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[April Newsletter](#)

Dear Piping Enthusiast,

Spring has sprung (almost), the daffs are out and the twitter of wildlife is in the air. The bagpipe world in the Northern Hemisphere is stirring from a harsh winter. We expected and got a smattering of snow and living in an oceanic temperate country, we are generally content with the weather's ebb and flow of a variable Scottish day .What else would we talk about? One weekend in particular resulted in chaos with all sorts of transport and school closures. It even went as far as causing the Uist and Barra Solo Piping to be postponed, and resulted in some light hearted derision from our Piping cousins in Canada - by comparison to a Canadian winter, it was only a few snowflakes but the country still ground to a halt.

Bagpipes of course are just as unpredictable as the weather and some other facets of life, and in many ways, more extreme and perplexing. When asked why he never got married, a famous piper once said "I've got enough trouble with my bagpipe" - Ha-ha, the old ones are the best!

It's time again to look forward to a new season and the toil of practice is nearly behind us. Blood, sweat, tears and a few drams; the new medleys chosen; drummers baying for the start line; all thinking this will be the year; why wouldn't the judges like that quirky tune - it's bound to go down a storm; why would they not love it; it's the dog's doodahs of piping medleys with a orgasmic 7 minutes of pure joy; no more now of "what does that judge know" ; never even heard of him; why does he wear hearing aids; his kilt doesn't even fit.

Well, some of the past misgivings may vanish this year with the introduction of consultation between judges and this may be of use. The huge disparities in past results of one judge having a band in first place and another judge having the same band in last place may disappear. I would not bet on this saving some judges blushes but will we end up with a result being somewhat of a hotchpotch? I hope not. The VAR in football is a comparable analogy, with the ref terrified to make a bold judgment - damned if he does or damned if he doesn't. Anyway, no matter the outcome, it is certainly worthwhile to give the new system a try.

Yours aye,
James C. Begg

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News

The big news announcement recently was the merging of [The National Piping Centre](#) with that old grandee [The College of Piping](#). This was always a possibility of the old guard at the College losing its way against the

perceived injustice of past squabbles. For a while now, there has been a rather petulant, unfavourable tone emanating from the College which, if anything, has been ramped up in recent times. Finance seems to be at the heart of the issue - the College was never run as a hard core business, with lessons either being really cheap and in some cases free. This of course was part of the College's mission and ethical appeal, and in fact, I personally benefitted from the fee structure - but as we all know, businesses and premises don't operate on thin air but if it hadn't been for the College's ethos, I may never have become a piper or started a piping business. I have always thought it was a good thing to have two schools of learning in Glasgow, with choice and competition between the two spurring things along. So, I am sad in some ways that the COP will not be as it used to be in my days, but combining both centres of excellence should provide good economies of scale and cross fertilisation. Add in the Piping Centre's powerful financial backing and you give long term viability to both institutions. We wish the new combined venture all the very best for the future.

p.s. if they go for a new logo, I hope they incorporate that of the COP - it is rather evocative and shouldn't disappear.



Special Offer - [synthetic pipe chanters by James Begg](#)

Ok, we have all heard the one about buy 1 get 1 free. This is not quite in the same category nor does it have the same ring - **buy 5 get 1 free**, but it is still a great offer for this month only.



This would be of particular interest to a new band on start up or a band looking for new chanters with a good tone without breaking the bank. So if you need 5, 10, 15 or 20 get cracking and pick up a free one with every 5 ordered.

Top Tip - Drone Reeds

We sometimes overlook the really strong effect a well selected set of drone reeds can have on volume, tone and balance. You don't necessarily need a strong pipe reed for volume. Get a strong, deep bass - this is crucial. It supplies the depth and a reed that is more like a tenor is of no use. Select tenors with a depth of sound that sit an octave above your bass. There is the school of thought that one tenor may be slightly lighter and that would be generally be the middle drone. The reason for this is it does not overpower the other reeds and makes it easier to lock in the third reed when tuning. Therefore if there is slight drifting, it won't be noticed as much. However, if reeds are well selected, the reed won't alter during playing. The idea that we have 3 drones all sounding does not necessarily mean we have good tone and sound. Initial choice of reeds is critical. Pick badly and you're stuck with your choice so it is worth spending time on your selection

and taking advice where you can ([don't hesitate to ask me](#)). Synthetic reeds may be a quick and simple solution resulting in an average tone - this could well suit the guy who can't decide which cane reed is better than another but hey, mediocrity is not a great policy. Quality of sound is paramount and this is why many of the top players and bands predominantly use cane reeds and leather bags (with perhaps a sneaky synthetic reed in the mix to help with stability).

Tune of the Month

Back in May 2016, I went away for a holiday with my brothers to Loch Melfort and reported in a subsequent newsletter about a great march from there - John MacFadyen of Melfort. Well, Dave Macpherson from Downunder recently wrote to me and suggested that I should recommend other good tunes to our readers, and so with thanks to Dave, here is another.

