

ARTICLE

John and William Mahon, the earliest British clarinet soloists

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Abstract

Over the course of a playing career that spanned roughly fifty years, John Mahon (pronounced M'hone) introduced and popularized the clarinet as a solo and chamber instrument throughout Britain. He performed extensively in London and in many provincial towns. This article presents biographies of John and William Mahon, illustrations of contemporary clarinets and a basset horn, Mahon as a teacher, his music, and his influence and legacy. William Mahon's concerts and reviews and a conclusion end the article.

Over the course of a playing career that spanned roughly fifty years, John Mahon (pronounced M'hone) introduced and popularized the clarinet as a solo and chamber instrument throughout Britain. As well as performing extensively in London, Mahon also travelled to many provincial towns and cities, bringing both the clarinet and his musical talents to the attention of audiences. This article presents biographies of John and William Mahon, and information on the Mahon family, many of whom were outstanding musicians. Like several musicians of the late eighteenth century, John Mahon was active as a military musician, likely beginning as a youth and extending to about 1781. By this time, he was actively performing in London orchestras during their regular seasons and continued to augment his income by travelling to various provincial towns to play in concerts and music festivals, over 800 of which are documented in newspaper advertisements and other published sources. His playing was of a high standard and he achieved wide recognition as a clarinetist. The article also discusses John Mahon as a military band musician; as an orchestral musician; as a soloist, accompanist and chamber musician with reference to contemporary reviews; Mahon's published music and clarinet tutor; illustrations of clarinets and a basset horn that he would have played during his career; Mahon as a teacher; later life; and influence and legacy. This is followed by a section on William Mahon's concerts and reviews, and a conclusion.

Mahon Family Biographies

The patriarch of the Mahon family was William Mahon, of Irish background and likely a musician active in the Oxford Militia Band, who died in Oxford on 10 March 1773.¹ Evidence that William was a musician and teacher appears in an advertisement in the *Oxford Journal* for 9 November 1771:

¹Dates for members of the Mahon family on the Ancestry website, <<http://www.ancestry.com>> (accessed 2019 and 2020) have been adopted.

Wanted,--A Lad, fifteen Years old or upwards, as an Apprentice to a Person in a musical Branch: The first Instrument intended for him to learn is the French Horn, which will require him to be a healthy Lad, and some Hopes of having a musical Ear; to prove which, it will be necessary to have him some Time on Trial. He must be a Lad of good Character, and a Premium will be expected. Any one whom this may suit, by applying to Mr. Mahon, in St. Ebb's, Oxford, may be further satisfied. No Letters will be answered except Post-paid.²

He and his wife Catherine (1733–1808) had nine children: four sons, John (ca. 1748–1834), William (ca. 1752–1816), Ross (1755–1789), and James (1762–1828), all of whom became well-known musicians; and five daughters, three of whom became singers, Elizabeth or Miss M (1758–1836) known as Mrs Warton; Mary (1766–1830), known as Mrs Ambrose; and Sarah (1771–1805) known as Mrs Second. The last two singers garnered the greatest fame.³ Another of the Mahon sisters, Jane, became Mrs Munday and had a daughter, Eliza, who, as Mrs Salmon (1787–1849) became well known as a singer.⁴ Nothing is known about the childhoods of the Mahons' children. In 1806, Mrs Salmon performed Giordani's *Silver Clarion* with her uncle, John Mahon, who played the clarinet *obbligato* for this work in Dublin; she sang on two of Mahon's Dublin benefit concerts of 1809 without an *obbligato* clarinet piece;⁵ and in London at an 1817 concert of the Philharmonic Society when Mahon played second clarinet to Thomas Willman, and Willman played the clarinet *obbligato* in 'Parto, parto' from *La Clemenza di Tito* for Mrs. Salmon.⁶

John Mahon became the most important and well-known clarinetist throughout Britain during the last thirty years of the eighteenth century, and up to about 1815. He frequently played as a clarinet soloist with orchestras, performing works by noted composers of the time. For example, in 1810 he was the first clarinetist in 1810 to perform the *obbligato* part of the bravura soprano aria with Latin text, *Gratias agimus tibi* (ca. 1795), with orchestra by Pietro Alessandro Guglielmi (1728–1804).⁷ The text of Guglielmi's *Gratias agimus tibi* is based on the Gloria from section two of the ordinary of the Catholic Mass,⁸ and throughout the nineteenth century became a staple of hundreds of sacred and secular programmes in London and throughout the provinces. In performances of this work, Mahon accompanied the famous singer, Angelica Catalani (1780–1849) in this aria at nine concerts in Salisbury, Bristol, London, Portsea, Leeds, and Liverpool from 1810 to 1814.⁹

²*Oxford Journal*, 9 November 1771.

³Betty Matthews, 'The Musical Mahons', *The Musical Times*, 120, no. 1636 (June 1979), 482–4; *A Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses, Musicians, Dancers, Managers & Other Stage Personnel in London, 1660–1800*, ed. Philip Henry Highfill, Kalman A. Burnim, and Edward A. Langhans, 16 vols. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1973–1993), vol. 10 (1984) 56–9, vol. 13 (1991), 244–5; Pamela Weston, *Yesterday's Clarinetists: A Sequel* (Haverhill: The Panda Group, 2002), 106–10.

⁴*Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. Sidney Lee, 63 vols. (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1885–1900), vol. 50 (1897) 204–5.

⁵*Saunders's News-Letter*, 13, 18, 19–21, 23 June 1806.

⁶Concert on June 9, 1817; Myles Birket Foster, *History of the Philharmonic Society of London 1813–1912* (London: John Lane, 1912), 32.

⁷Pietro Alessandro Guglielmi was one of the most important late eighteenth century opera composers. In 1757, he began writing dialect comic operas in Naples, and was commissioned in 1763 for an *opera seria* in Rome. From 1767 to 1772 he shared the post of composer and music director of the King's Theatre in London with Felice Alessandri, where he penned a number of famous works, and from 1772 to 1776 he wrote operas for Venice, Rome, Turin, and Milan. From 1776 to 1793, Guglielmi lived in Naples and continued to compose. In 1793, he was appointed *maestro di cappella* at St. Peter's in Rome, and took on those duties at San Lorenzo Lucina, continuing to write for theatres. He belonged to a number of important institutions such as the Accademia di Santa Cecilia in Rome; the Institut National des Sciences et des Arts; and the arts and sciences section of the Istituto Nazionale in Naples. Mary Hunter and James L. Jackman, 'Guglielmi family (opera), (1) Pietro [Pier, Piero] Alessandro Guglielmi', *Grove Music Online*, accessed 20 June 2021.

⁸Nico Bertelli in the introduction to a modern edition of *Gratias agimus tibi, Aria for Soprano, obbligato Clarinet and Orchestra* (Massa, Italy: Nico Bertelli, 2013).

⁹Mahon also performed this work with Mary Ann Wood in Salisbury in 1822. Albert R. Rice, 'The Repertoire for Voice, Clarinet, and Orchestra or Piano, ca. 1780–1888', *The Clarinet* 45, no. 4 (September 2018), 38–46.

Angelica Catalani was an extraordinary soprano of great power and flexibility, with a range of over three octaves. She was trained at a convent in Gubbio near Rome and in 1795 first appeared in Venice with engagements at Leghorn (1798), at La Pergola in Florence (1799), La Scala in Milan (1801), and from 1804 in Lisbon, where she met Paul Valabrègue, the French attaché whom she married that year. She was engaged at the Portuguese Court Opera for an extremely high salary of 24,000 *cruzados* (£3,000). In 1812, she sang Susanna in the first London staging of *Le nozze de Figaro* at the King Theatre and became one of most highly acclaimed and paid prima donnas of the time. After serving as manager of the Théâtre-Italien in Paris (1814–1817), she toured extensively in Europe. In 1821 she retired from the operatic stage but continued to appear in concerts until 1828. After 1830, she established a singing school for girls at her home near Florence.¹⁰

Although primarily known as a clarinettist, John Mahon was also an accomplished violinist and beginning in 1774, often played violin as leader or concertmaster, in addition to a clarinet concerto. At many provincial concerts, Mahon played principal first violin and the clarinet. At the 1778 Salisbury and the 1787 Hampshire Music Meeting in Winchester, John, William, and his two younger brothers, Ross and James, played in the Dorset militia band, Ross on French horn or cello, and James on the trumpet. James also performed on French horn and was a fine bass singer in concerts and music festivals in London, Bath, Cambridge, Blandford, Wells, and in Kingston, Jamaica, and acted in many London plays.¹¹ On 30 June 1792, John Mahon married Margaret Perry in Dublin at St. Andrew's Church. It would appear that the Mahons had five, possibly six children – four, possibly five daughters and a son.¹² At least two of the children (the two eldest daughters) followed him into the musical profession and became singers.¹³

The Mahons as Military Bandsmen

Four members of the Mahon family, John (clarinet), William (clarinet), Ross (French horn and cello), and James (French horn) are known to have played in the Dorset Militia Band, which assembled at Blandford and moved to locations throughout southern England, including a few months in Winchester, Chatham, Southampton, and Portsmouth.¹⁴ The earliest report of John Mahon playing in a militia band is in 1778, at Salisbury's Cathedral Close, although he was likely a member earlier. John Marsh wrote in his journal:

On the 5th of June [1778] I was gratified for the 1st time with hearing the fine Band of the Dorset Militia w^{ch} played a considerable time in the Close in the even'g, Mr. Harris being amongst the auditors very much pleased. After this chancing to go to [music dealer, Henry] Bank's, I met with J. Mahon & his bro'r Ross, the 1st horn, who also played a good violoncello, on w^{ch} with

¹⁰Catalani, Angelica', Theodore Baker, *Baker's Biographical Dictionary of Musicians* (New York: Schirmer, 2001). *Gale in Context: Biography*, accessed 20 June 2021.

¹¹*Biographical Dictionary of Actors*, vol. 10, 56.

¹²Letter from John Mahon via Charles Ashley to the Governors of the Royal Society of Musicians, sent from Belfast, 22 January 1820; letter from John Mahon to the Governors of the RSM, sent from Dublin, 11 December 1826; letter from Margaret Mahon to the Governors of the RSM, sent from Dublin, before 10 March 1834; letter from Anne Mangan (Mahon's daughter) via Mr Simcock to the Governors of the RSM, sent from Dublin, after 10 March 1834. All letters contained in John Mahon's RSM file (RSM A065).

¹³Letter from John Mahon via Charles Ashley to the Governors of the RSM, sent from Belfast, 22 January 1820, contained in John Mahon's RSM file. In addition, it is possible that Mahon's only son also followed him into the musical profession, as in a letter of 1826, John Mahon comments that he is expecting his son to take 'the situation in the theatre'. See letter from John Mahon to the Governors of the RSM, sent from Dublin, 11 December 1826. Both letters contained in John Mahon's file (RSM A065).

¹⁴Matthews, 'The Musical Mahons', 484.

Mr Woodyear's assistance, who took the 2nd fiddle, we made up a quartetto (Mr Mahon playing the fiddle & I the tenor) & tried Liddels 6. Then lately come out & now 1st produced by Banks w^{ch} pleased so well that I immediately bought them & frequently play'd them afterwards.¹⁵

Within two years John's brother, William, joined the militia band as a clarinetist, since Marsh mentioned hearing the three Mahon brothers and the elder Mahon playing a concerto in Salisbury:

On Thursday the 8th [1780], the Dorset Militia happening to halt at Sarum [Salisbury], the concert was on that day instead of the week follow'g in order to take advantage of the celebrated Mahons being there & having assistance, the elder of whom played a clarinet concerto in a style that was then thought very little inferior to that of Fischers on the hautboy.¹⁶

By 8 February 1781, three Mahons were playing in the band: 'On the 8th [1781], the Mahons being at Sarum, we had assistance of 3 of them at the Concert, w^{ch} was lucky for Corfe, as they filled up the orchestra a little again'.¹⁷ Two weeks later, on 22 February, the Dorset Militia band played at Salisbury:

The celebrated Mahons of the Dorset Militia hav'g been lately at the Concert two of whom were reckon'd to excel on the F[rench] Horn I soon afterw'ds composed a concerto for them, w^{ch} was done at the concert on the 22d. But Ross Mahon who played the 1st horn being a little in liquor (to w^{ch} he was much subject) it did not go off so well as I expected & as it did at a future concert, particularly the last movem't w^{ch} he set off much too fast & so continued in spite of all I co'd do to keep him back.¹⁸

Ross Mahon married Elizabeth Hunt of Winchester on 6 November 1780. He is recorded as performing in Winchester at the Hampshire Music Meeting in 1787¹⁹ and remained in the Dorset Militia band until his death in Blandford on 24 February 1789.²⁰ The second horn player in the band, James Mahon, played trumpet and was a singer and actor. He never married but enjoyed a long career and died in Salisbury on 21 November 1828.²¹ After 1781, Marsh does not mention the Dorset Militia Band and John Mahon in his journal, which suggests that he probably stopped regularly playing in the band and concentrated on his work as an orchestral, solo, and chamber music performer. However, Mahon later performed in two benefit concerts, one for the Dorset Band in Blandford on 9 June 1789;²² and at a benefit concert for the poor in Henley-upon-Thames at the Bell Inn on 26 March 1795, playing a duet by Carl Stamitz for violin and viola, with W. Ryall.²³ Fourteen years later, while Mahon was performing in Dublin in May 1809, he wrote to the Earl of Leitrim to obtain the position of Dorset Regiment bandmaster, which he described as the finest in England. He highlighted his ability to instruct bandsmen, not only in wind and percussion instruments, but also in string playing and singing, important skills given the multiple purposes for which bands were used.²⁴ Unfortunately, he did not obtain this position.

