

employers to sample the market. It has been observed that the winner of the HSL Gold Medal in Inverness in later years could "rest on his laurels and select the most lucrative offer that was sure to follow" [MacAulay A. 1964(b): 11], and precisely the same held true of the Edinburgh competition in earlier times.

John Ban MacKenzie, after a schooling in Easter Ross, found his first piping employment on the estate of G.F. MacKenzie of Allangrange (near Fortrose on the Black Isle). It was whilst in his employ that he first competed in Edinburgh in 1820 to win the 4th prize. [Cal Merc 22/7/1820]. In the following year he moved to the estate of Duncan Davidson of Tulloch (near Strathpeffer), and completed a successful run at the competition in 1823 by winning the prize pipe. [Cal Merc 2/8/1823]. At this time also he was sent by Davidson to Raasay, for tuition under John MacKay. [MacKay 1838 Hist. Notes: 8]. In about 1828 MacKenzie set off post haste for Crieff, having eloped with the daughter of Donald MacKenzie of Applecross [Scott J.E. 1965(c): 8], and was not long there before he found employment with John Campbell, Earl of Ormelie, who succeeded to the Breadalbane estates in 1834.

During his time at Taymouth, John headed a large corps of estate pipers, and acquired a far-reaching reputation as teacher, composer and virtuoso player, enhanced by his winning of the first Gold Medal in 1835. [Cal Merc 23/7/1835]. On his death in 1864, after 28 years in service with Breadalbane, his wife erected a grave stone in

Strathpeffer which stated simply that

"He was known as the chief and father of all the Highland pipers, and had taught upwards of 40 young men".
[Scott J.E. 1965(c) : 12].

It was during John Ban's term as head piper that Queen Victoria came North for the first time, in September 1842, to be captivated by the Highlands, the Highlanders, and the bagpipe. George IV, of course, had preceded her, met by a barrage of gunfire and piping at Leith pier in 1822, but it was Victoria's enthusiasm for the bagpipe which firmly established the instrument as an essential feature on the fashionable Highland estate. Within three days of her arrival in Scotland she was at Taymouth Castle where, as her journal reveals, the pipers were in constant attendance:

"There were nine pipers at the castle; sometimes one and sometimes three played. They always played about breakfast time, again during the morning, at luncheon, and also whenever we went in and out; again before dinner, and during most of dinner time. We both have become quite fond of the bagpipes." [Victoria; 1868: Sept. 9].

Even while out boating on Loch Tay she had two pipers in the bow, in evocation of Scott's Lady of the Lake, ("See the proud pipers in the bow, And mark the gaudy streamers flow ..." [Victoria 1868: 19], and in all she was so impressed, that on returning to Windsor she sent for William MacKenzie, an old Waterloo veteran whom she had seen at Taymouth, to become her personal piper. [Lauder T.D. 1843:332]. MacKenzie declined on the grounds of ill

Fig. IX

THE SCENIC HIGHLANDS. Pipers in the foreground. Taymouth Castle and Loch Tay in the background. Watercolour c. mid-nineteenth century. [Provenance uncertain]



health, and the biographer of the Royal visit records that John Ban MacKenzie was then approached to recommend "a tall good-looking man like yourself".

"Ye may seek a' Scotland" came the reply, "before ye find sic a man as that" [Lauder T.D. 1843: 36], but eventually a suitable candidate was found in Angus MacKay. [QV IV.3(e)]. Thus a Royal precedent was established which continues to this day, and the high age of Royal patronage of the bagpipe was underway.

Other Districts

It would be wrong to imply that all the pipers at the competition were from Perthshire, or indeed that all worked on major estates. (The records suggest that about 35% worked on estates at one time or another.) Sutherland, Ross and Cromarty, Invernessshire, and Argyll all provided their fair share of pipers [Fig. V], and the old MacKay country of Sutherland in particular had a thriving piping community which, on the evidence of Joseph MacDonald's 1760 treatise [QV], was little affected by post-Culloden strictures. No fewer than 10 Sutherland pipers won the prize pipe in Edinburgh, 5 of them bearing the surname MacKay. [Comp'n. records].

