

SCOTTISH CLAN CONNECTION

# Newsletter

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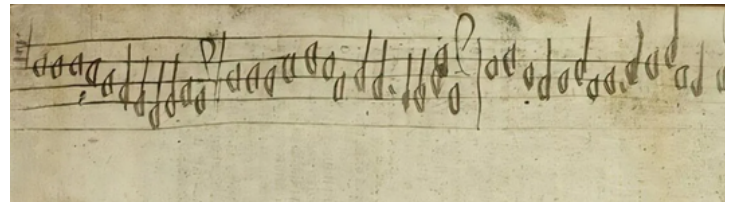
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## Ancient Scottish Hymn Resurfaces After Five Centuries

A remarkable discovery has shed new light on Scotland's musical past, linking Clan Lyon and Glamis Castle to a lost piece of sacred music. Researchers have uncovered a 55-note fragment of a polyphonic hymn within the Aberdeen Breviary, Scotland's first full-length printed book. Once housed in Glamis Castle, the Breviary contained this forgotten harmony of the Lenten hymn *Cultor Dei*, now identified as a rare pre-Reformation musical composition. Experts from Edinburgh College of Art and KU Leuven described the find as groundbreaking, offering evidence of a sophisticated sacred

music tradition in Scotland. The Breviary's presence at Glamis Castle highlights the Lyon family's historical ties to Scotland's Catholic heritage. Though now preserved in the National Library of Scotland, its discovery challenges past assumptions about Scottish liturgical music, proving it was as advanced as any in Europe.



## Preservation of Clan Maxwell's Historic Seat

Caerlaverock Castle, one of Scotland's most unique medieval strongholds, is undergoing essential conservation work to preserve its remarkable three-sided structure. Built in the 1270s, this triangular fortress, located near Dumfries, has a rich and storied history. Originally constructed by the Maxwell family, a powerful Lowland clan, the castle played a significant role in Scottish-English conflicts. The Maxwells were steadfast defenders of Scottish independence, and their castle bore witness to several sieges, including the famous assault by Edward I in 1300 and another in 1640 that led to its partial destruction. Historic Environment Scotland (HES) has initiated vital restoration efforts on the castle's staircase and northwest tower,

censuring its long-term preservation. While access to the interior is restricted during these works, visitors can still explore the scenic grounds, visitor centre, and participate in engaging activities like cyanotype photography and paper crafting.



## Correction

In our previous newsletter, January 2025, we published an article on the matriculation of the arms of Rupert Christopher Irving of Bonshaw. We would like to clarify that there are two distinct Scottish Chiefs bearing the Irving/Irvine name, both of whom have been granted arms by the Lord Lyon. The Irvines of Drum, a family created by royal appointment in 1323, are led by Alexander Irvine of Drum, 27th Baron Drum, who succeeded in 2019. The Irvings of Bonshaw, a Scottish Border Reiver clan with records dating back to the 1100s, are led by Rupert Irving of Bonshaw, 20th Clan Chief, who succeeded in 2021.

## Uncovering Clan Erskine's Mysteries Within Kellie Castle

Kellie Castle, nestled in the picturesque countryside near Pittenweem, Fife, stands as a testament to Scotland's rich and layered history. From its early days in the 12th century to its restoration in the 19th, the castle has been home to influential Scottish families, including the Oliphants and the Erskines. Today, thanks to cutting-edge 3D laser scanning technology, Kellie Castle's historic ceilings have been brought to life in breathtaking detail, offering a new dimension to heritage conservation and visitor engagement.

The first known owner of Kellie Castle was Robert of London, an illegitimate son of King William the Lion, around 1150. By 1266, the estate had passed to the Siward family before being assigned to Walter Oliphant of Aberdalgie in 1360. The Oliphants remained stewards of Kellie for 250 years, leaving their mark on the castle's structure and history.

In 1613, Sir Thomas Erskine, a trusted ally of King James VI, acquired the castle. As a reward for saving the king during the infamous Gowrie Conspiracy, Erskine was granted the title Earl of Kellie in 1619. The Erskines held Kellie Castle for generations, and it is possible that some of the ceiling designs now being restored date from their period of influence.

