

# Aboriginal teuchters

October 6, 1970.

Sir,—Mr Mackenzie has asked you—what is a teuchter? I do not know the origin of the word; but I would assure your correspondent that a teuchter is a readily recognisable species.

A teuchter is an aboriginal of the Western Highlands and Islands of Scotland. Very often he has the Gaelic "Aheenyah" and all that. Some foreigners, without an ear for music, discern a pleasing lilt in his speech. In fact, however, the teuchter speaks in a jerky whine, as if trying to make himself heard above the prevailing wind of his habitat.

The teuchter has prominent cheekbones set high, and a ruddy complexion. He is lazy and subsidised up to the hilt. Most of them profess Christianity, but only practise it once it has been liberally diluted with whisky, which they invariably buy in half-bottles because a full bottle would not fit into the hip pocket.

Earlier this year I was engaged as a deckhand on one of the small coasting vessels taking coal and the like to the barren rocks of Teuchterland. On my first evening aboard it was made clear to me that I could abuse my colleagues with impunity in any words I choose—with one exception. I could not call anyone, even *in extremis*, a "teuchter." Had I done so I would have been dropped quietly overboard.

After many setbacks we reached our island destination early one morning and beached the boat at high tide ready for unloading. A teuchter cargo checker came down the deserted windswept beach and shouted up to us:—"Hello. Is that you? We thought you were coming to-day, but now you're here to-morrow."

While the teuchter is not a logical animal it is only fair to add that he is harmless.

Renwick H. Leitch.

Kilmory,  
Skelmorlie,  
Ayrshire.

# Response from teuchters

October 11, 1970.

Sir, — Mr Renwick H. Leitch says in his letter yesterday that a teuchter is an aboriginal of the Western Highlands and Islands of Scotland. But your correspondent admits that he does not know the origin of the word. Let this poor sub-human with the Gaelic "Aheenyah ho" and all that, please lighten his intellectual darkness.

The word arose thus. Long ago a few foolish members of the Highland tribe migrated southward and found themselves among a strange and frightening people, who spoke a language known as mongrelese. It was not Gaelic and it was assuredly not English, for the word "tough," for instance, was pronounced by those harsh-tongued little men as "teugh."

The simple Northerner assimilated this pernicious parlance and on his return to his own folks continued to use it. His erudite and beautifully spoken tribesmen, appalled by such ignorance, immediately regarded him as a near-lunatic, a verbal Quisling, faithless to the proper English they spoke so fluently, alongside their lilting Gaelic, that he was termed disparagingly a "teughter" and the term was later corrupted in spelling to a "teuchter."

Later, as the Highland Host moved southward to the great cities to become doctors, professors, politicians, mathematicians, chief constables, company directors, and, generally, to assume the administrative overlordship to which their superior education entitled them, they brought with them the opprobrium-laden word "teuchter" and the short-of-words Lowlander was able to add one more to his limited vocabulary.

Mr Leitch avers that "the teuchter has prominent cheekbones set high, and a ruddy complexion." He has also a high forehead. Mr Leitch says that he is lazy and subsidised up to the hilt. Napoleon, Hitler, and the Kaiser did not consider him particularly lazy and, in regard to the subsidies, it is my opinion that he is shamefully treated, considering the insurmountable economic difficulties under which he has to operate.

The half-bottle in the teuchter's hip pocket is simply to proffer a little hospitality to his friends when he meets them — a kind and Christian thought rarely occurring south of the Highland line.

Your correspondent says that earlier this year he was engaged as a deckhand "on one of the small coasters taking coal and the like to the barren rocks of Teuchterland." He writes:—"On my first evening aboard it was made clear that I could abuse my colleagues with impunity in any words I choose — with one exception. I could not call anyone, even *in extremis* a teuchter. Had I done so I would have been dropped quietly overboard." What a pity Mr Leitch did not do it.

However, I sympathise with him, one of the herrenvolk, among such a lowly crew. Why on earth was he not at least captain, for it would appear that competition for the job was not too keen?

In closing I really must tell Mr

Leitch something as private and confidential as the name of the real felon in the Appin Murder. The strange remark, shouted up to the boat by the teuchter cargo-checker is real James Bond stuff. This code has never been broken and never will. It is used when a teuchter sees a stranger with low cheekbones, a low forehead, and perhaps a low I.Q. among the row of his cultured countrymen leaning on the rail and, having heard it, they retire below and emit roars of laughter that may be heard even in far-off Skelmorlie.

Angus Macintyre.

Bank House,  
Tobermory, Isle of Mull.

## Civilised

October 12, 1970.

Sir,—In reply to Mr Renwick H. Leitch's letter on October 10, and as a teuchter from mid-Argyll, I would inform him that we in the West had a Christian civilisation and culture — primitive though it may have been by to-day's standard — when inhabitants of other parts of the country were still painting their bodies, worshipping false gods, and indulging in the odd spot of cannibalism.

The teuchter is an articulate person who pays a great deal of attention to correct grammar, in contrast to the garbled, guttural grunts and groans which pass for speech in several other parts of Britain, and which I have occasionally had great difficulty in translating into the Queen's English.

After all, there are only two types of people in Scotland — the teuchters and those who wish they were.

A. H. MacAlpin.

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East Kilbride.



# Teuchter on the Govan Ferry

October 12, 1970.

Sir,—The etymological inquiry in your columns regarding the derivation of the highly emotive term "choochter" (misspelt "teuchter" by some of your less informed correspondents) impels me to reveal the true facts of the matter, as handed down from the time of my maternal grandfather, Angus John MacPhail (better known as "Anxious John" — because there were three other

Angus Johns in the family at that time).

Now it is averred by all that the latter's paternal grandfather, John Archie MacDonald (called John Archie Beag, since there were at that time more John Archie MacDonalds in the region), was evicted from his croft at Borrodale in September, 1804, and thereafter walked to Glasgow along with one Dugald Angus MacEwan.

There, in the city, they found employment at the Govan Ferry (as it was then). On the first day they had a tea break — and on discovering that this was a daily occurrence — they were the first to evoke the name "choochter" from the Glaswegians, simply because they kept referring in their own tongue to the "choochker" for the tea.

And so it caught on, the notion spread to the Renfrew Ferry and to the Craigendoran Ferry (as it then was) — for there were others evicted with John Archie and Dugald Angus, working here and there up and down the river.

It is only in the past century that the earlier connotation was lost to some. It was always preserved in our family.

Hugh Cattenach.

Glenfinnan.

## What is a teuchter?

October 17, 1970.

Sir,—I understand that during the First World War the term teuchter was commonly applied to Gaelic-speaking men of the Highland regiments, who were regarded as a tough bunch of men.

Yet another definition I have read is:—"A rough (young, generally) countryman, unfashionable in dress and speech—without polish or any desire to attain this."

The word dates back to the days of the ploughman who rarely, if ever, visited a city.

In this last connection, I should think it was applied irrespective of the part of the country to which the person belonged.

Donald G. Mackenzie.

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