

Dipping Times



Clasp
Conscious

Good Fortune Shines on Neil as He Rescues a Piece of Our Piping History

BY OUR NEWS STAFF

PIPER and judge Neil Mulvie has saved a unique piece of piping heritage from oblivion in the shape of a set of pipes which probably belonged to John MacDonald, Inverness, and a Gold Clasp which definitely did. Neil, back in Scotland after working abroad for many years, takes up the story:

“I happened to be passing the Glasgow auctioneers McTears when I noticed that a sale included some Scottish militaria, sgian dubh and the like. I had a quick look round and was just about to leave when I noticed that underneath a display cabinet was set of pipes.

“I thought they looked not bad and spoke to the auctioneer. He said he thought they would go for £300-£400 (\$575-\$850US). I thought that reasonable as they were ivory mounted. Comparing them with other sets, the pipes appeared to be Peter Henderson. The chanter that was with them was stamped as such. They were definitely African blackwood, ivory mounted and were in good condition though dirty. I decided to go back the next day and I happened to sit down next to a guy who had a programme for the sale which I had not bought. I asked him for a look at it and it stated that on the box that went with the pipes was a plaque saying that it had been presented to John MacDonald,



Neil Mulvie and the John MacDonald, Inverness, pipes and case.

Inverness, in 1903, for winning the Champions Piobaireachd.

“I initially assumed the plaque referred to the pipes and that they belonged to John MacDonald. Naturally I was very excited at this but you can imagine my feelings when on inspection I discovered the ‘plaque’ was in fact a Gold Clasp from the Northern Meeting. Sure enough it was engraved with John MacDonald’s name with the date 1903. I phoned the College Museum and confirmed that he had won the Clasp, his first, in 1903, so there was no doubt about it.

"Is it not absolutely certain that the pipes were his but it is more than likely that they were. I suspect that John MacDonald like a lot of pipers had more sets of pipes than he knew what to do with. This may clearly have been one of the sets he used.

"I was astonishingly excited. At the auction things were quite tense. I had set a limit of £800 on how much I was going to bid but of course I went over it but I got the pipes and the case for £1100 so I spent more than I intended to. However I was delighted to get them and even more so given that it is possible that they belonged to John MacDonald.

"There were no other distinguishing marks but I think given the Gold Clasp on the case there is more evidence to suggest they were his pipes than they were not.

"I have a few sets of pipes and got a stern warning from my wife that if I bought another set I would not be allowed back in the house. I always feel guilty with all the sets I've had and have sold a few to pupils. I suppose it is lucky that this set fell into my hands and not into the hands of someone who didn't realise their value. They could have ended up above a fireplace somewhere with the box cast aside."

John MacDonald, Inverness, won the Clasp on no fewer than seven occasions 1903/08/24/27/29/34/35.

The pipes did indeed prove to be of excellent tone and have since been sold to a good home. Neil has kindly donated the case to the College Museum where the 1903 Clasp, nailed to the top of the box, can be viewed by all visitors.

Sabhal Mòr Ostaig Piping Short Courses 2005

*5-day residential course set in a beautiful coastal location
on the Isle of Skye.*

4-8 July – Iain MacFadyen • **11-15 July** – Griogair Lawrie

8-12 August – Andrew Venters & Rona Lightfoot

15-19 August – Angus MacColl & Donald Lindsay

(Invermark Piping School)

For more information tel: **01471 888240**, e-mail: cg@smo.uhi.ac.uk

or visit www.smo.uhi.ac.uk/smo/cg

Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, Teangue, Sleat, Isle of Skye, Scotland IV44 8RO

Tel: **01471 888000**

www.smo.uhi.ac.uk

