

WHO RESOURCED AND BUILT IONA “CATHEDRAL OF THE ISLES”?

Final Part VI – FINAL: *Ian Ross Macdonnell, Australia.*

HOW IONA ABBEY HISTORY HAS PLAYED OUT

OPENING ACT :- St Columba and the early Christians of late antiquity steal the opening scene, which gets rave reviews by the 8th Duke of Argyll: "*The fire, the freshness and the comparative simplicity of the old Celtic church; **the real period of Iona's glory, almost confined to the life of one man** and to the few generations which preserved the impress of his powerful character*".

FINAL ACT :- This is a rousing tribute to the much eulogised "*extraordinary polymath, Liberal statesman, philosopher and theologian*", George, the 8th Duke of Argyll, for purportedly having the vision and generosity to restore Iona Abbey "*as you see it today*" and return it to the community. From Historic Scotland : "*The 8th Duke began reconstructing the abbey church, with the intention that it be used for ecumenical worship*". The fact is George only responded to repeated pressure ¹ to just stabilise some of the crumbling ruins (originally destroyed by his antecedent Earls!) and to allow unequal access to supervised and segregated Catholic and Anglican services on Iona. It was not ecumenism, but conciliation or appeasement. The imposed, 'refereed' access to segregated, unequal amenities is not embryonic ecumenism or anything even resembling a nascent, 40 year later, Iona Community. "Unification" it was not.

The 8th Duke of Argyll did not agree with The Oxford Movement, the precursor to ecumenism, eg, from his autobiography and memoirs ², pps 309-12, *"Then I had watched from the beginning the progress of the Oxford Movement, noting specially that its central idea was a theory on the nature and authority of the Church which **differed from that of Rome in nothing** except in the absence of a central authority or head. **I have also lived to see a recrudescence of the Romanising tendency which followed the Oxford Movement.**"* And p.103; *"...the famous Oxford Movement was in its full swing. The air was ringing with the cry of Puseyism. Under these circumstances, I heard the service performed in a way that **could not make on me any favourable impression**".*

In my view, the Duke had a *Love Columba hate Pope* relationship with Iona. He would have preferred the *medieval Abbey* never to have existed:- "*all these building before us are the monument of the dull and often the corrupt monotony of medieval Romanism*".

¹ Under "loud calls" and "increasing pressure on the Duke(s) of Argyll" (RCAHMS; 'ARGYLL VOL4'; p.12). 1839 :- " .., there is a loud call on the noble Duke, to adopt proper measures to keep up this venerable fabric". 'Lumsden & Son's Steam-boat companion, or, Stranger's guide to the Western Isles & Highlands'; J. Lumsden & Son; 1839; p177.

