

Pipe Major John Smith (1840 – 1877) *

John Smith was born in 1840 at Cullen, Banffshire, the second youngest of the seven children of John Smith (born in Croy) and Helen McDonald. At that time, his family was living at Cullenhouse Grounds, Rathven, Banffshire where his father John Sr was listed as Gamekeeper. (1841 Census) Cullenhouse is listed as the ancestral seat of the Earls of Seafield and other records show that John Smith Sr was also piper to the Earl of Seafield.

John Sr had a brother, William Smith who was in the 92nd Gordon Highlanders and apparently a piper of some reputation as he wrote a letter in 1828 complaining about the standard of piping at the *Edinburgh Races*.

“ J G Dalyell's advice to piping competitors from 1841,(Dalyell Gen. 374D:14) includes this reference:

IN 1828, WILLIAM SMITH OF THE 92ND GORDON HIGHLANDERS (and whose brother John Smith was piper to the Earl of Seafield), wrote on behalf of the 'North Country Pipers' (and talking of the decision to hold the Edinburgh Races every three years from now on)

***'The disappointment they met with this year has done them a great dale of harm, with regard to the studding of the Bagpipes music. In the event of no competition - the pipers will turn carless of learning - especially the young ones - Strengthen the hands that hange down and do not forget your ancistorale music'.
(From letter Smith/MacDonald 2nd April 1828.)***”

It is possible to infer from this family history and tradition that John Smith (the PM) was probably taught by his father John and/or his uncle William and likely of a high standard.

The 1851 Census shows the Smith family is now living in Inverness where John Sr is carrying out his trade as Turner/Pipe maker. Successive Census data show that John Sr continued to carry out this trade in Inverness until his death about 1870. According to the 1871 Census, his widow, the mother of John Smith(the PM), was drawing a widow's pension (Chelsea pension?) which might infer that John Sr had also served in the Highlanders in his early days.

Back to John Smith (the PM) - Instead of following his older brother in the teaching profession, for which young John Smith (the PM) apparently received some training, he enlisted in 1858 in the 72nd Highlanders and the following year, while he was stationed at the military barracks in Aberdeen, he married Margaret Coutts.

In 1860, He competed at the Northern Meeting as a Piper of the Depot Companies of the 72nd (Duke of Albany's own).

On 25/1/1862, he was appointed Piper in 72nd Royal Regiment of Scotland - Duke of Albany's (later Seaforth) Highlanders

(*This extract is from family records, archival records obtained from Ancestry.com and Scotlandspeople and research by the descendants of John Smith. Please note that despite every effort to cross-check very old archival records they do sometimes contain errors in transcription of names and dates and if any correction can be made, please contact maria_familytree@ihug.com.au.

Early in 1863 he was drafted to the Service Companies of the 72nd at Mhow in India as a Piper. This date is also confirmed by the Indian birth records of his two eldest children (July 1863 and January 1865) who were born at Mhow India during this period.

In 1865 John Smith acted as Pipe Major when the P/M of the 72nd was invalided home.

On 1/10/1865 he transferred to 106th Foot (Bombay Light Infantry) before the 72nd returned to Britain in 1866.

(After transferring to the 106th Foot (Bombay Light Infantry) it is not clear if he remained in India during this period. There are conflicting accounts. One unverified record states that he returned to Britain and there transferred to the 93rd Royal Regiment - Sutherland Highlanders on 31/12/1867, which date is as shown in the service record, and returned to India afterwards. It is more likely that he transferred to the 93rd while in India as the Indian birth record of his younger daughter Georgina confirmed she was born there in August 1867.

This part of his service period is also confirmed by the Indian birth, baptism and death records of his daughter Georgina (8 August 1867- 11 June 1869). Her gravestone is at the Cantonment Cemetery, Jhansi, India and reads as follows:

*Sacred
To The Memory
Of
Georgina the beloved
daughter of Pipe Major
John and Margaret Smith
XCIII [93rd Sutherland Highlanders] who died on the 11th
June 1869 Aged 1 year
10 months and 3 days

She is not lost but none before
P/R/B.S.*

)

His transfer to 93rd Royal Regiment of Scotland - Sutherland Highlanders was to replace their Pipe Major who had died in Sialkot, India and his service details show that he transferred on 31/12/1867 and was promoted to Pipe Major on 1/1/1868.

The *Historical Record of the 93rd Sutherland Highlanders* by Roderick Hamilton Burgoyne published 1883 in London by Richard Bentley & Son show that 1869 in India was a difficult year with heatwaves and up to 30th June in that year, 1 officer, 1 sergeant, 18 privates and 22 children died of disease, i.e. fevers and cholera etc.

The 93rd Regiment returned home in March 1870.

The service record of John Smith shows that he was Pipe Major 93rd Royal Regiment of Scotland - Sutherland Highlanders 1/1/1868 - 30/3/1871 (India and Britain) and also intermittently from April 1871 through to January 1873.

The 1871 Census shows John Smith, aged 30 living at the Aberdeen Military Baracks, Castlehill East Parish, Aberdeen. Relationship: Soldier, Occupation: Pipe Major 93 Highlanders. A long list of other soldiers is in this census with several spouses and children. (His wife Margaret and children are at 74 John Street)

In 1871 John Smith was the winner of the Prize Pipe for Piobaireachd at the Northern Meeting in September 1871. The silver engraved plate awarded for attaching to the pipes was kept by his daughter Mary and passed down to his great-grandson Alexander Bothwell, also a piper, living in Brisbane, Australia.

The service record of John Smith ends 31/3/1873

His wife Margaret Coutts had died some weeks earlier, in Edinburgh on 6/1/1873, after a long illness (tuberculosis) leaving three young children. (Aged 9, 8 and 4)

1874 Winner of Gold Medal.

Competing at the Northern Meeting in 1874 as Pipe Major John Smith, late of the 93rd Highlanders, he won the Highland Society of London's Gold Medal for Piobaireachd, playing 'The Chisholm's Salute'. (The Gold Medal was open for competition by previous winners of the Prize Pipe). A Picture of this medal is displayed on the website of the Pipingpress|Gold Medalists which also lists his name.

Research information from archival documents and records from historical piping experts and the Piobaireachd Society show that John Smith was referred to as a "most likeable man, a splendid and brilliant player and a very good teacher but not always consistent" **. He won several competitions and wrote pipe music which is evidenced by a lecture given by piping expert Andrew Wright in April 1996 "The Smith Manuscript". (The late?) Robert Meldrum who won the gold medals at Oban and Inverness and succeeded him as Pipe Major of the 93rd Highlanders in 1875 credits John Smith with being one of his teachers.

John Smith died of heart disease and dropsy on 4th June 1877 at the home of his brother William Smith, the parochial schoolmaster, in Lochgailhead in the county of Argyle.

*(**His service record shows that, on occasions, he had a drinking problem)*