

In the 1966 edition of “Creag Dhubh”, John Barton, my predecessor as Hon. Secretary of the Clan Macpherson Association, contributed a very interesting article on “Monuments of Badenoch”, in which he described various built monuments dedicated to famous local people with brief details of their history. As the article appeared over thirty years ago I thought it appropriate to give a few details on the present state of the monuments and describe a few new ones.

Stone monuments are not indestructible, but require less maintenance than most man made structures. They have the benefit of maturing gently into their surroundings and fitting well into the landscape.

One monument described is one which the Clan Association can take great credit for, i.e. that to the memory of “Old Cluny”. Situated on top of Creag Ruadh, its dominating site overlooking the district of Laggan attracts the full force of the weather at all times of the year. A few years ago a large football-sized stone fell from its position near the top of the twenty foot high column, the loss of which could well have led to progressive erosion of the structure. The damage was reported to me by a local retired engineer and an appeal was launched for restoration funds. Money was provided by the England and Wales Branch of the Association and the stone was secured in its proper situation by two local stalwarts who braved the elements to climb the summit.

Lady Cluny’s monument, which stands a few miles away, being at a lower altitude, has not suffered from the same ravages as that to her husband and apart from some repointing of the stonework and re-painting of the enclosing railings appears to be in good repair.

When considering that these stone pillars have been in position for over a hundred years any expenditure on repairs is very small, a testimony to the good workmanship of the local masons.

The most remote of the monuments described in John’s article is that to Captain John Macpherson (the Black Officer) in Gaick. It has been improved since its erection. During its lifetime of nearly a century exposure to the weather had eroded the original engraved inscription to make it illegible. This was replaced a few years ago by a stainless steel plate, bearing the same wording, secured to the stone. A full description of the monument is written by Rory Mor in his account of the 1993 Macpherson expedition on the trail of the Black Officer in the 1994 “Creag Dhubh”. A leading figure in the monument’s restoration was the late Affleck Gray, author and historian of Pitlochry, a well known member of the Clan Association.

One final word on monuments, one new and the other older, which were not described in John’s article. On a large boulder on the slopes of Craggan, a small hill overlooking the lower part of Glen Banchor and the River Calder, a metal plate is displayed recording the resting places of the ashes of Colonel Macpherson, one of the early enthusiasts of the Clan Association. Further up the Glen, a well built cairn erected during the summer of 1994 celebrates the late Mr Mike Haywood, former owner of Glen Banchor, who died a few years ago.

Scottish hills have many monuments, ranging from large elaborate memorials celebrating past notables to cairns marking the tops of hills and piles of stones acting as aids to navigation to assist travellers along mountain paths. They are all significant and all are important in their own way; life would be the poorer without them.

ORIGINS OF THE CLERICAL GIL-NAMES

By Bob Gillespie

Our clan Gil-names are very ancient, and rooted in the development of the Celtic church through Patrick’s successors in Armagh from 432 and Dal Riada, the Scots petty kingdom established in Argyllshire by Fergus, son of Erc, in 501. The transcription of these names in Norman times during the ‘surname period’ has led to some misunderstanding of their origin, and, in view of the antiquity of these names, tracing a common blood line to a clan, which is a comparatively recent 12th century tribal structure, is not always easy.

The origins of the Gil-names predate the arrival of Christianity in the 5th century to a time when petty tribal kings (Rig) of Celtic origin relied upon a class of druidic bards called 'Filid' to proclaim the king's aristocratic status in court. At the time, Celtic society functioned according to orally recited law within a hierarchical system of sworn oral testimony. After many years of training, the Fili-rig was able to recite from memory his kings' genealogy using bardic panegyrics as mnemonics, so establishing his lord's 'honour price' in a legal system based on sworn testimony according to the witness's aristocratic pedigree. An essential part of the king's retinue, the Fili-rig was able to entertain the king and his aristocratic guests every winter night from Samain (1st November) to Beltain (Mayday) with a different tale or anecdote rich in social morality. Columba and his missionaries were later to put the talents of the Filid-rig to missionary use as reciters of the religious canons as modified by the usual law (Brehon code) and as lay reciters of scripture and the lives of the saints.

The Filid-rig functioned in this way during the first millenium, his successors being the Tannists and Brieves of the Highland clan system. The title gave birth to the name Gilry (a Ewen Gilry was recorded as living in Drumelzier in 1331), and later in the hands of the Norman scribes the name became predictably Gilroy. The conventional etymology of Ghille ruaidh (red-haired lad) is closer to the Scots patronymic of Macllroy or the Irish Kilroy.

