THE SCOTTISH TWO-HANDED SWORD

By: Tony Willis

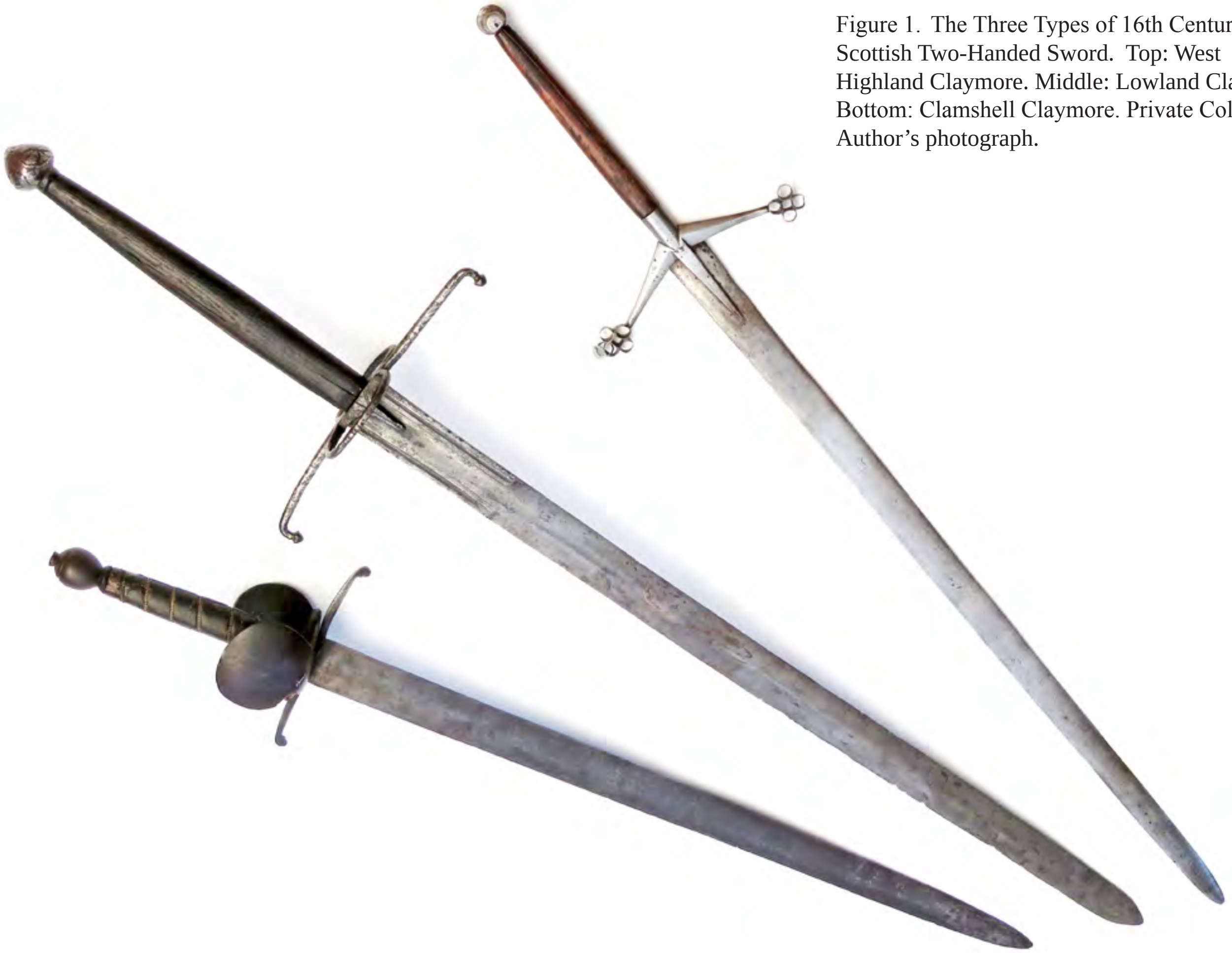

Figure 1. The Three Types of 16th Century Scottish Two-Handed Sword. Top: West Highland Claymore. Middle: Lowland Claymore. Bottom: Clamshell Claymore. Private Collection. Author's photograph.

Introduction

The two-handed sword holds a unique place in the development of arms and armour in Europe during the late medieval period. It evolved from earlier, smaller, single-handed sword types into its fully developed form by the late 15th century. Contemporary illustrations show that it occupied a small but important part of the European armoury and reached its zenith in the 16th century. It was most often used by specially selected and trained men for specific and dangerous tasks on the battlefield, such as first contact with enemy pike and shot formations and protection of the standard. These swordsmen were well rewarded for their efforts and received substantially higher pay than the average soldier.

Two-handed swords were also used for ceremonial functions. Some fighting swords were adapted for this use and as pomp and ritual increased towards the end of the 16th century, two-handed bearing swords of more flamboyant appearance, held point upwards in procession, were specifically manufactured for this purpose. The two-handed sword had largely disappeared across Europe as a fighting weapon by the beginning of the 17th century, although its use in ceremonies continued long after.

The two-handed sword evolved in Scotland around the same time and its widespread adoption there is striking. The sparse surviving records of battles, disputes, duels, inventories and weapons-shows[1] illustrate that they were present in great numbers, almost as the weapon of choice. And, not only were they popular, but the Scots devised three types, each forming a distinct and homogenous group in the 16th century.

Reprinted from the American Society of Arms Collectors Bulletin 120:35-69
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The aim of this paper is threefold. Firstly, it will describe each of the three types in their fully developed forms as they appeared towards the second half of the 16th century. Secondly, it will explore the background to their use, and thirdly, will trace the development of the Scottish sword from its earliest recognisable beginnings to the emergence of two-handed types.

The Three Types of Scottish Two-Handed Sword

Figure 1 shows full length examples of the three types. These are the West Highland Claymore, the Clamshell Claymore and the Lowland Claymore.[2] The Lowland sword is the largest and heaviest. Most surviving examples are well over five feet in length. The West Highland and Clamshell swords are smaller, lighter, more adaptable and dextrous to use, and of similar proportions measuring usually between four and four and a half feet in length.

The blades of Scottish two-handers are generally broad and double-edged designed for cutting as well as thrusting. These were imported mainly from the European blade-making centres of Passau and Solingen into Scotland where they were mounted with their hilts. Scottish smiths and armourers were not able to produce blades of this size, quality or quantity to satisfy demand. However, they were proficient hilt-makers and assemblers, capable of producing swords of sturdy functionality and with the most elegantly balanced profiles.

The unique nature of the hilts is illustrated in Figure 2. The Lowland Claymore has a broad flat quillon span and long grip in proportion with its massive blade. The quillons are slender, of rounded cross-section and abruptly terminate with downward facing knops. Pronounced pointed langets extend down the middle of the blade from the quillon block above which robust ring guards are applied on each side. The pommel is usual for the group, doorknob in shape, with a neck beneath.

The most distinctive feature of the Clamshell Claymore is the guard which consists of two convex clam-like shells which rise upwards from the quillon block towards the pommel to protect the lowermost hand of the user nearest to the hilt, when both hands are applied to the grip. The cross-guard consists of two gently sloping quillons which extend from between the shells and widen into flattened downward facing moulded terminals. The pommel is also typical of the group, doorknob in shape, with an integral button on top and a flared neck beneath.

The hilt of the third sword, the West Highland Claymore, consists of a quillon block with a high collar which extends upwards along the tang, and long langets which extend down the blade on either side, of more pronounced proportions than those mounted on the Lowland Claymore. The quillons are of diamond cross-section, downward sloping and taper towards their terminals which are forged into quatrefoils of circles. The pommel is typically of wheel shape, deeper than it is wide, and of small proportions, seemingly too slight to effectively balance the sword upon which it is mounted.

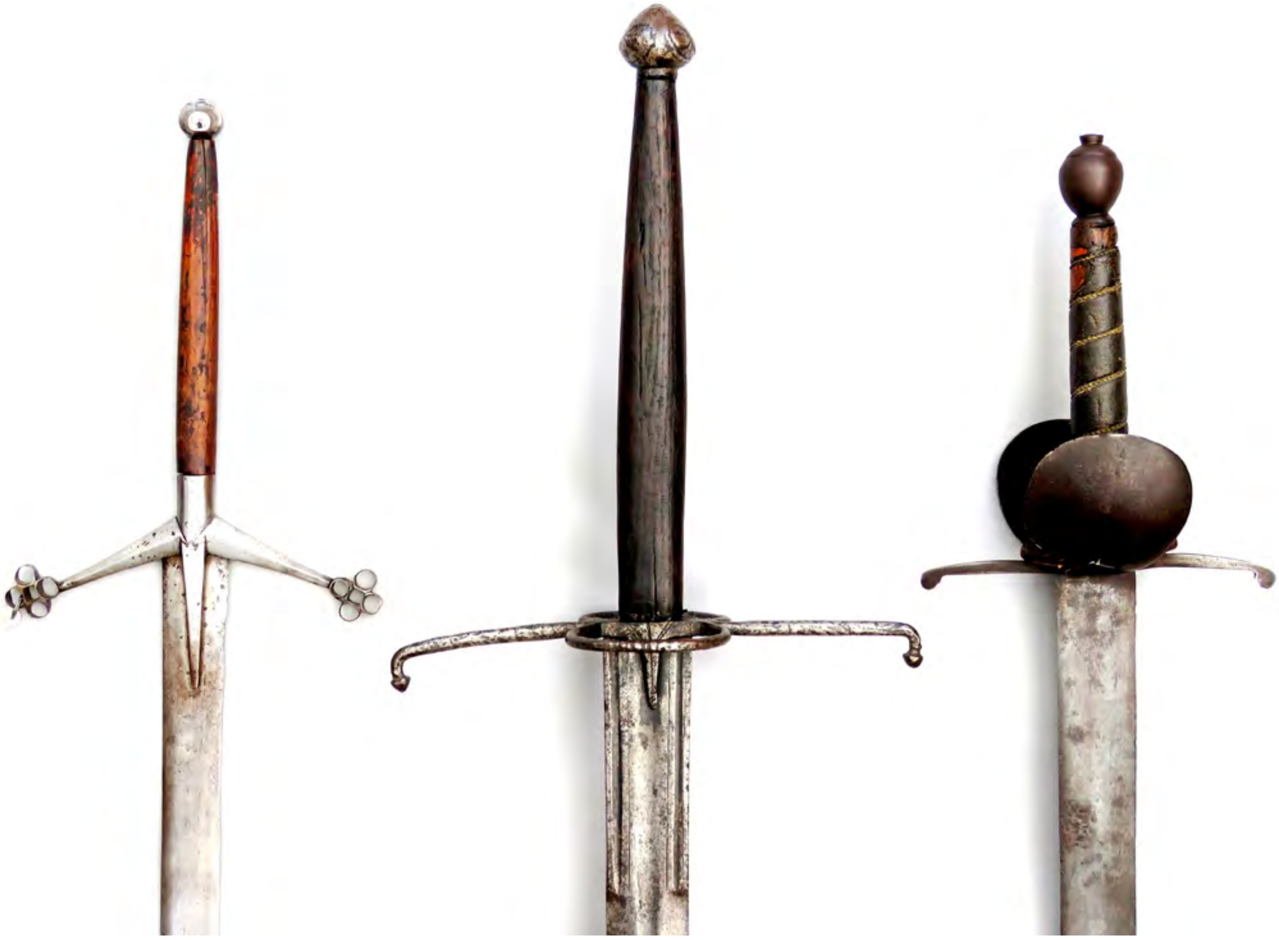

Figure 2. Left: West Highland Claymore. Middle: Lowland Claymore. Right: Clamshell Claymore. Private Collection. Author’s photograph.

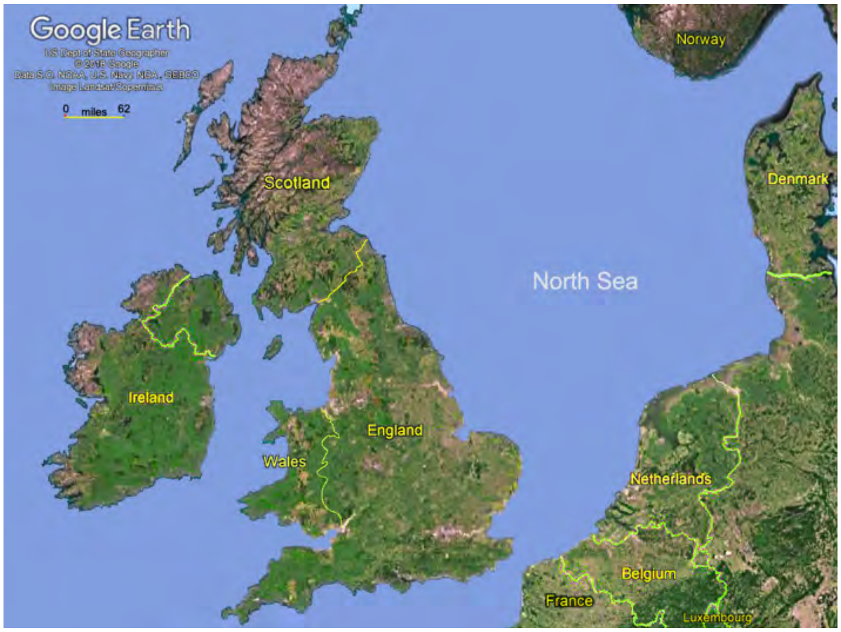

Figure 3. Scotland and its Surrounds. Courtesy Google Earth.

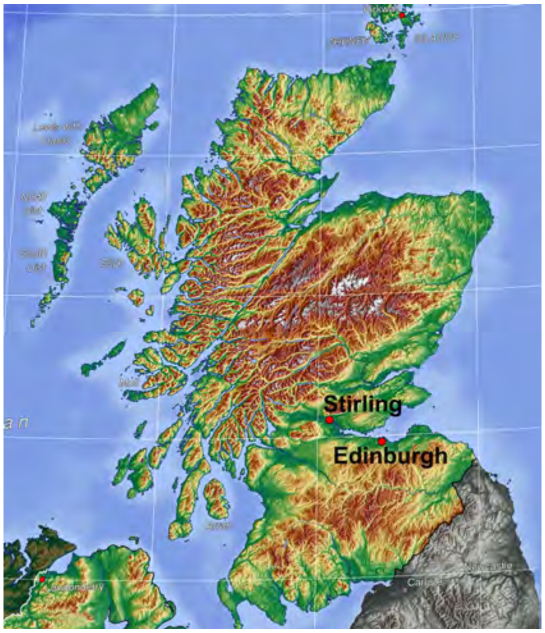

Figure 4. Topography of Scotland.

Political & Social Setting

A great number of two-handed swords alongside other weapons were present in Scotland in the 16th century. The main reason for this was the endemic lawlessness that existed across the country, particularly in areas lying outside the reach of royal control, which was most effective in the capital city and towns. The countryside was a dangerous place, a factor that the inhabitants had lived with for a long time. People carried arms as a matter of course for both self-protection, and attack, which through Scottish eyes at this time was often seen as the best form of defence. The civilian population was more martial and aggressive in nature compared to Scotland's more settled neighbour, England, and compared to most other European countries. Young Scottish men living in otherwise comparable farming communities were trained more intensively in the use of weapons from an early age, and they used them.

Scotland's population in the late medieval period was descended from culturally diverse races of people which over centuries had migrated into this northern expanse from neighbouring lands. They had formed shifting regional kingdoms and fiefdoms over which the Scottish crown had gradually assumed superiority. Figure 3 shows a map of Scotland and its proximity to its neighbours.

Since the end of the 8th century Norwegian Vikings had plundered the coasts of Scotland and had eventually settled there, mingling with the native Gaelic population, particularly in the north and west. The people of the Lowlands spoke Lowland Scots, which was similar to the English language. From the 12th century this was overlain with the Anglo-Norman French language and customs descended from the wave of people that had accompanied and followed William the Conqueror to England in 1066 and had travelled north in search of land and wealth. Robert the Bruce (de Brus) and the Stuart dynasty of Scottish kings were descendants of these Norman adventurers. At the time of his famous victory against the English at Bannockburn in 1314 Bruce would have been conversant in at least three languages current to Scotland; Gaelic, Lowland Scots and Anglo-Norman.

Controlling these culturally diverse regions was a perennial problem for the Scottish Crown. Feuding, raiding and warfare between groups was commonplace. For the ordinary person local life or death concerns were always more pressing matters than the realisation of misty benefits associated with national identity. The Crown had a vast region to rule consisting largely of hilly and mountainous terrain and a craggy coastline (Figure 4). Travel and communication were time consuming. Compared to many other sovereign states in Europe the Scottish Crown was not wealthy. Taxation revenues were low from this land and when necessary, monarchs could only muster enough force to focus on pacifying one part of the realm at a time with occasional shows of strength. The clan system, barely discernible at the time of Robert the Bruce, had emerged by the 15th century from an earlier patchwork of areas controlled by warlords and their followers, to varying degrees compliant with central authority, and with fiercely defended identities and bonds to land which were becoming more firmly entrenched as the 16th century approached.

To exert control over their realms Scottish monarchs appointed powerful magnates with superiorities over the clans in their regions to carry out royal policy in a divisive political system of checks and balances which was often ineffective. The dependence of monarchs on these nobles encouraged their self-interested and competing attempts to influence royal policy for their own benefit. The response from the Crown was to play these magnates off against each other. The volatile stalemate that ensued generally meant that a powerful noble was not able to topple the Crown or a competitor, and the monarch was often unable to remove a rebellious noble, without support from the others. The Crown was especially weak for much of the 16th century during the long minorities of James V and VI, and the disruption of civil war under Mary Queen of Scots, compared to the stronger contemporary realms of England, particularly under Henry VIII and Elizabeth I. At local level clan areas were self-governed hotspots, savage and unruly.

The Three Regions of Scotland

By the 16th century Scotland had settled into three culturally different geographic regions (Figure 5). These are the Lowlands, the East (& Central) Highlands and the West Highlands (& Isles). The use of the three types of two-handed sword is associated with these regions.

It is in the Lowlands that the structure for Scotland's national military organisation could be seen. The capital city of Scotland was Stirling in the first part of the 16th century and Edinburgh in the second. Both cities are in the Lowlands, as are the other major towns and ports which are mainly located along the East Coast. The capital was the seat of government for the whole of Scotland, the royal court and the base for international relations. The region provided the momentum for trade, industry and commerce. By the 16th century French was no longer spoken at court, but its prior importance betrays the Anglo-Norman origins of royal and other notable Lowland lineages (eg Bruce, Stuart and Wallace).

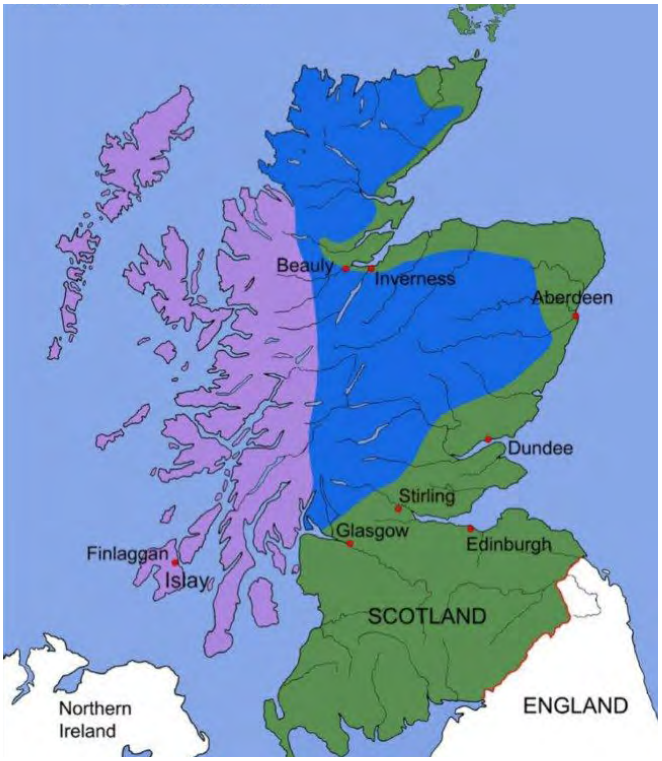

Figure 5. The three regions of Scotland. Green: Lowlands. Blue: East (& Central) Highlands. Purple: West Highlands (& Isles). Note: Some of the western clans also held lands in Northern Ireland. Islay was the seat of the Lords of the Isles and after 1493 the seat of the most senior clan of MacDonald, the MacDonalds of Islay who held lands in Antrim.

The king, and his most important nobles and lairds, were surrounded by permanent retainers and professional men-at-arms. These formed the nucleus of an armed force which could be expanded into an army when required. The Lowland Claymore is a massive weapon and was used on foot by men of high status who were trusted within these retinues. Its size is at least a match for the largest two-handed swords illustrated in contemporary continental manuscripts, used by men of great strength in the thick of battle, and, as a secondary function, in ritual peacetime procession.[3] Its huge size precludes the Lowland Claymore from being a weapon used by the general soldiery. It required a lot of training to use effectively. It can leave the user vulnerable when in use requiring some team-like support to protect his exposed flanks when the sword is wielded in battle. The sword was a specialist part of the Lowland armoury, carried mainly by men that represented royal authority, and used both as a weapon and stately symbol.

The Clamshell Claymore is a smaller two-handed sword, more adaptable as an all-round skirmishing weapon than the Lowland two-hander and was certainly more cosmopolitan. It was used throughout the Lowland region, increasingly so in those places most distant from seats of royal authority. In the 16th century the lawless lands in the south near the border with England were populated by the riding clans with names that dominated local territories (eg Johnstone, Armstrong, Scott, Maxwell and Elliott) collectively known to history as the "Border Rievers". This was a horse-based culture where clans[4] constantly feuded with each other and raided into England, behaviour which was mirrored by English raids into Scotland, much to the chagrin of the monarchs of both countries who had set up courts of march wardens to control this violent but traditional way of life.

By the 16th century the Gaelic language had retreated into the Highland regions. Whilst Gaelic speaking, and Gaelic in culture, the people of the East Highlands were eastern facing, interacting with the northern Lowland populations which surrounded the "Highland Line". Society was organised on a clan basis and was also somewhat feudal in nature. Whilst many clan names in the region were Gaelic in origin (eg Mackay, Ross, Munro, MacGillivray and Mackintosh), some were of Anglo-Norman descent (eg Fraser, Menzie, Stewart, Grant and Gordon) that had been assimilated into the Highland way of life. This fusion of East Highland societies achieved a tolerable co-existence with the Lowlands and through this benefitted from exposure to European influences. Lowland markets offered an outlet for the region's surpluses. East Highlanders and Lowlanders fought together as mercenaries in the armies of Sweden where some of these soldiers formed noble dynasties.[5] The East Highlanders also maintained their cultural difference and a propensity to explosions of violence and feuding which sometimes spilled over into the northern Lowlands. To the vexation of Lowland farmers cattle raids into their pastures by the more wayward clans was an endemic way of life. As well as in the Lowlands of the north and south, the Clamshell Claymore was also used in this East Highland region.

The West Highlands was a different Gaelic entity. Its people were western facing towards the Irish Sea and Gaelic Ireland which during the 16th century was cocooned in a world of internecine localised war. They did not regard themselves as vassals of a remote Scottish king. The West Highlands was a post-Viking era sea-based culture where travel between communities was mainly by boat amongst rocky promontories and islands. Much of the West Highlands had been a sub-kingdom of Norway which was only ceded to Scotland in 1266. Many of the clans had Norse origins (eg MacDonald, MacDougall, MacIvor, MacAskill and MacLeod) as well as Gaelic (eg MacLean, Campbell, Mackenzie, MacKinnon, MacFie and MacNeil) which had fused into a distinct regional Gaelic culture. Until its collapse in 1493 much of the West, and its clans, had been autonomously governed by the Lords of the Isles, whose progenitors claimed descent from Norse and Irish kings, and originated the genealogy of Clan Donald which had propagated the various MacDonald clans. The West Highlanders did not generally mix with the East Highlanders, from whom they were divided by natural barriers, and regarded them as a separate cultural entity.

The collapse of government by the Lords of the Isles had deprived the MacDonald clans and their allies of a cohesion in leadership which was to be their downfall, but in the 16th century they still formed the most powerful and recalcitrant group in the West. The inability of the Crown to effectively govern the region in the wake of the Lordship had opened a Pandora's Box of feud, warfare and ineffective relations with the Crown, which eventually worked against them. As the century matured the way was paved for Clan Mackenzie in the north and Campbell in the south, to grow stronger and assume positions of increased power and landholding as Crown appointed magnates overseeing the region at the expense of the MacDonalds and their allies. Whilst originating in the West Highlands, these two powerful clans had never respected the deep Gaelic cultural roots of the West, preferring instead to court favour directly with the king in a "Lowland" manner for their advancement. King James VI of Scots was not a supporter of Gaelic culture and regarded the language itself, which he referred to as "Irish", as a major cause of problems in the Highlands. Yet he did recognise a difference between the two regions, describing the Highlanders of the East as tolerable but not trustworthy, whilst those of the West he regarded as unworthy of a place in a civilised world, frequently reviling them in blistering rants concerning their cruelty, barbarity, incivility, disloyalty, etc, etc…which in many ways was true.

