

THE WOMEN OF THE GLEN: SOME THOUGHTS ON HIGHLAND HISTORY

HAMISH HENDERSON

Historians who write about the Highland Clearances — the infamous mass evictions in which (as Karl Marx stated in *Kapital*) areas as big as German principalities were systematically and brutally cleared of their inhabitants — invariably refer to the extraordinary lack of resistance on the part of the victims during this cataclysmic period of capitalist “social engineering”; yet none (as far as I know) has ever ventured anything like a convincing answer to the really baffling question which must surely occur to anyone reading the history on record: why was it the women, rather than the men, who offered such resistance as there was?

In his book on *The Highland Clearances*, John Prebble describes one such scene:

Four miles down the glen, as they came through a wood by the march of Greenyard, their road was blocked by sixty or seventy women, with a dozen or less men standing behind them. The women had drawn their red shawls over their heads, and were waiting silently.

Taylor, the Fiscal, and Stewart got down from the carriage and walked to the head of the police. Taylor shouted to the women in Gaelic and told them that they must clear the way for the Law, and when they did not move he took out the Riot Act and began to read it . . .

The constables went forward with their truncheons lifted, and, according to the *Inverness Courier* (which got the information from Taylor), the Strathcarron men immediately ran for the hills, leaving their women alone. Although some men must have remained, for two were injured and one was later charged, the absence of all the others is hard to condone, as it was at Culrain, Gruids, and elsewhere. The assault of the police was short, brutal, and bloody. The *Courier*, again reporting Taylor perhaps, said that there were three hundred women there, and that they were armed with sticks and stones. If they were, they were remarkably inefficient in the use of them, for no policeman suffered more than a bruise or a dented hat . . . (p. 244).

These events took place in 1854. No wonder the Highlanders were disinclined to turn out to fight the Russians. During the war against the French Revolution and Napoleon, the Isle of Skye had furnished thousands of men for the forces. By 1937 Skye had contributed to the British Army 21 Lieutenant-Generals and Major-Generals, 48 Lieutenant-Colonels, 600 Majors, Captains and Subalterns, 120 Pipers, and 10,000 N.C.O.s and men.

The Sutherlanders had fought under Gustavus Adolphus, and became the fame of the armies of Europe. When one remembers the accounts of their martial spirit on the battlefields of Germany, Spain, and the Low Countries, one asks oneself with incredulity why they did not defend their own homesteads. Your guess is as good as mine, and the following tentative explanation is offered with the utmost diffidence. I do not think it is the whole truth, but it is part of the truth.

First of all, one must get the Jacobite period into perspective. It is often said that the ancient clan society was destroyed at Culloden, and in a sense this is true, although the process of disintegration had begun long before. However, it is easier

to apply surgical methods to the body politic than to subvert the folkways of a millennium. Passing an Act to abolish the heritable jurisdictions does not mean that you get rid, automatically, of the mental attitudes involved, either on the victim's side, or on the side of the judges. Reading the accounts of some of the clearances, one gets an impression of the ritual of "pit and gallows" still in operation, and the luckless clansman waiting to be topped by the chief's *crochadair* (executioner).

There was, of course, occasional resistance, when the people were goaded to utter desperation, or when a resolute leader was thrown up. In 1849, at Sollas, North Uist, there were wild riots, and here and there one finds reports of men like Archibald Dubh Macdonnell, who — threatened with eviction — "called up his seven stalwart sons, armed himself with a broadsword his grandfather had carried at Culloden, and defied both the law and his Chief" (Prebble, p. 150).

But the general picture is one of almost masochistic apathy and defeatism. In 1832, evicted Chisholms living in Canada sent their chief an address of loyalty, although he had just finished throwing half his remaining clansmen out of Strathglass. It was not till the 1880's, with the "Battle of the Braes" in Skye, and the sending of warships to the Minch, that resistance assumed proportions serious enough to force Government action, and, ultimately, to secure the passing of the Crofters' Act of 1886.

Incidentally, the record of the evictions at Knoydart, Strathglass, and Glengarry makes it clear that there is no truth in the statement one occasionally encounters that there was more resistance in Catholic areas than in Protestant.

