

Notes on the Origins and Pedigree of the Clan Donnachaidh / Robertson Chiefs version 4

by and © Adrian C Grant 29th April 2020 (v2: Roman numerals corrected Oct 2023)
2024 Paper updates: v3 4th December; v4 14th December

Abstract

Traditional explanations of the pedigree of the Chiefs of the Robertsons aka the Clan Donnachaidh remain a mess. Not surprisingly they took umbrage at the first version of this paper advising me

"The Clan Donnachaidh Society has been and remains extremely well served with a mass of information from quite a number of distinguished historians and researchers. "

Sadly this is not true. Although their website has since been totally overhauled, they have sustained many chronologically unfeasible claims, but and have allocated responsibility for the documentation of their origins. So this new version of the paper adds to the last by explaining

- the Ancestry of Crinan
- the true connection to the kings of the Western Isles
- the most likely location for the grafting in of the Cenel Eoghain DNA (see below)
- a sensible explanation for the coat of arms.

Introduction

This 2024 substantial update of this paper has been occasioned by

- (i) a helpful message from [Edward Kane](#), the Cenel Eoghain DNA project administrator alerting me to the Robertson Chiefs' DNA being consistent with membership of this group. [This Cenel Eoghain is one branch of the descendants of [Niall of the Nine Hostages](#) (fl 400AD). There is, of course, no allusion to such a connection in Clan Donnachaidh lore.]
- (ii) the transformation of the Clan Donnachaidh website referred to above
- (iii) just how ill served the clan has continued to be by outsiders who have failed to recognise several ridiculous claims – and are still making them up!

- The records are garbled and very far from complete (a problem shared with many clans).
- Although Clan lore correctly connects them to Crinan through the original Earls of Atholl, like so many others they have had no understanding of who Crinan was
- Although this is no longer on the site, there is a tradition that one of their chiefs, Angus, came from the kings of the Western Isles.

On the old site the clan seemed to embrace the nonsense. On the new site, the work of the principal author [James Irvine Robertson](#) is fair enough. But the result is that much is left out including any acknowledgment of lacunae in the timeline etc. So too reference to much valuable Robertson lore has been excised – and in my view babies have been thrown out with the bathwater.

So far as the line of chiefs is concerned they have relied on [a third party](#), the Red Book of Scotland, with its many anachronisms turning what should be history into tartan and shortbread pastiche. For further back we need look no further than the Wikipedia page on the [Earls of Atholl](#) to see how stultified for so long what passes for “thinking” has been. Both will be deconstructed below.

Perhaps in the light of this it should come as little surprise that [Timothy McQuaid](#) would distort matters even further in his attempt to square the circle of the ancestry of the Earls with [the genetic analysis](#) of Clan Donnachaidh clan chiefs. Very sadly McQuaid clearly did not read either my 2012 book “[Scottish Clans: Legend, Logic & Evidence](#)” nor the original (2020) version of this paper of

mine before he uploaded his own in 2023. Had he done so he could have avoided several of the *culs-de-sac* he has felt inevitably drawn down: in his effort to try to make sense of the data he makes a number of assertions and draws several conclusions which are impossible. Fortunately for both the Clan Donnachaidh and the Cenel Eoghain project all this can be resolved – and is so resolved in this paper.

As Ed Kane says “DNA doesn't lie. It may at times be difficult to understand what it is telling you, but it doesn't lie.”. Exactly so. So I am taking their analysis of the science on trust because, again, as Ed says, he has no skin in the game. And this new information does add richness to the whole Robertson story. My general analysis of the origins of the clan is wholly unaffected by this new dramatic additional data, but I take the opportunity of the rewrite also to revisit some aspects also not directly affected by the new evidence.

Unlike Ed, I do have skin the game for my maternal grandmother was a Robertson and as such I am vested in a full and as accurate as possible narrative being available.

1. Making sense of the Chiefs they do recognise

(a) Chiefly Numbers

The Robertsons are hampered from the start. The basic rule for Clan Chiefs is that the Chief is chief of a NAME - in this case name in question is Robertson (see the website of the Standing Council of Scottish Chiefs). As we shall see below it is Alexander Robertson who appears to be the first of the name and from whom the chiefly numbers should count, but even here the matter is not so simple. This matter will be better examined (below) once we have a better grasp of the chiefly line.

Despite this, it is the “Clan Donachie in Atholl” (note the spelling of the day) is amongst the clans specified in the 1587 Act of the Scottish Parliament – the first time on record when the clans have official legal recognition.

The Early Chiefly Line

At <https://donnachaidh.com/timeline> the list of the early chiefs is given as:

- | | |
|------|---|
| I | Duncan d.1355x7 |
| II | Robert de Atholia |
| III | Duncan (Crosda) de Atholia |
| IV | Robert (Riabhach) de Atholia - d.1461 |
| V | Alexander Robertson - d.1505, succeeded by his grandson |
| VI | William Robertson of Strowan - executed 1516 |
| VII | Robert Robertson of Strowan - d.1566 |
| VIII | William Robertson of Strowan - d.1588, succeeded by his brother |
| IX | Donald Robertson of Strowan |
| X | Robert Robertson of Strowan - d.c1630 |
| XI | Alexander Robertson of Strowan - d.1636 |
| XII | Alexander Robertson of Strowan - d.1688 |

Note that the numbers are the chiefly numbers.

We may start at the bottom, noting an approximate 58 year gap between the deaths at X and XII - which would be expected with the 25 year average inter-generational gap which I have found to work extremely well for Scottish gentry in this period.

