

THE HIGHLAND SHIELD

The Highland Shield Challenge Trophy was presented by The Glasgow Highland Club to the Glasgow Battalion of the Boys' Brigade for annual Pipe Band competition. Only Boys' Brigade members of qualifying age could participate and numbers were limited to six pipers, two side drummers and a bass drummer. The limited numbers encouraged companies who did not have large numbers of players to participate. The competition became established as the annual pipe band competition of The Glasgow Battalion.



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Willie MacDonald spent his Boys' Brigade service during the Second World War years. Willie, an architect by profession, designed the "re-construction" of the house at Innellan which became the retirement home of Alex Ibell and his sister Meg. They lived there, moving from Haldane Street in Whiteinch, for the last few years of Alex's life. Those who visited this house would understand that Willie's project was challenging and what a fine job he did for his close friend and piping tutor, Alex Ibell.

Willie is also an artist and was a member of Glasgow Art Club. While attending an Art Club event where the main guest was the famous Glasgow born writer, raconteur and cartoonist Emilio Coia, Willie was selected from the group to be sketched. The result was the cartoon shown below and it sits duly framed with many of Willie's own creations on the wall in the hallway of his home in Helensburgh. Willie played for several years with the Rutherglen Pipe Band, as, of course, did Alex MacIver and many ex-members of the 214 BB.



WILLIE McDONALD

SKETCH BY EMILIO COIA



This photo shows Willie in the back row on the right with Alex MacIver beside him on the occasion of the Rutherglen Pipe Band's annual Tartan Ball in The Trades House in Glasgow. His wife, Bunty, is front right, with Nessie McFarlane centre, and Jimmy Wright's mother on the left. Jimmy's father (the Rutherglen big drummer) is third from the left, and between him and MacIver is Nessie's husband, Henry MacFarlane. The tunes *The Tartan Ball*, *Nessie McFarlane* and *P.M. Alex MacIver* all feature in the collection of Alex's music.

Willie tells how his first few chanter lessons were with Donnie MacIver, Alex's brother. He advises that the 214 achieved second place in The Highland Shield competition in 1943, and that in 1944, with Willie as acting Pipe Major, the 214 won The Highland Shield for the first time. On that occasion John McPherson was bass drummer, with Alfie Anderson and Andy McFadyen on side drums. The pipers playing that day included three boys from Haldane Street: Bobby Ferguson, Jimmy (Biff) Gordon and Tom Seymour "big" George's older brother. By the time of the 1945 event Willie had "joined up".

Robin Tedford recalls that he played with the 214 band which recorded the second 214 "Shield" win on Thursday the 22nd of May 1947. The photo below provided by Robin shows the band with the Shield on the day.

Standing from left to right are Bob Ferguson, Robin Tedford, John Finlay, big drummer Malcolm Irvine, Jack (Biff) Young and Tom Seymour. Kneeling in front are Alex Connell on the left and Stirling McMurchie on the right. The band photo shows only five pipers. Is there a missing piper and if so who might he be?



HIGHLAND SHIELD WINNERS 1947

Robin in reply about the possible missing piper wrote:

21/6/2013

I think the reason for there being five pipers was that Alex (MacIver) reckoned that this was the group which he felt were ready for The Shield competition and he was impatient to get going in the competitive world.

I have deciphered my scribbled notes on the back of this photo and what they tell me is that this was my first experience in band competition on Thursday 22 May 1947. It also records (to my Horror!) that we were placed third in 1948!

The band next won in 1949 and we also won in 1950 when I was acting pipe major. Celebrations were conducted in the Park Café.

Robin subsequently added: *you're probably right about the number of musicians Hector. I don't recall what the actual ruling was although I would tend to think it was 'no more than six pipers and three drummers'. I'm sure it will be recorded somewhere. I have attached a photo of the 1950 Highland Shield competition where I received the Shield on behalf of the 214th company. Robin*



