

## Charlie's Year (4)

### The Quern-Dust Calendar — Ragnall MacilleDhuibh

THE STORY so far. It's about this time of year in 1745. Prince Charles has landed in Moidart. He has persuaded some chiefs to join him in an attempt to regain the throne for his father. On 19 August they raise the Jacobite standard at Glenfinnan. General Cope is despatched north with his troops to disperse them. It's the first trial of the brand-new system of military roads built by his superior officer, Field-Marshal Wade.

The roads work too well. Everyone uses them. Cope approaches the foot of Corrieyairack Pass and is unnerved by intelligence that Charles's army is massed at the top, waiting to cut him down. He retreats to what is now the A9 and reaches the safety of Fort George in no time. As we will now see, the main result of Wade's efforts is to bring the Jacobites to the Lowlands with speed and comfort.

Sure, the story has been told before. But my purpose is to compare Robert Chambers's "History of the Rebellion in Scotland in 1745-6" (1840) with John Mackenzie's "Eachdraidh a' Phrionnsa" (1844). Mackenzie's publisher had asked him simply to translate from Chambers – in effect, to write Gaelic history through the prism of English. Chambers was from Peebles, where I am now, looking out over Borders hills. Would Mackenzie obey? Read on . . .

The descent upon the Lowlands is described in Chapter 6 of both books. Charles spends "two happy days" at Glenfinnan, or as Mackenzie puts it, *dà latha, ri òl agus ri aighear, ri ceòl agus ri dàmhhs*: "two days, drinking and merrymaking, with music and dance". Is this Mackenzie's inside information? No. It's the word "happy" translated into the language that Gaelic tales require for warrior heroes. Such men must be cool.

The Jacobite army marches by Kinlocheil to Moy and across the Lochy to be joined by the Stewarts of Appin at Low Bridge – *aig an drochaidh iosail*. It makes you wonder if Mackenzie was ever shown a proof. Indeed, as far as I know (from the pipe tune *Ceann na Drochaide Bìge*) the Gaelic name of the bridge was *an Drochaid Bheag*, but Mackenzie was a Gairloch man and I suppose it was all the same to him whether the bridge was little or low.

While his troops defend Corrieyairack, Charles is at Invergarry. He's visited there on 27 August by Fraser of Gortuleg – *moch sa' mhadainn*, "early in the morning", says Mackenzie, apparently an inference from something Chambers says later.

Gortuleg advises Charles to march north and raise the Frasers. Why doesn't the Fraser chief do it himself? Because, as Chambers makes clear, he is the chronically conspiratorial 78-year-old Simon, Lord Lovat, who instead demands the dukedom which Charles's father had promised him "and begged to have an order for seizing the President Forbes *dead or alive*." This is his friend and neighbour Duncan Forbes of Culloden, Lord President of the Court of Session, the Hanoverian government's principal representative in the Highlands.

Charles grants the order, but two days later Lovat writes a friendly letter to Forbes passing on intelligence. His own men are out, yet he's still playing a double game. Mackenzie omits this stuff – in some distaste, no doubt.

Chambers tells us that the Glengarry MacDonalds and Grants of Glenmoriston have joined the Prince's army by the 27th. Mackenzie puts it differently. They join, he says, by going *gu bràighe choirre Ghearraig far an robh na Gàeil eile san àm cruinn*: "to the brae of Corrieyairack where the rest of the Gael were gathered." Inside information, perhaps. Gortuleg (writing to Forbes!) says that when tying the latches of his shoes that morning, Charles "solemnly declared that he would be up with Mr Cope before they were unloosed". In translation this becomes: *Thuir e gun robh dòchas aige gum biodh greim aig air amhaich Iain Chope, mas deanadh a rithist am fuasgladh*. Being "up with Mr Cope" becomes gripping him around the neck!

In fact Mackenzie seems to think he's in a metaphor competition, but I suppose that's a mark of a good translator. Chambers says that it was the wish of the Highland army that Cope be pursued "and his men cut to pieces" – *gun gearradh iad Iain Cope agus a dhaoine "cho mìn ri biadh eun"*, says Mackenzie, "that they would chop up John Cope and his men 'as fine as bird food'". But, metaphors apart, Charles and his officers decide to leave Cope in Inverness where he can do little harm and the Frasers and Mackintoshes can keep an eye on him. Their own task is to march south as quickly as possible.

