



Hills District Pipe Band – The Early Years

The Hills District Pipe Band was formed in early 1970, based at Castle Hill, from the remnants of the Toongabbie Pipe Band, and a number of significant new members who gave strength and direction to the band.

Key Foundation Members

- **Ruthven (John) Milne** – foundation Pipe Major (1970-73) of the Hills District. John had also been P/M of the Toongabbie Pipe Band and was a kilt maker who ran a thriving Scottish supplies business (“Highland Crafts”) from his home in Lochinvar Pde. Carlingford. He left the band and Australia after 1973 and migrated to Blairgowrie, Scotland where he established “Piob Mhor”, a Scottish supplies/kilt making business that went from strength to strength. At one stage between 1970 and 1973, John Milne had four children playing in the band – Janet and Cathy (both pipers) and Ian (side drummer) and Heather (tenor drummer).
- **John Alexander (Sandy) Young** – foundation Pipe Sergeant and second Pipe Major (1973-76). Sandy was a former Pipe Corporal, 1st battalion, Scots Guards. Sandy left the Hills District in 1976 joining briefly St Mary’s Band Club Pipes and Drums and soon after the NSW Police Pipe Band as a special constable, a full time piping job. Sandy was a fitter and turner by trade and went on to establish his own business manufacturing bagpipes from his home in Seven Hills. He died in January 1998.
- **Tom Parker** – foundation Drum Sergeant and ex-drummer in the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders Drum Corps. Tom established the Hills District Drum Corps on a firm footing and the Argyll and Sutherland tartan and drum corps uniform was chosen in his honour. Currently Tom lives on the Central Coast and is Drum Sergeant of the Toukley RSL Pipe Band.
- **Andy Scott** – foundation Drum Major and ex-Scots Guardsman in the North Africa campaign of WW2. Andy was the Hills District Drum Major for most of the 1970s. In 1984 he returned to the UK, living in northern England and in Lanarkshire, Scotland. Andy has since died.
- **Ian Bost** – non-playing foundation Secretary of the Hills District and one of the driving forces in the establishment of the new band in 1970. Ian lived at North Rocks and had three playing children in the band, Doug and Nerole (both pipers) and Jeff (Bass Drummer).

Foundation Pipers	Foundation Drummers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joe Kirkwood • Andrew Spalding • Janet Milne • Cathy Milne • Doug Bost • Nerole Bost • Anita Wright • Tom Wright • Graham Wood 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ian Milne • Heather Milne • Kevin Arnott • Jeff Bost • Christine Smith • Heather Martyn
First Joiners - Pipers	First Joiners - Drummers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Judy Kerr • Anne Stewart • Keith Robertson • Paul Leadon • Angus MacNaught • Noela Hattersley • Peter Baldwin • Geoff Kinchin • Alex Burns • William Grennall 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alec Robertson • Jeff Douglas • Ron King • Arthur Robinson • Fred Brown



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End of an Era.

The Toongabbie Pipe Band was officially disbanded at the end of 1969. It wore the MacBeth tartan and practised in a community hall in Wentworthville and Pendle Hill in Sydney's west. When the Hills District Pipe Band was first established early in 1970 it continued to practise in the Pendle Hill hall for a few months, then practised for approximately two years at Castle Hill High School using the Canteen for indoor practises and the Oval for outdoor manoeuvres. Early in the 1970's the band began practising every Tuesday night in the Harvey Lowe Pavilion at Castle Hill Showground where they still practise to date. The Band held its first annual ball in the Harvey Lowe Pavilion at Castle Hill showground in 1972.

The new Uniform

The choice of the new band's uniform underlines both the origins of some of the key foundation members and the direction charted for the band. The Macdonald of Clanranald (Ancient) tartan was chosen for the pipers on John Milne's suggestion both because of the attractiveness of the ancient colours and because the clan badge design was that of a castle. This was appropriate as the band saw its future clearly in the Hills District with its base in Castle Hill. The piper's tartan was thought to be very distinctive making a clear break with the uniform of the Toongabbie Band (and the blue MacBeth tartan) and with that of any other band around at the time.

One distinctive feature of the uniform then and still is the differing tartan worn by the drum corps, almost like two bands in one. Drummers wear the Argyll and Sutherland tartan (similar to the Black Watch tartan) in honour of Tom Parker, the foundation Drum Sergeant, an ex-Argyll and Sutherland drummer. Also, like the Argyll's, pipers wore green jackets and drummers (originally) red jackets. Drummers also wore other aspects of their uniform identical to the Argylls, including red and white diced hose tops, white waist belts and "swinging six" sporrans which Tom Parker purchased directly from the regiment in the UK on a holiday shortly after the band was formed.

