

RECORDS OF ARGYLL PART THREE: MACNAUGHTAN OF THE FORT

By Ken McNaughton

The Records of Argyll [1] contains an Appendix that promises more history of the MacNaughtan Clan—“Macneacain an Dun, MacNaughtan of the Dun (Dundaramh). A Poem.” This Appendix is seventeen pages long and one might be excused for getting excited at the prospect of learning so much about our ancient history. Unfortunately the promise is not fulfilled. Campbell is more of a folk-tale gatherer than an historian. He has done a great service by collecting many interesting tales throughout this book, but must have been less confident of this material to place it in an appendix. It is a bit of a mish-mash, to say the least.

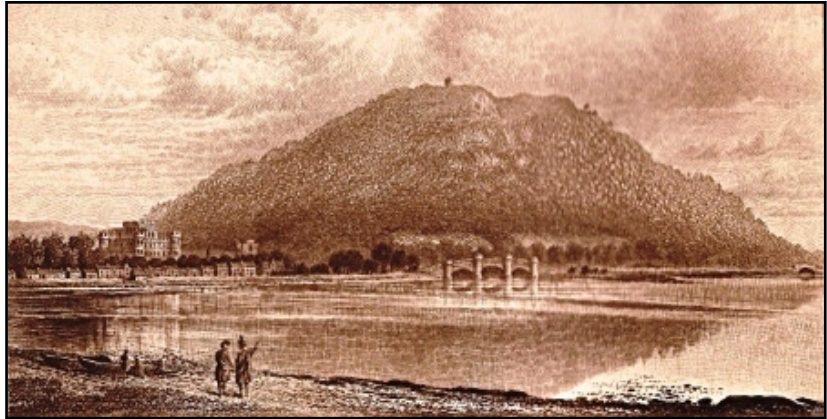


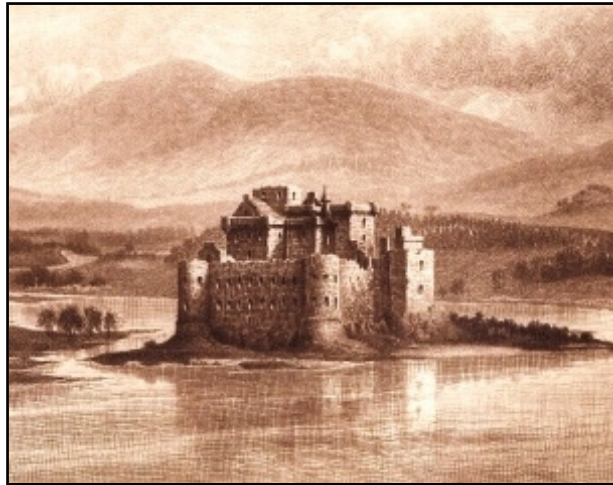
Figure 1. Etching of Old Castle of Inveraray by Charles Laurie in 1883 [1]. The headquarters of the Campbell Clan on Loch Fyne is three miles (5 km) west of the Macnachtan headquarters at Dunderave.

The section is prefaced “With introduction and notes by Alexander Carmichael, H.M. Inland Revenue” and there is no obvious transition to work by Campbell so it seems to be all by Carmichael. He starts off speaking of the Clan Arthur of Scotland, perhaps linking them to the Campbells, many of whom were Arthurs. This may be relevant to a book about Argyll but not too relevant to the MacNaughtans. He says “Clan Arthur claim descent from a King Arthur of Scotland of prehistoric times.” Being of “pre-historic times” would certainly excuse him from providing any evidence for such a claim. Not a great start.

He goes on, “Nor is it improbable that this King Arthur of the Northern Britons may have been related to the celebrated King Arthur of the Southern Britons.” This would be a tempting speculation except that there is no evidence that King Arthur of the Southern Britons ever existed. What we know now—and what Carmichael may not have been in a position to find out—is that the myth of King Arthur was initiated by Henry II (my 25th great grandfather) and deliberately and magnificently manipulated by Edward I, Hammer of the Scots (my 22nd great grandfather [2]). The reason for this device was so Edward could link himself to a mythical dynasty of ancient British kings and hence justify his attempts to become sovereign of the whole of Britain [3]. Not that either Arthur, mythical or real, has anything to do with the MacNaughtans.

