

North Sea Gas: A Brief Band History

1980 Autumn/ Winter **White Hart Inn Grassmarket** Edinburgh.

Colin McKenzie came into the White Hart Inn with his mandolin and played along with myself (Dave Gilfillan) and **Peter Farrell** who were playing a regular weekly gig. This had become a regular occurrence over a past few months during which the idea of forming a band to play good entertaining folk music with rousing choruses for the public to enjoy was discussed over a few pints of beer.

Pete was happy playing just for the fun of it and once a week was fine by him. He was not that keen on playing and travelling and with the music emphasis being traditional material, so he made it known he would stand aside if another member could be found.

During this period the name of the band was discussed with **“North Sea Gas”** being one of a few ideas, **“Brewers Droop”** being another if my memory serves me well!

1981 February **Wally Allan** joins Colin and myself on St Valentines Day to form what was to be called **“North Sea Gas”**



Wally, Dave and Colin (White Cockade)



Dave, Wally, Colin and some fans!!

While playing in the **White Hart Inn** Grassmarket Edinburgh we were approached by Jim Abercrombie who asked why we did not have an album for sale. Explaining the high costs involved (this was back in 1980 remember), Jim kindly offered to pay for the recording. So after further discussions a business agreement was made and we went off to the **“Pan audio”** recording studios on Forth Street, Edinburgh and recorded our first album **“Those So Dearly Held”** which was released in **1981**.

The album was a great success proving very popular with the public and in business terms it sold well. So we quickly returned to the studios to record **“Spirit Of The Banished”** which was released in **1982** and proved to be equally as popular. “We were up and running”.

During these early years we were very fortunate to take part in many Scottish Television programmes recording 6 **“Hear Here”** shows in the old Gateway studios which used to stand in Leith walk, took part in the **“Thingimajig”** shows, appeared many times in numerous afternoon magazine programmes and even made a guest appearance on **“Glen Michael's Cartoon Cavalcade.”** The children's show of its day. We dressed as pirates!! (If anyone has a copy of this on video please let me know.)

1981: We had moved our regular nights from the White Hart Inn to The **Caledonian Hotel** at the West End of Edinburgh where we played what was then called **“The Lothian Lounge”** the hotel's main entertainment area.

1982: Saw the Caledonian hotel open a new entertainment bar called **“Platform 1”**.

We were the first band to play the new venue, and we played there for 13 years. For most of that time we appeared twice a week Wednesday and Friday nights.

1982: Around this time we also started doing a series of Late night concerts in the **“Caley Cinema”** in

Lothian Road, Guest artists included **Hamish Imlach, Tich Frier, Madeline Smith, Clem Allan and Johnny Cunningham.**

We also supported **Gene Pitney** in the **Edinburgh Playhouse Theatre**, during which Wally told the audience that we had been digging around in our song bag and came up with a little number appropriately called "Twenty four hours from Pumpherston"

We have supporting many well known artists and famous bands and performers during the bands career, **The Swinging Blue Jeans, Alvin Stardust, Showwaddywaddy, Frank Ifield.**

1982: During the summer of this year we were instrumental in starting the Scottish show in the Caledonian Hotel "**Hail Caledonia**" which later moved to other premises but continued to run for many years.

1983: We were brought to the attention of the promoter **Drew Taylor** and asked to headline The "**White Heather Show**" which was to tour England, Colin and myself were very keen to do this but Wally was not so keen (having a good job with British Telecom at the time). He decided it would be better if he stood aside. Wally's last gig with the band was Saturday the 20th February **1982**. Fortunately for us Wally is a man for his diary and was able to tell me that during his stay with the band of 2yrs and 6 days we played 526 shows if you think of the fact we also recorded two albums and with all the TV appearances it's



unbelievable.

1983 February 20th **Wally Allan** leaves the band and **Ronnie McDonald** joins "North Sea Gas" for the first time on Wednesday 24th of February and we headlined the "**White Heather Show**" tour. During the tour we played the Brighton Dome Theatre and were introduced to **Dame Flora Robson** who came to our dressing room to meet us, but Mac's visit to the band was to be only a brief spell of four months.

1983: June Mac was replaced by **Colin Ramage**. It was a very busy introduction to the band for Colin as within the first 6 months we played the **40's Field celebration** where we recorded a video with **Barbara Dixon, Noel Edmonds, Peter Sarstedt and Noel Murphy**. We also recorded 4 cassettes called the "**Legends of Scotland**" telling the stories of Robert Burns, Robert the Bruce, Mary Queen of Scots and Bonnie Prince Charlie. We provided the music and they were narrated by **Bill McCue**, then to top off a very busy spell we recorded our third album "**From Fields Afar**" released in the same year **1984**. Now that's busy!