So why — you well may ask — were things so different in Ireland? To that the short answer must surely be that in Ireland the landlords were felt to be (as indeed in many cases they often were) foreigners: whereas in Scotland the expropriators and savagers were in the main the old ancestral clan chiefs themselves. In spite of their galloping anglicization, and the inner erosion of their patriarchal status, the chiefs were still felt to be the clan fathers — *Mac Gille Chaluim* or *Mac Sheumais Chataich*, or whatever — to whom obedience and allegiance were owed.

It is when we examine the role of the women in resisting the evictors that the folklorist begins to feel he might be able to offer the historians some revealing evidence. One of the most noticeable and most easily documentable characteristics of Celtic tribal society, from the early Irish heroic sagas onwards, is the place in it of tough, strong-minded women.

This is the hidden world of matriarchy, exercising power indirectly, which existed over against the masculine authority of the chief. (Curiously enough, it was when dealing with a subject from Celtic tribal history that Shakespeare drew the archetypal portrait of a hero who is outwardly all panache, pride and swagger, but who depends almost abjectly on his mettlesome wife at moments of crisis.

Infirm of purpose! Give me the daggers!)¹

At this point we need to recapitulate what is known of the status of women, and of their military prowess, in early Celtic society. Polybius, writing in the second

century BC, states that in time of war the women of the Celts accompanied the men to battle, following them in waggons.² The bellicose reputation of Gaulish women is attested by Ammianus Marcellinus in an often quoted passage:

Nearly all the Gauls are of a lofty stature, fair, and of ruddy complexion; terrible from the sternness of their eyes, very quarrelsome, and of great pride and insolence. A whole troop of foreigners would not be able to withstand a single Gaul if he called his wife to his assistance, who is usually very strong, and with blue eyes; especially when, swelling her neck, gnashing her teeth, and brandishing her sallow arms of enormous size, she begins to strike blows mingled with kicks, as if they were so many missiles sent from the string of a catapult.³

The most formidable single opponent encountered by the Romans in Britain — with the possible exception of the Caledonian chief Calgacus, who commanded the northern tribes against Agricola at Mons Graupius — was the ‘warrior queen’ Boudicca (Boadicea), who is thus described by Dio Cassius:

She was huge of frame, terrifying of aspect, and with a harsh voice. A great mass of bright red hair fell to her knees: she wore a great twisted golden necklace, and a tunic of many colours, over which was a thick mantle, fastened by a brooch. Now she grasped a long spear to strike fear into all those who watched her . . .⁴

In *The Celtic Realms*, an excellent comprehensive survey by Myles Dillon and Nora Chadwick, the high status of women in the Celtic world is continually emphasised:

History and tradition alike echo the high prestige of women in Celtic mythology . . . In the Heroic Age of Ireland Medb, Queen of Connacht, is the reigning sovereign. Ailill, her husband, is never more than her consort, and Medb is the greatest personality of any royal line of the Heroic Age.

In Irish and Welsh stories of Celtic Britain the great heroes are taught not only wisdom but also feats of arms by women. In the Irish saga known as ‘The Wooing of Emer’ Cuchulainn is trained in all warrior feats by two warlike queens — Scathach, who is also a *fáith*, i.e. a prophetess, an expert in supernatural wisdom — and Aife . . . Among the ancient Picts matrilinear succession was the rule till the ninth century. Bede tells us that even in his own day whenever the royal succession among the Picts came in question their ruler was chosen by succession from the female line (pp. 194-5).

The most famous allusion to Celtic fighting women occurs in Tacitus’ description of the Roman assault on the island of Angelsey in AD 61. Women and Druids were among the British warriors drawn up to withstand the assault, and to protect the island’s sacred groves. After the battle these groves were destroyed — an act untypical of Roman policy, and suggesting a real fear of the Druids as inspirers of opposition.⁵ (As Julius Caesar had put it a hundred years previously, *natio est omnis Gallorum admodum dedita religionibus*, “The whole Celtic people is greatly addicted to religion”.)⁶

The “man’s world” of the Celts was also, of course, a warrior world, and the descriptions of it given by several classical authors tie in remarkably well with the information contained in the Gaelic heroic sagas. Like many warrior societies, in which the young men are isolated from the women for long periods, trained from their earliest years in the use of arms, and brought up to vie with each other in battle and in the hunt, it was a society in which homosexuality seems to have been very widespread. The references of Greek and Latin historians to this subject are

quite explicit, and have a remarkable consistency. They are not as well known as might be expected, for the whole idea seems to have embarrassed Celtic scholars, much as the speech of Alcibiades in *The Banquet* about his relations with Socrates is said to have embarrassed and troubled poor Jowett.

