



## NOTING THE TRADITION

An Oral History Project from the National Piping Centre



Interviewee            Iain MacDonald

Interviewer            Bill Gallacher

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**It is 11.40 on Wednesday the 2<sup>nd</sup> of May 2012. I am Bill Gallacher and I am in the library at the National Piping Centre and I am going to be talking to Iain MacDonald, who is among other things, the pipe major of the Neilson and District Pipe Band. This is part of the Noting the Tradition Project.**

**Well Iain, thanks very much for taking part in this.**

It's a pleasure

**I have had a brief look at some of your career, primarily on the internet. I am aware that there are varied aspects to it, so I don't think it is going to be possible just to start at the beginning and run through to the end. We are probably going to have to explore various facets. But let's just start off at the beginning. Can you tell us when and where you were born and maybe tell us a bit about your family and any piping in your family background?**

Yes. It is a pleasure to be here. I was born of Hebridean parentage, my mother and father having been born on the island of Great Bernera off the West Coast of Lewis. I was brought up...I spent most of my pre-school days in Bernera and I was aware of the wealth of traditional music that was surrounding me, both in my mother and father's side of the family; different aspects, including box, fiddle players locally. and my mother encouraged me to go to perhaps one of the best pipers on the island at the time, who happened to be my mother's school master, his name was Cally Murray. My mother used to take me to the schoolmaster's house, but she refused to cross the threshold because of the barrier between school children and headmasters in particular, but I was allowed to cross that threshold simply because I had an interest in learning to play the pipes.

We moved initially to Partick in Glasgow, as a lot of Highland people did post-war. Thereafter, both my mother and my father secured careers in nursing, in Dykebar Hospital in Paisley. So we settled in Barrhead.

**So what age were you when you came?**

Well I was actually born in Johnstone Maternity Hospital, but spent most of my pre-school days in Lewis. I would have been five, ready to start primary school, and I can remember my first day in the playground thinking that I had to learn another language because I had been brought up in the Gaelic tradition mostly, although I was English speaking, bilingual to a degree. But in the school playground in Baurheid as they called it, it was proving very difficult for me to understand, but I managed to sort that one out fairly quickly.

**So had you been speaking Gaelic solely or was it?**

Both, although it wasn't quite as fashionable as it is now. My mother and father were both fluent Gaelic speakers and I was encouraged to use it in these pre-school days, but also my mother was aware that I had to make sure that my English was correct before going to school.

So that was us established in Barrhead and my mother was keen for me to continue with my practice chanter tuition and we were made aware of the existence of the Rover Scouts Piper Band in Barrhead.

**Right. Is there any piping in your family background? Have you got uncles or grandfathers?**

My grandfather, maternal grandfather, was a piper and I had some second cousins and uncles. There was always music about in one form or another.

**Who were these? Can you give me names to the people?**

Yes, well my instructor, Cally Murray, was a good piper, as was his brother Roddy Murray. There was a relative who lived in Mealabhig in Uig, Am Fuar was his Gaelic name. He was a good piper and he won a medal at the Willow Glen Highland Games in Stornoway on more than one occasion. So I was never particularly far away from piping, although not in my immediate family.

**So when you came to Barrhead you kind of left that teaching and tradition behind.**

Yes, but I caught up on our many visits. I thought the world began and ended between Barrhead and Stornoway, because that was the only place we ever went on holiday. I would take my chanter and go and see my mentor for a brush up, as it were.

**So you are five year old, you come down to Barrhead, you are already getting**

Yes

**So when did you actually start getting involved?**

I joined

**When did you first start getting the chanter lessons?**

I probably would have been about five when I first started on a small practice chanter. When I joined the Rover Scouts Pipe Band it was something different. It wasn't the way I imagined it to be. In those days, post Second World War in the sort of late fifties, there was no great emphasis, certainly not from my point of view, put on playing together in unison. In fact matched chanters were unknown, so it was a bit of a free for all.

**This was in the Rover Scouts Band?**

In the Scouts, yes.

**Who was your teacher, can you remember?**

Yes, the pipe major's name was Robert Porterfield and the drum major was Dick Bell and both of them were ex-army.

**Was it quite a big band?**

It was a sizeable band. There was a Boy's Brigade pipe band in the town and sadly neither are still in existence. Yes, it was a fair grounding.

**Right. So how did you move from the chanter to the pipes?**

Well I was actually given a set of pipes by then I came on fairly quickly with the basic tunes that the Rover Scouts were playing at that time, and I didn't have any particular difficulty with them. I am not saying that they were absolutely correct, but within, I don't know, by the age of eight perhaps, I had a set of pipes on loan from the Scout Association.

**Do you remember what kind of pipes they were?**

They were army issue.

**Army issue**

Yes. Flat combed, I suspect, Lawries. We all had the same, so it looked as if they had negotiated pipes from a territorial unit or a post-war regiment or for whatever reason they could lay their hands on any sets of pipes to be honest.

**Just to go back to your original, the Cally Murray teaching. What was his method of teaching? Was it in music or was it all**

It was essentially the Logan's method and we stuck fairly rigidly to that.

**So you just worked your way through the book?**

Yes, we did indeed

**So you learned to read music as part of your introduction?**

Yes, yes I had

**In the Boy Scouts, was that similar?**

It was similar, but I actually from an early stage I was quite good at picking up tunes even without music. So I really just referred to the music to brush up on doublings and missed doublings and whatever had to be sorted out.

**So when you say you were picking up tunes, what was your other exposure to pipe music. Were you getting that through the family?**

Yes, yes. And I was always aware that a lot of Gaelic songs could be transposed and at that time to my knowledge they were not available. So I started building up a repertoire of tunes by ear.

**By ear?**

Yes

**Where were you hearing from, was it the radio or was it gramophone or?**

Both, and at ceilidhs and yes, just having the music in both camps really, both on my mother and my father's side.

**So you obviously had an ear for the music and you could pick up tunes quite readily.**

I still do and I still...especially when we are abroad...I always have one ear listening out for any unusual tunes that I can scribble down somewhere and I can transpose. So that was the early days.

**So where did you go after the...or how did you develop from the Boy Scouts?**

I left the Boy Scouts and I joined a rock band as a singer.

**So what age was that then?**

About seventeen

**So you go right through from the sort of Cubs through to the Boy Scouts?**

Uh huh

**Just go to go on and talk about that, the Boy Scout band. Were you in competitions or was it just parades and services and things?**

No, exactly, parades, cold, cold Remembrance Day parades, just anything to do with the Scouting movement.

