

# Fiddle Tune History

By Andrew Kuntz

## The King of the Patrons

I had, in the last issue of *Fiddler*, the pleasure of relating a brief history of Suphy and Lucy Johnston, who had inspired (for different reasons) or composed some memorable pieces of music. I referred then to a “patronage pool” of traditional dance tunes, primarily 18th and early 19th century Scottish — although common enough as well in English and Irish genres — but before I leave the subject for future topics I thought to present some music associated with “The King of the Patrons,” William Ramsay Maule. He was, in his own way, as engaging and eccentric a figure as were the Johnstons. His sobriquet for this article (for which I accept all blame) is deserved by his generosity to Scottish artists, the number of tunes named for him, and because they were composed by no less than four of the greatest Scots fiddle-composers of the era, and perhaps of all time: Niel Gow, his son Nathaniel, Robert “Red Rob” MacIntosh, and Robert Petrie.

Who was Maule, and why was he (and family members) named in so many compositions? Maule was a complex man who made fast friends and bitter enemies, and who ultimately represented different things to different people at different times, even unto his immediate family. He lived from 1771-1852, born the second son of George Ramsay, eighth Earl of Dalhousie. As “second son” he would not inherit the Earldom, however, in 1787 at the age of sixteen he fortuitously inherited many of the extensive lands of the Panmure estate, Angus, Forfarshire, under the will of his uncle William, at which time he assumed the name and arms of Maule of Panmure, and established himself as laird. At eighteen, he entered the army as a cornet (the lowest commissioned rank) in the blue-uniformed 11th Dragoons, afterwards raising an independent company of foot, which was disbanded in 1791. It was during the brief military phase of Maule’s career that he came into contact with Scots poet Robert Burns, as he was stationed at Dumfries for a time, near where the bard lived. The relationship was not cordial

however, for, in a letter dated October 29th, 1794, Burns sent an epigram (the most condensed form of poetry) to his elderly friend and critic Mrs. Dunlop, addressed “To the Hon. Wm R. Maule of Panmure” with the comment “One of the other Corps which burst out as follows”:

*Thou fool, in thy phaeton towering,  
Art proud when that phaeton is prais’d?  
Tis the pride of a Thief’s exhibition  
When higher his pillory’s rais’d.*

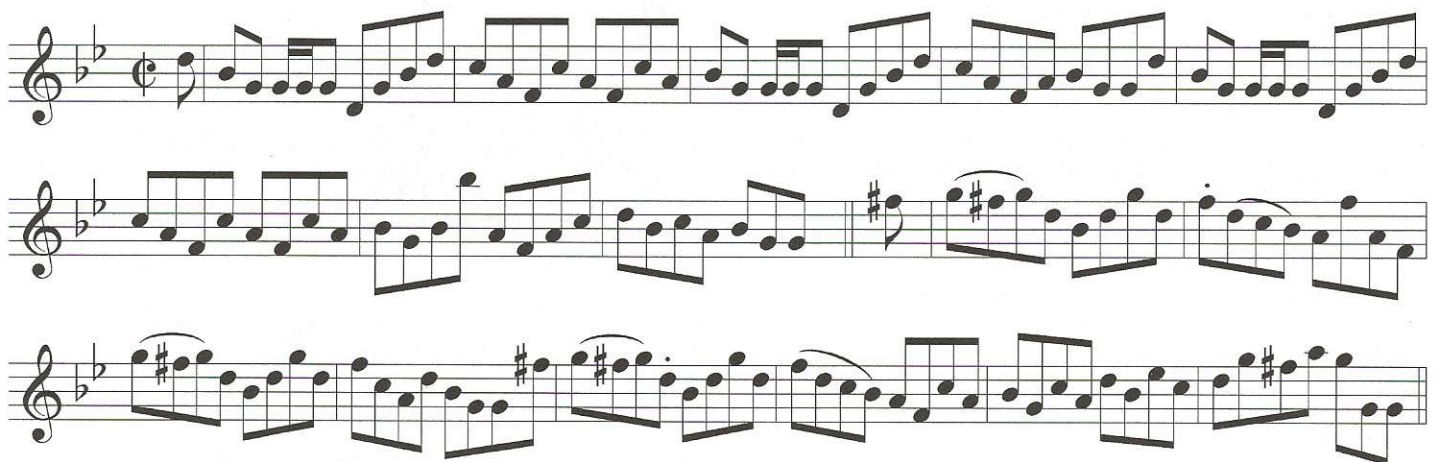
While the lines are rather dense today (it helps to know that Phaeton in myth was the headstrong lad who had the hubris to commandeer his father Apollo’s chariot-of-the-sun, for which he was struck down by a Zeus-thrown lightning bolt), the meaning is clearly demeaning, and was indeed perceived as an attack. In the first of many conundrums regarding Maule’s character we find, upon Burns’ death a few years later in 1796, that Maule provided his widow with an annuity of £60 per annum (although he only had to disburse it for eighteen months, after which Burns’ son James assumed financial responsibility for the household).

