

Certificate of Authenticity



I have recently had the privilege of documenting a very special bagpipe owned by Mr. Joel Fabin of Austin Texas. The nature of this instrument was such that I immediately involved experts from around the world, and primarily with George Hannah of Australia. The instrument was purchased at an auction in Florida. It is made of cocuswood with elephant ivory ferrules, mounts, rings, and bushings. The chanter was stamped "P_ Henderson Glasgow_" and the chanter profile was ca 1900 or earlier and lines up perfectly with the chanter stock.



The following will provide insight into what we do when identifying old bagpipes. Some might say that we're obsessed with accuracy and transparency. They would be correct. We are not perfect and sometimes we make mistakes. In the end we hope to provide reliable information that will serve as reference years from now.

Internal measurements of the various components are shown below.

Bass stock length	7.250
Bass stock bore	0.786
Bass bottom length	11.625
Bass bottom bore	0.360
Bass mid overall length	11.513
Bass mid chamber length	4.126
Bass mid chamber bore	0.708
Bass mid small bore length	7.387
Bass mid small bore	0.444
Bass top - overall length	11.604
Bass top - chamber length	3.805
Bass top - chamber bore	0.704
Bass top - small bore length	7.500
Bass top - small bore	0.510
Bass bell depth	1.576
Bass bell width	1.030
Bass top - bushing	0.586
Tenor stock length	5.500
Tenor stock bore	0.790
Tenor bottom section	9.000
Tenor bottom bore	0.314
Tenor top - overall length	8.000
Tenor top - chamber length	3.080
Tenor top - chamber bore	0.660
Tenor top - small bore length	4.900
Tenor top - small bore	0.500
Tenor top - bell depth	1.174
Tenor top - bell width	1.000
Tenor top - bushing	0.571

There is a very early stamp, which is bent and simply states “P HENDERSON GLASGOW”. You will note that there is an underscore following “P” and “GLASGOW” which is unique in my experience. The bulb is also profiled as a chalice, which changed following Peter’s death in 1902. The shape of the bulb places this pre-1900 or very shortly thereafter. The underscores presents us with a bit of a mystery. Was this a mistake or does it tell us something else?



Without the chanter, which by all considerations is original to the rest of the instrument, one might struggle to associate this bagpipe with other known makers. The chanter and most of the internal measurements provide strong evidence in support of Peter Henderson, however this should not be considered conclusive without consideration for other possibilities.

We know that Peter Henderson was a patternmaker however we have no record regarding where or when he acquired the skill to make bagpipes. There is a suggestion of an association with Thomas Glen of Edinburgh, however that evidence is faint at best.

We know that Donald MacPhee's business existed from 1872 to his death in December of 1880. His health was in decline for several years, resulting in an erosion of motor skills, eyesight, and memory. One could be forgiven for questioning the consistency of his product and overall productivity during the last years of his life. His business was sold at auction on April 23, 1880.



HIGHLAND BAGPIPES AND FINE GOLD AND SILVER ORNAMENTS,
FOR SALE BY PUBLIC AUCTION,
Within the Premises, 17 Royal Arcade, Cowcaddens,
on Friday, 23d day of April, at 12 o'clock.
The above are First-class Goods, and are sold by instructions
of the eminent Maker, Mr. Donald M'Phee, owing to his
Retiring from the Trade.
The Stock consists of 18 Sets of Bagpipes, 44 Chanters, 29
Silver Ornaments, 7 Fine Gold Medals, 2 Sets Kilts, 2 Silver
Cups, 1 Claymore, Sterling Silver Mounted Dirks, Sterling
Silver Suite Ornaments, Skein Dhuss, Ferules, Feathers,
Tassels, and a very extensive Assortment of Outfitting suitable
for the Trade, too numerous to detail.
Catalogues may be obtained from the Auctioneer, price 6d.
each. The Goods will be on View from 10 to 12 o'clock on day
of Sale.
HUNTER, Auctioneer, Property and Land
Business Agent, Royal Arcade, Cowcaddens, has been
favoured with instructions to Sell the above.
Sale to commence at 12 o'clock prompt.

On May 1, 1880 The Oban Times reported that Peter Henderson would be taking over the business premises of Donald MacPhee. It may well be that he acquired the items mentioned above, along with machinery, tools, and timber, however we have not seen a record of this. It is interesting to note the number of bagpipes and chanters that were included in the auction. Donald MacPhee's declining health must have negatively impacted his productivity during the final years of his life. He must have had others working for him. He died December 1880.

