IN THIS SPECIAL ISSUE;
the Past, Present and Future prospects of the
Border (conical bore chanter) pipes

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The Journal of the Lowland and Border Pipers’ Society

Editorial

Let’s start off with a good grovel. Regrettably, in the last edition of COMMON STOCK, I incorrectly transcribed a letter from Matt Seattle (sorry Matt) and, as a result, omitted that important little word “not”. Helpfully (and a trifle pointedly!) he sent his next submissions on disc. This can be of tremendous assistance. For no matter how carefully we proof read (and here my ‘other half’ Sam does noble work), the occasional mistake remains undetected. It is also a serious saving in labour; for every page of each issue (except for contributions received on disc) is typed by me before being set. So if you have contributions - keep them rolling - and access to a PC, the program I work to is Wordperfect, though I can read ASCII and some of the more well known word-processing packages. And those who have sent discs in the past will support my claim that I return all discs promptly.

But PC or no PC, exchange of information is still the priority. Contributions are welcome on Fax (01621 855447), by tape (once transcribed it will be sent to the contributor for approval before publishing) and of course on any scrap of paper - written or typed.

Many thanks to all who have contributed to the debate on Border (conical bore) Pipes - the focus of this issue - and, while ‘thank you’ are in the air, the Society is much indebted to Bill Sutherland for his photographic records of the annual Competition; a valuable addition to the archives of the Society and a source of on-going material for COMMON STOCK.

Jock Agnew.
11 Ulting Lane, Langford, Essex CM9 6QB

LETTERS

From Ray Sloan Bagpipes, Northumberland

In response to the appearance of two letters in the last issue of CS namely by a Mr. Deakin and Les Cowell of D. Naill & Co, I should like to make the following comments.

It is unfortunate that the deliberately outrageous comments which were contained in my article (Common Stock Dec ’94, Piping Times Aug ’94) in the hope of producing a constructive ‘debate’ and which were aimed at unspecified and unnamed makers have provoked what appears to be an idiotic attempt to discredit me by one maker in particular, D. Naill & Co. There is more than one ‘Highland Pipe-Maker of distinction’ (as mentioned in my article) so why are D. Naill & Co in particular reacting so sensitively? It would have served their cause better had they defended the virtues of their work instead of resorting to libellous innuendo.

The facts are that I was requested by a customer for a set of pipes mounted with hand engraved ferrules, together with a drone stock ferrule containing the inscription “Made by Ray Sloan 1994”. My customer suggested that I try D. Naill & Co as I personally have no experience of hand engraving. Mr. Les Cowell of D. Naill & Co made no mention of any of this nor of the fact that the ferrules were actually made of sterling silver and as such are stamped with the D. Naill Hal-Mark. This alone would make it particularly stupid of me to try and pass them off as my own, which seems to be one of his ridiculous suggestions!

D. Naill & Co, as professional pipemakers, know full well that it is perfectly normal practice to contract out for parts which are not made ‘in-house’. They also know full well that a Drone Stock ferrule with the inscription “Made by Ray Sloan” signifies the ‘pipes’ having been made by myself and not, as in this case, the ferrule. It is their understanding of this which makes their comments particularly distasteful.

With regards to the contents of Mr. Deakin’s letter and in particular to his comments about customers being ‘allowed’ or otherwise to express their opinions, this is not, never has been and, I am sure, never will be an issue with me and I am as equally puzzled by this comment as I am by Mr. Cowell’s comment about my honesty. I personally do not regard customers as ‘MERE’ customers in any way and value their opinion enormously since it is in fact their opinions which have kept me in business all of these years.

Finally, the question arises as to the purpose of Mr. Cowell’s actions in sending copies of my order to the editor of Common Stock. Were these the actions of someone trying to ‘accuse’ or ‘expose’? I would suggest that the only thing which Mr. Cowell’s letter exposes is his own dishonesty and contempt for the intelligence of others. Having now been enlightened by the full facts of this situation readers now have the opportunity to decide for themselves.

From Jim Buchanan, Midlothian

I have read the letter in the last issue that appears on casual inspection to accuse Ray Sloan of counterfeiting small pipes. It seemed to suggest that other people make the bits and he assembles them with a designer label attached. As someone who owns a set of Ray’s smallpipes (D, Bb and A) and has visited his workshop twice I can vouch for his workmanship and the quality of the finished instruments. They are very fine smallpipes.

I suppose Ray’s letter in the previous issue of COMMON STOCK did tweak the ulcers of some makers and was almost bound to provoke an angry response of some kind. However, I feel I should make some comments of my own.

Surely it would be unusual for any manufacturer not to contract out some item such as ferrules, mounts, bags, covers etc. In the case in point the silver ferrules were contracted out. It did seem to me (and others whom I have spoken with) to be mischievous, if not malicious for a contractor to accuse him of being less than honest in this regard. Would one expect a golf club manufacturer to put “Head forged by’X’, from Steel made by ‘Y’, shafts by ‘Z’ Grips by A.N.Other, designed, finished and assembled by ‘The Maker’. I think not.

[ I hope this brings to an end the debate on this thorny subject. Ed.]
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BORDER LINES

Keith Sanger sets the appropriate historical scene for the ensuing articles with their slant on Border (conical bore) pipes.

When this article was first mooted to the Editor it was my intention to examine the movements of minstrels, pipers in particular, and the cross border influences that this produced. However, following the debate within the Society over its name and the continuing efforts to classify the various early sets of pipes, the article has now turned into a different sort of beast altogether.

It seemed the time was ripe to re-examine piping history from the contemporary written or printed sources and compare these against current belief. For example the term 'Cauld Wind Pipes' recovered from comparatively modern folk memory is descriptively accurate and with the tenacity of oral sources may well have a distinguished lineage, yet does not feature at all in early written sources, where indeed the first recorded mention of bellows blown pipes in Britain may be no earlier than the end of the 17th/ beginning of the 18th century. His was also of course the time when bellows blown pipes similar to the rest of the UK began to appear in Ireland.

An instrument cannot be divorced from its music and evidence of some form of "Pipe Music" in early Scotland survives on the 7 - 11th century carved stones featuring a mouth blown triple pipe which probably, from the distribution of the stones, entered Scotland under Irish influence.

I now these instruments were made and played is open to question. It is however worth noting that if the current Highland Pipe fingering is simply viewed as a top and bottom hand, it is possible to play two practice chanters (with the missing hand finger holes selloptaped over) simultaneously. This results in a permanent drone from whichever chanter has all bottom 'A' fingers closed. Add in another drone pipe and circular breathing and the result is a two drone mouth blown pipe. The addition of a bag and inflation tube to this arrangement simply enables the instrument to increase in size and volume.

Perhaps the first firm reference to a bag occurs in the household accounts of Edward I of England for 1285/86 where "Cuidam Garciae cum una bagpipe pipanti coram rege de dono iпись regis iis." And Edward's granddaughter Lady Eleanor in 1332/3 where a minstrel called 'Baggepiper' got 12d for playing to her (5). How long it took for the bagpipe to appear in Scotland is uncertain, the sculptures at Melrose Abbey and Rosslyn Chapel would indicate mid 15th century at the latest, but there is no reason to suppose that if it had appeared in England by 1286 it would not also be known in the North too. Certainly a piper of some sort had held a 4 shilling land at 'Pipers' in the earldom of Morton, Dunfriesshire prior to 1376 (6).

References in fifteenth century Scots poetry confirm that the bagpipe was in use by that period and it was among the instruments said to have been played by James I (1394-1437) (7). Towards the end of the fifteenth and beginning of the sixteenth centuries references to pipers and musicians in general became more common in the records. It is also around this time, 1513-61, that the earliest 'Highland Pipers', i.e. musicians whose origins clearly lay within the Gaelic cultural entity, appear on the scene (8).

By 1531 clear evidence can be found for at least two sizes of bagpipe. "Compeard James Wilson Pyper accused for playing on the great pype under silence of night" in Perth (9) and "James Roy Pyper assisi for ganging through the town playing on his gryt pype" (1592 Elgin), (10) both infer that there was a smaller version which is confirmed by an entry in the Stirling Presbytery Record of 1600, where the piper James MacFarlane played both "small pipe and great pipe" (11).

It is at this point that the specific term 'Highland piper' occurs, one of the earliest of these being 'Ane heland pyper' found in the St Andrews Burgh Accounts for 1612 (12). As most of these references come from Lowland Scots sources, possibly no more should be read into them than the piper was regarded as coming from the Gaelic speaking area. However it should be noted that where the nature of the bagpipe was specified it was referred to as 'a great pipe' which corresponds with the Piob Mhor of contemporary Gaelic sources.

It would seem that all that can be said with certainty is that by the end of the sixteenth century, local variations in a large mouth blown bagpipe were played throughout Scotland (and as the 'warpipe' in Ireland), while a small pipe that was common to Lowland Scotland and both sides of the border may only have had limited penetration into the Gaelic speaking areas. It is not clear whether Scottish pipes were markedly different from those used in England, although an entry in the accounts of the Earl of Huntingdon for the 21 November 1606, where 3 sh 4 d were paid for a "pair of Scotch baggepipes for the fool" suggests that a distinctive Scottish instrument may have already appeared.

