



From Jacobite To 'Judas'? A Re-Assessment Of The Reputation Of 'Pickle The Spy' AKA  
Alistair Ruadh MacDonell, 13<sup>th</sup> Chief Of Glengarry

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## Abstract

Alistair Ruadh MacDonell, 13<sup>th</sup> Chief of Glengarry was a staunch Jacobite at the time of the 1745 uprising and a key figure in raising the Scottish clans in support of Charles Stuart. After his release from prison in 1747, MacDonell turned his back on the Stuarts and became an agent for the House of Hanover – the infamous ‘Pickle The Spy’. The only dedicated literary study that exists on him was published in 1897 by Scottish novelist and classicist, Andrew Lang: *Pickle The Spy; Or, The Incognito Of Prince Charles*. In this work, Lang identifies MacDonell as ‘Pickle’ and weaves a tale of a malevolent, self-serving traitor whom he compares to Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Master Of Ballantrae*. This dissertation seeks to challenge Lang’s view of MacDonell and re-assess the information pertaining to him. This will be achieved in two ways: firstly, through a literary review of Lang’s work, discussing the potential for inaccurate research and literary stereotyping, and how the strong influence of the neo-Jacobite movement in the late nineteenth century may have affected his writing. Secondly, it will turn to the primary source material where possible, to gain a more complete picture of both MacDonell and his circumstances. This study aims to provide a broader perspective on MacDonnell’s life and experiences at a time of great political unrest and uncertainty. The greater purpose, perhaps, is to fill the existing gap in modern scholarship pertaining to MacDonell; to invite the reader to formulate their own opinions after considering the broader evidence, and to inspire further study of this fascinating, yet very much underplayed, character in the later Jacobite story.

**Word Count: 10192.**

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## Introduction

Alistair ‘Ruadh’ MacDonell, 13<sup>th</sup> Chief of Glengarry, (1725 – 1761) is a figure much underplayed in modern Jacobite scholarship, yet according to Andrew Lang, who unmasked him as the notorious ‘Pickle the Spy’ in 1897, MacDonell was ‘the foremost of many traitors’ who indulged in ‘a whole romance of prosperous treachery’.<sup>1</sup> Thus, on the strength of this single well-known publication, MacDonell has been disgraced for over a century as an odious villain; a Judas to the cause, marking him as an important character in the later Jacobite story, and one worthy of further study. It is not the intention of this dissertation to dispute Lang’s claims on ‘Pickle’s’ identity, or to exonerate MacDonell of his charge of treachery, rather, it seeks to examine the circumstances surrounding him to determine the nature of the events that shaped his activities, and whether he is entirely deserving of his unpleasant infamy.<sup>2</sup>

Chapter One will discuss Lang and attempt to determine how he may have drawn his conclusions regarding the character and personality of ‘Pickle’. It will also review the only dedicated source of literature on MacDonell: Lang’s *Pickle The Spy; Or, The Incognito Of Prince Charles*, originally published in 1897. In this work, Lang unmaskes the identity of ‘Pickle’ as that of MacDonell through handwriting analysis and a particular idiosyncratic spelling of the word ‘who’, which both MacDonell and ‘Pickle’ spelt as ‘how’.<sup>3</sup> Lang relates the story of the espionage of ‘Pickle’ in a way that is heavily biased against him, supporting the view that MacDonell was a heartless, self-serving traitor. Part of this chapter involves analysing the potential for inaccuracies in his research and will also consider the possibility of Lang’s literary stereotyping of MacDonell as a Jacobite turncoat resembling that of Stevenson’s

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew Lang, *Pickle The Spy; Or, The Incognito Of Prince Charles*, (London: A&C Publishing, 2022), p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Numerous versions of the spelling of his surname exist in different publications, however I am assured by the High Council of Clan Donald that the correct spelling of his surname is MacDonell. Private email correspondence with Major Bruce W. MacDonald, 21 September 2022.

<sup>3</sup> Lang, *Pickle*, p. 66.

*Master of Ballantrae*. Lang had a long friendship with Stevenson, whom he revered as a genius, and it is evident that he was deeply influenced by Stevenson's works, particularly in relation to Jacobitism. According to Marysa Demoor, Lang 'unconditionally surrendered to the charm of Stevenson's person and his writings.'<sup>4</sup> The rise of neo-Jacobitism will be briefly summarized to connect Lang's literary motivations with the interests of the late nineteenth century. Modern scholarship will also be examined, to determine how much has been written about MacDonell, and to what extent Lang's work has influenced academic assessment of the character and motivations of 'Pickle'.<sup>5</sup>

Chapter Two will return to the primary sources to gain a more complete story with which to challenge Lang's portrayal of MacDonell and reveal a version of him that is perhaps more sympathetic. It will demonstrate that in the years leading up to his espionage activities, (which Lang suggests was between 1752 and 1760), MacDonell was treated atrociously by the Stuarts, with numerous snubs and insults being directed towards him and his family. At a time when honour codes were rather different to how we might perceive them today, such snubs would have caused extreme distress. We will see correspondences from MacDonell to James Stuart and his royal advisors, requesting payment due, in the politest terms, for his military service, and for financial assistance on being released from prison - incarceration that was a result of his Jacobite activities. These pleas for help were largely ignored or treated in a dismissive manner. The evidence will reveal that MacDonell's behaviour was more likely born out of poverty, desperation, loss of trust and faith in the Stuart dynasty, and a realisation that the Jacobite cause was irretrievably lost, than any inherent malevolence in his character. This study will present additional biographical information that Lang omitted from his book, which may help to illuminate the complexities of MacDonell's circumstances. It will be evidenced that far from being a treacherous

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<sup>4</sup> Marysa Demoor, *Dear Stevenson: Letters From Andrew Lang To Robert Louis Stevenson With Five Letters From Stevenson To Lang*, (Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters, 1990), p. 4.

<sup>5</sup> Lang's book is divided into fifteen chapters, with only three of them devoted to MacDonell and his life and activities. The rest of the work is focused on Prince Charles Stuart and his exile into Europe from 1749 until his death in 1788, and although interesting, will not form part of this study unless specifically pertinent to MacDonell.

opportunist, MacDonell was indeed a loyal Jacobite in his early military career, whose family engaged actively with the cause, at times at great risk, and ultimate loss to themselves. Post-Culloden, his lands were seized, and his ancestral home destroyed by Cumberland's Army, so it is unlikely that MacDonell harboured any positive feelings towards the Hanoverian regime.

## Chapter One: Andrew Lang And The Legacy Of 'Pickle The Spy'

Born in Selkirk, Scotland in 1844, Andrew Lang attended both St. Andrews and Glasgow Universities, and finished his education at Balliol College, Oxford, holding an open fellowship at Merton College until 1875. His major disciplines were anthropology, the Classics, folklore, and mythology, but he was perhaps best known for his poetry, literary criticism, and fairy stories. It is important to note therefore, that although an accomplished scholar and prolific writer, Lang did not receive any formal academic education in Scottish political history.

He was a writer of 'effortless expertise' and 'works ... flowed from his pen in a wide range of academic disciplines.'<sup>6</sup> He was undoubtedly revered as a gifted classicist, as his translations of *The Odyssey* (1879) and *The Iliad* (1883) demonstrate, but by the 1890s, Lang had turned his attention to Scottish history and the subject of Jacobitism. The text that underpins this study: *Pickle The Spy; Or, The Incognito Of Prince Charles* (1897), represents his first literary foray into Jacobite territory. One might question why Lang chose to pitch MacDonell against Charles Stuart. In focusing heavily on a Jacobite traitor, Lang may have detracted attention from his sympathetic treatment of Charles Stuart, and his own neo-Jacobite associations, thereby avoiding judgement from a Victorian populace which supported the current royal family. Regardless of his motives, the text was hailed as a major contribution to Jacobite historiography as it offered such detailed personal insight into the life, character, and ultimate decline of Charles Edward Stuart, as well as sensationally unmasking the identity of the treacherous 'Pickle the Spy' as that of Alistair MacDonell, 13<sup>th</sup> Chief of Glengarry.