Carmichael goes on to talk about the MacGrigors and, after two pages, supplies a cross heading “The Clan Naughtan.” In the opening paragraph he refers to “the scholarly Skene” and gives a brief history of the ‘Clan Naughtan,’ starting in the eleventh century when the MacNaughtans were supposedly “Mormaers of Moray.” Carmichael does not give Skene’s full name, nor does

he cite any references, but it is clear to whom he refers. William Forbes Skene was a Scottish historian who in 1837 published “The Highlanders of Scotland, their Origin, History and Antiquities,” and in 1876-1880, “Celtic Scotland, a History of Ancient Alban.” It must have been easy to be impressed by the sheer size of Skene’s work in the 19th century, but Angus Macnaghten tells us that Skene has been discredited by modern scholars and that the so-called



Skene Manuscript, a fifteenth century Gaelic manuscript of Highland genealogies is sadly lacking in authorities [4]. Angus goes on to point out that the individuals named in the consequent “Genealogy of the Macnaghtens” compiled from Skene’s work may have existed but their connection with our clan is improbable.

Figure 2. Etching of Kilchurn Castle in Lochow by Charles Laurie in 1883 [1]. This Campbell stronghold dominated the northern tip of Loch Awe just as the former Macnachtan castle on the island of Fraoch Eilean dominated the western view through the Brander Pass to the Atlantic Ocean.

Carmichael quotes the inscription over the front door of Dunderave (Fig. 1) as follows:

1596. J · MAN · BEHALD · THE · END · OF · ALL · BE · NOCHT · VEYN · NOR · THE ·
HJESTEST · J · TRUST · IN · GOD

This is often misquoted [5] and here are Carmichael’s mistakes:

1596 should read 1598
J · MAN should read IM · AN
OF · ALL is not there
VEYN should read VYSER
HJESTEST should read HIESTES
J should read I
and TRUST should read HOIP.

Carmichael then goes on to relate the Scottish story of Fraoch, which is sometimes associated with the island and castle of *Fraoch Eilean* where the MacNaughtans had their castle whose ruins can still be seen (Fig. 2). Some translate this as “Heathery Isle,” but Carmichael prefers “The Island of Fraoch.” James Logan, writing in 1847 [6] tells us that *Fraoch Ellan* was also the battle cry of the MacDonalDs and there were many islets which were equally “heathy” as that in Lochaw. Carmichael tells us that he took down several versions of the poem of “Fraoch” but the one he liked best he took down from a ‘remarkable’ six-year-old boy, Donald McDonald. I’m guessing the boy might have learned it from an elder, and may or may not have got it right. This is a good story but not great scholarship.

Carmichael next lists various members of the MacNaughtan clan down through the ages, but by this time we are a bit jaded and might opt to go to Angus Macnaghten if we want to try to figure

out the MacNaughtan genealogy. I prefer authorities who can quote sources and depend on two independent referees to give credence to facts.

Figure 3. A Macnachtan gamekeeper or shepherd dressed in the modern fashion and resolutely facing a storm, in which the utility of the ample plaid, and the original flat bonnet, as protective from the effect of the cauld blast and the drift, is so apparent. The pattern of the breacan or clan tartan is well shown by the breadth of drapery. The hose are of a pattern *dubh a's dearg* (black and red) at present very commonly worn [6]. The most prominent features of the McNaughton coat of arms are the two roebuck supporters, which refer to the office of Forester of Benbuie, held by the McNaughton Chiefs in the 17th century [7].



Finally we come to the famous story about John MacNaughtan and the two eldest Campbell sisters of Airdkinglas, which was already related earlier in the book [8]. While this is a charming story and may have some allegorical value, Angus Macnaghten dismisses most of it as inconsistent with known facts. Carmichael however closes this Appendix with a remarkable and moving rendition of the poem supposedly penned by John MacNaughtan's spurned wife. He transcribed this from the singing of Mrs. Ann Livingston, née Macpherson, aged eighty, of Bay Cottage, Bunawe, on September 18th, 1884, so we are bolstered by his precision of name, place and date. She probably learned it as a girl at the start of the nineteenth century.

