

# Armadale Castle



The ramifications of Clan Donald are vast and confusing. There is a High Chief in the person of Godfrey, 8th Lord Macdonald of Macdonald, and four other acknowledged Chiefs — Clanranald, Glengarry, Sleat, and Keppoch; all of them are descendants of the legendary 12th-Century King of the Isles: Somerled.

With their traditional headquarters on the island of Islay, Clan Donald dominated Scotland's western seaboard for centuries and were related through marriage to King Robert II of Scotland. The founder of the Macdonalds of Sleat was Uisden (Hugh), a six times great grandson of Somerled. With territories that encompassed the Sleat Peninsula on Skye, this branch of the Clan became known in the Gaelic language as 'the children of Uisden'.

After a century of feuding, Donald of Sleat finally submitted to King James VI and, after his death, his nephew succeeded as Chief and was created 1st Baronet of Sleat. However, when his son succeeded as 2nd Baronet of Sleat in 1644, Civil War had broken out in the British Isles. Although the 2nd Baronet, Sir James Mor Macdonald, declined to become personally involved in the conflict, he was eventually persuaded to allow around 400 of his clansmen to support the Marquis of Montrose and the Royalist Cause.

As is so often the case, there was originally a true fortress at Armadale but it was burnt down, in revenge for the Clan's early support of the Jacobite cause at the Battle of Killiecrankie in 1690. As a result, the Chief was forfeit of his lands, but they were fortuitously restored to his grandson in 1727 as the Barony of Macdonald — although it seems that by then he preferred to spend time at his castle at Duntulm (at Trotternish, in the far north of the island) or in Glasgow.

While he did so, his factor and kinsman Hugh Macdonald was installed at Armadale. Hugh was married to his widowed cousin Marion, the mother of Flora Macdonald, heroine of the 1745 Jacobite Rising, and it was to Armadale

that Flora came for refuge after helping Prince Charles Edward Stuart to escape from Benbecula, in the Uists, to Portree. Five years later, it was at Armadale House that Flora married her kinsman Allan Macdonald of Kingsburgh.

Memorably, this same house was visited by Dr. Samuel Johnson and his companion James Boswell in 1773, while on their famous tour of Scotland. However, the property was by then in the keeping of Sir Alexander Macdonald, 9th Baronet of Sleat and 1st Baron Macdonald, yet another Clan Donald kinsman. Famously, in Boswell's account Sir Alexander is noted to have been criticized by Dr. Johnson for putting on a poor show of being a Highland chief, a criticism that was watered down for the book's second edition!

The 1st Baron's son, another Alexander, succeeded him in 1795 and, although he chose to live for the most part in England, the improvements to the estate began. In 1815, Gillespie Graham was commissioned to design a castle built on the existing mansion house, facing southeast across the Sound of Sleat, which would reflect the status of one of the most influential Chiefs and barons of Scotland's west coast.

However, the 2nd Baron Macdonald died unmarried in 1824 and his brother, Godfrey Bosville Macdonald, succeeded him. When his son inherited in turn, chunks of the family's inheritance were sold off to pay debts, including North Uist and Duntulm Castle. This did not seem to deter the 4th Baron Macdonald from commissioning the architect David Bryce in 1850 to extend Armadale Castle, following a fire that severely damaged the central section.

By this point, inheritance matters had by then become a trifle complicated to say the least. The eldest son of the 3rd Baron was born prior to his parents' marriage. Under English Law, rules of primogeniture therefore prohibited him from succeeding to the Macdonald peerage. As a result, the second son inherited the peerage and the Scottish lands, becoming Chief of Clan Donald, while his elder brother inherited his grandmother's Bosville estates in Yorkshire.

In 1910, Alexander Wentworth Macdonald Bosville, grandson of Alexander William Robert Bosville, obtained a Court of Session decree and was recognized as 14th Baronet of Sleat and 22nd Chief of the Macdonalds of Sleat. Financial circumstances obliged the Macdonald family to abandon Armadale in 1925 when the 6th Baron Macdonald moved his family to the more habitable Ostaig House, which had previously been used as Armadale's Dower House.

With his father's death in 1970, Godfrey, 8th Lord Macdonald was confronted by crippling death duties and forced to sell off the better half of the Sleat Peninsula and a hotel. As a result, in 1972 the 20,000-acre Armadale Estate was purchased by the Clan Donald Lands Trust.

In 1984, Armadale's Category A listed stables were converted by the Boys Jarvis Partnership into The Clan Donald Centre, which now operates as the café and visitor center. In 2002, the Museum of the Isles was opened on the site of the Little Garden.

With the west section demolished, the Category C listed Armadale Castle today stands partially derelict, but nevertheless survives as a romantic and impressively dramatic testimony to past glories.