Lang employed a host of research assistants to help him collate his evidence. The book does not detail the credentials of these individuals aside from their names in the acknowledgements, so consequently readers may not know explicitly the accuracy of any of the information collected. Indeed, it is telling to note the comments of Alistair and Henrietta

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<sup>6</sup> William Donaldson, 'Andrew Lang: A World We Have Lost', *Studies In Scottish Literature*, 43.1 (2017), 155–165 (p. 159).

Taylor in their introduction to *The Stuart Papers At Windsor*, in which they discuss Lang's 1900 publication, *Prince Charles Edward*: 'It is, however, somewhat unsatisfactory that he rarely indicates the date of the particular letter from which he, somewhat loosely, quotes.'<sup>7</sup> Compare this also with an important comment regarding *Pickle The Spy*: 'he weaves his story almost entirely from the Windsor material, but again usually by indirect quotation, or quoting from memory'.<sup>8</sup> These comments set Lang up as a less reliable source of historical information than we may have assumed him to be, given his academic background. It also indicates the relatively narrow field of material he personally studied to draw his conclusions regarding MacDonell and his character.

Prior to the publication of *Pickle*, Lang communicated frequently with his friend Robert Louis Stevenson, who was, in 1889, living in Samoa working on a new Jacobite novel which he did not live to finish. Lang sent Stevenson copies of documents from the Stuart Papers held at the British Museum to assist with his research for the story and was heavily involved in helping Stevenson to develop the characters and plot. Lang's rather sycophantic relationship with Stevenson should not be understated. By his own admission he was 'an admirer, a devotee, a fanatic.'<sup>9</sup> After Stevenson's death in 1894, the papers were returned to Lang, and he used them to generate the story of *Pickle*. The work effectively championed the romantic ideal of Jacobite heroism by dismantling the character of Alistair MacDonell by contrast, whilst praising the 'courage, endurance, and gay content of the Prince in his Highland wanderings.'<sup>10</sup> That this Chief of a noble Scottish clan could commit such treachery was no doubt shocking to a Victorian readership, especially given that there was a certain amount of fetishizing of the Highlands and Highlanders, thanks to the *Waverley* novels of Sir Walter Scott, Queen Victoria's love of Scotland and the rise of neo-Jacobitism. After the '45, Jacobitism was rigorously suppressed, the movement essentially disappearing in England.

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<sup>7</sup> Alistair Taylor And Henrietta Taylor, *The Stuart Papers At Windsor: Being Selections From Hitherto Unprinted Royal Archives*, (London: Butler & Tanner Ltd., 1939), p. 4.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Demoor, *Dear Stevenson*, p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> Lang, *Pickle*, p. 12.

Remaining Jacobite sympathisers were forced underground and formed secret societies in which to safely discuss ideas. Neo-Jacobitism can be linked to the 'Order Of The White Rose' formed in 1886 which claimed to be linked to an older Jacobite society, the Welsh 'Cycle Club' originally formed around 1710.<sup>11</sup> The Order was primarily concerned with the sentimental side of the movement, and Lang became a member, along with other famous persons such as W.B Yeats, Henry Jenner, and James Whistler. The decline of anti-Catholic sentiments towards the end of the eighteenth century had resulted in a 'relaxation of dynastic anxieties' and Highland culture had ceased to be regarded as a credible threat.<sup>12</sup> This led to lowland Scots fetishizing it to enhance their Scottish identity, and as Kidd states: 'This fond appropriation of a bogus Highland tradition was, of course, a crucial and widely recognised ingredient in the refashioning of an equally kitsch Jacobitism'.<sup>13</sup> This is no doubt why Scott felt able to add an element of romance to his Jacobite Highlanders in the early nineteenth century. Queen Victoria's endorsements of Highland life further supported the romance. In 1889, she approved an Exhibition of the Royal House of Stuart at the New Gallery in London, which Neil Guthrie suggests was motivated by the revival: 'An additional impetus for the 1889 exhibition lay in the neo-Jacobite revival of the late nineteenth century, which centred around the shadowy Order of the White Rose'.<sup>14</sup> Around the same time that *Pickle* was published, we also see a marked increase in the publishing of Jacobite memoir material such as Forbes' *The Lyon In Mourning* in 1895, *Memorials Of John Murray Of Broughton* published in 1897 by the Scottish History Society, and Fraser-MacKintosh's *Antiquarian Notes* also published in 1897. Lang, it seems, was following the trend and adding his own voice to the literary milieu.

Lang, in keeping with his neo-Jacobite sympathies, is unflinchingly scathing in his opinions of MacDonell, labelling him a 'traitor, a profligate, an oppressor of his tenantry,

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<sup>11</sup> Murray Pittock, *The Invention Of Scotland: The Stuart Myth And The Scottish Identity, 1638 To The Present*, (London: Taylor & Francis, 2014), p. 147.

<sup>12</sup> Colin Kidd, 'The Rehabilitation of Scottish Jacobitism', *The Scottish Historical Review*, 77.203 (1998), pp. 58–76, (p. 60).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Neil Guthrie, *The Material Culture Of The Jacobites*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013) p. 154.

and a liar'.<sup>15</sup> From the outset, the reader is blatantly influenced into loathing MacDonell, and Lang's evidence very much reflects that point of view and his romantic notions around Jacobitism, rather than offering a broader overview of the facts. Indeed, he uses Stevenson's villain, *The Master Of Ballantrae*, as a comparison 'somewhat akin' to MacDonell's character:

The cool, good-humoured, smiling, unscrupulous villain of high rank and noble lineage; the scoundrel happily unconscious of his own unspeakable infamy, proud and sensitive upon the point of honour; the picturesque hypocrite in religion...<sup>16</sup>

If we are to accept Lang's opinion of MacDonell, it would be very difficult to tell him and *The Master* apart, as their stories have such striking parallels. It is important to note that in *Pickle*, the very first lines of text are a quote from *The Master*: 'I knew the Master: on many secret steps of his career I have an authentic memoir in my hand.'<sup>17</sup> This appears to be another method of persuasion; suggesting to the reader that in their hand, they too possess a similar 'authentic memoir'. The fact that there is limited surviving primary source evidence which describes the personality of MacDonell, except through the written correspondence (quoted in Chapter 2), seems irrelevant to Lang here; he appears to be more concerned with creating a dramatic backdrop for one of his leading characters. MacDonell is presented like the villain of a Victorian melodrama. Indeed, much of the book reads more like a romanticized, melodramatic version of history than an academic historical text. Given that *The Master Of Ballantrae* was published in 1889, just short of a decade before *Pickle*, one cannot help wondering how much Lang was influenced by it, and how much he attached the personality of *The Master* to MacDonell as a convenient way to build his character when the primary evidence did not support his narrative or was simply non-existent.

The fact that Lang refers to a fictional character at all gives pause for thought; was this a device to perpetuate the stereotype of the Jacobite turncoat so well

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<sup>15</sup> Lang, *Pickle*, p. 4.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Lang, *Pickle*, p. 1.

described in *The Master*, and negatively influence the reader against MacDonell? This is perhaps not surprising given Lang's interest in neo-Jacobitism, and one correspondence with Stevenson that makes for interesting reading:

I have a lovely new old portrait of my Prince aetat XII ... Such a dandy ... I have also his hair & cypher in two contemporary sleeve links ... The locks of our outraged sovereign were singularly bright and pretty ... No red nor vulgarity in it.<sup>18</sup>

'My Prince' and 'our outraged sovereign' certainly hints at the very least, an affectation of Jacobite sympathy and most certainly at a romantic view of Prince Charles Stuart. Murray Pittock has stated categorically that for Lang, 'famous collector of fairy-tales, Jacobitism was a fairy-tale, perhaps the greatest one of all.'<sup>19</sup> However, Scottish author and politician Thomas Drummond Wanliss accused Lang's *History of Scotland Vol. 3*, of pandering to 'the lowest form of Oxford bigotry' and 'English prejudice' and that Lang was 'anti-Scottish'.<sup>20</sup> Lang's response was that he had 'no sympathy with the suppression of truth', which seems a little at odds with his comment to Stevenson and his romantic neo-Jacobite associations.<sup>21</sup> It appears that Lang's sentiments depended upon which audience he was hoping to impress.

