



PROJECT MUSE®

The Impact of the Military Profession on Highland Gentry
Families, c. 1730 -- 1830

Stana Nenadic

The Scottish Historical Review, Volume 85, Number 1: No. 219, April
2006, pp. 75-99 (Article)

Published by Edinburgh University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/shr.2006.0023>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/199873>

STANA NENADIC

The Impact of the Military Profession on Highland Gentry Families, *c.* 1730 – 1830

Abstract

The expansion of the British military establishment from *c.* 1730 to 1830 is well known, as is the large numbers Scots and particularly highlanders who formed the British officer class. There is a common assumption—in some respects well founded—that the army had a beneficial impact on the political and economic experience of Scotland. This article offers an alternative interpretation through a focus on the social and cultural implications for highland gentry families of having so many male kin engaged in one particular career. The first two sections examine the scale and increasing attractions of military employment relative to other career destinations, notably farming, the legal profession and trade via urban business apprenticeship. Two generations with different motivations are compared, and the importance of the loss of practical farming and commercial expertise is noted. The next section explores the impact of military employment on relationships within families, particularly between officers and their father or elder brother, but also on relationships with female kin and on the broader processes of family formation through marriage. Of particular significance was the tendency towards teenage recruitment among the highland officer class, which removed boys from the influence of family and gave rise to reckless behaviour, extreme individualism and conspicuous consumption, posing major problems for gentry families and estates. The article concludes that although the military profession was a valuable short-term route for disposing of sons in a gentlemanly manner, the impact on their families and on the highlands could be highly disruptive. Yes, there was success and material benefits for a lucky few, but also tragedy, failure and family discord for many.

The expansion of the British military establishment over the course of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries is well known.¹ Colony building and defence of empire, frequent European warfare and major peacekeeping activities at home, transformed Britain into a significant ‘fiscal-military state’ with a large army and navy supported by a sophisticated tax system.² In the early decades of the eighteenth century the number of military officers and men in Britain fluctuated, according to

¹ For a recent survey see, S. D. M. Carpenter, ‘The British Army’ in H. Dickinson (ed.), *A Companion to Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford, 2002) 473–80.

² J. Brewer, *The Sinews of Power: War, Money and the English State, 1688–1783* (London, 1989).

STANA NENADIC is senior lecturer in Economic and Social History at the University of Edinburgh

war-status, between 12,000 and 25,000. The peacetime establishment was in the order of 18,000 in the 1750s—about 2,000 of these were officers—and the wartime establishment peaked at 68,000 in 1761 during the Seven Years War. Another peak of over 90,000 was achieved in 1777 at the height of the American War. The Napoleonic Wars pushed the numbers to over a quarter of a million in the early nineteenth century—a mobilisation of men that was not matched again until the First World War.³

For most of the eighteenth century the British officer class was disproportionately drawn from the Scottish gentry.⁴ Many Scotsmen were the military heroes of the day and Scottish variants on military manliness and Scottish military style were uniquely influential.⁵ It is estimated that between a quarter and a third of all officers in the British army of the second half of the eighteenth century were Scots, and a high percentage of these were the sons of the highland gentry.⁶ A similar proportion was Irish.⁷ The large numbers of Scots and Irish officers reflected the large numbers of Scots and Irish regiments,⁸ though men from these countries were also numerous in English regiments.⁹ From the end of the century men of prominent birth, including peers and their sons, were to enter the army in growing numbers,¹⁰ as did the sons of the urban middle class;¹¹ and many men of all backgrounds served part-time as militia and volunteers in their own locality.¹² On the whole, however, military officers in the regular army were drawn from the gentry and disproportionately from the highland gentry.

The numbers of military officers relative to other elements of the gentry or the pseudo-gentry professions (law and church) is hard to determine with certainty. The 1759, taxation-based estimates of Joseph Massie suggest that at the time of the Seven Years War there were 8,000 army and navy officers in Britain (only a quarter of these in the army) and military officers comprised 16% of a broadly defined British elite.¹³ A more sophisticated assessment by Patrick Colquhoun in 1815, based

³ C. Cook and J. Stevenson (eds) *The Longman Handbook of Modern British History, 1714-1980* (London, 1983), 220.

⁴ J.E. Cookson, *The British Armed Nation, 1793-1815* (Oxford, 1997) ch. 5, 6.

⁵ See, P. Womack, *Improvement and Romance: Constructing the Myth of the Highlands* (London, 1989) ch. 3.

⁶ See J. E. Cookson, *The British Armed Nation, 1793-1815* (Oxford, 1997) ch. 5.

⁷ *Ibid.* ch. 6.

⁸ A. K. Murray, *History of the Scottish Regiments in the British Army* (Glasgow, 1862).

⁹ P.E. Razzell, 'Social Origins of Officers in the Indian and British Home Army, 1758-1962', *British Journal of Sociology* 14 (1963) 248-60.

¹⁰ This was particularly true of certain high status regiments, where the number of peers as regular army officers doubled in the half century after 1800 compared with the half century before. L. Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (New Haven, London, 1992) 184.

¹¹ Razzell, 'Social Origins of Officers', 248-60.

¹² For a Scottish study see: M.M. Lodge, 'The Militia Issue: the Case of the Buccleuch Fencibles, 1778-1783', unpublished M.Litt. Thesis (University of Edinburgh, 1985).

¹³ P. Mathias, 'The Social Structure in the Eighteenth Century: a Calculation by Joseph Massie', *Economic History Review* 2nd ser. 10 (1957) 30-45.

on numbers taken from the Census and Income Tax along with the published Army and Navy Lists,¹⁴ gauged that at the end of the Napoleonic Wars, there were 21,000 regular military officers on full pay in Britain and 8380 full-pay naval officers, plus a further 6,500 half-pay and pensioned officers. By these calculations, the military profession comprised about 35% of Britain's elite.¹⁵ If a third of officers were Scottish, and the Scottish gentry and pseudo-gentry professionals were about one fifth of those of Britain as a whole, one can estimate that Scottish officers comprised at least 40% of all Scottish gentlemen in 1815 and in the region of 50% of highland gentlemen. The 'half-pay' system and the tendency for military men to adopt their military titles and behaviour as life-long indicators of status, further suggests that despite the post-1815 decline in numbers in active service, army officers remained significant.¹⁶

Much has been written on the impact of the British military establishment on the politics and identity of Scotland. The development of 'Britishness', the rise of empire and the 'myths of the highlands' have all been tied to the growth in military participation among Scots.¹⁷ The impact of the army on the economics and politics of highland estates in Scotland has also been explored.¹⁸ Less has been said, however, on the impact of military life on the life and experience of those who were the ordinary officers¹⁹—and almost nothing has been written to date on the social and cultural effect on Scottish and particularly highland gentry families of having so many male kin engaged in one particular career. This article seeks to do the latter through an exploration of the ways in which involvement in the military profession evolved and shaped family relationships, family formation and family finances. The first two sections examine the scale and increasing attractions of military employment relative to the other career destinations adopted by the sons of the highland gentry, notably farming and trade. Two generations are compared—those that came to adulthood in the 1730s and 1740s and the sons and nephews of these men who come to adulthood in the 1760s and 1770's.²⁰ At a time when the highland counties were being drawn into the painful process of social and economic modernisation, these two generations of soldiers were strikingly different in their characters and

¹⁴ P. Colquhoun, *Treaties on the Wealth, Power and Resources of the British Empire* (London, 1815).

¹⁵ This is a broad estimate that excludes the female element of the 'gentlemen and ladies living on incomes'.

¹⁶ Scottish fiction provides good illustrations. See. S. Ferrier, *Marriage* (Edinburgh, 1818) and S. Ferrier, *The Inheritance* (Edinburgh, 1824).

¹⁷ Colley, *Britons*; M. Pittock, *Inventing and Resisting Britain* (London, 2001).

¹⁸ A. Mackillop, *More Fruitful than the Soil: Army, Empire and the Scottish Highlands, 1715-1815* (East Linton, 2000); A. Macinnes, *Clanship, Commerce and the House of Stuart, 1603-1788* (East Linton, 1996).

¹⁹ Though the hagiography of nineteenth-century military heroes is remarkable.

