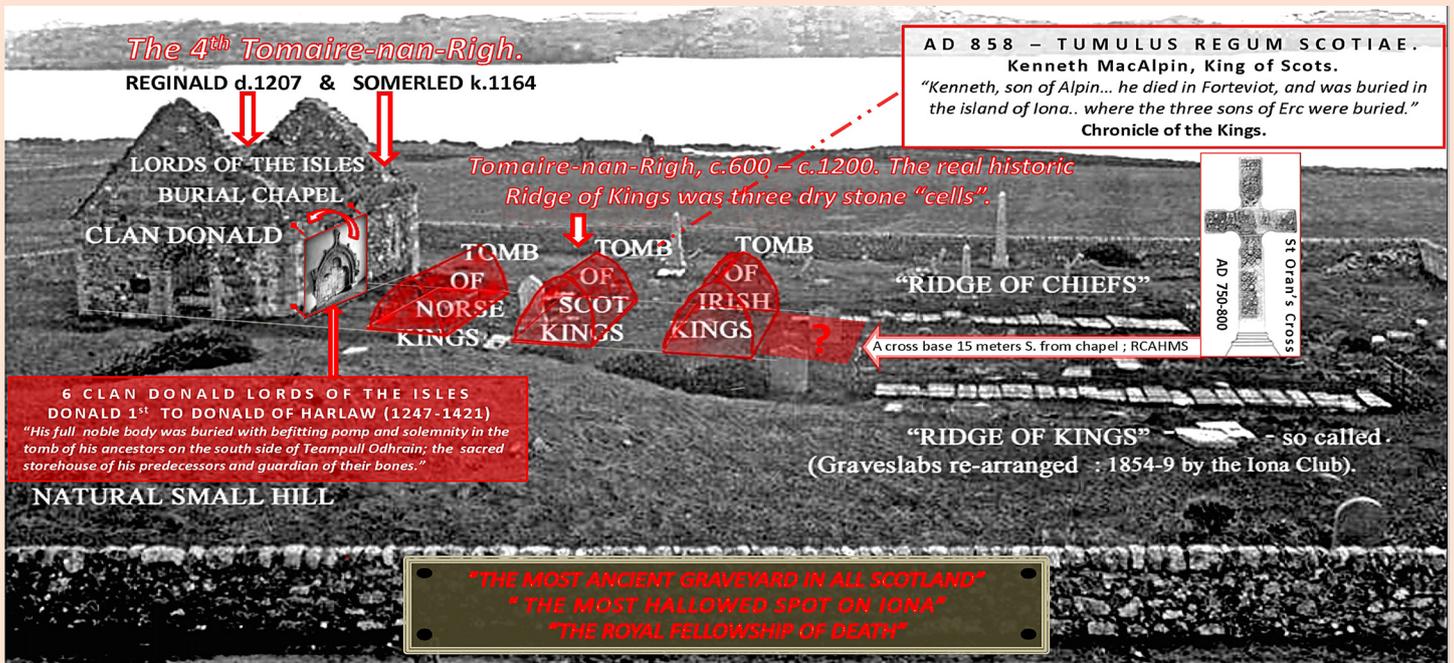


CLAN DONALD
&
IONA ABBEY

1200-1500



IONA

The ancient ecclesiastical capital of Dalriada and of the 'Royal Family of MacDonald' 1200-1500

W. Sacherverell Esq., Governor of Mann, 1688.

The Gall-Ghàidheil MacDhomhnaills, regularly "Allied on equal terms with England's pride" and "Old enemies of the realm of Scotland", had as their main goals the security of their extensive possessions and their independence. Scotland was not a unified nation state – patriotism and loyalty were alien concepts. Clan Donald's enemies were local. Firstly the MacDougalls, then the combined Stuart Kings and Campbells.

A misplaced trust in treating with England started the great Royal Clan Donald's downfall. Divisions within its leadership resulted and the weakened Lordship of the Isles lost it all, 1493. Including its ecclesiastical history which was also "Reformed" and the much transformed country forgot Clan Donald was the whole reason for the very existence of medieval Iona Abbey and its *Cathedral of the Isles*.

For its entire existence over the whole medieval period, Iona Abbey was recreated, prospered and grew under the one continuous family of founder, builders, patrons, benefactors and endowers, the early Clan Donald. They gifted the "*Hand of Columba*."

