“Curious Travellers”
Dr Johnson and Thomas Pennant on Tour

An Exhibition at Dr Johnson’s House, London

October 2018 – January 2019

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Front cover image: Moses Griffith, '*Lady Frederick Campbell* in the Sound of Mull', probably 1772 (NLW)

Back cover image: Thomas Rowlandson, *The Dance on Dun-Can*, 1786 (DJH)

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Dr Johnson's House

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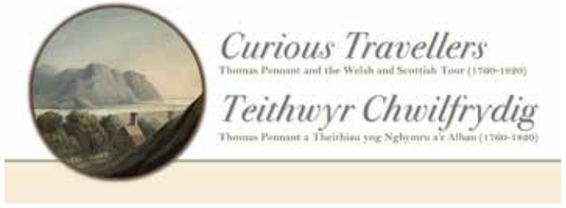
with an essay by
Nigel Leask, Mary-Ann Constantine and Elizabeth Edwards
2018

Design by Martin Crampin



Thomas Rowlandson,
Revising for the Second Edition, 1786 (DJH)

Acknowledgements

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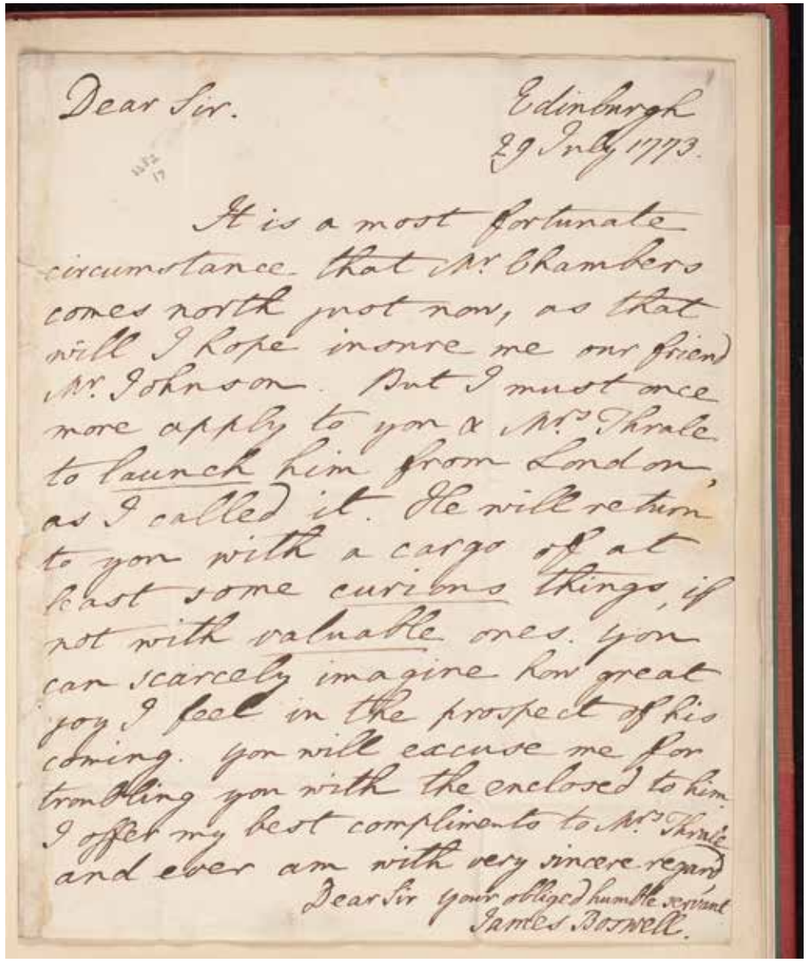
Abbreviations

DJH	Dr Johnson's House
NLW	National Library of Wales
PC	Private Collection

Place-names in citations reflect the spellings used in the eighteenth-century sources.



Dear Sir. Edinburgh 29 July 1773.

It is a most fortunate circumstance that Mr Chambers comes north just now, as that will I hope induce me our friend Mr Johnson. But I must once more apply to you & Mrs Thrale to launch him from London, as I called it. He will return to you with a cargo of at least some curious things, if not with valuable ones. You can scarcely imagine how great joy I feel in the prospect of his coming. You will excuse me for troubling you with the enclosed to him. I offer my best compliments to Mrs Thrale and ever am with very sincere regard Dear Sir your obliged humble servant James Boswell.

Letter from James Boswell to Henry Thrale, 29 July 1773 (John Rylands Library).

Boswell asks the Thrales to 'launch' Dr Johnson from London on his Scottish tour: 'He will return to you with a cargo of at least some curious things, if not with *valuable* ones.'

Foreword

Celine Luppo McDaid, the Donald Hyde Curator, Dr Johnson's House

"The world is now not contented to be merely entertained by a traveller's narrative; they want to learn something"

Samuel Johnson

Dr Johnson's House was bought for the benefit of the public in 1911 by Liberal MP Cecil Harmsworth, who later established an independent charitable trust to operate it. Samuel Johnson, the writer and wit, lived and worked here in the middle of the eighteenth century while composing several works, most notably his great *Dictionary of the English Language* published in 1755. Harmsworth restored the late seventeenth-century townhouse, with its wealth of original features, and commissioned the building of a cottage next door, still home to the resident Curator. The museum is now run by Dr Johnson's House Trust with the charitable aims of preserving Dr Johnson's House, 17 Gough Square, London for the use of the general public, and to advance and encourage learning and scholarship.

Today, the House is open to the public all year with collections relating to Dr Johnson, a research library and regular exhibitions with accompanying events programmes. A broad and engaging education programme is also offered to students and enthusiasts of all ages. Various previous exhibitions have explored Dr Johnson's importance as a writer and a wit through his writing and his significance within eighteenth-century society more broadly: *The Tyranny of Treatment: Samuel Johnson, his Friends and Georgian Medicine* (2003); *Behind the Scenes: The Hidden Life of Georgian Theatre* (2007); *Tea and Coffee in the Age of Dr Johnson* (2008); *The House of Words* (2009); *Telling Tales: Stories from Dr Johnson's House* (2011); *Shakespeare in the 18th century: Johnson, Garrick and friends* (2015); *Johnson, Barber and Thoughts on Liberty* (2016); *Remembering the Past, Securing the Future* (2016); *Collecting Johnson* (2017) and *Johnson & Garrick: a friendship in constant repair* (2017).

The exhibition Curious Travellers: Dr Johnson and Thomas Pennant on Tour (2018), curated and staged at Dr Johnson's House in collaboration with the AHRC-funded project 'Curious Travellers:

Dr Johnson in his travelling coat, line engraving after Thomas Trotter, 1786 (DJH)

Thomas Pennant and the Welsh and Scottish Tour 1760–1820', explores the genre of travel writing in the eighteenth century through the Scottish and Welsh tours of Thomas Pennant and Samuel Johnson. The themes of this exhibition highlight the relationship between the accounts and experiences of these two eminent British travel writers, and the differing records of their journeys, published in the 1770s. Johnson's somewhat fraught and often contradictory views on Scotland and the Scots are also examined, along with those of his travel companion and biographer, the Scot James Boswell. The exhibition also includes the voice of the mutual friend of both Johnson and Pennant, Hester Thrale Piozzi.

Pennant wished to be thought of as a 'curious traveller', while Johnson claimed that 'Curiosity is seldom so powerfully excited, or so amply gratified, as by faithful relations of Voyages and Travels'. It is in this spirit of curiosity about such relations that this exhibition and accompanying booklet are produced.

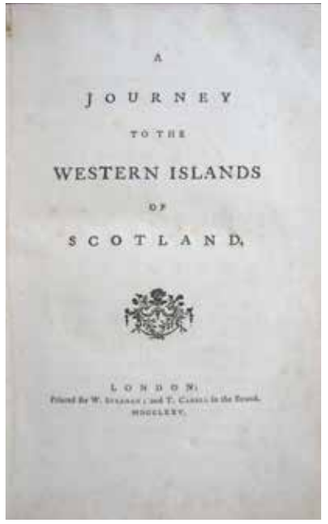
1: Dr Johnson on Tour

This exhibition explores the relationship between the tours of Thomas Pennant and Dr Johnson (as well as those of James Boswell and Hester Thrale), comparing their achievements and contemporary reception. It highlights the fascinating and complex relationship between Pennant and Johnson, two of the most influential British travel writers of the eighteenth century: it is a relationship that has seldom been addressed, or even acknowledged, by commentators. The exhibition title and much of the work presented here derive from research undertaken during the four-year AHRC-funded project 'Curious Travellers: Thomas Pennant and the Welsh and Scottish Tour, 1760–1820'. It is that spirit of inquiry – that need to go and see for oneself – which still animates the writings of Johnson and Pennant for us today. Pennant wished to be thought of not as a 'Topographer' but as a 'curious traveller', while Johnson claimed that 'Curiosity is seldom so powerfully excited, or so amply gratified, as by faithful relations of Voyages and Travels'.[1] Both men, through their writings, sparked a similar curiosity in their readers, inspiring many of them to follow in their footsteps.

Dr Johnson's *Dictionary* defines 'TRAVEL' as:

1. Journey; act of passing from place to place
2. Journey of Curiosity or instruction
3. Labour; toil. This should be *travail*...

'TRAVELS' is succinctly glossed as: 'Account of occurrences and observations of a journey into foreign parts'. All of these definitions evoke the important role played by travel and travel-writing in Johnson's own life and work, despite the prevalent image of his portly figure firmly planted in the drawing rooms and coffee houses of eighteenth-century London. His famous novel *Rasselas* was essentially a fictionalised travel account, while his own *Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland* (1775) certainly stimulated a great deal of curiosity (as well as hostility, as we will see), and remains one of the most widely-read and studied travel accounts in British literature.

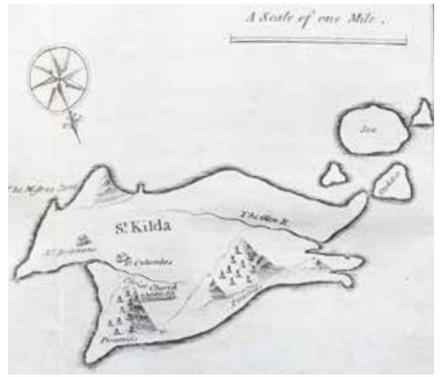

A
JOURNEY
TO THE
WESTERN ISLANDS
OF
SCOTLAND.
LONDON:

Dr Johnson, *A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland*, 1775 (PC)

The eighteenth century was (after the Renaissance) the second great age of travel and exploration, as the beaten track of the Grand Tour to France and Italy expanded to include colonial travel to Africa, America, Asia and the Pacific. At precisely the same time, however, the British public were becoming curious about the Celtic peripheries of Britain. The Jacobite threat that had made Scotland a dangerous destination was extinguished by 1750, and General Wade's military roads made the Highlands accessible to tourists for the first time. Just as victory against French and Spanish rivals meant that the British empire was expanding on the global stage, so, nearer to home it sought to understand and 'improve' its own mountainous and infertile 'Celtic fringe', places often considered as bastions of lawlessness and Jacobitism, where Gaelic and Welsh were universally spoken, and few understood English.