²⁰ Most of the individual and family illustrations that are used here are drawn from the extensive kin connections of one particular Highland family over several generations. See, S. Nenadic, 'Experience and Expectations in the Transformation of the Highland Gentlewoman c. 1680-1830', *SHR* 80 (2001) 201-20, for details on the Campbells of Barcaldine.

careers. They indicate significant alternative explanations for the motivation for, and impact of, enlistment to those offered by Colley or Cookson in their accounts of the making of 'Britishness' and the rise of 'defence patriotism'.²¹

The section that follows considers the impact of military employment on relationships within families, particularly between officers and their father or elder brother, but also on relationships with female kin and the broader processes of family formation. Of importance here was the reckless and nomadic lifestyles that officers adopted, especially the growing numbers who entered the army in their early teens, and the tendency towards conspicuous consumption and the adoption of an anglicised status agenda, which placed major burdens on families and estates. The article concludes that although the military profession was a valuable short-term route for disposing of sons in a gentlemanly manner—an opportunity that boys and young men were eager to seize—and was clearly connected in certain specific ways to 'Britishness'—there was also a distinctly highland cultural agenda in play. The impact on highland gentry families was less positive than is commonly suggested, particularly when it is considered where the sons of such families had previously made their careers. Indeed, the evidence suggested here is of an ambiguous process, socially and culturally disruptive, that brought success and material benefits for a lucky few, but also tragedy, failure and family discord for many.

*

For their younger sons in particular, the gentry of Scotland's highland counties, as elsewhere, had always been obliged to seek employment and sources of income beyond that generated through the ownership or tenancy of land. Even elder sons and heirs commonly added to a landed income through paid employment.²² Diversification was the key to success for families and this meant that men of gentry background became merchants or professionals—particularly lawyers, medics, government office holders, occasionally clergymen and increasingly soldiers.²³ The great advantage of a military career over most of the other areas of employment was that it required no education or training. There were no compulsory officer training schools in Britain, though there were a number of private military academies in London by the later eighteenth century.²⁴ The only skill that was required of a potential

²¹ Colley, *Britons*. Cookson, *British Armed Nation*, p. 128, comments on the 'generalized social explanation for the success of military recruitment in Scotland' but also notes the lack of local studies.

²² A recent study of country-house building in England suggests that those who built new houses or made extensive additions to an existing house generally did so with sums of money acquired from non-estate sources. R. Wilson and A. Mackey, *Creating Paradise; the Building of the English Country House, 1660-1880* (London, 2000).

²³ The modest incomes of the Scottish clergy ensured that, in contrast to England, this was not a popular career for the sons of the gentry.

²⁴ The only officers to have a systematic training in the second half of the eighteenth century were those attached to the artillery, a relatively small group who attended the

officer was horsemanship—an accomplishment taught in childhood to the sons of the gentry as a matter of routine and increasingly available in towns through urban riding academies. All other qualifications were of a social and cultural character: according to one contemporary, the qualities ‘valued in an officer were the qualities valued by the country gentry; courage, physical toughness, a determination to stand up for one’s rights, a touchy sense of honour.’²⁵ It is not surprising that professional commentators lamented the absence in Britain of formal military training on the European model—‘how much better would our Army be supplied with officers than it is at present. Men would be officers by their ability, not from distaste to other professions, or a want of proper qualifications for them.’²⁶ Of course, entry to a military career did require personal connections and cash to purchase a commission.²⁷ But unlike a business investment, the capital did not need careful monitoring once the investment was made: unless the holder was killed, the value of a commission remained intact.

In the early decades of the eighteenth century the opportunities offered by the military profession were relatively few, though the relationship between the Scottish and particularly the highland gentry and military service was of long standing. In the sixteenth century and through much of the seventeenth men who were raised in a martial culture at home often found lucrative careers as mercenary soldiers in the service of European kings and princes. A typical case was General Thomas Dalryell of the Binns estate near Edinburgh, a royalist career officer and ‘soldier of fortune’, who was in the paid service of the King of Poland and the Tsar of Russia for about ten years during the Cromwellian occupation of Scotland. At the time of his death in 1685, all four of his adult sons were in military service, two in Scotland and two abroad.²⁸ In European terms, this was not unusual. The city-states of Italy supported many extended gentry and noble families whose men routinely found employment as professional soldiers.²⁹ Though the men involved

²⁴ (Continued) Royal Military Academy at Woolwich, which provided a formal education from 1741. Cavalry officers mostly attended private riding schools and infantry officer learned their skills through drilling and on the battlefield. The Royal Military College, the first state-sponsored training school for infantry and cavalry officers was founded in 1799. Carpenter, ‘British Army’ p. 478.

²⁵ P. C. Bruce, *The Purchase System in the British Army, 1660-1871* (London, 1980).

²⁶ Samuel Bever, *The Cadet: a Military Treatise, by an Officer* (London, 1762), 114.

²⁷ Bruce, *Purchase System*. In the second half of the eighteenth century the cost of a first level commission as cornet or ensign ranged from £250-400, according to the prestige of the regiment. Jamie Campbell, one of the feckless younger sons of Duncan Campbell of Glenure, entered the Highland Regiment of Colonel Stirling in May 1774 at a cost of £400 cash. The position was organised by his maternal uncle, Major James MacPherson. Edinburgh, National Archives of Scotland [NAS], GD170/1354/27,29, Letters of Major James MacPherson to his brother-in-law Duncan Campbell of Barcaldine, 4 May, 26 May 1774.

²⁸ J. Dalryell and J. Beveridge, ‘Inventory of the Plenishing of the House of the Binns at the Date of the Death of General Thomas Dalryell, 21st August 1685’, *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* 5th Ser. 10 (1923-24) 344-370.

²⁹ G. Hanlon, ‘The Decline of a Provincial Military Aristocracy: Siena, 1560-1740’ *Past and Present* 155 (1997) 64-108.

were a restless group of perpetual bachelors, devoted to feats of physical prowess, much given to feuding and fighting among themselves, and difficult to control within families, symbolic importance was attached to this military life. Such men were trained from boyhood in fighting skills and horsemanship along with complex social skills such as dancing and conversation, in order to take advantage of the military patronage that took place at court. Success as a mercenary abroad was important for family prestige and also a source of wealth for a lucky few

The collapse of the early-modern mercenary labour market in the late seventeenth century left behind a significant employment vacuum. Among the Italian gentry there was a shift in career choice towards that other potentially lucrative 'bachelor profession', the Catholic Church, particularly when demand for clergymen rose with the Counter-Reformation. In Scotland, where there was no wealthy clerical hierarchy in either the Catholic or the Protestant church, few were attracted to this profession. A privileged minority—with money and brains—could find careers in the expanding legal profession, but for most of the highland gentry the main alternatives were farming or commerce.³⁰ However, as in Italy, a culture of militarism survived long after real employment had declined and it is not surprising that when military careers again became a reality with the expansion of the British army after 1750, highland gentlemen—including men with sophisticated commercial training—flocked to the profession.

This eagerness to shift towards army employments is well illustrated by the family of Campbell of Barcaldine, middling lairds from the Appin area of northern Argyll.³¹ Patrick Campbell (b. 1677) had eight sons who came to adulthood in the period from the 1720s to the 1740s. His plans for their future careers, which were extensively discussed within the kin network, were entirely consistent with gentry strategies for maximising the interest of the family as a whole. As was usual in such families, the opportunities made available to older boys were always better than those of the younger, with greater sums spent on education or training for those higher in the sibling hierarchy. The elder two, John and Colin, were destined to be practical landowners and were educated as 'gentlemen', partly with private tutors in Perth and Edinburgh and partly in the office of an Edinburgh lawyer, where they gained a smattering of the type of legal knowledge that was useful to modernising lairds. The third son, Duncan, with little likelihood of inheriting land (though in the event he did succeed to an estate) was trained to be a professional lawyer. His early education was similar to that of the elder brothers; for, as stressed in a contemporary career manual, a lawyer's 'education ought

³⁰ It is estimated that c. 90% of the Scottish legal profession had a landed background. J. Clive, 'The Social Background of the Scottish Renaissance' in N.T. Phillipson and R. Mitchison (eds), *Scotland in the Age of Improvement* (Edinburgh, 1970) 225-244.

