

MacLeod of Lewis

A 17th century writer described the Lewis MacLeods in this manner: "The clans Torquil in Lewis were the stoutest and prettiest men, but a wicked bloody crew whom neither law nor reason could guide or modify."

The Clan leadership descended from Torquil MacLeod, a brother of the founder of the Harris line, who held Lewis from David II's reign. About 1343, the chief had a royal grant of the lands of Assynt in Sutherland, with its isle and fortress; they also owned lands in the Trotternish district of Skye, the isles of Raasay and South Rona, and Gairloch and Coigach in Western Ross.

They showed constant loyalty to the Lords of the Isles, and their chief Torquil was at Ardtornish in 1461 when preparations were being made for an alliance with Edward IV of England. The next chief submitted to the Scottish king after the forfeiture of the Lord of the Isles in 1493, but the family joined in the various attempts to restore the lordship.

Roderick (or Rory) MacLeod of Lewis was one of the rebel Council of the Isles which planned an abortive rising in 1545. For half a century, off and on, he was a thorn in the side of the authorities. Rory was thrice married, to a Mackenzie, a Stewart (the surname Lewis is also seen as a sept of that Clan) and a MacLean; and each wife had a Torquil: the first known as Connacht from his mother's people, he disowned; the 2nd, Torquil the heir, was lost in a storm while crossing the Minch; and the 3rd, Black Torquil, was murdered.

The Chief's private and public reputation gave King James some pretext for fixing on Lewis as the scene of a misguided attempt at development with the double aim of swelling

the royal revenues and rooting out disorderly elements. Lewis was forfeited and granted to a Lowland company named "Fife Adventurers." The scheme failed due to local opposition; the MacLeods offered a resistance under Neil Mor, one of Rory's illegitimate sons, who was subsequently executed in 1613. In the meantime, Mackenzie of Kintail bought out the Adventurers, and in putting down any resistance to his ownership, exterminated the immediate family up to the chief.

To the MacLeods of Raasay fell the representation of the Lewis' line. Malcolm IX, the son of a cousin of the three Torquils, escaped massacre in 1745 and became Chief. Raasay was sold in 1846, and the family emigrated to Australia, but the clan Torquil is not forgotten in the Hebrides.

{From R.W. Munro "Scotland Land of Kin and Clan", 1980}

The first MacLeods built their Clan House on the South of the island of Raasay at Clachan, which lies between the Isle of Skye and the mainland of Scotland. Saint Moluag, a follower of Saint Columba settled here in the 11th century, built a chapel and monastic dwellings. The chapel stands beside the modern Raasay House. The present house began construction in 1746 and the walled garden can be seen today.

The Raasay branch lived at Raasay House and the Chief John MacLeod was reported as being quite hospitable to visitors. He became Chief when his father joined the 1745 uprising; his father passed the estate to him so that the estate would continue to remain in the hands of the family, regardless of the outcome of Prince Charlie's fight.

His grandson, John, was in the Highland Regiment. During his time as Chief, financial difficulties caused him to sell the estate. The financial problems stemmed from a decline in

the market for cattle and from the inability of his tenants to pay rent due to crop failure. He added extensively to Raasay house, further incurring debt. His only issue, a daughter who died at age 3 was buried at the chapel on Raasay. He later immigrated to Australia along with his three brothers. The Island landlords replaced the MacLeods in 1830, after 500 years; Raasay was lost to the MacLeods.

He was succeeded by his nephew, James. James died un-married and his first cousin succeeded, Loudoun Hector Macleod XV of Raasay. Torquil Bright MacLeod, his son, born in 1889, served at Gallipoli in WWI and in WWII he commanded the Australian 22nd Light Horse. He was also the President of the Royal Agricultural Society in Tasmania.

His son, Torquil Roderick, was born in 1919 served in WWII and was a POW in Timor and Java. In 1988, he was recognized as the Chief and Head of the Baronial House of MacLeod of the Lewes by Lord Lyon. The use of 'Lewes' is based upon an ancient spelling of the Isle in the Outer Hebrides now known as Lewis.

