



Jaame I. Koyil, President

April 2016

President's Letter

I'd like to say a special thanks to Francesca McCrossan and Fred Rutledge who have been doing yeoman's work in helping to interface with the Queen's Birthday group which includes the BBS and the BABC.

I hope all of you will consider attending this once in a lifetime event.

I hope to see you at our monthly meeting soon.

Your aye,

Jaame I. Koyil

President



This article was first published in the Spring 2016 edition of Scottish Life Magazine.

The Pipes are Calling

Ross Calderwood's handmade bagpipes, once just a weekend hobby, have become an international sensation.

By Terry Williams

Ross Calderwood is a lucky man and he knows it. I met him on a breezy day at his workshop beside the waters of Loch Alsh, where the light can change a dozen times in an hour and the wind chases white-laced waves between the Kylerhea narrows and the pale arch of the Skye bridge on the northern horizon. Ross's business is bagpipes—making them, talking about them and playing them when he has time—and Lochalsh Pipes is the culmination of a musical journey that has dominated most of his life so far.



Ross Calderwood at work on the lathe.

Photo © Terry Williams

He started playing the Highland pipes when he was eight years old, with the Boys Brigade Pipe Band in Port Glasgow. Like many youngsters, Ross swapped music for earning a living when he left school, turning his attention from pipe bands to pipe-work engineering. Then came marriage, children, a home in Yorkshire and a weekly commute across the Pennines to work at Sellafield in Cumbria, where he shared lodgings with Angus, a young man from a small village called Balmacara in Wester Ross. With hindsight, their meeting seems more than coincidental.

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Scotland Lobbies To End Haggis Ban

Haggis, a traditional dish made with sheep's pluck (heart, liver and lungs), oatmeal, suet, onion and seasonings, is beloved by Scots on both sides of the Atlantic. But since 1971 the U.S. Department of Agriculture has banned it, maintaining that sheep's lungs are unfit for human consumption. After a number of unsuccessful attempts over the years to overturn the ban, a group of Scottish officials recently tried a new approach. "What if we take the lungs out of U.S. haggis?" the Scottish delegation asked. But while they wait for an official response, haggis makers like Sandy Crombie, the owner of Crombie's of Edinburgh, are having serious second thoughts, saying that lungs are crucial to any self-respecting haggis recipe.

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Butcher Sandy Crombie contends, "It's the lungs that make haggis."

Photo © Lisa Ferguson/The Scotsman

Continued from front cover

Pipes

Despite his origins, Angus had never learned to play the pipes and he persuaded Ross to give him some lessons. A small advert in the *Whitehaven News* attracted a few more pupils, including 70-year-old Ronnie.

"Eventually Ronnie and Angus needed a set of

pipes." Ross told me. "So we decided that we were just going to make them. One of Ronnie's hobbies was woodturning and I was working in engineering. Our landlord's brother had a joiner's shop up at his farm, which was quite handy. Between us, we made a homemade lathe out of a washing machine motor. It worked alright!"

So Ross added woodturning to his engineering

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Completed parts await assembly.

Photo © Terry Williams

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Pipes

skills. Thanks to the washing machine lathe, Angus and Ronnie got their Highland pipes, but it wasn't long before a different kind of bagpipe caught Ross's attention during his weekends at home.

"I started going to folk festivals in Yorkshire. That was the first time I'd seen these smallpipes. I was intrigued, coming from a Highland piping background. When I saw people playing these pipes in the pubs, I realized they were using Scottish fingering and that I could play them if I learned the bellows."



Testing the chanter with a leather bag not yet covered with Harris Tweed.

A generous Christmas gift from his father provided Ross with his own set of small pipes and he teamed up with a fiddler friend in Cumbria. They started a regular folk session and had a lot of fun, but eventually it was time for a change. Never afraid to take a leap in the dark, Ross and his wife Jane decided to move back north with their family. The house by the sea in Reraig—the by-the-sea portion of Balmacara village—seemed perfect, and, of course, there was that connection with Angus of the Sellafield lodgings.

"We moved up, not knowing what we were going to do," said Ross. "We started with bed and breakfast and a few part-time jobs. I began making an odd set of pipes for kids and friends. Then I built a Web site. I sold a few sets of pipes, then it got bigger and bigger. I could probably keep going part-time with people who know me, but for it to be a full-time job, the Web site is the thing."

