



# Piping Times

Vol. 35, No. 5

February, 1983.



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TWELFTH ANNUAL

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**14th - 26th AUGUST, 1983**

INFORMATION FROM

**Dr. CHARLES B. MacGLASHAN, Jr., M.D.,**

**501 EAST ROMIE LANE,**

**SALINAS, CALIFORNIA, 93901.**

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# The College of Piping

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The College provides facilities to learn to play the bagpipe in three ways :—

## 1. Full-time day courses

These can usually be provided at any time of the year, for any length of time. Students attend for most of the day—usually 9.00 a.m. to 12.30 p.m., 2.00 p.m. to 4.30 p.m.—Monday through Friday. Individual instruction is given each day, following by practice and revision periods, prescribed reading and listening, tests and demonstrations.

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## 2. Evening Classes

These are held on several evenings of the week but normally students attend once a week only. The session runs in three terms—September 15th to December 20th, January 5th to Easter, Easter to June 25th. Tuition is usually in classes of from two to four and the syllabus followed is that for the Institute of Piping certificates. Tuition fees are at present £5.00 per term for adults and £2.50 per term for juveniles (under 21).

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**Open Piobaireachd**

Commences 10.00 a.m.

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**March, Strathspey, Reel**

Tunes—Three of each

Prizes— 1st £100      2nd £75      3rd £50

**Amateur Competition**—Confined to Argyllshire

16 to 18 yrs.—March, Strathspey, Reel—own choice

Prizes—1st Gold Medal 2nd Silver Medal 3rd Bronze Medal

12 to 15 yrs.—March, Strathspey, Reel—own choice

Prizes—1st Gold Medal 2nd Silver Medal 3rd Bronze Medal

Competition to compose 6/8 March—"Gayre's Gathering"—Prize £100

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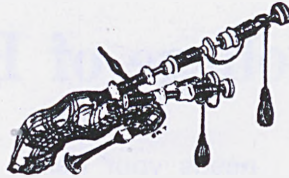
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# Piping Times

Vol. 35, No. 5

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**COVER PICTURE:** John MacMurchie with wife and daughter,  
Perth, W.A. — see page 14.

**TARTAN:** MacLean.

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# The College of Piping

needs your help

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Thanks to the generosity of Piping Times readers the modest target required to guarantee the continuation of our 38 years service to piping has been substantially reduced in the first month of our **APPEAL!**

## ***Still however we need a lot of help***

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2. Local millionaires seem thin on the ground, but there are some and all are anxious to do some good with the folding stuff.
3. You yourself can send, or promise to send, whatever you think the whole thing is worth.



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**THE COLLEGE OF PIPING SURVIVAL APPEAL**

## EDITORIAL

A refreshing sign of the times is that the vexed question of judging piping competitions is receiving considerable airing—apart from the usual moans and groans about bad results. By the time this appears in press the Piobaireachd Society's two Tutorials will have been completed, and with a bit of luck they will have done a great deal to establish a basis for the training of judges for the future.

These Tutorials incidentally were not open to all, since it was felt that the judges and potential judges themselves should have a quiet get-together to examine their own problems and formulate their own feelings on the matter. Later it is planned that courses may be offered to those who would like to involve themselves in the extremely difficult, often hazardous and generally unrewarding business of deciding the order of merit of competing pipers.

It is a measure of the progress being made in piping organisation that at a time when the average judge is probably a better qualified piper now than in the distant past, almost all judges, and of course all pipers, feel that something should be done to improve the standard of results produced. Ability to play well is not sufficient qualification to judge; some of the best pipers have, as judges, given the worst results. In addition to the knowledge of how to play and what to play, a judge must be able to concentrate, to free his mind from bias and to debate without undue emphasis, or undue meekness, his opinion against that of the other members of the bench.

Results in recent years have been demonstrably bad on occasions. The use of tape-recorders, even when banned in some places, has given proof (if any were needed) that judges who sit apparently engrossed in the great music are actually sound asleep. On two separate occasions at Grants Championship pipers won piobaireachd prizes when in fact they had gone completely wrong in their tunes—one of them had his tune included in the commercial record of the event and so it is available for all to hear. At the Silver Chanter last year and at London pipers were placed who committed grave and obviously undetected (by the judges) errors. Again the recordings are there to tell the tale.

An interesting suggestion was put forward recently by one of the top competing pipers. Whether this will be taken up by the Competing Pipers' Association or by anyone else we do not know, but in our opinion it is the first concrete and sensible suggestion put forward to combat the apparent lack of concentration of many judges. His idea is that just as a football player is awarded penalty points for infringements of the rules—such as cautions, orderings off, bringing the game into disrepute—so penalty points should be awarded to judges for certain offences. When their points total reaches ten they should be—as are the football players—suspended for a predetermined period.

One of the beauties of this suggestion is its simplicity. Another is the fact that it will discourage the incompetent (in any respect) person from offering himself as a judge. The capable and experienced judge is so ashamed of giving a bad result that he will be happy to thole his assize—making a public penance as it were.

The drawback to the scheme is that it requires the co-operation of all the organisers of major piping competitions. This however is something which must come in the near future if the present difficulties caused by the increasing numbers of competing pipers are not to swamp us completely and produce a state of major chaos. Chaos we have at present, but fortunately only in its minor form.

What can be done to persuade the various organisers to co-operate with one another? Some of course are happy to do this already but often they are met by the proverbial cold shoulder and the insular attitude of those who have done it their way for donkey's years and intend to continue in the same donkey fashion for ever. The best approach would be by individual persuasion from those whose persuasive powers are high and who, unlike ourselves, have not failed in such an approach in the past.

A quicker method, and in the long run more effective, would be for rules governing competitions to be decided and enforced by the Competing Pipers' Association. Hackles will be rising at such a suggestion but it is a perfectly sensible state of affairs to look forward to, and it works perfectly in other spheres. The professional golfers, the tennis players, the pipe bands have it down to a fine art, so why not us?

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### ROYAL CIRCLES

The current edition of "Cable Talk", the magazine of the Electrical Contractors Association of Scotland, has on its front cover a colour picture of the Queen accompanied by Sir James Morrison-Low, currently the Association's president. The photograph was taken at the Centenary Ball of the Royal Scottish Pipers Society in the Assembly Rooms Edinburgh. Sir James, a former pupil of the College of Piping, is Honorary Pipe Major of the R.S.P.S.

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### BACK NUMBERS

Copies of most back numbers of the Piping Times are available, price 50 pence each including surface postage.



## TOP PIPERS ?

The competition organised by William Grant and Sons Ltd., in October each year at Blair Castle, is probably the most sought after one so far as the competing pipers are concerned. It is important therefore to the pipers—and to the rest of us—to learn that consideration is being given to a change in the method of selecting competitors this year.

Strangely enough great minds seem to be thinking alike in piping, because the Competing Pipers' Association decided at its annual general meeting to keep a record of all results in piping competitions, from the highest to the lowest. This ambitious venture, together with the Grants decision, should be able to lead to an almost automatic choice of who the top ten pipers will be in October each year from now on.

