

## Welcome to Begg Bagpipes

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

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### Newsletter - July

Dear Customer,

Welcome to our 5th newsletter. We are now well into the piping season and the British Championships in Birmingham's Cannon Hill Park have just passed last Saturday. We had our roving or should I say raving reporter there (my brother Bill who is a fiddler and piper, as well as being the editor of this newsletter) - check out his report below. Beyond this, the European championships are on July the 26th in Lisburn, Northern Ireland. This then takes us into the busiest month of the year with the World Pipe Band Championships at Glasgow Green on the 16th August- the Worlds are now well established at the Green .The setting however, is perhaps not the best with regard to parking and beauty, but its central location wins out in the end. As Greg Sharp of Kintails suggested to me, it would be good to have a formal parade of all the bands either to or from George Square, as we have at the Cowal Games. We do have a good parade on the Friday from Blythwood Square just around the corner from our Bath Street shop to the Square by mainly selected overseas bands. However it would be far more interesting for all to have a massive turnout in the city from all the bands. Perhaps we need to be going back to the days of being more appealing to the public and not just fulfilling our self-interest in competitions .



Yours Aye,

James C Begg

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### News

The Blackheads, an American Rock Group, popped into the shop whilst they were playing at T in the Park and King Tuts .They were doing a TV spot for channel 4's The Bite, and wanted some video footage in a bagpipe environment. I had some good patter with them.



A new "super band", The Spirit of Scotland, is forming shortly and will be using Beggs sheepskin bags. This is a band under Pipe Major Roddy Macleod ( who featured in last month's newsletter with his Top Three Tunes) with the initial aim of competing at the forthcoming World Championships. Its members will consist of some of the world's greatest individual players and it be quite a challenge in a short space of time for Roddy to mould their individual brilliance into a cohesive unit. It is an exciting project and I look forward to hearing the superb band in

action. Rumour has it that a tour of Brazil may be on the cards for next year.

New Items - The Coyne collection of music at £15 and the long delayed Field Marshall DVD from the Glasgow Concert Hall at £16.50. Check out the website if you would like to order.

Are you in Glasgow for the Worlds? Then why not join us in the shop on Thurs 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 skin cow /sheep and we will manufacture your bag for you and send it on when completed.

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## Top Tip

Practice chanters.

Whilst we have many world class pipers as customers, some customers are pipers that are just starting. It is perhaps stating the obvious but when some customers buy chanters, they can on occasions not even know which end to blow into!

So here we go with perhaps stating the obvious.

1 The reed is placed in the top mouthpiece section. It is important to insert the top section of the chanter fully over the hemp as the resultant sound will be poor and flat if the top section and main body of the chanter are not tight against each other.

2 We are looking for a sweet mellow tone and not a coarse,croaking flat-pitched sound.

3 A new player will tend to prefer a stronger reed to begin with as he or she tends to blow too hard. However,it would be better to try and adjust your strength of blowing to accommodate the reed rather than over-exerting yourself by blowing a reed too hard. Therefore, what you may prefer initially will alter as you develop your technique.

4 The hemp should be tight enough not to let the blowpipe top wobble but not so tight that it seizes on when moisture expands the hemp.

5 The chanter reed can be adjusted with hemp added or taken away from the bottom of the reed -upwards positioning of the reed in the chanter flattens the pitch and downwards sharpens it. We are looking for a balance between the top and the bottom hand -i.e the high A matches the low A and the E is in tune with the D as you progress up the scale. It really is quite easy to achieve and a chanter that is in tune is much more appealing to play. So get a good chanter and reed before you do anything else.

6 The practice chanter reeds will get wet when you play and the degree will vary from player to player. Moisture will be most apparent in a synthetic chanter. The blackwood chanter I make can help slightly in this regard by stopping some of the moisture flow. Take the top off and blow out any excess; blow through the reed likewise. It may appropriate to have a second reed to replace the moist

one. It is also a good sign to some extent when moisture appears as it is a sign of practice - little and often is preferable practice to say one long weekly session.

