

Scottish Airs in London Dress: Vocal Airs and Dance Tunes in Two Eighteenth- Century London Collections

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The three-year, AHRC-funded Bass Culture research project (2012–15) investigated the bass-lines and keyboard accompaniments of a substantial number of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Scottish dance tune-books, whilst another strand of the project focused on contemporary bagpipe sources. The present article focuses on two English fiddle tune-books containing genuine or purportedly genuine Scottish repertoire.

In the early stages of the project, Gore's online Scottish Music Index – previously known in book form as the *Scottish Fiddle Music Index* – was a primary resource to help us draw up a list of 299 printed fiddle music sources to consult.¹ As well as examining the bass-lines and accompaniments, it was also important to find out what we could about the collections, their compilers and their publication history, in order to place them in context. To this end, any paratextual material – the title page itself, contents lists, subscribers, introductions or whatever – was crucial.

Gore's index revealed a good number of Scottish publications, and quite a few that had been published both in Scotland and London. Some, however, were published solely in London. Two of these, published at either end of the eighteenth century, turned out to be of particular interest, one for the sheer extent of its paratextual material, and the other for the lack of it. The later one, the *Caledonian Muse*, was published in 1790 by the Thompson family, a flourishing publishing house in St Paul's Churchyard. This collection contained an unusually extensive preface compared to most other fiddle tune books; this was intriguing, because prefaces and extended introductions are more prevalent in songbooks than in functional collections of dance tunes.²

By comparison with the paratextually-rich *Caledonian Muse*, the earlier collection was positively enigmatic. In Gore's index, it is described as *A Collection of Scots, Irish & other airs*, ostensibly published by Daniel Wright, whose shop was at the Sun Tavern in Holborn. It dated from approximately 1735, and consisted of a modest 26 pages, with no title page. Gore supplied the provisional title, and

¹ Gore 1994.

² Thompson 1790a.

with no apparent paratextual material at all, there was little to indicate its identity, although Moffat reported that Frank Kidson had confidently identified it as a Wright publication.

The timeline of interest in the mystery volume is quite involved. In 1983, the Librarian in Dundee Central Library sought the opinion of Irish music expert Aloys Fleischmann, whose typed reply was pasted inside the bound cover of the mystery volume. Fleischmann cited the entry on Irish folk music in the fifth edition of *Grove's Dictionary of Music* published in 1954, in turn citing Moffat's *Minstrelsy of Ireland* of 1898. Moffat's remarks were contained in a footnote about the air to a song entitled, 'The day went down: the last lay of the dying bard', by Desmond Ryan.³ The air itself was originally called 'The Princess Royal', but by Moffat's time was known as 'The Arethusa'. Moffat reported here that Frank Kidson found 'unmistakable evidence to show that the [untitled Dundee] work is one of Wright's publications'.

Further research traced Kidson's remarks to a *Musical Times* article of 1894, 'New Lights upon Old Tunes: "The Arethusa"'; and indeed, Kidson later reiterated his views on the Arethusa in an article he wrote for *Grove's dictionary*, but in *Grove* he made no mention of the Dundee enigma.⁴

There were, however, a number of features which promised to assist with the identification of this book:

1. Upon examining the book in the Wighton Collection, the strange numbering of the tunes was noteworthy, with two sequences of tune numbers being apparently interleaved, and the whole publication then page-numbered normally (see Figures 1 and 2).
2. Each sequence appeared to use a slightly different typeface for the tune titles, and one sequence was distinctly more 'Celtic' in nature than the other – with a few Irish and Welsh tunes as well as Scottish, and some English ones. The untitled volume therefore appeared somehow to be a compilation of two pre-existing collections. The existence of two sequences with differing coverage had not been noted by Kidson.
3. Kidson's 'unmistakable evidence' of the volume being a Daniel Wright publication appeared to be that he had traced the 'Arethusa' air in three early eighteenth-century collections, of which Daniel Wright's *Compleat Collection of Celebrated Country Dances* (c.1730–35) and *Compleat Tutor for ye Flute* (c.1735) were two;⁵ and the third was John

³ Moffat 1897, p. 232.

⁴ Kidson 1894; Kidson 1910.

⁵ Wright 1730; Wright 1735.

