

# December 2022



Hi Friend,

As this year draws to a close and we reflect on 2022, we are grateful for all the wonderful events that have happened. Piping got back to being live again and we managed to travel once more. I look forward to even more of both in 2023. Having said that, I don't know about you but 2022 has been quite a quick year.

In last month's newsletter, you may recall I said I would provide more detail into the last tune [played superbly by Pipe Major Burns at the late Queen's funeral](#). The tune was *Salute to the Royal Fendersmith*. The tune refers to Willie Banks, the elder brother of the composer, Pipe Major Jimmy Banks MBE. Willie died in a tragic accident while swimming in the Thames River. Jimmy and Willie both served in the Scots Guards. The tune is a beautiful, melodic piece of music, which Jimmy wrote in 1993. You will find the score in volume 3 of the Scots Guards' collection. Jimmy also has a recording of him playing the tune along with his other brother Alex playing the keyboard. After leaving the Guards, Willie joined the Royal Household and was known to be a favourite of the Queen and she was known to have loved the tune and in fact asked for it to be played at her funeral.



After leaving the Guards Willie joined the Royal Household and was known to be a favourite of the Queen, who asked for it to be played at her funeral.

Willie worked at the Queen's favourite residence, Windsor Castle, and his main role as the Royal Fendersmith was to light the Queen's fire in the evening in the Oak Room. Part of his duties was to maintain the brass on the fenders, andirons (two metal stands that supported wood burning in a fireplace) and other fireplace hardware.

The role of the Royal Fendersmith is not just ceremonial but is actually

very important: he had to make sure that all fires were safe and extinguished completely after use. In November 1992, you may recall, a fire broke out in Windsor Castle, the largest inhabited castle in the world and one of the Queen's official residences. The castle was engulfed in what quickly became a massive fire. Incidentally, this was due to restoration work and not caused by a fireplace.

Subsequently, officials at Edinburgh Castle realised that they would not be able to get modern fire engines into the castle in the event of a fire. A huge tunnel was built so the bigger fire appliances could get into the upper part of the castle. The threat of fire was taken very seriously. There was also a small fire in the Army School of Piping in the 1980s when it was still hosed at the castle. Again, this was when restoration/painting was taking place. Luckily, it was contained quickly, and little damage was done. Some historical photos were sadly lost.

Another aspect to the Queen's request for this tune (which was played at the end of the Windsor funeral service) might have been her signifying that the old flame is extinguished, and it's now time for the new flame.

This tune was written for a reason albeit a sad reason - just like the old, classic piobaireachd pieces. This is unlike today where too many are an arranged group of notes in a key signature that does not belong to the highland bagpipe. It is impossible to hum along to the melody of these tunes unlike this tune where you can't get it out of your head. The other similarity with piobaireachd is that Jimmy's tune is pure pentatonic in the scale of A. Pentatonic A scale is A B C - E F - A. Plus, it is in compound time, which is basically waltz time in Highland bagpipe music. The meaning is to salute Willie. Had it been a lament it would probably have been written in one of the other two pentatonic scales used by the Great Highland Bagpipe: G scale G A B - D E - G or D scale D E F - A B - D. I will cover more about pentatonic scales in my next newsletter.

**Canadians finding the secret  
- my reeds continue to be discovered.**



I was pleased to note that pipers playing my products were in the prizes recently at some of our leading solo piping contests. For example, Alex Gandy won the former winners March, Strathspey, Reel at the Northern Meeting. Not to be out done his father, Bruce (pictured above with his wife Beverly after winning the Bratach), won the Bratach Gorm at London. Both played a full set of my HR3 drone reeds. Bruce gave me permission to reproduce his recent comments to me:

*"In October of this year, I put in a new, full set of Balance Tone (high resonance) reeds into my pipe while down in California on holiday. I had taken my pipes down there as I was going to play in London later in the month and felt a week off was not wise. I don't usually put in a full set right off the bat but tried so this time, just to see how they would react.*

*"Results right off the bat were a different sound that took me a bit to get used to, but I was happy with it and the air efficiency and steadiness was really selling me. I did not adjust the reeds for a few days but slightly opened them up after 3 days of playing.*

*"As my playing increased in time, the pipe was getting better, and the harmonics were really starting to come through.*

*"In the end, I have a set of reeds that are sounding like I enjoy, I am getting more harmonics for sure, and physically, and this is important, the very high air efficiency has really helped my own steadiness without losing tonal sound, quality, or even volume as I have lost a lot of strength in the past year due to a shoulder injury. My results at*

*London and the following week in Florida were good and much of this comes from having confidence in the instrument behaving itself which these reeds are doing for me. These are a 5-star reed for me just now in terms of sound quality, ease of playing, ease of setup. Thanks!"*

Thank you, Bruce.



Young Callum Bevan won the overall at the George Sherriff Invitational, the Amateur contest run by Bob Worrall. Gillian Blaney finished third overall, both playing a full set of HR3 reeds.

Callum's father, Alan, is also playing a full set of HR3 reeds.

Callum and Alan are pictured, left. , Alan (the Pipe Major of Simon Fraser University Pipe Band) told me recently:

*"I could not be happier with my HR reeds. Simply put, they are the best set of synthetic drone reeds I have ever played. They are extremely steady and air efficient, and I love that they achieve this without sacrificing anything tonally. They produce a very rich, cane-like tone with a range of harmonics that make the chanter come alive."*

Fred Morrison won the overall championship at the Scottish Piping Society of London's solo competitions. Fred was playing my reeds, too.

## **Pipe bands discovering the secret**

Another interesting development I have noticed for a while is that I am receiving more and more orders for my reeds and moisture control products from pipe bands.

For many years, it was solo pipers who tended to play my reeds with bands intending to stick with cane and sheepskin. My reeds unlike most synthetic reeds are airtight which means they function more like cane reeds and give plenty of higher harmonics just like cane. They are however more resistant to moisture and climate conditions. My engineered designed moisture control systems - they use the [Venturi effect](#) - are the most effective way to have confidence without losing tone.

Clearly, many pipers play in pipe bands and may use a different set up with their band pipes from their solo set up. Orders have definitely been increasing and weather that is from pipe bands or individuals it is a very pleasing development to know that pipers are starting to get the benefits of well design and engineered products.

***In my next newsletter I hope to bring you news of a new feature on my website. You will want to take advantage of it, I assure you ...***





I extend to you my warmest greetings of the season.  
Enjoy your piping in 2023. Use [Highland Reeds'](#) products.

Bruce Hitchings MBE BEM

[Click here to view my website](#)

### Highland Reeds

54 Braekirk Avenue,, Kirknewton, Midlothian EH27 8BL Scotland  
Route 66, Ash Fork, Arizona, 86320, USA

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