In the past the qualification to play at Blair Castle has been to win one or more of the major piobaireachd competitions. Which these are of course is in some ways a matter for debate, because most competition promoters like to think that theirs is at least a major event, if not the most important one of all.

Some competitions are obviously of the first rank, such as the Clasp at Inverness, the Senior event at Oban, the Silver Chanter and of course Grants Championship itself. In 1981 the Falkirk Tryst Competition was certainly an addition to the list, but it would be hard for a neutral observer to argue convincingly that any of the other events in piping is really up to the calibre of these five.

A lower grading therefore would have to be given to the Glasgow, Edinburgh and London competitions, and no rating at all would seem appropriate for all other contests.

This may seem a bit hard on some, and a contradiction to what may well be generally felt by those not truly cognizant of the situation in piping. For example the Gold Medals at Oban and Inverness could not be counted in a top grading scheme, for although they carry a great deal of kudos and prestige they are after all not competitions for premier pipers—in fact the top competitors have already won them and are no longer eligible to play for them.

Such a scheme also ignores the implied importance given to some events by the London competition. There entry for the prestigious Bratach Gorm is permitted to pipers who have won the Dunvegan Medal at Portree, the Senior Uist and Barra Piobaireachd in Glasgow or the Open Piobaireachd at South Uist Games—in addition of course to former winners of a Gold Medal. In fact of course the Dunvegan Medal is again a contest for lower grade pipers (former winners are barred from it) and the South Uist Games has been very much a second rate competition for many years—it is doubtful if it should ever have been made a qualification for the London event. The Uist and Barra in

Glasgow seems a strange qualification to choose—perhaps there was a strong Uist lobby in London at one time.

The situation therefore is that winning a Gold Medal this year will not automatically qualify a piper to play at Blair Castle, neither will winning any other event be an automatic qualification. In the past Grants have tried to choose the top winners but there always have been places reserved for a few top pipers irrespective of their winnings, and in addition there have always been consultations with the Competing Pipers' Association in order to get their views on the matter. As it has worked out almost everybody has been satisfied with the choice of pipers, but there have been one or two small anomalies and Grants are anxious if possible to satisfy everybody concerned in this matter.

How in fact an order of merit will be reached is still to be decided but there will be no difficulty in doing it—the only difficulty is in deciding the basis upon which the order is to be drawn up. In tennis and no doubt in many other competitive sports the order—even of the top three hundred—is churned out by a computer, once it has been given the data and the criterion for selection. In piping the problem is really a lot easier. Several attempts were made for the year 1981 to decide who were the most successful competitors in piobaireachd during that time.

Please note that this is an order of success in competitions, not necessarily a list of who the best players are. God alone knows who the best piobaireachd player is in the world (maybe he doesn't even compete) and judges are not only liable to make mistakes but regularly do.

With that in mind it may be of interest to note the following order of prize-winning ability :-

1. Murray Henderson
2. Pipe Major Angus MacDonald
3. Iain MacFadyen
4. Hugh MacCallum
5. Pipe Major Iain Morrison
6. John MacDougall
7. William Livingstone
8. Donald Macpherson
9. Malcolm MacRae
10. John Wilson
11. Pipe Major Gavin Støddart
12. Tom Speirs

This of course was only one way of doing the calculation. Modifications should perhaps be built in and it may be that a finer grading of the importance of each event should be considered.

The strange thing is that although other systems of calculation were tried and produced slightly different results, the top man in every case was Murray Henderson. 1981 was obviously a very good year for him.

Assuming that a better method of deciding the placings is devised

then this obviously would be a very good scheme for deciding who should be invited to the competitions which operate by invitation. There may be more events going over to the invitation system in the future.

One obvious snag of course is that a similar system has to be applied to march, strathspey and reel playing and then the problem is to decide which ten, taking both lists into consideration, should be invited. In the past we have had embarrassing moments at Blair Castle where a man who qualified solely on his ceol mor ability gave a very much below standard performance in the other event. So long as there are two events at Blair, each carrying more or less equal weight and equal prize-money, then consideration has to be given to both areas of piping ability.

In conclusion it is to be hoped that too much importance is not paid, by anyone, to lists of this kind. Remember that errors of judges can alter the list appreciably. Perhaps, although it will have to be updated with every competition during the year, the list should be kept locked away in a cupboard some place and only brought out when absolutely necessary.



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## A VISIT TO AUSTRALIA

by Dr. John MacAskill

In mid April 1982 I arrived in Brisbane, Australia, on what was to be a medical exchange with my friend and colleague, Dr. Iain Mathewson of MacKay, Northern Queensland. Part of the exchange deal was for me to be interviewed by Sir Evan Thomson (a Board Member of the Queensland Health Board).

On stepping off the plane in Brisbane complete with suit, white shirt and tie, I suddenly felt the impact of the heat which was over 90°F. I immediately took my tie and jacket off, there and then, and did not wear them again until my departure from Australia in September.

After what was really an informal interview (I presume it was to see if I spoke English properly) Sir Evan talked only of the beauties of Scotland and how his wife came from Stirling. I felt that if I discussed piping with him I would have been there all night and miss my plane to MacKay. Since it was Easter Thursday I immediately hopped into a taxi from the Federal Government Buildings and headed for the airport en route to MacKay.

After a short journey on the plane I was greeted by Dr. Iain Mathewson who took me to his home and introduced me to his wife and two daughters. The topic all night of course was piping. Iain is a keen piper himself and originates from Aberdeenshire. His daughter Catriona is also a keen piper and both play in the MacKay and District Pipe Band. We discussed piping most of the night and exchanged stories.

In the morning I gave them both some lessons. After that we left on a journey up to Ayr and Northern Queensland to what was to be the Northern Queensland Pipe Band Championships in order to meet up with the rest of Iain's band. Of course I was suffering from the heat and also from jet-lag. My faculties were not quite 100% in that lovely town on the coast named after its counterpart in the Southwest of Scotland.

The piping, I thought, was of reasonably high standard and I met a lot of interesting people, whom I could not possibly name in the scope of this magazine. However, I heard enough that day to see that enthusiasm was strong in that part of Australia.

I became friendly with Pipe Major Clive Alcorn of the MacKay and District Pipe Band and also with other members of the band, including Drum Major Bruce (whose every second sentence was a hilarious joke) and Dawn Toomey, an extremely efficient secretary of the band and who also plays with them. I also met Jim Anderson, the longest serving piper, who is a remarkably fit 70 year old who could sing songs like no man's business (his favourite regiment was the Gordons).

The band in fact won the Northern Queensland championships and has a superb drum corps. There are several good players in the band which deserve a mention—especially the MacDonald twin brothers, sons of Alec MacDonald who is President of the band and is a cane farmer outside MacKay. These lads showed tremendous promise and I was especially impressed by their fingering techniques.

After a very good ceilidh that night, in full view of one of the most brilliant sunsets I have ever seen, I managed to snatch a few hours sleep before heading back with Iain and his charming wife and daughter to MacKay. On Sunday 4th April I got myself acquainted with the area



Stopover in Hawaii.

I was going to be working in and on Monday 5th April after driving Iain and family to the airport on their way to Scotland I immediately started work.