By the 1760s, however, rugged mountain landscapes began to acquire a new set of associations. This was partly in response to Thomas Gray's dramatic Snowdonia-based poem *The Bard* (1757), but largely thanks to James Macpherson's *Poetry of Ossian,* which, in the 1760s, offered a series of atmospheric 'translations' from the Gaelic of a supposed third-century Highland warrior-poet. Dr Johnson was sceptical of Macpherson's claims about the antiquity of Ossian's poetry (and quite indifferent to the mountain sublime: 'an eye accustomed to flowery pastures and waving harvests is astonished and repelled by this wide extent of hopeless sterility' (*TH*, 88).[2] His Scottish tour was thus in part intended to gather ammunition to use against Macpherson, and especially to refute the latter's claim that he had used ancient Gaelic manuscripts of the poems. As Johnson himself admitted, his conclusion was foregone: 'I suppose my opinion of the poems of Ossian is already discovered. I believe they never existed in any other form than that which we have seen' (*TH*, 209). These remarks, as well as other slights to national pride, were fiercely contested by many Scottish readers, and to some extent the *Ossian* controversy overshadowed other aspects of Johnson's *Tour*, including his more thoughtful insights into the conditions of the modern Gaels.

James Macpherson, *The Poems of Ossian*, pocket edition from 1819 (PC)



Detail of a map from Martin Martin, *A Voyage to St Kilda*, fourth edition, 1753 (NLW)

Despite his reputation for Scotophobia (viz. the *Dictionary's* famous quip about the oats that nourish English horses but 'support the people' in Scotland), Dr Johnson's curiosity about Scotland, and especially the Highlands and Western Isles, was a life-long concern. As Boswell suggested, his interest in Hebridean society probably derived from his childhood reading of Martin Martin's *Description of the Western Isles* (1703), with its accounts of the popular beliefs and superstitions which prevailed before the traumatic changes later in the eighteenth century. Though no admirer of Presbyterian Scotland, Johnson, a Tory and high churchman, sympathized deeply with the defeated Jacobite cause. In 1773, when Johnson was approaching his sixty-fourth year, an opportunity to visit Scotland finally emerged through his friendship with the much younger Edinburgh advocate Boswell, his devoted admirer and future biographer.

Portrait of James Boswell engraved by William Daniell after George Dance, 1808 (DJH)

The Scottish tour might be described as Johnson's 'Rasselas' moment – a quest in search of the wild and the primitive. He was far less interested than Boswell in Lowland Scotland, which was then experiencing a European-style 'enlightenment' in the university cities of Edinburgh, Glasgow and Aberdeen. When at one point Boswell suggested that he inspect Lord Finlater's 'admirably laid out' gardens Johnson replied 'that he had not come to Scotland to see fine places, of which there were enough in England, but wild objects – mountains, waterfalls, peculiar manners'. (Here Boswell added wryly, 'I have a notion that he at no time has had much taste for rural beauties. I have very little.') (*TH*, 74). Like Rasselas, the protagonist of his novel, Johnson failed in his quest for 'peculiar manners', despite his fascination with stories of 'Second Sight' and other superstitions: regarding the Highlands, he regretted that 'we came thither too late to see what we expected, a people of peculiar appearance, and a system of antiquated life'. The decline of clanship

and the suppression of Gaelic culture by the Hanoverian government in the wake of the Battle of Culloden in 1746 meant that 'now a longer journey than to the Highlands must be taken by him whose curiosity pants for savage virtues and barbarous grandeur' (*TH,* 124). He nevertheless discovered a great deal else during the course of his tour, and his *Journey to the Western Isles* can be read as a philosophical reflection on the social effects of rapid modernization, with all the losses and gains which that traumatic process entailed. And while Johnson reflected on Scotland, Boswell minutely observed Johnson on tour, keeping a travel journal that only came to light in Malahide Castle in 1930. Boswell would wait until after his mentor's death before publishing his own *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides* in 1785. This was in many ways a preview of his later magisterial *Life of Johnson* (1791); it was also an exercise in damage limitation, aimed at mollifying his fellow-Scots.

Display

Dr Johnson in his travelling coat, line engraving after Thomas Trotter, 1786 (DJH)

Samuel Johnson, *Dictionary of the English Language*, page open at entry for 'Travel' (DJH)

Samuel Johnson, *A journey to the western islands of Scotland* (London: Printed for W. Strahan; and T. Cadell in the Strand, 1775) [First edition] (PC)

Portrait of Dr Johnson by unknown nineteenth-century artist, after John Opie (DJM)

James Boswell, *The journal of a tour to the Hebrides, with Samuel Johnson, LL.D. With an authentick account of the distresses and escape of the grandson of King James II in the year 1746* (London: Printed by Henry Baldwin, for Charles Dilly, 1785) [First edition] (DJH)

Facsimile of Martin Martin, *A description of the Western Islands of Scotland: to which is added a brief description of the Isles of Orkney, and Shetland* (London: Printed for Andrew Bell, 1703) (DJH)

Fingal, an ancient epic poem..., translated by James Macpherson (London: Printed for T. Becket & P.A. De Hondt, 1762) [First edition] (PC)

Temora, an ancient epic poem..., translated by James Macpherson (London: Printed for T. Becket & P.A. De Hondt, 1763) [First edition] (PC)

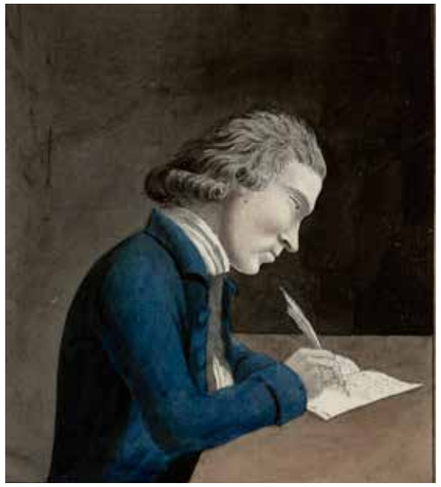
II: 'Mr Pennant has led the way; Dr Johnson has followed'[3]

Portrait of Thomas Pennant by Thomas Gainsborough, 1776 (Amgueddfa Cymru–National Museum Wales)

Martin Martin may have whetted Johnson's appetite to visit a 'primitive' society, but in his *Journey* Johnson omits any mention of the work of a far more recent traveller, Thomas Pennant (1726–1798). In his *Tour in Scotland, 1769,* Pennant had provided a meticulously researched and up-to-date account of the country which was enthusiastically received on both sides of the border, going through five editions before the end of the century. Born into an old Welsh gentry family from Downing in Flintshire, Pennant was educated at Wrexham Grammar School and Oxford, and at the time of his Scottish tours was known as a naturalist and author of *British Zoology* (1766) and *Synopsis of Quadrupeds* (1771). During earlier tours of Europe, Cornwall, Ireland and Wales in search of mineral and ornithological specimens, he established a wide network of scholarly correspondents, including the Comte de Buffon, Joseph Banks, and the great Swedish botanist Linnaeus, and was elected to membership of various learned societies. In other words (and quite *unlike* Dr Johnson), he was a typical enlightenment savant. Although as a writer he sometimes overloads his readers with information, his writing abounds in sharp and lively passages of description, particularly of the natural world: the Perthshire snow-hare, we read, is 'very agile and full of frolick when kept tame; is fond of honey and carraway comfits, and prognosticates a storm by eating its own dung' (*Tour in Scotland 1769*, 85). The fame of Johnson and Boswell's travel writing has today rather eclipsed Pennant's achievements, and one goal of this exhibition is to restate his importance by exploring the links between Pennant and Johnson, who was (sometimes very closely) following in Pennant's footsteps when he set out for Scotland in 1773.

Moses Griffith, Scene near the Isle of Eigg, probably 1772 (NLW)

In his autobiographical *Literary Life* (1793), Pennant recalled that in the year 1769, accompanied by a single servant and riding on horseback, 'I had the hardiness to venture on a journey to the remotest part of *North Britain*, a country almost as little known to its southern brethren as *Kamschatka*. I brought home a favourable account of the land […] shewing that it might be visited with safety, [and] it has ever since been *inondé* with southern visitors'.[4] With the publication of the first tour proving such a success, Pennant set out on a more ambitious, five-month, second tour of Scotland, this time including a 'Voyage to the Hebrides' on board the 90-ton cutter *Lady Frederick Campbell.*



Portrait of Dr John Stuart by Moses Griffith, probably 1772 (NLW)

Inspired by the recent Pacific expedition of his friend Joseph Banks with Captain Cook, and by Banks' voyage to Iceland via the Hebrides, Pennant assembled a team of botanists (Edward Lightfoot and Dr John Stuart of Killin), a Gaelic expert (Stuart, translator of the Old Testament into Gaelic, performed a double role here), and an artist (Moses Griffith), as well as his French servant Louis Gold, a fowler and a groom.

Pennant's *Tour in Scotland and Voyage to the Hebrides, 1772* (published 1774–76) was dedicated to Banks, and included over ninety topographical plates; this is in striking contrast to Johnson and Boswell's volumes which had no visual material at all.

'He's a *Whig*, Sir: a *sad dog*... But he's the best traveller I ever read; he observes more things than anyone else does'. Such was Dr Johnson's stated opinion of Pennant, as recorded in Boswell's *Life of Johnson.* Boswell himself was far more critical, dismissing Pennant's *Tours* as the works of a too-hasty and superficial traveller, who 'could put together only curt frittered fragments of his own, and afterwards procured supplemental intelligence from parochial ministers, and others not the best qualified or most impartial observers, whose ungenerous prejudice against the house of Stuart glares in misrepresentation'.[5] More pragmatically, although neither Johnson nor Boswell acknowledges the fact, the publishing success of Pennant's 1769 *Tour in Scotland* was a major motivation for their own Scottish tour of 1773. As we will see, Pennant influenced their route through Scotland, as well as their descriptions of people and places encountered there.

Although Johnson and Boswell only seem to have found out about Pennant's second Hebridean tour in 1772 when they were touring the Isle of Skye the following September, Johnson had the benefit of reading some of Pennant's account while drafting his own *Journey* back in London. The first part of Pennant's *Tour in Scotland, 1772* (which included the 'Voyage to the Hebrides') came out in May 1774, just a month before Johnson delivered most of his own manuscript to his publisher William Strahan on 20th June. Thomas Campbell claimed that Johnson's famous book was written in just twenty days, but it seems more likely that his manuscript (which he had been working on since returning to London in November 1773) actually underwent intense revisions *after* he had obtained a copy of Pennant's 'Voyage'.[6] Ralph Jenkins, one of the few scholars to have studied this literary debt, notes that 'Johnson certainly had to take [Pennant] seriously; since he was dealing with the same territory as Pennant, addressing the same audience, publishing soon after Pennant's two well-received accounts, and reading Pennant while actually writing, he could hardly escape being influenced by [him]'; moreover, he had 'to avoid repetition when dealing with a subject recently treated by a thoroughly competent rival'.[7] Quite apart from the characteristic hallmarks of Johnson's style, this explains a great deal about the difference between the two travel accounts: Johnson is succinct where Pennant is expansive, he takes pains to avoid repeating material already covered by Pennant, and he prefers philosophical reflection (or sometimes personal anecdote, where Pennant is noticeably reticent) to factual reportage. Johnson's literal short-sightedness might have even helped him in this respect: observing less, his is a narrative of the mind.

