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PIPING TODAY

Terry Tully

St Laurence O'Toole Pipe Band

The Glenfiddich

John Wilson's experience of the day

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NYPBoS newsletter No.40

THE NATIONAL
Piping
CENTRE

ISSUE NUMBER 43 • 2009

PRICE - UK £3.30 • EUROPE €5 • CANADA AND USA \$6.50



Patience of the

Terry Tully — St Laurence O'Toole Pipe Band

ST LAURENCE O'TOOLE Pipe Band will celebrate the centenary of their founding next year. The band was brought into existence in 1910 at a meeting of St Laurence O'Toole Gaelic Athletic Association Club at the current premises of the St Laurence O'Toole school in Seville Place, Dublin.

The band have stayed very close to their Dublin roots and hold their practices in Talaght, a suburb of Dublin, and the majority of the current band members are Dubliners, though the band does have seven pipers and two drummers who are from Northern Ireland. The band are very well known and fondly regarded by the Dublin community and still take part in parades in and around the city.

"Unfortunately we don't do the main St Patrick's Day parade in Dublin City," explained current pipe major Terry Tully. "We stopped that a few years ago when the Dublin Corporation thought it might be a good idea for the bands to pay to participate in the parade. We decided that as the St Patrick's Day Parade was one of the worst engagements of the year; on March 17 with the lashing rain and the snow; to say 'Thanks for asking us to pay you, to play in the parade — but no thanks!' So we move out into the suburbs of Dublin City, and even as far down as County Carlow, to take part in parades."

In its first few decades the band chalked up some achievements: being one of the first bands to be broadcast on BBC Radio in Scotland when they performed at the Cowal Games in 1925, the first band to broadcast on Irish radio in the 1930s, and the first Irish band to travel to England and the USA. Over the years the band has won every major prize for piping and drumming in Ireland, and their success first peaked in the 50s when, under pipe major John Duggan and drum sergeant Frank Saunders, they won the All Ireland Senior Championship and the Open Drumming prize.



The Two Terrys: Terry Lee and Terry Tully congratulate each other as they receive their trophies for first and third place respectively, at the World Pipe Band Championships 2009.

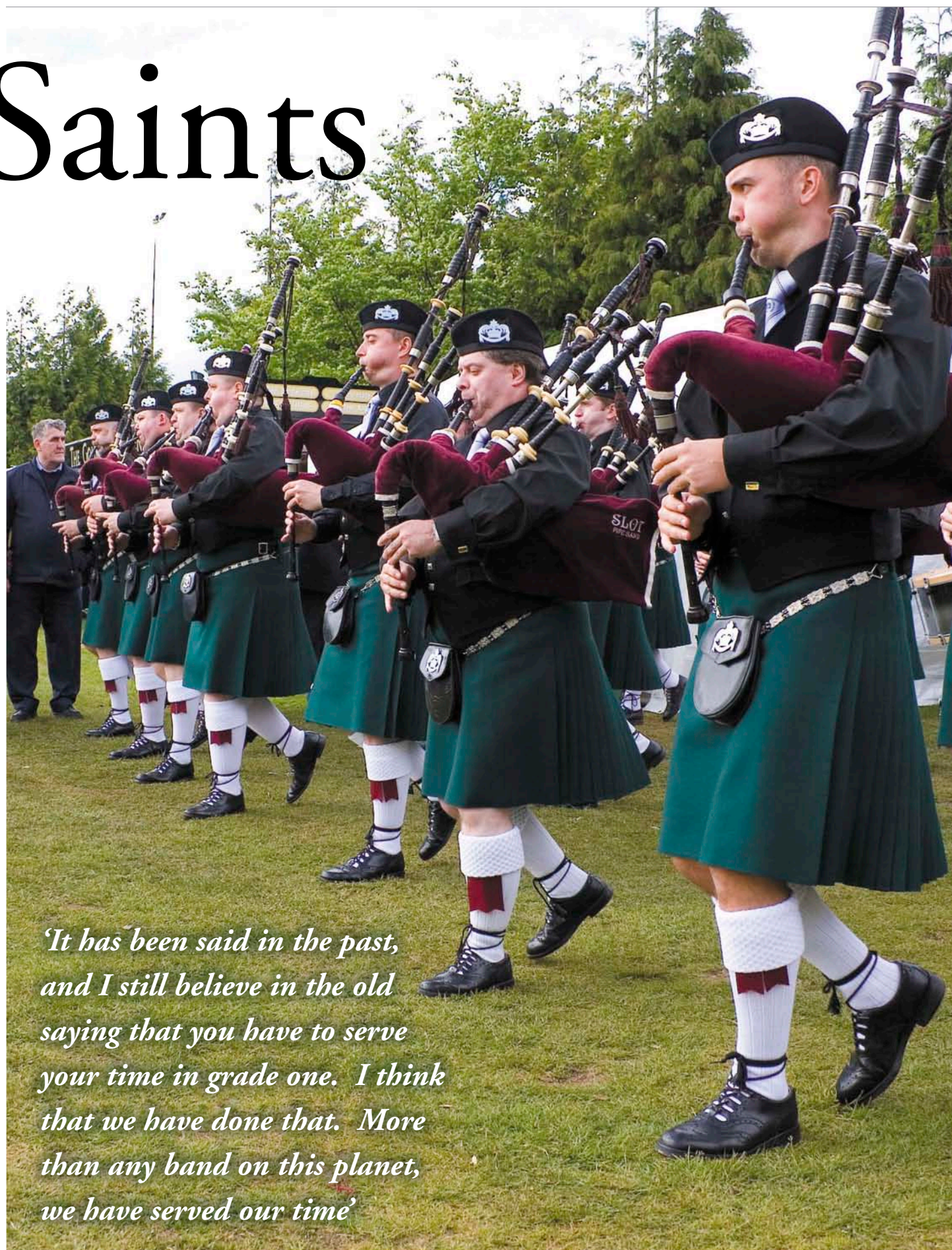
This period of achievement in the 50s was followed by a gradual decline in the band's membership over the next decade, until pipe major John Duggan resigned in 1967 and the band reached a stage that it could not compete. The band continued leaderless for a while, with Terry's father, Tommy Tully, stepping in to act as pipe major whenever they had a public engagement, till in due course Tommy was awarded the pipe major's post in 1968. Sadly, membership continued to dwindle leaving just four players: Charlie Stokes, Seamus Casey, Tommy Tully and Peter O'Rourke. In 1970

