

## Charlie's Year (10)

### The Quern-Dust Calendar — Ragnall MacilleDhuibh

JOHN Mackenzie was the compiler of an influential anthology of Gaelic verse, “Sàr Obair nam Bàrd Gaelach” of 1841. It went through many editions, including a pirated Canadian one, and was reprinted as recently as 2001.

He was an eccentric man who could be economical with the truth and was sometimes very careless. In “Sàr Obair” he mixes up the Clanranald poet Iain Dubh mac Iain mhic Ailein and the MacLean poet Iain mac Ailein. That is unforgiveable.

When we compare his “Eachdraidh a’ Phrionnsa” (1844) with the book which he had been asked to translate, Robert Chambers’s “History of the Rebellion of 1745–6” (1840), his carelessness is much to the fore. His spelling is inconsistent, and he’s bad at dates and other numbers, which is surprising, given that since 1836 he had been working as a book-keeper at the Glasgow University printing office in Dunlop Street. When Chambers tells us that in October 1745 “thirteen regiments of infantry and two of cavalry also were in the course of being raised by the nobility and gentry of England to oppose the insurgents”, Mackenzie comes up with: *bha trì rèiseamaidean gu bhi air an togail air chosg mhathaibh agus dhaoin’-uaisle Shasuinn a chum còmhnaidh le Deòrsa*.

Oops! All you can say for him is that missing out *deug* and turning thirteen into three is a bit like missing out “not” in English – an everyday hazard of the writing business.

It isn’t all bad, however. Chambers has a great deal to say about the double-dealing of the aged Lord Lovat, who bullied his 18-year-old son, a student at St Andrews, into leading out the Frasers for the Jacobites while he himself sat at home moaning in letters about the young man’s reckless behaviour. Mackenzie produces an interesting spelling for Lovat’s home, *Caisteal Dhùinidh* or Castle Dounie – he makes it *caisteal Dhùn-Shìth* as if the name meant ‘Fairy Fortress’, which is an interesting idea, as the ending isn’t usually considered to mean anything in particular!

In another attempt at clarification, where Chambers tells how the student colonel “led out the Frasers, it has always been said, with great reluctance, but not in time to join the army before the march into England”, Mackenzie adds helpfully that the Prince’s army had left Edinburgh a week before the Frasers arrived, and that they journeyed no further.

Mackenzie never admits that his work is basically a translation of Chambers’s. Chambers lists the large number of accessions to the Prince’s army, especially from north-east Scotland – Angus, Aberdeen, Banff, what we’d think of as SNP territory these days – and adds: “Various other gentlemen from the north, along with some inferior sept of Highland families, joined the army before the end of October.” Mackenzie names the names Chambers has named, then adds with obvious frustration, clearly wondering who those “inferior sept of Highland families” were: *agus iomadaidh eile air nach d’fhuair mi ainm*, “and many others whose names I have not found”.

Mackenzie is less cautious than Chambers about letting his personal feelings be known. Admittedly there’s a wonderfully telling phrase describing King George’s administration in London, “the German government”, which would have had even more resonance in 1944 than in 1844. But Chambers has it safely in inverted commas, where Charles threatens retaliation on the Hanoverian officers in Edinburgh Castle for endangering the citizens by firing on Jacobite guardposts in the town – there will be reprisals upon their estates, it is announced, and also upon those of “all known abettors of the German government”. Mackenzie doesn’t rise to the bait, as he omits a good deal at this point, but when Chambers speaks of the activities of the “old chevalier” (Charles’s father) in Rome, Mackenzie calls him simply *Rìgh Seumas*.