In a letter to the Editor of the Oban Times dated January 12 1927, a Mr. J. C. MacLean wrote ***“Sir, with respect to recent correspondence regarding the above, it is not generally known that the late Major Wm. MacKinnon, 74th Highlanders, author of one of the finest bagpipe marches on record (74th Highlanders Farewell to Edinburgh) was a bagpipe maker. I have in my possession a very fine set made by him for the late Mr. D. McPhee, bagpipe maker, Glasgow, referred to in your last issue by Mr. John Grant. The fame of Henderson’s pipes was due in no small measure to hints given by Major MacKinnon both in pipe-making and reed-making.”***

This suggests that neither Donald MacPhee nor Peter Henderson made bagpipes in isolation. Input from others as well as employee turners all played a part in what would eventually become the MacPhee/Henderson legacies.

The subject bagpipe reflects an early “Edinburgh” influence. We know that Peter William Henderson (Edinburgh) established his business in 1868, which, interestingly, is consistent with advertising by Peter Henderson (Glasgow). (Why would the business make such a claim without some plausible connection?) Peter William’s father worked for Thomas Glen and Peter William worked for Alexander Glen before establishing his own business. He moved to Glasgow following the closure of his shop in Edinburgh in 1874. He died in Glasgow in 1897. It is possible that he turned bagpipes for Donald MacPhee and perhaps Peter Henderson (Glasgow) prior to his death.

Peter William Henderson (Edinburgh) also had a son, Peter Henderson, who married and moved to Glasgow at about the same time as his father. He, too, was a turner and it is possible that he worked for Donald MacPhee and/or Peter Henderson (Glasgow). This is the extent of the information we have that might link Peter William Henderson and his son to bagpipe making in Glasgow. At this time, it is without solid foundation other than what is mentioned above.

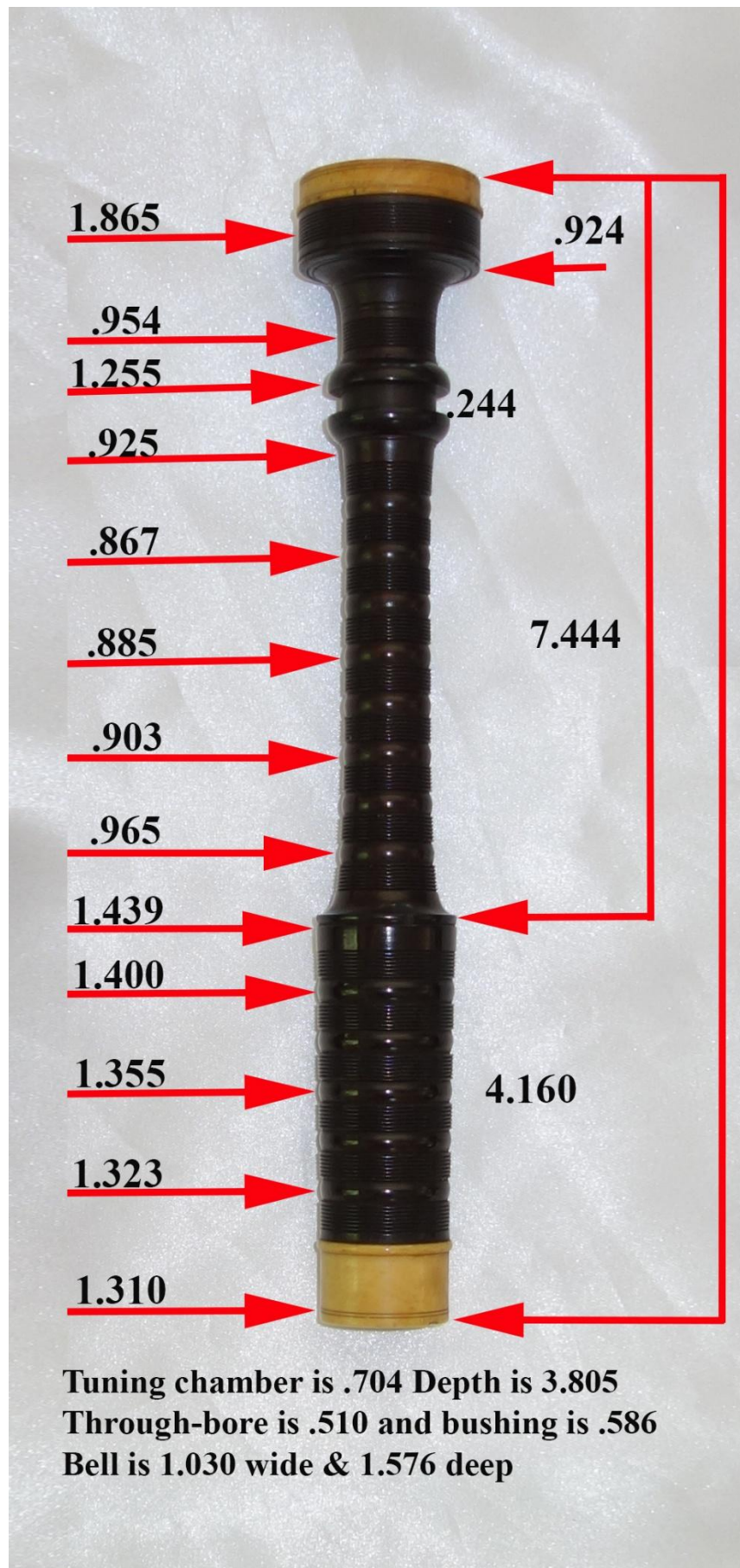
We also know that Robert MacKinnon established a bagpipe business at 12 Royal Arcade, Glasgow in 1880. Peter Henderson’s shop was at 17 Royal Arcade. MacKinnon must have been well-respected as a turner as he was said to “finish” bagpipes for Alexander MacArthur, who operated a business a mile away. Although we don’t know what was meant by “finish” we have stamped examples of MacArthur’s instrument with beading that is quite small. This is not sufficient to draw any conclusions however it is worthwhile mentioning.

