



General George Wade to King George I

10th December 1724



This lengthy but fascinating letter from General George Wade to King George I, gives an intriguing glimpse of life in the Scottish Highlands in the early 1700s

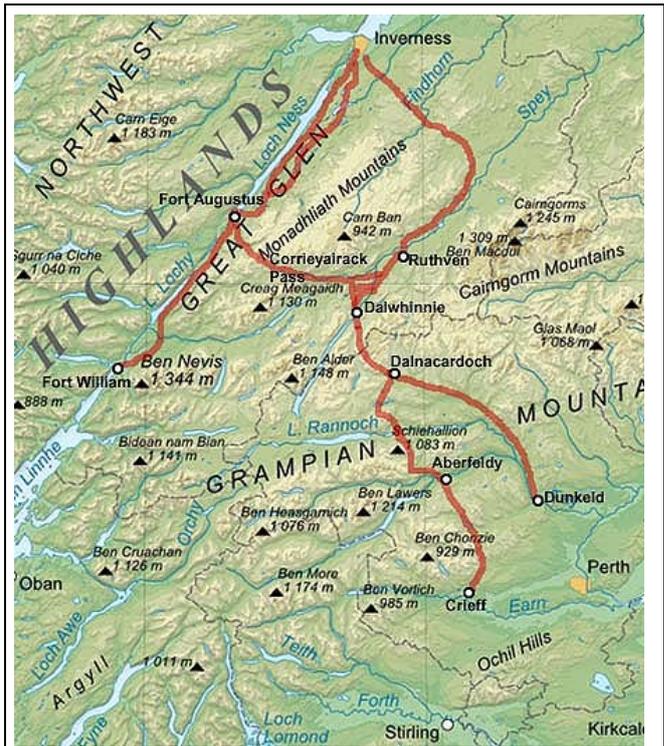
In Obedience to Your Majesty's Commands and Instructions under your Royal Sign Manual bearing date the 3rd day of July 1724, Commanding me to go into the Highlands of Scotland, and narrowly to inspect the present situation of the Highlanders, their Customs, Manners and the State of the Country in regard to the Robberies and Depredations, said to be committed in that part of your Majesty's Dominions; As also to make strict and particular enquiry into the effect of the last Law for Disarming the Highlanders and for securing your Majesty's Loyal and faithful Subjects, represented to be left Naked and Defenceless by paying due obedience thereto; and to inform Your Majesty of all other particulars contained in the said Instructions, and how far the Memorial delivered to Your Majesty by Simon Lord Lovat and his Remarks thereupon are founded on Facts, and the present Practices of those People; And whether the Remedies mentioned therein may properly be applied for preventing the Several Grievances, Abuses, and Violences complained of in the said Memorial.

Your Majesty has farther been pleased to Command me to make such Enquiries and endeavour to get such Information, relating to the several particulars above mentioned as may enable me to suggest to your Majesty, such other Remedies as may conduce to the Quiet of your Faithful Subjects and the good Settlement of that part of the Kingdom. The Day after I received your Majesty's Instructions I proceeded on my Journey, and have Travelled through the greatest and most uncivilized Parts of the

The Military Roads were built in the 1700's to allow Government forces to deploy rapidly to key locations in the Highlands if there was a Jacobite uprising. More than 250 miles of these roads were built under the command of General Wade linking forts in the Great Glen between Fort William and Inverness and with the road network in the south of Scotland at Dunkeld and Crieff.

Highlands of Scotland; And humbly beg leave to lay before Your Majesty the following Report, which I have collected as well from my own Observations, with all Faithfulness and Impartiality, as from the best Informations I could procure during my Continuance in that part of the Country.

The Highlands are the Mountainous Parts of Scotland, not defined or described by any precise Limits or Boundaries of Counties or Shires but are Tracts of Mountains, in extent of Land, more than one-half of the Kingdom of Scotland; and are for the most part on the Western Ocean, extending from Dumbarton to the North End of the Island of Great Britain, near 200 Miles in length,



and from about 40 to 80 Miles in breadth. All the Islands on the West and North-West Seas are called Highlands as well from their Mountainous Situation, as from the Habits, Customs, Manners and Language of their Inhabitants. The Lowlands are all that part of Scotland on the South of Forth and Clyde, and on the East side of the Kingdom from the Firth of Edinburgh to Caithness near the Orkneys is a Tract of Low Country from 4 to 20 Miles in Breadth.

