

3.1 CASTLE TIORAM:

HISTORY, FORM AND FABRIC

Summary History

As with most other western seaboard castles, historical evidence relating directly or indirectly to the building, development and use of Castle Tioram is relatively sparse, and the documented history of the castle, particularly in its medieval phases, largely consists of a series of disconnected references and episodes.⁸³

The first specific mention of the castle of ‘Elantyrin’ occurs alongside that of Borve, Benbecula (‘Uynvawle’) in a charter issued by John MacDonald, first Lord of the Isles, to his son, Reginald or Ranald, at some date between 1346 and early 1373.⁸⁴ In 1346, following the murder of her brother, John’s first wife, Amy MacRuari, whom John had married in 1337, inherited the lordship of Garmoran, of which Eilean Tioram formed part, and on 1 January 1372/3 John’s charter received royal confirmation by King Robert II.⁸⁵ The small island on which the castle was to be built had clearly been signalled as being of some significance, for, as indicated above (section 2.2), ‘insula sicca’ (dry island, that is, Eilean Tioram) was considered worthy of special mention in a charter of MacRuari possessions issued by Amy’s paternal aunt, Christina, probably in the 1320s, possibly slightly earlier.⁸⁶

According to MacDonald tradition as recorded in the early 17th century, Amy MacRuari ‘built the castle of Borve in Benbecula and Castle Tirrim in Mudart’, a statement which is plausible but now impossible to validate.⁸⁷ If true, it may narrow down the commencement of building works at Tioram to a period between 1346 and 1350, given that Amy may have died by July 1350 when, lacking any associated evidence of annulment or divorce, her husband received papal dispensation to re-marry. Whatever the circumstances surrounding this presumed first phase and whatever Amy’s involvement may have been, the castle was certainly functional by the 1380s. In about 1389, John’s eldest surviving son by his first marriage to Amy, Ranald, progenitor of Clanranald or ‘Sliocht Ragnail’, is said to have died at his ‘manor of castle Tioram’, and in July of that year Ranald’s brother, Godfrey, issued a charter from the castle.⁸⁸ Ranald’s son, Allan, is said to have died at Castle Tioram in 1419, while his grandson, also Allan, laird of Clanranald 1481-c.1503, is alleged to have imprisoned three Highland chiefs there at one time.⁸⁹ Among these, Macleod of Harris is said to have been ‘kept ... prisoner for seven years at Castle Tirrim where he got his back broke which made him hunch backed all his lifetime’.⁹⁰

Though the lands of Moidart, including Castle Tioram, were among those claimed by the Crown following the forfeiture of the Lordship of the Isles in 1493, the family remained in possession of their lordship and from at least 1519 styled themselves ‘Captains of Clanranald’.⁹¹ John Moidartach, Captain of Clanranald from 1530 until 1540 and again from 1542 until his death in 1584, remained for the most part a powerful thorn in the government’s and neighbouring chieftains’ sides throughout his long life, evidently withstanding a bombardment of Castle Tioram in 1554 at the hands of the Earl of Argyll.⁹²

Compliance with the so-called ‘Statutes of Iona’ of 1609 and a bond of 1616 ushered in a new and more settled relationship between a number of West Highland chiefs, including Clanranald, and the royal government.⁹³ The agreements placed constraints on Clanranald’s customary lifestyle, however, particularly with regard to the use of only one birlinn (galley) of 16 or 18 oars and an annual consumption of wine restricted to one tun (252 gallons). By the terms of the 1616 bond, Clanranald’s designated residence was ‘Ylantyrin’, but because he did not have a mains or home farm ‘about his house’, his mains which he undertook to ‘labour with his awne goodis’ was at Howbeg in South Uist.⁹⁴ Part explanation of this unusual situation – and, incidentally, our earliest description of the actual appearance and setting of the castle – is provided by a topographical account which has been ascribed by the editor of the text, Arthur Mitchell, to a date of around 1630.⁹⁵ Here, Moidart is described as being ‘plenteous of milk and fishes, deir and roe but not fertill of corne ... There is one castle in this countrie which is called Illandtirrein. And it is builded on a rock high above the sea and shipps doeth come to the castle and there is one high mountaine above the castle on the west and southsyde theroff.’

Royal favour had long assisted the territorial ambitions of the Campbell Earls of Argyll who, partly by agreeing in 1633 to pay off Clanranald’s growing burden of debt, came to assume feudal superiority over the mainland Clanranald estates.⁹⁶ Over ten years later, however, in 1644 Clanranald elected to pursue a political and military course opposed to that of his feudal superior and in support of the Royalist cause led by James Graham, Marquess of Montrose, and Alasdair MacColla. MacColla was at Castle Tioram in 1644 and 1646,⁹⁷ but the castle was eventually lost to the Parliamentary forces. It may have been captured by General Leslie in 1647, though a later source credits the Earl of Argyll with the reduction of ‘Castle Tyrim in Moydart, the last that held out for the King in those parts’.⁹⁸ There is no evidence to show that the castle was garrisoned during the 1651-60 Cromwellian era.

The first surviving record of actual building work at the castle dates from 1668 when Donald, soon to become 13th Chief in 1670, was seeking deals cut from fir wood in Lochaber in order ‘to repaire my old house of Castle Tyrholme’.⁹⁹ A delivery of slate nails in 1676 shows that he was then paying attention to the roof covering.¹⁰⁰ This Donald, known as ‘Black Donald of the Cuckoo’ (the ‘cuckoo’ being his favourite gun), was in fact the last Captain of Clanranald to reside in Castle Tioram. On his death in 1685, his son, Allan, 14th Chief, remained in the Uists where he had lived from an early age with his tutor, Donald MacDonald of Benbecula.¹⁰¹

Allan’s defection in October 1692 to the court of James VII at St Germain, Paris, led to a detachment of the regiment based on Fort William being garrisoned in Castle Tioram.¹⁰² In March 1693 the castle was ordered to be made ‘watter and wind tight’ and payment was to be made out of Clanranald’s rents.¹⁰³ Though Allan made his peace with William’s government in 1696-7, Castle Tioram remained in military occupation, its usual garrison consisting of a half company (a dozen or more men) under a lieutenant and a sergeant. In contrast to his MacDonald kinsman, Alexander of Glengarry, who made strenuous efforts to secure the return of Invergarry Castle,¹⁰⁴ Allan appears to have accepted the loss of Castle Tioram without demur, and at the beginning of the 18th century had set about the building of Ormiclate on South Uist as his chief residence (see below, 3.2).

