

MACNAB

Source: The Scottish Highlands, Highland Clans and Highland Regiments, Volume II (of 2) by Sir John Scott Keltie

The clan Anaba or Macnab has been said by some to have been a branch of the Macdonalds, but we have given above a bond of manrent which shows that they were allied to the Mackinnons and the Macgregors. "From their comparatively central position in the Highlands," says Smibert, "as well as other circumstances, it seems much more likely that they were of the primitive Albion race, a shoot of the Siol Alpine." The chief has his residence at Kinnell, on the banks of the Dochart, and the family possessions, which originally were considerable, lay mainly on the western shores of Loch Tay. The founder of the Macnabs, like the founder of the Macphersons, is said to have belonged to the clerical profession, the name Mac-anab being said to mean in Gaelic, the son of the abbot. He is said to have been abbot of Glendochart.

The Macnabs were a considerable clan before the reign of Alexander III. When Robert the Bruce commenced his struggle for the crown, the baron of Macnab, with his clan, joined the Macdougalls of Lorn, and fought against Bruce at the battle of Dalree. Afterwards, when the cause of Bruce prevailed, the lands of the Macnabs were ravaged by his victorious troops, their houses burnt, and all their family writs destroyed. Of all their possessions only the barony of Bowain or Bovain, in Glendochart, remained to them, and of it, Gilbert Macnab of that ilk, from whom the line is usually deduced, as the first undoubted laird of Macnab, received from David II., on being reconciled to that monarch, a charter, under the great seal, to him and his heirs whomsoever, dated in 1336. He died in the reign of Robert II.

His son, Finlay Macnab, styled of Bovain, as well as "of that ilk," died in the reign of James I. He is said to have been a famous bard. According to tradition he composed one of the Gaelic poems which Macpherson attributed to Ossian. He was the father of Patrick Macnab of Bovain and of that ilk, whose son was named Finlay Macnab, after[259] his grandfather. Indeed, Finlay appears to have been, at this time, a favourite name of the chief, as the next three lairds were so designated. Upon his father's resignation, he got a charter, under the great seal, in the reign of James III., of the lands of Ardchyle, and Wester Duinish, in the barony of Glendochart and county of Perth, dated January 1, 1486. He had also a charter from James IV., of the lands of Ewir and Leiragan, in the same barony, dated January 9, 1502. He died soon thereafter, leaving a son, Finlay Macnab, fifth laird of Macnab, who is witness in a charter, under the great seal, to Duncan Campbell of Glenorchy, wherein he is designed "Finlaus Macnab, dominus de eodem," &c., Sept. 18, 1511. He died about the close of the reign of James V.

His son, Finlay Macnab of Bovain and of that ilk, sixth chief from Gilbert, alienated or mortgaged a great portion of his lands to Campbell of Glenorchy, ancestor of the Marquis of Breadalbane, as appears by a charter to "Colin Campbell of Glenorchy, his heirs and assignees whatever, according to the deed granted to him by Finlay Macnab of Bovain, 24th November 1552, of all and sundry the lands of Bovain and Ardchyle, &c., confirmed by a charter under the great seal from Mary, dated 27th June 1553." Glenorchy's right of superiority the Macnabs always refused to acknowledge.

His son, Finlay Macnab, the seventh laird, who lived in the reign of James VI., was the chief who entered into the bond of friendship and manrent with his cousin, Lauchlan Mackinnon of Strathaird, 12th July 1606. This chief carried on a deadly feud with the Neishes or M'Illduys, a tribe which possessed the upper parts of Strathearn, and inhabited an island in the lower part of Loch Earn, called from them Neish Island. Many battles were fought between them, with various success. The last was at Glenboultachan, about two miles north of Loch Earn foot, in which the Macnabs were victorious, and the Neishes cut off almost to a man. A small remnant of them, however, still lived in the island referred to, the head of which was an old man, who subsisted by plundering the people in the neighbourhood. One Christmas, the chief of the Macnabs had sent his servant to Crieff for provisions, but, on his return, he was waylaid, and robbed of all his purchases. He went home, therefore, empty-handed, and told his tale to the laird. Macnab had twelve sons, all men of great strength, but one in particular exceedingly athletic, who was called for a bye-name, Iain mion Mac an Appa, or "Smooth John Macnab." In the evening, these men were gloomily meditating some signal revenge on their old enemies, when their father entered, and said in Gaelic, "The night is the night, if the lads were but lads!" Each man

instantly started to his feet, and belted on his dirk, his claymore, and his pistols. Led by their brother John, they set out, taking a fishing-boat on their shoulders from Loch Tay, carrying it over the mountains and glens till they reached Loch Earn, where they launched it, and passed over to the island. All was silent in the habitation of Neish. Having all the boats at the island secured, they had gone to sleep without fear of surprise. Smooth John, with his foot dashed open the door of Neish's house; and the party, rushing in, attacked the unfortunate family, every one of whom was put to the sword, with the exception of one man and a boy, who concealed themselves under a bed. Carrying off the heads of the Neishes, and any plunder they could secure, the youths presented themselves to their father, while the piper struck up the pibroch of victory.

The next laird, "Smooth John," the son of this Finlay, made a distinguished figure in the reign of Charles I., and suffered many hardships on account of his attachment to the royal cause. He was killed at the battle of Worcester in 1651. During the commonwealth, his castle of Eilan Rowan was burned, his estates ravaged and sequestered, and the family papers again lost. Taking advantage of the troubles of the times, his powerful neighbour, Campbell of Glenorchy, in the heart of whose possessions Macnab's lands were situated, on the pretence that he had sustained considerable losses from the clan Macnab, got possession of the estates in recompense thereof.