¹⁵John Marsh, *The John Marsh Journals: The Life and Times of a Gentleman Composer (1752-1828)*, ed. Brian Robins (Stuyvesant, New York: Pendragon Press, 1998), 180–1.

¹⁶Marsh, *John Marsh Journals*, 215.

¹⁷Marsh, *John Marsh Journals*, 230.

¹⁸Marsh, *John Marsh Journals*, 232.

¹⁹*Hampshire Chronicle*, 27 August 1787.

²⁰Ancestry.com, <<http://www.ancestry.com>>

²¹Ancestry.com, <<http://www.ancestry.com>>

²²*Salisbury and Winchester Journal*, 8 June 1789.

²³*Reading Mercury*, 23 March 1795.

²⁴National Library of Ireland, Killadoon Papers, MS 36058/7; Trevor Herbert and Helen Barlow, *Music & the British Military in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 135.

John Mahon as an Orchestral Musician, Chamber Musician, and Soloist

John and William's first public clarinet performance likely was a rehearsal and performance at the Salisbury Festival on 24 and 25 October 1771, where both played in an orchestra performing Handel's *Messiah* and Guglielmi's *La pazzie d'Orlando*, with Antonin Kammel from London as leader.²⁵ Clarinet parts were probably added to both works. On 5 November 1772, John 'Mahone' performed a clarinet concerto in Oxford at a benefit concert for Mr Monro.²⁶ John's first London solo performances were on 19 and 26 February 1773, at the Theatre Royal in concertos between the acts of Handel's *Messiah*.²⁷ There were ten further concerto performances, all at the Theatre Royal between 3 March and 31 March 1773, and at concerts in London and the provinces, during the 1770s. He eventually moved to London in 1783, performing concertos at various concerts, where he was hailed as an important performer. 'At a concert for the Musical Fund, the performances that gave the greatest satisfaction were, [among others] Mr. Mahon's Concerto on the clarinet. It must be observed of Mr. Mahon, that his tone and execution on the clarinet is unrivaled; the composition he played had also great merit but was evidently too long in every movement'.²⁸

In London, he played in several orchestras, including the Pantheon (1774); Drury Lane (1783, 1784); opera (from 1784), professional concerts (from 1785); oratorios in Covent Garden (1790, 1791, 1792, 1794, 1797, 1800, 1801); Pantheon Opera, (1790–1791 and 1791–1792) with James Oliver, second clarinet;²⁹ and the following with Oliver as second clarinet: vocal concert series, London (1802, 1804, 1807, 1814, 1815); King's Theatre (1805), Willis' Rooms Series (1810);³⁰ Hanover-Square (1812); the Philharmonic Society (1813–1816);³¹ New Musical Fund (1817); and the Wesley Concert Series (1820). From 1817 to 1824, the Philharmonic Society and from 1818 to 1819, the revival of the vocal concerts both listed Thomas Willman as first clarinet and John Mahon, second clarinet.³²

After he settled in London, Mahon continued to perform in Oxford and played in many provincial music festivals ('Music Meetings') and concerts (see [Map 1](#) of Britain for the location of John Mahon's provincial concerts).

The following is a list of all the festivals taken from advertisements: Salisbury (1771, 1781, 1782, 1783, 1788, 1807, 1810, 1813, 1818, 1821, 1824); Worcester (Three Choirs, 1773, 1776, 1782, 1788, 1791, 1800, 1806, 1809, 1812, 1815, 1824); Reading (1778, 1788); Birmingham (1778, 1780, 1784, 1790, 1802, 1805, 1808, 1811, 1814, 1817, 1820, 1823); Hampshire (1781, 1783, 1784, 1785, 1787, 1789, 1790, 1791, 1796, 1797, 1804, 1805, 1807, 1812, 1814); Gloucester (Three Choirs, 1781, 1802, 1808, 1811, 1814, 1823); Manchester (1786); Hereford (Three Choirs, 1786, 1789, 1792, 1804, 1810, 1822); Norwich (1788); Isle of Wight (1788); Cambridge (1788, 1811); Hull (1789, 1812); Nottingham (1789, 1809); Leeds (1790, 1812); Sheffield (1790); York (1791, 1823); Chester (1791, 1806, 1814, 1821); Oxford (1791, 1793, 1810); Bury (1802); Stamford (1803); Liverpool (1805, 1812, 1813); Dock (close to Plymouth, 1806); Truro (1806, 1809); Exeter (1809, 1813); Warwick (1810); Derby (1810); Bristol (1814, 1821); and at benefit and subscription concerts in Bath, Oxford, Blandford, Southampton, Bristol, Cirencester, Manchester, Derby, Salisbury, Winchester, Dublin, Reading, Romsey, Belfast, Edinburgh, Bury, Norwich, Cambridge, Weymouth, Coventry, Wells (near Bath), Stamford, Portsea, Nottingham, Antrim, Nottingham, Belfast,

²⁵Salisbury Journal (October 1771), cited by Donald Burrows and Rosemary Dunhill, *Music and Theatre in Handel's World: The Family Papers of James Harris 1732–1780* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 651.

²⁶Oxford Journal, 31 October, 5 November 1772.

²⁷Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser, 19, 24 February 1773; Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser, 17, 19, 25 February 1773; Public Advertiser, 23 February 1773.

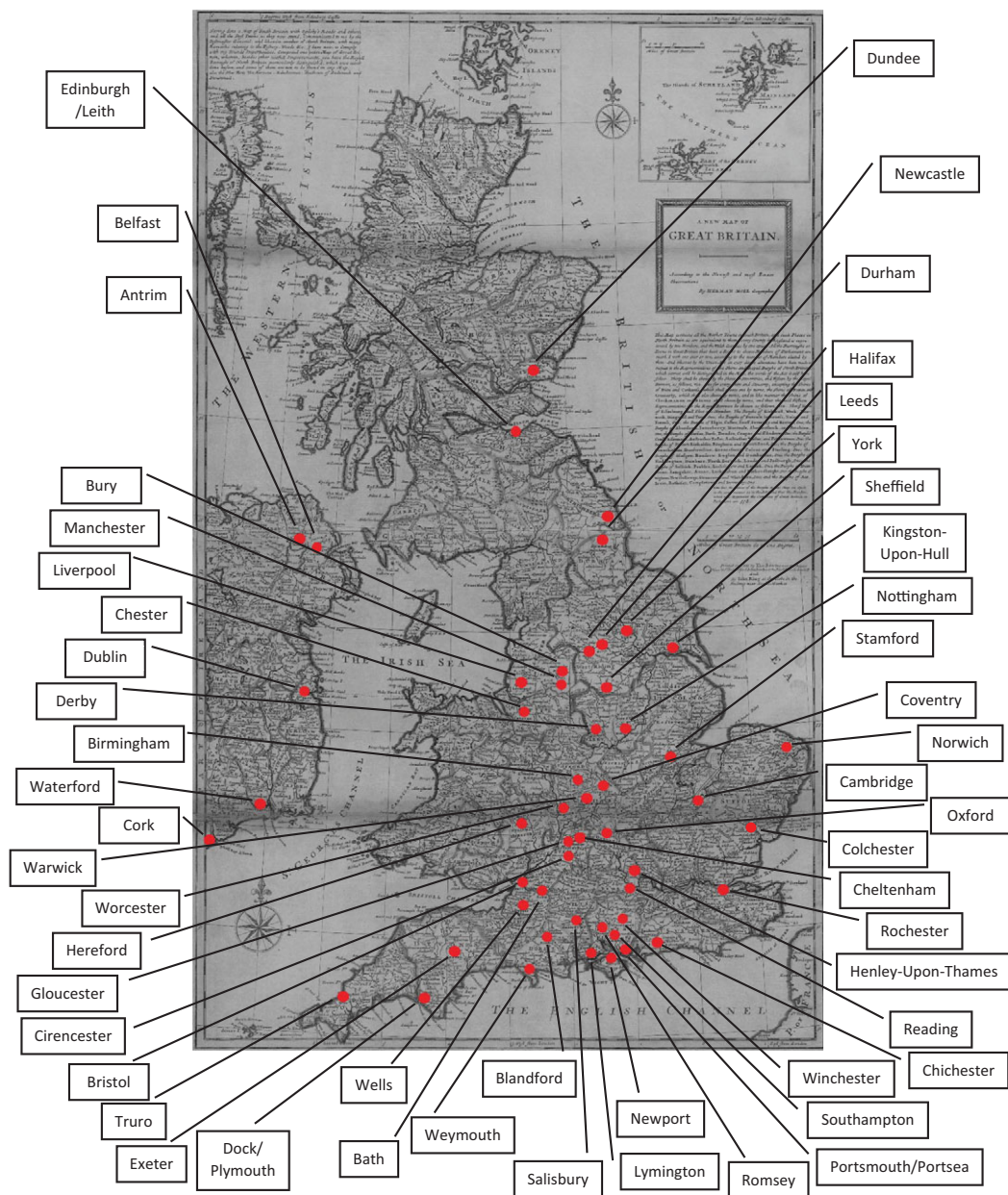
²⁸Morning Herald and Daily Advertiser, 3 March 1783.

²⁹Curtis Alexander Price, Judith Milhous, Robert D. Hume, and Gabriella Dideriksen, *Italian Opera in Late Eighteenth-Century London* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), vol. 2, 693 and concert programmes contained in 'Historical Texts' online platform, <<https://historicaltexts.jisc.ac.uk>> (accessed 15 June 2020).

³⁰John Carnelley, *George Smart and Nineteenth-Century London Concert Life* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2015), 103.

³¹Foster, *History of the Philharmonic Society of London 1813–1912*, 8–27.

³²Foster, *History of the Philharmonic Society of London 1813–1912*, 29–98; Morning Post, 23 February 1818; and Anonymous, 'The Vocal Concerts', *Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review*, 1 (1818), 464.



Map 1. Map of provincial concerts given by John Mahon. Herman Moll, *A new map of Great Britain: according to the newest and most exact observations* (London, 1720-1729?). Map reproduction courtesy of the Norman B. Leventhal Map & Education Center at the Boston Public Library.

Cork, Newcastle, Durham, Dundee, Henley-upon-Thames, Hull, Chichester, Portsmouth, Gloucester, Cheltenham, Halifax, Colchester, Rochester, Leith, and Waterford. In 1805, after playing the subscription concerts for Mr Corri and two concerts in Leith, Mrs Mahon stayed in Edinburgh singing at several concerts. Her benefit concert at Corri’s Rooms on 1 April 1806, proclaimed:

Mrs Mahon most respectfully informs the Nobility, Gentry, and the Public, that, in consequence of the failure of Concerts in Edinburgh, Mr Mahon has been under the necessity of leaving the City; and having a numerous family under her care, she has been advised to take a Benefit Concert in the above Rooms, which have been kindly offered to her by Mr Corri, and which occasion she hopes for the patronage and protection of a generous Public.³³

John Mahon was a versatile and successful musician primarily because he played a variety of instruments at a high level of musicianship. For example, he initially played principal violin in a 1774 benefit concert in Southampton and played a clarinet concerto.³⁴ From 1777, Mahon played first violin and a clarinet concerto in five concerts in Southampton, Derby, Winchester, Belfast, and Edinburgh.³⁵ From 1779, he also played first violin and a violin concerto in Oxford, first violin in Romsey, and violin in the 1784 and 1786 Handel Commemoration Concerts in London's Westminster Abbey and Pantheon. Throughout his career, Mahon continued to play violin and/or clarinet in a number of concerts. From 1792, he also performed on the basset horn (called the *voce claria*) in Belfast, Edinburgh, Newcastle, Durham, and Dundee.³⁶ Mahon performed with the finest singers and instrumentalists in London, Dublin, and Edinburgh. The development of his career as an orchestral clarinetist coincided with the instrument's inclusion into a wider range of orchestral works by significant composers who used the clarinet to provide further variation in tone quality and timbre within the woodwind section. Several concerts in which Mahon performed were historically significant because of the date of the performance or because they included works commissioned by English orchestras. Some of the most important and interesting works are:³⁷

Stamitz [Carl], Concerto 21 July, 1784, Mr Mahon's Concert, Blandford, Assembly-Room. The only occasion that Mahon played a clarinet concerto by a well-known Continental composer.
Haydn, *The Creation* (1796-1798) 28 March, 2 April, 1800, Oratorio Concerts, Covent-Garden (first two English performances).

