Badenoch 1215 – 1665 AD

The Politics of Clan Chattan and the emergence of Clan Macpherson

Reynold Macpherson, 19 January 2011

The Battle of the Clans, oil on canvas by an unknown artist of The Scottish School, 19th century

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Reynold Macpherson[1]

Introduction

This chapter attempts to answer four questions. What happened when Clan Chattan migrated from Lochaber on the west coast of Scotland into the Badenoch Highlands? Why did a clan with ecclesiastical origins become one of the most warlike confederations of clans in Scotland? Why did the Chattan Confederation's power wax and wane between 1215 and 1665? How did Clan Macpherson emerge from Clan Chattan?

Clan Chattan

Clan Chattan was established in the 1200s in Lochaber (see right). While dates vary, most oral traditions agree that the founder of Clan Chattan was Gillichattan Mohr, the Baillie of Ardchattan Priory. He was probably appointed in 1215 by Lord Duncan McDougall of Argyll to establish and manage the priory that was formally opened in 1230 (see below right, some of the ruins and the McDougal chiefs' gravestones). I will come back to the political implications of this appointment below. The priory lands are on the northern banks of the tidal Loch Etive in south Lochaber on the west coast of Scotland, shielded from the Irish Sea by the Isle of Mull and a short sea trip away from Ireland.
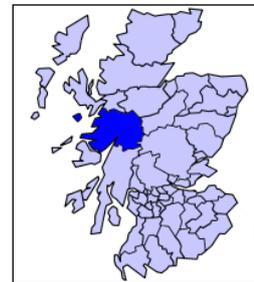

   Oral traditions in Clan Chattan (2010) have it that Gillichattan Mohr's family expanded and become known as Clan Chattan. Gillichattan Mohr was the 1st Captain of Clan Chattan. He was succeeded by his son Diarmid (2nd Captain) and then by his grandson Gillicattan (3rd Captain).

   The founder then had two great grandsons Diarmid (who seems to have died without issue) and Muirach (the parson of Kingussie who became the 4th Captain of Clan Chattan and grandfather of the three branches of Clan Mhurich (or Macphersons, sons of the parson). The 5th Captain was Gillichattan, a son of Muirach. The 6th Captain was Dougal (short sighted) or Gilpatric, a grandson of Muirach. Dougal's sole child, Eva, married Angus Mackintosh of Torcastle in 1291, the 6th chief of Clan Macintosh, who thereby became the 7th Captain of Clan Chattan. Muirach the parson also had a second son, Ewan Ban (the fair) who founded the Clan Macpherson, as well as having three other sons (David, Neill and Ferquhard).

   Eva's right to bequeath the leadership through marriage was disputed by the Macphersons for centuries who argued that the leadership of Clan Chattan should have reverted to Ewan Ban and his descendents or his three brothers. Eva and Angus' marriage blended the leadership of Old Clan Chattan and Clan Macintosh and gave the Chattan Confederation its greatest strengths (royal patronage, size and land) and its greatest weakness (deep internal divisions). Rather than arbitrate various claims asserted since, this chapter will try and take the common ground paved with facts from the Chattan Confederation (2010).

   In addition, I will argue that the reactionary military culture of the Confederation and member clans was due to a combination of two processes over centuries; inter-culturalism (where Gael immigrants blended with the fierce prior inhabitants of Badenoch, the Highland Picts) and bitter intra-clan and inter-clan rivalries over leadership and scarce resources (tillable land in the Highlands and cattle).

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[1] References are used sparingly with extensive use made of Wikipedia.

Local Consequences of Migration from Lochaber

As Clan Chattan thinned out in Lochaber it loosened its control of the district, allowing the Camerons to settle yet failing to negotiate their inevitable claim to ownership based on occupation. This led to the longest and bloodiest feud in Highland history. It ran for 360 years, despite the intervention of Scotland's King Robert III (see right), and was not finally settled until 1665 when the protagonists began to develop the tools of negotiation and reconciliation.

