



Music and Clan Irwin Association Part IV

*Hark when the night is falling,
Hear! hear the pipes are calling,
Loudly and proudly calling
Down through the glen.*

Truly, the words of the familiar song *Scotland the Brave* are ones that speak to the soul! Who doesn't get a chill down their back and feel their spirits rise as they get close to the fields of Scottish Games or Festivals and hear the skirl of Highland Bagpipes and the beat of the Snare Drums? Perhaps you have been fortunate enough to come across a lone piper busking on the corner of Edinburgh's Waverly Station or playing on a stark hillside while motoring through Glencoe. Wherever you have heard them, whether you are Scottish or not, you will never forget the sound of this unique instrument. Even though, ironically, the pipes are not Scottish in origin, they certainly are paramount to celebrating Scottish culture around the world.

I am sure that many of you have wonderful stories about the first time you heard the Pipes and Drums, and I would love to hear them. My most memorable ones occurred during my year at the University of St Andrews, that "little city, worn and grey...by the Northern Sea", as the Scottish poet Andrew Lange referred to it in his poem *Almae Maters*. We had time to explore Scotland a bit before term began and, as it was the 1st Saturday in September, drove up to the famous Braemar Gathering. We were standing on a hillside in iconic chilly, misty weather behind the Royal Box when the Massed Bands came marching around the field. I found myself welling up with tears at that magnificent sound and knew that my year in Scotland would be the experience of a lifetime. Later, when settled in at University, I started out one Sunday morning on a walkabout and heard the faint sound of pipes floating in the air. Following the sound, I discovered a piper practicing at the top of the hill above the famous pier which extends out into the North Sea. You might have seen pictures of us students walking this pier in our bright Scarlet Academic Gowns, made of pure Scottish Wool. It was an entirely different sound, plaintive and mysterious, another unforgettable memory.

Stuart McHardy writes in his book, [The Silver Chanter and Other Piper Tales](#) that "Trying to figure out where and when the Bagpipes were first invented is an exercise in futility". With that thought in mind, I will not attempt to discuss the history of pipes in any detail. There are many different types: Scottish Highland or Small Border, Northumbrian, Irish Uilleann, and others. They were known in the ancient Middle East and have been used in many cultures throughout the world. I was interested to find out that the earliest evidence of bagpipes in the British Isles dates to Anglo Saxon days in the 11th Century: and that the word "bagpipe" was first mentioned in connection with records of pipers being paid to play in the king's court. In literature, they were mentioned in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* (1386).

As I am sure you have guessed by now, the music presented in this article is a Pipe Tune and the featured musicians are a Pipe Band. The tune, *Major Irvine of Barra and Straloch Slow Air* was written by Piper Bowman and dedicated to an Honorary member Toby Irvine on the occasion his attending the Grandfather Mountain Scottish Games sometime in the mid-80s. The Major re-dedicated it to Clan Irwin and encouraged all pipers to use it at Clan Gatherings. According to our Chief Alexander Irvine, Toby was "tickled pink" with this honor.

Major Francis Charles Quentin Irvine (known as Toby) spent his youth at Barra, an estate in Aberdeenshire on the site of Barra Castle. Here, the Battle of Inverurie was fought, giving Robert the Bruce a victory over John Comyn, Earl of Buchan (1308). The Castle had various owners until John Ramsay purchased it in 1754. A Ramsay heiress married Andrew Irvine of Drum. Toby was with the Cameron Highlanders and served in Ethiopia and Egypt before being wounded in Holland. When he left the Army about 1956, he returned to Straloch, another mansion and estate in Aberdeenshire which also came into the possession of John Ramsay in 1758. A Mary Ramsay married Francis Irvine of Drum, and the second son inherited Straloch. The Ramsays of Straloch became the Irvines of Barra and Straloch.

Frank Johnson, one of our members and a piper with the Pipes & Drums of Barnegat Bay, has graciously contributed a newly typeset score of the tune and will be working up a video recording as well. This band was started in 2007 and practice at Christ Episcopal Church in Toms River, New Jersey. They wear the Irvings Tower of Bonshaw Tartan. Frank's mother bought him his first kilt in this tartan for solo competition and they are the only American Pipe Band to wear it. The band recently started to compete in grade 5 with the Eastern United States Bagpipe Association. Their Pipe Instructor Derek Midgley is a world champion and former member of Scottish Power Pipe Band. They welcome anyone with a desire to learn to play the Bagpipes.

The score for this tune is also in our Music Folder in the Clanirwin.org GSuites along with all the other tunes and scores which have been collected. STAY TUNED! A Clan Irwin UTube Channel is coming, providing a much more attractive platform for our music. Once again, I invite members who play instruments or sing to join in on the FUN! My next article will feature two dance tunes written for Irvings, a Strathspey and a Reel, so dancers take note, you might be interested as well.

As we begin a new season of Festivals, I think I can "*Hear! hear the pipes are calling*".

Susan Irvine McRae
Music Project Administrator

Note: Many thanks to Sherrie Irwin for getting me touch with Robert Bogdan, Toby's nephew in Scotland, who provided me with information about his Uncle Toby and our Chief Alexander for filling in some blanks.

Major Irvine of Barra and Straloch Slow Air

Piper Bowman

The image displays a musical score for a slow air, titled "Major Irvine of Barra and Straloch Slow Air" by Piper Bowman. The score is presented on four staves of music, each beginning with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The music is written in a traditional notation style, featuring a variety of note values including eighth, sixteenth, and thirty-second notes, as well as rests and slurs. The piece concludes with a double bar line and repeat dots at the end of the fourth staff.