



Alnwick Pipers' Society

NEWSLETTER

Issue 10 February 2012



Welcome

A New Year, and Spring is just around the corner, we hope. At least this winter we managed to get our Christmas Celebrations in, although driving conditions to and from the Dyke Neuk were not the easiest! We had a very enjoyable meal, however, and a good playaround afterwards and everyone seemed to enjoy themselves, so thanks must go to Richard and Fiona for organising the event.

This year will be one of change as the Society will be looking for new committee members, in particular, for the offices of Chair and Secretary. The performing group is continuing to evolve as, since last April, Susan Clarke has ably led monthly, open-to-all, informal Sunday practice sessions in the absence of Musical Director, Richard Johnstone, who has been unable to fulfil this role for some time due to heavy work commitments. In addition, APS will be now be charged with organising a Gathering in November, so it's going to be a busy year for committee and members!

We hope that 2012 will bring APS lots of playing opportunities and we will keep you informed of these either by e-mail, on our website diary page or in a future newsletter. We are especially looking forward to the visit of the Garioch Fiddlers to Alnwick in October. As far as we know at present, APS will be playing at the concert they are giving at Alnwick Playhouse on Saturday 13th October, and also sharing a session with them at the White Swan in Alnwick on the evening of Sunday 14th - put the dates in your diary now!

Di and Louise

Forthcoming Events

Feb 22nd (Wednesday) - Monthly meeting at the Farriers Arms, Shilbottle 8.00 pm.

Mar 11th (Sunday) - Monthly tunebook meeting at Newton-on-the-Moor Village Hall. Arrive 2.00 pm for a 'cuppa', start playing 2.30 ish. Please bring small contribution for a pooled tea. Any query contact Susan 01665 575232.

Mar 28th (Wednesday) - Monthly meeting at the Farriers Arms, Shilbottle 8.00 pm.

Apr 25th (Wednesday) - AGM followed by monthly meeting at the Farriers Arms, Shilbottle 8.00 pm.

Trad Fest is here!!

A celebration of traditional music with
Northumberland
Creative & Performing Arts
Alnwick Playhouse on
Saturday 17th March 2012

Instrumental taster sessions 1pm-3pm
concertina, accordion, N pipes, fiddle,
clogging, harp

Tutors: Sophie Ball, Emily Stephenson,
Lynn Tocker, Richard Johnstone,
Jasmin Earnshaw-Brown

Matinee concert 4pm - 6pm
featuring traditional youth projects,
Rothbury Ceilidh Band and
Northumbrian Pipes & Harp ensemble

Evening concert 7.30pm - 9.30pm
Featuring **The Northumbrian Ranters**
Compère Alex Swailes MBE

For more information contact:
Richard Johnstone 01670 533579
Alnwick Playhouse 01665 510785

The **Morpeth Northumbrian Gathering** will take place on
13-15 April 2012

The theme this year reflects the area's local sporting heritage, particularly the Morpeth Olympic Games between 1870 and 1958 (yes, it really existed!); 150 years of the Blaydon Races song; and the time of Charles II with the regranting of Morpeth's ancient coat of arms.

The weekend will be full of outdoor entertainment and free indoor workshops and sessions. For details please see

www.northumbriana.org.uk

VIOLIN FOR SALE

Restored, full-sized and ready to play. Included in the set is a brand new carbon fibre bow, plus a very old case.

£130 the lot.

Contact Susan
01665 575232

If you have a RAT stand and bag marked APS in your possession please could you bring it along to the regular meeting at the Farriers, or to the Sunday piping session at Newton on the Moor where they can be stored and set up for use each time. There are no concerts/performances on the near horizon but it has been proposed that APS do a Jubilee Year concert at the Jubilee Hall in the Spring and it would be really useful to have the stands available.
Many thanks. Susan Clarke

The Alternative Alnwick Gathering

Alnwick Pipers' Society organised a workshop for Northumbrian pipes and other F pitch instruments on Saturday 12 November 2011 at Newton on the Moor Village Hall, in place of the Alnwick Gathering. Richard Johnstone and Nick Leeming led the workshops. A good time was had by the 19 APS members who attended!

