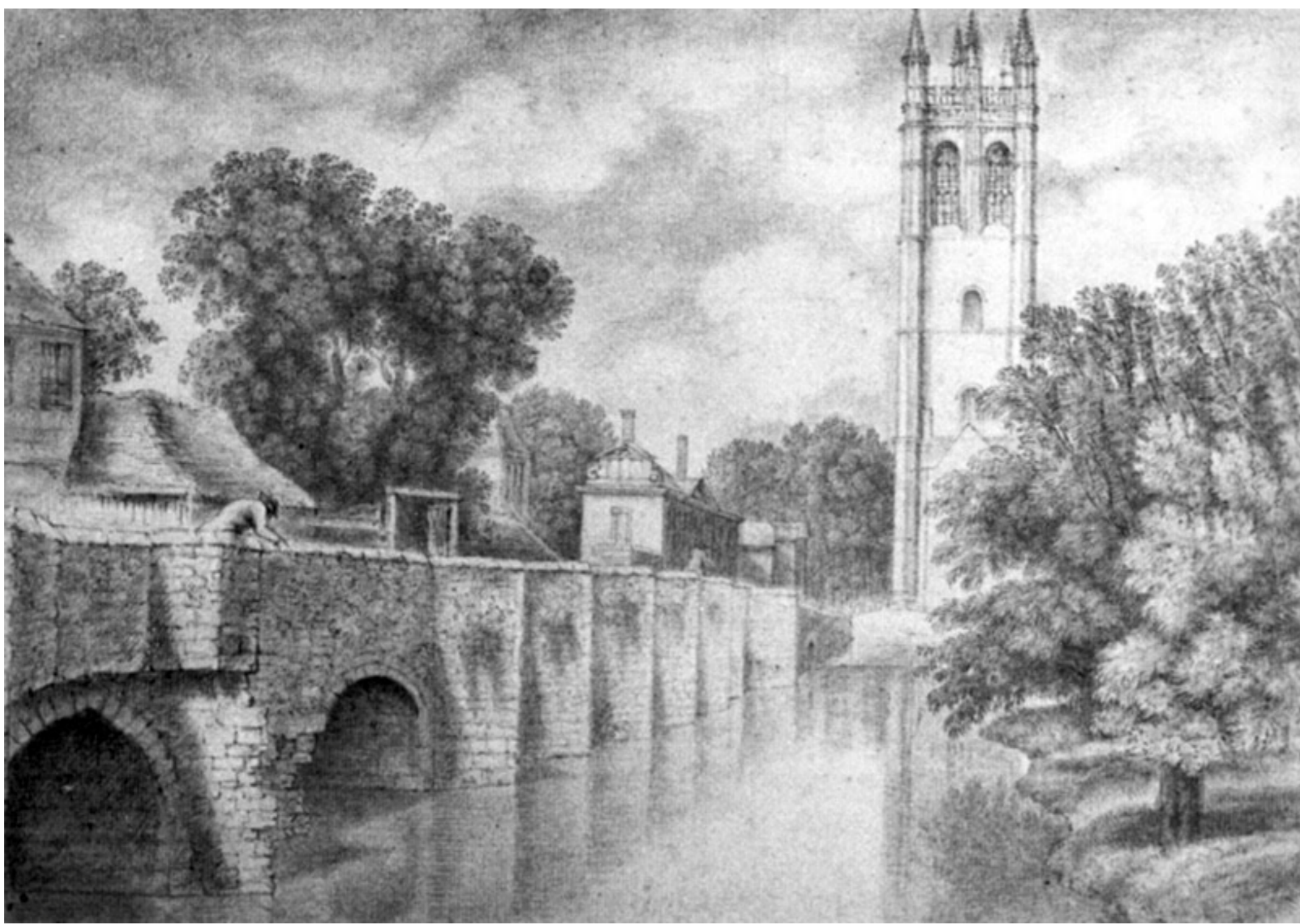


The tunebooks of JB Malchair, Oxford c.1770-1812

Alice Little, DPhil Music — St Cross College, Oxford



From the 1770s until his death in 1812 JB Malchair, a musician and artist living in Oxford, collected traditional tunes of various nations.

His sources ranged from acquaintances at the University to the whistling of boys in the street. Malchair's collection includes 987 tunes spread across three manuscripts and various publications by his friend, William Crotch.

Malchair's work stands apart from that of his contemporaries in both content and function

Musician or collector?

Malchair's tunebooks provide an audio snapshot of eighteenth-century Oxford — but more than this, his tunebooks form a *collection*: a conscious effort to organise this material, an activity not attempted by any of his contemporaries.

Malchair's manuscripts are more than just a musical *aide memoire*.

Viewed as a collection, Malchair's tunebooks represent a collecting practice in the eighteenth century that has not previously been studied, and which might be said to foreshadow the birth of ethnomusicology a century later.