We may thus reconstruct the pedigree in generational form adding putative dating and a name in italics:

I	Duncan	<i>1335 -</i>	
II	Robert	<i>1360 -</i>	
III	Duncan "Crosda"	<i>1385 -</i>	
IV	Robert "Riabhach"	<i>1410 -</i>	
V	Alexander Robertson	<i>1435 -</i>	
	<i>"Robert" Robertson</i>	<i>1460 -</i>	
VI	William Robertson	<i>1485 - 1515</i>	(executed)
VII	Robert Robertson	<i>1510 -</i>	
VIII	William Robertson	<i>1535 -</i>	
	IX	Donald Robertson	<i>1540 -</i>
	X	Robert Robertson	<i>1565 - 1630</i>
	XI	Alexander Robertson	<i>1595 - 1636</i>
	XII	Alexander Robertson	<i>1620 - 1688</i>

Immediately we can see that in generational terms there is an excessive time gap between chiefs V and VI – and the 'obvious' reason for this is that there is a missing generation. So I have interpolated one. The naming pattern clearly suggests that his name was Robert and the most likely reason for his omission is that he died before his father.

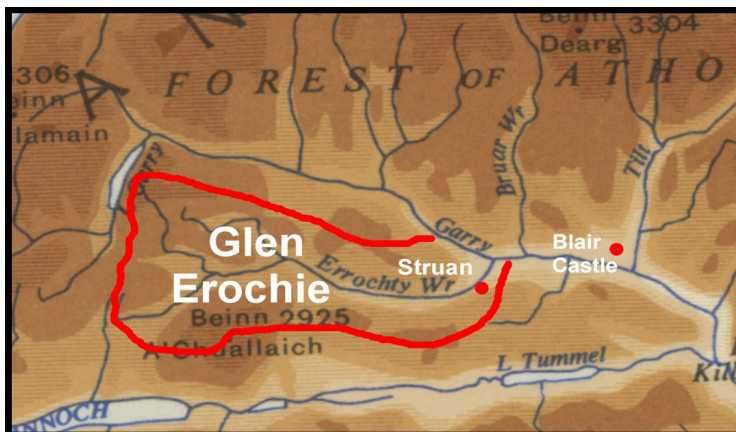
So far good, but contrary to the date assigned on the site, the Duncan at the top of the list was only born c1335 and cannot have taken part in the Battle of Bannockburn..... Panic!! So much for an overview.

Off to a bad start

We may now turn our attention to

<https://donnachaidh.com/pubd/images/66d9e61b-cadetfamilies.pdf> where we find the details upon which the list of chiefs has been drawn. The note on Conan, the progenitor of the line, says:

CONAN OF GLENEROCHIE, was a younger son of Henry, Earl of Atholl, and to whom his father assigned the lands of Glenerochie. He made a grant of the woods of these lands to the monks at Coupar Angus in around 1240x45, in which charter he is styled "Conan son of Henry, Earl of Atholl,".....



Base map: <https://maps.nls.uk/geo/explore/#zoom=11.6&lat=56.79281&lon=-4.13212&layers=10phys&b=OS1920s&o=100>

The claim above is a plain silly – frankly an insult – for these reasons

1. We can see from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Earl_of_Atholl that the line of Henry Earl of Atholl failed to the heiress Isabella. Had Conan been a “younger son” he would have become the Earl.

2. For more than 100 years any interested historian has had access to the [Atholl Chronicles](#) written in 1898 by the then Duke of Atholl. Conan is noted on page 3 – as an illegitimate son of Henry.

The irony is that at that time and, indeed, right up to the reformation the gentry were siring and giving estates to their illegitimate sons all over the place – so in the grander scheme of things this is no big deal. So the question has to be asked as to why such a lie would be persisted with? This is a prime illustration of the prissy and misty eyed tartan and shortbread nonsense clan members have had to deal with.

So much for the boast quoted at the beginning of this paper.

Origins of the (apparently now discarded) claim to descent from the Kings of the Isles

There has been a strand in Robertson lore which denies descent from the Earls of Atholl, but claim instead that their ancestor in line, Angus was from the Kings of the Isles. This is untrue, but we can see that it comes from a confusion of two separate elements.

Element 1: Henry, Earl of Atholl was the son of the previous earl, Malcolm. The author of the webpage <https://a2fister2000.tripod.com/id28.htm> explains how “Macintoshes” in Glentilt were not part of the Clan Macintosh:

The Macintoshes of Atholl are in fact Macdonalds and have no connection with the Mackintoshes of Inverness-shire. Henry, the third and last of the early Celtic Earls of Atholl, before joining the Crusade gave a Charter of Glentilt and Glenfender to Eugenius (Ewen), who is said to have been a brother of Reginald, Lord of the Isles, but was more probably a nephew..... Glentilt was a thanage so that the owner had heritable jurisdiction over all his territory. Thane is a Saxon word, and its Gaelic equivalent is Toiseach and both mean “Leader.” The Thane of Glentilt was therefore known as the Toiseach,’..... Glentilt was held by Macintosh Thanes till 1502, when the Thanage was acquired by the Earl of Atholl from Finlay Toiseach.

There are errors of detail here, but unwittingly the author has unlocked what had been a major problem in local history over some hundreds of years, so I regret that we have to go down what is in part a major digression. The good news is that it will bring hugely improved understanding.

