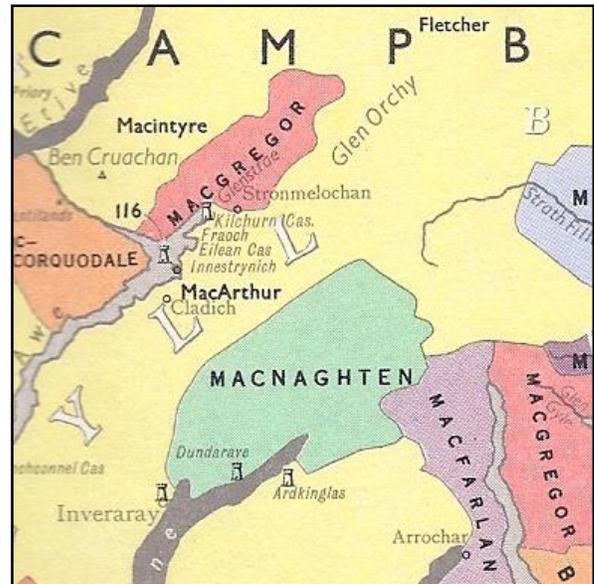


# McNaughtons, McGregors & Campbells

By Ken McNaughton

On the November 12<sup>th</sup>, 1570, Alexander McNaughton of Dunderave, Chief of the Clan, executed a letter at Inveraray Castle addressed to Patrick McAne MacGregor. Someone had been speaking ill of him and he didn't like that. The letter is polite, in a sixteenth century sort of way, but if there is not an apology, there is a threat of a duel. It was written in old Scots, rather than Gaelic. Here is a translation into modern English of the letter, which has been preserved largely undamaged.

**Figure 1. West Central Scotland, showing McNaughton holdings on Lochs Fyne and Awe around the time of King James VI, King of Scots 1567-1625 [1].**



*Greetings, trusty friend.*

*I am informed that you repeatedly said that you heard and saw that I gave my written and spoken consent to put down and destroy my three brothers, viz. the one that is deceased and the two who are living, along with 16 of their best friends [relatives]. Therefore, either you stand my debtor or else find me a debtor, for I think long till you find a debtor or else yourself. And I heard that Gregor Neilson was present and said the same to my brother Ewin MacGregor. I care not what debtor you find for me, if he were never so great a man, for the life of the gentleman that you said consented to the aforesaid. I am sure they will have a debtor of you or else of Ewin MacGregor that claimed you said sinister and wrongful vicious false revelations. Send me your answer in writing in all haste. I believed that such wrongful talk should not be the [ he...and of our good company] and whatever I lost for Clan Gregor's sake I never gained one merk of land or anything for putting down any of my brothers or any of their surname.*

*Commend me to your bedfellow and trust in God.*

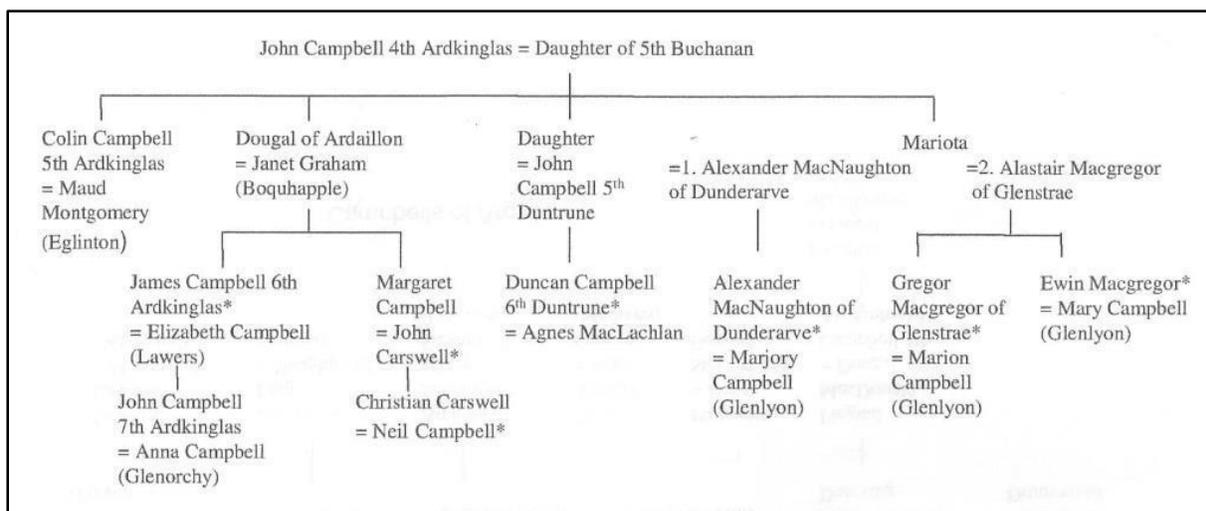
*From Inveraray the 12<sup>th</sup> day of November the seventieth year.*

