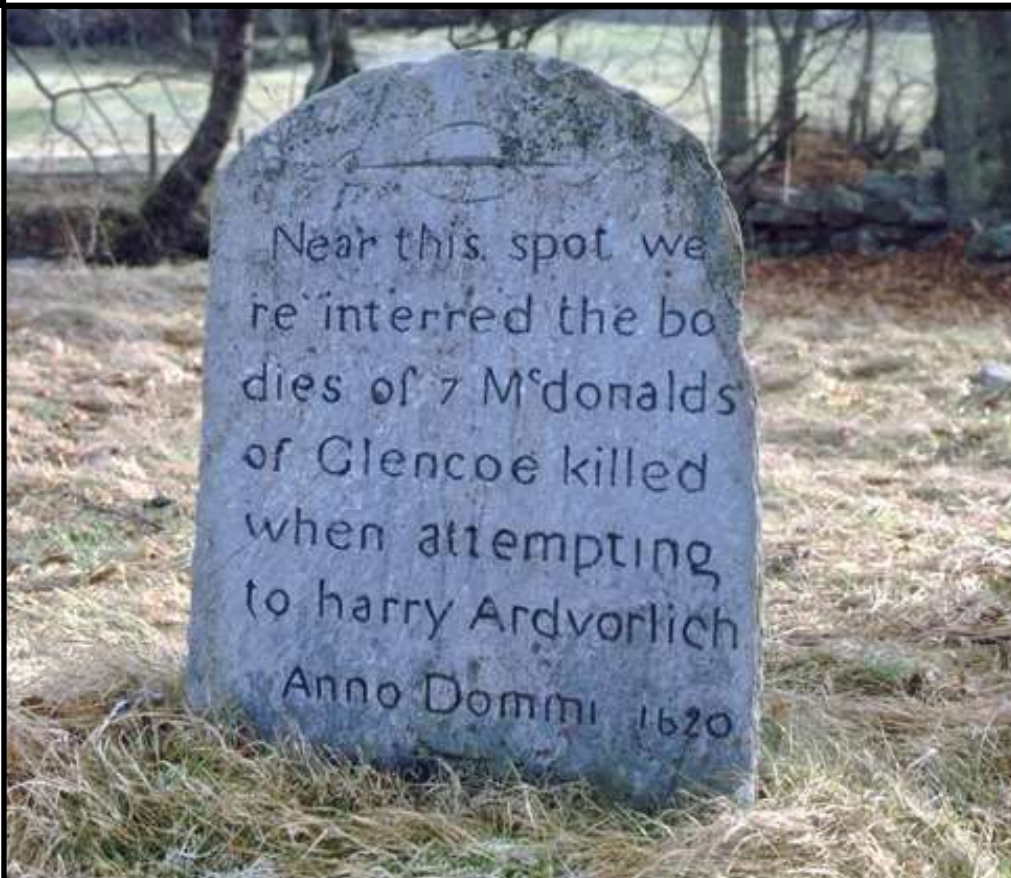


# A' Bhirlinn

Newsletter of the Clan Donald Society of the Highlands and Islands  
*Cuairt-litir Chomann Chlann Dòmhnail na Gàidhealtachd is nan Eilean*



**Issue 21 — Spring 2020**



[www.clandonald.org](http://www.clandonald.org)

## **The MCDONALD STONE of LOCH EARN - 1620**

John Stewart of Strathgarry in Atholl had been murdered. This led to a raid by a confederation of all the Highland Stewarts upon the homesteads of the MacDonalds of Glencoe, where the Chief and his eldest son were both killed. This was followed naturally enough by the MacDonald thirst for revenge. A party of MacDonalds, guided by a MacGregor from Glendochart called McClerich, descended on Loch Earn with the intention of raiding Ardvorlich and burning down James Stewart's home. The MacDonalds' men were in full attack when James unexpectedly arrived home to find a man with a lighted brand trying to set fire to the thatched roof of his dairy, whilst the lady of the house was struggling with him in order to prevent him from doing so. James had his gun with him, took aim and fired, and shot the MacDonald dead.

By this time some of James's own men had arrived on the scene and they wasted no time in slaying the remaining MacDonald raiders. Only McClerich escaped initially, only to be chased and hunted down and killed in the nearby wood, called ever since *Coille Chlerich*. The Stewart men then dragged the bodies down to the shores of Loch Earn and buried all seven of them in a mass grave.

Many years' later, in the early 1900s, when foundations for the new road round the haugh at Ardvorlich were being prepared, the skeletons of seven men were unearthed, complete with decaying rags of clothing and metal buttons. They were re-buried nearby and a memorial was erected to mark the spot.

Near the east gate of Ardvorlich and just across the bridge over the burn is a stone which carries the following inscription:  
*Near this spot were interred the bodies of 7 Mcdonalds of Glencoe killed when attempting to harry Ardvorlich Anno Domini 1620.*

Contributed by Ian McNeish – text from Callander Heritage Society, 8 February, 2019.

*Photo shown on front cover*

## President's Message

### *Cracked it!*

We were in a rough circle. A guitar emerged. Some singing began and a spontaneous ceilidh flowed. It was the last night of the Skye outing and we were at our hotel in Kyleakin. We all relaxed and enjoyed each other's company, our thirsts quenched by some very pleasant local refreshments.



And, yes, it had taken a lot of hard work by Glen MacDonald and Lois MacDonell to make it all happen, but they had arranged a fascinating Clan Donald tour of Skye 16-19th September – and it hardly rained once! Read more about it in this issue.

A couple of months later was our official Clan Donald Ceilidh and thanks to excellent planning by the Ceilidh Committee we had a great time at Munlochry Village Hall.

