

The Skye Boat Song

Although written by Sir Harold Boulton in the late nineteenth century, this song recalls a famous episode in the aftermath of the last Jacobite Rising over 100 years earlier. After his eventual defeat at the Battle of Culloden in April 1746, Prince Charles Edward Stuart spent five anxious months on the run in the Highlands. In the midst of a major manhunt, Flora MacDonald agreed to help the fugitive prince. She dressed him as her maid and helped him escape to Skye. The song reflects the popular romanticism of the Jacobite story, but is tinged with sadness for the lost lives and dashed hopes of the Jacobite cause. It remains popular to this day.

[Chorus:]

Speed bonnie boat like a bird on the wing
Onward the sailors cry.
Carry the lad that's born to be king
Over the sea to Skye.

Loud the winds howl, loud the waves roar
Thunderclaps rend the air;
Baffled, our foes stand by the shore
Follow they will not dare.

[Chorus]

Many's the lad fought on that day
Well the claymore did wield;
When the night came, silently lay
Dead on Culloden's field.

[Chorus]

Though the waves heave, soft will ye sleep
Ocean's a royal bed;
Rocked in the deep, Flora will keep
Watch by your weary head.

[Chorus]

Burned are their homes, exile and death
Scatter the loyal men;
Yet ere the sword cool in the sheath
Charlie will come again

[Chorus]



After Allan Ramsay (1713–84)

Mrs Flora Macdonald, RCIN 658347