

Fiddle Tune History

By Andrew Kuntz

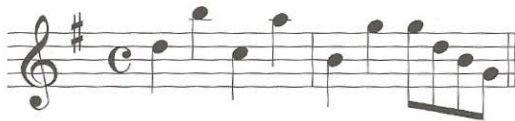
A Well-Traveled Melody

Recently, a banjo player in my local traditional Irish music session revived a melody we had enjoyed playing a few years ago, called the “Glenbeigh Hornpipe.” As we struggled a bit to recall the melody, the usual session banter broke out — delaying tactics, but effective, as we later played the tune with improved confidence. There were the usual questions about where and from whom it was learned, who had recorded it, and so on. Apart from the banter, this particular tune seemed to contain some genuine puzzles. First, as another fiddler pointed out, it really sounded more like a barn dance than a hornpipe, and so was probably misnamed. Someone else thought they had heard a polka tune that was similar. One of the flute players opined that to her ear it didn’t even sound that “Irish” — a deliberate provocation in a “pure drop” session like ours, and a remark that set off numerous assertions about provenance. I remained interested enough after the session to resume earlier tentative investigations of my own into the melody. After all, I liked it and intended to add it to my repertoire, and now that it had resurfaced I was curious to find out more about it. I had no sooner started inquiries into the “Glenbeigh Hornpipe” when serendipitous information came from an entirely new and different direction, courtesy of the Tradtunes group on the internet, a group dedicated to mostly British traditional dance music. This information opened new vistas on the tune and its variations, and, coupled with what I had turned up, revealed that the “Glenbeigh” melody was a well-traveled melody indeed, meandering through many different styles, genres, and permutations. Just the kind of twisty threading I take particular delight in.

In tracing the melody, let’s start with the “Glenbeigh Hornpipe” version and work backwards, and, to try to avoid confusion I’ll refer hereon to the core melody as “Glenbeigh” since that’s our starting place. Different people start “Glenbeigh” with either part of the tune, and it will avoid confusion to label them. The A part begins in step-wise fashion to the 5th of the scale, jumps to the octave, then outlines the octave before returning to rest on the 5th:

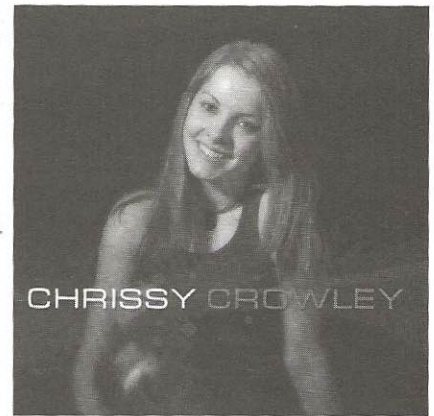


The B part begins on the 5th of the scale with a series of intervals of a sixth that descend in step wise fashion, ending with an outline of the tonic chord:



With regard to the name itself, it turns out that “Glenbeigh” is a relatively recent title, first attached to the melody on the Irish group De Danann’s eponymous 1975 recording. Glenbeigh is a coastal village in south County Kerry, and it may be that the tune was learned at a session there, sans title, and, rather than leave it untitled on the album, it was called after the place where it was learned — certainly a common enough practice. Concertina player Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin taught the tune in the late 1990s as the “Ballybunion Hop,” another County Kerry reference, since Ballybunion is another coastal town, this time in the north of the county. Gearóid styled it a barn dance. So, is it a Kerry tune?

It turns out its history in Ireland is quite a bit older than the relatively recent Kerry sources, and indications are it was popular in the north of Ireland first. “Glenbeigh” was



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recorded in the 78 RPM era by several of the most influential Irish fiddlers of the era, including Michael Gorman (1902-1969) and James Morrison (1893-1947), both émigré's from County Sligo — the latter to America at the age of twenty-two, in 1915, and the former to London. Gorman, accompanied by musical partner and tenor banjo player Margaret Barry, recorded the "Glenbeigh" tune under the title "Chaffpool Post," and paired it with "James Gannon's Barn Dance." The latter title references an older fiddler who was Gorman's teacher and main influence in County Sligo, who also was a mentor of Gorman's older contemporary (and second cousin), Michael Coleman, also an émigré to the Bronx. Gorman, according to English collector and researcher Reg Hall, claimed composer credits for "Chaffpool Post," and that he wrote it in the 1920s. This assertion is erroneous, as we shall see, although the title (for this particular melody) is certainly unique to Gorman (there is another unrelated tune as well called the "Chaffpool Post"). Chaffpool is a townland in Tubercurry, south County Sligo, which grew up around a country manor, Chaffpool House — home territory for Gorman and Gannon (the latter surname is one of the more common ones in the area).