*Yours, Alexander MacNaychtane of Downderaw.*

This is the only letter credited to a McNaughton in The Breadalbane Collection of 324 Scottish Letters, which was put online by Jane Dawson in 2010 [Refs. 2-11].

The McNaughtons had to live cheek by jowl with the powerful Campbell Clan (Fig. 1). They intermarried and the McNaughtons had to make deals with their protector. According to The

Breadalbane Collection, John Campbell the 4<sup>th</sup> of Ardkinglas had two sons and two daughters [9]. One of the daughters, Mariota, married Alexander MacNaughton of Dunderarve and they had a son, also called Alexander of Dunderarve (Fig. 2). This son married Marjory Campbell (Glenlyon). It claims that Mariota married a second time, to Alastair Macgregor of Glenstrae. They had six sons, including Gregor Roy Macgregor of Glenstrae who married Marion Campbell (Glenlyon) and Ewin Macgregor who married Mary Campbell (Glenlyon).



**Figure 2. Genealogical table—Campbells, Macgregors and MacNaughtons.**

Dawson says that Alexander became the MacNaughton chief in 1552, married a second time to Egida Drummond and died in 1596. Angus Macnaghten, our MacNaughton scholar [12], does not say much about Alexander. In his Chapter IV, “The Sixteenth Century and the Building of Dunderave,” he quotes a Retour of General Service on 18<sup>th</sup> March, 1551/2 from the Menzies Report about “Alexander McNachtan as lawful and nearest heir of the deceased Gilbert McNachtan of Dundawraff, his brother.” Angus concludes this was probably Alexander Maknachtan of Dundaraw who in 1579 wrote to the laird of Weem about the state of the Isles. At the end of that chapter Angus provides a ‘Conjectural Genealogy of the Chiefs,’ showing that Alexander had three sons. The eldest, John (Iain) married Anne Maclean (Nykelane) and put their initials IM/AN on the lintel at Dunderave when it was built or restored and he was chief (Fig. 3). Duncan MacNaughton leans heavily on Angus in his work [13]. He provides a more complex genealogy of the chiefs but does not supply as many sources. Neither Angus nor Duncan mention the letter of 1570. They both quote ‘1596’ as the date at Dunderave, whereas the plate above the lintel appears to read ‘1598’ [14].

It is ironic to reflect that, despite the invention of movable type printing in the eleventh century and the use of the Internet after the end of the twentieth century, we still have a more secure knowledge of the genealogy of Nechtan and the Pictish kings between 448 and 843 AD than we do of the MacNaughton chiefs from 1267 to 1773—because the lineage of the Pictish kings was etched in stone.

## MCNAUGHTONS, MCGREGORS AND CAMPBELLS

The map in Figure 1 was approved by the Standing Council of Scottish Chiefs and by the Lord Lyon King of Arms. The lands colored for each name indicate general spheres of influence, usually about the time of King James VI who was King of the Scots 1567-1625, but taking the history of each district or family as a whole. It shows west-central Scotland, with large areas dominated by the Campbells colored yellow. The largest McNaughton area on the map is marked “Macnaghten,” presumably in deference to the Irish branch, which assumed the Chiefdom in 1818. This area is clustered around the Clan’s last Scottish castle Dunderave at the head of Loch



Fyne. We are totally surrounded by Campbell lands, except for a small eastern frontier with the Macfarlanes. East of them across Loch Lomond is some MacGregor land. The MacGregors also cluster above Loch Awe, to where the McNaughton lands once stretched. According to the Records of Argyll [15] the McNaughtons once owned all the land between Loch Fyne and Loch Awe. But by the time of King James VI the Campbells had swept between us and Loch Awe. Our castle in Loch Awe, *Fraoch Eilean*, is marked 116, the McNaughton code on this map.

