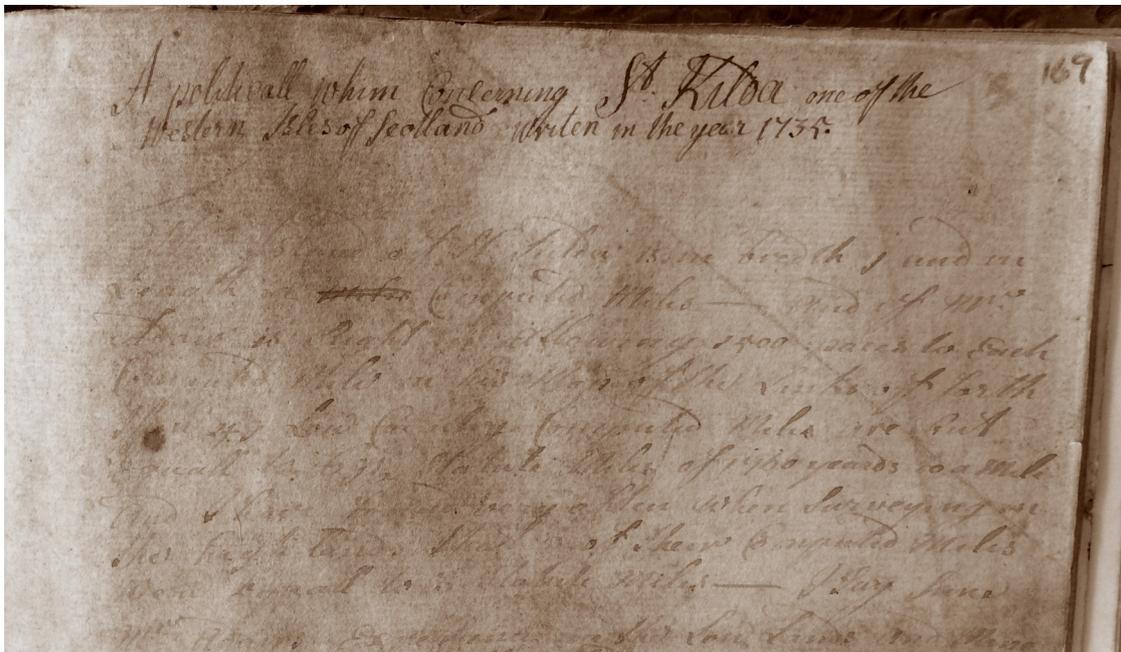


## ‘A Political Whim’, by Sir Alexander Murray, 1735

National Library of Scotland, Murray Papers, Volume 7, ff.169-172  
(Reference: *Adv.MS.29.1.1/vii*)

Composed by Sir Alexander Murray of Stanhope <sup>1</sup> (but not in his hand), and dated 1735. The author was a Jacobite, and seemed to be proposing that St Kilda and the Long Isle be established as a Jacobite Enclave.

It is handwritten, on both sides of the paper, which is ‘foolscap folio’ size. Because of stains and folds on the paper, the first page is in places almost illegible; at least one final page is missing from the end. Some words or phrases have been written down, then immediately scored out and replaced with alternative wording, which suggests that the text was perhaps being dictated to an amanuensis by Murray.



Folio pages follow the archival numbering (nnnA - recto; or nnnB - verso) in the transcript below. Illegible text is marked by [xxx words], with the number of unread words noted. Words whose reading is uncertain are shown *in italics*. The words which are scored out in the handwritten text have been included, but shown in smaller font and struck through ~~thus~~. Some of the arithmetic is erratic and is corrected in the footnotes. Spelling is accurately transcribed.

The title “A politicall whim...” has been added in a different hand, probably Sir Alexander Murray’s own. While Murray’s name appears nowhere on the manuscript, all the available evidence – inclusion in the archive folio, and strong echoes of the essay’s details in Murray’s later published work (*The True Interest* of 1740) – argue for his authorship.

<sup>1</sup> **Sir Alexander Murray**, 3<sup>rd</sup> Baronet Stanhope. 1687-1743. Stanhope is an estate near Drumelzier.

