# Title screen

Towards a Taxonomy of Collecting

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# Repertoires

If there’s a common thread in my research – apart from the focus on late 18th and 19th century Scottish and British music – it’s an interest in collections, whether Dundonian flute manuscripts, 18th and 19th century Scottish song or fiddle collections, or the historical copyright music collection at the University of St Andrews – a collection assembled by late 18th and early 19th century professors.

However, the keen observer will have noticed that I’ve addressed different levels of collecting at different points. Under the broad heading of music collecting, can we attempt to categorise the wide variety of sub-types? I entitled this talk, Towards a Taxonomy of Collecting, to allow us the opportunity to step back and contemplate the challenges offered by these different groupings. (Incidentally, I’ve used a couple of QR codes in my powerpoint, so if you have a QR scanner on your phone, today’s the day to try it out!)

# Categories

Although different types of collection raise different questions, most document an individual, or several individuals’ preference in one way or another. We can debate whether they constitute systematic collections, or indeed whether the collector’s motivation can be construed as fetishism, or what Pearce defines as ‘souvenir collection’,[[1]](#footnote-1) however, it seems to me that in the context of music collections, the question as to whether the collection is intended for use by the collector or by others – is equally important..

For example, compare a collection of tunes for a published anthology, with a manuscript tune-book. The former will have been subjected to many editorial decisions before it appeared in print, whether there was one single editor, a collaboration, or a committee of some kind – such as the ladies behind Robert Archibald Smith’s *Scotish Minstrel*. Moreover, its contents of the published collection will have been selected with a view to third-party use – by the purchaser - even though it will reflect editorial preferences with regard to presentation.

On the other hand, the manuscript tune-book is likely to have been compiled for someone’s personal use, maybe for instruction, or even for religious purposes. Furthermore, far from Baudrillard’s suggestion, after Freud, that collecting is in a sense synonymous with loneliness, I would argue that this kind of collection is often the very opposite, since music performance, and particularly ensemble playing, is such a convivial activity.

Although I won’t be mentioning them today, the volumes that special collections librarians would call *Sammelbänder* - collections of published sheet-music bound together in larger volumes – again offer a snapshot of the compilers’ preferences, also depending on commercial availability to the purchaser. Such books appear in bookshops, stately homes and libraries on a regular basis, prompting today’s inquisitive scholar to speculate how they came to be put together, and how they were used in the owner’s daily lives.

On a larger scale, there are collections of music, such as those deliberately assembled by individuals such as Andrew Wighton - another mid-nineteenth century Dundonian - or the well-connected Dorothea Ruggles-Brise, whose collection was divided between the National Library of Scotland and the A K Bell Library in Perth. Both individuals amassed an impressive array of Scottish music, displaying keen discernment as well as a collector’s zeal, and the fruits of their own connoisseurship now survive for hundreds of scholars to benefit from.[[2]](#footnote-2) Their systematic, determined activities certainly did involve elements of curation as well as collecting, as Robert Opie rightly identified when discussing his own museum with John Elsner and Roger Cardinal.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Lastly, of course, there are library collections built up by organisations, with all the different motivations that lie behind them, and where curation is a major part of the exercise. The historical copyright collections that interest me are actually just one subset of this enormous category, and – as I shall demonstrate – the curation of the collections are crucial to their subsequent use.

I propose to examine examples of these different kinds of collections, to see how some of today’s approaches to collecting, can be applied in the context of national music collections.

# Who was the Collector? and what did they Collect?

It would be naïve merely to categorise these collections by size; their origins are just as significant, if not more so. Who was the collector? How did his or her background affect the nature of the collection? And, most pertinently, how did they set about assembling it?

# From Dalfield Walk to Myrekirk

I’d like to begin by comparing two compilers of flute tunes. The first I encountered was the Dundonian James Simpson, whom I mentioned at the outset. He obligingly wrote his address in his flute books – Dalfield Walk, Dundee. A later hand pencilled ‘Myrekirk, near Dundee’, in one of the three books. Living from 1806-1872, there is sufficient archival data to establish that he was first a mason, then a warehouseman, and finally a lodging-house superintendent wealthy enough to buy Myrekirk - a comfortable small detached house just outside town. My guess is that James Simpson would have been a known figure in the town. In the 1860s, his son became a partner, and then manager, of Methven Simpson, a Dundee music shop that actually continued into the 1970s.

