



CLAN DONALD and IONA ABBEY
1200-1500

KINGS and LORDS OF THE ISLES

BISHOPS



ABBOTS

Introduction



IONA

The ancient ecclesiastical capital of Dalriada and of the 'Royal Family of MacDonald', 1200 ~ 1500.

THIS IS A THOROUGHLY CLAN DONALD CENTRIC ACCOUNT.

AS IT OUGHT TO BE.

- ❖ HIBERNIA'S 'SCOTTI' WERE THE FUNDAMENTAL FOUNDATION TO DALRIADA, IONA, CLAN DONALD and the CULTURE, LANGUAGE AND CHRISTIANITY OF 'ALBA'
- ❖ BUT, A FOUNDATION IS NOT A VIABLE CONTINUUM WITHOUT THE MANY BUILDING BLOCKS AND STRONG, INDIVIDUAL CORNER STONES THAT MAKE UP THE UNIQUE NATIONAL IDENTITY OF TODAY'S SCOTLAND.
- ❖ FROM 1207 TO 1493, THE EARLY CLAN DONALD AND ITS CHIEFS, THE LORDS OF THE ISLES WERE ENTIRELY CENTRAL TO IONA ABBEY'S WHOLE MEDIEVAL EXISTENCE, DEVELOPMENT AND POLITICS. IN ALL BUT NAME, ST MARY'S WAS CLAN DONALD'S CATHEDRAL OF THE ISLES, c.1480.
- ❖ THIS ENDURING MACDONALD PHASE EQUALS THE 300 YEAR PERIOD OF PRIMARY COLUMBAN MONASTICISM. IT IS PARAMOUNT IN PROVIDING THE SOLE WITNESS TO IONA'S EXTANT ARCHITECTURE AND IS A PRINCIPAL WITNESS TO THE SURVIVING MONUMENTS.
- ❖ THE CULT OF SAINTS, BODY PART RELICS, THE DOCTRINES OF PURGATORY AND INTERCESSORY PRAYER (AND EVISCERATION, "HEART BURIAL") WERE TO PROFOUNDLY SHAPE THE BURIAL RITES OF THE CLAN DONALD LORDS OF THE ISLES – OF THE 'BODY POLITIC.'

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IAN ROSS MACDONNELL ©
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MEDIEVAL GRAVESLABS: The complete research contains nine chapters, one for each Lord's graveslab, the result of work spanning six years and six research trips to Scotland, Ireland and London. They give a sound basis for identifying individual graveslabs for a couple of the Clan Donald Lords of The Isles and their "body politic" burial rituals to protect and perpetuate the *Kingship of The Isles* as a continuous living institution. These graveslabs, in order of certainty, are those of *Angus Og of Bannockburn*¹ (k1318); *Reginald mac Somerled*, the Abbey founder (Chapter 2); and tentatively the eponymous *Donald I* and *Good John of Islay* (with impression of original finishes). The cult of saints, body part relics, the doctrines of purgatory and intercessory prayer were to profoundly shape their lives, institutions and burial rites.

IONA ABBEY: Reginald mac Somerled had the vision and technically made the decision to found the Iona Abbey but he took the order of brother and retired to Paisley Abbey "before 1200." Reginald's original vision, requiring a restart in 1205 after a destructive Irish razing (and similarly by King of Mann, 1210), was actually implemented long after his 1207 death, by his son the eponymous Donald, *Mac Somurli ri Airir Gaidil*,² and his son Angus Mor mac Donald³ over a period of some 80 years. If this occurred with King Henry I, II or James I, II, III, then these distinctions would be made. It is fundamental to the correct understanding of the origins of this medieval abbey, to clearly state that it was not, as commonly told, neither funded by nor built by the Benedictines. It is quite insufficient to only say that someone called Reginald (sometimes adding mac Somerled) founded or endowed the Abbey. Its not that he is a relatively unknown figure, but the statement, on its own, is meaningless and very misleading.

This living medieval monastery, as you see it today, is the result of *Angel Funding*,⁴ the construction of and then the extensive rebuilding by successive early *Clan Donald Lords of the Isles* and their hereditary Chief Masons the O'Brolchans over 300 years. (As restored by the Iona Cathedral Trust through public subscription and the Abbey buildings by George McLeod's self funded Iona Community.) Kings were the *principal* Abbey builders, not Abbots; they are the King's Master Masons or Church-Wrights, not the Abbots, etc. Edward the Confessor built the first Westminster ("St Peters"), not the Abbot; in 1245 it was Henry III who (re)built the upgraded Westminster, not the Abbot (and again, Netley, 1239). Queen Margaret, King David I, King Edgar, *built* their Abbeys – not the Abbots. The Lord Rhys built Talley Abbey, Wales, c.1171. "*Charlemagne built (constructed) Aachen cathedral*", Einhard. Not the Archbishop. It is the "*Confessor's Abbey*", not the Abbots (⁵ Fernie, Gem & Rodwell).

And this is so for other Abbeys, including Iona.⁶

"Reginald, the son of Somerled, undertook the rebuilding of the [Iona] monastery."⁷

¹ Ref. my submissions to Historic Scotland in 2006 (pre-lim.) and May 2011. 2011 acknowledged, but no response yet.

² Full paper has reasons for giving Donald this title from annal

³ **Aonghas Mór (1247-92 as Chief) has been called "the first MacDonald"** by W.D.H. Sellar, "*Hebridean Sea-Kings: The Successors of Somerled, 1164-1316*", in Edward J. Cowan & R. Andrew McDonald (eds.), *Alba: Celtic Scotland in the Medieval Era*, p. 207.

The accurate & precise **Annals of Ulster** and the Four Masters refer to "*Clainni Domnaill*" and "*MacDomhnaill Gallócclach*" as early as 1264 (& use prior?)

⁴ A modern term, but correct and very apt here – for feudal tenure of "divine or spiritual service". An *angel investor* or *angel* (also known as a business angel or informal investor) is an affluent individual who provides ("seed") capital for a business start-up (until viable, self funding). The first Abbot did not arrive with his own bags of gold, fleet of galleys, his own source of resources (materials) or teams of skilled workers and labourers. Each Benedictine Abbey was completely autonomous – all that was "corporate" was their "order", liturgical practise and Abbey layout, furnishings (Not part of the formal organisational structure of, or funded by Roman Church). There was a Benedictine monastic "**rule**" (religious 'practice') but their structure as an organisation was not even formalised, and with limited success, as late as 1216 (4th Lateran Council) - AFTER IONA RE-FOUNDED, let alone a co-ordinated network and systematic organisation of any sort.

⁵ Mortimer, Richard, Ed. *Edward the Confessor - The Man and the Legend*; 2009. **Ch 6.** Edward the Confessor's Westminster Abbey; Fernie, E; **Ch 7.** New Glimpses of Edward the Confessor's Abbey; Rodwell, W; p.155. **Craftsmen and Administrators in the Building of the Confessor's Abbey**; R Gem; pps 168-172.

This is not to say that some powerful and/or wealthy Coarb or Archbishop, who controlled the aggregate revenue of a large confederation or a Province, didn't initiate and manage the "building" of a particular Cathedral for themselves. Palatine Archbishops were little short of sovereigns in their own jurisdiction, "Lords of Regality", who were paid fief-duty, homage fees, etc.

⁶ The BBC: "*In 1200 AD, Ragnall, son of Somerled, virtual King of the Isles, brought in the Benedictine Order and built the great abbey.*" (grammar: they clearly mean Reginald was the principal builder).

⁷ *The Ecclesiastical Architecture of Scotland*, VOL III; pps 48,49. David MacGibbon and Thomas Ross; 1897.

However, if an Abbot does manage the construction (and maybe supply contracts, etc), it is because the King or Lord has especially selected him on his unusual blend of qualifications (*canon-artificer*) and experience for this role and superintended the work to him (like one Derry O'Brolchan Coarb of Columba was). But, as said before, an Abbot is primarily installed to run the monastery full time (with responsibilities outside the Abbey as well), just like a Chancellor is installed to run a new University with his Professors – he is not the builder in public or private universities. I think the point is made.

In understanding who funded and built Iona Abbey, it is informative to explore the human condition of a preoccupation (obsession?) with a soul, “the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting” :-

It is easy for all to grasp that the ancient Egyptian Pharaoh funded and built the pyramid and not the High Priest, because it is a single user, use once, “**resurrection machine**” to the after life (earliest belief in rebirth after death; arriving at one’s reward in afterlife in ancient Egypt was a demanding ordeal, *requiring a sin-free heart!*)

While the *high middle ages* (old order) Benedictine abbeys were founded for the same purpose to get a “fast track status” through purgatory to “the life ever after”, they were **permanent “prayer machines”** (intercession: *need of purification to enter into the happiness of heaven*). They were for both the ancestors and heirs of the founder, and, were lived in by the “priests/monks” (the word purgatory appearing 1160-1180 and official recognition by the Pope in 1254.) Over time, if they were productively and scrupulously managed, continually endowed, in a prosperous area, protected and supported, then they became self sufficient and some became wealthy (ie, on the backs of their endowers) and now almost everyone assumes it was the Abbot and the monks who funded and built them from the beginning. They are wrong :- and it doesn’t help when people confuse what happened with the *later Orders*, eg, the Cistercians with their new *conversi*, the lay brethren (not servants) and their innovative system of grangefarming which they pioneered, etc, etc. They attracted huge endowments from Royalty because of their reputation as “the highest form of monasticism – authentic Christianity” (viz, Lord “Good John” (MacDonald) de Yle with his Oransay Priory). They developed a system of government to oversee their network :- that is, they, **the Cistercians**, revolutionised the management of the economy.¹

¹ *Monastic and Religious Orders in Britain, 1000-1300*. Burton, J. 1994; p.65.