The Filid were coached by the early missionary bishops to proclaim the word of God at the highest level in the tribal aristocracy. As a class the Filid were Christian by the second half of the 7th century, able to recite the scriptures or the lives of the saints, so giving rise half a millenium later to a series of names. Fili-Padruig and Fili-Bride date probably from the 6th century and were later transcribed to the Irish Gilpatrick and Gilbride names: these Filid recited the lives of the 5th century abbot of Armagh and abbess of Kildare. Up to the 4th century, the Filid, as a class, held a special devotion to Imbolc, which became the feast day of Bride, or St. Brigid.

Similar constructions exist for other Celtic saints such as Gilfillan or our own Gillichattan, although it would appear that the Vatican has never heard of St. Chattan.

Fili-Criosd and Fili-losa were probably 7th century reciters of the parables of Christ, or Jesus, later to become Gilchrist and Gillies. Fili-Moire, Fili-Peadair and Fili-Martin were 7th century reciters of scripture concerning the lives of the saints, Mary, Peter and Martin, later to become Gilmore, Gilfeather, Gilmartin. Gillanders (Andrew) and Gilzean (Eoin, or John) have similar origins.

The early church canons went to great lengths to integrate the Brehon code of marriage which permitted bigamy in the Irish Celtic church: Patrick and his first learned convert, the Fili, Dubthach, agreed to admit all the dispositions of the Celtic law which were not in contradiction with scripture or with conscience. In this way, the creed of the 5th century Irish church was effectively re-shaped according to Irish Celtic traditions, and the Filid adapted their panegyrics to include Christianity. Columba, having journeyed from Iona up the Great Glen to Inverness, used Patrick's tactics a century later in converting the Pictish king Bridei's druid, Broichan, to the faith. Patrick and his successors consulted the Filid in the settlement of disputes arising from the complexities of integrating the church canons with the Brehon code and would have spoken through the Fili-brath, the 'reciter of judgement,' probably a 5th century function which would be transcribed six centuries later by the Normans to Gillivray or Gilbraith.

The Brehon code stuck right up to the Synod of Cashel in 1101 when the reforms of Pope Gregory VII against Simony, Nicolaiism and Secularisation (finally promulgated at the first Latran Council of 1123) attempted to infiltrate without the success achieved in the three other Irish provinces of Dublin, Cashel and Tuam, the recalcitrant valleys of Armagh and Moray. For 600 years the bishops of the Celtic, rather than Roman traditions of Canterbury, Lindisfarne or Cluny, applied orally-recited canons which integrated the Brehon code in the exercise of their pastoral office, canons which were memorised as panegyrics by the bishops' Filid (Fili-asbuig), who were equally responsible from the 7th century onwards for

establishing the bishops' honour price, which came close to that of a petty king. In those early courts a dispute between a bishop and a petty king would have been debated in poetry between their advocates, latter-day Gillespies (Filid-asbuig) and Gilroys (Filid-rig). There's an idea for Hollywood!

In 1111, the synod of Rathbeasail accorded the province of Armagh, which included Dal Riada, a total of 12 sees. During the critical surname period marked by the Normanisation of the Scots there were 12 'Fili-asbuig' in the service of the 12 bishops responsible for dioceses from Donegal and Down to Argyll. These men were certainly deacons and therefore not under full orders. They were allowed to marry without incurring the wrath of Malcolm Canmore's Queen, Margaret. For the Gillespies among us, genealogical points of departure from the surname period arguably originate from these 12 Filid-asbuig deacons of the province of Armagh who may traditionally have held these functions on a close family basis enabling each generation early coaching of the next in their remarkable feats of memory.

A 1993 phone book count in Scotland revealed that of the 2000 Gillespies and 4000 Macphersons mentioned, the geographic distribution gives a much lower than expected distribution of Gillespies in the Highlands and a much higher than expected distribution in Argyllshire, Strathclyde, Perthshire and Fife, more-or-less constituting the lands of Dal Riada and the ancient province of Armagh. The post-Clearances Gillespie and Macpherson diasporas are therefore not the same.

Today's Irish Gillespies are predictably grouped in Donegal and County Down, part of the ancient province of Armagh.

The Filid-asbuig as a profession had been long 'dead in the water' by the time Norman scribes attempted to commit their names to paper in the spirit of the Ragman Roll in 1296. By then the Gaelic language had retreated North of the Highland line. From 843, when Kenneth Macalpin united the Picts and Scots under the ravages of the Norsemen, no more Celtic canons were devised because Viking atrocities against church property had simply rendered large tracts of the law inapplicable: abbots and bishops used the protection of the strongest kings to protect their considerable wealth and paved the way to early forms of feudalism. However, as long as the Brehon code resisted Gregorian reform and the Highland Gaels and Scots continued to shun the written word, the Filidasbuig would still have held positions as men of learning in the church, much as the Filid-rig were to become the Tanists and Brieves of the newly emerging clans.