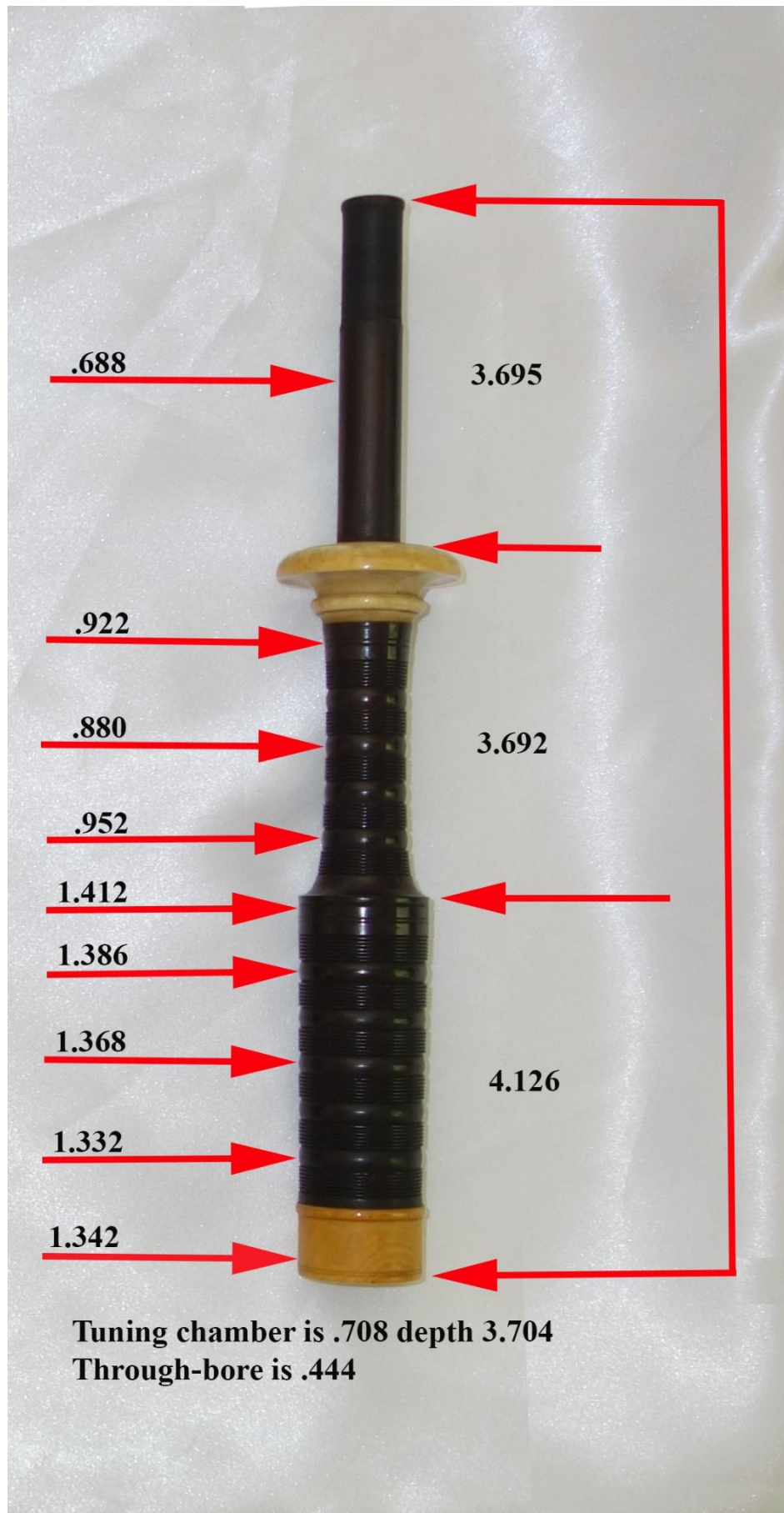
The following are dimensions and observations of the subject bagpipe. When researching bagpipes, one must take into account that hydraulic tracers did not come into existence until 1940. This innovation enabled turners to duplicate patterns with greater consistency. Prior to this, the skill of individual turners was the primary factor in creating consistency from piece to piece.