The chief of the Macnabs married a daughter of Campbell of Glenlyon, and with one daughter,[260] had a son, Alexander Macnab, ninth laird, who was only four years old when his father was killed on Worcester battle-field. His mother and friends applied to General Monk for some relief from the family estates for herself and children. That general made a favourable report on the application, but it had no effect.

After the Restoration, application was made to the Scottish estates, by Lady Macnab and her son, for redress, and in 1661 they received a considerable portion of their lands, which the family enjoyed till the beginning of the present century, when they were sold.

By his wife, Elizabeth, a sister of Sir Alexander Menzies of Weem, Baronet, Alexander Macnab of that ilk had a son and heir, Robert Macnab, tenth laird, who married Anne Campbell, sister of the Earl of Breadalbane. Of several children only two survived, John, who succeeded his father, and Archibald. The elder son, John, held a commission in the Black Watch, and was taken prisoner at the battle of Prestonpans, and, with several others, confined in Doune Castle, under the charge of Macgregor of Glengyle, where he remained till after the battle of Culloden. The majority of the clan took the side of the house of Stuart, and were led by Allister Macnab of Inshewan and Archibald Macnab of Acharne.

John Macnab, the eleventh laird, married the only sister of Francis Buchanan, Esq. of Arnprior, and had a son, Francis, twelfth laird.

Francis, twelfth laird, died, unmarried, at Callander, Perthshire, May 25, 1816, in his 82d year. One of the most eccentric men of his time, many anecdotes are related of his curious sayings and doings.

We give the following as a specimen, for which we are indebted to Mr Smibert's excellent work on the clans:—

"Macnab had an intense antipathy to excisemen, whom he looked on as a race of intruders, commissioned to suck the blood of his country: he never gave them any better name than vermin. One day, early in the last war, he was marching to Stirling at the head of a corps of fencibles, of which he was commander. In those days the Highlanders were notorious for incurable smuggling propensities; and an excursion to the Lowlands, whatever might be its cause or import, was an opportunity by no means to be neglected. The Breadalbane men had accordingly contrived to stow a considerable quantity of the genuine 'peat reek' (whisky) into the baggage carts. All went well with the party for some time. On passing Alloa, however, the excisemen there having got a hint as to what the carts contained, hurried out by a shorter path to intercept them. In the meantime, Macnab, accompanied by a gillie, in the true feudal style, was proceeding slowly at the head of his men, not far in the rear of the baggage. Soon after leaving Alloa, one of the party in charge of the carts came running back and informed their chief that they had all been seized by a posse of excisemen. This intelligence at once roused the blood of Macnab. 'Did the lousy villains dare to obstruct the march of

the Breadalbane Highlanders!' he exclaimed, inspired with the wrath of a thousand heroes; and away he rushed to the scene of contention. There, sure enough, he found a party of excisemen in possession of the carts. 'Who the devil are you?' demanded the angry chieftain. 'Gentlemen of the excise,' was the answer. 'Robbers! thieves! you mean; how dare you lay hands on His Majesty's stores? If you be gaugers, show me your commissions.' Unfortunately for the excisemen, they had not deemed it necessary in their haste to bring such documents with them. In vain they asserted their authority, and declared they were well known in the neighbourhood. 'Ay, just what I took ye for; a parcel of highway robbers and scoundrels. Come, my good fellows,' (addressing the soldiers in charge of the baggage, and extending his voice with the lungs of a stentor,) 'prime!—load!—' The excisemen did not wait the completion of the sentence; away they fled at top speed towards Alloa, no doubt glad they had not caused the waste of His Majesty's ammunition. 'Now, my lads,' said Macnab, 'proceed—your whisky's safe.'"

He was a man of gigantic height and strong originality of character, and cherished many of the manners and ideas of a Highland gentleman, having in particular a high notion of the dignity of the chieftainship. He left numerous illegitimate children.

The only portion of the property of the Macnabs remaining is the small islet of Innis-Buie, formed by the parting of the water of the Dochart just before it issues into Loch Tay, in which is the most ancient burial place of the family; and outside there are numerous gravestones of other members of the clan. The lands of the town of Callander chiefly belong to a descendant of this laird, not in marriage.

The last Laird of Macnab.

Archibald Macnab of Macnab, nephew of Francis, succeeded as thirteenth chief. The estates being considerably encumbered, he was obliged to sell his property for behoof of his creditors.

Many of the clan having emigrated to Canada about the beginning of the nineteenth century, and being very successful, 300 of those remaining in Scotland were induced about 1817 to try their fortunes in America, and in 1821, the chief himself, with some more of the clan, took their departure for Canada. He returned in 1853, and died at Lannion, Cotes du Nord, France, Aug. 12, 1860, aged 83. Subjoined is his portrait, from a daguerreotype, taken at Saratoga, United States of America, in 1848. He left a widow, and one surviving daughter, Sophia Frances.

The next Macnabs by descent entitled to the chiefship are believed to be Sir Allan Napier Macnab, Bart., Canada; Dr Robert Macnab, 5th Fusileers; and Mr John Macnab, Glenmavis, Bathgate. The lairds of Macnab, previous to the reign of Charles I., intermarried with the families of Lord Gray of Kilfauns, Gleneagles, Inchbraco, Robertson of Strowan, &c. The chief cadets of the family were the Macnabs of Dundurn, Acharne, Newton, Cowie, and Inchewen.