

The Brooch of Lorn, continued...

by *Ronnie Black*

In the last newsletter I told the story of how King Robert Bruce lost his brooch during a fight with some followers of his enemies, the MacDougalls of Lorn, in 1306. John Dewar's Gaelic story of how the 'Brooch of Lorn' came to the light of day again is equally good. This is how it goes.

By the mid-seventeenth century, the MacDougall chief of the day, called John, lived at Gylen Castle in Kerrera, the island which faces the modern town of Oban. He was married to a daughter of Campbell of Inverawe. They also had a farm called Ballimore in the island. They had a house thatched with heather there, and often went to live in it during the summer.

The couple had no children, but on a visit home to Inverawe, Lady MacDougall got to know her brother's son, a little boy. The pair became very fond of each other, and she brought him back to Kerrera to live with her. He took to calling her husband his daddy. This infuriated MacDougall's brother the laird of Slatrach, who did have children and expected his eldest son to succeed to the chiefship.

To cut a long story short, the laird of Slatrach murdered the wee boy, whose father, Campbell of Inverawe, then assembled a large warband of Campbells, and led it to Kerrera to avenge the death. Among the Campbells was a famous warrior called Iain Beag of Braglen (in Glen Euchar, south of Oban).

Inverawe's force landed at Rubha an t-Sianaich near Gylen Castle. Iain Beag went to see MacDougall's dairymaid, a relative of his, and asked if she knew a way of getting MacDougall's men out of the castle. She said, "I'll let the calves in with the cows, and it won't be long before the men come out to separate them."

She let the calves in with the cows, but the men in the castle didn't appear, so the



The ruins of Gylen Castle, near Oban

Campbells began hamstringing the cattle and burning the houses. That galvanised the MacDougalls into action – MacDougall came out of the castle and assumed the leadership of his men. But the laird of Slatrach was terror-stricken, as it was he who'd committed the crime, and he took himself and his family out of the way.

The Campbells and MacDougalls met between Rubha an t-Sianaich and the castle. The battle had begun before the MacDougalls had got properly into order, and they lost. Many of them were killed, and the rest were pursued. MacDougall tried to get back into the castle, but his wife, blaming him for her nephew's death, slammed the inner door shut. MacDougall cried out: "Open up and let me in!"

She replied: "It's open behind you. Turn around and go the other way."

He said: "I'm thirsty. Let me in so that I can get a drink."

She said: "Go to the green well above the house, and get a drink there."



sgrios, Thug Glann Donachaidh gach mi luach mhòr b'fhiach a thoirt air falbh mach a caisteal na'n lyaith-lean, agus chuir iad caisteal na'n lyaith-lean ri theine, agus loig iad a, agus thug iad a chreach dhachaidh leo, Bha am bràisidh òir, a thug Glann Dughail o rìgh Roibeart Brus latha blàr Dhail-rìgh, ann an tigh a Bhaile-mhoir, bha fios aig a bhannarach air an taiseg anns an robh e, Chaidh i agus ghoid i leatha am bràisidh, chuir i teine ris an tigh anns an robh e, theich i dh'ionnsaidh Iain bhig bhraigh lhlinn-iuchar, agus thug i dh'a am bràisidh, lhlaidh Iain-beag mac

The burning of Gylen Castle, as related in the Dewar Manuscripts

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This was the well from which King Alexander II had taken the famous drink that led to his death in 1249.

MacDougall had to stand on the narrow stairway that led up to the castle door and defend himself with his sword as best he could. He killed three or four men, but they wounded him around the feet so that he fell and was killed. Then the door was opened, allowing the Campbells to go in and seize the castle.

The Campbells continued the massacre, plundered Gylen Castle, set it on fire, and burnt it down. It's standing there as a shell to this day. As for the golden brooch that the MacDougalls had taken from Bruce, it was at Ballimore House. The dairymaid knew the store where it was kept, so she went in, stole it, set fire to the building, then ran off to Iain Beag and gave him the brooch.

Iain Beag kept it, and it remained in his family at Braglen. The MacDougalls assumed that since the store had been burned down, it must have been destroyed by the fire. The laird of Slatrach took over the MacDougall estate, and it's his descendants who are now called the MacDougalls of Dunollie.

Five generations down from Iain Beag, around the time of the '45, Campbell of Braglen's widow felt Glen Euchar was too remote, and moved to Kilninver where she could be near a school. She gave her five sons a good education. Her eldest, the heir, reached the rank of major in the army, and married a woman from Lismore. The Braglen estate was heavily in debt and had to be sold, but Major Campbell leased a farm called Tournalt in Glen Doan from Campbell of Lochnell.

