

Charlie's Year (25): Look around you

The Quern-Dust Calendar — Ragnall MacilleDhuibh

FOR a year now we've followed the events of the '45 through two pairs of eyes. The Lowland (or rather Border) pair belong to Robert Chambers (1802–71) from Peebles, the Highland pair to John Mackenzie (1806–48) from Gairloch. We've come to the point after Culloden where Charles has got safely away to Benbecula, and we'll leave him there for the moment, because we have to deal for the last time with his opponents. It will allow us to compare Chambers's ideology with Mackenzie's.

We've already noticed each author's loyalties. Chambers is to constitutional government, Mackenzie's is to the Gael. Despite the title of his book ("History of the Rebellion of 1745–6") Chambers loves to dwell on Prince Charles and tends to minimise the heroism of the Highlander. His translator, Mackenzie, in defiance of *his* title ("Eachdraidh a' Phrionnsa"), shows little interest in the Prince and concentrates on the ordinary Highland soldier, cutting out the Lowland stuff and most of the politics.

During the rest of the summer we'll see how this works out as the Prince discovers how tough it can be to live like a squaddie with a price ticket on his head. But when Charles isn't in the frame at all, and the picture is of ordinary people suffering, is there a difference in sympathy between Chambers and Mackenzie?

Chambers came from a county where the towns were Hanoverian and the countryside was Jacobite. Mackenzie came from a tribe which had suffered from its Jacobite past and had decided to sit on the fence – though in this chapter we will notice it putting a foot down on either side. As a Gaelic writer and poet he himself was instinctively Jacobite, but the north was full of Hanoverians – Munros, Rosses, MacKays, Sutherlands.

So Chambers is utterly trenchant in his criticism of the excesses of the duke of Cumberland and his soldiers. Mackenzie is trenchant too, but cuts it short, perhaps because he knew that the Highland Jacobites had gone into it with their eyes open, whereas Chambers saw them as simple people who had been wronged by their chiefs. In his introduction to "Highland Songs of the Forty-Five" the late John Lorne Campbell felt he had to demonstrate to Scottish historians that Prince Charles's soldiers actually knew what they were fighting about!

I think both Chambers and Mackenzie had a sense of Scotland as a single large community divided by politics, made up of lots of microcosmic communities each of which was also divided by politics. Very like today. So how do they differ in describing how an ignorant 25-year-old generalissimo waded through the subtlety with fire and sword, murder and rape?

Chambers begins gently enough. In a passage which Mackenzie omits, he mentions some evidence that Cumberland was "at first disposed to take mild methods". But when he looks at the protections offered to those who submitted, he finds they were only for six weeks. Why should anyone come in on terms like that? And he shows what happened to the Grants of Urquhart and Glenmoriston. Persuaded by their chief to surrender, they were thrown into foul prison-ships along with the rest.

Measures were taken to prevent others escaping. Chambers: "The passes from the Highlands into the Low country were guarded by militia." Mackenzie: *Bha Mailisi a' freiceadan na dìridh eadar machair a's Gaèldachd*. By coincidence, this word *dìridh*, "wilderness", is discussed by Dr John MacInnes in a new book "Cruth na Tíre", just out. It's *dithreabh*, a place with no *treabh* (habitation). MacInnes has never heard it other than as a place-name, but Mackenzie uses it casually enough.

Chambers: "Lord Fortrose, son of the Earl of Seaforth, raised the Mackenzies to guard the passages to the isles." Mackenzie: *Thog Mac-Choinnich, Mac-Dhòmhnuill, agus Mac-Leòid, an cuid daoine' chum fògaraich a chumail á eileanan Innse-Gall*. It makes sense that the Skye chiefs, who also controlled Harris and North Uist, were involved too. Many people went to the islands for safety – you can see it happening in "Mo Rùn Geal Òg", where the singer begins in Strathglass and ends in Skye.

Chambers now explains how the Jacobite earl of Cromarty, a Mackenzie, had "allowed himself to be surprised" at Dunrobin on 15 April "while conferring with a party of the assailants respecting terms of surrender". Mackenzie tells the story differently, larding it with

irony. The earl of Sutherland (*Morair Cat*) had fled to London *le eagal nan "Reuballach"* (for fear of the "Rebels"), leaving his wife behind. "The Earl of Cromarty, the kind man, for he was always most considerate (*oir bha e do ghnà ro chaoimhneil*), thought he had better go to Dunrobin castle to keep the countess company (*a chumail cuideachdas ris a bhana-mhorair*) as she had been some time *gun mhirre, gun mhàran*."

"Without mirth or melody" – it's a phrase from a song by Màiri nighean Alastair Ruaidh which Mackenzie had published in "Sàr Obair". And he promptly comes up with something similar, "*sùgradh ri mìneig na maise*", from a song which I can't recall: "When he was 'dallying with the damsel of loveliness' the Sutherland men caught him unawares and many of his men were killed; he was sent by ship to Inverness, and from there to London."

After surveying the evidence for plundering and atrocities and finding both on a huge scale, Chambers loses his rag. He says: "Whilst the natives and the fugitive Prince were enduring every species of hardship, Duke William and his myrmidons at Fort Augustus spent their time in a ceaseless round of festivity. Enriched by the sale of their spoils, the soldiers could purchase all the luxuries which the Lowlands could supply, or which could be conveniently transported over the Grampians; and for several weeks their camp exhibited all the coarse and obstreperous revelries of an English fair.