³¹ The detailed history of this family is pieced together from the extensive personal documents and correspondence contained in NAS, GD170, Campbell of Barcaldine papers.

to be Liberal. This is not only necessary to qualify them for their profession; but to enlarge the mind and give it a bias above little pettifogging practice.'³² He served a formal apprenticeship over many years, partly in Glasgow and partly in Edinburgh, and practised his profession throughout his long life. In common with many Scottish lawyers, through a combination of a good income from his practice and business acumen, he was able to accumulate a significant landholding of his own and was by far the most successful of Patrick Campbell's sons.³³ The fourth son Allan was educated in a similar way to the elder two, but not with the intention of land ownership, but rather to be a substantial tenant on his family estate, a tacksman, and also a 'man of business' for the head of the family. The acquisition of practical farming knowledge was part of his training. Alexander, the fifth son, was intended by his father to be a clergyman, but he objected so loudly to this as a boy that his father relented. In the absence of other avenues and mindful of cost, Alexander, along with the next two sons, Archibald and Robert, were each provided with merchant apprenticeships—two in Glasgow and one in Stirling. Finally, the youngest son, Donald, was apprenticed to a tradesman, an Edinburgh 'cherurgeon', for three-years of training in the practical skills of the surgeon.

None of Patrick Campbell's sons was destined for a military career, but with military opportunities about to rise, it is not surprising that in adulthood five of these men turned their ambitions to such employment. The first to do so was the youngest, Donald, who qualified as a surgeon in 1734 and set his sights on the navy—the largest element of the military establishment at that time—which was, according to one contemporary commentator, the best way of making a good income and possibly even a fortune through the trade. The manner of this is worth quoting in full—for the basic principles also applied to office holding in the army.

The salary of a surgeon of the Navy is but inconsiderable, that is the pay he immediately receives from the Crown is but small; but his perquisites depend upon the largeness of the ship. He has forty shillings for every clap or pox of which he cures.... he has a chest of medicines at the government expense.... and is allowed for slops... all of which put together make a surgeon's place in a sixty-gun ship to be worth near two hundred pounds per annum in time of peace, besides his share of prizes in time of war, in the division of which he is ranked as Lieutenant.³⁴

Sadly, in common with many military men, Donald's career was short: he died at sea in 1738, a victim of fever, aged twenty-five, unmarried and poor.

³² R. Campbell, *The London Tradesman, being a Compendious View of all the Trades, Professions, Arts, both Liberal and Mechanic, now Practiced in the Cities of London and Westminster* (London, 1747) 71.

³³ The high earning potential of the legal profession is explored in G. Holmes, *Augustan England: Professions, State and Society, 1680-1730* (London, 1982).

³⁴ Campbell, *London Tradesman*, 56-7.

By the early 1740s, with war in progress in Europe, four of the sons of Campbell of Barcaldine, now in their twenties or early thirties, were either in, or about to join, the army, mostly to serve with the Earl of Loudon's regiment. Colin, the second son, enjoyed the privileges of land inheritance and was a practical farmer, but he also craved the excitement and prizes that the army offered. He served on-and-off for nearly ten years and rose to the rank of captain, but suffered injury and resigned his commission in order to marry and develop his estate. Allan, the fourth son, also abandoned farming for the military option. He remained in the army for decades, serving as lieutenant in North America, the Caribbean and Ireland and was stationed for many years at Chatham Barracks.³⁵ Alexander—whom his father had wanted to be a clergyman—had soon given up on his business career and, like Allan, spent several years as a tenant farmer on his brother's estate before joining the army and also rising to lieutenant. He was seriously injured in 1748 and after two years on half pay he returned to farming in Argyll, but died in 1751, having never fully recovered. Archibald stuck with commercial pursuits in Glasgow for a period, but was bored and longed for something more exciting. As he wrote to brother Duncan,

I can only give my mind to forming encampments, sieges and battles, my mind is so entirely hurried in castle building that now I'm a Captain then a Colonel sometimes a General but in a few minutes coming to myself after I have moved in those high stations I find the General reduced to a fifth brother that has neither credit nor money to purchase an Ensign's staff.³⁶

The money was found, however, and he entered the army soon after, only to die abroad of fever in 1754.

It is striking to note that three of the four younger sons of Patrick Campbell died prematurely, unmarried, undistinguished and poor as a result of their military service—and the brothers who remained outside the army lived longer, were married and produced thriving families. In the wake of the Jacobite rebellion, loyal government service, in both the army and as Crown Factors (offices held by the two elder brothers) will have helped the political fortunes of this family, who, though mostly Whig, had close marriage connections with several local Jacobite families.³⁷ However, none of the brothers generated wealth or achieved high office from their time in the army, which was the primary personal and family motive for adopting such a career. Yet some men of similar background who entered the army as adults in the mid-eighteenth century were successful in exploiting the opportunities that it represented, not

³⁵ Allan's career can be pieced together from letters to brother Duncan. NAS, GD170/1067.

³⁶ NAS, GD170/1074, Archibald Campbell to Duncan Campbell (his brother) n.d./ c. 1751.

³⁷ See V. Wills (ed.) *Reports on the Annexed Estates, 1755-1769*, 2 vols, (Edinburgh, 1973) for details of the lengthy administrative career of John Campbell of Barcaldine. John's 'natural' son Mungo was also a Crown Factor, as was Colin Campbell of Glenure (victim of the Appin murder), the second brother.

through war-prizes or spectacular promotions, but through business. They were, in effect, soldier-entrepreneurs. A typical case was Major James Macpherson (b.1725), the eldest son of a Glenorchy laird and cattle drover and brother-in-law to Duncan Campbell the lawyer, third son of Patrick Campbell of Barcaldine.³⁸ Coming from a sophisticated commercial background, it is not surprising that James was apprenticed to a Glasgow merchant in his teens with the intention of following a trading career. He was in business for several years with modest success, but in 1761, at a high point of military recruitment for the Seven Years War, James Macpherson, a bachelor aged thirty-six, travelled to London to seek an army commission at his own expense. By exploiting family patronage as well as his Glasgow-business connections, he gained a place in the 42nd Regiment of the Royal Highlanders and spent the next two years in full-time service in England and Ireland, rising to captain.

James Macpherson returned to Glasgow, the regimental headquarters, at the end of the war and the rest of his unheroic, but financially lucrative career, was spent in Scotland. He was a captain of Edinburgh castle in 1775 and major in charge of Dumbarton castle by 1778. Throughout these years he was heavily involved in recruiting for his regiment and in hunting out commissions for his younger relatives. He was also engaged in the business of military supply, which generated a personal profit sufficient to allow him to marry and purchase a small estate while still a serving officer. When he left the army in October 1778 he had a comfortable income from his property and £500 from the regiment on leaving—‘a little more than the price of my commission’³⁹—that he invested in a high-yielding life-insurance policy. But he continued to maintain a series of business interests linked to the army—building on both his family connections and his early commercial career in Glasgow. The most important was a venture to supply uniforms to highland regiments, which he ran in partnership with a textile manufacturer. When he died ten years later he left his wife and children with a comfortable fortune.⁴⁰

*

James Macpherson was of a generation where an urban commercial career was socially acceptable for a gentleman of his background—and commonly sought by highland gentry families, to their considerable advantage⁴¹—and a military career was usually entered later in life with little cost to his family. Men of this type, combining entrepreneurial flair

³⁸ NAS, GD170/1354/1-72, Letters from Major James Macpherson to his brother-in-law Duncan Campbell of Glenure.

³⁹ NAS, GD170/1354/51, Major James Macpherson to Duncan Campbell of Glenure (his brother-in-law), 12 Nov. 1778.

⁴⁰ The final letter in the series was sent from ‘Lochfinehead’ in September 1789. ‘I came here about a fortnight ago for the benefit of my health...’. NAS, GD170/1354/70, 30 Sept. 1789.

⁴¹ Explored in Macinnes, *Clanship, Commerce*. See also, W. Mackay (ed.) *Letter Book of Bailie John Stewart of Inverness* (Edinburgh, 1915) for the trade and family connections of such a businessman.

with military opportunism, benefited most from the army, for they could expect to generate a handsome profit even when they were not at war. James Macpherson was also of a generation where relatively few men entered the military profession. As the century progressed, however, two developments arising out of the closer integration of Scotland into the social and cultural values of England, trapped the gentry in Scotland, and particularly the highland gentry, into sending their sons at an increasingly young age and in growing numbers into military employments. The first was the changing perception of business as a respectable avenue in life, consistent with gentry status.⁴² Second, and connected to the first, there was the growing trend for Scottish gentry families, including those from fairly modest backgrounds, to educate their sons at English boarding schools to give them valuable network connections and anglicised gentlemanly credentials.⁴³ Education of this type was expensive, as were the other still-gentlemanly careers, such as the law. For families faced with a narrowing set of expensive options for their sons, the army was an attractive alternative, providing a quasi-education and employment from an early age at relatively small initial cost and also providing opportunities for social networking within an anglicised context. Youths, often as young as twelve, were sent into regular regimental life with little or no preliminary training. Commissions purchased for teenage entry (as a coronet or ensign) were cheap and certainly much cheaper than several years at school followed by university or a legal training. An officer earned an income and could rise through the ranks if lucky in war, or if his family paid for promotion. The son in question was out-of-the-way and fully occupied under male supervision—a boon to widowed mothers in particular.⁴⁴ Illegitimate sons for whom a father maintained a responsibility, which was common in Scotland, were easily sent off to seek their fortunes elsewhere.⁴⁵ Useless and delinquent sons were similarly dispatched.⁴⁶

⁴² It is hard to pinpoint when and why this happened, but it may be linked to the shift in commercial activity from the trade in landed and colonial produce to the trade in urban manufactures.

