

When Malcolm passed away, in early November 1966, he was staying in Vanburgh Place in Leith but was penniless, so his protector and friend Dr. Roderick Ross took it upon himself to arrange the funeral, as a last gesture for the piper whose playing interpretation of Piobaireachd had seemed like a gift from the Gods and had inspired him to immortalize it in the collection 'Binneas is Boreraig'.

"I tried to get a squad of soldiers from the army to fire a volley over the grave", he announced, clutching a glass of whisky in the West End Hotel lounge bar, "but it emerged Calum had been dishonorably discharged. So they refused." Roddy himself had served in Burma, where he had once offered to parachute into a Japanese P.O.W. camp to help the sick, but even this would not make the Army change its mind.

For most people, that would have been that, but the good doctor, who considered himself descended from the MacCrimmons - his father was from Glendale in Skye next to where they lived and knew the genealogy by heart - was not so easily daunted. Not so long before, when the question of a nuclear deterrent was being debated in the same bar, he halted the discussion by snarling "what do we need a deterrent for? We should ATTACK!"

"I saw Captain Ian MacArthur. He was in the Commandos. He's going to help. He'll set off a charge of gelignite nearby instead." The others nodded sagely, as one does after a couple of whiskies and something outrageous is proposed.

Where did he get the explosive? To have such a thing was highly illegal. But he was a Jekyll-and Hyde figure, with underworld contacts, and it was likely he got someone with coal mining connections to steal it - we never heard the details.

So there was a certain frisson in the air when the cortege of several cars and a hearse set off up the A 9 for Badenoch in the Highlands. At the new hotel in Dalwhinnie, everyone pulled in for a snifter - only the solitary coffin remaining in the glass-sided funeral hearse. "I'll bet that's the only time Calum ever waited outside a pub", someone observed.

The service was in the church in Laggan. After it finished, the mourners gathered around the open grave next to Malcolm's grandfather, the famous Calum Piobaire, and John MacLellan, the Instructor at the Army School of

Piping played 'Lament for the Only Son'. Malcolm's father, old Angus, watched impassively as the coffin was lowered, earth was shovelled in, and a small Rowan tree was inserted by an Edinburgh 'strong man', a theatrical touch arranged by the Doctor - who then disappeared behind the church with his camera. The plan was to use the flashbulb to signal to Captain MacArthur, lying on a crag across the glen to the south, with a car battery attached to the gelignite by a long wire.

The next moment there was an ear-splitting explosion, like the Crack of Doom at The End of the World - totally out of proportion with the quiet solemnities being enacted. As the echoes rolled up and down the glen, a squall of rain swept in from the West, scattering the mourners, who fled to their cars and the nearest bar.

And that was Malcolm MacPherson's last farewell.

Later, I climbed to the crag where the blast had occurred. The granite had been pulverized, and a few pieces lay about. I still have one, over forty years since.