

Piping Conference

The eagerly awaited conference on piping organised by the Piobaireachd Society was held from March 17th to March 19th at Minard Castle, Argyll. The response to the project was excellent, and approximately 40 people gathered on Friday evening for an informal dinner to mark the start of the proceedings. This was specially gratifying since several other piping functions were taking place that weekend—notably the professional contest organised by the Edinburgh Police pipe band. Several pipers came from the south of England and all parts of Scotland were well represented.

After a warm welcome by Mr. Alasdair Anderson, president of the Piobaireachd Society, a most enjoyable piping ceilidh was held in the large room which was to be devoted to the proceedings of the conference.

Minard Castle Hotel was particularly appropriate for this meeting, and the facilities it offered were quite ideal. Often it is said that the best value of such get-togethers comes from the casual discussions which take place between formal sessions. Apart from the bar, there were innumerable rooms, corners and points of vantage where arguments could be elaborated and discussions continued at length and in depth.

The principal performers at the Friday night ceilidh were Captain John MacLellan who played "The Lament for the Children" and Colonel Neil Ramsay who chose as his piece "The Earl of Seaforth's Salute". Piping continued till all hours, and most of those present claimed afterwards that they fell asleep to the sound of at least one bagpipe echoing remotely in some part of this magnificent building.

The conference was divided into three sessions, two on Saturday and one on Sunday forenoon. The first session began at 10 a.m. on Saturday and was chaired by John MacFadyen with Donald MacLeod as the first speaker. The topic under discussion was the possibility of organising the teaching of piobaireachd throughout Scotland, and this gave rise to an interesting and enthusiastic discussion. Donald reviewed the situation as it stood and posed several questions which if satisfactorily answered might well lead to a big improvement in the facilities offered to learners of piobaireachd in this country.

He was followed by Neil Ramsay who had consented to stand in at the last minute for Robert U. Brown whose departure to Australia had taken place earlier than anyone anticipated. Neil gave an account of the situation with regard to the teaching of piobaireachd in North America, with several interesting personal illustrations which did much to clarify and entertain.

Many people contributed to the general discussion which followed, and it was with regret that the morning session had eventually to be brought to a close about 12.15 p.m. The general consensus of opinion seemed to be that some kind of correlation of the teaching of piobaireachd would be advantageous in many ways, and that the societies concerned—either through their Institute of Piping or otherwise—might consider how best these improvements could be brought about.

The day had turned out to be one of beautiful spring weather, familiar perhaps to Argyll but unusual to those of us who came from the big cities. It was with mixed feelings that we gathered for the afternoon session, torn between the beauties of the Loch Fyneside shore and the attraction of another stimulating discussion.

The chairman for the afternoon was Mr. James Campbell and the topic to be considered was the advisability of republishing in different form the collections of the Piobaireachd Society, with accompanying tape or disc illustrations.

The principal speakers this time were A. G. Kenneth and Captain John MacLellan. Archie Kenneth's article will be printed in full in the "Piping Times" shortly, but John MacLellan's contribution involved tape recordings and slide projection and so only part of it can be presented in printed form.

Both of these contributions aroused a great deal of interest, especially as the two speakers were obviously not in agreement on all points. Again it was with considerable reluctance that the meeting was brought to a close. It would have run even more over its time but for the fact that photographers were champing at the bit and they were obviously worried about the fading of daylight for their external scenes.

Dinner was a long, leisurely, talkative affair, and one could only regret the inability of being in two places (or even three places) at once, in order to hear the many interesting conversations going on around the room.

Fear-an-tigh for the evening ceilidh was John MacLellan. Three pipers were billed to start the ball rolling. The first was Seumas MacNeill who chose as his tune "MacLaine of Lochbuie's Lament", playing the original setting as it appeared in Duncan Campbell's manuscript, and not the amended version printed in the Piobaireachd Society book 11.

This was followed by "Corrienessan Salute" from Donald MacLeod and then the nameless tune, "Hiharin Odin Hiharin Dro" from John MacFadyen. With this as a basis the evening rolled on enjoyably and successfully, with piping eventually being heard from

various splinter groups in other places than the main conference room. John MacLellan played the grounds of two tunes, Neil Ramsay played "The Old Woman's Lullaby", and a sprinkling of light music provided something for everybody. Once again most of us fell asleep with the sound of bagpipes, real and imaginary, ringing in our ears.

