

Clan Macpherson, 1215 - 1550

How the Macphersons acquired their Clan Lands and Independence

Reynold Macpherson, 20 January 2011



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Introduction

The Clan Macpherson Museum (see right) is in the village of Newtonmore, near Kingussie, capital of the old Highland district of Badenoch in Scotland. It presents the history of the Clan and houses many precious artifacts.

The rebuilt Cluny Castle is nearby (see below), once the home of the chief. The front cover of this chapter is the view up the Spey Valley from the memorial near Newtonmore to the Macpherson's greatest chief; Col. Ewan Macpherson of Cluny of the '45. Clearly, the district of Badenoch has long been the home of the Macphersons.

It was not always so. This chapter will make clear how Clan Macpherson acquired their traditional lands in Badenoch. It means explaining why Clan Macpherson emerged from the Old Clan Chattan, was both a founding member of the Chattan Confederation and yet regularly disputed Clan Macintosh's leadership, why the Chattan Confederation expanded and gradually disintegrated and how Clan Macpherson gained its property and governance rights.

The next chapter will explain why the two groups played different roles leading up to the Battle of Culloden in 1746. The following chapter will identify the earliest confirmed ancestor in our family who moved to Portsoy on the Banff coast soon after the battle and, over the decades, either prospered or left in search of new opportunities.



Prior Inhabitants of Badenoch

In previous chapters it was shown that Clan Macpherson's traditional lands in the Badenoch were first visited from about 11,000 AD by Mesolithic hunter-gatherer-fishers who originated in Iberia. It was then settled from about 7,000 AD by Neolithic farmers. These settlers were heavily influenced culturally during the Bronze Age (c. 2100-750 BC) by the Beaker People and again by Celt immigrants (from about 750 BC) during the Iron Age.

The Roman invaders in 68 AD recorded that a Pictish tribe known as the Vacomagi held Badenoch and Moray but failed to subjugate them. The Vacomagi helped form the Pictish Kingdom of Fortrui. They were fiercely warlike yet skilled farmers and artistic.

Viking attacks then seriously weakened the Pictish Kingdoms and, in 470 AD, they amalgamated with the Gaelic Kingdoms of Dalraida in the Western Isles to form the Kingdom of Alba. The Highland Picts were encouraged by Irish missionaries and the Kings of Alba to welcome the Gael immigrants from Ireland. Their descendents today exhibit the outcomes of this inter-culturalism over centuries.

The Emergence of Clan Macpherson

The story of the Macphersons can be traced from 1215 when the McDougals of Argyll hired an Irish church administrator to establish their clan priory in Ardchattan on the site of a pre-existing chapel. Church records show

that the new priory opened about 1230 (Hunter-Blair, 1907). The Baillie of Ardchattan Priory was Ghillichattan Mohr (big servant of St. Chattan). His family expanded and became Clan Chattan (pronounced ‘Hattan’). Three or four generations later, after 1291 and probably after 1308, four major changes became apparent.

The ‘Old Clan Chattan’ began subdividing into Macphersons, Davidsons and MacPhails. They began migrating to Badenoch and blended with the Highland Picts descended from the Vacomagi. Encouraged by King Robert I (the Bruce) they supplanted the prior overlords, the Comyns, The Old Clan Chattan developed into the Chattan Confederation by accepting leadership from the Macintoshes and by establishing new clans or taking in neighboring clans.

Two political processes changed everything. First was forging of a fresh alliance between the Chattan Confederation (including Clan Macpherson) and King Robert. In 1319 King Robert officially recognized the Clan Chattan/Clan Macintosh’s conquests of Comyn land as ‘land grants’. Second was a new tradition of continuing political violence, originally associated with the brutal colonization of Comyn lands but increasingly disputes between Clan Chattan member clans and neighboring clans for the next 360 years, until 1665, when a settlement was finally negotiated between the Chattan Confederation and Clan Cameron.