Mozart, Requiem (1791) 20 February, 4 March, 1801, Oratorio Concerts, Covent-Garden (first two English performances; principal 2nd violin, later performances, basset horn and clarinet.)

Beethoven, Symphony No. 1 (1801) 11 May, 1804, Harrison's Annual Concert, King's Theatre (An early performance of a Beethoven symphony in England).

³³*Caledonian Mercury*, 29 March 1806. The Mr. Corri referred to here is most likely to be Natale Corri (1765–1822), a singing master, guitarist, composer, and music publisher who arrived in Edinburgh in 1785 to reside with his brother Domenico. Domenico moved to London around 1790 and Natale remained in Edinburgh, establishing concert rooms there and organising subscription concerts. See Peter Ward Jones, revised by Rachel E. Cowgill, 'Corri family', '(2) Natale Corri,' *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, <<https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.06565>> (accessed 2 July 2021).

³⁴*Hampshire Chronicle*, 1, 15 August 1774.

³⁵*Hampshire Chronicle*, 25 August 1777; *Derby Mercury*, 3 October, 1777; *Hampshire Chronicle*, 25 September 1780; *Belfast Mercury*, 13 January 1786; *Belfast News-Letter*, 6–10 January 1786; *Caledonian Mercury*, 20 February, 13 March, 3 April 1786.

³⁶*Belfast Newsletter*, 29 June–3 July, 1792, 10–13 July, 1792, Roy Johnston and Declan Plummer, *The Musical Life of Nineteenth-Century Belfast* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 31; *Caledonian Mercury*, 21 July 1792, 9 February 1793, 11 March 1793, 13 July 1793, 17, 22, 24 March 1794, 26 April, 15, 17 May 1794, 10 October 1801; *Newcastle Courant*, 24 November, 1 December 1792, 12 January 1793; Weston, *Yesterday's Clarinetists*, 108. The basset horn was introduced to England by the Duke of York in 1787 on returning from his ancestral German home. It was remarked that the Duke had 'added to the excellence of his Band, by the introduction of a new instrument called the Basset horn, which he brought with him from Dresden in Saxony. It is much of the construction of the clarinet, and nearly as long, as a bassoon. The tones of course are not so loud and shrill as those produced by the clarinet and possesses all the variety and sweetness of the flute.' *The World*, 27 October 1787; *Reading Mercury*, 29 October 1787; *Finns Leinster Journal* (Ireland), 31 October–3 November 1787.

³⁷A listing of the programmes with performers is in Foster, *History of the Philharmonic Society of London*, 8–70; and in Ian Taylor, *Music in London and the Myth of Decline: From Haydn to the Philharmonic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), *inter alia*.

Beethoven, Symphony No. 2 (1801-2) 14 February, 1805, Russell Concerts, Russell Assembly Rooms (one of the earliest performances of Symphony no. 2 in England).³⁸

Handel, *Messiah*, 'For unto us a Child is born' with additional accompaniments for Wind Instruments by Mozart (1789, published, 1803) 3 May, 1805, Harrison's Annual Concert, King's Theatre.³⁹

Guglielmi, Pietro Alessandro, *Gratias agimus tibi* (ca. 1800) 12 July, 1810, Salisbury Festival, Assembly-Rooms, Mahon and Angelica Catalan (the earliest known performance of this extremely popular work).

Beethoven, Quintet for Piano, Oboe, Clarinet, Horn, and Bassoon, op. 16 (1796), 13 June, 1811, Hanover-Square Rooms.

Beethoven, Septet for Violin, Viola, Violoncello, Clarinet, Bassoon, Horn, and Contrabass, op. 20 (1800), 16 May, 1812, Salomon Benefit concert, New Rooms, Hanover square.

Mozart, Serenade for two clarinets, two horns, and two bassoons, K. 375 (1781), 8 March, 1813, The Philharmonic Society, Argyll Rooms.

Mozart, Serenade (Notturmo) for two clarinets, two oboes, two horns, and two bassoons, K. 388 (1782), 15 March, 1813, The Philharmonic Society, Argyll Rooms.

Beethoven, Symphony no. 5 (1808), 15 April, 1815, first performance in England, Argyll Rooms.
Beethoven, *Overture to Fidelio* (1805), 24 February, 1817, first performance in England, Argyll Rooms.

Beethoven, Symphony no. 7 (1812), 9 June, 1818, first performance in England, Argyll Rooms.

Mozart, Octet for two oboes, two clarinets, two horns, and two bassoons (1782), K. 388, 3-6 October, 1820, an early performance in England, Birmingham Grand Musical Festival.

John Mahon in performance

John Mahon became the most important figure in the promotion of the clarinet during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Many of his performances occasioned comments and reports in contemporary newspapers, often receiving effusive praise from reviewers. 'Mahon. – The clarinet in this performer's hands assumes the softness of a pastoral pipe. None of those horrid notes, resembling the screaming and screeching of an enraged goose, are ever heard from him. Energy, however, he also preserves, and joins to it great volubility and facility of execution'.⁴⁰ The comparison of his playing with the sound of the pastoral pipe⁴¹ is an interesting one, as it suggests that he performed with a sweet tone quality that could enchant the listener with its beauty and melodious nature. This review is also notable for its description of how the instrument could potentially sound in the hands of significantly less-skilled performers. The knowledge that Mahon therefore could draw such beautiful sounds from this instrument, contrary to some expectations of the clarinet, must have made this performer appear even more talented. The comments above regarding Mahon's 'great volubility and facility of execution'

³⁸Carnelley, *George Smart and Nineteenth-Century London Concert Life*, 81; Weston mistakenly stated that John Mahon played in the Russell Concerts when a comparison of the lists of performances by John and William indicate that William performed.

³⁹Carnelley, *George Smart and Nineteenth-Century London Concert Life*, 86. Mozart's orchestration remained controversial and at George Smart's Oratorio series 1813 concert, it was criticized by J. Carter in *The Gentleman's Magazine*, 1 (1813), 220–2 as Mozart's 'improvements'; Carnelley, *George Smart and Nineteenth-Century London Concert Life* 127, note 93.

⁴⁰*Stuart's Star and Evening Advertiser*, 9 April 1789.

⁴¹The soft, Irish or bellows-blown uilleann pipe. 'Bagpipe \$4: Ireland', *The Grove Dictionary of Musical Instruments*, 2nd ed., ed. L. Libin (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), vol. 1, 169.

are also reminiscent of his first London review, which reported on the execution and grace evident in his playing.

Mahon made his London debut as a clarinetist in 1773 at the Theatre Royal, Haymarket, performing a clarinet concerto between the acts of the oratorio *Messiah* by Handel.⁴² In a review of the oratorio, Mahon's performance is commented upon, suggesting that the work was so well received that it was worthy of comment alongside the main part of the entertainment. 'Mr. Mahoon's [Mahon's] concerto on the clarinet surprized every person; his masterly execution of the lighter parts of the concerto beggar description. The lovers of music cannot have a higher treat; but let them not trust to report; let them hear, and be convinced'.⁴³ The surprise may have been purely as a result of hearing a solo clarinetist, a novel experience at a time when the instrument was usually heard playing in military bands or performing in partnership with horns at the London pleasure gardens. The audience may therefore have been unprepared for the solo sound of the instrument. The latter part of the review also suggests that the audience may have been surprised by the high quality of Mahon's performance, indicating that they may have had little perception of what the instrument could achieve technically. The reference to Mahon's 'masterly execution of the lighter parts of the concerto' suggests that his playing was technically impressive and delicately phrased. This comment is most likely to have referred to the outer movements of the concerto and it is probable that Mahon would have been performing a concerto of his own composition for his *début* performance. Concerto No. 2 (the only extant concerto by Mahon), features lively first and third movements with light-hearted melodies and challenging semiquaver passagework, and these movements would certainly have allowed Mahon to display his 'masterly execution'.⁴⁴

Following Mahon's impressive debut, he appeared at the same venue on Wednesday 3 March 1773 performing a clarinet concerto for an event entitled *A Concerto Spirituale*.⁴⁵ In this concert, Mahon performed his concerto as part of the main entertainment, and the review was again full of praise, commenting that the work contained: 'such exquisite variations, such pleasing notes, and is executed with such graceful sprightliness, that it is wonderful the merit of that Concerto alone does not fill the House'.⁴⁶ This review echoes the first report of Mahon's playing regarding the 'graceful sprightliness' with which he performed, suggesting that his technical assurance and virtuosity impressed the audience. Indeed, Mahon's playing appears to have been the high point of the evening for this reviewer, who clearly felt that the performance deserved a larger audience than was present. The reviews quoted above demonstrate that audiences appreciated many elements of Mahon's playing, including his sweet and beautiful tone quality, his technical assurance, virtuosity and the energy and ease with which he played, allowing a useful insight into the complete performance.

Whilst the majority of reviews of Mahon's performances are favourable, there is however one notable exception. A 1783 review of a performance of *Alexander's Feast*, where Mahon performed a clarinet concerto between the acts, reads: 'Mahon's Clarinet is as well as a Clarinet can be—it would be much aided by combining it with the Hautboy and Bassoon'.⁴⁷ The grudging praise of this review, where the author takes issue with the instrument itself rather than Mahon's playing, is particularly revealing concerning the expectations of the clarinet at this time. It is interesting that the reviewer felt that

⁴²*Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser*, 17, 25 February 1773; *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, 19, 24 February 1773; *Public Advertiser*, 23 February 1773. The *Messiah* was also performed at the same venue on 26 March 1773, again with Mahon performing a clarinet concerto between the acts. See *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, 26 March 1773; *Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser*, 25, 26 March 1773; *Public Advertiser*, 26 March 1773.

⁴³*Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser*, 27 February 1773.

⁴⁴John Mahon, *Clarinet Concerto no. 2*, ed. Elaine Thomas (London: Novello, 1989).

⁴⁵*Public Advertiser*, 3 March 1773. The advertisement claimed that this was a new form of entertainment, including sacred works and solo performances and clearly taking its inspiration from its Parisian counterpart. The *Concerto Spirituale* was repeated 'By Particular Desire' on 17 March 1773 and again featured a clarinet concerto performed by Mahon. See *Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser*, 13, 15 March 1773; *Public Advertiser*, 13, 15, 17 March 1773.

⁴⁶*Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser*, 4 March 1773.

⁴⁷*Public Advertiser*, 5 April 1783. For an advertisement for the performance of *Alexander's Feast* see *Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser*, 3 April 1783.

combining the clarinet with other instruments, as heard in the London pleasure gardens, would render its sound acceptable and suggests that solo clarinet performances were still considered as something of a novelty. Clearly this reviewer had usually heard the clarinet in combination with other instruments and was unimpressed by its transition into a solo instrument. In spite of this, however, the author did acknowledge that Mahon had made the most of the instrument and that he had performed as well as the instrument would allow.

Apart from this review, Mahon's performances, both solo and ensemble, appear to have been very well received, and other contemporary clarinet players were measured against him. In 1785, when the German musician Christoph Friedrich Eley performed at a concert given for the Anacreontic Society, it was reported that: 'Mr. Eley, a German, and the leader of the Duke of York's band performed a concerto on the clarinet. He possesses great powers on the instrument, and has a considerable degree of taste, but his tone is much inferior to Mahon's'.⁴⁸ There also appears to have been a certain amount of pride felt in Mahon's status as the first British, rather than foreign virtuoso clarinetist, as proved by a 1787 review entitled *Music in Paris* which reads: 'There is an excellent *Clarinet* – Hoster [Hostié] – a concerto player – but not so excellent as our *Mahon*'.⁴⁹

The clarinet and voice in performance

John Mahon's talents for accompanying the voice were first recognised as early as 1773 (the year of his London debut). On 5 March 1773, he played in the orchestra at the Theatre Royal for the premiere of the oratorio *The Prodigal Son* by Samuel Arnold. In a review of the performance, Mahon was the only member of the orchestra discussed and his clarinet *obbligato* accompanying the vocalist Signora Galli was highly praised, the reviewer commenting that 'The different airs by Signora Galli are well set, and sung with taste and judgment, one of them accompanied by Mr. Mahoon [Mahon] on the Clarinet, cannot but give pleasure to the coarsest ear'.⁵⁰ John Mahon also frequently accompanied his sisters, the singers Mrs Ambrose and Mrs Second in performances. A number of reviews are notable for the favourable comparisons they draw between the tone qualities of the clarinet and the voice, reflecting the close association between these two instruments and highlighting Mahon's talents in blending his tone effectively with the human voice. One such performance was given at the Cambridge Music Meeting of 1788, where Mrs Ambrose performed 'a beautiful song, accompanied on the clarinet by Mahon [...] the voice and clarinet were in most perfect unison, and left us at a loss which to admire most'.⁵¹ The 'perfect unison' between these two performers was also remarked upon in a review of an Italian song with clarinet accompaniment given at the Norwich Music Meeting in September 1788. Both performers were complimented, and the report commented specifically upon 'the beautiful tones of the voice [which] were so exactly imitated by the clarinet'.⁵²

Eight years later, at a performance of *The Woodman* given at the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden on Monday, 17 October 1796, Mahon accompanied his sister Mrs Second in two new songs that had been written especially for the performance. The reviews that followed were full of lavish praise for both performers and especially commended Mahon for the beauty of his tone and his ability to emulate the voice. One review commented that 'His tone approaches nearer to the human voice than that of any performer we ever heard; indeed in some of the passages it was difficult to distinguish the *voice* from the *instrument*'.⁵³ Contemporary reports also reveal the essential part Mahon played in

⁴⁸*The Norfolk Chronicle or the Norwich Gazette*, 17 December 1785.

