

MaD Pipes and Drums Blog

World Pipe Band Championships

After months and months of practice, Drum Sergeant Dixon and Piper Gray met up in Glasgow on the 9th of August, as part of Murrumba Pipes and Drums, for the lead up to the World Pipe Band Championships.

Staying at the University of Glasgow College, each day consisted of practice chanter/pad sessions in the morning, prior to walking to Kelvingrove Park a few blocks away for another practice session on the pipes and drums, regardless if it was rain, drizzle or sunshine. The evenings were free, and all took the opportunity to attend a few major events such as the Royal Military Tattoo in Edinburgh and the Grade 1 band, St Laurence O'Toole's, sold out Concert at the Glasgow Royal Concert Hall which showcased their medleys, including an inspiring rendition of the *Mingulay Boat Song*. Listening and watching world-class pipers such as Stuart Liddell, Angus McColl, Callum Beaumont and Alex Gandy battling it out in the Lord Todd Recital to find out who could wow the judges and audience in the freestyle event, and watching 8-time Glenfiddich Champion Willie McCallum at his Piping Live Recital held at the National Piping Centre, was also well worth it.

Upcoming Band Events:

- **9th November**
RSL Armistice Centenary Dinner
- **11th November**
Remembrance Day Services
- **1st December**
St Andrews NMBC



The first competition for Murrumba was on Saturday the 11th of August at North Berwick, which is located on the Firth of Forth, around 40kms east of Edinburgh and a 2-hour bus trip from Glasgow. In this competition, Murrumba competed in Grade 4A and 3B events, performing their MSR *Hugh Kennedy, Caledonian Canal and Lexy McAskill*. While Murrumba didn't place in either event, it gave the members a chance to play in Scotland for the first time together. With Pipe Major Orr also along for the tour, North Berwick gave an opportunity to listen to several Grade 1 pipe bands only a few meters away. Listening to these Grade 1 bands playing their MSRs and Medleys with their supreme piping execution and drummer's light and shade elements is a master class that all pipe bands would love to achieve. The end of the competition always involves a massed band parade prior to the award ceremony, which incorporated *Scotland the Brave, Mari's Wedding, Green Hills, Battle's O'er* plus *Highland Laddie* for the salute to the chief. Murrumba then took part in the Street Parade that allowed the band to showcase their Hornpipe and 6/8s, *Monster in the Pond* written by Ross Page, a former Mackay and District Pipe Band member, *Bonawe Highlanders* and *Angus MacKinnon*. Upon reaching the long downhill march, Murrumba then played their Medley (*Electric Chopsticks, Hag at the Churn, Late Night Combo, My Darlings Asleep, Devil in the Kitchen – Strathspey, Devil in the Kitchen – Reel, Humours of Tulla*) that includes a strathspey and a few jigs into reels and a slow air, in front of the North Berwick Official Party. After an 18-hour day of travelling and competing it was great relief to return back to Cairnscross House.

The next day, Sunday the 12th of August, was another day of competition, The Perth Highland Games held on the lower grounds of the Scone Palace, near the city of Perth, about a 1-and-a-half-hour bus trip from Glasgow. On the trip up, we passed the sites of Bannockburn, Stirling and the town of Dunblane where in 1996, 16 primary school children and their teacher were killed in a massacre at their school. One of the most haunting slow airs, *Bells of Dunblane*, was written as a tribute to them. The Scone Palace is a Category A listed building and near the site of the original Scone Abbey, where the Stone of Scone was housed. The Stone of Scone was used for all the crowning ceremonies of the Kings of Scotland prior to the stone being taken by Edward I in 1296, and then placed under his coronation chair. It was last used in 1953 for the coronation of the current Queen, Elizabeth II. The weather conditions could not have been any more different from yesterday's competition at North Berwick, where it was a mild summer's day, at Perth it was cold, with showers or constant drizzle. Therefore the chanters' pitch changed and tuning would have to start all over again from the day before while still trying to get a tighter sounding band in the lead up to the Worlds. Needless to say, one learnt a lot of lessons this day, don't stress out the Pipe Major by asking any questions, and how to clean and dry a very wet set of pipes after spending hours out in the rain. Murrumba competed again in the Grade 4A and 3B events with their competition MSR. Due to the weather deteriorating into heavy showers and very cold conditions almost all the Grade 1 bands didn't end up attending the competition or didn't venture off their buses. Most of the members of Murrumba and group had retreated to the beer tent or the bus, which had to move to higher ground along the exit road as the buses were sinking into the soft ground. Two members of the tour group jumped the back gate that said 'Private' up to the Scone Palace and found a nice dry spot for some warm soup and away from the shared port-a-loos to a super clean toilet with paper and warm running water. By the time they had returned, the band had found out that the massed bands had been cancelled and also to the fantastic news that Murrumba finally had a Third Place in the Grade 4A event in Scotland. Let's say, on the trip back to Glasgow everyone was enjoying the moment and happy that they had achieved something special for all their hard work. It's hard work with all the competitions and practice sessions along the way, in achieving the playing standards that are required for this level of piping and drumming. Murrumba unlike most competition bands that practice together a few times a week, only meet maybe once a month. Every member of all the competition bands all are trying to achieve a win in Scotland, so it's special when you come away with a place in such trying conditions. While travelling on the bus, Mark McKenzie and David Greenhaugh would have their practice chanters out playing some hornpipe, jig or reel. Needless to say, most are very entertaining and somehow in the next day or so you'd be playing them as well without knowing the tune's name. Since returning to Mackay one tune was still creeping into practice so one SMS to David and within a couple of minutes he had recorded it and sent it. The name is unknown, and one must find out the name one day as even David doesn't know.