Reginald, “opulent, and the most distinguished of the Gaill or the Gael for prosperity, sway of generosity and feat of arms was “Rex Insularum - Dominus de Ergile et Kyntyre; Dominus de Inchehal” (known titles he used; WDH Sellar). Reginald’s Iona Abbey dream had to be realised, right from the very beginning, by his immediate heirs. These Kings and Clan Donald Lords of the Isles were builders of thirty large stone structures in many difficult coastal and island locations from c.1150² requiring considerable sea power,³ regional control of land resources (eg, red granite, freestone, timber from Mull for Iona), building expertise, organisational ability, many vassal men and significant finances.⁴

The Benedictine order is unique in that it is not a confederation (unaffiliated). The new Iona Abbot, Benedictine community, re-installed in 1205 by Reginald’s right of assent, or most likely by Donald as *ri ar tothach*, king in effect,⁵ was not some powerful and/or wealthy Coarb or Archbishop, who had at his disposal the aggregate revenue of a large confederation or an Archdiocese/Province; he was by their policy, self-reliant, autonomous, having no *Superior* and without his own wealth, institutional funding or capital reserves. He was not an *equity partner* even if he was given a feudal tenure of only “*divine or spiritual service*”.⁶

The Iona Abbot was not given “tenure in free alms” – freehold, inalienable, ‘hereditary’ land endowment (*‘in puram et perpetuam elemosinam’*) for the major estates distributed widely through the Western Isles and mainland. Under ‘free alms’ tenure, the Abbot could only

² Clai Castle, (“Caisteal Claidh”) on Am Fraoch Eilean, Heather I. (S/W off Jura). NB: Lord Rhys also castle building.

³ “**Galley**s played a crucial role in Highland economic life. **They were the basis of all inter-island communication, all trade and all warfare**”. Rixon, D; *The West Highland Galley*; 1998. p.77.

⁴ “**Provided the territory, land, stone and timber, books, furniture, farming implements and gold**”; ie, by Donnachadh Ua Cearbhaill (O’Carroll), **King of Airgialla**, for Mellifont abbey, c.1142-57 (NB: these Cistercian monks to Reginald’s Saddell Abbey, 1203); *New History of Ireland*, VOL 1; 2005 (Ussher’s MS, Class B, Tab 1, no.1; Trinity, Dublin. Petrie, G.). “*Archbishop of Armagh, Maelpatrick O’Sconnal, brought the Friars Minor to Armagh; according to tradition it was MacDonnell Galloglaigh that commenced the erection of the monastery.*” (Annals of Four Masters (AFM) 1264-10).

⁵ SIMMS, K. ‘*Gaelic Warfare in Middle Ages*’. The usage.

⁶ Knowles, D. *The Monastic Order in England*, 2nd edition. Cambridge University Press; 1963. Burton, J. *Monastic and Religious Orders in Britain 1000-1300*; 1994. “Of all the orders, the Benedictines have the most traditionally feudal relationships with their patrons, who are generally regarded as liege lords. This is especially true of the older monasteries, which hold much of their land by military tenure from their patrons” (ie, after the Norman conquest, 1066).

recognise one Lord – GOD (Religious houses in receipt of free alms could not recognise a secular lord.) The relationship between the Abbot and Lord of the Isles in this case would have been at ‘*alms length*’, subsidiary. But this was clearly not the case because the Iona Abbot always served as a Lord Spiritual on the Lordship’s Council of the Isles and ‘*MacDonald, King of the Isles*’, made solemn oaths (land grants) to his vassals ‘*sworn on the black stones*’ before witnesses, just west of the abbey church (Martin Martin, 1695). The RCAHMS (VOL 4; p.145) also think that some of the Iona endowments were reallocated to Oransay Priory by Lord John MacDonald, c.1430 - meaning they were not inalienable, not held in freehold by the Iona Abbot. The “perpetual free alms” arrangement was only for their lessor “donations” (cows, pennies, tithes on goods) to other foundations, eg, to Paisley and a small, late grant by Angus Master, 1485, to Iona. It was not for the major estates of their major foundation, Iona, which endowed income producing lands that required feudal “functional reciprocity” of the abbey providing divine service - spiritual service, salvation for their souls (and for kin, descendants and ancestors).

[I do not think the major estates also had a military obligation as well - to provide ship service or castle guard; even if they did after the Lordship fell. The Abbey in fact provided a whole range of reciprocal services for the Clan Donald Chiefs and it gave considerable prestige and status as well. It was a place of privilege for the elite :- refuge and sanctuary for “unfortunate” noble women of the Lord’s kin; education, law and medical services; hospitalisation, retirement home. IN HOUSE CANON LAWYERS: drafting Vatican petitions to secure release from disabilities imposed by strict letter of canon law:- “marriage dispensations”, remarrying; illegitimacy, etc. They also obtained personal spiritual guidance on matters of state, feuds, battle, health, times of disaster, and the art of dying, death.]

Functional reciprocity was a perpetual “conditionality of endowment”¹ that extended to ALL Clan Donald Lords of the Isles who had the power, authority and responsibility to manage the mutual obligation :- “.. “there is a clearly conceived notion that foundation and endowments are given conditionally. This attitude is of course feudal yet it is not restricted to the lay condition, but is in fact found embracing all forms of ecclesiastical foundation. Property is given conditionally. And these conditions are the handles by which the founder and his heirs can direct the endowment towards its specific purpose of providing service.”

- **THERE IS ONLY ONE FOUNDER (REGINALD);**
- **BUT THERE ARE MANY ENDOWERS;**
- **ENDOWMENT IS NOT A ONCE ONLY EVENT - IT IS A CONTINUING PROCESS.**

THERE ARE NOT ONLY SUBSEQUENT ADDITIONAL ENDOWMENTS, BUT THE RECIPROCAL FUNCTIONALITY, THE “CONDITIONALITY OF ENDOWMENT”, IS DYNAMIC AND REQUIRED ALL CLAN DONALD HEIRS-CHIEFS TO REGULATE AND MANAGE IT. AND THEY DID - EVIDENCE OF THEIR INTERVENTION COMES LATER.

At first, the Iona Abbot had 12 monks, with oaths of poverty, chastity and obedience, who spent the majority of their time, *Horarium*, on religious (*opus Dei*) and intellectual functions, copying MSS, and routine duties such as gardening, fishing, food preparation, cleaning, hospice functions and making medicine, etc. Their own lay estate workers, *manaig*, and their *famuli*, the hired servants of the monastery (not *lay brethren* [Cistercian]), came gradually later as did their specialist productive herds and the various re-directed revenue streams trickle in from the land endowments, notably also coming “*with the men belonging to the same lands*”- ie, the economically all important attached physical labour of the *Dhomhnallach* (men comprising Clan Donald; “*the MacDonald men*”, even if of other “family”).

Iona then was without any of its prestigious relics², was a bare shadow of its former self, and the *pray & pay* nouveau Columban pilgrim trade would also be a gradual build from an impoverished base. The enabling endowments, the core economic strength and life-blood of the Abbey, came from successive **Clan Donald Lords of the Isles**³ and for 300 years were regularly confirmed,

² Esp. body parts. No evidence “hand of Columba” was on Iona before gifting of reliquary by Donald II, c.1412.

³ Good John (I) of Islay (d. 1386) was the Lord of the Isles (1336–1386) and chief of Clan Donald. In 1336, he styled himself Dominus Insularum, “Lord of the Isles”. Because this is the first ever recorded instance of the title in use, modern historians count John as the first of the **later medieval** Lords of the Isles, although this rather broad Latin style corresponds roughly with the older Gaelic title Rí Innse Gall (“King of the Isles”), in use since the Viking Age, and for instance, the even more similar Latin title *dominus de Incheval* (“Lord of the Hebrides”), applied to Reginald Mac Somerled in the mid-12th century. In fact John is actually styled Rí Innsi Gall or **King of the Isles** shortly after his death in a contemporary entry in the Irish Annals of Ulster (of precise terminology). All in all, its trite and churlish to misuse semantics to say, as some do,

¹ John Wyclif as Legal Reformer; (Conditionality of Endowment); William E. Farr; University of Washington; 1971. Wyclif; 1320-84: “*The Morning Star of the Reformation*” - Lollard leader, but very useful for legal insight.

protected, increased and expanded. Endowments had “*carta confirmationis*” and additional ones made by them during the 14th and 15th centuries as late as 1440, 1485. Donald of Harlaw (1386-1421) : “*gave lands to the monastery of Iona, and every immunity which the monastery of Iona had from his ancestors before him*” – MacVurich. It might be expressed that Iona Abbey had been acting as a ‘(holy owned) land trust’ for Clan Donald.