the remaining players made a last ditch effort to save the band. So Tommy Tully brought along his sons Terry and Patrick, and Seamus Casey brought his sons Eamonn and Dominic.

Terry Tully had been piping for seven years by the time his dad got him involved to help revive St Laurence O'Toole. He started playing at St Joseph's Pipe Band of Clondalkin in 1966 and was taught by his father who was the instructor of the Clondalkin band while also being a piper with St Laurence O'Toole. Like a lot of people who are involved in piping and pipe bands, it was very much an interest

The front rank of St Laurence O'Toole Pipe Band marching out of final tuning at the Scottish Championships at Dumbarton this year. Pictured from left: Terry Tully, Kevin Rogers, Darren McCarthy, Philip Tasker, Barry Keegan, Ronan Maguire and Alen Tully

Saints

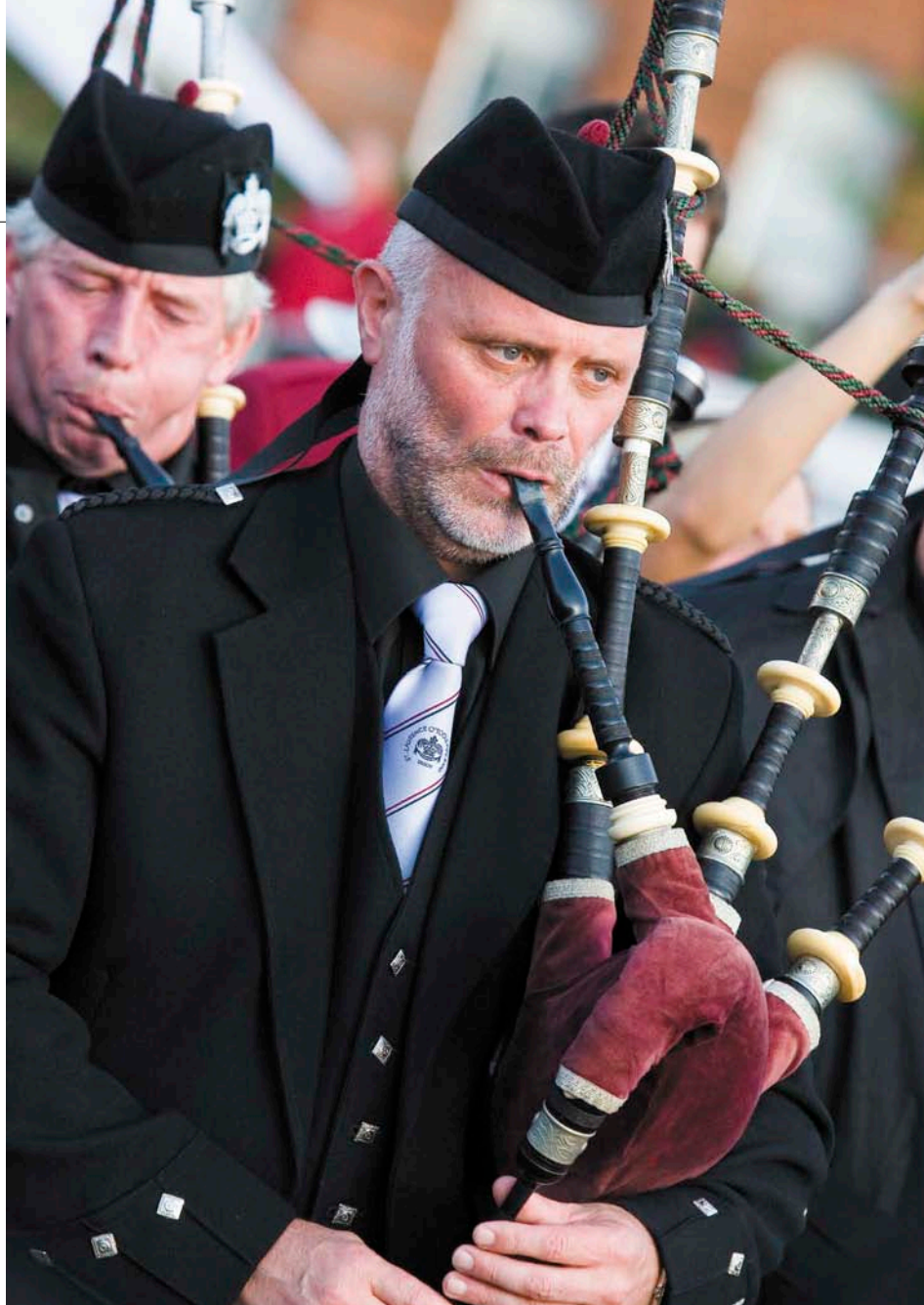


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that involved the whole Tully family as Terry's mother and grandfather were also pipers. So Terry became the third generation piper in the family, and his son Alen, who is pipe sergeant of the current St Laurence O'Toole Pipe Band, has carried on the tradition and become the fourth generation.

Terry was also greatly influenced by traditional Irish music which shines through in the band's repertoire today, and it was another passion which was passed on through the family. His dad Tommy played traditional Irish music on accordion and was the first to introduce traditional Irish music into St Laurence O'Toole Pipe Band. When Tommy Tully died in 1984, Terry continued where his father left off, and brought more and more traditional Irish tunes into the pipe band