

# The Clan Gregor Story

## Part 1: Origins and Early History

Clan Gregor is an old clan. They traditionally claim descent from the royal family of Dalriadan kings related to Kenneth MacAlpin or through his kinsmen who were Abbots of Glendochart. This tradition yields the clan motto, 'S Rìoghal mo Dhream, or "Royal is my race." An early 9<sup>th</sup> Century origin in Perth and Argyll would place the clan beginnings amid the early mixing of Gaels and Picts. Indeed, genetic markers that are characteristic of the Picts occur very frequently in members of Clan Gregor today. Perhaps the royalty referred to in the clan motto were in fact Pictish kings.

The people that became Clan Gregor originally inhabited Glen Orchy, Glen Strae, and Glen Lochy, all of which emptied into the head of Loch Awe in Argyll. They also inhabited parts of Glen Lyon, Glen Gyle, and areas around the head and eastern shores of Loch Lomond. Robert the Bruce granted feudal charters to the lands around Loch Awe to the Campbells in 1315. At that point the MacGregors found themselves legally designated as feudal tenants on land they had always considered their own.

Most historians agree that the first acknowledged chief of Clan Gregor was a man known as Gregor of the Golden Bridles (c. 1330-1390). He lived in Glen Orchy in the generation following King Robert's grants to the Campbells. While the Campbells adapted quickly to the Norman system of feudalism, the Gregarach resisted the idea for a long time. This was the beginning of the long and tragic feud between the Campbells and Clan Gregor.

## Part 2: Feud with the Campbells and the Battle of Glen Fruin

The Campbells moved in and harassed the MacGregors, forcing them out of the lands around Loch Awe. Losing control of Glenorchy and Glenlochy, the Gregor Chief now held only Glenstrae. The Campbells of Glenorchy eventually purchased Glenstrae as well (from the king, not from the MacGregors). With the Gregor chief now his feudal vassal, Sir Colin Campbell of Glenorchy tried, by fair means or foul, to take control of the clan and lands.

Sir Colin's machinations began with marrying his kinsman's daughter Marion to Gregor Roy of Glenstrae (*Griogair Ruadh*, or Gregor the Red). The young chief did not prove to be an obedient in-law, and before long open hostilities had broken out between the clans. After years of guerilla raiding and retribution, Gregor Roy was captured. Gregor was beheaded by Grey Colin personally, who forced the pregnant Marion and her young son Alasdair to watch. The grieving Marion composed a poignant lament, *Griogal Cridhe*, a haunting song which is still performed by Celtic musicians today. (See the accompanying story on this site.)

The conflict carried over into the next generation as Alasdair grew into the Gregor chiefship. Sir Colin's heir, Sir Duncan Campbell of Glen Orchy, refused to accept Alasdair's feudal fee for Glenstrae. Sir Duncan wanted Glenstrae for himself, so he colluded with his kinsman and chief, Lord Archibald Campbell, 7<sup>th</sup> Earl of Argyll, who had a quarrel with his neighbors, the Colquhouns. The Campbells engineered a feud between the MacGregors and the Colquhouns which culminated in the Battle of Glen Fruin on 6 February, 1603. Though outnumbered nearly three to one, the MacGregors routed the

Colquhouns while suffering fewer than twenty casualties themselves. (See the accompanying story on this site.)

### Part 3: Proscription and Diaspora

The Campbells promptly ran to King James VI, telling tales of the bloody, lawless conditions in the Highlands. They identified the MacGregors as the instigators of the anarchy and volunteered to enforce the peace for the king in return for permission to evict the MacGregors from all their lands. On # April, 1603, King Jamie and his Privy Council issued an edict now called The Proscription in which he banned the use of the name MacGregor, under pain of death. The Earl of Argyll was commissioned by the Privy Council to harry the MacGregors with 'fire and sword' till they be "estirpat and rutit out and expellit the hail boundis of our dominionis."

Every man, woman, and child of Clan Gregor became an outlaw overnight. It became legal to persecute, even murder, any MacGregor. It was illegal to offer them aid or shelter. In a later century, what was done to the MacGregors would be called "ethnic cleansing" or "genocide". The Gregarach scattered across the highlands, across all of the British Isles, Europe, and the colonies. Most took aliases and continued their lives in foreign places under a hundred different surnames.

Alasdair of Glenstrae, the chief of Clan Gregor and victor of Glen Fruin, was hunted mercilessly. Eventually, The Earl of Argyll offered Alasdair safe conduct across the English border if he would surrender. Alasdair accepted the offer and was arrested by officers waiting on the English side of the border in Berwick. A record of his hanging, which took place on the 20th of January, 1604, reads; "He was hangit at the croce, with eleven of his freindis of the name, upone ane gallows: Himselff, being chieff, he was hangit his awin hicht above the rest of his friendis."

### Part 4: Rob Roy and the Children of the Mist

Not all the MacGregors left Scotland under the Proscription. Many lived an almost guerrilla existence in the remotest parts of the highlands, all under false names. Government persecutions of the "Children of the Mist" continued almost unabated for 171 years. For a short time, from 1661 to 1693 under Charles II, the Proscription was lifted because the Gregarach had, astonishingly, supported the Stuart monarchy against the Covenanters and Cromwell. But William III renewed the Proscription and it was not finally lifted until 1774.

Though still proscribed, the MacGregors nevertheless were fierce supporters of the Jacobite cause, coming out for the Stuarts in both the '15 and '45 risings.

Rob Roy, probably the most famous member of the clan, was born in 1671 during the brief respite of Charles II's reign. At the age of 22, when the Proscription was renewed, Rob ironically adopted the alias "Robert Campbell." Rob Roy's exploits are legendary, and most of the stories told about him are founded in truth. In fact, most of the events depicted in the 1995 film, except for the climactic duel, really did happen.

### Part 5: Restoration of the Clan and the Scottish Resurgence

Shortly after the Proscription was lifted, Sir Walter Scott's poetry and novels made a romanticized version of the old highland culture wildly popular throughout Europe. Roderick Dhu and Clan Alpine in

Scott's *Lady of the Lake* are, in fact, thinly disguised MacGregors. No longer did the populace support the extirpation of highland culture. Woolen mills created the idea of linking specific tartan setts to specific clans. Being Scottish became fashionable.

Some families who had been living for generations under assumed surnames took once again the name of their ancestors. But most did not. Descendants of Clan Gregor were scattered widely around the world, and many had hidden their ancestry so deeply to escape persecution that they had forgotten who they were and where they had come from. Clan Societies founded near the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century have been trying for over a hundred years to find and gather the scattered Children of the Mist. (See the accompanying article on the MacGregor DNA Project on this site.)