Inverness-shire, too, could boast a tight-knit community of pipers. At Glenmoriston, for instance, was Finlay MacLeod ("Fionlaidh Piobaire"), a tremendous character who had fought through the Peninsular War with

the 79th, and who on winning the prize pipe in 1813 was commended as having been wounded no fewer than four times in active service. [Cal Merc 31/7/1813]. At Abriachan, on the Seafield estate by Loch Ness, was Thomas MacDonald, a member of a long-established piping family. [MacDonald Alex 1914: 113]. At Glengarry was Archibald Munro, a native of Oban who, on Alasdair Ranaldson's untimely leap from a sinking steamer on Loch Linnhe (in 1828), composed the well-known Glengarry's Lament. [Celtic Monthly 13 (1904-5): 70]. These were all close friends and colleagues, and "many a day", wrote the chronicler of Glenmoriston, "MacLeod, MacDonald and he [Munro], made the pìob-mhòr sound and resound about Invermoriston". [MacDonald A. 1914: 113].

One feature which emerges clearly from the competition records is that in the early nineteenth century the playing of the Highland bagpipe was still largely the preserve of the Gael. In Perthshire, for instance, the vast majority of pipers came from the Gaelic speaking Northern parishes of Blair Atholl, Dull, Weem, Killin, Fortingall and so on, and very few from the Anglicised southern parts in the vicinity of Perth, Crieff and Callander.(6) Similarly, there were very few pipers from Aberdeenshire, Fife and the Central belt, and most of the pipers who did live in the Lowlands were acknowledged to be of Highland background.

It has been suggested, probably with a deal of truth [e.g. Campbell A. 1962(b):9] that the Highland pipe gained ground in the lowlands as the heavily depleted Highland

regiments were forced to seek Lowland and Irish recruits to maintain their numbers. (In 1809 certain Highland regiments were so depleted that they lost the right to wear the kilt. [Boag 1975: 29]). It is certainly of interest that in 1820 Colonel Farquarson introduced a piper of the 25th Regiment [K.O.S.B.] to the Edinburgh competition in the hope that "his not understanding the Gaelic language may be immaterial." [Kilberry I: 13]. At the 1815 competition we learn that Sir John MacGregor Murray addressed the assembled competitors in Gaelic, "which appeared to gratify them highly" [Cal Merc 31/7/1815]; but changes were afoot, and as the century progressed it was to become increasingly hard to recognise the piob mhòr as a uniquely Highland instrument.

(3) The Army

"What could be more gallant or heroic than a man unarmed advancing intrepidly in the face of an enemy, encouraging his comrades to deeds of hardihood and glory, by those martial strains so congenial and animating to the feelings of every Highlander?" (Speech by Sir John MacGregor Murray, 1816. [Cal Merc 3/8/1816]).

The lifestyle of the army piper has yet to be documented, but an intriguing foretaste is to be had in the memoirs of John MacDonald (1752-1832), the Argyll-born dominie and soldier, who was Pipe Major of the North Fencibles in 1778, and had an eventful military career

which encompassed the Siege of Gibraltar, and a diplomatic mission to China with Lord MacCartney in 1792. [MacDonald J. 1906; MacCulloch J. 1824 II: 373].

The records show that at least 20% of the pipers who competed in Edinburgh (probably an underestimate) were at some stage involved in military service. The competition during the war years (pre-1815), was used by the organisers as an opportunity to extol the virtues of army life, and the value of the bagpipe as a military instrument. Their attack was two-pronged. On the one hand the competitions were invariably concluded with some stirring military rhetoric, usually delivered enthusiastically by Sir John Sinclair or Sir John MacGregor Murray. These speeches were reported at length in contemporary newspapers such as the Caledonian Mercury, but the approach was by no means new: as early as 1783 the competition was being heralded as a means of reviving the "warlike ancient music" [E.E.C. 20/10/1783]; and in 1798 the public were reminded that the bagpipe was "so necessary to be patronised, particularly at present, when so many loyal bands of Highlanders are embodied ... for defence of their King and Country." [Cal Merc 2/8/1798]. The second approach was to single-out military pipers for special notice, in the hope, no doubt, of inspiring emulation. Several instances are cited in the course of this work. One example was in 1816 when the Waterloo veteran, Donald Robertson (P/M of the 42nd) was called forward for a special award. [Cal Merc 3/8/1816].

