

Fletchers in the Black Book of Taymouth

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NB: In the original text significant modifications had been made in hand to the typewritten copy. The deleted sections are included as struckthrough text while handwritten items are bolded and italicised. Documentary references from the articles are bracketed. Modern clarifications and annotations are in square brackets. The text in the original copy is extremely dark and in places hard to discern. This is particularly true of the vowels. Unfortunately this may have resulted in some inaccurate assumptions regarding Gaelic spelling. - Gordon Fletcher, April 2003.

Chapter 1 Introductory

For many centuries Glenorchy has been the home of the Fletchers. From Loch Tulla to Loch Awe there was scarcely a dwelling to be found that had not cherished them in their youth or sheltered them in old age. But, like wheat from the hand of the sower, they have been scattered to all parts of the earth until not a single Fletcher remains to dispute with the stag the lordship of the glen.

Beginning with the migration of Gillesp-na-crannaich in the Forty-Five, the exodus of the clansmen was a long drawn out flitting that finally came to an end in the passing of the last of the Tyndrums, one hundred and fifty years later. One by one with heavy hearts they turned their footsteps southward and struck out bravely for unknown shores, buoyed with the hope of returning to pass their declining years in rest and comfort. At rare intervals a few came back and after a brief stay went their way again - the others, more fortunate, carried with them their treasured memories to a foreign grave.

The dispersal of the clan makes difficult the compilation of a history at once authoritative and complete. Some of the material here obtained has been handed down from generation to generation in individual families among whom traditions are plentiful and documents scant. Supplementing this, much has been gleaned from the more reliable sources of Parish Registers, Records of the Court of Sessions, Privy Council Records, the Commissariats of Argyle, Origines Parochiales, and the Black Book of Taymouth, etc. The latter volume is the journal kept by William Bowie, tutor in the family, in which are set down with meticulous care the transactions and events occurring in the Breadalbane household between the years 1582 and 1648. It forms a remarkable record of great historic value and throws a vivid light on life in the Highlands during the stirring years of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The manuscript is was in the charter-chest room of Taymouth castle and when Taymouth was sold the papers were removed to Craic near Dalmally about 1923 and for its publication in book form, Scotland and the world at large, is deeply indebted to the Bannatyne Club of Edinburgh. The book was "printed by the Marquis of Breadalbane for private circulation" and presented in the club.

It is a matter of regret that other documents in the Breadalbane charters Room are not available in the compilation of the present volume for the close relation that existed between the Breadalbanes and the Fletchers for centuries, necessarily, was productive of a continuous record of rentals, deeds, bonds, etc., bearing more or less on the activities of the clan.

The principal members of the clan in 1587 and in 1638 as given in The Black Book were:

Johne MacNychole V'Angus
Nychole MacEan, his sone
Johne Roy MacEan V'Angus Vekinleister
Nychole MacEan Roy, Son to said Johne
Angus MacEan Roy, Son to said Johne
Johne dow MacEan Roy, Son to said Johne
Archibald MacEan V'Nychole V'Inleister
Johne MacEan Roy V'Gillespik V'Angus
Nychole MacEan V'Nychole (appears to duplicate No. 2)
Johne MacPatrik V'Gillespik, Auchalladour
Johne MacEan Roy beg, thair
Johne dow MacEan V'Gillespik, Arrechastellan
Archibald MacEan V'Gillespik, Knockintay
John dow Mac Gillespik, "that pays na stent"
Patrik McEnduy (Mac Ean dow)

Their kinship is more clearly apparent by reference to the following genealogical tree, the numbers appearing thereon corresponding with these proceeding names on the foregoing list. The genealogy is carried down to the four sons of Archibald Fletcher of Bartavurich from whom most of the Fletchers of the present day trace descent.

Chapter II

Origin

The Fletchers were known formerly by their Gaelic patronymic Mac-an-Leisdear, variously spelled MacInLester, Macinledster, Macinleisdfeair, etc. The name is derived from mac son, leis arrow, and fear man, literally "The Son of the Man of the Arrow", and denotes the clan skilled in the use of the bow and arrow or as arrowmakers. In documents as early as 1507, the English equivalent, under variants of Flegeare, Fledger, Macphledger, etc., appears indiscriminately with the various forms in Gaelic, but, by the middle of the eighteenth century the latter had been superseded almost entirely by the anglicized Fletcher. Their badge is the pine (Giuthas), and their tartan an artistic arrangement of blue, black, and green relieved by diagonal lines of red.

