

Early Irish harp music

played by Simon Chadwick

Wighton Harp Day Recital

Wighton Heritage Centre, Dundee Central Library, Saturday 24th March 2007

This recital looks at the 18th century repertory of the early clàrsach. Though it died out in Scotland between 1700 and 1750, the Gaelic harp was still played in Ireland up to 1800, and even after that there were a few attempts to keep the tradition alive, before it became quite extinct in the late 1800s.

Though many tunes survive in Scottish books, the sole source for the playing technique and technical details is the work of Edward Bunting. From 1792 he collected tunes, techniques, terminology and lore from the last of the old harpers. The Wighton Collection has pirate copies of his 1796 and 1804 volumes (Wighton 7066) but strangely does not have a copy of the 1840 publication - by far the most important. I have brought my own copy along for you to look at if you wish. Amazingly, most of Bunting's field notebooks and rough drafts survive, kept in Queens University Library, Belfast. Today's recital includes some tunes, in settings which are taken directly from the field notebooks.

Denis O'Hampsey was Bunting's most important informant. He was taught a conservative and old fashioned repertory and style in the early 1700s by Bríghid Ní Chatháin. Hampsey came to Scotland at least twice. Around 1730 he was in Lude, Perthshire, where he restrung and played the Queen Mary harp, and in September 1745 he was at Holyrood where he performed for Charles. His harp, the "Downhill", was made in 1702 by Cormac O'Kelly. The instrument still exists, preserved in the Guinness Museum in Dublin. My harp is an accurate copy of it, made by David Kortier in July of last year.

Féachain Gléis
Cumb Caoine an Albannaich

Collected from Denis O'Hampsey by Edward Bunting in the 1790s, these two settings are straight from Bunting's field notebook (QUB ms4.29). The lament is by John Scott and was composed in 1599. These tunes were published in 1840 and do not (as far as I can tell) appear in the Wighton collection.

Eibhlín a Rúin.

This tune appears dozens of times in the Wighton Collection, in Scottish as well as Irish books. I play Hampsey's version (from QUB ms4.29) which Bunting describes: "This set is quite different from any I ever met with".

Lady of the Desert.

This tune by the harper and composer Cornelius Lyons is based on the old Irish song air *An Chúilfhionn*. I play Hampsey's version; it appears in a slightly different variant in three different books in the Wighton Collection. The *Coolin* was very popular in Scotland and the Collection has many copies of it.

Seabhad na hÉirne

A song by Carolan in praise of Katherine O'More, also known as *The Hawk of Ballyshannon*. The setting I play was collected by Bunting from the harper Arthur O'Neill (1734 - 1816) (QUB ms4.33.1). Carolan did not compose the tune; it is *Port Atholl* by Ruaidhrí Dall Ó Catháin (c. 1570 - 1650), which appears in Oswald's "Caledonian Pocket Companion" (Wighton 31983).

King James March to Ireland

This tune in the Blakie Manuscript (hand-copied by Wighton himself from a lost original of 1692) commemorates the wars in Ireland in 1689-91 and so was very contemporary and political when written down. It supposedly originates as a tune by Myles O'Reilly from Cavan (b.1636), and was taken to Scotland by one of the brothers Thomas or William Connellan who claimed it as their own. There are many variant settings in the Wighton collection. Allan Ramsay used the tune for his song *Lochaber no More*.

A Chailini, an bhfaca sibh Seoirse
or *Conchubhar Mhac Coiréibhe*

A traditional air, used for a number of songs (hence the multiple titles), with variations by Cornelius Lyons. This is Denis O'Hampsey's set from Bunting's field notebook (QUB ms4.29). The only occurrence in the Wighton collection is Bunting's 1798 collection (Wighton 7066) where it is printed without the variations.