Lang pondered the question of whether it was possible to defend the Stuarts, believing that James had 'everything to gain from an unprejudiced examination of his career', and had 'certainly nothing to lose', yet there is very little that is unprejudiced in his treatment of MacDonell.<sup>22</sup> One questions why he believed the Stuarts needed to be defended at all, if his book was simply a historical study rather than a political statement. Lang's politics are not overtly evident in this work, but he was clearly excited by neo-Jacobitism. He is most sympathetic in his treatment of the Young Pretender, referencing 'the brilliant hour of Prince Charles' and his achievements in the first chapter of the book.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Demoor, *Dear Stevenson*, p. 133.

<sup>19</sup> Pittock, *The Invention Of Scotland*, p. 148.

<sup>20</sup> Catriona M. M. MacDonald, 'Lang and Scottish Historiography: Taking On Tradition', *The Scottish Historical Review*, 94.239 (2015), 207–236, (p. 208).

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Lang, *Pickle*, p. 2.

<sup>23</sup> Lang, *Pickle*, p. 5.

Conversely, in dealing with MacDonell, the language assumes a different tone as Lang states: 'To understand Pickle's career, the reluctant reader must endure a certain amount of actual history.'<sup>24</sup> The narrative here is heavily biased, suggesting that the reader must suffer the history and information pertaining to MacDonell, but may relax and enjoy the 'brilliant' story of Charles. Given that his book is a purported historical text on MacDonell and Charles Stuart, surely 'actual history' should be central to its theme!

What is lacking in *Pickle* is a balanced examination of the politics of the movement. Lang's emphasis is very much weighted towards the idea that Jacobitism was centred around loyalty to, and the desire for, the restoration of the Stuart dynasty; that it was vehemently supported in Scotland, and that ultimately, it was a Highlander versus English conflict:

The story of the Forty-Five is the tale of Highland loyalty: the story of 1750 – 1763 is the record of Highland treachery, or rather the treachery of some Highlanders.<sup>25</sup>

This was a gross over-simplification of the Jacobite agenda. He refers several times to the 'last romance' of Jacobitism, as if Culloden and its horrific aftermath were a heroic romantic saga.<sup>26</sup> The memoirs of the '45 uprising in Forbes' *The Lyon In Mourning*, despite its 'language of sentiment', tell a different story, as we shall see in due course.<sup>27</sup> Interestingly, Lang states that *The Lyon* 'contains, I now find, no addition to the facts here set forth.'<sup>28</sup> This is an absurd assertion given the volume of eye-witness information it contains. Lang's opinion was more likely because his book was 'in type' and he did not want to delay its publication by making amendments.<sup>29</sup> Pittock takes a more holistic view on the matter of

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Lang, *Pickle*, p. 3.

<sup>26</sup> Lang, *Pickle*, pp 3–4.

<sup>27</sup> Murray Pittock, *Culloden (Cùil Lodair)*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 128.

<sup>28</sup> Lang, *Pickle*, p. 2.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

Jacobite politics which will be briefly summarised in the next chapter and may help to shift the weight of opinion against MacDonell to a more balanced position.

Lang's narrative relating to MacDonell throughout his book lacks the neutrality one would expect from an academic historian. There is little evidence that suggests he has attempted to dig any deeper into MacDonell's life aside from that which he has gleaned, inaccurately (according to the Taylers), from the information in the Stuart Papers. In his defence, Lang's book is clearly not a biography, so he may only have included information that supported his theory that MacDonell was the infamous 'Pickle'. There is a curious merging of fact and fiction however, in relation to the history of the Glengarry Clan. Lang tells us that 'Pickle' was a 'descendent of Somerled and the Lords of the Isles.' He then corroborates the statement with a quote from the staunch female Jacobite, Flora MacIvor, a *fictional* character from Scott's 1814 *Waverley* novel:

O sprung from the kings who in Islay held state, / Proud chiefs of *Glengarry*,  
Clanranald, and Sleat, / Combine like three streams from one mountain of snow /  
And resistless in union rush down on the foe!<sup>30</sup>

This is a prime example of the romance of Jacobite fiction influencing Lang's academic writing, perhaps seeking to demolish MacDonell's character still further, by highlighting his noble ancestry in a way that would elicit an emotional response from his readership. Lang interestingly avoids using full transcripts of MacDonell's letters, particularly those dated *before* he becomes 'Pickle', instead selecting the sections he feels are relevant to the story, or that can be highlighted in a way that maligns MacDonell's personality. This fact is noted in a scathing review of Lang's book, published in *The Scottish Review* by A. H. Millar in April 1897. Of Lang's editing Millar states: 'The method in which Mr. Lang treats this incident betrays the animus of a special pleader against Glengarry.'<sup>31</sup> The parts that demonstrate his loyalty to James Stuart for example, or the polite manner of his correspondence, are

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<sup>30</sup> Lang, *Pickle*, p. 66.

<sup>31</sup> A. H. Millar, 'ART. I. – Pickle The Spy' *The Scottish Review*, 29 (1897), 20–226 (p. 207).

noticeably omitted, and some important letters are omitted entirely. However, the chapter concerned with the Elibank plot towards the end of the book, reproduces 'Pickle's' letters in full, including examples of his cypher, as if to showcase the full horror of his treachery. Lang's bias against MacDonell is overwhelming, and he twists the evidence to suit his own perception of 'Pickle' against a backdrop of Jacobite romanticism, clearly fuelled by his fanatical admiration of Stevenson's work and the pervading neo-Jacobite trend. Demoor tells us that Lang's attitude towards fiction was 'more claymores, less psychology', an attitude that certainly seems to have permeated his first attempt at Jacobite history.<sup>32</sup>

Reviewing the modern literature on 'Pickle' will be an uncomplicated process as there is very little in existence. Modern scholars have tended to avoid any discussion of him, or those that do, mention him briefly in passing with no re-examination of Lang's opinion. Perhaps these authors do not regard him as an important character in the Jacobite narrative or are simply happy to accept Lang's explanation of him. Leading Jacobite historian Murray Pittock does not include any information regarding MacDonell or 'Pickle' in *The Myth Of The Jacobite Clans*, nor does he appear in *Material Culture And Sedition* by the same author, despite 'Pickle' famously using code and cypher in his correspondences to the British government. He is also absent from Pittock's latest publication: *Scotland: The Global History 1603 To The Present*.<sup>33</sup>

In *The King Over The Water*, Desmond Seward mentions MacDonell in relation to the Elibank plot and refers to Andrew Lang unmasking him as 'Pickle' in 1897. Seward offers a non-judgemental, almost dismissive opinion of MacDonell. He does not label him a 'traitor', rather describing him as 'a gentlemanly looking man, very good company.'<sup>34</sup> Frank McLynn references 'Pickle' briefly, again regarding the Elibank plot in his *Bonnie Prince Charlie: Charles Edward Stuart*, as this final Jacobite effort was 'Pickle's' finest hour in terms of his

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<sup>32</sup> Demoor, *Dear Stevenson*, p.20.

<sup>33</sup> Murray Pittock, *The Myth Of The Jacobite Clans: The Jacobite Army In 1745*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), *Material Culture And Sedition: 1688–1760*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), *Scotland: The Global History 1603 To The Present*, (London: Yale University Press, 2022).

<sup>34</sup> Desmond Seward, *The King Over The Water: A Complete History Of The Jacobites*, (Edinburgh: Birlinn Limited, 2019), p. 140.

espionage, but again, McLynn's opinion of MacDonell's activities are treated neutrally and lack the emotive narrative that Lang employed.<sup>35</sup> Every modern academic book studied for this project that mentions MacDonell/'Pickle', does so only in relation to the Elibank plot, with one exception. Richard Davenport-Hines, author of *Enemies Within: Communists, The Cambridge Spies And The Making Of Modern Britain*, clearly influenced by Lang, refers to him as MacDonell's 'biographer.'<sup>36</sup> Davenport-Hines describes 'Pickle' in Lang's terms, suggesting he was 'a conceited man who enjoyed the secret importance of double-dealing. His second alias was Random, which suggests his liking for risk.'<sup>37</sup> The connection to Tobias Smollett's picaresque characters 'Roderick Random' and 'Peregrine Pickle' may, in fact, give a more sympathetic insight to MacDonell's nature; his choice of pseudonyms being a way of expressing the circumstances in which he found himself. Both of Smollett's protagonists experienced the highs and lows of eighteenth-century life, sometimes in the extreme; and Smollett was certainly commenting on the cruelty and greed of the world. Early in *The Adventures Of Roderick Random*, Roderick makes a statement that echoes the straits MacDonell finds himself in on leaving prison: 'I found myself deserted to all the horrors of extreme want, and avoided by mankind as a creature of a different species, or rather as a solitary being.'<sup>38</sup> MacDonell's experiences, which will be examined in the next chapter, may help to explain his choice of pseudonym. Despite this interesting literary connection, from Davenport-Hines' perspective, 'Pickle' receives the same brief acknowledgement as he does in every other text. It appears that Lang's view of MacDonell has had little influence on modern scholarship, and the same may be said of MacDonell himself, as no other study of him exists apart from Lang's and this dissertation. Let us therefore turn our attention to him and see if we might reveal a better-informed version of Alistair MacDonell of Glengarry.

