

ROBERTSON.

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

Robertsons or Clan Donnachie—Macfarlanes—Campbells of Argyll and offshoots—Royal Marriage—Campbells of Breadalbane—Macarthur Campbells of Strachur—Campbells of Cawdor, Aberuchill, Ardnamurchan, Auchinbreck, Ardkinglass, Barcaldine, Dunstaffnage, Monzie—The Macleods of Lewis and Harris—Macleods of Rasay.

Besides the clans already noticed, there are other two which, according to Skene, are set down by the genealogists as having originally belonged to the Gallgael or Celts of the Western Isles; these are the Robertsons or clan Donnachie, and the Macfarlanes.

Tradition claims for the clan Donnachie a descent from the great sept of the Macdonalds, their remote ancestor being said to have been Duncan (hence the name Donnachie) the Fat, son of Angus Mor, Lord of the Isles, in the reign of William the Lion. Smibert thinks this is certainly the most feasible account of their origin. Skene, however, endeavours to trace their descent from Duncan, King of Scotland, eldest son of Malcolm III., their immediate ancestor, according to him, having been Conan, second son of Henry, fourth and last of the ancient Celtic Earls of Athole. This Conan, it is said, received from his father, in the reign of Alexander II., the lands of Generochy, afterwards called Strowan, in Gaelic Struthan—that is, streamy. Conan's great-grandson, Andrew, was styled of Athole, de Atholia, which was the uniform designation of [170] the family, indicative, Mr Skene thinks, of their descent from the ancient Earls of Athole. According to the same authority, it was from Andrew's son, Duncan, that the clan derived their distinctive appellation of the clan Donnachie, or children of Duncan. Duncan is said to have been twice married, and acquired by both marriages considerable territory in the district of Rannoch. By his first wife he had a son, Robert de Atholia.

As it is well known that Mr Skene's Celtic prejudices are very strong, and as his derivation of the Robertsons from Duncan, king of Scotland, is to a great extent conjectural, it is only fair to give the other side of the question, viz., the probability of their derivation from the Celts of the Western Isles. We shall take the liberty of quoting here Mr Smibert's judicious and acute remarks on this point. "There unquestionably exist doubts about the derivation of the Robertsons from the Macdonalds; but the fact of their acquiring large possessions at so early a period in Athole, seems to be decisive of their descent from some great and strong house among the Western Celts. And what house was more able so to endow its scions than that of Somerled, whose heads were the kings of the west of Scotland? The Somerled or Macdonald power, moreover, extended into Athole beyond all question; and, indeed, it may be said to have been almost the sole power which could so have planted there one of its offshoots, apart from the regal authority. Accordingly, though Duncan may not have been the son of Angus Mor (Macdonald), a natural son of the Lord of the Isles, as has been commonly averred, it by no means follows that the family were not of the Macdonald race. The proof may be difficult, but probability must be accepted in its stead. An opposite course has been too long followed on all sides. Why should men conceal from themselves the plain fact that the times under consideration were barbarous, and that their annals were necessarily left to us, not by the pen of the accurate historian, but by the dealers in song and tradition?"

Referring to the stress laid by Mr Skene upon the designation de Atholia, which was uniformly assumed by the Robertsons, Mr Smibert remarks,—“In the first place, the designation De Atholia can really be held to prove nothing, since, as in the case of De Insulis, such phrases often pointed to mere residence, and were especially used in reference to large districts. A gentleman 'of Athole' is not necessarily connected with the Duke; and, as we now use such phrases without any meaning of that kind, much more natural was the custom of old, when general localities alone were known generally. In the second place, are the Robertsons made more purely Gaelic, for such is partly the object in the view of Mr Skene, by being traced to the ancient Athole house? That the first lords of the line were Celts may be admitted; but heiresses again and again interrupted the male succession. While one wedded a certain Thomas of London, another found a mate in a person named David de Hastings. These strictly English names speak for

themselves; and it was by the Hastings marriage, which took place shortly after the year 1200, that the first house of Athole was continued. It is clear, therefore, that the supposition of the descent of the Robertsons from the first lords of Athole leaves them still of largely mingled blood—Norman, Saxon, and Gaelic. Such is the result, even when the conjecture is admitted.

