

RECORDS OF ARGYLL

PART I: INTRODUCTION

After Blair McNaughton read my first articles in *The Red Banner* in 2007 he asked if I would research the McNaughtons of Perthshire. I told him I would need some good historical references. There are more of these for the McNaughtons of Argyll than exist for their cousins to the northeast so I am doing what every good writer does—tackle the easy part first. But this is also an apology to Blair and something of a promise—that after I have done with Argyll I hope to attempt the harder part. This resolve is hardened by Duncan McNaughton’s statement “Within broad limits, those who spell the final syllable “-ton” tend to have stemmed from Perthshire, while those with “-tan” are more likely to have originated in Argyll” [1].

Let’s divide non-fiction authors into three categories: *scholars* who examine historical records and artifacts; *analysts* who examine the references; and *populists* who pull bits and pieces from here and there to suit their own agendas. In the field of family history, we find lots of populists who muddy the waters with repeated stories that get more and more distorted with distance from the source. Hence it is always nice to discover true historians, researchers and scholars who are careful about what they write. I admit to being a bit of a dabbler myself, but after spending twenty-five years in the publishing industry I have developed a feeling for the difference between writers at one end of the scale from those at the other.

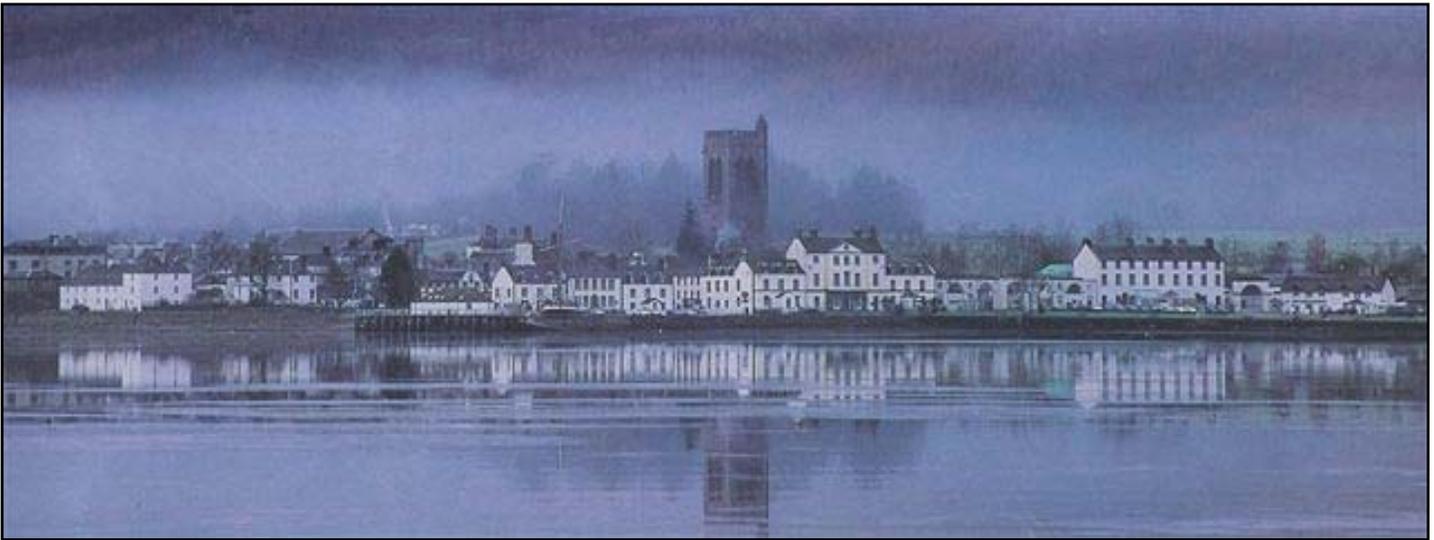


Figure 1. Inveraray, Argyll, Scotland.

“INVERARAY”

When I started researching the locations of the Macnachtan Settlements of Dubh Loch [2], Peter McNaughton sent me some material from Matthew Cock’s book [3], which has a chapter on “The Dubh Loch Castle.” My analysis started with an examination of Cock’s references and he says, “Re the plague graves see Peter MacIntyre, *Inveraray: Its Scenery and Associations* (1909).”

Figure 2. Inscription over door of Dunderave Castle.