After a few days I was asked by members of the local pipe band (which I had met previously) if I would give them some tuition before their next competition at the Brisbane Commonwealth Games. I did this on approximately 2 nights a week for three months and I found great pleasure in doing so. The Committee worked hard and all the pipers, some of whom travelled considerable distances, responded adequately. They were a very good "Family" unit and they got their just reward by winning the Queensland Championship in Brisbane at the

Commonwealth Games Grade C level.

While in Queensland, I was asked by Mr. Sandy Campbell of Brisbane, who is the Pipe Major of the Queensland Irish Pipe Band, to judge the Highland House Competition in Brisbane on 25th June. I enjoyed this very much. Despite the odd technical errors of the pipers I thought the standard was very high, especially in the Intermediate Grade. In this Grade Geoff Smith, Simon Brown and Andrew Hall shone particularly, and it is no wonder they were later upgraded to the Open Grade Competition standard.

I was also delighted to see at this competition my old friend Gordon Ferguson whom some may remember in Scotland. He was a stalwart of the 214 B.B. Pipe Band in its heyday and who was also a member of the legendary Muirhead Pipe Band when they were going strong.



On the Great Barrier Reef.

Gordon has not changed very much and is his usual well-mannered self. His playing is as usual up to a very high standard despite his continued habit of either breaking down or making gross mistakes which so often separates him from that first prize which I feel on occasions he really deserves.

Credit must be given to the excellent teachers these young pipers have in the Queensland area. Some of them indeed need not be ashamed of competing in a similar type of competition in Scotland. The organisation of the judges, sheets and comments impressed me greatly, as did

the stewarding in this competition.

On 1st August I was privileged to speak to the Queensland Highland Piping Society in the Caledonian Club in Brisbane. The audience was very enthusiastic and the hall was acoustically very good. Lots of suitable questions were asked. Afterwards I enjoyed playing to them.

That weekend I was a guest of Mr. and Mrs. Val. Smith. Val is the Secretary of the Queensland Highland Piping Society and does a tremendous amount of work for them. The previous night I was at a barbecue arranged by the Society and held in the home of Ronald Paterson. Ronald is a keen piper in the St. Andrew's Pipe Band and the work done that night was by the Committee of this band. I was very honoured indeed that so many people went out of their way to make me so welcome.

There are several good pipers in Brisbane and there are obviously some top class bands who could easily fare well in our Grade 2 competitions in Scotland, such as the Queensland Irish Pipe Band under the leadership of Pipe Major Sandy Campbell. They did very well several years back in the competitions in Scotland. Then the St. Andrew's Pipe Band, also from Brisbane, under the leadership of Pipe Major Rob Roy MacGregor (what a great name). Sandy Campbell himself comes from Blairgowrie in Scotland and entertained me the first weekend I spent in Brisbane. He really is quite a character. His home seems to be a haven for pipers from everywhere and he and his charming wife make everyone feel very welcome.

I got the impression that Brisbane is really the centre of piping in Queensland, if not of the whole of Australia, and the quality of some of the pipers is exceptionally high. My only regret is that I did not have enough time to mix with them.

During a short break in my medical duties, I flew out to Perth in Western Australia. I did this mainly to try and locate the grave of an uncle of mine, a John Archibald MacAskill, who himself had been a piper in the First World War. He served with the Cameron Highlanders and after the war was over he played with the legendary Glasgow Police Pipe Band under Pipe Major John MacDonald in the successful years of the 1930s. He died long before I was born but I thought it might be interesting to try and find out more about him. On arrival in Perth I booked into the Sheraton Hotel, but on the way there the taxi driver noticed my Scottish accent and asked what I was doing that night. I had nothing planned so he suggested that I go to Perth Annual Ball which apparently is a function held by the people who are affiliated to or belong to the original Perth in Scotland.

I asked if he would take me there and on arrival at the function hall I discovered that it was an all Tartan affair, with dancing, singing,

piping etc. One would have thought it was the annual Caledonian Ball held in Glasgow or Edinburgh. I suddenly realised I did not know anyone there and that I was not officially invited. So, remembering the advice of Pipe Major Rob Roy MacGregor of St. Andrews Pipe Band of Brisbane, I asked if Pipe Major Angus Martin was present. He apparently was the Pipe Major of the Western Australia Police Pipe Band. Angus was present and I told him who I was and what I was doing in Perth. He immediately took me into the hall and made me very welcome as did other people present. It just so happened that the Secretary of the Perth Piping Society, Mr. Hugh Nicol was also present.



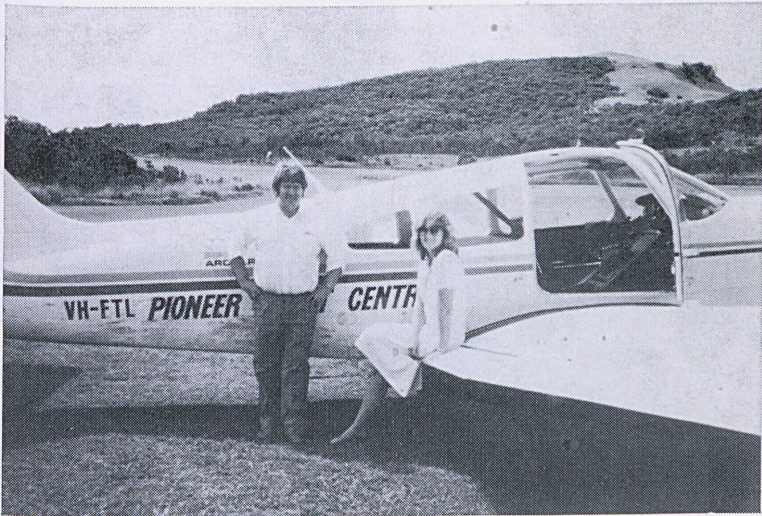
Fingers put to another use.

I had great pleasure in meeting Ian Powrie, a famous Scottish dance band Leader in the 1960s before emigrating to Australia. I found him most interesting and he took a great interest in some of the piping tunes. Ian, Hugh, Angus and myself got together in a good ceilidh, discussing tunes and events in Scotland.

The next day I was invited to the monthly competition which was held by the Perth Piping Society and I heard some very good piping indeed in a most beautiful setting at a local cricket ground. The open event was won by John McMurchie. John, incidentally, is quite a stalwart of Perth and I had the privilege of being a guest in his house the following night along with several other piping stalwarts in the area. He and his wife showed me around Perth the next day. He has a son

who at that time was doing the Pipe Major's course in Edinburgh Castle and is a piper in the Royal Scottish Dragoon Guards.

I spent a pleasant and hilarious evening with Angus Martin and his family in Perth. I was really surprised to find out that Angus was a drummer in the Edinburgh City Police Pipe Band when Donald Ramsay was their Pipe Major. He told me some great stories and he has a tremendous sense of humour. I have not met many people who can play both the drum and the pipes. He also thought nothing of driving me around Perth in his police patrol car and he used his influence to obtain information regarding my uncle. As it so happened, the pipe major of the



The Flying Doctor, with assistant, on his rounds.

