



## The Battle of Culloden, 16 April 1746

*Culloden* by Murray Pittock.

New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2016. Pp. xxi, 192. ISBN 978-1-19-966407-8.

*Culloden: Scotland's Last Battle and the Forging of the British Empire* by Trevor Royle.

New York: Pegasus Books, 2016. Pp. xiii, 409. ISBN 978-1-68177-236-3.

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In the 270th anniversary year of the battle of Culloden, the last major military engagement fought in Britain, these two books offered reappraisals of that culminating event of the Jacobite Rebellion of 1745. Culloden has always drawn attention as the central moment in the mythology of Scottish independence, including the destruction of the power of Highland Clans and the image of their way of life in the popular imagination.

Both books provide context for an engagement that historian Murray Pittock (Univ. of Glasgow) calls “one of the decisive battles of the world, and one of the most powerful in its continuing influence on cultural memory” (1). The authors take distinctly different approaches to their subject. Pittock is a leading historian of Jacobitism; his work is scholarly and analytical, and shows a full conversance, for example, with the new archeology of the battlefield and discussions of the battle’s place in the cultural history of Scotland and Britain. Trevor Royle is, by contrast, a journalist specializing in international affairs and a prolific author of popular military histories; he sees Culloden within the framework of eighteenth-century geopolitical conflicts between Britain and France and the emergence of Britain’s global empire.

Pittock’s first three chapters (of six in total) concern the 1745 Jacobite rising and the battle on Culloden Moor; their detailed narrative offers a fresh interpretation of events and personalities based on new scholarship. Gone are the accepted descriptions of Prince Charles Edward Stuart, Lord George Murray, Colonel John Sullivan and others going back to John Prebble’s seminal work in the 1960s and 70s.<sup>1</sup> In particular, Pittock quashes the notion that the Jacobite Army comprised solely Gaelic-speaking, semi-savage Highlanders, equipped only with basket-hilt broadswords and targes, and commanded by their coercive clan chiefs. Instead, he unveils a rather modern force drilled and directed in the French fashion, armed with French and Spanish muskets. The rank and file included, yes, Highland clan soldiers, but also Lowland Scots, men from the French army’s Irish Brigade, and even volunteers from the English Midlands (37-49).

Pittock’s minute-by-minute account of the battle is the fullest and most granular to date, devoting forty pages to an engagement that lasted less than an hour. We learn, for instance, the exact numbers of troops on both sides by regiment and detachment and their formations and tactics on the battlefield, based on the evidence of contemporary maps and sketches as well as relevant archeological

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1. Viz., *Culloden* (NY: Atheneum, 1962), *Glencoe: The Story of the Massacre* (NY: Holt, Rinehart, 1966), *The Highland Clearances* (1963; rpt. Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1969), *Mutiny: The Highland Regiments in Revolt, 1743-1804* (1975; rpt. NY: Penguin, 1977).

finds. The author even discusses the numbers and types of weapons the Duke of Cumberland's government troops seized as they systematically bayoneted and cut down Jacobite wounded and prisoners in the bloody aftermath of the battle:

Kingston's [regiment] and what remained of the piquet of Cobham's [regiment] from the British right—about 125 cavalry—were deemed sufficient to pursue the fleeing left on the road to Inverness. This they did ... with expedition, cutting down a Mackintosh stand at the "White Bog" near their "ancestral burial-ground" and killing women and children who got in their way till the last Jacobite on the road was killed a mile from Inverness. As Elcho puts it, "Everybody that fell into their hands got no quarters." (96–97)

The second half of the book describes the violent "pacification" of the Scottish Highlands after Culloden and outlines the treatment of the rising, the battle, and Jacobitism as a whole in histories of the period. One interesting section concerns the evolution of the battlefield as a place of commemoration and a tourist destination.

Pittock's findings clarify the motives behind the rebellion of 1745 and, in general, corroborate longstanding opinions about the brutality of "Butcher" Cumberland's army after Culloden and the harrying of the glens that followed. In modern terms, these actions constituted war crimes and even genocide (99–101). Pittock ties them to the cooption and bastardization of Highland culture by Georgian elites bent on unifying a greater Britain during its wars with France and later by Victorians who developed their own myths and traditions regarding Scotland. In short, the author frames both rising and battle as crucial to the making of modern Britain. In this sense, he does not much diverge from the assessments of other historians.<sup>2</sup>

Trevor Royle's study of Culloden differs sharply from Pittock's. He dispenses with the 1745 rising and indeed the battle itself in less than a third of his narrative. The rest of his book concerns the subsequent War of the Austrian Succession and Seven Years War. In so apportioning, Royle casts Culloden as just one of several significant battles in France and Britain's ongoing war for global supremacy.<sup>3</sup> He also carefully tracks the careers of British officers like James Wolfe, whom the Duke of Cumberland gave commands during the suppression of the 1745 rebellion; these men went on to achieve great success and lasting fame. Royle maintains that Culloden and the campaign in the Scottish Highlands not only made some of these men's reputations, but were also pivotal moments in the making of the British Empire:

the main characteristic that unites the officers in the Cumberland Ring is that, like all good soldiers, they learned from their experiences in the Jacobite campaign, profited from them and put them to good use in the Seven Years War, especially in the fighting in North America and India which gained Britain its first empire. Telling that story is the main purpose of this book. (xi)

Royle's twelve chapters offer a good, reliable history of the wars that ended in 1763 with the resounding British victories that led to the Treaty of Paris. Separate chapters covering the fighting in Europe, North America, and India feature first-rate accounts of the major battles at Plassey (23 June 1757), Minden (1 Aug. 1759), and Quebec (or Plains of Abraham, 13 Sept. 1759). One wonders, however, why Royle chose to entitle his book "Culloden." He certainly demonstrates that the Jacobite campaign was critical in the larger story of eighteenth-century Anglo-French conflict, but it is doubtful that the battle on the Plains of Abraham was at all influenced by the brief engagement on Culloden Moor.

Both of these books are solid additions to the scholarly literature on their subject and should be read by all serious students of military history. But for those seeking a fuller, more discerning account of the Jacobite Rebellion of 1745, Pittock's *Culloden* is the clear choice.

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2. E.g., Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation* (New Haven: Yale U Pr, 1992; 3rd ed. 2009), and Trevor Royle.

3. So, too, Ciro Paoletti, "The Battle of Culloden: A Pivotal Moment in World History," *Journal of Military History* 81 (2017) 187–98.