Originally the band wore only summer uniforms with a long sleeved army khaki shirt and Glengarry bonnet. At that stage the band comprised seventeen pipers and a drum corps of seven including the Drum Major. In mid 1973 the Band was able to afford full uniform with plaids and doublets (green for the pipers and red for the drummers) though not feather bonnets. Glengarries were worn with the full uniform as well as the summer uniform.

John Milne made all the original kilts and plaids and outfitted the band. The band was very active with a wide range of free and paying engagements (the latter to pay for the uniforms) throughout the Hills District and further a field. We generally entered in any competition that was going, competing usually in our own grade (then Third or C Grade) and then sometimes one grade higher as well. On one occasion at Gosford we entered an A grade contest against St Mary's and won. There were only two Bands competing and St Mary's were disqualified for fielding only 5 pipers. That was one of the more memorable and humorous competition victories.

Competitions

In the early years of the 1970s the Hills District won the Marr Cup on one or two occasions. It was awarded by the NSWPBA to the band in any grade which won the most points in competitions throughout the year, not a mean feat when you consider that bands of all grades were competing for it.

The band entered many competitions in its first few years which were held variously at Wentworth Park every New Year's Day (run by the NSW Combined Scottish Societies), Gosford, Goulburn, Ettalong, mini band competitions at Fairfield and St. Mary's, and a major competition at Broadmeadow, Newcastle where the East Coast Pipe Band Championships were regularly held at the end of January. For the first half of the 70s the Band would turn up early at Wentworth Park for the New Year's Day competition after playing in a regular New Year's Eve performance at Blacktown RSL Club resulting in a few sore heads during the initial tuning scales, and one or two that lingered much longer.

Perhaps the most significant competition win in the initial years was the Band winning B Grade at Wentworth Park on New Year's Day in 1973. Only two or three bands had entered. The Hills came first and the city of Newcastle RSL Pipe Band came second. Our winning competition tunes were.



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Type	Tune Name
6/8 quickstep	: The Hills District Pipe Band (written by Sandy Young)
2/4 march	: McPherson's Lament
Strathspey	: Caledonian Canal
Reel	: Over the Isles to America

Our competition tunes in 1970-72 were the 6/8 Leaving Port Askaig and the 2/4 McPherson's Lament. We played these tunes at a number of C Grade competitions and our chief rival at the time was Nepean Pipe Band, sometimes they won and sometimes we did. Generally we either came first, second or third out of a fairly healthy field of competing bands. Other contemporary Grade C bands included Epping RSL, Fairfield Police Boys, Parramatta Caledonian, Parramatta Police Boys, Manly, Lakemba and the NSW Ladies Pipe Band.

Other competition tunes in the band's early years included the 2/4 Marches 'John MacDonald of Glencoe' and 'Captain Norman Orr-Ewing' and the 6/8 March 'Dalintober'.

Some of the memorable (for one reason or another) band engagements I participated in included:

- Playing for Andy Stewart's shows at Blacktown RSL Club whenever he toured Australia (on at least three occasions in the early 70's)
- Playing for then Prime Minister William McMahon one winter weeknight in 1972 at the Old Council Chambers building in the main street of Castle Hill.
- Playing at the North Rocks Community Centre in May 1974 for a visit by Billy Snedden, Federal Opposition Leader during the 'double dissolution' election and never being paid for it!
- One exceptionally long, hot march in 1970 when the band, still largely in the old Toongabbie uniform of blue MacBeth kilts, marched from Market St in the city to Redfern Oval, followed by a long tail of gradually wilting marchers, with patrons emerging from pubs all along the route cheering wildly while they continued their schooners. The purpose of that march now eludes me.
- New Year's Eve performances at Blacktown RSL Club and of course.....
- The annual Hills District Pipe Band Balls which started in 1972 and were always well attended. At a number of the Band's Balls in the 70's we wore white jackets and performed under the black lighting which always seemed to bring the house down.

Early Pipe Majors.

The early Pipe majors of the Hills District Pipe Band were:

1. Ruthven (John) Milne: 1970 – 1973
2. John Alexander (Sandy) Young: 1937 – 1976
3. Joe Kirkwood : 1976 – beyond my time in the band

The words of a Foundation Member

1st June 2004