Simpson’s manuscripts tell us much about his interests. The manuscripts include metrical psalm-tunes in three or four parts (not the pointed Anglican type), with the tune present in the middle line; along with copies of flute duets from a contemporary flute instruction manual, a flute fingering chart, and a multitude of flute trios and duets of varying quality, all written in open score, along with some unaccompanied tunes. The repertoire was mainly Scottish, with a few Irish tunes. Certainly, some of the trios (source unidentified) are no more than competent, and I’d suggest he gathered material widely, possibly over a number of years.

# Campbell (“Cam”) Douglas

Let’s turn now to the shockingly modern year of 1908, when a childless old man in Glasgow gave his little flute manuscript and his eight-keyed flute to his 18-year old great nephew. I recently acquired the manuscript for the Whittaker Library at RCS, because the antiquarian dealer mentioned its Glasgow connection, and it seemed appropriate that we should repatriate it – particular as we already had the three Simpson manuscripts, which James Simpson began compiling between 1828-1831. Because the Glasgow manuscript had been commenced in 1845, the collections actually originated less than twenty years apart, and I was curious to compare them.[[4]](#footnote-4)

# Old Cowcaddens Church, now the National Piping Centre

When we bought the Glasgow manuscript, I had no idea that its compiler was one of Victorian Glasgow’s most prolific and respected architects, Campbell (“Cam”) Douglas. Indeed, the National Piping Centre – which jointly delivers a Piping degree with RCS – is based in a church designed by Cam and his partners.[[5]](#footnote-5)

Cam Douglas lived from 1828-1910, so he was a generation younger than James Simpson. He commenced compilation of the book in 1845, aged 17. It’s a single part-book – ‘Primo Flute’ - written in a very neat, uniform hand, and is finished off with an alphabetical index at the front.

Cam was home-educated by his father, a dissenting Presbyterian minister. Although he wasn’t born in Glasgow, he did attend Glasgow University, and spent most of his adult life in the city. He had a succession of equally talented architect partners, and attracted commissions all over Britain. A different social bracket from Simpson, Cam’s career and family connections ensure there is ample biographical material, although there are still tantalising gaps to intrigue the musicologist.

For example, Cam’s one small manuscript has several Irish tunes – certainly proportionately more than Simpson’s three large books. A late Victorian Glasgow magazine called ‘Quiz’, alluded to Cam having spent some time visiting Irish and other architectural practices as a young man; his Irish trips must have taken place between 1847 and 1855. However, I’ve been unable to establish whether he had Irish contacts before 1847; nor do I know when he completed his manuscript, although the tunes I’ve dated suggest the mid-the nineteenth century. His family was solidly Scottish Presbyterian, and there appears to be no family connection in Ireland. Nonetheless, Cam does seem to have had this interest in Irish national music.

# Psalms or Quadrilles?

Whilst Simpson copied psalms, there’s no church music in Cam’s collection, which consists largely of Scottish and a few Irish tunes, and a lot of social music: marches, waltzes, quicksteps and quadrilles. Although Simpson’s collection did have dance tunes, it had no quadrilles at all. This dance form was introduced into Edinburgh by Nathaniel Gow in 1817, and was still being danced as late as the end of the nineteenth century,[[6]](#footnote-6) so it would certainly have been known, but it seems that Simpson didn’t collect any. Actually, there’s always a danger in generalising about someone’s collecting preferences. Whilst one can summarise what a particular book contains, one has no idea whether the original owner had other volumes with different content, or simply had other interests not represented in this book.

The contents of Cams’s book are entirely consistent with a comment in his biography (Dictionary of Scottish Architects, online)[[7]](#footnote-7) that his employees were made welcome at ‘musical at homes’ in his flat above the office! Moreover, there may have been further part books. Several tunes in the book exist as flute ensembles in Simpson’s, too.