Diodorus Siculus, writing in the first century BC, has this to say:

The Celtic women are not only as tall as the men, but are just as courageous . . . But although they are attractive, the men are much keener on their own sex; they lie around on animal skins and enjoy themselves, with a lover on each side. The extraordinary thing is that they haven't the smallest regard for their own personal dignity or self-respect; they offer themselves to other men without the least compunction. Furthermore, this isn't looked down on, or regarded as in any way disgraceful; on the contrary, if one of them is rejected by another to whom he has offered himself, he takes offence.⁷

This information came to Diodorus from Posidonius, an historian who travelled through Southern Gaul, and observed Celtic folkways on the spot. Strabo, who died about 26 AD, writes laconically that "the young men in Gaul are shamelessly generous with their boyish charms", and Athenaeus, two centuries later, repeats the statement of Diodorus about the Celt's male bed-partners.⁸ This evidence of homo-erotic practices in an enclosed warrior society is, of course, in no way surprising. It is confirmed in the most striking manner by several passages in the great Irish heroic saga, *Táin Bó Cuailnge* (The Cattle-Raid of Cooley).⁹ In the versions contained in the Yellow Book of Lecan and (more completely) in the Book of Leinster the tale is told of the fight between Cuchullain and his "ardent and adored foster-brother" Ferdia, who face each other in heroic single-combat at the ford. Ferdia does not want to fight Cuchullain who has been his comrade-in-arms at the battle-school of Scathach in Alba (Scotland), but Medb, the queen of Connacht, sends "poets and bards and satirists to bring the blushes to his cheek with mockery and insult and ridicule, so there would be nowhere in the world for him to lay his head in peace." When Cuchullain learns that Ferdia is on the way to fight him, he says: "I swear I don't want a meeting. Not because I fear him, but because I love him so much", and before their first encounter he reminds him:

Fast friends, forest-companions
We made one bed and slept one sleep
In foreign lands after the fray.
Scathach's pupils, two together,
We'd set forth to comb the forest.

In this verse, written down in Ireland more than a thousand years after Diodorus wrote the passage quoted above, we have an unmistakable echo in poetry of the rather ironic down-to-earth description of 'heroic love' in the Greek historian's prose.

The combat of Ferdia and Cuchullain has been compared (by Aodh de Blacam) to the duel between Hector and Achilles, and Cuchullain's lament over the body of his lover to David's lament for Saul and Jonathan. ("The beauty of Israel is slain upon thy high places"). — On another level (more in tune, perhaps, with the native temperament) one feels like repeating of the two champions what Henry de

Montherlant once wittily remarked of the heroes of the *Satyricon*, that they may be *bougres*, but at any rate they are not *de mauvais bougres*.

In view of the enormous time-gap to which we just alluded, it is maybe advisable, at this point, to recall Gordon Childe's remark in *Scotland before the Scots* that human history comes not so much in 'Ages' as in 'Stages'. It should always be remembered that because of Ireland's relative isolation, aboriginal Celtic folkways continued to flourish there right up until the early Middle Ages. Rudolf Pörtner puts it succinctly when he compares the 'protected' survivals in Ireland, the Off-Off Island, to life in a *Naturschutzpark* or nature reserve¹⁰

The same general situation undoubtedly prevailed in many parts of the Scottish Highlands and Islands until even later, as voluminous folklore records testify. Ancestral memories of Celtic head-hunting are still to be encountered in parts of the Outer Hebrides — as are hang-overs of some of the other phenomena we have been discussing. The plot of a folk-tale *MacNeil of Barra, the Widow's Son and the Shetland Buck*, which was recorded from "the Cuddy" (the late John Mac Pherson, postmaster of Northbay) by John Lorne Campbell, contains some curious motifs. MacNeil (the chief) takes a fancy to the Mingulay widow's son, and carries him off to Barra, in spite of his mother's pleas. All goes well until the boy is big and strong enough to beat the chief in wrestling matches; the latter then attempts to murder him by ordering the crew of the *birlinn* to put to sea in a hurricane.¹¹

