



## **NOTING THE TRADITION**

### **An Oral History Project from the National Piping Centre**



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**Project National Piping Centre, name Noting the Tradition, interviewee Iain Hurst, location of recording Pipe Band Hall, Oban, on the 1<sup>st</sup> of March, 9pm. This was recorded on Marantz 661 digital recorder supplied by the National Piping Centre. There was background noise of traffic, the interviewer is Christine MacKay, and that completes the ID for Iain Hurst.**

**Iain, thank you very much for coming along tonight to speak with me**

No problem

**...after a very busy day. You work during the day, first of all?**

Yes, I work for CP architects. I am a technologist of some 35 years' experience, I think now, so yes, it's a varied practice, a small rural practice, so we tend to not specialise in any one thing, so we see a bit of business in domestic and commercial and retail, industrial, the whole range of work, so quite interesting, and happily still quite busy despite the recession

**Excellent. So you belong to Oban?**

IH – I do indeed yes. I was born in Glen Iuchar as it was then, the maternity hospital, in October 1958, so Oban born and bred really.

**Indeed, indeed. And you family belonged to the town?**

Yes, I am married to Margaret, who oddly enough was born in Glen Iuchar exactly 36 hours before I was [Laughter]

**She beat you to it?**

She beat me to it, yes. And we have two daughters, and Ailsa the first born, was born in the Vale of Leven in Alexandria, but Lorna, happily was also born in Glen Iuchar before that facility closed down, so yes, the girls are both working in Glasgow now, but we're still living in Oban.

## **Right. So do you come from a piping family?**

Not at all. To the best of my knowledge there's no music in my family at all really. I think I was telling you before curiously about my introduction to piping, which was when I was in Primary 5, I think, or Primary 6 in Rockfield School, I noticed on a Friday that some of my pals disappeared after morning interval and they came back just before lunchtime. So I asked them where was it that they disappeared to for this two hours and they said "Oh, we're learning the chanter". So I said, "Oh, what's that?", and so a chanter was duly produced and they showed me the scale and gracenotes, and I thought, hmm this is quite interesting, and it gets me out of class for a couple of hours. So I badgered my parents to get me a practice chanter and after some weeks they relented, and so I got my first practice chanter and started taking lessons. And that was with Pipe Major Ronald MacCallum from Inveraray...

## **Right**

...who was a very well known piper and Gold Medallist and Piper to the Duke of Argyll, part of a very well known piping family in Argyll and most notably I suppose currently, grandfather of Stuart Liddell...

## **Of course**

...who is currently one of the top pipers in the world. So Wee Ronnie, as he was affectionately known was my first tutor.

## **So what style did he use in teaching?**

Well, I don't know what school he belonged to in terms of tradition, but I know that he was a very quietly spoken man in all the years I knew him, you could count comfortably on one hand the number of times I ever saw him get a bit short with someone. He was a very patient man, nice, laid back sort of approach, beautiful fingers, quite, you know, quite stout fingers, but lovely, crisp, lovely resonant sound

on his practice chanter. A very musical man, and he could sing, he could give you canntaireachd, and in those days we were very fortunate because, in all the years that I went through Oban High School, you had the chance on a Friday afternoon to do leisure activities. And there was a wide range of things, ranging from academic subjects, you could do debating, you could do poetry, you could do drama you could do sports, anything, you could do motor mechanics, any of those sort of things, and there were various musical options, of which piping was one. So we had wee Ronnie. I started in primary school, but all through the High School years I had my Friday afternoon with him also. And there was also, you can imagine in that sort of scenario, some people are just there for a lark and because they didn't fancy anything else, and Ronnie was very patient with those that were, let's say, not as committed as most of us were [Laughter]. So he had a very kind of laid back, musical approach. He could show you something and make it so interesting, and so musical, that ehh, I found him very easy to pick music up from.

**And you mentioned canntaireachd? Did you learn by that method?**

Not really, but it was a method that he could convey...we tended to really not do a lot of piobaireachd in those school lessons, it was mostly light music...but he could just, you know, he could sing, you know, very nicely in a way that used to be the method before music was written down. And many would say it's still the best way to teach, to be able to sing.