The Number of Men able to carry Arms in the Highlands (including the Inhabitants of the Isles) is by the nearest Computation about 22,000 Men, of which Number about 10,000 are Vassals to the Superiors well affected to Your Majesty's Government; most of the remaining 12,000 have been engaged in Rebellion against Your Majesty, and are ready, whenever encouraged by their Superiors or Chiefs of Clans, to create new Troubles and rise in Arms in favour of the Pretender.

Their Notions of Virtue and Vice are very different from the more civilized part of Mankind. They think it a most Sublime Virtue to pay a Servile and Abject Obedience to the Commands of their Chieftains, altho' in opposition to their Sovereign and the Laws of the Kingdom, and to encourage this, their Fidelity, they are treated by their Chiefs with great Familiarity, they partake with them in their Diversions, and shake them by the Hand wherever they meet them.

Hand Shaking

The Virtue next to this, in esteem amongst them, is the love they bear to that particular Branch of which they are a part, and in a Second Degree to the whole Clan, or Name, by assisting each other (right or wrong) against any other Clan with whom they are at Variance, and great Barbarities are often committed by One, to revenge the Quarrels of Another.

They have still a more extensive adherence one to another, as Highlanders in opposition to the People who inhabit the Low Countries, whom they hold in the utmost Contempt, imagining them inferior to themselves in Courage, Resolution, and the use of Arms, and accuse them of being Proud, Avaricious, and Breakers of their Word.

They have also a Tradition amongst them that the Lowlands were in Ancient Times, the Inheritance of their Ancestors, and therefore believe they have a right to commit Depredations, whenever it is in their power to put them in Execution.

The Highlanders are divided into Tribes or Clans, under-Lairds, or Chieftains (as they are called in the Laws of Scotland), each Tribe or Clan is subdivided into Little Branches sprung from the Main Stock who have also Chieftains over them, and from these are still smaller Branches of Fifty or Sixty Men, who deduce their Original from them, and on whom they rely as their Protectors and Defenders.

The Arms they make use of in War, are, a Musket, a Broad Sword and Target, a Pistol and a Durk or Dagger, hanging by their side, with a Powder Horn and Pouch for their Ammunition. They form themselves into Bodies of unequal Numbers according to the strength of their Clan or Tribe, which is Commanded by their Respective Superior or

Chieftain. When in sight of the Enemy they endeavour to possess themselves of the highest Ground, believing they descend on them with greater force.

They generally give their fire at a distance, they lay down their Arms on the Ground and make a Vigorous Attack with their Broad Swords, but if repulsed, seldom or never rally again. They dread engaging with the Cavalry and seldom venture to descend from the Mountains when apprehensive of being charged by them.

The Fiery Cross

On sudden Alarms, or when any Chieftain is in distress, they give Notice to their Clans or those in Alliance with them, by sending a Man with what they call the Fiery Cross, which is a Stick in the form of a Cross, burnt at the End, who send it forward to the next Tribe or Clan. They carry with it a written Paper directing them where to Assemble; upon sight of which they leave their Habitation and with great Expedition repair to the place of Rendezvous, with Arms, Ammunition and Meal for Provision.

I Presume also to Represent to Your Majesty, that the Manners and Customs of the Highlanders, their Way of Living, their Strong Friendships, and Adherence to those of their own Name, Tribe and Family, their blind and Servile Submission to the Commands of their Superiors and Chieftains, and the little Regard they have ever paid to the Laws of the Kingdom, both before and since the Union, are truly set forth in the Lord Lovat's Memorial and other Matters contained in the said Paper, which Your Majesty was pleased to direct should be put into my Hands to peruse and Examine. The Imposition mentioned in that Memorial commonly called the *Black Meal* is levied by the Highlanders on almost all the Low Country bordering thereon. But as it is equally Criminal by the Laws of Scotland to pay this Exaction or to Extort it, the Inhabitants avoid the Penalty of the Laws, agree with the Robbers, or

Below: Wade's Bridge crosses the River Tay on the north west side of Aberfeldy on the Weem/Kenmore road. It is one of over 40 bridges built in the Highlands between 1726 and 1735 as part of General Wade's 402 km of road construction 'for securing a safe and easy communication between the highlands and the trading towns of the low country' as the inscription on the bridge reads.