Perth Highlanders was Peter MacLean whose father comes from Lewis. Peter is a superintendant of the graveyard Karrakatta where my uncle was buried. With his help I found out the location of the grave and also that there was a friend still alive of my uncle's. This pleased me greatly and I got a lot of information about him. John Archie was pipe major of the then Coastal Scottish Pipe Band in Perth. He was a Gaelic bard and piper of great merit, so much so that it inspired Alec Morrison to write a book about him.

Western Australia seems to be the Cinderella State of this continent. They seem a little cut off from the rest of the piping centres but the enthusiasm with which I was greeted was very heartwarming. The city of Perth is possibly the most beautiful city I have ever seen with its

streets lined by palm trees, its National Parks, lovely river and the many yacht marinas. Truly a wonderful atmosphere for piping.

When in Queensland I was amazed by the number of non-pipers who showed an interest in the instrument. There was one weekend when I was a guest in Brisbane of the Loane family when Scotland was playing Australia in the Rugby International at Ballymore Park. The son Mark was the captain of the Australian International Team but while he was getting himself ready, his father, brother Mike and I had a great session. Sandy Campbell later joined us and both of us gave the family a recital which was greatly appreciated. The father was nearly moved to tears listening to some piobaireachd music which he never heard before and was taken by it.



The Piper at Sydney Harbour.

It did not help the Australians much because the next day they got beaten by the Scottish team, although narrowly. What astonished me was that there was no pipe band playing at the beginning of the game, yet the night before when New Zealand played Australia in the Rugby League Sandy Campbell's band was playing for the audience. A brass band played the Scottish team on to the park.

I visited Ayr Rock, Alice Springs, Northern Territory and also Adelaide which is also a rather beautiful city, but I did not have the chance to meet any pipers there. However, before my departure from

Australia I spent a weekend in Sydney and wandered down to the magnificent harbour one lovely Saturday morning. While on Pier 5, there was a young piper playing for the tourists whose name I did not know. He had exceptionally good fingers and occasionally played a Scottish tune. When I questioned him he did say he was taught by John MacLellan from Edinburgh. I did not mention the fact that I was a piper as I was really a tourist myself on that occasion.

I later crossed the harbour on the Hydrofoil and on reaching the lovely suburb of Manly I heard a pipe band playing on the pier. This was the Manly Pipe Band and their selection was indeed interesting and lively. The pipe major, of course, was busy trying to get the pipers set up after the selection and seemed to be asked a lot of questions by the surrounding tourists about them. He took his job seriously and I decided I better leave him alone. Hence I did not speak to him. However, it was really nice that, even when I did not go looking for pipers, piping was so prominent in Sydney. Meeting that young piper on pier 5 and listening to the Manly pipe band made me realise what a widespread influence piping has internationally and how proud I am to play this instrument.

On Sunday 5th September I left Sydney about 10 p.m. for America for a holiday and to visit some friends. My stay in Australia had been very enjoyable and I made a lot of friends. I was really impressed by the enthusiasm for piping and the standards of some of the players I heard. I cannot vouch for New South Wales, Victoria, Southern Australia or Northern Territory, but my welcome in Queensland and Western Australia by the piping fraternity was immense and a joy to behold. I found the Australians extremely helpful and kind. It is a land of marvellous sunsets and sunrises, of great athletes and also a land of some exceptionally good pipers who strive to do well. It was a great pleasure to mix with them and I hope I will meet them again in the not too distant future.

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ANNUAL COMPETITION—20th November, 1982**

**Piobaireachd—**

Judges: Pipe Major A. B. Watters and Captain W. G. Sheppard, M.B.E.

1. C. I. Terry—"Lament for Donald Duaghal Mackay"
2. B. Mulhearn—"Lament for Mary MacLeod"
3. R. W. Hendry—"A Flame of Wrath for Squinting Patrick"
4. C. A. Hall—"Mary's Praise"

**March—**

Judges: Mr. R. G. Geddes & Pipe Majors R. Blevens & J. S. H. Caraher

1. C. I. Terry—"Alan Dodd's Farewell to Scotland/Clan MacColl"
2. B. Mulhearn—"P/M W. Gray's Farewell/Abercairny High-landers"
3. L. W. Durham—"The Young MacGregor/Bonnie Ann"
4. C. A. Hall—"Father John MacMillan of Barra/Donald MacLellan of Rothesay"

**Strathspey and Reel—**

Judges: Mr. R. G. Geddes & Pipe Majors R. Blevins & J. S. H. Caraher

1. C. I. Terry—"The Ewe Wi' the Crookit Horn/Johnny MacDonald's Reel"
2. B. Mulhearn—"Shepherd's Crook/Mrs. MacPherson of Inveran"
3. C. R. Mulinder—"Cameronian Rant/Little Cascade"
4. L. W. Durham—"Arniston Castle/Lachlan MacPhail"

**Overall Winners—**

1. C. I. Terry—L. M. Millar Memorial Trophy and One Hundred Guineas (210 Rand) ("Best Piper of the Year")
2. B. Mulhearn—Fifty Rand (Twenty-five Pounds)
3. R. W. Hendry—Thirty Rand (Fifteen Pounds)
4. L. W. Durham—Twenty Rand (Ten Pounds)

**March, Strathspey and Reel—**

Judges: Mr. R. G. Geddes & Pipe Majors R. Blevins & J. S. H. Caraher

1. C. I. Terry—"Edinburgh City Police Pipe Band/Maggie Cameron/Willie Murray's Reel"
2. B. Mulhearn—"P/M W. Gray's Farewell/Dornie Ferry/The Sheepwife"
3. J. D. Farmer—"Glen Caladh Castle/Monymusk/John Morrison of Assynt House"
4. L. W. Durham—"The Conundrum/Dora MacLeod/Major David Manson"

# The College of Piping Survival Appeal

## Target £20,000

*Received by January, with grateful thanks:-*

	£
Archie G. Kenneth, Stronachullin	100.00
James Campbell, Cambridge	200.00
Roderick J. Livingston, Norwich	5.00
Alister D. Smith, London	13.05
Ralph V. Clements, Kent	100.00
M. John Gray, Beaconsfield	100.00
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## MODERN PIOBAIREACHD

by Frank M. Richardson

The Piping Times has, since its beginnings, been fortunate in numbering among its contributors the top experts and authorities of the piping world. We are privileged this month to present a major article of topical importance from the pen of that distinguished writer, musician, judge of piping and turner of the well chosen phrase, Vice-President of the Piobaireachd Society, Major General Frank Richardson.

Seumas MacNeill once told me that he believed that to pipers of John MacDonald's generation the idea of composing piobaireachd almost amounted to sacrilege. We are accustomed to the esteemed Editor of Piping Times expressing himself with uninhibited forcefulness, but **Sacrilege**? Yes, I do believe the word is hardly too strong.

In my young days the idea of composing piobaireachd was apparently never considered. I often questioned John MacDonald about this and his usual comment was that with the hundreds of tunes we already have the possibilities of the bagpipe scale have been fully explored. I later came to wonder if John hesitated to try to succeed in a field in which one of his most respected teachers had failed; for he did not like Calum Piobaire's compositions.