Moses Griffith, Inveraray Castle, probably 1772 (NLW)

While Pennant devoted much space to the Scottish university cities and the achievements of the Scottish enlightenment, Johnson dismissed Edinburgh in one sentence as 'a city too well known to admit description' (*TH,* 1). Compared to Pennant he had little to say about Aberdeen, Inverness and Glasgow, which he regarded as places displaying all the symptoms of Scottish cultural decline. Pennant dedicated four pages in his 1769 tour (and seven in his 1772 tour), to Inveraray, the seat of the 5th Duke of Argyll, one of the patrons of Whig improvement in Scotland; Johnson, by contrast, summarised his visit to the estate of a man for whom he had little political sympathy in one brief sentence.

We can also compare Johnson's famous complaint that 'a tree might be shown in Scotland as a horse in Venice' (*TH,* 7) with Pennant's upbeat account of young pine plantations near Banchorie 'planted by gentlemen near their seats: such a laudable spirit prevails in this respect, that in another half-century it never shall be said, that to spy the nakedness of the land you are come' (*Tour in Scotland 1769*, 120). Many readers interpreted this as the difference between 'a glass half full' and 'a glass half empty' approach to Scotland. Others lamented that Johnson had simply taken the wrong road north from Edinburgh: had he travelled through Perthshire he would have seen an abundance of trees.

Display

Reproduction of a portrait of Thomas Pennant by Thomas Gainsborough, 1776 (Amgueddfa Cymru–National Museum Wales)

Portrait of Thomas Pennant by unknown artist (PC)

Thomas Pennant, *A tour in Scotland. MDCCLXIX* [1769] (Chester: printed by John Monk, 1771) [First edition] (PC)

Thomas Pennant, *A tour in Scotland, and voyage to the Hebrides, MDCCLXXII* [1772] Part I (London: printed for Benj. White, 1776) [Second edition] (PC)

Thomas Pennant, *A tour in Scotland MDCCLXXII* [1772] Part II (London: printed for Benj. White, 1776) [First edition] (PC)

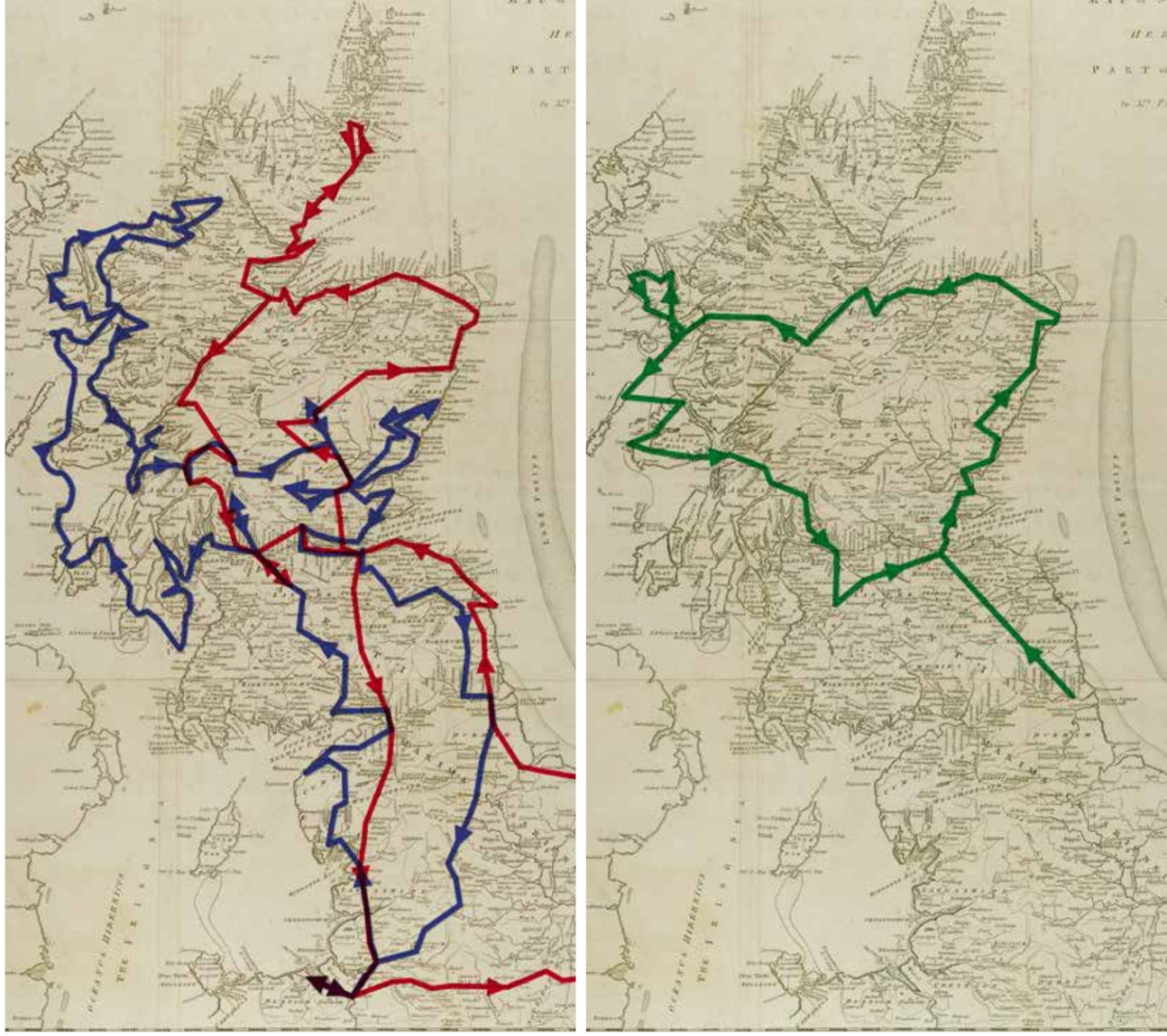
Reproductions of watercolours by Moses Griffith from various volumes of Pennant's Extra-Illustrated *Tours in Scotland*, compiled from the 1770s: '*Lady Frederick Campbell* in the Sound of Mull'; Portrait of John Stuart; Inveraray Castle (NLW)

III: 'As little known to its southern brethren as Kamschatka': Travel and Writing about Scotland in the Eighteenth Century

Besides opening up Scotland (and especially the Highlands) to English tourism in terms of geography, Pennant also claimed that he had performed an 'act of union', by 'labour[ing] earnestly to conciliate the affections of the two nations, so wickedly and studiously set at variance by evil-designing people'.[8] Although many of his fellow countrymen were decidedly anti-Scottish, one could argue that his Welshness helped him to do this. In his influential *Tour Through the Whole Island of Great Britain* (1724–26) Daniel Defoe had lamented the failure of Scotland to benefit from the 1707 Union, which he had personally helped to bring about as a secret agent of the London government.[9] The spate of published memoirs by soldiers serving in the Hanoverian army in the 'Forty Five' fuelled anti-Scottish prejudice south of the Tweed. Edmund Burt's *Letters from a Gentleman in the North of Scotland* (1754), the first modern travel account of the Highlands, was written by a deeply prejudiced English Treasury employee whose task was to collect rent from the forfeited Jacobite estates – a writer from whom impartiality could hardly be expected. English antagonism peaked during the short-lived administration of Lord Bute, the first Scottish prime minister of Britain, in 1762–63.

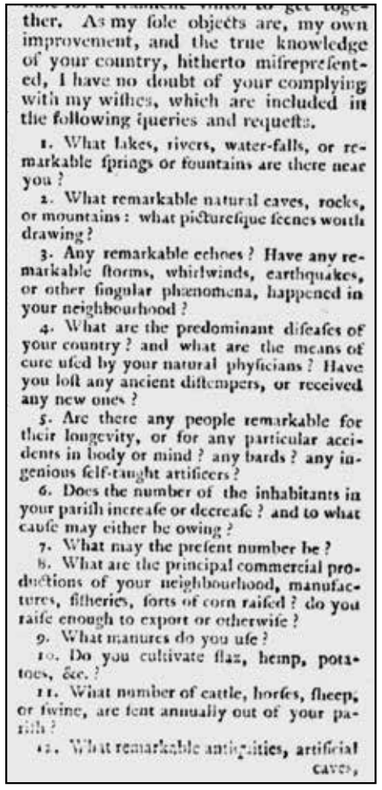
Following the pacification of the Highlands, a handful of English travellers like Sir William Burrell (1758) and Bishop Richard Pococke (1760) made significant tours of Scotland, travelling on Wade's military roads and visiting the recent battlefields of 1745, but mainly concerned with visiting antiquarian sites. In the 1760s, naturalists such as Dr John Walker and James Robertson were dispatched on botanical surveys of the Highlands and islands; although in one sense they blazed a trail for Pennant and Johnson, their tour narratives and botanical reports remained unpublished during their lifetimes. It was Pennant's achievement, spotting a market opportunity, to publish his ambitious tours in high-quality illustrated volumes that would serve as guide books for the 'inundation' of tourists that followed in the later decades of the eighteenth century.

Pennant seems to have been the first to describe the short or '*petit tour*' of Scotland, which became the beaten tourist track in the 1780s and 1790s. From Edinburgh, this route followed Wade's military



'A Map of Scotland, The Hebrides, and Part of England, adapted to Mr Pennant's Tours', (London: Benj. White, 1777). The superimposed routes show Thomas Pennant's tour of 1769 (red) and 1772 (blue) and James Boswell and Dr Johnson's tour of 1773 (green). Itineraries mapped by Alex Deans and Chris Fleet

roads up through the Perthshire Highlands as far as Blair Atholl, returning via Loch Tay, Inveraray and Loch Lomond to Glasgow (*Tour in Scotland 1769*, 91). His own itinerary in 1769 was a great deal more ambitious, taking him on horse-back as far north as John o'Groats, and back via the Great Glen, Fort William and Inveraray. Conscious that he had entirely omitted the Western Isles, he concentrated in 1772 on Skye, Mull and the Inner Hebrides, with a heroic mainland foray on foot as far north as Ledbeg in Sutherland.



ther. As my fole objects are, my own improvement, and the true knowledge of your country, hitherto misrepresented, I have no doubt of your complying with my wishes, which are included in the following queries and requeſts.

1. What lakes, rivers, water-falls, or remarkable ſprings or fountains are there near you?

2. What remarkable natural caves, rocks, or mountains: what picturesque ſcenes worth drawing?

3. Any remarkable echoes? Have any remarkable ſtorms, whirlwinds, earthquakes, or other ſingular phænomena, happened in your neighbourhood?