Colin Ramage, Dave Gilfillan and Colin McKenzie 1983



The Glasgow Marathon Glasgow Green Sept 1983
Colin McKenzie, Colin Ramage (standing behind)
Billy Connolly and Dave Gilfillan.



Christmas eve show Platform 1
“ I think it was a fancy dress party “



1986: Gerry McKenna joined the band. He played bass guitar, keyboards and awesome banjo and with that line up we recorded the Album “**Live from Edinburgh**” at the **Churchill Theatre Edinburgh**. **Live From Edinburgh** received a **Silver Disc** in recognition of albums sold from the Scottish Record Industry Association.

1986 Colin Ramage decided he wished to try a solo career. He left and recorded a solo album.

1988: Bobby Miller replaced Gerry. He played the double bass and bass guitar. Over the years Bobby has been a great friend and asset to the band.
From then Colin McKenzie and myself continued to work as a duo with Bobby playing with us in Platform 1.



The compilation album **“The Collection “** was released in **1988**.

We also took part in the **Brian Matthews Round Midnight** shows being recorded live during the Edinburgh Festival, appearing with **Tom Roberson** (of War Baby fame) and on another occasion **Peter Ustinov** was the special guest.



“Embo's Golden Shore “

A song Colin McKenzie wrote. It was Recorded and released as a single all in the name of charity



BP released a floppy Disc with “Black Black Gold” and “North Sea Gas” to Celebrate the Trillionth Cubic ft of North sea gas coming ashore in 1985

We also began our Hogmanay shows which we held in various venues: Platform 1, L'attache, Carlton Studios and The Merlin (for many years).

We were also invited to the London Barbican theatre and performed with **“Dame Edna Everage” (Barry Humphries)**. A very memorable occasion evening.

1988/9 Colin McKenzie for personal reasons (getting married and settling down) decided it was time for him to call it a day. We had agreed to make a live album in **“Platform One”** which was now the entertainment lounge of the Caledonian Hotel and the live venue of Edinburgh at that time. We played there twice a week every week for over 13 years.

The album was **“Caledonian Connection”** released **1989**.

This was recorded live and was a huge success but as agreed shortly after its release, Colin McKenzie bowed out!

“Caledonian Connection” received a **Gold disc** in recognition of album sales

Knowing the situation and needing continuity I had invited Colin Ramage to return to the band, he agreed and joined the band for the recording of the Caledonian Connection album.

1989: Colin McKenzie leaves band and **Colin Ramage** rejoins band.

We continued playing Platform 1 until 1994 when we decided to move to The Balmoral Hotel Princes Street Edinburgh where we played our regular Friday nights. We later moved to the Belford Hotel



Edinburgh. Colin Ramage and myself worked as a duo and also with Bobby Miller.



**Ronnie Browne presents Colin and myself
with Keltic Heritage Silver disc.**

We also headlined the **Hunter Mount Celtic Festival New York State August 1992**



On Stage: Hunter Mount Celtic Festival August 1992



Colin leading the audience in something!!

During the period **1989** until November **1998**, Colin Ramage and Dave Gilfillan recorded the following Albums

“Keltic Heritage”	1991.	Keltic Heritage received	Silver Disc Award.
“Scottish Destiny	1993.	Scottish Destiny received	Silver Disc Award.
“Power of Scotland”	1995.	Power Of Scotland received	Silver Disc Award.
“Schiehallion	1997.		

We toured Germany extensively including what used to be the GDR. We also toured and played in Holland, Austria, Switzerland, Denmark, America and Canada.

1998: November of this year saw myself and Colin Ramage part company. This not being a planned or organised event and being left with the situation where contracts must be fulfilled I needed a band.

1998 December. Fortunately with friends like Gerry McKenna and Bobby Miller I had no trouble solving this problem. We did need a lead instrumentalist and we persuaded **Kirsty McLean** to play fiddle for us.

So from **1998** till early **2002** this was the band. We recorded the album “**Spirit of Scotland**” which was released in the year **2000**.



We worked mostly in Scotland during this period but we did venture across to Germany. During this period of time Bobby and Kirsty were married and with this and the pressure of work their continuing time commitment to the band was proving very difficult. It was time to change again!!



Kirsty McLean



Gerry McKenna



Bobby Miller

2002: February saw the return of **Ronnie McDonald** to the band. “Mac” had been in Australia and on returning I asked him to join the band and along with **Tim O’Leary** we recorded “**Dark Island**” in the same year. Gerry McKenna also returned to the fold adding banjo and keyboards to the line up.