NB: if this Lordship was not forfeited 1493, then the Reformation would have seen all the Abbey’s assets returned effectively to under Clan Donald’s headship control - Act of Convention of Estates, 1561-74 (with local Macleans employed there only as vassals: factor, bailiff, etc.).

Under Lord Angus Mor, later 13th c., the church was extended south by a partly vaulted transept, possibly for pilgrims, but there are sound reasons to doubt it was completed. The reason was evidently both Lord Alaxandair Og’s devastating regional war with the MacDougalls during the last decade of the 13th c. and then the two 14th c. Wars of Independence in which Lord Angus Og was committed (1st one). While the war was disruptive on the mainland, the Abbey on Iona was relatively isolated (and it was not destroyed, like most others were). This shows the extent to which the building and rebuilding of the church and Abbey depended on the resources and attention of these Clan Donald Lords (ie, the management, contracts, supply, transport, superintending, funding, construction, etc, etc.) Lord John I also had a long and contested minority.

Byc.1450:- “The monastery was collapsed, impoverished in its rent and of extreme poverty.” It had been so for decades and the previous Lord, Alexander MacDonald, said c.1443 that he was forced by conscience to rather “*diminish the monastery*” than augment because of the unfettered, nefarious, wicked Finguine(s) MacKinnon. The 1428 “three years off purgatory dispensation bonus scheme” to raise annual pilgrim funds on St Columba’s feast day, mainly for restoring the choir’s floor, was not the saviour of the *collapsed monastery*.

But, post 1450, new works were of - “so comprehensive a scale as to involve the destruction of nearly three-fourths (3/4s) of the structure.”

that there were no “Donald” Lords of The Isles until 1336 or no Clan Donald until the 15th century when surnames became universal and entrenched. **Its accepted by all that Reginald and Donald are referred to as “Clan Somairle”.** Equally therefore, there is no reason to deny that Angus Mor, Alaxandair and Angus Og are “*Cloinne Domhnaill*”: (Annals, mid 13th c.).

Clan Donald Lord, John II, instead of just economically restoring the existing *dilapidated* Abbey church, obviously used his treasury and resources to significantly enlarge and enhance it (over 1450 to 1476, 1st forfeiture), with the aim of raising its status as their **MacDonald Cathedral of the Isles**. He was assisted by his cousin Bishop Angus MacDonald and the exemplary reforming Abbot Dominic MacKenzie.

This political goal was the zenith of a many decade’s long sequence of connected events:-

(1) 1387. Split from the Isle of Man, *The Isles* becomes a diocese in its own right, subject to York;

(2) 1390-1421. Donald II defeated the corrupt MacKinnon’s attempted inside coup of the Lordship (their reaction to abbey governance by him). John MacAllister (“*Iohannes Goffredi Angusii*” MacAlasandair), descendant of the undeposed Clan Donald Chief (III), Alaxandair OG, k.1299 became the Claustal Prior and then Abbot of Iona (c.1390- 1421). All of Alaxandair OG’s sons did **not** go to Ireland, despite what CLAN DONALD history and MacAllister Clan wrongly claim.

He was the lead reforming Prior and Abbot of the early 15th century. Prior John MacAllister broke the corruption and nepotism of the Finguines MacKinnon (1,2,3) family of Abbot (“*the greatest tyrant*”), son Prior (“*wicked and covetous*”), son monk (“*bad tree cannot bear good fruit*”), and it was John that commenced the long process of recovery and reform of the impoverished, collapsed monastery. (The MacKinnons had been given too much free reign for too long ¹ and John I was diverted with his “new order” Cistercian Priory foundation on Oransay and others.) John MacAllister stopped the encroachment and diversion of abbey funds into MacKinnon hands. John, of the senior Clan Donald line of MacAlasandair (of the undeposed Chief, Lord Alaxandair OG, k.1299) obviously had the full backing and necessary financial support of his 2nd cousin, Lord of the Isles, Donald of Harlow. John’s successful *commissio privationis* to the Vatican to expel Abbot Finguine was a very expensive legal action. He “devoted much of his career to **securing full control of the monastic revenues** ² as a preliminary to the repair of the abbey”.

¹ Chief Gilbride/*Bricius* MacKinnon was reputedly at Bannockburn with Angus Og. The Mackinnons on Mull had become hereditary *marsagál* of Clan Donald’s military forces and standard bearer. (and protector of the Abbot’s house?)

² “**if clerics occupying temporalities are wanting according to the form of the donation, temporal lords are held not only by fiscal law, but by the law of scripture to protect against impoverishment of the land.**” p.109. 1309. Parliament to Pope Clement : “According to the law of the land, possessions given to churches and religious places, should they be applied to a use contrary to the desire and intention of the founders and

(3) c.1390 . PUT BLUNTLY IN TODAY’S TERMS, THE MACKINNONS COMMITTED TREASON IN AN ATTEMPT TO PROTECT THEIR ABBEY RACKET BY INSTIGATING A REBELLION TO PLACE THEIR “PUPPET” AS THE LORD OF THE ISLES. The local “perverse noblemen” MacKinnons, had (c.1390) inspired a serious rebellion against Donald (II) of Harlaw, after usurping “control of a substantial part of the Abbey property” (RCAHMS). **Donald II (Chief 1386) had obviously threatened the MacKinnon’s Chief and Abbot with failing to meet the “conditionality of the endowment” (conditions of tenure – corporate governance; accountability).** The MacKinnons and supporters (including the ensnared Tanist, Ian Mor MacDonald, MacLeans, Harris McLeods) were defeated and the McKinnon Chief was hung. However, the “subtle, eloquent” Green Abbot, Finguine MacKinnon (I) who entrapped the Tanist, Ian Mor, was spared and confined to Iona because he “was a churchman!”

THIS WAS A PIVOTAL 30 YEAR PARTNERSHIP of Lord of the Isles, Donald (II) of Harlaw and Clan Donald Abbot, John MacAllister. ¹

(4) 1412-20. Donald II of Harlaw, 1386-1421, gifted the prestigious, precious and status-money raising reliquary of St Columba’s body part via the above Abbot MacAllister (the only known relic to be returned and at great trouble and huge expense);

[Relics were only displayed to pilgrims on the Saint’s feast day (“one of the great Catholic traditions”- V&A Museum). It is this annual opportunity that particularly attracted them. To even see one could cure illness, etc. In this case, the reliquary was gifted by Donald c.1412 (joined the order after 1411) well before the 1428 petition by Abbot Dominic (ie, through Donald to Rome) for the three years off purgatory for pilgrims. The Abbot linked it (a “bundled” add on) to the pilgrims already coming there on the feast day. Monies raised on the feast day are therefore at least due to the *Hand of Columba* being on view as due to the “sentence reduction” in the feared purgatory. Without a reliquary it would be less effective. Despite both “incentives”, the monastery remained “impoverished”. NB: ‘By late 14th century, pilgrimage was losing much of its earlier spiritual quality and becoming a tourist experience.’ Faith in miracles and indulgences was waning (Norfolk Museums & Archaeology; Lynn].

(5) 1433. The Bishop Angus (I) **MacDonald** (grandson of the King of Scots, son of Lord Donald II) petitioned and relocated the Episcopal See or **Cathedra of The Isles**

(Bishop’s Seat/Throne) from Skye to Iona (c.1433). **This seat is placed in the bishop’s principal church, which is therefore called the Bishop’s Cathedral** [also 12 canonries and 12 prebends petitioned for the cathedral];

(6) 1443. Under Donald II’s son Alexander, the power of Clan Donald reached its high tide; both secular and ecclesiastical. With Ross and all of the Western Isles under his control, Alexander’s power was even greater than that of Somerled. He was **King of Western Scotland** – not just the Isles and Western Highlands – on equal terms with King James I of *South Eastern Scotland* (1421-d.1449). He said, 1443, that he was forced by conscience to rather “**diminish the monastery**” by invoking the serious and real threat of moving the “*relics and bones of his progenitors who are buried therein (Iona) and the precious things which have been given..*” He was in fact threatening to “shut the place down”! And he could (if necessary : a “*writ of cessavit*” ²). By taking away the reliquaries, etc, the Abbeys prestige, status and viability would decline but more so, by removing his ancestors bones (eg, to their Oransay, Saddell?) the nexus of *divine service* for souls in return for endowments to the abbey was breached and under functional reciprocity there was no obligation to continue that recurring income. (Endowments can be re-allocated, as agreed by RCAHMS). Endowed lands would be withdrawn (“revert to their original owner”) and this would redirect the cash-flow of both the temporalia (rents and labourers, etc) and the spiritualia (ie, ecclesiastical - tithes, their appropriated benefices/vicarages, etc) away from the abbey. The estates were administered locally by stewards or lay bailies (office of *Fragramannach* and *Armannach*) who were vassals of the Lordship (eg, MacLean) who, under orders, would action this directive, quickly and effectively.

