

Robertson

Clan Donnachaidh, sometimes known as Clan Robertson, is a Scottish clan. William Forbes Skene (1809–92), Historiographer Royal of Scotland, wrote in 1837 that: “the Robertsons of Struan are unquestionably the oldest family in Scotland, being the sole remaining branch of that Royal House of Atholl which occupied the throne of Scotland during the 11th and 12th centuries.”

Gaelic forms of the name

Mac Dhònnchaidh ('son of Duncan').

Mac Raibeirt ('son of Robert').

Origins of the clan

The Gaelic Clann Dhònnchaidh claims descent from Duncan I (ruled 1034–1040), King of Scots.

He ruled Scotland from 1034, having succeeded his maternal grandfather, Máel Coluim II (1005–43), until killed by Macbeth, Mórmáer of Moray (ruled 1040–57).

Duncan may have married Sybil, a daughter (or sister) of Siward, Earl of Northumbria (d. 1055). His consort is also recorded as Suthen, a Gaelic name. Whatever her origins, she had three known children by Duncan. These three sons were Máel Coluim (later Máel Coluim III Ceann Mór, ‘Great Chief’; usually anglicised Malcolm Canmore), Domnall Bán ('Fair-Haired'), later Domnall III), and perhaps Máel Muire of Atholl. Máel Muire means ‘servant of Mary’ in Old Irish. Clan Donnachaidh is descended from this Máel Muire through the Mórmáers of Atholl. Mórmáer, ‘great steward’, was the Scottish Gaelic equivalent of English ‘earl’.

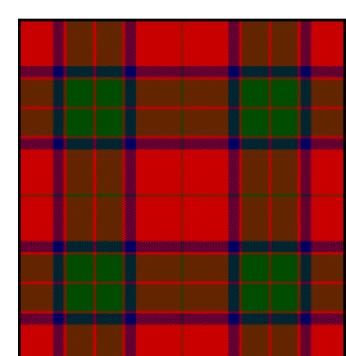
Wars of Scottish Independence

The clan’s first recognized chief Dònnchadh Reamhar, “Stout Duncan”, ('Stout', ie. ‘dependable, resolute’, not ‘fat’!) son of Andrew de Atholia, Latin ‘of Atholl’, was a minor land-owner and leader of a kin-group in Highland Perthshire, and (it is said) an enthusiastic and faithful supporter of Robert I (1306–29) during the Wars of Scottish Independence. Stout Duncan’s relatives and followers (not yet known as Robertsons) are said to have supported Robert Bruce at the Battle of Bannockburn in 1314 (though it should be noted that this patriotic story is not supported by contemporary documentation). His descendants became known (in English or Scots) as Duncanson, or Gaelic Clann Dhònnchaidh, ‘Children of Duncan’.

14th to 15th Century & Clan Conflicts

“Clandonoquhay” tartan, as published in 1842 in the *Vestiarium Scoticum*.

In 1394 a clan battle took place between Clann Dhònnchaidh and the Clan Ogilvy, during a cattle raid on Angus. Sir Walter Ogilvy was slain at this battle, though his son became the Earl of Mar who commanded the Duke of Albany’s forces at the Battle of Harlaw in 1411. Clandonoquhy (Old Scots form of the Gaelic name) had rather a reputation as raiders and feuders in late medieval Scotland, though the chiefs seem always to have been loyal to the Bruce and Stewart royal dynasties.



Robert Riabhach ('Grizzled') Duncanson, Fourth Chief of Clann Dhònnchaidh, was a strong supporter of King James I (1406–1437) and was incensed by his murder at the Dominican Friary in Perth. He tracked down and captured two of the regicides, Sir Robert Graham and the King’s uncle Walter Stewart, Earl of Atholl, as they hid above Invervack in Atholl, and turned them over to the Crown. They were tortured to death in Edinburgh on the orders of the Regent, James I’s widow, Joan Beaufort (d. 1445). The Robertson crest badge of a right hand upholding an imperial crown was awarded by James II (1437–60) to the Fourth Chief, on 15 August 1451 as a reward for capturing his father’s assassins. The highly unusual third supporter (below the shield) on the Robertson coat of arms, of a ‘savage man in chains’ is in reference to the capture of Graham. It is in honor of Robert Riabhach that his descendants and many of his clanfolk took the name Robertson. James II also erected the clan lands into the Barony of Struan, which formerly took in extensive lands in Highland Perthshire, notably in Glen Errochty, the north and south banks of Loch Tay and the area surrounding Loch Rannoch. None of these lands are any longer in the possession of the clan.

Struan (Gaelic Srùthán, ‘place of steams’) is a parish church, of early Christian origin and dedicated to St. Fillan, at the confluence of the Errochty Water and Garry rivers. Many of the medieval chiefs were buried in this church (although individual monuments have unfortunately not survived). The present building was built in the early 19th century, but the foundations of its predecessor can be traced in the churchyard. Dònnchadh Reamhar is, however, said to have been buried in the parish church of Dull, near Aberfeldy. Recent generations of chiefs have been buried in a family vault in the grounds of the estate of Dunlastair, near Kinloch Rannoch.

Recent excavations by members of the Clan Donnachaidh Society within the now redundant church of Dull (the name simply means ‘meadow’ in Gaelic) failed to find evidence of this specific burial, though many others were uncovered, along with early medieval carved stones.

17th Century & Civil War

Red Modern.

During the Civil War the Clan Donnachaidh fought alongside James Graham, 1st Marquess of Montrose in all of his battles. The Clan Donnachaidh along with Alasdair MacColla and his Irish soldiers supported James Graham at the Battle of Tippermuir in 1644 and the Battle of Aberdeen in 1644 where they were victorious on both occasions.