The migration into Badenoch was accelerated by an allocation of lands by King Robert the Bruce to the Macintoshes leading Clan Chattan and signaled a successful realignment of the Confederation's external alliances. On the other hand, this external success did relatively little to resolve the tensions between quasi-independent member clans, like Clan Macpherson and Clan Davidson. Most of the clans of the Confederation were located in remote Highland valleys and were well distanced from, and thus largely indifferent to, the affairs of kings and countries, to their eventual destruction at the Battle of Culloden in 1746.

To begin, a recent and useful interpretation of Clan Chattan's history follows (Electric Scotland, 2010):

> Clan Chattan was not a clan in the true sense of the word, but an exceptionally powerful Highland confederation, some of those members adhered to the alliance for convenience, others through a genuine blood bond. The name derived from Gillichattan Mor, "the Great servant of St. Catan" of the ancient Culdee Church, who lived on the Island of Bute. By the 12th century, the descendants of the saint's family and his followers had spread to Glenloy and Loch Arkaig in Lochaber. The direct line ended in the 7th Generation with Eva, an only child who married Angus, 6th Chief of Clan Mackintosh in 1291. He accordingly assumed the title of 7th Captain of Clan Chattan. During the war of independence he supported Bruce, probably because his enemies, the Comyns were in the Balliol camp. As a reward in 1319 he received a grant of the Comyns' forfeited lands of Benchar in Badenoch. From this time dates the emergence of the great Clan Chattan confederation - "The Haul Kin of Clann Chattan" which included 17 tribes. A grandson of the 7th Captain led 30 Clan Chattan men in the famous battle against the Camerons on the North Inch of Perth in 1396. For the next 500 years, the clan had a turbulent history remaining a powerful and influential force in the Highlands, holding lands that extended from Inverness to Laggan in the Upper Spey Valley. Obviously a tribal community of this magnitude was a source of apprehension both to the Lord of the Isles and to the Kings of Scotland. Once the Macdonald's island power had been broken, records show machinations for "crying doon the Clan Chattan" which was eventually rendered powerless by fermenting internal dissemination and not by oppression.

Another way of looking at the same events is to consider the incremental processes of migration and developing a 'loose-tight' confederation that spread across remote Highland glens. It was 'loose' in the sense of incorporating geographically separate and largely autonomous clans for different reasons and specific events. It was occasionally 'tight' in pursuit of common goals, such as when commonly threatened or offended. The phases of federation are evident in Table 1:

Table 1: The principal branches of Clan Chattan (Allison, 2007, p. 47)

Old Clan Chattan	Macintosh and related	For Mutual Support	Now Extinct
MacPherson	Macintosh	MacGillivary	Tarrill
Davidson	Shaw	MacBean	Clan Dhu
MacPhail	MacLean	Gow	Sliosh MacAonas
	MacAndrew	Clark	Gorries
	Macqueen	MacIntyre	
	MacThomas		
	Farquharson		

Allison's interpretation has the Old Clan Chattan group as three related networks of extended families that developed in Lochaber prior to Eva's marriage to Angus Mackintosh in 1291 and them initiating the migration to Badenoch. There are no surviving written records prior to 1291 that can settle the matter definitively. Those written since were also constructed at a time of great turbulence in Scottish history and when authors were understandably partisan in one sense or another.

National Dimensions of the Migration from Lochaber

The first phase of the Scottish Wars of Independence was from 1296 to 1305 (Traquair, 1998). When Scotland was left without a successor to Alexander III, King Edward I of England was invited to arbitrate. He then insisted that his choice be accepted, by invading in 1297, but undermined the standing of the hapless King John Balliol (see right, with broken crown and scepter and blank arms). William Wallace and Andrew Murray organised guerilla campaigns against Edward. King John abdicated.

THE ARMS OF THE BALLIOVN

The second phase of the Wars of Independence started in 1306 when Robert the Bruce (see left) killed his main rival for the Scottish crown and Balliol supporter, John Comyn of Badenoch. Their argument in front of the high altar of Greyfriars in Dumfries turned nasty. Robert the Bruce was installed as King Robert I six weeks later.

He then set about removing Balliol's supporters in Scotland from their castles, lands and positions of power. He replaced them with his own men. He then called them out in 1314 to destroy the English Army at the Battle of Bannockburn. And in 1319, he awarded Comyn's forfeited lands in Badenoch to the Macintoshes and Clan Chattan for their support.

