

Charlie's Year (11)

The Quern-Dust Calendar — Ragnall MacilleDhuibh

“THE Highland regiments were commanded by their chiefs, and generally officered by the kinsmen of that dignitary, according as they were near of kin. Each regiment had two captains, two lieutenants, and two ensigns. The front rank of the regiments was filled by men of good birth, who in the Highlands, however poor in fortune, are constantly styled gentlemen, and who had for pay one shilling a-day, while that of the ordinary men was only sixpence. The pay of the captains was half-a-crown, of the lieutenants two shillings, of the ensigns one shilling and sixpence.

“The gentlemen of the front rank were each completely armed, in the fashion of the Highlanders, with a musket, a broadsword, a pair of pistols, a dirk at the belt, to which were also attached a knife and fork; the left arm sustained a round target, made of wood and leather, and studded with nails; and some, who chose to be armed with extraordinary care, besides the dagger at the belt, carried a smaller one stuck into the garter of the right leg, which they could use in certain situations, when the other was beyond their reach.

“The undistinguished warriors of the rear ranks, were in general armed in a much inferior manner, many of them wanting targets.”

That's how Robert Chambers, in the 1840 edition of his “History of the Rebellion of 1745–6”, describes the army that marched into England in November 1745. It's a pretty good description, I think, though we'll “test” it later against John Mackenzie's Gaelic version.

The first point to note is social organisation. The commanding officer, who enjoyed the rank of colonel, might be a chief, as Chambers says, or a chief's son or cousin. The other officers were chosen from the “tacksman” class, who were in a close degree of kinship to the chief.

The colonel of Clanranald's regiment, for example, was Clanranald's eldest son. One of the captains was the poet Alastair mac Mhgr Alastair mhic Aonghais mhic Raghnaill mhic Ailein – that is, his father was minister of Ardnamurchan, his grandfather was Angus MacDonald of Balivanich in Benbecula and of Milton in South Uist, his great-grandfather was Ronald MacDonald of Benbecula, his great-great-grandfather was Allan, chief of Clanranald. He was a professional man with a legal training who had worked as a factor and schoolmaster.

The rest of the front-rank men would have been tacksmen. These “privates” brought their servants with them, perhaps one each. The servants, who were cattlemen, ploughmen and the like when at home, would have fought alongside the joint tenants of runrig farms in the rear.

It's worth mentioning that there was a fourth class, or rather caste, in Gaelic society, the remaining menials and cottars who had no weapons and did not go to war. They were called *bodaich* – not “old men” but “peasants”.

As for pay, Alastair's half-crown per day as a captain was pretty good, given that the teaching job which he abandoned to join the Prince was latterly bringing in £12 p.a., having fallen from a maximum of £18 p.a. In the army he could now earn £12 in 96 days, or £18 in 144. If paid for eight months of Charlie's Year, he will have made £30.

Now let's check Chambers's words against those of a Gaelic writer. We've found that in “Eachdraidh a' Phrionnsa” of 1844 Mackenzie didn't so much translate Chambers's book as put it through a riddle. He leaves a lot out, changes a good deal of what he keeps in, makes fascinating additions; even where he translates directly we learn much. For example, “lieutenant” becomes *oifigeach*, “ensign” *fear-brataich*, and “men of good birth, who in the Highlands, however poor in fortune, are constantly styled gentlemen” simply *daoine'-uaisle*.

Where Chambers moves straight from pay to weapons, Mackenzie adds a passage on what was for decades after Culloden the most emotive theme of all, the Highland dress. *Bha na daoine'-uaisle' air toiseach nan Réiseamaidean, air an éideadh na'n làn-dheiseachan*

Gàèlach, sia slatan-diag breacain, eadar bhreacan-guaile 's éileadh, (sin an t-uidheam ris an abradh na Gàèil bho shean, breacan an éilidh.) Bha bonaid beag gorm, biorach, orra mar cheann-aodach, cha robh ac' air son phòcaidean ach na sporanan bruic. ("The gentlemen of the front rank wore full Highland dress, sixteen yards of tartan including shoulder-plaid and kilt, i.e. the garb called by the Gael of old the belted plaid. As headgear they wore a small pointed blue bonnet; for pockets they only had badger sporrans."

