

# A History of the Great Highland Bagpipe

By Lynn Newcomer

The pipes have been a folk instrument for quite a long time. Aristophanes, 446 B.C. to 386 B.C., wrote, “you pipers who are here from Thebes, with bone pipes blowing the back end of a dog.” You can tell this was a high-status musical instrument.

The pipes appeared in the British Isles during the 12th C. renaissance via the Atlantic Seaway from the mid-East. At this time the form taken was a blow pipe, bag, chanter, and a drone or two drones.

The arrival of the bagpipe in Scotland is open to debate. Written notice of its coming puts the date at around 1400. At this time Scotland and Ireland were on the Atlantic Ocean sea route from the Mediterranean. A gargoyle on Melrose Abbey from 1338 has a depiction of a piper in the form of a pig playing a bagpipe.

A written mention of the pipes is found in an account of the Battle of the North Inch, or the Battle of the Clans in September 1396. It is said that one clan had a piper, and the pipes were referred to as War Pipes, which played that side into the battle. My guess is that these were probably two drone pipes.

A satirical mention of the pipes comes sometime in the 1500’s when the author of the satire, after fifteen verses of praise for the pipes finally says, “...but I am tired of praising you and your beast of a pipe with its stinking smell, Filled with disgusting spittle ... A bag of sticks under your arm, More bitter than henbane it’s screaming. Often the sweat is on your brow, Giving hands and wind to the Grizzled One.”

By the 1600’s the pipe was elevated in status, and wealthy gentry in Scotland vied to have a piper on staff. This was the golden age of piping and piobaireachd. (Piobaireachd - pronounced “pee-brock” - is the classical form of pipe music

written between 1600 and 1800. Highland chiefs promoted this type of music until the fall of the clan system. Wealthy Scots merchants noticed this decline and formed the Highland Society of London in the 19th century to preserve piobaireachd and Scottish music.) The drastic decline came in 1745 with the Jacobite Rebellion II. In 1746, forces loyal to the Hanoverian Government put down the Stewarts and the clan system. Clan chiefs could no longer afford a piper, and the Act of Proscription of 1746 banned

the playing of the pipes or possessing pipes.

How effective these laws were is open to debate, but penalties were harsh. This led to the big “pipe drain” and widespread immigration to the Americas, Australia, and New Zealand.

The expansion of the Empire played a large part in revising the pipes and piping during the 1700’s.

Someone in the English War Department in White Hall thought

the Scottish problem could be solved by recruiting impoverished Scots into the Army. Scots loved to fight so why not tap into their naturally pugnacious spirit? Win-win!

Highland Regiments were raised starting in 1688 and grew rapidly in the 1700’s with colonial expansion and mercantilism on the continent, North America, India, Africa and the Pacific. Scottish Regiments were allowed to have pipers and so carried pipes with them everywhere. Pipers saw action in North America during both wars- the Seven Years War and the Revolution - and in the rest of the Empire.

Pipers were on hand during World War One to pipe the troops over the top from 1914 to 1918. Two thousand, five hundred pipers served in the Great War. Five hundred were killed and six hundred wounded. Piping “over the top” was phased out after 1916, but the continued piping to-and-from the trenches and in rear areas.



A Scottish piper entertains troops on D-Day.

*Continued, next page*



**Piper Kerr, a member of the Scottish National Antarctic Expedition, plays the bagpipes for an indifferent penguin, March 1904.**

In WWII pipers were not officially sanctioned in the war zone. There are two notable time pipes were played in battle. Bill Millin a piper with Lord Lovat's 1st Special Forces Brigade piped ashore on Sword Beach on June 6, 1944 and on to Pegasus Bridge. The movie *The Longest Day* includes this event. When Millin initially reminded Lord Lovat that regulations forbid it, Lovat replied, "Ah, but that's the English War Office. You and I are both Scottish!" Captured German snipers later told Millin they didn't shoot at him because they thought he'd gone mad!