There are three major difficulties to understanding why Clan Macpherson disputed the leadership of Chattan Confederation with Clan Macintosh. The earliest accounts of the disagreements were based on oral traditions and written at least two hundred years after they occurred (A. G. Macpherson, 1982). Some historians asserted their partisan beliefs without providing evidence or sources. Even non-partisan historians can’t agree on key issues and dates due to the paucity of evidence. Hence, while it is impossible to arbitrate the earliest claims, the common ground and verified dates, such as battles, can be used to identify the likely sequence of general events and some of their consequences.

Clan Macpherson challenges the leadership of Clan Chattan

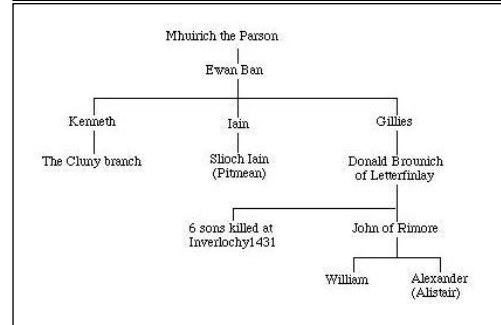
According to the Clan Chattan Confederation (2010), Williamsson’s (2003) review of Macintosh, Davidson and Macpherson claims, Allison’s summary (2007, pp. 40-47), and Clan Macpherson’s most authoritative historian (A. G. Macpherson, 1985), the Old Clan Chattan was established in Lochaber by Ghillichattan Mohr, Baillie of Ardchattan Priory (see right, north west of Airds Bay House).

Ghillichattan Mohr’s son, Diarmid, and his grandson Gillicattan the Clerk succeeded him in turn as the second and third captains of Clan Chattan. When Ghillichattan Mohr’s first great grandson, another Diarmid, died without having children, his second great grandson Muireach was selected to serve as the fourth captain.

This Muireach is associated with the earliest references to Clan Macpherson. He is referred to in various genealogies as Muirach, Mhuirach, Muirach Cattanach and as Vuireach. He is commonly described as being ‘the parson of Kingussie in 1173’ (perhaps a little early), the originator of Clan Mhuirach/Vuireach (the Gaelic names for Clan Macpherson) and as grandfather of Kenneth, John (or Iain) and Gillies who established the three main branches of Clan Macpherson (or MacPherson or McPherson) (see right).

To confuse matters further, Muireach is also recorded in other clan histories as the common ancestor of the Macphersons, Davidsons and McPhails (the Old Clan Chattan).

Muireach’s eldest son, Gillichattan, became the 5th Captain of Clan Chattan and his grandson, Dougal (short sighted) or Gilpatrick became the 6th Captain. Dougal/Gilpatrick had one child, Eva.

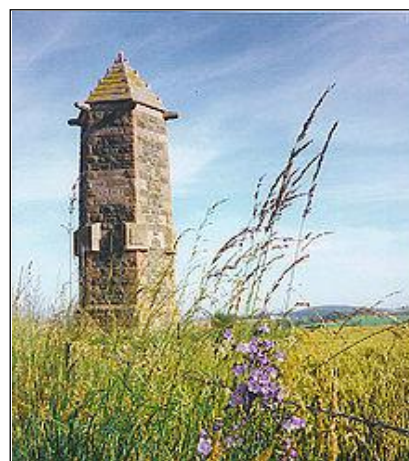


The problem for the Macphersons began when Eva married the sixteen year old Angus Mackintosh of Torcastle in 1291, the 6th chief of Clan Macintosh (meaning son of the leader). Angus became the 7th Captain of Clan Chattan through this marriage and his descendents were regarded as the hereditary leaders of the Chattan Confederation, by all except the Macphersons. Why?

The Macphersons challenged the legitimacy of Macintosh leadership of the Chattan Confederation under the rules of primogeniture, where the right of inheritance belongs exclusively to the eldest son. They claimed to be the male heirs of chieftainship in the Old Clan Chattan, and therefore its successor organization, the Chattan Confederation. Since Dougal/Gilpatric had not produced a male heir, they argued, succession should have reverted to Muireach's second son, Ewan *Ban* (the fair) Macparson (son of the parson), and his three sons (Kenneth, John/ Iain and Gillies Macpherson), or if need be, in turn to each of Muireach's three other sons (David, Neill and Ferquhard Macpherson).