It’s clear that, although both men’s manuscripts are for flute ensembles, contain a lot of Scottish tunes, and are chronologically not far apart, they are nonetheless quite different in character. However, in terms of motivation, the impulse was probably similar for both: they were compiled for personal use with friends. Simpson’s books may also have found their way into a church choir practice, or perhaps in family devotions, whilst Cam’s were perhaps used at social gatherings. But to attempt to force them into the mould of ‘fetishism’ or ‘souvenir collection’ seems to me somewhat perverse. If anything, they would have to class as the latter, because their compilers would presumably have chosen material because they liked it, needed it (viz, Simpson’s psalm tunes), and/or it was fashionable, rather than out of an acquisitive determination to collect ‘everything’.

Before we leave the flute mss, let me just add as an aside, that, Cam’s great-nephew would become a Labour MP and later a Governor of Malta.[[8]](#footnote-8) In terms of public engagement, this is a gift! Whilst the musicologist will be curious about the contents of the manuscript, and about the compilers’ musical interests, many more people will be attracted by an interesting personal story and a sense of the history surrounding the book.

# Geographical Influences: Highlands and Islands

Obviously, personal collections reflect the owners’ origins, too. I encountered very different repertoire in some Gaelic music collections from the Isle of Mull. I’ve written at some length about these ‘accomplished ladies of Torloisk’ and their Gaelic tune collecting in the very early nineteenth century. These well-connected young ladies collected books of Gaelic folklore as well as tunes – they were thoroughly immersed in the culture, whilst also enjoying life in Edinburgh and occasionally visiting London. At least one played the harp and piano, and another sang. Their mother seems to have known Patrick Macdonald, compiler of *Highland Vocal Airs;* and the family was friendly with Sir Walter Scott. He referred in his correspondence to their song-collecting interests, which they shared with his own daughter.

Compared to either Simpson or Douglas, the Maclean-Clephanes’ hobby was well on the way to a full-blown obsession. Should we define this as fetishism? As teenagers, Margaret Maclean Clephane and her sister compiled a curious book of *Songs Collected in the Western Isles of Scotland*, for voice and harp or piano. It was was “printed but not published”, containing Gaelic and English song settings. Their printed collection is musically literate, but is not high art. For example, harmonies are distributed oddly between treble and bass clef, full chords are always root inversion, and the song settings don’t possess any startling artistic merit. A photocopy was given to the National Library of Scotland, and can be consulted on microfilm.

At least one sister had music tuition on a trip to London, and one assumes they had some kind of music lessons in Edinburgh, if not on Mull itself. Indeed, when Margaret’s portrait was painted by Raeburn, it portrayed her with her harp - clearly, she considered it very much part of her persona. Moreover, it’s clear from the manuscripts and folklore collections that their Gaelic identity was as important to them as their music. Copies of the Gaelic materials can be viewed at the University of Edinburgh and the National Library of Scotland, and the present Marquess of Compton holds one unique tune manuscript.

There must be something about collecting that has a genetic predisposition, for Margaret Maclean Clephane went on collecting when she and her husband, the Marquess of Compton, lived for a while in Italy. Her Italian collection ended up in the British Library! (At least part of it was a personal collection of published music that the Comptons purchased from an earlier collector.)

Personal collections of tunes prompt questions such as the owner’s collecting interests, the provenance of their tunes, the timescale and so on. We don’t always know their modus operandi. Ritson believed songs originated with peasant folk, but he didn’t actually collect much from them. Only a few decades later, Alexander Campbell – the compiler of *Albyn’s Anthology* - had people gathered together to share their tunes which were then ‘pricked down’. You could call it an early ethnomusicological approach. Maybe the Maclean Clephane girls did the same. Walter Scott alluded to transactions of some kind, though his meaning is not entirely clear to the modern reader. If they asked local people to sing the tunes, did they pay them? Possibly! Some of their songs were not Gaelic folksongs at all, and were presumably copied from printed material.

Often the only commentary available in any of these collections is the title above the tune, or the briefest of indications such as James Simpson’s naming of a local psalm-tune composer, or Campbell Douglas’s “Scotch” or “Irish”. Or, just once, the pencilled word – ‘good’.

