

Telling Her Story of War.

Addressing gender bias in war interpretation at Culloden Battlefield Visitor Centre

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1. Introduction

In 2007 I was appointed Learning Manager at the National Trust for Scotland's then brandnew Culloden Battlefield Visitor Centre. I was responsible for developing and implementing a programme of live interpretation to make the history and heritage of the 1745 Jacobite Rising and its last battle at Culloden accessible to visitors.

Soon after the centre opened we received a request by a photographer. He asked for two costumed interpreters to represent both sides of the conflict. On the day in question, only one of our male Learning Officers was on duty. Thus I volunteered, in my period Highland woman's costume, to represent the Jacobites.

The experience was to become pivotal for my consequent work. The photographer refused to accept a female representation of the Jacobite side and preferred to limit himself to the Government, represented by a man in the uniform of a Government soldier.

This raised two questions for me as an interpreter: was this photographer, despite relevant content in the centre's exhibition, not aware of the importance of the women's role and experiences during the '45? Or, if he was, did he feel that it did not hold the same importance and consequently power of representation as the men's?

In the following, I want to share my experiences of presenting women in the live programmes at Culloden Battlefield.

2. Women and The '45

In 1745, Prince Charles Edward Stuart arrived on the shores of Scotland to restore his father, the exiled Stuart King James VIII of Scotland and III of England, to the throne of Britain. Thus began 'The '45', the fourth Jacobite Rising – from 'Jacobus', the Latin name for James.

Less than a year later, the Jacobite campaign ended at the Battle of Culloden on 16 April 1746. The Jacobite forces were crushed, the Highlands of Scotland came under military occupation and legislation was passed with the aim of suppressing the military threat the Government saw in the Highland clans¹.

The literature on the '45 and the Battle of Culloden has focussed on the military aspects of the campaign², the emotional experience of the soldiers involved³ and the lives of the male protagonists⁴. Women have largely been ignored with the exception of Flora MacDonald⁵ whose involvement has mostly been exaggerated and romanticised.

¹ Stephen, J. (2005a) *Culloden Battlefield Memorial Project. Papers to be used as primary source material for interpretive work*. Edinburgh: The National Trust for Scotland [unpublished], p 157ff

² See for example Reid, S. (1994) *Like Hungry Wolves*. London: Windrow & Greene; Reid, S. (1996) *1745. A Military History of the Last Jacobite Rising*. Staplehurst: Spellmount; Duffy, C. (2003) *The 45*. London: Cassell

³ See for example Prebble J. (1961) *Culloden*. London: Pimlico

⁴ See for example Cuthbert Hadden, J. (1913) *Prince Charles Edward. His Life, Times, and Fight for the Crown*. London: Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons; Maclean, F. (1988) *Bonnie Prince Charlie*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson; Charteris, E. (1913) *William Augustus, Duke of Cumberland: His early life and times 1721 – 1748*. London: Edward Arnold; Speck, W.A. (1981) *The Butcher*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell; Tomasson, K. (1958) *The Jacobite General*. Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons.

⁵ See for example MacDonald, A.R. (1938) *The Truth about Flora MacDonald*. Inverness: The Northern Chronicle; Vining, E. (1967) *Flora MacDonald: Her Life in the Highlands and America*. London: Bles; Douglas, H. (1993) *Flora MacDonald: The Most Loyal Rebel*. Sutton Publishing

The first book to deal with the women's role and experiences in general during the '45 was published in 1997⁶.

Particularly on the Jacobite side, however, women played an active part in the wider campaign. Women were important in passing on information as well as supporting Prince Charles with much needed money⁷. Often, it was due to the women's influence that men participated in the campaign to begin with. The Stewarts of Appin, for example, who were prominent at the Battle of Culloden, may not have been there at all had it not been for Isabel Haldane, wife of the core clan's factual leader. Charles Stewart of Ardsheal, it is said, joined Prince Charles' army only after his wife handed him her apron, threatening that she would lead the Appin men herself if he didn't⁸. William Boyd, the 4th Earl of Kilmarnock and one of the four peers that were executed for their involvement in the '45, also was swayed to join by his wife, thus providing Prince Charles with another cavalry regiment⁹.

