

IV.

NOTES ON THE DUIRINISH COMMUNION CUPS.

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On the 16th of June 1886 an interesting and valuable paper, entitled "Notice of Communion Cups from Duirinish, Skye (fig. 1), with Notes of other Sets of Scottish Church Plate of which Specimens were Exhibited,"



Fig. 1. Duirinish Communion Cup.

was read before the Society by Norman Macpherson, LL.D., Sheriff of Dumfries and Galloway, Professor of Scots Law, University of Edinburgh, V.P.S.A.Scot. The following notes are intended to be an amplification and partial correction of Professor Macpherson's contribution, and are based on information which, although available at the time, if inquiry had been addressed to the proper quarter, was not in the possession of Professor Macpherson in 1886. The only part of Professor Macpherson's paper with which these Notes are concerned is that descriptive of the Communion Cups from Duirinish, Skye, and the correction which requires to be made relates entirely to the question, not of present-day ownership, but who was the original donor of these cups and to which parish was the presentation made? In the first sentence of his paper in the *Proceedings*, vol. xx. p. 398, Professor Macpherson refers to the cups as "the Communion Cups of Bracadale," and in a footnote (p. 406) he states his reasons for concluding that the cups were gifted by Sir Roderick MacLeod of Talisker to the parish of Bracadale as follows:—

"Having first heard of the cups as belonging to Bracadale, I at once concluded that they were the gift of Sir Roderick of Talisker, which is situated in that parish. But anxious to test the accuracy of my impression, I wrote to the Lyon Office, enclosing a rubbing of the shield. I gave no information as to where it came from, nor did I say on what the arms were engraved; I merely said, 'You say Heraldry is History; if it be, tell me whose shield was this.' Lyon being

absent, my note fell into the hands of Mr Stodart. Next day I had this reply:—"The arms of which you send a sketch do not seem to be registered here, but Highlanders used to be a little irregular in their proceedings in armorial as well as other matters. I think it probable that this coat may have been borne by Sir Roderick MacLeod of Talisker, who made a considerable figure in the reign of Charles II."

Professor Macpherson's description of the cups, which he describes as of great age and remarkable form, is concise and accurate. They are recognised to be of English manufacture, with the hall-mark of 1612-13. Approaching the question of how these cups came to be used for Church purposes in Skye, he deals with the evidence furnished by the cups themselves. He says:—"Engraved on each cup are the letters S.R.M. over a shield—not a matriculated shield of any MacLeod family, but found in the Lyon Office, in the MS. known as 'Gentlemen's Arms,' and these titled 'MacLeod of that Ilk.' The castle points not doubtfully to the family of MacLeod, to which the whole of the two parishes of Bracadale and Duirinish belonged at one time, as they still do in great part; and the letters S.R.M. no doubt stand for Sir Roderick MacLeod; but there were two of that name and family: (1) the well-known Rorie More, a leading chief in the days of James VI., whose chequered career shows frequent periods of strained relations with the Government of the day. He is known, however, to have got a free pass to go to England, to have been in London for some time, and to have been knighted in 1613. He thus was in London about the very time that these cups were made. He died in 1625." In point of fact, Sir Rory Mor died in 1626. Continuing, Professor Macpherson states:—" (2) A younger son of Rorie More, to whom his father gave a long tack of the lands of Talisker, in the parish of Bracadale, he commanded a large detachment of Skye men at the battle of Worcester. He frequently appeared at the Court of Charles II. after the Restoration, and he too was knighted. The introduction of the Mackay stag's head into the arms engraved on the cups points to this Sir Roderick as the probable donor, as he married a daughter of Lord Reay, and is the only member of the Dunvegan family known to have married a Mackay."

Fortunately for a satisfactory solution of the question, we to-day are in possession of many facts which were unknown to Professor Macpherson, and these facts now fall to be stated. I take first the question of the arms on the cups, and in particular the presence of the stag's head, which, according to Professor Macpherson, pointed to Sir Roderick MacLeod of Talisker as being the donor. After an examination of these arms, Stodart could go no further than say:—"I think it probable that this coat may have been borne by Sir Roderick MacLeod of Talisker."

