



Culloden

John Prebble

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This is the story of ordinary men and women involved in the Rebellion, who were described on the gaol registers and regimental rosters of the time as 'Common Men'. There is little in this book about Bonnie Prince Charlie and other principals of the last Jacobite Rising of 1745. *Culloden* recalls them by name and action, presenting the battle as it was for them, describing their life as fugitives in the glens or as prisoners in the gaols and hulks, their transportation to the Virginias or their deaths on the gallows at Kennington Common. The book begins in the rain at five o'clock on the morning of Wednesday, 16 April 1746, when the Royal Army marched out of Nairn to fight the clans on Culloden Moor. It is not a partisan book, its feeling is for the 'Common Men' on both sides - John Grant charging with Clan Chatten and seeing the white gaiters of the British infantry suddenly as the east wind lifted the cannon smoke, and Private Andrew Taylor in a red coat waiting for Clan Chatten to reach him, likening them to 'a troop of hungry wolves'. *Culloden* reminds us, too, that many of the men who harried the glens as ruthlessly as the Nazis in Occupied Europe were in fact Scots themselves. It recalls the fact that many men in Prince Charles' army had been forced to join him. It shows that a British foot-soldier's wish for a sup of brandy on a cold morning before battle is as much a reality as a Prince's pretensions to a throne. The detail for the story told in *Culloden* has come from regimental Order Books and manuals, from contemporary newspapers and magazines, from the letters and memoirs of soldiers and officers, eye-witness accounts of atrocity and persecution, and the personal stories of the victims themselves. *Culloden* is the story not of a Prince, but of a people.

Culloden Details

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From Reader Review Culloden for online ebook

Peter Harrison says

This book reminded me a little of Dee Brown's "Bury My Heart At Wounded Knee". Brown's book is better, but this is a similar partial account of a way of life deliberately destroyed. I felt that the account occasionally got a little too bogged down in the minutiae of a wide range of personal accounts. It lacked broad context and a sense of the wider history. But as a narrative of the apocalyptic nature of Culloden itself and the aftermath both for highland society and for individuals who fought on the Jacobite side it is valuable.

Steve says

A very good account of the battle and a good overview of the events leading up to it

Richard says

Prebble writes marvelously about battles, carefully processing official accounts with eyewitnesses and survivors. In the case of Culloden, the battle itself took little time, but the gathering and placement of the English troops and the clans is laid out in detail.

The aftermath of the battle and the rapine practiced in the Highlands and on the islands suspected of harboring the Pretender over the next year saw the reduction of the clans to pauperized starvation and the growing bitterness of the isolated English officers and men, many of whom saw the Highlanders as mere savages.

Prebble spares no one in his depiction of the irresolute and feckless would-be king, his followers, and their opponents. His disdain for the romanticization of the Highlanders (Walter Scott, etc) in the 19th century effectively undermines that attitude. Lukas's Marxist interpretation of the historical novel does, however, give another life to the Scott vision of the burial of the feudalistic clans and the emergence of the propertied leaders who, in the Highland clearances (the subject of a third Prebble volume), preferred monies made from sheep-grazing to the presence of clansmen and became capitalists of the worst sort, populating, among other places, Canada with their exiled "families."

Well written and lively, an informative book, indeed.

Debbie says

It's taken me many months to read. There was some horrific things that went on during that war. This story was hard for me to read. So glad I've finished it. Now it's time to go to Culloden and pay my respects to the fallen

Joan says

Culloden and its aftermath, in great detail with all the fierce loyalties, brutality, and treachery that was part of war and what the victorious English saw as treason. There is no romantic picture of the Scottish clans, their bagpipes and tartans here, but Cumberland and the English fare worse in this well-documented book. I must be honest and add that part of my enjoyment was in the listening, the narration being done by the divine Davina Porter. I look forward to my second visit to Culloden this fall with the additional insight provided by Prebble's book, particularly of the months that followed the battle.

Rose says

The definitive book about the battle of Culloden

Melinda says

I bought this in the gift shop of the Culloden battlefield, a solemn place as befits the event described in this book. I learned a great deal about this battle.

