We are now in the final quarter of the year but there are still a number of events yet to be enjoyed.

But before we talk about those let’s look back on the last three months and revisit three events that helped our Society continue on its road of exploration and outreach. Our annual Garden Party continues to grow and attract new members and guests. This year 150 guests convened at the home of the British Consul General in Hancock Park to enjoy camaraderie and good food and drink. The support of whisky merchant Alexander Murray & Co. and MacLeod Ale Brewery ensured guests were never thirsty and for those whose tastes tended to a non-alcoholic beverage, Jenny Chatham, The Tea Lady was on hand to provide exquisite English tea. It wasn’t all about feeding our epicurean proclivities however, there were some serious items to bid on in the silent auction, including hotel stays, restaurant vouchers, and of course whisky. The months of planning and preparation by a team of dedicated volunteers paid off when we were able to welcome our members and their guests to this memorable event. Donations raised through the silent auction and ‘Lucky Dip’ will help fund the Society’s multi-year commitment to Children’s Hospital Los Angeles.

Next on our event calendar was the second of a series of planned ‘Meet-Ups’. This was organized by Board member Kimberlee Bradford and held at Rosenthal Winery in Malibu. Once again good food and very drinkable Rosenthal wine contributed to an afternoon of fun and laughter attended by not only Society members and guests but several of our good Outlander friends.

The last of our events last quarter was of course the fabled Seaside Highland Games. Now in its fifteenth year the ‘friendly games’ did not fail to deliver. For those of us staffing the Society tent we were rewarded with several new members registering on the spot, including a new Life member – for those of you of a certain age it really does make economic sense.

Now we look forward to the concluding part of the year. Starting with our annual Kirkin of The Tartans at Beverly Hills Presbyterian Church, followed by our St. Andrew’s Day dinner. For those of you planning the trip to Montreal to enjoy the hospitality of our sister Society you will experience the remarkable spectacle of the pipes and drums of The Royal Highland Regiment of Canada – The Black Watch playing for the spirited country dancing of the fearless guests as they hurtle around the dance floor.

Best wishes and Slainte mhath!

In Gear

McLaren

Yes, you are correct. McLaren was the subject of this column in the last issue of The Thistle.

So why again? You ask. Last issue this article focused on the Formula 1 driver and designer of the original McLaren car, New Zealander Bruce McLaren. Although Bruce was from New Zealand his name
Rosenthal Meet-Up

Our second Meet-Up of the year was a great success. The Rosenthal Winery is a lovely location in Malibu next to the Pacific Ocean with cooling onshore breezes wafting over the guests as they sample the Rosenthal wine with fellow Society members, friends, and guests.

We’ll do it again, so keep your eyes on the event calendar and on your incoming email announcements from the Society.
1. **Josh Littlejohn**  
*Chief Executive, Social Bite*

The founder of Social Bite is probably Scotland’s best known social entrepreneur, having earned funds to develop the social business by getting the likes of Bill Clinton, George Clooney and Richard Branson to speak at his other venture, the Scottish Business Awards.

The son of entrepreneur Simon Littlejohn, who runs seven restaurants across Scotland, Josh knew he wanted to launch his own business when he left university in 2007. After a few successful ventures in event management, Josh was inspired by Nobel Peace Prize winning economist Professor Muhammad Yunus to explore the potential of a social business in Scotland. Since opening Social Bite in 2012, Josh has developed the business into Scotland’s first social enterprise sandwich shop chain, now consisting of five shops in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Dundee and Aberdeen. Josh is committed to more than profit and creating a cause-driven business, so a quarter of Social Bite staff come from a homeless background.

2. **Alan Mahon**  
*Founder, Brewgooder*

Alan cut his teeth in the social enterprise world through sandwich shop Social Bite, before creating Brewgooder, a craft beer label which donates 100% of its profits to clean water projects all over the world.