It was a time of intense nationalism, given expression in the Declaration of Arbroath sent to the Pope (though largely ignored) in 1320;

> For so long as a hundred of us remain alive, we will never in any way be bowed beneath the yoke of English domination; for it is not for glory, riches or honour that we fight, but for freedom alone, that which no man of worth yields up, save with his life.

The problem with this brief summary is that gives the impression that Clan Chattan developed on the West Coast on empty land, migrated inland to another empty land, and then developed into a powerful Highland confederation at the behest of a grateful King Robert the Bruce. The politics were much more complicated.

The Problem with the McDougals

As Robert the Bruce rose to power, the Old Clan Chattan found that it was too close to the McDougals, allies of the Comyns. When threatened by the McDonalds, who were allies of Robert the Bruce, Clan Chattan distanced themselves from the McDougals by moving into the Highlands and accepting leadership from the Macintoshes who were long close to the new King. The evidence lies in the role that Ardchattan Priory played in the lead up to the Battle of Bannockburn in 1314.

To go back to the 1100s, the part-Viking part-Scot Lord Somerled had established the powerful Clan McDougal in Argyll, centred on the impregnable Dunstaffnage Castle (see right). In the 1200s the McDougals commissioned Ardchattan Priory and buried their chiefs there. When Ghillichattan Mohr

was employed to extend the Priory from about 1215 and manage it as Baillie from 1230, he was not to know that his descendents would have to find alternative sponsors to the Clan McDougal a century later.

The McDougals were cousins to the Comyns. When Robert the Bruce stabbed John Comyn he became an enemy of the McDougals. However, when the McDougals set an ambush to kill King Robert on the slopes of Ben Cruachan at the Pass of Brander above Loch Awe, they were themselves ambushed by James 'Black Douglas' and his men who had climbed even higher above the McDougals without being spotted.

The surviving McDougals retreated to the Dunstaffnage Castle. Their leader John Bacach took refuge in England and the Lord of Argyle surrendered; bringing King Robert's 1307-08 campaign against the Scottish allies of the Comyns to a successful end (see right, a poignant portrayal of the McDougals (McIan, 1983, p. 109)).

King Robert then celebrated with a 'Parliament' at Ardchattan Priory in 1309 to extend his dominance of Argyll and the West of Scotland. Robert spoke his mother's Gaelic and refreshed his alliances with the Gaelic-speaking clans of the west who all wanted rid of the English. He later granted the lands of 'Durror and Glenco' to his friend and ally, the grandson of Somerled, Angus Og, 5th Chief of the Macdonalds of the Isles (see below from McIan, 1983, p. 101)).

In 1314, when King Robert destroyed the Comyn's Inverlochy Castle on the outskirts of Fort William, he gave the lands to the MacDonalds and the Campbells. These clans later strongly supported King Robert at the Battle of Bannockburn.

It was during this period, sometime after 1291, that Angus Og McDonald so threatened Angus Macintosh and his wife Eva, that they abandoned Torcastle as the seat of Clan Chattan and withdrew north east to the relative safety of Rothiemurchus, Badenoch. This migration enabled Clan Chattan to distance themselves from their now politically dangerous link to Clan McDougal, realign with Clan Macintosh, and 'rebrand' Clan Chattan as supporters of King Robert.

These migration and rebranding strategies worked. The Comyns' lands in Badenoch were reallocated to the Macintoshes and the wider Chattan Confederation, who now enjoyed royal patronage by association. Clan Macpherson exploited this political patronage by occupying Badenoch with fire and sword.
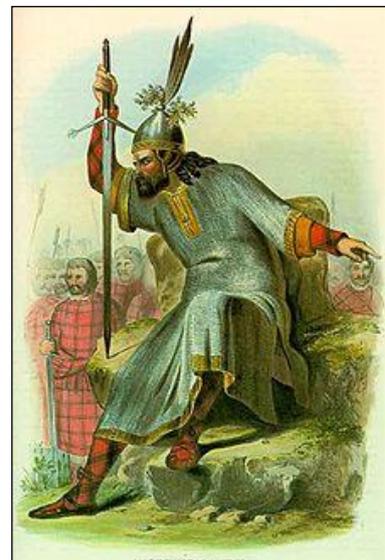
From Ecclesiastic Management to Militant Confederacy