Richard's workshop focussed on pulse and rhythm:

Exercises to help develop a pulse and rhythm while playing:

Play a tune with other musicians and stop at the end of the second A. With your foot tapping, sing the first B part in your head. On the second B part, join in again. Did you all come in at the same time?

With a partner play a simple tune such as Jimmy Allan. One person claps while the other plays. The one clapping the beat speeds up and slow down. Can the player follow the alteration in speed?

Everybody clap a basic pulse, then get your partner to clap twice as fast, then twice as fast again while you maintain the original speed.

As the awareness of pulse is increased more complicated patterns can be tried. Try this:
Tap pulse with your foot; clap two beats to each pulse; count aloud five to each pulse or say hippopotamus;
Tap pulse with your foot; tap on a flat surface a different subdivision with each hand; count aloud another subdivision.

The last tip is to develop the pulse as a physical movement such as dancing, marching or tapping your foot. All this helps to build up an understanding of pulse and rhythm. This advice came from a Swiss composer called Emile Jaques-Delcroze and is known as Eurhythmics.

Nick's workshop [*This is a summary of the workshop, contact Di or Louise for the full text.*]

Fettling

- Do the bellows and bag hold air?
- Can all the drone sliding parts move easily?
- Do the tuning beads move easily?
- Do the end of drone valves open and close properly?
- Is the chanter secure in its stock?
- Does the blowpipe stay engaged with the bellows pipe?
- Do the pipes play, with all notes (keyed and unkeyed), and all drones sounding **at the same pressure?**



The last session of the day !

If the answer to any of these is 'no', then the pipes need fettling. If you're not confident to have a go yourself, find a recommended fettle or go back to your pipemaker.

Posture

Adopt a relaxed posture to avoid muscle strain and discomfort. Use a large mirror to examine your own posture. Sit or stand with your shoulders level and feet level. Keep your chin down and neck straight. Squeeze the bag with the arm, not the wrist; the left wrist should be held away from the bag. Rotate the chanter in the stock so that neither wrist is flexed.

Finger technique

Listen to yourself playing. Does each note begin and end cleanly? The note should begin sharply with the digit being lifted away from the chanter quickly and smoothly, with the skin leaving the whole circumference of the hole at the same instant, like a cork leaving a bottle.

Timing

Use a metronome to train yourself to play in good time. To set up a metronome, hum the tune you want to play, at the speed you think you can play. Adjust the metronome to that speed, then slow it down by two notches. Advanced players alter the length of notes to put more emotion into a tune, but this can only be done successfully if the rest of the tune is very steady.

Listening

Duet to make yourself listen to another player. Play tunes in unison. If you think that you speed up, ask a 'steady' player to help you. Play tunes you know, so that you are concentrating on listening, rather than reading the manuscript. It is always easier to hear a player who is behind you than one that is in front. Get them to sit behind you if you are having difficulty hearing them.

Play and learn variations

Some pipers find these terribly boring, but they are very useful to practice intricate note patterns and for seeing off unwelcome relatives.

Expand your repertoire

Try something harder. Play it slowly, and when you hit a hard bit, work at it. But don't just concentrate on the bit where you keep falling out. Frequently it is the bit immediately before or after where you have trouble that is the actual cause, or a contributory factor, in falling out of a tune.

A Reel Surprise

Recently the players who come to Newton on the Moor for the monthly tunebook session were asked to add a new set of tunes to their list. The third tune was Jean Milligan. Imagine my surprise when, during a conversation with Margaret Cato, I was informed that she and Jean Milligan had met and Margaret had recognised the name whilst downloading the music. How had this happened? You must imagine Margaret aged twenty-two and deciding to emigrate to America. She arrived in Boston and quickly found a job.

One day, a notice appeared on the board advertising a seminar in New York for anyone wishing to spend the weekend learning Scottish Country Dance. Along with three colleagues, Margaret signed up and it was here that she was to meet Jean Milligan. Miss Milligan turned out to be a co-founder of the Royal Scottish Country Dance Society (RSCDS) in Glasgow, which was based at Jordan's Hill College and which is now part of the University.

