

## **Notes on Kilbride Kirk and its Environs**

Liam Griffin, Lerags

In peaceful Lerags Glen, slumbering among Argyllshire's hills, stand the ruins of Kilbride Parish Church (NM 857257). The current building was erected in 1740, with Clan McDougal sacred chapel erected some years later (1786?).

Parish records of 1791 show that the population of Kilbride and its surrounding area was 2,729. It was a subsistence farming community, mainly rearing the famed hardy "black" cattle, with oats and potatoes providing food for the people and additional fodder for the cattle. Sheep were eventually introduced which were to have a dramatic effect on this pastoral society, resulting in their diaspora scattering to the new Worlds of Canada, North America and indeed anywhere that British colonization occurred.

Oral tradition holds that there has been a sacred building on this site for centuries, and some sources claim that the current building stands on the foundations of a sacred chapel erected in 1249. Indeed, place names in the immediate area of the Kirk indicate that spiritual thinking influenced the choice of those names: Kilbride (the Prayer Place(cell) of St Bride), Tobar an Easbuig (the Well of the Bishop), Beallach-an-t-sleuch-daidh (the place of prostration).

In a note made circa 1700, Master Colin Campbell, Minister of Ardchatten, records that a Cross considered as idolatrous was broken in 3 pieces and cast down "on graves in the kirk of Kilbryde." This is Archie Campbell's "Lerags Cross", now restored.

"Highland Postbag", the correspondence of four Clan MacDougall Chiefs, collated by Jean MacDougall tells us that in December 1757, the Clan chief Iain Ciar (Dark John), a fierce warrior yet a gallant and gentle husband and father, having died in his bed, could not be buried at the family Burial vault, at Ardchattan, on the far side of Loch Etive, because of stormy seas, and so his earthly remains were laid to rest at Kilbride, "A graveyard among quiet hills." The sacred chapel attached to the main building

contains the remains of other important Clan MacDougall personalities; while in the adjacent main graveyard other lesser known Clan members lie slumbering in their eternal rest.

In 1840, the peripatetic parish minister, who attended Kilbride, wrote to MacDougall Clan Chief, John, that if he were given the opportunity, without hesitation, he would close down every public house in Argyll, with the exception of that at Kilbride. Apparently, due to the lack of a vestry at Kilbride Kirk, the minister used the pub as a changing room, and additionally, babies awaiting commencement of the Baptismal part of Sunday service would be accommodated in the public house, the Kirk building being too cold and damp for babes of tender years ! (The Firth of Lorn acts as Nature's funnel, directing the warm wet Atlantic air stream whistling through Kilbride, and the Kilbride Kirk is not excluded from this moist sometimes dank environment.) I wonder how many times there was a slip 'twixt Baptismal font and lip' ?

Above Kilbride Kirk, lie the farmlands of Cologin. These were owned for some time by Clan MacDougall, but tenanted by The MacCallums, a sept of the Malcolm clan. Apparently, sometime in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, because they had a sea crossing from the Isle of Kerrera and a far longer walk over the hill from Gallanach, 'the Field of Rhubarb', the MacDougalls arrived for Sunday service at Kilbride, only to find that their tenants, the MacCallums had long since taken all the available pews. Upon their arrival, the MacDougalls claimed their rights as the senior clan and demanded the MacCallums make way for them. Somewhat foolishly as it transpires, the MacCallums refused, we can only presume on the basis that they perceived Kilbride Kirk as part of the kingdom of God and not part of the kingdom of Clan MacDougall. It is reported that "Lady MacDougall" placed a curse on the Cologin MacCallums, to the effect that that unless they abandoned their holdings at Cologin, the MacCallums would wither and die off !!

Within 12 years, says the legend, only 3 MacCallum sons remained alive to flee the curse. In the year 2002, a plan was mooted to lift the curse and restore amicable relations between the two clans. Being Scottish, practical and gregarious, the curse-lifting was to take place over a dram or several !

As a footnote, to this lovely legend, I note that my granny Griffin was married twice; latterly to Thomas Griffin, my paternal grandfather. However, she married Thomas as the widow of Archie MacCallum, who died in service as a soldier, in the trenches of the Great War 1914-1918. I am now the Title Holder to Kilbride Kirk, a collateral relative of Clan MacCallum !

The public house once situated in the environs of Kilbride Kirk has a less cheerful tale attached to its history. Court records of Argyll and The Isles record that in January 1674, John M'Ilmichell, John M'Auley, Fingwell N'Dowgall and others were arraigned before the "panel" at Inverary accused of the robbery and murder of Patrick Reid, "shopman". Sometime in April 1673, about noon, as Patrick Reid made his way "on the King's Highway upon the lands of Cologin, in a most peacable maner, no wayes fearing any hurt or danger" the murderer, John M'Ilmichell fell upon the victim stabbing him to death with "nine or ten stobs of his dirk." He was aided in this dreadful deed by Fingwell N'Dowell and John M'Auley. The murderer then involved (the) "servant Archibald M'Indeor and Mary M'Indeor" his sister in the crime, as accessories. They hid the proceeds of the robbery, "merchant ware" in foxes' dens and helped to dispose of the unfortunate corpse into a peat hag. Later they recovered the packs of "merchant ware" to a barn, having revisited the corpse and "ryped the pockets for money."

However, Justice followed swiftly, and on the 8<sup>th</sup> of July 1674, the gang were tried in the court at Inverary, variously charged with murder, manslaughter and theft. The gang confessed to their crimes and sentence was swiftly passed. Even more swiftly the Court exacted retribution. John M'Ilmichell was taken to a gibbet set up at Cologin, the scene of the murder, within view of Kilbride Kirk, the House of God, and hanged by the neck till he was dead. His body was left to hang, in chains, predated on by the wild birds and animals till it disintegrated. His execution took place on the 11<sup>th</sup> July, 1674, just three days after the start of his trial. Fingwell was hanged in Inverary, as was John M'Auley, on the 15<sup>th</sup> of July at two pm. On the same day, an hour later at 3 pm, Mary M'Indeor was scourged through Inverary and her shoulder was branded. Archibauld M'Indeor had sentence "continews upon certain considerations."

Reading between the lines, I wonder if Patrick Reid was a travelling salesman who perhaps took lodgings at Kilbride pub, using it as a base to travel around the outlying hamlets and crofts, selling his wares, and there he fell in with those who were to bring about his demise, sharing a dram or a jug of barley ale with his murderers. The court records show his packs contained alum, pepper, linen cloth, and various herbal medicines, including “aconite” potentially a deadly poison. The murderers tell us his pockets held some money. The murder gang had been before the authorities just the previous year, found guilty of sheep stealing.

Could it be that following the taking of strong drink, they had got up their courage to lay in wait for poor Patrick as he meandered along the King’s Highway ? Of course, a Hollywood director would tie in the femme fatale angle. Was Patrick lured under false pretences to a deadly tryst with Fingwell, who then betrayed her membership of the gentler sex by colluding at his awful murder and then assisting in disposing of his earthly remains.

And what of Archibald M’Indeor, their fellow accused. It seems he was mysteriously excused from punishment thanks to “certain considerations.” But what were these considerations? Perhaps extreme youth, or was he mentally sub normal, and thus adjudged not capable of knowing right from wrong. Or, perhaps he informed on the others, turned King’s Evidence.

Whatever the facts, the public house that was sited at Kilbride Kirk is no more; it is now the site of my workshop, and though my unskilled hands have often “murdered” some piece of domestic joinery, I’m pleased to say that evil crimes like those committed against poor Patrick hardly exist today in Kilbride either !