

MCPHERSON'S LAMENT

James McPherson, 1700

This is a two-part arrangement of "*McPherson's Lament*", a song written by Jamie McPherson the night before he was hanged. McPherson was the illegitimate son of a Highland laird, and a beautiful gypsy girl he met at a wedding. The gentleman acknowledged the child, and had him reared in his house. After the death of his father, the boy was reclaimed by his mother's people, although, she frequently returned with him, to wait upon his relations who never failed to clothe him well, besides giving money to his mother. McPherson became an expert swordsman, a renowned fiddler, and eventually the leader of the gypsy band. He was also an outlaw, which got him arrested and sentenced to death.

McPherson is said to have composed the tune the night before waiting his execution. Sir Walter Scott says that the next day, he played it under the gallows, and, afterward he offered his fiddle to anyone in his clan who would play it at his wake. When no one came forward to take the fiddle, he broke it - either across his knee or over the executioner's head - and then threw it into the crowd with the remark, "*No one else shall play Jamie McPherson's fiddle*". The broken fiddle now lies in the McPherson Clan museum near Newtonmore, Inverness-shire. He was then hanged or, according to some accounts, threw himself from the ladder, to hang by his own will. This was allegedly the last capital sentence executed in Scotland.

It is universally believed in the North-East of Scotland that a reprieve was on its way to Banff at the time of the execution. Legend has it that Duff of Braco saw a lone rider coming from Turriff and assumed he carried a pardon from the Lord of Grant. As the story goes, he then set about turning the village clock 15 minutes ahead so McPherson would hang before the pardon arrived. The magistrates allegedly were punished for this and the town clock was kept 15 minutes before the correct time for many years. Even to this day it is reported that the town of Macduff has its west-facing town clock covered so the people of Banff can't see the correct time!

In music and friendship,

~ Jull