

# MAINTENANCE AND TUNING

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These are a series of instructions that I give to new members of my band. They assist in making everyone aware of the importance of maintenance, cleanliness and care of the instrument.

## HEMPING JOINTS

All joints on the bagpipe must be airtight. Heavily waxed hemp should be used. Start by following the thread turned on the instrument and winding the hemp on tightly, following the thread at all times. The joint should be rolled on a board to compress it until it is the correct diameter for the stock or drone top. Stocks should always be tighter than the drone tops so that they don't turn during tuning. The tuning slides should move freely but be sufficiently tight not to move when the instrument is in use. The drones should then form a solid tube and not bend/rock at the tuning slides when slight pressure is applied.

Joints should be lubricated with cork grease, bearing grease or some other non petroleum based product as Vaseline type products will deteriorate the wax. Joints should be re-wound at any sign of wear or deterioration, if applied correctly the first time, this may only require the outer layer to be replaced. They should be checked every time you play.

## DRONE CORDS

Drone cords should not be too wide apart as they can make your instrument hard to control and move when you march. The loose end of the cord should measure about 13cm from the drone to the top of the tassel. There should be a space of about 14cm from the edge of each drone. The loose end at the top should be knotted to the 1/2 way up the length of the cord running up the bass drone. Check your cords against the Pipe Major's instrument for the sake of uniformity. Cords must always be clean with no fraying on the tassels

## BLOW STICK

Ensure that the blow stick and mouthpiece have a uniformed bore size that is of sufficient diameter to allow air to flow freely with no sign of restriction, usually about 8.5mm. It should be regularly pulled through to ensure that it remains clean and the air flow as efficient as possible. The valve should be tested to ensure that it is airtight each time you play. A valve should not restrict airflow or potential bore size like the "Little Mac" or similar valves, a rubber flapper valve or Moose valve is preferable.

## CHANTERS

Chanters are very delicate they should be installed or removed from the pipes by grasping the bell at the stock end of the chanter. Any lower and it will break. It should also be altered while

playing by twisting in the same place, never any lower. **Treat them like very thin glass**, as they are almost as delicate.

The chanter reed should be kept dry whilst not playing by keeping it in a chanter cap made of a hardwood or plastic. Cane dries the reed too much. The top should be sealed and not open such as an old stock. Be careful not to chip your reed by connecting with the stock when installing or removing your chanter.

The holes on the chanter must be regularly cleaned using a match stick. Never anything which could damage the hole such as a metallic object? The inside of the chanter can be cleaned using a large feather. **NEVER** oil a chanter, it will cause damage! Tape must be regularly replaced and kept in perfect condition so that it will not move during playing.

**NEVER** carve a hole in a chanter yourself. This is a delicate procedure that can permanently damage a chanter if carried out incorrectly. The note becomes unstable if too much is cut from it. Only the top of a hole is carved or taped and at an angle upwards inside the chanter. The ends of tape should all be located along "your" right side of the chanter for ease of alteration.

### **CLEANLINESS**

It is expected that all bores in the pipe, stocks, chanter, bags, hoses etc will be maintained in a perfectly clean state at all times. Dirty bores and stocks create a dull sound. These should be pulled through using a clean cloth and rod or cord tied to the cloth. Do not use anything that might scratch the bore.

If using a canister check for loose rocks or dust in the bag and hoses and remove the dust by blowing through the hose. Check the bag to ensure that it is airtight by corking the stocks and blowing up the bag to see if it holds air. Blow through each stock and block the other end of each hose to ensure that they are not leaking and are free from dust regularly.

In the event that the timber looks dry, particularly the stocks, a small amount of bore oil can be wiped over the internal bores. Never soak your pipes in oil. This will affect the tone, and usually lead to cracking as the aim has to be to keep a constant moisture level in the timber. After a short period wipe any excess oil that remains on the surface.

### **ACCESSORIES**

- In your box you should keep the following:-
- a roll of tape
- waxed thread
- a knife
- any tools for bags or reeds (e.g.: Allen keys or screw drivers)
- cleaning cloths and pull through
- a stick for cleaning stocks
- a box of matches
- corks for stocks and drones

- a spare valve

Please keep these in a box so that nothing soils your pipes or punctures your bag!

### **TUNING PROCEDURE RULES**

- Blow your drones before playing to check that they are well set up and steady.
- All chanters must be played for the same amount of time; the whole band starts tuning at the same time and plays constantly during the tuning procedure.
- You should tune up in the same conditions as you intend to play. If you have to play in the sun, you tune in the sun. If you play on grass you tune on grass. The entire band must tune under the same conditions. Do not play on bitumen while the rest of the band plays on grass as you will be much sharper when it comes time to tune you. The same if you play in the sun while the band tunes in the shade. Do not stand next to a hot wall, car or under a roof.
- The Pipe Major will guide you as to how long the tune up will be, and start on time! Watch for your turn to be checked. Tuning should be as quick as possible so do not delay and do not play where you cannot see the process taking place.
- Follow the instructions of the person tuning instantly, without hesitation as a delay affects the sound of the whole band.
- When being tuned blow a steady constant tone the same as you should when performing. Do not blow harder when being tuned or drop your pitch with time.

**REMEMBER** the guy tuning the band is under a lot of pressure to check a lot of people and has to deal with many problems very quickly. Make his job easier by presenting with a well set instrument that has been tested briefly before leaving home. Ensure that your instrument is well maintained and abide by his instructions, rapidly and to the letter.

There is a lot more of this type of information to be found in Brett Tidswell's book, "The Complete Pipers Handbook" which funds the freely available School of Piping website and is available here: <http://www.schoolofpiping.com/handbook.html>