Drawings of Castle Tioram and Eilean Donan Castle were among the products of a survey of military works in Scotland conducted by Brigadier Lewis Petit Des Etans (c.1665-1720), senior military engineer.¹⁰⁵ Undated, the drawings almost certainly arise from his first tour of inspection in 1714, and in the case of Tioram appear to show additions and alterations that were possibly intended to strengthen its defences. However, a report of July 1715 submitted by Sir Robert Pollock, governor of Fort William, cast a gloomy light on his outposts of Castle Tioram, Eilean Donan and Invergarry which must 'be repaired this season, for not only the windows but even the roof and floors are ruined, there having been no reparations made in any of them these five or six and twenty years ... And if there should be any trouble in the country, they are so far from being of any use that we shall certainly lose so many men and arms as is in them.'¹⁰⁶

Just over two months later his fears were realised, and in a report of 24 September his informant confirmed that Invergarry and its garrison had been taken and that 'the Captain of Clanronald had taken a detachment of twelve men and a serjeant under the command of Lieut. Gains of the said [Lord Irwin's] regiment at Tyreholm Castle one of his own howses.'¹⁰⁷ According to local tradition, the Captain of Clanronald then authorised the firing of the castle, presumably in order to deny its further use by government troops.¹⁰⁸ The belief that the castle was burned on that occasion was recorded as early as 1733 in a note incorporated in a map of Loch Sunart published in that year, and was also referred to in a short report prepared for the Board of Ordnance in 1748.¹⁰⁹ The caption against Castle Tioram on the map of 1733 reads as follows: 'Anno 1715. The Kings troops in Garrison in Castle Tyrim were surprized by the late Capt. of Clanronald whose property it was and after disarming and dismissing them set the same on fire.'

One version of the abduction of Lady Grange, en route to exile on St Kilda in 1732, presents a lurid account of her short stay in Castle Tioram which, it is alleged, 'was still very entire' at that date.¹¹⁰ The fact that Petit's plans of this and other castles were copied in 1741 also suggests that they were still usable and that the government was considering their further rehabilitation as garrisoned outposts of Fort William. In the event, evidently un-garrisoned, Castle Tioram stood close to the heart of the action in the very first phase of the Jacobite Rebellion in July and August 1745, when Prince Charles Edward landed in Moidart, stayed at Kinlochmoidart and raised his standard at the head of Loch Shiel. During this stage of operations the castle is said to have been used by the Jacobites as a store for arms and ammunition,¹¹¹ suggesting that it still then remained secure and perhaps to some degree weatherproof.

In the aftermath of the rebellion, Castle Tioram and Duart Castle on Mull were the objects of a composite drawing of 1748 by Paul Sandby for the Board of Ordnance.¹¹² A contemporary note on Tioram records that 'if this castle was repair'd it might accommodate a party of 50 men. The repairs would cost at least 800£s; the walls of the building being at present quite insufficient from the burning and injuries of the weather.'¹¹³ Both Tioram and Duart were clearly still being viewed as having potential military significance, and in 1749 Tioram became one of only four Scottish castles short-listed for conversion to barracks.¹¹⁴ Of these, however, only Braemar and Corgarff on the route through the Eastern Highlands to the new Fort George at Ardersier went ahead.¹¹⁵

In the later 18th century, other than a reference in a 1798 rental to a 'change house of Castle Tyrim',¹¹⁶ the castle disappeared from record, and, following the break-up and sale of the family estates in the first half of the 19th century, Eilean Tioram, Castle Tioram and the island of Riska remained isolated and neglected Clanranald possessions. It fell to successive owners of the adjacent Lochshiel estate, builders and occupants of nearby Dorlin House, to care for the castle ruins in accordance with the standards of the time. Hope Scott, owner of the estate between 1856 and 1871, had the inner courtyard of the castle cleared of debris 'which filled the court to a depth of several feet' and which included a significant coin hoard of Spanish and silver dollars.¹¹⁷ Work undertaken by the 2nd Baron Howard of Glossop in about 1888 is known to have included the infilling of breaches in the castle walls,¹¹⁸ but it is clear from the surviving fabric that other consolidation operations were undertaken in the last decades of the 19th century, much of it apparently unrecorded.

In 1905 the Clanranald connection with the castle and island was finally severed when Tioram and Riska were purchased and attached to the Lochshiel estate. In 1926 Tioram island and castle were acquired by James Wiseman Macdonald who commissioned a survey and a programme of limited conservation work by the Ministry of Works, 'securing ... wall tops, excavating and securing walls exposed in the courtyard and waterproofing the vaults. Only the very worst joints in the face work have been treated.'¹¹⁹ Castle and island remained in the possession of the Wiseman Macdonald family until their acquisition by the Anta Group in 1997.



Fig. 100
Castle Tioram:
MacGibbon and Ross plan



Fig. 101
Castle Tioram:
Simpson plan



Fig. 102
Castle Tioram:
GUARD outline plans showing
phases of development

Form and Fabric

Though for the most part undocumented, these late 19th-century attempts at consolidation of the main wall surfaces are generally sufficiently obvious and crude to permit much of the form and fabric of the earlier architecture to shine through. Admittedly, there remain difficulties in detecting the extent of detailed alterations to openings, margins and wallheads, but, though thereby rendering an analysis of the standing structure more difficult than it might otherwise have been, the exercise involved in peeling back the layers of this particular 'old master' is not appreciably much more difficult than others of its kind. On the other hand, from the few brief records of the castle clearance work, particularly that undertaken in the mid-19th century, we can only guess at the sheer amount of archaeological deposits from within and around the castle precincts that has been lost. We can, however, be reasonably sure that it was considerable, informative and now, sadly, irretrievable.

The considerable body of measured survey work compiled by GUARD since 1997 certainly serves as a useful basis for understanding the building fabric of Castle Tioram. The thoroughness of the stone-by-stone survey coverage across the elevations is exemplary but the fresh large-scale layout and floor plans created as part of this exercise remain unpublished and have still to be used for the purposes of detailed building analysis;¹²⁰ further investigations and additional survey data remain desirable in those critical areas where the hall tower adjoins the curtain wall. For some purposes, therefore, reference still has to be made to the small-scale plans which accompanied the surveys conducted by MacGibbon and Ross and by Simpson.¹²¹

The recent thorough reviews of the historical source material are equally exemplary,¹²² and the fact that the research was conducted and compiled independently of the physical survey has ensured that the results of each approach have been presented without prejudice to the other. However, especially given the relative paucity of material which bears directly on the history of the building fabric, there is now a compelling case for aligning these two major bodies of evidence to see whether - or not - when drawn together they provide a clearer and fuller picture of the castle's development, and in particular to see how far the suggested sequence of building and alteration may correspond with historical circumstances. Whilst still maintaining an independence in the evaluation of each main branch of survey, only an integrated approach of this kind will permit the fullest possible meanings to be extracted from the fabric and form of the castle.

As far as the suggested outline sequence of building history is concerned, this reporter finds little to disagree with in the analyses originally presented by GUARD and essentially confirmed by McNeill,¹²³ except with regard to the very earliest phase. Their suggestion that the enclosure wall, simply by reason of its polygonal form and by comparison with others of this type, most notably Mingary, belongs to the 13th century and pre-dates any of the surviving structures contained within it is not convincing. The general flaws inherent in dating by these comparative approaches have been set out above (section 2.1).

