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October 7, 1989

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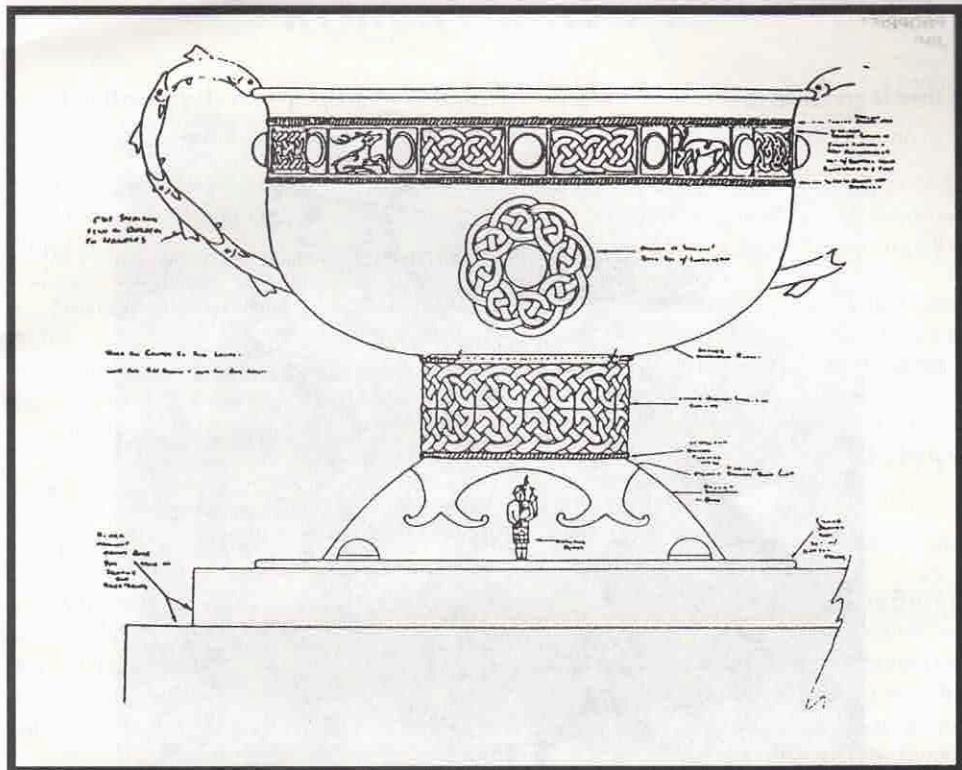
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The Chalice

Nicol-Brown Memorial Chalice Piobaireachd Competition
2:00 p.m.

William Ross Challenge March/Strathspey/Reel Competition
7:30 p.m.

Adjudicator - Seumas MacNeill





Robert Brown

ROBERT BROWN

Bob Brown was born in 1906 in Aberdeenshire, of a family which had long shown a keen interest in all the music of Scotland.

He received his first instruction on the bagpipe from William Fraser, a pupil of G.S. MacLennan, who although suffering from a physical handicap acquired during the First World War, was still considered a fine player.

Next the young Brown passed on to Jonathon Ewen, an Inverness medalist, who began for him his life-long study of ceol mor. Ewen was a pupil of Sandy Cameron, so it was not surprising that his young pupil began to win a number of competitions in his local county.

This brought him to the attention of G.S. Allen, who took him under his wing, and in particular accompanied him to the Argyllshire Gathering in 1925, where he won the junior piobaireachd.

The following year he was unplaced, but highly commended in the gold medal event.

Although he was a keen competitor and loved the excitement of the boards, Bob Brown did not always find it easy to get time off from his work - which is surprising because his employers have always been enthusiasts of piping. In fact, it was not until 1931 before he was able to return to Oban, and this time he won the medal. By then, however, he was the holder of the Inverness medal, which he gained in 1928. This was also the year when, according to Brown, there occurred the most important event in his piping life as he began to take lessons from John MacDonald.

"I owe my knowledge," said Brown once, "to John MacDonald who made me the piobaireachd enthusiast that I am."

Certainly it is partly through his long and close association with John MacDonald that he came to be looked at as a great authority, but this was also due to his own clear and reasoned expositions on his subject, and his unfailing ability to produce great music whenever he played.

His fame and his standing increased as time went on.