⁴⁹*World and Fashionable Advertiser*, 6 September 1787. Italics present in original quotation.

⁵⁰*Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser*, 9 March 1773 and 'Account of the Prodigal Son, an Oratorio, As it was performed, for the first time, at the Hay-Market, on Friday, March 5, 1773', *The Hibernian Magazine, or Compendium of Entertaining Knowledge, for April 1773*, vol. 3 (Dublin: James Potts, 1773), 186–7.

⁵¹*Morning Post and Daily Advertiser*, 2 July 1788.

⁵²*London Chronicle*, 27 September 1788 – 30 September 1788.

⁵³*Morning Chronicle*, 18 October 1796. Italics present in original quotation.

the success of this performance, one account noting that Mahon had accompanied ‘with delicacy and neatness very seldom heard, and loudly applauded’.⁵⁴ Another review added further specific detail, reporting that: ‘Mr. Mahon’s accompaniments on the clarinet were received with the warmest plaudits, and from being an *auxiliary to the performance, he became a principal by the brilliancy of his variations and the grace of his cadences*’.⁵⁵ The recognition of the crucial importance of his accompanying role in this performance demonstrates Mahon’s musical intelligence in successfully complementing the vocal melody. The references to the delicacy and neatness with which he accompanied, the brilliancy of his variations and the grace of his cadences provide valuable insights into the performance. These comments suggest that Mahon was able to incorporate tasteful and expressive ornamentation, phrasing, effective articulation and harmonic variations that rendered the performance closer to a duet rather than a soloist and accompanist. The reviews discussed above of John Mahon’s performances given in a variety of different contexts are particularly useful in the vivid descriptions they provide. Specific tonal qualities, such as softness and sweetness, impressive technical virtuosity in faster and lighter sections and contrasts of musical expression such as grace, energy, and sprightliness are all commented upon. In addition, the close alliance between his clarinet playing and the voice is also highlighted, likening the sweetness of sound Mahon could produce on the instrument to the tone and texture of the voice itself. As such, it is possible through these reviews to gain an insight into the musical intelligence, expressive power, and technical prowess of the first British clarinet soloist.

John Mahon’s Clarinet Tutor and Published Music

During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Mahon wrote clarinet solos and concertos to showcase his individual skills. He also wrote chamber music, works for wind band, and *obligato* parts for clarinet or violin that he performed with either of his two sisters, Mrs Ambrose and Mrs Second, who were accomplished singers. Four musical works and two editions of his important clarinet method book were published during Mahon’s lifetime, likely restricted because of the cost of engraving and publishing. In addition, there are few surviving copies of this music, suggesting the number published was limited.

1. Mahon’s 2nd Concerto for the Clarinet, Hoboy, German Flute, or Violin, in all its parts. London: J. Bland., [1786], 4s.⁵⁶

This is the earliest clarinet concerto by a British composer and is historically significant. The publisher Bland and Mahon himself must have recognized the value of offering this clarinet concerto as a solo concerto for oboe, flute, or violin, three very popular instruments.⁵⁷ Mahon’s first ‘*Concerto for clarinet &c.*’ was listed in John Welcker’s London catalogue dating to ca. 1775, but a copy has not been found.⁵⁸ Mahon initially performed his first clarinet concerto in 1772 in Oxford; several times in 1773 in London; two performances in Oxford, two performances in Bath; and in 1774 in London, Blandford, and

⁵⁴Oracle and Public Advertiser, 18 October 1796.

⁵⁵Times, 18 October 1796.

⁵⁶Oxford Journal, 6, 13, 20, 27, 1786; General Evening Post, 13–16 May 1786. Manchester Central Library, Henry Watson Music Library, Br 580 Mc 71; Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, MS16781-4^o. Mus. J. Bland’s Catalogue of Music lists Mahon’s 2nd Concerto, dated 25 March 1786, British Library, Hirsch IV.113.(1). Cited by Elaine Thomas, ‘John Mahon, Concerto No. 2 for Clarinet and String Orchestra’ (M.A. dissertation, The City University London, 1987), 8–9.

⁵⁷Two later eighteenth-century British oboe concertos were published with alternate solo parts for the flute and clarinet: Karl Friedrich Baumgarten, *A Grand Concerto for the Hautboy, Flute or Clarinet Obligato, with Accompaniments for Two Violins, two Tenors, two Flutes, two Bassoons, two horns and a Violoncello* (London: Longman & Broderip, [ca. 1790]), and William Thomas Parke, *A Grand Concerto for the Oboe, German Flute, or Clarinet; with Accompaniments for two Violins, two Flutes, two Tenors, two Horns, two Bassoons, a Violoncello and Bass* (London: Fentum, ca. 1790).

⁵⁸A Catalogue of Vocal & Instrumental Music. Engraved, Printed and Sold Wholesale and Retail by John Welcker, No. 9 Hay Market facing the Opera House London., 1, British Library, Gen. Ref. Coll. 7896.h.40.(17.). See, also, Elaine Thomas, ‘John Mahon, Clarinet Concerto No. 2’, ed. Elaine Thomas (London: Novello, 1989), Preface.

Southampton. The second concerto was first performed on 16 February 1775 at a concert organized by Thomas Arne, and probably written in 1774. The third movement makes use of Arne's song, 'The wanton God, that pierces Hearts' from *Comus* (1738) perhaps in tribute to Arne, who likely approved. The second slow movement includes sensitive settings of two Scots songs, 'The Birks of Endermay' and 'Roslin Castle' by James Oswald.⁵⁹

On 16 February 1775, Mahon performed the *Second Concerto* at the Theatre-Royal, Haymarket a 'with variations on the Wanton God', 'under the direction of Dr. Arne.'⁶⁰ This theme is used at the beginning of the third-movement rondeau in the *Second Concerto*.⁶¹ Because the lowest note of the B♭ clarinet part is *e'*, John Bland, the publisher, published this concerto rewritten for the oboe, flute, or violin, increasing its sales to amateurs for domestic use. In advertisements for concerts in Edinburgh and other cities, Mahon performed additional clarinet concertos, such as a military concerto, suggesting that these may have been additional lost concertos or adaptations of the first two concertos.⁶² During the 1770s, John Mahon was the first to perform clarinet concertos in London. His role in promoting solo works for the newest woodwind instrument was especially significant, allow contemporary audiences to hear the clarinet in a solo capacity alongside concertos performed on the flute, oboe, and bassoon. Concertos on these established woodwinds were featured in London from the first half of the eighteenth century, and it was Mahon's pioneering solo performances that began a journey towards the acceptance of the clarinet as a solo instrument.

A typical five-key clarinet that Mahon would have played in the 1773 concerts was made by Thomas Collier in London about 1772 (Figure 1). It is made of boxwood with a one-piece mouthpiece-barrel and a one-piece stock-bell surmounted by a single ivory ring. This was a less expensive model for a militia musician, gentlemen amateurs preferring additional decorative ivory ferrules.

2. John Mahon. *Hope thou cheerful Ray of Light. A Favorite Song introduced by Mrs. Second in the Opera of the Woodman and at the Winchester Music Meetings with universal applause*. London: Longman and Broderip, [1796], 1s.⁶³

This soprano song has a keyboard part for piano or harpsichord, a soprano solo part, and a clarinet solo part. The clarinet part is written in the sounding tonality of D major and meant to be played on the A clarinet, transposed to F major. On the last page is a separate version of the melody transposed for the "English Guittar" or cittern, a fashionable solo instrument at the time, sometimes appended to songs published as sheet music.⁶⁴ Based on newspaper advertisements, John Mahon performed this song at least three times: 1) 21 April 1795 in Edinburgh with Miss Barnet; 2) 17 October 1796 in London with Mrs Second; and 3) 25 October 1796 in London with Mrs Second.⁶⁵ William Shield's opera, *The Woodman* (1791), was performed with an orchestra accompaniment, but performances may have taken place with soprano, clarinet *obbligato*, and piano or harpsichord.

⁵⁹David Johnson, 'Preface', *John Mahon Concerto in F for Clarinet in B Flat (or Violin, Flute or Oboe), 2 Horns, Strings and Continuo*, ed. David Johnson (Edinburgh: David Johnson Music Editions, 2006).

⁶⁰*Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser*, 16 February 1775; *Morning Post and Daily Advertiser*, 16 February 1775. Thomas, 'John Mahon, *Clarinet Concerto No. 2*,' Preface.

⁶¹Albert R. Rice, *The Clarinet in the Classical Period* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 157.

⁶²David Johnson states that based on Edinburgh newspaper advertisements, Mahon wrote at least eight concertos for clarinet. Unfortunately, only the first two were published, so the total number must remain speculative. See David Johnson, *John Mahon Concerto in F for Clarinet in B Flat*, Preface and Notes.

⁶³British Library, G.250.(28.); Bodleian Library, (W) Mus. Voc. I, 38 (9); University of Glasgow Library, Library Research Annexe, Store HQ01101; University of California at Berkeley, Music Library, M1621.M216 H6 1796 Music Case X.

⁶⁴For examples of other instruments printed at the conclusion of sheet music, see Albert R. Rice, 'Some Performance Practice Aspects of American Sheet Music, 1793-1830', *Music in Performance and Society, Essays in Honor of Roland Jackson*, ed. Malcom Cole and John Koegel (Warren, Michigan: Harmonie Park Press, 1997), 230-47 (pp. 230-4).

⁶⁵*Caledonian Mercury*, 16, 18 April 1795; *Star*, 15 October 1796; *Oracle and Public Advertiser*, 15, 17, 25 October 1796; *Telegraph*, 17, 25 October 1796; *Sun*, 18 October 1796; *True Briton*, 18 October 1796.



Figure 1. B \flat clarinet, Thomas Collier, London, ca. 1772, five keys, MIM, Edinburgh, 1154/100. Photograph by Albert R. Rice.

3. John Mahon. *The Oxford association, slow and quick march; for a military band of clarinets, horns, &c. as approved of by the Committee composed & dedicated to Sir Digby Mackworth, Bart. and the other officers, of the Corps.* London: Lewis Lavenu, [ca. 1800].⁶⁶

⁶⁶British Library, g.271.w.w.(1.); University of Glasgow Library, Sp Coll Farmer f187; National Trust, Tatton Park, bound with D. Steinbelt, *A Spanish Air* [1800].

Many marches were composed in England specifically for small winds bands including clarinets from the late 1760s. John and William Mahon grew up in Oxford and may have played in the band for the Oxford Association. The bands were financially supported by officers, and several officers received dedications on music title pages. This work is scored for two flutes, two clarinets, two horns, bassoon, trumpet, and serpent.⁶⁷

4. John Mahon. *Four Duets for two clarinets, in which are introduced favorite airs*. London: Clementi, Banger, Hyde, Collard, and Davis, [1801], 8s.⁶⁸

Each of these idiomatic and well-written duets has three contrasting movements, fast (*allegro moderato*), slow (*andante*), and fast (*rondo*). There are also cues for flute parts in the first clarinet, and in the fourth duet of the second clarinet part, a flute part is provided. This instrumentation would have made them more interesting to amateur players. Only one favourite air is identified as ‘Donald’.

5. John Mahon. *New and Complete Preceptor for the Clarinet*, London: Goulding, Phipps and D’Almaine, [1801], 10s 6d.⁶⁹

Mahon’s 62-page *New and Complete Preceptor for the Clarinet* was the first substantial clarinet instruction book written in England. All previous British instruction books were printed in a small, oblong form of about 7" by 9½" with a minimum of text. Mahon’s was printed on large or royal quarto sheets of about 10" by 12½" to accommodate a longer text, explanation of music notation, and many duets. A very positive review in *The Monthly Magazine; or, British Register* of 1801 is full of praise for ‘an elaborate and well digested series of instructions, progressively disposed and clearly laid down, and which, if duly studied, cannot fail to produce a correct and comprehensive idea of the characters and powers of the clarinet, and a rapid advance in its practice and execution’.⁷⁰ The reviewer also states that

We find some remarks so illustrative of the best method of acquiring a free and just style of performance, that we cannot do better than extract the sense of them. The great beauty of the clarinet, (says Mahon,) consists in a fine mellow tone, and a judicious expression, to acquire which the practitioner should not attempt too soon to move the finger rapidly, but, on the contrary, should play the gamut, swelling and diminishing the notes till the tone becomes steady and confirmed.⁷¹

At the end of the tutor, several cadenzas or preludes in different keys are printed, appropriate for use in contemporary concertos.

