

SYMBOLS OF THE CLAN MACNACHTAN

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The French philosopher Francois-Marie Arouet, better known by his pen-name as Voltaire, famously wrote: “Je pense, donc je suis” (I think - therefore I am). One of the benefits of exceeding one’s allotted three score years and ten, and hopefully becoming wiser in the process, is that a quieter life style gives one plenty of time to keep one’s grey matter active by indulging in lengthy periods of rumination.

Slipping back 1,500 years to the time of King Nechtan I of the Picts, when our Clan had its origins as his followers – Sons of Nechtan – an analysis of the life style of the Picts living at that period would reveal that they, too, had plenty of time for thought, because, although life in many ways was much harder and they were old at the age of 40, there were none of the distractions which are such a mixed blessing of 21st century life, such as money, electricity, books, cars, computers.

However, this is not to say that their lives were dull and boring. Far from it, they lived much closer to nature and observed the world of nature with a degree of intimate knowledge and reverence, which is sadly lacking in modern society. They had to grow their own food crops, hunt for their meat, fish for their seafoods and learn to cope with everything the unpredictable weather threw at them. So much that we take for granted they had to make for themselves - humble dwellings of stone and turf, clothing from sheep’s fleeces, shoes from cattle hides.

They had no metals, so for knives and axes they depended on sharp flints and stones and fish bones for needles. For light they made lanterns from tallow and candles from beeswax. For music they made simple drums and whistles from hollow elder stems. They could not write, so their bards memorised imaginative legends and family stories, which they recited at gatherings around the hearth. Trees were very important to them as a source of building materials for their houses and hollowed out canoes and for firewood and they almost worshipped them.

With all this background, it is hardly surprising that the Clan Symbols chosen over the centuries were almost exclusively from the world of nature, which they knew and respected so well. Take the **RED DEER STAGS** which form an important part of the Clan Coat of Arms. They have always been native on the mountains and moorland of Scotland, whether in Argyll or in the Perthshire Clan Lands, and will continue to be so.



Also prominent on the Coat of Arms is the symbolic **CASTLE**, and the Clan Chiefs have always had a Clan Seat, symbolic of their power and influence. King Nechtan I of the Picts, forefather of our Clan, had his capital at **ABERNETHY** in Perthshire in the 6th century.

Over the following centuries, the Kings/Chiefs moved from there to **SCONE** and in the 13th century to Argyll, where Malcolm, the first of the official Scottish Chiefs of Clan Macnachtan, was given lands by King Alexander II. His son Gilliechrist, the 2nd Chief, received a charter from King Alexander III for **FRAOCH EILEAN**, an island with a castle on Loch Awe.



Duncan the 5th Chief, was the last to possess Fraoch Eilean and he moved on to build a castle on the Dubh Loch in Glen Shira, which was called **DUNDERAWE**.

Then in the late 16th century Alexander, 11th Chief, built the present **DUNDERAVE CASTLE** on the shore of Loch Fyne. His son John, 12th Chief, completed it in 1596 and inscribed the Clan Motto over the front door:



IM. AN. BEHALD THE END. BE NOCHT WYSER NOR THE HIESTEST. I HOIP IN GOD.

(IM = Ian (John) Macnaughton. AN = his wife Anne Nhiclaire - Nhic meaning daughter of rather than Mac, Son of.)

(Behold the end. Be not wiser than the highest. I hope in God.)

Sound advice, and a timeless exhortation to all the Clan. Although no longer in the



possession of the Clan, the present owner, Dr Joffe, has allowed the Clan Memorabilia to be stored in the castle, and it remains as the symbol of a strong, independent Clan Seat in the hearts of all Macnachtans. Neil Munro, in his novel "Doom castle" writes: "There was the castle, truly, beating against the breakers. Very cold, very arrogant upon its barren promontory. It rode like a ship, oddly independent of aspect, self-contained, inviolable, eternally apart, for ever indifferent to the mainland."

The importance of a Clan Seat is emphasised by the fact that when the Chiefs devolved to the Irish branch of the Clan in the early 19th. century, the 21st Chief - Sir Edmund Charles Workman-Macnaughton - had a handsome new



DUNDARAVE built

on the site of the demolished Bushmills Manor in County Antrim. This remained as the Clan Seat until 2016, when our present Clan Chief – Sir Malcolm Macnaghten, 31st Chief, sold the house and estate. Hence the continued vital importance of **DUNDERAVE** on Loch Fyne.



The next Clan Symbol is drawn from the world of nature, and, although only recently adopted officially by Clan Members, it would have been familiar to both Picts and Scots over the centuries. From time immemorial the **ROWAN TREE** has been believed to protect the inhabitants of a dwelling from evil spirits if one is planted on each side of the entrance. This emphasises again the pre-religious pagan era, when the Picts and other tribes worshipped



Gods of nature involving Trees, Plants, Rivers and Ponds. The Scottish Piping March tune and Folk Song melody have been adopted by our Clan.

Still in the world of nature, another Clan Symbol is the relatively rare alpine plant which grows on high land in Scotland, The **TRAILING AZALEA**. This has long been the Clan Emblem, worn on the bonnets of the Clan Warriors to distinguish them from other Clans in battle.

A more recent Clan Symbol than **TRAILING AZALEA**, also used to distinguish our Clan members from others, is, of course, our **CLAN TARTAN**. The Celts had the skills to weave chequered cloths away back before Roman times, but **CLAN TARTANS** as such developed from the 16th century on and were given a big boost in the early 19th century when King George IV visited Scotland, the first monarch to do so since the 1745 Rebellion. The **TARTANS**, of course have a close connection to nature, because the dyes used were obtained from local plants such as broom and heather.



The most recent Clan Symbol, also from the natural world, is a wading bird called the **CURLEW**, which was adopted at this year's AGM in September 2018. A bird with rich Folk Tale associations (See article in the August 2018 Red Banner), the haunting song of this appealing wader is synonymous with summer in the Scottish moorlands.

Finally, there are two Mountains, which should really be considered to be adopted as Clan Symbols, one in Argyll – **BEN CRUACHAN** - which towers over the Clan Lands on Loch Awe, and the other in Perthshire - **BEN LAWERS** - which dominates the Clan lands around Loch Tay.



Ben Cruachan

Ben Lawers

