

# The Lads of Tarland

Alexander Walker

jig

## LADS OF TARLAND, THE.

Walker: *A Collection of Strathspeys, Reels, Marches, &c., 1866; No. 185, pg. 63.*

Scottish, Jig, G Major, AABB'.

i. Dan Hughie MacEachern, tape, c.1970, reissued to CD. ii. Andrea Beaton, CD, c.2004  
Popularized by Buddy MacMaster at dances.

Tarland is a village some 10 miles from Castle Newe. It has a colourful history according to the following account (From 'Scottish Fiddle Club of Colorado Some Perspectives on Scottish Fiddling') relating to the eighteenth century:

*"An almost invariable accompaniment of certain of the fairs was the occurrence of party fights, or personal encounters between rustic athletes fond of testing their physical prowess. These encounters, which ordinarily took place about the close of the fair, were sufficiently brutal in character, the combatants often mercilessly belabouring each other with cudgels. In no quarter perhaps were they so formidable or so systematically kept up as in the district of Cromar, where the periodical onsets between 'the rough tykes of Tarland,' and 'the Leochel men' seem to have been as regular in their occurrence as the fairs in which the two parishes were interested; the fight being understood always to end in one or other of the sides being driven off the field vanquished."*

*"Tarland is home historically to the composer Peter Milne (1824-1908) and has a reputation as a musical place. Sandy Milne (a former conductor of the Banchory Strathspey and Reel Society who was brought up in Tarland) claims that around the early 1900s, 'almost every household in Tarland had at least one fiddler and a lot of them very good fiddlers who played the real old style of Scots traditional fiddling.'"*

Tarland has strong musical links with Banchory, as fiddlers from the village in the past and at the present have often been members of the Banchory Strathspey and Reel Society, and it is still home to a well-known fiddler Paul Anderson.

The following information from the Paul Anderson web site gives more details about Peter Milne:

*Peter Milne (pronounced "Mill") was the son of Andrew Milne, a tailor, and Elspet Milne. His parents were married on 3 December 1820 in the parish of Aboyne. Peter was born on 30 September 1824 in the village of Kincardine O'Neil. His family moved to Tarland in his early childhood and in his youth was a herd boy at the farm of North Gellan.*

*Milne earned the nickname of "The Tarland Minstrel" for his fiddle playing but, although he is associated most strongly with Tarland,*



*he was in fact an itinerant fiddler who lived in a number of different places. The 1881 census for Midlothian, for instance, lists Peter Milne as a teacher of music living at 13 Hill Place, Edinburgh, in the parish of St Cuthbert's, along with his wife, Isabella Milne, aged 44 and born in Aberdeen.*

*Although the playing of itinerant fiddlers was often described as unpolished, Milne's playing was held in very high esteem. James Scott Skinner, "the Strathspey King" who learned the Scots fiddle player's art and who accompanied Milne on the cello for several years described Milne as "perhaps the grandest Strathspey players that ever graced Scotland and probably the finest native musician of any Country in the world." Milne took part in some high profile musical events, such as the concert of national music he gave along with the blind pianist from Aberdeen, Willie Grant. In addition, he led orchestras at the Gaiety and Prince's Theatres in Edinburgh as well as at M'Gork's Theatre in Leith, and received a silver medal from Queen Victoria for his "pathetic rendering of 'Auld Robin Gray' at Balmoral". Milne loved playing the fiddle and is reputed to have said that he was "that fond o' ma fiddle I could sit in the inside o't an look oot".*

*Milne's life was dogged by misfortune, however. He is said to have become an opium addict after taking the drug initially as a cure for rheumatism whilst working in Manchester. Tragically, while socialising with friends in Aberdeen in 1898 his chair was pulled out from below him causing him injure himself so badly that he was bedridden for the last 10 years of his life. Peter Milne died on 11 March 1908 at Aberdeen Poorhouse, Oldmill, Newhills aged 83. The monument to Milne in Tarland Square was erected with the proceeds of a collection instigated by Alex Innes of Crispin Cottage, Tarland, a souter and fiddle pupil of Peter and was unveiled by Lord Aberdeen. In 2007 Peter Milne's unmarked paupers grave was discovered in the Nellfield cemetery, Great Western Road, Aberdeen by another Tarland fiddler, Paul Anderson almost 100 years after his death.*

### **Alexander Walker Connection**

Alexander would have known Peter Milne and other Tarland fiddlers for a number of reasons. Alexander at Newe was only 10 miles or so away from Tarland. Both Peter Milne and Alexander played at Balmoral for Queen Victoria. In the Aberdeen University Library Special collections there is a fragment of a composition written by Peter Milne, Scott Skinner and Alexander Walker, indicating that Milne and Walker worked together.