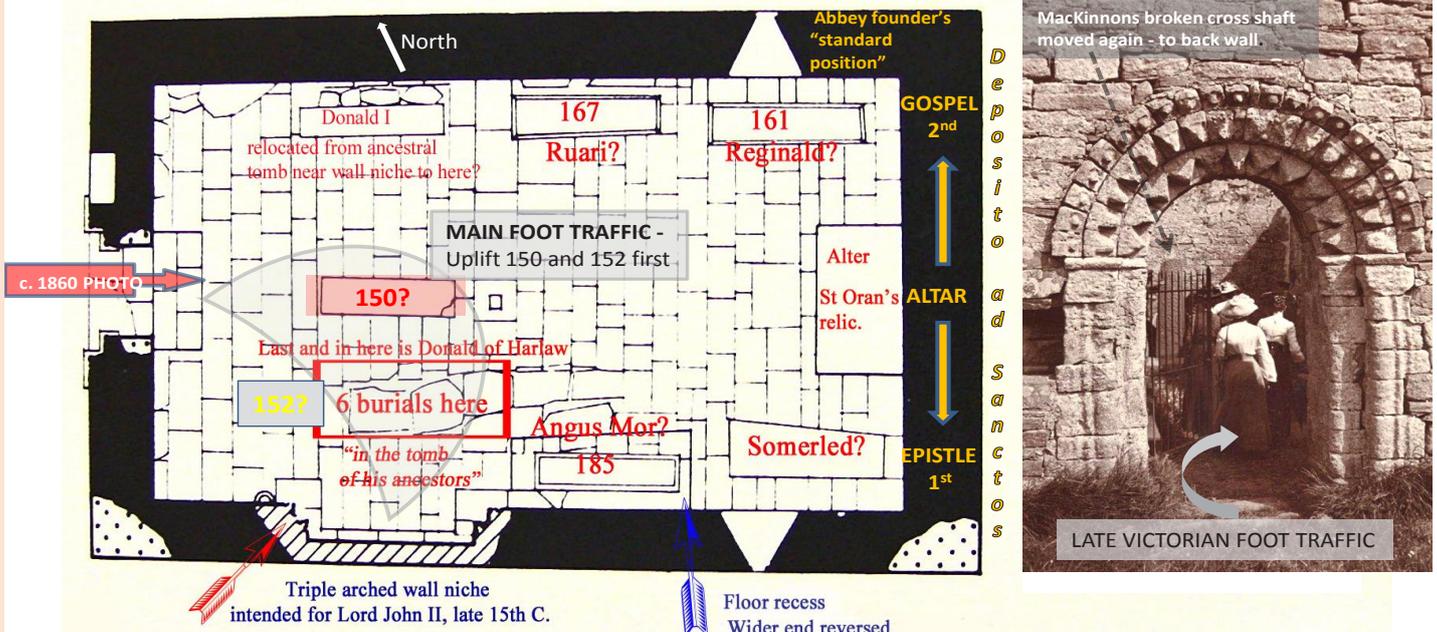
By c.1450, despite defeating the corrupt MacKinnon's attempted inside coup of the Lordship (their reaction to abbey governance) and the leading reforms by Chief Donald (II) of Harlaw with Clan Donald Prior/Abbot, John MacAlasdair (together 30 years 1390-1421), "*the monastery was collapsed, impoverished in its rent and of extreme poverty*." With the previous Lord "Good John" absorbed by his many new

foundations at Oransay Priory and Eilean MoLaise, etc, it had been so for decades. The next Lord, Alexander MacDonald, said c.1443 that he was forced by conscience and "conditionality of endowment" to "*diminish the monastery*" (shut it down) by "*removing the bones of his ancestors and their precious gifts*" (stopping reciprocal endowments) because of the continuing income diversion and "*moral delinquency of the wicked and perverse noblemen*" the previously unfettered MacKinnons (including Finguine, 3rd). Pilgrim income from indulgences, such as reduced purgatory "sentences" given on the annual feast day, was not the saviour of the *collapsed monastery* (choir, bell tower, chapter.)

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*." 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, with his Cathedra on Iona, and reforming Abbot, Dominic MacKenzie. This political goal was the inevitable zenith of a many decade's long sequence of connected events.

Iona Abbey : "*probably the completest and most interesting group of ancient ecclesiastical structures in Scotland*"; "*the immediate architectural debt is to Ireland rather than to England*."

AUTHOR'S ATTRIBUTION OF LORD'S SLABS AND POSITIONS OF BURIAL IN ST ORAN'S CHAPEL



CLAN DONALD ANCESTRAL TOMB (6) - DONALD I, 1247, TO DONALD OF HARLAW, 1421

"It was considered the duty of the heir of the latterly deceased person, after having cleared out the tomb by removing the bones, to raise the body of his relative, and, without any aid from others, to deposit it in its **temporary** resting-place". "His full noble body was buried with befitting pomp and solemnity in the tomb of his ancestors on the south side of Teampull Odhrain; the sacred storehouse of his predecessors and guardian of their bones." This is a secondary ritual to protect and perpetuate the kingship which represents the *body politic* as a continuous living institution.