Blackmail

some of their Correspondents in the Lowlands to protect their Horses and Cattle, who are in effect but their Stewards or Factors, and as long as this payment continues, the Depredations cease upon their Lands, otherwise the Collector of this Illegal Imposition is obliged to make good the loss they have sustained. They give regular Receipts for the same Safe Guard Money, and those who refuse to submit to this Imposition are sure of being Plundered, their being no other way to avoid it but by keeping a constant Guard of Armed Men, which, altho' it is sometimes done, is not only illegal, but a more expensive way of securing their property.

The Clans in the Highlands, the most addicted to Rapine



A well-preserved section of General Wade's Military Road near Melgarve, leading to the Corrieyairack Pass

and Plunder, are, the Cameron's on the West of the Shire of Inverness, the Mackenzie's and others in the Shire of Ross who were Vassals to the late Earl of Seaforth, the McDonnell's of Keppoch, the Broadalbin Men, and the McGregors on the Borders of Argyleshire. They go out in

Rapine & Plunder

Parties from Ten to Thirty Men, traverse large Tracts of Mountains till they arrive at the Lowlands where they Design to Commit Depredations, which they chuse to do in places distant from the Clans where they Inhabit; They drive the Stolen Cattle in the Night time, and in the Day remain on the Tops of the Mountains or in the Woods (with which the Highlands abound) and take the first occasion to sell them at the Fairs or Markets that are annually held in many parts of the Country.

Those who are robbed of their Cattle (or Persons employ'd by them) follow them by the Tract and often recover them from the Robbers by Compounding for a certain sum of Money agreed on, but if the Pursuers are Armed and in Numbers Superior to the Thieves and happen to seize any of them, they are seldom or never prosecuted, the poorer sort being unable to support the charge of Prosecution.

They are likewise under the Apprehension of becoming the Object of their Revenge, by having their Houses and Stacks burnt, their Cattle stolen or hockt, and their Lives at the Mercy of the Tribe or Clan to whom the Banditti belong. The Richer sort (to keep, as they call it good Neighbourhood) generally compound with the Chieftain of the Tribe or Clan, for double Restitution, which he willingly pays to save one of his Clan from Prosecution, and this is repaid him by a Contribution from the Thieves of his Clan, who never refuse the payment of their proportion to save one of their own fraternity. This Composition is seldom paid in Money, but in Cattle stolen from the opposite side of the Country to make reparation to the Person injured.

The Chiefs of some of these Tribes never fail to give Countenance and Protection to those of their own Clan; and tho' they are taken and committed to Prison, by the Plaintiff (who is) better satisfied than if the Criminal was executed, since he must (be) at the Charge and Trouble of a tedious dilatory and expensive Prosecution; and I was assured by one who annually attended the Assizes at Inverness for four Years past, that there had been but one Person Executed there by the Lords of Justiciary and that (as I remember) for Murder, tho' that Place is the Judicature, in Criminal Cases, for the greatest part of the Highlands of Scotland.

There is another Practice used in the Highlands, by which the Cattle stolen are often recovered, which is, by sending Persons to that part of the Country most suspected and making an offer of a Reward (which the Highlanders call Tascal-Money) to any who will discover the Cattle and the Persons who stole them, by the temptation of the Reward and promise of Secrecy, discoveries were often made and Restitution obtained. But to put a stop to a practice they thought an injury to the Tribe, the whole Clan of the Camerons (and others since by their Example) bound themselves by Oath never to take Tascal-Money, nor to inform one against the other. This they take upon a Drawn Durck or Dagger, which they kiss in a solemn manner and the Penalty declared to be due to the said Oath, is, to be stabbed with the same Dagger.

Deadly Oath

This manner of Swearing is much in practice on all other occasions, to bind themselves one to another that they may with more security exercise their Villany, which they imagine less Sinful than the Breach of that Oath, since they commit all sorts of Crimes with impunity, and are so severely punished if forsworn.

An instance of this happened in December 1723, when one of the Clan of the Camerons suspected to have taken Tascal-Money, was in the Night time called out of his Hut from his Wife and Children and hanged up near his own door. Another of that Tribe was, for the same Crime (as they call it) kept a Month in the Stocks and afterwards privately made away with.

