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THE FLETCHERS OF AUCHALLADER

THE Fletchers of Auchallader in Glenorchy claimed to be descended from Kenneth MacAlpin, King of Scotland. Their Clan Patronymic - Mac-an-leister - was anglicised c. 1700 as Fletcher - i.e. "man of the arrow". It is recorded that Fletchers migrated from Drimfearn in the 11th century and became the original inhabitants of the upper part of Glenorchy. The tradition of the district was that Is e Clann-an-Leisder a thog a cheud smuid thug goil air usage an Urcha - "It was Clan Fletcher that first raised smoke to boil water in Orchy". This was the ancient mode of establishing ownership of hitherto unoccupied land. For centuries the Fletchers held as undisputed proprietors the lands of Auchallader and Bartavurich, ante-dating, probably, the Macgregors in Glenorchy, though Buchanan of Auchmar designated them only as a sept of Clan Macgregor. Although a strong bond of friendship existed between the two clans, it is clear that they were distinct, as is shown by the fact that when the Macgregors were driven from the glen in 1432 the Fletchers remained, and their title to their lands was recognised by Sir Duncan Campbell (ancestor of the Breadalbane Campbells), who received as a patrimony the lands of the dispossessed Macgregors.

Ancient documents attest that the Fletchers were in possession of their lands in Glenorchy in the 13th century. Their stronghold was Auchallader Castle, at the head of the glen on the north-east shore of Loch Tulla.

Gradually the Fletchers spread through the entire glen, ancient records showing them to be in possession of Kilchurn, Ballieveadau, Clachandysart, Stronnanes Knockinty, Lerigs, Inverveigh, Arreschastellan, Inveroran, and at Camuslaimh and Pubyll in Glenlyon.

The first recorded Fletcher chieftain was Angus Mac-an-leister, b. circa 1450. In 1497 some Maclarens raided Macdonald country and were driving off the cattle they had stolen when the Macdonalds caught up with them at Auchallader. The Maclarens, who were greatly outnumbered, were assisted by Stewart of Appin and the Fletchers. Combining, they defeated the Macdonalds in a sanguinary affray in which Macdonald of Keppoch and Stewart of Appin were slain. Cairns in the vicinity of Auchallader are silent witnesses to the ferocity of this affair. Out of gratitude for his help on this occasion, the Stewarts entered into a bond of alliance with Mac-an-leister, agreeing to pay the eirig or fine for any offence committed by the Fletchers. The latter, for their part, agreed to go to Appin's aid whenever called upon.

The Fletchers continued to hold their lands by coir-a-chlaidheimh - "the right of the sword" - until about 1587, when John McNychole V'Angus, the third chieftain, lost the seigniorial rights to their lands through the duplicity of Sir Duncan Campbell of Glenorchy, founder of the family of Breadalbane. The story reads like a Scottish version

of Naboth's Vineyard.

According to this tale, handed down over many generations in the glen, Sir Duncan (of Kilchurn Castle and descended from "the Black Knight of Lochawe") received a commission from King James VI to maintain the peace among the turbulent clans of Argyll and Perthshire. He was authorised for this purpose to maintain a large force of armed retainers with which he policed and, so it is said, terrorised and plundered the territories over which he had been granted authority.

Among these retainers he had a number of violent and lawless men from outwith the Highlands, who were ready for any rascality at the bidding of their unscrupulous master. By the use of this force, and by the liberal employment of methods of violence and intimidation, Sir Duncan gained possession of more and more territories from Glenorchy to Taymouth Castle.

He had long had his eyes on the Fletcher lands in Glenorchy, but he had never been able to induce Mac-an-leister to part with his rights. And so, notwithstanding his professed friendship for the chief, he concocted a plot to further his ends. Leaving Finlarig Castle late one evening with a band of armed retainers, he reached the vicinity of Auchallader Castle by daybreak. Hiding the main body of his force behind a low bill, he told off three of his Lowland bravoos to tether their horses in a field of Fletcher's growing corn. He then joined the main body of his men to await developments.

At dawn Fletcher emerged to discover the horses grazing happily in the midst of his crops. Angrily he ordered the three men to remove them forthwith. Their only response was a torrent of violent abuse. Enraged, the chieftain pulled from the ground the iron wedge to which the horses' halters were attached and hurled it at the head of one of the miscreants, killing him instantaneously.

