

## MacGregor Clan History

**Clan Gregor**, **Clan McGregor**, **Clan MacGregor** or **Clan M'Gregor** is a **Highland Scottish clan**. It is the most senior clan of *Sìol Alpin*, translated as (Seed of Alpin) referring to King Kenneth I, descending from the ancient Kings of the *Pìcta* and *Dál Riata*. Outlawed for nearly two hundred years after a long power struggle with the **Clan Campbell**, the Clan Gregor claims descent from Constantin and wife and cousin *Malvina*, first son of Dougalilas and wife Spontana (daughter of a **High King of Ireland**) and grandson of *Giric*, the third son of **Alpin mac Eòdhach**, the father of **Kenneth MacAlpin**, the first King of **Scotland**, a descent which is proclaimed in the motto, *S' Rìghal Mo Dhrèam*, translated as *Royal is my Race*.

### Origins

The surname *MacGregor* is an **Anglicisation** of the **Gaelic** *Mac Griogair* meaning "son of Griogar". The **personal name** *Griogar* is a Gaelic form of the personal name *Gregory*.

The Clan Gregor is believed to have originated in Scotland during the 9th century. The MacGregors suggest that they take their name from Gregor (derived from the Latin 'Gregorius' and the Late-Greek 'Gregorios' which means "alert, watchful, or vigilant"). Gregor is identified as a son of the Scottish king **Alpin II Mac Eòghaidh** and younger brother of **Kenneth MacAlpin**, the king who first united Scotland in A.D. 843. Alpin II was the son of Eòghaidh VI 'the Poisonous', High King of Scots, by his marriage to his cousin, the Pictish Princess Royal, and thus had claims to the Scottish and Pictish thrones.

Alpin was defeated and allegedly beheaded in his attempt to gain the Pictish throne. His son, Kenneth, was successful, taking advantage of **Viking** harassment of the Picts from the east. While there is no surviving concrete record of a younger 'Prince Gregor', the Gregg Family website claims that an ancient Latin record of the Alpinian family mentions a Gregor as a commander in the army of Kenneth Mac Alpin. Kenneth had at least one other known brother, Donald, who succeeded him as king of Scots. Unfortunately, most of the early public records of Scotland were destroyed by order of the English King **Edward I**, during his occupation of Scotland at the end of the 13th century.

It was not unusual for the Mac Alpin kings to give **Latin** or **Scandinavian** names to their sons. Typical examples are Constantine, named after the famous Roman Emperor, and Indulf, named after a Viking leader. Gregor would probably have been named after the famous Pope Gregory 'the Great' (Gregorius).<sup>[*original research?*]</sup>

On the other hand, Dr William Skene found a rare Mediaeval Gaelic manuscript in the library of the Faculty of Advocates in Edinburgh, which traces the male line of the Mac Gregor chiefs to King Ferchar II 'the Tall', a 7th-century Scottish king of Dalriada, this would make the Mac Gregor chiefs a branch of the Cinel Labhran - the Labhran line of the original Scottish royal house, as opposed to the Cinel Gabhran (King Alpin's family). Both families are male-line branches of the same Celtic royal house. If Skene's document is correct then the present Chief's ancestor would have been a cousin (or son) of King MacBeth, and a member of his extended family. Recent research by Gerald McKinnon, clan sennachie of Clan Fionnain (Mackinnon) has revealed a tombstone found in the royal cemetery on the holy island of Iona by the Royal Commission for Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland. This tombstone lists at least five Mackinnon chiefs buried there and exactly corresponds with the Mackinnon pedigree given in Dr. Skene's Gaelic manuscript. This discovery appears to confirm the descent of the Mackinnon, MacGregor and Macquarrie chiefs from Prince Ferchar Og, a younger son or grandson of King Ferchar II "Fada". Gerald McKinnon's research further suggests that the chiefs of these three clans may even be descended from King MacBeth himself.