One reason for the change in Clan Chattan's organizational philosophy over centuries is that from Ghillichattan Mohr through to his great grandson, Muirach the Parson in Kingussie, they were managers of Church assets and thus temporal rather than as spiritual leaders. They were not bound by the rules for priests, especially celibacy which denied property rights to descendents. Land rights acquired by purchase and marriage over generations could be defended with vigour.

Another is that when the first Gael Catholic members of Clan Chattan migrated to Glenloy and Loch Arkaig in Lochaber, and later when Muirach the Parson moved to Badenoch, they did not travel as a coherent military force or threaten other's interests. They came in small groups and integrated with the warlike prior inhabitants; the Highland Picts rebadged as McDougals or Comyns. The general context of inter-culturalism intended to integrate Pictish and Gaelic cultures into a united Kingdom of Alba' was well advanced (Moffat, 2005), long supported by Irish missionaries interested in a Catholic peace and saving souls.

This context in the Highlands changed dramatically in the early 1300s with the military expeditions of groups from Clan Chattan commissioned by King Robert the Bruce that were intended to destroy the Comyn's power base in Badenoch. It destabilized the prior order. The new order was contested by those displaced. Land acquired by fire and sword had to be retained the same way. As shown in Table 1 above, the Clan Chattan

changed from being a loose confederation of three largely autonomous clans into a ten-clan confederation that dominated the Highlands with its military might.

The Waxing and Waning of Clan Chattan's Power

The economic power of Clan Chattan depended primarily on its capacity to hold land suitable for raising black cattle. Its military power derived from its capacity to put clansmen in the field to retain and add to its stock of land and cattle. Its power as a confederation waxed and waned according to its leaders' capacity to unite its constituent clans, organize them to achieve economic success and project their combined military power.

Military disasters put the bonds of confederation under extreme duress. For example, when Angus and Eva made an enemy of the fierce Angus Og McDonald, they judiciously moved out of Torcastle and withdrew north east to the forested highlands of Rothiemurchus. Hence, the Camerons later claimed that the Arkaig and Glen Loy lands in Lochaber had been abandoned, and, under right of occupation, they now owned the lands and its castle.

This triggered a vicious 360-year feud with the Clan Chattan that weakened all involved. Three major confrontations occurred between Clan Chattan and Clan Cameron, in addition to many murderous ambushes, cattle raids and skirmishes.

The Battle of Drumlui, 1330 or 1337

William MacKintosh, son of Angus, 6th Chief of Clan MacKintosh, demanded the return of the disputed lands that had long been occupied by the Camerons. The clans met at Drumlui (see right) to settle the matter by sword. Although the Camerons under the leadership of Donald Alin Mhic Evin were defeated on the day, the two clans continued to attack each other at every opportunity. The second major confrontation came about forty years later.

The Battle of Invernahaven,1370 or 1386

About 400 Camerons were returning up the Spey valley from a successful cattle raid on the area around Kingussie, in reply, they claimed, for an earlier cattle raid into their area (in lieu of rent, claimed the Chattans). They were heading southwest until overtaken at Invernahavon by over 400 of Chattan Confederation, led by Lachlan Macintosh, comprising Mackintoshs, Davidsons and their neighbors and close relatives, Macphersons.

There was then an internal dispute in Clan Chattan over whether the Davidsons or the Macphersons had the seniority to take the right wing. When Lachlan gave the honour to the Davidsons, the Macphersons withdrew across the River Trium in disgust, and sat and watched the ensuing battle (from the near bank, see right). The Camerons now had superior numbers, along with the services of Charles MacGilony who both led them into battle and proved decisive with his skill as an archer.

The Camerons defeated the Macintoshes and the Davidsons, the latter suffering particularly heavy losses. During the night, however, the Macphersons decided to attack the Camerons at dawn, slaughtering many, including Charles MacGilony at a place now called Charles' Valley. The surviving Camerons fled up the Truim valley towards Drumochter and returned home without their booty.

