

The Seán Reid Society Journal.

Volume 2

March 2002

Editorial.

Welcome to volume two. Volume one was well received but a little disappointment from a few quarters regarding the medium chosen for publication. It may well make sense to consider book form after several volumes have been issued, but the over-riding factors for the present are still cost and a low circulation. The journal could never have existed without the advent of the CD ROM.

In this issue we have 14 articles, the updated index of makers, and a new section termed 'miscellanea' which has been introduced to cover items, which do not quite qualify as a paper or 'article.' Pat Mitchell's article includes sound files for the first time in the journal and we hope in future issues to build on the opportunity this media offers. These present samples are of Willie Clancy's playing. We are delighted to welcome several new article contributors, namely, Peter Laban, Patrick Lyons and David Quinn. Pat Sky kindly offered measurements of his fine Kenna 'B' chanter and this is to be found in the miscellanea section. The article from Seán Donnelly is, I believe, the most important paper yet written concerning the union pipe-making masters and we are honoured to publish it. Seán has 're-written the book' as we previously knew it, bringing life to the Kennas and Coynes as we have never seen before and all in a highly entertaining, informative and scholarly way.

There is more flexibility regarding layout in this volume in that you will find articles with embedded pictures etc. and others, which are simply text with pictures and other details supplied as appended files in the same directory – as per volume one. Each contributor has their own way of doing things and the time involved in standardisation is not warranted and might even irritate.

Geoff Wooff, Jimmy O'Brien Moran and myself made visits to the National Museum, Dublin, in May and again in September of this year, to examine and catalogue some of the collection. I returned for a third time along with Wilbert Garvin in October to clear up a few loose ends. A report appears in section 12.

We are highly indebted to assistant curator Sandra McElroy for the time given to us and for the very hospitable reception we received. I am delighted to report that we found many of the most important sets reasonably intact, that is, unmodified or butchered by later 'reed-makers.'

This issue has taken too long time to get to completion and to save any further delay the name index has not been included in this issue but will be resumed in volume three.

The heated debate which occurred early last year regarding the modification of old chanters, reminds us only too harshly that the Union pipes, in their most perfected form, have not been saved and continue to be modified and ‘modernised.’ There is of course nothing new about modifying classic musical instruments. History shows clearly that this has generally been to the detriment of the instruments. My major concern is that I cannot name six sets of pipes made at the height of the art, which are still in good order and complete as the maker left them. Part of the aims of this society is to impart what meagre knowledge we have to those who care deeply for the instrument presently and in the future.

We are entrusted with land, heirlooms, art of significance and so forth, to look after these things during our lifetime and to pass them on to honourable relations, persons or institutions who will, likewise look after them during their time and pass them on in turn. The ancient chieftains or Kings did not own the land of their Kingdom - this belonged to the tribe. The King’s responsibility was to look after it for the tribe during his lifetime. The responsibility was then taken over by the next King or chieftain.

The Gildas Pipes.

Below left is a picture of Seán Reid playing the ‘Brother Gildas’ set by Michael Egan, which is now in the possession of Clare fiddler and piper, Peter O’Loughlin.



The picture of Gildas playing this set, above right, shows the extension or ‘turn’ on the bottom of the bass regulator. It also shows the chanter tied into the bag in the old way. The picture of Seán Reid¹ playing the same set shows that it had been somewhat ‘modernised’ after Gildas’ time. The bass regulator extension survived with the set until it was borrowed for study in the 1970s and never seen again. Peter appealed for its return but it has never been recovered. For your interest, my copy of the Gildas picture was given to me by Chris Langan in Toronto around 1990 and it is signed on the back “To Chris from Barry O’Neill.”

Flat Pipes? A personal opinion (a little bit tongue in cheek).

In terms of the work of the great masters, I think it is time to drop the term ‘flat pipes’ and to stop calling these classic sets ‘*Uilleann*’. The following are my reasons. The term ‘flat pipes’ was obviously invented by the wide bore fraternity early in the 20th century, after they had adopted the concert pitch, wide-bore instrument invented in America by the Taylor brothers. This early 20th century collection of ‘Celtic twilight’ promoters came up with the term ‘*Uilleann*’ perhaps as an unnecessary need to reclaim the instrument or to help restore the nation’s pride, but certainly using a very weak argument to justify their chosen name. ‘Woollen pipes?’