The fingering chart on page three illustrates a five-key clarinet incorporating James Wood’s 1800 patent with his innovations: a brass-lined barrel for greater ease in tuning and bushings of metal inserted into tone holes covered by keys with round, self-aligning brass swivel key heads providing airtight seating.⁷² These instruments were new to the market and although promoted by John Mahon and made by both the Goulding Company and James Wood, Wood’s designs were never incorporated by other makers for popular use.

⁶⁷Compare this instrumentation to other published marches of the same period in Herbert and Barlow, *Music & the British Military*, Appendix 2, 287–93, (p. 292).

⁶⁸*The Morning Post*, 25 March, 11 April 1801; British Library, g. 1104.e(1.) Another band work by Mahon was advertised in *The Times*, 28 October 1800 as ‘John Mahon’s Twelve Divertissements, dedicated to the most Noble the Marquis of Salisbury’, price 10s 6d. Printed by Geo. Astor. This work has not been found but may be preserved in a collection.

⁶⁹*The Observer*, 30 August 1801, 20 December 1801; *Morning Post*, 18 December 1801; *Star*, 22 August, 18 December 1801; *Sun*, 22 August 1801; *Morning Chronicle* 22 August 1801; a second reprinting with corrections was advertised in *Morning Post*, 2 May 1806 but has not been found. A later printing by Goulding, D’Almaine, Potter & Co. was completed in 1812.

⁷⁰Anonymous, ‘Review of New Musical Publications’ *The Monthly Magazine; or, British Register* (1 September 1801) vol. 12, part 2, 147.

⁷¹*Loc cit.*

⁷²British patent, no. 2381 (10 April, 1800). See Rice, *The Clarinet in the Classical Period*, 48 and Andrew Lyle, ‘John Mahon’s Clarinet Preceptor’, *Galpin Society Journal*, 30 (May 1977), 52–5.

Here is an example of a Goulding & Co., B♭ clarinet (Figure 2) with Wood's brass-lined barrel, and self-aligning metal swivel key heads and an illustration of a five-key fingering chart in Mahon's *New and Complete Preceptor for the Clarinet* (1801) (Figure 3).

The tutor's music includes tuneful duets for basset horn that become progressively more difficult as one continues through the book. An eight-key basset horn attributed to Cramer and Co., London, ca. 1810 (Figure 4) is placed next to Mahon's fingering chart (page 52) of an eight-key basset horn with a brass bell similar in design to Jakob Grundmann's basset horns made in Dresden during the 1780s and 1790s (Figure 5).⁷³

The 1812 edition includes a spelling correction to the name 'Corno Bassetta' to 'Corno Bassetto' on page 38. The second printing and second edition were likely a response to a continued demand for Mahon's clarinet tutor.

John Mahon's Unpublished Music

During his many concerts, Mahon was occasionally required to write music for inclusion in them. In newspaper advertisements he is credited with 32 chamber works, *obbligato* parts, solos, and orchestral and military band works, some written with other performers. It is possible that there were other works he wrote that were not credited to him. These compositions were performed in London, Dublin, Newcastle, Belfast, and Edinburgh.

- 1) Overture, 27 April 1785, London.⁷⁴
- 2) Concertante for clarinet and bassoon, 12 April 1787, London.⁷⁵
- 3) Quartetto Concertante, 24 April 1787, London. [Probably written for two violins, viola, and cello].⁷⁶
- 4) Quintetto for Clarionet, two Violins, Tenor and Violoncello, 23 June 1789, Dublin.⁷⁷
- 5) Trio for Clarionet, Violin and Violincello, 30 June, 1789, Dublin.⁷⁸
- 6) Concerto Violin, with 'Shepherd, I have lost my love', composed and to be performed by Mr Mahoon, 7 December 1789, Dublin.⁷⁹
- 7) *New Echo-Piece in imitation of Birds*, for the Flute and Clarionet, 16 December 1789, Dublin.⁸⁰
- 8) Glee for three Voices.
- 9) *Elegy on the Death of an amiable young Lady*.
- 10) Duet for Violin and Tenor, 15 January 1793, Newcastle.⁸¹
- 11) Overture; Duett for Violin and Violincello by Mahon and Reinagle.
- 12) Select Parts of an Elegy.
- 13) Concerto Clarinet with a Scots Air, and the Favourite Rondo 'Up and war them a' Willie'.
- 14) Conversation Piece for the Voce Claria and Violincello, in which will be introduced Favourite Airs.
- 15) Bravura Song, [Miss Giolivetti, later Mrs Natale Corri] with an obligato accompaniment for the Clarinet, 14 March 1793, Edinburgh.⁸²

⁷³Albert R. Rice, *From the Clarinet d'Amour to the Contra Bass: A History of Large Size Clarinets, 1740–1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 111–12, 161.

⁷⁴*Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser*, 14, 27 April 1785.

⁷⁵*Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, 24 March 1787; *Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser*, 7, 10 April 1787.

⁷⁶*Morning Herald*, 21 April 1787; *The World and Fashionable Advertiser*, 20 April 1787.

⁷⁷*Freeman's Journal*, 20 June 1789; *Saunders's News-Letter*, 23 June, 14 July 1789, Dublin; *Freeman's Journal*, 7–9, 9–11 July 1789; *Hibernian Journal*, 10 July 1789; Taylor, *Music in London and the Myth of Decline*, 46, Figure 3.8.

⁷⁸*Hibernian Journal*, 26 June 1789.

⁷⁹*Belfast Newsletter*, 1–4 December 1789; Johnston and Plummer, *The Musical Life of Nineteenth-Century Belfast*, 30.

⁸⁰*Belfast Newsletter*, 15–18, 22–25, 25–29 December, 1789; Johnston and Plummer, *The Musical Life of Nineteenth-Century Belfast*.

⁸¹*Newcastle Courant*, 12 January 1793.

⁸²*Caledonian Mercury*, 11 March 1793.



Figure 2. B♭ clarinet, Goulding & Co., London, ca. 1805, six keys, with James Wood's improvements, MIM, Edinburgh, 933. Photograph from www.minim.ac.uk.

- 16) New Concerto Clarinet, with the beautiful Air of 'Lora Gregory as set by Pleyel' and with 'Loch Erroch Side' made into a Rondo.
- 17) 'My Native Land' Mrs. [Catherine] Mahon accompanied on the Voce Claria, 25 March 1794, Edinburgh.⁸³

⁸³*Caledonian Mercury*, 17, 22, 24 March 1794.

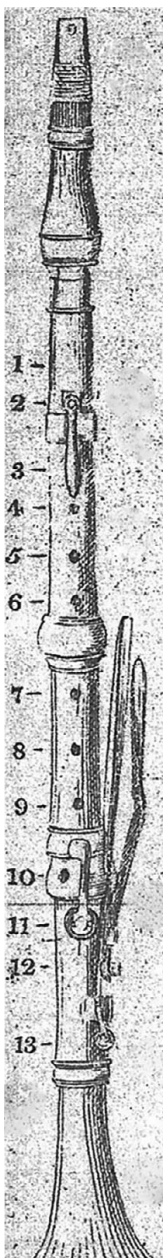


Figure 3. John Mahon's five-key clarinet from the fingering chart, with James Wood's improvements in *New and Complete Preceptor for the Clarinet*, London: Goulding, D'Almaine, Potter & Co., [1812], 3.

- 18) Solo Piece, Voce Claria in which will be introduced a favourite Glee and Scots Air, with Variations, 21 April 1795, Edinburgh.⁸⁴
- 19) Song, Mrs Second from *Abroad and at Home* composed by John Mahon and accompanied on violin by Moorehead, Jr, 10 March 1797, Dublin.⁸⁵

⁸⁴*Caledonian Mercury*, 16, 18 April 1795.

⁸⁵*Hibernian Journal*, 10 March 1797.



Figure 4. F Basset horn, Anonymous, attributed to John Cramer, London, ca. 1810, eight keys, Victoria & Albert Museum, 305-1882. Courtesy, The Victoria & Albert Museum, London.

- 20) Song, Mrs Second, 27 February 1800, London.⁸⁶
- 21) Song, Mrs [Catherine] Mahon, 'A round of brave British Tars'.
- 22) Recitative and Song, Mrs [Catherine] Mahon, 9 April 1802, Edinburgh.⁸⁷
- 23) Military Introduction composed for two Orchestras by Mr Mahon—to be Performed by the two Military Bands.
- 24) Song — Mrs [Catherine] Mahon — 'Tell me my Damon'—Mahon.
- 25) Concerto Violin—Mr Mahon—in which will be introduced as a middle movement, 'Shepherds I have lost my love,' and 'Dainty Davie,' the subject of the Rondo—La Motte.
- 26) Scots Song—Mrs [Catherine] Mahon — 'Busk ye, busk ye'—with new Symphonies and Accompaniments by Mr Mahon.
- 27) Grand military Concertante, by the two Military Bands—Principal Clarionet Mr Mahon—Mahon. 23 March, 1804, Edinburgh.⁸⁸
- 28) A Scottish Air, and the Favourite Rondo of 'The Quaker's Wife (Violin).
- 29) A Favourite Medley Overture, in which will be introduced Scottish, Irish, English, and Welsh Airs.
- 30) New Military Concerto, Clarinet, in which will be introduced the Favourite Rondo of 'Speed the Plough,' with accompaniments for a Military Band.
- 31) Military Piece, with Bugle Horn, 25 February 1805, Edinburgh.⁸⁹
- 32) Handel Song, *Blind Allen's Darlin*, a favourite Ballad as sung by Mrs Second, 11 March 1805, Edinburgh (Mrs [Catherine] Mahon); 10 June 1806, Dublin (Mrs Second).⁹⁰

The high regard afforded to Mahon by fellow musicians encouraged them to perform his music. In addition, he was familiar with the performance capabilities of most musicians and tailored each work to achieve the best results. This process was undoubtedly familiar to contemporary musicians. The range and diversity of Mahon's unpublished music referred to in contemporary newspaper advertisements

⁸⁶*Morning Chronicle*, 26 February 1800.

⁸⁷*Caledonian Mercury*, 8 April 1802.

⁸⁸*Caledonian Mercury*, 15, 17, 19 March 1804.

⁸⁹*Caledonian Mercury*, 7, 23 February 1805.

⁹⁰*Caledonian Mercury*, 9, 11 March 1805; *Saunders's Newsletter*, 31 May, 7 June 1806.

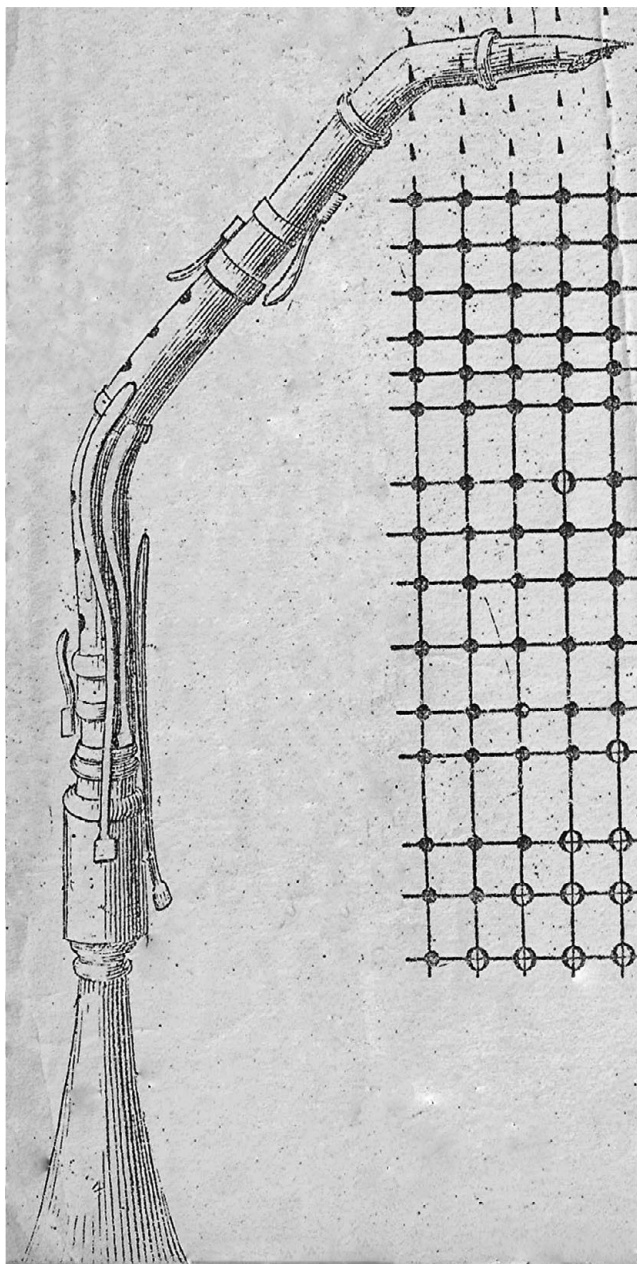


Figure 5. Mahon's basset horn with eight keys from the fingering chart of the *New and Complete Preceptor for the Clarinet* (London: Goulding, D'Almaine, Potter & Co., [1812]), 61.

adds further insight into his talents as a composer or arranger and his interests as a musician. In particular his fondness for folk songs (especially Scottish songs) with clarinet *obbligatos* and military pieces is clearly in evidence. He also appears to have enjoyed pairing the clarinet with other woodwinds such as the bassoon or flute or with strings in his chamber works, perhaps reflecting his specific connections with musical relatives, friends, and colleagues. The amount of music produced suggests an enthusiastic composer and arranger who enjoyed performing with others.

