1982:339); two Irish jesuits, Patrick O’ Kerulan and Richard Arnot, who were apprehended at the behest of the Synod of Argyll for conducting mass in South Uist and Barra in 1697 (*ibid*:346); and a “Mr. Mc O’ Ure”, a “lustie bodied black haired young man” whom Allan MacDonald of Clanranald kept at Ormiclate as his resident priest around 1707 and who was complained against in a Synod report (*ibid*:352-3). “Mc O’ Ure” may have been an Irish Dominican priest whom Bishop Gordon is known to have placed in South Uist in 1708 following his visitation through the Hebrides (*ibid*:355).

Anecdotes and tales that have survived in South Uist’s oral tradition attest to the dangers faced by priests in those days and the community’s sympathy for their work. In Loch a’ Phuirt Ruaidh a secluded islet is known to this day as *Eilean an t-Sagairt*, the Priest’s Island, ever since Fr. James Devoyer, an Irish missionary

recruited from Paris, hid there from protestant authorities in the 1680s.<sup>12</sup> Also stemming from that era is a grisly tale of death and comeuppance: a priest on the run in Howmore is caught by a band of soldiers while still wearing the vestments for mass; the soldiers take him to a nearby hill and build a fire, into which his vestments are thrown –

*“A-nis nuair a bha an teine air gabhail suas gu math, dh’ fhalbh fear do na saighdearan agus chàirich e a chas air muin culaidh an t-sagairt anns an teine airson agus gun loisgeadh i ceart, ach nuair a dh’ fheuch e ri chas a thogail, cha robh rathad no innleachd aige air a gluasad as an àite anns an robh i. Thòisich e air slaodadh a chois cho math sa b’ urrainn dha, ach cha tigeadh a chas as a sud, agus bha an teine a sìor-loisgeadh timchioll oirre. Mu dheireadh thòisich a theang’ air tighinn a-mach air a bheul leis a’ chràdh agus a chas ‘ga gualadh. Chaidh càch air fad an sàs ann ‘ga shlaodadh ach cha toireadh iad òirleach as a sud e. Mu dheireadh, thàinig a theang’ a-mach leis is còrr air a bheul agus leagh a chas suas chun na glùine, gus mu dheireadh an do bhàsaich e agus a chas anns an teine.*

*A-nis bha e na chleachdadh aig an àm ud, nuair a bhiodh tòradh sam bith ann, bhiodhte a’ taghadh seann bhoireanach airson tuiream as deidh a ghiùlain. Bha cuid do bhoireanaich a bha ainmeil air tuiream agus bhiodh pàigheadh aig a h-uile té a dhèanadh tuiream air tòradh. Fhuair seann bhoireannach anns an sgìreachd airson tuiream air tòradh an fhir a chaidh a loisgeadh, agus nuair a ghluaiseadh air falbh leis a’ ghiùlain, thòisich a’ chailleach air tuiream, agus seo an tuiream a bh’ aice:*

*‘Cnàmhlach dubh air na maidean*

*Do chas a’ dol an giorrad*

*‘S do theang’ a’ dol am faidead*

*Loisg thu culaidh an t-sagairt.*

*Obara bob, adara dad*

*Obara bob, bob bò i*

*Cnàmhlach dubh air na maidean*

*Obara bob, bob bò i.’ ”<sup>13</sup>*

Now when the fire was stoked up well, one of the soldiers went and put his leg over

the priest's garments in the fire so that it would burn correctly, but when he tried to lift his leg, he had no way to move it from where it was. He started to pull his leg as hard as he could, but it wouldn't come out, and meanwhile the fire was burning all around it. Finally his tongue started to come out of his mouth with the pain of his charring leg. The others all pulled on it but they couldn't bring it out one inch. Finally, the rest of his tongue came out of his mouth and his leg melted up to the knee, till at last he died with his leg still in the fire.

Now as was customary at that time, when any burial took place, an old woman would be chosen to kee behind the procession. Several women were well-known for keening and anyone who would kee for a burial would be paid. An old woman from the area was got for the keening of the man who was burned, and when he was moved along with the procession, the old woman began to kee, and this is what she sang:

'Blackened skeleton on the firewood  
 Your leg getting shorter  
 And your tongue getting longer  
 You burned the vestments of the priest.  
*Obara bob, adara dad*  
*Obara bob, bob bò i*  
 Blackened skeleton on the firewood  
*Obara bob bob bò i.'*

All in all, the reports of the Irish Franciscan mission and the character of certain local tales to have survived since that time suggest that elements of, and sympathy for, the catholic faith were preserved in South Uist despite the breakdown of formalities in the sixteenth century. This was most likely to do with the island's geographic isolation and a cultural conservatism that was both local and reflective of the wider Clanranald territories; looking back, one must also conclude that Ireland's efforts toward the re-introduction of catholicism in the Hebrides was equally important, and facilitated in no small way by the Irish northeast's linguistic and cultural ties to Clanranald.



### 3.b. Protestant Inroads

After the upheaval of 1560, the Church of Scotland Reformed made what progress it could in the vast *Gàidhealtachd* of the period only by distributing resources, ministers and readers as widely as possible, and by directing most available funds toward that end at the expense of ministerial salaries (Kirk, 1986:32-35). So South Uist saw protestant clergy in the late 1500s probably as rarely as they had catholic clergy in the early 1500s; the Church was simply stretched too thin, especially considering their efforts to match the few Gaelic-speaking ministers with the many Gaelic-speaking regions. By the time of the Irish Franciscan ‘counter-reformation’ in the 1620s, Thomas Knox was Bishop of the Isles and under his administration, nineteen ministers in all served the entire western seaboard (*ibid*:47).

One of these was Ranald MacDonald, a native of the Hebrides and in charge of South Uist and probably Barra when Fr. Ward arrived in 1625. MacDonald is conspicuous in local history for having been the first Calvinist minister *and* the first secular catholic priest to reside in South Uist since the Reformation. Ward persuaded him to convert and train for the priesthood in January, 1626; he accompanied Ward back to Ireland and thence to Belgium, where he trained at the college in Louvain and was back in Uist at work for the old faith by c. 1631.<sup>14</sup>

Protestantism today owes its presence in South Uist mainly to the work of the SSPCK, a protestant body directed by their Majesties’ Letters Patent in 1710 to “erect and maintain schools in such places in Scotland, Especially the Highlands and Islands, as shall be found to need them most” (GD 95, i:31). If the track record of the previous century was any consideration, they must have felt South Uist to be in dire need. Three catholic schools were already up and running in South Uist and Barra under Allan MacDonald of Clanranald’s patronage around 1707 (Stewart, 1982:355), one of them in his own Ormiclate stronghold, and the SSPCK’s committee records indicate that at least two “popish schools” were still in operation in 1727.<sup>15</sup>



The first SSPCK school in South Uist was set up in March of 1726, when Norman MacLeod was sent there to be certified and set to work as its headmaster (GD 95, ii:366); four years earlier, committee records show both a petition (most likely coming from the Long Island presbytery and not Uist itself) for a protestant school on the island and an acknowledgement of Uist's catholic majority:

“4 January 1722 – The Committee reported that they had considered the petition of the presbytery of Zetland representing the need of a school in Fair Isle, and found that there are many other petitions for schools lying before them, particularly ... for one in the Island of Southuist [sic] where the people are generally popish.” (GD 95, ii:195)

But the prospect of an SSPCK school in South Uist languished in bureaucracy until 1725. In that year, the records show evidence of protestant activity in Clanranald's Hebridean lands in which, as the Synod of Argyll stated, “priests do normally reside” (Stewart, 1982:340). This activity was undoubtedly to combat the “discouragement that Protestants do meet with therein” by a “multitude of papists” such as was found in the parishes of “Kilmanivaig and Southuist” (GD 95, ii:342). Four months before Norman MacLeod's departure to Uist,

“The Committee, having searched the Registers and considered the report of the Societies Correspondents as to the condition of their schools... shewed that they had ordered John Young [who had desired to be transported in respect of some Grievances] to succeed [Mr. Arthur Gregory of Corgraph] with his former Salary, and they were of Opinion that Mr. Gregory's salary should be divided into two, one hundred pounds thereof to be given to a Schoolmaster in Southuist, and that the other one hundred pounds should be allowed for an itinerant school to the four isles of Egg, Roum, Mucka, and Cana, and that they had written to the presbyteries of Long Island and Skye to look out for and certifie fit persons to be Schoolmasters in those parts.” (GD 95, II:349)

The protestant minority fostered by schools in South Uist such as MacLeod's were by no means silent and ineffectual in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

They had Scottish law and government behind them, after all, at least until 1829.<sup>16</sup> J. L. Campbell has written of the “tight little oligarchy” – including the parish minister and excluding all Catholics – that managed community affairs during the land controversy of the late nineteenth century (1954:10); he has also written of Daliburgh’s school board as being systematically pro-Protestant and anti-Catholic in electoral and curricular matters until Fr. Allan MacDonald’s election to the board and Bishop Angus MacDonald’s entreaties to the Crofters’ Commission in the 1880s (Rea, 1964:xiv-xix). Possibly the most destructive instance of Protestant influence in South Uist was the zeal of Colin MacDonald of Boisdale, cousin to Ranald MacDonald of Clanranald and co-owner of the island, who was brought up a Catholic but converted to Presbyterianism as an adult. Boisdale thereafter believed that his Catholic tenantry should follow his example, and persecuted them to such a brutal degree as resulted in Uist’s first large wave of emigration to the New World in 1772 (see ch. 4).

Today Protestants exist in friendly relations with their Catholic neighbours, with an estimated ten percent of the main parish of Daliburgh attending the Church of Scotland.<sup>17</sup> In Benbecula the mix is more balanced, as was demonstrated in 1898 when twenty-four by thirty-two yards were added to the Nunton burial ground; when completed, a large group met at the site and neatly divided it into two equal parts – half for Catholics, half for Protestants (*OT*, 26/2/1898 p.6).

### 3.c. Tradition Preserved

The typical Protestant approach toward Gaelic folk culture is discernible in Martin Martin’s impression of South Uist in 1695: “The people residing here in summer say they sometimes hear a loud noise in the air like men speaking. I inquired [sic] if their priest had preached or argued against this superstitious custom. They told me he knew better things, and would not be guilty of dissuading men from doing

their duty, which they doubted not he judged this to be ... The Protestant minister hath often endeavoured to undeceive them, but in vain, because of an implicit faith they have in their priest; and when the topics of persuasion, though never so urgent, come from one they believe to be a heretic there is little hope of success" (1994:153).

Perhaps the priest mentioned was O' Kerulan or Arnot, the Irish jesuits hunted by the Synod of Argyll in 1697. The SSPCK had more success in St. Kilda in 1710, when we find that their schoolmaster, Alexander Buchan, claimed to have taken "no small pains and trouble" to eradicate "the pagan and popish superstitious customs so much yet in use among that people" (Campbell, 2000:13).

Their motive, of course, was a belief that the 'idolatry' inherent in catholic or pagan symbolism detracted from a proper focus on Christian worship; anyone familiar with the First Commandment will understand the protestants' reasoning. The approach of priests to this issue, however, was profoundly different: instead of suppressing pagan customs in favour of a solidly ecclesiastical gamut – 'wiping the slate clean', as it were – they strived to incorporate these beliefs into an overtly Christian framework while leaving something of the core of indigenous tradition intact. Looking back on seventeenth-century observations and missionary reports, one is led to wonder if their efforts were really for the sake of the eternal soul or merely to steer as many away from the reformed faith as possible, as if to fill a nominal quota of conversion at the expense of more substantial Christian persuasion. Consider, for instance, Martin's record of a priest's visit to Eigg:

"In the village on the south coast of this isle there is a well, called St. Katherine's well; the natives have it in great esteem, and believe it to be a catholicon for diseases. They told me that it had been such ever since it was consecrated by one Father Hugh, a Popish priest, in the following manner: he obliged all the inhabitants to come to this well, and then employed them to bring together a great heap of stones at the head of the spring, by way of penance. This being done, he said mass at the well, and then consecrated it; he gave each of the inhabitants a piece of wax candle, which they lighted, and all of them made the dessil, of going round the well sunways, the priest leading them..." (1994:303)<sup>18</sup>

The priest is said to have bade them repeat this ceremony every 15<sup>th</sup> of April, and Dressler (1998:23) has suggested that this was to undermine, in effect to replace, the islanders' hitherto usual custom of venerating a saint uncanonised by Rome (likely Donnan, Martin or Mary) every April 17<sup>th</sup>. This sort of thing undoubtedly took place in South Uist, where certain hymns and incantations collected among the folk by Carmichael in the nineteenth century indicate a like-minded incorporation of pagan rituality. Alexander MacBain, giving a paper on this material in 1890, observed that "what is religious passes imperceptibly into what is purely superstitious, especially if the culture of the people is not high. Superstition is nearly all a survival of Paganism into Christian times; and in the incantations the names of Christ, his apostles, and the Virgin Mary took those of the old heathen gods" (1890-91:230). Many such verses survived into the twentieth century through local oral tradition; one in particular, collected in the 1950s, was invoked when smothering a fire before bed each night:

<i>"Smàlaidh mise nochd an teine</i>	Tonight I smoor the fire
<i>Mar a smàlas mac Muire</i>	As does the son of Mary
<i>Gu ma slàn an taigh 's an teine</i>	Bless the house and the fire
<i>Gu ma slàn a 'chuideachd uile.</i>	Bless all the people.
<i>Mac Dé a dh' innseadh</i>	The son of God who would tell
<i>Aingeal geal a labhras</i>	The white angel who speaks
<i>Aingeal an doras gach tighe</i>	An angel in the door of each house
<i>Gus an tig an latha geal a-màireach.</i> " <sup>19</sup>	Till comes the morn's light.

Cornelius Ward, like Fr. Hugh in Eigg, understood perfectly well how the superstitious nature of the folk in Clanranald's islands could be used to aid their reconciliation to catholicism. We have already seen how Ward encountered such veneration of St. Columba in South Uist and Canna to have digressed into superstition; in Barra also, pagan ceremony sat comfortably with catholic awe. It was said, for instance, that dust from St. Barr's grave calmed a storm at sea when thrown on the waters: "For the sea," writes Ward, "as often as it is sprinkled with the dust of the grave of this saint is accustomed, as the inhabitants affirm, to cease from all

storm” (Campbell, 1954:33).<sup>20</sup> A Barra man of upstanding social rank even claimed to have had a vision which led many others to convert when they’d heard of it: he saw three friars, swathed in white and surrounded by light, approaching Barra; two said farewell and drifted elsewhere and the third landed on Barra’s shore, where a great throng of people met him, eager to convert (*ibid*:83). This actually coincided with the meeting of Ward, O’ Neill and Brady in Benbecula, upon which O’ Neill and Brady left for Skye and Ward made for Barra. When he revisited the island after a further spell in Uist, the same man told him that an old woman had earlier seen two armies approaching Barra in a vision of her own: one clothed in “shining raiment” and its leader “more resplendid than the sun”, the other clothed in darkness and led by a man of “fearful countenance” (*ibid*:84). The islanders interpreted the first army as that of Christ, and the other that of Satan; 116 people were reportedly terrified enough by this vision to have converted *en masse* at Ward’s hand. Ward did nothing to dissuade them from a belief in second sight; like Fr. Allan McDonald of Eriskay after him,<sup>21</sup> the ‘Son of the Bard’ probably identified with it culturally and did not think it at odds with Christian teaching. These and other instances when a superstitious belief persuaded many to convert<sup>22</sup> leads one to conclude that, when compared with the ministers of the period, catholic missionaries in and around South Uist were savvy in the art of conversion, more attuned culturally to the Hebridean way of life, and quick to realise how powerful a Christianity made tangible with pagan ceremony could be among the west Highland Gaels. “For this reason unbelievers are daily attracted to catholicism,” writes Ward. “It is impossible to say how great a number of people, for this reason alone, acquire a reverence for catholic ceremonies” (Giblin, 1964:88).

The rise of evangelicalism in the early eighteenth century tended to bolster the ranks of secessionists in the Church of Scotland Reformed – those who grew more and more disgruntled with the state’s right to nominate ministry, and the moderates’ tolerance of it – and this culminated in the Disruption of 1843 when 451 clergy walked out of the General Assembly and established the Church of Scotland Free.<sup>23</sup> These evangelical ministers stressed the zeal of conversion, the godliness of temperance and the fellowship to be found in large revival-like gatherings such as the



communion at Cambuslang in 1742.<sup>24</sup> They embraced scholastic Calvinism and saw an over-importance being placed on ‘earthly’ rather than ‘spiritual’ matters for their taste; they dismissed moderate ministers as being “indifferent to the morals of their people and being too tolerant” (Ansdell, 1998:98).

The Free Church became extremely popular in the protestant Highlands. Their values, if anything, were more inclined toward strict social asceticism than the moderates’ ever were, and so the evangelical movement has often been viewed as responsible for the decline of Gaelic oral literature and music in the Highlands and Islands, particularly in Lewis, since the nineteenth century. This is perpetuated in both scholarly prose –

“The oral traditions, so carefully fostered by previous generations, were at one time actively discouraged by the Church, and most of them have been lost. Anything that savoured of the past was once frowned upon, and contemptuously referred to as *gorach*, foolishness. In this way, much of the island [of Lewis]’s heritage of songs, stories, customs and beliefs came to be abandoned. Even the fiddle and the bagpipe had to give way to the triomb, Jew’s harp.” (MacDonald, 1978, 115)

– and in Gaelic poetry, such as Derick Thomson’s *Bodaich-Rocais*, or “Scarecrow”, who “came into the ceilidh-house / a tall, thin, black-haired man / wearing black clothes / ... A woman was sitting on a stool / singing songs, and he took the goodness out of the music” (MacAulay, 1976:165). Another classic example is Carmichael’s introduction to volume one of *Carmina Gadelica*, in which he encapsulates his experiences in late nineteenth-century Lewis into a composite scene. Visiting a Ness household, he asks the lady of the house:

“ ‘I suppose there is much fun and rejoicing in your marriages – music, dancing, singing, merry-making of many kinds?’

‘Oh indeed no, our weddings are now quiet and becoming, not the foolish things they were in my young days. In my memory, weddings were great events, with singing and piping, dancing and amusements all night through, and generally for two or three nights in succession

... It is long since we abandoned those foolish ways in Ness, and indeed throughout Lewis. In my young days there was hardly a house in Ness in which there was not one or two who could play the pipe, the fiddle, or the trump.'

'And why were they discontinued?'

'A blessed change came over the place and the people', replied the woman in earnestness, 'and the good men and the good ministers who arose did away with the songs and the stories, the music and the dancing ... that were perverting the minds and ruining the souls of the people ... They made the people break and burn their pipes and fiddles.' " (1928:xxix)

However, it would be wrong to say that the sort of tyrannical depravity implied in these albeit legitimate examples are typical of the entire Free Church or its principles. John Knox did not "utterly condemn" dancing (Donaldson, 1972:65); Calvin's teachings were never against music, *per se*; if they were, there would be no tradition of psalmody in Gaelic presbyterian communities today. The difference is that the Calvinist associates piping with traditional Gaelic social culture – the dance, the *céilidh*, the whisky – which he in turn regards as secular excess. Abraham Kuyper captured the essence of this philosophy in a lecture on "Calvinism and Art" delivered at Princeton in 1898:

"As Protestantism in general, but Calvinism more consistently, bridled the tutelage of the church, so also was music emancipated by it, and the way opened to its so splendid modern development. The men who arranged the music of the Psalm for the Calvinistic singing were the brave heroes who cut the strands that bound us to the Cantus firmus, and selected their melodies from the free world of music. To be sure, by doing this, they adopted the people's melodies, but as Douen rightly remarks, only in order that they might return these melodies to the people purified and baptised in Christian seriousness. The choir was abandoned; in the sanctuary the people themselves would sing, and therefore ... the Calvinistic virtuosi ... were bound to make the selections from the popular melodies, but with this end in view, viz, that now the people would no longer sing in the saloon or in the street, but in the sanctuary, and thus, in their melodies, cause the seriousness of the heart to triumph over the heat of the lower passions." (1961:168)

Piety, restraint and a turning away from worldliness are the basic aims of Calvinism in the form of the Free Church; the obstacles to these things are anything that can be deemed a worldly excess, such as drinking, dancing, and merry-making in general. The “people’s melodies” are returned “purified and baptised in Christian seriousness”.<sup>25</sup> Hebridean areas in which this religious climate prevails would find the merry-making that goes on “in the saloon or in the street” – and by extension the *taigh-céilidh* – contrary to the dignity that comes with the observance of that faith’s principles. And in traditional Gaelic social culture, with merry-making comes piping.

The assault on folk culture conveyed by the examples above are rather indicative of extreme lay groups within Free Church communities such as *Na Daoine* or *Na Bodaich* (The Men or The Elders), those who take an active hand in preaching the Scriptures but who are not formal ministry; or else of the newly converted, whose fresh zeal has made them “apt to be intemperate of speech and rash in action” (Carmichael, 1928:xxv). Musical instruments were often the first to be sacrificed, even for those who were avid performers before conversion. This was the case with Donald Munro, blind fiddler and SSPCK catechist in Skye of the early nineteenth century, who never touched his fiddle after being converted (Meek, 1996:45); and with Sinclair Thomson, the ‘Shetland Apostle’, who until his conversion around 1816 often played the fiddle for dances (Fotheringham, 1917:5). It was also the case with John MacDonald of Ferintosh, the ‘Apostle of the North’ and the “pet aversion of the old Moderates” (Kennedy, 1932:535), an excellent piper in his youth, whose father “applied the axe to his son’s bagpipes after the latter’s mind was engaged in ‘higher matters’ ” (Meek, 1996:45). The common view that the Free Church is based fundamentally on this kind of severe austerity is proof enough of The Men’s influence at the grass-roots level of Hebridean presbyterianism. Donald MacLeod, in his article in *The Realm of Reform*, tried to reconcile the extreme and the ordinary among those who expound the evangelical ideal:

“The human tendency to equate religion with asceticism has sometimes existed within Scottish Calvinism itself. The converted turn their backs on the world, regarding all secular

activity as at best a necessary evil, to be abandoned as soon as possible in favour of church and prayer-meeting. There was nothing wrong with the positive side of such a culture; certainly nothing wrong with a relish for Christian fellowship and a hunger for Christian teaching. What was wrong was that it became a rule for the Order – for example for ‘the Men’ of the Highlands – forbidding involvement in social, cultural, and political activities. Even the man who was over-enthusiastic in his crofting was frowned on as earthy (*talmhaidh*).” (1999:46)

From the above, one can imagine how a community given to the natural puritanism of the Free Church, and made more so by the asceticist influence of *Na Daoine*, would have little place for piping – a very “social” and “cultural” activity in the *Gàidhealtachd*.

It was a different climate altogether in South Uist. Religious occasions were a time not for ascetic solemnity, but for earthly jubilation: Carmichael observed that “The Night of St. Michael is the night of the dance and the song, of the merry-making, of the love-making, and of the love-gifts” (1928:198). Odo Blundell similarly observed that in Uist, “St. Andrew’s Day was the beginning of the shinty season, which afforded endless amusement during the winter afternoons, whilst the evenings were enlivened with song and story, the bagpipe and the fiddle, several of which may still be seen in almost every cottage. Little wonder that Catholic Uist should have been a happy home where the ancient ballads survived better than elsewhere” (1917:52). Even the songs themselves reflect the people’s temperament: in “*Chan eil mi gun nì air m’ aire* (I’m not free from thoughts that harass)”, a waulking song most likely dating from the early eighteenth century, the Virgin Mary’s name is invoked in the same breath as a reference to young men dancing at their weddings in the great hall of Ormiclate (Campbell and Collinson, 1969:139). In another, “*Craobh an Iubhair* (The Yew Tree)”, God, Mary and Christ are called on to bless the tree and the singer describes her lover, a man named MacKay, as one who “would dance neatly, nimbly and lively” (*ibid*:146). There is even a tale collected by Calum Maclean in 1959 of a woman with rheumatism whom the local priest cures by bringing out a fiddle and making her dance (SA 1959/58/A2). All this is a far cry from The Men’s

pious restraint; it testifies to a people who fundamentally associate catholicism with Gaelic music and festivity.

Of course, there are always exceptions. The suppression of Gaelic music and tradition by catholics is rare, but on record. The establishment of Mary of Guise, for example, made the first attempt in Scotland to ban May-day or Beltane traditions (Donaldson, 1972:65); other instances since then are known in Ireland and Cape Breton.<sup>26</sup> As for the protestant church – “Religion can never be divorced from the culture in which it takes root” (Meek, 1996:38), and accordingly we find occasional instances of protestantism looking kindly on pipe music in the *Gàidhealtachd*. Historically, this is by no means unheard of; tolerance of native folk culture was just one of the faults the evangelicals found with moderates before the Disruption. Joseph MacDonald, author of *A Compleat Theory of the Scots Highland Bagpipe* (c. 1763), was the son of a moderate minister, and his brother Patrick, also a minister, played the fiddle all his life. In South Uist itself, the South End Piping Club, based in Daliburgh, was founded in 1989 by a committee that included both the resident catholic priest and the Church of Scotland minister (see ch. 11). When asked why this minister in particular lent a hand in encouraging local piping, my informant simply replied that they were both aware that such matters as music and piping in the area were in a state of decline (NJ, 26/4/99) – revealing a sympathy for local culture and an understanding of what the community finds important. Even in evangelicalism the lines can sometimes be blurred. This was the case with the aforementioned John MacDonald of Ferintosh, a fervent presbyterian who had been an avid piper before conversion. Rev. John Kennedy reveals a rare sympathy to Gaelic folk culture among evangelicals by means of a metaphor surrounding MacDonald’s preaching:

“Duin’ an Toir, as James MacKay of Proncy in Dornoch was called, was once giving an account of how he got on at Tain Communion... The season might be spoken of as a feill or feast. So might also a fair or market be described, and at these old markets there used to be piping and dancing. James said, ‘Chaidh mi gu Baile-Dhubhthaich do’n fheill agus nuair a ràinig mi bha Ian a’ pìobaireachd, is cha b’fhada nach robh mi fhìn anns an ruidhle.’ (‘I went to Tain to the fair, and when I reached it John was piping, and it was not long until I was in



the reel.’) When he reached Tain Dr. MacDonald was preaching, and he was not long a hearer until his heart was dancing to the music of the good news he was hearing. So our old worthies could shroud their meaning in a cloak of figures.” (1932:338)

So it would appear that in this case at least, Calvinism could not entirely divorce itself from the grass-roots of Gaelic social culture.

With South Uist’s association between catholicism and indigenous Gaelic tradition in mind, it comes as no surprise that certain members of the clergy in Uist have embraced piping and, by and large, encouraged it out of a sense of community interest. This is almost certainly what Fr. Roderick MacAulay had in mind when he helped to establish the South End Piping Club in 1989. In addition, Fr. Alexander MacDougall, likely a piper himself, was a central figure in the founding of both the Highland games and the South Uist Piping Society in the beginning years of this century (see chs. 6 and 8); although his actions in hindsight betray an ‘improver’ mentality, they nonetheless reflect the catholic record of encouraging local tradition.<sup>27</sup> Others notable for their involvement in the indigenous arts include Fr. Angus MacRae of Ardkenneth, who like MacDougall helped found the South Uist Highland games in Ardvachar in 1898 (see ch. 8); Fr. MacIntosh, parish priest of Bornish, a member of the South Uist games committee around the year 1911 (see ch. 6); and Fr. MacKellaig, parish priest of Bornish in the 1950s, who was a piper and founding member of the Bornish Pipe Band.

But perhaps the most noted of Uist’s catholic clergy in that regard is Fr. Allan McDonald (1859 – 1905), resident of Daliburgh parish initially, latterly of Eriskay, and a contemporary of Fr. MacDougall (Johnson, 1991:126). ‘Father Allan’ or *Maighstir Ailein*, as he was known, was intensely interested in Uist’s oral folklore and aided many scholars with their own studies of local traditions during his lifetime; his own pursuits in collecting and preserving the culture around him are widely acknowledged. It is said that he was first introduced to Uist’s folklore by Fr. Alexander Campbell (1820 – 1893), formerly parish priest of Bornish but by the time of Fr. Allan’s arrival was retired and living in Daliburgh. Campbell was a “mine of

information on the traditions of South Uist” (Campbell, J.L., 1954:15) and was listed among McDonald’s informants for his *Gaelic Words and Expressions from South Uist and Eriskay* (1958:9). Fr. Allan’s fondness for bagpipe music was well-known. It has been written how “his eyes lighted up at the music of a strathspey, and, at a pibroch, his rugged weather-beaten countenance became suffused with colour and he drew himself up to his full six feet height at its warlike strains” (Rea, 1964:86). His feelings as such reflected an abiding appreciation of Gaelic oral tradition as a whole, and no where is this more aptly demonstrated than in the Gaelic poetry which he himself composed:

*“Pìob ‘ga spreigeadh, binn a feud leam,  
Is cha b’ e sgreud na fìdhle;  
Cridhe toirt breab as, ‘s e ‘ga freagairt  
Ann am beadradh inntinn.  
Air an fheasgair bhiodh na fleasgaich  
Ag comh-fhreagairt tìm dhi:  
Leam bu ghasda bhith ‘nam faisge  
Dol ar teas an righlidh.”* (Watson, 1932:3)

Bagpipe inciting, sweet its whistle to me,  
It wasn’t the screech of the fiddle;  
Heart marking the beat, as it answers  
By toying with the mind.  
In the evening the young would be  
Keeping time to it:  
As for me, it was fine just to be near  
Basking in the heat of the reel.

All in all, it is fairly clear that religion has played an influential role in the nature of piping in South Uist and, certainly, throughout the greater Hebrides. Different attitudes toward Gaelic social and musical culture that reflect different denominations of Christianity have fostered different climates of tolerance. We have seen how catholicism has survived in South Uist despite the neglect that characterised the sixteenth century and the founding of the evangelical Free Church in 1843; how, among Free Church communities, the severe asceticism of groups such as *Na Daoine* compounded the already restrictive social mores of the Calvinist ideal; and how catholic clergy, in contrast, have acted with benevolence and encouragement toward South Uist’s oral tradition in general, and piping tradition in particular.

1. See Stewart, 1982:349-355 for more information on Bishop James Gordon's missions through the west Highlands and Hebrides, including South Uist, in 1707 and 1711. Details of the Irish Franciscans and other itinerant priests in South Uist will be elaborated upon below.
2. Stevenson, 1980:22; Stewart, 1982:76; MacLeod, 1933:116. The MacDonells of Antrim were descended from *Iain Mór* MacDonald of Dunyveg and Islay, who married into a prominent Antrim family in the early fifteenth century and acquired lands there known as the Glens.
3. Angus Óg MacDonald, Lord of the Isles, married Àine Ní Cathan of Keenaght, Co. Derry, in the late thirteenth century. The wedding took place in South Uist. Àine's bridal retinue consisted of "140 men out of every surname in O' Cathan's territory", all of whom stayed and settled throughout the Highlands and Islands. Their descendents were referred to as *Tochradh Nighean a' Chathanaich*, or 'the Dowry of the Daughter of O' Cathan' (MacDonald, A. and A., *Clan Donald* vol i, 1896 p. 100; see also Thomson's *Companion to Gaelic Scotland* pp. 3-4).
4. See Cameron, *Reliquiae Celticae*, 1894. Many elegies contained in the Red Book show rich allusion to catholic symbolism and to Irish Gaelic mythical sagas and descent, such as on the death of Allan (c. 1510), who was "dexterous like Cuchulainn" (p. 225), and his namesake who fell at Sheriffmuir in 1715, referred to as "the leader of the army of the race of Fergus" (p. 249), i.e. the Clan Donald. See also chapter 5b.
5. Giblin, 1964:vii; Mathew, 1955:194; Campbell, 1954:34, quoting from W.C. MacKenzie's *History of the Western Isles*, p. 184.
6. This traditional verse (*Urnaigh Mara Chlann Raghnaill* in MacDonald, A and A, 1911:25) is similar to a prayer written down by Martin Martin c. 1695 (1994:187) most likely around Skye, which invokes the Holy Trinity. By all accounts, a prayer before sailing was a common thing, as it remains today.
7. The late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were basically a time of alternating church government – between episcopacy and the presbytery – while the unity of the national church as a whole remained intact; only when worship procedures were meddled with, such as the Five Articles of Perth and King Charles's introduction of the Book of Prayer in 1637, did matters affect the common people enough to lead to civil war in the 1640s. Presbyterian administration finally won out over episcopal bishoprics and ties to the crown in 1690 and was established into law (see Donaldson, 1972:70-79; 1985:204-211).
8. Giblin, 1964:xii. The missionaries claimed in all to have converted or reconciled 6,627 and baptised 3,010 in the west Highlands and Hebrides by 1633; the number was so unexpectedly high that their superiors in Rome for a time refused to pay the priests' meager salaries until it could be authenticated.
9. Catholic incorporation of pagan superstitions in the Hebrides around this time was a standard tool for mass conversions and will be elaborated upon below.
10. Stevenson, 1980:54; Black, 1972-4:220-1; Mathew, 1955:194. Despite converting almost the entire population of Colonsay in 1625, the bishop was active there at the time and Ward was compelled to leave for his own safety.
11. MacDonald, A and A, 1900:347; Anson, 1970:38; Black, 1972-4:223. Hegarty withdrew from the field the following year due to this sort of persecution, but he thereafter directed the mission from its headquarters in Bonamargy, Co. Antrim until the mid-1640s (see Giblin, 1964).

12. D.J. MacDonald MSS, book 3, p. 229. See Stewart, 1982:344 for information on Fr. Devoyer.
13. D.J. MacDonald MSS, book 3, pp. 231-33.
14. Giblin, 1964:76; Rea, 1964:viii. Ward's report from this time reveals that MacDonald first applied to the Scots' college at Douai in France, but was refused admission on the basis of his Calvinist background, and that three English-speaking students were admitted in preference to him despite a letter of commendation from the nuncio in Belgium. Ward complained to Rome about the institutional neglect of Gaelic-speaking students (Giblin:144).
15. GD 95, ii (3 March 1727); Rea, 1964:xvii.
16. The Reformation was recognised by the Scottish Parliament but their acts were not established into law until 1690, at which time parliament made official the intentions of the Church articulated at their first General Assembly on 20 December 1560 – e.g. "... To petition parliament to inflict punishment upon idolaters, and maintainers of idolatry, and those who say mass, or cause mass to be said, or are present thereat." (See *An Abridgement of the Acts of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland*, Edinburgh, 1831.) Westminster finally passed laws to protect Catholics in Scotland in 1829.
17. Estimated by Rev. Lawson, Daliburgh, during an informal talk in April, 1999.
18. The pagan rituality behind wells, springs, cairns and the *deiseil* among Gaels has been documented elsewhere and is widely accepted. Ross (1974:48-56) refers to the cult and sacredness of wells and springs in pagan tradition among the Celts of Gaul, Ireland and Britain; the Reeses (1961:161) refer to the Irish tradition of a well of "knowledge and inspiration" from which flow the Boyne, the Shannon, and Ireland's "seven chief rivers". Donald John MacDonald of South Uist (MSS book 66, p. 6168) remarks in a treatise on local traditions that a funeral party would circle the deceased person's house *deiseil*, or sunwise, before continuing on to the gravesite, a custom which survived until about the turn of the twentieth century; and Donaldson claimed that as late as 1920, "throughout the Highlands the natives, wholly irrespective of the religion they profess, are not without relics of pagan superstition, being careful, for instance, to go *deiseil*, or sunwise, in leaving the house or in walking round anything. In this practice can be traced the remains of sun-worship" (1920:90).
19. D.J. MacDonald MSS book 3 p. 196. Carmichael (i, 1928:234-241) gives several variants of this smooing blessing, which is likely indicative of regional variations; they are all generally alike in theme and formula but differ in references to names of saints, such as John, Peter, Paul and so on. MacBain (1890:232) gives one version, based on Carmichael's collected material, which invokes saints Peter and Paul.
20. This sort of superstitious custom deriving from Catholic veneration is echoed by Fr. Allan McDonald of Eriskay's ritual blessing of the island's fishing fleet every May (Beltane?) for three years before his death in 1905: "The fishermen at his request thoroughly cleansed out their boats and gave them the names of saints. He then gathered them together and blessed them. They cast lots to decide on what boat Mass would be celebrated. An altar with a canopy overhead was erected on the lucky boat, and the others gathered in a circle round it, all gaily festooned and decorated with flags and banners" (Campbell, 1954:20-1). The sprinkling of dust from St. Barr's grave and the celebrating of mass on the Eriskay fleet 300 years later both smack of pagan luck-belief incorporated into a Catholic framework.
21. Fr. Allan's high regard for folklore in Uist and Eriskay (see below) included the belief in second sight, information on which he collected on behalf of the American researcher Ada Goodrich-Freer



(Campbell, 1954; see also Campbell John L. and Trevor H. Hall, *Strange Things*, London, 1968).

22. Ward recounts that a member of the South Uist gentry took some holy water up to North Uist, where a woman apparently found that it multiplied food by a third when sprinkled on it (Giblin, 1964:87). It need hardly be said that a rumour that holy water multiplies food, in a place like the Outer Isles in the seventeenth century, would doubtless attract many to the faith. Baptism was also regarded by the people of South Uist as a way of ridding houses of spirit-pests, the ghosts of the recently deceased, and so on (*ibid*:88).

23. "Spiritual independence" (Thomson, 1994:86), or the separation of church and state, was the issue at the heart of the Disruption. Lairds and other dignitaries could place ministers of their own choosing in charge of congregations with no need of the congregations' approval. This system had its roots in the reign of James III, who in 1473 overrode the election of an abbot by a Dunfermline monastery and placed in his stead James's own nominee (Mathieson, 1902, i:26). It was neither the first nor the last abuse of crown power in the Scottish Church, but it did set a precedent for the system prevailing over 300 years later. See also Drummond and Bulloch, 1973:58-9.

24. The Cambuslang revival was a breakthrough for the evangelical movement in Scotland. Throughout the spring and summer of that year people came from all over to hear sermons and witness conversions in unprecedented numbers, and in August, 30,000 people are said to have gathered for a huge communion (although perhaps only a tenth of them actually received it). See Bebbington, n.d.:24; Drummond and Bulloch, 1973:53-55 and 1975:21-34.

25. Kuyper's comment recalls a debate at a folk music conference in Belfast ten years ago. In it the well-known Gaelic singer Mary Jane Campbell remarked on the legacy of the Free Church in Lewis: "So, there was a great flood of new writing because of the destruction of the old songs. I think that in an island like Barra there is not the same need to produce new material. I was at a little session with an old man, and he sang a song. Somebody said, 'Where did you get that?', and he said, 'Oh, that's an old song. That was composed about 1920.' Well now, if you said that to someone in Barra, they would say, 'That was composed about 1620,' or earlier" (McNamee, 1991:25). "Destruction" in this case may have referred to folk songs "purified and baptised" by the local ministry, altered beyond recognition for the sanctity of the church service; it gives perspective to Derick Thomson's "Scarecrow", who "took the goodness out of the music."

26. Emmerson (1972:224) and the Fletts (1964:271) mention one instance at least of the Eightsome Reel being proscribed and fiddles being destroyed by priests in Cape Breton, and there are old stories and jokes in Ireland about priests banning traditional music and dancing (McNamee, 1991:65), but these all centre around Sunday temperance rather than a general doctrinal intolerance.

27. As a side note to priests' involvement in local piping, the dean of Daliburgh in the 1930s, Fr. A.F. Gillies, was often chairman of the South Uist Games Committee and a keen supporter of the piping competitions throughout his residency. At a *céilidh* in Lochboisdale after the Games in 1932, the pipers, judges, committee members and others all gathered to toast the day's events and each other's contributions; "in proposing the health of Dean Gillies," writes the *Oban Times*, "Mr. Seton Gordon (a piping judge) said how fortunate South Uist was, when the Church entered into the festivities of the island and, as it were, gave them her blessing. He said that when Pipe-Major John MacDonald or when any other master piper played a piobaireachd, it was an uplifting experience, and it was only right that the fine music of the pipes should be encouraged in every way possible" (13/8/32 p. 2).



## CHAPTER FOUR

### *“We followed the old pipe-playing in the new country”:*

#### **From South Uist to the New World, 1772 – 1923**

Out-movement from South Uist in some form or another has been a characteristic of the island's history for over two hundred years. This has to do mainly with social, economic and agricultural problems which members of each successive generation will either endure or escape according to their means or inclination. Out-movement can of course take several forms, the three most common, historically, being seasonal or permanent migration to the Lowlands in search of employment; joining the military; and emigration to Canada.<sup>1</sup> The first of these has been an accepted facet of Uist life ever since the famine years of the 1840s,<sup>2</sup> and is a road travelled by some of South Uist's finest competitive pipers of the twentieth century, such as Rona Lightfoot, Willie Morrison, Ronald and Fred Morrison, the *Roideins*, and Calum Johnstone. These pipers will be discussed in greater detail in chapters 7 and 8, and the military's contribution is discussed broadly in chapters 5, 6 and 9. My task in this chapter is to briefly describe the emigration of local pipers to Canada and to assess, to the extent that evidence allows, the impact of this on the home tradition.

South Uist produced frequent emigrations to Canada during the period in question, the four most notable being that of the *Alexander* in 1772; 'Cluny's Clearances' between 1847 and 1853; the 'Cathcart Settlers' of 1883 and 1884 who founded a township in Saskatchewan; and those who boarded the *Marloch* in 1922 and 1923 for northern Alberta as part of the Empire Settlement Act. The size of these ventures varied considerably, as did the circumstances which prompted them. The 1772 voyage, for instance, is particularly well-researched<sup>3</sup> and was unique for being "the only known Highland transatlantic movement of the later 18<sup>th</sup> century brought about by religious persecution" (Bumsted, 1978:512). Most emigrations at that time were caused by a general dissatisfaction with landowners' progressive economic measures, such as the introduction of improvement schemes and kelp manufacture,<sup>4</sup> which came about as a

result of increasing integration with the British money-based economy since the beginning of the century. Writers have often attributed the lairds' shift in priorities to the post-Jacobite aftermath, but this had merely intensified a process already underway (see Campbell, 1988:99 and Macinnes, 1988:76).

Circumstances surrounding the *Alexander* episode were atypical of the times: Colin MacDonald of Boisdale, cousin of Ranald MacDonald of Clanranald, was a tacksman receiving rent from about three hundred families, all of whom were catholic, then living on his South Uist lands. He himself was brought up with the old faith but, in 1768, converted to the presbyterian church and thereafter harassed his tenantry in an attempt to see them converted as well. Threats and ultimatums came to no avail, however. He is even said to have attacked men in sectarian frustration with an old cane, prompting the nickname for presbyterianism still heard in Uist today: *Creideamh a' Bhata Bhuidhe*, or 'the Religion of the Yellow Stick'.<sup>5</sup> The Scottish Catholic Church took notice and eventually persuaded eleven of these families, comprising about fifty-five people, to emigrate to St. John's Island (as Prince Edward Island was then known) under the leadership of John MacDonald of Glenaladale – also a senior Clanranald tacksman and most disgruntled by the changes in land tenure developing around him (MacKay, 1963:18-20; Bumsted, 1982:57). The actual number of passengers aboard the *Alexander* was 214; the rest was made up of tenants from Barra, Eigg, Moidart and Arisaig who were prosperous enough not to need financial support and who, instead of being the victims of religious persecution, left Scotland in response to the good things they were hearing about opportunities in the New World.

Unlike the *Alexander* emigration, the victims of 'Cluny's Clearances' were physically driven from their homes. This was during the notorious famine years of c.1846 to 1856, which left many of the crofting regions of the western Highlands destitute and in need of charitable aid. Kelping was no help; the industry had ceased to be remunerative ever since cheaper materials were secured by government from abroad in 1815.<sup>6</sup> South Uist was unique in the early 1800s for continuing to produce it in spite of losses in order to fend off rent arrears as long as possible; this went on until Reginald George MacDonald of Clanranald, the last hereditary laird of that line, sold the estate to Colonel John Gordon of Cluny in 1838.<sup>7</sup> By the late 1840s, kelping had been discontinued even

as a means of making the rent, while the increasing scarcity at harvest time left cattle in poor physical condition, causing a decline in price already low due to transport difficulties. Consequently, the crop failures which left South Uist with a “total” potato failure from 1848 to 1850 (Devine, 1988:301-2, appendix 2) really left the Uist folk with nowhere to turn but the various philanthropic organisations of the central belt<sup>8</sup> and their proprietor, Colonel Gordon.

His response to the crisis was less than inspiring. He was condemned by the Lord Advocate’s Office and the Sheriff of Inverness contemporaneously, and by several histories latterly, for his lethargy in the face of squalor and rumours of deaths in Barra<sup>9</sup> and for his lack of concern for the well-being of those he forced to emigrate.<sup>10</sup> It must be said, however, that he went to great expense in feeding the hungry on his estate once complaints grew loud enough.<sup>11</sup> In a memorial to Sir George Gray, the Home Secretary on 20 June 1849, he finally appealed to the government for assistance in applying “the remedy of an effectual emigration” to his destitute tenantry, which he described as about half the population of Uist and Benbecula. From that year through to 1853, Cluny forced the emigration of nearly three thousand individuals to mainland Canada, by far the most severe depopulation in the Hebrides: from 1847 to 1853, 2,906 left South Uist, Barra, and Benbecula under Cluny, compared to 234 from North Uist under Lord MacDonald; 2,279 from Tiree and the Ross of Mull under the Duke of Argyll; and 2,337 from Lewis, a far bigger and more populous island than South Uist, under Mathieson (extrapolated from Devine, 1988:206).

The ‘Cathcart Settlers’ of 1883 and 1884, so-called for the assistance they received from proprietrix Lady Emily Gordon Cathcart, Col. Gordon’s daughter-in-law, consisted of 287 people from townships in both South Uist and Benbecula. Upon arriving in Canada they journeyed to the Wapella district of Saskatchewan, Canada, and founded a settlement called “St. Andrews and Benbecula” seven to ten miles southwest of Wapella town. The most complete record of this double-venture is a document written and printed by a son of one of the emigrants in 1921 (T.60.02), which is immensely valuable as it gives not just the names (both in Gaelic and in English) of the heads of families, but extensive biographical details as well, including religious affiliation. There is no explicit mention of why Lady Cathcart assisted these emigrants, as indeed appears to

have been the case. The first man listed among the heads of families in 1883, for instance, a *Dòmhnall mac Dhiarmaid* ('Donald son of Dermott'), had surveyed the territory the previous year to assess it "as Lady Cathcart's agent" (p. 3). Nor does it explain really why the emigrants wished to go, for indeed it appears that the move was voluntary. A religious motive of the same type which spurred the 1772 venture can cautiously be ruled out, since both faiths were well-represented: out of 287 individuals, 185 were catholic and 102 protestant. Occasionally one finds passing references to having been "cooped up for ages" (p. 7) and having left "cramped quarters for spacious ones" (p. 8), which clearly suggests overpopulation and too much subdivision of crofting lands. The author also points out "their decision to leave a place where a poor man has no chance to assert himself, and come for their children's sake, if not their own, to a country where every one has a good fair chance to do so" (p. 9), suggesting a dissatisfaction with contemporary landholding policies which, ironically, were to be addressed that same year by the Napier Commission and later by the Crofters (Scotland) Act of 1886.

The last significant emigration from South Uist was in 1923 and 1924, when a total of 489 individuals (291 in the first year, 198 in the following) boarded the *Marloch* for northern Alberta, Canada, in response to persistent economic and agricultural hardship at home as well as to take advantage of opportunities abroad presented by the Empire Settlement Act. Implicitly it was also, like the *Alexander* venture, an attempt to establish a catholic colony by its main organiser, Fr. Andrew MacDonell (see Harper, 1994:69-108).

But what of pipers? There are plenty of recorded instances of Gaels and other Scots bringing piping to the New World. Among the men who emigrated on the particularly well-documented voyages of 1774 and 1775, for example, six listed their occupation as "piper"<sup>12</sup>; and Alexander MacKenzie observed, regarding the *Hector* on its 1773 journey from Lochbroom to Pictou, Nova Scotia:

"As they were leaving, a piper came on board who had not paid his passage; the captain ordered him ashore, but the strains of the national instrument affected those on board so much that they pleaded to have him allowed to accompany them, and offered to share their own rations with



him in exchange for his music during the passage. Their request was granted, and his performances aided in no small degree to cheer the noble band of pioneers in their long voyage of eleven weeks, in a miserable hulk, across the Atlantic. The pilgrim band kept up their spirits as best they could by song, pipe-music, dancing, wrestling, and other amusements, through the long and painful voyage.” (1883:390-1)<sup>13</sup>

Many pipers and piping families were among the emigrant groups who departed from South Uist’s shores during the period in question, including those noted above.

Examples abound:

- The name MacIntyre continually appears in the annals and memorates of emigrant pipers. For instance, the hereditary pipers to the Menzies and Clanranald families were traditionally MacIntyres, and Robert MacIntyre, piper to Clanranald, is said to have left sometime between 1790 and 1804 from his base in Benbecula (see ch. 5a). He reportedly bequeathed the famous Bannockburn Pipes, which his family had possessed for generations, to MacDonald of Kinlochmoidart.<sup>14</sup> A variant of this story was published in the *Oban Times*, date unknown, which Calum Beaton copied down by hand in his youth and from which he recited to me in 1998:

CB: “Donald Mór MacIntyre was a native of South Uist. He received his piping tuition from the MacCrimmons of Skye. He was hereditary piper to the Clan Menzies upon completing his course on Skye. He was succeeded as piper to Sir Robert Menzies by his grandson, Donald Ban. The family possessed a set of pipes which were supposed to have been played at Bannockburn. Robert went to Canada and left the pipes to MacDonald of Moidart.” (SA 1998.70)

The latter version is unlikely, since Sir Robert is not recorded in family muniments as moving to North America at any time, and in fact was asked to stand for M.P. of Perthshire in 1806 (GD 1/337/41). We can therefore attribute the confusion between Robert MacIntyre and Sir Robert Menzies to the ordinary course of traditional narrative. Similarly, the ‘MacIntyre’ connection has enmeshed the emigration legend in some way with the fund of *Piobairean Smearclait* tales discussed in chapter 2b; or so it appears



from an anecdote, preserved by Fr. Allan McDonald (1859 – 1905) in the late nineteenth century, which refers to the Smerclate Pipers as emigrants to the New World:

“Neil MacRury of Kilpheder was a sailor. In one of his voyages to America he encountered another Uist man and they both went paddling about the bay in a yacht. They saw a beautiful 3-masted vessel and strange to say they heard the bagpipes played on board. As was natural they sailed toward the vessel and listened with pleasure to the wild music doubly dear so far from home. The piper asked them whence they came. They answered that they came from Uist. He asked if they knew Smerclate. They said they did. ‘Did you ever hear of the Pipers of Smerclate?’ They told him they had. ‘Well,’ says he, ‘I am of the family. We followed the old pipe-playing in the new country. We have got on well. This vessel is my own and I sail about in it in fare [sic] weather.’ He entertained the Uist men hospitably, and they departed realising the old proverb, ‘*Coinnichidh na daoine, ged nach coinnich a’ chruinne* (People come together, though the world does not).’” (Carmichael-Watson MS 58[A]57)

Other MacIntyre pipers appear in the emigrant record. Donald MacIntyre, or *Dòmhnall mac Thormaid* (‘Donald, son of Norman’), born around 1748, emigrated from South Uist in c. 1820 and settled in Boisdale, Cape Breton County; his grandson *Dòmhnall Mór* (‘Big Donald’) and three great-grandsons were noted pipers. Another Donald MacIntyre is known to have left South Uist in 1826, settling at French Road, and his descendants were also pipers of note in that area.<sup>15</sup>

It is generally considered that Gaelic oral tradition can preserve the memory of an event for a hundred years and more as effectively as the written word, as was the case in Pictou concerning the *Hector* in 1773 (see MacKenzie, 1883:390) and in Uist concerning Cluny’s evictions in the 1840s. Jessie MacAulay spoke of her own ancestors’ eviction from the Corodal area of South Uist at that time to make room for sheep pasturage (see chapter 7). According to MacAulay, several families of MacIntyres, pipers among them, were evicted from this area at the foot of Beinn Mhór in the 1820s – 1840s. While her great-grandfather settled with his wife in Smerclate, others were coerced to emigrate:

JM: *Chaidh feadhainn dhiubh gu Nova Scotia agus thug iad leoth’ a’ phiob. Agus tha cuimhn’*

*am sgrìobh' a chuir iad gu m' athair anns na, oh, nineteen-twenties. Chunnaic iad an t-ainm againn anns a' phàipeir, Oban Times, sgrìobh iad aig an am, is chuir iad dealbh [de] phìob agus fear-gille, gille aca a' pìobaireachd. They sent a photo of the boy, the young man, playing the pipes they had taken with them in the eighteen-forties; eighteen-twenties, thirties, or forties, the middle of the last century. Tha mi 'smaoineadh gur e Joe an t-ainm a bh' air an gille, Joseph, no Donald Joe, no Dan an t-ainm air. Tha e cho fad air falbh. (SA 1998.68)*

JM: Some of them went to Nova Scotia and took the pipes with them. I remember a letter they sent to my father in the, oh, nineteen-twenties. They saw our name in the paper, the Oban Times, and they wrote us, attaching a photograph of the pipes and a boy, a boy of their's piping. They sent a photo of the boy, the young man, playing the pipes they had taken with them in the eighteen-forties; eighteen-twenties, thirties, or forties, the middle of the last century. I think the boy's name was Joe, Joseph, or Donald Joe, or Dan. It was so long ago.

MacAulay herself belongs to a family of MacIntyre pipers, based in Smerclate these past 150 years, whom she describes as having been “pipers and archers to MacDonald of Clanranald” and as having relations in Boisdale, Cape Breton (see ch. 7) – both things that could indicate a close connection to the MacIntyre families of 1820 and 1826.

- According to his descendants, one Allan MacCormick, a piper, emigrated from South Uist to Prince Edward Island sometime before 1808, and moved on to Lake Ainslie, Cape Breton, in that year (Gibson, 1998:240).
- Three people were recorded as pipers among the ‘Cathcart Settlers’ on their journey to Saskatchewan. *Dòmhnall a' Bhanca* (‘Donald MacDonald of the Bank’) of Rudha a' Bhruich, a protestant, was evidently an important member of his community, for “in his early days no wedding or entertainment was complete without Donald and his pipes” (T.60.02:20); *Ruairidh mac Isaic* [sic] (‘Roderick MacIsaac’) of Uachdar, a catholic, “being a piper of some ability ... keeps the cares and worries of this vale of tears at a respectable distance” (*ibid*); and Donald John, the son of *Raghnall Mór* (‘Big Ronald MacDonald’) of Aird, also a catholic, was a “fine piper” who “joined the forces in France during the war in that capacity” and who “came home ... with a complete fine Highland

costume and an elaborate set of pipes” (*op cit*:18).

- In 1907, the *Oban Times* reported the emigration to Canada of an E.C. MacRury of South Uist, an “excellent musician who could play the violin and the bagpipe with grace and taste” (8/6/1907 p. 5). Assertions that many pipers in Cape Breton could also play the fiddle suggest a west Highland and Hebridean origin of the custom which the case of MacRury, and others like him, supports.<sup>16</sup>

- Passengers on board the *Marloch* in 1923 reportedly entertained themselves with “concerts, whist parties” and “dances” (Harper, 1994:80, quoting the *Montreal Gazette*, 30 April 1923), among other things, and judging by memorates of elderly pipers concerning the universality of piping in South Uist at that time (see ch. 6), it is fairly certain that bagpipes were among the instruments played to provide music. Additionally, piping was reported on Lochboisdale pier as the tug *Dunara Castle* ferried passengers to the main vessel.

How have these emigrations of pipers and piping families affected the home tradition? Transatlantic emigration may weaken the local tradition in theory, perhaps in the same way as wartime casualties weakened it during the Great War – a simple lessening or dispersing of numbers under whose stewardship the tunes, styles and customs are maintained; in practice however, whatever impact emigration has had could not have been widespread, permanent or debilitating to the tradition as a whole. Emigrant pipers can be counted in individuals or families, not in whole communities. Countless references to the universality of the aural idiom in the early decades of this century (see ch. 6) and of the literate throughout (see chs. 7 and 8) prove the vitality of piping on the island despite emigration overseas.

In the end, we are left with a less tangible but no less real knowledge of the legacy which South Uist pipers have bestowed, through emigration, on their North American beneficiaries. This legacy has come full circle of late, since many Gaelic emigrant communities in Nova Scotia have been culturally conservative enough to ensure that what we know of traditional dance-piping predating this century comes mainly from research into their own inherited piping traditions. The most authoritative such body of research

to have come out in recent years is John Gibson's *Traditional Gaelic Bagpiping, 1745 – 1945* (1998), which examines the history of Highland piping over the last two and a half centuries from the perspective of old-world Gaelic social culture. Gibson provides us with a distinctly different point of view than that of most other histories; as I mentioned in Chapter 1, they tend to deal exclusively with the institutional aspects of piping's modern development. He instead addresses the economic and cultural changes affecting Scottish Gaels in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and outlines in turn how this would have affected the indigenous functions and character of their music. A sufficient base of reference for old-world Gaelic piping cannot stand on documentary evidence alone, however, as the written record since the eighteenth century is mainly from the English-language perspective and, with the exception of travellers' memoirs, not too concerned with rural Gaelic social traditions. This is why Gibson fleshes out the written record of Scotland with the oral and instrumental traditions of Nova Scotia. His and other, smaller-scale publications in recent years<sup>17</sup> show that emigration from South Uist and other Highland areas is not without a positive side; that its legacy to modern piping, at least, is the value with which scholars and performers alike have come to regard the North American *gàidhealtachd* and all it has to teach us of Highland piping's roots.

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1. J.L. Campbell listed these as the three options available to the typical young man in South Uist during storyteller Angus MacLellan's day in the 1880s; see MacLellan, 1962:xiii.
2. When the famine hit, "men came in significant numbers from the Outer Hebrides to work at the railways and in the farms of the central Lowlands. At least 107 natives of Barra, South Uist and North Uist were labouring as railway navvies in the summer of 1847" (Devine, 1988:157).
3. The main analyses of this emigration are MacKay, 1963; Bumsted, 1978; Bumsted, 1982; Bailyn, 1986; Lawson, 1991; Adams and Somerville, 1993.
4. Improvements began with the introduction of such crops as clover, rye-grass, turnips, and potatoes upon arable Highland farms in the mid-eighteenth century, which was likely influenced by Lowland practice (Gray, 1957:76-77; Bumsted, 1982:4, 38); however, "Ideas of improvement are seen with aversion", wrote MacDonell of Barisdale to the Board of Annexed Estates in 1763 (McLean, 1991:24). Gray discusses rent raises across the Highlands from the mid-eighteenth century as reflecting "progress and attention to the land" (1957:146), and of ventures from 1773 to 1775 which were unusually well-recorded, most Highlanders professed to be emigrating because of high rents (Bailyn, 1986:191, 198). For protest against these measures in South and North Uist, see Bumsted, 1982:85-6. For the



- introduction of the kelping industry and its profitability, see Gray, 1957:12, 17, 132; Bumsted, 1982:42; MacInnes, 1988:76; and McLean, 1991:17.
5. MacKay, 1963:17. A slightly different version of this anecdote was recorded in 1965 for the School of Scottish Studies from Calum MacRae, South Uist (SA 1965/115/B3). *Creideamh a' Bhata Bhuidhe* is a legend known in Coll and Rum as well as Uist, as Samuel Johnson remarked (*OT*, 12/3/1898 p. 3; Johnson and Boswell, 1924:115), so it is difficult to pin down where the event that inspired the legend actually took place.
  6. The lowering of import duties and the abolition of the salt tax in 1825 contributed to the decline in price for Highland kelp, as did advances in the chemical industry in mass producing soda. Kelp declined from about £20/ton in 1811 to about £3-5 in 1834, effectively ruining all viability. See Gray, 1957:156-7; Stewart, 1982:568; Bumsted, 1982:42; *New Stat Acc*, 1845:194.
  7. 1,872 tenants were still engaged in kelp manufacture in South Uist in 1837 (see Gray, 1957:158 and Devine, 1988:25, 147). The *New Statistical Account* (1845:194) reveals that "the wages of the kelp-makers have been ... reduced, and indeed, the manufacture would not be continued at all, but to enable the tenants to pay their rents." For Cluny's feelings on the matter, see Memorial, 20 June 1849, in AD 58/86.
  8. Such organisations included the Central Board of Management of Funds (collected from subscribers to relieve the destitute), the Glasgow and Edinburgh Relief Committees, and the Free Church; see, for instance, HD 16/60, AD 58/86, Gray, 1992:51, and Devine, 1988.
  9. AD 58/86, Anon to Sheriff of Inverness, 5 January 1847; F. Skene to Lord Advocate, same date; Sheriff of Inverness to Lord Advocate, 15 February 1847; and the Lord Advocate wrote to Coffin, 5 January 1847, "...It grieves me to the heart to think that destitution should have made a progress so stern and alarming on a property belonging to one of the most wealthy proprietors in this country. But there is no present help. I have little hope of assistance from him."
  10. See MacKenzie, *History of the Highland Clearances*, 1883:250-261 and the concluding chapter of James Stewart's PhD thesis on the history of Clanranald (1982).
  11. Sir Edward Coffin of the Treasury, a "sober and experienced" man who thought generally ill of the whole clearance process (Devine, 1988:180), wrote to C.E. Trevalyan on 30 June 1847: "...although Col. Gordon may have done his share with a bad grace, it is undeniable that he had performed it more fully than the proprietors of either North Uist or Harris" (AD 58/86). See also Devine, 1988:90-4. Cluny himself wrote that he'd spent £8,000 in relief expenses from 1840 to 1849 (*ibid*, 20 June 1849).
  12. Adams and Somerville, 1993:122-3. Cf. Bailyn, 1986:191,198.
  13. For fuller accounts of the *Hector* voyage, see Bumsted, 1982:62 and Adams and Somerville, 1993:71-6.
  14. Collinson, 1976:133; Stewart, 1982:311; James MacGregor Collection, GD 50/225/5.
  15. For the French Road MacIntyres, see Shears, 1986:12 and MacEachen, "The MacIntyre pipers of French Road" in *Am Bràighe*, Summer 1995, p. 11. For the Boisdale MacIntyres see Shears (*ibid*) and MacMillan, *To the Hill of Boisdale*, 1986:262-270.
  16. Such assertions include a descendant of Donald MacIntyre of French Road recalling that "very many of the violin players around at that time (early this century) could play the pipes" (MacEachen, "The MacIntyre pipers..." in *Am Bràighe*, Summer 1995, p. 11) and John Gibson pointing out that "[most] of those old pipers over here could [play] on two instruments – the fiddle as well as the pipes" (Anon,



“Bagpiping revelations” in *Am Bràighe*, Autumn 1998, p. 7).

