

“Pipe Major Donald McLeod’s Farewell to Fort George”



Alex MacIver wrote this tune for Donald MacLeod in recognition of their friendship and Donald’s retirement from army service from Fort George. It is a four part 2/4 of considerable substance and musically pleasing. Donald who was one of the most significant composers of quality pipe tunes of the twentieth century chose to include this piece in his publication of compositions “Donald Macleod Book Four”. Alex and Donald were contemporaries and shared a Lewis heritage. Donald would often visit Alex at Gordon Park Church on 214 BB band nights and was known to bring with him his latest musical creation, one example being “The Cockerel in the Creel”. 214 learners were often directed to Donald’s shop and workshop “Grainger and Campbells” to purchase blank manuscript books and other essentials to be used as fundamental tools for their piping studies.

PIPE MAJOR DONALD MACLEOD'S FAREWELL TO FORT GEORGE - MARCH - ALEX. M. MACIVER



The tune written by Alex to mark Donald MacLeod's retiral from the army is dated 29-12-62 on this original manuscript in Alex's hand.

FORT GEORGE



Following the 1746 defeat at Culloden of Bonnie Prince Charlie, King George II created the ultimate defence against further Jacobite unrest. The result, Fort George, is the mightiest artillery fortification in Britain, if not Europe.

Its garrison buildings, artillery defences bristling with cannon, and superb collection of arms – including bayoneted muskets, pikes, swords and ammunition pouches – provide a fascinating insight into 18th century military life.

Positioned strategically on a promontory jutting into the Moray Firth, Fort George was intended as an impregnable army base – designed on a monumental scale using sophisticated defence standards. Today, it would cost nearly £1 billion. Within almost a mile of boundary walls was accommodation for a governor, officers, artillery detachment, and a 1600-strong infantry garrison. It also housed a magazine for 2,500 gunpowder barrels, ordnance and provision stores, a brewhouse and chapel.

When the fortress was completed in 1769, the Highlands were peaceful but it was maintained in readiness for action that never came, and has remained virtually unaltered. Visitors today can see historic barrack rooms which are a time capsule of the domestic life of the Scottish soldier.

Fort George is the only ancient monument in Scotland still functioning as intended – a working army barracks but still welcoming visitors. The Regimental Museum of the Highlanders is found here at the property while dolphins can often be seen from the ramparts. Fort George is one of the finest examples of 18th century military engineering in Britain. Begun in 1747 in the aftermath of the Battle of Culloden, the Fort was built to prevent another Jacobite uprising in the Highlands.

The fort became a recruiting base and training camp for the British Army and was the home of the Seaforth Highlanders and later the Queen's Own Highlanders between 1881 and 1964.

During the Second World War Donald saw many years of active service at the front line. He was eventually stationed at Fort George and it was from there he retired in 1962.

Career Milestones of 'wee' Donald

THE Notices of Pipers records the following:

Date of Birth: 14 August 1916, Place of Birth: Stornoway, Lewis, Date of Death: 29 June 1982, Place of Death: Glasgow
Father's name: Donald MacLeod, Mother's name: Donaldina MacDonald

Relatives who were pipers: Father P/M of Stornoway PB, brother Angus (Boxer), cousins

Taught by: Father, John Morrison, Assynt House, Willie Ross then John MacDonald, Inverness, for 25 years.

Forces service: Seaforth Highlanders. PM 1941-63. Depot 1941-42. 7th 1942-46. Captured with 51st Highland Division but escaped. 9th 1946. Training Batt. 1946-47. Instructor Highland Brigade and Depot 1948-57. Highland Brigade and Junior Soldiers wing 1957-62.

Trade or profession: After retiral from army partner in Grainger and Campbell Bagpipe Makers.

Prizes won: Inverness GM 1947, Clasp 1948, 1949, 1952, 1955, 1959, 1961, 1962, 1964.

Won Jig at Inverness 10 times, six of them with his own compositions; Oban GM 1954, Open 1953, 1957, 1961.