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<sup>35</sup> Frank McLynn, *Bonnie Prince Charlie: Charles Edward Stuart*, (London: Sharpe Books, 2020).

<sup>36</sup> Richard Davenport-Hines, *Enemies Within: Communists, The Cambridge Spies And The Making Of Modern Britain*, (London: William Collins, 2018), p. 36.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Tobias Smollett, *The Adventures Of Roderick Random*, (London: Amazon, 2022), p. 29.

## Chapter Two: Alistair MacDonell And The Evolution Of ‘Pickle’

Before proceeding to examine MacDonell and his circumstances in more detail, it will be useful to summarise, very briefly, the general aims of the Jacobite movement in the eighteenth century.<sup>39</sup> According to Murray Pittock, these aims differed nationwide, but the common goal that underpinned them was the desire to de-stabilize the modern British state as it had developed since 1688. For Irish Jacobites, the driving force was the desire for a Catholic hegemony and an end to English rule in Ireland; a desire that the Catholic Stuarts could fulfil. English and Welsh Jacobites rallied against higher taxation, the threat to the Anglican church posed by Lutheranism, and an objection to pro-Hanoverian foreign policy which meant that any threat to Hanover was by association a threat to Britain. In Scotland, Jacobitism was concerned with dismantling the Union of 1707 to facilitate the restoration of an independent Parliament in Edinburgh, supported by an Episcopalian Church government, and establishing a multi-kingdom monarchy. Many Jacobites also desired a re-assessment of property rights under the Hanoverian regime, which were generally considered to be corrupt. Jacobitism was, therefore, much more than a dynastic argument, and the Stuarts simply became the means to an end, so it is important to note that:

Relatively few Jacobites, especially after the earliest stages of the movement, fought or intrigued or wrote or displayed their sympathy with the cause solely for reasons of personal allegiance to the Stuart heir.<sup>40</sup>

These points, therefore, are essential to bear in mind as we begin this exploration of MacDonell.

Alistair (or Alexander) Ruadh MacDonell (see Appendix 1), was the eldest son of John MacDonell, 12<sup>th</sup> Chief of Glengarry and Margaret MacKenzie. His grandfather Alistair Dubh MacDonell was a warrior who distinguished himself with such ferocity on the battlefields of Sheriffmuir and Killiecrankie, that James Stuart granted him a peerage, ‘bestowing upon him

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<sup>39</sup> For a comprehensive account of Jacobite politics, see Pittock’s *The Myth Of The Jacobite Clans*, pp. 42–58.

<sup>40</sup> Murray Pittock, *The Myth Of The Jacobite Clans*, p. 42.

the dignity of Lord MacDonald', a fact that will soon become relevant.<sup>41</sup> At age thirteen, Young Glengarry was sent to France to complete his education, joining Lord John Drummond's Scots Royals regiment in 1743, serving in France until November 1745, achieving the rank of Captain.<sup>42</sup> Around this time MacDonell met Prince Charles Stuart, who had arrived in France from Rome to join a planned, and later aborted, French invasion of England aimed at restoring the Stuart monarchy. Charles stayed with MacDonell thereafter in Paris, taking him into his confidence. In 1744, MacDonell was sent to Scotland as a Jacobite representative to prepare the country for the arrival of Charles Stuart in 1745 and to ascertain the levels of available political support. He returned to France with a document signed by clan Chiefs:

The representation contained in the principal document pledged the allegiance and support of the clans on the understanding that suitable auxiliaries should at the same time be sent from France.<sup>43</sup>

As a result of his activities during this period, MacDonell was considered such a danger to the British government that a reward was issued for his capture.<sup>44</sup> Unfortunately, by the time MacDonell returned to France, Charles had prematurely sailed for Scotland to commence the 1745 uprising. In November of 1745, MacDonell sailed with his regiment to join the Prince and the Jacobite army in Scotland, but his vessel was captured by HMS Sheerness off the coast of Deal in Kent, and MacDonell was imprisoned at the Tower in London.

Andrew Lang may have believed that the arrival of the 'gay, kind, brave, loyal, and clement Prince Charlie' in July 1745 was a matter for great celebration in Scotland, but Forbes' *The Lyon In Mourning* offers a different perspective from an eyewitness account.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Rev. A. MacDonald and Rev. A. MacDonald, *The Clan Donald*, Vol. 2, (Inverness: The Northern Counties Publishing Company Ltd., 1900), p. 458.

<sup>42</sup> 'Young Glengarry' is the name often used for MacDonell in the primary sources, before his father's death in 1754.

<sup>43</sup> MacDonald and MacDonald, *The Clan Donald*, p. 463.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, p. 462.

<sup>45</sup> Lang, *Pickle*, p. 8.

The eyewitness in question was one Duncan Cameron, who had accompanied Charles Stuart on his voyage to Scotland. According to Cameron, the party arrived at the Isle of Eriskay on July 21<sup>st</sup> 1745 and he described:

... *a devil of a minister* that happened to be in the island of Barra, who did us a' the mischief that lay in his power. For when he had got any inkling about us, he despatched away expresses with informations (sic) against us.<sup>46</sup>

Add to this Prince Charles' encounter the following day with Norman MacLeod of MacLeod and Alexander MacDonald of Boisdale, uncle of the Chief of Clanranald. Both men informed the Prince that no Highlanders would join him, and that it would be prudent for him to return to France to wait for a more favourable opportunity. MacDonald 'spoke in a very discouraging manner to the Prince, and advised him to return home.'<sup>47</sup> The Prince responded that he *was* home, and that he was 'persuaded' his 'faithful Highlanders would stand by' him, to which MacDonald replied that 'he was afraid he would find the contrary.'<sup>48</sup> Lang, as previously stated, suggested that the uprising was a 'tale of Highland loyalty' but this is evidently incorrect.<sup>49</sup> Between 1745 and 1746, thousands of troops from northern Scotland and the islands were raised in support of the Hanoverian regime, and these troops were instrumental in the defeat of the Jacobite army at Culloden. By Christmas of 1745, the Jacobites had amassed around 4000 men, and the Hanoverians around 4700 Highland Scots.<sup>50</sup> Therefore, Lang's use of Highlanders as a synonym for Jacobitism becomes problematic. In questioning why the Gaels would take up arms against the Jacobite cause, Matthew Dziennik states that in the decades before 1745, the British government had invested significant financial and political support into the area as a way to undermine Jacobite tendencies, and that this 'encouraged sustained engagement between clan chiefs and Westminster and created strong networks of pro-Hanoverian sympathies across

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<sup>46</sup> Robert Forbes, *The Lyon In Mourning*, (London: FB&C Ltd., 2018), p. 204.

<sup>47</sup> Forbes, *The Lyon*, p. 205.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Lang, *Pickle*, p. 3.

<sup>50</sup> Matthew Dziennik, "Armailt Làidir De Mhilisidh": Hanoverian Gaels and the Jacobite Rebellion of 1745', *The Scottish Historical Review*, C2.253 (2021), 171–198 (p. 178).

northern Scotland.<sup>51</sup> Indeed, MacDonell's father was very much 'on the fence' at the time of the rising and had written to Duncan Forbes of Culloden 'lamenting the folly of his friends.'<sup>52</sup> However, although he took no active part in the rebellion, John MacDonell was later imprisoned in 1746, after correspondences supporting Prince Charles were discovered in his possession.