Prize giving of The Shield to Robin Tedford in 1950

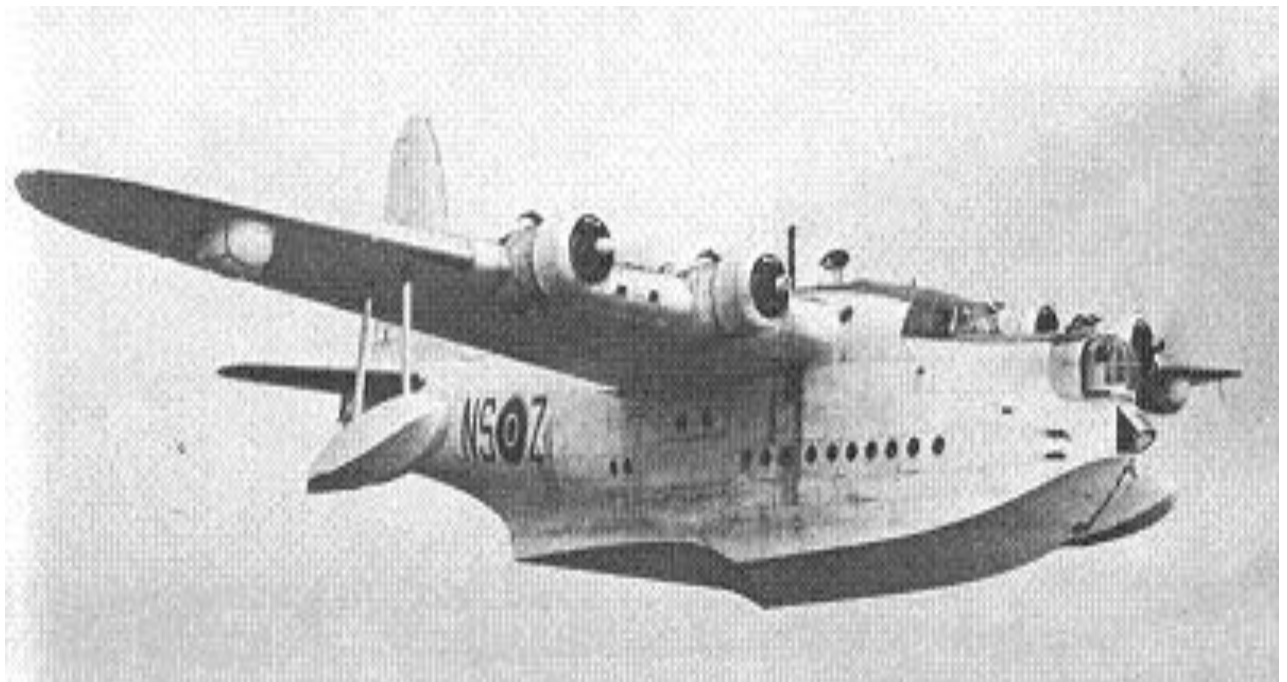
Both images are valuable in 214 folklore, not least the 1950 photo which although not the clearest supports Robin's valuable contributions, including of course his modest confession of our infallibility!

Robin and Willie's information added to the evidence engraved on the Shield, confirms our wins in 1944 and 1947. The run of consecutive wins, 1949 to and including 1966 is also confirmed by The Shield, from which year the trophy was no longer the prize in the Battalion Pipe Band contest.

The 1947 band image was sent to Alex Connell who remarked how well the side drums look given that the photo was taken more than sixty years ago. He confirms that these were not only a good set of sides for the band to have at that time, but that "they were brass cases converted from ROPE DRUMS to ROD TENSION by the redoubtable Alex Ibell".

This may seem far-fetched to some, but given the talent which Alex Ibell undoubtedly possessed and some of the resources he could call upon (i.e. the technicians employed in the Blackburn Aircraft factory), these were challenges he could master with some aplomb! Alex Connell, however, did report that Joe King, who probably had a hand in the construction of the drums, regularly delivered some stick (no pun intended) when they were not kept polished to the highest standard!

It is not really a surprise that Alex Ibell and his cohorts at The Blackburn Aircraft Factory (numbering over 4000 at the war time peak) could tackle such minor tasks when their day and night jobs were to manufacture fighters and bombers particularly



Blackburn Sunderland Flying boats which were “launched” in the shadow of Dumbarton Castle. From there they taxied up to speed and took off. The Sunderland was developed from the Short C Class Empire Flying Boat, which had already proved extremely reliable in long journeys to the far-flung outposts of the British Empire. Because of its large load capacity it was an excellent vehicle for carrying depth charges, and was much feared by the Germans. They nicknamed it *Fliegende Stachelschwein* (The Flying Porcupine), because of its formidable defensive fire power.

Alex Ibell worked for many years before during and after World War Two at Blackburn Aircraft in Dumbarton, as did Neilly MacLellan (Ian’s father), Joe King (who met his wife Mary there), together with Bill Russell (Hector’s father) and, no doubt, others with connections to the 214.

All homers were of course, strictly attended to during the fag, tea and lunch breaks!

Robin Tedford has provided copies of his Highland Shield certificates awarded to members of the winning bands and his 1952 example is shown below.



Ian McLellan confirms that 1952 was his first Highland shield competition and that he has his certificates, 1952 through to 1956, when he was Staff Sergeant. The image below shows the massed bands at the "Shield" event in Kelvingrove Park on Thursday 22nd of May 1952. Ian is in there somewhere!. In the middle of the pipers can be seen Rab Little in short trousers. In the front rank on the right as we look is Robin Tedford; immediately behind the officer is Robert Caldwell. Behind Robin Tedford is Willie Grant and behind Willie is Graham Smith. Dan Finlay is seen just behind the officer's left shoulder.



Pipe bands prove a hit in the park

THE excitement of the Pipe Band Championships in Glasgow can't be beaten.

