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Hi Friend,

I was very saddened to read of the passing of Tommy Johnston. Tommy was one of the piping world's great characters. In his company, you were assured a smile and some cheer. Tommy was immensely proud of his son's achievements on the competition platform and I hope that this will be of some comfort to Finlay at this very sad time. My sincere condolences go to Finlay and to Anne, and also to Tommy's business partner at Pipe Dreams, Ronnie McShannon.



Over the last couple of months I have enjoyed Colin MacLellan's postings of his piobaireachd recordings. Colin was one of our greatest competitive pipers and is now a well respected teacher and judge (and maker of fine pipe chanter reeds).

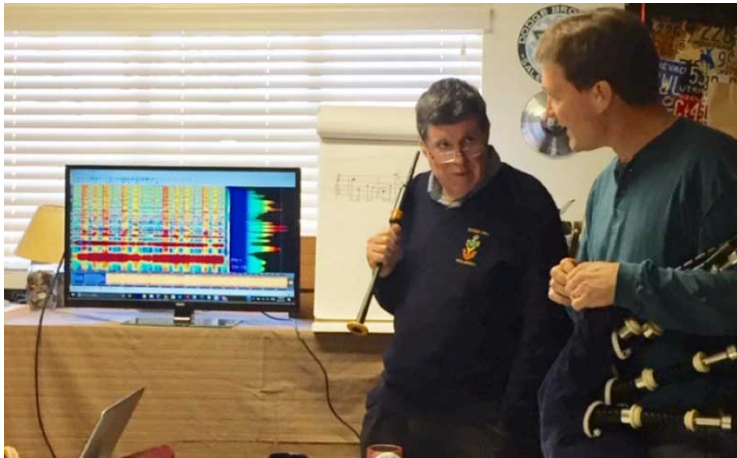
I am delighted to say that Colin's set up includes a hybrid Canmore bag and my Balance Tone High Resonance drone reeds plus my Moisture Control System and Moisture Tube.

If you're not aware of Colin's recordings I urge you to take a listen on his website [HERE](#).



Listen to the outstanding sound of his drones – which are possibly his father's old MacDougall set.

On a similar note, I am delighted that Iain Speirs has been playing my tenor drone reeds for a while now. He has played the bass reed for many years. Plus, Fred Morrison has also been playing the HR reeds for a number of years. Both recently played in the Silver Chanter Competition as did Stuart Liddell. Congratulations to Stuart on winning, with a magnificent Lament for the Children. Stuart plays my moisture control system.



One of my interests is in teaching, not just pipe tunes and technique but the science and facts of the bagpipe *sound*, its harmonics and scale and how they are produced. The photo on the left was taken earlier this year at the Los Gatos, California workshop. It shows me with Robbie Boyd testing his new

HR Reeds with a Sound Analyzer. I maintain that the old pipers knew all about this sound if they were unable sometimes to put it into words. For example, Willie Gray wrote in 1939: "Through unvarying wind pressure the drones demand a harmonic running which governs the pipe scale, its frequencies and amplitude."

Young Joseph MacDonald, too, knew what he was talking about when he included this diagram, right, of the bagpipe scale in his book.

Remember, Joseph wrote his book in the 1760s.

Try this exercise, ensuring there are no imperfections in the clarity of performing each note.

A wee reminder that your drone reeds should be 100% airtight. This was always the first principal of cane reeds. Not only does it make your reeds far more air efficient, if the reed is leaking air this will distort the drone harmonics. It is like having distortion on a radio channel you are listening to. Blow the reed in your mouth just enough that it stops sounding, there should be no air leakage whatsoever. Or cork your chanter stock and blow your pipes until the drones stop, you should not hear air leaking from the drone tops. You can see me doing this in [a video on my reed product page](#).

S C A L E.

f. → S
p. → R

	G	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	A
Left Hand	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Thumb, Holes.	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Right Hand	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
or sometimes with the little finger on	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•

There is no natural C. or F. in the Bagpipe Scale, nor has it any Flats or Sharps, as neither the Compaqs of this Instrument, nor the Nature of its Compositions can well admit of any. The few that might be play'd would be an entire Deviation from the Genuine and Original Style of this Music, which we alone intend to difcover, with the Rules Invented for it, by the first and most Eminent Masters of this Instrument.

A Disposition of the Notes in the Taste of this Music, serving likewise as an Exercise of the Scales.



By this, the Scale is Exercised, and a nice ear may easily distinguish the peculiarity of the Style already appearing in this order of the Notes, as shall be soon more plain. The blowing of them must be Strong, Steady, and Equal, which at first is a little hard upon every beginner, as it exercises their Breasts and Lungs, but practice will give them additional Strength of breath, and make this familiar and Easy, the Movement of each Finger must be as high as possible, that they may return with greater Force, For true Pipe Music, depending Chiefly on the disposition and execution of the Fingers, must be so performed, with all the Strength as well as agility of the Fingers to make it well play'd.

A friend of mine who is a well-respected player was getting headaches every time he played his pipes. I told him to perform the 'blow test' on his drone reeds and he found they leaked air when shut off. He replaced them with my drone reeds and the difference was instantaneous. He experienced a far better and more stable sound – and with no more headaches.

I was fortunate to have had lesson for many years from Captain Andrew Pitkeathly, both during his time in the military and later at his house before his death in 1994. Andrew used to say he was not interested in teaching people to win Gold Medals but more than happy to pass on the *music*. What he meant was he was not going to spend a year going over the same Gold Medal tunes every week but by teaching/going over other different tunes he believed you would learn more about the music and therefore become a better player. He also used to say you have to put a wee bit of yourself into each tune. Andrew had spent time with Pipe Major Donald MacLeod MBE at Fort George near Inverness, Scotland, and was the first serving Sovereign's Piper. He spent four months every summer with Bob Brown and Bob Nicol – the 'Bobs of Balmoral' – at Balmoral for the eight years he served as 'The Queen's Piper' before becoming Director of Army Piping in 1975 taking over from Captain John MacLellan MBE at Edinburgh Castle. He also taught Pipe Major Alisdair Gillies and Pipe Major Gordon Walker, who indeed put a lot of

themselves into their music with great success. Alisdair never competed against the other competitors, only against himself. As long as he achieved his best performance, he was happy, this was more important than winning. Concentrate on what you can control, playing music and having a good performance – and not on winning.

Finally, I wish to thank all those who have sent some photos and videos of me playing and teaching through the years. These will all go on to my [new website](#). If others have images they'd be willing to share please email them to me at bruce@highlandreeds.com including a caption of event and date. I would also encourage anyone who is playing my products to leave a [product review](#) on the appropriate produce page or leave a comment, video clip of you playing on the '[Submit your comment/playing](#)' page. There is a very interesting thread from a descendant from Donald MacDonald on [Patrick's Molard's testimonial](#).

Have a grand August. Isn't it most unusual not to be heading to the Worlds?



Enjoy your piping.

Bruce Hitchings MBE BEM.

[Click here to view my website](#)

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