The Encouragement and Protection given by some of the Chiefs of Clans is reciprocally rewarded by giving them a share of the Plunder, which is sometimes one half or two thirds of what is stolen. They exercise an Arbitrary and Tyrannical power over them; They determine all disputes

and differences that happen among their Vassals, and on extraordinary occasions such as the Marriage of a Daughter, the building of a House, or any other pretence for the support of their Chief, or honour of the Name, he Levies a Tax on the Tribe; to which Imposition, if any one refuse to contribute, he is sure of the severest Treatment or at best to be cast out of the Tribe. And it is not to be wonder'd that those who submit to this Servile Slavery, will, when Summoned by their Superiors, follow them into Rebellion.

To remedy these Inconveniences there was an Act of Parliament, passed in the year 1716 for the more effectual securing the Peace of the Highlands in Scotland, by Disarming the Highlanders, which has been so ill executed, that the Clans the most disaffected to Your Majesty's Government remain better Armed than ever, and consequently more in a Capacity not only of committing Robberies and Depredations, but to be used as Tools or Instruments to any Foreign Power or Domestic Incendiaries who may attempt to disturb the Peace of Your Majesty's Reign.

By this Act the Collectors for Taxes were empowered to pay for the Arms delivered in, as they were Valued by Persons appointed for that Service in the respective Countries, but as the Government was to support the Charge, they did not scruple to Appraise them at a much higher rate than their real worth, few or none being delivered up except such as were broken and unfit for Service; And I have been informed that from the time of passing that Act, to the time it was put in execution, great Quantities of broken and useless Arms were brought from Holland and delivered up to the Persons appointed to receive the same at exorbitant prices.

Bogus Weapons

The Spaniards who landed at Castle Donnan in the Year 1719 brought with them a great Number of Arms; They were delivered to the Rebellious Highlanders who are still possessed of them, many of which I have seen in my passage through that Country, and I judge them to be the same from their peculiar make, and the fashion of their Locks. These and others now in their Possession by a Moderate Computation are supposed to amount to 5 or 6000, besides those in the possession of the Clans who are in Your Majesty's Interest, provided as they alledge, for their own defence.

The Legislature in Scotland before the Union of the Kingdoms have ever considered the Highlands in a different State from the rest of the Nation, and made peculiar Laws for their Government under the severest Penalties. The Chieftains of Clans were obliged to send their Children or nearest Relations to Edinburgh as Hostages for the good behaviour of their respective Clans, and in default they might by the Law be put to death.

The Clans and Tribes who lived in a State of Anarchy and Confusion (as they seem to be in at this present time) were, by the very Words of the Act of Parliament to be pursued with Fire and Sword, but as the Execution of the Laws relating to the Highlands was under the care of the Privy Council of Scotland (now no longer Subsisting, who

by Act of Parliament were obliged to sit the first Day in every Month for that purpose) it often happen'd that Men of great Power in the Highlands were of the said Council, who had no other way of rendering themselves considerable than from their Numbers of Armed Men, and consequently the less Zealous in putting the Laws in Execution against them.

The Independent Companies raised by King William not long after the Revolution reduced the Highlanders into better order than at any time they had been in since the Restauration. They were composed of the Natives of the Country, inured to the fatigue of travelling the Mountains, lying on the Hills, wore the same Habit, and spoke the same Language; but for want of being put under proper Regulations, Corruptions were introduced, and some who commanded them, instead of bringing Criminals to Justice (as I am informed) often compounded for the Theft and for a Sum of Money set them at Liberty. They are said also to have defrauded the Government by keeping not above half their Numbers in constant Pay; which, as I humbly conceive, might be the reason Your Majesty caused them to be disbanded.

Your Barracks were afterwards built in different parts of the Highlands, and Parties of the Regular Troops under the Command of Highland Officers, with a Company of 30 Guides (Established to conduct them through the Mountains) was thought an effectual Scheme, as well to prevent the rising of the Highlanders disaffected to Your Majesty's Government, as to hinder the Depredations on your faithful Subjects.

It is to be wished that during the Reign of Your Majesty and your Successors, no Insurrections may ever happen to experience whether the Barracks will effectually answer the end proposed; yet I am humbly of opinion; That if the number of Troops they are built to contain, was constantly Quartered in them (whereas there is now in some but 30 Men) and proper Provisions laid in for their support during the Winter Season, they might be of some use to prevent the Insurrections of the Highlanders; Though as I humbly conceive, (having seen them all) that two of the four are not built in as proper Situations as they might have been.