Military concerns impinged on the competition in other

respects too. In certain years, such as 1810 and 1813, military demands were so high that the number of competitors was actually affected. [HSL 268, 25: 100; Cal Merc 31/7/1813]. At other times military officers were in attendance, availing themselves of "the presence of so many good performers ... to select regimental pipers for the Highland Corps." [Dalyell 1849: 102]. An amusing anecdote is told of the 1825 competition, when General Duff of the 92nd Regiment, on promising a piper an attractive and lucrative posting in the U.K. (and not abroad), was requested to "give that in writing". [Dalyell Gen. 355D: 15; 1849: 102].

The Piping College

The main thrust of the Societies' activities in promoting army piping, however, was directed towards the establishment of a piping college for army pipers. Such a scheme was contemplated from the earliest years: in 1783 John MacArthur of the Sleat piping family was urged to establish such a college, and a hope was expressed that

"... those at the head of the army will in particular encourage so laudable an undertaking, that the Highland corps may be better and more easily furnished with pipers than they have hitherto been." [E.E.C. 27/10/1783).

Nothing specific came of this proposal, but the societies continued to encourage military instruction, praising the

Fortingall MacGregors for their efforts in this respect in 1784 [Scots Mag 46 (Oct 1784): 552]; urging Malcolm MacGregor to establish a Glasgow piping school in 1804 [Cal Merc 28/7/1804]; encouraging Donald MacDonald's use of staff notation as a teaching medium in 1806 [Cal Merc 7/8/1806]; and in 1810 urging pipers to instruct others "in the practice of this useful and warlike instrument". [Cal Merc 2/8/1810].

In July 1788 the HSL finally determined on a plan for "establishing the professorship of the Great Highland Pipe". [HSL 268, 21: 91, 98]. As chance would have it, in London at that time was Donald Ruadh MacCrimmon (c.1743-1825), last (along with his brother Iain Dubh), of the hereditary pipers to MacLeod of Dunvegan. The society soon decided that Donald Ruadh was the ideal candidate for the job, being "the last of the celebrated race of pipers and composers of that name, who successively for five centuries presided over a similar institution in the Highlands." [HSL 268, 25: 4,5]. If this was perhaps an exaggerated claim, there is no doubt that Donald Ruadh was a respected authority: in 1815 Alexander Campbell described him as "the best qualified of any now living to initiate beginners in the true stile of playing" [Campbell 1815 (a): 33]; in 1827 MacLeod of Gesto remarked that he was "allowed by all to be the best piper of his time..." [HSL 268, 2: Letter 24/12/1827].

In 1789, however, he was rather down on his luck. Having left Skye in 1772, following substantial rent

increases on the Dunvegan estates, [Grant I.F. 1959: 560; A Morrison, n.d.], Donald Ruadh emigrated to America. He was not there long, however, before the War of Independence broke out, and he took a Lieutenant's commission in the 84th Regiment of Royal Immigrants (in October 1778). [Poulter 1939: 5]. His war service was most adventurous (he is said to have captured a fully-armed privateer with only six men), but he lost an eye in action, and returned to Britain at the end of the war penniless. [HSL 268, 1: Petition 8/8/1808]. In December 1788 he was given the rank and emoluments of half-pay lieutenant (which rank he held until December 1808) [PRO WO 24/748-761], but in April of the following year he found himself in Newgate prison in London for debts incurred in "the support of his wife and numerous family." [HSL 268, 21: 96].

The HSL, on discovering this unfortunate turn of events, promptly bailed him out [HSL 268, 21: III; 31: 31/10/1789], and as luck would have it, the grandson of Donald Ruadh's old patron, General Norman MacLeod of MacLeod, was a member of the Society at the time, and secured the piping "professorship" for him. He was provided with an annual salary of 20 guineas, a further gratuity of £30 to render his circumstances "somewhat comfortable", and a berth to Glenelg with his family. [HSL 268, 21: 96, III; 34: 1789, 90, 91]. General MacLeod, in the meantime, was lobbying the War Office for the use of a wing of the abandoned Bernara Barracks in Glenelg, built by General Wade in 1720, to house the college, but his efforts

proved unavailing, and by March 1792 Donald Ruadh had moved from Glenelg to a farm in Skye. [HSL 268, 21: 115, 116, 131]. (A communication in 1792 shows that he was temporarily at Lochbay in Duirinish [HSL 268, 21: 147, 151], but R.H. MacLeod records that he held the land of Trien in Waternish from 1792. [MacLeod 1977(c): 16]).

