

## **THE CLAN CHATTAN HISTORIANS**

### 5 - Historians of the Macphersons (Part 1) by Dr Alan G. Macpherson

The modern historian of the Clann Mhuirich Macphersons of Badenoch and the Castlelands of Inverness - the classic Clan Chattan country - owes his greatest debt to Sir Aeneas Macpherson of Invereshie (1644-1705). Before Invereshie's contribution is considered in this series, however, some comment is required on three groups of Highland historians and genealogists who, in different ways, precede or complement his work. Little can be said biographically about these men, but their roles in adding to the history of the Macphersons can at least be acknowledged.

The first group consists of Lachlan MacIntosh of Kinrara and Murdoch MacKenzie of Ardross. Ardross, significantly, is just across the river from Contulich in Alness, which may be sufficient to explain the association of this younger man with Lachlan of Kinrara. He was married to Margaret Grant of the Easter Elchies and Clonfurres family. Both men were important for their references to early members of the *Clann Mhuirich* and its relationship to the earlier *Clann McGillichatain* or Old Clan Chattan from which it and several other clans were derived. The second group consisted of a number of Macpherson *seanchaidhean* (senachies or, story-tellers) who, although they are not known to have written a word of their own, were the informants who provided Invereshie with vital links to the past. Finally, mention at least must be made of Master John Campbell who served the Campbells as Invereshie served the Badenoch Macphersons, and of Hugh Macdonald, the historian of the Macdonalds of Sleat and their predecessors, the Lords of the Isles, both of whom provide important clues to the origin of Macphersons along the West Highland seaboard. All the individuals in these groups, as it happens, were contemporaries of Invereshie, although Kinrara and the Macpherson *seanchaidhean* were of older generations.

Kinrara and Ardross

Lachlan Macintosh (b. c 1613) was the second son of Sir Lachlan Mackintosh, the laird who died in 1622. By his own account he "gave himself to the study of philosophy for the space of three years" (1632-35) at Marischal College, Aberdeen, and then "applied his mind assiduously to the study of letters" until his older brother, William, married (1635-38) whereupon, William being infirm, he assumed the management of his brother's affairs "as well in the north and in the south parts of Scotland". Consistent with this, he was always referred to as "Lachlan McIntosh, brother of the Laird of McIntosh" until William's death in 1660 and his own marriage to Isobel Graham of the Claypots family in 1662, at which point he seems to have acquired the designation "of Kinrara". All his children who grew to adulthood and marriage were born prior to this marriage, and were probably the offspring of an earlier and unacknowledged handfast marriage. Kinrara was a royalist in politics. In 1652, after Preston and Dunbar, he was "commissioned by the nobles and gentlemen of Inverness-shire to meet the delegates of the English nation at Dalkeith", where he refused to sign the Tender renouncing the new King, "spurned the very lucrative gift of the office of sheriff and commissary of Inverness-shire, and was ever afterwards held in dislike by the usurpers". The Restoration of 1660 saw him return to favour as J.P. and Commissioner of Excise for Inverness-shire, at, which time he became "tutor", or guardian, for his nephew and namesake, heir of Laird William, whom he had had educated at Inverness, Elgin, King's College, Aberdeen, and St Leonard's College, St Andrews. He was the principal advocate for his nephew in the legal contest with the Camerons over the Locharkaig lands which was finally resolved in 1666. Sir Aeneas Macpherson, in his *Loyall Dissuasive*, referred to Kinrara as "a man of very good sense (who) knew how to reason" and with whom he had had "a sett conference . . . at Inverness . . . about the Chieftainrie of the Clan Chattan", from which the older man

“paired in a huff, leaving all the company much scandalised at his weakness and impertinency”. This event occurred after the Privy Council contest of 1672.