While Alistair MacDonell was imprisoned, two events occurred that may have coloured his opinion of Charles Stuart. It is important to note that both these events are subject to a great deal of mythologizing and uncertainty as we shall see, but they may well have had a bearing on MacDonell's state of mind. The battle of Falkirk (17<sup>th</sup> January 1746), although overall a Jacobite victory, ended with a tragic event which seriously affected the morale of the Jacobite army. MacDonell's younger brother Colonel Æneas MacDonell, who commanded the 900 men of the Glengarry regiment, was accidentally shot two days after the battle by a member of the Clanranald regiment. Officers of the Glengarry's, enraged by the incident, demanded the man's immediate execution. Clanranald, clan chief of the accused, was then faced with a difficult decision. If he refused to allow the execution, it would have immediately created a feud with the Glengarrys, who may well have renounced their support for the Jacobite cause in protest. Conversely, if the Clanranald man *was* executed, then the Clanranald regiment would have been equally enraged. Despite Æneas's pleas for the man's life to be spared, he was executed the next day. According to Bernard W. Kelly the situation was exacerbated when, ignoring the wishes of Æneas, 'Charles Edward ... unjustly consented to his murder.'<sup>53</sup> After three days, Æneas died from his injuries, and his shooting cast a shadow on the Jacobite victory, not least because Charles Stuart approved the execution. Æneas's death divided the clans, and rumours circulated that his death had been no accident; thus, animosities and loyalties immediately took precedence

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<sup>51</sup> Matthew Dziennik, "*Armailt Làidir De Mhilisidh*" p. 173.

<sup>52</sup> Lang, *Pickle*, p. 68. I was unable to trace the original letter, as he cites it as being within the collection of the Culloden Papers, page 405. I have studied the collection and was unable to locate the letter on the page he referenced, nor anywhere else in the collection, so must therefore take Lang's word for it in this instance.

<sup>53</sup> Bernard W. Kelly, *The Fate Of Glengarry; Or The Expatriation Of The MacDonells. An Historico-Biographical Study*, (Dublin: James Duffy & Co. Ltd., 1905), p. 4.

over the Stuart cause. Matters came to a head when Prince Charles apparently failed to attend Æneas's funeral because he had a cold and according to Geoff B. Bailey:

... he was cosseted at Bannockburn House with his mistress and his favourite advisors such as O'Sullivan and the Marquis d'Eguilles. Far from showing his concern for the Highlanders he seemed to shun them in favour of the foreign sycophants.<sup>54</sup>

There appears to be some confusion on this matter, however, as the dedicated history of Clan Donald compiled in 1900 by the Reverends A. and A. MacDonald, states that 'the Prince attended Angus's funeral as chief mourner'.<sup>55</sup> Perhaps this was historical propaganda on the part of the MacDonald genealogists who might wish to spin their clan history in a pro-Scottish and pro-Jacobite light, given the fascination for neo-Jacobitism at the time of its compilation. Campbell-Paterson however, in *The Lords Of The Isles*, states that 'Charles did not attend the funeral, claiming he had a cold', echoing Bailey's statement.<sup>56</sup> The situation certainly warrants clarification, but in any case, Æneas's death caused many of the Glengarry regiment to desert as tensions mounted, morale plummeted and support for the cause began to wane. Other clans followed suit and soon 'They were deserting by Thirty's, Fifty's & Sixty's, in a Body.'<sup>57</sup> The Jacobite Army was beginning to disintegrate. Unfortunately, there is no extant evidence detailing how Alistair MacDonell reacted to his brothers' death, or to Prince Charles' behaviour, but we may logically assume he was in mourning for Æneas and angry at Charles given the importance of the Glengarrys in the clan hierarchy. Charles' failure to attend the funeral, if true, would have been regarded as a gross insult to the honour of the Glengarry clan, especially when one considers that Charles himself stated that he intended 'always to take particular care' of the Glengarry regiment.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Geoff B. Bailey, *Falkirk Or Paradise! The Battle Of Falkirk Muir, 17 January 1746*, (Glasgow: Bell & Bain Ltd., 1996), p. 183.

<sup>55</sup> MacDonald and MacDonald, *The Clan Donald*, p. 471.

<sup>56</sup> Raymond Campbell-Paterson, *The Lords Of The Isles: A History Of Clan Donald*, (Edinburgh: Birlinn Ltd., 2001), p. 184.

<sup>57</sup> Bailey, *Falkirk Or Paradise!* p. 185.

<sup>58</sup> Winifred Duke, *Prince Charles Edward And The Forty-Five*, (London: Purnell And Sons, Ltd., 1938), p. 162.

The potential for animosity towards Charles Stuart from MacDonell's perspective, however, may have been increased by an incident on the battlefield at Culloden.

The events at Culloden and its dreadful aftermath have been well documented, but what is perhaps less well-known is an apparent insult bestowed on the MacDonald regiments by Charles Stuart on the day of the battle on 16<sup>th</sup> of April 1746. Legend states that the MacDonald regiments of Glengarry, Keppoch and Clanranald always took the place on the first right of the battle line; an honour given to them by Robert Bruce after the battle of Bannockburn in 1314. According to Raymond Campbell-Paterson, this legend appears to be 'a late tradition, however, which finds no support in contemporary evidence' and that this 'ill-informed nonsense ... is still trotted out with depressing frequency' indicative of the mythologizing of aspects of clan history.<sup>59</sup> On the day of Culloden, Charles Stuart gave the position to Lord George Murray and his Atholl men, who claimed an entitlement to it after Montrose's wars of 1645. Charles' decision was alleged to have had a devastating effect on the outcome of the battle. Placed on the far left position (see appendix 2) and based on the relative position of the Jacobites to the British army, the MacDonald regiments had approximately '200 meters further to go than Murray's men on the right, and moreover ... had to cross much boggy ground from the very outset.'<sup>60</sup> Stuart Reid quotes Captain James Johnstone of the Glengarry regiment who complained that the land was so waterlogged, that the water 'reached halfway up the leg.'<sup>61</sup> The fact that the MacDonald regiments were encumbered by the terrain, up to their knees in water and consequently much slower to reach the battle, led to accusations that they had refused to participate in protest of the insult; accusations which have since been disproven.<sup>62</sup> Murray Pittock agrees that whilst there may have been 'some bad feeling over the positioning of the MacDonalds on the left', the situation has, over time, 'become mythologized.'<sup>63</sup> Rumours that the regiments held

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<sup>59</sup> Raymond Campbell-Paterson, *The Lords Of The Isles: A History Of Clan Donald*, (Edinburgh: Birlinn Ltd., 2001), pp. 22–23 and p. 185.

<sup>60</sup> Stuart Reid, *Culloden 1746: Battlefield Guide*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn. (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2018), p. 94.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*, p. 95.

<sup>62</sup> Reid, *Battlefield Guide*, p. 94.

<sup>63</sup> Murray Pittock, *Culloden*, p. 75.

back were perpetuated by supporters of Lord George Murray, who used the information to explain the Jacobite defeat, creating scapegoats of the MacDonalds.<sup>64</sup> However, Pittock notes that the reluctance of the MacDonald regiments to charge was less likely due to any alleged insult and 'more likely they were fearful of flanking by Cumberland's reinforced right or had by now noticed the poor quality of the ground ahead of them.'<sup>65</sup>

This collection of (partly mythologized) events may have influenced MacDonell's later decision to turn against the Stuarts, but this can only ever be conjecture, as it is not known how he, still incarcerated, reacted to any of them. It is entirely plausible that he would have been angered by the situation given that his regiment, already reduced in number by approximately 300 men since Falkirk, may have endured some form of dishonour on the battlefield, either due to alleged insult, post-battle scapegoating, or pure frustration at the logistical difficulties of engaging the enemy. It may be helpful to note here, that concepts of honour up until the late eighteenth century, were taken very seriously, and Scottish noble elites shared a common core set of values and expected behaviours which were fiercely expressed. According to Szechi, throughout the Jacobite period, the Highland clans 'preserved a unique social organisation designed to sustain them through the chronic vicissitudes of their harsh environment.'<sup>66</sup> Given that it was a society predominantly 'geared for war', it is not surprising it produced war-like social constructs.<sup>67</sup> A singular aspect of honour in Scotland was its collective nature and 'there was a powerful and persistent connection between lineage and honour that was passed through the blood of ancestors and was owned collectively'.<sup>68</sup> This meant that kinsmen and friends could be permanently exalted or shamed by the reflected honour of one of their own; what affected one, affected all. This heavy emphasis on reputation created:

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<sup>64</sup> Reid, *Battlefield Guide*, p. 94.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*, p. 87.

