

26th May 2020

Connections

"There is a history in all men's lives ..."

William Shakespeare, Henry IV, Part 2

In *George Macleod*, a biography of the founder of the Iona Community, Ron Ferguson recounts George's oft-repeated tale of his first visit to Iona when he was nine years old. His father, George would relate, insisted he talk with a Mrs McCormack. "She's eighty-five," he was told, "and you are to shake hands with her." When George had dutifully done so, his father said, "Now, I will tell you why I asked you to do that. When she was nine years old this lady shook hands with a Mrs Campbell who was then eighty-five years old, and Mrs Campbell, when *she* was nine years of age, stood on exactly this point on the jetty and watched the boat going down the Sound of Iona taking Bonnie Prince Charlie back to France." And George would add with a flourish, "Now isn't that wonderful! Two handshakes away from Bonnie Prince Charlie."

In the mid-1980s, when George had passed eighty-five and my son, James, wasn't yet nine, George took him with other children down to the same Iona jetty, and, with enthusiasm, told them his story. He then shook hands with the somewhat bemused children, who heard these immortal words: "Isn't it wonderful! On exactly this point on the jetty, you are only *three* handshakes away from Bonnie Prince Charlie." Three handshakes away from the 1745 Jacobite Rebellion! Now, there's a thing!

But George was right! We should never be disconnected from what's gone before, floating about in our present era as if we had no links with anything or anyone else. We'd like to think *we* know it all, that our generation have "got it all sussed". Yet this present crisis gives the lie to that. So let's value our connections with people and events of the past. Let's shake hands with history and rediscover the truth that we are closer to our ancestors and their stories than we might realise.

A prayer for today

*God of all time, bind me this day with my Communion of Saints,
that I might serve as they have served, love as they have loved,
and be ever strengthened by their closeness, wisdom and example. Amen.*

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