In the last decade he became better known than ever before, partly because pipers began beating a path to the door of his cottage at Balmoral and partly because he began taking his knowledge to different parts of the world.

For several years he was the instructor at Invermark summer school in New York State, he visited South Africa, and it was while he was in Australia that the first signs of the ailment which was to prove so quickly fatal. His one thought was to get back to his beloved forests and mountains, but within a few hours of reaching home, he was dead.

(Excerpt from The Piping Times)



ROBERT NICOL

BOB NICOL

Bob Nicol was born in 1905 at Durris, Aberdeenshire, and was first taught by a piper MacKellar, a pupil of MacDougall Gillies, who was later killed in the First World War.

He was then taught by one of the Ewen brothers. The other brother, Jonathon, at that time was teaching the then young Bob Brown, who was later to become Bob Nicol's life-long friend.

He has a successful junior career and his first piping appointment was as piper to Lord Cowdray at Dunecht. It was from here that he moved to Balmoral as King George V's piper in 1924.

In 1926 when only 20 years old he suffered a shooting accident that resulted in the loss of his right eye, a shot from a fellow gamekeeper ricocheted off a frozen tree and hit him in the eye.

Later that year, King George V was anxious for Nicol to receive the best tuition possible and he consulted the factor at Balmoral, Sir Douglas Ramsay, and Sheriff Grant, Rothie-murchus, themselves both John MacDonald pupils.

As a result Nicol was sent to John MacDonald in Inverness for a month that same year, and a nerve-racking time it was as he related.

"When John MacDonald came into the room he gave me a good dressing down. MacDonald said - you're no used to me. In fact he was quite nasty to me for the whole month."

But on the completion of his course a very good report was sent to Balmoral.

The following year he was accompanied by Bob Brown, and the visits continued every year until 1939.

During this period Nicol became one of the outstanding players, winning all the top honors including the Gold Medals at Inverness and Oban in 1930 and the Clasp in 1932. His medal tune at Inverness was "Lament for Donald Ban MacCrimmon" a tune he was later to play at both the graveside of John MacDonald and Bob Brown.

Throughout the Second World War he served as Pipe Major in the 2nd Gordons and ran a piobaireachd class for the 15th Scottish Division.

He also taught at schools in America and Brittany. He was a very good and firm teacher, a very likable man with a sharp wit and pawky sense of humor.

Dedicated to keeping the traditional piobaireachd alive he was undoubtedly one of the greats and most knowledgeable men of our time.

Bob Nicol Died in 1978.

(Excerpts from The Piping Times)

PIPE MAJOR WILLIAM ROSS

Pipe Major William Ross was born in 1879, and learned his early piping from his father and mother.

There is no evidence that Ross was taught by anyone other than his immediate family and his uncle, Aneas Rose, who guided his early steps in piobaireachd. Thus by his own great musical ability, he rose to the top of his chosen profession.

His Northern Meeting record in both Ceol Mor and Ceol Beag is so far unsurpassed and his name is a household one among pipers. Music flowed from William Ross' pipe and fingers with no apparent effort - "the mighty frame seemed hardly to need to blow." It was the simplicity of the true expert, of how easy it looks until we try it ourselves.

Success never spoiled him and if one ever needed a tonic, an hour in the company of the illustrious Pipe Major would assure a cure for the ailment. He loved human beings and was loved by them in return.

In his life and his work, Ross was a delightful example of the perfect gentleman. By his courtesy, his modesty and the professional ability his name and his music will always be remembered.

He joined the Scots Guards in 1896 and from that date until his retirement in 1957 as tutor to the Army Class he served piping and pipers.

In 1920 he was appointed principal of the new Army School of Piping at Edinburgh Castle. In 1921 he became the Piobaireachd Society's tutor and through his appointment pipers both military and civilian were able to benefit from his tuition.

His pupils are scattered throughout the world and always provided the cream of the piping world with many champions among them.

Ross also worked to ensure the great heritage of piping music will be passed on and his collection of pipe music remains the mainstay and guide to many pipers.

William Ross died in 1965.

