

Family matters

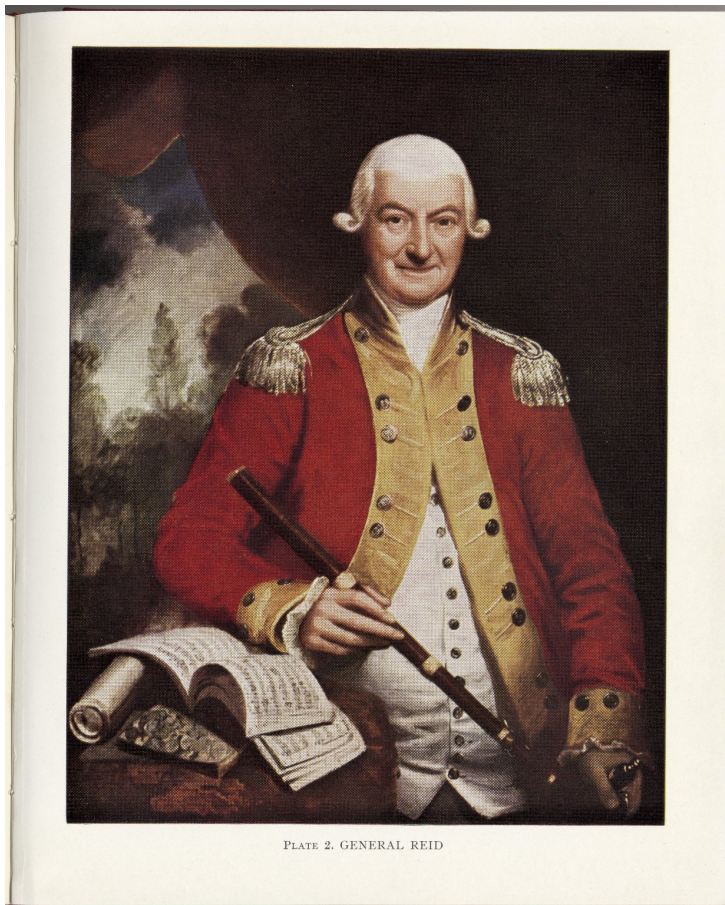
At 8, Queen Street, Edinburgh, on the 22d current, Mrs THOMSON, widow of the late John Thomson, Esq. Professor of the Theory of Music in this University, of a son.

This notice from Edinburgh newspaper *The Caledonian Mercury*, on 25 November 1841, caught my eye while I was researching another possible source for our first-year students to explore.

Newspapers are particularly rich sources for studying the history of musical life in this period, containing information on events, publications, professional musical life and much more: digitalisation makes these sources easily accessible and, of course, easily searchable. Sometimes, however, it is the things that we come across by accident, while looking for something else, that grab our attention.

John Thomson's tenure as the first Professor appointed under the terms of John Reid's bequest was a short one. He had only recently organised the first, highly successful Reid memorial concert when he died in May 1841, possibly without knowing that a child was on the way. Under the circumstances, those left behind may well have read something into the date on which Thomson junior entered the world: 22 November is, of course, St Cecilia's Day.

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Portrait of John Reid © The University of Edinburgh; full catalogue information at <https://images.is.ed.ac.uk/luna/servlet/s/94q844>

The Reid School of Music is named for General John Reid, who left money to the University for the establishment of a Chair in Music and an annual concert, also to be held in his name.

As the portrait featured here shows, Reid was an accomplished flautist and also a composer: his most famous piece is the military march “The Garb of Old Gaul”.

Although Reid died in 1807, the first Professor of Music was

not appointed until 1839, in the form of John Thomson. Thomson, however, remained in post only for a very short time: he died in 1841, the same year as the second part of the terms of Reid's legacy was fulfilled with the very first Reid Concert.

Reid inherited most of his fortune from his cousin, also an officer in the British military. Both men were involved in military campaigns in colonial North America. We do not know at this stage to what extent or how directly Reid's fortune was linked to colonisation and settlement, but it is probably that some of Reid's inheritance was linked to this.

More on Reid's music from the Reid Concerts database

Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities' project on decoloniality