The other Chattan Confederation clans accepted the chief of Clan Macintosh as their paramount chief. The old Pictish method of selecting a leader, 'the tanist choice', may have been used. The Picts selected the best leader from the female line. Whatever the process used, the Macphersons did not accept the views of the majority and reserved their right to choose the occasions on which they would accept leadership of the Chattan Confederation by the chief of the Macintoshes. It resulted in the "final disintegration of the Old Clanchattan" (A. G. Macpherson, 1985, p. 15),

The Macphersons fought on the winning side in support of royal power at the Battle of Harlaw in 1411 (see monument right), while the rest of the Chattan Confederation fought for the Lord of the Isles. With this decisive end point in mind, when Clan Macpherson fought against the rest of Chattan Confederation, we now need to go back to the beginning of the migration, colonization of Badenoch and expansion of both the Macphersons and the wider Chattan Confederation.

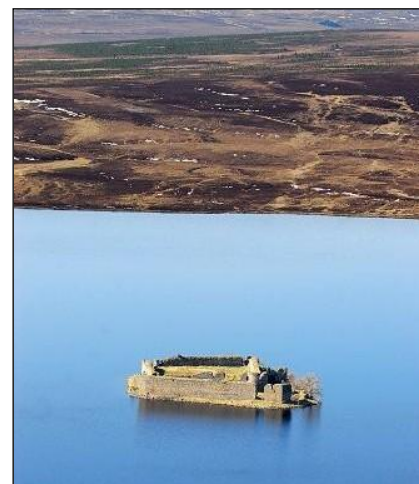


Macphersons colonise Comyn lands in Badenoch

The migration of Macphersons from Locahaber on the West Coast to Badenoch in the Highlands seems to have started in the years after Angus Macintosh and Eva married in 1291 (A. G. Macpherson, 1985, pp. 14-16). In the previous chapter I explained that they had made an enemy of Angus Og McDonald, an ally of Robert the Bruce. The Old Clan Chattan's leaders probably made a strategic decision after 1308 to disconnect from the McDougals, who commissioned Ardchattan Priory but who were cousins to the Comyns, and to realign with the Macintoshes, who were close allies of Robert the Bruce. It was a matter of prudent politics with a view to survival and prosperity.

The chiefs of Clan Comyn (or Cumming or Cumin) are descended from Robert of Comyn who came with William the Conqueror from France. He was made Earl of Northumberland after the Battle of Hastings. Robert's grandson Richard came north with other Norman knights when King David I claimed the throne of Scotland. Richard and his descendants gathered influence and lands through marriage, and, by 1300, had become the most powerful clan in Scotland.

Their most senior chief was ennobled as the Lord of Badenoch and they ruled their extensive lands from their island stronghold of Lochindorb Castle on Dava Moor north-west of Grantown-on-Spey (see right). Their clan chief John "the Black" Comyn was one of many competitors for the crown of Scotland when King Alexander III fell from his horse and broke his neck in 1286, and the child 'Queen' Margaret, the 'Maiden of Norway' died in 1290.



A Tradition of Political Violence

The migration and acquisition of land ‘by conquest’ from the Comyns (see right from McIan, 1983, p. 41) probably proved a temporary solution to the Chattan Confederation’s internal tensions. Compounding the issue of leadership legitimacy raised by the Macphersons was much increased organizational complexity. The warrior elites leading each of the clans typically had large families that needed extra land and economic opportunities for their offspring. Over generations this pressure generated competitive relationships, shifting alliances and boundary disputes between family networks over tillable land.

The process was initiated by Angus and Eva who had seven sons and two daughters to place; William, John, Eneas *oig* (young Angus), Malcolm, Ferquhard, Duncan, and Shaw *beg* (little Shaw), Muriell and Slane (Skene, 1890, pp. 356 – 357). Their expansionary needs had to be reconciled with the other families of the Old Clan Chattan, and once Clan Macintosh had joined, the Chattan Confederation, which then attracted other extended families due to its growing power. It therefore made some sense for Clan Macpherson to look to its own interests as the Chattan Confederation expanded, as did both old and new members.