Still another figure spices the tasty pot of Sligo musicians of the era, publican and fiddler James McDermott (b. 1874) of Bunnanadden, County Sligo, whom English collector Peter Kennedy says was another of Gannon's students (although that may be in error given McDermott's date of birth). McDermott likewise played the "Glenbeigh" tune — so much so, in fact, that "McDermott's Barn Dance" became another name attached to the melody. It was recorded under the "McDermott's" title by Paddy

Killoran (1904-1965), another fiddler who emigrated to the Bronx in 1925, originally from — where else — County Sligo, from the same parish as James Morrison.

James Morrison was born in Drumfin, County Sligo, and was, like his friend and contemporary Coleman, a highly skilled dancer. Morrison's nickname, "The Professor," was an affectation from his early career as a dancing master in Ireland, later cemented by his renown as a music teacher in the Bronx. His name became attached to the "Glenbeigh" tune through the same oral "folk" process as did McDermott's — through calling it after the influential player from whom one learns it — and thus it acquired yet another title, "Morrison's Polka." However, on Morrison's own recordings (plural, for he waxed it twice: in 1931, in a duet with fiddler Paddy Killoran, and as a solo in 1935 for Columbia Records) he called the tune "The Curlew Hills." Now, the curlew is a wading bird with a distinctive cry and common to Ireland, although the Curlew Hills that straddle the Roscommon/Sligo border have nothing to do with birds. Rather, this low range derives its name from the Irish word *corrsléibhte*, "the rounded hills," famous as the site in 1599 of the last victory of the Irish chieftains in the Nine Years War against England. When Dublin fiddler John Kelly and his son James made their 1976 recording of the melody they called it "The Curlew Hills Polka." An even more northerly Irish provenance was assumed by Kerry fiddler Maire O'Keeffe, who referred to it as "a (County) Donegal barn dance."

So, from the above we might conclude that the tune was first popularized in the north of Ireland — despite modern associations with County Kerry — and that the dotted rhythm variously suggested to Irish traditional fiddlers a setting as a hornpipe, barn dance, and polka. It acquired several titles in Ireland: the "Glenbeigh Hornpipe," "Ballyunion Hop," "Chaffpool Post," "Curlew Hills," "Morrison's Polka," and "McDermott's Barn Dance." We know the melody was, and remains, popular in Ireland — it is historically one of the most recorded of Irish barn dances, as researcher Alan Ng has statistically proven — and although we have traced its development a bit in Ireland, questions of provenance remain. Is it Irish?

The answer is definitely no, not originally, and, in fact, our tune has an international presence. In the United States, for example, it has had an equally long — if not longer — history than it has in Ireland, and was just as popular at one time. The catchy melody caught the attention of music researcher Samuel Bayard, a Penn State professor who collected a variant in 1944 from an elderly Fayette County, western Pennsylvania, fiddler named Levi Hall, who called it by the title "Pretty Baby." Hall's tune has the B or second part of "Glenbeigh" as the first part of his tune, paired with a different melody for his own second section. Bayard found other variants in American music literature, including a version called "Snyder's Clock" in E.F. Adams' 1928 volume *Old Time Fiddlers' Favorite Barn Dance Tunes*. Adams' version has the B part (the step-wise descending sixth part) paired with yet another different part. Whoever named Adams' variant evidently found the sixths descriptive of the tick-tock of a timepiece. Boston publisher Elias Howe's *Diamond School for the Violin* (1861) contains a set of the melody under the title "National Schottische," and thus the melody is conceived in name as another dotted-rhythm dance form — the schottische.

Ira Ford printed a three-part setting of the tune (one of my favorite versions) in his *Traditional Music in America* (1940), another schottische setting called the “Military Schottische.” Ford collected mainly in Missouri, and although he has no source attributions to go with his tune we may assume it was collected in the American Midwest. The “Military Schottische” version features a third part added to the first two parts of our original “Glenbeigh Hornpipe” melody. Although not labeled as such by Ford, this third part might be called a “trio,” a form which has been called a “Victorian affectation” sometimes added for contrast. Trio parts were usually inserted into 19th century marches and ballroom dances, and were often in different keys — as is the one in “Military Schottische” — for a marked departure from the other parts of the piece. It’s a delay serving to heighten musical tension, and, when effective, affords a greater sense of release when the familiar parts of the tune come around again. The tension-and-release process is a primary source of pleasure in music, as elementary psychology of music tells us, and trios were certainly popular with dancers as they helped to propel the experience. Unfortunately, trio parts are, by and large, unremarkable, indistinct, or even poor melodies (as their main purpose was to delay and not to distract from the main parts of the tune with another melody of substance). David Murray, author of the book *Music of the Scottish Regiments* (1996) is of the opinion that inserted trio parts almost never improve a good two-part melody, and he mourns the destruction of many good marches with Victorian trio parts that remain in military repertoire. The third part of “Military Schottische” may be an exception, for it fits quite nicely to my ear with the two “Glenbeigh” parts. It may have been the main part of another tune which floated into the orbit of the strong first two parts and was captured, like an errant moon drawn by gravity.