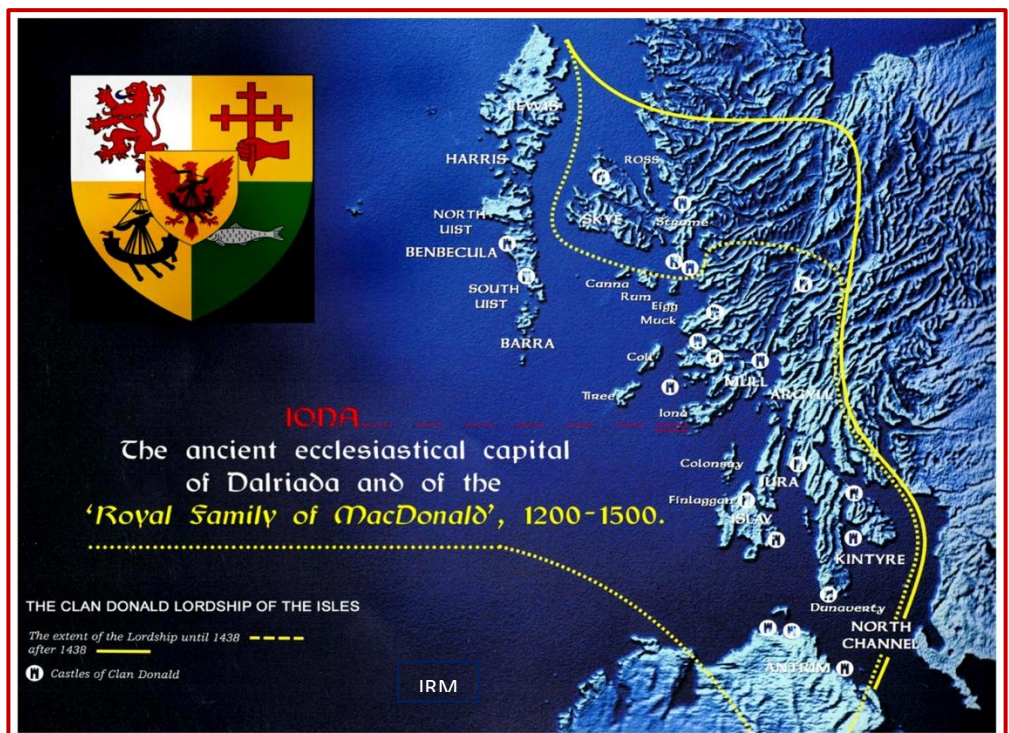
² The 1300 plus pages, two volume, "*George Douglas, Eighth Duke of Argyll, K.G., K.T. (1823-1900) : autobiography and memoirs*"; Ed. **Ina, the Dowager Duchess of Argyll**; 1906.

³ Nils. If 300 pages, the text was not reprinted in 1993, eighth Duke and Duchess of Argyll, the K. The Ref. 1990 on autobiography and memoirs"; Ed. Ina, the Dowager Duchess of Argyll; 1906.

He was proud of 'owning' Iona not because of the medieval Abbey but because of his love for the island's nature and particularly its association with one man, St Columba. It is hyperbole to credit him for Iona Abbey's restoration, but even more so to expound that his purpose was to allow ecumenical worship (further detail here:- <https://goo.gl/WmkWnn>).

CENTRAL ACTS :- (in every sense of the words). THE CLAN DONALD LORDS OF THE ISLES' central role in the very creation, continued existence, restoration and development of the Abbey and Cathedral has been virtually written out of the story. This enduring Macdonald phase, 1207-1493, which equals the long 300 year period of primary Columban monasticism, is downplayed and virtually forgotten, even though it is paramount in providing the sole witness to Iona's extant architecture, and is a principal witness to the surviving monuments. Nothing remains of St Columba's monastery. Nothing remains of the three ancient *Tomair-nan-Righ* of the early Dalriadic, Scots, Irish and Norwegian kings (600-1200).

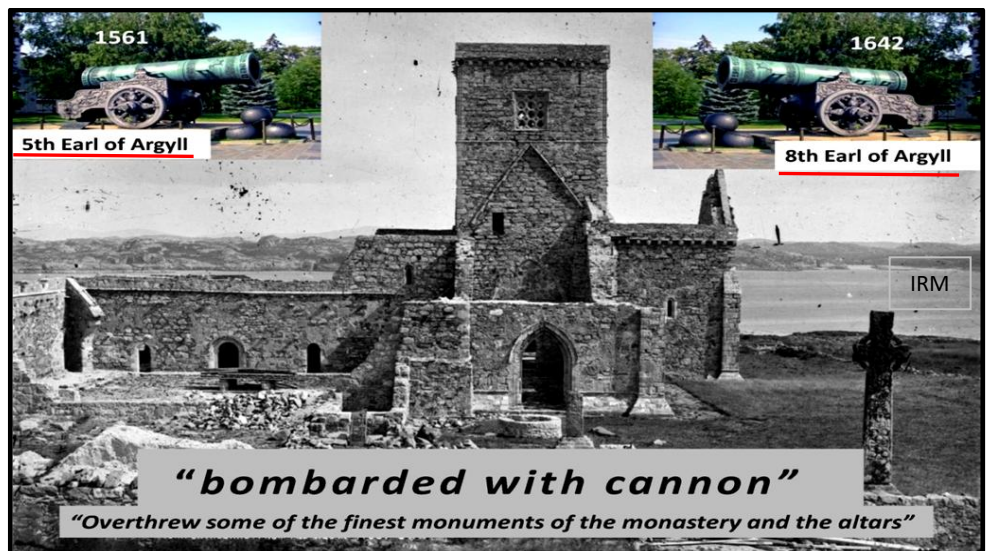
The only original monument left standing today from St Columba's early Christian monastery is St Martin's cross and that is 200 years after St Columba died. **For all intents and purposes, Iona Abbey is currently an early Clan Donald medieval site in terms of the surviving architecture** (as restored 20th century).



