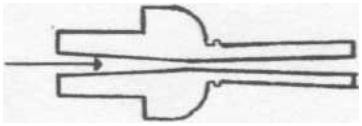
Many good chanters are sharpish, particularly on G' and a slight (fractional) reaming

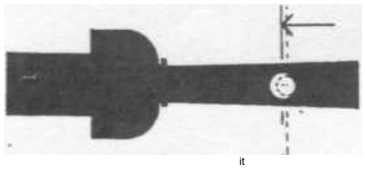


s all that is necessary.

Returning to the chanter "at its basic stage". the positioning of the bottom-hand holes in relation to E should be such that the notes are flattish to E most particularly low A and low G). cone No. 4 (Belling Bottom) has the effect of sharpening the low-hand (A and G. most particularly). This again provides the maker with the latitude to deal with the quirks of the timber and drilling, Belling (within limits) has a desirable effect tonally.

Assuming that all the above has been lone, and the maker "feels" that the tuning cones have been inserted to their limits, certain individual notes may be found to be slightly out of tune. This can be corrected (provided within limits) by undercutting "the top of the hole."

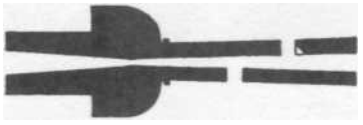
Also, if the hole is on the smallish size. it may be enlarged thus:

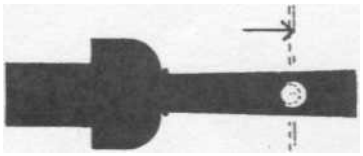


it

shifting the "locus" of the hole towards the top of the chanter.

The opposite treatment to flatten a sharpish applies equally:





II

If the hole has been badly placed in the beginning, too much undercutting may be required endangering the physical strength of the shell, and apart from fracture, may adversely affect tone.

It is my strong conviction that many of the "mass produced" chanters, whilst being fundamentally sound, are not finished in the turning, and are rarely "just right."

THICKNESS OF CHANTER WALL OR SHELL has a marked bearing on tone and resonance. Too much wood, particularly on the bottom-hand and around the two transverse holes controlling low G, has a dulling and flattening effect. Too thin a shell at top has an ill effect most pronounced on F.

CHARACTERISTICS TO LOOK FOR IN TESTING A CHANTER

I do not intend to make any statements with regard to what "concert pitch" or type of tone a chanter should be. These have varied over the years and what is appealing to one is "tasteless" to another. These factors are also so dependent on the reed and the blowing of the player that dogmatism is completely out of order.

1. Several reeds should be used on the one chanter, and the reeds used on several chanters, to ensure that the reed decided on is not at fault.

2. The reed should not be too old, but "blown-in" and not stiff; where the player is able to blow each note to the drones without varying pressure or squealing.

3. It is essential that E and low A tune exactly to the same drones setting. This reed position must be established before any criticism of other notes can be reliable.

Many chanters are flat on the "bottom."

4. The high A should be tested then to this setting. There is a tendency to play the high A flat and accept it as being true.

Whilst it is "not a bad thing" to start with a new reed "just flat" on top, any obtruding flatness is just as incorrect as sharpness.

5. Chanters should be critically tested for both the Gs (high and low) in relation to the A-E-A' and the drones which are only As fundamentally. One has only to listen to a lot of pipes tuning up to hear that they quite often don't sound low G at all, and only the high G in passing. I think it is the two Gs which make the pipe scale so characteristic. There are a vast number of urlars in the ceol mor which make fantastic tuning notes for the two Gs that the modern player is allowing to slip into oblivion. My own personal opinion is that low G is very closely a Major Tone Gap below low A, and the most desirable high G is one very near the octave note above low G. Many chanters have a tendency to be sharpish on high G. There is an opposite trend in some later-day chanters to overdo the flattening of high G.

6. D is a note frequently found to be too sharp in older model chanters, and flat in a very popular modern brand. F is also flattish in this model.

7. Even after accepting that the note ratios of a chanter are harmonious with the drones, a retrogressive trend in modem chanters is the fading-away (almost to the point of total loss of volume) on the top notes, particularly high G and high A. When played with powerful drones, almost obtruded. This would not be accepted in other instruments.

Reprinted from the late "Piping World" Magazine, 1967.