

Two early post-Reformation inscriptions in Argyll
by John Bannerman

CARNASSARIE CASTLE

The inscription carved on the armorial panel (pl 25a) above the door of Carnassarie Castle in the parish of Kilmartin is in Gaelic and reads

Dia le ua nduibhne
'God be with Ó Duibhne'

John Dewar, minister of Kilmartin, made a reading in 1882 (241) which got the gist of it, although not all the letters were accurately reproduced. Ten years later, MacGibbon and Ross (1887-92, iv, 320-1) published a drawing of the inscription, but they were clearly doubtful about Dewar's reading and also quoted a Mr John Whyte of Inverness who thought that the inscription was in Latin. Not until 1970 was it transcribed correctly by R L Thomson in his edition of John Carswell's Gaelic translation of the *Book of Common Order* (lxxix).

The inscription is in Gaelic manuscript lettering. This immediately suggests a post-Reformation date, if only because the inscriptions on stone-carving of the distinctive West Highland tradition, that came to an end c 1560, were, from c 1500, in black letter and before that in Lombardic capitals. Moreover, the language was almost always Latin (Steer and Bannerman). This date receives support from architectural historians who are agreed that the castle itself cannot be earlier than the second half of the sixteenth century. The design is an advanced one, constituting an elongated version of the orthodox Scottish tower-house (MacGibbon and Ross 1887-92, iv, 311-21; Dunbar 1966, 71-2).

Ó Duibhne is a style of the chief of the Campbells of Argyll and an alternative to the later and more popular *MacCailein*. It was associated with the kindred name *Clann Duibhne*, 'kindred of Duibhne', that dates in origin to a period before this kindred had become commonly known as the Clan Campbell, and, therefore, before the second half of the thirteenth century, when we first find members of the kindred appearing in the records bearing the surname *Campbell* (Sellar 1973, 110-12). The antiquarianism implicit in its continued usage thereafter is not unconnected with the fact that it is normally, though not always, to be found in a literary context. This, together with the lettering of the inscription, suggests that the author was familiar with the classical tradition of the Gaelic learned orders of the medieval period.

If we can assume that the author of the inscription was also the builder of the castle, we are looking for a person unique in the context of the times, a member or supporter of the Clan Campbell, who was associated with Carnassarie, who had considerable financial resources, and in whose person the old and the new were combined to a remarkable degree. None other, as we shall see, than John Carswell, bishop of the Isles, who died in 1572.

It seems to have escaped general notice that a document entitled *Ane Descriptione of Certaine Parts of the Highlands of Scotland*, written c 1630, and therefore only some sixty years years after Carswell's death, contains the following statement:

'There is a castle at Arskeodness called Carnasrie which was builded be Mr John Carswall Bishope of Argyll Lismore & of the Illands of the highlands of Scotland, and this Castle was builded be him to the Earle of Argyll' (Macfarlane 1906-8, ii, 148-9).¹

Carswell first appears on record in the matriculation roll of St Andrews University for the year 1540. He graduated BA in 1542 and MA in 1544 (*St A. Recs.*, 146, 149, 245). He was parson of Kilmartin by July 1553 (*AT*, 24 July 1553) and by June 1562 had been appointed superintendent of Argyll in the Reformed Church (Cameron 1972, 118). Continuing as superintendent of Argyll, he was formally presented to the bishopric of the Isles in 1567, although he had enjoyed its revenues since 1565 (Watt 1969, 206; Dilworth 1971, 99-100). For much of his career he was closely associated with Archibald Campbell, 5th earl of Argyll (1558-73). In 1559, when the latter made a grant of lands, which included the eight merklands of 'the two Carnasseries', *pro bono servitio*, to John Carswell, *familiari servitori suo*, it was the first of many such (*RMS*, iv (1546-80), no. 1592). Indeed, despite the surname that he commonly used, Carswell may have been himself a Campbell, perhaps a member of a family of that name who were still occupying the lands of Corsewell or Crosswell in the parish of Kirkcolm in Wigton (*RMS*,

ii (1424–1513), nos 183, 185, 1471, 2920, 3084; iv (1546–80), nos 226, 333, 1127; *ER*, xiv (1513–22), 542).

On 24th April 1567, eight days after he had been elected a lord of the Articles (APS, ii (1424–1567), 546), Carswell published in Edinburgh his Gaelic translation of, and additions to, the *Book of Common Order*, sometimes known as *Knox's Liturgy* (Thomson 1970, 1). This work was written in the literary dialect of the day and so expert was Carswell, despite his protestations to the contrary, that he almost certainly underwent a period of formal training, perhaps under the auspices of the MacEwens, who were professional bards, historians and genealogists to the Campbells of Argyll at this time. But we also know him to have been in Ireland, at least in the year 1545 (*Henry VIII Letters*, xx, part 2, no. 42), and it is possible that he attended a bardic school in that country (Thomson 1970, 183–6; Matheson 1956, 200–4). He dedicated his book to his chief, *do Ghiolla Easbuig Ua nDuibhne*, ‘to Archibald Ó Duibhne’, using as a surname the style that appears in the inscription. He uses the style itself in the first verse of a poem in bardic metre which he addressed to the book.

