



Scots Language Centre

## Crack Aboot Politics



### Document 4

Diary of John Nicoll  
1650

## John Nicoll (c.1590-1667)

John Nicoll was born and bred in Glasgow, but spent much of his life in Edinburgh. He was a notary public – writing legal documents on behalf of clients – and Writer to the Signet, a legal department of the Scottish government which oversaw the administration of decrees of the Court of Session. Nicoll was a prolific diary writer, which he began writing in 1637, providing much detail about the Covenanting period, political and religious affairs, war with England, the English occupation of Scotland, and the early Restoration government. Besides these great matters, Nicoll also recorded in passing many day to day events and curious incidents. The diary ends in 1667 which is when Nicoll appears to have died.

### Political Background

In the six extracts given below John Nicoll describes the outbreak of war with England and the course of the conflict during 1650. Although England and Scotland were independent kingdoms, with separate customs, governments, laws and churches, they had shared the same monarchy since 1603. When conflict broke out between King Charles I and Scotland (1637) and then between Charles and England (1642), each country became directly involved in the affairs of the other. In **Extract 1** Nicoll speaks about the regime which took over England after the execution of Charles I in 1649, and the rise to power of English puritan sects who felt threatened by an independent Scotland, and Presbyterian Church, which had proclaimed Charles II as king. The English under Oliver Cromwell invaded Scotland in July 1650 (**Extract 2**), and in September won a crushing victory at Dunbar (**Extract 3**). The ministers of the Church of Scotland had continued to ‘purge’ the Scottish army of those considered ‘ungodly’ or labelled ‘malignants’ because of their political and religious views, a fact which Nicoll accurately identified as fatally weakening Scottish military strength and national unity (**Extract 4**). In **Extract 5** Nicoll describes the break-up of the Scottish army and the advance of the English into his country, and, finally the increasingly confused state of the government coupled with the spread of deep religious divisions (**Extract 6**).

### Language and Style

John Nicoll’s language is basically Scots, but there are a number of noticeable Anglicised forms which are features of a general trend in Scottish writing of this period. Indeed, it would be true to say that the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century represents a low point for writings in Scots as people adopted a more English style for their written language. This was an uneven, drawn out process which varied from region to region, person to person. Texts in Scotland intended for publication were ‘Englished’ (to use the contemporary phrase) with an eye to the bigger English market while the only complete version of the Bible was also in that language. Nonetheless Nicoll’s written language is unmistakably Scottish and could only have been produced in Scotland. We should note the following forms:

#### And- endings

There are a class of words known as ‘participles’ that express actions and movement (verbs) but which can also be used to describe (adjectives). In Nicoll we find *refuisand* (refusing), *takand* (taking) and other forms. We note the difference between Scots –*and* and English –*ing*. During the 18<sup>th</sup> century it became common, through English influence, to spell the –*and* endings as –*in*’, so, for example, *gangand* became *gangin*’ (going) with an apostrophe because it was imagined that a letter was ‘missing’, though the pronunciation remained the same. This is why today we generally spell these endings in Scots with –*in* (with the ‘apologetic apostrophe’ now removed) rather than –*and*.

## English forms

Nicoll uses a number of English forms, some of them quite consistently, others occasionally. We find *much* and *such* used quite consistently in place of the Scots *muckle* (or its variants) and *sic* (or *sik*). Both Scots *lang* and English *long* are used, as are Scots *quha* (wha) and English *quho* (who), Scots *fra* and English *from*, Scots *thir* and English *these*, and Scots *baith* and English *both*. We also find *went* used. This is the past tense of *wend* ('turn or wind') common to the Germanic languages, but in Scots the past tense of *gae/gang* (go) is *gaed*. Scots speakers, of course, say *mair* and *maist*, but we also find Nicoll writing *moir* and *moist* alongside these forms throughout the diary. To a Scots speaker it seemed logical that an 'a' should be changed to an 'o' to give the English form, which is why more and most are spelled as they are. But why and when Nicoll chooses to replace *mair* and *maist* (or other forms) with the English forms is not clear. In this respect he is inconsistent, appearing neither clearly Scots, nor clearly English.

## It endings

In Scots in the 17<sup>th</sup> century (as also today) many words ended in *-it*, as in *apprehendit* (apprehended), *brandit* (branded), *compellit* (compelled), *delayit* (delayed), *followit* (followed), *keipit* (kept), *quarterit* (quartered), *routtit* (routed), *scatterit* (scattered) and *woundit* (wounded), which are, of course, equivalent to the custom of ending in *-ed* in English. All these forms are found in John Nicoll's diary.

## Ou

Generally pronounced as 'oo' in Scots. In the John Nicoll extracts we find *hous(e)*, *out*, *outreik* (equip), *sould* (should), *toun* (town) and *without* pronounced with an 'oo'. There are also a number of Latin words (which came by way of French) with this ending, such as *associatioun*, *capitulatioun*, *conditioun*, *divisioune*, *natioun*, *ordouris* (orders) and *soumes* (sums), though the 'oo' may not always have been stressed. Today in Scots both spellings 'oo' and 'ou' can be found, as in *oot* (out) and *toun* (town), all pronounced as 'oo'.

