

One of my favourite recollections of Malcolm MacPherson, or Calum as everyone called him, is of him teaching Seumas MacNeill how to play 'Lament for Donald of Laggan'.

Of course, Seumas already knew how to play this tune; indeed, he had competed a number of times but had never won the coveted Gold Medal at Inverness. And he was no longer a young man, but an old dog needing to learn a new trick or two.

It was a happy coincidence which led to the lesson. Calum had been found a job teaching piping under the aegis of the Edinburgh Corporation Further Education Service, on a Wednesday evening, in a District School. This had been managed by his minder and acolyte, Dr. Roderick Ross, who saw his relationship with Calum as one who tended the sacred flame (one already guttering in the wind, alas...)

Seumas was there, also on a teaching commitment, and so it occurred to him to ask Calum to show him his way with the tune. After their respective students had left, the two found a room, and Calum told him to blow up his pipes and play 'Donald of Laggan'.

Seumas paced slowly before the seated 'old master' - who suddenly leapt to his feet and shot out his right arm like a gun tracking a pheasant, as MacNeill came up from the low A to the D and then the E double beat, following the elusive note and forbidding MacNeill to let go of it too soon.

Poor Seumas! It was like someone was using his head for bayonet practice - he had to duck down, bending his knees and try to retain his composure, as well as keep playing - for he dared not stop!

The Hoyle had seized Calum and he was electrified, no longer the washed-out wee man in a crumpled grey suit, but a predatory, commanding presence. You could literally feel the fire flowing from him through his gestures and into the tune Seumas was playing - or was playing him. For it was no longer the old Seumas, but a new man. That Summer, he came second in the Gold Medal, the best he had done.