There were pipers in the South Pacific also, but there the pipes tended to fall victim to termites and rot. Pipes were air dropped to troops in Burma on one occasion. Otherwise, shipments were made the normal way- slow boat.

The final known official use of pipes in war was in 1967 by the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders at the Battle of the Crater during the Aden Emergency in Yemen. This in no way excludes their use in unofficial way and in the Falklands War.

### **DESIGN**

The earliest pipes had one bass drone. Then two tenor drones were the fashion for a pipe. A third bass drone made its entrance about 1650, and this radical design became dominant by 1700s. After 1650 the current three-drone Scottish version of the pipe became the standard design. By the 1800's pipes of many designs were in use in the theater and music halls, though Ireland held on two drone lower pitch chanter.

Early pipes were made of local hard wood; holly, laburnum, and boxwood. The spread of the British Empire introduced hard tropical imported from Africa- African Black Wood, and cocus wood from South America into the design. These woods are still used today, but are increasingly expensive and difficult to obtain. Trim for the pipes is made from aluminum, stainless steel, imitation ivory, German silver and sterling silver. In the early 1900's imitation ivory was made from early plastics like Bakelite,

and by mid-century, Catalin. Catalin turns pumpkin orange in sunlight, so it is easy to pick out. Other imitation ivory stays whiteish.

Reeds can be natural cane or synthetic. Chanter reeds remain natural cane.

The pipe scale is Mixolydian and has 9 notes; low G to High G. Into the 1960's the Low A was 466 htz. On the chanter some notes are not true notes E and F being slightly flat. The sound is not too noticeable. (Okay, that's a lie. We use tuning tape to finalize the tuning of some notes.) The tenor drones tune to Low A one octave lower than the chanter's Low A. The bass drone tunes two octaves below Low A.

In the 1980's synthetic drone reeds became available and saved a lot of marriages, but cane reeds still are used for their perceived better sound.

And one last note ... DO NOT BUY PIPES ON E-BAY OR AMAZON. OR WALMART! \$150 is not a bargain. They are good for wall decorations, only!

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## 2025 SAS-W BOARD & OFFICERS

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The SAS-W Board consists of 12 elected members. All board members serve a 3-year term, unless an unexpected vacancy occurs.



## What the Frenchman Heard

Submitted by Tami Schumann

The following journal entry came from French geologist Barthélemy Faujas de Saint-Fond who found himself at a bagpipe competition in 1784. It doesn't sound like he was a particular fan! I found this account in the book *Scotland: An Autobiography* edited by Rosemary Goring.

### Scotland's distinctive musical instrument makes a strong impression on an unprepared visitor.

A few moments later, a folding door opened at the bottom of the room, and to my great surprise, I saw a Scottish Highlander enter ... playing upon the bagpipe, and walking up and down an empty space with rapid steps and a military air, blowing the noisiest and most discordant sounds from an instrument which lacerates the ear.

The air he played was a kind of sonata, divided into three parts. Smith begged me to give it my whole attention, and to tell him afterwards the impression it made on me. But I confess at first I could not distinguish neither air nor design. I only saw the piper marching away with rapidity, and with the same warlike countenance. He made incredible efforts both with his body and his fingers to bring into play at once the different pipes of his instrument, which made an unsupportable uproar. He received nevertheless great applause from all sides.

A second musician followed into the arena, wearing the same martial look and walking to and fro with the same martial air ... after having listened to eight pipers in succession, I began to suspect that the first part was connected with a warlike march and military evolutions: the second with a sanguinary battle, which the musician sought to depict by the noise and rapidity of his playing and by his loud cries. He seemed then to be convulsed; his pantomimical gestures resembled those of a man engaged in combat; his arms, his hands, his head, his legs, were all in motion; the sounds of

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his instrument were all called forth and confounded together at the same moment. This fine disorder seemed keenly to interest everyone.