**Indeed, indeed, indeed. So did you, when did you start in the bands?**

Well, I started, I would have been about 10 or 11, I can't exactly remember, and so, it was just individual lessons at first. When I learned, that would have been about 1969, the Oban Pipe Band was still in the doldrums so to speak, the band had been active for, gosh,

may 40, 50 years, but because there weren't enough people to keep it going, it foundered. But at the time that Ronnie MacCallum was teaching in the schools, there was a number of us of about the same age, learning at the same time, and so a few of us were invited to come along to the band, and so with that fusion, which was unusual then, strange to think it, so commonplace now, the young with the older experienced players that were still around, the band was restarted.

**Have any of your contemporaries gone on to play a lot?**

Yes, yes, there's still quite a few that learned alongside me, some of them went to the dark side and became drummers, but that to me, is probably the next best thing, if you are not going to stick with pipes, then pipe band drumming would be the next best thing.

**Right, right. So did you play solo at that time?**

I played in solo competition, in my sort of early teens, and up to the age of probably about 15 or 16 I competed in , mainly just in local events in juniors, and I kind of let that side of it slip for perhaps, for 20 years or so [Laughs].

**Ah...**

Once I became a senior, I stopped competing, still playing with the band of course, that has been a bit of a mainstay for me, really for about forty years...so, I restarted competing in about 1986, 87, I think. I decided if I was ever going to do serious competing in the solos, I should go and get some tuition and I went to Arthur Gillies at Kilchrenan, who was a very well known and well respected piper, who had also been a previous Gold Medallist at Oban. And so Arthur gave me tuition in piobaireachd, which I hadn't really pursued, and so I went to Arthur for a couple of years and kept on the boards, I don't know for about 13, 14 years before I stopped.

## **Where did you compete?**

I competed in all of the main events. I mean, the main open events are Oban and Inverness, that's where the Highland Society's Gold Medals are competed for. So these are the main open events, there are other invitation events...

## **Right**

...that if you achieve levels of success at those you can go on to as well. There's a burgeoning games circuit, which is even more heavily populated now that when I was competing, pipers of all ages and nationalities converge on Scotland in the summer, and it's become a really big and you know, it's a big thing now piping.

## **Indeed!**

I think when I was learning, I was in a minority, but piping is now cool!

## **Very cool!**

It's cool and there's lots of youngsters been learning, you know, over the last 10 to 20 years, and which is just wonderful for piping in general, and piping in this area in particular. But whereas in the old days you would go to games like Inveraray or Tobermory, and you would have senior events and junior events, you now have to have Premier and A Grade Seniors, you have B Grade Seniors and C Grade Seniors, there are so many...

## **Right**

...that they have to be you know, graded. And it's tough, because C grade might sound like it's third best, but really, there are very high quality players in every grade, so it's a tough...it's a tough game now.

**Now, I was very impressed when I came in tonight. You were teaching youngsters.**

Yes

**Not only do you have a full time day job, but you were teaching the evening. So who are you teaching?**

Well, well we just have a few kids now. In recent years the tuition in the schools here has taken off. For many years, you know, kids in this area didn't have that many options. It would just be, you know, if they were able to get a tutor, eh, you know, that they could go to privately. So we had in days gone by up to 15, 17 kids coming down on a Thursday night, eh, it's just a handful now because happily, now, tuition is available in the schools. Angus MacColl is teaching in the schools, so that's now available on the curriculum, and you know, that system is producing, not only, you know, successful pipe bands that I am sure that you are aware of, but also, you know a lot of good individual pipers as well.

**Right**

So we are still here for kids that want it, but as I say, there are fewer now than there were in the past.

**But in the schools do the children have to be taking this as a subject, as one of their core subjects?**

Yes, I think, I don't know how exactly it works in the school, I think that maybe when they are introduced to it it's not a core subject, but it could become that later on if they take it seriously. I think it's fitted in. I gather the way that they get their lessons it's not at the same time every week, because they are coming out of another class to go to and get their piping...