In the current tradition of the country Is e Clann-an-Leisdear a thog a choud snuid thug goil air uige an Urchay, "it was the Fletcher who first raised smoke to boil water in Urchay." This, the primitive mode of acquiring property in land is significant of the original right of the Fletchers to the lands of Bartavurich and Auchallader and also gives colour to the claim advanced in certain quarters that they are the descendants of the Picts, the original inhabitants of upper Glenorchy. "The Picts for the most part were said to have been destroyed by Kenneth MacAlpin when he conquered their territory in 837, and if he did not actually exterminate them he compelled them to change their names,

language and peculiar manner so that they could no longer be distinguished from his Scottish subjects." (*Ritson, Annals of the Scots*). The Fletchers, however, belong to the Suel Alpin and in common with the MacGregors derive descent from Kenneth MacAlpin, King of Scotland; and it was probably during his reign that they came into possession of Upper Glenorchy, although the advent of the MacGregors into Lower Glenorchy did not take place until four centuries considerably later. The Dean of Lismore records the death at Glenorchy of John ?? of Glenorchy on 19th April 1390. The Macgregors are descended from Gregor, third son of Alpin, King of Scots, who flourished in 787. Skene says they "proceeded from Hugh of Glenorchy, a district which formed part of the territory in Argyle which was declared forfeited by Alexander II and was given to the chiefs in his army 1221 A.D. It is probable Glenorchy was given to the chief of the MacGregors, a vassal of the Earl of Ross." (*Skene, History of the Highlands*). A glance at the map of Glenorchy will show that Upper Glenorchy is not a natural continuance of the lower part but a distinct locality geographically. Glenorchy terminates naturally in the neighbourhood of the Bridge of Orchy and when the MacGregors were awarded the district by King Alexander their lands did not extend north of that place. When the MacGregors were driven from the glen until 1432, the MacGregors were vassals of Argyle when he handed over to Sir Colin Campbell the lands and vassals of Glenorchy. Later on the MacGregors were driven from the glen by the Campbells. In 1432, Sir Duncan Campbell received as patrimony from his father the Earl of Argyle the lands of the dispossessed clan. As [But] the Fletchers continued to remain in possession of and to hold the superiority to the lands of Auchallader and Bartavurich forming Upper Glenorchy, it is evident that at that period they were recognised by the Campbells as a separate and distinct clan and were not, as asserted later by Buchanan of Auchmar, "a sept of the MacGregors". A strong friendship, however, always existed between Fletchers and MacGregors due to their ancestry in common, and they were united as one in their bitter enmity to the Campbells, who later plundered the Fletchers as they had previously put the MacGregors to fire and sword. That the Fletcher were an independent clan is further apparent by the bond of amity that existed between them and their kinsmen the Stewarts of Appin ante-dating 1497.

Chapter III

Auchallader

The ancestral home of the Fletchers was Auchallader embracing the upper reaches of Glenorchy. The region is hemmed on the east by a mountain range comprising Ben Doran, Ben Dothaid, and Ben Auchallader, towering to a height well over thirty five hundred feet of precipitous slope. At the base of these majestic giants lies Loch Tulla, a beautiful sheet of water about three miles long and half a mile broad, from which the River Orchy issues and hastes through Glenorchy to Loch Awe, thirty odd miles away. Northward, the moor of Rannoch for many a mile broods in sullen silence - the most desolate place in Scotland.

Auchallader Castle, a square massive stronghold of granite now stands like a sentinel on watch, in the angle formed by the Moor, the Loch and the Bens. For purposes of offence or defense the site was admirably chosen for the needs of primitive warfare. It

was near enough to the highway road [The present A82] that connected the Highlands with the south to enable the clan, if so minded, to sally forth and levy toll on peaceable drovers, or on thieving raiders laden with spoil, bound north or south, and it was a safe place for retreat and a secure one in case of attack.

The date of the erection of the castle is lost in the mists of antiquity. "In 1523 the fortalice of Glenurquhay was confimed along with the lands, by Colin, Earl of Argyle, to Duncan, son and heir of Sir Colin Campbell (third laird of Breadalbane)." (*Origines Parochiales*). The Fletcher lost the superiority of their lands to the Campbells probably sometime between 1497 and 1523. A tower was added to the castle by Donacha dubh na Castellan (Black Duncan of the Castles). "He biggit the toure of Auchalladoure for the workmanship [originally - warkmanfchip] of the quhilk he gaif ane thousand markis Anno..." (*Black Book of Taymouth*, p.35). Although the date has been omitted in the entry the addition of the tower was made about 1587 as Black Duncan did not succeed his father Sir Colin until 1583.