The piper then passed, without transition, to a kind of andante; his convulsions suddenly ceased; the sounds of his instrument were plaintive, languishing, as if lamenting the slain who were being carried off from the field of battle. This was the part which drew tears from the eyes of the beautiful Scottish ladies. But the whole was so uncouth and extraordinary; the impression which this wild music made upon me contrasted so strongly with that which it made upon the inhabitants of the country, that I am convinced we should look upon this strange composition not as essentially belonging to music, but to history ... The same air was played by each competitor, of whom there was a considerable number.

The most perfect equality was maintained among them; the son of the laird stood on the same footing with the simple shepherd, often belonging to the same clan, bearing the same name, and having the same garb. No preference was shown here save to talent, as I could judge from the hearty plaudits given to some who seemed to excel in that art. I confess it was impossible for me to admire any of them. I thought them all of equal proficiency: that is to say, the one was as bad as the other; and the air that was played as well as the instrument itself involuntarily put me in mind of a bear's dance.



**Did you know that there is no common ancestral or genetic heritage that links the people of Scotland? The country was a patchwork quilt of tribes who owed allegiance only to their kith and kin. Ancient Scotland was made up of four separate groups: Angles, Britons, Picts, and Gaels. Latin became the common language of the whole country after the Christianization of Scotland in the 6th century A.D.**

# ENTER THE LADIES ... By Howard Topp

I WAS ASKED IF I RECALL WHEN WOMEN WERE FIRST ADMITTED AS MEMBERS TO SAS-W, AND I CERTAINLY DO.

It was in 2006, when the late Taylor Frazier was President and I served as his Veep. Although St. Andrews Societies had traditionally been “men only” organizations from their inception in Charleston, SC in the 1730s, it was an only a minimally controversial issue in the SAS-W.

Oddly enough, I included a question addressing that very issue in a survey that was administered to the society membership in 2003. Some of you old timers may remember that survey.

The response was overwhelmingly in support of female members, and it was decided that the issue needed the guaranteed participation of the entire membership – which was accomplished with proxy voting. Not surprisingly, it easily passed. As I recall, the first ladies admitted to the society were Maureen Brown and Lucretia “Lu” Gordon at the December 2006, board of directors meeting - as well as our current President, Sherri Cornoni.

Sherri is one of two female Society Presidents who have very ably led our organization, over the years. The first was Jamie Griffin in 2010, and Sherri first held the office in 2016. I think it would be wise to honor these trail-breaking women for their roles in promoting Scottish heritage and culture in our community. I will address the first two ladies and then Sherri and Jamie, in the next issue.

Maureen Brown was one of the most influential women of the SAS-W and the Scottish community in the Tidewater area. She came to the U.S. as a teenager and eventually married an officer in the USAF, named Kim Brown. Maureen certainly enjoyed her role as “The Colonel’s Lady.” In retirement, the



Browns settled in Williamsburg. Maureen quickly became involved in Scottish activities, particularly the Williamsburg Scottish Festival, by serving in leadership roles and as the annual event’s president. She was honored by the St. Andrew’s Society as the 2000 Scot of the Year for her many contributions to the Scottish community. Maureen always had a mischievous twinkle in her eye and could thoroughly charm people with her friendly smile and delightful Irish lilt. Sadly, she passed away in 2011.

Lu Gordon was also a significant leader in the Scottish community, not just in Williamsburg but in the entire southeast. She had an active leadership role with the Gandfather Mountain Highland Games and served as President of the Upper East Tennessee Celtic Society, before moving to Williamsburg. Lu served multiple terms as President of the Williamsburg Scottish Festival. However, it was in the clan Gordon that she gave particularly commendable service, as the National Convener for the House of Gordon USA. Even more significant, she was honored with a commission as the Chief’s Lord Lieutenant for the USA by Granville Gordon, the 13th Marquis of Huntly and Chief of the House of Gordon. Like Maureen, Lu had been selected as the SAS-W Scot of the Year in 1991. Unfortunately, Lu also passed away in 2011. As with Maureen, her loss was heartfelt by everyone in the Saint Andrew’s Society of Williamsburg.

