

# *The Fair Maid of Callart*

## *Oral Tradition and Parallel Record*

### *Chapter 7*

*Published in West Highland Notes & Queries, Series 2, No.2, October 1988, pp.5-9*

The tale 'The Fair Maid of Callart' was submitted to Lord Archibald Campbell, Editor of *Records of Argyll*,<sup>1</sup> 1884, by Isabel Smith from Stronmagachan. Her father was the Rev J. Smith, minister of Glenaray. Her mother's family, the Campbells in Achlain were descended from the Campbells of Inverawe which may account for the provenance of the story.<sup>2</sup>

The exact wording of the traditional tale is not significant in this case. The gist is as follows:

Mary, daughter of Cameron of Callart sometime in the 17th century, was enamoured of a son of MacConnochie of Inverawe. This and her generosity to the poor did not please her father who locked her in a garret. Meanwhile a trading vessel brought the plague to the family and all but the isolated Mary died. Calling to a herd from her window she got a message taken to her lover who came from Inverawe to rescue her. Setting a ladder to her window he bid her climb down wrapped only in a blanket. He then had her submerge herself in the loch, leaving the tainted blanket behind and, wrapping her in his plaid, he took her to Inverawe. There he built a sheiling for her on the side of Ben Cruachan where she lived 'in quarantine for three months' before being allowed into the house of Inverawe where they were then married.

One wonders whether such a good understanding of the quarantine principles and the avoidance of contact with tainted clothing had become normal practice in the Highlands by the 17th century or whether these concepts became grafted onto the tale in a more health-conscious age. These precautions seem to be so fundamental to the story line as to show the likelihood of being original.

There is record of the marriage of a son of the MacConnochie of Inverawe and a daughter of Callart. Patrick Campbell is mentioned as brother to Dugald Campbell, apparant of Inverawe, in a Glenurchy Sasine dated at Edinburgh on the 2nd November 1640.<sup>3</sup> He appears to have fought at Inverlochy and died of his wounds. He is mentioned as the deceased Patrick Campbell, brother german to the deceased Lachlan and Alexander, brothers german to [Lt. Col.] Dugald Campbell of Inverawe, in a Sasine dated on the 6th and 10th of December 1649.<sup>4</sup> One suspects that Lachlan and Alexander may also have been victims of Inverlochy. Then this Patrick is identified as the husband of a Mary Cameron in a discharge by their 'only lawful son and heir' and 'only bairn and nearest of kin to the said father', John Campbell in Torgormaig in Mull.<sup>5</sup> The discharge is dated at Inveraray on the 17th of November 1665. A further link with Callart is made in the list of curators where, besides 'Dugald Campbell my brother natural' there are 'Allan Cameron

Tutor of Callart and John McAlaster vcEane vcAllane alias Cameron in Morverne'. Yet another link with Callart is provided in the marriage of this John Campbell, son of Patrick Campbell and Mary Cameron, to Florence Cameron, daughter of John Cameron of Callart and widow of Lachlan, brother to John MacLean of Kinlochaline.<sup>6</sup>

A Callart tree shows that, Mary was a name used by that family. Florence had a sister Mary who married Alan Maclean of Drimnin in 1653. Their grandmother, the wife of Ewen Cameron of Callart, was a Mary NcEan VcAlaster. Ewen of Callart was living in the mid 1630's and his heir John of Callart was alive in 1633<sup>7</sup>. John of Callart's brother, Allan, Tutor of Callart, is mentioned in both the tree and in the discharge quoted above. He was living in 1654, 57 and 69<sup>7</sup>. Perhaps John Cameron of Callart may have died of the plague but had a son to whom Allan was Tutor. There are some pointers to the fact that John may not have long outlived his father. Since John Campbell was the 'only bairn' of Mary and Patrick they may not have been long married before Inverlochy. This would indicate that Mary, who does not appear in the Callart tree, could have been the daughter of Ewen Cameron of Callart and Mary NcEan VcAlaster and so the sister of John and his brother Allan the Tutor. Patrick would appear to have been the 6th son of Archibald Campbell of Inverawe (the subject of the 'Uncle and Nephew' tale in *Records of Argyll*) who would seem to have come of age in 1602-3, leaving one to postulate that Patrick might have been born between 1610 and 1620.