After falling into disrepair in the 19th century, Kellie Castle found new life when architect Robert Lorimer and his family leased and restored it in the 1870s. Today, the National Trust for Scotland manages the site, ensuring that its historical and architectural significance endures.

The National Trust for Scotland and Historic Environment Scotland (HES) have undertaken a groundbreaking project to digitally preserve Kellie Castle's intricate plaster ceilings. Using state-of-the-art 3D terrestrial laser scanning, experts have mapped the ceilings down to the millimetre. This process, which involves firing millions of laser points per second to create a digital point cloud, has allowed conservationists to document every detail of the ceilings with remarkable precision.



The oldest of these ceilings, located in the castle's library, dates back to 1617 and may be one of the earliest plaster ceilings created in Scotland. The restoration team has discovered that certain ceiling moulds used in Kellie Castle match those found in Craigievar Castle, indicating that 17th-century Scottish craftsmen likely traveled between sites, bringing their skills and motifs with them.

Beyond conservation benefits, this digital project enhances visitor experiences. The 3D scans allow guests to interact with the castle's history in new ways, with printed models and digital reconstructions deepening engagement. By creating an accurate digital archive, the project also ensures that structural changes over time can be closely monitored, preserving Kellie Castle's heritage for generations.

Given that the Erskines took control of the castle in 1613, it is tempting to speculate that some of the plasterwork now being scanned and preserved was commissioned under their tenure. The elaborate designs, featuring heraldic and symbolic motifs, may have been crafted to reflect the Erskines' status and their close ties to the Scottish crown.

The possibility that visitors today may be admiring work from the era of Thomas Erskine himself adds an extra layer of intrigue. Could some of these ceilings have once echoed with discussions of noblemen loyal to King James VI? Could they have been witness to political intrigue, alliances, and the daily life of a powerful Scottish family?

## Clan MacNab vs. Clan MacNeishes

### Famous Clan Feud

The feud between Clan Macnab and Clan MacNeish stemmed from the MacNeishes' frequent raids from their stronghold on Neish Island in Loch Earn. King James IV ordered Lord Drummond to destroy their homestead and confiscate their boat, briefly halting their raids, but they quickly resumed. Clan Macnab, residing on Loch Tay, frequently clashed with the MacNeishes, culminating in the Battle of Glenboultachan on February 3, 1522, after Findlay MacNeish killed the Macnab chief with an arrow. Seeking revenge, the Macnabs, led by the chief's widow, marched to St. Fillans. The MacNeishes gathered their forces, and the two clans fought savagely at Littleport. The Macnabs overwhelmed the MacNeishes, killing their chief, whose blood was said to stain a boulder.

Only 30 of 500 MacNeishes escaped to Neish Island. A year later, MacNeishes ambushed Macnab servants returning from Crieff, killing all but one and stealing supplies. Enraged, the Macnab chief vowed revenge. The MacNeishes, owning the only boat on Loch Earn, believed they were safe. However, the Macnabs carried a boat overland from Loch Tay, launching a surprise attack on the island. They massacred the remaining MacNeishes, sparing only one



small boy who hid under a table. This final act wiped out the MacNeish clan and ended the long-standing feud.

## Historic Clan Castles of Scotland



### Comlongon Castle Dumfriesshire, Scotland

Comlongon Castle, a 15th or early 16th-century tower house in Dumfriesshire, was the stronghold of the Murrays of Cockpool. The lands were granted in the early 14th century by Thomas Randolph, 1st Earl of Moray, to his nephew William de Moravia, establishing the



Murrays' ancestral estate. The castle replaced their earlier fortress at Cockpool, now reduced to earthworks. While traditionally attributed to Cuthbert Murray (d. 1493), a building licence granted around 1500 to his son John Murray suggests construction was completed in the early 16th century. By 1508, the structure was recorded as part of the newly established Barony of Cockpool. The Murrays remained influential, with later descendants elevated to Viscounts Stormont (1621) and Earls of Mansfield (1776), maintaining control of Comlongon until 1984. The castle, built of red sandstone, features formidable walls, mural chambers, a vaulted cellar, and intricate heraldic carvings reflecting the family's wealth. A Scottish Baronial mansion, added in 1900, housed a children's home from 1939 to 1952 before becoming a hotel. A renowned wedding venue, it fell into financial difficulties in 2019, leaving its future uncertain.