Pictured from the top: Lucretia Gordon, Maureen Brown, and Sherri Cornoni

## Wilmot (“Wil”) Heyward Phillips ~ A life well lived

An exceptional SAS-W member - Wil Phillips - passed away on June 8, 2025. Wil served as President of SAS-W (in 2003 and 2004); in 2007 he was awarded the SAS-W Scot of the Year. He was an active member of St. Andrew’s Society of Williamsburg and is deeply missed. Wil was a proud member of Clan Kennedy.

He was born in Decatur, Georgia in 1941 and married Diane Louise “Scottie” Phillips, in 1965. Wil was self-employed as an architectural renderer and architect until retirement. He was also a gifted artist and sold many works for charity.

In 1994, Scottie and Wil moved to Williamsburg, VA, and managed the Colonial Gardens Bed & Breakfast, for twelve years. They were frequent travelers to England and Scotland, and spent time in retirement aboard their boat, exploring the waterways of Virginia and Maryland.

Wil is survived by his daughter, Heather Chapman and two grandchildren - Hunter and Katherine Woodman. Wil’s final resting place is at Bruton Parish Church, along with his beloved wife Scottie.

# How Orkney and Shetland Became Scottish (What a Story!)

By Martin Cox

From majestic prehistoric sites such as Skara Brae and Maeshowe to the Standing Stones of Stennes, from Viking-era locations such as St. Magnus Cathedral and the ruins of the Brough of Birsay to modern-day cultural events such as the Up Helly Aa Festival, the Orkney and Shetland Islands present a cultural history that is distinctly different than mainland Scotland. How did these archipelagos become part of Scotland when the Faroe Islands remained Scandinavian?

The explanation is both complex and simple, culminating in a forfeited dowry from the King of Norway to the Scottish regent. For most of the Early and High Middle Ages, the islands were part of a Scandinavian North Sea empire, belonging to the King of Norway and populated by the farming, trading, and raiding peoples we think of as “the Vikings.” During this time, the Hebrides were known as the Suthreyjar,



or Kingdom of the Isles, to the Norwegians. Norway and the emerging Scottish kingdom frequently fought over control of the islands, as well as parts of the northern Scottish mainland.

Most of the Hebrides were ceded to the Kingdom of Scotland in 1266, but the Scots continued to recognize Norwegian control of Orkney and Shetland. This began to change in

the late 13th century when the last Norse jarl was murdered and suzerainty of the islands fell to Scottish earls from the houses of Angus and St. Clair. Norwegian royal interest in the islands lessened even more after 1380 when Norway entered a political union with Denmark.

Things came to a head in 1469, when the islands were pledged by Christian I, the King of Norway and Denmark, to Scotland as security for the dowry payment for the marriage of his daughter Margaret to James III of Scotland. Although the marriage did happen, the dowry payment was never made and the Scottish crown's control over the islands became permanent in 1472. Margaret herself was a popular queen in Scotland, and although her marriage to James III was an unhappy one, she became the great-grandmother of the better-known Mary, Queen of Scots.



Margaret of Scotland (1469) by Hugo van der Goes.



## The Saltire: The Story of the Scottish Flag

By Russ Madigan

First, let's speak of why Saint Andrew is the patron saint of Scotland. After being captured by the Romans and sentenced to death in 60 A.D. The normal Roman means of execution was being crucified on a cross. Saint Andrew felt unworthy to be crucified on a cross like that of Christ. He asked to be crucified on an X-shaped cross. In heraldic terms, Saltire (sautoir) means to cross into an X shape.

