The Pastoral Repertoire, Rediscovered

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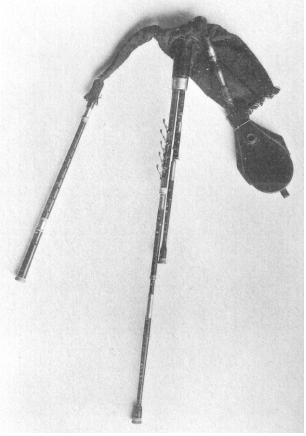
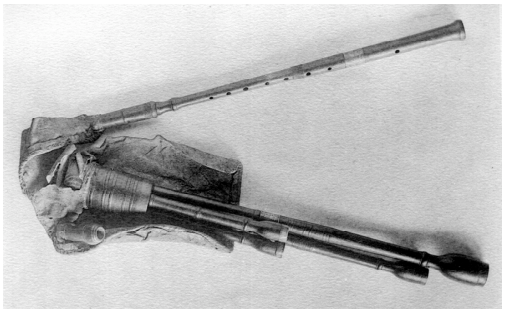
Some music has recently been rediscovered for the pastoral pipe – the fascinating ‘missing link’ between the border pipes of 1700 and the union pipes of 1800. This looked like a union pipe, except that the chanter had a bell with sound-holes at the side – like a border or highland chanter – and so could not be stopped against the player's knee. It had a narrow conical bore and would overblow a second octave, like the union pipe or oboe; it had two or three drones in a common stock; and some later instruments even had one or two regulators. Until recently, we knew about it from a tutor book published by Geoghegan in 1746 [1], and from a handful of surviving instruments. The two pictures below (courtesy of Chris Bayley) show pastoral pipes in the Duncan Fraser collection.