When dealing with the various bagpipes it may be preferable to think in terms of zones of influence rather than tight geographical boundaries. However even this approach may be too simplistic given that musicians were a very mobile profession and could turn up anywhere. Given the proximity of the Scottish border it is not surprising to find a Scottish piper at Naworth Castle, Cumberland in 1626, but when a musician called Robert Sympson appears in York in 1602 is it just coincidence that he bears the same name as our own piper of Kilbarchan? (13).

Both minstrels shared the same propensity for getting into trouble and Habbie Simpson's known dates are not incompatible with an appearance in York (14). Indeed, although speculative it is very easy to concoct reasons why Habbie may have found his way to York. At Kilbarchan Habbie would have found patronage from local families including the Sempill's (where Sir James Semphill the poet's father was ambassador to England in 1599) and the Montgomery's. One senior branch of the latter at Braidstane and Hessilhead just seven miles south west of Kilbarchan were heavily involved in political intrigue on both sides of the border and in the north of Ireland.
Two of the younger brothers of Hugh Montgomery of Braidstone were resident in England. George was Dean of Norwich, (later to be Bishop of Deny and Raphoe then afterwards of Meath in Ireland), and John, a doctor of medicine who was established in practice in London during the reign of Queen Elizabeth. It would take too much space to deal with the activities of the family here, but as the principle characters behind the plantation of Ulster they were responsible for increasing the Scottish influence in Ireland (15).

Before leaving York a further coincidence is worth noting. Between 1611-1626 a family of musicians called Peacock, father Robert and sons Francis and Walter appear in York House Books (16). This brings to mind another clutch of Pecocks, Francis (d 1807) the musician and dancing-master who was one of the three professional musicians responsible for founding the Aberdeen Musical Society in 1748 and John Peacock (circa 1755-1817) a key figure in the Northumbrian Piping tradition (17).

There is no reason to connect the York family with their later namesakes but it might be worthwhile sometime to explore further the backgrounds of the last two and connections between Newcastle and Scotland especially the east coast up to Aberdeen. Many of the familiar names in Northumbrian Piping seem to occur earlier in a musical context on the Scottish side of the border. Alexander Munro Kinloch, the Newcastle based dancing master and William Anderson of Ellon, Aberdeenshire, who had been one of the leading Newcastle merchants for over fifty years prior to his death in 1816, were just two examples of the Scottish migration southwards over the 17/18 centuries. Indeed the Newcastle Theatre at one time was in the habit of playing both 'God save the King' and 'Bruces Address' although neither seemed to receive a particularly rapturous reception (18).

Granted too, once the political divisions had moderated after 1603, the closer geographical proximity of Northumberland to the Scottish capital of Edinburgh rather than London was bound to exert a northwards pull. This was aided no doubt by the considerable Scottish traffic along the east coast route and the cattle droves from the north that had long passed through Morpeth market for the south.

When sometime prior to her death in 1776, the Countess of Northumberland presented to Jamie Allan "a pair of small pipes handsomely made of ivory and decorated with silver chains which she had procured for him in Edinburgh", she may simply have gone to the natural place to obtain them at that time (19). It is just possible that by the end of the seventeenth century Edinburgh was already a centre for purchasing or making pipes.

According to the accounts of the Earl of Breadalbane he paid his piper 24 in 1674 to buy pipes in Edinburgh. It is not certain what sort of pipes these were but, since the piobaireachd known as "The Caries with the Breeks or Breadalbanes March" is associated with the year 1669 when 'two pipers and their men' were with Breadalbane and in 1697 his piper was being sent to the Isles to Rankine and MacCrimmon for training, it can be assumed that the purchase was a large pipe (20). The price was not too far from the thirty merks paid in 1711 for 'pypes bought MacCrimmon MacLeods principal piper', a merk was 13 shillings and 4 pence, hence the price was 20 Scots (21).

On firmer ground the MacDonalds of Skye purchased Highland pipes in Edinburgh in 1748 and 1767, for which they paid 3-3 sh and 3- respectively. The apparent reduction in price between these four purchases probably reflects a change from pounds Scots to pounds Sterling, (Scots was half of sterling). The account for the set of Highland pipes mounted on ivory - purchased in 1767 came from Hugh Robertson Turner, whose bill was for 2-5-4 since 44 lbs of Cocoa Wood. costing 14 sh 8 d had been supplied to the purchaser (22).

Jamie Allan (1734?-1810) illustrates the open attitude to piping that existed prior to the latter part of the nineteenth century. Allan was said to have played Highland pipes, the small pipes, the Northumbrian raising or gathering pipes and the Union pipes. Allan was not the only Northumbrian piper to play the Union pipes. An account of Robert Bewick (1788-1849), a pupil of John Peacock describes him playing on the Union pipes. He was described as "walking about excitedly playing Scotch airs with variations in the loveliest manner on that most delicate of native instruments (23).

The Union pipes made by Robert Reid (1784-1837) of North Shields were presumably intended for the local market but it is clear that Bagpipe makers of the time did not feel constrained by local or national considerations (24). Donald MacDonald (1750-1841), a native of Skye who became a pipemaker in Edinburgh, published in 1808 a set of instructions for Highland, Lowland and Northumbrian Bagpipes. When in 1817 he published 'a new and Complete Guide or Tutor for the Great Highland Bagpipe' he also advertised that he 'carries on the Business of Pipe making in all its branches and gives lessons on the Highland and Union Pipes & co'. This was followed in about 1822 by the claim in his collection of Piobaireachd that he taught the great Highland, Northumbrian and Irish bagpipes (25).

The lack of reference to Union or Irish bagpipes in MacDonald's 1808 advertisement may be a reflection of the presence in Edinburgh from 1806-1816 of Richard Fitzmaurice the Irish piper who played, taught, sold and possibly made Union pipes (26). Among the many Edinburgh "gentlemen" as his advert quaintly puts it, was probably an Edinburgh Writing Master called William Swanson (d 1812) among whose collection of instruments were Scots, Irish and Northumbrian Pipes.

Nor was Donald MacDonald the only pipemaker producing more than one type of instrument. In 1912 at the annual piping competition in Edinburgh, Malcolm MacGregor piper and musical instrument maker to the Highland Society of London was complemented for 'essential improvements he had made to the great Highland Pipe and the Union and Northumbrian pipe on which last instrument he played several tunes' (27). This experimentation and development continued, according to a report in the Edinburgh Evening Courant of 4 February 1836, "Robert Miller of Montrose, performer on Northumbrian, Union and Great Highland Bagpipes and now in Dundee had improved our noble national instrument the bagpipe adding a horn to the chanter and extra holes which he works by means of keys".

This cross fertilisation in piping extended over the Irish sea, where the introduction of the Union pipes probably occurred no earlier than elsewhere (28). Between 1789-1798 two Irish pipers a John Murphy and one 'MacDonnell' played at meetings of the
Highland Society in London. MacDonnell is known to have referred to his pipes (which seem to have been small with ivory tipped with silver and gold) as the Irish Organ and it has been suggested that the introduction of the term Union pipes came into use between 1784-1794 (29).

Murphy went on to become piper to the Earl of Eglinton, where among his duties he entertained the company in the stand at the Ayr races on his 'Irish bagpipe'. After publishing a collection of Irish music he moved on from Eglinton and in 1818 died at his lodgings in West Portman Square, London. His obituary described him as an eminent professor of the Union pipes whose loss will be long felt by admirers of Scots and Irish music (30).

While in Scotland, Richard Fitzmaurice and John Murphy published collections of music which were among the earliest to be produced by pipers, anywhere. It is important to note however, that these were music for the 'Union Pipes and other instruments', not specifically pipe music, an important distinction. A substantial part of these collections comprise song airs and music by Carolan and other harpers which were not necessarily wholly of native origin (31). It is also clear from accounts of performances and advertisements for concerts by pipers like Mr Ilannigan at New Ross in 1839, which stated that he would perform 'Popular Airs, National Melodies, Scotch Sonnets &c, &c, &c', that what was played covered a very wide range (32).

A similar picture is conveyed by Peacock's collection where:- "It is well to remember what the aims of the book were not. The book is a collection of favourite tunes adapted for the Northumbrian small pipes, other instruments. It is not claimed to be a collection of pipe tunes, nor is it meant to typify Northumbrian music .........." (33).

John Peacock in collaboration with John Dunn is credited with adding keys to extend the range of the Northumbrian Pipe chanter, but it is far from certain when the closed chanter was devised or bellows introduced (34). Most authorities to date have relied heavily on a musette like instrument dated 1695 to derive the Northumbrian pipe from the French musette. But this particular instrument belonged to a Salathiel Humphries in London, which at that time appeared to have been included in the small pipe circuit, according to the evidence of George Skene's diary. Indeed Skene's short account which is probably the earliest written evidence for bellows blown pipes in north Britain, poses a number of questions. Who was 'the famous fellow at Newcastle' who was beaten by James Bell and why does there seem to be no mention in Northumbrian piping tradition of Bell himself if he was crowned 'King of the pipers at Newcastle'? (35).