Walsh's *Compleat Country Dancing Master* (c.1730).⁶ Additionally, Wright had also published another collection combining Scottish, Irish and Welsh airs – his *Aria di Camera* for solo violin or flute, which Kidson dated c.1726.⁷ The mixed nature of the contents, and some overlap of tunes, presumably formed part of Kidson's premise, although the melodies themselves were certainly not identical in detail. *Aria di Camera* has no bass-lines, and does not fall within the remit of the Bass Culture project. Whilst 'Arethusa' and the *Aria di Camera* had no bearing upon the present project, a more decisive identification of the unnamed Dundee book was nonetheless clearly desirable.

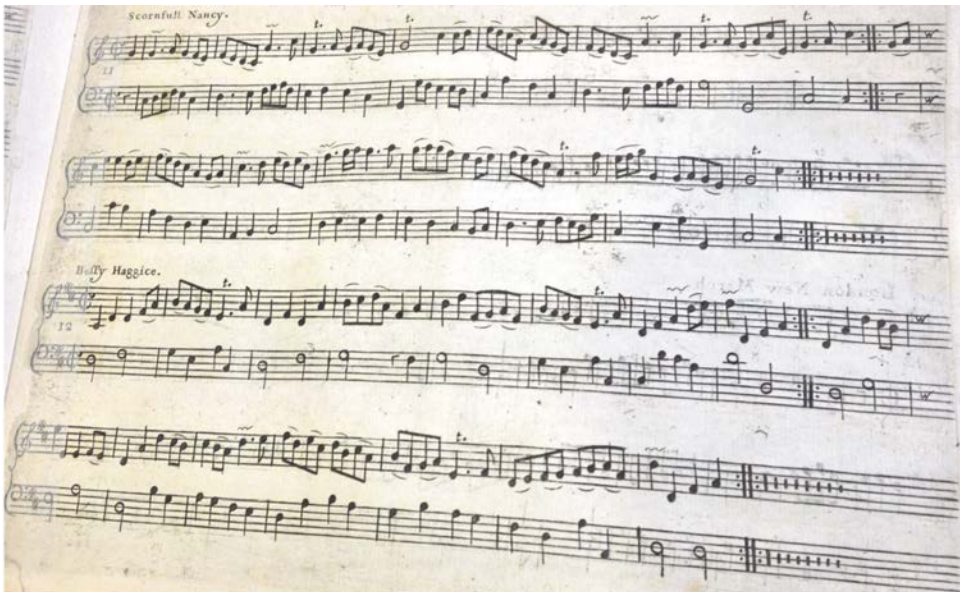


Figure 1 Dundee enigma, p. 3

⁶ Walsh 1730.

⁷ Wright 1731.



Figure 2 Dundee enigma, p. 4

4. Kidson, and in turn the music bibliographers Charles Humphries and William C. Smith, had mentioned that Daniel Wright had more than once pirated publications by the prolific John Walsh publishing house – not that Walsh himself was entirely blameless in that regard. It was rather surprising that, despite the fact that the ‘*Arethusa*’ had also appeared in a Walsh book of country dances, these authorities had missed this clue that the Dundee enigma might be connected with Walsh rather than Wright.

Three questions thus remained: in the first instance, where did Daniel Wright come into it? Had he in fact pirated Walsh materials for this enigmatic little book of dance tunes, or was Kidson’s suggested link with Wright a complete red herring? Second, what precisely was the connection with Walsh? And third, could identifications be made for the two books that constituted the source material for the Dundee enigma?

The online tools that we have at our disposal today make musical detective work much easier than in the past. Methodical internet-searching of a few distinctive tune-titles led to a recent University of Toronto doctoral dissertation about Handel aria arrangements in a series of Walsh publications called *The Lady’s Banquet*. Sara-Anne Churchill’s primary focus was on the Fifth Book, but she examined the Fourth in some detail, relying to a certain extent on secondary

sources and drawing on Smith and Humphries' Walsh bibliographies.⁸ She traced some of the tunes to Fleischmann's index rather than their earliest iterations; and although she noted the unusually-numbered tunes, she had not been able to establish the significance. However, it was clear from her list of contents that the Dundee enigma was none other than the second edition of Walsh's Fourth Book of *The Lady's Banquet*.⁹ The series was an instructional collection of dance tunes and popular songs arranged for keyboard. Drawing his repertoire from the wide array of sources available to him, Walsh chose opera arrangements and other easy music for his series, selecting social dance tunes from England and her Celtic neighbours, for this new edition of the Fourth Book.

