

# Welcome to Begg Bagpipes

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

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## Newsletter - April

Dear Customer,

Welcome to April's newsletter.

I am pleased to report that bag sales are going through the roof and it's back to the hay days of the early 80s before synthetic bags were about. It looks like people are returning to the original and best type of bags. Our international business continues to grow strongly, including a recent order from Mr Jaswant Singh of the Malaysian Sikh Band based in Kuala Lumpur. A sign of how well the business is going generally is in the size of my postage bill - it is one of the few bills that I like to see growing!

It also seems busy in Ireland currently with the O'Tooles/Slot's recent concert and the Field Marshall's two concerts at the end of March - must be putting the frighteners onto other bands in that these two will be fully up to speed at the start of the new season.

The Strathclyde Police issue, reported in last month's newsletter, seems still not quite settled and I continue to receive rumblings of discontent about the situation - will keep you posted.

We get a fair number of learner pipers visiting the shop for equipment and advice, and one such recent visit was particularly pleasing - he had been recommended to come and see us by Ronnie Browne, the famous Scottish folk singer and founding member of the Corries - Ronnie's comment was "It is a great wee shop." Very nice.

Yours Aye,

James C Begg

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## News

Inveraray Pipe Band under Stuart Liddell are holding their now annual junior solo piping event on Saturday 4th April. Begg Bagpipes are pleased to donate our hand made blackwood practice chanter for event 5 - strathspey and reel, with the idea that getting a good quality chanter will be ideal for this age group and assist in raising standards even further.

Planning is well underway for the Piping Live! Event in Glasgow in August. I am hoping to do a workshop/promotion as part of it but more on this next month.

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### **Top Tip - Chanter Reeds**

Don't play a bagpipe reed that is too strong for you. Comfort is a major factor when playing the pipes. You may want a new reed to be slightly stronger initially as it will weaken to your comfort zone after a few plays. A weak reed, whilst easy to blow, has little life and will not give much enjoyment. I would advise a medium strength reed to be best option.

The strength of the reed is not dependent on size - a large person does not always equate to needing a strong reed and so therefore you should go with what is suitable for you.

A good example for you to think about is this: people are all different and I discovered by accident that the discarded reeds of a friend of mine were perfect for me - I just made sure that when he was renewing his reed, I grabbed the old one and it saved me all the hard work of blowing a new one in!

Pipe bands seem to encourage pipers to blow strong reeds and you can see the advantage as this gives more volume.

Drone power/quality is often ignored and the chanter reed is given all the attention. However the drones give a wall of sound and provide the harmonics-organ effect. The Field Marshall are a great example of my point with drones being of equal importance to the chanter reed.

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### **The Top Three Tunes - By Captain( rtd) S. Samson M.B.E.**

#### **1. The Old Rustic Bridge - 4/4 March.**

I particularly like this tune as it is simple and very melodic. I have used this tune many times with Massed Pipes and Drums and it is very effective when played with harmonies.

#### **2. Mrs MacPherson of Inveran by G S MacLennan - Reel.**

G S MacLennan has written many fine tunes but this has to be my favourite reel. It is a difficult tune to play due to the amount of embellishments in it. However the musical phrases are really quite simple and I like how the phrases are so similar within each part, either a note higher or lower. It is musically well balanced in its structure.



### 3. The Earl of Seaforth's Salute - Piobaireachd.

I like this piobaireachd and have played it for many years. It is one of these tunes that each time I play it I never play it exactly the same. The musical expression and pace of this tune very much depends on one's mood at the time. The timing of the Ground and the following two variations are very tricky and I like how these variations musically progress.

Stuart Samson.

( Photo shows Stuart as Pipe Major of the Gordon Highlanders along with Drum Major Jeff Harper, before the Gordons' amalgamation with the Queen's Own Highlanders to form the Highlanders.)

During Captain Stuart Samson's distinguished 30 year Army career, he has served as the Pipe Major of the Gordon Highlanders, Pipe Major of the Highlanders and as the Director of Army Bagpipe Music. Now retired from the Army, he is currently in charge of the degree course at the National Piping Centre, following on in the footsteps of Major Gavin Stoddart. Beyond the Centre, Stuart organises massed pipes and drums and obviously with his experience in this field is well suited for it -I suspect the Old Rustic Bridge is top of his list when picking massed tunes. Stuart has had a bespoke bag made for him by Begg Bagpipes very recently and I'm glad to report he is happy with it . Stuart is a member of the Spirit of Scotland Superband and it is likely we see more of him in the world of solo piping this year.