(Excerpts from *The Piping Times; A Highlander Looks Back*, Angus MacPherson; *Scots Guards Book 1; Pipers Handbook*, J. A. MacLellan)



Pipe Major William Ross



Last Year's Winner - Daniel Whatley

SEUMAS MACNEILL

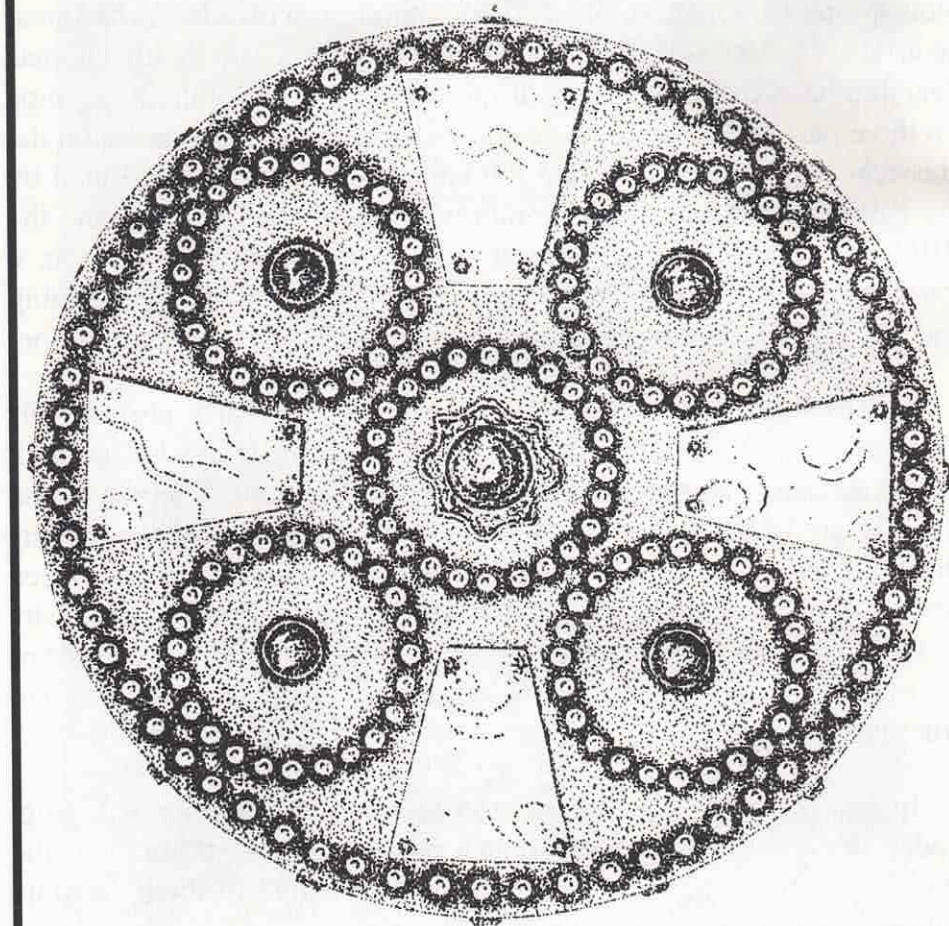
Seumas MacNeill comes from the Gigha family of pipers. He was taught by his uncle, Archie MacNeill, the Blind Piper, and has gained most of the important prizes in piping, including the Gold Medal for piobaireachd at Oban in 1962. In collaboration with J.M.A. Lenihan, he established the scientific basis of the bagpipe scale. With Thomas Pearston he is the joint author of the Tutor for the Highland Bagpipe (in three parts) published by the College of Piping. His treatise on the classical music of the bagpipe, Piobaireachd, was commissioned by the British Broadcasting Corporation and published in 1968 and the BBC also commissioned his recording of Piobaireachd. He is a founder-member of the Board of Examiners of the Institute of Piping and one of the judges of piping for the Scottish Pipe Band Association.

As "piobair barraichte" Seumas MacNeill regularly presents his own programs on radio and he is no stranger to television as both performer and commentator. He has given concerts in eight of the world's capital cities, lectured on piping at a dozen European universities and has often visited Canada and the U.S. He has recorded three albums of solo bagpipe music and published a collection of pipe music. In 1948 he was a founder of The Piping Times and has been editor of the magazine since 1951. He also writes frequently in the press and other periodicals.

In 1945 he and Thomas Pearston founded the College of Piping. Today the college is recognized as a major authority throughout the world. The tutor, published by the college, issued in three separate volumes, is universally accepted as a standard.