The West Highland Claymore evolved in this region as a unique Gaelic representation of its culture. This sword type, like the similar-sized Clamshell, is an adaptable weapon, suitable for different circumstances and terrains and was much used by West Highland mercenaries fighting in Ireland.

Given that Scotland's only international land border is with England, Scotland was rarely at war as a nation abroad in the late medieval period, other than sporadically with its neighbour. In contrast, the nation was almost permanently at war with itself. By the turn of the 16th century increasing clan warfare and raiding were the main drivers for the proliferating use of weapons in the remoter regions of the Lowlands, as well as in the Eastern and Western Highlands. The century is characterised by bloody feuds and known in lore as the "time of the raids".

The nature of this warfare was mainly small scale skirmishing, raiding and ambushing, in an agile form of moving contest and fast-paced pitched battles. In this respect, the Clamshell and West Highland Claymores, compared to their heavier Lowland cousin, provided a portable and high-impact weapon more suitable for this form of warfare. This kind of conflict also revealed the Scottish warrior at his best. The leaders of the huge cumbersome Lowland royal armies, with ranks swelled by recruits from the Highlands for Scotland's two momentous battles of the 16th century, and defeats, against the English at Flodden in 1513, and Pinkie in 1547, never effectively harnessed these strengths, which were much valued abroad by foreign armies, but squandered at home.

The drivers for this continuous small-scale warfare in the regions are worth closer inspection. For centuries in the hinterlands of Scotland people had collected in clan communities for protection. By the 16th century through the absorption of weaker groups and their lands, clans had become large and powerful organisations, led by autocratic chiefs, living in imposing strongholds and sometimes with no legal title to the lands they occupied. The wealth and power of the chiefs depended upon large numbers of people to occupy and sustain themselves on clan lands, swordsmen to defend the interests of the clan, and numbers of cattle. Cattle were an important source of food, raw materials and capital. Consequently, cattle were an attractive form of mobile booty and herds were key targets for clan raids.

Whilst the clan system bound people together for protection in a locality it also had its weaknesses. All over Scotland in the 16th century clan enmities and feuds could be long lasting and intense. Opportunities to attack and wipe out communities existing on the fringes of enemy clan bounds would be taken. Whilst few records, particularly in the Gaelic speaking parts of Scotland, have come down to us, those that have give an indication of the violent nature of society at the time. For example, in 1577, in line with an ongoing bloody feud, the MacLeods of Dunvegan on Skye in the Western Isles, attacked the island of Eigg, a dependency of the mainland based MacDonald clan of Clanranald. The MacLeods massacred the entire population of just under 400 people. This brief example is but one of many.

If part of a clan population was wiped out it had to be quickly replaced. The need for people to hold land meant that almost all terrain capable of sustaining a community had people living upon it. In times of good harvests communities could sustain themselves, but resources were being stretched in some places. Poor harvests pushed some areas into starvation in winter.

It is now clear that the arrival of the climatic phenomenon known as The Mini Ice Age in the third quarter of the 16th century further aggravated an already volatile situation. Temperatures dropped by up to 2 degrees C for the next century which caused seas and rivers to freeze over in winter and inevitably reduced harvest yields. With this onset, some communities could no longer sustain themselves on a permanent basis and to survive regularly raided other clans out of necessity to plunder their resources to supplement their own. This behaviour inevitably fuelled a spiral of clan warfare of increased intensity. Some clans temporarily set aside their differences and organised themselves into large raiding parties organised on military lines focussed on specific lucrative targets, usually in the Lowlands, moving like small armies at night, well-armed and expecting fierce resistance.

Finding territory upon which the growing number of sons of chiefs and clan leaders could live and raise families was also a problem which escalated the demand for land. To improve their lot some of the more powerful clans forcibly took over the lands of smaller less important neighbours and evicted, or exterminated, the residents in favour of their own. This led to an increase in the number of "Broken Men", people with no land and no option but to live in inhospitable agriculturally unproductive areas and organise themselves into brigand bands living solely by robbery and raiding. Sometimes these men and their families were adopted by clans depleted of manpower. Events caused layers of historic obligations to be disrupted when new loyalties became necessary and more feuds ensued. Consequently, for many often conflicting reasons, the number of men being pitched into violence was escalating towards the end of the century.

By the last quarter of the 16th century the two-handed sword was at the peak of its use in Scotland. Demand for swords had intensified and the supply of blades from the main continental blade-making centres had become more economic as production meth-

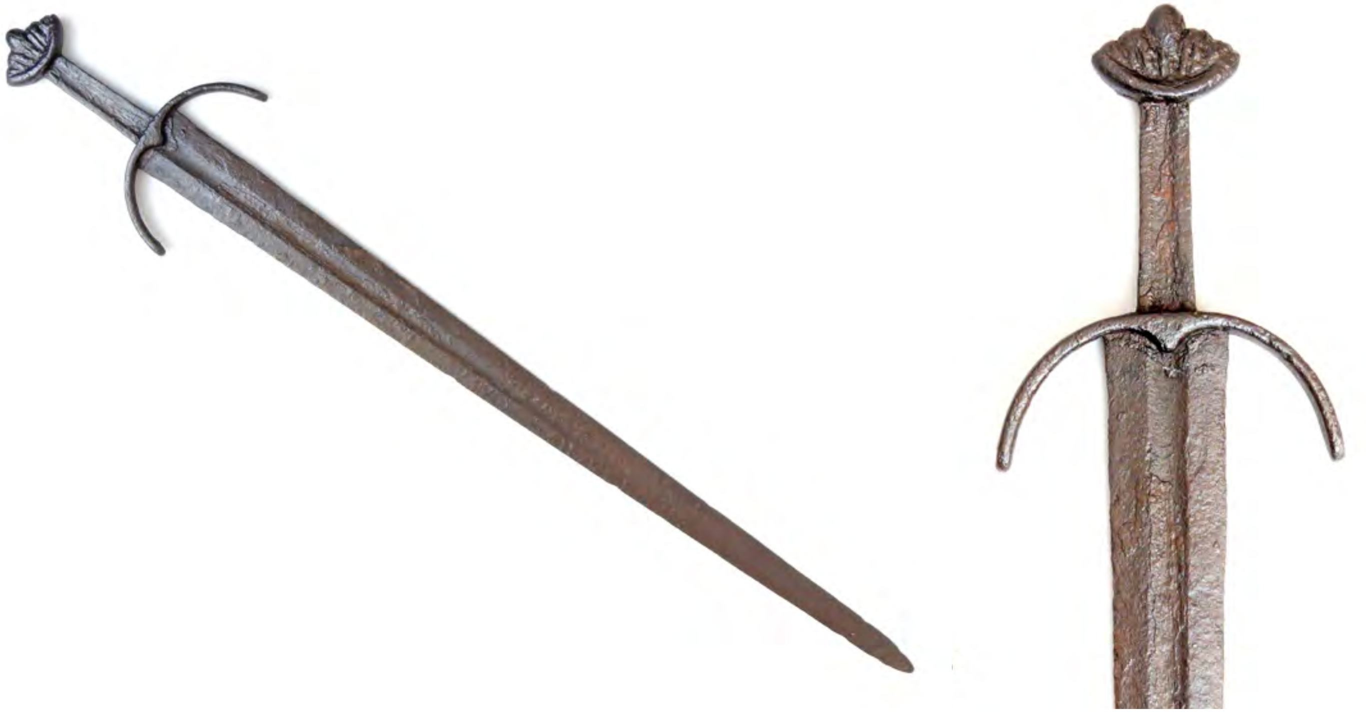

Figure 6 illustrates an example of the Scandinavian influenced sword used in Scotland and neighbouring countries prior to the arrival of the first uniquely Scottish sword type. It has a broad tapering blade with a pronounced central fuller. The distinctive hilt consists of a cross guard with downward curved quillons and small pointed langets which extend down the blade on each side. The pommel is of late lobated type, with a pyramid-like arrangement of five lobes on top of a concave crescent which forms the base of the pommel. The central lobe upon which the tang is peened is the most prominent and each is decorated with an incised middle line.[6]

ods improved. However, life for the young men wielding these swords was a far cry from the romantic warrior existence painted by Victorian novelists. Compared to today their lives were harsh and often short.

Evolution of the Scottish Two-Handed Sword from the earliest Scottish Sword Forms

The Scottish two-handed sword evolved from single-handed swords of Scandinavian influenced design used in Scotland and its surrounds from the late Viking age of the 11th century through to the post-Viking era of the 13th. After the emergence of the first distinctive Scottish sword type in the late 13th century, the Scottish sword developed at a more rapid pace into more advanced and larger forms.

The study of this progression in Scotland is fortunate in that there was a tradition of carving grave slabs, effigies and high crosses from stone which was fully established by the end of the 12th century. This custom developed further in the West Highlands to become a unique form of Gaelic art, as it died out elsewhere, until the craft came to an end as a whole in the middle of the 16th century. Many of these grave carvings incorporate patterns of interlace, symbols and motifs including depictions of contemporary swords which are usually life size and often shown in their scabbards. The swords are remarkably detailed and almost certainly copied from individual physical examples.

Only a few slabs and effigies which depict swords are inscribed with dates. The dates of others can be estimated by the association of changing styles and features with the dated slabs. Whilst we can be confident about the specific dates of some carvings, and the approximate dates of the rest, we cannot assume the same dates for the swords depicted. These were manufactured some time before, but how long before, will differ from example to example, and for the study of early Scottish swords this is an important piece of informed guesswork.

At a time of developing blade technology and hilt design, it seems likely that if the users of swords during this period could afford a prestigious burial, they would also possess the most modern equipment available to them, including their swords. In the opinion of the writer, therefore, it seems to be a reasonable assumption that the date of manufacture of a Scottish sword depicted in a carving during this time of change would predate its image by somewhere between 10 and 20 years. Although of course this assumption cannot be held hard and fast. Some older swords may have been featured, not because they were part of a late medieval arms race, but because of some ancestral connection.

Of the five examples of this sword type presently known, the find locations of only two have been recorded. One was found in the River Ouse in the North of England and another at Korsoygaden in Norway. Earlier swords bearing some similarities have been found in Norway, Finland and England.

The excavation of a Dominican Friary in Edinburgh 2014, which was founded in 1260, unearthed a grave slab with a sword carved upon it which is illustrated in Figure 7. It has very similar proportions to that in Figure 6.

A grave slab known as Ionnes' Stone, found at the site of the Church of the Blessed Virgin founded in 1198 north of Edinburgh at the coastal town of Dundee is also carved with a very similar sword.[7] A fragment of a slab at Inchmahome Priory, west of Stirling near Aberfoyle, which was founded in 1238, and the Ardrossan Sarcophagus, discovered at the medieval church at Ardrossan

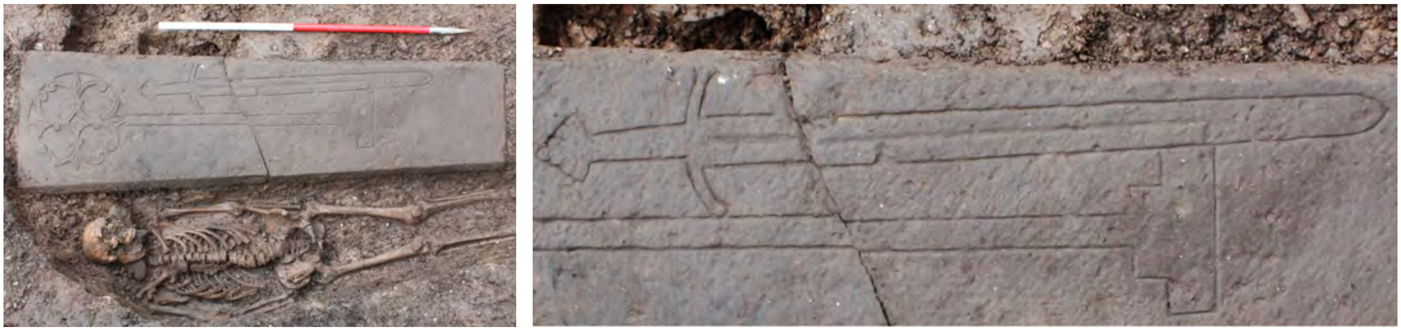

Figure 7. Grave Slab excavated at Infirmary Street in Edinburgh on the site of a Dominican Friary founded in 1260 showing a sword of Scandinavian type. Courtesy of Headland Archaeology.

on the south west coast of Scotland in 1911, also show similar carved swords. Several 13th century stone grave slabs at Iona and Finlaggan in the Western Isles also depict this sword type. Two further slabs in England at Ebberston Church in North Yorkshire, and the tomb effigy of Robert Curthose, at Gloucester Cathedral, show similar swords. Further west in North West Ireland a 13th century slab, at the coastal church of Clonca in Donegal, is carved with perhaps the best surviving representation of this sword type (Figure 8).

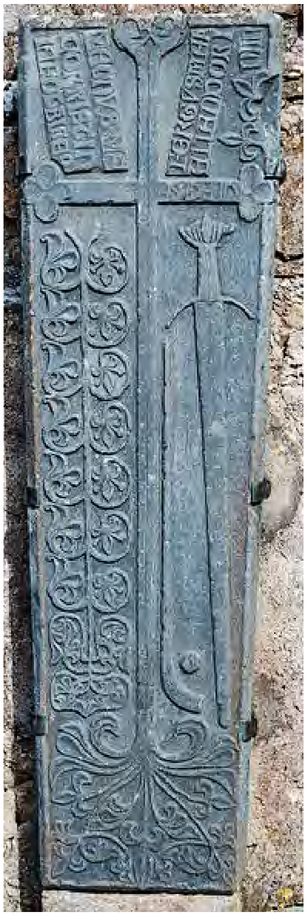

Figure 8. 13th century grave slab at Clonca Church, Donegal, North West coast of Ireland. This is an exceptionally well-preserved carving of the Scandinavian type sword used across Scotland and its surrounding region from the 11th to 13th centuries. The stick which resembles a golf club carved alongside the sword, and the ball, may represent equipment for what is now the Gaelic Irish sport of hurling. It has been proposed that games of this nature were played between communities to settle disputes in the first instance rather than resort to war. In this respect the occupant of this grave may have been an accomplished warrior and sportsman.

Towards the beginning of the 14th century the first sword form of uniquely Scottish type emerged. Surviving examples are extremely rare. To date only three are known. One of these is in the National Museums of Scotland (Figure 9).

The sword is of single hand length and dates to the time of the Scottish Wars of Independence (1286 to 1329) fought against the English in which a number of battles occurred including the famous Scottish victories of Stirling Bridge in 1297 and Bannockburn in 1314. Its evolution from the earlier Scandinavian style sword is visible in that the cross guard has downward sloping arms and langets. However, the quillon block is more advanced with a pronounced collar and the guard arms are forged thick and straight with swollen terminals. The pommel is a Scottish adaptation of the European wheel pommel, formed from bossed out side plates forged onto a middle band. The pointed pommel extension seems to be a skeuomorphic design throwback to the pronounced middle lobe of the pommel on the preceding sword type. The illustrated sword has a single-edged, rather than the more usual double-edged blade which appears on some other, earlier Viking swords found in the Scottish / Irish region.[8]

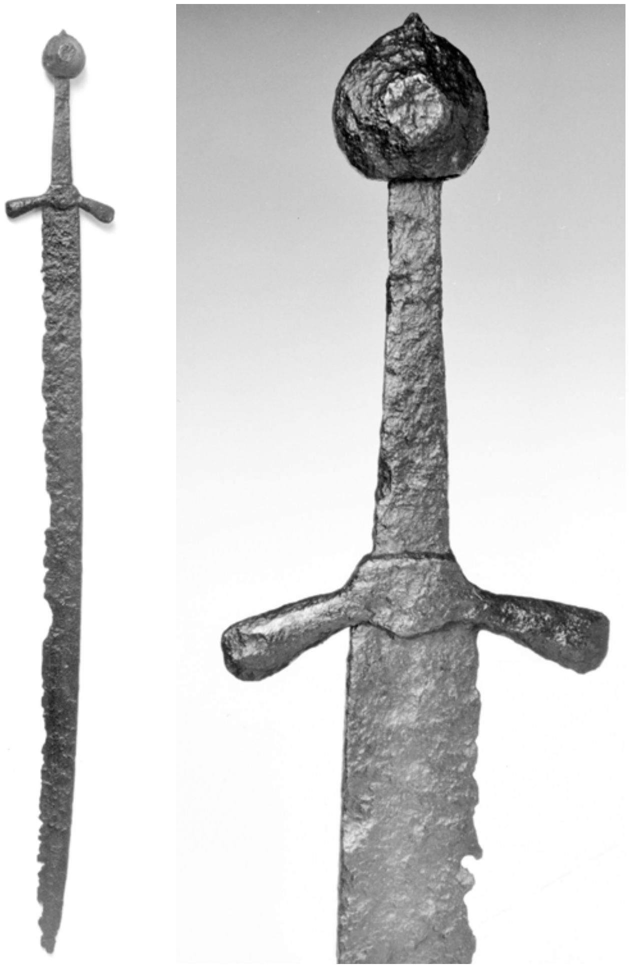

Figure 9 . Early 14th Century Scottish Sword in the National Museums of Scotland, Edinburgh. Author’s photographs.

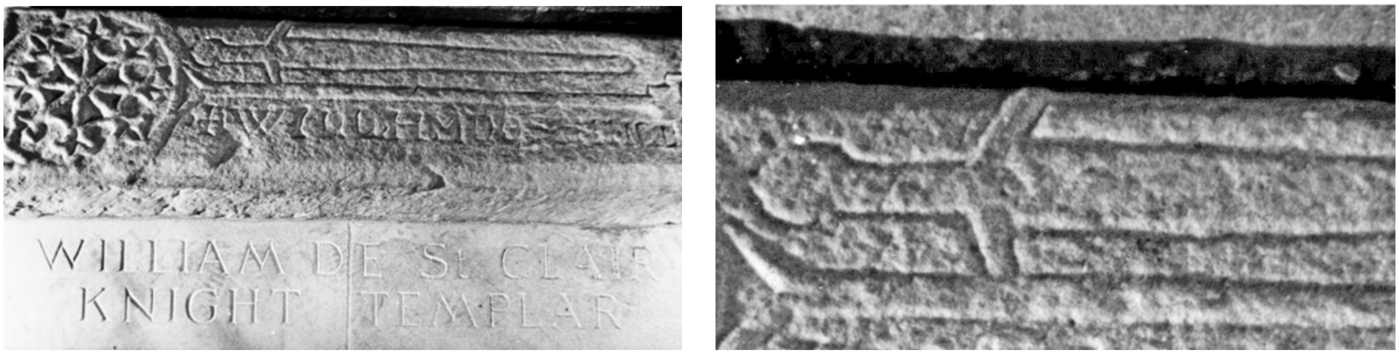

Figure 10. Grave Slab of Sir William de Sinclair. Courtesy of Rosslyn Chapel

A very similar sword in style and proportion is depicted on the grave slab of Sir William de Sinclair at Rosslyn Chapel in the Eastern Scottish Lowland region of Midlothian (Figure 10). Sir William was killed in 1330 whilst supposedly carrying the heart of Robert the Bruce on crusade against the Moors in Spain. The sword hilt on the slab shows straight, thick, sloping quillons, small langets and a pommel of circular wheel type with a protrusion on top. Further north on the east coast, a more worn grave slab fragment found at St Cyrus in Kincardineshire shows a similar hilt size and form.[9]

During this period different vying interests in Scotland were beginning to solidify into different regional expressions. Angus Og, the Lord of the island of Islay in the Western Isles, had assisted Robert the Bruce in his quest for kingship and at the Battle of Bannockburn in 1314. Angus was rewarded and became the most important magnate in the Western Isles. His successors became the Lords of the Isles and leaders of Clan Donald ruling a vast swathe of territory with a federation of subject MacDonald and allied clans. The Lords of the Isles fostered a resurgence in traditional Gaelic learning, arts and expression. At the same time the Lowland nobilities were becoming established but were more outward in orientation, absorbing European tastes, particularly through the alliance of Scotland with France which had prompted Scots to serve abroad alongside the French king against Edward III of England.

Towards the end of the 14th century the West Highlands and Lowlands were moving more keenly in opposite cultural and political directions with the East Highland Gaelic region lying in between. This evolving difference is indicated by three 14th century slabs in a chapel at Kilmory Knap, a remote peninsular in the West Highlands in Argyll (Figure 11). The cross guards of the three swords depicted are clearly like that on de Sinclair's slab in the Lowland East. Of significance is the continued use of the earlier lobated pommel type, which is an indication of the slower pace of change and absorption of European influences in the West. The sword on the slab to the right is of the same date as the de Sinclair slab. The slabs to the left and middle with more advanced decorative styles and imposing pommels on the swords are some decades later.

At the end of the 14th century, Donald, the second Lord of the Isles was one of the most powerful nobles in Scotland. Through marriage he had a claim to the Earldom of Ross, in Northern Scotland, which was opposed by the Regent, the Duke of Albany.

John's claim was also opposed by some of the most powerful clans of the Eastern Highlands, particularly the Mackays, Frasers and their allies. To press his claim Donald invaded the East Highlands with a force of 10,000 men, plundering along the way, then headed towards Aberdeen in the Northern Lowlands which he had promised to burn.

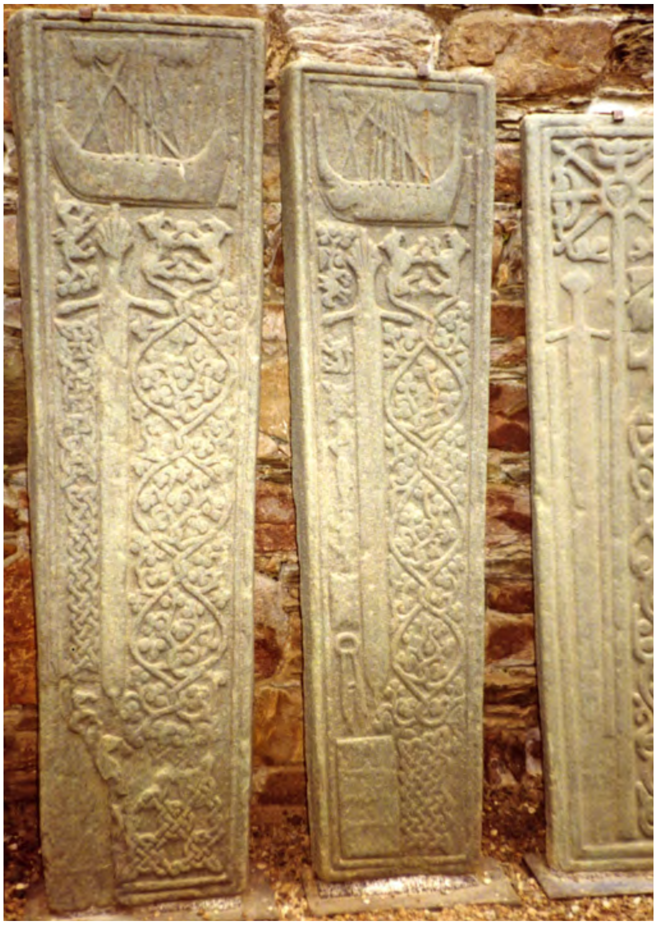

Figure 11. 14th century grave slabs, Kilmory Knap Chapel, Argyll, West Highlands. The cross guards of these swords are like that carved on the William de Sinclair grave slab at Rosslyn Chapel. The pommels show the continued use of the earlier lobated type in the West. Author's photograph.

A hastily assembled army commanded by the Earl of Mar met Donald's forces north of Aberdeen at the Battle of Harlaw in 1411, which unreliable records indicate ended in a bloody draw. Harlaw was one of many battles conducted between the nobles of the West Highlands and those of the East Highlands and Northern Lowland regions during a series of seven invasions from the West carried out by the Lords of the Isles until the Lordship was forfeited in 1493. Inverness was captured numerous times and on one occasion

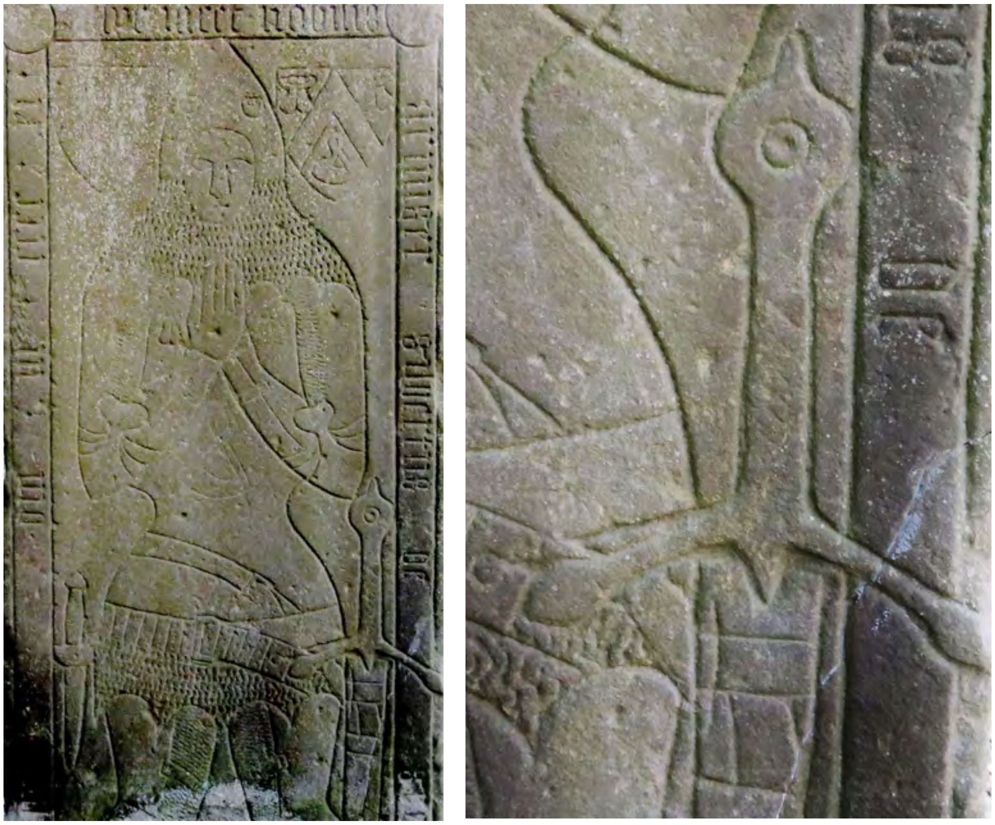

Figure 12. Tomb slab of Sir Gilbert de Greenlaw, Kinkell Church, Aberdeenshire. The effigy shows the Scottish sword type as it appeared by the late 14th / early 15th century. Author’s photographs.