The Marchioness of Tullybardine's Welcome to Blair Castle

[Parts 1 and 2](#) [Part 3 and 4](#)

The following is a quote courtesy of Wikipedia:

The composer is variously given in bagpipe collections as "A. Duff" (by P.M. William Ross) and C. Duff (David Glen, Donald MacPhee, Scots Guards). David Glen's collection (Book 10, p. 1) gives the tune as "The Marchioness of Tullybardine's Welcome to Blair Castle" and says it was "comp'd by Chas. Duff, Donavourd, 1863" (Donavourd is in the neighborhood of Blair Atholl, the seat of the Marquis and Marchioness of Tullybardine). If that is the case, the march was written to honor Louisa Moncreiffe, daughter of Sir Thomas Moncreiffe, 7th Baronet, who married John Stewart-Murray, Marquess of Tullibardine, in 1863. They had four sons (of whom the eldest died in infancy) and three daughters (all of whom survived to adulthood).

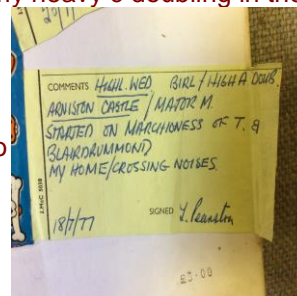
The Duchess of Atholl died in Italy in July 1902, aged 58.

I have always liked the Glen books and especially how the titles are more expanded. So I am going with C Duff and the extended title. It's easy for the sake of convenience to chop titles since some are a bit of a mouthful. Dr Ross' March instead Dr Ross' 50th Welcome to the Argyllshire Gathering is a case in point and many other examples exist. I generally like Glen's piobaireachd layout too and the style of tunes. With the complete score written out, there is no confusion as to what line is next. It starts at the beginning and proceeds directly to the end. This is unlike Kilberry where it can be tricky unless you are guided to find the path or indeed Thomason, which is beyond my intellect - unless I can find another extra day in the week!

There are many great marches but I think this one is melodic throughout, with drive and interesting changes. It's not easy but I hope it's a good test after John Macfadyen of Melfort. I prefer to not speed it up too much but give it more thrust as the parts evolve with an overly heavy c doubling in the last bar - hang on it till you can't hang any more.

I learned this tune with Tommy Pearson on a summer school at the College of Piping in Glasgow. I still have notes from Tommy written in my 1974 era Scots Guards' book and in fact, I also have an original 1954 Scots Guards' in my collection. Tommy was a most interesting guy - very quiet and as he taught, he would wander off and look out the window. This was slightly disconcerting but at end of the tune, he would just briefly say what was wrong and write it down so you would not forget the next time. The [photo](#) is an example of his notes.

He never shouted but stuck to his task of intelligent comment - a great teacher.



Field Report - Who to watch out for in 2018

Well, this Field Report is coming to you from my nice warm workshop - too parky for Fields!

Balagan, from the lovely country of Denmark may be the band to make its mark in the grade 2 Championships. With the move of a few top bands to grade 1, it clears the arena for fresh faces. Balagan were a bit light on numbers last year but that has been addressed with the addition of some top Scottish players including the ever busy Roddy Macleod. Distance for practicing may be the big issue with half the band in Scotland with the rest in Denmark and Europe. This seems not to be an issue with many bands which are split in half - FMM is a prime example with half in Ireland and Scotland plus more dispersed players commuting from Oz and elsewhere. However, it must be a real challenge logistically as well as financially. The City of London will be another band to look out for. Lots of effort has been put in from this band and they should be a force to be reckoned with - it should be a big help being able to draw from a large pool of players around a city like London. In Grade 1, who would vote against Inveraray? They have a [concert](#) on May 4th in Ballymena, N. Ireland which will be well worth catching if you can. In amongst his massive commitment to the Band and his solo career, Stuart is ensuring the Liddell dynasty will continue with another off-spring just arrived - congratulations Stuart! Will this cause him to take the eye off the bag? Not a chance! The band has quality right across piping and drumming - no weakest link here.

FMM will be up for the challenge as always and can be relied on to push the current champs all the way. This will be a fight to the finish with no holds barred. Others who will be up for it will be Shotts, along with Scottish Power and the other Irish class act St Lawrence O'Toole - SLOT are doing the pre worlds concert this year. The SFU will no doubt be improving as well as many others that take the time money and effort to go Worlds. Make no mistake - all these guys practice till they are blue in the face when they take the decision to travel to Scotland.

Other tips for this year would include St Thomas Alumni from Florida and The City of Dunedin in Grade 2.

So all in all, there is a good lot to look forward to.

YouReport

If you would like to report on any aspect of the Piping World from wherever you live, or if you would like to comment on any articles or issues, we'd be pleased to hear from you. Email to bill@beggbagpipes.com



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