Around 30,000 people turned up to watch the competition just over a week ago in Glasgow Green, which this year was held over two days for the first time.

And for Northern Ireland's Field Marshall Montgomery Pipe Band it was three in a row as they were

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again crowned world champion.

The buzz about the place was no doubt the same in 1952

for the conclusion of the pipe band contest for the Highland Shield in Kelvingrove Park, in the city's West End.

At least the rain had stayed off for a change, unlike the showery weekend that faced the event this year.

The spectators were all in place to see who was named the winner out of the 15 competing.

We have many images showing The Highland Shield. These, however, are mainly group band photos which do not lend themselves well to editing for our purposes. The two "Shield" images seen at the top of this chapter have been provided by Drum Major Mick O'Neill, one of the tutors of The Pipe Band of George Watson's College. George Watson's are the current holders of the trophy which they won in 2013. The "Shield" which currently resides in Mick's room at the College spent 20 years, cosily, with many other trophies under Alex Ibell's bed at 9 Haldane St. in Whiteinch.

Details of the inaugural winners in 1909, the 36th Glasgow Company of the Boys Brigade, are recorded on The Shield. The wins by the 214 in 1944 and 1947 are also inscribed there, as are their consecutive wins from 1949 through to and including 1966. The last Boys' Brigade inscription on the Shield is the 214 in 1966 which was the last year that The Shield was competed for as the premier prize in The Glasgow Battalion Pipe Band Contest.

The Battalion competition continued as did the 214's consecutive run of successes to 27, which when added to the wins in 1944 and 1947, means the boys from Gordon Park won the Battalion Championships on 29 occasions.

After 1966 the Highland Shield trophy was competed for by bands from private schools, and the first of the school winners shown on the Shield are Stewart's Melville College in 1979.

In 1943, the year before the 214's first win, the notable winners were the 139 BB. They first won the trophy in 1925 and then achieved a run of consecutive wins from 1933 to 1937 inclusive. Archie MacNeill, the famous blind piper, became tutor of the 139 in 1917 and continued to teach them for the next 17 years. The 139 were World Juvenile Champions in 1919, 1920 and 1923. The 139th won many other Juvenile contests including the Battalion Championships and the Glasgow Contest held annually in the Winter Gardens on Glasgow Green. The 139th also performed well in solo contests and Tommy Pearston, who joined the Band aged nine, was Champion Boy's Brigade Piper for four years, twice junior and twice senior. Archie's own sons, Donald and Alex MacNeill, then aged 13 and 11, joined the Band when Archie took it on, and his nephews, David and Seumas MacNeill, joined later when they were old enough. Others included Donald MacLean and John Allan McGee.

Seumas MacNeill and Tommy Pearston jointly became first Principals of The College of Piping, and Blind Archie is seen as the progenitor of that august organisation. It was Archie's teaching methods and theories which were used in the College of Piping's first tutor which is the highest selling product of its kind in piping.



The current Principal of The College of Piping is Robert Wallace, ex-member of the 214, and who was, as a boy, a resident of Whiteinch. Little wonder that Robert, living as he did next door to Alex Ibell at No. 9 Haldane St. would become a member of the 214 Glasgow Company of the Boys' Brigade! Among many aspects of Robert's piping career are his successes as a double Gold Medallist and winner of the Bratach Gorm.

Pipe Major Alex MacIver who led the band of The 214 through it's glory years is often remembered as saying that he was put under pressure several times to withdraw his band from the Battalion competition on the grounds that the 214 were technically so far ahead of the other BB bands. His response was that such an action would do no service to piping education in The Boys' Brigade. His view was that it was better to encourage other bands to aspire to the standard of the 214. Alex was well known and respected by other pipe bands' tutors as a man who was readily available to provide others with every possible support and guidance.

Under Alex MacIver's direction the 214 won all of the Major Championships including The World Championships many times. They also won many Adult Grade Three and Grade Two competitions, not least The Grade Two British Championships. However, Alex was always emphatic that no trophy was held in higher esteem by him and his boys than the Highland Club Challenge Shield.

All who have been associated with Boys' Brigade Pipe Bands throughout the generations (players, tutors, company officers and parents) are united in recording their thanks to the members of the Glasgow Highland Club for their initiative in creating organising and maintaining The Highland Shield competition for Pipe Bands of The Glasgow Battalion over a period of more than sixty years.

Fellow ex-member Jackie MacLellan advises that 1975 was his last year in the 214 BB. That year Jackie had the privilege of being acting Pipe Major of the 214 at the Glasgow Battalion Pipe Band Contest when the band won first place. He believes that was the last time the 214 competed in the competition. He has provided a scan of the certificate he received confirming the result and it is shown below.

There are four MacLennan brothers who were all piping members of the 214. Their father was from Scalpay and was a friend of Alex MacIver. To read more of their connection please see the chapter named The Kyles of Scalpay.



THE HIGHLAND SHIELD



SURE AND STEDFAST