

The Emerald Girls Pipe Band , Dublin

- a brief appreciation by Brian Mac Mahon

What have the following women got in common ?
:

- Gerri Nolan R.I.P. - well-known piper who played with a number of Irish pipe bands over the years .
- Gerri's sister June Nolan - Retired



IPBA Registrar and Treasurer , first female adjudicator in Ireland , winner of All Ireland Junior Drumming Solos 1995.

- Margaret Saunders - IPBA National Treasurer for many years , piper at various times with New Ross & District , SLOT 3A , St. Joseph's PB Clondalkin, currently instructor with the juvenile section of St. Joseph's .
- Agnes Kelly - piper with St. Lawrence of Howth Pipe Band , piping instructor with the Aer Lingus PB and Howth .

They are all past members and products of one of Ireland's oldest and best known bands - the Emerald Girls Pipe Band of Dublin City .

Although the 'Emmies' , as they were known , didn't feature in competition after the late 1970's , they did continue to practice and appear at engagements for a number of years after that.

The heart of Dublin City might not be the first or most likely place that would spring to mind when one thinks of the culture of pipe bands in Ireland .

However , it might surprise one to learn that it was precisely in that place that

many of our foremost bands of yesteryear and the present day had their inception and recruited their players for generations . Names such as the St. Laurence O'Toole pipe Band , the Fintan Lalor Pipe Band , the James Connolly Pipe Band , the City of Dublin Girls Pipe Band and of course the Emerald Girls Pipe Band . Up to the mid 1970's , Dublin City Centre was very much a community in its own right - almost a village of sorts . Many generations of pipers and drummers came through the ranks of the bands there . This article is dedicated to one of those bands - The Emerald Girls .

I had the pleasure of being guest of Tommy Fitzsimons and Margaret Lynch in the 'Emmies' band hall prior to a band practice many years ago . The band was as much a social club as it was a band and the members usually gathered around for a chat and cup of tea prior to , and after, a practice . A number of the members still gather for an annual reunion .



Tommy Fitzsimons was the leading light of the band since its inception . Margaret Lynch was Tommy's companion , friend and supporter and although Tommy took most of the limelight , Margaret made a huge contribution to the band over the

years.

Tommy was an ex-army cashier and one of the most meticulous men I have ever met . He had records of the band going back to the very first meeting . He was able to tell my companions the evening I visited , past members June Nolan and Margaret Saunders , the dates they had joined and left the band and if their weekly subscriptions had been up to date at the time they had left . I think I remember a 20p. overpayment by someone ! Tommy also had every All Ireland Pipe Band Championship programme dating back to the first contest

and every issue of the RSPBA Pipe Band magazine dating back to the first issue . All of these were meticulously stored on shelves in his 'office' at Parnell Square .

The idea of a girls band for Dublin came from a visit to Dublin in 1933 by two leading lights of the Dagenham Girls Pipe Band , EnglandMiss Paine and Miss Pyle .. rather unforgettable names Tommy informed me with a mischievous smile . The Emerald Girls Pipe Band was formed in 1939 and



joined the pipe band association in 1941 . The early pipe band association was based at the offices of the Gaelic League at 14 Parnell Square , Dublin and meetings of the Leinster Branch were held there for many years .

Tommy informed me that it was at a meeting in Parnell Square in 1947 with Eddie McVeigh , of the Northern Ireland Scottish Pipe Band Association , that the new Irish Pipe Band Association agreed to affiliate to the Scottish Pipe Band Association thus beginning a relationship that exists to the present day . Tommy related a very interesting story to me regarding the seriousness with which the band prepared for competition . The competition in question was the 1956 World Pipe Band Championships held at the Balmorel Showgrounds in Belfast . Tommy discovered as early as 1951 that the Worlds was to come to Belfast and decided that this was the competition that the 'Emmies' would win.

That year he set off for Scotland to "suss out the competition" as he put it . The

band prepared for the following four years under the late great Tim Keogh for the Championships . Tim was very careful to pick tunes that the band could easily handle while John Keogh Snr. prepared the drum corps . The great day arrived and the Emerald Girls duly took 1st. prize in their grade .

Some of the people who played on that band are still playing pipes and drums



to this day !

I left the 'Emmies'

band hall full of

admiration for this

group of stalwarts

who have been

involved in the pipe

band scene for so

many years .

Although some of our

contest bands might

be tempted to

nowadays scoff at the

efforts of non-contest

bands such as the Emerald Girls , they would do well to reflect on the amount of effort and dedication that these people showed to the piping scene in Ireland over generations . Such bands as the Emerald Girls were the "feeder bands" for our more successful contest bands . Without colourful characters such as Tommy Fitzsimons , Margaret Lynch and others our association would be much poorer today .

Both Tommy Fitzsimons and Margaret Lynch have both now passed away and the Emerald Girls' Pipe Band no longer exists. Apart from the huge difference they brought to the lives of the hundreds of young female Dubliners who joined their ranks at a time when sport and other activities for females wasn't

quite as accessible as it is now and the enormous public relations exercises they did for our small country during their active years , they had a very distinct and important impact on the history of the IPBA .

EMERALD GIRLS' PIPE BAND, DUBLIN



Winners of Ladies World Championship, 1956

This band is the first non-Scottish Band to win a World Championship and our congratulations are extended to them in achieving such a distinction. The following letter is self-explanatory:

Dear Mr. McIntosh,

Many thanks for your letter and congratulations on our win at the recent World's Championships. It certainly was a great day and I have received shoals of letters like yours from bands and people. It is nice to know that so many people are taking an interest in piping and drumming.

I enclose an up-to-date photograph of the girls who competed in the Ladies Championship. The Drum-Major is Phyllis McLoughlin. Pipe-Major Joan Lynch commands the band and is assisted by Pipe Sgt. Angela Williams and Pipe Corporal Annie McKenna and the Drum Sergeant is Agnes O'Connor.

Our history is brief. The band was formed on 6th June, 1939, and I am the only founder-member still serving. After two years of preparation the band made its first public appearance at the St. Patrick's Week Show in the Queen's Theatre, Dublin, on 17th March, 1941. The first award for piping came in March, 1943, when the then Pipe-Major, Miss Vera McCullough, won the medal for Ladies Solo Piping at the Irish Pipe Band Association Contests. Several awards have been won by the band during the following years including the All-Ireland Junior Drumming Cup which was gained at Balmoral in 1952.

The girls have travelled all over Ireland and they visited Edinburgh in 1948. They visited London on two occasions and high honours were accorded the band twice in the past 12 months when the girls were selected to represent Ireland at the 3rd International Festival of Pipe Bands at Brest, Brittany, in August, 1955, and at the International Festival of Music at Angers, France, in May, 1956.

The band is completely independent and is maintained by the voluntary efforts of the members. A working committee is appointed each year at the annual general meeting and this committee is responsible for the smooth working of the band. As Secretary I hold the record for long service — having been re-appointed every year since the foundation of the band. A number of the girls also have long service, being with the band 10 or more years.

The uniform consists of a green tunic and a specially designed kilt of green and gold tartan. The stockings are emerald green with black shoes.

I trust that these short particulars will be suitable to you.

MARGARET LYNCH,
(Hon. Secy.)