REVIEW. FALL OF THE LORDSHIP OF THE ISLES - 1493. Disregarding Martin Luther's *"Two Kingdoms"* for separation of Church and State and Knox's *"First Book of Discipline"* that all of the assets of the old church should pass to the new, the ruling Argyll Earls began using their privileged Royal connections to partake heavily of "the fruits" of Iona's benefices and revenue as soon as the Macdonald Lordship was forfeited for a second time, 1493. They regarded it as their hereditary "family propriety interest" (see Part V). They suppressed it and shared to an unknown extent in the dissolution "*plunder of Iona*", with the Mcleans, of :- library books and manuscripts of great value, Registers (so called "*dispersed and lost*"), some gold and silver plate and the tower bell. They were instrumental in physically destroying the Abbey, being the responsible local "*Leaders in the Field for the Reformed Religion*" and 'lost' 300 priceless Iona graveslab inscriptions of the "*best men of all the isles*" (compiled in the 1650's by Sir Robert Moray).

(1.) **Archibald Campbell, the all powerful 5th Earl of Argyll, 1561** :- "An Act was passed by the Privy Council suppressing *"Idolatri and all monumentis thair of"* and Arran, Glencairn and Argyll were dispatched to the west to carry the Act into execution". It is said that his 'army' was bigger than that of England and France. He "*bombarded with cannon*", destroying Iona Abbey!

(2.) **Archibald Campbell, 8th Earl and 1st Marquess of Argyll (1607–1661)** :- effective ruler of Scotland; Leader of "Committee of Estates"; "*Leader in Council and in Field for The Reformed Religion*". Following the Synod of Argyll 1642, he went around the Isles destroying various crosses and "*idolatrous monuments*". He was said to have overthrown "*some of the finest monuments of the (Iona) monastery and the altars*" and "*dispersed*" the valuable, irreplaceable library (Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments, Scotland (RCAHMS), 1977).



It is vital in understanding this history not to separate the destruction of Clan Donald, the "Daunting of the Isles" to end "400 years of barbarism" and the destruction of Iona Abbey by these two Earls of Argyll. Their acts were utterly integral. Once all "the fruits" of the abbey were stripped, including by seven successive Earl of Argyll's Commendators ("property managers - family proprietary interest"!) and the wealth transfer mainly to the reforming Calvinist elite had occurred, the edifice that was created by Clan Donald, its ecclesiastical capital and Cathedral of the Isles in all but name, needed to be 'erased' from memory - like the 'papists and the highland barbarous savages'.

THE EARLY CAMPBELL EARLS did not contribute one iota to Iona Abbey or its cathedral rebuild (or any abbey at all). At dissolution, the property "*fell into the hands of*" the Mull Macleans for nothing (*Act of Convention of Estates*, 1561-74),³ then to the Campbells by force in 1692 ("50 Year War") after trying to buy it at a fraction of the face value in 1674 by 'leveraging' Maclean debt bought by them over years.⁴

Over 1833-54, George William, the 6th Duke of Argyll, and John, the 7th Duke, 1839, and George John, the 8th Duke, 1847, were urged by the Society of Antiquities (via Norwegian scholar P. Munch) including by its early Secretary, Donald Gregory, the famous historian, Celtic scholar and antiquarian and by the Iona Club, to protect the Abbey buildings and St Oran's tombstones. The Rt. Hon. Godfrey William Macdonald was an Iona Club member, 1835. George, the 8th Duke of Argyll did not do any actual restoration of the Abbey's fabric.

