

## VII.

### A CHRONOLOGY OF THE ABBEY AND CASTLE OF SADDELL, KINTYRE.

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The Abbey of Saddell was situated on the east coast of Kintyre, in Argyll, about ten miles north of the modern burgh of Campbeltown. Its history is interesting because of its close connection with the family of Somerled and the Lords of the Isles, and in that it was the only Cistercian foundation in the West Highlands. The name is Norse, signifying sandy dale or valley, and occurs in the records in such forms as Saundle, Sandal, Sadagul, Sagadul, and Sconedale. Its chartulary has been lost, and information relating to its history has to be sought for in many scattered sources. In what follows an attempt has been made to collect, and present in chronological order, the very scanty references to it in contemporary documents, and in others of later date.

1160, 1163.—The English antiquary Birch discovered among the Cotton MSS. in the British Museum several lists of all the Cistercian houses in existence, with the dates of their foundation. These lists were written in a French hand of the 13th century, and he concluded that they could only have been compiled in the mother abbey of Citeaux in France. In the lists there are references to "Saundell in Cantire *circa* 1163," and to "Sconedale MCLX (1160)."<sup>1</sup> These references would appear to indicate that the act of foundation took place before the death of Somerled in 1164, and that the original idea of founding the abbey may have been his, but his son Reginald is referred to as its founder in a papal mandate of 1393, and in a charter of King James IV. It is probable that the buildings were not completed, and the monks assembled, before Reginald's death in 1207, for it is not included

<sup>1</sup> *J.B.A.A.*, xxvi, 281, 352.

in the list of Scottish abbeys in Gervase of Canterbury's *Mappa Mundi*, written between 1205 and 1211.<sup>1</sup> The monks are traditionally said to have come from the abbey of Rushen in the Isle of Man, but this opinion, although probable, is not supported by any evidence known to the present writer.

There is no mention of Saddell in the Chronicle of Man, which was composed by the monks of Rushen Abbey, and which records events occurring between A.D. 1000 and 1374.

1263.—King Hacon of Norway invaded Scotland. When his fleet anchored at Gigha, on the west coast of Kintyre, there came to him "an abbot of Greyfriars," begging protection for their monastery and church, and this was granted by the king. In return, the monks were able to afford Christian burial to one of the King's chaplains, named Simon. They interred his body in their church, and "spread a fringed pall over his grave, and called him a saint." The reference can only have been to the Cistercian monks of Saddell,<sup>2</sup> although the place is not mentioned by name.

1353, 3 Non. Feb.—Mandate to the Bishop of Argyll, the Abbot of Sagadal in Kintyre, and the Prior of Orwansay in the diocese of Sodor, to cause Gilleg hannan, son of the late John, scriptor of Mule [Mull], acolyte, of the diocese of Sodor, to be received, if fit, into the monastery of St Columba of Hy [Iona].<sup>3</sup>

1390/1, 17 Jan.—Commission by the Pope to the Bishop of Glasgow to ratify an excambion of properties between the abbey of Saddell in Kintyre, and the abbey of Crossraguel in Carrick.<sup>4</sup>

Two pennylands of Kildonan and Creisboig, in the parish of Barr in south Ayrshire, and the chapel of Kildonan, had been bestowed on the abbey of Saddell by Neil or Nigel, Earl of Carrick. He was the son of Duncan, Earl of Carrick, the founder of Crossraguel, and the maternal grandfather of King Robert the Bruce. Crossraguel had possessed the island and chapel of Inchmarnock, situated between Bute and Kintyre in the old Norse Kingdom of the Isles. The printed charters of Crossraguel throw no light on this donation, but it must have been by some member of the family of Somerled. The donations to Saddell by the family of Carrick, and to Crossraguel by the family of Somerled, are accounted for by the tie of blood which connected the two families. Both traced their descent from Fergus, the first lord of Galloway, who died in 1161.<sup>5</sup> The ratification of 1391 shows that the exchange of these properties had been effected thirty years before, that is, about 1360.