I also want to take this opportunity to say a big thank you to David McDonald who spotted the photo of Samuel Smith Macdonell on page 4 of the last issue. I had mentioned he was some kind of MacDonell ancestor but 'haven't a clue how he fits in!' David got in touch saying 'information can be found in Volume 3 of The Clan Donald'. Your editor Lois MacDonell very kindly lent me her copy of this enormous tome. It proved quite a trawl but it turns out he was my great-great-grandfather on my father's side! My family are delighted and my cousin Nicholas said: "You've cracked it!" So, David, Lois and A' Bhirlinn, thank you. We've cracked it together!

All small things in their own way but together they help us be aware of the many things we have in common through Clan Donald. I'm sure there are many more stories out there!

Yours ever,

*William*

# Ceilidh 2019

Our 10th ceilidh was held on 23rd November 2019. This is always a wonderful chance to catch up with old friends and to make new ones. One member even came up from London!



Heilan' Toe dancing

Munlochy Hall was transformed with banners and wall hangings. Tables and chairs were set out along three sides of the room and each table was covered with a pretty cloth and decorated with a battery-operated candle standing in an attractive leafy arrangement. Guests were delighted to take the table decorations home.

After seven o'clock the hall seemed to fill up rapidly and just after seven-thirty *Fear an Tighe*, Jeremy Price, welcomed us and introduced our piper, Sandy MacDonell, who started the programme.

This was Jeremy's first appearance as *Fear an Tighe* for our Ceilidh but he proved himself invaluable and we hope he will be back.

After Sandy MacDonell set the scene with his usual brilliant piping, Lois, our Ambassador, gave a short address. A comment had been made that it was not obvious that the Ceilidh was open to non-members. Lois extended a particular welcome to all visitors and described briefly our annual activities.

The dances were led by Jean, with music by the two Hamishes on accordion and keyboard. The enthusiasm was terrific, especially in Strip the Willow.

Sadly Alpha Munro has been taken ill and we had to make do without her popular Kiltearn Fiddlers. Jeremy filled one of their slots by reciting a hilarious poem.

Two of the delightful *Sunndach* trio were with us. (*Sunndach* means merry, cheerful, lively.) We have enjoyed their lovely singing most years.

This was the second time Rod Mackenzie has entertained us with his rollicking poems. There was much giggling from the audience and we hope to have him back again.

*Heilan' Toe* returned for the third time with their energetic step dancing accompanied by a fiddle and a flute. We did have a fiddler after all!

Refreshments were enjoyed during the Interval, the raffle was drawn and a vote of thanks was made by William, our President.

*Auld Lang Syne* was sung at about 11 pm and guests departed with smiles on their faces. Please come again next year, bringing friends and family with you.

*Alaine Macdonald*



Heilan' Toe preparing to dance and play

## The Birlinn of Clanranald

Kettillonia is proud and delighted to be publishing this work, which is a complementary volume to Alan Riach's version of that other epic of 18th-century Gaelic poetry, 'Praise of Ben Dorain'. Like that pamphlet, it contains new and remarkable illustrations by the acclaimed Scottish artist Sandy Moffat.

As well as being a poet, Alan Riach is Professor of Scottish Literature at Glasgow University.

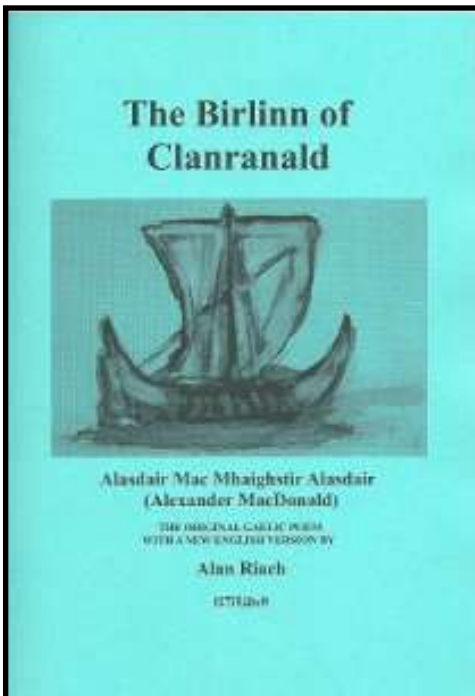
### Description

Alasdair Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair (Alexander MacDonald, c.1693-c.1770) was a teacher and soldier, a Jacobite who was out in the 1745 Rising and who was Gaelic tutor to Prince Charles Edward Stewart. The long poem for which he is best known, 'The Birlinn of Clanranald', describes a working ship, a *birlinn* or galley, praising its parts and its crew of sixteen, and

describing a voyage from South Uist in the Hebrides to Carrickfergus in Ireland, and the terrible storm encountered en route.

As Alan Riach, whose new English version is published here for the first time along with the original Gaelic, points out, the poem can also be read as a commentary on the social and historical context and consequences of the failure of the '45 and all that meant for Gaelic and Highland culture and society.

It also has a striking relevance for our own time, as we witness thousands of displaced people making





perilous journeys across water into whatever the future holds for them.

## Reviews

‘In this translation, Alexander MacDonald’s epic song in homage to ocean, ship and sailors sings with equally melodious eloquence in the guest language. One of the greatest poems in Gaelic lives again in this vibrant new guise that will bring many of us back to the original. Two for the price of one!’ – *Aonghas MacNeacail*

‘This is a terrific rendering of the poem and very much for the 21st century... The words “the best yet” spring immediately to mind.’ – Ronald Black

‘Quite extraordinary, a triumph, and makes the thing live as no other version I have read. Full of weather, and sea, and vigour.’ – Andrew McNeillie

£5.00 SKU: 978 1 902944 32 6

## CDSH&I AGM

7.30pm on Thursday 7 May

The Seaforth Lodge, Station Square, Fortrose IV10 8SZ

There will be a bring-and-share-supper with a raffle.

Donated prizes will be most welcome.