I wanted to learn more about the plague graves so I paid \$31 for a used copy of the Second Edition of MacIntyre [4] and was bitterly disappointed. This slim 5 by 7-in., 70-page volume contains 17 full pages of advertisements—including one for Peter Macintyre, Tailor and Clothier; one for Alexander MacIntyre, Harris & Hebridean Tweed Merchant; and one for MacNaughton’s Stores—but did not reference any sources. In his section on Dunderave Castle, MacIntyre incorrectly quotes the inscription above the doorway as “I maun Behold the end, Be Nocht Vyser, Nor the Hiestest, I Hoip in God.” Now this is not an easy inscription to transcribe—especially since all the “N’s” are reversed—but Fig. 2 shows clearly how the inscription reads:

“TM.AN.BEHALD.THE.END.BE.NOCHT.VYSER.NOR.THE .HIESTFS.I.HOIP.IN.GOD.”

So however we parse the meaning, we know immediately that we should not rely on MacIntyre for the true text.



On page 34, MacIntyre tells us: “It is called Dhu or Black Loch [Fig. 3] from the dark appearance of its bottom. About 150 yards from the bridge on the west side of the Dhu Loch is a triangular peninsula on which are the remains of a castle which belonged to the MacNachtan, and part of the walls of this castle were standing in 1803. A great plague ravished the district, and some of the members of the MacNachtan family who resided at this castle were seized with it and died. The others fled from the castle, and a short time afterwards set about erecting Dunderave Castle as a residence. This plague was said to have been brought to the locality by some people who came about selling linen. The people who died with the plague were buried in a place near the castle which is known and is called Bruach-nan-uaignean, Bank of Graves.” This is all very fascinating and of course we have heard it before but MacIntyre has not told us where he got this information.

Figure 3. Dubh Loch, looking across suspected site of Bank of Graves toward Macnachtan crannog on eastern shore.

Some of the things that make this paragraph frustrating are as follows. Millar [5], in his 1964 detailed analysis of the Dubh Loch castle site, says “The location of the castle lies east of the river’s exit from the loch [Fig. 4], and is on the point of a low, triangular-shaped green promontory.” Since Millar quotes four sources and says “east of the river’s exit,” he is more credible than MacIntyre who quotes no sources and says “on the west side of the Dhu Loch.” MacIntyre says that part of the walls were standing in 1803, more than a century before he wrote his book. It would be nice to know where he got this information.

Finally, we get to MacIntyre’s precious only comment about the location of the plague graves (the reason for buying the book at Matthew Cock’s recommendation) and he tells us that the bodies “were buried in a place near the castle *which is known*” (my italics). Known by whom? And if this place is known, where is it?

Figure 4. Waters from Dubh Loch flow under bridge toward the Short River.

Opposite page 28 there is a full page photo with the caption “Dhu Loch, showing site of the First Castle of the MacNachtan in District.” Exciting stuff. The photo shows some cows on the western shore of the loch with a triangular spit of land about thirty feet on a side, which is surrounded by water, protrudes from the water no more than one foot, and doesn’t look very green. This does not correspond with Millar’s description: “The site ... consists of a grass-covered mound and what may be associated walling, the whole being oval in form and measuring some seventy feet by fifty, with its long axis oriented roughly NW and SE. The mound itself is no more than about six to seven feet high.” MacIntyre’s book may be useful in some respects, but is not credible as a source for accurate Macnachtan Clan history.



“RECORDS OF ARGYLL”

On 4 February 2008 I requested four reference books on inter-library loan, even though my other such requests at the local library in the last couple of years were unproductive. Two weeks later I was GIVEN leather-bound Copy No. 259 of “Records of Argyll” (1885) by Lord Archibald Campbell [6], the reference most quoted by Cock in his chapter on Dubh Loch. This book, valued at \$500 on the Web, was surrendered by the Brooklyn Library, 199 Montague Street in New York. The covers were separated from the text and some



front pages were loose, which may have made it difficult to sell, but this book is so beautiful I want to tell you all about it. This article, Part I, is just an introduction. Subsequent parts will, I hope, convey specific stories about our Macnachtan ancestors.

Figure 5. Inveraray Castle (center) nestles in the hills where the River Aray enters Loch Fyne under Bridge Aray (left).

Generally I prefer substantiated history to legend but there are exceptions. There was a legend in my family about John Johnstone, one of my ancestors. It sounded fantastic, even unbelievable, yet after I researched it, not only did I find that most of the facts were true, but it opened a door that led to an unbroken string of great grandparents through six Plantagenet Kings of England all the way back to Geoffroy I Count Gastinois, born in Anjou, France, in the year 970 A.D. [7, 8]. After that, I learned to be more respectful of legend; take it with a grain of salt, but investigate and see if it can be substantiated.