**But you were building up your own**

Yes I was

**your own**

repertoire

**repertoire of tunes, which was running in parallel?**

Yes it was

**Did you practice at home?**

I did, yes uh huh. Most of them I learned by ear and you sorted them out the way it should be.

**So the rock band, did you stop the piping altogether?**

I did for a period.

**All right, so what was the name of the rock band?**

The Incision

**The Incision. Now what date was that then?**

That would be the Tamla Motown era. So it would be the late sixties.

**The late sixties, right.**

Yes, and we developed a reasonable following and were quite popular apparently.

**Was that around about Glasgow or?**

Yes, we did play in Glasgow and supported some of the big rock bands, but never really aspired to much more than that. It was more North Ayrshire and Renfrewshire. At the same time I had started a career and left school; first of all as a laboratory technician in Paisley Grammar School and studying at Paisley College of Technology; and thereafter moved to the Royal Ordnance Factory in Bishopton

**Oh right, I know it well, yes.**

where I suppose you could be called a bench chemist. I decided that I would like to branch or take a different direction in analytical chemistry. I worked from 1970 to I had an early retirement in 1995 from the Royal Infirmary in Glasgow here and I became the Head Chemist in the Anaesthetics Department. I had an enjoyable career, but all the time I was able to marry it with my piping career.

**So the band that you had, the rock band, how long did that last for?**

About three years

**Did you carry on piping at home or did you give up?**

I was actually and I actually did a couple of arrangements with the rock band, which was different at the time.

**So did you play the pipes on the stage with the rock band?**

Perhaps one or two sets.

**That must be quite ground breaking?**

It was different, it was.

**And was that playing traditional pipe tunes or had you written your own music for that?**



No, it was a modification of...I can't even remember what the tunes were now...but I had sort of run over the tunes that I had selected with the other musicians in the rock band. There was a keyboard player, two guitarists and a drummer. So we just effectively did arrangements of one or two sets of tunes. It wasn't particularly cool at that time, I have to say, it was somewhat frowned upon.

**Well I use the term groundbreaking literally.**

Exactly

**I don't suppose you would have any problem playing in that format with the key of the chanter, because I suppose it was just a fairly loud noise.**

It was, it was

**You wouldn't get into that side of things, that would be something that came later. So how did you get back into the piping then?**

Well again, my mother was responsible for it. She bought me a new practice chanter at the age of twenty. She arranged for me to have private one to one tuition at the College of Piping. She also has a good musical ear, so she would have realised that I needed to sharpen my pencil as it were, and get some proper tuition.

I was very fortunate indeed to meet with Duncan Johnson, the late Duncan Johnson, who was a full time instructor at the college. I can remember having a look at and thinking I was playing the Glenfinnan Highland Gathering reasonably well and even before I hit the first beat of the first bar I was told to stop, the first doubling in E was incorrect. To be fair he allowed me to carry on and he had a think about it and he said, you know it's musical enough, but I think you need to go back to square one and start again, and follow the College of Piping Tutor Book, as it still is to this day.

**But the thing is, you had obviously been taught in a Boy Scout band and learnt yourself, so.**

Yes, there was a sort of gap, a couple of years stewing my rock phenomenon days, those days that I had really not paid enough attention to my piping. So in many ways I think my pride was hurt more than anything else when this instructor, who I was paying, told me that I had to go back and start from square one, when I thought I was chapping at the door for some big medal competition. But I soon discovered that he was absolutely correct and to follow the format of a recognised piping instruction book is the way to do it, together with the help of a professional, to sort out anything a bit dubious, shall we say.

**Can you tell us a bit about Duncan Johnson and what he was like as a tutor? What his methods were and his personality?**

Duncan himself came from a Hebridean background and he was in many ways...although the generation before me immersed in the same kind of thing that I had experienced. He was a remarkable teacher and he was a remarkable player of course and a very prolific composer of music and he had a really good ear. He had a style of playing that he had inherited from his tutor.

**So who was that?**

Donald MacLean and Roddy McDonald from the Hebrides. A very clean and articulate style of playing, with attention particularly in doublings. He was very exacting about keeping doublings very clean and added to the whole impression of the tunes. I was very fortunate. He also had a wealth of material that he had gleaned from the Hebrides...much more than I ever had. He in turn passed it on to me and others of course, that had the benefit of his teaching.

**Yes. It must had been a kind of strange transition to go into the rock n roll and then back out of the rock n roll?**

Yes it was. I mean, I still to this day enjoy listening to any form of music, but yes it was in a way. I was convinced since my mother had bought me a set of pipes, that I was going to try to make a decent go of it. At the same time I was very fortunate to be introduced to Pipe Major Donald MacLeod, who came from Lewis, who came from Stornoway. He was selectively taking on pupils at the Royal Scottish Pipe Band Association

Headquarters in Washington Street in Glasgow. He offered me tuition in piobaireachd and I was very fortunate to be able to take advantage of that. I didn't really compete much in piobaireachd. There were a lot of things happening musically in my life at that time that precluded me from any serious competitions.

### **And what was he like as a tutor?**

He was magnificent as a tutor, he was an absolute gem, and he was a gentleman to boot. He then took me on on a Wednesday afternoon in his premises of Grainger and Campbell's in Argyll Street in Glasgow and I had an hour's tuition in light music. I remember with great joy rushing away down there in my lunch break just to enhance my repertoire of tunes. Donald of course had more than six books of tunes and his arrangements. I always remember glancing into the waste paper bucket to see what he had discarded before I had got down at lunchtime. I have some hand written arrangements and tunes that he started off and perhaps abandoned for whatever reasons. He was just a genius, particularly in competitions both as a competitor, but also his whole approach. He was a true professional, as was Duncan of course.

### **So how long did you carry on with the tuition with your two tutors?**

I followed Duncan from the College of Piping when he opened a school in Robertson Street and actually Duncan lived fairly close to me, he stayed in Pollok at the time, and I used to pick him up in the morning and take him up to Robertson Street. On occasions I would go down at lunchtimes and just have a tune or a blether with him and I would take him home at night.

### **So how long did that go on for?**

That was years, that would have been well until Duncan retired from the school in Robertson Street, and even as he continued to take on private pupils at his home, he had moved to Strathbungo by this time and I took my daughter for lessons and my son both went for lessons to his home. So I was and still am friendly with all the family and yes it was a very interesting time for me musically.

**So just to go back to the time when your mother bought you the chanter, were you still using the original pipes you got from the Boy Scouts?**

No, I had handed those back, but I had heard the playing of the Northumbrian piper Billy Pigg. I was given a recording and I was absolutely fascinated by the sound, the chromatic structure, the possibilities of playing in harmony with Northumbrian small pipes. Also I was given a recording by Seamus Ennis, the famous uilleann piper, and I was equally as struck by the sound and the compass of the chanter and the drones and of course the chordal accompaniment of the regulators.

