

## Gladsmuir that glads us all

### The Quern-Dust Calendar — Ragnall MacilleDhuibh

A MONTH ago I wrote about the old belief that the Gael would come into his own again at a last great battle fought on Clyde. I tried to show that this must be based on the middle English ‘Romance of Thomas the Rhymer’, which prophesies that the last battle will be fought by ‘a bastard from out of the west’ at a place called Sandyford.

Then, two weeks ago, I showed how some women at Port Glasgow in April 1744 were terrified out of their wits at the thought of the Clyde running with blood. A little over a year later their worst fears began to take shape with the arrival of Prince Charles. On 23 July he reaches Eriskay. On 25 July he lands at Loch nan Uamh in Moidart. The Highland army begins to come together, and on 19 August the Jacobite standard is raised at Glenfinnan. He marches south, outflanks Sir John Cope, and takes Edinburgh on 17 September.

What happens next cannot be better told than in the 24-year-old Prince’s own words, in a dispatch to his father in Rome, whom he has proclaimed King at the Mercat Cross. “Tis impossible for me to give you a distinct gurnal of my procydings, becose of my being so much hurried with business, which allows me no time; but notwithstanding I cannot let slip this occasion of giving a Short accoun of ye Batle of Gledsmuire, fought on ye 21 of September, which was one of ye Most Surprising action that ever was.”

He explains: “We gained a complete Victory over General Cope who commanded 3000 fut and to Regiments of ye Best Dragoons in ye island, he being advantajiosly posted with also Baterys of Cannon, and Morters, wee having neither hors or Artillery with us, and being to attack them in their position, and oblied to pas before their noses in a defile and Bog. Only our first line had occasion to engaje, for actually in five minutes ye field was clired of ye Enemy, all ye fut killed wounded or taken prisoner, and of ye horse only to hundred escaped like rabets, one by one, on our side wee only losed a hundred men between killed and wounded, and ye Army afterwards had a fine plunder.”

Now this is the battle known to historians as Prestonpans. Why then does the Prince call it Gledsmuire? An explanation is forthcoming in the memoirs of a whig laird who lived in the vicinity, Sir John Clerk of Penicuik. “Few of our people behaved well in the Battle, except, perhaps, Colonel Gardiner, who, endeavouring to stop his Regiment of Dragons, fell a sacrifice to the fury of the Rebels.”

Sir John continues: “His own house hapned to be within a quarter of a mile from the field of Battle, which the Rebels affected to call Gladsmoor, to make it quadrat with a foolish old prophecy of Thomas the Rhymer, ‘In Gladesmoor shall the Battle be’; but Gladesmoor happens to be at least two miles from the field of Battle, which being just at the back of the Town of Preston could in no time or age have been different from what it is at present, being one of the best fields in East Lothian for all kinds of Grain.”

His point is, of course, that the site of the battle could by no stretch of the imagination be described as a gled’s muir or glad’s moor, that is, moorland occupied by hawks or falcons, in Gaelic *Sliabh a’ Chlamhain*. Why then were the Highlanders, followed by their royal leader, so anxious to identify their victory with the one prophesied by Thomas the Rhymer?

For an answer, I think we can safely go back to the ‘Romance of Thomas the Rhymer’, which was written around 1430-1450. Its third and final part begins with the Otherworld Queen predicting to Thomas the invasion of Scotland under Henry IV, who died in 1413. In other words, the author (whoever he was) had the advantage of knowing what happened, because he had just lived through it himself.

Next he comes to a battle ‘between Seton and the sea’. In modernised spelling it goes like this.

*Careful shall be the first mass  
Between Seton and the sea,  
Then shall they fight with helms and shield there  
And wounded men all English shall run away,  
But on the morn there shall be care  
For neither side shall have the gree.*

Posterity lined this up with the battle of Pinkie (behind Musselburgh) in 1547, despite the inconvenient facts that Pinkie is not ‘between Seton and the sea’ and was an English victory, although admittedly their further advance was blocked by Edinburgh. The poem goes on:

*Then shall they take a truce and swear  
Three year and more, I understand;  
There neither side shall other dare  
Neither by sea nor by land.  
Between two Saint Mary days  
When the time waxes near long,  
Then shall they meet, and banners raise,  
In Gleydes More, that is so long.  
Gladysmore, that glads us all,  
This is beginning of our glee;  
Great sorrow then shall fall  
Where rest and peace were wont to be.*

*Crowned kings there shall be slain  
 With dints sore, and wonder see;  
 Out of a more a raven shall come,  
 And of him a shrew shall fly,  
 And seek the more, withouten rest,  
 After a cross is made of stone;  
 High and low, both east and west,  
 But up he shall find none.  
 He shall light where the cross should be  
 And hold his neb up to the sky  
 And he shall drink of gentle blood and free.*