1393, 27 June.—Confirmation by Pope Clement of previous grants of land

<sup>1</sup> Anderson, A. O., *Scottish Annals*, p. 327.

<sup>2</sup> Johnston, Rev. J., *King Haco's Expedition* (1782).

<sup>3</sup> *C.P.R.*, III, 490.

<sup>4</sup> *Highland Papers* (S.H.S.), IV, 142.

<sup>5</sup> Robertson, E. W., *Early Kings*, I, 356; II, 188, 189.

to Saddell by Reginald, son of Somerled; Roderick, son of Reginald; John, first Lord of the Isles; and Christina, daughter of Calen.<sup>1</sup>

These grants and others are enumerated in a charter of King James IV, to be referred to later. The gift of Christina was of the island of Davaar, or Saint Barr, situated at the entrance to Campbeltown loch. It is surmised that she was a daughter of Alan, son of Roderick, and grandson of Reginald, the founder of Saddell, and that Calen is an abbreviation for MacAlain. She is said to have married a Sir Duncan of Mar, probably a son of Donald, Earl of Mar.

1438, 7 Id. Jan.—Mandate to the Abbot of St Mary's, Sadagal, in Kintyre, in the diocese of Argyll, and to Malcolm Cristini [Malcolm son of Cristin] canon of Lismore, to collate and assign the rectory of St Congans in Ardnamurchan to John Angussii [John son of Angus], clerk.<sup>2</sup>

This mandate, and the following, reveal that the abbey, or abbey church, of Saddell was a dedication to the Virgin Mary.

1450, 16 June.—Mandate to the Abbot of St Marys, Sagadul, the Prior of St Marys, Ardchattan, and the Dean of Argyll, to adjudicate in the case of Patrick Cornton, perpetual vicar of Kilcalmonell [in Knapdale], who was reputed to have taken part in deeds of violence, and who is a foreigner who cannot understand or speak the language of his parishioners.<sup>3</sup>

1450/1, 20 March.—Mandate to the Abbot of Sagadail to collate and assign to Moricius [Maurice] son of Dugald Macneil, rector of the parish church of Kilblane [Sancti Blaani in Kintyre], who is by both parents of noble birth, the perpetual vicarage of Kilcalmonell [Sancti Colmoneli] in Knapdale, resigned by Patrick Cornton.<sup>4</sup>

The parish of Kilblaan is now included in the modern parish of Southend, Kintyre. The Macneils were a Kintyre family, originally of Gigha, and with later branches at Carskey, Tirfergus and Ugadale. Another Maurice Macneil, presumably of the same family, was Rector of Kilblaan about a century later, and died in 1527.

1454, 23 July.—Mandate to the Abbot of Saddell and Prior of Ardchattan, to adjudicate in the case of Malcolm, son of John, rector of the parish church of Kilmichael in Kintyre, who is charged with having dilapidated the possessions of the said rectory, and of having neglected the care of the parishioners.<sup>5</sup>

1470, 28 Nov.—Mandate to the Abbot of Saddell and Prior of Ardchattan to enquire into charges against Robert Fowler, rector of the parish church of St Columba in Morvern.<sup>6</sup>

This is the last reference found in the records to an abbot of Saddell, and by this date the abbey appears to have been in a state of dissolution.

<sup>1</sup> *Highland Papers* (S.H.S.), iv, 148.

<sup>2</sup> *C.P.R.*, viii, 10.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, x, 493.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, x, 547.

<sup>5</sup> *C.P.R.*, x, 706.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, xii, 805.

1498, 14 July.—Precept under the signet by King James IV to William, Bishop of Aberdeen, Keeper of the Privy Seal, to expedite a charter under the Great Seal, confirming all previous grants of land to Saddell Abbey.<sup>1</sup>

King James visited Lochkilkerran, now Campbeltown, in the summer of 1498, and caused a new royal castle to be built there. His attention had obviously been drawn to the state of Saddell Abbey by the Bishop of Argyll, David Hamilton, a natural son of James, Lord Hamilton, whose interest in the matter will be clear from what follows. No charter under the Great Seal can be traced as issuing at this date.