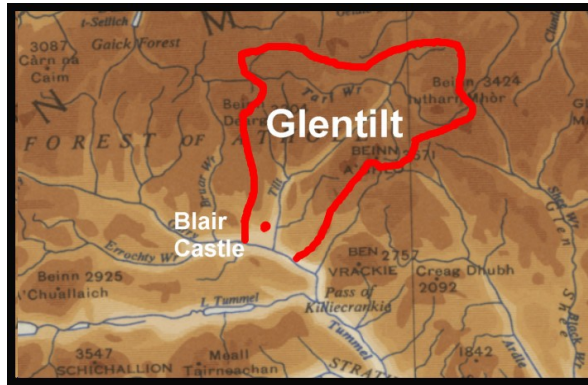
The Celtic Mormaers of Atholl and the Thanes of Glentilt.

(a) The surname Mackintosh. The Highland Mackintoshes take their name from their progenitor Shaw who was the son of the Earl of Fife. So far as the Highlanders were concerned The Earls of Fife were the rightful kings of Scotland, so Shaw was the Mac An Toiseach – the (junior) son of the (rightful) leader. (See my “Scottish Clans...” Vol II)

(b) Entry by marrying the heiress: Aethelred/Aeth, Mormaer of Moray was parachuted in. His place was cemented by marrying Gruoch, the daughter of Lulach erstwhile Mormaer of Moray and indeed King of Scots. (See *idem*). Likewise Siward Osulfsson was secured in place as Thane of Fife by marrying a close relative of the late Mormaer (see my “Fife: Genesis of the Kingdom”)

(c) Crinan: King Malcolm II parachuted Crinan (see below) in to become Mormaer of Atholl – but as he was already married to Bethoc, Malcolm's daughter, he was unable to marry a daughter of the previous line of Mormaers (including Dubdon and Duncan MacDonachadh), members of the Cenel Gabhrain put in post by Kenneth mac Alpin.

(d) Glentilt's central position: Glentilt is central to Atholl – it even includes Blair Atholl!!!



base map: <https://maps.nls.uk/geo/explore/#zoom=11.1&lat=56.86911&lon=-3.94257&layers=10phys&b=OS1920s&o=100>

Narrative Summary: When Crinan was parachuted in to be Mormaer there was no argy-bargy – so much so that many “historians” suppose that Crinan was a family member, even a dynast. But no.... the line of the original Scottish Mormaers were simply demoted to become hereditary Thanes of Glentilt. As such they will have continued managing Atholl as they had done before, but now they were answerable to Crinan rather than loosely to the king. When Crinan was murdered there was an apparent lacuna, but actually it was business as usual – the old mormaers resumed their role – until Malcolm III divided their lands in two between his brothers Donalbane and Maelmuir. The Thanes of Glentilt then resumed their subordinate role – this time to Maelmuir.

The Thanes of Glentilt were the “rightful” mormaers – the “Toiseach”s

It is normal that from time to time a male line fails to heiresses – and this is what we should presume happened here. So it will have been the Thane himself who will have arranged for Ewen “de Insulis” (of the Western Isles) to marry his daughter to carry on the line of the former mormaers, now thanes.

Link to a crusade: I do not doubt the coincidence of this marriage with a crusade, and it may well be that the permission of the mormaer will have been sought – and granted. The only chronologically feasible crusade is the [3rd Crusade](#) (which started in 1189). Earl Malcolm did not die until 1211, so it was clearly he who would have been responsible for approving the marriage. [We can be confident that Earl Henry did go on crusade because the time windows available require that he did not start having children until c1193.]

Conan's son was called Ewen. We can be confident also that Ewen was Conan's son because, as I show in my paper about the [Skenes](#), Conan also had another son, John, who became the Skenes' progenitor. We may go further and suppose with great confidence that Conan's wife was a daughter of Thane Ewen.

The same “cadets” paper says of Ewen:

EWEN OF GLENEROCHIE, styled as son of Conan when witness to a charter by his father to the Abbey of Lindores in around 1240x1245. He granted his lands of Calziebrochan to the Monks of Coupar Angus Abbey in 1282 to be held by them of Ewan and his daughters and their respective husbands as superiors. He m. Muriel, daughter of Conghal, grandson of Malise, Steward of Strathearn, and d. without male issue prior to 1284.

From this we may understand how it could be assumed, , some generations later, that it was Conan's supposed son who was a member of Somerled's immediate family.

**So this is the true basis for the claim to a descent from the line of Somerled.
It is a descent, but it is not in the male line.**

We can take this one stage further. The timescale requires Ewen to have been born c1170. This means that we should begin by taking a date around c1145 for the birth of his father. Somerled himself was born c1113, but did not marry before 1140 – rather later than the norm. We should not suppose that he behaved like a monk in the meantime. Thus my best proposition is that Ewen's father was an illegitimate son of Somerled, conceived before his marriage. In this way the soubriquet “de Insulis” precisely echoes Conan's “de Atholia”. This should serve to focus future research to establish what Ewen's father's name was.

Thus I propose that Ewen “de Insulis” was a(n illegitimate-line) grandson of Somerled

Element 2: So who was Angus?

(i) Who he was not

The entry on Ewen quoted above goes on to say:

Although his daughters were his heirs in certain parts of his lands such as those of Calziebrochan, he was ultimately succeeded in his lands of Glenerochie by the Robertsons of Struan as heirs male.

This is misleading

- (i) At this time there were no “Robertsons” nor was anyone “of Struan”
- (ii) There were daughters (plural) but only one is specified.