A New and Complete
Preceptor,
for the
CLARINET,
which Contains a Short & Easy
TREATISE ON MUSIC,
The Art of acquiring a Fine Tone, including Forty-two
Lessons on the relative Notes, peculiar to the Clarinet,
On the Chapumeau and Fingering the Instrument, on counting
Time &c. — with TWELVE EASY LESSONS for TWO
CLARINETS, TWELVE FAVORITE AIRS. selected from the best
Scottish, Irish, & French Music; adapted for Two Clarinets
two with Variations EIGHT EXERCISES for acquiring neat
Execution FOUR CONCERTANTE DUETS, Pleyel's German Hymns,
with Variations arranged for Two Clarinets, and a Variety of
CADENZAS or PRELUDES in DIFFERENT KEYS.
To which is added the Gamut, for the Clara Voce. or Corno Bassotto
and a Scale of Transposition for Clarinet Players in General.

by
JOHN MAHON.

Entered at Stat: Hall. — LONDON — Price 10^s/6
London Printed by Goulding, D'Almaine, Potter & Co. 20, Scho Square ^{804, 42} Westmorland Street, Dublin.
Musickellers to their Royal Highnesses the Prince & Princess of Wales
and Manufacturers of Military Musical Instruments.

Figure 6. John Mahon. *New and Complete Preceptor for the Clarinet*, 2nd ed. (London: Goulding, D'Almaine, Potter & Co., [1812]), 10s 6d.

John Mahon As a Teacher

Most eighteenth-century musicians augmented their income by teaching, and several were renowned for their abilities, but there is little information about Mahon's pupils. Teaching also provided a satisfying activity where one could pass on knowledge, technical advice, and musical insight to students. That Mahon possessed a genuine interest in teaching and improving a student's clarinet playing is perhaps suggested by the publication of his *New and Complete Preceptor for the Clarinet* in 1801 (Figure 6). The work provides practical and constructive advice for beginners and provides cautions against some common faults which the experience of teaching the instrument would have made him keenly aware of. One such comment reads:

in particular I would recommend [playing] all the beautiful Scottish Airs that are well adapted for the Clarinet which with a fine Tone will please more than Allegros, Prestos and other difficult Pieces. It will be time enough to attempt them when you are perfect in your Tone, fingering and the management of the Reed, and Embouchure. I know that young Performers often attempt to play difficult music too soon, which is a great fault, and sometimes gives pain to the audience instead of pleasure; therefore I strongly recommend slow music for beginner, in order to establish a good Tone.⁹¹

The inclusion of the reasoning behind this advice to beginners suggests an experienced teacher used to explaining and clarifying their teaching points with skill. These comments also suggest that Mahon was a teacher with a sincere desire to improve and develop the playing of all inexperienced clarinetists.

On 20 April 1787, at Mr Peene's annual concert at the King's Arm's in Leominster, a band performed led by a Mr Coyle. During the performance concertos on the clarinet were played by a 'Gentleman', formerly a pupil of Mahon's.⁹² After giving several concerts in Belfast during 1789 and 1790, Mahon advertised that he intended

to reside here for some time and proposes to teach the Violin, Clarionet, Tenor, Violincello, and Flute. Terms for teaching each Instrument one Guinea a month, and eight Lessons to be given in that time—no entrance expected—Ladies and others who perform on the Harpsichord, may be accompanied with the Violin, on the same terms as Scholars; also any person within ten or twelve miles of Belfast will be attended to on moderate terms.⁹³

By 15 February 1790, Mahon returned to London to play at the Lenten oratorio concerts at Covent Garden. In March 1790, he was a clarinet teacher in Walter Clagget's Musical Seminary or Academy, and it is possible that some gentlemen amateurs were inspired to learn the instrument, as a result of hearing his performances. Mahon is listed at this academy alongside the violinist Lewis Lavenu and cellist Joseph Reinagle, musicians that he regularly played with in various orchestras. Unfortunately, there is no record of his students at Clagget's Academy.⁹⁴

One pupil of Mahon's is known. John Sinclair, born in Edinburgh in 1789 became an opera singer of some repute, making his London debut at Covent Garden theatre on 20 September 1811.⁹⁵ In his youth, before embarking on his career as a professional singer, Sinclair played flute and clarinet in a band

⁹¹John Mahon, *A New and Complete Preceptor for the Clarinet* (London: Goulding, Phipps and D'Almaine, 1801), 2.

⁹²*Hereford Journal*, 12 April 1787. A gentleman would not want to be identified as a musician at this time.

⁹³*Belfast Newsletter*, 29 January–2 February, 5–9, 9–12 February 1790.

⁹⁴Catherine Crisp, 'Teachers and Amateur Players of the Clarinet in London, ca 1750 – ca 1810', *A Handbook for Studies in 18th-Century English Music*, 23, ed. Colin Coleman and Katherine Hogg (2019), 1–32 (pp. 6–7).

⁹⁵Soon after his debut, it was remarked that his voice 'displayed such universal compass of voice, combined with strength, sweetness, and flexibility, as raised him to the highest degree of popular favour. The distinctness of his articulation, the felicity of his cadenzas, and the rapidity of his shake, were deservedly the theme of universal approbation.' Anonymous, 'Memoirs of Mr. Sinclair', *The Theatrical Inquisitor and Monthly Mirror*, 4 (February 1814), 67–71 (p. 70).

attached to the Edinburgh Regiments of Volunteers. He is said to have ‘soon acquired a proficiency as a performer on the flute and clarinet, which excited such general admiration, that Campbell of Shawfield, Colonel of the Argyleshire [sic] Militia, who was himself a great amateur, pressed him to engage with his band, offering the most liberal encouragement’.⁹⁶ It was in this band that Sinclair’s playing flourished and he ‘soon attained such a degree of excellence, under the tuition of Mr. J. Mahon, that he was considered one of the best performers on the clarinet in Scotland’.⁹⁷ Unfortunately, no references to Sinclair performing on the clarinet appear to remain extant.

Deborah Rohr observes that ‘An unpredictable aspect of teaching was the variation in the number of pupils. Private pupils could discontinue their lessons at any time or fail to pay their fees’.⁹⁸ In 1827, John Mahon wrote to the Royal Society of Musicians in London: ‘Pupils, I have not any[,] two or three called on me and took 9 or 10 Lessons each, but never paid me. This week a person call’d on me to take some Lessons on the Violin, and I made him pay me a Pound’.⁹⁹

Later Life

John Mahon’s later life is detailed in his own words in a number of letters he wrote to the Royal Society of Musicians. These letters are a rich resource concerning Mahon’s final years and paint a vivid and deeply affecting picture of his declining health, financial concerns, and the monetary support he received from the RSM, of which he had been a member since 1783 (Figure 7).

By 1820, Mahon was living in Dublin with his family, and he and his two eldest daughters, who were singers, were all engaged at the theatre in Belfast. In a letter of 22 January 1820, Mahon wrote to the Governors of the Royal Society of Musicians that ‘the Theatrical business here has failed’ and asked for their financial assistance to support him and his family.¹⁰⁰ In the same year, Mahon’s health began to fail, and he continued to petition the Governors of the RSM for their financial support, which was received for the remainder of his life.

In 1823, Mahon was playing in the orchestra of the Theatre Royal Dublin and reported that ‘my Eyes have been failing for some years past, and now it is with great uncertainty that I can read Music, even with the best glasses: therefore and I understand that the Band of the Theatre will be reduced, I conclude that I shall be one of the number dismissed’.¹⁰¹ In spite of this, Mahon added more optimistically to the end of this letter that ‘The defect in my Eyes is the only bar against my continuing, as I have nearly as much command of my Instruments as ever I had’.¹⁰²

Mahon is reported to have continued to play second clarinet in The Philharmonic Society orchestra until 1824,¹⁰³ and his last recorded performances in England were advertised to be as second clarinetist to Thomas Willman at the 1824 Salisbury and Worcester Music Meetings. In spite of Mahon’s name appearing in these listings, the letters contained in the RSM archive detailing Mahon’s declining health by this date strongly argue against the possibility of him actually having performed for these events. It would appear likely that, rather than playing in these concerts, his name was included within the records for these performances and he was paid for them in recognition of his long-standing and dedicated service to these societies.

⁹⁶ Anonymous, ‘Memoirs’, 68.

⁹⁷ Anonymous, ‘Memoirs’.

⁹⁸ Deborah Rohr, *The Careers of British Musicians, 1750-1850: A Profession of Artisans* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 138, 206, note 73.

⁹⁹ Taken from letter from John Mahon via John Watts to the Governors of the RSM, sent from Dublin, 31 December 1827. Letter contained in John Mahon’s file (RSM A065).

¹⁰⁰ Letter from John Mahon via Charles Ashley to the Governors of the RSM, sent from Belfast, 22 January 1820. Letter contained in John Mahon’s file (RSM A065).

¹⁰¹ Letter from John Mahon via Mr Simcock to the Governors of the RSM, sent from Dublin, 31 August 1824. Letter contained in John Mahon’s file (RSM A065).

¹⁰² Letter from John Mahon via Mr Simcock.

¹⁰³ Foster, *History of the Philharmonic Society of London 1813-1912*, 66–70.

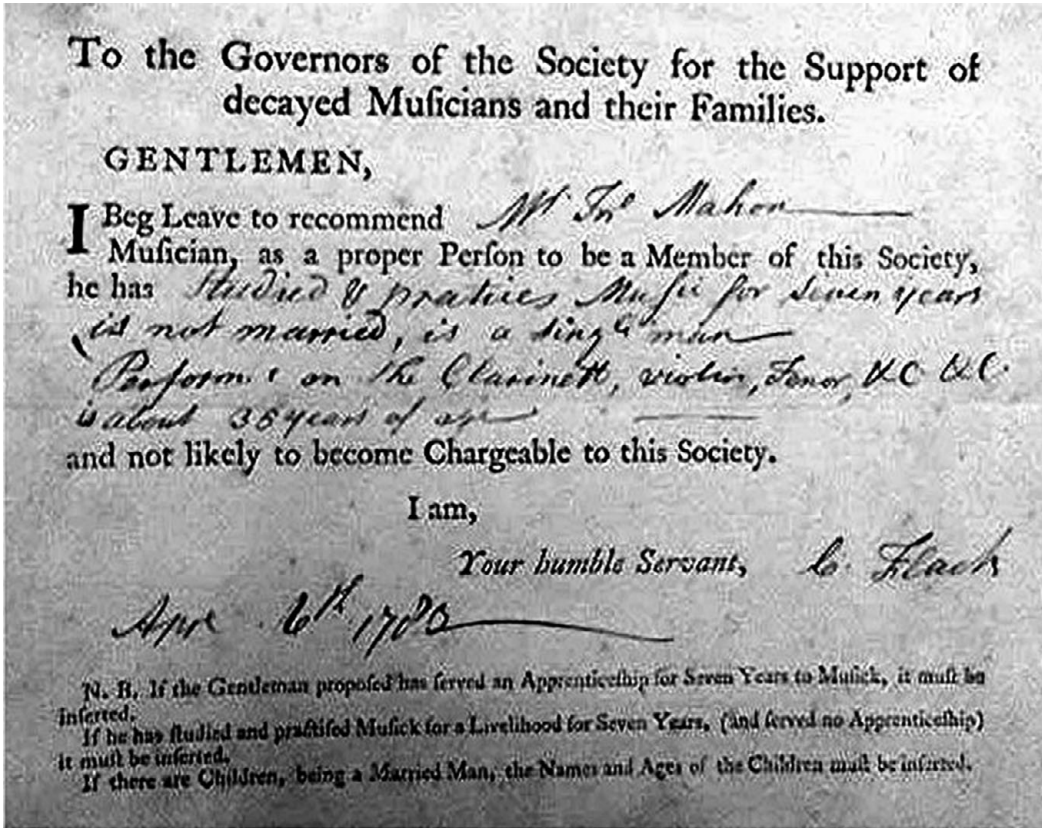


Figure 7. John Mahon's Royal Society of Musicians admission card, 6 April 1783. Image courtesy of The Royal Society of Musicians of Great Britain.