# Published Collections and Paratext

With published tune compilations, we move into very different waters. As I’ve mentioned, these were produced commercially, with a particular audience in mind. This is what I mean by an outward rather than an inward focus. The nature, or indeed, the presence of an accompaniment, also tells us much about the compilers’ intended audience. Some collections are clearly for middle-class parlours, such as those for voice and piano trio commissioned by George Thomson from Beethoven, Haydn and Kozeluch. Occasionally there are comments about performance – Finlay Dun recommended Scottish songs being sung in a manner that suggests echoing glens and mountains – which still leave me wondering precisely what he wanted the singer to do!

Paratextual material such as an introduction or preface, commentary, a subscribers’ list or even an index, is invaluable. There’s more paratext in vocal collections of national airs than in the more functional instrumental dance collections, partly perhaps because the presence of lyrics add an extra dimension. Books of ‘national airs’ contain stories of historical incidents or periods, reminding the singer and audience of all manner of national associations, reinforcing their sense of Scottishness, or allowing non-Scots to enjoy the sense of ‘the other’, and the distinctive flavour of Scottish song. The author of the song (ie the lyrics) or the air (ie the tune) is often a matter of some importance - to this day, traditional singers will introduce a song by saying something about its background. Issues of authenticity of tune, ornamentation, or the nature of the accompaniment all invite comment by the compiler. Paratextual metaphors are often similar to those in contemporary literature; for example, Walter Scott’s novel, *The Antiquary*, or his extended ballad, *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, allude to buried treasure and minstrels, whilst other writers use metaphors of flowing water for the passage of time, alchemy to compare ‘pure’ or corrupted sources; or flowers to denote something delicate, natural and prone to decay. Very similar language appears in prefaces to song collections. The idea of a ‘museum’ or ‘cabinet’ is similarly extended to a collection of songs, with the implicit suggestion that the contents are old, valuable and worthy of preservation.

However, this is not to say that the more practical collections of Scottish fiddle tunes are totally devoid of paratext! Subscribers lists are common to both types of publication, and there is still much to be gained from close inspection of any other paratext that is there – for example, Nathaniel Gow asserted that he and his family wished to establish the correct versions of all the tunes in their collections, and his later publications express satisfaction that this aim was now being achieved. Moreover, whatever the collection, it is important that we take careful note of everything on the title page, which often betrays much about the editorial approach, the instrumentation, or perhaps the important person providing some element of patronage. There may be occasional assertions that an edition is signed as being genuine; the Gow editions were subsequently pirated by less scrupulous publishers. There might also be reference to the fact that the music has been registered at Stationers’ Hall. Caution! These particular words are often empty rhetoric!

# Personal Libraries

Posterity owes a great deal to individuals such as Andrew Wighton, Dorothea Ruggles-Brise, J. Murdoch Henderson, or Frank Kidson – to name but a few - who carefully and systematically amassed collections of rare national music, then bequeathed it to a town, university or national library. Indeed, libraries are full of personal collections which reveal the particular interests of their original owners. (The slide shows the Wighton Collection in Dundee.) Windsor cites Susan Pearce, when he observes that a collection is effectively a tacit admission by the collector that, ‘I am what I own.’[[9]](#footnote-9)

Pasted into Wighton’s copy of William Chappell’s *Popular Music of the Olden Times,* and overflowing into a folder, we find Wighton’s correspondence with fellow antiquarians. Wighton (1804-1866) was contemporary with James Simpson, and must surely have known James and his son Alexander, since Wighton himself was not only a general dealer but also a musical instrument seller.

With an ambition to collect every publication of Scottish music that ever existed, strong feelings about what Scottish music actually was – and equally strong views as to who was entitled to consider themselves an authority – Wighton’s correspondence with the erudite Edinburgh librarian David Laing, Aberdeen publisher James Davies, and English ballad-collector William Chappell, tells us as much about his values, as about his collection.[[10]](#footnote-10) With collections of hundreds of volumes, these individuals certainly do fall into a different category to the private musician copying tunes for their own personal enjoyment. I struggle to decide whether one can separate out a systematic approach from the personal so-called fetishism of such collections. In my own sphere of national musics, I would argue that their systematic approach, over many years, is evidence of a very strong sense of national identity, not to mention an awareness of the historical context of their prized possessions. Whether or not one would define these big collections as ‘souvenirs’ or more than that, Susan Stewart’s description of collections as metonyms for something larger, fits well with the idea that these Scottish music collections represent Scotland itself to their devoted collectors.[[11]](#footnote-11)

If we seek to explore collectors’ values, then any information about their reading matter is also a rich source of evidence. The grumpy, fussy Joseph Ritson was actually quite good at referencing his sources – in a late eighteenth century way - as were the London compilers of the *Caledonian Muse* – whilst other individuals’ citations are much more challenging.