It is possible to argue that the history of a specific type of Northumbrian pipe' starts with John Peacock and his tutor Joseph Turnbull. But to return to the beginning of this article and the written evidence, the argument can he extended further by the suggestion that a period of perhaps less than 100 years from circa 1740-1840 was a time of innovation in pipe making generally which saw the evolution of the modern national instruments:- the Northumbrian small pipes and larger 'Union pipes', now primarily represented by the much developed Irish version. This period was not unique to bagpipes, *a number of other musical instruments including the harp, piano-forte, and flute were undergoing considerable changes at the same time. It is perhaps not unrel-

(17) Francis Peacock seems to have had a wide musical interest. He left a set of rules for tuning and playing a Psaltry (Scottish Record Office GD 103/2/134). When his daughter Miss Elizabeth Peacock died in Aberdeen in 1814 she was described as the last of a worthy line.

(18) Mr Munro Kinloch junior from Newcastle returned to Scotland to set up as a dancing instructor in Edinburgh in 1822; Edinburgh Evening Courant, 25 May 1816, 6 Jan 1820 and 28 Sept 1822.

(19) K Proud and R Butler, the Northumbrian Small Pipes, An Alphabetical History, Vol 1 Early Times - 1850. (1983), 2. (Despite its name a large number of the entries in this publication, including most of the earliest historically, fall north of the Scottish border).


(21) H Cheape, The Making of Bagpipes in Scotland, in 'From the Stoneage to The 45', ed A O'Connor and D Clarke, 598.


(23) K Proud and R Butler, op cite, 2 and 8-9; For another account see Northumbrian Pipers Society Magazine, Vol 3, (1982); he generally relieves his powerful mind, in the bosom of his very amiable family, either by hearing Scotch Songs (of which he is passionately fond) sung to the Piano-Forte, or his son Robert "dirt" strathspeys & jigs on the Northumbrian pipes.

(24) K Proud and R Butler, op cite, 30; Common Stock Vol 2 No 1, March 1985, 6-7.

(25) Edinburgh Evening Courant, 3 November 1808, 25 August 1817. Unfortunately no copies of these publications seem to have survived.

(26) Fitzmaurice appears to have been dogged by illness, but at various times be claimed to have "newly invented pipes". "to have perfected rapid teaching method" and to have "his charming toned Irish made Union Pipes for sale" although it is not clear if these were in fact his own set; K Sanger, 'The Irish Pipers' in Scotland, forthcoming.

(27) Edinburgh Evening Courant, 21 March 1812, 30 July 1812.


(34) The fact that the two chanters illustrated in 'Peacocks Tunes' still have vestigial belled open chanter like ends suggest that the introduction of a closed chanter was not too far back in the distant past; S Cocks, The Northumbrian Bagpipes; Their Development and Makers, (1933), and other later writers seem to be unspecific about dating the advent of the closed chanter claiming that it occurred 'during the 18th century'.


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Dixon's music? For a start, none of the tunes overlap, so a direct tune-to-tune comparison is not possible. We may assume until proven otherwise that the pipe tunes he records are from his own sources of the three surviving traditions. It is also at least equal in quality to anything we have written from an established player, who will demonstrate each phrase on the chanter and in canntaireachd." (The Highland Bagpipe and its Music, Edinburgh 1988).

With Border piping we have the unusual position that there are no surviving practitioners to show how the music was played, but as of now we have a literate source of great integrity, and that source considerably pre-dates the literate sources of the three surviving traditions. It is also at least equal in quality to anything from these traditions. This puts us in a particular predicament. Firstly, we are either interested or not: at one extreme, we can simply ignore William Dixon’s document if it lies outside our own interests or does not fit in with what we are doing. A middle position is to accept it as a historical record of one person’s repertoire at a point in the past, perhaps interesting as something for scholars to study, but not relevant to today’s circumstances. Thirdly, we can take it as a challenge.

Dixon’s tunes are not an alien idiom. Put simply, it is the idiom of variations as found in John Peacock’s and Robert Bewick’s collections, but applied to a nine-note chanter rather than an eight-note chanter. It is surprising how much difference the one note makes. Tunes which need nine notes had to be modified to be played on the old small pipes, and many of them are here recorded in their original condition, in some cases adding a completely new dimension to what had previously been known. Evidence tells us that the people who played one type of pipe were the same people who played the other (north and south of the Border), and though the techniques are different it now seems to me that there was a largely overlapping repertoire between the two, but with some necessary compromises, and also, I believe, a similar style of playing, even allowing for the difference of technique between closed and covered fingering. In the Borders, and probably the Lowlands as a whole, the style was one of variation by melodic embellishment and substitution. This style was of course not limited to bagpipe music but was a significant component of all 17th and 18th century traditional instrumental music. Irish pipers were writing variations into the 19th century, and variation writing still goes on to some extent in the Highland and Northumbrian piping of today. 18th century Highland pipers had a different slant on the matter. Pibroch is a unique example of creating variations by changing the ornaments rather than the tune.

Anyone trying to recapture the old style of Border piping will find that though some mysteries may remain, in a way the old style has never really left us: there has always been a small but significant number of Northumbrian pipers playing the old variation sets on smallpipes, and we now know that some of these same sets go back to 1733, and who knows how much earlier than that? However tenuous it may seem there is, in fact, a continuity of tradition and transmission, and it has taken place south of the Border.

There may be a distinction to be drawn between Lowland and Border piping. Dixon’s book, a record of Border piping, to which some may object that it is in fact the music of the Northumbrian half-long pipes, and therefore ‘Northumbrian’ rather than Border. It cannot at present be proved one way or the other, but my strong feeling, supported by the reams of Scottish fiddle variations I have studied, is that the same style of music was played on both sides of the Border, and the word ‘Border’ as an adjective usefully acknowledges this. It also enables us to dispense with the ugly and near meaningless expression half-long’ (half as long as what?), which has as little to recommend it as ‘cauld-wind’.

The only known comparable records of Lowland piping from the same era as Dixon’s book are in fiddle rather than pipe collections. One of them, the George Skene manuscript, is particularly relevant to our enquiry. Skene was active in Aberdeen but also travelled widely, and was a fiddler and a piper. If we may assume until proven otherwise that the pipe tunes he records are from his own locality, the north-east Lowlands, what do they tell us about his music in relation to Dixon’s music? For a start, none of the tunes overlap, so a direct tune-to-tune comparison of style is not possible. Skene has four tunes actually labelled as pipe tunes...
(or in "Bagpipe humour"), and they are all tunes with variations - two have eight strains, two have ten. Time signatures are absent as with Dixon, but the note values correspond to modern notation rather than to Dixon's old-fashioned double values. The style of the music, however, is essentially the same as Dixon's, but with one reservation: in three of the tunes, all reels, there are passages of what Skene calls 'gatherings', which are clusters of repeated notes of the same pitch. These are clearly what we would describe today as 'birls', and are a common feature of Highland piping as well as of many fiddle styles. It may very well be that the piping round Aberdeen at this time was essentially in the same musical language as in the Borders, but with this different northern 'accent' and some differences of vocabulary, just as in the spoken language. Whether one is a dialect of the other or not depends on your point of view. It is safer to say that they are closely related, with many points in common and some differences.

The fact that Dixon's and Skene's tunes are far more similar to than different from each other in style (if not quality) would suggest to me that the Lowland and Border styles in the early 18th century were fairly homogeneous over a large geographical area, but that there were differences, and the differences can possibly be understood in the light of their relative proximity to Highland styles of playing. Do not forget, we are talking about adjacent parts of a stylistic spectrum, rather than the origin of the styles and their influence on each other, on which it is not safe to speculate without adopting a partisan stance.

If we can agree that Dixon's tunes are actually representative of piping in the Borders and possibly also the Lowlands to a greater or lesser extent, it is still possible to object to their relevance today on the grounds that this is an antiquated style, interesting as 'early music' but divorced from the conditions of its arising. This may be a tempting argument, but anyone who does feel that way will also have to discard much of the repertoire of the Highland Pipes, including all of Pibroch, not to mention Bach, Beethoven, Burns, Bartok, the Beatles and anything else written before this week. If it was any good then it is still good now and will be good in the future.

I commend to members of this Society the repertoire which was written down by William Dixon. It is at present the earliest known substantial record of bagpipe music from anywhere in the British Isles (we have to admit that the French got there earlier), and it is Border bagpipe music. We should, without being arrogant, take pride in the fact that a Border piper, one of our musical ancestors, was far-sighted enough to preserve for us some of the treasures of the tradition when it was in its first flowering. It is my hope that this repertoire will feed a second flowering of this tradition, and that this Society will be the fertile ground in which it will bloom.

HALF LONGB: DEVELOP OR DIE

Denis Dunn is a piper and archivist who has had a life-long involvement with the Northumbrian Smallpipes and Half Longs (debate continues over the difference - if any - between Half Longs and Lowland or Border pipes). Here he reflects on some of the personalities involved with the recent history of these pipes, and speculates on their future. Note; where he mentions Smallpipes in the article Denis is of course referring to the Northumbrian Smallpipes.

Nearly a hundred years ago the old Northumbrian Small Pipe Society died out from Saturday night boozing, and for twenty years or so very few people continued playing the Small pipes and, as far as I know, no-one was playing the Half Longs let alone making new sets.

