

Iona Cathedral and Historic Slavery

Introduction: - Setting in context the story of Iona, the Abbey and connections to slavery has much history on which to draw. It is well-known that in 563AD Columba arrived on Iona from Ireland, that a monastery was built, that Columba was its first abbot, and that he died in 597. To cover the next thousand years in a few paragraphs is superficial to say the least but, in an attempt not to detract from the point of the timeline, only a few aspects will be mentioned. Much is derived from Rosalind Marshall's book, and 'RKM' is shown where there are direct lifts from her text. (Rosalind K Marshall, *Columba's Iona a New History*, commissioned by the Iona Cathedral Trust in 2013 to mark the 1450th anniversary of Columba's arrival on Iona, published by Sandstone Press, Dingwall, Scotland).

Iona and its abbey suffered in Viking raids; relics were therefore moved from the island and, for a period of three centuries (apparently from mid 9th to mid 12th), sources are only vestigial and a chronological narrative cannot be constructed (RKM 43). By 1203, the monastery had been transformed into a Benedictine Foundation (RKM 47, 51), and in essence the structure still present today was in place by the mid 13th century. By 1403, however, the abbey had collapsed; rebuilding was undertaken in the mid 15th century (RKM chapter 5).

What happened on Iona and with the Abbey seems to have become more intertwined with the activities of local landowners. John MacDonald, first Lord of the Isles, was buried on Iona in 1387. From the time of creation of the Earldom of Argyll in 1457, the Campbell family rose to prominence, their main rivals in the area being the MacDonalds. Subsequently, the bishopric of the Isles went to John Campbell. The date of this is not clear from RKM, but John died in 1510, so around the turn of the 15th to 16th centuries (RKM 77). The tussle between the Campbells and the MacDonalds seems to have been replaced by a struggle with the MacLeans, the Campbells succeeding in wresting control of the island from the MacLeans around 1690. (RKM 90).

Meanwhile, the small matter of the Reformation had intervened. But even in 1635, there was still a Bishop of the Isles (one Neil Campbell, RKM 86). He was deposed in 1638 (RKM 88). A minister, Martin MacGillivray, was appointed to Iona Abbey in 1641. A local landowner, Archibald Campbell, first Marquis of Argyll, was a staunch Covenanter. The minister was censured in 1645 for Royalist sympathies. Iona was without a minister from around that time until 1829 (RKM 90).

There were ten Earls of Argyll before it became a Dukedom, the tenth Earl becoming the first Duke in 1701 (peerage of Scotland – the Dukedom became part of the peerage of the UK in 1892). Of the ten Earls, seven were called Archibald. (<https://www.ccsna.org/chiefs-of-the-clan-campbell>)

Timeline

1763: Lord William Campbell, a former MP and naval officer and fifth son of the fourth Duke, married Sarah Izard. The Izards were a plantation owning family, but there appears to have been a direct connection between Lord William and slavery. See note 1 below.

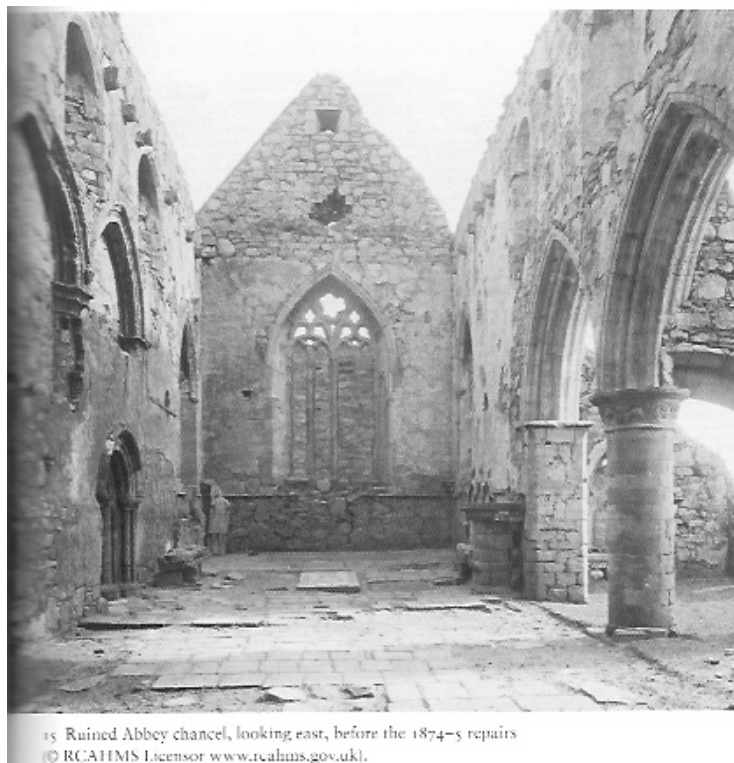
1820: John Campbell, brother of the sixth Duke, while still Lord John Campbell (he became seventh Duke in 1839, on the death of his brother) married his second wife, Joan Glassell,

the daughter of John Glassell. Joan died in 1828. Some of the Glassell money may have been derived from slavery, but the position is not wholly clear – see note 2 below.

