

# DAN FINLAY



**'The quietest and most un-assuming of men, Dan Finlay was a vital component in the 214 production line of excellence. He had a way of always re-assuring the boys as they left Alex Ibell as successful chanter students and tackled the pipes for the first time. With him we learned to blow and to finger and play our tunes with the required pointing. Anyone who has taught the pipes will know how difficult this transition from chanter to bagpipe can be. Yet when you left Dan you knew you would be ready for the band and the somewhat tougher regime of the pipe major, Alex MacIver. It was thanks to Dan's coaching that I was able to play with the band so early, a mere two and a half years after first picking up a practice chanter. My first contest was the World Championships at Dam Park, Ayr, in 1964 and the 214 was placed first playing Stirlingshire Militia, John Roy Stewart and Doctor MacPhail. I was 12 at the time and still cherish the memory and the look of satisfaction Dan had at seeing another of his charges make it into the 214 'big time'.'**

**Robert Wallace, Principal, the College of Piping May 2014.**

**Born in 1934 in the shadow of Ibrox Park in Copeland Road, Dan's football team of choice was not Glasgow Rangers. For Dan it was "Firhill for thrills", and he became a lifelong staunch supporter and season ticket holder of Partick Thistle, following them home and away.**

**There are many ex members of The 214 who can lay claim to a "Lewis" heritage and Dan is certainly one of those. His mother, Murdina (maiden name McLean), was born and brought up at Uigen on the island.**



**Murdina with Joe King**

**The photo below shows the family croft where they lived close to the manse. Dan's maternal grandfather was a MacLeod from Skye. The MacLean family home was not far from the homes of the "Mac an Irish" family and beyond their croft there was only the Atlantic Ocean! Dan's father was a lowlander from Kelvinhaugh Street in Glasgow.**



**Dan did not begin his Boys' Brigade career with the 214, but in The Lifeboys of the 135 BB attached to Scotstoun East Church. Attracted by the prospect of athletics, football and swimming, he effected a BB "Bosman" along with a couple of pals and joined the 214 BB at Gordon Park where his older cousin, John Finlay, was already an established piper. It was here that Dan began learning his piping under the tutelage of Alex Ibell.**

**After The War, when Captain Alex MacIver returned from active service in India and assumed charge of the band of the 214, Dan was "fast-tracked" along with Willie Grant to be tutored by Joe King. This was part of Alex MacIver's initiative and ambition to expand band numbers sufficiently to allow them to compete in SPBA competitions.**

**When Dan had completed his time in the 214 he joined the Renfrew Pipe Band playing with them for three years, together with Joe King.**

**Shown below at camp in Rhyll, from the left as we look are Dan Finlay, Alex Clapperton, Rab Little, Hamish McMurchie, Willie Grant, Jimmy Wright, ?????????? Hughie Davidson and Robert Caldwell. The drummers in front are: left, Ronnie Kinloch, and right, George Hunter.**



**At the age of 21 Dan undertook his National Service in The King's Own Scottish Borderers. There he was not only a piper in the band, but was also a member of their highland dancing team, as may be seen below. Dan had already learned highland dancing skills in the 214 at Gordon Park, coached, as were many others at that time, by Willie Grant's sister, Morag. His initial training with the KOSB's was down South, but most of his time was served in Malaya, hence the white dress tunics.**





**On the left of this image is Willie Grant who worked in Lawrie's as a sporrans maker. He joined Kenmure Park under the legendary Pipe Major Bob Hardie. Willie immigrated to Canada and became Pipe Sergeant in a Canadian Air Force pipe band. Dan is middle of the front rank, and Robert Caldwell is to his left. Farthest to the right of this photo, in the second row, is Robin Tedford.**

Dan would eventually become, together with Alex Ibell, Alex MacIver and Joe King, one of the key tutors in the development and maintenance of the band of the 214 as a "force majeure", often competing "up" with success into the adult grades. This was demonstrated in some style when the band won Grade Two at the British Championships in 1955. That level of success would eventually result in rule changes preventing bands playing up into a higher grade at major championships.

