

Niel MacLeod of Gesto's Collection of Piobaireachd

Niel MacLeod was the laird of Gesto, which is about six miles from Dunvegan in the Isle of Skye. He was born about 1766/8, and succeeded to the land and title in 1787. He served in the Army from 1793, becoming a Lieutenant in the 42nd Regiment, and finally a Captain when he left the Regiment in 1797. The expression which he used, 'Captain H.P. Independents' means that he was on half-pay and not attached to any regiment.

Iain Dubh MacCrimmon is thought to have been born in the early 1730s and lived until 1822. In 1828, Niel MacLeod published this book containing 20 tunes in canntaireachd 'as verbally taught by the M^cCrummen pipers... to their apprentices', taken, as he says, from John M^cCrimmon.

The book was reprinted by J. & R. Glen in 1880. The reprint was freshly typeset, but is extremely accurate, and the present writer has not noted any discrepancy between the two, except for the word 'piobaireachd' on the title page which became 'pibaireachd' in 1880 (it remained as 'piobaireachd' on the outer cover).

Among pipers this collection is often known simply as 'the Gesto book' and this has caused some confusion. First, there is a large collection of Highland music, not set for pipes, published by Dr. K. N. MacDonald, a grandson of Niel MacLeod, in 1895 and 1902, and this is entitled 'The Gesto Collection of Highland Music'. Secondly, there are persistent claims that MacLeod of Gesto left a large manuscript of piobaireachd, from which the printed book is only a small selection. These claims originate with Simon Fraser (1844-1934) and no-one else has claimed to have seen this manuscript.

There are at least two authentic traces of other music collected by Gesto. In 1815 the music collector Alexander Campbell visited Gesto, and copied out the canntaireachd for 'The Cameron's Gathering' [i.e. Piobaireachd Dhomhnaill Duibh or 'Black Donald's March'] and 'MacGregor's Gathering'. He published piano arrangements of both in his *Albyn's Anthology* (Edinburgh, 2 vols, 1816, 1818). His transcript of 'The Cameron's Gathering' is in Edinburgh University Library, MS La.51, and a partial copy of 'The MacGregors' Gathering' was printed in the *Celtic Monthly*, volume 3, page 79 (January 1895). i /

A recent discovery is a short manuscript written by MacLeod of Gesto, of historical notes on the 20 tunes in the present work, now in the National Library, Mus.D.s.138.

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