Please make every effort to attend. All welcome.

# FLORA MACDONALD WINNER OF THE MACDONALD OF SLEAT POETRY PRIZE 2019



## DUAIS BÀRDACHD MHICDHÒMHNAILL

An Duilleag

*The Leaf*

*Duilleag*

*A solitary leaf*

*a" siubhal*

*Travelling on its own*

*leatha fhèin*

*With hope*

*le dòchas*

*With adversity*

*an aghaidh*

*Going down*

*an t-sruth*

*Down*

*Dol sìos*

*Into the Earth*

*Dol fodha*

*Fertilising it for regrowth*

*Todhar*

*Na h-ath tè*

*Flora MacDonald*

Extract from the Armadale website



This year's MacDonald of Sleat poetry prize is being shared by two winners, Flora MacDonald who wrote 'The Leaf' and Martin MacIntyre with 'Healing'. The competition, which is run by *Sabhal Mòr Ostaig* in collaboration with Clan Donald Lands Trust, was instituted by Sir Ian MacDonald of Sleat in memory of his daughter, Deborah, who passed away at an early age.

Flora's poem, 'The Leaf', represents life – a solitary leaf travelling, sometimes following hope, then adversity. It ends with the leaf going into the earth and bringing about new growth. The circle of life is embedded in the poem and eternity is reflected in the earth.

Speaking of receiving the prize, Flora commented: "I was delighted when I received the news. I felt great respect and admiration for the MacDonalds, particularly my own ancestors, Angus MacDonald, who wrote *The Clan Donald* and *The MacDonald Collection of Gaelic Poetry*; and Rachel MacDonald. I am so proud of the South Uist bards; the respected MacDonalds – Donald Allan MacDonald, Donald John MacDonald and the Paisley Bard – and I hope they influenced my writing in some way. I was thankful and happy to be back in Sleat. I felt close to the place, the trees, the MacDonalds and the beautiful surroundings. I slept in Flora MacDonald's room and we were here, together, with our thoughts. Winning this prize has given me great confidence and encouragement and I would like to congratulate Martin also."

Flora was presented with her prize at a gathering at Armadale Castle and Gardens on Saturday 28 September by Sir Ian MacDonald, Chair of the Board of Trustees of Clan Donald Lands Trust. Martin was unable to attend the ceremony. On behalf of *Sabhal Mòr Ostaig*, the judges would be delighted to see even more entrants encouraged to take part next year and to raise a greater awareness of the competition.

# The Battle of the Braes



On a rainy April morning in 1882 a rather sea-sick column of fifty City of Glasgow police constables made their way from Portree to the crofting district of Braes on the north-eastern seaboard of Skye. Along with them there were about a dozen or so police constables from across Inverness-shire, some sheriff's officers, a handful of press men, and at their rear, in a coach, rocked Sheriff Ivory from the Highland capital, whose idea this punitive expedition was.

The immediate issue was the non-payment by the crofters of Braes of rents for their holdings to the landlord, Lord MacDonald of Sleat. To this end they had informed the factor, the solicitor Alexander MacDonald, in his office in Portree at Candlemas – the beginning of February, when rents were traditionally paid – and had sent five representatives from Braes to petition the factor for the restoration of their common grazing rights to the slopes of nearby Ben Lee of which they had been deprived since the 1860s. This petition was rejected as a similar one had been the preceding November. Having made their grievances known and taken their stand, the men of Braes went home.

In the eyes of the property-owning class in the Highlands at that time the people of Braes had committed “a most heinous crime”. Indeed, Lord MacDonald demanded that the perpetrators be immediately arrested, tried, convicted and gaoled for “criminal intimidation”. Neither Lord MacDonald nor his factor was overly concerned with the trivial legal requirement concerning proof of innocence or guilt. This procedural oversight was shared by the judicial authorities. Instead of arresting the entire population of Peinchorran, Balmeanach and Gedintailor – the three principal crofting townships of Braes – it was thought that some

counter-intimidation by Lord MacDonald upon the crofters would be productive in quelling this “insubordination” and, because it would be within the law, it would not be criminal. The action of the crofters, it was considered, being the direct opposite.

So it was that early in April 1882 a dozen names were picked at random from the tenants’ register for Braes and warrants were issued for their eviction. To enforce these warrants sheriff officer Martin and two assistants set off from Portree to Braes. Martin, as well as being the sheriff officer for the district, was also the deputy factor of the estate. Alexander MacDonald, the estate factor, was also the deputy sheriff officer and captain of the local militia, secretary to or member of every school board, Clerk of the Peace for Skye, a bank agent, a member of the parochial board, clerk to the road trustees, a collector of the poor rates and a landowner in his own right. If ever Skye had a Mister Big in 1882 Alexander MacDonald was it. But soon comedy was to turn to tragedy.

“*Is Treasa Tuath na Tighearna*”, or in English “The People are mightier than a Lord” was the unofficial slogan of the Highland Land Law Reform Association formed in 1883 and of the Highland Land League which came after it, and the truth of it was proven by the crofters of Skye that April day. Instead of meekly bowing down to the will of the factor, as the people of Kildonan and Strathnaver in Sutherland had done in the first decades of the 19th century, the crofters of Braes smartly intercepted Martin and his two assistants and made them burn the eviction warrants there and then and sent them back to Portree “to think again”.

“Deforcement” such as this – the physical removal of a warrant from a sheriff officer – was a criminal offence. The Law and the landed Interest – the same thing in the Highlands in the 19th century – saw an opportunity to stamp out what they described as “the Irish disease”. They were well to be on their guard. The tactic of the rent strike was a major weapon in the Irish peasants’ war against the landlords there. Many of the men from Braes had gone to the herring fishing off Ireland in previous years, basing themselves in Kinsale, which was a centre of anti-landlord agitation. They had also seen the successful use of the rent strike the previous year in Glendale and Kilmuir, where such direct action had secured land concessions from the landowners in those western districts.