By early 1825, Mahon's fears regarding his dismissal from the Theatre Royal, Dublin had obviously been realized. However, as he reported in a letter dated March 1825: 'a friend of mine has had a conversation with the Proprietor of the Theatre on my account, and he has agreed that I may remain in my situation in the Theatre as long as I find it convenient, therefore, altho I am not adequate to the situation, I will for the present accept his kind offer, and next week I will resume my former situation'.¹⁰⁴ In August of the same year, having commented that he had given up the clarinet two years earlier, Mahon claimed that

within the last Six months, having some time on my hands, I undertook the Clarinet once more, and I have not only improved the instrument by adding two Notes to the lower part and three to the upper part, which give a great Compass and a grand effect in a Concerto, but the Tone is more melodious, and I flatter myself that I can now perform a Concerto in a greater Stile than ever I could.¹⁰⁵

Although Mahon may have indeed been practising the clarinet and attempting to regain his former skills, it would appear likely that his claims to have improved the instrument himself were misleading. Instead,

¹⁰⁴Letter from John Mahon via Mr Watts to the Governors of the RSM, sent from Dublin, 13 March 1825. Letter contained in John Mahon's file (RSM A065). Cited in Rohr, *The Careers of British Musicians*, 129.

¹⁰⁵Letter from John Mahon via Mr Watts to the Governors of the RSM, sent from Dublin, 3 August 1825. Letter contained in John Mahon's file (RSM A065).

it is probable that the improvements he described referred to a clarinet designed by William Gutteridge of Cork, whom Mahon may have known. Gutteridge's clarinet was patented in 1824 and produced and advertised beginning in 1825 by Clementi & Co. The two extant examples have fifteen keys, with two additional keys and a lowest note of *e*.¹⁰⁶

In 1826, Mahon's hopes of regaining his former powers of clarinet playing were devastated by illness and he wrote to the Governors of the RSM that 'I have had two fits of illness which have weakened my constitution, and I have lost two Teeth which has destroyed all my hopes, as I have not one Tooth in my upper jaw, and very few in the lower one'.¹⁰⁷ Even after this catastrophic event, Mahon continued to play violin in the orchestra of the Theatre Royal, Dublin, but in December 1826, noted:

My salary at the Theatre has been cut down to one Guinea a week, which in some weeks, when the Theatre is open only 3 or 4 nights in the week, amounts only to 14s or less, according to the number of nights they perform, besides which, there has been three month's vacation, in addition to Passion week, and the principle [sic] fast days in Lent.¹⁰⁸

Ehrlich reported much higher salaries in London and the provinces compared with Mahon's payment:

The Philharmonic Society began by paying only wind instrumentalists, but soon had to remunerate most of its orchestra. In 1821 front desk strings received £52. 10s 0d. for ten rehearsals and eight concerts; principal woodwinds £27. 6s 6d. and brass £20. 9s. 6d. In 1824 principal winds received 2 gns. for one rehearsal and performance, but three guineas if they must 'come forward for a solo performance'. London fees generally ranged from 3 to 5 gns., with occasional gift or 'royal munificence'. Provincial festivals paid similarly. At Norwich in 1824 the principal instrumentalists received 25 gns. for eight to ten concerts.¹⁰⁹

Mahon's last reference to his work in the theatre is found in a letter of December 1829, after which date there are no further reports of any musical activity.¹¹⁰ After Mahon's death in 1834, a short article appeared in the 1837 *Musical World* under the heading of 'Miscellaneous, Royal Society of Musicians' stating:

The late John Mahon, once an eminent performer on the clarinet, died at Dublin in 1834, aged 79 [rechte 86], having been a member of the society for half a century, and having for many years previously to his demise, been a claimant on its funds. He left a daughter in a state of idiotism, to whom this excellent society allows £25 a year, although she has no claim on it, beyond that of being the daughter of a departed member, in total destitution.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁶These clarinets are identical to the instrument illustrated in the fingering chart of William Gutteridge's *Introduction to the Art of Playing on Gutteridge's New Patent Clarinet* (London: Clementi & Co., 1825), although five variations of keywork are illustrated in Gutteridge's patent. These include one clarinet with two keys for low E \flat and D (*e \flat* and *d*) E and E \flat (*e* and *e \flat*) and duplicate keys on the upper joint for ease of fingering. It is significant that Thomas Willman, clarinetist and long-time colleague of Mahon's, also played a Gutteridge clarinet in the patent with a lowest note of E (*e*), prominently illustrated in Thomas Willman's contemporary tutor, *A Complete Instruction Book for the Clarinet* (London: Goulding, D'Almaine & Co., 1825).

¹⁰⁷Letter from John Mahon via Mr Simcock to the Governors of the RSM, sent from Dublin, 20 February 1826. Letter contained in John Mahon's file (RSM A065).

¹⁰⁸Letter from John Mahon via Mr Watts to the Governors of the RSM, sent from Dublin, 31 December 1827. Letter contained in John Mahon's file (RSM A065). Cited in Rohr, *The Careers of British Musicians*, 128.

¹⁰⁹Cyril Ehrlich, *The Music Profession in Britain since the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 49.

¹¹⁰Mahon comments: 'I have for a long time been out of the Theatre, but for a few weeks I was engaged on a very small Salary'. See letter from John Mahon via Mr Watts to the Governors of the RSM, sent from Dublin, 20 December 1829. Letter contained in John Mahon's file (RSM A065).

¹¹¹Anonymous, 'Miscellaneous, Royal Society of Musicians', *The Musical World*, 6, no. 78 (8 September 1837), 203.

Although the amount received each year is unclear from existing letters, it is certainly true that the Governors of the RSM continued to support Mahon's daughter Elizabeth, who suffered from an unspecified condition. From June 1834, another of Mahon's daughters, Anne Mangan, wrote to the Governors on various occasions asking for monetary assistance to support the care of her sister Elizabeth, which was always received.¹¹² From 1834 until Elizabeth's death in 1847, the Society continued to provide financial support for her care.¹¹³

Influence and Legacy

Mahon's fame as a clarinettist was immortalized (in his own lifetime) in two contemporary poems. The first was a satirical poem published in 1797 by Jenkin Jones, part of which is devoted to describing the most celebrated instrumentalists in London at this time:¹¹⁴

See our Musicians seize with skillful hand,
Of tuneful *steeds* a well united *band*,
All act in *Concert*, meet in one design,
And in the same pursuit accordant join.
To no rude hand commit the tuneful rein,
Let no unskilful touch such *steeds* profane.
For Dragonetti's *Bass* let none dispute,
Give Salomon the *Fiddle*, Ashe the *Flute*,
Let Krumpholtz in her *Harp* concerto sport,
Clementi sits at the *Piano Forte*.
Let either Parke the dulcet *Hautboy* tune,
Send Holmes and Parkinson to the *Bassoon*.
Entrust the *Vi'loncellos* to the care
Of Linley, Ashley, Reinagle and Ware.
Let Sargeant swell the *Trumpet's* silver tone,
And give the *Clarinet* to its Mahon [M'hone].¹¹⁵

The second poem was published in 1805 in the memoirs of an English actor named Charles Lee Lewes. Here, Lee Lewes quotes a poem written by a Mr Bell, who staged a benefit concert on 29 April 1793 at the New Theatre in Edinburgh. The poem, perhaps designed to entice an audience to attend, describes the performers taking part in this benefit and Mahon is featured amongst them:¹¹⁶

'Tis humbly hop'd the audience thinks it right,
To see Jack Tar return'd in health to-night;

¹¹²See letter from Anne Mangan via Mr Watts to the Governors of the RSM, sent from Dublin, 17 June 1834. Letter contained in John Mahon's file (RSM A065). In this letter she refers to 'the state of destitution my unhappy sister is in being utterly incapacitated by the afflictions of the almighty'.

¹¹³See letters from Anne Mangan to the Governors of the RSM, Dublin, 10 January 1840; Dublin, 10 July 1840; Dublin, 4 February 1846; Dublin, 12 February 1846; and Dublin, 24 July 1846. Letters contained in John Mahon's file (RSM A065). Anne Mangan's final letter is dated 11 December 1847, in which she confirms that her sister Elizabeth was aged 29 at her death.

¹¹⁴Extract of poem taken from Jenkin Jones, *Hobby Horses, A Poetic Allegory in Five Parts* (London: M. Allen, 1797), part 5, 125-6. Italics present in original quotation.

¹¹⁵Although John Mahon was born in Oxford, the Mahon family were of Irish origin. As such, it is likely that his name was pronounced 'M'hone'. The rhyming couplets in this poem support this idea, rhyming the word 'tone' with 'M'hone'. See P. Weston, "Mahon family" *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, <<https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.17462>> (accessed 7 June, 2020).

¹¹⁶Extract of poem quoted in C. Lee Lewes and J. Lee Lewes, *Memoirs of Charles Lee Lewes, containing Anecdotes, Historical and Biographical, of the English and Scottish Stages, During a period of forty years. Written by himself*, 4 vols. (London: R. Phillips, 1805), vol. 4, 234-5.

They'll be inform'd their foes were made to tremble;
 In a Duet by Bell and Mrs. Kemble.
 And to sustain true mirth, he has not fears,
 When Mr. Mahon on the stage appears:
 The audience of this night will ne'er forget,
 The sounds that issue from his clarionet,
 Which will contribute to support their glee,
 With compositions ta'en from Langolee.

His contemporaries and fellow musicians Charles Burney and William Parke both noted Mahon's talents as a clarinetist in their writings. Parke described him as 'Mr. Mahon, the celebrated clarionet player' and Burney included him in his list of 'instrumental performers of the first class' commenting that these performers were 'too well known for my readers to require information concerning their abilities'.¹¹⁷ His abilities as a clarinetist were also recognized in descriptions of the instrument contained in an English translation of J. G. Albrechtsberger's treatise on Thorough-Bass, Harmony, and Composition and in the nineteenth-century music journal *The Harmonicon* (1830).¹¹⁸ In Albrechtsberger's treatise, Mahon is included in a list of the most celebrated performers on the clarinet and in *The Harmonicon's* article on the instrument, the author reminisced fondly on Mahon and Mrs Second's performances for clarinet and voice. The article commented that the clarinet's

tones assimilate so closely to a fine soprano voice, that a most beautiful effect is produced when imitative passages are given; or, indeed, when they move in 3rds or 6ths together. Mr. John Mahon and his sister, Mrs. Second, used to perform some Scotch and Irish melodies in the most beautiful manner imaginable, the rich voice of the one blending sweetly with the mellow tones produced by the other from his clarionet.¹¹⁹

This article also remarked on Mahon's longevity and the support he received from the Royal Society of Musicians, of which he had been a member for forty-seven years, noting: 'This professor is still alive, and about 80 years of age. He resides in Dublin and receives an annual allowance of *Sixty Guineas*, from the Royal Society of Musicians, to cherish the *coda* of his long life'.¹²⁰

William Mahon Concerts and Reviews

William Mahon became a well-known and accomplished clarinetist, violinist, viola player, and oboist during the same time as his brother John. It is not always certain if William or John played clarinet in a concert because they were usually identified as 'Mr. Mahon'. The newspaper advertisements and concert posters began to include a first initial or first name sporadically after 1780. Although many concert advertisements are found with William, W. or Wm. Mahon listed, they are considerably less than those recorded for John or J. Mahon. From 1771, William played clarinet in several concerts and music festivals

¹¹⁷William. T. Parke, *Musical Memoirs; Comprising An Account of the General State of Music in England*, 2 vols. (London, Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, 1830), vol. 1, 13 and C. Burney, *A General History of Music from the Earliest Ages to the Present Period*, 4 vols. (London: Printed for the author, 1789) reprinted with critical and historical notes by Frank Mercer, 2 vols. (New York: Foulis, 1935), vol. 2, 1021–2.

¹¹⁸Johann Georg. *J.G. Albrechtsberger's sämtliche Schriften über Generalbass, Harmonie-Lehre, und Tonsetzkunst zum Selbstunterrichte*, ed. Ignaz Ritter von Seyfried, 3 vols. (Vienna: Anton Strauss, 1826), vol 3, 194 and J. P.[arker], 'On the Clarionet', *The Harmonicon* (London, 1830), vol. 8, part 1, 57–8. Albrechtsberger's treatise was translated into English by Arnold Merrick, who included the reference to Mahon. See A. Merrick, *Methods of Harmony, Figured Base, [sic] and Composition, Adapted for Self-Instruction by John George Albrechtsberger*, 2 vols. (London: R. Cocks & Co., 1835–1844), vol. 1, 286.

¹¹⁹J. P.[arker], 'On the Clarionet'.

