

Grey's Notes

by Michael Grey



Photo: John Savin@designfolk.com

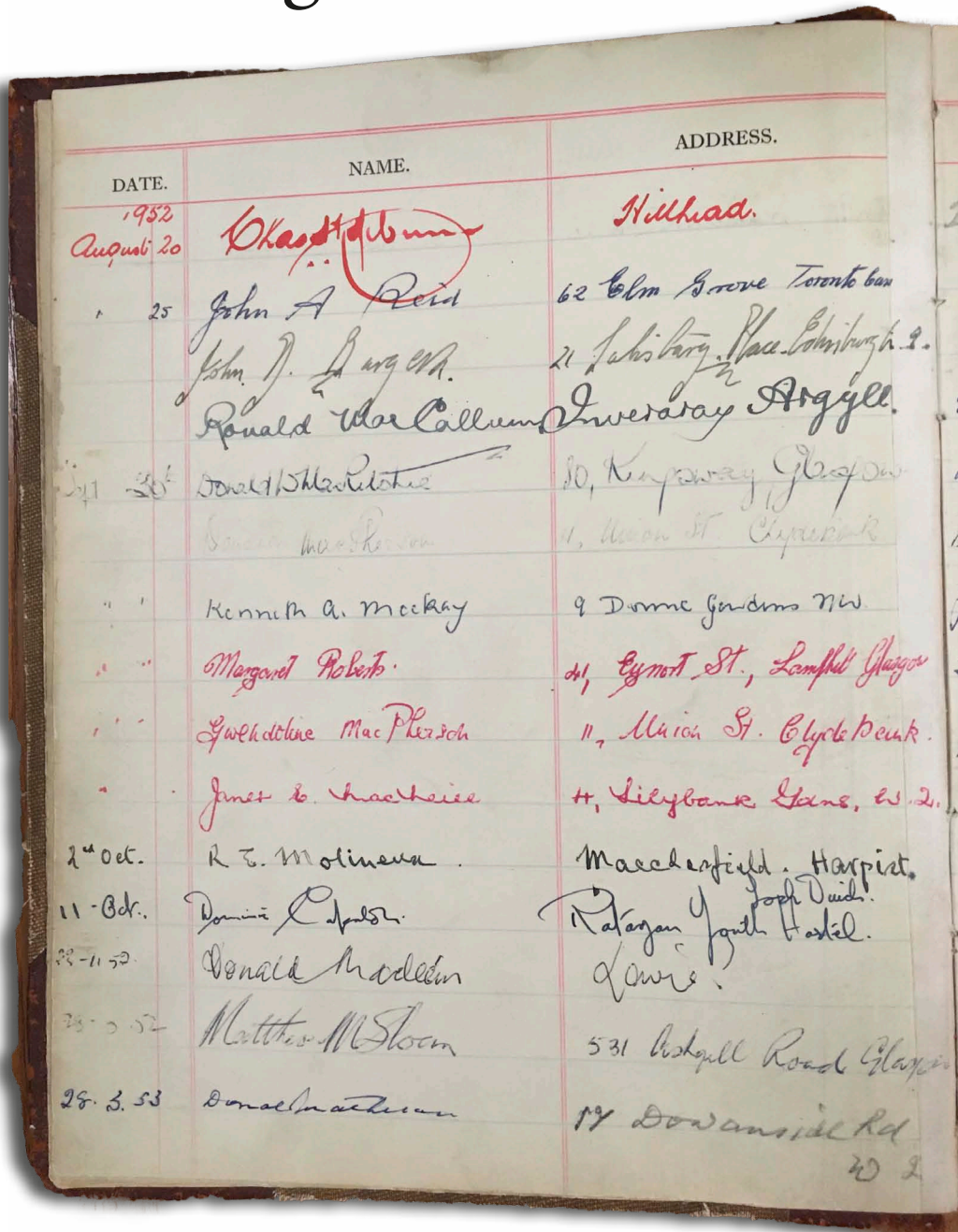
A signature book of signatures

THAT which is used – develops. That which is not used wastes away. Such was the opinion of Hippocrates, Greek physician and huge figure in the history of medicine. He might've said, use it or lose it – so much more meme-friendly – but his considered opinion of more than 2000 years ago holds true today. The great golfer Sam Snead said practice puts brains in your muscles. He'd know. His record of over 80 championships didn't happen by chance. We know idle muscles shift to flab, or, at least become weak. Unpractised skills fall away.

Consider handwriting. Good, old-fashioned squiggly curlicued pen styling. Cursive lettering. Longhand penmanship. Call it what you want but I know that if I was to take pen to paper and mark out this sentence it would be mostly illegible. Some of you may not have been taught cursive so it would be tricky to read. And for everyone else? No one has been taught "scrawl" – which is what my unused longhand has become. Today my fingers tap buttons – or cover small holes – far more than they hold a pen.

On reflection it's interesting (to me) that almost the only time I now use cursive writing is in recording assessment pages, you know, scoresheets, for solo piping and band contests. My handwriting has deteriorated to the point where I've found myself printing in parentheses transcriptions of especially illegible penned words. Dashing off a signature is likely the other most common use of my waning cursive ability.