Much fascinating information about the sexual mores of medieval Celtic society is to be found in Kenneth Nicholls' *Gaelic and Gaelicized Ireland in the Middle Ages*. The rights enjoyed by women under Brehon law — which continued to be operative in most parts of Ireland until the seventeenth century, although 'officially' terminated by the Statutes of Kilkenny in 1366* — would be the envy of women's libbers in many parts of the world in 1980. Women had the right of independent property ownership, could divorce and remarry with ease, and could be practitioners of the arts and sciences if they so desired. "There was no such thing as an illegitimate child; a mother had simply to 'name' the child and if it was a son, he would inherit part of his father's property. Marriage was one of the keys to Irish women's independence, based as it was upon a complex series of property relationships which did not automatically involve property transfer from women to men."¹² Nicholls tells us that "down to the end of the old order in 1603, what could be called Celtic secular marriage remained the norm in Ireland . . . Christian matrimony was no more than the rare exception grafted on to this system" (p. 73).

According to Peter Trehwela, "If a couple chose to part, all they had to do was to stand back to back on the hill of Tailteann near Tara, and walk away from each other. Trial marriages were very common . . ."¹³

Myles Dillon, in *The Celtic Realms*, confirms the statements of the writers already quoted:

The law of marriage in early Ireland is of special interest, as it shows in great measure the persistence of ancient customs in spite of Christian teaching. Divorce is freely

allowed. Indeed there is a trace of annual marriage. A marriage may always be ended by common consent . . . The practice of placing one's children in the care of foster-parents was a normal feature of Irish society, and it was not confined to the noble class . . . The time of fosterage ended for boys at seventeen, for girls at fourteen, and they returned home. Those who had been fostered together were bound in close relationship. This relationship with one's *comaltae* is a recurring motif in the sagas. (pp. 132-3)

Dr. John MacInnes informs me that until the forfeiture of the Lordship of the Isles at the end of the fifteenth century, a very similar judicial system must have prevailed over much of the Highlands. We know of a family of hereditary law-givers — the Morrisons of Ness in Lewis — who, after the Irish pattern, acted as jurists for the Lordship. There can be no doubt that these *breitheamhan* were the far-off heirs of the learned men reported among the Celts of Gaul by Julius Caesar and Posidonius.

That the women of Celtic Scotland were as combative as those of Ireland is attested by Hector Boece:

The wemen war of litil les vassalage and strenth than was the men; for al rank madinnis and wiffis, gif they war nocht with child, yeid als weill to battall as the men.¹⁴

In his splendid, erudite book, *A Midsummer Eve's Dream*, which is a discursive commentary on William Dunbar's poem "The Tretis of the Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo," Professor A. D. Hope provides much information on the position of women in Scottish society at various periods in our history. He quotes the statement of Thomas Morer (who was chaplain to a Scottish regiment about 1689, and who wrote *A Short Account of Scotland*) that "the women of Scotland are capable of estates and honours, and inherit both as well as the males and therefore after marriage may retain their maiden name," and adds:

The way in which women retained their own names and often their own property in Scotland impressed many travellers. It was perhaps the last afterglow of an age in which the real power had been theirs to exercise and enjoy.

What light — if any — does all of this throw on the recurrent pattern of women's resistance to the clearers which is so amply documented. If I am on the right track — and I emphasize again that this is a theory, advanced tentatively — then there is more to the presence of the women in the front line than the obvious considerations that they were less likely to be clubbed by police and military; were in themselves (as wives and mothers) the most direct human reproach to the callousness and inhumanity of the evictors; and (to put it at its lowest) were less likely to be proceeded against than the men. All these are valid points, but they are not enough to explain this very perceptible pattern. Surely it is only completely explicable as another hang-over from the mental world of the shattered tribal system. It was the "women's world", which stood in, with all its spirit, courage, and resilience, when the "man's world" faltered.¹⁵

The swashbuckling "man's world" of chief, gillie-wetfoot, and arms-toting *duine uasal* had come unstuck — finally unstuck — on Drummoissie Moor; not

long after, it was to be taken over, lock, stock and powder-horn, by the British army. The hidden "matriarchal" women's world, of whose splendid vigour we have so much evidence in Gaelic song-poetry, had remained intact, and when the men took to the brae in ignominious *sauve qui peut* on the appearance of the "baton brigade", it provided a fragile last line of resistance before the fire-raisers moved in. It was as if they meant to show that if the men were not prepared to defend hearth and home, they were.

