

WHO RESOURCED AND BUILT THE IONA "CATHEDRAL OF THE ISLES"? (Part 1)

Ian Ross Macdonnell, Australia.

"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'; p.152; Burton, J., 1994.)

Let's put some authentic ancestral bones and a bit of flesh on that academically sound, authoritative statement above. And we have

"It was .. Reginald mac Somerled.. the founder of.. Iona Abbey.. and his heirs .. the MacDonald Lords of the Isles... who provided the impetus to build or rebuild, who might contribute ideas ...like their rebuilding, enlarging and raising of St Mary's church to the Cathedral of the Isles ... and who furnished resources to finance the project."

But will the Scottish authorities acknowledge this truth? No. They continue to maintain it was the Iona abbot who financed and rebuilt St Mary's church.

They are plain wrong. Just like they were wrong in emphatically stating it was "inconceivable" for the Iona graveslab No. 150 to be the monument of Bannockburn famous, Lord Angus Og MacDonald, d.1318. It took seven years for me to prove them wrong and receive official acknowledgement in 2013.

See here :-

<http://www.ionaabbeyandclandonald.com/angus-ogs-graveslab-no-150---savior-of-the-bruce.html>

And they will be proved wrong again. Historic Scotland acknowledged in writing in 2012 that:-

"In the later medieval period, control by one of the most prominent forces in Scottish politics, the Lord of the Isles is likely to have had a strong impact on the island and its monuments but the role of the Lordship on the architectural, ecclesiastical and political landscape of Iona is poorly understood."



Yet, even understanding that weakness, they still maintain that the Lords of the Isles (unnamed) were only 'generous benefactors throughout or patrons' for Iona abbey. This is about as completely inadequate and insulting as saying that Bill Gates is a prolific, high profile programmer for Microsoft!

Historic Scotland's flawed, inadequate account leaves the Clan Donald Lords of the Isles forfeit of any due recognition, outside of the minimalist role of being called mere benefactors or patrons for Iona Abbey/Cathedral. 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 - under the one family. In many respects, they are sidelined, what's more anonymously, to St Oran's Chapel which I have already begun to successfully rectify. At the moment a further eight graveslab attributions by me are being assessed by Dr Nicki Scott, Historic Scotland. Identifying individual and well known MacDonald Lords/Chiefs with significant Iona monuments is an essential element in my strategy to reclaim ("personalise", legitimise) and publicise the fact that medieval Iona Abbey and Cathedral of the Isles is the true legacy of various Clan Donald Chiefs.

For the general public to be misinformed that the Lords of the Isles were just patrons (and with limited modern meaning) or benefactors of Iona Abbey and Cathedral is substantively misleading in terms of a proper interpretation of the history of the site's extant architecture.

Exactly what bit was left standing in c.1900...?



If you'd like to fully appreciate why, and I'm sure many of you do, it will take just a bit of further reading. Here is the first part of a 'short' 5000 word essay and I've made it as engaging and compelling as I can for you within the bounds of an academic environment. I'd like you to be enthused – to join the just cause!