We to-day can go much further and say that these identical arms, including the stag's head, were borne by Sir Rory Mor MacLeod of Dunvegan. They appear on an old gourd or water-bottle which has been in the possession of the MacLeods of Dunvegan from the time of Sir Rory Mor, and is preserved to-day in the castle among the relics of

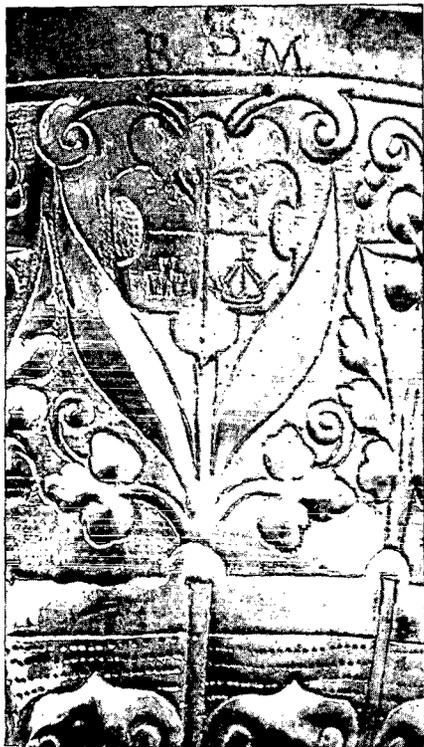


Fig. 2. Arms on Communion Cup.

that chief. An illustration of these arms on the cups (fig. 2) and on the gourd (fig. 3) will be found in a paper read by me to the Society on 18th January 1913 (*Proceedings*, vol. xlvii. pp. 119 and 120). Above and on each side of the shield on the gourd there appear the letters "Sr. R.M." So strikingly similar is the formation of these letters on both cups and gourd that one is forced to the inference that the draughtsman was the same in each case.

Professor Macpherson endeavours to explain the appearance of the stag's head on the cups by the fact that Sir Roderick MacLeod of Talisker married a daughter of Lord Reay. The true explanation is that the MacLeods of Dunvegan, for generations before Sir Roderick of Talisker married into the Reay family, bore a stag's head in their coat, MacLeod of MacLeod in fact being warden of the royal forest of Harris. Buchanan in his *Travels in the Western Hebrides*, published in 1793, refers specifically to the "King's

Forest" in Harris, and the Privy Council Records show that James III. and James V. both hunted there. On 29th June 1542 Alexander XII., chief of MacLeod, appended his seal to a charter in favour of John MacLeod, illegitimate son of John MacLeod of Minginish, and in the seal the stag's head erased is distinctly shown. The original can be seen in the Lovat Charter Chest. I do not think it necessary, in view of the above direct evidence, to labour the point of the introduction of the stag's head in the shield on the cups, but I am at least entitled to say that at most the stag's head only resembles one part of the arms carried by the first Lord Reay. Before leaving the question of the arms,

it is important to note that whereas the identical coat depicted on the cups appears on Sir Rory Mor's gourd and part of the coat appears upon his tombstone (fig. 4) in Fortrose Cathedral (*Proceedings*, vol. xlvii. p. 118), one cannot find in document, sculpture, or plate in the possession of the MacLeods of Talisker any of the arms displayed on the cups. On the contrary, it can be proved by the evidence of seals and an examination of Sir Roderick MacLeod of Talisker's tombstone in Eynort Churchyard,



Fig. 3. Arms on Gourd.

Skye (which I have made), that he never displayed any arms other than the castle.