## Quh-

The spelling *quh*, which had once also been used in Northern English, was by this period considered peculiar to Scots and would remain common in writing until the 18<sup>th</sup> century. *Quh-* was pronounced as either a 'k' or 'wh' depending on the word. In Nicoll's writing we find *quha/quho* (wha/who), *quhair* (where), *quhais* (whase 'whose'), *quhat* (what), *quhen* (when), *quhilk* (whilk 'which'), *quhill* (while), *quhome* (whom), so he is quite consistent in this usage. We still see this spelling today in some Scots words and place-names, such as *quaich*, originally *quhaich* (a drinking cup), or the village of Kilconquhar (pronounced Kinuchar) in Fife.

## Sch- Spellings

*Sch-* was once a common spelling in Scots (in common with German) but has since disappeared. In the John Nicoll we find *Inglische(s)* (English), and *Scheltering* (sheltering).

## U/V/W

These three letters could be used interchangeably in Scots which is why we find *down*, *trouping*, *throw*, *toun*, and *twitching* in Nicol. The first four words were pronounced with an 'oo' and the last probably with an 'i' or 'ee'. In other Scots texts from this period we can find

spellings such as *uar* (were), *wse* (use) or *uith* (with) and words such as *cou* and *toun* might also be spelled as *cov/cow* and *tovn/town*.



### **Cognates**

Cognates are words that are clearly derived from a common origin with closely related tongues. In Nicoll we find many Scots words with clearly related English equivalents, such as *aganes* (against), *airmy* (army), *als* (also), *ane* (one), *awin* (own), *brocht* (brought), *eftir* (after), *farder* (further), *feght* (fight/battle), *fra* (from), *furneis* (furnish), *haid* (had), *haif* (have), *haitrent* (hatred), *heidis* (heads), *nicht/nycht* (night), *nychtboures* (neighbours), *pairtie* (party), *puneist* (punished), *socht* (sought), *sodgeris* (soldiers), *thame* (them), *thameselffis* (themselves), *togidder* (together), *watter* (water), *wechtie* (weighty), *weit* (wet), and *yeemen* (yeomen).

### **Various**

John Nicoll also provides examples of words peculiar to Scots, such as *drakie*, meaning damp or soaked due to wet weather. He uses *outreik* which means to supply or furnish, and also *tymouslie*, which is equivalent to English timely, and today in Scots takes the form *timeous*. He is consistent in spelling *thai*, *thair* and *thairby* (they, their and thereby) which were well established in Scots, and uses *do* and *to* which were also standard in Scots at that period, but later evolved into the *dae* and *tae* we are familiar with in Modern Scots.

### **Extract 1: June 1650: Scotland prepares for war**

This pairtie, eftir thai haif actit such thinges in England and Yreland, conceaving that thai can not be establischid and eat the fruit of thair awin devyces without contradictioun, als long as the Kirk of Scotland standis in thair way; thairfoir thai threaten us with a warr, drawing thair forces northward, and sending thame in small pairteis toward the Border, that it may be the les decerned quhat thai do. And gif the Lord sall suffer thame to invaid this land, (as it is to be feared) that the gangrene of thair errouris may tak hold upone sum ignorant and unstable myndis quho hath not resaved the love of treuth, so we may luik for desolatioun and destructioun; thairfoir, and for many uther grave and wechtie ressones, the Estaites did levie ane army, and put this kingdome in a posture of defence. And the Commissioun of the Generall Assemblie upone the 25 day of Junij 1650, did emit ane Seasonable Warning concerning the present dangeris and dewteis unto all the memberis of the Kirk...

### **Extract 2: July 1650: English invasion**

22 Julij 1650, being ane Monday, the Inglische army, under the commandement of Generall Oliver Cromwell, croced the watter of Tweid and marched in to our Scottis bordouris to and about Aytoun; quhair of present advertisement wes gevin to our Committee of Stait, and thairupone followit ane strict Proclamatioun that all betuix 60 and 16 sould be in reddines the morne to marche, both horse and fute. The same day, the fute sodgeris lying heir for the tyme did cast ane trinsche fra the fute of the Cannogait to Leith, for halding out of the enymie, that thai sould not pass that way; bot that Edinburgh and Leith sould haif saif correspondence ane with the uther without interruptioun of the enymie.

### **Extract 3: September 1650: Battle of Dunbar**

The Englische army entered in a parlee with the Scottis army both at Corstorphyn and Dumbar, and did offer gret and lairge offeris gif we sould suffer him to returne to England without farder molestatioun. Bot our army refusand, he, upone a Monday the secound day of September, anno 1650, pat himself in ordour, and that nicht being a drakie nycht, full of wind and weit, quhairin our Scottis army wer cairles and secure, and expecting no assalt be ressoun of the frequent parlees and offeris maid by the Englische, he tymouslie upone the morne thaireftir, be brek of day, being Tysday the third of September, 1650, invaidit our army, all of thame being at rest, and thair horses, and slew of our army about [blank] thowsand men, tuik and apprehendit many thowsand prissoneris, hurt and woundit many thowsands, scatterit all the rest of our army, quha for feir fled to Edinburgh and uther pairtes of the country.