This is “*conditionality of endowment*” at work. The local “*perverse noblemen*” MacKinnons were once again trying to continue that corruption through Finguine MacKinnon III. He had entered the monastery despite Abbot Dominic’s counter-petition and Dominic could never have overcome the MacKinnon’s corrosive influence over the community without Lord Alexander MacDonald having the ultimate authority and powers to enforce compliance and accountability. “**Property is given conditionally. And these conditions are the handles by which the founder and his heirs can direct the endowment towards its specific purpose.**” 1309. to Pope Clement : “*According to the law of the land, possessions given to churches and religious places, should they be applied to a use contrary to the desire and intention of*

donors, can be most certainly recalled through their founders and donors or their heirs.....”. *John Wyclif as Legal Reformer*).

¹ The patron (Donald) had these rights.... gave permission for selection of a candidate; **right to give assent to the election..** .. his referral to bishop for benediction. *Monastic and Religious Orders in Britain, 1000-1300*. Burton, J. 1994. p.213.

² Given by statute to recover lands when the tenant has for two years failed to perform the conditions of his tenure.

*the founders and donors , can be most certainly recalled through their founders and donors **or their heirs**.....”¹*

(7) **1450-80**. John greatly enlarges and enhances the Abbey church (c.**1450-1480**) using none other than Clan Donald’s church-wright (architect) and chief masons, the renowned O’Brochans, “*Chief Artificers of Ireland*”. He obviously used his treasury; just as others did, eg, Edward the Confessor’s wife, Edith, financed the rebuild of Wilton nunnery. [“...it was the founder of a house **and his heirs** who provided the impetus to build or rebuild, who might contribute ideas, and **who furnished resources to finance the project**”.²]

(8) **1472**. Donald II’s grandson, Angus II, becomes the Lordship’s second Bishop of the Isles.*

1390-1450. “*THE MACDONALD*” HEIRS (“*2nd ESTATE BELLATORE*” NOBLES) AND THEIR “*DE INSULIS*” ELITES (“*1st ESTATE ORATORES*” PRELATES) ACTED AS A CORPORATE ENTITY, MANAGING THE BUSINESS OF THEIR ABBEY; PROTECTING THEIR INVESTMENT AND THE CORE “FUNCTIONAL RECIPROCITY” OF THE ABBEY PROVIDING SALVATION OF THE SOULS OF THEIR ANCESTORS AND SUCCESSORS.³

IF SUCCESSIVE CLAN DONALD CHIEFS HAD NOT EXERCISED THEIR POWERS AND RESPONSIBILITIES UNDER CONDITIONALITY OF ENDOWMENT (1207-1493) THEN IONA ABBEY WOULD HAVE BEEN “COLLAPSED” AND UNSUSTAINABLE WELL OVER A CENTURY BEFORE ITS FINAL DISSOLUTION. INSTEAD, IT PROSPERED AND THE ABBEY CHURCH WAS ENLARGED AND ENHANCED BY CLAN DONALD’S LONG TERM STRATEGIC INTERVENTION, AT BOTH A TEMPORAL AND SPIRITUAL LEVEL, FINANCED

BY THEIR INFRASTRUCTURE SPENDING.

[INTERRUPTIONS : over Earldom of Ross; King James I. Incl., Battle of Harlaw, 1421; Alexander imprisoned 1427 ; Battle of Inverlochy, 1431.]

This sequence, which is firmly interwoven with the high stakes power play of John II’s 1461 Treaty of Ardtornish-Westminster (his high expectations), was interrupted by the forfeiture of him in 1476, the Battle of Bloody Bay with his son Angus Master, c.1480 and the continuing troubles. In 1499, the Bishopric of the Isles and the Abbacy of Iona were brought together; the Abbey church acted de facto as Cathedral of the Isles.⁴ It is an injustice of some magnitude that in 1506 when the Cathedral status was finally confirmed, and the MacDonald Lord of the Isles had recently been forfeited again (1493), that **three centuries** of their legacy and posterity “*came into the hands of*” interlopers and usurpers who had no spiritual or secular investment in it, whatsoever. Furthermore, they were instrumental in the stripping of its assets and benefices, its suppression, destruction of the whole infrastructure and in part for the loss of books, bells, MSS, Chartulary, Registers and the record of 300 priceless, irreplaceable graveslab inscriptions – a monumental catastrophe (see Chapter 8).

Despite a virtually non-existent wages bill, no taxes, and the corrupt Fingine III gone, the contemporary records prove that the Abbey was ‘**collapsed, impoverished in its rent and of extreme poverty.**’ It was barely able to meet its basic running costs or even feed themselves and could never have funded these massive improvement works, regardless of its many, but ‘**impoverished**’ spiritualia (ecclesiastical) and temporalia recurring income streams. Ranging from: Vicarial tithes, rents, pensions from rectories/vicarages; dues, offerings (*mass-pennies*) few bequests, (entry) fee dowries; produce, stone carving profit?) including the incessantly overvalued revenue from the *pray & pay* pilgrim trade - and all their other *slow and low* earning methods of capital raising for one off projects (eg, indulgences, fines, dispensations, appropriating benefices, forgoing *pittances*, etc). Iona, whilst famous and popular, was not Rome or London; or Canterbury (Becket), York (St William) or even Dunfermline which were within easier, safer reach of large populations.⁵

¹ Wyclif : p.109. “It had been John Wyclif’s contention that when the purpose of the secular donations had been frustrated, those same donations ought to revert to their original owner. This seems, in fact, to have been true for a large segment of tenures. Wyclif had, of course, further asserted : ‘if clerics occupying temporalities are wanting according to the form of the donation, temporal lords are held not only by fiscal law, but by the law of scripture to protect against impoverishment of the land.’

² **Op cit**; *Monastic, Religious Orders*; Burton; p.152. The Abbot/s couldn’t save from **their income** (their share in the “obediatory system”) for a “building fund” as it was already impoverished. Self denial of food there was already a necessity!

³ The act of giving to a monastic community was a gesture of faith in the usefulness of intercessory prayer and an expression of collective anxiety over the fate of the unredeemed soul..... PURGATORY! (earn a *fast track* with a “*healthy soul*”).

⁴ **Eóin Caimbeul** (I), 1487 – d.1510; Son of 1st Earl Argyll. Bishop. Abbot - **Commandator from 1499. Petition to Pope 1498 by Archibald, Earl Argyll** “one can hardly avoid seeing personal motives - perfect opportunity to promote Campbell interests in the area” – Steer & Bannerman; LMMSWH; p116.

⁵ **Long travel was expensive and saint veneration was not just practised by distant pilgrims** (and new saints – mendicant orders – centred in Burroughs). Many pilgrims were crippled or gravely ill and the east mainland ones would choose a closer Saint (as all mostly would now in Ireland). West coasters and

It was not the usual 'rich' Benedictine Abbey built next to the King's castle and the borough (with annual fair and markets) and no valuable mill income from "right of multure" to many villagers from nearby urban centres. There is no evidence of any extended "network of patronage" around the monastery (at least of any material size – just Clan Donald, and their vassals). The north was not manorialised heavily like the south. There were no homage fees, feu-duty like to St Andrews (a royal burgh) and no evidence of royal grants or Archdiocese allocation – and why would they. The Bishopric of The Isles was ranked 11th out of 12 in **1472*** only ahead of Orkney.

Its very hard to get decent comparative figures, but around 1200 for a coarse contrast, the west highland's Bishopric of Argyll's total revenue was £280, but St Andrew's, Fife, was £8,018 (figures : Lyon, CJ; *History of St Andrews*, VOL II; pps 97, 233). Official estimates of Iona abbey's income varied widely: between £60 and £20 between 1421 and 1465. It can be safely assumed that John's upgrade would have cost nearly as much as the building of the entire less elaborate and smaller original Church two centuries before (even reusing materials). In conjunction with these works, **John built the elaborate tomb-recess, St Oran's Chapel**, twenty years in advance, exactly as did Alexander McLeod of Dunvegan in the south choir wall, church of St Clement, Rodel. The nunnery was also developed.

It ought to be stated that the Iona Abbey Church/CATHEDRAL as it stands to day (restored 20th c.) is due to the benefaction and building of the CLAN DONALD CHIEF, LORD OF THE ISLES, "*JOHIS DE YLLE COMIS ROSSIE DOMINI INSULARUM*" assisted by his first cousin, Angus MacDONALD II, Bishop of the Isles, Iona, and the reforming Abbot, Dominic MacKenzie. (Not due to the unproven, unknown income of the secondary pilgrim indulgence scheme of 1428 – 1 day/year.)

islanders were the main Iona pilgrims and all could get to it relatively easier by boat in good weather but these areas were poor and sparsely or much less populated. Of all others, many would not now do the *extra long, dangerous, arduous journey* as the only testimony of a pilgrim; 'tourist'? (The enormous affects of the Black Death on populations... and pilgrimage?) "*From the end of the Norse period in 1266 - the Hebrides languished on the periphery of Scotland. They were no longer at the centre of a commercial network between Norway, Dublin and Iceland. They were an impoverished appendage to a kingdom (Scotland) that looked south and east for trading contacts. They lacked urban centres, markets and good quality agricultural land*". Op cit RIXON; p.77.