Thus, one can find out quite a lot about a music collector’s tastes and attitudes by looking at the books that they owned. For example, in 1781, a certain John Callander tabled proposals to write a book about Scottish music, but never actually wrote it. His book-list might suggest why! There was nothing there that would have promised anything very different from William Tytler’s contemporary essay – certainly not enough to make a book, unless his appeal for tunes had yielded substantial content to go with his proposed narrative.

On the other hand, a certain Hugh Cameron is associated with a fiddle tune-book that turned up in a local authority archive in Greenock. He – or someone associated with him – wrote a long list of books, many theological – in the beginning of the book which was to be filled up with fiddle tunes. (The paper and handwriting are slightly different from the rest of the book.) Since it had the potential to help identify him, I did track down the diary of a contemporary Hugh Cameron with suitably religious interests – not a Kirk minister - but I’m not entirely sure that I found the right person – the diarist was born into a Gaelic-speaking family, but the fiddle book shows little connection with Gaelic repertoire. It has to be said that the identity of the mystery Hugh Cameron – who may not have copied the fiddle tunes – is more interesting than the fact that half the book was copied from just one publication!

# Copyright Collections

The history of institutional collections is, essentially, the history of libraries. Library history is a whole discipline in itself, but, as I mentioned earlier, my particular interest is in the UK’s historical copyright music collections. The Queen Anne Copyright Act of 1709/10 obliged publishers to deposit copies of all printed material at Stationers’ Hall, where they were registered to protect their copyright. The books were distributed to the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge, to Sion College and the Royal Library (later the British Library), to four Scottish university libraries and to the Advocates’ Library in Edinburgh.

The libraries claimed their entitlement with varying degrees of success. One could assert that the universities’ collections are accidental, rather than deliberate, insofar as they were provided as a legal obligation, but there was still an element of choice as to what would be claimed.

However, when it came to music, childrens’ literature and ephemeral material, the situation is even more complicated, both with regard to what was registered, and to what was claimed or retained. Some universities wanted nothing to do with children’s literature or music; some retained a lot, and still others seem to have added some to stock much later.

The University of St Andrews’ historical Copyright Music is particularly interesting because of the archival documentation supporting it. My study began out of curiosity about what the library committee deemed worth keeping, and I have been privileged to have had access to senate minutes, accession and binding registers. Most significantly, the borrowing records survive, too – and make no mistake, this collection was well-used! I’ve transcribed every transaction of music borrowed between 1801 and 1849, with the aim of finding out what was popular, for how long, and whether different categories of borrower preferred particular kinds of music.

Collections such as these clearly have different parameters from those built up by private collectors for their personal use and enjoyment. The St Andrews professors didn’t bind their music straight away, but they – or someone delegated by them – generally adopted the pragmatic, and quite systematic approach of compiling volumes of similar material – such as songs, operatic excerpts, piano music, harp music, instrumental music, or instructional material. One particular volume, bound within a few years of its acquisition, combines songs relating to the Napoleonic Wars, and a very significant proportion of women’s compositions produced within the same period. This can’t have been accidental. And – while we’re talking about the women – it’s interesting to note that most of the copyright music collection was catalogued by a woman, too – the bluestocking niece of one of the professors. In a nice twist which museum historians will appreciate, her book-borrowing record shows an interest in botany and conchology – indeed, her name even appears in contemporary texts on the latter subject. This would seem to suggest a natural predeliction for codifying and organising materials!

