



## **NOTING THE TRADITION**

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



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**Interviewee                      Kenneth Stoddart**

**Interviewer                      Christine Martin**

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**Please refer to the Noting the Tradition Project Manager at the National Piping Centre, prior to any broadcast of or publication from this document.**

**Project Manager  
Noting The Tradition  
The National Piping Centre  
30-34 McPhater Street  
Glasgow  
G4 0HW  
[jbeaton@thepipingcentre.co.uk](mailto:jbeaton@thepipingcentre.co.uk)**

***This is Christine Martin for Noting the Tradition. I am with Norman Stoddart today at Kilbride House in Torran, on October 30<sup>th</sup> 2012. Norman I have come to talk to you today about Kenneth Stoddart, what relationship is he to you?***

The late Kenneth, yes he was my cousin..., first cousin.

***Can you tell me where he was born and where he grew up?***

Well he was born in Glasgow, and from there his mother died at a very young age. So his father then brought him and the rest of the family home to Torran, for their grandmother to then look after them and bring them up.

***Did he have many brothers and sisters?***

He had three brothers.

***And were they pipers too?***

One of them could play a bit by ear, but the other two no they weren't playing at all.

***And where was he educated?***

Kenneth was educated in Torran School.

***It was probably quite a big school at that time?***

It was quite a big..., I think there would be about twenty in the school at that time.

***And do you know who taught him pipes at that time?***

Well actually I think he started playing himself just by ear music, but then as he grew up and when he moved away from here he went to Glasgow. And he was taught by the late Pipe Major Peter MacLeod Partick, who was a well-known piper and composer.

***What sort of age was he when he moved to Glasgow?***

He would be about..., I think he would be about 18 years..., between 18 and 20.

***And did you see a lot of him when you were young and hear him play?***

Yes I did..., yes in fact I was brought up here with him after he came home. Of course he had to do his time in the army in the Second World War, but then when he came away from the war he inherited the family croft here at Kilbride and he was working the croft and I worked a lot with him over the years. But he was very unfortunate when he got called up to the war, he wasn't called into an infantry regiment at all. He was called into the RASC, so he didn't get a chance to further his piping during his war service at all, he wasn't involved in a pipe band when he was in the army.

***Do you know if he knew canntaireachd?***

Yes he did, he was well known for his canntaireachd. In fact there is a lot of pipers say that he is the best they have ever heard at canntaireachd.

***Did you learn some to?***

Not really, no, no I didn't get round to it no. But it was lovely to listen to him at canntaireachd.

***I know you also play the pipes, so can you tell me a bit about your families piping history?***

Well it's just that I had a lot to do with Kenny and helping him up on his croft there when I was in school, and I was very keen. So he said to me one night just buy yourself a chanter and come up and see me and I will start you off, which I did. And he started me off, and from

there I carried on. But I was getting help from the likes of Andy in Broadford, and Ruaraidh the shoemaker I was talking about.

***And was that an Andy Stoddart as well?***

Andy Stoddart yes.

***And was he any relative?***

No I don't think they were..., no relation no.

***What about Ruaraidh the shoemaker what was his surname can you remember?***

Ruaraidh was MacGregor, his name was Ruaraidh MacGregor.

***So what are the names of other family members who play the pipes at that time in Strath, beside Kenneth and yourself?***

Well there was Graham Richardson from Elgol, it was Kenneth that taught Graham but that was before me..., before he started to teach me. And then Graham of course he left..., he had to go and do his National Service and he was involved in the Cameron Highlanders Pipe Band. And then when he came away from completing his national service he got onto the Glasgow Police and he got into the pipe band there.

***He has done well?***

He has done very well for himself.

***Did Kenny himself compete in piping competitions?***

Yes he did..., yes he did. He competed at the local Skye games and he did win quite a few prizes, but I don't think he ever won first because there was rivalry between him and John McKenzie in Uig..., because John was always coming out with the first prize.

***Right...***

Yeah..., but Kenny was always second after John McKenzie Uig.