The male who does appear in baleful prepotent pride on the scene of the Clearances is, alas, on the oppressor's side. Haranguing his cowed subjects from a high wooden throne, and threatening them with hell-fire if they disobey those set in authority over them, he is the Calvinist minister. This sinister character can well and truly be regarded as the devil of the piece; while lambasting the people for their sins, and openly suggesting that they are being made to suffer because of them, he is quite capable at the same time of angling for an extension to his glebe. Donald MacLeod informs us in *Gloomy Memories* that during the famine of 1836 the Rev. Hugh MacKenzie, moderator of the Presbytery of Tongue, exchanged part of his glebe for more extensive property. "But in consenting to the change he made an express condition that the present occupiers, amounting to eight families, should be removed, and accordingly they were driven out in a body".¹⁶

And so it was the women who — in accordance with aboriginal Celtic tradition — defied the invaders of their world: the venal Calvinist ministers, and the crowbar-wielding minions of "the gentry with no pity". However, their appearance in the front line raises a number of questions to which one would be glad to have the answer. Where were the children and babies during such scenes as that at Strathcarron? Who was looking after them?

In this connection one must also take into consideration several reports — factual news reports, as well as "folk narratives" — that men dressed as women took part in episodes of resistance. One hesitates to believe that the heroes of Badajoz or Waterloo, or their relatives, would dress themselves in women's attire because they lacked "civil courage". In Ireland the 'Molly Maguires' were the most belligerent of transvestites. Was this an example of military camouflage, the better to do down the aggressor?

Be that as it may, one could wish — reading the accounts of some of the clearances, and their pitiful consequences — that the seven battalions of the Fingalians had been deployed in battle array against the rapacious chieftain-landlords, and their factors and minions, rather than this "petticoat brigade". Donald Ross, a Glasgow lawyer, went to Skye after the Boreraig and Suisinish evictions of 1853, carrying with him large quantities of food and clothing for the people. His account of his experiences was published in a pamphlet *Real Scottish Grievances* the following year: —

"He saw seven children, all under the age of eleven, lying in a shed on a collection of rubbish, fern, meadow-hay, straw, pieces of old blanket, and rags of clothing. Rain and snow fell upon them. They were so thin, and so light, he said, that he

could have carried them all in his arms for a quarter of a mile without feeling their weight".¹⁷

And what were the sanctimonious Calvinist mullahs doing when all these dreadful things were taking place on their manse doorsteps? The discreditable truth (with very few exceptions) is — nothing, or practically nothing. The record of the Free Kirk is better than that of the Established Church in this context.

One cannot avoid the conclusion, from much of the evidence available, that the "judgment of the Lord" fulminations of the ministers tended to induce a hopeless apathetic subjection in the minds of their flocks, and sapped their will to resist their oppressors.

The moral is that no-one surveying this whole subject can afford to leave out of the picture the peculiar psychology of Scots Calvinism — how it can both energize and hypnotize, and — at worst — make thoroughly apathetic. G. K. Chesterton gave gnomic expression to the inner truth of the matter when he wrote (in *The Honour of Israel Gow*): "Scotland has a double dose of the poison called heredity; the sense of blood in the aristocrat, and the sense of doom in the Calvinist."

When the people of Glencalvie were evicted (May 1845), they sought refuge in Croick Kirkyard, and they scratched a few messages for posterity on the window panes. The most pathetic, and in many ways the most revealing of these, reads as follows: *Glencalvie people the wicked generation*.¹⁸

It seems clear that there were a lot of hidden — and open — persuaders who wanted the people to believe that what had hit them was a sort of divine scourge, and that resistance offered to the landlords was tantamount to resistance offered to the Lord. I suspect that women were less susceptible to the powers of this sinister hoodoo than were their menfolk; the women, as we have seen, were the bearers of very old traditions of custom and belief that were deeply antagonistic to the puritanical (and essentially "father-figure") Church.

It was a woman — Mary MacPherson, *Mairi Mhor nan Oran* — who wrote the most poignant lament for the older Scotland shattered by the Clearances. However, in our own day a male poet, T. S. Law, has written in English a poem on the same subject which strikes a quite individual note of lyric elegy, and of truly Swiftian *saeva indignatio*. I conclude by quoting it in full:

The Clearances

Hear how the names sing,
 Macdonald, Clanranald,
 Hear how the names sing,
 Argyll and Lochiel.
 Hear them, hear them,
 MacLeod and Glengarry,
 hear them,
 Baillie, MacDonnell and Ross.
 These are the names that ennobled their line,
 these are the owercome in auld lang syne.