4. What are the predominant diſeaſes of your country? and what are the means of cure uſed by your natural phyſicians? Have you loſt any ancient diſtempers, or received any new ones?

5. Are there any people remarkable for their longevity, or for any particular accidents in body or mind? any bards? any ingenious ſelf-taught artificers?

6. Does the number of the inhabitants in your pariſh increaſe or decreaſe? and to what cauſe may either be owing?

7. What may the preſent number be?

8. What are the principal commercial productions of your neighbourhood, manufactures, fiſheries, ſorts of corn raiſed? do you raiſe enough to export or otherwiſe?

9. What manures do you uſe?

10. Do you cultivate flax, hemp, potatoes, &c.?

11. What number of cattle, horſes, ſheep, or ſwine, are ſent annually out of your pariſh?

12. What remarkable antiquities, artificial caves,

Thomas Pennant's 'Letter and Queries to Scottish Naturalists', *Scots Magazine* (April 1772)

Although in general Pennant travelled clockwise, and Johnson and Boswell anti-clockwise, there are considerable overlaps between Pennant's two itineraries in 1769 and 1772 and the route taken by Boswell and Johnson in 1773. Johnson's party, which included Boswell's servant Joseph Ritter, travelled by carriage to Inverness, subsequently on horseback and boat.

Perhaps Pennant's most important innovation as a traveller was his sophisticated method of data-gathering via his social and correspondence networks. Prior to setting out in 1772 he published a letter in the *Scots Magazine* addressed to Scottish gentlemen and parish ministers, with a questionnaire which he asked them to fill in and post back to him at Downing. In it, he solicited information about geographical and landscape features, population, agriculture and popular superstitions; he also wanted to know about natural history, requesting information on bird migrations and nesting sites, and urging informants to 'preserve any singular birds by flaying, and stuffing them, and collect insects of all kinds', as well as mineral specimens. Antiquities also loomed large: 'intrenchments, druidical circles, pillars, or stones, crosses, gravestones, monuments, inscriptions'. The Pennant archives still contain numerous letters from Scottish gentlemen and ministers laden with local detail in response to this questionnaire, upon which Pennant drew in composing his published *Tour* after his return to Downing.

A

TOUR

IN

SCOTLAND,

AND

VOYAGE TO THE HEBRIDES;

MDCCLXXII.

PART I.

SECOND EDITION.

LONDON.

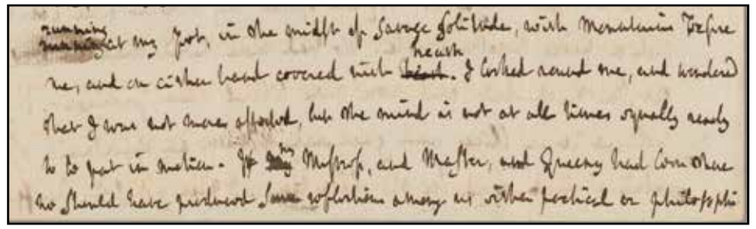
Printed for Benj. White.

MDCCLXXVI.

Thomas Pennant, *A Tour in Scotland, 1772*, second edition, 1776 (PC)

Dr Johnson believed passionately in the importance of the traveller 'writing to the moment'. Delay, he felt, was fatal to the truthfulness of the narrative: 'how much a few hours take from the certainty of knowledge, and distinctness of imagery' (*TH*, 379). In this respect Pennant fell short of Johnson's requirement. Although he kept journals on both his Scottish tours, they are unfortunately lost, and he only dispatched a couple of letters to correspondents during his travels. Yet in all probability, judging from other cases where his earlier notes do survive, these missing journals would have furnished a framework to which supplementary information from his correspondents could subsequently be added. Johnson's *Journey to the Western Isles* was also composed at home after he had returned from his travels in November 1773, and he seems to have had a fuller set of field notes to draw upon than Pennant. His editors have painstakingly reconstructed his compositional practices, based on three main sources (as well, of course, as his memory): a 'book of remarks' Johnson kept while he travelled (sadly it has shared the fate of Pennant's lost journals); the seventeen journal-letters written during the tour to his friend Hester Thrale back in Streatham; and Boswell's manuscript 'Journal', to which he was given almost daily access, both during the tour and back home in London.

The changes wrought by Johnson in revising his original notes are exemplified in his description of one iconic moment in his tour. On 1st September, nearly a fortnight after they had set out from Edinburgh, Johnson and Boswell, accompanied by Ritter and their two Highland guides John Hay and Lauchlan Vass, paused to rest their horses beside the road near Loch Cluanie, en route to Glen Shiel, gateway to the Hebrides. In the published *Journey* Johnson described himself sitting on a grassy bank: 'before me, and on either side, were high hills, which by hindering the eye from ranging, forced the mind to find entertainment for itself. Whether I spent the hour well I know not; for here I first conceived the thought of this narration' (*TH*, 88–89). In a long letter of 21st September to Hester Thrale, however, the episode reads rather differently: 'I sat down *to make notes* on a green bank, with a small stream running at my feet, in the midst of savage solitude, with Mountains before me, and on either hand covered with heath. I looked around me, and wondered that I was not more affected, but



Dr Johnson's letter to Hester Thrale, 21st Sept 1773 from Dunvegan (Houghton Library, Harvard University)

the mind is not at all times equally ready to be put in motion'. He continued with the thought that, had he been accompanied by the Thrales, his mental indifference to the scenes around him would have been converted into 'reflections…either poetical or philosophical, for though *Solitude be the nurse of woe*, conversation is often the parent of remarks and discoveries'.[10]

Here the desire for familiar conversation with the absent Thrales (hardly a compliment to his travelling companion Boswell!) is transformed, in the published narrative, into an historic decision to write a travel book. Interestingly, Johnson's decision to dramatize this moment of literary conception occurs just after he has entered the alien environment of the *Gàidhealtachd*, his first encounter with a culture in which the written word was subservient to oral communication, and in a language that he could not understand. The Highlands seem to have literally driven Johnson in on himself, albeit with magnificent results.

Display

'A Map of Scotland, The Hebrides, and Part of England, adapted to Mr Pennant's Tours', (London: Benj. White, 1777) (PC)

Digitally enhanced maps showing the routes of Pennant, Johnson and Boswell

Reproduction of Pennant's 'Letter and Queries to Scottish Naturalists', *Scots Magazine*, xxxiv (April 1772), 173–74

Facsimile of Dr Johnson's letter to Hester Thrale, 21st Sept 1773 from Dunvegan, with the equivalent passage in his *Journey to the Western Isles* (Houghton Library, Harvard University)

IV: People and Places

One of the most fascinating aspects of these two great Scottish tours is the fact that Johnson and Boswell are frequently 'footstepping' Pennant, about a year in his wake. The experiences of the different parties when visiting the same places are often illuminating. As we have seen, Johnson's brusque accounts of Scottish cities offer a marked contrast to Pennant's expansive descriptions; in some places, however, the Doctor seemed at a loss to find anything to say at all. At Forres, in Moray, for example, Pennant provided a very full antiquarian description of the Pictish 'Sueno's Stone', following it up with a reference to the witches in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, and a brief dissertation on witchcraft. Johnson was likewise inspired by the *Macbeth* connection ('this to an Englishman is classic ground'), but otherwise merely commented: 'At Fores we found good accomodation, but nothing worthy of particular remark' (*TH*, 17). Sueno's Stone, described by nearly every other eighteenth-century Scottish traveller, passed unmentioned.

The same holds for Glenelg, where Johnson and Boswell have nothing to record apart from the horrors of the inn where they stayed; Pennant devotes six pages to the parish and its famous Pictish brochs, illustrated in a foldout engraving by Moses Griffith (*Tour in Scotland 1772*, 336–41). Little wonder that Johnson later commented to Boswell, 'Pennant seems to have seen a great deal which we did not see. When we travel again, let us look better about us'.[11]

Moses Griffith, 'Danish Fort in Skye', probably 1772 (NLW)

At other times, however, the immediacy of Johnson and Boswell's commentaries more effectively conveys the harsh actuality of Scottish life. In the 1769 Tour, Pennant had noted that 'the houses of the common people in these parts are shocking to humanity, formed of loose stones, and covered with clods, which they call *devots*, or with heath, broom, or branches of fir: they look,

Engraving after a sketch by John Frederick Miller, 'Inside of a Weaver's Cottage in Islay', probably 1770s (NLW)

at a distance, like so many black mole-hills' (*Tour in Scotland 1769*, 117). On Islay in 1772 he pities 'a set of people worn down with poverty', huddled in their huts: 'lean, withered, dusky and smoke-dried' (*Tour in Scotland 1772*, 217). In Johnson (and especially) Boswell's accounts these Highland living conditions become scenes of dramatic incident. Arriving in the Great Glen from Inverness they sought to visit 'a Highland Hut', and settled on the *Taigh an Dìridh Mhòir* near Dores.[12] Entering the dark and smoky interior, the pair find 'an old woman boiling goats-flesh in a kettle': via their two Gaelic-speaking guides (for the woman has little English) the travellers discover that she is mother to five children, that her 80-year old husband is out working in the woods, that she farms a small-

holding, and is 'mistress of sixty goats'. (The fact that her eldest son was only thirteen suggests that, despite appearances, she was not in fact an 'old woman' at all). After a concise account of the primitive interior of the traditional 'black house', Johnson reflected, 'such is the general structure of the houses in which one of the nations of this opulent and powerful island have been content to live' (*TH*, 82).

Boswell's account of the same visit illustrates the value of his 'Journal' in framing Johnson's narrative. 'Mr Johnson asked her where she slept. I asked one of the guides, who asked her in Erse. She spoke with a kind of high tone. He told us she was afraid we wanted to go to bed with her. This coquetry, or whatever it may be called, of so wretched a like being was truly ludicrous' (*TH*, 107). Despite her refusal, Boswell's 'more ardent curiosity' led him to light a spill and enter her bedchamber, where he noted a bedstead with blankets rolled up in a heap. He described how both travellers were afterwards 'merry upon it', each of them jestingly accusing the other of being a potential seducer, restrained by the good offices of his companion. Although in the end 'Mrs Fraser' (Boswell, unlike Johnson, provided her name) doesn't seem to have taken offence, there is a darker side to this story. Ronald Black tells us that 'her fears were real. Here […] when still a change-house twenty-seven years earlier, an officer of Cumberland's army had murdered the innkeeper and raped her grand-daughter. Our travellers' hostess, who had taken the house over in 1747, was related to them; she was about the same age as the grand-daughter and must have known her well' (*TH*, 486). Far from coquetry, Mrs Fraser's fearful reaction to Johnson's question was motivated by traumatic memories of war-time sexual violence: the touristic curiosity of an English visitor might appear in a very different light to Gaels who had suffered rape and violence from government soldiers in the terror that followed Culloden only a quarter of a century before.

