

*Culloden: Great Battles*. By Murray Pittock. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2016. xxi + 192 p.  
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On 16 April 1746 the Jacobite army under Charles Edward Stuart was defeated at Culloden Moor. At a stroke this put an end to their rebellion and to Jacobitism as a serious force, and began the military oppression of the Highlands. Although the battle was small by the standards of the age, as Murray Pittock notes in his new book, the political and strategic ramifications were wide and long-lasting. In Whig historiography Culloden marked the laudable defeat of a movement that was anachronistic, absolutist and divisive, and therefore in the way of British progress, democracy and unity. Pittock is at pains to contest these traditional binaries and suggests that they linger in British historiography to this day: he suggests that 'no battle out of living memory is remembered so powerfully and so falsely' (p.158). The latter sections of the book consider Culloden's place in historiography and popular memory. Pittock offers a compelling overview of the battle's changing fortunes over the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The battle site, in particular, is an interesting case study in the history of heritage: it was until recently the site of telegraph wires, a teashop and a bungalow, and efforts by National Trust Scotland to restore the site to its original condition have been incomplete, therefore affecting our interpretation of the battle itself.

In order to correct these misconceptions, Pittock pursues various lines of enquiry. He offers a detailed account of the campaign and muses about the many 'what ifs' posed by the Forty-Five. He agrees with the consensus that Charles Edward was wrong to turn back at Derby, but suggests that his army could have been intercepted as soon as Northampton, and further doubts that they would have been able to hold London for long. Pittock also offers a thorough reassessment of the military capabilities of the Jacobites, drawing on battlefield archaeology and accounts of the army's matériel. This section (some of which was presented at the BSECS President's Lecture in 2015) is the most significant contribution of the book. Pittock argues that – contrary to myth – the Jacobites primarily fought with muskets rather than swords, and that their tactics and methods were much more modern than they are usually given

credit for. Whether they were 'probably better shots' (p.89) is doubtful, though, given that musketry is by its nature inaccurate. Pittock's retelling of the battle and its aftermath are pointedly factual, and he lets their horrors speak for themselves.

Pittock describes his approach as 'evidence-led' (p.118), but historical writing is rarely objective, and Culloden is no exception. The historical rediscovery of the Jacobites over the last forty years has been bound up with a reassertion of Toryism, monarchy and religion, and the battle itself has provided an obvious focus for Scottish nationalism. Pittock's own politics are clear from the foreword, where he justifies his use of terminology. He rejects the label 'Highland army', since throughout the book he emphasises that this was a unified Scottish effort (he takes a dim view of the English contribution) that was suffused with national symbolism. Their adversaries were not a 'Hanoverian army' but a 'British army'. Instead of the pejorative 'Pretender' or neutral 'James Stuart', he uses 'James VIII and III', which implies the legitimacy of his claim (p.xiii). Historical writing that wears its heart on its sleeve is all the more interesting for it, however, and Culloden is certainly timely. Following the referendums of 2014 and 2016, the days of the British state may be numbered. If Culloden's history has largely been written by its victors, it may well be rewritten in years to come.