Enter the recent discussion on Tradtunes, which came with serendipitous timing. It focused on a piece called “Bielbie’s Hornpipe” (sometimes given as “Beilby’s Hornpipe”), a name previously unknown to me. “Bielbie’s” is a variant of the “Glenbeigh” from Northumberland, in the northeast of England, played by Borders musicians Joe Hutton (Northumbrian small pipes) and Willie Taylor (fiddle), among others. No one knows who Bielbie/Beilby was, but it was pointed out in the discussion that the famous 19th century Northumbrian musician Robert Bewick (sometimes called “the Younger” to differentiate him from his equally influential father Thomas [1753-1828]) had a musical associate named Bielbie. Interestingly, the name Beilby crops up in the early 18th century English slang term “Beilby’s Ball,” referring to an execution by hanging: “He will dance at Beilby’s ball, where the sheriff plays the music” (*A Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue*, 1811). It is perhaps possible that “dancing Beilby’s hornpipe” was a figure of speech that survived long enough to be attached to the melody, the origin of which was then forgotten. Another Northumbrian variant is called the “Linehope Lope” (a wonderfully evocative title that brings to (my) mind dozens of awkwardly “loping” couples on a ballroom floor), although only the first part (the Glenbeigh B part, with the stepped progression of sixths) is the same. “Linehope Lope” was also in the recorded repertoire of Willie Taylor. The “Glenbeigh” melody, with a third part that is different from all other versions I have seen, was included in the music manuscript copybooks compiled in Northumberland by William Hall Lister and Robert Lister between 1840 and 1860. It appears untitled, labeled simply “Schottische.”



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Our melody was not exclusive to northern England, however, as the Tradtunes discussion soon revealed. The “Glenbeigh” tune appears in the musical manuscripts of the famous Dorsetshire writer Thomas Hardy (1840-1928). Hardy will be recognized as the author of several deservedly famous novels, including *Return of the Native*, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, and others. In addition to his writing talents Thomas Hardy, along with others of his family, were musicians — Thomas was a fiddler — and left manuscript copybooks filled with traditional tunes, popular melodies of the era, and church music. A melody entitled “The Original Schottische” in the Hardy manuscripts corresponds nearly identically to both parts of the “Glenbeigh” tune. Sussex fiddler Michael Turner (1796-1885) included it in his manuscript copybook under a similar title to Hardy — “The Original Schottische Polka,” albeit with a third part added (a different third part than the one printed in America by Ford). Yet another, different, third part is attached to the “Glenbeigh” melody in the c. 1840 music manuscript of Lawrence Ledley (1827-1897) of Helperby, Yorkshire.

Interestingly, one of the Tradtunes list members found a 19th century form of “The Original Schottische Polka” printed in Sydney, Australia, between 1840 and 1849 whose first and third parts correspond closely with the Ledley version, although the second part is unique. It is a set as a polka for piano forte, and the arrangement is credited to the French music conductor Louis Antoine Jullien (1812-1860). Jullien was compelled to leave Paris to escape creditors; however, his classical music reputation had already been compromised in the city by his penchant for “light” forms of music. He removed to England and became a familiar figure in popular music circles there, where he led an orchestra that gave celebrated promenade concerts (a showman, he conducted with his back to the orchestra, the better to commune with his audience, and had white gloves delivered to him on a silver tray as he stepped to the podium). He subsequently traveled with his orchestra to Scotland, Ireland, and America, and it is possible that not least through his efforts our “Glenbeigh” melody was disseminated.

One of the Tradtunes list members cleared up another mystery about the tune. A source briefly mentioned that the “Glenbeigh” melody was contained in *Kerr’s Merry Melodies*, a collection of four volumes issued by James Kerr, a Scottish publisher, in the 1880s. Several of us searched unproductively through each of the four Kerr’s volumes without finding it, but it was finally

discovered by a list-member “hiding in plain view” in volume 1, as the harmony line in “Duet for Two Violins.” The main part of the duet was the familiar “Home, Sweet Home,” but the second part — our “Glenbeigh” melody — was the counter, and called only “a German Schottische.”