The Piping Times, also published by the college, has a worldwide circulation. The magazine contains contributions by leading pipers and other authorities and reports on piping events.

Seumas MacNeill was born in Glasgow and is a senior lecturer in the Natural Philosophy department of the University of Glasgow.



Drawing of Targe

ON TUNING

One of the most unusual aspects of a bagpipe competition witnessed by those unfamiliar with the art is the practice of tuning the instrument on stage in front of both audience and judge. While other venues would consider this highly irregular, in piping it is quite the opposite. In fact, considering the extremely temperamental nature of the instrument, it is absolutely essential. The few minutes of fine tuning you will hear tonight is the culmination of a long process of setting up and settling the instrument.

Unlike other woodwind players the piper has to contend with four reeds. Each of the three drones has a single beating reed. They provide the chord that serves as background for the melody. The chanter (or fingerpiece), which provides the melody, has a double reed. In setting up the instrument, the piper must consider pitch, tone and clarity of all three drones and the chanter.

The scale of the pipe is not the well tempered scale. The chanter must be in tune with itself, that is, the intervals between each note must be correct. Each drone must be in tune with the entire chanter and the other two drones.

A piper must also consider tone, balance and blend of the sound being produced. This highly subjective area can provide for a surprising number of different sounding instruments.

Tonight the competitors will each resolve for themselves questions such as:

-pitch of the chanter - some players feel a sharper sound is brighter while others feel a flatter sound is richer;

-volume of chanter against volume of drones - some players prefer one of the two to slightly dominate the other, while others seek a more even balance;

-drone sound - some players prefer a strong bass, others a more dominant tenor, and still others seek an even balance between the two.

After completing these tasks, the player is still somewhat at the mercy of four reeds with which he or she has no direct contact while playing. Each reed is highly sensitive to even the most subtle and brief change in temperature and humidity. Even the short walk from the final tuning room to the stage will change the drone reeds, hence the need for final adjustments.

The few minutes of tuning each piper will perform tonight will try to meet the challenge of playing on the best pipe possible. Each player will begin his or her performance without stopping, so, for the benefit of those in the audience who are unfamiliar with pipe music, a light illuminating the a list of the titles of each tune being played will be turned on when the performance begins.

TROY SAVINGS BANK MUSIC HALL

In 1870, when Troy was the center of cultural activity in Upstate New York, the Board of Directors of the Troy Savings Bank voted to construct a new office at the corner of Second and State Streets. At this time, Second Street was considered to be the most attractive and most important street in Troy. It was decided by the Board to construct a music hall on the upper floors of the building as a gift to the citizens of Troy, in appreciation of their support of the bank. George B. Post of New York City was chosen as the architect and his design was accepted unanimously. The music hall was built in 1875 and opened April 19 of that year featuring the Symphony Orchestra of Theodore Thomas.

The Troy Daily expressed relief regarding the success of this opening because the citizens of Troy had never experienced an event of this kind before. Perhaps a quote from the Troy Morning Whig best describes the response to the music hall:

"Catherine of Russia once complained of the exorbitant salary demanded by a famous prima donna - it is more than I pay my field marshals said the monarch. Then let your field marshalls sing for you answered the saucy soprano. Whoever this song queen was it is not too much to say that with all her presumption this very city of Troy now holds a temple wherein she might have been proud to sing."