The growing complexity of political interests, the competitive and militant culture and the difficult geography and communications in the Highlands would also have made the new Chattan Confederation under the Macintoshes almost ungovernable and virtually unsteerable. Governance and leadership had to be local to be effective. The exceptions were compelling collective aims, such as in the early 1300s when they shared a common desire to wrest land by sword from the Comyns, at the behest of King Robert. Alliances between clans would have had to be recreated for every major decision, making tactical leadership of combined forces difficult and the coherent strategic projection of the Confederation’s considerable military power beyond its borders virtually impossible.

Even the presence of a common external enemy could not guarantee the coherence of the Confederation. In the previous chapter it was shown that the Clan Cameron’s encroachment from Lochielside into the partially deserted Glenlui and Loch Arkaig lands in Lochaber led to the Confederation demanding rent, making cattle raids, and in 1330 or 1337, William, the eldest son of Angus Og and 7th Chief of Clan Mackintosh, bluntly demanding rent or the vacant possession of the disputed lands. Although the Camerons were defeated at the Battle of Drumlui, Clan Chattan clearly did not have the infrastructure and resources to occupy and farm the land.

The Battle of Invernahavon in 1370 or 1386 resulted in another mauling of the Camerons, but the near annihilation of the Davidsons, major damage to the leadership of Lachlan, Laird of Macintosh, and a victory of doubtful honour to the Macphersons. The post battle discussions between the Macintoshes, Macphersons and the few surviving Davidsons must have been particularly bitter.

The ongoing feuds within the Chattan Confederation, and between them and the Camerons, became so destabilising to life, trade and development in the Highlands that King Robert III of Scotland (see right) set up a commission of conciliation in 1396. When that process failed, he had the Battle of North Inch staged in the hope that the military elites in the warring clans would be neutralised. While the detail is also available in a previous chapter, the need to resort to ‘trial by combat’ pointed to the absence of alternative problem solving capacities in the participating clans and at national level. Instead, the Confederation’s leaders attempted to reconcile militancy with the need for peace, and to mediate the Macpherson’s propensity to take independent and violent action, by developing ‘bonds of mutual support’ as the Confederation continued its expansion.



Clan Macpherson fight against the Chattan Confederation

The Chattan Confederation's first bond may have been created in 1397 after the Battle of North Inch, but it only lasted 14 years until 1411 when the Macphersons decided to take a different stand in national politics than the rest of Chattan Confederation. The 14 years were marked by continued expansion by the Confederation by sword, marriage and shifting affiliations (Allison, 2007, pp. 42-47).

Examples follow. The Perth armourer Gow (Gaelic for Smith), who fought with the Macphersons or Chattans at North Inch, established Clan Gow or Smith. Shaw Macintosh was rewarded by his father for his leadership at the Battle of Inch with the lands of Rothiemurchus, where he founded his own Clan Shaw. In 1400, a branch of the McLeans had come north from Lochbuie on Mull to serve as Constables of Urquhart Castle. They settled in Dochgarroch and joined the Chattan Confederation when their chief married Margaret, Malcolm's daughter. The Clarks joined about the same time. In 1409, Malcolm the 10th Chief of Macintosh married Mora McDonald of Clanranald. Her kinsmen formed Clan MacAndrew, Clan Gillanders and Clan Macqueen.

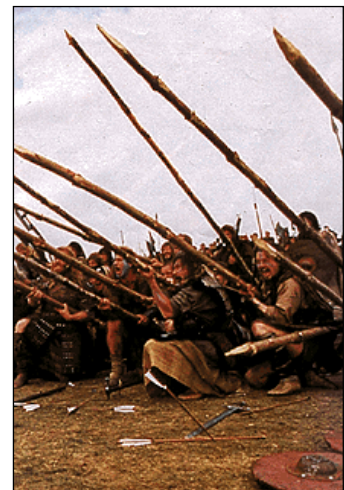
However, on 24 July 1411, for reasons that are not clear, but at huge risk, Clan Macpherson fought under Alexander Stewart, Earl of Mar, in the Battle of Harlow (A. G. Macpherson, 1985, p. 15). They took the side of the Royal Stewarts although King James I of Scotland (see right) was absent. Some historians note that the battle was between Gaelic-speaking Gaels from the Western Isles and English-speaking Gaels from Aberdeenshire and Moray but this does not explain the political affiliations on the day.