repertoire. He has now published three books, *Irish Tunes Old and New*, *Collection of Traditional Irish Music* and *Terry Tully Book Three* between 1987 and 1997, and a new one is being prepared for release in early 2010. "Irish pipe bands have always played some Irish music, but since my tune books came out they have started to include Irish tunes in their competition medley selections," said Terry. "There is very rarely a pipe band CD played in my house, it is usually CDs from Irish groups like The Bothy Band, Dervish, Altan or Paddy Keenan and it has been there for so long that the music is in my head — and in anybody's head that visits the house. So it is just by knowing these tunes in my head that I can transmit them down to my fingers and if it fits on the pipe scale — well and good. There are lots of Irish tunes out there that are an octave and a half and don't fit on the bagpipe scale, but there is also an awful lot of them that do."

"My last book came out 12 years ago and there has been a wealth of music collected in those years, and there was also a lot of material that I didn't actually use in my last book in 1997. So I probably have enough material at home from what I have collected myself, from my own music, and from other people's music to publish two books. I have been working on it recently: gathering pieces of paper that are floating around, writing out music that has been in my head, and going back to CDs that I have noted tunes that would fit on the pipe scale and writing them out. I have gathered 99 per cent of the material now, and just need to decide what is going into book four, and leave the rest for book five — for maybe next year," said Terry.



