

RATTLIN ROARIN WILLIE — INTERLUDE FOR LYRA-VIOL

In many of the places, printed and online, where *Rattlin Roarin Willie* is discussed, mention is made of a tune called *Bony Roaring Willie* which is included in both the Leyden and Blaikie lyra-viol manuscripts.

Along with the lute, the lyra-viol

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:Lyra_viol.gif

was an instrument of the upper classes, who engaged professional musicians to teach it to their daughters and to write out music for them in tablature. The period around 1700 was the last gasp for these instruments, their approximate functions soon being taken over by harpsichord and violin, but it yielded what is probably the best collection of Scottish music ever, the Balcarres lute manuscript, which preserves many tune settings and variations by the best Scottish fiddler ever, John McLachlan. The lyra-viol books are far less ambitious; they contain mainly song airs, used for instruction because the pupil would have known them already, but some of these are intriguingly early sightings of tunes which are still popular.

Respective dates of 1690 and 1692 are usually given for the Leyden and Blaikie manuscripts. The originals are written in tablature and, as far as I know, there are as yet no readily available translations into staff notation. WEL's correspondent Mr Muir Wood, however, "having translated it [*i.e. Bony Roaring Willie*] from the old tablature in the Leyden MSS. ... has been able to identify it as the same air."

So, the tune is the right tune, and the dates are the earliest known for it, but lyra-viol manuscripts are foreign territory to most of us. I am therefore the more indebted to Dr Evelyn F Stell for making available to me relevant parts of her doctoral thesis *Sources of Scottish Instrumental Music 1603 - 1707*, University of Glasgow, 2000, and for giving me permission to quote from it.

Both lyra-viol manuscripts are now named after previous owners rather than their original owners or compilers:

Leyden

"In 1847, George Farquhar Graham, a noted antiquarian with a special interest in early Scottish music, presented to the Advocates' Library in Edinburgh the copy he had made of the tablature pages of John Leyden's Lyra-viol manuscript. In a prefatory note to this copy, now NLS MS Adv.5.2.19, Graham tells how he came to study it. Originally the property of another well-known antiquarian, John Leyden, who had died in 1811, it had been sent to Graham, via a friend, Patrick Maxwell, for study and assessment in 1844 (actually November 1843) by James Telfer, a schoolmaster in the Borders. Telfer stated that he had received the manuscript from the brother of John Leyden, to whom he had promised to return it, otherwise he would have been prepared to give the volume away. Graham made his copy, and duly returned the original, but with misgivings, being aware how easily these precious manuscripts could be lost if they remained in private hands. To try to preserve

what he could do of this one for the nation, he decided to donate his partial copy to the Library. Sure enough, the Leyden manuscript then disappeared completely from view, and scholars had only the Graham copy to work from - until an unexpected discovery took place around 1970.

In 1942, King's College Library in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, now Newcastle University Robinson Library, had been presented with an important local collection by Professor Sir George White Pickering and other members of his family. This collection of 4,400 volumes had been gathered over fifty years by their uncle, Robert White, a Newcastle antiquarian who had died in 1874, and contained documents covering many aspects of Northumbrian life and culture.

The wartime situation was probably the reason why the family now wished to ensure its preservation, and it may also have been the reason why no-one realised until 25 years after its deposit that among this enormous collection was the original Leyden lyra-viol manuscript." [EFS]

Blaikie

"Andrew Blaikie was an engraver living in Paisley in the early nineteenth century. He was well known at that time as an enthusiastic collector of early ballads and songs, and is on record as possessing two seventeenth-century manuscripts of lyra-viol music. Sadly, both of these have long since disappeared, but a portion of one of them has come down to us, thanks to another avid collector of early music, Andrew John Wighton of Dundee." [EFS]

Wighton's careful copy of 40 of the tunes is now housed in Dundee Central Library along with the rest of The Wighton Collection.

Dr Stell convincingly identifies the compiler of both the Leyden and Blaikie manuscripts as Glasgow musician Andrew Adam, who also compiled the Margaret Sinkler manuscript of 1710 which is in standard staff notation for fiddle and keyboard. She notes that:

"The general accuracy of the [Blaikie] manuscript seems not to have been good, in spite of Wighton's care in copying. Some tunings are wrongly named, rhythm-signs are rarely included, and those that do exist are not always correct. There are very few time-signatures. A common reason for inadequate rhythmic indications in this type of manuscript is that the tunes were already well-known to the performers. Working out the sometimes complex rhythmic patterns would have been unnecessary, and indeed might have proved confusing for less able players." [EFS]

This is a very good explanation why the *Bony Roaring Willie* tablatures in both sources are so difficult to "translate" with certainty. While the rhythm markings and barlines are clearly written in the Blaikie copy, they do not bear any relation to the tune as known elsewhere, and even if we had nothing else to go on, we would notice that the same melodic phrases within the tune occur with different rhythm markings and in different relationships to the barlines in different places. I have therefore ventured a translation which ignores the original rhythm markings and barlines, and followed the pitch values of the melody only, which are given in the tablature by letters indicating which fret should be stopped on which string. These are clear enough and are almost exactly the same in both sources, including one glaring error where a finger is placed at the right fret on the wrong string. Readers may wish to try different rhythmic interpretations using the same pitch values.

The various lyra-viol tunings specify relative, not absolute pitches. The tune is here scored in G and A, for easy comparison respectively with the *Museum* version and with the

bagpipe versions. There being no major 7ths, modal key signatures are used.

BLAIKIE G SCORE AND MIDI FILE

BLAIKIE A SCORE AND MIDI FILE

As translated here, this is recognisable as Rattlin Roarin Willie, but with a few different touches. With only one strain, I take it to be an instrumental rendition of the song air. A few chords punctuate the melody line and sketch out some harmony: in bars 4 and 5 the lower note should be understood as the melody, with the upper chordal note possibly held over the next melody note, while in bar 8 the upper notes are the melody. Rhythmically, there is plenty of scope for cutting and dotting, but I have deliberately refrained from this as many different interpretations are equally possible. Slurs and trills follow the original; these make approximate sense when the tune is put with the first stanza of Burns' lyric, but this setting appears, with the different number of notes — syllables — in the otherwise similar bars 1, 3 and 7, to be tailored to fit another lyric which Andrew Adam and his pupil knew. While the evidence is in favour of this being a song version it will be noted that the range and scale are those of the chanter — the tune may have always been a pipe tune as well as a song air.

The main difference from the *Museum* and most other versions is in the last two bars. Bar 7 is a reprise of bars 1 and 3 rather than a new high-note figure. In bar 8 Andrew Adam's chords give a V-I cadence as in the *Museum* version, but the low leading-note is absent from the melody, even though it is available. This bar fits "welcome hame to me" perfectly, with the slur in the right place for "wel-" and only one note for "hame". This melodic feature will crop up again in one each of the fiddle and pipe settings.

It is well to pause here. This is the earliest known version of the tune. It may be a survival of its original form, or something very close to it. With the Atkinson fiddle version, written down about the same time, we will begin a breathless journey as we watch this single stem put forth branches many, varied, and wonderful.