Donald Ruadh's precise instructions from the Society are unclear. In June 1792 his salary was discontinued until he could "fix himself in any situation in Glenelg or near Fort Augustus, and carry the Society's initial intentions into execution." [HSL 268, 21: 151]. Donald Ruadh responded in February 1794 by saying that he was settled "in the ancient college of pipe music in the Isle of Skye", and was ready to take on pupils. [HSL 268, 22: 14, 15]. The likelihood is that he was then back at Borreraig (which rentals confirm him to have held between 1795 and 1797 [Morrison A. n.d.]), his brother Iain Dubh having quarrelled with MacLeod and left that farm in about 1793. [Morrison op cit.; MacKay 1838: 5]. For the time-being, however, the Society's enthusiasm for the project faltered, and plans for the college were temporarily shelved.

Thirteen years later, in February 1807, Donald Ruadh returned to London, apparently to pursue his military career, and obtained a posting as Lieutenant in the 10th Veteran Battalion. [PRO WO 12/11189]. His appearance revived the HSL's interest in the piping college, and in March 1808 he was invited to perform at the Society's

anniversary dinner "to afford an opportunity of judging of his performance." [HSL 268, 23: 185]. The Society again strenuously lobbied the War Office for the use of the Bernera barracks, sending a high-powered delegation to discuss the proposal with the Commander In Chief (HRH The Duke of York), whilst also soliciting the help of the Duke of Sussex. [HSL 268, 23: 166, 167, 180; 25: 4, 5, 18, 23-6, 31; Inv. Courier 30/12/1808]. The society stressed that the only real outlay would be in providing a permanent salary for MacCrimmon (who was in any case an army officer), and that the objective was to promote a music "known to animate and preserve the military spirit of the Highlanders". [HSL 268, 25: 18]. The Duke of York expressed a "disposition to promote such an establishment" [268,25:18], but appears to have taken no action. In the meantime Donald Ruadh, whilst waiting in London for developments, again landed himself in Newgate prison, and was again bailed out by the Society. [HSL 268, 25: 18, 34: 1809; Box 1 Petition 8/8/1808]. To compound matters, the 10th Veteran Battalion was posted to Canada, and the Society was forced to apply for an extension of Donald Ruadh's leave of absence. [HSL 268 25:26].

War Office records show that he did not, in fact, accompany the Battalion to North America [P.R.O. WO 12/11145], but rather returned north, where in August 1813 he was stationed at Fort George. [NLS ms 19953, fol.9]. Sir John Sinclair recorded in that year that "The Plan [for the piping college] was suspended for a time, but is by no

means abandoned" [Sinclair J. 1813: 14], while a communication from the Duke of Kent revealed that he, at that time, was anxious to procure Donald Ruadh's services to instruct pipers in his own regiment, The Royal Scots. [NLS ms 19953, fol.9: 12/8/1813]. A final flurry of activity came in early 1816 when Alasdair Macdonnell of Glengarry suggested that the HSL might care to co-operate in the project with his own Society of True Highlanders ("a pure Highland Society"). [HSL 268, 26: 131-3, 141-2, 200]. By this time, however, Waterloo had been fought and won, the war effort was being wound down, and the venture was finally allowed to lapse.

After his departure for America in the 1770's Donald Ruadh did not again act as official piper to MacLeod of Dunvegan, (this post was occupied by distant cousins who had neither "the talents or respectability of their progenitors" [Clerk A. 1841: 340]), but he did occasionally come out of retirement to grace major occasions. He was at Dunvegan in 1799, for instance, to greet Norman MacLeod's homecoming from the Parliamentary session [MacLeod F.T 1933: 133], and was there in August 1814 to entertain Sir Walter Scott (who recalled "an old man, a lieutenant in the army, and a most capital piper"), during his visit with the Lighthouse Commission. [Lockhart 1837 IV: 309]. He was by this time living in Glenelg, bought by P.C. Bruce from the MacLeod estate in 1811, and it was there that in October 1815 he was visited by Alexander Campbell. Campbell recounted that Donald Ruadh had

