

RATTLIN ROARIN WILLIE — BAGPIPE SETTINGS

Settings of *Rattlin Roarin Willie* have been made for Border pipes, Northumbrian smallpipes and Highland pipes. They are all set in the tonic or 6-finger key of the chanter. The tune is not in the Irish pipe repertoire but, set in D, would have been eminently playable on the earlier pastoral pipes with their low C natural bell-note, though no written settings are known.

HIGHLAND PIPE SETTINGS

(NB: for musicians not familiar with Highland pipe notation, a key signature of 2 sharps is assumed and actual pitch is usually a semitone higher than written.)

William Gunn's is the first (1848) published Highland setting. Though he gives it a new Gaelic title, *Am Porst Cròm*, which he translates as *The Circle*, his setting is closely modelled on the previously published Gow fiddle version, but with the fiddle grace notes lengthened into melody notes, and pipe gracings added. As with many early ceol beag settings, interest lies in the ornamentation as well as the tune. Gunn uses two gracings which fell out of use in the 20th century:

1/ the form of *taorluath* which includes what is now called the "redundant A" (bar 1); Gunn writes this as a melody note, giving it a rhythmic value

2/ the index-finger trill on C sharp (bar 7) rather than the more familiar two-handed "C doubling".

The image shows a musical score for the Highland pipe setting of 'Rattlin Roarin Willie'. The score is written on four staves of music. Above the first staff, the title 'Am Porst Cròm.' is written, followed by 'The Circle.' and '(Rattling roaring Willie.) 61'. The notation includes various pipe-specific ornaments such as grace notes and trills, and the key signature is two sharps (D major).

Courtesy Museum of Piping at the College of Piping

David Glen published two settings which differ only a little from Gunn and Gow (one is closer to Gow than to Gunn, and has Gow's *Ladykirk* title as well as Gunn's *Circle* title). Logan's setting (c. 1907), credited to Neil Macmillan, keeps to the same outline but has a couple of different melodic touches (bars 1, 3 & 7), probably from the song version in the *Museum*.

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Rattlin' Roarin' Willie. Jig. Neil Maemillan's Set.

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Courtesy Museum of Piping at the College of Piping

While these settings are serviceable readings of the tune they cannot be taken as representative of any Lowland or Border piping tradition. I believe them rather to be typical of Highland settings of Lowland and Border tunes which are often directly traceable to published fiddle and song collections. It is neither wise nor fair to expect the Highland tradition to shed light on traditional Lowland or Border piping; viewed from a distance the traditions lie close to each other on the spectrum, but each has its own colour and makes its own distinct contribution to the musical rainbow.

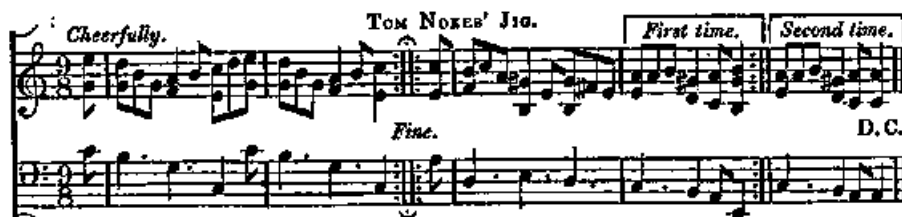
Highland editors ignored this tune for most of the 20th century, but it has been included in two recent collections, Wm M MacDonald's *Glencoe Collection* (Book 2, 1997), and Rory Campbell's *Field of Bells* (1999). The chief difference between Highland pipe versions and all others is the use of low G natural in the last bar, effectively a modification of the underlying harmonic pattern. This feature was ironically taken up by later fiddle editors unaware of the tune's long and distinguished history on the fiddle; I include here the settings in my own first editions of Vickers and Bewick, since corrected.

NORTHUMBRIAN SMALLPIPE SETTING

The only known Northumbrian smallpipe setting, *Ranting Roaring Willie*, is recorded in Robert Bewick of Gateshead's manuscripts (c. 1835), and it is a gem. The alternative title, *The Mitford Galloway*, is that of a song which Thomas Whittle of Cambo wrote to the tune, but Bewick's version is thoroughly instrumental rather than vocal.

Bewick's full setting only came to light comparatively recently (1986), though a partial and, regrettably, careless transcription was included in the *Northumbrian Minstrelsy* (1882) and has since been widely copied along with its errors, also regrettably, and its mistaken commentary, likewise. The *Minstrelsy* editors wrote that the tune was "of English parentage, as it can be traced to the year 1669, where it appears in the first edition of "Apollo's Banquet" as "Tom Noke's Jig". They copy William Chappell in pointing out a connection between *Tom Nokes' Jig* and *Come open the door, Sweet Betty*, but it is they, not Chappell, who make an imaginary connection between these and *Rattlin Roarin Willie*.

It is not *Tom Nokes' Jig*, and although it flourished in the musically fertile soil of Northumberland and Tyneside there is no evidence of its being English in origin. It may be a harsh judgment on the *Minstrelsy* editors, but it seems that because of their flimsy grasp of, coupled with lack of respect for, their sources, they did not feel it necessary to accumulate the knowledge, experience, or contacts which would have enabled them to do what they were attempting. Fortunately many of their (mainly uncredited) written sources — Peacock, Vickers, Topliff as well as Bewick — survive in unmutated form, but too many innocent readers have been lulled by the knowledgeable tone of their often inaccurate commentary into an inability to detect a level of musical incompetence which verges on vandalism.



