

Mermaids and Muggles: Fantastic Tales and Kintyre Folk

The Mermaids and Muggles exhibition explores the connections that may exist between us and our ancestors, both physical characteristics and more intangible connections.

The portraits and documents featured in the exhibition are from the Anne Campbell Collection held by the Argyll Papers and from the LiveArgyll Archives. Anne was the wife of Duncan Campbell, Sheriff Substitute of Kintyre in the early nineteenth century, and an ancestor of the author, JK Rowling.



The story of the Corphin mermaid, recorded by Duncan Campbell in his role as Sheriff Substitute, provides a springboard for investigating fantastical tales from Kintyre, how and why they arise, and the connections that might exist between generations who believed in fantastic creatures and a descendant who writes about fantastical worlds.

Exhibition Catalogue

The Portraits

1. Anne Campbell (1744-c.1820) [Unknown artist, c.1815]

Anne was the great grand-daughter of Ronald Macdonald. He was saved as a child from the siege of Dunaverty. As the story goes, the Macdonald child was wrapped in a Campbell blanket, this 'cloak of invisibility' protected him from the massacre.

She married Duncan Campbell, Sheriff Substitute of Kintyre, on 23 February 1780 and they lived at Drumore, Campbeltown. They had three children: Dugald, Elizabeth (known as Betsy) and Anne. Later in life, Dugald described her as a 'tender and affectionate mother'.

2. Duncan Campbell (1748-1822), Sheriff Substitute of Kintyre [Unknown artist, c.1810]

In his obituary published in the Scots Magazine, 1822, Duncan is described as a 'patient and indefatigable' judge. 'His manners were unassuming, mild and complacent, his honour and integrity irreproachable. In his domestic duties a loving husband, a kind and affectionate parent, a warm and generous friend. He lived esteemed and revered, and died, as he lived, at peace with all mankind.'



Written in the Landscape

3. Col. Dugald Campbell R.A. (1781-1849) [Unknown artist, c.1848]

Dugald enjoyed a successful military career, having joined the Royal Artillery at the age of 15. In his portrait, he wears the General Service Medal, awarded for action between 1793 and 1814, and the Gold Medal awarded for service in Egypt.

He met his wife, Ann Mary Kerr in Jamaica, and they were married in Edinburgh in 1816. A family member described him as 'a fine hearty old gentleman'.

4. Ann Mary Kerr (1783-1854) [Unknown artist, c.1815]

Ann Mary met Col. Dugald Campbell when his regiment, the 2nd Battalion Royal Regiment of Artillery, was stationed at Fort Royal in Jamaica between 1813 and 1815. They married in 1816 and Ann Mary accompanied Dugald throughout the remainder of his military career. After his retirement, they settled in Edinburgh. A member of her family recalled her 'good and kind and cheerful heart'.

5. Elizabeth MacMillan (1825-1912) [Unknown artist, c.1845]

Elizabeth grew up in Lephonstrath House, Southend. In 1849, she married Alexander Hall, a Ship's Master from Greenock. A merchant, journeying from Valparaiso to Liverpool with Elizabeth and her husband in 1863, comments that 'Mrs Hall ... having no children, shows her love of good manners by allowing her lap-dog to absorb her affection and care, and to run on the table and drink out of her glass'.

In his will, Alexander Hall referred to Elizabeth as 'my dear and faithful wife... in whom I have the most unbounded confidence'.

Original Documents

1. The sworn statement of John McIsaac of his sighting of the mermaid, formally recorded by Duncan Campbell, Sheriff Substitute of Kintyre. (The Argyll Papers, Anne Campbell Collection, AC/01/01)

2. Rental book, 1776, showing the terms of the lease of Corphin to John and Lachlan McIsaac. (The Argyll Papers, Kintyre Rental, 1776)

3. Extract from Catherine Loynachan's testimony, recorded by Duncan Campbell, Sheriff Substitute of Kintyre: 'At Campbeltown the second day of November 1811... compeared Catherine Loynachan, daughter to Lachlan Loynachan herd in Ballinatunie, aged eight years and a half...' (The Argyll Papers, Anne Campbell Collection, AC/01/02)

4. Plan submitted by Duncan Campbell, Sheriff Substitute of Kintyre, to the Duke of Argyll in 1814, for permission to build a new house in the grounds of his house in Campbeltown, known today as Ivybank. (The Argyll Papers, NRAS 1209/3126)