Alan is inspired by the possibility of turning everyday acts of consumption, like drinking beer, into a force for social good. Alan led the launch and growth of the corporate catering arm of Social Bite in 2014, which now brings in £1 million a year for the social enterprise, making it one of Scotland’s largest independent caterers. Alan has also managed the operations of the Scottish Business Awards, the leading gathering of business leaders in the UK, which has seen President Bill Clinton, Sir Richard Branson, Bob Geldof and George Clooney come to Scotland as keynote speakers.
Meet New Member Kelsey Deanne

With a lifelong background in acting, filmmaking, piano, symphony and the Arts, Kelsey attended The Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in London, The New School in New York City, and Lawrence University Conservatory of Music. She has appeared in more than 20 films, with lead roles in 5, and is currently preparing for lead roles in three feature films starring opposite Robert Picardo (Star Trek), Sylvester McCoy (The Hobbit), and Samantha Mumba (Time Machine).

Kelsey manages social media for St. Andrew’s Society LA, BritWeek, Mercury Pictures, and CSA Celebrity Speakers International.

Meet New Consul General – Michael Howells

Michael Howells is a British diplomat and Consul General in Los Angeles.

He is the senior representative of the UK government in Southern California, Arizona, Nevada, Utah and Hawaii. In this role, he promotes trade and investment, scientific cooperation, creative and media collaborations and educational partnerships between the UK and the southwestern United States. He also oversees delivery of essential consular services to a 600,000-strong British resident community and British visitors numbering over a million per year.

Michael has an academic background in Anthropology and International Law. Prior to government service, Michael worked as a human rights lawyer and in the UK tech sector, supporting clients in the British entertainment industry.

Michael began his government career as a policy adviser in the UK Department for International Development where he edited the 2006 White Paper "Making Governance Work for the Poor." For the past 11 years he has held a series of national security roles in the British Foreign Office, covering Counter-Terrorism, EU Security and Defence policy and the Middle East.

From 2009-2013 Michael served at the British Embassy in Washington DC, acting as the bridge between UK and US policy towards the Middle East, during the tumultuous events of the Arab uprisings and the “P5+1” nuclear negotiations with Iran. From 2013-2015 Michael oversaw British foreign policy towards Iran, including the re-opening of Embassies in London and Tehran. From 2015 to 2017 he was Head of Near Eastern Affairs at the British Foreign Office, responsible for UK policy towards Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Israel, the OPTs and the Middle East Peace Process.
All annual memberships must be renewed 1st January each year. If you became a member after 31st August of the preceeding year your membership is paid up through 31st December of the following year.

Notification of annual membership dues are mailed to each member, regardless of whether you joined after 31st August or if you are a Life member. The reason for this is that the renewal form includes an opportunity for everyone to make a tax deductible donation to the Society in addition to their membership dues. The form is also an opportunity to make any corrections to your personal membership profile, including mailing address, email address, and phone number.

If you have not done so already please send in your membership dues. This is the only regular source of income for the Society and is depended on to plan and organize our various events throughout the year. The Society is administered and operated by volunteers. The Society is a 501(c)(3) organization and as such your donations are tax deductible.

NEW SOFTWARE

The Society is currently evaluating new membership management software and plans to implement a new system by the beginning of the new year. We have been limping along with a combination of spreadsheet recording and an online database that frequently leaves a lot to be desired. While this system was adequate in the past the growth of the membership demands a purpose built software system. The new system will combine many of the resources that hitherto have been provided by several different systems. This will enable us to keep closer control over our database and integrate the functions of membership tracking, outreach, event marketing, recording reservations, and ticket payments. This will enable the Society to be far more proactive in meeting our member’s needs.

Watch this space.

McClaren, from page 1

has obvious Scottish origins and that being the case, we approached McLaren of Beverly Hills asking if they would provide a car as a prize for our Garden Party Lucky Dip. As you may expect they declined. However they did agree to bring along one of their new cars to our Garden Party and display it in the driveway of the British Residence. Getting such a car into a driveway is not as simple a task as you may expect nor one that most of us usually encounter. The car is so low to the ground that driving in was not an option. The only way was to back into the driveway and at a careful and extremely slow pace – better they than me. A car costing several hundred thousand dollars requires careful caresses and understanding, not to mention deep pockets. This beautiful example of automotive design and engineering formed a popular photographic backdrop for our guests as they arrived, some even daring to sit in the cockpit and fantasize they were reaching 200 mph down the Mulsanne straight at Le Mans. Our deep appreciation and thanks to McLaren of Beverly Hills for providing this magnificent example of British engineering perfection. Maybe next year we can have one for the Lucky Dip?