THE CELTIC CONTINUUM

These are the names of the traitors and tinkers,
these are the merciless, murdering swine,
these the destroyers, the deaths heads, blood-drinkers,
these are the owercome in auld lang syne,
these are the names that ennobled their line.

Listen to
Drummond, Breadalbane, and Atholl,
listen to
Hamilton, Balfour, and Innes,
listen and hear,
Sutherland, Fraser,
listen,
Matheson, Seaforth, Robertson.
These are the names that ennobled their line,
these are the owercome in auld lang syne.

These are the cannibals, heart-cruel, savagers,
their Highlanders' bodies and souls meat and wine,
these the procurers of gentleness, ravishers.
These are the owercome in auld lang syne,
these are the names that ennobled their line.

NOTES

¹*Macbeth*, Act II, Scene 2.

²Polybius, *Histories*, V, 78.

³XV, xii. (Charles D. Yonge's translation).

⁴*Roman Histories*, Epitome of Book LXII, 3-4.

⁵Tacitus, *Annals*, XIV, xxx.

⁶*De Bello Gallico*, VI.

⁷Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliothēke Historike*, Book V. Diodorus is as frank about the drinking habits of the Celts: "They take such inordinate pleasure in wine that when it is imported by merchants they drink it straight; and when they're intoxicated with excess of drink, they either go to sleep, or go crazy altogether." (The Greeks customarily diluted their wine in one way or another.)

⁸Strabo and Athenaeus, quoted in Gerhard Herm, *Die Kelten* (Düsseldorf 1975), p. 96.

⁹The quotations from the *Táin* are taken from Thomas Kinsella's translation (Dublin 1969).

¹⁰*Bevor die Römer Kamen*, p. 325.

¹¹See *Tales from Barra. Told by the Cuddy*, ed. J. L. Campbell (Edinburgh 1960).

¹²Tom Woodhouse, "Lost Freedoms," *Gay Left*, no. 8.

¹³"How Celtic Women fell from Power," in *Celtic Theology*, an SCM pamphlet.

¹⁴*Chronicles of Scotland*, Bellenden translation, I, 20.

¹⁵Professor Kenneth Little tells me that the same sort of thing has happened in Africa, when a male warrior caste is broken by defeat, and the women for that reason "have the edge" on the men. While the latter sit around, play cards and get drunk on cheap liquor, the women conduct public and commercial business, and are the purposeful representatives of the group *vis à vis* the outside world.

¹⁶Donald MacLeod, *Gloomy Memories* (Glasgow 1888), p. 37.

¹⁷Prebble, p. 292. Ross's account of the treatment meted out to a 96-year-widow is reprinted in full in Alexander Mackenzie's *Highland Clearances* (pp. 239-44).

¹⁸P. A. MacNab, "The Church at Croick," *The Scots Magazine* (May 1963). MacNab's article epitomizes so well the whole tragic history we have been recounting that I quote it here practically *in toto*:

Croick Church was built in 1827. It is one of about a dozen churches built in Scotland by Thomas Telford, the famous road-maker. It was then the centre of worship attended by a weekly congregation of 200 from the little communities which won a living from the soil and grazings round about. Now they are gone. Nothing remains but old tracks radiating through the heather to green oases on the hillsides, and an occasional rickle of stones which mark where the houses of a thriving people once stood, mute evidence of the Clearances and subsequent depopulation. Every year on the last Sunday in July a Communion Service is conducted in the Church by the Minister of Kincardine Parish, whose consolidated charges and wide district point to the once large population for whom all those churches were established.

... Everything is plain and well preserved inside the church. The centre of interest lies, of course, in the east window where a few words and names scratched on the diamond panes remind us of the whole sad story behind the depopulation, the outcome of one of the later clearances or "Improvements" of the last century. The incidents which centred on Croick Church are as reprehensible as any of the more widely publicised Clearances, although, in justice to the landlord, Major Charles Robertson of Kindeace, it should be said that they took place on the initiative of his factor, James Gillanders, who lived in Tain. The object of his policy of Improvement was Glen Calvie, which lies quite near Croick, which itself had suffered in the same manner a few years earlier.