The Mackintoshes later claimed that a bard from their clan, pretending to be from Clan Cameron, had gone to the Macpherson camp site during the night and accused them of being cowards, triggering their furious

reengagement the next morning. Whatever the truth of the *volte-face* by the Macphersons, the ongoing internal relations in Clan Chattan were thereafter almost as bad as those externally with Clan Cameron, and together, extremely disruptive to peace, economic development and trade in the Highlands, until 1665. In the interim, the net effect of the violence was to weaken the capacity of all clans involved. An attempted circuit breaker was devised by King Robert III of Scotland.

The Battle of the North Inch or the Battle of the Clans, September 1396

There are two versions of the combatants involved (Gunn, 2010). It may have been a continuation of the Invernahaven dispute between the Macphersons and the Davidsons, over future line of battle precedence against Clan Cameron, or it may have been a continuation of the broader feud between the Chattan Confederation and Clan Cameron. More historians apparently now favor the former set of protagonists, that is, Clan Macpherson versus Clan Davidson (Battle of the North Inch, 2009), neighbors and kin in Badenoch.

Whatever the version, the common facts are that King Robert III (born about 1337, reigned 1390–1406, see right with Queen Annabella) despaired of the feud and the disruption it was causing. He commissioned David Lindsay, 1st Earl of Crawford and Dunbar, to negotiate peace between the two clans; "who being numerous, bold, and barbarous, mutually plundered and murdered each other."

When the Lindsay Commission failed the two clan chiefs reportedly asked for trial by combat, with the monarch to award honours to the victors and a pardon to the defeated. Each clan was to select 30 men and meet on what is now the North Inch Park in Perth on the bank of the River Tay. It appears that King Robert III approved of trial by combat in the hope that it would eliminate or disable the most militant warriors of both clans, break the continual cycle of provocation and retaliation, usher in a period of comparative peace in the Highlands and, in time, lead to his kingdom having a monopoly on the legitimate use of force.

On a Monday in late September, 1396, the two teams and their supporters marched through the streets of Perth to the sound of their bagpipes, armed to the teeth with bows and arrows, swords, knives, axes and targes (small round shields). An area on the western bank of the River Tay, in front of the Gilded Arbour summerhouse of the Dominican Monastery, had been marked off with barriers to keep spectators off the battlefield and to the sides of the grandstand constructed for the King and his court. The River Tay formed a fourth natural boundary.

The two sides formed up only to discover that the Macphersons were one man short. They refused to fight with less than 30. No one in the Davidsons would agree to stand down to even up the numbers.

A mercenary broke the impasse, to the immense relief of the blood thirsty crowd. Henry Smith, also known as Harry, Hal o' the Wynd, Gow-Chrom or Crooked Smith, was a local harness-maker and armourer (see sketch right from Scott, 1890). He 'volunteered' to join the Macphersons for half a French crown of gold, worth seven shillings and sixpence in 1764, as well as full board for life if he survived. He was described as being "small in stature, bandy-legged, but fierce."

Accounts of the resulting battle vary. One version notes that, at the signal from King Robert, Henry Smith got his arrow away first, instantly killing a Davidson leader. After a shower of arrows from both sides, with more deaths and injuries, both sides charged and all out savagery followed, as portrayed on the front cover of this chapter.

Having killed his man with an arrow, Henry reputedly held back from further action. When asked why by the leader of the Macphersons he reputedly replied "I have fulfilled my bargain and earned my wages." It was then hinted that he was on a *per person* rate, and the freshly inspired Smith leapt back into action, dealt with several more Davidsons; in some accounts making the difference.