5. Extract from an Account of the Siege of Dunaverty, copied in the 19th century from an original manuscript written by Sir James Turner, Adjutant to Lieut Col Leslie, 1647. The siege of Dunaverty was one of the bloodiest battles during the Wars of the Three Kingdoms. The Royalist army took shelter with Archibald Macdonald of Sanda in Dunaverty Castle, where they were first besieged and then slaughtered by the Covenanting army led by General Leslie. (The Argyll Papers, Anne Campbell Collection, AC/01/04)

6. Plague comes to Kintyre, excerpt from a notebook kept by Jane Margaret MacTaggart (born 1829). Jane was the daughter of Daniel MacTaggart, appointed Procurator Fiscal in 1815 and one of the co-founders Campbeltown Distillery. Jane records tales told by her father about his early life and oral traditions passed down to him. These include claims that houses in Main Street were built using bribery money paid for voting for the Act of Union in 1707; shenanigans by Elizabeth Tollmache, Duchess of Argyll; and a claim that the Duke's Chamberlain assaulted the Town Officer, Ivor MacVicar, in the course of his duties. (LiveArgyll Archives, DR1/351)

7. Witchcraft, an excerpt from notes written by Andrew McKerral on 'The People of Southend: Habits and Customs, Superstitions, Dialects'. This particular set of notes also covers tales of apparitions as well as more mundane matters such as wedding customs and festivals. Mr McKerral was a prominent member of the Kintyre Antiquarian and Natural History Society and their records, which can be accessed at LiveArgyll's archive facility in Lochgilphead, include several other works by him. (LiveArgyll Archives, KASC/1/11/69)

Objects

1. A piece of linen damask believed to have been handwoven at Lephenstrath in Kintyre between 1819 and 1855 and to have belonged to Anne Campbell. (The Argyll Papers, Anne Campbell Collection, AC/03/01)

Suggestions for further reading

Further details of the Corphin mermaid can be found in Angus Martin's 'Kintyre: The Hidden Past' (Grimsay, 2014) and an account was also published in The Scots Magazine in 1811.

Andrew McKerral, 'Kintyre in the 17th Century' (Kintyre Antiquarian and Natural History Society, 2001)

Colonel Charles MacTaggart, 'Life in Campbeltown in the 18th Century' (Campbeltown Courier, 1923)



Written in the Landscape

Cuthbert Bede's 'Argyll's Highlands: Or, Mac Cailein Mor and the lords of Lorne, with traditional tales and legends of the county of Argyll and the Campbells and Macdonalds' (1902) includes the story of the witch of Keil as well as other fantastical stories.

Eric Cregeen & Angus Martin's 'Kintyre Instructions: The 5th Duke of Argyll's Instructions to his Kintyre Chamberlain, 1785-1805' (Grimsay, 2011) provides detailed information on the management of Kintyre by the Duke of Argyll.

The Anne Campbell Collection

The Anne Campbell Collection was donated to the Argyll Papers in 2017 by Shirley Carey, wife of the late Ian Campbell Carey, and their sons, Adrian and Christopher Carey and by James and Caroline Clark, all descendants of Anne Campbell and of the Rev Colin Fisher Campbell, Minister at Lamlash, Arran and Ann Mary MacMillan.

The collection was named after Anne Campbell as the portraits and papers all relate to her, her ancestry or her descendants. It consists of five portraits (all included in the exhibition), a large family tree, a sample of linen believed to have been handwoven at Lephenstrath, and family history research. The collection has been gifted to the Argyll Papers at Inveraray Castle.

Written in the Landscape

The Argyll Papers, Inveraray Castle and LiveArgyll Archives are leading the **Written in the Landscape** project, with the generous support of the Heritage Lottery Fund, Tíree Windfarm Trust, the National Manuscript Conservation Trust, the Clan Campbell Education Foundation, An Iodhlann, Inveraray CARS and the Scottish Council on Archives (SCA).

The project will enable 64 family and estate archive collections to be catalogued and 1500 maps and plans in the Argyll Papers collection to be conserved. Selected records from both archives will be digitised and used to support community projects. Look out for talks, open days and other exhibitions. For further information, please email: archives@inveraray-castle.com or archives@liveargyll.co.uk.

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