On weapons, Mackenzie first repeats more or less what Chambers has said. "Each of these warriors was armed with a fowling-piece (*gunna-glaic*'), a broadsword (*claidheamh mòr*), a pair of pistols (*paidhear dhagachan*), and a dirk with a knife and fork in its sheath (*biodag le sgian agus gobhlag-fheola na duile*); in addition to this knife there was a *sgian dubh* in the stocking (*osan*), and a target (*targaid*), or as some say a shield (*sgiath*), on the left arm."

Mackenzie has a great deal more to say than Chambers on the arms and clothing of the "undistinguished warriors of the rear ranks". *Bha clann na tuath' air deireadh: an àite nam breacanan éilidh 'se bh' air cuid aca feile-beag, no preasach, no ma theireir ann an cuid de dh-àitean féile-cuaich: bha iad so air an armadh le "mosg mhòr a' pheileir Shasunnaich," claidheamh agus biodag; b' aineamh fear dhiù aig an robh sgiath.* "The tenantry were in the rear: instead of belted plaids some of them wore a small or pleated kilt, or 'folded kilt' as it is called in some places: these were armed with 'the great musket of the English bullet', a sword and a dirk; few of them had a shield."

One column of this army, led by Lord George Murray, took the Peebles road on 1 November. The Prince led a smaller one by a more easterly route in order to give the impression that he intended to challenge the force led by Field-Marshal Wade which faced them at Newcastle.

At Prestonhall gate, says Chambers, Charles enjoyed a breakfast prepared for him on the orders of the Duchess of Gordon: *chiad-lungaidh (no bhracbhaist)*, Mackenzie calls it, using first a Gaelic word that really means "first-fast", then the English word "break-fast". At one time the daily routine was marked not by names for the times when people ate, but for the times when they didn't.

For this simple act the Duchess lost an annual pension of £1,000 granted by the government for agreeing to bring up her children as Protestants. That puts Alastair's £12 p.a. into perspective.

The Prince's route took him by Soutra, Thirlstane, Channelkirk and Kelso, walking all the way "on foot", as Chambers says, *gun each, gun chàrbad* ("without horse or carriage") in Mackenzie's words, to encourage the men. A third column took a middle course by Galashiels (*Gall-Seile*), Selkirk, Hawick and Mossypaul.

Murray's western column reached Peebles – Chambers's birthplace, and my own adopted home – on Saturday evening 2 November. Chambers makes the most of the scene, speaking poetically of the alarm caused in the town by the reflection of the setting sun upon the weapons of the Highland army as they descended the hills which surround it on every side. As I look from my study window at the hills to the north, which I've never seen sparkling with anything but snow, I can imagine it.

Chambers points out that, contrary to the townspeople's expectations, the army cut no throats and plundered no property. Murray simply requested payment of cess in the form of supplies, as was normal for armies, making it clear that if cess was not paid it would be taken by force – *dh'aindeoin co theireadh e*, adds Mackenzie in the words of the Clanranald motto, "gainsay who dare". Chambers ends, citing "tradition at Peebles" as his source: "But scarcely any incivility was ever shown in the outset."

Incivility shown by Highlanders to the people of Peebles, he means, but Mackenzie turns it around the other way. *Chaidh iomadh cuideachd dheth an armailt gu caochladh theaghlaicean de'n bhaile, agus ma thimchioll, a' dh'iarraidh teachd-an-tìr agus cairtealan òidhche, agus chaidh na dh'iarr iar a bhairigeadh orra le carthannachd agus caoimhneas.*

“Numerous detachments of the army went to various families of the town and its surroundings, seeking provisions and lodgings for the night, and what they asked for was bestowed upon them with civility and kindness.”