An old Scots definition of the absolutely impossible was 'Ding down Tantallon; Big a brig to the Bass.' I thought of this the other day when taking a small granddaughter on the boat-trip round the Bass Rock to see the birds, and especially the puffins, for she is a dedicated Puffin-fancier. Tantallon Castle was in full view, well and truly dang down; and on the fairly short sea crossing I realised that brigs have been bigger far further than to the Bass.

So it has proved with the composition of piobaireachd. The Piobaireachd Society recently published a volume of twenty piobaireachds composed between 1930 and 1980, by fifteen modern composers.\* Some of these had been awarded prizes in competitions in 1966 and 1969. For the 1966 competition entries were required to be "based on the recognised structure of **ceòl mór**."

When the eleven best tunes were published by the British Broadcasting Council for Scotland, which had sponsored the competition, Sir Philip Christison wrote in a Foreword "that it is now time for modern inspiration to begin a movement towards new forms in pipe music." Accordingly, when the Saltire Society and the College of Piping sponsored another competition three years later, the minds of the judges were wide open for the recognition of some satisfying new idiom. I was one of the judges, but I think the minds of my two colleagues were pro-

\* Published with the help of a generous grant from Stiftung F.V.S. zu Hamburg, as a European prize for Folk Art.

bably more receptive, for they were the late John MacFadyen, always a restless seeker after the Holy Grail in our knowledge of **ceòl mòr** and Francis Collinson, not a piper but a musician and musicologist.

In 1966 sixty-six entries from seven countries had to be assessed by John Campbell of Shirvan, Robert Reid and Archie MacNab. I did not agree with their placings, but respect and affection for those three fine judges, and for some of the successful competitors, deters me from further comment. It only goes to show that in any form of Art personal opinions will seldom be completely unanimous; the same painting may be an inspired expression of artistic feeling to one 'expert', and a meaningless daub to another. But it is interesting to record that the 1966 judges made their choice "with surprising unanimity" and so did we in 1969.

I had just retired from my second post-retirement job, and could devote my entire time to study of the manuscripts, listening to the tapes submitted with them and playing them on the practice chanter and the pipe. I took my pipe to the North side of Cramond Island, where only the crews of vessels plying up and down the Firth of Forth could hear me trying to interpret the best of the tunes to be assessed. Some beautiful melodies were reluctantly put aside as being more like the slow airs or **ceòl meadhonach**, of which we have a great many. Forty-three tunes are included in **The Kilberry Book of Ceòl Meadhonach**. Neither these nor some curious efforts from pipers and non-pipers could be held to constitute a new idiom worthy of recognition.

One fairly long meeting of the three judges was enough, because from our individual studies we were virtually unanimous about the first four or five placings. I had written down my guesses about the names of the first four competitors. I only guessed two of them correctly, John MacLellan who was first and Archie Kenneth who came fourth. I spotted the winner's name because I thought I discerned in **The Phantom Piper of Corrieyairack** the same facility in interweaving several musical phrases as is evidenced in John MacLellan's tune in the 1966 competition, **Farewell to the Queen's Ferry**.

I am not sure why I guessed Archie Kenneth, but I would have placed his entry higher than I did had not each line in the Ground ended with a phrase which is one of my favourite sounds in piobaireachd, **Hi en edre ve o hihio din**. Perhaps wrongly, I felt that such a quotation, obviously made more or less unconsciously, should lose him a point or two. Archie Kenneth is a fertile composer of both kinds of pipe music and it is not surprising that echoes of the classical repertoire should be sounding in such a man's head, and, as in this case, escape on to paper. The phrase to which I refer is the ending of the ground of **The Old Men of the Shells**, and an even more magical moment for me is the sixth bar

of the third line of the thumb variation. I have always rather wished that it were not followed by those two **hiharins**.

If Archie Kenneth's tune went down to fourth place in my book on account of those concluding bars of each line of the ground, John Goodenow very nearly became my first choice because of the concluding bars of his ground. I cannot tell why that bar struck for me the authentic sound of our ancient music—Hi em o tra che a din. It was this sound and the way in which John MacLellan wove several phrases together, reminding me of the compositions of Iain Dall MacKay, which led me to say at the prize-giving ceremony in Stirling, that it would not have surprised me to learn that the canntaireachd manuscripts of these tunes had been dug up from a bog near Boreraig.

Unfortunately no such treats awaited us when, in 1971, Seumas MacNeill invited me to join the same panel for a new composing competition. All the entries seemed to me to be greatly inferior to at least the first six 1969 entries and I reported that I could not find any of them worthy of a prize. The other two judges concurred in this view and no awards were made.

Perhaps the two year gap was too short; but sadly ten years later yet another competition had the same result. To celebrate the bi-centenary of their first piping competition, held at the Falkirk Tryst on 12th October 1781, the Highland Society of London organised in October 1981 a commemorative competition at Falkirk and offered prizes for the composition of piobaireachd. A Gaelic poem by Angus Nicol was acclaimed as not unworthy of the poem composed for the same occasion in 1781 by the great Duncan Ban MacIntyre, but unfortunately it was deemed that the twelve tunes submitted were not worthy of the great occasion. The onerous task of spotting the winners having been entrusted to the Music Committee of the Piobaireachd Society, this melancholy outcome led to a certain amount of ill-feeling. But pipers are accustomed to taking disappointments philosophically and at least one burst of hearty laughter relieved the gloom. I am told that, during a session at the bar after the Grant's Whisky Competition later in the month, some of the competitors asked what was being done with their manuscripts. "Oh, Haven't you heard?" said Seumas MacNeill with a guileless air. "They're to be published next year in each issue of **Piping Times**, under the title 'Rotten Piobaireachd of the Month'." Even the ranks of Tuscany—etc., etc.!

What was done, in fact was that the The Highland Society, still hopeful of finding a winner, extended the competition by several months and then was advised to submit the tunes for judgment by men selected from their numbers by the Competing Pipers' Association, from players,

in fact, who might have been expected to give successful entries a public airing. Alas, their verdict was identical with the first depressing report.

Must we assume, from these experiences, that the necessary inspiration is absent, even inhibited, when composing for a money prize? Without the spirit of competition much of the fun in present-day piping would be lacking; and, of course, the greatest composers in history undoubtedly did sit down and compose for money; to keep their lucrative appointments at noblemen's courts and with ecclesiastical dignitaries; to please eminent patrons.

The 1966 winner, Angus Macpherson, had composed his '**Salute to the MacCrimmon Cairn at Borerraig**' many years before the competition was announced. The 1969 winner, John MacLellan, had agreed to be one of the judges but withdrew after, as he has told me "The Muse struck during a train journey." He wrote down the tune in canntaireachd then and there, and thought—why not enter the lists. One of the unsuccessful 1969 competitors, a doctor, told me that his tune '**Blood on the Heather**', came to him whilst stalking, and had nothing to do with old clan fights. There must be many such stories floating around which would make amusing reading in **Piping Times**. To start the ball rolling I have one which I share with Iain Cameron, who has allowed me to tell it.