In the particular case of Tioram it is significant that the alignment of the enclosure wall along its south-eastern flank and the position of the gateway which served as the original main entrance or postern almost precisely respect the position and extent of

the earliest standing internal building. Various described as a 'keep' or 'tower house' in previous accounts,¹²⁴ this relatively modest structure appears originally to have risen to no more than two, possibly three, storeys. It is of a markedly horizontal design and in its elongated oblong proportions is closely akin to the halls and hall towers found elsewhere in the region from the 13th century onwards, most especially from the 14th and 15th centuries. What appears to have been an original gateway to the enclosure, either a main entrance or postern subsequently blocked up, lies immediately to the west of this hall tower, and at the opposite (eastern) end of the building, formed within the angled enclosure wall in a manner which strongly suggests primary work, are the remains of a couple of vaulted mural garderobes which served the hall block at first and second-floor levels.

Taken together, the disposition and character of all these features in the enclosure wall suggest a relationship and functional integration with the hall tower, pointing to the reasonable probability that these adjacent stretches of enclosure wall were set out with the hall building in mind, if not as part of the same programme of building, a view that is reinforced by the fact that the walls of both hall and enclosure are also characterised by closely similar split-boulder masonry techniques. Viewed from this standpoint, it is difficult to sustain the traditional, Simpson-derived argument which draws a clear distinction and century-wide date between the enclosure and the rest of the castle, particularly the hall tower. Unfortunately, the critical areas for detailed physical investigation at the junctions between the enclosure wall and the hall tower remain obscured but, subject to further investigations and findings in these areas, the balance of probabilities otherwise presented by the physical evidence is, at least to this observer, weighted strongly in favour of a much closer phasing between the enclosure and the hall tower. In other words, the indications are that the first phases of Tioram as we see it today actually coincide with the first documented appearance of the castle in the middle decades of the 14th century, that is, at some date between 1346 and 1373.

The fact that Castle Tioram may not be part of the very first generation of castles in the region, though its design may have been derived from them, is no detriment to its interest and importance - indeed, probably quite the contrary. Deriving its layout and design from earlier forms of enclosure castle and 'hall houses', it appears to combine these two elements in a manner previously unrecognised in Scotland. In the broad sweep of western seaboard castellar development such an 'enclosure hall' would stand, chronologically and typologically, mid-way between the classic 13th-century enclosure castles and the towers and barmkins of 15th-century and later date.¹²⁵

As previous analyses have shown, a careful 'reading' of the building fabric also reveals successive but undocumented phases of later architectural development, particularly in the 16th and 17th centuries. Within a sheltered enclosure which they heightened, successive members of the Clanranald family were evidently at pains to enlarge and improve their domestic accommodation, storage and services. Judging from the surviving remains, these appear to have included the creation of a second entire household and ample provision for the hosting of social gatherings in a second hall, features which faithfully reflect the enhanced status and lifestyle of a Gaelic lord and his kindred, but are rarely identifiable. Although the castle retains a reasonable amount of dressed stonework (see below), there are few surviving diagnostic features which would permit close dating of these phases of alteration. However, it would not

be unreasonable to suggest that, in addition to the documented repairs from c.1668 onwards, some of the changes may have been associated with John Moidartach in the 1530s and Sir Donald around 1610. Among these later changes the heightening of the original hall tower evidently involved the creation and insertion of the existing masonry vault at its lowest level, a major and unusual structural undertaking, particularly in a region where unvaulted towers were the norm, or at least where they far outnumbered vaulted structures.¹²⁶

Those changes which appear to have taken place around the turn of the 16th and 17th centuries involved the creation of turreted upperworks which incorporate crisply and decoratively carved corbelled angle-rounds. Of a quality and style which follow 16th-century Lowland conventions and of a sharpness which has successfully defied the elements over four centuries, these rounds are not quite of the quality of those at Carnasserie Castle, Mid Argyll, or Gylen Castle, Kerrera, but they are otherwise of an exceptional standard within the seaboard region.¹²⁷

Following contemporary 17th-century fashion, the main stair in the south range was re-located to better serve the more numerous public rooms and private chambers. The new stair was re-housed in a lofty, projecting turret which now survives as the most dominant single feature within the castle courtyard. Even accepting that some surrounding buildings may have disappeared, this tower may well always have been calculated to impress visitors and guests. Of a type introduced elsewhere in the Highlands from the early 17th century onwards, the stair-tower is not in itself closely dateable, but if it had been built in the second half of the century it is much more likely to have incorporated a scale-and-platt stair of the kind which remains at Invergarry (see below). The Tioram stair-turret is more closely akin to that at Fairburn Tower, Easter Ross, which likewise once contained a turnpike or newel stair.¹²⁸

The evidence presented by the building fabric is somewhat distorted by the 19th- and 20th-century works of repair and consolidation described above, but behind them there appear to be discernible alterations to the access, room arrangements and wall-head defences in the latest phase of occupation. These may plausibly be attributable to the 1690s or early 1700s, and may point to a limited reorganisation of the layout in order to create barrack accommodation for government troops. This possibility is likewise hinted at, but not specifically referred to in the documentation of that period. But neither has any documentation yet been found for the north range within Mingary Castle, though this building, which probably dates from this same pre-1715 phase, undoubtedly was a barrack-block and in this case may have been Campbell-built.¹²⁹ Invergarry Castle, principal residence of the MacDonalds of Glengarry, is certainly known to have been garrisoned then and later, and even in its dilapidated condition shows clear traces of adapted or additional barrack rooms reached from a lofty central turret housing a scale-and-platt stair, an arrangement which bears a striking general resemblance to that at Tioram.¹³⁰

Finally, it is worth noting that close inspection of the fabric has confirmed that throughout the castle use has been made of sandstone dressings. In an area where sources of such stone are strictly limited, its occurrence provides useful tell-tale indicators to the organisation, logistics - and possibly phases - of the building industry which supported medieval castle- and church-building operations within this region.¹³¹

The dressed stone appears to be of three general types - and possibly sources - but further expert observation and analysis are needed. One type appears to be a hard, close-grained brownish sandstone, from which some stair-treads and the corbelling and decorative detailing of the upperworks have been fashioned. Dating from around 1600 these dressings appear to have robustly weathered some four centuries of salt-laden winds and rain, and remain for the most part in sharp, crisp condition. In appearance and texture these are said to be analogous with freestone that is likely to have been derived from Skye, Raasay or Scalpay, particularly from a small area around Broadford.¹³² A sandstone which appears among some high-level window, doorway and fireplace surrounds, out of reach of later depredations (though in some cases representing the results of later alterations), is of a yellowish colour and soft texture, in some cases very deeply eroded. The source of this freestone is uncertain, although it is not unlike that used, for example, in Mingary Castle in Ardnamurchan, the provenance of which has been identified as Inninmore Quarry in Morvern.¹³³

In summary, the architecture of Castle Tioram presents one of the best, relatively untouched illustrations of a second generation of West Highland stone castles. Overall, it exhibits as well and as authentically as any within the region, architectural features which broadly conform to the national pattern of domestic and defensive building between the 14th and the 18th centuries. Architectural provision for a second household, including a second hall, are, however, relatively uncommon features and may be subtle but important pointers to distinctive social usage within the *Gàidhealtachd*.