# A Practical Purpose

In short, although one could dismiss St Andrews’ copyright music collection as simply representing the music that certain publishers registered for copyright, its careful curation and continued use by the professors and their friends over the next four to five decades now tell the story of what was borrowed, how long it remained popular, and with whom. It’s interesting to note what was particularly popular amongst the readership, and gratifying to observe that the national song collections which have occupied so much of my attention, were equally popular at the time – Thomson’s Scottish, Welsh and Irish collections, Thomas Moore’s *Irish Songs*, and – maybe more unexpectedly - Braham’s settings of Byron’s *Hebrew Songs*. There are discernible trends regarding borrowing by the professors’ male and female friends, and a new category of music borrowers in the shape of military men in the 1830s and 40s.

# Fading Into Disuse

Obviously the collection began to lose currency after the “free” music supply stopped in 1836 – not that it was exactly free considering it had to be shipped, sorted and subsequently bound. One of the borrowing registers ended in 1849; by this time, the usage had fallen away markedly, and for this reason, I allowed it to define the limit of my present researches.

# Conclusion

We’ve gone from manuscripts to published anthologies, and from personal to institutional libraries, in half a century extending from the end of the eighteenth to the mid nineteenth century. We’ve explored personal motivations for collecting, and questions about the material’s origins; we’ve also considered the implications of private collecting for personal enjoyment, versus the editorial decisions surrounding commercial publication. Finally, we’ve looked at large collections in libraries, comparing personal collections of national music, with the assembly of a collection for communal use by university professors, friends and students.

It has been suggested by Jean-Luc Katzman, that items in a museum change their qualities once they’re there, because they have ‘no practical use’.[[12]](#footnote-12) I suggest that, as we endeavour to understand the motivations of all these different compilers and collectors, we should acknowledge that the assembly of a music collection on any scale is subtly different from a museum collection of objects. For music – the most sociable of hobbies – is there to be played as well as studied and admired. The collections left to posterity inform us of their owner’s musical tastes and personal repertoires, or, indeed, show their unexpected potential for examining the repertoire’s reception by a comparatively small, loosely-connected community. Even where there’s no evidence of ultimate performance, there’s certainly an abundance of detail about how much this music circulated.

I’m looking forward in due course not only to revealing the fuller story of these historical insights, but to exploring ways of bringing these collections back to life for modern audiences.

# Social Media

# Bibliography

1. John Windsor, ‘Identity Parades’, in *The Cultures of Collecting* (Reaktion Books, 1994), pp. 49–67. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Additionally, how many of us have been tantalised to read about collections such as the ones in Tatton Park (Cheshire) or Sydney Living Museums, both of which have been highlighted by Southampton’s Sound Heritage project? Research and Interpretation of Music in Historic Houses, <https://sound-heritage.soton.ac.uk/> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. John. Elsner and Roger. Cardinal, ‘Unless You Do These Crazy Things ... : An Interview with Robert Opie’, in *The Cultures of Collecting*, 1994, pp. 25–48. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Whilst we know that “Cam” had an eight-keyed flute, which implies it was not a Nicholson flute, we don’t know what kind of flute Simpson played. He may have had less cash to spare. Elizabeth Ford states that, ‘Because of the variety of fingerings possible for any note on any type of flute, it is impossible to determine from Simpson’s manuscripts what sort of flute he played.’ Elizabeth Ford, The flute in musical life in eighteenth-century Scotland (Doctoral thesis, University of Glasgow, 2016) p.171. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The former Cowcaddens Church, across the road from our own building. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. As I found in a curious book, *The Outings of the Sylvan Ramblers* (1892). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. ‘Dictionary of Scottish Architects - Home’, *Website*, 2016 <http://www.scottisharchitects.org.uk/> [accessed 13 February 2017]. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Francis Campbell Ross Douglas. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Windsor. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Indeed, his epistolary arguments with Chappell about the latter’s *Popular Music of the Olden Time* led me into a close reading of Chappell’s book in its various editions, revealing Chappell’s own interest in Scottish songs, which got him into hot water with nationalist Scots and eventually put him off compiling his own anthology. There are also some interesting changes in editorial policy in the latest editions of his *Popular Music* collection. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Roger. Cardinal, ‘Collecting and Collage-Making: The Case of Kurt Schwitters’, in *The Cultures of Collecting*, pp. 68–96. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Jean Luc Katzman, ‘The Meaning and Biographies of Collected Objects (17 May 2012)’, *Aggsbach’s Paleolithic Blog*, 2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)