Research focus

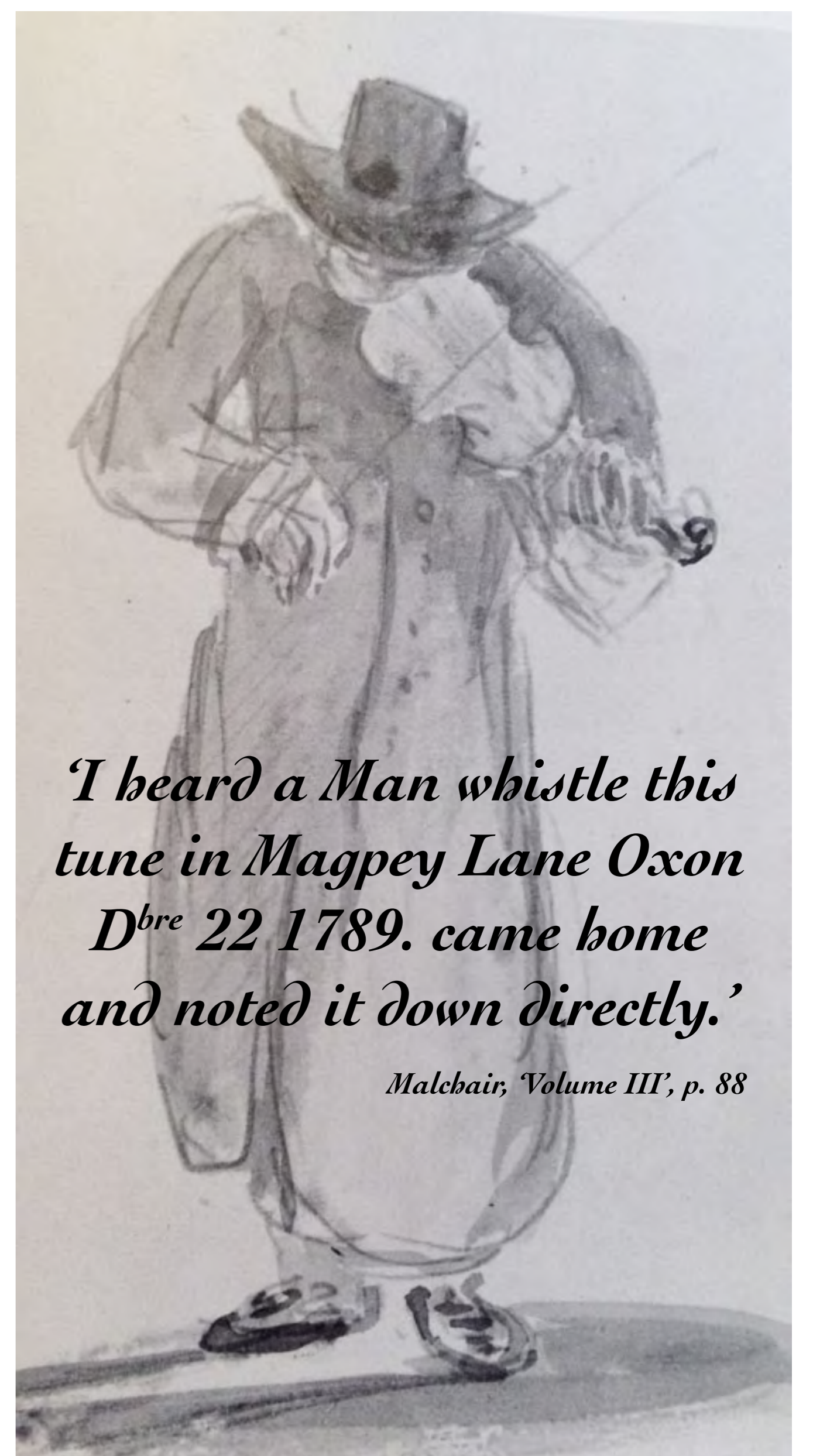
With implications for the history of music, ethnomusicology and the history of collecting, this study will investigate how and why Malchair categorised his tunes into national 'classes'; and analyse his collecting methods and legacy, asking whether he might be considered a forerunner of the better-known collectors of the nineteenth-century English folk music revival.

Sources:

- Malchair's tunebooks, William Crotch's transcriptions of Malchair's tunes
- Crotch's publications on 'national music'
- Contemporary tunebooks, such as William Henry Giles' Bampton manuscript
- Contemporary printed tune collections

Select bibliography: Margaret Dean-Smith, "The Preservation of English Folk Song and Popular Music: Mr. Malchair's Collection and Dr. Crotch's Specimens" *JEFDS* 7:2 (1953): 106–11; Susan Wollenberg, *Music in 18th Century Oxford* (1981); Colin Harrison, *John Malchair of Oxford: Artist and Musician* (1998)

Images: background: Malchair's tunebook 'Volume III', pages 106 and 80; top: Malchair's drawing of Magdalen Tower over the old bridge; bottom: a drawing of Malchair by his pupil, Henry Barnard.



'I heard a Man whistle this tune in Magpey Lane Oxon D^{bre} 22 1789. came home and noted it down directly.'

Malchair, Volume III, p. 88