At first he worked in an old garage that had seen better days. A cold, damp building isn't the best place for tuning bagpipes, so that part of the process took place in the house among the B&B visitors.

"Jane was getting sick of me making a noise, squeaking and squawking. Then the endowment matured to pay the mortgage, and I spent most of it on this!"

This is a bright, airy, warm and dry, timber-built workshop adjacent to their home. Almost every inch of space is devoted to bagpipes in various stages of development—from whole limbs of timber to milled planks, blocks cut to size, pipes with and without finger holes, bags and bellows—all waiting to be set to work. Not least is a treasured collection of books, built up over the years. Ross is more than enthusiastic about bagpipes; he clearly eats, sleeps and breathes their history and their future. Names and dates and spellbinding details spilled into our conversation like gold coins into an everyday purse.

"Smallpipes are the descendants of the 16th-century French *musette*," said Ross. "The oldest chanter we've got in Scotland is the Iain Dall chanter."



Laburnum smallpipes finished with ram's horn and brass.



Local wood ready to be worked.

In fact, it's the oldest surviving chanter of the Highland bagpipe anywhere in the world. Iain Dall MacKay, known as the Blind Piper of Gairloch, lived between 1656 and 1754. He was taught by the MacCrimmons of Boreraig in Skye and is considered one of the most important Highland pipers and composers. His chanter can be seen in the Museum of Piping at The National Piping Centre in Glasgow. The museum is also home to the oldest surviving set of Scottish smallpipes, known as the Montgomery smallpipes, which belonged to Colonel Montgomery of the First Battalion. Dating from 1757, they have been described as "a Rosetta Stone of Scottish bagpipe musicology."

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Pipes

“My pipes are inspired by the traditional appearance of the 18th-century pipes,” said Ross, “and by the work of key musicians during the 1980s revival of the instrument.”

That revival lifted folk and traditional music out of the province of an eccentric minority and turned it into an ever-developing mainstream. Bellows-blown smallpipes, Border pipes and reed pipes are Ross Calderwood’s passion. His research has led him to believe that this type of instrument was the most widely played bagpipe in Britain from early times. Their most obvious difference from the *Piob Mhor*, or Highland Pipes, is the bellows that fit under the player’s arm and are operated by his or her elbow.

Ross works only to commission. The customer chooses the wood, the horn, the bag cover and the key: D, C, A or G. It’s not a cheap option, and he describes his customer base as being from the “affluent West.” Very good factory-made smallpipes are easily available and more affordable, he said.

“The same sort of bagpipe, made in a big factory. It’s well done, they do a good job. But it’s not what I do. I see myself as a cottage industry.... There is a tradition of using local sources and it fits in with my politics. I want to keep things local, try to keep the carbon footprint small as well.”

He favours Scottish woods like holly, yew, apple and laburnam, and marks each piece of timber with its place of origin, which may be the Black Isle, or Loch Broom, or Ullapool. If you order a set of pipes, Ross is quite likely to tell you where the tree grew that provided the timber. There’s also a certain element of recycling—using timber that other people don’t want.

“This stuff at the back, it’s hawthorn,” he said. “I won’t get any pipes out of it so I’m going to swap it. There’s a guy who does wood turning along the road; I’ll swap with him. I got a lump of apple this week and I’ve got a load of laburnam. You struggle getting good laburnam. I’ve got a friend who’s a head gardener down at Holyrood Palace. There were a couple of trees there that they were going to get rid of, so he says you’re welcome to come and get bits and pieces.”

Turning lumps of wood into planks is one task Ross prefers not to do himself. He uses small sawmills and timber yards, which are properly set up to do the job. Then he takes over.

“It goes from the plank to this stage here.” He gestured to what looked like a child’s collection of building blocks, sorted into groups and stored in a series of small pigeonholes. He had carefully measured and cut every block, and each group would become a set of bagpipes.

“There are nearly 50 sets here,” he said. “They’re all ready to go. That keeps me at least two years ahead of orders. You’ve got to keep it rolling because the timber’s got to settle, although it’s well seasoned. I actually microwave it as well. I’ll stick each set in the microwave to show up any cracks, and if it’s going to bend, it’ll bend in the microwave. Then from there I start.” Each piece is drilled and then shaped on the lathe—the

washing-machine lathe of his early days was long gone, he added. “I’ve ended up with a really good lathe. Now I’m wanting an engineer’s lathe and keep my fingers crossed that I’ll get one eventually.”