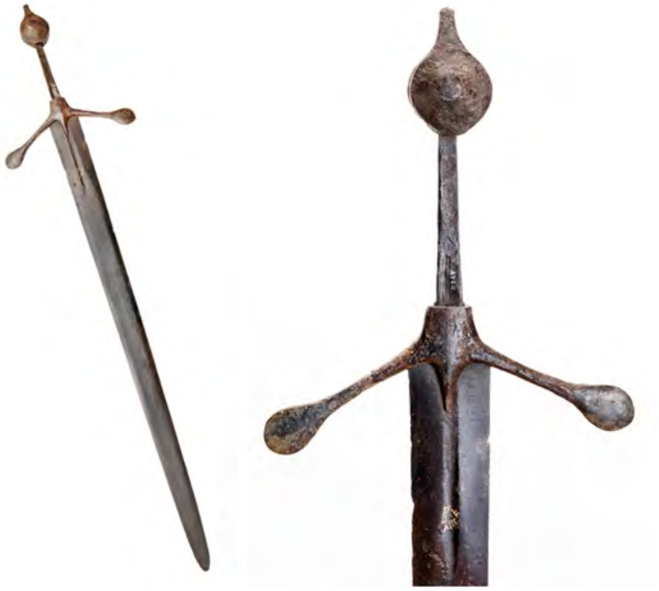

Figure 13. Early 15th Century Scottish Sword, Glasgow Art Gallery and Museum, Kelvingrove. Courtesy of Glasgow Museums.

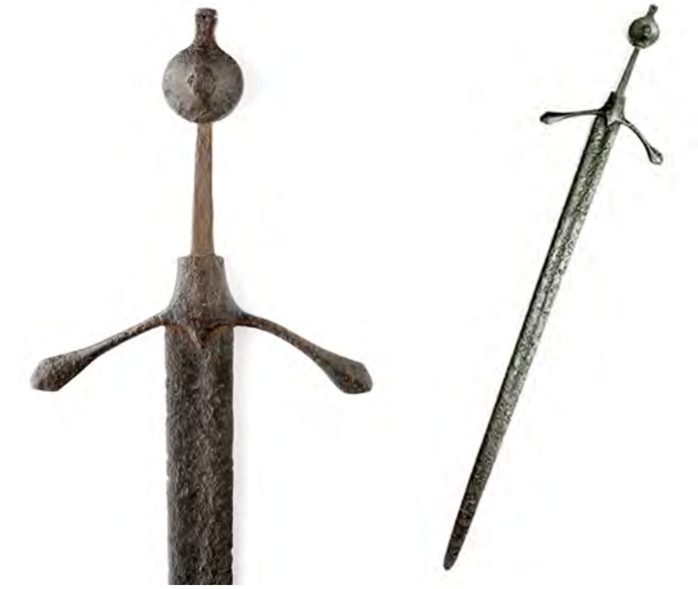

Figure 14. 15th Century Scottish Sword, Kienbusch Collection. Courtesy of the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

was occupied for over three years.

Mar’s army had a considerable number of knights at its apex. The tomb slab of Sir Gilbert de Greenlaw, who died in the battle, stands at Kinkell churchyard in Aberdeenshire (Figure 12). He wears full armour in the English / European manner. Of interest is his sword which was probably manufactured towards the end of the 14th century. It is a clear development from the earlier swords discussed above. It is larger, approaching two-handed or “hand-and-a-half” size, and although the blade width is disguised by its scabbard, it is a robust weapon. The sloping quillons are longer, slender, and now terminate in more developed, flat, spoon-shaped terminals. Furthermore, the langets are longer and more pointed, as is the protrusion on top of the wheel-shaped pommel.

Once more, the study of extant examples of this sword type is limited because so few have survived. To date four are known. The best-preserved example is on display in Glasgow’s Art Gallery & Museum at Kelvingrove (Figure 13).

This is a fine robust sword with similar features to the de Greenlaw sword other than the pommel top extension, which is thicker and with a wider flatter top than that shown on the slab. This is a later feature and for this reason the sword probably dates to the second quarter of the 15th century.

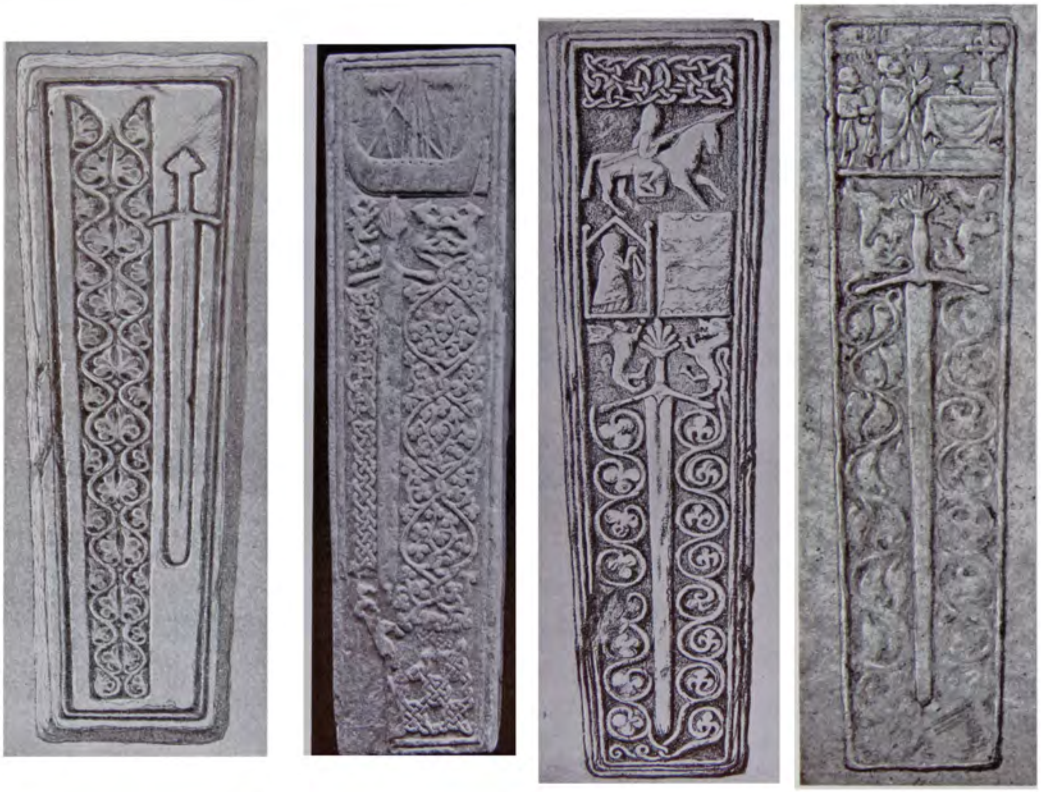

Figure 15. Grave slabs showing left to right the evolution in the West Highlands of the “de Greenlaw” type hilts with lobated pommels from the late 13th to mid-15th centuries. Courtesy of HMSO.

A second sword in this group, more slender in its proportions than the Kelvingrove sword, is in the Kienbusch Collection of Arms and Armour at the Philadelphia Museum of Art (Figure 14).

The pommel top of this sword has developed further compared to the Kelvingrove sword and that on the de Greenlaw slab, into an extension of more oblong and columnar shape. The quillon terminals are also diamond shaped. These are later features which date the sword to the mid-15th century. The pommel construction is complex. It consists of two bossed out side-plates which are brazed onto a middle band with the convex sides facing outwards. The middle band does not form a complete circle, but towards the top, extends upwards to form the left and right sides of the tang extension. The spaces front and back between the top of each circular boss, and the tops of the vertical middle band extensions, are filled with two small plates brazed onto the structure. The tang end is peened over a square shaped plate at the top of the column to complete the pommel. This sword has no provenance. The other two swords in this group were found in Ayrshire in South West Scotland and at Toome Bar on the River Bann in Ireland and lack pommels. Ten other swords in fragmentary excavated condition, also found in Ireland, are closely related but in such poor condition that it is difficult to draw conclusions other than to observe similarities with what we may now refer to as the de Greenlaw Group.[10]

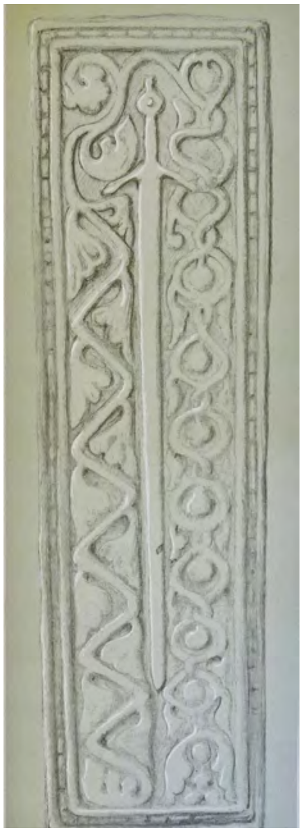

Figure 16. Grave slab with a sword of “de Greenlaw” type at Kilmichael mounted with a wheel pommel (James Drummond, “Sculptured Monuments of Iona and the West Highlands”, Archaeologica Scotica, 1881, Plate LXII)

In the West early 15th century tomb slabs depicting this sword type are still mounted with lobated pommels. Figure 15 shows a sequence of slabs showing sword evolution of lobated pommel type over a period of 200 years from the late 13th to the mid-15th centuries from left to right. The pommels on the later carvings become more exaggerated, and presumably heavier, to balance increasing blade sizes and represent the last flourish of archaic Viking or Scandinavian-influenced hilt design. Unfortunately, despite the relatively large number of grave slabs depicting these swords, none have yet come to light. It seems very likely that both sides at Harlaw were armed with swords with de Greenlaw cross guards, those of the West mounted with lobated pommels and those from the East with pommels of wheel type.

Some grave slabs show that the wheel pommel appeared in the West and began to replace the lobated type around the third quarter of the 15th century. Figure 16 shows a sword with a wheel pommel on a slab at Kilmichael in the West Highlands which is very similar to the Keinbusch sword in profile.

This suggests that for a period of time just after the midpoint of the 15th century the de Greenlaw type sword was used across Scotland, in both Gaelic and Lowland areas, mounted with the wheel pommel. It was also used in Gaelic Ireland, and most likely sometimes made there under Scottish instruction, given that some clans, like the MacDonalds, had held land in the North East of Ireland as well as in the West of Scotland since the early 15th century. The sword in Figure 13 is thought to have been found at Bonmargie Friary, at Ballycastle in Antrim, sometime in the middle of the 20th century. The Friary lies in the middle of lands then occupied by the MacDonalds. Antrim is but a short distance from Islay which was the centre of MacDonald dominions.

At the beginning of the fourth quarter of the 15th century the de Greenlaw sword was replaced in the West with proto, or transitional, types of the West Highland Claymore, which were also used in Ireland. By then the lobated pommel had come to the end of its life. None are so far recorded on depictions of any hilt types that postdate the de Greenlaw model. It was doubtlessly replaced in the East Highlands and Lowlands at the same time with sword designs influenced by developments in Europe. In Ireland, the native Irish developed a sword type of uniquely Gaelic Irish invention, the "Open-Ring" pommel sword, which is not covered in this paper.[11] Whilst sword styles across the region converged into the de Greenlaw sword form for a short time, its replacements were different and distinct in style, more appropriately reflecting the deepening regional and cultural identities and differences as the 16th century approached.

Some surviving records of the contents of armouries belonging to English nobles in the 14th and 15th centuries occasionally highlight Scottish swords amongst the many others. The uniqueness of Scottish swords was obviously recognised and regarded as different to English and French native types. Whether these were of lobated or wheel pommel type is not known.

A paper by Dr Ralph Moffat[12] ties together many of these threads to conclude that "Scottishness" was recognised by some English knights not only for unique sword design, but also because of the attractive finish on many. Some of the hilts were coated with copper, or silver, to give a stylish appearance especially when polished. The sword in Figure 13 has traces of a copper or bronze coating on the pommel,[13] which probably once covered the entire hilt. This practice may represent a continuation of earlier Scandinavian decorative traditions in Scotland started by Vikings who often covered or inlayed their sword hilts with soft metals.

The West Highland Claymore

Some late 15th / early 16th century grave slabs in the West show swords in transition from the pan-Scottish de Greenlaw type to the fully developed and regionally specific West Highland Claymore. Only four examples of this transitional group are known to have survived. Two of these are shown in Figure17. The collars of these swords are more exaggerated, formed in oval octagonal form, slightly wider when viewed from the front than the sides. The quillons terminate with rudimentary quatrefoil terminals and the langets are longer and more pronounced.

The sword in Figure 17 (left) is in Ulster Museum. The quillons have small flattened terminals pierced with hollow quatrefoil shapes. The pommel is similar in profile and construction complexity to that of the Kienbusch sword which precedes it. Figure 17 (right) shows a sword in the National Museums of Ireland found in the River Barrow at Monasterevin in Co. Kildare. Although in excavated condition, with only part of the hilt remaining, the sword is of exceptional craftsmanship and quality. Compared to the sword in Figure 17 (left) the grip is approaching, but not quite achieving, two-handed proportions. Its remaining flattened quillon terminal is shaped into a quatrefoil to its outside edge and four circular hollows are present each side, with a fifth in the centre, which do not penetrate all the way through the terminal. The hollows may once have been studded with semiprecious stones.

The quillon terminal is covered with a layer of tooled bronze sheet applied around the quatrefoil of hollows. The unusual double pommel consists of a functional wheel shape with the tang

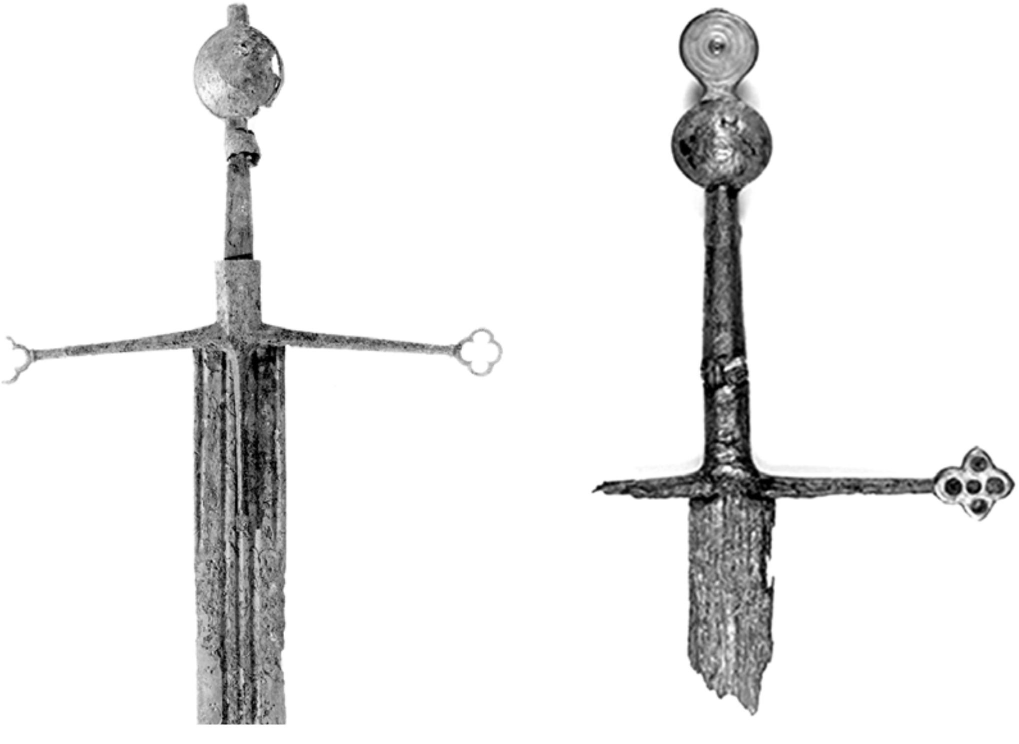

Figure 17. Late 15th / early 16th century swords of proto West Highland Claymore type. Courtesy of Ulster Museum, Belfast (Left) and the National Museums of Ireland, Dublin (Right).

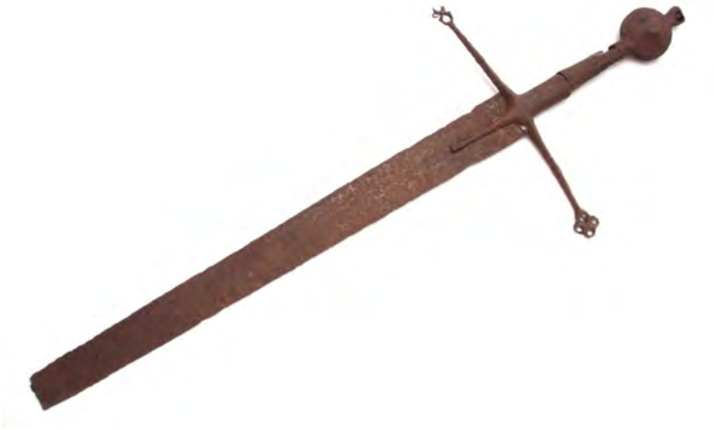

Figure 18. A proto West Highland Claymore type sword with quatrefoil quillon terminals. Circa 1480-1520. Courtesy of Hutchinson Scott Auctioneers. The sword is in excavated condition and lacks the lower portion of its blade.

extension above fashioned into a second pommel formed as a disc which is also covered with bronze. The iron parts of the hilt were probably all covered with the same bronze sheet when the sword was made and is a reminder of the "finish" achieved on some earlier Scottish swords discussed above. The third sword in the group is in the British Museum, in excavated condition and missing its quillon terminals. It was found in the River Bann in Northern Ireland and is mounted with a similar pommel to that of the sword in Figure 17 (left).[14] The fourth sword (Figure 18) has long, narrow, gently sloping quillons and a similar pommel to that in Figure 17 (left). The quillons are of diamond section with flat terminals pierced and shaped to form quatrefoils of diminutive proportions.

For dating purposes, the most significant grave slab depicting a sword with these transitional characteristics is at Cladh Beg burial ground at Kirkapoll on the island of Tiree, which is incised with an inscription around the edge, and the date 1495. This is shown in Figure 19 together with two other slabs of roughly the same date from burial grounds on the islands of Oronsay at the Priory and Mull at Kilninian.[15] The similarity between the style and proportions of the swords carved onto these slabs and the four surviving examples is clear.

The development of the transitional swords into larger more robust forms is illustrated by the three full length effigial tombs at St Clements Church at Rodel, on the Isle of Harris, in the Outer Hebrides. This was the traditional burial ground of the MacLeods of Harris and Dunvegan. The increasing size of the swords to two-handed proportions can be seen relative to the size and date of the effigies which hold them.

The oldest effigy is of Alexander MacLeod (Figure 20, left) who built the church shortly after 1500 probably on an older religious site. His tomb is built into the south wall and is a wonder of the Gaelic world (Figure 21).

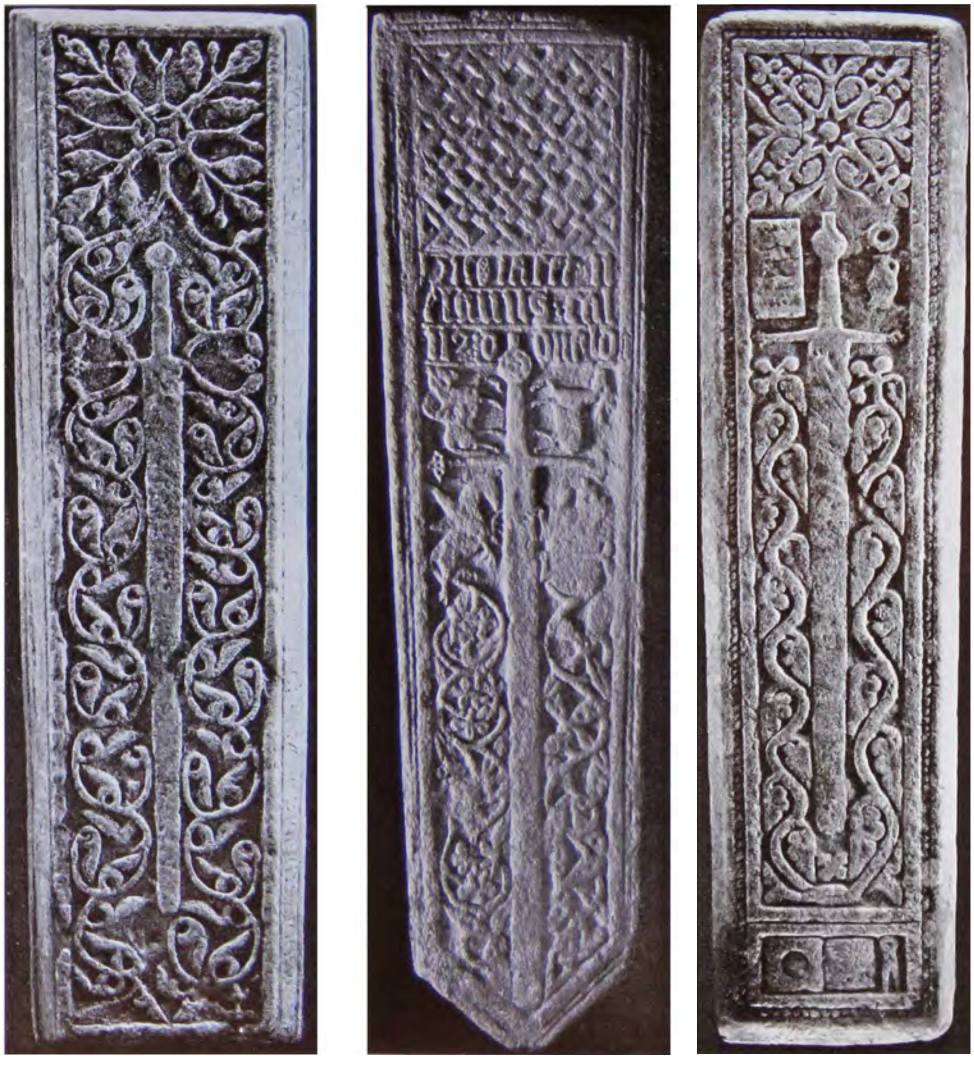

Figure 19. Three late 15th century grave slabs with West Highland Claymores of early transitional form. The slab on the left is at Tiree and dated 1495, the middle at Oronsay Priory and right at Kilninian on Mull. Courtesy of HMSO.