Fili-asbuig status gave birth to the early medieval 'Gillespic' fore-name possibly chosen by ambitious families with an eye for church property for males destined for a life of the cloth. Like the small number of other pre-medieval forenames, it was expected to be perpetuated during successive generations in the families concerned. We have in this respect two early cases at the origin of our own clan Chattan, but others exist; such as the early 13th century progenitor of the Campbells, Gillespic O Duithne Cam (crooked) Beul (mouth); or the 14th century Gillespie Mac Eoghain na h-Oitrich (5th Macewen of Otter); or one of Bruce's MP's in St. Andrews, Gillespie Maclachlan.

The commonly-held view that the etymological root of the Gil-names comes from the word Gilly, or serving lad, leads to the absurd notion that one could be a serving lad to a long-dead saint, or that judgement can be served upon (Gilly-brath instead of Filibrath). Kings and Bishops had vassals and deacons to serve them, not Gillys. If the sense is that of a devotee, the Gaelic language foresaw the prefix Maol-, literally the tonsuredone, giving Maol Colum Cille or Maol Chaluim, a devotee of Columba, known today as Malcolm; otherwise, Malone, from Maol Eoin, a devotee of John; or Malise or Mellish, from Maol Iosa, a devotee of Jesus.

The Norman scribes can be pardoned for mixing their f's and their g's because the first letter is not always pronounced in Gaelic when addressing a person by name and, in all events, an initial f is silent and a g sounds more like a y when followed by an i.

The scribes of Norman society forgot the Filid, and infants with the Christian name of a favourite saint could be simply called Eoin, Padruig, Peadair, Moire or Bride. The Gilnames, which had been linked to a profession, would survive as surnames.

Linking the Gaelic Gillespie, which survives as a surname, with the Germanic Archibald (Ercenbald), which predominantly survives as a Christian name, is as absurd as wishing to impose serving lads on the dead or the concept of judgement.

For those Gillespies who have confirmed their allegiance to Cluny, it is now clear why they won't find many, if any, of their name in the graveyards of Kingussie or Laggan, or indeed in Cluny's muster roll in the '45. Any of the Filid-asbuig who were Cattanachs and who followed the clan to Lochaber, and, later, to Badenoch to support Kenneth, the bastard son of Ewan Ban MacMuriach and his offspring, Duncan, in their struggle against the Comyns would have changed their name to Macpherson by ascription between the mid 14th and 15th century. By then, the crown had recognised that the progeny of the Parson had jelled into a Highland force to be reckoned with. The red hand and dagger in the Cluny arms are therefore inappropriate to clansmen not bearing the Macpherson name unless they claim descent from progenitors who helped Bruce and Moray rid Badenoch of the Red Comyn.

It is also clear that no Gillespie came forward in 1598 when the chiefs were requested to prove title to their lands before the union of the crowns in 1603, so the existence of a Gillespie clan with its chief, captain, tanist and brieve is a non-starter.

In conclusion, it is of interest to note that the birth of the Highland clans from the 13th century gave rise to more recent clerical names which are not Gil-names: in addition to the Macphersons, we find, for example, the Mactaggarts or the Macvicars.

For further reading on the subject of the Filid, Kathleen Hughes has written an excellent introduction to A. J. Otway-Ruthven's 'A History of Medieval Ireland,' Barnes & Noble, 1993.

BRANCH REPORTS

Badenoch and North of Scotland Branch

Joint Chairman - Mr Duncan Gillespie, The Manse Newtonmore; Lady Macpherson of Biallid, Craig Dhu House, Newtonmore.

We were all hosts this year to the Clan Macpherson Association's Jubilee, where large numbers from many countries enjoyed Highland hospitality including the lunch on Saturday in the School House, Newtonmore. The headmaster, Mr Donald Macdonald, organised a shinty exhibition, a local historical exhibition and a team of enthusiastic young servers. Mr Duncan Gillespie gave everyone a glass of dessert wine made from Cluny Castle fruit - which was extremely popular.

Ewen MacPherson, Chairman of the Association, suggested that Scottish membership could be revitalised by having a single Central Branch. After careful thought it was considered that centralisation was geographically impracticable. If this had to be done the Museum should be developed as the central point.

We are looking forward to a celebration and gathering with other historic people of the heraldic Cat, at an event at Dunrobin Castle in the Spring of 1997.

Canadian Branch

Chairman - Ian McPherson, 22 Skelton Street, Etobicoke, Ontario M8V 3W4; *Vice-Chairman* - Andrew K. E MacPherson; *Treasurer* - Marlene McPherson; *Hon. Secretary* - Mrs Nancy Macpherson, 193 Waldoncroft Crescent, Burlington, Ontario L7L 3A6.

We are pleased to report that the Canadian Branch enjoyed another successful year with an increase in our membership of over 15%. This was mainly due to a recruiting drive in the