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Hi Friend,

Happy New Year to you! I hope 2021 will be a wonderful fulfilling year for all of us.

Although I brought in the new year in Arizona, I

managed to catch the 'bells' being marked back at Edinburgh Castle where Pipe Major Peter MacGregor piped on the ramparts, as can be seen in this photo. I have performed there myself in the past and it is an immense honour. Peter's pipes sounded great and I understand he was playing the late Pipe Major Alasdair Gillies' pipes with a set of my HR drone reeds in them. Well done, Peter; a marvellous performance. [You can watch it by clicking this link – although you will need to have a BBC iPlayer account. Peter's performance is at 28:54.](#)



Despite looking ahead with optimism, it remains the case that there probably will be no piping during the first half of this year at least, unless you are in New Zealand. So far (up until May) most games/competitions here in the US have been cancelled. The Rob MacLintock School, San Diego (last week in June) and the Jim Thompson School, Flagstaff (09-16 July) at this stage are still going ahead.

It was pleasing to note that the Play for Sheets guys – Cameron Drummond and Glenn Brown, two of our leading pipers – recently

ran a competition on social media for people to listen to a recording of Cameron playing and to then guess what type of reeds he was playing in it. He was, of course, playing my reeds. [Use this link to hear an audio recording of Cameron. Listen to the harmonics from the drones in the slow air. His drones are 100% rock steady but resonating \(changing timbre/'colour'\) with each chanter note.](#)

Cameron was also kind enough to make these comments: *"The Balance Tone HR3 Reeds are fantastic. They have a great tone, lovely harmonics and a sweetness that lasts as long as I can play. The pipes are easy to tune, beautifully balanced and extremely steady. Along with the Highland Reed Moisture Control System my pipes have never performed better."*

Thanks, Cameron for your comments and for the great playing on a superb bagpipe. Play for Sheets is a good way for pipers to get great feedback on their latest tunes/performances.



I was saddened to hear at end of last year of Iain Morrison's passing. I was fortunate to have served with Iain when I joined the 1st Battalion, Queen's Own Highlanders in January 1979 after finishing my basic training. Iain was the Pipe Major. The Battalion went to Northern Ireland that summer but we two were required to stay behind to compete around the highland games circuit in Scotland. It was a magical time for me.

“In 1980 I was sent to The Army School of Piping at Edinburgh Castle to do my Senior Pipers’ Course and then stay during the summer at the castle before undertaking the Pipe Major’s Course later in the year. Iain spent several months at the Castle before taking over as Pipe Major of the joiner piping and drumming wing at Bridge of Don, Aberdeen. I did my time at the Castle under Pipe Major Angus MacDonald MBE and Captain Andrew Pitkeathly. At the end of the Pipe Major’s Course, in June 1981, I then went out to Honk Kong for six months



before the Battalion returned to Tidworth in England. Again, things were going well for me and I was posted as an instructor for two years to Bridge of Don under Iain as Pipe Major.

Some of the best – if not *the* best – performances I have heard were from Iain. When he was on form, he was outstanding. I have never heard anyone play a strathspey as good as him, even on recordings. He not only oozed music his technique was exceptional, and his bagpipe was musically full of harmonics and resonance on every chanter note. This probably came from the music he grew up with and his natural talent but he worked harder than anyone else. He started very working day doing at least two hours of figure/doubling exercises. He attended to nothing until this was done and it was reputed that even the Commanding Officer would not call him until his exercisers were finished. He did not play his pipes that much, preferring to practice tunes more on the practice chanter. Even and almost every time we travelled on a bus he would be practicing away in the front seat. I found his teaching was more about the student understanding what he was playing and saying than going over tunes again and again. I do not believe enough pipers today listen to the great players and work out what they are doing.

[My good friend and fellow judge, Ian Duncan sent me this recording of Iain winning the Gold Medal in 1969 with Lament for the Viscount of Dundee. It can now be heard on my website.](#)

Listen to the harmonics from the drones giving such clarity to the chanter notes. Also to the clarity of the playing and the preciseness and balance of the movements. Above all, listen to the subtlety given to each note in its length and musical flow. In this recording Iain goes on to play a wonderful MSR.

Iain was taught by Pipe Major Donald MacLeod MBE over many years. While Donald was on a tour of New Zealand in the early 1970s he was asked what makes a good, complete piper. His reply was: "Technique – Musicality – Sound and all are equal in importance."

Iain is pictured above with his pupil, James Duncan MacKenzie who won the Silver Medal at the Northern Meeting in 2019. I tried to find a photo of myself and Iain taken at the end of the

season in 1979 – Iain with all his cups and prizes and me with my lonely Silver Medal – but without success. However, I did find this clipping in the Regiment Magazine.

Competition Results
The Pipe Major and Piper Hitchings were left behind in Scotland to compete at the Highland Games. Pipe Major Morrison won no fewer than 18 first prizes, as well as 7 seconds, 6 thirds, 1 fourth and 1 fifth. He has been asked to play at Blair Castle again this year. Piper Hitchings won the Silver Medal at Oban following Piper Barnes who won it last year. He also had one second and two fourths at other Games, which were excellent results in his first year of competition. Piper Barnes who took his R & R to coincide with the Oban Games did extremely well winning first prize in the March and second in the Strathspey and Reel. He also won two firsts and a second at Gretna earlier in the year.

Lastly, a big 'thank you' to the many people who responded to my New Year's Facebook post video from the petroglyphs with good wishes for our recent marriage and the new year. A number have asked if I have moved to the US full time. At the moment we intend to keep the properties in Scotland and the business running there as well as here in the US. Hopefully, the best of both. We have a commitment to the horses and animals here in Arizona that also comes high on our priorities.

[If you haven't seen my New Year's Day video from the petroglyphs, this link should take you to it.](#)



Enjoy your piping.

Bruce Hitchings MBE BEM.

As ever, please send me photos or videos you'd be willing to share at bruce@highlandreeds.com including a caption of event and date. Please also leave a product review on the appropriate produce page of my website – or leave a comment or video clip of you playing on the ['Submit your comment/playing' page](#).

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