⁴³ L. Colley, *Britons* cites the importance of certain English elite boarding schools in generating a sense of Britishness; and Boswell remarks on the 'over education' of 'wandering' younger sons of the Highland gentry.

⁴⁴ See the recollections and letters of Anne McVicar Grant, a literary Highland widow, for a poignant account of the early death of her son in the army. A. Grant, *Memoire and Correspondence of Mrs Anne Grant of Laggan* (London, 1845).

⁴⁵ Illegitimate children had variable fortunes, and were often bitter at their experience—though this was also common among younger sons in large families. See footnote 37.

⁴⁶ As in all things military, Jane Austen provides an example in her novel *Persuasion*, first published in 1818, in the form of 'thick-headed, unfeeling, unprofitable Dick Musgrove.' As she explains, 'the Musgroves had had the ill fortune of a very troublesome, hopeless son; and the good fortune to lose him before he reached his twentieth year; that he had been sent to sea, because he was stupid and unmanageable on shore....He had been several years at sea, and had ...been six months on board Captain Frederick Wentworth's frigate....he had, under the influence of his captain, written the only two letters which his father and mother had ever received from him during the whole of his absence; that is to say, the only two disinterested letters; all the rest had been mere applications for money.' J. Austen, *Persuasion* (London, 1965) 76-7.

For a younger son of the mid-eighteenth century, and for the family into which he was born, the army quickly became a highly attractive form of employment—and those who still found themselves involved in farming or commerce, yearned for the military option. This is well illustrated by the experience of Patrick Campbell, the third son of the lawyer-laird Duncan Campbell of Glenure.⁴⁷ In 1763, at the end of the Seven Years War and having spent some months in training at a private military academy near London, Patrick was a compulsory 'reduced' half-pay lieutenant in his mid-teens, with an annual government income of about £45.⁴⁸ His uncle, the businessman Robert, who was based in London at the time of Patrick's 'reduction', suggested that the boy might be found a commission in a regular regiment, which was probably what he wanted for himself—but his father thought otherwise; a regular commission was expensive. Patrick was called back to the highlands and after much pulling of patronage strings, Duncan got him the tenancy of a forfeited farm in 1767, from where he subsequently operated a cattle-droving partnership. Patrick's ambition, however, was always to return to the army, which he managed to achieve in 1775, when, for the cost of a quota of recruits, made possible by a highland levee, he entered Colonel Simon Fraser's 71st Highland Regiment at the rank of captain, aged about thirty. In his opinion, being a field officer was a route in life that was 'far more respectable and I am sure profitable...than being a Morvern drover or tenant.'⁴⁹

As a motive for being in the army, 'respectability'—with all the contemporary connotations of public regard and status—was new to this second military generation of the highland gentry. The generation before was motivated by profit for self and family, coupled with adventure. As Captain Patrick Campbell fully appreciated from his youthful experience at a military academy, to be an officer in the British army was to be a gentleman, in receipt of a gentleman's income. Even during peacetime, many officers were granted half-pay status to keep them in readiness for future war and half-pay at the level of Captain was just enough to maintain the decencies of gentlemanly life for a single man. Of course, the average income of a military officer from military duties alone—estimated by Massie in 1759 as £100 per annum and by Colquhoun in 1815 as £200⁵⁰—was not enough to place him on a level with those who derived their incomes from land (assuming rents were paid), law or even modestly successful commerce. It was, nevertheless, a socially acceptable income, associated with a cosmopolitan, leisured and

⁴⁷ NAS, GD170/1176/1-15, Letters of Major Patrick (Peter) Campbell to his father Duncan Campbell of Glenure. NAS, GD170/391, Accounts and Papers of Major Patrick Campbell with his father Duncan Campbell of Glenure.

⁴⁸ Patrick's early experience in London is mentioned in letters sent from there by his Uncle Robert, the businessman. NAS, GD170/1186/1-102.

⁴⁹ NAS, GD170/1176/12/2, Major Patrick Campbell to Duncan Campbell of Glenure (his father), 2 Mar. 1778. This details the sale of his farming interests in Scotland to purchase a majority at the cost of £3,000.

⁵⁰ Colquhoun, *Treaties*, Mathias, 'Social Structure'.

high-status lifestyle.⁵¹ Moreover, although membership of the military establishment did not necessarily provide an income for life, it did give a status for life; for even in retirement, officers were known by their military titles.⁵² In an age when status hierarchies were challenged and transformed by new occupations and new types of wealth, an officer in His Majesty's Army or Navy had an easily recognised and valued position in the newly emerging Britain-wide status system. To quote a sophisticated commentator on gentry affairs in the early nineteenth century—'the profession, either navy or army, is its own justificant. It has every thing in its favour; heroism, danger, bustle, fashion. Soldiers and sailors are always acceptable in society. No body can wonder that men are soldiers and sailors.'⁵³ Soldiers and sailors could, if lucky, advance their status through military service. This was probably the greatest attraction of the military career, though some elements of elite society viewed with disdain a profession that was 'a means of bringing persons of obscure birth into undue distinction, and raising men to honours which their fathers and grandfathers never dreamt of.'⁵⁴

From the middle decades of the eighteenth century, highland gentry boys grew up with military aspirations. In some families almost every son became a soldier and those who were deliberately kept out of the military line—normally the eldest—yearned for the army life. James Boswell, diarist and biographer, was such a boy.⁵⁵ As the eldest son of an Ayrshire lawyer-laird with a family tradition in the legal profession, James (b.1740) was destined like his father to be a lawyer, an expensive profession to enter, and mundane to pursue, but one which normally generated an income suitable for marriage and generally safe as far as health was concerned. His brother David was apprenticed to an Edinburgh banker, though he ended his days as a poor clerk in London. The youngest, John, was sent into the army in his teens. James, who had no taste for study and hated the rough provincialism of Scotland, longed to enter the prestigious 'guards' in London and to lead the life of glamour and adventure that an English commission seemed to offer. This was denied by a careful father, anxious to protect his finances and ensure the continuity of the family. And with good cause, for neither David or John could afford to marry and John degenerated into mental illness.

Patrick Campbell—the young man who in 1775 felt it was more 'respectable' to be an officer than a tenant and drover—was a close contemporary of James Boswell; all of Patrick's brothers, except the eldest

⁵¹ Colquhoun's estimate of income in 1815 puts the military officer at the bottom of the gentry/pseudo-gentry hierarchy.

⁵² See the numerous examples give by E. Grant, *Memoirs of a Highland Lady*, 2 vols, ed. A. Tod (Edinburgh, 1997), particularly in recounting the titles of the mostly elderly ex-military relatives who were the tenants on her father's estate.

⁵³ J. Austen, *Mansfield Park* (London, 1966), 136, first published in 1814.

⁵⁴ The words are from Sir Walter Elliot, the status-conscious and foolish baronet in J. Austen, *Persuasion*. (London, 1965), 49, first published in 1818. See also, J. D. Grey, 'Military (Army and Navy)' in J.D. Grey, (ed.) *The Jane Austen Handbook* (London, 1986) 307-13.