17. See, for example, *Am Bràighe* (Autumn 1998) for an interview with John Gibson involving broad stylistic questions; “With Piper Alex Currie, Frenchvale” in *Cape Breton’s Magazine* (no. 73, June 1998) on the playing and foot-tapping techniques of Alex Currie; Flett and Flett (1964) on Nova Scotia piping’s dance-stepping customs; MacEachen, “The MacIntyre pipers...” in *Am Bràighe* (Summer 1995, p. 11) on stylistic elements of Joe Hughie MacIntyre’s piping; and Shears (1986) for commentary and transcribed notation of traditional aurally-learned dance-tunes from Nova Scotia.

## CHAPTER FIVE

***“We had the gratification of good cheer and excellent piping”:***

### **South Uist and Clanranald, c. 1630 – 1900**

Before moving on to the piping tradition as it developed in the twentieth century, let us look at what available sources can tell us about the island’s piping in earlier times. Four areas are discussed that, all told, give a broad picture of the medieval to early modern Uist piper: in section 5a, the patronage of pipers by Clanranald chiefs is juxtaposed against that of other chiefs and against other aspects of aristocratic traditionalism. In section 5b, the piper’s place in South Uist’s (and Clanranald’s) martial history, from *Linn nan Creach* to the Seven Years’ War, is explored. Section 5c addresses the question of a pre twentieth-century *ceòl mór* tradition on the island and refers to several tunes in the known repertoire whose titles suggest associations with Clanranald or whose traditional histories are linked in some way with South Uist. Section 5d offers specific and comparative evidence to depict the uses and functions of piping in South Uist’s community life up to the turn of the twentieth century.

The sources used encompass both the oral and the written. Oral sources include the song and story traditions, where either focuses on piping or some other musical aspect of social or aristocratic culture. The song repertoire in the South Uist community is especially rich in references to pipe music. I have also used recorded memorates of living Uist pipers where they support the above traditions’ evidence; they prove especially useful when illustrating the survival of a pre-Piobaireachd Society *ceòl mór* tradition in section 5c.

A variety of written sources complement and bolster the oral record. These include Clanranald’s own family muniments, which provide glimpses of patronised piping and the involvement of Donald MacDonald of Benbecula, or *Dòmhnall Gorm*, in the Seven Years’ War; contemporary tourist journals and other personal memoirs, which give rare observations of community life in the specified time period; competition records, music collections, letters, and eighteenth-century government intelligence reports – all

help to depict the place of the piper in pre-1900 South Uist.

### 5.a. Patronage

In the last two chapters we have seen how the spread of strict Presbyterian religious values and the modernisation of economic/agrarian priorities in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries fundamentally changed a clan chief's perception toward his land and people. This inevitably led to a decline in musical patronage in the Hebrides, since with "eviction, emigration and evangelism" the foundation for aristocratic traditionalism was removed (MacInnes, 1988:99). Ramsay of Ochtertyre, in 1784, expressed concern for the fate of Highland music due to these changing conditions in his introduction to Patrick MacDonald's *Highland Vocal Airs*; of Highland music in general, he believed that:

"In less than twenty years it would be in vain to attempt a collection of Highland music. Perhaps it is rather late at present; but enough may be got to point out its genius and spirit."<sup>1</sup>

He also wrote about piping, and of *ceòl mór* in particular; it is noteworthy that even as early as 1784 the tradition was perceived as deteriorating:

"Though the pipers have survived their brethren, the harpers, almost a century, they themselves will, ere long, share the same fate. The present ones are already inferior to their predecessors in knowledge and execution. Nor are they to expect encouragement from their chieftains and gentry, whose manners are formed on a new model: and the spirit of the commons is broken, and directed to objects very different from those of former times." (MacDonald, 1784:14-15)

Modern authors agree with Ramsay's assessment that changes in *ceòl mór* were brought on by the post-Jacobite climate. According to Gibson, "there was a decline in

the cultural vigour of *ceòl mór*, or classical piping, after Culloden. This was occasioned by the gradual disintegration of the link between the top stratum of chiefly pipers and their patrons. This rupture brought about the disappearance of two of the so-called piping ‘colleges’ in the 1760's and inevitably robbed the classical form of piping of its most powerful *raison d’être*.” (1998:108)<sup>2</sup>

Ramsay’s fear that *ceòl mór* was in danger of extinction due to a decline in Gaelic tradition and clan-based society reflected the sentiment of many urban-based Highland aristocrats, and this contributed, along with the desire for agrarian modernisation discussed in chapter 4, to the formation of the Highland Society of London (HSL) in 1778 and its annual *ceòl mór* competition from 1781 (MacInnes, 1988:18) – founded in order to, among other things, “[comprehend] the preservation of the music of the Highlands – much of it believed to belong to remote antiquity” (Dalyell, 1849:9; see also Donaldson, 2000:64-5).

It was nominally for this reason that the HSL and its off-shoot, the Highland Society of Scotland (est. 1783), promoted literacy in piping and patronised the writing down of tunes into staff-notated collections throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. One of their earliest ways of accomplishing this was to award cash prizes at the annual *ceòl mór* competitions to pipers who could produce their own written scores. This began around 1806 when one of the competitors was singled out:

“Sir J. Sinclair, by desire of the Committee, called Donald MacDonald, and informed him that a prize had been voted to him by the judges, for producing the greatest number of Pipe-tunes, set to music by himself; and it was recommended to him to continue his exertions in that way, and to instruct such others as might apply to him to be taught.” (MacKay, 1838:11)

MacDonald was a leading piper and pipemaker in Edinburgh at the time, and would later publish a seminal collection of tunes under the HSL’s sponsorship.<sup>3</sup>

Written settings of tunes gradually became the standard by which pipers were judged in these and other competitions, and as competing before a panel of aristocrats grew more culturally central to the mainland piping tradition – itself a symptom of the decline in Gaelic tradition that characterised the post-Jacobite era<sup>4</sup> – the status and

employability of the piper increasingly depended on a place in the prize-lists. They knew, after all, that potential employers, i.e. landed gentlemen caught up in ‘Celtic twilight’ and eager to retain pipers on their estates, were in the audience.

These were the circumstances which brought about mainstream literacy; it was nothing less than a “revolutionary change in piping” (Cannon, 1988:47-8), albeit a gradual one, in which the necessity of competition occasioned a shift from aural transmission to literate transmission as the accepted standard in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

In the days before the Highland Societies and the era of ‘preservation’, however, Highland chiefs were well-known for their patronage of Gaelic vocal and instrumental music, including piping (see Cannon, 1988:51). The MacCrimmons, the MacArthurs, and the Rankins, among others, were all west Highland/Hebridean piping families pre-eminent in the annals of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century musical patronage. The first two families mentioned were described in 1774 by Pennant, who encountered both on a tour of Skye:

“In feudal times the *Mac-donalds* had in this island a college of pipers; and the *Macleods* had the like; these had regular appointments in land, and received pupils from all the neighbouring chieftains. The *Mac-karters* were chief pipers to the first; the *Mac-krummens* to the last.” (1776, ii:347)

The Rankins were similarly long-established, and were referred to by Johnson and Boswell when they visited Captain MacLean of Coll in the early 1770s:

“[MacLean] has the proper disposition of a Chieftain, and seems desirous to continue the customs of his house. The bagpipe played regularly, when dinner was served, whose person and dress made a good appearance; and he brought no disgrace upon the family of *Rankin*, which has long supplied the Lairds of *Col* with hereditary musick.” (1924:116)<sup>5</sup>

Uist-born piper Ronald Morrison, who resides in Glasgow, has asserted that the MacArthurs maintained a footing in South Uist while engaged as hereditary pipers to the



MacDonalds of Sleat, based in Peingown (1999:21). The idea that MacArthur pipers were at least present in Uist at one time or another, and therefore “in all probability extending their piping knowledge there”, is supported by the local oral tradition that they ran a piping school in an area southwest of Gerinish (*ibid*). The assertion is supported on two further accounts: first, tradition has it that Donald MacArthur, son of Charles, drowned while ferrying cattle from Uist to Skye (Matheson, 1938:253); this would have been in the late eighteenth century since it is meant to have happened soon after the death of his father, who was alive in 1774 when Pennant was conducting his tour. If the circumstances surrounding Donald’s death are true, it suggests that he had a farm in Uist – perhaps near Gerinish. Second, and perhaps an indication of a far earlier presence, is a song-poem ascribed by Thomson (1974:18-25) to Neil Mór MacMhuirich, bard and *seanchaidh* to Clanranald, sometime before 1630. Collinson, however, ascribes it to Neil Mór’s great-grandson Neil Òg, who was born around that year (1975:187). Entitled *Seanchas na Pìob’ o Thùs*, or alternatively *Seanchas Sloinnidh na Pìob’ o Thùs* (The Pedigree of the Pipes from the Beginning), the poem is nothing if not a comic and biting satire on the bagpipe:

*“Éatroman muice o hó,  
Air a shéideadh gu h-an-mhór,  
A’ cheud mhàla nach raibh binn  
Thàinig o thùs na dilinn.*

A pig's bladder o hó,  
Excessively blown  
The first bag that wasn't sweet  
Came from the beginning of the flood.

*Bha seal re éatroman mhuc,  
Ga lìonadh suas as gach pluic;  
Craiceann sean mhuilt 'na dhiaidh sin  
Re searbhadas is re dùrdail.*

It was for a while of pigs' bladder,  
Filled up from each cheek;  
An old sheep's skin after that,  
Harsh and buzzing.

*Cha raibh 'n uair sin anns a' phìob  
Ach siùnnsar agus aon liop,  
Agus maide chumadh na fuinn  
Do'm [b'] cho-ainm an sumaire.*

The pipe at that time had only  
A chanter and one opening,  
And a stick that would keep the tune  
By the name of the *sumaire*.

*Tamall doibh 'na dhiaidh sin  
Do fhuair ais-inntleachd inneil:  
Feam fada leabhar garbh  
Do dhùrdan reamhar ro-shearbh.*

A while after that  
It got a backward device:  
A long thick rough tail  
A very bitter, deep, buzzing sound.

*Ar faghail an dùrdain sheirbh  
Is a' ghoithinn gu loma-léir,  
Chraobh-sgaoil a' chrannaghail mar sin  
Re searbhadas is re dùrdan.*

Upon resolving the bitter buzzing  
And the reed entirely,  
The contraption spread like that  
Harsh and humming.

*Pìob sgreadain Iain Mhic Artuir  
Mar eun curra air dol air n-ais,  
Làn ronn 's i labhar luirgneach,  
Com galair mar ghuilbrich ghlais.*

Iain MacArthur's screeching bagpipe  
Like a heron having gone backwards,  
Full of spittle, loud and spindly,  
An infected chest like a gray curlew.

*Pìob Dhòmhnail do cheòl na cruinne  
Crannaghail bhredòite as breun roimh shluagh:  
Cathadh a mhùin do 'n mhàla ghrodaich,  
Fuidh 'n t-sùil ghainde robaich ruaidh.''<sup>6</sup>*

Donald's pipe, of the world's music, is  
A bruised contraption, offensive to a crowd:  
Throwing its slavers through the rotten bag,  
Under the ugly, sloppy, ruddy eye.

As for whether it was composed by Neil Mór or Neil Òg, there are grounds for both cases;<sup>7</sup> whoever it was, it can be inferred that he was not a great lover of the piping arts. *Seanchas na Pìob' o Thùs* may reflect the professional bards' resentment toward the bagpipe's ascendancy over the harp (the bard's preferred accompaniment), which occurred over the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; alternatively, it may represent the bard's specific malice toward the two pipers mentioned in the text.

MacKenzie asserts in *Sàr-Obair nam Bàrd Gaelach* (1904:67) that John and Donald MacArthur called on the MacMhuirich home in Stilligarry on a night when Neil was bedridden with small-pox, and that the sound of them tuning their pipes in the next room drove him to this invective barrage (*ibid*).<sup>8</sup> The scenario is plausible: the MacDonalds of Sleat and Clanranald would have periodically visited each other due to marriage and business ties, and each would have been attended by a retinue of courtly artists, including

pipers; the MacArthurs mentioned could have quite reasonably visited the home of Clanranald's top poet and genealogist while the chiefs conferred at Nunton or, depending on the date of composition, Ormiclate. The upshot is that the poem, in conjunction with the oral traditions regarding Charles's son Donald and the piping school near Gerinish, gives strong support to Morrison's suggestion of a MacArthur presence in South Uist.

The Clanranald line has been noted in particular for its tenacious hold on tradition in the face of change,<sup>9</sup> and there is a wealth of examples from the South Uist community's song repertoire that illustrate Clanranald's patronage of Gaelic music in previous centuries. Some of these focus mainly on the work of bards,<sup>10</sup> but others clearly indicate the place of piping in a Clanranald chief's typical retinue. Angus Campbell of Benbecula, for instance, composed a lament for Capt. Angus MacDonald of *Àirigh a' Mhuilinn*, date unknown, which refers to him as "*Aonghuis òig riamhaich / Gu seinnte piob leat*" (young handsome Angus, for whom a bagpipe would be played).<sup>11</sup> A rare reference to dance as a metaphor for war, involving both fiddling and piping, is found in a MacMhuirich song on the wounding of Angus MacDonald of Clanranald at the end of the sixteenth century:<sup>12</sup>

<i>"... Gum biodh fiodhall ga rusgadh</i>	That a fiddle would be brought out
<i>Piob bu tartarach sionnsar</i>	And a bagpipe of most clamorous chanter
<i>Fuaim mhic talla ri chul sin</i>	A sound echoing behind
<i>Buidheann thaitneach air ùrlar</i>	A fine group on the floor
<i>'G iomart chleas air chrìos cùil nam fear òga</i>	Playing tricks on the rear guard of young men
<i>'G iomart chleas air chrìos cùil nam fear òga."</i>	Playing tricks on the rear guard of young men.

(DJ MacDonald MSS, book 8, p. 676)

This was followed in 1618 by an elegy for Donald MacDonald of Clanranald, attributed to his widow Mary, which mentions activities in his household such as piping, throwing dice, and poetry:

“... *Is iomadh sgal pìobadh,  
Mar ri farrum nan dìsnean air clàr,  
Rinn mi éisdeachd a’d bhaile  
Mar ri éisg agus caithream nam bàrd...*”<sup>13</sup>

... To every shrill cry of pipes,  
Just as to the clatter of dice on a board  
And to the jibes and verses of the bards,  
I listened in your household...

References to Clanranald pipers extend as far back as the mid-sixteenth century (see sections 5b and 5c) so clearly the Clanranald line’s patronage of piping was of very long standing. In spite of this, references to specific names (in particular those of South Uist and Benbecula origins) are relatively few. Our earliest such record is from 1636, when the “Piper to the Captain of Clanranald” was complained against for taking part in a plundering of the *Susannah*, an English barque laden with fruit and bound for Limerick, which had wrecked off the coast of Barra.<sup>14</sup> The piper mentioned was a MacDonald; how long he held the office, and whether or not he received it hereditarily, is uncertain. However, evidence from available muniments and other documentary records as well as traditional oral narrative regarding *Piobairean Smearclait* suggest that a family of MacIntyres held the office in hereditary succession for the longest unbroken period.<sup>15</sup>

This family is said to have belonged to the township of Smerclate (see ch. 2b), but its office-bearing members would have probably spent most of their working lives commuting between Ormiclate and Nunton. Origin theories of various strengths have been put forward. Stewart (1982:307) has postulated that they were a branch of the MacIntyres of Rannoch, pipers traditionally to Menzies of Menzies in west Perthshire. The Rannoch MacIntyres, in turn, were said by Whyte in 1904 to have originally served as bards to Clan Chattan in Badenoch (MacInnes, 1988:10) while the account published by Angus MacKay, perhaps significantly, claimed that the MacIntyre pipers to Menzies were “originally from the Isles” (see below); however, MacKay’s reliability concerning oral tradition is questionable.<sup>16</sup> Seton Gordon in 1930 referred to the hereditary pipers to Clanranald as MacIntyres who lived in Uldary “at the head of the Moidart River” (GD 50/225/5/27) while Jessie MacAulay claimed that her ancestors, being “pipers and archers to Clanranald”, came originally from Skye. However, MacAulay’s claim of Skye origins probably reflects a local tradition regarding incomers to Uist in the eighteenth century, and may not be relevant to piping.<sup>17</sup>

Ronald Morrison attempted to balance this array of quasi-historical accounts by claiming that the MacIntyres were originally a family of pipers from Moidart who were brought by their chief to Bornish, South Uist when the latter was given land there by Clanranald, and who eventually moved *en masse* from Bornish to Rannoch (1999:21). However, Morrison bases this largely on the brief anecdotal account in MacKay's *Collection of Ancient Piobaireachd*; in my opinion, it seems far too simple and linear a view as it fails to grasp the possibility of multiple branches of an extended family working in several areas at once. The bulk of oral tradition asserts that Clanranald's pipers were based in Smerclate, possibly since the seventeenth century or earlier; Menzies's pipers are said to have been even longer in Rannoch (Collinson, 1975; Eyre-Todd, 1923). In the surviving *ceòl mór* repertoire, both The Clanranald's Salute and The Menzies's Salute are ascribed to one family of MacIntyres, but this does not add up – the same family could not have flitted between Uist and Rannoch at the behest of two patrons, composing ceremonial tunes for each, for more than two centuries. On the basis of the many theories and traditions and their varying strengths, I contend that the MacIntyres were a much wider network of Gaelic tradition-bearers than can be accounted for by just one immediate family or one artistic discipline.

E.C. Carmichael writes, based on oral tradition, that one or more of Clanranald's MacIntyre pipers was among the last pupils at the MacCrimmon college in Boreraig.<sup>18</sup> The written record, on the other hand, gives us only a handful of examples of MacIntyres in service to the Clanranald line, most of which have been broadly outlined elsewhere<sup>19</sup> and are not without their own ambiguities.

The first is “A list of all the people of Benbeculla [sic], men, women, and young children past 12 yr old who are to be sworn September 29, 1738 for the extirpation of theft”, there includes “John the Piper”, “Helen his wife”, “Patrick his son” and “Janett his daughter” (GD 201/1/351/4). Stewart believes this John to be a MacIntyre – in fact the same John MacIntyre who composed the well-known 1745 *ceòl mór* tune *Thàinig Mo Rìgh air Tìr am Muideart*, or My King has Landed in Moidart (see section 5c). Stewart's position is reasonable, in that “John the Piper” was the only man on this extensive list (which also includes two MacMhuirichs) whose surname was not given, and further down the list there appears “John MacIntyre” and “Mary his spouse”; that the



piper was a MacIntyre, and “Piper” used to differentiate the two, makes sense. It remains conjectural that this John was actually in the service of Clanranald.

The second example from the written record is a charter drawn up in Nunton in 1759 and witnessed by Clanranald’s gardener, the Benbecula schoolmaster, and “Duncan MacIntyre Piper to Clanranald”. A tack registration signed in Edinburgh eight years later refers to the charter, and again mentions Duncan as a witness.<sup>20</sup>

The third and perhaps most problematic example surrounds one Robert MacIntyre, piper to Clanranald, who, perhaps with other MacIntyres, is said to have emigrated to North America around the year 1790. Angus MacKay’s competition records at first appear to support this: “Robert MacIntyre, Piper to John MacDonald Esq of Clanranald” took third place in the Highland Society of London’s *ceòl mór* competition in 1787, second place in 1788, and won the prize pipe in 1790 playing “The Duke of Hamilton’s Lament”, after which there is no trace of him in the records (1838, ‘A Circumstantial Account of the Competitions...’:10). MacKay mentions the emigration; he also links Clanranald’s and Menzies’s pipers as the same immediate family, and dismisses (or is ignorant of) any MacIntyre in Clanranald’s employ before Robert, which has been shown to be incorrect:

“These pipers lived in Rannach, but they were originally from the Isles. Donald Mór, the first [MacIntyre] of whom we have any account, was Piper to Menzies of Menzies. His son John learned from Patrick òg [MacCrimmon] at the college of Dunvegan... His son Donald Bane followed the same profession, and left two sons, Robert and John. Robert became piper to the late MacDonald of Clanranald, after whose death he went to America.” (1838:8)<sup>21</sup>

The emigration tradition was further supported by Seton Gordon in his article to the *Oban Times*, in which he stated: “[The Bannockburn Pipes] were given to Donald MacDonald of Kinlochmoidart (direct ancestor of him who showed them to me) by the last representatives of the MacIntyres before they emigrated to America... in 1790” (GD 50/225/5/27). Nowhere does he mention the death of Clanranald. More recently, Stewart (*op cit*) has shown that a Robert MacIntyre applied to Clanranald for a tack in South Uist in 1804 after serving some amount of time as piper to MacNeil of Barra,

which makes his Outer Hebridean origins that much more likely. Despite these sources, or perhaps because of them, the nature of Robert's supposed emigration remains extremely ambiguous. MacKay's competition records are of no use here, since the HSL committee established a rule in 1785 "whereby a piper could only win a higher prize than he had previously gained, or nothing at all" (MacInnes, 1988:53) after Donald MacIntyre, senior, from Rannoch (could this have been MacKay's "Donald Bane"?) won the prize pipe for the second time.<sup>22</sup> So Robert's disappearance from the competition records after 1790 proves nothing. The ambiguity surrounding his emigration has been mentioned earlier in this thesis (see chapter 4c) and at this point it is fair to say only that the real details have been lost in the variability of oral narrative.

Robert is the last MacIntyre ever identified as Piper to MacDonald of Clanranald, and if he was indeed the last, then with his departure ended what traditional and documentary evidence suggests was an extremely long term of office for that family. It is tempting to speculate that the piper to the laird of Boisdale, with whom Alexander Campbell dined in South Uist in 1815, was a MacIntyre –

"During dinner, the pipe, as usual in lairds' houses, struck up and we had the double gratification of good cheer and excellent piping. Boisdale's piper being regularly initiated in the art, is an able Artist, and brilliant performer." (Campbell, 1815:58)

– but we will probably never know for certain.

The last chapter in the Clanranald line's patronage of piping centres around Donald MacKay of the Raasay MacKays, son of John and older brother of Angus. According to the HSL competition records, Donald took third place in 1820 as piper to MacLeod of Raasay; he placed second the following year, listed then as "Piper to Reginald George MacDonald, Esq of Clanranald", and won the prize pipe in 1822 playing, appropriately enough, Clanranald's Salute.<sup>23</sup> He stayed in his position under Clanranald until 1829 (MacInnes, 1988:143) and by 1838 was serving as piper to HRH the Duke of Sussex, Earl of Inverness (MacKay, *op cit*). So the Clanranalds were retaining pipers until just nine years before South Uist and its adjacent isles were sold to Colonel Gordon of Cluny. This is significant in the wider picture of Highland musical

patronage: although Donald MacKay's appointment was a break from custom in the sense that he was not a native of Clanranald's holdings as was the great dynasty of MacIntyres that preceded him, it is a testament to the family's conservation of west Highland aristocratic tradition in an era of change.

### 5.b. The Martial Tradition

Many pipers of South Uist origin have filled the ranks (and bands) of the Lovat Scouts and the Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders in the twentieth century. This particular contribution of South Uist to the piping tradition of the British army will be discussed in chapters 6 and 9; but one must ask, what were the conditions which led to such a contribution? There is no single straightforward answer. On one side it has to do with the affinity for piping in Uist's social culture; in the case of the Lovat Scouts at least, the island and the regiment shared a religious affiliation; and not least among pre-requisite conditions is the island's martial tradition. As will be shown below, the affinity among *Uibhistich* for military service is deeply rooted in the custom of Clanranald and the greater Highlands, and is an important context to the island's piping tradition not just for the sheer wealth of pipers who served in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but also because of the influence it inevitably had on attitudes regarding literately- and aurally- learned piping within the community. The question of attitudes is addressed in chapters 6a and 10; this section will address South Uist's (in the context of Clanranald's) pre twentieth-century martial past and the place of pipers within it.

The earliest references to martial piping in South Uist, in the oral record at least,<sup>24</sup> concern Clanranald's involvement in the mainly sixteenth-century period known as *Linn nan Creach*, or the Age of Forays, when inter-clan warfare was rife due to the vacuum of power left after the forfeiture of the Lordship of the Isles in 1493. Of the few *Pìobairean Smearclait* tales noted down by Fr. Allan McDonald toward the end of the nineteenth century, one at least bears the telltale signs of originating in this period and refers to the

journey of a piper from Smerclate to Ormiclate:

“On one occasion Clanranald was going on a foray to the mainland and he summoned the head piper of the family of the Smerclat pipers to appear at Ormiclat in good time so as to be ready to accompany the expedition.” (Carmichael-Watson MS, 58[A] 57)

On the journey to Ormiclate the piper encountered an old woman whose gift of a magic bannock rendered him invisible while he carried it on his person. He got rid of it only to find that:

“Clanranald was particularly pained at the idea of an enchanted bannock being given up so easily as the invisible piper might have proved of notable value in any conflict that might occur.”

Inter-clan strife of this type led Clanranald to become a conspicuous player in the Royalist forces during the Covenanters' War of the 1640s.<sup>25</sup> He is said by Neil Mór MacMhuirich in the Books of Clanranald to have raised “all the men of Uist, Eig, Moydart and Arasaig”<sup>26</sup> in anticipation of Alasdair MacColla's approach and alliance against the Campbells under Argyll in 1644, to a combined total of eight hundred (Stevenson, 1980:142); he is also recorded as turning out a further five hundred men of his clan under his son Donald to accompany MacColla in joining Montrose's forces as they neared Perth in 1645 (*ibid*:199). These men, described as the “truly fierce, very brave, powerfully spirited band of the Clanranald”,<sup>27</sup> were to lead a charge against Covenanting forces at Kilsyth (Stevenson, 1980:201). They and the Glengarry contingent were noted as the “main MacDonald strength” (*ibid*:156) at the battle of Inverlochy, recorded in contemporary song as the “great blood-letting” of Clan Campbell by Clan Donald.<sup>28</sup> And in 1648, Clanranald's son led an expedition from South Uist to Ireland to fight for the Irish Catholic cause accompanied by those Irish soldiers who had fought for Clanranald during the Covenanters' War, as well as some “Scottish gentlemen” - all told, about three hundred men.<sup>29</sup>

It is reasonable to believe that in all these instances, natives of South Uist were

among those fighting, and perhaps piping, under the Clanranald banner. The Earl of Lothian in fact wrote in 1640 that the Covenanting forces were “well provided of pipers”;<sup>30</sup> in light of this, why not the Royalist forces as well, what with the participation of the west Highland clans? Chiefs, when turning out men from their holdings to fight for Montrose and MacColla, would undoubtedly have been attended by pipers from these holdings and/or those they personally patronised - much like what was to occur the following century during the two main Jacobite risings and the Seven Years’ War.

Clanranald, and arguably clansmen-turned-soldiers (and pipers?) of South Uist origin, were involved in all three of these conflicts. Allan MacDonald of Clanranald was made a colonel in the Earl of Mar’s army during the rising of 1715 (MacDonald, A and A, 1900:342-3), and is estimated to have commanded about a thousand “brave clansmen” (*ibid*). Although the records do not explicitly state it, native *Uibhistich* were likely among this number. Allan died in November of that year at the battle of Sheriffmuir when a party of cavalry and foot under Lord Torphichen doubled back after a retreat and attacked (Taylor, 1936:100); some surrounding evidence suggests that his body was carried off the field by a Uist-born MacIntyre piper in his service (see section 5c).

Also present on the field was Allan’s bard, Neil Òg MacMhuirich, the last ever patronised by the Clanranald line. As befitted his office, Neil composed an elegaic song-poem praising his chief’s generous character and old-world Highland values, and describing the effect of Allan’s death on those close to him:

“... ‘S mòr gàir ban do chinnidh,  
O’n a thòisich an iomart,  
An sgeul a fhuair iad chuir tiom orr’,  
T’ fhuil chraobhadh a’ sileadh,  
‘S i dòrtadh air mhìre,  
Gun seòl air a pilleadh,  
Ged tha Raghall d’ ionad,  
‘S mòr ar call ged a chinneadh an rìgh...”<sup>31</sup>  
(MacKenzie, 1904:66)

... Great was the cry of your kinswomen  
Since the endeavour began,  
They were daunted by the news  
Of your blood gushing forth  
And spilling upon mirth,  
No way for you to return  
Though Ranald was on by your side,  
We have lost much though the king did well...



The Jacobite army of 1745 has been called the “valedictory manifestation of a martial culture peculiar to the Highlands of Scotland” (Carswell, 1995:29) and regardless of its accuracy,<sup>32</sup> the Clanranald family’s participation was considerable. The late Allan’s grandsons, Ranald younger of Clanranald and Donald of Benbecula, reportedly raised an initial two hundred and fifty men for the Pretender’s army<sup>33</sup> from all corners of the Clanranald territories – including the Hebridean quarter, as contemporary poet Alasdair Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair expressed in *òran luaidh*:

“*Mo chion a dhèanamh leat éiridh,  
Do Chaiptin fhéin Mac-Mhic-Ailein. /  
Gun theann e roimhe roimh chàch riut,  
'S nì e fàs e, ach thig thairis. /  
Gach duine tha 'n Uidhist 's am Muideart,  
'S an Arasaig dhubh-ghorm a' bharraich. /  
An Canna, an Eige, 's am Mór-thìr,  
Reisimeid chórr ud Shìol-Ailein!*

My hero would not fail thee,  
Thy own Captain, young Clanranald. /  
He joined thee before all others,  
And will again if thou comest. /  
Every man in Uist and Moidart,  
And dark-green Arisaig of birchwoods. /  
in Canna, in Eigg, and in Morar,  
The noble regiment of Clanranald!<sup>34</sup>

Government intelligence reports and contemporary letters indicate Clanranald’s, and in particular South Uist’s, importance in tactical terms to Prince Charles’s campaign. It is believed that the Prince stopped at South Uist before ever touching at Moidart or Glenfinnan in order to enlist the aid of MacDonald of Boisdale, whom he regarded as an influential figure (Eyre-Todd, ii:244); that the Prince had indeed visited Uist beforehand is confirmed by the governor of Fort William, who wrote to the Duke of Argyll that the *Doutelle*, having left Moidart, “intended to *return* to Wist; if so Loch Boysdale or Loch Skipper are the only places such a ship can come into...” (my emphasis).<sup>35</sup> The governor added that “if there be any appearance of a considerable rising of the Clans near Moydart, then the arms, as it is said, are to be landed either at Arisaig, Clanronald’s house, or at Uring Kenlochmoidart’s house”. The Prince gained additional men from South Uist several months after raising his standard, as an unsigned letter dated 14 December 1745 indicates:

“Two Spanish ships from Ferrol arrived lately among the Western Islands of Scotland, touched at South Wiste, and brought from thence and some adjacent isles about 300 M’Donalds of Clanronald’s men, and landed them on the mainland at Moidart, with 2,500 stand of small arms, 100 barrels of powder, with ball conform, and some chests of silver, supposed to contain 6000 [pounds], all which the said M’Donalds, with what further can be raised in that country from whence the Rebellion sprang, and to convey the said arms, ammunition and stores to Perth...”<sup>36</sup>

That piping was heard under the Clanranald banner during the ‘45 can be inferred from oral tradition and tune titles (see section 5c), and the Fort William governor’s intelligence reports to Argyll provides a modest written record. When writing in August of the news that Ranald MacDonald younger of Clanranald, Donald MacDonald of Kinlochmoidart, Alexander MacDonald of Glenaladale and other Clanranald relatives had boarded the Prince’s ship upon its arrival in Moidart, he noted that “two of [his deputy’s] servants saw this ship [landing] in the mouth of Lochainort<sup>37</sup> where there is 15 fathom water, and saw Clanranald and others go out to that ship with pipers playing in their boat” (RH 2/4/342/217). This at least gives us a glimpse of piping’s function as an accompaniment to ‘affairs of state’ in old Highland aristocracy.

Both Ranald younger and his brother Donald of Benbecula obtained employment in the French army after the events of 1745. (MacDonald, A and A, 1900:360) Both were to return to Scotland, however, and it is in association with Donald that the Clanranald line, and its pipers, make their first real contributions to British military tradition.

In response to the outbreak of the Seven Years’ War, three of the elder Clanranald’s sons – Donald, William and Normond – received commissions in newly-raised Highland regiments.<sup>38</sup> Donald was given command of a company in Fraser’s 78<sup>th</sup> Highlanders (Gibson, 1998:83) and by 1757 was recruiting among his clansmen (tenants by this time) in Uist and Benbecula to fill the ranks.<sup>39</sup> For this reason, he was likely to have had at least one piper from his holdings accompany him to North America as part of the company.<sup>40</sup> Donald was wounded in 1758 at Louisbourg in “the taking of Cape Bretton”,<sup>41</sup> after which he took over a grenadier company whose first commander,

Charles Baillie, had been killed in combat; Donald's piper is believed to have followed him in the transfer (Gibson, 1998:85).

As it happened, this piper disgraced himself at the Plains of Abraham in September, 1759 for cowardice in combat – a rarely recorded occurrence in the annals of martial piping – and according to the company sergeant was ostracised for it by the men:

“Our company had but one piper and he was not provided with arms... When our line advanced the charge, General Townshend observing that the piper was missing, and he knowing well the value of one on such occasions, he sent in all directions for him and he was heard to say aloud, ‘Where’s the Highland Piper?’ And, ‘Five pounds for a piper’, but de’il a bit did the Piper come forward... For this business the Piper was disgraced by the whole of the Regiment and the men would not speak to him, neither would they suffer his rations to be drawn with theirs, but had them served out by the commissary seperately and he was obliged to shift for himself as well as he could.”<sup>42</sup>

The following year, Donald of Benbecula was killed at the Battle of Quebec (Gibson, 1998:85; MacDonald, A and A, 1900:360), but, auspiciously for the British military piping tradition, his unnamed piper was again present on the field and managed to redeem himself by staying and rallying the men (Gibson, *op. cit.*). I say auspiciously because the piping of the Frasers at Quebec in 1760 was among the first instances of piping in British warfare to gain wide public acclaim, and therefore contributed directly to the modern image of the British army piper on the battlefield, which, among other things, influenced the formation of the Highland Society of London in 1778.<sup>43</sup> This then was the first significant contribution of the Uist piping tradition to that of the British army.

Other contributions were soon to follow. The (Old) *Statistical Account of Scotland* recorded that from 1772 to the last decade of that century, “no less than 400 stout young fellows ... have gone as recruits to the army and navy from the parish” (p. 132). This is a huge number of men within such a small population<sup>44</sup> to have left for military service in a twenty- to thirty-year span, even allowing for those who would eventually return; it is reasonable to believe that pipers were among them.

The next century saw the blossoming of the militia movement in Scotland,

whereby units of officers and men for home defense were organised within specific counties.<sup>45</sup> Reginald George MacDonald of Clanranald, last of the line to own South Uist, commanded the Long Island regiment of the Inverness-shire militia for many years until his death in 1873 (MacDonald, A and A, 1900:364). With the territorial reforms of the Army in 1881, the militia formally became the reserve of the Regulars, each regiment adopting a regional recruiting district and assimilating that district's militia or volunteer unit; the Inverness-shire militia integrated with the Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders, a thoroughly Gaelic regiment (see ch. 9) and became their 2<sup>nd</sup> – later 3<sup>rd</sup> – (Militia) Battalion. Many South Uist pipers are on record, both documentary and anecdotal, as having served in this and other battalions of the Camerons since at least the 1880s; several of them noted prize-winners at regimental and civilian competitions, as will be discussed in chapters 6, 7, and 8.

### 5.c. South Uist, Clanranald, and a *Ceòl Mór* Tradition

According to living memory, very few individuals in South Uist displayed practical knowledge of *ceòl mór* in the years leading up to the twentieth century. It is commonly held by piping authorities that the 'classical' form of piping completely died out in the Hebrides with the decline of musical patronage in the eighteenth century, and that it was re-introduced to the South Uist community with startling and long-lasting effect by the Piobaireachd Society from 1909.<sup>46</sup> This is true to an extent, in that it was re-introduced from outside on a large-scale, organised basis, but the idea that *ceòl mór* had totally evaporated from the community by then is difficult to accept when considering that South Uist had been unanimously regarded for the previous fifty years as the last great storehouse of Gaelic tradition (see ch. 2). There is evidence from oral and written sources that disproves the notion.

When asked who is remembered as having played it locally before the advent of Piobaireachd Society instruction, Calum Beaton mentioned in particular Lachlan



MacCormick, Neil Campbell and William MacLean, the last having won the Inverness gold medal in 1901 and that of Oban in 1912. However, MacLean cannot rightly be considered as a bearer of any specific Uist tradition because he was an incomer from Mull and learned *ceòl mór* in Badenoch; he was living in Benbecula by the time of his first medal, but by his second was residing in Glasgow. The case of MacCormick presents another difficulty: although a native of Benbecula and a very successful competitor in both *ceòl mór* and *ceòl beag* around the beginning of the century, contemporary reports in the *Oban Times* show that *ceòl mór* was not played in competition in South Uist prior to 1908; therefore, what is claimed in oral tradition cannot be verified by written records.

Despite these difficulties, oral tradition asserts that *ceòl mór* was indeed known and played in South Uist before the involvement of the Piobaireachd Society<sup>47</sup> and this is supported by several points. Lachlan MacCormick was known to play settings of tunes in competition which conflicted with the Society's,<sup>48</sup> and there is no reason to doubt that he learned them within the Uist community rather than, say, in the army where tuition was by Society instructors. Furthermore, Neil Campbell of Frobost is reputed to have been taught *ceòl mór* by a family of MacGillivrays who leased land in Eoligarry, Barra, in the early 1880s (Morrison, 1999:22). Additional (if ambiguous) support is found in the military record of Neil MacInnes, a native of South Uist who enlisted in the Cameron Highlanders in 1889; appointed Piper in the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion in 1892, he took second place in *ceòl mór* at the regimental Games in Malta in 1893 and first place in 1896 (Crawford, 1999:175). This is inconclusive, however, in that he may have learned *ceòl mór* in the army rather than in Uist.

The memoirs of Frederick Rea, an English Catholic schoolmaster in Garrynamonie from 1890 to 1913, provide further support for a pre-twentieth century *ceòl mór* tradition. Among his observations of the piping community, he remarked:

“Much as I had enjoyed the sound of the pipes at times, I must confess that I was not able to appreciate the music of the pibroch. It was supposed to be a musical poem telling of the beauty of hill and dale, of gentle love, joys, war, of battles, victory, defeat, and sorrow ... Among the pipers who played to Father Allan there was one whom I saw only once or twice. He was a peculiar looking man with almost lint-white hair, smooth hairless face, was of squat figure, and



spoke no English. There was no doubt about his ability as a piper. His speciality was the pibroch, and as he played the others seemed to listen to him in awe – I believe that he read and wrote music for the bagpipes and was himself a composer. I heard afterwards that he subsequently carried off many valuable prizes for pipe-playing at the various annual Highland gatherings held in many parts of Scotland.” (1964:86)

Fr. Allan McDonald, to reiterate, died four years before the Piobaireachd Society sent their first instructor.

By far, however, the most compelling evidence of a pre-twentieth century tradition of *ceòl mór* performance in South Uist comes from the experience of Calum Beaton, whose first lessons in *ceòl mór* were by a man from a neighbouring township in the 1940s:

CB: *Thuirte fear a bha agam a theagasg, Alasdair Peutan, nach b'aithnte dha airson [ceòl mór] a chluichd, agus dh'iarr e orm a dhol gu fear eile, John Archie MacLellan, a bha a' fuireach 'san ath-bhaile ... Chaidh mi far a robh e is thuirte e nach chluicheadh e mórán idir – dhà no trì a bha fhios aige. Thug e dhomh 'Cumha Màiri Nighean Alasdair Ruaidh', agus 'Cumha Phadruig Òig MacChruimein'. Bha e a' toirt dhomh dìfir dòigh ... Bha mise smaoinneadh gur ann mar sin a bha 'correct', is bha mi 'ga chluichd mar sin. (SA 1998.70)*

CB: The man who I had for teaching, Alasdair Beaton, said that he didn't know how to play *ceòl mór*, and he asked me to go to another man, John Archie MacLellan, who stayed in the next township ... I went to him and he said that he didn't play much at all – he knew two or three. He gave me 'Lament for Mary MacLeod' and 'Lament for Patrick Òig MacCrimmon'. He gave me a different way ... I thought that it was the correct way, and I played it like that.

John Archie MacLellan was taught by one of the Smiths of Howmore, a well-known Uist piping family who in turn may have been taught by pipers from either Eochair or Barra in the late nineteenth century (more on this in ch. 7). In these two tunes, he taught Beaton to play a movement very common in *ceòl mór* known as 'hiharin' (as it is called in the Campbell Canntaireachd) or the 'pibroch birl' in a very different way than was then, and is now, heard in mainstream competition performances; a way which in fact

recalls an eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century style which went largely out of fashion between the publication of MacKay's *Ancient Piobaireachd* (1838) and the Piobaireachd Society's second series of tune collections which began in 1925. Contemporary notation suggests that in the former time period, 'hiharin' comprises a pulse on the low A note followed by a division of the A by two low G gracenotes in quick succession; the whole of the movement making, apparently, two distinct beats. The A would invariably be introduced by a cadence of short G-E-D gracenotes, such as in Donald MacDonald's setting of 'Patrick Òg' in his published collection, c. 1820. Shown below is the last bar of line 1 of the ground:

Figure 3.



MacKay's publication eighteen years later, however, represents the introductory E in general as having greater value. Whether MacKay's notation in this instance reflects a different style than MacDonald's, or simply a different way of depicting the same style, is uncertain; but in the case of the 'hiharin', one can clearly see that it absorbs some of the value of the themal A:

Figure 4.



Representations of the introductory E's value would become greater still in the early twentieth century under the editorship of the Piobaireachd Society, who based many of their settings on MacKay's. Their version of 'Patrick Òg' was published in book 3 of their second series (1930); notice how the E of the 'hiharin' has become essentially equal in value to the themal A, taking up the whole of the first beat, while the A's division is compressed into a run of short gracenotes as a result:



that at least some local pipers performed in an older style than that which was commonly played in mainstream circles; and third, that transmission of this style, or at least a remnant of it in the form of the ‘hiharin’, continued among a few families or individuals until well after the piping community’s initial exposure to mainstream influences. Of course, there is room for doubt. By Beaton’s time, other styles of ‘hiharin’ had been in print for decades (such as in the works by MacLennan and Ross) and there is no way to know whether John Archie MacLellan, or the Smiths before him, had not come upon such publications themselves or been influenced by players outwith Uist who had. Indeed, the quick division of low A in the ‘hiharin’ as it appears in MacLennan (1907) is strikingly similar to Beaton’s. But the idea that the South Uist community’s conservative nature was tenacious enough to retain a fragment of old-world *ceòl mór* for so long, and under such pressure from conflicting influences, is a tempting one. I believe Beaton’s testimony, combined with other indications presented above, makes a strong case for it.

Beaton appears to be the last piper in South Uist to have ever played the ‘hiharin’ in the older manner, but he did not play it for long: after his time with MacLellan he went for lessons to Angus Campbell of Frobost, who had learned *ceòl mór* in the Piobaireachd Society’s classes and who, throughout his life, has remained the island’s acknowledged authority (see ch. 7). Campbell was curt in his appraisal:

CB: *Thòisich mi a’ dol gu Aonghus Caimbeul à Frobost, fhios agad Aonghus Nill Chatrìona, is cho luath ‘s a dh’ iarr e orm a chluichd, chluichd mi pìos do Mhàiri Nighean Alasdair, is “O Dhia, chan ann mar siud a dh’fheumas tu ‘ga chluichd idir,” thuirt e, “tha siud ceàrr.”* (SA 1998.70)

CB: I started going to Angus Campbell of Frobost, Angus son of Neil son of Katherine you know, and as soon as he asked me to play, I played a piece of Mary MacLeod, and “Oh God, you mustn’t play it like that at all,” he said, “that’s wrong.”

Campbell reportedly branded it “*seann dòigh an t-saoghail mhóir*” – “the old-fashioned way of the world” – and promptly taught Beaton the Piobaireachd Society method. He never played the older style in public again.

There are a handful of tunes in the known *ceòl mór* repertoire whose associated folklore provides additional material to round out what has already been presented of the Clanranald line's cultural and martial history. As so often happens with *ceòl mór*, the tunes have multiple and at times inter-mixed titles, but this is not disadvantageous, as highlighting the phenomenon here will be of interest to students of oral tradition and Gaelic musical nomenclature.<sup>49</sup>

The tunes in question cover a range of categories, consisting of a battle, two gatherings, two salutes, a Jacobite event-commemoration and two that are more or less miscellaneous but whose surrounding origin tales survive in South Uist's oral tradition. The choice of tunes is based on the premise from section 5a: that the MacIntyres of Clanranald and those of Menzies were two separate branches of the same extended family. So tunes less relevant to the South Uist or Clanranald tradition, such as The Battle of Sheriffmuir and The Prince's Salute which are ascribed to John MacIntyre of Rannoch around 1715, are not included here but are discussed elsewhere.<sup>50</sup>

- “The Battle of Waternish”,<sup>51</sup> or *Blàr Bhatairnis*, commemorates a battle fought sometime in the 1580s.<sup>52</sup> Tradition has it that a party of MacDonalds of Clanranald from South Uist made a foray to Skye and set Trumpan Church on fire; many MacLeods praying within at the time were burnt alive. Clanranald's piper is said to have played a tune, perhaps some signature piece specific to Clanranald, as the church and its occupants blazed (Collinson, 1975:154). The MacLeods of Dunvegan were reportedly alerted to this incident by a progenitor of the MacCrimmon piping family, *Fionnlagh a' Bhreacain* (Finlay of the Plaid),<sup>53</sup> and in retaliation they attacked the MacDonalds at Waternish as the latter were returning home. Another traditional name for the battle, which I have found only in English, is the Battle of the Spoilt Dyke – stemming from the legend that the MacDonalds were “slaughtered to a man” (*ibid*) and buried beneath an over-turned dry-stone wall on the battlefield.

- There are two gathering tunes named for Clanranald which are melodically distinct but share some technical motifs.<sup>54</sup> One is found in Donald MacDonald's



unpublished manuscript (1826:13) and is entitled the “Gathering of the MacDonalds of Clanranald” with a Gaelic title of *Cnocan Ailein Mhic Iain*, or the “Hillock of Allan Son of John”. *Ailean Mhic Iain* most likely refers to Allan son of John Moidartach, who succeeded his father’s place as chief of Clanranald in 1584 (MacDonald, A and A, 1900:290). The other and better known of the two tunes is associated with the battle of Sheriffmuir in 1715 and its title differs according to the source: in Donald MacDonald’s published *Collection* we find “Cruinneachadh Chlaun Raonuill, the Gathering of the MacDonalds of Clanranald to the Battle of Sheriffmuir in 1715 Where the Chief was Slain” (1820:68); in Thomason’s *Ceòl Mór* it is given as “MacDonalds’ of Clanranalds Gathering to Sheriffmuir, ‘Cruinneachadh Cloinn Raonuill (Sliabh an t-Siorra)’ ” (p. 16); and MacLennan’s *Piobaireachd as MacCrimmon Played It* (1907:2) gives it simply as “Clanranald’s Gathering”. This tune is distinct from another tune unrelated to Clanranald, “The Battle of Sheriffmuir” (see section 5a), but it is understandably confused at times with *Cnocan Ailein Mhic Iain*. The Gaelic title of the first gathering tune and the Sheriffmuir association of the second suggest to me that *Cnocan* is an earlier composition and one on which “Gathering to Sheriffmuir” was stylistically based.

There is a tradition in South Uist that the body of Allan MacDonald of Clanranald was dragged off the field of Sheriffmuir and carried ten miles to Inchaffray Church by a clansman named John MacIntyre;<sup>55</sup> this could easily have been a piper in Clanranald’s service (perhaps the same “John the Piper” in the Benbecula list of 1738), and certainly the presence of the chief’s piper at the battle would account for the composition of the “Sheriffmuir” gathering tune.

- “Boisdale’s Salute” is found in several sources.<sup>56</sup> We are again indebted to Donald MacDonald’s *Collection* for his very descriptive titles, since with “*Fàilte Fir Bhoisdail*, A Salute to Allister More MacDonald First of Boisdale Upon his Taking Possession of the Estate” (1820:56) we can clearly deduce that the Boisdale in question was Alasdair MacDonald who, in 1734, received the entire tack of South Uist from his half-brother the chief, Ranald elder (MacDonald, A and A, 1900:350). With no written or oral evidence to go by, it must remain conjectural, though probable, that the tune was composed by a MacIntyre in South Uist.

It was played in the Highland Society of London competition of 1790 by “John Cameron, a boy, Piper to John MacDonald of Lochgary” (MacKay, 1838:10).

- “Clanranald’s Salute”, although not often played in competition today, can be found in many nineteenth- and twentieth-century collections.<sup>57</sup> It has gone by several titles in its time; prior to 1823, it was recorded almost exclusively as “Clanranald’s March” at HSL competitions,<sup>58</sup> and this is reflected by Gaelic cognates such as *Siubhal*, *Piobrachd* and *Spaidsearachd* which were all used as tune titles in conjunction with *Chlann Raghail* in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century records.<sup>59</sup> The Campbell Canntaireachd even records a linguistic hybrid, *Taotor Clan Ronail March*, but the tune itself corresponds to “MacLeod of Talisker’s Salute”.

“Clanranald’s Salute” was played by, among others, ‘Professor’ John MacArthur of that well-known Skye family (see section 5a) as an exhibition piece at the HSL competition of 1785; years later, Donald MacKay won the Prize Pipe with it as the last Piper to MacDonald of Clanranald at the competition of 1822.<sup>60</sup> Like “Boisdale’s Salute”, this tune was most likely composed by a MacIntyre.

- “My King has Landed in Moidart” or *Thàinig Mo Rìgh air Tìr am Mùideart* is an event-commemoration tune whose association with Clanranald, as was discussed in section 5a, is ambiguous but arguable. Jacobite tradition has it that the tune was composed by a John MacIntyre upon the landing of Charles Edward Stuart on the mainland coast in 1745. Collinson (1975:167) attributes this MacIntyre to those of Rannoch, but Stewart (1982:308-12) put forward the much more likely case that he was of the Clanranald MacIntyres. He may or may not have been the same John who carried Clanranald’s body off the field of Sheriffmuir in 1715 or who was among those extirpated for theft in Benbecula in 1738; either way, if tradition asserts that the tune was extemporised by a MacIntyre piper “at the very moment” of Prince Charles’s landing (Collinson, 1975:167) in the Clanranald territory of Moidart, then it is far more plausible that the MacIntyre in question was in Clanranald’s service rather than in Menzies’s in west Perthshire.

- The tune “MacCrimmon’s Sweetheart” is known in Gaelic as *Maol Donn*, which translates roughly as ‘brown hornless cow’ and has folkloric associations with South Uist and Clanranald. The derivation of the English title is unknown, but General Thomason’s unpublished work *Ceòl Mór Legends* provides the traditional Gaelic account of the tune’s composition: in Benbecula in perhaps the seventeenth or early eighteenth century, an old widow’s cow wandered off and got lost in the marsh, and as livestock was the main source of income for west Highland farmers before the rise of the kelping industry, she was understandably distraught. The cow was never found, and only a year later was its skeleton discovered among the peat-bogs. The piper to Clanranald was among those in her community who had initially come out to help search; it is said that he composed the tune to commemorate the sad occasion, knowing the cow’s importance to the old woman’s livelihood. Peter Cooke’s study of *Maol Donn* compares the *ceòl mór* tune with its pibroch song variants (1972:41-59) and quotes the lyrics, reputed to have been composed by the piper, as rendered by Kate MacDonald of Garryhellie:

*“Cha bu shealbhach dhomh t’ fhaotainn, ‘s e mo ghaol am Maol Donn,  
 Cha bu shealbhach dhomh t’ fhaotainn, ‘s e mo ghaol am Maol Donn.  
 Cha bu shealbhach dhomh t’ fhaotainn, ‘s e mo ghaol am Maol Donn,  
 ‘Gad iarraidh ‘s ‘gad fhaotainn, ‘s ‘gad shlaodadh à toll.”* (SA 1970/309/7)

I could not find you, my love is the brown cow,  
 I could not find you, my love is the brown cow.  
 I could not find you, my love is the brown cow,  
 I couldn’t get you, find you, nor pull you from the bog.

- Ronald MacDonald, son of the fourth chief of Moidart and cousin to Clanranald, was known as *Raghall mac Ailein Òig* (Ronald son of Young Allan) and is remembered today as a piper and composer of some renown. Several tunes in the repertoire are ascribed to him, including *A’ Ghlas Mheur*, or “The Finger Lock”.<sup>61</sup> The tune is enmeshed in Uist’s local folklore; piper and poet Donald Ruadh MacIntyre told a

version of the *Pìobairean Smerclait* tale in 1952 which attributes to it a supernatural origin. The reader is by now familiar with the tale: the youngest son in a family of pipers in Smerclate, in Uist's south end, cannot play well but is given the power to do so by a fairy in a knoll. He returned home that night and prepared for bed, which he shared with his father:

*“N’ air a chaidh ‘ad dhan leabaidh, nis có bha cadal còmh ris a’ bhodach, ach an gill’ òg, am fear beag a b’ òige. Agus bha ‘m bodach a’ dèanamh suas pìobaireachd ‘na inntinn fhéin agus, fhios agad, rug e air a mhac ‘na achlais a’s a’ leabaidh agus bha e ‘g obair le chorragan; bha e dèanamh a’ phuirt le chorragan a’s a’ leabaidh mar a sheinneadh e air a’ phìob e. Ach ‘tad thus’ ort an làrna-mhaireach n’ air a dh’ éirich am bodach, gu dé ‘n diabhol a chual’ e ach an gille beag a’ seinn air a’ phìob am port a bha e fhéin a’ cur air a chorragan an oidhche roimh ‘n a-sin. Cha chuala duine riamh leithid e. Dh’ fhaighneachd e dhe ‘n ghille, ‘Cà ‘n cual’ thu am port?’ ars esan. ‘Cha chuala mi riamh am port,’ ars esan, ‘gun cuala mi agad fhéin a-raoir e,’ ars esan. ‘Bha thu ‘g obair le d’ chorragan a-raoir air.’ ‘Well ma tà,’ ars am bodach ris, ‘sin agad,’ ars esan, ‘am port,’ ars esan, ‘ris an can mise ‘A’ Ghlas Mheur’’. Agus ‘s iomadach meur air am bì e glaist’ a bharrachd air a’ mheur agad-sa,’ ars esan.” (SA 1952/146.A/2)*

When they went to bed, now who was sleeping with the old man but the little boy, the youngest one. And the old man was making up a tune in his mind and, you know, his hand rested under his son's arm in bed and he was working with his fingers, making the tune with his fingers in bed as he would play it on the pipes. But wait – the next day, when the old man rose, what the devil did he hear but the little boy playing on the pipes the tune that he himself put on his fingers the night before. No one had heard anything like it before. He asked the boy, “Where did you hear the tune?” he said. “I never heard the tune,” he said, “until I heard you last night,” he said. “You were working it out with your fingers last night.” “Well then,” said the old man to him, “here you have the tune which I’ll call ‘The Finger Lock’. And many’s the finger will it be locked on besides your own.”

#### 5.d. Piping in the Community

Bagpipe music had a variety of uses and functions in the west Highland communities of previous centuries.<sup>62</sup> Keeping time for group labour, whether it be launching or rowing a boat, roadworking, reaping harvest or waulking cloth, was a normal feature as contemporary tourist journals and monographs on Highland culture illustrate: Knox, touring through Skye in 1786, noted that “at this time the inhabitants were mostly engaged upon the roads in different parts of the island, under the inspection of the gentlemen and tacksmen, and accompanied, each party, by the bagpiper” (1787:136). Logan, in 1831, drew attention to the unity of function between vocal and instrumental music in this vein when he remarked that “at all rural occupations in the Highlands it has been observed that labour is accompanied by singing. Where music can be had, it is preferred. A piper is often regularly engaged in harvest to animate the reapers, and he generally keeps behind the slowest worker.” (1831:275) And Edward Burt spoke like-wise of the western-most districts of the Highlands when he observed in the 1720s,

“In larger farms, belonging to gentlemen of the clan, where there are any of women employed in harvest-work, they all keep time together, by several barbarous tones of the voice; and stoop and rise together, as regularly as a rank of soldiers, when they ground their arms. Sometimes they are incited to their work by the sound of the bagpipe; and by either of these, they proceed with great alacrity, it being disgraceful for anyone to be out of time with the sickle. They use the same tone, or a piper, when they thicken the new-woven plaiding, instead of a fulling mill...

...And among numbers of men, employed in any work that requires strength and joint labour, as the launching a large boat, or the like, they must have the piper to regulate their time, as well as usky, to keep up their spirits in the performance; for pay they often have little, or none at all.” (1815, ii:129-30)

These writers portray bagpipe accompaniment to labour in communities outwith South Uist, but the time period and the social and cultural circumstances were the same; there is no reason to believe that the bagpipe did not have the same function in South



Uist, an area arguably more conservative of Gaelic culture than the mainland.

Another facet of life in Uist is of course the funeral, and oral sources such as waulking songs and recorded memorates indicate that piping has long been used to accompany processions and burials. D.J. MacDonald testified to this fifty years ago in a summary of information obtained in South Uist during many visits,<sup>63</sup> while an indigenous waulking song believed to have been composed no later than c. 1700 (Campbell and Collinson, 1977:3) describes a woman's last words before death:

<p><i>“Bheir iad mise leò air ghiùlain, Air each gorm nan strìan dùbailt... 'S truagh nach cluinninn sìod, 's nach fhaicinn Farum do shluaigh, fuaim do bhrataich, Glaodh do phioba bhith 'dol seachad Air luing, 's air bàt' no air barca...”</i> (Campbell and Collinson, 1977:152)</p>	<p>They will take me with them on a bier, On a gray horse with doubled reins... A pity I wouldn't hear nor see it, The noise of your people, the sound of your banner, The wail of your pipes as they go past On a ship, a boat, or a skiff...</p>
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These seventeenth-century *òrain luaidh* are among several oral and written sources which depict the pipes accompanying another major facet of community life in South Uist – dancing. Some informants claim that there was no instrumental music on the island in the early decades of this century other than that of the pipes (see chapter 6a), an exaggeration born of nostalgia for a time when piping was much more widespread. However, the waulking songs depict a vibrant multi-instrumental tradition in the South Uist of centuries past, presenting images of bagpipes, fiddles, harps and trumps all revolving around dance in both common and aristocratic circles. In “*Cha dìrich mi an t-uchd le fonn* (I'll not climb the brae with song)” for instance, we find this verse:

“*Mo cheist maraiche nan tonn,  
Chuireadh air an fhidhill fonn,  
Air an fhidhill, air an truimb,  
'S air a' phìob mhór nam feadan toll...*”  
(Campbell and Collinson, 1969:116)

My darling sailor of the waves,  
Who would play tunes on the fiddle,  
The fiddle, the trump,  
And the bagpipe of hollow drones...

Another, “*'S mi m' aonaran am Beinn a' Cheothain* (I am alone on the misty mountain)”, associates both fiddling and piping with Clanranald patronage:

“*Gu Ormaglaid nam ban teisteil,  
Far am bi crodh laoigh 'san eadradh,  
Ligeil fiona moch is feasgar,  
Fìoghall 'ga seinn, pìob 'ga spreigeadh.*”  
(*ibid*:126)

To Ormiclate of the chaste women,  
Where the cattle are milked,  
Wine is poured early and late,  
And the fiddle played, and the pipes struck up.

“*An Spaidsearachd Bharrach* (The Barra Boasting)” depicts fiddling, piping and harp-playing among the pastimes in an upper-class Gaelic household;<sup>64</sup> and, unusually, “*Rinn mi mochéirigh gu éirigh* (Haste made I to rise all early)” illustrates the use of small-pipes as well as the big pipe for dancing in what was likely an aristocratic setting:

“*Rachainn leat ro' chùl-taigh dùinte,  
Far am faighinn modh is mùirne,  
Daoine uaisle mu bhòrdaibh dùmhail,  
Ruidhleadh mu seach air an ùrlar,  
Le pìob mhór nam feadan dùmhail,  
Le pìob bheag<sup>65</sup> nam feadan siùbhlach...*”  
(*ibid*:68)

I would accompany you to the enclosed chamber,  
Where I would find manners and merriment,  
Gentlemen crowded round solid tables  
Reeling in turns on the floor,  
With the big pipe of thick drones,  
With the small pipe of flowing tones...

This verse is interesting in that no tradition of small pipe playing has existed in South Uist within living memory. It, *'S mi m' aonaran* and *Spaidsearachd Bharrach* all demonstrate that Clanranald's pipers maintained a rich tradition of dance-music, which supports Gibson's point of view that a chief's piper's repertoire was never necessarily

restricted to *ceòl mór* (1998:148).

Several sources illustrate dancing to pipe music in South Uist since the time of the songs. “The people of Barra,” noted a local minister at about the time of Barra’s sale to Gordon of Cluny in 1840, “have no games or amusements but what are common to the surrounding islands. Dancing, with music of the bagpipe, is a favourite pastime.”<sup>66</sup> *Dòmhnall a’ Bhanca*, or Donald MacDonald, the Protestant piper of Benbecula who emigrated to Canada aboard the *Buenos Ayrean* in 1884, was noted as being in frequent demand for “weddings or entertainment” (see chapter 4c) as was another Donald whom Frederick Rea engaged to play for a school dance in the 1890s:

“I shall never forget that dance! I had engaged a special piper who came from a distance but was very popular at all weddings and parties – he was said to be the best player of reels on the island.” (1964:132)

Although Rea refers only to reels and does not mention the name of the dance, his description of the performance suggests that Donald played strathspeys of moderate tempo first, then quicker, more even-timed reels for an extended Scotch Foursome Reel. In the Western Isles, then as now, the Scotch Reel was typically danced in two lines and changed from a strathspey to a reel rhythm (see Flett and Flett, 1964:1, 87; see also ch. 10a).