And, there we have the final and earliest strand in this tune thread. Bayard noted the German connection in his researches on his Pennsylvania-collected tune, finding versions of the “Glenbeigh” melody in Boehme’s *Geschichte Des Tanzes In Deutschland*. This was a two volume collection printed in Leipzig, Germany, in 1886, about the same time the Kerr collections were issued. Boehme gave two versions of the basic melody, “Russische Polka” and “Doppelpolka,” with the note “known in 1842, very popular up to 1860.” The former of Boehme’s tune names suggests origins even further east than Germany, but both names seem to cement an early association with the couple dance called the polka and its cousin, the schottische. The polka was a Bohémian invention of around 1835, introduced to ballrooms in France and England in 1843 by Cellarius. The schottische appeared in ballrooms in 1850 and was of German origin, the name being a German form of “Scottish.” The dance has nothing to do with Scotland, of course — it was also known as the Reinlander in Bavaria and, in Rhein- ish countries, as the Bavarian Polka. The dates of introduction of the dances are important, however, for it establishes the “Glen-

beigh” melody, in its earliest iteration, was a polka, and probably of German origin, if Kerr and Boehme can be believed. Just as the dances the polka and schottische were related, so too did the identification of the “Glenbeigh” tune become variously associated with first one dance form, then the other. As dance tastes changed, the melody was adopted as a vehicle for the barn dance, and, by association with the dotted rhythm was played as a horn- pipe (though probably not for dancing).

The trail of our Irish barn dance ends with a German polka that had been composed for society ballrooms some eighty years before the Sligo fiddle masters recorded it. Its composition corresponds with the beginning of the polka craze in France and England. It seems probable that the title “Original Schottische Polka” from the 1840s Australian publication is not just hyperbole, but close to the truth.

[The author wishes to thank Alan Ng and Terry O’Neill for clarifying information regarding the Irish portions of the above, and the several Tradtunes members who contributed to the discussion. Tradtunes is a Yahoo newsgroup.]

[Andrew Kuntz is the author of a book of old time songs and tunes called *Ragged But Right* (1987) as well as the on-line tune encyclopedia “*The Fiddlers’ Companion*” (www.ibiblio.org/fiddlers). When not researching tunes, he enjoys playing in Irish music sessions.]

Glenbeigh Hornpipe

The musical score for "Glenbeigh Hornpipe" is presented in four staves. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is common time (C). The first staff begins with a treble clef and a common time signature. It features a series of eighth and sixteenth notes, with a triplet of eighth notes marked with a '3' above the notes. The second staff continues the melody, also featuring a triplet of eighth notes. It includes first and second endings, marked with '1' and '2' above the staff. The third staff shows a repeat sign at the beginning and continues the melodic line. The fourth staff concludes the piece, featuring first and second endings marked with '1' and '2' above the staff. The piece ends with a double bar line.

Military Schottische

Musical score for "Military Schottische" in 2/4 time, key of D major. The score consists of six staves. The first four staves are in treble clef, and the last two are in bass clef. The music features a mix of eighth and sixteenth notes, with some triplet patterns. The piece concludes with a final cadence on the sixth staff.

Bielbie's Hornpipe

Musical score for "Bielbie's Hornpipe" in common time (C), key of D major. The score consists of four staves. The first two staves are in treble clef, and the last two are in bass clef. The music features a mix of eighth and sixteenth notes, with some triplet patterns. The piece concludes with a final cadence on the fourth staff. There are first and second endings indicated by brackets and numbers 1 and 2 above the staves.

The Original Schottische Polka

(Michael Turner version)

Musical score for 'The Original Schottische Polka (Michael Turner version)'. The score is written in treble clef, 2/4 time, with a key signature of one sharp (F#). It consists of four staves of music. The first staff begins with a treble clef, a sharp sign, and a common time signature. The second staff contains a repeat sign. The third staff contains a key signature change to two sharps (F# and C#) and another repeat sign. The fourth staff concludes with a double bar line.

The Original Schottische Polka

(Australian version)

Musical score for 'The Original Schottische Polka (Australian version)'. The score is written in treble clef, 2/4 time, with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). It consists of five staves of music. The first staff begins with a treble clef, a sharp sign, and a 2/4 time signature, followed by a triplet of eighth notes marked with a '3'. The second staff contains a repeat sign. The third staff contains a key signature change to one sharp (F#) and a repeat sign. The fourth staff contains a key signature change to two sharps (F# and C#) and a repeat sign. The fifth staff contains two first endings, labeled '1' and '2', leading to a final double bar line.