Whilst Iain was taking me in his car to the Falkirk Competition, as he has taken me to many piping occasions, I told him that I feared the news of the composing competition was not likely to be good. I told him that I had seen the entries and had been particularly struck by one of them, since it was a distinct echo of one of Iain Dall MacKay's greatest tunes, **The Laird of Anapool's Lament**. The two striking opening bars had been taken down the scale and their rather tricky gracenotes turned into plain notes. The second line began just like the second line of **Anapool**. I speculated about the composer and said I was at least sure that it couldn't be John MacLellan's, since the manuscript lacked his habitual neat calligraphy—if that is the right word. Iain kept a very straight face, but he told me on the way home that the tune was his. He had made it entirely in his head—I think whilst driving in his car—without the use of chanter or pen—surely that must be the way to make music. As for the untidy manuscript, he had heard about the competition very late, and had put his entry together in less than three days.

Iain is, of course, a very experienced composer, not only of light music, especially jigs of which he was once one of the foremost players, but of piobaireachd. His '**Salute to Captain D. R. MacLennan**' is in the Piobaireachd Society's collection of 20th Century compositions.

Iain Cameron's interesting experiment with echoes of Iain Dall

reinforced an idea which I formed after the 1971 competition. In some of the entries I detected sounds resembling passages in such classics as **The Lament for MacSwan of Roaig, The Prince's Salute** and **Kinlochmoidart No. 1**. I recalled not only Archie Kenneth's unconscious borrowing from **The Old Men of the Shells**, but the fact that John MacDonald's only known fragment of composition in the classical vein resembles part of the great piobaireachd which to him was almost sacred—**The Lament for Donald Ban MacCrimmon**.

Many of the great classical composers produced variations on themes or melodies of others. Beethoven even wrote a set of variations on **God Save the King**, parts of which were to be heard recently after television programmes about our post-war occupation of Germany.

I would like to suggest that in any future competition it should be announced that both original work, and compositions which openly admit inspiration from some old classical theme, would be considered by the judges. Although I am totally incapable myself of making any progress along these lines I have a feeling that there may well be less hidebound lovers of piobaireachd, blessed with powers of imagination and minds open for inspiration from the ancient music, who, if freed from the need of their compositions to be "based on the recognised structure of **ceòl mòr**", could allow their musical thoughts to soar into realms as yet unknown!

\* \* \* \* \*

To finish on a lighter note—with the light music in fact. In 1923 when I took to Willie Ross a 6/8 march which I had composed for my old school pipeband, he observed; "I think all this composing should be stopped for two hundred years". I'm sure now that I was too naive to imagine that this could be a sly comment on my worthless little tune. It certainly did not stop Willie himself, for which we can be thankful.

Many years later, as Pipe President of 15 (Scottish) Division in Germany, I had to approve countless new tunes, welcoming Colonel This and That to Here and There. In the Officers' Mess I exclaimed rather testily: "Why **must** they churn out all this Sauchiehall Street Swing? Any fool can write a robust 6/8 March". The Divisional Commander, whose presence I had not noticed, growled: "All right you b——. Make one. I give you three days". I did it easily and named the tune **General Barber's March to his Private Latrine**"—commemorating moments during the recent campaign when he had not been at his best.

This same General, a man of formidable proportions, nine inches at least over six feet, so inevitably nicknamed "Tiny", had later cause to complain, when he was taken ill in Mecklenburg Schwerin (later handed over to the Russians) and found that his personal physician, myself, was many miles away at a Piobaireachd School which I had organised in Lübeck. Happily it was easy to persuade him that he was much safer in

the hands of a junior doctor, whilst I was the only doctor in the Division who could be of any assistance to Pipe Major R. B. Nicol, whom I was lucky enough to secure as Instructor.

My leg was pulled about this tune during a BBC radio programme, to which I had been welcomed by an attractive pipe march. Seumas MacNeill said something about my admitted inability to put the right names to marches and so on, and asked me if I recognised the tune. Luckily I said that I had heard nothing like it—for it had been composed for the occasion by none other than Captain John MacLellan, then Director of Army Bagpipe Music.

This was not the only fine tune named for me. When I retired from the Army, after five years as head of the Medical Services in Germany, the medical officers, recalling that I had sometimes seemed to be more interested in piping than in the healing art, asked Colonel Hugh Spens, then commanding the 2nd Battalion of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, if he could send a piper to play at a farewell dinner being held for me. They were surprised to be refused; but the colonel soon rang back to explain why a piper was not to be sent. The dinner would be graced not only by Corporal Robertson and Sergeant Robson, but by Pipe Major Andrew Pitkeathly himself, who would compose a tune to commemorate the occasion. What piper could forget so generous a gesture from a man who was to rise so high in his profession?

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## The Piobaireachd Society

—o—

**The Annual Conference  
will be held in  
Middleton Hall, Gorebridge, Midlothian  
from March 11th to March 13th 1983**

The Conference begins with dinner on Friday evening and ends after lunch on Sunday.

The inclusive cost for the weekend is £46. Those not staying over the weekend pay a Conference fee of £2 for Saturday and £1 for Sunday, plus meals at cost.

**The Conference is open to all, whether members of the Society or not.**

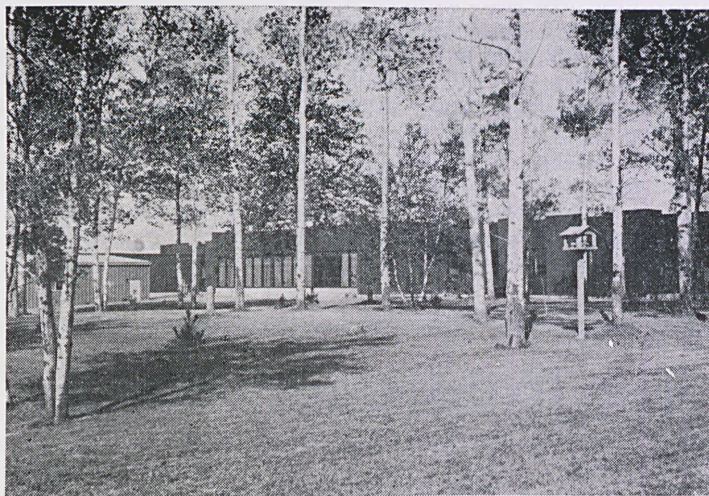
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# The Customers always Write

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## THE COMPETING PIPERS' ASSOCIATION

Kerrow House, Strathglass, Inverness-shire

Dear Seumas,

Our Association Annual General Meeting asked that I write to acknowledge the sentiments of support for the Association expressed in your November Editorial, but also to point out the inaccuracy of your estimate that about half of the pipers who compete in Scotland are not members of the Association.

Paid-up membership this year is 94, and most of the year round competitors belong. Those who have not joined save £3 per annum, but are denied the advantages of representation—and our spring publication of competition dates and details. As you point out, they nonetheless share in the other benefits which result from the Association's efforts.

We are striving to improve the competitive piping scene, not just for the benefit of the players but also in the interests of competition promoters and sponsors and, not least, the playing public. Our grading system forms a sound basis for restriction of entry where numbers are a problem, but competition promoters have been slow to adopt it. Grading system apart, we believe we have much to offer piping.

