

## Charlie's Year (2)

### The Quern-Dust Calendar — Ragnall MacilleDhuibh

IN THIS article I'm going to compare chapter 2 of Robert Chambers's "History of the Rebellion in Scotland in 1745-6" (1840) with chapter 1 of John Mackenzie's "Eachdraidh a' Phrionnsa" (1844), which is supposed to be a translation of it. The main purpose this time isn't to investigate issues of culture-clash, or to find what Mackenzie cuts out (a lot!) but to see whether this little-known work of his adds something to our knowledge of the '45.

Sometimes the differences are a matter of perspective. Chambers begins his account in 1740, when, he says, "associations had begun to be formed by the Scottish partisans of the Stuarts, engaging to rise in arms, provided that competent assistance should be sent to them from abroad . . . most of these being persons possessing influence in the Highlands". With Mackenzie the plotters become simply *cuid de na Fineachan Gàelach* – "some of the Highland clans".

Other differences are a matter of style. Mackenzie's models are not the novels of Dickens or Scott but folk-tales. For example, Chambers tells us about a French invasion attempt in February 1744. "A fleet was ready to sail, with an army of 15,000 men on board." Prince Charles is called to Paris to stand ready. Much alarmed, the British government sends a fleet to watch the French at Dunkirk, but the weather does their work for them: *dh'èirich storm anabarrach gaoithe 's doirinn a thilg an loingear Fràngach air tìr, a chuir cuid dhiù 'nan spealgan, agus a chuid eile á uidheam air chor is nach b' urrainn iad an cuan a ghabhail air sheòl sam bith*. This is more than Chambers has said and it is good writing (though Mackenzie spoils the effect a bit by translating "15,000 men" as *cùig mìle fear* "five thousand men").

Charles is mortified at the failure, and proposes setting off for Scotland in a herring-boat – *bàta beag iasgaich* – to put himself at the head of his friends, being convinced that all that's needed to start a campaign is his own presence. He is, after all, 25 years old and brim-full of confidence. At this point Mackenzie does what he hardly ever does – translate some of the correspondence with which Chambers besprinkles his text. "I wish you would pawn all my jewels, for, on *this* side of the water, I should wear them with a very sore heart, thinking that there might be a better use for them; so that, in an urgent necessity, I may have a sum which can be of use for the cause." *B' fhearr leam gu'n reiceadh tu m' uile sheudan: oir air an taobh so de 'n chuan cha 'n fheud mi am mealtainn ach le cridhe goirt: a smaointeach gu'm faodainn an cuir gu buil n'a b' fhearr, gu freasdal air am' fheum an àm na cròdhaig*. Three things are of interest: Mackenzie makes Charles address his father as *thu*, has no word for "pawn" (using *reic* "sell" instead), and turns *còmhraig* into *cròdhaig*.

Charles wrote those words on 3 January 1745. Despairing of his father's help, he falls back on his herring-boat idea, for, as Chambers tells us, he "had great confidence in the enthusiasm of his British, and more particularly his Scottish partisans". In Mackenzie's translation this becomes *bha mòr earbs' aig as na h-Albannaich agus gu h-àraid as na Fineachan Gàelach*. Perspective again!

Skipping reams of politics, Mackenzie gets on with the action. He explains that a Paris banker lends Charles £5,000 and enjoys telling us what he spends it on – *cùig-ceud-diag gunna-glaice, agus ochd-ceud-diag claidheamh maille ri rud math fùdair, peileirean, sporun, biodagan, agus fichead gunna mòr*. He's done a calculation here, I think, because the sum mentioned by Chambers was 120,000 livres. Or does he have another source? As for that shopping-list, in Chambers's text it's "1500 fuses, 1800 broadswords, and a considerable quantity of gunpowder, ball, flints, dirks, and other articles, including 20 small field-pieces". Perspective again – "20 small field-pieces" has become in Gaelic "twenty big guns".

So Charles gets ready. As Mackenzie says, *rinn Tearlach gach ni deas air son "Taisdeal nan tonn dù-ghorm"*. The expression means "coursing the dark-blue waves" and is straight

out of a *sgeulachd*. Nice touch; here's another. Chambers lists Charles's seven companions on the voyage, beginning with "the Marquis of Tullibardine, who, having been concerned in the affair of 1715, was attainted". In Jacobite terms this was the duke of Atholl – following attainder, his brother had succeeded to the dukedom – and Mackenzie calls him *Diuc Abhall, a theich á Sliabh an t-Siorraimh sa' bhliadhna 1715, agus a bha mu'n àm sin 'san Fhràing air fògradh* ("the Duke of Atholl, who fled from Sheriffmuir in 1715, and was at that time in exile in France"). Not very complimentary, but it's Mackenzie's view as an insider – the *Gaidhil* were badly let down by their leaders at Sheriffmuir.

