



Left: the monument to the 51st Highland Division that stands above the French town of St. Valery.

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Hi Friend,

Well, it looks like here in the UK, the restrictions placed on us as a result of the pandemic are gradually being eased.

That's great news although I do feel a sense of pride in how my native New Zealand has handled the virus. It has been truly brilliant apart from the unfortunate incident this last week.

It certainly looks like 2020 will go down in the history books as a pipe-free year. What an *annus mirabilis* for us all! Sadly, the Jim Thomson School at Flagstaff, Arizona has also had to cancel for this year. Hopefully, we can all look forward to returning to the grass in 2021.

That said, I hear that the MacGregor Memorial competition that's held at the Argyllshire Gathering is to go ahead online. It's certainly been interesting to note that quite a few competitions are being held digitally this year in a bid to adjust to Covid-19, more recently Aboyne Highland Games (for Professionals) and the Nicol-Brown amateur competition (for Amateurs). I discussed this and the downside of digital recordings in last month's newsletter and do wonder if this is the right way to go?

Like me, many of you will have played last week at the 'Heroes of St Valery' tribute. This was the 80th anniversary of the time around 10,000 Allied soldiers were taken prison shortly after

Dunkirk. The 51st (Highland) Infantry Division suffered huge losses and many were taken prisoner, including Pipe Majors Donald MacLean and Donald MacLeod. As you may know, it was MacLean who composed this fine, fine tune.

I have seen several copies of the tune score on social media written incorrectly. Retreat marches do not have any lead in notes, so the first note of the tune is the first beat. In fact, there is no need for lead in notes or incomplete bars in Strathspeys or Reels. They are only required when the part/measure is repeated except for retreat marches which is because of the number of beats per bar and part. For the US readers in Scotland we have bars and a part is a measure made up of bars.



I was asked the other day what would be the one aspect pipers could change to improve their sound immediately and without changing their set up. This is an easy answer and one issue that most pipers need to learn more about: the bridle. Having the correct bridle position and strength is vital to any bagpipe. By moving a bridle down (making the tongue shorter) you sharpen the drone and hugely increase the harmonics. So, it is a matter of tinkering around with the bridle position so that the reed still functions but gives the best harmonics/sound you can achieve out of your drones.

I was fortunate enough to spend a lot of time with Pipe Major Angus MacDonald MBE (pictured) in the early 1980s at 'The Castle' (most older pipers would know that is Edinburgh Castle). Angus was always tinkering with his bridles to try and squeeze an ounce of more harmonics out of his fantastic Henderson drones. He was also a great believer in using cane reeds (all cane then) from the same maker in the belief that the cane would

react in the same way to moisture and blend together better. These days, we hear a mixture of reed types in pipes and I constantly hear a bass drone, then the tenors and a chanter instead of one complete sound.

Judging by an increase in orders for my drone reeds, it seems that pipers have indeed been using the last few months to work on their sound, including many pipers who play in leading bands. With there being no pipe band contests this year, I wonder if this is because they are switching to synthetic bags and synthetic reeds? Whatever, I hope you are pleased with the sound you're now experiencing from your pipes. If you are new to my reeds please [register them on the website.](#)

Also, if you are using any of my products you can rate them in the [Product](#) pages or leave a comment under '[Submit a comment](#)'.

I've been collecting some images of me playing and teaching through the years. If you have some images you'd be willing to share please email them to me, bruce@highlandreeds.com including a caption of event and date.

Thank you for reading this newsletter and for your support.

Continue to keep the circle tight and stay safe. Enjoy your piping.

Slainte,



Bruce Hitchings MBE BEM.

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