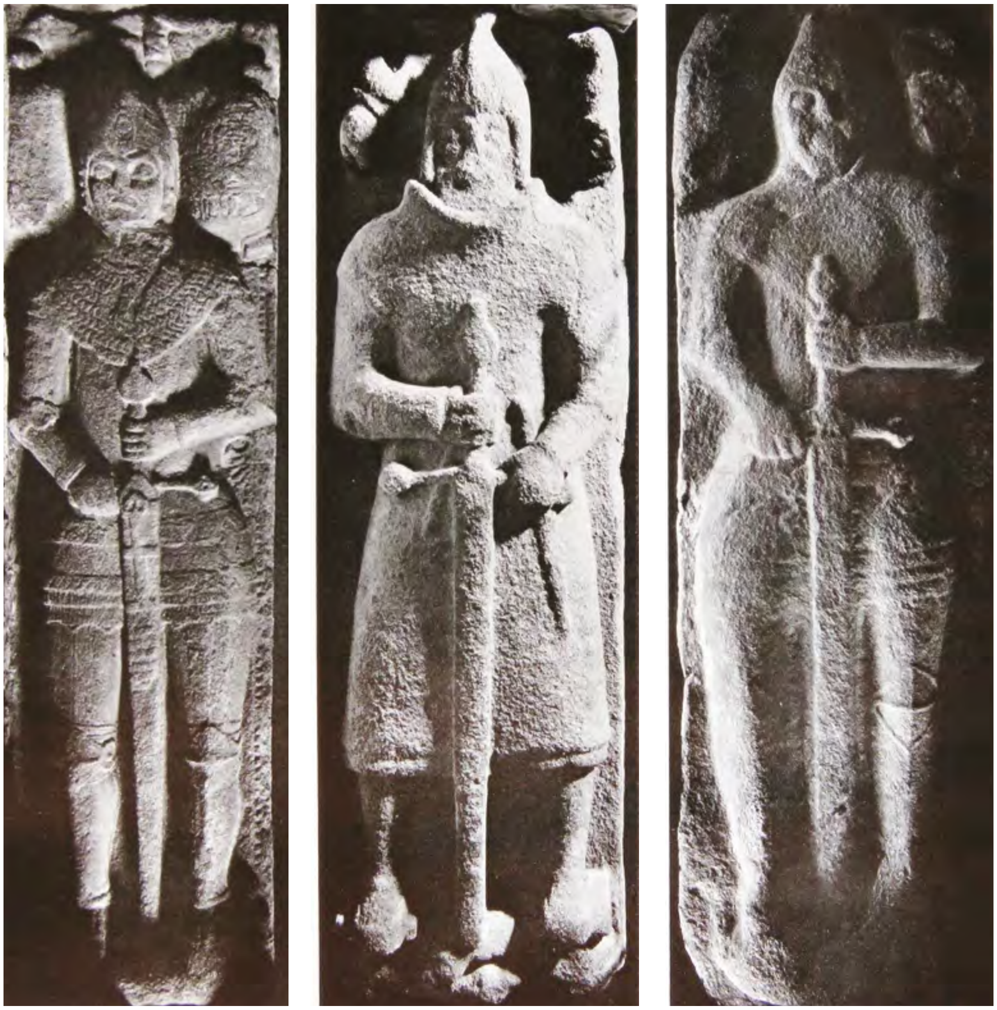

Figure 20. The tomb effigies of three MacLeod Chiefs at Rodel Church, Isle of Harris, Outer Hebrides. Alexander to the Left and John to the Right wear plate armour, William in the Middle is wearing traditional West Highland armour. Over a period of thirty or so years these carvings show how the West Highland Claymore evolved into its fully developed two-handed form by the middle of the 16th century. The swords are depicted in scabbards. Courtesy of HMSO.

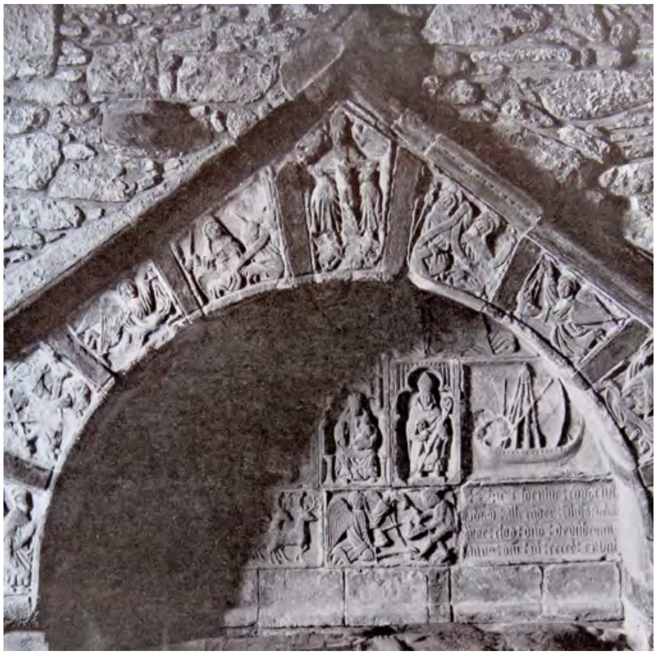

Figure 21. Recessed Tomb of Alexander MacLeod at St Clements Church, Rodel, Isle of Harris, Outer Hebrides. The church was constructed on an earlier religious site by Alexander by circa 1520. The tomb was completed in 1528. Courtesy of HMSO.

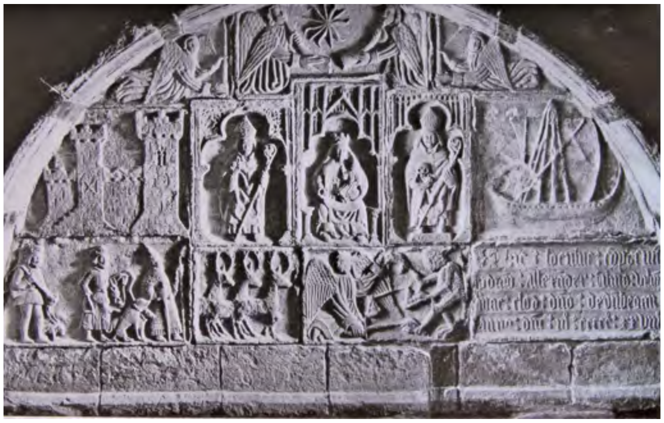

Figure 22. Recessed panels of the Tomb of Alexander MacLeod at St Clements Church, Rodel, Isle of Harris, Outer Hebrides. Courtesy of HMSO.

The semicircular recessed arch is shown in Figure 22 and is decorated with sculpted panels containing religious symbols. Other panels in the recess convey the wealth and influence of Alexander with images of his castle at Dunvegan and a West Highland galley, known as a "birlinn", which in harmony with the history of the West, was a descendant of the Viking long ship, and the main method of transport throughout the region. An inscription on one panel at bottom right informs us that the tomb was built in 1528 in preparation for Alexander's death which occurred 18 years later in 1546. Alexander's effigy rests on a stone coffin (Figure 20) and holds a Claymore of transitional proportions almost identical to those in Figures 17 & 18 and those depicted on the grave slabs in Figure 19. The grip is barely of hand and a half size and the slender quillons slope only slightly.

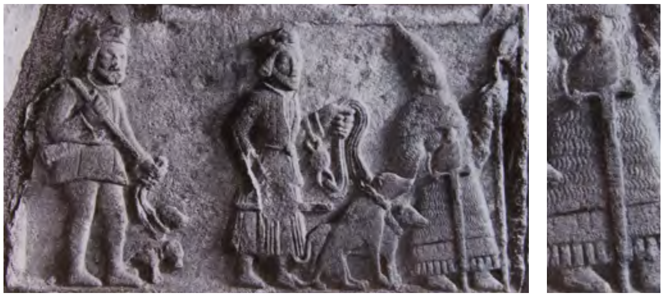

Figure 23. Detail of the Tomb of Alexander MacLeod at St Clements Church, Rodel, Isle of Harris, Outer Hebrides. This shows a hunting party amongst which a Gallowglass is present holding a sword of proto West Highland Claymore type in his right hand and a huge two-handed battle axe in his left. Courtesy of HMSO.

Of note is the panel to the lower left of Figure 22 which is shown in detail in Figure 23. This shows a party with dogs hunting deer amongst which the figure of a warrior holds a sword of similar proportions to Alexander's in his right hand, whilst carrying a huge two-handed battle axe in his left.[16] He is dressed in the full traditional armour worn in the West Highlands, and in Ireland, from at least the 14th century into the 16th. This consists of an undercoat, over which a full-length padded coat (aketon) is worn with a mail coat on top. A mail coif is added to give further protection to the shoulders and a typically tall bascinet is worn on his head. The same style of armour is seen on figures carved into tombs at Roscommon and Dungiven in Ireland as well as at numerous locations across the West Highlands.[17]

This is a Gallowglass, a member of the professional West Highland warrior class that plied their trade as a mercenaries throughout the western Gaelic region from the 13th century through to the end of the 16th. The term is Irish Gaelic and means "foreign warrior", reflecting their employment in great numbers by Irish chiefs. As well as providing the vanguard in battle they also provided a close protective circle around the lords they served and were often part of his household. Organised on clan-like lines, Gallowglass had a code of honour and often showed long standing loyalties to their paymasters. They were formidable warriors prompting one English observer to comment that they do "not leave the field lightly but rather bide the brunt to the death".

After generations in Ireland Gallowglass had evolved from groups of warriors available for hire into independent regiments, or "battles", and expanded their numbers by recruiting from within Ireland as well as from Scotland. In the earlier part of their era Gal-

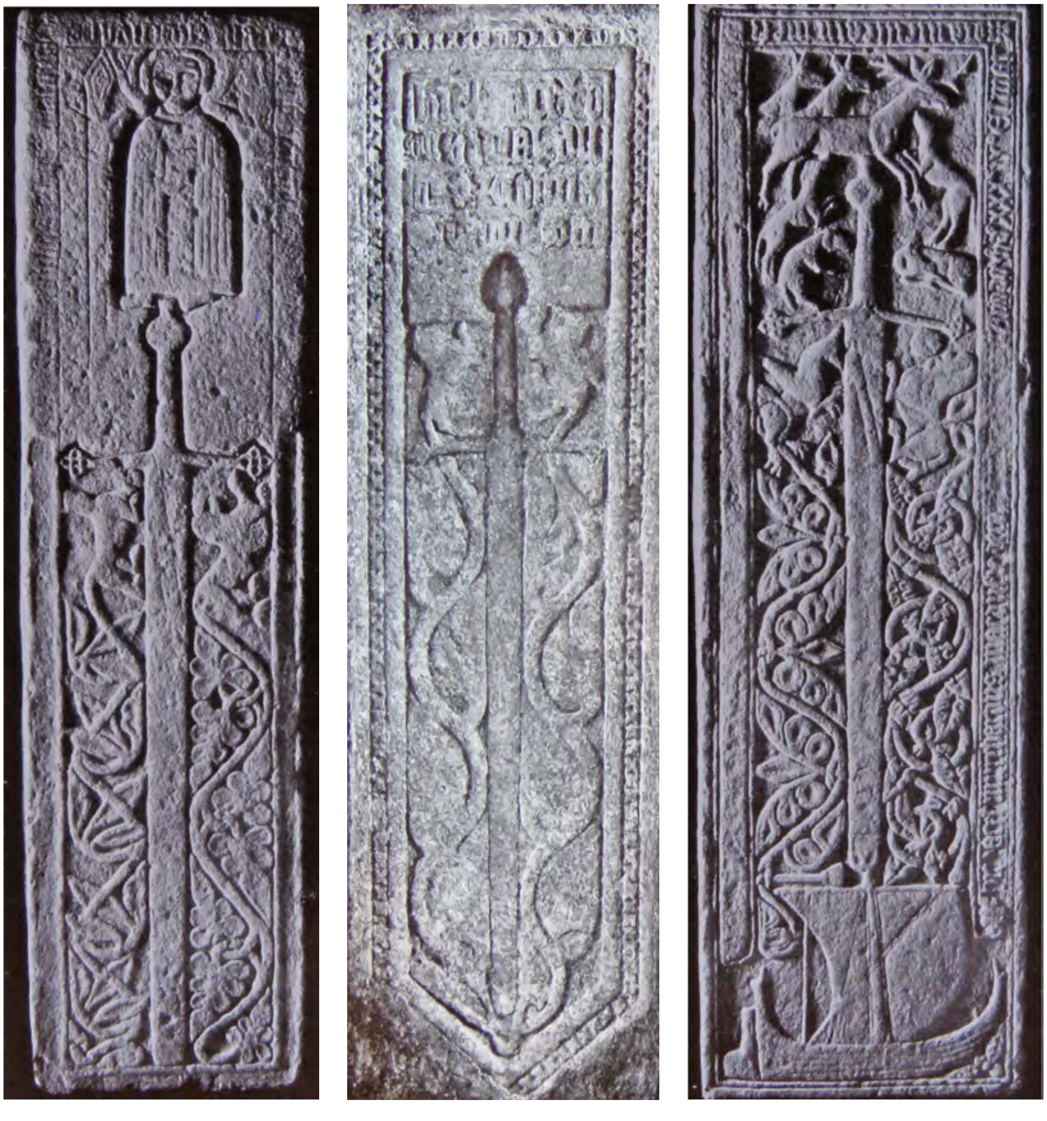

Figure 24. Depictions of West Highland Claymores of more developed form. Left Oronsay Priory, middle Kilchrenan, Lorn (inscribed with the name Dugallus MacKellar), and right, Oronsay Priory. Courtesy of HMSO.

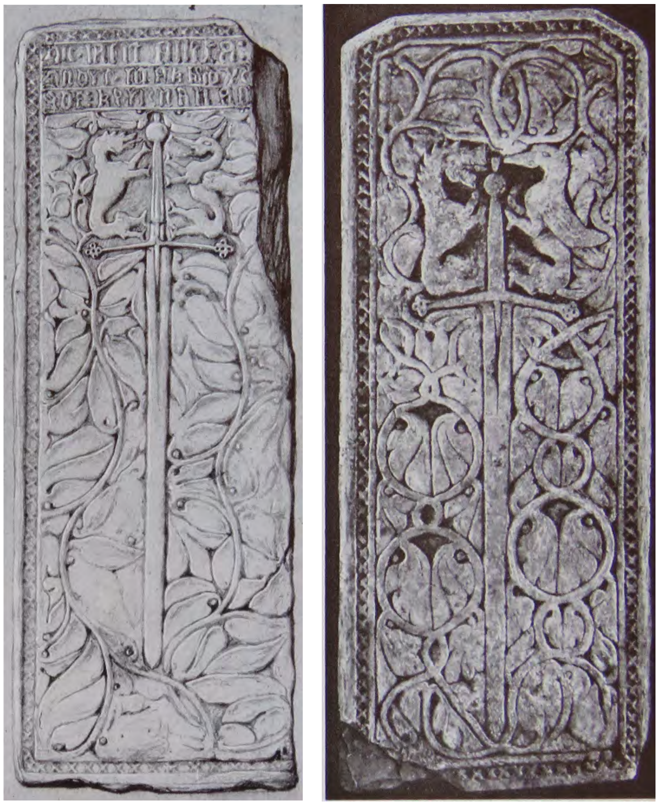

Figure 25. Mid 16th century tomb chest lids. Left, of Alexander McIver at Kilmichael Glassary, and right, a lid at Lismore. Courtesy of HMSO

lowglass are recorded as favoring the two-handed axe as the primary weapon of choice. The fighting style they adopted involved the use of weapons that could deliver powerful sweeping blows to an opponent. Groups of Gallowglass often fought other Gallowglass contingents where long standing enmities and slights would be remembered. This form of combat was up close, brutal and often settled old scores.

A second recessed wall tomb at Rodel was probably built for William, the son and successor of Alexander in 1539 (Figure 20, middle), and who died in 1553. William's Claymore is more massive than Alexander's and the quillons more obviously sloping. The Claymore on the third tomb, probably of John MacLeod of Minginish (Figure 20, right), is even larger and has reached fully developed form. As blades become longer, the grips are getting longer still, causing the pommels to become smaller given that less weight is required to balance the sword at the pommel end. John may have succeeded William. The Bannatyne MS indicates that he died in 1557[18] and was interred at Rodel. The tomb was most likely built before his death, but after he became head of the clan.

Three slabs depicting Claymores in Figure 24 show a similar evolution. The sword on the left seems to be on the way to fully developed form whilst the others have achieved it. The sword on the right is at Oronsay Priory and carries the inscription "Here lies Murchardus MacDuffie of Colonsay who died in the year of our Lord 1539 and Mariota McLean caused me to be made".

Patronage of Gaelic culture and its traditional arts by the Lords of the Isles had enouraged the various regionally based schools of carvers in the West to flourish. After the Lordship was forfeited in 1493 its infrastructure fragmented. Whilst the carving of slabs

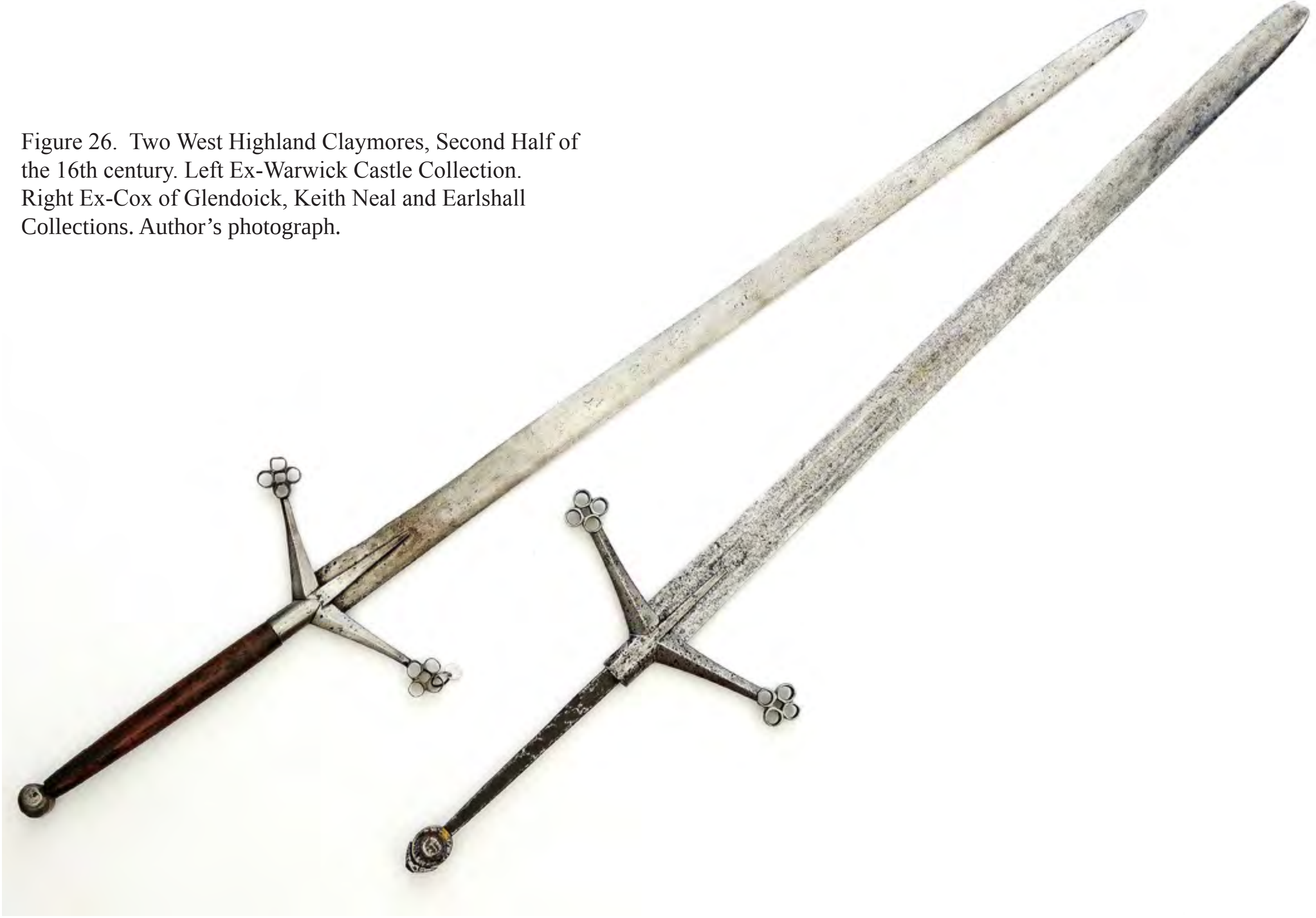

Figure 26. Two West Highland Claymores, Second Half of the 16th century. Left Ex-Warwick Castle Collection. Right Ex-Cox of Glendoick, Keith Neal and Earlshall Collections. Author's photograph.

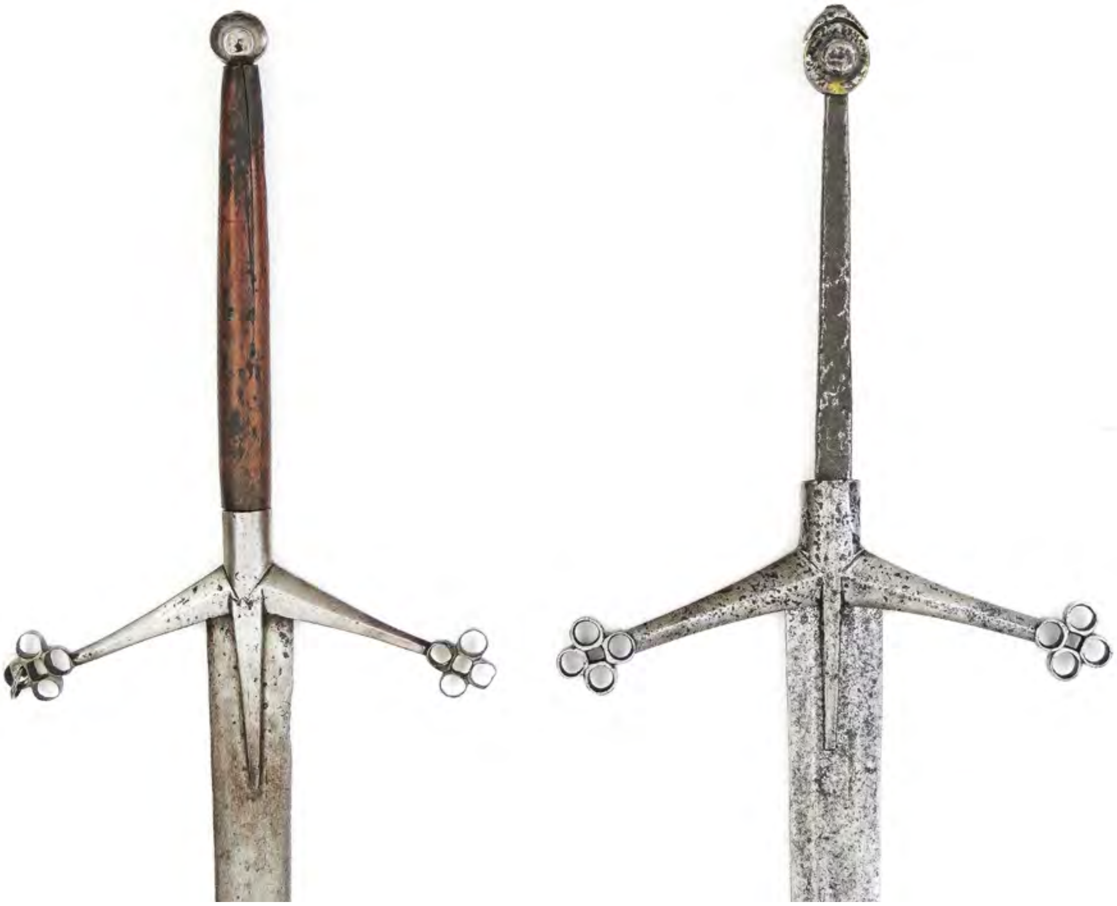

Figure 27. Close Up of the Hilts of the Swords in Figure 26, above. Author's photograph.

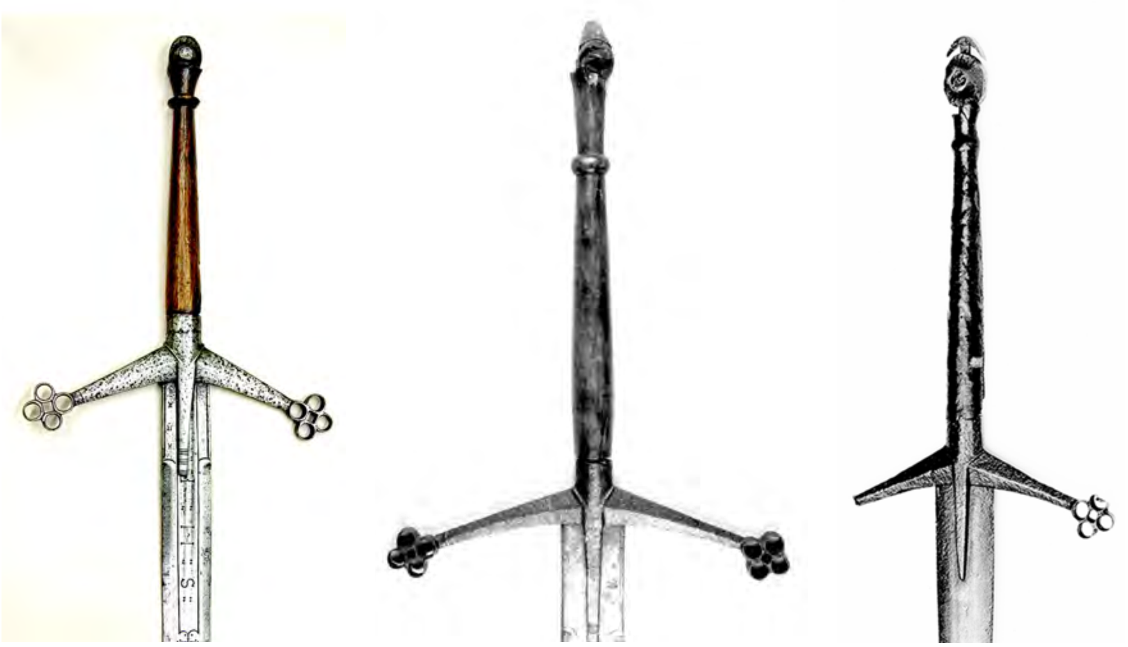

Figure 28. West Highland Claymores with swellings towards the tops of the grips. Left, the Breadalbane Claymore, Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Middle, Courtesy of The British Museum. Right, the "Noel Paton" Claymore, Courtesy of The National Museums of Scotland.

remained a fundamental part of Gaelic religious ritual it was in decline when the West Highland Claymore appeared, and for this reason the sword type appears to be under-represented on funerary monuments. Throughout the region of the old Lordship hundreds of monuments survive depicting earlier sword types on older slabs, but less than 20 have survived that depict West Highland Claymores in both transitional and fully developed forms.