At this point Sir Duncan appeared on the scene, ostensibly by chance, and at once expressed his surprise and consternation at the predicament in which his old friend Fletcher had become involved. His own position, he indicated, was a most distasteful one, for as the holder of a royal commission he would be reluctantly compelled to report to the King that one of his officers had been killed in the performance of his duties. Since hanging would undoubtedly be the penalty exacted for this unhappy occurrence, Fletcher would surely be well advised to go into hiding among his kinsfolk and friends in Rannoch. He, Campbell, would report that the chieftain had made good his escape before he could be apprehended. As for his lands, since these would inevitably be declared forfeit, Sir Duncan suggested that Fletcher should sign a deed of conveyance to himself and, later, when the matter had blown over be, Campbell, would reconvey the lands to their lawful owner. With the prospect of arrest and execution as the alternative, Fletcher reluctantly signed the deed and then "took to the heather". Sir Duncan lost no time in lodging the document in the Edinburgh Register House and, predictably, when requested eventually to re-convey the lands he blandly denied all knowledge of any verbal agreement to do so. With a charge of manslaughter hanging over him, Fletcher was in no position to make a public issue of the matter, and Campbell continued to

enjoy the fruits of his rascality.

Although they had thus been tricked out of their patrimony, the Fletchers still lived on at Glenorchy. In the Black Book of Taymouth, a muster roll for 1638 records "The names of the persones within the lands of Glenurquhay, John McPatrick V'Gillespik in Auchalladour, John Dow McEan V'Gillespik in Arreschast-ellan; and Archibald McEan V' Gillespik in Knockinty." There is also a reference to "The Gresse Rowmes within Glenurquhay that pays na stent, the four merk land of Auchallader possessit be John dow McGillespik."

Sir Duncan Campbell added a tower to Auchallader Castle in 1600, an addition which possibly enabled it to be held successfully against the Marquis of Montrose until 1646. Then it was burned and left to crumble into dereliction. The Fletchers then occupied the adjoining Bartavurich House. Later, Auchallader House was built and became the residence of John Campbell, a relative and factor of Breadalbane.

It was at Auchallader House that a meeting of Highland chiefs was held in July, 1691, with Breadalbane representing King William. At this gathering the Treaty of Auchallader was signed, whereby the chiefs agreed to take the oath of allegiance to the King. The exception was Macdonald of Glencoe, whose delay in signing led to the tragic events at Glencoe in the following February.

The Fletchers supported the Jacobite cause, both in 1715, when they were led by Archibald, son of the eighth chief, and again in 1745 under the leadership of Archibald's younger brother, John of Inveroran. Perhaps it was on account of their involvement in Prince Charles Edward's rising that, in 1746, many members of the clan removed themselves to Cowal, Jura and Islay. Around 1820 many of those who still lived in Glenorchy emigrated to the colonies, and from then on the number of Fletchers occupying their ancestral lands was lamentably small.

"Archibald of the Pine Wood", the ninth chief, was on friendly terms with his neighbour, the notorious Rob Roy. But this friendship did not inhibit the Macgregor from attempting to "lift" some of Gillesp's cattle. Caught by Fletcher in flagrante delicto, Rob Roy received a rough handling from the friend from whom he was trying to steal. In the ensuing fracas Fletcher successfully deprived Macgregor of his badge - a whistle - bearing it off in triumph as a trophy of victory to Dunans, where it long remained a prized possession of the Fletchers.

Too old to follow Prince Charles Edward's standard in the "Forty-five", and holding his lands as he did from the Campbell chief, Archibald was forced to provide men for service in the pro-Government forces under Argyll. Among these no doubt reluctant heroes was Duncan ban MacIntyre, later to win considerably more fame as a poet than ever he did as a warrior. Fletcher undertook to pay Duncan the sum of three hundred merks upon his returning from his military service, and in addition lent him his own claymore, a much valued family possession. But at the battle of Falkirk, with the Prince's Highlanders hot on the heels of the defeated Hanoverian forces, Duncan deemed it

wiser to discard his weapons and he and his borrowed sword parted company. On his returning to claim his promised reward, his chief demanded the return of the claymore. When he heard how it had been abandoned and lost he refused to pay, whereupon the future poet appealed to the Lord Justiciary. This was Argyll himself who, predictably, decided in favour of Duncan. As for the poet, he was later to vent his outraged feelings in a ballad entitled "The Sword of Fletcher of Auchallader".

Angus, tenth chief of Dunans, was born in 1719 and was a man of huge stature and immense strength. Known as Angus Mor, he was one day, so the story goes, helping his brother John to brand some half-wild Highland cattle when one of them, a steer, broke loose and attempted to escape. Angus succeeded in grabbing the beast by its hind leg, but after a lengthy and violent struggle the steer leaped over a wall and made off. When John jeered at his brother for allowing the animal to get the better of him, Angus Mor in grim silence held up the the beast's hoof. He died in 1807 at the age of 88.