“As a Lowland neighbourhood gave to the race of Robert, son of Duncan, the name of Robertson, so would it also intermingle their race and blood with those of the Lowlanders.”[172]

It is from the grandson of Robert of Athole, also named Robert, that the clan Donnachie derive their name of Robertson. This Robert was noted for his predatory incursions into the Lowlands, and is historically known as the chief who arrested and delivered up to the vengeance of the government Robert Graham and the Master of Athole, two of the murderers of James I., for which he was rewarded with a crown charter, dated in 1451, erecting his whole lands into a free barony. He also received the honourable augmentation to his arms of a naked man manacled under the achievement, with the motto, *Virtutis gloria merces*. He was mortally wounded in the head near the village of Auchtergaven, in a[171] conflict with Robert Forrester of Torwood, with whom he had a dispute regarding the lands of Little Dunkeld. Binding up his head with a white cloth, he rode to Perth, and obtained from the king a new grant of the lands of Strowan. On his return home, he died of his wounds. He had three sons, Alexander, Robert, and Patrick. Robert, the second son, was the ancestor of the Earls of Portmore, a title now extinct.

The eldest son, Alexander, was twice married, his sons becoming progenitors of various families of Robertsons. He died in, or shortly prior to, 1507, and was succeeded by his grandson, William. This chief had some dispute with the Earl of Athole concerning the marches of their estates, and was killed by a party of the earl's followers, in 1530. Taking advantage of a wadset or mortgage which he held over the lands of Strowan, the earl seized nearly the half of the family estate, which the Robertsons could never again recover. William's son, Robert, had two sons—William, who died without issue, and Donald, who succeeded him.

Donald's grandson, 11th laird of Strowan, died in 1636, leaving an infant son, Alexander, in whose minority the government of the clan devolved upon his uncle, Donald. Devoted to the cause of Charles I., the latter raised a regiment of his name and followers, and was with the Marquis of Montrose in all his battles. After the Restoration, the king settled a pension upon him.

His nephew, Alexander Robertson of Strowan, was twice married. By his second wife, Marion, daughter of General Baillie of Letham, he had two sons and one daughter, and died in 1688. Duncan, the second son by the second marriage, served in Russia, with distinction, under Peter the Great.

Alexander, the elder son of the second marriage, was the celebrated Jacobite chief and poet. Born about 1670, he was destined for the church, and sent to the university of St Andrews; but his father and brother by the first marriage dying within a few months of each other, he succeeded to the family estate and the chiefship in 1688. Soon after, he joined the Viscount Dundee, when he appeared in arms in the Highlands for the cause of King James; but though he does not appear to have been at Killiecrankie, and was still under age, he was, for his share in this rising, attainted by a decret of parliament in absence in 1690, and his estates forfeited to the crown. He retired, in consequence, to the court of the exiled monarch at St Germain, where he lived for several years, and served one or two campaigns in the French army. In 1703, Queen Anne granted him a remission, when he returned to Scotland, and resided unmolested on his estates, but neglecting to get the remission passed the seals, the forfeiture of 1690 was never legally repealed. With about 500 of his clan he joined the Earl of Mar in 1715, and was taken prisoner at the battle of Sheriffmuir, but rescued. Soon after, however, he fell into the hands of a party of soldiers in the Highlands, and was ordered to be conducted to Edinburgh; but, with the assistance of his sister, he contrived to escape on the way, when he again took refuge in France. In 1723, the estate of Strowan was granted by the government to Margaret, the chief's sister, by a charter under the great seal, and in 1726 she disposed the same in trust for the behoof of her brother, substituting, in the event of his death without lawful heirs of his body, Duncan, son of Alexander Robertson of Drumachune, her father's cousin, and the next lawful heir male of the family. Margaret died unmarried in 1727. Her brother had

returned to Scotland the previous year, and obtaining in 1731 a remission for his life, took possession of his estate. In 1745 he once more "marshalled his clan" in behalf of the Stuarts, but his age preventing him from personally taking any active part in the rebellion, his name was passed over in the list of proscriptions that followed. He died in his own house of Carie, in Rannoch, April 18, 1749, in his 81st year, without lawful issue, and in him ended the direct male line. A volume of his poems was published after his death. An edition was reprinted at Edinburgh in 1785, 12mo, containing also the "History and Martial Achievements of the Robertsons of Strowan." He is said to have formed the prototype of the Baron of Bradwardine in "Waverley."

