

Welcome to Begg Bagpipes

-----Est 1980 Glasgow city centre's oldest bagpipe shop-----

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Newsletter - November

Dear Customer,

I trust November's newsletter will find you all well and whilst it may be getting colder, it's the ideal time to get the pipes out in the evenings and awaken the docile neighbours from their slumber. I have always been careful to not overplay the pipes in the house and not too late in the evenings. I currently have good neighbours who seem to enjoy me playing and if I have not played for sometime, they mention that they are missing the lilting harmonics of my cane reeds, sheepskin bag and Lawrie drones. I did notice some were putting in double glazing but was assured it was not the playing that was at fault.....



Yours Aye,

James C Begg

www.beggbagpipes.com

News

The Glenfiddich Piping Championship was established in 1974 to inspire and stimulate the world's finest individual pipers, and to seek the best overall exponents of ceol mor or piobaireachd (the great music) and ceol beag (the little music). The 2008 competition has recently finished at Blair Atholl and Gordon Walker was the overall winner for the second year in a row -congratulations to Gordon and also for using a Begg Bag. Gordon has been a loyal customer for many years and sometime ago, I was astounded when he turned up in my old shop in Sauchiehall Street and changed his bag the day before a major competition in Oban. This was in his Army days and just shows how versatile you have to be - you also have to be able to react "on the hoof". Gordon has won many prizes, and is perhaps the most natural player in the world today - he makes everything look so easy and even gives the impression he could play in his sleep.



Top Tip

Drones and Pitch - part 2 and continued from October's Newsletter.

B fLAT is 466 hertz and this is the classical setting for a chanter but many bands tune between 474 and 480 or even higher. Pitch has always had a

tendency to rise - in fact there is an article from the 1900s in Celtic Monthly discussing rising pitch then and the same debate is still going on 100 years later in the 21st century. The danger with the higher pitch is that stability can be more volatile and a shrill, weaker sound can be easily produced. This may account for today's larger numbers of pipers in bands as volume also appears to decrease as the pitch increases.

Tuners are available to check the frequency that you wish to set your chanter to. This is a matter of taste when playing solo and it's actually slightly more useful when tuning a band. The best resource overall is of course your own ear and it is important to train it to detect all the harmonics from the drones i.e you should be able to separate the sound of the bass from the tenors.

The third hand at £9.50 is available as another tuning aid. This clamps round the 3 bottom notes and leaves your hand free to tune the drones whilst hearing low A. Normally this would not be possible and that is why when tuning without such an aid, we tune to the high A initially and finally the low A.

Steady blowing is the pre-requisite of good tuning and a learner piper will have the slightly more difficult task to tune as the blowing may not be consistently steady - however this will come in due course with practice.

So drones should give you the full harmonics, and it's crucial to get the full power and togetherness from the drones to give your bagpipe the "Ferrari" sound you might wish to achieve. There is no point in thinking that all is well just because you have 3 drones sounding .You need to work with the drone reeds to optimize the quality of the sound output and to continually keep improving on this very important aspect of the pipe.

[Read Part 1](#)

The Top Three Tunes - by Mr John Hamilton (Glasgow Highland Club)

1. Inveran - a traditional 2/4 March by P/M G.S. MacLennan.
2. Arthur Bignold of Lochrosque- a traditional 2/4 March by John MaColl.
3. Assynt Crofters- a melodic hornpipe by Craig Turnbull with an Ian Todd arrangement.

This month's top tunes comes from a rather different top piper. You do not have to be a gold medalist to be a great player and a font of knowledge on the bagpipe, and there is no better example of this than Mr John Hamilton. John is someone who has had a huge impact on Begg Bagpipes over many years and has had a crucial input to the success as well as the survival at times of the business.



John is now retired and lives in Prestwick, Ayrshire. He started his working life as a bagpipe maker and when there was a down-turn in bagpipe demand in the 1950s, he moved from Greenock and set up kilt making in Inverness. The employees all got a share in the new company and built Hector Russell Kiltmaker into one of the largest and most famous kiltmakers in Scotland. Begg Bagpipes enjoyed many years as a concession in Hector Russell's premises in Renfield St, Glasgow where John was the store manager. James learned a lot from John at this time including sales and management techniques and customer service. He would have done anything to help not just James but anyone who wanted to tap into his business and piping expertise. John was a well known piper at various events including regular appearances at the Glasgow Highland Club and during his National Service, was a well known part of the piping scene on the Rock of Gibraltar with the Seaforth Highlanders. The photograph above shows a younger John, resplendent in his Seaforth's attire.

Thanks John, for your top tunes selection.

Watch out for other world class pipers making their selection in future issues.

November Special Offers

1. In connection with the top tip on tuning, this offer is a small hand held tuner - the korg CA 30. Normally £25 incl. vat and for orders in November now £19 incl. vat -comes complete with batteries. This is ideal for checking your frequency and pitch. Call or email the shop to order.

2. On the blowing side of things, why not try the Airstream Blowpipe, reduced from £50+vat to £38+vat. This blowpipe is available in lengths of 9,10,11 or 12 inches and comes complete with a built-in valve. It has a wider bore than most other blowpipes and therefore allows more air into the bag at a greater speed, resulting in greater efficiency. The valve is reliable for 10 years and provides a great seal. Order online.

Last month's special price on bags was a big success and I trust newcomers to Begg's Bags are enjoying their new experience.

Special Feature - Begg Bagpipes

This picture shows not only show my good-self but some of the many hand made pipes that are sent out every week. The pipes here are the JCB5 model as well as a nice half mounted silver set in runic design. The attraction of these pipes is that they are all hand made to achieve a finish which is very precise and exact. All ferrules are fitted to size for each section and whilst the wood can sometimes shrink as it dries, this type of hand fitting helps alleviate the problem. The wood



is also stored and seasoned fully before use again helping the blackwood from moving . The pipes are all played and tested before despatch and packaged carefully for shipment.



We have over 100 years of experience in the shop with our master turner having been making pipes for 45 years. I have 28 years of retail and manufacturing experience and the staff contribute at least another 50. So the effect is continuity and it's great that we operate as a really cohesive team. One of our strengths is that we can achieve an individual bagpipe made to fit the

customer - bespoke but not expensive.

From the bag, through the drones and the reeds, all are individually hand crafted to achieve the highest quality possible. Begg Bagpipes offer a depth of experience and expertise that you will rarely find available elsewhere.

James C Begg

Testimonials

If you would like to comment on any aspect of Begg Bagpipes for inclusion on the web site, we'd be pleased to hear from you - click on the link below and then my email link on the home page, or go to the Testimonials section on the web site.

Bill Begg

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