Maule’s career, however, lay not in military life but in politics. The same year that he settled the annuity on the widow Burns, Maule was elected a Member of Parliament for Forfarshire, a position he was continuously re-elected to until 1831, when he was raised to peerage and acquired the title of Baron Panmure of Brechin and Navar. He was an ardent admirer of Whig party champion Charles James Fox (1749-1806) — he named one of his sons after him, Fox Maule, who became a War Minister for Queen Victoria. Although, like Charles Fox he had been raised in the Tory politics of his family, he converted and maintained Whig allegiances all his life, associating with a variety of liberal causes. He was a Mason and was, as his father had been, appointed Grand Master (1808-1810) of the Grand Lodge of Scotland, as much in recognition of his social status and growing political power as his allegiance to the organization.

His reputation, however, was decidedly mixed, largely as a result of his personal life, which often came before the public. In his volume *The Great Historic Families of Scotland* (1887), James Taylor gives this appraisal:

## Honorable Mr. Ramsay Maule’s Reel

Robert  
Petrie





Mr. Maule was a very remarkable character, and during his early and middle life, his name and eccentric doings, in one form or another, were almost continually before the public, whom he alternately surprised and scandalized by his systematic defiance of decorum and conventional usages. He was possessed of excellent natural abilities, which had, however, been only imperfectly cultivated, but his natural shrewdness stood him well instead of acquired knowledge. "He is the most long-headed fellow," wrote of him Mr. Hunter, of Blackness, in Forfarshireland, "and of the soundest judgment too (if he did not sometimes let his passion get the better of him) of any person of his years whom I know, and has more brains than his whole family beside." Unfortunately, Mr. Maule's passion did very often get the better of him. He was unmeasured both in his likings and dislikings, "devotedly attached to those who did not thwart him, implacable to those who did;" liberal and kind to those who came into contact with him only in the affairs of public life, but most arbitrary and despotic in his behavior to his own family. He would brook no opposition to his will, and was vindictive and unrelenting to those who thwarted him or refused to submit to his authority. He was ultimately at variance with all the members of his family and the verdict of public opinion unhesitatingly pronounced him in the wrong.

Maule's first wife was Patricia Hernon, daughter of Gilbert Gordon, Esq. of Halleaths, whom he married in his military years, and who bore him three sons and five daughters. She was remembered by Hunter as "the wisest, most judicious, best-tempered, best-dispositioned, sensible and good woman in the whole circle of my acquaintance." In other words, a saint to Maule's hellion. Presumably, Patricia kept the family emotionally intact until the children were mostly into their twenties, before she died in 1821. Maule mourned for six months, then promptly remarried to Elizabeth Barton, with whom he had no children. *Douglas's Peerage of Scotland* confirms that "His uncontrollable temper alienated him from nearly all his family in his latter years," and, "...in private life he was an immovable despot."

It seems another conundrum that Maule, who could be so miserable toward family members and those whom he perceived to thwart him, could champion many social causes, and could care deeply about the welfare of others. For example, when a succession of poor harvests plagued the tenantry of his Panmure estates in the

1820s, Maule was willing to forgo their rents for several years. In gratitude, when times were better, those same tenants in 1839 erected a prominent monument on a hill in Angus, called the Panmure Testimonial, or, popularly, the "Live and Let Live Monument." He enlarged the public schools of Brechin, and built a large public hall at the Mechanics' Institute in the same town. *Douglas's Peerage* records that, for whatever his faults, he performed many ostentatious acts of charity, while "...in politics he was a liberal, and his views were invariably humane." Maule also championed other Scottish artists besides musicians. For example, in 1836 he gifted the young painter John "Spanish" Phillip (1817-1867) with £50, enabling him to study under the painter Thomas Musgrove Joy, and then at the Royal Academy Schools.