**Young pipers steal the show**

SOME of the best pipers in Scotland took part in the British Pipe Band Championship in Renfrew yesterday. But when it was all over it was a Glasgow Boys' Brigade pipe band everyone was talking about.

The 214th Glasgow Company of the Boys' Brigade won first place in the juvenile grade, then stepped right out of their class into the second of the four senior grades—and won another first.

To complete their day of triumph they took second place in the senior grade three.

**Proudest man**

The boys who had such spectacular success are all under 18. Their company headquarters is at Scotstoun.

Proudest of them all yesterday was the leader of the band, Pipe-Major Alex. McIver, a native of Lewis, and a playing member of Rutherglen Pipe Band. Alex spends all his spare time coaching the boys.

The championship was won by Shotts Dykehead Caledonian pipe band. Runners-up were Muirhead and Sons, Grange-mouth.

Other results: Grade 2—1, 214 Glasgow Coy., B.B.; 2, Rollis Royce. Grade 3—1, 402 Light Regt., R.A.; 2, 214 Glasgow Coy., B.B. Twenty-nine bands took part in the championship.

**The band that stole the show**

A GLASGOW Boys' Brigade Band—the 214th Scotstoun Company—stole the show at the British Pipe Band Championship in Renfrew.

They gained first place in the juvenile grade, won another first in the second of the four senior grades, and won second place in the senior grade three.

**Boy champions**

Perhaps even more intriguing is the fact that the lads of the 214th Boys' Brigade Pipe Band have become a menace to adult pipers!

Not content with winning the juvenile championship at Renfrew, this ambitious band took second place in the Grade 3 championship, and then went on to make history by winning the Grade 2 championship from a field of nine senior bands.

Press cuttings relating to the 1955 Renfrew British Championships.

**Dan's close commitment to the 214 would last for forty years and his assistance in the development of band members, particularly pipers, cannot be overstated. His service to the Boys' Brigade and, in particular, to the band of the 214, is worthy of the highest possible recognition.**

**ALEX, ALEX, DAN and JOE with The Highland Shield**



**From the left are:**

**Alex Ibell, Alex MacIver, Robert Caldwell, Dan Finlay, Bill Goldie, Malcolm Irvine, Jack Young, Sgt. Bill Shepherd, Angus Cameron, Willie Grant, Robin Tedford, Joe King. In front, kneeling, are Bobby Laverty left and Stirling McMurchie on the right.**

**Dan was a lifelong friend of Joe King and with the two Alexs. His memories and experiences have played a major part in assisting us in the collection of 214 related data and corroborating the associated tales.**

**Dan is one of only three people known to have been given a set of miniature pipes made by Alex Ibell. The two others were Joe King and Ian McLellan.**

**Dan tells us that the tartan bag cover is Chisholm of Strathglass. The 214, received uniforms including plaids and kilts from Paisley British Legion, whose Pipe Major was Johnny Traquair. The plaids were never worn by the 214 but were converted by Betty Hardie, wife of Bob Hardie of Muirhead and Sons fame into pipe bag covers. Dan believes that the Chisholm of Strathglass tartan was similar to the tartan worn by P.M. Alex MacIver.**



**Dan's miniature pipes made by Alex Ibell.**

**The pipes measure 36 inches from the top of the big drone, as shown above, to the bottom of the bag.**

**The date shown on the original music for Alex MacIver's composition "Dan Finlay" is 12<sup>th</sup> December 1969.**

**The 214th Glasgow Company of The Boys' Brigade Company ceased to exist in 1986, when it amalgamated with the 135 BB attached to Scotstoun East Church. At that time Dan returned to The 135 where his Boys' Brigade adventure had begun and, together with Alex MacIver, he continued to train aspiring pipers.**