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The Jacobite Rebellion (1745-46)

Background

Bonnie Prince Charlie was a grandson of King James VII who was driven out of Britain in 1688 because of his support of the Catholic faith. Parliament had originally wanted James' daughter Mary and her husband, William of Orange from the Netherlands, to act as regents until James' newly born son, James Francis Stuart (Charles' father), reached his majority (and had been raised in the Protestant faith). But William was unhappy with this arrangement and insisted on having the crown along with his wife. Parliament agreed, thus sowing the seeds of the subsequent Jacobite Uprisings (Jacobite came from the Latin word for James - Jacobus).

Of course, King James VII tried to regain his throne. But on July 12, 1690, William defeated James in the Battle of the Boyne, Ireland. King James VII died in exile in 1701. There were further Jacobite insurrections in Scotland, particularly in 1715 when James Francis Stuart (nicknamed "The Old Pretender") landed in Scotland, some months after the Earl of Mar had conducted an ineffectual campaign. James had dithered in France about when to leave for Scotland and it was mid-winter by the time he arrived at Aberdeen on 22 December. And he did not bring the expected French military forces or any money. After two months he was advised to withdraw and left once more for France, never to return.

William and Mary died childless and her sister and successor Queen Anne also died without issue. Parliament then decided in 1714 (by a majority of one) to ask George, the Elector of Hanover in Germany to become king of Britain. George's mother was Sophia, a grand-daughter of King James VI. Even so, the rules of succession gave James Francis Stuart a stronger right to the throne, a point not lost on the Jacobite supporters, most of whom were in Scotland.

In 1718, James Francis Stuart married Princess Clementina Maria Sobieski of Poland who was one of the wealthiest females of royal birth in Europe. Their son, Prince Charles Edward Louis John Casimir Silvester Maria Stuart was born in Rome on 31 December 1720. The Pope gave his personal blessing to the infant.

Early Years

Although the Hanoverian rumour machine tried to spread stories that he was deformed and an imbecile, unbiased observers of the young Prince described him as headstrong and brave. He learned quickly and could converse in English, French, Latin and Italian (but there was nobody to teach him Gaelic). He was a good marksman with a cross-bow. It is possible that his father would have allowed

Charles to be reared as a Protestant to improve his chances of inheriting the throne but this was not a viable proposition while living in Rome.

In addition to being called Prince Charles Edward, he also gained the nicknames of "Bonnie Prince Charlie" and "The Young Chevalier" (the French word for Prince). His portraits certainly show him to be a handsome young man.

Charles was treated as a Prince in Italy and later in France. The French and British were at loggerheads (as on so many occasions over the centuries) and in 1744 offered a fleet with 7,000 soldiers to help Charles restore the Stuarts to the British throne. But many of the ships were lost in a storm and wrecked on the Dunkirk coast.

Jacobite Uprising, 1745

Despite the setback, Charles was resolved to sail to Scotland. For most of his life he would have been told exaggerated stories about the level of support and must have believed that his arrival would result in a massive, spontaneous uprising. He only sent a letter to his father about his intentions as he was ready to depart. On 23 July 1745, Charles landed on the white sands of the Outer Hebridean island of Eriskay, accompanied only by a small band of companions known as the "Seven Men of Moidart". The Prince is said to have scattered some seeds there and to this day a flower known as the Prince's Flower grows there and nowhere else in Scotland.

Initially, the Highland chiefs were reluctant to join him, particularly as he had no French army with him. The first to announce he would follow Charles was Ranald MacDonald and others soon followed. The Prince's standard was raised at Glenfinnan at the head of Loch Shiel on 19th August. At first there was no sign of any gathering clans but late in the afternoon the Camerons of Lochiel arrived followed by MacDonalds and MacGregors. Eventually some 1,500 men assembled. Many chiefs were reluctant to join him, but his enthusiasm and charm persuaded many who heard him. It is likely that the news that the Campbells were gathering a unit to assist the government forces, may have induced some clans with scores to settle to join the Jacobite cause.

The Highland army marched across Scotland, growing in size as it went. They reached Perth early in September and the Prince stayed at the Salutation Hotel there, which still functions as such today. The room where he slept is still used as a bedroom. Prince Charles rode into the city in full Highland dress, a direct descendant of Robert the Bruce. In Perth he was joined by Lord George Murray who was an able soldier and he was appointed lieutenant general of the Jacobite army. While in Perth, Charles is said to have visited Scone, the place where so many of his ancestors had been crowned.

Advance and Retreat

The Jacobite army entered Edinburgh on 17 September and Charles took up residence in the Palace of Holyroodhouse. Up until this time, apart from a few skirmishes, the Hanoverian army had avoided any major conflict. But they were camped at Prestonpans, to the east of Edinburgh under the command of Sir John Cope, waiting for reinforcements from the south. On September 21, Lord George Murray led the Jacobites in a circle to the south and took the redcoats by surprise

by attacking at dawn from the rear. The Battle of Prestonpans lasted only 15 minutes and gave the Jacobites a psychological boost.

After five weeks of inactivity in Edinburgh, Prince Charles crossed the English border with 5,500 men and advanced through England. By 4 December they had reached as far as Derby in the heart of England, 120 miles from London. But bad winter weather was taking its toll and there was no swelling of the ranks from the people of England. Faced by a Hanoverian army of 12,000 and another army of redcoats coming south behind them, the Prince's advisers recommended retreat. What they did not know was that London was in panic and King George had his valuables packed on a boat on the river Thames. Charles argued against retreat but eventually had to accept.

William, Duke of Cumberland, son of King George I, in command of the Hanoverian army was in pursuit but the Jacobites mainly kept ahead of him and reached Glasgow by Christmas Day. While in Glasgow, Prince Charles met 20-year-old Clementina Wilkinshaw who was later to become his mistress.

On 17th January, the Jacobite and Hanoverian armies met near Falkirk. Thanks once again to the tactics of Lord George Murray, the Highlanders inflicted heavy casualties on the redcoats who left the field of battle in confusion, only failing light stopping a rout. In the entire campaign from Glenfinnan to Falkirk the Jacobite army had never been defeated.

Culloden

After Falkirk, Charles was all for turning south again but his officers advised moving north. Charles was aghast, but had to accept. His army grew smaller as they marched north through the Highlands and the Duke of Cumberland was again in pursuit with fresh troops. By 20 February Charles and fewer than 5,000 men reached Inverness. It took time for the government forces to assemble and reach the Moray Firth but gradually 8,000 men were advancing on Inverness. On 16 April 1746 the opposing forces met on Culloden Moor. Hanoverian cannon fire over a period of an hour killed many clansmen. When the Highlanders eventually charged, the rifle fire from the redcoats ripped into them. "Butcher" Cumberland had given the order that no quarter was to be spared and many wounded Jacobites were later killed. It is estimated that Jacobite losses amounted to 2,000; the Hanoverians lost 300.

The Aftermath

The government forces hunted down anyone who was thought to have participated in the "Jacobite Rebellion" and many houses and castles were torched. The only unit to show any compassion was the Campbell militia from Argyll. Hundreds were executed (after brief trials in England), 700 died in the prison ships in the river Thames in London and a thousand were sold as slaves to the American plantations. The kilt was banned and no Highlander could carry a weapon. The clan system may not have lasted for much longer anyway, but the aftermath of Culloden hastened its demise.

Information sourced from www.RampantScotland.com



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