1831: John Campbell married his third wife, Ann Colquhoun Monteath. Ann was a widow, daughter of John Cunningham of Craighs (Renfrewshire) who before his death owned slaves on a Jamaican plantation. See note 3 below.

1847: the seventh Duke died and was succeeded by his son, George, then aged almost 24. There are contemporaneous accounts of the poor state of the ruins of the Abbey. The Duke was an active politician, spending much of his time in London, but the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland urged him to do something about the Abbey (RKM 99).

1855: the eighth Duke's factor raised with him the question of urgent repairs, estimated at £40, for stabilising the Abbey ruins, though there is no indication that the work was proceeded with (RKM 106). See note 4 below. Prior to 1867, the idea of giving the ruins to the Crown had been suggested to the Duke, who was 'not indisposed' to the possibility (RKM 108). In 1873, a detailed report was prepared, setting out what needed to be done. There is a photograph of the Abbey at this time – see below.



1874 to 1879: works were proceeded with at a cost of almost £1,900 (RKM 111). See note 5 below. The Duke was reportedly interested in the possibility of restoration of the Abbey, but no work took place for the next twenty years.

1897: the Church of Scotland resolved to mark the 1300th anniversary of Columba's death. Iona Abbey would be the most appropriate place for this. The Abbey remained roofless, though the re-stabilised walls were able to support a temporary roof for a service held on 9 June that year, with glazing in the windows, a pulpit and harmonium installed and benches for a congregation of around 250 (RKM 113).

1899: the Duke conveyed what were still largely the ruins of the Abbey to the Iona Cathedral Trust, without any endowment. The Duke's daughter, Lady Frances, explained that 'at the time when the gift was made it was hoped that the Scottish people would hasten to endow the Trustees with funds adequate for the carrying out of the necessary restoration' (RKM 121). The Duke died in April 1900, and is buried at Kilmun in Argyll.

1899 to 1912: the trustees undertook fundraising and restoration works – which were accompanied by controversy. Detailed narrative is set out by RKM in chapter 8. The Dowager Duchess, Ina, was determined that the works should be carried out, partly due to her wish that there be a memorial to her husband in a restored Abbey. The memorial (a life size marble effigy) was taken to Iona and unveiled at a special service in August 1912 (RKM 131). (The Duchess was added after her death in 1925: her body was embalmed and taken to Iona).

1913: another special service took place, this time to dedicate recent gifts of furnishings, including a communion table of Iona marble and 42 stalls, donated by the Dowager Duchess. Meantime the residential buildings remained in ruins until restored by George MacLeod and the Iona Community mid-twentieth century. In 1938, MacLeod first erected huts preparatory to the commencement of these works and building work began shortly after.

1979: Argyll Estates sold the island to the Hugh Fraser Foundation, which gifted it to the nation. In 1980, the island was placed into the care of the National Trust for Scotland. The Abbey remains in the ownership of the trustees.

1999: a 175 year lease transferring the whole complex into the care of Historic Environment Scotland was granted by the trustees. The Iona Community are sub-lessees.

Note 1: Lord William Campbell, a son of the fourth Duke of Argyll, married Sarah Izard in 1763. Lord William was an MP (for Argyll) then became governor of Nova Scotia 1766 to 1773. In 1775, he became British Governor of South Carolina – the last, as it turned out – and had to flee to England within a couple of years, as revolution was beginning in South Carolina, and British rule was ending. In fact, according to Wikipedia, in leaving America, he abandoned both his governorship and Lady Campbell. He died in 1778. This quote was found, which seems to constitute evidence of the ownership of slaves in Carolina:

In calmer times Campbell might have been welcomed by Carolinian planters, for he had married the daughter of one of their own, the beautiful young Sarah Izard, and bought a rice plantation, including eighty slaves to work it.