Recordings: 'Piper in the Nave' Vols. 1 & 2, 'Positively Piobaireachd', 'Piper's Ceilidh, 1967 New York Recordings, Series of CDs of piobaireachd instruction.

Books Published: 6 books of mainly light music from 1954 onwards plus one book of piobaireachd.

Outstanding tunes composed: Crossing the Minch, Susan MacLeod, Knightswood Ceilidh, Captain Colin Campbell, Glasgow Police Pipers, Stac Pollaidh, Fiona MacLeod, The Seagull, Hen's March, Flett from Flotta, Banks of the Lossie, The Duck, Man From Skye, Cockerel in the Creel, Duncan Johnstone, P/M Donald MacLean of Lewis, P/M George Allan, Glasgow Police Pipers and many, many more.

Other Achievements: MBE 1978



Donald second from left in the front rank of pipers leading the march to the games, probably Glenfinnan. The front rank is DR MacLennan, Donald, John MacFadyen and 'big' Donald MacLean



TWO LEWIS MEN, “WEE” DONALD MACLEOD on the left and “BIG” DONALD MCLEAN.

After leaving the army in 1962 and settling in Glasgow, Donald MacLeod was soon involved in the Glasgow piping scene. He became Club piper to the Glasgow Highland Club and he was a great supporter of the Scottish Pipers’ Association. Donald won the Piobaireachd event at the SPA competition in 1955, and the light music events in 1956. He won the piobaireachd again in 1964 and 1965 before his retirement from competition in 1966. Following this he was in great demand as a judge and was on the bench many times at both SPA Amateur and Professional competitions.

In 1977 The Glasgow Highland Club gave Donald a fine silver cup in recognition of his services as Club piper and Donald in turn, kindly gave the cup to the SPA. At the time he wrote to Flora MacNeill, then Secretary of the SPA,

‘I cannot think of any other Association which does so much for piping as the SPA, hence the trophy going there. And, of course, they have the nicest people on the committee. Winnie will be delighted to present the trophy. I gave her a direct order on this.’

It was decided that the new trophy would be awarded to the winner of the Class I Piobaireachd in addition to the Oban Times Gold Medal, which was already given in this event. Unfortunately the Oban Times Gold Medal was not returned to the SPA sometime in the early 1990s, but the Donald Macleod Trophy is still awarded annually. Donald judged the 1977 competition with Roddy MacDonald and the new trophy went for the first time to Kenneth MacDonald who played the “Old Men of the Shells”. Mrs Winnie MacLeod presented the trophy.

When the SPA Knockout competition for the Piping Times Trophy was started in 1964 Donald was one of the twelve invited pipers.

Winners.

1977	Dolina MacKay and Flora McNeill
1978	BBC Chanter Programme
1979	Alex MacIver
1980	Donald MacPherson
1981	Strathclyde Police Pipe Band
1982	Uist and Barra Association
1983	Angus J MacLellan
1984	Alfred Morrison
1985	Duncan Johnstone
1986	Evan MacRae
1987	Iain MacFadyen
1988	Niall Campbell
1989	
1990	
1991	
1992	
1993	Ian McLellan
1994	Queen's Own Highlanders
1995	PM Angus MacDonald
1996	
1997	
1998	
1999	The Glasgow Academy
2000	J. MacGregor Henderson
2001	



The Donald Macleod Tassie

Awarded to Alex MacIver in 1979 by The Scottish Pipers' Association for services to piping.

Donald recorded two cassettes, 'The Piper in the Nave' for Scotsoun in 1976. He refused to take payment for the recordings so Scotsoun instead gave him a silver Tassie. He again passed this on to the SPA who decided that instead of giving it as a prize in one of their competitions it would be awarded for services to piping. From 1977 onwards the Donald MacLeod Tassie has been presented to individuals or organisations, some of these being unsung heroes who have made a great contribution to piping, and this reflects the generosity shown by Donald himself.

In the 1970s the SPA Club Nights took place weekly, but the last Thursday each month was a special night with guests or invited players. Committee members took turns to choose the players and the November night was the turn of the secretary, Flora MacNeill. For a number of years her chosen players were Duncan Johnstone and Donald MacLeod. When in 1977 Donald decided to retire from public playing he chose this event for his final appearance. To mark the occasion the SPA organised a 'Salute to Donald' in the form of a presentation dinner at the Grosvenor Hotel on the evening prior to the recital. After all the tributes made to him Donald's speech illustrates his modesty in his own achievements. He began by saying "When I first heard about this presentation dinner my first reaction was one of wonder, what on earth for? I've been sitting here enjoying a beautiful meal listening to Angus and other speakers and still wondering what on earth for. All I have ever done is to share this enjoyment with you and many others, the love of the Highland bagpipe, its tradition and its music. I am quite convinced that's all I have ever done, nothing else."

The complete speech is quoted in the Proceedings of the Piobaireachd Society 1990. Donald's final recital was played in front of a capacity crowd at the Dorchester Hotel. Some listeners were not able to get seats or even standing room in the hall but crowded into the doorway in order to hear the piping. The evening was recorded and issued on cassette by Scotsoun. After playing Donald said a few words which were recorded on the tape:

"Ladies and gentlemen you have no idea how much I look forward each year to appearing on the same platform as Duncan (Johnstone). We're old old friends. But if I'd known he was going to play so well tonight I'd have been down at his house standing on his fingers. But you see that's what ten hours a day practice does for you. I hope that, in fact I'm sure that, Duncan will find a fitting partner because he's not threatening to finish for which I'm very grateful and I'll be out in the body of the kirk with you this time next year listening to Duncan and the poor guy that's going to be on with him. This is in fact my last public recital as such and I'm very pleased to have done it here with Duncan. I've had a very long innings and you know I can see the red lights all over the place. I have a nail at home all ready to hang the gloves up when I go back. It's been a very fine thing to come here and have a tune amongst friends. Thank you very much indeed."

After Donald's death in 1982 it was decided to hold a memorial night for him on the last Thursday in November, which had been his special night for playing at the Club. The recital was held in the Henry Wood Hall and the Chairman for the evening was Sandy MacPherson. Club President Angus J MacLellan played Donald's Gold Medal tune from Inverness, "Glengarry's March" and Andrew Wright played "Patrick Og", the tune with which Donald had won the Argyllshire Gathering Medal. Duncan Johnstone, Iain Morrison and John Wilson played light music, including many of Donald's own tunes, and Finlay MacNeill sang Gaelic songs with Lewis or piping connections. All profits from the evening went to Erskine Hospital. The Memorial Recital was repeated several times, the last being in 1994. At this final one in the Ingram Hotel the chairman was Dr Leslie Craig and the pipers were Willie McCallum and Alasdair Gillies. It had been decided that the Donald MacLeod Tassie for services to piping would be awarded to the Queen's Own Highlanders that year so the trophy was presented by Mrs MacLeod to Alasdair Gillies who accepted it on behalf of the regiment.

The Quaich was not awarded annually. In 1989 Seumas MacNeill was chosen to receive the award but for some unreported reason the award was never made. Jeannie Campbell was the committee's pick to receive the award in 2001, but she felt it was inappropriate to accept this recognition while she was still President of The Association. The Trophy has been in Jeannie's cupboard ever since. However, in 2014 Her Majesty the Queen awarded Jeannie an M.B.E. for her outstanding services to piping.

This was appropriate compensation and very much deserved!

We are grateful to Jeannie Campbell of The Scottish Pipers' Association for her help in providing much of the information included in this article.



The Donald MacLeod Tassie

This trophy was donated to The Scottish Pipers Association by Donald Macleod and has been awarded by them to individuals or organisations in recognition of outstanding service to piping.