Our Committee comprises Tom Speirs (Vice-President), James Hood (Secretary/Treasurer), Iain MacFadyen, Pipe Major Angus MacDonald, Pipe Major Iain Morrison, Dr. Iain Cameron, Robert Wallace, Ronald Clark, Iain Hines, and

Yours sincerely,

MALCOLM MACRAE (President).

---

Shepparton, Victoria, Australia

Dear Sir,

Many thanks for the pipe bag and hemp which was posted in August and received on 12th November. The speed of the present-day postal services is almost as good as it was in the days of sailing ships. Thank you also for trusting us with the goods before any money is paid. Although many Australians are able to trace their ancestry to a convict (quite a status symbol these days) we are all now fairly honest.

I enclose also payment for annual College membership (£1.00) and subscription for Piping Times surface mail.

As surface mail is taking up to three months to reach Australia, would it be possible to include the Piping Times renewal notice with the June issue instead of the August one?

Would you kindly convey to Seumas my appreciation for the continuing high standard of the Piping Times. I wonder if he would consider the following suggestion. I notice that a few reed-makers have had to cease advertising because they have been overwhelmed with orders. Is there any reed-maker who would be willing to write a few articles on reed making for beginners? I am sure that there are other pipers besides myself who would welcome a few hints on the correct way to go about it.

With best wishes, yours sincerely,

Jim Gillians.

**An excellent suggestion (renewal notices a month earlier) and we hasten to adopt it.**

**Articles on reed making? Well it seems the reed-makers are too busy making reeds but if any have spare time—or if anybody else would care to oblige—the pages of the PT are open to all.**

---

Dannevirke, Hawkes Bay, New Zealand

Dear Sir,

Your magazine is widely read by the members of our local pipe band of which I am Pipe Major.

Incidentally one thing I am very disappointed in. Our band was very keen on purchasing a new matched set of chanters. I personally wrote Mr. David Naill who advertises in the Piping Times extensively, extolling the virtues etc. of his product. This was over 5 months ago but I never even had the courtesy of a reply!!

We now have a set of Canadian Kyle chanters.

Best wishes to the Times.

Yours faithfully,

R. MacKenzie

**Your complaint has been passed on.**

---

Leicester.

Dear Seumas,

The "Piper and Dancer" magazines were given to me by Paddy Donovan, a very fine drummer who played in the Dublin Fintan Lalor pipe band. He settled in Glasgow and I think he played with Clan Macrae. I believe he worked on the transport. He had a father same name, who was also an accomplished drummer. Paddy has a son living in Glasgow but whether he also is a drummer I don't know.

The magazine was published by J. Hunter, 145 Barrie Terrace, Ardrossan, printed by Herald Press, Braefoot, Kilmarnock. Possibly D. R. MacLennan might be able to give you further information.

You will be interested to know that recently in Barcelona, Spain, I saw a Spanish piper busking in the Ramblas. He had a bass drone and a tenor drone (no back hole in the chanter) which came out of

the bag at the side, level with what would be a sporran top, though he was attired in the usual attire—scruffy jeans. We also saw a painting of a piper in El Escorial, near Madrid.

About a week after at Beverley, Humberside, in the Minster we noticed a sculpture of a pipe, also another of which Elspeth encloses a photo of a piper no doubt testing two chanterers possibly for pitch! We also saw two wooden carvings on the pews, of a pig and a monkey playing a bagpipe.

Shortly after this we were at the piobaireachd competitions in Oban and beseech you to approach the people responsible to heat the rooms. In fact we came out into the sunshine for a warm. How the competitors can play so well in that low temperature defeats me.

Please put me on your list of instructors if acceptable. I have taught about 20 people so far in Leicester and teach every week.

Many thanks for your teaching when I was in Glasgow.

Yours sincerely,

IAIN D. INSCH.

---

3300 Braunschweig, Postfach 64 62  
F.R. of Germany

Dear Sirs,

I read your "calling" in Piping Times 10/82 and I am willing to help others getting a start with piping as far as I am able.

On the other side I am very interested in getting addresses of pipers in the vicinity of Braunschweig resp. Hannover here in Germany.

If you could help me I would be very appreciated.

Yours sincerely,

Ulrich Schimmack.

---

24 Bonaly Avenue, Edinburgh EH1 30ET

Dear Sir,

Could you please tell me if there is a qualified piping tutor living in the Somerset and/or Bristol area.

Yours sincerely,

R. B. SALMON.

**Can anyone help? If so will he let us know also so we can add his name to our list.**

**Also the following :—**

7 Ledborough Lane, Beaconsfield, Bucks. HP9 2BZ

Dear Seumas,

Following my life long love of the Highland bagpipe even now as a middle aged enthusiast I am keen to, if not master then learn the art to which end some years ago I acquired a practice chanter through the College and three years ago purchased a David Naill set.

My professional activities leave me little time but I am sure that

with some help from a 'Piper' my progress could be much improved.

I write this letter as a plea—is there a competent piper within striking distance of Beaconsfield who would be prepared, on a fee basis, to take on a more 'mature' student?

If so I would like to hear from him before I am really too old to learn!

Sadly my old friend Ian McDonald-Murray, late of the Scotch House, is no longer with us otherwise I could have approached him.

Yours sincerely,

JOHN GRAY.

**You are never too old to learn. Any offers?**

**And consider also the following :—**

Paston House, Litcham, Kings Lynn, Norfolk.

Dear Sirs,

My daughter is keen to learn to play but she needs someone to teach her in Cambridge where she is at school. Do you know of anyone who can give her lessons? I would be very grateful to know.

I am learning with the Norwich Pipe Band.

Yours faithfully,

HENRY BEDINGFELD.

---

Minas de Tharsis, Huelva, Spain.

Dear Mr. MacNeill,

That unequalled book, Bagpipe Tutor. Part 1, quotes Neil Munro on the flyleaf: "To the make of a piper go seven years..." I confess I smiled when first reading it. Not a condescending smile, just a smile born of ignorance.

I'm still smiling, but now only at the prophetic value of the statement because I'm into my eighth year and, verily, the end seems sometimes to be in sight. One more year and you will receive a cassette. It will only be Ceol Beag I'm afraid. Piobaireachd teacherless would be absurd. One more year to let double E settle down after this 3rd and last change of fingering. One more year to sharpen up double C and put a bit of polish in the 2/4 marches.

Not that I'd have learnt any faster with a teacher to steer me away from pitfalls, because no teacher would have had the patience to last the course. So, teacher or no, it breaks even, more or less, time-wise.

The alleged apathies, dislike, nay, even hatred of the instrument; Diana should not include herself in the "broad middle segment" for the simple reason that she openly loves the pipe for itself alone. Amongst the "B.M.S." are many who claim a fondness for the instrument but only because it is Scottish and they are Scots. Cupboard love, in a way.

