

RATTLIN ROARIN WILLIE — INTRODUCTION

Rattlin Roarin Willie is most familiar today as a Burns song, often performed, widely recorded, and featuring in many Scottish song anthologies. Some fiddlers also play the song tune or the Niel Gow dance version, and a few Northumbrian pipers play an elaborate version called *The Mitford Galloway*.

Gordon Mooney and myself also included versions of *Rattlin Roarin Willie* in our respective reconstructions of a Border bagpipe repertoire. We were both working on the assumptions that

- this was a tune with strong Border associations, and
- it could be played on the pipes, therefore
- it was a prime candidate.

And we were both right: it is the last tune in William Dixon's manuscript, a highly playable setting lying within the range of a 9-note chanter.

While Dixon's setting would grace the repertoire of any Lowland or Border piper, this article aims to place the tune within a larger context, cultural and musical, and to take a longer view of its history, a closer look at its individual features, and a broader look at its many different manifestations. We will also look further afield than the previous exploration of the tune on the FARNE website, which by its nature was principally concerned with Northumbrian sightings.

We will consider *Rattlin Roarin Willie* as a song, a fiddle tune and a pipe tune, and thanks both to recent work and to older work recently come to light, we will delve further into the history of the tune and of the person it commemorates. As well as Robert Burns and Niel Gow, we will meet James Oswald and Sir Walter Scott, along with many whose names are less familiar and many whose names we do not know, all of whom had an encounter with *Rattlin Roarin Willie* and contributed in their own way to his story, his song and his tune.