## Alexander Ranaldson MacDonell

Alexander Ranaldson MacDonell of Glengarry (1771–1828) was a Scottish clan chief, soldier, and passionate defender of Highland culture. As the 22nd Chief of Clan MacDonell, he dedicated his life to preserving traditional Highland customs, resisting the decline of the clan system, and opposing the increasing influence of modernization. He served in the British Army with the Glengarry Fencibles and later sought to establish the Glengarry Light Infantry during the Napoleonic Wars, reinforcing his belief in maintaining a strong Highland presence in Britain's forces.

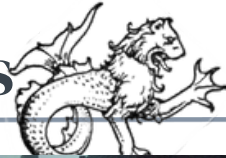
MacDonell was a staunch nationalist who revived traditional Highland dress, encouraged the use of Gaelic, and worked to uphold clan loyalty. His romanticized vision of Highland life inspired writers like Sir Walter Scott, but his arrogance and fiery temper often led to conflicts with other chiefs and government officials. His leadership style was divisive, and his resistance to change sometimes alienated his



own supporters.

One of the most infamous events of his life was a duel in 1821 with Thomas Alexander Fraser of Lovat, an episode that reinforced his reputation for being hot-tempered and combative. Despite his efforts, Highland culture continued to erode, and his death in 1828, after falling from his horse, marked the end of an era. He remains a symbol of Highland nationalism, remembered as one of the last great defenders of Scotland's Gaelic heritage.

## Scottish Clan Myths and Legends



### The Banshee of Dunollie Castle

Dunollie Castle, the ancestral home of the MacDougall clan, is said to be haunted by a Banshee, a ghostly figure whose mournful wail is believed to foretell death. According to legend, the banshee was once a young servant girl who fell deeply in love with a MacDougall heir. When their forbidden romance was discovered, she was cruelly cast aside, her heart broken beyond repair. In her despair, she is said to have thrown herself from the castle's cliffs into the sea below, her final cries lost to the crashing waves. But her spirit did not rest.

On stormy nights, when the wind howls through the ruins, her piercing wail echoes through the halls, chilling those who hear it. Many claim that her sorrowful lament is a warning—an omen of an impending death within the MacDougall family. Over the centuries, numerous MacDougall chiefs have reportedly heard her chilling cries just before tragedy struck. Some have even claimed to glimpse her spectral figure, a



pale woman in a flowing dress, standing on the castle walls, her sorrowful gaze fixed on the sea.

Visitors to Dunollie Castle have reported an unsettling presence, whispers in the wind, and the feeling of unseen eyes watching from the shadows. Whether a lingering soul of heartbreak or a harbinger of doom, the banshee's mournful song endures—a haunting reminder of a tragic love lost to time, echoing eternally through the ruins.

## The Battle of Bealach nam Broig 1452

The Battle of Bealach nam Broig was a violent and decisive clash fought in northwest Ross, with historical sources debating whether it took place in 1299 or 1452. The battle arose from tensions between the highland clans and the Earl of Ross. The MacIvers, MacAulays, and MacLeays rebelled against the Earl, prompting him to imprison their leader at Dingwall Castle. In retaliation, the clans captured the Earl's son at Balnagown and fled into the mountains. Determined to reclaim the boy, the Munros and Dingwalls, loyal to the Earl, pursued them and intercepted them at Bealach nam Broig, a rugged mountain pass near Ben Wyvis. The battle was brutal, fought with swords, axes, and shields, as both sides clashed in a desperate struggle. Old feuds between the clans only fueled the intensity of the fight. Despite their fierce resistance, the MacIvers, MacAulays, and MacLeays suffered catastrophic losses, with some sources claiming they were nearly annihilated. The Munros and Dingwalls emerged victorious, but the cost was high—historical records report the deaths of 140 Dingwalls and 11 Munros. Though the Earl's son was rescued, the battle left all involved