Tattoo leaves its mark

STEVE BUSCH is well known in southern California piping circles, and for good reason. He is a piper par excellence who shares his amazing talent with us all. Now as a result of the establishment of a new civilian pipe band he is known in Scotland as well. So impressed was The College of Piping they put Steve on the front cover of their August issue of Piping Times.

Please click here to read Steve’s story of piping at the 2016 Royal Edinburgh Military Tatoo.
Montreal & Los Angeles Societies Establish Formal Ties

In 2015 Vice President David Warburton and his wife Leslie attended the St. Andrew’s Day Ball presented by The St. Andrew’s Society of Montreal.

They came back to Los Angeles with such glowing reports that last year ten of our members attended to experience the spectacle first hand. However it would be false modesty to omit that your president had been asked by the Montreal Society to be their 2016 guest of honour. The Montreal Society was established in 1835 and is one of the oldest St. Andrews Societies in North America. In 2017 Montreal is celebrating its 375th anniversary, while Canada celebrates its 150th year. 150 years ago, Quebec, Ontario, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia — united to create the Canadian Confederation, called the Dominion of Canada. Quite a history and one we in Los Angeles are now a part of.

One of the results of our sending a delegation of Los Angeles St. Andrew’s members to Montreal was to set in motion a thought for a more official connection to be established. Los Angeles Board of Trustees member Dr. Richard MacKenzie, himself a native of Montreal and uncle of the 2016 President of the Montreal Society, drafted a statement attesting that the two Societies would henceforth be enjoined as sister entities. The draft was submitted to the Montreal Board who at their next meeting ratified the relationship between our two societies. We are therefore now an officially recognized and established sister society of Montreal.

It goes without saying that we as the junior partner in this newly established relationship have more to learn from Montreal than they have from us. I can say unequivocally that even in these early stages of our relationship I have learned a great deal. Much of which I hope we can emulate here in Los Angeles. Not least is the depth of involvement and commitment by individual members that ensures a regular transition to the leadership of the Society. Some things we cannot duplicate in Los Angeles. The Royal Highland Regiment of Canada, The Black Watch are headquartered in Montreal and maintain a strong connection with the Society. Past Society president Brian MacKenzie is the Pipe Major of the Black Watch Association Pipes and Drums. However southern California is not without talent and we are fortunate in having several skilled pipers among us as well as pipe bands that hold their own with the best. We were proud to welcome the Pasadena Pipes and Drums, who played for our country dancing as well as performing several tunes as they marched into the ballroom.

We were happy to welcome the newly installed Montreal Society president Jason MacCullum on a private visit earlier this year and we hope to see more Montreal Society members visiting in the future.

Eleven members of our Society will again be visiting Montreal this December to participate in their 2017 St. Andrew’s Ball.

If you are interested in attending please purchase tickets at:

http://www.standrewsball.com/tickets.html
3. James McIlroy
   Chief Executive, EuroBiotix

James McIlroy is one of Scotland’s youngest and most impressive social entrepreneurs, setting up EuroBiotix CIC while still a senior medical student at the University of Aberdeen.

The goal of EuroBiotix is to improve the lives of patients through the power of the human microbiome and to support health services and clinicians who perform faecal microbiota transplant (FMT). EuroBiotix is developing a range of market leading services that will catalyse scientific research and reduce the costs and hassle that are currently associated with FMT. James earned his BMedSci with Honours in Physiology from the University of Edinburgh. James has led Eurobiotix to multiple business competition successes, grant funding and governmental support. In recognition of his dedication to EuroBiotix and his entrepreneurial potential, James was awarded a highly prestigious Enterprise Fellowship at the Royal Society of Edinburgh. James is the first medical student to join the fellowship programme since it began in 1997.

4. Robbie Norval
   Director of Lingo Flamingo

There is a growing body of evidence to suggest that speaking multiple languages can delay the onset of dementia by up to five years.