¹²⁰J. P.[arker], 'On the Clarionet' and Betty Matthews, 'Mahon, John (Admitted 6 July, 1783)', *Members of The Royal Society of Musicians 1738-1984* (London: Royal Society of Musicians, 1985), 95. Italics present in original quotation.

with his brother John in Salisbury, Oxford, and later by himself or with members of the Mahon family in Bath, Blandford, Cirencester, London, Norwich, Salisbury, Dublin, Winchester, Birmingham, and Cheltenham. William performed sparingly on the oboe in a hautboy concerto in a 1774 benefit concert in the Oxford Music Room;¹²¹ clarinet and oboe in the 1804 Salisbury Festival, including a Concertante for oboe and bassoon with James Holmes; and oboe with John playing clarinet at the 1805 Birmingham Musical Festival.¹²² (see [Map 2](#) of Britain for the location of William Mahon's provincial concerts).

He also played the viola with John, who played violin in the Handel Memorial Concerts at Westminster Abbey and the Pantheon in 1784 and at the Abbey in 1786.¹²³ William accompanied Elizabeth Mahon with a clarinet *obbligato* in Sacchini's 'Lieta per alma' at the Chester Festival in 1786 and played a clarinet solo in London at Free-Masons' Hall in 1787.¹²⁴ He played violin or clarinet in the orchestra at the Oratorios in Covent Garden (1791, 1793, 1794), Russell Concerts (1805),¹²⁵ and Vocal Concerts (1805). He never married and died in Salisbury on 2 May 1816.

A few reviews provide observations on William's clarinet playing. Like his brother John, William also accompanied their vocalist sisters in performance by playing clarinet *obbligatos*. In common with his brother, William also appears to have possessed a notable talent for matching his tonal quality and expressivity to the voice. For example, William accompanied Mrs Second in a concert that took place as part of the Blandford race meeting in 1801. They performed the aria, 'Sweet Echo, sweetest nymph that liv'st unseen' taken from Arne's masque of 1738, *Comus*, and the review of the performance commented: 'Mrs. Second sung Sweet Echo! Accompanied by the clarionet, most sweetly; the effect of which was much heightened by the admirable imitation of the Echo, contrived by Mr. W. Mahon making the responses from without the room, where he was unseen by the audience.'¹²⁶ This favourable description of the performance, noting especially the effective relationship between the voice and the clarinet, indicates that William must have possessed a fine tone quality with a sweetness which echoed the tone of the human voice successfully.

For the second subscription concert in Bath on 24 November 1802: 'Mahon's clarionet was as usual an astonishing performance, both for sweetness and execution.'¹²⁷ William played with the finest singers and players in London and at Ranelagh Gardens in 1789, 1791, and 1798. His most significant performance was at a subscription concert for Johann Salomon on 23 April 1801. The programme includes at the end of Act 1: 'New Grand Sestetto (MS.) for Principal Violin, Viola, Violoncello, Clarionet, Bassoon, Corno, and Double Bass, Messrs. Salomon, Pieltain, Dahmen, W. Mahon, Holmes Leader, and Dragonetti, Luigi van Beethoven.'¹²⁸ The following day, a review appeared in the *London Courier and Evening Gazette*:

The success which attends Salomon's Concerts is the necessary effect of their merit. The third performance last night had a more numerous and elegant audience than any other this season. The room was completely full, and the entertainment gratifying in the highest degree. The instrumental novelty of the evening was *Sestetto* for the Violin, Viola, Violin cello; Clarionet, Bassoon, Corno,

¹²¹*Oxford Journal*, 5 November 1774.

¹²²*Morning Chronicle*, 23 August 1805; *London Courier and Evening Gazette*, 24 August 1805; *Manchester Mercury*, 27 August 1805; 24 September 1805; *Derby Mercury*, 29 August 1805,

¹²³*Hampshire Chronicle*, 29 August 1785; Charles Burney, *An Account of the Musical Performances in Westminster-Abbey, and the Pantheon, May 26th, 27th, 29th; and June the 3^d, and 5th, 1784 in Commemoration of Handel* (London: The Author, 1785), 17–18; *Biographical Dictionary of Actors*, vol. 10, 58.

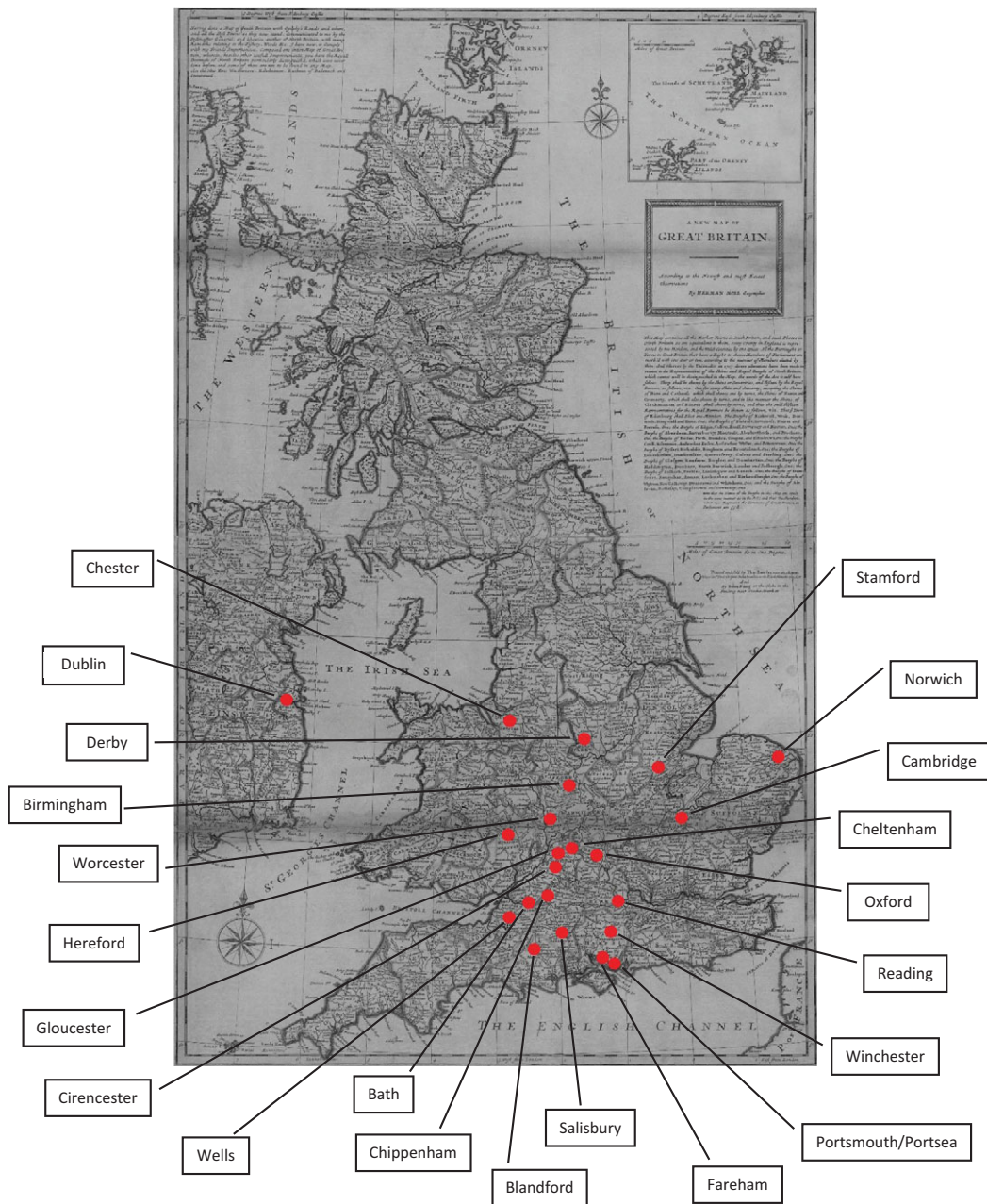
¹²⁴*The World and Fashionable Advertiser*, 26 February 1787; *Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser*, 26, 27, 28 February 1787; *Public Advertiser*, 28 February 1787.

¹²⁵Carnelley, *George Smart and Nineteenth-Century London Concert Life*, 80–1 and concert programmes contained in 'Historical Texts' online platform, <<https://historicaltexts.jisc.ac.uk>> (accessed 29 June 2020).

¹²⁶*Morning Post and Gazetteer*, 4 August 1801. In addition, at the first concert, William Mahon and Holmes performed a Concertante for clarinet and bassoon, which was also favourably received. See also Thomas A. Arne, *The Musick in the Masque of Comus* (London: J. Simpson, ca. 1740), 16.

¹²⁷*Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette*, 25 November 1802.

¹²⁸*Morning Post*, 20, 21, 23 April 1801; *Morning Chronicle*, 21, 23 April 1801.



Map 2. Map of provincial concerts given by William Mahon. Herman Moll, *A New Map of Great Britain: according to the Newest and Most Exact Observations* (London: Thomas Bowles, John Bowles, and John King, 1720–1729?) Map reproduction courtesy of the Norman B. Leventhal Map & Education Center at the Boston Public Library.

and Double Bass; the merits of which received the best support from Salomon, Pieltain, Dahmen, Mahon, Leader, and Dragonetti. It was composed by Luigi Van Beethoven, a pupil, we believe, of Mozart. It is airy, playful, and learned, and in all respects shews the hand of a master.¹²⁹

¹²⁹ *London Courier and Evening Gazette*, 24 April 1801.

This was the first performance of Beethoven's Septet in England, and it was repeated on Salomon's series on 27 May 1801 with the same performers.¹³⁰ The Septet became an extremely popular work played many times at the Philharmonic Society's concerts from 1813.

An obituary praised William's skill as a musician and clarinetist and highlighted the merits of his character.

On Friday, the 3d inst. [May] died, at the house of his brother in law, Joseph Tanner, Esq. Salisbury, Mr. William Mahon, aged 65 years. His abilities in the musical line had long rendered him one of the greatest ornaments of the profession. He was formerly a respectable Member of our Music Room Orchestra, and led the Concerts in Salisbury above thirty years, with great credit. His eminent talents were duly appreciated at the Opera House, where he was many years engaged, and judged, to be the first performer on the Clarionet in England. Nor was he less esteemed for his virtues. The goodness of his heart endeared him to all who knew him; the mildness of his manners, his sincerity, strict integrity, and generosity, procured him the respect and attachment of a numerous circle of friends.¹³¹

Conclusion

John and William Mahon's professional playing careers spanned roughly fifty and forty years, respectively, and they were crucial in presenting the clarinet to the eighteenth-century British public. Their careers encompassed military band, orchestral, solo, and chamber playing, and both John and William promoted and popularized the clarinet as a solo and chamber instrument. Through their performances, they ensured that the newest woodwind instrument became increasingly recognizable in orchestral, solo, and chamber contexts and were the first to demonstrate the technical and expressive capabilities of the solo clarinet to London-based and provincial audiences.

The range of favourable reviews of their playing are testament to their technically skilled and musically expressive performances. Their superb tonal qualities garnered particular praise, and they were the first British clarinetists to reveal the instrument's unique tonal resources and colours at this early stage in the clarinet's development. In addition, both Mahons also demonstrated their talents in blending their tonal qualities with a number of professional vocalists in performance. As proved by various contemporary reviews, their abilities to successfully blend with and imitate the human voice were often greeted with astonishment and wonder by contemporary critics and audiences. Extant reviews clearly recognized and appreciated their skills in achieving these effects in performance and provide important insights into the Mahons' tonal qualities, expressive awareness, and musical intelligence.

In the case of John Mahon, his great significance in the instrument's history and development can also be observed through his contributions to the clarinet literature. The most notable works were his second clarinet concerto, which is the first example of a clarinet concerto written by a British composer, and his pedagogical tutor, *A New and Complete Preceptor for the Clarinet*. Although direct references to his career as a teacher are harder to find and details of his pupils rare, the advice contained in his tutor demonstrates his wide experience of playing and teaching the instrument. It is likely that the highly practical and constructive advice contained in the preceptor is representative of the principles of his teaching and therefore provides insight into the significance of his role as an early teacher of the instrument. In addition, the variety of his unpublished music (no examples of which are believed to be extant) offer a tantalizing glimpse into his musical interests and the scope of his work as a composer and

¹³⁰*Morning Post*, 23, 27 May 1801; *Morning Chronicle*, 23 May 1801; Taylor, *Music in London and the Myth of Decline*, 47, 162. A June 1801 letter from Beethoven to Hoffmeister shows that before sending the Septet to his publishers, Beethoven had 'sent it to London to Hr. Salomon (for performance at his concerts, out of mere friendship)' Alexander Wheelock Thayer, *Thayer's Life of Beethoven*, rev. and ed. Elliot Forbes (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1970), 1, 279, cited by Taylor, *Music in London and the Myth of Decline*, 162, note 59.

¹³¹*Oxford Journal*, 11 May 1816; *Oxford University and City Herald*, 11 May 1816.

arranger. These works would have presented another important opportunity for Mahon to showcase the newest woodwind instrument to contemporary audiences.

John and William Mahon's roles as the first British clarinet soloists are of crucial significance to the development of the instrument in performance and the longevity and diversity of their careers highlights their importance within the clarinet's history.

Supplementary Materials. To view supplementary material for this article, please visit <http://doi.org/10.1017/rrc.2021.7>.