At this stage the blocks of wood are beginning to look like pieces of bagpipe and they are soaked in a linseed-based oil for a week. This helps bring out the beauty of the wood as well as the tone of the finished pipes. There are faster ways of doing it, but Ross is in no rush. There are plenty of other tasks waiting for him. Bellows and bags, for instance.

The bellows are double skinned, with vinyl on the inside and leather on the outside. This makes them completely airtight and eliminates the need to season the leather. For the plates, he uses recycled and local timbers such as oak, ash, cherry and alder. Crucially, in a bellows-blown set of pipes there is no contact between the player’s mouth and the chanter, therefore no moistening of the all-important reed.

“It makes sense,” said Ross. “If you could use dry air, your reed would last forever. That’s the idea of the bellows. And it’s not just how long the reed’s going to last altogether; it will last during the performance as well. It’s stability.”

He makes his own reeds from Spanish cane, one of the few materials he can’t get locally. He also buys in ready-made bags made of pretreated hide—another material that doesn’t need seasoning. This provides a maintenance-free bag that is 100 percent airtight. Over this goes the bag cover, which Ross makes according to the customer’s choice.

“I only use Harris Tweed, handmade in the Western Isles. Local timbers, Harris Tweed, natural horn....”

He may describe his business as a cottage industry, but if this conjures up an image of rough-hewn crafts and a musical sound as robust as the local climate, think again. Pipemaker Calderwood is a dedicated master of his art. He picked up a set of smallpipes and played me a tune that immediately set my foot tapping; then another on the Border pipes to demonstrate the difference in tone—a little deeper and perhaps a touch richer, to my untrained ear. Both are well suited to a congenial indoor setting. No wonder they found a niche among folk musicians, and no wonder Ross was won over by them. Today, his reputation brings him many customers by word of mouth, while his Web site draws the attention of a worldwide audience. He reeled off an impressive list of countries:

“North America, Canada, Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, the Dutch, the French, and the Italians. Never Australia for some reason, or New Zealand. I’ve never even had an enquiry, which I find strange. Some are professional musicians, some leisure, some semi-professional. I’ve made some pipes for the National Centre of Excellence in Traditional Music in Plockton. The Director, Dougie Pincock, plays my pipes. A lot of kids from the local pipe bands, quite a few of them get my pipes.”

Working to commission can present interesting challenges. Ross showed me a set of pipes with Baroque tuning, ordered by a customer involved in the Globe Theatre in London. It’s the sort

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Pipes

of idea that appeals to his historical curiosity, and, of course, the musician will be delighted to get exactly the sound he needs for an authentic performance. A local customer once set him a different test.

“An eccentric biologist, he was doing lectures on the eradication of *Rhododendron Ponticum*, an invasive species. At the start of the lecture he wanted to play a wee tune on a set of bagpipes made of rhododendron. I made him a chanter first to see if it worked. It did. We made the pipes, and they were really nice—that’s about four years ago and they’ve been good. Maybe a bit on the quiet side, but they’re a really sweet little set of pipes. Rhododendron is very close grained, not a very hard wood. It wouldn’t be my first choice—it’s a timber for an eccentric biologist.”

People appreciate having an instrument that’s special and different. A consultation with Ross would, you feel, be much more than a discussion about wood and keys and tweed. It would be a leisurely affair with plenty of time for debate and anecdotes, and stories about the history of this lovely instrument. What lay ahead for Lochalsh Pipes, I wondered. Definitely more of the same, building up the business and developing the Web site. Having met Ross Calderwood, I knew that wouldn’t be all.

“I want to develop more historical instruments,” he said. “The history side is the bit I like. I’m basing the aesthetics on historical instruments—they’ve got to look old—but the inside will be up to date. I want to use what’s going to make the best sound. The best sound as far as the chanter’s concerned is still cane, which has been used for centuries. That side of it is still traditional.”

I prepared to leave and let him get on with his work. Ross recommended a visit to the “really good collection of bagpipes” in the archives of Inverness Museum. Then there’s the Museum of Piping in Glasgow, and I think he mentioned a Musical Instrument Museum in Berlin. His enthusiasm is dangerously infectious....