This is why Robbie Norval decided to set up social enterprise Lingo Flamingo, which teaches foreign languages to older adults to postpone the effects of dementia and brain ageing. Through his professional career, Robbie has worked with vulnerable adults in various capacities and has seen the importance of communication and social contact for these adults. He has experience in teaching and understands the importance of flexible lesson plans to adapt to individual learning paths. Through his work with Lingo Flamingo he has developed his skills making language learning as accessible as possible and developing creative and fun learning activities for older adults.

5. Jennifer Paice
   Chief Executive of SafeDeposits Scotland

Jen started her career in 2000 as a sales graduate for Snowdrop Systems, a growing entrepreneurial technology business in Oxford.

After seven years, and an upward trajectory to management, she moved to New York as vice president of Scottish Development International’s financial services team. This position focused on promoting Scotland’s financial services sector as well as supporting MSP and government official visits to the US. On her return she went to work for RBS, and was promoted to chair of the RBS Lombard CSR board and director of origination with Lombard Asset Finance. Since taking on the top job at SafeDeposits Scotland in 2013, Jen has brought the housing social enterprise into profit, increased turnover to £1.5m in 2015, securing 60% of the Scottish deposits market and launching its grant-giving trust four years ahead of schedule.

6. Debra Riddell
   Chief Executive, Breadshare

Debra Riddell set up Breadshare in 2011 to bring the health benefits of good quality locally produced organic bread to her local community.

Debra has an Masters in Business Administration (MBA) and extensive business, IT and project management experience, having successful managed of her own software development business for over 25 years. However, after developing her own artisan baking skills she was struck with a passion for engaging more people in the fun and nutritious benefits of real bread. Breadshare uses simple natural ingredients, including flour milled by its associate company RMR Milling in the Scottish Borders. With its home in Portobello thriving as a hub for community breadmaking, including workshops for children and adults, Breadshare has opened a sandwich shop in Edinburgh’s Leith and is now set to launch a third venture in East Lothian’s Penicuik, partnering with Penicuik Storehouse, a local community alliance. Breadshare produce can also be bought at a range of shops and markets throughout Edinburgh.

7. Jeremie Warner
   Founder, Power A Life & Studio 2080

Glasgow-based social entrepreneur Jeremie Warner, 27, hopes to make a big difference with the wee PAL he created in 2015 with fellow entrepreneur Stephen Spiers, 25.

The pair have launched the wee PAL power bank, a portable charger for phones and gadgets. Using a buy-one, give-one philosophy, for every charger bought, the company gives a solar light, free of charge, to a child in an African Government school. These lights offer children without electricity the chance to study at night, helping them work towards a better education that can lead to more opportunities in life and a brighter future. Jeremie is already an old hand at social enterprise having also set up Studio 2080 in 2012 to empower communities in west Africa. Using a hands-on participatory design process, it create solutions to alleviate poverty for rural communities, specifically in areas of healthcare, education and agriculture. The University of Strathclyde Architecture graduate from Linlithgow is doing all this while continuing to study for his PhD.
Ten years after a Dundee V&A museum was first considered, the finishing touches are being applied to the exterior of the £80.1m building ahead of its opening next summer.

In the decade from concept to concrete, Dundonians have watched waterfront landmarks flattened and cleared before construction eventually began in March 2015.

No amount of artist’s impressions and computer-generated fly-throughs could have prepared the city for the true size and scale of the imposing design of Japanese architect Kengo Kuma, who will inspect the building on Wednesday.

Its prow now jutting confidently over the River Tay, the V&A Dundee is finally here.

Once the paint is dry (the interior is strictly off-limits to curious journalists until the opening) we will finally get to see what all the fuss is about.

The massive construction project has led a charmed life, despite initial reservations.

At a hastily-called and ill-tempered press conference in January 2015, where it was announced that the museum’s original £45m budget had almost doubled, Dundee City Council leader Ken Guild said the project partners were “making damn sure” the development would go ahead.

The pressure was on.

Work needed to begin in March 2015 to complete preparatory works in the River Tay before the seal pup season began in June.

Any delay and a summer-long embargo of work on the river would come into force and construction would grind to a halt.

This would stall the project for six months, a disastrous scenario for a building that was originally supposed to open in 2014.

The first challenge was the construction of an enormous cofferdam, a temporary watertight structure built around the protruding part of the museum, filled with 12,500 tonnes of stone.