James disapproved of his son’s enterprise, but did all he could to make it a success, and Mackenzie can’t help adding *mar bu nadurach do dh’ athair tlusmhor agus eudmhor a*

*dheanamh as leth mic* – “as would be natural for any kind and anxious father to do on behalf of a son”. A nice human touch. Then our Glasgow book-keeper runs into familiar territory – and trouble. James remits 200,000 francs to his agent in Paris to pay off Charles’s debts. Mackenzie makes this *200,000 francs*, which he footnotes “8750 Pund-Sasunnach” – £8,750 sterling. We’ll take his word for it. James banks 50,000 francs in Paris for future expenditure – *50,000 francs*, duly footnoted “2187 Pund-Sasunnach”.

James then banks 80,000 Roman crowns in Paris for the same purpose. Mackenzie obviously doesn’t know the exchange rate for Roman crowns, and translates it as *80,000 crùn Ròmanach* without a footnote. James, says Chambers, promises to follow this up with another 28,000 crowns, “which he said would exhaust his treasury”. It comes out in translation as *28 crùn Ròmanach*. Our book-keeper has missed out *mìle* “thousand”! Then, in a Freudian slip, he softens James’s complaint – *thuirid an rìgh gun dh’ fhàg na bha sin a dh’ airgead a thoirt seachad a sporan glé aodrum*. “The king said that giving so much money had left his purse very light.”

Clearly Mackenzie is better with words than with figures. Charles has friends in the French court, none greater it seems than the young Duc de Bouillon, with whom, says Chambers, “Charles had formed a romantic friendship”. You couldn’t get away with that nowadays; Mackenzie finds a better word, *dealaidh*, which Dwelly says means “keen, zealous, affectionate, fond, dear”. Phew.

Thanks to the young duke, early in October several French ships arrived in “Montrose, Stonehaven, and other ports in the north”, as Chambers puts it, with money, arms and ammunition. Being from the north himself, Mackenzie needs no help to tell the rest of the story. One ship was blown far off course to Loch Eriboll, and, as Mackenzie says, *Ghlac na Cataich le foill an long a thàinig do Dhùthaich Mhic-Aoidh*. “The Sutherland men treacherously seized the ship that arrived in MacKay’s Country.”

The Prince’s gold is remembered there to this day.

Chambers tells us some interesting facts about the Prince’s council which Mackenzie doesn’t bother with. They help us understand who called the shots and the extent to which his army was truly a Highland or a Gaelic one in terms of power-structure. The information is reliable, as it comes from a member of the council, Lord Elcho.

The council met every morning, said Elcho. Charles always began by saying what he was in favour of, then asking everyone’s opinion in turn. A third of the council (Elcho doesn’t say who) believed that kings and princes could do no wrong, and always agreed with Charles. Two-thirds believed that kings and princes were not much different from anyone else, and argued their case.

The council had 17 members, not counting the Prince. First there was Secretary Murray. Then there were the Prince’s old Irish retainers, Sheridan and O’Sullivan. There were five Lowland or Border aristocrats – the duke of Perth and lords Elcho, Ogilvie, Pitsligo and Nairn. There were three Highland aristocrats, Lord Lewis Gordon, Gordon of Glenbucket and Lord George Murray. Murray at least was a Gaelic speaker; he was a brilliant strategist, who could have won Culloden had he been allowed. And there were six Highland chiefs (or near kinsmen of chiefs), Lochiel, Keppoch, young Clanranald, Glencoe, Lochgarry and Ardshiel.

Seven, perhaps nine, Gaelic speakers in a council of 18. One wonders which of them, if any, believed firmly enough in the Divine Right of Kings to bite their tongue. Young Clanranald, perhaps, who earned the hostility of his kinsman Alastair mac Mhgr Alastair?

A sub-committee was created under Elcho’s chairmanship to provide the army with forage. They “issued out orders in the Prince’s name”, says Chambers, to all those with government contracts to provide the Jacobite army with hay, straw and corn under pain of military execution. Mackenzie isn’t interested in committees. In his translation, it’s the Prince who issues the order, and “military execution” is clarified – *feachd gu ruidhinn a*

*chùm na cìse so a thoirt dheth le lamhachas-laidir*, “troops to come and impose this tax by force”.