Jump forward to 832 A.D., when the armies of the Picts and the Scots, led by King Angus II, went into battle against the king of the Angles, King Aethelstan of East Anglia. On the eve of the battle, in a dream, Saint Andrew appeared to Angus to assure him of a victory the next day. In the morning, when Angus came out of his tent, he looked up into the sky and saw a cloud formation in the shape of an X set against a clear blue sky. He saw this as a good luck omen sent from Saint Andrew, and it inspired the Picts and Scots to win the battle over the Angles of King Aethelstan. Thus we have an X-shaped white cross on a field of sky blue as the national flag of Scotland.



# It's Pub Nite!

Kudos to everyone for making our 2025 Pub Night season so successful. The attendance during the summer months was outstanding! We had great speakers and interesting guests throughout. The 50/50 raffle

did well, bringing in much needed revenue to the general fund. Thanks to everyone for participating!

Our big Halloween bash will be fabulous and a great end to Pub Night 2025. It's been my pleasure to arrange these get-togethers over the last three seasons!

Yours aye,  
Jan Hruz



**Clockwise from top left:** Member Ed Matheson discusses the North Carolina storm recovery and the Highland Games; Susan White and Russ Madigan sport their logo apparel; Past-President Jerry Lelansky welcomes new members Lindsay Cerda (above) and Katie McAlpin (left) at the July Pub Night.

## 2025 EVENT CALENDAR

Unless otherwise indicated, email info request to: [secretary.standrewssociety.wbg@gmail.com](mailto:secretary.standrewssociety.wbg@gmail.com)

### OCTOBER

#### 23 Last Pub Night of the Year

5:30 p.m. Anna's Brick Oven  
(Halloween Theme; costumes welcome!)

### NOVEMBER

#### 9 Autumn Kirkin' of the Tartans

10:30 a.m. Gathering  
11:00 a.m. Service, Williamsburg Presbyterian Church

#### 15 Annual General Meeting (AGM)

1:00 p.m. Lewis Hall at Bruton Parish House

### DECEMBER

#### 1 St. Andrew's Day Food Drive

12:00 p.m. FISH, 312 2nd St., Williamsburg  
(Please sport your tartan for group photo!)

#### 6 Christmas Luncheon & Ceilidh

11:45 a.m. (lunch at 12:30)  
Fords Colony Club, Williamsburg

#### 7 Colonial Williamsburg Annual Christmas Parade

Parade at 5:00 p.m.; details TBA

~ 2026 ~

### JANUARY

#### 24 Burns' Night Dinner & Celebration

Doors open at 5:00 p.m.  
Ford's Colony Club - Williamsburg

If you haven't joined us for our monthly pub night, what are you waiting for?

# The 75th Anniversary of the Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo, 2025

By Andy McGowan



August marked the 75th Anniversary of the Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo. Started in 1950, the event has grown to a must-see event, featuring military bands, military drill, dancers and most of all pipe bands, on the Esplanade each August at Edinburgh Castle.

For me, the Tattoo is always something I'll remember that I shared with my dad, who grew up in Greenock, outside Glasgow. When he emigrated to North America, via Canada, he learned to play the pipes and was a fixture for decades in our local pipe band in Syracuse, New York.

As a kid, the chanter was thrust into my hands (yes, I rebelled a lot). But every August since I was little, PBS would broadcast the Tattoo, and I was forced to watch it. Then, the VCR recorder was invented, and I got out of watching it, but my dad recorded each year's broadcast and watched it over and over again.

When my wife, Bryce, came to visit my parents for the first time, my dad pulled out the Tattoo tapes and made her sit and watch it with him. And, whenever we visited, he was sure to pull out the latest edition for us.

So, when my dad was ill, my mother planned a final trip to Scotland. Bryce and I were recruited to play tour guides. We flew to Glasgow, rented a car, and drove for two weeks throughout Scotland. The highlight of the trip was the City of Edinburgh and the Tattoo. It was Bryce's and my first trip to Scotland.