***Can you tell me anything about his career, and any time he had when he was away from the island?***

Well the time..., he worked in Glasgow before he got called up in the war and that's when he was being taught by Peter R MacLeod in Partick. But then he got called up to go to the war, so he couldn't take his pipes with him but he had his practice chanter. And the four or five years he was doing war service he played his chanter and kept himself in good practice.

***And what was his career after he came out of the army or did he come back here?***

He was with truck driving..., during his war service he was with the RASC and that was a driver you see. So then he was doing local trucking here on lorries, and then he gave that up and he started just to work on the croft.

***Did he play at local events or ceilidhs or...?***

Oh yes he did, he used to play at weddings. But mostly in Glasgow before he got called to the war, he used to play at all the ceilidhs and concerts..., Highland concerts and Ceilidhs in Glasgow.

***Because Partick Hall was a pretty famous place for that wasn't it?***

Yes, yeah, yeah.

***It was... I saw a script of the interview with Graham Richardson and he mentions Kenneth Stoddart as his first teacher, do you remember him learning? Do you remember him learning with Kenneth?***

Well I was a bit younger..., I can't remember it very well because I was a bit younger and that. No I can't...

***Can't remember that?***

No I can't no.

***And did Kenneth just teach yourself and Graham?***

Yes.

***He didn't teach any other people locally?***

No, no.

***Do you know anything about his teaching style and what he did?***

Well yeah he was a good teacher, and had to be very, very thorough what he taught you. And he was quite strict, and if you didn't do it right he wasn't very pleased and you didn't show yourself the next night if you didn't have to [laughter] them off properly, the exercises.

***And was this after the time he had been to Partick and lessons with Peter MacLeod?***

Oh yes it was.

***Do you know what make of bagpipes he had and where they are now?***

Well I..., I don't know the make of the bagpipes but I bought them off him. He was keen that I would buy them off him when he couldn't play them any longer, because he got trouble with arthritis in his fingers and he offered them to me. But I paid him for them, I have got them, I have still got them.

***You have still got them?***

Yes.

***That's quite a nice thing to have isn't it?***

Yes, and the box they are in they were made by Peter MacLeod his tutor, Peter MacLeod, Partick and I have still got the box... Because

Peter he was a carpenter in the shipyard, and he made Kenny a box, a pipe box.

*And did Peter MacLeod ever come here?*

No, no, no.

*And did he play any other kinds of pipes beside Highland pipes?*

No just the Highland pipes and the practice chanter.

*Okay and what about any tunes? Did he write any tunes?*

No he didn't no..., but Peter MacLeod, that well known composer, his tutor. Peter composed a tune in his name, but what happened to it I don't know. It was in a jotter, but it was never...

*Wasn't published do you mean?*

Wasn't published.

*And you might have a copy of it somewhere?*

No I haven't...

*No...?*

No I'm sorry about that, no.

*Do you have any anecdotes about him, anything about his piping or himself that might be of interest to us?*

Well in his latter years he took a terrible notion for piobaireachd and he couldn't get anybody local to teach him, so he started himself. He bought the Kilberry Book of Ceòl Mòr, and yeah he taught himself. And the first piobaireachd he learned was the Lament for Mary MacLeod, and when he got that off he went on to Portree to the games and he competed in the locals and he got second prize for the tune he played.

*That was good...*

Yes it was.

***Are there any recordings of Kenneth playing pipes?***

I don't..., I haven't got any recordings of him. But maybe somebody else on the island could have, but unfortunately I haven't got any recordings of him at all.

***Thank you very much for talking to me about Kenneth..., perhaps you could tell me a little bit about your own piping and your playing. What age did you begin to play?***

I was about fourteen.

***And it was Kenneth that taught you as well?***

It was Kenneth that taught me yes.

***So where were you educated and have you always lived on Skye?***

Well I was educated in Torran School, and then when I came to the age of twelve I moved onto Broadford School and I was there until the age of fifteen.