‘Gladysmore, that glads us all, this is beginning of our glee.’ Gladsmuir is the second-last battle — it is immediately after this that the Bastard makes his appearance out of the west, and goes on to win the battle at Sandyford which, as I have shown, Gaelic tradition placed on Clyde. What the ‘Romance’ fails to make clear is the *location* of Gladsmuir, and in fact pre-1745 (or whig?) wisdom appears if anything to point west:

*It shall not be Gladsmuir by the sea;  
 It shall be Gladsmuir, wherever it be,  
 And the little lowne that shall be  
 Is betwixt the Lowmond and the sea.*

A ‘lowne’ is a peaceful sheltered spot. As for the *timing* of Gladsmuir, Aberdeenshire tradition offers a verse that seems to be about Foveran Castle on the edge of Foveran links (near Ellon), the seat of the Turing family and a major focus of Thomas the Rhymer’s ‘cult’:

*When Turing Tower falls to the land  
 Gladsmuir then is near at hand;  
 When Turing Tower falls to the sea,  
 Gladsmuir the next year shall be.*

The idea seems to be of a collapse of the castle wall first on the landward and then on the seaward side. I wonder if the latter happened in 1744? At any rate, it seems to me that in identifying Prestonpans as Gladsmuir, the Jacobites were clearing the way for that last battle on the Sandy Ford of Clyde that would settle the destiny of Scotland. It is curious that fate seemed determined to bring it about.

Prince Charles marched his army south from Edinburgh on 1 November, but turned back at Derby on 5 December. The return brought his army not to Edinburgh but to Glasgow, which they reached on Christmas Day. Those of the population who were minded like the women of Port Glasgow must have been in trepidation. Glasgow had done well out of the Union and the tobacco trade that resulted from it. “This city,” remarks Chambers in his ‘History of the Rebellion’, “newly sprung into importance, had never required nor recieved the means of defence, but was now lying, with its wide-spread modern streets and well-stored warehouses, fully exposed to the license of the invaders.”

Four days after *Sliabh a’ Chlamhain*, on 25 September, the Prince had sent John Hay, W.S., to Glasgow with a party of horse quietly backed up by almost the whole Clan Gregor to demand £15,000 plus the city’s tax arrears and all its arms; the magistrates had come up with £5,000 plus £500 in goods and denied possessing any weapons. Hay and the MacGregors had departed with their spoil on 30 September. Then while the Jacobite army was in England the city had set about raising a regiment of 1,200 men to help suppress the insurrection. “Obnoxious by its principles, and affording such prospects of easy and ample plunder,” says Chambers, “it was eagerly approached by the predatory bands of the Chevalier.”

George Macgregor’s ‘History of Glasgow’ tells us that the long march amid winter storms, through rough tracts of country, had made the Prince’s 4,000 Highlanders weather-stained and wild-looking, their beards overgrown, their skins tanned red, their clothing dirty and torn, their brogues destroyed. Charles commandeered the best house in town, that of a young speculator called John Glassford in the Trongate. “At his arrival,” says Chambers, “he is said to have caused his men to enter this house by the front gate, go out by the back door, and then, making a circuit through some by-lanes, reappear in front of the mansion, as if they had been newly arrived. But this ruse, practised in order to magnify the appearance of his army, was detected by the citizens of Glasgow, whose acute eyes recognised the botanical badges of the various clans, as they successively reappeared.”

It was a tense time. The Prince ordered the magistrates to supply 12,000 linen shirts, 6,000 cloth coats, 6,000 pairs of shoes, 6,000 pairs of hose, 6,000 waistcoats and 6,000 bonnets. The price agreed was £3,556.10s. and ninepence-halfpenny, less than had been levied in September. Throughout the occupation all the shops were defiantly shut, however, and the factories closed down. There were incidents, though only one led to murder. A joiner was going home from work when a Highlander, his feet aching after the long march, demanded his silver-buckled shoes. The joiner was slow to obey, the Highlander bent down to help him, and the joiner smashed his skull with the hammer in his belt.

The Prince got sixty recruits, far outnumbered by desertions. He dressed elegantly and dined in public, but one day a madman snapped a pistol at him as he was riding down the Saltmarket. Talk grew in the army of burning and sacking the city; Lochiel put a stop to it by threatening to withdraw his Camerons. When the army was refitted a review was held amidst the cold dampness of Glasgow Green, and an onlooker wrote of

the Prince, "I managed to get so near him, as he passed homewards to his lodgings, that I could have touched him with my hand; and the impression which he made upon my mind shall never fade as long as I live. He had a princely aspect, and its interest was much heightened by the dejection which appeared in his pale, fair countenance and downcast eye. He evidently wanted confidence in his cause, and seemed to have a melancholy foreboding of that disaster which soon after ruined the hopes of his family for ever."

On 3 January the army marched off to victory at Falkirk and defeat at Culloden. Shops opened, factories opened, business boomed, the Clyde was dredged and straightened and the Sandy Ford disappeared in the oily waters, taking with it all thoughts of the last battle and the Highland threat to moneymaking.

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