“The piper seeing that each at last had a partner immediately changed to a rousing reel tune. At once more than a hundred pairs of feet shod in heavy boots were thudding on the floor in some step of a reel, but all in time: all faces devoid of a smile, serious as though dancing were a business, the men looking upwards, and the girls with downcast eyes. *The rhythm of the tune changed with an increase in time.* With a loud yell the men now danced together in pairs – they whirled and sprang in a mad dance till, when they were pouring with perspiration, Donald slowed down his tune; it died away and the dancers were glad to rest – Donald knew his work!” (*ibid*:133; my emphasis)

A final example of dancing to pipe music in pre- twentieth-century South Uist

comes from D.J. MacDonald's interview with his father, acclaimed storyteller Duncan MacDonald, in Pininerine in 1956. In it Duncan describes the *Bàl Suitheadh*, or what might be termed a 'blackhouse ball', wherein members of a community would gather to hold a *céilidh* of dancing, piping and often drinking. This tradition evidently died out around the turn of the twentieth century, but had presumably thrived since much earlier times:

*“Bho chionn leth cheud bliadhna air ais, bhiodh dannsaichean air an cumail ann an tighean dubha ann an Uidhist. ‘S e bàl a chainte ri cruinneachadh dannsa ann an Uidhist, agus ‘s e sin a chanar riutha fhathast cuideachd ... An-diugh chan eil a leithid sin a’ dol ann an Uidhist idir. Tha cunntas mhór bhliadhnaichean bho ‘n nach robh bàl suitheadh ann an Uidhist ... Nuair a chruinneachadh na daoine uile gu léir, rachadh riarachadh liunn a chur mun cuairt air a h-uile duine, agus chuireadh am pìobaire a bha air fhasdadh aca suas a’ phìob agus thòisicheadh an dannsa. Cha robh eagal sam bith gum faigh am pìobaire damaiste, o chionn bha pìobairean gu leòr anns an àite, agus bhiodh fear is fear mu seach a’ toirt greis air a’ phìob. Thòisicheadh an dannsa, agus nuair a dhèante trì neo ceithir do ruidhlighean dannsa, dh’ iarrte air cuideigin anns a’ chuideachd òran a ghabhail ... Chuirte an sin mun cuairt riarachadh liunn eile ... Rachadh an oidhche a chur seachad mar sin gu maduinn, eadar dannsa is òrain is òl.”<sup>67</sup>*

Fifty years ago, dances were held in blackhouses in Uist. Dance-gatherings in Uist were known as balls, and they still call them that ... Today there's no such thing going on in Uist at all. It's been a great many years since we had a blackhouse ball in Uist ... When the people would gather all together, beer would be distributed to everyone, and the piper who'd been waiting on them would put up his pipe and the dance would begin. There was no fear that the piper would tire out, because there were many pipers present, and they would take turns on the pipe. The dance would begin, and when three or four reels had been played, someone in the group would be asked to give a song ... More beer would then be passed around ... The night would be spent like that till morning, between dancing, singing, and drinking.

MacDonald's reference to no other instrument on these occasions than the bagpipe is entirely consistent with the reminiscences of my own informants, as will be

seen in the next chapter. Some elements of the *bàl suitheadh* tradition yet survive. Calum Beaton, in interviews for this thesis, has used the word *bàltaichean* when speaking of dances in modern-day Uist; however, dances are held in town or church halls now and the circumstances are accordingly different. In a similar vein, Jessie MacAulay has spoken of the custom of pipers taking turns, “*a’ toirt turn mu seach*”, in the dances of her youth, but at the same time laments the rarity of such occasions today (11/14/98; see ch. 7).

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1. MacDonald, 1784:15. Thirty years later, of course, there appeared two seminal collections: Campbell’s *Albyn’s Anthology* (1815) and Fraser’s *Airs and Melodies* (1816).
2. Gibson later observed (p109) that piping for dance and labour accompaniment carried on unaffected by the aforementioned conditions, and this will be discussed below in section 5d. See also MacInnes, 1988 and Cannon, 1988:73.
3. Published c. 1819; see section 5c.
4. See Cannon, 1988:79-94; Gibson, 1998:173-176; it was a symptom, essentially, of what Ramsay had referred to as “the new model” of urban British values, among which the written word (or in this case note) was foremost.
5. For more information on the MacArthurs, see Matheson, 1938:252-4; MacKay, 1838:5; Johnson and Boswell, 1924:44; Collinson, 1975:155; and Cannon, 1988:54. For more on the MacCrimmons, see MacKay, 1838:3; Poulter and Fisher, 1936; Collinson, 1975:141-145; and Cannon, 1988:97-99. The whole body of MacCrimmon traditions are challenged by Campsie, 1980. For more on the Rankins, see MacKay, 1838:7; Collinson, 1975:156; and Cannon, 1988:78.
6. As printed in Thomson, 1974:21-2, omitting the final 4 stanzas. A similar version was given by well-known piper William MacDonald, Benbecula in his talk “Further Reminiscences” at the Piobaireachd Society Conference of 1999, calling it “an old poem I used to hear when I was young” (MacDonald, 1999:1). He attributed it to Lachlann, Neil Mór’s son.
7. Most printed versions of the poem attribute it to Neil Mór, e.g. MacKenzie’s *Sàr-Obair nam Bard Gaelach* (1904:67) and the McLagan and MacNicol MS collections; but Thomson (1974:18) warns that these all probably stem from one intermediate source, which taints the case somewhat. A further complication is the presence of MacArthur pipers in the poem: MacKenzie writes that Neil Mór composed it as a young man, soon after returning to his father’s house from a bardic college in Ireland; if there is even a kernel of truth to this, then the date of the poem goes back well before the end of the sixteenth century, since he is estimated to have been born c. 1550. This pre-dates even the MacCrimmons’ hey-day, and the MacCrimmons are said to have taught the MacArthurs (MacKay, 1838:5). The authorship of Neil Òg, on the other hand, is supported by the MacArthurs’ presence because the best of that family, Charles, was taught by Patrick Òg MacCrimmon in the late seventeenth to early eighteenth century, and Neil Òg flourished in this same period; he died having served as Clanranald’s last hereditary bard, c. 1726.



8. Calum Beaton related a version of this anecdote to me in conversation on 30 August 1995.
9. Stewart, 1982 discusses this aspect of the clan's history.
10. In the early 1950s, collector and tradition-bearer D.J. MacDonald of Pininerine, South Uist recorded his father, the late storyteller Duncan MacDonald, singing several examples of bardic verse with references to Clanranald's patronage; see D.J. MacDonald MSS, book 1 pp. 62-3, and book 62 p. 5,862. See also Thomson, 1970:289 and Cameron's *Reliquiae Celticae* vol ii, 1894:252-3, for Neil Òg MacMhuirich's references to the patronage of Allan MacDonald.
11. D.J. MacDonald MSS, book 45, p. 4,180.
12. This Angus was most likely he who succeeded to the chiefship after the death of Allan in the late 1500s; see MacDonald, A and A, 1904:231.
13. MacDonald, A and A, 1911:28; see also Thomson, 1968:71 and Stewart, 1982:307.
14. "MacDonald, John. Piper to the Captain of Clanranald. Was on 12 July, 1636, complained against along with others for seizing and plundering the ship *Susanna* which had been wrecked in the Western Isles – 'striking and stripping the Marines of their clothes and leaving them nude and destitute', in December, 1634." (Notices of Pipers, *Piping Times*, vol 23, number 4, 1971) See also MacKenzie, *History of the Outer Hebrides*, 1903:289.
15. See Stewart, 1982:307; Gordon, 1930, in GD 50/225/5/27; Carmichael, E.C., 1905:79, 82; in addition, both my South Uist informant Jessie MacAulay and Shears's Cape Breton informants (1986:12) claim that their MacIntyre ancestors were pipers to the MacDonalds of Clanranald.
16. Campsie (1980) questions both MacKay's reliability and his very authorship of *Ancient Piobaireachd* on account of his history of mental illness.
17. SA 1998.68. Her reference to Skye origins may mean that she is descended from either of three incomers from that area who came to Uist in the eighteenth century: *Niall Sgiathanach*, *Dòmhnall Ruadh*, or *Ruairidh* MacIntyre (Maclean, *TGSI*, 1984:500-1). In addition, MacAulay's reference to her ancestors as archers as well as pipers represents a tradition in South Uist that surrounds a MacIntyre called *Gille Pàdrúig Dubh*, Skye-born, who was in Uist about the mid-seventeenth century and who is remembered for his skills with the bow (Maclean, *op. cit.*:500; Bruford and MacDonald, 1994:417). *Gille Pàdrúig Dubh* was not a piper, however.
18. Stewart (1982:310) claimed this, and his source was an article in the *Oban Times* published in 1930 by the naturalist and piping judge Seton Gordon (GD 50/225/5/27), who in turn may have read of this tradition in an article in the *Celtic Review* published 25 years earlier by E.C. Carmichael (1905:79): "Two of the MacIntyres of South Uist, hereditary musicians to Clanranald, were among the last students of [the MacCrimmon] school - about the beginning of 'the '45'. Four cows are said to have been paid for there education there." This of course contradicts James Boswell's observation that the school was active until approximately 1772 (Cannon, 1988:54).
19. See Stewart, 1982:308-312.
20. GD 201/5/102 (2 October 1759) and GD 201/5/1148 (23 November 1767).
21. John MacDonald Esq. of Clanranald died in 1794 (MacDonald, A and A, 1904:236) so from MacKay's point of view the emigration would have taken place no earlier than this.

22. "Donald MacIntyre, sen., from Rannoch", "Donald MacIntyre, jun., from the estate of Sir Robert Menzies of that Ilk, in Rannoch, Perthshire", and Robert MacIntyre, Clanranald's piper, all played in the 1785 competition (MacInnes, 1988:315). Robert may have been a son of Donald senior as MacKay contends (1838:8) but it is likely that they were less closely related and, in this instance, represented two separate branches of the same family in a single competition. MacDonald of Clanranald was, incidentally, President of the HSL in this year and in 1783 (MacInnes, 1988:178) and judged on the competition panel on at least three occasions (*ibid*:50).
23. MacKay, 1838:13; Reid, 1826:19; Piobaireachd Society Book 7, 1938:213.
24. There is nothing of consequence in the written record of Clanranald pipers' involvement in *Linn nan Creach*; however, for what it's worth, Eyre-Todd wrote in 1923 of *Blàr nan Leine*, or the Battle of the Shirts (so-called because the combatants stripped to their shirts in the heat of the summer day) when the first *Iain Muideartach* led an attack on about 400 of Lord Lovat's men at the head of Loch Lochy in 1545, and referred to "the forces of John Moidartach descending upon him on the front and flank in 7 columns with pipes playing and banners flying" (1923, ii:247). No source for this account was given. See also Cameron's translation of MacMhuirich's original Gaelic record of the battle in *Reliquiae Celticae*, 1894, ii:170-1 (piping is not mentioned).
25. Although the war was fought over religious and political differences from the point of view of Montrose and Argyll, the Highland clans involved saw it as an opportunity to perpetuate long unresolved feuds stemming from *Linn nan Creach*; see Stevenson, 1980; Cameron, 1894 (ii); O Baoill & Bateman, 1994.
26. Cameron's translation of "*do thionail fecht Uibhisd, & Eige, mhuideord & arasaig*" (1894, ii:179; see also Stevenson, 1980:140).
27. "*reimh runbhuiribh ro chalma reachtaigentaigh ragnallaigh*" (Cameron, 1894, ii:191).
28. "*Mòr-dhragh na falachd*" from *Òran air Latha Blàir Inbhir Lochaidh eadar Clann Dòmhnail agus na Caimbeulaich* by *Iain Lom* in O Baoill & Bateman, 1994:106.
29. Cameron, 1894, ii:205; Stevenson, 1980:257; see ch. 3.
30. Gibson, 1998:70, citing Buchan, John, *Montrose*, London, 1928:120.
31. Ranald was Allan's brother, who took over the leadership of the clan after Allan's death; the 'king doing well' is a reference to the Jacobite army affecting a stalemate with the Hanoverian at Sheriffmuir. See other examples of Neil Òg MacMhuirich's elegies in Thomson, 1968-69:289-293.
32. The latter-day contribution of Highlanders to British army regiments, despite its dubious beginnings (see Adam and Somerville, 1993:142), surely qualifies as a "manifestation" of Highland martial culture. See chapter 9.
33. MacDonald, A and A, 1900:352. As opposed to 250 men, Eyre-Todd claimed that "Clanranald could at that time put between 700 and 800 men into the field" (1923, ii:245).
34. Campbell, J.L., 1933:149. The translation is Campbell's. Alasdair Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair was born in the late seventeenth century of South Uist parentage and spent his life "intertwined with the Clanranald and MacDonald clans, and with their territories" (Thomson, 1996:5). Though he probably maintained a sporadic connection to South Uist throughout his life, he spent most of it in or around the mainland Clanranald territories of Moidart and Ardnamurchan (*ibid*). His involvement in the 1715 rising is inferential but his participation in the '45 is well-known.

35. Roseneath, 12 August 1745 (RH 2/4/342/217).
36. GD 50/229/3, from the *Oban Times*, 24 December 1904. Stewart (1982:425, 434) believes that these men were transported to augment the Jacobite army at Falkirk. The letter's having neither address nor signature may cast some doubt on its quality as a source of evidence, but its indication of South Uist's martial contributions makes it worth mentioning.
37. I assume he meant Loch Ailort; Loch Ainort, or Eynort, is in South Uist.
38. Letter from Roderick MacLeod of MacLeod congratulating Clanranald on his sons' commissions, 27 January 1757 (GD 201/4/81).
39. Letter, Clanranald to MacLeod: "You need not doubt of my using all possible means to assist Donald in his recruiting, though I cannot help blaming him for promising more than he can expect reasonably to [perform?] in that way" (GD 201/4/85). *Dr. Walker's Report on the Hebrides*, compiled after 1771, estimated that seventy-two men from South Uist served in the Seven Years' War (Adam and Somerville, 1993:144); most if not all of this number would have served under Donald. This practice of a chief recruiting men from his own holdings for military purposes was undoubtedly a remnant of clan-based society which had been dying out in previous decades.
40. Fraser's 78<sup>th</sup> Highlanders had probably fifteen pipers all told dispersed between ten to fifteen companies; "inasmuch as most Highland companies were raised ostensibly by a gentleman who became at least a captain, pipers were associated with that captain, most likely farming on his holding" (Gibson, 1998:82).
41. Letter from MacLeod to Clanranald, 24 August 1758: "I hope that your Stout son is by this time on his way home as his long stay in the country is truly of no advantage to him in many respects" (GD 201/4/86).
42. Gibson, 1998:85, quoting from the diary of Sergeant Thompson of Capt. Donald MacDonald's grenadier company in Harper, J.R., *The Fraser Highlanders*, Montreal, 1979:90.
43. See MacInnes, 1988:26; Dalryell, 1849:25. Pipers nonetheless remained unofficial in the British army until 1854 when a Piper Major and five pipers were allotted to several Highland regiments (see Henderson, 1989:246 and Murray, 1994:113).
44. Calculated at the time as 3,450 (*Stat Acc*: 132).
45. See Henderson, 1994:30-1; *Cabar Feidh Collection*, 1983:279.
46. The Piobaireachd Society's tuition in South Uist spans a fifty-year period in the twentieth century; its involvement in local piping, as well as the general circumstances behind its formation, are addressed in chapter 6.
47. Interviews with Calum Beaton, 30/8/1995 (in writing), SA 1998.70, SC 2001.025 and Jesse MacAulay, SA 1998.68, SA 1998.71.
48. See "Further Reminiscences" by William MacDonald, Benbecula in *Piobaireachd Society Conference XXVI* (1999).
49. MacInnes (1988:151-194) discusses the ambiguity of tune titles in the *ceòl mòr* repertoire during the 1781-1844 period.

50. These tunes and others are commented on by Morrison (1999:21), though, since he believes that the MacIntyres to Clanranald and Menzies were one and the same, the tunes are listed under 'piobaireachd compositions associated with South Uist'. One other tune begs mention which may be relevant but could not be properly included among the examples of *ceòl mór*. Adam (1960:549), in a list of titles associated with Clanranald, gave "*Cumha Mhic 'ic Ailein*" or "Clanranald's Lament", which does not appear in any collection and, judging by the context of the passage, would seem to have been listed on the basis of oral tradition rather than documentary research. However, in Patrick MacDonald's *Collection of Highland Vocal Airs* of 1784, there appears a jig entitled "*Bhliadhna Dh' éirich an Iomart* - Lament for Clan Ronald" (p. 14). The Gaelic title is literally translated as "The Year the Endeavour Arose" and may refer to the 1745 Jacobite rising, known traditionally as *Bliadhna Theàrlaich* or 'Charlie's Year'. The tune is certainly not *ceòl mór*, and the similarity of the English titles may be entirely coincidental; but there may be a connection, however improbable.

51. The tune is found in the Piobaireachd Society's series Book 2 (1928:48) and Archibald Campbell's *Kilberry Book of Ceòl Mór* (1948:83).

52. Collinson (1975) gives three different dates for the battle at different points in his text – 1578, 1580, and 1587 – while Poulter and Fisher (1936:8) give 1580.

53. Poulter and Fisher, 1936:8. This would be an interesting connection between MacCrimmon piping and Clanranald piping. The only other known references to contact between the two are the wealth of *Smerclait* tales depicting MacCrimmon pipers journeying to South Uist to test the Smerclate pipers' skill (see chapter 2) and the legend that one or more MacIntyre pipers received tuition at the MacCrimmon school in Boreraig. Collinson (1975:147) reports a tradition that *Fionnlagh a' Bhreacain* composed "Waternish".

54. Both tunes are *fosgailte*, or 'open', in that they make use of a repetitive tripling motif in the *ùrlar* and this extends into *taorluath fosgailte* and *crunluath fosgailte* in the variations (see chapter 1).

55. MacLean, 1984:500. The point is debatable, but I believe that this was not John MacIntyre of Rannoch, who composed "The Battle of Sheriffmuir" – the same John whom Angus MacKay describes as the son of Donald Mór of the Rannoch MacIntyres (1838:8). Ronald Morrison believes the MacIntyres of Clanranald and Rannoch were one and the same (1999:21) – probably taking his cue from MacKay – whereas I suggest that they were two branches of an extended family (see section 5a). See also Eyre-Todd, 1923, ii:300.

56. The tune appears as "Boisdale's March" in the Campbell Canntaireachd (vol ii:28); Thomason recorded it (1900:25) having got it from Donald MacDonald's *Collection*; Lt. MacLennan (1907:5) gives the tune in his style, and another *canntaireachd* setting was written out by the Australian authority Simon Fraser (Orme, 1979:282).

57. See Orme (1979:157); Campbell (1948:85); PS series Book 7 (1938:213); Thomason (1900:249); Reid (1826:19).

58. "Clanranald's March" was played at the 1783 Edinburgh exhibition by James Munro, Piper to the Canongate (MacKay, 1838:10); later, all twelve of the competitors "marched round St. Andrew Square, all playing Clanranald's March" (*ibid*). MacDonald of Clanranald was president of the HSL that year (MacInnes, 1988:178).

59. See MacInnes, 1988:177. As a matter of interest, Daniel Dow recorded "*Piobrach Chlann Raonailt* or Clanranald's March to Edinburgh" in his fiddle-tune collection of c. 1783 (Cannon, 1980:18), so we know that the tune transcended strictly pipe music.



60. MacKay, 1838:13; Reid, 1826:19; PS series Book 7, 1938:213.

61. This tune will be found in the PS series Book 1, 1925, pp. 8-10.

62. See Logan, 1831:274; Dalyell, 1849:39-42; Gibson (1998:144-147) cites observations of piping as accompaniment to labour, dancing, weddings, funerary lamentation, etc. from various authors in various parts of the Highlands from the sixteenth to the twentieth century.

63. D.J. MacDonald MSS, book 66, p. 6,169:

*“Anns na seann laithean, bha e na chleachdadh aig daoine piobaire a bhi air an tòrradh.  
Bhiodh am piobaire a’ falbh air thòiseach air na daoine uile gu léir agus e a’ chuichd ‘port na marbh’  
air a’ phìob.”*

In the old days, it was customary for a piper to be at the burial. The piper would go at the head of all the people playing a ‘death-tune’ on the pipes.

64. Campbell and Collinson, 1977:128:

*“Chìteadh ‘nad thalla muirn is macnas  
Mairt fhèoil ‘ga bruich, crodh ‘gam feannadh  
Gachdan air òl, sùrd air dannsa,  
Piob is fiodhall ‘dol ‘gan deannruith  
‘S cruic nan teudan ‘cur ris an annsgair.”*

Merriment and sport would be seen in your hall  
Beef being cooked, cattle being skinned  
Strong drink, furious dancing,  
Pipes and fiddles run tightly together  
And stringed harps joining in the ruckus.

65. “*Pìob bheag*” may not refer to what we know as the Lowland Scottish small pipes, but to a miniature set of Highland pipes which some say were used specially for dance-music; in either case, any tradition of piping other than that of the full Highland bagpipe in South Uist has long been unknown. It is not impossible that bellows-blown pipes were typically played in Uist at one point; Alexander Carmichael referred to “bellow-pipes” as among the instruments played in the township of Ness in Lewis before the Free Presbyterian Church gained ascendancy there post-1843 (*Carmina Gadelica* vol i, 1928:xxx).

66. *New Stat Acc*, 1845:209. While Barra is not South Uist proper, it is close enough in social, cultural, religious and geographic terms to warrant mention; note that dancing to pipe music was “common to the surrounding islands”.

67. D.J. MacDonald MSS, book 63, pp. 5,948-58.



**PART TWO**  
**THE TWENTIETH CENTURY**

## CHAPTER SIX

*“Interest in piping in South Uist is getting keener than ever”:*

### **The Age of Improvement, 1900 – 1958**

By the turn of the twentieth century, South Uist had seen several important changes in its social and educational infrastructure. The entreaties of Bishop Angus MacDonald to the Crofters’ Commission in 1883 had succeeded not only in securing a truer representation of the island’s catholic majority on the school board (Rea, 1964:xiv), but in conveying the plight of Uist’s crofters whatever their religion. “Besides this special grievance,” he wrote, referring to the neglect of the catholic majority’s wishes, “I believe that a statement of this case will tend to show the existence of a widespread evil, in the dependent and degrading position in which such tenants are apt to be placed – with no security of tenure, no guarantee against removal at will, and with the fear constantly hanging over them, that if they venture to assert their rights they may be made to suffer for it, without having the power to obtain redress” (*ibid*). The Commission’s report and the Crofters (Scotland) Act of 1886 duly placed redress for such grievances within tenants’ reach, and gave the island’s catholics the means for proportional representation in their schools.

English-language schooling had become compulsory throughout the Isles in 1872, but by the turn of the century it seems to have had little effect on the general use of Gaelic, at least in the Outer Hebrides. An indication of this is the Duke of Atholl’s complaint to the Scottish Education Department, dated 29 August 1901, in which he claimed that a sub-inspector who visited Pittagowan School in Perthshire the previous spring had advised the children to abstain from speaking Gaelic at all times except Sundays. The Duke, long an active supporter of Gaelic, was uncertain if the sub-inspector was acting of his own accord or through Scottish Education policy. In either case, he was incensed.

Through a series of letters, it was discovered that the sub-inspector had been “joking” to the pupils, and his actions were in no way representative of official

policy; however, the initial reply of the head of the Department, Lord Balfour, reveals an implicit bias:

“My Dear Duke of Atholl,

I have been away for a week in the Hebrides and therefore only received your letter on Saturday ... From a purely Educational point of view, there is much to be said which runs counter to ideas of sentiment and of Highland Patriotism. In some parts of the west Highlands and Islands such as those where I was last week the continual existence of Gaelic as *the only* [sic] domestic language interposes a serious barrier to the well-being and prosperity of the rising generation...” (ED 7/1/80/3)

It therefore seems that under the Education Act of 1872, English was encouraged officially while Gaelic was discouraged unofficially. The evidence indicates that in these early days, as far as South Uist was concerned, neither edict was very successful.

South Uist at that time was undergoing a gradual decline in population, which was recorded in 1901 as 5,516 (*Third Stat Acc*, 1985:614); down over five hundred from ten years previously, but greater again than what the census would record the following decade. This decline was symptomatic of the perpetually poor economy which had caused much emigration in the previous century; kelping, for example, had lain dormant since the post-Napoleonic Wars period (see ch. 4) and although it enjoyed a revival from the late 1850s, it again took a downturn in 1875 with the importation of iodine from Chile and Peru. The kelping industry would never again provide enough to sustain the population, which at the turn of the century held upwards of a thousand crofts at five to fifty acres each (AF 39/16/3-5). Numbers of livestock, such as sheep, horses and cattle, remained stable at that time, as did crops such as potatoes, barley, and turnips (*ibid*).

So at the turn of the century, the South Uist community had seen great changes in some respects, and none in others: the population was in decline due to a poor economy and a language as yet irrelevant to their lives was being taught in their schools, but they were enjoying a renaissance of catholic free-will and Gaelic

remained the living tongue of the community. Where did the piping tradition fit into this picture? This chapter aims to establish the state of piping in the Uist community around the turn of the century and the involvement of two bodies, the Piobaireachd Society of Scotland and the South Uist Piping Society, who from 1909 to 1958 recruited the top instructors of the day to bring Uist's indigenous piping up to par with the technical and competitive innovations of Scotland's mainstream – i.e., to 'improve' it in the same sense that Highland landowners had improved their tenants' agriculture in the light of the new economic priorities of the post-Jacobite era. The first section is devoted to the various idioms of pipe music extant in South Uist c. 1900; the second deals with the formation of the two societies and their common objective; the third explores the work and lasting influence of the Piobaireachd Society's instructors.

#### 6.a. The State of Piping, c. 1900

Interest, if I may use that word, in piping was just as high at the beginning of the twentieth century as it had been for generations before then. The word 'interest' is deceptive; it is not meant in the western aesthetic sense, in which an objective psychic distance can exist between listener and performer (see ch. 10b), but in the sense that, as older pipers today remember, piping was an integral part of community life and taken fundamentally for granted. As the late Alexander MacAulay, himself a piper of Uist roots and a writer for the *Piping Times*, put it, "If it was in you to be a piper, you would be a piper ... The house that couldn't produce at least one person playing the chanter was not of the South Uist way of life. They lived and breathed piping there" (*PT*, July, 1961). It was a noteworthy phenomenon even to contemporary observers, as the *Oban Times* of 1910 reported that

"The music of the historic 'piob mhor' has always strongly appealed to the natives of the Outer Hebrides, and particularly to those of South Uist. There is hardly a family without

its piper, and frequently one finds father and two or more sons able to discourse on the national instrument.” (26/3/1910 p. 2)

Older pipers today confirm that at that period it would have been considered unusual if a family didn't produce at least one piper; indeed, it is unanimously held by sources that the bagpipe was the only instrumental music available at the time. This would prove to be an exaggeration – though not by much – but it serves to illustrate the depth of feeling and nostalgia that the subject provokes. As Jessie MacAulay of Smerclate, born c. 1913, remembers:

JD: *Carson a thòisich thu air a' phìob?*

JM: *Bha e cho furasda dhomh tòiseachadh ciùil! Bha a' phìob a' dol a-staigh againn daonnan tro a h-uile oidhche ... is sin an aon cheòl a bh'ann airson a chluichd. Cha robh ach a' phìob a bh'ann. Sin mar a thòisich mi air a' phìob.* (SA 1998.68)

JD: Why did you start (to learn) the pipes?

JM: It was so easy for me to start the music! The bagpipe was going every night ... and was the only music around for playing. There was nothing here but the bagpipe. That's how I started on the pipes.

Interestingly, the younger Calum Beaton expressed the same point of view that piping was, in his youth during the 1940s, the only music on the island. His contemporary, Neil MacDonald of Garryhellie, was similarly insistent:

NM: *Dh' ionnsaich sinne nuair bha sinn òg, is bha pìobairean gu leòr mu chuairt a dh'ionnsaicheamaid. 'S e ceòl an eilein an uair ud co-dhiubh. An aon cheòl a bha 'san eilean.*

JD: *An aon cheòl a-mhàin? Nach robh accordion, no fìdheal, no...?*

NM: *Cha robh sian a' dol idir ach a' phìob.* (SA 1998.69)

NM: We learned when we were young, and there were plenty of pipers around who would teach us. It was the music of the island at that point anyway. The only music on the island.



JD: The only music? Weren't there accordians, or fiddles, or...?

NM: There was nothing at all but the pipes.

MacDonald was born in 1934, Beaton in 1931. They could only have been speaking of the late 30s and 40s, long after the period in question; however, their viewpoint is very much the same as MacAulay's. It comes across as a slight exaggeration – informants' testimony and *Oban Times* records both mention the occasional use of the fiddle and the melodian in the *taigh-céilidh* around the turn of the century, and MacAulay once referred to the appearance of accordians in the 1940s<sup>1</sup> – and it suggests a remembrance born of nostalgia for a time when piping was more widespread. In this way the informants' descriptions are surely just as accurate for the beginning of the century as they are for the mid-point. Other sources lead to the same conclusion: the late Duncan MacDonald's description of the *bàl suitheadh* (see ch. 5d) is conspicuously devoid of any mention of instrumental music other than the pipes. At the dawn of the twentieth century, it seems, piping was everywhere and everything.

Both of the main branches of Highland pipe music, *ceòl mór* and *ceòl beag*, were extant at the time, though the indication is that *ceòl mór* had somewhat faded from general practice; this was the typical state of 'classical' piping throughout Scotland at the time, and will be discussed in the next section. As for *ceòl beag*, it is apparent that the piping tradition on the island had by then inherited two idioms of musical transmission: the literate and the aural. Each of these idioms implied different contextual functions. As was discussed in chapter 5, the use of staff notation in piping had developed concurrently with, and in direct relation to, the rise of competition and a technical standard of fingerwork in the nineteenth century, an 'improvement' due largely to the efforts of the Highland Society of London; before there arose the competitive function, however, piping in Gaelic society was passed on aurally and, in South Uist, most often as dance-music in the *céilidh* (see ch. 2). The South Uist community refers to aurally-learned piping – particularly with regard to the dance function – as *ceòl chuais*, or 'ear-music'. Chapter 10 discusses the functions and aesthetics of piping in South Uist in greater depth, but for now, the

pertinent issue is discovering the level to which both extended within the South Uist community at the beginning of the century, and the reasons why.

Literate transmission, or learning pipe music by staff notation, was known among individuals at least, if not communities. Gibson (1998:181) maintains that it was negligible in traditionally conservative areas like South Uist until the influences of the twentieth century came to bear; however, that is not to say that literacy, and its social acceptability in an otherwise ear-learned tradition, was entirely unknown on the island in the last half of the 1800s, when literate piping was becoming the established norm throughout Scotland.<sup>2</sup> The MacGillivray pipers, who leased land in Barra in 1883, are reputed to have been literate in staff notation (Morrison, 1999:22).

What most connected South Uist with literate piping in the latter half of the nineteenth century was the people's affinity for military service – a direct continuation of the martial tradition discussed in chapter 5 – which had led many Uist pipers into the British army, navy and militia since the eighteenth century. By the 1880s, some of these were quite literate and were noted prize-winners in local and regimental competitions.<sup>3</sup> Neil MacInnes and Lachlan MacCormick, for instance, both joined the Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders in 1889; MacInnes as a Regular and MacCormick in the Militia Battalion. In addition to winning the *ceòl mór* at the regimental Games in Malta in 1896, MacInnes took the Captain McLeod Medal for march, strathspey and reel playing and placed highly in the dancing (Crawford, 1999:175). MacCormick became Sergeant-Piper in the Camerons before latterly serving with the Lovat Scouts (*ibid*:189) and is regarded by informants as the pre-eminent competitive piper in Uist in the days before Piobaireachd Society involvement. He even acted as a judge of piping at the first Highland Games in South Uist in 1898, although this did not deter him from competing in subsequent Games.<sup>4</sup>

That the British army was a source of literate piping around this time is evinced in many ways. When the use of staff notation was first being promoted by the Highland Societies of London and Scotland in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, their efforts were nominally for purposes of 'preservation', but they were also heavily influenced by the army's need for pipers who could be taught

tunes quickly and be sent off to face the French.<sup>5</sup> The fact that Highland regiments held competitions in the late nineteenth century is itself strong testimony, since competitive piping implies literate piping (see ch. 10). Literacy in these years was in most respects necessary for the military piper to carry out his duties, both as a solo ceremonial player and as a member of a regimental band;<sup>6</sup> Pipe Major William MacLean, for instance – twice gold medallist and resident of Benbecula around the turn of the century – hauled a blackboard around France during the Great War so that his pipers would be “properly taught from music and not by ear” (*Cabar Feidh*, 1983:280). Not long after, Pipe Major Willie Ross is known to have made his army pupils write out their own manuscripts of tunes, “laboriously transcribed by hand”, in his course in Edinburgh Castle (MacKenzie, 1998:113); his example could hardly have been unique or original.<sup>7</sup>

In South Uist, such was their economic hardship in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century that the military was often a piper’s only recourse for literacy, since the published staff-notated collections were often too expensive for the unpatronised. Owning your own set of pipes was rare enough, which constituted another benefit of military service. As Jessie MacAulay recalls:

JM: *‘S e ceòl cluais, ‘s ann mar sin a bha iad ag ionnsachadh aig an àm sin. [Ach bha] feadhainn ... a’ dol dhan Arm, is bha iad sin ag ionnsachadh a’ chiùil as an leabhar; pipe bands, fhios agaibh. Sin fhéin an aon fheadhainn aig a robh na leabhraichean is a’ phìob ... ‘s ann nuair a chaidh iad dhan Arm a bha iad a’ tòiseachadh leis na leabhraichean is na pipe bands.*

JD: *An ann ‘san àite sin a bhiodh iad ag ionnsachadh ceòl a leughadh?*

JM: *‘S ann, seadh, anns na regiments. Bha bràthair agam-sa, bha e a-mach anns na Lovat Scouts, gum faigheadh e pìob! (laughs)*

JD: *Am b’ e sin dòigh airson fìr òga pìob fhaighinn? A’ dol dhan Scouts?*

JM: *Seadh, an TA is na Scouts. Bha pipe band aca.*

JD: *An robh pìoban daor aig an àm?*

JM: *Bha! Chan eil iad daor idir an-diugh, ach bha iad daor gu leòr an uairsin; fhios agaibh, cha robh mòran airgead againn ann.*

JD: *Dh’ fheumadh iad a dhol dhan TA no Scouts airson pìob a thoirt dhachaidh?*

JM: 'S e, 's e. *Cha robh dà phìob 'san aon teaghlach idir, cha robh [ach] aon phìob.* (SA 1998.68)

JM: Ear-music, that's how they learned at that time. But some ... went into the Army, and they were there learning the music from the book; pipe bands, you see. They were the only ones who had the books and the pipes ... It's when they went to the Army that they began with the books and the pipe bands.

JD: Is that where they would learn to read music?

JM: Yes, in the regiments. My brother, he was out in the Lovat Scouts in order to get a bagpipe! (laughs)

JD: Was that a way for young men to get a set of pipes? Going into the Scouts?

JM: Yes, the TA (Territorial Army) and the Scouts. They had a pipe band.

JD: Were pipes dear at the time?

JM: Yes they were! They aren't at all expensive today, but they were dear enough back then; we didn't have much money around, you see.

JD: They would have to join the TA or Scouts in order to bring home a set of pipes?

JM: That's right. There weren't two sets of pipes in the one family, just one set.

MacAulay can speak first-hand of the 1920s at the earliest, but there is every reason to believe that the same was true of the years surrounding the turn of the century. Military activity, and military piping, were omnipresent then.<sup>8</sup> Rarely was there a wintertime soiree or ball at which music by a local Cameron or Lovat piper did not feature highest on the bill.<sup>9</sup> In 1895, for example:

“[A]n enjoyable soiree, concert and ball [was] given recently by Miss Fyffe, the energetic public school teacher of Balvanich, Benbecula, [for] the scholars attending the evening class. Selections on the bagpipes were given by Piper MacPhee, of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders. Dancing was kept up with high glee till the small hours of the morning...” (*OT*, 30/3/1895 p.4)

The school in Kileravagh, Benbecula, held an annual end-of-year entertainment along similar lines, and in 1898 the Master of Ceremonies was

Sergeant D. MacCorquodale of the Cameron Highlanders; piping was provided by fellow Camerons Pipe Major MacPherson and Piper Angus MacLellan as well as civilian piper Alex MacRury. All were local. MacCorquodale and MacLellan danced the Highland Fling together “in excellent style” and the Sergeant went on to give a few tunes on the melodeon (*OT*, 5/3/1898 p.6). About the same date, the evening continuation school in Torlum held a soiree at which Lachlan MacCormick himself, Angus MacPhee of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion Camerons, and a member of a well-known local piping family, Roderick MacMillan, gave selections on the pipes (*ibid*).

The year 1906 marked the death of a young Torlum man, Roderick MacDonald of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion Camerons. He was described in the *Oban Times* as a “piper of no mean order” and was given a full military procession at his funeral in Inverness (28/4/06 p.5).

Also in that year, the Lovat Scouts sponsored a ball in Eochar:

“[A] most enjoyable ball was given by the Lovat Scouts in the Iochdar Public School. Mr. Alex. Morrison, Merchant, Ardnamonie, called upon Piper Angus MacPhee, Lovat Scouts, for the ‘79<sup>th</sup>’s Farewell to Gibraltar’, and right well did Piper MacPhee respond to the invitation. The M.C., Lance-Corporal D.J. MacKay, Lovat Scouts, displayed his tact and ability in marshalling the couples for the Scotch Reels that followed. Country dances, quadrilles, lancers, the Highland Schottische, and refreshments all lent variety to the next part of the programme. Mr. Donald Ewan MacLean, Liniquie; Sergt. MacPherson, Lovat Scouts; and Mr. Peter MacKay, Kilauley, displayed their skill by dancing the Highland Fling, the Highland Laddie, and the Sailor’s Hornpipe... The piping was much appreciated.” (*OT*, 3/3/06, p.4)

This last reveals the difference in cultural character between a regimental ball and a traditional *céilidh* of the period: the dancing of Scotch Reels notwithstanding, ear-learned dance-piping very likely had no place at that ball, where such Scottish Country dances as were mentioned were, and are, associated intrinsically with literate, non-Gaelic influences (see ch. 10). Moreover, the “79<sup>th</sup>’s Farewell” is a



standard tune in the military repertoire,<sup>10</sup> and as MacAulay's testimony suggests, the military repertoire, as much then as now, implied literate transmission.

For a final example of the military's literate influence in South Uist, we need only look to the annual Highland Games at Askernish. In 1922 and 1923, the Games received generous financial support by the Lovat Scouts and the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion Camerons, while the Lovats contributed further to the cost of the piping competition medals (*OT*, 5/8/22 p. 2; 4/8/23 p. 7). This is indirect influence at best, but it does reflect the regiments' point of view regarding competition and improvement.

To be fair, the fact of serving in the British army around the turn of the century does not prove conclusively that a piper was literate; there were always exceptions. Consider the case of Peter MacDonald, born in Inverness in 1837, who was unable to read or write when he enlisted in the 76<sup>th</sup> Highland Light Infantry in Arisaig, 16 January 1876, aged thirty-eight (Crawford, 1999:187). He served as a piper in the Militia for some years. His general illiteracy makes it improbable that he could read and write music on the staff, but there is a chance he was tutored in this once enlisted. And in South Uist itself, Jessie MacAulay was able to recall an ear-learned piper from her youth, noted for his dance-piping skills, as being in the Lovat Scouts and playing in their band:

JM: *Angus Campbell as an Iochdar – bha e sin 'na shuidhe 'sa room aige 'san sgoil agus a' cluichd a' chiùil .... Bha esan cuideachd anns na Lovat Scouts, is a' bhand. Cha leughadh e an ceòl idir, ach bha e anns a' phipe band.*

JD: *Cha b'urrainn dha leughadh?*

JM: *Cha b'urra dha leugh', ach bha ceòl aige-san. Leis a' chluais.* (SA 1998.68)

JM: Angus Campbell of Eochar – he was there in his room in the school and playing the music ... He was also in the Lovat Scouts, and the band. He couldn't read music, but he was in the pipe band.

JD: He couldn't read?

JM: He couldn't read, but he had music. With the ear.

These exceptions notwithstanding, the written record indicates that at the dawn of the twentieth century, literacy was extant among pipers in South Uist insofar as the Militia Battalions and the Lovat Scouts were involved.

Military pipers were always in the minority compared to the general musically inclined population. Informants state consistently that most piping in South Uist at the beginning of the century was learned aurally and within the context of dance, as it had been over earlier generations. This has proved to be yet another example of geography separating South Uist from the cultural happenings and trappings of less remote Highland areas. By the middle of the nineteenth century, it is certain that both idioms were in practice throughout greater Scotland, but the efforts of the Highland Society of London had steered the accepted standard of musical transmission firmly in the direction of literacy. Sir John Graham Dalyell was conspicuous in his use of the past tense when he wrote:

“The transmission of pipe music for this instrument otherwise than by oral tuition, or acquisition by ear, or by any semblance of notation, was probably unknown to our native musicians; and I presume, that teaching a pupil by language exclusively is a peculiarity in musical education.” (1847:9)

South Uist, geographically peripheral and culturally conservative, largely avoided what was happening on the mainland up to the period in question. “Literacy and staged competitiveness,” wrote Gibson, speaking of the 1800s, “were aberrations unknown to, or eschewed by, Gaels who managed to go on living in places such as South Uist, North and South Morar, Moidart, places where tourists did not go” (1998:181). Excepting the instances of literate piping that the military presence suggests, testimony obtained from Uist informants concurs with this impression. As Jessie MacAulay recalled, ear-learning was quite the norm for her father’s generation of pipers:

JM: *Bha mo bhràthair na dheagh phìobaire, agus dh'ionnsaich e an ceòl; bha m'athair na dheagh phìobaire cuideachd – cha do dh'ionnsaich am fear sin as an leabhar idir. Cha*

*b'urrainn dha na puirt [a thoirt?] as an leabhar, ach bha e math air pìobaireachd 'na dheaghaidh sin. Cha robh cothrom aca co-dhiubh leabhar a dh' ionnsachadh. Bha aca 'nan cluais, fhios agaibh; cha robh leabhar idir aca ach an cluas is cha robh iad ag ionnsachadh as an leabhar cus idir. (SA 1998.68)*

JM: My brother was a good piper, and he learned the music; my father was also a good piper – he didn't learn from the book at all. He couldn't get the tunes from the book, but he was good at piping nonetheless. They never had the chance to learn from a book anyway; they had it in their ear, you see. They had no book at all but their ear and they weren't learning by the book at all.

Calum Beaton told a similar story regarding his own father Archie and the older generation of pipers in Stoneybridge:

*CB: Bha m'athair, chluichdeadh e a' phìob agus feadan, is bhiodh e 'ga chluichd tric gu leòr ... Bha mòran a chanadh false fingering, pìosan do phuirt is rudan an t-seòrsa sin. Agus bha gu leòr dhe na seann daoine mu chuairt, chluichdeadh iad co-dhiubh feadan is bha feadhainn aca a' cluichd air a' phìob, ach 's ann anns an aon dòigh mar sin a bha iad 'ga chluichd ... Bha mòran do phìobairean, mar a bha mi 'g ràdh riut, a chluichdeadh ceòl chuaiseadh; 's e a chanainn e. Playing by ear. (SA 1998.70)*

CB: My father, he would play the bagpipe and the chanter, and he'd play it quite often ... What many would call false fingering, fragments of tunes and that sort of thing. And lots of the old people around, they would play the chanter at least and some of them were playing the bagpipe, but they would be playing in the same way as that ... There were many pipers, like I told you, who played ear-music, as I would call it. Playing by ear.

The term 'false fingering' should grab one's attention. When a piper is taught by staff notation, he learns the gracenotes and fingerings according to a precise template, whereas a piper taught by ear will position his fingers any which way in order to get what he perceives to be the right sound from his chanter. The literately-taught piper necessarily regards such practice as shoddy or faulty; hence the term 'false fingering'. This was Calum Beaton's impression of his father's

playing in 1940s Stoneybridge once he'd been taught by notation; the late Duncan Johnstone also had this in mind when describing the *ceòl chuais* pipers of Barra in the 1950s:

“When I visited Father John MacMillan on Barra during my holidays I used to go to see this old man with him. He was bed-ridden but he used to sit up when I took the practice chanter to him. He couldn't read music and his fingering was as false as hell, but if you didn't look at the fingers and just listened the music was brilliant.” (*WHFP*, 6/12/1996 p. 21)

When those tradition-bearers in South Uist whom I interviewed spoke of *ceòl chuais* as played in their youth (between the 1920s and 1940s), their testimonies are often characterised, as in Beaton's above, by the mention of *na seann daoine mu chuairt an uairsin* – ‘the old people around at that time’; they maintained that most ear-piping they had heard as children was performed by the elderly. This is a strong indication that the *ceòl chuais* tradition was becoming scarcer among the younger generation at the period in question, and that literate transmission was in turn becoming the more acceptable standard. By the time Calum, whose first exposure to piping was through Archie Beaton in the 1930s, was taught the bagpipe, it was through the latter method:

CB: *Bha m'athair, chluichdeadh e a' phìob ... Bha mi smaoin' aig an àm gu robh e uamhasach math, nuair a bha mi anns an sgoil, ach nuair bhithinn-sa airson feuchainn air an fheadan, chanadh e rium, “Cha dearg mis' air sian a theagasg dhuit idir, cha do dh' ionnsaich mi fhìn ... a-riamh dòigheil.” Cha robh e airson 's gum bi mi ag obair air an fheadan ann an dòigh anns a robh e fhéin idir ... Mar sin, cha do rinn mi móran gus an tig [sic] caraid, a thill dhachaidh as a' Chogadh – Alasdair Peutan ... 'S e a thug dhomh a' chiad tòiseachadh air an fheadan, is fhuair mi leabhraichean – Robertson's Tutor, Logan's Tutor. Bha mi fhìn a' togail gu leòr dheth cuideachd agus cha robh e uamhasach fada gus an rachadh agam air an ceòl a leughadh gu math fileanta. (SA 1998.70)*

CB: My father played the pipes and the chanter ... At the time, I thought that he was an excellent player, when I was in school, but when I myself wanted to try the chanter, he

would say to me, “I cannot teach you a thing, I never learned ... properly.” He didn’t want me to work on the chanter in the way that he himself did ... So, I didn’t do much until a relative returned home from the War – Alasdair Beaton ... It was he who first started me on the chanter, and I got books – Robertson’s Tutor, and Logan’s Tutor. I picked up quite a bit too, and it wasn’t long before I was able to read music quite fluently.

This snapshot of Beaton’s earliest impressions is extremely valuable for what it reveals of the attitudes and perceptions toward aurally-learned and literately-learned music prevailing in South Uist by the 1940s. If his testimony can indeed be taken as reflecting the perceptions of the wider community at the time, and not just his family’s, it would seem that the perception of *ceòl cluais* as an inferior idiom to the ‘improved’ competitive standard had become not just that of the up-and-coming, ‘receiving’ generation, but was by then established to the point of being cross-generational; where even those among the elder generation, who had expounded the ear-learned tradition all their lives, began to feel that they had somehow learned *gu mì-dhòigheil* – ineptly.

What factors were involved in bringing about what appears to have been a significant change in South Uist’s piping tradition from the nineteenth century to the twentieth? At the turn of the century, musical literacy was likely to be still a rare skill among the general *Uibhisteach* population, their long-standing affinity for military service notwithstanding. Another possible, though less accessible, avenue toward literate transmission would have been the increasing publication of music collections throughout the nineteenth century, which reflected the development of competition throughout Scotland and the consequent necessity attached to literacy (see ch. 5a). Beaton has referred above to collections like Robertson’s and Logan’s circulating in Uist in the 30s and 40s. However, it is unlikely that there was sufficient demand in a place as far removed as rural South Uist for such written collections to have been made widely available at the beginning of the century, and informants’ reminiscences have borne this out.

I believe the emphasis on literate transmission and its associated competitive function – which grew sufficiently widespread in South Uist to compel Beaton’s ear-



learned father to refrain from teaching his son – was created by two influences: the military, as shown, and latterly the involvement of the Piobaireachd Society in the instruction of South Uist’s pipers from 1909. Their presence formed a landmark of change that ushered in an era of mainstream priorities and influenced the island’s piping tradition for the rest of the century. But what were the circumstances behind their involvement? Why, indeed, did they become involved at all?

### 6.b. Two Societies, One Goal

In the closing years of the nineteenth century, piping throughout Scotland was vigorous and widespread, as it was in South Uist. The increasing role of the games circuit and the military as piping’s all-encompassing *raison d’être* by this time had ensured that *ceòl beag* was everywhere in a healthy state of development; but by the same token, *ceòl mòr* was being seen by some as an endangered species, its performed repertoire rapidly shrinking and knowledge of its interpretation under threat through a flawed competition system and a lack of sound judging practices. The qualifications of men called to the bench all too frequently rested on social rank, with no regard for any knowledge of the ‘classical’ piping.<sup>11</sup> An anonymously-written series of articles in the *Oban Times* of September, 1903, entitled “The Passing of the Piobaireachd”, lamented this state of affairs and sent out a clarion call to those who would affect change: “Today there are thousands of players on the pipes, but of true pipers how many? The present writer knows of six who are worthy of the name. There are probably not more than ten in the whole world. Three hundred years ago ten as good, if not better, could have been mustered in Skye alone ... Men are dying, tunes are vanishing, knowledge is waning.” He went on to conclude,

“The writer’s purpose has not been to prove, for no proof is needed, but to draw attention to, the barbarous apathy with which our present generation treats the subject of

piobaireachd music. He has reminded the reader how few piobaireachd are ever heard nowadays, and how pipers play piobaireachd solely in order to win prizes in competitions, judged frequently by men without the slightest elementary knowledge of the subject. He has tried to show that the fault lies, not with the present-day professional piper, but with those on whose patronage the piper is dependent.”<sup>12</sup>

The writer’s misgivings echo those of John Ramsay in his introduction to *Highland Vocal Airs* well over a century earlier (see ch. 5). In the 1770s and 80s the perceived climate had led Highland aristocrats with an interest in such matters to form the Highland Society of London, which in later years encouraged the ‘scientific improvement’ of piping based on the Victorian principle of progress and the industrial hallmarks of “rational management and modern efficiency” (Donaldson, 2000:67).<sup>13</sup> In 1903 a handful of landed gentlemen and military officers, one of whom was in fact the anonymous writer of the *Oban Times* articles,<sup>14</sup> perceived that the very system which the HSL established was leading to the downfall of its original goal as regards the preservation of *ceòl mòr*, and in answer to this concern they formed the Piobaireachd Society of Scotland.

After initial enquiries at the Argyllshire Gathering at Oban the previous summer, the group met in Edinburgh on 19 January, 1903. Their objects were set down formally:

“a) The Encouragement, Study and Playing of Piobaireachd Music on the Highland Bagpipe.

b) To collect Piobaireachd MSS and Legends, and publish tunes which have never before been published, and to correct, when possible, tunes already in print which are known to be wrong.

c) The general advancement and diffusion of knowledge of this ancient Highland music.

d) Eventually, by offering adequate money prizes, to hold Piobaireachd Competitions, to be judged by Members of the Society, a list of tunes to be played to such competitions to be selected by the Society.” (Acc 9103/1)

One may look quizzically at the fourth object and note that the competition system was earlier derided for its failures by the very people who now wished to continue it. In fact, Society members saw a problem not with competition itself, but with the conditions under which pipers competed. They believed that the rules of the day not only allowed incompetence among judges, but complacency among performers – in that one had only to learn half a dozen or so tunes and could thereafter compete with the same tunes all his life. The system gave no incentive to broaden one's repertoire.<sup>15</sup> Hence the Society's intention to have competitions judged by their own members (who at least at first would be eminently competent<sup>16</sup>) and to prescribe ever-changing lists of tunes so as to continually challenge the pipers' skills.

In 1908 or very early 1909, the South Uist Piping Society was formed in Lochboisdale. This was a group founded by several local gentlemen, among whom were Simon MacKenzie of the Lochboisdale Hotel and Fr. Alexander MacDougall of Daliburgh. It was established in the 'interest' (and here I mean the clear western aesthetic) of encouraging pipe music on the island, particularly *ceòl mór*, through large-scale organised tuition; that is, to bring the island's backwater dance-pipers "up to literate scratch" (Gibson, 1998:251). They were prompted by the same drive for improvement which fuelled nineteenth-century competition and literacy and which had recently prompted the formation of the Piobaireachd Society in Edinburgh; they saw piping all around them in kitchens, *céilidhs* and weddings,<sup>17</sup> but felt most of them lacked the literate tuition that competitive/military piping demanded. MacKenzie's son Finlay, who succeeded him as hotelier, was also a key member and active patron. It is difficult to distinguish who else, if any, made up the Uist Society's founding committee because no records of the Society's beginnings appear to have survived; local oral tradition alone tells us that MacKenzie Sr. and MacDougall became associated "in their mutual interest in piping and pipers"<sup>18</sup> but others with an interest in cultural and community affairs were probably involved. The late Alex MacAulay suspected that the island's factor at the time, a John MacDonald, had a hand in it (*PT*, July 1961) and an article in the *Oban Times* of 1923<sup>19</sup> supports this; the resident priest of Bornish, a Fr. MacIntosh, may also have

been a member.<sup>20</sup> Whoever else may have been involved in the group's formation, with Simon MacKenzie and Alexander MacDougall we are on solid ground.

Through their concerted efforts, the Piobaireachd Society was contacted, who in turn sent instructors to South Uist (beginning with John MacDonald of Inverness) on a yearly basis for nearly fifty years – interrupted only by bureaucracy and two world wars. This period of institutionalised instruction would cement the foundation for mainstream piping for which South Uist has been celebrated ever since.

Simon MacKenzie was born in the middle years of the nineteenth century in Ross-shire, and died c. 1928 (*PT*, July 1961). He managed the Castlebay Hotel in Barra from 1881 to 1908, but took over the Lochboisdale Hotel some time before 1897.<sup>21</sup> He was a keen amateur piper, but is remembered today more for his patronage than his playing: the machair of Askernish, for instance, was leased to Lochboisdale Hotel at the time, and MacKenzie donated it for use by the Highland games every July from 1909, before which time they were most often held on Nunton machair, Benbecula (see ch. 8).

His son Finlay was born in 1883, most likely in Barra, and is remembered as having been an avid piper in his youth. He spent time with the Mounted Police in Canada in the years after 1900, so he was probably not among the Society's founders. He returned home, however, at the outbreak of the Great War and served with the Royal Scots Greys, with whom he obtained the rank of Major. He took over Lochboisdale Hotel in approximately 1920, and it was from this time that he began to assert himself as a strong patron in the tradition of his father. The junior MacKenzie became a frequent contributor to the games and was often voted Honorary President or Secretary of the South Uist Piping Society during his life;<sup>22</sup> in time Major MacKenzie achieved lasting recognition in this capacity outwith South Uist, aided in no small measure by the Uist Society's functional association over the years with the Piobaireachd Society. This extract from the Piobaireachd Society minutes of 1948 shows his typical standing among mainstream piping circles:

“The Honorary Secretary submitted a letter from Mr. Norman MacKillop,<sup>23</sup> Deraclate, Harris, requesting the assistance of the Society in giving tuition to young lads in

the district. The Committee was of the opinion that the applicants should get in touch with the Piping Society of South Uist and particularly Major Finlay MacKenzie of Lochboisdale. If satisfactory arrangements can be made for the giving of tuition by the Piping Society of South Uist, the Society will consider the question of giving financial assistance toward a class of tuition.” (23/1/48, College of Piping, Glasgow)

Nothing seems to have come of this initial proposal, but it serves to illustrate the confidence placed by that time in MacKenzie as a patron and organiser, and in the South Uist Piping Society as a legitimate body in matters of professional tuition in the Hebrides.

It was in Major MacKenzie’s capacity as manager of Lochboisdale Hotel that his support of piping was most practically realised, though in this respect it must be said that his support was most often geared toward attracting mainland pipers, well-known in competition circles, to the South Uist Games. The anticipation of his hospitality – among competitors and judges alike – became as much of an incentive to make the journey<sup>24</sup> as was the potential prize-money on offer; as Rona Lightfoot remarked in 1996:

RL: *Aig an àm ud, nuair bha mise òg, bha mòran, mòran do dheagh phìobairean a' dol a-mach chun na games an Uibhist ... Bha am fear aig a robh Hotel Loch Baghasdal, Fionnlagh MacChoinnich an t-ainm a bh'air, 's bha leithid do notion aige fhéin 's do ghaol aig' air a' phìob. Bha na pìobairean a' faighinn trì laithean [air feadh na games] anns an hotel is cha robh e 'cosg sian. An asgaidh. (SC 2001.024)*

RL: At that time, when I was young, there were many many good pipers going out to the Uist games ... The man who owned Lochboisdale Hotel, Finlay MacKenzie was his name, and he had such an affection and love for piping. The pipers would get three days [during the games] in the hotel and it wouldn't cost them a thing. It was free.

Major MacKenzie’s martial spirit was revived at the outbreak of war in 1939, and he is said to have recruited many soldiers and pipers among his neighbours for the cause. He accompanied the Uist contingent all the way to Cameron Barracks in



Inverness, intent on commanding them himself during the war, but was turned away as too old by that time for active service.<sup>25</sup> In 1961, after forty years as a central figure in South Uist's mainstream piping activities, he sold the Lochboisdale Hotel and moved with his wife to Belfast, where he died three years later (*PT*, January 1964).

Before leaving South Uist, as a final gesture of patronage for the tradition to which he had so long been witness, he bequeathed £2,500 as a contribution to the island's piping under the trusteeship of Colonel Charles Cameron, Pipe Major Neil MacLennan, and Alasdair MacMillan – Uist men prominent in the military and business world. The trustees chose one promising young piper each year for several years following and used the money to buy him or her a new set of pipes. They announced the recipient and bestowed the gift on the occasion of the Flora MacDonald Cup, a competition strictly for locals which was established in the early 1950s and which has continued nearly every year since (see ch. 8). Such recipients of the 'Finlay MacKenzie Memorial Pipes' include Willie Morrison of Loch Eynort and Glasgow, Neil MacDonald of Garryhellie and Calum Beaton of Stoneybridge.<sup>26</sup>

The Rev. Father Alexander MacDougall emerges as a key figure in the introduction of organised piping tuition and Highland games to South Uist in these early years of the twentieth century. He was born in Morar in 1859 and educated in England and at the Scots' college of Douai in France (Johnson, 1991:127). After studying philosophy and theology at St. Peter's College, Glasgow, he was ordained in 1890. Church records indicate that his first charge was the mission of Eriskay,<sup>27</sup> but this is puzzling because Eriskay was not considered a separate mission from Daliburgh until 1894, at which point Fr. Allan McDonald was put in sole charge. The two even stood shoulder to shoulder in a photograph commemorating the opening of the island's new church in that year (Rea, 1964). If he was indeed sent to Eriskay in 1890, its non-status would explain the brevity of his tenure; before the year's end he was sent to Benbecula, where he served for thirteen years. He finally arrived at the Daliburgh mission in 1903, where he was to stay until 1920.

Alex MacAulay believed that Fr. MacDougall had played the pipes during his college days in Glasgow, and was forever after "religiously devoted to the finer art of

piping” (*PT*, July 1961). His devotion to the community and their traditions remains legendary to this day; while in Benbecula he spear-headed a campaign for the construction of Petersport Pier in 1904 (*OT*, 6/8/1906 p. 6) and was instrumental, it appears, in introducing Highland games complete with piping competitions – first in Eochar in 1898 (at which he judged the piping events along with Lachlan MacCormick) and again in Nunton on the occasion of King Edward VII’s coronation in 1902. In Daliburgh he is remembered chiefly for his involvement in soliciting tuition from the Piobaireachd Society in 1909, as non-piper Ronald MacDonald illustrated in conversation:

RD: *Bha na daoine bha sin, tha fhios agad, bha am music aca ach cha robh e cho math aca. Cha robh duine ann a dh’ ionnsachadh gu leughadh iad i à leabhar. Ach thachair sagart a bha seo ri Dalabrog, agus bha interest aige anns na daoine agus sa’ cheòl. Fhuair e piobaire bha siud, piobaire cho ainmeil ‘s a bh’ ann, Pipe Major John MacDonald, Inverness ... ‘S e sagart a bha seo a thug e ann a sheo, Father Alexander MacDougall. ‘S ann à tìr mòr a bha e ... is bha e gu math keen air piobaireachd ... Bha John MacDonald, Inverness a’ tighinn a h-uile bliadhna, a h-uile samhradh, a’ tighinn chun na games, ‘s e am fear a dh’ ionnsaich a h-uile piobaire bh’ ann, a thug dhaibh ... Seonaidh Roidein, Ruairidh Roidein, Dòmhnall Nill, Eairdsidh Lindsay, Aonghus Nill, Seonaidh Steele, Angaidh MacQuarrie, Calum Walker, Aonghus Alec Mhóir; a h-uile piobaire math bha sin, bha tòrr dhiubh. ‘S ann bhon duine sin a thàinig an ceòl mòr. (SC 2001.024)*

RD: The people here, you see, they had music but they didn’t have it so well. There was no one around to teach them to read it from a book. But this priest came to Daliburgh, and he had an interest in the people and in the music. He got a piper, the most famous piper around, Pipe Major John MacDonald, Inverness ... It was the priest who brought him here, Father Alexander MacDougall. He was from the mainland ... and he was quite keen on piping ... John MacDonald, Inverness would come every year, every summer, he would come to the games, and he’s the one who taught every piper around, who taught them ... John and Roddy MacDonald, Donald Neil, Archie Lindsay, Angus Campbell, John Steele, Angus MacQuarrie, Calum Walker, Angus son of Big Alec; every good piper, there were loads of them.<sup>28</sup> The pibroch came from that man.

After moving on to missions in Glenfinnan, Castlebay and Inverie, he retired on the eve of the Second World War and returned to his childhood home in Morar. He died in 1944 in his eighty-fifth year (Johnson, 1991:127).

### 6.c. The Instructors and Their Legacy

On 15 December 1903, the Piobaireachd Society's General Committee heard that "one of the objects of the Society should eventually be the appointment of Piobaireachd teachers in different parts of Scotland, and the Society to financially assist likely pupils to obtain instruction from them" (Acc 9103/1). This was not just a measure of their intent toward the "diffusion of knowledge of this ancient Highland music"; it was their way of establishing one definitive setting for each tune they prescribed in competitors' lists. The Society felt that there were too many variant settings of tunes extant at the time to make for fair and straightforward judging: "So many pipers have different settings of the same tune," their honorary secretary stated in a printed circular, "[that] they are afraid to play certain settings, in case their setting may be different to that which the judges think the correct setting" (*ibid*, 19 January 1903). Sweeping away all the traditional variation that made *ceòl mòr* a living art, therefore, and authorising one version only for each tune played in competition, simplified the whole business for players and judges alike. This was "rational management and modern efficiency" in action.