The battle itself was also described by Sir Walter Scott in his novel *The Fair Maid of Perth (Or St. Valentine's Day)* (1890, pp. 483-497). He assumed that the battle was between Clan Chattan and 'Clan Quhele' (Clan Kay, a sept of the Davidsons?). Since his book is long out of print, and available free on the Internet, an extended excerpt follows, with the imaginative heroics deleted to focus on description:

Both parties were disposed by the respective chiefs in three lines, each containing ten men. They were arranged with such intervals between each individual as offered him scope to wield his sword, the blade of which was five feet long, not including the handle [see right]. The second and third lines were to come up as reserves, in case the first experienced disaster. On the right of the array of Clan Quhele, the chief, Eachin MacIan [foster-son of Torquil, ex-clan leader], placed himself in the second line betwixt two of his foster-brothers. Four of them occupied the right of the first line, whilst the father and two others protected the rear of the beloved chieftain. Torquil, in particular, kept close behind, for the purpose of covering him. Thus Eachin stood in the centre of nine of the strongest men of his band, having four especial defenders in front, one on each hand, and three in his rear.

The line of the Clan Chattan was arranged in precisely the same order, only that the chief occupied the centre of the middle rank, instead of being on the extreme right ...

When the clans were thus drawn up opposed to each other, they intimated their feudal animosity and their eagerness to engage by a wild scream, which, uttered by the Clan Quhele, was answered and echoed back by the Clan Chattan, the whole at the same time shaking their swords and menacing each other, as if they meant to conquer the imagination of their opponents ere they mingled in the actual strife ...

The trumpets of the King sounded a charge, the bagpipes blew up their screaming and maddening notes, and the combatants, starting forward in regular order, and increasing their pace till they came to a smart run, met together in the centre of the ground, as a furious land torrent encounters an advancing tide.

For an instant or two the front lines, hewing at each other with their long swords, seemed engaged in a succession of single combats; but the second and third ranks soon came up on. either side, actuated alike by the eagerness of hatred arid the thirst of honour, pressed through the intervals, and rendered the scene a tumultuous chaos, over which the huge swords rose and sunk, some still glittering, others streaming with blood, appearing, from the wild rapidity with which they were swayed, rather to be put in motion by some complicated machinery than to be wielded by human hands. Some of the combatants, too much crowded together to use those long weapons, had already betaken themselves to their poniards [short stabbing swords], and endeavoured to get within the sword-sweep of those opposed to them. In the mean time, blood flowed fast, and the groans of those who fell began to mingle with the cries of those who fought; for, according to the manner of the Highlanders at all times, they could hardly be said to shout, but to yell. Those of the spectators whose eyes were best accustomed to such scenes of blood and confusion could nevertheless discover no advantage yet acquired by either party. The conflict swayed, indeed, at different intervals forwards or backwards, but it was only in momentary superiority, which the party who acquired it almost instantly lost by a corresponding exertion on the other side. The wild notes of the pipers were still heard above the tumult, and stimulated to farther exertions the fury of the combatants.

At once, however, and as if by mutual agreement, the instruments sounded a retreat; it was expressed in wailing notes, which seemed to imply a dirge for the fallen. The two parties disengaged themselves from each other, to take breath for a few minutes. The eyes of the spectators greedily surveyed the shattered array of the combatants as they drew off from the contest, but found it still impossible to decide which had sustained the greater loss. It seemed as if the Clan Chattan had lost rather fewer men than their antagonists; but in compensation, the bloody plaids and shirts of their party (for several on both sides had thrown their mantles away) showed more wounded men than the Clan Quhele. About twenty of both sides lay on the field dead or dying and arms and legs lopped off, heads cleft to the chine, slashes deep through the shoulder into the breast, showed at once the fury of the combat, the ghastly character of the weapons used, and the fatal strength of the arms which wielded them. The chief of the Clan Chattan had behaved himself with the most determined courage, and was slightly wounded. Eachin also had fought with spirit, surrounded by his body-guard. His sword was bloody, his bearing bold and warlike; and he smiled when old Torquil, folding him in his arms, loaded him with praises and with blessings ...

The two chiefs, after allowing their followers to breathe for the space of about ten minutes, again drew up in their files, diminished by nearly one-third of their original number. They now chose their ground nearer to the river than that on which they had formerly encountered, which was encumbered with the wounded and the slain. Some of the former were observed, from time to time, to raise themselves to gain a glimpse of the field, and sink back, most of them to die from the effusion of blood which poured from the terrific gashes inflicted by the claymore …

The wild pibroch again sounded the onset; but the two parties approached each other more slowly than at first, as men who knew and respected each other's valour ...

