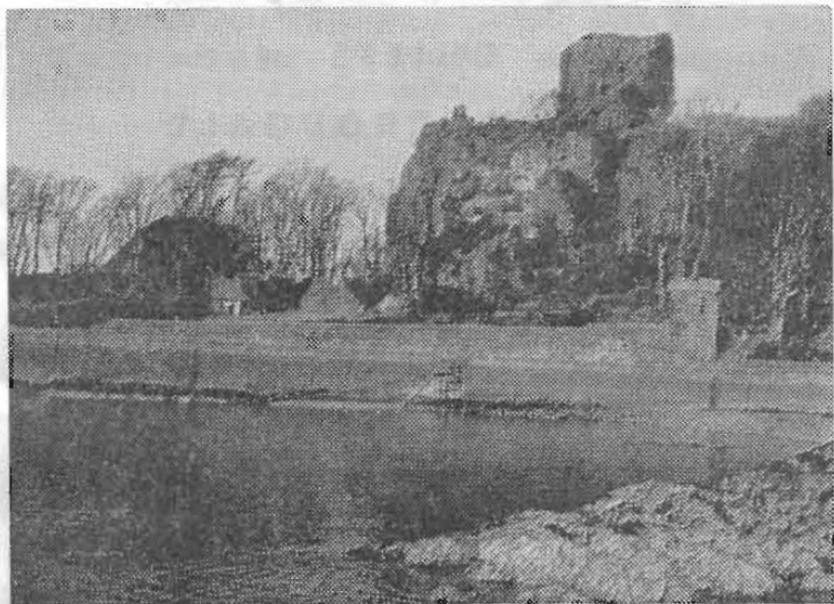


DUMFRIES CASTLE



*"The breezes of this vernal day
Come whispering through thine empty hall,
And stir, instead of tapestry,
The weed upon the wall."*

THOMAS BRYSON.

DUNOLLIE CASTLE
and the CHIEFS of the
CLAN MACDOUGALL

This short account of Dunollie and Gylen Castles, and the Chiefs of the Clan MacDougall, has been written owing to requests for information from a large number of overseas and other visitors to the Castle of Dunollie.

It has been difficult making the account short as there is much history to go through.

DUNOLLIE CASTLE, i.e., a Fortification of the Cliff or Rock, occupies a commanding position, standing on a rock, some 80 to 100 feet high, and surrounded on three sides by the sea. No one visiting Oban can fail to be struck by the beauty of its position, and its merit as a fortress, in early warfare.

The following is a description of it by Sir Walter Scott: "Nothing can be more wildly beautiful than the situation of Dunolly, the ruins are situated on a bold and precipitous promontory, about a mile from the Port of Oban . . ."

The principal part of the Castle which now remains is the keep; but fragments of other buildings overgrown with ivy show that it was once a place of importance. These fragments enclose a courtyard, entered by the east curtain wall through a five-foot wide doorway, with bar-hole. Another entrance in the north curtain wall is now blocked up.

The keep of the castle is of great strength, with walls varying from nine to eleven feet in thickness. The vaulted chamber on the ground floor has its present doorway in the west wall, but this is a modern arrangement, for the keep was probably entered by a draw ladder to the doorway nearly above the present entrance. This doorway also had a barhole inside.

Impressions of rushwork can be seen in the vaulted roof of the lower chamber. Leaving this, the upper storey is reached by a stair in the thickness of the wall within the entrance. Lighted by two windows, it mounts steeply, turning left to the now roofless upper rooms.

The first storey contains the kitchen; it has the garde-robe in the north wall, with a bed recess and the fireplace in the south wall. Above the level of the large windows can be seen the corbels for the beams of the timbered floors of the next two storeys.

The second floor, which contains the hall, was reached by another stair in the thickness of the wall, leading from the left of the draw-ladder entrance; at the level of the second floor this continues as a corkscrew stair to a turret in the south-west angle. In the second storey the windows are wider with stone seats, and the fireplace is in the north wall. In the south wall are the remains of a chamber which is vaulted.