Fig. 103
Castle Tioram:
general view from south



Fig. 104
Castle Tioram:
south-eastern curtain wall



Fig. 105
Castle Tioram:
south-eastern curtain wall
(annotated)



Fig. 106
Castle Tioram:
eastern curtain wall
(annotated)



Fig. 107
Castle Tioram:
south-western curtain wall



Fig. 108
Castle Tioram:
south-western curtain wall
(annotated)



Fig. 109
Castle Tioram:
general view from west



Fig. 110
Castle Tioram:
north-western curtain wall
(annotated)



Fig. 111
Castle Tioram:
north-eastern curtain wall
(annotated)



Fig. 112
Castle Tioram:
specimen angle turret



Fig. 113
Castle Tioram:
south courtyard range from ...



Fig. 114
Castle Tioram:
stair turret, south courtyard range
from ...



Fig. 115

Castle Tioram and mouth of Loch Moidart: high-level view from south-east, 14 September, 1920 (from R M Adam Collection, University of St Andrews, Library Photographic Archive, ...)

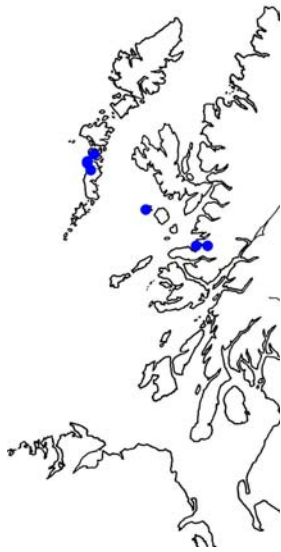


Fig. 116

Map of western seaboard showing distribution of principal Clanranald properties



Fig. 117

Extract of Fig. 59 showing extent of Clanranald possessions within the Lordship of the Isles

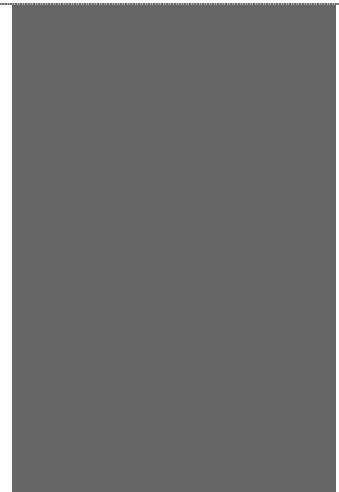


Fig. 118

Moidart and Loch Shiel:

3.2 CASTLE TIORAM:

CONTEXT

Facing seaward, effectively with its back to the mainland, on a tidal island with landing beaches and a well-sheltered boat anchorage nearby, Castle Tioram has a setting and location which is easily recognisable as being near-perfect for travel by galley or birlinn. Conversely, as was testified by the amount of engineering required in the 1860s to create a road along the banks of the River Shiel to Dorlin House,¹³⁴ the site has always had minimal natural advantages as far as overland communications are concerned.

Its immediate surroundings then as now probably consisted predominantly of rough and rocky, tree-clad slopes which only gave way to more gentle terrain some miles to the south and east around present-day Acharacle and Kinlochmoidart. Evidence for management and use of the naturally abundant growth of timber in the area emerges only in the 18th century but there is little reason to suspect that full use of this resource was not also made in earlier times.¹³⁵ Oddly, the castle also stood on the southernmost edge of mainland Clanranald territory adjacent to the estate boundary which was formed by the River Shiel, almost certainly then, as later, a rich source of fish stocks, particularly salmon.¹³⁶

However, contrasting starkly with other major castles of the western seaboard such as Mingary in Ardnamurchan and Ardtornish in Morvern, Tioram evidently had no hinterland or demesne or 'table' land to speak of, and, unlike them, there is no sign or hint of any church or village settlement nearby. Indeed, as Athol Murray has pointed out,¹³⁷ in the 1616 agreement with the Privy Council Castle Tioram was designated as Clanranald's principal residence but because he did not have a mains (demesne or home farm) 'about his house' he was allowed to designate another on his estate which, by terms of the agreement, he would undertake to manage himself. His choice of mains on South Uist at Howbeg and later Ormiclate tells us a great deal about the nature of the inter-island lordship over which Clanranald held sway. Likewise, in the immediate aftermath of the death of Donald, 13th Chief of Clanranald, the last to reside in castle Tioram, a letter of May 1685 conjures up a powerful word-picture of the overseas links when it refers to the fact that all the laird's kin and kindred had gone to Uist 'to bury the corps of our maister the Captaine of Clanranald and are not as yet come back'.¹³⁸

Unusually, when judged by the familiar and ultimately Anglo-Norman model of castle, church and associated township or burgh, Castle Tioram may thus have always been a relatively isolated and unitary feature in the local landscape around Loch Moidart. But it was the sea and the seaways which constituted the castle's real physical context and hinterland, joining it to relatively far-flung places of residence, worship and burial which were closely associated with Clanranald. First emerging clearly in the MacRuari lordship of Garmoran in the 14th century, this assemblage of disparate mainland and insular properties somewhat remarkably held together, more or less, for about four centuries as a water-borne family 'empire', a less extensive but much longer-lived version of the MacDonald Lordship of the Isles (c.1336-1493/1545) itself. Such lordships were relatively commonplace in West Highlands and Islands (see section 4 below), but very few were on this scale and none of them

had a chief residence of a form or position comparable with Castle Tioram. Effectively the mainland station of an inter-connected insular lordship, there is no other western seaboard castle with a balance or imbalance of contextual attributes quite like those which are possessed by Castle Tioram .

The most convenient way of characterising the physical components of the lordship which was exercised from the castle is to provide a summary descriptive record of the more significant surviving remains. Ecclesiastical sites that have varying degrees of association with the castle through MacRuari or Clanranald patronage and use include the following: Eilean Fhianain, Loch Shiel; Teampull Bhuirgh, Borge, Benbecula; Churches, chapels and carved stones, Howmore, South Uist; and Teampull na Trionaid (Church of The Holy Trinity), Carinish, North Uist. Principal secular residences other than Castle Tioram associated with MacRuari or Clanranald during the period of the castle's occupancy include the following: Borge Castle, Benbecula; Caisteal Bheagram, Loch an Eilean, South Uist; Ormiclate, South Uist; and Coroghan Castle, Canna.



Fig. 119
Eilean Fhianain, Loch Shiel:



Fig. 120
Eilean Fhianain, Loch Shiel:



Fig. 121
Eilean Fhianain, Loch Shiel:



Fig. 122
Howmore, South Uist:



Fig. 123
Howmore, South Uist:



Fig. 124
Howmore, South Uist:



Fig. 125
Howmore, South Uist:



Fig. 126
Howmore, South Uist:



Fig. 127
Teampull na Trionaid (Church of
The Holy Trinity), Carinish, North
Uist:

Eilean Fhianain, Loch Shiel

The ruinous remains of the church which served the medieval parish within which Castle Tioram stood occupies a site close to the western edge of the summit area of this steep-sided and distinctively 'green' island in the middle of Loch Shiel. The church is of elongated rectangular plan, measuring some 21 metres in length by about 6.5 metres in width overall.¹³⁹ It retains few closely dateable features but in its existing form it probably belongs to the 15th or early 16th centuries, and there are at least three sculptured late medieval monuments of distinctive West Highland type on the island, two lying within the ruins of the church.¹⁴⁰ At the east end of the church are the remains of an altar table which has obviously been reconstructed in relatively modern times but in an earlier un-reconstructed form such a feature, as at Oronsay Priory, Argyll,¹⁴¹ is likely to have been used by the Irish Franciscan missionaries in the third and fourth decades of the 17th century (see below). Tangible confirmation of the close association of this medieval island church and burial-place in Loch Shiel with Clanranald and Castle Tioram is provided by an inscribed monumental slab at Ardchattan Priory, Lorn, which may be ascribed to a period between 1515 and 1545 and which commemorates Ruairi, parson of Eilean Fhianain and half-brother of John Moidartach, 8th Chief of Clanranald.¹⁴²

Over six miles south-east of Castle Tioram as the crow flies, the island takes its name from of the saints bearing the Irish name, Finan, and a gravemarker, a cruciform stone and a cast bronze bell testify to its Early Christian origins.¹⁴³ It has remained in use into modern times as a burial-place by the Protestant and Catholic communities of Sunart and Moidart respectively, and the overland 'coffin' route between the castle and the loch shore near the island is evidently flanked at intervals by marker cairns in groups of twos and threes, totalling about 40 altogether.

Teampull Bhuirgh, Borve, Benbecula

Buried within a large sand dune on the coastal machair over 500 metres south-west of Borve Castle are the ruinous remains of a church of rectangular plan which measures internally some 14 metres in length by 5 metres in width within mortared rubble walls.¹⁴⁴ Its name indicates a close association with 14th-century Borve Castle (see below) with which it was probably contemporary. However, the ruin retains no closely dateable features and there are no visible traces of burials in and around the church, though pottery fragments found in abundance on the lower slopes of the dune point to the former existence of a settlement of uncertain date, possibly medieval or prehistoric.¹⁴⁵

Churches, chapels and carved stones, Howmore, South Uist

Long recognised as the most significant ecclesiastical complex on South Uist, the surviving remains at Howmore consist of the fragmentary ruins of two medieval churches (Teampull Moire and Teampull Chaluim Chille, also referred to as Caibéal Dhiarmaid) and the remains of two detached chapels (Caibéal Dhubhgaill and Caibéal Chlann 'Ic Ailean), while a third chapel (Caibéal na Sagairt) is said to have been removed between 1855 and 1866.¹⁴⁶ The churches and chapels stand on slightly elevated ground which at one time would have virtually formed an island in a rolling and marshy landscape, and they are associated with a walled burial ground and two burial-enclosures of 19th-century creation, one of which may be a rebuild of the missing third chapel.

The parish of Howmore first comes on record in the 14th century and became a parsonage dependent on the abbey of Iona.¹⁴⁷ It is not certain when it became the recognised burial place of the chiefs of Clanranald. A graveslab of late medieval type which was recorded in the burial-ground in 1866 but which no longer survives,¹⁴⁸ may conceivably have been associated with the family. The first Clanranald burial on record, however, was that of John Moidartach who bequeathed funds to build a chapel at Howmore where he was buried in 1574.¹⁴⁹

The fragmentary ruins of the two larger structures, Teampull Mor (which was evidently the medieval parish church of South Uist and measured over 20 metres in length by about 8 metres in width) and Teampull Chaluim Chille, preserve evidence of windows of 13th-century or later character. The two chapels are of oblong plan and the easternmost, at 5.3 by 3.2 metres the slightly smaller of the two, has been identified as the Caibéal Chlann 'Ic Ailean (Clanranald's Chapel), built with the bequest from John Moidartach. Fragments of moulded stone surrounds, including one bearing crisp and well-preserved dogtooth carving, are lying loose in the chapel which until recently also contained a triangular-headed armorial panel commemorating a prominent member of the Clanranald family.

Having been stolen from the chapel in 1990 and recovered from London in 1995,¹⁵⁰ this stone is now housed for safe-keeping in the Kildonan Museum, South Uist. Known as Clach Chlann 'Ic Ailean (The Clanranald Stone), it is a triangular-headed armorial panel of late 16th- or early 17th-century character and bears in relief the arms of Clanranald: dexter base, a lymphad (galley) with rudder, central mast and sail set; above this, a hand coupé bearing a wheel cross; sinister base, a castle, and above it a lion rampant; centre and surmounting the whole is a bird on a thistle slip, that is, in heraldic parlance, a representation of a thistle 'slipped' or torn from its root or stock. The source of the yellowish-coloured sandstone from which it has been carved has evidently not been geologically identified.

A cross-marked slab in the ruins of Teampull Chaluim Chille points to an Early Christian origin for the complex as a whole, while recent investigation of the standing remains of the churches and chapels has suggested that, with the exception of Caibéal Dhubhgaill, they have all undergone two or more phases of structural development, possibly going back to a period earlier than the 13th century.¹⁵¹

Teampull na Trionaid (Church of The Holy Trinity), Carinish, North Uist

The earliest records associated with this relatively substantial medieval church point to a connection with the MacRuari family, though there is nothing to indicate a continuing association with the Clanranalds. In the early 14th century the church, together with, among other assets, 'the whole land of Carinish', was granted to Inchaffray Abbey (Perthshire) by Christina MacRuari, aunt of Amy MacRuari, a grant which was confirmed by Amy's son, Godfrey, in 1389, and by Godfrey's half-brother, Donald, Lord of the Isles, in 1410.¹⁵² By the Reformation, the connection with Inchaffray no longer obtained and the church was included in a list of lands belonging to the abbot of Iona.¹⁵³ By 1575 it was being held of the bishop of the Isles by James MacDonald of Sleat, and on the occasion of a raiding party of MacLeods from Harris in 1601 local people used the church precincts 'as in a santuarie'.¹⁵⁴ The main body of the church, which measures some 19.8 by 6.6 metres overall, survives as a fairly substantial ruin standing up to 6 metres in height and incorporating numerous putlog-holes or slots for timber beams used in its construction.¹⁵⁵ It is likely to be of 14th-century origin but shows evidence of later alterations and additions. In a position on the north side of the church and linked to it by a vaulted passage is a small oblong gabled structure of 16th-century date which appears to have originally served a domestic purpose, probably a priest's house, rather than a sacristy. Later known as Teampull Clann a' Bhiocair (Chapel of the MacVicars), it came to be used as a family burial-place in post-Reformation times.



Fig. 128
Borve Castle, Benbecula:
general view from



Fig. 129
Borve Castle, Benbecula:
general view from



Figs. 130-1 (below)
Borve Castle, Benbecula:
extract from Pont/Blaeu map of the
Uists (date)



Fig. 132
Teampull Bhuirigh, Borve,
Benbecula: general view from ...
(with Borve Castle in middle
distance)



Borve Castle, Benbecula

This ruinous hall tower of relatively substantial proportions now stands in open and level grassland on the coastal plain behind the machair, close to modern houses and the remains of a World War II radar station. Present-day appearances and setting notwithstanding, on historical grounds Borve Castle is quite unambiguously Castle Tioram's Hebridean sibling.

