

A Note on the 'Glen 1409' pipes

by J. F. Bryan

In vol xiv of *PSAS* is a paper written by Robt. Glen (1835-1911) on the 'Ancient Musical Instruments of Scotland'. In it Glen describes a bag-pipe dated 1409 in his possession. This instrument appears later to have become the property of the Society, and for many years it was accepted as genuine, and as the oldest Highland bag-pipe in existence.

About twenty years ago the late W A Cocks expressed a strong doubt as to the authenticity of this instrument. Shortly afterwards, the late G H Askew voiced the same doubt, and more recently still the Museum has withdrawn this bag-pipe from exhibition. It is perhaps a significant fact that Glen gave no details of the history of the instrument, nor did he make any claim that the date was genuine. Glen himself was an expert bag-pipe maker, and also a musical antiquary and collector.

In 1963 the Curator courteously allowed me the liberty of making a minute examination of the instrument, and for this I am grateful. The following are my findings and conclusions.

Let us begin by noting the parts which do not match the remainder of the set; these are the blow-pipe with its stock, the chanter stock, and the lower or standing part of one drone. All these are quite modern and may be disregarded. This leaves us with one lower joint of a drone, two upper or sliding joints of drones, a drone stock, and a chanter.

The Drones

Both sliding joints have been turned from a white hardwood. They have pear-shaped terminals similar to the 'Waterloo' pipes and carry rather heavy metal ferrules. One of these joints has a contracted bell, but this feature is not in evidence on the second joint. The bores of both joints are $\frac{1}{2}$ in diameter opening out to $\frac{5}{8}$ in diameter to receive the lower joints. The overall length of these joints is $8\frac{1}{4}$ in. The decorative Celtic knotwork carved on the various parts is heavy and pronounced, and is quite unlike any other example of Celtic art which I have seen. The one matching foot joint has an overall length of $7\frac{1}{4}$ in and a bore of $\frac{5}{16}$ in diameter. The heavy coating of stain and varnish on all the components was applied after the metal ferrules were fitted; this is proved by the wood covered by them being quite new and creamy white in colour. The turning and boring of the pipes, normally hidden from view, are remarkable for their accuracy and neatness of execution, indeed suspiciously so, for when compared with other sets of ancient pipes the high standard of workmanship displayed condemns them in my opinion as counterfeit. Bag-pipes of that time, and for many years later, were rather 'rustic' in execution.

The Drone Stock

This is made from the forked branch of a thorn tree, and again we find the wood inside the bores to be quite clean and new. It is of a light reddish colour below the thin coat of varnish. The shape of this stock is unusual, for no other stock of this 'Y' form is in existence to my knowledge, though an illustration of something similar is shown in a portrait of the piper to the laird of Grant, painted by Waitt in 1714. The drones there depicted are, however, of unequal lengths. The carving of the galley, date and initials are in high relief, which is in keeping with the dating and general antique external appearance of the pipes. The bores, however, have been drilled out on a precision machine as they present a sharp clean, and altogether too precise picture. All other pipes in

existence boasting only half their alleged antiquity are quite roughly turned and drilled, while normal wear over five centuries would surely have left the drone stock and other parts in a somewhat distressed state, instead of in the pristine newness of the internal arrangements.

The Chanter

Boxwood has again been used to make this part of the pipes. The bore is conical, commencing at $\frac{1}{8}$ in diameter at the throat and opening out to $\frac{3}{8}$ in diameter at the keynote hole. On inserting a set of chanter reamers such as were used until the end of the nineteenth century and are now obsolete, the chanter was found to have a bore and finger-hole spacing identical with another chanter, which forms part of a set of Northumbrian Half-Long or Border pipes which were carried in the Peninsular War, and can be dated with certainty to between 1750–1780.

The finger holes on the chanter which we are examining are slightly oval in shape and are bevelled deeply into the outer surface of the chanter. To say that each hole is found at the foot of its own little crater would perhaps be the best description. This arrangement is seen on an old Irish Double Chanter in my possession. The foot of the 'Glen' chanter is belled out below the keynote hole, and has an external flange in the manner of the Spanish Gaita Gallega. It is studded with nails around the bell as decoration. The carved motifs are again heavy in their execution, being coarser than those used on the drones. That part of the chanter which is concealed in the stock is again suspiciously accurate and neat in its execution.

The Ferrules

These are made of brass and bronze. Should they not be of lead or horn? One would expect these at the alleged date of 1409, to be in keeping with the otherwise antique external appearance of what I consider to be a forgery, although a clever one. When the addition of the parts which do not match the set is considered, this in my opinion would seem to be the case. This conclusion is strengthened when we realise that these pipes have no recorded antecedents or pedigree beyond their exhibition to the Museum in the nineteenth century.

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