DUKES OF ARGYLL. Now is also the time and opportunity to remedy the century old popular myth that "*Iona Abbey, as you see it today, is largely due to the vision of the 8th Duke of Argyll*". A major problem with the how this site is currently interpreted is a perception that none of it, or very little, has anything to do with Clan Donald. This is caused in part by the collapse of the MacDonald Lordship of the Isles and time (and lack of understanding of monastery tenure, economics) but is now principally re-enforced by the location, visibility and one sided attribution of monuments. (I appreciate that Historic Scotland wants to remedy this, but to do so in a holistic approach.)

There is a glaring interpretative disjunct, even when not intentional, of:-

- The named monuments of the 8th Duke of Argyll and wife, large and gleaming white Carrara, prominently occupy the whole south transept of the main building, the Abbey Church (St Mary's – as rebuilt by the last Lord of the Isles, John (II) MacDonald, late 15th c.). That is, they dominate, and give a false impression of their integral relevance and of the Duke's contribution to the Church and Abbey's existence and restoration. The 8th Duke in fact did very little, the minimum possible and only after two "*loud calls*" of civic pressure, ¹ and disdainfully called the existing abbey structures as "*monuments (of) the dull and often corrupt monotony of medieval Romanism*". He is not entitled to receive plaudits as its *principal saviour*, especially at the expense of the real instigators of Gregory, Skene, Drummond, Bishop Ewing, his wife Ina, Sir David Russell ("*instigator of the Iona Retreat*"), then the Rev. Dr. Donald McLeod, the general public's generosity and the Rev. George McLeod's truly ecumenical Iona Community (with their pure selflessness; sheer back breaking work). Responding to complaints from as early as 1868, the Duke insisted that rival denominations should have access (separate, unequal) to the Abbey, against local opposition. This would have occurred if the Abbey buildings were ruins or perfect. **Settling the access dispute was a reaction, not the Duke's 'vision'. It wasn't planned 'ecumenism' 1868-99.**

- Not a single extant monument is attributed to any of the six Clan Donald Lords of the Isles buried in St Oran's

¹ *Lumsden & Son's Steam-boat companion, or, Stranger's guide to the Western Isles & Highlands*; James Lumsden & Son; p177. **1839.** " .., *there is a loud call on the noble Duke, to adopt proper measures to keep up this venerable fabric*". "*It is discreditable to the proprietors...*" *The gentleman's magazine, and historical chronicle*, Volume 100, Part 2; 1830; James Logan.

Chapel or their immediate antecedent and Abbey founder, Ranald/Reginald, but it is they who endowed/financed, built/constructed, superintended, patronised, sustained, protected and redeveloped this whole institution :- the Abbey Church, cloisters and all other buildings. But, there are named McLean and MacKinnon monuments (and Argyll.) Some have clear inscriptions. The only slab with the name clearly inscribed “**mac • domnill**” is even removed from its obviously correct placement where it might be recognised and acknowledged as such and is anonymously buried amongst ‘nondescript’ slabs in the cloister. The fact that the attribution to Angus Og, son of Angus Mor, has been incorrectly denied, does not seem to be, or given as, the reason. A “ring in” slab, not even from Reilig Odhrain but from the Nunnery, has been put into St Oran’s Chapel as a substitute.

- The other unnamed slabs (no legible inscriptions) of the Clan Donald Chiefs are correctly located in the removed Chapel of St Oran, but which pilgrims and tourists would relate to as distant and quite separate from “The Abbey” - and therefore of no relevance to it. Because here, the actual monuments as a grouping are not commented upon in a broad description of the all important Lordship they belong to, or the fact that they founded, endowed, built the whole monastery and nunnery and rebuilt, plus enhanced, nearly all of the main church. (The chapel’s exterior plaque is basic; “Burial place of the MacDonald family, Lords of the Isles.”) There is no attempt at a tentative attribution of a slab to any particular Donald Chief/Lord, or their order, method and places of burial.

It is also not clearly pointed out that this cemetery is the most important burial site on this holy island (and in Scotland?), being the “*most honourable and ancient place that was in Scotland in those days, as we read*”; *The Grand cemetery of Iona, the cherished and far-famed spot whither, for ages, funeral parties voyaged from a distance to inter the illustrious dead*”. The Reilig (relic of/burial place) Odhráin cemetery is the burial place of many historically important early Scottish Kings and some Irish and ‘Norwegian’ Kings, and the corpse of the King of The Isles, *Somerled*, is interred in the most significant chapel on Iona, St Oran’s Chapel (Teampull Odhráin in Reilig Odhráin). This chapel was built c.1150 (HS), therefore by Somerled (not Reginald, b.1153; died 54th year – G Buchanan) and it is the mortuary house of his descendant Clan Donald Chiefs, the Lords of the Isles. Even if his intestines and heart are separately buried elsewhere, eg, at Paisley and at Saddell.¹

He was *RI INNSE-GALL* (King of The Isles)² and would demand nothing less than to be buried with the 40 (at least) other Gaelic/Celtic/Norse Kings (or ‘subkings’) of Ireland, Scotland and ‘Norway’ in Reilig Odhrain, the most ancient graveyard in all Scotland (see Chapter ?) - in a “Celtic Church” cemetery. And buried *deposito ad sanctos* right next to the relics of a revered saint (Oran) whose earthly remains were *forever in direct contact with his soul in heaven*. St Oran was first on Iona, dying there in 548 of the plague, 15 years before Colum Cille even arrived.³ W Reeves even says “*St Columba’s bones should be sought for in the Reilig Odhrain*”!⁴

SOMERLED MAC GILLIBHRIDE: k.1164.

REX INSULARUM, BURIED IN HIS OWN SUPERIOR CHAPEL, TEMPEULL ODHRAIN, SYMBOLISING THE 4th AND LARGEST *TOMBAIRE NAN RIGH, HIS TUMULUS REGUM INSULARUM* (closest to the location of the *Tumulus Regum Norwegiae*). AND IT IS HERE, “*THE MOST HALLOWED SPOT ON IONA*” THAT HIS SON REGINALD IS BURIED “IN SOLIDARITY

¹ It is almost certain that Somerled’s intestines, heart and brain/eyes (evisceration, and for embalming) were removed by the Cluniacs in Renfrew as part of the preparation of his body :- “*The extraction of the inner organs and the separate burial of the heart and intestines was a hallmark of English and French aristocratic mortuary behaviour from the 12th century onwards. It is worth noting that the English often quickly discarded the viscera close to the site of corpse treatment, whereas the French treated them with great respect. The English aristocracy generally favoured a double interment (one for the body, the other for the heart), while French aristocracy often requested that their corpses be buried in three separate places (body, heart and entrails).*”

“*It was in 12th century France and England that the heart began to receive separate burial, not only from the corpse but also from the intestines.*” ‘*Embalming was the preferred option of body treatment among medieval English aristocrats from the 12th to the 14th centuries*’ - “*Heart Burial*”; p.132.

Heart Burial in medieval and early post-medieval central Europe; pps 119-34; Estella Weiss-Krejci. From Body Parts and Bodies Whole. Changing Relations and Meaning (Studies in Funerary Archaeology 5); by Katharina Rebay-Salisbury, Marie Louise Stig Sorensen and Jessica Hughes; 2010. pps. 120, 122.

² Historian Hugh MacDonald of Sleat, 17th c. has Somerled responding to Malcolm the Maiden : “He replied, that he had as good a right to the lands upon the continent as he had to the Isles. As to the Isles, he had undoubted right to them....”. (At least, a 17th c. Clan Donald, or their historian’s, opinion.)

³ AFM 548.7 : St. Odhran, of Leitirioch Odhrain, died on the second day of the month of October, AD 548. (*Tiroran* –land of Oran on Mull; Kiloran on Colonsay; Oransay, etc). Oran was not in the original 12 who came with Colum Cille. **The reburial ‘legend’ of him is simply a clever disguise of Oran’s prior foundation on Iona – he preceded Columba.**

⁴ Reeves, William; Adomnan’s *Life of St Columba*; p.317, notes *it lies*; 1857.

OF KINDRED” – THE FOUNDER OF IONA ABBEY AND HIS HEIRS FOR TWO CENTURIES, THE CLAN DONALD LORDS OF THE ISLES.