**Ah, right**

...so they don't want to miss, you know, maths every Wednesday afternoon...

**Ah, right**

...so maybe this week they will miss maths to go and get piping, but next week they will miss English to go and get their piping...

**Ah, right**

...that's the way it seems to work, but if they are going to take it as a core subject then it would have a place in the curriculum. I think piping helps people develop healthy characteristics, particularly in a band environment. It's something I have been involved in since probably about the age of 11 or 12, I started coming along to band, and I think it helps you develop teamwork, and you, a sense of responsibility. You learn to rely on other people and become someone you want people to be able to rely on yourself, at least that's the way I've always approached it, so I believe there's a lot to be said for pursuing what is after all a hobby, it's a traditional art, but it is a hobby, a thing that we do because we enjoy it, but if you do it in a group environment, people especially when they're younger tend to bounce off each other, and I think it's quite healthy when you see kids, maybe the better ones learning the tunes quicker, and the rest of them will go, oh, he's got that tune off, I'd better learn it now, and so they spur each other on I think, even if they don't necessarily know it at the time, I think. I've got nothing but good to say about to say [Laughter] about piping as an activity for youngsters.

**I am always very impressed by how smart the pipers are**

Mostly, I think we probably are, yes.

**Yes, all these youngsters...**

[Laughter] Yes

...must have a good sort of pride in what they're doing

I think so, I think so, and if, and if, that's, you know, the way they're taught it will become ingrained in them, and so that goes for how you carry yourself as well as the music you play.

**Now to back to the tutoring. What methods do you use for tutoring the children?**

Oh, much the same as I was taught myself that, you have to try, and make sure that kids have the basics, you know, there are certain elementary moves and rudiments that they need to have control of, and then to be able to put that together, to learn tunes, and so you just show them good technique, good example and try and just convey the music to them and just be a kind of a steady hand on the tiller if you like to keep pointing them in the right direction and if they stray off, you know, keep correcting them. There's no sense in saying that's good, that's wonderful, if there's something they're doing wrong, so you have to correct, but you also have to encourage at the same time, so that's what we try and do.

**So you've played solo and you've played in bands**

Uh,huh

**Any other areas of piping you've been involved with?**

Well, that's really been the main thing. As I said, I competed in solos as a youngster, and then I had about, you know, 12 or 15 years competing in the adult competitions. But I have been playing with the band all of that time. That's been unbroken, so that's kind of tended to dominate my perspective, and we've had lots of memorable times, probably one or two which I can't remember which were probably great fun. [Laughter]

**So how many years have you played in bands now?**

Well that's, it's, it's, it's forty plus. I think this is probably my forty second year.

### **And you've been pipe major?**

I have been pipe major for much of that time. I had a stint from the sort of late 70s to..., oh gosh I can't remember exactly the years now, but I had some years as pipe major, and I stood down from being pipe major when I concentrated on my studies through my work. I took it on again after that, so it was probably just over 30 years I think in total that I was pipe major of the band. Great times, I mean, happiest of times. The band has been something which has given me immense enjoyment, whether as leader or not, it matters not, but...

### **And have you seen lots of changes in piping?**

There have been changes in piping, yes I think, several changes. One we touched on earlier was that there are now far more young people playing than there used to be and that's to be applauded, and Angus and Stuart Liddell whom we also mentioned and Ian McKerral in Campbeltown and others have made it so that Argyll has a particularly rich provision now of young pipers. We're very well off and very lucky, so that's been one big change I think in recent years. Other changes, there are technical changes about the instrument of course in that time. When I started off, you could have a pipe bag that was either made of sheepskin or cow hide, these were pretty much the only materials that we had and now there are all sorts of synthetic materials used for bags. There are complex systems of moisture control involving cat litter and filters and canisters and bags with zips in them [Laughter], it's a different instrument to what it was 30, 40 years ago. Materials of reeds as well, that's another thing. We used to only have cane reeds, but there are all sorts of synthetic reeds available now. Pipes and chanterers are now commonly made of synthetic materials as well, not just the blackwood.