For at the root of the problem for the crofters of Braes, as it was throughout the Highlands and Islands, was the shortage of land available for cultivation when there was plenty of good land being wasted under sheep farms and deer forests. Having been cleared from the good ground of the inner straths some decades earlier, the remainder of the native people who had not yet emigrated were crowded

onto coastal patches, sometimes four or five families on land that could hardly support one. In 1880 and 1881 two successive wet springs brought blight to the potatoes and consecutive late Autumn storms ruined the oats and corn in the rigs. In short, the people were starving. To make matters even more precarious, the herring fishing for these two years had failed – the shoals had deserted their habitual grounds – and the income from these fishings vanished as a result. The denial to the common grazings on Ben Lee, the hill behind Braes, by Lord MacDonald proved to be the last straw.

As Angus Stewart, a crofter from Peinchorran, so eloquently told the Napier Commission in Braes Kirk on the 8th of May 1883, “What we suffer from is poverty. We are huddled together and the best part of the land is devoted to deer forests and big farms. If we had plenty of land there would be no poverty in the Highlands, for there is a sufficiency of land and we are willing to work it.” Angus Stewart was the very first witness to the very first meeting of the Napier Commission and the good Lords might as well have wrapped it up there and then, for in the four months of their evidence-taking from Argyll to Shetland they would hear the exact same story again and again but not with such precision and authority.

Such reasonable requests were brushed aside by the likes of Lord MacDonald of Sleat and Sheriff Ivory in Inverness. Instead 50 Glasgow policemen were dispatched to arrest five “hostages”. The arrests were not disputed nor was the entrance of the small army of officers, officials and press into the Braes district. It was on their return that the conflict erupted. To their dismay Glasgow’s finest saw the entire population of Braes in a line, blocking their return route to Portree. As a lot of the men were off at the herring fishing, this then being the 19th of April and the beginning of the season, the resistance was led in greater part by the women of Braes. The police drew their batons and rushed the raggedy line, only to be met by a hail of rocks and stones. The result was a lot of broken heads and blood on the heather but, fortunately, no deaths. The police returned subdued but with their prisoners to Portree, only to be met by the collective hisses of the inhabitants.

So “The Battle of the Braes” entered into folklore and into the public domain, chiefly by the honest eyewitness account of David Gow, a reporter for the *Dundee Courier*. Even *The Scotsman*, which “hated the crofters even more than Satan”, took up the cause. It was reported that the august London *Times* even sent their war correspondent to Skye. The result of all this was not what Sheriff Ivory or Lord MacDonald, who throughout all of this was sunning himself in Nice, wanted. Indeed, the very foundations of Victorian landlordism and the divine rights of property were shaken, even rocking.

The government, weary both with the demands of arrogant Highland proprietors and the agitation of the crofters, was at last stung into action, and a commission of enquiry was set up to investigate 'the conditions of the crofters and cottars in the Highlands ... and everything concerning them.' It had wide powers to call witnesses, demand any document, and to visit any place deemed



Previous memorial cairn - now replaced by one shown on page 19

necessary in order to obtain the fullest possible information. Starting in 1883, the commissioners travelled widely among the Highlands and Islands, interviewing hundreds of witnesses, both crofters and landlords. In April 1884 they made their report, less than a year after they had carried out their first interviews in Skye.

Though the Napier Commission's recommendations were less sweeping than some of the crofters had hoped, there was much they could be pleased with. London was slow to act, however, and there was further trouble and more rent-strikes on Skye, to the extent that the Government felt it necessary to send ships and around 400 marines to keep order. Four out of five Highland Members of Parliament were now committed to land reform, and the Liberal Government's slim majority gave them bargaining power. In 1885 the Crofters Act was passed through Parliament, and brought the crofting community substantial benefits. For the first time they had security of tenure, and this could be passed on to another family member. They had the right to compensation for any improvements they carried out, and a Land Court was set up to fix fair rents. It had taken over a hundred years of evictions and banishments, grief and separation, and finally anger and rebellion, but at last the remaining Highlanders had a right to a life in their own country.

*Glen MacDonald*

Extracted from Glen's:

*'Clan Donald Society of the Highlands and Islands 2019 Outing - A guided visit to the Clan Donald sites on the Isle of Skye - Itinerary & Historical Notes'*

## ANNUAL ACADEMIC LECTURE

Guest speaker: Sue Geale, Museum Manager at the Museum of the Isles

### BRINGING CLAN DONALD HISTORY ALIVE!

The Museum of the Isles, Armadale, Skye

An overview of the varied and valuable Clan Donald collections in the museum, with an introduction to recent acquisitions and their connection to history

Saturday 14 March 2020 at 11 am

Spectrum Centre, Farraline Park, Inverness

All Welcome



## SOCIETY'S OUTING 2020

This year we expect to have a day outing – 'stay-away' and day outings take place on alternate years.

As the Association of Highland Clans and Societies' (AHCS) planned day outing to Armadale in October 2019 had to be cancelled, due to late organisation and lack of take-up, the Society's Council has suggested to the AHCS that it should make Armadale its 2020 destination. If it does, then members of the Society would be encouraged to join in instead of having a separate outing. It has also been suggested to the AHCS that extra attractions might be laid on at Armadale, such as a welcoming piper, tours of the museum and gardens. (Lois MacDonell of Glengarry having become a Trustee of the Clan Donald Lands Trust in 2018 is an added bonus.)

As the Royal National Mod in 2020 is to be in Inverness from 9 to 17 October - and it would be as well not to clash with that or indeed with the school holidays - the Society has suggested that Saturday 3 October would be a suitable date.