Robert Bewick, son of the engraver Thomas Bewick, was a pupil of John Peacock who, from the evidence of his own *Favorite Collection* (Newcastle, c.1800), was an heir to the same cross-Border repertoire that William Dixon recorded. While we do not know for certain exactly which type of pipe Dixon played or the fingering or technique he used, and we do know for certain exactly which type of pipe Peacock played and the fingering and technique he used, this is of much less importance than their shared repertoire and musical idiom.

Because of their different scale some Border pipe tunes were musically compromised when transferred to smallpipes. The one-octave major scale remained the basis of the smallpipe chanter range, but Peacock took an active part in increasing it with the addition of keywork, and this changed the nature and direction of the repertoire. Nevertheless, the variation sets he and Bewick recorded show them still to be part of the golden thread of Border piping reaching back to the Allans and Dixon and, in altered form, forward to the Clough family who became — perhaps already were — the main tradition bearers.

So, to Bewick's setting. In addition to the 8-note plain chanter scale in nominal G (actual pitch traditionally F-and-a-bit), it uses the keyed notes low F sharp, and high and low F natural in all 6 strains, and high A and B in strain 4 only. There are discrepancies in Bewick's notation of accidentals but the overall meaning is clear, and consistent with the fiddle versions, with the major 7th low leading-note in bar 8. Whether Bewick's set is adapted from an older one for open-ended chanter, or newly developed from the basic melody, it is likely that John Peacock either had a hand in it or was its author. It contains details in common with Dixon's version, but they are standard runs; with some tunes there is a direct connection between Dixon and Peacock or Bewick, but here it is only in the broader musical idiom rather than the specific setting.

Bewick's manuscripts are in Gateshead Public Library. A later 19th century transcription of this tune, more accurate than the *Minstrelsy's* (also metrically more reliable than Bewick's original), is reproduced on the FARNE website.

BEWICK SCORE AND MIDI FILE

SCOTTISH SMALLPIPE SETTING

Bewick's Northumbrian smallpipe version is here adapted for Scottish smallpipes. The high note passages have been replaced and bar 8 of strains refigured for compatibility with the 9-note range.

SSP SCORE AND MIDI FILE

BORDER PIPE SETTINGS

Here we make a distinction between the early and the revived Border piping tradition. The early tradition is impossible to identify with absolute certainty but William Dixon's repertoire, corroborated by the tunes named in the *Life of James Allan*, is now widely accepted as representative of that tradition, and dissenters have as yet neither made a convincing case for its being anything else nor provided a plausible alternative. Whether or not Dixon's tunes were played on a bellows-powered instrument, and whether this had a conically or cylindrically bored chanter, are interesting hardware questions, but not as interesting as the tunes themselves, which in my published edition I was careful to describe as "A Border Bagpipe Repertoire" rather than "A Repertoire for Border Pipes". Lady Dorothea Ruggles-Brise, to whom we owe the rescue and preservation of Dixon's manuscript, said much the same thing in describing them as "pipe jigs of the border country".

Rattling Roving Willie is the last of the 40 tunes in William Dixon's book, in which the latest date written is 1738. It follows *Jack Lattin*, which we now know to have been a very recent tune at the time, so it may well have been a newly made setting. Scores are given in the original key of G and, following current practice, in A.

DIXON G SCORE AND MIDI FILE

DIXON A SCORE AND MIDI FILE

Dixon's strain 1 is a sound basic version of the tune. With 5 strains in all we cannot speak of an overall pattern of pairs, but there is a satisfying alternation between low and high strain openings. Strain 5 is built on an arpeggio figure — Dixon frequently brings in arpeggios at or near the end of a tune — but it is an ascending arpeggio rather than the descending arpeggio of other versions, suggesting that he was expanding the tune without reference to an existing variation set. In common with *Jack Lattin* this is not one of his best settings, its weakest feature being the excessive recycling of strain 1 bar 2 which recurs as bar 2 in strains 2 & 4 and as bar 6 in all 5 strains.

Dixon's strain ending, though, is extremely interesting. In common with the lyra-viol version

and Wright's *Rantin Bille* the low leading-note is absent here. It may be that Dixon knew the tune primarily as a song air, and it was still being sung this way over forty years after Andrew Adam had written it down, also from oral tradition. In preserving this feature of what may be the oldest form of the tune Dixon naturally avoids the chanter's minor 7th low leading-note, harmonically inappropriate at this point.

The modern revival of the Border tradition was spearheaded by Gordon Mooney and his pioneering *A collection of the choicest Scots Tunes for the Lowland or Border Bagpipes* (1983). In this he included William Gunn's *Rattling Roaring Willie*, and made mention of some of the older versions. He omitted Gunn's grace notes, wisely choosing not to be prescriptive about the specifics of gracing in a newly revived piping tradition.

For *The Border Bagpipe Book* (1993) I made a new setting based on the Atkinson version and expanded to 10 paired strains. In the light of Dixon's version, and longer and deeper acquaintance with the others given here, it became clear that this setting needed to be rewritten, with some strains discarded, new ones introduced, and the rest more or less radically revised. It has not been necessary to reinvent the wheel. The task has been rather to put together a wheel which fits my own cart: I have freely borrowed and altered ideas from Dixon and other settings, have used the traditional technique of overblowing, and have taken account of formal considerations. Some of the vocabulary is very Border-pipe specific and has grown directly from ideas in some of Dixon's other tunes. As Dick Hensold said to me once in another context, "It works in practice, but it'll never work in theory."

SEATTLE SCORE AND MIDI FILE