

Bagpipes

Bagpipes are a class of musical instrument, aerophones using enclosed reeds. The term is equally correct in the singular or plural, although pipers most commonly talk of "pipes" and "the bagpipe".

The bagpipes consist of an airtight bag, which can supply a continuous stream of air. Air is supplied either by a set of bellows or by a blowpipe; the inlet to the bag has a one-way valve which prevents air from returning via the supply.

Every bagpipe has a chanter, upon which the melody is played, and most have at least one drone, although there are a few (relatively) important exceptions to this rule. All these pipes are attached to the bag by a stock, a small, usually wooden, cylinder which is tied into the bag and which the pipe itself plugs into. The bag usually consists of leather, but in more recent times many other materials, such as rubber and Gore-Tex have become popular amongst many pipers, particularly Highland pipers.

The history of the bagpipe is very unclear, and worse, many of the secondary sources from the nineteenth and early twentieth sources are misleading or verging on fantasy (the works of Grattan Flood are particularly bad in this respect, but continue to be quoted and referenced to the present day). For example, an oft-repeated claim is that the Great Highland Bagpipe was banned after the '45 Rising.

This claim is untrue; there is no mention of the bagpipe in the Act of Proscription, and the entire myth seems to stem from the letterpress of Donald MacDonald's *Martial Music of Caledonia*, written by an unknown Romantic. However, it seems likely they were first invented in pre-Christian times. Nero is generally accepted to have been a player; there are Greek depictions of pipers, and the Roman legions are thought to have marched to bagpipes. The idea of taking a leather bag and combining it with a chanter and inflation device seems to have originated in Turkey.

Where they were first introduced to Britain and Ireland is debatable, though Ireland has references going back to the Dark Ages. An explosion of popularity seems to have occurred from around the year 1000; the tune used by Robert Burns for "Scots Wha Hae", "Hey Tuttie Taitie", is traditionally said to have been the tune played as Robert the Bruce's troops marched to Bannockburn in 1314.

Questions about the text

1. Every bagpipe has a chanter.

- True.
- False.
- We don't know.

2. The Great Highland Bagpipe was banned after the '45 Rising.

- True.
- False.
- We don't know.

3. Bagpipes became popular around the year 1000.

- True.
- False.
- We don't know.

4. Bagpipes were used by the British troops.

- True.
- False.
- We don't know.

Big Ben

Big Ben is the nickname of the Great Bell of Westminster, the hour bell of the Great Clock, hanging in the Clock Tower of the Palace of Westminster, the home of the Houses of Parliament in the United Kingdom.

One theory holds that the bell was named "Big Ben" after Sir Benjamin Hall, the Chief Commissioner of Works. Another theory suggests that at the time anything which was heaviest of its kind was called "Big Ben" after the then-famous prizefighter Benjamin Caunt, making it a natural name for the bell.

Big Ben is commonly taken to be the name of the clock tower itself, but this is incorrect - the tower is simply known as The Clock Tower. Sometimes, the tower is referred to as St. Stephen's Tower, but this title is not used by staff of the Palace of Westminster.

The bell weighs 13.8 tonnes (13 tons 10cwt 99lb), with a striking hammer weighing 203.2kg (4cwt), and was originally tuned to E. There is delay of 5 seconds between strikes. It is a common misconception that Big Ben is the heaviest bell in Britain. In fact, it is only the third heaviest, the second heaviest being Great George found at Liverpool Cathedral (14 tons 15cwt 2qr 2lb) and the heaviest being Great Paul found at St Paul's Cathedral (16 tons 14cwt 2qt 19lb).

The original tower designs demanded a 14 ton bell to be struck with a 6cwt hammer. A bell was produced by John Warner and Sons in 1856, weighing 16 tons. However, this cracked under test in the Palace Yard. The contract for the bell was then given to the Whitechapel Bell Foundry, who in 1858 re-cast the bell into the 13 ton bell used today. It too started to crack under the 6cwt hammer, and a legal battle arose. After two years of having the Great Bell out of commission, the 6cwt hammer was replaced with a lighter 4cwt hammer, and the bell itself was turned 90 degrees so the crack would not develop any further, coming back into use in 1862. However, the crack, now filled, and the turn meant that it no longer struck a true E.

The belfry also houses four quarter bells which play the Westminster Chimes, derived from Handel's Messiah, on the quarter hours. The C note in the chime is repeated twice in quick succession, faster than the chiming train can draw back the hammers, so the C bell uses two separate hammers.