John, eleventh chief, who was born in 1746 and married Margaret McNab of Innishewan, was also a man of great strength and was known as Iain-dubh-laidir - "Black John the Strong". He built the bridge at Dunans, assisted Macdonnell of Glengarry to raise the Glengarry Fencibles, contributed generously to the building of the Catholic Cathedral in Glasgow and died in 1832, aged 86.

Angus, twelfth chief, was born in 1805. An eminent advocate, he rose to be Comptroller-General of Inland Revenue for Scotland. He it was who built the present Dunans Castle, taking as his model Auchallader Castle, the home of his ancestors. He died in 1875, and was succeeded as chief by his brother Alexander, a Roman Catholic priest, with whom the male line of Dunans became extinct. The chieftainship passed to John Fletcher (born 1850, died in New York in 1911) of the house of Inveroran. He had a son named Colin.

Dunans passed on the death of Angus (XII) to his daughter. She eventually married a Mr. Cuddon, who thereupon took the name of Cuddon-Fletcher, as did his descendants after him. The Fletchers of Pubyll in Glenlyon were descended from Angus, fourth son of Archibald, the eighth chief. By his first wife Angus had four daughters; by his second wife, two sons. The elder of these, Archibald (how confusingly the names Angus and Archibald recur in the Fletcher genealogy!), was born in 1746, and achieved great eminence as an advocate and as a Whig politician in Edinburgh in the first three decades of the 19th century. He was known as the "Father of Burgh Reform in Scotland". Lord Brougham said of him: "Mr. Archibald Fletcher was a learned, experienced and industrious lawyer, one of the most upright men that ever adorned the profession, and a man of such stem and resolute firmness in public principle as is rarely found united with the sociable character which endeared him to private society."

Angus married Eliza Dawson of Tadcaster, a woman of outstanding beauty and character, who in Edinburgh conversed on terms of equality and friendship with many of the leading political, legal and literary figures of the day. Among their friends, she and

her husband counted the exiled Italian politician Mazzini and Joanna Baillie, the poetess. After Angus died at Auchindenny House in 1828, "the beautiful Mrs. Fletcher", as she was known, settled in Grasmere, in the English Lake District, where she bought and enlarged a property called Lancrigg. Here she became the close friend of Wordsworth and his family. Much of "The Excursion" was composed, we are told, on the terrace or along the drive at Lancrigg.

Angus and Eliza had two sons, Miles and Angus, and two daughters. The elder of these girls married Sir John Richardson, a noted Arctic explorer; the younger married Dr. Davy of Ambleside, a brother of the famous Sir Humphry. The younger son, Angus, was a friend of Charles Dickens, as well as being an amateur sculptor of some ability. It is his sculpted head of his mother, in relief, which confronts us from a pillar as we enter the south door of Grasmere church.

Miles (or Miles-Angus), the elder son, was, like his father, a distinguished advocate and was made Deputy-Keeper of the Great Seal of Scotland. He married Charlotte, daughter of General Clavering and his wife, Lady Augusta Campbell, herself daughter of the Duke of Argyll and his beautiful Duchess, born Elizabeth Gunning and formerly Duchess of Hamilton. Miles-Angus and Charlotte had three sons, of whom George, born in 1818, was in the service of the East India Company; Archibald, born in 1820, commanded a gunboat in the Crimean War; while Henry Mordaunt, born in 1822, took Holy Orders and became Rector of Grasmere. He married Charlotte, daughter of Alexander Monro, the third of a remarkable line of Professors of Anatomy in the University of Edinburgh. They lived at Lancrigg, the Rectory being let, and Henry died in 1915 at the age of 93. Two of his three sons became priests, and the elder of his two unmarried daughters, Charlotte, returned to Grasmere after her father's death and formed The Grasmere Players, a local dramatic group for whom she wrote a number of plays in the Westmorland dialect.

Like many another Highland family, the sons of Mac-an-leister have travelled far from their ancestral lands (theirs, alas no longer) in lovely Glen Orchy, and the "men of the arrow" have made their mark in diverse places and professions. In the silent glen itself only the ruins of Auchallader Castle and a tumble of ancient gravestones remain to remind the curious of the vanished clan, with a descent as proud as any in Scotland, who once, unchallenged, called these lands their own.

The Clan badge is the Pine Tree [giuthas], and the tartan an arrangement of blue, black and green, relieved by diagonal lines of red.