1507/8, 1 Jan.—Charter under the Great Seal confirming all previous grants of land to Saddell Abbey, annexing these lands to the Bishopric of Argyll, erecting a Barony of Saddell, and empowering the Bishop to erect castles.<sup>2</sup>

The castle of Saddell, which still stands, was erected by the Bishop immediately after this date, and completed by 1510. The King's charter discloses clearly the complete extent and location of all the lands possessed by the abbey, and the names of the donors, which were as follows: Glensagadull and 12 marks of Baltibean in Kintyre and 20 marks of Ceskin [Shiskine] in Arran by Reginald son of Somerled; Glentorsadull and Ugladull [Glentorrisdale and Ugadale] in Kintyre by Roderick son of Reginald; two pennylands of Creisboig and Kildonan in Carrick by Neil Earl of Carrick, and Isobel countess of Carrick; two marks of Lesenmarg by John first Lord of the Isles; two marks of Cragvane in Gigha, and the island of Sanctbarre in Lochkilkerran, by Alexander Lord of the Isles; Knockhantibeg and Kellipul in Kintyre, by John, fourth Lord of the Isles; one halfpenny land of Barrandayb and Blairnatibrade in Knapdale by Sir Duncan Campbell of Lochawe.

One or two points in this charter call for comment. The lands granted by the Earl of Carrick are still seen to have been Saddell property at this date, and the island of Inchmarnock was regarded as being in Saddell parish as late as the 18th century. It would appear, therefore, that the excambion of 1391 was of the two chapels only. The name of the wife of Neil, Earl of Carrick, was Margaret or Marjorie, not Isobel. The grant of the island of Davaar, here stated to have been by Alexander of the Isles, was in Pope Clement's confirmation of 1393 stated to have been by Christina, daughter of Calen. The "12 unciates" of Kellipul is clearly an error for  $\frac{1}{12}$  unciate, as that was about the extent of the place. The whole property of the abbey did not amount to 12 unciates.

1507/8, 12 March.—Charter under the Great Seal by James IV bestowing on the Bishopric of Argyll certain churches in Kintyre and also, *pro singulari*

<sup>1</sup> *Cal. of Charters*, Reg. Ho., IV, No. 614 B; Dowden, *Bishops*, p. 387.

<sup>2</sup> *R.M.S.*, II, No. 3170.

*favore*, ratifying to the Bishop the grant of the lands of Saddell abbey, with power to erect mills within the said Bishopric.<sup>1</sup>

1512, 22 April.—Letter of King James IV to Pope Julius II, proposing that, owing to the remote situation of Lismore, the see of the Bishop should be transferred to Saddell, and a new cathedral erected there.<sup>2</sup>

In the *Letters and Papers of Henry VIII* this letter is followed in serial order by another to the Cardinal of St Mark,<sup>3</sup> which is undated but which, from its tenor, must have been issued in 1507/8, and simultaneously with another letter to the Pope. The letter to the Cardinal states that the abbey of Saddell had been deserted by its monks from a time “beyond the memory of man,” and that its lands had fallen to the use of laymen, for which reasons he is addressing the Pope to have it transferred to the Bishopric.

The building of the Bishop’s castle was begun in 1508 and completed by 1510, but the death of King James at Flodden in 1513 put a stop to the negotiations for the transfer of the see to Saddell, and the proposed new cathedral was never built, although the erection of the castle must have resulted in virtually transferring the Bishop’s headquarters to that place.