<sup>66</sup> Daniel Szechi, *The Jacobites: Britain And Europe, 1688–1788*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), p. 23.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>68</sup> Keith M. Brown, 'Honour, Honours And Nobility Between The Reformation And The National Covenant', *The Scottish Historical Review*, 91.231 (2012), pp. 42-75 (p. 48).

... an extreme sensitivity to insult, real or perceived, especially apparent slights of courtesy, or the deployment of careless or violent words, all of which were believed to impugn honour and which might trigger violence.<sup>69</sup>

This violent upholding of honour is corroborated by Lynn Abrams, who states that in the eighteenth century, Highland men often:

wrought vengeance on another group of men in a planned violent confrontation which served to maintain the honour of the avenging party and which operated according to an agreed set of rules.<sup>70</sup>

So, if ‘apparent slights of courtesy’ were enough to incite violent vengeance, it becomes obvious how the potential for dishonour at Falkirk and Culloden may have affected MacDonell’s temperament. In addition, after the Jacobites were defeated at Culloden, his father was imprisoned, and according to the Highland Historic Environment Record, his home, Invergarry Castle, was destroyed by Cumberland’s army.<sup>71</sup> The defeat had sounded the death-knell for the Jacobite cause, and MacDonell and his family were left destitute as Prince Charles fled to Europe and began his period of incognito, and the Duke of Cumberland commenced his subjugation of the Highlands. It may be argued that potentially MacDonell had many reasons to harbour anger and resentment towards the Stuarts.

In July 1747, after twenty-two months, he was finally released from prison under the 1747 Act of Indemnity.<sup>72</sup> His release included a condition that he be exiled from Britain, and he immediately returned to France.<sup>73</sup> His circumstances from this point can only be evidenced through the letters he wrote to members of the Jacobite court which are

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid, p. 49.

<sup>70</sup> Lynn Abrams, ‘The Taming Of Highland Masculinity: Inter-Personal Violence And Shifting Codes Of Manhood, c. 1760–1840’, *The Scottish Historical Review*, 92.233 (2013), pp. 100–122, (p. 108).

<sup>71</sup> Highland Historical Environment Record, MHG5519 - Invergarry Castle (2023) <https://www.her.highland.gov.uk> [accessed 02 March 2023]

<sup>72</sup> See Matthew P. Dziennik, ‘“Under Ye Lash Of Ye Law”: The State And The Law In The Post-Culloden Scottish Highlands’, *Journal Of British Studies*, 60.3 (2021), pp. 609–631.

<sup>73</sup> MacDonald and MacDonald, *The Clan Donald*, p. 477.

reproduced in Browne's *A History Of The Highlands Vol. IV*.<sup>74</sup> There is an abundance of correspondence in this archive, so consequently it will only focus on the examples which highlight the main points of difference with Lang's opinions.

In France, MacDonell re-joined his regiment until March 1748 and attempted to claim arrears of pay up until that time without success. He wrote to James Stuart from Paris on 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1748 to ask for financial assistance. Lang used this letter to display MacDonell's 'ungrateful' attitude, citing only one sentence rather than the whole: 'Since I arrived here, after my tedious confinement in the Tower of London, I have not mett [sic] with any suitable encouragement.'<sup>75</sup> In Browne, the entire letter is reproduced, and the following sentence, which Lang omitted, suggests a different attitude:

I cannot dispense myself from having recourse to your Majesty, intending only to pursue what is consistent with my honour and has a reall connexion [sic] with your Majesty's interest, which I allways [sic] shall regard with utmost fidelity.<sup>76</sup>

Here we see the concept of honour highlighted and MacDonell reluctantly petitioning James, asking for payment that is due to him for his service to the cause and nothing more. He certainly does not appear 'ungrateful' or like one who 'constantly complains'.<sup>77</sup> It will be useful here to explain for context why MacDonell had to ask for financial support from his regiment and James Stuart, and in doing so reveal an aspect of his character that Lang attempted to underplay. While incarcerated, it appears that MacDonell had been given unlimited credit by Charles' brother Henry, Duke of York, via the Court of France amounting to £460 to support and feed Jacobite prisoners 'severals [sic] of whom, had it not been our timely assistance, had starved.'<sup>78</sup> This sum equates currently to around £80,300, a considerable amount of money therefore, which he used to assist his countrymen.<sup>79</sup> The

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<sup>74</sup> Browne's original text has been used in researching MacDonell's correspondence for this study.

<sup>75</sup> Lang, *Pickle*, p. 69.

<sup>76</sup> Letter from Alistair MacDonell to James Stuart, dated 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1748, in James Browne Esq., *A History Of The Highlands And Of Highland Clans, Vol IV*, (Glasgow: A. Fullarton & Co., 1838), p. 23.

<sup>77</sup> Lang, *Pickle*, p. 69.

<sup>78</sup> Letter from MacDonell to Cardinal York dated 8<sup>th</sup> June 1749, in Browne, p. 61.

<sup>79</sup> Bank Of England Inflation Calculator, (2023) <https://www.bankofengland.co.uk> [accessed 17 January 2023].

French War Office demanded repayment of the money upon his release and rather unfairly withheld four years of his regimental pay in lieu, leaving him destitute. MacDonell was unable to seek financial assistance from his family as his father was 'still a prisoner and his lands entirely destroyed'.<sup>80</sup> MacDonell wrote to Lord Lismore on 8<sup>th</sup> June 1749, begging him to intervene on his behalf and have the debt cancelled:

... for without that, I may safely tell your Lordship I shall be obliged to abandon this country, having no means at this juncture, as my father still continues prisoner, to support myself, if I can't obtain this relief.<sup>81</sup>

Lang seems to gloss over this situation, referring to it as a 'tale', perhaps because it does not suit the character of MacDonell that Lang was attempting to perpetuate.<sup>82</sup> It is also worth noting that by 1749, MacDonell was so impoverished that he had been reduced to 'selling his sword and shoe-buckles', indicating the desperate situation into which he had been cast.<sup>83</sup>

Returning now to the 1748 correspondence with James Stuart, MacDonell seems to have been met with silence. He wrote a second letter to James nine months later in September 1748 to ask for assistance again because he needed to return home as his affairs in Scotland made his presence 'very necessary.'<sup>84</sup> Again, this letter was ignored. MacDonell finally received a response after his application for a Colonelcy in the Scoto-French regiment of Albany was denied in favour of Archibald Cameron who had applied for it *in locum tenens* of his nephew John, who had been recommended for the position by James Stuart.<sup>85</sup> The response came via James' private secretary, James Edgar on 24<sup>th</sup> December 1748, who informed MacDonell of the decision and that:

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<sup>80</sup> Letter from MacDonell to Cardinal York dated 8<sup>th</sup> June 1749, in Browne, p. 61.

<sup>81</sup> Letter from MacDonell to Colonel O'Bryen "Lord Lismore" dated 8<sup>th</sup> June 1749, in Browne, P. 62.

<sup>82</sup> Lang, *Pickle*, p. 69.

<sup>83</sup> Letter from Rev. James Leslie to Mr Peter Grant, agent of the Scots Catholic Clergy at Rome dated 27<sup>th</sup> May 1752, in Browne, p. 101.

<sup>84</sup> Letter from MacDonell to the Chevalier de St George dated 20<sup>th</sup> September 1748, in Browne, p. 40.

<sup>85</sup> Lang, *Pickle*, p. 69.

