

BAGPIPE MUSIC and COMPOSITIONS RELATIVE to the CLAN MacNEIL

By P/M Bill Hart D,Urr

The following are the notes prepared for my presentation at the Annual Gathering of the Clan MacNeil, Australia, held at Caboolture, Queensland, on 12 October 2013.

Research of my music library, highlighted the following tunes, either in title or composer, having a link with the Clan. At the Dinner I played a number of these tunes, however, time is not available to play the complete list, nor did I have the memory capacity to learn them all. The list is provided here for future reference, should it ever be needed.

The Fair maid of Barra	*	Air
Hugh MacNeill		Air
Kildonan Castle		Air
Lamlash Bay		Air
Leaving Barra		Air
Loch Ranze Castle		Air
MacNeill's Oran Mor	*	Air
Mull of Kintyre	*	Air
Shores of Islay		Air
The MacNeill's March	*	March
Andrew MacNeill of Oransay		March
Captain MacNeill		March
Captain MacNeal's Welcome Home from South Africa		March
Brodick Bay		March
Dugald B. MacNeill		March
Duncan MacNeill of Melfort		March
[also listed as ...Farewell to Melfort]		
George Bell's Farewell to Bute		March
Kildonan		March
The Islay Lasses		March
Isle of Arran		March
Jim Anderson's Welcome to Arran		March
John McMillan of Barra		March
Farewell to Barra		March
Elly McNeil		March
John Neil MBE		March
Miss Mary O'Beirne's Welcome to Kidonan		March
Maids of Bute		March

Machrihanish Bay		March
Naill Nan Oran		March
Ormsary House		March
The MacNeill's of Ugadale	*	March
The Peaks of Arran		March
Miss Sheelah J. Nicol of Glasgow Islay Choir		March
Seumas MacNeill	*	March
The Kyles of Bute		March
Black Neil's Bonnet		Strathspey
Flora MacNeill		Strathspey
John MacNeill		Strathspey
Mrs C. MacNeill		Strathspey
Maid of Islay		Strathspey
Waves of Kintyre		Strathspey
An Islay Reel		Reel
Castle Bay		Reel
I was Born in Islay		Reel
Islay Ball	*	Reel
Kildonan		Reel
Lads of Islay		Reel
Mrs MacNeill of Ugadale		Reel
Ruairiah of Barra		Reel
Andrew MacNeill		Jig
An Islay Jig		Jig
Bute		Jig
Islay's Charms		Jig
Angus John MacNeil of Barra		Jig
Machrihanish Bay		Jig
MacNeill of Barra's Barge		Jig
Mrs Seumas MacNeill		Jig
Over to Islay		Jig
Road to Kintyre		Jig
John MacNeill's favorite		Hornpipe
Lament for Andrew MacNeill of Oransay	*	Piobaireachd
A S MacNeill of Oransay's Salute		Piobaireachd
Lachlan MacNeill Campbell's Fancy		Piobaireachd
Farewell to the Laird of Islay		Piobaireachd
MacNeill is Lord There		Piobaireachd
MacNeill of Barra's March		Piobaireachd
The Pride of Barra		Piobaireachd

* indicates tunes played at the presentation

There may be many, many more tunes having a link with the Clan MacNeil, however this is a good starting list.

My talk and playing focused on the following three MacNeill pipers, and their contribution to piping.

Archie MacNeill,

Born 1879 and died aged 82

Spent his early life in Gigha

He is referred to as the Blind Piper. The blindness caused by a domestic accident at age 10 and he became totally blind at age 18.

He was also the Uncle of Seumas MacNeill who I refer to later.

His two most popular compositions are the march, Donald MacLean's Farewell to Oban and the reel, Islay Ball. I spoke about both of these tunes prior to playing them

He also composed the following tunes:

Neil Sutherland of Lairg [strathspey], The Banks of the Allan [Jig] and David Ross [March]

Seumas MacNeill

Born 1917 in Gigha, and died in 1996, aged 79

Won the Gold Medal for piping at the Argyllshire Gathering in 1962

Held the position of Senior Lecturer in Natural Philosophy at Glasgow University

Referred to as teacher, player and adjudicator. However, his monumental contribution to piping was the formation of the College of Piping in Glasgow, with Thomas Pearston in 1944. He was the first editor of the Piping Times, a monthly publication which first appeared in 1948, and he continued in this role until his death in 1996. A Dougald MacNeill took over as editor for 3 years, and he was an adjudicator at the College in 2006, however I have been unable to ascertain if he was a relation of Seumas.