As to the Highland Parties, I have already presumed to represent to Your Majesty the little use they were of in hindering Depredations, and the great sufferings of the Soldiers employed in that Service, upon which your Majesty was Graciously pleased to Countermand them.

I must further beg leave to Report to your Majesty that another great Cause of Disorders in the Highlands, is the want of proper Persons to execute the several Offices of Civil Magistrates, especially in the Shires of Ross, Inverness and some other parts of the Highlands. The Party Quarrels and violent Animosities amongst the Gentlemen (equally well affected to your Majesty's Government) I humbly conceive to be one great Cause of this Defect.

Those who were in Arms for your Majesty, who raised a Spirit in the Shire of Inverness and recovered the Town of that Name from the Rebels (their Main Body being then at Perth) Complain, that the Persons employed as Magistrates over them have little Credit or Interest in that Country, and that three of Deputy Sheriffs in those parts were Persons actually in Arms against your Majesty at the time of the late

Rebellion which (as I am credibly informed) is true. They likewise complain, that many of the most considerable Gentlemen are left out in the Commissions of Lord Lieutenants, Deputy Lieutenants, Sheriffs, etc. And I take the liberty to observe that the want of acting Justices of the Peace is a great encouragement to the Disorders so frequently committed in that part of the Country, there being but one, residing as an acting Justice for the Space of above a hundred Miles in Compass.

Your Majesty's Commands requiring me to examine into the State and Condition of the late Earl of Seaforth's Estate, engaged me to go to the Castle of Brahan his principal Seat, and other parts of the said Estate, which for the most part is Highland Country, and extends from Brahan to Kintail on the Western Coast, being 36 Miles in length and the most Mountainous part of the Highlands; The whole Isle of Lewis was also a part of the said Earl's Estate. The Tennants before the late Rebellion were reputed the richest of any in the Highlands, but now are become poor by neglecting their business and applying themselves wholly to the use of Arms. The Rents continue to be levied by one Donald Murchieson a Servant of the late Earl's who annually remits (or carries) the same to his Master into France.

The Tennants when in a Condition are also said to have sent him free Gifts in proportion to their several Circumstances but are now a year and a half in Arrear of Rent. The Receipts he gives to the Tennants are, as Deputy Factor to the Commissioners of Forfeited Estates, which pretended Power in the year 1721 he extorted from the Factor appointed by the said Commissioners to Collect those Rents for the use of the Publick, whom he attacked with above 400 Arm'd Men as he was going to enter upon the said Estate; having with him a Body of 30 of Your Majesty's Troops. The last year this Murchieson travell'd in a Public manner to Edinburgh to remit £800 to France for his Master's use, and remained there -fourteen days unmolested.

I cannot omit observing to Your Majesty; this National tenderness your Subjects of North Britain have one for the other, is great encouragement to the Rebels and attainted Persons to return home from their Banishment.

Before I conclude this Report, I presume to observe to Your Majesty the great Disadvantages Regular Troops are under when they engage with those who Inhabit Mountainous Situations. The Serennes (*sic*) in France, and Catalans in Spain, have in all times been Instances of this Truth.

The Highlands of Scotland are still more impracticable, from the want of Roads, Bridges, and from excessive Rains that almost continually fall in those parts, which by Nature and constant use become habitual to the Natives, but very difficultly supported by the Regular Troops. They are unacquainted with the Passages by which the Mountains are traversed, exposed to frequent Ambuscades, and Shots from the Tops of the Hill, which they return without effect, as it happened at the affair of Glenshiels, where the Rebels lost but one Man in the (*sic*) tho' a Considerable number of Your Majesty's Troops were killed and wounded.

I have endeavoured to Report to your Majesty as true and impartial an Account of the several particulars required by my Instructions, as far as I have been able to Collect them during my short continuance in the Highlands, and, as Your Majesty is pleased to Command me, presume to offer my" humble opinion of what I conceive necessary to be done towards establishing Order in those Parts, and reducing the Highlands to a more due Submission to Your Majesty's Government.

PROPOSAL

1. THAT Companies of such Highlanders as are well affected to his Majesty's Government be Established, under proper Regulations and Commanded by Officers speaking the Language of the Country, subject to Martial Law and under the Inspection and Orders of the Governors of Fort-William and Inverness, and the Officer Commanding his Majesty's Forces in these Parts.