Other women raised men directly for the Jacobite cause. Jenny Cameron of Glendessary, for example, raised 300 men from her estates and personally led them to the raising of the Stuart standard at Glenfinnan at the very start of the rising in August 1745¹⁰. Women's recruiting practices often matched the forceful style of some of the Jacobite clan chiefs, as was the case with Charlotte Robertson, Lady Lude¹¹. She threatened tenants with having their houses burnt if they would not join the Jacobite Army¹². For her efforts, a company in the Atholl Brigade was named in her honour¹³.

Sometimes, the strength of the women's convictions even led them to oppose their husbands. One example is Lady Anne MacKintosh whose husband and chief of the

⁶ Craig, M. (1997) *Damn Rebel Bitches. The Women of the '45*. Edinburgh and London: Mainstream Publishing

⁷ Ibid, p. 51 and 56.

⁸ Ibid, p. 20

⁹ Ibid, 126, and Stephen, J (2005b) *Lord Kilmarnock*. Edinburgh: The National Trust for Scotland [unpublished].

¹⁰ Craig 1997, p. 20

¹¹ Ibid, p. 22 and Stephen 2005a

¹² Stephen 2005d

¹³ Stephen 2005a

Clan MacKintosh was a captain in the Government's Black Watch¹⁴. While her husband was away fighting Prince Charles, Lady Anne raised 600 of his clansmen for the Jacobites¹⁵.

The Government was well aware of these women's practical contribution to the Jacobite Cause. Pamphlets were published and their character defamed¹⁶, and when the Rising was crushed, women were not exempt from the consequences.

Many women were imprisoned for their involvement in the '45 and as with the men, their treatment depended largely on their social status. Jenny Cameron, for example, was imprisoned for nine months¹⁷ while Lady Anne MacKintosh, as a prominent upper class lady and wife of a Government officer, was held prisoner for only six weeks and allowed to receive visitors during that time¹⁸.

Women were also deported¹⁹ and the conditions they faced on the transport ships were no better than those faced by men of the same class²⁰.

For those left behind, the Government's occupation of the Highlands often meant harassment, rape and starvation. Isabel Haldane who had urged her husband to lead the Appin men into battle, for example, was repeatedly bullied and her house raided by Government soldiers in search for her husband²¹. Eventually, she joined him in his French exile, a fate that many women shared with their men voluntarily²².

¹⁴ Stephen, J (2005c) *Lady Anne MacKintosh, Version 2*. Edinburgh: The National Trust for Scotland [unpublished].

¹⁵ Stephen 2006c and Craig 1997: 24-26. She held 300 of these back to protect her house against her husband should he disagree with her actions.

¹⁶ Craig 1997: 43

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 129

¹⁸ Stephen 2006c

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 65

²⁰ Ibid. Overcrowding and poor conditions are reported for many men who lacked the financial means to alleviate their conditions. See for example Stephen 2005a.

²¹ Ibid, p. 137ff

²² Ibid, p. 139

2. Interpreting women in wars

Freeman Tilden, the author of the formative book on heritage interpretation²³, wrote that to interpret means to provoke the thought, 'Under like circumstances, what would you have done?'²⁴ Interpretation, he argued, must relate historical facts to people's own experiences and reveal the meanings behind them²⁵. In this sense, Tilden anticipated Peter Howard's definition of heritage as looking at history's benefit for the present and future²⁶. Interpretation, it has been said, is the tool to help people make that connection²⁷. It is through interpretation at visitor destinations that aspects of history and their relation to our modern lives are made visible to wide audiences.

This raises interesting challenges for interpreting women at battlesites²⁸. First of all, the iconography of weapons and soldiery is unmistakably male. JS Goldstein speaks of the phallic symbolism of weapons and reports that bombs are referred to as male while the containers that carry them are considered female²⁹. Historically, only two cases of substantial and official female participation in battles are reported³⁰. Individual women did fight in historic wars, however they did so in male disguise³¹. Therefore, at historic battlesites such as Culloden Battlefield, soldiers' uniforms and their weapons firmly evoke the image of a man.