He openly played down and disdainfully spurned this medieval abbey's significance and status during 1200-1560. It is surprising and very telling that in the Duke's memoirs he never once mentions Iona Abbey or ecumenism. He was neither attracted nor attached to either. Finally, in 1874, under community and institutional pressure, another "loud call" by the Society of Antiquities (RCAHMS; Vol 4; p.151), the 8th Duke eventually did some more stabilising to prevent further falls and decay - caused in the first place through the abbey's destruction by his forebear's cannon about 350 years before! (see presentation: <https://goo.gl/2WPNao>). They exerted, quote "*pressure*", on the Duke to stop further crumbling! *Pressured*, ie, not influenced or persuaded.

³ NB: If the Lordship of the Isles was not forfeited 1493, and had remained united, then the Reformation would have seen all the Abbey's assets returned effectively to (under) Clan Donald's headship control, viz, the Act of Convention of Estates, 1561-74, with local Macleans employed there only as vassals: factor, bailiff, etc.

⁴ Maclean, Sir Allan, 20th Chief of Clan Maclean, d.1674. Manfully resisted Campbells, but offered a settlement of debt which was rejected by Campbells, who were unwilling to compromise. Archibald Campbell, 10th Earl of Argyll, 1st Duke of Argyll, 1658-1703 :- When William of Orange came to power, the forfeited lands of his father were restored to him. He accepted the surrender of Duart and Cairnburgh Castles from Macleans in 1692, thus finally gaining the Duart Estate.

Then, twenty-five years later, in 1899, with very little else done, at death's door and under gentle coercion and obvious spousal pleading by his third wife Ina (nee MacNeill), ⁵ he signed a Trust Deed and handed the abbey back to the church ("established"/National) to let them restore it at their own and public expense. (NB: it was, to be honest, rightfully theirs in any case, ie, Knox's '*First Book of Discipline*' stipulating assets of the old church should pass to the new.)

Then the Abbey's restoration was performed by the community through public subscription and free labour, with Sir James Lithgow, the battleship builder, giving £5000 ⁶ to Rev. George MacLeod (£250,000 today). The Iona Community obtained the approval out of a number of those interested in the site, partly because of the work and plans already done by Sir David Russell, owner of the Fife paper mills. ("*Spirituality was a living concept to Sir David Russell, and his biography tells of his role as instigator of the Iona Retreat.*") A decisive factor in the timing and decision by the Church of Scotland to award the scheme to George MacLeod was to ensure a site on Iona was not turned into a "Popish" breeding ground by the wealthy Marquis of Bute who wanted to buy the island in 1938 and "*there was alarm that Iona might be turned into a Catholic seminary*"! What other historically significant religious site in Scotland with important Abbey ruins was handed over to an Ecumenical Community around that time as a matter of State policy? In the very same year, 1938, George MacLeod was awarded the site, after a decade of a number of other people showing continued interest, and he went ahead "*using Russell's plans for the restoration of the Iona buildings.*" [Those interested include Sir David Russell, The American Iona Society, George MacLeod, Clare Vyner (owner of Fountains Abbey), the Marquis of Bute.]

The issue being highlighted here is that the ecumenical Iona Community's success in winning the "tender" for Iona Abbey had nothing whatsoever to do with the so called "reconstructing intents" or "vision" for Iona Abbey by the 8th Duke of Argyll, or anything to do with his Deed of Trust returning the site back to the church (to the Cathedral Trust) or anything to do with him having a positive view of ecumenical worship (Besides, "*The contemporary ecumenical movement for Protestants is often said to have started with the 1910 Edinburgh Missionary Conference*" – the Duke died in 1900.) Any links are a product of "reconstructive intents" or hagiographic gloss of others, not by the Dukes. It must be kept in mind also that this occurred nearly 40 years after the 8th Duke died.