A smaller turret appears to have finished the south-east angle, and suggestions of a battlement are still to be seen; roof slates and timber have been found in the debris.

Around the keep are remains of exterior buildings, one of which had an arch springing from it. Foundations may be traced, and windows, loopholes and recesses are to be seen in the detached masonry. Probably cattle were driven within the courtyard in troublous times, but although the drainage system can be traced, no sign has yet been found of the well.

Dunollie Castle is said to be one of the most ancient on record. The first authentic date we have is 685 A.D. in "The Annals of Ulster" where it appears that Tula Aman burned Dunollaigh. In 697 A.D. the burning of Dunollaigh is again recorded. In 700 A.D. Dunollaigh was destroyed by Selbach, seventeenth King of Dalriada, a Scot. In 713 Dunollaigh was rebuilt by Selbach, but there is no record of its being totally destroyed at a later date.

In 731 A.D. Dun-aille is mentioned as a stronghold of the Scots' Colony, and captured by Angus MacFergus, King of the Gaels, who subdued the whole country at that time. In 733 A.D., Tolorgan, son of Drostan, was taken and manacled near Dunollaigh, possibly at the Dogstone, below the Castle.

We have little information to give as to the date of the present building of Dunollie Castle. From very early days it

has belonged to the Chiefs of the Clan MacDougall who are directly descended from King Angus MacFergus, King of the Gaels, who captured Dunollie Castle in 735 A.D.

The MacDougall Chiefs became the semi-independent Princes of Argyll, some time subject to the King of Norway and some time to the King of Scotland. In the 12th and 13th centuries, Dunollie and Dunstaffnage are mentioned as the principal strongholds of the Chiefs of the Clan MacDougall.

In 1140, the mighty Somerled, King of Argyll, and first Lord of the Isles, cleared the Norsemen out of Argyll and the Isles south of the point of Ardnamurchan. Somerled married Ranghildis, daughter of the King of Man. Their eldest son, Dougall, was the first Chief of the Clan MacDougall, and was given, by his father, the Isles of Mull, Coll, Tiree and Jura, and called King of the Isles and Lord of Lorn. In 1145 Arran was added to the Islands to be ruled over by Dougall's son, Duncan, who was granted the mainland district of Lorn, with the title of de Ergadia (of Argyll) by King Alexander II of Scotland. In 1220, Dougall, his father, built a wooden house at Ard-Chattan. In 1230 Duncan MacDougall de Ergadia founded and built the Priory of Ard-Chattan on Loch Etive. He died in 1248, and his tombstone is still preserved in the Priory burial ground.

In 1249, King Alexander II of Scotland made war against Duncan's son, Sir Ewen MacDougall, 3rd Chief of the Clan, but the King died soon after arrival on the Island of Kerrera. The next Chief was Sir Alexander MacDougall de Ergadia, Lord of Lorn and 4th Chief. There is an interesting seal on a document of his dated July 7th, 1292, attached to a Norman French document in the care of the Government, understood to be kept in Westminster Hall by Westminster Abbey. Alexander married a daughter of John, the Red Comyn, and as history relates, Robert the Bruce killed John the Red Comyn in Sanctuary (a terrible offence)

on the Altar steps in the Priory Church of Dumfries. Alexander de Ergadia resented this murder of his father-in-law, and it led to bitter strife between the MacDougall Chiefs and Robert the Bruce. Much warfare followed, and sometimes the MacDougalls were successful in battle and sometimes otherwise.

In 1306, Sir John MacDougall, son of Alexander and his followers, met Robert the Bruce's army at the Battle of Dalrigh, in Perthshire. The battle went against Bruce, and when retiring hurriedly with his rearguard, he was sorely pressed by the MacDougalls. To save his life, he unfastened his brooch, leaving his plaid and brooch in the hands of the MacDougall army. This trophy of war, known as the Brooch of Lorn, after various events, still remains in the possession of the present Chief of the MacDougall Clan.

Later, Sir John went to England and in 1311 was Admiral of the Fleet to the Western Isles, to King Edward II, and captured the Isle of Man.