FOR EACH CLAN DONALD CHIEF FROM DONALD I TO DONALD OF HARLAW :- *“His full noble body was buried with befitting pomp and solemnity in the tomb of his ancestors on the south side of Teampeull Odhrain; the sacred storehouse of his predecessors and guardian of their bones.”*

As Historic Scotland say: *Iona, of all the many sacred places in Scotland, is an enduring symbol of Christianity.* That endurance is a direct legacy of Somerled and then the powerful and independent Clan Donald’s building, patronage and enduring benefaction along with the Iona Community’s restoration and enduring residency. Otherwise, there would have been no, or maybe only insignificant and inferior, medieval buildings to restore. (*History of Clan Maclean*, p.318; 1899, says : *“In 818 was completed the new monastery made of stone.”*) But now :- *“probably the completest and most interesting group of ancient ecclesiastical structures in Scotland”*¹ (NB: contrast this praise to the 8th Duke’s condemnation) and *“the immediate architectural debt is to Ireland rather than to England”*²

Only the very foundations of St Columba’s 9th century “cell” remained. There would be scarcely any medieval graveslabs, and the only monument that may have endured and be left standing in Columba’s monastery today would be St Martin’s cross. The three ancient tombs of the kings are totally gone and the early Christian smaller gravestones, cross fragments would also have all but disappeared, stolen or mainly buried from view and memory without the central gravitas, attraction and therefore protection of what is currently, in the

main, an early Clan Donald medieval site in terms of surviving architecture and a majority of the medieval monuments (Clan Donald’s alone, plus the vassal clans of its Lordship).



Sole non-medieval survivor standing – St Martin’s Cross.

✦ THIS MONASTERY OF THE LATER MIDDLE AGES, WHICH IS ALREADY SPECIAL TO SCOTLAND BECAUSE IT WAS NOT TOTALLY DESTROYED LIKE MANY OTHERS BY THE 14th CENTURY WARS OF INDEPENDENCE, AND THEN NEITHER BY THE REFORMATION AND CIVIL WARS, IS PROBABLY UNIQUE IN BRITAIN FOR ANOTHER REASON.

✦ FOR EFFECTIVELY ITS ENTIRE EXISTENCE OVER THE WHOLE LATER MEDIEVAL PERIOD, IONA ABBEY WAS RECREATED, PROSPERED AND GREW UNDER THE ONE CONTINUOUS FAMILY OF FOUNDER, BUILDERS, PATRONS, BENEFACTORS AND ENDOWERS – FROM FOUNDATION TO PRE-DISSOLUTION.³ THIS IS CERTAINLY RARE. THIS MACDONALD FAMILY OUGHT TO BE ACKNOWLEDGED PUBLICLY AND PROMINENTLY AS SUCH ON THE ABBEY.⁴

✦ FOR PRECISENESS AND BETTER UNDERSTANDING IT SHOULD BE EXPRESSED IN FULL CONTEXT AS:

“THE CLAN DONALD LORDS OF THE ISLES”, WITH IONA:- *“The Ancient ecclesiastical capital of The Royal Family of MacDonald, formerly Kings of the Western parts of Scotland and the Isles.”* (W. Sacherverell Esq., Governor of Mann, 1688.)

Neither the (“Draft”) twelve page *Iona Research Framework* nor six page *Interim Statement Of Cultural Significance on Iona Abbey* (Jan 2012) mention the name *MacDonald* or *Clan Donald* even once. But the *“Campbells of Argyll”* are (and most everyone well knows that connection of name and place). Nothing else is insinuated – only demonstrating the situation. After 500 years affect of the “Daunting of The Isles”, etc, it cannot be left for all to guess who the *Lords of The Isles 1200-1500* really are, for the large majority do not have a clue,

¹ MacGibbon, David & Ross, Thomas; *“The Ecclesiastical Architecture of Scotland*, VOL III; pps 48, 49. ; 1897

² 1. Fawcett, Richard. *Scottish medieval churches. An introduction to the ecclesiastical architecture of the 12th to 16th centuries in the care of the Secretary of State for Scotland.* Publisher: Historic Buildings and Monuments Directorate, Scottish Development Dept.; H.M.S.O. Edinburgh; 1985.

2. **“This early Norse-Gael Lordship, founded by Somerled and which was to develop through his descendants into Clan Donald, was very definitely not part of Scotland” – Dr David Caldwell**, Archaeologist, Keeper of Scotland & Europe in the National Museums of Scotland, Curatorial Advisor to the Museum of Islay.

3. MacDonald, A. CLAN DONALD; VOL I; p.483, 1900. “No doubt the original home whence these arts of architecture, sculpture and others were imported into the Highlands was Ireland; but the connection between it and the Western Isles was for centuries so close that in all the essential features of their intellectual life they were the same”.

³ BETWEEN 1494 AND 1534, THE ABBEY WAS BUT AN UNWORTHY, PATHETIC PASTICHE – *A SLUSH FUND*. In 1534 King Henry broke with the Pope and by the Act of Supremacy made himself the supreme head of the church in his lands. The 1535 *Valor Ecclesiasticus* (church valuation) was not done in Scotland.

⁴ “.....an inauguration stone, which stood beside the door of a newly built church, recording the name of the aristocratic donor” (founder and heirs). *“Pilgrimage in Medieval Scotland”*, p.35; Peter Yeoman.

ie, especially the public. *Ranald, King/Lord of The Isles*, does not give the slightest hint of his immediate “Donald” heirs, successors. Are they the *MacRanalds*? McLeans maybe? MacKinnon, MacDougall, McLeod? Windsors! It surely matters for a sense of historical accuracy. There is no reason for excluding the name and denying Clan Donald the factual, due public recognition. Its not about whether Clan Donald *deserves* anything or not, it entirely concerns what is the correct interpretation of Iona’s late medieval Abbey for the whole three centuries, 1200-1500.

Full proof is in the detail of the full paper, MacDonald Lord by MacDonald Lord, graveslab by graveslab; the first in-depth integration of Clan Donald’s and Iona’s medieval history interfaced with the far reaching paramountcy and potency of the cult of saints, body part relics, the doctrines of purgatory and intercessory prayer (see Attribution).

Its somewhat of a pity and not my preferred manner (practice) that I feel, rightly or wrongly, a “loud call” has to be made to turn around the entrenched misconceptions or misplaced interpretations and emphases of long duration. Unfortunately, this is a case where the misunderstandings must be emphatically pointed out to even bring the correct history into people’s consciousness, and then painstakingly proven, to make any real difference and change to happen (and it is painful). It’s so very unfortunate in one sense that those who took immediate control as Commandators of Iona Abbey (regarded as a “family propriety interest”) from the fall of the MacDonald Lordship of the Isles and continued to benefit most from the very closely following Reformation beginnings, suppression and then eventual dissolution, were the Argyll Earls, the Campbells – the MacDonald’s “arch enemy” (Successive MacLean, MacGill-Eathain, Commandators also benefited.) It could hardly have been anyone else, but I sincerely wish it had been and someone of any other surname, so that no erroneous and frivolous inferences might be made as to the motives for this paper – alas, but by who else, a *MacDhòmhnaill*.

NB: At issue here are two Argyll Earls (5th, 8th) in the main and their legacy. And it need hardly be said, that their later Dukes and Clan Campbell as a whole should not be burdened by their actions and that many Campbells have made significant, valuable contributions towards Iona’s rebirth from the mid 19th century and continue to do so today.

HOW IONA 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.*”

FINAL ACT : This is a rousing tribute to the much praised “*extraordinary polymath, Liberal statesman, philosopher and theologian*”, the 8th Duke of Argyll, for supposedly having the vision and generosity of restoring Iona Abbey “*as you see it today*” and returning it to the community (and HS : “*The 8th Duke began reconstructing the abbey church, with the intention that it be used for ecumenical worship.*”)

The Duke had in my view a *Love Columba hate Pope* relationship with Iona. He would have preferred the late medieval Abbey to have never existed. : “*all these building before us are the monuments of the dull and often the corrupt monotony of medieval Romanism*”. 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. ¹

CENTRAL ACTS : The CLAN DONALD LORDS OF THE ISLES’ central role in the very being and continued existence of the Abbey and Cathedral has been *written out* of the story. This enduring Macdonald phase, 1200-1500 which equals the 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. **Nothing** remains of St Columba’s monastery. **Nothing** remains of the ancient *Tomair-nan-Righ* of the early Dalriadic, Scots, Irish, Norwegian kings. The narrative that reduced Clan Donald’s position is probably the most ubiquitous misconstruction of the arrangements for medieval ecclesiastical infrastructure and financing:- “*The monks built the Abbey!*”

REVIEW : The 8th Duke of Argyll did not do any major restoration of the Abbey. He was repeatedly pushed “*under increasing pressure*” by “*loud calls*” every inch of the way by many public luminaries to do some stabilising. He was totally and strongly against emergent ecumenism (“*the recrudescence of the Romanising tendency could not make on me any favourable*

¹ NB: The established Church of Scotland (orientation Calvinist) traces its origins beyond the Reformation and sees itself in continuity with the church established by St. Ninian, St. Columba, St. Kentigern and other Celtic saints.

impression” – his memoirs) AND he only gave back what was not, in all honesty or sincerity, his in the first place. 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 to Rev. George McLeod ¹ : £250,000 today). The Iona Community obtained the approval out of a number 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 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 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 significant 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 being interested 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), 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” of 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. Any links are a product of “reconstructive intents” of others and not by the Dukes of Argyll. It must be kept in mind also that this happened nearly 40 years after the 8th Duke died.