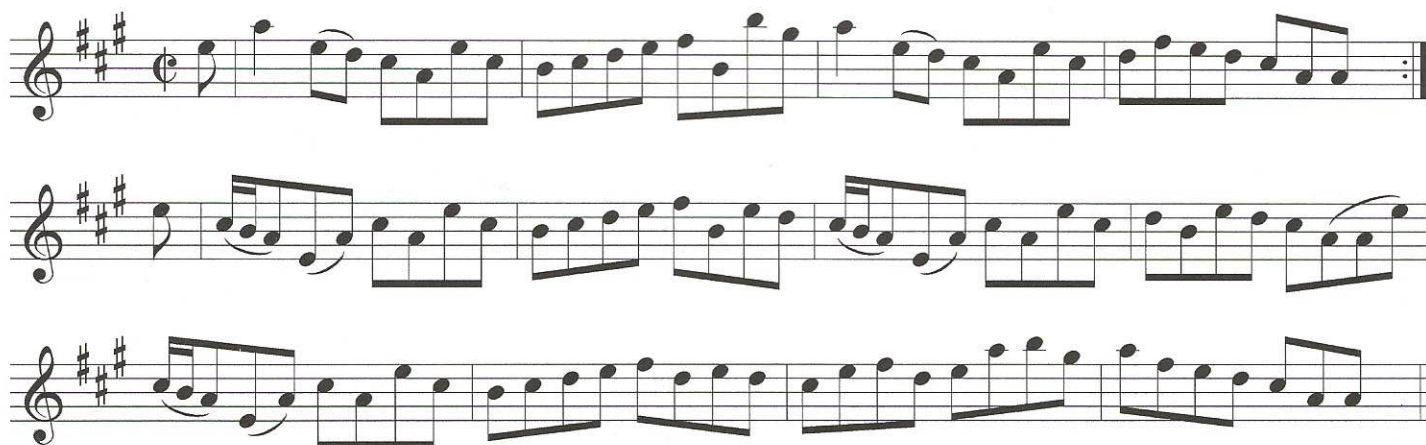
Maule is remembered as much for his numerous escapades as for his good works, for the adolescent part of his character persisted nearly till old age. The latter 19th century has been called an adolescent age; certainly for many "gentlemen," and particularly Scottish lairds (if Taylor can be believed), whose manners and conduct could be at once urbane and profligate. Maule seems to have been a typical product of the class of this era, and apparently one of its prime exponents in Scotland, if one considers how long he actually kept it up. Much of his behavior was of the "convivial" (read, "intoxicated") variety. *Douglas's Peerage* says that "as a young man he was devoted to the turf, and many of his practical jokes at race meetings were long recounted in Scotland. He had been one of the most dissipated and extravagant, even of the Scottish gentry of his younger days, and survived them, thanks to a constitution of extraordinary strength and a fortune of vast resources." One of his contemporary sobriquets was the "Generous Sportsman."

Mr. Hunter, one of the convivial Forfarshire lairds along with Maule and who was his friend, writes continually of their excesses. For example, in 1806 he records:

*We had a most dreadful day at Brechin Castle (a Maule holding); one of the most awful ever known, even in that house. What think you of seven of us drinking thirty-one bottles of red champagne, besides Burgundy, three bottles of Madeire, &c., &c., Nine bottles were drank by us after Maule was pounded. He had been living a terrible life for three weeks preceding.*

## Honorable Mrs. Maule's Reel

Robert "Red Rob" Macintosh





Hunter despairs of Englishmen such as the eminent publishers Murray and Longman who were in attendance at the event, concluding they will “never do in our country,” as they had relatively less capacity for sustained inebriation and took to their beds, ill, for some days after the event. A similar story is told of another Englishman in the company of Forfarshire lairds who practiced such unpleasant conviviality. It seems the hapless guest “quitted the dinner table when the drinking set in hard, and stole away to take refuge in his bedroom. The company, however, were determined not to let the worthy citizen off so easily, but proceeded in a body, with the laird at their head, and invaded his privacy by exhibiting bottles and glasses at his bed-side. Losing all patience, the wretched victim gasped out his indignation, ‘Sir, your hospitality borders on brutality.’” Indeed, Forfar long had the reputation of a place where stimulants were embraced. When a nearby loch was in need of draining the Earl of Strathmore suggested the cheapest, most efficient manner of accomplishing the task would be to throw a few hogsheads of good whisky into the water, and let “the drunken writers of Forfar” loose.