The colourless drab denizens of the B.M.S. could have been born in any country of the world. The constituent parts of this wet amorphous mass would be French if born in France, English if born in England, Spanish if born in Spain. I do hope you can get past the apparent absurdity of this remark to grasp the idea behind it. They would be grey nonentities in any land. They have not the courage of their convictions, not because they lack necessarily courage, but because they have no convictions to be courageous about.

Tell me, please, would it be any credit to the pipe if that contexture of humanity upheld it?

Let us rather go after those whose souls are not smothered under kilos of burgeoise fat. You find them anywhere on God's earth, as like as not where you least expect them. I give you one example.

I hie me up to a tip-heap daily, 3 Kms outside the village, to practise. When the venerable Land Rover has no other thoughts I go up in it. Otherwise I walk. It is a place high and lonesome and not unlovely, being of earthy overburden, not grey slag. The gradient is too much for a two-wheel drive. It smacks of moonscape, with spontaneous vegetation.

I was up the top marching up and down the only flat bit there is, trying to make a clean military turn-round with "The Sweet Maid of Glendaruel", without overdoing it, when I was aware of the hidden presence of an unbidden audience. It turned out to be my secretary with a friend of hers. The important part is the commentary of the friend a mere girl, repeated to me the following day: "Oh, what beautiful music. It would be a pity if this were lost. He must teach it to his children".

Of course the playing must have been very much run-of-the-mill stuff but even so, let that spontaneous expression of a young Spanish girl be food for thought. She, and those of her calibre, do not belong to the B.M.S. It was her first encounter with the instrument, face to face, apart from the odd bar or two heard on television occasionally from bands where the B.C.R. (bang-and-crashing ratio) would reach a new high, fit for tourists, and render inaudible not only the gracing (if permitted) but also the tune.

(There is by the way a formula for determining the B.C.R. of any pipe band. It takes into account the number of drones wilfully stopped, the weight and luridity of trappings and trimmings and the detectability of gracenotes other than triplings, plus drum volume as factor one).

We return to the theme. No wringing of hands at the banal tastes of the B.M.S. Leave'em to it. They're not worth converting. They can't see beyond a colour T.V.

I uphold upon the Book that the Great Highland Bagpipe is capable of that sort of music no other instrument with umpteen octaves and all the sharps and flats between could get anywhere near. Nor for the same reason could their virtuosos. Therefore is the piper in a class alone. Alone and aloof. Likewise his instrument, Q.E.D.

I also like classical music, and Arab music and genuine Flamenco, and Gregorian Chant. I admit it, not secretly either.

But way above them all I treasure my pearl of great price, for which I have traded in all my free time and all other pastimes and occupations, for which I have really suffered as can only suffer he who seeks perfection alone, and finds that, like a rising tide, the goal recedes and advances, tantalisingly slow and faltering. I have strived for nothing else with such unswerving passion, nor have I received such bad treatment from the hands of any one man or beast over so long a period of time. It is the desperate ding-dong battle where neither side lets up. Just occasionally, usually at sun-set and with perhaps increasing frequency now, the music becomes effortless and, to my beleaguered ear, beautiful and out of this world. Then do I tuck the pipes away and descend the hill with a light heart and, at home again, put in from one to three hours on the practice chanter, as always before turning in, with rekindled hope.

Re the closing of the College, it would be a very poor reflection on Scotsmen outside the B.M.S. if no grant, loan or government support could be found to safeguard the future of an institution which has done every bit as much today for piping in the world as did the whole lineage of the MacCrimmons at Borerraig, in their time and century.

Please let this situation be made more public. There may thus be found a way to put up the other half. If Britain remembers, and gratitude is not dead.....

Yours sincerely,

PAUL ELLIS  
(Sassenach, I wot)

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Sacramento, California

Dear Seumas,

In the September issue of the Piping Times, Iain Insch has a remark or two about MacDougall chanters and drones. He asks "Did they make a wonder chanter? I don't recall ever hearing one, but I imagine it would be as flat as a bannock".

I believe that my old friend Alan Stuart in Winnipeg, Canada has a MacDougall set plus chanter, and I also believe that I have heard it, and that Alan has used it from time to time at various functions. As I recollect, it is a loud, fairly low pitched chanter with lots of volume, but Iain will have to ask Alan about that.

But the remark "flat as a bannock" means precisely nothing

unless it is further qualified! Does Iain mean that the "tonic" note of the chanter is flat i.e. the so-called A? Flat with respect to what? To today's B flat tonic notes? Or does he mean that certain notes in the scale are flat with respect to the appropriate modal intervals? There is nothing "flat" about a chanter pitched accurately to an A provided that all the other chanter notes are consonant with the tonic A. As a matter of fact I've found that with moderate reeds, the old chanters are **sharp** on certain notes rather than flat, unless the reeds are made to the dimensions required for old chanters.

I've just set up my 1906 Peter Henderson ebony chanter to play with a set of fairly modern Grainger drones. I've used an easy reed; but the tonic or basic note of the chanter is close to A440. The D hole I had to tape because it sounded too sharp; and the G' hole is taped because I just cannot use the old G' fingering (second finger top-hand on) in playing modern tunes. The drone reeds are the thick ones. The chanter reed I made especially for the old chanter. It is longer and wider than the ones used to-day.

The sound from this old chanter is extremely mellow and right on pitch, one note with respect to another. The A' is a note of beauty and a joy for ever...far, far more melodious than on any modern chanter that I've ever heard...no croak, no gurgle, no fade-away...just a nice full-toned mellow note. There is nothing flat about its scale or sound unless, of course, you compare it to our modern B flat verging towards B natural tonic noted chanters.

I probably would not play the old chanter in competitions because it's too difficult to make up spare reeds for it, both drone and chanter, and one should always have some spares ready to "go". But I certainly would use it at functions like funerals and weddings.

And on my fairly old Davy Glen set my Hardie chanters go better than the Henderson for the drone reeds and settings I've established. They, the Hardies, are pitched to a tonic note of B flat, which is as high as I'd ever want to go.

le deagh dhurachd,

David V. Kennedy.

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## INDEX OF TUNES

The College of Piping maintains an up-to-date card index of all published tunes, including piobaireachd. Queries regarding the whereabouts of particular tunes will be gladly answered but in view of the labour involved a charge of 50 pence search fee for each tune is made, whether the search is successful or not.

Newtown, New South Wales, Australia

Dear Sir,

I would like to make a comment on the article "The Composition of Ceol Mor", by Bruce Campbell, contained in the October issue of the Piping Times.

To argue that a revival of piobaireachd composition is possible today is to assume that one can compose ceol mor which captures the spirit of classical piobaireachd (more than a mere technical achievement), without the experience of a living Gaelic culture.

I would argue that the experience of a living Gaelic culture is essential to the composition of ceol mor. The community of Highland clan life which gave rise to, and developed, the ancient piobaireachd is largely now lost.

I do not think that our predominant consumer life provides any sense of community, experience of social life, or spirit, which could be conducive to the composition of ceol mor.

Hence, I do not regard the "standstill" in the composition of ceol mor as an enigma, to be attributed to general apathy or lack of competition incentives, but rather as the natural consequences of the decay of the culture, and the life, which produced it.

Yours sincerely,

Moraig Spence.

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#### John Macpherson Trophy—

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