

Excerpts from "North Knapdale in the XVII and XVIIIth Centuries" by Alexander Fraser, B.D.,
1964
(Transcribed 28 Feb 2002)

Pg. 28: The situation of Knapdale was developing administratively. After having been included in the Shire of Tarbert, from 1481-1633, Knapdale was included in Argyll and was represented in Parliament by her biggest landholder, Sir Duncan Campbell of Auchenbreck. This district was part of the Sheriffdom of Argyll and the Isles of which the Earl of Argyll possessed the heritable office of Justiciary with privileges, liberties, immunities, casualties, profits and duties, an arrangement which lasted till 1748.

The Parish was strong in a military sense. It was dominated by Castle Sween, the key of Knapdale.

Pg. 29: Culturally, the parish was in a state of transition. The great majority of the people, and even some of the smaller lairds, such as Alexander MacTavish of Dunardry (1633), could not read or write.

Pg. 38: A year or two after 1643, came the depredations of Montrose and Sir Alastair MacDonald of the lands of Argyle and Auchenbreck.

Pg. 46: In August 1684, the heritors of North Knapdale were required to give bonds to the Marquis that they would "not receipt supplie or assist in any manner of way Archibald Earle of Argyll or any other declarit fugitive or trator or intercommoned person." Bonds were taken from:

Donald Campbell of Oib
Duncan Campbell of Larnanshen
Sir Duncan Campbell of Auchnabreck
Archibald Campbell of Danna
Duncan Campbell of Blarintibert
John MacNeill of Airchonnann
John McIlvernock of Oib
Donald McCavish of Dunardarie (Donald MacTavish)
John Campbell of Wlva

This charging the lieges with law borrows at the King's instance and the imposing of bonds without authority of parliament were very grievous to the heritors and were among the causes of discontent moving them to rebel.

In the spring, the affair came to a head. On 2 May 1685, Argyll sailed from Holland with three ships to invade Scotland. Mr. Charles Campbell, son of the Earl met Sir Duncan Campbell of Auchinbreck, and a garrison was placed by them in Carnassarie Castle.

Pg. 47: Eventually more than 140 men from Knapdale joined the Earl. Of these 17 were Campbells; 7 were MacTavishes, a sept of the Campbells; one or two were MacKellers, another sept of the Campbells; and 13 were MacIlvernocks.

Pg. 48: Desperate deeds were taking place at Sir Duncan Campbell's house of Carnassarie in Kilmartin.

The strength was kept by Colin Campbell of Blarintibbert, Duncan Campbell, his son, and Archibald Campbell in Danna and was beseiged by the MacLeans, MacNeill of Gallachuille and MacLachlan of Craigentyrve. The garrison and the beseigers therefore were well known to one another. Despite what one would have expected from neighbours, Dugald MacTavish fiar of Dunardary was executed in sight of the garrison. The Campbells, hearing that the Earl was taken, rendered up the Castle to Captain MacKenzie and others who had power from the Lord Marquis of Atholl to receive it.

Pg. 50-51: Among the most tragic sufferers in Knapdale was Marie Campbell, widow of John MacTavish of Dunardary, whose son Dugald had been hanged at Carnassary.

Pg. 52: In the following year, January, 1685-1686 the Government indicted the following persons:

Sir Duncan Campbell of Auchenbreck
Campbell of Knap
Mr. Alexander Campbell, Advocate
Campbell of Kilberry, younger
Archibald McIlvernock of Oak
Dugald McCavish of Dunardarie

Pg. 54: In 1690 there was an Act of Parliament rescinding all fines and forfeitures since the year 1665. (Earl of Argyll, Sir Duncan Campbell of Auchenbreck, the deceased Dugald M'Avish of Dinardrie and others).

Pg. 55: But the evil consequences of the Rebellion of 1685 could not be remedied by an Act of Parliament five years later. Auchenbreck and his heritors were ruined. His money went in payment of Argyll's troops and this was never recovered. Along with others, he suffered destruction of property, plundering of goods, loss of cattle and sheep, deprivation of rent for four years, the expense of living abroad. When he returned, it was to tenants who were themselves robbed and impoverished.