THE CAMPBELLS

The Campbells were arguably the most powerful clan in the heyday of the Scottish Highlands. They ferociously acquired land and, like the leaders in any clan system—be it Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Brooklyn, New York City, Saudi Arabia, Africa, or the Middle East—were hated and feared by their enemies and worshipped by their kinsmen. The seat of Campbell power became Inveraray Castle (Fig. 5), in Argyll, and the Macnachtans were one of their closest neighbors. The Macnachtans had their triumphs in the area—including the nearby Dunderave Castle (Fig. 6)—but they were not as strong as the Campbells; no one was. To the Macnachtans, the Campbells were alternately enemies, friends, relatives, landlords, and comrades in arms. Eventually the Campbells beat the Macnachtans at law, took over their castles and lands, and squeezed them out of Argyll. That’s the bad news. The good news is that we are indebted to the Campbells in several ways.

Figure 6. Dunderave Castle, on Dunderave Point, Loch Fyne, 4-1/2 miles north east of Inveraray.

Sir George Douglas Campbell (1823-1900), 8th Duke of Argyll, married Lady Elizabeth Georgiana Sutherland-Leveson-Gower in 1844. He was Chancellor of St. Andrews University 1851-1900, Lord Rector of the University of Glasgow 1854-1856, Postmaster-General 1855-1858, and Secretary of State for India 1868-1874. He wrote “The Reign of Law” and other books on a variety of subjects. When he died, the headline in The New York Times on 24 April said he owned 170,000 acres [266 square miles] in Scotland. Their first son, Sir John George Edward Henry Douglas Sutherland Campbell (1845-1914), became the 9th Duke of Argyll, married Her Royal Highness the Princess Louise Caroline Alberta, sixth child and fourth daughter of Queen Victoria, became Governor-General of Canada (1878-1883), and wrote several well-received books, including “Adventures in Legend: Being the Last Historic Legends of the Western Highlands,” Archibald Constable & Co., Westminster, 1898.



The second son of the 8th Duke was Captain Lord Archibald Campbell (1846-1913). He married Janey Sevilla Callander—an amateur actress-manager and author—and compiled the “Records of Argyll.” Their son, Sir Niall Diarmid Campbell (1872-1949), became the 10th Duke of Argyll in 1914. Duncan McNaughton [1] pays a moving tribute to Niall Campbell in a footnote to his Chapter III “The Chiefs and Their Lands on Loch Awe and Loch Fyne.” Duncan says “This chapter is based on the detailed pedigree of the McNaughtons of Dunderawe, the life’s work of Niall, 10th Duke of Argyll. The manuscript was made available to Angus Macnaghten and myself by the late Duke, who permitted Angus to make a copy. It is the most complete record available, including references to documents in other collections which have a bearing on the McNaughton chiefs. It also contains a summary of the now destroyed family papers of the McNaughtons.”

SAMUEL JOHNSON

Samuel Johnson was an essayist and biographer and between 1745 and 1755 wrote “A Dictionary of the English Language.” When he



Figure 7. Pass of Brander, under Ben Cruachan (3,700 ft.), from Fraoch Eilean.

and James Boswell passed through western Scotland in 1773, Johnson was looking for records of Highland history. He observed [9]: “But we soon found what memorials were to be expected from an illiterate people, whose whole time is a series of distress; where every morning is labouring with expedients for the evening; and where all mental pains or pleasure arose from the dread of winter, the expectation of spring, the caprices of their Chiefs, and the motions of the neighbouring clans; where there was neither shame from ignorance, nor pride in knowledge; neither curiosity to inquire, nor vanity to communicate.

“The Chiefs indeed were exempt from urgent penury, and daily difficulties; and in their houses were preserved what accounts remained of past ages. But the Chiefs were sometimes ignorant and careless, and sometimes kept busy by turbulence and contention; and one generation of ignorance effaces the whole series of unwritten history ... Tradition is but a meteor, which, if once it falls, cannot be rekindled.

“They said that a great family had a Bard and a Senachi, who were the poet and historian of the house ... Soon after I was told by a gentleman, who is generally acknowledged the greatest master of Hebridian antiquities, that there had indeed once been both Bards and Senachies; and that Senachi signified ‘the man of talk,’ or of conversation; but that neither Bard nor Senachi had existed for some centuries. I have no reason to suppose it exactly known at what time the custom ceased, nor did it probably cease in all houses at once. But whenever the practice of recitation was disused, the works, whether poetical or historical, perished with the authors; for in those times nothing had been written in the Earse [Gaelic] language.

