

# ELECTION OF THE CHIEF IN 1878

By Ken McNaughton

*We are fortunate to have a firsthand account  
of how the Chief of the Macnaughton Clan was elected in 1878,  
and how those present decided to form The Clan Macnaughton Association.*

In November 2017 I came across an issue of *The Celtic Magazine* and found within it an account of a meeting in Edinburgh on 8 March 1878 [1]. I have reproduced that article with indented sections below and have tried to amplify the import with some commentary. *The Celtic Magazine* was 'conducted' by Alexander Mackenzie, author of various books about Scottish history. Wikitree records an archive of thirteen volumes, 1876 to 1888 [2].

Figure 1. Edinburgh Castle from the Grassmarket 1878.



A. & W. Mackenzie had an address at 2 Hamilton Place, Inverness, and *The Celtic Magazine* was printed in Inverness. Maclauchlan & Stewart of Edinburgh, and William Love of Glasgow are credited on the title page; they may have been publishers who assembled the submitted text. From the article we learn that 40-50 men and women came to the meeting, some traveling from far away. Invitations had been sent out, perhaps to members of existing organizations or to people with the name Macnaughton. The spelling of the name remains constant throughout the article; it's likely some of those attending spelled the name differently.

We are glad to see the growing interest in Celtic and Highland questions, the most recent illustration of which we find in the general meeting, on Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> March, of the Clan Macnaughton, in the hall of the Literary Institute, Edinburgh, for the purpose of electing a chief, vice-president and bard, and for taking steps to elucidate their history and promote their social intercourse and general welfare; also to form a Clan Macnaughton Association, the objects of which are intended to be antiquarian, social and charitable. Some forty or fifty ladies and gentlemen responded to the invitation sent out, many of whom had come considerable distances to be present.

The driving force of this meeting came from Alexander Macnaughton, 39 York Place, Edinburgh, the Chair, and Daniel Macnaughton. It is claimed there were 70-80 letters of apology, many from older Macnaughtons, so attendees and those who apologized amount

to about 120, not counting those who received an invitation but didn't respond. A committee met in advance of the meeting to find a successor to the previous chief, Sir Edmund Charles Macnaghten, 2nd Baronet, who died in 1876, two years earlier. The appointment of a chief has to be approved by the Lord Lyon, whose functions in practice were carried out by the Lyon-Depute until 1866. In this case, the Clerk-Depute, Mr. R. R. Stodart, approved the succession passing to Francis Edmund, eldest son of the deceased.

Mr. Alex Macnaughton, 39 York Place, having been called to the chair, Mr. Daniel Macnaughton stated that there were between seventy and eighty letters of apology, some of them from people between 80 and 90 years of age. He also read a letter from the Lyon Clerk-Depute, Mr. R. R. Stodart, in regard to the chiefship of the clan, in which it was stated that there could be no doubt that Sir Francis Edmund Macnaghten, Bart. of Dundarave, County Antrim, was entitled to occupy the position. There was also submitted a report by a committee who had been appointed at a preliminary meeting to investigate this matter.

The article, which may have been based on reports before and after the meeting, includes some broad-brush history of the Macnaughton Clan, and coincides with our current understanding. Dalriads were a Celtic race who came over from Ireland to Argyllshire and established a kingdom in the southwest of Scotland until King Kenneth Macalpin succeeded in 843, obtaining rule both over it and the northern kingdom of the Picts, and becoming the first king of Scotland. Caledonia is the Latin name given by the Romans to the land in today's Scotland north of their province of Britannia; the etymology of the name is probably from a Celtic source; its modern usage is as a romantic or poetic name for Scotland as a whole. Albyn is ancient Gallo-Latin for Scotland, particularly the Highlands.

The origin of the clan, it was stated, was involved in obscurity, but authorities admitted that it was very ancient and that the misfortunes by which it was overtaken arose mainly for its unswerving loyalty to the causes for which it from time to time espoused. Some authors appear to come to the conclusion that the clan was Scoto-Irish, or belonged to the Dalriads of Argyllshire, who came from Ireland; others held that it was Pictish or Caledonian. It would have been impossible, it was remarked, to have traced the chiefship back through the labyrinth of intricacy which surrounded the early history of the clan, but fortunately there was an admirable stepping-stone more than half-way down the long period that had elapsed since the clan first came on the scene in connection with the early annals of Albyn.