⁵⁵ See, P. Martin, *A Life of James Boswell* (Yale, 1999).

who, like Boswell, followed his father into the legal profession, became soldiers in their teens. When Patrick eventually re-entered the army as a captain, he was sent to America, where he rose to the rank of major, having sold his farming interest to purchase a majority. In America he met and married a Quaker heiress with a family background in trade. His health was compromised by service, however, and he left the army to in New York, where he died in 1782, a wealthy man in his late thirties with a wife and son who remained abroad.⁵⁶ Over the course of his military career, he not only made himself a fortune—using his profession to achieve prosperity through marriage—he travelled widely, he was sophisticated in the ways of the world and familiar with metropolitan life. This was in striking contrast to his father and elder brother, both provincial lawyers, who never travelled beyond Britain and only rarely went further than Edinburgh. The army more than any other employment with which the highland gentry was associated was characterised by a propensity for travel and high levels of social mixing among the national elite. Even men who had been in the army but then returned to Scotland continued to travel at home and overseas—a habit once formed was hard to break.⁵⁷ Many who left the army and retired to private life never returned to their homes, but, like Patrick Campbell, remained abroad or chose to settle in London or in one of the English leisure towns. The military profession was also the first professional group in Britain to have a social club in London exclusive to their membership, and it is not surprising that a Scotsman of gentry background was largely instrumental in its founding.⁵⁸

The elite sociability with which officers were characterised and which made the profession so attractive to many, was partly a consequence of living in circumstances where there was little active soldiering to be done and much time available for hospitality and conviviality. Indeed, hospitality in the English gentlemanly manner was an increasingly important part of the social expectations of an officer, and commonly resulted in an expenditure that many could ill afford. Social mixing was also necessary for securing patronage and promotion—the more so during peace than in war, because peace brought reduction in employment opportunities. Officers had to play the patronage game to get on in life, which partly depended on family connections, but increasingly relied on face-to-face sociability within the right circles and the personal credentials of the individual seeking advance. This is revealed by the life and experience of Colin Campbell, another military son of Duncan

⁵⁶ NAS, GD170/1176/1-15, Letters of Major Patrick (Peter) Campbell to his father Duncan Campbell of Glenure. NAS, GD170/391, Accounts and Papers of Major Patrick Campbell with his father Duncan Campbell of Glenure.

⁵⁷ A classic case, whose life is well documented, is that of General Thomas Graham of Balgowan (Lord Lynedoch), a Perthshire laird and hero of the Peninsular wars, who travelled the length of Europe in retirement in his sixties and seventies, often visiting the sites of great battles, such as Borodino in 1819, which had quickly become a tourist attraction. See A. Brett-James, *General Graham, Lord Lynedoch* (London, 1959) ch. 26.

⁵⁸ Brett-James, *General Graham* 308-11.

Campbell the lawyer-laird, who based his attempts to secure military advance through his private social life and sophisticated networking in London.⁵⁹

Colin Campbell, like all of his brothers except the eldest, was a career officer from his teens.⁶⁰ His entry into regimental life in the early 1760s was organised by his maternal uncle Major James Macpherson (the soldier-entrepreneur whose history is sketched above) and he served for most of his career with the 42nd Royal Highland Regiment, rising from ensign to lieutenant and finally to captain and stationed, variously, in Scotland, India, England and Ireland. During his years in India from 1781 to 1783, at the time of the Second Mysore War, he suffered serious injury followed by chronic fever. Having arrived back home he spent two years on sick leave, attempting to recover in Bath and London, with occasional visits to his family in the north. Yet, despite poor health, he enjoyed a vigorous social life, networked furiously, engaged in various status-enhancing strategies and was one of the early members of the highly prestigious, London-based Highland Society.⁶¹ It is not surprising that at about this time, Colin Campbell, who was a second son, began to lobby his elder brother to grant him the title and tenancy of Glenure, a secondary estate connected with the Campbells of Barcaldine. And having achieved the tenancy, he was able to call himself Captain Colin Campbell of Glenure, and in effect have two status titles—one linked to his military profession and one linked to his gentry family background. On returning to military service, which meant a return to garrison duties in Scotland and then Ireland, this ambitious man turned his attention to another device for getting on the world—marriage. Like his younger brother in America, Colin Campbell married an heiress and when he died of fever in 1797—the legacy of his India days—he was the proprietor of an Irish estate near Cork.⁶²

Patrick and Colin Campbell both died young as a consequence of their military service. This was typical of military men. Atypically, both were successful in their personal lives, for they used the status and gentlemanly credentials that the army bestowed to achieve wealth through socially ambitious marriages. Most young men who entered the army hoped for fortune. Most, however, did not achieve it, as another brother in the same generation of the family clearly reveals. Alexander Campbell—Sandie—was the first of five siblings to enter the army. In 1763, at

⁵⁹ The importance of family and patronage connections, even among the great military heroes of the day, is nicely articulated in a recent and not altogether complementary biography of Nelson. T. Coleman, *Nelson: the Man and the Legend* (London, 2001).

⁶⁰ NAS, GD170/1628/1-50, Letters from Captain Colin Campbell of Glenure to his brother Alexander Campbell of Barcaldine. NAS, GD170/1090/1-43, Letters from Captain Colin Campbell of Glenure to his father Duncan Campbell of Glenure.

⁶¹ J. Sinclair *An Account of the Highland Society of London from its Establishment in May 1778 to 1813, Drawn up at the Desire of the Society with an Appendix Containing a List of Members, Rules etc* (London, 1813).

⁶² NAS, GD170/1628/50, Captain Colin Campbell of Glenure to Alexander Campbell of Barcaldine (his brother), 16 Apr. 1797.

the end of the Seven Years War and in his early twenties, he was living in London, a half-pay lieutenant, recently married and, like his brothers, looking for 'gentlemanly' employment.⁶³ He had hopes that his father would get him the tenancy of a forfeited farm in the highlands, but since he since he knew nothing of farming—which was typical of teenage recruits—his father declined to act. He tried his hand at business, but soon went bankrupt. He finally turned to America and in 1774 he left Greenock with letters of introduction to officers and merchants in New York. There he established a grocery business, dealing mainly with the army, he also joined one of the British regiments and by 1777 he was engaged in numerous activities to generate a remarkable income and support an expensive life style. As reported by a relative—'in the first place... Sandie is a Captain in Mcleans, in the 2nd place he is Brigade Major to De-Lancys Corps of York Independent Companies, in the 3rd place he is wood cutter general to the army and in the 4th place he has got a Lieutenancy for his son (a boy about 3 or 4 years old) in Mcleans regiment. In short...his income, one way or another, cannot be less than £1000 or £1200 per annum.... He has a country house on Long Island and a town house in New York.'⁶⁴ He was a wealthy man, but the situation was unstable. His relatives urged him to prudence, to leave the army and bring his profits home, but he did not heed their warnings. He was killed in action in 1779, his property was confiscated and his wife and children were penniless and back in Scotland by the early 1780s. With the small capital that she still owned in Scotland, along with a government pension of five pounds for each of her daughters, Mrs Campbell went into business as a Glasgow tea retailer. Her only son entered the army as a teenage ensign in the 1790s and was dead within a couple of years.⁶⁵

*

As Sandie Campbell's career demonstrates, making money and holding onto it were very different indeed. This characteristic of officers was a commonplace from the 1760s and was in striking contrast to the generation before, who could exploit their business backgrounds to good effect in the army. Another characteristic of the post-1760 gentleman soldier experience—and one that was to have implications for individuals and their families—was conspicuous consumption. As noted in the various biographies sketched so far, soldiers were remarkable for their experience of travel and for cosmopolitan sociability furth of Scotland. At a time when increasing numbers of the British gentry, male and female, were travelling for leisure and consumer opportunities,⁶⁶ the Scottish

⁶³ He worked for Uncle Robert for a while, who paid him £140 p.a., and he also had his half-pay. He estimated his family expenses in London at £200. NAS, GD170/1063-9.

⁶⁴ NAS, GD170/1065/3/1, Alexander Campbell of Greenock to his cousin Duncan Campbell, 2 Aug. 1775.

⁶⁵ NAS, GD170/1705, Letters from Mary Campbell, relict of Major Alexander Campbell, 1768-1793.

⁶⁶ See J. Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1997) ch. 16.

military officer was doing the same as part of his profession. This was important for a developing sense of Britishness, but it also introduced this growing element of the Scottish and highland gentry to levels of expenditure and expectations that they could not afford, and which damaged their families.