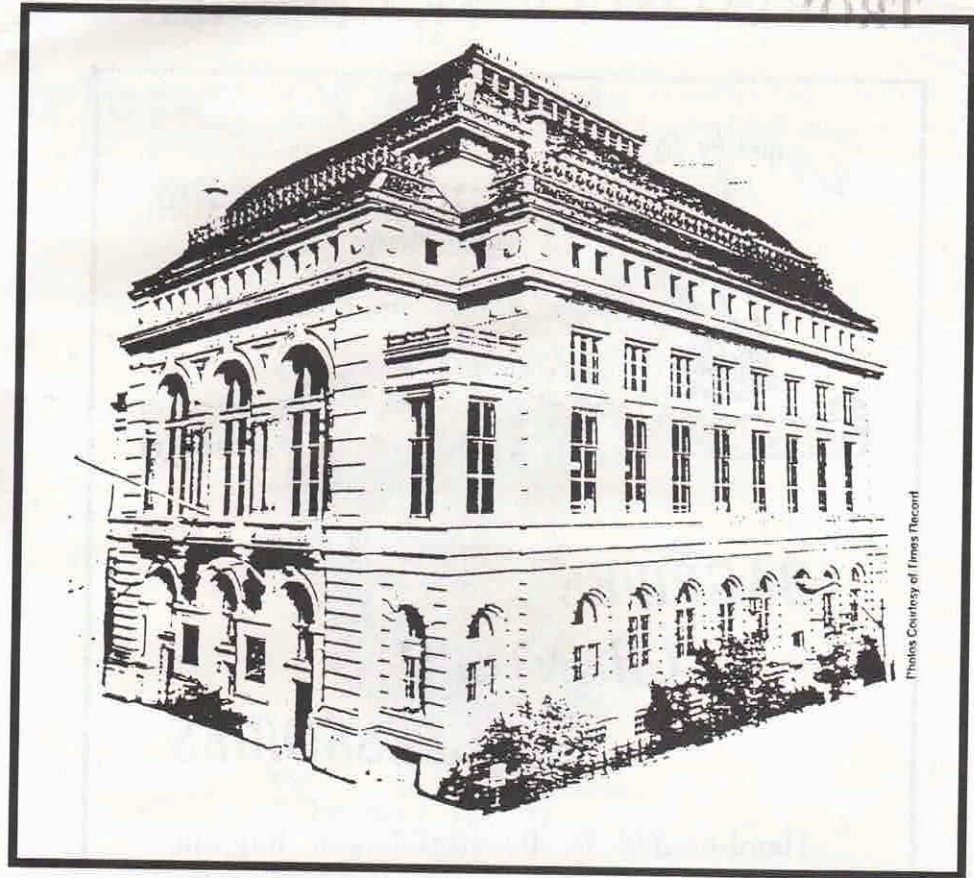
The Troy Savings Bank Music Hall was constructed in an era when science of the acoustics was not practiced in designing concert halls. Yet somehow the music hall became what is now considered by all musicians who have performed in it as acoustically the best of all music halls in the country.

The original music hall contained a magnificent gas-burning chandelier containing 14,000 glass prisms imported from Paris. Unfortunately it was necessary to remove the chandelier in the 1920s for safety reasons. In the initial design the back wall was flat and displayed an elaborate collection of beautiful frescoes. When the organ was donated to the hall in 1890 a rear false wall and stage canopy were built and the frescoes were lost.

The Troy Savings Bank Music Hall has hosted many great musicians including Keisler, Rachmaninoff, Horowitz, Rubenstein and Heifity. Dimitri Mitropolis said he would conduct there for nothing just to be able to experience the hall again. George Szell called it the greatest music hall in the county and claimed that "if ever the Troy Music Hall were in danger of being torn down, he would rush to Troy and stand outside the hall's entrance, arms outstretched.

Harold Schonberg of the New York Times made the following remarks about the Troy Savings Bank Music Hall:

"Everyone in the audience was saturated with rich glowing sound - with string tone of velvet sheen of incredible presence and sweetness, with a spectacular bass response that never sounded boomy or artificial, with solo instruments coming through bigger than life, with the various orchestral choirs perfectly balanced... Perhaps Symphony Hall in Boston is its only match but not even Symphony Hall has the presence, warmth and total intimacy of the music hall."



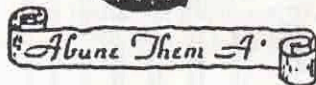
Photos Courtesy of Times Record

The Troy Savings Bank Music Hall has similarities to other major concert halls around the world. The hall is 110 feet long, 72 feet wide and 60 feet high. It is rectangular in shape with the approved European style of side boxes, and is one of the shortest major concert halls. It is, however, one of the widest and tallest halls relative to its length which is sometimes remarked upon in accounting for the hall's presence.

The stage canopy covers only half the stage making the stage area part of the audience space. Many feel that this contributes to a cozy feeling that adds pleasure and enjoyment to attending concerts at this hall.

Experts have been uncertain about which of the music hall's qualities its fine acoustics can be attributed to. Acoustician Christopher Jaffee guessed that it was the wooden ceiling and floor which acting like the belly of a violin had something to do with the hall's acoustics. There has been a great reluctance to tamper with the interior of the building. The same narrow seats on cast iron frames have remained for 100 years and even the paint on the walls has not been touched.

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