Chambers chooses this point to assess the impact of Charles's personality on his troops. The picture he paints resembles that of a modern athlete, totally focused on the next Olympics. Born 31 December 1720, he had been preparing himself for years to lead a Highland army. In particular, he "had made himself a first-rate pedestrian by hunting a-foot over the plains of Italy". Without realising it, Chambers makes explicit what is implicit in Mackenzie's translation – that the *mac rìgh* who is the hero of Gaelic tales has appeared in the flesh. "By walking, moreover, every day's march alongside one or other of their corps, inquiring into their family histories, songs, and legends, he succeeded in completely fascinating the hearts of this simple people, who could conceive no greater merit upon earth than accomplishment in the use of arms, accompanied by a taste for tales of ancient glory."

Mackenzie omits it all. For the reason why, we need look no further than Chambers's patronising tone. What's "simple" about enjoying a healthy outdoor life, a man's job, high-minded political principles and a taste for great literature? Honestly, it beats me. Gaelic-speaking people have been "spun against" for so long by the likes of Chambers that I'm tempted to see Alastair Campbell as their revenge!

At Blair on 30 August Charles "attempted to drink the healths of the chiefs in the few words of Gaelic which he had already picked up". This makes it sound feeble – "attempted", "few", "picked up". In translating, Mackenzie goes to the other extreme. *Ann an so dh-òl Tearlach air slàinte gach ceann-finne fa leth, ann am fìor Ghàellig, a dh'ionnsaich e le thainig e dh' Alba*. This seeks to imply that Charles deserves some sort of Learner of the Century prize awarded by CLI – since arriving in Scotland the previous month, while also chairing meetings, conducting negotiations, marching for miles and raising an army, he has achieved fluency!

I think reality lies somewhere in the middle. Chambers himself has just told us that Charles was mixing every day with men who were monoglot Gaelic speakers. We know that he had a Gaelic tutor second to none, Captain Alexander MacDonald of Clanranald's regiment – schoolmaster, famous poet, and author of the English-Gaelic vocabulary which Charles would certainly be carrying in his pocket. What's more, if Chambers is right in saying that Charles had been preparing for this campaign for years, would his preparation not have included Gaelic lessons?

Another point has to be made. Did you notice *le thainig e dh' Alba*? This will be a printer's error for *bho thainig e dh' Alba* "since he arrived in Scotland". Unfortunately John Forbes (schoolmaster in Fort Augustus, later minister of Sleat, father of Alexander Forbes who wrote a pair of rather odd books about Gaelic names of beasts, birds and fishes and the place-names of Skye) picked it up and used it as ammunition in a vitriolic review of "Eachdraidh a' Phrionnsa" which concentrated entirely on matters of detail. Forbes had an axe to grind – he had published a Gaelic grammar whose strictures Mackenzie blithely ignored! But that's another story.

More forces are joining Charles all the time. On the Robertsons Chambers says: "At Lude, the seat of a chieftain of the clan Robertson, to which he next proceeded he was very cheerful, and took his share in several dances, including minuets and Highland reels." Mackenzie says that at Blair he was joined by various chiefs and their followers, *maille ri prasgan gasda de Chlann-Dònnachaidh* – "along with a fine troop of Robertsons".

So the army reaches Perth. A cavalcade takes place. Charles, says Chambers, wears a superb suit of tartan trimmed with gold. In Mackenzie's words, he is *air éideadh ann an*

*deise ghrinn Ghàèlich de bhreacan dearg nan Stiùbhartach air a ghréiseadh le òr boisgeanta.* It's interesting that the concept of a Royal Stewart tartan is in the Gaelic source and not the English one. Were there clan tartans in 1745? Did Charles admire the suit worn by Ardsheil or one of the Perthshire Stewarts and have one made up the same? Or is the story just nineteenth-century nonsense?