Terry Tully sharing a celebratory tune with the band after the announcement of their third place in grade one at the World Pipe Band Championships.

Although Terry has managed to combine a love of bagpipes and Irish music, the two scenes in Ireland are quite separate and have rarely made happy bedfellows. Highland pipers have at times wished to go and join in with the traditional Irish music sessions, but due to the key and volume of the pipe chanter they have never been made welcome. However this has started to change in recent years due to the fact that more pipers are now playing Irish jigs, reels and hornpipes and they can swap their Highland pipes for a set of small pipes. "Since my books came out, and also Dave Rickard's book, *Traditional Irish Music for the Bagpipes*, bagpipers in Ireland have started to play a lot more traditional Irish music and are being made just that little bit more welcome now," said Terry Tully. "I play small pipes myself, and I'm a frequent visitor to Achill Island and the Saturday night traditional music session in Gielty's pub, where all pipers are welcome — even bagpipers."

Terry's work in adapting traditional Irish tunes for the bagpipe repertoire has helped open up a new repository of tunes for pipers to explore, but Terry has also given back and enriched the Irish music tradition via his own bagpipe tune compositions. Many of his tunes have been played and recorded by Irish and Scottish traditional musicians, and arguably, one of the most popular tunes has been *Ass in the Graveyard*.

"The tune title came about when friends phoned to ask us to go visit them for dinner, and I explained that we couldn't go because there was a mass in the graveyard. They just heard me completely wrong and it was a joke for a long time between the two couples. So I thought I would commemorate the joke by using it for the title of that tune," said Terry. "After my father died I took over from him as the instructor to the St Joseph's Pipe Band of Clondalkin, and one Thursday night on the way

to band practice I found myself playing that piece of music on the steering wheel of the car — going over it in my head. So I decided to pull over the car and got a piece of manuscript and wrote out the first part of the tune. If I had gone into the practice it would have been gone by the time I came out. So that is how it came about. I have heard other people refer to the tune as a mazurka, but it is written in 6/8 time so to me it is really a waltz,” said Terry.

AS PART of their centenary celebrations next year St Laurence O’Toole Pipe Band are booked to play at the pre-Worlds concert at the Glasgow Royal Concert Hall on August 11. The tickets are already on sale and, if the popularity of their excellent live CD, *Dawning of the Day*, from their 2005 concert is anything to go by, it will be a sell-out. The previous CD received wide critical acclaim and showed a departure from the standard pipe band repertoire, showcasing Terry’s work in bringing Irish tunes into

with lots of vibrato by Terry, with his son Alen adding harmony the second time through. This segues beautifully into the 4/4 version of the tune and is gradually taken up by the rest of the pipe corps marching in from the wings. I must have heard this track at least a hundred times now and it still sounds as fresh and exciting as the first time, and I have heard unprompted responses from non-pipers on how attractive this “old folk song” sounds on the CD.

Terry explains, “When I was a young fellow in the band this was the type of Irish music that we played. Lots of marches, like *Kelly the Boy from Killane*: the type of tunes that would be referred to then as *ComeAllYe’s*, and many people did not like playing them at the time. I played these tunes in the St Joseph’s band when I was a kid, and I couldn’t wait to introduce them again and always wondered what it would be like playing them with a band of 20 pipers — and it is great. The slow air is the tune to the song *Raglan Road* which was popular in

‘The pressure is still on us to go out there and deliver a good performance every time — for if we don’t deliver we could be out. Whereas other bands who have been up at the top for a long time can afford to have a not so good performance, and could possibly still win the competition — we are not at that stage yet’

the scene. “There was an absolutely fantastic response to that CD,” said Terry. “It is still selling very well and we buy our own supply to sell through our website. Even now, there could be half a dozen CDs sold in a week, the following week maybe none, and a dozen the next week. Some people have burned out their CDs and are replacing them with new ones! The response was very, very good and a lot of people have said that it is one of the best CDs to have come from a live concert recording and they found the music very interesting. As well as a lot of traditional Irish tunes, there is a couple of Galician tunes and a few that sound like Breton tunes. There is also a lot of tunes on it that are composed by myself and by various members of the band, and that is the plan for the live concert recording next year.”

The opening track of the CD sets the standard for what is to follow. It starts with the title tune, *Dawning of the Day*, played as a slow air

Ireland, but the singer who made the song his own was Luke Kelly of The Dubliners and that is where the idea for our slow air version came from.”