To complete the job we need to examine the next entry:

ANDREW DE ATHOLIA, OF GLENEROCHIE, is the first ancestor of the Clan Donnachaidh for whom there is positive proof. He is styled as father to Duncan de Atholia and grandfather to Robert de Atholia in several documents executed in the first half of the 14th century. Tradition states that he m. the daughter and heiress of Angus de Glenerochie with whom he acquired these lands although in view that **the destination of these particular lands being exclusively to the heir-male** this cannot have been so therefore a male **descent from the Earls of Atholl is proved.**

Oh dear, oh dear. Notice first the words in red here.

- (a) When I checked this phraseology with its author Gordon MacGregor he conceded that this was presumption on his part. He had no evidence.
- (b) There is a direct parallel with the MacLarens who were bloodline cadets and thanes of the Mormaers and then Earls of Strathearn (for whom see my paper on [Fortriu](#)). They had never even sought a new-fangled “charter”. They had relied on the time honoured – and honourable – “good old ways”. Unfortunately for them when the Strathearn lands were forfeit the MacLarens found themselves in a very sticky position – and sadly this dependence on honour came back to bite them.
- (c) At just this period of time the line of the original Grant chiefs failed to heiresses (and they DID have charters). The lands were divided between heiresses, the husband of the elder one adopting the surname Grant (the surname style had been adopted by the Grants relatively early – c1175). So...

- There is no evidence of a Charter restricting inheritance to the male line
- There is no evidence of any Charter at all
- There is good reason to suppose that no charter existed

Thus the words in bold are NOT proved – indeed I refute them.

And then there is the elephant in the room: it was the Countess in her own right Isabella who succeeded the Earl Henry and after Earl Patrick's death another woman inherited. When it comes to the far more important and prestigious Earldom of Atholl we know for sure that there was no such “male line” stricture!

(ii) Who he may have been

So far as the narrative is concerned, therefore, we know that Ewen had daughters who were his heiresses and we have no reason at all not to conclude that what we **really** have here is that Andrew was the son of Ewen's eldest daughter and her husband Angus – thus confirming another element of Robertson lore: Angus was an “interloper” into the line. But where did he come from?

The Cenel Eoghain DNA project suggests that there was an interloper who was a descendant of Niall of the Nine Hostages and **in this paper I suggest that Angus was he.**

Ewen was born c1215, very close in time to Patrick Earl of Atholl.

[Patrick came of age c1236 and was murdered in 1242. His father was Thomas of Galloway (d1231) who was the husband of Isabella, eldest daughter of Henry Earl of Atholl. Thus the time window for the marriage of Thomas and Isabella will have been 1213x14. Thomas was the brother of Alan Lord of Galloway (r.1199-1234) one of the most powerful figures of his era. The Lords of Galloway had close ties, especially by marriage, with the Kings of Man, the Lords and Kings of the Isles and with Irish kings.]

So we should expect Ewen's eldest daughter to have been born 1236x40 and so marriageable from about 1250x5. So we should expect Angus to have been born c1230.

So here is my favoured scenario:

When Thomas married Isabella and moved to Atholl he brought a retinue with him. Some of them will have been tantamount to a body guard, but others would have been functionaries of one sort or another. One of these 'courtiers' will have been of Royal Irish genetic stock who moved with his young family including a son who was still an infant at the time. That infant grew up in Atholl and married locally, siring a son Angus c1230x35.

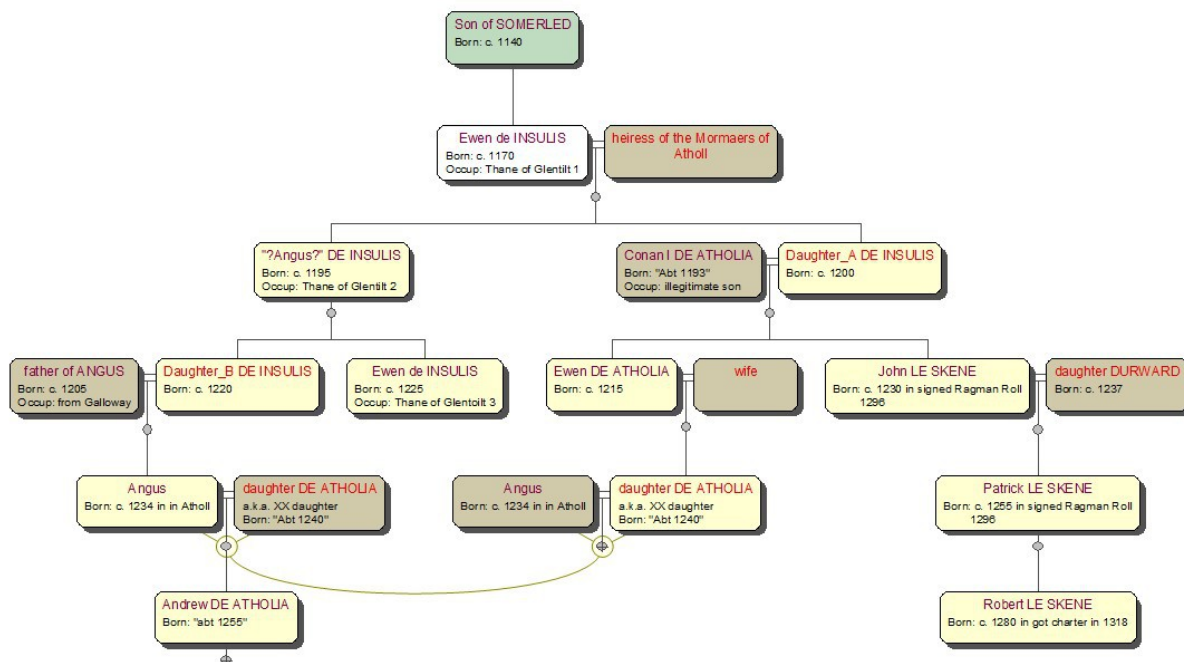
And here we should consider the name Angus. It is true that in one form or another Angus was a common name in Pictland and in Ireland – so the simple argument could be that the name tells us nothing. However we can see that the family of Glentilt took pride in their descent from Somerled. In this regard we should not overlook that Somerled had a son Angus (d 1210) who was a, if not the, major player post 1192. So it is quite likely that Ewen “de insulis” of Glentilt would have named his son, born c1195 Angus. So there is a good chance that Chief Angus was named after his maternal grandfather. This implies that Chief Angus' father married a daughter of the Thane of Glentilt, meaning that Chief Angus and his wife were second cousins. Ironically this means that Angus WAS in a sense descended from Somerled, but actually this was less so than Ewen.