In 1843 the people of Glen Calvie, reduced in numbers to no more than ninety by earlier evictions, were described as a happy, self-contained community. Although the glen was poor and rocky it was rented at £55.10, considered an exorbitant figure; yet the people paid it. Furthermore, they were free from debt, law-abiding and had sent many soldiers to the wars; they raised sheep and black cattle and grew potatoes and barley. They could trace their tenancies back for 500 years. The events which followed came to the notice of the *London Times* who sent a special correspondent to the scene. He summarised the general position in the north, with special reference to Glen Calvie: "through the actions of the factors in the lonely glens, hundreds of peaceable and generally industrious peasants have been driven from their means of support to become wanderers and starving beggars — a brave, valuable population lost."

In 1843 Gillanders began his scheme to turn the glen into one large sheep farm at an even higher rent. The first step was to serve summonses of removal on the tenants. Anticipating this, however, and on watch just outside the boundary across the river, the women of the glen intercepted the constables and, seizing the wrists of the man holding the writs, they applied live coals to the papers until they were destroyed, seeking to prove they had neither been seen or handled in the glen. Next year, not to be outdone, the crafty Gillanders invited the chief tenants to Tain for a "friendly discussion". Instead he placed the formal notices to quit in their hands. Decree for removal followed, and the law took its course. Stunned and bewildered, the people began to hunt feverishly for alternate holdings; but only six families could find a place, and poor ones at that. The others were at last evicted by force, and for a time, while their menfolk were continuing the hopeless search, they were allowed to shelter in Croick churchyard, exposed to the elements — wishing, as it is recorded, that death would come to allow them to join their forefathers beneath the sward. They were helped only by the minister, who did all in his power to ease their conditions. As the people passed the weary days among the tombs, someone among them, scratching idly on the diamond-shaped panes of the east window, left a short, pathetic message for posterity. In the unhurried copperplate writing of the last century, we can still decipher some of the names: "C. Chalmers", "John Ross, Shepherd, Parish of Ardgay", and others, and, bowing meekly to what was accepted by a God-fearing people as Divine chastisement — "Glencalvie people, the wicked generation." "Glen Calvie people was in the Churchyard here May 24th, 1845". The words "Church Officer" also appear under the name "Ann McAlister" but it is probable that the designation refers to an illegible name scratched below. It is highly unlikely that a woman would be acceptable as Church Officer in the middle of the last century, in a community such as this was. Why were they not allowed to shelter inside the Church? I suggest the answer is simple. In those days it would have been regarded as desecration of a holy place and even under such necessity, and if invited by the Minister, they would probably have refused.

Hamish Henderson's Women of the Glen - PDF

This paper is one of the very few that touches on the impact of “internal colonisation” (Hechter) on **masculinity in Scotland**. What Hamish said about the Highlands could, I think, be extended into the rest of Scotland if we go further back in history. Just before his death, my wife and I held his hand and steadied him at a GalGael event on Calton Hill to light the Democracy Beacon which the folk in Govan had been made. As we did so, and for what must have been the last time – because he only just made it out of the house and up the hill in a taxi – he sang the Freedom Come All Ye, while looking over the expanse of Edinburgh and Scotland all around. I notice that there are hardly any web references to this paper, and so I'm pretty sure I can discern his implicit posthumous encouragement and permission to put this PDF of it on the web!

It was published in that most splendid book, too often overlooked by scholars who have a problem with the “Celtic” idea because of how its ungrounded use appeals to the ungrounded. And yet, one only needs to view the map from the Atlantic to see that this was a culture region that, in the past, was united, and not divided, by the sea, as well as by linguistic links and, most importantly, cultural, psychological and spiritual mores: “The Celtic Consciousness,” ed. Robert O'Driscoll, Canongate, Edinburgh, 1982. (Alastair McIntosh)

“The Women of the Glen: Some Thoughts on Highland History,” in Robert O’Driscoll, ed., *The Celtic Consciousness*. 255–267. New York: George Braziller, 1981. Henry of Huntingdon. “Chaste Subjects: Gender, Heroism, and Desire in the Grail Quest,” in Glen Burger and Steven F. Kruger, eds., *Queering the Middle Ages*. 123–142. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001. McGarry, Daniel D., trans.