

## A note on highland dress after the '45

by A V B Norman

Considerable interest has been aroused by the question of when the philibeg, as opposed to the full plaid, first appeared. Less notice has been taken of the moment when the plaid itself ceased to be an all purpose garment which could be used also as a blanket at night simply by loosening the waist-belt.

Mr Stuart Maxwell has very kindly drawn my attention to an article on the great plaid by Miss Marta Holmes (1962). This dealt with the Highland dress thought to have been made for Evan Murray MacGregor of MacGregor for the visit of George IV to Edinburgh in 1822. In this Miss Holmes quoted part of the instruction for putting on the great plaid as given by Charles Grant, Vicomte de Vaux, in his *Mémoires historiques, généalogiques, politiques, militaires, &c. &c. de la maison de Grant*, published in 1796 but probably referring to the period of the Rising of 1745. It begins (p 7) 'Being sewed, and the broad belt within the keepers, the gentleman stands with nothing on but his shirt. When the servant gets the plaid and belt round, he must hold both ends of the belt, til the gentleman adjusts and puts across, in a proper manner, the folds or flaps before; that done, he tightens the belt to the degree wanted; . . .' It thus seems that the belt was still independent of the cloth and passed through loops ('the keepers') presumably sewn to the plaid. The reference to the plaid 'Being sewed' may refer to the pleats already being permanently secured even at this early period.

A passage in Sir Robert Murray Keith's correspondence clearly refers to a plaid made up so that the lower section formed a permanently pleated skirt, while the upper section continued to form the part of the garment worn loosely around the upper half of the body.

In a letter written home from Dresden on 30th December 1769 to his father, Robert Keith of Craig, Kincardineshire, he says: 'I have a very extraordinary commission to give you, which I am afraid you will hardly be able to execute without the help of honest Jock R—— or some such Highland oracle. The Elector has more than once expressed a curiosity to see me in the dress of my quondam corps. I intend to surprise him with it at one of his reviews, in spring. But to be completely in order, I want a handsome *bonnet*, a pair or two of the finest knit *hose*, and a plaid of *my colours*, sewed and *plaited* on a waist belt. If to this you are so good as to add a *handsome* shoulder-belt and buckle, and the hilt of an *Andrew Ferrera*, I shall be enabled to show my nakedness to the best advantage' (Gillespie Smith 1849, 121-2).

The dress described is presumably that illustrated in Keith's portrait by Anton Graff painted in Dresden in 1770 and now in the British Royal Collection (pl 29). For many years I knew this painting only from engravings and it was only because I mentioned it casually to Sir Oliver Millar, Surveyor of the Queen's Paintings, that I discovered where it was. I am extremely grateful to him for allowing me to examine it. The painting shows Keith wearing a red coat with a cape collar and green facings, button-loops of oak-leaf shape embroidered with gold thread, a white or pale buff waistcoat, a great plaid of dark green and black tartan, crimson sash, and red and white hose. His bonnet with its black cockade and black ostrich tips lies beside him. The star of the Knight of the Order of the Bath must have been added to the painting at a later date, since he did not receive it until 1772. All this is shown very much more clearly in the engraving by Johann Ernst Mansfeld done in Vienna in 1779 (pl 30).

This coat, or an identical one, is illustrated in the much more informal portrait by Nathaniel Dance, probably painted in 1772, which belongs to the Earl of Crawford and Balcarres.