G.V.B. Charlton was the 4th son of a Newcastle doctor. The family had been established on the North Tyne for several centuries, but G.V. had moved to Northamptonshire where he had a busy practice as a land agent at "Thrapston until his untimely death while on a fishing holiday in Scotland despite emergency surgery. Though never an accomplished player, his love for the North and for piping in particular had remained with him, and he had determined to revive the playing of the Half Longs.

First there had to be some pipes to play, and P/M James Robertson of Edinburgh, already a manufacturer of Highland Pipes, agreed to provide them. There was no definitive historical design to copy, only an assortment of old chanters, drones and bellows belonging to different sets.

In the spring of 1925 there was an historic meeting at Will Cocks' house at Ryton of the team Charlton had collected round him. The decision was taken that the pipe design would be bellows blown, with common stock drones following the Millburn pattern, and
Despite only tepid enthusiasm by various governing bodies - E.R. Thomas, Headmaster of the Grammar School, was an exception - Charlton was able to get Northumberland Half Long pipe bands started with the Fusiliers, the Boy Scouts, the University O.T.C and the Grammar School O.T.C., and it was with the latter that I was introduced to the mystique of piping. In the spring of 1925 it had been arranged for Ed Merrick, a geologist at Armstrong College, to demonstrate the Half Longs and for Vivian Fairburn, a pupil at the school and a protege of Will Cocks', to play the Small pipes at the school assembly. The lead was so impressed he ordered 4 sets as a start for the O.T.C. band.

On the 5th October 1928 the Northumbrian Pipers' Society was formed, meeting at first in the members' houses, for a while at Black Gate, but soon thereafter in the Great Hall of the Castle. Once a month during school term P/M Robertson came down from Edinburgh on a Friday afternoon and taught the pipers of the Grammar School band. In the evening, for an hour before the start of the regular Pipers' Society meeting, he held a further session for anyone who cared to turn up. These were mainly enthusiasts from the School and Boy Scout bands. The fingering technique and the gracing were those of the Highland pipe, as were most of the tunes.

Charlton persuaded several of the nobility and the Musical Tournament to sponsor silver and bronze medals to be competed for at the various village and town shows. Robertson himself presented a silver cup.

Alas the Pipers' Society minutes show that Charlton's enthusiasm and staying power were not matched by that of the various quasi military organisations. So poor was the attendance at the teaching sessions that after a year Robertson's teaching sessions were abandoned. At that time I myself was just starting at Medical School, and for a year I kept attending band practice at the Grammar School; a case of the blind leading the blind if there ever was one. Increasingly my involvement with the Peace Pledge Union conflicted with the O.T.C. and after a year I too gave up the teaching sessions. Exactly when the school band disintegrated does not seem to be recorded. Similarly with the Fusiliers' and Scouts' bands. It seems that Brian Ward's Scout band at Whitley Bay was the longest survivor.

The social and technical upheavals of Hitler's war were the final strokes for all the Half Long bands. Evacuation scattered the young. The "Pipes o' Havelock" (1) had no place in moving troops compared to lorry, coach, tank and parachute drop.

The present position (as seen from Essex).

After the war the playing of the Small pipes expanded rapidly. Both the number of players and quality of performance soared, and new craftsmen took up the demand for instruments, some becoming professionals. The Northumbrian Pipers' Society flourished, though its meeting place had to change several times. Residential instructional weekends and local satellite groups as at Morpeth, Alnwick, Hexham and Cleveland kept enthusiasm alight.

No such resurgence occurred with the Half Longs.

In 1994 the Northumbrian Pipers Society published a very useful list of members from many counties in G.B. and from several foreign countries. Unfortunately whether members were players or not was not recorded.

The Lowland and Border Pipers' Society published a membership directory for the same year along with a note about what pipes each member had and in several cases the pipe maker was named.

229 members were listed and some seventy of these had reported that they had pipes that may have been of Half Long type, e.g Northumbrian (Half Long or Small not specified), Cauldwind, Border, and Lowland. 10 makers were noted, and half a dozen bands.

Why have the Half Longs not had the upsurge in popularity shown to the Small pipes?

1. Loudness
   The Half Longs are really an out-door instrument, quite unsuited to indoor playing except in a large hall.

2. The Chanter Scale
   This is the same as the Highland pipe with several of the notes different
from the mean tone tuning of the modern piano. In particular the very flat leading note is unwelcome to the ear used to mean tone tuning and makes playing with other instruments difficult. Perhaps this is why "Amazing Grace" is so popular with massed Brass and Pipes and Drums. The 7th does not occur.

3. Marching.
   Except for a few ceremonial occasions there is no call for piping for routine marching.

4. Dancing.
   It just doesn't seem to happen except for the occasional New Year's Eve drunken reel.

5. Solo playing.
   Since there is no-one else to play with this is probably the commonest situation. But what a lonely activity with not even the fantastic gracing and timing of the piobroc player to aim at.

What is to be done?

(1) Loudness. Colin Ross tells me that substantially thinning the reeds will allow playing at reduced pressure and so make the pipes quieter.

The timbre of my Highland pipes is much fuller than the Half Longs which are squeaky by comparison. The former has appreciably larger finger holes, but maybe the type of wood is a factor: not to mention the wetter Highland reeds.

The Drones. With the continuous sounding of the bass and treble drones some dissonance is inevitable when any note other than the fundamental is played on the chanter, though less with the Dominant 'E'. The presence of the 'E' drone makes the dissonance a problem greater with tunes played in 'D'. Personally I had never been disturbed by this until my good friend the late Bill Kirton told me of the error of my ways in playing 'D' tunes with the 'E' drone on. He felt so strongly that he kindly turned me a little wooden bung to shut the drone off. To my insensitive hearing it made little difference except for the reduction in noise in the left ear.

How much of this dissonance is in the actual vibrations of the fundamental notes and the harmonics producing "heats", how much it is in the musical ear and how much it is in the theorising mind of the hearer I do not know. "Ears" vary: perhaps mine are very un-discriming.

There is no doubt, however, that the common stock drones have a loudness problem. Sounding alongside the left ear what else can you hear except the chanter? Certainly no other player or singer.

The Bellows. By avoiding the wetting of the reeds that occurs with the mouth-blown pipe, the bellows provide a considerable advantage. Except in very prolonged hot dry weather the reeds remain in good condition however long they are played or lie in the cupboard. Whether this dryness adds to the squeakiness of the pipe I do not know. Bellows are also an advantage during long marches or dancing sessions, particularly for the ageing piper whose lungs are not so strong as in former years or whose teeth no longer can grip the blow pipe firmly.

There is no doubt however that winding the pipe evenly is a little more difficult with bellows contrasted with the mouth blown instrument.

The Music.

   The scope of this is circumscribed by the chanter scale, but could be un-ending as the Highland pipe has shown. The nature of the pipe scale and the loudness of the reeds greatly limits the possibility of playing with other instruments. These points were well illustrated when playing at some protest marches organised against the export of live animals through the little port of Brightlingsea. The marchers progression hampering the lorries was to slow marches which could have gone on indefinitely with the use of the bellows blown pipe. Especially when a "sit down" occurred it seemed appropriate to intersperse the Dirges with a brisk chorus of "We shall over come", but in the third phrase the leading note is unacceptably flat and high '13' is off the chanter altogether. Transposing the phrase to the lower part of the chanter was off-putting to the un-rehearsed singers and the piper could not hear what was going on.

He had of course to laugh off the jibe that piping made the agony of the animals worse. Alas the calves are so cramped in the lorries that they have no room to turn let alone vote with their feet like the rats and children of Hamelin and show whether they hated or loved the music.

Playing Technique.

   Since, in the 1920's there were virtually no Half Long pipes and no pipers, there was no teacher-pupil tradition. Nor does there seem to be any written record. So how should the Half Longs be played? Robertson's teaching was in direct line with the Highland Regimental Band technique, gracing and all. Separated now by half a century from living in Newcastle how can I opine on how the Half Longs should be played? I don't even know how many people actually play them let alone how they are in fact being played. Nor do I know how that technique relates to that of the Border or Lowland pipes. I imagine the days of Highland Pipe fingering and gracing are long gone.

What can be done?

Competitions. One stimulus to more and better playing might be the revival at the District shows of Half Long competitions as are so successful with the Smallpipes. But with no tradition of how the Half Longs should be played nor what tunes are suitable to be played on them how are the judges to judge?

Even more difficult: who is to choose the judges? The long-running controversy over the
judging at Highland piping competitions is not encouraging (2). And even south of the Border there have been doubts (3).

The Smallpipe players seem to have reached the critical temperature and are bursting out with new players, new pipe makers, new local groups and new compositions. How can the Half Long players do likewise?

For a start it would be interesting to know how many of them are under the age of say 25. A few years ago when it was suggested that the Northumbrian Pipers’ Society should revert to the last century name ”The Northumbrian Small Pipers Society” there were enough voices raised in protest to get the proposal dropped.

Our problem could be tackled from two directions.

First the pipes could remain as they are and the playing technique altered. The range of the chanter can be extended upwards by "overblowing" (and/or pinching the upper note); But what does that do to the drones? (Colin Ross says nothing except possibly momentarily). The pitch of the present notes can be altered by cross-fingering as illustrated by Agnew, Ross et al. But can such dexterity be kept up at speed and controlled by the ear of the average player?