Charles is hailed with “acclamations”, says Chambers, or *luath-ghair éibhinn, a's bualadh bhas* (“cheerful rejoicing, and clapping of hands”), says Mackenzie. Though he knew full well that in Gaelic tradition *bualadh bhas* was a funeral custom, Mackenzie intended no irony. But a particularly limp piece of translation follows: Chambers's “he had every reason to be satisfied with his reception” becomes *bha na h-uile cheann-fath aig' a shaoilsinn gu'm be bheatha*. No wonder Forbes thought Mackenzie's Gaelic was poor. He didn't twig that the book was basically a translation!

Robert Chambers's father was a prominent citizen of a Royal Burgh; he himself just missed becoming Lord Provost of Edinburgh, and his elder brother William actually achieved that dignity in 1865. So it's not surprising to read that in Perth “the magistrates had thought proper to leave their charge”. Mackenzie, faced with this, adds helpfully: *air eagal, mur biodh e sealbhach anns na ghabh e os-làimh gun coisneadh iad dhaibh féin diomadh Rìgh Shasuinn* (“for fear, if he did not succeed in his undertaking, that they would earn themselves the King of England's displeasure”).

Again, Chambers says that a fair was being held (St John's Day, 29 August), so many strangers were present; Mackenzie adds: *bha'm baile cho dùmhail is nach d' fhuair cuid mhòr dhiu fo fhasgath taighe air an òidhche sin* (“the town was so packed that many of them could find no accommodation that night”). Sounds like inside knowledge. It's also interesting to note that when Mackenzie tells how Clanranald and Keppoch went to Dundee to seize two ship-loads of weapons, the spelling he uses is *Dun-Diagh*.

Chambers now tells a story of the young duke of Perth who was “disliked by many on account of his profession of the Catholic faith, in which he had been reared by a remarkably enthusiastic mother”. Mackenzie's cack-handed translation makes it seem as if his mother may have been more disliked than his faith: *A thaobh a mhàthair a bhi dheth na chreideamh sin, choisinn sin da mòr ghamhlas bho dhaoin' eil a bha de mhuthadh beachd*. The story tells how, when Charles was still in Moidart, two officers had tried to arrest the duke on the strength of a warrant against him, and how he escaped: “Down a back stair, through his gardens, and into the adjoining wood, crawling on hands and knees . . . he found a horse, though without a saddle, and only haltered, on which he rode to the house of his friend Moray of Abercairney”.

Mackenzie, who enjoys an anecdote more than anything, devotes more than a page to it, even adding: *'Nach ceart a thuir am facal,—“Gur feumail a dhol air each mall 'san àm nach faighear an saoidh.”* (“How true the saying is, ‘It's as well to ride a slow horse when no mare can be found’.”) As far as I'm aware this proverb is otherwise unrecorded. The point of the story is that when Charles arrives the disaffected duke joins his army immediately, bringing his tenants with him – about a thousand men!

In Perth Charles is also joined by Lord George Murray, an outstanding military strategist, and many others including only now, according to Chambers, the Robertsons of Struan. Of Murray Chambers says: “He caused each man to be provided with a sacken knapsack, large enough to carry a peck of oatmeal, the food chiefly depended upon by these hardy soldiers. He also took measures for supplying meal and knapsacks to the clans who were on their march to join the Prince. By no other means could this little army have long been kept together.” Mackenzie: *Fhuair e màlaidean cainbe air an deanamh, a h-aon do gach saighdear, anns an giùlanadh iad an cuid mine oir cha b'uirrt' an fheachd so a chumail suas air dòigh sam bith eile le cion cosgais*.

In earlier chapters Mackenzie got his Gaelic months muddled, but by now he has sorted them out. In Perth, he says, Charles attends his first ever Protestant service on *di-Dòmhnach*

*an t-ochdamh latha de mhìos meadhonach an Fhoghair* – Sunday 8 September. Charles personally issues passports to various people, including a linen draper from London, whom he asks, in Chambers’s words, “to inform his fellow-citizens that he expected to see them at St James’s in the course of two months”, or as Mackenzie puts it, *nach b’fhada gus am faiceadh iad Tearlach Stiùbhart agus na Gàèil ann an cùirt an Rìgh an Lunnainn* (“that they’d soon see Charles Stuart and the Gaels in the King’s court in London”).

And the Gaels, yes. Remember the Gaels.

**5 September 2003**