

bi **Stuart McHardy**



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Nou awbodie kens that history is written bi winners. Tho it micht be fairer tae say that history is written bi fowk paid bi winners. In the early days o oor history in Scotland awthin written cam frae the church – onlie monks an priests, an mebbe nuns, were literate.

Ane o the daftest things about history is that historians, fowk paid tae study, lecture an write about the past, act like since the comin o literacy, the auld wey o daein things, tellin stories, his nae relevance. Oral tradition is ‘jist stories’, or ‘simply anecdotal.’ As if fowk stoppit telling stories jist because some ither fowk cuid write things doun. Stories hae survived an it micht be that in some o the traditional tales there is information that cuid help us see oor past a bit clearer.

But the thing about stories is, even gin historians an ither academics dismiss them, they hae a funny wey o springin up. Ane example is MacBeth,. Gin ye trawl thru histories, national an local, written in the 18th and 19th centuries, the story o MacBeth is ivver the same. We are tellt that he wis a murderous usurper an that he got his comeuppance fae Malcom Canmore. The fack is that this is Shakespeare’s stpy an nivver wis intendit tae be ‘history’ at aw.

MacBeth, accordin tae some o oor ain auld historians hid as muckle richt as Duncan tae the throne an aince he had it.,he seems tae hae ruled fer seventeen year, maist o which were peaceful. They were that quiet that MacBeth fund time tae gang on a pilgrimage tae Rome. There is een some evidence tae suggest that his wife Gruoch, wis mairriet on Duncan first an this cuid raise aw sorts o interestin ideas anent the role o females in Scottish ‘kingship’.

Houaniver whit maitters here is that aw thae educated fowk tellin us aboot oor ain history were happy wi a dramatic version o it written by a foreigner. Nou Shakespeare wis a clever mannie an he pit scenes o witchcraft intae the play tae catch the ee o the King, Jaimie VI and I. He kennt the king’s obsession wi aw things diabolic but wis also up tae speed on the kings dislike o aw things ‘Celtic’. Like maist Scottish, an later British ,monarchs, Jimmy hated the clans fer

their adherence tae their ain rules o kinship an loyalty an contempt fer centralised law an order. So Willie Shakespeare created a great villain fer the 'Scottish Play'.

But hou come aw they fowk took that as history? Semple. They didnae ken onie better. Eer since 1707 Scottish history his been an affy puir relation o thon bastard discipline British History. British History is English History wi a few sops tae the Scots, Welsh an Irish, in thon order. An whit we hae wi MacBeth is an example o a story bein acceptit as the truth fer generations. We nicht ken better nou but we hae tae look a bit further.

Jist as history is scribed bi winners, so story cin contain whit fowk thocht o as reality among the communities in which the stories were tellt. It wis thru follaein up on stories anent a particular cateran – cattle reiver – that A fund a great deal o information showein that the Jacobites didnae stop fechtin in Scotland till a guid while eefir Culloden an that maist o the Hielands an a fair bit o the Lowlands were garrisons bi the British Army weel intae the 1750s. There is specific written evidence tae support this but it's nivver been publisht. An hou no? Because it wuid gang agin the message that British History wantit– that the Jacobite rebellion in 1745 wis a wee, pathetic, last gasp adventure bi a deein society in the face o the comin modern warld. Jist as MacBeth wis a malevolent psychopath an his wife warse.

An o coorse Malcom Canmore, the virtuous mannie that dung MacBeth doun is aye said tae hae been gey close tae the English. Well mebbe aye an mebbe no – his queen, the saintly Margaret, wis a refugee fae England, her brither haein failit tae get the croun fer himself. Bit the sub text is that he wis the modern ane an MacBeth the representative o auld weys, lang past their sell bi date. Well here's a thing. Whan Maclolm deid he wisnae succeedit bi his eldest son, but bi his brither Donald Bane, Eefir Donald, Malcolms' sons cam tae the throne ane eefir anither. This isnae primogeniture, the succession o the eldest son, but somethin mair like the auld tribal weys o the majority o Scotland's population in the eleventh century, Hieland an Lowland.

The thrust o British History is plen tae see – it is tae try an present Scotland as muckle like England as possible so as tae suggest that it only natural fer us tae be yokit thegither. Nivver mind that oor ancestors richt up till no lang afore the Treaty o Union aye lookit tae the sooth, no fer fashion tips or guidance on hou tae dae things, but tae check ther wisnae anither invasion comin.

An ivver since the Treaty o Union, them that cry themselves the defenders Scottish national cultural identity, the Law, the Kirk an the Univairsties hae been mair not happy tae push sic versions o events – they have aw duin gey weel oot o the status quo. An it's nae accident that sae monie fowk at the top o thae institutions hae cam theirsels fae that ithier class that his duin sae weel oot o the Union, the lairds, that aince were chiefs an unnerstood they were humans like the rest o their fowk. An jist as oor laun wis stolen bi the lairds* sae oor history his been taen awa bi the Gatekeepers o Scotia Subjectus. Nae fer muckle langer but.

see Andy Wightman's The Poor Had No Lawyers

Stuart McHardy is a writer and story-teller and is the author of [A New History of the Picts](#), published by Luath Press in 2011.