As the castle of 'Uynvawle', it first appears in historical record in the charter of John, Lord of the Isles, to his son, Ranald, between 1346 and 1372/3, the same document which makes first specific mention of Tioram, and the 17th-century 'History of the Macdonalds' attributes its building, like that of Tioram, to Amy MacRuari.¹⁵⁶ Listed among the major strongholds of the western seaboard, it is identifiable in Fordun's account of c.1380 as the castle of 'Benwewyl'.¹⁵⁷ The Ranald 'of Castleborf' on record in 1625 may have been Ranald, the younger brother of Angus and Sir Donald, 10th and 11th Chiefs of Clanranald, grandfather of Donald who became the 15th Chief in 1725.¹⁵⁸

The general settings around Loch Moidart and south-western Benbecula have probably always represented topographical extremes, but originally Borve's site and architectural character may have been less of a complete contrast with Tioram than now appears to be the case. Largely as a result of the effects of blown sand which buried its associated church, this landscape is known to have changed dramatically since the 16th century. Early map evidence shows that the castle originally occupied a promontory site flanking a sea-inlet in a much-indented coastline, quite different from that of the present day.¹⁵⁹ How much of the immediate surroundings of the castle have been disguised and regularised in the past few centuries is hard to say, but it seems likely that the main surviving structure would have been surrounded by some form of enclosure which has since been buried or removed.

The layout and horizontal emphasis of Borve's hall tower design may not have been all that dissimilar from the smaller but similarly proportioned hall-tower which constituted the earliest identifiable building at Castle Tioram. Of elongated rectangular plan, measuring some 18.2 by 10.1 metres over heavily mortared walls up to 2.7 metres in thickness, including an observable inner skin, Borve appears to have been of three main storeys and, like the original stone structure in Tioram, was evidently unvaulted throughout.¹⁶⁰ Set within what appears to have been a small gatehouse, the main entrance, protected by a draw-bar, is set near the centre of the south wall. Except for a window at the west end of the south wall there are few other visible features, and whilst different phases of work may be detectable in the fabric of the standing building, the overall physical development of the castle remains unclear.



Fig. 133

Loch ... , Benbecula: general view from ... showing island dwelling and typical landscape of the Uist archipelago



Fig. 134

Caisteal Bheagram, Loch an Eilean,
South Uist: general view from ...



Fig. 135

Caisteal Bheagram, Loch an Eilean,
and Howmore, South Uist:
extract from Pont/Blaeu map of the
Uists (date)



Fig. 136

Caisteal Bheagram, Loch an Eilean,
South Uist: detail fo tower



Fig. 137
Ormiclate, South Uist:
general view of house and landscape from ...



Fig. 138
Ormiclate, South Uist:
... elevation

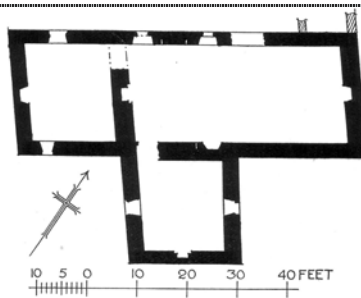


Fig. 139
Ormiclate, South Uist:
RCAHMS ground plan published
1928



Fig. 140
Ormiclate, South Uist:
general view from ...

Caisteal Bheagram, Loch an Eilean, South Uist

Standing within sight of the Howmore churches (see above), which lie about a half-mile to the south, Caisteal Bheagram was a Clanranald property from at least the early 16th century, Ranald 5th Chief of Clanranald, being described as Ranald Alansoun of Ylan-Bagrim or Ylanebigorn in 1505 and 1508.¹⁶¹ It is a small, two-storeyed tower which stands on a natural oval island, comparable in scale and setting with Dun Mhic Leoid, a late medieval island tower on the south-west side of Barra.¹⁶²

Caisteal Bheagram tower stands 3.8m high and is oblong on plan, measuring 6.4m in length by 5.3m in breadth over walls 1.2m thick.¹⁶³ The entrance is in the east wall, and in the north wall are two narrow gun ports. In addition to the tower, the island, which measures some 84m by 58m transversely, contains the remains of no less than seven other buildings and a small garden. The footings of a well-preserved causeway lie to the south-east of the island, heading towards the shore of the loch.

Ormiclate, South Uist

Probably the largest single structure of any kind erected on South Uist before the 19th century, this substantial laird's house of T-plan form was built between 1701 and 1707 for Allan MacDonald, 14th Chief of Clanranald, serving as a commodious residence and new estate centre on the open farmlands of Ormiclate.¹⁶⁴ Of two main storeys and an attic in height, it is a big building of its type, even by Scottish mainland standards, the sub-divided main block measuring some 21 by 7.6 metres overall. The house faces north onto a courtyard which is enclosed on the west by an earlier range containing a large kitchen fireplace. Over what used to be the doorway there is a panel bearing a Clanranald armorial, the charges being similar to those on the Clanranald stone from Howmore (see above) where they are reversed. The walling is of harled rubble masonry with freestone dressings from an unidentified source outside the Uists.

Now surviving merely as a ruinous shell, Ormiclate evidently had only a relatively short period of occupation. Persistent tradition states that it was accidentally burned in 1715, roughly coincidental with the firing of Tioram, but the episode is undocumented. Whilst it is known to have been in use in 1716,¹⁶⁵ there is little indication of occupation or rebuilding thereafter, its builder having died of wounds sustained at the Battle of Sheriffmuir in November 1715 and his successors remaining in exile at that time. After the forfeiture, Allan's widow, Penelope, despite remaining an active Jacobite, was allowed to retain Ormiclate and the South Uist estate as her jointure; the other Clanranald properties, including Castle Tioram, fell to the feudal superior, the Duke of Argyll.¹⁶⁶



Fig. 141
Coroghan Castle, Canna:
general view from ...

Coroghan Castle, Canna

Eyrie-like this rectangular two-storeyed structure occupies the top of the precipitous rock stack of Coroghan Mor on the south-east coast of Canna, the only building on the island which could – even approximately – be classed as a castle.¹⁶⁷ Although Canna was a possession of Iona Abbey, the Clanranald family had a long association with the island from the 16th century onwards, from 1628 under the superiority of the Argyll Campbells.¹⁶⁸ The castle is likely to have been a Clanranald structure, and the tradition that it was used as a prison by a jealous husband to confine his wife has long been plausibly linked with Donald MacDonald, 13th Chief of Clanranald and his treatment of his second wife Marion MacLeod.¹⁶⁹ ‘Black Donald of the Cuckoo’, as he was known (the ‘cuckoo’ (‘cuthag’) being his gun), was closely associated with Canna, receiving a charter of the island from the earl of Argyll in 1672. He died there in 1685.¹⁷⁰

Rubble-built and, like Caisteal Dubh nan Cliar in Ardnamurchan,¹⁷¹ partly utilising natural rock-faces, the building is entered from the landward by a wooden-lintelled doorway with draw-bar socket giving access to an ante-chamber from which a rock-cut internal stair leads to the upper floor. There are two main rooms on the upper floor, one of which has been sub-divided; the other, larger room is lit by five windows and has a cellar beneath, also lit by two windows. The crag was referred to as a ‘refuge’ in a description of c.1593, a term which might well embrace a building of this kind.¹⁷² As depicted in 1772 the castle was roofless but still standing to some height.¹⁷³ There are no visible earlier remains on the crag but a recent survey concluded that ‘given the presence of other forts and duns on the island, it is inconceivable that this impregnable position was not fortified at an earlier date.’¹⁷⁴

Cutting across most modern notions of communications, these are the main sites which effectively make up the historical hinterland of Castle Tioram and which, taken together, permit a fuller and more rounded appreciation of the castle’s place in successive MacRuari and Clanranald lordships. Their sheer geographical dispersion contrasts markedly with more nucleated forms of medieval lordship. Yet it is a context which retained remarkable cultural cohesion over at least 350 years from about 1350 to the early 18th century. Except for the MacDonald Lordship of the Isles and the subsequent Campbell empire, few lordships of the western seaboard region could match the extent, variety and longevity of the Clanranald empire.