Dave Spence says

Good book. Informative yet interesting at the same time.

Not sure I agree with accusations of Jacobite bias. I assuming this comes from the fact that Cumberland and his officers come across as brutal, however the book starts at Culloden and follows the period thereafter which was pretty much all one way traffic. Nothing Prebble could have done about historical fact, other than perhaps cover the whole rebellion to make it more balanced.

Drpsychorat says

This is a well written & researched book on the Battle of Culloden & its aftermath. It is an honest & brutal account of the destruction of the Highland Clans by the British.

Brad says

I never finished the book. I read the first hundred some odd pages, enough to take in the battle and couldn't bring myself to continue. Painstakingly detailed, Culloden tells the sad tale of the last great battle between the English and the Scots. As an aside, I actually visited the site of the battle. It is a desolate, wind swept moor. A hard place. I can't imagine what it must have been like to have marched several miles in the cold April rain and fog, half starved to stand in a line and let the English fire cannons at me. The visitors center at

Culloden is extremely well done, and I'd recommend it over the book any day.

Bettie? says

2nd prebble

Peter Pinkney says

This is the second book of John Prebbles' trilogy that I have read.

He is a superb historian, and also a great storyteller. This book is horrific. I knew very little about Culloden, before I read it, other than the English finally defeated the Jacobites there. I was so wrong, it's a lot more complicated, English and Scots fought on both sides.

The battle was short, and it is the aftermath that this book mainly deals with. The horrific murders, rapes, theft and destruction carried out in the Highlands by the soldiers under the crown. Peebles compares the leaders to the SS, and he is so right. Cumberland, Lockhart, and Hawley would have found themselves at home amongst the worst of Hitler's regiments.

A plague on all Kings and Queens and their petty quarrels. I'm surprised the Scots even allow the current incumbent of the British throne to ever set foot up there.

Please read this book and learn to never allow our "leaders" to take us to war again

Jan-Jaap van Peperstraten says

I like historical studies to make at least a gesture towards objectivity. Prebble so identifies himself with the Jacobites rebelling against the Hannoverian government that such a gesture is not made. The first half of the book, detailing events leading up to the fateful battle of Culloden is moderately interesting, what follows is a dreary litany of complaint rendering the study mostly pathetic and well nigh unreadable. Poor. Avoid if possible.

Aryama Ghosh says

Great one. ...

Poignantly portrayed. ..

One of the must read for pacification /small War studies

Kristoffer says

One of the most heartbreakingly tragic books I've ever read but I couldn't put it down. Stayed up too late two nights running and read on my lunch break at work. I was already somewhat familiar with the basic facts of the

battle on account of various books I've read over the years. But I walked Drumossie Moor on a cold, wet, windy day a few weeks ago and found the place entirely haunting. Upon returning home I wanted to learn more about the battle, as walking the ground really touched me.

I believe this book to be incredibly well researched. The author does a painfully thorough job of adding names and personal stories to an already well documented battle. The author really does a superb job of describing what (and who) was truly lost in the battle and its aftermath. The prologue states that it is a non-partisan book that does not take sides. I do not believe this to be true, but will let others decide.

The simplest review I can state about this work is this: I'm not sure whether my journey through the Highlands would have benefited from reading this book prior to it. The striking and quiet beauty of the deserted Highlands was haunting enough without the full picture of the tragedy that was Culloden and the events that followed. Just as Scotland is a place I cannot wait to revisit, this is a work that I will undoubtedly stay up too late reading again.

Bettie? says

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Jan-Maat says

Many years ago when the world was young and the Big Bang a recent memory, I went to a concert of the *Missa Solemnis*, to my misfortune this was preceded by a musicological sermon in which the preacher, much to the happy sighs of the congregation spoke of the beauty and nobility and excellence of music and how it refined our rough souls, brought people together in peace and happiness and rendered us in capable of harming one another. Nasty person that I am and was, I remain fairly sure that when the ancestors had shouldered arms and marched off to war there had been singing and music involved, indeed that it was a pretty unavoidable part of the entire procedure to get everybody in the correct mood, hence this review comes with a soundtrack, for God, King George, and Uncle Toby (view spoiler), Lilibulero, while for all you Jacobites (view spoiler)The White Cockade. In addition to a soundtrack there is also a film, which was made in 1964 (shot in black and white and made in documentary style (view spoiler)) is well worth watching and based on this book.