In a regimental system where men of modest background mixed with men of wealth, the expenditure norms of the latter set the tone. Officers were expected to provide their own uniforms and horses, which could be very expensive. Mess costs could be high—making some regiments prohibitive to all but the very rich—and the costs of the fashionable social life into which many officers were drawn could be great. It was easy to raise a loan on the security of an officer's salary and many young men and even teenage boys found themselves in considerable debt soon after entering military life. The cost to their fathers was often very much more than the cost of commissions, and family relationships were consequently strained.⁶⁷ Family correspondences were full of exhortations to greater financial prudence from fathers to sons and contemporary fiction gives many cautionary tales of improvident and unprincipled young officers.⁶⁸ The two youngest sons of Duncan Campbell of Glenure—James and Hugh—contracted such high debts that their father eventually abandoned them to their creditors. From the start of his military career, Hugh was vastly interested in fine clothing. As he wrote from New York in 1778:

Dear Father, I am sorry that I am under the necessity of drawing upon you for forty pounds Stirling; but I can assure you that it was consistent with nature to keep up the character of an officer and gentleman.... I am not a gambler nor am I a man of gallantry, but after all my money goes and I don't know how rightly...⁶⁹

Keeping up the character of an officer and gentleman not only involved costly clothing, but the maintenance of horses and packs of hunting dogs in some cases;⁷⁰ there were servants and attendants, and also the furniture and paraphernalia of domestic life and hospitality, which frequently travelled with a officer even when on active duty.⁷¹ Military men

⁶⁷ Lieutenant Allan Campbell, writing from Dover Castle in 1775, sought to warn his brother Duncan that army life was expensive. 'I can assure you that all the pay that he [Duncan's son] is to receive since he came to the regiment will be little enough to defray the expense of two suits of regimentals...sword, sash....[etc]'. NAS, GD170/1067/6/1, 11 Jan. 1775.

⁶⁸ The most famous example of the early nineteenth century is the devious seducer Captain Wickham in Jane Austen's, *Pride and Prejudice*. The Scottish novelist Susan Ferrier provides several more, though it is worth noting that the virtuous hero of *Marriage*, is an English-raised military man of Highland background.

⁶⁹ NAS, GD170/1118/8/1, Letter from Hugh Campbell to his father Duncan Campbell of Glenure, New York, July 22 1778.

⁷⁰ See the case of Lord Lyndoch, who kept a hunting pack, horses and necessary servants in Spain during the Penninsular Wars. A feckless man where money was concerned. Lyndoch eventually ruined his estate. Brett-James, *Lord Lyndoch*.

⁷¹ See *Autobiographical Journal of John Macdonald Schoolmaster and Soldier, 1770-1830* (Edinburgh, 1906). John Macdonald, having entered the army as a pipe-major in 1778,

of the later eighteenth century were famous for the tendency to high consumption and their search after comfort in situations of hardship. This was a far cry from the austerity and restraint that was commonly recommended in the military manuals of the day.⁷² James Boswell, always attracted by the glamour of military men, noted such a case in his travels through the highlands in 1773, when he and Johnson visited Sir Allan Maclean on Mull.

Sir Allan, like all other officers, who, though by their profession obliged to endure fatigues and inconveniences, are peculiarly luxurious...I take it the suffering, or at least the contemplating of hardships to which officers are accustomed (for from Sir Allan's account even of the American expeditions, it appeared that though the poor common soldiers are often wretchedly off, the officers suffer little, having their commodious camp equipage, and their chocolate, and other comforts carried along in little room, and prepared by their men, who are most subservient beings), makes them fonder of all indulgences.⁷³

Such conspicuous consumption when allied to gambling and 'gallantry', that is the pursuit of fashionable women and heiress hunting, ensured that many military men spent more than they ever earned and were locked into the pitiful business of keeping up appearances to get by in life.⁷⁴ Excitement, extravagance, an excessive preoccupation with clothing and outward image and an immoderate engagement in expensive sociability, gave the military profession its 'fashionable' image.⁷⁵ But on the other side of the coin, members of the profession could also be easily characterised as reckless, foolish and morally suspect.⁷⁶ Many men of this background led highly irregular personal lives that brought despair to their loved ones and many ruined their family fortunes or were a constant drain on family resources.

The impact on family finances inevitably extended to family estates and tenancy arrangements. In its organisation and culture, the army operated to maintain a hierarchical status quo that placed a high value

⁷¹ (*Continued*) spent most of his military career as a servant—mainly as butler—to various military officers, travelling with their personal property and providing for their hospitality in the field and abroad.

⁷² As in S. Bever, *The Cadet: a Military Treatise, by an Officer* (London, 1762). In ch. 13 'Concerning the education, study, application and behaviour of officers in private life' he laments the luxury, idleness and libertine tendencies of the British officer.

⁷³ F. A. Pottle and C. H. Bennett (eds), *Boswell's Journal of A Tour to the Hebrides with Samuel Johnson* (London, 1936) 327.

⁷⁴ See examples quoted in Hayes, 'Scottish Officers'.

⁷⁵ The term is commonly used in early nineteenth-century literature.

⁷⁶ Duncan Campbell of Glenure's military sons were a case in point. Captain Colin Campbell was brought before the Glasgow Sheriff in March 1778, where he was accused of ravishing a servant girl. The case, which was a great local scandal, was dismissed as not proven. NAS, GD170/1354/46, Letter from Major James MacPherson to his brother-in-law Duncan Campbell of Glenure, 4 Mar. 1778. One of the military sons of Robert Campbell, Duncan's brother, was thought to have caused the early death of his father by his criminal behaviour. As reported by Allan from London in 1774—'I fear he has ruined his father's family if he is caught he'll surely be hanged.' NAS, GD170/1067/5, 2 Mar. 1778.

on links with land. Land was the basis of status and it was also, in a practical sense, an important source of military recruits in some areas at certain points in time.⁷⁷ Thus men of gentry background who were unlikely to inherit land in their own right, nevertheless sought to connect landownership to their military office as a device for raising their own status within the officer corps. Such behaviour was not unique to soldiers, but it was very pronounced in this profession and did have a negative impact on the use of land in many parts of Scotland and particularly in the highlands, where increasingly debt-ridden landlords were eager to give tenancies to military relatives in return for secure rental payments from guaranteed military pay.⁷⁸ The problem with such tenants was that they were not necessarily good farmers. Career soldiers who entered the army in their teens were not familiar with farming practice and given their tendency to travel, were not resident on their farms for sufficient spans of time to allow them to develop any agricultural knowledge or skills. As Alexander Campbell of Barcaldine—the lawyer-laird—wrote to his brother, Captain Colin Campbell, when the latter pleaded for the tenancy of Glenure in the 1780s—‘you are not accustomed to the country business’.⁷⁹ Because the properties that were tenanted by soldiers were small and most officers could not afford to employ an agent or factor, these farms often languished. Their purpose was prestige. So when Alexander Campbell finally and reluctantly granted his brother the property and title—Captain Colin Campbell of Glenure—his fears were well founded. Colin rarely visited the estate and most of his interest in the property was invested in building a new high-status dining room onto the house and commissioning a new suite of dining room furniture.⁸⁰ Relationships were strained, the brothers argued over an inheritance from their mother and all communication ceased for over ten years.⁸¹ During his mature adult life in the last two decades of the eighteenth century, Alexander Campbell of Barcaldine deliberately cut all contact with three of his four younger soldier-brothers, mainly over financial matters. His older, ‘natural’ soldier-brother Sandie, and his other younger soldier-brother Patrick were already dead by the early 1780s. Alexander was never to meet Patrick’s wife or son, who remained in America; he never met the Irish wife and children of Colin; and he abandoned the impoverished widow and children of Sandie to their own devices.

For the Campbells of Barcaldine, as with other families, though the resort to military careers for younger sons became increasingly

⁷⁷ See, Mackillop, *More Fruitful*.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ NAS, GD170/1628/30, Captain Colin Campbell of Glenure to Alexander Campbell of Barcaldine (his brother), 13 May 1786.

⁸⁰ NAS, GD170/1628/41-43. Letters from Captain Colin Campbell of Glenure to his brother Alexander Campbell of Barcaldine his brother, 1788.