Whatever, the Earl of Mar, on behalf of the Duke of Albany, Regent of Scotland, had assembled several thousand in haste to defend Aberdeen. They were mostly local armoured gentry on horseback (see right) with spearmen organised in close-packed schiltrons (see below right), including the Macphersons. The rest of the Chattan Confederation fought under the leadership of the Macintoshes for Donald of Islay, Lord of the Isles. Donald brought near to 10,000 unruly clansmen to back his claim to the Earldom of Ross, promising them plunder in Aberdeen.

At the end of the bloody day, Mar had lost about 600 men and the Lord of the Isles about 900. Tactically it was a draw. However, when the Lord of the Isles withdrew at night, first to Ross and then to the Western Isles, he gave Mar a strategic victory. The Duke of Albany followed up by capturing Dingwall Castle, and in 1412, forced MacDonald to surrender his claim on Ross, to become a vassal of the Scottish crown and to give up hostages against his future good behaviour.

The Earl of Mar then ruled Badenoch and Moray, no doubt to the distinct advantage of the Macphersons, but far less so to the rest of the Chattan Confederation. The Confederation was clearly in abeyance.

In 1429, Alexander, son of Donald, Lord of the Isles, returned and burned Inverness and besieged the castle. However, when confronted by the larger Royalist army of King James I of Scotland, he fled to Lochaber. There he was deserted by Clan Chattan/Clan Macintosh and Clan Cameron, due to 'split allegiances', and forced to surrender to Mar at the Battle of Lochaber (Jaques, 2007, p. 593). For some reason these 'split allegiances' led to the Palm Sunday Massacre in 1430. The chiefly family of the McMillans, adherents of the Camerons, were trapped and burned alive in a church by Clan Chattan, with one survivor, Alexander mac Lachlan, who fled to Knapdale. The Macphersons were probably not involved in this appalling massacre but later bore the cost of guilt by association.



In 1431, Donald Balloch MacDonald, cousin to the Lord of the Isles, defeated Royalist forces led by the Earls of Mar and Caithness at the Battle of Inverlochy near Fort William. Over 1,000 men died, including Donald *Bronnach* (the portly) of Letterfindlay, son of Gilles McEwan Macpherson, and six of his seven sons. Balloch also ravaged the lands of Clan Cameron and Old Clan Chattan of Lochaber for deserting his Lord of the Isles.

King James I responded by leading an army into the Highlands and Donald Balloch's forces fragmented. Nevertheless, the seventh surviving son of Donald *Bronnach*, John Macpherson, was so concerned about the vengeful MacDonalds that he first shifted his people from Rimore to Rothiemurchus. His Macphersons lived there for three generations before finally settling in Invereshie in Badenoch. John's movements of the *Sliochd Chill-losa* completed the migration of the Macphersons from Lochaber to Badenoch.

Clan Macpherson and the Chattan Confederation Consolidate Independent Positions

By 1442, the Chattan Confederation, under Malcolm Macintosh's leadership, had regained the land in Nairn lost to the Comyns by Angus Og Macintosh, husband of Eva, including the lands of Meikle Geddes, Rait Castle and Inverness Castle. The opportunity came when Alexander Comyn hanged a number of Macintosh men for cattle rustling. Malcolm then killed some of Comyn's followers in the Castle of Nairn.

The Comyns then invaded in force. The Macintoshes retreated to their island on Loch Moy (see right, marked with an obelisk). When the Comyns attempted to dam the outlet, and drown the Macintoshes, a Macintosh swam in the night with an axe to demolish the dam. This drowned the Comyns stupidly camped below the dam, along with the Macintosh hero.