⁵ The 8th Duke's third wife, *Ina Erskine MacNeill* of Colonsay (1874-1925), m.1895, was invested as a Lady, Royal Order of Victoria and Albert, and held the office of Extra Lady of the Bedchamber to Queen Victoria. She died 25 years after George and made the notable, very personal decision to be buried in Iona Abbey church (not Colonsay) and oversaw the pairing and matching of her white Carrara marble monument with her husband George's (his in 1912). Why didn't Ina lie beside her husband at Kilmun like other Earls/Duke's wives? There was space to 1949. All this indicates Ina was a key driving force behind any real sympathy of the Duke towards Iona Abbey. Not the same as, but similar to Agnes Douglas, Catholic wife of the **7th Earl** who influenced his late conversion. The "*Duchess's Cross*" was erected in 1878 north of the Iona Abbey for Elizabeth, by the 1st wife of **8th Duke**. It's patently obvious that it was the wives of this Duke who had the real and sincere affinity with medieval Iona Abbey.

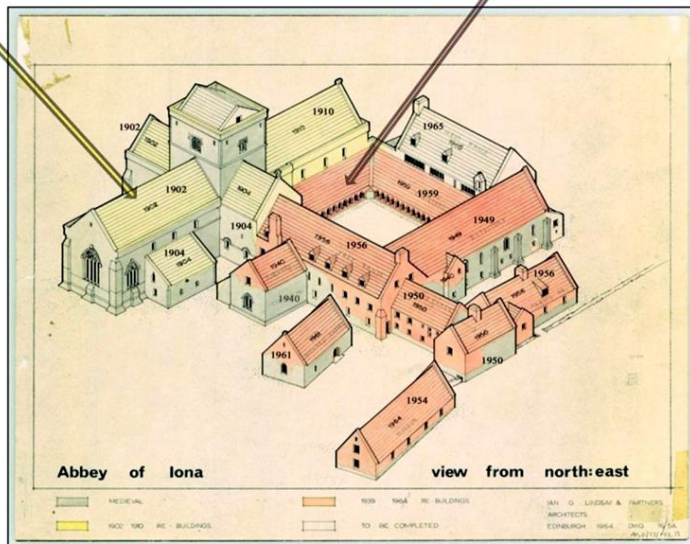
⁶ Macintyre, Lorn; *Sir David Russell: A Biography*; 1995. Uni. of St Andrews; Call Number MS 38515; Papers of Sir David Russell; 1826-1991.

IONA ABBEY, AS YOU SEE IT TODAY, IS CLAN DONALD'S LEGACY :-

AS RESTORED 20TH C. WITH PUBLIC MONEY & COMMUNITY LABOUR BY :

1. THE CATHEDRAL TRUST (1902-1910).

2. THE IONA COMMUNITY (1938-1965)



IRM

The Campbells enjoy a disproportionate amount of the accolades for “returning” and “restoring” the Abbey, when very little of it at all or the exact opposite is the truth. In 1979 “*Heavy estate taxes led the 12th Duke of Argyll to sell the island of Iona. The Hugh Fraser Foundation bought Iona for the nation; ownership transferred to the National Trust for Scotland*” (NY Times, Apr 2001).

