

# **P/M IAN MCLELLAN BEM    STRATHCLYDE POLICE**

## **PART THREE**

*The concluding part of **Robert Wallace's illuminating interview** with P/M Ian McLellan, formerly of Strathclyde Police Pipe Band and 12 times winner of the World Championship crown...*

**Our first two excerpts in the remarkably successful life story of P/M Ian McLellan concentrated on his pipe band work with Strathclyde Police and his time as an RSPBA adjudicator.**

**Here in the concluding part we go back to the beginning of Ian's career and look at how it all began for the man who became the most successful pipe major in history.....**

**There was no piping in Ian's immediate family, though his grandfather's cousin was John MacLellan of Dunoon, the famous composer and piper. During WW2 his father Neill had the good fortune to work beside Alex Ibell and Joe King at the Dumbarton aircraft works building the Sunderland flying boat. Both Alex and Joe were tutors with the 214<sup>th</sup> Co. BB Pipe Band. Ian's family were bombed out of their home during the Clydebank Blitz and went to live at his father's uncle's farm at Shandon on Loch Long. They were there until 1947 and Alex Ibell, a keen cyclist, was a regular visitor, ostensibly to pick fruit for his wife's jam making but also to teach young Ian. 'He arrived one day with a Logan's tutor and a practice chanter for me. I was probably about nine at the time,' said Ian.**



**Alex Ibell Ian's first tutor**



**Ian with his dad Neilly**

**Ian received great encouragement from his father and when the family moved back to Clydebank he was able to attend Alex's home in Whiteinch, Glasgow, for further lessons.**

**He remembers: 'I was a glutton for practice. I was always on the practice chanter. When I started working, I served my time as a toolmaker and I used to cycle home to Linnvale, Clydebank, at lunchtime every day, have something to eat and then get on the chanter and cycle back to work.'**

**'The grounding I got in the 214 was, to my estimation, second to none. Technique was everything, and Alex Ibell may not have been the best piper in the world, but by God he could teach. He knew what was right and what was wrong and he emphasised that every movement had to be correct. I was a year on scales before he would let us near a tune and my first was Lord Lovat's Lament the first tune in the Logan's Tutor. All the rudiments had to be off note perfect before you got near a tune.'**



**Joe King In his Renfrew uniform**



**Alex MacIver at Cowal 1980**

**Ian joined the Boys Brigade when he was 12 and his tutors became P/M Alex MacIver and Joe King. He competed in BB solos but in the other amateur events didn't do well.**

**Of these days Ian says: 'Obviously I wasn't good enough, but you were coming up against boys like Kenny MacDonald and Iain MacFadyen who were steeped in it. I was just a raw boy. I didn't even have a kilt. I was lucky with pipes because the ones I have now, the cocas wood set, were bought from Joe King by my father and they cost £15. They had belonged to a man Willie Francie who had bought them in 1928 at MacRaes brand new. With the modern pitch I had to change the bass bottom. The first one I got from Bob Hardie and that made a huge difference. Then I got another from Sinclairs and that was even better.'**

**'I didn't always play them in the solos because every now and then I could borrow Joe King's pipes shown below. In fact most of the big prizes I won at Oban and Inverness came when I was playing Joe's pipes. They were silver and ivory Hendersons I think, either that or Lawries. He suggested I keep my own pipes for the band and use his for the solos and that is what I did. They were a magnificent set.'**





**P/M Andrew Pitkeathly from his time as HM Queen's piper**

**Ian enjoyed many successful years in the 214 band (winning major titles consistently including in the adult grades). He did National Service in the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders under P/M Andrew Pitkeathly where he received further expert tuition. From the Army he joined the City of Glasgow Police where he came under the wing of P/M Ronald Lawrie. Ian impressed the pipe major to such an extent that he eventually became Pipe Sergeant of the band. Ronnie also encouraged Ian to compete in solo competition. 'I never thought of myself as being an exceptionally great player, until Ronnie gave me the confidence,' says Ian. 'He told me I was as good as anyone out there. He said that one of the things I did have which a lot of the competitors didn't, was a good bagpipe.' Ian credits Joe King with developing his ear. 'I got a lot from Joe and Tommy Shearer who was pipe major at Renfrew band for a short period. Joe spent quite a bit of time with me educating me about how to set up my instrument and how to blow it.**

**'Later, when I was setting up my own instrument for the solos big Ronnie taught me to be very conscious of note intervals in the chanter. If you don't get these intervals right your drones are never going to stay steady all the way up the scale of the chanter. Well I said if that was the philosophy for solos it was my philosophy for setting up a band. All the chanters had to have the note intervals spot on so that when the drones were tuned to low A you knew that drones would harmonise with every note and be rock solid. If you don't get the note intervals right you're going to get clashes now and again with the drones. Nowadays everybody does that, but it wasn't even anything like that back then.'**

**When Ronnie retired in 1972 Ian took over the band and after four years they began to figure in the major prize lists. Police forces in Scotland at that time had undergone amalgamation and the City of Glasgow Police were joined with Lanarkshire Police and Renfrew and Bute Constabulary to form Strathclyde Police. The City of Glasgow band absorbed pipers and drummers from these forces, but only those who were serving police officers.**

**Of his solo career Ian recalls: 'The first time I competed at Oban, 1965 I think, I won the Marches. I can always remember it. It was twice through, it was outside, it was bucketing down with rain and I was first on.**

**'Eventually I went away and played in the Strathspey and Reel. Later on I was wandering round the park and I met Andrew Wright. Oh well done, he says, you've won the Marches. You could have knocked me down with a feather. I can always remember the tune I played. It was Brigadier Cheape. You don't hear it often in the solos now. 'Earlier that year I had won the March at the Uist and Barra with the same tune. The thing that always stuck in my mind was that big Ronnie Lawrie won the Uist and Barra playing the same tune the previous year. I think I modelled a lot of my playing on Ronnie. I felt the way he played marches was just out of this world. Another guy I loved listening to was Hector MacFadyen. Strong hands and beautiful bagpipe. His tunes just flowed.**

**'One of the most musical players I ever heard was John MacKenzie, later of the Queen Victoria School, Dunblane. He was a lovely player. Not the same sort of 'in your face' type as you would get from Ronnie and Hector but talk about music! He could make tunes sing.**

**'Two years later I won the Oban Former Winners. I always remember that you got nothing to show for it, no trophy that your name could go on, no medal even though it was one of the most important prizes in piping. Just a £20 note that soon disappeared when I bought everyone a drink! It's different now thankfully.**

**The first time I played at Inverness was in the late 60s. I remember I played P/M John Stewart in the March and I was about second last on and I knew myself I had made a reasonable job of it. I was pretty happy with it and was hopeful of getting something. Later when the prizes came out I got nothing. One of the judges was P/M Donald MacLeod and he came up to me afterwards and said 'Do you know why you didn't get a prize?' No, I said, and I was surprised because I thought I had played pretty well. 'You did play well; very well,' said Donald, 'but DR MacLennan, my fellow judge, did not like the way you played the second time to the last part. It was not the way his brother GS had written the tune. You cut a note that should have been held, and he was adamant that you should get nothing. Things were better in the Strathspey and Reel where I got second and second in the jig to Donald MacPherson. The next time I went back it was either 1970 or '71 and I won the Marches with John Wilson second to me that day. I won it with the Highland Wedding. Hugh Kennedy was another of my favourites and the other was Major Manson at Clachantrushal. I won a lot of prizes playing that. If I look at competitions like the Eagle Pipers, Edinburgh Police, Uist and Barra and Scottish Pipers, the march that I was most successful with was Highland Wedding. In fact it got to the stage that I stopped putting it in.**



**‘I always liked a march to sound like a march. You hear some people playing and they are so much into the phrasing of the tune that they forget to keep it flowing. It happens in the big competitions. They are all out there playing their cards close to the chest; no mistakes. But I think I was the opposite. I used to say ‘to hell with it; I’m going for it; if something happens, so be it.’**

**During his time in the Army Ian was tutored in piobaireachd by Andrew Pitkeathly but later band commitments meant he did not have the time to devote to this branch of piping. ‘I knew that if I wanted to be any good at piobaireachd I had to get every crunluath in, it had to be spot on. It had to be like someone tearing linoleum as big Ronnie used to say. It has to ripple and if it is not 100% every time to my mind that wasn’t good enough,’ he says.**



**Ian judging with John MacDougall**

**Ian is now in great demand as a ceol beag adjudicator. Of current standards he says: 'There are so many good players today, a lot more than way back. There were good players in my day but you could probably count them on two hands. 'Having said that there are a lot of good technicians now but they are not all musical. They just don't know how to construct the tune. Tunes don't seem to flow. You don't notice it so much in reels. I always remember Alex MacIver talking about how to play a reel and him saying that it should describe a figure eight. That always stuck in my mind. So most times I find the reels are pretty good. Where pipers come unstuck are in the marches and strathspeys. You get some pipers coming to a strong beat and they forget to go off it; overemphasis and the tune halts. As far as strathspeys go some decide they are going to play fast and others slow. The format is strong, weak, medium, weak but tunes often don't always work out that way. The rhythm sometimes depends on the melody, how the tune is constructed.'**

**Some images of Ian and Robert in their 214 days are shown below.**



**Back row L/R:- George Robertson (D), Andy Hosie (D), Robin Hunter (TD)  
Jimmy Paterson (P).**

**Middle row:- Ian McLellan (P), Rab Little (P), Jimmy Wright (P), George  
Seymour (B/D), Rab Wallace (P “the first”), Hughie Davidson (P),  
Ronnie Kinloch (L/D).**

**Seated L/R Alex MacIver, Alex Ibell**



**Ex-Members band at the 214 Annual Inspection 1972 in St. Thomas Aquinas School: L/R Dan Finlay, George Seymour, P.M. Ian MacLellan,??, Gus MacDonald, Iain Glass, Hector Russell, Donnie Glass, Joe King, P.S. John Finlay.**



**From the left are Willie Grant, Dougie Cleland (big drummer who played with the Glasgow Police), Ian McLellan, Robert Caldwell, Alex MacIver, Hamish McMurphy, Robert Little, Graham Smith, Dan Finlay, Willie Goldie, and Robin Tedford. N.B. Please note Ian and Robert sporting lifebuoy socks!**

## THE BAND OF 1964



### **Band members shown are:**

**Standing L to R: Tom Yeoman, Dougie Elmslie, Finlay Drynnan, Gordon Medlow, Davie Scott (leading tip), Donnie Glass, Eddie Thomson (bass), David McGaffin, Alistair Ross, Kenneth Cape, Ronnie Elmslie, Tom Callaghan, Robert Wallace.**

**Sitting L to R: Matthew Recht, John Buchanan (side drummer), Archie Maclean, Dan Finlay, Alex MacIver, Alex Ibell, Alastair Osborne, Brian May (tenor), Hugh Fulton (tenor), Willie Law.**

**For those who would like to see and hear more about Ian McLellan, and the author of these notes Robert Wallace, check out :-**

**[www.piperspersuasion.com](http://www.piperspersuasion.com) for video interviews. Robert's interview is a complete revision of an earlier recording. An interview with 214 ex-member Joe Noble may also be viewed on Pipers Persuasion.**

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- *This interview first appeared in [Pipe Band Magazine](#) in July 2012.***

**The ex-Members of The 214 Glasgow Company of The Boys' Brigade are grateful to [pipingpress.com](http://pipingpress.com) in allowing the reproduction of this article.**