[169A]

**A politicall whim concerning St Kilda one of the Western Isles of Scotland written in the year 1735.**

The Island of St Kilda is in bredth 1 and in length 2 computed miles <sup>2</sup> - and if Mr. Adair is Right in allowing 1500 paces to each Computed mile <sup>3</sup> on his Map of the Links of Forth <sup>4</sup> Then 49 Low Country Computed Miles are but Equall to 69½ Statute Miles of 1760 yards to a Mile And I have found very often when Surveying in the High lands that 2 of their Computed Miles Were Equall to 3 Statute Miles — I say since Mr. Adair's *Experiences* in the Low Lands and more in the Highlands of Scotlands [*one word*] so nearly so Agree with [*one word: Maps?*] well enough [*word omitted? to?*] allow the Bredth of St Kilda to be 1½ miles its Length 3 Statute Miles and Consequently its Area 4½ square miles or ~~280~~ 2880 square acres.<sup>5</sup>

Besides *Hirta* there is here Isle Soa about half a mile to the West and the Isle Boreraay two Leagues to the North of St Kilda. Each of which being one Mile of Circumference are about 100 <sup>6</sup> acres (each) of superperciall extent.

There is [*three words*] severall Lesser Islands and Rocks which are of considerable Value to the Inhabitants as affording them the advantage of fishing and fowling upon them.

The Number of the Inhabitants of this Island are about 200 and the Area of the Island being (as about) 2880 acres there is 14 acres of Land to every one of the Inhabitants.

This Island *Rises high in the Midle* and there is one hill higher than the Rest — The Soil produces good Oats and the best Barley in the Western Islands — ~~the Island~~ *it is also well wattered with the fountains* which *rise* at both sides of the Island — [*four words*] with a high Rock [*five words*] landing place which is also *attended* with the Difficultie of Climbing up a *Rock*. On the South end of this Bay or Landing place there is the Ruines of an old fort called Dun fir-bolg <sup>7</sup> that is to say the fort of the

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<sup>2</sup> These are the figures provided by Martin Martin in his book '*Voyage to St Kilda*' (1698).

<sup>3</sup> A 'computed mile' would normally mean a Scots mile, considered to be about 1,980 yards – but could potentially be as long as 2,200 yards; a 'statute mile' is the familiar one of 1,760 yards, defined by English statute in 1593. However, Murray is obscurely referencing something else. The 'pace' is the distance covered by both legs, and was accepted in this period to be 5 feet in length. The 'Low Country Computed Mile' on the next line is almost certainly the Scottish 'common mile' (and not a *Dutch* mile, which is at least twice the length of a statute mile), which was defined as 1,500 paces of 5 feet each = 2,500 yards; this is also the length of the old Roman or Celtic 'league' (*leuca*). And 2,500 yards is 1.42 statute miles; thus, 49 of the 'common miles' would ( x 1.42) = 69½ of the Statute ones. But why 49 has been chosen as the base number is not explained...

<sup>4</sup> This particular map cannot be traced; John Adair drew up several maps of the coasts and rivers of Scotland in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century - see for example <https://maps.nls.uk/view/74414174>. The 'Links of Forth' is that stretch of the river Forth just downstream from Stirling.

<sup>5</sup> Murray thus applies the multiplier of 1.42 (as above) to the dimensions recorded by Martin Martin. Neither set of figures is particularly accurate.

<sup>6</sup> Even a circle (which would enclose the maximum area) with a circumference of 1 mile would have an area of 246,500 square yards, which equates to around 50 acres. The figure given here appears to be 100 acres 'each'.

<sup>7</sup> In Irish mythology, the 'Fir Bolg' were an early race of settlers in Ireland. This name for Dun is given by Kenneth Macaulay in his 1764 book on St Kilda, but he must have learned it from an earlier source.

*Bolgers.*

The Inhabitants *consume* yearly above 20000 Solan Geese [two words] little stone houses [three words] they have some [one word] ~~for~~ [two words] that ~~purpose~~ of the like purpose.

[169B]

There is plenty of Codd and Ling of a Large Size round this Isle.  
Solan Geese and severall other Fowls are very Numerous.

This little Mainland and its small adjacent Islands is an excellent Epitome of the whole world & by the above Description we have a veiw of it as being possessed with a few poor, Ignorant and Indolent people who by their poverty Ignorance and Simplicity are not at all or but very little either serviceable or hurtfull to the Rest of Mankind.

We shall in the next place consider it as possessed by a people whom we shall suppose ~~have it in their power~~ are powerfull Rich and Wise enough to defend their own properties and to mollest at least if not tottally conquer & subdue the other adjacent Islands; and by Degrees Subject to themselves not only the Dominion of the Seas and North part but even of the ~~island of B~~ whole Brittanick Continent & Islands.

