

# **Lessons learned reproducing Highland piping's most precious relic**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This reflective survey of a 12-year collaboration focuses on problems experienced by the investigators in making a replica of a Highland bagpipe chanter said to be owned by Iain MacAoidh, Am Piobaire Dall (1656–1754). It distils knowledge generated by the team's refusal to compromise the physical evidence of the original, coupled with their determination to produce a reliable professional instrument.

Any attempt to build a rewarding musical instrument on the basis of partial evidence, lacking the knowledge, skills and tools of the original instrument's maker and player is problematic. Some of the hazards were anticipated; others came to light when we had the opportunity of revisiting the original, which was donated in 2010 to the National Piping Centre Museum, Glasgow. Despite significant advances made in the area of staple and reed design in 2011, further revelations and rethinks are anticipated.

In addition to disseminating key aspects of good practice picked up from the fields of experimental archaeology and historical recorder and bassoon making, this paper contributes previously unpublished methodological recommendations and practical solutions. We hope that this will help raise achievement levels in a field where commercial pressures and the absence of formal training or research culture have hitherto hindered the flow of knowledge. Although we address bagpipe makers, most of our recommendations and solutions are also relevant to those measuring and reproducing other early woodwinds.

In summary, this paper offers a checklist of oversights, limitations and preconceptions arising from modern thinking, tools and techniques; a practical demonstration of solutions which might help to advance similar endeavours; and the performance of an excerpt from one of Am Piobaire Dall's pibrochs on a replica that we trust is homing in on the composer's original.

On-going documentation of the Iain Dall chanter project is available at [www.barnabybrown.info](http://www.barnabybrown.info) and [www.goodbagpipes.com](http://www.goodbagpipes.com). The authors can be contacted at [barnaby@pibroch.net](mailto:barnaby@pibroch.net) and [julian@goodbagpipes.com](mailto:julian@goodbagpipes.com).