The second approach involves developing the actual pipes, by adding keys (Greensitt, Richard, Ross, Swain a few I know of); relocating the finger holes to produce a mean tone scale (actually in ‘A’?); altering the size of the holes to give a fuller sound and thinning the reeds to make the pipes softer.

The tenor drone could have a tuning ring to alter the note from ‘E’ to ‘D’ at the touch of a finger of the right hand without even stopping playing, and it could have a valve at the top to shut it off completely.

By either of these means or possibly by a combination it would be possible to play a far greater number of traditional and new Northumbrian tunes and to play them alongside other instruments.

What we need is a latter day Charlton to enthuse the revolution.

Or would G.V., steeped in Northumbrian tradition, turn in his grave?

REFERENCES
(1) Pipes at Lucknow; John Greenleaf Whittier
(2) Editorial in ‘Piping Times’ Vol 47 No.8 May 1995
Of the original information available to me at the time, the original Cocks drawings constructions for making the reeds are given below. For those interested, precise dimensions and untrue for other chanter designs; I have tried without success to make good plastic in tone to a good plastic one, but there is very little in it. This does not necessarily hold beginners to cope with. On my pipes, I believe a good cane reed is slightly superior definitely, and since they need virtually no maintenance, are much easier for can be made in five minutes) and durability. Correctly treated they seem to last indefinitely, and since they need virtually no maintenance, are much easier for beginners to cope with. On my pipes, I believe a good cane reed is slightly superior in tone to a good plastic one, but there is very little in it. This does not necessarily hold true for other chanter designs; I have tried without success to make good plastic reeds for my previous chanters. For those interested, precise dimensions and instructions for making the reeds are given below.

Pitch. Most originals seem to be pitched around A or B flat. I decided to go for G, since in general this is a more useful pitch for playing with other instruments, and the early English pipes I was already making were in G. D would be even better from the point of view of compatibility, but this implies either a very small or very large chanter, and was to come later.

Chanter Reed. When making a new pipe, do you start with the chanter or the reed? It’s a bit ‘chicken and egg’, since clearly you can’t think of them in isolation. I considered Highland pipe reeds, but although there are obvious advantages in having such things easily available over the counter, I suspected they would be too hearty for the type of sound I was after. On the other hand, because I didn’t want to have to make staples. I had decided to work with modified modern oboe staples. In making a few sketches of reed configurations a staple length of about 30mm (1 1/8”) looked about right, the larger end of which measures about 4mm (5/32) internally. This decided the diameter of the chanter throat. The actual reed design is rather a simple one, compared with the reeds I had hitherto been making for the ‘historical’ bagpipes. At first I used cane, but later went over to plastic. The reasons for this were ease of manufacture (with practice a reed can be made in five minutes) and durability. Correctly treated they seem to last indefinitely, and since they need virtually no maintenance, are much easier for beginners to cope with. On my pipes, I believe a good cane reed is slightly superior in tone to a good plastic one, but there is very little in it. This does not necessarily hold true for other chanter designs; I have tried without success to make good plastic reeds for my previous chanters. For those interested, precise dimensions and instructions for making the reeds are given below.

Chanter. Of the original information available to me at the time, the original Cocks drawings looked the most suitable for scaling to G, but the details are to say the least sketchy. The main points to decide are: speaking length (bottom of reed socket to foot), bore shape, throat diameter, wall-thickness, and disposition of finger- and vent-holes.

Speaking length; this would be decided by experiment, starting with a model of the Cocks drawing.

Bore shape; I already had experience of using a taper of 30:1 and felt this was about right for the quality and loudness I was after; it was also a reasonably close match to the taper shown on the drawing. I later modified it slightly to 33:1. For simplicity I decided to try for a straight cone if possible.

Throat diameter; this was already decided at 4mm.

Speaking length and wall thickness would be determined initially by the drawing. I made a version of the Cocks chanter, and fiddled with the reed and hole sizes until the scale was reasonably in tune. This gave a starting pitch, which I can’t remember, but I had to scale it down somewhat to get a 6 finger G. (A useful scaling tool derives from a method of finding pitches in equal temperament. See note below.)

The result was a chanter which played a major scale in G with reasonable stability, but overblowing and chromatic possibilities left a lot to be desired. Various prototypes were made, lay around in corners of the workshop over several years, and would be taken up and put down in odd moments as fresh ideas arose. I didn’t really make any progress until I started playing around with the part of the bore below the lowest fingerhole (which for simplicity I will from now on call the ‘bell’).

When bell ventholes are referred to in books on wind instruments, they are usually described as affecting the harmonic spectrum, especially of the lower notes. They also have the function of equalising the tone of the lowest note, which would otherwise speak only through the open end. Normally the pitch issuing from a tonehole can be raised either by enlarging the hole, or by moving it up the bore. That the behaviour of a vented bell is not at all simple, I began to realise from the observation that if you have a chanter on which the 6-finger note (tonic) is a little sharp, you can flatten it by reducing the size of the lowest fingerhole; you can also flatten it by increasing the size of the ventholes, a result which is counter-intuitive. Conversely, reducing the size of the ventholes sharpens the tonic. (The sub-tonic will be sharpened and flattened respectively, which is what you would expect, and may not be what you want, but that is another question.) On the other hand, it remains true that moving the ventholes upwards tends to sharpen the lowest notes, and vice versa. The importance of the bell was confirmed when it occurred to me to insert a paper tube into the open end. A whole range of effects can be observed, from simple adjustment of the tuning of the lowest notes, to more complex ones such as the accuracy of cross-fingerings, ease of overblowing, tuning of the second register, stability of the tonic, and so on. Shown
diagrammatically and grossly simplified, the three different arrangements shown below may give the same basic chanter pitch, but the performance will be totally different.

In short, the length of the bell and the position and size of the ventholes appeared to be crucial, and getting the proportions right solved many problems of overblowing and tuning.

Optimising the wall thickness took some experimentation too. Too thin a wall seemed to adversely affect stability, but an over thick wall affected good overblowing. An important point, but easy to overlook, is that unless the bore is straight i.e. the drill does not wander when boring, the wall thickness will vary around the circumference of the tube. Other factors had also to be optimised, such as general fingerhole positions and sizes, and reed shape and dimensions.

In this way I eventually reached a point where I thought I had the basis of a useable instrument. The finger chart shows the functional performance of the chanter. I found it impossible to get a good minor third (B flat), so borrowed from the practice of pipemakers of Central France the idea for a hole for the thumb of the lower hand. A fingering not shown is the following, which usually gives a good G sharp.

Drones.
I offer various drone formats, including bass and two octave drones, bass octave and high fifth, and bass octave and double octave. A drone at the fifth can sound impressive with 5- or 6-finger tonic tunes, but tends to interfere with 3-finger tonic tunes, especially so if the fifth lies between the bass and octave drones. A high fifth can be made quiet enough that it does not overly interfere with 3-finger tonic tunes, but then it is hardly louder than the third harmonic of the bass drone. A switch or plug can solve the question of interference, but you still can’t mix 3- and 6-finger tunes in a sequence, in addition to which you are left with only two drones. For this reason, and because of the added richness which it gives, I prefer the double octave as the third drone.

The question of drone/chanter balance is another matter of taste. Mainly it seems to be a question of balancing the needs of the listener against those of the player. Drones which are well balanced to the listener can be tiringly loud for the player. The actual loudness of the drones is easily adjusted by choosing a suitable bore diameter/length. As far as drone reeds are concerned, provided that the diameter of the bore is not too large in relation to its length, and provided that they are properly set and adjusted, reeds with a brass or plastic tongue on a wood or plastic body are very satisfactory, plastic being much easier to set up than brass. Drone stability assumes even greater importance with an overblowing chanter, in that the drones must not change pitch when pressure is increased to go over the octave. If the drone diameter/length is correct, stability is relatively easy to achieve for a wide pressure range by reed adjustment.

A switch to turn off all the drones, an idea borrowed from the Irish Union pipes, is useful if you want to play with a harmonised accompaniment from keyboard or accordion, for example.

Appearance.
Rather than base the exterior design on one existing original, I decided to combine various features which I found attractive in several different instruments, including pastoral pipes, and generally to make the instrument as light and compact as possible. The sketches below show typical turning details, the top and bottom of a chanter above, and two styles of drone end below.
Materials. On the whole I prefer to use indigenous woods if possible, and of these I find plywood to be the best from the point of view of tone and appearance. Boxwood of course is superb, but I tend not to regard it as an ‘everyday’ wood for bagpipes for a variety of reasons, amongst them expense, problems of seasoning and warping and of getting in good quality in long enough lengths. I have also occasionally used ebony for a really bright sound, but it makes a heavy instrument, and you have to be careful of splitting where the tube wall is thin. I see no reason to use African Blackwood, fine wood though it is. It makes an even heavier instrument, and I feel the sound has less life than ebony.