A year into the construction, Kengo Kuma visited the site and declared himself “very happy” with its progress.

He said: “I can feel the scale of the spaces and the scale is as I expected.”

In October 2016, the building reached its next milestone with the completion of its upper floor.

BAM Construction’s Bruce Dickson said the project was progressing “better than we dared” as more than 100 workers continued their efforts.

A major piece of work which would allow the museum to be built over the water, its completion at the end of May 2015 meant the construction project had cleared its first significant hurdle.

Work on the three-storey structure could begin in earnest.

With 21 separate wall sections and no straight external walls, this was not a straight-forward building.

The first challenge was the construction of an enormous cofferdam, a temporary watertight structure built around the protruding part of the museum, filled with 12,500 tonnes of stone.
Could the north-east of Scotland become the next Bordeaux? Perhaps, with a little help from Russia...

From BBC Scotland, 11th October 2017

We’re used to drinking vino from France, Spain and even further afield, but could we soon be filling our glasses with Scottish wine?

These trenches help protect the vines from the worst of the weather.

The home-grown British wine industry is mostly located around England’s southern counties where warm weather encourages abundant grape growth.

So it may be something of a surprise to learn that the country’s most northerly outdoor vineyard is located in deepest Aberdeenshire.

Despite it being further north than Moscow, entrepreneur Alan Smith believes his site in Strathdon is the right location.

He grows Russian grape varieties, such as golubok, because they’re hardy and ripen quickly.

But even these must be protected from the north-east’s cold climate.

He told Radio 4’s Farming Today programme, “We grow the vines in trenches that are two feet wide and one foot deep so we can cover them on days when you get frost”.

“You can get frost down to about minus seven here.”

Polytunnel to the rescue

Alan also grows grapes in a polytunnel, sheltered from the frost.

However, some purists aren’t too keen on this method and claim that they’re too warm, resulting in the wrong balance of acids and sugars in the grapes.

But this is where Alan’s vineyard has an advantage over others in the UK.

“Here it’s colder. It was half a degree Celsius last night, even in the polytunnel.”

Grapes aren’t the only unlikely item currently being grown in Scotland.

Crofters Lucy and Chris Williams have just started their own tea plantation in Bonar Bridge.

They’re part of a small network of growers stretching from the Borders to Sutherland.

Chris told Radio Scotland’s Good Morning Scotland that the Scottish climate is surprisingly well suited to growing tea.

"The tea that we’ve planted comes from China, and the climatic conditions are actually very favourable.

"Although we don’t have a lot of strong sunlight, that’s actually not what you want to produce a premium primary leaf tea.

Rich tea-growing conditions

Dundee Museum of Design

from page 9

The formwork was stripped away in March this year, giving the city its first proper view of the building.

Drawing comparisons with Star Wars spacecraft, a tribute video appeared almost immediately, quickly becoming an internet hit.

The same month, work began fitting the 2,466 cast stone panels on the walls, creating the appearance of a cliff face.

Made in moulds, the panels weighed up to 3,000kg each and span up to 4m.

Groundbreaking 3D digital technology has been used used to ensure the building’s complex parts interlock.

Project manager John Tavendale described it as a sculpture as well as a building.

He said: “There’s not a square metre of the facade that is the same.”

With the removal of the cofferdam completed this month, the exterior of the building was complete and the museum fitting-out and galleries preparation will begin on schedule in January.

No opening date has been set, but the middle of the year is likely and then, after more than three years under construction, the V&A Dundee will be ready to show itself off to the world.
Social Media – A Giant Leap into the 21st Century

Kelsey Deanne with her fiancé Francis O’Toole attended our Tartan Day Celebration last April. Having many lines of Scottish descent, Kelsey immediately felt her Scottish blood jump and offered to help the Society with social media, market outreach tools, and resources from their Los Angeles film studio Mercury Pictures.

Kelsey set to work right away reestablishing and posting regular content on our Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram accounts.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA FOR NONPROFITS

84% of organizations in 2015 saw the greatest growth in charitable gifts received through social media. — Nonprofit Research Collaborative

The top benefits overall are increased exposure and increased traffic. According to the 2017 Social Media Marketing Industry Report commissioned by Social Media Examiner, 88% of all marketers indicated their social media efforts have generated more exposure for their businesses. Increasing traffic was the second major benefit, with 78% reporting positive results. Most marketers use social media to develop loyal fans (69%) and gain marketplace intelligence (66%).

