

Welcome to Begg Bagpipes

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

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Newsletter - August

Dear Customer,

Welcome to the busiest month of the piping year. We have the Piping Live! event from August 11th to the 17th, which is a jam-packed week with so many different events to choose from - check out the link below for more information. Some of the highlights include the House of Edgar Shotts and Dykehead giving a concert on the Wednesday followed of course by the World Pipe Band Championships on the Saturday. At the end of the month, we have the famous Cowal Championships "doon the watter" at Dunoon and this always makes for a great day or week-end trip. Solo piping is also much to the fore with the Argyllshire Gathering on 27th/28th Aug, whilst the Northern Meeting heads back to its spiritual home at Eden Court, Inverness on 4th/5th September after a short spell at the lovely Highland resort of Aviemore. We also continue our field reports this month, with the renowned Jack Henderson of Scottish Power Pipe Band reporting from the European Championships in Lisburn, N. Ireland - thanks Jack.



Yours Aye,

James C Begg

p.s Are you in Glasgow for the World Championships? Then why not join us in the shop on Thursday the 14th or Friday the 15th August and see our in-house master-craftsmen at work. Perhaps treat yourself to a chanter and see it getting made in front of you or alternatively select your own cow or sheep skin and we will manufacture your bag for you and send it on when completed. Even if you just fancy some piping chat, we'd be pleased to see you.

[Link to Piping Live! Website](#)

Testimonials

Our thanks go to Graeme Silvester from Australia for suggesting that we should have a Testimonial section on the web site. Graeme has sent in the first one, and when I read it, I wondered if he had my brother mixed up with someone else! But seriously, 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

www.beggbagpipes.com

News

Along the Road - a new collection of music for the Highland Bagpipe by Iain MacDonald of Canada.

Congratulations to Iain on his new book, which will be published on the week of the World Championships and will be available from the shop and on-line. I have had the pleasure of knowing and playing with Iain over the years, initially with Renfrew's Babcock Band in 1979. Iain had come over to Scotland from his native Saskatchewan to enhance his piping skills and experience, and had the good fortune to study under the famous Pipe Majors Iain MacLeod and Donald MacLeod. Both he and another Babcock's piper at the time, Iain McKerrel, have done so much for piping development and put a lot back into it with their dedication and enthusiasm. I haven't seen the book yet, but believe me, I will be first in the queue to own one!



Had an interesting interview /recording with Professor Collier Hyams of Georgetown University, Washington DC. He is putting together a comprehensive overview on piping, with an emphasis on piobaireachd, and this will provide a fully researched benchmark on the subject for future generations. He interviewed many piping luminaries so it was a privilege to be included in his research. I really enjoyed Collier's company, even although he was having a bit of a "bad hair" day - his camera was playing up, he crashed his car into a barrier and then he proceeded the wrong way up a one-way street!

Top Tip

Perhaps one of the hardest items for learner pipers to get to grips with is the pipe chanter reed. I have already covered one aspect of the reed in a previous newsletter and suggested that keeping it in the stock is the best policy. However, another important issue is that a lot of beginners usually persevere with reeds that are too strong for them to blow or are in fact of a poor tonal quality.

Tone itself, at least to begin with, is not that crucial and it is more important to be comfortable with the strength of reed. You can now actually buy an easy reed that will be a pleasure to play straight away, and avoids the need for hours of labour trying to play a new reed in. If you don't want to go down this route, the reed bridle is a very good item to soften a new reed. You can also squeeze the lips of the reed to ease the reed slightly or if more drastic measures are required, squeeze the base. Another option is to sandpaper the base or use a sharp knife to take some cane off at the base of the reed. This needs to be handled carefully since you can destroy the reed altogether but perhaps if your bank balance is sound it's worth the risk!