I once suggested in an article in *An Píobaire*² that we should use the terms ‘*Uilleann*’ to mean wide-bore concert pitch, and ‘Union’ to mean pitched lower than D. I would now like to suggest a slight modification to that proposition. Captain Francis O’Neill called the instrument the ‘Union’ pipes with good reason. Timothy Kenna, Maurice and John Coyne and Michael Egan made ‘Union’ pipes and that had been the correct and only name from c1780 to c1905. Prior to that time they seem to have been known as the ‘Irish Organ Pipes’ or more generally, the ‘Irish pipes.’ There are at present three species of the instrument, and I think that we need a name for each of these in order to avoid confusion. This third instrument is of course the so-called ‘flat’ pipes, made by people who learned their trade making wide-bore D pipes and assumed all that they had to do to make ‘flat’ pipes was to use longer and narrower reamers. They could then apply all their knowledge gleaned from their copies of wide-bore D pipes made by Taylor and Rowsome. Many, no let us be honest, most, of these modern ‘flat’ pipes have a tone and tuning which is to say the least poor, compared to the work of the old masters. A short conversation will usually tell one quickly just how much many modern makers know about the work of the classic pipes creators and how much interest they have in finding out the secrets of the masters. It is therefore easy to conclude which type of pipes they make – Flat, Union or *Uilleann*.

The Taylor’s are a bit of an enigma for some lovers of the Union pipes, myself included. They came a bit later than the majority of the old master makers. Their work is truly wondrous in terms of quality and design – almost Art Deco – long before its time. They were producing a louder instrument because of the necessities of the venues of the times.

¹ Courtesy of Seán og Reid, his son.

² The journal of *Na Píobairí Uilleann*.

I believe that the Taylors were able to tune their instruments although most people today have trouble getting a good E from Taylor chanters. Geoff Woof told me that a Taylor chanter he fitted recently (originally Patsy Touhey's) had an inversely tapered staple on the reed, which he emulated and successfully tuned the E. The Taylors' work is of too high a quality to consider other than a master's work, and unlike most concert pitch chanters made since, I am told they tuned their bores.³ Like Leo Rowsome however, they never seemed to make two chanters the same way⁴ and one wonders if they, and Leo for that matter, ever considered the wide-bore totally 'cracked.'

After those digressions I am proposing that the term '*Uilleann*' be applied only to those wide-bore pipes made after 1900, which those makers and players called *Uilleann* pipes. The term 'Union' should be used to call the pipes as their makers and players called them. 'Flat' really should be used to describe the modern low-pitched instruments, which are indeed 'flat' versions of modern wide-bore pipes – and in fact, as these makers and players generally call them. I therefore would expect very little argument!

'Flat' is an insulting term for a Coyne or an Egan, a Kenna, Colgan or a Harrington, where it is quite an apt term for a lot of modern trumpery. (They could of course also be called 'sharp' pipes – depending on their 'E and F#.') There are only a few makers today who are striving to make pipes which are equivalent to those made by the masters, and maybe a few dozen playing them.

There is, after all that, nothing wrong with the common terminology except to remember that the term 'flat' should only be used to describe low-pitched pipes made by wide-bore makers and players of the 20th and 21st centuries. The master makers made 'Union' pipes.

The Union Pipes are thus in an extremely fragile state of preservation and we need to do all that we can to save them from extinction.

In future I personally will be referring to the Irish pipes as outlined above.

Walker Jackson.

As piper Jackson is believed to have lived at a place called 'The Turret' at Ballingarry, Co Limerick, I found it of great interest to discover that there is indeed a house still in existence and still called The Turret at Ballingarry.⁵

Apparently the house got its name because a tower of an old Knight's Hospitaller castle was incorporated in the structure. The house was built in 1683 by Major John Odell, an old Cromwellian officer. Odell was at one time High Sheriff of County Limerick and also a Member of Parliament for Askeaton.

³ Per Craig Fischer.

⁴ Per David Quinn

⁵ The Houses of Ireland by Brian de Breffny and Rosemary ffolliott, Pub; Thames and Hudson 1975.

NOTE :

There were a couple of omissions of bore measurements with respect to the plans of the James Kenna set in Volume 1. The narrow bore of the baritone drone tuning-piece is 6.0mm and that for the tuning-piece of the bass drone 9.6mm. Thanks to David Quinn for pointing this out.

Ken McLeod. *Editor*. March 2002.

Constitution and rules of the society.

This society was the result of the wishes of a small number of Union pipers who have a serious interest in the history, music and technology of the Irish pipes. It is devoted to researching and the preservation of the Irish Union Pipes. It is not a 'club.'

One of the main aims is to discover as much as possible concerning the construction of pipes from the 'classic' period of pipe making – the late 18th and 19th centuries. We believe that much of this heritage has been lost. The conservation of pipes made by the old masters of the classic period is therefore of the utmost importance. We maintain that the work of the old masters is crucial to the whole endeavour and it is therefore a fundamental requirement of membership that ownership of such instruments is viewed as custodianship, and that no irreversible modifications should ever be made to them.

The journal is published from time to time. The society is non-profit making.

The members of the society are the contributors although the journal is available to anyone who agrees with the aims, terms, and conditions of the society. Subscriptions are payable in advance of each publication of the journal and this is presently £15 Sterling, 25 Euro, \$25US or equivalent. Contributors to the journal do not pay a subscription.

Publications & style.

To enable an efficient and cost-effective solution, in consideration of the small number of members, the journal is available only on CD ROM. Word © and Excel © have been chosen for text and spreadsheets. Adobe Acrobat © files are included for use on alternative word processors. This second issue was planned to be a multi-platform CD ROM but this has not been possible at this time. It is however being worked on and we hope to have both volumes 1 and 2 available in this style in the near future.

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permission. Likewise, individual contributors to this journal have a personal responsibility for anything they submit, and the editor will assume that the contributor has obtained any necessary permission. Sources must always be acknowledged.

Present contributing members.

Alphabetically: Seán Donnelly, Craig Fischer, Wilbert Garvin, Robbie Hannan, John Hughes, Peter Laban, Patrick Lyons, Ken McLeod, Pat Mitchell, Anne Moore, Jimmy O'Brien Moran, Barry O'Neill, David Quinn, Seán og Reid, Pat Sky, Mark Walstrom and Geoff Wooff.

Ken McLeod is editor and treasurer. Wilbert Garvin is secretary.

Archive copies.

Archive copies are supplied free of charge to the following: - National Library of Ireland, Na Píobairí Uilleann, Irish Pipers' Club, Irish Traditional Music Archive, Ulster Folk & Transport Museum, University College Limerick, National Museum of Ireland and Morpeth Chantry Bagpipe Museum.

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The society reserves the right to change its terms and conditions at any time.

Contents.

- 2.01 Reminiscences of my father.** Seán og Reid.
- 2.02 A Timothy Kenna set in C. Description, measurements and photographs.** Ken McLeod with drawings by Wilbert Garvin.
- 2.03 Rhythm & structure in Irish traditional dance music. Part 2.** Pat Mitchell.
- 2.04 Chanter Design and Construction of the Classic Makers.** Geoff Wooff.
- 2.05 A Robertson pastoral set. Description, measurements and photographs.** Ken McLeod with drawings by Wilbert Garvin.
- 2.06 Geoff Wooff's pipe making; a photographic project.** Peter Laban.
- 2.07 A method of making reamers.** John Hughes.
- 2.08 Museum collections.** Mark Walstrom.
- 2.09 Passionate industry.** David Quinn.
- 2.10 Lord Rosmore.** James O'Brien Moran.
- 2.11 A Harrington set pitched about B.** Patrick Lyons and Craig Fischer.
- 2.12 The National Museum of Ireland collection.** Ken McLeod, Geoff Wooff and James O'Brien Moran.
- 2.13 The Italian Sordellina.** Barry O'Neill.
- 2.14 A century of pipe-making 1770 – 1870. New light on the Kennas and Coynes.** Seán Donnelly.
- 2.15 List of pipe-makers to 1940, updated.** Mark Walstrom.
- 2.16 Miscellanea.**
 - i) A Kenna B chanter. Pat Sky.
 - ii) A simple purfling tool. Wilbert Garvin.
 - iii) Some reeds made by R. L. O'Mealy. Ken McLeod & Wilbert Garvin.