

Tasmania Police Pipe Band impress Edinburgh at 2002 Tattoo



Edinburgh Castle in the mist during an evening rehearsal of the Massed Pipes and Drums

All photographs are by Wayne Moore

Amanda Fletcher, the Pipe Major of the Tasmania Police Pipe Band, has a proud family association with the band, a history that came to Royal attention during the band's performance at the Edinburgh Military Tattoo in August.

by Viv Carroll

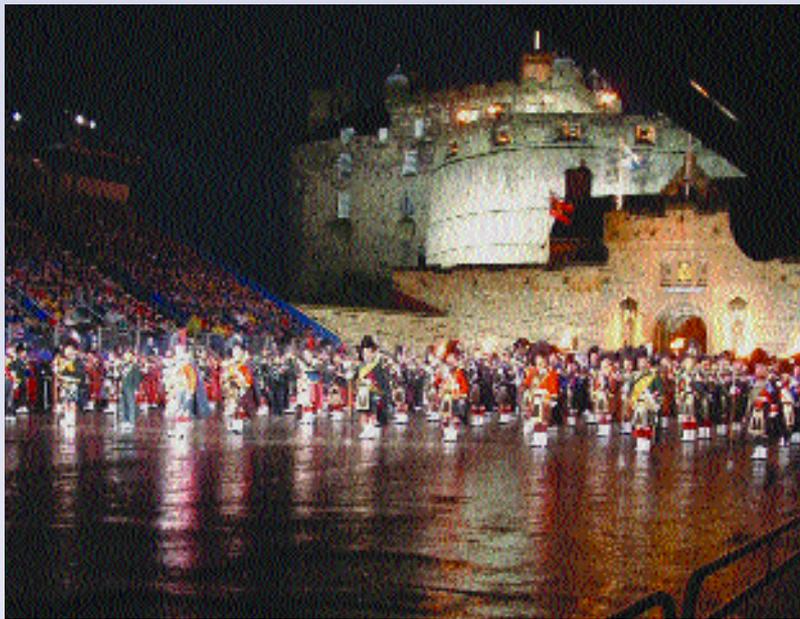
Amanda's father – who was Pipe major before her – played as a civilian in the band and taught her the pipes at the age of 10. But the connection goes deeper. In 1969 her grandfather, Frank Fletcher, then Police Superintendent, decided he wanted a Police Pipe Band. His brother, Phil Fletcher was Police Commissioner at the time, so in his honour the traditional clan tartan of the Fletchers of Dunans was adopted and continues to be worn today. Amanda, now 28, played in the band while her father was Pipe Major, and took on the role from him.

As a music teacher at Glenora District High School, Bushy Park, Amanda says she applies the same principals of musical performance and professionalism to her students and their school band as she does her adult pipe band colleagues.

The Edinburgh tour band of 30 members was comprised of Drum Major, Tony Bidgood (leads the band and takes charge of 'dress and drill' making sure they all look good and march correctly), Pipe Major, Amanda Fletcher (the musical director), 14 pipers,



Pipe Major, Amanda Fletcher with pipers, Iain Campbell and Sam Poynter displaying the pipe banners of Hobart, Glenorchy, and Launceston City Councils at Edinburgh Castle. Behind them stands the famous One O'clock Gun, the ancient timekeeper of Edinburgh, whose single shot at 1pm (instead of 12 midday) has been called a masterpiece of Scottish economy



The Tasmanian Police Pipe band (at right), performing in the Massed Pipes and Drums display on the concourse at Edinburgh Castle

one base drummer, three tenor drummers (the tenors are beaten with those fat, fluffy sticks), and six snare or (rat-a-tat-tat) side drummers.

It took six months to learn the music, set by the Tattoo directors, for the Tasmanian band's 10 minute segment at the beginning of the program, involving 12 other pipe bands – over 200 people – followed by individual performances by some of the world's best fulltime military bands such as the US Marine Band – and the finale, where the military and marching bands all played together.

In five days of full time rehearsals in Edinburgh they mastered the marching displays, to fit with the music learned back in Tasmania. Billeted at an army barracks, most days were spent rehearsing, with evening practice sessions at Edinburgh Castle. In total the band played in 26 performances – with all tickets sold out a month in advance.

This was the band's fourth invitation to Edinburgh, and Amanda Fletcher's first – a special one, it being the Queen's Golden Jubilee year. The highlight for Amanda?