I'm nervous as to what I can say, seeing as I want to avoid spoilers, and who is to know, for someone the 1745 Jacobite rising is an adventure that has not yet begun nor ended, it might be cruel to make an assumption and on the basis of that reveal inadvertently the sorry end of the whole business, silly and sordid.

The first third of the book deals with the battle and its immediate aftermath and the rest of the book with the reprisals and the fates of the prisoners. So for those that want it, there is no general account of the rebellion nor of the state of the kingdoms united of England and Scotland, look elsewhere for that, I didn't feel the lack of it personally. The account is vivid, drawn very much from primary sources, sharply biased against the cruelties and exploitations, but also against the Highland society of this period, this Prebble regards as savage and not prefixed by 'noble' either. He also regards the passing of the Highland social structures as a 'good thing', and some readers won't find that much to their taste. He is so un-Romantic in his view of the rebellion that it is almost, but perhaps for his treatment of the Manchester (view spoiler) regiment virtually a

form of bias as well. There's an up the workers! view, so he mentions both that the private soldier of King George served for tuppence a day minus deductions for his uniform and munitions (and he had to pay for beef and ale if he wanted it, bread and cheese out of the boundless generosity of the crown were provided) , Adam's Ale (view spoiler) , perhaps too freely provided by God, gave them their daily drink, brandy on the high days of the House of Hannover< spoiler> of which there were not nearly enough for tuppence a day (view spoiler)(view spoiler) and that the senior men of a clan considered themselves well within their rights to burn the roof off a junior clansman's hut to ensure that he voluntarily and of his own freewill answered the call of his clan chief to go to war. While the clan chief himself was a man who also had rights of the pit and the gallows over his clan and did on occasion sell some of his people into indentured servitude to meet the intemperate demands of his wine merchant or tailor (view spoiler).

Prebble is explicitly writing against a sentimental Jacobite tradition, which makes this book interesting at the current moment with the rumble of a second independence referendum rattling the window panes of the union of 1707, if not the long bred for union of the crowns achieved in 1603. One of the good things about being subsumed into a larger political unit, is that in sentiment the Patria can become a most perfect place. Prebble against this sets himself as an alarm clock of the modern variety that splashes the face with cold coffee at the first light of dawn - enthusiasm was limited, those who were enthusiastic were not shy in forcing others to fight, those who volunteered for the Manchester regiment - Prebble considers only the officers - who were a sad bunch(view spoiler) who died for a fairly silly young man. Once the Highlands had been broken and depopulated then for Prebble it was safe for a silly and sentimental Jacobitism to emerge in the Lowlands (view spoiler) . Among the prisoners (view spoiler) were a blind bagpiper (who had been left to march into the Hannoverian lines), two deaf-mutes, more than a dozen priests (four of whom were Jesuits) and a sprinkling of men over seventy(view spoiler), ie it was at least, an equal opportunities rebellion (no part of the barrel unscraped (view spoiler)). I suppose, reading between the lines, one can say that Prebble is a disappointed Romantic, arguing that if you scrap away the sentimentalism you can find in the truths of history a reality that one can be genuinely passionate about and that sense does give this book a good deal of energy.

Bill says

If you like detail and personal accounts, you'll like this book. From the opening paragraphs describing the British Army's equipment, drill and maneuvers to the closing paragraphs that summed up the end of Highland Culture, I was captivated by this book. I am undeniably a history enthusiast, a Scotophile and the proud progeny of Lowlanders so this book had me captivated. Culloden was the beginning of the end of the Highland clan system, and as the book points out, it was a curious and outdated system that was on its way to obsolescence anyway. The brutality that the Brits used to crush the Rebellion and destroy the Highlanders' morale and way of life is described in no uncertain terms in this book. I liked about this account that Prince Charlie is not talked any more than the ordinary people who fought and suffered for a cause that they did not always fully understand. A good read. Maybe too dry for some, but fascinating to me.