“Whether the ‘Man of talk’ was a historian, whose office was to tell truth, or a story-teller, like those which were in the last century, and perhaps are now among the Irish, whose trade was only to amuse, it now would be vain to inquire ... The nation was wholly illiterate. Neither bards nor Senachies could write or read;

Figure 8. Boating on Loch Awe.

“Where the Chiefs of the Highlands have found the histories of their descent is difficult to tell; for no Earse genealogy was ever written. In general this only is evident, that the principal house of a clan must be very ancient, and that those must have lived long in a place, of whom it is not known when they came thither ... Thus hopeless are all attempts to find any traces of Highland learning. Nor are their primitive customs and ancient manner of life otherwise than very faintly and uncertainly remembered by the present race.”

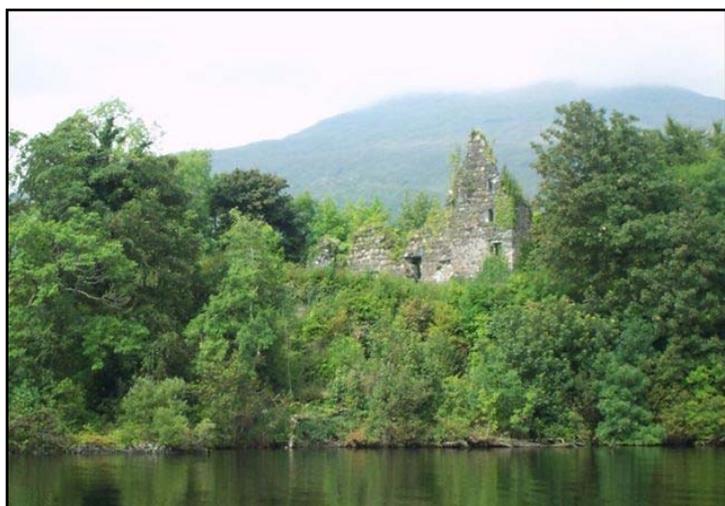


DEDICATION

Archibald Campbell starts the “Records of Argyll” with a Dedication to his kinsman Ian Campbell of Islay (1822-1885), a Gaelic scholar who collected, translated and edited folklore of the western Highlands, taken down from the lips of the natives and published in four volumes, “Popular Tales of the West Highlands” (1860-1862). [Loch Awe points to two islands off the west coast of Scotland—Jura and *Islay*, part of the Inner Hebrides—just as Loch Fyne points to Kintyre and Arran.]

In his Introduction Archibald Campbell defines the area of Argyll and speaks of Ben Cruachan, the Pass of Brander (Fig. 7), Lorne, Breadalbane, and Lochow (Loch Awe) (Fig. 8). The Macnachtan castle of Fraoch Eilean (Fig. 9) was in Loch Awe and was designed to monitor the Pass of Brander. Campbell says “the dark-coloured Lochow, with its fringe of hazel, ash, and rowan—Lochow, one of the most dangerous as it is one of the loveliest of West Highland lochs. It is to this land, lying at our feet, between us and the sea, that these RECORDS OF ARGYLL chiefly refer.” [N.B. Michael McNaughton [2] tells us that the lone tree near the Macnachtan graves on Dubh Loch is a European- or *Rowan-Ash*.]

Archibald Campbell goes on “My aim as Editor of this volume has been to rescue from an oblivion that is fast overtaking them, some of the more characteristic traditions of the Clans of Argyll and the Isles. Every year the chances of preserving the Gaelic legends that exist only in the recollections of the older generation of Highlanders are becoming less and less possible. The art of storytelling, which has shown a longer vitality among the Scottish Gael than among any of the other British races, is no longer cultivated with the same success as in days that are not very long gone by; and many a fine old legend perishes with the death of its only possessor.



“The bulk of the ‘Records of Argyll’ consists of tales, written down for the most part from the recitation of their possessors, and rendered as closely to the original Gaelic as the difference of the two languages permitted. Many of these appear for the first time in an English form ...Some scarce pamphlets and family papers, inaccessible to the general public, have also been quoted as tending to throw light upon the unwritten Records of Argyll.”

Figure 9. The Macnachtan castle on Fraoch Eilean in Loch Awe.

He signs off “Archibald Campbell, Inverary Castle, September 1884.” The “Records of Argyll” was published the next year—1885—the same year that Ian Campbell—to whom the book is dedicated—died. We shall explore, in future articles, some of these legends that relate to the Macnachtan Clan.

Ken McNaughton
Ellicott City, Maryland
(kjmcn@comcast.net)

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PHOTOGRAPHS

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