

by Paul Warren, DIRECTOR
THE NATIONAL YOUTH PIPE BAND OF SCOTLAND



New faces, new music, new show... bravo!



WE embarked not only a new run of concerts and a new show repertoire with our recent courses but also a new phase of our development as the National Youth Pipe Band of Scotland.

We had our senior team together in February-March and worked on the material for our new show, and had one rehearsal day going over it.

Then, on 7-8 April, we had the drum corps in rehearsal, and they put their part together — and that's probably the most prepared and organised they've been, with a full two days to work on the material. The drums' rehearsal also resulted the recruitment of two strong new players into the corps.

On 9-11 April we held a small but very successful Foundation Course.

Then a Band Camp was held the following weekend, 14-15 April, attended by 37 young pipers and drummers. While the band camp was a rehearsal, it also was an audition. All of those who auditioned were invited to do so having shown their potential during previous Foundation Courses, and 13 were successful in gaining membership of the NYPBoS.

I like to think it's a result of the Foundation Courses that they were able to engage so readily with what the NYPBoS is all about — but that they came in and fitted in so very well they way they did is also a considerable credit to them and their capacities.

I can't tell you how happy I was with that weekend.

Running from 10.30 a.m. on the Saturday until about 4 p.m. on Sunday, we got into rehearsing our concert — all of it new material.

It was a hard weekend with a lot of new tunes to learn and I was amazed and so proud of everyone,

the existing and new members, for getting this new material down the way they did. There is some tricky stuff there — we're opening with Gordon Duncan's 98 Jig for example — a tune that's never been done by a pipe band before.

And we had all of these new faces, all of this new material and two days to put it all together, really from a standing start — and I have to tell you that on the Saturday I was already feeling confident: "this is going to work".

By the Sunday, I was shouting and doing my usual, but the whole band was on the floor with instruments together and the music off, and we were going through the choreography for the show, which was fantastic. A lot of powerful, fast, hard work went into the weekend and the results were brilliant.

Basically, where we're at now is a transition phase. The NYPBoS is four years old and many of the original members who came in at 13 and 14 are now 17 and 18 and some people are moving on or not as involved as they have been because they are entering the next phase of their lives — and we're bringing people in at the junior end of things. Also, while the material we had was very good and although it had been renewed as we went along, it was time for a serious freshening up.

We'd reached a point where we had a very strong, talented group that had come through from the start and was providing the leadership — which was wonderful, but which also had the unintended effect of inhibiting some of the talent that was coming through and we had some unknown quantities in the band.

Moving on, we have now seen a fresh and exciting outpouring of creativity.

The NYPBoS inevitably has to deal with a lack of regular band practices, so bringing in new music and a completely new show is a really hard thing to do. And we have this run of concerts that began at Aberdeen on 21 April: a whole new show, new material, new players and more concerts coming up. It's been a challenging time.

The new members have fitted in extremely well and there's a very good feeling in the band.

And I think the standard is higher. Musically, I think we're stronger as a band now than we've ever been.

So I'm really, really very pleased.

Our Aberdeen outreach concert, organised by a parent, John Sharpe and held in front of an audience of 300 at the Aberdeen City Arts Centre, gave us a chance to perform our new material and play our new members for the first time.

It was wonderful to have members of the Royal Scottish Pipe Band Association and local bands attend — and the very favourable feedback we heard was greatly appreciated.

Coming up, we have a rehearsal day on 20 May, then, on 24 May, our *Piping Live!* Launch show with Callum MacCrimmon's Breabach group and TNT (The New Tradition) at the Glasgow Royal Concert Hall.

On 15 and 16 June we are on the road to play two concerts in Argyllshire: in Dunoon and Campbeltown.

And then, on 29 July, we are booked to play for the Soroptimist International Convention at the Scottish Exhibition and Conference Centre in Glasgow.

We can look forward to all of these engagements with confidence and expectations of thoroughly enjoying what we do — just keep up the hard work. ●

A taste of what's required

A 'FOUNDATION COURSE'

THE National Youth Pipe Band of Scotland Foundation course, 9-11 April at the National Piping Centre, was a small, intense and challenging few days for five young pipers keen to join the band and for a young existing member who is keen to advance his standing in the band and gain some teaching experience.