"Meeting the Queen. That was pretty special. It was the 5th of August, a Monday night, and after the performance, when all the other performers and audience had left, all the drum majors stayed behind and we formed a guard of honour. The Queen came down from her box and greeted us then got into her car and disappeared. She actually stopped to speak to me. She asked me about my family history, so she'd obviously read the programme and then she mentioned that I was the only female pipe major or drum major there."

While it's not rare, it is still uncommon to see women in pipe bands (although there are some all-female bands on the mainland) and even less common to see a woman pipe major in a police or regimental band (generally staffed by fulltime soldiers or police officers). Amanda is the first female pipe major for the Tasmanian band, and while she is one of three female band members, there would probably be half a dozen women

in police pipe bands throughout Australia.

Although the band went over with a good reputation, Amanda was nervous: "Firstly about being a female and secondly because I thought the bands over there were going to be better than we were, but it turned out to be quite the opposite. We did really well. So I felt good because my methods for training for performance were quiet well recognised while I was over there and were appreciated."

"We were seen as one of the best bands there – if not the best as far as being professional, knowing our music, and our tuning was very good," she said.

Constable Karl Krelle, stationed at Bellerive, has been involved in pipe bands since he was 8 years old and had watched every Edinburgh Tattoo on TV until 2000 when he made his first visit as an observer. His tour to Edinburgh in 2002 is so far the peak of his career. "It's the pinnacle of anyone in a pipe band to go to the Tattoo" Krelle said.

Of 28 members only four are police officers, two are state servants attached to the force, and the balance civilians. Two Victorian police officers made up the full compliment of 30 for the Edinburgh tour.

The band's two playing police members don't hold rank within the band, but they do provide a 'police presence' and role models for the others. Because of the title and the pipe band uniforms, the public assume that all members are police.

In the past police officers had more time to devote to band work, but not these days, hence the majority number of civilian members.

"Policing is arduous and you take it home with you. So it's very hard to convince police to join a pipe band. There's no extra pay, it's all voluntary and it's also work," Karl said.

The tour itself wasn't all 'beer and skittles'. Travelling did get on the nerves of some, and bunking in a dormitory room with ten others for over a month had its down side. For members with a military or policing background, like Karl, it wasn't such a shock.

"Where some thrived others suffered," he said, referring to the early morning 'piping' of snoring colleagues. But according to Pipe Major, Amanda Fletcher, the experience of some members and the fact that they were all brought together for a common cause made things work.



Right: A day performance in the Castle grounds with Edinburgh in the background. Also present were uniformed members of the South Australian Military Band and a group of Australian highland dancers. Tasmanian band members are (clockwise from 6 o'clock): drummers Mathew Farr, Andrew Castles, and Martin Pluyers; pipers Brynne Tanton, Catherine Campbell, and Steve Percival; and bass drummer Dave Clifford



“At the end of every day, no matter what our differences, mistakes or blues, the band would still go out for a beer together,” she said.

The tour also provided the opportunity for a small group to visit nearby Dunblane to pay their respects at the memorial: Karl Krelle and fellow band members, Adrian Leary (Bellerive Traffic), tenor drummer Mathew Farr (State Servant, Communications), side drummer Marcel Koppen (Southern Cross TV cameraman), and piper Iain Campbell, a civilian member from Launceston who has written a special pipe tune for the people of Port Arthur. The visit helped maintain the liaison that has developed between Tasmanian and UK police officers following the events at Port Arthur and Dunblane.

A souvenir of the liaison is now being tested on duty in Tasmania. The band was presented with a UK Police standard issue safety jacket, “one of the big yellow ones you see them wearing on The Bill,” Karl explained.

Most police bands travelling from Australia are expected to be at the top level – Grade 1 (on a scale of 1 to 4) – and full time players. Consequently expectations among the Edinburgh pipe band fraternity for the Tasmanians were extremely high. And they were not disappointed.

Yet Karl rates his band at around Grade 3 level, qualifying his assessment with the proud claim that the band performs far above its class and is admired internationally for its standards of musicianship and drill at the highest level of competition and performance.

“We put on a very professional display and got rave reviews and an invitation to come back. The powers that be didn’t realise we were not all police, just volunteers and part timers playing for the love of it.”