The tomb chest lids shown in Figure 25 are in different locations but sufficient similarities indicate that they are from the same workshop. They date to some 50 or 60 years after the slab at Kirkapoll on Tiree and show fine quality carving, but also a degeneration in detail. The West Highland Claymores depicted are of the most massive and developed form recorded on grave slabs, a factor complemented by the size of the lids which also seem to show that the biggest came last. The swords have longer and thicker quillons of more pronounced taper. These, and John MacLeod's Claymore, are amongst the last to be commissioned before the effects of the Reformation brought to an end the already waning traditions of carving in the middle of the 16th century.

Much of the output of the schools of carvers was destroyed during the post-Reformation period including many slabs and crosses. What has survived, and much of this is damaged, is just a small fraction of what was produced. Monuments that have come down to us depended on the stability of clan landholding together with unbroken ancestral bonds which helped to protect some of the effigies through this time.

We can reasonably assume that the West Highland Claymore had reached full development by the middle of the 16th century. The swords in Figures 26 and 27 show this fully developed form. Whilst the two swords are very similar, there are some small differences in manufacture which probably reflect regional variations in style and methods of construction.

The quillon terminals of the sword on the right are constructed from four small tubes brazed together. The terminals of the sword to the left are of similar scale but forged in one piece from a knob of iron teased from the terminals which is pierced in the middle with a circle, after which four further circles are shaped around it. The langets on the hilt to the left are in original forged form and taper quite markedly from the block whereas those on the sword to the right have been filed to make them thinner nearer the hilt and to taper less. A ridge is present at the upper angle where the quillons merge with the collar of this sword which is absent on the sword to the left.

The pommel of the sword to the right is hollow, roughly oval in shape and formed from thin plates in the same manner as the swords of "de Greenlaw" type, with side bosses brazed with latten onto a middle band. The middle band is now uninterrupted and pierced by the tang both top and bottom. The oblong extension is replaced with a swollen separate crescent of iron through which the tang end passes to form a close fitting cap over the contour of the pommel top which protects the hollow structure beneath when the assembly is peened together.

Fully formed West Highland Claymores depicted on slabs are almost exclusively shown with pommel extensions inheritted from preceding sword styles, the few that are not are unclear. No fully developed Claymores are known to have survived with this earlier pommel type. It follows therefore that those mounted with crescents are likely to date to after the Reformation gained momentum in the second half of the 16th century.

The pommel on the sword to the left is forged from a solid piece of iron in a similar wheel shape to that of the sword to its right. It is of more rounded form and is in fact a skeuomorph of the other. The denser solid construction is manufactured slightly smaller to achieve a similar point of balance for the sword. A crescent of iron is not required to protect the solid pommel in the assembly process and is therefore absent. A solid pommel of almost identical dimensions is mounted onto the West Highland Claymore at Fyvie Castle in Aberdeenshire.[19]

The sword to the left may be deemed to be of later design and construction due to its solid pommel. However, its hilt, with quillon terminals of pierced form seem to be earlier features, and vice versus with its neighbor. It seems that from the mid-point of the century earlier and later design features were applied simultaneously in separate areas of production. The blade of the sword to the right has the date 1574 amongst other armourers marks which include a latten inlaid running wolf, a sun in splendour and an orb and cross.[20]

This sword is also interesting because of a pattern of striations criss-crossed onto parts of the hilt and pommel. At first glance, these resemble the result of abrasive cleaning. However, closer examination reveals that ageing inside the crevices is similar to that on the rest of the hilt, indicating that the marks are contemporary. Originally, these micro-grooves may have provided an anchor for attaching a soft metal beaten sheet to the hilt at the time of manufacture, in a similar manner to that attached to the quillon terminal of the transitional sword (Figure 17). Small patches of latten on the pommel surface may be remants of this covering. When polished the effect would indeed have been prestigious. Over time the sheet has worn off and the iron beneath has aged to achieve its present homogenous patination.

The Black Book of Taymouth contains inventories of some of the Campbell Chiefs of Breadalbane and one, compiled in 1605, records "twa handit swordis" in the "Lairdis Chalmer (Chamber)", then, as a separate entity, "one twa handit sword gilt with gold….." Presumably a more prestigious piece for the use of Breadalbane himself. Perhaps the sword in Figures 26 & 27 (right), once had a similarly prestigious owner.

Some surviving West Highland Claymores retain their original grips, under a dozen in all. Generally these are formed from a single piece of wood bored through to take the tang of the blade. They taper towards the pommel, a feature apparent on slab carvings. The grip covering, where it survives, is usually leather. Four of these surviving grips have a swelling an inch or two below the pommel, three of which can be seen in Figure 28. Contemporary Europen two-handed swords often have grips with a swollen ridge in the middle to separate the hands when wielding the sword. The secondary function of this feature is to stop the forehand sliding down the grip, and displacing the hand nearest the pommel, when delivering a swinging blow. The swellings on the West Highland Claymore grips seem to perform the same function, but appear much nearer to the pommel. This feature invites the forehand to slide along the grip for nearly its full length to maximise the effect of a swinging, chopping stroke, more so than on European swords. The technique is similar to wielding a two-handed axe and consistent with the fighting techniques of the West Highlands.

No known grave slabs depict swords with these swellings on the grip. The latest approximately datable effigy, of John MacLeod, shows him with one hand resting on a quillon, and with the other holding the grip of his claymore just beneath the pommel, thus obscuring a knob if one is present. As is the case with the crescent shaped pommel top, this grip swelling is a later 16th century feature.

By the middle of the 16th century, the two-handed axe is less of a feature in the West Highland armoury. In 1545 a large force of Scots in Ireland was described as being armed with "long swords and long bows and few guns". No axes are mentioned. By then the two-handed axe had probably been replaced by the two-handed sword, which had by then achieved sufficient length and weight, to take its place as the primary weapon for West Highlanders and

Gallowglass.[21]

During the later 16th century the distinction between the elite socially superior warriors of the chiefs' households plus the Gallowglass, and the clansmen plus the Kern in Ireland, was becoming less marked. In the West of Scotland increasing numbers of clan chiefs, when free from their own feuding, were attracted to the wars in Ireland in which the Protestant Queen Elizabeth I of England was pitched against the Irish Catholic Earls for control. Both sides required manpower and clans negotiated contracts through agents to supply their warriors into the fray.

To some degree all the clans of the Scottish western seaboard were involved in the fighting in Ireland. The mercenaries they provided were easier and less expensive to hire through a process not trammeled with the traditional rituals which accompanied negotiation with companies of Gallowglass. Whilst the men that went by the name of Gallowglass continued to fight under other guises, the phenomenon of the Gallowglass in its traditionally organized form was becoming diluted and started to wane in the late 16th century.

The new wave of Highlanders seeking fortune in Ireland were known as "Redshanks" to differentiate them from the Gallowglass. They fought for the highest bidder, be it with the forces of the Catholic Earls funded by Spanish gold or for Elizabethan pay. This was a lucrative business for the clan chiefs that supplied these men. In a letter to the English agent Robert Bowes, dated 18th March 1595/6, one chief alone, Lachlan MacLean of Duart on Mull, specifies what he can provide for English service in Ireland in a single raiding season:

"1500 bowmen and 500 "fyremen". In this number we will not want our two-handed swords and armour of mail to be used if battle be offered to us; at which time we will change some of our bowmen to use their two-handed swords the time of battle".[22]

The swords mentioned are most certainly West Highland Claymores. It would also seem that the numbers of swords being produced for service by the western clans, and across Scotland, was growing at a rapid rate towards the end of the 16th century. Most of those that survive are from this period. Whilst demand fuelled supply, increased production of swords was also stimulated by the increasing availability of blades at reducing prices reflecting improving production methods in the main European blade-making centres and the establishment of more efficient routes to their main markets. These trends made more Claymores available to the general clansmen whereas previously they were afforded only by the upper hierarchy of clan society. It is not clear in this example whether Hector was paying to arm his men or whether they equipped themselves.

We can imagine clan leaders and their men at the beginning of each raiding season converging at embarkation points on Islay and Kintyre to board galleys at night to set sail for Ulster, dodging the screen of English navy ships on the way. It seems there was sometimes congestion in the queues for these boats. An incident is recorded in 1595 when a MacDonald leader, travelling with his men to fight in Ireland, was involved in a dispute in Argyle. As a solution he offered to resolve the matter by fighting a duel with "twa handit swordis".[23]

Many Redshanks were MacDonalds intending to fight with their kinsmen, descendants of the MacDonalds of Islay, that held lands in Antrim and who eventually became the MacDonnells of Antrim. To hold their possessions, they fought Irish and English alike. This added another dimension which further complicated the tangled politics of Ireland by drawing the Scottish Crown into the Irish scene. This situation suited the mercenary, providing numbers of options to serve many conflicting factions by playing sides off against each other, and to quickly change sides as circumstances changed. The record of the defeat of English forces under Chichester at Carrickfergus in 1597 shows that the Scots were carrying "sloughe swords".[24] "Slaughter", "slaugh" and "sloughe" were contemporary English terms used for two-handed swords which were not a standard part of the English armoury in the late 16th century. The swords referred to were most likely West Highland Claymores. It is not clear what weapons the Irish Kern carried at this time, or indeed whether they still operated in their traditional guise, given that their distinction from the Gallowglass was becoming more obscure.

Whilst two-handed swords were fashioned in blacksmiths' forges around the Western region, some records allude to the pre-eminence of Islay, and refer to hereditary smiths working there. Islay was an important bridge between Scotland's West and Ireland. It was a focus for various Gaelic arts and trades including arms manufacture, both during and after the Lordship. Unlike the Lowland region no written records of armourers have survived from the West, and evidence is indirect. The later medieval addition of an anvil to a 14th century grave slab at Finlaggan may mark the passing of an Islay based armourer. John Francis Campbell of Islay commented on a smith called MacEachern whose family had historically been hereditory smiths for the Lords of the Isles. In 1817 the Minister of Lismore, Donald MacNicol, commented from local Islay knowledge that a smith of the MacDonald of the Isles, called MacCregie and his descendents, lived near Finlaggan, and made arms and armour including the "Isla hilt for the broadsword".[25]

Seemingly, the "Isla hilt" was recognized beyond Islay but there has never been a clear view of what it is. Perhaps in looking too hard we miss the obvious. Smiths worked on Islay over generations from the time of the Lordship until the passing of the island from the MacDonalds to the Campbells of Cawdor in 1615. This period coincides with the main period of production and use of the West Highland Claymore. The "Isla hilt" can only refer to this sword. There is no evidence of other sword types. A further clue lies in the phrase itself which indicates that swords in entirety were not made on the island, but instead that hilts (including pommels and grips) were made on Islay for broadswords separately. In this context "broadsword" may simply refer to the broad sword blades, which, as discussed above, were made outside the region mainly in Germany and imported into Scotland where they were mounted with hilts.

The Clamshell Claymore

In the East Highland and Lowland regions there is scant evidence for transitional sword types occupying the space between the swords of "de Greenlaw" type and the arrival of the Clamshell and Lowland Claymores. The development sequence is not illustrated in funerary carvings as is the case for the West Highland Claymore.

The stimulus for both sword types came from northern Europe, and not, as may be assumed, from England. The English army had developed a two-handed sword in the 15th century which did not survive into the 16th. It was a specialist weapon used only by a small part of the army. The blades were long, of stiff diamond

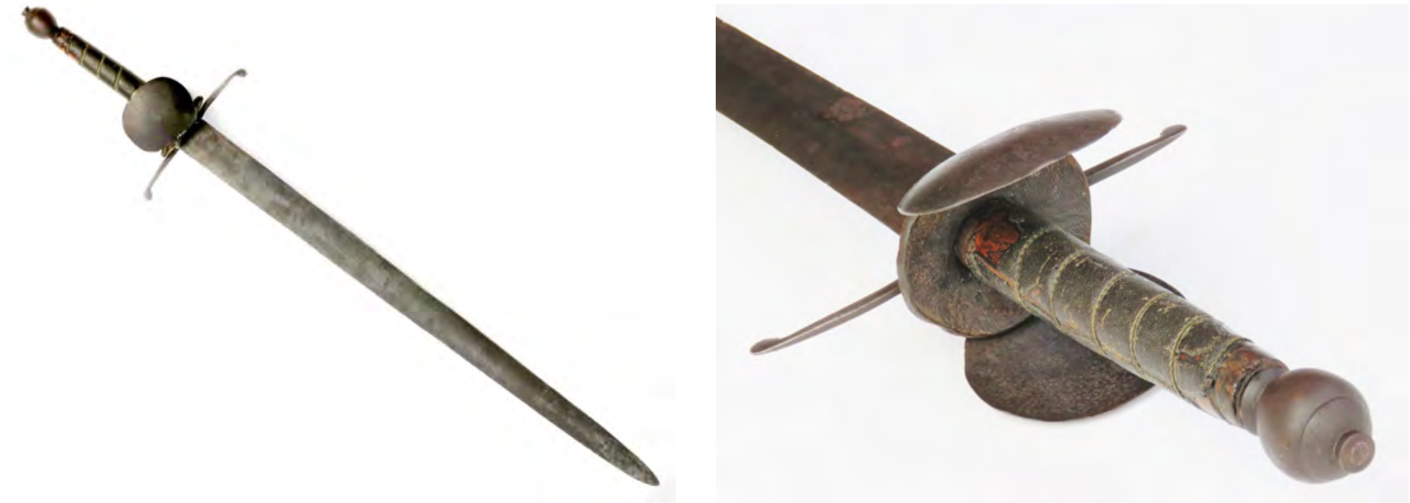

Figure 29. Clamshell Claymore illustrated in Figs 1 & 2. Detail of the hilt; the grip is original, of shaped wood, spirally grooved, covered with shagreen and brass twisted wire, with a circular leather liner at its base. Private Collection. Author's photograph.

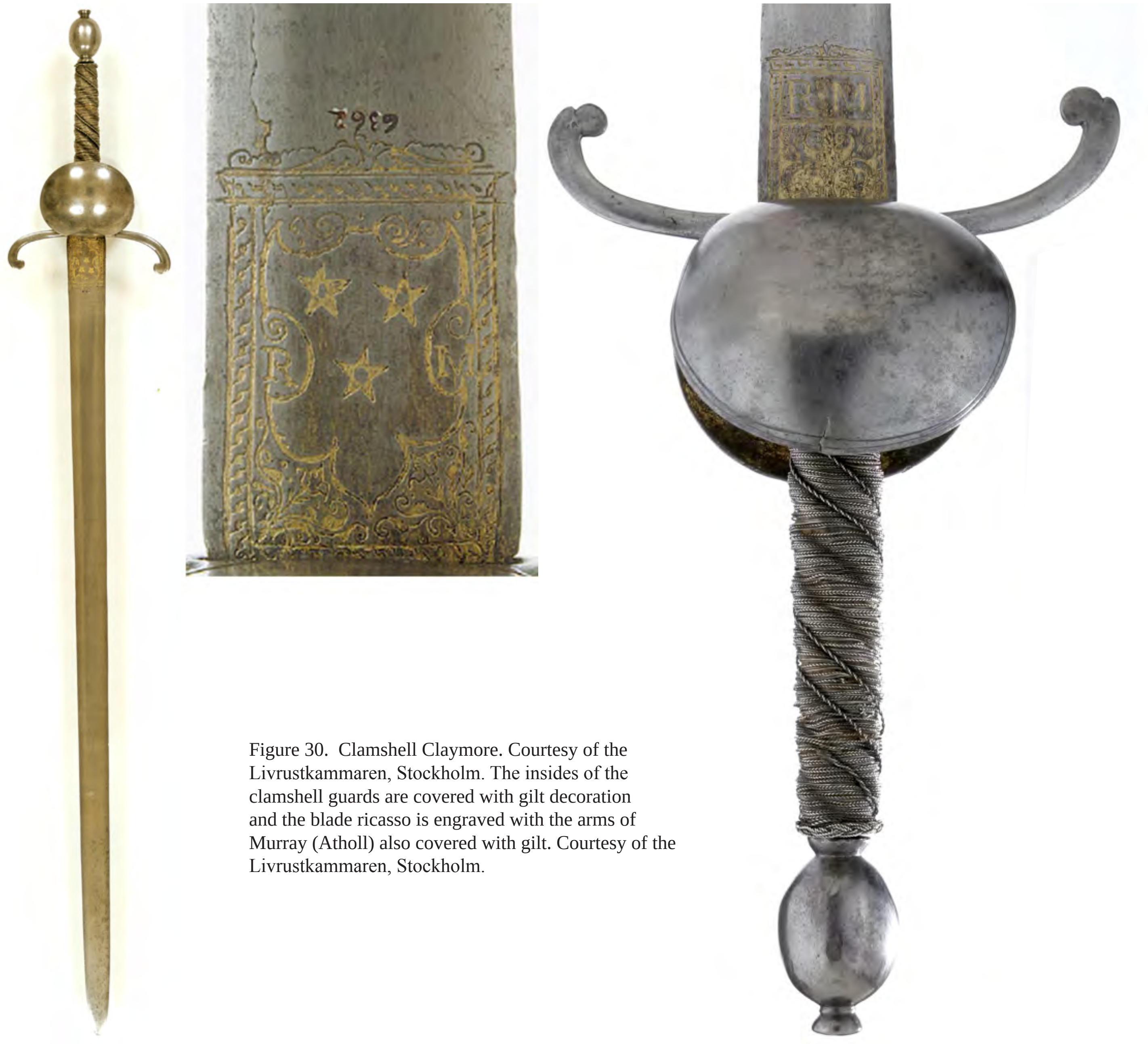

Figure 30. Clamshell Claymore. Courtesy of the Livrustkammaren, Stockholm. The insides of the clamshell guards are covered with gilt decoration and the blade ricasso is engraved with the arms of Murray (Atholl) also covered with gilt. Courtesy of the Livrustkammaren, Stockholm.

section, and used primarily for thrusting against opponents wearing armour, to tease through the overlapping plates and penetrate through mail. These are unlike the Scottish two-handed swords which were mounted with broad chopping blades and used in a different manner.

Whilst the West Highland Claymore had evolved into a unique form, it was essentially a two-dimensional cross-hilted sword which reflected its localized evolution within the Gaelic world from earlier types. The most significant contemporary development in Europe, particularly in the North Italian and German states, was the development of more three-dimensional protection for the hands on all sword forms (rapiers, broadswords, sabers, two-handed swords etc) with more complex guards, where the defence afforded by the quillons is enhanced with loops, scrolled bars, plates and shells. Given the interaction between the Lowlands and Europe these fashions presumably reached Scotland as they evolved, and the Lowland and Clamshell Claymores developed as Scottish adaptations of these influences. The Clamshell Claymore first illustrated in Figures 1 & 2 is illustrated again for a better view of the protection afforded by the hilt for the hands (Figure 29).

Before exploring these swords further, the question must be raised as to whether the Lowland and Clamshell Claymores are Scottish at all. It is possible that both were manufactured in Europe and imported into Scotland. However, the question is easily answered. There is no other source for these sword types other than in Scotland. They occur nowhere else. Those that have believable provenances are mainly attached to East Highland and Lowland Scottish locations and like the West Highland Claymore, they survive in sufficient numbers to be recognized as distinct and homogenous groups.

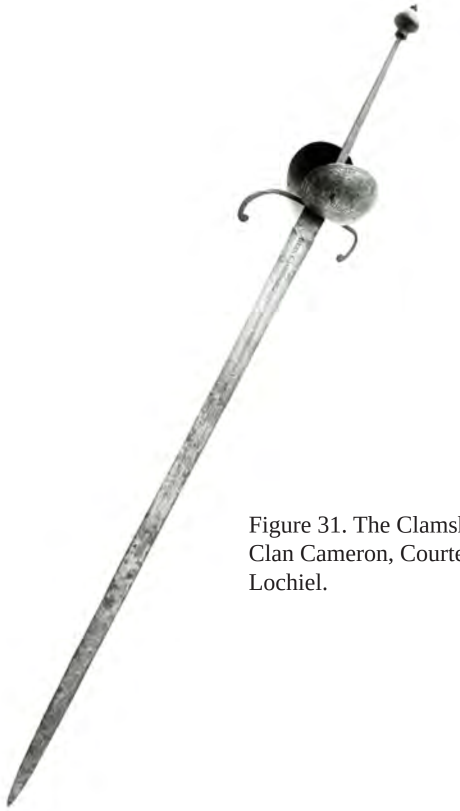

Figure 31. The Clamshell Claymore of Clan Cameron, Courtesy of Cameron of Lochiel.

By the 16th century the Lowland towns in Scotland had established arms making industries. Arms making was regulated by guilds in each burgh and some of their written records have survived, mostly from the later part of the century. One entry in 1583 records a Robert Lyell, Lorimer / Guard-maker in Edinburgh (active at least from 1584 to 1601)[26] who admitted as his essay for incorporation into his guild “ane pair of clam schellit gairdis …...”. In the absence of any evidence of other Scottish swords produced in any quantity at the time with shell-like hilts, this is almost certainly a reference to a Clamshell Claymore guard.

In 1589 Lyell is also recorded as providing eight “paire” of new guards and taking in six for repair. The term “paire” of guards appears numerous times in 16th century records across Scotland. Presumably the term reflects the conjoined functionality of the quillons and shells, just as today we refer to a pair of scissors, spectacles, trousers etc. The high proportion of guards being taken in for repair is also worthy of note. Presumably these had been damaged through use.

The inventory from the will of an Edinburgh Lorimer in 1577 records amongst other possessions “fyve pair of halflang hilts”. The Lowland Scots term “halflang” sword has for many years been taken to refer to a Scottish two-hander, but it is puzzling to explain what “half long” actually means. It only makes sense as a relative term when applied to the length of a Clamshell Claymore compared to the more massive Lowland Claymore. Of course, a Clamshell Claymore measures more than half the length of a Lowland Claymore, but if we envisage a single-handed sword at one extreme, and the Lowland type at the other, the length of a Clamshell Claymore does sit approximately halfway between the two. By inference the term also indirectly affirms the existence of the larger Lowland two-hander, which is significant given that no records are known which directly acknowledge the Lowland type.

Three different types of sword, again characterized by length, feature in a record in Perth in 1580, when Archibald Young, a Lorimer, is chastised by his guild for straying outside the bounds of his own specifically allotted craft to make sword guards, due to a shortage of work in his own field. He is ordered on pain of a heavy fine that he “sall exoner discharge and quitclame himself from all fordir handling bying changing or selling of ony kind of swordis other twa handed half longis or ane handit swordis in tyme coming….”. The sentence is not punctuated, and if a comma is inserted between “handed” and “half” the meaning is clearer, showing that the range of the three size types starts at the largest and finishes with the smallest, covering all the options of “ony” sword types. The record also affirms that the guilds in Perth recognize the existence of a larger two-hander as a separate sword type, presumably the Lowland Claymore, described as “twa handed” swords which are different to the “half longis” (“halflang” or “half lang” as referred to in other records), which presumably is the Clamshell Claymore, then thirdly “ane handit swordis”, swords of single hand length. The inventory of Thomas Hislope, armorer burgess of Edinburgh who died on 2nd November 1600, records a substantial number of swords and sword parts, and in particular “tua half lang swordis” which further illustrates the variations in spelling of the term.

Many surviving Scottish two-handed swords have over time acquired attachments to imposing historical figures and important events which often far predate the time of manufacture. Many of

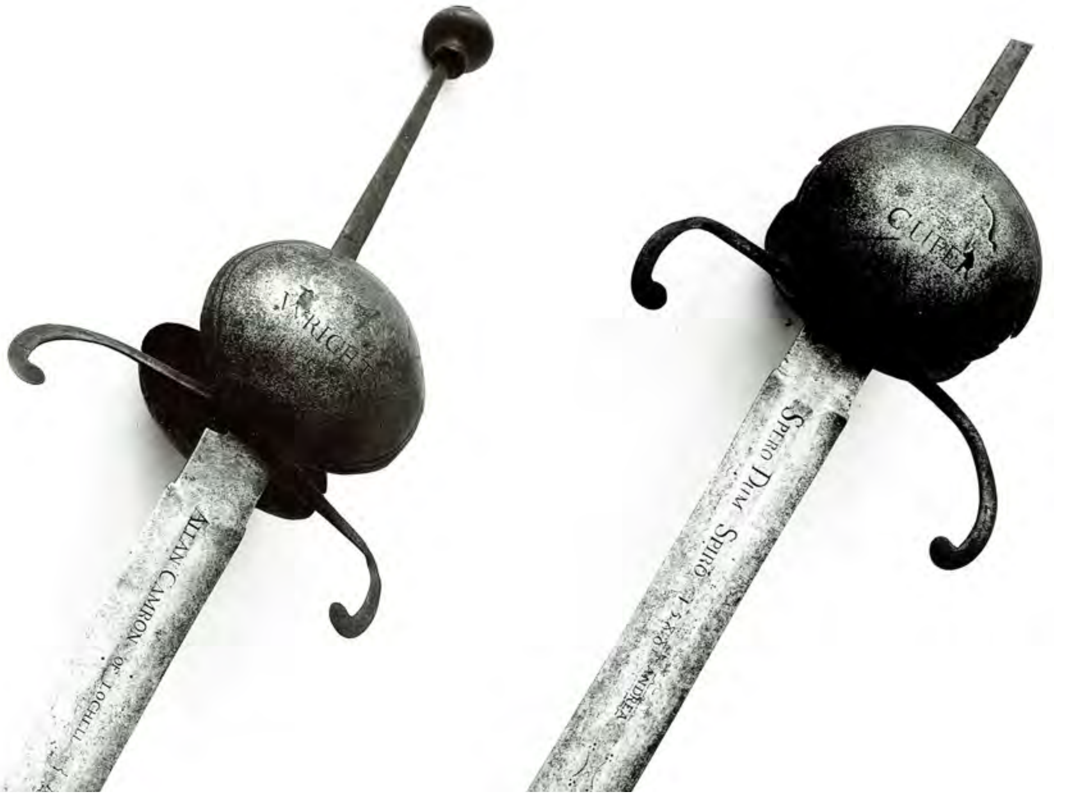

Figure 32. Close up of the Clan Cameron Clamshell Claymore. Courtesy of Cameron of Lochiel.

these associations cannot be taken seriously. However, two Clamshell Claymores have more than anecdotal historical attachments. The first is a very fine sword in the arms and armour collection at the Livrustkammaren Museum in Stockholm, Sweden. This sword was first recorded in the 1654 inventory of the armoury of Gustavus Adolphus, King of Sweden from 1611 until his death in 1632. It was published in "Den aldre Livrustkammaren" by R Cederstrom and G Malmborg, in Stockholm in 1930, and described as a sword which: "H(is) M(ajesty) wielded himself, with long grip, both guards gilded on the inside, the blade gilded at the hilt and grip with silverthread winding" (Figure 30).