### **So what kind of pipes have you concentrated on?**

Most of the guys in the band will have fairly old sets of pipes, by which I'm talking probably 50 years or older. Pipes tend to be, you know, the older makes, where it's Hendersons, MacDougalls, or there are several good old makes that pipers do tend to favour. But modern methods are also very good and, you know, you can buy a very good set now at a reasonable cost that are made in a, in a, you know, with traditional methods. We play in the band, plastic chanter, we play McCallums, so although everybody has their own pipes, we all when we come together, we play the same chanter, just so that everything, hopefully is easier to chord in together, so that they all are in unison, so, and that's something that pretty much every pipe band will play, one make of chanter.

**I was just looking at some of the advertising material out there, about the cost it must be for children to be kitted out for pipe bands.**

Yes, yes, well to kit anybody out now, I don't if the total is there, but it's several hundred pounds...

**Indeed.**

...you know. The kit is simpler than it used to be, again harking back to when I started it was common place for pipe bands to wear Number One kit, so you had a kilt and a tunic and a plaid and a hairy sporran made of horse hair; you had hose tops with spats that you wore over your brogues. That was a much more expensive get up because there were more bits to it. At least it's simpler now than in those days. Most of the bands, certainly civilian bands, are wearing what we call Number Two kit, which is kilt and leather sporrans and jackets and waistcoats and Glengarries, so...it's still an expensive business though.

**Is there finance available to help to support bands?**

Well from time to time there are grant sources that can be plundered, but most civilian bands that don't have sponsorship are doing what we do ourselves, and that, you know, is a lot of fundraising. I don't know how common it is now for bands to be sponsored. I mean over the years there were several bands that were, that carried sponsorship, either in the name or on the bass drum. We have sponsorship on a sort of a lesser scale, where people have kindly donated maybe four or five hundred pounds to allow us to buy a drum, so the name would be put on that drum, so that, you know, these things are of valuable help to a band like ours, but we don't have what you would call a main sponsor...

**Right.**

...so there's a lot of work goes on. We've got an industrious fundraising committee that have lots of quiz nights, soup lunches, you name it, there's always something on the go...

**So a lack of money would not prevent any child from being in the band?**

No, I don't think so, no.

**Right, that's good**

The more people you have in the band, the more work you have to do, it's as simple as that, we've never turned anybody away because we couldn't afford to kit them out.

**Right, right, oh, that's excellent. So what about what's happening in piping today, the various, you mentioned there's that it's changing....**

See, there's changes in all sorts of ways. But, well, we had a few years where we were unable to compete because we had too few drummers, so until last year we had had four years out of the competition scene, which I mean, that...the band was never only about

competing, but, you know, we did like to go and pit our wits, and we had had, you know, some good times in the past. But, as I say, we had had about four years out of the competition scene. However, over the past couple of years there have been changes within the Oban Pipe Band, and the main one of these changes has been that Euan Dewar has taken on charge of the band, he's now the Pipe Major. Bobby Davey is now in charge of drumming . We have had a bit of an influx of new members, you know, several from out of town, but it has swelled the numbers up and it's given us a good robust band that's been able to get back into the competition scene.

## **Right**

IH So last year we had a very good year. We had gone through the previous winter expecting that we would re-enter competition at the level that we were at when we had last competed, and that was Grade 3B. However, the Scottish Pipe Band Association decided before the start of the summer season that we had had several new players in. Some of these were from Grade 2 bands, and that it was maybe more appropriate that we compete in Grade 3A. So we were put in to 3A before the season started, and we had a very successful season in 3A, and the main, we had several good results but biggest one, without a shadow of a doubt was winning the World Championship in Grade 3A...

## **Excellent**

...at Glasgow Green. So that was, it was great to get back into competition again, and it was good to have such success. I think there might have been some who thought, oh crikey it all came about too quick because as a result of that success we were put up to Grade 2 for the coming season, so, so the bar has been raised and we need to try and crank it up another gear.