It would be another nine years before the objective was set down as a formal rule of the Society,<sup>29</sup> but the committee began to establish courses and hire professional tutors to teach their settings as early as 1907. In that year, three instructors were picked from the top competitive field of the day to give twelve lessons to four pupils each in their respective cities: John MacDonald of Inverness, John MacDougall Gillies of Glasgow and John MacColl of Oban. The pupils were approved by application to the committee, and evidently met with some success in

the games circuit that season;<sup>30</sup> this provided the Society with the impetus to repeat the courses the following year and to appoint a fourth instructor, Gavin MacDougall (a member of a long-established family of pipemakers and champion competitors), to teach in Aberfeldy.<sup>31</sup>

This is the background to the Piobaireachd Society's motives in answering the South Uist Piping Society's call for assistance; they were magnanimously diffusing knowledge of the 'ancient music', but they were also laying the foundation for their own reformed competitive tradition. The call was made, and it was answered: on 5 July 1909, the Society congregated for their Annual General Meeting, where the secretary reported that

"by instructions of the President, a sum of £14 had been contributed towards the expense of a class of 6 weeks' duration in March and April last arranged for in South Uist by a committee of local gentlemen of which Pipe Major John MacDonald, Inverness was Instructor and the Committee confirmed this payment. It was resolved to hold similar classes during the Autumn and Winter of 1909 – 10 in the Inverness, Oban, Glasgow, Aberfeldy, and Arisaig and Fort William Districts and also to contribute a sum not exceeding £10 towards the expense of a class in South Uist should the local committee again arrange for such being held." (Acc 9103/1)

The president mentioned was in fact Lord Lovat, whose private regiment, the Lovat Scouts, had been recruiting in South Uist since 1900. As such, it is a matter of academic interest that the man who had greatly contributed to South Uist's one avenue towards the literate idiom up to that point – its military presence – would also be instrumental in seeing the cause of piping literacy even further on the same island. The Piobaireachd Society sent four instructors in all to South Uist from 1909 to 1958: Pipe Majors John MacDonald, William Lawrie, Willie Ross and Robert Nicol. MacDonald's influence was arguably the greatest and longest-lived, and weight will therefore be given to his involvement, but each made his mark in his own way. Let us explore the circumstances surrounding each instructor's involvement in turn, that we may consider, in the end, the legacy they've left behind.



*John MacDonald, Inverness*

John MacDonald was born in Glentruim in 1865 to a notable Gaelic-speaking piping family. His father Alexander, piper to the laird of Glentruim, had won the gold medal for *ceòl mór* at the Northern Meeting, Inverness in 1860 and his uncle William had won the same award, coveted above all others in the piping world, in 1868. William was serving as piper to the Prince of Wales at the time.

Pipe Major MacDonald enjoyed the reputation of being one of the strongest links with the teaching of the MacCrimmons in his day. This is because, although MacDonald's playing was derived from several great piping figures of the nineteenth century, it came most notably from Malcolm MacPherson of Cat Lodge, Badenoch, also known as Calum Piobaire (1833 – 1898) and from Colin and Alexander Cameron, Jr., sons of Donald Cameron, a mainland piping authority who died in the same year MacDonald's uncle William won the gold at the Northern Meeting. Calum Piobaire was taught originally by his father, who is said to have been a pupil of Iain Dubh MacCrimmon.<sup>32</sup> He also received instruction from Angus MacKay (author the *Collection* of 1838), son of John MacKay of Raasay, the latter having been a pupil of both Donald Ruadh and Iain Dubh MacCrimmon in the early 1800s; and from Alexander Munro of Oban, piper to Glengarry, who also had roots in the MacCrimmon school. Donald Cameron, who had taught his sons Colin and Alexander, had been the star pupil of John Ban MacKenzie, who was himself a pupil of John MacKay of Raasay.<sup>33</sup> John MacDonald was therefore purported to have received MacCrimmon piping via two separate branches, albeit linked through the MacKay school. With such a piping genealogy, his status as a supreme authority was rarely questioned by contemporaries, nor even by piping circles today. Still less by his South Uist pupils. He won over two thousand prizes in his competitive career (Crawford, 1999:192), and in recognition of his status he was made a Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) in 1932.



In March of 1909, a gale had reportedly blown the mailboat carrying MacDonald from Oban off-course, and it was many hours late in arriving at Lochboisdale pier (*PT*, July 1961). He received an eager welcome: “Youth and youngsters of all ages flocked to him,” wrote Alex MacAulay, “and few, if any, of those who attended the initial classes were mere learners. Some were already accomplished pipers.” Meaning, presumably, that some of the older pupils in his first class had already received some literate training in the militia battalions and had competed. It is a touching indication of economy and cultural priority in Uist at the time that all the younger members of the class possessed home-made practice chanters but could not afford to wear shoes.<sup>34</sup> No less than twenty-one adults and twenty-five boys attended; compared to twelve pupils taught by the Society’s tutors in all of Scotland in 1907, and sixteen in 1908 and 1909, this speaks volumes for the breadth of piping in the South Uist community at the beginning of the century. Ronald Morrison has claimed (1999:21) that the youngest among them was ten, and the oldest sixty.

The honorary secretary to the Piobaireachd Society reported that “the progress made ... was considered most satisfactory” (Acc 9103/1).<sup>35</sup> The Uist Society’s committee were evidently satisfied enough to press for MacDonald’s return, and with enough subscriptions and financial help from locals, as well as the £10 the Piobaireachd Society had set aside earlier for the purpose, the second class duly took place in February and March of 1910. “The classes have been a great success,” reported the Uist committee’s secretary after MacDonald’s tuition that year, “and the local Committee is highly pleased with the progress which has been made, and are [sic] of the opinion that the money has been well spent” (*ibid*). ‘Progress’ was exactly the feeling of the day. Soon after the end of the second class in Daliburgh, which numbered thirty-one pupils as opposed to sixteen on the mainland that year, the Uist committee made an appeal in the *Oban Times* for more contributions to secure a third session, and from this piece we can identify several important aspects to the early years of Piobaireachd Society involvement:

#### “PIOBAIREACHD CLASSES IN SOUTH UIST

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A NURSERY OF PIPERS

The music of the historic ‘piob mhor’ has always strongly appealed to the natives of the Outer Hebrides, and particularly to those of South Uist. There is hardly a family without its piper, and frequently one finds father and two or more sons able to discourse on the national instrument. Last year a few local gentlemen formed themselves into a Committee to encourage the young men of the district to take up bagpipe playing systematically, and to play from music. With this idea in view, they appealed to the Piobaireachd Society for financial help and to friends in and beyond the Isles for subscriptions in order to secure the services of a professional piper to teach the young men and boys.

Pipe Major John MacDonald, Inverness, was accordingly engaged for six weeks last year. The result of his tuition was so satisfactory that the Committee decided to have him again this winter, and thus a second session has been concluded with still better results.

Now some of the young men are able to play several piobaireachds, marches, strathspeys and reels with perfect accuracy. The younger members of the class – boys eleven and twelve years of age – can read the music like their ordinary schoolbooks, and can render it with effect and precision on the practicing chanter.

The Committee are convinced that large numbers of the public outside the Outer Isles would be glad to help to promote the success of the school. Up till now, the classes have been carried on through the assistance of the Piobaireachd Society, augmented by local contributions, and the Committee now appeal for further outside aid to enable them to continue their efforts to improve and promote the cult of the pipes in South Uist.” (26/3/10 p.2)

The South Uist Piping Society’s motives in organising large-scale tuition were clearly to improve local piping from a backwater tradition to a modern one, where the pipes are played “systematically” and “from music”, i.e. by literate transmission. The Piobaireachd Society, in turn, needed to have their settings as widely diffused as possible among the performers of the day for their competitions to be credible. Working together, the two societies tapped into a community of pipers whose raw musical material probably exceeded everyone’s expectations; one wonders if Pipe Major MacDonald was really prepared to face forty-six pupils, chanter in hand and

mostly barefoot, in Daliburgh school that first season. The *Times* piece also reveals that he taught competition *ceòl beag* in the Uist course as well as *ceòl mór*, which is confirmed by Jessie MacAulay's reminiscences in chapter 7.

The courses continued. MacDonald composed a report on the class of 1913 which the Society added to the minutes of their General Meeting on 11 September (Acc 9103/1). In it he attests to the facility with which his pupils had learned the use of staff notation and their tendency to join the military once of age:

“The number of pupils attending this class was twenty-four. Of that number four were beginners this year, as the Committee thought it advisable to further advance the pupils of former years. The result is that nineteen of these are capable of doing for themselves in the reading and playing of music. The interest in piping in South Uist is getting keener than ever, and the Committee are desirous of carrying on this class another year, and in the event of their being able to do so, their idea is that, instead of starting another class of beginners, to continue instruction of the present class, confining it entirely to Piobaireachd, as they are sufficiently up in Marches, Strathspey and Reel playing. Personally, I think this is a very good idea, as there is very good material in the class, and I am certain that the majority of them would become good Piobaireachd players. I may mention that since the classes were started four of those who had tuition have joined the Regular Army, two Special Reserve and three the Lovat Scouts, and I can see that the tendency for the younger boys who are at present learning the Pipes is to join one or other of these branches, which will eventually lead to their joining either of the Highland Regiments of the line.” (Acc 9103/2, 11 September 1913 p. 8)

One cannot help but suspect that the pipers' instruction in notation and their subsequent military service are in some way related, considering the army's promotion of literate piping and the many high-ranking officers among the Piobaireachd Society's core membership.<sup>36</sup> The reader will recall that the Highland Society of London, who also had their fair share of military members, promoted the army as an attractive career for literately-taught pipers during the Napoleonic Wars. It seems a fair assessment that as the First World War loomed, the Piobaireachd Society tacitly followed their predecessor's example. MacDonald himself would

have proved a fine role model for his South Uist pupils, having held the part-time post of Pipe Major to the 1<sup>st</sup> (later 4<sup>th</sup>) Volunteer Battalion of the Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders since 1890.<sup>37</sup> We can also see from his report that only twenty-four people attended his course in Daliburgh that year, a sharp drop from forty-six in 1909; but as he makes clear, the Uist committee had thought it better to consolidate the learners' tuition in *ceòl mòr* rather than start an entirely new class of beginners.

Tuition was interrupted in 1914 by the Great War. He was not to return to South Uist as their tutor until the early years of the 1930s, although other tutors were engaged in the meantime and he returned often as a judge and sponsor of piping at the games. He resumed instruction from 1931 or 1932 (*OT*, 13/8/32 p. 2) and it wasn't long after this point that the Piobaireachd Society was paying MacDonald an annual subsidy of £100 and giving him the freedom to hold classes wherever and whenever he saw fit;<sup>38</sup> by this time he was in his sixties, and the older he grew, the more venerable he became and the more discretion he was given as to his teaching schedule. The South Uist classes were sporadic at best throughout the 1930s owing to ill-health<sup>39</sup> and other work requirements, and he made his final crossing to Lochboisdale pier on the eve of the Second World War. It was evidently common knowledge that this trip would be his last: the Pipe Major was presented at the end of the course with an antique cabinet, inside which were four tumblers and a decanter. A silver plaque was placed on its top, inscribed 'To John MacDonald, Inverness, from the piobaireachd pupils of South Uist, 1939.'<sup>40</sup>

### *William Lawrie*

Pipe Major MacDonald's annual course in Daliburgh was successful enough that by 1913, a committee modelled on that of the South Uist Piping Society was formed in Benbecula, with William MacLean as honorary secretary, for the purpose of organising tuition in Balivanich. The Piobaireachd Society had proposed on 20



September, 1912 that new piping courses be arranged for the following year in Benbecula and Aberdeen (Acc 9103/2), so they agreed to subscribe £15 toward the Balivanich course but left the work of finding a tutor to the local committee (PS, 5/1/13). A month after this decision, their General Committee heard that William MacLean would engage Pipe Major William Lawrie, of the 8<sup>th</sup> Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, as instructor (PS, 4/2/13). Lawrie was born in Ballachulish in 1882 and, like MacDonald, was an experienced prize-winner, having won both the gold medals at Inverness and Oban in 1910 and the clasp at Inverness in 1911.

This course was not a success. Admittedly, Pipe Major Lawrie was a fully qualified instructor under the employ of the Piobaireachd Society, like Pipe Major MacDonald, and enjoyed the full confidence of the Benbecula committee. He had been confirmed as their instructor in September, 1913 after they had reported the class a success and intended to continue it the following spring (Acc 9103/2, 11/9/13). However, the course was cut short after one season due to the outbreak of war in 1914, and Lawrie, on active service with the 8<sup>th</sup> Argylls, died from an illness aggravated by wounds in November, 1916.<sup>41</sup> It also appears that despite the committee's report, the piping school in Balivanich was not received as eagerly as was MacDonald's school. This, in any case, is the impression gained from the results of the 1914 Games, on which the *Oban Times* remarked:

“The Committee had expected that some of Pipe Major Lawrie's pupils from Benbecula would have attended, as special arrangements had been made to have some of the events confined to them and to Pipe Major MacDonald's pupils, and much regret was felt that none of the former came forward.” (1/8/14 p. 2)

As the Balivanich school, like the Daliburgh school, was an enterprise in the competitive idiom, it stands to reason that a measure of its success would be competition turn-out and results; neither of which were got from Pipe Major Lawrie's 1914 course.

However, the seeds were planted, and a course would again be held in Benbecula by succeeding instructors.



*Willie Ross*

The Great War caused a break in the Piobaireachd Society courses for much longer than actual war-time. Such was the depressed atmosphere in South Uist following hostilities that the summer games were not re-instated until 1922 (*OT*, 5/8/22 p.2; see ch. 9). It was not until the spring of 1923 that the South Uist Piping Society reassembled to engage the Piobaireachd Society for renewed tuition. They sent their first instructor since Pipe Major Lawrie nine years earlier: this was Willie Ross, who later that same year issued the first of five volumes of competition-standard *ceòl beag* in unprecedented detail of gracing and expression.<sup>42</sup> He was without doubt the top competitor in Scotland at the time.

Pipe Major Ross was born in 1879 in Strathfarrar and served with the Scots Guards from 1896 to 1920. Upon his retiral from the Guards, Lord Lovat appointed him Pipe Major of his Scouts, a post which he held until 1933. 1920 also marked his appointment as head of the Army School of Piping at Edinburgh Castle. By the time of his arrival in Lochboisdale as instructor of the Piobaireachd Society course, he had taken the Oban and Inverness gold medals and had won the Inverness clasp seven times; as such, he brought the same qualities of military example and competitive success to his tutelage in South Uist as did his two predecessors.

He held classes in Daliburgh in 1923 and 1924, in Benbecula in 1925 and in Barra in 1926 and 1927. He spent three weeks with his pupils, as opposed to MacDonald's six, but the society seemed every bit as appreciative of Ross's tuition. He no doubt endeared himself to committee and community alike through his methodical instruction and personal charm; this at least is the image gained from the *Oban Times*'s description of his last two evenings in Daliburgh in 1923:

“After holding piping classes in Islay, Pipe Major Ross proceeded to South Uist, where large and enthusiastic classes were held every evening from May 15<sup>th</sup> to June 8<sup>th</sup>. Pipe

Major Ross proved a most capable teacher. Accompanied by their friends the pupils assembled in Daliburgh School on the evening of June 7<sup>th</sup> and passed a most enjoyable evening of dancing and piping. Almost every man present was a piper. Mr. F.S. MacKenzie, honorary secretary of the South Uist Piobaireachd Society, presented Pipe Major Ross, on behalf of the pipers attending his classes, with a wallet of Treasury notes, thanking him in the name of his pupils for the care and patience he had exercised in instructing them.

On June 8<sup>th</sup> a smoking concert was held in Daliburgh School, and Pipe Major Ross was the guest of the evening. His entertainers were the members of the South Uist Piobaireachd Society, who wished to express how much they valued the honour of having the foremost piper in Scotland coming to instruct the youth of Uist.

Looking back, the Chairman said, to a period of about forty years, it appeared that piping would soon be a lost art. About that time there were three or four first-class pipers appearing at all the Highland Gatherings, but no young pipers were coming forward. Then the Piobaireachd Society was formed, and in time owing to the interest taken in piping by Mr. Simon MacKenzie, Lochboisdale; Mr. John MacDonald, Askernish, and Father MacDougall, Daliburgh, a Piobaireachd Society was formed in South Uist. For a time they had been successful in securing the services of that king of pipers and instructors, Pipe Major John MacDonald, for a few months every year, and the young pipers of Uist had just begun to make a name for themselves when the War broke out and the local Piobaireachd Society had to cease activities. The Society has been revived, and owing to the kindness of the Scottish Piobaireachd Society they had been able to recommence their classes. Pipe Major Ross had shown himself a worthy successor of Pipe Major MacDonald as instructor of piping.

Pipe Major Ross replied, thanking the Chairman for his kind words. He said that he felt it easy to work in such a piping 'atmosphere' and with the conviction that he was among friends.

The evening passed with selections on the bagpipes and reminiscences of old pipers and bygone contests with many a hint to young pipers interspersed. Too soon they had to say goodbye for Pipe Major Ross was leaving Lochboisdale by steamer at midnight. The pleasure of having met Pipe Major Ross is one which none of those present will ever forget." (16/6/23)<sup>43</sup>

Ross's classes in Barra prompted enough pipers from that island to compete in the 1927 and 1928 Games for the *Oban Times* to remark that "they will not be long in securing places on the prize list" (4/8/28 p.7). Alas, the Barra contingent had to satisfy themselves with Calum Johnston's first place in the *ceòl mór* event of 1924; as the *Times* published those words, several pre-war pupils of John MacDonald from Uist and Benbecula – Angus Campbell, Angus MacAulay, Archie Lindsay and Angus MacQuarrie, among others – were building a competitive oligarchy that would span twenty years and more (see ch. 8).

### *Robert Nicol*

The Second World War interrupted what might have continued through the 1940s, and as a result – much like the time of the Great War – it took years after the renewal of peace for the Piobaireachd Society to re-instate its South Uist tuition. The earliest mention in Society records of a Uist course post-World War II comes from a General Meeting in January of 1950, at which was heard

“a recommendation resolved upon by the Music Committee ‘that the General Committee should authorise a subscription of £10 towards the expenses of a course of winter instruction in South Uist which is being arranged by the President.’ Arising out of this recommendation, the President reported that by the gracious permission of HM the King, Pipe Major Nicol was meantime conducting classes in South Uist. The Committee accepted the recommendation and authorised a payment of £10 towards the expenses of the class.” (PS, 20/1/50)

Robert Nicol was born in Durriss, Aberdeenshire in 1905, and by the age of nineteen was piper to King George V (*PT*, June, 1978). This was a post he held jointly with another famous Aberdeenshire piper, Robert Brown, for many years. Together, Nicol and Brown were sent by the king to receive tuition in *ceòl mór* from

John MacDonald, Inverness, on a yearly six-week basis from 1926 to 1939; it was during MacDonald's tutelage that Nicol took both the Oban and Inverness gold medals in 1930, and the Inverness clasp in 1932. Just as MacDonald enjoyed a reputation for having received authentic MacCrimmon teaching, so Nicol and Brown, popularly known as the 'Bobs of Balmoral', enjoyed the same as a result of their time with MacDonald.

The 1950 course was well-received, and the same was arranged for the following year with the Piobaireachd Society again contributing £10 toward the expenses (PS, 19/1/51). In 1952, it was agreed that "the President be given authority to arrange for the continuation of instruction in South Uist and Inverness on the same terms as for the past year" (PS, 18/1/52), and this set the paperwork for the South Uist course, under Pipe Major Nicol, to continue with a yearly grant of £10 until the winter of 1958. It may interest some to note that the Piobaireachd Society's financial contribution in 1958 was the same as it had been every year that classes were held since 1910. It doesn't seem like much when compared to the gift of Duncan MacLeod of Skeabost, Skye, an honoured visitor to the Uist Games of 1929 who addressed the committee at the evening's post-games social:

"He thanked the people of Uist for their kindness to him on his first visit to the island, the pipers for their playing at the Gathering and that evening, and the Chairman for his kind attention to him at the Gathering. He asked the pipers to remember that in all things a piper is a man apart, a man with a message, a man above his fellows, and he should never forget it. At the close of an evening, perhaps in Uist, perhaps on the mainland, perhaps in the Colonies, the words would be said to him – 'Is math a fhuair thu, is math a rinn thu'. [Mr. MacLeod] learned with regret that there was now no tutor for the young pipers in Uist, and he would give £100 as a nucleus of a fund to engage a tutor." (OT, 3/8/29 p. 3)

Compared with MacLeod's generosity, the Piobaireachd Society's pittance leaves the impression that their interest in the Hebridean quarter had waned since earlier days.

By Nicol's time, automobiles and adequate roads had long been the norm in South Uist, as opposed to the coaches and horses of John MacDonald's day. This didn't stop many from attending MacDonald's courses; such was their devotion to the man and his teachings that, it is said, the Uist pupils would come from twenty miles' distance – almost the entire length of the island.<sup>44</sup> Because of the improvement in transportation, Nicol's courses took on a wider scope in that he would hold classes in various parts of the island during the six-week period. Calum Beaton was a member of Nicol's class in the 1950s. He amassed his repertoire of *ceòl mór* mainly in this period, although, as chapter 7 will show, he has received occasional instruction for many years from other pipers in the community who were among John MacDonald's original Daliburgh pupils. His memories give valuable insight into Nicol's techniques of instruction and the general make-up of his class; he describes, for instance, where and when the classes were held and how many tended to participate:

CB: *Thòisich [Nicol] air tighinn a dh' Uibhist is bhiodh clasaichean aige, o, mios gu sia seachdainnean a h-uile geamhradh airson bliadhnachan ... Thàinig e turas no dhà 's t-samhradh, cuideachd, ro na games, mu sheachdainn ro na games, airson gum [faicte] mar a bha sinn a' dèanamh, is bha e a' toirt dhuinn teagasg cuideachd. Bha e an Dalabrog, is Cill Donainn, is Beinn na Faoghla. Bha mi dol a Dhalabrog is Chill Donainn, is tha mi smaoinneadh gu robh mi aig a h-uile clas a bh' aige ...*

JD: *Có bh' anns a' chlas sin?*

CB: *Bha tòrr a' dol dhan chlas an uairsin. Bhiodh suas ri ceithir duine deug co-dhiubh.*

JD: *Dé an aois a bha thu aig an am?*

CB: *Bhithinn dìreach seach no ochd bliadhn' deug, tha mi smaointinn. (SA 1998.70)*

CB: Nicol began coming to Uist and holding classes, oh, a month to six weeks every winter for years ... He also came once or twice in the summer, about a week before the games, to see how we were getting on, and he gave us teaching then too. He was in Daliburgh, Kildonan, and Benbecula. I went to Daliburgh and Kildonan, and I believe I was in every class he gave ...



JD: Who were in that class?

CB: There were loads attending at that point. There would have been at least fourteen.

JD: How old were you at the time?

CB: I would have been just seventeen or eighteen, I think.

Nicol's tenure in South Uist was unique among those sent by the Piobaireachd Society because he was the only one to have actually competed in the games at Askernish while an active instructor, thereby pitting his skills against those of his own pupils. This occurred in 1955 (*OT*, 20/8/55 p. 10), at which he took first place in the *ceòl mór*, and in 1956 (*OT*, 1/9/56 p. 8), where he took third. These were probably the instances of summer tuition that Beaton mentioned above.

His teaching style in these courses largely reflected his own tuition under John MacDonald. Beaton said of Nicol:

CB: *Bha e uamhasach crosda, e fhéin; leam-sa, co-dhiubh. Bha e a' gabhail duine mu seach, ach dh' fheumadh tu fuireach, 's ann 'sa sgoil a bha e, bha sinn 'nar suidhe ann a shin, agus ged a bhithinn-sa aige a' chiad duine, dh' fheumainn suidhe ann a shin ag éisdeachd ri càch. Bha e a' toirt difir port dhan a h-uile duine, is bha agad a h-uile port a dh' ionnsachadh.*

JD: *Gheobhadh tu puirt aig daoine eile?*

CB: *Gheobhadh, ag éisdeachd ris, dé bha e ag ionnsachadh an duine eile. Dh' fheumadh tu éisdeachd ris a' whole lot.* (SA 1998.70)

CB: He was a terrible curmudgeon; with me, anyway. He took people in turns, but you'd have to stay there, it was in the school, we'd be sitting there, and although I'd be the first one, I'd have to sit there listening to everyone else. He gave a different tune to every man, and you had to learn every tune.

JD: You would get the tunes of other people?

CB: Yes, listening to what he was teaching the next man. You would have to listen to the whole lot.

This account echoes that given by Robert Brown when speaking to researcher Robin Lorimer in 1953 of the tuition he and Nicol had received from MacDonald:

RL: You would both be listening to him teaching at the same time, I suppose?

RB: Yes, yes, I had all he taught Nicol, and Nicol had all he taught me. Our method was to take twenty or thirty tunes, different tunes; you heard all [the other's] faults and wee points, and of course you never had them yourself. (SA 1953/256)

Despite the stated aims of the Piobaireachd Society and the South Uist Piping Society during their long period of co-operation, the instructors were under considerable constraints as regards the transmission of *ceòl mòr* on the island. This becomes apparent when comparing their teaching methods with their own experiences in receiving the music. The hallmark of John MacDonald's own education was the transmission of tunes by oral/aural means and a near-total avoidance of the written note: "I received most of my tuition from Calum MacPherson of Catt Lodge, Badenoch," he once wrote. "Calum was easily the best player of Piobaireachd I have ever known. He would ... sit down beside me, take away all books and pipe music, then sing in his own Canntaireachd the ground and different variations of the particular Piobaireachd he wished me to learn. It was from these early associations with Malcolm MacPherson that I realised that Piobaireachd must be transmitted by song from one piper to another in order to get the soul of it – the lights and shades. Most of the Piobaireachd players of the present day rely on the score, but you can not express in musical notation what you would like to. It is really impossible" (MacPherson, 1954:66). *Canntaireachd* was his most valued tool of transmission and his reliance on it formed the basis of his reputation as a master of the authentic MacCrimmon tradition; a tradition which Ronald Morrison believes MacDonald "passed on to his beloved South Uist pupils without the slightest deviation" (1999:22). He in turn taught Robert Nicol what he'd learned with the same strict avoidance of the score. The fact remains, however, that one of the Uist Society's fundamental objectives was the introduction of literacy, and that

MacDonald, Ross and Nicol were employed by the Piobaireachd Society and paid a yearly salary to teach their own specific settings – settings which many pipers, including MacDonald, personally loathed for deviating from accepted tradition as they had received it.<sup>45</sup>

That MacDonald taught *ceòl mór* in South Uist using the Piobaireachd Society's notated settings is beyond question: the Society's committee minutes, for instance, record an agreement to send two copies each of their publications with MacDonald for use in his 1933 course (PS, 20/1/33); more recently, the late Donald Morrison of Loch Eynort and Aberdeen, who attended his courses in the 30s, recalled MacDonald teaching strictly "what's printed in the book" (Campbell, 1977:44) while contemporaneously teaching the King's pipers, Brown and Nicol, other versions. Furthermore, MacDonald's employment by the Society rested in the first place on his willingness to adopt their printed settings – something which another hugely eminent competitor at the time, Pipe Major G.S. MacLennan, refused to do: when the Society was looking for someone to teach their Aberdeen course in 1913, John Campbell of Kilberry, one of the architects of the Society, stated on record that "the Committee do not intend to recommend Pipe Major MacLennan except under condition that he give up his traditional style" (Acc 9103/2, 11 September 1913). This of course was necessary in order to establish the credibility of their reformed competition system, but proscribing variability in favour of practicality still seems at odds with the Society's original purpose, e.g. "the Preservation of Old Highland Piobaireachd and the diffusion of knowledge concerning them" (Acc 9103/1, frontispiece) as Campbell himself put it in 1902.

MacDonald undoubtedly used *canntaireachd* when teaching in South Uist as a tool of expression, just as Nicol did after him, but both were obligated to base what they expressed, at least officially, on the Society's scores. They could have easily turned to a pupil in Daliburgh's school hall now and then and offered him other ways of playing, a phrase of melody here or there, with the proviso that 'they won't like this on the platform'; Calum Beaton, for instance, recalls Nicol showing him an alternative way of playing the *ùrlar* of the End of the Great Bridge as he himself had

got it from MacDonald, with the above advice.<sup>46</sup> Ross felt the same restriction, though conceded to styles other than the Society's in certain circumstances:

“Much could be learned simply by listening to Willie Ross tuning his pipe, playing snatches of piobaireachd in the old style. His natural style was not that of the Piobaireachd Society's books, but as he was being paid his salary by the Society, he felt obliged to follow their way, except when he was tuning.” (Mackenzie, 1998:113)

In the final analysis, the actions of the original South Uist Piping Society suggest “the superior stance of the inevitably modern and improved” (Gibson, 1998:252), their appreciation of bagpipe music seemingly confined to the competition idiom. But they must have been intimately familiar with the ear-learned tradition of dance-piping, as distinct from the literate technicalities of competition: before arriving in Lochboisdale, Simon MacKenzie had been manager of the Castlebay Hotel in Barra for many years, where piping was certainly of the aural idiom, and Fr. MacDougall had been born in mid-nineteenth-century Morar, where, as Gibson maintains, literate piping and competition were considered aberrations (1998:181). Although they may have been motivated, in particular, by a dearth of *ceòl mór* on the island at the time, the signs of an active and thriving piping tradition in every other respect were, as we have seen, in easy evidence. Instead of being unfamiliar with it, they likely saw it as antiquated, simple, behind-the-times. While this may have been true of the mainland where technical and competitive innovations had become the accepted standard, the sheer scale of *ceòl chuais* on the island relative to the rest of Scotland at the time suggests that it was perfectly in keeping with contemporary social life in South Uist. It was normal; it was common; it was how it had always been.

Enter the juggernaut of the mainstream. Several writers have referred to the Piobaireachd Society's bestowing of a ‘new tradition’ in South Uist where formerly there was none, as if this sequestered bastion of old-world Gaelic culture were a desert made suddenly green with crops.<sup>47</sup> The corollary to this view is that, by the early twentieth century, the functions and aesthetics of piping in mainstream Scottish



society – that is, outwith South Uist – had fundamentally changed. To be a ‘good’ piper no longer meant being able to perform an inexhaustible repertoire of reels for a Scots Foursome at the local wedding party, maintaining an impeccable dance-rhythm all the while, as it did in Nova Scotia until comparatively recent times; no longer were the subtleties and dynamics of melody resulting from oral/aural transmission deemed worthy of an ‘accomplished’ piper’s aspirations. In mainstream Scotland it had come to mean the technical mastery of a prescribed template of fingering in an environment where gracenotes took precedence over dance-steps.<sup>48</sup> The gentlemen who founded the South Uist Piping Society – a widely-recognised hotelier, a respected priest, an estate factor, etc. – were connected with and brought up in mainstream society and had learned piping within its modern literate idiom; they consequently saw the indigenous *céilidh* piping which was still largely the norm in their corner of the world as little more than raw material for the improvements they felt obligated to introduce. The two societies’ ‘new tradition’, in effect, saw the literate and the mainstream emerge as the measure of a piper’s skill, and meant a gradual redressing of the community’s view of their indigenous aural tradition as something inferior. Archie Beaton’s words to his son in the 1940s say it all: “*Cha dearg mis’ air sian a theagasg dhuit idir, cha do dh’ ionnsaich mi fhéin a-riamh dòigheil*” he said. “I cannot teach you a thing, I never learned properly.”

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1. When discussing *céilidhs* in her youth, MacAulay referred to the introduction of accordians in South Uist (as opposed to melodeons) for dance-accompaniment around the post- Second World War period (SA 1998.71). Chapter 4c referred to the emigration in 1907 of E.C. MacRury, who could play “the violin and the bagpipe with grace and taste”, and chapter 7c refers to Donald *Bàn* MacDonald, a turn of the century militia piper who may have been the “D. MacDonald” who step-danced to fiddle music at a Daliburgh ball in 1895. See below for instances of melodeon music in *céilidhs* and balls around that time.

2. More detail on the nineteenth-century rise of literacy as a phenomenon parallel to the development of competition can be found in chapter 5a; it is again referred to in section 6b.

3. Dick Crawford’s as yet unpublished compilation of pipers’ records from the Cameron Highlanders, 1854 – 1902, gives the names and brief details of seven South Uist pipers who joined the regiment in the nineteenth century. Two of them, Neil MacInnes and Lachlan MacCormick, were undoubtedly literate for having been successful competitors; the case of the others is less certain because they had



no competitive record. These were, in order of enlistment: John Munro MacInnes, born c. 1868 and who took part in the Soudan campaign in 1884 – 1885; James MacDonald of Daliburgh, who enlisted in 1886 at the age of 23 having worked previously as a farm servant; Donald Morrison, who enlisted in 1887 and served at home stations as a piper in the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion; Kenneth MacIntyre, who enlisted about 1889 and was for some time in the early 1890s stationed in Inverness as the Depot Piper; and John McLellan, whose term of service is uncertain. He died in Eochar in 1907.

4. *OT*, 15/1/1898, p. 6. See chapter 8 for more discussion on this and subsequent games in South Uist.

5. The Societies had made plans to set up a school of piping specifically for army recruits, plans which dragged on from 1783 to c. 1816 and never actually bore fruit (MacInnes, 1988:117-123); plans which coincided with cash being awarded by the HSL for music written on the stave, such as in 1806, with the expectation that such material would herald a more “scientific” and “improved” method of teaching. In addition, one of the earliest publications of a staff-notated tutor to be sponsored by the HSL was the *Bagpipe Preceptor* (1818), which first regaled the reader with anecdotes on the piping of the Fraser Highlanders at Quebec in 1760 (see ch. 5b) and the 92<sup>nd</sup> Highlanders in the Peninsular War, then endorsed the military life in unobtrusive terms: “Many a Piper have I seen in the service, who would not take the best farm in the Highlands in exchange for his honourable post in the army, where they are courted and caressed by every body, especially the Ladies” (Menzies, 1818:17). MacInnes (1988:123-126) comments on the *Preceptor* in more detail.

6. “As early as 1900 some Scottish regiments issued privately printed manuals of duty tunes for pipers” (Cannon, 1988:49). Seton and Grant similarly asserted that during the First World War, “every battalion has its own setting for every tune played in the band”, and called for an army-wide standardisation of tunes (1920:68). Regimental pipers were (and still are) required to play specific tunes in specific settings in the execution of their duties, which staff notation facilitates; this is even more pertinent for the pipe band since each member must play the same exact notes and gracenotes of the tune in as synchronous a manner as possible. See Murray (1994:209-224) for more on the various regimental duties and specific tunes of the military piper, and see also the various regimental collections of pipe music in required settings, such as the Gordons, Seaforths, and Scots Guards.

7. Examples like Willie Ross’s can be found within the Uist tradition: Neil MacLennan of Lochboisdale, local piper and Pipe Major in the Camerons, was known to teach solely “by the book”, and Neil Johnstone of Daliburgh, a former pupil, believes that MacLennan’s dismissal of anything that smacked of ear-learning was due to his military influence (see chapter 10).

8. See chapter 9 for the general goings-on (i.e. besides piping) of the regiments in South Uist around that time.

9. Sometimes there didn’t need to be military piping at an evening’s entertainment for the army’s influence to be felt. At a soiree at the public school on Eriskay in 1908, for example, a young woman sang The March of the Cameron Men to a “crowded and happy assembly” (*OT*, 8/2/1908 p.7).

10. “The 79<sup>th</sup> ‘s Farewell to Gibraltar” is a 2/4 march composed in 1848 by Pipe Major John MacDonald of the 79<sup>th</sup> Cameron Highlanders as his battalion sailed to Canada following duty in Gibraltar (Murray, 1994:112).

11. See Donaldson, 2000:205-6; Cannon, 1988:82; see also Gibson, 1998 and MacInnes, 1989 for discussion of this and other problems besetting nineteenth-century pipe music arising from a less than ideal competition system.

12. Campbell, 1977:31-32, quoting from the *Oban Times* of 19 September 1903, p. 3; see also Donaldson, 2000:277-281.

13. Industrialism, progress and missionary work by the Free Church all came together in the Victorian era to the degree that “the qualities demanded in the Christian life had come to be regarded as a good foundation for success in commerce and industry” (Drummond and Bulloch, 1975:267); the new economic reasoning gave ground to the principle of competition as the best means of cultural preservation (see Donaldson, 2000:67). ‘Scientific improvement’ by the HSL included the promotion of literate notation for pipe music and its use by a school for military pipers (see ch. 5a and section 6a).

14. Campbell (1977:30) and Cannon (1988:90) at one time believed it was Archibald Campbell of Kilberry, scion of the Society and author of the *Kilberry Book of Ceòl Mòr* (1948), but Donaldson (2000:281) has presented a strong argument that it was in fact Archibald’s brother Angus, also a founder member of the Society.

15. The Society’s view in this matter was made clear in one of their own printed circulars (c. 1902-3) explaining the need for change: “In the Competitions for Piobaireachd playing, held under the existing rules, many of the most beautiful of the old Piobaireachds are never played at all; the reason being that at present it is only necessary for a piper to give a list of from 3 to 8 Piobaireachds to the judges, and many pipers give the same list year after year. The result of this is, that out of nearly 300 Piobaireachds which are in existence, only about 20 are ever played at Competitions ... The Society believe that the falling off of Piobaireachd playing is largely due to 2 reasons. First, That so many pipers have different settings of the same tune, and they are afraid to play certain settings, in case their setting may be different to that which the judges think the correct setting. Second, That many tunes are so long that the pipers are afraid to play them, as a long tune is a much greater strain on both the fingers and on the pipes than a short one. A set of pipes might stand splendidly for ‘Glengarry’s Lament’, but would go all out of tune in playing ‘Donald Ban MacCrimmon’s Lament’.” (Acc 9103/1)

16. The Society’s most notorious shortcoming in its early years was the internal politicking which led non-players to take over most of the decision-making, in protest of which most of the real players resigned around 1905. Competitions accordingly continued to be judged, by and large, by well-meaning but ignorant aristocrats. Matters eventually improved, but enough damage was done to dog the Society’s reputation more or less every since. See Campbell, 1977; Cannon, 1988:91 and Donaldson, 2000:282-316.

17. Margaret Fay Shaw famously described a Glendale wedding party in the 1930s as resounding with “the firing of guns and the skirling of bagpipes, which, playing the fine tune *Highland Wedding*, led the procession home to the wedding breakfast. The celebration continued through the day and night ... Dancing began with a Scots foursome reel for the bride and groom and best man and first bridesmaid. Then the guests joined them on the floor and danced until morning. South Uist is famous for its pipers and a great delight of such a day was to listen to their perfect playing and their timing of the lovely tunes” (1955:16). Frederick Rea participated in a similar Scots foursome ‘wedding reel’ in the kitchen of Fr. Allan McDonald’s own house around the turn of the century: “The swirl of the air set up in this little kitchen seemed to grip me up and whirl me around with its rousing rhythm, and as the ripples of the notes rose and fell,” wrote Rea of the piping, “they made my toes ache to dance.” (1964:46)

18. *PT*, July 1961. This article is the primary source for information on the South Uist Piping Society’s formation, but other sources, such as the *Oban Times* and oral memorates in the Uist community today, attest to the MacKenzies’ and MacDougall’s participation. This is elaborated upon below.

19. In “Piobaireachd Classes in South Uist”, 16 June 1923, p. 3, the formation of the South Uist Piping Society is attributed to “Mr. Simon MacKenzie, Lochboisdale; Mr. John MacDonald, Askernish; and Father MacDougall, Daliburgh.”

20. Fr. MacIntosh was one of nine members of the South Uist Games Committee listed in the *Oban Times* of 8 September 1913 (p. 2). Simon MacKenzie, Fr. MacDougall and the factor MacDonald

were also listed. The impetus behind the establishment of Highland games being largely akin to that behind the South Uist Piping Society's formation, MacIntosh and MacDonald could have conceivably supported both groups; see chapter 8.

21. The *Oban Times* of 6 June 1908 reported that "Mr. Simon MacKenzie, lessee of the Castlebay Hotel, is leaving Barra. During his tenancy of the hotel, which dates from 1881, Mr. MacKenzie, by his genial and kindly nature has endeared himself to many ... When an epidemic of measles was rampant on the island in 1886, Mr. MacKenzie's beneficence was readily obtained, and no applicant for help went away empty-handed. The fishermen of Barra will ever remember his generous action in lending them money to buy boats, when the Normal Company became insolvent." His tenancy of the Lochboisdale Hotel must have occurred some time before 1897, because in that year the *Oban Times* mentioned his name twice in that regard (30 January and 16 October).

22. See *PT*, January 1964 and *OT*, 9/8/24 p. 5 for mention of Finlay's position in the Society.

23. Norman MacKillop of Harris had served during the Great War in the 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion Camerons' pipe band along with many South Uist pipers. The Paisley Bard, Donald Ruadh MacIntyre, mentions MacKillop in his poem on the Germans' final offensive in 1918 (MacMillan, 1968:41, 347; see ch. 9).

24. The late Frank Richardson commented on MacKenzie's patronage of the games (1987:108) but wrongly referred to him as its founder; MacKenzie was only fifteen years old when the games were first held in Eochar in 1898. See ch. 8.

25. This incident is mentioned in an obituary in the *Piping Times* of January, 1964; it was written anonymously, but bears the telltale familiarity and style of Alex MacAulay.

26. See the *Piping Times* coverage of the Flora MacDonald Cup in March, 1966 and March, 1967.

27. *Glasgow Catholic Directory for Clergy and Laity of Scotland*, 1889:226.

28. These pipers are discussed in chapters 7 and 8.

29. Acc 9103/2, "Revised Rules of the Piobaireachd Society", 1912.

30. Acc 9103/1, 20 September 1907. The committee minutes record that "Three instructors were appointed this year to teach young pipers and a large number of applications were received – twelve of the most promising were selected and put through a course and their success at the various meetings this season shows the benefit they have derived."

31. Acc 9103/1, 6 July 1908: "... with reference to classes for the tuition of pipers in the *Society's tunes* [my emphasis] it was resolved to resume these classes during the Autumn and Winter of 1908 at Glasgow (to include pupils from Edinburgh), Oban, Inverness and Aberfeldy, and the Secretary was instructed to make the necessary arrangements with the respective teachers at those centres, viz. MacDougall Gillies, MacColl, John MacDonald and Gavin MacDougall for twelve lessons each being given to four pupils at each centre." For information on the MacDougalls as competitors and pipemakers, see "The Art and History of the MacDougalls of Aberfeldy" in *PT*, January 1964.

32. SA 1952/119; information derived from Calum Piobaire's son Angus MacPherson (1877 – 1976), who was interviewed for the School of Scottish Studies by Calum Maclean in 1952.

33. Information on these 'piping genealogies' can be found in numerous published works, including Campbell, 1948; Cannon, 1988; MacNeill and Richardson, 1987; and Donaldson, 2000.

34. Pipe Major Neil MacLennan, Lochboisdale, spoke about MacDonald's first course at the Flora MacDonald Cup in 1966. He had in his possession a photo taken by MacDonald himself of all the boys on the class's first day, showing that everyone "with the exception of one member who borrowed his granny's boots for the occasion" was barefoot (*PT*, March 1966). The photo is now apparently lost. Jessie MacAulay remarks on the making of practice chanters in chapter 7.
35. See the *Oban Times* of 4 September 1909, p. 7, where the correspondent for the South Uist games reported that "the marked improvement noticeable in piping was due to the pains taken by Pipe Major MacDonald, who held classes at Daliburgh last spring." This was the *Times*'s first mention of John MacDonald in connection to South Uist instruction. Many who have previously written on the subject give the wrong year, e.g. 1905, 1910, etc., but this and other sources in this section should put the record straight.
36. See Donaldson, 2000:282-316.
37. MacKenzie, 1998:6. MacDonald held this post until the outbreak of the Great War, when he was deemed unfit and invalidated out from active service; see *Historical Records of the Cameron Highlanders*, vol iii, 1931:423.
38. PS minutes, 11/9/34, College of Piping; the committee discusses schemes by which MacDonald would be able to teach piobaireachd around his work commitments and his ill-health; it is agreed that he be paid a salary of £100 a year and Col. Grant of Rothiemurchas agrees to approach MacDonald's firm (he worked for a distillery) to ask for two periods of two months' leave per year for this purpose.
39. See, for instance, PS minutes of 5 September 1936 at the College of Piping.
40. Information on the commemorative cabinet from Rona Lightfoot (SC 2001.024).
41. Malcolm, 1927:252. See also Seton and Grant, 1920.
42. *Pipe Major W. Ross's Collection of Highland Bagpipe Music*, vols i-v, 1923 – 1950; see also Donaldson, 2000:371-374.
43. A slightly different extract from the same article is found in Donaldson, 2000:371.
44. The Piobaireachd Society's committee minutes of 4 March 1920 record a discussion on classes to be held that year in the Highlands and Islands; Sir Colin MacRae pressed strongly for a renewed course in South Uist, claiming that "we have had as many as sixty men and boys come distances of twenty miles to attend the course of instruction" (Acc 9103/2, 4/3/20 pp. 15-16). He was also in favour of John MacDonald's re-appointment, but it fell to Willie Ross three years later.
45. The Piobaireachd Society's music committee, which was responsible for arranging and publishing tune settings, fell into the hands of non-players in its early years and although they claimed to take the advice of expert pipers into consideration, what they eventually put out was largely criticised as unsatisfactory and at odds with conventional wisdom. Even when Archibald Campbell of Kilberry took over the editorship of an entirely new series and, later, produced his own collection entitled the *Kilberry Book of Ceòl Mòr* (Glasgow, 1948), John MacDonald in particular found his work sadly lacking; see Donaldson, 2000 (especially chapter 20). Other pipers, who chose not to compete if it meant playing the Society's 'flawed' texts, expressed the same view in the letter columns of the *Oban Times* around the 1920s and 30s, such as George Moss of Kinnoek and G.F. Ross of Calcutta. See Cannon, 1988:89; Moss, 1983; Murray, 1997; Ross, 1926.
46. In an unrecorded conversation after interview SA 1998.70. Nicol also taught the alternative setting to Norman Mathieson of Aberdeenshire in the 1970s, and a recording of it can be found in volume ii of the "Masters of Piobaireachd" CD series, Greentrax, 1999.



47. This view has been stated most often with reference to *ceòl mòr* performance. Francis Collinson noted of one celebrated Uist piper, the late Adam Scott: “He studied under the late Pipe Major John MacDonald of Inverness, for long the doyen of pibroch players, who by his teaching has bequeathed to the island of South Uist a great piping tradition” (n.d.:2). Seumas MacNeill similarly wrote that “probably the place where [John MacDonald, Inverness] had the greatest impact was in the island of South Uist. When he first went there *piobaireachd* playing was practically non-existent, but soon this island became one of the most famous piping centres in the country” (1987:58); a comment which Hugh Cheape criticised for its lack of qualification (1990:204). Peter Cooke was ultimately correct when he suggested that “there is no present-day pibroch playing in the islands that does not stem from the teaching of visiting instructors sent by the Piobaireachd Society earlier this century” (1972:53) but this is not to say that nineteenth-century *ceòl mòr* phrasing had entirely died out by then (see ch. 5c).

48. See chapter 10 for a more indepth discussion of the functions and aesthetics of transmission in South Uist piping.



## CHAPTER SEVEN

*“You could catch it by the ear”:*

### **Pipers and Piping in Twentieth-Century South Uist**

What follows is an introduction to a few families and individuals who occupy an important place in the South Uist piping community, whether from the point of view of the performer, the enthusiast or the scholar. It is by no means exhaustive, for one chapter has not the scope for such an undertaking, but even a limited survey yields insights into the nature of transmission and the legacy of mainstream influence this past century. The two are ultimately linked: the passing of music onto succeeding generations has been, above all, the jurisdiction of the family unit, and a father’s example to his children has meant the survival of the aural idiom in some cases and the perpetuation of the literate in others. It is less often the mother’s example – the instrumentalists in Highland tradition tend to be men, and the vocalists women – but this is certainly not unknown in South Uist. Alasdair Boyd first heard pipe music as a child in Eochar when his aunt, *Anna nighean a’ Phìobaire*, rocked him to sleep with pibroch songs; and the MacDonald siblings in Garryhellie, profiled below, owe much of their repertoire of light music to their mother’s *puirt-à-beul*. *Ceòl mòr* too seems to have been maintained and transmitted by various families throughout Uist, possibly allowing a pre-Kilberry style of the big music to vie, however imperceptibly, against the mass acceptance of Piobaireachd Society tuition up to the 1940s (see ch. 5c). Transmission therefore began within the family, but ultimately extended between townships and across whole regions.

The profiles below are meant to add a biographical dimension to most of the tradition-bearers who have contributed to this thesis, but they also exemplify the communal network in which they live. The families comprising the first three sections (the MacDonalds of Garryhellie and Daliburgh and the Campbells of Frobost) illustrate the degree to which piping families in Uist can inter-relate, either through blood or marriage. The next section is devoted mainly to Louis Morrison of the Loch Eynort area; he is the only member of his family to still reside in South

Uist, playing and teaching, and his reminiscences depict the literate tradition's typical progress from one generation to the next in the competitive era. Following this is a brief look at the Smiths of Howmore, who were by all accounts the last family in Uist to maintain and pass on a distinctly nineteenth-century style of *ceòl mór*; speculating as to their own source leaves the impression of a vibrant classical tradition where there was formerly thought to be none. Finally, we consider the backgrounds of Calum Beaton and Jessie MacAulay, whose value as informants is unmatched.

It need hardly be said that these represent only the tip of the iceberg in a community such as Uist's in the past century. There are many families and individual pipers of renown who, for lack of space, I cannot but mention in passing throughout this and the next chapter: Calum Campbell and Catriona Garbutt of Benbecula, for instance, both cousins of Angus Campbell of Frobost, are respected as pipers throughout the Highlands; Duncan MacLellan, also of Benbecula, has taught pipe music locally for generations and in 2000 was awarded the Balvenie Medal for services to piping; among his many ex-pupils is his nephew, Donald MacDonald (or *Dòmhnall Bàn*), formerly of the Queen's Own Highlanders and current Pipe Major of the South Uist Pipe Band; and the island's reputation for piping would never have developed were it not for local families such as the Walkers or the MacMillans of Daliburgh, the Morrisons of Gerinish, the MacIntyres of Boisdale or the Lindsays of Garryhellie – families whose prominence in the prize lists testify to their place in the twentieth-century tradition. While those profiled below remain the most knowledgeable, experienced and articulate informants available today, no study would be complete without giving a nod to the many others who, in whole and in part, made South Uist truly the 'home of piping'.

### 7.a. The MacDonalds of Garryhellie

On 28 January 1967, at the annual Flora MacDonald Cup competition for local piping held in Daliburgh, Alasdair MacMillan of Alginates, Ltd. took the floor to award one promising competitor the Finlay MacKenzie Memorial Pipes. He spoke of MacKenzie's abiding affection for the island and its music and of the Trust set up in his memory. He then referred to "two families, especially, who supported these meetings and virtually carried it on their shoulders. There were the MacDonalds of Clanranald Cottage and the Morrisons of Locheynort; all taught within their own family circles. Neil and Rona MacDonald were taught by their uncle, Angus Campbell and cousin John MacDonald" (*PT*, March 1967). Neil and Rona were born in the township of Garryhellie, immediately north of Daliburgh, and raised in the house their father had called 'Clanranald Cottage'. That year, Rona took home the Cup for the most points won; the MacKenzie Pipes, complete with case and silver plaque, went to Neil.

Neil MacDonald, born in 1934, and his sister Rona (now Lightfoot), born in 1936, are the last of their immediate family to inherit a long tradition of piping. Rona has long since made Inverness her home, while Neil and his wife Angela run a bed and breakfast accomodation just across the road from the MacDonalds' childhood home. It is called, aptly enough, 'Clanranald House'. As indicated above, they were taught most of what they know from their uncle and older cousin (both of whom represent distinct piping families in their own right, as will be seen), but, as was characteristic of piping transmission among the island community, they were given the rudiments of the chanter by their father Archie.

Archie MacDonald, or *Eairdsidh Raghmaill* (1893 – 1973), was one of five sons of Ronald and Mary MacDonald, who had married in 1875. All five were involved in the military during wartime; four of them – Alex, Angus, Ronald, and Archie himself – as pipers (*PT*, July 1970; see ch. 9). The latter two served in the Lovat Scouts during the Great War, while Angus was commissioned in the Middlesex Regiment and Alex enlisted in the Tyneside Scottish. Ronald Sr. (1852 – 1921) and his two brothers, Donald and James, were well-known pipers, the latter at one time Piper to the Marquess of Bute (*PT*, July 1970). It remains uncertain whether or not their own father Roderick was a piper, but given the nature of the

family unit in the transmission of piping in South Uist, we can reasonably presume that he was.

Archie maintained a croft in Garryhellie throughout his adult life, though he supplemented this with occasional work as a gillie at Lochboisdale Hotel (*Tocher*, iv:131; Davidson and Strand, 1967). It is safe to say that his piping abilities and/or style leaned toward the literate idiom more than the aural, judging by his military affiliation and that of his brothers; his history of competitive piping also suggests this. As Neil remarked,

NM: *Bha e glé mhath, ach cha robh e cho math 's a bha sinne nuair a dh'ionnsaich sinne suas. Bha e compete-adh ceart gu leòr, ach cha robh e faighinn gin de phrìzichean 's a bha mi fhìn is Rona a' faighinn.* (SA 1998.69)

NM: He was quite good, but not as good as we were when we learned. He competed right enough, but he wasn't getting the prizes that Rona and I were getting.

Archie in fact took second place in the *ceòl mór* event confined to pupils of John MacDonald, Inverness at the 1914 games, the last before the outbreak of war (*OT*, 1/8/14 p. 2), and took prizes in marches and strathspey and reel playing on that and two other occasions (*OT*, 9/8/13 p. 2; 4/8/23 p. 9). We can discern from this that he was at least skilled enough in the competition idiom over a period of around ten years to compete successfully on a local level, and that he was a pupil of John MacDonald during the latter's 1909 – 1914 courses in *ceòl mór*.

In 1925, he married Kate Campbell. Kate (1897 – 1977) was born into a similarly gifted family which represented a storehouse of Gaelic arts. Her father Neil was a well-known piper from the Frobost area north of Askernish, as was her brother Angus, while her mother Marion (*Mór*), née MacLellan, was considered an authority on traditional Gaelic song. Kate's uncle, Angus MacLellan, was a published storyteller and a recipient of the MBE for the preservation of Gaelic oral tradition.<sup>1</sup> Kate, or *Bean Eairdsidh Raghnaill* ('Wife of Archie son of Ronald') as she became known throughout her married life, gathered a vast repertoire of songs

while growing up amid these influences and eventually recorded nearly two hundred for the School of Scottish Studies.<sup>2</sup> Just as Archie MacDonald transmitted his piping to his children, so Kate passed on her vocal tradition in her own way: Rona, now that she is retired from competition, is known today almost as well for her singing of *puirt-à-beul* and pibroch songs as she is for her piping, and is in great demand for workshops; while Neil claims to have inherited his memorisation skills, particularly with regard to *ceòl mór*, from his mother's ability to remember songs.

Kate worked for two to three years as a domestic servant in the estate factor's residence in Askernish, and spent nearly a decade in the same capacity at Lochboisdale Hotel before settling down with Archie in Garryhellie. Together they had seven children, only two of whom – Neil and Rona – took up piping seriously.

The two MacDonald siblings were competition pipers first and foremost. This was a reflection of the times; like Calum Beaton, they came of age in the post-Second World War era when the best competitors from the mainland were flocking to Askernish for the annual games and the reputation of Uist's home-grown talent, fostered by decades of Piobaireachd Society instruction, was at its zenith. But unlike Beaton, it had also to do with the dynamics of family tradition at Clanranald Cottage. Archie MacDonald was a literate-minded piper; their uncle Angus Campbell was a firmly-established local prize-winner and authority on John MacDonald's teachings; and their cousin John MacDonald of Daliburgh was famed throughout Scotland for his successes at the big meetings, both in solo piping and as Pipe Major of the Strathclyde Police. Neil was also a student of Robert Nicol. Mainstream piping was therefore instilled in the MacDonald siblings from a very early age; in interviews, they each recalled how their father would have them compete with each other, and perhaps with other local children, for prize-money in the family's sitting room once a week:

RL: *Nuair bha mise 'nam chnapach, bhiodh co-fharpais bheag againn a h-uile oidhche h-Aoine, as deaghaidh na sgoile ... Bha leithid do dhaoine is do ghillean òga an uairsin ... 'S e leth-chrùn a bha thu a' faighinn ... sin agad a' chiad duais, uill, sin an aon duais a bh'ann, cha robh ach an aon duais.* (SC 2001.024)



RL: When I was a young girl, we would have a small competition every Friday evening, after school ... There were adults and youngsters [coming round] then ... You'd get a half-crown ... that was the first prize, well, that was only prize there was, there was nothing but the one prize.

According to Neil, this weekly household event was nothing more than an incentive to practice and to entertain visitors:

NM: *Cha robh ach gum biodh iad fhéin, mo phàrantan, 'na judges – chan ann ach dìreach spòrs, car, feuch an cluichdeamaid na b'fheàrr, is bhiodh na gillean anns a' bhaile a' tighinn a-nuas a' céilidh, is bhiodh sinn a' cluichd airson tasdan agus sia sgillin, air fìrst a' second. Bhitheamaid a' sìor-practice gu faigheamaid an tasdan.* (SA 1998.69)

NM: It was only my parents themselves judging – it was really only for fun, to see if we could play better, and the boys from the township would come up for a visit, and they'd play for a shilling and sixpence for first and second. We were always practicing so that we'd get the shilling.

Taking Neil's view into account, his family's custom – I have come across nothing similar in other South Uist piping families – gives the impression that ear-learned piping had no place in the MacDonalds' home. We may look on their weekly contests as an incentive to hone skills and to entertain neighbours, but behind these functions it seems a product of the mainstream idiom cultivated in Uist since the beginning of the century, and I suggest that it would not have developed had they or their father acquired their piping in an age before the advent of the games or of Piobaireachd Society tuition. This is not to say that indigenous Gaelic tradition is inherently non-competitive; foot- and horse-racing, among other traditional sports, were a natural part of Hebridean life until the nineteenth century<sup>3</sup> and elements of these survived into the twentieth century as events in South Uist's games (see ch. 8). Local piping, also, may not have been above informal competition before the mainstream influences of the twentieth century came to bear. Around the turn of the

century, for instance, Frederick Rea organised a school picnic along the machair at Kilbride and arranged for a piper to come along:

“The pipes were playing and many of the older children were dancing reels, the rest of them clapping hands and laughing – it was a happy scene! Afterwards the piper selected a few boys and girls who danced the ‘Highland Fling’, and I was surprised at the agility and lightness of foot they showed. Next I found that a number of boys had brought their ‘chanters’, and the piper held a competition to ascertain the best player. It was amazing to me to see and hear how well these lads played, and as I watched their easy but rapid fingering of the notes and listened to the variety of tunes I felt that they were natural players. The teachers seemed to take it as a matter of course, and when I expressed my surprise they told me that the families to which these boys belonged had been noted as great pipers for many generations; indeed, there was scarcely a house on the island where you would not get one or more pipers in the family.” (1964:82)

Rea does not intimate the details of the boys’ contest, nor with what type of pipe music they competed – probably either marches or reels, if the coincident activities of the day are anything to go by. But his account does suggest that competition among pipers was not entirely alien to indigenous tradition in South Uist before the mainstream era. It lends support to Neil MacDonald’s point of view that competition is a natural and intrinsic part of piping; it is important to keep in mind, however, that whereas the school-children’s contest seemed impromptu and inspired by light dancing, Neil’s perspective is based rather on the ‘staged’ nature of piping in its modern idiom, divorced from any indigenous Gaelic context. The weekly contests in Clanranald Cottage were not of the old tradition, then, but of the new.<sup>4</sup>

Rona has been celebrated as the “finest woman piper ever produced in Scotland” (Tocher iv:132), but her record would be impressive regardless of gender: after competing successfully in practice chanter competitions at the Uist games as a pre-teen in the late 1940s, she went on to take first prize in the junior pibroch, march strathspey and reel (MSR), and jig events in 1952 (*OT*, 23/8/52 p. 8). Her successes at both the South Uist games and the Flora MacDonald Cup since then are too numerous to list, and the reader is referred to the chart in Appendix B. Being a

female piper in a predominantly male tradition has given Rona a unique perspective that provides valuable insight into a side of the South Uist tradition rarely discussed. Most interestingly, her testimony reveals what may have amounted to a gender-related double standard accorded to female piping on either side of puberty:

RL: *Cha robh mòran ann ach mi fhéin do bhoireannaich, do nigheannan ... Ach nuair thòisich iad air ionnsachadh air a' phìobaireachd anns an sgoil, bha cuid a bharrachd nigheannan a' dol a-staigh airson a bhith a' cluichd na pìoba. Ach nuair a bha mi òg, a' dol suas anns na teens, ... uaireannan, gheobhadh tu faireachadh gu robh feadhainn ann ag ràdh gu robh e car fireann a bhith 'ga dhèanamh, nach robh e boireann a bhith 'ga dhèanamh. Ach cha do chuir sin dragh sam bith orm-sa. Bha e fad na bu duilghe dhomh a dhèanamh nuair a bha mi anns na teens, ach fhuair mi seachad air a sin. (SC 2001.024)*

RL: There weren't many females, girls, around but myself ... But when they started teaching the pipes in school, most of those going in for the pipes were girls. But when I was young, reaching into the teens ... sometimes, you would get the impression that there were those who said it was a masculine thing to do, that it wasn't feminine to do it. But that didn't bother me. It was far more difficult for me to do it when I was in my teens, but I got past that.

As a sidelight on this social phenomenon, it is worth mentioning that during an informal discussion, Rona claimed that her mother could play the practice chanter quite well, but hid that fact from others and made her daughter promise to keep the secret for as long as she, the mother, were alive. Rona even recalled that her mother had corrected her playing on one occasion, when the men had left the house and no one was around to overhear. This recalls a certain legend that the wives and daughters of the MacCrimmon pipers were just as good as the men, but were not allowed to play in public, and it reflects the gender roles that have often played a part in the transmission of music in Highland tradition.<sup>5</sup> *Bean Eairdsidh's* life-long powers of silent observation in the presence of men such as her father, brother, and husband must have been truly remarkable, to say nothing of the power of the social taboo which compelled her silence. Nowadays, any prejudice in South Uist against

women playing the pipes has happily faded away, but this may only be because piping itself is not as prevalent as it once was.

### 7.b. The Campbells of Frobost

In Frobost, a west coast township situated between Askernish and Milton, Kate MacDonald née Campbell was born into a family rich in folklore and oral tradition. She, of course, sang; her mother Mór sang also, and the two of them were described in 1962 as representing the “oldest living culture in Europe” (Davidson and Strand, 1962:47). Kate’s paternal grandmother, Catriona, was also known for her singing and her uncle Angus, as noted earlier, was a published storyteller. The instrumentalists in her family were her father Neil and brother Angus: both highly-regarded pipers whose backgrounds encompass tradition and change in South Uist over a period of 140 years.

