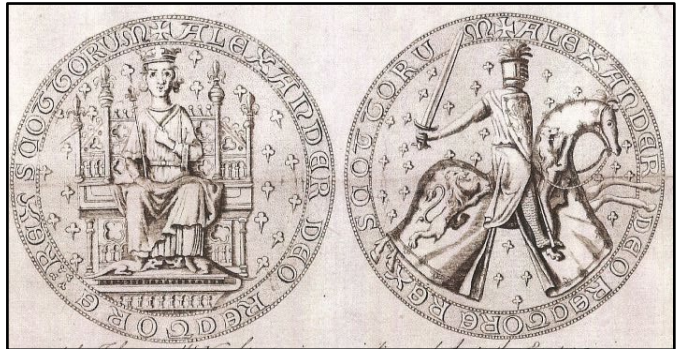


1267 AND ALL THAT

By Ken McNaughton

*The year 1267 was a good one for the Macnachtan Clan.
On 12 February, King Alexander III gave a charter to Gillecrist Macnachdan and
his heirs for the keeping of his castle and island of Frechelan in Loch Awe [1].
This is the first written evidence of the Macnachtan Clan.*

The year 1267 was also a good one for Scotland. It came at a peak of success for a country that has arguably seen more than its share of setbacks. I wanted to explore events around 1267 in hopes of learning more about how the Macnachtan Clan fitted into this part of Scottish history. With no previous written record of the clan, what are the options?



Two sides of King Alexander III's seal show him seated at his inauguration in Scone Abbey 13 July 1249 and mounted on horseback.

In 1965, Jane Oliver published “Alexander the Glorious,” an historical novel about the life of the Scottish king who granted the keeping of the castle of Frechelan to the Macnachtan Clan [2]. An author who publishes historical fiction has to do extensive research to avoid being caught out. The London *Times* said of the book “Reconstruction of the events is skillfully done and the result is both enjoyable and informative. Description of medieval life is particularly good.” The book does not mention the Macnachtans or the castle of Frechelan. But it does describe what life was like in Scotland before, during and after 1267, when the young king gifted our clan.

One advantage of historical fiction over non-fiction is that we can read more about what people think and say, even if it is imagined. Jane Oliver makes a convincing job of bringing King Alexander to life, integrated with his contemporaries and his times. We identify with the young man who became king at age seven and had to endure his regency through a bitter struggle for the control of affairs between two rival parties. This conflict will sound familiar to readers in the major democracies as I write in 2022. In 1251, when he was ten, Alexander was married to eleven-year-old Margaret, daughter of King Henry III of England, in an attempt to bring Scotland and England together. But the English wanted Scotland to pay homage to their crown. We are introduced to Margaret's brother Edward, who gradually becomes more powerful, and is later remembered as *Edward Longshanks* and the *Hammer of the Scots* [3].

In 1262, on attaining his majority at the age of 21, Alexander declared his intention of resuming the projects on the Western Isles that the death of his father thirteen years before had cut short. From the 8th to the 15th centuries, Vikings and Norse settlers, mainly Norwegians and to a lesser extent other Scandinavians and their descendants colonized parts of what is now the periphery of

modern Scotland [4]. In 1263, King Hakon [Jane Oliver's spelling] of Norway held a fleet of warships off the western coast of Scotland. Alexander stalled Hakon with extended peace talks, until autumn storms arose. Alexander's sheriffs watched for Hakon's response. Alexander swore "such services shall not go unrecognized." In mid-October the Norwegian fleet withdrew and Alexander worked out rewards for those who had served him best in the Norwegian campaign.

In the mid-summer of 1266, Alexander concluded the Treaty of Perth, by which Scotland acquired sovereignty over the Western Isles and the Isle of Man. Scotland was prosperous and at peace. The next year, on 12 February 1267, Alexander granted the keeping of the Castle of Frechelan in Loch Awe to Clan Macnachtan. It was a good time for the clan. It was a good time for Alexander. And it was a good time for Scotland.

But if you are looking for a happy ending, read no further. Bad news followed. King Edward I of England was crowned on 19 August 1274. Alexander's wife, Queen Margaret, who had borne three children, died on 26 February 1275 aged 34. Their youngest son, David, died in 1281, aged nine. Their daughter, Margaret, married King Erik of Norway in a gesture to cement the peace, but died in 1283, aged 22. Their only other child, Alexander died in 1284, aged 20.

According to the *Lanercost Chronicle*, Alexander did not spend his decade as a widower alone [Jane Oliver does not cover this]: "he used never to forbear on account of season nor storm, nor for perils of flood or rocky cliffs, but would visit none too creditably nuns or matrons, virgins or widows as the fancy seized him, sometimes in disguise." The need for a male heir led him to contract a second marriage to Yolande de Dreux of Flanders on 1 November 1285. On 18 March 1286, he insisted on returning to his new wife in a gale at Kinghorn. His horse stumbled and he was killed.

Jane Oliver paints a very credible portrait of King Alexander, from a naive young boy, through a man growing in wisdom, and crowned with success, just in time to grant the castle of Frechelan to Clan Macnachtan. We also see the tragedy of family life, and the difficulties of dealing with children. For some, it may be hard to keep track of all the notables in the court circle. But we are introduced to Robert the Bruce, who was born in 1274 and became King of Scots in 1306 until his death in 1329. We are also introduced to William Wallace, born around 1270, who battled King Edward I of England with some success until he was captured and killed in 1305.

Jane Oliver's book about King Alexander III is a fine example of historical fiction. It would be a good read for young adults of the clan who want to know more about Scotland in medieval times when McNaughtons took control of the castle on the Isle of Frechelan.

REFERENCES

1. McNaughton, Ken, "[King Alexander III and the Macnachtan Charter](#)," Clan Macnachtan Association Worldwide website, 29 January 2009.
2. Oliver, Jane, "Alexander the Glorious," G. P. Putnam's Sons, New York, 1965.
3. McNaughton, Ken, "[Scotland vs. England](#)," Clan Macnachtan Association Worldwide website, 26 April 2019.
4. McNaughton, Ken, "[Scandinavian Scotland](#)," Clan Macnachtan Association Worldwide website, 15 May 2021.

NOTES

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