(*Slave Law and the Politics of Resistance in the early Atlantic World*, Rugemer, Harvard University Press, 2018)

Note 2: John Glassell, born 1734, purchased the estate of Long Niddry in East Lothian. He went to Fredericksburg in Virginia before the revolutionary war (i.e. before 1775). He was 'a merchant of large enterprises and fortune' (from the section '*Glassell*' in *Virginia Genealogies*¹). At the beginning of the war, he transferred all his American property to his brother, Andrew, and returned to Long

¹ https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=IJ0V9Rzd3kIC&pg=PA8&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false

Niddry. 'Virginia Genealogies' reproduces a letter from Walter Colquhoun of Glasgow to Daniel Grinnan of Fredericksburg in May 1806, which bears on the source of the family wealth:

"GLASGOW, 18 May, 1806.

"DEAR SIR :—Although none of your favours are with me unacknowledged, I ought to have written because among the things I had to communicate to you the death of my old friend, Mr. John Glassell, which took place at Long Niddry on the 15th of last month. It is probable the intelligence may get to you long before this reaches you. I have not heard who are his executors or trustees, or in what manner he has devised his property. But I presume that his only daughter, now about ten years of age, will inherit all, which, in lands, money, &c., will at least amount to fifty thousand pounds Stirling. Nay, the estate of Long Niddry itself would sell for £45,000 or upwards. Mrs. Glassell, who is only a few years turned of fifty, will no doubt have a handsome jointure, and seven or eight years hence Miss will have numerous admirers. * * * *"

The 'Miss' concerned is Joan, who married Lord John Campbell in 1820, with a marriage portion (dowry) of £50,000. Andrew Glassell did repay the value of the estates in America to his brother John; there seems to be ample evidence that Andrew was involved in tobacco growing and his descendants are described as having become 'slave-owning Virginian aristocracy' (*From Roucan to Riches: the Rise of the Glassell family*, by David McKenzie Robertson). The database referred to below does not include data on slave-owning in former colonies in the (now) United States.

Note 3: In the database held by the Centre for the Study of the Legacies of British Slave-ownership at UCL, there is an entry for John Cunningham of Craighends, the father of Ann Cunningham who became third wife of Lord John Campbell.² John Cunningham owned the Grandvale estate in Jamaica, clearly recorded in the UCL database as having enslaved people:

² <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/2146634894>

1817 [Number of enslaved people] 178(Tot) 89(F) 89(M)
[Name] **Grandvale Sugar Estate**
In the possession of Taylor Cathcart as attorney to John Cunningham Esquire.
T71/178 113-115

1819 [Number of enslaved people] 174(Tot)
[Name] **Grand Vale**
[Stock] 267
Registered to John Cunningham.
Jamaica Almanac (1820) transcribed at
<http://www.jamaicanfamilysearch.com/Members/AI20p14.htm>. The almanac was based on the givings-in of the previous March Quarter, hence the earlier evolution date.

1820 [Number of enslaved people] 173(Tot)
[Name] **Grand Vale**
[Stock] 254
Registered to John Cunningham.
Jamaica Almanac (1821) transcribed at
http://www.jamaicanfamilysearch.com/Members/al1821_10.htm. The almanac was based on the givings-in of the previous March Quarter, hence the earlier evolution date.

1820 [Number of enslaved people] 173(Tot) 86(F) 87(M)
[Name] **Grand Vale Estate**
In the possession of Taylor Cathcart as attorney to John Cunningham.
T71/179 Book 4 2

1821 [Number of enslaved people] 174(Tot)
[Name] **Grand Vale**
[Stock] 217
Registered to John Cunningham.
Jamaica Almanac (1822) transcribed at
<http://www.jamaicanfamilysearch.com/Members/AI22p14.htm>. The almanac was based on the givings-in of the previous March Quarter, hence the earlier evolution date.

Note 4: Argyll Papers 30 Jun 1855. John Campbell – repairs to the ruins at Iona and the small chapel.
25 Aug 1858. John Campbell – removal of stones on Iona – have been placed round the walls of the buildings, but has not interfered with the stones in the burying ground – discusses how best to preserve them.
ref. AP NRAS1209/1523

Note 5: Argyll Papers 7 Jun 1873. Report of repairs required to be carried out on the ruins on Iona, by James Ferguson, Inveraray.
Aug-Sep 1874. List of articles found in making the excavations and repairing the ruins on the island of Iona, by Sir Rowand Anderson, architect.
16 Aug 1875. Sir Rowand Anderson, architect, Edinburgh – difficulty of procuring masons for the work at Iona.
ref. AP NRAS1209/1528
22 Feb 1875. Letter from the 8th Duke - report to me whether we can engage any masons in the Country to carry on the operations at Iona this year – as I must arrange for something to be done, one way or another, with the architect.
ref. AP 1209/1583

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