

History of Clan Lamont

Clan Lamont is one of the oldest of Scottish clans, with an oral tradition of descent stretching back to the Kings of Ireland. The name is derived from a chief in the 13th century, Sir Laumon, whose charter granting lands to the Paisley Abby, is still in existence. Few clans can document their existence at such an early date. Although the name comes from the 13th century chief, the clan is much older, being known as MacKerracher before Sir Laumon's time. Sir Walter Scott refers to him in *Antiquary* as "*Lamon mor*", or the Great Lamont in English. Sir Laumon's mother is believed to have been a daughter of the great Somerled, ancestor of the MacDonalds. Powerful when Scotland was being shaped into a nation, and still a notable clan for some six centuries afterwards.

The Cowal peninsula is the homeland of Clan Lamont. This rugged land was the homeland of the Clan Lamont. Tradition ascribes to a chief of the clan the impressive title of 'Great Lamont of All Cowal', but, in what might be termed historic times, the northern boundary of the Lamont lands has been a line from the Holy Loch by Glendaruel to Kilfinan on Loch Fyne. Along the eastern shore of Loch Gilp, an inlet of Loch Fyne, were other lands of the Lamonts. Cowal, takes its name from Comgall, king of Dalriada and progenitor of one of the four main tribes of that early western kingdom. On three sides its shores are washed by the waters of the Firth of Clyde, the Kyles of Bute and Loch Fyne, while Loch Riddon, Loch Striven, the Holy Loch and Loch Goil run into its interior. To the north it is almost sealed off by mountains. Cowal still retains the wild beauty of lonely places much as they were in days when the clans settled their differences with blood shed.

Tradition, supported by a genealogical work of 1682 found in Inveraray Castle, maintains that a son of Sir Laumaon, had to flee Cowal as a result of a murder; and founded the Lyons of Glamis. He took the name of Lyon from the Lamont arms, and chose as his arms, the reverse of the Lamonts, a blue lion on a silver field. As the Queen Mother, Queen Elizabeth, is a Lyon of Glamis, if this tradition is correct, the Queen Elizabeth II is a Lamont on her mother's side !

As detached from the mainstream of Scottish history as their native hills are from the surrounding country, and "swart" to get involved in events which stirred other Highland clans. Twice they sallied forth in force: first to oppose a claimant to the throne and secondly to help a king who was to lose his head. Both campaigns cost them dear.

In the early 1300s, came a great down turn in the Clan's fortunes. Laumon's grandson, Sir John, supported the MacDougalls of Lorne against Robert the Bruce. The Lamonts of Ardlamont, however, who held their land as vassals of the High Steward in Bute, may have fought in Bruce's bodyguard at Bannockburn. When Bruce was secure on the Scottish throne the Lamont Chief suffered with the House of Lorne and the Clan's land was claimed by the king's loyal supporter, Campbell, Black Knight of Lochawe. By the end of the 14th century a great deal of the original territory of the clan had been lost ; and thus began a feud between the Lamonts and the Campbells which continued on and off for centuries in spite of considerable intermarriage .

Toward Castle, the seat of the Lamont Chiefs, was built in the 14th-15th centuries. Mary, Queen of Scots spent a night there in 1563 during the lifetime of John, 10th chief, who was the son-in-law of the Earl of Argyll. A century later, it was another Campbell Earl of Argyll, who was to be responsible for the destruction of Toward Castle.

In the 17th century wars of Montrose, Sir John, 14th chief, who had been knighted by King Charles, after



Lamont Memorial

much shilly-shallying, joined Argyll's Covenanting army and in the inglorious rout of that force at Inverlochy he and his brother were taken prisoner. He then threw in his lot with Montrose the Royalist general. Archibald, the chief's brother, with Colkitto's fighting Irish, crossed Loch Long in boats provided by the Lamonts and landed at the Point of Strone. After defeating a Campbell force in the heights above the point the Royalist army mustered at Toward and then harried far and wide in the Campbell lands. The Lamonts had their share in this killing and plundering particularly in North Cowal, and they attacked the old tower of Kilmun and the bishop's house in Dunoon. Dunoon is a place of grim memory for the Lamonts. There the Campbells carried out one of the massacres which stain their clan's history.. In 1646 the Campbells made a concentrated attack on the Lamont castles of Toward and Ascog, and, when the garrisons surrendered under written guarantee of liberty, the Campbells ignored the terms of capitulation. The survivors of the defenders were carried in boats to Dunoon and in the church were

sentenced to death. About 100 were shot or stabbed to death and another 36 of 'the special gentlemen' of the Lamonts were hanged from a tree in the churchyard and dead and dying were buried in pits. The Chief and his close kin were hustled away to Inveraray, where some were hanged The Chief and his brothers being kept prisoner for five years. It was 16 years before the ringleaders of the massacre were brought to justice, and Sir Colin Campbell was beheaded.. The Clan Lamont Society in 1909 raised a monument on the spot where so many met their deaths.

After 1646, the much reduced Clan Lamont had a fairly peaceful history, finally having the good sense or luck to not get involved with any more losing causes. We stayed out of both the 1715 and 1745 Jacobite uprisings. This may have been due to the fact that they were now pretty well surrounded by Campbells, who always sided with the English government (To their great profit).

With the destruction of the Clan system in 1745, the structure of Highland society was changed for all time. When the power of the Chiefs was eliminated, so was their need for dedicated clansmen to protect and expand the clan lands. The result of this, in time, was the infamous Highland clearances; where chiefs cleared the land of crofters, and substituted the more profitable sheep. As was the case with the Lamonts, some chiefs tended to sell off the clan lands instead of shifting to sheep. Sadly, as a result of this policy, there are now none of the ancestral lands in Lamont hands. Starting very early, even before 1600, Lamonts have tended to disperse, and are now one of the most widespread of clans.

On a more positive note, over the years, the Lamonts have tended to devote the energy once expended in battling Campbells, to achievements in science, government, the military, and the arts. Colin Lamont (1754-1851) a famous Astronomer, Major General John Lamont, (1773-1829) 19th Chief, Thomas W. Lamont Wall Street financier, John Swainson (1926-1994) Governor of Michigan 1960's, and Norman Lamont British Chancellor of the Exchequer in the early 1990's are just a few examples.