

Early clàrsach music played by Simon Chadwick

Wighton Harp Day Recital

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

A selection of old Scottish tunes played on my battered old replica of the medieval “Queen Mary” harp.

The old Gaelic harp repertory from Ireland was collected by Edward Bunting directly from the harpers in the late 18th century, and his notebook jottings contain many clues about harmony, setting and arrangement. By contrast, the repertory preserved in Scotland was printed in settings for other instruments. This means that to play it on the harp a lot of reconstruction and guesswork is required. The tradition died out in Ireland soon after 1800 but was already extinct in Scotland 100 years earlier.

There are two main sources of Scottish Gaelic harp music. First is the 17th century lute manuscripts, mostly now kept in Edinburgh at the National Library. They are from the East of Scotland, e.g. the Straloch book from Perthshire and the Wemyss book from Fife.

The second main source of harp music is 18th century printed collections for flute or fiddle, preserved in the Wighton Collection. The most important are:

John Bowie, “A collection of Strathspey Reels and Country Dances” with a bass for violoncello or harpsichord, of 1789 (Wighton Collection 10459); **James Oswald**, “Caledonian Pocket Companion” for the German-flute or violin, of c. 1740 (Wighton 31983); and **Daniel Dow**, “Collection of Ancient Scots Music” for violin, harpsichord or German-flute, of 1776 (Wighton 53675).

Port Preist
Port Jean Lindsay

Two tunes from the Straloch lute manuscript, c. 1629 (NLS ms adv.5.2.18). A version of Port Preist appears in Dow titled “The Fiddlers Contempt by Rory Dall” so the tune may be a composition of Ruaidhri Dall Ó Catháin (c. 1570 - c. 1650).

Airs by Fingal
Port Lennox
The Battle of Sheriff Moor

These tunes are from Bowie’s “Collection”. John Gunn in his “Enquiry” (Wighton 10405) relates how they were passed down to Bowie through the Robertson family, from John Robertson of Lude who played them on the Queen Mary harp in the early 1700s.

Caoineadh Rioghail

From Oswald’s “Caledonian Pocket Companion” where it is titled “The Royall Lament”. This tune was composed by Iain Garbh Cholla (The 7th MacLean chief, c.1600-1680) on the execution of Charles I in 1649. The variations are from Angus Fraser’s unpublished manuscript, and may have been composed by him in the 1850s.

Da Mibi Manum

Composed in the early 17th century for Lady Eglinton, by Ruaidhri Dall Ó Catháin. This tune was popular in Ireland as well as Scotland, and there are many 18th century copies in the Wighton Collection. I play the much older version from the Wemyss lute book of c. 1643 (NLS ms 2085)

Cumb Peathar Ruari

Composed by Ruaidhri Dall Ó Catháin as a lament for his sister, and preserved in Dow’s book.

Gallarway’s Lament

From Oswald’s “Caledonian Pocket Companion”. This tune also appears in Irish sources, and Irish scholars guess its title is a misspelling of *Galway’s Lament* and ascribe it to Carolan.

Cumb Joarla Wigton

The Lament for the Earl of Wigton was composed in 1619 and is preserved in Dow’s book. It has a ground somewhat like the “ports” and a set of variations that are similar to “piobaireachd” bagpipe playing. Following Ann Heymann, and imitating the pipers’ “singlings” and “doublings” I play each variation twice in different ways.