The Robertsons are said to have fought with distinguished bravery at the Battle of Inverlochy (1645) where the Clan Campbell of Argyll was defeated. The Robertsons fought at this battle alongside their allies of the Clan MacDonald, Clan Cameron, Clan Mackinnon, Clan Ogilvy and Clan MacLean. Their enemy was an army of Scottish Covenantors commanded by Duncan Campbell of Auchinbreck whose forces mostly consisted of the Clan Campbell.

The Clan Donnachaidh and cavalry from the Clan Gordon also supported James Graham at the Battle of Auldearn in 1645. It was a victory for Montrose and Alasdair MacColla, heading the royalist forces, over a Covenanter army under the command of Sir John Hurry whose forces included the Clan MacKenzie and the Clan MacLennan.

The Clan Donnachaidh and the Clan MacLachlan supported James Graham at the Battle of Alford in 1645. Having defeated Colonel Hurry at Auldearn, the Marquis of Montrose continued his raiding campaign in the Highlands. Fearing that Montrose intended to attack Aberdeen again, Major-General William Baillie led the Covenanter army to cut him off but was defeated by Grahams forces.

The Clan Donnachaidh, Clan MacNab and Clan Ogilvy supported James Graham at the Battle of Kilsyth in 1645. Despite the numerical disadvantage, the battle was another victory for Royalist forces over the Covenanters, and marked the end of William Baillie’s pursuit of the Royalists.

At the Battle of Philiphaugh in 1645 James Graham was supported by the forces of Clan Douglas who were led by Chief William Douglas, the 11th Earl of Angus. Graham was also supported by the Clan Donnachaidh, Clan Stirling, Clan Ogilvy, Clan Charteris and Clan MacLachlan at this battle. The Royalist army of the Marquess of Montrose was destroyed by the Covenanter army of Sir David Leslie, restoring the power of the Committee of Estates.

The main Robertson castle at Invervack, near the present Clan museum, was burned by Cromwell’s forces during the Civil War, and many family records lost. The Earl of Glencairn was in Rannoch in 1653 looking for support for Charles II. He raised the Clan MacGregor from the Isle of Rannoch. He would have no difficulty recruiting them because one of their opponents was the Earl of Argyll, a Campbell, one of their hereditary enemies. Alexander, the 12th Robertson Chief led his men from Fea Corrie. Both forces met above Annat and marched up the old path to Loch Garry. History informs us that the leaders quarrelled so much amongst themselves that the Cromwell General, General Monk had little difficulty in winning the ensuing Battle of Dalnaspidal.

Robertsons may also have fought in the first Jacobite Rebellion at the Battle of Killiecrankie in 1689 (they certainly did in subsequent risings), though the then Chief Alexander Robertson of Struan (c1668–1749) arrived too late to take part in the battle.

18th Century & Jacobite uprisings

Hunting Ancient.

Alexander Robertson led 500 men of Clan Donnachaidh in support of the Earl of Mar at the Battle of Sheriffmuir in 1715 where he was captured but later rescued.

The eccentric ‘Poet Chief’, 13th in the direct line, was also ‘out’ in 1745 in the last rising, but his advanced age prevented him taking part in the fighting, and he was sent home to Atholl by Prince Charles Edward Stewart in Sir John Cope’s carriage, captured by the rebels after the Battle of Prestonpans.

Many Robertsons fought in the Jacobite army as part of the Atholl Brigade.

After the defeat of the Rebellion in 1746 the Robertson lands became part of the Forfeited Estates, though most were returned to the then Chief, another Alexander Robertson, in 1784 after it became clear that the Central Highlands were wholly pacified.

Unlike many other Highland noblemen, the Robertson Chiefs refused to countenance ‘clearing’ their clansmen in favour of the more profitable sheep during the late 18th and early 19th centuries. This honourable, humane, but financially disadvantageous policy led to the eventual alienation of the entire clan lands by the early 20th century. Only the family vault at Dunalastair is still in the possession of the family of Struan, however many modern properties have been added to the clan land. The title Baron of Struan is still transferred through Dunalastair.

Gaelic Names

MacDhònnchaidh (Surname)

MacRaibeirt (Surname)

Robasdàn (Surname)

Robasdànoch (Singular)

Clann ‘ic Dhònnchaidh (Collective)

Clann Dhònnchaidh (Collective)

Na Robasdanaich (Collective)

Note: the Gaelic spelling often appears with an “a” after the double nn of Dhònnchaidh, but this is not correct (though it does reflect the Gaelic insertion of an obscure vowel in pronunciation). Cf. the anglicised surname MacConnachie (and variants).

Clan profile

Clan Motto: Virtutis gloria merces (Glory is the reward of valour) & Scientia potestas est (Knowledge is Power).

Clan Slogan: Garg ‘n uair dhuisgear, ‘fierce when roused’.

Clan Crest: A dexter hand holding an imperial crown or bible, all proper.

Clan Badge: fine-leaved heath or bracken (both common in the Clan’s lands on the southern side of Loch Rannoch, Gaelic Loch Ranaich, “Loch of Bracken”).

Pipe music: “Teachd Chlann Dhònnchaidh” (“Clan Donnachie Has Arrived”).

Clan Chief: Alexander Gilbert Haldane Robertson of Struan, 24th Chief of Clan Donnachaidh, 28th of Struan (styled Struan Robertson).

Branches

Robertson of Auchleeks.

Robertson of Kinlochmoidart.

Robertson of Inches.

Robertson of Lude.

Robertson of Kindeace.

Robertson of Struan.

