



MACAULAYS OF ARDENCAPLE AND THE MACGREGORS

Source: <https://www.scotweb.co.uk/info/macaulay>

The traditional descent of the seven clans of Siol Alpin. In 1591 the MacAulays signed a bond of manrent with the MacGregors, acknowledging the MacGregors as senior in line to the MacAulays. The MacGregors had signed a similar contract with MacKinnons in 1571.

Around the end of the 16th century Clan Gregor was involved in several disputes. In order to strengthen its position the clan proceeded to enter in alliances with clans who were reputed to share a common ancestry. One such alliance was concluded on July 6, 1571 between James Macgregor of that Ilk and Luchlin Mackinnon of Strathardill, and another alliance was formalised twenty years later, on 27 May 1591, with Clan MacAulay. This formal agreement, known as a bond of manrent, was between Aulay MacAulay of Ardencaple and Alasdair MacGregor of Glenstrae. In the bond, the two chiefs promised to aid each other against anyone but the King. Prior to this bond of manrent, the chief of Clan MacAulay does not appear to have been involved with Clan Gregor in anyway. According to the 19th century historian Joseph Irving even though the chief of Clan MacAulay was at feud with the Buchanans it is unclear how such an alliance would benefit his own clan. Irving wrote that the MacAulay chief must have known that any connection with Clan Gregor “would end (as it actually did) in a manner most disastrous to all connected with the turbulent MacGregors”.



This bond of manrent has been used as evidence of an ancestral connection between clans Gregor and MacAulay. A passage in the bond states: Alasdair MacGregor of Glenstrae on the one part and Aulay MacAulay of Ardencaple on the other part, understanding ourselves and our names to be MacAlpins of old and to be our just and true surname. From this statement the 19th century historian W. F. Skene discounted a descent from the old Earls of Lennox, and further concluded there was no doubt that Clan MacAulay was a member of Siol Alpin - a group of clans which could claim descent from Kenneth MacAlpin (Cináed mac Ailpín) whom Scots considered to be their first king. Later historians have shown that such bonds were used by the MacGregors to cement alliances with weaker clans, and that such a bond was likely to have been forced upon the MacAulays by the more powerful MacGregors.

Following the Battle of Glen Fruin, between Clan Gregor and Clan Colquhoun in February 1603, there was much public outcry against the rebellious MacGregors. By an Act of the Privy Council, on April 3, 1603, it was made an offence to bear the name MacGregor, or to give one aid or shelter. The Earl of Argyll, who was responsible to the Privy Council for the actions of the MacGregors, was entrusted to bring the force of the law against this lawless clan. Deeply suspicious of the Clan MacAulay chief and his relations with the Clan Gregor chief, one of his first moves was to bring acts against Aulay MacAulay of Ardencaple. On 17 March 1603, Aulay MacAulay and his sureties were ordered to appear and answer for reset, supplying, and intercommuning with Alasdair MacGregor of Glenstrae and other MacGregors. He was also to answer for not “rising ye fray” and pursuing the outlawed clan Gregor in the Lennox. MacAulay was accused of bringing the MacGregor “thevis and rebels” to the Colquhoun lands of Luss and for their part in stealing from the Colquhouns of Luss.

It seems clear that the Duke of Lennox’s influence with the King is all that saved Clan MacAulay from suffering the same fate as Clan Gregor, who were outlawed and hunted down throughout the country. On 7 April 1603, James VI of Scotland wrote from Berwick to the Justice General and his deputies, stating; And we, understanding that the said Aulay MacAulay is altogether free and innocent of the said alleged crimes laid to his charge; and that he is to accompany us to our realm of England, with our dearest cousin the Duke of Lennox, his master. The King’s order stopped all investigation against the Laird of Ardencaple, thus protecting the small Clan MacAulay from the powerful Earl of Argyll and his allies. By the time the King’s letter was received, MacAulay had left the Lennox as part of the Duke of Lennox’s train, which accompanied King James VI on his way to England to be declared King James I of England.

On 18 January 1604, the chief of Clan Gregor, Alasdair MacGregor of Glenstrae, was apprehended by the Earl of Argyll after almost a year in hiding and was brought to stand trial in Edinburgh. Before his execution two days later, MacGregor accused the Earl of Argyll of trying to persuade him to kill the Chief of the MacAulays: I confess, before God, that he did all his crafty diligence to entice me to slay and destroy the Laird of Ardencaple, MacAulay, for any gain of kindness or friendship that he might do or give me. That which i did refuse, in respect of my fateful promise made to MacAulay before.