

The Hills of Moffat

March



The Hills of Moffat: This march was written by George S. Cockburn (who also wrote the march “John D. Burgess”) for the local pipe band; so this is an example of a tune written by a piper for other pipers but which was to be played mainly in the box and fiddle world. George Cockburn 1897-1974 was born in Craigmillar, Edinburgh and learnt his piping from his father. A biography by Charlie Todd may be consulted online at www.boxandfiddle.com/george_cockburn.htm

Permission to reproduce “The Hills of Moffat” was kindly given by his son, also George Cockburn, who provided the following information about the tune and his father:

“The Hills of Moffat” [was] composed in his late 60’s when he retired to this town. It was immediately taken up by the local pipe band and spread to top fiddle and accordion bands across the country. His earlier tune “John D Burgess” was written in the late 40’s. The Burgesses were family friends. John first played it in our house, so musically that my father immediately put his

name on it. My father, who came from a family of Lowland enlisters in the Highland Regiments, was a beautiful player of the highland bagpipes, making music out of that unpromising instrument. He was a “noted piobaireachd player” according to his obituary in the *Oban Times* and I believe he won medals there and Inverness. He was a lead piper in the Highland Pipers Society (--in Edinburgh--the working class equivalent to the posh other gentlemen’s society, to which he was often, condescendingly, invited to play!). MCC versus Players! He served in the Dandy 9th (9th Battalion Royal Scots) from 1914-1919 as a piper. He was pipe-major of the Edinburgh Home Guards and led their demobilisation parade along Princes Street in Edinburgh.

He wrote many other tunes, of various merit. He gave most of them away to friends, unnamed. The manuscripts were all given, by my brother, to Hector MacAndrew... a noted and excellent fiddler from the Aberdeen area...Hector may have been chiefly responsible for spreading “The Hills of Moffat”!

Myself, I think “John D Burgess” is the better tune. John did, though he also played “The Hills of Moffat”...

But you should have heard him play, as Burns had it, “jigs, strathspeys and reels”. His fingers fled, with joy and music...”



The Hills of Moffat from north of the town