severely weakened, highlighting the high toll of Scottish clan warfare. Historical accounts vary regarding the exact details. Sir Robert Gordon (1813) recorded the battle as occurring in 1275, while *Conflicts of the Clans* (1780) placed it in 1299. George Mackenzie (1669) described the near-total destruction of the rebel clans. Later 19th- and 20th-century publications continued to debate the details. Some sources suggest the battle was part of ongoing conflicts involving the Lordship of the Isles, while others emphasize local rivalries within Ross.

## Scottish Clan Artifacts



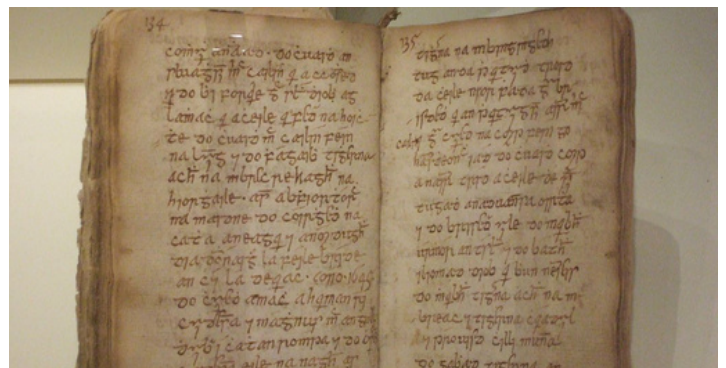
### The Red Book of Clanranald

The Books of Clanranald are two early 18th-century Gaelic manuscripts detailing the history and traditions of Clan Donald. Known as the Red Book and Black Book, they are written in Classical Gaelic and serve as valuable records of the clan's heritage. The Red Book—possibly misnamed—was primarily composed by Niall MacMhuirich, a member of the renowned bardic MacMhuirich family. It contains the clan's history, along with poetry and other literary material, some of which was later added by another hand.

The Black Book differs in that it is a more varied collection of materials, with its historical content written by Christopher Beaton, from the learned Beaton family. Beaton seems to have worked for the Earls of

Antrim, linking the book to the MacDonnells of Antrim.

Both manuscripts, dating from the late 17th and early 18th centuries, provide a vital connection to Scotland's oral traditions and Gaelic literary heritage. The Red Book is displayed at the National Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh, preserving a rich legacy of Highland history.





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## Featured Clan Crest



**CREST:** A hart's head couped Gules, attired Argent

**MOTTO:** Si je puis

**TRANSLATION:** If I can

Clan Colquhoun, originating near Loch Lomond in the 13th century, played a key role in Scottish history through military and government service. Notable events include Sir John Colquhoun's governorship of Dumbarton Castle and the 1603 battle against the MacGregors at Glen Fruin. The clan's feud with the MacGregors ended in the 18th century, and its legacy continues today under Sir Malcolm Colquhoun.



We are excited to introduce "A Clan A Day," a new podcast hosted by Colin MacDonald that delves into the history of a different Scottish clan each day. Through engaging stories of legendary battles, key figures, and enduring traditions, Colin brings Scotland's rich heritage to life. Whether you're of Scottish descent, a history enthusiast, or just love a good tale, this podcast offers something for everyone. Subscribe on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Substack, or YouTube Podcasts to join us in exploring the fascinating stories of Scotland's clans.

### About Us

Our Scottish clan newsletter is a publication dedicated to exploring the rich history and culture of the Scottish clans. As a community of proud Scots, we are passionate about preserving and sharing our heritage with the world. We are committed to celebrating the unique character and identity of each Scottish clan, highlighting their achievements, and exploring their place in Scottish history. Whether you are a member of a clan, a descendant, or simply a lover of Scottish culture, our newsletter has something for you



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