At this stage I cannot say whether Angus' father saw himself “marrying up” and so gave respect to his father in law by naming his eldest son this way, or whether there may have been an older son who did not survive to inherit.

When Thomas died, so shortly thereafter, Earl Patrick was still a boy, so the court will have been needed to carry on the administration on behalf of Isabella and then Patrick. Forbhlaith (Isabella's sister) and her husband, Sir David de Hastings, will not have expected to have been involved in comital affairs – so when Patrick was murdered they too will have kept the court in place to do the day-to-day management they had suddenly been pitched into.

In summary there is a plausible basis for Angus to have been in the right place at the right time with the right DNA to be the missing piece in the proto-Robertson jigsaw.

So here is a putative family tree based round the Glentilt family



Back to the Robertsons' Chiefly line

Having now established the basis of (i) the claimed connection to the Western Isles, (ii) Angus marrying in to the line and (iii) a likely entry point for Cenel Eoghain DNA, we can now return to the Robertsons' chiefly line to sort out the chronological mess.

I could go into exhaustive detail, but two elements will serve to illustrate the point:

(a) We have Robert de Atholia born in 1307 and named after Robert the Bruce at his request because the family had sheltered him in 1306. And then we have his supposed son Duncan who was murdered in 1443 (aged rather over 100) with his son dying of wounds sustained in battle in 1459 (aged about 100). Only an idiot could try to make such a claim – because they have clearly not bothered to do some elementary sums.

(b) We have Robert born in 1307 whose younger brother Gibbon was a commander in “the Angus raid” in 1392 (aged over 80)! Aye.... that'll be right! The only word which comes to mind is fatuous. So let us go back to the data itself, adding to the detail above and try to create an intelligent timeframe to put it into.

1. Andrew father of Duncan father of Robert - this documented in the first half of the 1300s - hence all these are antecedent to the Duncan I listed above.
2. Duncan de Atholia an active adult in the period 1343x55 and heir to Ewen's lands. He is supposed to have died 1355x7
3. Robert supposedly named in honour of Robert Bruce and soon after June 1306.
4. Duncan Robertson "de Atholia" was an adult in 1428
5. Robert "Rioch" Duncansson was already an adult in 1428 and died in 1459.

We are now in a position to extrapolate backwards in time from I Duncan (with my date **b 1335**) to list:

- | | | | |
|------|-------------------------|---------------------|---|
| (a) | Conan | <i>1193 -</i> | |
| (b) | Ewen | <i>1214 -</i> | <1284 |
| (c) | Angus' wife | <i>1236 -</i> | |
| (d) | Andrew | <i>1259 -</i> | |
| (e) | Duncan | 1285 - c1357 | (Given charters 1343, 1355) |
| (f) | Robert | 1307 - | (named in honour of Robert Bruce; Charter 1362) |
| I | Duncan | <i>1335 -</i> | |
| II | Robert | <i>1360 -</i> | |
| III | Duncan "Crosda" | <i>1385 -</i> | <1443 (granted charter 1428; another with son 1438) |
| IV | Robert "Riabhach" | <i>1410 -</i> | 1459 (died of wounds) inherited Struan from uncle |
| V | Alexander Robertson | <i>1435 -</i> | (adopted surname Robertson) |
| | <i>Robert Robertson</i> | <i>1460 - dvp</i> | |
| VI | William Robertson | <i>1485 -</i> | 1515 (executed) |
| VII | Robert Robertson | <i>1510 -</i> | |
| VIII | William Robertson | <i>1535 -</i> | |
| | IX | Donald Robertson | <i>1540 -</i> |
| | X | Robert Robertson | <i>1565 -</i> 1630 |
| | XI | Alexander Robertson | <i>1595 -</i> 1636 |
| | XII | Alexander Robertson | <i>1620 -</i> 1688 |

Identifying the “name fathers”

Because the Clan lore has missed out key generations we can see that their Duncan (I) was a son of the Robert named in honour of the king: so in principle could have been the first Robertson.

However [Pat Pritchard](#) refers to

the noble Robertson Clan, who took their name from their chief, Robert, in celebration of the capture of the murderers of King James I in 1437.

On the other hand I can see a possible less salubrious reason: Alexander could have adopted the surname Robertson around 1457 because he wanted to distance himself from John Stewart, newly installed as Earl of Atholl, with whom, I suppose, he and his father did not enjoy any congeniality. I cannot choose between these mutually exclusive explanations, so I think it would be a good idea if the historians so lauded by the Clan Society would investigate the various possibilities thoroughly and hopefully be able to reach a conclusion by eliminating the impossible.

