

Neil Munro and the Lerigmore Letters

Neil Munro (1863-1930), journalist and writer, was a Gaelic speaker from Inveraray, Argyll. He worked for the Glasgow News and the Glasgow Evening News (amongst other papers). He was also a successful author and his achievements as a writer were recognised by the University of Glasgow who granted him an honorary LLD in 1908. Some his books, such as *John Splendid*, were historical novels and this short piece with five 'letters' appears to be in the same vein. Clan Maclachlan did actually raise 200 men for Prince Charles in the Jacobite rising, known in Gaelic as Bliadhna Theàrlaich, 1745-46. The chief, Lachlann MacLachlan, was killed at the Battle of Culloden. The letters give a fascinating (imagined?) account of Highland experience at the University c.1745. As far as I am aware there is no Lerigmore in Argyll and the 'letters,' which follow, below, are a work of fiction.

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Ronald W. Renton, 'Munro, Neil [Hugh Foulis] (1863–1930)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, May 2006 [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/40351, accessed 9 Nov 2013]

Edward M. Furgol, 'Maclachlan, Lauchlan (1688–1746)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, May 2006 [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/17634, accessed 9 Nov 2013]

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Neil Munro, 'The Lerigmore Letters. A Chapter in Jacobite history' pp. 69-76 in:

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<https://archive.org/details/bookofjubileeinc00univuoft>

The Lerigmore Letters. A CHAPTER IN JACOBITE HISTORY.

By Neil Munro.

AMONG the Jacobites who fell at Culloden was the young Chief of Maclachlan in Cowal, who in his campaigning and in his exit was accompanied by a cadet of the family, Colin Maclachlan of Laglingarten, who had been a student in Glasgow University when the clans rose for Charles Edward. Through the kindness of the present laird of Mid Lerigmore, whose charter-chest contains material for a score of those pseudo-historical romances that are in favour at the moment, I have been permitted to make extracts from letters which were addressed by Colin Maclachlan in 1744-5 to John (Iain Dubh) Maclachlan, at that time Younger of Mid Lerigmore, a contemporary and companion of the unfortunate lad who died at Culloden.

The letters may be of some interest as throwing light upon Glasgow University life a century and a half ago, and incidentally giving some hint of a love tragedy. Maclachlan's spelling, and occasionally his grammar, take some of the license of the period, and I have presumed in some parts to make both in more conformity with modern usage.

I.

SCOUGALL'S CLOSE, TRONGAIT,

GLASGOW, 31 October, 1744.

DEAR JOCK,

There is a cursed chime of bells clashing away at a tune called " Nancy's to the Greenwood Gane " in the Trongait Kirk steeple, and the lad Macfarlane that shares the room with me is at this minute diverting himself with the rottenest chanter surely ever a reed squealed in ; and there's the most deplorable smell of roasting halecum rubrarum (there's Latinity for you !) being prepared for my Four Hours, and a when more Distractions, but still I take my pen in hand. Oh ! Jock ! it's me that wishes you were here or I was yonder in Strath Lachlan, for it would take more paper than I have placks for, and more of my pen than I have patience for, to tell you of my Exploits in Glasgow since I came to College. When I left you at the Cross Roads on Wednesday was a fortnight, I bragged I could carry my half-boll of meal at least the length of Dunbarton, but I must be telling you I was gey sick of it before I got the length of Arroquhar. Who should I come on there but the carrier Campbell (him with the Reel Feet, as they call it here) ! I claps my poke of meal upon the hinder-end of his cart, and told him to take it to my direction in the High St. and then puts my legs to the road again quite sturdy, so that I got into the toun of Dunbarton as the bells were ringing. I put up the night at a tavern kept by a fellow Grant that kent the Gaelic, and took sixpence off his Accompt in consideration that I was Laglingarten's son and wore the breacan Then on to this place, through the most extraordinary little small touns like Partick and Finnies Toun, and Ander's Toun, and the like, and got to my good-brother's cousin's house in this Land at twelve.