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 used their privileged Royal connections to heavily partake 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". They suppressed it and shared to an unknown extent in the dissolution "plunder of Iona" (with McLeans, et al) of :- library books and MSS of great value, Registers (so called "dispersed and lost"), some gold and silver plate (tower bell?). They were instrumental in destroying the Abbey, being the responsible local *Leaders in the Field for the Reformed Religion*, and 'lost' 300 priceless Iona graveslab inscriptions, c.1660, of the "best men of all the isles."

(1.) **Archibald Campbell**, 5th Earl of Argyll (c. 1537–1573) :- In 1561 an Act was passed by the Privy Council suppressing "Idolatori and all monumentis thairof". Arran, Glencairn and Argyle were dispatched to the west to carry the Act into execution. The Abbey is "bombarded with cannon." It is said that his 'army' was bigger than that of England and France.

(2.) **Archibald Campbell**, 8th Earl and 1st Marquess of Argyll (1607–1661), effective ruler of Scotland:- following the Synod of Argyll 1642 he went around the isles destroying

various crosses and "idoltrous monuments". He was said to have overthrown "some of the finest monuments of the (Iona) monastery and the altars" (Royal Commission, 1977).

It is vital in understanding this history to not 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"), 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 McLeans, *MacGill-Eathain*, also had many such successive Commendators. They had all entered "the monastery rather by reason of succession than from devotion"...) Iona abbey is but a pastiche between 1493-1561.

Its no use Clan Donald *getting up from the canvas* unless they are prepared to make a hard, fair fight of it, with good combinations. However it will be a big mistake for anyone to try and portray an extra round with the old Argyll Earls as the main "title" match. It is simply a necessary fixture to the endgame :-

A Lord's title and lands may be forfeited, but not his clan's history and legacy.

"HIC IACET JOHANNES DOMINUS INSULARUM"

"HERE LIES JOHN LORD OF THE ISLES" – IONA, THE ECCLESIASTICAL CAPITAL OF

"THE ROYAL FAMILY OF MACDONALD, FORMERLY KINGS OF THE WESTERN PARTS OF SCOTLAND AND THE ISLES" – W. SACHERVERELL, GOVERNOR OF MAN, 1688.

Representation of what **Good John (I) of Islay's** (d.1386) possible graveslab and erased Lombardic inscription may have looked like c.1500 as finished with tempera and gilding (just after the fall of the Lordship, John II, 1493). The elaborate, magnificently designed slab of 14th-15th c. (RCAHMS; not Maclean's) could be Good John's because he was the impetus for the (O'Brolchan) Iona School of carving and its grand cultural patron. He had immense wealth and a reputation for unrivalled church benefaction. "*Eoin Mac Donnail, rí Innsi Gall*" (AU1387) was *nobilis*, with his Stewart wife Princess Margaret - "**The Royal Family of MacDonald,**" on equal terms to the "The Steward" of the Eastern parts of Scotland and he deserved nothing less. It is based on the observation of other monuments and tombs of the same status and period in the few surviving abbeys and in museums and what was the world renowned artwork of Iona in its various forms and techniques. This graveslab monument is for inside John's ancestral chapel: "*His full noble body was interred in the same grave with {of} his father on the south side of Teampull Odhráin*" the "*sacred storehouse of his predecessors and guardian of their bones.*"

It is not fanciful to suggest that some of the Lord's graveslabs were enriched when one also considers how elaborately and beautifully decorated the cloisters of the Iona abbey and nunnery were clearly known to have been. In addition :- "*There repose the glorious bodies of both Archbishop Conled and the noble virgin Brigit in their sarcophagi, the one to the right and the other to the left of the beautifully adorned altar.*" {As in St Oran's chapel are the Kings of Isles, Somerled, on the epistle side of the holy table and son Reginald (father of eponymous Donald), gospel side.} "*These sarcophagi are richly decorated with gold, silver and multicoloured precious stones; they have also pictorial representations in relief and in colours, and are surmounted by crowns of gold and silver.*" (From Cogitosus' seventh century *Vita Sanctae Brigidae* of Kildare. "Burial practices of the Irish were very similar to those of their western European neighbours – Scotland, France; similarities are notable." Fry, S; *Burial in Medieval Ireland, 900-1500*; 1999.)