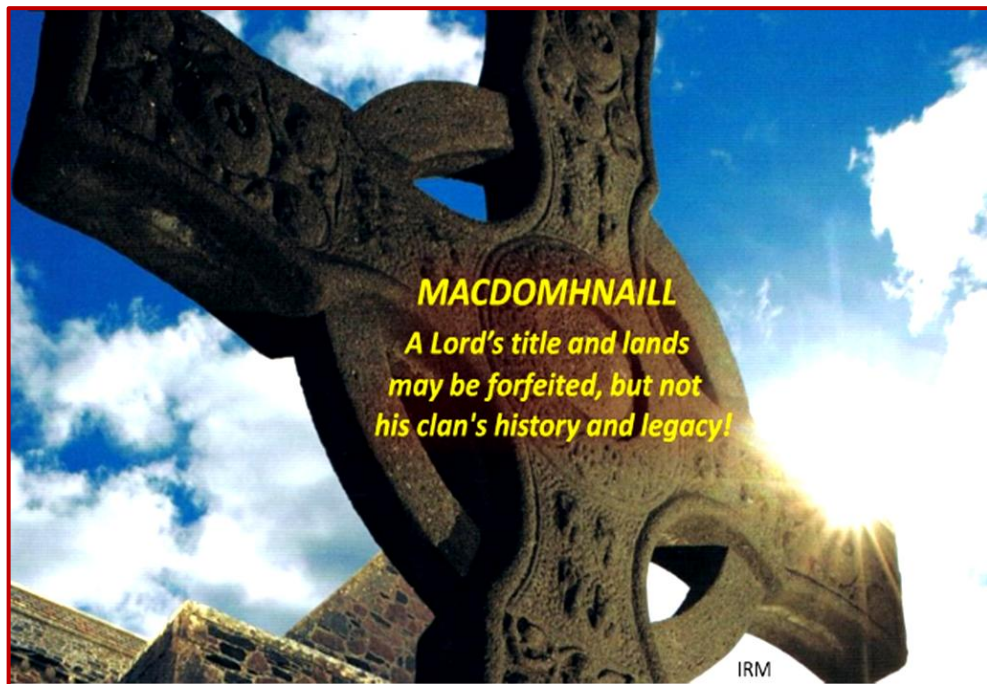
SUMMARY. When it comes to who is most associated with “Iona Abbey”, the lion’s share of attention is focused on the internationally famous, iconic St Columba, the early Christian era and Iona’s Hiberno-Scottish mission. Then fast-forwards to (the recency of) the regional celebrity of the so called “extraordinary” Renaissance Man, the 8th Duke of Argyll, with the large white carrara marble effigies of himself and wife Ina so dominant in the cathedral (taking up the entire south transept). The inclusion of George’s effigy in the Abbey gives an artificial reading that this Abbey has significantly benefited from the patronage and benefaction of the Dukes of Argyll - and he is not even buried there.⁷ This leaves the Clan Donald Lords of the Isles forfeit of any due recognition, outside of the minimalist role of being called benefactors or patrons.

⁷ He is buried in the Campbell Chief’s mausoleum at Kilmun Church, near Dunoon, Cowal Peninsula (1st wife beside him as normal), where he would have been buried regardless of that transept not being restored until 1902.

This is a gross understatement of their fundamental contribution to this medieval infrastructure, the resulting macroeconomics of the region at the time and the truly extraordinary three centuries' long existence of Iona Abbey and its Cathedral of the Isles. In many respects, they are sidelined, what's more anonymously, to St Oran's Chapel. It is all substantively misleading in terms of a proper interpretation of the history of the site's extant architecture :- *"probably the completest and most interesting group of ancient ecclesiastical structures in Scotland"*.⁸

Is the 8th Duke of Argyll's incongruous monument in the Abbey Church, minus his remains, a reflection of his exaggerated role in its 20th century re-birth or a statement and constant reminder of the plunder, demise and destruction of this whole medieval abbey by his dynasty over the 16th and 17th centuries?

A solution to that interpretative and ethical dilemma is to acknowledge authentically and publicly the following historical fact : Medieval Iona Abbey, as you see it today (restored in the 20th century), is principally the legacy of the 15th century Clan Donald Lords of The Isles and their Clan Donald Abbots and Bishops. And Iona Abbey Church is, in all but name, the Clan Donald's Cathedral of The Isles.

