

## DUNDERAVE AND DOOM

In “Doom Castle” [1], the Romance published by Neil Munro in 1901, Count Victor de Montaignon travels from France to Scotland to seek the man who wronged his lover. He lands at Dysart, a port on the coast of Fife, north of Edinburgh across the Firth of Forth and due east of Loch Fyne on the other side of Scotland. He buys a gallant little horse and rides via Loch Leven, and Luss on the western shore of Loch Lomond, into Glen Croe from Loch Long (to Rest and Be Thankful), down upon the House of Ardkinglas (Fig. 1), round the loch head (Loch Fyne), and three miles further to the Castle of the Baron. If you look at a detailed map of Scotland and follow his journey, you will see that he has arrived at Dunderave (Fig. 2), the ancestral home of the Macnachten Clan.

**Figure 1. At Ardkinglas, long a Campbell stronghold, Sir Andrew Noble had Robert Lorimer design and build this new manor house 1906-8.**

But Munro is mixing fact with fiction. He calls the castle Doom, not Dunderave, and the Baron’s name is Lamond, not Macnachten. Munro calls the baron Doom, the same as the castle, in the Scottish style. Munro has set out to write a story of romance, danger and dark mystery, and Dunderave is the perfect setting. Remember, the last Macnachten Chief left Dunderave in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century and Sir Andrew Noble of Ardkinglas did not restore it until 1906-08 [2]. So when Munro used it as a model in 1901, it must have been, as he says “a dismal tower perched upon a promontory... the rude dark keep.”



## DOOM CASTLE

There’s more: “the place seemed to jut into the sea ... its gable-ends and one crenelated bastion or turret betraying its sinister relation to its age, its whole aspect arrogant and unfriendly, essential of war.”

**Figure 2. Imagine Dunderave Castle as Neil Munro saw it, before Sir Andrew Noble restored it and added two low wings.**

Count Victor “was cut off from it by a natural moat of sea-water

that swept about it in yeasty little waves. It rode like a ship, oddly independent of aspect, self-contained, inviolable,

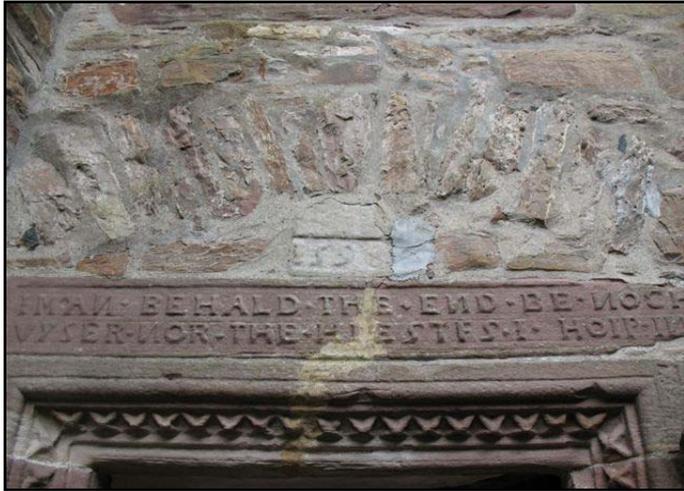


eternally apart, forever by nature indifferent to the mainland, ...” The Count had to wade through water to get to the castle, but some landscaping must have been done since then because we don’t have that problem any more.

**Figure 3. “He passed through the little garden and up to the door.”**

“Close at hand the edifice gained in austerity and dignity while it lost the last of its scanty air of hospitality. Its walls were of a rough rubble of granite and whinstone, grown upon at the upper storeys with grasses and weeds wafted upon the ledges by the winds that blow indifferent, bringing the green messages of peace from God. A fortalice dark and square-built, flanked to the southern corner by a round turret, lit by few windows, and these but tiny and suspicious, it was as Scots and arrogant as the thistle....”