Reliability

The clock is famous for its reliability. This is due to its designer, the lawyer and amateur horologist Edmund Beckett Denison, later Lord Grimthorpe. As the clock mechanism, created to Denison's specification by clockmaker Edward John Dent, was completed before the tower itself was finished, Denison had time to experiment with the clock. Instead of using the deadbeat escapement and remontoire as originally designed, Denison invented the double three legged gravity escapement. This escapement provides the best separation between pendulum and clock mechanism. Together with an enclosed, wind-proof box sunk beneath the clockroom, the Great Clock's pendulum is well isolated from external factors like snow, ice and pigeons on the clock hands, and keeps remarkably accurate time.

The clock had its first and only major breakdown in 1975. The famous quarter bells broke in late April 2004, and were reactivated again on May 9. During this time BBC Radio Four had to make do with the pips.

The idiom of *putting a penny on*, with the meaning of slowing down, sprung from the method of fine-tuning the clock's pendulum by adding or subtracting penny-coins. Even to this day, only old pennies, phased out of British currency during the 1971 Decimalization, are used.

A 20-foot metal replica of the clock tower known as Little Ben, complete with working clock, stands on a traffic island close to Victoria Station. Several turret clocks around the world are inspired by the look of the Great Clock, including the clock tower of the Gare de Lyon in Paris and the Peace Tower of the Parliament of Canada in Ottawa.

Culture

Big Ben is a focus of New Year celebrations in the UK, with radio and TV stations tuning to its chimes to welcome the 'official' start of the year. Similarly, on Remembrance Day, the chimes of Big Ben are broadcast to mark the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month and the start of two minutes silence.

For many years ITN's "News at Ten" began with an opening sequence which featured Big Ben with the chimes punctuating the announcement of the news headlines. This has since been dropped, but all ITV1 and ITV News Channel bulletins still use a graphic based on the Westminster clock face. Big Ben can also be heard striking the hour before some news bulletins on BBC Radio 4 and the BBC World Service, a practice that began on December 31, 1923.

The clock features in John Buchan's spy novel *The Thirty-Nine Steps* and makes for a memorable climax in Don Sharp's 1978 film version, although not in Alfred Hitchcock's 1935 original adaptation. A similar scene is recreated in the 2003 film, *Shanghai Knights* which culminates with Jackie Chan hanging from the hands of the clock. The clock also appears in the animated cartoon *Basil, the Great Mouse Detective*.

An earlier film climax on the clock face of Big Ben appears in Will Hay's 1943 film *My Learned Friend*, although the scene is more slapstick than thriller.

Questions about the text

1. The Palace of Westminster is where the Houses of Parliament reside.

True.

False.

We don't know.

2. Great George, the bell at Liverpool Cathedral is heavier than Big Ben.

True.

False.

We don't know.

3. How many quarter bells are there in the belfry?

Three.

Four.

Five.

4. When did the clock break down?

1975.

1971.

1923.

5. Little Ben looks exactly like Big Ben.

True.

False.

We don't know.

6. BBC Radio started broadcasting the chimes on news bulletins in

1923.

1935.

1978.

7. The clock was never used for any film.

True.

False.

We don't know.

Coronation Street

Coronation Street is Britain's longest-running television soap opera, and the UK's consistently highest-rated show. It was created by Tony Warren and first broadcast on the ITV network on Friday December 9, 1960. The working title of the show was Florizel Street, but Agnes, a tea lady at Granada Television, Manchester, (where Coronation Street is produced) remarked that "Florizel" sounded too much like a disinfectant. Jubilee Street was another option considered.

Coronation Street (commonly nicknamed Corrie, and also Coro St, Corra or even Corruption Street) is set in a fictional street in the fictional industrial town of Weatherfield which is based on Salford, now part of Greater Manchester (a Coronation Street does exist in Salford). Its principal rival soap operas are ITV1's Emmerdale and BBC1's EastEnders.

The show's iconic theme music, a brass-band throwback to the sounds of the 1940s, was written by Eric Spear and has been only slightly modified since the show's beginning.

Coronation Street can be seen on ITV1 on Sunday, Monday, Wednesday and Friday at 7:30 p.m. There is also an extra episode on Monday night at 8:30 p.m.

Granada and ITV executives, as well as the people in charge of distributing the show overseas, have called (and still call, as of 2006) Coronation Street the world's longest-running soap opera. The Guinness Book of Records recognises American soap opera Guiding Light as the world's longest-running soap opera, with over fifty years on television and an extra fifteen on radio.

Questions about the text

1. Coronation Street was first broadcast in 1960.

True.

False.

We don't know.

2. Florizel Street was the first title thought for the programme.

True.

False.

We don't know.

3. Sometimes people refer to the show as Corrie.

True.

False.

We don't know.

4. The programme can be seen on ITV1.

True.

False.

We don't know.

5. It is the world's longest-running soap opera according to the Guinness Book of Records.

True.

False.

We don't know.