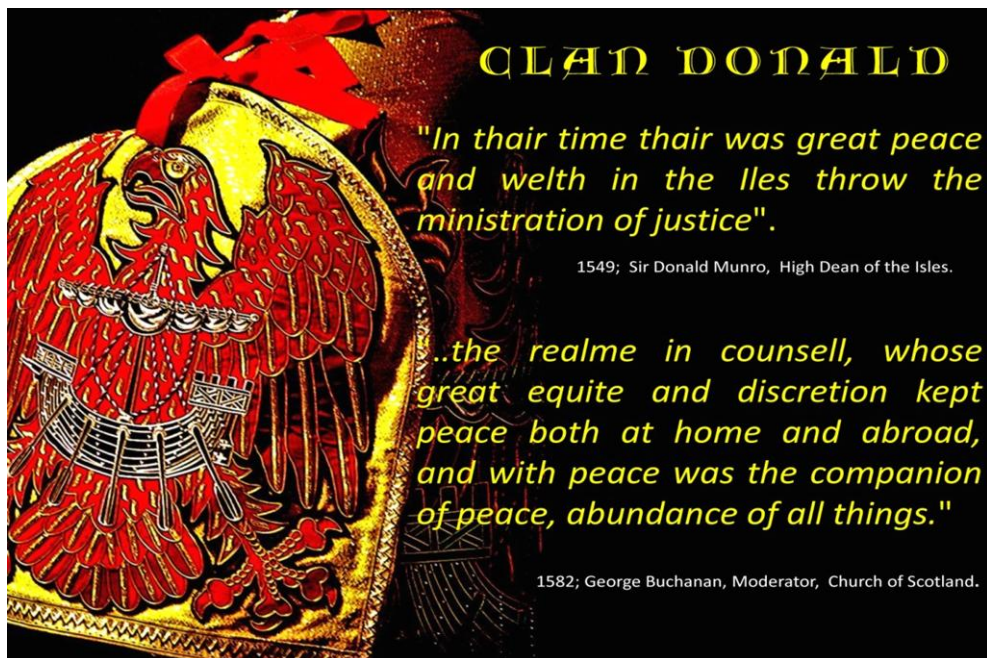


⁸ MacGibbon, David; Ross, Thomas; *"The Ecclesiastical Architecture of Scotland, VOL III; pps 48, 49; 1897.*

During the tenuous, seventeen-year period between his two forfeitures (1476 and 1493), and interspersed with his headstrong heir Angus Og's destructive reprisals, a Cathedral petition to the Pope by Lord Macdonald (to officially raise Iona Abbey to Cathedral status) had absolutely no prospect of obtaining King James IV's required endorsement. But, in 1499, with its characteristics and attributes entirely unchanged or improved, Iona Abbey church acted '*de facto Cathedral*' under Eoin Cambuil I, *Abbey Commendator* and Bishop of the Isles, nephew of a new 1498 petitioner, Archibald Campbell, 2nd Earl of Argyll.⁹

Lord of the Isles John Macdonald died in 1503. In 1506, the Cathedral was confirmed. "***O Children of Conn, be resolute and fierce, be forceful and stand your ground, Now is the time for you to win recognition***", that :-

IONA CATHEDRAL OF THE ISLES IS CLAN DONALD'S LEGACY.
"Còir fhògradh - "It is right to proclaim it."



1549; Sir Donald Munro, High Dean of the Isles.

1582; George Buchanan, Moderator, Church of Scotland.

Ian Ross Macdonnell, 2018.

⁹ Archibald, 2nd Earl of Argyll, the petitioner, supported by his enabler, King James IV and his son, James Stewart (Duke of Ross) the new Archbishop of St Andrews from 1497, which was now the Metropolitan See, controlling the Isles' Diocese! *Commendators* were regularly feuing (transferring – siphoning off) abbey lands to family members. Pensions were granted from revenues of the bishopric and the recipients were family members. King James V used the church as a source of income and for appointments for his illegitimate children and favourites.