Neil Campbell was born in 1860, the son of Donald Campbell, a crofter, and Catherine (or Catriona) MacMillan. Whether or not Catriona was related to the MacMillans of Daliburgh or Benbecula, both piping families of repute, is uncertain; nor is it certain that Donald was a piper. In either case, Donald may not have been around to teach his son much of piping anyway because Neil’s traditional name was matronymic – *Niall Catriona* – which in Gaelic society suggests that a father has died, leaving young children to be raised by the widow. Neil is remembered as being musically literate, but there is no indication that he had been in the military. Rona Lightfoot could not account for it, but Ronald Morrison claims that he was taught to read staff notation by the MacGillivrays of Barra in the 1880s.<sup>6</sup> This, coupled with the lack of information on his father, naturally suggests that he learned much of piping in general from the MacGillivrays and was therefore one of Uist’s earliest exponents of the competitive idiom, to be grouped with such militia-trained pipers of that era as Lachlan MacCormick and Neil MacInnes. Also, he name appears in the



prize lists of the pibroch events at the South Uist games confined to John MacDonald's pupils in 1909 and 1911 (*OT*, 4/9/09 p. 7; 12/8/11 p. 5), so we know that he attended at least the pre-war courses of Piobaireachd Society tuition; although he was nearly fifty when MacDonald first arrived, this could only have added to his mainstream experience and his competitive repertoire.<sup>7</sup>

Neil emerges as quite a character in the local lore of turn-of-the-century Uist life. One can still hear the bagpipes referred to in Uist today as *na cnàmhan* – ‘the bones’ – due to his fabled and unfruitful efforts at that time to fashion drones out of the leg bones of wether sheep (unrecorded interview with Calum Beaton, 30 August 1995); like the many pupils who turned up at John MacDonald's 1909 course barefoot, it is a telling reminder of the state of the island's economy. Another tale still in circulation is Neil's alleged encounter with a bull stuck in a bog: he and a fellow piper are said to have chanced upon the bull as it was helplessly sinking in the mire, and the two grabbed a horn each and began to pull. Neil suddenly began fingering gracenotes; he asked his friend, “Is this the way to make the throw on D?”, and performed the flourish on the bull's horn; with his grip loosened, the bull slipped from their hands and immediately sank.<sup>8</sup> No points awarded for believing it to be true, but the anecdote is noteworthy as it bears a certain relation to the legend of *Maol Donn* (see ch. 5c).

In 1896, he married Mór MacLellan and they had three children: Kate, Mary and Angus. The latter would carry on his father's piping tradition.

Angus Campbell was born in 1900 and has lived most of his life in Frobost, but resides now at the age of 101 in Uist House, a Daliburgh rest home. Although arthritic hands have left him unable to play the pipes for many years, he remains without doubt the pre-eminent authority on *ceòl mór* and the teachings of John MacDonald in South Uist. He in turn has taught many younger players who have since made names for themselves, either locally or nationally: Rona and Neil of course, though the latter did not learn directly from Angus; of the two, Rona was always considered Angus's favoured pupil, and Neil just picked up from his sister what she'd learned during her own lessons. Calum Beaton also received lessons occasionally, as did Angus's younger cousin Calum Campbell of Benbecula. Fred



Morrison, Glasgow-born but whose roots lie in a strong piping family from Gerinish, also counts Angus as a major influence; he is also a nephew by way of Angus's marriage to his aunt, the late Bell Morrison. His contemporaries included some of the finest competitive pipers of the modern age, such as John and Roderick MacDonald of the Glasgow Police (cousins of his through the MacDonalds of Garryhellie) and Angus MacAulay of Benbecula, who later emigrated to New Zealand. So Angus Campbell has had a connection, through either blood or music, with nearly every piper in the tight-knit community that made up South Uist in the twentieth century.

Although his father reputedly taught him the 'basics' of notes and gracenotes as a small child, the training with which he has been associated his entire life began in 1909 with John MacDonald of Inverness. Angus is considered by many to have been MacDonald's star pupil in the local courses and, as Rona illustrates, he remained a life-long devotee:

RL: *Teagasg a thug Seonaidh Dòmhnallach do dh' Aonghus Nill ... cha do chaill e riamh. Chan eil mi smaoineadh gun do dhi-chiumhnich Aonghus a-riamh note a fhuair e; cha do dhi-chuimhnich e rud sam bith a thuir an duine. Cha do sgrìobh e sìan a-riamh sìos. Nuair bhithinn-sa faighinn lesson bhuaithe, chanadh e rium, "Mar a thuir an Dòmhnallach rium..."* (SC 2001.024)

RL: The teaching that John MacDonald gave to Angus (son of) Neil ... he never lost. I don't think Angus ever forgot a note he received; he didn't forget anything the man said. He never wrote a thing down. When I would get a lesson from him, he would say to me, "As MacDonald told me..."

The question whether or not MacDonald taught his own interpretations of those of the Piobaireachd Society has been addressed in chapter 6. In either case, his tutelage served Angus well: out of twenty-seven years of competition at the local games (that's forty years minus war-time), he placed in the *ceòl mór* event no less than twenty-one times, and won it outright on at least ten occasions.<sup>9</sup> His presence

on the competition platform at Askernish became an established fixture of the annual games, and his performances became the stuff of Hebridean legend. The late Duncan Johnstone of Glasgow, whose roots lie in Barra and Benbecula, reminisced on watching Angus compete in the late 1940s and 50s:

“He was some sight to see. He used to play in plus fours. He used to dander round the boards and come down on his knee when he was expressing a bit of the tune. He had a big Harris tweed bunnet. He never wore a kilt but that all changed when Sheriff Grant of Rothiemurchas started judging, you had to be properly dressed.” (*WHFP*, 6/12/1996 p. 21)

Angus’s only foray outside South Uist, to his own recollection, was the Argyllshire Gathering of 1934. The *ceòl mòr* competitions at the Gathering included an open event as well as that of the gold medal, and he entered both. Unfortunately, he was given the same tune to play in both events – the Blue Ribbon – and many pipers will agree that the sheer repetition involved in playing the same tune twice in one meeting, especially one as long and as taxing as the Ribbon, is off-putting. For this reason perhaps, despite a “very musical performance” (*OT*, 15/9/1934 p. 2), Angus took second place in the gold medal behind Pipe Major Charles D. Smith of the Black Watch. Most would consider placing runner-up in ‘the Gold’ on one’s first and only attempt as a worthy feat in itself, but, as he told his story over sixty years later, his tone was still laced with invective.<sup>10</sup>

Naturally enough, the Blue Ribbon was not his favourite tune. His ‘masterpiece’, however – the tune with which he was most successful in competition – was *Cumha Phàdruig Òig Mhic Cruimein*, or Patrick Òg MacCrimmon’s Lament. Local memorates of Angus’s playing usually include a reference to this tune, such as Rona Lightfoot’s:

RL: *Nuair a chluichd e Pàdruig Òg, uill, mar a chanadh iad fhéin, cha do dhearg aig duine an duais a thoirt bhuaithe. ‘S e favourite a bh’ann. Bha e faighinn a’ chiad duais leis a sin co-dhiubh, co-dhiubh. Bha e cinnteach as an rud, agus gu dearbh fhéin, bha e breagha bhith ag éisdeachd ris nuair a bha e cluichd. (SC 2001.024)*

RL: When he played Patrick Òg, well, as they would say, no one could take the prize from him. It was his favourite. He'd get the first prize with that, no bother at all. He had the thing down pat, and it was indeed a pleasure to listen to him when he was playing.

Neil MacDonald also commented on Angus's playing of this tune, and in his remarks we can see the survival of the oral/aural concept in musical transmission among South Uist's pipers:<sup>11</sup>

NM: *Chan eil mi smaointinn gu robh duine ann a-riamh a chluichdeadh ceòl mòr coltach ris. Chanainn nach robh cho math ris ... chuala mi air cantail nach gabh e sgrìobhadh, mar a Pàdraig Òg Mac Cruimein – sin agad am favourite a bh'aige – cha ghabh a sgrìobhadh mar a tha e air a chluichd ceart, agus 's iomadh duais a fhuair e leis.*

JD: *Dé bha difireach mu dheidhinn a' chluichd aige?*

NM: *Direach an t-òran. Bha e fhéin a' dèanamh a-mach nach robh, 's ann glé bheag a bha an t-òran anns a phiobaireachd a bha sinneach. Is mar a tha mi fhìn a' dèanamh a-mach, gu bheil cuideachadh mòr ann a bhith bruidhinn Gàidhlig leis a' phiob.*

JD: *An robh e a' leantail an òrain?*

NM: *Chanainn-sa gu robh, is tha mi cinnteach gun canadh gu leòr eile nach eil e dèanamh difir sam bith, ach tha mise smaointinn gun dèan e difir mòr co-dhiubh. (SA 1998.69)*

NM: I don't think that there was ever anyone who could play pibroch like him. I would say there were none as good as he was ... I've heard it said that it can't be written, Patrick Òg MacCrimmon's Lament, that is – that was his favourite – it can't be written how it is played correctly, and it's many a prize he got with it.

JD: What was different about his playing?

NM: Just the song. He himself figured that it wasn't, that there was very little of the song put into that pibroch. And as I myself see it, it's a big help to be speaking Gaelic with the pipes.

JD: Was he following the song?

NM: I would say so, and I'm sure that plenty of others would say it doesn't make any difference, but I think it makes a big difference anyway.

Angus was ninety-five years old when I first went to him with tape recorder in hand, only to find that first, he was past the point in life where a productive interview could be conducted, and second, he hated tape recorders. Over the course of my stay in Uist, I visited Angus several times and decided to approach each session as if it were a lesson (see Methodology, ch. 1b), the objective being to grasp, by his comments and criticisms of my own playing, how he himself would have played before arthritis set in. I would play *ceòl mór* and the occasional competition march to him all afternoon while he and his wife Bell sat and listened. He would occasionally sing the *canntaireachd* of the tunes in order to indicate where he believed I'd gone wrong in the score or on some point of ambiguous interpretation, but I got the impression that the way Angus sang at that time was a mere approximation to how he'd played in his prime; although he was strong for a man of his age, the years had undeniably taken their toll. The recordings made by ethnomusicologist Peter Cooke for the School of Scottish Studies, who interviewed Angus in October and November of 1970, probably contain the best examples of his playing while he was still able to do so: the Old Woman's Lullaby and I Got a Kiss of the King's Hand were given a full airing on the pipes, while snatches of *Maol Donn*, My King has Landed in Moidart, MacIntosh's Lament and the Earl of Seaforth's Salute were played on the practice chanter amid discussion on gracenotes and cadences.<sup>12</sup> In these recordings, Angus's playing was slow and deliberate in the main melodic thread, but brisk in the transitional movements between phrases; a style reminiscent of John MacDonald himself and others taught by him, such as the 'Bobs of Balmoral' and John Stewart of Aberdeen.

Angus encapsulated the best of both idioms. He was a literate player probably from the first day he picked up a practice chanter; his father Neil, who taught him the rudiments, was literate, and John MacDonald's courses, in which Angus took part from the age of nine, emphasised literate transmission. However, MacDonald's insistence on *canntaireachd* as the only authentic means of expression imparted to his pupils, particularly Angus, the idea of the 'song' inherent in *ceòl mór*; this reflected piping's Gaelic origins, and was in keeping with MacDonald's own education even if the settings he taught in Uist were not (see ch. 6c).<sup>13</sup> Like

many of MacDonald's more well-known pupils on the mainland, Angus forever after emphasised the necessity of grasping the perceived 'song' that lay underneath the printed score in order to properly express it. The paradox lay in his strict reliance on the score as the basis not of expression, but of what is expressed – the 'song' may be important for the final interpretation of any pipe music, but, when it came to *ceòl mór* at least, deviating from the note-for-note settings in the Piobaireachd Society scores was considered akin to blasphemy, even when text accompanying a particular tune offered alternative phrasing here or there. This was characteristic of most of John MacDonald's former pupils in South Uist. He may not have intended so severe a legacy, but their reverence for his every word, to the letter, ensured it nonetheless.

### 7.c. The MacDonalds of Daliburgh

This family is closely connected to the MacDonalds of Garryhellie through the paternal line. Donald MacDonald, or *Dòmhnall Bàn Roidein* ('Fair Donald of the Running Leap'<sup>14</sup>) as he was known, was the son of Roderick and Annabella MacDonald and the younger brother of Ronald, whose son Archie was Neil and Rona's father. Pipe Major Neil MacLennan (1895 – 1985) was quoted in the *Piping Times* in 1966 as calling Donald one of "only two pipers of note in this area" as far back as he could remember (*PT*, March 1966), which, knowing MacLennan's sensibilities, indicates that he was thoroughly literate; the other piper he mentioned was Lachlan MacCormick. He went on to refer to both as being in the "old Militia", which was of course latterly the Camerons, and all this information together puts Donald's hey-day roundabout the 1890s. Although militia-trained, *Dòmhnall Bàn* was widely celebrated as a traditional dancer; in his fifties, he danced and taught Ewan MacLachlan's pieces at the Askernish games during the 1920s (see ch. 8b), prompting some to say he'd learned from MacLachlan himself and others to say he was the "local comedian" and had only picked up the steps long after MacLachlan's



death (Flett and Flett, 1964). He also taught formal Highland dancing (the Highland Fling, Gillie Calum, etc.) in the Daliburgh area during Frederick Rea's time (Rea, 1964:vi). Knowing Donald's penchant for both piping and dancing, he could well be the same "D. MacDonald" who was praised in the *Oban Times* for his entertainment at a soiree in 1895:

"Dalibrog: The pupils attending the Evening Continuation School closed the session with a most enjoyable soiree and dance ... Music was supplied by Mr. D. MacDonald, Dalibrog, on the bagpipes, while Mr. A. Morrison, joiner, Kilpheder, handled the bow with his usual good style and spirit ... A feature of the evening was the fine step-dancing of D. MacDonald." (*OT*, 2/3/1895 p. 5)

Two of Donald's children (first cousins once removed to Neil and Rona) became mainstream competitive pipers of world-renown. These were John MacDonald (1898 – 1988), or *Seonaidh Roidein*, and Roderick MacDonald (1900 – 1981), or *Ruairidh Roidein*. To avoid confusion with his namesake from Inverness, this John MacDonald will henceforth be referred to by his Gaelic name.

Both learned piping from before the age of ten from their father until their tuition, like Angus Campbell's, was taken over by John MacDonald, Inverness in 1909. The earliest record of *Seonaidh* as a competitor is in 1913 when, at the age of fifteen, he won the first division of the junior level MSR at the local games (*OT*, 9/8/13 p. 2) – it says something about the breadth of piping in the community when the junior competitions had to be separated into three divisions just to accommodate the number of entrants. He went on the following year to gain second place in both the marches and the open *ceòl mòr*, and won the *ceòl mòr* event confined to John MacDonald's pupils (*OT*, 1/8/14 p. 2). Roderick's first appearance on the prize list was in 1922, the first meeting of the games in eight years, and he managed to win the marches and take second in the MSR (*OT*, 5/8/22 p. 2).

*Seonaidh* was involved in the military from a very early age. Whether influenced by his father's tenure in the militia or by John MacDonald, who had held the post of Pipe Major in the Camerons for twenty-four years, *Seonaidh* reputedly

walked from Mallaig to Inverness in order to enlist in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Camerons at the outbreak of the Great War (*Cabar Feidh Collection*, 1983:280). Although a year underage, he was aided by “a muscular frame and a sympathetic recruiting sergeant” (*PT*, July 1988) and served thereafter with the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Battalions in France and Belgium.

Emerging from the war unscathed, he moved to Glasgow in 1920 to join the city’s police force, and was swiftly drafted into their pipe band. His brother followed him into the Glasgow Police, and the band, in 1923. Thereafter followed many years of competitive success for both the *Roidein* brothers and the band; in 1926 *Seonaidh* set a record for winning the gold medal at both the Northern Meeting in Inverness and the Argyllshire Gathering in Oban, plus the march and the strathspey and reel events in Inverness, plus the open *ceòl mòr*, the strathspey and reel, and second place in the MSR for former winners in Oban. Roderick also placed highly in these events throughout the 1920s and 30s. His successes were perhaps not quite so explosive as his older brother’s had been in 1926, but it hardly mattered; after winning the gold medal in Oban in 1938 and in Inverness in 1946, there was little need to prove himself further. The Glasgow Police were already famously successful during these years under Pipe Major William Gray, and their status as world champions only continued after he stepped down in 1932, leaving *Seonaidh* at the helm.

Although they spent their professional lives in Glasgow, they returned to Uist upon retirement and thereafter settled into the life of tradition-bearers, passing on, as did Angus Campbell, the music they’d made their own. *Seonaidh* gave lessons to Rona, Neil, Calum Beaton and any number of other young players, and played regularly for the dancers at the annual games. Of the two brothers, however, Roderick was universally considered the better teacher. This was particularly true of *ceòl mòr*; he was responsible, for example, for teaching several past gold medal winners, such as Iain MacFadyen, Kenneth MacDonald and the MacDonald brothers of Glenuig. Neil Johnstone, a contemporary of Neil MacDonald and Rona Lightfoot, remarked on this perceived difference between the *Roidein* brothers:

NJ: *Tha mi smaoinneadh gun d'fhuair Seonaidh a h-uile major award a bha 'dol over the years, fhad 's a bha e 'na Phipe Major. Bhiodh a' bhand a' dol air feadh an t-saoghail ... Bha Ruairidh, mar a chanadh iad, dìreach 'na lone piper; bhiodh e 'na phrofessional e fhéin, fhuair e mòran de chupannan is do mhajor prizes; ach leis na bha do dh' eòlas agam air Ruairidh, chanainn gur e na b'fheàrr airson ionnsachadh na Seonaidh, a chionn bha Seonaidh cho fìor dhomhainn air fad – tha mi cinnteach gu robh e gu math duilich dha tighinn a-nuas agus tòiseachadh air duine, duine aineolach ionnsachadh. Mar a bha Ruairidh, bha dòigh air choireigin aig Ruairidh.* (SA 1998.71)

NJ: I think *Seonaidh* got every major award that was going over the years, while he was Pipe Major. The band would go all over the world ... Roddy, as they used to say, was only a solo piper; he was a professional himself, he got many cups and major prizes; but from what I knew of Roddy, I would say that he was better at teaching than *Seonaidh*, because *Seonaidh* was so deep altogether – I'm sure it was quite difficult for him to come down to the level of tutoring a beginner. While Roddy, Roddy just had a certain way.

#### 7.d. The Morrisons of Loch Eynort

At the Flora MacDonald Cup in 1967, the master of ceremonies referred to the MacDonalds of Garryhellie and the Morrisons of Loch Eynort as two families who “supported these meetings, and virtually carried it on their shoulders” (*PT*, March 1967). “The Morrisons comprise 4 young men and 1 girl, all first class pipers,” he went on. “They were exclusively taught by their father, Donald John Morrison, a woodwork teacher in the South Uist Schools. The grandson is the kingpin of the lot.” The grandson in question is William J. Morrison, born in 1948, a mainstream competitor of some renown who left Uist at twenty-two to work in Ayrshire and has resided in Glasgow for over twenty years. Willie was brought up in a particularly large family of pipers who can be confused at times with one or two other, albeit unrelated, piping families named Morrison in the same general area: Donald Andrew Morrison (1927 – 1988), for instance, came from Loch Eynort.

*Dòmhnall Anndra* was a highly successful competitor and composer<sup>15</sup> among mainland piping circles in the 1950s and 60s, having won the gold medal in Inverness in 1961 and numerous other awards at the premiere gatherings; he won many of the light music events at the South Uist games during the 50s, both local and open, although his *ceòl mór* was at times overshadowed by mainland competitors and one or two other local exponents. After spending time in the Merchant Navy, he joined the Aberdeen City Police in 1952 and was Pipe Major of the Police band for many years. Another family of Morrisons, from Gerinish, were known locally as *Clann Sheonaidh Aonghuis Ruaidh* or ‘the children of John, son of Red-haired Angus’ (see *Am Bràighe*, Autumn 1998:3). They are most noted for two brothers, Alfred (1914 – 1990) and Ronald, and the former’s son Fred, who is considered one of Scotland’s most gifted mainstream pipers. Fred was brought up in Bishopton but, in a conscious attempt to re-connect with his heritage, now lives in Loch Carnon, South Uist with his wife Dierdre. Bell Morrison, Angus Campbell’s late wife, also belonged to this family. Of Willie’s family, only his uncle, Ludovic or ‘Louis’ Morrison, remains in South Uist today. He is among Uist’s most prominent players and teachers.

Louis was one of eight sons and daughters of Donald John, or *Dòmhnall Iain Morrison*. Their mother was known as *Mairead Dhòmhnaiill ‘ic Dhòmhnaiill Ruaidh*, or ‘Margaret, daughter of Donald, son of Red-haired Donald’; her father, a Gaelic song-poet, was noted for his composition *Fàgail Bhòirnis*.<sup>16</sup> Donald John was born in Lewis, raised in Strom, Benbecula, and spent some time in Glasgow before settling on a croft in Loch Eynort in 1933. During his childhood in Benbecula, he attended John MacDonald’s courses in Daliburgh from 1909 to 1914; later in life, he was a technical teacher who travelled throughout South Uist and Benbecula with a joinery class and an unofficial half-hour chanter class alongside, spending two to three days each in Garrynamonie, Daliburgh, Loch Eynort, Gerinish, Eochar, Torlum, and parts of North Uist.

According to Louis, his father’s parents were not pipers. Nonetheless, he likely picked up the basics of the practice chanter within the Strom community before taking classes with MacDonald, and probably carried on learning and playing



among the Highland element of Glasgow before settling in Loch Eynort. As his mainstream education suggests, he was above all else a literate player who reputedly taught all eight of his children in the same spirit. Louis claims to have picked it up mostly by “listening to the singing and playing” of his father and older siblings (LM, 3/9/95) – attesting, in itself, to the survival of aural transmission in South Uist – but this disregards his grounding in staff notation as a child at Donald John’s knee. Although intimately familiar with the nuances of dance-music and its place in the local *céilidh* tradition, Louis is, like Neil and Rona, a product of the mainstream era. As a competitor, he rose to prominence at the South Uist games in the late 1970s and early 80s; he began figuring highly in *ceòl mór* in 1981 and won it outright in 1982 and 1986 against such formidable mainstream players as Roderick MacLeod and Norman Gillies.

Louis is a widely recognised tutor on the island, and is called upon regularly to teach chanter classes with Calum Beaton for the South End Piping Club, the modern-day incarnation of the original South Uist Piping Society (see chapter 11). He has taught his own children in Ormiclate, where his family have lived since 1993 after leaving the old croft in Loch Eynort. He is typical of the present-day piper of South Uist origins: raised on a diet of competition settings and staff notation, measured by the yardstick of the games, yet sharing that foundation in the staff-notated idiom with the myriad folk melodies and nuances of *ceòl chuais* extant throughout his life. Reconciling this musically bi-lingual repertoire against the backdrop of the twentieth century is a matter for chapter 10, in which Louis’s example is again mentioned.

### 7.e. The Smiths of Howmore

Sometime in the late 1800s, John Smith, crofter and piper, married Christina MacMillan in Howmore. Their three sons, Sandy, John, and Neil, all became literate



pipers of merit and played regularly for dances, soirees, and doubtless the odd *bàl suithheadh* at the turn of the century.<sup>17</sup> The Smith brothers were raised in Stoneybridge, and Neil eventually moved back to Howmore where he married Christina Gillies in 1905. At that time he was employed as a general labourer, but in later years he worked as a postman.

Neil and Christina had at least three sons who took up piping: Neil Jr. (b. 1906), John (b. 1908), and another named John (b. 1916). Neil and the elder John were quite successful for a time in local competition; both dominated the junior level MSR, for instance, during the years that Pipe Major Ross taught for the Piobaireachd Society in Daliburgh and Benbecula (*OT*, 4/8/23 p. 7; 9/8/24 p. 5; 15/8/25 p. 7). These two Smiths were Donald A. Morrison's first teachers.

According to Calum Beaton, Sandy and John Smith (if not also Neil) attended John MacDonald's Daliburgh courses in the pre-war era. If they had not already received literate tuition from their father, they certainly received it from Pipe Major MacDonald, along with a thorough grounding in the Piobaireachd Society's own settings of *ceòl mór*. Despite this, however, Sandy Smith is reputed to have taught John Archie MacLellan – the same MacLellan who introduced Calum Beaton to *ceòl mór* with the long A 'hiharin' in the Lament for Mary MacLeod and the Lament for Patrick Òg MacCrimmon (see ch. 5c). Beaton believes that MacLellan learned this musical anachronism from Smith; he went on to theorise (after some investigation of his own among older relatives and neighbours) that Smith's first exposure to the 'big music' came neither from his father nor from John MacDonald, but from either a family of Curries in Eochar or by Roderick MacDonald of Barra, a prominent local player in the Smiths' time.<sup>18</sup> This would have taken place in the late 1800s. If Beaton is correct, then we must see South Uist in the nineteenth century not as a place barren of the classical tradition, as Seumas MacNeill or Francis Collinson believed, but as a culturally self-supporting community in which various families from Barra to Benbecula maintained tradition in the face of change; a community in which, despite the lack of good roads or easy mobility, the transmission of music extended from township to township, region to region, and ultimately, island to island.

The thorn in this scenario is that although piping competitions had been a part of the annual Uist games since their inception in 1898, the first *ceòl mór* event did not take place until a decade later (see ch. 8). If it were an isolated case, we might attribute it to any number of reasons that do not detract from the idea of a healthy *ceòl mór* tradition in South Uist at the time, but games throughout the Hebrides appear to have fared the same. Weighing scant evidence on both sides, I suggest that performance and staged competition of the big music was at a low ebb in the Isles – perhaps confined to those trained in the military, where *ceòl mór* was still possessed of practical function – but knowledge of the repertoire, at least in Uist, was kept alive by various families until the era of Piobaireachd Society tuition began.<sup>19</sup> The Smiths, as the last of these families, occupy a pivotal place in the indigenous classical tradition of South Uist.

#### 7.f. Jessie MacAulay (née MacIntyre) of Smerclate

Jessie MacIntyre was born circa 1913 – “I’m eighty-five,” she told me proudly in 1998 – in the township of Smerclate in Uist’s south end. She is a retired school teacher and now resides, like Angus Campbell, in Uist House. Her grasp of piping and of pipe tunes is as sharp as ever: on the occasion of our first meeting, I played several sets on the bagpipe for the rest home, and Jessie intently followed along with her fingers on such competition-style tunes as “Marchioness of Tullibardine” and “Maggie Cameron”. However, due to her infirmity, she has not played in many years.

According to Jessie, her family has lived in Smerclate for approximately a hundred and fifty years. One may be forgiven for thinking that her family are connected with the *Piobairean Smerclait* so immortalised in folk memory, but she makes no claim to this. While most sources identify the Smerclate Pipers as MacIntyres, Jessie maintains that the quasi-mythical family may have been MacNeils

who came over from Barra (see ch. 2b), and in any case were established in Smerclate long before her own family. When asked about her *sloinneadh*, or ancestry, she replied in English that her family did not go untouched by Cluny's Clearances in the nineteenth century:

JM: They were famous pipers in Skye, the MacIntyres. They came across the Minch to the back of Ben Mór, a place called Corodal. My great grandfather left Corodal in the 1840s; they were driven out, you see, with the sheep coming in. They lost the hill at Ben Mór, and they came to Smerclate. His wife was from Smerclate, so that's where they went. That's where we are today. (SA 1998.71)

Since losing the hill, her father and grandfather were each referred to by the appellative 'of Corodal', and for this reason, Jessie is known today as *Seònaid Dhòmhnaiill Chorodail* or 'Jessie, daughter of Donald of Corodal'. On another occasion she referred to her ancestors as having been pipers and archers to Clanranald upon arriving from Skye, which purports a connection not so much with the Smerclate Pipers as with the historical character *Gille Pàdruig Dubh*, a Skye-born MacIntyre who resided in South Uist in the seventeenth century as Clanranald's personal archer (see ch. 5a, endnote 17). A family in Cape Breton descended from Donald MacIntyre, who left South Uist in 1826 and settled at French Road, made a strikingly similar claim; it is as yet uncertain if the families are related, but Jessie has mentioned having relations in Boisdale, Cape Breton, so it is entirely possible (see ch. 4c).

Jessie's perspective on South Uist's piping tradition this century is every bit as valuable as Calum Beaton's, not only for the corroboration they provide for each other's testimony, but for their individual, experiential differences as well. Jessie's perspective covers a greater period of time, for instance. Her memories of life in the 1920s portray a fundamentally musical community whose inventive creativity belied their lack of material wealth. She describes pipers in the *céilidhs* of her youth sitting on creels, for instance, as they played one after the other while dancing continued till morning (SA 1998.68); perhaps they sat because the blackhouse ceilings of the

period were too low for the drones when a piper stood at full height. Although the custom is no longer the norm anywhere in Scotland, it is still common among pipers in Gaelic emigrant communities in Nova Scotia, where mainstream influences have had, until recently, little bearing.<sup>20</sup> Jessie seems to believe it went out of style here due to military influence:

JD: *Am biodh [piobairean] 'nan suidhe a' cluichd?*

JM: *Cha robh mu dheireadh, ach bha an toiseach. Nuair bha mise òg, bha iad 'nan suidhe. Mo bhràthair fhéin, cha robh e 'na shuidhe uair sam bith a-nisd, ach bha e anns a' regiment, is pipe band, is rudan a bharrachd.* (SA 1998.68)

JD: Would pipers sit while playing?

JM: Not lately, but at first. When I was young, they would sit. Now, my own brother never sat at any time, but he was in the regiment, and the pipe band, and so on.

Practice chanters and reeds were prohibitively expensive for most crofting families at the time, to say nothing of the full bagpipes. Jessie has earlier noted how many young men in Uist, including her older brother Alasdair, would join the army just to get their hands on a set of pipes (see ch. 6); as for chanters and reeds, they were not imported from the mainland as often as they were constructed locally from wood and barley:<sup>21</sup>

JM: *Cha robh feadain furasda faighinn. Bha feadan daor do dhaoine, agus bhiodh iadsan a' faighinn pìos fiodh a bha freagarrach agus dhèanadh iad tuill air. Bha an t-seann fheadhainn, na seann bhodaich, glé mhath air an dèanamh, bha iad na b' fheàrr na na gillean òga, fhios agaibh; bha an t-seann fheadhainn a' dèanamh feadain dhan fheadhainn òig.*

JD: *Bha iad a' dèanamh reeds?*

JM: *Seadh, yes, cha robh gleusan<sup>22</sup> againn idir. Bha sop eòrna againn, a' gearradh pìos dheth, am beulag air a' chéile, is bha e a' dèanamh ceòl math math bog, fhios agaibh. Cha robh e cruaidh idir mar a tha an gleus a tha 'san fheadan an-diugh. Dh'fhaodadh tu feadan*

*a chluichd a-staigh leat fhéin agus daoine a' bruidhinn, is cha robh e cur dragh sam bith orra. Ceòl bog bog. (SA 1998.68)*

JM: It wasn't easy to get practice chanters. The chanter was expensive for people, and they would get a piece of wood that was suitable and would make holes in it. The old people, the old men, were very good at making them, they were better than the boys, you see; the old ones made chanters for the young ones.

JD: They would make reeds?

JM: Yes, we didn't have reeds at all. We would take a straw of barley, cut off a piece of it, bind them up against each other, and they would make very soft music, you see. It wasn't harsh like the reed in the chanter today. You could play a chanter indoors on your own, with people around talking, and it wouldn't bother them at all. Very soft music.

Although Jessie's reminiscences on piping in the 1920s and 30s are an important contribution to our knowledge of the area's material customs and folklore, her greatest value as an informant lies in her observations of an indigenous aural tradition set against imported mainstream influences. In this vein, she and Calum Beaton have much in common: her father, like Calum's, was a piper who had learned entirely by aural transmission in the *taigh-céilidh* in the nineteenth century; as a result she, like Calum, is unusually articulate among South Uist pipers about the effect of games and literate tuition on playing style in her community; and like Calum, her perception of what the local style used to be reflects her perceived cultural identity. Her own piping tuition was literate, having received lessons as a child from Willie Ross in the 1920s and from John MacDonald in the 1930s. In conversation, she implied that these lessons were irregular and informal, somewhat on the side of the proper courses, which may have had something to do with her gender but perhaps also with her age. Both had ramifications for her in open competition:

JM: *Cha robh e doirbh anns a' chompetition agam ... 's e nighean no aon bhoireannach a bh' ann ... agus ùine a' chluichd dhaibh, agus bhithinn a' faighinn special prize.*

JD: *Seach gu robh thu 'nad [bhana-]phiobaire a-mhàin?*



JM: *'S mi, seadh, 's mi gu dearbh. Well, chan e 'competition' a bh'ann ach bha iad sin a' toirt orm a dhol suas chun a' phlatform airson selection a thoirt seachad, is bhithinn a' faighinn special prize ...*

JD: *Chluich thu selection –*

JM: March, strathspey, is reel. (SA 1998.68)

JM: It wasn't difficult when I was in competition ... There was only a girl or one woman ... playing for them for a while, and I'd get a special prize.

JD: Because you were the only girl?

JM: That's right, I was. Well, it wasn't really a 'competition' but they were there, having me go up to the platform and give a selection, and I'd get a special prize.

JD: You'd play a selection –

JM: March, strathspey, and reel.

Jessie's situation probably had less to do with being young (after all, the games committee had already organised 'junior division' events by 1913) than with being a young girl. Her account is interesting compared to Rona Lightfoot's remarks on being a female piper in South Uist for the impression it gives of a double standard between male and female piping. Rona's testimony suggests that at the mid-point of this century, piping was discouraged among girls in their teen years as being unfeminine; Jessie's remarks imply that this was also true of an earlier date, and that unlike Rona, who managed to be taken quite seriously in competition, Jessie was relegated to the periphery of the competition proper. It's always possible that Jesse may have been just a poor competition-style player – she is, after all, never mentioned in any games prize list – but if so, there would not have been much reason for giving her a "special prize".

Despite her literate tuition with these giants of the competition world, she grew up in a household which, unlike Clanranald Cottage, resounded with the rhythms of *ceòl chuais*. She therefore grew to observe first-hand the difference in style which the influence of mainstream piping – whose functional context was radically different from the hitherto predominant *céilidh* piping<sup>23</sup> – must necessarily

have produced. In describing the difference, she contrasted her father's playing against her own and her brother's:

JM: *Tha mise a' smaoinadh gu robh an ceòl a bha m' athair a' toirt as an fheadan na b' fheàrr na 'n ceòl a bha mi 's mo bhràthair a' toirt as, 's an aon phuirt. Bha rudeiginn aige-san nach robh sinn a' glacadh idir, le bhith 'ga leughadh as an leabhar. Bha e toirt 'nam chuimhne-sa ceòl Éirinneach, an ceòl a bh' aige-san, nuair a chluichdeadh e. Bha rudeiginn ann a bha sinn a' call, le bhith 'ga thoirt as an leabhar. Mar gum biodh 'abiding by the rules'; cha robh esan idir ... bha e car traditional. You could catch it by your ear. (SA 1998.68)*

JM: I think that the music my father got out of the chanter was better than the music my brother and I got out of it, and playing the same tunes. There was something he had that we weren't catching at all, reading it from the book. It reminded me of Irish music, the music he had, when he would play it. There was something there that we lost, reading from the book. It was 'abiding by the rules' in a sense; but he didn't ... he was somewhat traditional. You could catch it by your ear.

The "Irish" character of her father's displaced musical idiom was a theme she developed at length:

JM: *Tha mi smaoinadh gun do dh' atharraich e, co-dhiubh. The music. 'Nam dh' aois òig, seach mar a tha an-diugh ... Tha mi smaoinadh gu robh na seann daoine, mar a bha m' athair fhéin, bha e a' cluichd leis a' chluas. Bha rudeiginn anns a' cheòl nach robh againne, a' toirt as an leabhar. Bha sinne 'ga cluichd straight from the book, mar gum biodh. Agus music coltach ri ceòl a bh' aig m' athair, 's e ceòl Éirinneach. Bha lift air choireiginn, fhios agad, nach robh againne idir.*

JD: *Togail?*

JM: *Seadh. Bha rudeiginn aotrom air choireiginn anns a' cheòl aige. 'S ann a chluinneadh sibh ceòl Éirinneach a' tighinn as an radio; you know it, that's Irish music. What tells you it's Irish music, different from Scots music? It's got a certain lift air choireiginn nach eil ann an ceòl Albannach idir. Tha [ceòl Albannach] an-diugh gu tric as an leabhar, co-*

*dhiubh. Tha lift air choireiginn anns an Irish, is bha sin aig m' athair, anns na puirt a bh' aige.* (SA 1998.68)

JM: I think it changed, anyway. The music. In my youth, compared to today ... I think the old people, like my father, he played by ear. There was something in the music we didn't have, getting it from notation. We were playing it straight from the book. And music like my father played is Irish music. There was a kind of lift, you see, that we didn't have at all.

JD: A lift?

JM: Right. There was a kind of lightness in his music. It's like when you listen to Irish music on the radio; you know it, that's Irish music. What tells you it's Irish music, different from Scots music? It's got a certain kind of lift that Scottish music doesn't have at all. Scottish music today is often based on notation, anyway. There's a certain lift in Irish music, and that's what my father had, in the tunes he had.

Jessie clearly identifies culturally with the dance-music of her father's generation, as opposed to the competition-music of her own. This in itself articulates an insider's point of view toward an essentially foreign idiom. Yet she perceives the culture in question as Irish, which I found to be unique among informants. The fact that Jessie was alone in comparing the local ear-learned idiom to Irish music does not detract from its insightfulness; the anthropologist Edward Sapir recognised that an individual's divergence from the norm can be a fundamental property of any given culture, revealing truths that would otherwise remain unvoiced (Moore, 1997:92-94). The truth in Jessie's perception suggests, on one hand, the traditional ties between South Uist and Gaelic Ireland, maintained for centuries through a shared catholic culture (see ch. 3); on the other it suggests the influence of Jessie's own ancestry: her mother's family were O' Henleys, who were among the bridal entourage of Àine Ní Cathan of Keenaght, Co. Derry, who married Angus Òg MacDonald, Lord of the Isles in South Uist in the thirteenth century (see ch. 3).

### 7.g. Calum Beaton of Stoneybridge

Calum Beaton, or *Calum Eairdsidh Choinnich* ('Calum, son of Archie, son of Kenneth'), has been a valued source of information on local folklore and oral tradition for many years, most notably in his collaborations with Peter Cooke for the School of Scottish Studies.<sup>24</sup> He is one of very few remaining in South Uist who can give accurate and intimate accounts of local piping's development throughout the bulk of the twentieth century. He was born in 1931, the son of a piper who learned exclusively by ear and who, as discussed in chapter 6, subsequently refused to pass onto Calum the tradition as he'd received it. Times had changed since Archie Beaton first picked up tunes in the *taigh-céilidh*: the Piobaireachd Societies of Scotland and South Uist had spent the last generation bringing Uist's backwater dance-pipers "up to literate scratch"; post-war depression had seen a decline in the local gatherings in which music was most often heard and enjoyed (see ch. 9); the *Roidein* brothers from down the road were the toast of Glasgow; and the games, which had been held on Askernish machair for over thirty years, were beginning to attract more and more mainland competitors on the summer circuit. Most young pipers by then aspired to the platform and the prize, the spectacle and the recognition, rather than to a style and social context that seemed inferior. By Calum's day, South Uist had finally come round to the modern age.

As discussed in chapter 6, Calum did not begin on the bagpipe himself until an older cousin of his, Alasdair Beaton, returned home from the Second World War and agreed to give him lessons. Even Alasdair was a reluctant teacher, though perhaps for different reasons than Archie:

CB: *Deagh phiobaire bha sin, gu h-àraid air ceòl aotrom; cha robh e suas ris a' cheòl mhór idir. Ach nuair a thàinig e dhachaidh, cha robh e deonach sam bith, ionnsachadh sam bith a thoirt dhomh. Bha e builteach air ... obair deoch, is òl ... bha e 'g ràdh mar gum biodh piobairean, gum biodh an deoch daonnan ... Ach co-dhiubh, bha mise gu math titheach airson tòiseachadh, agus thòisich e ionnsachadh dhomh an uairsin. (SA 1998.70)*

CB: He was a good piper, especially of light music; he wasn't up to the pibroch at all. But when he came home, he wasn't at all willing to teach me. He was inclined to the drink ... he was talking as if pipers were always drinking. But no matter, I was very keen to start, and he began to teach me then.

Both Alasdair, born in 1901, and his brother Roderick, born in 1894, the sons of Archie's brother John, were literately-trained pipers whose skills were polished in the military; in addition, Roderick was a member of John MacDonald's initial courses in Daliburgh. Alasdair, on the other hand, had no taste for *ceòl mòr*, which was why he sent young Calum to John Archie MacLellan in the first place.

In the early 1950s, Calum followed a path trodden by many a Uist piper before him when he enlisted for a tour of duty with the Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders. He served in the 4<sup>th</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> (Territorial) Battalion under Pipe Major Robert MacKay – more popularly known as 'Mickey' MacKay – and fellow Uist man Pipe Major Donald MacIntyre of Boisdale. Pipe Major MacKay was a native of the Inverness area who was taught by John MacDonald in the latter's capacity as the Army's instructor. Calum in turn received a few lessons from MacKay while serving in the band, and it was under his tutelage that, in 1952, Calum made his first and only appearance at the gold medal competition at the Northern Meeting in Inverness. His tune was *Beloved Scotland*. As he remembers it, his chances were "scuppered by nervousness" when his bottom hand slipped off the chanter, but the pride of his battalion was saved when Pipe Major MacKay took the gold with, aptly enough, MacKay's *Banner*. Calum and Pipe Major MacIntyre were not the only *Uibhistich* among the ranks of the 4<sup>th</sup>/5<sup>th</sup>: out of fourteen pipers serving in the band in 1953, no less than eight hailed from South Uist,<sup>25</sup> a measure of nothing so much as the vestigial force of the island's martial tradition in modern times.

In his competing days, Calum placed often in the South Uist games and the Flora MacDonald Cup. He won the jig event at Askernish in 1956 (*OT*, 1/9/56 p. 8), won the *ceòl mòr* in 1968 (*OT*, 15/8/68 p. 7), and took third in the MSR in 1972 (*OT*, 10/8/72 p. 5). He won the *ceòl mòr* event at the Flora MacDonald Cup in 1966 with the *Lament for Mary MacLeod* (*PT*, March 1966), but it is doubtful that he



performed it in the manner in which he'd first learned it from MacLellan; the fact that the judges accepted his performance means, in itself, that he had by then adopted the mainstream Kilberry style as passed on by Angus Campbell, the *Roideins*, and Bob Nicol. Today, like Louis Morrison, Calum is much in demand for dances, *céilidhs*, and lessons. He teaches a twice-weekly chanter class with Louis under the auspices of the South End Piping Club (see ch. 11).

Despite his long association with the literate idiom through competition and the military, Calum has never forgotten his childhood days listening to *ceòl chuais* at his father's knee. Because of this, perhaps, he is particularly conscious and articulate about the implications of aural transmission and dance customs on local piping (see ch. 10). In his view, these influences led to a difference in playing style between South Uist pipers and those from the mainland up until the post- Second World War era. Since then, Calum perceives that all piping in Uist has come to reflect mainstream influence, but he looks back on local piping up to the post-war period as being literally a class apart:

CB: *Nuair a bha pìobaireachd a' dol gu làidir ann an Uibhist – a' dol fada roimhidh sin, ro'n chogadh mu dheireadh ach nuair thòisich mi fhìn air pìobadh, 's ann as deaghaidh an Darna Cogadh is thòisich na games as ùr ann an Uibhist – bha mòran phiobairean matha ann an Uibhist an uairsin. Bha an ceòl a bh' aca, chanainn-sa gu robh an ceòl aig muinntir Uibhist ann a sheo na bu chruaidhe, fhios agad; 's e daoine a bh' ann, bha iad ag obair daonnan air a' chruit is àiteachan eile, is bha na corragan aca na bu chruaidhe. Gheobhadh tu an ceòl aig an fheadhainn nach robh ag obair le 'n lamhan – ged a bha iad uamhasach fileanta, bha an ceòl aca car bog air choireiginn. Cha robh e tighinn suas idir ris a' cheòl chruaidh a chluinneadh tu [aig?] muinntir Uibhist. Tha mi cinnteach gum bi gu leòr nach aontaich ris a sin, ach sin mar a chuala mise iad co-dhiubh ... Car bog anns a' chluichd aca. Bha gu leòr aig an àm co-dhiubh ... bha na doublings, mar a chanas sinn, is na gracenotes, bha iad 'gan dèanamh na bu chruaidhe na chluinneas tu an-diugh iad ... Bha a h-uile gracenote agus doubling cho soilleir is cho cruaidh 'gan dèanamh.*

JD: *Anns na farpaisean?*

CB: *Anns na farpaisean is 'gan cluichd ann an àite sam bith. Dannsa cuideachd.*

JD: *'S mar sin, bha difir dòigh aig muinntir Uibhist anns na seann laithean, an robh?*

CB: *Uill, cha robh difir sam bith anns na puirt, mar sin, ach chanadh tu anns a' cheòl, gu robh difir ann ... A' chuid bu mhotha dhe na bha tighinn far tìr-mór, 's i an obair a bh' aca – feadhainn dhiubh dotairean, is tidsearan, is maighstirean-sgoile, feadhainn ag obair ann an oifis. Cha robh iad ag obair le 'n lamhan, is corragan bog' orra. Cha b' ionnan iad 's mar a bha na corragan a bhios air duine a bha 'g obair le spaid is ... na gnothaichean a bha sin idir; òrd mór is piocaid. Sin mar a bha a' chuid bu mhotha co-dhiubh do mhuinntir Uibhist. Bha corragan cruaidh orra is tha mi smaointinn air a thàilleabh sin gu robh an ceòl a bha iad a' toirt a-mach na bu cruaidhe is na bu shoilleire na'n ceòl grinn a bh' aig an fheadhainn a bha tighinn dhachaidh<sup>26</sup> far tìr-mór. Sin am beachd agam-sa co-dhiubh. (SC 2001.025)*

CB: When piping was strong in Uist – since long before the last war but when I started piping myself, which was after the Second World War and the Uist games started anew – there were many good players in Uist then. I would say that the music that the Uist people had here was harder, you see; the people here, they were working on the croft and other places, and their fingers were harder. You would get the music of those who didn't work with their hands – although they were very skilled, their music was somewhat soft. It just wasn't up to the hard music that you would hear the Uist folk playing. I'm sure there are many who won't agree with that, but that's how I heard them, anyway ... Their playing was a little soft. Often enough at the time ... the doublings, as we call them, and the gracenotes, they made them harder than you would hear them today ... Every gracenote and doubling was made so clear and so hard.

JD: In competitions?

CB: In competitions and played in any other place. Dances, too.

JD: So, the Uist people had a different way of playing in the old days, did they?

CB: Well, it wasn't any different in the tunes, as such, but you could say in the music, there was a difference ... Most of those who came from the mainland, it was their work – some of them doctors, teachers, schoolmasters, those who work in an office. They didn't work on the land, and their fingers were soft. They weren't like the fingers of someone who worked with a spade and ... that sort of thing; a sledge-hammer and pick. That's how most of the Uist people worked anyway. They had hard fingers, and I think that's why the music they made was harder and clearer than the delicate music of those who came home from the mainland. That's *my* opinion, anyway.

Although I translate the word *cruaidh* as ‘hard’ in the above extract, it does not refer to difficulty. Calum was trying to convey the idea that Uist pipers (up until the present generation) tended to strike the chanter with their fingers more solidly and resoundingly than their mainland counterparts, producing a ‘crack’ in ornamentation that he did not perceive elsewhere. This may be Calum’s own nostalgia coming across, but in his remarks we can see a perception of the local playing style as a marker of identity and social boundary, where agriculture meets white-collar and island meets mainland. The difference lay not in “the tunes”, but in “the music”. Music as an expression of identity along such lines has been the subject of study within many cultures,<sup>27</sup> and in the case of the Hebridean Gaels, Calum’s remarks suggest the point of view of a community on the periphery of the mainstream, where ‘differentness’ is cultural and social as well as geographical. It is the point of view of the insider looking out. It is this particular frame of mind, combined with his experience in all facets of piping, which make Calum Beaton the ideal informant: a genuine tradition-bearer, a skillful performer, and a sensitive observer of his own cultural heritage.

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1. Angus MacLellan’s biography and repertoire of tales were edited and published by the late folklorist John Lorne Campbell: see *Stories from South Uist*, London, 1961; *The Furrow Behind Me*, London, 1962; and *Tocher*, iv, 1977-8:130.

2. See Sound Archive recordings, section R1, in the School of Scottish Studies.

3. One great competitive tradition in the Hebrides was the *oda*, a race-meeting which Carmichael described as occasioning St. Michael’s Day and consisting of “the athletics of the men and the racing of horses” (i, 1928:198). The last such meeting in South Uist took place, according to Dwelly, in 1820 (1901:703; see also Gibson, 1998:225).

4. Competitive piping in and of itself was never entirely alien to old-world Hebridean tradition. A sizeable body of folklore on the MacCrimmons of Skye refer to competition among chiefs’ pipers for the sake of clan pride (see MacLeod, *Tales of Dunvegan*, 1951:18-23; Carmichael, E.C., 1905: 80-82), and the *Piobairean Smeaclait* tales in South Uist, which depict MacCrimmon pipers coming to test the MacIntyres’ ability, imply a competitive spirit (see ch. 2). However, these examples had their place firmly within the surroundings of traditional Gaelic social culture, while the ‘staged’ nature of modern-day competition is rooted in the philosophies of nineteenth-century mainstream Britain.

5. Calum Beaton told me this MacCrimmon anecdote on 30 August 1995. The instrumentalists in Highland tradition tend to be men, and the vocalists women; while certainly not always the case, it was a striking enough commonality among piping families in South Uist whom I've encountered over the course of this study. This can also be seen in the Bulgarian tradition, where the *gaida* players are often men and the singers women (Rice, 1994:43).
6. Morrison, 1999:21; according to Neil's son Angus. More on the MacGillivrays in chapters 5c and 6a.
7. Calum Beaton could recall Neil playing only one *ceòl mòr* tune, *Cumha Mhic an Tòisich* or MacIntosh's Lament, and was not sure if he'd learned it during or before the Piobaireachd Society's courses. The MacGillivrays were said to be able masters of *ceòl mòr* (Morrison, 1999:21), so either case is plausible. Neil reportedly played it in the mainstream 'Kilberry' style, however, which lends weight rather to the Society's tuition.
8. CB, 30/8/1995. This particular interview was conducted in English and was not tape-recorded, so I have phrased Neil's 'D throw' question according to my notes.
9. Due to gaps in available records, some even-numbered years cannot be accounted for when logging games results, such as 1910 and 1912. These figures represent what we can be sure of.
10. Angus was identified in the *Oban Times*'s review of the Gathering as one of John MacDonald's Daliburgh pupils, and he was not the only one to compete that day. Other pipers of South Uist origin played for the gold medal but did not place, and significantly, they were all pipers in the Lovat Scouts: "A notable new competitor at Oban was Piper Malcolm Walker, Lovat Scouts, another of Pipe Major John MacDonald's South Uist pupils. He played the 'Bells of Perth' but unfortunately lost the thread of his tune and broke down. He is, however, a very promising player and with more experience should come well to the front. Pipe Major Angus MacAulay, Lovat Scouts, rendered the 'Finger Lock'. Through an oversight he omitted to play the first half of the second bar of the ground, rather an unusual occurrence for an experienced player. Apart from this lapse he might have been in the prize list ... Piper Angus MacQuarrie, Lovat Scouts, another member of the South Uist piping school, was handicapped by a very much over-used set of reeds. His tune was 'Patrick Og MacCrimmon's Lament'. He was apt to drag out the piece, but otherwise he gave a very good performance, which was full of expression" (*OT*, 15/9/1934 p. 2). These pipers receive some mention in chapter 8, and their record in South Uist's games can be found in the appended chart. Campbell also spoke of his experience at the Argyllshire Gathering with collector Jenny Fulton in 1987 (SC 87.07.B).
11. Chapter 10 looks in greater detail at the survival of aural transmission in the South Uist community.
12. SA 1970/5, /6 and /309.
13. Chapter 2a deals in greater detail with piping's original oral/aural transmission in Gaelic society.
14. Dwelly's *Illustrated Gaelic Dictionary* (1901) defines *roidean* as the run-up or bounce before a great leap, but it may possess some other meaning in South Uist; perhaps Donald MacDonald was the athletic type. The nickname naturally fell to his sons in the course of time, as is standard practice in Gaelic society.
15. Donald A. Morrison famously composed the 9/8 jig "Donald, Willie and his Dog", which he composed after a trip up Ben Mòr with fellow Loch Eynort piper Willie Morrison.
16. LM, 22/4/99. Louis's sister Peggy MacDonald (née Morrison) sang this song for the School of Scottish Studies archives in 1957 (SA 1957/100, item 4).



17. On 10 February 1906, for example, the *Oban Times* reported a concert and dance at Howmore Public School, featuring selections on the bagpipe by “Mr. Smith and Mr. Smith Junr.”, among other musical acts (*OT*, 102/1906 p. 4). This at least confirms that the father was a piper.
18. Interview with Calum Beaton on 30/8/1995 and in SA 1998.70. Roderick MacDonald of Barra was the father of Neil Angus MacDonald (1910 – 1994), a piper who worked as a headmaster in Inverness for most of his life and who compiled a book of tunes, *New Bagpipe Collection of Old and Traditional Settings* (Inverness, n.d.), based on his father’s playing style. Roderick would have been extant as a piper and tutor in the Smiths’ time, so Beaton’s postulation is reasonable.
19. Cf. Nattiez, 1990:105 on the capacity for repertoires to die out among indigenous peoples when the music’s overt function disappears.
20. The custom of sitting while playing has produced in Nova Scotia a highly specialised foot-tapping technique (see “With Piper Alex Currie, Frenchvale” in *Cape Breton’s Magazine* no. 73, n.d.) but Jessie could not recall pipers in her own locality doing the same.
21. Donald John MacDonald, collector and tradition-bearer from Pininerine, South Uist, described a similar process of constructing chanters and reeds in his youth (MacDhòmhnuaill, 1981:30).
22. Jessie’s use of the word *gleus* for ‘reed’ seems to be unique to South Uist; Fr. Allan MacDonald of Eriskay noted it in his *Gaelic Words and Expressions from South Uist and Eriskay* (ed. J.L. Campbell, 1972:141).
23. See chapter 10 for an expanded discussion on the difference in functional contexts between local and mainstream piping.
24. Calum Beaton was just one of many performers of song, story and music in South Uist whom Peter Cooke and Morag MacLeod, both researchers for the School of Scottish Studies, interviewed in the autumn of 1970. They recorded Calum discussing *ceòl mòr* such as the Prince’s Salute with examples on the practice chanter, and singing its cognate pibroch song *Isbeal Nic Aoidh* (SA 1970/122/5 and /6); they also recorded the goings-on at a *céilidh* in which Calum plays for an extended Eightsome Reel (SA 1970/145/2 and /3); he also discusses with Cooke how the local style of playing cadences altered with the advent of the Piobaireachd Society courses (SA 1970/2 and /133).
25. An official photograph of the entire band was taken in Aldershot in 1953, and Calum can still point out all seven of his neighbours among the ranks, pipes in hand; see appendix A.
26. Beaton probably refers in this instance to pipers of Uist roots who had left for work on the mainland, and who came back occasionally to play at the games.
27. England (1967), Blacking (1971) and Magowan (1994) present indigenous African and Australian examples of music symbolising identity, whether social or geographical. While they are concerned more with structure and organisation than style, they show the capacity that musical expression allows on that front and the emphasis which scholars have lent to this subject in the past. Examples from other South Uist pipers can either support or conflict with Calum’s point of view: Angus Campbell once commented on when, as a young man, he would work as a labourer on the roads all day before competing at the games in the afternoon, his hands “all corns” (SC 1987.07.B), while Neil MacDonald has claimed that Willie Morrison’s grandfather and piping tutor, Donald John, wouldn’t allow him to work on the land as a boy, saying it would have spoiled his fingers (informal conversation, August, 1995).



## CHAPTER EIGHT

*“Nowhere in Scotland do the pipers come forward in such numbers”:*

### **The Highland Games in South Uist**

Families such as the MacDonalds of Garryhellie and Daliburgh, and individuals such as Angus Campbell and Louis Morrison, measured their worth as pipers largely by the yardstick of the annual Highland games held on Askernish machair. Because they became in South Uist (as they did everywhere else in Scotland) the standard measure of a piper’s skill, an overview is needed on the games’ history in Uist in order to understand their place in the local tradition’s development. To this end, contemporary reports from the *Oban Times* serve as an excellent source of information; correspondents in the early decades of the century often inundated the reader with what may at first seem like trivialities, listing the names of gentry, clergy and honoured visitors who came to watch the day’s events, describing the performance of competitors under adverse weather conditions, and quoting nearly verbatim the toasts made at the post-games *céilidh*. But such trivialities will often elicit a vivid portrait of piping’s golden days and the characters who lived them.

Pipe music has always been at the heart of the South Uist games; it is the feature for which it has been most recognised, by players and non-players alike, since its inception. “The great attraction was the piping events,” reported the *Oban Times* of the games in 1931, “ – not to be wondered at when one knows South Uist to stand out predominantly as the home of piping” (15/8/1931 p. 7). Indeed, it attracted such stiff competition by the post- Second World War era that Askernish was considered a qualifier, among several, for the premier contests at the Northern Meeting (Inverness), the Argyllshire Gathering (Oban) and latterly the Bratach Gorm (London). This is not so often the case nowadays, but the memory of the Uist games’ importance in the wider circuit of Highland gatherings is long-lived. Rona Lightfoot competed successfully against the best the mainland community could offer during the 1950s, 60s and 70s, and her remarks depict the passing of former glories:

RL: *Aig an àm ud, nuair a bha mi òg, bha móran, móran do dheagh phiobairean a' dol a-mach chun na games an Uibhist. Cha mhór nach robh na games Uibhist a' cheart cho cudthromach 'sa bha an Northern Meeting agus an t-Òban. Bha na piobairean air fad a' dol a-mach ... Bha na MacFadyens a' dol a-mach, is bha Dòmhnall MacLeòid a' dol a-mach, is bha Seumas MacNeill, is Mickey MacAoidh ... fìor dheagh phiobairean ... Tha cuimhn' am mo mhàthair a bhith ag ràdh nuair bha na games seachad, bha a' phìob 'na cluasan airson trì no ceithir a laithean as a dheaghaidh ... Bha i laidir, laidir anns an eilean.* (SC 2001.024)

RL: At that time, when I was young, there were many, many good pipers going out to the Uist games. The Uist games were almost as important as the Northern Meeting and Oban. All the pipers were going out ... The MacFadyens were going out, and Donald MacLeod was going out, and Seumas MacNeill and Mickey MacKay ... really good players ... I remember my mother saying that when the games were finished, the pipes were in her ears for three or four days afterwards. It was extremely strong on the island.

Rona was speaking in this instance primarily of mainland competitors journeying to South Uist while completing a summertime circuit around many Highland games, and indeed, this aspect of the yearly competitions at Askernish has been an invariable fixture since the 1930s. But as the following chapter details, local competition has always been steady and by no means scarce. Studying contemporary games records in order to better understand this local/non-local ratio has made clear just how popular the Askernish games became in the twentieth century among competitive pipers outwith Uist. It has also proved valuable for identifying those who were most prominent in the Uist piping community – at least as regards competitive piping.

Consulting the prize lists and commentaries on the Uist games from sources such as the *Oban Times* and the *Piping Times* is not without its drawbacks. Reports do not appear in some even-numbered years, such as 1908, 1910 and 1912. And they cannot, of course, tell us who may have excelled in traditional ear-learned dance-

piping and for how long; as discussed in previous chapters, the games carry literate associations which necessarily preclude consideration of the aural idiom. However, verbal testimony tends to reveal in that regard what written records leave out (see ch. 10), and we will concern ourselves for now with the games and its place in the community's mainstream aspect. In the first section, I discuss the circumstances around which the South Uist games began in relation to other Hebridean areas. I then highlight the conservation of tradition – whether genuine or perceived – within the surrounding artificiality of the games, using sporting events and traditional dance as examples. Finally, I review successive generations of South Uist pipers on the competition platform and the more outstanding characters among them, showing, at the same time, how mainland competitors have increasingly saturated the prize-lists throughout the century.

### 8.a. Beginnings

Organised Highland gatherings as we know them today, complete with competitions among athletes, dancers and pipers, are a product of the 'Celtic twilight' made popular by King George IV and Queen Victoria in the nineteenth century. Admittedly, the spirit of post-Jacobite romanticism had permeated high society with the image of the Gael as 'noble savage' and inspired notions of cultural preservation since earlier times – Johnson and Boswell's travels, MacPherson's *Ossian* and the establishment of the Highland Society of London are just a few examples – but this only paved the way for the occasion of George IV's visit to Edinburgh in 1822, the preparations for which were spear-headed by Sir Walter Scott (Trevor-Roper, 1983:29). The caricatured pageantry which adorned those proceedings, and George's espousal of it, heralded a national infatuation with all things perceived to be Highland. Games developed in the years that followed as the popular, if flawed, image of traditional Gaelic pastimes, and these benefited in time by Queen Victoria's patronage

from her vantage point in Balmoral. One of the earliest games established was at the Northern Meeting in Inverness in 1837, and as transportation and mobility between rural and urban areas improved in the 1860s, games cropped up all over the country (Donaldson, 2000:197-203). Oban saw its first Argyllshire Gathering in 1871.

According to Gibson, the games phenomenon “spread north and west from the Lowland/Highland fringe in the east and south ... eventually reaching Glenfinnan and the Outer Hebrides in the 20<sup>th</sup> century” (1998:223). While this is undoubtedly true, there are a number of Hebridean islands which had organised annual games, including piping events, prior to the turn of the century. Islay, for instance, held “Highland Sports” and piping competitions in Bridgend in 1895, reportedly “revived after several years’ lapse” (*OT*, 17/8/1895 p. 2). In the same year, a regatta was held in Colonsay which ended with entertainment put on by the MacNeills of Oronsay, and which included “bagpipe competitions among the native youths” (*OT*, 3/8/1895 p. 2). Annual gatherings for sport and music were held in Lewis and Skye by this time as well (*OT*, 5/9/1896 p. 2; 4/9/1897 p. 2). So while the sub-culture of Highland games was far from intrinsic to the whole of Scotland’s western islands before 1900, the process was well under way.

South Uist, too, saw its first mainstream Highland gathering prior to the turn of the century, though at the unlikeliest of times and places. Games were held at Ardvachar machair, on Uist’s extreme north-west coast, on 6 January 1898. The gentlemen who organised and funded it came mainly from the immediate surrounding area – Ardvachar township, Eochar, Liniquie, Ardkenneth, a man from Aird, Benbecula and another from further south in Drimsdale<sup>1</sup> – which probably explains why the games took place at Ardvachar as opposed to the more populous south end. “These are the first Highland games that have ever been held in South Uist,” wrote the *Oban Times* correspondent. “The day was rather showery in the morning, but it turned out very favourable and the afternoon was beautiful. There was a large turnout of spectators and competitors, there being over three hundred in all” (15/1/1898 p. 6).