Moses Griffith, 'Whisky House near Loch Maree', probably 1772 (NLW)

Coirechatacan today: its ruins are now part of a sheepfold (photo: Nigel Leask)

The Isle of Skye provided both sets of travellers with their fullest encounter with Gaelic society. On Skye (to a greater extent than Mull, which Pennant only visited briefly) Johnson and Boswell were following hot on Pennant's heels, especially at Coirechatacan, Kingsburgh, Dunvegan, and Talisker. In mid-July 1772, Pennant and his party arrived at Coirechatacan, a few miles south-west of Broadford, and stayed for two days as guests of Lachlan Mackinnon and his family, while waiting for their ship to pick them up on the northern tip of Skye's Trotternish peninsula. Mackinnon was a 'tacksman' (or leaseholder) of Sir Alexander Macdonald of Sleat, and, given that he also played host to Johnson and Boswell the following year, we know a considerable amount about his flourishing Highland household.

Pennant and his companions were not idle here: Lightfoot and Stuart botanized in the neighbouring hills and found them 'covered with that rare plant the *Dryas octopetala*', which Moses Griffith duly illustrated. Pennant attended a *luagh*, or cloth-waulking session, where the women sat 'on each side of a long board, ribbed lengthways', upon which they fulled the cloth, singing all the time. 'As they grow very earnest in their labours, the fury of the song rises; at length it arrives to such a pitch, that without breach of charity you would imagine a troop of female demoniacs to have been assembled' (*Tour in Scotland 1772*, 284–85). There follows a very Pennantian digression on Gaelic work-songs in general, sung while working the hand-quern, or harvesting: 'thirty or forty join in chorus, keeping time to the sound of a bagpipe, as the Grecian lasses were wont to do that of a lyre during vintage in the days of Homer'. In ways wholly characteristic of eighteenth-century antiquarian writing, local customs are here dignified by comparison with those of the Greek or Roman classical past.

Moses Griffith, 'Dryas octopetala', probably 1770s (NLW)

Moses Griffith, 'Women at the Quern and the Luaghad with a View of Talyskir', probably 1772 (NLW)

Moses Griffith, 'A view of Quillin mountain', probably 1772 (NLW)

Energetic as ever, Pennant also writes of his ascent (guided by Mackinnon's son) of the neighbouring mountain Beinn-na-Caillich ('the hill of the old hag'), which he describes as 'the place of sepulture of a gigantic woman in the days of Fingal...one of those picturesque mountains that made such a figure from the sea' (285). This is the occasion for one of his finest topographical descriptions, which is vividly illustrated by Griffith:

> The prospect to the West was that of desolation itself; a savage series of rude mountains, discolored, black and red, as if by the rage of fire. Nearest, joined to this hill by a ridge, is *Beia-an-ghrianan*, or the mountain of the SUN; perhaps venerated in ancient times (285).

In September 1773 Johnson and Boswell also stayed at Coirechatachan, where their spirits were raised after their rather tepid reception by the anglicized laird Sir Alexander Macdonald of Sleat at Armadale. Lachlan Mackinnon's household was full of Gaelic conversation and joviality: Boswell noted that 'they talked in their own ancient language, with fluent vivacity, and sung many Erse songs with such spirit, that, though Dr Johnson was treated with the greatest respect and attention, there were moments in which he seemed to be forgotten' (*TH*, 134–35). And there was clearly talk of Pennant's recent visit. Boswell noted: 'Mr Pennant was two nights here. He and young Mackinnon went to the top of Ben Caillich, a very high mountain just by, on the top of which is a cairn'. In his published *Tour to the Hebrides*, Boswell chose to omit this sentence (perhaps reflecting too well on their rival's spirit of adventure?). Instead, we are given the following Johnsonian anecdote: 'on its being mentioned, that a present had here been made to [Pennant] of a curious specimen of Highland antiquity, Dr Johnson said, "Sir, it was more than he deserved: the dog was a Whig"' (*TH*, 496).

On Raasay, where Johnson fully experienced 'the true patriarchal life […] what we came to find' (*TH*, 154), Boswell climbed Duncaan – perhaps to compensate for his failure to ascend Beinn-na-Caillich. Here he danced a reel on the summit, to mouth music provided by his Highland companions, an event memorably caricatured by Thomas Rowlandson in 1786 (*TH*, 155).

Thomas Rowlandson, *The Dance on Dun-Can*, 1786 (DJH)

In striking contrast to Johnson's silence on the subject, Boswell peppered his *Journal* with the exploits of surviving Jacobites during the Forty-Five, conveying vivid first-hand anecdotes of 'the prince in the heather'. Indeed, for Boswell, Dr Johnson's meeting with the Jacobite heroine Flora Macdonald at Kingsburgh was the highlight of the tour: '[Flora] was a little woman, of a mild and genteel appearance, mighty soft and well-bred. To see Mr Samuel Johnson salute Miss Flora Macdonald was a wonderful romantic scene to me…my *facility of manners*, as Adam Smith says of me, had fine play' (*TH*, 214).

Boswell drank three bowls of punch to celebrate his symbolic bringing together of 'The Rambler' and 'The Wanderer' at Kingsburgh House, where the Prince had sheltered in 1746. 'To see Mr Samuel Johnson lying in Prince Charles's bed, in the isle of Skye, in the house of Miss Flora Macdonald, struck me with such a group of ideas as it is not easy for words to describe', he wrote. Johnson was less enthusiastic, smiling and saying, 'I have had no ambitious thoughts in it' (*TH*, 215). The knowledge that Pennant had slept in the same bed the previous year might, perhaps, have dampened Bozzy's enthusiasm.

Unknown artist, 'Johnson and Boswell with Flora MacDonald', early nineteenth century (DJH)

The paths of Pennant and Johnson and Boswell would cross again, especially among the monastic ruins on Iona, so meticulously described in Pennant's 1772 tour – as Johnson remarked, 'Mr *Pennant's* delineations, which are doubtless exact, have made my unskillful description less necessary' (*TH*, 381). Yet nothing in Pennant can quite match Johnson's stirring reflection: 'that man is little to be envied, whose patriotism would not gain force upon the plains of *Marathon*, or whose piety would not grow warmer among the ruins of *Iona*!' (381). For all the political differences between them, both Johnson and Pennant shared common ground in summing up the pressing social crisis of the *Gàidhealtachd*: the abject poverty, rack-renting, and growing desire of the oppressed Gaels to emigrate

Moses Griffith, 'Ardmaddie House' (showing Pennant and Capt Archibald Campbell), probably 1772 (NLW)

to America. At Talisker, Boswell reported that Pennant's stringent criticism of Highland landowners had caused offence in some quarters. Col. Macleod's objection that Pennant had not offered any real solutions to the situation elicited – rather surprisingly – a spirited defence from Dr Johnson. 'Sir, there is no end of negative criticism. He tells what he observes, and as much as he chooses [...] I tell that many of the Highlanders go bare-footed, I am not obliged to tell how they may get shoes' (*TH*, 244). This outburst was sarcastically dubbed by Boswell the '*Oratio pro Pennantio*'.

Pennant concludes his 1772 *Voyage to the Hebrides* with a remarkable passage describing his 'Vision at Ardmaddie', in which, as he nods off to sleep, he is visited by an Ossianic spectre, 'a figure dressed in the garb of an ancient warrior', who 'floated in the air before me' (*Tour in Scotland 1772*, I, 365). After praising the chivalric and paternalistic aspects of the feudal clan system abolished after Culloden, the spectre laments the sad transformation of 'mighty chieftains' into 'rapacious landlords', determined 'to exchange the warm affections of their people for sordid trash' (367). He tasks the absentee chiefs to return to their estates and introduce the peaceful arts of fisheries and textile manufactories (although, less peacefully, he also urges increasing military recruitment for the British army). In 1774, the *Critical Review* excerpted 'Mr Pennant's fanciful, elegant, and pathetic vision at Ard-maddie' and praised it as an example of his 'lively imagination and clear understanding'.[13] It is one of the most celebrated passages in his whole book.

Although Johnson must have regretted that Pennant had employed an Ossianic warrior as his mouthpiece, he would have applauded the social criticism behind the 'Vision' – which he would just have had time to read before delivering his own manuscript to the publisher. He certainly drew upon it in the long dissertation on the contemporary crisis of Highland society, the 'Ostig in Sky' section that concludes his account of that island, and which in a sense forms the philosophical core of his whole book. Despite the ill-spirited attack on Ossian and Scottish national partiality at the end, Johnson's moral outrage is evident here as he criticizes commercial landlordism for breaking the clan system and infecting both tenants and tacksmen with what he calls an 'epidemic of emigration'. This prompts what is perhaps the most radical note in his whole book, a bitter indictment of *Pax Britannica* in the decades after Culloden: 'to hinder insurrection, by driving away the people, and to govern peaceably, by having no subjects, is an expedient, but argues no great profundity in politicks. [I]t affords a legislator little self-applause to consider, that where there was formerly an insurrection, there is now a wilderness' (*TH*, 194). Johnson here both echoes Pennant and paraphrases the Caledonian leader Calgacus's famous denunciation of the Romans before the battle of Mons Graupius, as reported by Tacitus: 'they create desolation, and call it peace'. This passage must challenge any simplistic view of Dr Johnson as a dedicated Scotophobe, just as his '*Oratio pro Pennantio*' collapses the view of Pennant and Johnson as polar opposites. As we will see, however, that sense of opposition was precisely what characterised the contemporary reception of both their books.

Display

Thomas Rowlandson, *The Dance on Dun-Can* (1786) (DJH)

'Johnson and Boswell with Flora MacDonald', oil on canvas (Unknown artist, early nineteenth century) (DJH)

Reproductions of engraved plates, pencil drawings and watercolours by Moses Griffith from Thomas Pennant's Extra-Illustrated *Tour in Scotland 1772*, compiled from the 1770s: 'Inside of a Weaver's Cottage in Islay' (engraving after John Frederick Miller); 'Ruins on Iona'; 'Women at the Quern and the Luaghad with a View of Talyskir'; 'A view of Quillin mountain'; '*Dryas octopetala*'; 'Danish Fort in Skye'; 'Whisky House near Loch Maree'; 'Dunvegan Castle' (showing Pennant and Norman Macleod); 'Ardmaddie House' (showing Pennant and Capt Archibald Campbell) (NLW)

V: Polemics

Thomas Rowlandson, *Scottifying the Palate*, 1786 (DJH)

Critical attacks on Johnson actually preceded the publication of his *Journey to the Western Islands* in January 1775, due to the extensive press interest in the tour. In September 1773, while the travellers were still in the Hebrides, the young Edinburgh poet Robert Fergusson lamented that the professors of St Andrews had not force-fed 'SAM, the lyin loun' with 'a haggis fat' and 'a gude sheep's head / Whase hide was singit, never flead [...] bedown his throat had learned to hirsle'.[14]

Portrait of Robert Fergusson by Alexander Runciman, 1772, Scottish National Gallery

But initial responses to the published *Journey* were generally favourable, at least in the London press. In a nice reversal of current historical appraisals of the two writers, the *Monthly Review* described Johnson's book as 'a valuable supplement to Mr Pennant's two accounts of his northern expeditions [...] Mr Pennant travels, chiefly, in the character of the naturalist and antiquary; Dr Johnson in that of the moralist and observer of men and manners'.[15] The *Monthly's* positive reaction (echoed by the *Critical Review* and the *Gentleman's Magazine*) was followed by a spate of more negative reviews, with Scottish writers especially showing hostility to Johnson. Perhaps the most notorious Scottish reaction was James Macpherson's, who apparently threatened Johnson with violence if he did not remove his remarks about *Ossian* from future editions. Johnson purchased an oak cudgel, and responded: 'I will not desist from detecting what I think a cheat, from any fear of the menaces of a Ruffian'.[16] Rather less menacing (but more cutting) was an anonymous article by 'Staffa' entitled 'Sketch of a Comparison between the two late writers of Travels in Scotland', published in the *St James Chronicle* on 18th February 1775, and later republished as a quarto pamphlet.