Marlowe says

Good solid stuff; enjoyed it immensely although I should say I knew little about the history of highland Scotland. Possibly a bit too heavy on the military history and not big enough on the social, but I've always enjoyed military history so that wasn't a problem. For me.

Christ, they practically destroyed highland Scotland. Will probably read the other Prebble books too.

Rosalind says

The last formal pitched battle involving British soldiers on British soil – I choose my words carefully to avoid bringing in the brawls between black and white GIs in WW2 which are a whole other story – was a tawdry affair of 1746 that has been elevated to a romanticism that it does not deserve. It was a well-organised force raised by the Hanoverian George II under the command of his son William Augustus, Duke of Cumberland, set against a rag-tag army raised, often on pain of loss of land, livestock and home, by Highland chiefs still loyal to the Stuart monarchy. Cannon and musket against broadswords, fought on a foul April day on a boggy moor between Inverness and Nairn with a bitter east wind blowing sleet and snow into the faces of the Highlanders. It was a rout; the moor afterwards littered with bodies of Highlanders many of them broken by grapeshot. It was also the end of serious resistance to the triumphant Whigs, who like all big winners went on to write the history of the times as self-righteous, self-justifying truth. The aftermath of Culloden isn't generally part of that history; it's not much taught in British school history and it's a shameful blot on the nation. What followed the events on Drumossie Moor was an act of genocide.

John Prebble, working in the 1950s and early 1960s (the book was published in 1961, just a year after Macmillan's "Wind of Change" speech) dug up the dirty truth of Culloden and its aftermath from accounts and journals of people who took part on both sides as ordinary soldiers. He is sympathetic to those on both sides, they were the hapless pawns of history after all, but not to their leaders. Charles Edward "Bonnie Prince Charlie" Stewart, the hero of the romantic version, is only ever a shadowy presence in the background, flitting from one bolthole to another as the slaughter went on.

Prebble gives a clear and detailed account of the battle itself but that is less than half of the book and, for me, the least interesting part (although I'm sure those interested mainly in military history would be fascinated) but from the common soldier's perspective. The triumphant Whig soldiers, many Lowland Scots amongst them, marched from the battlefield into Inverness slaughtering any hapless civilian they met on the way, unrestrained by their officers. Inverness was occupied and prisoners crammed into the town's Tollbooth and, when that would take no more, into any available cellar until the stench of death and neglect became unbearable. From Inverness the Whigs spread out over the Highlands and Islands with a scorched earth, slaughtering, burning and pillaging the lands of the clansmen, driving off and selling the cattle into the Lowlands and England, starving the Highlanders, who were regarded as savages much as the Indians in the American colonies were, into submission. Unrepenting Highland chiefs were taken to London to be eviscerated for the entertainment of the Tyburn mob. The wearing of tartan and Highland dress and the speaking of the Gaelic language was proscribed; the law was repealed forty years later but by then it was much too late. The clan system was broken, the clan chiefs who survived were assimilated and their landholdings consolidated so that they could finish the job of clearing the Highland people so the land could be sold to English sheep-farmers. And all was safe for the romanticising of the Highlands, the invention of "clan tartans" made possible by chemical dyes and the Yorkshire woollen industry, and the whole shortbread-tin, tartan-tat Scottish tourism industry.

Culloden isn't an easy read; it's intensely harrowing in places as befits the subject matter. But it really ought to take its proper place in the history syllabus just to teach the point that national history and myth isn't all as glorious as some would have us believe. The winds of change are blowing once again, not through Africa this time but through Scotland itself, a Scotland which is waking up to its own history and regaining its self-confidence. The kilt – the authentic, homespun, vegetable-dyed version – is being worn with pride once

again outside the tourist areas. There are Gaelic road signs in the Highlands and Islands and bilingual station names on the railways even in places where Gaelic was never much spoken. The true story of Culloden is not being forgotten.