Carmichael quotes the poem in Gaelic, "*Macneacain an Dùin*," then gives a close English translation, apologizing that there is no attempt at versification. However, the translation is highly romantic and probably more so in Gaelic. Carmichael presents twenty-seven numbered stanzas, mostly couplets; I have dropped the numbers and grouped the lines in verses of four or six to make it scan more easily. He presents six lines as an alternative to the original eight, saying he prefers the eight because the six are 'so harsh and unlike the rest of the poem' that he only gives them 'in deference to the opinion of others.' I find the six lines more credible, as I think it much more likely that some soft-hearted person tried to dumb down the passion from the original, rather than the other way around. Dun means fort, often a hill fort, and *Dundaramh* is Gaelic for Dunderave.

This is a poem supposedly written by the eldest daughter of the powerful Campbell family who was married to John MacNaughtan, whose own family was clearly in decline. The story goes that John may have been tricked into marrying her—because he was supposedly in love with the more beautiful second-eldest daughter. But he was a man of honor and went ahead with the marriage in deference to the wishes of the Campbell laird. Later he eloped with the younger sister. We are more used to hearing poems written by men about women but this is written by a woman about a man. She could have hated him for deserting her, but she remembers only the good times and paints a picture of John MacNaughtan that fulfills all our fantasies about the glamour of the Highlands, the bravery of its men and the beauty of its women, the chivalry of the clans in their castles and the glory days of the MacNaughtans (Fig. 3). This is set against her hatred of her sister, who ran off with her man.

MACNAUGHTAN OF THE DUN (*DUNDARAMH*)

Though this night be so cold,
Alas! alas! how long it is!
Though the rest be in sound slumbers,
Oh! small is my desire to sleep!

It is not the narrowness of my space,
Nor yet the hardness of my bed,
But the beauteous youth of the brown clustering hair,
Who has my heart oppressed, who has brought me to despair.

I dreamed of thee, love, yestreen,
That I was happy in thine arms;
Beneath the shade of the fragrant birch,
In the kindly warmth of thy tartan plaid,
So tenderly wrapped in thy tartan plaid.

But on my awakening from my dream,
Afar from me wert thou wandering!
Thou brave MacNaughtan of the Dun,
Of the tower, of the hospitality, and of the battlements.
Of the fair beauteous maidens, and of the brave men.

Oh that I but saw thee coming
Along the front of the Leacáin!
With thy servant, and with thy dogs,
And with thine own noble manly step!

If silver or if gold
Would induce thee to sail home again,
Afar would I know thy noble head
Coming over the bold crest of the Creachan.

Well becomes thee thy bonnet blue,
On thy head of hair, brown, heavy, and free!
Well becomes thee thy pleated kilt,
On thy person so stalwart, brawny, and fair.

Well becomes thee thy tartan hose over thy leg,
And the fresh-red garter binding it.
And well becomes thee thy pistols beneath thy shield,
With thy blue glaive so brave, sharp, and keen.

And oh! at the feast or on the field,
The like of my own love never has been seen!
Heard ye ever of a woman,
Who lost her reason for her lover?

Alas! if I an untruth do not tell,
I myself am that woman!
I shall sit sad and lonely,
Beneath the people of the MacCailean.

O thou woman who took from me mine own husband,
And I so sorely grieving for him!
May a kertch never on thee be seen,
On market-day or on church-day!
And never, oh never, may child of thine
Be seen going to the temple of baptism!

*

Be spikes of thorn beneath thy sole,
And an earth-hole be beneath thy feet!
May the drip-drop wet and cold
Ever pour on thy bed-stock.

And had it not been for thyself,
This, oh! this were no joy to me!
And that, sad the story, alas! retold,
That she was the same mother we had!

* *Alternate ending:*

But placing them under the cold flag,
And they numerous beneath thy feet.
May grave-stones be beneath thy soles,
And earth-holes be beneath thy feet.
May the drip-drop so wet and cold
Ever flow from the bank of thine eyebrows.

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NOTES

1. A kertch is a white scarf worn by a married Catholic woman.
2. Ben Cruachan is the highest point in Argyll, about four miles (7 km) northwest of Fraoch Eilean.
3. The River Leacáin flows into Loch Fyne at Furnace (formerly Inverleacainn) eight miles (13 km) southwest of Inveraray; there is also a Loch Leacainn and a Dun Leacainn.
4. Glaive. A single-edged blade about 18 in. long (45 cm), sometimes with a small hook on the reverse side, on the end of pole 6-7 ft long (2 m). Either from the Latin *gladius* or Celtic *cladivos* for sword (but why blue?).
5. MacCailean. Campbells.

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