

Will ye no come back again?

LSE, which is slowly extending its sites in central London, would not have to expand much further in order to incorporate the place where, 250 years ago, the epilogue was staged to the last great armed rebellion in mainland Britain. It would be an unlikely juxtaposition between an institution founded to promote the rational improvement of humanity on scientific principles, and a memory of religion, revolution, and romanticism, for the rebellion was that of Bonnie Prince Charlie. A few yards further in LSE's extension of territory, and we could expect a re-styling of the School's cafés and refectories: the Claymore Bar, the Three Neeps, and the Bannock Burger.

The road to LSE is a strange one. In 1745 Prince Charles Edward Stuart, the 'young pretender' to the throne, had raised an armed revolt in Scotland and, marching south, reached as far as Derby before his highland army began to melt away. The following year his army was bloodily defeated at Culloden Moor near Inverness. It was the last battle fought on British soil, and has generally been seen as putting an end to the Jacobite challenge. The young pretender's escape, much celebrated in song and on shortbread biscuit tins in Edinburgh gift shops, took him over the sea to Skye, and back, before he finally eluded the pursuing recalcitrant soldiers



St Mary-le-Strand

and landed in the safety of continental, and Catholic, Europe. 'Charlie will come again' may have expressed a rebel hope in song, but it was no longer a practical political expectation.

But Prince Charles Edward Stuart did come back again, and to within a few hundred yards of where LSE now stands. In 1750, four years after his escape, he visited London incognito. Just round the corner from what is now Houghton Street, he received communion in the Anglican Church at St Mary-le-Strand. It was both a last bid for the British throne, and a final surrender. One of the barriers to the Stuart monarchy had always been its Roman Catholicism. The British wanted a Protestant monarch, and in 1701 passed the Act of Settlement, still in force today, to ensure that they got one. In taking the Anglican communion Bonnie Prince Charlie was removing one of the objections to a Stuart monarchy, but also making a major surrender of principle. Reconciliation with the Church of England was the ideological, or more

precisely theological, conclusion to Culloden. It was both a religious and a political move, in an age when religion was of profound political significance.

It is a neat accident of history that one of its less-known conversions should take place on the doorstep of one of its great universities. One of the main purposes of universities is to make people look again, or for the first time, at their assumptions about what the world is like, what it should be like, and why they believe what they believe. *Rerum cognoscere causas* is only a sensible motto if the *causas* you understand at the end are different, or better understood, than the ones you understood at the beginning. Radical changes to belief, and to lack of it, are what universities are all about. Without it, they are just seminaries.

Bonnie Prince Charlie's religious politics are no longer an anachronism. The end of the 20th century has seen the end of the certainties of what we used to think of as a modern rational age. The Jacobites of faith and community have eclipsed the Jacobins of rational revolution. Political divisions and loyalties now have a deep religious dimension, and it is impossible to understand the politics of identity without understanding the politics of faith. The battles for the control of economic resources, the struggle for territory, the assertion of and challenge to patriarchy, all are conducted in the language of religious belief. Politics and religion are once again enmeshed, and it is apt that on our very own doorstep we had one of the minor historical manoeuvres of the politics of religion, and the religion of politics, a remembrance from another time when religion had major political significance. The old Jacobite lament to the departed prince was 'Will ye no come back again?' In spirit, perhaps he already has. ■

Charles Edward Stuart
1729-1788