Sunday morning came all too soon, not helped by the change of the clock for summer time, and the final proceedings of the conference eventually got under way about 10.45 a.m. This was chaired by Seumas MacNeill, and the first speaker was Professor Alex Haddow to talk on the communication gap in piobaireachd. Before he began, Professor Haddow was congratulated on his recent election as a Fellow of the Royal Society, the first piper to have achieved the highest honour in the scientific world.

Professor Haddow gave a most interesting address which appears in full later in the "Piping Times".

He was followed by the second principal speaker, Neil Fraser, the well known producer of piping programmes for the B.B.C. Neil also dealt with problems of creating a bridge between the pipers and the public, and suggested the various ways in which this situation might be improved. It is hoped to publish part at least of his address also.

The subsequent discussion was again full, free and interesting, and this being the last opportunity at the conference, many people were encouraged to speak who had not previously contributed.

The conference was brought to a close by the President of the Piobaireachd Society, Mr. Alasdair Anderson, who expressed the universal feeling that the venture had been a success, even greater than anyone could have imagined. He thanked everyone for participating and hoped that there would be another occasion of a similar kind.

Those who attended the conference were—Mr. Alasdair Anderson, Edinburgh; General F. Richardson, Edinburgh; Mr. William Robertson, Greenock; Mr. Finlay MacNeill, Inverness; Mr. James Campbell, Cambridge; Mr. A. G. Kenneth, Stronachullin; Mr. and Mrs. Gowans, Eigg; Dr. and Mrs. Caird, Edinburgh; Prof. Alex. J. Haddow, Glasgow; Dr. David Hannay, Glasgow; Capt. John A. MacLellan, Edinburgh; Mr. Dugald MacIntyre, Glasgow; Mr. Thomas Pearston, Glasgow; Mr. Bob Lindsay, Oban; Mr. Neil Ramsay, London; Mr. John MacFadyen, Busby; Mr. Eric Cornish, Appin; Mr. Seumas MacNeill, Bearsden; Mr. David Brown, Sunderland; Mr. Donald MacLeod, Glasgow; Mr. Dugald McShannon, Campbeltown; Pipe-Major Andrew Venters, Belfast; Mr. Peter Cook, School of Scottish Studies, Edinburgh; Dr. R. Cannon, Norwich; Mr. Wm. MacDonald, Newton Mearns; Mr. Sandy MacPherson, Glasgow;

Mr. Edward Swindle, Glasgow; Mr. Duncan Cameron, Edinburgh; Mr. Richard Cameron, Inverness; Mr. Gordon Spiers, London; Mr. Russell Clayton, Essex; Mr. Neil Fraser, B.B.C., Glasgow; Mr. Robert Swift, Glasgow; Mrs. Munro, School of Scottish Studies; Mr. Wm. Summers, Glasgow; Mr. Brian Nicholson, Sunderland; Mr. Alan Beaton, Oban; Mr. Duncan MacFadyen, Johnstone; Mr. Ronald MacCallum, Inveraray; Dr. Leslie Craig, Minard.

Dundee Competition

The annual competition organised by the Tayside Pipers' Society was held on Saturday, 25th March, in the Y.M.C.A. Halls, Broughty Ferry. This was once again a very successful venture with a record entry of over thirty boys and girls. Nineteen played in the march strathspey and reel under fifteen years, sixteen in the under nineteen years and twenty-three competed in the piobaireachd event.

The judges were, for piobaireachd, James MacGregor, A. Robertson and Peter Forbes. For march strathspey and reel, Pipe-Major John Mackenzie (Queen Victoria School), Peter Maynard (Dundee and Major Gibb (Glenisla).

The results of the competition were as follows:—

Class A, under 15, march strathspey and reel—

1st, Donald MacBride, Prestonpans; 2nd, Kevin Lynch, Dundee; 3rd, Patricia Innes, Aberdeen; 4th, Jimmy Drummond, Whitburn; 5th, Robt. Matheson, Whitburn.

Class B, under 19, march strathspey and reel—

1st, Philip Taylor, Glasgow; 2nd, Ian Larg, Dundee; 3rd, Roderick Barron, St. Andrews; 4th, Ann Stewart, Carnoustie; 5th, Graham Brown, Aberdeen.

Class C, Piobaireachd—

1st, Roderick Barron; 2nd, Ann Stewart; 3rd, Ian Larg; 4th, Philip Taylor; 5th, Elizabeth Hutcheson, Edinburgh.

Drummond Trophy, best under 15 not in prize list—Kevin Lynch.

Deportment—Philip Taylor.