But the necessity of keeping their most distinguished soldiers around the person of their chief [in Clan Quhele] told to disadvantage on the general event of the combat; and so few were now the number who remained fighting, that it was easy to see that the Clan Chattan had fifteen of their number left, though most of them wounded, and that of the Clan Quhele only about ten remained, of whom there were four of the chief's body-guard, including Torquil himself …

They fought and struggled on, however, and as their strength decayed, their fury seemed to increase …

The Clan Chattan were then observed to be twelve in number, but two or three were scarce able to stand without leaning on their swords. Five were left of the Clan Quhele; Torquil and his youngest son were of the number, both slightly wounded. Eachin alone had, from the vigilance used to intercept all blows leveled against his person, escaped without injury. The rage of both parties had sunk, through exhaustion, into sullen desperation. They walked staggering, as if in their sleep, through the carcasses of the slain, and gazed on them, as if again to animate their hatred towards their surviving enemies by viewing the friends they had lost.

The multitude soon after beheld the survivors of the desperate conflict drawing together to renew the exterminating feud on the banks of the river, as the spot least slippery with blood, and less encumbered with the bodies of the slain …

The pipers on both sides blew their charge, and the combatants again mingled in battle, not indeed with the same strength, but with unabated inveteracy. They were joined by those whose duty it was to have remained neuter, but who now found themselves unable to do so [the two standard bearers and the two pipers] …

Eachin … [still untouched] … plunged into the stream of the Tay. A roar of contumely pursued him as he swam across the river, although, perhaps, not a dozen of those who joined in it would have behaved otherwise in the like circumstances …

With difficulty King Robert was withdrawn from the field, the tears running down his aged cheeks and white beard, as he conjured all around him, nobles and priests, that care should be taken for the bodies and souls of the few wounded survivors, and honourable burial rendered to the slain. The priests who were present answered zealously for both services, and redeemed their pledge faithfully and piously …

Thus ended this celebrated conflict of the North Inch of Perth. Of sixty-four brave men (the minstrels and standard bearers included) who strode manfully to the fatal field, seven alone survived, who were conveyed from thence in litters, in a case little different from the dead and dying around them, and mingled with them in the sad procession which conveyed them from the scene of their strife. Eachin alone had left it void of wounds and void of honour.

It remains but to say, that not a man of the Clan Quhele survived the bloody combat except the fugitive chief; and the consequence of the defeat was the dissolution of their confederacy. The clans of which it consisted are now only matter of conjecture to the antiquary, for, after this eventful contest, they never assembled under the same banner. The Clan Chattan, on the other hand, continued to increase and flourish; and the best families of the Northern Highlands boast their descent from the race of the Cat-a-Mountain.

Most accounts agree that Henry Smith was paid his gold and adopted into Clan Chattan, and, as the progenitor of the Gow and Smith branches of the Clan Macpherson, honoured in perpetuity.

There was another legend born that day, the first miracle recorded in Clan Macpherson. A Black Chanter (see right) is on display today in the Clan Macpherson Museum in Newtonmore. When the Davidsons were initially doing well, an over excited Macpherson piper
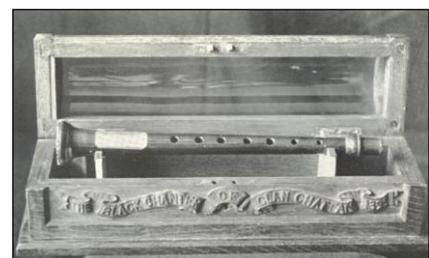
accidentally disconnected and dropped his chanter. Someone stood on it and it snapped, useless. He claimed that a black chanter then floated down from the sky. And it was his playing of this magical chanter, he said, that turned the tide of the battle.

Did the trial by combat achieve the King's objective? It may well have calmed matters internally for a while within Clan Chattan, if the protagonists were the Davidsons and the Macphersons.

On the other hand, the feud between the Clan Chattan and Clan Cameron rumbled on viciously until 1665 when another battle was narrowly avoided at Arkaig (2009) (see right, where a bridge today spans the ford).