The portion of the original estate of Strowan[172] which remained devolved upon Duncan Robertson of Drumachune, a property which his great-grandfather, Duncan Mor (who died in 1687), brother of Donald the tutor, had acquired from the Athole family. As, however, his name was not included in the last act of indemnity passed by the government, he was dispossessed of the estate in 1752, when he and his family retired to France. His son, Colonel Alexander Robertson, obtained a restitution of Strowan in 1784, and died, unmarried, in 1822. Duncan Mor's second son, Donald, had a son, called Robert Bane, whose grandson, Alexander Robertson, now succeeded to the estate.

The son of the latter, Major-general George Duncan Robertson of Strowan, C.B., passed upwards of thirty years in active service, and received the cross of the Imperial Austrian order of Leopold. He was succeeded by his son, George Duncan Robertson, born 26th July 1816, at one time an officer in the 42d Highlanders.

The force which the Robertsons could bring into the field was estimated at 800 in 1715, and 700 in 1745.

Of the branches of the family, the Robertsons of Lude, in Blair-Athole, are the oldest, being of contemporary antiquity to that of Strowan.

Patrick de Atholia, eldest son of the second marriage of Duncan de Atholia, received from his father, at his death, about 1358, the lands of Lude. He is mentioned in 1391, by Wyntoun (Book ii. p. 367) as one of the chieftains and leaders of the clan. He had, with a daughter, married to Donald, son of Farquhar, ancestor of the Farquharsons of Invercauld, two sons, Donald and Alexander. The latter, known by the name of Rua or Red, from the colour of his hair, acquired the estate of Straloch, for which he had a charter from James II. in 1451, and was ancestor of the Robertsons of Straloch, Perthshire. His descendants were called the Barons Rua. The last of the Barons Rua, or Red, was Alexander Robertson of Straloch, who died about the end of the last century, leaving an only son, John, who adopted the old family soubriquet, and called himself Reid (probably hoping to be recognised as the chief of the Reids). John Reid entered the army, where he rose to the rank of General, and died in 1803, leaving the reversion of his fortune (amounting to about £70,000) for the endowment of a chair of music, and other purposes, in the University of Edinburgh. This ancient family is represented by Sir Archibald Ava Campbell, Bart.

Donald, the elder son, succeeded his father. He resigned his lands of Lude into the king's hand on February 7, 1447, but died before he could receive his infeftment. He had two sons: John, who got the charter under the great seal, dated March 31, 1448, erecting the lands of Lude into a barony, proceeding on his father's resignation; and Donald, who got as his patrimony the lands of Strathgarry. This branch of Lude ended in an heiress, who married an illegitimate son of Stewart of Invermeath. About 1700, Strathgarry was sold to another family of the name of Stewart.

The Robertsons of Inshes, Inverness-shire, are descended from Duncan, second son of Duncan de Atholia, dominus de Ranagh, above mentioned.

The Robertsons of Kindeace descend from William Robertson, third son of John, ancestor of the Robertsons of the Inshes, by his wife, a daughter of Fearn of Pitcullen. He obtained from his father, in patrimony, several lands about Inverness, and having acquired great riches as a merchant, purchased, in 1615, the lands of Orkney, Nairnshire, and in 1639, those of Kindeace, Ross-shire; the latter becoming the chief title of the family.

The Robertsons of Kinlochmoidart, Inverness-shire, are descended from John Robertson of Muirton, Elginshire, second

son of Alexander Robertson of Strowan, by his wife, Lady Elizabeth, daughter of the Earl of Athole.

The fifth in succession, the Rev. William Robertson, one of the ministers of Edinburgh, was father of Principal Robertson, and of Mary, who married the Rev. James Syme, and had an only child, Eleonora, mother of Henry, Lord Brougham. The Principal had three sons and two daughters.[173]