"It was common, while thousands were starving around them, to hear these miscreants talking, over their feasts, of the languor and tedium of their campaign, and execrating the rebels for bringing them into such a wilderness. In order to amuse them, the duke instituted races, which were run by the trulls of the camp, with circumstances of indecency which forbid description."

He ends this passage with sarcasm directed at Henry Hawley, who lost the battle of Falkirk: "General Hawley also ran a race with the infamous Howard, and, probably rendered a proficient in that exercise by his practice at Falkirk, gained it by four inches."

How does Mackenzie deal with this explosion of rage? Laconically. "The red army (*an t-arm-dearg*) was still not satisfied with the spoils they had lifted on the lands of the kindreds who had risen with Charles, and they now started driving before them all the stock they came across (*gach spréidh a bha tachairt nan co-dhail*), so that those who had stayed at home during the war were treated the same (*air an aon diol*) as those who had begun the rebellion (*a thionnsgain an t-àr-a-mach*).

"The quantity of stock they lifted was therefore so great that many hundred cattle and horses (*cunntas cheudan mhart a's each*) were sold by the Duke's army to English drovers for half-a-crown a head. This money was divided as booty amongst the soldiers. The rest of the activities of these godless, inhumane people (*daoine an-diadhaidh, neo-dhaontachail*) were so loathsome (*gràineil*) to relate, so disgusting (*déistinneach*) to read and heart-wrenching to hear (*na chràdh cridhe ri chluinntinn*), that it is appropriate for me to bring the Chapter to an end."

And so he does! But as we read the rest of what Chambers has to say we make some interesting discoveries. First, he tells us that during that summer the ravages of the army extended "to the very gates of the capital". He means Edinburgh, not Inverness. "For some time Scotland might be said to have been treated throughout its whole bounds as a conquered country, subjected to the domination of military law . . . No form of trial was adopted with the insurgents, even within a few miles of the seat of the Court of Session; nor did the soldiers ever appeal to the neighbouring justices for warrants, when about to plunder their houses."

He also speaks of the horror of "lawful creditors" at seeing debtors' assets seized by lawless bands and exposed to public sale, and refers approvingly to the refusal of kirk sessions to compile lists of rebels for the military. It's interesting that when he speaks of the economic and social affairs of the Lowlands he adopts the same laconic tone as Mackenzie. We now see why he could get so angry. Nowadays when there's war and famine in Sudan we who are far away can understand it best through the plight of raped women and dying children. Those obliged to live through it seem more concerned with economics.

Chambers now comes to Duncan Forbes of Culloden, Lord President of the Court of Session, and we discover that Mackenzie has been glancing forward, for he has already taken this in in a long footnote which represents another personal contribution to the chapter. This footnote comes much earlier on, where John Campbell, earl of Loudon, marches from Inverness with 1,700 militia on 8 May and proceeds to disarm Lochaber quietly and

peacefully. Chambers doesn't say who these militia are, and Mackenzie is keen to tell us. "The Earl of Loudon's army comprised four of the Highland kindreds themselves, the Mackenzies of Ross, the MacLeods of Dunvegan (*Leòdaich Shiol Tòrmod*), the MacDonalds of Sleat and the Rosses of Balnagown, &c. That was why Duke William distrusted them as *good butchers* (mar *fheoladairean matha*)."

Mackenzie now explains Forbes's role – this, too, is not in Chambers's account. "The Laird of Culloden took care (*Thug Tighearna Chuil-Fhodair mu'n airidh*) to send these men to uplift the weapons in order to show sensitivity to the other Highlanders (*a' chum a bhi bàigheil ris na Gàèil eile*) and as an act of conciliation (*agus an gnothach a dheanamh le réite*). Also (*Os barr*) he knew the Highlanders would not give up their arms to the English as long as they had a drop of warm blood in their veins."

On 23 May 1746 Cumberland followed Loudon out of Inverness with Kingston's horse and eleven battalions of foot, and the work of destroying the Highlands began. It never really stopped. Look around you, and listen for Gaelic.

Mackenzie slides slowly back into line with Chambers, who speaks of Forbes's voice being "occasionally heard amidst these outrages". Chambers portrays Forbes as an "amiable man" who pointed out to Cumberland that his soldiers were "breaking the laws of the land". He says Cumberland was afterwards heard at Inverness calling Forbes "that old woman who talked to me about humanity".

Very interestingly, according to Mackenzie, Forbes peddled precisely the line which John Lorne Campbell found had sunk so deep in historians' minds two hundred years later. "*Bha Tighearna Chuil-Fhodair ro thoigheach m'a shiol Alba gu leir*. The Laird of Culloden cherished the people of Scotland as a whole. He went to the Duke to intercede (*a dh-eadar-ghuidhe*) on behalf of the Gael, saying that the rising was not their fault (*nach robh coire sam bith aca ris an àr-a-mach*) and that they were only acting according to their chief's instructions (*a dol a réir comhairl an tighearnan*), and he asked the Duke to be merciful to poor creatures who did not know what they were doing."

It was a stereotype, a caricature, but Forbes was desperate. Mackenzie ends his footnote: "As soon as the Laird of Culloden had turned his back to the Duke the monster (*an ua-bheisd*) started laughing, and said to one of his officers: 'That old woman wanted *me* to be merciful.'"

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