"Staffa", 'Sketch of a Comparison between the two late writers of Travels in Scotland', c. 1775

SATURDAY Feb. 18th.

For the St. James's Chronicle.

Sketch of a Comparison between the two late Writers of Travels in Scotland.

MR. PENNANT made two Tours into *Scotland*, in order to get acquainted with the inhabitants, their manners and customs; to see the face of the country, and learn the state of agriculture, arts, manufactures, fisheries and commerce; to discover its various productions, antiquities and curiosities of nature and art; and to observe how far the remotest creeks and islands are, or might be made, subservient to the general good and prosperity of the British empire.

Dr. Samuel Johnson travelled into *Scotland*, in order to discover unpolluted glens, and remote fir-clad rocks hardly inhabited, where needles and ink are scarce, and natives with wooden legs are used to lead hordes.

Mr. Pennant enumerates the forests of *Scotland*, with the size, quality and value of the trees, their situation with respect to water-carriage, and the proper soil and manner of cultivating them, &c.

Dr. Johnson went to discover spots where no trees grow, and having found a spot nearly such, learnedly and logically concludes that there is not a tree in *Scotland* any more than there are horses in *Venice*.

Mr.

MR PENNANT enumerates the forests of *Scotland*, with the size, quality and value of the trees, their situation with respect to water-carriage, and the proper soil and manner of cultivating them, &c.

DR JOHNSON went to discover spots where no trees grow, and having found a spot nearly such, learnedly and logically concludes that there is not a tree in *Scotland* any more than there are horses in *Venice*.[17]

The comparison continues in this vein, itemizing Pennant's achievements and Johnson's defaults as travel writers, including their treatment of ruined abbeys and castles, the Scottish clergy, descriptions of social conditions in the Highlands, food and hospitality. The review concludes by speculating on the reason for the difference: 'is it because Mr *Pennant* is a gentleman and a scholar, and Dr *Johnson* only a *scholar*? Or is it because Mr *Pennant* is a *Welchman*, and Dr *Johnson* an *Englishman*, and the subject of discourse, *Scotland*?' In a similar vein, the Edinburgh *Weekly Magazine* published a negative review signed 'A Hater of Impudence, Pedantry, and Affectation'.[18] Boswell later grumbled in the *Life of Johnson:* 'it is painful to recollect with what rancour he was assailed by numbers of shallow irritable North Britons'.[19]

Boswell sought to console Johnson by claiming that the Highlanders were more favourable towards him than Lowland Scots, who were offended by his attacks on Presbyterianism and on the Scottish universities, as well as by his sympathy for Jacobitism.[20] Yet this was not always the case. Easily the most visceral (if probably the least known) contemporary satire on Johnson was the work of the Argyll poet James Macintyre (1727–99), who was incensed by the English lexicographer's remarks on the Gaelic language. His Gaelic poem 'Song to Dr Johnson', stretching to nearly 100 lines, was published anonymously in 1776:

Ceann puinnsein a chinnich ‘na fhàsach
Den fhailbe’s den àileadh lomlàn
Gann uiread maighdeige-tràghad
De dh’eanchainn nàdarr’ ad’ throm-cheann,
Chan iongnadh ged thigeadh toth gràneil
O dheudach beàrnach do ronnachraois
‘S do chom gun chridhe gu d’ àinean
Ach uiread màileid de dhomblas.

A head of poison that became a vacuum
Full of emptiness and air
With scarce as much as a little shore-whelk
Of natural brain in your bloated head,
It’s no surprise if a foul smell wafts
From your huge spittlemouth’s gapped teeth
Since your trunk has no heart for your liver
But just a satchelful of gall instead.[21]

English critics of Johnson included the traveller Edward Topham and the anonymous female author of *Observations made in a Journey to the Highlands of Scotland, with Occasional Remarks on Dr Johnson’s Tour, by a Lady* (1777).[22] The most substantial attack in prose, however, was the work of another Gaelic scholar, Rev. Donald McNicol, minister of Lismore in Argyll. In *Remarks on Dr Samuel Johnson’s Journey to the Hebrides* (1779), McNicol praised Pennant’s ‘liberal sentiments’ about Scotland, and the manner in which he had ‘travelled with his judgement unbiased and his eyes open’. Johnson, on the other hand, was driven by a ‘master-passion’, a hatred of Scotland, and a determination to disprove the authenticity of the *Ossian* poems, which ‘distorted representations of everything he saw on the north side of the Tweed’. Johnson ‘came to Scotland’, he said, ‘without eyes to see the objects that lay in his way… [we are left] trusting to a *blind* guide’.[23] Although McNicol’s book makes some valid criticisms of Johnson, its length and its defensive tone allowed Boswell to dismiss it as a ‘scurrilous volume, larger than Johnson’s own…filled with malignant abuse’. Johnson, more pithily, dismissed the folly of attacking him in a ‘five shilling book […] if they had wit, they should have kept pelting me with pamphlets’.[24]

Portrait of Dr Johnson by an unknown nineteenth-century artist after John Opie (DJH)

Between them, Pennant and Johnson had established the canonical descriptions of the Scottish tour to which all subsequent travellers were indebted, particularly once the Highlands became ‘*inondé*’ with visitors

Thomas Rowlandson, *Revising for the Second Edition*, 1786 (DJH)

in the decades after 1780. The respected London travel writer John Knox wrote of Johnson in 1787: ‘I have often admired the accuracy, precision, and the justness of what he advances, respecting both the country and the people’. Revealingly though, Knox also observed that the *Journey*, cropped of some ‘illiberal epithets’, would ‘make an excellent supplement to the invaluable writings of the traveller who preceded him’ – namely Thomas Pennant.[25]

Display

Dr Donald McNicol, *Remarks on Dr Samuel Johnson’s Journey to the Hebrides* (London: Cadell, 1779) (PC)

Reproduction of ‘Staffa’, ‘Sketch of a comparison between the two late writers of Travels in Scotland’ (pamphlet *c.* 1775) (NLW)

Robert Fergusson, extract from ‘To the Principal and Professors of St Andrews University, on their superb treat to Dr Johnson’ (1773)

Seamus Mac an t-Saoir (James Macintyre), extract from ‘Oran don Ollamh MacIain’ (‘A Song to Dr Johnson’, 1776)

Thomas Rowlandson, *Scottifying the Palate* and *Revising for the Second Edition*, 1786 (DJH)

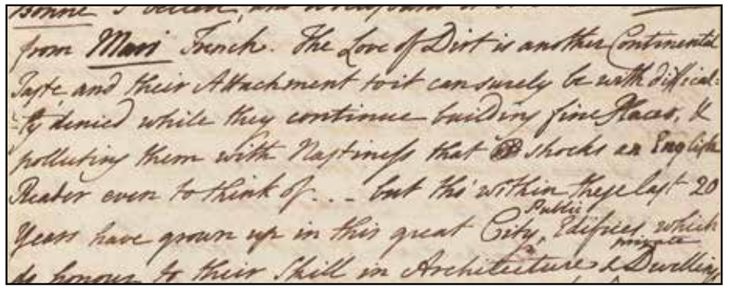
Dr Johnson’s wooden letter case, used when travelling (DJH)

Moses Griffith, A view of Ffestiniog, North Wales, 1770s or 80s (NLW)

VI: 'Nothing to be seen': Pennant, Johnson and Hester Thrale in Wales

Writing from Edinburgh in 1789, Dr Johnson's old friend Hester Thrale (now Hester Piozzi) described the *Journey* as 'one of his first Rate Performances – I look it over now every day with double Delight – Oh how the Scotch do detest him!'[26] Piozzi was by then engaged in her own extensive 'Scotch Journey', intended, like Boswell's account, as a defence of Johnson; in the event, her fine manuscript tour was never published.[27] Ironically, while sharing Johnson's disgust at Scottish dirtiness, she enthused about *Ossian* in the Highlands and admired the Duke of Argyll's extensive plantations at Inveraray, perhaps showing more affinity with her countryman (and kinsman) Pennant than with the Doctor.

In 1774, the day after he had submitted the manuscript of his *Journey to the Western Isles* to the publisher, Johnson wrote to a friend, 'I have just begun to print my Journey to the Hebrides and am leaving the press to take another journey into Wales, whither Mr. Thrale is going to take possession of at least five hundred a year, fallen to his Lady.'[28] The trip with the Thrales had been mooted while



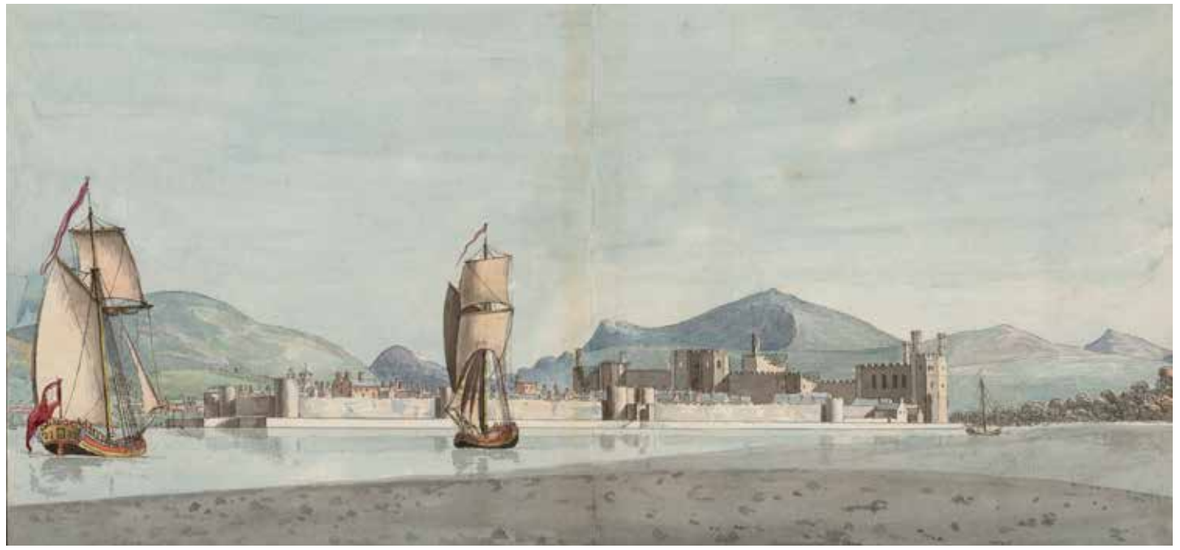
Extract from Hester Thrale Piozzi's 1789 Tour in Scotland (John Rylands Library)