This context of widely ramified interests, lands and sites intimately associated with Clanranald gives added cultural meaning to Castle Tioram. From Loch Shiel in the east, through Moidart and the Small Isles to South Uist and Benbecula in the west, fragmentary and elusive as these remains are in some cases, collectively, in their island and highland settings, these sites have an extraordinary power as fixed points in a lifestyle based on maritime mobility. They bring together and make manifest a post-Norse world of Gaelic lords which modern generations probably find more exciting and understandable than many of the grander yet perhaps socially more remote examples of castles elsewhere in the Scottish highlands and islands.



Fig. 142
Red Book of Clanranald:



Fig. 143
Red Book of Clanranald:



Fig. 144
Black Book of Clanranald:



Fig. 145
Bonamargy Friary, County Antrim,
Ulster:
general view of church from ...



Fig. 146
Oronsay Priory, Argyll:
east end of church and altar table
almost certainly used by Irish
Franciscan missionaries in the
1620s



Fig. 147
Inverlochy Castle:
Horatio McCulloch (1857)

3.3 CASTLE TIORAM:

ASSOCIATIONS

Cultural associations

Over more than four centuries Tioram was possessed by the remarkably enduring family of MacDonald of Clanranald which came to embody and epitomise many distinctive attributes of Gaelic lordship, architecture (see above, section 3.2) and culture. They were the patrons of the most important bardic dynasty known to West Highland history, and perhaps partly through this close association have been the subject of many tributes and stories in poetry and song, much of it handed down through oral tradition, a living link with Clanranald in its 16th- and 17th-century heyday.

During the 16th and 17th centuries Clanranald became intimately linked to the later members of the famous MacMhuirich family, a long-established dynasty of up to 18 generations of Gaelic bards.¹⁷⁵ They first appear on record in the 13th century and came to be associated with the Macdonalds, Lords of the Isles. Following the forfeiture of the Lordship in 1493, a MacMhuirich lament for the decline in the MacDonalds' standing was followed by anonymous elegies for two Clanranald chiefs killed in 1509 and 1514, perhaps indicating a shift in patronage to this sept. These elegies may be attributable to a 'John McMurech Albany', who is likely to have been a relation and descendant of the John MacMhuirich, dean of Knoydart, who died in c.1510. Either of these could have been the first of the line to be closely associated with Clanranald, while Niall Mór MacMhuirich is likely to have been the first to be born (c.1550) under the Clanranald régime. One of his poems casts a sharp light on social customs in the early 17th-century *Gàidhealtachd* with a description of a lengthy spree on the occasion of the wedding in 1613 of John of Moidart and Marion Macleod, daughter of Macleod of Dunvegan. Niall and his successor were involved in the writing of the *Red Book of Clanranald* (see below) which includes history, legend and genealogy as well as poetry.

His successor was Cathal MacMhuirich who may have served as Clanranald's secretary, appearing as witness to Clanranald transactions in 1629, 1630 and 1634. There are indications that, following a dispute, Cathal may have transferred his main allegiance from Clanranald to MacDonald of Sleat but, whatever transpired, his successor, Niall MacMhuirich (d.1726), certainly resumed the family links with no less than three elegies or praise-poems for Allan of Clanranald who died of wounds received at the Battle of Sheriffmuir in November 1715.

Bound paper manuscripts dating from the late 17th and early 18th centuries, best known for their accounts of MacDonald history and the Montrose wars, the so-called *Red Book of Clanranald* and the *Black Book of Clanranald* are counted among the most remarkable and significant survivals in the entire corpus of Scottish Gaelic history and literature.¹⁷⁶ Both books formed part of a Clanranald bequest in 1944 to the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland (now the National Museum of Scotland). However, the *Black Book*, which was discovered in Dublin in the 19th century and presented to MacDonald of Clanranald in 1892, appears to have been more closely associated with the MacDonalds of Antrim than with western Scotland. Its MacDonald history is drawn from the *Red Book*, and its contents include a

miscellany in English, in addition to Gaelic prose and verse. It was completed no earlier than 1715 by Christopher Beaton, last of the famous medical and professional Gaelic kindred known under that name or as MacBeth.¹⁷⁷ The *Red Book*, on the other hand, has much more direct Clanranald associations, though its title should properly be applied to another, more ancient manuscript now lost. Largely compiled by Niall Mór and Cathal MacMhuirich, the *Red Book* contains a contemporary historical account based on personal experience and enquiry, in addition to accounts of early Irish history and genealogy and compilations relating to the Lordship of the Isles. As well as formal elegies to the Clanranald chiefs, it includes further poems by the MacMhuirichs and others. It remained in the possession of that bardic family and was finally acquired on behalf of James ('Ossian') MacPherson in South Uist from a MacMhuirich descendant.

Typical of the light which such sources and MacMhuirich poetry may cast upon life and customs within the buildings of the Scottish *Gàidhealtachd* is provided in the extract cited in translation by Allan Rutherford in the introduction to his 1998 report on documentary sources relating to Castle Tioram:¹⁷⁸

*Six nights I had been in the dun,
It was not a fallacious entertainment I received:
Plenty of ale was drunk at the board,
There was a large wine-hall and a numerous host.*

*The attendants of the great house were on every side,
It was a cheerful great clan;
As quietness was better for the prince's comfort
The party of the tribe took their drink in retirement.*

*A prince from whom a good disposition,
He keeps the fellowship of all ecclesiastics;
In his regal court drinking is not a dream,
To his numerous company he is plentiful and hospitable.*

As Rutherford points out, the poem is dedicated to Rory Mór MacLeod (d.1626) of Skye and Harris and the 'dun' in question is an unspecified MacLeod stronghold, possibly Dunvegan itself. Nonetheless, the imagery has more widespread application, and it is through Clanranald patronage that such word-pictures as this have come down to us.

