



The Fugitive Bonnie Prince Charlie (1746)

Following the defeat of his army at Culloden on the 16th April 1746, Prince Charles Edward Stewart fled north and decided to cross the Minch in a boat supplied by Angus of Borrodale in Skye. His companions were Colonel O'Sullivan, Captain O'Neill and Allan Macdonald. His guide was 70-year-old Donald Macleod of Guaterrigill, Skye. Also there were eight oarsmen, Roderick Macdonald, Lachlan Macmurrich, Roderick Macaskill, John Macdonald, Duncan Roy, Alex Macdonald, Edward Burke and Murdoch Macleod, a son of the guide.

They were blown off course by a storm while on their way from Skye to Eriskay, and they landed at Eilean Glas, Scalpay on 30th April. The Prince remained in Scalpay for four days where he was well received by the tacksman Donald Campbell, while his guide Donald Macleod sailed on to Stornoway to try and get a ship that would take the Prince to Norway, then he could make his way back to France safely. During their stay in Scalpay the fugitives passed themselves off as the crew of a merchant ship that was wrecked on a reef, and that the Prince was the son of the Captain. While in Scalpay the Prince, in the guise of the Sea Captain's son, went fishing with the tacksman's son, and on the way back they helped to pull a cow out of a bog.

On the 4th May the Prince left Scalpay with his three companions and sailed up Loch Seaforth, landing at the head of the Loch with the intention of heading for Stornoway on foot to make contact with his guide, Donald Macleod, whom he hoped had hired a ship. It was a wet and stormy night, and they lost their way in the Lochs district. Local tradition relates that the party crossed Loch Erisort at Habost, and instead of reaching Stornoway about midnight as planned, it was nearly midday the next day before they arrived, footsore, cold, hungry and fatigued.

Meantime there was a reward of £30,000 offered for the capture of the Prince. Rev. Aulay Macaulay of Harris, together with his son Rev. John Macaulay of South Uist, both strict Hanoverians who feared that victory for the Prince would lead to the spread of the Roman Catholic Faith in the Islands, as well as being very interested in the rewards and the favours the Prince's capture would bring to them, informed Rev. Colin Mackenzie, the Minister of Lochs, that the Prince was in his area and to arrange with Lord Seaforth for the Prince's capture. It appears that Rev. Colin Mackenzie did not take any action.

The Prince stayed at the house of Lady Kildun at Arnish near Stornoway, and he was received very hospitably, and no one else made a move to betray him, and claim the £30,000 offered for his capture.

Donald Macleod, the Prince's guide did find a ship in Stornoway that was willing to take the Prince, but later on the Captain of the vessel withdrew from the bargain to charter his ship, and the Prince and his party decided to leave Stornoway on the 6th May, and without telling the oarsmen, the Prince planned to cross the Minch in the open boat. When the boatmen realised that they were expected to cross the Minch, they refused to co-operate because of the danger, but they proceeded on their way to Uist.

When they were off Kebbock Head they sighted two ships, and the party debated as to whether the ships were French or British. The oarsmen decided they were not prepared to take any risks, and they landed at Eilean Ewart at the mouth of Loch Shell, out from Lemreway, and climbed to the top of the hill to get a better view of the ships. At that time Eilean Ewart was frequently used by Lewis fishermen for drying their white fish on the rocks. There were some fishermen on the Island as the Prince's boat approached, but they made off on seeing the strangers, whom they mistook for the hated press-gang. The hungry visitors had a hearty meal of dried fish left behind by the fleeing fishermen. The Prince wanted to leave money for the fish but was dissuaded from that idea, as it was safer to appear to have really been the press-gang.

At one time there were people living on Isle Ewart. There are also ruins of a substantial house of stone and lime walls and apparently a slated roof and a red tile floor on the Island. It was called 'Tigh Geal'. Nowadays the people of Lemreway use the ruins of the 'Tigh Geal' for a sheep fank.

On the 10th May, the Prince's party sailed again calling at Glass Isle, Scalpay and shortly after leaving Scalpay, they narrowly escaped capture by a patrolling naval sloop, by landing at Rodel.

Although the well-known part played eventually by Flora Macdonald in the escape of the Prince from Uist was made famous by the 'Skye Boat Song', the truth was that Flora stubbornly declined at first to become involved in helping the Prince to escape to Skye because of the danger, as there were over 3000 soldiers searching for the Prince in the area, and that meant serious consequences for anyone found helping him.

Flora Macdonald was temporarily in South Uist to help her brother there, and she was due to return to her home in Skye. She came under heavy pressure to help the Prince from several of the Prince's friends, but particularly from her own stepfather, Hugh Macdonald of Armadale, who as Captain of a Company of Militia with orders to find Charles, was actually sympathetic to the Prince, and willing to help him escape.

Hugh Macdonald proposed that his stepdaughter Flora should help with the escape of the Prince back to Skye. He would issue a pass for her to show any guards or soldiers she encountered on the journey. Naturally he would not want her to travel alone, so the pass would make provision for an accompanying maid and a manservant. While the maid was to be the Prince dressed in woman's clothes, the manservant was to be Flora's cousin, Neil MacEachen from Uist. Women were employed to prepare a female disguise for the Prince, and they worked day and night until on Saturday morning, 28th June everything was ready - the disguise, the passes and the boat.

O'Neill, the Prince's friend, was arrested, and it was he who revealed that the Prince's health was in a serious condition. Later on it was rumoured that Prince Charles died, and the search parties were relaxed to the point where escape was possible.

Flora Macdonald thankfully passed her charge on to others at Kingsburgh. She never heard from the Prince again, and he never once referred to her in his writings for the remaining 43 years of his life.

Flora was imprisoned for a year for her pains, and then she emigrated to North Carolina with her husband. Eventually they returned to Skye where Flora died in 1790.

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