



THE BAGPIPER

The St. Andrew's Society of the Eastern Shore

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Did The Scots Also Invent The Bagpipes?

The origins of the bagpipes, specifically the chanter with bladders and later with drones, are deeply rooted in ancient history, in the cradle of civilization, and in countries that no longer exist. However, it can be argued that the version the Scots invented (or at least refined), the Great Highland bagpipes*, is the most recognized form of the instrument.

Bagpipes have long been a symbol of Scotland. Unlike many musical instruments that have random connections to culture, bagpipes hold deep significance that reflects Scotland's history, identity, and heritage. Their unique sound is more than just an auditory experience; it embodies the emotional core and lively traditions of Scotland.

A Brief History



The evidence for bagpipes before the 13th century is uncertain, but several textual and visual clues have been suggested. The Oxford History of Music notes that a sculpture of bagpipes was found on a Hittite slab at Euyuk in Anatolia, dating to around 1000 BCE. Another interpretation proposes that this sculpture shows a pan flute played alongside a friction drum.

Dio Chrysostom wrote in the 1st century CE about a contemporary ruler, possibly the Roman emperor Nero, who could play a pipe (tibia, Roman reed pipes similar to Greek and Etruscan instruments) with his mouth, as well as by tucking a bladder under his armpit.

In the 2nd century CE, Suetonius also described Nero as a player of the tibia utricularis. Modern scholarship suggests that such instruments, rather than being regarded as a separate class, were seen as variants of mouth-blown instruments that used a bag as an alternative blowing aid. It was only when drones

"A baggepye wel coude he blowe and sowne, / And ther-with-al he broghte us out of towne." The Canterbury Tales (~1380)

were added during the European Medieval era that bagpipes became recognized as a distinct class.

In the early part of the second millennium, images of bagpipes began appearing more frequently in Western European art and iconography. The Cantigas de Santa Maria, written in Galician-Portuguese and compiled in Castile in the mid-13th century, depicts several types of bagpipes. Several illustrations of bagpipes also appear in the Chronique dite de Baudoin d'Avesnes, a 13th-century manuscript from northern France. Although evidence of bagpipes in the



*The Great Highland Bagpipe is a type of bagpipe native to Scotland, serving as the Scottish counterpart to the great Irish warpipes. It has gained widespread recognition through its use in the British military and in pipe bands worldwide.

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British Isles before the 14th century is debated, they are explicitly mentioned in The Canterbury Tales (~1380): "A baggepype wel coude he blowe and sowne, /And ther-with-al he broghte us out of towne."

For Scotland, the earliest records referencing the instrument date from around the 14th century. The influence of various European musical traditions contributed to the unique characteristics of Scottish bagpipes, with instruments such as the Irish Uilleann pipes and the Northumbrian smallpipes sharing a direct lineage with early bagpipe forms.

The first clear mention of the Scottish Highland bagpipes is from a French historian who notes their use at the Battle of Pinkie in 1547. George Buchanan (1506–82) claimed that bagpipes had replaced the trumpet on the battlefield. During this time, the creation of the ceòl mór (great music) of the bagpipe emerged, reflecting its martial roots, including battle tunes, marches, gatherings, salutes, and laments.

The "Battell" sequence from My Ladye Nevells Booke (1591) by William Byrd, likely referencing the Irish wars of 1578, features a piece titled "The bagpipe: & the drone." A manuscript from the 1730s by William Dixon of Northumberland includes music suitable for the border pipes, a nine-note bellows-blown bagpipe with a chanter similar to that of the modern Great Highland bagpipe. In 1760, the first significant effort to study the Scottish Highland bagpipe and its music was made through Joseph MacDonald's Compleat Theory. The rise of piping families in the Highlands, including the McCrimmons, MacArthurs, MacGregors, and the MacKays of Gairloch, began in the early 17th century.

Recent history

During the 19th and 20th centuries, as a result of the participation of Scottish regiments in the expansion of the British Empire, the bagpipes became well known worldwide. This surge in the bagpipes' popularity was boosted by large numbers of Allied pipers who served in World War I and World War II. This coincided with a decline in the popularity of many traditional forms of bagpipe throughout Europe, which began to be displaced by instruments from the classical tradition and later by gramophone and radio.

As pipers were easily identifiable, combat losses were high, estimated at one thousand in World War I. A front-line role was prohibited following high losses in the Second Battle of El Alamein in 1943, though a few later instances occurred.



McCrimmon was the piper for Macleod of Macleod

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The Bagpiper Says

Nemo Me Impune Lacessit

Your Bagpiper editor drones on, and on, and...

There's been a lot of hot air over the past few months with temperatures in the 90s, and the many politicians giving speeches at our local fairs and picnics. Therefore, it's no surprise that the phrase 'hot air' makes us squirm and seek a cooler environment. However, on the positive side, it's hot air traveling through the pipe and drones, that produces the majestic, stirring sounds that set the tone for Scotland's dance through history. Is it not surprising then that we of Scottish heritage take note when we hear the 'pipes,' whether at the games, or in a parade, or perhaps in the background on TV. There are few other sounds like it (if you discount certain natural sounds in the animal kingdom). The sound of a single bagpipe has a commanding presence; A group of them (a pipe band, or tattoo) tends to be a dynamic presence, meant to be heard and even felt.

The bagpipes have always been an essential symbol for the Saint Andrew's Society of the Eastern Shore. Our society has been associated with a pipe band since it's beginning. Early on with the Kiltie Band of York (late 70's) to our wonderful Chesapeake Caledonian Pipes and Drums of today. This undoubtedly led SASES's founders in 1977 to name this newsletter The Bagpiper.

Though the bagpipes served as a vital communication tool on the battlefield, capable of being heard above the din of battle, today they serve to communicate with our Scottish souls, and lead our hearts to the home land.

Let's raise a toast to our society's intrepid bagpipers and the Great Highland Bagpipes; Sláinte Mhath!

Nile J Simpson