1556.—James Hamilton, the then Bishop of Argyll, natural half-brother of the Earl of Arran and Duke of Chatelherault, in return for certain sums paid to him by the Earl, viz. £1200 for various purposes, and £10,000 to meet the tax granted to the Queen, conveyed to the Earl for the yearly payment of 49 merks, the lands, manor, and fortalice of Saddell, the whole estate amounting to 48 merklands of old extent.<sup>4</sup>

In the same year James Macdonald of Dunnyveg, on giving up his claim to certain lands in Arran, received from the Earl of Arran the whole lands of Saddell, and the keeping of the Castle, on condition of his paying the dues, keeping open house for the Earl and Bishop as masters of the same, doing nothing to the prejudice of the isle of Arran, and binding himself to assist in levying rents and teinds throughout Kintyre.<sup>5</sup>

The Macdonalds of Dunnyveg, in the person of Angus, son of the above-mentioned James, were forfeited by the Crown in the last decade of the 16th century and, in the year 1607, all the lands of the Lordship of Kintyre, including the Saddell lands, were conveyed by a Crown charter to Archibald seventh Earl of Argyll.<sup>6</sup>

1650.—In this year the Marquis of Argyll, son of the seventh Earl, planted Kintyre with a colony of Lowland Covenanting lairds, the men who are referred to by Robert Baillie as “the Remonstrant gentlemen of Kintyre.”

<sup>1</sup> *R.M.S.*, II, No. 3208.

<sup>2</sup> *Letters and Papers of Henry VIII* (1920 ed.), I, pt. i, No. 1151.

<sup>3</sup> *Letters of James IV* (S.H.S., 3rd Ser., XLV), No. 149

<sup>4</sup> *Orig. Par. Scot.*, II, 24; Dowden, *Bishops*, p. 391.

<sup>5</sup> *Coll. de Rebus Alb.* (Iona Club), p. 88. Gives the agreement in full between the Earl and Macdonald.

<sup>6</sup> *R.M.S.*, VI, No. 1911.

Their leader was William Ralston of that ilk, who had given to him Saddell castle as his residence, together with a tack of 23 merklands in its vicinity, including some of the old abbey lands. Ralston executed an agreement<sup>1</sup> to have the castle put in a proper state of repair before November 1652, and must have left it more or less in the condition in which it stands to-day.

The material remains of the abbey buildings are very scanty, and have been described by one writer as "a mass of featureless confusion." No satisfactory plan of them has ever been made, nor can this be done until the necessary excavations of the foundations have been attempted. Of the abbey church, however, the ground plan can still be clearly traced, and portions of its walls still exist. Captain White, who was in charge of the Ordnance Survey party about 1870, and who was an artist and archæologist, gives its length as 134 ft. and its breadth 25 ft., and thought that its design must have closely resembled that of the church of the Valiscaulian priory of Beaulieu.<sup>2</sup> It appears to have been slightly larger than Iona cathedral, and the largest pre-Reformation church in Argyll.

Within the ruined church are a number of sepulchral slabs, some of which Captain White considered to have been among the finest that he had encountered in the West Highlands. Two of these, one representing a warrior in quilted gambeson or acton, with gorget, gauntlets and pointed shoes, and the other an ecclesiastic in alb and chasuble, are reproduced here (Pl. XXII).

Above the entrance door of the castle there is carved in stone the date 1508, which corresponds to that of King James IV's charter empowering the castle to be built. Above that is a representation in stone of a galley or lymphad, the heraldic device of the family of Somerled. On the outer and inner sides of the arch of an entrance gateway there are placed two stone panels, one representing a galley, and the other an armed man on horseback (Pl. XXIII). These appear to be meant to represent the two sides of the seal of Reginald, as that is described in the chartulary of Paisley Abbey,<sup>3</sup> of which he was also a benefactor. No specimen of Reginald's seal is known to exist to-day.