I have scoured the toun since then, high and low, and think well enough of it though it is not the Shire of Argyll and the braes that's round about it. The throng at any hour of the day is like a Fair ; they'll be jostling you like stots upon the street, and if it was not that I kept a good hand on my sporran, I'm thinking there would be little change of my siller by the week-end. You would burst to see the Virginian Merchants, with their three-cockt hats and their long rattans, and their snuffy waistcoats, daundering up and down on the plain-stanes of the Trongate, everyone as if he was MacCailen himself, with 10,000 swords and a tail of fifty pretty lads.¹ One of them pushes me off the causey into the syver. " This part of the street is not for Hielan' cattle," says he, and if the brock had been less than sixty years and had not a paunch like Uncle Archie, I would have given him Yon, if I was to get the gallows for it. But I had not the wherewithal even if I had the inclination, for neither dirks nor whingers is allowed by the Faculty to be worn by any of the students, which is surely a droll kind of civility. " My name is Maclachlan," I told the fellow, " and if you have a son that's like the

¹ MacCailen Mòr is how the Earls of Argyll, chiefs of Clan Campbell, are known in Gaelic. The 'tail' was a retinue and the amount of followers a laird could muster was a demonstration of his power.

world, send him to me and I will strew his intervals about the street ! " With that he calls the Watch, and I made no more parley about the matter. But the thing will be showing you the kind of folks we have to put up with.

The noises of the place are beyond Description a continual clatter of waggons and horses at the trot, and merchants crying in the booths and women quarrelling in the wynds and closes, and bells jawing, and pigs squealing about the middens. I would have taken up my quarters in the College, but the rooms there are costly, coming to as high as ten shillings in the session, according to the situation, and there are fees to bed-makers forbye; and in the College it is all coal fires, which, at one shilling and threepence a cart, is dear enough, as you will allow. So I have boarded on Mistress Gilkson, my good-brother's cousin that is a widow and has one daughter, Mally, gey throughther in her manner, I think, and little to my taste, I can assure you. Two days after I came here my firkin of herrings came by the packet, and the carriers delivered the meal, so that my vivers for the session are certain, whatever of it.

And there you are, and you will be asking what in the world I am doing in Glasgow. Well, there are my classes, that engage much of my time, and my lessons in my lodging that would engage more if the glaikit lass they call Mally was not for ever coming out and in and saying something impudent about my bonnet and my kilt and the rest of it. When it is not that, I go down to the Molindinar Burn that is close at hand, and watch the laddies guddling baggy-minnows (as they call them), or take the air as far out in the country as a town they call Camlachie, that is reached through a pleasant enough road with hedges on either hand. There is many a good Highland name in the College (far too many of them lousy Campbells to my thinking !) and we have a sort of gang of it among ourselves, with an understanding that there must be no politics or pedigrees talked about. On the Saturdays we have a game of the camanachd on the Fleshers' Haugh, and I'll not deny but that there's sometimes a sederunt in Lucky Baxter's in High Street, where the ale is twopenny, and I'll warrant not very long on the gantrys.

Whether I'll like my father's plan for me in sending me or not, I cannot just now be sure of. 'Chan eil fios coid an lann a bhios san trual gus an tarraingear e !'² as we say up yonder. Anyway, here's for it ! but there's one (between our two selves, Jock) that but for the father of him in a place called Laglingartan, would sooner carry Claymore than bang a stoury pulpit cushion. And so no more at present, but your old friend,

² No one knows the worth of the blade until it is unsheathed

II.

April 3rd, 1745.

. . . The flying stationer that goes through Cowal has promised to take a letter to-morrow, and here I am in reply to yours, that was considerably on the side of brevity, laochain!³- And Yon about the day among the hinds ! Oh, Jock ! Jock ! You must not be telling me about the like of that if you would not have me with my knapsack on my shoulder trudging home for a diversion. I have not had a gun in my elbow since I came to this place, though there might be sport enough with hare and paitrick about Little Govan way, and round about the Gorbals that is surrounded by fields. As for a rod lord ! I am itching for a whip at Clyde, but the thing's prohibit. I have seen cart-loads of the finest salmon netted not a mile from here, and still dear enough when cried at the Cross at a penny a pound.

Since I wrote last I have learned the game of Bulzards, that is a rarity late come here, and is played upon a table kept at a Vintner's in the Gallowgait, but you need not mention it if you are the way of Laglingartan, or should meet my brother Alasdair, who clypes all to my father. That and the camanachd, and two nights a week at the dancing, is my whole diversion. You need not mention the dancing neither, Jock. I am taking some lessons at a genteel tutor's Gilderoy, from Edinburgh, that has opened a Class in Anderson's Close. The thing would be better sport for me but for the lass Mally (my good-brother's cousin's daughter) that makes out I am the only one she can get the right step of. And indeed the creature is neat by-ordinar herself at a Strathspey. She has the most Genteel walk, and sings to Perfection, and thinks (I will swear) her mother's lodger is a clod, though Macfarlane makes out otherwise.