⁸¹ NAS, GD170/1628/50, Letter from Colin Campbell, Cork 1797, which re-established communication with his brother Alexander and provides an account of what he’d been doing during ten years of silences.

necessary for short-term financial and status gains, it was also increasingly damaging to long-term family relationships and family finances. Fathers and elder brothers now found it near impossible to control the behaviour of their military kin in the interests of the family, once they were launched on their military careers and motivated by self and not family concerns. Another group who suffered were women. The purchase system made enormous demands and raising the necessary lump sum to get a young man into office could pose financial difficulties.⁸² One way that gentry families sought to get access to capital sums for the purchase of commissions was to target those members of the family with assets but limited intrinsic economic or production value for the family as a whole; thus widows and older spinsters with annuities were frequently under pressure to help out.⁸³ In the early nineteenth century, Lady Louisa Stuart, a middle-aged spinster living on a modest annuity, was petitioned on several occasions by her widowed and impecunious sister, Lady Caroline Portarlington, for significant sums to purchase teenage commissions for her younger sons. Neither their wealthy brother—the Earl of Bute—nor the elder son of Lady Caroline—heir to an indebted Irish estate—was willing to help.⁸⁴

Widows and older spinsters were invariably marginalised in highland gentry society and the rise in military careers worsened their position.⁸⁵ The fact that the military provided the gentry with a socially acceptable avenue for disposing of surplus males—one, moreover, that put responsibility on the son to make his own fortune—was attractive to gentry families. Unfortunately, there were no equivalent routes in life for surplus gentlewomen: and surplus gentlewomen there were, particularly as more and more men entered the army; for rates of marriage among officers were low, many died young and those that married often did so outwith Scotland. The ‘spinster problem,’ which was endemic in highland gentry families, was partly a consequence of mass employment in the military profession.⁸⁶ The cost to families of maintaining their unmarried female kin was considerable and growing, for as with sons, by the second half of the eighteenth century, the earlier route of commercial apprenticeships for unmarried daughters was no longer consistent with gentry status. These women had to be maintained as dependants, and as highland gentlewomen entered the ranks of conspicuous consumers, their costs were rising. Some enterprising souls, facing the prospect of life-long spinsterhood for themselves or their female kin, did follow the military abroad. Katharine Read (1723-78), daughter of

⁸² Bruce, *Purchase System*.

⁸³ Duncan Campbell’s widow was frequently petitioned for financial help by her many grandchildren, particularly the children of her daughters.

⁸⁴ See Mrs Godfrey Clark (ed.), *Gleanings from an Old Portfolio, Containing Some Correspondence between Lady Louisa Stuart and her Sister Caroline, Countess of Portarlington, and Other Friends and Relations*, 2 vols (Edinburgh, 1896).

⁸⁵ Nenadic, ‘Highland Gentlewoman’.

⁸⁶ See Nenadic, ‘Highland Gentlewoman’ for examples from the family of Cambell of Barcaldine.

Alexander Read of Turfbeg and Logie, a Forfarshire gentleman, who did much to support her soldier-brothers and their families through her success as a fashionable portrait painter, even went to the extreme of travelling to India in the 1770s to find an officer husband for her niece and to get some portrait commissions for herself among military men.⁸⁷ This was unusual, most spinsters of highland gentry background simply stayed at home, destined for a fate of genteel, celibate, marginalised poverty—in much the same way that most of the men that they might have married were destined, as soldiers, for a fate of genteel, unmarried, though not necessarily celibate poverty, beyond the shores of Scotland.

*

The impact of military careers for such large numbers of the highland gentry was profound. Military office gave men who did not have automatic access to land a valued status and title, which they generally adopted for life, so that even when they had retired they were still known by their military rank. They dressed distinctly, both in and out of uniform, and had distinct forms of address, behaviour and leisure.⁸⁸ More than any other profession with which the highland gentry were connected, the military profession preserved and celebrated traditional values, while simultaneously adapting very effectively to the new polite and urban world. Certain British towns, particularly the leisure and county towns, were full of officers on leave or half pay, many of them highland Scots—seeking to entertain themselves, sometimes recovering from illness or injury and always looking for further opportunities among their peers and patrons.

The military profession was highly visible by the late eighteenth century and—in the language of the day—it was ‘fashionable’. The impact of military employment, however, could be very damaging for the many gentry families and particularly the highland gentry families who provided the officer corps. Of course, such a statement runs directly counter to the generally positive assessment of the army as an avenue to material opportunity that has dominated most commentaries on the subject.⁸⁹ In particular the relationship between Scots, the military and empire has led one notable analyst to remark, ‘There could have been few gentry families in Scotland after *c.* 1760 which did not reap some benefit from the profits of empire, even if the precise scale of the gains made awaits much more detailed research.’⁹⁰ It may never be possible to know the ‘precise scale of the gains’, but this detailed research suggests some cause for caution when the issue of ‘benefit’ is explored in a broader, cross-generational context that embraces the social and cultural impacts.

⁸⁷ A. F. Struan, ‘Miss Katharine Read, Court Paintress’, *SHR* 2 (1905) 38–46.

⁸⁸ Colley Britons, 193; J. Babington, *Records of the Fife Fox Hounds, Compiled by Lieut. Col. Babington* (Edinburgh, 1883).

⁸⁹ See, B. Lenman, *The Jacobite Clans of the Great Glen, 1650–1784* (London, 1984); Macinnes, *Clanship, Commerce, MacKillop More Fruitful*; T. M. Devine, *Scotland’s Empire, 1600–1815* (London, 2003).

⁹⁰ Devine, *Scotland’s Empire*, 334

The family of Campbell of Barcaldine, along with their extensive networks of kin, demonstrate quite clearly the astonishing popularity of military employment for the sons of the highland gentry. When military opportunities started to rise from the 1750s, adult men who were trained and active in other careers—notably commerce and tenant farming—rushed to become soldiers; and fathers pulled all manner of patronage strings to get their teenage boys into junior offices in the army. Quickly, a well-established and highly advantageous gentry practice of placing younger sons into business apprenticeships all but vanished. Even the sons of successful businessmen of highland family background—such as Robert Campbell of Stirling—turned their backs on commercial careers to take the military route in life.⁹¹ Of course, highland gentlemen still engaged in tenant farming on family estates—but increasingly the desirable tenant was an officer on full or half pay, with ready cash for the rent, but not necessarily accustomed to the ‘country business’. For gentlemen such as these, land equalled status more than income and they were often elderly, ineffective or absentee.⁹²

Though it is impossible to quantify the precise impact, which did include some short-term benefits,⁹³ these trends were clearly of long-term disadvantage to highland gentry families and their estates—particularly the loss of businessmen, whose importance can be seen when scrutinising the intimate financial relationship between a lawyer-laird like Duncan Campbell and his younger brother Robert, the latter raised from boyhood to serve the interests of his elder brother and the family.⁹⁴ Of course, there were some impressive highland soldier-entrepreneurs in the first few decades of military expansion, mostly officers with a solid background in commerce who operated business interests from within the army. The business connection collapsed quite rapidly, however; largely through the practise of using the army, rather than apprenticeships or other forms of land-focused training, as a quasi-education for teenage boys. The army became a ‘respectable’ career and an opportunity for personal status enhancement on terms that, when compared with trade or farming, were more leisured, though risky to health and far less mundane. This does not mean that in certain circumstances the army could not be exploited for financial gain. At some points in time, highland recruiting did bring much needed cash to many estates; clever men in high office could exploit the government’s cash bounties; and there were prizes for a very lucky few. The vast majority of men who joined the army, however—if the cases cited here are at

⁹¹ Robert Campbell was greatly opposed to his sons entering the army, NAS, GD170/1186.

⁹² Grant, *Memoirs*, ii suggests that the usual residents on the farms at Rothiemurchus were mostly elderly ex-army relatives.

⁹³ With reference to recruiting and rents see, MacKillop, *More Fruitful*, ch. 5.

⁹⁴ This relationship is explored in S. Nenadic ‘Military men and businessmen: Scots in London in the mid-eighteenth century’, unpublished paper presented to the ‘Scots in London in the 18th Century’ Conference. University of Edinburgh, November 28, 2004.

all typical—did not come into such categories and some were the cause of much distress to their families. The Campbells of Barcaldine were repeatedly driven to states of serious crisis, financial and reputational, by the affairs of their military kin—no other type of employment exercised such an impact on the family. John Campbell of Barcaldine (1704-78), an able man, supplemented the income from his own estate through employment as a Crown Factor on Forfeited estates in Perthshire. By the mid-1770s, however, he was ruined and was obliged to sell Barcaldine to his half-brother Duncan. The principal reason for his downfall was the cost associated with the military careers of his sons; particularly the recklessness of his eldest who eventually killed himself in 1779 while serving as Governor of Fort George. In the opinion of his nephew, Patrick—‘...a poor situation the honest man has brought himself to. Cheated by the one son and bullied by the other son out of his estate.’⁹⁵ The only reason the property remained in the family and in reasonably good financial health was because Duncan, through his legal practice and business dealings, had accumulated sufficient capital to purchase and stabilise the estate.