Events included throwing the hammer, putting the ball, and tossing the caber



(although where they obtained a caber in the Outer Hebrides is anyone's guess); several types of jumps and races, including a race specially for boys under sixteen; a tug-of-war between married men and bachelors; two dances, the Highland Fling and the Sword Dance; and two light music competitions for the bagpipe – one for marches, and another for strathspeys and reels. The lack of *ceòl mór* was a common, though not universal, feature of piping contests in the fledgling years of Hebridean games: while *ceòl mór* competition had long been an institution on the mainland, *ceòl beag* remained the only music played in piping events in many gatherings in the Hebrides until John MacDonald, Inverness first made his rounds for the Piobaireachd Society in 1909. As discussed in chapter 7, this suggests that performance, if not knowledge, of the *ceòl mór* repertoire was at too low an ebb in these areas to provide for varied competition until the Society's tuition was introduced. Six gentlemen of local standing judged the day's events, including Revs. Angus MacRae of Ardkenneth and Alexander MacDougall of Benbecula – the same Fr. MacDougall who would later co-found the South Uist Piping Society in Daliburgh (see ch. 6). The piping was judged by Lachlan (*Lachlainn Bàn*) MacCormick of Benbecula, the well-known militia piper,<sup>2</sup> and the winner of both events, John MacLellan, was an Eochair man who went on to take prizes in subsequent games such as in 1905, 1906 and 1907 (see section 8c below).

The *Oban Times* report, being the only existing record of the Ardvachar games, gives no explanation as to why the committee chose to hold the traditionally summer-time events in early January; nor does it give any clue as to what prompted the establishment of games in the first place. We can reasonably suppose, however, that the holy Epiphany had something to do with both. Epiphany was traditionally a day of festivity and sport in catholic Highland communities, as was New Year's Day and Michaelmas,<sup>3</sup> and the Ardvachar games' falling on 6 January seems too much of a coincidence not to be related. Furthermore, that the games' committee members came mainly from the immediate surrounding area suggests that its timing and location was their decision, not the proprietor's, as was often the case in the late nineteenth century.<sup>4</sup> In effect, we are left with the impression that this was a



gathering by and for the folk of Uist; a product of the people, not the gentry; and that its establishment accordingly contained elements of traditionalism not often seen in games across the mainland. Considering the overall context of a 'Highland gathering', however, complete with a caber toss, hammer throw and tug-of-war, the committee members probably had some connection with mainstream Scottish society and were not typical of the grass-roots Uist crofting community at the turn of the century. The same applies to the founders of the South Uist Piping Society, as was discussed in chapter 6. South Uist's introduction to the modern age, therefore, can be traced back to these men.

According to the Ardvachar games report, the committee intended to hold subsequent games in the month of August, and to hold the next games at either Drimore or Grogarry machair. Inexplicably, however, it appears that the whole matter was dropped, for no record exists of any games in South Uist for another four years.

1902 marked the establishment of games on several Hebridean islands, such as Tìree, Coll and Gigha. Reasons for their inception varied. In Tìree, for instance, the advent of games came apparently with the need to cater to the rising influx of tourists during the months of July and August. An *Oban Times* correspondent in Coll remarked in July of that year:

"Our islands always look their best this month, and may be said to have put on their annual new suit for the visitors. The only drawback is that a social gathering of the inhabitants ... is not arranged to meet the visitors ... We understand the people of Tìree are alive to this want, and have arranged games and athletic sports to be held on the 22<sup>nd</sup> inst." (OT, 26/7/1902 p. 6)

The number in attendance at this first Tìree gathering was estimated at two thousand, and included piping competitions for marches and for strathspeys and reels (OT, 2/8/1902 p. 2). The year 1902 also marked the first games in South Uist since January of 1898, but for reasons other than tourism. As the coronation of King Edward VII approached in July of that year, the communities of many islands

arranged to celebrate the occasion with a day of sporting events. A ‘Coronation gala’ was held in Coll (*OT*, 12/7/1902 p. 2) where pipers played but apparently did not compete; and in South Uist and Benbecula combined, no less than three such gatherings – at Nunton, Howmore, and Daliburgh – took place in one day (*ibid*). No piping competitions were held in the latter two, though bagpipes were indeed played; in Howmore, for example, after an inter-school shinty match,

“the children were reformed into procession, and headed by the pipers, they were conducted to a beautiful hollow on the opposite slopes of which the children sat down to the number of 200.” (*ibid*)

On Nunton Farm, matters differed:

“In anticipation of the King’s Coronation ... the Committee wisely arranged that a public holiday would be held ... and athletic sports would be open to all competitors. The judges were, for bagpipe playing: Messrs. MacLean, Creagorry Hotel; MacDonald, Moss Cottage; ex-Sergt. Piper MacCormick, Creagorry; and D.L. MacLennan, Sorrell Lodge. Rev. Father A. MacDougall acted as secretary.” (*ibid*)

The first judge mentioned was undoubtedly William MacLean, gold medallist and Pipe Major of the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Cameron Highlanders during the Great War (see ch. 6a), and Lachlan MacCormick again took to the bench, as he had in 1898. The other two, MacDonald of Moss Cottage and MacLennan of Sorrell Lodge, were probably landed gentlemen on holiday, flattered by the games committee’s offer to adjudicate the strains of the national music but knowing little of real piping; it was this sort of thing which prompted the establishment of the Piobaireachd Society in Edinburgh the following year (see ch. 6b). Events for marches and for strathspeys and reels were held, both for adults and for boys aged seventeen and under (*OT*, 12/7/1902 p. 2), but unfortunately there was no mention of the prize-winners.

Fr. Alexander MacDougall appears to have had a leading hand in the proceedings which were to make the games in South Uist an annual event. He was a

financial backer of the Ardvachar games in 1898; he also acted as captain of the bachelors' tug-of-war team that year while Fr. MacRae of Ardkenneth, dubiously, led the married men's team. He was then made secretary of the committee for the 1902 games and was frequently involved at some level with the committees of subsequent years. He was certainly recognised later in life as having spear-headed their inception, for in 1925, by-then Canon MacDougall (who was at that point a resident of the Castlebay parish) was mentioned as having "founded the Uist Games in Benbecula 23 years ago" (*OT*, 15/8/1925 p. 7), a clear reference to the Nunton Farm coronation festivities. Perhaps by 1925, the Ardvachar games had been forgotten. Fr. MacDougall's name appears in 1903 in connection with establishing the permanence of what was deemed a successful day of sport:

"We had our Coronation Sports ... last year, and they were such a decided success and so much interested the spectators that the Committee in charge arranged to have them annually. The Committee would feel grateful to any native or friend of Benbecula who would contribute towards the prize fund. Contributions may be sent to Rev. Father MacDougall, Benbecula, and they will be publicly acknowledged." (*OT*, 18/7/1903 p. 6)

The games continued to be held on Nunton Farm until 1906, in which year it was held on Askernish machair, just north of Garryhellie; Simon MacKenzie of the Lochboisdale Hotel acted as President of the Gathering (*OT*, 8/9/1906 p. 2). Events then reverted back to Nunton until 1909, at which point Askernish became the games' permanent home. As Askernish was that time included among the holdings of the Lochboisdale Hotel, Simon MacKenzie's role in the newly-formed South Uist Piping Society was probably a deciding factor in the games' placement.

### 8.b. Sports and Dancing as Elements of Conservatism

Although Highland gatherings in the Hebrides are largely an invention of the past hundred years, sporting activities, both organised and spontaneous, were central to the character of traditional Hebridean life since far earlier times. Stone-throwing, wrestling, jumping, shinty and all manner of races were typical athletic pastimes in west coast and island communities of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries;<sup>5</sup> shinty in particular, in Gaelic *camanachd* or *ioman*, boasts of a connection to Irish Gaelic tradition going back to *Cù Chulainn* and the Ulster Cycle (MacLennan, 1999:83-99). The sports played at coronation celebrations and gatherings throughout the Hebrides in 1902 reflected these pastimes in many ways. At the coronation gala in Coll, for instance, “putting the stone, throwing the hammer, jumping, running, etc., brought out a large number of competitors” (*OT*, 12/7/1902 p. 2). For the first official gathering in Tìree, athletic events included races, putting a sixteen-pound stone, a long jump, a running high jump, throwing a hammer, and a football match (*OT*, 2/8/1902 p. 2). And in the celebration at Howmore, South Uist, there occurred a curious mix of the indigenous and the alien when “the proceedings opened with a shinty match, the teams being Howmore v. Stoneybridge Schools ... The winning team were awarded a large Union Jack, the gift of Mr. Guthrie, Grogarry, the captain of the team being directed to keep said flag for the use of the school” (*OT*, 12/7/1902 p. 2). The day went on to include events for jumping and separate races for “young men”, “young women”, and “married men” (*ibid*).

Since then, ‘Highland sports’ not indigenous to the Hebrides have indeed been played at the Uist games, some becoming established and others fading away: the caber, for one, was tossed in 1898 and again between 1922 and 1925, but thereafter only rarely; vaulting and hammer-throwing, by contrast, have enjoyed a long life. Despite these mainstream elements, the gamut of athletics at Askernish has stayed remarkably true to traditional pastimes involving running and feats of strength in Gaelic folklife. Wrestling, jumping and stone-throwing (albeit with regulated poundages) have remained the cornerstone events, as has a huge variety of races over the years: take the “married men’s race” which occurred in 1902, or the “old men’s race” in 1924; Major Finlay MacKenzie won a bare-back pony race along the seashore

in 1922, and again in 1928; a motorcycle race was introduced in 1925; and so forth in like manner to modern times.<sup>6</sup> These events echo the Hebridean *oda*, or annual horse-race, last enacted in South Uist in 1820 (see ch. 7, endnote 3) and recall the more unusual races observed in the late nineteenth century at games throughout the greater Highlands. In Kintyre, for instance, the Athletic Sports of 1878 included a “blindfold wheelbarrow race”, and the Castleacres games of 1883 included a “hurdle sack race ... a race for ploughmen over half a mile, and a fisherman’s donkey race” (Telfer, 1994:121). To some extent, the racing tradition in South Uist survives today, albeit along more standard lines: flat races of 100 yards, 220 yards, 440 yards, 880 yards and a full mile still occur, as does a race from Askernish machair to the summit of Ben Kenneth (and back again) on the day of each annual games. In modern times, then, we find in South Uist the essentials of traditional rural Gaelic sports surviving in what is outwardly the manifestation of nineteenth-century ‘Celtic twilight’.

The Gaels’ love of racing is matched only by their love of dancing. Highland games from the beginning included dance among the competitions, incorporating well-known traditional pieces such as the Highland Fling, Seann Trubhais and the sword dance Gillie Calum into an increasingly smoothed-out and standardised framework from the nineteenth century to the twentieth – like piping, the scope for free and dramatic interpretation diminished under the constraints of adjudication. These dances, performed solo and to pipe music, were never peculiar to South Uist, nor indeed to the Hebrides as a whole; they rather evolved within a Highland-wide tradition of Pyrrhic, pantomimic and social dancing with analogies across medieval Europe.<sup>7</sup> The South Uist games have included events for the Highland Fling and Gillie Calum every year since its inception in 1898 and, unusually, for the foursome Scotch Reel since at least 1909. The foursome Reel is considered to have been the “supreme social dance of Scotland”, both Highland and Lowland, in the eighteenth century (see ch. 5d and 10a) and is not ordinarily subject to competition; that it has been included in the South Uist games for nigh on a century suggests, along with the races, the kind of traditionalism preserved at Askernish within the surrounding artificiality of the ‘Highland Gathering’ phenomenon. The Scotch Reel was not,



however, the only element of dancing at the games to suggest this, as events in 1923 were to show all of Scotland.

The games had only just been re-established the previous July after eight long years of war and recovery. Roderick MacDonald, Angus Campbell, Archie MacDonald of Garryhellie and seventeen year-old Neil Smith of Howmore were out in competitive force in the summer of '23, and the whole day was handsomely patronised by – among others – the British Chemical Co. of Glasgow, Lady Gordon Cathcart, the 4<sup>th</sup> Cameron Highlanders, the Lovat Scouts and one or two of the leading piping authorities of the day: John MacDonald of Inverness, Willie Ross, and the well-known enthusiast and judge Seton Gordon. Piping and athletic events carried on as they had in years past, but the line-up of dances included something new or, rather, something old:

“A novel feature was a competitive exhibition of old Highland dances which are remembered in South Uist and Barra, but which are almost entirely forgotten in other parts of the Highlands. There were two competitors, Mr. Archd. MacPherson, Eochdar, South Uist, who is over 75 years of age, and Mr. Donald MacDonald, Daliburgh. This event was much appreciated by the judges and spectators, and will be suitably developed at future gatherings.”  
(*OT*, 4/8/1923 p. 7)

The three dances exhibited – The First of August, Over the Water to Charlie and Scotch Blue Bonnets Over the Border – were solo and stepped to pipe music like the formal competitive pieces, but clearly they were of a peculiar enough character to impress the onlookers. The judges may not have fully appreciated what they saw that day, for they came primarily for the piping and had no special expertise in dancing that I am aware of.<sup>8</sup> But the community appreciated it. These dances were the legacy of Ewan MacLachlan, an itinerant dance-master from Moidart who lived and taught in South Uist from the 1840s until his death in Loch Eynort in approximately 1880, and as the *Oban Times* report suggests, by the early 1920s his dances were considered peculiarly Hebridean rather than universally Highland like the Fling or the Reel (see ch. 10a). Archie MacPherson of Eochar had learned them, and others, from

MacLachlan as a boy of ten or eleven years; Donald MacDonald of Daliburgh was in fact *Dòmhnall Bàn*, “renowned piper and exponent of Highland dancing” (Rea, 1964:vi) and father of the celebrated *Roidein* brothers. His tutelage under MacLachlan is less certain than Archie’s (see ch. 7c) but he could have easily learned the steps second-hand. Over the next decade, these two men became the lynchpin in the dances’ survival into modern times.

From 1924 to 1931, more of MacLachlan’s solo step-dances were included in the games’ competitions, such as Miss Forbes, Scotchmakers, Flowers of Edinburgh, Tullochgorm, Scotch Measure and Highland Laddie.<sup>9</sup> MacPherson and MacDonald began taking on pupils in order to pass the dances on, and prizes were soon offered to the best learners under the age of thirty (*OT*, 9/8/1924 p. 5). They began to attract the patronage of prominent gentlemen like Duncan MacLeod of Skeabost, Skye and William Donald of Glasgow, and even the Celtic Society of Edinburgh took notice enough to donate prize-money. Headlines in the *Oban Times* reading “Revival of Ancient Celtic Dancing” and “Interesting Exhibition of Old Highland Dances”<sup>10</sup> attracted the attention of D.G. MacLennan, an authority on dance in his day and author of *Traditional and Highland Dances of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1950); soon he too was a regular visitor to Askernish in these years. After 1931, however, interest seemed to slacken. The dances began to appear far less frequently in the record of events, and of them all, only Over the Water to Charlie and Highland Laddie have featured more or less continuously since. Clearly a feeling of great traditionalism and revival pervaded the South Uist games during the 1920s on account of these dances; but the question remains: how authentically Hebridean were they?

It is said that MacLachlan studied for the priesthood in France as a young man, but that an illness which left an arm deformed caused him to give it up (*Còmhlán Danmsa*, 1995:14-5). It is generally accepted that he either learned the dances there or composed them himself after settling in South Uist in the 1840s. Emerson, however, noted that a dance called Highland Laddie was extant in Scotland from at least the 1830s and that MacLachlan’s studies and continental influences had probably led him to come up with his own version of it, which he later taught only in South

Uist and Barra (1972:162). The same can likely be said the rest of his surviving repertoire – that he either composed them himself or arranged them based, like Highland Laddie, on pre-existing dances he'd learned in his travels prior to 1840. Undoubtedly it was a bit of both. In this sense, the dances seen at Askernish during the 1920s were indeed peculiar to the Hebrides, and we are left with the impression that the South Uist community considered their local games a venue for exhibiting – i.e., preserving – what they perceived as a genuinely Hebridean style of dance. At the same time, the games authorities and/or the *Oban Times* applied the stamp of romantic caricature to these dances by presenting them as “ancient”, “Celtic” and as “old-world Hebridean dances ... rescued from oblivion” (14/8/1926 p. 2); it bespeaks an invention of tradition, deliberate or otherwise, in the spirit of the games phenomenon itself.<sup>11</sup>

### 8.c. Piping at the Games: Local v. Mainland

For practicality's sake, I have separated the years since 1898 into four eras:

- 1898 – 1914
- 1922 – 1939
- 1946 – 1979
- 1980 – present

Sectioning off the years in this manner is meant to reflect times of interruption caused by the two World Wars, as well as the length of time which any one generation has maintained prominence on the boards before giving way to the younger, up-and-coming body of competitors. As we look at each of these eras in turn through the prize-lists and occasional eloquent correspondences found in the *Oban Times*, we see not just changes in the ‘who’ and ‘when’ of local piping, but the increasing influx of

mainland competitors as well and how this eventually necessitated a separation of events between local and non-local. Readers will find the chart in Appendix B a useful reference, as mainland competitors' names have been highlighted to show more clearly the proportional dichotomy over time. Competitors from Barra and North Uist, for the purposes of the chart, are considered local.

When trying to convey the fluctuations of entire generations of local pipers over a century-long period, there is a strong temptation not to leave any one piper out of the picture in the belief that every individual has been an important part of the whole and worthy of mention. There is, in effect, a fear of casting too bright a light on one while passing it entirely by another; the inevitable result is a running-on of names and competition details which may be peripheral to, or too large a scope for, the point of this section. Accordingly, I must remind the reader that this work can only be qualitative, not quantitative; I discuss only enough names, dates and competition details as are necessary to adequately illustrate the generation in question. The bulk of statistical data remains in Appendix B.

#### 1898 – 1914

Piping events during these fledgling years of the games consisted entirely of *ceòl beag* until 1908, the year before John MacDonald of Inverness began his annual tuition, but unfortunately no record exists of the prize-winners. Until then, events for marches and for strathspeys and reels were held with separate divisions for boys (aged eighteen or under) and men. This was taken a step further in 1906, when a separate full MSR (March, Strathspey and Reel) event was held for “old men” in which Ronald MacDonald of Garryhellie, Neil and Rona’s grandfather, took second (*OT*, 8/9/1906 p. 2). First in the MSR for boys that year went to John Smith of Howmore. Available records show that in 1909, 1911 and 1914, when the Society’s tuition was under way, *ceòl mór* was played under two categories: one confined to those who

took MacDonald's course the previous spring, and one open to all.

This was the era of Neil Campbell and Archie MacDonald, and the coming-of-age of John '*Seonaidh Roidein*' MacDonald as a competitor; and yet the less-remembered John MacLellan of Eochar was the first big name at the games, having taken the overall award at the inaugural events of 1898 and several other top places in the years following. He appears last in 1907, having placed third in the strathspey and reel contest (*OT*, 7/9/1907 p. 2).<sup>12</sup> These pipers' successes notwithstanding, the man universally remembered as South Uist's pre-eminent player before the days of Piobaireachd Society tuition is Lachlan MacCormick of the 'old Militia' and Lovat Scouts. Born in 1859 in Creagorry, Benbecula, he competed in many regimental and other mainland gatherings and was known beyond Uist as among the best Hebridean players of the early twentieth century. He was also a prolific composer, whose most notable work is perhaps the two-part strathspey "The South Uist Golf Club". On Askernish machair, he won the march events in 1905, 1907 and 1909, won the strathspeys and reels in 1907 and placed second in the open *ceòl mór* competitions of 1909 and 1911, among various other top placings.<sup>13</sup> He does not seem to have attended John MacDonald's courses in the years leading up to the Great War – or at least that is the impression gained since his name does not appear on the prize-lists for the class-confined *ceòl mór* event. Naturally, however, it may just mean that he competed in the event but did not place. He died in 1951 aged ninety-two, a legend in his own time; it is said, for example, that he celebrated his last birthday with a half-hour on the pipes, playing his own compositions (Crawford, 1999:189).

Two other pipers of merit from this era, possibly brothers, were Angus MacIntyre (b. 1893) and Donald MacIntyre (b. 1890). Both received tuition in the Piobaireachd Society courses. It seems that Angus was a *ceòl mór* player first and foremost, having won both the class-confined and open *ceòl mór* events in 1909 (*OT*, 4/9/1909 p. 7). He went on to take second place in the open event of 1913 (*OT*, 9/8/1913 p. 2). Donald MacIntyre, or *Dòmhnall Ruadh* ('Red-haired Donald') as he was known, stood out in his hey-day for placing highly not just in piping, but also in competitive dancing: in 1911 he placed first in the open *ceòl mór*, second in the event



confined to MacDonald's pupils, and third in the strathspey and reel; he then won all three of the dancing events – the Highland Fling, the Scotch Reel, and Gillie Calum (*OT*, 12/8/1911 p. 5). Few have since attained such a record in one meeting.

Donald's talents extended beyond music and dance, however, and he is remembered today mainly for his poetry.<sup>14</sup> Although born in the township of Snishival between Stoneybridge and Howbeg, he spent the better part of his post-war years in Paisley; hence his nickname in literary circles, the Paisley Bard. He is thought to have inherited his piping talent maternally: his mother's father, Angus MacLean, was known as *Am Piobaire Bàn* (the Fair-haired Piper) and had been a regimental Pipe Major and personal piper to MacNeil of Barra before the latter emigrated to America in the early nineteenth century (MacMillan, 1968:xv). Donald himself served as piper to Cameron of Lochiel before and during the 1914 – 18 War (see ch. 9). The Pininerine-born poet Donald John MacDonald (*Dòmhnall Iain Dhonnchaidh*) has left us probably the most fitting tribute to MacIntyre's musical abilities, revealing the importance of dance-piping in South Uist even in the age of mainstream competition:

“...Ann an ceòl ‘s ann an dannsa	...In music and in dance
Measg do sheòrsa ‘s gach àm bhiodh tu ‘m	Among your kind, at all times, you were
bàrr ann.	supreme.
Meur a b’ fhinealt air sionnsar	Fingers most fine on the chanter
‘S a chuireadh òigridh gu ùrlar le	That would send the young ones merrily
àbhachd...” <sup>15</sup>	to the floor...

It wasn't just the pipers who made this era a colourful one. Archibald Campbell of Kilberry, co-founder of the Piobaireachd Society and author of the *Kilberry Book of Ceòl Mór*, travelled to Uist to judge the piping events in 1911, and it is said that he hitched a ride from Lochboisdale to Askernish machair with Simon MacKenzie in his coach and horses – this being in the days before paved roads and motor vehicles were the norm. MacKenzie's expertise at the reins was well-known, and he apparently drove the horses at such breakneck speed that Kilberry, at the end of the day, preferred to walk the five miles back (*PT*, July 1961).

1922 – 1939

We come now to the era framed between two World Wars. The Great War had ended in 1918, but so severe and debilitating was the depression it caused, and so many were the casualties, that it took another four years for the pace and character of Hebridean life to recover sufficiently for a return to the games (see ch. 9). The day in July, 1922 opened with considerable fanfare and optimism: “On July 18<sup>th</sup>, upon the ‘machair’ at Askernish, near Lochboisdale,” wrote the *Oban Times* correspondent, “this Highland meeting was revived. For the island, the event was a great one, for the games have not been held since 1914. As is only natural for an island noted for its pipers, the piping events were the most important ones of the meeting, and the prizes for these events were handsome ... Before the games commenced pipers were tuning their pipes along the seashore, with a foreground of many-coloured flowers on the machair, and in the background the misty slopes of Hecla and Beinn Mhor, while across the machair spectators walked in crowds from every part of the island. The attendance was unusually large” (5/8/1922 p. 2). The piping events began before noon and continued till seven that evening; it was close to nine before the games ended entirely.

The format of the piping events was changing with the times: a full, open MSR event was added, at least for a time, to the existing format of separate ‘march’ and ‘strathspey and reel’ events, and a jig event was introduced in 1923 (*OT*, 4/8/1923 p. 7), although absent again from the programme until 1927 (*OT*, 13/8/1927 p. 2) from which point it has remained standard. *Ceòl mór* was reduced now to a single, open event except on rare occasions when two patrons would each sponsor their own, as was the case in 1931 – the prize for one contest given by the President of the Gathering, and the prize for another given by Colonel John Grant of Rothiemurchus, one of the judges (*OT*, 15/8/1931 p. 7). Rothiemurchus, a former

officer of the Lovat Scouts and thereafter a sheriff of Inverness, was a stalwart of the Piobaireachd Society and is remembered among mainstream piping circles today as one of the century's great authorities; he also remains the longest-serving judge in the history of the games in South Uist. He first appeared in 1931 and judged the piping, along with various other leading figures, every year until 1960.<sup>16</sup>

Several of the century's most prominent local players emerge in these years. Angus Campbell, Roderick MacDonald and Angus MacQuarrie all make a name for themselves, as do Archie Lindsay, Finlay Martin and Pipe Major John Steele of Lochboisdale, all veterans of the Great War. Steele (1889 – 1961) had enlisted as a piper in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion of the Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders in 1906, and received some lessons from John MacDonald while stationed in Inverness in 1908 (*PT*, November 1961); he could thereafter be found taking many of the top places at army gatherings at home and abroad until the outbreak of war, and it wasn't until about 1920 that he was able to return to Uist. Like the celebrated John MacColl of Oban (see Donaldson, 2000:201-2), Steele excelled in the piping events but was also a gifted athlete: in 1922, for instance, he took first place in the MSR and *ceòl mór* and third in the march, then proceeded to win the hammer throw and the caber toss, in addition to tying for first in the stone throw and second in the long jump (*OT*, 5/8/1922 p. 2). He continued to compete with some success until 1937. In 1962, a year after his death at the age of seventy-one, a new open event was inaugurated at the games in his memory: each competitor played a march, strathspey and reel taken from set lists of Steele's favourite tunes, the winner receiving the John Steele Cup (see *PT*, August 1964).

Calum Johnston of Barra, or *Calum Aonghuis Chaluim* ('Calum, son of Angus son of Calum'), was another prominent name in this era. He made his mark locally by winning the *ceòl mór* event in 1924 (*OT*, 9/8/1924 p. 5) and went on in later years to place highly, and often, at the Argyllshire Gathering's gold medal competition. In addition to his piping, Johnston was a valued informant of Barra traditions for the School of Scottish Studies.<sup>17</sup>

When speaking to Uist pipers today, one still hears constant references to

Angus MacAulay of Benbecula (1902 – 1995), or *Aonghus Sheòrais* (‘Angus son of George’), one of the most consistently successful competitors in the history of the Uist games, local or otherwise. His name was never absent from the prize lists at Askernish between 1923 and 1952, and in 1947 he had the singular distinction of taking all four events – the *ceòl mòr*, the march, the strathspey and reel and the jig – in the same meeting (*OT*, 16/8/1947 p. 7). In 1952 he emigrated to New Zealand when offered the Pipe Majorship of the Whangarei Pipe Band, and in 1993 was awarded the MBE for services to piping in that country.<sup>18</sup>

These were the men to whom the Uist games belonged in the era between the two World Wars – infringed upon only slightly by an influx of competitors from the mainland and other islands which began in 1933 and gradually increased in the years following. The reason for their appearance in the lists at that particular time are unclear, since the practice of travelling around the nation-wide games circuit by seasoned competitors was nothing new, then as now. Perhaps the answer lies in transportation improvements: an *Oban Times* correspondent had remarked three years earlier how the mailboats *Lochmor* and *Lochearn* were filled to capacity with travellers on their way to Lochboisdale the night before the games (*OT*, 9/8/1930 p. 2), so it is not hard to imagine that professional pipers on the circuit would soon take advantage of the service. Whatever the reason, the gathering in South Uist was soon removed from the remote, peripheral aspect it had hitherto enjoyed and into a position ever closer to the popular and the mainstream. In 1922, the *Oban Times* correspondent had commented:

“It is safe to say that nowhere in Scotland do the pipers come forward in such numbers, and it is all the more remarkable because of the fact that it is all local talent. At Oban, Inverness, or Braemar, the prizes are usually carried off by those world-famous pipers who travel to most Highland meetings to compete, but South Uist is too remote for them to appear at these games.” (*OT*, 5/8/1922 p. 2)

In 1933, things changed. Owen MacNiven of Paisley came to compete at Askernish that year, and took second place in the strathspey and reel and the jig

events (*OT*, 5/8/1933 p. 7). In 1935, Corporal Bain of the Scots Guards and Hugh Kennedy, a native of Tiree, were present and took third and fourth place respectively in the *ceòl mór*. MacNiven appeared as well, and placed highly in the march and the strathspey and reel (*OT*, 31/8/1935 p. 8). In 1936, double gold-medallist and clasp winner John Wilson of Edinburgh made an appearance and placed second in the *ceòl mór* behind local exponent Calum Walker; second in the jigs behind Uist piper Angus MacDonald, who by then had won the jigs for the fifth consecutive time; and first in the march and the strathspey and reel (*OT*, 15/8/1936 p. 7). By the eve of the Second World War, both the big and the light music events were dominated by competitors from the mainland, with Wilson, MacNiven and Archie MacNab of the Glasgow Police taking the lion's share (*OT*, 12/8/1939 p.3).

These numbers would only increase in the post-war years.

#### 1946 – 1979

After the Second World War, it seems as if word had spread in mainland Scotland of the standard of local piping found at the South Uist games, for by 1950 the number of visiting competitors had swelled quite beyond those of the mid to late 30s. In that year, Donald A. (*Dòmhnall Anndra*) Morrison of Loch Eynort, Angus Campbell and the Morrison brothers from Gerinish, Ronald and Alfred, managed to secure places in the *ceòl mór*, but all prizes in the light music events (save one in the strathspey and reel and the jig) were won by prominent competitors from the mainland:

“Piobaireachd – 1, J. Garroway; 2, **Alfred Morrison**; 3, **Ronald Morrison**; 4, **D.A. Morrison**; 5, Pipe-Major Donald Maclean; 6, **Angus Campbell**.

Marches – 1, Pipe-Major Donald MacLeod; 2, Pipe-Major Donald Maclean; 3, Pipe-Major Ramsay; 4, John Garroway; 5, Duncan Johnstone; 6, D. Lawrie, Oban.

Jigs – 1, Pipe-Major Donald MacLeod; 2, Pipe-Major Ramsay; 3, Pipe-Major D.



Maclean; 4, **Donald A. Morrison (Locheynort)**.

Strathspeys and Reels – 1, Pipe-Major Ramsay; 2, Pipe-Major D. MacLeod; 3, Pipe-Major D. MacLean; 4, John Garroway; 5, Duncan Johnstone; 6, **D.A. Morrison.**” (*OT*, 19/8/1950 p.8)

Practically overnight, it seems, the piping community in South Uist found themselves facing the best competitors in mainstream Scotland, from Pipe Major Donald MacLeod of the Seaforth Highlanders to John D. Burgess of the Camerons and Duncan Johnstone of Glasgow – these were just a few of the men who characterised piping in the post-war years at the national level. Paradoxically perhaps, this was also the time Calum Beaton remembers local piping being at its strongest, at least in the competitive sense. It was the season, after all, of the Morrison brothers of Gerinish, and of Willie Morrison from Loch Eynort; of Angus Campbell’s cousin Calum from Benbecula, and of Calum Beaton himself, all of whom held their own in open competition; it was the season in which Rona *nighean Eairdsidh Raghnaill* was introduced to the national stage under headlines such as “Garryhaillie Girl Takes the Trophies” and “Woman Piper Wins 5 Cups at Uist Gathering”.<sup>19</sup> Another local phenomenon to have emerged in those years was William MacDonald of Benbecula, formerly of the Highland Light Infantry and the Cameron Highlanders and now living, like Rona Lightfoot, in Inverness. William first appeared in local prize-lists in the mid 1950s and thereafter took the gold medals at Inverness and Oban in 1965 and 1967, respectively. He was taught in his early years by Lachlan MacCormick.

The first indication that local pipers were being purposefully separated from non-locals at the games comes from the prize-list of 1949, when a quaich named after John MacDonald, Inverness was awarded to Angus Campbell who, in fourth place, was the highest-placed local player in open competition (*OT*, 20/8/1949 p. 3). This was only a pre-cursor to entirely separate events. It would appear that the sheer number of top-level mainland pipers at Askernish had grown high enough that the games committee had to address it in no uncertain terms; consequently, in 1953, we find one group of judges overseeing the open events and another group entirely

judging events confined to local players (*OT*, 22/8/1953 p. 6). As the chart shows, the open events were dominated entirely by visiting competitors while the local *ceòl mór* went to Rona MacDonald (Lightfoot) and the local MSR to North Uist man Norman MacLean. This move toward a local – visitor separation culminated in the establishment of the Flora MacDonald Cup in the late 1950s, a competition for *ceòl mór*, MSRs and jigs, confined strictly to locals and held each spring in Daliburgh School.

### *1980 – present*

With regard to the mainland contingent, the last twenty years have seen a saturation point at the games. Few local competitors of late have taken places in the open competitions, and a look at the chart shows that of these, the most consistently successful have been Calum Campbell; Louis Morrison and his nephew Willie; Donald John (or D.J.) MacIntyre, son of Pipe Major Donald MacIntyre of Boisdale of the 4<sup>th</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> Cameron Highlanders, and now a Pipe Major himself in the amalgamated Queen's Own Highlanders; and Donald (*Dòmhnall Bàn*) MacDonald of Kyles Flodda, Benbecula, librarian and Pipe Major of the South Uist Pipe Band.

Because of the Uist games' popularity in the mainstream circuit, they are no longer really considered the primary measure of the local community's standard; satellite competitions like the Flora MacDonald Cup have since made up for the games in that respect and are eagerly anticipated every year. On the whole, though, the games still matter a great deal to the South Uist community – aside from being just a good reason for neighbours to gather in fellowship and rivalry, they represent a channel to the establishment and the means by which this peripheral community transformed itself from backwater to mainstream. South Uist piping today is far removed, after all, from what it was in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when *ceòl mór* was primarily the jurisdiction of the Clanranald MacIntyres (see ch. 5a) and

*ceòl beag* echoed the song tradition stylistically, learned by ear, and played for a variety of functions – in particular, group labour and dancing (see chs. 2a and 5d). Military duty was likely the only avenue to musical literacy as the nineteenth century progressed. There is no record of organised, regular competition among the island's piping community until the dawn of the twentieth century, though if it did take place before then, it probably would have been either among military pipers or of an informal nature, such as during Frederick Rea's picnic outing in the 1890s or the household contests at Clanranald Cottage during the middle years of this century (see ch. 7a).

Several elements were to bring changes in the status quo. Literacy on the mainland became more widespread in keeping with the rising influence of the competition system in the 1800s, and by the turn of the twentieth century the South Uist Piping Society were keen to encourage this state-of-the-art idiom among what they must have considered their all-too rustic piping community. Accordingly, the arrival of the Piobaireachd Society tutors heralded a new age wherein literacy and competition-style settings became not just the business of the Lovat Scouts or the Militia, but standard among most South Uist pipers, and the competitive climate of the modern era has since maintained that standard.

So while dance-piping stylistically reminiscent of *ceòl chuais* may still be heard and practiced in the odd South Uist *céilidh*, the competition system – as represented by the games, the Flora MacDonald Cup, and so forth – has ensured that the literate idiom has become just as much 'tradition' in modern South Uist as was the aural in the previous century.

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1. The *Oban Times* remarked: "Great praise is due to the committee that arranged the sports, viz: Messrs. D.J. MacDonald, Iochdar; Donald Morrison, Aird; Ranald MacEachen, Liniquie; Ewen MacDonald, Drimisdale; Norman MacPhee, president; Norman MacLeod, treasurer; Roderick MacKay, secretary; John MacEachen, assistant secretary" (15/1/1898 p. 6). All these names, with the possible exception of MacLeod and MacKay, suggest that they were native to South Uist. See Alasdair Maclean's lecture "Notes on South Uist Families" in *TGSI* vol liii, 1984 pp. 491-518.

2. That MacCormick, as a professional-level piper, was chosen to judge the piping events at the Ardvachar games is surprising, since the major competitions throughout the nineteenth century were often marked by non-playing, unknowledgeable judges whose only claim to the bench was social superiority (see ch. 6b). It could be that this was the case only with the major Highland Society of London competitions in Edinburgh and latterly in Inverness and Oban, and that minor, peripheral games actually fared better in that regard.

3. New Year's Day and Epiphany were traditionally celebrated with village-wide shinty matches throughout the Highlands and Islands in the nineteenth century, which MacLennan (1999:83-99) interprets as a remnant of an ancient Irish Gaelic celebration; St. Michael's Day was also celebrated with sport in South Uist (see ch. 3).

4. Hamish Telfer, in his article "Play, Customs and Popular Culture of West Coast Communities, 1840 – 1900", remarks that "events such as Highland Gatherings were often subject to the patronage and control of the local landlord or landlady. The timing of events, for example, often suited the social calendar of the patron more than the working pattern of the estate workers and other fractions of the working class" (1994:117). The Ardvachar games of 1898 probably had nothing to do with Uist's proprietor at the time, Lady Emily Gordon Cathcart, since she almost never visited the island and took little interest in her tenants' affairs. Funds for it came from the tenants themselves, as well as the catholic clergy.

5. See Gibson, 1998:225-6. According to Telfer (1999:113-124), villages in Skye commonly gathered for stone-throwing and shinty matches up to the 1850s, and similar activities constituted a typical Saturday evening in Lochgilphead in the 1860s and 70s; wrestling and leaping games were also indulged in by people throughout the west coast and islands, presumably to pass the time, when watching over a body the night before a burial. The *oda*, or horse-race meetings, were another typical Hebridean custom until the early nineteenth century; see ch. 3c and ch. 7, endnote 3.

6. *OT*, 12/7/1902 p. 2; 9/8/1924 p. 5; 5/8/1922 p. 2; 4/8/1928 p. 7; 15/8/1925 p. 7.

7. See Emmerson, 1972:7-26, 181-192. 'Pyrrhic' refers to dances involving weapons and meant for military drilling and exercise, such as the Dirk Dance, Gillie Calum or Argyll Broadwords.

8. The piping and dancing that year were judged by Brigadier-General Cheape, John MacDonald of Inverness and Sir John Bartholomew of Glenorchard. Little is known of General Cheape's knowledge of either art; MacDonald would have certainly been familiar with Highland dancing, but I doubt he was really qualified to judge it; and Bartholomew's tenure as a judge of piping at Askernish was quite long – from 1913 to 1927 – but there is no indication that he was a dancing expert. Bartholomew was a steadfast member of the Piobaireachd Society and its Music Committee (Campbell, 1977:41) and over the course of years was considered "a staunch friend to South Uist" (*OT*, 15/8/1931 p. 7) for his judging at the games.

9. See *OT*, 9/8/1924 p. 5; 15/8/1925 p. 7; 20/8/1927 p. 2.

10. The headlines appeared in *OT*, 9/8/1924 p. 5 and 13/8/1927 p. 2; see also 15/8/1925 p. 7.

11. See Trevor-Roper, 1983 for a discussion of Highland customs in the light of the 'invention of tradition'.

12. It remains uncertain if this was the same "John McLellan" who served with the Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders and died in Eochar on 20 December 1907; see ch. 6 endnote 3.

13. *OT*, 12/8/1905 p. 2; 7/9/1907 p. 2; 4/9/1909 p. 7; 12/8/1911 p. 5.

14. See MacMillan, Somerled, *Sporan Dhòmhnaill*, Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1968; for poetry concerning Uist pipers in the first World War, see chapter 9; for an example of his storytelling, see his rendition of *Piobairean Smearclait* in chapters 2 and 5c.
15. “Marbhrann do Dhomhnall Ruadh Mac an t-Saoir”, in MacDhomhnuill, 1973:64.
16. For detailed reminiscences of Rothiemurchus as a judge and Highland gentleman, see MacNeill and Richardson, 1987:108-122.
17. See Johnston, Scottish Tradition Cassette Series vol xiii: *Songs, Stories and Piping from Barra*.
18. The best published source for information on Angus MacAulay’s life is Picketts, 1995. Anecdotes still circulate in the South Uist community: Calum Beaton has referred to his composing of a competition 2/4 march known only as *Port Aonghuis Sheòrais*, or ‘Angus MacAulay’s Tune’ (26/11/2000), which reportedly has been written down only in an unpublished collection compiled by Catriona Garbutt of Benbecula; and Rona Lightfoot described MacAulay as an extremely gifted player of dance-music as well as of the standard competition tunes (SC 2001.024), reflecting perhaps the innate survival of the dance function in the Uist musical tradition this century (see ch. 10).
19. *OT*, 30/7/1970 p. 2; 19/8/1971 p. 3.



## CHAPTER NINE

*“A credit to the Hebrides, which has given of its best sons”:*

### **South Uist Piping and the Great War**

Military service has played an ever-present role in the cultivation of literate, competitive piping in South Uist.<sup>1</sup> Appendix B offers name after name of prominent local players, from the last decades of the nineteenth century to the present day, who have spent time in the army: Lachlan MacCormick, Angus MacLellan, John Steele, John (*Seonaidh Roidein*) MacDonald, Neil MacLennan, Archie MacDonald, William MacDonald, Calum Beaton, Donald John MacIntyre; these are but a latter-day few who have followed in the tradition of Clanranald’s patronised pipers from the Covenanters’ War to Sheriffmuir to the Heights of Abraham. Indeed, the military can justifiably be considered piping’s modern-day patron. Jessie MacAulay earlier attested to this regarding the early decades of the twentieth century: a Uist man too poor to own a set of pipes (and these were many) had but to enlist and he was furnished with all he needed. To an extent this form of patronage continues to the present day, and can be interpreted as having effectively replaced the patronage of clan chiefs in the eighteenth century and of Highland gentry in the nineteenth. On the whole, Uist’s affinity for military service (since the late nineteenth century at least) may arguably be put down to a genuine scarcity of employment options,<sup>2</sup> but, as the above suggests, the vestigial force of a deeply-rooted Highland martial tradition cannot be entirely ruled out.

This chapter aims to highlight the role of South Uist’s pipers in the First World War and the War’s effect on traditional life at home; this serves to illuminate the particulars of a significant aspect to the twentieth century tradition – military service – while also addressing the changes in Hebridean life which came as a result of post-war depression. While the 1939 – 45 War had a comparably disastrous impact throughout Scotland, the transition from an old-world way of life in South Uist to a more mainstream social culture had been long underway thanks to the events of 1914

–18. Traditional *céilidh* customs and local dances of great antiquity began to slowly fade from the scene around this time,<sup>3</sup> and the radio was introduced soon after; competitive piping lost, at least temporarily, a certain vibrancy as so few were left to play it (see below). As the present thesis aims fundamentally to portray this transition and its effects on local piping, emphasis is given accordingly to the Great War.

The Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders, and latterly the Lovat Scouts, have been the main recruiters in South Uist ever since the Inverness-shire militia were incorporated into the regular army in 1881 (see ch. 5b). Uist men probably felt at home among the Camerons, not only for the regiment's association with famous pipers<sup>4</sup> but also for their long-established Gaelic leanings: when first inspected at Stirling in January, 1794 and its strength raised to a thousand men, the regiment's patron and commander, Alan Cameron of Erracht, made sure that all recruits were Gaelic-speaking. "Erracht was so determined to have his regiment not merely nominally but really a Highland corps," writes Adam (1960:468-9), "that he enlisted none but Gaelic speakers, so that the 79<sup>th</sup> was long familiarly known as the *Cia mar thas!*" (*Ciamar a tha thu*'s, meaning the 'How are you's').

The seeds were sown. Over a hundred years later, the 3<sup>rd</sup> (Militia) Battalion Camerons contained so many monoglot Gaels from the Western Isles that its drill instructors were ordered to attend Gaelic language classes so as to better acquaint themselves with, and relate to, the men under them.<sup>5</sup> At the outbreak of the Great War, two-thirds of officers and men in the 1/4<sup>th</sup> (Territorial Force – formerly Militia) Battalion, which drew primarily from Skye and the Outer Hebrides, were Gaelic-speaking.<sup>6</sup>

The Lovat Scouts, though not principally associated with the Western Isles, would have contained many Gaelic-speakers as well. Simon Fraser, 16<sup>th</sup> Lord Lovat, had raised the regiment for the purposes of reconnaissance in the Boer War in 1900. Alasdair, Lovat's younger brother, was made a lieutenant. As their second contingent left for war in June of 1901, Lindley (1935:96) records that Alasdair was studying Gaelic; one could reasonably infer that he was doing so to cope with the number of Gaelic-speakers under his command. Soldiers and pipers from South Uist may have

been drawn to the Scouts for this reason, but they may also have been attracted by the regiment's catholic leanings.<sup>7</sup> In any case, by 1908 there were enough Uist-born soldiers in the Scouts to warrant large-scale training at home. The *Oban Times* records wargames and firing exercises being held by the regiment's 2<sup>nd</sup> Squadron in Eochar on 13 July of that year (25/7/1908/ p.7); every name on the published score-lists except a very few were typical of South Uist and Benbecula. Only one piper was listed among them, a James MacDonald, but there were probably others who played unofficially.

In addition to home exercises in these years, the men of each militia battalion were required to meet at their regimental headquarters annually for a month's training. Those of the Camerons met in Inverness every summer, during which time communities in South Uist could feel particularly empty, especially considering that summer was the season when young men were most needed at the peats and on the croft. The Benbecula correspondent to the *Oban Times* wrote in 1898:

“Most of our young men are now away to undergo their annual training in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion Cameron Highlanders. It is hoped, as this regiment is this year going to England to take part in the Autumn manoeuvres, that the men will prove themselves exemplary and worthy of their native land.” (27/8/1898 p. 6)

Ten years later the Eochar correspondent made a similar report, but could not refrain from hinting at the irony of native patriotism in the face of governmental neglect of the region's economic problems:

“Off To Camp – This district at present is almost entirely denuded of its young men, who are all either in the militia or the Lovat Scouts. The militiamen went for their annual training two weeks ago, and the Scouts on Tuesday morning last week. They assembled at midnight at the Gerinish crossroads and rode to Loch Skipport to await the arrival of the s.s. Dunara Castle ... The military spirit is very strong among the hardy and stalwart Hebrideans, and the Government can render no greater service to the country at large than by making it possible for these brave and capable men to earn a living at home.” (*OT*, 27/6/1908 p. 5)

Hebridean “military spirit” would hold dire consequences for South Uist’s militia and Lovat pipers in the years that followed.

The Great War of 1914 – 18 caused an upheaval in the daily routine of Highland life. During this period, the *Oban Times* frequently ran short biographic pieces on absent soldiers in order to cheer the hearts and fortify the morale of Highland communities emptied of their fighting-age men; it was a welcome distraction from the obituaries. On 5 February 1916, they published a photographic spread of five brothers posed in Highland and regimental dress under the title:

### A GALLANT UIST FAMILY

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#### FIVE SONS WITH THE COLOURS

These were the MacDonalds of Garryhellie,<sup>8</sup> sons of Ronald and Mary MacDonald; four of whom – Alexander, Archibald, Ronald and Angus – were pipers like their father before them. The war saw them scattered over the theatres in various regiments: Angus held a commission in the South African Forces; Alexander served with the Tyneside Scottish; the non-piper, John, was awarded for gallant conduct in France while serving with the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Contingent; Ronald also fought in France; and Archibald, or Archie (*Eairdsidh Raghnaill*), went to the Dardanelles with the Lovat Scouts. All but Angus survived the war. Archie would later have seven children, one of whom, Ronald, who died a young man, was a piper in the army while two others, Neil and Rona, are well known to the reader by now as pipers of note. “There are few families who can show such a fine record,” wrote the *Times* in 1916, “and they are a credit to the Hebrides, which has patriotically given of its best sons for King and Country” (5/2/1916 p. 2).

The Hebrides indeed gave its best during those four years, and as a result the daily flow of traditional life in South Uist was severed. The *céilidh*, Gaelic tradition’s primary social context at the time, became less common due to the gloom cast over communities by casualty reports and news from the front;<sup>9</sup> dancing a Reel or telling a



tale simply held no joy anymore. As storyteller Donald Alasdair Johnson of Loch Carnan told collectors of oral tradition in the early 1970s:

DAJ: *[gu] faigheadh tu rudeiginn air bàsachadh air falbh a choreiginn seach mar a b' àbh ... nach fhaigheadh tu an toil-inntinn 's an gnothach cho lively 's a bha e idir roimh'n a' chogadh. Chan fhaigheadh tu na daoine cho cridheil 's cho sunndach idir. Well, bha gu leòr dhe sinneach a thaobh feadhainn a chaill daoine 's a' chogadh ... Bha gu leòr dhiubh a thaobh an dòigh sin. (SA 1970/206/A2)*

DAJ: You would find that something had sort of died away compared to what used to be ... that you wouldn't find the pleasures and what have you at all so lively as they were before the war. You wouldn't find the people as hearty or joyful at all. Well, that was often enough the case for those who had lost people in the war ... and there were plenty in that way.

Indeed there were, as the statistics bear out. Out of over five and a half thousand officers and men of the Cameron Highlanders killed or mortally wounded in the Great War, 186 were from Barra, the Uists, Benbecula and Harris; of these, at least eighty-eight were from South Uist and Benbecula.<sup>10</sup> The number recorded is undoubtedly conservative and does not even take into account the casualties of other regiments.<sup>11</sup> Looking over the Camerons' Roll of Honour at the National War Memorial, it seems as if almost every township had cause to grieve: from Smerclate, Lochboisdale, Daliburgh and Askernish in the south, to Bornish, Stoneybridge and Stilligarry mid-way up, to Eochar, Creagorry and others towards the north – all had “given of their best sons”, often more than one, to King and Country.

Pipers were naturally the most conspicuous targets for enemy fire, so one's prospects for survival in a battalion band were not great. The statistics for the Cameron Highlanders tell a grim tale: of the 155 pipers who made up the battalions' bands, 69 were either killed or wounded. Of the thirty-four pipers in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion alone, among whom were South Uist's John Steele and 17-year old Archie Lindsay, twenty-one were killed or wounded, and this in addition to illness having “caused the disappearance of the band” as it entered Bulgaria (Seton and Grant, 1920:131); Steele



himself was wounded in February of 1915, but recovered. The 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion, probably containing the most South Uist pipers of any battalion in the war, lost fourteen out of forty-three and invalided six more.<sup>12</sup> They were hit particularly hard, as were the other battalions, at the Battle of Loos in September of 1915, in which “practically all the pipers became casualties” (*ibid*:132). The 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion’s pipe band was led at the time by Pipe Major William MacLean, one-time resident of Creagorry, Benbecula, who had been promoted and transferred from the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion’s band.

We are fortunate to have been left a glimpse of life among the Uist pipers of the 5<sup>th</sup> through the poetry of Snishival-born Donald MacIntyre, or *Dòmhnall Ruadh*, otherwise known as the Paisley Bard (see ch. 8). Piper, poet, and myriad other professions, Donald had completed a tour of duty in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion Camerons sometime before the war, serving as personal piper to Donald Walter Cameron of Lochiel, and upon the outbreak of war and formation of the 5<sup>th</sup> he again enlisted and was appointed Lochiel’s piper (MacMillan, 1968:xviii-xix). In his poem *Pìobairean Camshronach anns an Ruaig Mhór (1918)*, or “The Cameron Pipers in the Great Retreat (1918)” (*ibid*:40-42), he conveyed the action his battalion faced when falling back from the German army’s final offensive along the front lines in France:<sup>13</sup>

<p>“<i>Bu sgairteil am feachd air an t-sliabh ud,          ‘Gam faicinn ‘s Lochial air an ceann, –          A’ gluasad gu cruachanach, calpach,          Is suaicheantas Albann ri crann.</i>”</p>	<p>Frantic the fighting on that hill,          Seeing me and Lochiel at their head, –          Moving with heavy legs          And the standard of Scotland above us.</p>
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MacIntyre was able to convey the terrors he and other pipers faced with a poignant and wry humour:

“Nuair thàinig na Gearmailtich tarsuinn,  
 ‘S chuir iad an gas oirnn a nall,—  
 Chuir sinn ar n-aghaidh air Calais  
 Is thug sinn ar casan leinn ann;  
 Chaidh sinn a-stigh a dh’ Estaminet  
 Is cheannaich sinn galan de ‘n dram,  
 ‘S bha mise ‘s am Bòideach is Lachlann  
 S am pìge ma seach air ar ceann.  
 O, ‘s ann againn bha ‘n dram, —  
 Cha robh e ‘s an fhasan bhith gann;  
 Bu sud againn buideal is pìge  
 Agus botul-ar-fhichead Vin Blanc.”

When the Germans came across,  
 And sent the gas upon us, —  
 We about-faced toward Calais  
 And hoofed it without delay;  
 We made it to Estaminet  
 And bought a gallon of drams,  
 And the Bòideach and Lachlann and I  
 Took turns up-ending the pitcher.  
 Oh, indeed we had the drams, —  
 It wouldn’t do to hold back;  
 The cask and the pitcher were ours,  
 As were twenty-one bottles of *Vin Blanc*.

“The *Bòideach*” and “*Lachlann*” referred to were fellow South Uist pipers Alasdair Boyd of Eochar and Lachlan MacLean of Creagorry. Boyd lived latterly in Oban and gave much valuable information on local oral tradition and *puirt-à-beul* to the School of Scottish Studies (see ch. 2); MacLean competed in the South Uist Games before the war and placed third in the strathspey and reel in 1906. MacIntyre described other pipers whom we would have known otherwise only by their competition records:

“Fionnla’ Martainn is Tormad MacFhilip  
 Na sùilean gun sheas iad ‘nan ceann,  
 Nuair thàinig iad goirid dha ‘n station,  
 Gun sgial air an tréan ‘s i air chall.  
 O, chan urrainn sinn ann,  
 Ciamar is urrainn sinn ann;  
 Chan urrainn sinn coiseachd nas fhaide,  
 ‘S an t-acras ‘gar dalladh ‘s sinn fann.”

Fionnla’ Martainn and Tormad MacFhilip  
 Their eyes stood in their heads,  
 When they approached the station and found  
 No word on the train, as it was lost.  
 Oh, we can’t get there,  
 How can we get there,  
 We can walk no farther  
 Being faint and blinded by hunger.

MacIntyre refers in this stanza to Finlay Martin of Daliburgh and Norman MacKillop, a piper from Harris. Martin had attended the Piobaireachd Society

courses under John MacDonald, Inverness. He must have been a very young soldier in the 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion, perhaps just seventeen like his contemporaries Archie Lindsay in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and *Seonaidh Roidein* in the 7<sup>th</sup>, since he placed second in a march, strathspey and reel event for juniors at Askernish in 1913. He went on to place highly at the games in the post-war years (see chart).

Piping in South Uist at this time would have been affected as much as any other cultural institution on the island. Literate, competitive piping probably suffered more than ear-learned dance-piping in these years, since many who could read staff notation had either learned in the Piobaireachd Society courses or as members of the militia battalions, or both; hence, when the battalions were called out, there were simply few pipers left in wartime South Uist who could read music. The situation would have been parallel to that of the 1939 – 45 War, which caused a similar haemorrhage. Calum Beaton recalled:

CB: *Bha an fheadhainn a' dèanadh piobaireachd ceart, bha iad sa' Chogadh. Cha robh air fhàgail a seo ach seann daoine ... Mar sin, cha do rinn mi mòran gus an tig [sic] caraid, a thill dhachaidh as a' Chogadh – Alasdair Peutan ... 'S e a thug dhomh a' chiad tòiseachadh air an fheadan. (SA 1998.70)*

CB: Those who could play correctly, they were in the War. There was nobody left here but old people ... So, I didn't do much until a relative returned from the War – Alasdair Beaton ... It was he who first started me on the chanter.

Though literate pipers like Donald MacIntyre and those to whom he referred in his poem survived the war and returned home, there were many who didn't. Pipers who lived on only as names on the granite memorial south of Bornish: Neil Wilson, Donald MacPhee, Alex MacEachan, and so on.<sup>14</sup> In addition, Pipe Major William Lawrie of the 8<sup>th</sup> Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, who had been brought in by the South Uist Piping Society in 1913 to teach its course in Balivanich, was wounded two years later and soon after died of illness (see ch. 6c). It comes as no surprise, then, that eight years elapsed from the outbreak of war before the games at Askernish

began again, which says as much for the organisational depression of the time as it does for a decline, albeit temporary, in the mainstream idiom's vitality.

We can reasonably infer that the situation for *ceòl cluais* in these years was broadly parallel to that of storytelling, which shared the same cultural context in South Uist (see ch. 2). Both would have suffered as a consequence of the decline of the traditional *céilidh*. Donald Alasdair Johnson described the striking change to collector D.A. MacDonald:

DAM: *'S bha gnothach nan sgeulachdan, cha mhór nach do sguir e leis a' chogadh fhéin.*

DAJ: *O cha mhór gu dearbh. Cha chualas mórán dhe as deaghaidh a' Chogaidh Mhóir. Cha chualas mórán de sgeulachdan 'gan gabhail air feadh thaighean.*

DAM: *Aye. Mun do dh' fhalbh sibh bha iad 'gan gabhail.*

DAJ: *O bha iad 'gan gabhail. 'S e an aon chluichd a bha 'dol a' cur seachad na h-oidhcheadh a's a' gheamhradh, eadar cairtean is sgeulachdan. (SA 1971/43/A2)*

DAM: And the practice of storytelling, it was nearly stopped by the war itself.

DAJ: Nearly indeed. Not much of it was heard after the Great War. Not many tales were heard being told throughout the houses.

DAM: Aye. Before you went away [to war] they were being told.

DAJ: Oh yes they were being told. It was the only thing going around to pass the evening in the winter, between cards and tales.

The depression caused by the Great War was not itself responsible for the demise of ear-piping in South Uist. Rather, this was the long-term effect of the Piobaireachd Society courses, the Highland games, and the growing overall importance of staged competition and literacy that these institutions represented. However, the War's effect on tradition in Highland communities did signal the beginning of the end for the old-style *céilidh* in the twentieth century, such as in the manner described by Johnson; and being Gaelic musical tradition's primary social context, this could not have but facilitated the decline of *ceòl cluais* in South Uist.

1. See chapters 5b and 6a for discussion on Uist's pre twentieth-century martial tradition and the military's contribution to literacy by the turn of the century.
2. When the late Gaelic storyteller Angus MacLellan was coming of age in Loch Eynort, South Uist in the 1880s, he found that he had three choices, as J.L. Campbell explains in *The Furrow Behind Me* (MacLellan, 1962:xiii): "Escape from these conditions was only to be made by seeking employment elsewhere. For an islander this usually meant the armed forces or the merchant marine, where one could get by with a minimum of English; a job on a mainland farm where Gaelic was spoken; or emigration to Canada." MacLellan enlisted in the militia in 1889.
3. Flett and Flett (1964) discuss the disappearance of old dances like *Cailleach an Dùdain* and the threesome Reel in the Hebrides around the time of the Great War, to be replaced often by the Quadrilles and Lancers of mainstream influence (see ch. 10).
4. The Cameron Highlanders were well-known for their pipers since the Napoleonic Wars. Kenneth MacKay is famously credited with playing the pibroch *Cogadh no Sìth*, War or Peace, around the square his battalion had formed in preparation for the Battle of Waterloo (Malcolm, 1927:159), for which he received the Victoria Cross; another Cameron piper, Donald Stewart, took second place at the HSL competition for *ceòl mòr* in 1824 and first in 1825 (MacKay, 1838:13). John MacDonald, Inverness was for years a Pipe Major in the Cameron's Volunteer and Territorial Battalions (see ch. 6c). To date, forty-four of the winners of the HSL gold medal, from Donald MacRae in 1791 to Alasdair Gillies in 1989, have served with the Cameron (or the amalgamated Queen's Own) Highlanders (*Cabar Feidh Collection*, 1983:282-292; Argyllshire Gathering prize-lists).
5. "Recruiting from the Highlands" in *Oban Times*, 7 May 1898 p. 3. The order was given by a General Chapman, commanding Scottish forces, upon inspection of the battalion's drill instructors in Inverness. Classes were immediately started under a "Sergt-Piper Cameron".
6. *Historical Records of the Cameron Highlanders* vol iii, p. 422.
7. The Frasers of Lovat were traditionally catholic; the 15<sup>th</sup> Lord in fact built a church at Eskdale and donated land in Fort William for a Benedictine monastery (Lindley, 1935:24). Mass was even performed at the South African front for Lovat's troops (see photograph, *ibid*:92).
8. See section 7a for more detail on this family.
9. Over a thousand pipers are estimated to have been killed or wounded in the first World War; Bruce Seton remarked in the preface to *The Pipes of War* (1920) that "with over 500 pipers killed and 600 wounded, something must be done to raise a new generation of players"; see also Donaldson, 2000:318-9.
10. See *Historical Records* vol iv, p. 515, appendix D. Cf. the Cameron Highlanders' Roll of Honour at the National War Memorial, Edinburgh Castle, for the number of casualties specifically from South Uist and Benbecula.
11. There was some over-lapping among regiments that makes definite casualty figures elusive. The Lovat Scouts, for instance, second only to the Camerons in recruiting from the South Uist area, consisted of two battalions that were amalgamated into the 10<sup>th</sup> (Reserve) Battalion of the Camerons in 1916 in order to build up infantry strength. Some South Uist men killed or wounded who enlisted



initially in the Lovat Scouts were therefore named in the casualty lists of both regiments. See *Historical Records*, vol iv, p. 389; Malcolm, 1927:190-191; Rolls of Honour, National War Memorial, Edinburgh Castle.

12. Breaking the figures down, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion lost nine out of seventeen pipers; the 2<sup>nd</sup>, twenty-one out of thirty-four; the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion (presumably the 3<sup>rd</sup> fed reserves to the others) lost eight out of fifteen; the 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion lost fourteen out of forty-three, by far the largest band with most of its pipers coming from the Western Isles; six out of eighteen were killed or wounded in the 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion; and the 7<sup>th</sup>, in which sixteen-year old *Seonaidh Roidein* served, lost eleven out of twenty-eight. Data extrapolated from Seton and Grant, 1920:130-135.

13. The German offensive lasted from March of 1918 to late summer, by which time the British (mainly Scottish) contingents were able to respond and end the war; the Camerons, led by Pipe Major William MacLean of the 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion band, were the first to cross the Rhine into Germany. See *Historical Records* vol iv, pp. 118-123.