This book will attribute, with clear and convincing proof, the graveslabs of Angus Og of the Battle of Bannockburn fame as well as for the opulent Reginald mac Somerled the Abbey founder, "*most distinguished of the Galls or the Gael for prosperity and sway of generosity.*" Somerled and Reginald are buried next to the relics of the revered Saint Oran, *deposito ad sanctos*, whose earthly remains, *dynamis-virtus*, were forever in direct contact with his heavenly soul. Six Clan Donald Lords of the Isle's mode of sepulture, rotating through the one grave of the *ancestral life-force centre* according to the "tradition of the country", will also be revealed for the first time. Ancestral graves remain the *constant centre of life*, because there one's forebears are present, guaranteeing the line of descent and the dispensation of justice. This is a *secondary ritual* to protect and perpetuate the kingship which represents the *body politic* as a continuous living institution, reanimated by the processes of the son and heir connecting with the corpse

of his father and the bones of his grandfather (*The Ancestors*). Shown directly below Lord John II's (intended) grandiose tomb-recess, in the wall of the "*south side of Teampull Odhráin*", is the location of the single ancestral tomb where Donald of Harlaw, the last Lord buried there, now rests. Also shown is the plausible *final* resting place of the eponymous Donald's *imperishable skeleton* under his then relocated slab in the royal family's chantry chapel. Countless masses were sung by the Lords' perpetual chantry Priests for their souls in Purgatory. The key to medieval religion is the fate of the individual's soul after death, with the belief that "*the dead are not actually dead*" and, at the resurrection, "*Our flesh, then glorified and Holy, Is put on us once more*" (Paradiso; 1308).

From 1207 to 1493, the early Clan DONALD and its Lords of the Isles were entirely central to Iona Abbey's whole medieval existence, development and politics. This enduring phase also equals the 300 year period of Columban monasticism. It is paramount in providing the sole witness to Iona's extant architecture and is a principal witness to the surviving monuments. By c.1450, due to corruption, "*the monastery was collapsed, impoverished in its rent and of extreme poverty.*" Iona Abbey Church as it stands to day (restored 20th c.) is due to the resources and re-building by the CLAN DONALD HIGH CHIEF, LORD OF THE ISLES, "*JOHIS DE YLLE COMIS ROSSIE DOMINI INSULARUM*", c.1450-80 (1461: John's grand expectations of the Treaty of Ardtornish-Westminster with Edward IV.) Lord John II's enterprise employed *Donaldus O'Brolchan* of the Lordship's long serving hereditary chief masons, church-rights and personal secretaries established from the Derry Abbots/Bishops, past Coarbs of the *St Columba Familia* and *Chief Lectors, Prime Artificers of Ireland*. Elaborate enhancements to the greatly enlarged abbey church were lastly superintended by John's first cousin, Angus MacDONALD II, Bishop of the Isles with his Episcopal See, Bishop's Throne or *CATHEDRA* firmly set on Iona. It was relocated by his father from Snizort, Skye, c.1433. He was Angus MacDONALD I, "*first native*" Bishop of the Isles, son of DONALD (II) of Harlaw who acquired and gifted to the Abbey c.1412-21 the priceless "*Hand of St Columba*" - a rarity and the only corporeal relic of St Columba repatriated from its five centuries of safekeeping in Derry, Ireland - a prestigious, sacred "*Hebridean Holy Grail*". Donald and his artists enshrined it in a '*charismatic*' gold and silver reliquary of '*dazzling, wondrous beauty*'. This event, of momentous religious significance and high political status, was achieved after a three decades long partnership with his second cousin, the Iona Claustal Prior and lead reforming Abbot John MacALASANDAIR from a senior line of Clan DONALD. The acquisition was a huge symbolic gloss, not only on Donald II himself, but was a blessing on the whole Lordship, providing the collective merit in raising the Abbey's status. Abbot John married Anna, Donald II's niece, the grand-daughter of *Good John (I) MacDONALD de Yle, Domini Insularum*. A Cathedral petition by John II during the tenuous, seventeen year period between his forfeitures, interspersed with his heir's reprisals, had no hope of obtaining James IV's required support (to Pope). But in 1499, with its attributes entirely unchanged, Iona Abbey church acted 'de facto Cathedral' under Eoin Cambuil I, Abbey Commendator/Bishop, brother of a new, 1498 petitioner, Archibald, 2nd Earl of Argyll. Lord John II died, 1503. In 1506, the Cathedral was confirmed. In God's truth,

"THE IONA CATHEDRAL OF THE ISLES" IS CLAN DONALD'S LEGACY.

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