## **What are the differences in demands then?**

The difference? Well, basically as you go up the grades, you are getting a better quality of playing and a better quality of sound, and you know, that means that you have to be more precise about how you play musically and in unison together, and you have to try and have a good, rich, musical sound, that has to be, again, it's the level of accuracy that goes up. I mean we can all say that we went on and our pipes were in tune, but could it be better, well, yes, if you listen to Grade 1 bands and you hear how good pipe bands can sound. When you up into Grade 2, it's a higher quality that you are aiming for. So, I have no doubt it will be tough. I think we're looking forward to it, but it will be, it will be tough.

**But you've got a fairly small threshold area here in Oban and in Argyll for pipers haven't you?**

You mean as regards to being a centre that people can travel to?

**Well, I was just thinking in comparison with some of the big bands in Grade 1?**

Yeah

**They possibly have a bigger threshold area for material.**

Well yes, I mean, yes, our players are coming from, you know, quite a wide catchment area, and some of them are travelling up from Dunoon, we've got one piper comes over from Mull, several from out of town, Dalmally, Taynuilt, Seil, places that are local, so it's quite cosmopolitan. So yes, there's a bit of travelling involved for some of them, but that's the way it is in a pipe band. All bands are like that nowadays, they tend to be less localised, and certainly compared to say, North American bands, where people are travelling three or four hundred miles to get to a practice, I don't think any of us need to complain too much. [Laughter]

**No, we tend to think of distance in different ways to North America.**

Quite [Laughter]

**And it's quite amazing, Inveraray is only forty miles away and they're also doing very well.**

That's right, that's right, well they're winning prizes in Grade 1 now. It's just astonishing the progress that they've made, but it's been a stellar rise and they won prizes in every major last year...and to their credit much of the core of that band is still Inveraray born and bred.

**Indeed**

But they have some, you know, travellers as well.

**Did Inveraray have a long piping tradition?**

Inveraray as a town did have I think, but, I don't think they had ever had a band before. I may need to be corrected on this one, but, I am sure Jimmy Beaton would put us right on that one. I don't think there was a band before Stuart Liddell started the band movement, which was only in about 2004 or 5 I think, or thereabouts, because he was teaching in the schools in the Inveraray district, and just decided, well I would quite like to start a band, so that's how it started, from humble beginnings, with just one drummer and a handful of pipers, and it's grown to an extraordinary level, absolutely extraordinary.

**So do you reckon that they'll be at the top this year?**

Absolutely, absolutely, well at the top, they'll be certainly, I think, in the prize list. It's interesting, I think, when it comes to August and we're looking forward to the World Championship, and everybody's speculating about who's going to win the World Championship, I think you'll probably find there'll be a few people putting bets on Inveraray now to be in the mix quite seriously, so...

### **And Oban soon after that?**

[Laughter] I would love to think so. As I say, the bar has been raised for us, so we'll take our first year up in Grade 2 again...

### **But you're very optimistic about the future of piping in this area?**

Well, I think there's no, there's no question, piping in Argyll, is in very good shape, better, than it's ever been before, and it's just lovely, I'm a bit of an old guy now in this scene [Laughter] and it's just lovely to be a part of a scene that is so vibrant, and long may it continue.

### **One of the...I shouldn't really say a problem, one knows of this only too well, but living in Argyll one tends to leave for education... therefore you possibly will lose pipers when they go to the city.**

Well, it's kind of always been a factor in a rural place like Oban, it, you know, if you have youngsters learning, that's great, just as they're kind of reaching maturity, they might up sticks and go off to uni or college, or not be able to find work and need to go elsewhere. I think, well two things I suppose, one is hard and all as it may be to lose people from an area, if you have a sort of continuum, then, you know, of you have faith in that system, if it goes on producing new stars to replace ones that have gone, it's not going to die out. The other thing is, you know, that I think the world's a smaller place now and people being based, you know, you're saying even about our perception of distance is different to North America, but you know, if someone goes away to uni in Glasgow say, it's not such a big deal to be coming back home every couple of weeks, so, and, I think that probably bands like ours, although you might lose a proportion, you're maybe less likely to lose people than you once were.