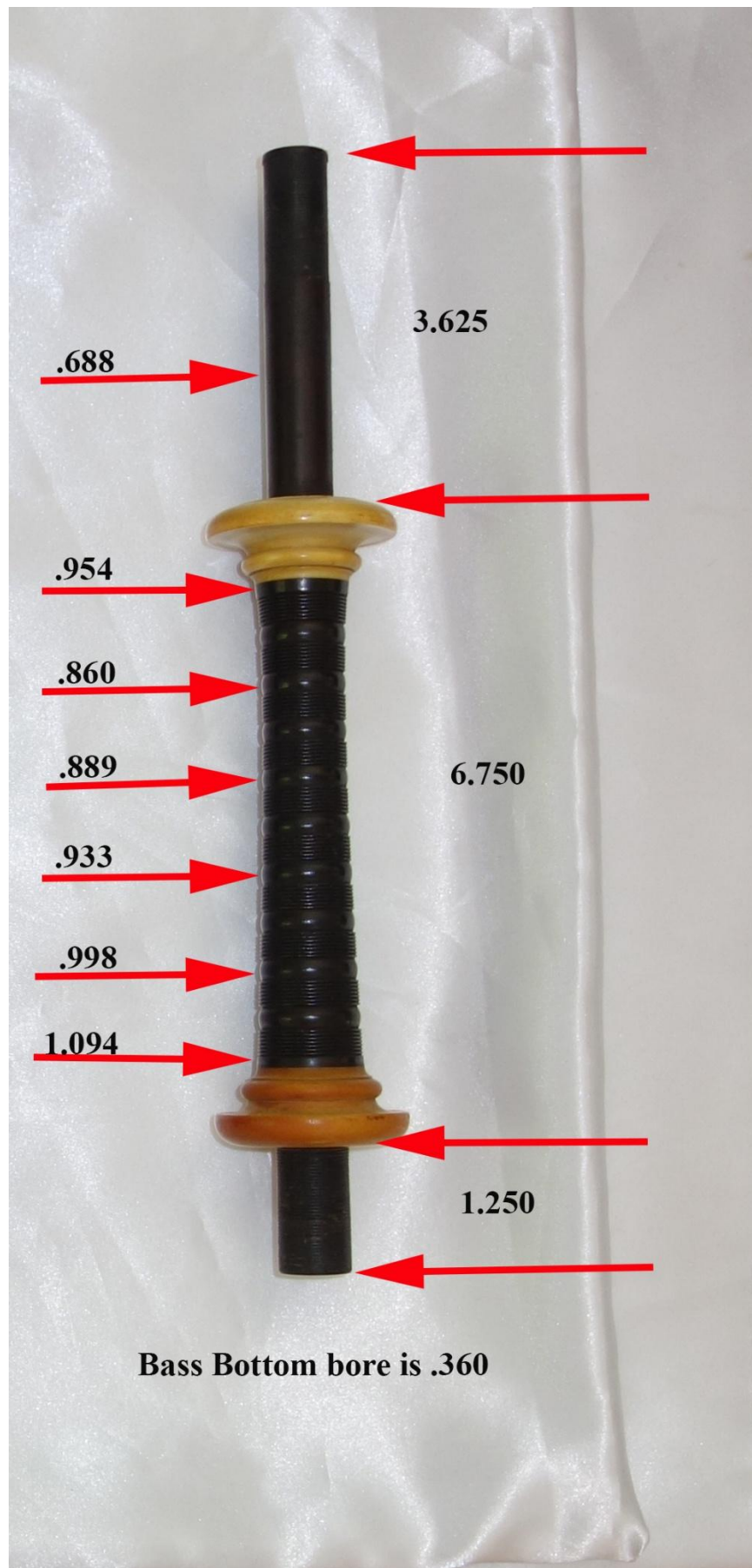
We also must account for “makers” having input from others. Woodturners of the day were journeymen and might move from maker to maker. Apprentices were not as skilled as seasoned turners, and it is possible (probable) that products not totally representative of a maker made their way out the door.