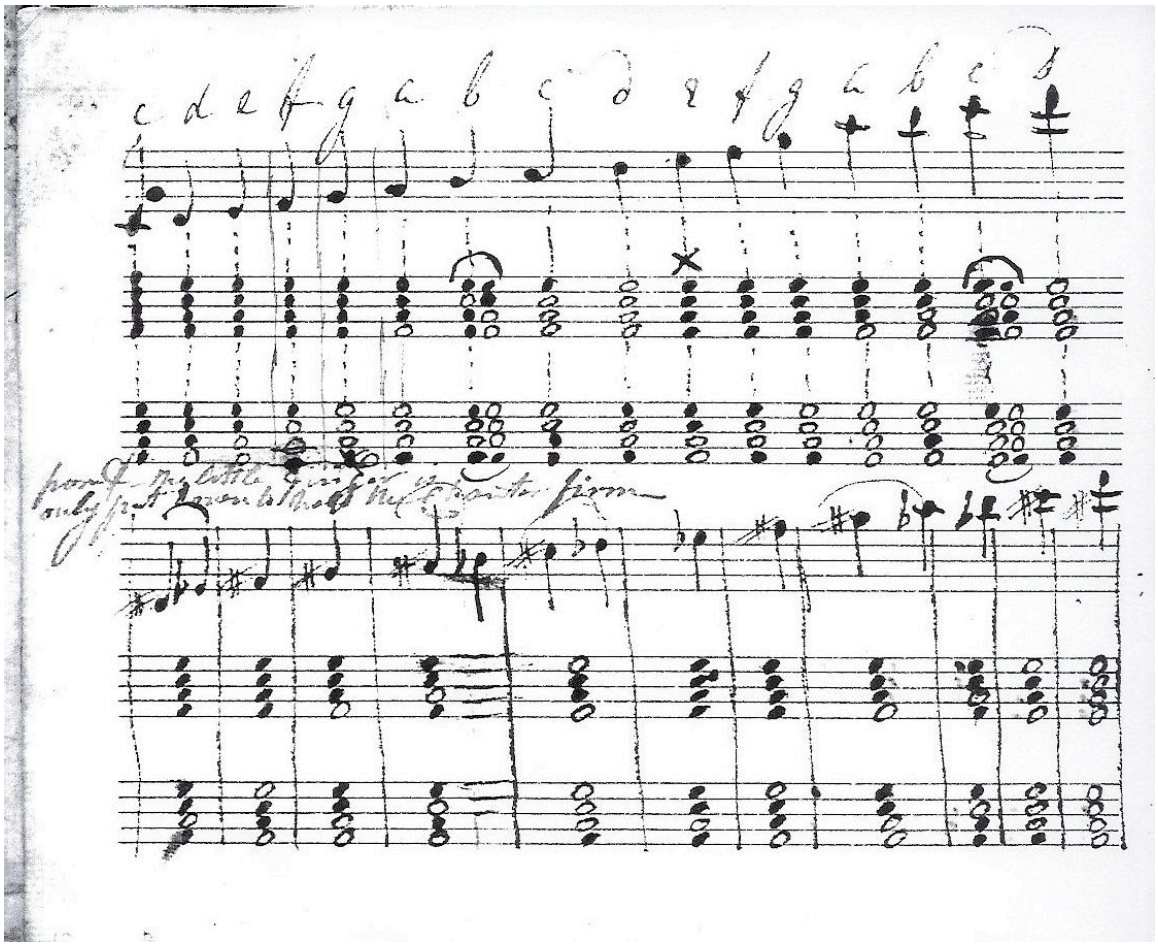




The music played on these instruments has until recently been a matter of guesswork. Geoghegan’s tutor is less helpful than we would like; although he has some information on playing technique, most of his tunes are just the popular music of the period, and some are hard to play on the pastoral chanter. (I'll discuss this in more detail later.) Nonetheless, the instrument he describes is generally accepted as the ancestor of the union pipes [2,3].

Hugh Cheape deserves the credit for finding the first new tunebook. This is a manuscript, written by a Mrs MacKie, which he got at auction along with a keyed pastoral pipe from the 1820s; he described it in a talk at the William Kennedy festival in November [4]. This manuscript challenges one conventional view of the pastoral pipes, namely, that it was difficult for a player to move from the lower to the upper register. A modern uilleann piper who wants to leap, say, from the first octave G to the second octave g will stop the chanter momentarily while he increases the bag pressure, causing the reed to double-tone. People had assumed that the pastoral pipe wouldn't be capable of such octave agility; that the player would have to ‘run up’ to high octave notes; and that this motivated its evolution into the union pipe in the late eighteenth century. However, the MacKie manuscript has a setting of ‘Speed the Plough’ with vigorous G □ g □ G octave leaps.

Hugh gave me a preview of the manuscript in August, after which I spent a couple of hours looking through the piping manuscripts in the National Library of Scotland. This was rewarded by the discovery of a miscatalogued manuscript [5], in the Advocates' collection there. Although listed as music for the union pipe, it is actually for the pastoral instrument. The give-away is a fingering chart almost identical to Geoghegan's (below).