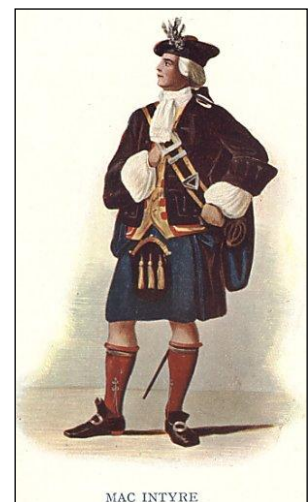


The Comyns then invited the Macintoshes to a reconciliation feast at Rait Castle in 1442 (see right). However, Comyn's daughter told her lover, a Macintosh, of a plot to kill the guests when a bull's head was carried in. When the signal was given, the forewarned Macintoshes slaughtered the Comyns, but not before their chief had cut his daughter's hands off with his claymore as she tried to escape. She died and is reputed to still haunt the ruins of Rait Castle.



The independent consolidation of the Chattan Confederation and Clan Macpherson continued, as ever marked by shifting political alliances, tactical marriages and violence. For example, in 1496, surviving MacThomases and the MacGillchynichs, the Badenoch McIntyres (see right from McIan, 1983, p. 117), sought the protection of the Confederation from the Macphersons. They had good reason to do so.

By 1450, Duncan the Parson's family had consolidated their position in Badenoch at the expense of the MacGillchynichs and the McNivens (A. G. Macpherson, 1985, p. 18). Duncan's eldest son, Donald *Mór* Macpherson, married the daughter of the chief of the MacGillchynichs who lived at Clunie, and therefore inherited and incorporated the chief's clansmen and property on his death. When Donald *Mór* of Clunie's daughter was sent to collect Macpherson cattle that had strayed across the River Spey, she was returned by the MacNivens with 'her petticoats cut off' [raped?] and the bull's tongue removed. Retaliation was swiftly launched by night on all MacNiven townships, led by Alasdair *Goint Mac Iain Mhic Eoghain* (Alexander the Bewitched), the ancestor of the Pitmean Macphersons. The 18 MacNiven men that survived this



massacre were hidden by their women in the Cave of Raitts, until discovered by Alasdair's trickery. They were 'held for few days' [tortured?] and then executed. Their women, children and lands were incorporated into Clan Macpherson.

This was the last blood feud that the Macphersons participated in, although their colonisation campaign continued unabated. In brief (A. G. Macpherson, 1985, p. 19) (illustration from McLan, 1983, p. 163)

From 1450 to 1600, under the leadership of the Macphersons of Clunie, son succeeding father for five generations: Donald *Mór*, Donald *Dall*, Donald *Og*, Ewan, and Andrew, the Clan Macpherson emerged as a new aristocracy of the soil, in the southern parts of the Shire and Sherriffdom of Inverness. By 1600 they had acquired the *duthchas*, or right of ancient possession, to all but a few of the sixty daughlands in Badenoch, and to lands in Strathdearn, Strathnairn, and the Castlelands of Inverness. Their grazings encompassed all the upper drainage basins of the Spey, the Findhorn, and the Nairn, and marched with Strathspey, Stratherrick, the Braes of Lochaber and Rannoch, and the Forests of Athole and Mar. They held the lands from the Earls of Moray and Huntly and the Lairds of Mackintosh and Grant, first as tenants, later as possessors of wadset [mortgage] rights and feu charters [the right to use land in perpetuity for a fixed annual payment], until by 1700 large parts of Badenoch had been alienated to them by the feudal superiors, The feu charter to Clunie, one of the last estates to be alienated, was acquired in 1680.



Whether the disintegration of the Chattan Confederation should be traced from the Battle of Harlow in 1411 or from the Split Allegiances of 1429, it is clear that the Macphersons sought and achieved political independence from the Chattan Confederation.