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, and then fast-forwards to the recency of the regional *celebrity* of the “*extraordinary Renaissance Man*”, the 8th Duke of

Argyll with the large marble effigies of himself and wife Ina, so dominant in the cathedral.

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. This is a gross understatement of their fundamental contribution to this infrastructure, the resulting macroeconomics of the region and the truly extraordinary three centuries long existence of the late medieval 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.

In Historic Scotland’s conference papers mentioned above, the “*Lordship of Isles*”, was mentioned in the context of its impact on the abbey as “*poorly understood*” with “*major gaps in understanding*” and “*a better knowledge of this period is crucial to our understanding of the medieval development of the abbey*”. I and Clan Donald, the pre-eminent stakeholder of the medieval period, hope the publication of our submission (2nd Ed.) and allied website will greatly assist the research group.

We finish with this question :- Is the 8th Duke of Argyll’s monument in the Abbey Church a reflection of his exaggerated role in its 20th century re-birth, or, a statement and constant reminder of the demise and destruction of this whole medieval abbey by his dynasty over the 16th and 17th centuries? (It has to stay as part of the “layering” of history.)

A solution to that interpretative and ethical dilemma is to authentically and publicly acknowledge the following historical facts :-

From 1207 to 1493, the early Clan Donald and its Lords of the Isles were entirely central to Iona abbey’s medieval existence, development and prestige.

This enduring MacDonald phase equals the 300 year period of primary Columban monasticism. It is paramount in providing the sole witness to Iona’s extant architecture and is a principal witness to the surviving monuments.

The Iona Abbey Church was in all but name The MacDonald’s Cathedral of The Isles.

Medieval Iona Abbey, as you see it today (restored in the 20th century) is largely the legacy of the 15th century Clan Donald Lords of The Isles and their Clan Donald Abbots and Bishops.

¹ Macintyre, Lorn; Sir David Russell: A Biography; 1995. UNI OF ST ANDREWS; Call Number MS 38515; Papers of Sir David Russell; 1826-1991.

BOOK'S ANALYSIS, FINDINGS:- CONCLUSIONS AND/OR PREDICTIONS ABOUT IONA ABBEY, ST ORAN'S CHAPEL, CEMETERY AND ASSOCIATED ISSUES WITH CLAN DONALD AND THE LORDS OF THE ISLES.

IONA ABBEY

❖ REGINALD, THE FOUNDER : BUT HIS DREAM HAD TO BE REALIZED BY HIS SON DONALD (I) AND HIS DESCENDANTS : **MACDONALDS**, "*CLOINNE DOMHNAILL*". HE RETIRED TO PAISELY ABBEY BEFORE 1200 AND DIED, 1207 JUST AFTER IT HAD BARELY (RE)STARTED, 1205 (AFTER BEING RAZED = DEMOLISHED). DONALD ASSUMED THE ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITY OF FOUNDER. DONALD ARBITRATED THE SERIOUS DISPUTE AND GAVE ASSENT TO A NEW ABBOT APPOINTMENT. IT WAS THEN PLUNDERED A FEW YEARS LATER.

❖ THERE WAS A PERPETUAL "**CONDITIONALITY OF ENDOWMENT**". CLAN DONALD LORDS OF THE ISLES WERE "HANDS ON MANAGERS" OF THEIR INVESTMENT RIGHT FROM THE START AND THROUGHOUT THE THREE CENTURIES OF THEIR CONTROL OF THEIR "*ECCESTASTICAL TENANT-IN-CHIEF*" REQUIRING "**FUNCTIONAL RECIPROCITY**" – SOUL SALVATION. IONA ABBEY AND NUNNERY STRUCTURES ARE THE LEGACY OF DONALD (I) AND ANGUS MOR MAC DONALD. IT WAS THEIR LANDS, RENTS, GOLD, STONE, TIMBER. THEIR BUILDERS AND LABOURERS (*THE DHOMHNULLACH*), ETC. THEIR GALLEYS FOR TRANSPORT OF THE MATERIALS FROM MULL AND MAINLAND. THEIR MANAGEMENT, CONTRACTING, OVERSEEING, SUPERINTENDING. AND IT WAS THEIR MASTER MASONS, ARCHITECTS, THE O'BROLCHANS. **THEY "ERECTED" THE ABBEY.** ¹

¹ The enabling endowments, the core economic strength and life-blood of the Abbey, came from successive **Clan Donald Lords of the Isles** and for 300 years were regularly confirmed, honoured, protected, increased and expanded. Endowments had "*carta confirmationis*" and additional ones made by them during the 14th and 15th centuries as late as 1440, 1485. Donald of Harlaw (1386-1421) : "*gave lands to the monastery of Iona, and every immunity which the monastery of Iona had from his ancestors before him*" – MacVurich. It might be expressed that Iona Abbey had been acting as a '*holy owned*' land trust' for Clan Donald.

PUT ANOTHER WAY :- IT WAS **NOT** 12 BENEDICTINE MONKS WHO FINANCED **OR** BUILT THE ABBEY.

❖ THE MACKINNONS ON MULL BECAME HEREDITARY *MARSHALS* OF CLAN DONALD'S MILITARY FORCES AND STANDARD BEARER. NEARBY IONA WAS "ENTRUSTED TO THEIR STEWARDSHIP" AND PROTECTION. THESE LOCALLY POWERFUL MACKINNONS WERE GIVEN TOO MUCH AUTONOMY AND NO CHECKS AS THE DISTANT LORD JOHN (I), 1336- 1386, HAD ALSO BEEN PRE-OCCUPIED WITH HIS NEW FOUNDATIONS AT :- ORANSAY PRIORY, THE 'HOLY ISLAND' MONASTERY (EILEAN MOLLAISE), AND KILDALTON AND KILNAVE CHURCHES. MACKINNONS WERE UNFETTERED AND VERY "DISTRACTED" BY NEW FOUND FREEDOMS FROM CELIBACY THAT HAD WIDELY BROKEN DOWN OVER TWO CENTURIES AND SPLURGED ABBEY RESOURCES ON CONCUBINES, ETC.

❖ THE MACDONALDS RECOVERED THE COLLAPSED MONASTERY FROM MACKINNON CORRUPTION AND NEPOTISM : late 14th - 15th century. FIRST BY DONALD II PUTTING DOWN A MACKINNON INSPIRED, ABBEY RELATED REBELLION; CLAN DONALD ABBOT, JOHN MACALLISTER'S REMOVAL OF ABBOT FINGUINE MACKINNON AND SECURING ABBEY REVENUE; LORD ALEXANDER MACDONALD'S STRONG AND REAL THREAT TO "CLOSE THE ABBEY DOWN", ETC.

❖ EMPHASISED AND CLARIFIED EXACTLY WHO ABBOT JOHN MACALLISTER REALLY IS (DESCENDANT OF ALAXANDAIR OG - NOT AN ALASTER **MOR** "MACALLISTER").

❖ RECOGNISED THE GREAT SIGNIFICANCE OF HIS LENGTH OF 30 YEAR PARTNERSHIP WITH DONALD OF HARLAW AND WHAT THIS MEANT FOR THE ABBEY'S DEVELOPMENT.

❖ NOT ONLY DID THEY GIFT THE RELIC AND RELIQUARY CALLED THE HAND OF COLUMBA BUT THEY HAD TO OBTAIN THE RELIC AT GREAT EXPENSE AND TROUBLE, MOST LIKELY FROM DERRY, IRELAND. RECOGNISED THAT ONLY *CLAN DONALD OF ERIN & ALBAN* COULD HAVE ACHIEVED THIS.

❖ MY IDENTIFICATION OF THE SEQUENCE OF EVENTS THAT WERE MAINLY ORCHESTRATED BY CLAN DONALD OVER 50 YEARS TO RAISE THEIR ECCLESIASTICAL CAPITAL TO CATHEDRAL STATUS.

❖ IF SUCCESSIVE CLAN DONALD CHIEFS HAD NOT EXERCISED THEIR POWERS AND RESPONSIBILITIES UNDER *CONDITIONALITY OF ENDOWMENT* (1207-1493) THEN IONA ABBEY WOULD HAVE “COLLAPSED” AND BEEN UNSUSTAINABLE WELL OVER A CENTURY BEFORE ITS FINAL DISSOLUTION. INSTEAD, IT PROSPERED AND THE ABBEY CHURCH WAS ENLARGED AND ENHANCED BY CLAN DONALD’S LONG TERM STRATEGIC INTERVENTION, AT BOTH A TEMPORAL AND SPIRITUAL LEVEL, FINANCED BY THEIR INFRASTRUCTURE SPENDING .