There was evidently no connection with Daniel Wright at all. This was confirmed by examination of the National Library of Scotland's microfilm of Wright's *Aria di Camera*, published by Daniel Wright senior at the Sun Tavern in Holborn, and his son, Daniel Wright junior, at the Golden Bass in St Paul's Churchyard. A small book of tunes for flute or fiddle, it included a flute tutor at the beginning of the volume. There was some overlap in repertoire between the *Aria di Camera* and the second edition of *Lady's Banquet* Book 4, but too many melodic differences – not to mention different keys – for there to be any discernible link.

One might note at this juncture that Elizabeth Ford identified Wright's flute tutor as a reprint of Peter Preluur's *The Modern Musick-Master*, which was itself a translation of Hotteterre's flute instructor. Whether either the reprint or translation was authorized remains a mystery, but it does enable us to date the Wright *Aria di Camera* to c.1731, some five years later than Kidson's estimate. Andreas Habert's modern edition of *Aria di Camera* capably summarises its history.¹⁰

An internet search finally established the provenance of Walsh's country dance tunes for the *Lady's Banquet*, Book 4, as they were drawn from two of Walsh's own slimmer volumes, each printed only on one side of paper, presumably already with the intention of later combining them. *Thirty New and Choice Country Dances Set for the Harpsichord or Spinnet, The Dances Perform'd at Court and publick Entertainments Being a delightful and Entertaining Collection*,¹¹ was followed by *A Second Collection of Thirty New and Choice Country Dances* [...].¹² The subtitle of the second volume is significantly followed by another line squeezed in using small type: 'Consisting of Irish, Welch, & Scotch Tunes'. This vindicates the observation that one of the two collections was more Celtic than the other. The Smith/Humphries bibliography of Walsh publications (1721–1766)¹³ enables us to pin these down to catalogues of 2 October 1731 and 20 May 1732, with *The*

⁸ Churchill 2011.

⁹ Walsh 1734.

¹⁰ Habert 1986.

¹¹ Walsh 1731.

¹² Walsh 1732.

¹³ Humphries and Smith 1968.

Lady's Banquet Fourth Book (which we know to be the second edition, as the first had different contents) dating from c.1734. Repackaged for the female keyboard student, Walsh boasted 'the newest and most airy lessons', 'proper for the improvement of the hand'. It was still a 'choice collection', and although he now mentioned 'minuets and marches' as opposed to 'dances perform'd at Court, the Theatres, & Publick Entertainments', scans of the two country dance books and the *Lady's Banquet* Book 4 (2nd edition) proved that the contents and indeed the plates themselves, are identical.

The triumph of several mysteries solved cannot, however, mask the fact that rather than being a book of Scottish fiddle tunes for enthusiastic Highlanders or Edinburgh society dancers, the Dundee enigma is merely an English-published collection of accessible harpsichord tunes combining both Celtic and English country dances. It certainly informs us of the kind of repertoire that was popular in English society in the early 1700s, but it is necessary to look beyond the presence of a variety of accompaniment styles to deduce anything about their significance. Some of the dance accompaniments are specifically written using occasional chords for the harpsichord, whilst others have single lines, perhaps reflecting a more dance-band style – for example, 'Role the Ruple Sawny' (p.15), which could be said to have a prototypical fiddle bass. Significantly, this tune appears in the *Second Collection of Thirty New and Choice Dances*, the one which features Celtic repertoire. Twelve dances in the first collection employ chords to a greater or lesser extent in the left or right hand, and a couple more use left-hand octaves. However, in the second, Celtic collection, only three of the thirty dances employ triads or dyads and octaves, and to a limited extent at that. This is either a conscious or subconscious recognition of a different style of tune, or – as a wild guess – it could even suggest that a different individual provided the bass-lines in this collection.

By sheer commercial coincidence, the Thompson family's later *Caledonian Muse* was published in St Paul's Churchyard, where Wright junior's shop had also been situated. St Paul's was at the heart of the eighteenth-century printing, publishing and bookselling trades. Starting c.1746, the music publisher Peter Thompson and his successors published a prolific catalogue of music from no. 75 St Paul's Churchyard for some 59 years. Examination of their extant catalogues reveals a wide range of publications, ranging from popular songs and country dances, Scottish material, military music, an extensive line of songs 'as sung' at the main pleasure gardens – principally but not entirely at Vauxhall Gardens and Ranelagh – to more serious chamber music and songs. According to Van der Straeten's *History of the Violin*, Peter Thompson senior was an oboist and violinist at St. Paul's as well as a publisher (the source of this statement is not cited);¹⁴ and Philip H. Highfill's *A Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses, Musicians, Dancers,*

¹⁴ Straeten 1933, p. 473.