14. Cf. Seton and Grant, 1920:131-135 with the Camerons' Roll of Honour.

## CHAPTER TEN

### ***“B’ fheàrr leotha fear a bha cluichd leis a’ chluas”:***

### **Aesthetics and Transmission in South Uist Piping**

The above title translates as “They preferred someone who played by ear,” something Jessie MacAulay remarked of dancers in the *céilidhs* of bygone days. As it suggests, aural transmission of music is closely associated with dance in the traditional Gaelic world.<sup>1</sup> The reasons underlying the association, at least in the Hebridean quarter, are largely cultural and functional: the aural idiom comprised music picked up by ear within the surroundings of the *céilidh* and played specifically to provide rhythm for dancing; it flourished, therefore, within the social setting of the old-world Gael. The literate idiom instead comprises staged competition, playing music learned from staff notation in a setting divorced from traditional dance and the associated milieu of *céilidh* customs. Thus in South Uist, aurally-learned piping was associated with local dance while literately-learned piping implied, in its transmission and performance, a wholly distinct cultural and functional environ. That *ceòl chluais* survived as long as it did alongside the mainstream tradition in South Uist is testimony in itself to the community’s conservative nature, and has undoubtedly had a bearing on how local pipers perceive, apprehend and evaluate their own music.

There are no genuine exponents of the ear-learned dance-piping tradition left in Uist<sup>2</sup> as mainstream games culture and the decline of the traditional *céilidh* (occasioned by war and television<sup>3</sup>) have undermined its social and functional value, but a collective memory still exists among informants of a certain age. This penultimate chapter, therefore, is devoted to the local ear-learned idiom, its association with dance, its relationship to the literate idiom and how it has influenced local aesthetic perspectives. In section 10a, I give a brief background to traditional dance in South Uist in order to provide some functional context; in section 10b, I argue that both the ear-learned and the notation-learned (or note-learned) idioms are bound by a local aesthetic sensitive to the context of associated traditions, whether it

be in the *céilidh* or on the platform; it also addresses the aesthetic paradox encountered when informants evaluated music of different idioms based on different functional standards. Section 10c looks at the ‘voiced’ and ‘unvoiced’ aesthetics in Gaelic tradition and reviews their presence among South Uist pipers; and section 10d addresses the co-existence of aurally-learned and literately-learned music in local pipers’ repertoires and explores the reasons behind it.

### 10.a. Traditional Dance

The character of dance itself in South Uist has changed over the course of the twentieth century. Modern Scottish Country dances such as the Eightsome Reel, a Lowland development, and the Quadrilles, imported from Paris after the Napoleonic Wars, are often danced in local town halls today but were virtually unknown in Hebridean communities before the late nineteenth century.<sup>4</sup> The Fletts, for instance, were told by an informant on traditional dance customs that in Eriskay in 1895, “They were not keen on Country Dances at all. Give them the Scotch Reel and the Highland Schottische all the time” (1964:3). The Schottische appeared about 1855 and has since been used as a step in a variety of Reels (*ibid*:103). The Scotch Reel is indeed considered to have been the “supreme social dance of Scotland” (Emmerson, 1972:152) in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as much in South Uist as anywhere else. The Fletts observed:

“Throughout the mainland of Scotland and in the Western Isles, the commonest Reel within living memory was the Scotch (Foursome) Reel.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, up to about 1880-90 this dance was so popular among the ordinary working people of the Central and West Highlands and the Western Isles that in these regions it was almost the only dance in the local repertoire.” (1964:2)

This is supported by Frederick Rea’s memoirs of time spent in South Uist between 1890 and 1913, in which he occasionally comments on local dance. On a

day out to the sea-side with a hundred and fifty schoolchildren in tow, “pipes were playing and many of the older children were dancing reels” (1964:82). He later observed the Scotch Reel at an evening dance for eighteen-and-over’s<sup>6</sup>: “The dance went on into early morning, reel succeeding reel as though there were no other dance, and I strongly suspected this to be the only dance they knew” (*ibid*:134). Reels were almost always danced to common-time strathspeys and reels,<sup>7</sup> the only exception being a number of pantomimic dances collected by researchers in South Uist and Barra such as *Cath nan Coileach*, or the Combat of the Cocks, and *Cailleach an Dùdain*, or the Old Wife of the Mill-dust, which were performed to compound-time jigs until around the turn of the century (Flett, 1964:87,167; Emmerson, 1972:225, 231, 239). Alexander Carmichael witnessed many such dances in South Uist in the late nineteenth century, some on the occasion of Michaelmas: “The song and the dance, the mirth and the merriment, are continued all night, many curious scenes being acted, and many curious dances being performed, some of them in character” (1928, i:206). Of *Cailleach an Dùdain*, he observed: “The tune varies with the varying phases of the dance. It is played by a piper or a fiddler, or sung as a ‘port-a-bial’, mouth tune, by a looker-on, or by the performers themselves” (*ibid*:207) .

The tradition of singing to provide a rhythm, as opposed to playing an instrument – such as the *port-à-beul* tradition – is of great antiquity across the West Highland seaboard, as was discussed earlier in chapters 2a and 5d. *Port-à-beul* survived in South Uist well into the twentieth century, which says much for the conservative nature of Uist’s Gaelic social culture, but even before the turn of the century, imported Scottish Country dances were gaining an appreciable foothold. This appears to have been due to class differences and social changes as much as to the whims of national popularity: for example, in stark contrast to sea-side Reeling, kitchen foursomes, blackhouse balls and the enacting of *Cailleach an Dùdain* among the common folk, a dance was held at Lochboisdale Hotel sometime after 1890 to which Frederick Rea was invited. A lavish drawing room set the scene for thirty to forty of Uist’s ‘high society’ – the proprietor, the clergymen, the banker, the factor, the doctor, several tenants of the largest farms, the accountant, the estate office clerk, a “gallant captain of the Camerons and one of the heroes of Dargai”,<sup>8</sup> etc. The music

was supplied solely by a piano – “several ladies willingly presiding there in turn” – and a few “Scottish songs” were sung. Rea himself recited Shakespeare. The dances reflected contemporary British rather than traditional Gaelic tastes: “I was happy to dance again the polka, the waltz, the quadrille, and the lancers,” writes Rea, “which were the dances in vogue when I had first left my native city to come to the Hebrides” (1964:149-50).

The nature of the professions listed gives the impression that, like Rea who hailed from Birmingham, many of the guests were not native to the Hebrides. This, as much as their place on Uist’s social ladder, explains the evening’s lack of indigenous Gaelic flavour; no pipe or fiddle played for a Foursome Reel at this party. However, the late nineteenth century would see the spread of Country dances beyond the confines of the Hebridean upper class, due in great part to the visits of itinerant professional dance masters (Emmerson, 1972:280). In Rea’s time alone, at least two such masters included South Uist among their rounds, teaching the fashionable Country dances as well as more traditional social dances and those solo dances introduced to South Uist earlier in the century by Ewan MacLachlan.<sup>9</sup> A woman from Perth, for instance, retained her own fiddler and taught in Uist during the winter months (Rea, 1964:vi) and a man named MacDougall taught occasionally on the island from 1890 to 1912 (Flett and Flett, 1964:22). By the mid-point of the twentieth century, Country dances were a common fixture in the local repertoire. Calum Beaton illustrates this during a discussion on the kinds of tunes played for dancing in the *céilidhs* of the 1950s:

JD: *Dé seòrsa puirt a bha sibh a’ cluichd?*

CB: *Bha sinn a’ cluichd marches gu leòr airson danns’ a bha gu math bitheanta aig an àm, Canadian Barn Dance ... ‘S e 2/4 marches a bha thu cluichd an àm sin, ged a chluichd thu na bu luaidhe na chluichdeas tu aig farpaisean. Agus bha ruidhliidhean gu math tric, airson eightsome reels, jigs airson quadrilles, 6/8s a bha sin. Gu leòr dhiubh co-dhiubh, ‘s e ceòl cluais ... Bha feadhainn dhiubh as an leabhar, ach bha e cho furasda dhuinn na puirt a thogail mar sin. (SC 2001.025)*

JD: What sort of tunes were you playing?



CB: We were playing many marches for a dance that was quite popular at that time, the Canadian Barn Dance ... It's 2/4 marches you'd play then, though you'd play faster than you would at competitions. And there were reels very often, for eightsome reels, jigs for quadrilles, those were 6/8s. Enough of them anyway, it's ear-music ... A few of them were from the book, but it was so easy for us to pick them up that way.

Both Beaton's and MacAulay's extracts above testify to the association of dance with aural transmission of music among South Uist pipers, independent of the dance's character – whether it be a Foursome Reel or the Military Two-Step. This is a fundamental property of local aesthetics in South Uist, and one which sets the theme for the rest of the chapter.

### 10.b. Toward a Local Aesthetic

For our purposes, we may define musical aesthetics as a society's evaluation of their own music, culturally embedded and expressed in a variety of ways both verbal and behavioural. Merriam (1964:261-269) has listed the six factors which he feels characterise the nature of the voiced and analytical aesthetic commonly found in western or other urban, literate societies: the presence of psychic distance (to be explained below); manipulation of form for its own sake – like composition, it presupposes a knowledge of such elements as rhythm, pitch and melody and a cultural imperative to manipulate them; emotion-producing qualities attributed to music conceived strictly as sound; attribution of beauty to the piece and/or the process; a purposeful intent to create something 'aesthetic'; and lastly, the presence of a philosophy of an aesthetic. In considering their relevance to non-western or traditional societies, Merriam writes:

“It seems impossible to determine which of these is the most important, if any one of them is, or whether the absence of one, two, three or more indicates a lack of an aesthetic. If, however, the six factors are correctly adduced, their limited attribution or their absence in

another society would seem to indicate serious question as to the presence of an aesthetic, defined always in Western terms.” (1964:261)

Thus if a society’s aesthetic lacks one or more of the above criteria, then their aesthetic cannot, by Merriam’s definition, be typically western. Pipers in South Uist display a few characteristics reflecting this model: like Highland pipers elsewhere, they can manipulate the form of existing tunes and at times compose new ones; they are capable of attributing beauty to a piece or performance; and they engage in critical discussion of piping, though, as will be discussed in the following section, this last implies influence outwith native Gaelic tradition. One may conclude, therefore, that South Uist piping today possesses an aesthetic that is recognisably ‘western’ when viewed from certain angles. But the Uist pipers’ sensitivity to context when evaluating their music is, by its sheer acuity, outwith Merriam’s model. A piper playing a competition-idiom reel for a Scotch Foursome in an old-world *céilidh*, for example, would receive quizzical looks from the dancers because the tempo and melodic nuance would be regarded as unsuitable; and a piper playing instrumental *puirt-à-beul* on the platform at the Askernish games would receive equally short shrift for much the same reason. While this particular aesthetic quality can be attributed to all Highland piping in Scotland, it nonetheless illustrates in practical terms the relevance of functional context in South Uist. This leads us to focus for a moment on one particular element in Merriam’s list – psychic distance – which, despite his reservations about placing more or less relevance on any single point, can indeed hinge on the difference between the aesthetic of analytical discourse and the aesthetic of contextual and unvoiced functional preference. The term implies a sense of objectivity, that an observer within a society can stand back and analyse that society’s music, or a performance of it, with a detached awareness of the sum of its parts. Stokes (1994:2-3) has observed that this can occur in our urban civilisation whenever we turn on a radio and listen to a song or melody unfamiliar to us, not knowing who composed it, when or why. Still, we evaluate it and find it pleasing or dis-pleasing depending on our personal tastes, and often express such tastes verbally. The absence of psychic distance, on the other hand, leaves an aesthetic based not only on the sheer artistry or beauty of the music

concerned, but on the social and functional values associated with it. This is the type of aesthetic observed among many peoples who lack an extensive musical vocabulary or maintain a non-literate tradition.<sup>10</sup> McAllester, for instance, wrote of the Western Apache:

“There is little esthetic discussion in our sense. Appreciation of a song is nearly always phrased in terms of understanding it – of knowing what it is for. One or two informants did speak of preferring songs with long choruses and short verses since these are easier to learn, but the usual preference was for the important healing songs or the sacred songs in the puberty ceremony. This ‘functional esthetic’ is found very widely among preliterate peoples.” (1960:471-2)

Merriam has problems accepting McAllester’s use of the phrase “functional esthetic” as he figures that music evaluated largely by its function could not foster an aesthetic in his defined terms – i.e., one without overt context (Merriam, 1964:271). However, more recent ethnographic studies show that a folk society can find its music pleasing (or dis-pleasing) and can verbalise its appreciation (or criticism) *because* of the music’s context as much as a literate society can in the absence of it. Of the Bulgarian bagpipe tradition, for example, Rice observed that playing the *gaida* well, in the opinion of native players, entails “good ornamental technique and a strong sense of rhythm” (1994:48) because the greatest priority lies on dance music, wedding dances in particular, and the ability to play “lightly”. One can see how playing lightly (the ability to make rapid, easy finger-movements) facilitates both ornamental technique and good rhythm, which in turn makes for better dancing. The functional context, therefore, guides the evaluation. This is also true of the Cape Breton fiddling tradition in that bowing techniques and intra-rhythmic expression are based fundamentally on step-dance accompaniment (Dunlay and Greenberg, 1996:4, 12-14). Furthermore, Cooke found that to the Shetland fiddler, rhythm is all-important so that particular steps could be established when his music is danced to (1986:98). Of course, rhythmic function is not the only factor in a positively-valued musical performance for any of these examples; in South Uist particularly, the manipulation of musical form, the feedback that occurs between instrumentalist and

dancer, and the music's conformity to surrounding custom can all have a direct bearing. Nevertheless, a performance's evaluation is influenced largely by its contextual value. The following will show that the South Uist piping tradition is a similar example of a context-sensitive aesthetic in that the surrounding function, be it for *céilidh*-dancing or for competition, plays a prominent role in one's evaluative criteria.

In South Uist, literate transmission is fundamentally associated with competition and technique, while the process of learning tunes aurally and the performance of ear-learned tunes – *ceòl chluais* – comprise an idiom fundamentally associated with dance and, by extension, timing. Therein lie both its functional value and the reason for its survival in the local tradition. Jessie MacAulay hinted at one point about the functionality of ear-music in the context of dancing, how it fitted into the Uist aesthetic in the early decades of the twentieth century, and why:

JD: *Am biodh tu a' cluichd airson dannsa anns na seann laithean?*

JM: *Bhiodh. Bhithinn a' cluichd the Military Two-Step, Scotch Reels; cha robh me a' cluichd airson Eightsome Reels no Quadrilles, bha iad cho fada.*

JD: ... *An robh daoine an uairsin ag ionnsachadh le chluas?*

JM: *Bha, bha gu dearbh – cha robh cothrom aca co-dhiubh air leabhar a dh' ionnsachadh ... Bha feadhainn dhiubh math math, gu h-àraid air ceòl dannsa; b' fheàrr leotha fear a bha a' cluichd leis a' chluas air ceòl dannsa, na fear a bha mach as a' leabhar air ceòl dannsa.*  
(SA 1998.68)

JD: Would you be playing for dances in the old days?

JM: Yes. I'd be playing for the Military Two-Step, Scotch Reels; I wasn't playing for Eightsome Reels or Quadrilles, they were so long.

JD: ... Were people at that time learning by ear?

JM: Yes indeed – they had no opportunity anyway to learn from a book. Some of them were very good, especially with dance-music; they preferred one who played dance-music by ear to one who played dance-music out of a book.

She reiterates this in a later interview:

JM: *B' fheàrr leotha, na dannsairean, b' fheàrr leotha fear a bha cluichd leis a' chluais na fear a bha ... as a' mhusic.*

JD: ... *Carson a tha siud?*

JM: *Bha barrachd lightness air choireigin ann ... Bha rhythm air choireigin aige, fhios agaibh. Cha robh e cut-and-dry. Bha lilt air choireigin anns a' cheòl chluais nach robh anns a' cheòl eile. (SA 1998.71)*

JM: They preferred, the dancers, they preferred someone playing by ear to someone playing by the staff notation.

JD: ... Why is that?

JM: It had more lightness ... It had some kind of rhythm, you see. It wasn't cut-and-dry. There was a kind of lilt in the ear-music that wasn't in the other music.

MacAulay's use of the word "lilt" calls to mind its use by Shetland fiddlers. Cooke found that it "pertains to the rhythmic flow of the melody" (1986:98) and is used by Shetlanders to describe the dynamic accents made with the bow by ear-learned players so that notes equally-valued on the stave become unequal and given to lights and shades in practice. It is what Dunlay and Greenberg refer to as the "subtle inequality of note-lengths" that characterises the style of traditional Cape Breton fiddling (1996:13); it adds bounce to a tune which, Cooke contends, makes Shetlanders "feel like dancing". This recalls MacAulay's memories of dance-piping in South Uist exactly. It seems therefore that the community of MacAulay's youth preferred ear-learned music to note-learned music when dancing because its rhythms were perceived to more naturally facilitate the steps involved; something that Calum Beaton confirmed when explaining what, in his experience, makes a good performance for dance-piping:

JD: *Nuair a bhios tu cluichd airson banais no céilidh no rud sam bith, am bi preference agad dé chluicheas tu?*

CB: *Tha mi smaoineadh a h-uile piobaire, bidh puirt aige fhéin, tha e smaointinn co-dhiubh, a tha freagairt air dannsa na's fheàrr na port air choireigin eile. Feadhainn de phuirt, tha iad trom – car doirbh a chluichd – is bidh e feuchainn ri port car simplidh, mar sin. 'S e an time-eadh aig an danns' a tha cunntais ... Nam fàgadh tu as gracenote thall 's a bhos, chan*



*eil duine dol a ghearain mu dheidhinn sin fhad 's a tha deagh time-eadh agad.* (SC 2001.025)

JD: When you are playing for a wedding or a *céilidh*, etc., do you have a preference as to what you play?

CB: I think that every piper, he has tunes, he believes so anyway, that better suit dancing than some other tune. Some tunes are heavy – quite difficult to play – and therefore he'll try a relatively simple tune. It's the timing of the dance that counts ... If you leave out a gracenote here and there, no one will complain about that while you have good timing.

“Timing”, then, or rhythm and tempo, is the most important factor of good dance-piping in Beaton's experience, just as it was in MacAulay's. Local dancing may have changed somewhat in character and form since the nineteenth century, but these findings suggest that music learned aurally is perceived by the South Uist community to make for better dancing in any case – whether it be Reeling to instrumental *puirt-à-beul* or the latest continental waltz. One finds the same principle in the traditions of Shetland and Bulgaria; in Orkney, too, the Fletts encountered this with regard to fiddling. “The essence of good dance-fiddling,” they wrote, “was once very succinctly stated by an old Orkney fiddler, Danny Rosie. At a dance on the island of Flotta about 1920, a young fiddler playing with Danny Rosie stumbled over a difficult part of the music and fell out of time with the dancers. Afterwards, Danny Rosie commented on this and told the young player ‘never lose time by trying to get in a note – the dancers won't notice if you leave it out. There are only three things which are important when you are playing for dancing, time, sound, and dird’ ” (1964:47). One can hear Beaton's words echoed in this account. “Dird”, according to the Fletts, was to Orkney what “lilt” was to Shetland and, as we've seen, to Jessie MacAulay.

If the community in MacAulay's day preferred *ceòl chuais* to staff-notated music when dancing, the difference in timing must necessarily have been the reason why. Aurally-learned piping was perceived to provide more suitable rhythms for the stepping and travelling of the Reels than literately-learned piping because a tune picked up by ear implied that it had been learned in the *céilidh* – i.e. in the same social setting as the Reel itself. Naturally, the timing of the tune would fit the Reel

steps as the dancers were accustomed to performing them. A tune learnt by the book, however, implied music heard on the competition platform, with gracenoting too cumbersome and a tempo too plodding for the Reels as they were locally danced. The whole environment of transmission, essentially, was different. One need only recall MacAulay saying that dance-tunes in the *céilidhs* of her youth, when the Scotch Reel was still supreme, were basically instrumental versions of *puirt-à-beul* (ch. 2a) to see the intuitive connection dancers must have felt with the music of ear-learned local pipers, and how the timing of the tunes would have encouraged their dancing – i.e. facilitated their steps – far more than would tunes learned in written measures with a comparatively dragging tempo and no basis for improvisation. Tunes that were in effect “cut-and-dry”, as she put it. From this point of view, the difference between aurally-learned and literately-learned piping within the South Uist tradition emerges as cultural as well as musicological, perceived as well as real: aurality implied one culture, literacy another.

If we accept that timing was and remains the most important factor in good dance-piping in South Uist, it follows that *ceòl cluais*, as an idiom of performance, requires competition-idiom technique less so; this is what Calum Beaton had in mind when commenting below that the ear-learned piper would not succeed in competition, where technique is king. Conversely, he feels that modern competition piping dismisses over-much the “natural” timing for which his long familiarity with the *ceòl cluais* idiom has bred great appreciation:

CB: *Bha feadhainn dhe na chluichdeadh an ceòl cluais a bha sin, 's e an fheadhainn a bha, a dh' ionnsaich na scale, is rudan mar sin, b' fheàrr leam-sa bhith 'g éisdeachd riubha a chionn 's gu robh timing aca cho nàdurra. Piobairean matha an-diugh, tha iad a' chluichd airson a bhith cho buileach ceart, is tha iad a' call pàirt dhen cheòl nàdurra a bh' aig na seann daoine a bha dol an uair ud.*

JD: *Chan fhaigheadh iad duais ann an co-fharpais ach ...*

CB: *O chan fhaigheadh iad duais sian air farpais gu dearbh!*

JD: *... ach math airson éisdeachd?*

CB: *Bha iad math, ag éisdeachd riu', is nuair bha thu a' dannsa riu'; cus na b' fheàrr na bhith a' danns ri cuideiginn a bha uamhasach math gu bhith 'gléidheadh duais air na*

*farpaisean. An-diugh, feumaidh a h-uile sian a bhith cho ceart. Tha iad a' call air an timing nàdurra.*

JD: *Siud a tha air chall an-diugh?*

CB: *Well 'nam bheachd-sa, tha, co-dhiubh. (SC 2001.025)*

CB: Of those who used to play the ear-music, I preferred listening to those who learned the scale and so forth, because they had such natural timing. Good pipers today, they play so entirely correctly that they lose something of the natural music that the old people had at that time.

JD: They wouldn't win a prize at a competition but...

CB: Oh, of course they wouldn't win a thing in competition!

JD: ...but good to listen to?

CB: They were good, listening to them, and when you were dancing to them; much better than dancing to someone who was awfully good at gaining prizes in competition. Today, everything must be so correct. They lose the natural timing.

JD: That's what's lost today?

CB: Well, in my opinion at least, yes.

Beaton is clearly influenced enough by his literate training to require accurate fingering technique in the appraisal of a performance, but likewise appreciates the timing that the elderly ear-pipers in his youth displayed in the *taigh-céilidh*. This seems to form a personal aesthetic which combines the two idioms – i.e., finding most pleasing the ear-music of “those who learned the scale”, i.e. those who learned the technical rudiments. That this aesthetic sense reflects that of all other pipers in South Uist, both past and present, cannot be ascertained; but it is significant that of those pipers interviewed, only one explicitly rejected one idiom in favour of the other.<sup>11</sup>

*Ceòl chuais*, then, in accordance with its function in the Uist community, emphasises timing just as staff notation emphasises technique. Through the course of interviewing, I was struck by the impression that this leads to an aesthetic paradox: pipers tended to contrast what they termed ‘correct’ playing, i.e. playing by staff notation, and playing by ear – the implication being that *ceòl chuais* is inherently incorrect – while praising each for its respective function. Put another

way, those spoken of as exceptional dance-pipers were in the same breath dismissed as being ‘not good’ – implying that they did not possess the mechanically precise fingerwork needed to succeed in competition. The frequency with which I encountered this perception gives a clear impression of how far mainstream influence has penetrated local tradition since the nineteenth century, when literate competitive piping was uncommon in Uist, likely the domain of the Volunteer Battalions, and most piping was performed for *céilidh*-dancing. It is this paradox, this emic evaluation of different idioms based on different functional standards, which first suggested to me the idea of an aesthetic based overall on function and context in South Uist. It is this paradox which allowed Louis Morrison to speak of a neighbouring piper as having been “never very good” but who “played dance music well” (22/4/99), and which prompted Rona Lightfoot to say:

RL: *Nis, Niallaidh Scott, cha robh e dol a-staigh airson co-fharpais idir, ach cha chual’ thu riamh cho math ‘sa chluich e airson dannsa. (SC 2001.024)*

RL: Now, Neillie Scott, he was never one for competing at all, but you never heard such good dance-piping.

This was also the case for Calum Beaton when speaking of his father, his township, and the older generation of pipers who resided there. One can see how he distinguishes between “correct” piping (i.e. competition-idiom) and ear-piping (i.e. *ceòl chuais*) while positively evaluating both:

CB: *Ged a chluichdeadh m’athair, cha b’e pìobaire math a bh’ ann. Ach an aon rud a bha math mun deidhinn ... na seann daoine bha sin a bha cluichd, bha time-eadh, mar a chanas iad, aca bha air leth math. A chionn bha iad eòlach air a bhith a’ cluichd do dhannsairean. ‘S toigh leam a’ smaoineadh gun do thog mi pàirt dhe sin, a chionn bhite ‘gam iarraidh gu math tric, no co-dhiubh roimhidh seo, airson cluichd do dhannsairean is games is céilidhean is rudan mar sin.*

JD: ... *A bheil Staoineabrog ainmeil idir airson pìobaireachd air an eilean?*

CB: *Well 's e na Smithich a bha sin, is Alasdair Peutan, is Ruairidh; bha mòran do phiobairean, mar a bha mi 'g ràdh riut, a chluichdeadh ceòl cluaiseadh; 's e a chanainn e. Playing by ear.*

JD: *Sin an dòigh a bh' aig Alasdair is Ruairidh Peutan?*

CB: *O chan eil – bha iad-san suas ris. Leughadh iad an ceòl. Fhuair iad, dh' ionnsaich iad ceart e. Ach a' chuid as motha dhe na seann daoine bh' ann ... Bha an fheadhainn a dhèanadh pìobaireachd ceart, bha iad sa' Chogadh. Cha robh air fhàgail a seo ach seann daoine. Gu leòr dhiubh sin anns a' bhaile seo, a chluichdeadh air feadan is a' phìob cuideachd, ach **cha robh iad math idir**. Bha timing aca bha air leth math, co-dhiubh na's fheàrr na chluinneas tu an-diugh, ach ... Bha tòrr dhiubh, ach bhàsaich iad. Bha Ailean Còcair'; chluichdeadh fear dhe na gillean aige cuideachd, ach cha robh e ro mhath. Bha Ailean Dòmhnallach, Ailean Dhòmhnail Ruaidh a chanadh iad ris, is Dòmhnall Iain Leòid – bha am fear sin càirdeach dhomh-sa – uill, sin an aon fheadhainn a chuala mise cluichd. Niall Steele – bha am fear sin na b' fheàrr na càch air ceòl chuais. **Bha e cluichd glè mhath**, am fear sin.*

JD: *A bheil e ann fhathast?*

CB: *O, chan eil ... Chan eil duine aca beò an-diugh. (SA 1998.70)*

CB: Although my father would play, he wasn't a good piper. But the one thing that was good about them ... the old people who played, their timing, as they say, was excellent. Because they were accustomed to playing for dancers. I like to think that I picked up part of that, because I'm called on quite often, up to now anyway, to play for dancers, games, *céilidhs* and so on.

JD: ... Is Stoneybridge known at all for piping on the island?

CB: Well there were those Smiths, and Alasdair Beaton, and Roderick; there were many pipers, as I told you, who played ear-music; that's what I'd call it. Playing by ear.

JD: Was that the way Alasdair and Roderick Beaton played?

CB: Oh, no – they were up to it. They could read the music. They received and learned it correctly. But most of the old people around ... Those who played correctly, they were in the War. There was nobody left here but old people. Enough of those in this township would play the chanter and the pipes as well, but **they weren't good at all**. They had extremely good timing, better anyway than what you hear today, but ... There were many, but they've died. There was Alan Cook; one of his boys played as well, but he wasn't too good. There was Allan MacDonald, Allan son of Red-haired Donald they'd call him, and Donald John (Mac?)Leod – that one was a relation of mine – well, that's the bunch I heard



playing. Neil Steele – that one was better than the rest with ear-music. **He was playing very well**, that one.

JD: Is he around still?

CB: Oh, no ... Not one of them is alive today.

Alasdair and Roderick Beaton, being “up to it”, learned and played correctly while Neil Steele did not; Calum praised them all, however, according to their respective functions. The key here is that Beaton evaluated his relatives and Steele by different standards – the literately- and the aurally-learned – and recognised skill in each.

The aesthetic of differing standards is not universal to pipers in South Uist. Not every piper shares the same views, just as not every piper shares the same particular background and experience; however, I encountered this view often enough to warrant the generalisation that addressing a ‘functional aesthetic’ implies. Whether indeed there has ever been a completely homogenous aesthetic among Uist pipers is doubtful, and to demonstrate the difference of opinion within the tradition and among its bearers, it may be useful to contrast Calum Beaton’s views with those of Neil MacDonald. Although much of my contact with MacDonald went unrecorded, I was able to grasp his point of view by assuming the role of pupil whenever it suited him to give a lesson, a method I also adopted with his uncle Angus Campbell (see ch. 7).

While Beaton acknowledges the importance of ear-piping, recognises that a degree of it is quite universal to pipers’ repertoires in Uist (see section 10d) and appreciates their musicality and function, he stresses also the importance of clean fingerwork. This reflects his early exposure to *ceòl chuais* in the family and his subsequent literate training by his cousins and in the army. MacDonald, like Beaton, is a competition piper, but unlike Beaton he evaluates piping by no other criteria. He marginalises ear-piping and the playing of *puirt-à-beul* as “for entertainment only” and not serious piping by any means. In this way, he is undoubtedly influenced by his personal background just as Beaton is influenced by his own: as one sees in chapter 7, MacDonald’s family, going back at least two generations, were scions of the competition platform and the military regiment. Thus in his childhood home,

*ceòl chuais* was frowned upon. However even here we see an element of the functional creeping into MacDonald's aesthetic: he recognises that *ceòl chuais*, though marginalised, occupies a definite place in the social and functional context of the Uist tradition – i.e., as “entertainment”. Furthermore, he always evaluated a performance of mine in terms of prize-winning: “That would never get a prize” or “Now that would get a first”. Here too, the function is the guide. The perceptions of Beaton and MacDonald reflect both the competitive and the non-competitive natures of the South Uist piping tradition and were doubtless shared in varying proportions by the pipers who have come and gone before them in the twentieth century, as well as by those few who remain.

### 10.c. The Voiced and the Unvoiced

Music in the *Gàidhealtachd* was transmitted through the voice and the ear before the drive for preservation through literacy took root in the nineteenth century. One unsung leader in this drive was Angus Fraser, son of Capt. Simon Fraser of Knockie, who compiled a list of over two thousand musical terms in Gaelic around the year 1855 (Adv 73.1.5-6). It is not a comprehensive glossary of established literate terms used throughout Gaelic society so much as an illustration of just how expressive the Gaelic language can be about the qualitative character of musical or otherwise artistic phenomena. Hence we find *breabadaich-mheòir*, literally ‘a kicking of the fingers’, for playing lightly and nimbly, in the sense of rapid finger movement; and *mil-cheòl*, ‘honey-music’, for melody, or “the rhythmical descent which accompanied ... hymns and chants”. Many of Fraser's piping and harping terms (for indeed, their shared nomenclature in his and others' work testifies to a common musical stock) possess an equally technical character, such as *barr-lu* [sic], ‘top movement’, which refers to a pibroch variation and/or gracenote cluster involving much top-hand activity, sadly no longer extant in modern piping; and *cath-lu* [sic], ‘battle movement’, referring to the last pibroch variation played, according to Fraser, “in the heat of battle” and synonymous with the modern-day *crunluath*

(more on this below). The terms were all drawn from forty-four works of poetry, songs, hymnals and dictionaries extant at the time, ranging from 1770 to 1848, which he listed at the beginning of the manuscript and quoted from in support of many terms entered thereafter. The work was never published, however. Even if it had been, it might have come too late, for a comprehensive musical vocabulary has not survived in modern Gaelic as much as it has in, say, English, Italian or Chinese, whose literate traditions have preserved a wealth of technical terms and fostered an aesthetic based on critical discourse, notational analysis and philosophical reflection; an aesthetic conforming for all appearances to Merriam's western criteria.

Fraser's is not the only evidence we have that suggests Gaels enjoyed an extensive vocabulary in the past. Bunting's *Ancient Music of Ireland*, a treatise on the Irish harp tradition published in 1840, is not listed among Fraser's sources but he consulted it nonetheless. Bunting offers many technical terms which he had collected from elderly Irish Gaelic harpers at a great gathering in Belfast in 1792, each quite as descriptive and qualitative as the terms in Fraser's work. Hence we find the Irish harpers used the phrase *sruth mór*, 'a big stream', for an ascending or descending line of notes along the entire range of the scale; *bualadh suas no suaserigh* [sic], 'a striking up or rising up', for an upward succession of triplets; and *leith leagadh*, 'a half-falling', for the gracing of a main note from one half-note's distance above (Bunting, 1840:18-36). The now-extinct *barrludh* variation in piping (*barr-lu* in the Fraser MS) is found in Bunting's work as a harping term. Joseph MacDonald's treatise on the Highland pipes (c. 1760) also gives *barrludh* and other terms of the same character pertaining to pipe-music (Cannon, 1994:105-8). And eighteenth-century poets such as Duncan Bàn MacIntyre and Alasdair MacMhaighstir Alasdair referred to various piping terms as well. We are left with the impression that a considerable vocabulary and aptitude for discourse – a 'voiced' aesthetic – existed among learned Gaels at a time when the language and the socio-musical institutions were held at a higher premium in Highland society than they are today.

There is also a case to be made for a predominant 'unvoiced' aesthetic among the Gaelic grass-roots, both historically and currently. A process of selection takes place, for instance, between a composer of songs and his or her audience; a song

deemed ‘good’ was one which survived in the repertoires of the wider community, whether because the song was easy to memorise, had particularly catchy verses, was contemporarily topical, or any other reason. McKean had this in mind when commenting on the popularity of Duncan Bàn MacIntyre’s work in the eighteenth century (1997:158). A related criterion would have been the size and diversity of one’s repertoire which, in the Irish folk tradition at least, was the source of keen rivalry among musicians. Memorisation and the “singability” of songs, as McKean put it (*ibid*), are paramount aesthetic criteria. A music producer for a Belfast television station specifically contrasted this type of aesthetic against more literate verbal analysis during a conference in 1991:

“There is no language of criticism in traditional music ... there are no established aesthetics for the music, no uniform way of judging it: tradition itself only seems to give you one way of judging, if you go by the tales that are told about musicians, and that is that the person who plays the most tunes or sings the most songs is regarded as the best. There are innumerable stories about pipers who have it out all night, one tune after the other, and the guy who wins is the guy who goes out for a break, hears the lark singing outside and bases the tune on it,<sup>12</sup> comes in, and the other fellow doesn’t have it; therefore he wins. Thirty miles away from here in Teelin in County Donegal, Conal O’ Cuinneagain, a local singer, won the competition with a neighbouring townland by running away to his own townland and waking up a woman in the middle of the night to learn a song from her, so that he could run back to the competition and sing it, and no one else would have it! That seems to me to be the only evidence of an aesthetic we have in the tradition itself. There are no words about value and judgement in performance common to everyone.” (McNamee, 1991:57)

There is little basis for verbal critical analysis among the Gaelic folk because, as in the Donegal tradition described above, the musical information conveyed by an evaluative vocabulary – words like ‘rhythm’, ‘pitch’, ‘gracenote’ and ‘quaver’ – are assumed in the aural transmission of the music, making their verbalisation in many cases redundant. Naturally this means that such terms in modern Gaelic are quite rare. Shaw (1992/3:40-3) has noted their scarcity in the Gaelic of the Cape Breton fiddling community, and I have observed a similar situation among pipers in South Uist. The ‘unvoiced’ nature of the Gaelic folk aesthetic has been classified by

Merriam (1964:271) as distinctly non-western, but that is not to say that the ‘voiced’ aesthetic is confined to the west; certain Asian peoples, for instance, possess a comparably sophisticated aesthetic, and Feld’s study of the Kaluli singers in Papua New Guinea revealed a tremendous capacity for verbal discourse and enquiry (Feld, 1982:231). At the same time, other ‘unvoiced’ aesthetics besides the South Uist pipers’ exist in the west, as Rice showed when he undertook lessons in Bulgarian piping from a native master who could not verbalise the difference between melody and gracenotes (Rice, 1994). As was stated earlier in this chapter, pipers in South Uist engage in critical discussion of piping; they can all state the difference between melody and gracenotes. It is a sign of the mainstream community’s influence, however, that whenever they do so, they state it in English.

Calum Beaton once remarked on the playing style of most mainstream pipers today:

CB: **Too clinical**; *leis an leabhar, mar gum biodh tu dìreach a’ tomhas a h-uile crotchet is quaver is semi-quaver. Uill tha mis’ a’ smaointinn nach toireadh ceòl sam bith ... expression, ma tha thu ‘falbh exactly mar a tha sgrìobhte, co-dhiubh air ceòl beag no ceòl mòr ... Bidh iad overstressing, mar a chanas iad. Bidh iad a’ stretch-eadh tuilleadh ‘s a’ chòrr feadhainn dhe na notes.* (SA 1998.70)

CB: Too clinical; by the book, as if you were exactly measuring every crotchet and quaver and semi-quaver. I think that no music would give ... expression, if you’re going exactly as is written, either with the light music or the pibroch ... They’re overstressing, as they say. They stretch out too much some of the notes.

Again in a later interview, he remarks on the playing style of local Uist pipers around the mid-century post-war era as he at least remembers it:

CB: *Bha na doublings, mar a chanas sinn, is na gracenotes, bha iad ‘gan dèanamh na bu chruaidh’ na chluinneas tu an-diugh iad ... Bha a h-uile gracenote agus doubling cho soilleir is cho cruaidh ‘gan dèanamh.* (SC 2001.025)



CB: The doublings, as we say, and the gracenotes, they made them harder than you hear them nowadays. Every gracenote and doubling was made so clear and hard.

Beaton casually refers to “expression”, “crotchets”, “gracenotes”, “timing”, etc., and we have already read Jessie MacAulay’s references to “rhythm”, “lightness” and “lilt”. Rona Lightfoot similarly spoke of “*Ceòl dannsa – ‘s e art tha sin, a bhith a’ chuichd aig a’ speed ceart*” (Dance music – it’s an art, to play at the right speed”) (SC 2001.024). The phenomenon is by no means confined to South Uist piping; that the borrowing of English terms when verbalising a musical aesthetic is found in other areas of modern Gaelic society is suggested by McKean’s study of the Skye song-maker Iain MacNeacail, who tried to explain how he chose melodies for his songs:

*“Cha robh music a’masa dhaibh gad [a bha mi] gan chur ri chéile. Bha mi coma fhad ‘s a bha ... ad a’ dol ann an rhythm. O cha robh music agam ... idir ... Chuirinn na faclan ri chéile ceart gu leòr air bha ad correspond-adh ... facal air an fhacal eile ... ach a chur ann am music, bhiodh e eadar-dhealaichte, mar a tha fhios agaibh fhéin ... Cha robh mi ach dìreach a’ smaoinichadh ... a bha ad a’ rhyme-adh ... bha na faclan a’ rhyme-adh, bha mi ga chur air a’ rhythm a bha sin. Cha robh fonn agam dha na càil ... mu facal tighinn ann a’ rhythm, fhios agaibh, go sound-adh ad mar sin.*

I didn’t have music for them, although I was putting them together. I was happy as long as they were going in rhythm. Oh I didn’t have music at all. I would put the words together right enough till they were corresponding, one word with another, but to put them to music, it’s different, as you know yourself ... I was only just thinking that they were rhyming, the words were rhyming, I was putting it to the rhythm there. I did not have a tune for it at all ... [I think] about words coming in rhythm, you know, till they would sound like that.” (McKean, 1997:118-119)

The use of English loan-words in each of these cases represents a native Gael’s attempt to articulate critical evaluations of his or her own music, and in so doing, they automatically turn to English-language cultural conventions with which they associate the very idea of a verbal discourse on music. Articulate analysis does not often occur in Gaelic aural tradition because the information conveyed in such

words as ‘doubling’ and ‘timing’ is inherent in the transmissive process. This is precisely why in 1880, when the folklorist J.F. Campbell asked Duncan Ross, Gaelic-speaking piper to the Duke of Argyll, to explain the written *canntaireachd* ‘hiririn’, the man could only play the movement on the chanter over and over, unable to describe the movement in any other way.<sup>13</sup> It is also why Angus Campbell of Frobost, when asked by Peter Cooke in 1970 to explain the theory behind cadences in *ceòl mór*, found himself similarly lost for words:

PC: What is a cadence?

AC: (silence) ...

PC: This is the one thing in piping I don’t understand.

AC: The cadence, you see – you get more song out of the tune; it’s more or less written like that as a guide. It’s a join, a join between the notes. (Plays examples on the chanter, then sings the *canntaireachd* of a cadence on C, then on B, then plays the second bar of line 2 of the Old Woman’s Lullaby.) I can’t explain more. (SA 1970/5)

A final insight into how the traditionally-raised Gaelic piper associates aural transmission with Gaelic and literate transmission with English, and its aesthetic implications, is Jessie MacAulay’s earlier testimony that dancers in her youth preferred ear-learned piping to note-learned. Read again how she put it:

JM: *B’ fheàrr leotha, na dannsairean, b’ fheàrr leotha fear a bha cluichd leis a’ chluais na fear a bha ... as a’ mhusic ... Bha lilt air choireigin anns a’ cheòl chluais nach robh anns a’ cheòl eile.* (SA 1998.71)

JM: They preferred, the dancers, they preferred someone playing by ear to someone playing by the staff notation ... There was some kind of lilt in the ear-music that wasn’t in the other music.

‘*Ceòl*’ is Gaelic for ‘music’; while she uses the Gaelic word when describing ear-learned piping, she uses the English for staff notation: *fear leis a’ mhusic*.<sup>14</sup> Undoubtedly a degree of idiom was involved, as many pipers (and other musicians) will say ‘music’ when meaning ‘notation’; but in this instance a difference was

clearly meant, consciously or otherwise, between ‘*ceòl*’ and ‘music’. I would speculate that Iain MacNeacail of Skye was using the word ‘music’ in the same way during his interview with McKean, but the context leaves it open to interpretation. For now, we can only observe the mainstream’s linguistic legacy and say that in South Uist, a ‘voiced’ aesthetic – i.e., one conforming to Merriam’s West and Feld’s Kaluli – exists predominantly within the cultural conventions of English, and that MacAulay’s unconscious word-association represents the surviving emic aesthetic of the old-world Gael.

Despite the ‘unvoiced’ nature of the Gaelic folk aesthetic, a limited vocabulary of technical terms survives – especially, as was mentioned earlier, where piping is concerned, and in particular *ceòl mór*. This we may attribute to its status as ‘art-music’ relative to the lighter and more immediately functional *ceòl beag*, as well as to the terms’ preservation in written collections over the past 250 years; supported, one should add, by the explosion of interest in piping around the globe over the last several decades. The literate idiom, therefore, has preserved for widespread use what the aural idiom, in this case, could not: pipers the world over (whether or not they have Gaelic) refer casually to the *ùrlar*, *siubhal*, *dithis*, *taorluath* and *crunluath* – the ground and variations of a pibroch as discussed in chapter 1. Such terms are used in South Uist, albeit with a subtle but significant difference. In my studies I often heard pipers of the elder generation refer not to *taorluath* and *crunluath*, but to *taorludh* and *crùnludh*, which recalls the terms as noted by, among others, Joseph MacDonald in 1760, Donald MacDonald in c. 1820 (see ch. 5a) and Angus Fraser in 1855. Joseph referred to *tuhudh* and *creanludh* (Cannon, 1994:106), Donald to *turludh*, *taorluidh* and *creanluidh* (MacDonald, c. 1820:4) and Fraser to *crùn-lu* (Adv 73.1.5); the connection being the suffix *ludh* or *lùth*, a word no longer extant but which used to mean, among pipers, the activity or movement of the fingers to produce certain gracenote groups or variations.<sup>15</sup> The modern mainstream use of *luath*, meaning ‘quick’, is a latter-day misconception occasioned by the shift in piping’s setting from mainly Gaelic in the eighteenth century to mainly English in the twentieth (Ó Baoill, 1999:175), and the survival of *ludh* in South Uist pipers’ terminology underlines their conservative nature despite the English setting’s influence.

I have recorded several other terms in South Uist which are largely descriptive and subjective. The reader is already familiar with the term *ceòl chuais*, ‘ear-music’, which I have heard being used nowhere else but among the Gaelic-speaking pipers of South Uist. It may be that this term was more widespread in the past, and used differently: Angus Fraser listed “*ceòl chuaise*” among his compilation of terms as joyful music, “music of ecstasy and rapture”, as if happiness were somehow connected to aurality in Gaelic music. He gives ten examples of this use from published Gaelic poetry. Surprisingly, he went on to define a related term, *ceòl chuais’-aire*, as:

“Competition music, – or that which is performed before an audience and is addressed solely to the ear, as at competitions and concerts, without any intention on the part of the performers to move the passions or create emotions, – but to delight and gain approbation by their several performances.” (Adv 73.1.5)

If the term *ceòl chuais* was indeed used in this manner throughout traditional Gaelic society in earlier times, then its use in South Uist today reflects an opposite and more literal meaning, probably coming about in response to the introduction of literacy among Uist’s pipers from the nineteenth to the early twentieth century.

In his Cape Breton study, Shaw gives us words such as *blas*, ‘flavour’, meaning in the musical sense a ‘stylistic sound’ and in the linguistic sense an ‘accent’. His informant would say of fiddle performances lacking the traditional local style: *Chan eil am blas aca*, “They don’t have the sound” (p. 41); implying of course that they lacked the ‘true’ or ‘correct’ sound from his traditionalist point of view, i.e., the sound, or style, associated with the local language rhythms. Coming from the same cultural source and serving the same social function, traditional Cape Breton fiddling and *ceòl chuais* piping in South Uist are basically the same music played on different instruments; accordingly, South Uist’s Neil MacDonald and Angus Campbell have used *blas* in the same way regarding the performance styles of Gaelic- and non-Gaelic-speaking pipers.<sup>16</sup> In a similar vein, Calum Beaton often refers to the timing of the ear-pipers of his youth as *nàdurra*, ‘natural’, compared to that of pipers entirely note-learned, which bespeaks the outside influence with which

written music is associated there. *Slaodach*, ‘dragging’, is a word MacDonald would use to describe my phrasing in *ceòl mór* if it was too slow and needed brisker treatment. Calum Beaton used *grinn*, ‘handsome’ or ‘neat’, to describe what he perceived as the ‘delicate’ fingerwork of mainland pipers as opposed to that of locals (see ch. 7). All these terms illustrate the survival of a voiced aesthetic among Gaelic-speaking South Uist pipers. They are of course subjective; *blas* and *nàdurra* in the uses described reflect a traditionalist nature while *grinn*, in Beaton’s case, reflects his own perceptions of cultural identity as well as the influence of the competition idiom.

An indication of how deeply this competition influence has pervaded the South Uist aesthetic compared to that of Cape Breton fiddling is the use of a term common to both – *ceòl ceart*, or ‘genuine, correct or proper music’. Another subjective expression, Cape Breton fiddlers use it to describe the older, traditional style which, as Shaw’s informant reveals, they clearly differentiate from the modern style resulting from non-Gaelic influences:

“*Chan eil fhios a’m gu dé an diofar a th’ ann. Tha mi smaointinn gu robh an seann cheòl a bh’ ac’ an uair ud na b’ fheàrr na’n ceòl a th’ ac’ an dràs ... ‘S e an ceòl ceart a bh’ aca an uair sin.*”

I don’t know what the difference is. I think the old music they had back then was better than what they have now ... they had the genuine music then.” (1992/3:42)

If the reader casts an eye back to the extracts from Calum Beaton’s interviews in section 10b, one sees the fork in the road: his idea of *ceart* is mainstream, not traditional piping:

JD: *Bha timing math aig na seann daoine a bha cluichd, nach robh?*

CB: *O, ‘s e timing a b’ fheàrr a chual’ mise riamh, co-dhiubh. Ach cha robh iad a’ cluichd ceart idir. Bha false fingering a’ dol.* (SC 2001.025)

JD: The old people who played had good timing, did they not?

CB: Oh, they had the best timing that I ever heard, anyway. But they didn’t play correctly at all. There was a lot of false fingering going on.



Beaton's use of the term reflects the widely-held perception in modern Uist that 'correct' or 'proper' piping is the competitive and note-learned style; in this sense South Uist is no different from mainland Scotland. That *ceòl ceart* is used in Cape Breton to describe a *ceòl cluais* style of fiddling means that, until relatively recently, that area has been far less subject to mainstream influence than has South Uist.

#### 10.d. By the Ear v. By the Book: Attitudes and Repertoires

In chapter 6a, Calum Beaton relates how his ear-learned father refused to teach him piping because he felt that he himself played *gu mì-dhòigheil* – ineptly; i.e., by the ear. Beaton had to wait until after the war for his older cousin Alasdair to return in order to get 'proper' lessons; i.e., by the book. Beaton's father was self-deprecating due to the prevailing local aesthetic in Uist at that time and, it must be said, since that ear-piping was backward and mechanically incorrect and that to be notation-learned is to be a better piper. Neil Johnstone told a similar story regarding his own tuition as a boy in the 1950s. His lessons with his first teacher depict the same aesthetic sense in favour of literate transmission:

JD: *Bha thu ag ràdh rium air Pipe Major Neil MacLennan, gu robh e fiadhaich air ceòl cluais – nach robh ùine aige idir air ceòl cluais.*

NJ: *O cha robh, cha robh e airson 'na dhèanadh duine le cluas, cha robh e airson a-muigh no a-mach idir ... bidh tu a' leughadh is a' sgrìobhadh, 'ga chluichd mar a bha 'san leabhar. Cha robh e airson duine sam bith a bha ri obair le cluaiseadh.*

JD: *Cha robh e a' leigeadh –*

NJ: *Cha leigeadh e leat idir a chluichd mura biodh e dìreach note perfect. Cha robh e air a shon. Ged a thachair gu leòr a bhith 'nan deagh phìobairean cluaiseadh. Bha daoine gu math ainmeil 'nam pìobairean cluais; le ciùil eile cuideachd, mar a tha feadhainn dhiubh air bocsaichean is gnothaichean. Bha iad 'ga thogail dìreach, is bha iad gu math ainmeil, feadhainn dhiubh sinneach ... Tha mi a' smaoinneadh, duine mar Neil MacLennan a bha sin,*

's ann anns an Arm a dh' ionnsaich e fhéin, far an do chuir iad polish air an teagasg a fhuair e 'na òige. Cha robh e idir idir a-muigh no a-mach airson sian ach an rud ceart.

JD: An esan a ' chiad tidsear a bh' agad air a' phìob?

NJ: Neil MacLennan, 's e. Agus bha William Walker an uairsin ann. Bha e fhéin math math. Pipe Major Nicol, bha e ag ionnsachadh ceòl mòr dhuinn ... Mary MacLeod, Cumha Chatrìona, Kiss of the King's Hand, feadhainn mar sinneach. (SA 1998.71)

JD: You were telling me about Pipe Major Neil MacLennan, that he was incensed about ear-music – that he had no time for ear-music at all.

NJ: Oh no, he didn't want to produce anyone by ear, he wouldn't have anything to do with it at all ... You read and write and play it as it was in the book. He didn't like anyone who was working by ear.

JD: He didn't let –

NJ: He wouldn't let you play if it were not absolutely note perfect. He wasn't for it. Although there did happen to be many good ear-pipers about. There were quite popular ear-pipers; with other music too, like some of them on the box and that sort of thing. They would just pick it up, and they were quite popular, some of them there ... I think that a man like Neil MacLennan, it was in the Army that he himself learned, where they put the polish on the tuition he got in his youth. He wasn't at all for anything except the correct thing.

JD: Was he your first teacher on the pipes?

NJ: Neil MacLennan, yes. And then there was William Walker. He himself was very good. Pipe Major Nicol, he taught us *ceòl mòr* ... Mary MacLeod, Catherine's Lament, Kiss of the King's Hand, some like that.

The prevalent aesthetic sense in South Uist cannot always have been one in favour of literate piping, since musical literacy itself has become prevalent in South Uist only within the past century. Evidence has been presented in this thesis as to how this came about; evidence that in effect points toward significant change in the performance and transmission of local piping from the nineteenth century to the twentieth. This suggests a change in local aesthetics as well.

Today, preferences among my informants generally steer toward the competitive repertoire of march, strathspey and reel sets, *ceòl mòr*, and jigs. That many note-learned pipers have excelled in the playing of jigs reflects the deeply-rooted function of dance music in South Uist and its survival amid mainstream

literacy. John Steele, for instance, was noted for it by Alex MacAulay: “At a ceildh in Uist about the mid-twenties, there were present among an enthusiastic audience some very famous players. John Steele, in good form, gave an excellent selection of Marches, Strathspeys and Reels. John MacDonald, Inverness, also present, gave a rousing applause and requested an encore. Steele lifted his pipes, tuned them, and played one tune, a jig, ‘Shaggy Grey Buck’, with a flow and expression of musical simplicity that I never heard before nor since” (*PT*, Nov 1961).<sup>17</sup> Jessie MacAulay spoke of another piper from earlier this century named Angus Walker, brother of William and Calum: “*Aonghus Beag* (Little Angus). He lived in Kildonan. He specialised in jigs; no one could touch him, he always got the first wherever he played. *Cha chluicheadh duine jigs coltach ris* (No one could play jigs quite like him)” (14/11/98). The very first jig competition held at the Northern Meeting, Inverness, was won by South Uist’s Angus MacAulay in 1938 (*PT*, Nov 1995) and William Morrison of Loch Eynort and Glasgow, still competing today, has won too many jig competitions in both South Uist and mainland Scotland to note here. Such an abundance of strong jig-players in Uist echoes the days when *ceòl chuais* prevailed; even so, the overall preference for competition MSRs and mainstream *ceòl mór* in today’s community confirms that the improver mentality developed at the turn of the century has stood the test of time.

Despite a prevalent attitude in favour of the literate idiom, all my informants indicate that their repertoires include at least some tunes, invariably dance tunes, learned by ear. For example, Louis Morrison’s musical education was typical of twentieth-century Uist in that it was influenced primarily by literate transmission – his father’s first task in teaching his son the pipes was to mark out the scale and progressive gracenote groups, etc., on the stave – and Louis has since amassed a repertoire made up of competition MSRs, jigs, and *ceòl mór*. However, even while growing up in an era when skill is measured by the yardstick of the games, the island’s surviving oral tradition ensured that he became familiar with all the melodies and nuances of *puirt-à-beul*. As a result, his knowledge of their instrumental versions in the form of strathspeys and reels is exhaustive. An indicator of his functional aesthetic is that although he practices competition tunes on a daily basis, he considers the “local tunes”, as MacAulay calls them, being dance-music,

too simple to require regular practice. Speaking as a piper, however, I can understand if this does not reflect purely evaluative feelings, but is rather to maintain the dextrous fingering that competition demands. Even here though, the function remains the guide.

Jessie MacAulay's repertoire is similar in that she was, in her playing days, an able exponent of both *puirt-à-beul* music and the more technically precise competitive standard. Notice how she distinguishes the process of ear-learning from the performance of MSRs and *ceòl mór*, a sign of the functional aesthetic that automatically associates ear-learned music with dance and note-learned music with competition:

JD: *Nuair a bha thus' a' cluichd air a' phìob, bha puirt agad a fhuair thu le cluas, an robh?*

JM: *O bha, puirt mar gum biodh* 'local tunes', you know.

JD: *A bharrachd air march, strathspey and reels?*

JM: *Seadh, tha.*

JD: ... *An toigh leat ceòl cluais a bharrachd air ceòl leughte?*

JM: *O, 's toigh leam ceòl cluais ... Uill, 's toigh leam deagh cheòl sam bith; 's toigh leam march, strathspey and reel, no jigs; pìobaireachd cuideachd, ceòl mór.* (SA 1998.71)

JD: When you were playing on the pipes, did you have tunes you'd got by ear?

JM: Oh yes, 'local tunes', you know.

JD: Apart from march, strathspey and reels?

JM: Yes, that's right.

JD: ... Do you enjoy ear-music in addition to notated-music?

JM: Oh I like ear-music ... Well, I like any good music; I like march, strathspey and reel, or jigs; pibroch as well, *ceòl mór*.

Neil Johnstone's story is similar again, as he depicts ear-learning as preceding his literate tuition:

JD: *Nuair a bha thu ag ionnsachadh na pìoba an toiseach, agus b' fheudar dhuit an ceòl fhaighinn as an leabhar, an robh ceòl cluais idir agad?*

NJ: *Cha robh, cha robh. Well, dh' fhaoidte gu robh ann an toiseach tòiseachaidh, dìreach mun deach gu dh' ionnsachadh no sian, bhithinn a' togail is bhithinn a' feadarachd; bhiodh sinn a' cluichd, mar a tha mi 'g ràdh, bho jew's harp is mouth organ, na tionndaidhean tha sin, bhiodh sinn 'gan togail leis a' chluas. Ach nuair a thòisich mi air ionnsachadh, cha do ghabh mi turas ri ceòl chluaiseadh tuilleadh. Bha [MacLennan] a' ràdh rium, "Uill ma tha thu dol a dh' ionnsachadh rud, ionnsaich ceart e". Sin agad an gnothach. (SA 1998.71)*

JD: When you were first learning the pipes, and you had to get the music from the book, did you have any ear-music at all?

NJ: No, no. Well, it could be that in the beginning of the beginning, just before learning anything, I would pick up things and I would whistle; we would be playing, as I say, from a jew's harp and mouth organ, those turns, we'd be picking them up by the ear. But when I started to learn, I no longer had the chance for ear-music. MacLennan said to me, "Well, if you are going to learn a thing, learn it correctly". That was the way it was.

Just as formal lessons with literate tutors, regimental pipe band involvement, Piobaireachd Society involvement and the increasing availability of sheet music all provided a setting for the literate transmission of piping in South Uist, so too was aural transmission perpetuated within its context. The dance-gathering was its prime setting, whether the *céilidh* in MacAulay's time or the *bàl*, or town ball, in Beaton's. We have already seen in chapter 2 how, according to MacAulay, winter-time *céilidhs* were often the natural place for a learner to 'pick up' melodies and rhythms, coming not just from other pipers, but from the singing of *puirt-à-beul* when pipes were not at hand; Beaton too observed this setting of transmission within his own generation, albeit lacking the vocal resource of *puirt-à-beul* singers and relying instead on the playing of older pipers. By Beaton's time the transition between a predominantly aural tradition and a predominantly literate one was long underway, and young pipers invariably had a grounding in staff-notated movements – the doublings, the *taorluath*, etc. – while still 'picking up' tunes by ear at local *céilidhs* and balls. The era produced in South Uist what Gibson referred to as "the musically literate traditional Gaelic piper" (1998:246):

JD: *A thaobh ceòl cluais, tha cuid ceòl cluais agad-sa, a bheil? Puirt a fhuair thu le cluas?*



CB: *O thogainn gu leòr dhe na puirt, mar bu tric air na bàltaichean a bha sin. Cha robh leabhraichean ach gann aig an àm. Bha iad gann an uair ud; chan eil an-diugh. An uair ud, mar bu trice bha thu faighinn leabhraichean Willie Ross; bha còig leabhraichean ann, book one gu five; ach cha robh mòran airgead a' dol. Bha Logan's Tutor is Robertson's Tutor, ach ma bha, cha robh fhios againn-e mun deidhinn! Mar sin, tha thu a' togail gu leòr dhe na puirt – uill, bha fhios agad, bha sinn air ionnsachadh mar a bha na doublings is na gracenotes, is bha thu a' tuigsinn far a robh còir agad na doublings a chur; is taorluath,<sup>18</sup> is rudan mar sin, as na leabhraichean. Ach bha sinn a' togail gu leòr dhe na puirt air na bàltaichean – gu h-àraid ruidhli dhean, strathspeys, is rudan mar sin ... Bha sinn fileanta gu leòr air an ceòl a leughadh nam biodh leabhraichean gu leòr againn. (SC 2001.025)*

JD: Regarding ear-music, you have some yourself, do you? Tunes you've got by ear?

CB: Oh I used to pick up many tunes, most often at the balls. Books were scarce at that time. They were scarce then; no longer. At that point, most often you'd get Willie Ross's books; there were five of them, book one to five; but there wasn't much money going around. There were Logan's Tutor and Robertson's Tutor, but if there were, we didn't know about them! So, you pick up many of the tunes – well, you knew, we had learned the doublings and the gracenotes, and you understood where you should put the doublings, and the *taorluath*, and so on, from the books. But we'd pick up many of the tunes at the balls – especially reels, strathspeys, etc ... We could read music fluently enough if we had enough books.

In the final analysis, we see a musical bi-lingualism emerging in the nineteenth- to twentieth-century Uist tradition as learning by the book slowly made its inroads. MacAulay received tuition in competition *ceòl beag* from both John MacDonald, Inverness and Willie Ross during their courses, but, like Beaton, grew up in an ear-learned piping family which provided a foundation of 'local' melodies and dance-based rhythms on which to build the technical, literate repertoire of later years. Morrison and Johnstone were likewise exposed to *ceòl chuais* despite the discouragement of their literate tutors, and their repertoires reflect it. This musical balance between ear-learned dance tunes and note-learned competition tunes in the repertoire of a single piper was made possible because, as we have seen, ear-piping retained an inherent social and functional value in the tradition and in the wider community, ensuring its survival against the juggernaut of 'improvement'.

To summarise, the contexts of *ceòl chuais* dictated the setting and method of its survival. That is, ear-piping survived in South Uist because it was fundamentally associated with dancing, something not even the Protestant Reformation could stamp out there, much less the Piobaireachd Society. The social context of the *céilidh* or the *bàl* and the functional context of dancing ensured ear-piping's retention because the dancers and the community at large preferred it to literate piping, as MacAulay mentioned, for what they perceived as its rhythmical benefits. It had "lightness" and "lilt". Just as in the Shetland fiddling tradition, where rhythm is perceived as the most important feature of performance so that particular dance-steps could be established, so too the South Uist community believes that music learned aurally makes for better dancing – whether it be the Foursome Reel or the Quadrille. In either case, though the character of the dances may be different, my studies suggest that the perception is the same.

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1. This is supported by the little existing scholarship on Scottish Gaelic aesthetics. Shaw (1992/3) gave an unprecedented account of the internal perceptions of Cape Breton Gaelic fiddlers by essentially treating his subjects as non-western; Gibson (1998) describes in broad scope the association of ear-learning and dance-accompaniment among Gaelic pipers in Scotland and Nova Scotia up to the mid-twentieth century.