The insides of the clamshell guards are covered with gilt decoration. The ricasso of the blade is engraved with the arms of Murray (Atholl) and also covered with gilt (Figure 31). The decoration is very similar in execution to that seen on a well-known group of late 16th and early 17th century Lowland Scots daggers associated with Edinburgh's Canongate cutlers.

The decoration on the blade shows the arms of Murray (the family name of the Dukes of Atholl seated at Blair Atholl Castle in Perthshire) and the initials "R M" on the reverse, which presumably represents a Murray who had associations, or served, with the Swedish army in the late 16th or early 17th century. The sword was included in the "Scots in Sweden" exhibition held at the Royal Scottish Museum in Edinburgh in 1962.

The second sword is illustrated in Figures 31 and 32, which is in the possession of the present-day Chief of Clan Cameron, at Achnacarry, the ancient seat of Clan Cameron of Lochiel in Lochaber. It is believed to have belonged to the 16th chief of the clan, Allan Cameron, who lived from circa 1562 to 1647. It seems that the sword was lost by a party of Camerons raiding lands to the East in the Lowlands of Aberdeenshire at the end of the 16th century. It fell into the hands of the Wrights & Coopers, one of the trade incorporations in Aberdeen, in this case a livery company, who thereafter claimed it was a trophy taken at the Battle of Harlaw in 1411. The battle predates the manufacture of the sword by at least a century and a half and the claim is not feasible.

Historically the trade organizations had assumed a responsibility for defending Aberdeen. Their efforts under Provost Davidson at the Battle of Harlaw being a case in point. Some survivors from the battle returned to Aberdeen with captured weapons as trophies, of which the Annals of Aberdeen, Volume II, tells us: "These venerated trophies have been handed down from one generation to another, and are carefully preserved by several corporations at the present time. The tailors in particular, at their annual election, exhibit the sword belonging to the corporation, and present it, unsheathed, before the deacon".

It seems that the need for a trade corporation to boast a trophy to illustrate its involvement at the Battle of Harlaw, and to bolster its standing with peer corporations of other trades as a committed defender of Aberdeen, led to a little latitude being applied to the provenance of some later souvenirs. The genuine circumstances surrounding the capture of the sword would be much more interesting. Such swords would not be given up easily by raiding parties of Highlanders.

The Wrights and Coopers certainly venerated this trophy, and incised "WRIGHTS" to the outside of one shell-guard and "CUPERS" to the other, to announce the new ownership of the sword. Typical of the time the blade is incised with a makers mark, a running wolf and "ANDREA FERARA", indicating that the blade was made in Solingen or another important German blade-making centre. In different script on one side is incised the name "ALLAN CAMRON OF LOCHELL" and "SPERO DUM SPIRO 1588" on the other. Allan was a notable chief of the Camerons but unfortunately we will never know if he led the raid during which the sword, presumably his, was lost.

In the late 18th century the Camerons of Lochiel requested the return of the sword. The result is recorded in the Wrights and Coopers Sedurant Book, which shows that on "the twelfth day of August one thousand seven hundred and ninety three, the court of the Wrights and Coopers……agreed to comply with Lochiel's request and he being present the sword was delivered him by the Deacon in presence of the Trade and by their desire". This seems to have been a formal and sombre affair indicating an atmosphere of veneration that sometimes surrounded two-handed swords many years after they had gone out of practical use. The 16th century guilds of Aberdeen still exist today in reduced form as the Seven Incorporated Trades of Aberdeen based at Trinity Hall in the city. Its symbolic treasures include two further Clamshell Claymores and a West Highland Claymore. These swords may well be trophies from other successfully repulsed raids into Aberdeenshire from the Highlands or donations. The Clamshells may even have been made in Aberdeen.

A significant proportion of surviving Clamshell Claymores have provenances in areas north of Edinburgh in the East Highland and northern Lowland regions. Further south, given that Edinburgh was a centre of manufacture of two-handed swords, it is not surprising that a Clamshell Claymore resides in at least one historic location nearby. The House of Binns, the seat of the Dalyell family, is located a few miles west of Edinburgh. Its sword is associated with Sir Thomas Dalyell, first Baronet of The Binns, who lived from 1615–1685, although the sword is of earlier date.

The lawless Lowland region near the English border is also worthy of further consideration. There are no surviving two-handed swords of integrity and strong provenance from this area, but there are some written references. Some Scottish ballads have survived from the borders which are thought to date to the 16th century and were first recorded in modern times by Professor Francis James Child (1825–1896), amongst a wider collection of English and Scottish ballads, which became known as "Childs Ballads". Many are of Border origin, and somewhat predictably, are often concerned with feuding, raiding, intrigue and violence, which was business as usual along the Scottish / English frontier.

One ballad, "Dick o the Cow", is the tale of a simple farmer living in Cumbria on the English side of the border. A John Armstrong, a member of the Liddesdale Armstrong Clan residing a few miles away in Scotland, raids England, and in frustration at finding no herds of cattle to steal, decides to steal the three cows which belong to Dick o the Cow. Dick pursues them across the border and arrives in Armstrong territory at John's Tower House at Puddingburn, where he is ridiculed, but his life is spared. Later Dick makes his escape and in retribution steals two of John's best horses. John chases him alone and catches up with Dick intending to kill him. Instead, Dick is victorious in the duel that follows. Dick takes John's horse to add to the two that he has already taken and sells one for money and a good milk cow. However, having come out on top, Dick needs to leave his home, and move to another area to avoid Armstrong revenge.

Of interest in the tale is the reference to John's "twa-handed sword that hang lieugh (low) by his thigh" which Dick also steals and uses in the duel. Unable to harm John with the blade in the scuffle he manages to stun him with a blow from the hilt under his eye then makes his escape. In the context of the ballad, it seems quite normal for a simple English farmer to be so acquainted with two-handed sword fighting techniques. Other references to swords in the border ballads do not specifically refer to two-handed types but do often comment on swords with broad blades, used with sweeping strokes.

The reference to John's two handed sword hanging low at his thigh rather than at the waist, indicates that it was in a scabbard, and unlike the smaller single handed sword, which was usually strapped with the mouthpiece nearer to the belt, John's sword most likely hung lower down from the waist, suspended by straps. This arrangement allows the user to pull back the scabbard with the left hand to allow the right hand to conveniently draw the longer blade. The Triumph of Death by Pieter Breughel the Elder, circa 1562, shows a two-handed sword of "halflang" size in the European context being drawn in this manner (Figure 33). Unsheathed swords of similar type are being used elsewhere in the portrait to deliver powerful strokes from overhead. It seems reasonable to assume that John's sword was a "halflang" of Clamshell Claymore type.

Many 15th century tomb effigies in the West show precursors to the West Highland Claymore sheathed in scabbards and strapped to the waist. The later tombs at St Clements Church show swords in scabbards held free of the effigies to the front. Two-handed swords are carried in this manner in numerous contemporary illustrations[27] and they were also carried strapped over the back of the carrier.

The border communities were "riding" clans known as the "Border Reivers". The main method of communication and transport was by horse particularly when raiding. The heyday of the Rievers was the later 16th century when both Scottish and English bands raided with impunity across and along the border without any respect for nationality and authority. The "Great Sword", the bruising, larger, heavier version of the simple cross-hilted European knightly sword of the 13th and 14th centuries is shown in contemporary illuminated scripts being effectively used on horseback. Considering this, it is very likely that users of the Clamshell Claymore in the border regions were also experienced in using it on horseback, with one hand or two, as well as on foot.

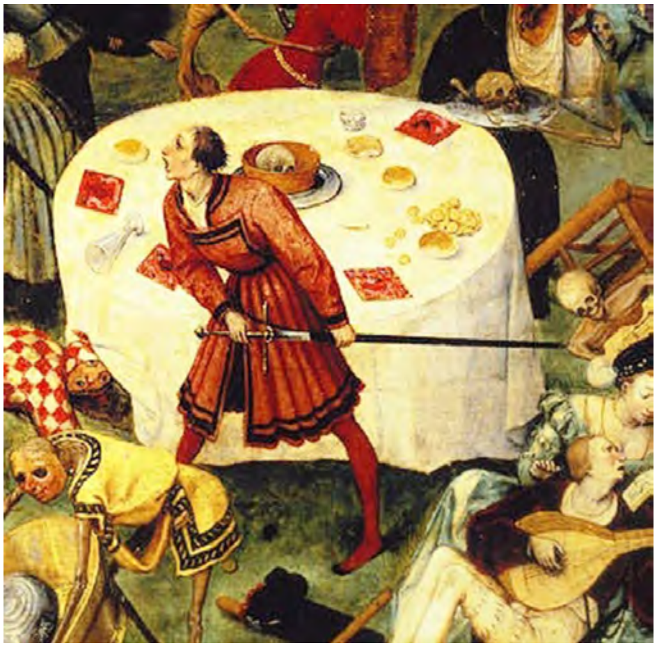

Figure 33. "The Triumph of Death" (Detail) by Pieter Breughel the Elder c. 1562/3 showing a man drawing a two-handed sword of "halflang" size from its scabbard. Courtesy of the Museo del Prado, Madrid

The line in the Highlands which separated the areas of usage of Clamshell and West Highland Claymores was, as to be expected, a grey area. The Clan Cameron lands are well into the "West" in Lochaber where use of the West Highland Claymore would be expected. Yet we have seen above so much attachment from the Clan for a 16th century Clamshell Claymore which it claimed belonged to one of their chiefs. Some years ago, a relic West Highland Claymore was unearthed on the Black Isle east of inverness in the "Eastern" part of the Highlands.[28] It is possible that this was lost in a seaborne raid from the West. Another West Highland Claymore, in poor excavated condition, lacking its pommel and quillon terminals, from Glenshee in Perthshire, also most likely originated in the West.[29]

Not so easily explained is the effigy of a warrior sculpted into the left side pillar of the fireplace in the Upper Hall at Huntly Castle. He is wearing armour and holds a West Highland Claymore-like sword to his front. Huntly is in the East Highlands and was refurbished around 1600 when the figure is thought to have been carved. It is similar in form to the effigies at Rodel but post-dates them by at least 50 years. The figure may be something of a throw-back and indicates that the sword type was well known in the East but its symbolism in this instance is unknown.

Inverness, north of Scotland, is a town known as the gateway to the Highlands and lies between these regions. Like other Lowland towns Inverness had its armourers. In 1572 it is recorded that a Patrick Henderson, Swordslipper, had a complaint brought against him over "ane pair of Heland (Highland) hiltis…". Assuming the hilt in question was for a two-handed sword, it is most likely of West Highland rather than Clamshell type, given that burgh records elsewhere when making reference to what we assume are Clamshell Claymores, do not specify the swords as "Highland", most likely because they were used by Lowlanders as well as East Highlanders. Whilst most swords of West Highland Claymore type were almost certainly made deep in the West, it would not be surprising to find them made in the nearest burgh to the region.

A fine Clamshell Claymore associated with Castle Coull in Aberdeenshire,[30] and now in the Marischal College Museum in Aberdeen, seems to be a hybrid form with some features of both Clamshell and West Highland types incorporated into the hilt (Figure 34). The hilt has clamshell guards, beneath which downwardly arched quillons are fashioned in diamond section and taper towards their terminals which are pierced with diamond shapes. A further hybrid is a Clamshell Claymore, formerly part of the Windsor Castle collection, but now on display at Holyroodhouse in Edinburgh. Its pommel is of West Highland Claymore type with protruding bosses and is mounted with a crescent of iron on top.

The blade of the Clamshell Claymore preserved at the House of Binns[31] has the unusual maker's mark of a bishop's mitre. The same mark is present on the blade of the West Highland Claymore in Figures 1 (Top) and 2 (Left). This may indicate that the blades are from the same workshop, and if so, also suggests that the German blade-makers and their agents saw Scotland simply as a market, and that neither they nor Scottish armourers, differentiated blades on grounds other than quality for mounting with either "halflang" type of hilt.

The Lowland Claymore

The Scottish features of the Lowland Claymore are more subtle than those of the other two-handed sword types. Similar huge fully developed two-handed swords mounted with straight cross guards, side rings and sometimes langets, appeared in Europe towards the end of the 15th century. The distinctive composition of the Lowland hilt lies in the long slender guard arms which terminate abruptly in downward facing knobs and the longer than usual langets.

16th century references to these swords are difficult to identify because the term "Lowland Claymore" did not exist then. Instead we are left searching the sparse records for descriptions of swords which appear to be relatively more massive than the other two-handed or "half lang" types. Armourers' records play a role in this and are discussed in the previous section. However, some literary sources are also of assistance.

In the only surviving part of a Lowland ballad called "The Laird of Muirhead", the Laird is described standing before the king:

"Wi that same twa-hand muckle sword,
That Bartram felled stark deid.…"

Muirhead, and Torwood, another place mentioned in the poem, lie in the central Lowlands to the north east of Glasgow and to the south west of Stirling. The Muirheads controlled an area of land to the south of this area in the 16th century, which at the time was one of the more civilised parts of Scotland.

The ballad refers to the Battle of Flodden fought by the Scots against the English in 1513 and is printed in Sir Walter Scott's "Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border". John Muirhead, the Laird of Muirhead, fought with two hundred in his kinsmen, defending King James IV of Scots (1488-1513) and they were all killed, as was the king. The noble stature of Muirhead, and the trusted task he and his men had of protecting the King's standard at close quarters, may indicate that Muirhead at least, was armed with the Lowland two-hander, given that "muckle" means "very large" in Lowland Scots.

Provenance is a difficult issue to negotiate. Today, no doubt because of the number of copies that have come onto the market, a provenance of over 50 years for a Scottish two-handed sword is regarded as attractive, yet even this leaves over 400 years unaccounted for. Records of find locations carry more weight than verbal or anecdotal association. For example, a 19th century inventory at Blair Castle shows that John Stewart-Murray, 7th Duke of Atholl, found the "Blair Atholl" Lowland Claymore, (Figures 1 & 2 and 35), on a tour of his estates in the year he succeeded to the title and made precise measurements. He found the sword:

> *"in the lumber room, Brick Buildings, Dunkeld, (in) 1864, (which) appears to have been burnt, hence it may be a relic of the second siege of Dunkeld, 21 Aug 1689, when the whole town except 3 houses was burnt and many highlanders perished in the flames".*

The sword was an archaic weapon by 1689, and if it was used at the time it was probably for processional and ceremonial, not combat purposes. A record also exists indicating that Alasdair MacDonald of Glengarry, son of the chief, carried a two-handed sword at the Battle of Killiecrankie in 1689 but it is not known for what purpose it was carried or what type it was.

A few swords do exist with Scottish associations which unconvincingly part-fill the evolutionary gap between the "de Green-

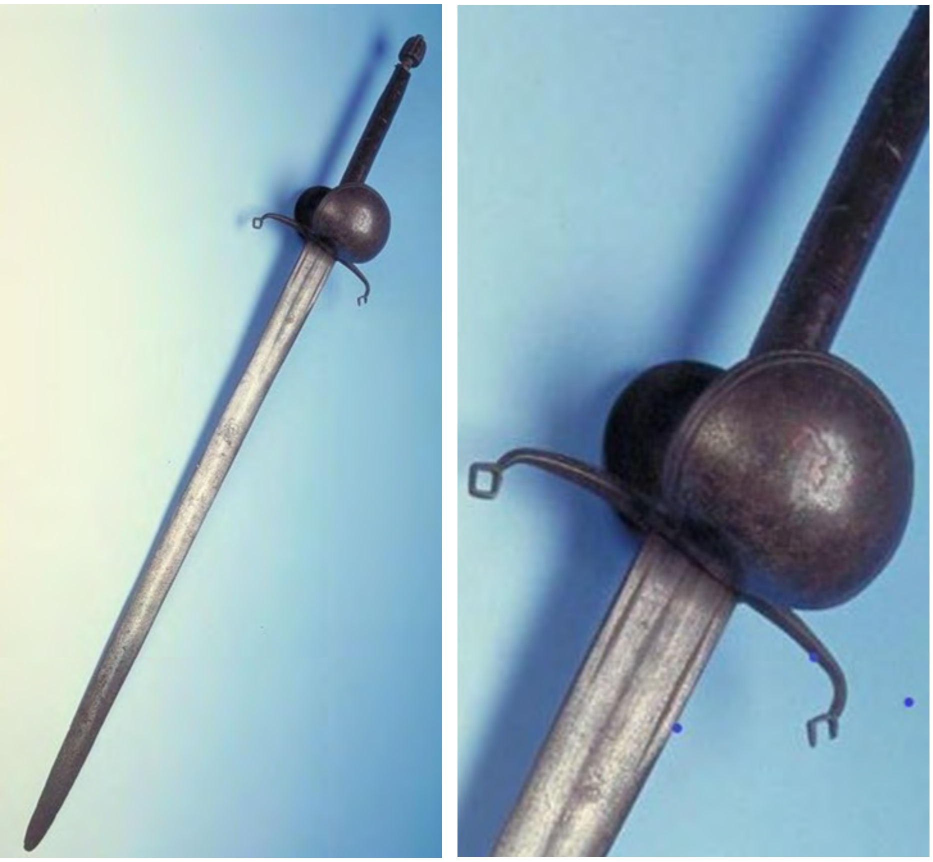

Figure 34. The Clamshell Claymore associated with Castle Coull. The tapering guard arms are of diamond cross section and terminate in diamond shaped apertures which are features reminiscent of West Highland Claymore manufacture. Courtesy of the Marischal College Museum, Aberdeen.

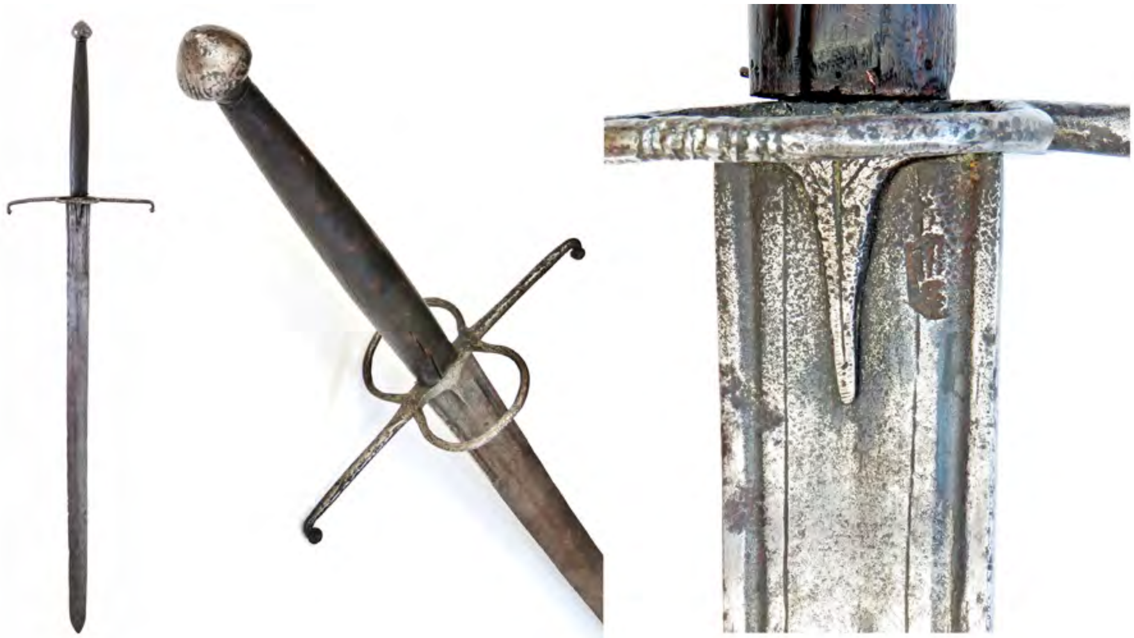

Figure 35. The "Blair Atholl" Lowland Claymore, Ex-Blair Atholl Castle, Perthshire, first shown in Figs 1 & 2. Note the hilt and hand mark in the ricasso (right). Private Collection. Author's photograph.

law" type and the arrival of the Lowland and Clamshell forms. The sword in Figures 36 is such an example. It is in the National Museums of Scotland and possesses some transitional features of note with regard to the cross guard.

The sword in Figure 37 hangs in a small rural church in Scania, the most southern province of Sweden, which was part of Denmark until 1658, when the eastern half of the country was conquered by Sweden. The sword is "half lang" in size, early 16th century in date and probably Danish. The hilt is mounted with side rings and long guard arms which turn downwards at the ends, though not as abruptly as on the Lowland swords illustrated above. Of further interest are the flat shell guards which emanate from the quillon block to fill the space within the side rings without touching the edges. Nothing is known about the history of the sword other than it has been in the church for centuries. The features of the hilt seem to be northern European, and suggestive of both Lowland and Clamshell Claymore types, and may be one of a number of European developments that influenced Scottish designs.[32]

Scottish effigies with single hand swords at Beauly Priory and Corstorphine Church, plus a grave slab at Forveran Church carved with figures bearing "halflang" swords, fall into the Lowland region and date to the 14th and 15th centuries. These swords are

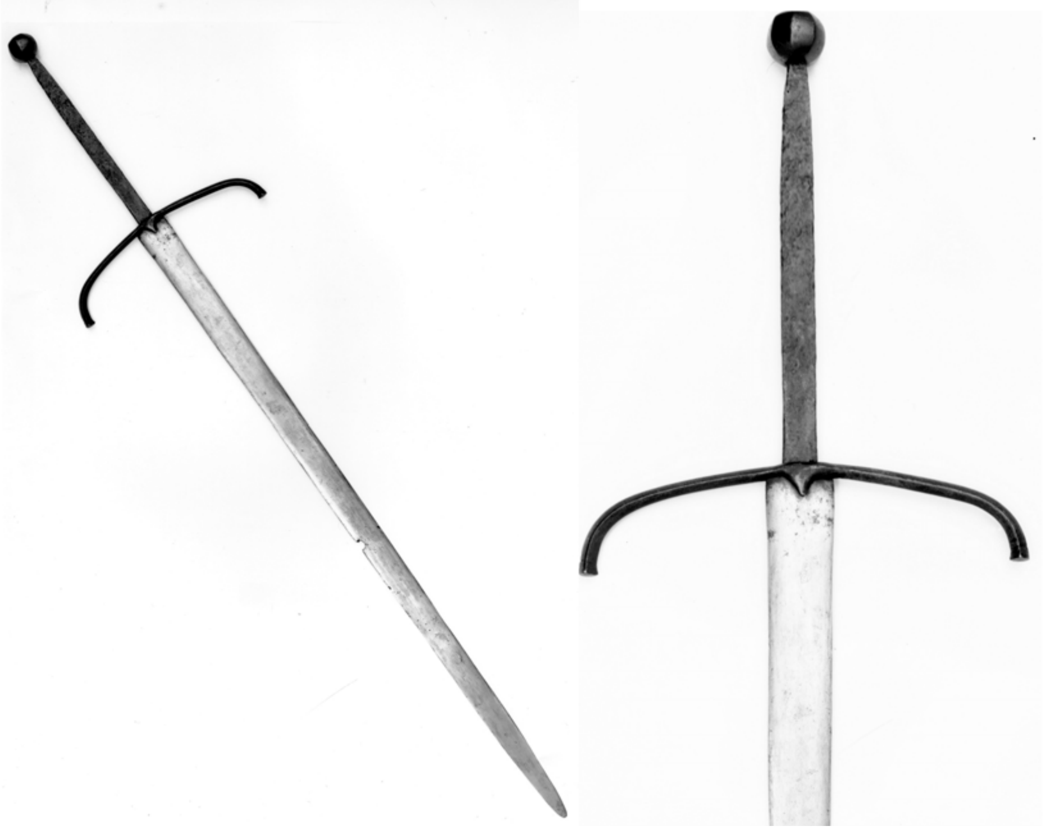

Figure 36. A two-handed sword of possible proto Lowland Claymore type. The hilt has long thin curved arms and small langets reminiscent of the fully developed Lowland Claymore. Courtesy of The National Museums of Scotland.