At the Perth Highland Games while the band was warming up, someone posted a small clip on YouTube which can be seen at this link <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ODiDDcwGu40>.

Monday the 13th of August started with another practice in Glasgow prior to travelling to Pitlochry to be the guest band at the Pitlochry Highland Night, hosted by The Vale of Athol Pipe Band. Pitlochry is located in central Scotland on the Tummel River and home to two whisky distilleries. The Blair Athol Distillery is one of the oldest legal whisky making sites in Scotland, which started around the 1780s and Edradour Distillery, the smallest in Scotland producing only a dozen casks per week in this handmade single malt distillery. Pitlochry is also home to Blair Castle where only ten qualifying world's finest solo pipers annually compete in the Glenfiddich Piping Championships, for the best exponents of Ceol Mor (the great music, piobaireachd) and Ceol Beg (the little music, 2MSRs). The Pitlochry Highland Night first involved a street march from Fisher's Hotel in Main Street, down to the Recreation Grounds located next to the Tummel River, that incorporated normal massed band tunes. Mackay and District Pipe Band Life Member, Lex Cameron joined Drummer Dixon in the snare ranks for the two street performances. During the evening, crowds of people sat around watching Scottish Singers plus Highland and Scottish Dance Groups. Murrumba as the guest band performed a march on, performing their 6/8s prior to entering the stage area for their concert sets. The concert sets performed included their medley, starting with *Electric Chopsticks*. Another set included new tunes such as *Iona*, a slow air written by Mark McKenzie, with an arrangement of jigs including *Glasgow City Police Pipers*, *Smoke in The Chimney* and *Last Tango in Harris*. As a march off, Murrumba played a funky version of *Waltzing Matilda* with Pipers Gray, and R.Capon along with Pipe Sergeant Greenhalgh playing a special hornpipe version that David had arranged in the days before. At the end of the Highland Night, down on the Recreation Grounds, the massed band regrouped and marched up into the Pitlochry town centre and onto the City Hall up a very long and winding road. By the time the bands had arrived at the City Hall, the members had earned themselves a few cold drinks and light supper. A couple of the Vale of Athol pipers performed a few solos and Piper Gray was requested up on stage for a solo where he performed a hornpipe and jig, *Tam Bain's Lum* and *Judge's Dilemma*. It was a great highlight to have played on this stage where one of Vale of Athol's most famous pipers, Gordon Duncan once played many solos. Gordon Duncan was an influential piper who created a new style of expression of traditional bagpipe music while composing over one hundred tunes. Sadly, he died at the age of 41 after a lifetime struggle with depression. A great loss to the piping world.

For the next couple of days in the lead up to the Worlds, the major focus was working on the MSR as this would be the only set being played, since Murrumba was only competing in the 4A Event. By viewing the past judging sheets the elements that need to be worked was highlighted, such as working on the dot and cut notes in the strathspey and E taps in the reel. A more detailed practice session was deployed and the band continued working on playing a tighter ensemble. The weather for the week had taken a turn and Glasgow was lucky to see any sunshine, most practices in the park had all members in Inverness capes, huddled together under trees whilst playing in drizzle.

On Friday the 17th of August at the World Pipe Band Championships on Glasgow Green, the Grade 1 bands qualifiers were in full swing, while Murrumba headed into the centre of Glasgow to take place in the World's Street Parade. This involved several guest bands forming one-massed band that marched down to the City Hall to be welcomed by The Right Honourable Lord Provost Eva Bolander, whom was the Chieftain of the World Pipe Band Championships. After reaching and playing a few tunes for the crowds gathered at the City Hall, the band members were invited into a special lunch. In the afternoon, Murrumba as part of the Piping Live Festival, took part in playing a couple of performances along the length of Buchanan Street. This gave a final chance to work out all the chanter pitch issues and finer tuning. Again Murrumba played their MSR, medley and concert sets from the Pitlochry Highland Night. These street performances can be viewed on YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I3DAvK0angQ>.

Saturday the 18th of August, the day of the World Pipe Band Championships had finally arrived. Everyone was up, had breakfast and all dressed, ready to go at 7:00am for the bus to take the band to the Worlds. All buses had a band pass that allowed them to queue along the River Clyde end of the Glasgow Green with each given a set arrival time. The weather continued to be very cold with showers, not ideal playing conditions. Murrumba was playing in Event 4A Heat 1 at 9:24am. Grade 4A consisted of two heats with a total of 32 bands. To advance into the finals, Murrumba would have to place in the top 6 of our heat. As we arrived at Glasgow Green, our playing area was noted, and Murrumba found a suitable tuning up area and started to prepare ourselves just like we would for any competition. As this was the pinnacle of our competition week in Scotland, everyone had to be playing at their best and for the pipers, that meant that our chanter reeds had to be at the perfect pitch and tuned correctly. Blowing pressure is always an issue for any piper, and must be maintained evenly across the band. In Murrumba every piper has the same type of chanter reed and all are hard in strength as it gives bands a more stable and strong sound, unlike here in Mackay where we play a chanter reed to our blowing ability and we don't worry about blowing pressure as much. At any stage, a piper will be forced to stand down and are out if they don't have the same chanter pitch. Tuning tape will also only do so much as well. For Piper Gray, this was an extra challenge as the chanter pitch was rising over the course of the week, this affect caused the situation that the ideal blowing pressure must be maintained and regulated for pitch corrections across notes and not to over blow on some notes as this would be too sharp. The only problem was that the blowing pressure required was just above where the chanter would stop and choke. Therefore, not only are you having to be in perfect timing with the pipe major with all clean and crisp embellishments but always worrying about the pressure and having a chanter choke, a huge problem. Luckily the chanter reed was raised during the street performance the day before but it was still touch and go. Murrumba, like all competition bands, had in the past had dropped a piper, as the chanter wasn't right. Pipe majors in a competition bands are totally different from social bands, one has to develop a 'thick skin' and accept to be yelled at for any little problem that annoys the pipe major. You have to understand that it's not personal, accept it, and move on so you can improve your ability. For Drummer Dixon, although he had played at the Worlds on a number of occasions, the weather conditions also don't make it ideal as you don't know if you are playing in rain which can also affect the pitch and tuning as well. Playing in the rain is never fun, drumsticks may slip or be dropped and at any stage you may have to be ready encase the Drum Sergeant has an issue, so you can add your light and dark elements when required without waiting. For Murrumba, in the end all pipers and drummers ended up tuned and ready to go. Near the competition arena, the band does one final tune up and then marches to the starting position. Although this was the World Championships, on the start line, you are ready to go out and play your best competition set together and hope that everything goes according to plan. Piper Gray and Drummer Dixon didn't miss a beat but sadly Murrumba finished outside the top 6 and didn't get the chance to advance into the Final of 4A, which took part in the afternoon. The two top bands from the Heat 1 with Murrumba went on to take out second and third in the final and have advanced now to Grade 3.

With Murrumba now finished for the day until the award ceremony, it left members and supporters with free time until the early evening. While some headed to the beer tent to drown their sorrows, Drum Sergeant Dixon headed to check out the drums section of the Trade area, before watching the Grade 1 drum corps. Piper Gray opted to first head to the Grade 1 Tune Up areas to watch and follow bands as they progressed to the Grade 1 arena, whilst watching and listening to their professional, efficient tuning techniques and how teamwork all plays an important part. It is no wonder that the pipers' ranks contain so many world class pipers from all areas of the world. After a while, he joined Pipe Major Orr in the grandstand watching the Grade 1 Medleys. The standout was Field Marshall Montgomery and Piper Gray was sure they were in the box seat for another World Championships. Scottish Power's Medley was also played well, along with St Laurence O'Toole.

After all the final events had finished, all the bands take part in the award part of the championships, including the march past the Chief. This part of the Worlds takes over 3 hours and the procedure is that six Grade 1 bands enter with the previous year's champions leading the others. These six bands take their place in the front row and continually play for the march past in a round robin situation until all two hundred plus bands have taken their place on the field. This order is set out by the organisers, luckily for Murrumba they were out early and ended up directly behind Field Marshall Montgomery. After every band had taken their positions, the Salute to the Chief was done, all those players playing *Highland Laddie*, the spectators may have had a great lifting sound, on the ground however, it sounded very different as each band played their own version. When finally, Field Marshall Montgomery were awarded the championships, Murrumba was right there watching all the players jumping around and glengarry caps flying in the air. The roar of triumph was echoing around the Glasgow Green. On the YouTube link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eGBjADecm3U> around 20 seconds in, you can spot the two Mackay members towards the top left-hand side watching and enjoying this moment. After that Murrumba quickly took the opportunity to make a dash for the bus before the rush of over ten thousand pipers and drummers, plus the fifty thousand spectators. With the day finally over, we had time to reflect on what we had achieved in Scotland, a fantastic experience, one not to be forgotten.

The next day, all the Mackay and District Pipe Band members went on their separate journeys before arriving back home in Mackay. For our Drum Sergeant, it was onto Ireland with Drummer Brucey for a holiday with a factory visit to Andante, where they picked up some very interesting tips and techniques for our drum section.

Now back in the full swing of band events, with time to take in all that happened in Scotland, the months and months of preparation in the leadup to the Worlds, the learning of tunes and pushing skills to the limit, it was a great trip and experience that all pipers and drummers should try and undertake. I hope to once again find myself on Glasgow Green with those tens of thousands fellow pipers and drummers for another go.

World War Two Services:

August 2018 was a particular busy time for Piper Cameron as he performed at several important memorial events starting with the Victory in the Pacific on August 15th and Vietnam Veterans Day on the 18th of August. The photo included is from the Victory in the Pacific with Piper Cameron playing for the wreath laying ceremony at Jubilee Park.

At the end of August, The Rats of Tobruk memorial service took place at the Mackay Rats of Tobruk Memorial located in Queens Park. This memorial is a replica of the original in the Tobruk war Cemetery in Libya, which was later, destroyed.

Between April and August 1941 around 14,000 Australian soldiers mostly from the 9th Australian Division and some from the 7th Division along with British troops were besieged by the Afrika Corps, commanded by General Rommel at the Libyan Port of Tobruk. This became known as the Siege of Tobruk during World War II. The Australian gave themselves the nickname "Rats of Tobruk" after Berlin radio described them as "caught like rats in a trap".



Vale James (Jim) Breadsell

It is with sad news I report the passing of another former member of the Mackay and District Pipe Band, Jim Breadsell. Jim was a piper from 1956 to 1973 and held the position of Pipe Major from 1961 to 1963. Thanks to members and Piper Rankin for attending and playing at Jim's funeral held on Friday the 28th of September.

National Police Remembrance Day

The last Friday in September was also the National Police Remembrance Day, a day where we remember and honour Queensland Police Officers who have been killed in the line of duty. We also remember members whose deaths did not occur as a consequence of their duty. Thanks to the members of the Mackay and District Pipe Band for leading the parade by marching from the site of the old Police Station in Brisbane Street down Victoria Street and up to St Patricks Church in River Street. This march was also the first time our Bass Drummer Dew had used the bass drum with its new logo which was designed by Drum Sergeant Dixon. Piper Gray played at both the Candlelight Vigil and Church Service and was personally thanked by Deputy Commissioner Bob Gee. The Vigil and Church service was very emotional as only just before, Constable Peter McAulay aged 24, was critically injured in an attempt to stop an allegedly stolen motor vehicle, and his condition and future was on everyone's thoughts. Thankfully, his name will not be added on next year's remembrance list.

October 2018



World Pipe Band Championships Photos:









Notices:

- Please look out for emails and be sure to reply as it makes the organisation of events easier.
- If you have any exciting news, photos or information, please email to: fionagray71@gmail.com