ST. ANDREW’S SOCIETY SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

Facebook
Our Facebook page has 429 followers, reaching 3800 people and receiving 952 post engagements each month. Facebook has 1.8B followers worldwide, 157M Americans, and 6M+ in Los Angeles.

Twitter
Twitter has just been launched and has already received 5315 impressions in its first month. Twitter has 317M followers worldwide and 67M Americans.

Instagram
Instagram followers have almost doubled in the past month, reaching 61 followers and 4400 impressions each month. Instagram has 500M followers worldwide, and 77.5M Americans.

GOALS
Of all social media platforms, nonprofit marketers use of Instagram increased the most in 2016 from 38% to 58% — CMI & Blackbaud

Our Goals:
Instagram will be the primary focus, followed by Facebook and Twitter.

• Increase followers who are local to our area by 10% in 3 months.
• Increase engagements by involving ourselves in the conversation.
• Connect with other local organizations and individuals who could share our organization’s message.
• Engage our organization’s volunteers and team.
• Establish a St. Andrew’s Society of Los Angeles LinkedIn page

MEMBERS CALL TO ACTION

If you have photos or videos taken at St. Andrew’s of Los Angeles events, or other Scottish related events and travel, please send them to us for social media placement: rees1@icloud.com

• Follow St. Andrew’s of Los Angeles:
  • Facebook: StAndrewsLA
  • Instagram: StAndrewsLA
  • Twitter: StAndrewsSocLA

Benefits of social media marketing

[Diagram showing benefits of social media marketing]
The St. Andrew’s Society of Los Angeles wishes to thank all our supporters and sponsors who have contributed and continue to contribute to the goals of the Society.

MISSION

The purpose of the Society is to promote Scottish history, traditions, and culture by developing educational and charitable undertakings that nurture relations between the Society, the people of Los Angeles and the greater community.
The opportunity to play at the Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo (REMT), an historic event that honours the armed forces and supports military charities in the United Kingdom, proved to be an amazing experience for me. The Tattoo is an entertaining spectacle complete with lights, fireworks, and performers from around the world. The 2016 event had 25 nightly shows from August 5-27. Approximately 8,800 people, for a total audience of 220,000 people, attended each performance. The BBC filmed the Tattoo and the TV filming is seen in over 40 countries by up to 300 million people.

Until three years ago, the only way to pipe or drum in the Tattoo was to be in a participating regimental or civilian pipe band. In 2014, Tattoo Producer Brigadier General David Allfrey, MBE, created ‘The Piper’s Trail’, a new civilian band consisting of individual volunteer drummers and pipers, like me. Our 2016 Pipers’ Trail group consisted of members from Scotland, England, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Argentina, Uruguay, and the USA. We were honoured to have Roderick MacDonald as our Pipe Major. Roddy is a world-class player, a prolific composer and a really nice guy. If you watch the BBC recording of the Tattoo you will see him featured as the Lone Piper.

The first week upon arrival in Edinburgh was strenuous. Daily practices on the military parade ground were long and consisted of much standing around punctuated by marching and playing. Playing in a military setting was a new experience for me. My background in solo competition has trained me to learn new tunes carefully and slowly, taking great care to focus on open gracenoting. The first time we played The Black Bear together on the parade ground, I realised I was in a completely new environment. I have never played a march so fast in my life. At first I couldn’t believe that the tempo wasn’t a mistake! Eventually, I jettisoned most of the gracenotes and ended up with a ‘streamlined’ version of the tune that my fingers could just barely handle.

The military’s strong emphasis on dress and deportment was also new to me. I polished spats for the first time in my life, polished my brogues (although I never could see my face in them), and learned some basic sewing. I learned to look right and left to dress the lines while marching, to mark time with my knees up, and to slow march without falling over. I am grateful for these skills. They have inspired me to put more effort into my personal dress and deportment back home.