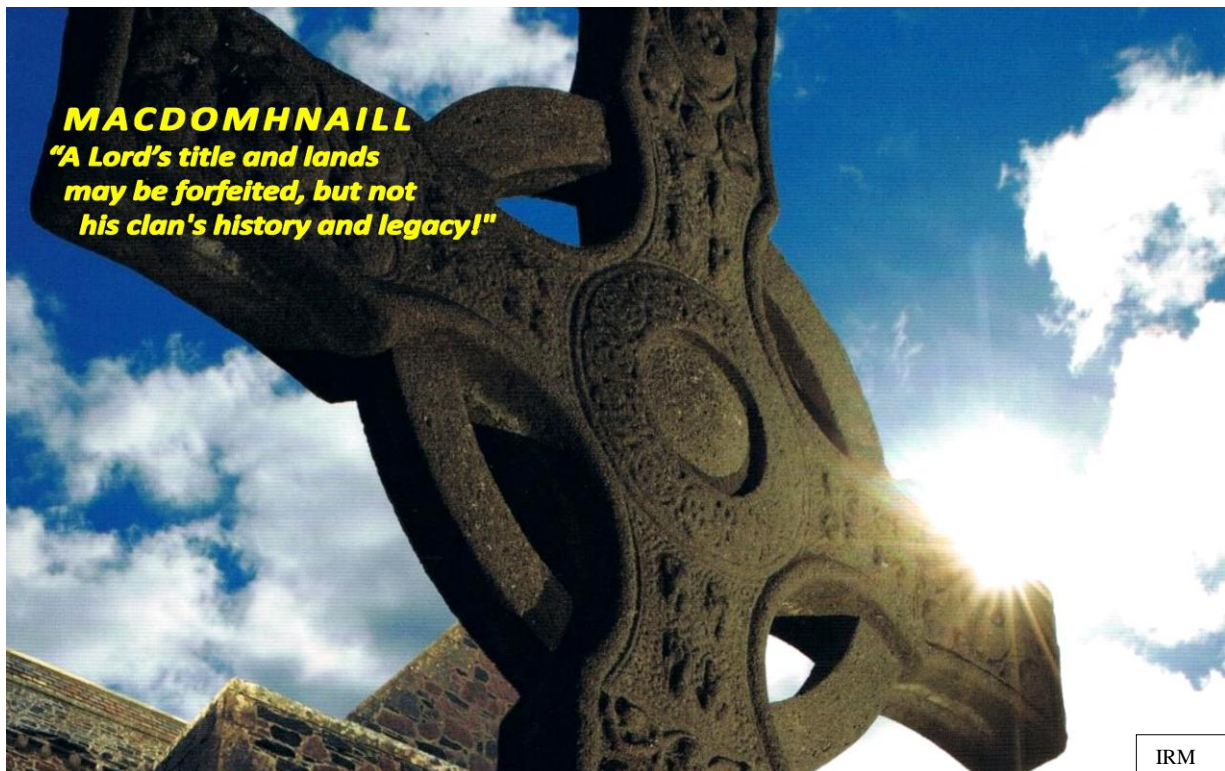
My website has various papers and pages on this which explain in more detail and with full references and footnotes, etc, eg :- <http://www.ionaabbeyandclandonald.com/introduction.html>

What are we up against? Dr. Iain MacDonald, Glasgow University; 2013 :- "***The Highlander has never enjoyed a good press, and has been usually characterised as peripheral and barbaric in comparison to his Lowland neighbour, more inclined to fighting than serving God***". In his "*Clerics and Clansmen - The Diocese of Argyll between the Twelfth and Sixteenth Centuries*"; 2013.

BUT, FOR EFFECTIVELY ITS ENTIRE EXISTENCE OVER THE WHOLE LATER MEDIEVAL PERIOD OF 300 YEARS, IONA ABBEY WAS RECREATED, PROSPERED AND GREW UNDER THE ONE CONTINUOUS FAMILY OF FOUNDER AND HIS HEIRS, THE BUILDERS, PATRONS, BENEFACTORS, PROTECTORS, REBUILDERS AND CONTINUOUS ENDOWERS – FROM FOUNDATION TO PRE-DISSOLUTION.¹

THIS IS CERTAINLY RARE. THIS MACDONALD FAMILY OUGHT TO BE ACKNOWLEDGED PUBLICLY AND PROMINENTLY AS SUCH ON THE ABBEY.²

(cont. next edition....)



¹ After the MacDonald Lordship fell, **BETWEEN 1494 AND 1534, THE ABBEY WAS BUT AN UNWORTHY, PATHETIC PASTICHE – A SLUSH FUND** for the "*capacious greedy craws*" of the Campbell Earls of Argyll and their agents, the many Campbell Iona Abbey Commendators (stripped Abbey's assets!). **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.

² As used to be :- "***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; Dr. Peter Yeoman.