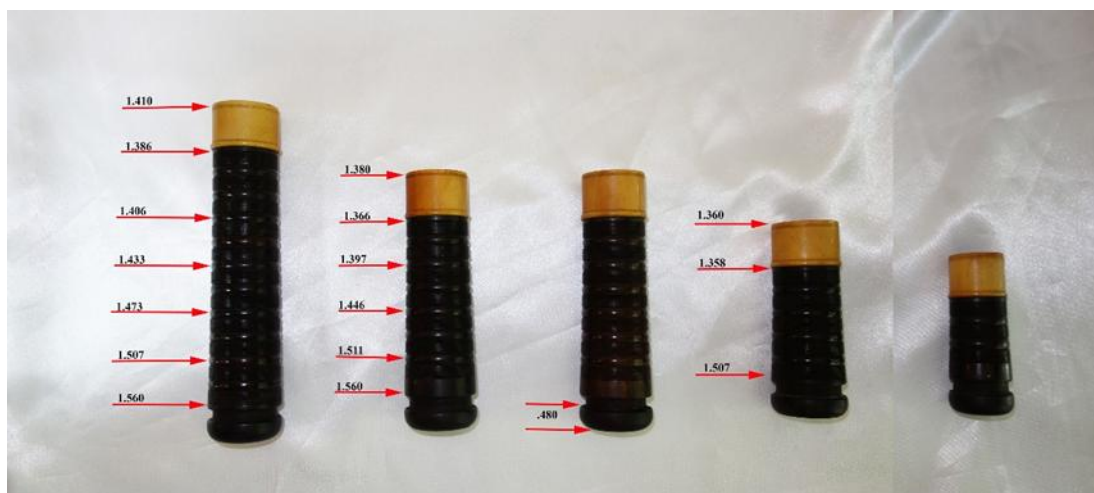
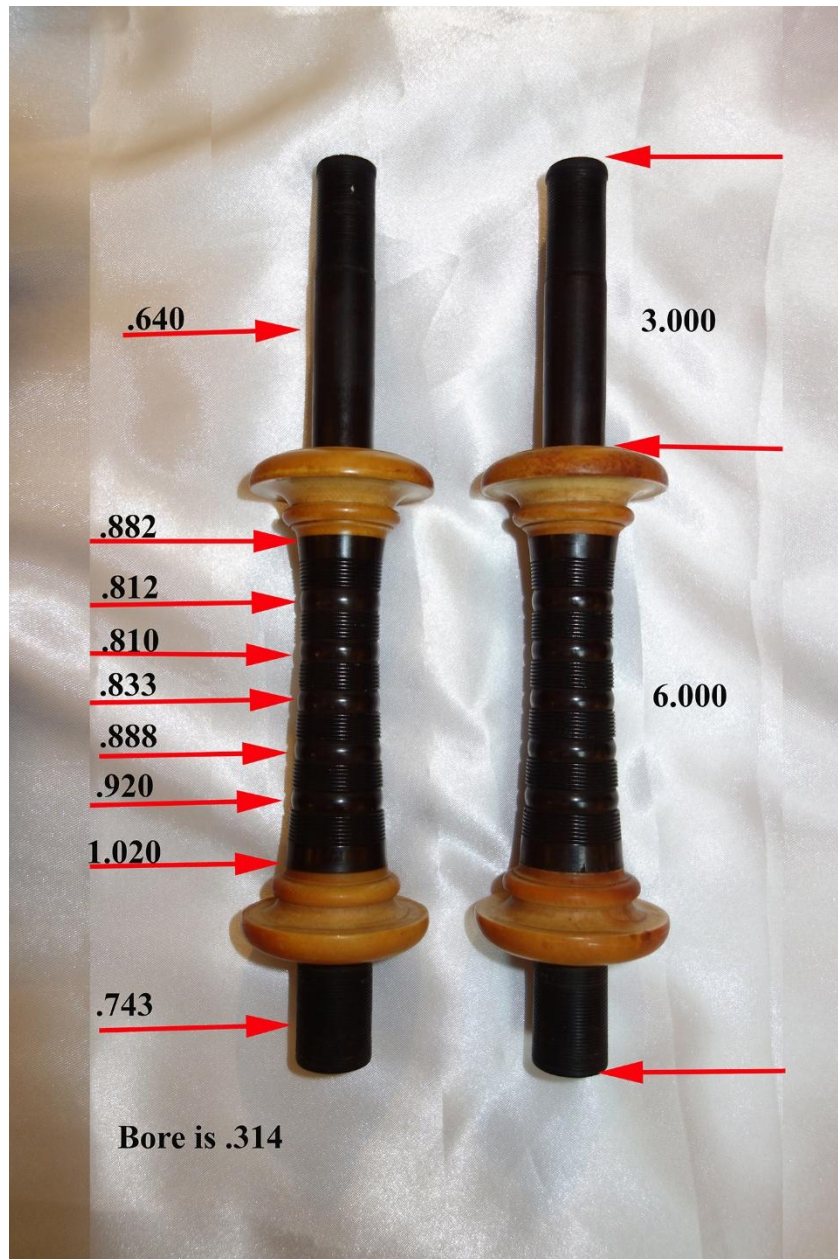
Evidence is strong that this is a very early Peter Henderson bagpipe. Unique aspects should not be overlooked.

