

The Elizabeth Ross Manuscript

The Society is delighted to be supporting the publication of a new edition of the Elizabeth Ross Manuscript, including an annex of 59 bagpipe tunes from the Manuscript. This update is being led by Dr Angus MacDonald (winner of the Society's Gold Medal at both the Argyllshire Gathering and the Northern Meeting, amongst many other accomplishments) and published by Christine Martin at Taigh na Teud Music Publishers, based on the Isle of Skye.

Compiled around 1812, the Elizabeth Ross Manuscript was the one of the earliest collections of Highland vocal and instrumental music – and unique in that it apparently represented the wide-ranging musical repertory known to Gaelic-speaking inhabitants of just one Hebridean island, Raasay, including the Highland home of James MacLeod, laird of Raasay.

Elizabeth Ross was born on 17th September 1789 and, after the death of both her parents, was taken into the care of her uncle, James MacLeod, laird of Raasay and his wife Flora (daughter of Lt. Col. Maclean Angus of Muck). Elizabeth was sent to school in Edinburgh and must have received a good grounding in music and musical literacy, returning to Raasay to start compiling her manuscript aged 23.

As well as her uncle, who was an accomplished violinist, Elizabeth acquired many of her tunes from John MacKay (MacLeod of Raasay's piper, whose son was later Queen Victoria's piper). The collection includes 150 tunes, almost all of which have Gaelic titles. Work on the collection must have ended by 1813 when she sailed to India.

The original manuscript is now held in the archive of the School of Scottish Studies, part of the University of Edinburgh. The Society contributed to the funding of a print version of the manuscript in 2016, published by Musica Scotica. This new edition is being financed by the Society in conjunction with Fèisean nan Gàidheal, Urras an Eilein (the Skye Gaelic Trust) and others.

