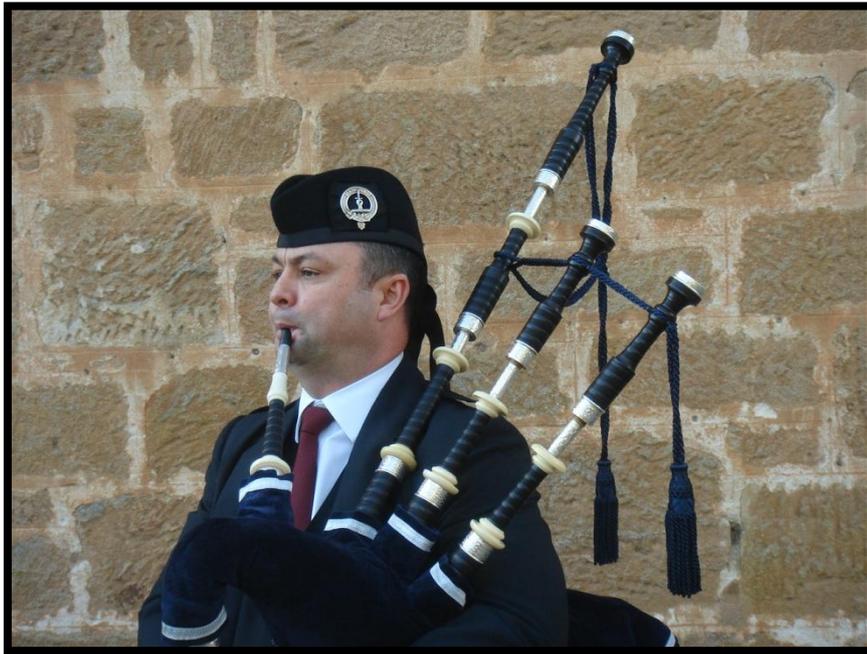


## Brett Tidswell's Bagpipe Profile

Playing a 1930 set of Silver and Ivory Henderson's is a great pleasure, but not without some concerns. I travel a lot as a piper and CITES permits have to be regularly obtained due to the ivory on the pipes, the difficulties with hand luggage and fears of putting pipes in cargo holds etc led me to the decision to build a custom instrument, for band-work and travel.

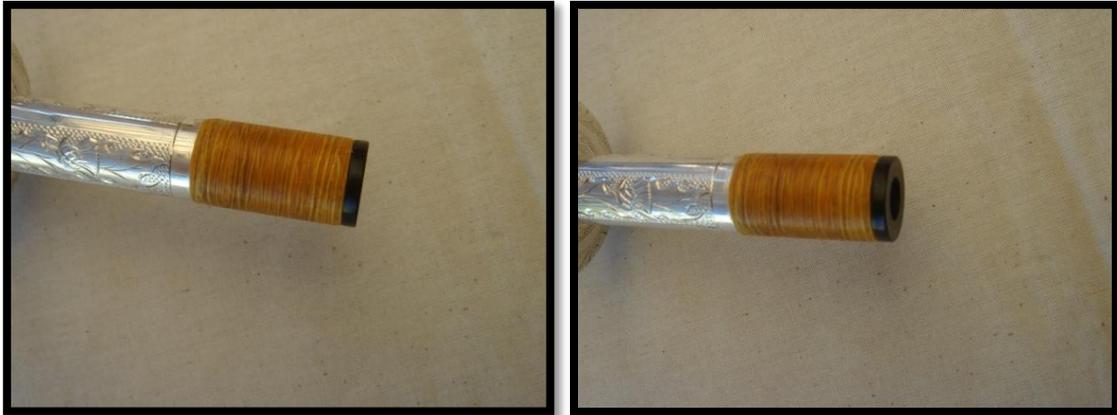


*1930 Henderson Bagpipe.*

Over the years I have played many fine bagpipes and also made many custom changes to instruments, so I had a fairly clear view of what I wanted. First I had to decide on timber and mounts. I had access to a stock of 30 year old ebony, but in our climate I am not convinced that it would be as resilient as I wanted, despite the possible (and debateable) tonal benefits. I decided on an African Blackwood, Henderson style, but what mounts. I have a stock of old ivory, but that puts me back in the same position as before. I thought about a basic set, but there's nothing special or unique about that. You can buy a good basic set of pipes off the shelf from numerous makers of quality instruments.

A "Rolls Royce" was the only option. Hand selected, instrument grade, African Blackwood, mounts by David Marshall Silverworks, in a new thistle design. I also wanted hemp retainers that allow the maximum amount of hemp on the tuning slides, but are squared off and fit so close into the tuning chamber that the hemp has to stay even and cannot roll off the top. We have discussed this at band numerous times. Some of the pipes have retainers that

come unglued often. Plastic is not a good option as it often doesn't adhere well to the timber. Blackwood retainers I think are a great option. My last pipes had them turned in ivory, but that wasn't an option for the purpose of this instrument. A 9mm blow stick bore was essential as I hate any sense of restriction.



*Perfectly fitted Blackwood hemp retainers.*



*Sterling Silver Mounts by David Marshall.*

There are a number of companies that do nice silver, but David has great designs, beautiful engraving and most importantly to me, hollow projection mounts to keep the weight down. I selected a thistle design as I wanted to keep the instrument aesthetically classical in appearance.

In the varied climates in which I play, and considering I am not exactly a dry blower, I decided to use a synthetic bag and canister system. I do not play with any form of hose to the chanter stock though, choosing in preference to use a hose from the blow stock to the back of the bag. This is made from respirator hose that has a huge surface area due to corrugations in its length. Blocked off at the rear end, it has two holes just larger than the blow stick bore to let the air out and retain as much moisture as possible. This is the most effective water trap I have ever used. I found the hose to the chanter stock gave me instability on Piobaireachd high G, and without the chanter feels free, vibrant and easier to blow. I am currently using a Blackwood Sinclair Chanter.

I decided to hemp the pipes with pre-waxed yellow hemp. I have used Teflon tape in past years and find it troublesome. I also believe it compresses very hard and can leak, but also seems to create a harsher tone from the instrument. I have used black waxed hemp before, but the yellow stuff seems to feel nicer on the tuning slides. I lubricate it with a mixture of beeswax and bore oil and the slides with cork grease. Many years ago I had used Vaseline but that makes the wax go dull and sticky.



*Yellow waxed hemp joints.*

Despite the pipes being quite heavy, they sit very well. The blow stick was carefully measured for length and I had to try two bags before I got the size right for my build. I then had to tie the chanter stock in and test a couple of time before I got the positioning correct. Cord spacing also I believe is very important for control, comfort and aesthetics. Time well spent to get the comfort and feel that I wanted.

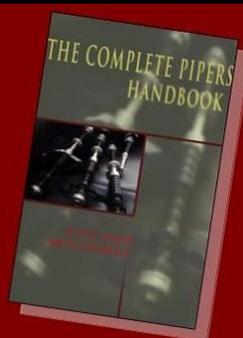


*Full Silver Mounted African Blackwood Bagpipe.*



There are more details of significant and historic bagpipes as well as information on maintenance, refinement and instrument set up to be found in “The Complete Pipers Handbook”, which funds the freely available School of Piping website and is available here:

<http://www.schoolofpiping.com/handbook.html>



## The Complete Pipers Handbook

Is a must for every serious piper. Never before has a more comprehensive guide been published. Maintenance, set up, refinement, tuning, setting up bands, performance psychology and much more!

Available from: [www.schoolofpiping.com](http://www.schoolofpiping.com) selected stockists.