### **Indeed. So have any of your pupils gone on to study piping, have they gone on to the Royal Academy?...**

Now, there were, I think there was one chap that we used to have that went down, but I think, we've kind of lost touch now, so I'm not sure if there are any others, since that time, or from Angus's crop that have gone. I know there's one or two from Argyll, from Campbeltown and Inveraray that are currently doing the degree...

### **Excellent**

...at the Conservatoire, as it is now....

### **Conservatoire [Laughter]...so therefore there is a future in piping?**

Yes, yes. It's still not easy I would say to envisage making a living out of piping. There will be a few who will manage it, but that's going to be through probably teaching. I think, you know, perhaps competing at the top level can be fairly well rewarded but, but it's not something that I think, you know, any of the top boys could even really rely on as a sole means of income, but I think the degree course certainly gives people a good grounding with a prospect of, I think teaching, is probably the main avenue that....

### **And of course that will filter through the schools and ...**

Absolutely, absolutely

### **... and the children as well.**

That's right, that's right.

### **And what about groups and such like? One often sees pipers in groups on television.**

Yes. It's another nice thing that, you know, in recent years, and again it's probably, you know, more down to gifted individuals, you know, people like, sadly I just heard on the radio the other night, you know, talking about people that are no longer with us, Martyn Bennett and Gordon Duncan probably stand out, there are probably other people

around that have done a lot to make piping popular, but I think those two...in similar, but at the same time different, ways have done a lot to make piping appeal to a wider audience. But with respect to traditional foundations, not everybody's cup of tea I know, there are some died in the wool traditionalists who have no time for all these fancy, kind of Irish tunes, or pop type tunes, or things that are too different but I don't think you can really knock it if brings piping to a wider audience and a lot of that is serious, people come to it by whatever means maybe if they have heard a recording on the radio or if they've gone to a concert, and if that's what gets them in the door, there's a lot of people that will come in that way, and they'll stick with it and they'll broaden their interest in other genres of piping, so a lot of that was done in a sort of a group context. It's been done a lot over a long period of years I think, you know, with pipers playing in groups like Ossian and what have you, but to actually do something different, as I say these guys have broadened it still further.

### **And what about Continental influences, like Galician pipes and Breton pipes and such like?**

Well, speaking personally, I don't, I haven't witnessed too much of an influence there, but that's because I'm in a wee bubble here, I think, there's probably quite a lot of crossover now thanks to the Piping Live! festival, which goes on in Glasgow for the week leading up to the World Championship and, so that is now well established as a kind of feast of piping, and you have all sorts there, it's not, it's not, it doesn't only feature people that are going to be participating at the World Championship, you know there are groups and artists of all sort of different nationalities and some here, that you've never heard of, and you realise that piping is so much more diverse than many people would have thought, but they're all finding platforms that they otherwise have had. I think Piping Live! has been a big thing for bringing other, you know, Continental and overseas styles to what you might call the mainstream piping audiences here.

**And what about, for example, our pipers going to Lorient?**

Yeah, again that's been going a few years now and I think, I've never been myself, and I think that features Scottish, Irish and Breton, isn't it, I think the three sort of backgrounds that you have to do a selection in each style...

**Right, right...**

...I understand it's a very big event, but I don't have any experience of it myself, so couldn't really talk too much about it...

**Well, it's something you'll have to investigate!**

Well yes, I'll put that...yes, never too old to set targets is it?

**Now Iain, you competitions as a solo item. Where did you compete?**

Well, I competed in most of the Games around the West of Scotland, and Oban and Inverness, the main open competitions, and some of the professional competitions in Glasgow, the SPA competition, so it was...reasonable success in those, and the best shout overall probably was a second in the Gold Medal at Inverness, I can tell you the year it was the early 90s, and the good thing about that was, I happened to get an invitation that year to go to the Glenfiddich Championship at Blair Castle in the October, which was a nice experience.