**Right, so when was this?**

This was when I was going to Grainger and Campbell's for lunchtime lessons.

**So when would that be?**

In the early seventies

**In the early seventies, right**

After my lesson I became quite friendly with the bagpipe turners in Grainger and Campbell and I used to go for a coffee with them after my lesson. We were having a chat about Northumbrian pipes and uilleann pipes and I actually had written to the Newcastle Evening Chronicle. I had spent a holiday in Northumberland in search of a set of Northumbrian pipes. Now at this time, to my knowledge, there were no full time makers of Northumbrian small pipes, so I decided that I would write a rather scathing article to the Newcastle Evening Chronicle about the apparent demise of Northumbrian small pipes. I knew that actually wasn't the case, but what I was trying to do was actually stimulate a bit of aggro, if you like.

I certainly did get that in abundance. There was a sackload of mail arriving at my doorstep, insinuating what do you think you are doing coming over the border into Northumberland, suggesting that there are no makers of Northumbrian small pipes. Let me tell you, this gentleman who

is making Northumbrian small pipes, and it wasn't too many at the time, but I settled on a maker who was in the throes of becoming a professional, David Burleigh, who at that time was a taxidermist in the Hancock Museum in Newcastle and making Northumbrian small pipes at that time was his hobby.

So I went down and negotiated what I was looking for and about six months later I duly received my first set of Northumbrian small pipes. I took them in to show the Highland bagpipe makers at Grainger and Campbell and one of the turners, Ernie Robertson, was more than knowledgeable about bellows blown pipes and I discovered that he had helped the late William Hamilton, who was a pipe maker who lived in Hathaway Street in Maryhill and he had converted a Singer sewing machine into a turning lathe. He sat in this room and kitchen and made mostly Northumbrian small pipes. In fact he won the maker's competition as part of the Northumbrian Pipers' Society competition for makers on several occasions.

So Ernie had, when it came to long joints that were outwith the scope of the sewing machine, Ernie would oblige and turn a long section and he became quite friendly with William Hamilton. So much so that he could remember that he had different sets of bellows pipes and he had died some five years previously and Ernie offered to take me to meet his widow, who by this time was living in Yoker. When I went to see her my objective was to borrow an Irish uilleann chanter to add to my now collection of two sets of pipes. Ernie had agreed that he would try to modify a tapered reamer and make the necessary hole spacings to get me started. At that time I was making bags, highland pipe bags, so making a bag wasn't a great difficulty. When we duly went to see the lady, she was a wonderful lady, she actually came, from originally born in North Uist.

### **And what was her name again?**

Mrs Hamilton. She was very interested in the fact that I was interested in different pipes, as her late husband was. I explained my situation about the borrowing of a chanter and she asked me to come back the following day. When I went back there were five suitcases of pipes waiting for me in the hallway and she announced that she would like me to become a custodian of this collection of pipes. I could not believe what was

awaiting me. I duly took the pipes and at that time there was a Renfrew ferry which I was crossing, and in the back seat of my car opening the suitcases to see what was in them, it was like an Aladdin's Cave of pipes.

**Do you know how these were originally collected, where they came from?**

Well yes I do. William Hamilton, after the war and perhaps even during the war years, he served in the Argylls as a piper...he had this interest in Northumbrian small pipes and had struck up a friendship with Billy Pigg and some of the well known Northumbrian pipers in the North East of England. He had made sets of pipes for them. In fact Roy Williamson of the Corries played a set of one of Hamilton's small pipes. He also concurrently had become friendly with Leo Rowsome who was I think referred to as the king of uilleann pipers and also an uilleann bagpipe maker, based in Dublin. They would exchange letters...no emails in those days of course...and drawings and they would try different combinations of bore sizes, chanter finger spacing.

Indeed, I am led to believe that William Hamilton used to go and visit...in fact I know that he did used to go and visit these bagpipe makers primarily to exchange chanters. I met Leo Rowsome's grandson, Kevin, at the Rothbury Folk Festival about ten or twelve years ago and I had a set of his grandfather's uilleann pipes with me. He found it very hard to believe, because Leo Rowsome didn't make so many sets of uilleann pipes, but the sets that he did make were pristine, first class, as collectable as MacDougall of Aberfeldy Highland pipes. He was a bit dubious about whether I actually had a set of his grandfather's pipes. I remember I asked him a question, I said "Do you have a set of full ivory and silver Northumbrian small pipes in your family?" He was quite taken aback and he said "How do you know that?" I said "Hell, the man who made those pipes was given the set that I have in your possession by your grandfather, and they exchanged these sets of pipes." I actually had them in the car and he was taken aback when he saw the set. The exact copy of his own, the exact copy of Liam O'Flynn's set and many others.

**Right. So what else was in this treasure trove?**

There was four sets of uilleann pipes, one of them was a late eighteenth century set of pastoral pipes in cherrywood and walrus ivory, with a hybrid chanter detachable foot section, not unlike one of the sets that's in the museum. There was three Spanish gaitas, four sets of Northumbrian pipes, a French cabrette. I had them all in bits and pieces like an Airfix kit. At three o'clock in the morning still trying to assemble them and figure out what goes where. To this day I have actually built on the collection. I now have about thirty two sets of pipes, which I use for demonstration purposes, both at the Piping Centre here or at the Academy, or wherever. I do occasional speaking about the collection really and European bagpipes.

So that really sparked off a big interest in let's say, European bagpipes. The other thing that happened at the same time, I was competing with a set of Northumbrian small pipes at the Northumbrian Pipers' Society annual competition, which was held in the Blackgate in Newcastle. I came across, or I was approached by the President, his name was John Forster Charlton, himself a very good and prolific player of Northumbrian pipes who was sadly killed in a car crash about ten years ago.

He asked of me a question, do you know of any pipe band that would be interested to go to what was then Czechoslovakia, in 1978, still in the time of the Communist regime, to take part in the European/World Bagpipe Festival held in the town of Strakonice, which is about one hundred kilometres south of Prague in Bohemia. I did a bit of research into this and I thought this sounds like Utopia for me...not only listening to all these different pipes from different countries, but actually taking my pipe band. By this time I had become the pipe major of the Neilston and District Band.

**I think we will pick that thread up later at the end of the day, if you carry on.**

So I can remember going back to my pipe band practice and announcing that in the month of August, the last weekend in August, we wouldn't be going to the Cowal Games, that it was my intention to take the pipe band to Czechoslovakia. They all burst out laughing, because we knew the name Czechoslovakia, but a lot of the former Eastern European countries were not quite closed, but difficult to gain access to.

## **So what year was this again?**

This was '78. In fact we had to apply for visas to get in at that time. But we did the fund raising and in fact the last thing we did before we departed, we did a recording for the BBC. We were invited to play on the Good Morning Scotland programme, Bob Dixon. I can remember explaining that the tune that we were going to play, we were given the notes and it's a Czechoslovakian bagpipe tune called Bavarov. Nobody had ever actually heard of Czechoslovakian bagpipes, although I knew of their existence. I had seen a set in the Pitt Rivers Museum in Cambridge and I was interested in this bagpipe that essentially looked like a goat, complete with head and horns.

So we did the recording, I did the interview, and we headed off to Prague. What we were met with was a lot of bureaucracy at that time and difficulty in getting into the country, difficulty getting back out, but the hospitality at the festival was incredible. We were in fact the first pipe band to have played in Prague since the war, because of the communist takeover, and certainly the first pipe band to play at the festival, the International Bagpipe Festival.

I can remember playing in Wenceslas Square and people throwing flowers into the middle of the band. I couldn't quite understand this and our courier translator explained that some of the, particularly the older people, could remember the sound of Scottish regiments marching through and liberating Prague and they had a great respect and they remembered the kilts and the uniforms. So it was, well quite a different place to what it is now of course. But the Bagpipe Festival thrives. It is every second year and we are in fact going this year, thirty four years down the line.

**Before we carry on to explore it, can we just pick up the; I will let you come back to that and maybe bring it on through your great Highland bagpipes and the Neilson and District Pipe Band. Can we go back to the Northumbrian pipes? You said you were competing with the pipes, what**

I was actually. I think it was the first Scot to win the Northumbrian Challenge Shield. I must admit at that time I had a few goes at it before the judges would sort of recognise...although there are a lot of tunes and



cross-fertilisation between Northumbrian and of course Irish tunes. But I was transposing perhaps marches, strathspeys and reels, which weren't quite within the proper idiom. Eventually I got the prize and was quite happy about that. At the same time, since being in possession now of Northumbrian and Irish uilleann pipes, I started going to the music sessions on a Saturday afternoon. They were held at that time in the Third Eye Centre and we used to go to a pub called His Nibs, I believe it is in Holland Street. We would have a session there with pipes and fiddles.

### **When was this then?**

Early seventies

### **Early seventies, right**

It all kind of really kicked off in the early seventies for me.

### **Were there any sort of notable players around at that time?**

Well yes, I was just going to come on to, one potential problem we had was...not in my case...but when any pipers who were just starting to play with other acoustic instruments came into a session, we met with not quite disapproval, but there were a number of issues about kicking off a full set of Highland pipes, particularly in a small confined pub:

- a) the volume would drown out the other instruments;
- b) B flat or E flat wasn't considered to be a particular sociable key, particularly for string instruments.

So there were a number of issues...not only that, but in those times pipes were still by association connected with the army. People used to assume that we had a very limited repertoire of tunes and so that most people who could play had been in the army or had army or territorial associations.

There was still a strong link, I felt, between let's say CND/left wing parties, who had adopted a lot of folk songs in that particular era. A full set of Highland pipes just didn't form part of that scene if you like. So at that time I also met up with Robert Wallace, who was playing with the Whistlebinkies and still does, and Jimmy Anderson, who was playing with

Clutha. We resolved to put our heads together and see what could be done to put together a set of pipes that

- a) was volume friendly in comparison to other acoustic instruments, and
- b) preferably in a key that was acceptable to the other musicians.

Jimmy Anderson was a fine craftsman, turner and woodworker. We tried various combinations of oboe reeds and practice chanter and various combinations, any bladed reeds. We eventually came up with a combination of a bassoon reed that had been shaved down and a practice chanter that Jimmy had bored out with a tapered bore and repositioned the holes and also made a bigger reed seat. Hey presto, we had a chanter that was playing in D and was volume compatible with fiddles, accordions.

### **Was this on the great Highland bagpipes?**

It was a small pipe, yes. The original one that I had was a mouth blown small pipe. Suddenly we were kind of accepted a bit more gracefully for these reasons. Also that we started introducing tunes...well in my case Hebridean tunes various things. Shortly after this I was invited to join a folk group called Tinkler Maidgie, with Jim and Sylvia Barnes and Chris Miller, the fiddle player. We started going around the folk circuit, as were Clutha and the Whistlebinkies.

We decided then to expand the group and we formed the band Kentigern, and by this time Kentigern particularly were becoming very popular and we were out perhaps three nights a week playing a folk clubs from anywhere from Wick to Dumfries and all points in between. It was starting to get a bit congested at my life at that time, because

- a) I was running a pipe band,
- b) I was playing three nights a week, two nights a week practice with the pipe band and we were actually competing at that time, and
- c) two small children to contend with.

So it became all too much.

When the album...I put together the bones shall we say, of the album. By this time Douglas Pincock had taken...well he was side by side with me for a few months and then he took over the reins of piper in Kentigern, and of course moved on from there to the Battlefield Band.

**I have read somewhere that you actually played on one of the Battlefield Band's albums.**

I did indeed, yes. About the same time I was invited to be part of the Battlefield Band's second album. They decided that they would like to introduce Highland pipes, Northumbrian pipes and uilleann pipes, and I was joined by Angus MacGregor on small pipes and David Munro on uilleann pipes. We each put together a set of tunes that we played along with the Battlefield Band.

**Right. That was on their second album?**

Second. It was an Arfolk album called "Whae's me for Prince Charlie." Yes I remember the original sleeve for the LP was printed the wrong way around. Plus the fact they got all our names mixed up. I became Angus MacGregor and Angus became Dave Munro.

**Right, so that's what is on the album?**

Yes. Well they rectified it later. Maybe it's a collector's item that.

**It could be a collector's item, yes.**

It could be

**Yes. Is it on eBay?**

But I found myself guesting with the Battlefield Band as and when I could.

**Was that on the small pipes and the great Highland pipes?**

It was on the Great Highland Pipes on the particular track that I used. I always tried to keep up with the sessions, they changed to the Victoria Bar at the Briggate and then with the opening of Babbity Bowsters in the

Merchant City of Glasgow, Fraser and Tom Laurie, who are great supporters of traditional music, were very anxious to present a platform for session musicians and traditional music. To this day on a Saturday afternoon you can, if you so wish, come and join in.

**Yes, I have been there and seen it, yes.**

Nowadays I tend to play as most bellows pipers play, a conical chanter, similar to a Border chanter, in A which is still within a good comparable volume to the other acoustic instruments and of course plays in A. It has this sort of slightly more strident sound, like the Highland pipe. There is the possibility of cross fingering of course, which isn't possible in a small pipe chanter.

**Just to go back on the small pipes side of things. You were involved in the setting up of the Lowland and Borders Pipers Association. How did that come about?**

I was yes. I...again through the sessions, I met a group of people who were interested in Lowland and Borders pipes, actually any bellows blown pipes. Mike Brown, otherwise known as Big Rory, he was involved, as was the late Jimmy Wilson, who had a set of Lowland pipes.

So yes, in the early days I helped perhaps formulate the structure to a certain degree, along with others of course. Yes, I still maintain an interest in that.

**The date I got was the 16<sup>th</sup> of April 1983 and you were down as the Vice Chairman. Was that right?**

Yes, I am sure I was actually.

**Was that just you guys getting together and setting up an association to promote the small pipes?**

Yes, and also to promote the sessions and give help where we could on reeds and instruments. There was an annual...in fact there still is an annual competition. I don't find myself with enough time to be able to do all these things, even though I am retired from my full time occupation. I just

have so many things to do with the band, you know other piping interests and teaching of course.

**Your involvement with pipe makers; you have mentioned Grainger and Campbell...have you been involved with any of the others, Nigel Richards, Hamish Moore?**

I mean, Hamish and Nigel are good, great friends. I have always maintained an interest. In fact Hamish Moore was with us at the Bagpipe Festival in Strakonice for his first time two years ago and he is in fact coming back this year with his son Finn. Yes, we have enjoyed, we have similar interests of course, and also the musical, the playing aspect of it. My particular interest was because we did so much travelling, was in transposition of European folkdance tunes. I always thought it was a great mark of respect if you could visit a country and quickly learn a tune or even in advance if you are very organised, and play the tune on the pipes.

I can remember that during the days of the original Glasgow Folk Festival that I helped bring a folk dance group over from Rotterdam, and they were quite amazing in as much...we had met them in Israel and become very friendly with them and managed to secure them a place at the Glasgow Folk Festival...and when they arrived they arrived in a coach and they had I think it was four, perhaps five, costume changes from different countries. They had gone to the trouble of looking at the costumes, having photographs taken and having replica costumes made. Not only that but research into the music, so that albeit a group from Holland, could present Israeli folk dance tunes, music, song and costumes and dances. When they came to the festival they gave a performance and I remember they had a costume change and they came out in tartan kilts and dresses and they sang Westering Home, I think perhaps five verses of it. We were all dumbstruck, because I think I knew perhaps one, maybe two verses. Here was this group from Holland in our traditional costume singing Westering Home and they had done their homework properly.

Hence the reason on the Controversy of Pipers album, which I produced, my thinking was that Douglas Pincock and I should play a set of European dance tunes, which we did. I think we played tunes from Norway, Sweden, the Czech Republic, Breton and strung them all together as a set. That album was in fact...I was prompted to do it by Robin Morton of

Temple Records and of course the management of the Battlefield Band, because of the interest and the increased awareness of pipes and pipe tunes with regard to folk groups...that I should perhaps put a group of pipers together to highlight these tunes, not necessarily European dance tunes, but just tunes that are perhaps a bit different and out of the way that could be adapted to be played by folk groups.

I can remember reading the review that Seamus MacNeill made of it in the Piping Times, suggesting that it be despatched the waste paper bin.

**[laughter]**

[laughter] I think enough said about that. But it sold very well actually.

### **What other disc recordings have you been involved in?**

Another aspect of piping that I particular enjoy is orchestral playing. I was approached by Shaun Davey, one of Ireland's foremost composers of music. Shaun had a vision of using traditional in the early days, uilleann pipes along with an orchestra, to great effect, with the Brendan Voyage being one of the first recordings. I had a phone call one day from Shaun Davey asking if I could please help him out with a pipe band in Derry City, to play a piece of music that he had composed on commission from Derry City Council and the European Union. It was called The Relief of Derry Symphony. It was to highlight the historical part that the Scottish soldiers took part in the relief of Derry. That was orchestrated by having the introduction of a pipe band, together with an orchestra, finish the first section with a rousing battlecry, if you like, with pipe band and full orchestra. Of course, Liam O'Flynn was playing with uilleann pipes and whistles.

Thereafter I became involved with his next commission, which was called The Pilgrim. We in fact played in the Concert Hall in the year the Concert Hall opened in Glasgow. It was the last event in Glasgow's Year of Culture and it was on Hogmanay and it was a multi-Celtic cultural piece of music involving bombards and binious from Brittany, gaitas from Galicia, uilleann pipes of course and Highland pipes. I actually played Spanish gaita on that particular piece.

Since then I have done numerous Orkney Weddings, the Peter Maxwell Davies piece with an Orkney wedding, Sunrise, which George McIlwham originally played on and I had a call from George in a panic one day in the early eighties I think, when he had sustained an arm injury and he had a performance of the Orkney Wedding with the SNO as it was then, in Glasgow. I had to quickly get myself a set of pipes in A and learn the piece of course. I actually have a set of pipes in A set aside under the bed, which I use for the Orkney Wedding.

In the early days because Sir Peter Maxwell Davis had written the score in A without consulting a piper and had gone to the trouble of having all the scores done for all the orchestral instruments, and last but not least, presented a copy to George and told him that he would not be playing his flute or his piccolo at the next piece that they were going to do, he would be playing pipes. George had a look at the piece and reminded him, not in this key. He duly all but fainted and they had to think then, what can be done about this.

So what George did in the early days was, he had managed to find an old, I think it was a Henderson chanter, probably pre-dating 1900, which was in itself flat, as the pitch was about A at that time. Then the difficulty was finding a reed maker who would make a sufficiently flat reed to keep it within the scale of A. So there were lots of tears and trials and tribulations and rolls and rolls of tape and experimenting, but he eventually got something that was in an A concert pitch. I actually had Hamish Muir make me an A chanter, which saves a lot of difficulty.

So that set aside, we did a piece from it with Evelyn Glennie, the percussionist. She also joined us at the Last Night at the Proms with my pipe band. We did a few pieces together, which I find very stimulating and rewarding, I must say. You really have to have your wits about you.

**Just to go back to what you said about the attitude towards Controversy of Pipers and then maybe we can use this to bring us back into the great Highland bagpipes. We left off earlier where you were getting your lessons at piobaireachd and with the great Highland bagpipes and we have then gone down the route of the bellows pipes.**

Yes

**I would like to go back and let's have a chat about your...what can we call it...mainstream for great Highland bagpipes. But just to take us back, you said that there was controversy over the Controversy of Pipers, but you obviously went into the bellows pipes. What was the feeling then? My understanding is that the establishment, if you would like to call it that, kind of frowned upon anything outwith the extreme and you were obviously getting involved with the folk scenes.**

**a)What drove you to that and**

**c) what was the view of the sort of mainstream pipers, the establishment pipers?**

On reflection, I think from my rock band days, I think it carried on with me, the concept of playing with a group of other musicians. So, without amplification of course, and balancing volumes and so on and so forth, which one wouldn't necessarily have a platform for; the idea of playing with different instruments, different acoustic instruments and doing arrangements of tunes; the bellows pipes allowed that avenue for the reasons that we spoke about earlier; and just the overall sound.

In the early days of groups like Alba, The Battlefield Band, Whistlebinkies and so on and so forth, I think it added another dimension and I still think it adds another dimension to the whole overall sound. I currently play with let's say a ceilidh band and the combination is bellows pipes; in fact it's shuttle pipes that I play, it's a variation of a Lowland set if you like of small pipes, and the other combinations are whistles, fiddle and accordion. The end result is good, I think personally. It is enjoyable playing with musicians at that level that we can try things that are pushing the boundaries just that bit.

**I read that, I think Dougie Pincock said that you introduced them to the Chieftains and Planxty\* and Bothy Band. What kind of influence did they have on you?**

Immense. The first time I heard the Bothy Band I was actually playing with Jim and Sylvia Barnes and the first album, and hearing the first track, the Kesh Jig, it reminded me about having a rock band overall sound, but playing traditional music on traditional instruments. I was totally taken aback with, not only the first record, but everything they did, as I was with



Planxty. The Chieftains I think were, although experimental in their own way, they stuck certainly in the early days more to the tradition. They have gone on as well on their own to play with various resounding artists to great effect, rock n roll, country and western, anything, Chinese. They have had a go at everything, which I think is very admirable.

**So just to go back to the great Highland bagpipes and your tuition in the piobaireachd and with the chanter; how did that continue with the great Highland bagpipes?**

Well I actually continued going to see Duncan, and since both my children were going for lessons I arranged it so that I would just hang around for another hour or so and just pick up more tunes.

**Right. And how did you then progress into...did you compete with the Great Highland Bagpipes or was your interest more in the bellows pipes?**

I did, but not a lot. I suppose I had limited success, but not in any sort of professional or semi-professional way. I had a bad experience when I was a youngster. I was persuaded to join a choir, the local cooperative choir in Barrhead. For whatever reason I was selected to take part in a musical competition for both choir and soloists. I can remember that the song chosen for me was Dream Angus and off I went on a double decker bus along with the choir, with my kilt and did not enjoy the experience. I think we arrived at nine o'clock in the morning and there were rehearsals. I think I was the last competitor in the under six year olds. By the time I got onto the stage I had stage fright, my knees were knocking, it was the last place on earth I wanted to be and I didn't give a good account of myself. I remember thinking I will never do that again.

By contrast, when I was in front of an audience at a rock concert, I seemed to lose that.

**That's interesting**

But it has stuck with me all these years and the thought of going in front of an audience of potentially a hundred, or a hundred would be judges waiting for a mistake, never appealed to me. I am sure you will have

heard the old adage that you get your best playing either in a kitchen or in a bar amongst friends, when you feel more relaxed within yourself. I take my hat off to the competitors, the Willie McCallum's. I don't know if they have nerves of steel, or if they have been doing it for so long that they have become used to it. I could never imagine myself being in that position. I was much happier and still happy just playing the music the way that I like to do it.

One thing that has stuck with me is from the teaching point of view that I learned primarily from Duncan, but also from Donald is...I pass this on I hope to the students that I have, I currently teach at the Music School at Williamwood High School and Carlibar School in Barrhead...to try to make the learning experience enjoyable as these mentors did for me. It is not sometimes an easy road to go down, as you will know yourself. Some people have an adaptability or a natural sense of being able to play and I have four or five students who have that, just like a duck to water you might say. The progression of whichever teaching method, I think has to be stuck to. It pays results at the end of the day to come out of the experience of learning all the movements, all the exercises, all the doublings, grips, taorluaths, but to play them correctly. The net result at the end of the day should be pleasing and enjoyable and that's what it's all about I think.

**So just to go back to your great Highland bagpiping. How did you progress through into Neilston and District Pipe Band, how did all that come about?**

I had recently been married in 19...I have just had my fortieth wedding anniversary as it happens...1972 when my wife read in the local newspaper that the Neilston Pipe Band were struggling for numbers and that they were in danger of folding if they didn't get some help. She suggested that I should go and help them out since I wasn't doing terribly much at that particular time. So off I went and offered my services.

It coincided with the late John MacFadyen, who was at that time the Headmaster of Springhill School in Barrhead. John was very keen to promote piping in the primary school. As it happened, in the same year there were two pipers; there were actually more who went on to become good pipers; Douglas Pincock was one, Ian Plunkett was the other. There

were another three pipers who perhaps didn't go as far as Douglas and Ian. Douglas and Ian appeared at the band just before I became the pipe major and I realised their potential. I used to take them on a Saturday afternoon to piping competitions, solo piping competitions and I tried to encourage them as much as I could. When I was voted in as pipe major, reluctantly at the time I may add, I had about five primary six I think boys, including Douglas and Ian, who then helped form the nucleus of a younger pipe band. We really just went on from strength to strength.

### **Had you had any experience of being a pipe major in a band?**

I did for a short time in the Rover Scouts, but it was a completely different discipline. Suddenly we were faced with the prospect of getting matching uniforms, and of course matching pipe chanters and paying more attention to tuning aspects. We had our first attempt at the Cowal Games I suppose in 1973 I think it might have been. We didn't have any money to buy uniforms and stumbled across a bundle of fireman's uniforms from the City of Liverpool Fire Brigade, that were in a job lot sale in the Army and Navy Stores. One of the member's wives did a bit of tailoring and she decided that she might be able to modify these fireman's jackets to have a tail at the back and effectively become a number one doublet. She did so and off we went to the Cowal Games and that year was one of the exceptionally warm years and it was well in the seventies. I can remember we were all dying of exhaustion and sweat. It transpires that the jackets were lined with asbestos.

**[laughter]**

[laughter] Of course no such thing nowadays, but we had to discard them. What we did retain was the buttons from the uniforms which had the Liver Bird insignia on them. To this day we still have Neilston and District Pipe Band with the Liver Bird centre stage.