Of the number of the monks of Saddell we possess no information, and of its abbots the name of only one has survived. Abbot Thomas flourished *circa* 1257, and is described by Dempster as *vir magna vitæ austeritate et continentia celebris*, and as the author of several books, said to have been at one time in the library of St Andrews, but which had disappeared when Dempster wrote in 1627.<sup>4</sup>

Saddell appears to have functioned as a religious corporation for a period of 250 years, approximately from 1220 to 1470. Its dissolution, nearly a century before the Scottish Reformation, is shrouded in some degree of

<sup>1</sup> MS. copy, presented by 10th Duke of Argyll, in Public Library, Campbeltown; McKerrall, A., *Kintyre in 17th Century*, ch. x.

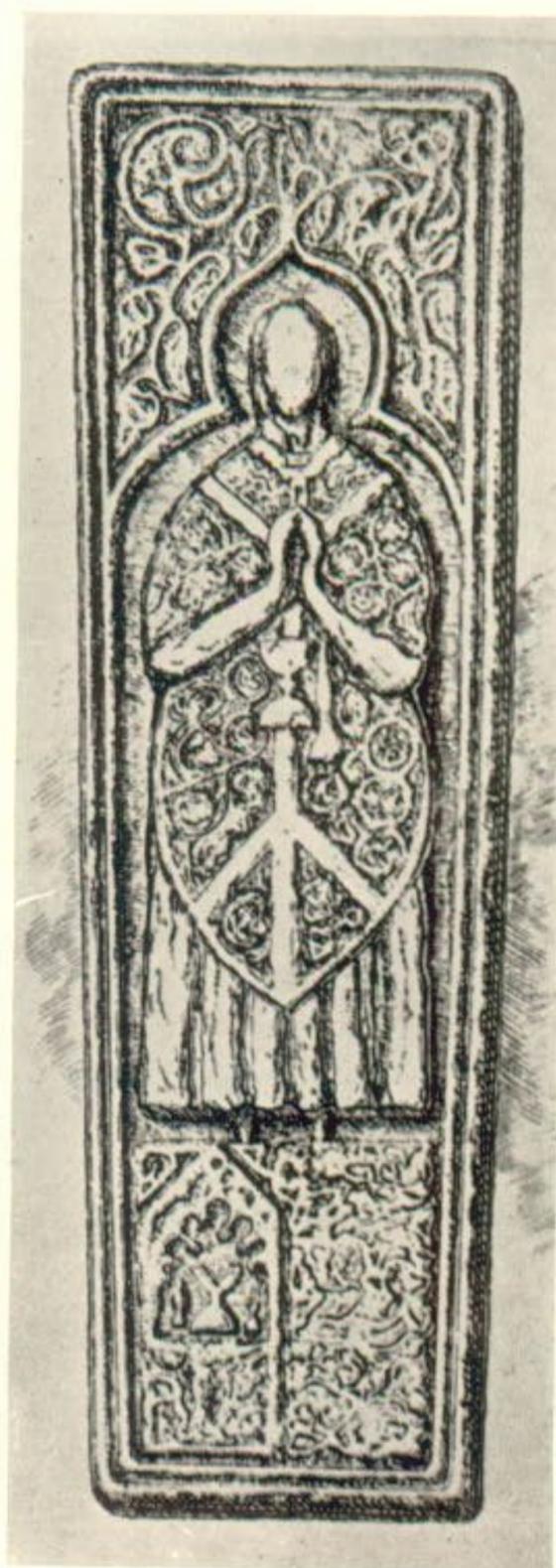
<sup>2</sup> White, Capt. T. P., R.E., F.S.A., *Arch. Sketches in Kintyre*, 1873.

<sup>3</sup> *Reg. de Passelet*, pp. 147-9.

