J for Jacobites—Kyle Granite continues her A—Z of Scottish History

Okay okay, you probably predicted this one, but let's be honest, you cannot have an A to Z of Scottish History without including the Jacobites! However, I am under no illusion that the members of this fine society have no knowledge of who the Jacobites were. In fact, I reckon many of you could teach your own lectures on the seventeenth and eighteenth century rogues. So instead I'm going to give a brief overview and then dive right in to a celebration of my two favourite Jacobite heroines, that you rarely find in the history books!

The Jacobites appeared on the scene following the Glorious Revolution in 1688, when James II and VII was ousted from the throne, fleeing to France and was swiftly replaced by William III and his wife, James' very own daughter, Mary. The name 'Jacobite' derives from Jacobus, the Latin version of James, and simply means supporter of James, but as the decades bore on and James II and VII and his descendants failed to reclaim the crown, the term Jacobite came to mean supporter of the Stuart dynasty. Jacobitism was popular in Scotland, Ireland and Wales but the Jacobites also had supporters in England, mostly from Roman Catholics who, for obvious reasons, disliked their new protestant monarchs and the Anglican Tories, who were unsatisfied with the way things were being run under the new leadership. The movement dominated the scene in Britain from 1688 to at least the 1750s, spanning three generations of Stuarts. Within those years there were five attempts to restore the Stuarts to the throne. The final rebellion, the Forty-Five Rebellion, was the most formidable and has been heavily romanticised ever since. This is largely down to the charm of the young prince, Charles Edward (grandson of James II and VII), who would later be referred to as Bonnie Prince Charlie and the Young Pretender. The years following the devastating Jacobite defeat at Culloden, Jacobitism declined as a serious political threat, nonetheless, the sentiment lived on and remains a very present feature of Scottish culture today.

Can the real Jenny Cameron please stand up!

A diehard Jacobite, through and through, Jean Cameron of Glendessary raised three hundred clansmen, single handedly, in support of the Bonnie Prince's rebellion in 1745. Jenny was the eldest daughter of Hugh Cameron of Glendessary, a cadet of Cameron of Lochiel. Poor Jenny has a bit of an unfortunate reputation. When she was eleven she was sent to live with an aunt who was tasked to teach her to be more of a lady. Instead, Jenny was said to have built a friendship with a frontman and household maid, and the trio were known to frequent the local brothels and cause all sorts of trouble in the underbelly of Auld Reekie.

At only sixteen years old and with her family in despair, she was sent to a French nunnery. Despite living under the eyes of the church, Jenny's debauchery continued and she teamed up with an Irish lieutenant Colonel O'Neill for a while, who persuaded her to dress as a male soldier and join him on campaign to Flanders. By 1717 she was pregnant (allegedly not the first time) but was left destitute by the father, an Italian Count. Saved again by her family, Jenny moved in with her brother and sister-in-law, where her escapades continued when she was caught in bed with her own brother by his wife, causing the latter to faint in shock! It is all beginning to sound a little ridiculous now, right? Well, it is now widely accepted that this was not the real Jean Cameron,

and much of the stories that are associated with her were fabrications produced by enemies of the Jacobite cause. What we do know is that she was an ardent supporter of the Jacobites and she DID muster hundreds of clansmen to fight against government troops at Culloden. She was described at the time as being on a:

"*Bay gelding decked with green furniture trimmed with gold, her hair tied behind in loose buckles, with a velvet cap and a scarlet feather, carrying a naked sword in her hand"*

She was a favourite at the court of Charles Stuart and travelled alongside the Jacobite army, wearing a tartan doublet, trews and carrying a sword, to Prestonpans and Falkirk. In February 1753 she was captured by the Hanoverians and imprisoned in Edinburgh Castle. Government troops remained suspicious of her and followed her closely for many years after Culloden as they suspected she was actively plotting for the Jacobites.

And the Academy Award for Best Performance goes to Lady Nithsdale!

Lady Winifred Maxwell, Countess of Nithsdale, has such an unbelievable story that you would be forgiven for believing that it is in fact pro-Stuart propaganda, but amazingly is completely true!

Winifred was born into a strong Jacobite family, with her father William Herbert, Earl of Powis a close confidante of the exiled Stuarts. She then went on to marry another staunch Jacobite, William Maxwell, who she met at the Stuart court. Unsurprisingly, William Maxwell jumped at the opportunity to fight to restore James Francis Edward Stuart to the throne during the 1715 Jacobite Uprising, unfortunately he was captured at the Battle of Preston, taken to the Tower of London and sentenced to death.

And this is where the story really gets interesting!

Well, our Winifred was not going to just sit back and let her man be killed for restoring the rightful King to the throne! She set off for London immediately, accompanied by her maid and two female friends. She managed to secure permission to visit her husband on the eve of his execution and with her ladies in tow they handed out drinking money to the guards and entered the cell to say goodbye for the final time. After many, many tears, the ladies began to exit the cell. Eventually Winifred herself appeared, after loudly conversing with her husband, she latched the door and informed the guards that William was praying and should not be disturbed. By the time the guards eventually entered the cell, the Earl had long made his escape! Disguised as a 'Mrs Mills', with rouge on his cheeks, a wig on his head and female attire, William snuck past the guards while Winifred carried out a two way conversation with herself in his cell. The couple managed to escape London and lived out their lives with the exiled King in Rome. Winifred was rewarded for her bravery by being appointed governess to little Charles, the Bonnie Prince.

William Maxwell's Escape

The unbelievable stories of these two women are a large part of the reason why the Jacobites are so fondly remembered in Scotland today. The Jacobites represented the unsurprising heroes and the underdogs, the regular folk who were not afraid to lose everything for what they believed in.