The Tattoo started at 9.00pm each night and after a brief trumpet...
fanfare, the massed pipes and drums marched through the drawbridge of Edinburgh Castle onto the Esplanade. We marched and countermarched playing *Ghillie Callum* for the highland dancers. The pipes and drums appeared again halfway through the show and at the end of the show for the finale. Between performances we sat in portable office buildings and dined on packaged meat pies and lukewarm tea. The time spent in the portable went slowly and it was always a relief to get back out into the fresh air and into the show.

While piping, my mind was focused on marching, keeping my lines straight, and hitting cut-offs. However, when standing at attention between sets I was able to take in the experience. I listened to music of the military bands, watched the fireworks in the glass reflection of the royal box, and observed the precision marching of the honour guard as it passed by. The audience was enthusiastic and each performance was well received. When we played *Auld Lang Syne* the audience would cross arms and hold hands. It was a great feeling to see thousands of strangers linked together in camaraderie and friendship. My favourite moment was the Lone Piper playing on the battlements. All of the lights were turned off except for a spotlight on the piper while he played the haunting slow air, *Sleep, Dearie, Sleep* to commemorate those fallen in battle. There was an absolute hush over the audience and it was emotionally powerful.

Members of the Pipers’ Trail are non-paid volunteers responsible for paying for their own airfare to and from Edinburgh. Once in Edinburgh, we received free room and board for the month of August. Civilian performing groups (musicians, dancers, drill teams, etc.) including Pipers’ Trail were housed in a dormitory at the University of Edinburgh’s Pollock Halls. Many of the performers were young students on summer break. When the Tattoo was over at 11.00pm they would head to the bar on the university campus and drink until the next morning, go to sleep until around 4.00pm, get up, have dinner, and repeat the process. I was more interested in sightseeing and avoiding a hangover, so I went to bed earlier than most and took advantage of free time during the days to see a little bit of Edinburgh. I was also fortunate to take a few short trips to other towns in Scotland.

My personal journey to the Tattoo was a long one. I was born in Ventura, California, USA about an hour north of Los Angeles. As a teenager I became interested in British military history. I remember browsing in a British shop for military books where I discovered a cassette tape of regimental bagpipe music. I purchased the tape and wore it out over time. At 15 years old, I saw my first bagpiper in person and learned that he was the Pipe Major of a pipe band in a neighbouring city. The band offered free lessons and my parents drove me to band practice for lessons every Monday night. After six months on the practice chanter I moved to the pipes, and after six months on the pipes I joined the band as a piper.

Playing in the band was a tremendous amount of fun. I loved playing in local parades and especially going to highland games. California has a population of 39 million people, which allows for some very large highland games. The Seaside Highland Games in my hometown of Ventura attracts around 30,000 people per year, and the Caledonian Club of San Francisco sponsors the largest highland games in the USA that attracts around 50,000 people each year. Spending a weekend at these games with all the people, piping, dancing, music, and culture was always a highlight for me. The only fly in the ointment was that our band was terrible! We
were in the lowest grade, and invariably came in last place. Our chanter reeds were incredibly hard and tuning was the exclusive domain of the Pipe Major. I was never shown how to tune my own drones or select and set a chanter reed. We never bothered tuning individual notes on the chanter, and I had never seen tape put on chanter holes. The Pipe Major also had a nasty habit of issuing new chanter reeds on the morning before a competition. I remember one morning before a competition where I was issued a stiff new reed, and then we played *The Green Hills of Tyrol* for over an hour while the Pipe Major attempted to tune our drones and chanters. The gruelling experience left us exhausted and our competition performance was even more abysmal than usual. It is no wonder that I developed a hernia and had to have surgery to repair it in my senior year of high school.

This went on for seven years until a breakthrough occurred. In 2001, I went to a week-long bagpipe summer camp in Aurora, Ontario, Canada taught by Jim McGillivray. On the first day of camp, after watching me play, Jim handed me his bagpipes and told me to give them a try. I was shocked at how easy they were to play! Jim told me that he could play for 45 minutes without taking a break, and I realised that on his pipes, I probably could, too. I had never played anyone else’s pipes before, much less the pipes of a Gold medalist. That experience gave me my first ray of hope: perhaps I was capable of improvement!

Over the course of the following week I learned how to select and manipulate chanter reeds, tune the chanter and drones, maintain my pipes, and play different types of tunes (marches, strathspeys, reels, jigs, etc.). I even learned how to play my first pibroch.

