

Creativity

The flexible pibroch on the new Zanussi bagpipe transforms the appliance at a touch into the ideal multi-directional Hoover, says Paul McHugh. He also suggests using bagpipes as an Action Man for a baby octopus. Other cephalopod ideas include:

Stand-in for octopuses in undersea adventure films (Elaine Bisco), or octopus sex-education groping-practice aid (John and Fiona Earle). Indeed, as Des Waller points out: "Bagpipes can be used as a substitute for an octopus in all those tricky little household chores where an octopus is invaluable." On criteria of musicality, however, he comes down in favour of the octopus.

Tom Hibbert stresses the usefulness of bagpipes in medical training as a demonstration model of the heart. They may even be rigged to squeal if a student makes an incision at the wrong spot. Mrs J Cussens inverts her bagpipes in the bath to produce a jacuzzi effect. Gordon Beastall outwits his local water board by using his "incognito as a lawn sprinkler".

Dugald McCullough looks forward to the time "when a good day's cruelty-free shooting on the grouse moors can be had by those who pit their skills against bagpipes inflated with helium and sprung from hidden traps among the heather."

Bernard Jaffa suggests a comforter for orphaned Daleks. The Earles suggest winter quarters for orphaned haggises. Mike Armstrong offers "surrogate mother for abandoned babies on Scottish squid farm".

Sebastian Robinson is unenthusiastic about finding uses for bagpipes: "Finding ways to stop their use would be more helpful," he says. Terence Sarlius explains how you can blot out the noise of bagpipes by wrapping a set around your ears. Jonathan Hulme, after pointing out the possibility of filling the bag with flour and eggs and extruding interesting pasta shapes through the tubes, provides the definitive use for bagpipe haters: bayonet practice.

Having arbitrarily eliminated anyone who used the word "octopus", we award prizes of *Chambers Compact Reference* books (*Great Inventions Through History*, *Great Modern Inventions* and *Great Scientific Discoveries*) to Jonathan Hulme, Mrs J Cussens and Gordon Beastall.

We now seek uses for a sheet of House of Commons notepaper, and *Chambers* are offering three copies of *The Concise Scots Dictionary* as prizes. Ideas to: Creativity, The Independent, 40 City Road, London EC1Y 2DB by 17 November please.

William Hartston

The Vikings are coming



Battling it out at Salford University College

Photograph: Howard Barlow

They came, they saw, they squabbled, writes Tanya Reed. Looting and pillage may have been on the minds of their predecessors, but today's Vikings are more concerned with audience understanding.

The Vikings' Norse Film and Pageant Society do not behave like a band of blood-thirsty heathens charging at each other yelling old Norse terms like "Bordval". Instead, they scream in Old English. Bordval, by the way, means a wall of shields.

For an annual fee of £12.50, 449 members around the country meet at events and displays where they stride around purposefully in long robes, looking menacing and drinking from horns of plenty.

For Ray Long from Leeds, (whose Viking name is Elfick Godwinson) being a Viking is all about harnessing your aggression. "If you go on to a battlefield with a vendetta, you shouldn't be a member of our society."

His son, Gavin, (aka Olaf Elrikson) put up with the taunts of his friends until an impressive performance with a large sword changed their minds. "It's all about arms, weaponry and fighting. We don't treat it as playing about or being idiotic — well, I suppose it is really. I have broken four swords so far."

Paul Vernon Lydiate, the special events co-ordinator,

has broken two bones in his hand through mistimed lunges, but other would-be warriors fall by the wayside before they get a sniff of battle. Considered to be too much of a danger to themselves and others, they are re-routed towards Viking pursuits of weaving, spinning and smithing to help provide an authentic backdrop.

Jane Asquith, 27, explains that not all the women — who make up 40 per cent of the group — enjoy fighting. She prefers acting to warfare and appears as either the queen or her lady-in-waiting.

'It's all about weaponry and fighting. We don't treat it as playing about'

Those who opt for combat fighting face five hours' rigorous training and a lot of discipline to maintain safety standards. Today's Vikings are trained to deaden the power of their blows before they connect.

In true Viking fashion, all weapons are lovingly crafted. Tony Sayer, a technology teacher from Ilkley in Yorkshire, has soundproofed his garden shed in order to hammer and bend spears and swords. Helmets take half a day to complete, swords take three days.

Members despair of cheap imitation props used in televi-

sion series. One winced at the memory of knitted string for chain mail in *Brother Cadfael*. Instead, they painstakingly wind bales of wire around rods of a desired thickness, making long heavy springs to drape over themselves in battle. The maintenance of chain mail can prove a problem. When you oil it with WD40 it rots the cloth beneath. Better to use bran from pet shops which prevents rusting.

In 1991, the society re-enacted the battle of Malden, 1,000 years to the day when Anlaf and 93 ships sailed into Folkestone and began laying

the Battle of Hastings for English Heritage, and recording authentic music as programme soundtracks. Drum machines are definitely out. Members will play pipes to create the haunting dirge necessary for a Viking get-together.

The group makes no bones about the sort of people they re-create. "They were mean, evil, vicious bastards," says Peter Campbell, an archivist who is also known as Od Haraldson. Like many Vikings, he has a flowing beard and matching hair.

There is a theory, however, that blames the pillaging, looting and raping on the effects of magic mushrooms. According to a Spanish friar writing in 1529, mushroom eaters displayed a variety of symptoms: "They began to be excited, they started dancing, singing, weeping. Some saw themselves lying in a vision, others being eaten by a wild beast."

"Some imagined they were capturing prisoners of war, they possessed many slaves, had committed adultery and would have their heads crushed for the offence."

Peter Campbell adds darkly: "If there weren't enough mushrooms to go round, the second lot who arrived would drink the urine of the first. It's not one of the quaint Viking customs we carry on these days."

waste to the countryside. Last year, they took part in the anniversary of the first Viking raid on Britain in 793, enhanced by the reconstruction of an Anglo-Saxon hall. Members have also appeared in Magnus Magnusson's "Vikings!"

In the early days, the society, which was set up in 1971, admits that true authenticity was somewhat lacking. Equipment ranged from pre-Roman to 13th century. In 1987, organisers pinned the Vikings' moments of glory in Britain down to between 793 and 1066.

This year's projects include