Johnson was still in Scotland, where he had bravely declared that he was 'too well acquainted both with mire and with rocks, to be afraid of a Welsh journey.'[29]

In the event, however, the Welsh journey was a rather flat affair; not geographically, of course (a short ascent of the slopes of Snowdon left the Doctor 'breathless and harassed'), but rather in its prevailing tone. Time and again in the journal Johnson kept of this trip, places and buildings, including Hester Thrale's sixteenth-century ancestral house at Bachegraig, appear 'less than I seemed to expect'.[30]

Moses Griffith, Bachegraig, Tremeirchion, 1770s or 80s (NLW)

The Bishop of St Asaph's palace is 'but mean', as is Tremeirchion Church ('a mean fabrick'); Pwllheli is 'a mean old town' (38, 39, 49). He makes a grudging visit to a cascade near Rhuddlan: 'I trudged unwillingly and was not sorry to see it dry' (42) – the water was turned on for them shortly afterwards. Dinner with Colonel John Myddleton at Gwaenynog Hall near Denbigh proved one of the few highlights ('Middleton is the only man who in Wales has talked to me of literature'), but even here the rooms were 'low and gloomy' and although the 'table was well supplied, the fruit was bad' (42). For much of the time Johnson was not feeling in good form, and this evidently dampened his enthusiasm. The journal is dotted with references to various ailments and remedies, and to nights of broken sleep. One can only pity the travellers who ended up sharing a room with him in the (inevitably) 'very mean Inn' at Bangor: 'I lay in a room where the other bed had two men. I had a flatulent night' (46).



Moses Griffith, Caernarfon from the Menai Straits, 1770s or 80s (NLW)

Only the imposing Edwardian castles of the north-west coast roused him to anything like admiration. At Caernarfon castle (where, impressively, he seems to have climbed '169 steps' up to the Eagle Tower) he admits, 'I did not think there had been such buildings. It surpassed my Ideas' (47). Johnson's response, however, is inspired simply by what he finds around him; he makes no attempt to connect these ruins to any wider historical or political context. Brief as they are, Thomas Pennant's famous comments on the same place offer a sharper, more culturally-inflected appraisal of 'the grandeur of the castle', which for him is 'the most magnificent badge of our subjection'.[31]

For Hester Thrale, by contrast, the 1774 Welsh tour was a homecoming. Born near Pwllheli on the Llŷn Peninsula in 1741, Thrale had recently inherited the Bachegraig estate near Denbigh, and so the 1774 visit was essentially a business trip. But Wales meant much more than money to Thrale, who descended from generations of Welsh gentry. Now married to a wealthy brewer, her Welshness was the source of her class status, and perhaps of her independently-minded status as a salon hostess – in contrast to her fellow, rival English bluestockings.

Portrait of Hester Thrale, engraving by T. Holloway after a painting of 1781 by Robert Edge Pine (NLW)

Yet important as Wales was to Hester Thrale, her responses to the 1774 tour, which she recorded in a diary, were ambiguous for a number of reasons. Years of living in London now made north Wales seem unfamiliar, even unsettling. She reveals her misgivings in comments on her native Llŷn Peninsula, where the distinctive landscape of mountains and sea 'reminds you of the immence distance … from any English habitation' (113). Here, she gives free rein to 'the terrors which such a prospect as this naturally forces on the mind', imagining some of the logistical challenges of everyday life in the westernmost parts of north Wales:

This is indeed a retreat from the World … [t]he distance one is at from all relief if an accident should happen fills one with apprehension, and when I have surveyed the place of my nativity, I shall be glad to return to a land fuller of inhabitants (114).

Thrale's worries perhaps make most sense in the immediate context of her domestic life, filled at this point by raising children, and all too often by losing them (only four of her twelve children would live beyond their first few years). Family pressures also emerge in other ways in the tour. Thrale's mother had died the previous year, and the tour describes her ongoing grief as a journey through loss and a tribute to a way of life now ended:

> …'tis so melancholy a thing to have nobody one can speak to about one's clothes, or one's child, or one's health… Nobody but *Gentlemen*, before whom one must suppress everything except the mere formalities of conversation … I hoped, and very vainly hoped that wandering about the World would lessen my longing after [my mother], but who have I to chat with on the Road? who have I to tell my adventures to when I return? (95)

The travelogue becomes a substitute for frank talk, a place to confide feelings that must stay hidden in company. As a result Thrale is a hugely engaging commentator – gossipy, intimate and revealing, as well as a rewarding close observer of daily occurrences 'on the Road' from people to weather,

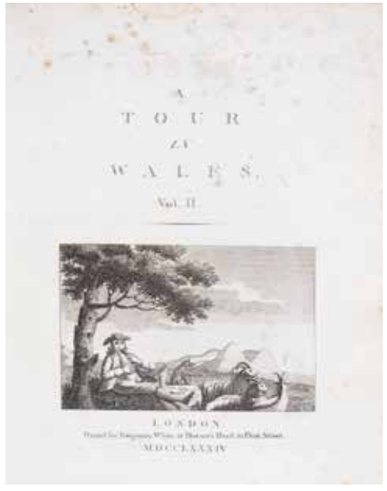
places, pastimes and travelling conditions. Thrale's Welsh background means that she is welcomed at every stopping point, but the personal dimensions of this tour also set it apart from the assured, authoritative narrative style of the travelogue she published in 1789, *Observations and Reflections made in the Course of a Journey through France, Italy, and Germany*, or the Scottish tour made the same year. However, as a piece shaped both by real experiences on the road and more ghostly ones of memory and grief, the Welsh tour perhaps foreshadows events in Thrale's life some twenty years later, when she would return to live in north-east Wales with her second husband, Gabriele Piozzi. This time the homecoming – to the place she now called 'Paradise' – would be complete.

S. Baker after J. Bluck, *Brynbella, the seat of G. Piozzi Esq*, 1795 (NLW)

Writing to John Taylor after returning to London, Johnson offered a fairly damning summary of the Welsh tour:

> Our Journey took up more time than we expected … We entered North Wales from Chester and went to the extremities of Carnarvonshire, and passed into Anglesea, and came back by Wrexham and Shrewsbury. But Wales has nothing that can much excite or gratify curiosity. The mode of life is entirely English. I am glad that I have seen it, though I have seen nothing, because now I know that there is nothing to be seen.'[32]

It is fortunate for the Welsh tourist industry that it was Thomas Pennant and not Dr Johnson who published the most-read *Tours in Wales* of the eighteenth century. The first of Pennant's three volumes came out in 1778: by 1784 the three separate 'journeys' had appeared



Thomas Pennant, *A Tour in Wales*, Vol II, 1784 (PC)

as a two-volume set, and by the 1790s travellers' accounts of north Wales are filled with citations from these works. Richly researched, dense with historical, botanical, antiquarian and mineralogical information, they are also, like the Scottish tours, shot through with moments of brilliant description, such as the account of watching the sun rise from the top of Snowdon, or an evocation of the swirling currents of the Menai Straits. Pennant acknowledged that the experience of writing about his native country differed from that of exploring the 'unknown' lands north of the Tweed: 'I am the first that attempted travels at home, therefore earnestly wish for accuracy.'[33]

Though he did undertake specific 'journeys' around north Wales in the early 1770s in order to research the places he described, Pennant's Welsh tours do not follow the same kind of clear itinerary as his Scottish ones. They often layer more recent experiences with those from his earlier years, weaving in childhood memories of careering down the slopes around Dinas Mawddwy in a peat sledge, or an ascent of Snowdon made in the 1750s. As with the tours in Scotland, Pennant obtained further information from a wide network of friends and acquaintances, all of whom could contribute expertise in particular areas: William Morris and Hugh Davies, botanists on Anglesey, John Evans the cartographer in Llanymynech, or Philip Yorke the antiquarian at Erddig. The library at nearby Mostyn Hall was full of rare volumes and manuscripts, and when Pennant married Ann Mostyn in 1777 (his first wife, Elizabeth Falconer, had died some fourteen years previously) he would have had even freer access to its treasures. Another key figure in researching material for the Welsh tours was the cleric and antiquarian John Lloyd of nearby Caerwys, who not only sourced a great deal of information for Pennant, especially the Welsh-language material, but advised on how to organize and present it.[34]

Engraving by W.C. Wilson after Moses Griffith, *Downing, The Seat of Thos Pennant Esq, Flintshire*, 1792 (NLW)

Moses Griffith, Mostyn Hall, 1770s or 80s (NLW)

Moses Griffith, View near Penywern, 1770s or 80s (NLW)

Pennant was related to Hester Thrale through the Salisburys of Bachegraig (her paternal grandmother had been a Pennant), and they met each other occasionally; the relationship soured for a while in the 1790s when Hester and Gabriele Piozzi began building their italianate villa at Tremeirchion, and entered into a 'tiresome' dispute over the purchase of lands which Pennant owned there. Generally, however, the relationship was civil, and even warm, especially during years of social unrest in Flintshire in the later 1790s, when Piozzi noted 'strong Dispositions towards Rioting, & they have threatened to stick poor Pennant's Head upon a Pike – What Rascals! His Literature, his Virtue, his Piety, – his Charity & perpetual Almsgivings will not perhaps secure his Safety and his Peace'.[35] There is, however, no sign that Johnson and his party visited Downing when they passed through Holywell on their Welsh trip of 1774. It is hard to imagine Johnson *not* recording such a meeting had it happened, given how preoccupied he was with the publication of his own Scottish tour at the time (page proofs arrived while he was travelling). It is interesting that for both writers the Welsh tours followed on immediately from their travels in Scotland. For Johnson this seems to have had the effect of making Wales less impressive, and certainly less exotic ('Wales', he wrote to Boswell, 'is so little different from England, that it offers nothing to the speculation of the traveller').[36] For the more historically-minded Pennant, the experience of Scotland undoubtedly gave a broader and deeper context to his understanding of the Welsh past. This is nowhere better displayed than in the strikingly bold opening to his *Tours in Wales,* which acknowledges their shared history of resistance to Roman rule:

> I now speak of my native country, celebrated in our earliest history for its valour and tenacity of its liberty; for the stand it made against the Romans; for its slaughter of the legions; and for the subjection of the nation by Agricola, who did not dare to attempt his Caledonian expedition, and leave behind him so tremendous an enemy.[37]

Both Pennant and Johnson travelled through British landscapes haunted by the ghosts of past conflicts, both recent and distant. From their different political standpoints and with their different temperaments, they observed the cultural complexities of the relatively new 'united' Kingdom of Great Britain. Their responses to the people, history and landscapes of Scotland and Wales are, to this day, alive with information, insight, polemics and humour; like all good travel accounts they both instruct and entertain. In restaging this 'close encounter' between two of Britain's most famous eighteenth-century travellers we hope to have captured some of the period's distinctive characteristics – its energy, its sense of possibility, and its curiosity.