After Major Campbell's death his widow remained at Tournalt. On one occasion she went to a festive gathering in Inveraray wearing Bruce's brooch on her breast. Her landlord, Lochnell, saw it and recognised it.

A while afterwards, Lochnell was seeking election to parliament as member for Argyllshire. He was promised a number of votes; MacDougall of Dunollie was of great service in assisting him, and he was duly elected.

After that, Lochnell was keen to give MacDougall a gift in return for his services, so he went to Tournalt and said to Lady Braglen, "If you give me Bruce's brooch, I'll give you Tournalt free of rent for three years."

Lady Braglen accepted the deal, and handed over the brooch.

In those days the Argyllshire gentry met at the Great Inn in Inveraray every year in October for a week of dancing and merrymaking. One night, when the musicians had finished playing, Lochnell came into the ballroom with Bruce's brooch in the palm of his hand and said, "I have something here that doesn't belong to me." He went over to George, duke of Argyll, and said to him, "As you are lord lieutenant of the county, I'm giving it to you, so that you can put it where it ought to be."

Duke George looked at the brooch and saw King Robert Bruce's name on it. Realising it was the very brooch that had been taken off the king on the day of the Battle of Dalrigh, he went over to MacDougall, pinned it to

his chest, and said, "This is where this brooch ought to be."

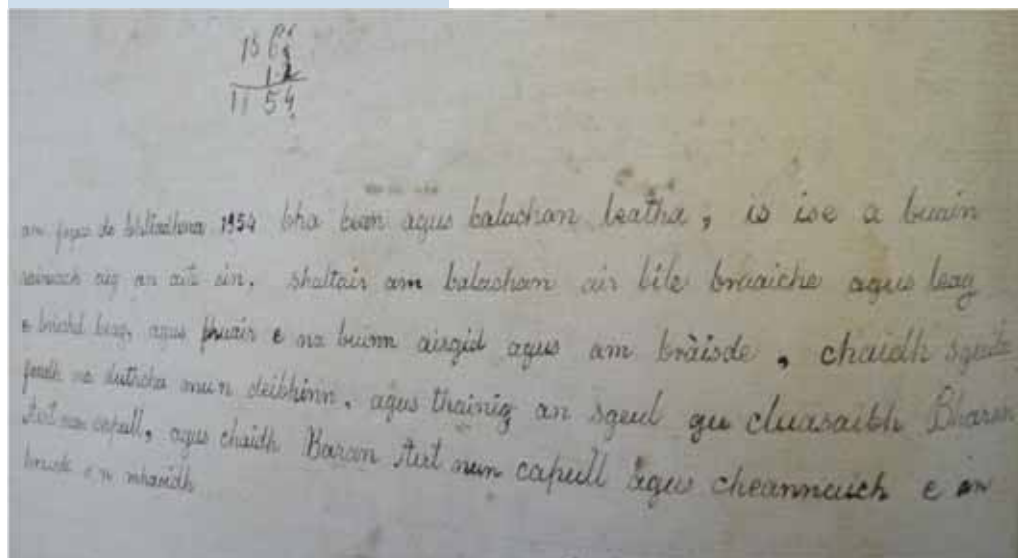
MacDougall asked where it had come from, but all he was told was that it had been found in an antique shop.

I asked my friend Diarmid Campbell, historian of the Inverawe Campbells, about Dewar's story, and he tells me that the attack on Gylen Castle by Dugald Campbell (6th of Inverawe) and Campbell of Braglen is a matter of historical record. He says that one version of the story shows Inverawe taking the brooch from Gylen, but confirms that it was in the Braglen family when Lochnell bought it.

I can't resist ending with with a puzzle. There's a page of the Dewar MSS that appears to have no connection with what precedes or follows it. In translation, it says simply: "Near the year 1854 a woman had a little boy with her while she was cutting bracken at that place. The little boy stepped on the edge of an earthen bank, which caused a minor landslide, revealing the coins and the brooch. The news about them went around the district, and came to the ears of the baron of Ardincaple, who went on to buy the brooch from the woman."

There were MacDougalls of Ardincaple in Lorn, and MacAulays of Ardincaple in Dunbartonshire. My understanding is that it was in 1824, during Duke George's time, that Lochnell returned the brooch to MacDougall, and that Queen Victoria examined it in 1842. So what brooch was found in 1854? Replies on a postcard please . . .

*The battle had begun
before the
MacDougalls had got
properly into order*



The Dewar Manuscript relates the finding of the brooch and silver coins in 1854