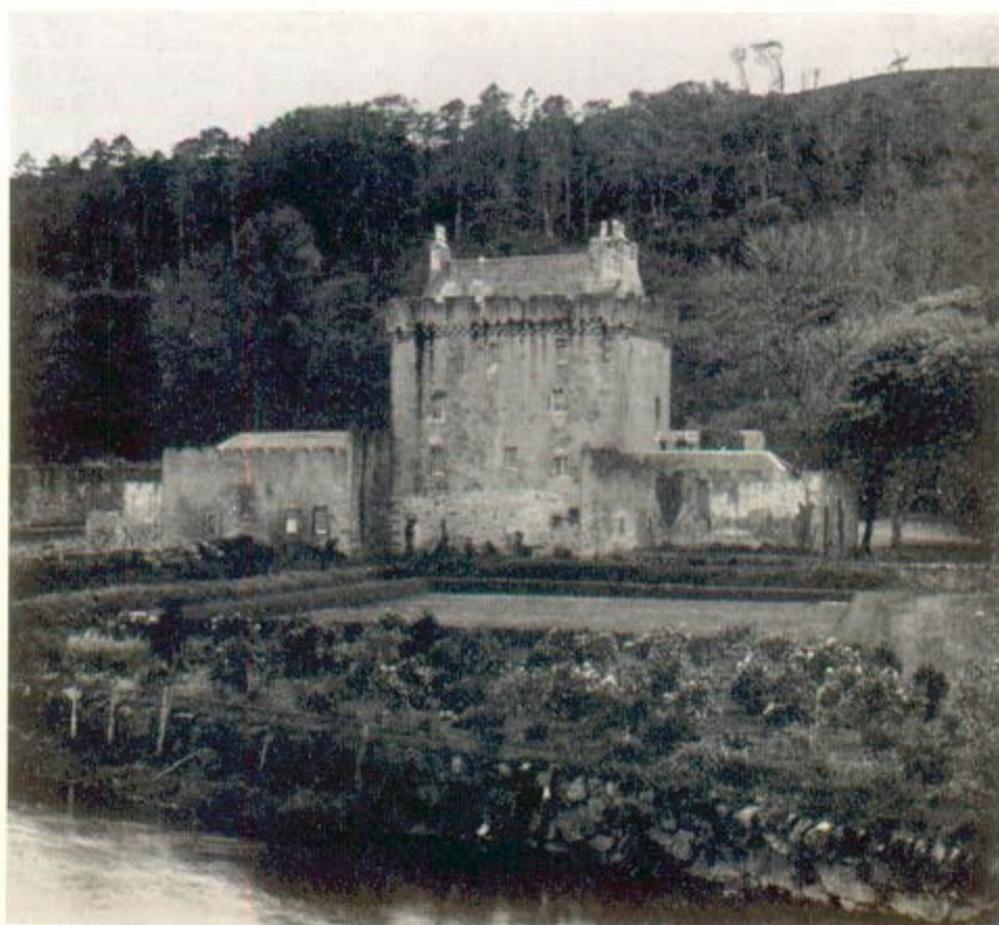
<sup>4</sup> Spottiswoode, *Religious Houses*, ch. ix.



1. Sepulchral slab of warrior, from a drawing by Captain White.



2. Sepulchral slab of ecclesiastic, from a drawing by Captain White.



1. Bishop's Castle from seaward side.



2. Entrance gateway showing above it an armed man on horseback. Through it can be seen the inner door, with heraldic galley and date 1508.

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mystery, and it was the first of the Cistercian abbeys of Scotland to be dissolved. All the others persisted to the Reformation, and their lands were not erected into temporal lordships, or otherwise disposed of, before that event. King James IV, in the letter to Pope Julius in 1512, speaks of it as having been "suppressed," but no formal act of suppression has been traced. The grants of land to Saddell by John, 4th Lord of the Isles, and by Sir Duncan Campbell of Lochawe, made during the first half of the 15th century, would hardly have been made to an abbey in a state of dissolution, and they make its sudden disappearance towards the end of the century all the more difficult to understand. Whether this may have been connected with the disturbed state of the district at that time, or the result of progressive secularisation and waning of religious zeal, can only be matters of conjecture, but it is clear that the two Hamilton bishops were quick to turn the circumstances of its dissolution to the advantage of themselves and their family.

For the photos of the Bishop's castle I am indebted to Mr Duncan Colville, President of the Kintyre Antiquarian Society.