***And obviously as a Skye family was it Gaelic or English in your home?***

Oh Gaelic very much so yeah.

***It would have been Gaelic around here for everybody wouldn't it?***

Around the whole village yeah, I think there would be about five houses in the village at that time and it was a hundred percent Gaelic.

***And did you have any exposure to canntaireachd when you were learning?***

Not really no, no I have got no voice for that at all no.

***And have you been involved in competitions or do you just play at home for your own pleasure?***



Well just for pleasure, I used to play at the local competition in Portree at the Skye games. And sometimes I would win a third, and other times I might not be put in it at all. But no I never got further than winning a third, I was out in Harris at the games one time and I think I won second. But yeah I got second there but there was only four competing so [laughter]...

***And did you go away for a career or...?***

No I didn't, no I joined the Territorial Army when I was eighteen. And they had a pipe band, and I was involved in that pipe band and they put me on a piping course I think for a month in Edinburgh Castle, and that really improved my piping. The tutor was , I can't remember now, Captain John MacLellan, that was in 1962.

***Graham Richardson in his interview mentions an old shoemaker in Broadford who taught pipes, and sometimes helped him learn a tune. Did you also go to him?***

Yes I used to call in and see Ruairaidh, Ruairaidh was very good at teaching. In fact Ruairaidh taught quite a few in Broadford, young lads. They used into go into his shop there at night and he would be starting them off on...

***And what was his full name?***

Ruairaidh MacGregor.

***Ruairaidh MacGregor ... and where was his shop?***

The shop was down near the pier in Broadford, you know what is it they call it the small pier..., the stone pier? And I think written across above the door now it says exhibition.

***Okay.***

I think it belongs to the landlord now the house, that's Sir Iain Noble, the late Sir Iain Noble, I think it belongs to him now.

***Graham also mentions Pipe Major Donald MacLean as the first piper to teach in schools, do you remember him?***

No that was in the early fifties, when I was just at a young age then. But I used to hear them talking about him, and he was teaching piping to the young ones and Highland Dancing.

***And dancing oh that's interesting...?***

Yes he was.

***Can you tell me about your own involvement in the Isle of Skye Pipe Band?***

Well I started in the Skye Pipe Band when it really started up after the Second World War..., well I think that it would be about 1959. And then I started just to go playing with them, and I carried on with them. And I think I was thirty-three years with the Skye Pipe Band.

***That's a long time?***

It was a long time.

***Did you help run it as well?***

Yes the last eight years I was Pipe Major and President of the Skye Pipe Band.

***That's a big commitment [laughter]?***

Yes it was.

***Are you still in the pipe band?***

No not now, I finished with the pipe band I would say about eighteen years ago.

***Oh right...***

Yeah.

*Well thank you very much Norman that has been most interesting.*

Okay..., I hope it's alright\*... Maybe I should have said more about Willie Fraser.

*Well tell me something about Willie Fraser now then that would be fine*

Willie well he belonged to Broadford and he was Pipe Major in the Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders in the regular army, and he composed the tune Miss Delicia Chisholm. I think it's a 2/4 march, and the other tune he composed was Broadford Bay. And he was very friendly with Ruairaidh MacGregor that we talked about, they used to sit in Ruairaidh's shop there at night doing nothing but playing the chanter and the bagpipes and talking about piping and tunes and whatever.

*So did quite a lot of young people come in there to listen?*

Oh yes, yes.

*And he stayed in Broadford did he?*

Ruairaidh stayed in Broadford...

*And Willie did as well?*

Yes he stayed in Broadford.

*And did he have pupils as well?*

I don't think so no, no not Willie no.

*And was he somebody who went abroad with the army, or was he just the local person who lived here?*

Willie?

*Ah ha.*

Yes..., Willie Fraser?

***Yes Willie Fraser?***

Yes he was in the regular army, in Cameron Highlanders.

***Fine...***

And it's after retiring from the army that he lived in Broadford.

***Fine, oh that's a nice addition to our talk as well. Thank you very much [laughter].***