Seumas was claimed by many to be 'outspoken and holding strong opinions' and in his writing held an 'abrasive pen'. At the end of his Letters to the Editor Column in the Piping Times, he would state *the customers always write*. [but I do not think he ever conceded they were *right*]

An example of his 'abrasive pen', was told to me by Donald Bain, the Champion Piper from New Zealand, when he visited the NSW Pipers Society in the early 1980's, to judge the Silver Chalice Piobaireachd Competition and to give a piping recital. He recounted how on his first visit to Scotland in an attempt to win the Gold Medal at the Northern Meeting, everything that could possibly go wrong went wrong, and the final straw was on the day when he was not one hundred percent happy with his pipes, and as a result he admitted his performance was not up to standard.

Seamus in his report on the event in the Piping Times, made statements along the lines of *colonial pipers need to learn how to play before they travel to Scotland and waste the time of the judges*. Donald returned to win the event, and after the prizes were announced, Seamus who had judged the event, sent his steward to invite Donald over in order to congratulate him, and find out more of his piping background. Donald, who I might add was a very quiet deep thinking man in my

opinion, was very quick to tell the steward that Seamus would find out all he needed to know, if he looked at page..... vol..... of the Piping Times.

Historically the first three pipers, outside of Scotland, to win the Gold Medal were all from New Zealand. Namely, Lewis Turrell in 1958, Murray Henderson in 1975 [formerly a pupil of Donald Bain prior to moving to Scotland in 1973] and Donald Bain in 1979.

The College of Piping is to this day a very strong organization in the world of piping, however I rate its two most outstanding contributions as follows:

- **The production of the College Tutor Book 1 in 1952, which has been republished many times and has sold 400,000 copies. This tutor introduced a new way of learning, making it more interesting for the young learner. I demonstrated the difference between this new and the old method of teaching.**
- **The introduction of Summer Piping Schools in Canada and America. Top tutors from Scotland can be credited with raising the standard of piping and the pipebands in these countries, and the results they now achieve in their visits to compete in Scotland.**

In 1968 Seumas also produced a book on Piobaireach for the BBC, in an attempt to inform a wider audience of the beauty of this music. In 1987 he produced another book titled, Piobaireach and its Interpretation.

Andrew MacNeill of Colonsay

Born in Helenborough, Glasgow, served with the Glasgow Highlanders in World War 11, and lived and farmed in Colonsay.

Died in 1997

He was a member of the Music Committee of the Piobaireachd Society and also a regular judge at the major piobaireachd competitions.

During his life he was recognised as one of the leading authorities on the MacPherson style of piobaireach playing, being taught by the great Robert Reid. One of his pupils was William Barrie, a Scot who spent time in the USA, Australia and New Zealand, before finally settling in Canada. He died there in 2004. He will be remembered for his many compositions, and I played the Ground of the beautiful piobaireachd 'Lament for Andrew MacNeill of Colonsay', which he wrote in memory of his tutor.

NOTES ON THE TUNES PLAYED

The MacNeill's March: The Clan pipe tune, and high quality 2/4 competition style march.

The Fair Maid of Barra: Her name was Morag MacAuley and she died in 1998 aged 87. She is buried in Cuier Cemetery, Barra. She was acknowledged as an authority on Gaelic language, songs and stories.

This popular air, was composed by John Campbell of Barra

MacNeill's Oran Mor: Translates as 'light music' and was composed by Seumas MacNeill

Mull of Kintyre: A modern hit tune, written by Paul McCartney and Denny Laine in 1977. The original hit recording featured Kintyre's local Campbelltown Pipe Band, and in UK was top of the charts for 9 weeks and sold over 2 million copies.

The MacNeills of Ugadale: This tune was a very popular 6/8 march with Australian pipe bands in the 1960's. It was composed by Pipe Major J.M. MacKenzie, bagpipe teacher at the Queen Victoria School, Dunblane.

Donald MacLean's Farewell to Oban: To this day still a very popular competition style 2/4 March for solo piping and pipe band competitions, and was composed by the blind piper Archie MacNeill. My piobaireachd tutor P/M Jim Jackson from Luss, Scotland, told me that the tune was based on the main melody notes of the Welsh National Anthem, Land of My Fathers.

Seumas MacNeill: The same Seumas referred to in the notes above. This 6/8 march was written by Bobby MacLeod.

Islay Ball: The pipe setting of this reel, was arranged by the blind piper Archie MacNeill. The structure and melody of the tune, leads me to believe that it was originally a fiddle tune.

PIPE MUSIC

of the

CLAN MacNEIL

