

I.

NOTE ON A PAIR OF PIPE BANNERETS OF REAY'S FENCIBLE HIGHLANDERS (1794-1802) OFFERED TO THE SOCIETY OF ANTIQUARIES AS A LOAN EXHIBIT ON BEHALF OF THE CLAN MACKAY SOCIETY.
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During the latter half of the eighteenth century the military resources of this country were severely strained, not only by our wars with France, but by our efforts to maintain peace among the disaffected population of Ireland.

The plan of raising fencible corps in the Highlands was first proposed and carried into effect by Mr Pitt, afterwards Earl of Chatham, in the year 1759. In England, county militia regiments were raised for internal defence in the absence of the regular army, but in view of the comparatively recent occurrences in connection with the 1745 rising, it was not deemed prudent to extend this system to the Highlands of Scotland, where it was believed that the Stuarts and their adherents were still fomenting Jacobite plots. An exception, however, was made in favour of the people of Argyll and Sutherland, and letters of service were issued to the Duke of Argyll and to the Earl of Sutherland respectively to raise a fencible regiment within their own districts. Unlike the militia regiments, which were raised by ballot, the fencibles were to be raised by the ordinary mode of recruiting, and like the regiments of the line the officers were to be appointed and their commissions signed by the King.

Between the years 1759 and 1799 twenty-six fencible regiments were embodied from time to time. No less than four of these were connected with the county of Sutherland. The first Sutherland Fencibles, raised in 1759, were disbanded in 1763. A second Sutherland Fencible Regiment, raised in 1779, was disbanded in 1783; and a third Sutherland Fencible Regiment was raised in 1793, and though nominally disbanded in 1798 a large number of the men subsequently enlisted in the 93rd Regiment (the Sutherland Highlanders), which was added to the regular

army in the year 1800. A fourth regiment from this district was known as the "Reay Fencibles."

On the 24th of October 1794 a royal warrant for raising a regiment of fencibles from Lord Reay's territory was issued to Colonel Hugh Mackay Baillie, grandson of the Hon. Colonel Hugh Mackay of Bighouse. Unfortunately the chief of the Mackays, Hugh, Lord Reay, was at the time incapacitated from leading his clan, and the command was assigned to Colonel Baillie as a military officer of note and proved experience, and a near kinsman of the chief. He was greatly assisted in getting the men together by Colonel George Mackay of Handa, afterwards of Bighouse, and by the Hon. Eric Mackay, cousin-german of the chief, whom he succeeded in 1797.

In the month of March 1795 the Reay Highlanders were embodied, by Sir Hector Munro of Indian fame, at Fort George. The regiment consisted of 800 men, 700 of whom had the Gaelic prefix "Mac" to their names. No sooner was the regiment embodied, uniformed, armed, and drilled for a few weeks, than it was ordered to proceed to Ireland, where, by its steady conduct and soldierly bearing, it soon attracted the attention of Generals Lake and Nugent. The former was particularly attached to his "honest Reays," who frequently formed his bodyguard. The regiment was first stationed in the north of Ireland, in Belfast and neighbouring towns, for about two years and a half. The conduct of the regiment in these quarters met with the highest commendation from the general officers commanding the district, and gained the universal respect and esteem of the inhabitants amongst whom it was quartered.

When the Irish Rebellion broke out in 1798 the Reays saw active service, and on the 26th of May of that year particularly distinguished themselves at the battle of Tara Hill. The regiment was eventually disbanded in 1802. Many officers and men who served in it attached themselves thereafter to other regiments in the regular army.¹

¹ I would refer those who wish further information to the interesting historical sketch of the Reay Fencibles written by the late Mr John Mackay of Hereford, and published in 1880 for the Clan Mackay Society by Charles Mackay, 263 Buchanan Street, Glasgow.

Shortly after the restoration of St Giles' Cathedral the present Lord Reay presented one of the regimental colours to the authorities of that church, and it now hangs from one of the pillars near to the organ. It is to be hoped that its companion colour may ere long be placed beside it, but in the meantime I have reason to believe that it is in the possession of Sir Robert Farquhar, Bart., the elder brother of Lord Farquhar and a grandson of Eric, Lord Reay, who sold the family estates.

As already stated, Colonel George Mackay of Bighouse was largely instrumental in raising the regiment, one of the companies of which, known as the Bighouse Company, had its first headquarters in the neighbourhood of his house at the northern extremity of Strathhalladale and close to the township of Melvich. His great-grandson and direct representative, Mr Colin Campbell Mackay of Morinish, Wilmer, British Columbia, has recently conveyed to the Clan Mackay Society a pair of bannerets which had come into his possession along with other family relics, and I have been instructed by the council of the Society to request the Society of Antiquaries to accept the custody of these little flags as a loan exhibit to be placed in its Museum as near as possible to another banner which we value as a clan relic, namely, the "Bratach Bhan."

Each of these flags consists of a double fold of silk, probably originally of violet tint, now faded into a grey mauve. Each is about 2 feet 9 inches in length by $21\frac{1}{2}$ inches in breadth, stitched at one side to a thin rod presumably of whalebone, and having three pairs of small silk ribbons attached thereto. Presumably they were used or intended to be used for the adornment of the drone of a bagpipe. One side of each flag bears the device of a large Scottish thistle supporting a pair of leaves worked in gold thread and sequins, surmounted by a border 4 inches in depth carrying the inscription "Reay's Fencible Highlanders" worked in similar material.