The next point of importance to consider is the lettering S.R.M. above the shield on the cups. Here I am on equally firm ground. I can cite the authority of extant evidence. I have already referred to this lettering appearing on the gourd in Dunvegan Castle. The same lettering, subject again to the addition of the letter L—with a curious persistency in the character of the outline of the letters—appears above and below the shield engraved on the tombstone of Sir Rory Mor in Fortrose. Still more important and direct is the documentary evidence in Dunvegan Castle. In describing the gourd in the paper read by me ten years ago, already referred to, I pointed out that subsequent to receiving the honour of knighthood Sir Rory Mor always

inserted the letter "S" before his signature. There are many signatures of Sir Rory Mor preserved showing this change in the style of signing his name.

These facts are in my opinion amply sufficient to displace the probabilities which were erroneously accepted by Professor Macpherson as facts. It is only fair to the memory of a learned and enthusiastic antiquary to inquire into the cause of the not unnatural mistake he made. In 1617 an Act was passed ordaining heritors to provide Communion Cups for the use of the parish, the minister of the parish and his executors under the Act being made responsible for their safe keeping. The cups from time immemorial had admittedly been in the custody of the minister of the parish of Duirinish, in the parish church of which the MacLeods of Dunvegan regularly worshipped and in which they took a deep interest. The late Mr John T. Mackenzie, who was an elder of the parish church, Duirinish, for over forty years, was deputed by the Rev. Duncan M'Callum to carry the Communion Cups to Bracadale and carefully to bring them back to him after the celebration of the Communion. There are several people living in the parish who can support this statement from their own personal knowledge. The Rev. Roderick Morison, Kintail, informed Professor Macpherson of the existence of the cups which were in the hands of the minister of Duirinish, the Rev. Duncan M'Callum, and the latter, at Professor Macpherson's request, sent the cups to Edinburgh for examination and exhibition. Professor Macpherson's own statement



Fig. 4. Arms on Rory Mor's Tombstone.

is:—"Having first heard of the cups as belonging to Bracadale"—his informant being the Rev. Roderick Morison. From that moment his efforts were directed, not towards discovering the accuracy of the information given to him, but towards finding evidence on the cups themselves to support Mr Morison's mistaken view. The presence of the stag's head and the fact of the marriage into the Reay family quickly led the learned professor to make a serious but very simple and natural slip.

The life history of Sir Rory Mor—ample details of which remain to us in the old documents in Dunvegan Castle—entitles one to say with some assurance that if one were left to the consideration of probabilities the weight of such evidence would be entirely one-sided. Sir Rory Mor

occupied the position of Chief from 1596 to 1626. He took the greatest possible interest in the welfare of the people in the parish of Duirinish, and regularly attended the Church of St Mary (Duirinish) and took an interest in the ecclesiastical affairs of the parish. He received the honour of knighthood in London in the year 1613, the date of the hall-mark on the cups. It is highly probable that on his return to Skye he brought with him the cups for presentation to the parish of Duirinish for the use of the church he worshipped in. Whether or not there is any connection between the gift of these cups to Duirinish and the agreement entered into by him and others in 1622 to build and repair the parish churches at the sight of the Bishop of the Isles, I cannot say, but a connection is possible.

On the other hand, we have practically no knowledge of any interest Sir Roderick MacLeod of Talisker took in Church matters, and he did not receive the honour of knighthood until thirty-five years after Sir Rory Mor's death. We are entitled to assume that the lettering on Sir Rory Mor's tombstone in Fortrose was carved within a few years of the date of his burial. We are also entitled to assume that the lettering on the gourd was put on for purposes of identification during Sir Rory Mor's life. We therefore have this identical lettering intimately associated with Sir Rory Mor for the period of at least thirty-five years, during the whole of which Sir Roderick of Talisker had no right to prefix to his initials the letter "S."

In the above circumstances, and for the reasons stated, I think it right to put on record in the *Proceedings of the Society* my belief, as opposed to that of Professor Macpherson, that Sir Rory Mor MacLeod of Dunvegan was the owner of the cups in question; that he gifted them to the parish of Duirinish for the use of the Church of St Mary between the years 1613 and 1626; that the cups have since remained in the custody of the incumbent of that parish, and that they have never been in the custody of the incumbent of the parish of Bracadale, except when occasionally lent on occasions of Communion.