My ‘standard’ design uses brass ferrules in structurally exposed places such as the ends of sockets, with plastic artificial ivory on the ends of the drones and top and bottom of the chanter. There are various substitutes on the market, but generally I use GPS which is a lot less fragile than it used to be. An attractive veined variety comes from France (intended for cutlery handles). Recently I used it on a set in boxwood which was to be stained with nitric acid. Not having tested it first I found that the acid attacked the plastic, causing the surface to soften and bubble up; fortunately I was able to rescue the situation before it had gone too far.

Makers beware!

I also like using black horn, both as a reinforcement and as decoration (i.e. no brass), but except for buffalo horn where you can only use the first few inches of the tip before it begins to flatten off, good black ox horn is now very hard to get. I understand that African sources are drying up because growth hormones are increasingly used, resulting in animals coming to slaughter weight before having had time to grow decent horns. How long before hornless cattle are the rule?

Developments.
Since the original design in ‘G’ I have extended the range to include the pitches upwards of ‘A’. ‘Bb’ and ‘C’ (I have tried a ‘D’ but it doesn’t work very well yet), and downwards ‘F’, ‘D’ and ‘C’. On the two latter largest sizes, I have compressed the physical length of the bass drone by triple boring the first section, which makes the instrument more convenient to manage.

Some while ago I introduced a simplified, single (bass) drone, mouth-blown model for beginners, using exactly the same acoustic design for the chanter. More recently I added an intermediate design with two drones, also usually mouth-blown.

The vast majority of the full sets ordered are bellows-blown, but occasionally I am asked for mouth-blown versions, and see no reason not to comply with this request. Mouth-blown versions need slightly more maintenance, and moisture condensing on the reeds can cause problems in extremely cold conditions, but otherwise the performance is not affected.

General Observations.
On the whole the tone quality is clear, clean, expressive and loud enough for most purposes without being overpowering indoors. It is relatively easy to reed, and there are no real ‘problem’ notes. The extended range and chromatic possibilities widen considerably the scope of the music which can be played, and the chanter will accommodate quite a wide range of styles. An effective and tasteful vibrato can be found for most notes if required. On the other hand there are many Highland pipe gracings which it does not like, but then it was not intended to. That problem has been addressed by the development of a new Lowland Bagpipe design which uses a Highland scale of fingering, but that is another story......

Note on ‘Scaling’.
It hardly needs saying that the pitch of a woodwind instrument is directly related to the length of its bore. Frequency doubles at the octave, so broadly speaking, halving the length of the tube doubles the frequency of the note it gives. For small length changes, you can divide the length of the known tube by the frequency (Hz) of its pitch and multiply by the new frequency to get the new length. This is OK if you have a frequency counter plus microphone and probably an amplifier. On the face of it, electronic tuners are not much help directly, because they give a readout in pitch (relative to equal temperament) which is much more useful musically than frequency. Of course you could convert the pitch reading to frequency. Equal temperament means 12 equal semi-tones per octave, each semi-tone being further divided into 100 cents. Since frequency doubles at the octave, to find the pitch of a note one semi-tone above the pitch of a known note, the multiplier is \(2^{\frac{1}{12}}\), otherwise written as \(2^{\frac{1}{12}}\) (in words, “two to the power of one over twelve”) which is more easily handled on a pocket calculator. No, I don’t really understand any of it either, but it works. So A 440 Hz x \(2^{\frac{1}{12}}\) = A# 466Hz. Since there are 1200 cents per octave, smaller intervals can be handled by

But since length is directly related to frequency, there is no need to go through the conversion. You can use the same multiplier (or divisor) on the length. Suppose you have made a prototype chanter, speaking length 350mm, and find your tuner tells you that it plays 45 cents flat of A440. \(350/2^{\frac{1}{12}}\) = 341 = new length. The same calculation can then be applied to the position of each tone hole and the ventholes. Strictly speaking the reed/staple length should be adjusted as well, but the amount will be small. For a reed/staple length of 45mm, the new length will be 43.8mm. This seems to work quite well for small intervals, but the bigger the interval, the more that other factors come into play which will disturb the usefulness of the result.

SEE OVER FOR FINGER CHART
PLASTIC CHANTER REEDS.

Notes on making plastic chanter reeds; these were developed for the bagpipes which I make. They would not necessarily suit a chanter of different design. The methods and principles may be useful for other designs, and the dimensions can be changed as appropriate. The dimensions given here are for a chanter in 'G'.

TOOLS:
Scissors.
Mandrel; made from a piece of 6mm trol steel about 150mm long; turn one end to a taper to fit inside of staple; file tapering 'flats' 20mm long symmetrically on opposing sides of the tip, ending up with a slightly ovalised shape to the tip, the minor axis measuring about 1mm. See sketch.
Small vice.
Sharp knife; (e.g. Stanley).
Long-nose pliers; preferably with flat smooth jaws.
Small hard wood block; with very smooth surface; the ideal is end-grain box, 50mm diameter, 25mm thick.
(Reed blade shaping tool; see note below).

MATERIALS:
Plastic pot for the reed blades: I use Safeway Fromage Frais, 500gm size (see note below). This measures about 85mm high, by 95mm diameter at the bottom and 110mm diameter at the top. Diameter is important because it controls the degree of opening of the lips of reed. Thickness is between 0.30 and 0.35mm. Food pots range from very soft to quite brittle. Choosing one from the middle of the range, tending towards soft is probably best. Prepare the pot by slicing off the bottom by cutting with the knife round the bottom corner; take off the top moulding in the same way. Make a single cut from top to bottom with scissors so as to open the cylinder. Again with scissors cut about 13mm from the bottom edge where the material is too thick to be useful. Then reduce the width of the remaining material to 35mm by cutting a strip from the top end. From this cut blanks about 25mm wide. You should have now a dozen or so blanks. Make a note at this stage which ends come from the upper part of the pot, and which from the lower. The upper will be at the tip end of the reed.

Staples; standard oboe staples, cork removed and reduced in length to 31mm by cutting off the wide end. See note.

Dental tape: (the wide kind of floss).
PTFE tape: (white plumber’s tape).

METHOD:
1. Prepare a staple by placing it on the mandrel. Flatten the end to conform to the
flats filed on the mandrel by squeezing between the jaws of long-nose, smooth-jaw pliers. You can form a nice 'eye' with a burnisher (or any smooth steel rod) by stroking towards the tip.

2. Take a plastic blank, and cut it down the centre along the length, making two blanks. Cut each one to exactly the same trapezoidal shape, 10mm wide at the lip end and 3.5mm at the other, 35mm long. If you are making a lot of reeds, a shaping guide is useful. See note below.

3. Temporarily bind the blades together (concave surfaces facing) with a few turns of thread, or you can use a small square of 19mm masking tape folded across the tips (wide end).

4. Position the vice on right hand end of the bench (if you are right handed), or if it is a swivel vice, place it anywhere but angle it at 45 degrees; this is so that your hand does not hit the bench when winding on the thread. Place the mandrel in the vice, with flats above and below.

5. Place a prepared staple onto the mandrel, and slip the blades onto the staple. Secure them with a clove hitch round the tails without cutting off the thread. Adjust the position of the blades on the staple so that the tails are 12mm from the large end of the staple. Bind with firm, close turns of thread so that the edge of the last turn comes 34mm from the large end of the staple. Make the last turn a half hitch. Wind back to the start with two or three wide turns and finish off with two half hitches.

Wind thread onto the bare end of the staple to suit the reed socket in the chanter. Start from the bottom of the blades, trapping the end of the thread with the first few turns, wind to within 0.5mm of the end; back to the start with one turn, then close turns for two thirds of the way to the open end, back again to the start in one turn, then back in close turns for one third and finish with a half hitch.

6. Remove the mandrel from the vice. Cover the binding with a few turns of PTFE tape. Start from above the socket binding, work diagonally towards the top; make a couple of turns there, just covering the end of the binding, then return to the start, pull the tape to break it, and rub it down with the fingers.

7. It is necessary to give the blades a little more arch in the throat area. Do this by squeezing across the width in the middle of the binding; a fair amount of force is required and the plastic will bend quite dramatically; the sides of the blade will open slightly. Then squeeze in the opposite direction to restore the shape of the reed. The sides should be closed, but there should be a visibly greater curve in the centre of the blades above the binding. This area can be closed further (or opened) by gentle pressure to adjust the response later on.

8. The reed is finished by scraping with a very sharp knife. A new heavy duty Stanley knife is adequate, though a slightly curved (convex) blade is better as it can be used more selectively. First trim any excess off the tip by reducing the overall length of the reed/staple to 10mm; lay the reed flat on the cutting block and make a vertical cut over the whole width of the tip at once.

The degree of scraping required depends entirely upon the quality and thickness of the plastic, and the required response. Safeway's current formulation of plastic needs very little work. It is impossible to say how many scraping strokes should be made, because it depends upon how much material is removed at each stroke. Don't try to remove too much at each stroke. Attempt a mean between skating over the surface and digging in.