2. The closest we have to a recording of genuinely ear-learned piping in South Uist is an interview with Kenneth Morrison by Peter Cooke in 1970 (SA 1970/334). Morrison had learned to play by ear from about the age of ten. However, the recording is not truly representative of the *ceòl chuais* idiom as observed in the *céilidh* setting because, though one can clearly hear 'false fingering' (see ch. 6) that reflects having learned aurally, he plays tunes associated with the competitive, literate repertoire such as the 2/4 march "John MacFadyen of Melfort" and the strathspey "Maggie Cameron"; tunes composed or arranged with complex gracenoting in tempos too deliberate and measured for traditional dance. It says something about the influence of mainstream piping that Morrison probably believed (as most pipers now do) that to play by staff notation is to be a better piper, and may have simply played what he thought would impress the researcher.

3. For a commentary on the eroding influence of television and like media on Gaelic tradition, see Bruford and MacDonald, 1994:8.

4. See Flett, 1964:4; Emmerson, 1972:143. According to Gibson, "even in Britain, where Highland society was affected by the vast social changes of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, pockets of proud conservatism remained in the Hebrides and on the mainland where outside cultural influences, such as quadrille dancing, were powerfully resented and effectively resisted" (1998:4).

5. The Foursome Reel was undoubtedly a variant of the Four-handed Reel found in Nova Scotia, known as *Ruidhle Cheathrar*, which Flett and Flett (1964:278-9) in turn associate with the dance found in South Uist and Barra, *Ruidhle nan Coileach Dhubha*, or the Reel of the Blackcocks.

6. This is the same dance-gathering mentioned in chapter 5d.
7. Following convention, the dance known as a “Reel” is distinguished from the tune “reel” by the use of the capital R (see Flett, 1964).
8. Examples of the military’s association with Country dancing are given in chapter 6a.
9. MacLachlan taught solo dancing in South Uist from 1840 until his death in c. 1880. At least two of his pupils, John MacMillan (Flett and Flett, 1964:100) and Archie MacPherson (see chapter 8b) taught locally after MacLachlan’s death.
10. Merriam names several studies up to 1964, including his own among the Basongye and Flathead (1964:261-272); Finnegan (1992:131) refers to many more in recent times. Other studies of ‘ethno-aesthetics’ more relevant to this chapter are mentioned in the main text.
11. Neil MacDonald of Garryhellie, as will be described toward the end of the section, considers *ceòl chuais* to be frivolous and not worthy of discussion. This was the strongest rejection of ear-piping I had met with among local informants, since other pipers, even if literately-trained, would at least concede to the rhythmic skill of ear-learned dance-pipers, if not their technique. MacDonald’s feelings probably stem from the strong competitive piping tradition within his own family’s history, as will be discussed in the main text.
12. Birdsong as the origin of pipe music is a concept firmly enmeshed in Gaelic musical folklore; see chapter 2b.
13. Campbell, *Canntaireachd: Articulate Music*, 1880:11-12; see also Donaldson, 2000:2-3. The musicologist Jean-Jacques Nattiez discusses the lack of a western-like musical vocabulary among indigenous peoples and the assumptions some ethnomusicologists make because of it during interviews with informants (1990:188-9). The movement ‘hiririn’ was a long A pibroch birl as discussed in chapter 5c, though apparently lacking the initial E gracenote contained in ‘hiharin’.
14. Sharon MacDonald discusses the shifting of cultural classifications with regard to language-use in her article “‘A bheil am fear gorm fhathast?’: Some Problems Concerning Language and Cultural Shift” in *Scottish Studies* (2000:186-197). Her concern is primarily the growing tendency of English labelling over traditional Gaelic concepts which may not be exactly equivalent, and the problems in translation which ensue as a result.
15. Cannon (1994:105) and more extensively Ó Baoill (1999) discuss the various forms and uses of the *ludh* or *lùth* term in Gaelic music.
16. See chapter 2, where this and other examples of the language/music interrelationship in the Uist tradition are explored.
17. “The Shaggy Grey Buck”, it should be noted, is the English title for *Bochd Liath nan Gobhar*, a traditional jig used in Barra until the late nineteenth century to accompany the dance *Cath nan Coileach*, or the Combat of the Cocks (Fletts, 1964:169; see also Emmerson, 1972:225-6).
18. Although Beaton in this instance says *taorluath* rather than *taorludh*, as I’d earlier indicated was what I’d heard most often from Uist pipers of the older generation, the reader should keep in mind that he was speaking within the context of literate piping and had just mentioned terms like ‘doubling’ and ‘gracenote’; conceivably this could have influenced his use of *taorluath* in the spirit of a Freudian slip. It relates to MacAulay’s use of ‘*ceòl*’ for music and ‘music’ for staff notation.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### CONCLUSION

South Uist has seen many changes since the days when the MacIntyre pipers received patronage from Ormiclate, or when MacArthur pipers may have been busy transporting cattle between Gerinish and Peingown; a great many changes, even, since John MacDonald first stepped onto Lochboisdale pier in 1909, bringing with him all the institutions that had developed in mainstream piping over the last century and that would influence its character in Uist over the course of the next. Throughout the present work we have discussed these institutions, e.g. the Piobaireachd Society, the Highland games, and the quantifiable standards of literacy and competition, and the changes associated with them; we have also discussed aspects of old-world culture and function in South Uist to have survived these developments, such as transmission within the family unit, the importance attached to jigs and other types of dance-music, and the traditional complementarity between piping and other Gaelic arts. Despite their survival, however, piping in Uist is very much the mainstream compared to a century ago. Let us review the main points put forward in previous chapters illustrating this transition from a predominantly aural tradition in the nineteenth century to a predominantly literate one in the twentieth:

- The community's martial history and the presence of Militia and Territorial Battalion pipe bands have encouraged literate transmission since at least the late nineteenth century, as discussed in chapter 6a. John Steele, *Seonaidh Roidein*, Lachlan MacCormick, Neil MacLennan, Jessie MacAulay's brother Alasdair and doubtless many others were influenced in this manner by their military service.
- Changes took place in the local *ceòl mór* tradition, however tenuous its existence at the time, on account of the Piobaireachd Society's involvement; this is indicated by Calum Beaton's testimony of a nineteenth-century style of performance (ch. 5c) practiced by at least one man in Uist by the 1940s who was himself taught by a well-



known local piping family. The style was seen as an anachronism and rejected by Beaton's second tutor, Angus Campbell, as old-fashioned (ch. 6c).

- The overall climate of piping competition in Scotland contributed to the formation of the South Uist Piping Society, the involvement of the Piobaireachd Society, and the general preference for literate piping in Uist that they and military service fostered. Staged competition was encouraged in the nineteenth century by the rise of Highland games, and it caught up with South Uist, on the periphery, by the twentieth (ch. 8).

- Our most compelling indication must be informants' testimony that the elderly, ear-learned generation of pipers in Uist from the 1920s to the 40s played in a markedly different style from that of the younger, literately-learned generation (ch. 6) who saw it as backward. This argues strongly that great changes took place from the nineteenth to the twentieth century in local piping and that internal perceptions changed with it; enough so that *ceòl chuais* went from being the normal idiom to something seen as old-fashioned and out-dated. Although pipers still recognised its social and functional value in the local tradition, that didn't make it any less technically 'incorrect' in the new era of musical literacy and standardised fingerwork.

Today, piping is not as universal a part of daily life in Uist as it was in previous generations, but this is not the fault of the literate and competitive era. Such influence may have altered the character of local piping, but could not have actively diminished it. From my informants' point of view, the real reason is that young learners nowadays tend to lose interest in the pipes once they reach the age of between fourteen and sixteen; other instruments, such as the keyboard or the box, and other activities, such as football and computer games, grab their attention and most begin at that point to view piping as too time-consuming a discipline. Of course this isn't the only factor involved in the tradition's decreasing breadth. When searching for answers, one cannot ignore the inexorable pull of mainland work opportunities over the years and how rarely those who leave ever return for more than a holiday. The *Roidein* brothers left for Glasgow, as did Fred and Ronald Morrison; Donald Morrison found work with the Aberdeen Police;



Willie Morrison left for Ayrshire at the age of twenty-two and has since lived in Glasgow for many years; the list goes on. But moving to the mainland in search of work has always been an aspect of life in Uist, as has the pull of the army and the attraction of opportunities overseas, as in the case of the Emigration Scheme in the 1920s or Angus (*Aonghus Sheòrais*) MacAulay's move to New Zealand in 1953. Local piping was still considered to be in its 'golden age' at that time. The real difference between then and now, I believe, is what informants have been saying all along: that other activities now vie for young people's attention to a greater extent than ever before. There were no televisions, nintendos or discos, for example, in 1953. Pastimes still mainly centred round the *céilidh* – old-world classroom for dance-piping and source of the Gaelic arts' complementarity.

But despite its relatively diminished state, piping is still promoted within the community at various levels. The Local Education Authority added piping to school curricula around 1971, and the late Roderick Gillies, formerly in the army and a native of Uist, taught pupils from Eriskay to Eochar until his retirement in 1984. Gillies's work has since been taken over by Calum Campbell (*Calum Chaluim Iain*) of Benbecula. To his efforts we can add the ongoing work of the South Uist Pipe Band, led by Pipe Major Donald (*Dòmhnall Bàn*) MacDonald, and two local societies, the South End Piping Club (SEPC) and the Uist and Barra Piping Society. The former was founded in 1989 by a committee whose first members included Fr. Roderick MacAulay, parish priest of Daliburgh at the time, and a Rev. Elliot of the Church of Scotland (see ch. 3). The Club organises classes twice a week, one in a Queen's Own Highlanders drill hall in Daliburgh on Sundays and another in the community hall in Stoneybridge on Thursdays. They are taught by Calum Beaton and Louis Morrison and are open to all. The latter society, known locally as *Comann Piobaireachd Uibhist is Barraigh*, tends to complement the SEPC's work by bringing well-known players to Uist for recitals. They also organise the Young Piper of the Year competition, an annual event which usually coincides with the Askernish games in late July and which is open to all pipers, local or non-, under the age of thirty.

And lest we forget present initiatives stemming from outwith Uist, the annual *Ceòlas* workshop is held in Daliburgh every summer, combining tuition in various Gaelic

performing arts so as to emphasise the spirit of complementarity discussed earlier. Lessons in *ceòl mòr* can be complemented with lessons in pibroch songs, for example, so as to bring the music's Gaelic roots to the foreground in the learner's consciousness and thereby broaden his or her options as regards performance style; an important goal, considering that all young pipers in Uist today learn within the mainstream idiom. The workshop was conceived in the mid-1990s by Hamish Moore, a pipe-maker from Dunkeld who has advocated traditional Gaelic step-dance style piping ever since encountering vestiges of it in Nova Scotia. He saw the potential in re-discovering piping's cultural and functional roots in Scotland and recognised South Uist as the natural backdrop for such an exploration. *Ceòlas* now attracts students from home and abroad; though it has yet to be seen whether the workshop will make any real difference in the number of players locally, or the style in which they play. The community have embraced it, however, for its economic benefits as well as its recognition of Uist's profound contribution to the panoply of Scottish music.

All in all, one hopes that the present work will be seen as a useful addition to past scholarship, however scarce, on the internal Gaelic perspective toward folk culture and music in Scotland, and no less as a foundation for research yet to be made; particularly in piping. The influence of competition on the aesthetics of Highland piping beyond the *Gàidhealtachd*, for instance, is open to further enquiry by ethnomusicologists. The particulars of change in other Gaelic-speaking areas could provide further insight into cultural conservation, transition and adaptation. And this record of piping in South Uist is by no means complete, as it does not delve as intimately into the details of some family histories as it could have. Much more could be said of the Morrisons of Gerinish or the *Roidein* brothers, for example, if only surviving family members would agree to talk about them. I note in hindsight that the only potential informants to decline to be interviewed for this thesis were among those who no longer reside in Uist; one may be reluctant to discuss his or her island roots amid mainland surroundings, but this in turn leads to questions about the difference in cultural perspective between the urban Gael and the Hebridean Gael. It could also lead one to take a more focused look at the migration of pipers from South Uist to mainland Scottish cities over the course of the past century, and to address specific causes and effects. Further research could also be done on the

titles and settings of dance-tunes specific to the Uist community: the widely-known competition strathspey 'Cameronian Rant', for instance, was once, according to Calum Beaton, commonly played in Uist as a two-part reel called *Cailleach a' Ghleann Dorcha*, or 'the Old Woman of the Dark Glen'; the Dark Glen being a ridge under the shadow of Uist's largest hill, Beinn Mhór. But an adequate treatment of this and other topics mentioned above depends entirely on seeking out the elder Gaelic-speaking generation and utilising what they have to offer, as younger pipers, Gaelic-speaking or not, will have little knowledge of such bygone ways. Calum Beaton, Jessie MacAulay and others are custodians of a perspective which will not long be in evidence, and only by considering them a bonafide resource for ethnographic or historical work will our knowledge – of piping and of all else concerning tradition and change in Scotland – find balance.

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**APPENDIX A**  
**Portraits of Calum Beaton and Jessie MacAulay**  
**(and other illustrations)**



Calum Beaton and his youngest son Calum Antony Beaton on the croft in Stoneybridge, with Beinn Mhòr in the background. Photo by JD.



Jessie MacAulay née MacIntyre in Uist House, Daliburgh. Photo by JD.





Pipes and drums of the 4<sup>th</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> Battalion Queen's Own Highlanders, taken in Aldershot, 1953. Eight of the fourteen pipers seen above are from South Uist. **Top row:** second from right, piper Campbell; far right, piper MacKillop. **Middle row:** the first five from the left, pipers MacDonald, Angus Walker, Donald John Steele (son of John Steele of Lochboisdale), MacMillan and Calum Beaton. **Bottom row:** fourth from right, Pipe Major Donald MacIntyre, Boisdale. Photo courtesy of Tim Atkinson.





The South End Piping Club practising in Daliburgh Drill Hall, April 1999. Calum Beaton appears second from the right, and I appear at far left. Photo by Tim Atkinson.

## APPENDIX B

### South Uist Games' Piping Results, 1898 – 1999

The following chart details the piping event prize-winners at the games in Askernish from their inception to nearly the close of the twentieth century, excluding years for which records are unavailable or inconclusive. For space and formatting reasons, the chart is in two parts, each listing a different range of events: part one covers the open pibroch (shown here as 'piob'), open march, open strathspey and reel, open jig, local pibroch, local jig, local march, strathspey and reel (MSR) and junior-grade march; part two covers the pibroch confined to the Piobaireachd Society courses, the junior pibroch, open MSR, junior MSR and three separate practice chanter events for children of various ages.

Ostensibly, the chart best illustrates the growing proportion of non-local competitors over the years compared to that of the local contingent; as discussed in chapter 8, names of non-locals have been highlighted so that they may more clearly be distinguished. The chart has many other uses, however. It measures generations of local pipers during the competitive era and how long each lasted at the top of the field before giving way to a younger crowd. It records many local families who have competed successfully but who have not been mentioned specifically in this thesis. It traces the progress of individuals from practice chanter competitions to the open *ceòl mòr* level. And of course, it reveals the types of events put forward over the years. In the end, the chart is simply raw data; as such its uses are only limited by the purposes of those studying it.



	Piob (open)	March (open)	S/R (open)	Jig (open)	Piob (local)	March (junior)	Jig (local)	MSR (local)
1898 1 <sup>st</sup>		MacLellan, John	MacLellan, John					
2 <sup>nd</sup>		MacDonald, Allan	MacPhee, Norman					
3 <sup>rd</sup>		MacDonald, Angus	MacDonald, Angus					
1905 1 <sup>st</sup>		MacCormick, Lachlan	MacLellan, John					
1906 1 <sup>st</sup>		MacLellan, John	MacLellan, AJ					
2 <sup>nd</sup>		MacLellan, AJ	MacLellan, John					
3 <sup>rd</sup>		MacIntyre, Kenneth	MacLean, Lachlan					
1907 1 <sup>st</sup>		MacCormick, Lachlan	MacCormick, Lachlan					
2 <sup>nd</sup>		MacPherson, Alex.	MacLellan, AJ					
3 <sup>rd</sup>		MacLellan, Angus John	MacLellan, John					
1909 1 <sup>st</sup>	MacIntyre, Angus	MacCormick, Lachlan	MacLellan, Gilbert					
2 <sup>nd</sup>	MacCormick, Lachlan	MacLellan, Gilbert	MacCormick, Lachlan					
3 <sup>rd</sup>	MacMillan, Donald	MacIntyre, Angus	MacDonald, Ronald & MacMillan, Donald					
1911 1 <sup>st</sup>	MacIntyre, Donald	MacMillan, Donald	MacMillan, Donald					
2 <sup>nd</sup>	MacCormick, Lachlan	MacLellan, Gilbert	MacCormick, Lachlan					
3 <sup>rd</sup>	MacMillan, Donald	MacCormick, Lachlan	MacIntyre, Donald					
1913 1 <sup>st</sup>	MacMillan, John	MacMillan, John	MacMillan, John					
2 <sup>nd</sup>	MacIntyre, Angus	MacDonald, Archibald	MacIntyre, Angus					
3 <sup>rd</sup>	MacIntyre, Donald	MacIntyre, Donald	MacLellan, Gilbert					
1914 1 <sup>st</sup>	MacMillan, Donald	MacMillan, Donald	MacDonald, John					
2 <sup>nd</sup>	MacDonald, John	MacDonald, John	MacMillan, George					
3 <sup>rd</sup>	MacMillan, George	MacLennan, Neil	MacDonald, Archibald					
1922 1 <sup>st</sup>	Steele, John & MacKinnon, George	MacDonald, Roderick	MacMillan, George					
2 <sup>nd</sup>		MacKinnon, George	Currie, Donald					

3 <sup>rd</sup>	MacIntyre, Donald	Steele, John	MacCormick, Lachlan				
1923 1 <sup>st</sup>	MacMillan, George	Steele, John	Lindsay, Archibald	Steele, John			
2 <sup>nd</sup>	MacDonald, Roderick	MacAulay, Angus	Currie, Donald	MacMillan, George			
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Steele, John	Martin, Finlay	MacDonald, Archibald	Lindsay, Archibald			
4 <sup>th</sup>	Campbell, Angus	MacDonald, Roderick	MacAulay, Roderick				
1924 1 <sup>st</sup>	Johnstone, Malcolm	MacAulay, Angus					
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Campbell, Angus	Martin, Finlay					
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Steele, John	MacKinnon, George					
4 <sup>th</sup>	MacAulay, Angus & Lindsay, Arch.	MacMillan, George					
5 <sup>th</sup>		Steele, Malcolm & Beaton, Alex.					
1925 1 <sup>st</sup>	MacDonald, Roderick	Campbell, Angus					
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Campbell, Angus	Steele, John					
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Johnstone, Malcolm	MacAulay, Angus					
4 <sup>th</sup>	MacMillan, George	Martin, Finlay					
1927 1 <sup>st</sup>	MacDonald, Roderick	Steele, John		MacAulay, Angus			
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Campbell, Angus	MacAulay, Angus		Steele, John			
3 <sup>rd</sup>	MacAulay, Angus	Campbell, Angus		MacLennan, Neil			
4 <sup>th</sup>	Martin, Finlay	Martin, Finlay					
1928 1 <sup>st</sup>	Campbell, Angus	Steele, John		Currie, Allan			
2 <sup>nd</sup>	MacAulay, Angus	MacAulay, Angus		MacAulay, Angus			
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Lindsay, Archibald	MacQuarrie, Angus		MacDonald, Angus			
4 <sup>th</sup>	MacLennan, Neil	Walker, William					
1929 1 <sup>st</sup>	Johnstone, Lachlan	MacAulay, Angus	MacAulay, Angus	MacAulay, Angus			
2 <sup>nd</sup>	MacAulay, Angus	Campbell, Angus	MacDonald, Angus & Campbell, Angus	MacDonald, Angus			
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Lindsay, Archibald	MacQuarrie, Angus		MacQuarrie, Angus			

4 <sup>th</sup>	Campbell, Angus & MacLennan, N.	Walker, William	MacQuarrie, Angus	MacLennan, Neil				
1930 1 <sup>st</sup>	Campbell, Angus	MacAulay, Angus	MacAulay, Angus	Currie, Allan				
2 <sup>nd</sup>	MacAulay, Angus	Steele, John	Steele, John	MacAulay, Angus				
3 <sup>rd</sup>	MacQuarrie, Angus	MacQuarrie, Angus	MacQuarrie, Angus	MacDonald, Angus				
4 <sup>th</sup>	Lindsay, Arch.	Martin, Finlay	MacDonald, Angus	MacQuarrie, Angus				
1931 1 <sup>st</sup>	Campbell, Angus	MacAulay, Angus	Steele, John	Steele, John				
2 <sup>nd</sup>	MacAulay, Angus	Steele, John	MacAulay, Angus	MacDonald, Angus				
3 <sup>rd</sup>	MacQuarrie, Angus	MacLennan, Neil	Campbell, Angus	MacQuarrie, Angus				
4 <sup>th</sup>	MacLennan, Neil	Campbell, Angus	MacDonald, Angus	MacLennan, Neil				
5 <sup>th</sup>	Walker, William	MacMillan, George	Walker, William	Campbell, Angus				
6 <sup>th</sup>	MacDonald, Angus	MacDonald, Angus	MacQuarrie, Angus	Walker, William				
	(second piob event –							
1 <sup>st</sup>	MacQuarrie, Angus							
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Walker, William							
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Lindsay, Arch.)							
1932 1 <sup>st</sup>	Campbell, Angus	MacQuarrie, Angus	MacQuarrie, Angus	MacDonald, Angus				
2 <sup>nd</sup>	MacAulay, Angus	MacAulay, Angus	Steele, John	MacAulay, Angus				
3 <sup>rd</sup>	MacQuarrie, Angus	Steele, John	MacDonald, Angus	Campbell, Angus & MacQuarrie, Angus				
4 <sup>th</sup>	MacKinnon, John	Campbell, Angus	Campbell, Angus					
5 <sup>th</sup>	MacDonald, Angus	Walker, William	MacAulay, Angus					
6 <sup>th</sup>	Lindsay, Archibald	MacDonald, Angus	Walker, William					
1933 1 <sup>st</sup>	Campbell, Angus	MacAulay, Angus	Steele, John	MacDonald, Angus				
2 <sup>nd</sup>	MacQuarrie, Angus	MacDonald, R	MacNiven, Owen	MacNiven, Owen				
3 <sup>rd</sup>	MacAulay, Angus	Campbell, Angus	MacQuarrie, Angus	Walker, Malcolm				
4 <sup>th</sup>	MacLennan, Neil	MacQuarrie, Angus	MacAulay, Angus					
5 <sup>th</sup>	MacDonald, Angus	Martin, Finlay	MacDonald, R					



6 <sup>th</sup>	MacMillan, George	MacLennan, Neil	Campbell, Angus				
1935 1 <sup>st</sup>	Campbell, Angus	Bain, Corporal	MacAulay, Angus	MacDonald, Angus			
2 <sup>nd</sup>	MacAulay, Angus	MacNiven, Owen	Smith, I.	Smith, I.			
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Bain, Corporal	MacAulay, Angus	MacNiven, Owen	MacLennan, Neil			
4 <sup>th</sup>	Kennedy, Hugh	Smith, I.	MacDonald, Angus				
5 <sup>th</sup>	Walker, Malcolm & Smith, I.	MacLean, D. & Walker, W.	Scott, Adam & Campbell, Angus				
1936 1 <sup>st</sup>	Walker, Malcolm	Wilson, John	Wilson, John	MacDonald, Angus			
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Wilson, John	MacNiven, Owen	MacNiven, Owen	Wilson, John			
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Campbell, Angus	Walker, Malcolm	MacDonald, Angus	Scott, Adam			
4 <sup>th</sup>	MacLennan, Neil	MacLennan, Neil	Scott, Adam				
5 <sup>th</sup>	MacDonald, Angus	Scott, Adam	Walker, Malcolm				
6 <sup>th</sup>	Walker, William	Walker, William	Walker, William				
1937 1 <sup>st</sup>	Campbell, Angus	MacAulay, Angus	MacAulay, Angus	MacAulay, Angus			
2 <sup>nd</sup>	MacLennan, Neil	Scott, Adam	MacNiven, Owen	MacLennan, Neil			
3 <sup>rd</sup>	MacAulay, Angus	Steele, John	Scott, Adam	Scott, Adam			
4 <sup>th</sup>	Walker, William	MacLennan, Neil	Steele, John				
5 <sup>th</sup>	MacNiven, Owen	Lawrie, P/M	Campbell, Angus				
6 <sup>th</sup>	Scott, Adam	Walker, William	MacLennan, Neil				
1938 1 <sup>st</sup>	Wilson, John	Wilson, John	Wilson, John	Wilson, John			
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Campbell, Angus & Robertson, JB	MacAulay, Angus	MacAulay, Angus	MacAulay, Angus			
3 <sup>rd</sup>		Robertson, JB	Robertson, JB	Walker, William			
4 <sup>th</sup>	Walker, William	MacLean, D	MacDonald, Angus				
5 <sup>th</sup>	Scott, Adam	Walker, William	MacLean, D				
6 <sup>th</sup>	MacLean, D	Campbell, Angus	Scott, Adam				
1939 1 <sup>st</sup>	Campbell, Angus	MacNiven, Owen	MacNab, Archie				
2 <sup>nd</sup>	MacAulay, Angus	MacNab, Archie	Wilson, John				

3 <sup>rd</sup>	MacNab, Archie	MacAulay, Angus	MacAulay, Angus				
4 <sup>th</sup>	MacNiven, Owen	Wilson, John	Scott, Adam				
5 <sup>th</sup>	Wilson, John	Scott, Adam					
6 <sup>th</sup>	MacLennan, Neil	Campbell, Angus					
1946 1 <sup>st</sup>	Campbell, Angus	MacFarquar, Peter	MacKinnon, John	MacDonald, Angus			
2 <sup>nd</sup>	MacAulay, Angus	MacAulay, Angus	MacDonald, Angus	Pearston, Thomas			
3 <sup>rd</sup>	MacLennan, Neil	MacKinnon, John	MacAulay, Angus	MacFarquar, Peter			
4 <sup>th</sup>	Scott, Adam	Walker, William	MacFarquar, Peter	MacNeill, James			
5 <sup>th</sup>	MacKinnon, John	MacLean, Donald	Scott, Adam				
6 <sup>th</sup>	MacLean, Donald	MacLennan, Neil	Walker, William				
1947 1 <sup>st</sup>	MacAulay, Angus	MacAulay, Angus	MacAulay, Angus	MacAulay, Angus			
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Morrison, Roderick	MacFadyen, John	MacDonald, Angus	Scott, Adam			
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Scott, Adam	Scott, Adam	Scott, Adam	Morrison, Donald			
1948 1 <sup>st</sup>	MacAulay, Angus	MacAulay, Angus	MacFadyen, John	MacFadyen, John			
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Campbell, Angus	MacFadyen, John	Lawrie, Ronald	MacAulay, Angus			
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Lawrie, Ronald	Lawrie, Ronald	Morrison, Donald	Morrison, Donald			
1949 1 <sup>st</sup>	Garroway, John	MacLean, P/M	MacLean, P/M	Garroway, John			
2 <sup>nd</sup>	MacLean, P/M	MacAulay, Angus	Garroway, John	Johnstone, Duncan			
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Lawrie, Ronald	Garroway, John	MacAulay, Angus	MacLean, P/M			
4 <sup>th</sup>	Campbell, Angus	Morrison, Alfred	Lawrie, Ronald	Walker, William			
5 <sup>th</sup>	Morrison, Alfred	Johnstone, Duncan	Walker, William				
6 <sup>th</sup>	Walker, W. & Morrison, R.	Campbell, Angus	Johnstone, D. & MacMillan, N.				
1950 1 <sup>st</sup>	Garroway, John	MacLeod, Donald	Ramsay, P/M	MacLeod, Donald			
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Morrison, Alfred	MacLean, Donald	MacLeod, Donald	Ramsay, P/M			
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Morrison, Ronald	Ramsay, P/M	MacLean, Donald	MacLean, Donald			
4 <sup>th</sup>	Morrison, DA	Garroway, John	Garroway, John	Morrison, Donald A.			
5 <sup>th</sup>	MacLean, Donald	Johnstone, Duncan	Johnstone, Duncan				

6 <sup>th</sup>	Campbell, Angus	Lawrie, D.	Morrison, DA					
1951 1 <sup>st</sup>	Burgess, John	Burgess, John	MacAuley, Angus	Burgess, John				
2 <sup>nd</sup>	MacAulay, Angus	MacAulay, Angus	Burgess, John	MacKay, P/M				
3 <sup>rd</sup>	MacFadyen, John	MacFarquar, Peter	MacLean, Donald	MacAulay, Angus				
1952 1 <sup>st</sup>	MacKay, P/M	MacLeod, P/M	MacLeod, P/M	MacLeod, P/M				
2 <sup>nd</sup>	MacLeod, P/M	MacLean, P/M	MacAuley, Angus	Johnstone, D.				
3 <sup>rd</sup>	MacLean, P/M	MacAulay, Angus	MacKay, P/M	MacKay, P/M				
1953 1 <sup>st</sup>	MacKay, P/M	MacLeod, Donald	MacKay, P/M	MacKay, P/M	MacDonald, Rona	MacDonald, Neil J.	MacLean, Norman	
2 <sup>nd</sup>	MacNeill, Seumas	MacKay, P/M	MacNab, Major	MacNab, Major	Campbell, Calum	Campbell, Angus	MacDonald, Rona	
3 <sup>rd</sup>	MacGillivray, D.	MacNab, Major	MacLeod, Donald	Johnstone, Duncan	Scott, Adam	MacKillop, Andrew	Scott, Adam	
4 <sup>th</sup>	MacLeod, Donald	MacNeill, Seumas	MacNeill, Seumas	Scott, Adam	MacLean, Norman	Scott, Adam	Campbell, Angus	
5 <sup>th</sup>	Campbell, Angus	MacDonald, Rona	Johnstone, Duncan				Campbell, Malcolm	
6 <sup>th</sup>	Beaton, Calum	MacKillop, Andrew	Forbes, T.					
1954 1 <sup>st</sup>	Morrison, Ronald	MacDonald, William	Morrison, Donald	MacDonald, W.	Morrison, Ronald	Morrison, Donald	Morrison, Donald	
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Morrison, Donald	MacKillop, W.	MacKillop, W.	Manson, B.	Johnstone, George	MacDonald, Neil J.	MacDonald, Neil J.	
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Campbell, A.	Morrison, Donald	MacDonald, W.	MacKillop, A.	Morrison, Donald	MacKillop, Andrew	MacKillop, W.	
4 <sup>th</sup>	Johnstone, G.	Manson, B.	MacDonald, Rona	Morrison, Donald				
5 <sup>th</sup>	MacDonald, Rona	Johnstone, G.	MacInnes, James					
6 <sup>th</sup>		MacDonald, Neil J.	Johnstone, G.					
1955 1 <sup>st</sup>	Nicol, P/M	Burgess, John	MacDonald, William	Burgess, John				
2 <sup>nd</sup>	MacDonald, William	MacKillop, William	MacKillop, William	MacDonald, William				
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Burgess, John	Johnstone, Duncan	Burgess, John	Morrison, Ronald				
4 <sup>th</sup>	Morrison, Ronald	MacDonald, William	Johnstone, Duncan	Johnstone, Duncan				
5 <sup>th</sup>	MacKillop, William	Scott, Adam	Nicol, P/M					
6 <sup>th</sup>		Morrison, Ronald	MacKillop, Andrew					
1956 1 <sup>st</sup>	MacDonald, William	MacDonald, William	MacDonald, William	Beaton, Calum				
2 <sup>nd</sup>	MacLean, P/M	MacLean, P/M	Walker, William	MacDonald, William				
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Nicol, P/M	Nicol, P/M	Beaton, Calum	MacKillop, Andrew				



4 <sup>th</sup>	Walker, William	Walker, William	MacKillop, Andrew	Walker, William				
5 <sup>th</sup>	Beaton, Calum	MacKillop, Andrew	Campbell, Angus					
1957 1 <sup>st</sup>	Morrison, Ronald	MacDonald, William	Brown, P/M R	MacDonald, William	Walker, William		MacKinnon, Angus	Scott, Adam
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Brown, P/M R.	Brown, P/M R.	MacDonald, William	Brown, P/M R.	Scott, Adam		MacDonald, Angus	Walker, William
3 <sup>rd</sup>	MacDonald, William	Young, J.	MacKillop, William	MacKillop, William	Campbell, Angus		MacKillop, Andrew	Beaton, Calum
4 <sup>th</sup>	MacKillop, Andrew	MacKillop, William	Young, J.	MacKillop, Andrew				
5 <sup>th</sup>	MacKillop, William	Fraser, L/Cpl.	Beaton, Calum					
6 <sup>th</sup>	Young, J.	Beaton, Calum	Nicol, P/M					
1958 1 <sup>st</sup>	MacDougall, John	MacDougall, John	Morrison, Donald	Morrison, Donald	MacKinnon, Angus		Walker, William	MacKinnon, Angus
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Morrison, Donald	MacFadyen, Iain	Young, James	MacDougall, John	Walker, William		MacKinnon, Angus	Morrison, Angus
3 <sup>rd</sup>	MacFadyen, Iain	Young, James	MacGregor, P/M	Young, James	Scott, Adam		MacCormick, John	Walker, Angus P.
4 <sup>th</sup>	Young, James	Morrison, Donald	MacLean, P/M	MacFadyen, Iain	MacCormick, John		Walker, Angus P.	MacCormick, John
5 <sup>th</sup>	MacLean, P/M	MacGregor, P/M	Beaton, Calum					
6 <sup>th</sup>	Morrison, Ronald	MacKillop, Andrew	Morrison, Ronald					
1959 1 <sup>st</sup>	Brown, P/M R.M.	MacDougall, John	Morrison, Donald	Morrison, Donald				
2 <sup>nd</sup>	MacDougall, John	Brown, P/M	MacDougall, John	Dodds, Allan				
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Morrison, Donald	Morrison, Donald	MacFadyen, Iain	MacDougall, John				
4 <sup>th</sup>	MacLean, Donald	Dodds, Allan	Brown, P/M	MacKillop, Andrew				
5 <sup>th</sup>	Fraser, Iain	MacFadyen, Iain	Morrison, Alfred					
1960 1 <sup>st</sup>	MacFadyen, Iain							
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Burgess, John							
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Morrison, Donald							
4 <sup>th</sup>	MacDonald, William							
5 <sup>th</sup>	MacDonald, Alex.							
1961 1 <sup>st</sup>	Young, James	MacCormick, John	Young, James	Young, James				
2 <sup>nd</sup>	MacFadyen, Iain	MacDonald, William	MacDonald, Cpl. William	MacDonald, Cpl. William				
3 <sup>rd</sup>	MacDonald, William	MacDonald, Sgt.	MacDonald, William	MacDonald, William				

		William					
1962 1 <sup>st</sup>	Lawrie, Ronald	Young, James	Burgess, John	MacDonald, Sgt. William			
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Young, James	MacNeill, Seumas	MacDonald, Sgt. William	Burgess, John			
3 <sup>rd</sup>	MacDonald, Kenneth	MacDonald, William	Morrison, Ronald	Lawrie, Ronald			
4 <sup>th</sup>	Morrison, Ronald	Burgess, John	MacDonald, Kenneth	MacDonald, William			
5 <sup>th</sup>	MacDonald, William	MacDonald, Kenneth	MacDonald, William				
1963 1 <sup>st</sup>	Burgess, John	Burgess, John	Campbell, C.	MacAskill, J.			
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Morrison, Ronald	Campbell, C.	Burgess, John	Campbell, C.			
3 <sup>rd</sup>	MacDonald, P/M Angus	MacKillop, A.	MacPhail, A.	MacKillop, A.			
1964 1 <sup>st</sup>	Young, James	Burgess, John	Young, James				
2 <sup>nd</sup>	MacLellan, P/M John	MacLellan, P/M John	Burgess, John				
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Burgess, John	MacKillop, Cpl. William	MacKillop, Cpl. William				
4 <sup>th</sup>	Morrison, Ronald	MacDonald, Rona	MacDonald, Rona				
5 <sup>th</sup>	Campbell, Calum	Young, James	Campbell, Calum				
1965 1 <sup>st</sup>	Brown, P/M R.U.	MacLellan, P/M John	MacLellan, P/M John	MacLellan, P/M John			
2 <sup>nd</sup>	MacLellan, P/M John	Morrison, Ronald	MacFadyen, Iain	Morrison, William			
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Campbell, Calum	Brown, P/M R.U.	Brown, P/M R.U.	MacFadyen, Iain			
1966 1 <sup>st</sup>	MacDonald, Kenneth	MacDonald, Rona	MacDonald, Kenneth	Morrison, William			
2 <sup>nd</sup>	MacDonald, Rona	MacDonald, Kenneth	MacDonald, Rona	MacDonald, Kenneth			
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Campbell, Calum	Forbes, Peter	MacCormick, John	Johnson, Norman			
4 <sup>th</sup>	Lindsay, Donald	Campbell, Calum	Campbell, Calum	Campbell, Calum			
5 <sup>th</sup>	Forbes, Peter	Lindsay, Donald	Forbes, Peter				
1967 1 <sup>st</sup>	MacDonald, Rona	MacDonald, Rona	MacAskill, John	MacDonald, Rona			
2 <sup>nd</sup>	MacAskill, John	MacAskill, John	Morrison, William	MacAskill, John			
3 <sup>rd</sup>	MacCormick, John	MacCormick, John	MacCormick, John	Morrison, William			



4 <sup>th</sup>	Campbell, Calum	Campbell, Calum	Campbell, Calum	Lindsay, Archie			
5 <sup>th</sup>	Morrison, William	Lindsay, Archie	Lindsay, Archie				
1968 1 <sup>st</sup>	Beaton, Calum	MacCormick, John	MacCormick, John	MacDonald, William			
2 <sup>nd</sup>	MacDonald, William	MacDonald, William	Morrison, William	Morrison, William			
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Morrison, William	Morrison, William	MacDonald, William	Campbell, Calum			
1970 1 <sup>st</sup>	Lawrie, P/M Ronald	Lawrie, P/M Ronald	MacLellan, Iain	MacDonald, Rona			
2 <sup>nd</sup>	MacLellan, Angus J.	MacLellan, Iain	MacDonald, Rona	MacLellan, Iain			
3 <sup>rd</sup>	MacDonald, Ronald	MacFadyen, Iain	Wilson, Joe	MacFadyen, Iain			
1971 1 <sup>st</sup>	MacDonald, Rona	MacDonald, Rona	MacDonald, Rona	Beaton, Calum			
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Beaton, Calum	Morrison, Fred	Beaton, Calum	Morrison, Fred			
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Morrison, Fred	Beaton, Calum	Johnson, Norman	Scott, John			
1972 1 <sup>st</sup>	Morrison, William	MacDonald, Angus	MacDonald, Angus	Campbell, Angus			
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Campbell, Calum	Graham, John	Morrison, William	MacDonald, Angus			
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Graham, John	Morrison, William	Graham, John	Morrison, William			
1973 1 <sup>st</sup>	MacDougall, John	MacDougall, John	Morrison, William	Morrison, William			
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Morrison, P/M Donald	Morrison, William	Morrison, Donald	Gillies, Norman			
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Smith, Neil	MacDonald, Rona	MacDougall, John	MacDonald, Rona			
1975 1 <sup>st</sup>	Gillies, P/M Roderick	Smith, Neil	Smith, Neil	Forbes, Peter			
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Smith, Neil	Gillies, P/M Roderick	Gillies, P/M Roderick	Gillies, P/M Roderick			
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Campbell, Calum	MacDonald, Donald	Campbell, Calum	Campbell, Calum			
1976 1 <sup>st</sup>	MacDonald, Kenneth	Duncan, Iain	MacDonald, Angus	MacDonald, Angus			
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Duncan, Iain	Smith, Neil	MacDonald, Kenneth	MacDonald, Kenneth			
3 <sup>rd</sup>	MacRae, Evan	MacDonald, Kenneth	Smith, Neil	Duncan, Iain			
1977 1 <sup>st</sup>	Duncan, Iain	Duncan, Iain	Lindsay, Archie	Smith, Neil			
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Menzies, Jim	Gillies, Roddy	Gillies, Roddy	Duncan, Iain			
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Hoffman, Fritz	Smith, Neil	Not given	Lindsay, Archie			
4 <sup>th</sup>	Gillies, Roddy	Menzies, Jim	Smith, Neil	Hoffman, Fritz			
5 <sup>th</sup>	Beaton, Calum	Hoffman, Fritz	Duncan, Iain				

1979 1 <sup>st</sup>	MacDonald, Kenneth	Burgess, John	Morrison, Iain	Grant, Patrick		
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Duncan, Iain	MacDonald, Kenneth	MacDonald, Kenneth	Wallace, Robert		
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Burgess, John	Morrison, Iain	Burgess, John	Morrison, Iain		
4 <sup>th</sup>	Grant, Patrick	MacDonald, Donald	Campbell, Gordon			
1981 1 <sup>st</sup>	MacDonald, Kenneth	Grant, Patrick	MacDonald, Kenneth	Grant, Patrick		
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Campbell, Calum	MacInnes, Hugh	MacInnes, Hugh	MacDonald, Kenneth		
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Grant, Patrick	MacDonald, Kenneth	MacPherson, Alexander	Smith, Neil		
4 <sup>th</sup>	Morrison, Louis	MacPherson, Alasdair	Campbell, Calum	MacDonald, Donald		
5 <sup>th</sup>	Smith, Neil	MacDonald, Donald	Steele, George	Morrison, Louis		
1982 1 <sup>st</sup>	Morrison, Louis	MacInnes, Hugh	MacLeod, Roderick	MacLeod, Roderick		
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Smith, Neil	Morrison, Louis	MacInnes, Hugh	MacInnes, Hugh		
3 <sup>rd</sup>	MacLeod, Roderick	Smith, Neil	Begg, James	Monk, Ronald		
4 <sup>th</sup>	Monk, Ronald	Monk, Ronald	Monk, Ronald	Morrison, Louis		
5 <sup>th</sup>	Gillies, P/M Norman	MacPherson, Iain	Morrison, Louis	Smith, Neil		
1983 1 <sup>st</sup>	Wallace, Robert	MacInnes, Hugh	MacBride, Donald	MacLeod, Roddy		
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Morrison, Louis	MacLeod, Roddy	MacDonald, Michael	MacBride, Donald		
3 <sup>rd</sup>	MacKay, Neville	Wallace, Robert	Hutt, Lesley	Morrison, Louis		
4 <sup>th</sup>	Campbell, Calum	MacBride, Donald	MacLeod, Roddy	MacInnes, Hugh		
5 <sup>th</sup>	Monk, Ronald	MacDonald, Donald	Morrison, Louis	Hutt, Lesley		
1985 1 <sup>st</sup>	Duncan, Iain	MacInnes, Hugh	MacKinnon, Angus	Morrison, Louis		
2 <sup>nd</sup>	MacLeod, Roderick	MacKinnon, Angus	MacInnes, Hugh	MacLeod, Roderick		
3 <sup>rd</sup>	MacGregor, Bain	MacLeod, Roderick	Morrison, Louis	Duncan, Iain		
4 <sup>th</sup>	Duncan, Gordon	Duncan, Iain	MacLeod, Roderick	MacInnes, Hugh		
5 <sup>th</sup>	Morrison, Louis	Morrison, Louis	Bilsland, Graham	MacKinnon, Angus		
1986 1 <sup>st</sup>	Morrison, Louis	MacLeod, Roderick	MacDonald, Iain	MacDonald, Iain	MacPherson, Colin	
2 <sup>nd</sup>	MacLeod, Roderick	MacKinnon, Angus	MacLeod, Roderick	MacLeod, Roderick	Burnett, John	
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Smith, John Angus	Smith, Neil	MacKinnon, Angus	Smith, Neil	MacKechnie, Ann	
4 <sup>th</sup>	Monk, Ronald	Morrison, Louis	Smith, Neil	Monk, Ronald		
5 <sup>th</sup>		Monk, Ronald	MacCormick, Iain	MacKinnon, Angus		



1987 1 <sup>st</sup>	MacLeod, Roderick	Cusack, Michael	Gillies, Alasdair	Gillies, Alasdair		MacRory, Iain		
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Matheson, N.	Matheson, N.	MacLeod, Roderick	MacLeod, Roderick		MacDonald, Allan		
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Cusack, Michael	MacLeod, Roderick	Cusack, Michael	Cusack, Michael		MacInnes, Donald		
4 <sup>th</sup>	MacIntyre, Donald John	MacInnes, Peter	MacIntyre, Donald, John	MacDonald, Iain				
5 <sup>th</sup>	Campbell, Calum	MacDonald, Iain	MacInnes, Peter	Henderson, Margaret				
1988 1 <sup>st</sup>	Cusack, Mike	MacDonald, Allan	Cusack, Mike	MacDonald, Allan				
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Reese, P/M A.	Cusack, Mike	MacIntyre, Donald John	Lindsay, Archie				
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Johnstone, Tom	MacIntyre, Donald John	MacDonald, Allan	Cusack, Mike				
4 <sup>th</sup>	Matheson, Neil	Smith, Neil	Smith, Neil	Johnstone, Tom				
5 <sup>th</sup>	Smith, Neil	Matheson, Neil	Johnstone, Tom	Morrison, Louis				
1991 1 <sup>st</sup>	MacLeod, Roderick	MacLeod, Roderick	Matheson, Neil	Morrison, William				
2 <sup>nd</sup>	MacKenzie, John Don	Roach, Andrew	Morrison, William	MacDonald, Dr. Angus				
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Morrison, William	Smith, Neil	MacLeod, Roderick	MacPherson, Iain				
4 <sup>th</sup>	Matheson, Neil	Morrison, William	MacPherson, Iain	MacLeod, Roderick				
5 <sup>th</sup>	Morrison, Louis	MacDonald, Dr. Angus	MacIntyre, Donald John	MacPhee, James				
1992 1 <sup>st</sup>	MacPhee, Donald	MacPhee, Donald	MacPhee, Donald	MacPhee, Donald				
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Smith, John Angus	MacInnes, Donald	Smith, John Angus	Smith, John Angus				
3 <sup>rd</sup>	MacLeod, Donald	Smith, John Angus	MacInnes, Donald	MacInnes, Donald				
4 <sup>th</sup>	Morrison, Louis	MacLeod, Donald	Morrison, Louis	MacLeod, Donald				
5 <sup>th</sup>	Young, Kenneth	Morrison, Louis	MacLeod, Donald	Lindsay, Archie				
1996 1 <sup>st</sup>	Crabtree, R.	MacInnes, Donald	Crabtree, R.	Crabtree, R.				
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Burnett, John	Smith, John Angus	MacInnes, Donald	Burnett, John				
3 <sup>rd</sup>	MacInnes, Donald	Crabtree, R.	Nicholas, F.	Smith, John Angus				
4 <sup>th</sup>	Morrison, Louis	Burnett, John	MacDonald, Donald	MacDonald, Donald				
5 <sup>th</sup>	Smith, John Angus	MacDonald, Donald	Smith, John Angus	Morrison, Louis				
1997 1 <sup>st</sup>	Smith, John Angus	Smith, John Angus	Hutt, Leslie	Hutt, Leslie				
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Burnett, John	MacInnes, Donald	Smith, John Angus	Smith, John Angus				
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Hutt, Leslie	Burnett, John	MacLeod, Donald	MacLeod, Donald				
4 <sup>th</sup>	Morrison, Louis	Hutt, Leslie	MacDonald, Donald	MacDonald, Donald				

5 <sup>th</sup>	Smith, Alastair	MacDonald, Donald	Morrison, Louis	Morrison, Louis				
1999 1 <sup>st</sup>	MacKay, Donald	Duncan, Gordon	Eade, Brendan	Watt, Robert				
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Houlihan, Margaret	Eade, Brendan	Duncan, Gordon	Duncan, Gordon				
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Roy, Graeme	Watt, Robert	Watt, Robert	Burnett, John				
4 <sup>th</sup>	Duncan, Gordon	Houlihan, Margaret	MacLeod, Donald	MacKay, Donald				
5 <sup>th</sup>	MacLeod, Stewart	MacLeod, Stewart	Houlihan, Margaret	Houlihan, Margaret				

	Piob (class)	MSR (junior)	Piob (junior)	MSR (open)	Chanter, -12	Chanter, -14	Chanter, -15
<b>1906</b> 1 <sup>st</sup>		Smith, John					
2 <sup>nd</sup>		MacMillan, D.					
3 <sup>rd</sup>		Steele, Alick					
<b>1907</b> 1 <sup>st</sup>							
2 <sup>nd</sup>							
3 <sup>rd</sup>							
<b>1909</b> 1 <sup>st</sup>	MacIntyre, Angus						
2 <sup>nd</sup>	MacMillan, Donald						
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Campbell, Neil						
<b>1911</b> 1 <sup>st</sup>	MacMillan, Donald	MacLennan, Neil					
2 <sup>nd</sup>	MacIntyre, Donald	Beaton, Roderick					
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Campbell, Neil	MacLennan, John					
<b>1913</b> 1 <sup>st</sup>		MacDonald, John (1 <sup>st</sup> Div)					
2 <sup>nd</sup>		MacLennan, Neil (1 <sup>st</sup> Div)					
3 <sup>rd</sup>		MacLennan, John (1 <sup>st</sup> Div)					
1 <sup>st</sup>		MacDonald, Angus (2 <sup>nd</sup> Div)					
2 <sup>nd</sup>		Campbell, Angus (2 <sup>nd</sup> Div)					
3 <sup>rd</sup>		MacKinnon, Geo. (2 <sup>nd</sup> Div)					
1 <sup>st</sup>		Martin, Finlay (3 <sup>rd</sup> Div)					
2 <sup>nd</sup>		Lindsay, Arch. (3 <sup>rd</sup> Div)					
<b>1914</b> 1 <sup>st</sup>	MacDonald, John	Martin, Finlay	Campbell, Angus				
2 <sup>nd</sup>	MacDonald, Archibald	Campbell, Angus	MacMillan, Donald				



3 <sup>rd</sup>	MacMillan, George	Lindsay, Archibald	Lindsay, Archibald			
<b>1922</b> 1 <sup>st</sup>		Smith, Neil		Steele, John		
2 <sup>nd</sup>		Not given		MacDonald, Roderick		
3 <sup>rd</sup>		Not given		Johnston, Lachlan		
<b>1923</b> 1 <sup>st</sup>		Smith, Neil		Steele, John		
2 <sup>nd</sup>		Smith, John		MacDonald, Roderick		
3 <sup>rd</sup>		MacInnes, Donald		MacMillan, George		
4 <sup>th</sup>		Not given		Martin, Finlay		
<b>1924</b> 1 <sup>st</sup>		Smith, Neil		Steele, John		Smith, John
2 <sup>nd</sup>		MacDonald, John		MacAulay, Angus		MacMillan, J.
3 <sup>rd</sup>		Smith, John		Martin, Finlay		MacQuarrie, Angus
4 <sup>th</sup>		Walker, Will. & MacQuarrie, Angus		MacMillan, George		
5 <sup>th</sup>						
<b>1925</b> 1 <sup>st</sup>		MacQuarrie, John		Steele, John		
2 <sup>nd</sup>		MacDonald, John		Martin, Finlay		
3 <sup>rd</sup>		Walker, William		MacAulay, Angus & MacDonald, A		
4 <sup>th</sup>		Smith, John				
<b>1927</b> 1 <sup>st</sup>		Walker, William		MacAulay, Angus		
2 <sup>nd</sup>		MacMillan, J.		Campbell, Angus		
3 <sup>rd</sup>				MacDonald, Roderick		
4 <sup>th</sup>				MacQuarrie, Angus		
5 <sup>th</sup>				Martin, Finlay		
6 <sup>th</sup>				MacMillan, George		
<b>1928</b> 1 <sup>st</sup>				MacAulay, Angus		
2 <sup>nd</sup>				Steele, John		
3 <sup>rd</sup>				Campbell, Angus		

4 <sup>th</sup>			Currie, Allan			
<b>1932 1<sup>st</sup></b>			Walker, Malcolm			
2 <sup>nd</sup>			Smith, John			
3 <sup>rd</sup>						
4 <sup>th</sup>						
5 <sup>th</sup>						
6 <sup>th</sup>						
<b>1933 1<sup>st</sup></b>			Smith, John			
2 <sup>nd</sup>			MacLean, DA			
3 <sup>rd</sup>			Scott, Adam			
<b>1946 1<sup>st</sup></b>					Campbell, Catherine	MacMillan, Neil
2 <sup>nd</sup>					MacDonald, Rona	Currie, John
3 <sup>rd</sup>					MacKinnon, Angus	Campbell, Neil
4 <sup>th</sup>					MacDonald, Neil	MacKiggan, Samuel
5 <sup>th</sup>					Campbell, Malcolm	MacLellan, Alick
6 <sup>th</sup>					MacKinnon, George	
<b>1947 1<sup>st</sup></b>		MacDonald, Finlay				MacDonald, Rona
2 <sup>nd</sup>		Campbell, Catherine				Gillies, Ronald
3 <sup>rd</sup>						Campbell, Catherine
<b>1948 1<sup>st</sup></b>		(March only) MacDonald, Finlay & Campbell, Catherine				MacDonald, Rona
2 <sup>nd</sup>						MacDonald, Neil
3 <sup>rd</sup>		MacDonld, Neil				Lindsay, Angus
<b>1949 1<sup>st</sup></b>		Campbell, Catherine				MacDonald, Rona
2 <sup>nd</sup>		MacDonald, Neil				MacKillop, A.
3 <sup>rd</sup>		MacDonald, Rona				MacKinnon, G
4 <sup>th</sup>		Lindsay, Angus				Lindsay, Angus

5 <sup>th</sup>						MacIsaac, Kathleen
6 <sup>th</sup>						MacKay, Neil
1951 1 <sup>st</sup>		MacDonald, Rona	MacDonald, Rona			
2 <sup>nd</sup>		Campbell, Malcolm	MacKillop, M.			
3 <sup>rd</sup>		MacKillop, W.	Campbell, A.			
1952 1 <sup>st</sup>		MacDonald, Rona	MacDonald, Rona			
2 <sup>nd</sup>		Campbell, Malcolm	Campbell, Malcolm			
3 <sup>rd</sup>		Tasker, Robert B.	Campbell, Angus			
1955 1 <sup>st</sup>						MacCormick, John
2 <sup>nd</sup>						Campbell, Katie Mary
3 <sup>rd</sup>						Wright, Ronald
4 <sup>th</sup>						
5 <sup>th</sup>						
6 <sup>th</sup>						
1956 1 <sup>st</sup>						MacLean, Jason
2 <sup>nd</sup>						Campbell, Katy Mary
3 <sup>rd</sup>						MacCormick, John
4 <sup>th</sup>						MacEachen, K.
5 <sup>th</sup>						
1961 1 <sup>st</sup>						Currie, John
2 <sup>nd</sup>						
3 <sup>rd</sup>						
1962 1 <sup>st</sup>				MacDonald, Sgt. William		
2 <sup>nd</sup>				Burgess, John		
3 <sup>rd</sup>				MacNeill, Seumas		
4 <sup>th</sup>						
5 <sup>th</sup>						

1963 1 <sup>st</sup>			Burgess, John		
2 <sup>nd</sup>			MacAskill, J.		
3 <sup>rd</sup>			MacPhail, Archie		
1964 1 <sup>st</sup>			MacDonald, Rona		
2 <sup>nd</sup>			Burgess, John		
3 <sup>rd</sup>			MacLellan, P/M John		
4 <sup>th</sup>					
5 <sup>th</sup>					
1965 1 <sup>st</sup>			MacFadyen, Iain		
2 <sup>nd</sup>			Brown, P/M R.U.		
3 <sup>rd</sup>			MacLellan, P/M John		
1966 1 <sup>st</sup>			MacDonald, Kenneth		
2 <sup>nd</sup>			MacDonald, Rona		
3 <sup>rd</sup>			Campbell, Calum		
4 <sup>th</sup>			Morrison, William		
5 <sup>th</sup>					
1967 1 <sup>st</sup>			MacAskill, John		
2 <sup>nd</sup>			MacDonald, Rona		
3 <sup>rd</sup>			MacCormick, John		
4 <sup>th</sup>			Morrison, William		
5 <sup>th</sup>					
1968 1 <sup>st</sup>			Morrison, William		Steele, Ewen
2 <sup>nd</sup>			MacCormick, John		MacMillan, D. & Campebell, John
3 <sup>rd</sup>			MacDonald, William		
1970 1 <sup>st</sup>			MacDonald, Rona		Campbell, John
2 <sup>nd</sup>			MacLellan, Angus J.		MacLellan, Murdo
3 <sup>rd</sup>			Lawrie, P/M Ronald		MacMillan, Donald

1971 1 <sup>st</sup>			MacDonald, Rona			
2 <sup>nd</sup>			Johnson, Norman			
3 <sup>rd</sup>			Morrison, Fred			
1972 1 <sup>st</sup>			Morrison, William			
2 <sup>nd</sup>			Graham, John			
3 <sup>rd</sup>			Beaton, Calum			
1973 1 <sup>st</sup>			Morrison, P/M Donald			
2 <sup>nd</sup>			Gillies, Norman			
3 <sup>rd</sup>			MacDougall, John			
1975 1 <sup>st</sup>		MacLennan, Murdoch				MacIntyre, Alick
2 <sup>nd</sup>		MacDonald, Donald				
3 <sup>rd</sup>		Monk, Ronald				
1976 1 <sup>st</sup>		MacDonald, John A.		MacIntyre, Donald John		
2 <sup>nd</sup>		MacDonald, Donald		MacLennan, Donald		
3 <sup>rd</sup>		MacKenzie, Ester		MacLennan, Rebecca		
1977 1 <sup>st</sup>		MacLennan, Murdoch				MacLennan, Ronald
2 <sup>nd</sup>		MacInnes, Peter				MacLeod, Morag
3 <sup>rd</sup>		MacNeill, Lena				Morrison, Mary
4 <sup>th</sup>		MacRury, Neil				
5 <sup>th</sup>						
1979 1 <sup>st</sup>		Morrison, Angus		MacMillan, Flora		
2 <sup>nd</sup>		MacKenzie, Ester		Burnett, John		
3 <sup>rd</sup>		Morrison, Angus John		MacLeod, Fiona		
4 <sup>th</sup>		MacIntyre, Donald John				
1981 1 <sup>st</sup>		MacPherson, Iain				
2 <sup>nd</sup>		MacKinnon, Angus				
3 <sup>rd</sup>		MacLennan, Ronald				
4 <sup>th</sup>						



5 <sup>th</sup>						
<b>1982</b> 1 <sup>st</sup>		MacIntyre, Donald John				MacInnes, Donald
2 <sup>nd</sup>		MacKinnon, Angus				Smith, Colin
3 <sup>rd</sup>		Henderson, Margaret				MacEachern, Ann
4 <sup>th</sup>		MacLennan, Ronald				
5 <sup>th</sup>						
<b>1986</b> 1 <sup>st</sup>					MacIsaac, Iain	
2 <sup>nd</sup>					MacSween, Donald A.	
3 <sup>rd</sup>					Morrison, Margaret	
<b>1987</b> 1 <sup>st</sup>					MacSween, Donald A.	
2 <sup>nd</sup>					Morrison, Margaret	
3 <sup>rd</sup>					MacAskill, Anne Marie	

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Below are the Sound Archive accession numbers and actual recording dates (the reader will find that the years given do not always match) of informant interviews. Original recordings of interviews are housed in the School of Scottish Studies, and copies have been retained by the author. Interviews in 1995 with Angus Campbell, Calum Beaton, Louis Morrison and Neil MacDonald were recorded in writing, as was an interview with Morrison in 1999.

#### Calum Beaton, Stoneybridge, South Uist

- 30 August 1995
- SA 1998.70 (14 November 1998)
- SC 2001.025 (20 April 1999)
- SA 2001.056 (26 November 2000)

#### Angus Campbell, Frobost, South Uist

- August 1995

#### Neil Johnstone, Daliburgh, South Uist

- SA 1998.71 (26 April 1999)

#### Rona Lightfoot, Inverness

- SC 2001.024 (April 1996)

#### Jessie MacAulay, Smerclate, South Uist

- SA 1998.68 (14 November 1998)
- SA 1998.71 (23 April 1999)

#### Neil MacDonald, Garryhellie, South Uist

- August, September 1995
- SA 1998.69 (15 November 1998)

#### Ronald MacDonald, Daliburgh, South Uist

- SC 2001.024 (August 1995)

Louis Morrison, Ormiclate, South Uist

- 3 September 1995
- 22 April 1999

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 SA 1952/146.A/2: *Piobairean Smearclait – A' Ghlas Mheur* by Donald MacIntyre  
 SA 1953/36/A1: *Piobairean Smearclait* by Roderick Bowie  
 SA 1953/36/B1: *Piobairean Smearclait* by Archie MacDonald  
 SA 1959/58/A2: Priest cures rheumatic woman with fiddle music and dancing, by Peggy MacDonald  
 SA 1960/8/9: *Piobairean Smearclait* by John Campbell  
 SA 1960/24/A7: *Piobairean a' Chlaiginn* by D. MacDonald  
 SA 1965/115/B3: *Creideamh a' Bhata Bhuidhe* by Calum MacRae  
 SA 1967/61/B12: MacCrimmon receives chanter from fairy woman, by Murdo MacLeod  
 SA 1968/116/A and B1: Emigration from Benbecula, 1836 and 1843, by D.A. MacEachen  
 SA 1970/5/6: Comments on *Maol Donn* by Angus Campbell  
 SA 1970/206/A2: Discussion of post- Great War depression in Uist, by Donald A. Johnson  
 SA 1971/43/A2: Further discussion of post-war depression in Uist, by Donald A. Johnson  
 SA 1975/32/A1: *Piobairean Bhòirnis: Fear a' fhuair ceòl as an t-sithein* by D.S. Stewart  
 SC 87.07.B: Memories of the games, by Angus Campbell

### *Music*

These items were all collected by Peter Cooke and Morag MacLeod of the School of Scottish Studies during a trip through the Hebrides in 1970.

- SA 1970/5: Old Woman's Lullaby, by Angus Campbell  
 SA 1970/6: I Got a Kiss of the King's Hand, by Angus Campbell  
 SA 1970/7: *Fhir a' Chinn Duibh* (song) and Lament for the Children (*canntaireachd*), by Alasdair Boyd  
 SA 1970/122/5: *Prince's Salute* (chanter) and *Isabel MacKay* (song), by Calum Beaton  
 SA 1970/145/2, 3: Strathspeys and reels for an Eightsome Reel, by Calum Beaton  
 SA 1970/309/3, 4: MacIntosh's Lament, by Angus Campbell

- SA 1970/309/5: My King Has Landed in Moidart, by Angus Campbell  
 SA 1970/309/6: Earl of Seaforth's Salute, by Angus Campbell  
 SA 1970/309/7: *Maol Donn* and *Cha Till Mi Tuilleadh* (songs), by Kate MacDonald  
 SA 1970/334/A, B: Various light music, ear-learned, by Kenneth Morrison

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- General Meetings vols i and ii  
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