The signature is an interesting thing. For millennia it has been a mark of validation, an acknowledgement of acceptance, approval or obligation. Ancient Egyptians used pictographs and over time, as technology developed, so did the signature. In 1677, the signature became a real instrument of power. English Parliament passed the Statute of Frauds Act decreeing that all law contracts must be signed. No two handwritten signatures are believed to be the same and the law was an attempt to crackdown on hoodwinking and deceit – surely a great name for any law firm.



You may know that a graphologist is the expert who connects our handwriting patterns to psychological traits. It's generally believed that our handwriting tells us who we are and the signature, well, that tells us who we want to be. In our handwriting the routine pushes and pulls of the ballpoint gives way to something usually quite different in our signature mark. Grand curves and sweeping arcs and maybe even a heart-shaped "dot" more often land on

a page. This M followed by an insanely unintelligible journey to Y is who I want to be, I guess – Michael Grey, indeed.

Graphology is one of those pursuits that doesn't have an awful lot of science behind it. The word sketchy comes to mind. I imagine it might be a good long time before any graphologist wins the Nobel. But like astrology – and who

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doesn't read their horoscope – there's a little fun to it. There are a few graphology basics: if you have a large signature you're a narcissist. Small? Insecure (of course). Illegible? You're very private. If yours is easy to read, well, you're an open, friendly sort of person. The list of analytics goes on (and on).

Last summer, I spent some time in the west end of Glasgow and so, naturally, found my way to the College of Piping for a few practice sessions (looking to use it and not lose it, you see). In making my way to one of the rehearsal rooms, I came across an old book. It seemed to have been randomly placed on a side table in an alcove. It was the College of Piping visitors book. And not just any old visitors book. This dated back to some of the earliest days of the College and was just plain fascinating. The first entry was 1952. Touched by the hands of 20th century greats, you could feel the book's energy. I can imagine in the hands of a medium or psychic, the book would strike in transcendental conniptions.

Here before me was a simple and generic stationer's book. At the time, likely bought for no more than 10 shillings. A notable cash outlay for a start-up piping enterprise. And over the years, it has morphed to become a priceless record of the undulating swirls and rolling contours of many of the piping world's greats – and, yes, not-so-greats. A signature book of signatures.

And look at the names on page 46: August 25, 1952, a 20-year-old John D Burgess visits, as does Ronald MacCallum, Willie McCallum's uncle Hugh MacCallum's cousin (a tune name there). We can see that John Reid, pipe major of the General Motors band in Ontario was visiting. John Wilson had immigrated to Canada from Edinburgh in 1949 and married John Reid's daughter not long after.

And on this page: October 6, 1956 and what surely must have been an echoes of Oban gathering: Duncan MacFadyen, D R MacLennan (he won double Gold Medals that year), Charles D Scott, pipe sergeant of the Glasgow Police, John MacDonald, pipe major Glasgow Police, Robert Reid, Ronald Lawrie, future pipe major of the band and Donald MacLeod, with "Pipe Major", humbly bracketed after his name.

A few pages turned lands on 1957 and a remarkable juxtaposition of names – the marks of famous piping partners: R G Hardie and John Weatherstone, signed even in the usual

DATE.	NAME.	ADDRESS.
8/10/56	R G Hardie	308 Kilmungton Rd Glen 15 - abis 48
12/9/56	Lain Jordan	33 Moorburn Ave, Gifford
1/10/56	Duncan MacFadyen	105 Leithan Dr. SW
6/10/56	D R MacLennan	The Rhodes, North Bawd. S.
10/56	Charles D. Scott	Glenzie.
2/10/56	John MacDonald	Glasgow Police,
	Pipe Major Robert Reid	Glasgow.
	Dorothy W. Zvain	Stewarton.
	Joan M. MacKenzie	Stonnoway.
	Donald M. MacLeod	Stonnoway.
6.10.56	Ronald Lawrie	City of Glasgow Police.
--	Squad Leader (P. Reid)	The Seaforth Highway
	Mr. James	Glenmalla
27/1/57	Pauline P. Mellow. R.F.P.B.	128, Audenshaw Road Aldershot Manchester
	Dorothy Zvain	36, Woodcock Lane, Glasgow, Derbyshire

R G Hardie	22 Muirpark Dr B/Brighton
John Weatherstone	51, Kennure Lane, B/Brighton

ordering of their business, Hardie followed by Weatherstone.

While the book is any piping-enthusiast-cum-graphologist's dream, the names offer insight for historians and even genealogists. The book is full of addresses and personal affiliations like band memberships – and who a person was likely friendly with at the time. It seems to me books like this are signed in groups: a bunch of people might visit the college together and then take turns making their mark.

In scanning the pages I was surprised that I

failed to spot my own grand signature. So in all my visits to Otago Street, evidence of the great event was never recorded. I duly signed. The next day I came back to take some pics of the pages and was saddened to see that someone had defaced the page that followed my signing.

I hope this volume makes its way to a museum very soon. This book is important. There are still many pages that might be filled though maybe managed by a Keeper of The Book. Use it or lose it. That goes for handwriting and, I'd say, visitor books. ●