Mackenzie follows this up with something thoroughly dishonest, in my opinion. While the Jacobites were in Edinburgh the law courts did not sit. Chambers points out, however, that “courts-martial sat every day for the discipline of the army, and some delinquents were punished with death”. In Mackenzie’s translation this becomes: “During the time Charles was in the city a court of justice (*mòd ceartais*) sat in judgment, and a number of thieves and criminals (*luchd-reubainn a’s droch-bheirt*) were found guilty and hanged.”

Chambers was trying to show that the Jacobite army did a good job of disciplining itself. Mackenzie, I think, can’t bear for Gaelic readers to be told that a Highland army needed any disciplining.

And it’s to the army we now turn, for Field-Marshal Wade is lying in wait with a sizeable force at Newcastle. The Prince is convinced that all he has to do is march that way, and Wade, in Chambers’s words, “would fly before him”. Mackenzie adds a simile, *mar ghearr ro chonabh* – “like a hare before hounds”.

The council isn’t so sure, and after endless debates, reported by Chambers but not by Mackenzie, they agree to march at least to the border. What Mackenzie does tell us is the date, and he gets it wrong. Twice. *Air an treas latha de mhìos dheireannach an Fhoghair 1745*, he says – “by the third day of the last month of Autumn 1745” – Charles’s army has grown to between 5,000 and 6,000 men, well armed and with plenty of supplies. The trouble is that the last month of autumn in the Gaelic calendar is October, and on 3 October many recruits have still to come in. No, Mackenzie means 3 November, the date when one of the army’s three columns left its camp at Dalkeith, “the Prince walking at their head, with his target over his shoulder”.

Among the recruits still to come in, Mackenzie is keen to remind us, are the Frasers. “In addition to this, many others of the Gael had risen but not yet advanced, among them being *feachd Mhic-Shimidh na h-Airde* – Lord Lovat’s regiment.”

It was announced that the army would be reviewed on Leith Links, but as the muster began, some shots from Edinburgh Castle caused a hasty change of venue and it was held on the sands between Leith and Musselburgh, now known as Portobello Beach. Then, says Chambers, “at six o’clock on the evening of Thursday, the 31st of October, Prince Charles finally left the palace and capital of his paternal kingdom, and, accompanied by his life guards, rode to Pinkie House”. Mackenzie translates the date as *an tri-amh latha diag thar fhichead de mhìos dheireannach an Fhoghair* – 33rd October!

Fortunately for him, after that the dates get easier. Lord George Murray’s column takes the Peebles road on 1 November, which comes out as *a’ chiad latha de’n Gheamhradh* (“the first day of Winter”); the Prince’s column, as we have seen, takes the road to Lauder and Kelso on 3 November, *an treas latha de’n Gheamhradh* (“the third day of Winter”).

Measurement of time by *ràithean*, quarters, came more naturally.

Chambers chooses this point to provide some statistics. “At the commencement of this singular march, the insurgents amounted in gross numbers to 6000, 500 of whom were cavalry, and 3000 Highlanders.” That makes the army only half Highland. He goes on: “Thirteen regiments, many of them very small, were composed of the Highland clans; five regiments, generally more numerous, of Lowlanders; and besides the two troops of horse-guards . . . there were bodies of horse . . .”

Chambers supplies a breakdown of the numbers in a footnote, and from this we discover that he has classified Lord George’s 600 Gaelic-speaking Athollmen as one of the five Lowland regiments, resulting in a total of 2,960 men in the “Clan Regiments” and 2,850 in the “Lowland Regiments”.

Mackenzie is having none of this. Bringing the table up into his main text, he shifts the Athollmen into “Reiseamaidean nam Fineachan Gaelach” where culturally they belong, thus

increasing the “Highland” total to 3,560 and reducing the “Lowland” total to 2,250. With 260 cavalry, it makes a grand total for the army of 6,070.

Next time, as they move off into the winter, we will find out what they look like, how they are armed, and what they are paid.

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