That summer camp taught me the importance of good instruction, and it is a lesson I didn’t forget. Shortly after the summer camp I struggled with some health issues that I thought might prevent me from ever piping again. However, I did recover my health and began piping again in 2012. I had been given a second chance to pipe and was determined to make the most of it. Because of my experience with Jim McGillivray, I knew I needed a good instructor. I found Aaron Shaw, a College of Piping certified instructor based in Los Angeles. Aaron studied with Pipe Major Angus MacDonald of the Scots Guards, and has won many competitions. After taking lessons from Aaron my piping began to improve immediately. Aaron taught me how to further maintain my pipes, hemp them properly, find the correct blowpipe length, select and set chanter reeds, tune my drones, and play with expression. I started using a pressure gauge when practicing to develop steady blowing.

Aaron encouraged me to attend the 2014 College of Piping summer school in San Diego, California. This was an incredible experience. Our piping instructors were Major (Retd) Bruce Hitchings MBE BEM, Dugald MacNeill, and Iain Macey from the College plus Colin Armstrong and Aaron Shaw from California. The classes and workshops were full of good information, and the instructor recitals were inspiring. My piping improved and I learned more about expression, tuning, and setting up my instrument.

Taking lessons from Aaron Shaw and attending the summer school produced tangible results. In 2013, I was the Grade 4 solo piping aggregate aggregate.
winner in the Western United States Pipe Band Association and was moved up to Grade 3 in 2014. In 2015 I won the same award for Grade 3 and was moved up to Grade 2 in 2016. These solo competition successes opened the door for me to play at the Tattoo. I learned about the Pipers’ Trail from the March 2016 Piping Times front-page picture and Tom Breckenridge’s accompanying article. The Pipers’ Trail was seeking pipers at a Grade 2/Grade 3 level and since I had recently been moved to Grade 2, I submitted an application and a video.

Being in Edinburgh a whole month for the Tattoo allowed for some day trips. On one day trip I visited the College of Piping in Glasgow in order to sit for the PDQB Performer’s Certificate exam. It was my first time to visit the College and I felt a little nervous before the exam, but the staff welcomed me and put me at ease. I had the good fortune to run into Jim MacDougall, a fellow student from the summer school in San Diego, and two of our instructors, Bruce Hitchings and Dugald MacNeill. The exam required me to play for about 20 minutes and introduce each set of tunes. Students at the College formed the audience. Some of the students were local Glaswegians taking a single lesson while others were from farther away, including Germany and the US, and were taking tuition for a week or more. I felt the same camaraderie with instructors and students at the College that I did at the summer school in San Diego. Everyone was friendly, encouraging, and enthusiastic about piping. I passed the exam and hope to go back to the College in the future for additional tuition and examinations.

On another day trip I travelled to Blair Atholl to be the day piper at Blair Castle. As a Murray clan of North America member, it was exciting to be able to pipe at the seat of the Murray clan. A bulletin listing in the Piping Times had asked for day pipers to play at the castle and Ben Kellett, the organiser, graciously offered for me to play on a Sunday, since there are no Tattoo shows on Sundays. I travelled to Blair Castle on Sunday, August 21 and as piper for the day, played five times for 15 minutes each, on the hour from 11.00am to 3.00pm. I played traditional tunes like Scotland the Brave, Green Hills of Tyrol, Loch Lomond, and Highland Cathedral. During breaks I visited with some of the tourists who wanted to talk and take pictures, or I relaxed in a staff break room inside the castle. The staff was extremely hospitable and friendly. I learned about work at the castle and daily life in the area, and after my piping was finished, they offered me a free tour of the castle and gave me a ride to the train station. It was a fantastic experience that I’ll never forget.

My trip to the Tattoo was my first trip to Scotland for piping, but it won’t be my last. It whetted my appetite to come back and experience more. Events like the PipingLive! festival, the World Pipe Band Championships, the Argyllshire Gathering and the Northern Meeting are unparalleled, and I don’t know of a better opportunity to hear truly great piping, benefit from top-notch instruction – and make new friends from around the world.

• This year’s Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo takes place from August 4-26.