

CHIEF'S MESSAGE TO THE HOUSE OF GORDON USA – AGM 2010

To all Gordons and friends,

I have recently begun to try and make a better job of understanding my family history. I am enjoying this enormously but it has highlighted huge differences between then and now. Not just the obvious things like electricity and telephone but more the business of life expectancy, the lack of communications and the perils of travel. You and I ring each other, pop over the county boundary for a get together, plan a holiday and fully expect to see our grandchildren grow up. It would be worrying for us if this were not so. Very different for our ancestors.

The 4th Earl of Huntly, the famous Cock o' the North, held the position of Warden of the Marches. Given this responsibility by King James it was his job to quell disturbances on the borders with England. He was also Lieutenant General of the North where he had to travel to the Highlands and Islands to settle differences between feuding clans. His home was at Huntly Castle in the North East. The man must have spent much of his life in the saddle.

But what intrigues me is how he discovered where he was needed most. No text messages, no chopper in the castle courtyard. But once he had set off across uncharted countryside, presumably with a posse of supporters, how did he know where he was going once he left the beaten track. There were precious few roads, no signposts, and mountain ranges to cross. Add to this impassable rivers and hostile clansmen and you have a seemingly impossible dilemma.

One might imagine that once word had reached him of hostilities - say in the borders - that it might have taken a couple of weeks to get there - only perhaps to find peace restored before he arrived. After all, the messengers themselves inevitably took time to deliver the message in the first place.

So I am finding that it is in thinking through the consequences of how they lived and the daily risks that they took that they really come alive. Looking at their portraits one wonders - did they really look like that - what would they have sounded like - would one have liked them or were things so different then that we would have nothing in common.

My successors will have photographs, recordings and a detailed biography to view before they decide whether they can find anything in common with me. I am afraid they will deduce that the 18th Earl is a shadow of the 4th Earl. That civilisation has tempered the breed. The dead no longer lie in heaps at the castle gates but, above the roofline, the flag is still flying.

Yours aye,

HUNTLY