

Bonnie Prince Charlie is not my Darling



Bonnie Prince Charlie

A YouGov poll in 2021 indicated that only a third, 35%, of Britons say they think they know what cancel culture means, yet a majority, 57%, say that at least sometimes they feel unable to express their political or social views for fear of judgment or negative responses from others. Almost half, 49%, of Britons tone down or censor their opinions to avoid causing offense to someone, and 21% do so with one's family. The alarm has been raised by the distinguished British actress Dame Maureen Lipman that cancel culture may wipe out comedy for fear of offending people. Humorless, close minded ideologies have an insidious chilling effect on freedom of expression.

Yet, more appropriate than pessimistic premonition is *carpe diem*, seize the present day, with laughter at absurdities of cancel culture. The latest comedy, unintended though it is, is provided by the National Trust for Scotland, NTS, which now

borders on the ludicrous. The Trust is an independent charity, not part of government, politically neutral with no allegiance to any political party, whose purpose is to protect, make known the magnificent heritage of Scotland. It cares for the 88 properties it controls, ancient houses, battlefields, castles, and gardens, places like Robert Burn's birthplace, Bannockburn and Loch Lomond, though not for Nessie, the Loch Ness monster, and perhaps in the future the home in Glasgow of Andy Murray. It is admirable that the NTS attempts to provide a truthful view of Scotland's complex past.

The NTS has gone beyond this useful enterprise to survey how these properties are linked to the slave trade, and the links between families that built them and the money that funded them. It has published a report, part of a project following BLM protests in 2020 that found that more than a third of Scotland's great sites had links to the slave trade, from money gained by Scottish settlers from sugar plantations in the West Indies, or the tobacco fields of the southern U.S. states. So far, 29 of the 48 sites are classified as having direct links to ownership of plantations and slaves. Among them are Leith Hall in Aberdeenshire and Harmony Hall in Melrose.

The NTS has now provided well needed comic relief and exposure of the folly of woke history, naming two properties which have indirect links to slavery. One is the battlefield of Culloden, and the Glenfinnan monument at the head of Loch Shiel, connected with Bonnie Prince Charlie, the Young Pretender, born to be King. The other is the birthplace and home of JM Barrie, novelist, and playwright.

After the Jacobite threat to government had ended the Glenfinnan monument was erected on 1815 to honor the failed rebellion. And now, 150 years after Charlie's death, the site of his final defeat Culloden, near Inverness, is being added to the slave list by the National Trust of Scotland. The new report of the NTY grimly states the Scots

have historically forgotten or chose to ignore the country's connections with slavery.

Prince Charles Edward Stuart was born in Rome, Italy 1720, the son of exiled father James VI of Scotland, James II of England, a handsome, charismatic figure. He became leader of the group, largely but not wholly Catholic that sought to reclaim the British throne for the deposed Stuart dynasty, to restore James II and heirs, himself, to the throne. Historically, the first Jacobite rebellion was ended at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690, and the deposition of Britain's last Stuart and last Catholic monarch.

This was a moment of tension between Protestant England and Catholic/Jacobite communities. Charles wanted to seize the British throne by fostering civil war, and seemingly suggesting the French invade England. Without informing France, Charlie sailed from Nantes, a port involved in the transatlantic slave trade, headquarters of the trade to the French Caribbean colonies, and landed in the Outer Hebrides in July 1745.

The NTS is primarily interested in the fact that Charlie sailed on a French slave ship, Du Teillay which was owned by an Irish born shipowner, Antoine Walsh, who was a plantation owner and whose family were exiled Jacobites. Antoine's father had conveyed the deposed James II from Ireland to Saint Malo. Antoine provided Charlie with supplies and funds. Charlie is being "cancelled" because of his link to this important financial supporter.

Charles, the symbol of a doomed cause, the romantic figure, raised the standard of civil war on August 10, 1745, gaining support from the Highlands organized forces and their lairds against the Presbyterian cities and the Lowlands. He campaigned from Glenfinnan to Derby but his Highlanders gave up and could not reach London, and he retreated to Culloden the site of the defeat in 40 minutes of the Jacobite

rebellion on April 16, 1746. Charlie was crushed by the forces of the Duke of Cumberland, and many Jacobites were transported to British colonies, in the West Indies where they went on to become owners of enslaved people, and profited in islands like St. Kilda and Iona.

Charlie escaped capture, in improbable escapades and secret locations, and hinted he would become Protestant if he could become king. But he lost his followers and left Scotland, after one year, going to France in September 1746. Charlie, may still be the romantic symbol and legendary figure of some Scottish nationalists, but he was a failure, fomenting a civil war not to achieve Scottish independence, but to become king.

Charlie, who was only in Scotland for just one year, never returned to the country and died, a drunken and licentious person, in Italy in January 1788, aged 67. He was buried near Rome. His heart lies in the crypt of St. Peter's Basilica in the Vatican.

There are two ironies. One is that though Charlie had the support of some Catholic highlanders, against English soldiers, it is probable that the Hanoverian army had more Scots than English. The other is that the NTS decision will disappoint many youngsters. The "cancelled" site was the location of a Harry Potter film.

And youngsters will be disappointed a second time with the cancelling of J M Barrie, Scottish novelist and playwright, 1860-1937, known to the whole world as the author of Peter Pan, the charming, adventurous, and mischievous boy who refused to grow up. Barrie was born in a small whitewashed traditional weaver's cottage's, where the family of seven lived in upstairs rooms while the workshop of his father, moderately successful, was downstairs.

Barrie left Scotland at an early age, and lived in London where a plaque indicates his home in Bayswater Road. Most

people will accept that as his most important residence. However, his home in Scotland is now more important for the NTS because the Scottish weaving industry produced clothing for slaves.

This is another farcical irony because the weaving industry in Barrie's hometown of Kirriemuir, Angus, made corsets not clothes for slaves. Yet the NTS wants Barrie's home to be used as an educational tool to teach visitors to the cottage how coarse linen was used to clothe enslaved people in the Americas and the Caribbean. This it believes will help "people understand better our country's history." it is worth pointing out to the NTS that Barrie was born in 1860, 27 years after slavery was abolished in most of the British Empire.

The NTS with its farcical logic has given us some amusement but disgraced itself by promoting such nonsense. At least, Barrie still stands in a statue in Kensington Gardens, London, and Peter Pan prepares to fly at various places in New York City on his way to Neverland.