In order to [*word omitted: probably 'show'*] this we shall Consider how many persons this Island is Capable to Maintain and this will be very soon done since by the above Calculation we find every person on the Island has but 14 acres of Land to subsist on where as every person in the Shire of Argyle has about 80 acres. This Difference must happen by the plenty of fowls and fish which these the present Indolent & Lazy Inhabitants come at so easily.

[170A]

Now find our supposed wise & powerfull possessors are Capable of Improveing even the land of this Island so far that every 4 acres Could maintain one person. Then May this litle main land and its Islands belonging to it maintain 770<sup>8</sup> souls - and if we can beleive Sir Will. Petty<sup>9</sup> when he tells us in his politicall arithmetick:

“That he could have set down the very numbers of acres that would bear Bread & Drink-Corn together with flesh, butter and cheese sufficient to victuall 9000000 of persons as they are victualled on Ships and Regullar families[”] but says he<sup>10</sup> [“]I shall only say in generall that 10 millions of acres will do it.”

I say if we can believe him in this as we have very good Reason to do from the Example of the Dutch who have little more than one acre of land to every person Then is our Island above mention'd Capable to maintain 2310 souls without any Trade or Industry out of their own little teritories.

And if we further consider the situation of this Island with Respect to Conveniency of fishing and fowling there the ~~fishes~~ first especially is what we propose the whole Inhabitants may be employed about one way or other the husbandmen excepted and ~~He~~ we hope it will not be thought absurd if we say that as many people may be employed about and live upon the Fishing as can live upon the Land &

<sup>8</sup> 2880 divided by 4 = 720, not 770.

<sup>9</sup> **Sir William Petty** - noted political economist, 1623-1687.

<sup>10</sup> This pair of closing and opening quotation marks are missing in the original.

fowling on the Island and if so the Number of people who possibly could live on the product of this Island by Land and Watter will be about 5000.

[170B]

Thus far we have considered this Island ~~under its~~ in it's *sizsable* and known Capacity of affording the Neccesarys of Life to a Number of five thousand Souls.

Besides which its very probable that it can afford us as yet an unknown Subterranean Treasure — for it hath been Shown that the West Cost of Scotland is Richly stored with Mines of Lead Coppar Iron &c. and that the Islands of Brittain have all been joined to the Continent of Europe and to one another so that the Island of St Kilda has as good a Chance of Mines as the west side of the Mainland of Scotland and the other adjacent Islands: and we are Inform'd by Mr. Martin that the Natives of N. Uist and the HARRAS do affirm that gold Dust has been found at Griminis on N. Uist and Copveaul on Harris. Now these are the places to which St Kilda is Directly oposite & nearest ~~to~~ of any other of the larger Western Islands.

If this should prove true then would it and the fishing trade abovemention'd be two ~~the~~ almost Inexhaustable commodities. The Managing, Manufacturing & Carrying of which to proper Markets would Employ as Many hands as could probably have houses to Lodge in the Island which might be about twenty thousand — But by this time some will Readily say we have carryed this point as high as we can and object that tho all we have said were really true yet the want

[171A] of a harbour in the Island Ruins our whole scheme.

This is indeed a very formidable objection but would have been much more so before the art of Building Ships & boats was known for then it would be said how should we get thither — But now as we know how to build Boats & Ships and how in them to be conveyed thither so we know how to make harbours or places to preserve them from the Rigour of a Tempestuous Ocean when we are there and that with being at no great expence because at the same *time* that the people are quarrying stones for building houses to Dwell in they may order also as be making harbours for their boats — And if we cannot make harbours for Ships of any burthen here they may ly in the opposite Islands where harbours are good & plenty — Long boats will serve our turn especially if we are at peace with our Neighbours — and in Deed we cannot well propose this Little State or Government can Make or Long Maintain a War without the aid and assistance of some one or more powerfull potentates who have all or a Great Share of the Dominion of the Sea ~~without the~~ except they are at the same *time* possessed of the Long Isles viz: Lewis Harris and North & South Uists what they might do if possessed of these (tho now poor and contemptable) places shall be the Subject of the following part of these papers.