Sometimes Maule seemed incapable of regulating his behavior away from his home turf. After a night of imbibing at an inn in Perth, Maule and a small company of friends departed to seek adventure in the town. Their attention focused on the street lamps of the town, which they proceeded to eagerly demolish with their walking sticks, until in a short time the entire burg was reduced to darkness. The next day Maule learned that the town magistrates were at that very moment meeting to determine what to do about the outrage, whereupon he took himself to the very chamber they were meeting in and addressed the charge. By way of explanation Maule offered that he and his companions had been ashamed to see the shabby looking lamps in the streets, a disgrace to so fine a town. They had acted on the town’s behalf, explained Maule, and destroyed the offending utilities in advance of presenting the town with a new and handsome set of lamps — at his own expense. It was a thin fiction, of course, and, no fools, the magistrates quickly accepted the implied apology and the gift.

Other Maule anecdotes show more humor. Taylor relates the story that while Maule was riding through his estates one day, his attention was drawn by the sound of chopping wood. Upon investigating, he found a young man in the act of felling a prime tree, with

an ox and cart nearby to haul away his prize. Maule hailed him and asked what he was about — “Do ye na see what I’m about?” said the fellow confidently, adding “Nae doot ye’ll be ano o’ the understrappers frae the big hoose.” Bemused at having his identity mistaken, Maule played along: “What if Maule were to come upon you?” “Hout, man! He wadna say a word; there’s no better hearted gentleman in a’ the country; but as I am in a hurry, I wish ye wad lend me a hand, man.” Maule complied and helped the lad fill his wagon, receiving from him the offer of a dram in a neighboring public-house in reward of his efforts. This proposal Maule declined, and countered that he might arrange to have the young man visit the “big house” the next day. “Just ask for Jamie the footman,” the lad was told, with the promise of the treat of a dram out of his own bottle. It was an opportunity the youngster did not want to miss, and he went as arranged the next day to the castle, whereupon he was admitted not to “Jamie” but into Lord Panmure’s presence, who told the now-terrified lad that next time he should “ask Maule’s permission” before disposing of his trees. He dismissed the fellow without further reprimand, with the instruction that the lad be taken to the hall and given a fine meal in addition to his promised dram. Another escapade is alluded to by John Glen in his short biographical sketch of fiddler and composer Robert Petrie (1767-1830) in his forward to *The Glen Collection of Scottish Dance Music* (Edinburgh, 1891). Petrie knew Maule, and was apparently a kindred spirit — an excellent violin player, states Glen, “although from his personal habits and propensities he has been described as a ‘ne’er-dae-weel.’”

*He was much employed at balls, weddings, &c, and was associated with a partner, by name John Fleming, who played the violoncello on such occasions. Both Fleming and Petrie are said to have participated with the Hon. William Maule in one of those mad freaks which were so characteristic of the latter. On this occasion a mock resurrection had been organized and was performed in the churchyard of Logie, Dundee. Fleming it is said afterwards regretted having been concerned in the frolic, and he declared that none of those who took part in it would die a natural death. To verify his prophecy, he kept a book, in which he might record the various deaths. So far as Maule and he himself were concerned, however, his prediction proved wrong, but (whatever had been the fate of the rest of their associates) we know that Petrie was found dead one*

## Miss Maule’s Strathspey

Robert “Red  
Rob” Macintosh

The image displays three staves of musical notation for the piece "Miss Maule's Strathspey". The notation is written in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a common time signature (C). The first staff begins with a treble clef, a sharp sign, and a common time signature. The melody consists of eighth and sixteenth notes, with some rests. The second and third staves continue the melody, featuring more complex rhythmic patterns and some beamed notes. The notation is clear and legible, typical of a fiddle tune score.