I am sending you with this a Chap Book or two of Dugald Graham that are of the latest. Also a Journal, which you will be so kind as to pass to Lachlan Ruadh, at the Poll, and tell him to give to his brothers at Ballimeanach.

³ 'Laddie'! or 'wee hero'!

III.

June 3rd, 1745.

. . . Last week there was an odd thing happened.

You must ken that the girl Mally I mentioned before has gone on a Great Jaunt to Edinburgh, leaving on Friday last by the stage that makes the journey twice a week at this season. I was at the change-house seeing her departure, for though she is a Fair Torment, blood is thicker nor water, and I was almost vext to see her go. She will be gone as long as a fortnight, and there is no doubt there is Peril in Journeyings. On this score, Jock, do not say anything about the girl Mally to Alasdair ; the fellow has no more sentiment than a stirk. But the bit is who should be on the top of the coach but the Laird himself ? He had come from Strath Lachlan by post horses in a hurry, and was for some weighty business in the East Country. 'Tis the first time I ever saw Himself in the Lowland habit. We got on the crack. " Colin," said he, " there's a fine ploy on foot, that I may have a needcessity for every man of the clan to take a hand in between now and next Martinmas ; " and he whistled a bit of an air. What the bit air was I will not put down here, but you can be using your wits to guess, and keep your thumb on it. A year ago I would have been Sick Sorry to be in Glasgow and my nose in a book if this Particular Affair took place, and now I'm in a swither. It is not as if I had just myself to consider. And still ; perhaps there's nobody cares a curse, except the old man at Laglingartan, and he is so keen on the pulpit for me.

Dear Jock, I wish you could take a turn this length ; you would find Glasgow pleasand enough in this weather. For some reason I could not do a hand's turn for a week back because of the unusual quietness of the house now that that hussy Mally is gone, and I have been sitting by the hour in the garden behind our close, where the tumult of the Trongait will be sounding like a convocation of bagpipes at a considerable distance. For a divert I made some lines To a Young Lady, which for a piece of nonsense I am sending you. They are about nobody in particular, but just came into my head, and can be sung to the tune of Hazel-eyed Helen, Never let on to Alasdair if you meet him ; and, indeed, I think it might be well to burn them when you have laughed at them.

IV.

August 14th, 1745.

... I had a great laugh at what you said about the ballad I sent you and the girl Mally. I think you might be sure, after all I said in my other letters, that I value Madame's opinion not a nail-blade, though I never denied she had some likeable qualities. She is not back from Edinburgh yet, and her mother tells me there is some man of business there is paying attentions to her. I'm not caring. Thank God, I have always known what women were ; there is not a dependable one in all the sex of them ; no, not one, and the man that puts his ease of mind in their keeping must be the sheep indeed. I had another talk with the Laird a week ago. He is very throng about the Affair, and is going to the first Kilmichael market to offer a pound a head for lads to make up his two hundred that are ill to make up in these days in Strath Lachlan itself. I am half promised to take a hand in it myself, for I'm sick of this place and do not care what happens. It will depend on another business I am hearing from the tenant's son at Glen Branter that you are often on the road at night about Dr. Paul's. Is it the Red One or her cousin from across the loch ? Whatever of it, I wish you Joy ; but I am bound to be telling you that it's the wise man puts his trust in none of their deceitful sex.

V.

December 23rd, 1745.

I am sending this by a Sure Hand. He is coming back to Glasgow by way of the ferries next week, and I want you to send me the two Doune pistols Uncle Archie promised me last year. He will give them to you if you show him this letter. Likewise tell Alasdair I must have the Ferrara sword by the same messenger, as the weapon I have is no better nor a bull-rush. The woman Mally came back last night from Edinburgh, and is to be married in Aprile to the Edinburgh man I mentioned. Her mother and her friends are quite proud of the match, and I am sure I wish her well. Since her return she has scarce looked once the road I was on.

There is great news to-day, that the Prince is to be in Glasgow next week. I depend on you to have the Arms specified here by then, as I have sent word to Maclachlan that he may count on me from the Gallowgate of Glasgow to the gates of the Worst Place. And so, meanwhile, Jock, fareweel !