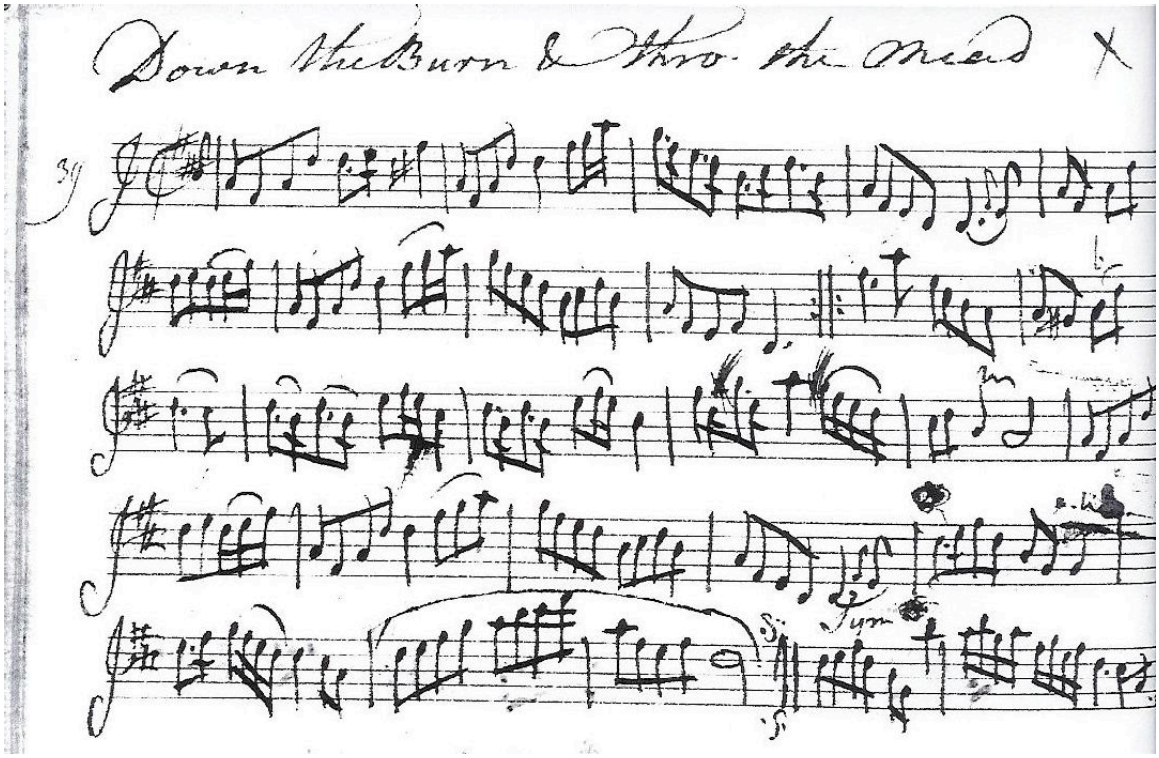


In the union pipe, the chanter has been truncated – in effect by removing the foot joint from the earlier pastoral chanter – and the six- and seven-finger notes are D# and D respectively, as opposed to D and C in the pastoral pipe. In its fundamental register, the pastoral chanter plays a nine-note scale of an octave plus a flattened lower seventh. Essentially, it plays the highland pipe scale, but with an extra octave available by squeezing harder, and many accidentals available by cross-fingering. Why then did the pastoral pipe ever go out of fashion? Is such an instrument not the piper's dream?

The Advocates' manuscript, which is believed to be late eighteenth century, contains about eighty tunes. It is a leather-bound 64-page book, 6 1/4" by 7 3/8", with printed staves and handwritten music. From one end there is the pastoral fingering chart, followed by 56 numbered tunes and a couple unnumbered; from the other end there are

22 numbered tunes, of which one is an arrangement for a quartet while the rest are playable on the pipes. There are also several tune fragments.

The tunes together provide a fascinating bridge between these islands' different piping traditions, and I can at most attempt a very preliminary appreciation here. There are Irish jigs, Scots reels, early strathspeys, a minuet, and a number of marches – including the jolly "Down the Burn and Through The Mead" below, and a four-parted 2/4 march of the kind that became popular in the following century. One of the nameless tunes is Burns' 1789 song "My Love she's but a Lassie yet"; two of the familiar ones are "The White Cockade" and "Johnnie Cope", both dating from 1745. Two of the tunes ("Tweedside" and "The Humours of Westmeath") are also in Geoghegan.



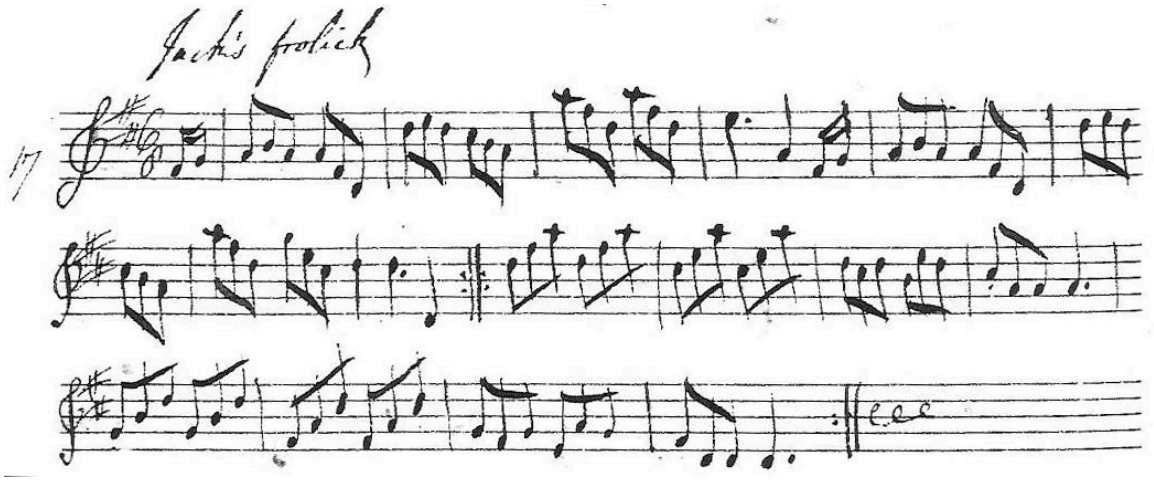
There are double-tonic Scots tunes, and Northumbrian flavours too. The most obvious is a 9-part variation set on "Corn Riggs" which tests almost the full capability of the instrument, a tune ("Mary Scott") rather reminiscent of "John Fenwick", and several tunes which use divisions familiar from Dixon and the classic Northumbrian repertoire.

Other aspects of the tunes reflect eighteenth-century fashions. For example, the dance tunes are not all an even four bars or eight bars to the measure – we find 6-bar tunes, and tunes with 6 then 8, or 6 then 10.

With luck, the MacKie and Advocates' manuscripts are just the beginning. I already have a report from the USA of another pastoral manuscript, which I'm following up, and hopefully we will discover a whole submerged repertoire for the instrument. Eighteenth-century tune books containing music extending from middle C upwards for about two

octaves are the most obvious candidates. Determining whether a particular manuscript was written by a piper, a flautist, a fiddler or an oboist may need study by people familiar with the instruments, unless we get lucky and find a tell-tale like a fingering chart. (Even this is no guarantee – another manuscript, Adv MS 5.2.25, contains measurements for a pastoral pipe but seems to be mostly fiddle music.)