With six years in the force and a Navy background, Karl has wide experience of pipe bands both here and on the mainland. He says there are two types of pipe bands – ‘crowd pleasers’ and ‘competition bands’.

Competitions were expensive as they required travel, and prize money was either “low or not at all.” Despite the strong support provided by Tasmania Police the band cannot follow every competition or performance opportunity, especially after an event like Edinburgh.

Departmental support focuses on consumables, capital funding for instruments and uniforms and assistance with major events like the Edinburgh tour. The band’s main source of additional income is a round of commercial engagements: welcoming

The Tasmanian Police Pipe Band at Edinburgh Castle



The Tasmanian Police Pipe band (on right), performing in the Massed Pipes and Drums display on the concourse at Edinburgh Castle



The Tasmanian pipers found a courtyard behind the Castle to rehearse before a major performance

cruise ships, ceremonial events, and their big annual fundraising gig, the Gaelic Ball, and the band's CD.

Karl believes the pipe band assists policing through its 'community policing values'. And that this was supported by the Commissioner who regards officers in the band as being 'on duty' and officers were granted relief to do band work.

"It helps break down barriers," he said. Karl's police experience of "team leadership and group dynamics" also fed back into the band.

As President of the band, Inspector Paul Sergeant (of Tasmania Police Executive Support), functions as band manager. With a Scots heritage – his mother was a Douglas and he can quote the clan's Gaelic motto – Paul has enjoyed one previous trip to Edinburgh, while for most it was their first time. He believed the trip was worthwhile, citing the combined success of the performances, interaction with Scottish musicians, a side-trip to the championships in Glasgow, networking with other bands and liaison with UK police officers.

The Tasmanian band was 'right up there' with the Grade 1 full time police bands from Queensland, Victoria, and Western Australia.

The level of support provided by both the Department and the State Government was "exceptional", he said and the attendance of Deputy Commissioner Jack Johnston at Edinburgh was greatly appreciated by the band, who were 'stoked' that such a senior officer saw them perform.

Looking to the future, Paul believes youth will provide the talent and energy needed to sustain the band. He and his colleagues are formulating a concept for a schools program that would see retired and civilian band members promoting pipe music to high school music students.

"A good team player and a good musician are always welcome," agrees Jelena Wedlake, a communications officer in Radio Despatch Services, Hobart.

Now in her third year with the band, Jelena is granted leave to pursue her band work, but every hour she does so affects her pay packet. Yet as a state servant, she says being in the band gives her a feeling of pride and makes her feel more like a police

officer – like her husband, stationed at Glenorchy.

Her Communications colleague, Mathew Farr was talking about his work with the band and sparked her interest. Born in Croatia, Jelena is an experienced player of the oboe, piano and flute. At first pipe music was alien to her but she soon fell in love with it.

"We didn't have pipe bands in Croatia," she said. But there was a folk instrument, the 'gajde' – a rustic Croatian highland pipe. "It looked like a dead goat with a pipe sticking out of its belly," she recalled.

With her background, what band instrument did she choose? The tenor drum. "I've played all the girlie instruments. Done the blow, now the bang!" she laughed.

The range of ages – the youngest is 18 – and mix of experience gave the band 'spirit', she said, adding that she loves working in a group and being part of a respected band. It was also entertaining as a musician to see the faces of children at the Christmas pageant, and to receive letters and emails from cruise ship passengers who were surprised at how well they were welcomed into Tasmania.

"It was a great honour to be in Edinburgh and meet all the bands like Black Watch and Highlander that are professional bands and exchange tricks of the trade."

It was both rewarding and exhausting, marching about all day, then playing at the Castle in front of 8,600 people each night – 'a wave of people' – and not getting to bed in the dormitory until 1.30am.

She believes police officers see the value of the band. "Their appreciation starts at graduation and they always remember you," she says.

The band has been invited to play at the 2003 Military Tattoo in Adelaide and hope to record their next CD 'live' on a cruise ship for release in the new year.

All enquiries including details of how to order CDs can be directed to: Inspector Paul Sergeant (03) 6230 2257 paul.sergeant@police.tas.gov.au, Sergeant Wayne Moore (03) 62302363 wayne.moore@police.tas.gov.au Website: www.police.tas.gov.au then click on 'About Tasmania Police'.



A hopeful wave of spectators surge down the Royal Mile leading up to Edinburgh Castle. 8600 people watched each evening performance