# THE KINVARA SCHOOL OF IRISH TRADITIONAL MUSIC

The KINVARA SCHOOL OF IRISH TRADITIONAL MUSIC offers one week, intensive, fully inclusive courses in Irish music, taught by a world-class faculty – located in the village of Kinvara, on Galway Bay in the beautiful West of Ireland.

The tutors at KSITM, as well as being widely recognised, accomplished musicians, are chosen for their proven ability and experience as teachers. Small-group classes receive the best instruction available on their instrument. Students are encouraged to experience the roots of the tradition and the spirit of the music.

## CORE FACULTY:

GERRY O'CONNOR  
LIZ & YVONNE KANE  
BOBBY GARDINER  
ANDREW MacNAMARA  
TOMMY KEANE  
GARRY O'BRIAIN



COURSES IN:  
Fiddle, Accordion,  
Flute, Uilleann Pipes,  
Tin Whistle, Harp,  
Concertina, Banjo,  
Bodhran/percussion,  
Accompaniment  
(guitar, piano,  
bouzouki).

FOR 2005 COURSE DATES & INFO:  
[www.ceolkinvara.com](http://www.ceolkinvara.com)  
Tel: (353) 91 638025  
Email: [info@ceolkinvara.com](mailto:info@ceolkinvara.com)



THIS PROJECT HAS BEEN PART FUNDED BY GALWAY RURAL DEVELOPMENT UNDER THE NDP. GARD CANNOT ACCEPT RESPONSIBILITY FOR OMISSIONS OR INACCURACIES CONTAINED HEREIN.

*morning in the end of August or beginning of September 1830 by the side of a small stream. He had suddenly expired when on his way home from a party.*

Petrie included a pair of reels in his *Second Collection of Strathspeys Reels and Country Dances*, giving them pride of place on the first couple of pages. The first he presumably composed himself, "The Honorable Mr. Ramsay Maule's Reel," while the companion, "The Honorable Mrs. Maule's Reel," was credited to Robert "Red Rob" Macintosh. The tunes may have been written to commemorate Maule's first election to Parliament, for Petrie's collection was published the same year, 1796, and the honorific "Honorable" was used for MP's.

Macintosh (1745-1807) was an older man at this time, a contemporary of Niel Gow, and a long-established music seller and musician in Edinburgh. He is said to have been an excellent performer on the violin, and gave tutelage in the instrument to Niel's son Nathaniel at his Edinburgh shop. "Red Rob," as he was familiarly called, and his (long suffering!) wife had thirteen children, three of whom they also named Robert. What Macintosh's connection to Maule might have been is unknown, however, another tune from his pen, the popular "Sheep Shanks," was originally entitled by him "Miss Maule's Reel," presumably in honor of one of Ramsay's daughters. The reel is paired with a strathspey, "Miss Maule's Strathspey," and both have had some currency among Cape Breton fiddlers.

The Gows seem to have had much contact with Maule over the years, and Maule outlived both father and son. Niel Gow (1727-1807) composed a strathspey in E minor, "Mr. Ramsay Maule's," which appeared in later collections with the honorific "honorable" preceding. The Gow melodies "Panmure House" (*Complete Repository, part 4*, 1817) and "Brechin Castle" (*Complete Repository, part 1*, 1799), are named after holdings of Maule's and possibly for events there. The deepest relationship, however, was with Niel's son, Nathaniel Gow (1763-1831), his contemporary, with whom he was long on friendly terms and whom Maule held in high regard. Nathaniel also seemed to admire Maule (although he may at the same time have been trying to curry favor) and wrote several melodies in his honor. Among them are "Mr. Ramsay Maule's Favorite" and the aptly named "Mr. Maule's Frolick." The latter title, of course, is a joke, as frolic referred to both a dance event and the politician's escapades. The melody is also a jig, perhaps to stand apart from the many reels and strathspeys attached to Maule, but perhaps to enhance the joke as well, as jigs were considered a less serious form than either strathspeys or reels. The "Frolick" jig, however (tempo directed "slowish") may have been based on an actual incident, now lost, as Gow gave it the subtitle "The Trip to Dormont." It seems a rather dramatic, classically influenced piece for a dance jig, and it is set in four parts, the first two of which are in major tonality, while the last two are minor.

When Nathaniel was elderly, infirm, and in dire financial straits from the bankruptcy of his music publishing business, old friends