

# Fiddle Tune History

By Andrew Kuntz

## The High Level Hornpipe

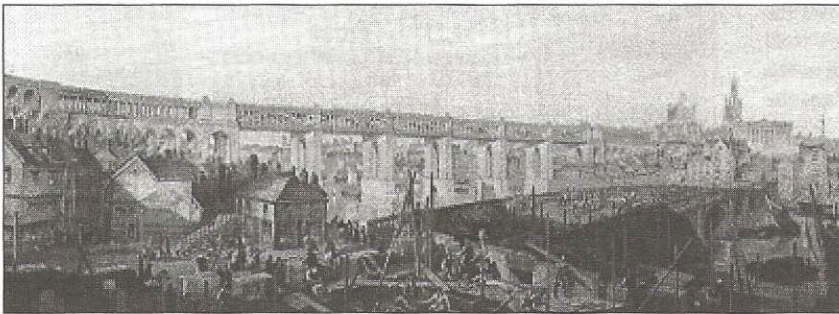
“The High Level Hornpipe” is one of the most popular hornpipes in the Scottish repertoire. It was fashioned by 19th century fiddler James Hill, a noted composer of hornpipes who lived in Gateshead, northern England (near Newcastle), although he was born in Dundee, Scotland. The “High Level Hornpipe” was apparently first published in Kohlers’ *Violin Repository*, Book 1, in the latter 19th century. It quickly became popular, especially in the north of England, and many players evolved their own elaborations of it, according to Robin Williamson (1976).

The hornpipe is named after Newcastle’s famous bridge across the River Tyne linking Newcastle and Gateshead, the first important rail crossing in

Britain designed to carry more than two tracks. It was begun in 1846, opened in 1849, and replaced a bridge that had been built in 1781. Designed by Robert Stephenson, the High Level was based on a series of cast iron bowstring arches springing from tall stone piers; each of the six main spans stretched for 125 feet, the length of the whole being 1,372 feet, well over a quarter of a mile. The two-tier structure allowed three railway lines to be carried on the upper deck, while pedestrians, horses and carriages traffic travelled on the road beneath. It was an architectural marvel of the age, and was so splendid that Queen Victoria herself performed the opening ceremonies. The bridge has survived almost unaltered since then, apart from the removal of two of its railway lines and some strengthening in 1922 to enable trams to pass safely across.

There is a pub at one end of the structure called The Bridge, that has long been home to The Bridge Folk Club, where the band The High Level Ranters started. It remains a desirable venue for traditional and folk performers.

Despite the melody’s origins in northern England, it has become a staple in several genres. It became popular in the American Mid-West (especially in Missouri), largely through the playing of fiddlers who could sight-read music and who had a copy of *Ryan’s Mammoth Collection* (1883, the predecessor of Cole’s 1001 Fiddle Tunes), in which it appeared. R.P. Christeson (1973) included it in his *Old Time Fiddler’s Repertory* and said he believed the melody was derived from the “Highland Hornpipe,” a tune that can be found in several older publications, including Ryan’s/Cole’s. “The High Level Hornpipe” was a signature tune of American fiddler Howdy Forrester, and the swing version in Stacy Phillip’s *Traditional American Fiddle Tunes* features a fourth part in the key of G Minor. In County Donegal, Ireland, as well, it is a popular hornpipe and contrasts with another popular Donegal hornpipe, “The Low Level Hornpipe,” and a Prince Edward Island, Canada, version was included by Ken Perlman in his *Fiddle Music of Prince Edward Island*.



The High Level Bridge, Tyneside, c. 1890 (Gateshead Library)

## Marmaduke’s Hornpipe

“Marmaduke’s Hornpipe” is a tune that has long been a Missouri standard that can often be heard at Mid-West fiddlers’ contests and gatherings. Missouri fiddler Charlie Walden listed it high on his list of 100 essential Missouri fiddle tunes, as had musicologist Vance Randolph half a century earlier. Local central Missouri fiddlers well remember that “Marmaduke’s Hornpipe” was a signature tune of Daniel Boone Jones, a renowned fiddler from Boone County, who represented Missouri in one of Henry Ford’s national contests in the late 1920s, according to R.P. Christeson. In fact, the tune was so closely associated with the influential Jones that his name was used as an alternate title for his contest-winning version.

Missouri fiddler Howard “Rusty” Marshall reveals that Missouri oral tradition gives that the tune was named for Confederate general John S. Marmaduke, son of pre-conflict Missouri governor M.M. Marmaduke, who was “from a dynasty of Little Dixie tobacco and hemp farmers, slave holders, and politicians.” More political appointee than warrior, John S. and his outnumbered, outgunned rebel forces were soundly defeated at the battle of Boonville in June, 1862, resulting in the surrender of control of the Missouri River to Union forces. Marmaduke led a regiment at the bloody battle of Shiloh, and participated in Price’s raid in Missouri, during which he had two horses shot out from under him at Little Blue. His military career came to an end when he was wounded and captured at Marais de Cygnes in October, 1864. Despite his lack of success in

the martial arena, Marmaduke remained esteemed and, like his father, was elected Governor of the state after Reconstruction. He served from 1885-1887, and died in office.

“Cricket on the Hearth,” “Grand Hornpipe,” and “Rocky Mountain Goat” are melodies thought to be reminiscent of “Marmaduke’s” and perhaps cognate. “Damon’s Winder” is a nearly identical melody, save for the C natural notes played in the third and fourth measures instead of a C sharp.



John S. Marmaduke

[Andrew Kuntz is the author of a book of old-time songs and tunes called “Ragged but Right” (1987) as well as an on-line tune encyclopedia, “The Fiddler’s Companion” (<http://www.ceolas.org/tunes/fc>). Currently he spends as much time as possible playing fiddle in Irish music sessions, when not engaged in his other passion, researching traditional tunes.]