The objective is to produce a slight taper in the thickness of the blades from the binding to the tip. Start with 5 or 6 strokes from just above the binding towards the tip. The scrape will be mainly in the centre of the blade at the binding, but across width at the tip. Work progressively towards the tip, finally working on the last 2-3mm. Continue until tuning, response and sound quality is correct. It may be necessary to raise the pitch of the reed by clipping the tip. Don't take off more than about 0.25mm at once. If you reduce the length of the reed too much, the upper octave (the B natural is especially noticeable) will become sharp. Remember that you can also alter the response of the reed at this point, by adjustments in the degree of opening at the top of the binding. Most often the reed will need closing here, which reduces playing pressure, and improves overblowing. It can also make low G more pressure sensitive, but this can be rectified by further scraping.

8. 500 grit silicon carbide paper is useful for refining the tips of the blades. Hold the staple between thumb and fourth finger. Pressing the tips of the blades onto the paper with the tip of the index finger. Aim to treat only the last 3mm or so. Adjust downward pressure and the amount by which the end of the staples is raised accordingly.

NOTES

BLADE SHAPING GUIDE:
Take a pair of long-nose pliers. Grind out between the jaws to take a piece of metal with the same dimensions as the reed blades (but slightly longer at the wide end), and having the same curvature. Braze one piece to each jaw (curves matching rather than opposing), in such a position that when the pliers are closed, a plastic blank is held firmly overall. A sharp blade along the edge of the metal inserts then cuts the blank to shape.

STAPLES:
I get mine in bulk, to size, from Guercio, Wombachgerstr 65, 97816 Lohr-Wombach, Germany. They will supply standard sizes or make any size to order.

POTS:
Since these notes were written, Safeways have changed their Fromage Frais pots (the bastards!), however their current Creme Fraiche pots appear to be the same as the original Fromage Frais pots.

REEDS FOR CHANTERS IN A
1. Staple length, 30mm.
2. Distance from large end of staple to blade tails, 11 mm.
3. Finished blade length will be slightly less.
Concerning the conical bore LOWLAND PIPES here are some of my comments.

1. **Overblowing.** If the chanters are in 'A' or 'G' sharp or 'G' then overblowing is not too difficult on one or two notes above the thumb hole, but the Bb chanter is too high a pitch to do it comfortably. This also depends on the reeding which should be light i.e. 15" water pressure as with the small pipes or any of the bellows blown pipes for that matter.

2. **Versatility.** If by this we mean being able to play in other keys or obtain half tones then the maker should look to the diameter of the finger holes. These should be of the optimum size to allow for cross-fingering, as in the recorder, that gives a true half note where required. That particularly applies to the top G which can sound natural or sharp with the present hole position if the relevant holes are small enough to allow for cross fingering and yet still large enough to give good tone. The same applies for the minor third C nat in A.

3. **Noise level.** If you are intent on playing with the opportunity to overblow and also cross fingering then as I have said the playing pressure would be at 15" water level which tends to produce a warm rich but relatively sweet sound. If you wish to be as loud as possible then a harder REED must be used which would forgo the previously mentioned facilities to a large extent.

4. **Pitch.** I have mentioned as preferably being lower than Bb and the range to be extended by overblowing. However a top B being played with the pinkie of the left hand is a useful addition. For other key work the chanter becomes a different instrument and should be called a "keyed shawm" as it is no longer a Lowland Chanter in the same way that the "Brian Boru" chanter is not a Highland chanter.

5. **Future Prospects.** I think that the present degree of proficiency in making a reliable instrument is not sufficient to endear it to many pipers but given that the reeding, once dimensions and hole spacings on the chanter can be properly resolved then it may stand a chance. Even if that was accomplished it is still a little too loud for playing indoors without annoying the neighbours, family or cat, to be widely taken up. However if it was to be used by dancers as an accompaniment or to be considered as a band instrument it might become more used, but it will be a very long time before it overtakes the small pipes.

6. **Making.** Compared to the small pipes it is more difficult to make because of its size and mainly because of the difficulty in making the reamer for the chanter and then the actual process of reaming out the chanter.

The bag and bellows are no more difficult to make than for other bellows blown pipes.
7. Materials. Despite the voices of doom concerning the unavailability of black wood etc in the future, there is still enough around of one sort or another including our own native woods such as laburnum, box, walnut etc, to make the pipes which do not require the dense wood essential in small pipe making. The mounts and ferrules are easily available in many different materials.

8. The Drone arrangement. The traditional 2 tenor and one bass drone system for the Highland pipes may not be obligatory when it comes to the Lowland pipes. The Northumbrian half-long mistakenly had a tenor, baritone, bass arrangement (a,A) when they were revived in the 1920s, when it should have been alto, tenor, bass (e a A) which is commonly found on old examples of the pipes.

Maybe there is room for future development there with double bass drones (as with the Irish pipes) or multiple configurations that can be switched off and on at will (as with the Northumbrian small pipes). These drones could then perhaps have regulators added, and with a fully keyed chanter (or double chanter) become at last the fully fledged Cold Wind pipes.

HAMISH MOORE WRITES:-

CONICAL BORE CHANTERS

They are difficult to make, difficult to reed and difficult to play, and these are probably the reasons why they have not become as popular as the smallpipes.

My aim is to produce a chanter that is as quiet and as "sweet" sounding as possible and these two qualities are almost entirely dependent on the reed. If a Highland chanter reed is to be used then my advice would be to use the best quality reed available. A good Border reed will never be obtained from a poor quality highland reed nor one which has already been mouth blown for some time.

ROBBIE GREENSITT WRITES:-

REEDS FOR CONICAL-BORE (BORDER PIPE) CHANTERS

I have found the chanter reed to have a considerable effect on the chanter. The same chanter will behave differently with different reeds, and the same reed will have the same effect on different chanters. The allegedly "Northumbrian" chanters with a sharp seventh are no different from a "Lowland" chanter with a flat seventh. My chanters were made with the use of Glen's tools dating from the mid-1800s. Depending on the reed, they played a flat seventh with both normal and alternate fingering, or a sharp seventh with normal and a sharp seventh with alternate fingering. I found that this also applied to other chanters, Scottish and Northumbrian, of traditional style.

Other individual notes could vary considerably in pitch depending on the reed. I have heard similar comments from Highland pipe reed makers.

I have found that a strong reed gives high 'B' more easily than a soft reed does; no increase in pressure should be required. Soft reeds tend to burble on the low notes.

There are a lot of arguments about drone reeds. As long as they are stable and reliable and you like the sound they make in your drones, that is all that matters.

As far as the Lowland/Northumbrian pipes are concerned, I am a traditionalist. If you are not going to play Scottish/Northumbrian tunes in a style appropriate to the tradition, then these pipes are not for you.

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GORDON MOONEY WRITES:-

OVERBLOWING: In theory this is possible but I have found that the overblown notes are not quite true i.e. they are flat in pitch. There is also the problem in stability as to get the overblown note you need a soft reed and this causes lower notes to be unstable and also squeaks and squeals occur unpredictably. I am of course talking about a chanter without keys and using either half holing on the back thumb hole (shiverin the back lilt) (literally in Scots shive= to halve, lilt = finger hole/note).

All in all it is better to have a keyed note, and a stronger reed to get the upper notes. The note is in tune, the note is reliable and the chanter performs well.

VERSATILITY: Bagpipes are not versatile instruments, but the conical chanter has some advantages over the parallel. Some chanters can produce 'almost ' a chromatic range, certainly some extra notes and vibrato and slides are more effective. In a loud session they are good, but balance with most other instruments is a problem. With a band you find that the pipes need hardly any PA while the other instruments need a lot.

SOUND LEVEL: A lot of people are turned off by bagpipes, especially the raw sawedged Scottish type. It is important to get the right level and sound quality from the instrument. The drones should be mellow and the chanter extremely well in tune.

I spent a lot of time with a tuner and went through a lot of reeds to find a nice sound. It is mostly in the reeds and not in the kinds of woods etc (but that does have some effect).
You presumably have some examples of these pipes in your collection?

Alan: Yes; several. All hold a particular interest. Of the two made by Colin Ross, there is a tendency to be too loud, drone bores too big etc.

Jock: Where did you get this old set?

Alan: From a pipe band drummer in Canada in the early 1980s, who in turn had found them in a second-hand shop in southern Ontario. When first put back into playing condition by American pipemaker David Quinn, it played close to B, but Colin (Ross) later fitted an extension bush in the chanter so that it would take a more standard reed, and it now plays in Bb.

Jock: Do you think there is a difference between Border and Half Long pipes?

Alan: Yes. The pipes with the conical bore chanters I have always personally referred to as Border or Half Long pipes. I tend to use ‘Lowland’ as a way of describing the group of pipes which includes both the conically bored Border/Half Long pipes AND the cylindrically bored Scottish Smallpipes. However, I am aware that there is not an overall common consensus on this matter concerning organological designation of these instruments.

Jock: You use the word “Border” rather than “Lowland” to describe these pipes.

Alan: Yes. The pipes with the conical bore chanters I have always personally referred to as Border or Half Long pipes. I tend to use ‘Lowland’ as a way of describing the group of pipes which includes both the conically bored Border/Half Long pipes AND the cylindrically bored Scottish Smallpipes. However, I am aware that there is not an overall common consensus on this matter concerning organological designation of these instruments.

Jock: Do you think there is a difference between Border and Half Long pipes?