²³ Tilden, F. (1977) *Interpreting Our Heritage*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

²⁴ *ibid*, p. 15

²⁵ *ibid*, p. 8

²⁶ Howard, P. (2003) *Heritage: Management, Interpretation, Identity*. London: Continuum, p. 21

²⁷ This view of interpretation is supported by current literature on interpretation. See for example Beck, L. et al (2002) 2nd edn. *Interpretation for the 21st Century. Fifteen Guiding Principles for Interpreting Nature and Culture*. Champaign: Sagamore Publishing.

²⁸ We will exclude here consideration of the very recent and still limited admission of women into direct combat roles in modern armies.

²⁹ Goldstein, J.S. (2003) *War and Gender. How Gender Shapes the War System and vice versa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 349ff

³⁰ Goldstein 2003, p. 21ff. The corps in question are from the Dahomey Kingdom of West Africa in the 18th and 19th century and presumably the Soviet Army in World War II.

³¹ *Ibid*, p. 106ff

Considering the above it may not be surprising when Hamzah Muzaini reports that women so far have been marginalized in war interpretation³². Most often they appear on war monuments but not as subjects in their own right but as allegories³³. Muzaini's own case study of a war museum in Singapore found that interpretation of women during the second world war was limited to quotes amongst the largely male content³⁴. He suggests that one reason for this may be that the role society traditionally expects women to fulfill, i.e. to nurture, is incompatible with their actions in war³⁵.

Of course, this argument can only explain why women who actively engaged in combat have not been interpreted. It does not address the issue of women's alternative enlistment with armies in the roles of nurses³⁶, for example, or any other female perspectives on war, all of which have gone equally uninterpreted.

As was shown, historically the instances of female participation in direct combat are extremely rare and in the case of the 1745 Jacobite Rising and the Battle of Culloden unsubstantiated³⁷. However, to only view direct engagement with an enemy as worthy of interpretation at battlesites means to exclude not only the breadth and importance of women's involvement but also their experiences. These experiences, however, are representations of the private sphere and as such can offer insights into the ways in which battles and wars impact and change the lives of ordinary people. Arguably, this impact on a country is why we still remember its battles.

The challenge is to avoid the stereotype of women as passive victims of war. Goldstein reports that the idea of protecting women can and often does serve as motivation for

³² Muzaini, H (2005) 'Reading representations of women's war experiences in the Changi Chapel and Museum, Singapore'. *Geoforum* 36, pp. 465-476; p. 466

³³ *ibid*, p. 466

³⁴ *ibid*, p. 470

³⁵ *ibid*, p. 471.

³⁶ Goldstein 2003 gives an overview of women's roles in modern armies as nurses and typists up to the 1990s (p. 10).

³⁷ Peter Craddick-Adams (2005) mentions in a BBC article on Women at War one Trooper Mary Ralphson who is supposed to have fought at Culloden alongside her husband, presumably in the Government Army and disguised as a man. No further reference to Mary Ralphson could be identified, however, nor does Craddick-Adams cite a source for his information.

men to fight in wars³⁸. Any one-sided interpretation presenting women only as victims would therefore simply serve to reinforce existing representations of wars as male affairs and downplay the actual roles and experiences of the women.

On the other side of the spectrum, however, is the need to acknowledge and present the historical fact of rape and harassment of women in times of war. Rhonda Copelon pointed out that before the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina the rape of women during wars remained largely unreported³⁹. This is certainly one explanation for why it has also not been interpreted at relevant sites. However, just as the discussion is shifting in other disciplines⁴⁰ so must war interpretation play its part in provoking visitors to think about the topic. Again, the challenge is not to simplify the issue by focusing on women as victims, as Muzaini found to be the case at the war museum in Singapore⁴¹. Rather, interpreting rape and harassment can make visible the relevance of these acts to whole communities and the psyche of a nation at large. Thus war interpretation can create that crucial connection between the historical fact of rape with visitors' own horizons and contribute to current discussion. For Tilden, that was the primary mission of any interpretation⁴².