In 1309, Dunstaffnage Castle was captured by Robert the Bruce from Sir Alexander MacDougall de Ergadia the 4th Chief, and Dunollie Castle became the principal stronghold of the Chiefs of the Clan MacDougall.

In 1587, Gylen Castle, on the south end of the Island of Kerrera, was built by Duncan MacDougall of Dunollie. The initialled stone of himself and his wife, and date, still exists, and also an inscription over the entrance, and Elizabethian figures. The inscription runs:—"Trust in thy God and not me, thy son do well, and let them say."

This Castle stands on a commanding promontory, overlooking the Atlantic, and is also a stronghold of the Chiefs of the MacDougall Clan.

In 1645, the MacDougalls fought under Montrose in the Loyalist cause. In 1647 both Dunollie and Gylen Castles were besieged by Cromwellian troops under Colonel Robert

Montgomery, in command of a detachment from the main force.

In 1686, King James VII of Scotland, and II of England, granted Duncan MacDougall, Chief of the Clan, the greater part of the lands of Lorn which had previously been lost to the MacDougalls by confiscation, etc., to be erected into a Barony, the principal messuage of which to be Dunollie Castle.

In March, 1689, the Chief received a letter from King James VII calling upon him and his followers to help his majesty to recover his throne, promising to reimburse him fully in all expenses, and that: "we will stand to our former declaration in favour of the Protestant religion, the liberty, and property of our subjects . . ." Signed, "James R."

In 1715, John MacDougall, 22nd Chief, often call "Iain Ciar" with his followers, joined the Rising of that date, fighting under the Earl of Mar, for the Jacobite cause, in support of Prince James, the only son of King James VII of Scotland and II of England, and father of Prince Charlie. John MacDougall was away for seven years fighting and in exile for this cause, and a price was on his head. He left the care of the Castle of Dunollie to his wife, charging her to keep no less than 12 men in the Castle as a guard and to keep it as long as possible. She defended the Castle with the greatest gallantry, against all assaults, and the attacks of the Argyllshire Militia.

John MacDougall's wife was Mary MacDonald of Sleat in the Isle of Skye. She married the Chief at Dunollie Castle, he having sent 12 noted clansmen with their barges to escort his bride from Skye. Fancy sometimes takes one to the scene of the arrival of the bride with her escort, as one stands on the Castle Rock looking out to sea. Her bravery in holding the Castle made it possible for the Chief to return to his home after seven years of absence and hard-

ship. Mary, too, suffered great hardship at home. They managed to get letters to each other, many of which are preserved. In an early one sent by a faithful follower, he tells her to "haste back Donald, urge him travel night and day till he comes up with this army". In one he writes her to send his cloak and all his clothes, "if you can see any safety for them, if not, it cannot be helped".

It is interesting to note that her grand-daughter, Mary, was the last daughter of a Chief to be born in the Castle, and married McNeill of Colonsay and Oronsay, the ancestor of Miss Jane McNeill, now the Countess of Dalkeith.

The first to meet the Chief when he came home, was his little daughter, Catherine, aged seven years. He had left her in her mother's arms. When away, news reached the Chief that local enemies had captured the Castle, and that they said they were not leaving one stone upon another. The Chief, John MacDougall (often called "Iain Ciar") wrote to his wife about this report, saying if his enemies had really captured the Castle they would not pull it down as reported. The Castle was never surrendered.

However, during the troublous times, much damage was done to both Dunollie and Gylen Castles, and about 1746 the then Chief, and son of Iain Ciar, Alexander, decided to build a new house instead of repairing the Castle of Dunollie. The house was small, and has since been added to by the late Chief's grandfather, Admiral Sir John MacDougall of MacDougall, R.N.

The late Chief died in 1953. A memorial is erected to his memory on the Castle Rock by members of his Clan, his friends, and his family. He is succeeded by his eldest daughter who reverted to her maiden name, and is now Madam MacDougall of MacDougall, 30th hereditary Chief of the Clan MacDougall, wife of Leslie Grahame MacDougall, Esq., R.S.A.