Thanks Stuart, for your top tunes selection. Watch out for other world class pipers making their selection in future issues, including those based outside of Scotland.



#### Special Offer - College of Piping Tutor Books

Following my enjoyable return visit to the College of Piping, this month's special offer is 20% off the price of the College of Piping Tutor books - Part 1 and Part 2 are available.

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#### Field Report - Uist and Barra Piping Competition, Saturday 14th March.

The annual Glasgow Uist and Barra Association Piping Competition at the College of Piping went off very well and all enjoyed it . It was a good day weather wise and as I took the underground from the City Centre, I felt somewhat reminiscent of days gone by - as a young boy travelling on the underground from what was then a very rough, cold, dark Govan to the

College of Piping for my lessons from Duncan Johnstone, Duncan MacFadyen and others. The highlight was not just the craic with both Duncans but the chips round the corner at the Philadelphia fish shop on the way home after the gruelling lessons - it's still there . You knew on a Monday night you had had a lesson -it was hard going -"that's wrong" was the comment most heard from the two Duncans -and that was before a note was played -what an experience!

So onto the event itself which was extremely well organised by the committee of the Uist and Barra. I know them all well from the ceilidhs that they run on a regular basis and the next one is on Friday 24th April at the Whitefield Road Community Centre, Ibrox, Glasgow - would recommend it to you -very few do it so well. The event was held upstairs in the new concert hall and a large crowd enjoyed the day. I only heard some light music (march, strathspey and reels) and the standard overall was perhaps not very good from a musical point of view but that changed when Gordon Walker appeared. This was piping at its very best - the feet were tapping, the hall rocked and a masterly performance ensued. There could only be one winner.

It was also very good to have the 2 jigs after the MSR -not only did it save time tuning etc but we have to remember that not every person in the audience is a piping expert. Many are more interested in being entertained and this is where the jig hit the spot. It is harder work for the pipers but if you are going to put yourself up there, you have to go with what is asked of you - hence the professional Mr Walker found it all a bit of a "stroll in Kelvingrove Park".

Many thanks to the Uist and Barra for the hospitality and I look forward to next year, which will I think be the 63rd staging of this prestigious event.

James C. Begg



### **Milngavie Pipe Band in Verona, Italy**

At the September 08 weekend, Milngavie Pipe Band represented Scotland at the Tocati Festival of Ancient Street Games held in Verona, Italy. This is an annual festival which focuses on the traditional games of Italy alongside those of a guest country- previous

participants have included Spain and Croatia. The whole town is closed to traffic for the weekend which makes a great atmosphere with crowds milling around the piazzas, watching demonstrations of wrestling, stone putting and hammer throwing while some tried their hand at caber tossing, conkers and even joined the Jedburgh Hand ba players in their mad sport.

The band began with a street parade and short performance at the opening ceremony, then as darkness fell pipers were dispatched to the top of all the

major towers in the city to play Highland Cathedral in unison. It was a spectacular way to announce the presence of "i Scozzesi" and the festival seemed to gather momentum from then on - at one point it was reported that 9 million people were watching on TV! It was a great experience for the band members and a well organised festival in a beautiful city. The Veronese were a very appreciative audience and the invasion of kilties seemed to catch everyone's imagination.

Since the trip, the band has inherited a new drum corps, which leaves the pipers a bit outnumbered and we would be glad to invite any grade 3 players to join us with a view to competing this season. Please contact P/M Peter Maxwell on 0141 563 8333 if you are interested. It should be pointed out that we can't guarantee gigs like the Tocati one every year!

Rona Dawson

Thanks Rona, and it sounds like everyone had a great time.

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## YouReport

If you would like to report on any aspect of the Piping World from wherever you live, we'd be pleased to include it in this Newsletter and our website - click on the link below and then my email link on the home page, or copy and paste [bill@beggbagpipes.com](mailto:bill@beggbagpipes.com)

Thanks

Bill Begg  
[www.beggbagpipes.com](http://www.beggbagpipes.com)

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