Unfortunately there has been no decision made by the AHCS yet. If there is no outing to Armadale, the preferred destination for the Society would be Kinloch Rannoch (see article in Issue 19 about the MacDonalds of Dalchosnie Mausoleum).

Please watch the Society's website for an update on this or, if you are not online, let us know that you would like to be informed when a decision is made.



## THE SOCIETY'S BOARD OF TARTANS

The Council of the Society decided that something which would be of interest to members and people attending Highland Games would be to see what tartans there were in Clan Donald.

Following a relatively small display on a pinboard, we subsequently purchased a much larger custom-made and hinged board, more tartans were donated by members, and in particular by Lochcarron Weavers, and a display was created, which is now copied overleaf. This new board excited much interest at the Inverness Highland Games in July 2019, but it was awkward to display, as it had been hinged in landscape format. This has now been changed to portrait format and was shown at the Clan Donald Ceilidh last November.

Please note that the display (overleaf) is not comprehensive, but there are examples of all the main designs. If anyone can contribute samples from other Clan Donald tartans, we would be very pleased to incorporate them.

**More volunteers are needed at the Clan Donald table at Inverness Highland Games, Bught Park, on Saturday 18 July. Please let the Council know if you can help.**

### **Correction to the MacDonalds of Dalchosnie article in the Autumn 2019 issue:**

The final part of my article on the MacDonalds of Dalchosnie in Jacobite times didn't come out as it should and I'm sure will be picked up on. The only part I would change was the reference to the Stuart Kings in the toast as the king over the water. Unfortunately, that reference was exchanged with the reference to George III. The point was that *Iain Mòr*, having been a loyal Jacobite all his life, making his nightly toast to "the king over the water" now, following the perceived act of kindness to Henry Stuart by the Hanoverian King, also made a toast to George III.

*Sandy MacDonell*

# Clan Donald Tartans

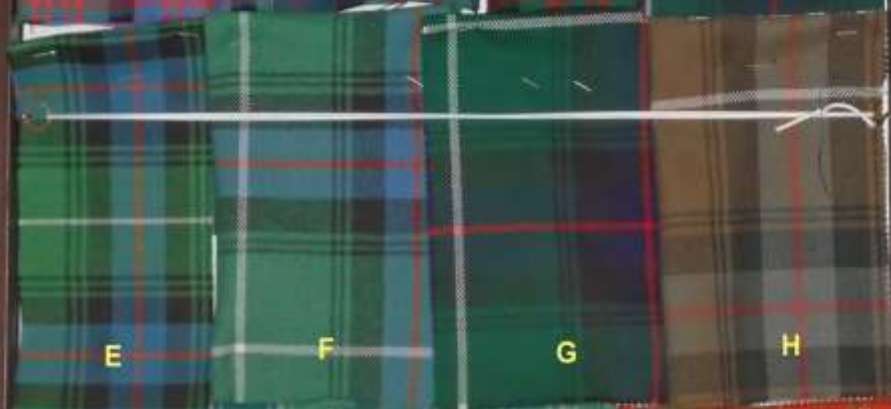


A

B

C

D



E

F

G

H



I

J

K



## THE TARTANS OF CLAN DONALD in the centre spread

A	MACDONALD of SLEAT
B	MACDONALD of SLEAT - Muted
C	MACDONALD of SLEAT - Modern
D	MACDONALD of THE ISLES - Modern
E	MACDONALD of THE ISLES - Ancient
F	MACDONALD of THE ISLES - Ancient Hunting
G	MACDONALD of THE ISLES - Hunting Modern
H	MACDONALD of THE ISLES - Hunting Weathered
I	MACDONALD LORD of THE ISLES - Ancient
J	MACDONALD LORD of THE ISLES - Ancient Hunting
K	MACDONALD of KINGSBURGH
L a	MACDONELL of GLENGARRY - Ancient ( kilt weight)
L b	MACDONELL of GLENGARRY - Ancient (dress weight)
M	MACDONELL of GLENGARRY - Dress
N	MACDONELL of GLENGARRY - Dress
O	MACDONALD of CLANRANALD - Modern
P	MACDONALD of CLANRANALD - Ancient
Q	MACDONALD of CLANRANALD - Weathered
R	MACDONALD of CLANRANALD - Ancient
S	MACDONELL of KEPPOCH - Ancient
T	MACDONELL of KEPPOCH - Old
U	MACDONALD of BOISDALE - Modern
V	MACDONALD of ARDNAMURCHAN - Modern
W	MACDONALD of SLEAT - Ancient
X	MACDONALD of ARDNAMURCHAN - Ancient
	<b>Note:</b> Despite an effort to be correct, there are apparent duplications and contradictions. It is hoped to refine the collection as more information becomes available.

# Outing to the Clan Donald Sites on the Isle of Skye

16 - 19 September 2019

The undoubted success of this outing was largely due to Glen MacDonald, who not only was our guide for most of it but also produced a booklet 'Itinerary and Historical Notes'. Sadly, there is not enough space here to reproduce it (other than the Battle of the Braes section), but it may be used in future editions. The three days have been reported separately by different participants.

## Day 1

An enthusiastic and happy group of CDSH&I members gathered at various pre-arranged pick up points in Inverness and Dingwall and set off for a three-day outing to the Isle of Skye, where the party would visit various areas on the island associated with Clan Donald history. The weather was in our favour, which enabled us to enjoy the beautiful scenery and wonderful autumn colours as we travelled West towards Kyleakin and our first comfort stop.

Having already crossed the Skye Bridge, we then headed north towards the crofting district of Braes, where the whole party met up with Glen MacDonald at the Cairn which commemorates the "Battle of the Braes" fought on 19th April 1882 (see article from page 10 onwards).

We had a wonderful view of the rugged area as far as the eye could see as we listened with interest to the historical details which led up to the Battle so thought-provokingly presented to us by Glen, who continued to inform us throughout our trip.