H. M. is sorry to find you so low in your circumstances, and reduced to such straits at present as you mention, and he is the more sorry that his own situation, as to money matters never being so bad ... he is not in a position to relieve you ... But his Majesty sends you here inclosed (sic) a duplicate of your grandfather's warrant to be a Peer.<sup>86</sup>

MacDonell, now completely destitute, unemployed, and with no hope of financial assistance on the horizon, was yet again let down by the Stuart household, by a man who, residing in luxury in Rome, did not have any inclination to help him despite all he had done, suffered, and lost for the Jacobite cause. The warrant for the peerage was laughable considering MacDonell's lands and property had been seized by the British government, and that according to Kirsty O'Rourke of the UK Parliament History Department:

Jacobite peerages had no validity whatsoever. The deposed monarchs handed out quite a few of these to their supporters in the hopes that one day they might be able to enjoy them properly, but they were not recognized in Britain, and they conferred no seat in the Lords.<sup>87</sup>

The peerage, therefore, was worthless and could not be exchanged for money. Lang appears to delight in this turn of events stating that it was easy 'to imagine the florid eloquence of Young Glengarry, when he expected a cheque and got a duplicate copy of a warrant ... to be a Peer'.<sup>88</sup> However, Lang does recognize that at this point, MacDonell must have realised 'the absurdity of the Stuart cause', and suggests that this was the turning-point for him becoming 'Pickle'; the final indignity in a catalogue of apparent snubs and insults.<sup>89</sup>

Lang highlights an interesting point towards the end of his final chapter on MacDonell, which if true, gives the precise reason for MacDonell's decision to become an

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<sup>86</sup> Letter from Mr Edgar to MacDonell dated 24<sup>th</sup> December 1748, in Browne, p. 51.

<sup>87</sup> Kirsty O' Rourke, email correspondence, (03 January 2023).

<sup>88</sup> Lang, *Pickle*, p. 69.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

agent for the Hanoverian government. After 'Pickle' exposed the Elibank Plot in 1752, Dr Archibald Cameron was the last Jacobite to be arrested, tried, and executed as a traitor to King George II for his part in the 1745 uprising. Dr Cameron's wife Jean had visited King George before his trial to unsuccessfully plead for his life. In January 1754, she revealed in a letter to James Edgar, that Sir Duncan Campbell of Lochnell declared that he had been asked by Henry Pelham if he knew Alistair MacDonell. This allegedly happened in either 1748 or 1749; she was unable recall the correct date. She stated that Pelham told Campbell that MacDonell:

... came to him offering his most faithful and zealous service to the Government in any shape they thought proper, as he came from feeling the folly of any further concern with the ungrateful family of Stuart, to whom he and his family had been too long attached, to the absolute ruin of themselves and country.<sup>90</sup>

If true, the statement speaks volumes. MacDonell's decision to become a spy was motivated by his animosity towards James and Charles Stuart and how their actions and attitudes had wreaked havoc on Scotland and his family. He did not, by this admission, necessarily turn his back on his political ideologies, but instead recognised that how they could be achieved had proven woefully inadequate and had cost both himself and his country everything.

However, the statement must be treated with caution. Mrs Cameron was unaware of this information until after her husband had been executed, and her evidence is not a first-hand account. One might question the wisdom or validity of Pelham openly exposing MacDonell as a potential Jacobite traitor to anyone, even a fellow Hanoverian such as Campbell. One could argue that Mrs Cameron was seeking revenge for her husband's death and laid it at the feet of MacDonell because he had previously accused her husband of stealing a portion of Jacobite money in 1746.<sup>91</sup> The facts presented amount to little more than circumstantial evidence, an opinion which Lang shares, but if they are true they certainly demonstrate that

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<sup>90</sup> Extract from a letter from Mrs Dr Cameron to Mr Edgar dated 25<sup>th</sup> January 1754, in Browne, p. 118.

<sup>91</sup> See Marion F. Hamilton, 'The Loch Arkaig Treasure', *Publications Of The Scottish History Society*, 35 (1941), pp. 148–168.

as early as 1748, MacDonell could have been completely disillusioned and realised that supporting the Stuarts was a lost cause.

In September 1754, John MacDonell passed away, and Alistair returned to Scotland to assume his position as chief and take possession of what remained of his estates. Again, Lang uses this situation as an opportunity to malign MacDonell, who he sarcastically refers to as ‘a little Highland prince among his own clan’ and claims to have evidence that reveals MacDonell to be ‘not only a traitor, but a bully and an oppressor.’<sup>92</sup> The evidence he refers to comes from a letter from Alexander Trapaud, a Dublin-born British Army officer, and the Lieutenant-Governor of Fort Augustus. In the letter to Lord-Advocate Dundas of Arniston, Trapaud states that MacDonell was heavy-handed with his tenants, demanding rent from them and behaving ‘like the worst type of bad landlord.’<sup>93</sup> According to Trapaud, MacDonell’s ‘whole behaviour has greatly alienated the affections of his once dearly beloved followers.’<sup>94</sup> It is possible however that Trapaud was simply demonstrating inter-cultural prejudice because, despite having spent a great amount of time in the Highlands, he was not part of the culture and may have been ignorant of some customs and behaviours. It is important to note that there was a strong belief that ‘the chief should provide land for his clansmen even if they did not have rights to specific individual holdings in perpetuity.’<sup>95</sup> Much was expected of a clan chieftain and therefore he expected much in return. Clans existed within ‘a system which gave an extremely miserable living to farmers, and left practically no margin for rents either reasonable or unreasonable.’<sup>96</sup> Poverty was therefore the norm amongst tenantry, as indeed was the extractive behaviour of native landlords, so the recorded hatred towards MacDonell from his cottars is unsurprising and perhaps irrelevant to the broader arguments presented here. Lang seems to have used this episode

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<sup>92</sup> Lang, *Pickle*, p. 128.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid*, p. 129.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid*, p. 128. I was unable to locate the original copy as it is held in a private, unpublished collection, so I have reverted to Lang in this instance.

<sup>95</sup> T. M. Devine, *The Scottish Clearances: A History Of The Dispossessed*, (Milton Keynes: Penguin Books, 2019), p. 35.

<sup>96</sup> Margaret I. Adam, ‘Eighteenth Century Highland Landlords And The Poverty Problem’, *The Scottish Historical Review*, 19.75 (1922), pp. 161–179, (p. 162).

as a device to incite further revulsion towards MacDonell in his readership and to strengthen the literary stereotype he was attempting to create.

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of December 1761, Alistair Ruadh MacDonell died aged just 36 years old. He died penniless in the grounds of his ruined castle having succumbed to ‘the more grievous shadow of broken health.’<sup>97</sup> Whatever he had been promised by the British government for his services never materialised as his handler, Henry Pelham, died before any payment was forthcoming. It seems ‘Pickle The Spy’ was simply abandoned to his fate. Andrew Lang vilified MacDonell, attempting to label him a contemptible traitor, a venal personality, almost identical in nature to *The Master Of Ballantrae*. A different version of MacDonell emerges, no doubt a little biased, through the words of Dr Angus MacDonald in *A Family Memoir Of The MacDonalds Of Keppoch*. It should be emphasised that at the time of publication, Dr MacDonald would have had no knowledge of MacDonell’s espionage activities, and if he had, MacDonell might well have been remembered differently:

... Duncan, the late Glengarry, succeeded his uncle Alexander, one of the best men in the Highlands in his day, possessing eminently all the virtues of a Cean Cuine, whose hospitable mansion was ever open, as his assistance to distress was ever ready. But alas! like too many of our clan, he was cut off in the prime of life, to the great grief of his family, and while he was busy in promoting the happiness of his people, as his worthy ancestor, Lord MacDonald of Aros, had done before him.<sup>98</sup>

In closing, it is hoped that this research has provided a more holistic view of some of the circumstances which surrounded MacDonell (and there are many more not included in this study), which could be used to argue his case in choosing to become a Hanoverian spy. As previously stated, Lang desired ‘more claymores, less psychology’ in his Jacobite romances, but in MacDonell’s real-life situation, the reverse is perhaps more appropriate.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> MacDonald And MacDonald, *The Clan Donald*, p. 479.

<sup>98</sup> Dr Angus MacDonald, *A Family Memoir Of The MacDonalds: Written from 1800 To 1820 For His Niece Mrs. Stanley Constable*, ed. by Clements R. Markham, (London: Whiting & Co., 1885), p. 107. MacDonell was interchangeably referred to as Alexander and Alistair in nineteenth-century books.

<sup>99</sup> Demoor, *Dear Stevenson*, p.20.