After a day or two at Peebles, Murray led his men up to Moffat and down Annandale, entering England near Langtown (or *Changton*, as it stands in Mackenzie’s book). Chambers says, citing as sources the “Edinburgh Courant” and Peebles tradition: “During this march, the Highland army lost a great portion of its numbers by desertion. The eastern column, led by Charles himself, suffered most from this cause. The Lanarkshire and Stirlingshire roads are described as having for some days swarmed with the men who thus abandoned the standard; and great quantities of arms were found lying in the fields adjacent to the line of march, which the deserters had flung away.”

Mackenzie reports this conscientiously, but adds by way of response: *Tha mi’n dòchas nach miste leibh a’ chluinntinn gu’m bu Ghall-Albannaich no Machraich a’ chuid bu liugha dhiubh.* (“I hope you won’t mind hearing that most of them were Lowlanders.”)

Charles tried to keep Wade guessing. He stayed two days at Kelso. He sent orders to Wooler in Northumberland – where he had no intention of going – to be ready to receive his entire army. He sent a party across the Tweed to proclaim his father on English soil. Then, after a night at the Nag’s Head Inn in Jedburgh, says Chambers, he crossed the high grounds to the south-west of the town and led his men up Rule Water and into Liddesdale.

Mackenzie is very careless here, making Charles go *thar a bhealach gu taobh na h-airde-n’earra-dheas de dh’Uisge-Ruidhle*, “over the pass to the south-east of Rule Water”. And he shows no interest at all in the little anecdotes Chambers tells us from Border folklore. One is from an old lady whom Chambers saw in Jedburgh in 1826. She was seven when the Highland army came to town. She especially remembered their horses, “and could mimic the strange uncouth jabber which they used in performing the duties of hostlers”.

Another, told by Chambers from “tradition in Liddisdale”, is a good example of the sort of thing that Mackenzie censored out of his translation. The Prince gave a farmer called Charles Scott, Charlie o’ Kirnton, half a guinea for slaughtering a flock of sheep which he had purchased to feed his army. It took Scott all night, and on his way home to Kirnton in the morning he was quietly relieved of the money by two Highlanders “clapping their pistols to his breast”.

It’s entirely credible. Half a guinea was three weeks’ pay for a private, and the Jacobite army was full of Gaelic-speaking men from places like Rannoch for whom stealing from Lowlanders was a way of life.

On Friday 8 November, on the bank of the Esk four miles below Langholm, Charles’s column joined the one which had come by Selkirk. Two things are of interest here. Chambers says, followed by Mackenzie: “When the first division soon after entered England, they raised a loud shout (*thog iad iolach bhuidh-chaitream*), and unsheathed their swords.”

The late George Campbell Hay had a different version which stresses not noise but silence, and he based a poem on it, “Feachd a’ Phrionnsa”.

*Nuair a chuir an t-arm an abhainn
's a sheas iad air ceud raointean Shasuinn,
thionndaidh iad gun ghlaodh, gun fhacal,
dh’amhairc iad le dùrachd dhainginn
air Albainn, 's rùisg gach fear a chloidheamh.
Bheachdaich iad 'nan tost car tacain,
is gheall iad dhi an neart 's an gaisge.*

*Sgrìoch na truailleann fo’n stàilinn,
dh’èigh a’ phìob is lean am màrsal.*

Hay translated it himself. “When the army forded the river and they stood on the first fields of England, they turned round without either a cry or a word, they looked with steady purposeful devotion on Scotland and every man unsheathed his sword. They gazed silently for a while, and vowed to her their strength and courage.

“The sheaths scraped under the returning steel, the pipe cried out and the march continued.”

Hay was presumably unaware of the twist to the story in the Chambers/Mackenzie version: “Some grew pale when informed that Locheil, in drawing his weapon, had cut his hand, this being looked on as an evil omen (*na chomharradh air diom-buaidh no turas mi shealbhach*).”

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