

STORY OF THE CLANS

Their country was the cradle of Scotland

by ALLAN DOUGLAS

WITHIN what is now the North Knapdale parish of Kilmichael-Glassary, where MacTavishes once abounded, stood Dunadd — the stronghold believed to be the capital of ancient Dalriada.

Every schoolboy knows Dalriada as the first kingdom of the Scots. To Dalriada in Argyll in the sixth century came those emigrants from "Scotia", early name for Ireland. A footprint in stone, a cup hewn out of rock, the sculptured figure of a boar — all combine to suggest Dunadd as a ceremonial place for the inauguration of the Dalriadic kings.

And so MacTavishes can claim at least a territorial connection with the very cradle of Scottish civilisation.

The name MacTavish is generally regarded as an anglicisation of a Gaelic name, "MacThomais", which has its associations with Thomas and with the Lowland Scots name Thomas (often shortened to Tom). The fact that many Argyll MacTavishes changed their name to Thompson and Thomson adds credence to this belief.

However, "son of Thomas" usually appears as "MacThomais" in Gaelic. There is a Clan MacThomais, separate and apart from the Clan MacTavish, whose membership includes persons of the name Thomson. It was a part of the great Clan Chattan federation, and was situated principally in Glenelg, Perthshire, with MacIntosh and Farquharson connections.

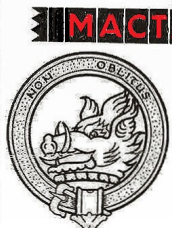
INLETS

Could it then be that MacTavish comes from the Norse word "Tabbi", meaning a long inlet or fiord of the sea? The word early found its way into Gaelic, and Tavish could describe one who lived along such an inlet. Or bay, the opposite of the "hill dwellers".

MacTavish would then come from "MacTabhaiss", meaning "son of the inlet-dweller".

Whatever the derivation of the name, the clan are said to take their descent from Tavish, second son of Sir Colin Campbell, Lord of Knapdale, who married a daughter of Sir John MacTavish, Lord of Knapdale and Thane of Glassary; and so through this ancestry MacTavishes may trace their pedigree into the realms of antiquity.

The Campbells profited greatly in 1480 when King James IV took action against the Lord of the Isles; and it was in this same



"The crest is a lion's head. The motto means 'Let us not forget'."

year that Sir Colin Campbell, first Lord of Knapdale, acquired the four merlands of Inverneil and Knapdale. He afterwards exchanged these lands for property in Perthshire, which may account for the appearance of MacTavishes in that area.

In early records, the name took such strange forms as MacCaw, MacCawis, MacCawis and MacCawis. Donald MacCawis — described as "son of Duncan" — is on record in 1480 as being a Crown tenant of a portion of the lands of Ardnamoan, which lay in Breadalbane. He occupied grounds on the south eastern shore of Loch Tay.

Killyrie, on the north side of the loch, was also let to Donald MacTavish; but by 1484 he had quit possession of both tracts. Donald's death is recorded in 1494 in the "Chronicle of

MACTAVISH

Fothergill," a record kept in Latin by the Pope's knight, Sir James MacGregor, and by the vicars of ancient Fothergill. The account says Donald died "in the Crae", which probably means he met death on Craigchallach, a 2950-foot peak in the north eastern part of what is now Killyrie Parish.

Ardnamoan—which today is a hamlet in Kenmore Parish, Perthshire, a few miles north east of Killyrie — apparently was abandoned by the MacTavishes, for we find they left the south side of Loch Tay, settling eventually in Glen Quich.

The chiefs of the Clan MacTavish did not reside in Perthshire, however, but in Dunardary, Argyll.

HISTORIAN

The Rev Somerset MacMillan, the Paisley historian and bard of Clan MacMillan, has traced the MacTavish chiefs in his "Families of Knapdale." John MacTavish, 1st of Dunardary, received a feu charter for his lands from the Earl of Argyll in 1533.

His death occurred before June 18, 1547; and his successor was his son, Dugall, 2nd of Dunardary. Dugall, however, held the lands only a short time for he died in October of the same year.

Patrick, who succeeded his father, was 3rd of Dunardary and was granted a sasine for the MacTavish lands. John, Patrick's heir, died in 1633 and was succeeded by his son, Archibald, 5th of Dunardary.

On the very day he was lawfully recognised as his father's heir, Archibald resigned the lands in favour of John, his eldest son. John married a MacNeill and had a family of four sons including Donald, his heir. Archibald, Hugh and Dugall. A Knapdale tradition claims that Dugall, a vassal of Argyll, was hanged from the battlements of Carnisary Castle in 1686; but Mr MacMillan disapproves this, for it is on record that Dugall died peacefully at Dunardary, Knapdale in 1677.

Donald, 7th chief, had his lands forfeited for his part in the Monmouth Rebellion of 1687; but the lands were later restored to him.

It was about this time that the Tay-side MacTavishes left Glen Quich and settled at Errichol, near Aberfeldy. A document signed by the first Earl of Breadalbane, of Glencoe

notoriety, was for years in the possession of one of these Errichol MacTavishes. Brown with age, it promised Breadalbane's protection to the MacTavishes as follows: "Whereas I find by old papers that the MacTavishes have had your dependence upon my predecessors . . . and they being desirous to continue in the same condition, therefore I shall continue to you as my predecessors were in owning and protecting you in all your lawful affairs. . . . Signed, Breadalbane."

There is also a tradition of one Errichol MacTavish, known as "The Little Archer," who could live a standing post with arrows side by side from the ground upwards.

Tenth chief was Lachlan MacTavish, who seems to have been in financial difficulties, selling his property to Major-General John Campbell of Barbreck. He died in 1796 in Edinburgh. His heir, Dugall, became a Writer to the Signet in 1813.

PROSPEROUS

His son, William, went to Canada with the Hudson Bay Company and the family became prosperous in that country.

Another MacTavish had less good fortune there. This was Donald, a native of Stratherrick, one of the partners of the Northwest Company of Canada. "The Inverness Courier" of September 20, 1814, gives an account of his death by drowning. He was on an expedition across North America "for the purpose of establishing a connection with China," the account explains.

His last resting place: Cape Disappointment.

While MacTavish is a distinct clan,

CLAN SEPTS

MACAWS, MACCAWIS, CAVISH, KAVISH, MACCAVISH, MACKAVISH, THOMPSON and THOMSON.

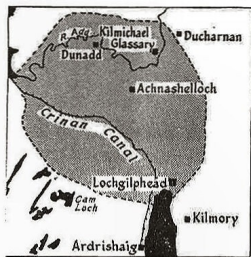


NOTE: Research has shown that some statements are inaccurate. For example, the motto means, Do Not Forget. MacTavish is older than given here.



ABOVE: The town of Lochgilphead near clan country. RIGHT: The colours of the MacTavish tartan are red, black, and azure.

the name often appears as a sept of Clan Campbell.



A map of the clan country