**Figure 3. Dunderave Castle McNaughton Clan headquarters Argyll restored 2007.**

In the larger map (Fig. 4) there is a McNaughton sphere of influence between Loch Tay and Glen Lyon, this time spelled “McNaughton,” also within Campbell lands. The MacGregors have some influence immediately to the west. The marriages of the McNaughton and MacGregor half-brothers support this link to Glen Lyon. So it is clear that the McNaughtons, the MacGregors and the Campbells were closely associated by geography and marriage.

When Iain of Glenstrae died in 1519 with no direct heirs Clan Gregor was plunged into disarray as the powerful Campbells meddled with succession and asserted claim to the last remaining MacGregor lands. The River Strae drains into the northern end of Loch Awe, the northern-most limit of McNaughton lands. In 1560, the Campbells dispossessed Gregor Roy MacGregor, who then waged war against the Campbells for ten years before being captured and killed. His son Alastair claimed the MacGregor chiefship but was utterly unable to stem the tide of persecution. Argyll and his Clan Campbell henchmen were given the task of hunting down the MacGregors. About sixty MacGregors made a brave stand at Bontoik against a party of two-hundred chosen men belonging to the Clan Cameron, Clan MacNab and Clan Ronald under command of Robert Campbell, son of the Laird of Glen Orchy. The Orchy River also flows into the head of Loch Awe. In this battle, Duncan Aberach, one of the chieftains of the Clan Gregor, his son Duncan and seven other MacGregors were killed. Although they made a brave resistance and killed many of their pursuers the MacGregors, after many skirmishes and great losses, were at last overcome.

It must have been very difficult for Alexander McNaughton in this period of bitter conflict between the Campbells and the MacGregors 1560-70. He was half-brother to Gregor and Ewin



We can gain insight into the deadly struggle for land from a bond that was struck eighteen years later, on 18 May 1588 [16]. The McTarlich brothers, Donald and Dougall, rented land from Duncan Campbell in Glen Orchy. The McTarlich land falls into the MacGregor portion of the map in Fig 1. In return for renting this land, all they had to do, according to the bond of 18 May 1588, was to slaughter MacGregors. One of the witnesses to this bond was Marcus MacNaughton. It reads in part:

*Therefore we, being of a mind to do this before ever we shall crave possession of the aforesaid lands by virtue of the condition and promise aforesaid made by the aforesaid Duncan, and understanding Clan Gregor to be manifest malefactors and his Majesty's declared rebels for sundry slaughters, evil deeds and oppressions done by them to divers persons his Highness' leiges, we bind and oblige us, and either of us, that with the whole company and forces we may or can make, we shall, immediately following this date, enter into deadly feud with the Clan Gregor, and shall endure and continue therein and in making of slaughter upon them and their adherents both secretly and openly and shall in no manner of way or persuasion leave the same or desist and cease therefrom until the time that the aforesaid Duncan Campbell of Glenorchy finds himself by our travails and diligence satisfied and content with the slaughter we shall do and commit upon them, and especially abstract and withdraw us therefrom by himself as also will he find the way to make and agreement and pacification between us and the Clan Gregor for the slaughter we shall commit upon them, so that thereafter we may possess and enjoy the benefits of the aforesaid manner according to the tenour of the aforesaid assignment, and to this end we bind and oblige us and our aforesaid (heirs) faithfully and without fraud or guile. Subscribed with our hands as follows at Balloch (Kenmore) the 18th day of May, the year of grace, 1588, before these witnesses, Colin Campbell, son to Campbell of Lawers, Gavin Hamilton, Donald MacAngus and Marcus MacNaughton.*

**Figure 5. Campbell Clan headquarters, Inveraray, Argyll, 2007.**



## THE TIMES

After a revolution in 1559-60 overthrew the Roman Church, a state professing the Protestant faith owed allegiance to a Queen living in France who was a convinced Roman Catholic. On 5 December 1560