"lately experienced disappointment" in a musical venture, which we can well imagine to have related to the proposed piping college. [1815(a): 62]. Although we know of certain of Donald Ruadh's pupils(7), there is no evidence that at any stage he had undertaken widespread instruction of army pipers. Certainly the whole episode, dragging-on as it did over 28 years, must have been very frustrating for him. Donald Ruadh enjoyed an army pension in later life, and died in London in 1825 after one last, if fleeting visit to the debtors prison in 1823 (this time in Inverness), when he was 82 years old. [PRO PMG 3/5; Poulter 1939: 6]. He will be best remembered for Alexander Campbell's description of his piping in October 1815:

"After a few glasses of his own good tody, MacCrummin seized the pipe - put on his hat (his usual custom) - breathed into the bag - tuned the drones to the chanter - gave a prelude in a stile of brilliancy that flashed like lightning - and commenced Failte Phrionnsah, in tones that spoke to the ear and affected the heart". [Campbell A. 1815(a): 62].

The Bagpipe Preceptor

With the culmination of the Napoleonic Wars, any sense of military urgency in the Societies' piping activities was considerably diminished. They did, however, continue to support army piping in many different ways, and I believe

that we might include under this general brief a curious bagpipe tutor, entitled The Bagpipe Preceptor, published in 1818. [Menzies 1818].

This work scarcely rates a mention in the piping literature, but is of interest in that it actually predates the earliest significant pipe music collection (that of Donald MacDonald) by over two years. Its shortcomings are manifest: the gracing is dreadfully over-simplified and inaccurate (using a system of enumeration to represent grace-notes); the music is written a fifth lower than the actual sound of the chanter; certain tunes incorporate a high E (high B in modern notation), which was not a feature of Highland piping; and the choice of tunes, the list of 15 including such favourites as God Save the King and Taste Life's Glad Moments, could hardly have inspired confidence.

The work is divided into two portions, of tutor and music, the former taking the most unusual form of a conversation between "amateur" and "shepherd" on the Perthshire moors, in which snippets of piping lore are interspersed between fishing tips and prognoses for the shoot. The relationship is not quite what one would expect, however, for it is "Amateur" who instructs "Shepherd" in the art of piping, and offers tempting inducements to the army life, where, apparently, the piper is "caressed by every body, especially the ladies, who would prefer a piper to a prince". [1818: 17]. "When you are master of the instrument", promises Amateur, "I shall recommend you to attend the competition of pipers at Edinburgh ... And who

knows but you may one of these days 'scorn the Shepherd's slothful life', and launch into the service of your King and Country in the capacity of a piper ..." [1818: 16].

Such a line in dialogue gives a clear indication of a military impetus behind the work. The work was produced anonymously, but James Logan identified the author in 1831 as "Captain Menzies". [1876 Edn. III: 307]. The author was further identified by "The Notices of Pipers" as Capt. Robert Menzies "of a Perthshire family" [PT Nov. 1973], but I am inclined to suggest that a much more likely candidate was Major Archibald Menzies, of the 42nd Regiment, who greatly distinguished himself at Waterloo. [Keltie 1879 II: 396]. He was a member of the HSS between 1817 and 1845 [THSS], with a particular involvement in musical matters : he judged regularly at the piping competition between 1818 and 1841 (he was on a shortleat of recommended judges in 1826 [HSSPMB: 43]); and he helped in the production of the Dalness Report in 1832. [QV ch II 2(8)]. Certainly he had the credentials to produce the Preceptor, but the case is not yet proven.

The author also demonstrated a healthy interest in another of the Societies' enduring concerns - staff notation - stressing to "Shepherd" that instruction by this "scientific" method would allow him to learn a hundred tunes for every one learnt in the traditional manner. [1818: 34]. To the Societies the musical and military concerns were not distinct, for staff notation was perceived as the most effective way of teaching piping to

Army recruits. Although this work was of little worth in its own right, its real value lay in the encouragement it gave to other experiments along similar lines, a point discussed in Ch.IV 3(c).

(4) Society Pipers

The competition records show that 6% of the competing pipers had at one time or other worked for one of the various Highland and sporting societies which enjoyed enormous popularity from the 1820's. Our concern here, however, is with the pipers who specifically worked for the two major Highland Societies.

1. The Highland Society of London put great stock in its social gatherings and the provision of nourishing fare, both culinary and musical. The Society held four major meetings between February and May, and at each (but particularly at the annual dinner) a full programme of music was offered. This had three major constituents - Highland piping, Irish union piping, and dance music, provided for many years by the band of John Gow.