Pg. 62: On Aug 27, 1691, the Government gave the chiefs an opportunity of taking an oath of allegiance, after which all treasons would be pardoned and the chiefs restored to their estates. The danger of invasion in the Jacobite interest still continued, and a list of the fencible men in Knapdale, between sixteen and sixty, was given up on 26 May 1692.

Pg. 67: A number of the MacTavishes in Dunardary left North Knapdale about 1718 and settled in the Fraser country of Stratherrick.

Pg. 68: Under the leadership of Duncan Campbell of Kilduskland and Dugald MacTavish of Dunardry "a considerable number of people" sailed from North Knapdale in July 1739. In November, 1741, word was received that the adventurers had settled at Cape Fear in North Carolina and were in expectation of "a greater number of the poorer sort to follow."

Pg. 74-75: Thirty years later came the upheaval of the Forty Five Rebellion. Less wise than in 1715, the chief heritor of North Knapdale, Sir James Campbell of Auchenbreck had been "in correspondence with the Pretender, and in 1741 had been one of the sept seigneurs ecossais who signed the assurance to Cardinal Fleury that Scotland would rise in support of a Franco-Jacobite invasion. In conspiracy with Auchenbreck was Dugald MacTavish younger of Dunardry and treasonable correspondence existed between the two men.

In Nov 1745, the person of Auchenbreck was seized in his house at Lochgair and handed over to the Deputy Governor of Dunbarton Castle, who promised to treat him with all possible civility. His correspondent Dugald MacTavish was arrested within a month of Auchenbreck.

In April of 1746, Campbell of Auchenbreck was said to be "in a starving condition." "Too old and too futile to be regarded as dangerous and he was ultimately released." MacTavish being released later under the general pardon of 1747.

Pg. 84-87: The collapse of the Auchenbreck family could not be indefinitely averted, and judicial bankruptcy overtook the Auchenbrecks in 1762. The Campbells of Auchenbreck had been one of the main pillars on which the fabric of society had rested. Such an integral part of the edifice could not be removed without weakening the shole, and the economic collapse of the Auchenbrecks was followed by the disappearance of many smaller houses. In 1785, Lachlan MacTavish of Dunardry was in financial straits and was compelled to sell. While it is true that the same economic difficulties, which had embarassed the Auchenbrecks, worked against these smaller proprietors, there is also no doubt but that all these estates had borrowed from Auchenbreck on their own security, and when the crash came, they had not the money to repay their debts.

It was not long before the voice which was left by the passing of the Campbells of Auchenbreck and others was filled by two large proprietors in Knapdale. These men were prepared to buy the estates of the MacNeills, the MacTavishes and of the various Campbell families, and by adding these estates together they acquired possessions so extensive as to divide the parish between them. One of these was Colonel, later Sir Archibald Campbell.

The other large proprietor who acquired extensive holdings in the parish at this time was Neil Malcolm, 11th of Potalloch. In 1792 Neill Malcolm of Poltalloch obtained the three merk lands of Dunardry and the 2 merk lands of Dunancs, and other lands were gradually added to his possessions until the Malcolm of Potalloch held more than half the parish, an arrangement which lasted for more than a century.

Thus during the closing decades of the eighteenth century, one group of landed gentry passed away and was replaced by another. The probably reason for the wealth and vigour of the succeeding families was that they were more in touch with the new enterprises of the times and were able to reap the profits of such fields of service and opportunity as India and Jamaica. Both the Malcolms of Poltalloch and the Campbell of Inverneill and Ross spent much money in Knapdale. They undertook extensive reconstruction, supported the enterprise of the Crinan Canal, promoted the building of new roads, helped modernise agricultural methods, opened up the district and brought it more closely into touch with the outside world.

With the development of this silent revolution, the old closely-knit society of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries disintegrated. Such families as the Campbells of Lairig na h uinnseann, the

MacIle-bhearnaigs of the Oib, the MacNeills of Taynish, the MacTavishes of Dunardry, and above al the robust baronets of Auchenbreck were gone forever. Without doubt, the new times were better for the individual than the old, yet one is conscious of regret for a change which was contemporary with and in part akin to the break-up of the clan system.

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