7 Apply almond oil occasionally to stop the blackwood chanter from splitting - this is particularly important in hot, dry countries.

8. Long chanters are an option and may suite some players who have particularly big hands but I would normally recommend a standard size - it is generally more comfortable for most players and tends to lead to a more accurate and tidier technique. This again is open to opinion so the best plan is to try a few out to see what fits best. We have a broad range in the shop as well as different prices to suit your pocket.

To sum up, practice chanters should be comfortable to blow, should provide a sweet melodic sound throughout the scale and be enjoyable to play. They should of course also be pleasant on the ear of anyone listening.

p.s. Circular breathing has been used in the past to produce a more constant sound -however, this is difficult to do but it is an interesting technique should you like to explore it.

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## The Top Three Tunes - by P/M Gavin Stoddart

1. The Lament for the Children - this piobaireachd is a masterpiece of composition, using only 5 notes of the pentatonic scale 'D' and lasts 18 minutes.
2. The Abercairney Highlanders - a 2/4 March and a great favourite of Gavin's father, who also called it the Piper's Graveyard.
3. Blair Drummond - a fine strathspey.



Major Gavin Stoddart, MBE, BEM is very much a military man, having joined the 1st Battalion of the Scots Guards in 1966 as a piper under P/M Angus MacDonald. After serving as pipe sergeant, he transferred in 1979 to the Royal Highland Fusiliers as Pipe Major, and subsequently served at the Army School of Bagpipe Music in Edinburgh Castle. In September 1997, he was promoted Major and in 1999 all piping and drumming schools within the Army merged to form the Army School of Bagpipe Music and Highland Drumming under his command.

Gavin has composed some great tunes over the years, not least of all Murdo's Wedding and Ladies of the Alamo. He also composed the tune which was played as the Stone of Destiny crossed the border between England and Scotland on its famous journey back from Westminster Abbey to its rightful home in Scotland. . Gavin is now retired from the Army and is a Senior Solo Adjudicator at the National Piping Centre. He is in great demand world-wide both as a judge and as an instructor.

There are few medals for piping that Gavin has not won and I am glad that I have had the honour of his company on several occasions.

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

Thanks Gavin, for your top tunes selection.

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

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## July Special Offer

James C. Begg standard practice chanter, hand crafted in african blackwood reduced from £69 to £59 plus vat. Order on-line and also receive free delivery to any part of world.



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## Special Feature

Field Report - British Pipe Band Championships, Cannon Hill Park, Birmingham June 28th 2008.

With some 3000 pipers, drummers, drum majors and enthusiasts having attended the British Championships, Birmingham took on a distinctly Scottish hue today -at least in the Edgbaston area, which is normally more famous for its cricket. The weather was overcast although it fortunately remained dry for the whole day. It actually says a lot for the commitment of bands across all the grades that they travelled great distances in many cases to be here, particularly when their big moment is only for several minutes during a competition.



Robert Wiseman Dairies Vale of Atholl Pipe Band must be pondering their outing having been disqualified for playing the wrong March, Strathspey and Reel – what a shame. Similarly, some controversy surrounds Field Marshall Montgomery who were voted first and last by the two piping judges respectively - I also had the FMM ahead on the piping. It seems P/M Parkes had a problem with his bag and a stock came out when he struck up (it was a Begg bag but not tied in by us!). Anyway, despite these mis-haps, it was a great day out and a great spectacle for the residents of Birmingham who happened to be passing through the Park. Parking and admission were both free, which is always a good thing when so many Scots are around (!), and Birmingham City Council gave the event a lot of help – even the Lord Mayor, Councillor Chauhdry Abdul Rashid (pictured above), put in an appearance to show his support.

My only criticism would be that the bands, whether competing or practising/tuning, were all too close together. As a result, it was very difficult trying to listen intensely to one band's performance when you could also hear one or more of the other bands playing at the same time.

From Eire, St Laurence O'Toole or SLOT as they are known (and who also play Begg bags), came out on top and added the British Championship to their recent Scottish success – can they now go all the way and win the grand slam of all five majors?

Bill Begg

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