Display

Thomas Pennant, *A Tour in Wales*, two volumes (London: Benj. White, 1784) (PC)

Dr Johnson's *Diary of a Journey into North Wales in the year 1774*, edited by Richard Duppa (London: R. Jennings, 1816) (PC)

Portrait of Hester Thrale, engraving by T. Holloway after a painting of 1781 by Robert Edge Pine (DJH)

Reproduction of a manuscript page from Hester Thrale Piozzi's 1789 Tour of Scotland (John Rylands Library)

'Journal of a tour into north Wales, 1808' by Hester Thrale Piozzi's daughter Sophia Colt Hoare (PC)

Reproductions of images by Moses Griffith and others, from Thomas Pennant's Extra-Illustrated *Tour in Wales*, compiled from the 1770s over many years: Ffestiniog, North Wales; Bachegraig, Tremeirchion; Caernarfon from the Menai Straits; Mostyn Hall (NLW)

Reproduction of engraving by W.C. Wilson after Moses Griffith, *Downing, The Seat of Thos Pennant Esq, Flintshire*, 1792 (NLW)

Reproduction of *Brynbella, the seat of G. Piozzi Esq,* engraving by S. Baker after J. Bluck, 1795 (NLW)

Notes

1 Advertisement to John Newbery's *The World Displayed*, 1759, quoted by Thomas Curley, *Samuel Johnson and the Age of Travel* (Athens, Georgia: Georgia UP, 1976), 73. Characteristically, Johnson also expressed the opposite view, noting in a letter to Hester Thrale in 1773: 'you have often heard me complain of finding myself disappointed with books of travels, I am afraid travel itself will end in disappointment'. Bruce Redford (ed.), *Letters of Samuel Johnson, Volume III, 1773–76* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 50.

2 [*TH*] here and throughout refers to *To the Hebrides: Samuel Johnson's Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland, and James Boswell's Journal of a Tour to the Highlands*, ed. Ronald Black (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2007).

3 Review of Johnson's *Journey to the Western Islands* from *The Monthly Review, or Literary Journal* (January–July 1775) 57.

4 *The Literary Life of the Late Thomas Pennant, Esq., by HIMSELF.* (London, Benj. and John White, 1793), 11.

5 James Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, ed. R.W. Chapman, revised by J.D. Fleeman, with a new introduction by Pat Rogers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, World's Classics, 1980) 933. Boswell here was doubtless alluding to Pennant's notorious remark on the massacre following the Battle of Culloden: 'let a veil be flung over a few excesses consequential of a day, productive of so much benefits to the united kingdoms'. Thomas Pennant, *Tour in Scotland, 1769*, 158.

6 See editor's comment in *Samuel Johnson, A Journey to the Western Isles*, with an introduction and notes by J. D. Fleeman (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), xvii–xviii.

7 Ralph Jenkins,'"And I travelled after him": Johnson and Pennant in Scotland', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 14, 3 (1972), 445–62, at 453 and 454. The two travellers are also discussed in Curley, *Samuel Johnson and the Age of Travel.*

8 Pennant, *Literary Life*, 13.

9 See Daniel Defoe, *Tour Through the Whole Island of Great Britain,* ed. Pat Rogers, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971) 596.

10 To Hester Thrale, 21 September 1773, *Letters of Samuel Johnson*, Vol II (1773–1776), ed. Bruce Redford, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 73.

11 Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, 818.

12 'The house of the steep climb.'

13 *Critical Review*, July 1774, 17–27. Quoted in Jenkins, "And I travelled after him", 452.

14 'To the Principal and Professors of the University of St Andrews, on their superb treat to Dr Johnson', ll. 27, 39; 45–48. *The Poems of Robert Fergusson*, ed. Matthew McDiarmid, 2 vols (1954–6) (repr. Eastbourne: Scottish Texts Society, n.d.), II, 182–85. The poem was published in the *Weekly Magazine* on 2 September 1773.

Moses Griffith, 'Ruins on Iona', probably 1772 (NLW)

15 *Monthly Review* (January 1775), 57–65, at 57.

16 To James Macpherson, 20 January 1775, *Letters of Samuel Johnson*, II, 169. See *Life*, 580.

17 'Staffa', 'Sketch of a Comparison between the two late writers of Travels in Scotland', *St James Chronicle,* Saturday 18 February [n.d. but *c.* 1775]. The National Library of Wales dates this pamphlet to 1780, but Fleeman (*Journey,* xxxi) suggests 1775.

18 *Weekly Magazine*, xxvii (16 and 23 February 1775), 225–28, 257–60.

19 Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, 584.

20 Boswell to Johnson, 18 February 1775, in Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, 587.

21 Seamus Mac an t-Saoir, 'Oran don Ollamh MacIain' ('A Song to Dr Johnson', 1776), in Ronald Black, ed., *An Lasair: An Anthology of 18th Century Scottish Gaelic Verse* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2000) 292–97: lines 73–80. See also note on pages 495–99. Translation by Ronald Black.

22 Edward Topham, *Letters from Edinburgh; Written in the Years 1774 and 75...during a Six Months Residence in Edinburgh* (London, 1776); 'A Lady', *A Journey to the Highlands of Scotland, with Occasional Remarks on Dr Johnson's Tour* (London: n.d.).

23 Rev. Donald McNicol, *Remarks on Dr Samuel Johnson's Journey to the Hebrides* (London: Cadell, 1779) 5, 19 and 24.

24 Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, 586. James Macpherson had a hand in seeing McNicol's book through the press.

25 John Knox, *A Tour through the Highlands of Scotland, and the Hebride Isles, in 1786* (London: J. Walter 1787), lxviii.

26 Hester Piozzi to Sophia Byron, 11 July 1789, *The Piozzi letters : correspondence of Hester Lynch Piozzi, 1784–1821 (formerly Mrs. Thrale)*, ed. Edward A. Bloom and Lillian D. Bloom (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1989), 304

27 Hester Piozzi, 'Journey through the North of England & Part of Scotland Wales &c.' (1789). [John Rylands Library, GB 133 Eng MS 623]. A transcription and edition by Elizabeth Edwards is available at http://www.curioustravellers.ac.uk/en/

28 Samuel Johnson to Bennet Langton, 5 July 1774, *Letters* II, 147.

29 Samuel Johnson to Hester Thrale, 3 November 1773, *Letters* II, 114.

30 *Dr Johnson and Mrs Thrale's Tour in North Wales 1774*, edited with an introduction and notes by Adrian Bristow (Wrexham: Bridge Books, 1995), 38. Page-numbers to this volume hereafter included in text.

31 Thomas Pennant, *A Tour in Wales*, II (London: Henry Hughes, 1783), 214.
32 Samuel Johnson to John Taylor, 20 October 1774, *Letters* II, 151.
33 T. Pennant to G. Ashby, 18 May 1773, MS E2/22/2/f. 25 Suffolk County Record Office.
34 For a useful introductory article, see R. Paul Evans, 'Thomas Pennant (1726–1798): The Father of Cambrian Tourists', *Cylchgrawn Hanes Cymru / Welsh History Review* 13, no. 4 (1987): 395–417.
35 Katherine C. Balderston (ed.), *Thraliana: The Diary of Mrs Hester Lynch Thrale* (2nd edition, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951), II, 943. Pennant's death in 1798 affected her deeply: 'Poor Poor deserted Downing! Poor Wales which never boasted such a Writer – ay and poor Literature too which sustains such a Loss in your long predicted Death of my Relation and Friend Mr. Pennant'. Hester Piozzi to Leonard Chappelow, 26 December 1798, *Piozzi Letters* II, 547.
36 Samuel Johnson to James Boswell, 1 October 1774, *Letters*, II, 151.
37 Pennant, *Tour in Wales*, I, 1.

Moses Griffith, 'Dunvegan Castle', probably 1772 (NLW)

Some Further Reading

Primary

To the Hebrides: Samuel Johnson's Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland, and James Boswell's Journal of a Tour to the Highlands, ed. Ronald Black (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2007).

Samuel Johnson, *A Journey to the Western Isles*, with an introduction and notes by J.D. Fleeman (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985).

Letters of Samuel Johnson, Volume II, 1773–76, ed. Bruce Redford (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1992).

Boswell's Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides with Samuel Johnson, 1773, Edited from the Original Manuscript, ed. Frederick A Pottle and Charles H. Bennet (London: Heinemann, in Collaboration with Yale University, 1963).

James Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, ed. R.W. Chapman, rev. J. D. Fleeman, with a new introduction by Pat Rogers (Oxford University Press, 1980).

Thomas Pennant, *A Tour in Scotland in 1769* (facsimile based on 3rd edition of 1774, Perth: Melvin Press, 1979).

– *A Tour in Scotland and Voyage to the Hebrides, 1772,* edited by Andrew Simmons with an introduction by Charles Withers (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 1998).

– *A Tour in Wales* (facsimile based on the two-volume 1784 edition with an introduction by R. Paul Evans (Wrexham: Bridge Books, 1991).

Dr Johnson and Mrs Thrale's Tour in North Wales 1774, edited with an introduction and notes by Adrian Bristow (Wrexham: Bridge Books, 1995).

Secondary

Mary-Ann Constantine and Nigel Leask (eds), *Enlightenment Travel and British Identities: Thomas Pennant's Tours in Scotland and Wales* (London: Anthem Press, 2017).

Thomas Curley, *Samuel Johnson and the Age of Travel* (Athens, Georgia: Georgia UP, 1976).

Robert DeMaria, Jr., *The Life of Samuel Johnson: A Critical Biography* (Oxford UK and Cambridge USA: Blackwell, 1993).

R. Paul Evans, 'Thomas Pennant (1726–1798): The Father of Cambrian Tourists', *Cylchgrawn Hanes Cymru / Welsh History Review* 13, no. 4 (1987), 395–417.

Ralph Jenkins, '"And I travelled after him": Johnson and Pennant in Scotland', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 14, 3 (1972), 445–62.

Murray Pittock, 'Johnson and Scotland', in Jonathan Clark and Howard Erskine-Hill, *Samuel Johnson in Historical Context* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), 184–96.

Pat Rogers, *Johnson and Boswell: The Transit of Caledonia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

Prosiect amlddisgyblaethol cyffrous dan nawdd yr AHRC yw 'Teithwyr Chwilfrydig: Thomas Pennant a Theithiau yng Nghymru a'r Alban 1760–1820'. Tîm y prosiect yw Mary-Ann Constantine, Nigel Leask, Alex Deans, Elizabeth Edwards, Ffion Jones, Kirsty McHugh, Luca Guariento a Vivien Williams. Am ragor o wybodaeth gweler:

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