History tends to record only cold facts and Lang certainly chose to showcase MacDonell through that lens, ignoring the possible emotional and psychological impact of the essentially traumatic events that he endured. The existing scholarship concerning MacDonell, meagre as it is, rests entirely on the opinions of Lang, opinions which are heavily biased against MacDonell due to inaccurate research and the fascination with neo-Jacobite romance which pervaded the late nineteenth century. The aim of this research has been to sketch out an alternative interpretation, to discover a truth suspended between the bias of some of the historical material and the bias of Lang, which may ultimately reveal the human being between these two extremes.

## Conclusion

When considering a conclusion for this research, it is apparent that we are left, in part, with an open verdict. Alistair MacDonell died over 260 years ago and is beyond the reach of cross-examination, unable to explain the circumstances which resulted in his behaviour, so the opinions that accuse him must be reliable and balanced with evidence that challenges such opinions. As stated at the outset, that MacDonell was a traitor to the Stuarts is not in dispute in this study. Regardless the circumstances which explain his behaviour, he clearly went against his clan and his family's long-standing adherence to the cause. It is therefore unsurprising that he is perceived as a Judas character, as his duplicitous actions in appearing loyal to the Stuarts whilst informing the Hanoverian government were certainly a betrayal. However, many former Jacobites after Culloden realised the futility of the cause and recognised that they must accept the new reality to keep or restore their titles and estates. Most were open about their transition and largely severed ties with the Stuarts. Lang believed his evidence, albeit circumstantial, was enough to convict an accused man in court. One questions whether Lang became too enamoured of his own fantasy regarding MacDonell, creating in *Pickle* his own real-life *Master Of Ballantrae*, at the expense of unbiased academic investigation; a creation which followed the literary trends of his time and has since become the received opinion. Jacobite scholars such as Pittock and Szechi have evidenced that Jacobitism was a far more complex movement than Lang ever demonstrated in *Pickle*; a movement in which the Stuarts were arguably the least important aspect of the politics. From that perspective, MacDonell was indeed a traitor in acting against them, but whether he was a traitor in the wider aspect of the movement is open to debate. One could argue (purely as a thought experiment), that in becoming a spy, MacDonell *saved* his country from more bloodshed. He knew the cause was lost and the Stuarts were an inadequate alternative, so foiling later plots could be viewed as intelligent acts of prevention for the greater good of Scotland. After all, the evidence shows that MacDonell took part in the '45, but it does not necessarily indicate his private political ideals. Whatever it was that truly motivated MacDonell, however, must for now, remain a mystery. We cannot fully know his mind, or what he was promised (or threatened with), by the British government, regardless of the allegations of Mrs Jean Cameron. MacDonell must

be examined as the human being he was, rather than the fictional villain Lang attached to him. It has been shown that Lang's opinions were, on one hand, extremely influenced by his fanatical admiration of Robert Louis Stevenson and his own neo-Jacobite affectations; whilst on the other, he demonstrated, and was accused of, anti-Scottish sentiment in some of his other works. His fluctuating passions and opinions, therefore, seem inappropriate for a reliable academic historian.

Ten thousand words has proven to be wholly inadequate given the wealth of information available on MacDonell, which therefore leaves exciting opportunities for further study. A deeper examination of the primary sources, most notably the *Glengarry Letter Book* and the accounts of the battle at Falkirk held within the Stuart Papers at Windsor would offer greater insights to support the arguments presented here.<sup>100</sup> Word count restrictions have made it impossible to include evidence which further indicts Charles Stuart, indicating that after Culloden, he became motivated by his own selfish desire for power and kingship, exposing him as one who was perhaps truly unworthy of the position he sought. MacDonell himself has proven to be a fascinating subject of research and has emerged as a man who was far more important in the later Jacobite narrative than he has ever been given credit for. He is noticeably missing from modern Jacobite scholarship, so it is hoped that this dissertation has provided a window through which to observe him and may inspire further interest in the life and experiences of Alistair Ruadh MacDonell, 13<sup>th</sup> Chief of Glengarry.

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<sup>100</sup> Glengarry's Letter Book is mentioned by Andrew Lang in *The Companions Of Pickle; Being A Sequel To "Pickle The Spy"*, (Victoria: Leopold Publishing, 2022), p. 266, but I have been unable, at this stage, to determine if it is still extant in records anywhere.

## Appendices

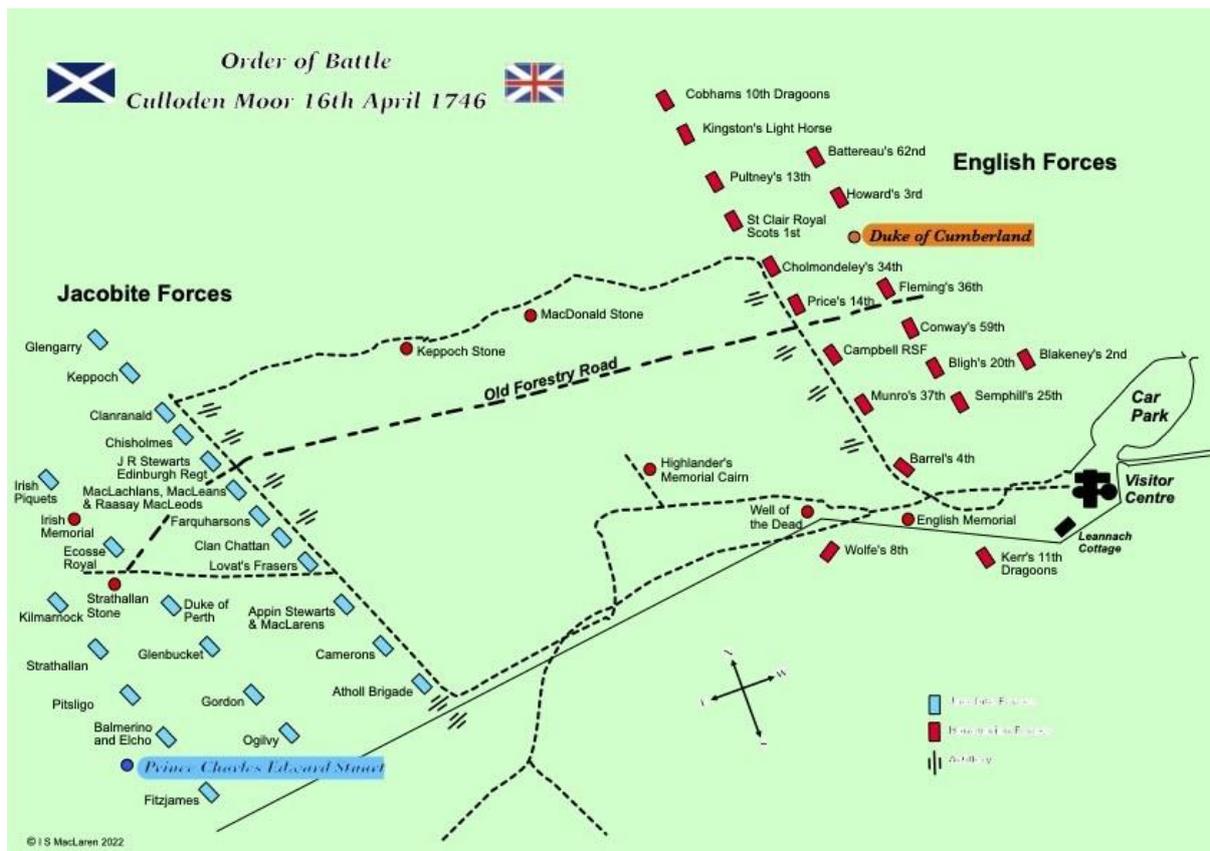
### Appendix 1



Artist Unknown, *Alistair Ruadh MacDonell (c.1725 – 1761) 13<sup>th</sup> Chieftain Of Glengarry* [Oil on canvas] (c.1750s)

<https://www.artuk.org> [accessed 14 August 2022] Image enhanced by Ian S. MacLaren

Appendix 2



Ian S. MacLaren, *Order Of Battle Culloden Moor, 16<sup>th</sup> April 1746*, reproduced from the original 1746 map by Thomas Sandby, [Computer-generated diagram] (August 2022). Original held in The Royal Collection Trust, London.

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