❖ THEY REBUILT ^{3/4}s OF THE CHURCH INTO A CATHEDRAL. IT WAS LARGELY MONEY FROM JOHN II’S TREASURY. ¹ **IT WAS NOT PILGRIM INCOME** (PLAYED A MINOR ROLE THEN).

❖ RECOGNISED AS A FIRST THAT TWO 15TH CENTURY ABBOTS OF SADDELL WERE ALSO MACALLISTERS, DESCENDED FROM ALAXANDAIR OG (LAST ONE WAS THERE TO ITS CLOSURE).

❖ FIRST COINED THE PHRASE “MACALLISTER ECCLESIASTICAL NOBLEMEN”.

BURIALS - ST ORANS CHAPEL.

❖ THE POSITION AND DRAWINGS OF THE *TOMAIRE NAN RIGH*. SOME EARLY CHRISTIAN GRAVE MARKERS ARE SECONDARY BURIALS OF EARLY KINGS FROM TOMAIRE NAN RIGH.

❖ **SOMERLED** mac Gillibride: k.1164 - KING OF THE ISLES. BURIED IN HIS OWN SUPERIOR CHAPEL, *TEMPEULL ODHRAIN*, “*THE MOST HALLOWED SPOT ON IONA*”.

HIS CHAPEL, IS IN MEANING AND EFFECT THE FOURTH *TOMAIRE NAN RIGH*, THE *TUMULUS REGUM INSULARUM*. HE WAS *RI INNSE-GALL* (KING OF THE ISLES) ² AND WOULD DEMAND NOTHING LESS THAN TO BE BURIED NEXT TO THE 40 (AT LEAST) OTHER GAELIC/CELTIC/NORSE KINGS (OR ‘SUB-KINGS’) OF IRELAND, SCOTLAND AND ‘NORWAY’ IN REILIG ODHRAIN, THE “*MOST ANCIENT GRAVEYARD IN ALL SCOTLAND*”. (HE IS NOT BURIED IN SADDELL.... UNEQUIVOCALLY! MAYBE HIS HEART IS – AND HIS SON’S REGINALD.)

❖ THE LOCATION OF SOMERLED’S AND REGINALD’S BURIALS EITHER SIDE OF ST ORAN’S ALTAR FROM OTHER RECORDS OF PRACTISE (“*depositio ad sanctos; solidarity of kindred*”) AND CUSTOM OF KINGS AND FOUNDERS OF ABBEYS IN IRELAND. USED AND ASSIMILATED MORE RELEVANT IRISH RECORDS THAN BEFORE.

❖ THE SECONDARY BURIAL PRACTISE OF ROTATION IN THE “TOMB OF THEIR ANCESTOR” ON THE SOUTH SIDE OF ST ORANS CHAPEL FROM THE “PRACTISE OF THE COUNTRY” IN CLONES, TYRONE (FROM DONALD (1) TO DONALD OF HARLAW). LATE 15th c. WALL NICHE BUILT OVER IT – TO *CROWN* THE SITE.

❖ HEART BURIAL : RELATIONSHIP OF IONA, PAISLEY AND SADDELL AND THE LORDS OF ISLES’ HEARTS, ETC. (JOHN I’S TO ORANSAY?)

❖ **GRAVESLABS ATTRIBUTED FOR** : (and see location plan in the Attribution, Location section)

1. REGINALD THE FOUNDER; No. 161 With his pilgrim staff most likely still in his grave, north of the altar.
2. ANGUS OG K.1318; No. 150. Major submission.

¹ “...it was the founder of a house **and his heirs** who provided the impetus to build or **rebuild**, who might contribute ideas, and **who furnished resources to finance the project**”. *Monastic and Religious Orders in Britain, 1000-1300*. Burton, J. 1994; p.152.

² Historian Hugh MacDonald of Sleat, 17th c. has Somerled responding to Malcolm the Maiden : “He replied, that he had as good a right to the lands upon the continent as he had to the Isles. As to the Isles, he had undoubted right to them....”. (At least, a 17th c. Clan Donald, or their historian’s opinion, which in any case is hard to argue with.)

❖ **TENTATIVELY:-** 1. DONALD (I). No. 126. (opposite wall niche along N. wall)

2. CLANRANALD; No. 154. (Clanranald 1st).

3. DONALD OF HARLAW; No.152. Last buried in chapel. His location in front of the wall niche/arch, south wall.

CLAN DONALD HISTORY.

❖ THAT MACALLISTER AND ALEXANDER CLANS IN FACT DESCEND FROM ALAXANDIAR OG; ALL OF THEM.

NONE DESCEND FROM THE NEBULOUS, NON ENTITY, ALASTER MOR. THE ALASTER MOR (BURKE'S PEERAGE) PEDIGREE HAS A FATAL "BLACK HOLE" AT NUMBER 'IV' WHO IS CONCLUSIVELY PROVEN AS RAGHNAILL (RANALD) SON OF ALAXANDAIR OG. PROVEN THE MISUSE OF GENERATIONS IN ALEXANDER OG'S TREE. PROVED *RAGHNALL MAC ALAXANDIAR* WENT TO IRELAND 1366 AS THE HEIR OF CLAN ALAXANDAIR OG (MACDONNELL GALLOGLAICH); NOT CLAN ALISTER MOR.

❖ IMPROVED, CONSOLIDATED ARGUMENTS FOR : ALAXANDIAR OG, **K 1299**.

THE CONCOCTED 1308 'DEPOSITION' OF CHIEF ALAXANDAIR OG.

STATEMENT : The Clan Chief, Alaxandair Og de Hyle, son of Angus Mor, son of Donald was killed in 1299. The story of his deposition in 1308 was a later political fabrication and is untrue.

❖ REVISITED AND ADDED TO, BETTER EXPLAINED NARRATIVES, BETTER CONTEXT TO ARGUMENTS :- ANGUS OG, K. 1318. DONALD, (I) K. 1247. IT WAS *JOHN (SHANE) MAOL* SON OF RAGHNALL SON OF ALAXANDIAR OG WHO SUBMITTED TO KING RICHARD II, DROGHEDA 1395 (NOT IAN MOR).

❖ MUCH STRENGTHENED DETAIL ON CLAN DONALD'S EARLY DYNASTIC AND STRONG POLITICAL LINKS TO THE NORTHERN UI NEILL AND N/W IRELAND, PARTICULARLY AROUND DERRY, 1250 - 1400. IT WAS RE-INVIGORATED BY THE 1266 TREATY OF PERTH. (NOT THE

MUCH LATER, MORE POPULARLY KNOWN GLENS OF ANTRIM LINK). INTEGRATED MORE CLAN DONALD HISTORY OF IRELAND AND SCOTLAND – MAINLY THROUGH A MORE THOROUGH IN- DEPTH UNDERSTANDING OF THE MACDONNELL GALLOGLAIGH DYNASTIES.

ARGYLL EARLS, DUKES AND IONA

❖ SHOWN CLEARLY HOW THE ARGYLL EARLS ("*LEADER IN COUNCIL AND IN FIELD FOR THE REFORMED RELIGION*") NOT ONLY DESTROYED IONA ABBEY BUT POSITIONED THEMSELVES TO SYSTEMATICALLY DRAIN ITS RICHES AND RESOURCES BEFOREHAND. (DISREGARDED MARTIN LUTHER'S "*TWO KINGDOMS*" FOR SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE AND KNOX'S "*FIRST BOOK OF DISCIPLINE*" - ABBEY ASSETS TO NEW CHURCH.) IF THE LORDSHIP OF THE ISLES WAS NOT FORFEITED 1493, THEN THE REFORMATION WOULD HAVE SEEN ALL THE ABBEY'S ASSETS RETURNED EFFECTIVELY TO UNDER CLAN DONALD'S HEADSHIP CONTROL - *ACT OF CONVENTION OF ESTATES*, 1561-74.

❖ THEN DEMONSTRATE THAT THE STATEMENTS THAT *IONA AS YOU SEE IT TODAY IS MAINLY DUE TO THE VISION OF THE 8TH DUKE OF ARGYLL* AND THAT HE *BEGAN RECONSTRUCTING THE ABBEY WITH THE INTENTION THAT IT BE USED FOR ECUMENICAL WORSHIP* ARE BOTH SIMPLY NOT TRUE.

❖ THE 8TH DUKE OF ARGYLL HAD A "LOVE COLUMBA, HATE POPE" RELATIONSHIP WITH IONA. (This book is not a direct criticism of the 8th Duke. It is a statement on other's hagiographic (Saintly) gloss on him and their narrowness of cause and affect. They make Irish panegyric (praise) poetry seem reserved.)

❖ WE FINISH WITH THIS QUESTION :- IS THE 8TH DUKE'S MONUMENT IN THE ABBEY CHURCH A REFLECTION OF HIS EXAGGERATED ROLE IN ITS 20TH CENTURY RE-BIRTH, OR, A STATEMENT AND CONSTANT REMINDER OF THE DEATH AND DESTRUCTION OF THIS WHOLE MEDIEVAL ABBEY BY HIS DYNASTY OVER THE 16TH AND 17TH CENTURIES?