Terry Williams describes herself as a “travelling writer.” For over half her life, she has gradually crept northwards: first crossing from Cumbria into the Borders in 1976, then moving to Perthshire, followed by the Isle of Skye and more recently the Black Isle. She now maintains a static winter base and spends the kinder

months exploring Scotland’s “roads less travelled” in a diminutive motorhome known to her family as the Granny Van.

FURTHER INFORMATION

The Lochalsh Pipes

Reraig, Kyle of Lochalsh,
Ross-shire IV40 8DH

web: www.lochalshpipes.co.uk

tel: 01599 566 208*

e-mail: info@lochalshpipes.co.uk

Ceol na Mara B&B

Reraig, Balmacara, Kyle of Lochalsh,
Ross-shire IV40 8DH

web: www.ceolnamara-lochalsh.com

tel: 01599 566 208*

e-mail: info@ceolnamara-lochalsh.com

The Museum of Piping

National Piping Centre
30-34 McPhater Street
Glasgow G4 OHW

web: www.thepipingcentre.co.uk/museum-heritage

tel: 0141 353 0220*

e-mail: museum@thepipingcentre.co.uk

*When calling Scotland from the U.S., enter “011 44” first, and omit the first “0” of the telephone number shown.

SUMMER CEILIDH

Joint Bay Area Scottish Societies

Encinal Yacht Club, 1251 Pacific Marina, Alameda

SATURDAY JULY 9, 2016

6:15 pm - Registration - No Host Bar

6:30 pm - Scotch Whisky Tasting

7:00 pm - Buffet Dinner

8:30 pm - Ceilidh Dancing

Scotch Whisky Tasting \$15

(by Alan Purves)

Buffet Dinner & Ceilidh \$45

Registration / Mail To: PBSFCO - P.O.Box 10162 - Pleasanton, CA 94566

Email: karenburtonlind@gmail.com

Advanced Reservations required by July 2, 2016





RSCDS San Francisco Branch ASILOMAR WEEKEND Friday 28th ~ Sunday 30th October 2016



Merrill Hall Dancers. Photo by Dianne Wilson © 2014

The Asilomar Weekend and workshops is a fantastic San Francisco Branch tradition going back more than 50 years. Held on the spectacular Monterey Peninsula, in the historic oceanside setting of California's Asilomar State Park, the weekend promises to be packed full with fun, friends, learning, formal glamour and Scottish Country Dancing.

You are cordially invited to join us

for a wonderful Weekend with stellar teachers, outstanding musicians, great workshops, welcome dance, formal Ball and more, at the Asilomar Conference Grounds, Pacific Grove, CA, USA.

Teachers ~ Graham Donald, Leeds, England ~ Pat Coyle, Uxbridge, Ontario, Canada ~ Sara Gratiot, Marina, CA ~ Robert McOwen, Arlington, Massachusetts ~ Linda Pettengill, Half Moon Bay, CA ~ Andrew Smith, Emporia, Kansas.

Music by ~ Tullochgorum, StringFire! and more

Consider **extending your weekend** into a longer stay on the Monterey Peninsula, or use the Weekend as a jumping-off point for a longer vacation in the San Francisco Bay area, California or further afield.

Applications available online from April 1st, 2016. Full weekend details & downloadable applications online at asilomar.rscds-sf.org

Questions? Please contact:

Asilomar Weekend Chair: Patti Cobb pkcobb23@gmail.com

Asilomar Weekend Registrar: Julee Montes julm-hcs@pacbell.net



The fLYING SCOTSMAN (NILES CANYON TRAIN RIDE)



PLEASE JOIN PBFSCO
FOR OUR ANNUAL NILES CANYON TRAIN RIDE,
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING AND PICNIC

SUNDAY, MAY 1ST
TRAIN DEPARTS 10:15AM PROMPTLY!

ALL ABOARD! Wear your tartan and bring your children. Aye, there will be pipes on the journey!

The train will take us from the Sunol Station to Niles and back. The train leaves **promptly at 10:15am** so please arrive early. There is free parking at Sunol Station. The ride is about 1.5 hours but you may stop in Niles for a walkabout if desired.