The final link between the traditional tale of the 'Fair Maid of Callard' and this Mary Cameron and Patrick MacConnochie Campbell is found in Mary's lament for Patrick upon his death. A version in the Gaelic is preserved in an MS by Dr Archibald Smith (McLulich) written down in 1886.<sup>8</sup> only a few years after the publication of *Records of Argyll*. In his notes Dr. Smith identifies Mary as a grand-daughter of Lochiel and Patrick as the heir of Inverawe, the latter being clearly incorrect, but he does use the name Patrick for Mary's husband which the version in *Records of Argyll* fails to do. Besides Mary's using the patronymic MacConnochie for her late husband through most of the lament and her remarking how like to him is the child upon her knee, indicating John's being still in his infancy at the time of his father's death, some significant lines of the lament are:

You took me from the house of pestilence  
Where died my father and my mother,  
My sister and my five brothers .  
and;  
There are deer on the little isle of the Yews  
And trout in the pool of the marsh  
And thought there are, what use are they to me,  
And my beloved Patrick, he lies in the vault of the church.

A further search may yet identify this 'Isle of the Yews', 'Tha feidh air. Innsaig na n'Iubhraich.

Diarmid A Campbell

## END NOTES:

<sup>1</sup> Lord Archibald Campbell (ed) Records of Argyll 1881 pp 131135. Callard clearly refers to Coillart or Callart.

<sup>2</sup> Dr Lorne Campbell's Notes (unpublished) at Inveraray Castle (Achlian).

<sup>3</sup> Gen. Reg. of Sasines 1617-61 Vol 49 fol 377. The other sons of Archibald Campbell of Inverawe were: Lt Col Dugald of Inverawe; John Campbell, 1st of Achaworran in Lismore, Archibald, Lachlan and Alexander.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* Vol 8 fol 24. Lt Col Dugald served under Gen Leslie and died in 1665.

<sup>5</sup> Reg. of Deeds, Books of Council and Session, Durie 15 pp. 735-40.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* Mack 53 pp 707-9.

<sup>7</sup> SROGD 202/90.

<sup>8</sup> Nat Lib Scot M S 2128 'Reminiscences of the Clan Donnachie of Inverawe' 1886. Dr Smith's version of the tale is not substantially different from that in Records of Argyll. What is of great value is his recording of Mary's Lament in the Gaelic.

NOTE: John Campbell, son of Mary and Patrick, appears later to have been tacksman of Ardtornish; (R D Index 1684 Dal 63 p 1137, and in Argyll Testaments cc 2/3/3), where Florence Cameron, wife to John Campbell in Ardtornish, Morvern, is on record as having died in January of 1686, leaving two daughters, Mary and Margaret.

The writer must thank Dr Lorne Campbell, Tayness, Alastair Lorne Campbell of Airds, Yr, Unicorn Pursuivant, and Andrew MacEwen for their help over a number of years with references. Also various people for their help in the translation of the Lament.

## REPLY

### Isle of the Yews (2 N & Q no 2 p 8)

The isle of Bernera off Lismore, according to Donald Monro's 1549 description of the Western Isles, had 'ane wood of Ewin it' (1961 edn., p 55 no 64 - missing in previous editions). George Buchanan wrote of '*Bernera, olim sacrosanctum asylum dicta, silus taxi nobilils*' (Historia, book 1, fol. 9, lines 63-4), translated as 'Bernera, formerly named the Holy Sanctuary, the forest of noble yew' (James Aikman's translation, 1827, vol 1 p 44). It is referred to in Ian Carmichael's Lismore in Alba, pp 42-3, Seton Gordon, *Highways and byways in the West Highlands*, p 215. There is also an article by Seton Gordon on 'Berneray of the Noble Yew' in The Scotsman of 29th July 1955, in which he tells of crossing to the island by an isthmus joining it to Lismore.

R W Munro

(*West Highland Notes & Queries*, Series 2, No.3, March 1989, p. 26)

NOTE: There is a legend told by the Earl of Dunmore and confirmed by Alex Campbell of Lochnell, that one of the Lochnell family who was building the 18<sup>th</sup> century part of the house at Lochnell, cut down a yew on the island of Bernera under which by tradition one of the early saints had preached. A curse was therefore put on the family. Until the yew grew again, no son of the Campbells of Lochnell would inherit from his father. That occurred until at the time of the birth of Alex Lochnell, a new shoot appeared from the old dormant root. Yet it is his brother who has the son and heir to date (2010).