Latin charter records from the Registry of St. Andrew's Priory dating from the early 12th century record "Cormac filli Macbeth" as a charter witness about the year 1100-07.<sup>[*?*]</sup> **Jacqueli Finley** claims that MacBeth left young sons at the time of his death from mortal wounds sustained at the **Battle of Lumphannan**, 1057. Under Celtic **Brethon Law**, these princes were too young to take the Scottish throne, and were passed over in favour of their cousin, **Lulach**, who was then in his 30s. Lulach was crowned and enthroned at Scone (earliest surviving records of a Scottish coronation), but was killed six/seven months later by "the Saxon invaders" who placed Mael-Colum "Caemnor" on the Scottish throne (**Malcolm III**).<sup>[*?*]</sup> Gerald suggests that Mac Beth's sons may have fled to Ulster in Ireland, where they were educated and at least one entered the Celtic church, later returning to Scotland under the protection of the Church. At least one of these sons may have married - Celtic canon permitted the marriage of priests - and the chiefs of at least three clans may be descended from Cormac, Bishop of Dunkeld, grandson, or great-grandson of MacBeth.<sup>[*?*]</sup> If Gerald McKinnon's research is accurate then the traditional Alpinian descent of the MacGregor chiefs is discredited - at least in the male line, though the MacGregor chiefs are still descended from the Scots kings via King MacBeth or one of his cousins. Furthermore, surviving evidence suggests that Macbeth's mother was a MacAlpin princess, possibly the daughter of King **Cináadh** (**Kenneth**)**II** (reigned 971-995), so his descendants could then claim to represent King Alpin in the female line, since Jacqueli Finley claims that King Alpin's family became extinct in the male line at the death of King **Mael-colum II** in 1034.

The Y-chromosomal data supports the Dalriadic Scottish royal claim as the hierarchical family Y-DNA is consistent with that of the other clans claiming similar descent.<sup>[*citation needed*]</sup> The data supports descent from the Dalriadic Scottish kings, ancestors of the kings of united Scotland, but is not yet clear as to which branch or Cinel the Mac Gregor chiefs descend from. Further DNA research and analysis will eventually establish whether the Mac Gregors are descended from King Alpin's line (Cinel Gabhran), or King MacBeth's line (Cinel Labhran).<sup>[*original research?*]</sup> Alternatively, historians<sup>[*which?*]</sup> have suggested the clan descends from a Pictish king Griogair, son of Dungal, who is said<sup>[*by whom?*]</sup> to have been a co-ruler of **Alba**, an area of north central Scotland, between AD 879 and 889. However The Y-DNA data does not support this second contention.

### Wars of Scottish Independence

By tradition in the 14th century during the **Wars of Scottish Independence** the Clan Gregor fought at the **Battle of Bannockburn** under chief Malcolm MacGregor. However most historians agree that the first certain Chief was Gregor "of the Golden Bridles". Gregor's son, Iain Camm ("of the One-Eye") succeeded as the second Chief sometime prior to 1509.

The MacGregors suffered a reversal of fortune when the Scottish king, **Robert the Bruce**, granted the barony of **Loch Awe**, which included much of the MacGregor lands, to the chief of **Clan Campbell**. The Campbells ejected the unfortunate MacGregors from these lands, forcing them to retire deeper into their lands until they were largely restricted to Glenstrae.<sup>[*?*]</sup> The MacGregors fought the Campbells for decades and were eventually dispossessed of their lands. Reduced to the status of outlaws, they rustled cattle and poached deer to survive. They became so proficient at these endeavours other clans would pay them not to steal their cattle as they exhausted other means of stopping them.

The taking of **Castle Grant** in the 14th century; Originally a **Clan Comyn** stronghold, **Clan Grant** traditions tell us that the castle was taken from the Comyns by a combined force of the Grants and MacGregors. The Clan Grant and Clan Gregor stormed the castle and in the process slew the Comyn Chief - and kept the Chief's skull as a trophy of this victory. The skull of the Comyn was taken as a macabre trophy and was kept in **Castle Grant** and became an heirloom of the **Clan Grant**. (In the late Lord Strathapey's book on the Clan, he mentions that the top of the cranium was hinged, and that he saw documents kept in it.) Clan tradition predicts grave things if the skull ever leaves the hands of the family - prophesying that the Clan would lose its lands in Strathapey.

### 16th century and clan conflicts

Iain of Glenstrae died in 1519 with no direct heirs. This plunged the Clan Gregor into disarray as the powerful Campbells meddled with succession and asserted claim to the last remaining MacGregor lands. In 1560, the Campbells dispossessed Gregor Roy MacGregor, who waged war against the Campbells for ten years before being captured and killed. His son, Alistair, claimed the MacGregor chiefship but was utterly unable to stem the tide of persecution which was to be the fate of the "Children of the Mist."

Argyle and his **Clan Campbell** benchmarks were given the task of hunting down the MacGregors. About sixty of the clan made a brave stand at Benteik against a party of two-hundred chosen men belonging to the **Clan Cameron**, **Clan MacNab**, and **Clan Ronald**, under command of Robert Campbell, son of the Laird of Glen Orchy. In this battle, Duncan Aberach, one of the Chieftains of the Clan Gregor, his son Duncan, and seven other MacGregors were killed. But although they made a brave resistance, and killed many of their pursuers, the MacGregors, after many skirmishes and great losses, were at last overcome.

During the **Anglo-Scottish Wars** the Clan Gregor fought against the English at the **Battle of Pinkie Cleugh** 1547.

In 1558 a deadly feud took place between the **Clan MacLaren** and the Clan Gregor when the MacGregors were accused of killing 18 MacLarens men along with their whole families and taking possession of their farms. This incident was not investigated until 1604 when the MacGregors were on trial for slaughtering many men of the **Clan Colquhoun**. However the MacGregors were cleared of doing anything against the Clan MacLaren.

In 1589 Patrick, 3rd Lord Drummond, of **Clan Drummond**, appointed his deputy kinamen, John Drummond of Drummond-Ernock, Royal Forester of Glenartney. It was in his post that he cut off the ears of MacGregors he had caught poaching. In revenge the MacGregors attacked Drummond and cut off his head. They then proceeded to John's sisters residence, burst in, and demanded bread and cheese. The MacGregors then unwrapped John's head and crammed its mouth full. However soon afterwards a Major Stewart hunted down the MacGregors and hanged them.

### 17th century and clan conflicts

The **Battle of Glen Fruin** took place in 1603 where the MacGregors were victorious, defeating five hundred **Clan Colquhoun** men, three hundred of whom were on horseback, by four hundred MacGregor men at Glen Fruin. Over two hundred of the Colquhoun men were lost when the MacGregors, who had split into two parties, attacked from front and rear and forced the horsemen onto the soft ground of the Moss of Auchingalach. It meant the proscription of the Clan Gregor. It wasn't until the 18th century that the enmity between the clans was laid to rest when, at Glen Fruin on the site of the massacre, the chiefs of the Clan Gregor and Colquhoun met and shook hands.

The MacGregors were formally banished in 1603 by King **James VI** who made it a capital offence to bear the MacGregor name. From this period comes the Clan Gregor's most famous historical figure, **Rob Roy**.

The dispossessed MacGregors rustled cattle and poached deer to survive. When John Drummond, the king's forester, was murdered after hanging MacGregors for poaching, the chief of the Clan Gregor, Alistair of Glen Strae was condemned by the Privy Council. In April 1603, King **James VI** issued an edict proclaiming the name of MacGregor 'altogidder abolished', meaning that those who bore the name must renounce it or suffer death.

Alistair MacGregor of Glen Strae was then captured, having sought protection from the Chief of the Campbells to go to London to beg clemence from James the VI, who had recently claimed the English throne. The Campbells gave him safe passage to the borders, but arranged in advance for soldiers to capture him on the English side, and return him to Edinburgh to stand trial. He, along with eleven of his chieftains, was hanged at Edinburgh's Mercat Cross, or, alternatively in the Edinburgh Tollbooth, the site of which is now marked by the Heart of Midlothian. He was hung one ell higher than his relatives, to distinguish his rank.<sup>[*?*]</sup> In January 1604, Clan Gregor was scattered, many taking other names, such as Murray, King, or Grant. They were hunted like animals, flushed out of the heather by bloodhounds. Persecution of the MacGregors continued until 1774 when they were permitted to be reestablished.<sup>[*?*]</sup>

An Act of the Scottish Parliament from 1617 stated<sup>[*?*]</sup> (translated into modern English):

“ It was ordained that the name of MacGregor should be abolished and that the whole persons of that name should renounce their name and take some other name and that they nor none of their name and that they nor none of their posterity should call themselves Gregor or MacGregor under pain of death ... that any person or persons of the said clan who has already renounced their names or hereafter shall renounce their names or if any of their children or posterity shall at any time hereafter assume or take to themselves the name of Gregor or MacGregor ... that every such person or persons assuming or taking to themselves the said name ... shall incur the pain of death which pain shall be executed upon them without favour. ”

The **Clan MacThomas** spent much of their time breeding cattle and fighting off those who tried to rustle them. One of these incidents in 1606 is remembered as the Battle of Cairnwell. A force of around 200 men from the Clan Gregor and some Catarrans made off with around 2,700 of the MacThomases cattle. The MacThomases eventually caught up with their enemies and defeated them but not before they had butchered most of the MacThomases cattle out of pure spite. This caused much financial damage to the MacThomases with some of the clansmen being completely ruined.

The **Earl of Glencairn** was in Rannoch in 1633 looking for support for **Charles II**. He raised the Clan Gregor from the Isle of Rannoch. He would have no difficulty recruiting them because one of their opponents was the **Earl of Argyll**, a Campbell, one of their hereditary enemies. Alexander, the 12th chief of the **Clan Robertson** led his men from Fea Corrie. Both forces met above Annat and marched up the old path to **Loch Garry**. History informs us that the leaders quarrelled so much amongst themselves that General George Monck, an English Parliamentarian, had little difficulty in winning the ensuing **Battle of Dalnaspald**.

### 18th century and Jacobite uprisings