The Expence of these Companies which may in the whole consist of 250 or at most 300 Men, may be answered by reducing one Man p Troop and Company of the Regular Forces.

2. THAT the said Companies be employed in Disarming the Highlanders, preventing Depredations,



bringing Criminals to Justice, and hinder Rebels and Attainted Persons from inhabiting that part of the Kingdom.

3. THAT a Redouble or Barrack be erected at Inverness, as well for preventing the Highlanders descending in the Low Country in time of Rebellion, as for the better Quartering his Majesty's Troops, and keeping them in a Body sufficient to prevent or Subdue Insurrections.



4. THAT in order to render the Barrack at Killihnimen of more use than I conceive it to be of at present (from its being situate at too great a distance from Lake Ness) a Redouble be built at the West End adjoining to it, which with the said Barrack may be able to contain a Battallion of Foot, and a Communication made for their mutual support, the space of ground between one and the other being less than 500 Yards. This appears to be more necessary from the Situation of the Place, which is the most Central part of the Highlands, a considerable Pass, equally distant from Fort William and Inverness, and where a Body of 1000 Men may be drawn together from these Garrisons in twenty-four hours to suppress any Insurrections of the Highlanders.

5. THAT a small Vessel with Oars and Sails be built on the Lake Ness, sufficient to carry a Party of 60 or 80 Soldiers and Provisions for the Garrison, which will be a means to keep the Communication open between that place and Inverness and be a safe and ready way of sending Parties to the Country bordering on the said Lake, which is Navigable for the largest Vessels. It is 24 Miles or more in length, and a Mile or more in breadth, the Country being Mountainous on both sides.

6. THAT the Governors, or such as his Majesty is pleased to appoint to Command at Fort William, Inverness, or Killihnimen, till the Peace of the Highlands is better Established, be required to reside at their respective Stations, and to give an Account of what passes in that Country to the Commander in Chief of the Forces in Scotland, and to such other whom His Majesty is Pleased to appoint.

7. THAT Inspection be made into the present Condition of the Garrisons and Castles in North Britain, and necessary Repairs made, to secure them from the danger of a Sudden Surprize, and more especially the Castle of Edinburgh, which remains exposed to the same attempt as was made on it in the Year 1715, there being nothing effectually done to it since that time, for the security of that important place, on which depends not only the Safety of the City, but of all that part of the Kingdom.

8. THAT a Regiment of Dragoons be ordered to Quarter in the Low Country between Perth and Inverness (when Forrage can be provided for their Support) which will not only hinder the Highlanders descending into that Country from the apprehensions they are under of engaging with Horse, but may be a means to prevent the Landing of small Bodies of Troops that may be sent from Foreign parts to invade that part of the Kingdom, or encourage the Highlanders to Rebellion.

9. THAT for the support of the Civil Government proper Persons be nominated for Sheriffs and Deputy Sheriffs in the Highland Counties, and that Justices of the Peace and Constables be Established in proper Places with small Salaries allowed them for the Charge they say they are of necessity at in seizing and sending Criminals to

distant Prisons; and that Quarter Sessions be punctually kept at Killihnimen, Ruthven in Badenoch and Fort William, and if occasion should require at Bernera near the Coast of the Isle of Skye.

10. THAT an Act of Parliament be procured effectually to punish the Highlanders inhabiting the most uncivilized parts of the country, who carry or conceal in their Dwellings, or other Places, Arms contrary to Law; and as the Penalty of a Fine in the former Act has never been (or from their Poverty can never be) levied, it is hoped the Parliament will not Scruple to make it Felony or Transportation for the first Offence.

11. THAT an Act of Parliament be procured empowering the Heretors and Freeholders in every County to assess themselves Yearly, not exceeding a definite Sum, to be applied by the Commissioners of the Land Tax and Justices of the Peace for defraying the Charges of apprehending, prosecuting, and Maintaining of Criminals while in Gaol; For, as the Prosecutor is now to defray the Charges it is not to be wondered at that so few of them have been brought to Justice, and so many Malefactors escaped with Impunity.

All which is most humbly Represented and Submitted to Your Majesty's Royal Consideration.

London, 10th December, 1724.

GEORGE WADE.