It was led by Paul Warren, director of the NYPBoS, and Keith Bowes, the band's pipe major.

The intention of the course is to provide, along with some helpful tuition, an experience of the sorts of demands that membership of the NYPBoS involves: the need to learn new tunes at the drop of a hat, the need to manage your own instrument well, the need to function well as a full-on team player, the need to think about structuring a performance programme and think about how to best present your playing on stage.

It so happened that, on 11 April the Scots Guards Association was in Glasgow to place a 27-inch grey granite headstone over the previously unmarked grave of one of the first soldiers to be awarded the Victoria Cross, Sergeant James McKechnie, a Scots (Fusilier) Guardsman who won the honour for his courage at the Battle of Alma during the Crimean War in 1855.

Following the service at the Eastern Necropolis, about 80 Scots Guards veterans and serving soldiers and their partners attended a special lunch in the auditorium at the National Piping Centre, and provided an appreciative audience for the course's 15-minute closing performance.

And the course members, playing tunes they had learned over the previous 48 hours, did well, said Paul Warren. The performance was a significant test for them all.

"Well done guys, I hope you enjoyed that," he told them after the concert. "I'm really proud of you.

"I expected to hear mistakes because you had tunes thrown at you, you had to memorize and play them in a very short space of time and you're not going to be as comfortable with them as you'd like to be. But, to be honest, I think you did very well.

"Learning tunes quickly is a good skill to get: your listening skills, your reading skills — you handled that very well. I know I shouted and pushed, only because I wanted to see what you can do and stretch you a bit. And I think you've come through really very well."

THE youngest on the course was 13 year-old **Alex Duncan**, from Perth. The son of the well known pipe major and teacher Ian Duncan has his ambitions set on a musical career of some sort: "teaching and performing," he said.

"I think I learned a lot during the course. I learned seven or eight tunes: the most I've learned in such a short time — it'd usually take a week or two." And he said he appreciated learning to tune drones better.

While Alex Duncan did not belong to a pipe band,



15 year-old **Kyle Howie** from Dundee has been with Tayside Police Pipe Band since last November. He began learning to pipe when he was nine and a half and I had his pipes going when he was 10. "My mum was always saying I needed to learn an instrument. I was at the Boys Brigade and they were offering lessons on piping and pipe band stuff so I went down and started getting lessons," he said. "A couple of weeks after I got my pipes, I had all three drones on and was going about with the 13th Boys' Brigade Band.

"I'm now getting lessons in school with Ian Duncan and that's helping a lot."

As soon as he finishes his schooling, he wants to go on and complete a BA (Scottish Music — Piping) degree. For now, he wants to play with the NYPBoS.

And the Foundation Course was good, he said. "The hardest thing was learning the new tunes for the performance on the last day. It'd take a good couple of weeks with the Tayside Police Pipe Band to get them off. We did it in three days.

"But it's been great: piping for three days non-stop ... that's all I want to do, just pipe and learn loads of new tunes and get the tuition — it's an experience and a half.

"I was at the NYPBoS show in Forfar last year and that was an inspiration; since then I've wanted to go on that stage and pipe with them."

Graham Harris, from Belfast, had already played with the NYPBoS, once when it played in Armagh at the William Kennedy Piping Festival and again at last year's *Piping Live!* Glasgow International Piping Festival. "Although I'd played with the NYPBoS, I'd never come to a course and Paul Warren thought that this'd be good for me," he said.

"So I came over for the Foundation Course and for the Band Camp on 14-15 April.

"It's been tiring but I've enjoyed it, I really have. It's been good fun. I enjoy learning new tunes and the challenge of getting so much stuff and learning it and playing it, and playing it well. Learning the tunes was the toughest part of it of the Foundation Course because there's a lot of them."

Graham Harris, who plays with the Blearly and District Pipe Band, got his taste for the pipes through his mother's regularly inviting a piper to their home to play in the New Year. He now attends Campbell College, the only school in Northern Ireland to have a pipe band. Fred Russell, a brother of Nat Russell of West Australia Police Pipe Band fame, teaches and leads the band.

"I prefer solos to playing in a band and get more of a buzz from them," said Graham Harris. "I come over for lessons with Roddy MacLeod and Paul Warren heard me play last year at the junior competitions at



the Centre, and knew about me. He gave me a music pack for the NYPBoS and I started learning the tunes.