Memories and legends relating to the Clanranald lineage have subsequently acquired a life of their own, enduring into modern times in Gaelic poetry and song. *Birlinn Chlann Raghnaill* (*Clan Ranald's Galley*) by George Campbell Hay (1915-84) typifies such modern legendary associations,¹⁷⁹ no doubt strongly influenced by the great Alexander MacDonald (1695-1770), born in Moidart and evidently a one-time protégé of Clanranald:

*They raised the chequered sail
towering, windproof;
they stretched out the ropes, stiff,
rigid, tough,*

*from the tall, high timbers
of the resin-red tapering points.*

Other direct and apposite evocations of the Clanranald legend are to be found preserved among the Hebridean waulking songs collected in modern times by John Lorne Campbell (1906-96), expert on Gaelic culture.¹⁸⁰ One of the songs in praise of Clanranald runs (in translation) as follows:

*O God! loved
by me is the lad
who is red and
white (complexioned) and brown (haired);
fosterling of bards,
leader of poets,
grandson of the laird
of Castle Tioram;
who would make
the hogshead pour
with red wine,
and it gushing!*

It is by no means alone in its emphasis on the theme of lairdly hospitality and generosity:

*My beloved is Clanranald
I know the custom of your household:
Beef being cooked, cattle being flayed,
A baker making bread,
Brewers drawing off ale,
Maidens sewing linen,
Embroidering their garments with silk
On their shoulders and their sleeves;
The old men look like young men,
The old women look like young girls.
I know the custom of your household:
It's not beer that you will buy,
(But we hear) wine being poured,
Strong brandy down from Caithness.
My beloved is Clanranald,
A drinker of wine in the ale-house,
Whatever the rest would drink, Allan would pay!*

Few dynasties of castle-owners in Scotland as a whole, not just within the Western Highlands and Islands, can rival such encomiums. It is perhaps no exaggeration to aver that Clanranald has acquired a legendary and heroic status as the archetypal lordship within the *Gàidhealtachd*, a status which in many ways has become greater than that accorded the parent Clan Donald, Lords of the Isles. A lifestyle symbolised by galleys and wine-filled halls, Clanranald has come to represent the very essence of semi-piratical, island-hopping, Gaelic lordship, always generous to its dependants. The fact that that the chief died heroically fighting in the Jacobite cause in 1715 has

simply added to the Romantic aura surrounding the family, while the lack of a major modern centre of lordship since that date has meant that memories of Clanranald relate directly to their heyday between about 1500 and 1700. They remain unadorned with the emblems and lifestyles which have so successfully disguised the Gaelic antecedents of the owners of such mansions as Inveraray, Dunvegan or Armadale.

Religious associations

The one-time owners of Castle Tioram were also key players in a process which contributed significantly to the long-term survival of Roman Catholicism in those parts of the West Highlands and Islands over which they exercised lordship, most notably in Moidart and the Uists. Records show that members of the Clanranald from the Chief downwards were intimately associated with the Irish Franciscan missionaries and their covert operations in the West Highlands and Islands after 1619 and more particularly after 1624.¹⁸¹ Operating from Louvain in Belgium and, after 1626, Bonamargy Friary in Co. Antrim, Northern Ireland, the missionaries liaised closely with those lairds with whom their work did or might find sympathy, among whom Clanranald and MacNeill of Barra appear prominently.¹⁸²

Typical of these operations is the 1625-6 report of Cornelius Ward, one of the four missionaries, who describes how, after a particularly hazardous journey from Maclaîne of Lochbuie at Moy on Mull, he was warmly welcomed (presumably at Tioram) by John, Chief of Clanranald, whom his colleague, Paul O'Neill, had re-converted the previous year.¹⁸³ Having administered the sacraments to Clanranald, his family and others, the missionaries subsequently went on to the Small Isles and, at the specific request of Clanranald's uncle, South Uist where the gatherings and lists of conversions would regularly be numbered in hundreds and where the missionaries had their greatest success rate. By 1637, when the missions effectively ceased, some of their greatest and longest-lasting effects had been among Clanranald lands and people both in Moidart and the Uists, regions which, unlike other areas in Argyll and the islands covered by the missions, resisted later efforts to integrate them within what became the established Presbyterian church. These regions have remained predominantly Catholic down to the present-day, a remarkable cultural phenomenon by any standards and one in which, at a critical juncture, Clanranald sympathy and patronage clearly formed vital initial ingredients.

As in other castles, the lack of an identifiable chapel or oratory within the enclosure of Castle Tioram does not necessarily mean that private religious services were not undertaken there, especially given that by 1642 Clanranald is reported to have had a priest 'commonly residing in his family'.¹⁸⁴ And while the venues used by the missionaries in Moidart are not recorded, the isolated church on St Finnan's Isle, Loch Shiel, which effectively served as castle chapel and nearest burial-place, would have been near-ideal for the purpose.

Aesthetic associations

Its widely acknowledged picturesque qualities notwithstanding, there is, as Athol Murray has convincingly demonstrated,¹⁸⁵ no clear evidence to show that Castle Tioram became especially noteworthy in the later 18th and 19th centuries as a Romantic ruin in the landscape, or that it featured prominently in travellers' writings and artists' paintings of that period. Indeed, its appearances in their recorded itineraries is relatively rare, and comments about it are generally sparing in their

praise for its intrinsic picturesque qualities. Known to Sir Walter Scott through his correspondent friends John Leyden and John MacCulloch,¹⁸⁶ the ruin was generally seen as a relatively formless structure which was subordinate to its natural setting. Following Sandby's military survey drawing of 1748, Tioram does not appear to have been the subject of any major artist until Horatio McCulloch's painting of it was exhibited at the Royal Scottish Academy in 1860.¹⁸⁷ Another McCulloch view of Tioram evidently turned up at an auction in 1981, incorrectly identified as Eilean Donan Castle.¹⁸⁸ However, neither published nor publicly hung, both of these paintings are among the lesser known products of this artist's work on Highland castles, a theme which is generally typified and represented by his widely known and celebrated study of Inverlochy Castle.

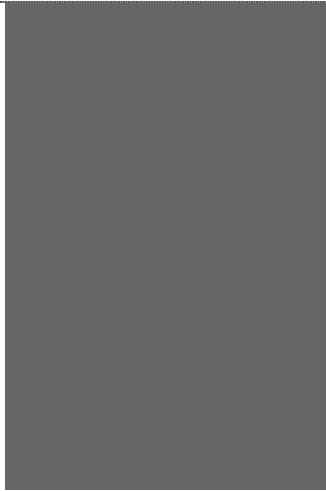


Fig. 148 = Fig. 33

Polygonal and other West Highland castles of enclosure:
John Dunbar, *The Medieval Architecture of the Scottish Highlands*
in Loraine MacLean (ed.), *The Middle Ages in the Highlands* (1981)



Fig. 149
Dundrum Castle, County Down,
Antrim:



Fig. 150
Minor polygonal castles of
enclosure in Ulster:

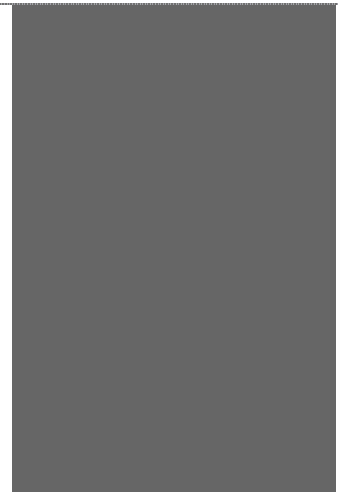


Fig. 151
Harry Avery's Castle, County
Tyrone, Ulster: