



## **NOTING THE TRADITION**

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



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**This is Veronica Hartwich speaking to piper Jim Butler of Kilwinning on Monday 6th August. I want to talk to Jim about his experience as a piper. Welcome Jim.**

Thank you Veronica, thank you.

**Jim we could start off with the simple introductions, how did you begin to take an interest in piping, what brought it into your life?**

Right well, I can't remember whether I was always fascinated by the sound of the bagpipe or not but I do remember when I started off in the Army Cadet Force at the age of 14, we headed off to camp and we had two pipe bands in camp, one from the Argylls and one from the Royal Scots Fusiliers and we formed up in Central Station to march to Queen Street Station and the when the pipes and drums started up in Central Station that did something for me. When I got to camp I contacted the Pipe Sergeant of the Royal Scots Fusiliers Cadets' Band and arranged lessons with him, that was some time ago obviously and from then I went into the Cadet Pipe Band and I think I played in that for about five years or something and realised then that I wasn't really learning very much. I transferred then to Kilmarnock Pipe Band but continued with my association with the Army Cadet Force, in fact, that continued for 15 years.

**Yes five years and then another 10 years?**

Yes but back in the training side of Cadets and I finally finished up commanding my own detachment in Kilmarnock.

**Oh [laughter] good for you.**

As a Captain in the Cadets so I thoroughly enjoyed that and all that time

I kept piping going, all the time. From Kilmarnock Pipe Band which I was in for about five years, I then moved to Stevenston Pipe Band, now Stevenston Pipe Band no longer exists and in fact hasn't existed for a long time but in those days they had a Grade One pipe band I tended to I think though rest on their laurels, they never actually did very much, they went to a couple of contests a year and eventually they were downgraded. By that time of course the band had folded, I was married at that time and living in Kilwinning which is roughly equidistant between Ayr and Paisley, so I tossed a coin to see whether it would be Ayr Pipe Band or Paisley and it came down for Paisley. I went up to Paisley and spent about twenty years up there in Paisley Pipe Band, many of those as Pipe Sergeant. That was a great learning experience but in many ways, I don't regret it but I do regret not having continued with my own personal development if you like, I was involved in pipe bands at that time and you just tend to play the tunes that the band plays and I would rather having started piobaireachd, for example, much earlier than I did.

**Yes.**

I did go for piobaireachd lessons to an old chap in Kilmarnock called James Munro, an old man from Skye who had been a piper in the First World War and he and I were getting along fine just using the practice chanter and he decided that it was time we had the pipes going so I got the pipes going, we had only been going for a few minutes when there was a knock on his door and the man across the entry was there and said "who's playing pipes?" and James Munro introduced me to this man called George Miller who apparently had been a piper himself and was my mother's uncle, [laughter] so this was a strange coincidence, very strange and George Miller lived across the passageway, across the entry from James Munro and because none of the two of them had played

pipes for years and years...

**No?**

None of them knew that the other was a piper.

**So, interested to finally break in, there is a couple of things that are curious actually, the first one is, that if James Munro wasn't playing pipes much, how did you come across him?**

Ah, he turned up the band practice at Kilmarnock Pipe Band one evening, I didn't know who he was but everybody had spoken in Kilmarnock about Jimmy Munro, what a good player he had been in his day, and I saw this old chap sitting over in the corner with the bunnet on and the pipe going and after the band practice had finished he came across to me and he said "did you ever think about going in for any competitions?" and I said "no, it hasn't crossed my mind at all." He said "well I think you should" he said "you should come to me for lessons", I said "well, who are you?" He said "I'm James Munro." So that was how it started then we would go down to his place on a Monday evening for lessons and we were getting on fine, he had me onto a good march, strathspey and reel and by that time, I think I had moved at that time to Stevenston Pipe Band and I did enter a solo competition in 1964, I think it was and that was the, I better get this right, Ayrshire, Dumfriesshire and Galloway and Northern Ireland Solo Championships which was held in South Ayrshire. The first prize in the march went to Northern Ireland, second prize in the march went to Northern Ireland and the third prize in the march went to our Pipe Major, Don Stevenson. First prize in strathspey and reel went to Northern Ireland, second in strathspey and reel went to Northern Ireland and the third prize went to me. Didn't seem to me to be the right way to be going so, anyway I did go into Irvine Pipe Band for a few years, I didn't enjoy it particularly and came

out of that and since then I've simply been playing on my own for weddings, funerals, dinners, bar mitzvahs, anything at all, anything that comes up and I've thoroughly enjoyed it, it's been great. In fact I've only recently returned from three weeks on the National Trust cruise, three weeks on a cruise ship, piping and being paid for it, which can't be bad.

**No indeed, indeed. I was aware of you, had made acquaintance with you through the Irvine Harbour Arts and common themes Burns' Suppers.**

That's right yes.

**I was always acquainted with you piping the haggis in and I became aware that you did other ceremonial work and you do, I mean you've mentioned the cruises.**

Yes, aye.

**And you do lecturing on those as well?**

Well I have, yes I have spoken, and strangely enough I have spoken about pipes on the cruise and the reaction from the passengers has been quite favourable. The very first one I did in fact, there was one hundred turned up to listen and I gave them a talk on the bagpipe, explained how it works and showed them the instrument, let some of them handle it, explained that the instrument was not a native Scottish instrument, but was imported to us sometime round about the 14<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup> century. I also explained what piobaireachd was and gave them an example of primary piobaireachd and how it is instructed. To my horror at the end of this talk though, this gentleman came up and said "I thought you explained the construction of primary piobaireachd very well". I said "Oh thank you" he says "allow me to introduce myself, I'm James Burnet of the

Piobaireachd Society.” [laughter] So I was glad he told me afterwards rather than before but he was very positive about what I had said, so I was quite pleased about that. He was on the cruise with his wife and his brother and his wife and we spoke quite a bit after that about piping and so on, it was nice to meet him. I haven’t actually seen him since but I will always remember that first encounter with him.

**Yeah, you play on board the cruise ship, do you play on land in the places you visit?**

Yes actually my job is to, as the ship docks in various ports, there are tour buses to take passengers away on various tours, it’s all very well organised and my job is to play up on the pier side until these tour buses go but occasionally we have functions in the evening for which I’m asked to play. On one memorable occasion the ship was going through the Kiel Canal, and one of the officers on the ship had relatives who lived very close to the Kiel Canal and she asked me if I would play as we were going through the canal and give a kind of salute to her relatives. That was a fantastic day, it was a beautiful day, it was a lovely sail down through the canal, her relatives turned up, she was excited and they were excited and I played some tunes for them and apparently it went down very well, in fact somebody said it was on YouTube somewhere but not being a computer buff, I wouldn’t know about these things.

**[Laughter] Do you get much chance now to meet people from other countries?**

Yes, the cruise, although it is primarily for the National Trust of Scotland, there are friends in the National Trust on board and we have in fact National Trust members from Australia, USA, Canada, France I think in fact this year, so they have asked me back next year which

means I must be doing something right. So that's the cruise, the other aspect which has been interesting over the last few years is that I have been asked to, when I took early retirement from full-time art teaching in 2000, North Ayrshire Council, under the guidance of Brian Kerr who was in charge of music at that time, North Ayrshire Council asked me to come in and teach piping in the schools. Now this all started with a summer school which Brian Kerr had kicked off in about, that would be about 1996 I think they kicked off the summer schools just to see what the reaction would be and we invited as many kids along as wanted to come and they would get the chance to have hands on experience with the tin whistle, practice chanter, clarsach, Gaelic singing, dancing and so on and it was a great success. It was repeated the following year and after that Brian reckoned it was time to introduce some of these elements to main stream education so that's why I was asked to go in and do the piping tuition which I thoroughly enjoyed. I then decided that I better do something about getting a qualification so I went up to the National Piping Centre, took my Level Four certificate here and then my tutor certificate at the College of Piping. I like to spread between the two establishments you see, not showing any favour to one or the other. [laughter] So I earned my tutor certificate and I taught the piping in the school for about seven years, at the end of which time I had a North Ayrshire Schools' Pipe Band and we took some of the youngsters from the band and some of the traditional music groups on various outings, we went to Norway for the opening of a Viking festival in the Highland of Haugesund. We went to Slovenia and played a dinner in the capital Ljubljana, this was a joint Burns/Prešeren, they apparently have a poet who they regard in the same high esteem as we regard Burns. This was a joint Burns/Prešeren dinner, Prešeren is their poet and the kids were excellent at that, they played at this dinner and the traditional musicians played fiddle and clarsach and things. It was really good. In the course

of this we visited a school and gave some musical examples to the school and at the end of it, one of the pupils in the school, all of whom spoke very good English, one of them passed one of my piping pupils who was a young lady who was half Filipino, turned out to be a nice wee player, he asked her, “can I ask the young lady why she decided to learn the pipes?” and Sarah looked up at me and I thought she’s going to say “when I heard Mr Butler play the pipes in the school I thought that’s what I want to do” but she looked up and said “my name was pulled out of a hat.” [Laughter] It was a bit of a letdown for me but in some ways it just shows you the long arm of coincidence, had her name not been pulled out of a hat she would not have been the good wee piper that she is. She still continues to play, in fact, I’m supposed to be meeting her tomorrow sometime at Piping Live so I’ll see how that goes. So that was an experience there but I left that in 2007 when my wife retired from primary school teaching I decided I would retire for the second time so I retired from that in two thousand and seven and a chap called Gordon Bruce took over from me but Gordon didn’t wait too long in North Ayrshire because they couldn’t guarantee him a full-time job and he moved to, I think it’s West Lothian Schools and now the man in charge of the band is George Sharp. So the band is still going strong, I’m quite pleased about that because that was my baby, I’m quite pleased about that. So I still try to learn new tunes all the time, the thing about leaving the band scene is that you tend probably to fall into the habit of playing the same tunes as you always played but I was determined for that not to happen so I tried to keep up with learning new tunes and tried to learn a new tune once every couple of months or so and that keeps me going.

**Alright, again so there’s things that intrigue, you were a student at Glasgow School of Art?**



Yes I was.

**And you were studying piping at the same time weren't you? That's an unusual combination.**

Well the piping thing was part-time really, it was in the evenings. I went up to the College of Piping, the National Piping Centre did not exist of course in those days and I went to the College of Piping up near the University in Glasgow and took some lessons there from Duncan Johnstone and Seamus MacNeill, I was doing reasonably well I thought and then I was approached to see if I would take a class up there, the class next door which was a learners' class lost their tutor, he was a merchant seaman I think and he was called off, so I was asked to take this learners' class and I thought, well being asked to teach at the College of Piping is great when I'm more or less up there to learn myself, so I took this class for two or three weeks and then realised that it wasn't really doing me any good and by that time the Art School work was beginning to get ratcheted up anyway, so I reluctantly had to pack that in. So that was when I decided to go down to James Munro in Kilmarnock, well he decided that I should go along and get some lessons from him. So the College of Piping thing didn't really last that long unfortunately. So that was that, the other interesting experience which I had with the piping, well I've had lots of interesting experiences but somebody asked me some time ago what was the strangest situation you've been in with the pipes and at that time it was playing in a fashion show, believe it or not in ICI, the ICI Colour Show which was a travelling fashion show that went round all Europe showing off the ICI dye stuff and clothing and so on and when it came to ICI Stevenson and they put on a big show there and I was asked to bring the models out onto the catwalk which was quite an experience because I had to share a dressing room with these completely uninhibited and very beautiful

Portuguese models, [laughter] so that was quite a thing and that was the most unusual experience probably in piping but that has been superseded I think just within the last month or so when I played at a ceilidh on the deck on the ship and we were bumping along the edge of the Arctic ice field, several hundred miles from the North Pole, I think that was the experience to beat all. That was really something. Other things that have happened, well I have been in three Brigadoons, believe it or not [laughter]. Three Brigadoons which makes me about six hundred years old. The very first time was with Kilmarnock Amateur Operatic Society and the producer at that time, first of all he came along, they sent a representative from the Society along to the Kilmarnock Pipe Band practice and asked if anyone was interested in taking part in this show, Brigadoon, nobody was so I thought, well we can't let the side down here, so I thought I would have a go at that. So I go along and was given music and the producer said "can you come along for the rehearsal in a couple of week's time?" and I said "yes". At the rehearsal he asked me "is it possible to fade the bagpipe out?" obviously not knowing much about bagpipes [laughter] and I said "no, there's no volume control, it's either on or off and that's it". So he said "well I would like a fade in this funeral scene if we can do it." I said "well the only way we can do this is if I leave the stage, go down the fire steps at the back and out the fire doors and into the yard there and if somebody closes the fire doors slowly." He said "we'll try that." We tried it and it worked a treat, it was beautiful. So he said "right can we do that at the dress rehearsal?" Now I should point out that the Palace Theatre where this was taking place in Kilmarnock and the Grand Hall in Kilmarnock share a common back yard. So I come to the dress rehearsal, it comes to the funeral scene, I get the pipes up, off I went off stage, down the stairs, off through the fire doors and they were just beginning to close the fire doors when a man in a dinner suit came running round from the front

and said “for God’s sake stop, stop.” I said “well, what’s the problem?” and he was almost speechless and he pointed to the back doors of the Grand Hall, “BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra Verdi’s Requiem Mass ruined.” So [laughter] I was mortified, absolutely. So I wrote a letter to the secretary of the Kilmarnock Choral Union, apologising profusely but I think the producer of our show, Brigadoon, dined out on that story several times. Anyway I enjoyed that Brigadoon and I also did another one with Kilmarnock Operatic several years after that and then one with Paisley, so that was good fun, I really enjoyed it. The music was...

### **Different?**

Yes different, it’s different. It’s a load of hokum the show obviously, but the music’s fine.

### **Yes [laughter] I have recollections of having seen the film.**

The film was abominable, dreadful, [laughter] really awful. I didn’t enjoy the film one bit but the show was, in fact the musical show was actually better.

### **Just a good musical?**

Yes a good musical. So that was Brigadoon. That led to a long association with Kilmarnock Amateur Operatic Society, hereon known as KAOS, K-A-O-S which they, that’s their proud title, KAOS and every year we do a big charity concert in the Grand Hall in Kilmarnock with, it’s called the 50-50 Concert, fifty choristers and fifty musicians which is really good and the musicians are led by a redoubtable character called Gordon Cree who is a first class musician and entertainer all round. He gets this orchestra together and the choral section is donated by Kilmarnock Amateur Operatic Society obviously but they also have, at the very end, a piping finale which I have done for

several years and several years ago they actually asked the Schools' Pipe Band to take part in this finale and it was great. They really rose to the occasion did the young players but when I left the band, that connection was broken and I'm now back to doing that on a solo basis. It's always a very good concert and something I always look forward to and they always raise a lot of money for charity. So that is that. Just see where we go from here actually.

**Yes, this is curiosity on my part, it's picking up on something you said earlier on about your suddenly meeting this uncle, you hadn't been aware of that no?**

I had heard my mother speak about him, he was my mother's uncle, I had heard her speak about George Miller who had been a piper in the Royal Scots Fusiliers in the First World War and he also played for Highland dancers and my mother did a wee bit Highland dancing when she was young so he played for her but he hadn't played for years and years and I had only seen him in photographs. He was not, he didn't really take part in any family activities, he was quite far removed from the family being my mother's uncle. But it was an incredible coincidence to meet him, that was really another thing.

**Yes that was rather remarkable.**

Yes.

**Yes and so your family encouraged you with the piping?**

Well they never discouraged me, let's put it that way, [laughter] they were very supportive, they've been very supportive with just about everything. When I mentioned going to Art School for example, neither of them knew anything at all about Art School and neither of them knew any kind of career paths that might follow on from this but at no time

was I told, you know, that's not a good idea and when I went to Art School I thoroughly enjoyed it and moved into teaching from there which, again I thoroughly enjoyed. It was fantastic. We had some excellent pupils who did well in the art world, quite a few are professional painters and designers and quite a few have gone into teaching as well. So I thoroughly enjoyed it, that was really good and if the request for early retirement had been turned down, I would have been quite happy to soldier on teaching art but to move from that into piping tuition was fantastic and it was a great way to ease into full-time retirement, which I'm really not in at the moment. I mean I must have done last year somewhere in the region of between forty and fifty weddings last year so that's hardly retirement.

**No indeed, that's nearly one a week.**

Yes, well sometimes it's more than one a week, sometimes it's three a week. It just depends and you get around with the weddings too, in fact, I had so much, they were getting so busy I had to set myself up as a small business and now, this is the bit I like, I have an accountant down in Ayr who looks after my books for me because having been on PAYE all my life I didn't know my way round the tax system, so I thought I have to find someone who does. So I go down and see this chap once a year down in Ayr, he sets me right and that keeps me going on that [laughter]. Yes the piping for weddings has been super, I mean I've been invited to play, well first of all in Paris a good number of years ago for a wedding and then in Sorrento. Several years ago there was a chap from Glasgow, has a restaurant in Glasgow who was being married in Sorrento and his bride was Scots so he wanted a Scottish element in his wedding and I was asked if I would go and do this. That was a super wedding, that was great, I really enjoyed that. In fact there may well be another one coming up next year from the same contact, not that he's

getting married again [laughter] it's a friend of his I think, that was super, so you take the rough with the smooth in the weddings and sometimes don't know where you're going to land up and some of the venues are less than salubrious shall we say, I still enjoy them. You're in amongst people who are out to enjoy themselves and as long as you turn out smartly, keep the pipes going reasonably well and don't get drunk and don't over charge, you get the jobs. One wedding that sticks in my mind, happened several years ago, I was up one day in the National Piping Centre and Roddy MacLeod came out of his office and shouted "hello" and came across to speak to me and he said "tell me are you playing at the wedding in Seamill Hydro on such and such a date?" I forget what the date is, I said "yes, how did you know that Roddy?" he said "oh I'm going to the wedding." I thought oh boy but then I thought he's probably only going to the evening reception because by that time I'm away. I said "are you going for the whole day?" "Oh yes, my wife and I are going." So no pressure there then, Roddy's the Principal as you know of the National Piping Centre and a fantastic player and this was me playing in front of him at this wedding. However he was very kind, we had a few drinks together and a chat and everything else and he commented very favourably on what I was doing so quite pleased about that but it was a bit of a horror story there for me.

**Almost this problem of being faced with someone you regard as a serious expert.**

Oh exactly that, exactly. Occasionally people have come up to you at weddings and said "I used to play the pipes", you know you start speaking to them and you realise that they didn't get very far really.

**A few lessons maybe?**

But they're not all Roddy MacLeod that's for sure.

**Yes. Now, you began playing in bands, through Cadets etc, I presume you were supplied with a set of pipes?**

At the beginning yes.

**So at some point you must have had to take the step of making your own purchase?**

Yes.

**When was that?**

That was when I started teaching, my first year in teaching which would be nineteen sixty-five or sixty-six, something like that, I went up to Grainger and Campbell's who had a shop in Argyle Street. The manager in the shop at that time was the redoubtable wee Donald MacLeod who is a legend in piping, a composer, player, teacher, he was just a good all rounder, a fantastic player. So I went up and ordered a set of pipes from him and he said "well it's going to be several weeks before they're ready", it was a month or two in fact, I said "well that's fine" so I got a postcard from him to say they were ready, it was a November day I remember, went up to Glasgow, very cold, headed along Argyle Street and went in and Wee Donald was there and he sent the girl in the shop across the road for a couple of sticky buns and he put on a big pot of tea and he took my pipes and I had an hour's private recital from Donald MacLeod on my pipes which was a wonderful experience. So he finished playing, he said "well just straight off the production line but I think they're going to be a good set." I was proud as punch, handed the money over, headed down towards the railway station to get my train back to Kilmarnock and it was very slippy under foot and I saw this young couple heading towards me, slipping and sliding, the girl was laughing away and as they drew closer I realised that I knew her, she had

been at the same secondary school as me, several years below me, three or four years below and I smiled and nodded to her and she smiled and nodded back. About three weeks after that we met at the dancing down in Ayr and it turned out that she'd been at a wedding the day before I met her in Glasgow and it was the tradition then, whether it still is now or not, I'm not really very sure, the tradition then was that the best man would take the bridesmaid out the following day for lunch or on a date and that was her the following day date, she said that it didn't last, I said "well I'm glad about that". So we got together and that was the girl who became my wife, who still is in fact.

**Yes.**

And who I'm meeting up with about two o'clock for lunch today. So that was that. That was an experience with wee Donald, that was fantastic. I still have that same set of pipes, I've no intention of changing them and when I hit my sixtieth birthday, my wife...it was the only time I was parted from the pipes, she took them away from me for about a week and they were taken to MacCallum's, just outside Kilmarnock and the tuning slides were silvered, so that was my sixtieth birthday present from my wife. She got the tuning slides silvered on the pipes. They're a nice set of pipes and I think they sound alright and I'm really very pleased with them, they're very comfortable. Playing someone else's pipes is like wearing someone else's shoes, it's not quite the same thing as having your own set.

**Fingers get used to.**

It's the shape of it and everything else and you know what the pipes are capable of doing, you know how to set them and adjust them and reed them and so on. So that's that, unfortunately it doesn't look at the moment as if my grandson is going to follow on playing but he's only



five so we'll give it a few years yet and see.

**Yes I think a wee bit early yet.**

I did buy him a small practice chanter but he's not quite big enough to tackle with that.

**No, not much control of the puff.**

No, [laughter] it's actually the spanning of the practice chanter, with his fingers, it'll come as he gets a bit bigger and I am hoping that he will want to learn the pipes, I hope so because what I don't want is for a good set of pipes to be nailed to a wall in some seedy old Scottish bar or something, I don't want that, I want them played.

**Aye, yes that is the thing about musical instruments, I think that musicians become attached to the musical instrument they play, they know it, they know what it can do.**

That's right.

**It's an interesting question, it's someone like myself being a museum curator, I have worked with museum musical instruments but, of course, they become museum pieces...**

Yes.

**And if they're not played then they deteriorate.**

They do, they do. I certainly wouldn't want that to happen to the pipes because well they tend to get better as they get older, unlike the player [laughter] the pipes tend to get better as they get older.

**Why is that?**

Well I think the wood settles in, it dries to some extent and of course the

best wood for the bagpipes is African blackwood or ebony, which is very, very hard and you get a good sound from that. So the instrument, apart from replacing reeds and bags and so on, could last for, well a couple of hundred years easily, easily.

**So it would be nice for you to think yours will carry on [laughter]?**

I would hope they would be played, yes, when I'm not here.

**Right.**

I can't think of anything else that would be of any interest to anyone who might listen to this.

**You never know [laughter], you've given me quite a lot of good stories there, I've got quite a few headings so.**

Right, I'm just looking over the previous interview which had to be terminated, I don't really see anything that we haven't covered.

**It would be more a case of just elaborating on what you have and if you don't feel like doing that?**

I think that's probably as much as I can say but if you have any other questions then please fire away.

**I don't think I have any, I've asked the questions that I've picked up on the points that I had noted, like how you made contact with the gentleman in Kilmarnock, that was interesting, the fact that he turned up.**

Yes.

**And you were able to...**

Yes it's things like that that can set you off on certain paths through life,

you know.

**I'll tell you what's there, have you anything that you could say about the tuition you've been given over the years, you had this gentleman Mr Munro, you've had the college tuition, are there differences, were there differences in the way that he approached teaching you?**

Yes.

**I mean I would assume that he would be, he wouldn't have the formality for example?**

Well there certainly wasn't that and also there was something which has lingered with me since and I'm really disappointed that it has, I was taught to play very early on with an open C, to play an open C which means that you play the note C with the little pinky raised off the chanter, that is not the way the C is played nowadays. One of the reasons for that of course, is the pitch of the bagpipe has got sharper so they've had to compensate by playing a closed C. I thought I had got that well and truly laid, I mean I don't, to my knowledge I didn't play a closed C any longer but when I came up for my audition at the National Piping Centre from Roddy MacLeod he said to me, after I'd played the tune, he said, "tell me, when you were taught to play did you play an open C?" I said "I did for several years." He said "well it still sometimes comes out in fast tunes, not that anyone would ever hear it in a fast tune but I notice it there." I said "well I thought I had managed to get rid of it completely but it's still there." So that was one thing, the other thing is of course, that the standard of teaching nowadays is so much higher, with people coming out of the National Piping Centre and the College of Piping and the Royal Scottish Academy or the Conservatoire as it is known now, with people coming out of there with

qualifications and degrees in piping, the standard is obviously going up and although probably traditional music teaching in schools will suffer in the present financial climate, just the same as other music tuition in schools is suffering, of course, it will suffer, at least we know that those who are teaching in schools nowadays are teaching far more efficiently I think and teaching better than has been taught in the past. I mean when I started playing there were still some pipers that didn't read music, some of the old pipers who were taught as they say, off the fingers, just by watching other people's fingers, they didn't read music.

**I presume that with a lot of band playing, military playing that would have to be the case?**

Yes well quite a few didn't. They were the exception, I think, but there were quite a few who didn't but you will never find any piper now who doesn't read and sometimes write music. I think as I said in the past that pipers trained pipers but now I would tend to think that it is musicians who are being trained, not simply pipers and of course the playing of pipes with other musical instruments has lead to pipers having to find out more about what other instruments do and how to marry that with the bagpipe. So all of that has been to the good I think, it really has.

**That's interesting, yes it's obviously indicative of the way in which the pipes were a part of society but slightly isolated in the past, a very specific function.**

I think too and this still applies today I think, with other musical instruments, the player is important obviously but the instrument is probably not as important as the whole package that you get with piping. You simply cannot divorce the bagpipe from the visual aspect of piping, I think it's, especially if you're playing at a function, I mean a pianist can turn up at a function in a dinner suit, play and just go away but a

piper has to present the whole package I feel and that's what makes it a wee bit different I think from other musical instruments and very often people listen to the sound of the bagpipe without listening to the music, again I think that's changing, I think that's changing.

**Yes, that's interesting, I wonder, definitely intriguing, any suggestions as to why that's happening?**

Well I think because a lot of people don't know an awful lot about piping, the standard of appreciation of piping in the country is not particularly good considering this is the home of the Highland bagpipe, a lot of people just don't know anything about it at all, they know a few tunes like Scotland the Brave and ubiquitous Highland Cathedral, Flower of Scotland and things like this but when you suggest to them that there are thousands of tunes for the bagpipe then they look puzzled sometimes and a lot of them have no knowledge or appreciation of piobaireachd, none at all and this is Scotland's own contribution to Western music, it's completely unique. So from that point of view there's a lot of work to be done to educate not just pipers but the general public I think and unfortunately we only get an hour a week on BBC Radio Scotland, an hour a week is better than what we used to have, when I started playing it was fifteen minutes on a Wednesday, that was all the piping we ever got so we get an hour a week and there's also a Crunluath program which comes on, on a Thursday which is an hour long, that program, however, is presented entirely in Gaelic so it means that some information just doesn't reach you if you're listening to that, if you don't have any Gaelic.

**Yes, BBC Alba television might be a better deal then you could have...**

We get quite a bit of piping in that but it tends to be to a great extent,

one hundred mile an hour stuff which is not for everybody. I mean I appreciate the dexterity and the technical expertise of some of the young players but I have to confess I prefer piping played straight, march, strathspeys and reels, jigs, hornpipes, piobaireachd and so on, slow airs, but I do very much appreciate the fantastic talent that's coming through these days, the hundred mile an hour stuff is fine, it's good fun, any more than nine notes to the second then I don't think is music but there you go.

**I have a recollection that similar problems occurring in the old days of rock music and blues guitarists becoming obsessed with how fast they could play rather than how well they could play [laughter].**

Yes there could be a wee bit of that in it. I think this is maybe a bit of jealousy on my part because I can't really control when I'm playing too fast.

**[Laughter] OK, well you feel like you've said enough.**

I think I probably have shot my bolt.

**Well thank you very much.**

I've really enjoyed it Veronica.

**Let's hope that this comes out OK.**

Let's hope so and I'm looking forward to going to the launch of the website tomorrow.

**Yes, see you there.**

Thank you very much, thank you.