

## Charlie's Year (17): The low road to Falkirk

### The Quern-Dust Calendar — Ragnall MacilleDhuibh

WHEN Prince Charles's Highland troops began straggling into Glasgow on Christmas Day 1745 at the end of their long march from Derby, the townspeople were deeply apprehensive. Their Covenanting attitudes had given way to mercantile ones, but both were deeply inimical to Jacobitism, and they had never been reluctant to show it. They held their breath waiting for reprisals from this frustrated army.

Worse, they were only too well aware of the propaganda bandied about by both sides. They knew that Thomas Rhymer had foretold how the Clyde would run red with blood in some last great battle on the Sandy Ford which would bring the Gael back to his own. Now these very Gael were arriving, hell bent on restoring their own king to the throne and breaking the Union which had brought the city such prosperity through its share in the tobacco trade. They knew, too, that Thomas had said that the Gael would be led by "a bastard from out of the west". Charles had come out of the west in July, but was he a bastard?

Well, the Whigs' own propagandists claimed that he was. In his 1840 edition of the "History of the Rebellion of 1745–6", Robert Chambers cites "A Dialogue between a Gentlewoman at Derby and her Maid Jenny, in the beginning of December 1745", a broadside said to have been taken from the "Chester Journal".

Jenny: "You are so hasty, madam, with your snarles, / Would you ha' me call the gentleman plain Ch——s?"

Mistress: "Prince Ch——s again! Speak out your treason tales: / His royal highness, Ch——s, the Prince of W——s."

Jenny: "Oh! madam, you say more of him than me, / For I said nothing of his pedigree."

Mistress: "Pedigree! Fool – what would the wench be at? / What pedigree has any bastard brat?"

Charles is said to have remarked with bitterness that nowhere had he found so few friends as in Glasgow, and indeed at one point an "insane zealot" snapped a pistol at him as he rode along the Saltmarket. But then, look at the friends he had brought with him. Says Chambers: "Their hair hung wildly over their eyes; their beards were grown to a fearful length; and the exposed parts of their limbs were, in the language of Dougal Graham, tanned quite red with the weather. Altogether, they had a wayworn, savage appearance, and looked rather like a band of outlandish vagrants than a body of efficient soldiery.

"The pressure of want compelled them to take every practicable measure for supplying themselves; and, in passing towards Glasgow, they had stripped such natives as they met of their shoes and other articles of dress. After their arrival in Glasgow, a joiner, in going home from work, was required by a Highlander to throw off and deliver up his shoes. The young man, having a pair of silver buckles at his insteps, showed great reluctance to comply, when the Highlander stooped down and attempted to take them by force. As he was thus employed, the joiner, in a transport of rage, struck him a blow on the back of the head with a hammer which he held in his hand, and killed him on the spot."

In his "Eachdraidh a' Phrionnsa" of 1844, which was supposed to be a translation of Chambers's work, John Mackenzie tells us nothing of that. He just says (I translate): "Their clothing had naturally (*mar bu dù dha bhi*) lost its beauty and colour (*a' mhaise 's a' dhath*) through storm and bad weather and other vicissitudes (*le sion a's doireann a's droch ghiullachd eile*); their shoes had fallen apart (*bha 'm brògan air diobairt*) and their stockings were worn (*agus an osanan air caitheamh*)."

This was in fact a rendering of Chambers's words: "Their clothes were of course in a most dilapidated condition. The length and precipitation of their late march had destroyed their brogues; and many of them were not only bare-footed, but bare-legged."

In this city which had dedicated itself to manufactures and money, Charles proceeded to relieve it of both. At a cost of £4,500 to the magistrates, he ordered them to provide 12,000 shirts, 6,000 coats, 6,000 pairs of stockings and 6,000 pairs of shoes. This was on top of £5,500 which he had got from them in September by the simple expedient of sending a detachment of MacGregors to threaten them with reprisals if they failed to pay up – the eighteenth-century equivalent of a polite boot through the TV set. The council managed to get the full £10,000 back off the Government in 1749.

Now anyone reading these figures would deduce that the Jacobites had 6,000 men. That's exactly what Charles and his officers wanted their enemies to believe. But on 2 January 1746 a review was held on Glasgow Green, the men in their new clothes, drums beating, colours flying, pipes playing. It allowed Government spies to reach an accurate tally. After desertions, Charles was down to 3,600 foot and 500 horse.

For a Glasgow Gael who lived in Clyde Street, Mackenzie shows astonishingly little interest in this, and even the industrious Chambers doesn't tell us what the weather was like that day. But 2 January was then the shortest day of the year, or nearly so. We can guess that it was dreich, damp and cold. One observer who saw the Prince spoke of "the dejection which appeared in his pale fair countenance and downcast eye".