[171B]

Haveing in ~~a for~~ one of the above paragraphs supposed the Islands of St Kilda may be inhabited by a people wise Rich & powerfull enough to begin easy Neighbours to apparently more powerfull more Numerous & richer Governments and Societys of Men — to illustrate this Supposition I have already shown what Number of people may live upon the product of its Land and Sea and to remove all objections ~~which May~~

~~be made of the Naturall Impediments~~ of its want of harbours, its being situat in a rough & tempestuous ocean &c. I suppose the inhabitants ~~possessed of the Neighbouring Islands~~ are likewise possessors of the Neighbouring Islands which are not so Inconsiderable or Contemptable as some may imagine. The superficial Contents of Lewes Harris North & South Uists Exclusive of the vast number of Lessor Islands lying closs upon their Coasts is about 967 square miles or 616880 <sup>11</sup> square acres which allowing 4 acres to each person would afford Mainttainance to 129220 Soulls of which we may well enough suppose 40 thousand are men fitt to carry Arms.

Now as these Islands are capable of furnishing the Necessarys of Life to such a Number of people ~~have such a sizable fund~~ the Lochs and Bays Numerous and well stored with Fishes of all kinds. Great Numbers of Ships can ly at Anchor in Safe & Commodious harbours. The Island of St Kilda being Naturally so well fortified that the Arms Amonition and Stores of all kinds may be lodged there and defended by a small number (even) of invallids against the most powerfull fleet in Europe considering the Situation of it.

[172A]

And if there are mines in these Isles as probably there is (for Reasons already given) it is an advantage Supperior and almost double to all the rest.

I say supposing these Islands possessed with a wise and Industrious people able skillfull and willing to make use of Such Naturall advantages as is immediately above mention'd who can deny but they will be in a capacity of being Dangerous Neighbours especially if they have any considerable share of the Dominion at Sea.

Possibly it will be said here that tho' all this may be allowed yet ~~however~~ such a thing can never come to pass have we not now a powerfull & well disciplined Land army ~~have we not wise~~ are not our Ambassadors and plenipotentiaries abroad; Men of the best Conduct, prudence & penetration. Are not those at the head of affairs at home Men of the greatest parts, & best skill'd in politicks of any another Nation, is not our fleet at sea the bulwark of Brittan, and Terrour of Europe.

I answer this is the *Sume* of all that can be said to allay our fears and I shall in my turn take the Liberty of proposing a few Questions of the like Nature.

~~And first had not the Roman Empire profited by all the other great and in their Severall Times flourishing Empires that were befor and gained as many great and good advantages as these~~

[172B]

And first [*one word*] by all these former <sup>flourishing</sup> <sup>12</sup> Empires Kingdoms and ~~flourishing~~ States that were Conquered and overthrown by one another and at last by the Romans were all Constrained to *obey one* head & Governour.

I say had that other Great Empire<sup>13</sup> once much more Reason to look upon her self *invincible* than either Great Brittain or any of her Government now in being has — and yet nothing remains of that Mighty Empire to this day but only the Name.

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<sup>11</sup> Two mis-calculations (or mis-spellings) here and following:  $(967 * 1760\text{yds} * 1760\text{yds}) / 4840 = 618880$  acres; and  $616880$  divided by  $4 = 154220$  (or  $618880 / 4 = 154720$ ). However,  $516880 / 4 = 129220$ ...

<sup>12</sup> The word 'flourishing' has been inserted just above the line, between 'former' and 'Empires'

<sup>13</sup> i.e. the Roman Empire

Was it not the lesser powers (in almost all Conquests) that by degrees over came Lands far greater. Was it not from haveing possession of the small Isle of Thanet and after wards of Kent that the Saxons made their most entire Conquest of Brittain that ever any one people or Nation Made of another.

Was it not by haveing possession of the Isles of Orkney that the Norwegians & Danes so Mollested and Disturbed the Scots in the north and the Saxons when possessed of the South parts of Brittan.

Doe we not Read that the Brittans (who were for years under the Government of the Romans) became acquainted with the Learning and politeness of their Conquerors so that when they were conquer'd by the Saxons they were perhaps as wise & polished as at this day.

And what proportion of the Number of our Ships of War ~~beare~~ of *this* day bear to their 2600 Riged out by King Edgar notwithstanding of ~~the~~ which and of the large addition made to that fleet by Ethelred his successor [,] the Danes *not only [one word]* for ~~his~~ the

***[The manuscript breaks off here. There must once have been at least one further page, which is missing from the folio volume.]***