### **Excellent. So how did the band progress from there?**

We competed on a regular basis up until the touring started and then it became very difficult to commit to the band. I can remember, not so very long ago on two occasions, when we were having a committee meeting, I suppose, or a band show of hands for I think it was the second weekend in

May; whether to be in Bathgate at the Highland Games or Barbados. Now forgive me, if I tell you I got hit on the head with a coconut, I don't think there are many coconut trees in Bathgate. Indeed, we played at the Barbados Highland Games two years on the trot, which was an incredible experience.

### **So it all kicked off with the Czechoslovakia?**

It did, yes

### **And where else have you...**

We have probably been to most East and Western European countries. Perhaps the thing that I would never have imagined was being able to take the pipe band to Japan. One day in 1995, or perhaps the year before, I had a phone call from my friend Big Rory, aka Mike Brown, who had been out in Japan the previous year. He had been taking part at a Dutch village called Orandamura. The following year, this would have been '95, they were opening a second Dutch village in the South Island at a place called, well it was near Nagasaki. The Dutch theme arose because of the connection between the Japanese and the Dutch historically, through the Dutch East India Trading Company, at a time even when Japan was trading with no-one else in the world, they traded with Holland. So much so that they developed a great mutual respect for each other and Japanese children are taught about the Dutch/Japanese relationship and with respect of the historical aspect.

It is almost like a Mecca for them to be able to have the Dutch experience with the windmills, with the canals, with the lace in the costumes and the food. But Japanese men of working age tend not to take enough holidays. It is a very competitive environment and the prospect of them; realistically they would have to take two weeks for a family holiday; realistically is out of the question for most salarymen, as they are called, of working age. So they decided to bring Holland to Japan. In doing so they also wanted to present a platform for the wider aspect of European folk dance, music and song and street theatre.

So we were invited to go and represent Scotland and there was a group from Italy, flag wavers, and there was also an historical re-enactment

society from Belgium with stilt walkers and Flemish pipes, as it happens. Every day we took part in a parade. I have never actually been, but I can imagine it would be something like Disneyland or something similar, but definitely themed on European and in particular Dutch folk music and song, Dutch food and windmills. Actually they have an exact replica of Queen Beatrix of Holland's residence, hence the name Huis ten Bosch.

So we met up with the Tokyo Pipe Band at that time, and Professor Yamane, Masame Yamane who invented the bagpipe tuner. His son, he was the pipe major at that time, his son has since taken over, Atsushi Yamane. We developed almost like a twinning relationship. Ever since we have either been going to Japan or the Tokyo band have been coming here [telephone rings]...So that has been a very fruitful liaison. In fact we are going in a few weeks' time to meet with the Tokyo band in Tokyo and head six hours north into the mountains to take part in a Scotland and Japan week.

**So what kind of grade would you say, what level of pipe band would you say you were if you were to go into competitions? What level would you be playing at?**

I think, given the effort and if we chose to do so, we would probably be a good Grade Four if not a mediocre Grade Three band. We were in Grade Three for a space of time.

**So you did compete in Grade Three? How many years did you compete for?**

About, I would say about fifteen years basically.

**And what kind of catchment does your band cover? Is it all local or do you have people from?**

No, we have players who will be joining us this weekend at our local agricultural fair who come from the village of Rothbury in Northumberland. That is another connection that we have had for thirty five years, and that connection came through my interest in Northumbrian pipes initially, but stumbled upon the Rothbury Highland Pipe Band who had been going and still had the original uniforms from the Seaforth

Highlanders who were based at Otterburn. We have been on numerous trips and we have had players, guest players, coming with us. We have actually been in Scandinavia with the Rothbury band on a few of their trips.

So the basis on which we run the band is that because we don't compete, it's open doors, so that there is no commitment to learn competition sets of tunes and consequently we can augment the band with players and sometimes we would have; I think we are going to be about thirty strong at the Czech Republic this year. And it is largely because people want to come and play and they don't feel the pressure of the competitive side. I think that's testament of the fact that the nucleus of the band have been together upwards of twenty five/thirty years in some cases.

**So you have a fairly expansive repertoire, yes?**

Yes

**I want to ask you to list all the countries. I think it would be better to ask you which European countries have you not been in.**

[laughter] I don't think there's many actually.

**Can I come back to your kind of individual interests. I read that you were an honorary tutor in one of the Spanish schools in Galicia. You were interested in Breton piping. Could you maybe just tell me a little bit about that and how you got into it?**

I think my first exposure to Breton music was listening to Alain Stivell again in the early seventies, and his connection with the Bleimor band. I was fascinated with the combination of bombarde, binou and Highland Pipes, which they had adopted by this time.

**Can you explain just a wee bit about the background of how the Highland Pipes got into it?**

Yes, the traditional group of musicians in Brittany would normally comprise a bombarde, a biniou and perhaps a small percussion unit and perhaps an accordion. As with a Galician folk group ensemble, using a

single drone gaita percussion and some other, typically four or five acoustic traditional instruments. After the Second World War the Breton regimental groups, naval, air force, army groups, decided that they needed a bigger unit rather than employing bombardes and binious because the biniou koz of course is very high pitched. They didn't feel that it was a suitable matching instrument. So by this time Seamus MacNeill for example and various other instructors had been going over to Brittany to Summer, Spring, Easter schools and teaching Highland piping. Highland piping was becoming very popular...of course you only have to look at the Lorient festival and Quimper to see the number of Highland pipes that have merged with traditional Breton pipes.

Now a similar thing started in Galicia in the north west part of the Cape Finisterre as it was then. There was a gaita instructor called José Manuel Foxo\*, who decided that he had been to the Edinburgh Military Tattoo and he was really impressed with the combination of the discipline, the marching, the combination of pipes and drums, whether it be regimental group, pipe bands or whatever.

He decided that he was going to try to establish a school of piping in Galicia and he approached the then Premier; his name was José Manuel Fraga\*. He was the President of Galicia and he made a proposal to him. He had some, I suppose it would be video footage. Whilst the gaita has always been in existence, I mean it is part of the Celtic tradition; it was never envisaged that they were going to come together particularly with snare drummers. So this man made the proposal and the President thought that it would be a good representative unit and Escola de Gaitas was established. In many ways a similar institution is the National Piping Centre or the College of Piping. The aim was and still is, to promote the playing of gaita, but they also had a vision that they were going to incorporate not just a four or five piece folk group, but the Royal Band, the Real Band of the Gaita, who are based in Ourense, where the piping school is, have typically perhaps forty pipers.

### **Is that great Highland bagpipes?**

No, it is playing the gaita in various forms. They have one, two and three droned combinations of gaitas. They also have bellows blown gaitas that play in harmonies and produce fifths. So they have taken essentially the

basic traditional repertoire of Galician folk music and expanded it by playing it on all these different types of pipes, all based and the administration centre for it is in Ourense.