Likewise because there is an extra Duncan we do not actually know who was the “namefather” of the Clan Donnachaidh. What we do know is that many clan chiefs already had adopted the surname style by this time (eg the Grants in 1175 and the Stewarts in 1204). Note I cannot recolour other chiefly names because I cannot choose between them!

Claim to Seniority

Sadly for the Robertsons they have been misled by a relation. On their [history page](#) they quote former Historiographer Royal for Scotland William F Skene as saying:

'The Robertsons of Struan are unquestionably the oldest family in Scotland, being the sole remaining branch of that Royal House of Atholl which occupied the throne of Scotland during the 11th and 12th centuries',

Unfortunately this is not true. At least these lines would take precedence:

1. The family of Wemyss bear the Lion Rampant undifferenced. They descend though the Earls of Fife from Aethelred a son of Malcolm III rather than (as in the case of the Robertsons) illegitimately from Malcolm's youngest brother Maelmuire.
2. The Macintoshes and their cadets are similarly descended
3. So too the Strathbogie Earls of Atholl were “senior” to the Robertsons.
4. The Dukes of Fife are similarly descended, albeit through a female line.

We can go further because given that this claim on behalf of the Robertsons is based on descent through an illegitimate son and though a female, this opens up many other clans who could make a similar – or better – claim. [Thus, for example, the mother of Sir Lawrence Grant, 3rd Chief of Grant was Mary Bisset, herself the daughter of an illegitimate daughter of King William the Lyon.]

Claim to other names

[The claim made](#) that

“Clan Chiefs are heads of very large extended families, including all of the same surname, and often, several other surnames as well.

Is simply untrue. As we have seen above, by definition a clan chief is the chief of a name.

Of course there may be people who bear different surnames who are members of the clan. This can be arranged formally by a Bond of Manrent whereby the Chief accepts the person into the clan, usually on the basis of specified stipulations. The families of such people then become “septs” of the clan. But that does not make the chief the head of that name.

One of the names claimed by the Robertsons is “Reid” and there is no doubt that there are many Reids who are indeed a sept of the Clan Donachie, but that is NOT the same as claiming that all Reids are *ipso facto* part of the Clan Donachie. Thus:

- there was a Gilbert le Rede in Aberdeen in 1259 – before there was a Clan Donachie, never mind a Robertson and
- the writ of the Robertson chiefs did not extend to Aberdeen! In fact
- it is quite likely that the name Reid was established in several different places independently of each other. This is well illustrated by three entirely separate Reid blazons which can be seen [here1](#), [here2](#) and [here3](#).

The so-called Celtic Earls of Atholl.

The Clan Donnachaidh has nothing to say about Conan's ancestors beyond his being a son of Henry Earl of Atholl which, as we have seen, is couched in misleading terms. It is all too easy to sympathise with them here given how messed up this line is.

[Wikipedia](#) lists:

- [Crínán?](#) (died 1045)
- ?
- [Máel Muire](#), Earl of Atholl (fl. 1130s), son of Duncan I of Scotland
- [Matad Earl of Atholl](#) (died 1151x1161), son of Máel Muire of Scotland
- [Máel Coluim, Earl of Atholl](#) (died 1190s), son of Matad, Earl of Atholl
- [Henry, Earl of Atholl](#) (died 1211) son of Máel Coluim, Earl of Atholl

To be fair the list does not comment on Crinan's ancestry, nor that of the antecedents listed (omitted here). Which is just as well. There are several points to be made here.

1. Crinan: For those who have not read either my “Scottish Clans...” book or indeed my “Fife: Geneis of the Kingdom”, Crinan remains an enigma which various “historians” have sought to solve without the benefit of any understanding.

- He was the “Banquo” of Shakespeare's Macbeth (“Crinean” is Gaelic for “miser” – it was a nickname because he was King Malcolm II's Chancellor of the Exchequer).
- He was the Karl Hundisson of the Orkneyinga Saga, who “took power” after the death of Malcolm.
- He was the brother of Earl Siward of Northumbria. [They were the grandsons of Sigurd the Stout through his eldest son Hlodvir (nicknamed Hundi). For a very full explanation of this, see my “Scottish Clans...” book, Vol. II Book C Ch. 5 pp206-25]
- He had served as Steward of the Western Isles for his grandfather after Hundi and Siward were taken to Norway as hostages by King Olaf Tryggvasson in 995.

[Sigurd the Stout's ancestry can be traced back to Eystein Glumra, King of Trondheim in Norway (for which see “Scottish Clans.....” Vol II Book D Chapter 1).]

This is the total refutation of McQuaid's propostion referred to above.

2. Maelmuire: We know that King Duncan I was killed in 1040, so Mael Muire, the youngest of his three sons must have been born 1035x1038. To suggest that he “flourished” in the 1130s is clearly preposterous. Nevertheless we know that Maddad (variously Matad) was the son of Maelmuire. So we may recast the generations this way:

King Duncan I	b.c. 1005	killed 1040
Maelmuire (I)	b.c. 1037	
“Duncan”	b.c. 1060	
Maelmuire (II)	b.c. 1085	?died 1130s?
Maddad	b.c. 1110	died 1151x61 (in his 40s)
Malcolm	b.c. 1135	died 1190s (c60 years old)
Henry	b.c. 1160	died 1211 (c50 years old)

So we can see that “**Matad Earl of Atholl** (died 1151x1161), son of Máel Muire of Scotland” is not true. Maddad was the son of Mormaer Maelmuire and the great grandson of Maelmuire of Scotland. The name Duncan is likely because it was normal to name your eldest son after your father and Malcolm III had done this. [Donalbane had no son, but he named his daughter Bethoc.]

