

Dandy Handy

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The Complete Piper's Handbook

By Pipe-Major Brett Tidswell

www.schoolofpiping.com

61 pages

Reviewed by Pete Aumonier

The Complete Piper's Handbook by Brett Tidswell is an outstanding publication for pipers in need of guidance, information and assistance for all things related to bagpipe set-up and maintenance.

Designed to inform even the most novice of pipers, this book takes the player through the simplest of things such as the construction of a practice chanter, to complex issues like repairing warps and cracks in drones.

Experienced professional players may, at first blush, not give much thought to the content of this book. However, that would be a mistake. In my experience, even the best players sometimes lack some basic skills and understanding of bagpipe maintenance and tonal colour and construction.

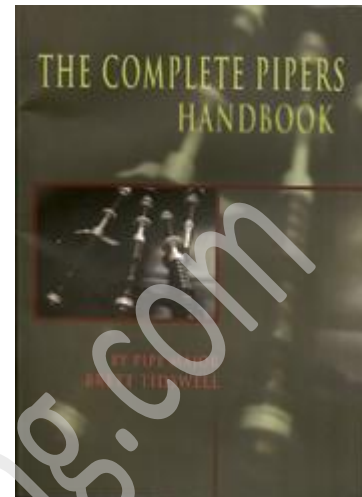
For instructors, *The Complete Piper's Handbook* can be used as a clear guide and curriculum for teaching the basics of the instrument, understanding concepts of tone and tuning, reed balance and manipulation, and a multitude of other bagpipe fundamentals.

The section on chanter reeds is particularly good. What piper, from novice to professional, has not struggled with reed selection and adjustment from time to time? A section devoted to problem-solving is of great value, from reed-strength issues to instability problems, clear, practical and often simple solutions supported by photo illustrations are offered.

Similarly, the section on drone reeds provides clear information on selecting, adjusting and tuning drone reeds. Again, this is great practical guidance supported with visual illustration.

I shared the book with a couple of young players to see what their impressions were of *The Complete Piper's Handbook*. They were very impressed and found it to be informative and of great practical assistance. In their college environment, they deal with players of varying skills and this book provided them with information to solve basic instrument problems along with providing a framework from which to teach.

There are also sections devoted to getting the most out of practicing, whether as a solo player or member of a band, along with how to get the most out of actual performance



–all good, practical information designed to assist in producing the best results.

There was a time when learning the pipes was like serving an apprenticeship. Indeed, this book brought memories of my own time as a student of James Troy. If I needed new drone reeds, he'd pull out the box of cane and we'd make enough reeds until we had what was required in terms of balance, colour, texture, volume etc. I had to tie-in my pipe bags, make reeds, oil drones, hemp them (and then melt wax over the hemp - oh the days before pre-waxed hemp!), even repair drones and chanters when the requisite lathe was purchased. The book even contains a section on how to wear the kilt (and associated accessories). Today, I look around and realize that much of this is missing in the education of pipers.

The Complete Piper's Handbook is professional in presentation and very well formatted. As well as being informative, it is enjoyable, with photos of top pipers such as Donald Bain and Gordon Walker, placed appropriately in sections, giving the reader a connection between the players and bagpipe fundamentals. There is also a nice acknowledgement to R.U. Brown and the impact he made in Australia as evidenced by the formation of the R.U. Brown Piobaireachd Society.

There are countless books of pipe music available today. Brett Tidswell has done a tremendous service to pipers by producing *The Complete Piper's Handbook*. While the amount of quality music and quality teaching today is at an all-time high, since the outstanding *Pipers' Handbook* by Captain John MacLellan in the 1960s, there has not been a book designed to assist the piper with clear, practical advice in maintaining the instrument and understanding how it works.

The Complete Pipers Handbook is available here:

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

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