From the evidence explored here, it was the practice of placing young teenagers in commissions—popular from the Seven Years War through to the early nineteenth century, when banned by government⁹⁶—that was most damaging to highland families. Putting boys in the army not only robbed the highland gentry of their kin connections in urban business or commercial farming, it removed boys at an impressionable age from the controlling influences of the family, it introduced them to luxury-driven lifestyles and it led to an early exposure to ‘English’ gentlemanly status systems. Boys who entered the army as youngsters were not trained or educated for anything that was ‘useful’ to the family, other than being in the army. The motives for teenage army entry were complex and shifting, and deserving of much more scrutiny than is possible here. Regardless of motive, however, the impact was damaging. Indeed, the man who finally ruined the Barcaldine estate was one who began his career as a teenage officer and through his military office and associated elite fashionable connections was drawn early into a pattern of expenditure that far exceeded his income.

Duncan Campbell (1786-1842), son and grandson of lairds who had supported the estate through successful legal practice, was the first in the family (he succeeded to his inheritance as a youth in 1800) to combine major landownership with a military career. He entered the army as a teenager at the start of the Napoleonic Wars, swept along on the tide of ‘defence patriotism’ that drew unprecedented numbers of Scotsmen into the military.⁹⁷ He was encouraged to do so by his widowed

⁹⁵ NAS, GD170/1176/8, Major Patrick Campbell to Duncan Campbell of Glenure (his father), 24 Dec. 1774.

⁹⁶ Carpenter, ‘British Army’.

⁹⁷ Cookson, *British Armed Nation*; J.E. Cookson, ‘The Napoleonic Wars, Military Scotland and Tory Highlandism in the early nineteenth century’, *SHR* 78 (1999)

mother; had his lawyer-father been alive, the story may have been different. He served in Copenhagen in 1801 and fought with Wellesley in the Peninsular Wars. In 1810, when painted by Henry Raeburn in military uniform—the first of the family to commission a fashionable portrait—he held ‘double-rank’ as lieutenant in a regiment of Foot Guards—an expensive, elite London regiment—and captain in a Scottish regiment. Even at this early stage he was getting into debt, for in 1812, Raeburn wrote to Campbell requesting that he settle forthwith his long outstanding bill of fifty guineas.⁹⁸ His military exploits and later office as Deputy Lord Lieutenant for Argyll were rewarded with a baronetcy in 1831—so he was successful in status terms. However, he had embarked on a perilous course of reckless spending—a cause of dismay among his own family and disgust among his business-owning in-laws in Glasgow—that finally ended in ruin, a pattern of behaviour that was seen elsewhere among commonly cited ‘successful’ career soldiers.⁹⁹ The Glenure estate was sold in 1818 and the Barcaldine property, which the family had owned since the late seventeenth century, supported through trade or diligent legal practice, was lost in 1842 when he died in virtual bankruptcy.¹⁰⁰ Sir Duncan Campbell of Barcaldine ruined his family. He was, of course, a very fine military gentleman and he was also, as the Raeburn portrait reveals, a loyal and patriotic Briton. So what does this sketch of a highland gentry family and their military employments reveal about that other frequently cited theme of eighteenth century Scottish experience—the formation of Britishness and its impact on the highlands?

Of the period that is commonly identified as one of ‘defence patriotism’, during the French and Napoleonic wars, it would seem that the highland gentry embraced an ethos that was common to the whole of Britain—a kind of loyal, British military patriotism in which highlanders played a critical role, and which in turn defined both the image and practice of highland regiments through the nineteenth century and beyond.¹⁰¹ Sir Duncan Campbell was part of this culture. The two generations of highland military elites that came to maturity before the late eighteenth century, and are the focus of this article, were motivated by more complex, individualistic, localised and shifting agendas.¹⁰² These

⁹⁷ (*Continued*) 60-75, suggests there was a transformation in the character and public perception of Scottish regiments quite suddenly at the end of the Revolutionary War in 1799 that gave rise to massive patriotic popularity.

⁹⁸ See D. Thomson, *Raeburn* (Edinburgh, 1997) 140-1.

⁹⁹ Lord Lyndoch was a case in point, see Brett-James, *Lord Lyndoch*. Another frequently cited ‘success story’ (see Devine, *Scotland’s Empire*, 317) is MacKenzie of Seaforth, a career soldier who eventually achieved high office as Governor of Barbados in 1800. But Lord Seaforth, like Sir Duncan, spent more than he ever earned and eventually lost his estate.

¹⁰⁰ NAS, GD170, Introduction.

¹⁰¹ Cookson, *British Armed Nation*; H. Streets, *Martial Races: The Military, Race and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture, 1857-1914* (Manchester, 2004).

¹⁰² Mackillop, *More Fruitful* ch.7. also questions the robustness of the ‘British identity thesis’ with reference to the broader process of Highland recruitment.

included short-term financial opportunism through recruiting and renting, the hope of quick and spectacular riches through war, adventure and escape from mundane provincialism, and also access to a type of 'respectable' career—with the associated social life and consumption—that was more acceptable in a changing gentry status regime than urban business or practical farming. An appreciation of the importance of contemporary Scottish preoccupations with English gentlemanly status systems is critical for any understanding of the military generation that came to maturity in the period from the 1760s to the 1780s.¹⁰³ This was 'Britishness' of a sort, but not the patriotic Britishness that is commonly represented as having a foundation in Scotland from the middle decades of the eighteenth century.

In describing, often in painful detail, the ambitions and activities of their numerous military kin, no one connected with the family of Campbell of Barcaldine, soldier or civilian, ever wrote of loyalty or patriotism prior to the early nineteenth century—other than when they were trying to claim military pensions from the Crown, as happened in the case of Sandy Campbell's widow, following his death in battle in 1779. This supports the conclusion of one notable recent commentator that 'too much has been claimed for the Scottish regiments before the Napoleonic wars.'¹⁰⁴ Indeed, the only overt statement of attachment to any identity beyond that of the family and estate—or, occasionally, regiment, though most officers shifted regiment as opportunities arose—was that made by Captain Colin Campbell, recovering in London from his India exploits, when he became an early member of the Highland Society in 1784. Colin Campbell, a socially ambitious man, was probably involved with the Highland Society for status and patronage reasons, for it was a prestigious and fashionable body that gave him access to such powerful magnates as the Duke of Argyll within a cultural context of metropolitan politeness. He may also have been making a heart-felt statement of gentlemanly-highland-Britishness through membership of an organisation which, while not at this time particularly 'military' in tone,¹⁰⁵ was devoted to the preservation and promotion of highland culture and economy within the context of union and Hanoverian loyalty. Indeed, this was a strong and established ethos within the Barcaldine family, which in the generation before had provided three Crown Factors for the Forfeited highland estates, all practical farming men with a good legal knowledge, again with the mixed motives of family interest, personal opportunism and a complex local-national political agenda.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ See J. Dwyer and R. B. Sher (eds), *Sociability and Society in Eighteenth Century Scotland* (Aberdeen, 1992), esp. J. G. Basker, 'Scotticisms and the problem of cultural identity in eighteenth century Britain'. Also, on 'culture-shifting' among the Highland elite, see S. Nenadic, 'Consuming at a distance: the Highlands of Scotland in the first half of the eighteenth century,' *British Journal for Eighteenth Century Studies*, 28 (2005) 215-28.

¹⁰⁴ Cookson, 'Napoleonic Wars' p. 63.

¹⁰⁵ Cookson 'Napoleonic Wars', suggests a major shift c. 1800 in the preoccupations of Highland society towards militarism.

¹⁰⁶ This more complex, nuanced and localised culture and identity among the Highland elite than is commonly assumed in the 'fiscal-military state' and centralised

Captain Colin Campbell's multiple ambitions and identities, and simultaneous attachments to both a local and national agenda, may well have been typical of his and his father's generation of military and non-military kin, but were probably different to what came after with highland gentlemen, such as Sir Duncan Campbell, who were mostly absentees but also highly involved with military highlandism.¹⁰⁷ We should not lose sight of the fact that, though a more successful man than many of his peers because he married to advantage, Colin Campbell was responsible for neglecting a family property, which he had sought for status reasons and was incapable of managing in any practical sense; he fell out with his elder brother over family financial matters, in common with most of his military siblings; and he suffered years of ill health, from which he eventually died at a relatively young age, as a result of service in India. For this man and for his family, though there were some gains on the positive side—and gentlemanly 'Britishness' may have been one of them—there were also many negative consequences that arose from mass involvement in the military profession.

¹⁰⁶ (*Continued*) centralised 'Britishness' thesis is also suggested in A. Mackillop, 'The political culture of the Scottish Highlands from Culloden to Waterloo', *Historical Journal* 46 (2003) 511-32.

¹⁰⁷ Seen, for instance, in Sir Duncan's plans for remodelling Barcaldine House in the military baronial style. NAS, GD170.