[We should note that greater Atholl was subdivided, with Maelmuir getting what we would recognise as Atholl, while his uncle Donalbane was given Gowrie. In the same way Dalriata was divided with Malcolm, King Malcolm III's second son by Ingebjorg getting Lorne (including Argyll) while his younger full brother, Donald, got Kintyre. Other mormaerdoms were also divided.]

The reader may well wonder why there is such a lacuna as we have had to fill between Maelmuire's appointment c1060 and the death of Maddad nearly 100 years later. A clue is to be found in the “silly” history of the Skenes. The [Wikipedia](#) page quotes an old (ie now replaced) Skene webpage (ie the link is broken) saying

After Malcolm died, Skeen supported the claim of Donald Bane who was a rival to the succession of Edgar, King of Scotland.[4] As a result his lands were forfeited and were only restored when the Skenes joined the army of Alexander I of Scotland which marched against rebels in the north in 1118

Now in one sense this is silly because there were no Skenes as such until after 1200. However if we reinterpret the claim to refer to the Skene male line ancestor living at the time, all of a sudden the claim makes potential sense. It is highly likely that Maclmuir and/or his son “Duncan” would indeed have supported Kings Donalbane (and Edmund) against the Norman-English backed Edgar in 1097. It is also true that King Alexander I was on the throne in 1118 and it is not impossible that by that time it was “Duncan” who was the Mormaer and that he decided to switch sides. The leader of the opponents of Edgar and Alexander was Edmund's next eldest brother Aethelred aka Aeth the Mormaer of Moray (who was followed by his son Angus). So a reassessment of the realpolitik and a switch of sides may also have been occasioned by Aethelred's death (for which we do not have a date).

Maclmuire (II) is mentioned in the Book of Deer under the year 1130. This is the date of the end of the Moray Risings after which King David I was in firm control of Scotland – and there were no more mormaers of Fife or Moray (they were replaced by earls). So it is indeed likely that Malcolm was the first Earl of Atholl. [NB Do not follow the lazy thinking and assertions of so many “historians” who try to claim that “Mormaer” and “Earl” are interchangeable titles.]

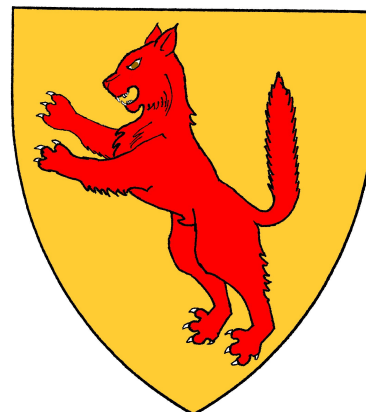
Heraldry: An ill-understood treasure trove

Heraldry enthusiasts are themselves partially responsible for many people, including historians, not taking heraldry seriously enough. Heraldry is considerably older than many of them realise. In the 1980s Beryl Platts wrote three books proposing that Heraldry originated in the Lotharingia of King Lothar II a descendant of Charlemagne. She was a pioneer who was studiously ignored for many years. But the fact is that no-one could gainsay her general proposition. But partly because she worked alone she made many small mistakes of detail – none of which interfered with her general thesis.

In my “Scottish Clans...” book (Vol II, Book D, Chapter 3) I took Platts' thesis on a stage or two further, offering a theory as to why and how it had been introduced (initially as badges of office). I showed also that King Edward the Confessor was the first person to bear a coat of Arms in England and, following on from that it was King Malcolm III who brought his undifferenced Lion Rampant back to Scotland and why he had chosen his motif. A logical extension of this is that Aethelred adopted the same coat of arms, but featuring Wild Cat rather than the Lion. When the Earl of Fife inherited the Lion Rampant as was his right and as was agreed as part of the settlement of the Moray Risings, the wild cat was relegated to the crest – which is why the Mackintoshes and most other Clan Chattan federation have the wild cat in one pose or another as their crests.



Lion Rampant undifferenced
image courtesy of the late Eddie Geoghegan



Wild Cat Salient undifferenced
base image <https://mistholme.com/dictionary/cat/>

[The Mackintosh crest is a “Cat-a -mountain” *salient* rather than *rampant*. At this stage I cannot say whether Aethelred's arms would have been Salient or Rampant. I suspect Rampant, with the Mackintoshes choosing Salient for difference, but I cannot be sure.]

Maelmuire's Coat of Arms

While it is not necessary that Maelmuir and Donalbane would have adopted a coat of arms, it is surely likely that they did, if only out of solidarity. Unfortunately Donalbane died without a son. Given Aethelred's choice, and given that the Kings of Man had quickly copied Malcolm arrogantly claiming to outrank him by choosing the Eagle Displayed as their emblem, what might Maelmuire have chosen? Amongst the “obvious” fierce wild animals which might appear were the bear, the wild boar and the wolf. So too he could have chosen the image of the War Hound. [Ron Greer advises me that in the Vatican Archives it is recorded that so impressed was one Roman Emperor by Pictish war hounds that he had at least one taken back to Rome where it took down a lion in the arena – a useful indicator of just how fierce and how powerful they were.]