3. Interpreting the women of the '45

When the National Trust for Scotland began work on a new exhibition and visitor centre at Culloden Battlefield, it was decided to include the women's experiences⁴³. Women are present in paintings and in a case with artefacts illustrating their support for the Jacobite cause. Women also feature in the interactive character stations that allow

³⁸ Goldstein (2003), p. 305

³⁹ Copelon, R (1998) 'Surfacing Gender. Reconceptualizing Crimes Against Women in Time of War.' In *The Women and War Reader*. Ed Lorentzen, LA and Turpin, J. New York and London: New York University Press, pp. 63 - 79

⁴⁰ Copelon, for example, argues for a change in international law on how rape in war time should be treated to better reflect the impact it has on the women and their communities, as well as acknowledge the motivation of the perpetrators.

⁴¹ Muzaini (2005), p. 471. He writes that the interpretation of the story of the women forced into prostitution camps by the Japanese Army, the so-called 'comfort women', reinforce their status as victims while the men are both aggressors and protectors.

⁴² Tilden 1977, p. 8

⁴³ National Trust for Scotland (2005) *Culloden Exhibition Stage D overview*. Edinburgh [unpublished]

visitors to hear dramatisations of their experiences during the campaign alongside those of the men.

So far no research has been done to establish the effectiveness of the women-related messages in the exhibition. The following discussion focuses on the live interpretive programmes that were developed to tell the women's stories.

Presentations were advertised on an in-house daily events schedule to which admissions staff referred when visitors bought their admission tickets. Evaluation at the centre suggested that visitors deliberately chose to see a presentation rather than simply chance upon it. This implies that presentation titles were important in informing visitors' decision to see a presentation.

Two women-specific presentations were developed focusing on the Jacobite side⁴⁴. One presentation looked at the women's active involvement in the Rising while a second presentation reflected on how women were impacted in the aftermath of the failure of the campaign.

Presenting the Women's involvement

We approached this presentation with the intention of showing the active role that Jacobite women played in supporting the rising. The presentation was delivered by myself in a period Highland woman's costume. Its format was a mixture between informal talk and storytelling to help visitors relate to the lives and decisions of the women interpreted.

The presentation used five case studies to illustrate the breadth of the women's involvement and the acknowledgement it received from the most prominent male protagonists of the campaign. These case studies were Jenny Cameron, Charlotte

⁴⁴ Women supporting the Government side commented on the Rising but were not involved any further. Equally, the impact of the failure of the rising was limited to women living in the Highlands through Government legislation effecting their culture rather than the direct repercussions Jacobite women experienced. See Craig 1997.

Robertson and Anne MacKintosh who had raised men for Prince Charles as well as Isabel Haldane and Isabella Lumsden who had persuaded their men to join, in the case of Isabel's husband with a whole regiment.

This presentation was first trialled in August 2008 under the title 'Strong Women for the Cause'. No formal evaluation has been done on this presentation so far. However, visitor reaction and attendance numbers give us a few indicators.

While still called 'Strong Women for the Cause' attendance numbers were considerably lower than those for other presentations on the same day (e.g. 5 versus 55 an hour earlier). It was also very noticeable that male audience members exhibited pronounced signs of rejection during the presentation to a far higher degree than the signs of boredom that sometimes happen with other talk-style presentations.

After one presentation, a male visitor challenged me forcefully on whether the women had actively fought in battles. When told no, he pointed out that the men had and that while the women may have encouraged them to fight, this did not count as contribution. In fact, he suggested that the women cowardly coaxed their men into giving up their lives while they themselves risked nothing. He implied that for these reasons, there was no need for this particular presentation although this viewpoint cannot explain the obvious strength of his feeling.

Interestingly, Muzaini reports a similar argument in relation to the war museum in Singapore. There it was suggested that important roles are defined by direct engagement with an enemy⁴⁵, an understanding that would effectively exclude women from war interpretation prior to the most recent military conflicts.

In contrast, female audience members at Culloden tended to be attentive yet hesitant when viewing the women's involvement presentation, particularly where they were in groups that included adult males. Mostly their interest became apparent after presentations had concluded. Women would often approach me with questions about

⁴⁵ Muzaini (2005), p. 471

the historic women discussed and inquire about further sources of information about them.

After a trial period of two months, we decided to change the title of the presentation to the more neutral 'Women of the '45'. We also changed the presentation venue from an open space in the exhibition to the enclosed learning suite. This eliminated distraction from other visitors and allowed for greater focus.

After changing the title and venue, visitor reactions became more open. One reason may be that those choosing to attend had a real interest which motivated them to come into a separate room to view the presentation. Attendance numbers, however, remained low, indicating that interest in the women's involvement is limited.