Jean McDonald at the Battle of the Braes cairn

We then proceeded towards Portree, where the group spent two most comfortable nights in the Rosedale Hotel and from where we travelled to glean more history about Clan Donald.

*Ann McGhee  
and Wilma Downie*



## Day 2

On a lovely clear morning, we made our way by minibus past the Storr Lochs, Loch Fada and Loch Leathan and past the Storr. The Old Man of Storr juts out of the undulating terrain like an igneous shard of mythological proportions. A tent pole of the rugged vistas that characterize the Isle of Skye, this point of interest in the Scottish Highlands is a site of folkloric mysticism and natural grandeur.

Situated atop Trotternish Ridge, created as the result of a colossal landslide - the Old Man of Storr is a 160-foot pinnacle rock formation named after its likeness to, well, an old man. The Storr, which refers to the group of looming outcrops that include and surround the Old Man, is a title derived from the Norse word for "Great Man".

Legend has it that the Old Man of Storr was a giant who resided on the Trotternish Ridge. When he was laid to rest upon his death, his thumb - the "Old Man" - remained partially above ground.



Trotternish Ridge

With the isles of Raasay and Rona on the right, we passed through a land dotted with small crofts, and Glen pointed out the 'lazybeds' left over from the 18th and 19th century. This was a traditional method of arable cultivation. Rather like cord rig cultivation, parallel banks of ridge and furrow are dug by spade, although lazybeds have banks that are bigger, up to 2.5m in width, with narrow

drainage channels between them. These made the most of fertile land and look like corrugated strips.

The northern part of the island is formed from volcanic activity which is represented by the lava flows that dominate the landscape. Of these, one is the magnificent 90 metre Kilt Rock, which looks strikingly similar to a pleated kilt. Made up of basalt columns resting on a sandstone base, one might even say that the colours of the rock formation appear almost like tartan cloth!

Coming into Staffin, past the rock feature the Quiraing, we were rewarded with a beautiful view. We then came to Flodigarry House Hotel. Flora MacDonald lived in a cottage behind the main building. This has been converted into seven en-suite rooms as part of the hotel, a turn-of-the-century former hunting lodge. All of the rooms are named after her seven children. About eight years ago, a plaque was





Flodigarry House Hotel



The group outside Flora MacDonald's cottage

erected on the wall of the cottage by the 1745 Association, as there was nothing to indicate who had lived here.

We then travelled to Duntulm Castle, which is now a ruin and sits on a rocky headland with views out towards the Isle of Lewis. This castle dates back to the 14th and 15th centuries and has a very chequered history, but don't they all! According to one local legend, the castle was abandoned after the infant son of the chieftain, who dwelt there at the time,, in the charge of a nursemaid, fell from a window and was dashed on the rocks below. As a punishment, the nursemaid was set adrift on the North Atlantic in a small boat.

Hugh MacDonald, a cousin of Donald Gorm, the 9th chief, planned to kill his cousin and take his place. The plot was discovered, and Hugh went into hiding in North Uist. He was eventually captured in 1601 and thrown into the dungeon at Duntulm, where he was left to die with nothing but a plate of salty beef and an empty water pitcher to torment him. Not surprisingly, the starving prisoner went mad before he died. His ghost



The group in front of Duntulm Castle

is said to haunt the castle ruins, screaming madly. Meanwhile, we were surrounded by some tourists from Taiwan, all girls, who were delighted to find Malcolm White dressed in his kilt, Harris Tweed jacket and Balmoral. All wanted a selfie with him, so he found himself surrounded by ten giggling girls!



Malcolm White and the Taiwanese girls

From there, we travelled to Kilmuir Burial Ground to visit Flora MacDonald's grave. Given her popularity as a Jacobite heroine, it is not surprising that a large memorial was erected by her grave, which became a popular destination for tourists. The original monument to her was destroyed in a gale in 1871. It had been gradually defaced by people chipping bits off for souvenirs. It was replaced by a new memorial designed by Alexander Ross in 1880. Ross's design includes a 28 foot high Celtic cross of granite, rising above a slender rectangular chest tomb, also of granite. A marble plaque was added in 1922. The top of the original cross is still visible lying on its side a few feet away. Perhaps the most interesting grave marker is a late medieval effigy of Angus Martin, or 'Angus of the Wind'.

The nickname came from his habit of going to sea no matter what the weather. Martin is said to have married a Danish princess.



To left: Flora MacDonald's grave



Above: The old headstone

Monkstadt House was our next stop. Monkstadt House, originally built in the second half of the 17th century as a dower house for the widow



Monkstadt House before and after restoration

of Sir James Mor, was rebuilt c.1732 by Sir Alexander Macdonald as a replacement for Duntulm Castle, using that latter place as a quarry for materials. Monkstadt House was vacated by the MacDonalds in 1798 when they moved their base to Armadale in Sleat. The house later became the dwelling for successive tacksmen and, after the land was laid out for crofts, it became the house of one of them. We learned from Glen that, in 1746, the fugitive Bonnie Prince Charlie, disguised as Betty Burke, landed with Flora MacDonald about a mile away from Monkstadt on the Kilbride shore, having sailed from Benbecula. He did not have the support of Sir Alexander Macdonald of Sleat, but his wife, Lady Margaret MacDonald, was sympathetic. Flora went to Lady Margaret, a relative, who was at Monkstadt House with some guests, which included the officer in charge of the militiamen who were charged with capturing the Prince. Lady Margaret was in a quandary, and was advised by her husband's factor, Alexander MacDonald of Kingsburgh, to allow him to take the Prince to his house. Lady MacDonald agreed and sent refreshments to the Prince, who remained near the boat. When darkness fell he was taken by Kingsburgh to his house some eight miles distant from the landing place when again he met Flora, who had arrived by a different route. Later they continued on to Portree where they parted company.