The Stand-off at the Fords of Arkaig

About 1500 members of Chattan Confederation, led by Lachlan Mackintosh, confronted about 1200 members of Clan Cameron, once again over the disputed lands around Loch Arkaig and Glen Loy. Ewen Cameron of Lochiel brought 300 bowmen to the confrontation, plus 900 men armed with guns, broadswords and targes.

After a few days of marching up and down the river banks and aggressive posturing about the ford, the clansmen gradually cooled and realized that the three options were a continuing military stalemate, an honourable peace, or a debilitating loss of life in both clans.

Given the intransigence of the older clan leaders, negotiations started between seconds. Eventually Ewen Cameron and his co-leaders agreed to purchase the long alienated land from the reluctant Lachlan Mackintosh for just over 72,500 merks (a Scottish silver coin worth 13s 4d). As important, the agreement was finally sealed when the clan leaders exchanged their favorite weapons. The long-running cycle of retaliatory violence ended.

A period of uneasy peace and slow economic capacity building started in each of the clans, although 360 years of intermittent killings had left an appalling legacy. And then, 81 years later (about four generations), as I will explain in the next chapter, almost all of Clan Chattan's military capacity and most of their social and political networks were destroyed in the aftermath of the Battle of Culloden, 1746.

Summary

The Clan Chattan migrated from Lochaber to Badenoch and was significantly advantaged by the fresh external political alliances with King Robert I (the Bruce) that were gained by forming the Chattan Confederation with the McIntosh leadership (see right from McIan, 1983, p. 119).

The Confederation gradually extended its loose-tight reach across Moray and Inverness districts, sometimes by the women 'marrying out' (to gain land) and the men 'marrying in' the clan (to retain land).

By the 14th century, as Skene (1890, p. 330i) observed; "Crossing the Mounth [the Grampians] we find the Highland districts of Mar and Buchan occupied by the Clan Chattan, who likewise, with their branches and dependent septs, extended over Strathdearn, Strathnairn, and Badenoch, into the district of Lochaber". This was a major accomplishment and probably marked the high point of the Chattan Confederation.

Conclusions

While the Chattan Confederation successfully evolved from an administrative to a militant culture, it was slow to value diplomatic skills. First engaged by the McDougalls as lay managers of a priory, these Gaels resettled successfully among the Highland Picts as managers of Church communities and assets. They rose as Gaelic communicators with earls and kings.

As the two-way process of cultural integration unfolded, the Clan developed a Pictish-style culture of hostile independence that was reflected in their heraldry and motto. Although the migration from Lochaber and integration between Gael and Pict occurred well after the power of the Pictish kingdoms had been subsumed into the Kingdom of Alba, and the centre of national power had moved south from old Pictland Kingdom of Fortrui to the Gaelicised court of the Kings of Alba, the remote Gaelic-speaking Chattan Confederation seems to have retained many Pictish values and remained engaged more in inter-tribal feuds than in the statesmanship needed for confederacy and nation building.

The founders of Clan Chattan were Gaelic administrators for the Catholic Church and probably beneficiaries of the unification process initiated by the Kings of Alba during their migration and integration with local Highland Picts. And although the Chattan Confederation grew to become one of the most powerful military networks in the Highlands, under the captaincy of the Macintoshes, and duly reaped rewards when Robert the Bruce came to power. Their social, economic, political and technological development was significantly retarded by internal and external feuds that required them to live in a constant state of war.

Like ancient Sparta, the Chattan Confederation did not consider or adapt to the changing world around them, and as a purely militaristic society, became increasingly obsolete. One result was that the Confederation played a relatively minor role in the Wars of Independence and in the development of the nation states of Alba and Scotland.

Clan Chattan remained largely unaware of international affairs, and was ill prepared to do anything other than fight or flee against hopeless odds when England colonized Scotland after the Battle of Culloden in 1746. In next chapter I will deal more fully with the disintegration of the Chattan Confederation, the growing independence of Clan Macpherson (see right from McIan, 1983, p. 163) from Clan Macintosh, and how they were both overtaken by the destruction of the Highland way of life.

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