Gow was of the well-known Perthshire family, and was a music publisher in London. His brother Andrew played quite regularly with his band in the 1780's and 1790's, and his brother Nathaniel, who was well established in

Edinburgh, played once in 1793. [HSL 268, 34: 1793]. John was paid a regular salary of 10 guineas per annum, with an additional sum to cover the costs of his musicians. [HSL 265: 34]. The Society's patronage of the Irish Union Pipe (the term Uilleann was not then in use) is a fascinating issue which is unfortunately outwith the scope of this work. Irish pipers played regularly at Society meetings between 1788 and 1822, and in the ranks of the performers were some of the leading exponents of the instrument at this crucial stage in its development.(8) Between them they published five of the earliest collections of Irish pipe music, and O'Farrell's collection of National Irish Music for the Union Pipes (1804) was for long a standard work. (It might be observed that this was published by John Gow, and it would be interesting to gauge the extent of the Society's patronage of this and like works).

Details concerning the Highland pipers who played at Society meetings are presented in Table III/1. A good deal of emphasis was put on the ceremonial, from the quality of the piper's dress, to the observance of correct etiquette during the meetings. In 1792, for instance, it was decided that the piper should

"... play on the outside of the door, except at the time the whisky is going about, when he is permitted to play once or twice round the room". [HSL 268, 21: 145].

A good example of the musical arrangements for the annual dinner is to be found in the minutes for March 1807, which

instructed that "Mr Gow do provide a good band of music, consisting of three violins, a French horn, Jones the harper, O'Farrell the Irish piper, and John MacGregor the Highland piper ..." [HSL 268; 24: 126]. In 1811 Gow's band was six in number, while in 1816 the full Regimental band of the Royal Scots was in attendance. [HSL 268, 25: 117, 319].

The dinner itself was a real Society event, frequently receiving press coverage, as in 1802 when the Scots Magazine reported:

"An elegant dinner was served at half past six o'clock, during which several national airs on the pipe were performed by the pipers of the Society, and a few pebrachs, with wonderful skill and execution, by Buchanan P/M of the 42nd Regiment ... The greatest harmony and conviviality prevailed during the evening. Gow's band of instrumental music, Murphy the Irish piper, together with the vocal strains of Dignum ... added much to the general festivity". [Scots Mag 63 (April 1802): 369].

Fig. X

NEIL MACLEAN. Piper to the HSL 1785-1791. From a contemporary print. [National Museums of Scotland]



Table III/1

PIPERS TO THE HIGHLAND SOCIETY OF LONDON

	Period as Official Piper	Period as Extra Piper	Payment	Other Outlay	Others Acting as Extra Piper
Peter MacGregor	1782	(1799, 1800)	n.a.		
John MacGregor (I)	1783	-	n.a.		
Neil MacLean	1785-1791	-	£15-15-0 pa	Dress £41-9-9 Sundries £67-4-6	
Charles MacArthur	1791-1805	-	£1-1-0 per performance (2-5 per annum)	Dress £30-13-0 Pipe + Bag £7-12-0	John MacGregor II (1791, 92) P. MacDonald (1791, 94) Angus MacArthur (1796) John Buchanan (1802)
John MacGregor (IV)	1805-1821	(1800-1804)	£1-1-0 per performance (2-5 per annum)	-	Malcolm MacGregor (1805-15) Angus MacArthur (1815, 16)
George Clarke	1816-1837	-	£1-1-0 per performance until 1824 £10-10-0 pa 1824-37	Dress £1-17-0 Pipes £11-3-6	72 Regt. Pipers (1828)
John MacBeth	1829-1842	(1826, 27) (1843-50)	£8-8-0 pa until 1837 £40-0-0 pa 1837-42 as <u>Piper & Messenger</u>	Pipes £2-2-0	John Thomson (1841)
Donald MacKay	1843-1850	(1829-40)	£15-15-0 pa	Banner £6-5-0	John MacLennan (1847; 8)
Angus Mackay	1851-1854	(1845-50)	£15-15-0 pa	-	Alex MacKay (1853, 4) Michael MacCarfrae (1855)
William Ross	1855-1891	-	£21-0-0 pa	Sundries £23-4-0	Donald MacKay Jnr. (1879-92)

Sources: HSL Minute Books NLS Dep. 268:15, 16, 17, 18, 20, 27, 28.
HSL Accounts Book NLS Dep. 268:34.

