

ROB ROY

by Ken McNaughton

Figure 1. Rob Roy engraved from an original drawing by W. H. Worthington ca. 1820.



In Sir Walter Scott's novel [1] Rob Roy is a shadowy figure who emerges only gradually in the romantic adventures of a more conventional, well-bred English protagonist. Frank Osbaldistone declines to take over his father's business and travels from London to Northumberland to the home of his uncle, Sir Hildebrand

Osbaldistone, one of whose sons, Rashleigh, has been chosen to take over the business instead. Frank falls in love with Hildebrand's beautiful and outspoken niece, Diana Vernon. Scott teases us throughout the book by constantly keeping her just out of reach, for mysterious reasons, despite her obvious affection for Frank. Scott even robs us of a natural consummation, but maintains our interest by his rollicking page-turning drama. We catch glimpses of Rob Roy, the road to Glasgow, Inveraray, the Duke of Argyll, Catholics and Protestants, Jacobites (who want to return the House of Stuart to the throne) and those opposed, English and Scots, lawyers, landowners, villains and assorted others. Scott uses a lot of phonetic Scots pronunciation, both Highland and Lowland. There is no mention of McNaughtons, but some of the action occurs in the lands of the Campbells, McGregors and McNaughtons (see a 1570 letter from McNaughton Chief, Alexander, which addresses his conflicts with McGregors and Campbells [2]).

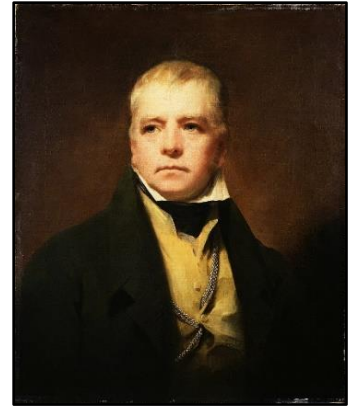
Figure 2. The remains of Rob Roy McGregor's house in Glen Shira, ca. 1716 (21st Century Pict).



In 1716 Rob Roy moved to Glen Shira for a short time and lived under the protection of John Campbell, 2nd Duke of Argyll. Argyll negotiated an amnesty and protection for Rob and granted him permission to build a house in the Glen for the surrendering up of weapons. The story goes that Argyll only received a large cache of rusty old weapons. A sporran and dirk handle that belonged to Rob Roy can still be seen at Inveraray Castle. Rob Roy used this

house occasionally for the next three or four years. He became a respected cattleman—this was a time when cattle rustling and selling protection against theft were commonplace means of earning a living. Rob Roy borrowed a large sum to increase his own cattle herd but owing to the disappearance of his chief herder, who was entrusted with the money to bring the cattle back, he lost his money and cattle and defaulted on his loan. As a result he was branded an outlaw and his wife and family were evicted from their house at Inversnaid, which was then burned down. After his principal creditor, James Graham, 1st Duke of Montrose, seized his lands, Rob Roy waged a private blood feud against the Duke until 1722, when he was forced to surrender. Later imprisoned, he was finally pardoned in 1727, and died in his house in 1734, a folk hero.

Figure 3. Sir Walter Scott 1822, by Henry Raeburn, National Galleries of Scotland.



Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832) was a Scottish historical novelist, poet, playwright and historian. *Encyclopædia Britannica* argues “Scott gathered the disparate strands of contemporary novel-writing techniques into his own hands and harnessed them to his deep interest in Scottish history and his knowledge of antiquarian lore. The technique of the omniscient narrator and the use of regional speech, localized settings, sophisticated character delineation and romantic themes treated in a realistic manner were all combined by him into virtually a new literary form, the historical novel.” His 1817 book is not a biography, but conveys a vivid picture of life in England and Scotland at the time of Rob Roy. Scott owned a book about Rob Roy that was published in 1723, the year after Rob Roy surrendered [3].

Clan Macnachtan built a castle or fort on a crannog or small island at the southern tip of Dubh Loch in Glen Shira sometime after historical references to the castle at Fraoch Eilean in Loch Awe at the end of the 13th century and abandoned it before the end of the 17th century. Glen Shira is the valley of the Shira River, which flows north to south, through Dubh Loch, into Loch Fyne. Inveraray, home to the Campbells, and Dunderave, traditional home of the McNaughton Clan, are both on the shores of Loch Fyne. Rob Roy’s house is a few miles north of Dunderave. At one time, all the lands between Loch Fyne and Loch Awe belonged to the McNaughtons.

The 1995 movie [4] stars Liam Neeson as Rob Roy, Jessica Lange as his wife Mary, John Hurt as the local English Marquis of Montrose and Andrew Keir as the Duke of Argyll. It was filmed entirely in Scotland and focuses on the central known drama of Rob Roy’s life. Michael Caton-Jones, the director, was born in West Lothian, Scotland, twelve miles west of Edinburgh. Tim Roth was nominated for Best Actor in a Supporting Role as Archibald Cunningham, Montrose’s ruthless and vicious chief henchman.

REFERENCES

1. Scott, Sir Walter, “Rob Roy,” published 1817, Penguin Classics, 1995.
2. McNaughton, Ken, “[McNaughtons, McGregors & Campbells](#),” Clan Macnachtan Association Worldwide, 18 August 2013.
3. Brockett, Elias, “The Highland Rogue: or, the Memorable Actions of the Celebrated Robert Mac-gregor, Commonly called Roy-Roy,” 1723.
4. “[Rob Roy](#),” MGM 1995, directed by Michael Caton-Jones.

COPYRIGHT

This work is copyrighted and may not be reproduced in whole or in part in any medium without written permission from Ken McNaughton Living Trust, 3778 College Avenue, Ellicott City, MD 21043; phone/fax: 410-418-9340; kjmcn@comcast.net (10 July 2019).