Upon his death, the chieftainships of the two branches were divided between Roderick's sons. The current Lewis Chief, Torquil Donald was born August 5, 1948. The Chief of the Raasay branch is John, his brother.

{Alick Morrison w/ Revisions by Major Loudoun D. MacLeod, 1990}

After attempts at converting Raasay House into a successful Bed & Breakfast, the present Raasay House is home to the Raasay Outdoor Centre, opened in 1984, at a time when much of the house was derelict. There are a variety of sporting activities, island walks and a community 'Ceilidh place' which provides entertainment. Unfortunately in January 2009, a fire gutted the building and reconstruction is planned.

Ardvreck Castle is another place of MacLeod of Lewis historical note, serving as the only remaining tower house in the Highlands. It lies on a rocky promontory that juts into Loch Assynt, in Northern Scotland. It was built by MacLeods of Assynt in two phases around 1500 and 1590. The ruins can be toured after a short walk on the donation 'honor system.' It was sacked in 1672 by the Mackenzies and subsequently replaced by Calda House. The wife of Mackenzie refused to live in the 'old-fashioned' castle and he was forced to build Calda House to placate her. Calda House is visible from the ruins of Ardvreck.

The castle originally built as the stronghold of the **Lewes in Stornoway** is now a pile of ruins. Currently, they lay beneath the pier and are commemorated by a plaque noting their location only. The castle of Lewis is a relatively recent construct and has no association with the Clan whatsoever.

The **tartan** now called 'of Lewis' first appears as MacLeod dress tartan. It is also known, amusingly, as the Loud MacLeod. It appears in a painting dated to the 1830s of the 13th Chief of Raasay and is properly described as "generally worn by MacLeods of Lewis & Raasay." Dame Flora MacLeod of MacLeod (28th Chief) appears in a portrait with the MacLeod of MacLeod green & blue skirt with a shawl of the 'Lewis Yellow' over her shoulders. It has a yellow back-ground with three black stripes in plaids and a thinner red line crossing through the larger yellow field. The tartan can be worn by either branches of the Clan; there is no evidence that only MacLeods of Raasay or Lewis can wear this tartan.

The Raasay tartan is solid red with black plaid in the same sett, the red line is also

black; this is now used by the Raasay Chief and his line as their tartan.

The ruins of **Brochel Castle** lie on the northeast coast of Raasay; built in the 1500's. It was originally three or four stories and composed of four towers circling a well and small courtyard and served as the home of the chiefs of Raasay. It fell into disuse in the 1600's and all descriptions, unfortunately, only involve it being in ruins. No records adequately describe this fortress in its heyday.

The Lewis Chessmen

The Lewis Chessmen are of Viking origin, having most likely been carved in Norway in the 12th century from walrus ivory. They are considered to be the most outstanding ancient chessmen of the world.

The story is that a Viking ship pulled aground on Lewis and a man departed to hide his booty, after digging a hole on the beach at Uig, Isle of Lewis. This man later came to an ignoble end, being hanged for murder in Edinburgh.

A MacLeod lad discovered them while taking his herd of cattle out to graze. Apparently, the story goes, one of the cattle was attracted by the leather in which the pieces were wrapped and unearthed the pieces.

Discovered in 1831, 78 pieces are known, 11 of which are displayed in Edinburgh and the remainder at the British Museum, London. Some reports state that they were found in a small chamber of dry built stone some 15 feet below the top of the sand bank.

Modern historians state that there is no reputable account of their discovery that gives credence to MacLeod lore, but due to oral history, this story is included here as part of the history of MacLeod of the Lewes.

MacLeod of Lewes



An Cìrean Ceann Cinnidh

"I birn quhil I se"
"I burn while I see"
(representative of beacon fires)

Information provided courtesy of:
Clan MacLeod

Septs: (all other spellings):
Lewis, MacLewis, MacAulay, Aulay, MacCabe,
MacCaskie, Askey, Caskie, MacCaskill,
MacCorquodale, MacCorkindale, MacCorkill,
MacCorkie, MacCallum, MacGilleChallum,
Callum, Malcomson, Norrie, Norn, Tolmie.

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