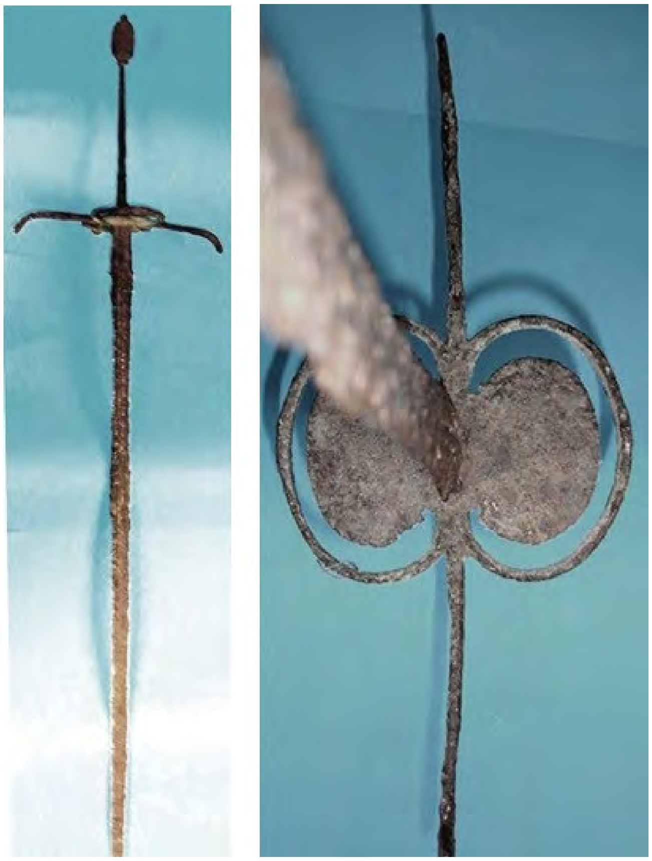

Figure 37. Two-Handed Sword of "half lang" size preserved in a church in Scania, Sweden. Courtesy of Staffan Kinman

simple cross-hilted knightly swords in appearance and show more of a French than Scottish influence. Their presence is not surprising for the warrior classes of the time with some role to play in the "Auld Alliance".

There is a passing similarity between the profile of the fully developed Lowland Claymore cross guard, with its long, slender, downturned quillons, and that of the elaborate two-handed Sword of State of Scotland which was a papal gift from Pope Julius II to James IV in 1507. It was made by Domenico da Sutri and replaced an earlier Scottish Sword of State made in 1502. The implication being that the Lowland sword profile was influenced to a degree by this papal gift which would date the arrival of the Lowland Claymore hilt to sometime after 1507.[33]

Whilst these possible immediate predecessors to the Lowland Claymore exhibit differences, the fully developed swords, although very rare today (a dozen or so are yet known) form a remarkably homogenous group. Three are illustrated in Figure 38. Some have the usual running wolf and orb and cross markings to the blades, and a small sub-group including the Atholl sword, have a mark resembling a hand stamped into the ricasso (Figure 35). The blades with this mark are similar in form and probably from the same blademaker. Any further significance is unknown.[34]

A few swords in the group have the side rings infilled with a lattice pattern of iron strips. One of these swords, in the National Museums of Scotland, has the strips formed into central roundels, one is engraved with a very worn helraldic shield and the other with the letters "M.I.V." incised in the Scottish manner. The ring guards on most Lowland Claymores are without infills.

The most massive sword known to be carved onto a grave slab which may represent a Lowland Claymore is at Stobo Church (Figure 39). In a naïve manner the worn slab shows the figure of a noble in armour. The most identifiable pieces are on his legs; sabatons, greaves and poleyns. He also wears spurs and the sash of a noble around his waist. The figure has a manicured beard and his hair has a middle parting. His hands are clasped at his front emulating the better contemporary carved funerary effigies in both England and Scotland. Of significance is the enormous two

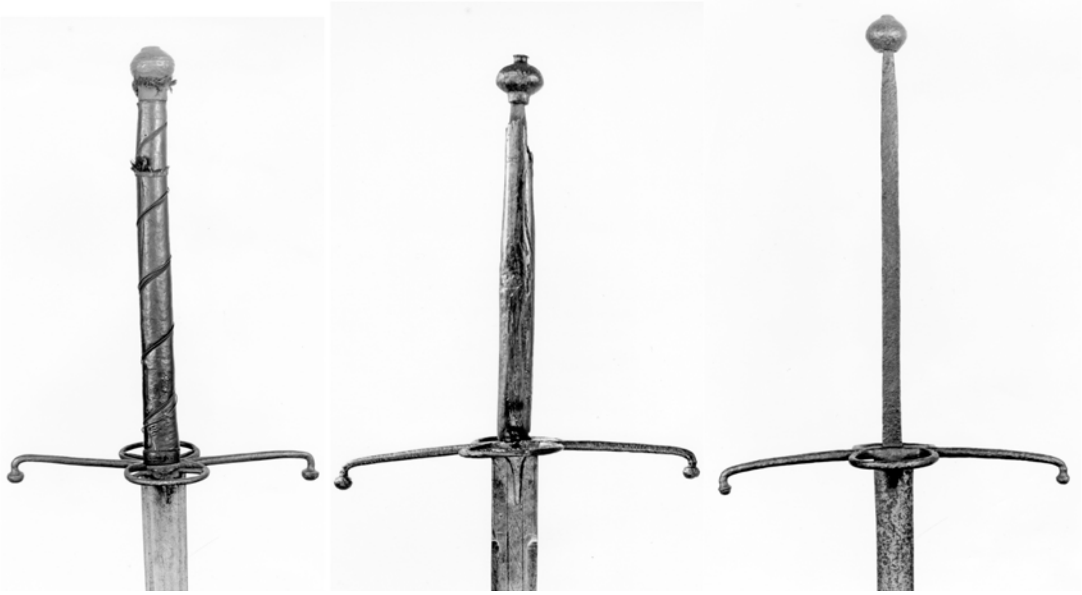

Figure 38. Three Lowland Claymores. Left and Right Courtesy of the National Museums of Scotland. Middle Courtesy of the Royal Armouries.

handed sword that hangs on his back down from his left shoulder (to the right in the photograph). The hilt is not clear enough to definitely identify it as a Lowland Claymore but it it cannot really be anything else.

Stobo is some 60 miles west of the site of the Battle of Flodden which was fought in 1513, and 30 miles south of the Battle of Pinkie Cleugh near Edinburgh, fought in 1547. Both battles were against the English and were decisive defeats for the Scots. The standard of this carving is inferior to that which the noble depicted would have envisaged for himself. It is feasible, but certainly not proven, that the slab belonged to a wealthy laird like Muirhead, who was killed in one of these battles and whose body was recovered from the field by attendants to be hastily buried at Stobo for retrieval later, with the improvised slab used as a location marker. Stobo was a canonry of Glasgow lying 50 miles south east of the city. Coincidentally, an inventory of 1542 lists the possessions of Adam Colquhon, the Parson of Stobo, which includes various weapons including a single handed and a two-handed sword.

The Decline of the Two-Handed Sword in Scotland

A number of influences converged at the beginning of the 17th century to initiate the decline of the two-handed sword in Scotland. These can be divided into two spheres: firstly, those which impacted from outside the realm and secondly, those from within. The net result was the replacement of the two-handed sword with the single-handed basket-hilted sword.

The external influences were mainly due to the changing battle tactics of European armies. The increasing availability and use of firearms meant that the specialist tasks previously reserved for two-handed swordsmen could now be dealt with more cost-effectively and quickly from a distance. The need for increased mobility of tightly knit formations precluded the use of the two-handed sword because it needed space to wield, and was a weapon more suited to the individual, face-to-face, maverick fighter rather than the well-drilled soldier standing shoulder to shoulder with his disciplined comrades. Scots fighting abroad absorbed these influences, and those that used them put down their two-handers to adopt new practices. It was important for a mercenary to be up to date with new tactics and to possess modern rather than outdated equipment. These influences most certainly took hold at home when these soldiers returned to Scotland and were adapted to local circumstances. Similarly, towards the end of the 16th century the Gallowglass in Ireland seem to have swapped their two-handed swords for pikes as the Catholic earls attempted to modernise their armies on European lines for their final, futile, push against the English. At the same time the Kern adopted a new role as Arquebusiers as well as light infantry.

Although relatively few men in 16th century European armies were armed with two-handed swords, the whole population of pan-European users provided a viable market for the blade-makers. The reduction in demand for two-handed swordsmen contributed to the obsolescence and decline in the manufacture of two-handed sword blades, and the key blade-making centres of Solingen, Passau etc turned their attentions to demand for other blade types. Supply routes from these centres to armourers in relatively remote countries like Scotland were convoluted commercial channels of agents that bought from the blade-makers, then from each other, and who would avoid the risk of being encumbered with redundant stock. As a result the availability of two-handed sword blades for armourers in Scotland was diminishing due to decline in production as well as local demand as the 17th century arrived.

Internal influences were mainly precipitated by the political and social changes that occurred at the beginning of the 17th century when in 1603, James VI of Scots, secured the English throne in addition to that of Scotland on the death of the childless Queen Elizabeth I. From being the ruler of an insignificant backwater kingdom, overnight James became one of the most powerful men in Europe. The two realms with the same king inevitably became closer, and at this time, and thereafter, Lowland Scots generals adopted some of the tactics and weapons of the more advanced English army that had no use for the two-handed sword.

Until his accession to the English throne James had been continuously frustrated by his inability to control his remoter Scottish regions and he took full advantage of his new circumstances to tighten his grip. In the lawless Lowlands at the border with England the riding clans had lived for many years raiding across the frontier at will, and vice versa. Although a system of March Wardens had been in place for centuries on either side to police these clans, they were generally under-funded, and although they had some effect, the border remained porous for raiding. By the end of the 16th century the region was barely governable. In 1603, the raison d'etre for these clans disappeared and there was no longer anywhere to hide from this sort of criminality as the region was forcibly opened up with a show of combined Scottish and English strength. James targeted the unruliest clans and ordered the demolition of at least 30 towers belonging to the Elliotts for example.

Capital punishment was introduced for any Englishman or Scotsman caught stealing goods worth 12d or more from across the border and was fiercely implemented. In Jedburgh in September 1606 Sir George Home, by then Earl of Dunbar, in what became known as Jeddart Justice, ordered the hanging of 140 of the border "thieves" almost without trial. A further 92 were herded into court in 1611 of which 38 were hanged. It is certain that many more hangings and other forms of local execution took place around this time in order to wipe out targeted groups that are not recorded. Transportation to colonies was also an option taken to clear out hitherto unstable areas.

Some major offenders escaped this rough justice. Those in favor with the King, who to demonstrate their loyalty had turned on their neighbours to assist in this "pacification" process, and to simultaneously conclude long-standing feuds, were rewarded with titles and assumed a pastoral existence over large consolidated estates. Others, on the reverse side of this coin, were forced off the lands they had traditionally occupied to scratch an existence in penury elsewhere. As a result of this brutal approach the commissioners could record that there was "perfect and settled peace and quietness" in the Borders.

Isolated incidents of violence continued but the King's justice was now in full control. This was a major turning point in border society. We can assume the two-handed sword disappeared in the area as archaic at this time. Although weapons of various less obvious sorts persisted, they were for occasional, individual, rather than organized use, unless this was attached to the actions of justiciary bodies appointed to police the region. Whether or not they were "in" or "out" of favour with the King's justice, the border clans that had used the two-handed sword during the 16th century were extinct as independent military entities and never re-emerged.

A bigger problem for James was bringing the Highlands more tightly under Crown control. Once more the circumstances and events surrounding his accession were of great assistance. Throughout the 16th century clan chiefs in the West had prospered by helping fuel the melting pot of Ireland. As in the Border region, the volatility of the West had been increasing as the century progressed. Spanish policy since 1585 had been to assist the Catholic Irish Earls and their forces against Protestant England to distract Elizabeth's attention away from Spain's ambitions in Europe, and was not a reflection of territorial aims in Ireland. The earls had offered the Irish crown to King Phillip II in 1595 (died 1598) but he had turned it down. In 1601 the Protestant forces of Elizabeth defeated the Irish at the Battle of Kinsale, which was followed by an English rampage of destruction in the countryside. This prompted the end of the Nine Years War in Ulster in 1603. Upon the accession of James to the English throne, King Phillip III of Spain wished to be at peace with the new Stuart regime, and this was ratified in a treaty in 1604, and direct Spanish support for the Catholic cause in Ireland ceased.

Continuous Protestant encroachment on the lands of Irish Catholics led to the event known as the "Flight of the Earls" in 1607.

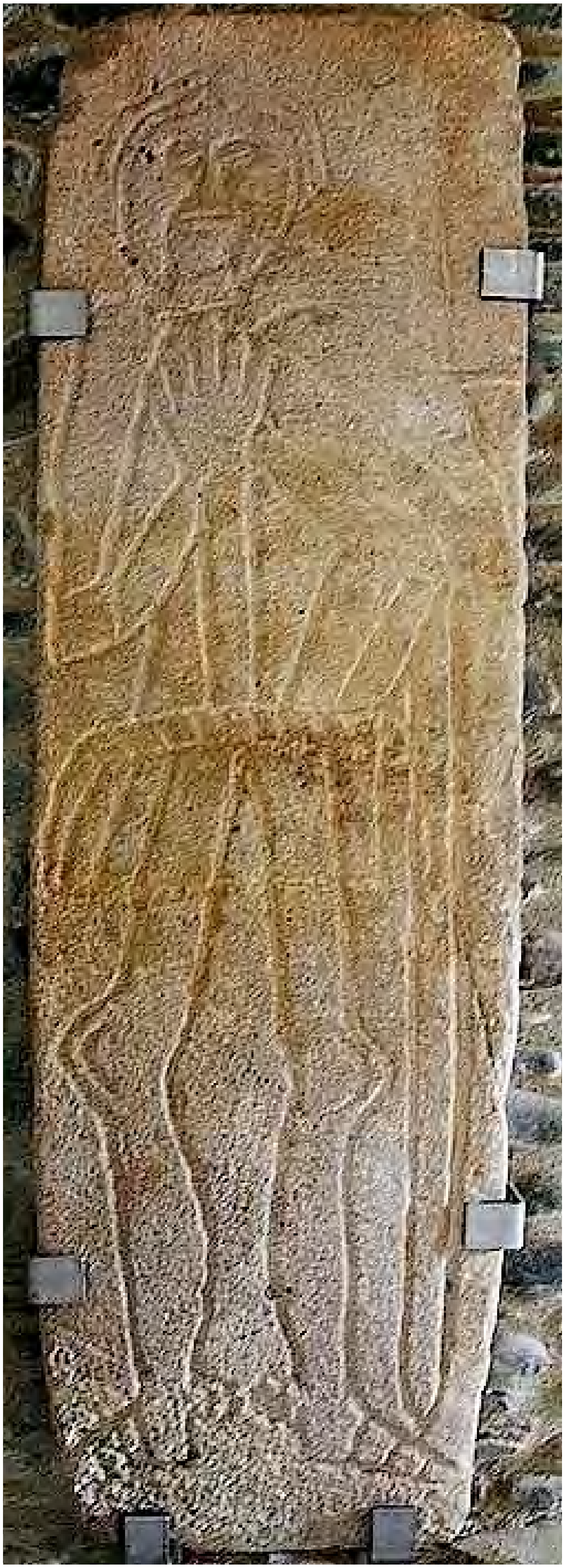

Figure 39. Grave Slab at Stobo Church showing a 16th century Scottish noble with a huge two-handed sword hung behind his left shoulder. Courtesy of Stobo Church.

This marked the end of the old Gaelic order which had ruled for centuries in Ireland and cleared the way for the plantation of Ulster by English & Scots settlers. In this respect the Flight marked the transition from an Ireland ruled by warlords to one run by Crown officials from Dublin. For the moment Ireland was controlled and at peace. For many of the clans in Scotland's West the fall of Catholic Ireland was a disaster. Their heyday was over. Incomes reduced and they became poorer. For now, they were corralled into their region by the English navy which patrolled the waters between Ulster and the Western Isles in greater force.

The first official move in the new reign to weaken and curb the behaviour of the western chiefs is embodied in the Statutes of Ikolmkill (Iona) in 1609. The commission to prepare and execute the statutes was given in Edinburgh on 14th April 1608 to "Andro, bishop of the Isles, Lord Steuart of Uchiltree, and Sir James Hay, Lord of Bewlie, Comptroller, to confer with McConeill of Dunivaig and McClayne of Dowart …for the obedyence of thame and thair clanis." Whilst it is not the purpose of this paper to discuss the statutes in detail, one item in the list of conditions that preceded the final draft was "that they shall forbear wearing any kind of armour (specially guns, bows, and two-handed swords) except only one-handed swords and targes".[35] The two-handed sword was already in decline and any satisfaction the commissioners may have taken in its shrinking usage was largely coincidental. It is also ironic that the basket hilted "one-handed" sword combined with the targe was to be used to such great effect by the clans as the 17th century progressed.

Some writers regarded the Statutes as "the first of a succession of measures taken by the Scottish government specifically aimed at the extirpation of the Gaelic language, the destruction of its traditional culture and the suppression of its bearers".[36] Whilst targeted towards the West conformity to the core conditions of the Statutes was a widespread requirement across Gaelic Scotland. James regarded the Gaelic language as a phantom of the air that infected people with dissent and referred to it disparagingly as "Irish", along with anything else of Highland Gaelic origin.[37] For much of his reign James was a believer in witchcraft and even wrote a book on the subject.

The way was paved for the agents of the Crown, mainly the Mackenzies in the north and the Campbells in the South, to dismantle the old order of the West. Castles were abandoned and went into ruin as regional ruling families changed name. The most marked symbol of this was the fall of Islay, the traditional seat of the Clan Donald Lordship of the Isles, to a Crown-backed well-resourced expedition by the Campbells of Cawdor in 1614, precipitated by continued MacDonald hostility to the Reformation in Scotland.

The fall of Islay was an important milestone for King James. History had taught him to be most wary of the clans in the West, and although his powers were now so great that he had in reality nothing to fear from them, the spectre of an invasion from the West was a constant presence in his mind. Having survived an attempt on his life in London by English Catholics in the Gunpowder Plot of 1605, James was under no illusion that his life was in danger from different quarters. William Shakespeare in his play MacBeth, written shortly after the Plot, publicised for Londoners the nature of this particular threat from the West. At the beginning of the play, an insurrection has just been quashed and King Duncan, with his son Malcolm, arrive at the scene of the battle and speak with a soldier who in part of his report describes the leader of the rebellion:

"The mercilless Macdonwald –
Worthy to be a rebel, for, to that,
The multiplying villanies of nature
Do swarm upon him – from the western isles
Of kerns and gallowglasses is supplied……."

The unique profile of the West Highland Claymore was most certainly known to James and was probably a symbol of his fears.

Through a combination of the Statutes of Iona, and the other influences discussed, production of two-handed swords across Scotland in large numbers ceased at the beginning of the 17th century. Early designs of basket-hilted swords replaced the two-hander, many of which were dismantled and the hilts re-forged into basket hilts. Blades for single-handed swords were already being imported and it made economic sense for armourers to utilise redundant two-handed blades by grinding them down to suitable one-handed sizes.[38]

Unlike the measures taken in the Scottish borders, the Statutes of Iona cowed the clans but did not destroy them and Gaelic culture survived. Whilst localized clan warfare continued, clans could no longer wage war on their own volition on a large scale. Instead they needed a bigger national cause with which to take sides to screen their vendettas, and the clans of the West had to wait until the English Civil War period 30 years later to achieve only a temporary respite from their irreversible decline. Through political intrigue, some traditional families survived this period, but in general, the beginning of the 17th century marked the end of the MacDonald federation of clans and their allies as a major force.

The survival of Scottish two-handed swords in the period between the early 17th century and the 19th often depended, as is the case with other Scottish weapons, upon their custodians realising sufficient reason to preserve them, not necessarily related to their use as fighting weapons, to offset their obsolescence and the temptation to recycle or dispose of them. Contemporary diarists, touring in the West Highlands and Isles in the relative tranquility of the post-Culloden era in the late 18th century, noted a reverence towards ancient weapons with ancestral significance in some of the places they visited. Thomas Pennant visited the island of Raasay in 1772 where in the house of MacLeod of Talyskir he saw a "Claymore or great two handed sword".[39] Similarly on a visit to Dunvegan Castle on Skye in 1773 with Dr Samuel Johnson, James Boswell saw the Claymore said by the MacLeods to have been used by Sir Roderic MacLeod (1573 to 1626) "which was wielded with both hands and is of prodigious size".[40] The Dunvegan sword is probably the West Highland Claymore which is still displayed at the castle. The whereabouts of the Raasay sword is unknown. The Clamshell Claymore of Clan Cameron described above also indicates the strong emotional attachment a family can have with a sword to motivate its return to Achnacarry in 1793.

Historic associations encouraged the preservation of some swords even though many of these are fantasy. A West Highland Claymore in a private collection in Clackmannanshire is associated with William Wallace, and a greatly modified Lowland Claymore, displayed at the Wallace Monument in Stirling, is also associated with William Wallace, who died at least 200 years before these swords were made. Even more astonishing is the association of a West Highland Claymore, once preserved at Clontarf Castle near Dublin in Ireland, and most likely captured from a Scottish mercenary, with Brian Boru, an Irish king killed at the Battle of Clontarf in 1014.

Scottish two-handed swords also survived as bearing swords. Towards the end of the 16th century and into the 17th, some massive cumbersome swords of European, mainly German origin, were manufactured with more flamboyant hilts than the usual fighting swords, most notably those of "Brunswick" type, for purely ceremonial purposes. The Scots did not devise a new type of two-handed sword for ceremonial use, but instead adapted swords of the three 16th century types described above. These were carried in front of nobles in formal procession as occasions required. The Black Book of Taymouth lists "ane two handit suord the hand quairof is overlayed with velvet". The original grip covering of surviving two handed fighting swords is leather and sometimes shagreen. This sword was possibly embellished for ceremonial use, and, may have had a gilt hilt, same as another two-handed sword in the same reference.[41]

The traditionally made hollow pommels of West Highland Claymores were made of thinly beaten metal which was easily damaged. The pommel of the British Museum sword (Figure 28, Middle) has completely worn through to the hollow centre from its front. Some surviving West Highland Claymores have had their original pommels replaced, presumably due to damage, with pommels more usually made for basket hilted swords dating from the beginning to the end of the 17th century. This probably indicates an extended life of some swords to periods after the skills of traditional wheel pommel-making had disappeared. Whether this continued use was as combat, or bearing swords, or simply collectors restoration is not clear.

The decorative finishing technique of Japanning for furniture arrived in England and Scotland in the early 17th century. This was an imitation of Asian lacquer work which involved coating objects with a layer of black resin upon which foliate and other designs were applied with gilt paint, highlighted by contrast with the dark background. Later in the 17th century the technique was applied to smaller metallic objects and sometimes weapons. The Clamshell Claymore illustrated in Figure 40 shows remnants of Japanning on the hilt. This was probably applied some decades after the date of its manufacture when its use changed from a combat weapon to one with more of a ceremonial function.

In 1679 when the MacLeans of Mull surrendered their armoury at Duart Castle to the Campbells, the inventory records 185 swords, 95 guns and one two-handed sword. It seems unlikely that a single MacLean clansman was trained in the use of the two-handed sword at that time, and more likely, that this sword was a West Highland Claymore used for ceremonial purposes by the Chief. A Clamshell Claymore in the Royal Armouries (Collection Ref: IX-II) is thought to have been carried in front of the Old Pretender in 1716 at his coronation at Scone Palace as James III/VIII. The "Sword of Justice" at Blair Atholl Castle is a Clamshell Claymore which was most likely carried before the Earls of Atholl who held hereditary Jurisdiction over most cases of law in the region and were invested with the power of "pit and gallows" to execute criminals. These regional courts were only abolished in 1747, although by then most had given up imposing the death sentence.

In Scotland swords were commonly used for beheadings in the 16th century. Another two-handed sword at Blair, this time a West Highland Claymore, is traditionally known as the Executioner's Sword. In 1570, Grey Colin Campbell of Glenorchy, chief of the Breadalbane branch of Clan Campbell, personally executed the Chief of MacGregor by beheading during a phase in the long-standing feud between the two clans. Although the records do not state whether a two-handed sword was used, it probably was.