Charles was only 25 years old. What he really wanted to do was fight battles – if he were around today, he'd be good at team sports – and another one was coming up. Not on the Clyde, but further east. Cumberland had gone to the south of England to deal with the French invasion which never materialised, leaving Wade in Newcastle while Lieutenant-General Henry Hawley marched north via Berwick and Edinburgh. Hawley, says Chambers, was "an officer of some standing, but ordinary abilities; who, having charged in the right wing of the King's army at Sheriffmuir, where the insurgents were repulsed with ease by the cavalry, entertained a confident notion that he would beat the whole of Prince Charles's army with a trifling force".

Mackenzie appears not to have understood the difference between "having charged in the right wing" and "having charge of the right wing". He calls Hawley *an dearbh dhuine aig an robh riaghladh lamh dheas an àirm dheirg latha Sliabh an t-Siorraim*, even though Sheriffmuir was fought thirty years earlier when Hawley was very young.

In fact, as Chambers describes complex manoeuvrings Mackenzie becomes bored and seems to lose the plot. Chambers: "On the day that Charles thus commenced the siege of Stirling, Hawley had been joined at Edinburgh by all the divisions of the army which he could immediately expect . . . his force consisted of nearly eight thousand men, of whom thirteen hundred were cavalry." Mackenzie: *Air a' cheart latha a chaidh na Gàeil a steach do Shruidhleadh bha Seanaileir Hawley an deigh an t-arm-dearg fhaotainn ri chèile ann an Dunéideann, bha fheachd ma thuairream ochd mìle fear agus bha trì cheud diù na'm marcshluadh.*

So the start of the siege of Stirling is turned into its finish, and Hawley's 1,300 cavalry are reduced to 300 by the omission of *deug*.

Chambers actually has a great deal of interest to say here about events in the Highlands during the time the Jacobite army was in England. We read, for example, of a little-known episode in which the MacLeods, having been brought out by their chief on the Government side, fought a pitched battle by moonlight with the Gordons at Inverurie on the evening of 23 December. They lost, and for good reason. "When he [MacLeod] endeavoured to rally them at Elgin, they kept him in mind how he had already deceived them, by making them believe they were to serve the Young Man, when he first brought them out of the island; and afterwards how, to hold them together, at Inverness, he had dissembled with them, as if he always meant to let them follow their own inclinations; till at last, having led them to Inverury, a just dispersion (said they) had there befallen them for his perfidiousness to the Young Man."

We hear, too, of the Farquharsons. Their chief was likewise a friend of the Government, so they came out under the leadership of his daughter, “Colonel Anne”, who was married to Mackintosh of Mackintosh and had already raised the Mackintoshes for the Prince. But it’s when we read Chambers’s account of how the Mackenzies mustered at Brahan Castle, found that Seaforth expected them to fight for the Government, and promptly went home again, that we get an inkling of why Mackenzie has lost interest. Chambers tells it of what he calls “a body of Kintail Mackenzies”; Mackenzie, who of course knew the story much better, had already told it in an earlier chapter of the Lewismen.

What matters is this. After leaving Glasgow on 3 January, Charles gained thousands of recruits from the Highlands; Hawley gained one thousand Campbells, brought in on the morning of the battle of Falkirk by “Lieutenant-colonel John Campbell, afterwards Duke of Argyle”, as Chambers calls him, or *Iain-Caimbeul a Mhàim Mhòr* as Mackenzie calls him – Mamore. The poet Donnchadh Bàn was one of them.

Mackenzie hadn’t lost the plot at all. On Thursday 16 January 1746 Charles’s army marched from Stirling to meet Hawley. Both writers tell us that as the redcoats lay in their camp at Falkirk that night and the Highland army lay on Plean Moor below, two miles east of Bannockburn, they could see each other’s lights.

Chambers uses a lot of words to describe Henry Hawley’s character and opinions. Hawley thought that Cope had not been beaten by a superior force but by his own incompetence, that the victorious Highland army at Prestonpans was just a rabble, and that the retreat from Derby showed that they were still a rabble. Mackenzie sums it up inelegantly but succinctly. *Bha ’n e’n duil, gu’n cuireadh an t-arm dearg fhaicinn mu’n coinneamh, ann an òrdugh catha, maoim air a nàimhdean.* “He thought that seeing the red army in front of them in battle order would scatter his enemies.” Donnchadh Bàn thought so too.

*A’ dol an coinneamh a’ Phrionnsa  
Gum bu shunndach a bha sinne —  
Shaoil sinn gum faigheamaid cùis dheth  
'S nach robh dhùinn ach dol ga shireadh.*

“On our way to engage the Prince / Our morale was very high – / We thought that we were going to win / And only had to find him.”

They both had another think coming.

**5 March 2004**