Jean spent many years visiting different branches of the RSCDS all over the world to teach, and in 1961, when Margaret met her, she was an elderly, stern and typically scrupulous teacher of Scottish Dance. Margaret was taken by surprise to see her former teacher's name as a tune title and is hoping to discover more about the composer, Winifred B Mathew, and find out when the tune was written.

Hopefully Miss Milligan would have been well pleased with this popular tune as well as being impressed by Margaret's performance in the Eightsome Reel!

Miss Jean Milligan

Winifred B Mathew



[Ed: the tune is printed out above in its original key of A.]

Susan Clarke

Garioch Fiddlers

Way back in August 2011, Susan took an interesting phone call from Joe McDowall from Aberdeen. The Garioch Fiddlers were planning their annual trip and had decided to come to Alnwick in 2012. Would Alnwick Pipers be interested in helping them find a local charity to support, promoting their visit, and playing with them at the concert and stramash?

It was an offer too good to turn down! The group of around 30 fiddlers, along with accordion and flute players, is arriving in Alnwick on Friday 12th October. We are planning to play at their concert at the Northumberland Hall on Saturday 13th, then join them for a session at the White Swan on Sunday 14th. **Carers Northumberland** has been chosen as the charity which will benefit from the proceeds of the concert. Rehearsals and repertoire will be agreed nearer the date, but please put the date in your diary if it's not already there. We have a copy of the band's CD so if anyone would like to borrow it, contact Di or Susan. Oh, by the way, we're reliably informed (by Morag) it is pronounced "Geeiry" !!

Louise Woodman

Alnwick Pipers' Society Annual General Meeting

Just a reminder that it is our AGM at 8pm on Wednesday 25 April 2012. This will take place prior to the monthly session at the Farrier's Arms, Shilbottle. As always, we need nominations for committee members and officers, so if you would like to get more involved in running the society – or know someone else you can persuade to volunteer – please contact any committee member for a chat - names and contact details are on page 5. Please come along and support your Society.

Winter Reminiscences

I travelled by bus from my home in Otterburn to Newcastle and then by trolley bus to Longbenton for saxophone lessons from Harry Sharples, an ex 'Desert Rat'. After 18 months of lessons (at 6 shillings a time which included tea courtesy of Mrs Sharples), I joined the Redewater Rhythm Boys, a steep learning curve. The band was busy, playing alternate Saturdays at Stamfordham, and the Royal Hotel at Hexham.

One particular Friday, I think in 1957, we were at Whitley Chapel [*just south of Hexham*] for the Young Farmers Ball. There was snow on the ground when we set off, with a stiff wind making the snow go skittering across the road as we travelled past Slaley. It was a good night, the dance was packed and we played until 1.00 am. We came outside at the end to load up and found our Morris van, belonging to Bob Thompson, buried, a raging blizzard having sprung up during the evening. We tried to get home in the van via Hexham and the A68 but got so far and no further. We turned back and tried the Colwell road, but after lots of pushing and shoving finally became stuck after about 2 hours. We curled up in the van trying to keep warm but suffered a long cold night. We were very relieved as it got lighter and saw that we were about 100 yards from a farm (the Steel). The farmer took pity on us and we were fed a welcome breakfast of bacon and eggs before we set off on foot. The farmer also said he would keep an eye on the van which was going nowhere at this stage, and of course still had all our instruments in it.



George at the Alnwick Garden

By 9.00 am we were en route to Kirkharle and, after Bob Brydon and Keith Rutherford started playing around in the snowdrifts, I took charge, being the eldest at 23, and we then took it in turns to lead the others in a more orderly fashion. We eventually arrived at Kirkwhelpington, where we had a lunch of sorts at the Temperance Hotel, costing 2 shillings and sixpence. We plodded on past Knowesgate and up onto the moor, and we were all starting to suffer by now. Coming up to Ottercops, Bob started to get cramp so we took it in turns to support him. By now it was sunny although still bitterly cold with a stiff wind. I at least had Wellingtons on but I recall that the others were just in ordinary shoes. We continued down past Blaxter, and as luck would have it, as we came up to Rayleys, there were the council lads complete with wagon and snowplough. We must have looked a sorry sight but at least we were saved! We had a lift for the last 5 miles into Otterburn, and arrived just as it was getting dark. A day not to be repeated.