Some 17th century records give the impression that being the custodian of a family heirloom, like a two-handed sword, carried obligations to ensure its safety. A letter dated February 10th, 1619, from the Earl of Menteith to his uncle, Sir Duncan Campbell of Glenorchy, asks him to return his two-handed sword and hagbut that had been held in safe-keeping by Glenorchy for a time. These items had belonged to the Earl of Menteith's father and had been deposited with the Laird of Glenorchy for the Earl's mother.[42] Such were the values of honour bestowed in the custodianship of ancestral relics that sometimes two-handed swords were used as deposits or security. On 29th November 1648 a Robert McIlcher in Portnacraige granted a receipt to Sir Robert Campbell of Glenorchy for the return of a two-handed sword belonging to James McIlcher, the granter's brother.[43] The specific reason why the sword was first of all deposited with Glenorchy is unknown. Further references to two-handed swords occur in the 17th century but the context is unknown. A letter of 7th August 1660 from Henry Watson to Patrick Smyth of Braco acknowledges the receipt of eight muskets and two two-handed swords plus a sum of money for pistols.[44]

The last known recorded use of a two-handed sword as a weapon in Scotland is in the description of an incident in the late 17th century. A confrontation occurred between Kennedy of Fenwick, who wished to cut a dyke to drain a bog, and Forbes of Watertown who objected to the idea. When faced by a number of Forbes antagonists, the son of Kennedy the Elder, who had been a Covenanting soldier, produced "ane horrid twa-handit sword", "ane extraordiner hideous weapon of offence".

Kennedy's opponents considered that "it was some mighty sword of his far back forefathers, rusted and dim, which he had taken from the wall and sharpened, and put it on a war footing afresh". Kennedy's great sword is described as "swooping ominously through the air, and clearing a ring around it" keeping his assailants at bay, but a stone thrown from the Watertown side knocked in three of his teeth and broke his jaw: "blinded by fury he dashed among them and inflicted a severe wound on the laird of Watertown's skull, from which he died four months later". It seems that this was the first time that some of Kennedy's assailants had seen a two-handed sword.[45]

By the early 18th century the two-handed sword was clearly obsolete, but as seen above, still effective in the right hands and technically still a weapon. After the failure of the 1715 Jacobite Rebellion, the Disarming Acts of 1716 which aimed at "securing the peace of the highlands in Scotland", demanded the surrender of weapons with special licences being issued to those that could prove a need for them. Whilst difficult to police in the outer regions, those areas nearest the towns where troops were garrisoned were easier targets. In Inverness the Armourer Robert Low surren-

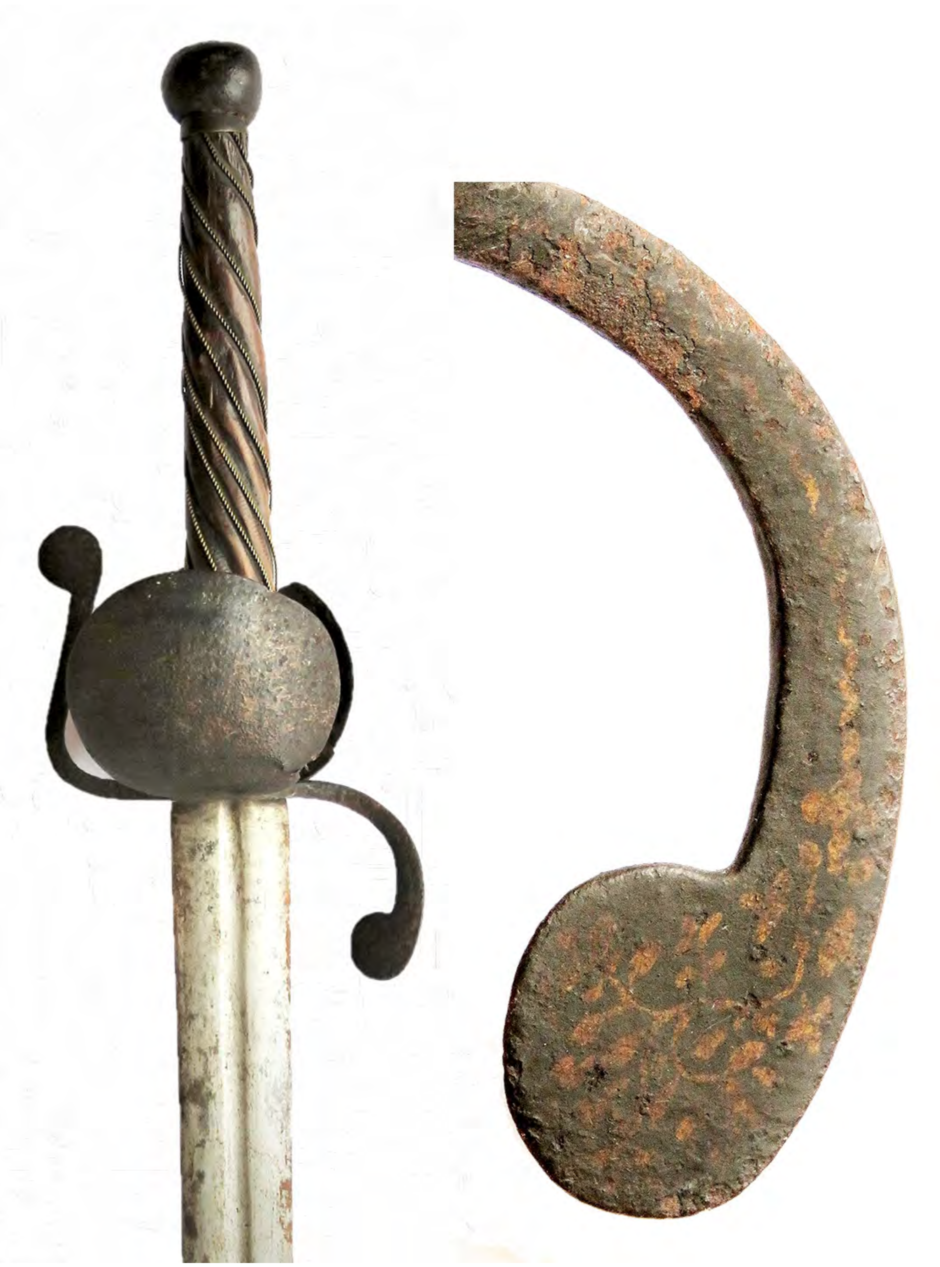

Figure 40. A Clamshell Claymore with the remains of Japanned decoration to hilt. Detail of quillon to the right. The vertically counter-curved arms of the guard are a variant of the more symmetrical arrangement of downward facing quillons mounted on other swords described above and is typical of a small group of swords within the surviving population. Private Collection. Author’s photograph.

dered seventy swords plus “Three Gunns, a pistol and two handed sword”. The record indicates that the diminution of the already small remaining population of two-handed swords was accelerated by the Disarming Acts.

Most of the two-handed swords that survived this period, particularly in the Highlands and North East Lowlands, had some historical significance and were in the hands of influential people, rather than ordinary folk, where the law could be overlooked, particularly after the failure of the 1745 Jacobite Rebellion, and the more stringent disarming measures that followed. These swords, stored away in the corners of large houses, and transported from place to place as the occupants moved around, represent most of those which survived into the 19th century.

The modern appeal of Scottish two-handed swords, and other forms of traditional Scottish weapons, came about largely through a surge of interest in Highland culture and history during the second quarter of the 19th century in the period known as the “Highland Revival”, initiated by George IV’s visit to Edinburgh in 1822. After many years of prohibition after the ’45, Highland regalia and antiquities, including weapons, became fashionable adornments for the walls of Scottish castles and country houses owned both by traditional families and an influx of wealthy merchants and industrialists. We must be grateful for this intervention because the survival of many artefacts depended upon it.

However, the price was the loss of provenance in many cases. It seems that at the time of the assembly of these collections the true histories of some objects were already forgotten, or set aside and then forgotten, in favour of invented associations, as the gentry acquired and connected these artefacts with spurious heroic deeds of their sometimes-adopted ancestors. It seems, to the writer, that in the 19th century when little was accurately documented about Scottish weapons, the obvious “Scottishness” of the West Highland Claymore, based upon grave slab evidence, caused it to be sought after by early collectors in Scotland particularly in the Lowlands and the Eastern Highlands.[46] The genuine origins and provenances of these swords will never be known but would be much more interesting than what replaced them.

Conclusion

Today, traditional Scottish weapons are a popular subject for collectors of antique arms and armour. During the period from circa 1600 to the middle of the 18th century, the Scottish armoury consisted of a unique range of arms including pistols, dirks, targes, polearms, basket-hilted swords and long guns, many of which are associated with the Highland clans, their intrigues, involvement in the Civil War periods, and with their "pro" or "anti" stances in the Jacobite Rebellions. This is the period that most enthusiasts are familiar with.

The Scottish two-handed sword belongs to an earlier more obscure period. 16th century Scotland was the time when the clans were at their most independent, strongest, uncompromising and warlike. The two-handed sword, more than any other object, has come to represent the warrior qualities of the clansman during this period, for whom death in localised warfare was an ever-present reality. Whilst later events also highlighted these characteristics of the clansman, the heyday of the clans had in fact ended together with the two-handed sword, nearly a century before the Jacobite period had even begun. Whilst often vilified by Scottish rulers, modern admiration for the warrior qualities of the 16th century clansman has caused his weapon of choice to be much sought after by collectors during the last two centuries.

Apart from the attraction of the historic context, the aesthetic appeal of these swords is also an alluring feature for collectors. Whilst there are three uniquely different types of Scottish two-handed sword, all three are of the most elegant proportions and design, a factor which somewhat helps disguise the brutality that characterised the time of their use.

A third factor which has fuelled interest in these swords is their scarcity.[47] In the late 16th century we can envisage many thousands of two-handed swords being wielded across Scotland (and Ireland). Yet today, under a hundred examples of the three types, and their immediate predecessors combined, are in existence. Most of these are in institutional collections and vary enormously in states of preservation and originality of condition. This scarcity has inevitably prompted the huge numbers of copies that are on the market which is further testament to the interest these swords inspire in people with but a passing interest Scottish history and arms and armour.

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Ewart Oakeshott, *Records of the Medieval Sword*, Boydell Press, 1991.

Acknowledgements:

Many thanks to the following people for their kind assistance in the preparation of this paper:

Dr Ralph Moffat, FSA Scot., Curator of European Arms & Armour, Glasgow Museums

David Stevenson, Professor Emeritus, University of St Andrews

Dr David H Caldwell, Keeper of Scotland and Europe (including Scottish weapons Retd), National Museums of Scotland.

Mr Kevin Palmer

The late Mr Sandy Gordon

Endnotes

1 “Weapons Shows”, often recorded as “Wapinshaws” and “Wappenshaws” with variations, were a regular practice in Scotland which required communities to periodically “show” their weapons and fitness for service to a royal representative when called upon.

2 The word “Claymore” is an Anglicised version of the Gaelic term “Claidheamh Mòr” which translates as “Great Sword”. Historical records show that the term was applied to the Scottish basket-hilted sword which first appeared in the late 16th century and has continued up to modern times in the Scottish military. However, due to the term “Great”, many collectors and academics from the late 19th century onwards thought that the term must originally have applied to the earlier bigger two-handed swords, although no direct evidence has survived for this. At present there is some debate about whether the term “Claymore” is appropriate for the Scottish two-hander preferring instead terms like “Scottish Long Sword”, which as far as this writer is concerned achieves nothing. So, for the purposes of this paper, the term “Claymore” is a 16th century Scottish two-handed sword of which there were three types.

3 Illustrations can be seen in Neil Melville, “*The Two-Handed Sword*”, Pen & Sword Military, 2018.

4 Whilst much has been written to define what a clan is in Scotland, and which usually ties the term “clan” to the Highlands, for the purposes of this paper a clan is regarded as any geographically based group of people bonded by kin or other ties capable of mobilising its manpower for military action.

5 There are strong traditions of Scots mercenary service abroad. The Scots Guard The Garde Écossaise of the French Kings was formed in 1430 by James II of Scots and only disbanded in 1730. Scots served in Swedish and Danish armies and further afield in Northern Europe in the 16th century.

6 For a discussion of this sword type see Ewart Oakeshott, “*Records of the Medieval Sword*”, Boydell Press, 1991, pages 76-81. Whilst his discussion is informative Oakeshott uses the opportunity to correct his earlier held view that the sword type dates to the 13th century, by re-assigning it to the 11th century, when in fact the evidence shows that the sword type had a long life and was probably in use from the 11th to the late 13th centuries.

7 In 1841, a fire burned down the medieval church of the Blessed Virgin at Nethergate in Dundee. The fire was very destructive, and much of the original church, founded around 1198, was lost. During excavations for the foundations of a new East Church the following year, a collection of intricately carved grave slabs were found and recovered. The sword on Ionnes’ Stone is most like the sword in Figure 6. Four others in the group known as The Ship Stone, The Lady’s Head Stone, The Fish Scales & Sword Stone and the Rosette & Shield Stone show similar sword hilts.

Thanks to Dr Ralph Moffat for bringing this to my attention.

8 Some found in Ireland are at the National Museum of Ireland in Dublin.

9 Thanks to Dr Ralph Moffat for bringing this to my attention

10 For illustrations and descriptions of these see Dr A Halpin, “*Irish Medieval Swords c. 1170 - 1600*”, Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy, 86C, No 5, 183-230.

11 See Tony Willis, 15th Park Lane Arms Fair Catalogue, *Apollo Magazine Ltd*, 1998, pages 18-27, “*A Two-Handed Gaelic Irish Sword of the Sixteenth Century*” for a discussion of this sword type.

12 Dr Ralph Moffat FSA Scot, “*A Sign of Victory?: ‘Scottish Swords’ and Other Weapons in the Possession of the ‘Auld Innemie’* ” , Journal of the Arms & Armour Society, 2018, Vol 15, No 2, pages 122-143.

13 Thanks to Dr Ralph Moffat for bringing this to my attention.

14 Photographs from the early 20th century of this sword show that it had a fragile loop of metal extending over the tang which protruded from the pommel top. It seems that in “restoration” of the sword the restorer has misunderstood that this is extension was actually part of the original shape of the pommel, and has removed it leaving the tang end flush with the pommel top, thereby removing the extension, and leaving the pommel with more of a “European” profile. The unrestored sword can be seen in Oakeshott, see endnote 6, above, page 237.

15 The grave images in Figs 22 then 26 to 32 are taken from A Steer & JWM Bannerman, 1977, “*Late Medieval Monumental Sculpture in the West Highlands*”, Edinburgh, 1977. Thanks to HMSO Press for permission to reproduce them here.

16 For a detailed discussion on Scottish axes see Dr David H Caldwell, “*Some Notes on Scottish Axes and Long Shafted Weapons*”, *Scottish Weapons & Fortifications*, pages 253-314, John Donald Publishers Ltd, 1981.

17 See James Drummond RSA, “*Sculptured Monuments in Iona and the West Highlands*”, Archaeologia Scotica Edinburgh, 1881. Although this study concentrated on only a few religious centres where these carvings are present, it is particularly important because many of the effigies have decayed having been left open to the elements in the period of over a century since the study was completed to the degree that some are now barely recognisable. In recent years some have been taken under cover. Some of these figures wear aketons without mail or with just the mail coif added. There is seemingly no uniformity, with each warrior kitting themselves out from a standard inventory as they see fit.

18 Steer & Bannerman, 1977, page 80.

19 The sword in Figures 1 top, 2 left, 26 & 27 left, had been part of the collection at Warwick Castle in England since at least 1871 until its divestment in 2007. For a detailed comparison between this and the Fyvie Claymore, with which it has much in common, see Tony Willis, “*The Park Lane Arms Fair*”, Spring 2009, *Apollo Magazine*, “*Three Claymores from Warwick Castle*”, pages 43-60.

20 This sword, Figs 26 & 27 right, was first illustrated in Sir Guy Laking, "*A Record of European Armour and Arms Through Seven Centuries*" in 1920 and described as a Claymore from Perthshire, at that time in the possession of Robert Cox of Glendoick. More latterly it featured in Tony Willis, "*A Scottish Highland Claymore circa 1574*", Peter Finer catalogue, 2013, De Montfort Press, pages 24-30, and The Baron of Earlshall, "*The Scottish Basket-Hilted Sword*", Volume 1, Earlshall Publications, 2016, pages 34 & 35.

21 The issue is probably not black and white. Perhaps in the early part of the 16th century the two-handed West Highland Claymore of early type was a captain's weapon, and a badge of rank, with the most common weapon being the two-handed axe. Whereas later in the century the increased performance and availability of the fully developed swords caused the Claymore to be the weapon of choice for those who could afford, and/or preferred, it compared to the axe, which would mean that the presence of the axe, a less expensive weapon to make and acquire, continued in some places but overall was declining in its usage.

The two-handed axe remained a presence the Scottish armoury and evolved in the Highlands, in name at least, into the Lochaber Axes assumed to be of 17th and 18th century manufacture.

22 J. Bain and others (eds), *Calendar of the State Papers Relating to Scotland and Mary Queen of Scots 1547-1603* (Edinburgh, 1898-1969), vol. 12, no. 142, p.170.

Thanks to Dr David Caldwell for this observation.

It is interesting that the bowmen are generalists, capable as archers and as infantrymen, fighting head to head with two-handed swords (we can also assume that the arquebusiers {fyremen} are similarly armed with two-handed swords). This draws a parallel with the depiction (illustrated in Willis, "*A Two-Handed Irish Sword of the Sixteenth Century*", Fifteenth Park Lane Arms Fair, 1999, p. 20) by Albrecht Durer dated 1521 and shows Irish soldiers probably on service as mercenaries in the Low Countries. One of these, intentionally shown as a man of some standing, is dressed in mail, has a large two-handed sword of Irish open ring pommel type carried at the slope over one shoulder, and tucked under the other arm, carries a bow with a range of arrows mounted with different heads, presumably intended by Durer to show his skill with the bow given the variety of uses the various arrows would be put to. Two two-handed swords are shown in the woodcut, both without scabbards.

23 State Papers, Eliz. Scotland, LVI, 5, 7, 13 and Scots Mercenary Forces in Ireland.

24 Calendar of State Papers, Ireland, 1596 to 1597 p 465.

25 Thanks to Dr David Caldwell for these observations (author of "*Islay, Land of the Lordship*", Birlinn Books, Edinburgh, 2008)

26 These guild records are taken from Charles E Whitelaw, "*Scottish Arms Makers*", Arms & Armour Press, 1977.

27 See various illustrations in Neil Melville, "*The Two Handed-Sword*", Pen & Sword, 2018.

28 Now in Inverness Museum.

29 Now in the National Museums of Scotland Collection ref: (L.1907.1).

30 This sword was once in the collection of an Aberdeen based collector in the mid-20th century known as Taffy Davidson who managed to gather a small group of Clamshell Claymores, some of which are now in the Marischal College in Aberdeen. Some of these were from locations in the Northern Lowlands and the East Highland regions and had been in situ for some time. Davidson noted that the Clamshell Claymore was the favoured two-handed sword type in these regions, but unfortunately, as far as the present writer is concerned, his observations were never published.

31 Illustrated and described in "*The Swords and the Sorrows*" National Trust for Scotland Trading Company Ltd, 1996, page 23, Fig 1:2

32 Published in Staffan Kinman, Edged Weapons in Sweden, Swedish Arms & Armour Society, 2014, page 31.

Some two handed swords regarded as Swiss appeared in the early 15th century which are mounted with straight quillons and thin, flat, crudely executed, square section guard plates either side. Unlike the Scania sword these swords comprise a distinct group but appear completely unconnected with Scottish sword development.

33 A number of similar swords were presented by Pope Julius II and to a lesser degrees by some other popes to various heads of state around Europe.

34 A Lowland Claymore with this hand mark in the ricasso is illustrated in "*The Swords and the Sorrows*", 1996, page 24. This sword is at the House of Dun at Montrose in Angus.

A further Lowland Claymore with this mark is in the National Museums of Scotland (Ref LA6) and shown in Fig 37 left.

35 For further details of the Statutes see The Register of the Privy Council of Scotland; AD 1545-1626, ed. by J. Hill Burton (Edinburgh: HM Register House, 1877-1898)[The Statues of Iona are in Vol. IX, 26-30] Vol. VIII, 737 [in left margin] Edinburgh 14th April 1608 [main text] Power and commission given to Andro, bishop of the Isles, Lord Steuart of Uchiltree, and Sir James Hay, Lord of Bewlie, Comptroller, to confer with McConeill of Dunivaig and McClayne of Dowart.Instructions to the above-named Commissioners as to what they shall propone to McConeill and McClayne "for the obedyence of thame and thair clanis."To propone to McConeill and McClayne that they shall find caution for payment of the Kings rents; (2) that they and their followers shall be answerable to the laws; (3) that they shall deliver to his Majesty all their houses of defence and "crannakis" (crannogs or island defences) in the Isles; (4) that they shall renounce all jurisdiction hitherto usurped by them over the King's subjects, and shall live in future as private persons, obedient to the ordinary sheriffs, bailies, justices, and other ministers of the law; (5) that they shall content themselves with such lands as his Majesty shall design, and under such form as he shall appoint; (6) that they shall destroy their "birlingis, limfadis and galleyis," reserving only such as shall be necessary for transporting his Majesty's dues and for other necessary uses; (7) "that thay and thair freindis, at leist sa mony of thame as ar or salbe found of abilitie, sall putt thair bairnis and childrene to the scoolis as the Counsell sall appoynt", (8) that they shall forbear wearing any kind of armour (specially guns, bows, and two-handed swords) except only one-handed swords and targes.

36 Kenneth MacKinnon, "Gaelic – A Past and Future Prospect", The Saltire Society 1991, Edinburgh, p. 46

37 Although a huge number of West Highland Claymores were used in Ireland in the 16th century, mainly in the north and west in areas lying outside the English pale, only two have survived with a clear Irish provenance. Both have ties with the South West of Ireland. One, first identified in the early 19th century at Rostellan Castle in County Cork, was later preserved at Clontarf Castle near Dublin until the mid-20th century and became known as the Clontarf Claymore, after which it was in the collection of RT Gwynn until circa 2000. For photos and description before restoration see "Sixteenth Century Irish Swords in the National Museum of Ireland", GA Hayes-McCoy, Dublin Stationery Office, page 45. For a photo and description after restoration by The Royal Armouries (the quillons were bent upwards out of shape and in restoration were bent back to make them straight and the grip was resurfaced) see Tony Willis the 13th London Park Lane Arms Fair, Spring 1996, pages 12-25, "Scottish Twa Handit Swerdis". This sword also retained fragments of latten sheet on the pommel which once most likely covered the whole hilt.

The second was preserved at Loftus Hall in the South West of Ireland and had come into the hands of the Marquesses of Ely in the 16th century. In reduced condition, lacking its pommel and with a modern grip, it was sold at Christies in London on 18th June 2009, sale number 5854. For photographs and description of this sword in restored condition, mounted with a modern-made pommel and grip, see Tony Willis & Andy Halpin, London Park Lane Arms Fair, Spring 2016, "The Loftus Hall Claymore", pages 26-32.

38 Occasionally basket-hilted swords of early 17th century type come to light mounted with cut down two-handed sword blades. For an obvious example see The Baron of Earlshall, "The Scottish Basket-Hilted Sword", Volume 1, Earlshall Publications, 2016, plates 154 to 157.

39 Thomas Pennant, "A Tour in Scotland and Voyage to the Hebrides", Vol I, pages 333-334, London, 1786).

40 James Boswell, "Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides with Samuel Johnson", London, 1786.

41 A peculiar sword of West Highland Claymore type was once preserved at Hawthornden Castle in Midlothian. The sword has four quillons of tapering diamond section with quatrefoil terminals. Two quillons are produced in the normal manner, whilst the langets have been manufactured as two further quillons. The four quillons radiate from the hilt with 90 degree spaces between. The sword is mounted with a flattened globular pommel, a narwhal tusk grip and a typical 16th century blade of German manufacture. In the opinion of the writer this sword is utterly impractical as a fighting weapon and can only have been made for ceremonial purposes, and to the knowledge of the writer, if it is genuine, is the only Scottish two-handed sword known to have been specially made for such a purpose. For an illustration see Dr David H Caldwell, "Claymores – the Two-Handed Swords of the Scottish Highlanders", London Park Lane Spring 2005, page 49, Fig 6. The sword is now preserved in the National Museums of Scotland Ref: H.LA 160.

42 Thanks to David Stevenson, Professor Emeritus, University of St Andrews, for bringing this to my attention (Ref: National Registers of Scotland {NRS}: GD112/35/3/9).

43 NRS: GD112/35/10/7. Thanks to David Stevenson for bringing this to my attention.

44 NRS: GD112/2/113/3/17. Thanks to David Stevenson for bringing this to my attention.

45 For a full account of this incident see "Kennedys in Orkney and Caithness", Proceedings of the Orkney Antiquarian Society, XI, 1933, John Mooney, summarised in "The Scottish Basket-Hilted Sword", Volume 1, The Baron of Earlshall, Earlshall Publications, 2016, pages 42 & 43.

46 And further afield. Warwick Castle in the English Midlands had three genuine West Highland Claymores acquired for its collection in the 19th century by the Earls of Warwick.

47 Today less than a hundred genuine Scottish two-handed swords of all types discussed in this paper are known to exist. Ignoring the earlier forms of sword which eventually developed into the three types of fully developed form there are around 40 West Highland Claymores, 30 Clamshell Claymores and a dozen or so of the Lowland type. The swords in each group vary greatly in terms of condition and originality with only 14 of the known population of West Highland West Highland Claymores retaining their original pommels. Only three institutional collections are known to have an example of all three and these are in the UK: The Royal Armouries in Leeds, Glasgow Museums and the National Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh.