

# JOHN KIRKWOOD—CHAMPION

(reprinted from *North American Scotsman*, 1971)

*John Kirkwood died an untimely death in August of 1972. We hope you enjoy reading about his history-making life.*

D/M John Kirkwood is hanging up his sticks. After 32 years of drumming he is calling it quits. For most of that 32 years John has been at the top—winning the World's Championship for Solo Drumming; playing lead stroke for Shotts and Dykehead when they won the World's Championship; playing lead stroke for Clan MacFarlane, three times North American Champions and Champions Supreme.

John, who now makes his home in St. Catharines, Ontario, where he owns a Highland Outfitters store and operates a thriving business manufacturing drum sticks used by most North American pipe bands (and even dance bands), was born in New Mains, Lanarkshire, Scotland. He got his first love for drumming at age 11 when he joined his hometown band, the New Mains and District Pipe Band, in the early years of World War II. Within the year he was a full-fledged member, but as it was wartime and competitions were few and far between, John had little chance to exercise his new talents.

At that time drumming in New Mains was a good basic drumming technique patterned on Army styles, but very basic, hardly the diet for someone who felt that drumming had much more to offer than that. However, he continued his drumming mastering all the new techniques taught till he was 14 when Chance intervened and he met a kindred soul 2 years older than himself, Alex Duthart. Though neither of them knew it at

the time each was destined to play an important part in the future of drumming; each was to point and lead the way in styles and techniques; each was to become the future World's Solo Drumming Champion; each was to be Drum Major of future World's Championship Pipe Bands; but above all, each recognized the revolutionary spirit in the other and his desire to fire drumming with new patterns and techniques. And so, two rebels against the rub-a-dub-dub style then prevalent, started playing together.

John remained with New Mains and District, but after playing with Alex for about six months he left them and joined Alex's band, the Dalziel Steel Works Pipe Band. Here, under D/M Gordon Jelly, he stayed till he was drafted into the Army at eighteen. All the time he was with Dalziel John worked together with Alex developing new drumming techniques and slowly moving away from the old style. In 1946, he was called up and after completing his basic Army training he was drafted into the Highland Brigade Pipe Band, a piping and drumming pool that supplied Army Pipe Band needs.

It was here that John got his opportunity to introduce a progressive style of drumming. Army drumming at that time was strictly military drumming. As an example, when pipe bands were about to play, the tempo was called out by the P/M as 2/4, 4/4, 6/8, and the drum corps played a set drum score for this tempo or time. It was a mechanical accompaniment that did little to encourage drummers in anything but perhaps to see if they could go to sleep while playing and having their buddies watch to see if they missed a single beat!

John wanted to change this rote playing and write drum scores properly pointed to suit the tune being played. This would not only help the pipers to point their tunes but assist them in playing along with the band. In order to help himself understand the piper's point of view John started taking piping lessons from the late Hughie Fraser, piper in the Highland Brigade. (Among other pipers in the Brigade then was Piper Chris Anderson who played in the band in 1947 till he was posted to 5th Airborne. Chris is now P/M of the City of Toronto Pipe Band.)

It was while John was with the Highland Brigade Pipe Band that it became the first military pipe band to compete in civilian contests. In 1947, at Murrayfield, Edinburgh, the Band won the Grade II World Championship in Piping and Drumming but were not awarded the prize as they were a military band. However, they continued entering competitions in the Lothian area winning quite a few prizes. All this time John was using the progressive style of drumming with his drum corps but found on many occasions the general acceptance of his style to be poor. The Band was marked down in many cases because the judges found it hard to accept a style of drumming that conflicted with their own and often simply because they didn't really understand what the drum corps was trying to do.

After a stint at Edinburgh, John was posted to Fort George, Inverness. He and Alex Duthart had kept in touch with each other. Alex, who still played for Dalziel, had become lead stroke when D/M Jelly emigrated to Australia. From Inverness, John was granted leave

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## Kirkwood

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many times to play with Alex and the Dalziel band. Discharged in May of 1948, John went back to Dalziel and finished off the year drumming with Alex. Though the Band did very well that year in drumming, they lacked support from the piping section. John left Dalziel the following year because on the retirement of P/M Willie Hastie, the new Pipe Major, David Ross, did not want to compete in 1949. He wanted a year to work with the band first. It was a parting of the ways for John and Alex, both of whom had come a long way on their paths to drumming fame though their greatest honours were still ahead of them. When Alex got married in 1949, he chose as his best man his drumming partner, John. Their friendship has survived John's emigration to Canada and the years that followed. Both manage at different times to cross "the pond" and renew the ties and bonds of old friendship.

John returned to the band he had started out with, New Mains and District, and started teaching. In his first class he had 8 boys keen on becoming drummers among whom were his brother Jim, now lead stroke with Clan MacFarlane, Davy Armet, lead stroke with the Worcester Kilties; Jackie Fair, bass drummer with Clan MacFarlane; Tom Weir, former tenor drummer and present President of the Ontario Piper's Society; John Stevenson, John Greenock and Tom Hunter. At the end of six months instruction, John took his drum corps into competition for the Juvenile Championships at the Highland Institute in Glasgow where his pupils took 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th prizes. His fifth drummer broke down. He stayed with New Mains teaching and playing till 1950, finding a gradual acceptance

of the progressive style of drumming. This of course meant recognition and took the form of winning many of the competitions. Recognition of another sort was now moving in John's direction.

Coming home from a drumming practice one night in the late fall of '49, John was surprised to see several cars pulled up in front of his house. Apprehensively he entered the house to find P/M Tom MacAllister, John MacAllister, and the committee of Shotts and Dykehead waiting for him. They got to the point immediately. They wanted John to take his entire drum corps to Shotts and Dykehead Pipe Band. Since the New Mains and District Pipe Band wasn't progressing too well at this time—drummers were frustrated and had considered quitting—when this offer came along. After consulting with the other members

of the Band, John and the entire drum corps joined Shotts and Dykehead. In their first year in competition the band won a prize in every major competition of 1951. They topped this in 1952 by winning the World's Championship for Grade I at Ayr.

John had always had in the back of his mind the idea of emigrating to Canada and when Hugh Macpherson approached him with the offer of playing with the St. Catharines Pipe Band, St. Catharines, Ontario, John accepted. John's enthusiasm must have been contagious for the entire drum corps left with him. Only one, Alex Snedden returned to Scotland.

*Next issue: John joins the St. Catharines Pipe Band and later organizes Clan MacFarlane.*

## QUESTION OF THE ISSUE

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# JOHN KIRKWOOD— CHAMPION

reprinted from *North American Scotsman*, 1971

## Part II

In May of 1953, the entire drum section of the World Champion Shotts and Dykehead Pipe Band arrived in Canada. Their port of entry was Halifax and though they had arrived early in the morning, so many other ships were waiting to be berthed, Greek, Norwegian, Swedish, German, etc., that it was not until 8:00 o'clock that evening that they got through customs. As a result, they missed their train to Montreal and would have to wait until late that night before they could catch another. Tempers which had been simmering all day due to the delay and the petty red tape of custom officials were brought dangerously close to the boiling point by a walk around the Halifax dockyards. So strange and rough were they that they made John and his fellow drummers question the wisdom of their decision to come to Canada. Some were for getting back on the ship again

and booking passage home. However, at the railway station, news that a special train being made up for all passengers who had missed the earlier one would leave at 11:00 p.m. heartened them somewhat and temper temperatures took a big drop. As a special train though, it would not have a diner so they all headed out for the nearest grocery store to stock up. They must have all had the same food in mind because for the two-day trip they had nothing to eat but meatloaf sandwiches washed down with condensed milk!

Because they had only a half-hour wait in Montreal, it was a race to the nearest restaurant to get the taste of meatloaf and condensed milk out of their mouths. It wasn't easy though—the waitress spoke little English and they spoke no French. With much shouting and sign language they finally got sandwiches and coffee and headed back to the train for the rest of

the trip. Arriving in Toronto that evening and faced with a three-hour wait for a train to St. Catharines, they looked for a pub to cheer them and chase away the memories of long waits on railway sidings, meatloaf sandwiches and condensed milk. But even the beer tasted differently—which of course they should have realized. With determination though, they struggled through the first few draughts and then with a warm glow suffusing them for the first time since their arrival in Canada, they began to think that things were looking up. Then jokes started to fly around the table easing tensions and the desire to go back that had dominated their thinking since landing in Halifax.

It was at St. Catharines that they first felt really welcome. A pipe band was there to meet them at the station. The mayor, John Smith, a fellow Scot, had been there to welcome them also, but as the train was delayed and he was committed to another function, he had to leave. P/M Dick Macpherson of the St. Catharines Pipe Band made them welcome and after a few rousing tunes they marched off to his house. From there they broke up to the homes of the various band members. It was a fine display of hospitality.

Their first problem was finding work, but that problem was as chronic then as it is now. John, who was a technical engineer having served his apprenticeship and worked with Rolls-Royce, anticipated no trouble. He looked forward to his first job hoping it would make some demands on his engineering skills. Used to working to fine tolerances at Rolls-Royce where one mistake was all you made, John was a little disappointed when he landed his first job. His tools? A hammer and a 100 lb. sack of nails! His job? Nailing crates!! Many a laugh has been had at that job since then. Though somewhat put out, he was nevertheless glad to get the job if for no other reason than of now being able to look for a better one. In time they all had jobs. The crate job lasted until John got a job with Thompson Products, at that time making shells for the Korean War. This job lasted for a year and it was from here that the group lost their only member. Alex Snedden went back to Scotland after three months. With the war over in '54, John was out of work for a long time but never once did he consider going back home. Finally one day he lined up with twenty other applicants for a job with MacKinnon Industries. Of the two chosen, John was one. He stayed with them for ten years.

All this time of course the drum section was working with the St. Catharines Pipe

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## CAMBRIDGE HIGHLAND GAMES

July 17, 1993

CAMBRIDGE, ONTARIO, CANADA

### Grade I

- 1 Peel Regional Police
- 2 78th Fraser Highlanders
- 3 St. Thomas Police
- BDC 78th Fraser Highlanders

### Grade II

- 1 City of Detroit
- 2 48th Highlanders
- 3 Glengarry

### Grade III

- 1 Strathroy Legion
- 2 Braemar
- 3 Rob Roy
- BDC Braemar

### Grade IV

- 1 48th Highlanders
- 2 Invergarry
- 3 Glengarry
- BDC Glengarry

## SOLO DRUMMING

### Open MSR

- 1 Tom Robinson
- 2 Steve Hill

### Open H/J

- 1 Tom Robinson
- 2 Steven Hill

### Grade I MSR

- 1 Chris Barr
- 2 Chris Bell
- 3 Ryan Barr

### Grade II MSR

- 1 Andrew Lawson
- 2 Ryan McDonald
- 3 Jason Grant

### Grade I/II H/J

- 1 Chris Barr
- 2 Ryan McDonald
- 3 Andrew Lawson

### Grade III

- 1 Howard Edwards
- 2 Katie Burchell
- 3 Graham Pocock

### Grade IV

- 1 Douglas Burgess
- 2 Jenny Houk
- 3 Blair Pocock

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**KIRKWOOD***continued from page 5*

Band. It was a Grade II band and competed on the 'circuit' but it was not a winning band. John got the drumming section into good shape and the band's first public appearance that year was in the Coronation Parade in St. Catharines. They went into competition that year but the piping section was so weak that John wound up playing pipes for the rest of the year. Embro, Dutton, Oshawa, Maxville, Syracuse, Schenectady—they took them all in. Their drumming points were always high, their piping was holding them back. That first year John functioned as both piper and drum major.

A winter's hard work produced results for the St. Catharines piping section at the Toronto Indoor Games in the spring. There they tied for first place with the 48th against such pipers as Billie Gilmour, John Wakefield and Reay MacKay. In the St. Catharines quartette were P/M Dick Macpherson, Dave Dewar, Jim Greig and John. After the Indoor Games the piping section fell apart and the band did not compete at more than one or two games that year. Piper Jim Greig who had come out from Scotland that year returned home because of family illness. John went on the judging panel. For the remainder of the year the band played at civic functions only.

The following year, the local RCEME militia unit asked the St. Catharines Pipe Band if they would supply pipers and drummers for a church parade. The officers of the unit were quite impressed with the showing of the three pipers and drummer who paraded and, as the RCEME unit had authorization for a band, they were asked if they would be interested in joining the militia. At a band meeting later, all seemed enthusiastic, and a committee was elected to meet with the unit and discuss the situation. When all the formalities had been completed and they came to sign on the dotted line only about one-half of the pipe band came forward. John felt that they had committed themselves and that this wasn't the time to refuse. So, the one-half joined.

At their first practice it was patently obvious that unless something were done this band just wasn't going to go anywhere. They had no kilts and no pipe major. The kilt problem was solved by borrowing MacGregor kilts from the Essex Scottish Pipe Band in Windsor. The pipe major problem was not so easy of solution. A meeting was held with the officers of the unit to decide the future of the band. It was proposed that they elect one of their own members to be pipe major and when John's name was proposed along with some others, he let it stand. He did not want the position to fall into the hands of someone who was not aggressive enough to get the band going and keep it going. John was elected. It was P/M John Kirkwood now!

He had his work cut out for him. The pipers did not have the proper grounding and had not been taught correctly. After their first practice, John told the pipers to leave their music books at home and bring only their Logan Tutors to future practices. Quite a few pipers took a dim view of this idea of going back to basic exercises again and quit. John recruited younger pipers to replace them among whom were Mike MacNeill of Niagara Falls and Jack Gillies of Buffalo.

Work on basic exercises became the order of the day to whip the band into shape. By the following spring, though they played few tunes they played them properly. The result was a very creditable band for the RCEME militia unit. They took on many engagements but never went into competition. Remaining as Pipe Major now that the band was a fairly competent one did not interest John. When he heard that Jim Greig was returning to Canada, he wrote and asked him if he would be interested in taking over the band. An answer in the affirmative—and on his arrival in Canada John turned the band over returning to the drum section as lead stroke.

Jim Greig was well-qualified to take over the band having played with the Edinburgh City Police from 1954 to 1958. Now the band could really get down to work. With a top man in charge of piping John's worries in that department ceased, and he turned his attention to drumming once more.

Authorization for the RCEME band had never materialized and the band members were paid as militia. They had no uniforms of their own as they still used the kilts from the Essex Scottish. This was a sore point with band members and when John heard that the National Guard Pipe Band in Detroit had folded and had uniforms for sale he acted quickly. He called Detroit and made an offer of \$600.00 for the 22 uniforms and had it accepted. Collecting \$30.00 from each of the RCEME band members, John together with Bob Hayworth, 2 i/c of the unit, took off for Detroit that week end and picked them up. It was the beginning of a new pipe band.

Since each member of the band had contributed the money for his uniform and no authorization for uniforms had come from RCEME, each owned his own uniform and

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HIGHLAND GAMES****August 14, 1993  
FERGUS ONTARIO CANADA****Grade I**

- 1 Metro Toronto Police
- 2 Peel Regional Police
- 3 St. Thomas Police
- BDC Metro Toronto Police

**Grade II**

- 1 City of Detroit
- 2 Midlothian Scottish
- 3 Glengarry
- 4 48th Highlanders
- 5 North Coast
- BDC 48th Highlanders

**Grade III**

- 1 Scott McCormack
- 2 Braemar
- 3 C.F.B. Borden
- BDC Braemar

**Grade IV**

- 1 48th Highlanders
- 2 Glengarry
- 3 Windsor Police
- 4 Invergarry
- 5 Petrolia Legion
- BDC Invergarry

**SOLO DRUMMING****Open MSR**

- 1 Scott Currie
- 2 Steve Hill
- 3 Tom Robinson

**Open H/J**

- 1 Scott Currie
- 2 Steve Hill
- 3 Ken Constable

**Grade I MSR**

- 1 Debbie Hinton
- 2 Jim Enright

**Grade II MSR**

- 1 Andrew Lawson
- 2 Steve Lanning
- 3 Ryan McDonald

**Grade I/II H/J**

- 1 Ryan McDonald
- 2 Andrew Lawson
- 3 Jason Grant

**Grade III**

- 1 Craig Colquhoun
- 2 Graham Pocock
- 3 Katie Burchell

**Grade IV**

- 1 Jenny Houk
- 2 Currie Gator
- 3 Mark Buchanan

## MONTREAL HIGHLAND GAMES

August 1, 1993

MONTREAL QUEBEC CANADA

### Grade I

- 1 78th Fraser Highlanders
- 2 Metro Toronto Police
- 3 Peel Regional Police
- BDC Metro Toronto Police

### Grade II

- 1 City of Detroit
- 2 Frederickton
- 3 Toronto Transit
- BDC City of Detroit

### Grade III

- 1 Gaelic College
- 2 Frederickton
- 3 Halifax Police
- BDC Gaelic College

### Grade IV

- 1 Glengarry
- 2 Dunlorgan
- 3 Border Caledonia
- BDC Glengarry

## KIRKWOOD

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was a shareholder. The kilts were Clan MacFarlane and this posed a problem. They couldn't call the band the RCME Pipe Band nor could they call it the St. Catharines Pipe Band as there already was one. A vote was taken and the new name became Clan MacFarlane. They stayed with RCME another six months playing at functions, etc., but as the Essex Scottish kilts had been returned and they were wearing their own (RCME contributed the practice hall only) they decided that they should come out as a private band with no affiliation at all. This they did joining the Pipers' Society and entering as a Grade II competing band. The first games they competed at were the Grimsby Games in 1958 and they took first place. As a competing band that year they took a prize at every competition. They stayed two years in Grade II. Among the trophies as a Grade II band was the North American Slow March in Open Competition. That year they were upgraded to Grade I.

*Next Issue: Concluding installment.*

# A BRIEF HISTORY OF DRUMS AND PIPE BAND DRUMMING

WHERE IT ALL BEGAN

by Allan Chatto

*Principal of Drumming—Australia*

Having had the opportunity during many, many years of involvement with drumming within the pipe band movement, playing with leading pipe bands and teaching and adjudicating drumming in a number of parts of the world, I feel that I have been privileged to have had the opportunity to meet and hold drumming sessions, discussions or exchanged drum scores with some of the great drummers who have been responsible for much of the development and direction of pipe band drumming as we know it today.

Many of these great exponents of the past, some of whom have now unfortunately departed, have entrusted others with some of their original or copies of many scores that they wrote and played with their champion drum corps. Those of particular interest were played in the early days of the Scottish Pipe Band Association.

I feel somehow bound to document something of the part some of these greats have played, by their dedication and inspiration, in setting the examples and guidelines of pipe band drumming that we have come to accept today.

Over the years I have written a great number of articles for pipe band magazines on some of these personalities, the history and the development of pipe band drumming. It gives me great pleasure to pen a few lines for the new publication solely devoted to pipe band drumming, "The International Pipe Band Drummer" magazine.

The drum is reputed to be the oldest instrument. To learn a little of the history of pipe band drumming, we must firstly look back into the history of the drum and to say "why pipe bands?"

In the time of the Crusades, history tells us that there were trumpets, shawns and tabors (or drums). These instruments were probably used more to frighten the enemy by martial sounds rather than to create marching music for the soldiers.

Of course, drums came in various shapes and sizes. The tabor, usually a smaller drum, played with one hand while the other hand played a three-hole pipe. The side or snare drum, a double-headed drum with a wooden or sometimes metal shell, usually about

12-18 inches in diameter across the vellum and up to 26 inches in depth. It usually had one or more cord or similar material snares on the bottom head or vellum. The tension was firstly by cords through holes in each vellum stretched over the cylinder. Later the vellums were fixed to a cane or willow hoop with a counter hoop over. The tension was then by means of "V" formation cords going from top to bottom hoop, diagonally and extra tensioned by means of buff (or "tug-ears") braces, on each "V" of the cord or rope.

It is well documented that from the 13th to 18th century that particularly the snare drum, and the side or snare drummer, had a significant important part to play in military warfare and on the field of battle. Usually two side drummers were assigned to each regimental company. The colonel's, who had his own drummer and he was usually with his colonel in the command post, located in the centre of the regiment. On the colonel's command, the drummer would signal to the other drummers and beat out in a prescribed form or code of beating. The company drummers would take up the call. The whole of the regiment would then know the colonel's orders. Such as shoulder muskets, advance, close your ranks or even to beat the retreat.

The whole of the regiment, as it will be appreciated, had also to know the meaning of the drum signals. Hence the old British saying "having it drummed in to you."

Some regiments had a "drum major" who was responsible for teaching all of the drummers the regimental signals or codes. So we see that during a battle the drummers had a very responsible task.

Later, there was an addition to the corps, the bass drum. This was quite a large instrument. Always much wider than the width of the vellum or drum head. In some old paintings we see a "drum carrier" as well as a "drum beater." The drum corps was also used to beat time to help the soldiers keep in step during the long marches. In later years the fife was introduced, so together with the drums, became as we know the regimental "drum and fife band."

We see that in Europe, that bands were also now well-established. In the Swiss regiments during the early 15th century, drum and fife bands were common. They

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# JOHN KIRKWOOD

## Part III

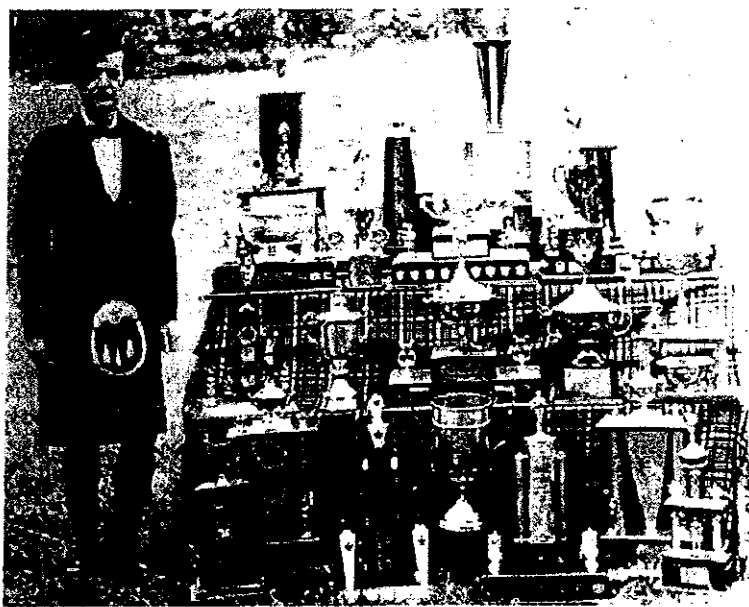
by Jim Sim, Jr. Pipe Major

If you have been following the story of John Kirkwood in the first two issues of the *International Pipe Band Drummer*, you will know that Parts I and II were reprinted from the North American Scotsman magazine from 1971 and were written by Art McLeod. Mr. McLeod never published his final installment due to John's death in August of 1972. I will attempt to complete the biography of John Kirkwood Sr. with the help of some of the people who played with and knew John very well.

The Clan MacFarlane, recently promoted to Grade I, continued to improve with the efforts of John in the drum corps and Pipe Major Jim Grieg. In the words of Ken Eller (who later went on to be the

for many years), "John was the heart of the Clan. He kept the band going through hard work and determination. He worked endless hours developing scores."

John's best years in the Clan were probably the mid to late sixties, before his health started to fail him. In 1966 the band went to Scotland to compete at the



John Kirkwood with Clan MacFarlane Awards, 1968.

Worlds Championships in Inverness. The band was sent off with a bon voyage dance at the A.T. Church Branch of the Royal Canadian Legion. The band stayed with local families in the town of Kingussie, about 45 miles from Inverness. They had two days of concentrated practice leading up to the Worlds. The band put on a fine show and in doing so had paved the way for the many overseas bands who attend the Worlds Championships today.

The best year the drum corps may have had was 1968. This corps consisted of John, his son John Jr., his brother Jim (who both went on to play lead with the Clan in later years), Jimmy Agnew, Alex Clark, John Newland, and John's good friend from Shotts, Jackie Fair on bass. The band, during these years, was a consistent prize winner and definitely became the band to beat in North America. According to Jimmy Agnew, the corps would practice every night Monday through Friday, and again with the pipers on Sunday afternoons. Other drummers who played with John in the Clan were Fred Fisher, Dave Haynes, and George Kidd.

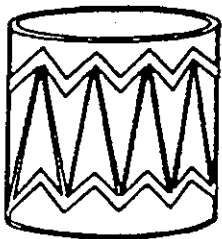
As busy as John was, he always had time to help other young aspiring drummers and always had a kind word and a handshake. John was the proprietor of John Kirkwood Highland Outfitters. It was a pipe band supply store on St. Paul

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## KIRKWOOD

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Street in St. Catharines. He was probably better known for the sticks he manufactured in the shop. It seemed that every year he would have a new innovative idea for the design of his sticks. They went from small beaded sticks to hollow oblong beads. John offered many of the young players in the Clan full and part time jobs at the shop. Some of the players who worked there were Peter MacKenzie, Alex Price, Ken Eller and others. John always looked for ways to help the band members out. According to Ken Eller "Saturdays were special at John's shop. Many of us lived close by and would meet at John's every Saturday morning for coffee at 9, 10, 11, etc. Usually we would have a few tunes and some good stories. We would always

adjourn to the Franklin Tavern up the street for the rest of the afternoon."

John rarely judged bands as he was too busy teaching and competing himself. People always came to him so he would travel very little. John was also a very accomplished piper as was mentioned in the previous installments. He played many of the old classical tunes like Highland Wedding, Balmoral Highlanders, etc. He always seemed to "hum" the tunes as he played with the band.

Around 1970 John's health started to deteriorate under the constant attack of diabetes. Through his illness he continued to work at the shop and write music. Jimmy Agnew recalls "John wrote 32 scores in ten days using a magnifying glass six inches away due to his loss of eyesight from the diabetes. The band

then used these scores to play for a Shrine Ball in Erie, Pennsylvania, USA. The band alternated every twenty minutes with the orchestra all night."

I personally remember John had trouble finding his way to the front of the massed bands to accept the best drum corps award at the Brantford Highland Games due to his failing eyesight. This was a very bittersweet moment for me, as I was a young drummer who admired John so much.

By 1972 John Jr. and Jimmy Agnew were playing with the General Motors Pipe Band in Grade II. John's health had deteriorated to the point where he could no longer play. Even then when you went to John's shop, you were greeted with a smile and a warm handshake. In August of 1972, the reigning World

Champion Edinburgh Police came to Canada along with many other Scottish bands to play at the Canadian National Exhibition Tattoo and Competition. The World Champion Edinburgh Police came over early with Pipe Major Ian MacLeod and Leading Drummer Bob Montgomery to compete at the Fergus Highland Games. It is a week I will never forget. I was a 17-year-old drummer from Chicago looking forward to a week of lessons and some good contests. Upon my arrival at the Fergus Games, I noticed John Jr. was not with the General Motors Band. I went up and asked Jimmy Agnew where John was and Jimmy told me that he was with his Dad. John's health was very grave at this



**Clan MacFarlane circa 1965.**

(front row, left to right: John Kirkwood, brother Jim and son John Jr.; Pipe Major Jim Greig far right. Second row, second and third in from left: Jim Agnew, Jackie Fair. Back row, far right: Ken Eller.)

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Jim

As a drummer I find it difficult to relate to your comments made in your first edition of *International Pipe Band Drummer* magazine regarding the lack of drumming adjudicators being used in an ensemble capacity in major contests.

Speaking from personal experience, I find that I tend to be used more in this capacity than in drumming and I feel that a drummer trained in the merits of ensemble can only lead to a better balanced result.

There is no doubt that under the present points system "Piping Rules," and the effect of drumming points on a contest outcome can be nil, so this can be balanced by a drummer on ensemble, because no matter what the experts say, an ensemble adjudicator will always be influenced by a good or bad performance in his own field, piping or drumming.

I recall the 1992 Worlds when I was judging ensemble with Jim Hutton judging drumming. We looked at each other in disbelief at the terrible integration throughout one performance. From an ensemble viewpoint I felt the rhythmic flow of the performance was destroyed from start to finish and although I recognised that the piping sound and playing was excellent, I was so distracted by the poor drumming that I marked the band well down.

I am not suggesting that a piper on ensemble would not have picked this up, far from it. I have more respect for my colleague's ability than that but how much importance would he have attached to this, bearing in mind the excellent piping performance of that band.

So if, as you say, there is a lack of drummers being used in an ensemble capacity in North America, perhaps this is an indication of a need for further training of drummers in the art of ensemble adjudication.

David Brown

Aberdeen, SCOTLAND

(David is a well-respected drumming and ensemble judge on the RSPBA panel.)



*David, you bring out a point that few people are honest enough to admit. "An ensemble adjudicator will always be influenced by a good or bad performance in his own field." In North America it is not so much that we have a lack of "qualified" drummers to judge ensemble, but North American contests differ in one large respect from those in Scotland; that is, North American contests have solo events in the morning and band contests in the afternoon. There are always more solo pipers than drummers which results in the need for an additional piping judge for the morning events who can then judge the ensemble aspect of the band events in the afternoon. This is compounded by the fact that many contests run two contest circles at the same time so the point comes out, do you need two drumming judges and another drummer for ensemble. This will give you three drumming judges for solos and decrease your piping judges for the crowded solo events by one. Thanks for your enlightening letter.*

J.S.

## KIRKWOOD

*Continued from page 17*

point, and it did not look very good at all. The Clan went on to beat the Police on that hot day, but this seemed a very minor detail. I drove to St. Catharines that night and contacted John the next day. John Jr. told me it didn't look good. John Jr. was the same age as me and yet, here he was about to lose his father, one of the greatest drummers of all time and one of the greatest people of all time.

The next day I got the news John Kirkwood had passed away due to complications from diabetes. He was just 44 years old and had so much more to give. This was probably the greatest evidence of God only taking the good when they are young. John was survived by his wife Connie, three sons: John Jr., Douglas and Scott, and two daughters, Edith Ann and Linda, as well as his brother Jim Kirkwood and two sisters in Scotland.

The following weekend the CNE Contest and Tattoo went on as scheduled with John Jr. and Jimmy Agnew playing together in the General Motors Band.

Each of us, it would seem, is given a purpose in life. To understand that purpose and achieve it is something that very few men every accomplish. Such a man, however, was John Kirkwood.

John's legacy carries on. His oldest son, John Kirkwood Jr., is one of the top drummers today. He has played with the bands mentioned earlier as well as the Muirhead & Sons in Scotland. Until 1993, he was the leading drummer of the record setting and many time World Champion Strathclyde Police. His next oldest son, Douglas, was a member of the 1987 World Champion 78th Fraser Highlanders from Toronto and in 1993 played with the Simon Fraser University Pipe Band from Burnaby, British Columbia, Canada, who were fourth in the 1993 Worlds.

I know John Kirkwood and my father were my inspiration in drumming. Any one who would follow John's example as a drummer or as a man was sure to be on the right road. As Ken Eller said "he gave much more than he ever took."



**DRUMMERS' BEAT**

*This score was composed by the late John Kirkwood.*

**Blair Drummond**  
Strathspey

John Kirkwood Sr.  
Clan MacFarlane P.B.  
1924

The musical score is written on eight staves in common time (C). It features a complex rhythmic pattern with frequent sixteenth and thirty-second notes. The notation includes various ornaments such as slurs, accents, and grace notes. Specific rhythmic markings include '10:3' above the first two staves, and '3', '6', and '8' above various groups of notes on the subsequent staves. The piece concludes with a double bar line and repeat dots.