

## Welcome to Begg Bagpipes

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

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### Newsletter - June

Dear Customer,

Welcome to our 4th newsletter and it's been a very busy May in the shop and on the web - thanks for your custom and support. We are now seeing more visitors from overseas and in particular from Germany, Australia and France. The euro is good at the moment for a lot of customers, making the quality products from Begg Bagpipes even more affordable.



I enjoyed a coffee with Masaki who works in the National Piping Centre. He is over from Japan and has completed the three year piping degree course that the Centre runs - no doubt it was hard work, but worth it in the end. He kindly dropped off the Simon McKerrel/Findlay MacDonald collection of pipe tunes. Lots of interesting modern style tunes with an emphasis on reels and priced at a reasonable £15 (incl.vat).

Hope you enjoy this larger issue and don't miss the special offer on hemp below.

Yours Aye,

James C Begg

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



### James in action

Piping in the guests at his nephew's wedding in the magnificent Fyvie Castle, Aberdeenshire - January 2008

James is playing a set of silver and ivory Lawrie pipes from 1909. His MacDonald kilt is augmented beautifully with a silver plaid brooch from the 1820s and a dress hair sporran of similar vintage.

## News

Deger electronic pipes have been a big seller over the last 15 years, and Manfred Deger has just informed me that a new and improved version will be available at the end of June. In some instances, a buzzing sound could be heard with the old model and this has been eliminated on the new one. The battery will be in the top section and the metal strip will disappear. All in all, this is an exciting prospect particularly when it looks as if the price will remain the same.

Gourock Highland Games, now in its 52nd year, went off well on a lovely day with a good sized crowd. It is a well run event so congratulations to the organisers. Lots of bands from the lower grades were in attendance, with some trying out new tunes for the new season. Stirling Schools, under P/M Chris Gibb, sounded good as did Central Scotland Police under P/M Rab Russell in Grade 3. They took 2nd place with an impressive performance, with honours going to Clydebank in 1st place. Grades 1 and 2 went to Scottish Power and Mauchline and District respectively.

It was interesting to note the different sizes of bands in the lower divisions. Some fielded large bands whilst others struggled with numbers - however, size and quality did not always go hand-in hand.....so small bands stick with it, even if it is a bit disheartening when you are light on players.

Don't forget you can get a 10% discount at the coffee shop above me by presenting my business card and I am always up to join you for some piping chat, given half a chance.

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## Top Tip

Hemping.

As in most piping topics, there are different views on how to hemp your bagpipe and today there are many different choices. To try and clarify matters, I can make the following suggestions against the four main choices of waxed hemp, unwaxed hemp, black waxed twine and pvc teflon white plumber's tape.

1. Waxed hemp has the ability to repel moisture and also to produce the nice smooth finish which is popular today. However it can be too "slidey" on the stock joints.

2. Unwaxed hemp is probably the best option for most players. Wax the first layer with thermowax -a tar-like substance. This gives the hemp a grip on the wood. Then continue with the unwaxed hemp-the unwaxed hemp absorbs moisture so don't make it overly tight . You do however need to make sure that the stock joints are a little tighter than the slide joints i.e. you want the slide joints to move and the stock joints to remain rigid as you tune. Remember you still need to be able to take the stock joints out occasionally to adjust the reeds.

3. Black waxed twine is different to hemp and is less absorbent. It's good for the slides -gives a very good finish and makes the slides nice and slippy. You may need to add to the twine occasionally with use. We introduced this to the market

some 15 years ago and everyone else copied it - perhaps we should have patented it!

4. Pvc teflon white plumber's tape is the worst option -looks poor and lets air escape. It also produces unsteady drones and poor tuning, so should be avoided.

So to sum up, the hemp is not just there to hold the pipes together-it has other functions as well. It helps take up moisture, provides a seal, gives a solid tuning platform on the slides and a seal on the drone stocks. It should be noted that the unwaxed and waxed hemp is quite a lot thinner than in the past-i.e. it breaks much more easily these days. It may be advisable when waxing the unwaxed hemp to double it up and then apply it as single layer. I have advised hemp manufacturers that breaking is a problem, but we still await action on their parts to address this issue.

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### **The Top Three Tunes - by Roddy MacLeod MBE**

1. Hugh Kennedy, a 2/4 march composed by Peter MacLeod.

2. Major John MacLellan, a 6/8 march composed by P/M G.S. MacLennan.

3. The Little Cascade, a reel, also composed by P/M G.S. MacLennan.

Roddy MacLeod, arguably the world's greatest piper and multiple winner of many great competitions, is the well known and respected Principal of the National Piping Centre in Glasgow. I was fortunate to have learned the pipes at the same time as Roddy and we became close friends. We don't see as much of each other these days as I would like, since Roddy has huge demands on his time from many different sources. I am pleased however that he continues to play a Begg Bag and it has been a pleasure to have been involved with his hugely successful piping career.



The choice of tunes is interesting in that Hugh Kennedy and the Little Cascade are both very technically demanding and perhaps this accounts for their longevity as all-time favourites. The 6/8 march is more melodic than the 2/4, but still offers the piper a challenge in delivering a good musical performance. Please get in touch with us if you would like the music for these or any other pipe tunes.

Thanks Roddy, for your top tunes selection.

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

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## June Special Offer

Whilst on the subject of hemp from Top Tips, June's special exclusive on-line offer is of course on hemp.



For every order worth £20 (excl vat) or more in June on any product(s) from the website, receive one free large ball of unwaxed hemp, normally selling for £5.53 (excl vat). (Photograph shows two balls.)

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## Special Feature

The Playing Formation of a Pipe Band.

Much has been said and debated over the years on how a pipe band should form up when playing. Some favour an alternative approach by way of copying orchestral set-ups i.e a semi circle, whilst other prefer the traditional full circle approach. It seems somewhat self evident that a full circle offers a far better visual and hearing solution for the Pipe Major and to individual pipers and drummers respectively. Each can clearly hear players on either side and on the opposite side as well whilst being able to maintain full eye contact with the whole band and the Pipe Major in particular. From an audience perspective, the full circle provides a greater all round sound even if some players have their backs to the audience. The semi circle would perhaps offer a better audience visual experience in that the whole band would be facing them more or less "head on", but this would be offset by the audience being compressed into a smaller area and with less surround sound. Judges probably are not concerned one way or the other since the formation is of little relevance to their judging duties - they have complete access to all areas of the competition area no matter how the band lines up.

So all in all, it seems little can be gained by changing the formation and a lot could be lost in terms of the musical experience.

What are you thoughts? Join in the debate!

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*Begg Bagpipes  
202B Bath Street  
Glasgow, Strathclyde G2 4HF*

*United Kingdom*

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