Skene provided an interesting summary of the general outcome by the late 1400s (1890, p. 315):

The Clan Chattan in later times consisted of sixteen septs, who followed MacIntosh as captain of the clan, but did not recognize him as one of the race, and regarded MacPherson of Cluny, head of the sept called Clan Vuireach as the male representative of the founder of the clan. The first of the MacIntoshes who appears with the title of Captain of Clan Chattan is Duncan Macintosh, the son of Malcolm, in 1400 and in 1466, and he was probably placed by the Lord of the Isles over that part of the clan who adhered to him. Eight of the septs forming the late Clan Chattan may be put aside as having been affiliated to the clan subsequently to the year 1429, as well as the family of MacIntosh, descended from Malcolm. The remainder represent the clan as it existed before that date. It consisted of an older sept of Macintoshes, who possessed lands in Badenoch, the principal of which was Rothiemurchus, and appears to have claimed those of Glenlui and Locharkaig in Lochaber. The eight septs who then formed the Clan Chattan proper were the Clan Vuirich or MacPhersons, and Clan Day or Davidsons, who were called the old Clan Chattan, and six stranger septs, who took protection from the clan. These were Clan Vic Ghillevrays or MacGillivrays, the Clan Vean or MacBeans, the Clan Vic Govies, the Clan Tarrel, the Clan Cheandry, and the Sliochd Gowchruinn or Smiths. The Clan Vic Govies, however, were a branch of the Clan Cameron, and the Sliochd Gowchruinn were believed to be descendants of the person who supplied the place of the missing member of the clan at the combat on the North Inch of Perth, and who was said to have been a smith.

Recognition of Clan Macpherson's Independence of the Chattan Confederation

By the early 1500s, Clan Macpherson was accepted as being well distanced from the Chattan Confederation led by the Macintoshes. This recognition extended to national levels.

To illustrate, in early June 1528, the 16 year old James V of Scotland (see right, in later years) escaped from the custody of Archibald Douglas, 6th Earl of Angus, his mother's second husband who had been acting as Regent of Scotland. James raised support in Stirling, declared his majority and invested Angus in Tantallon Castle.

He then turned his attention to the continuing turbulence in the Highlands. On the advice of the Earl of Moray he sanctioned "the extermination of Clan Chattan" (Arnold-Baker, 2001, p. 730) although not including Clan Macpherson.

The reasons for the distinction were complex. Lauchlan, the 14th Chief of the Macintosh, had been murdered in the Findhorn in 1524 or 1526 and his infant son had been taken into the care of his uncle, the Earl of Moray. Another uncle of the boy, Hector Mackintosh, had raised Clan Chattan and razed the Earl's town of Dyke and lands in Moray. According to Allison (2007, p. 44), the Earl of Moray confessed his role to the King at the last minute, who then suspended his extermination directive and calm was gradually restored.

There was more to it than that. Another and deeper cause was the feuding and treachery within the MacIntoshes themselves over the leadership of Clan Chattan (Roberts, 1999, pp. 35-36), behaviours that no doubt alienated the Macphersons. Farquhar Macintosh had been imprisoned in 1495 by James IV for supporting the rebellion by Alexander MacDonald of Lochalsh in 1491. He was released in 1514 when James IV died at Flodden, but died a year later. Farquhar's cousin William then succeeded but was murdered within a year by his second cousin, who was soon murdered in revenge.

William's son Lauchlan then led Clan Chattan until 1524 or 1526 until he too was murdered when hunting at Findhorn near Inverness. Lauchlan's three year old son William was taken into care by James Stewart, Earl of Moray, himself an illegitimate son of James IV and the feudal superior of Clan Chattan. Farquhar's natural brother, Hector, then took command of Clan Chattan during William's minority. He was angered when the Earl of Moray gave Clan Ogilvie charge of William's upbringing and lands that had once belonged to Clan Chattan. Hector invaded these lands in Moray and killed 24 Ogilvie 'gentlemen' (see right from McIan, 1983, p. 181). There is no indication that Macphersons were involved in this invasion, to their clear advantage.

At this point, in 1528, King James V intervened and gave the Earl of Moray a commission to kill the men of Clan Chattan and transport their priests, women and children to Shetland and Norway.

This threat deterred Hector until 1531 when he once again invaded the Earl of Moray's lands and laid siege to Darnaway Castle. A brilliant surprise counter attack resulted in 300 of his men being captured and executed.

Hector escaped but must have resumed his attacks because George Gordon, 4th Earl of Huntly, was given a second 'Commission on Fire and Blood against Clan Chattan' in 1534. Hector eventually surrendered and was given a royal pardon, assassinated, and then succeeded as Captain of Clan Chattan by William when he came of age in 1540.