Managers & Other Stage Personnel in London, 1660–1800 suggests that he may have been a descendant of the London and Dublin book and music seller, Nathaniel Thompson who traded in the late seventeenth century.¹⁵ Intriguing though this suggestion is, it seemed unnecessary to pursue it for the present project.

By 1790, when the *Caledonian Muse* was published, the firm was in the hands of Samuel, Ann and Peter.¹⁶ (Considering Ann's name was still on the books thirty years after Peter senior's death, she might have been his widow or maybe a daughter or daughter-in-law – this is another unexplored detail, incidental to the story.)

The Thompsons produced both their *Caledonian* and *Hibernian Muse*¹⁷ books in 1790, as confirmed by their catalogues. (There was no 'Cambrian Muse', although they did publish Welsh tunes in James Hook's set of *Two English, Two Irish, Two Scotch and Two Welch Airs* for four hands at one piano, op. 83.)¹⁸

These were by no means their only Celtic offerings. For example, they published a composite volume of McGibbon's *Collection of Scots Tunes* (entitled, *A Choice Favorite Collection of Scots Tunes*) between 1779 and 1794; additionally, they published a book of *Thirty Favourite Scots Songs*, which was a very different collection indeed to the Scotsman Bremner's contemporary London-published *Thirty Scots Songs*.¹⁹ Whilst Bremner's collection had been based on Allan Ramsay's *The Tea-Table Miscellany* repertoire, the Thompsons' contained an Anglo-Scottish assortment which included a large number of 'Scotch' and 'Jockey' songs, linked to named singers famous at London's Vauxhall Gardens and elsewhere on the pleasure garden circuit.

Both of the Thompson family's *Muse* collections have introductory essays, drawing heavily on recent scholarship – crucially, but by no means exclusively, Ramsay of Auchtertyre's essay from the Macdonald *Highland Vocal Airs*, of 1784; and Joseph C. Walker's *Historical Memoirs of the Irish Bards*, of 1786.²⁰ Whilst in this sense derivative – as are the contents of the collections themselves – the introductions conscientiously reference their sources with plentiful footnotes, and are plainly intended to inform and provide readers with relevant context. Where the tunes are from operas, they are directly referenced, and Highland connections are noted, but there is otherwise no indication as to where the tunes are sourced from.

The subtitles of the two collections give a fair indication of the contents inside. The *Caledonian* one contains, 'scarce and favourite Scots Tunes, both

¹⁵ Highfill 1973.

¹⁶ Thompson 1790a.

¹⁷ Thompson 1790b.

¹⁸ Hook n.d.

¹⁹ McGibbon 1779; Thompson 1789; Bremner 1757a.

²⁰ Ramsay 1784; Walker 1786.

Highland and Lowland, viz, Songs, Luinigs, Laments, REELS, Strathspeys, Measures, Jiggs &c, properly adapted for the Violin, German-Flute, Harpsichord & Piano-Forte', whilst the *Hibernian* one offers, 'Irish Airs: Including the most Favourite Compositions of Carolan, the Celebrated Irish Bard. To which is prefixed An Essay on Irish Music; with Memoirs of Carolan'. Both are instrumental, untexted collections. My comments hereafter will focus, for obvious reasons, on the *Caledonian Muse*.

The *Caledonian Muse* repertoire falls essentially into several distinct categories. Not surprisingly, given the provenance of the introduction, we find Gaelic Highland airs from the Macdonald collection. There are also a good number of tunes from ballad operas, such as Ramsay's *Gentle Shepherd* (the Thompsons published Linley's music for this; see Linley 1781);²¹ Arne's *The Beggar's Opera*;²² Shield's comic opera, *The Highland Reel*;²³ Linley's *The Duenna*;²⁴ and Samuel Arnold's incidental music for *Mackbeth*.²⁵ This repertoire spans sixty years, from 1728 to 1788. The remainder – about half of the collection – is Lowland Scottish repertoire, with about one in four finding a concordance in Bremner's *A Collection of Scots Reels or Country Dances*, of 1757–61, and a few song titles that had earlier appeared in McGibbon's *A Collection of Scots Tunes*.²⁶ Since, as mentioned above, the Thompsons also published a composite volume of McGibbon's *Scots Tunes*, there is no doubt they were familiar with the repertoire.²⁷

Notwithstanding the ballad opera element, the *Caledonian Muse* has more genuinely Scottish repertoire than the very 'Anglo-Scotch', pleasure-garden repertoire in the Thompsons' *Thirty Favourite Scots Songs*. Where there's a Bremner concordance, the tunes in the *Caledonian Muse* show more proximity to Bremner's published *Scots Reels or Country Dances* version, than a comparison of the Thompsons' *Thirty Favourite Scots Songs* with Bremner's *Thirty Favourite Scots Songs*.²⁸

The bass-lines are mainly simple – at one extreme, a few have the simplest repeated crotchet bass, whilst others display a more baroque elegance reminiscent of McGibbon, with the rest falling somewhere between. This instrumental collection contains a mixture of vocal airs and dance tunes, so a certain amount of variety in style is inevitable.