John and Peter MacGregor (1782, '83).

The very first piping appointments to the Society, however, were temporary posts which did not involve work in London, but rather attendance in an official capacity at the Falkirk competition.

John MacGregor Senior (1708-1789), patriarch of the remarkable family of Fortingall pipers described in Appendix III, was official piper to the Society in 1783. He was known as Iain "Mac an Sgeulaiche", and was of a family of pipers established in the Ruadhshruth (Ruaro) region of Glenlyon for several generations. During the '45 he had fought and been wounded in the Jacobite cause at Culloden, but escaped subsequent reprisals. [MacGregor A., 1879: 404]. He attended the first piping competition in Falkirk in 1781, when aged 73, and won the 3rd prize, being listed as piper to Colonel John Campbell of Glenlyon at Fortingall; he was again 3rd in 1782; and in 1783 was appointed piper to the HSL, and was asked to proceed to Falkirk to act as intermediary between judges and competitors. [Competition Records; Trigge 1783: 2]. There a dispute arose between the competitors and the judges (members of the Glasgow Gaelic Club), who had appointed their own man, John MacAllister, as official piper. "This I thought was using the Highland Society and you exceedingly ill", wrote David Trigge to the London secretary, "and the poor old man also [MacGregor] who at such a great distance and an advanced age had ventured out

to pay that respect due to the orders of the Society." [Trigge 1783: 2]. An alternative competition was arranged in Edinburgh for the following week, and old John was there to open the proceedings with Clanranald's March (in honour of the Preses) [Cal Merc 27/10/1783]. He was paid £5.11.1 for his services in 1783, with a £5 gratuity in 1785 in recognition of "the great age of John MacGregor, and his merit as a performer and teacher." [HSL 268, 34: 1783; HSS Sd. Bk. I: 86].

The reputation of the MacGregors as teachers is well documented. When John's son, John (II), piper to Breadalbane, won the prize pipe in 1784, the Scots Magazine reported that he, "with the additional merit of having taught above 50 military pipers himself, is the eldest of five sons taught by their father John MacGregor, together with 90 other pipers". [Scots Mag Oct 1784: 553]. James Logan subsequently confirmed that "there was a branch of the MacGregors ... who were celebrated musicians, and afforded instruction to the chief part of the pipers of the Central Highlands ..." [Logan J. 1876 Edn. II: 289]. The folklorist Henry Whyte also commented on the MacGregors' reputation, and that "it was their habit to send their best pupil for a year to the college of music conducted by the MacCrimmons". [Whyte 1912: 207]. Whether or not this was the case, one MacCrimmon-bred pupil of the MacGregor school was John's own son, Peter (known as "Patrick na Coraig"(9)), who won the prize pipe at the inaugural contest in 1781, and acted as the official piper to the HSL

in 1782. (The Caledonian Mercury [27/10/1783] explained that he was "bred at Dunvegan".) The HSL provided him with a badge of office to place in his bonnet [HSL 268, 1: minutes], but his association with the Society was fairly short-lived, involving, after 1782, only a brief spell as "extra piper" in London in 1799 and 1800. [HSL 268, 34: 1799, 1800]. He was in later years piper to F.G. Campbell of Troup and Fortingall, and died in Fortingall, aged 76, in 1824. His obituary spoke of him as "nearly unequalled as a performer on the Great Highland Bagpipe." [Edinburgh Magazine (93): April 1824].

Neil MacLean (1785-1791: Fig. X)

In 1784 the HSL decided to import a piper from Scotland, who would be available to perform on a regular basis at Society meetings. This was not a full-time post. Rather the Society would pay "an annual allowance in proportion to his merit and good conduct", while it was hoped that the owner of the Shakespeare Tavern, in which the Society met, would provide more permanent employment. [HSL 268, 21: 17].

The selected candidate was Neil MacLean, a young piper from Mull, who in 1783 had won the prize pipe in Falkirk, rather to the surprise of all concerned. Neil was of a family of hereditary pipers to the MacLeans of Lochbuy, whose patronage of the bagpipe is attested to in the tune