**So who did you play long with there, on that occasion?**

Oh, gosh, Angus MacColl, Willie McCallum, Jack Lee, Gordon Walker, Brian Donaldson, Mike Cusack, I can't remember them all, but it was, you know a very nice convivial atmosphere, wonderful surroundings, turned out to be the only time I played there, but to have, to have played there once was just a lovely experience, you know in the Great Hall with a full house and a lovely acoustic. It's a wee bit nerve-wracking I suppose, but if you can't come off that and

say you enjoyed it, then there's something wrong with you.

[Laughter]

### **So through piping you've met very many people?**

Yes, well that's a wee bit of name dropping there I suppose but, yes I have competed with and just met an awful lot of good characters. I think piping has in my experience...pipers by and large are pretty reasonable, down to earth, mostly pretty good humoured people, they're not too up themselves and they don't take themselves too incredibly seriously, it sounds like I am painting a fantastic picture here but, no it's a fact, I think that in all the years I was competing, and just been around competing pipers, I think they are all quite realistic people with a very fair outlook, I don't think there's hardly ever any backbiting that I ever witnessed, and people, genuinely, you know, encourage each other. I am not saying it doesn't go on in other circles, but piping seems to me to be a game that does encourage fair play.

### **Excellent. So where has piping taken you? Have you been abroad?**

I have been abroad, yes once or twice, again with the band really rather than on my own, we had a lovely trip, I am just trying to think, it was the year 2000, we were invited to celebrate St Patrick's Day in Goray County Wexford. Goray is the twin town of Oban, and they kindly paid our expenses and took us over there for the weekend. That was a wonderful time. I had better not tell you any of the detailed stories but just to say we had a great time. [Laughter] We flew the flag and we represented Oban with, I think dignity and responsibility, and yes we went out and had a pint at night. That's enough [Laughter]...and gosh overseas, yes we had a championship in Belgium a few years ago, I think, gosh was it 2008, no it was earlier than that, it was probably 2003 or 4. There is a regular event at a place called Alden Biesen which is near the border with Netherlands, a

beautiful setting and they regularly have a Belgian championship there, and on this one occasion, the European Championship was staged on the same weekend, with the European taking place on the Saturday, followed by the Belgian championship on the Sunday, so the bands, many of the bands went over just for the Saturday, but there was many of us that stayed on and made a weekend of it. We were playing in 3B at that time, had a, that was at the end of the season and had a lovely end to the season because we won that Championship and had a very nice time playing in beautiful surroundings, and the Band is actually going to be going to Spain this year. Plans are just at an early stage but the invitation has come to go for about four or five days I think, in mid-July, so I believe that there have been enough of the band that have said, yes they can go, so it looks like that's on the cards, so...

### **So you'll be there?**

Well, I won't personally because I'll be at a wedding that weekend on the Saturday, but I'm sure I will be told all the stories. [Laughter]

### **Which part of Spain is it that they are going to?**

Do you know this, I couldn't even tell you...

### **Right, right...**

...that's terrible....no, no, I'm trying to think but it's just a big empty space there, I'm afraid. [Laughter]

### **But even although you're not going to Spain, you're still very much involved with the band?**

Absolutely, absolutely.

### **And you're tutoring individuals...**

I'm doing a wee bit of that, and as I say I'm just, I'm playing just a supporting role, I'm helping Euan out. I'm a co-pipe sergeant, we

have two pipe sergeants helping Euan, and I'm very happy just playing that supporting role. You know, if somebody on my side makes a mistake, I can still snarl and snap at them and give them a good boot up the backside if it's needed. [Laughter] So no, the band is still a very happy place to be, and I think I'll probably be here until I keel over. [Laughter]

**Well, Iain, thank you so much for being so very generous with your time...**

No problem...

**...on a Thursday evening, after a day's work and after tutoring children. Many, many thanks.**

Ok.

**Thank you then.**