The Tattoo was a magical evening. The walk up the Royal Mile was awe inspiring. The streets were packed with people headed to the Castle for the show.

The pomp and circumstance. The military bands. The military drill. The highland dancers. And of course, the massed pipe bands coming out of the Castle and performing on the Esplanade. As I write this, I can see in my mind sitting in the grandstands with my family and hearing the pipes and drums.

And, the end, with the lone piper playing on the rampart of the Castle ... It will give you chills.

It was an evening to remember as my dad finally got to return to Scotland and see the Tattoo live. To be with him is a memory I cherish to this day.

Bryce and I went again in 2014 and took our two girls to experience the Tattoo. Lindsay, my eldest, learned Scottish Dancing and a number of her "classmates" from Atlanta now dance each year at the Tattoo. Thus, more members of the McGowan clan indoctrinated into the lore of the Tattoo.

So, if you're asking yourself, should I go? The answer is yes. It is something that is not to be missed. You won't regret it.

If you want to prepare yourself for the experience, you don't have search for old VCR tapes like my dad did. You can watch past years on YouTube. If my dad were still here, he would have figured out how to stream video and be watching every year available.

# WEBSITE UPDATE

This is your friendly neighborhood webmaster with an update on SASW's various web presences. Our website, [www.scotsofwmbg-va.org](http://www.scotsofwmbg-va.org), is now fully functional. The main page is our main presence for the general public, explaining who we are, what we do, and how they can join the Society.

We also have a Member's Only page at [members.scotsofwmbg-va.org](http://members.scotsofwmbg-va.org), where you can renew your membership, look at the Society Google Calendar, review our leadership and governing documents, and peruse photos in our Gallery. You can also view (with a password) the Member's Directory for Society members who have allowed their contact information to be displayed.

Lastly, you also will be able to electronically pay for events such as Burns Night and the Holiday Ceilidh; the ability to pay for these events will be turned on once their details are finalized and approved by the Board.

## New SAS-W Winter Apparel

Just in time for winter's chill, the Saint Andrew's Society of Williamsburg is proud to announce the warm-weather clothing in our webstore.

In addition to summer items, we have added a good selection of fleece jackets, fleece ¼ zip pull-overs, fleece vests, a soft shell jacket, and a raincoat. For inside wear, check out the long-sleeve oxford and woven shirts, denim shirts, a long-sleeve polo, and a sweatshirt.

All items are available in a variety of colors and come in both men's and women's sizes. There's also a youth size in the fleece jacket. All items feature the SAS-W logo in contrasting color.

Future items will include two styles of large stainless steel travel coffee mugs. More information is coming soon!

All items can be shipped to your house for a Fedex fee - or simply save shipping and pick up your item(s) at the A Logo For You store in Williamsburg.

SHOP: [https://stores.inksoft.com/st\\_andrews\\_society](https://stores.inksoft.com/st_andrews_society)

If you have any questions, please feel free to email me.

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Society photos may be easily viewed on the SAS-W Flickr page. The page can be found at [www.flickr.com/photos/202471013@N02/albums](http://www.flickr.com/photos/202471013@N02/albums).

If you have SAS-W photos that you'd like to add to our Flickr page and the website gallery, you may submit photos via the Gallery Page on the website, or email photos directly to me at the address below.

Yours aye,  
Martin Cox  
[webmaster@scotsofwmbg-va.org](mailto:webmaster@scotsofwmbg-va.org)



If you have a Facebook account, please join us on the St Andrews Society of Williamsburg Facebook group at:

[www.facebook.com/groups/1410543212957245](http://www.facebook.com/groups/1410543212957245)

Currently we have 65 members on the page. We post fun information about various Scottish news and the Society's upcoming events as well as photos of events that the Society holds throughout the year. Come over and join the fun and share your thoughts and pictures and help our Facebook community come alive with interesting posts. Please remember this is a non-political site and we do not allow any posts that can be construed as political in nature. See you there!!

Thanks,  
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