Mary's weakly young husband Francis II died. Mary sailed from Calais for Scotland in 1561. Elizabeth of England, a Protestant, had failed to give her safe conduct across the North Sea. Following the Reformation and in light of a Catholic Counter Reformation, all of Europe was watching. Mary followed her own faith, held interviews with the Scottish Protestant reformer John Knox and tried to follow a middle path. A suitable marriage was important and in July 1565 Mary married Henry Stewart, Lord Darnley, in a Roman ceremony. Mary began to hunt the leaders of the Protestant nobles, who had attempted a coup. David Riccio, an Italian and suspected Vatican spy, had risen in favor at Mary's court and incurred Darnley's jealousy. Riccio

was murdered at the door of Mary's apartment in Holyroodhouse on 9 March 1566. Mary's son, the future James VI, was born in June. Mary did not forgive Darnley for the murder of Riccio, and after Darnley became sick, the house in which he was staying was blown up. Darnley's, strangled body was found in a nearby garden. James Hepburn, Fourth Earl of Bothwell, who was implicated, married Mary on 15 May by Protestant rites. Mary was pursued and imprisoned by the lords, who forced her to abdicate on 24 July. Her half-brother, James Earl of Moray was appointed regent and Scotland was ruled by regents until 1578. It's no wonder the clans in Argyll seemed a little out of control at this time when their supposed rulers seemed even more out of control and their religion, which often holds a people together, was also in turmoil. MacGregors were primarily Catholic and the Campbells embraced the new Protestant faith.



**Figure 6. Ardkinglas Manor 2007, site of Campbell cadet branch at Ardkinglas on Loch Fyne.**

Dawson made some notes on Alexander's letter, which allude to an accusation that he was going to destroy his three brothers. Gregor MacGregor of Glenstrae, half-brother to Alexander, was executed on 7 April 1570 at Balloch Castle, seven months before this letter. Gregor and his brother Ewin are shown in Fig. 1, but they had other brothers. McNaughton denied this serious charge, which impugned his honor and created a debt of honor that had to be satisfied by an apology or a duel. Dawson claims that, for most of the Campbell feud with the MacGregors, McNaughton had been under suspicion of having assisted the MacGregors. She says that Gregor Neilson was the other negotiator with Patrick MacGregor in the settlement between Grey Colin and the MacGregors. The peace was actually concluded over the course of a year, between Grey Colin and Ewin MacGregor, with other MacGregors, including Patrick McAne, as witnesses.

To justify her assertion that Alexander was under suspicion of assisting the McGregors, Dawson points to a Campbell letter of 8 June 1570 from Argyll to Glenorchy, which says McNaughton is to appear for trial at Inveraray before the 5th earl, Grey Colin, Dougal Campbell of Auchinbreck, Dougal MacDougall of Dunollie, James Campbell of Ardkinglas, Duncan Campbell of Duntrune, Colin Campbell of Barbreck and John Campbell of Inverliever—a terrifying lineup of Campbells. We don't have the date or result of this trial or whether it was even held. Gregor had already been executed two months earlier. Alexander's name cropped up a number of times in correspondence between Argyll and Glenorchy and on 5 July 1565 Argyll had said if McNaughton did not cooperate Argyll would not grant him the leases that were coming up for renewal.

## THE CAMPBELLS

In the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century the Campbells managed two things very well: rising into the Scottish peerage and becoming earls of Argyll; and establishing strong cadet branches such as the Campbells of Glenorchy. Despite this the Clan retained its unity and cohesion and remained

prepared to act as a single unit under one chief, the earls of Argyll (Fig. 5). Clan Campbell was the most successful kindred group in early modern Scotland. They were able to function as a Highland clan and a Lowland surname, working within two languages and cultures—Scots and Gaelic—and Latin as well where necessary. This enabled them to operate successfully in Lowland politics and the royal court whilst thriving in the clan-based structure of Highland politics. The major military power that they drew from their extensive landed base, kinsmen and affinity gave the earls of Argyll a powerful voice in national and international affairs. They also remained close to the Scottish Stewart monarchs and acted as their trusted servants for most of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. They moved from their original base on Loch Awe to Inveraray on Loch Fyne. From here they spread south, north and east, targeting travel and communication routes and frontier areas between the Highlands and Lowlands.