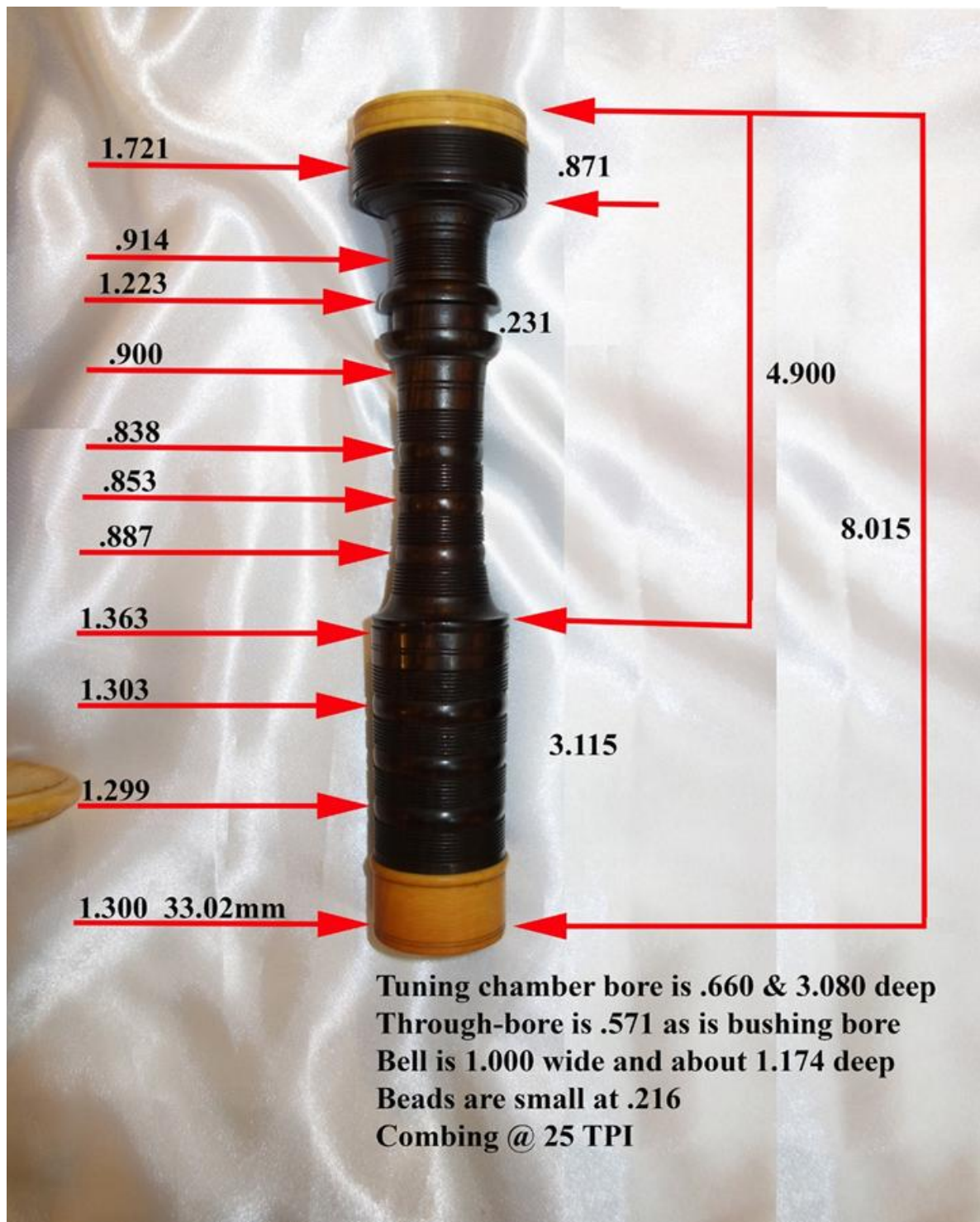
- 1) The profile of the drones and stocks was somewhat less robust than we would expect to see in an early Peter Henderson bagpipe.
- 2) Beading is very small and perfectly rounded, more so than typical early Henderson beading.
- 3) Stocks are slender, straight-sided, and have a small, flat bottom.
- 4) The neck on the bass drone top section is straight rather than a typical Henderson taper.
- 5) The double-flat at the top of the tenor drone tuning chambers is the most generous that I've seen on a Henderson bagpipe.
- 6) The double-flat under the tenor drone cord holders is consistent with early Henderson bagpipes however more generous than is typical.