The voyage was eventful. Thanks to the connivance of government friends in Paris, the Prince's ship, the 'Doutelle', was accompanied by a 68-gun French warship, the 'Elizabeth'. West of Cornwall the 'Elizabeth' was engaged by a British ship of 58 guns, the 'Lion'. After a five-hour battle the 'Lion', defeated, "sheered off like a tub", but the 'Elizabeth' was disabled, the captain wounded, and up to forty men killed or injured. She returned to port with Charles's weapons still aboard, and that was the last he saw of them.

"Charles, nevertheless, continued his voyage," says Chambers simply, but this rings another bell in Mackenzie's head. *Cha tug sin air Tearlach pilleadh on a bha 'n saoirbheas fabharach: "chàraich e rithe gach seòl bréid-gheal," a dol air aghaidh le mòr mhisnich*, he says, quoting from a *sgeulachd* again. "That did not make Charles turn back, for the breeze was favourable: 'he hoisted upon her each kertch-white sail,' pressing on with great courage."

There was another dramatic encounter. "The vessel sailed by night without a light," says Chambers, "the better to escape observation. On one occasion it was chased, and prepared for an action, but escaped by fast sailing." Mackenzie seems to have had additional information. *Thainig long Shasunnach cho faisg orra ri àite teine, ach air ball dh' eirich oiteag chruaidh ghaoithe, agus bha long a Phrionnsa cho gleusta 's gun sheòl i gu grad á cunnard, agus cha b' fhada gus an dh' fhàg i fradharc an nàmhaid gu tur.* ("An English ship came within firing range of them, but suddenly a stiff breeze sprang up, and the Prince's ship was so agile that she sailed straight out of danger, and was soon completely out of sight of the enemy.")

There's another discrepancy in what follows. Chambers says of the 'Doutelle' that "on the 21st of July, it approached that remotest range of the Hebrides, which, comprehending Lewis, Uist, Barra, and many others, is commonly called the Long Island". Mackenzie translates this by saying that on 22 July they reached *cùl Leòghais* – "the back of Lewis". Is Mackenzie in a muddle? Or does he know from some other source that the 'Doutelle' made her approach to the Western Isles on the 21st, sighted Lewis on the 22nd, then turned south?

The latter seems to be confirmed by what happens when they sail into the Sound of Eriskay. Chambers says that "observing some doubtful sails at a distance", they made haste to land on Eriskay; Mackenzie says that what they sighted was *dà long Shasunnach*, "two English ships". It seems to me that the personal knowledge of Mackenzie's island friends is kicking in, and that from this point on his account has independent value.

According to Chambers, the tacksman of Eriskay tells Charles that Clanranald's brother Boisdale is at home nearby in Kilbride, and that Clanranald is with him. *Cha luaithe chuala Tearlach so, says Mackenzie, na chaidh e air ball gu taigh Fhir Bhaòsdail, agus chaith e 'n òidhche maille ris an duin' uasal sin.* ("As soon as Charles heard this he went straight to Boisdale's house and spent the night with that gentleman.") That isn't how Charles reacts in Chambers's account: "A messenger was dispatched to desire an interview with Boisdale, and in the mean time Charles spent the night in the house of the tacksman." This is in line with Eriskay tradition, which tells us the tacksman's name was Angus MacDonald, Aonghas mac Dhòmhnail 'ic Sheumais 'ic Iain 'ic Dhòmhnail 'ic Iain 'ic Sheumais. There's a picture of his house in Freer's book "Outer Isles".

In the "official" version, Charles returns to the 'Doutelle' from Eriskay in the morning, and Boisdale joins him. In Mackenzie's, he returns to the 'Doutelle' from Kilbride in the

morning, and, again, Boisdale joins him. Of course both could be true – he could have spent his first night in Eriskay and his second in Kilbride.

But Mackenzie’s version is credible. This young man clearly thought that all he had to do to make the fiery cross go around was turn up and wave his sword. I can imagine him bounding into Kilbride House. And he would have wanted to meet Clanranald.

But meeting Clanranald and Boisdale would have been like walking into a brick wall. Clanranald was old, sick, the antithesis of leadership. Boisdale turned out to be the first of a long line of Jacobites who considered that their duty to the cause – to the party, if you like – lay in advising the young prince to turn round and go straight back where he came from.

