

Bellows-blown Pipes Weekend - Castlemaine, Victoria (6-7 October 2012)

Geoff Jones

There are a number of musicians in Victoria (Australia) who play the Scottish smallpipes, border pipes, Northumbrian smallpipes, uilleann pipes and other bellows-blown pipes. Whilst there are many events and activities for players of the great highland bagpipe, there are few opportunities for players of these other pipes to meet and play together.

On the weekend of 6-7 October, Sarah Wade organised a 'Pipers' Weekend' for players of bellows-blown pipes. Although she played a basic set of smallpipes in D for a number of years, Sarah's enthusiasm for smallpipes had recently been boosted as she had taken possession of a new set of Hamish and Fin Moore combo SSP in August.

The pipers' weekend was held in a lovely old six-bedroom house in Castlemaine in the Central Goldfields district of Victoria. It attracted 15 pipers from diverse backgrounds. Some lived in the local area and others travelled up to 650 km (400 miles) to attend. The weekend provided the opportunity for fellow bellows-pipers to meet, share tunes and be inspired.

The weekend commenced with a meet-and-greet lunch on the Saturday followed by two concurrent workshops during the afternoon. Geoff Jones ran an introductory lesson to the smallpipes and other bellows-blown pipes. Sarah led a session for some of the more competent pipers, including SSP, uilleann pipes, border pipes, whistles and even an electronic bagpipe! During this session pipers enjoyed trying out and sharing different tunes that can be played together on the different types of pipes. They made a good start to a common repertoire of Celtic pipe tunes – now available on the website!

<http://victoriabellowspipes.weebly.com/>

Saturday evening was a time for a bit of fun at the jam session in the lounge room. Everyone had a go at playing a few tunes by themselves or with others. A few other instruments also joined in the fun, including piano accordion, crumhorn, flute, whistles, concertina and didgeridoo (it is Australia of course!). The piper who discovered that red wine should go *through* the piper *before* making contact with bagpipes shall remain nameless! The session was a great opportunity for pipers to jam together and also show off some party-pieces. Andrew Teusner and Martin Hungerford showed off their skill of singing along to their playing. All in all it was a great night and the last of the session players dragged themselves to bed at about 3am – an early night indeed! Sunday morning saw brunch at a respectable hour followed by more sharing of tunes, playing and tuning tips until early afternoon.

Following on from the bagpipe weekend, Sarah also organised a smallpipe session at the Maldon Folk Festival a few weeks later. This was attended by 7-8 pipers; some from the weekend, and others drawn out of the woodwork, which was great to see.

The weekend gathering and smallpipe session were both successful and will hopefully be the first of many regular events for players of these other Celtic pipes in Victoria and beyond.

For those wishing to find out more or be notified about other piping events, just drop an email to Geoff at email@geoffjones.info.

See the website for photos <http://victoriabellowspipes.weebly.com/>