After the train ride, we will meet in the adjacent park for our Annual General Meeting (AGM) and picnic with family and friends. All are welcome. FYI, lunch is **NOT** included in the ticket price so don't forget to bring your own. Space is limited so get your reservations soon!

| | | | | |
|------------------|---------------|------|-----------------------------|------|
| Train Ride Cost: | Adults | \$18 | Children (3-12 years) | \$8 |
| | Seniors (62+) | \$12 | Infants (2 years and under) | Free |

Questions/Information? Susan Spiegel ♦ 650.799.9001 ♦ susan@celtic-lass.com

PRESENTED BY PLEASANTON BLAIRGOWRIE FERGUS SISTER CITY ORGANIZATION

Please print legibly, complete this form and mail with check (payable to PBFSCO) by April 26th to:
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(Reservation Name)

Telephone _____ Email _____

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| Seniors | \$12 x _____ | \$ _____ |
| Children | \$8 x _____ | \$ _____ |
| Infant | Free x _____ | |
| Total Check Amount | | \$ _____ |

Tickets can also be purchased online through our website www.pbfsco.org or <http://FlyingScotsman2016.bpt.me>



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aroon' us gather Yer a' the wel-
comer early Tae crown yer right-
ful, lawful king For wha'll be King
but Chairlie? Caledonian Club
Clansman Harry Clyde is disguis-
ing hissel' as a handmaiden and
fleein' tae the Isle of Skye! (He
is retiring as Clans Chair, and
has graciously left me to face the
English.)

**151st Scottish Games &
Gathering to be staged at
the Alameda County Fair-
grounds in Pleasanton on
September 3-4, 2016.**

The 2016
application and **guidelines**
governing this coming year's
Gathering of the Clans at the
Caledonian Club of S.F. can be
found on our **website**.

Should you have difficulty open-
ing these documents, please
feel free to give me a call at
(925)784-1150.

If by chance you too have
relinquished your position in the
vanguard as Clan Representative,
kindly forward this email to your
successor and advice me
accordingly.

Kristan Robbie Anderson
Past Chief, Glen of the Clans
Chairman

Kris will serve you well.
He is also more fun than I am.

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Meeting & Events Schedule

| Date | Event / Topic | Location / Notes |
|---------------------|---|---------------------------|
| 2016 | | |
| Mon. April 18 | Member Meeting..... | 1088 Green St., SF |
| Thurs. April 21 | Queen Elizabeth's 90th Birthday..... | N/A |
| Sat. April 23 | John Muir Day / Earth Day celebration..... | Martinez, CA |
| Mon. May 16 | Member Meeting..... | 1088 Green St., SF |
| Sat. June 11 | HM The Queen's 90th Birthday Celebration | Fairmont Hotel, SF |
| Mon. June 20 | Member Meeting..... | 1088 Green St., SF |
| Sat. July 9 | Summer Ceilidh | Encinal Yacht Club |
| Mon. July 18 | Summer Break – no meeting | |
| Mon. Aug. 15 | Summer Break – no meeting | |
| Sept. 3–4 | Caledonian Club's 151st Highland Games & Gathering | Pleasanton, CA |
| Mon. Sept. 19 | Member's Dinner | 1088 Green St., SF |
| Mon. Oct. 17 | Member Meeting..... | 1088 Green St., SF |
| Sun. Nov. 13 | Remembrance Day Service..... | Grace Cathedral, SF |
| Nov. | 153rd Annual Banquet & Ball (11/19 or 11/26) | Marine's Hotel, SF |
| Mon. Dec. 21 | No Meeting due to Hogmanay Potluck on 12/31 | |
| Sat. Dec. 31 | Hogmanay Celebration..... | 1088 Green St., SF |
| 2017 | | |
| Mon. Jan. 16 | Member Meeting | 1088 Green St., SF |
| | <i>Inauguration of 2017 Office Bearers</i> | |
| Sat. Jan. 27 | Annual Burns Supper (The Family) | 545 Powell St., SF |
| Mon. Feb. 20 | Member Meeting | 1088 Green St., SF |
| Mon. Mar. 19 | Member Meeting | 1088 Green St., SF |
| Sat. April 1 | 20th Annual Tartan Day Scottish Faire | Ardenwood, Fremont |

About Us

The Saint Andrew's Society of San Francisco

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Editor: Gary Ketchen
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Membership Meetings

Meetings are held the 3rd Monday of the month, at 7:30 P.M. Light supper served before the meeting. (Free valet parking is provided for members' meetings. MUNI: one block east of Hyde St. cable car).

Officers of the Society

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David Campbell, First VP
Francesca McCrossan,
Second VP
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