George Brown

All Change for the Concert Band

As you all know, the Concert Band part of Alnwick Pipers' Society has been a regular feature of our organisation since 1999 when we needed to put on a good show for our trip abroad. With the help of Colin Bradford, Alan McKenzie and Richard Johnstone, we were able to improve our image, form a repertoire, play to a higher standard and have an enjoyable time. Many individuals improved their own playing and the Concert Band brought cohesion to the Society.

Just recently, the Committee received the resignation of our Musical Director Richard, who is finding work commitments very demanding at present, and after 12 years is now withdrawing from this role. This also applies to Fiona, who has been a stalwart of the band. So ends an era, and members of the Society who enjoy performing are faced with a different form of organisation.

Sunday Tune Book sessions began in April 2011 when it was thought that a routine of sorts would help us to continue to play well together. To this end, the Tune Book has been updated by the sub-committee, and by December we had completed and played all new material. Soon the sub-committee will be meeting again to compile sets for 2012. Any member can put forward a tune to the Tune Book committee, which is:

Susan Clarke, Di Jevons, Jimmy Little, Hilary Paton and Louise Woodman

Susan Clarke

Below is a copy of a recent letter from the Alnwick Northumbrian Gathering Committee to the Chair and Committee of Alnwick Pipers' Society. The full text is also available on the Alnwick Pipers' Website.

13th February 2012

To the Chair & Committee of Alnwick Pipers' Society

The Alnwick Northumbrian Gathering (ANG) Committee feels it has done all in its power to promote the ANG in recent years and were disappointed not to hold the event in 2011.

This decision was not taken lightly and, only after considering all relevant factors after the 2010 Gathering – lack of competition entrants in the vast majority of disciplines, reduced turnout for the evening concert, poor attendance at the Saturday night ceilidh, and the increased costs of hiring venues. The ANG committee was then forced to question the 'whys and wherefores' of putting on the event again along similar lines, given the amount of time, commitment and finances that are required to organise the event.

We did appeal to interested parties for suggestions as to how the committee might inject renewed enthusiasm into such an event, but on reflection, feel that little has changed in the last 12 months and can offer few suggestions as to how the situation might be improved in the short-term.

It is therefore with regret that the ANG committee feels it should stand down from organising the event and pass the responsibility back to Alnwick Pipers' Society (APS). The ANG committee understands that it is within the terms of the APS constitution that the APS is required to hold a Gathering on an annual basis in the month of November, and are aware that a small-scale 'Gathering' of APS did take place at Newton-on-the-Moor Village Hall for an afternoon of workshops on the Saturday afternoon of the 2011 Gathering weekend.

The dedicated bank account currently stands at just over £8000 and the ANG committee would strongly recommend that it remains a separate account, and be designated purely for future Gatherings, whatever shape or form they may take. The Gathering committee would like to encourage APS to consider holding a concert/ceilidh/session in addition to piping workshops and perhaps widen the remit of workshops to include other traditional instruments. Committee members would also like to offer their assistance to APS in whatever way possible for future Gatherings, and do very much hope there will be a revival of interest in years to come.

In practical terms, the Gathering Secretary will take steps to retrieve any cups that were handed out at the 2010 Gathering and which have not yet been returned and arrange to have them engraved with the winners' names. It will also be necessary to make arrangements for these and other Gathering-related items and paperwork to be handed over to the APS.

Sincerely, and with regret

Chair and Committee, Alnwick Northumbrian Gathering

Chair: Robert Whitehead **Secretary:** Joan Little **Treasurer:** Di Jevons

Members: Catherine Beal, Gillian Birnie, Robin Dunn, Mike Jevons, Jimmy Little

Your 2011/12 committee and their contact details are:

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