The present owners, who are restoring the building to be used as holiday accommodation, are hoping to have it ready in early 2020. They had laid on a wonderful table for us, filled with cakes and biscuits and with tea and coffee.

The work inside was exemplary, being built to a very high standard from a complete ruin. In the future, they have plans for a visitor centre.

Lunch was at Uig Pier Restaurant where we had booked several tables, which turned out to be a bit of a mystery to the staff! However,

it was all sorted out and we had a very nice lunch.

The church at Trumpan was familiar to some of us, as it was the subject of a piece included in the spring 2012 edition of the CDSH&I newsletter. Suffice to say that it was the scene of a dreadful massacre



Trumpan Church

of the

MacLeods by the MacDonalds. This was a reprisal for an earlier feud when the MacLeods massacred almost all of the MacDonalds on the island of Eigg the previous year. The MacDonalds surprised the MacLeods who were assembled for worship in this church, and after barricading the doors, set fire to it. I have to admit, I got a lump in my throat as I was relating this story to everyone. Standing next to this ruin, I could almost hear the screams and crying of the victims trapped inside. They all died except a young girl, the solitary survivor of the massacre, sacrificing a breast squeezing through a narrow corner window to escape and run ten miles to Dunvegan Castle to raise the alarm. She would eventually collapse and die from her injuries. It was never rebuilt, is a roofless ruin and can be a little spooky standing inside it, knowing what happened here.

Glen then related a fascinating story about Lady Grange. Rachel Chiesley, usually known as Lady Grange (1679–1745), was the wife of Lord Grange, a Scottish lawyer with Jacobite sympathies. After 25 years of marriage and nine children, the Granges separated acrimoniously. When Lady Grange produced letters that she claimed were evidence of his treasonable plottings against the Hanoverian government in London, her husband had her kidnapped in 1732. She was incarcerated in various remote locations on the western seaboard of Scotland, including the Monach Isles, Skye and St Kilda. Lady Grange's father was convicted of murder and she is known to have

had a violent temper; initially her absence seems to have caused little comment. News of her plight eventually reached her home town of Edinburgh and an unsuccessful rescue attempt was undertaken by her lawyer, Thomas Hope of Rankeillor. She died in captivity, after being in effect imprisoned for over 13 years. Her life has been remembered in poetry, prose and plays. She lies in Trumpan churchyard.

From Trumpan, we arrived at Skyeskyns. Established in 1983, Skyeskyns is the sole remaining commercial woolskin tannery in Scotland. Created and developed by Clive and Lydia Hartwell, the venture was a dream nurtured for twenty years, ever since Clive first set eyes on the beautiful coastal village of Waternish. Today, the second generation of the Hartwell family is helping to steer the business through the 21st Century, producing and stocking the highest quality, hand-crafted sheepskins, leather and woollen goods.

Skyeskyns has become an immensely popular 5-star visitor attraction, drawing thousands of the visitors who come to the Isle of Skye throughout the year. Here we had a well-earned cup of coffee in the tea and coffee shop. Later we took a tour of the tannery to learn how they produce such lovely products.

Finally, back to Portree where we had all made our own arrangements for the evening, to round off a very enjoyable day.



*Ian and Jean McDonald*

A trio of kilts

### Day 3

So, the (almost) final day of our trip began with our departure from Portree with its picturesque harbour. We were all feeling the benefit of some wonderful vittles the previous evening in the village.

Today was the Garden of Skye - Sleat, which has become the focal point for Clan Donald as a whole.

First stop was a detour from the main road, across to Tokavaig and Dunscaith Castle - a favourite of mine. Dunscaith is another in the infinite Clan Donald list of piles of stones planted on a big rock on a headland, with excellent surveillance opportunities of the highway, or sea, to you and me. Forget Jeremy Bentham, Old Donald and Somerled had this panopticon\* business sewn up nine hundred years ago! (\*definition page 31 )

Dunscaith is easily seen from the road, and fairly easy to get to. It's on the back road to Tarskavaig and Toravaig, which is a through road of about 13 miles. Roughly halfway around, out of the car, and a 585m track - rough walking half the way, and an easy, if wettish, ground walk the rest.

Dunscaith is actually one of the better castles, along with Tioram and Dunyvaig, to get an idea of the Lordship's infrastructure. The



Ian McDonald on Dunscaith Castle

armoury is still visible, as well as other building remains on the outside of the castle. There is pretty clear evidence of boat noosts (channels in the rock or shore into which *birlinns* were

brought and/or beached) below, and the castle itself is a lesson in accessibility.





Chas scootering  
towards Dunscaith

About which: a note! There is a short footbridge of about 2-3yds, but its flagstones have been removed to prevent entry. It can be done, but if it's icy, wet, windy, you're icy or windy, or, you're not nimble and strong: take the hint and stay out. There's a ten-foot drop onto the rocks - a built-in hazard for protection.

Glen gave a very informative talk here and William did some terrific sketching of the party as we talked. The morning wasn't great, but the entire party enjoyed the visit very much.

A few minutes in the van again, then we took a wee wander round the back of the new Toravaig

distillery to see Knock Castle, AKA Castle Camus. Knock sits on a low rise overlooking the sound of Sleat and a bay and small harbour suitable for *birlinns*. Due to continued Highland weather, we forewent a walk up to the old fortification. There was no point getting wet & muddy at the outset! (I will make a small point about the 'locals' at the end of this...).



Knock Castle

For information: Knock is an anglicisation of cnoc = hillock, low rise. Torr = a rise or hill. Camus = bay, usually a bending one. Aig = harbour shelter. So you can see how its two names come about.

The next time we got out of the bus, we were visiting Kilmore Church, 1.5 miles towards Armadale. From the outside it is

somewhat austere - one might coin it 19th century Highland Presbyterian Brutalist. But a church is what's on the inside, and there we found a place of worship which held a warmth belying the external severity.

