

MACNICOL

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

In a district mostly in Ross-shire, anciently known by the name of Ness, there was originally located a small and broken clan, known as the Macnicols. The only districts, according to Skene, which at all answers to the description of Ness, are those of Assynt, Edderachylis, and Duirness.

The Macnicols were descended from one Mackrycul (the letter r in the Gaelic being invariably pronounced like n), who, tradition[272] says, as a reward for having rescued from some Scandinavians a great quantity of cattle carried off from Sutherland, received from one of the ancient thanes of that province, the district of Assynt, then a forest belonging to them. This Mackrycul held that part of the coast of Cogeach, which is called Ullapool. In the MS. of 1450, the descent of the clan Nicail is traced in a direct line from a certain Gregall, plainly the Krycul here mentioned, who is supposed to have lived in the twelfth century. He is said to have been the ancestor, besides the Macnicols, of the Nicols and the Nicholsons. When Gregall lived, Sutherland was occupied by Gaelic tribes, and the Macnicols may therefore be considered of Gaelic origin.

About the beginning of the 14th century, the family of the chief ended in an heiress, who married Torquil Macleod, a younger son of Macleod of Lewis. Macleod obtained a crown charter of the district of Assynt and other lands in Wester Ross, which had been the property of the Macnicols. That sept subsequently removed to the Isle of Skye, and the residence of their head or chief was at Scoirebreac, on the margin of the loch near Portree.

Even after their removal to Skye the Macnicols seem to have retained their independence, for tradition relates that on one occasion when the head of this clan, called Macnicol Mor, was engaged in a warm discussion with Macleod of Rasay, carried on in the English language, the servant of the latter coming into the room, imagined they were quarrelling, and drawing his sword mortally wounded Macnicol. To prevent a feud between the two septs, a council of chieftains and elders was held to determine in what manner the Macnicols could be appeased, when, upon some old precedent, it was agreed that the meanest person in the clan Nicol should behead the laird of Rasay. The individual of least note among them was one Lomach, a maker of pannier baskets, and he accordingly cut off the head of the laird of Rasay.

In Argyleshire there were many Macnicols, but the clan may be said to have long been extinct.