The Glenorchy Campbells were the most successful cadet branch. They sprung from Black Colin of Rome (d. 1475)—the second son of Duncan Campell of Lochawe and brother to the 1<sup>st</sup> earl of Argyll—who built Kilchurn castle at the top of Loch Awe where Glen Orchy and Glen Strae meet. They expanded east from their patrimonial lands in Glen Orchy in co-operation with the MacGregors of Glenstrae, right down to Loch Tay. The Glenorchy Campbells established their main base at the east end of Loch Tay, at the easternmost extent of their territories. They also extended their affinity through bonds of manrent, with Grey Colin, 6<sup>th</sup> laird, producing a book to keep track of his servitors. Control was enforced through legal process and military muscle, using Highland warriors. After Argyll and Glenorchy the third Campbell strand came from the Campbells of Ardkinglas, at the northeast side of Loch Fyne (Fig. 6). They also looked to move eastwards.

In Breadalbane—central Scotland around Loch Tay and Glenlyon—the MacGregors were often used to do the Campbell's dirty work. The McNaughtons are thought to be descended from Picts who ruled this area AD 448-847. By the 13<sup>th</sup> century the McNaughton headquarters had moved to Argyll but many remained around Perthshire. The Campbells prepared for expansion into an area by marriage alliances, although the marriage of their heiresses was restricted to other Campbells, ensuring the lands remained in Campbell hands. Remember Alexander McNaughton and his two MacGregor half-brothers all married Campbell women from Glenlyon.

Grey Colin's second marriage to Katherine Ruthven produced eight children and safely secured the Glenorchy line. He proved a very dynamic laird, ruling for thirty-three more years until his death in 1583. He was very tough on his own affinity and drove a hard bargain with Gregor, the young chief of the MacGregors of Glenstrae. This pressure helped cause a breakdown and the start of the major feud between the MacGregors and the Glenorchy Campbells in 1562. Grey Colin did not have sufficient military resources to prosecute the MacGregor feud and needed help from his chief, fellow clansmen and other allies in Argyll. The military effort was coordinated by the earl of Argyll and his council but Grey Colin was constantly consulted by letter and in person.

The Breadalbane letters focus on Grey Colin and his wife Katherine Ruthven. The struggle between the MacGregors of Glenstrae and Campbells of Glenorchy was essentially a fight for control over the manpower, land and other resources of Breadalbane and Lorn. It was particularly intense because the two clans had previously been close allies who had successfully

expanded together from their neighboring glens in Lorn into Breadalbane and had settled side-by-side in these new lands. Gregor Roy was finally captured on 1 August 1569. On 7 April 1570 he was tried, sentenced to death and personally beheaded by Grey Colin. In October 1570, as part of a settlement, Grey Colin accepted Ewin MacGregor—brother of Gregor and half-brother of Alexander—as tutor to Gregor’s two sons, The feud was Grey Colin’s main preoccupation for the 1560’s and may have encouraged him to collect his correspondence. The McNaughtons got caught in the crossfire.

Chief Alexander’s 1570 letter gives us a vivid glimpse of what has been called an *annus horribilis* in Scottish history. It reveals so much about the times and the culture and some of the quirks as well. Alexander calls Patrick ‘trusty friend’ and challenges him to a duel. In closing he asks to be commended to Patrick’s ‘bedfellow,’ presumably the equivalent of our ‘remember me to your wife.’ Alexander’s final words, ‘trust in God’ echo the McNaughton Clan’s plaintive plea for an Ally who was of little help against the might of the Campbell lawyers—“I hope in God.” It is hard to find out details about our ancestral clan. Here we have a telescope that looks in reverse at a time 443 years ago and gives us a glimpse of what life was like for the chief of our Clan.

#### NOTES

The spelling of our surname can be confusing. When I am quoting an authority I try to use the spelling in that authority. Otherwise I use the spelling of my own name, McNaughton. I am grateful to Ed Moore, a researcher of the Clan Gregor, who asked me if I had information about Alexander McNaughton. Ed alerted me to the Breadalbane Collection and the work of Jane Dawson, guiding me to the parts most relevant to Alexander’s 1570 letter. He also read my draft and supplied additional background on the MacGregors. I am also grateful to the McNaughtan brothers in Glasgow. I asked David if he would translate the Old Scots into modern English and he referred my query to his brother Adam. The manuscript letters are owned by the National Archives of Scotland and the copyright of the letter transcripts is held by Professor Jane Dawson, School of Divinity, University of Edinburgh. This work is copyrighted and may not be reproduced in whole or in part in any medium without written permission from Ken McNaughton, 3778 College Avenue, Ellicott City, MD 21043; phone/fax: 410-418-9340; [kjmcn@comcast.net](mailto:kjmcn@comcast.net) (18 August 2013).

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