

***John Dubh and the Yell of the Cat***  
*With Reference to John dubh MacConnochie Campbell*  
*Tutor of Inverawe. d.circa 1602-06*  
*Chapter 6*

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***A Horrible Tale***

The following comes from 'Letter of Mrs. Campbell of Barbreck containing an Account of the Campbells of Barbreck from their first ancestor to the Present Time', Ipswich; written by Frederick W. Campbell of Barbreck; printed by R. Deck, Cornhill, 1830.

"An extraordinary instance of Highland superstition, called the Taigheirm, (or yell of cats,) was performed, for the last time, in the 17th century, in the island of Mull. The sacrifice consisted of living cats roasted on a spit while life remained; and when the animal expired, it was replaced by another. After the completion of these rites, the votaries were entitled to demand two boons. Cameron of Lochiel performed the Taigheirm some time before this, and was presented with a small silver shoe, which was to be put on the left foot of every son born in that family; and this custom was observed until it was lost, when Lochiel's house was consumed by fire in 1747. The shoe fitted all of them but one, and he afterwards turned his back to the foe at Sherriff Muir, having inherited a large foot from his mother, who was of another race."

In the copy I have in front of me, kindly donated to Inveraray by Miss Campbell of Barbreck, the words 'in the island of Mull' have been scored through and a pencilled note in the margin substitutes 'Inveraw'. Was this disgusting rite common practice and is there truth in the Lochiel story?

A.L. Campbell [Alastair Campbell of Airds]

*(West Highland Notes & Queries, Series 2, No.1, March 1988 p.17)*

NOTE: The version that I have run across has no reference but states that the 'trial' was to swing the cat by the tail and spin the cat about the head until it died. DAC

REPLY:

A Horrible Tale (*N & Q* Series 2 No 1, 17)

A. L. Campbell reported finding 'A Horrible Tale' among the Barbreck papers at Inveraray. He adds that he found a note in the margin which indicated that at least one of the Barbreck family thought that the last occasion upon which the Taigherm (or yell of cats) was conducted was at Inverawe 'sometime in the 17th century'.

At first glance this appears unlikely, the members of that family having supported the kirk during most of that period. However if 'the 17th century' can be said to have included the very early years there was one member of the MacConnochie Campbells of Inverawe whose ruthless and bloodthirsty style could well have culminated in his having the ceremony

attempted there. John Dubh MacConnochie, Tutor of Inverawe while the heir Archibald was in his minority (1582-1602-3), had made a reputation for himself leading Islemen against Elizabethans in Ireland during the late 16th century and is frequently on record for deprivations in the Highlands in the 1590's.

On one occasion he lopped off an offending head and had his men carry it before them on a pike. Legend has it that he attempted to kill the heir in the hopes of gaining Inverawe for himself and one suspects that he might well have resorted to a Taigherm before attempting that final step.

*Diarmid A Campbell (West Highland Notes & Queries, Series 2, No.2, October 1988 p.27)*