Reeded with EZ Drone reeds, the tenors were bright and lively. The bass was pleasant and blended nicely, however not as bold as typical Henderson bass drones from any era. The smaller bushing bore may have had an impact on the diminished power of the bass.





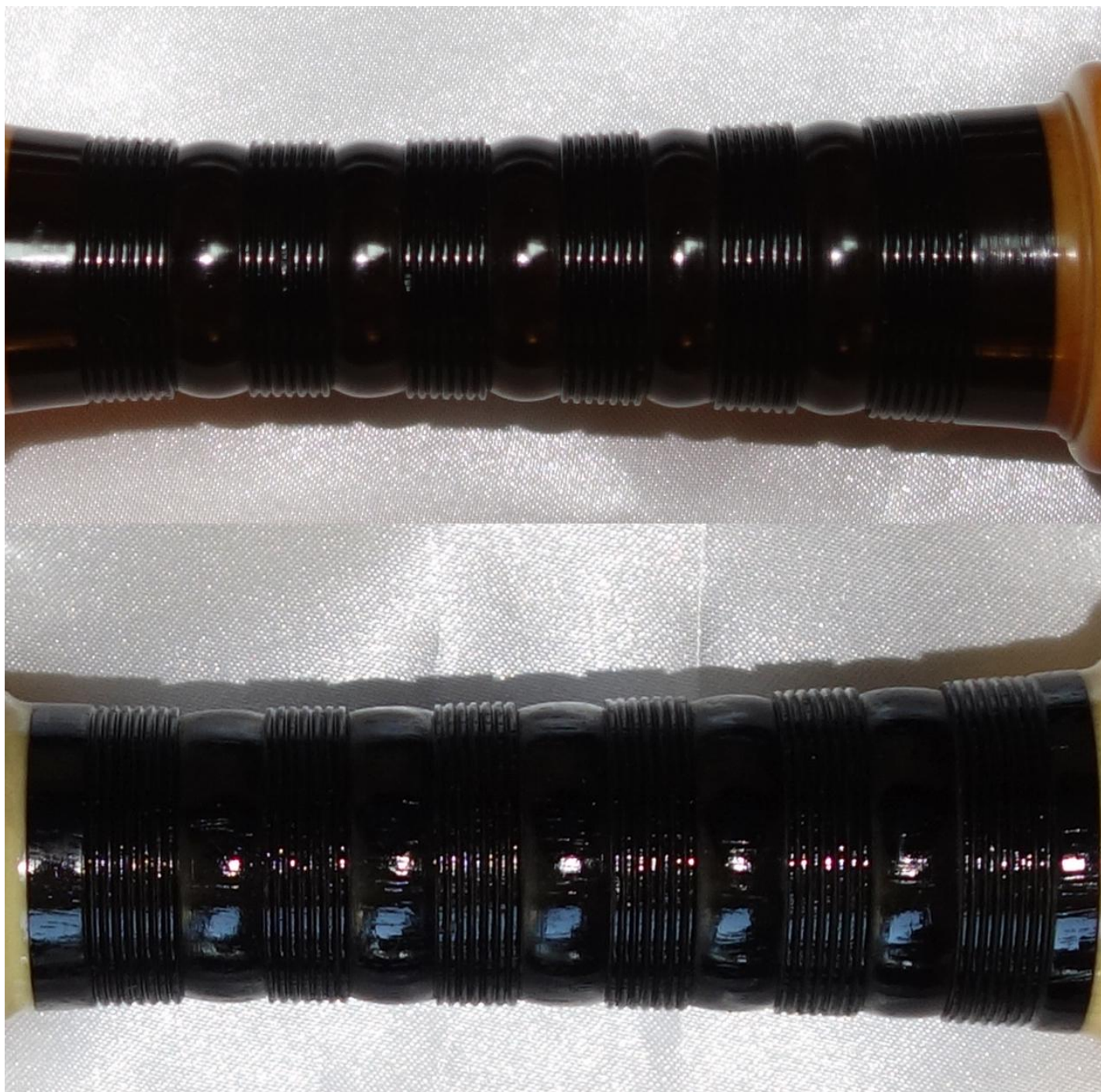
Above we see small differences in the lengths of the tuning pins and the bottom tenons. The differences are small however this is not something that is typically found on Henderson bagpipes.

When working from pictures, it is critical that they are taken against a neutral background. One must avoid angles. Shoot straight on and stay far enough away from the subject matter that lens distortion is minimal. A flash should be used to eliminate any shadows. Leave images in high resolution and then crop to eliminate non-subject material. Profiles and proportions are critical.

Lastly, we clear our minds of any prejudice. Sometimes your eyes will see what your mind wants to see. Start with a blank piece of paper, let the bagpipe tell you its secrets, add up the clues, and draw a logical conclusion. In the end, allow that you may be wrong.

I began this journey in 1971 and published my first book at the suggestion of Captain Ken Eller. Ken and I spent many hours together and I consider our close relationship an honor and a privilege. Jack Dunbar, founder of Dunbar Bagpipes helped immeasurably. Again we spent many hours together and I wish we could do it all over again. Special mention to Rick Pettigrew, (current owner of Dunbar Bagpipes) Roddy MacLellan, and Dave Atherton, all who provided help along the way. There are others that are too numerous to mention to which I owe tremendous gratitude.

Do I consider myself an expert? No. I know what I know, however there is so much that I don't know and will never know. The quest for discovering more endures.



The image at the top is that of the subject bagpipe. The image beneath is that of a 1906 silver and ivory Henderson bagpipe. Not only is the profile of the section (tenor bottom section) different, but the beading is dramatically different. If I were looking at the subject bagpipe without benefit of the chanter, mounts, ferrules, rings, bushings, and internal measurements, I would say that it was early Edinburgh.



The bass drone at the left is that of the subject bagpipe. On the right is that of a 1906 S&I Henderson. One can see similarities and differences.

In conclusion, I do believe that this is a Peter Henderson product, but I can't tell you who turned it. The beading and combing reflect years of experience and great skill. I am doubtful that Peter Henderson turned this bagpipe. I believe that this bagpipe helps us to understand those early years and the transition from MacPhee to Henderson, if there was a transition at all. Perhaps this is one of the sets listed in the MacPhee auction advertisement seen earlier. Without additional strong evidence, we are left to carefully and conservatively speculate.



Bower