Since he does not mention the coat in his letter home, he had presumably had it made up in Dresden. His 'quondam corps' was the 87th Regiment of Highland Volunteers, also known as Keith's Highlanders, which he had raised in 1759. It was disbanded in 1763 after a period of very successful active service in the allied army under Prince Ferdinand of Brunswick (Stewart of Garth 1822, 68-80). The actual appearance of the uniform coat of this corps is shown in the miniature of Captain James Gory who served as Captain in the 87th Regiment from 27th October 1759 until he went on half-pay in 1763 (Carman 1962, 85-7). This shows a red coat without lapels, with green facings and gold lace. The button-holes, which are edged with gold lace, are of two patterns down the front of the coat, alternately bastion-ended and round-ended. The coat worn by Keith has a pair of epaulettes of the very latest fashion introduced by the Royal Warrant of 1768 (Dawnay 1960, 12-16), but the cuffs are of the type fashionable for many years before with a buttoned flap as well as a turn-up, superseded in 1768 by a round cuff without a flap. Cape-collars had been in use in some Highland regiments long before they were officially approved for the army by the Royal Warrant of 1768. Captain Gory, for instance, is wearing one, and the custom certainly goes back to 1751 at the latest, since the Grenadier of the 42nd Highland Regiment, painted by David Morier in that year, is already wearing one (Haswell Miller and Dawnay 1966-70, cat no. 107). The custom of buttoning the cape to the top of the lapel, as shown in Keith's portrait, however, first appears as a result of that Warrant. Keith's coat also has the long lapels introduced in 1768, although Gory's coat is without lapels altogether. They were, in fact, worn in some Highland regiments before 1768, as shown for instance, in the portrait of John Campbell, 4th Earl of Loudon, colonel of Loudon's Regiment, painted by Allen Ramsey between 1745 and 1748 (property of the Marquess of Bute), and an unknown officer of the 42nd Regiment painted about 1762 (Haswell Miller 1940). Both paintings show lapels finishing at waist level in the pre-1768 fashion.

It may be this coat, or its successor, which Keith refers to in another letter, written to his friend, Thomas Bradshaw, from Vienna on 1st September 1773. He had apparently taken part in a procession wearing a 'spick and span new regimental suit, richly ornamented with three-and-forty embroidered button-holes, and two shoulder-knots stiff with gold; . . .' (*Memoires*, I, 443).

Keith wears over his right shoulder the typical black leather Highland shoulder-belt or baldric for the carriage of his sword, but, unfortunately, the buckle, tip, and slide are concealed by the sitter's arm. Captain Gory has a shaped buckle, plain straight slide, and a heart-shaped tip, but no badge of any sort. On the other hand, what is presumably a regimental badge, apparently of bronze, a bull's head caboshed, is shown both on the baldric and on the cartridge-box of the Honble. William Gordon, in his portrait painted by Pompeo Batoni in 1766. The picture which is

still at Gordon's home, Fyvie Castle in Aberdeenshire, shows him wearing the uniform of the 105th, Queen's Own Regiment of Highlanders (Hesketh 1961, fig 34). This corps was raised in 1762 and disbanded in 1763, but in 1766 Gordon was still on its half-pay list.

Keith's hilt, which is presumably the one his father sent out to him, was of a type known to have been made at this period in Stirling. Comparable hilts, with wavy bars and diamond-shaped plates in the looped forward guards, are recorded, one signed by Walter Allan in Stirling (active from 1732) another by his former journeyman John Grant (admitted freeman in 1759) (Reid 1963, 16-21, 37). Stuart Maxwell has very kindly drawn my attention to a hilt signed by Walter Allan with similar bars in front of the knuckles but without the diamond-shaped plates, on loan to the National Museum of Antiquities from the Royal Scottish Pipers' Society (Acc No. L 1963. 55). Unfortunately, since nothing has been written about basket-hilts made at this period in towns other than Glasgow and Stirling, it is impossible to say with any certainty that Keith's hilt was not made in Aberdeen for instance, where it might have been more convenient for his father to buy it.

John Wallace suggested to me that the pistol Keith is wearing might be the work of Alexander Campbell of Doune. Jack Scott, Curator of the Department of History, Glasgow museum and Art Gallery, has very kindly confirmed that the Museum's pistol, Reg No. 52.31a which is signed by this man, is inlaid with silver in a similar, but rather more complicated pattern, to that on Keith's pistol.

Plate 29 is reproduced by gracious permission of Her Majesty The Queen. Plate 30 is reproduced by kind permission of the Trustees of the British Museum.

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Sir Robert Murray Keith (1730-95) by Anton Graff, painted in Dresden in 1770 (reproduced by gracious permission of Her Majesty The Queen)





The engraving of 1779 by Mansfeld after Graff's portrait of Keith