### **Extract 4: September 1650: Recriminations**

To speik or writ of the opiniounes of many twiching the tinsell of this battell, it wer tedious, for the opiniouns of sum persones wer, that in the Scottis army thair wer mony independantis and sectareis, quho haid too much relatioun and correspondence with Generall Cromwell: sum utheris wer in the opinioun that the Englische gold did corrupt many. These wer the opiniounes of many, bot certane it wes that, befor this army wes routtit, thair wes much bussiness maid anent the purging of the Scottis army of malignantis be the space of many dayis; evin than quhen the Englische army mycht haif bene easelie routtit, and quhen thair souldieris fled in to the Scottis for feir, and quhen honorable conditiones and lairge offeris wer maid to the Scottis army to suffer thame to depairt and to leave the Kingdome; yea, evin the nycht befor the fecht, our Scottis leaderis wer in purging the Scottis army, as gif thair had bene no danger. For at this tyme the Scottis army thocht that the Englische army wer thair prissoneris, be ressoun of the double number of the Scottis above the Englishes, and



that the Inglishes wer than in capitulatioun with the Scottis to give thame lairge moneyis and uther conditiones to suffer thame depart this Kingdome.

Oh, what can be sufficentelie writtin of these thinges; for thir trubles daylie increst, be resson of the divisiounes of this Kingdome quhilk daylie increst: Sum of the commanderis dispysing honest men, quhome thai termed Malignantis; these Malignantis (as they call thame) being willing to ryse for defence of the natioun, bot wer rejected: Utheris, in the west pairtes of this Kingdome, drawing togidder, and takand up a great pairtie of men, by way of associatioun and refusing to joyne in the public service. And quhen the Scottis airmy mycht haif easelie routtit the Inglishes, and sindry notable occasiounes offered to invaid thame, yit the commanderis of the army still delayit, till it please God to delyver thame all in the handis of thair enymies.



### **Extract 5: October 1650: Scotland divided**

Quhill these thinges war in doing by the Englische army, thair wes lytill cair tane to oppose thame: bot faith and curage failled the Scottis universalie throw the land; divisiounes, haitrent, and malice still increst throw the Kingdome. Collonellis Ker and Strachane withdrew thameselffis fra the Scottis generall, Generall Leslie, and David Leslie his lievtenant; left thair ordouris, refused to serve under thair command; and not thairwith content, went to the west cuntrie, sik as Glasgow, Paislay, Ranfrew, Irwing, Air, Lanerk, Hammiltoun, quhair thair wes ane Associatioun concludit and drawn up among the Westland schyres, and quhair thai and thair followeris keipit thair randevous, quarterit thair men and hors upone the west pairtes of the land, compellit the gentell men, burgesses and yeemenis to furneis and rander thair horses for thair service, exacted great soumes of money for thair outreikis; and yit thair did lytill or no service, bot trouping up and down throw the cuntrie a lang space, even fra the fecht at Dumbar to the end of November or thairby.

In the meantyme, Generall Oliver Cromwell, cheiff commander of the Inglische army, come from Edinburgh to Lynlithgow, Falkirk, and Kilsyth, and thairefter come with his haill army to Glasgow, upone Fryday, the xi day of October, 1650; at quhais incuming the maist part of the inhabitantes left the toun, and fled to sindry pairtes of the cuntrie for scheltering thameselffis, not so much for feir of the enymie for thair cairge wes indifferentlie guid, bot becaus thai feared to be brandit with the names of complieris with sectarianes, as befoir thai wer censured and puneist for remayning in the toun the tyme of James Grahame his incuming, and brocht upone thameselffis the name and style of Malignantes, devysit aganes thame be thair awn nyctboures, quha haitted thame, and socht thair places and offices.

### **Extract 6: October 1650: Scotland in confusion**

The Kingdome being thus in a moist pitifull and deplorabill conditioun and sad estait, nane to ryse aganes the enymie, nor to defend the Kingdome, severall meetingis wer appoynted by the Estait to meet and consult on the effaires of the land; sum tymes at Sterling, uther tymes at Peerth, quhair dyveris dyettis of Parliament, Committee and Commissioneris for the Kirk met and wer holdin, and for crowning of the King: bot all wes to small purpos, the divisiounes both of Stait and Kirk inressing, to the great advantage of the enymie, quha esteemed these inward divisiounes of this land to be worth to him and moir profitable than twenty thowsand men.

I thocht guid to remember heir how that the names of Protestant and Papist wer not now in use, nor hes bene thir sindry yeiris past, bot suppress: and, in place thairof, rais up the name of Covenanteris, Anti-Covenanteris, Croce-Covenanteris, Puritanes, Babarteres, Roun-heidis, Auld-hornes, New-hornes, Croce-Petitioneris, Brown-lites, Separistes, Malignantis, Sectareis, Royalistes, Quakeris, Anabaptistes...

**Source:** 'A Diary of Public Transactions and other Occurrences, chiefly in Scotland, from January 1650, to June 1667, by John Nicoll', (Edinburgh, printed 1836).