Unfortunately Charles was hard to talk to, as he had *already* tried everything else. And he could argue. When Boisdale advised him to return home he said: “I am *come* home, sir.”

For a while after this there’s little disagreement between Chambers and Mackenzie. Both offer the extraordinary spectacle of arguments raging below deck while the ‘Doutelle’ weighs anchor and sets sail across the Sea of Canna, Boisdale’s little boat bobbing along behind on a painter. We can see it now as the farce that led to Culloden.

Boisdale was of course outnumbered. After a while he got into his boat and sailed back to Kilbride. He and his brother played no further role in the ’45. But where Chambers contents himself with saying that Charles continued his voyage to the mainland “with a still resolute heart”, Mackenzie says he decided *nach geilleadh e gus am “biodh fuil Shasuinn air fraoch Alba”* (“that he would not yield until ‘the blood of England was on Scotland’s heather’”). I wonder where he got the quote?

On 19 July the ‘Doutelle’ anchored in Loch nan Uamh. Both books agree that Charles stayed on board this time. It seems to me he had learned caution – and knew he had a better chance of winning arguments in his own cabin than at another man’s fireside.

The man he had come to see was Clanranald’s son and heir, Ragnall Òg. By upbringing, the father and uncle were Benbecula MacDonalds, but the son was a Mùideartach, and could raise the mainland men if he pleased. Ragnall Òg brought his cousin Kinlochmoidart with him and they took the same line as Boisdale. But both Chambers and Mackenzie tell how the three men came on deck to take the air, and who was there but Kinlochmoidart’s young brother. When he found out who the stranger was his colour changed, his eyes sparkled, and he grasped his sword. “Will *you* not assist me?” says the Prince. *Nach éirich thusa leam?*

“I will! I will! I am ready to die for you.” *Éiridh! Éiridh! Tha mis ullamh gu bàsachadh air do shon.*

Ragnall Òg and Kinlochmoidart give in. The mainland Clanranald are on side, at least. But what’s mainly of interest is that Chambers makes much use of a journal written anonymously by another man who climbed on board at that point and who was also to become an officer in Ragnall Òg’s regiment. Chambers calls him ‘the journalist’. Mackenzie calls him *fear dheth na daoin-uaisl’*, ‘one of the gentlemen’. We know now that he was none other than Alastair mac Mhgr Alastair, brother of the tacksman of Dalilea on Loch Shiel and one of the greatest Gaelic poets who ever lived.

Alastair wrote his journal in English, and Mackenzie translates it into Gaelic, but badly. For example, Chambers correctly reports Alastair as writing: “We were warmly welcomed by the Duke of Athole, to whom most of us had been known in the year 1715.” This is our only evidence that the great poet may have fought at Sheriffmuir. How does Mackenzie translate it? *Dh’-fhàiltich Diùc Abhall sinn gu suilbhear’, duin-uasal air na chuir sinn gu léir eolas latha Sliabh an t-Siorraimh.* So “most of us” becomes “all of us”.

Mackenzie’s carelessness can be seen again in what follows. On 22 July, Chambers tells us, Ragnall Òg went to Skye to persuade Sir Alexander MacDonald and MacLeod of MacLeod to rise, and they refused. Suddenly forgetting his Gaelic months, Mackenzie tells us this was *air an dara latha-fichead de mhios mheadhonach an t-Sàmhradh*, on 22 June.

On 25 July (Mackenzie omits the month) Charles came ashore, spending the next seventeen days under the modest but hospitable roof of the tacksman of Borrodale. The best

source for this period is Alastair, and Chambers tells us how one night “our friend the journalist” drinks the King’s health in Gaelic: *Deoch slàint’ an Rìgh*. The Prince repeats this as best he can. “The company then mentioning my skill in Gaelic, his royal highness said, I should be his master in that language.”

Ironically, given that ten years earlier (in 1834) he had published an edition of Alastair’s poems, Mackenzie writes the “journalist” out of the picture, saying simply that the Prince learned the toast from *a’ chuideachd* – “the company”.

Chambers concludes: “It may be scarcely possible to conceive the effect which Charles’s flattering attention to their language had upon the hearts of this brave and simple people.” He’s implying that if you don’t speak English you’re thick, a common sentiment nowadays. Mackenzie translates simply and wisely: *Thaitinn e ro mhath ris na Gàèil, am Prionnsa’ bhi cho toigheach air a’ Ghàèilig*. “The Highlanders were delighted that the Prince was so partial to Gaelic.”

**8 August 2003**