CLAN DONALD & IONA ABBEY 1200 - 1500

THE EARLY CLAN DONALD AND THEIR IMMEDIATE ANTECEDENT ANTECEDENT *REGINALD mac SOMERLED* WERE THE UNRIVALLED ENDOWERS, FUNDERS, BUILDERS, PATRONS, PROTECTORS AND GENEROUS BENEFACTORS OF IONA'S ABBEY, CATHEDRAL, NUNNERY AND MONUMENTAL SCULPTURE, 1205 - 1503.

THE KINGS AND LORDS OF THE WESTERN PARTS OF SCOTLAND & ISLES

1156 - 1164 : **SOMERLED
KING OF THE ISLES**

- EXPELLED THE VIKINGS AND WON BACK THE ISLES. TRIED TO RESTORE COLUMBAN PRIMACY FOR IONA. BUILT THE CURRENT ST ORAN'S CHAPEL AND IS BURIED THERE.
- *"FOUNDED BY THE SPEAR, SLAIN BY THE SWORD, SOMERLED DIED."*

1205 - 1207 : **REGINALD**

- ABBEY FOUNDER. ORIGINAL ENDOWER* OF BENEDICTINE ABBEY AND NUNNERY. LIVED TO BUILD THE MICHAEL CHAPEL. NOMINATED HIS SISTER BETHAG AS NUNNERY'S 1ST PRIOR.
- *"THE MOST DISTINGUISHED OF THE GALL OR GAEL FOR PROSPERITY AND GENEROSITY..."*

1207 - 1247 : **DONALD**

- *"OF THE STATELY GAZE."* CLAN DONALD'S FOUNDER. HE BUILT THE ABBEY CHURCH. IONA IS CLAN DONALD'S ANCIENT ECCLESIASTICAL CAPITAL.

1247 - 1292 : **ANDRUS MOR**

- COMPLETED THE CHURCH. CLAUSTRAL BUILDINGS AND THE NUNNERY.
- *"FROM YOU, COLUM GILLE CAME OVER THRICE TO HELP US - O SCION OF TARA."*

* ENDOWMENT IS NOT A ONCE ONLY EVENT AND IT'S CONDITIONAL.

"Remained generous benefactors to the abbey throughout."

IT'S A CONTINUING PROCESS BY THE FOUNDER'S PATRILINEAL SUCCESSORS *"Unrivalled among the barons of Scotland as monastic patrons."*

1292 - 1299 : **ALEXANDER 06**

- *"BEST MAN OF HIS TRIBE."* KILLED IN IRELAND FIGHTING MACDOUGALLS. UNDEPOSED.

1299 - 1318 : **ANDRUS 06**

- *"MY HOPE IS CONSTANT IN THEE."* VITAL ROLE WITH ROBERT BRUCE, BANNOCKBURN, 1314.

1318 - 1387 : **GOOD JOHN OF ISLAY**

- *"DOMINUS INSLARUM."* INITIAL IMPETUS FOR IONA SCHOOL OF STONE CARVING.

1387 - 1421 : **DONALD OF HARLAW**

- *"SONS OF CONN REMEMBER."* CRUSHED MACKINNON EXPLOITATION. LAST BURIED IONA.

1421 - 1449 : **ALEXANDER**

- *"A GRAND MAN, CALLED MACDONALD."* BURIED CHANONRY OF ROSS, INVERNESS.

1449 - 1503 : **JOHN II**

- *"THE SOVEREIGNTY OF THE GAEL TO CLAN COLLA, IT IS RIGHT TO PROCLAIM IT."*

HE FUNDED & BUILT THE CATHEDRAL OF ISLES, IONA. LAST MACDONALD LORD OF ISLES.

IN THE 15TH CENTURY THERE WERE TWO MACDONALD ABBOTS OF IONA AND TWO MACDONALD BISHOPS OF THE ISLES. DONALD OF HARLAW GIFTED IONA ABBEY (ABBOT, JOHN MACALXANDAIR) WITH THE GOLD AND SILVER RELIQUARY *"HAND OF COLUMBA."*

The dominion of the *Royal family of MacDonald* was evident in their thirty castles throughout the *Lordship of the Isles*.