Presenting the women's fates

The second presentation about the women's stories focussed on the aftermath of the failed Jacobite rising for women in general. It was built around the experiences of the women, however, as was discussed above, this by extension touched on the experiences of the men. It was delivered as a storytelling session in the separate learning suite by myself wearing a period Highland woman's costume. The content of the presentation included women hiding Jacobite soldiers from the Government, women helping the wounded, women being imprisoned and women being left to look after their families when their men were killed or deported.

Again we can draw some conclusions from attendance numbers and visitor reactions since no formal evaluation of this presentation has been done so far.

The presentation was first trialled in August 2008 and advertised under the title 'The Women's Aftermath'. It received no interest whatsoever. We therefore immediately changed the title to 'Stories from Culloden's Aftermath'. The content of the presentation remained the same.

Upon changing the title of the presentation, attendance jumped upwards to attract similar numbers of visitors as other presentations offered on the day. Reactions were exclusively positive both from male and female audience members, eliciting strong emotions and empathy for the women and men discussed.

This experience again suggests that visitors have very little interest in women-only content. What we cannot know is whether the ultimately positive feedback once the change in title attracted visitors would have been the same had the presentation itself excluded the men's experiences. As it were, through using the women's stories from the aftermath of the battle we told the stories of the men and children as well. Perhaps it was this aspect of the presentation that made it so successful in touching so many audience members. The research that produced this wealth of material, however, was entirely focussed on the women.

4. Conclusion

Interpretation as a communication process⁴⁶ is affected by many factors: visitors' personal circumstances, their state of mind during the visit, their prior experiences with a topic or presentation-style, and the style of the interpreter herself⁴⁷.

Without formal research it is impossible to establish at this point why one presentation that focussed solely on women was less popular than one that included the men's fates. Certainly, the fact that the popular aftermath presentation did not refer to women in its title suggests that interpretation of the women is not something that visitors to Culloden Battlefield are currently interested in. It would be revealing to test whether the general identification of wars and battles with men leads to an overall dismissal of the women's

⁴⁶ See for example Veverka, J. (1994) *Interpretive Master Planning*. Tustin: Acorn Naturalists as well as definitions by the National Association for Heritage Interpretation, Interpretation Canada, Interpretation Australia Association, Association for Heritage Interpretation.

⁴⁷ See for example Falk, J.H. and Dierking, L.D. (2000) *Learning from Museums. Visitor Experiences and the making of meaning*. Lanham: Altamira Press; Silverman, L.H. (1997) 'Personalizing the Past: A review of literature with implications for historical interpretation'. *Journal of Interpretation Research* 2, (1) pp. 1 - 12

side of the story and lack of motivation to engage with it through interpretation in a leisure environment.

What the experience with the aftermath presentation has highlighted, however, is the ability of the women's story to interpret the experiences of people as a whole. In addition, and perhaps more importantly, it gives all visitors an opportunity to relate and to do so as a mixed gender, mixed age social group. It may point to a solution rather than a problem when it comes to making women more visible through interpretation. Perhaps in transcending a gendered approach, the aftermath presentation was able to tell the women's story embedded in a larger story that intrigued visitors overall. In an ideal world this should perhaps not be necessary and yet it may more accurately reflect the daily experiences of interpretation's audiences who find their lives as men and women intertwined.

This approach may also serve to interpret more sensitive issues such as rape and harassment during wars. Although we know that both occurred during and after the Jacobite Rising, this has so far not been interpreted at Culloden. Considering the experiences with the aftermath presentation, however, I feel very strongly that a non-gendered approach may offer a safe format. Rather than create a gender division among visitors as potential perpetrators and victims, this style of interpretation can help engage more people positively and make it relevant to them through considering the social implications that they find mirrored in their own lives.

As history and related disciplines uncover the importance of the women's roles and their experiences in war, so must war interpretation make these visible to visitors at related sites. As was shown, this need not always be a direct approach in order to successfully engage visitors with the women's story. Meaningful interpretation can gradually raise awareness and erode reluctance to engage with alternative stories until our male and female visitors alike come to expect the women's experiences to be presented as part of the overall story.

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