

MACLAURIN OR MACLAREN.

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Maclaurin, more commonly spelled Maclaren, is the name of a small clan belonging to Perthshire, and called in Gaelic the clann Labhrin. The name is said to have been derived from the district of Lorn, in Argyleshire, the Gaelic orthography of which is Lubhrin. The Maclaurins bear the word Dalriada, as a motto above their coat of arms.

From Argyleshire the tribe of Laurin moved into Perthshire, having, it is said, acquired from Kenneth Macalpin, after his conquest of the Picts in the 9th century, the districts of Balquhider and Strathearn, and three brothers are mentioned as having got assigned to them in that territory the lands of Bruach, Auchleskin, and Stank. In the churchyard of Balquhider, celebrated as containing the grave of Rob Roy, the burial places of their different families are marked off separately, so as to correspond with the situation which these estates bear to each other, a circumstance which so far favours the tradition regarding them.

When the earldom of Strathearn became vested in the crown in 1370, the Maclaurins were reduced from the condition of proprietors to that of "kyndly" or perpetual tenants, which they continued to be till 1508, when it was deemed expedient that this Celtic holding should be changed, and the lands set in feu, "for increase of policie and augmentation of the king's rental."

About 1497, some of the clan Laurin having carried off the cattle from the Braes of Lochaber, the Macdonalds followed the spoilers, and, overtaking them in Glenurchy, after a sharp fight, recovered the "lifting." The Maclaurins straightway sought the assistance of their kinsman, Dugal Stewart of Appin, who[280] at once joined them with his followers, and a conflict took place, when both Dugal and Macdonald of Keppoch, the chiefs of their respective clans, were among the slain. This Dugal was the first of the Stewarts of Appin. He was an illegitimate son of John Stewart, third Lord of Lorn, by a lady of the clan Laurin, and in 1469 when he attempted, by force of arms, to obtain possession of his father's lands, he was assisted by the Maclaurins, 130 of whom fell in a battle that took place at the foot of Bendoran, a mountain in Glenurchy.

The clan Laurin were the strongest sept in Balquhider, which was called "the country of the Maclaurins." Although there are few families of the name there now, so numerous were they at one period that none dared enter the church until the Maclaurins had taken their seats. This invidious right claimed by them often led to unseemly brawls and fights at the church door, and lives were sometimes lost in consequence. In 1532, Sir John Maclaurin, vicar of Balquhider, was killed in one of these quarrels, and several of his kinsmen, implicated in the deed, were outlawed.

A deadly feud existed between the Maclaurins and their neighbours, the Macgregors of Rob Roy's tribe. In the 16th century, the latter slaughtered no fewer than eighteen householders of the Maclaurin name, with the whole of their families, and took possession of the farms which had belonged to them. The deed was not investigated till 1604, forty-six years afterwards, when it was thus described in their trial for the slaughter of the Colquhouns: "And siclyk, John M'Coull cheire, ffor airt and pairt of the crewall murthour and burning of aughtene housholders of the clan Lawren, thair wyves and bairns, committit fourtie sax zeir syne, or thairby." The verdict was that he was "clene, innocent, and acquit of the said crymes." [236] The hill farm of Invernenty, on "The Braes of Balquhider," was one of the farms thus forcibly occupied by the Macgregors, although the property of a Maclaurin family, and in the days of Rob Roy, two centuries afterwards, the aid of Stewart of Appin was called in to replace the Maclaurins in their own, which he did at the head of 200 of his men. All these farms, however, are now the property of the chief of clan Gregor, having been purchased about 1798 from the commissioners of the forfeited estates.

The Maclaurins were out in the rebellion of 1745. According to President Forbes, they were followers of the Murrays of Athole, but although some of them might have been so, the majority of the clan fought for the Pretender with the Stewarts of Appin under Stewart of Ardsheil.

The chiefship was claimed by the family to which belonged Colin Maclaurin, the eminent mathematician and philosopher, and his son, John Maclaurin, Lord Dreghorn. In the application given in for the latter to the Lyon Court, he proved his descent from a family which had long been in possession of the island of Tiree, one of the Argyleshire Hebrides.