So how can we be sure that these tunes are largely for the pipes? Well, quite apart from the fingering chart (which refers explicitly to the "chanter"), the tunes lie easily under the piper's fingers. With the exception of "Corn Riggs" which makes heavy use of low C, they can pretty well all be played easily on a modern uilleann chanter.



How did the pastoral piper access the second octave? It took only a few minutes' experimentation with uilleann chanters, played 'off the knee', to find that one can leap from G to g by playing a D# gracenote – that is, slapping down the top three fingers of the right hand on the chanter momentarily while increasing the bag pressure slightly. Going from A to a similarly takes a second-octave e gracenote. Alternatively, one can 'run up' a few intervening notes, as modern players do up to high d. The above tune, "Jack's Frolic", has an A a leap in the first line followed by d a; we can do the first with an e gracenote and the second with f, or use {ef} in both cases for emphasis.

So why, then, did the pastoral pipe fall out of fashion sometime in the first half of the nineteenth century? A hint may come from Haynes' history of the baroque oboe [6]. Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century woodwind development was driven by the search for more expressive instruments. The move from the shawm to the oboe, with its lipped reed, was one innovation in this line; so was the move from the recorder to the traverse flute, and many of the subsequent more technical evolutions.

The pastoral pipe may simply have gone against this grain. Although it could play the highland repertoire, it lacked the bottom-hand punch of the highland chanter with its more conical bore and harder reed. Although it could play the Northumbrian repertoire, it could not do staccato in the way a Northumbrian or union chanter can.

So when did pipers start removing the foot joint from the pastoral chanter and playing it on the knee? There may be a hint in Geoghegan, who prints two tunes ("Portsmouth Harbour" and "Clark's Hornpipe") that use a low C#. Some commentators have suggested that since the pastoral chanter does not nominally have such a note, Geoghegan was unversed in the instrument. Yet, according to Haynes, oboists of the period would frequently remove and invert the foot joint in order to play low C#, jamming the bell on to the lower tenon of the midsection – this had the effect of moving the sound-holes towards the reed. It is easy to imagine the player of a pipe that was inspired in part by the baroque oboe, and who was probably familiar with the oboe, doing the same. (It was common for town waits to play the pipes, the flute, and the shawm or oboe too.)

If by 1746 some players would already invert the foot joint to play C#, then it must have been a small step to remove it, play on the knee, and get the staccato effect already familiar from smallpipes. If playing on the knee become fashionable because of the staccato, the improved dynamics and the greater range of tone colour – in short, as it made the instrument more eloquent – then in time the instruments would be tuned for performance on the knee rather than off, and the foot joint would fall into disuse. Losing the low C was a small price to pay for the increased expressiveness. That pastoral pipes were still being sold as late as 1842 [7] suggests that their fall from fashion was slow by comparison with the world of concert woodwinds, which saw model changes every few years. There was perhaps less competitive pressure on pipemakers. Also, while a frequent player of the union pipes can render double-tonic tunes in A across both octaves, a highland piper who plays the instrument only occasionally will find this transposition awkward. So it is possible that the performer community diverged for a while into 'union' pipers playing without the foot joint, and 'pastoral' pipers who retained it.

With luck, now we know what to look for, we will discover more of the hidden repertoire of the pastoral pipe and fill in more of the gaps in its history – whether from other old manuscripts, or by studying known tunes from the period. Meanwhile, the Trustees of the National Library of Scotland have kindly given me permission not just to use the three images reproduced here, but also to scan the whole manuscript and place it online [5].

References

[1] J Geoghegan, 'The Compleat Tutor For the Pastoral or New Bagpipe', John Simpson, London (1746); at www.cl.cam.ac.uk/homes/rja14/music/
[2] W Garvin, 'The Compleat Tutor For the Pastoral or New Bagpipe', An Piobaire v 2 no 14 pp 5-6; no 15 pp 5-6; no 16 pp 2-3 (1982-3)
[3] P Roberts, 'Unravelling the history of the uilleann pipes', Common Stock v1 no 2 pp 11-16 (Nov 84)
[4] H Cheape, 'Pastoral and Union Pipes', William Kennedy Festival, 16 November 2005
[5] Adv MS 5.2.22: see www.cl.cam.ac.uk/homes/rja14/music/
[6] B Haynes, 'The Eloquent Oboe – A History of the Hautboy 1640-1760', OUP (2001)
[7] AD Fraser, 'The Bagpipe', Wm J Hay (1907) p 144