The reed bridle however is the safest option. It clamps over the base of the reed between the hemp and the cane and works with the use of the screw on the

side. By tightening the screw you can make the reed as easy as you like and eventually you would remove it when the reed softens to a comfortable level in time. Some players use orthodontic bands that are water resistant and are available from me but there is the problem of the band moving or indeed squeezing the reed just too much - the reed then gets choked and does not vibrate freely. There is a similar effect from synthetic bags and synthetic bags fitted with a cannister, in that the bagpipe does not oscillate/vibrate with freedom and is restricted with its volume and output i.e you are putting far more in than you are getting out. It also needs to be remembered that a new reed needs time to settle and may get harder initially rather than easier. Order a bridge online or in the shop or why not take advantage of August's Special Offer below.

So take action of some sort -I have loads of customers who say "Help - my pipes are too strong!" and the solution is actually readily achievable.

The Top Three Tunes - by Stuart Liddell

1. Thunderstruck - a composition by Gordon Duncan.
2. The Abercairney Highlanders - a 2/4 March by Angus McKay.
3. John MacKechnie's Big Reel (trad.)



This month's top tunes have been selected by Mr Stuart Liddell from Inveraray. Stuart is a major force in today's piping, playing with the Simon Fraser University Pipe Band and running the prize-winning Inveraray Juvenile Band - both bands of course using Beggs Bags. In addition, Stuart has won many of the top awards in solo piping, including the Gold Medal at the Argyllshire Gathering (2000), the Gold Medal at the Northern Meeting (2004), and the former winner's Clasp at the Northern Meeting (2007). Although he is known for his fast and flashy playing with innovative arrangements of standard piping tunes, his impressive collection of prizes demonstrate that he is also well-versed in traditional playing styles- we see this in his selection. It is also interesting to note that like Gavin Stoddart in a previous newsletter, he has selected the Abercairney Highlanders. He also replicates one of John Wilson's Top Tunes with John MacKechnie's Big Reel.

Stuart has other musical talents, including that of tuning pianos. If you thought 3 drones and a chanter are on occasions difficult to tune spot on, you can imagine the difficulty with 88 keys on a piano. I am always pleased to hear from such an easy going person as Stuart. He has been a customer for many, many years and I well recall Barry Donaldson of Strathclyde Police helping Stuart to select cane reeds in my old Renfield Street kiltmaking shop -that was not yesterday and he certainly doesn't need any help now!

Please get in touch with us if you would like the music for these or any other pipe tunes.

Thanks Stuart, for your top tunes selection.

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

[Click here to see Stuart in Concert](#)

August Special Offer

Two special offers this month:

1. A free bridle, with every online order placed during the month of August.
2. 12 nearly new blackwood shepherd bagpipe chanters -holes slightly adapted but still a very good buy at £90 each or take them all for £80 each. Only 12 chanters so don't hang around!



Special Feature

Field Report - The European Championships.

The European Pipe Band Championships this year were in the most beautiful City of Lisburn, Northern Ireland at the Lagan Valley LeisurePlex. The City and the facilities proved to be excellent with everything needed close to the field. Not only that but the weather also proved to be the best of the year with the temperature soaring to over 24 C with the sun shining the whole afternoon. All of the bands sounded very good – the weather must have helped! Among the many highlights, I thought that Tayside Police played well, as did House of Edgar Shotts and Dykehead with drones and chanters sounding as good as usual. Among the great Irish representation, the St Laurence O'Toole was excellent though perhaps their phrasing could have been a little better in the march -they did not seem to quite match their recent winning performance of Birmingham. Field Marshall Montgomery's whole set up here was outstanding. The only thing that marred this near perfect performance was a slightly early E in the introduction. Their march ,PM Thomas MacAllister, was excellent, followed by the strathspey Susan MacLeod which had wonderful timing and they finished off with the best rendering of the reel Charlie's Welcome that I have ever heard! As you can see from the above there was no doubt about Field Marshall being the best band and they also won the drumming.

From then on it was a matter of taste and I don't think the judges were far out in giving St.Laurence O'Toole 2nd with Shotts 3rd , Boghall 4th , Strathclyde Police 5th and Scottish Power 6th.

Jack Henderson

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