In 1557 Colin Campbell of Glenurquhay granted a tack for nineteen years to Archibald Campbell (his natural son) of the four merk lands of old extent of Auchalladour with the keeping of the house thereof, the lands of Oanderrybeg and two thirds of Oillay, with the keeping of the forest in Bendoren, for a yearly payment of twenty stones of chees, four wedders, and eight bells of bear, of four shillings for Canderrybeg, and of forty shilling for Oillay, with the "lele trew and afald" service of himself and sub-tenants, and on condition that he should always have under him a sufficient 'servant man' in the keeping of the forest of Bendoran in the barony of Glenurchay, but remitting to him the payment of the eight bells of bear, as the lands were waster, and also the gersum of the lands extending in the rental to eight "nvcaled Ky" (new claved cows) every five years." A life rent tack of this four mark land of old extend was set by Sir Colin Campbell (eighth laird) to Duncan Campbell natural son to Sir Duncan Campbell in Glenurchie in the year 1634 with particular accompt of the charge of the sowing of that town for that year (*Black Book of Taymouth*).

About the year 1595 the castle was raided by retainers of Grant of Ballindalloch, Simon Fraser Lord Lovat, and others, resulting in "the slaughter and injury of several person in the lands of Auchallander and spoilation thereof." Among the names of the claimants for damages against the raiders are Angus McAngus V'eane (Fletcher) and John McIlliespikis (Fletcher) son (*Reg of Acts and Decrests V.156 fol 254 and V.151 fol 32*) probably Archibald.

Black Duncan in 1603 added to his holdings in Upper Glenorchy the lands of Crannaich, adjoining Bartavurich on the "gevin for the twelf mark land of Crandich (with other) to the Laird of Wemeight eight and twenty thousand markie." He had his troubles Black Duncan had other troubles too for the MacGregors had many scores to settle with him in which as a rule they got the worst of it. "Sir Duncane in Anno 1603 hade great wearis with the Clangregoris at quhat tyme they brunt to hime (with other strongholds) the hows of Achallader for the quhilkis hanous and intollerabill faitis eightene of the principallis of the Clangregour were tane to Edinburghe and there were hangit and

quartent, Alester Roy McGregor of Glenurquhay (quho wes hung on ane pyn about ane eln heichar nor the rest)." (*Black Book*, p.37).

Breadalbane had trouble from other enemies as well as from the MacGregors for "in the seiris of 1644 and 1645 the Laird of Glenorchy his whole landis and setealt betwixt the Foord of Lyon and Point of Leamoir weir burnt and destroyit by James Grahame soumtymes Earle of Montrois...yet by the providence of God his garrisone housis, to wit, Balloch, Isle of Tay, Finlarig, Auchalladour, Castelkylchorne, and Barchaltan, weir keepit from these enimies". At this period the Fletchers held as their own "the four mark land of Auchalladour that na stent possessit be John dow McGillespik (Fletcher)." (*Black Book*).

A side light is thrown on life in the Highlands at this time by reference to various entries in contemporary records. Under date of 1613 Nickie Fletcheour (Nicholl McEanroy) (*Privy Council Records Vol. 8 P. 30*) was accused of trafficking in stolen cattle and a few years later his brother [Angus] became meshed in the drag-net of the law for a similiar offence for in 1621 "the Laird persewis Johne dow M'Eanroy as executor and intromettour with the guidis and geir of his umquhile brother Angus M'Eanroy quha was ane thief. The heall assy is decernis and ordanis the defender as the executour of his umquhile brother to make payment to the Laird of 1 mairt, price thairof XXV merkis." (*Black Book*, p.370). A mairt being a cor or an ox fattened, killed and slated, for winter provision. Nickie appear again in 1621 in another entry where "It is ordaint that Robert Campbell of Glenfalloch and Archibald M'Ean officiar sall tray (i.e. enquire or ascertain) at auld men, sic as Macolme dow McGillechrist and Gillechrist M'Gillespik, and Nicoll M'Ean Roy, to whom the girssing of Auld Clasheta perteines." (*Black Book*, p.370). This inquiry probably had some connection with the Breadalbane claim to Mamlorne.

