

# David Johnston pipes in New Year

by Lily Dane

**AWARD-WINNING** Pipe Major David Johnston - who some years ago settled in Germany, where he maintains his long held passion for the bagpipes - was on a recent visit home to his native Fermanagh.

An accomplished piper, whose list of honours includes world championship success, David is also a record-breaking piper. In 1997, the piper did a freefall

jump for charity just after he played a few jigs on the bagpipes at 13,000 ft. The feat is captured in the Guinness Book of Records as the fastest descending bagpiper in the world.

In spite of what he has achieved and the lengths he has gone to, David is always proud to mention his beginnings in Fawcay pipe band, Lisnakea.

Born in Enniskillen, a son of Louise Johnston and the late Alfred, David lived on a

farm in Pettigo for a time, before the family moved to Lisnakea and he was educated at Lisnakea High School, followed by Enniskillen High School, where his headmaster was the late Ronnie Hill.

He was 13-years-old when he took up the bagpipes with Fawcay Pipe Band, where he was taught by Walter Morrison from Lisnakea, whom he credits for starting him off on his piping career.

"I have played ever since," said David, who in his quest to develop and improve his talent, joined the Irish Guards Pipe Band.

His regular performances included those at State Banquets and the Annual Trooping of the Colour at Horse Guards in London in honour of Her Majesty the Queen.

After piping his way to success in many solo piping competitions, David was posted to the Guards Depot Piping School as a piping instructor for the Irish and Scots Guards, where he received further advanced instruction and mentoring from Jimmy Banks, a famous Pipe Major. In his five years with the piping school, David enjoyed success in the World Championships and also the London Society Solo Piping Competition.

He subsequently attended military piping courses at the Army School of Piping (at Edinburgh Castle) under

the guidance of the late Pipe Major Angus Macdonald. Following a glowing recommendation from the school, he had the opportunity to attend a nine month pipe majors' course and achieved a Grade A pass.

David's home is in Bruggen, Germany, where he has developed his own business, The Piper's Corner shop and describes the interest in piping in Germany as "massive". He supports Europeans with their piping and drumming and organises workshops and classes. He is assisted by his German wife Heike and their 11-year-old son, Kian, who is currently learning to pipe.

The Piper's Corner Winter School runs from February 6 to 12. It is supported by the National Piping Centre in Glasgow which sends over instructors to help. They offer certification and work with beginners to advanced level. Piper Robert Watt and Mark Wilson, drummers, come to help with the school and their seminars. "We try to use as many Northern Ireland instructors as possible," said David.

Last year, the musician launched his own CD, 'Farewell Enniskillen' which includes him performing his favourite piece, A Seven from Germany accompany



David Johnston with his wife Heike and son Kian.

him on some of the tracks on the CD, which is available at Enniskillen Castle.

Pictured on the cover piping on Devenish Island, the scenic location is very close to his heart as it is where he celebrated his marriage and

their son Kian was christened on the island. It is "a special place," believes David, who as a child used to canoe to Devenish Island.

A widely travelled figure, whose career and musical interests have taken him

around the world, David remains very proud of his roots in Northern Ireland, where he says bagpiping is very strong. "I always acknowledge where it started," said David who likes to get home whenever he can.



David Johnston at the Edinburgh Tattoo this year.



Tuning up the bagpipes

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the Pipe Band Competition in Scotland.

Working for the Foreign Office as a Trade Officer for the British Embassy in Germany, he is currently director of music with Cross Swords Pipe Band - a British led European Pipe Band, which has a membership of about 100. The band, which has members from all over Europe, participated last year in Molow Military Tattoo in Red Square for two weeks and they also took part in Edinburgh military tattoos for four weeks last year.

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The record breaking freefall parachute jump undertaken by David Johnston which got him into the Guinness Book of Records.



Pipe Major David Johnston pictured meeting Prince Charles.