"I've been involved since then."

Jonathan Cheyne came to Paul Warren's attention as a member of the NYPBoS director's "other band": the grade 2 Lomond and Clyde Pipe Band. The Bishopbriggs Academy student began on the practice chanter with his local Boys Brigade band, "But it was basically on chanters and it wasn't really going anywhere. So I started coming to the National Piping Centre and it started to pick up in group lessons.

"I still wasn't getting as much tuition as I was needing so I got a one-on-one teacher four years ago, Decker Forrest, and he started me over again.

"I joined the Milngavie Pipe Band's juvenile band and went on from there." At 16, he is now entering his third pipe band competing season, playing in grade 2.

Jonathan Cheyne said he thought the NYPBoS would present him with a good challenge, particularly alongside his membership of the Lomond and Clyde band: "they're doing very different things," he said.

The Foundation Course, he said, had helped him better understand the tuning process. "I have a better idea of what to do, and have more confidence.

"And the experience of learning a number of tunes over a short period of time helps: it makes you learn. Getting the tunes down, learning them overnight... was the hardest part because the course is full on and, when you're tired, it's harder to pay attention. And, when you learn them on the chanter, then there's getting them onto the pipes. But it's been good. We've had a good laugh but the craik's mostly been focused on the tunes."

Fourteen year-old **Matt Underwood** of Helens-

burgh found the Foundation Course exhausting. On top of a busy week just before the course and a few long nights, his stamina faded as the demands of the course mounted. "I totally ran out of energy," he said. "But I learned a lot of new tunes and skills, how to better tune pipes and things like that, and I've learned to play a bit better — more slickly, with starts and stops properly done and so on.

"There were so many things going on it was hard to keep up with everything. But I'm still interested in the NYPBoS. Although I wasn't successful this time I'll definitely be coming back and trying again.

And, at some point, I'd like to get into Paul Warren's Lomond and Clyde Pipe Band: I've been learning the tunes for the past few seasons and getting them onto the pipes. I'm trying hard to improve my playing to be good enough to play in a band like that."

Said Paul Warren: "Matt's still very young and his relative lack of experience, more was new to him and meant he faced a rather bigger task than others on the course. I hope he comes back."

Colin Greeves, a member of the NYPBoS since December 2005, when he joined as a junior member, and a full member since December last year, wants to become a music teacher and intends to take the BA (Scottish Music — Piping) degree. He attended the course to add to his experience and advance himself within the NYPBoS. He acted as the group's pipe major and gave a lecture to the prospective members on bandcraft.

"Pipes are my main instrument and my object with piping is just to enjoy myself. I'll use it as my main instrument at the Academy, but I'm not going to get too hooped up over winning a gold medal."

At 15, he is one of the youngest pipers with the

East Kilbride Pipe Band and he attends Claremont High School.

His father introduced him to piping when he was nine years old. "He plays pipes and he took me on a band trip with him. I saw him playing the pipes and knew that's what I wanted to do.

"My dad started me on the scale and then I went to the Kinning Park Pipe Band and began getting lessons, and then I started going to the College of Piping and I'm still there, six years later, learning with Bob McPhee.

"One of my friends from Kinning Park, Graham Griffiths, who also went to Bob McPhee, got into the NYPBoS and he came in with the tunes one time — and I liked them all. From then on I wanted to be in the National Youth Pipe Band.

"It's great getting to play new tunes and to play with other really good people." ●

New members

THE National Youth Pipe Band of Scotland welcomes the following new membersB:

- Louise Augaitis**, drummer, from Glasgow
 - Patrick Baxter**, piper, from Fife
 - Grant Cassidy**, drummer, from Uddingston
 - Jonathan Cheyne**, piper, from Bishopbriggs
 - Keith Christie**, piper, from Dundee
 - Alexander Duncan**, piper, from Perth
 - Grahame Harris**, piper, from Belfast
 - George Hill**, piper, from the Isle of Bute
 - Kyle Howie**, piper, from Dundee
 - Stuart Hunter**, drummer, from Burntisland
 - Jamie McAndrew**, piper, from Laurencekirk
 - Craig Sutherland**, piper, from Crieff
 - Laura Underwood**, piper, from Argyll.
- Congratulations!