These three brothers were parties to the Bond of Manrent of 1587 made with Breadalbane, and when the Laird sued John dow in 1621 (?), Angus had presumably died a natural death leaving John dow his heir and as such responsible for the value of the stolen property. If Angus had received the usual penalty for being "ane thief" and been hung the court would have undoubtedly sequestered his estate.

The Archibald M'Ean officiar who was appointed to ascertain the rightful ownership of the grazings of Auld Clasheta is described in the Bond of Manrent as Archibald McEan V'Nychole V'Inlester. The position of officer or ground officer, was one of some importance in former days, and there are still, or were until quite recently, such officers for the different parts of the Breadalbane estate.

As an indication of the ancient authority and stern discipline of the Church, the following entry in the Parish Register Kirk Session Book of Glenorchy is worth quoting: "In the year 1654 The Synod of Argyle appointed Sir Colin Campbell the Laird of Glenurchay to stand on a Sabbath before the Congregations of Glenurchay, Kilchrenan, and Muckairn, to be rebuked for a lapse into fornication." There is an evident error in the date of the above incident, or in the name of the culprit, as Sir Colin died in 1640. The entry was made by the Rev Joseph McIntyre about 1790.

During the continual forays and attacks of those predatory days the Fletchers no doubt suffered severely but it was all part of the day's work and in the main the score generally stood fairly balanced. But there as becoming more and more apparent a tendency to settle disputes in courts of law rather than by appeal to the sword, and this feeling culminated in tendency became a reality after the assembling of the Highland Chiefs at Auchallader in 1691 and coming to terms with the Government. when they took the oaths of allegiance to King William and Queen Mary, and that with the a????t of King James.

Except for the castle ruins there is nothing in the Auchallader of today to indicate that at one time it maintained within its precincts over one hundred souls. Even as late as the year 1772 when Archibald Fletcher the advocate, visited the old home he found there eighty of his name and descent, yet on another visit fifty years later not one of his name remained (*Sketches of the Highlanders, Stewart of Garth*). A story is told of Auchallader in its hey-day which, si non e vero e ben trovato. It seems that one stormy night a poor way-farer came to the castle and knocked and knocked and knocked but no one opened the door. In dire extremity he called out "Is there no Christian here?" and the answer came "No, we are all Fletchers".

The present Auchallader consists of a single dwelling house and the grim ruins of the ancient stronghold. In the shadow of the castle lies the Burial Place of the Fletchers, a miniature "gods-acre" fifty four by thrity six feet, enclosed by a rough granite wall. A few tombstones, erected about a hundred year ago, are still standing - the others are down-and-out, water-worn and half-hidden by the encroaching sod of years.

Bartavurich House stands about a mile north of Auchallader in close proximity to Crarmaich Wood, a remnant of the ancient Caledonian forest that covered the Highlands in the days of the Roman invasion which here reached its furthest limit. South-ward on the lower shore of Loch Tulla is Inveroran another of the old homes of the Fletchers, standing alone on the highway half-way between Tyndrum and Glencoe and built about the middle of the eighteenth century. It is now an inn and a well-known resort for lovers of the rod and reel - the salmon fishing in the vicinity being considered among the best in Scotland. Near here, where the bridge now spans the river, Charles Dickens and his sister, while touring the Highlands with Angus Fletcher the sculptor came nearly losing their lives while attempting to cross the stream in spate. [This Angus was a descendant of the chiefly (Pubil) family b. 6/10/1799 d.1862].

The dawn of the 19th century brought with it an enormous increase in the valuation of Highland rentals, due to the advance in the price of sheep from eight to twenty and even thirty shillings a head. The yearly rents of the combined farms of Auchallader and Bartavurich which 1751 and 1765 stood at £29 had soared by 1805 to £800; Knockinty from £7 to £90; Clashgour from £10 to £350; Auch from £26 to £700 and every other farm or croft accordingly. The fishing privileges in 1765 were valued at the modest sum of £4 but probably brought a very larger sum in 1806.

A census of the inhabitants of Glenorchy in 1792 showed a total of 1143 souls of which

545 were male and 598 female. Auchallader and Bartavurich sheltered 25 male and 39 female. Knockinty 15 and 18; Clashgour 12 and ??; Auch 16 and 28; Barran 7 and 7; Brackley 16 and 20; and Inveroran 9 and 9 respectively. The Dalmally of today at that period numbered 153 male and 196 female inhabitants.