Lachlan MacIntosh of Kinrara, in fact, was an old adversary of Sir Aeneas Macpherson, his manuscript history having as one of its themes, the untrustworthiness of friends, among whom the Badenoch Macphersons were particularly - but not exclusively - singled out. Nevertheless, one of his daughters married William Macpherson of Nuide, and his granddaughter by his illegitimate son Alexander married William *dubh* Macpherson, Sir Aeneas' younger brother. Through Nuide he thus became ancestor to all later chiefs of the Macphersons to the present, and through William *dubh* a forebear of the Macphersons of Inverhall, the representatives of the *Sliochd Ghilliosa* Macphersons during the eighteenth century, and through them a forebear of the Macphersons of Gordonhall, the senior representatives of the *Sliochd Iain* branch of the clan during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Kinrara's manuscript history of the Mackintoshes, completed about 1680, makes scattered reference to the *Clann Mhuirich* in such a fashion as to suggest that he was in fact appealing to knowledge of facts already in the folklore of his intended readers. He identifies the whole Clan Macpherson with “Clan Wurrich ... so the Macphersons were formerly called”, and acknowledges that this clan “were held to be amongst the most ancient of the families of the Clanchattan”. He refers to the three major lineages of the *Clann Mhuirich* (later documented in detail by Invereshie) as “Slighk Kynich vic Ewin”, “Slighk ean vic Ewin”, and “Slighk Gillies vic Ewin” - thus corroborating Invereshie's account of the three brothers Kenneth, John and Gillis, sons of Ewan, from whom all the Macphersons of Badenoch and the Castlelands were and are descended. He accounts for the ascription of the name *Macpherson* to the whole *Clann Mhuirich* by referring to “Kenneth Mak ewn” as “father of Parson from whom the Clanchattan are named” thus providing an origin for the surname that is historically sounder and more acceptable than that elaborated by Sir Aeneas Macpherson.

The Kinrara Manuscript also records that Isabel, daughter of Ferquhard, that chief of the Mackintoshes who was obliged to abdicate his leadership in 1409, was married to “Duncan Makkynich vic Eun, commonly designated Parson, and bore to him Bean Makpherson, from whom the family of Brin took rise”; it adds that her eldest brother, Duncan McIntosh, “contracted marriage with the daughter of Donald Makkynich vic Ewn”, Duncan the Parson's brother. These statements all corroborate Invereshie's account. What is most invaluable is Kinrara's frequent use of patronymics in referring to these men, thus lending a ring of ancient truth to the facts related. He was, in fact, faithfully reproducing traditional material from the writings of Ferquhard McIntosh, the chief who was incarcerated in the Castles of Edinburgh and Dunbar between 1495 and 1513 which would otherwise have been lost to us. The earliest statement from this source that is of interest to historians of the Macphersons refers to “Gillicattan Makgellespick chlerich from whom the Clanchattans are so called, who came from Connoght, a province of Ireland, into Lochaber in the year of our Salvation 1215”. Needless to say, Kinrara provides much detail of local political events closer to his own time and during his own lifetime, and throws much light upon the crucial roles played by Andrew McPherson of Clunie and Dougal McPherson of Powrie in Mackintosh's affairs in Lochaber in 1665. In 1670 (1664?), he acquired from his aunt, the dowager Lady Balnagowan, the estate of Contulich in the parish of Alness on the north shore of the Cromarty Firth, and that is where he died in 1686.

Murdoch MacKenzie of Ardross was the eldest son and heir of Alexander MacKenzie of Dundonnell, a cadet of the MacKenzies of Achilty in Wester Ross who bought Ardross in 1664. His widow, Margaret Grant died in 1734. His manuscript, *The origin of the haill tribes of the Clan Chattan* (1687), was based

on an early work written by "F.M.T." - almost certainly Farquhar McIntosh, the incarcerated- chief of 1495-1513. Much of the same detail as appeared in the Kinrara Manuscript indicates the same source. The Ardross Manuscript also confirms much of Invereshie's *Genealogy of the Three Brethren*, though with less detail. Its most valuable contribution is its amplification of the Clan-chattan descended from "Gillicattan More MacGillespick" from Connacht who "fixed his habitation in Lochaber in the year 1215"; his fifth son, Muirrach, "had his residence in Lochaber" and was the father of Evan MacVuirrich, father of the three founders of the *Macpherson sliochdan* or lineages. Ardross also indicates the relationship of the Clan-vuirrich to the chiefs of the Old Clanchattan from whom the later chiefs of the MacIntoshes were descended, to the *Clann mhic Gillemhaoil* or MacKevoils of Lochaber from whom the MacMillans of Locharkaig, MacGillonies of Glen Loy and MacMartins of Letterfirilay were all descended, and to the *Clann mhic Gillenaoimh* or MacNivens of Badenoch from whom the MacIntosh chiefs later acquired Gaskmore and Dunachtan and from whom the Macphersons took possession of Breakachy and other farms in Badenoch. MacKenzie of Ardross's version of the origins of the Old Clanchattan and Clan Vuirrich is therefore considerably at variance with that of Sir Aeneas Macpherson, and as it has a greater ring of traditional truth about it, it must be treated with great respect by our clan historians. So the Macphersons of Badenoch and the Castlelands are indebted to two men of other clans for a record of the furthest reaches of their history.