So then they took on instructors and they started sending the instructors out to the outlying schools. One by one the schools started to put together their own band of the gaitas and I was there last year and I think they had upwards of fourteen or fifteen thousand pipers and drummers within the province.

## **Fantastic**

They have a structured pipe band competition series, very similar to our own in Scotland, with major championships. It is not without its critics, I have to say, as was the case in Brittany when they adopted Highland pipes as a marching instrument. In both cases I think what is important is that they have retained the music and the tradition of both Galicia and Brittany. They have actually become more and more like; at second glance you would be convinced it was a; even listening to them that it's a Highland Pipe Band. They also moved the pitch from C, which was the traditional pitch, to nearer B Flat and above, which is in keeping with the present day pitch.

## **What is your role as the honorary tutor?**

Again, they like to build up a repertoire of international tunes. I have taken part in Ortiguera, which is their European Bagpipe Festival, on many occasions. Also, I have been there as an advisor and also teaching Scottish fingering, Scottish tunes, phrasing and so on. I have maintained that friendship and a healthy relationship. In fact I was able to get the Real Band of the Gaita involved in the Bagpipe Festival in the Czech Republic and they will be going this year. Also, I was able to get them into Japan. They are extensively travelled worldwide. They are seen as; in many of the provinces in Spain, especially in the Basque region they have their own indigenous language, their own music, their own culture and they are quite happy to have this autonomous situation that they can be recognised with, as with Asturias and Cantabria. I think especially in Galicia the gaitas are to be heard on every street corner.



**Yes. Well what about your involvement in Breton music and the influence that has had on your repertoire?**

I think having heard and studied manuscripts and just listened to; there has been a wealth of talent of combinations of arrangements, orchestral arrangements; I do particularly like the sound the marriage of bombarde and Highland pipes, yes.

**I have been to see Finlay two or three times and he certainly seems to be keen on the Breton piping. He features it on some of his stuff and at his concert last year at Piping Live. Just to go on to your son and your daughter, do they both play pipes?**

Yes, my daughter and now my grandchildren, grandsons play and are learning. My daughter is a particularly good piper.

**Did she play with your band?**

She did yes, and she has been to Galicia and Japan. I always maintain that; I don't know if you would call it a carrot to dangle, but if you can convince pupils who are struggling a bit, that the light at the end of the tunnel is that you will have a chance to go to Switzerland, Spain, somewhere nice, but maybe that's a bit of bribery. I didn't have to do that with Fiona or perhaps a bit of that with Finlay. When I taught Finlay I realised that he had not just ordinary talent, but exceptional talent. Like many boys as an early teenager; I had actually started teaching him when he was eight; but it came to rebellious and there was other interests, rugby, probably girls, that took preference over piping. When it came to a stage where he really had to think about what he was going to do with his life, he thought well I am not bad at this piping lark and I have started to put a few tunes together.

He didn't receive sadly great encouragement from the Music Department in his school, with the exception of one teacher, a lady, Mrs; sorry I have forgotten her second name. She was particularly keen and I think she recognised Finlay's talent, but they weren't keen on principle to present Finlay for his Higher.

**Is that right?**

Because he hadn't gone for it, he didn't feel the time was right to do a Standard grade. I was actually teaching at Paisley Grammar School at the time and so we presented him as an external candidate. He had in fact composed a piece of music based on the Breton style of playing, using Bombards, keyboards, harp, clàrsach and it was superb. I took great delight in phoning the Head of the Music Department. I knew of course what the result was, that he had got an A Plus in his Higher, straight first time.

As it happened, he wanted to become more and more involved in music, along probably the same lines as I was going. I was aware of the establishment of the National Piping Centre. I was also aware of the lobbying of the RSAMD as it was at the time, to have traditional music instruments accepted as creditable degree level awards. They both sort of came together at the same time. The Academy, as it was then, were inviting candidates for these courses and Finlay was in the first batch of pipes as his first instrument, and whistle and flute as his second, or one or other. I think it has just been a great success story ever since.

### **What was your involvement? Did you have any involvement in the setting up of the Piping Centre?**

I did a bit of lobbying just to people that I knew. I knew some people in the Academy and I just lent my weight to it, such as it was. I mean, there were much more important people than me that were having better, well fundraising for example and the location, just everything about the centre; in conjunction of course with the College of Piping, which has been a great success story even longer, even since after the Second World War. But all these things coming together just happened to coincide with Finlay leaving school and we got the news that he had been accepted, actually when we were in Tokyo.

He in turn had a conflict, when during the time when he was a student he was invited to join the Battlefield Band on a full time basis. I think he would have been in his second or perhaps third year. So we had a bit of a head to head about that. Whilst life on the road has its ups and downs, essentially playing with one of the best folk rock bands in the world is a great accolade, but it wasn't the correct time, I didn't think. After he

qualified I remember saying to him, well go where you want now. You have got the degree and that will hold you in good stead. So he went on and to this day he is still doing similar things, but more adventurous I would say. It's a great feather in my cap on that score. I would never have thought that when he was a wee boy kicking a ball about, that he would end up as a full time professional musician. I am very proud indeed.

**I have read, I think in one of the sites on the web, that you have had quite an illustrious solo performance career playing in front of the Queen, Prime Ministers and various others.**

Oh yes, I have yes

**Could you just tell us about that?**

Yes. I have played over the years for most of the Royal Family and American Heads of State. I just seem to get pulled down when...yes, I must be a low security risk. Yes, one thing that I can say from the days of my pals calling me a big Jessie with my kilt and a set of pipes, I always had the feeling that if the instrument was played correctly, that it might extend my world between Barrhead and Stornoway. Sure enough it did, and it still does.

**Well I think the piping world has come around to your way of thinking, hasn't it?**

Oh without a doubt.

**With the variety and the wide interest in it.**

And of course Piping Live! has been a great advance providing a full week's platform for pipers throughout the world to come and listen to the cream of Pipe Idol, for example, and pipes from different countries playing in the concert hall and George Square and at the Piping Centre and the College of Piping and all the venues. It is really fantastic and it has been well thought out and a great success story, I would say.

**Yes. Well I think, unless you have got anything else you want to add?**

I don't think so

**I think it has been a great chat. Thank you for having me.**

I hope there has been something of interest there.

**I have really enjoyed it Iain. I have to just say, thanks very much for doing this. It has been great.**

It's a pleasure indeed. Sorry about the intrusion.

**No, that's fine. OK, well thank you very much.**

Thank you. It has been nice speaking to you.