This year sees the 150th anniversary of the Pipes and Drums of the London Scottish regiment. One hundred and fifty years is an impressive age for any pipe band, but London may hold claim to an important piping precedent. Although many of the major historical connections between Scotland and London are well known; Scotland Yard, Caledonian Road, the Highland Society of London, the Caledonian Society of Scotland, the Caledonian Club, The London Scottish, (the regiment, the bank, the golf club and the rugby team) and the Gaelic Society of London, (founded in 1777, it is the oldest Gaelic Society in existence), it probably would not have occurred to many to look to London for the origins of the pipe band.

However, in 2003 piping historian Keith Sanger located a report from the Edinburgh Courant of November 3, 1803. The paper contained a review of what is possibly the earliest recorded instance of a pipe band, the Loyal North Britons, playing in Hyde Park, London. The band consisted of bagpipes and kettle drums, and they played *O'er the Hills and Far Away* to an appreciative crowd.

The Loyal North Britons (also known as the Highland Armed Association of London) were raised on June 14, 1793, as part of the country’s volunteer forces, ready to repel Napoleon’s threatened invasion of Britain. This corps was disbanded in 1816, and was the original predecessor of the London Scottish Regiment, who were formed in 1859. A firm footing for resident military pipe bands had been established in the capital by the Loyal North Britons, and the London Scottish Regiment were not slow to re-establish the tradition.

Within a year of the formation of the regiment, a regimental pipe band had been formed, consisting of a Pipe Major, five pipers and an instructor from the 2nd Battalion Scots Guards. All pipers, including the instructor from the Scots Guards, wore the Hodden Grey uniform.
of the London Scottish, but with pipe bags covered in the dark Government tartan.

In June of the following year, 1861, Lady Elcho, wife of the regiment’s founder, Lieutenant Colonel Lord Elcho, (later The Earl of Wemyss and March), presented the regiment with six sets of pipes, a banner for the Pipe Major and £109, on behalf of some “Scottish Ladies resident in London”. One of these sets of pipes is still held in the Regimental Museum. A pamphlet containing Lady Elcho’s speech on the occasion has an illustration of a London Scottish piper on its cover. The piper’s uniform is virtually identical to the one worn today, 150 years later, although the original regimental cap and sporran badge was a white metal thistle.

The London Scottish regiment continued to grow, and in 1886 moved in to its Headquarters in Buckingham Gate. In 1898 Pipe Major A.L Reith and his brother Corporal-Piper R. Reith of the London Scottish Pipes and Drums were to set another piping precedent, with their wax cylinder release of *Cock Of The North*, which may have been the first ever commercial recording of piping on sale.

The outbreak of the Boer War saw the London Scottish mobilising and sending a company to South Africa, as well as sending volunteers to serve as a company of the 2nd Battalion Gordon Highlanders. This began a long association between the London Scottish and the Gordon Highlanders that is honoured by the use of the Gordon’s tartan on the pipe bags of the London Scottish to this day. In 1908 army reforms saw the London Scottish become the 14th Battalion County of London Regiment, (London Scottish) and the now familiar badge showing the Lion of Scotland superimposed over the St Andrew’s Cross, surrounded by a border of thistles, was adopted. Also on the badge is the battle honour South Africa 1900-02 and the regimental motto, Strike Sure.

On the outbreak of the Great War, the 1st Battalion were mobilised immediately, marching through London to embark via Watford with the full Pipes and Drums, and became the first territorial army unit to see action when they took part in savage fighting on Messines Ridge on October 31, 1914. Ordered to hold
a gap in the line, the London Scottish were confronted by an elite Bavarian unit. Worse was to occur when it was discovered that the rifles and ammunition that they had been issued with were incompatible, meaning that each rifle had to be hand loaded and fired individually, one bullet at a time. Despite these odds, the attack was beaten off, but at a high cost. The Battalion sustained 394 casualties that night, including four pipers killed. Of the original pipe band that embarked in 1914, only one was to survive the first six months of the war unscathed. In total 11 London Scottish pipers were killed before strenuous efforts were made to keep them out of the frontline, much to the pipers’ frustration.

The 2nd Battalion of the London Scottish was also sent to France, but were then ordered to Palestine to fight the Turks. The pipe bags fell apart in the heat, but substitutes were made from goat skin seasoned with whale oil! However, nothing could be done about the problem of sand getting in the reeds. The drummers were perhaps a bit more resourceful. When their drum skins rotted and the shells broke up, they captured Turkish drums and fashioned their own sticks from Turkish tent pegs. The Pipes and Drums of the 2nd Battalion were thus able to march into the Holy City of Jerusalem with all instruments functioning.

Once the Great War was over, the rebuilding of the band began. It wasn’t long before the Pipes and Drums were back to full strength, competing at the Worlds at Cowal in 1927 and 1928, and winning the TA competition in the latter year. In May 1935 HM Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother became Honorary Colonel of the London Scottish. This association with the Regiment was to last until her death in March 2002. The Queen Mother’s personal pipers were appointed from within the regiment and included John Spoore and Chris MacPherson. In 1936 the regiment was renamed The London Scottish, The Gordon Highlanders (T.A.), strengthening the links established with the Gordons back in 1900.