“A low wall surrounded a patch of garden-ground to the rear, one corner of it grotesquely adorned with a bower all bedraggled with rains, yet with the red berry of the dog-rose gleaming in the rusty leafage like grapes of fire. He passed through the little garden and up to the door [Fig. 3]. Its arch, ponderous, deep-moulded, hung a scolding eyebrow over the black and studded oak, and over all was an escutcheon with a blazon of hands fesswise and castles embattled [like the Macnachtan coat of arms represented on the back cover of *The Red Banner*], and the legend—“Doom. Man, Behauld the End of All. Be Nocht wiser than the Hiest. Hope in God!”



**Figure 4. 1598 IM AN BEHALD THE END BE NOCHT VYSER NOR THE HIESTES I HOIP IN GOD**

Angus Macnaghten tells us [3] that IM and AN were the initials of the owner and his wife in 1596 when the castle was started, and hence did not mean “Man.” Then comes the admonition, “Behold the end. Be not wiser than the highest,” and the family motto, “I hope in God.”

Inside the castle Count Victor finds: “A room ill-furnished as a monk’s cell, lit by narrow windows... sunk deep in massive walls ...the magnificence of the typical Highland stronghold ... It was up a flight of corkscrew stairs, and lit with singular poverty by an orifice more of the nature of a porthole for piece than a window, and this port or window, well out in the angle of the turret, commanded a view of the southward wall or curtain of the castle.”

**Figure 5. The little knoll between Dunderave and Loch Fyne may contain the ruins of an earlier building.**

“As he walked upon a little knoll (Fig. 5) that lay between the side of the castle and the wave itself ...The castle ... had something pleasant in its aspect looked at from this small eminence ... the rock of Doom, so noisy on its promontory, so sad, so stern, so like an ancient saga in its spirit ...”



## THE BARON



Baron Lamond is eking out the last days of his family’s inheritance at Doom. He says, “... this ruckle of stones we sit in (are) all that’s left of what was my father’s and my grandfather’s and their forebears, back till the dark of time.” He refers to one other property, “...there’s Drimdarroch, all that’s left of it to me: the land itself is in the hands of my own doer [lawyer], Petullo the writer down-by, and scab seize his bestial!” This could be a reference to the supposed Macnachtan castle site at nearby Dubh Loch (Fig. 6).

**Figure 6. The site at Dubh Loch in Glen Shira where the stones of an early Macnachtan castle are thought to lie.**

Later on it is observed of the Baron that “...his house and family ... seemed to have been dogged by misfortune for a century and a half; that had owned once many of these lush glens, the shoulders of these steep bens, the shores of that curving coast. Bit by bit that

ancient patrimony had sloughed off in successive generations, lost to lust, to the gambler's folly, the spendthrift's weakness." Doom himself reminisces "These woods and this shore and this lonely barn of ours, all robbed of what once made it a palace to me and mine ... Shira Glen—The best of it was once our own,..." The River Shira enters Loch Fyne not two miles west of Dunderave, through Dubh Loch [4].

It is also noted "...the Government of England robs him of his plaid ..." which places the period of the novel 1745-90 when the kilt and tartan were banned. Doom goes on, "I have been robbed of credit and estate, and even of my name; I have seen king and country foully done by, and black affront brought on our people, ..." He comments on the inscription over the door, "My great-great-grandfather was the wise man and the far-seeing when he carved it there: "Man, Behauld the End of All. Be Nocht Wiser than the Hiest. Hope in God!"

## ARGYLL

Although Count Victor's quest takes him directly to Doom Castle and Baron Lamond, he knew "he was in the country of the Argyll" and "he meant...to seek the earliest and most plausible excuse of removal into the immediate vicinity of Argyll's castle." And so "He walked to the south through the little hamlet ... and ...found himself at last on a horn of the great bay where the Duke's seat lay sheltered below its hilly ramparts. The lime-washed walls of the town gleamed in sunshine, ... that white phantom town ... with grotesque roofs, odd corbeau-stepped gables, smokeless chimneys all white with snow, and wild birds on its terrace, preening in the blessed light of the sun."

