

Rebel of the wyld Ilis

Donald Dubh MacDonald

d. 1545

Some lives appear to be shaped even before they leave the womb.

Donald Dubh MacDonald, was born in prison at Innis Chonnell Castle on Loch Awe in Argyll, the heir to a broken lordship.

In earlier times the Lords of the Isles had claimed to be kings of a Gaelic Hebridean realm separate from the kingdom of Scotland.

This was finally suppressed in 1493 when the lordship was forfeited by the Scottish crown.

Donald refused to accept his lot, escaping in 1501 and taking refuge with island chiefs.

Greeted as the legitimate Lord of the Isles, he rallied support before returning to the mainland and plundering Lochaber and Badenoch.

A royal fleet destroyed the rebellion and Donald imprisoned for 40 years 'until his hair got grey'.

Yet his spirit was unbroken.

Donald went west and revived the traditional council, consisting of powerful men of the isles, to act as his advisers.

He and his supporters swore loyalty to King Henry VIII of England, telling him of the sufferings of the men of 'the wyld Ilis', which meant they were always the enemies of the Scottish kingdom.

Plans were laid for a large invasion of Scotland, with Donald accused of wanting to create his own kingship under an English flag.

The assault was delayed – which proved fatal as Donald died from fever and the last major attempt to rebuild the lordship fizzled out.

- Read the Oxford DNB biography here: <http://www.oxforddnb.com/public/dnb/69918.html>.