The critical point is that Clan Macpherson apparently kept well away from these machinations and were not subject to these Commissions.



The viciousness continued and provided even greater reason for the continued demise of the Chattan Confederation. James Stewart, Earl of Moray, died in 1544. In 1546 William Macintosh acted as deputy to George Gordon, who was now Lieutenant of the North, and assisted in the capture, trial and execution of Ewan Cameron of Locheil and Ranald MacDonald of Keppoch. These Highland chiefs had supported the rebellion mounted by John Moydertach, Chief of Clan Ranald, and the rebellion led by Donald Dubh.

In 1548, George Gordon was granted the lands and earldom of Moray and became feudal superior of William Mackintosh, captain of Clan Chattan. The following year, however, William was charged with plotting against the Earl of Moray's life, tried and convicted by same George Gordon (see right, 1566), and executed and buried in secret. The Macphersons were no doubt pleased to have no part in these events.

The execution of William MacIntosh, however, had the intended effect; the compliance of most Highland chiefs, including the Macphersons, with the imposition of central government authority. This process gathered pace in the 1550s and culminated in the Scottish Reformation of 1560 that effectively ended the Middle Ages in Scotland. The centre of authority shifted forever from the Clan Chief, Court and Kirk to the Government and its agencies.



Since the coherence of the Chattan Confederation depended primarily on clan chiefs pooling their interests and authority, the basis of its existence was finally gone.

Sir Aeneas Macpherson's (1902, p. xxxi) commentary 450 years after these events revealed an inherited and prejudiced perspective that revealed how Clan Macpherson had come to feel about the quality of MacIntosh leadership of Clan Chattan (original emphasis):

He was captain of the Clan Chattan in its forays, and diplomacies. He bore the brunt of its illdoings, and profited by its success. The Chartulary of Aberdeen bears witness to the ravaging of Deeside 1382 as far down as Birse by Farquhard Macyntoshy. The counties of Kincardine, Aberdeen, Banff, and Elgin knew well the prowess of Clan Chattan, and its captain was always Mackintosh. The clansmen got a bad name as *caterans*, and no doubt their evil deeds under the Mackintoshes deserved punishment; but nothing so atrocious as that appointed in the fearful *mandate of James V* ordering (*on 10th November 1528*) the earl of Moray and the sheriffs of the bordering counties to leave '*na creatur levand of that clann except preists, wemen, and barnis,*' and '*because it were inhumanite to put hands in the blude of wemen and barnis,*' the earl was to drive them to the sea-coast that they might be transported to the shores of the opposite continent. '*Slaughter, burning, drowning, and other ways,*' were the methods of destruction imposed. The *tribus Pharsaneorum* – the Macphersons of Badenoch – were untouched in all this slaughter. It was Mackintosh only, and his belongings, that was looked upon as Clan Chattan by the author of this commission of the fire and sword, and those who carried it out limited their operations to that family and following.

Conclusion

It is one thing to blame individuals for the decisions they made. It is another to appreciate the historical circumstances in which they found themselves and why they made the decisions they did in the belief that what they did was right.

Looking back, it seems clear that Clan Macpherson acquired their lands in Badenoch by progressively integrating with the descendents of the Highland Picts and then violently displacing Clan Comyn's control of the lands from about 1215. Their colonisation of Badenoch was completed by about 1550 through managing political alliances, marriages, violence and treachery.

Clan Macpherson emerged from the Old Clan Chattan, was a founding member of the Chattan Confederation and yet regularly disputed Clan Macintosh's leadership on the principles of primogeniture. The Clan gradually achieved

political independence from the Confederation, avoiding many of the internal feuds that marked Macintosh leadership and their tragic consequences regionally, although not anticipating the impact of national and international politics.

In the next chapter I will continue to trace Clan Macpherson's path through Scottish history, beginning with the impact of the Reformation from the 1550s until the late 1700s when the Battle of Culloden and the Highland Clearances finally destroyed the clan system in Scotland, scattering our forebears first to Banff and Portsoy, then to all parts of the world.

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