Fortunately we have a very clear steer: We see the name Maddad amongst the Mormaers of Atholl – and Gaelic “Madadh” means “wolf” (albeit it can be more generic to include fox and war hound). So too Conan is a diminutive of Con and so means “little wolf” (“wolf cub” if you will). I am, therefore, left in no doubt that Maelmuire had adopted the Wolf Rampant for his arms:

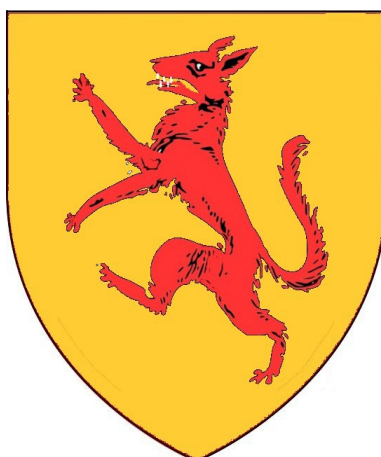
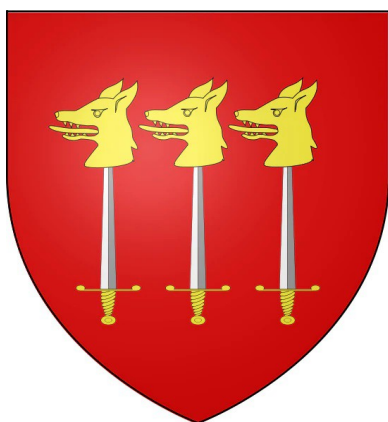


image developed by the author based on <https://heraldicart.org/wolf/>

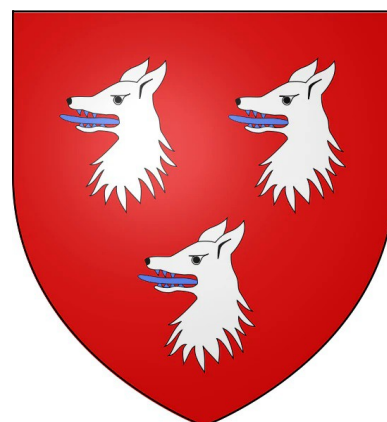
We can now compare and contrast the Robertson and Skene arms to understand the arms that Conan himself will have borne



Skene



Conan



Robertson

First of all we should consider the arms of Skene. Here we note that the tinctures (colours) are reversed from those of Maelmuire (and indeed Earl Henry). This indicates vassalage. We also note the daggers which are a “canting” difference referring to the lands of Skene (Gaelic “sgian” means dagger, but that is not the meaning of “Skene”). He would need to do this for differencing because he was a junior son of Conan. [Note that the wolves' heads “surmount” the daggers, they are NOT “impaled” upon them.]

Now we can consider Robertson. Here we notice the same inverse tincture (ie the red ground) but we also have another differencing by tincture – ie the wolves heads are white rather than gold. I interpret this as recognising that this is through a female line. [As a parallel example we can consider the Grant Arms – 3 ancient crowns in gold on a red ground. In this case the vassalage was to the king. But the Grants had an “away strip” featuring red crowns on a white ground – which is to be found quartered on the arms of families where a Grant girl “married in”, a good example being Fraser of Lovat.]

This leaves me in no doubt that Conan adopted the arms indicated above: Inverse tinctures from his father to show vassalage and three heads rather than one to show his next-level-down status as an illegitimate son rather than a true cadet as such.

The Mottoes: That the Robertsons and the Skenes are closely related is further illustrated by the mottoes

Robertson:	Virtutis Gloria Merces	Glory is the reward for valour
Skene:	Virtutis Regia Merces	A palace the reward for bravery

Here again we see the humour of John le Skene – for with his lands he appears to have gained Skene Castle (now the core of Skene House). By default it is likely that the Robertson motto was inherited from Conan.

The Crests: I am prepared to believe that the Robertsons may have adopted a new crest to celebrate their capture of the murderers of James I in 1437. I don't know what to make of the Skene crest and so I have no pointers as to what any crest Conan may have adopted may have been.

Discussion: Because the true origins of the connection to the Wolf have been lost all sorts of silly stories have been made up. I will not dignify them by replicating any of them here. While it is good that the Robertsons ditched the nonsense it is a pity that they did not embrace the core of my thesis which was available in v1 of this paper. However I am pleased to have been able to elaborate on the matter in this revision

General concluding comments

When we look at the ancestral lines of the Robertson chiefs and their relatives we find

1. King Kenneth MacAlpine through Maelmuire and King Duncan I
2. King Eystein Glumra of Trondheim through Crinan
3. King Niall of the 9 hostages (via DNA) and probably through Angus
4. “Cairbre Riata” through the Cenel Gabhrain
5. Harald the Black of Waterford through Somerled and Ewen “de insulis”

And that is just for starters. So there really is no need to make anything up, no need for pretentiousness or braggadocio. So it is good that some of the wilder claims have been at least sidelined. However something of a vacuum has been left.

It is clear that there is a lot of (albeit informed) interpolation (some would call it speculation) in this paper. I make a lot of claims which cannot be “proved”. However I do believe they are the best way of explaining all the “facts” that we do have and so long as they are presented in this way – ie not overclaiming and remaining open to new information coming to light, a discussion document, if you will, then there is immensely richer story to share and celebrate. There is certainly a lot in this paper which is not available to Robertsons otherwise.

I am very grateful to Edward Kane for bringing the DNA evidence to my attention. I hope I have done justice to the science.

It is my earnest hope that the Robertsons will find common cause with the Skenes first to celebrate their co-descent from the Mormaers and Earls of Atholl. The baton is not in anyone else's hands. And given that the wolf is totemic for them surely they can also spearhead appreciation for the role of the wolf in Scotland's biodiversity.

I note that earlier versions of this paper have been read, in particular and *inter alia*, by very many Robertsons. I hope they will enjoy this enhanced update and look forward to any comments they (and others, of course) may have to make.