Dark island received a Silver disc Award



Mac, Tim and Dave

2004: This was the year Tim was replaced by Cameron Gaskell or Cammy as we all knew him.

We recorded the album **“Lochanside”** with Cammy and this was released in 2005.

We also visited Estonia for the first time and had a great time meeting and playing for the Scottish business community. That and the subsequent repeat trips were organised by Iain Lawson former Vice Convenor of the SNP and good friend of the band. We will always be indebted to Iain for the help he gave us.



Lauffen Festival one very hot day 2003



Neckarmühle Mundelsheim

Germany has been a great place for the band. We have toured there regularly for over 25 years.

We (Colin McKenzie and Myself) started visiting the military bases doing shows for all the Scottish regiments and when we were invited by Liz Holtmann to play “Herford folk club” we were delighted. The transition into the folk circuit went very smoothly. It was in “Herford folk club” around **1991** we met a young man who asked if we would like to have a band web site? We said “yes please “ the young man was Uwe Schuerkamp who has been our web master ever since. Over the years, both Brian L. Wong and Christian Wessely have kindly provided computing resources and bandwidth to host our home page.

We were one of the first if not the first Scottish folk band to play in what used to be the GDR. We made some wonderful friends who with their help we have built up a very good circuit. Our Summer tour is mostly outdoor events playing in castles all over Germany. It's good to see other Scottish folk acts following in our footsteps.



Burg Falkenstein always a great night



Playing and the Hude Celtic Festival 2010

2003: We began touring America in earnest. It all began with Linda Zelenski (a fan of the band) contacting me and asking why we do not play in America more often ? I replied that it was difficult to organise tours from this side of the pond. Her reply to this was she could maybe try and do this for us. (With Linda now our agent in the States) We began touring America twice a year and have continued to do this twice a year every year. This added to our twice yearly tours of Germany and our constant work at home. When we were recording a TV show in Cape Cod 8th of February 2003, we were presented with a Declaration from the House of Representatives and Commonwealth of Massachusetts welcoming North Sea Gas and declaring 8th of February North Sea Gas day in Massachusetts!

On the 2nd of October the same year when recording the Don Lincoln Show we were presented with a Senate Citation from The State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations.

We have played many of the famous Clan Gatherings and Music Festivals over the years in the USA. The pressure of the work load led to Tim (never happy touring once he had met his wife to be Fiona) making the decision to leave the band.

2006: Cameron Gaskell leaves the band and was replaced by Grant Simpson.

2007: Sadly on the 25th of January 2007 Cameron Gaskell died. A great wee man with a big personality who is sadly missed by all who knew him. I will always remember being in Estonia when we received the news.

2006: Grant Simpson: I was in the Royal Oak bar in Edinburgh one night (not a rare visit I must admit) when this young lad came into the downstairs bar. There was a session going on but it needed a fiddler. Grant grabbed the bar fiddle (not a Stradivarius it must be said) but he made the piece of plywood he was playing sing. I was impressed to say the least and mentioned it to Mac who later discovered that Grant was also working in the Royal Oak as a barman. I met him a week later and discussed his joining the band to which he agreed (something I think he feels is penance for something he did in a past life).



Recording the “Woodsongs “programme USA

on stage recording “Songs of the Mountians”

Over the years in the USA we have taken part in so many Television and Radio programmes it would be impossible to mention them all (because I can't remember)

2007: The compilation album “**Massacre of Glencoe**” was released and we recorded:

Rosslyn 2007

Edinburgh Toon 2009

Tak A Dram Afore Ye Go 2011

For the last 3 years we have been very fortunate in being invited to **Istanbul** to celebrate St Andrews Day!



Two of the things tourists have to do is having a puff on the old shisha and enjoying the local tea!

We tour constantly in Germany (three to four times a year), America (twice a year) Estonia, Turkey, Canada, Ireland and of course our own native Scotland which we have tried to cover extensively in these last few years, I can proudly say there are not many places in Scotland we have not visited at some time in the band's history.

For those places we have not yet played: “**Give us time we are working as hard as we can!**”

Throughout the bands history there have been various musicians who have played with the band on the odd occasion. I would like to thank them all for their help and talent.

This brief history was compiled by Dave Gilfillan with input and information from Colin Mckenzie, Gerry McKenna and Bobby Miller. Photos from band members and friends.

Thanks to everyone. Dave.

Miscellaneous photos



Concert USA



On Stage Huntermount USA



Out and about in New York City



on stage in USA



On horseback in Oz



High street Edinburgh after open air concert



The Tupelo USA



Church Concerts USA!!