Three battalions of the London Scottish were raised for World War Two and the 1st and 3rd battalions had a significant role to play in Italy. London Scottish pipers and drummers were present from the landings in Sicily in 1943 right through to beating the retreat in St Mark’s Square, Venice to mark Victory in Europe day in May 1945.

Post-war, the London Scottish have survived various Territorial Army reorganisations and today are officially known as A (The London Scottish) Company of The London Regiment. They are affiliated to the Scots Guards, and maintain the links established with the Scots Guards back in 1860. Like other Territorial units, the company has seen recent active service in Iraq and Afghanistan. The company Pipes and Drums still continue to provide music for the troops where ever possible.

‘It’s not all military engagements for the Pipes and Drums of the London Scottish though. There is no requirement to join the Territorial Army in order to join the band, (although there are serving members of the TA in the band), and in reflection of this, the band perform at an eclectic variety of venues.’

‘Although they were exceptionally busy, I managed to speak to Pipe Major Jim McLucas and Drum Major Nobby Foulis in the brief time they had before an appointment with some delegates from Kneller House, the headquarters of the Royal Military School of Music, to plan yet more musical engagements.

‘When you enter the present London Scottish HQ in Horseferry Road, you are immediately struck with the sense of tradition and time. In the drill hall where the band practise, the walls are hung with paintings recalling the Regiment’s achievements. The balconies that hang over the hall house the artifacts of the Regimental Museum, uniforms, medals, weapons, paintings, photos, banners and bagpipes. With such a long history behind the London Scottish Pipes and Drums, I asked Jim how the band manage to keep healthy links with the traditions and duties of the past, while remaining contemporary?’

“We still have members within the band who are serving soldiers in the Territorial Army, quite a few are Regimental Association members, so there’s still a current link with the Company and with the Regiment. We play at Mess Dinners, we play at various parades during the year where the serving company and the pipe band are together.

“We also remember days gone past with visits to past battlefields, such as Messine Ridge, where we are made very welcome in the local towns. We have also played through the Menin Gate, and played the lament there; it was a very moving experience.

“The Pipes and Drums also had the opportunity to recreate the Beating of the Retreat in St Marks Square, Venice, originally performed by the band on VE Day, 1945. We maintain links with some of the offshoots of the Regiment, the London Scottish Rugby Club and the London Scottish Golf Club, where they still have the original rifle lockers from the early days of the Regiment.”

‘Being based in central London, the band get the opportunity to take part in events that wouldn’t arise elsewhere.’

“We’ve done Royal duties recently for Prin-
cess Anne at St James’s Palace, as well as Beating the Retreat at Horseguards and taking part in the Lord Mayor’s Parade,” added Jim.

“I piped HMS Westminster through Tower Bridge, actually standing on top of the roof of the bridge of HMS Westminster. We’ve also taken part in the Xixón Bagpipe Festival in Spain, performed the music for the stage version of *Tunes of Glory*, where the London Scottish Pipes and Drums were recorded on parade, then projected onto a back screen.

“We were approached by this theatre company to see if we could provide the pipe band for *Tunes of Glory*. They didn’t realise that the London Scottish had provided the band for the well-known film of the same name in 1960. We got the uniforms from the outfitters in Edgeware and they were the original uniforms that were used in the film, the same uniforms that had been worn by the London Scottish, which then went on to star in *Carry On Up The Khyber*, so we wore the kilts of the famous 3rd Foot and Mouth!

“The backdrop had to look authentic Army 1950s so it was filmed down at the old Officer Training School in Woolwich on a Saturday morning. We were invited to see it in the theatre, when the play is finished it ends with the London Scottish band playing on the backdrop; the play is over, but nobody goes, everyone waits till the music finishes. It was good fun!”

Jim then returned to the theme of the band’s anniversary by telling me about some events taking place in 2010 to celebrate 150 years of the London Scottish Pipes and Drums.

“We are going to be holding a large Band Supper, where we hope to get 150 people attending. One of the guest speakers will be Tom Speirs, who is well known within the current piping circuit, and his father Jock was pipe major of the London Scottish in both the 1st and 3rd Battalions in 1945, so we thought it would be quite fitting to get him and his son, Iain, down for the supper. There will be piping there, obviously! We’ve also just had a one-off solos competition to mark the event, with Tom judging. We’ve got invites to go across to Gibraltar, possibly Italy, Germany, Spain, various tattoos, also we’ll be taking part in some of the summer concerts at Kneller Hall.”

Although the band are busy celebrating their history, Jim also has his eyes firmly set on the immediate future.

“The pipe band goes in cycles, and we have gradually built up over the years, and we now have a very strong pipe core and a very strong drum core.

“In previous years we have steered clear of the competing circuit, just because of the sheer amount of other stuff that we do, but hopefully we will be dipping out toes a bit more into the competition circuit.

“We intend to take it seriously, but not in a way that will take the fun out of it. That’s the general comment about the band, it’s a fun, family organisation and whatever we do, we don’t want to lose sight of that, nor lose sight of the link that we have to the regiment, because, first and foremost, that’s what we are here for.”