

Pilgrims and the Picts: links between the Great Glen and Aberdeenshire, By Joyce Gilbert

After living in Glenmoriston for nearly nine years, I recently moved back to Aberdeenshire where I was born and brought up. Our new home is in the village of Aboyne, Deeside and while everything feels familiar, after a gap of 35 years I realised how little I actually knew about the story of the places where my family (on both sides) go back several generations.

I quickly joined the local heritage group, started reading books about the history of Deeside and as the weather has improved have been exploring on foot. There are several surprising connections between the Great Glen area and Aberdeenshire, including the journeys taken by the early missionaries, who came to the North-East to preach the gospel to the Picts between 500AD and 900AD.

Their early pilgrimages from religious centres in the south of Scotland and Ireland took them via the Great Glen and east over the mountain passes.

Later the converts went on journeys themselves – sometimes west and back to the Great Glen area. Among these Pictish pilgrims was St Erchard (also known as Mo Erchard or Merchard) who was born in Torphins and established a religious community at Kincardine o'Neil, six miles east of Aboyne. He also happens to be the Patron Saint of Glenmoriston!

Iron bells were an essential part of monastic life – so much so that they often became relics of the saints. These bells were thought to have special properties and were often taken into battle, sworn upon or used to convey signs. Some were so elaborately mounted that they could no longer be used as bells.

Taistealaich agus na Cruithnich: ceanglaichean eadar an Gleann Mòr agus Siorrachd Obar Dheathain, Le Joyce Gilbert

Às dèidh dhomh fuireach ann an Gleann Moireasdan airson faisg air naoi bliadhna, dh'imrich mi air ais a Siorrachd Obar Dheathain o chionn ghoirid far an do rugadh agus thogadh mi. Tha an dachaigh ùr againn ann am baile beag Aboyne, Oir Dhè agus ged a bha mi a' faireachdainn gu robh mi caran eòlach air a h-uile càil, às dèidh beàrn de 35 bliadhna thuig mi cho beag 's a bha fios agam mu sgeulachd nan àiteachan far a bheil mo theaghlach (air gach taobh) a' dol air ais grunn ghinealaichean.

Gu sgiobalta ghabh mi sa bhuidheann dualchais ionadail, thòisich mi a' leughadh leabhraichean mu eachdraidh Oir Dhè agus mar a thàinig piseach air an aimsir tha mi air a bhith a' rannsachadh air chois. Tha grunn cheanglaichean iongantach eadar sgìre a' Ghlinne Mhòir agus Siorrachd Obar Dheathain, a' gabhail a-steach na tursan a rinn na miseanaraidhean tràtha, a thàinig don Ear-thuath agus an soisgeul a shearmonachadh dha na Cruithnich eadar 500AD agus 900AD.

Thàinig na taistealachdan thràth aca bho ionadan creideimh ann an ceann a deas na h-Alba agus ann an Èireann tron Ghleann Mhòr agus dhan ear thairis air na beanntan.

Nas fhaide air adhart chaidh an luchd-tionndaidh air tursan iad fhèin – uaireannan chun iar agus air ais gu sgìre a' Ghlinne Mhòir. Am measg nan taistealaich Cruithneach seo bha an Naomh Erchard (air an robh cuideachd Mo Erchard no Merchard) a rugadh ann an Torphins agus a stèidhich coimhearsnachd chràbhach aig Ceann Chàrdainn Ùill, sia mìle an ear air Aboyne. Tha e cuideachd na pàtran-naomh do Ghleann Moireasdan!

Bha glagan iarainn nam pàirt riatanach de bheatha mhanachainn – cho mòr is gum biodh iad gu tric taisean nan naomh. Bhathar den bheachd gu robh feartan sònraichte aig na glagan sin agus gu tric bhiodh iad air an toirt gu cath, air an cleachdadh mar phàirt de bhòid, no air an cleachdadh airson soidhnichean a chuir an

<p>According to legend Merchard was visiting Strathglass when he noticed a white cow gazing at the same tree for several days without eating. Curiosity led him to dig there and he found three pristine bells. He asked his two companions to each take a bell and establish a church where the bells rang for the third time of their own accord. Merchard traveled with his bell towards Glenmoriston.</p>	<p>cèill. Bha cuid dhiubh air an cur suas cho ann an cruth cho toinnte 's nach gabh an cleachdadh mar chlag tuilleadh.</p> <p>A rèir beul-aithris bha Merchard a' tadhal air Srath Ghlais nuair a mhothaich e mart bhàn a' coimhead air an aon chraoibh fad grunn làithean gun ithe. Thug a shron ann e agus chladh e an sin agus lorg e trì glagan priseil. Dh'iarr e air a dhà chompanach clag a ghabhail gach fear agus eaglais a stèidheachadh far an do sheinn na glagan airson an treas uair leotha fhèin. Shiubhail Merchard leis a chlag gu Gleann Moireasdan.</p>
<p>When he reached the hill called An Suidhe (The Seat), the bell rang for the first time. It rang for the second time at Fhuaran Mherchaird ( Merchard's Well) at Balintombuie and it rang for the third time where the burial ground is now situated.</p>	<p>Nuair a ràinig e an cnoc ris an canar An Suidhe, sheirm an clag airson a' chiad uair. Sheirm e airson an dara uair aig Fuaran Mherchaird ann am Baile an Tom Buidhe agus sheirm e airson an treas uair far a bheil an cladh a-nis suidhichte.</p>
<p>No traces now remain of the original church or "tilleadh". However, Merchard seemingly cared for his people long after his death.</p>	<p>Chan eil lorg air fhàgail den eaglais thùsail no tilleadh a-nis. Ach, a rèir choltais, thug Merchard cùram dha na daoine aige fada an dèidh a bhàis.</p>