There remains one last curious detail relating to this collection, which has no bearing on the contents, but might provide a small extra layer of context. Five

²¹ Ramsay 1725, Linley 1781.

²² Arne 1760.

²³ Shield 1788.

²⁴ Linley 1776.

²⁵ Arnold 1778.

²⁶ Bremner 1757b; McGibbon 1742.

²⁷ McGibbon 1779.

²⁸ Thompson 1789; Bremner 1757a.

years before the Thompsons' musical *Caledonian Muse* was published, the Northern English song-collector, Joseph Ritson, was due to have had his own *The Caledonian Muse* poetry collection published by the radical book-publisher, Joseph Johnson, just three doors away from the Thompsons at no. 72 St Paul's Churchyard. The unfortunate Mr Johnson had already had his previous premises in Paternoster Row destroyed by fire in c.1770, and in 1785, there was another fire at his printers' premises. It was a calamity that reportedly happened only too often in the publishing trade. It is unclear whether Johnson's printers were on site at no. 72 St Paul's Churchyard or elsewhere, but one of the casualties this time was the essay for Ritson's poetry collection. A few copies of the work itself survived, but it was not published until many years later, after the deaths of Ritson and Johnson, by another publisher. Could the Thompsons have heard about the fire-damaged poetry collection, and decided to use the title for their own forthcoming collection, since the Ritson anthology was plainly not appearing any time soon? At a distance of 224 years, we can only conjecture.

On the face of it, one might ask what music publication history has to do with a project on bass culture in Scottish fiddle tune-books. On the other hand, what has it *not* to do with it?! These tune-books only came into existence because compilers drew together a mixture of pre-existing materials and new compositions – or new arrangements of older ones. It is therefore interesting to observe where they sourced their materials to put into these collections, and what they did with them before they made it onto the printed page. Moreover, the question of what a London compiler perceived as 'Scottish' is in itself a matter of some curiosity. We are in a sense talking about boundaries of perception, rather than geographical boundaries of provenance, for both compilers plainly had no problem combining more genuinely Scottish tunes with their theatrical, Anglo-Scottish cousins.

We are as interested in the reception of these books, as in their compilation. It is clearly important to understand the audiences for which the collections were intended, and the purposes to which their new music books would be put. A lengthy preface with copious references surely indicates a desire to inform and educate the recipient of such a collection. A mixture of Highland airs and Lowland songs suggests the sources available to the publisher, but one has also to surmise that they imagined there would be a market for such a compilation. A London audience might arguably have been more comfortable with keyboard arrangements of Lowland songs, than Highland airs that they were far less likely to have recognised, and yet the Thompsons were prepared to invest in such a collection. Of course, the publications would have had a wider circulation than just the metropolis, although comparatively few copies survive on which to base a reception study.

Similarly, the conjunction of two country dance collections of different national origins, repackaged as a young ladies' instruction manual, but citing the

repertoire's popularity at balls, theatres and public entertainments, informs us a great deal about the kind of music in popular circulation at the time. Both collections demonstrate what kind of accompaniments were conventional for differing repertoires, and in the case of the *Caledonian Muse*, perhaps also indicates which styles from earlier times were still acceptable, as late as 1790.

Reading the literature, it soon becomes evident that whilst musicologists and book historians have resolutely forged ahead with research into music and book publishing respectively, the two have very seldom met. Yet the tradesmen lived and worked in the same streets and neighbourhoods, and must have intermingled socially and even professionally, when it came to the practicalities of running a publishing and/or printing house. Visiting St Paul's Churchyard today in its post-War, redeveloped configuration, it is almost impossible to imagine the scene, the infamous smog, and the bustling activity that would have been there in 1734 or 1790. These rare collections, Walsh's *The Lady's Banquet*, and the Thompsons' *Caledonian* and *Hibernian Muses*, thus emerge as valuable evidence of a culture buried not only in the mists of time, but whose premises themselves were obliterated in the debris of the London Blitz.

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