**Figure 7. The lime-washed walls of Inveraray.**

Readers who have visited this area may recognize the delightful town of Inveraray (Fig. 7), the seat for centuries of the Campbell Clan under the auspices of the Duke of Argyll and Argyll castle (Fig. 8). "... the castle itself a high embattled structure ... this haughty palace with its black and yellow banner streaming in the wind ... If Count Victor was astonished at the squalid condition of things in the castle of the poor Baron of Doom, he would have been



surprised to find here, within an hour or two's walk of it, so imposing and luxuriant a domesticity. Many lands, many hands, great wealth won by law, battle, and the shrewdness of generations, enabled Argyll to give his castle grandeur and his table the opulence of any southern palace ... It's not Doom ... The army and the law are about it ... Argyll's court ... half a hundred perhaps of whom have traveled ... in Paris too ..."



**Figure 8. Inveraray Castle, the home of the Duke of Argyll and seat of the Campbell Clan.**

## DENOUEMENT

Lamond, in spite of his politics and his comparative poverty, was on neighborly terms with Argyll, while Argyll says: "... it was in Doom, the place of a small landowner, Lamond, whose castle is but a ramshackle old bigging now...Lamond himself is a man I have a sort of softness for, though, to tell the truth, he has forced me into more litigation than he had money to pay for and I had patience to take any lasting interest in."

The tragedy of Doom Castle is when the last of the clan renounces it: "... it was to surrender the last remnant of his right to the home of his ancestors. With the flourish of a quill he brought three centuries of notable history to a close. "Here's a lesson in humility, Mr. Campbell," he said to Petullo's clerk. "We builded with the sword, and fell upon the sheepskin." And then "Clean up your filth!"

said Doom in the Gaelic, sheathing his sword and turning to join his daughter, “He took Drimdarroch from me, and now, by God! He’s welcome to Doom.”

The loss of the family lands and traditions is sad, but the story “Doom Castle” is multi-layered. It is a gentle love story, a swashbuckling adventure, and a dark mystery, set in a bygone time with quotes in Gaelic, French and lowland Scots dialect. The mood that is set could tell us what it felt like to be at Dunderave in the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. And it is a romance, so yes, there is life after death.

## MUNRO

According to Brian Osborne [5] Neil Munro was born in Inveraray on 3rd June 1863, the illegitimate son of Ann Munro, a kitchen-maid. Rumor identifies his father as a member of the Ducal House of Argyll. Educated at Inveraray School, at thirteen he started work in the office of the Sheriff-Clerk of Argyll. He moved south in 1881 to follow a career in journalism, eventually becoming assistant editor of the *Glasgow Evening News*. His first novel, “John Splendid,” was published in 1898. This and his other historical novels, such as “Doom Castle,” deal with Munro’s constant theme—the impact of change on the Highlands.

**Figure 9. In Inveraray, where Neil Munro was born, a puffer has been named the Vital Spark and Para Handy sits at the stern.**



Around 1902 Munro retired from full-time journalism, retaining a commitment to produce a weekly column for the *News*. This column was to win him as much fame as his novels. In it appeared three series of humorous short stories, “Archie, My Droll Friend,” “Jimmy Swan, the Joy Traveler,” and “Para Handy.” These last, the adventures of a West Highland puffer skipper and the crew of the coaster Vital Spark (Fig. 9) have enjoyed continuing popularity and have been adapted for television, stage and film. Munro used these stories for light-hearted social comment on contemporary events, such as the introduction of old-age pensions. Munro thought little of journalism, or of these pieces, which he published under the pen name Hugh Foulis to distance them from his serious works.

Munro died in Helensburgh on 22nd December 1930. He is buried in Kilmalieu Cemetery, Inveraray, and a monument to his memory was unveiled in Glen Aray in June 1935. Although awarded the Freedom of Inveraray and honorary doctorates by Glasgow and Edinburgh Universities and described as “the apostolic successor of Sir Walter Scott,” Munro’s reputation suffered a posthumous decline, the consciously archaic and poetical style of the novels undoubtedly playing a part in this. There has, rightly, been a resurgence of interest in Munro and his major works are again available.

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