The article goes on to describe the 13<sup>th</sup> century chief Gilchrist Macnaughton and some of his famous descendants—14<sup>th</sup> century Duncan; 16<sup>th</sup> century Sir Alexander; and John, who fought at Killiecrankie in 1689. The last of the Scottish chiefs died without issue in 1773 and the clan was without a chief for forty-five years. Here the provenance is broken and a new chief was selected more by negotiation than legal proof, although papers were submitted. There is a good description of this dubious process called "Who Was Shane

Dhu?” [3]. Sir Edmund Alexander McNaghten of Ulster was confirmed chief in 1818; members of this distinguished family have been chiefs of the clan ever since [4].

That stepping-stone was Gilchrist Macnaughton, who, in the year 1267, received from Alexander III a patent granting to him and his heirs the castle of Fraoch, in Loch Awe, and hence *Eilean Fraoch* was long the war cry of the clan. In his day, Gilchrist Macnaughton was chief, and that being the opinion also of the Lyon-Clerk Depute, the committee did not consider it necessary to go further back. Among Gilchrist’s descendants were Duncan Macnaughton, who in 1330 embarked for the Holy Land with the heart of Robert the Bruce; Sir Alexander Macnaughton, who in 1513 accompanied King James to the fatal field of Flodden, where he was slain; John Macnaughton, who joined Viscount Dundee with a body of the clan, and greatly contributed to the victory at Killiecrankie. This John left two sons, who died without issue, and the representation of the clan fell to the descendants of John, the third and youngest son of Alexander Macnaughton, who fell at Flodden. This John, who was known as “Shane Dhu,” had settled in County Antrim; and the lineal descendant of that branch of the family at the present day was Sir Francis Edmund Macnaughton, Bart., whom the committee had no hesitation in saying was the hereditary chief of the clan. In that opinion, as already stated, the Lyon Clerk-Depute coincided.

This gathering in 1878 was not present to debate the legitimacy of appointing Sir Edmund Alexander McNaghten of Ulster in 1818. They had gathered to witness the decision of the committee and the Lyon Clerk-Depute that Sir Francis Edmund Macnaughton, the third Baronet, was the lineal descendant of that branch of the family, and was now the new chief. The official nomination mimicked the decision made in 1818, claiming that the new chief was “a lineal descendant of the ancient line of chiefs of the clan,” and there were no dissenters. The Chair, Alexander Macnaughton, who had originated this move to appoint a new chief, was made vice-president. The appointment of a bard, an ancient tradition, was deferred. Perhaps the biggest news from this 1878 document is that the meeting resolved to form “The Clan Macnaughton Association.” In modern times, members of Clan Macnaughton have gathered in various bodies with different names, the current one being “Clan Macnachtan Association Worldwide.” But this 1878 reference is the earliest known mention of a similar body.

The thanks of the committee were recorded in the report to Mr. R. R. Stodart, of the Lyon Office, for his courtesy in making these inquiries. The Chairman having made a few remarks, the nomination of the Chief of the Clan was made by Mr. Macnaughton, banker, Callander, in these terms:—

The meeting having considered the report of the committee and other information laid before it, finds that the Chief of the Clan Macnaughton is Sir Francis Edmund Macnaughton of Dundarave, Bushmills, Ireland—a lineal descendant of the ancient line of chiefs of the clan, and otherwise qualified to occupy the position of chief, and the meeting confirms him in that position accordingly.

This was seconded by Mr. Duncan G. Macnaughton, Stirling, and was unanimously agreed to. The nomination as vice-president of Mr. Alex. Macnaughton, 39 York Place, Edinburgh, who was the originator of the present movement, was also cordially accepted. It was resolved to defer the appointment of a bard for the clan until the next meeting in 1879. On the motion of Mr. D. Macnaughton, Stonefield, Blantyre, it was unanimously resolved, "That an Association be formed, to be called 'The Clan Macnaughton Association.'"

#### REFERENCES

1. Mackenzie, Alexander, [\*The Celtic Magazine\*](#): A monthly periodical devoted to the Literature, History, Antiquities, Folklore, Traditions and the Social and Material Interests of the Celt at Home and Abroad," Volume III, No. XXX, April 1878, pp. 236-7, Inverness, Edinburgh & Glasgow.
2. Wikitree, [The Celtic Magazine](#).
3. McNaughton, Duncan, "The Clan McNaughton," Albyn Press, Edinburgh, 1977.
4. McNaughton, Ken, "[Dunderave and the New Chiefs](#)," Clan Macnachtan Association Worldwide, December 2007.

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