Today's iteration of buildings on the site was built by Lord Macdonald, entering service in 1876. It contains a number of memorials to members of that family, and we were treated to a wonderful explanation and interpretation of the history. Neil MacKinnon is a long time congregational member, and part of the trust group which raised tens of thousands of pounds globally to restore the building to use.



Kilmore churchyard mausoleum

In  
the

churchyard are the remains of the previous church, which likely incorporates its own predecessor, burnt down in the early 1600s by the MacLeods, while it sheltered a group of MacIntyres (said to be a sept of Clan Donald). Our two clans did a lot of that in those days!

From Kilmore we headed two miles 'home' to Armadale, and the pristine heart of the clan at Armadale Castle and Gardens, where we received a superb welcome and tour from Sue Geale, Chair of the Management Committee, and her staff.

After a marvellous lunch we were given a glimpse of the many wonders to be found in the Museum Archives. Sue showed some notable books, maps, and records which exemplified the sort of holdings, and therefore, the sorts of research resources, held on site. Then we were back in the open air.



The Stables



The garden

It's quite easy to wander the gardens at Armadale, just leaching out tension in the calming atmosphere of the enormous woods and exotics. But that is to miss the incredible variety, and importance, of the flora contained in the castle policies. Maintenance of that

rich complexity is now being addressed by the Trustees, facilitated by the appointment of a Head Gardener in the form of Andrew Peters. Andrew took us on a walk of the garden's various spaces and specimens, revealing a bewildering array of species, as well as some of his own favourite spots. These are places you need a guide for, as they can be more hidden, making them the more special upon discovery.



Armadale Castle

That was the main part of the day, and a fulfilled troupe headed off to Kyleakin for a group dinner. Later, in the bar, we were treated to a lead in our informalities by Andrew MacDonald, one of our drivers, and a very accomplished folk singer and instrumentalist. Andrew runs his own tour company, Hame Tours, from Inverness, and had regaled us with stories throughout the week, complementing Glen. But Andrew's music really topped off the trip, giving such as myself and Glen the chance to warble a few words and notes to the assembled company. Well, maybe it was the congenial atmosphere and liquids, but I'm crediting Andrew!

A great day and evening, *Clann Dòmhnail gu bràth!*

Two small last points: although this was our last day, on our drive home the next, some of us were able to take the opportunity to visit Strome Castle, once a stronghold of the Glengarries. It's a wee bit off the beaten track, but well worth it for the history, as well as the view west from the great doorway, down Loch Carron to Plockton. Magnificent!



Secondly, the locals, as mentioned before, need a little consideration by us visitors tramping around. We had a bit of a run in at Castle Camus with a householder who was a bit irked at vehicles coming down to his property and blocking access with their vehicles. Fair enough! And we had a bit of a reconciliation later. But it was instructive to consider parking away from built property where one might restrict access or impede daily activity on farms and such like. It can be difficult to know what to do, so a bit of an extra eye to it doesn't go amiss. Even with the top class organisation from Lois and Glen, we fell foul of this unforeseeable happening.

*Chas MacDonald*



Two views of Strome Castle

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### **DISCLAIMER**

The contents of this newsletter come from a wide variety of sources and are representative of the general views and aims of the Clan Donald Society of the Highlands and Islands. We want to encourage freedom of expression, but the Council cannot be held responsible for all the content being correct. Whilst every effort is made to check spellings, particularly of names, and to get historical details correct, these cannot be guaranteed either.

### **Panopticon - Extract from the Encyclopaedia Britannica**

Panopticon, architectural form for a prison, the drawings for which were published by Jeremy Bentham in 1791. It consisted of a circular, glass-roofed, tanklike structure with cells along the external wall facing toward a central rotunda; guards stationed in the rotunda could keep all the inmates in the surrounding cells under constant surveillance.

# DIARY DATES

## **Saturday 14 March**

11am Annual Academic Lecture at the Spectrum Centre, Farraline Park (bus station), Inverness. 'BRINGING CLAN DONALD HISTORY ALIVE! The Museum of the Isles, Armadale, Skye. An overview of the varied and valuable Clan Donald collections in the museum, with an introduction to recent acquisitions and their connection to history'

by Sue Geale, Museum Manager. Entrance £6 or £4 for members.

## **3 - 5 April**

Celebrations of the Declaration of Arbroath (details to be found on the internet)

## **Friday 17 April**

7 for 7.30 pm AHCS lecture at the Glen Mhor Hotel, Inverness. The Director of the Scottish Battlefield Trust, Dr Arran Johnson, will be talking about the development of the Highland army from Glenfinnan to Culloden. £10 per person. Coffee and tea available. Email the Secretary to confirm your place. [highlandclansociety@gmail.com](mailto:highlandclansociety@gmail.com)

## **Saturday 18 April**

Battle of Culloden Commemorations

11 am Service at the Main Cairn conducted by the Gaelic Society of Inverness, followed by procession to Clan Donald Stones and wreath laying. Thereafter the Clan Donald Culloden Lunch, organised by Lois MacDonell of Glengarry, takes place at the Drumossie Hotel. Booking essential (see enclosed flyer).

## **Thursday 7 May**

7.30pm AGM and bring-and-share supper at the Seaforth Lodge, Fortrose.

## **Saturday 18 July**

Inverness Highland Games and AGM of Association of Highland Clans and Societies (AHCS). More volunteers needed at the Society's table in the tent.

## **Saturday 3 October**

Provisional date for AHCS outing to Armadale (possibly replacing Society's usual day outing).

## **Saturday 21 November**

7.30 pm Clan Donald Annual Ceilidh in Munlochy Hall, Ross-shire. All welcome. Please bring your friends and a raffle prize. Anyone who can help set up at 2.30 pm will also be most welcome.