‘Move onward, little book,
to Ó Duibhne come in thy course,
as soon as thou shalt leave the press,
speed prosperity to him in his abode.’²
(Thomson 1970, 3, 13)

The shield carved above the inscription is parted per pale: dexter, for Campbell of Argyll, quarterly: 1st and 4th, gyronny of eight; 2nd and 3rd, a galley, sail furled, pennon flying; sinister, the Royal Arms of Scotland, a lion rampant within a double tressure flory counterflory. The Campbell arms are present in this form on all five surviving seals of Archibald, 5th earl of Argyll (Stevenson and Wood 1940, ii, 271). Their combination here with the Royal Arms appears to indicate a marriage between Campbell of Argyll and a member of the royal family. Archibald married Jean, natural daughter of James V, sometime before October 1561 (*SP*, i, 342), and this is the only royal marriage by an earl of Argyll on record in the sixteenth century.

When Carswell was granted the lands of Carnassarie in 1559, custody of a castle thereon went with them. However, it is unlikely that he built the existing castle before acquiring the lands and we must assume that he replaced an earlier castle. What is clear is that Carnassarie was a Campbell castle, that Carswell was the keeper not the owner, and this explains the statement in the seventeenth-century account already quoted that he built the castle for the earl of Argyll. It also explains the content of the inscription and the presence of the coat of arms. Such a project, perhaps undertaken in gratitude for the constant support of his patron and chief or perhaps a formal condition of that support, is more likely to have belonged to a period nearer the end than the beginning of his career. Indeed, the wording of the seventeenth-century account implies that he was already bishop of the Isles at the time of building, and perhaps not until he was enjoying the combined revenues of the dioceses of Argyll and the Isles would the necessary financial resources have been available to him. It would seem most likely, therefore, that the castle was built and the inscription carved between 1565, the year in which Carswell was granted the revenues of the bishopric of the Isles, and 1572, the year of his death.

ARDCHATTAN PRIORY

The reading of the inscription (pl 25b), which is on a grave-slab in the burial ground, depends to some extent on the date of carving. Colin Campbell, minister of Ardchattan (1667–1726), made a drawing of it on the back of a letter dated 30th April 1700, which is among his

papers deposited in the library of Edinburgh University. It is clear from his attempted reading and from his comments thereon that he had no idea whom it commemorated. Yet, as he himself tells us, the stone was 'not farre from the door of the kirk of Ardchattan', and therefore presumably in a fairly prominent position, and he was certainly ready to identify the people commemorated by other medieval funerary monuments that he recorded at Ardchattan (Steer and Bannerman). In these circumstances, the stone is not likely to have been carved much later than 1600.

The intersecting arcs round the border of the stone recall the decoration on the sides of certain early sixteenth-century tombchests in the area, but the lettering, language and form of the inscription indicate that the grave-slab is not a product of the West Highland style of stone-carving which, as we have already noted, came to an end *c* 1560, and of which Ardchattan has a number of examples (RCAMS 1975, 111-13). It is our conclusion, therefore, that the stone almost certainly belongs to the second half of the sixteenth century.

The lettering of the inscription was, like that of Carnassarie Castle, influenced by the manuscript hands of the period but badly executed. Colin Campbell thought that it had 'been done by one that was illeterat, and had only a draught of the letters rudely given to him, which he more rudely copied'. A fair estimate, one feels, and it is therefore less surprising than in the case of the Carnassarie inscription that the language of this inscription has also been identified on different occasions as both Gaelic and Latin (M'Lagan 1892, 73-4; Brydall 1899, 40-1; 1901, 94-5). We shall see that it is in fact Gaelic but heavily Scotified and that the most likely reading is

iohne · mak · d[oue]ll · m(a)cc allen³
'John MacDougall, son of Alan'

Iohne, with a Roman capital 'd' for what can only have been intended as 'o', is a common contemporary spelling of *John*, in this case the equivalent, or translation, of Gaelic *Ian* or *Eoin*. The letter 'k' commonly displaces 'c' in the Scotified form of Gaelic *mac*, 'son'. The gap in the middle of *douell* was not so wide in Colin Campbell's day and he saw the letters 'o' and 'e' and allowed space for only one missing letter, almost certainly either 'n' or 'u', giving respectively a Scotified form of Gaelic *Domhnall*, 'Donald', or Gaelic *Dùghall*, 'Dugall'.