Alan: I used to think that Border pipes from north of the Border had the drone arrangement of A a a, whilst the Northumbrian Half Longs had one of its 3 drones tuned to 5th - be it a high or middle 5th - but I have heard a number of differing opinions on this subject also. I understand that most old (18th & 19th century) sets of these pipes that do in fact incorporate a 5th drone, are to be found with a high,
dock: What sort of drone reeds do you favour in your Border pipes?

Alan: I like composite reeds for the drones i.e. metal body cane tongue or metal body plastic tongue. My own experience in Border pipes is that they seem to be more stable than cane reeds. In contrast, it could also be said that getting absolutely the correct sized airtight cane reed can also result in a more stable drone. Stability is certainly more important to me than the difference in tone between cane and composite reeds, for if you have stable drones you will certainly sound more musical, and greater enjoyment will be found in playing a stable set of pipes. Also important is the amount of air needed to keep the pipes going. Border pipes can sometimes take a fair amount of air. I personally prefer to have an efficient and good sized bellows to supply a good volume of air with each stroke - as it also makes it much easier to keep the pipes stable, control the instrument in tune, and regulate a constant playing pressure. As for chanter reeds, cane is still the preferred material for most pipes; although research and experimentation does continue with various plastics. I have tried plastic chanter reeds, in search of greater reed stability with changes of temperature and humidity, but so far, have not achieved full satisfaction with them.

Jock: Is there much interest in North America for these Border pipes?

Alan: There is a definite interest, but I am only personally aware of 3 or 4 other persons who actually possess and play Border pipes. If I may be allowed to use a North American expression, they certainly seem to require more "TLC" i.e. "tender loving care" than a smallpipe, but the single most important contributing factor to the small number of players is the difficulty in obtaining a set. There are one or two makers now offering Border pipes, but nowhere near the same availability as smallpipes. I am not aware of any North American pipemaker who is seriously producing Border pipes.

Jock: Is part of the attraction of smallpipes that they mix nicely with other instruments?

Alan: In some cases that may be so, but from personal practical experience, I have found that the fiddle goes particularly well with the Border pipe and fiddlers really like the instrument's comparable volume. I like the extra "edge" and volume that one can get with the Border pipe.

Jock: Your pipes are appropriately on display in Galashiels, in the Scottish Borders right now. What next?

Alan: An exhibition in Brittany, an exhibition in Wales in 1996, and possible potential exhibitions in both Italy and northern Scotland next year.

As a prime home base, and without labouring a point about the more favourable British climate, for the general well being of the collection it is my intention to keep them in the U.K. for the foreseeable future.
THE BERWICKSHIRE COMPETITION

The 3rd Berwickshire competition took place in the British Legion hall at Duns on the afternoon of Saturday 24th June, when the attendance was somewhat poor. Perhaps the date coinciding with the Rugby World Cup Final may have had something to do with this.

As usual the event was arranged by Jim Eaton and sponsored by the Berwickshire District Arts Council with prizes in all the six classes being played for. Davie Robertson from Longniddry won the Pipes and Song, and also won the Scottish Smallpipes Grade II, with Brian Rumble from Dundee coming second. David Stevenson from Edinburgh won the Scottish Smallpipes Grade I, and the class for Any Other Bagpipe, playing his Great English pipes. Gordon Mooney from Lauder won the Great Lowland/Border Bagpipe, and also the duet for Pipes and Other Instrument, along with his wife Barbara playing the Flute.

The Competition was highly honoured with the presence of the eminent Scottish pianist and composer, Ronald Stevenson, who very kindly gave a short talk at the conclusion of the afternoon. It is a great pity there were not more pipers in attendance to hear what he had to say. He has long taken an interest in piping and pipe music, and indeed a few years back did a series of broadcasts on the MacCrignon of Skye for the BBC. He felt that our whole movement was not only about revival, but also conservation, and quoted Sir Thomas Beecham stating that although there was plenty going on in the modern concert hall, he didn't hear very many tunes there. Mr. Stevenson said that, unlike Sir Thomas, he was pleased to have heard an abundance of tunes this afternoon - and also some quality playing. This small Competition in Duns had been for him "like a breath of fresh air". He was then asked to present the prizes.
REVIEW

Hamish Moore
Stepping on the Bridge (Dannsa' air an Drochaid)
Greentrax cdtrax 073

I had not heard of Cape Breton and its music until Hamish Moore told me. He had a tape of two elderly pipers. It was not of broadcast quality. He played it to us at the Lowland and Border meeting in Hammersmith in 1993. This is the most important music you will ever hear in your life, he said.

You would not guess this from the contents of most record stores. Normally they have nothing at all from Cape Breton; just occasionally you might find something hopefully filed under ‘World; France’. You can however get Cape Breton music from Dave Mallinson’s mail order business (01274 879768), or at any rate you could the last time I asked, and there is a helpful man, believe it or not, at HMV in Oxford Street.

By the next time I saw Hamish I had listened to some and was inclined to think he was right about it being the most important music you might ever hear. I told him about an amazing Cape Breton fiddle-player I had discovered, called Jerry Holland. He’s on my next record, he said, with a hint of smugness.

This is the next record in question. It was released last year and, at the risk of spoiling the suspense, I had better say it has spent more time on the machine than anything else since. I have cannibalised its tunes in the most unlikely places and formats and I think it is the most purely enjoyable record he has made.

And not entirely because he has made a record of Cape Breton music, because he hasn’t, entirely.

In the notes he quotes Maire O’Keefe: “The first time I came to Cape Breton, I thought I’d die and arrived in heaven.” Indeed, the whole Cape Breton business is up to here with arcadian overtones, especially for those of us who, unlike him, have never been there and will probably never do so. It is easy to project your particular fantasies and prejudices onto it. Here are two, first a fantasy and then a prejudice.

Fantasy: It is the place where everyone plays the fiddle, there’s a session in every back room and music in the streets.

Prejudice: Because Cape Breton was settled by Scottish fishermen before the time of the Clearances, bringing with them the Gaelic language and their dance music, it is a direct line to the real music, the great tradition which was destroyed forever when the English army got its hands on the pipes and the price for giving them back was the assault course in pedantry we have all grown to know and love.

Cape Breton music is fast. Jigs and reels are taken at Irish speeds and there is no room for the more elaborate gracing; it is inflected only enough to keep the notes apart. Nearly always fiddles are involved; occasionally Highland pipes. Some of the fiddle-players indulge in quite recklessly relative tonality, which is of course not possible on the pipes.

The music is also highly rhythmical, most tunes being accompanied by percussive piano, often on the off-beat. It’s relentless and sometimes so wild it’s as frightening as a force of nature; listen for example to the massed fiddles on the final track of the ‘Nimbus record ‘Traditional Music from Cape Breton’ (NNI 5383).

Which brings us to the first interesting thing about ‘Dannsa’ air an Drochaid’. The small pipes are not a force of nature, and rarely frightening. Indeed the small pipes are not generally found in Cape Breton music at all. Just as he (and others) did with the small pipes and Scottish music, Hamish Moore is to an extent inventing a tradition. Where this is particularly fascinating is with strathspeys. One of the standard ploys in the music is to build tension up with strathspeys and resolve it into fast reels. This works beautifully with fiddles, where the bowing lends itself to the strathspeys’ repressed dotted crotchets, but it nearly always falls apart on the wind instruments, including the Highland pipes on which it is of course often rashly attempted. One of the glories of this record is how Hamish Moore invents a way of playing strathspeys on the pipes. I wish I knew how he did it.

The second interesting thing is that Hamish Moore is not a force of nature either. There is always a canny knowing quality about his playing which is very much at odds with the straight-ahead nature of most Cape Breton music. You always feel that part of him is sitting to one side watching. He is the Sonny Rollins of Scottish music (if a multicultural reference may be permitted in what is after all a specialist publication), not the John Coltrane.

The tunes, apart from one set of modern reels, are traditional Scottish jigs, reels, hornpipes, strathspeys and airs played in Cape Breton; few of them session standards this side of the Atlantic; no duds. If you have the opportunity to dip in, and no more, play tracks 10 and 11, a set of marches culminating in the intriguingly melancholy ‘The Boy’s Farewell to his Dragon’ followed by a killer set of slip jigs, none of them bearing any resemblance to ‘Drops of Brandy’.

What else can I say? This is one of the great records.

Robin Bynoe
Meetings and Events

Friday 26th January, Tron Bar. LBPS BURNS SUPPER. Contact Jim Gilchrist 0131 6698235

Saturday 17th February. Pitlochry. Teaching Pipers to Dance.

March (date to be advised). Hugh Cheape on The Duncan Fraser Collection. National Museum of Antiquities.

Glasgow. Date to be advised. Ian MacDonald and his Shuttle Pipes.


EDINBURGH Sessions 1st Tuesday each month. Tron Bar 8.30 pm Contact Nigel Richard Tel.

MIDLANDS first Tuesday of each month. Start about 7.30 pm and finish 10 pm. Contact Don Ward 0121 472 1555

LONDON 3rd Friday of every second month (except July). From about 8 pm to 10 pm. Contact Jock Agnew 01621 855447

ITALY The Willy Clancy Cultural Association organises events like sessions, concerts, workshops. Contact Fabio Rinaldo, Via Crispi 7A/13, 17100 Savona. Tel 39 10 826359

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