“There is a lot of music out there that you can do a similar thing with,” said Terry. “You can take marches and break them down into slow airs, or move them up into hornpipes or jigs. It has become very popular in recent years for people to take a tune that was written as a hornpipe and play it as a jig. We did a similar thing with *The Girl from Dungannon* which is on the CD as well. That started life as a song and we play that as a hornpipe and a jig with a little bit of the slow air in between.”

TERRY TULLY has been pipe major of St Laurence O’Toole for more than 25 years now and is surely a shining example of patience, hard work and real dedication — and no little talent. He is now reaping the benefits of his

experience as the band is now a fixture in the top three in grade one, and placed third this year at the World Pipe Band Championships; their highest-ever placing at the Worlds in grade one.

Just four years after the Tully and Casey family revival of the band in 1970 it rose like a phoenix from the ashes to win the All Ireland in grade three under pipe major Tommy Tully in 1974 and was moved up to grade two. Terry then took over from his father in 1984 and spent the next five years honing his craft before having a very successful season in 1987: winning 17 prizes in 17 competitions and coming second at the Worlds. They repeated this placing at the Worlds in 1988 and were subsequently moved up to grade one. Terry has bided his time in grade one making gradual improvements over the years and regularly took prizes in Ireland but did not find as much success in Scotland.

“For a long, long time we had been finishing seventh and eighth and had been knocking on the door of the top six,” said Terry. “Our big break came in 2002 at Ormeau Park in Belfast when we just managed to sneak into the top six, and really since then the band has been getting better and better. I suppose people have started to notice the band now, and more to the point, people have realised that we are not going to go away — we are going to keep coming back.

“In recent years people have probably listened to us a little bit more. We were a top six band for quite a while, and there has been the odd time when we did slip out of the top six. I feel that we are at a stage if we go to a competition and don’t play to the best of our ability that we could slip out of the top six. There are bands who are snapping at our heels and are in the same position as we were a few years ago, in sixth, seventh and eighth place, and are ready to get in there. So the pressure is still on us to go out there and deliver a good performance every time — for if we don’t deliver we could be out. Whereas other bands who have been up at the top for a long time can afford to have a not so good performance, and could possibly still win the competition — we are not at that stage yet.”

Since the band’s ‘big break’ in 2002 they have gradually improved their results and prizes in the top six every season till they reached a pinnacle in 2008 — or maybe they are still on their way to the pinnacle and they have just established a base camp in the top three.



St Laurence O'Toole Pipe Band march onto the field at the Cowal Highland Gathering 2009, where they placed second in grade one behind Field Marshal Montgomery Pipe Band.

Photo: Ken MacKenzie • www.piprazz.net

2008 saw them win the Scottish and British Championships, come second at the Europeans and Cowal, and place fifth overall at the Worlds. "The only other thing to come close to our 2008 achievements would be winning the All Ireland in 2007 for the first time since 1958. The one thing I was concerned about the most, was that before I retired as pipe major I wanted to take the band to an All Ireland title. To then go on and win the All Ireland again in 2008, win two majors and at the end of the season take the Champion of Champions really has to be the highlight. Whether we can achieve that again, and I would like to think that we can, we

have really got to be consistent. We are probably more consistent this year, and delivering better performances, without actually getting the big results that we did last year."

It seems likely that if the band keep it together, Terry will eventually help them take the next step to be World Pipe Band Champions. It may be next season, or perhaps now they are in the top three they will need the patience for another prolonged period of hard work and dedication, but I'm sure they must now have the belief that they can do it. "I think I have got to have that belief, and it has to be instilled into the band as well, otherwise we will probably

never win a Worlds," said Terry. "Up until last year people were asking 'did I think the band could ever win a Worlds?'. Now I'm thinking 'when is the band going to win a Worlds?'. I think that the performances, especially this year, have been good enough to win a World Championships. It has been said in the past, and I still believe in the old saying, that 'you have to serve your time in grade one'. I think that we have done that. More than any band on this planet, we have served our time. What we have to do now is be happy with our performance and leave it in the hands of the judges to make their decision." ●

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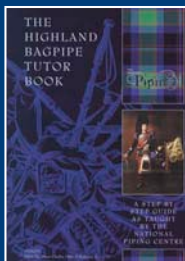
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