Colin Campbell thought that the first of the final group of letters was in fact two letters, and that they were upside down and, for that matter, back to front, and he read 'vc', a possible abbreviation for *mheic*, genitive of *mac*, the 'v' being a common Scotified representation of the Gaelic intervocalic spirant 'mh'. But this is a form of the letter 'm' which is frequently attested in Gaelic manuscripts. The remaining letters seem to be 'ccallen'.⁴ The 'n', which was not recognised as such by Campbell, is chipped but a final minim is still clearly visible.

As Campbell realised, two words are here run together in a manner not uncommon in contemporary documentary sources where an abbreviated form of *mac* or *mheic* is followed by a personal name. If the division is made after the first 'c', the following name is a Scotified form of Gaelic *Cailein*, gen. of *Cailean*, English equivalent *Colin*. If, however, the 'c' of *mac* or *mheic* is doubled, especially common before an initial vowel, the following name is a Scotified form of Gaelic *Ailein*, gen. of *Ailean*, English equivalent *Alan*. Either is possible, and when one remembers that, besides the uncertainty as to whether *Domhnall* or *Dùghall* is correct, *mac* or *mheic* plus a forename, in whatever position they appear, can be either a patronymic or a surname, then it is possible to suggest no less than twelve different and, on the face of it, perfectly valid readings of this inscription; a clear demonstration of the complexities raised by Gaelic name formulae of this type, at least in a Scotified context.

However, and fortunately, many of these readings are inherently unlikely in the circumstances. Thus, people bearing surnames which contain the forenames *Ailean*, *Cailean* or *Domhnall* are not likely to have been buried at Ardchattan in the second half of the sixteenth century. *Cailean*, moreover, was very much a Campbell forename at this period and the only two Campbells on record who were associated with Ardchattan in the second half of the sixteenth century were John and his son Alexander, successive commendators of the priory. John, who succeeded John Carswell as bishop of the Isles in 1572 and died *c* 1594, was a son of John Campbell of Cawdor (*Cawdor Bk*; Dilworth 1971, 100–4). On the other hand, the priory of Ardchattan had been founded *c* 1230 by Duncan who was a son of Dugall, son of Somerled, the eponym of the Clan Dugall. The MacDougalls seem to have remained closely associated with the priory thereafter and it is a fact that no laymen other than MacDougalls can be identified as having been buried there in the first half of the sixteenth century (Steer and Bannerman) and there is no reason to suppose that Ardchattan ceased to be a MacDougall burial ground in the second half of that century.⁵ One of the most characteristic MacDougall forenames of the period was *Ailean*. We should, therefore, probably accept *Ailean* rather than *Cailean* as the last word in the inscription.

Finally, in this type of naming formula in contemporary documents, where *mac* is written out in full and Scotified, it seems to be, more often than not, a part of a surname, and having already rejected *MacDonald* as the surname in question, we are left with *MacDougall*. The person commemorated by this grave-slab appears, therefore, to have been John MacDougall, son of Alan. The chiefs of the Clan Dugall are on record for this period and John, son of Alan, is not one of them, but he was probably the head of a lesser MacDougall family.⁶

It remains to add that these inscriptions, taken together with another two, both carved in Roman capitals and dated 1582, the one in Scots on the wall of Gylen Castle, Kerrera (RCAMS 1975, 219), and the other consisting of initials of Gaelic names on a cross at Pennycross, Mull (Bannerman), represent a striking departure from the inscribed stonework of the style that had hitherto prevailed in the West Highlands and help to date its demise.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Two photographs (pl 25a and b) used to illustrate this paper have kindly been supplied by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland and are Crown Copyright. I am indebted to Dr K A Steer and Mr I Fisher, who read the paper in a first draft, for help and advice.

NOTES

- 1 Ardskeodnis is the name of the district encompassed by the parish of Kilmartin (*OPS*, ii, part 1, 91).
- 2 Translation by R L Thomson (1970, 181).
- 3 The points represent the stops visible in the inscription.
- 4 It is possible to read 'i' for the first 'l', as did Colin Campbell, but this in no way affects our final understanding of these letters.
- 5 But Duncan MacDougall of Dunollie, who died 31st August 1616, was buried in Kilbride, Oban (MacKinnon 1912, 276).
- 6 If mak d[oue]ll is not a surname, then, expanding the letters 'mcc' to read *m(hei)cc*, translate 'John, son of Dugall (or Donald), son of Alan'.

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a Carnasserie Castle, Argyll, inscribed panel above entrance



b Ardchattan Priory, late sixteenth-century stone

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