As an indication of the benefits resulting from Marshal Wade's "New Road" through the Highlands the tenants of the glen in 1780 found it to their advantage to build the Bridge of Orchy and also the other in Lower Orchy at a cost of upwards of £650 sterling, raised by subscription. The New Inn at Dalmally was erected in 1782 at a cost of £350 besides the timber contributed by Lord Breadalbane. The Manse at Dalmally was built the same year at an expense of £90 "with much extra work done by the minister".

Chapter IV

Battle of Lecando and Alliances

Among the early records of the clan is that of their share in the Battle of Lecando (leacan - dothaid or slope of Ben Dothaid). While the story derived from various quarters differs in minor details the main facts show that in the year 1468 a band of Maclarens of Balquhiddy, after a successful cattle-raid into Lochaber, were hurrying south with the spoil or creich when they were over-taken at Auchallader by the Macdonalds, under Donald MacAngus of Keppoch. The Maclarens sought safety with the Fletchers who rallied to their support. Finding themselves greatly outnumbered by the Macdonalds, the Fletcher chief sent a message to his ally, Stewart of Appin, to rally to his assistance, as Stewart was obligated to do under the terms of an ancient bond of manrent that existed between them - the two clans being of common ancestry. One of the most sanguinary clan-fights on record ensued, resulting in the defeat of the Macdonalds. Dugald chief of the Stewarts, and Donald, chief of the Macdonalds, were both slain and tradition related that Fletcher left several of his sons on the field. Numerous cairns erected over the dead still bear evidence of the severity of the battle.

In this connection it might be stated that such bonds of amity and friendship, or manrent, were not infrequent among the smaller clans who found in these alliances a means of protection against the inroads of their more powerful neighbours. The bond existing between the Stewarts and the Fletchers required the one to come to the assistance of the other when called upon and also provided, among other things, that each became bound to pay the eirig or composition for any crime committed by any member of his clan. The late Charles Stewart of Invernahyle, a cadet of the Appins, informed Duncan Campbell of Stronich, Glenlyon, that he had seen a copy of this bond in the Appin archives but the family papers were in a great measure lost or destroyed when the estate was sold about fifty years ago (1773) (*ms. dated 1823*). It is said that a proceeding was held on this bond within a not remote period when Stewart of Appin offered to the Earl of Argyle as Heritable Sheriff of the County, the eirig or composition for a crime committed by a Fletcher, but Argyle contended that at that late period no composition could be taken legally and the criminal was accordingly hanged. The scene of the execution in Lower Glenorchy is still known as Tom-a-crocher or Hanging Hill.

Particulars of a similar bond of manrent entered into in 1567 between the Breadalbanes and Fletchers will be found in the chapter following. [This chapter is not attached to the original document].

Another bond or custom existed many years ago, and to some extent still exists, between the Curries and the Fletchers whereby at the funeral of a member of one clan, two members of the other may demand the right to the "first lift", that is, the right of bearing the deceased for the first part of the journey to the place of interment. This peculiar custom was the outcome of a dispute over a certain piece of land between a Currie and a Fletcher in which both combatants were mortally wounded, and was intended to prevent a rupture of, and at the same time strengthen, the friendship of long standing between the two clans. Such a demand was made and duly honoured in 1916 at the funeral services of a member of the family of Fletchers of Landale, Morvern.

[Details of manrent between the Breadalbanes and Fletchers (p.242, Black Book of Taymouth)

Bond by John V'Nychole V' Angus; Nychole M'Ean his son, Johne Roy M'Ean, V'Angus Vekinlister in Auchalladour, Nychole M'Ean Roy, Angus M'Ean Roy, Johne Dow M'Ean Roy, sons to the said Johne, Archibald M'Ean V'Nychole V'Inlister; Johne M'Ean Roy Vekillepsik V'Angus in Auchalladour and Nychole M'Ean V'Nychole to Duncane Campbell of Glenurquhay and his heirs, giving them their Calps, Colene Campbell son to the laird of Laweris, Johne Henrysone. Wa;ter Lindesay servants to the said Duncane Campbell and Patrik Dow McNab in Wester Ardnagald witnesses.
8 November 1586, Finlarg.]