

## *"Ancient Kingdom of the Scots"*

*The relationship between the peoples of Scotland and Ireland is an ancient one. It is known that around 8000 BC, during the Mesolithic or Middle Stone Age, settlers arrived in North Antrim. This migration was part of the re-population of Europe following the last Ice Age. The settlers, probably Scandinavian in origin, came from what we know today as Scotland.*

*Ireland was known to the Romans as Scotia; what is modern Scotland, was called Alba and was home to the Picts. As a result of settlement on the west coast of Alba by the Scoti, the area became known as Scotia Minor. This distinction remained until the Eleventh Century when there was a re-emergence of the name Eire. Alba claimed the name Scotia; Land of the Scoti, to itself.*

*Dalriada was named for the clan known as the *Dál Riata* whose origins were in the coastal region of north-east Antrim. The tribes of this part of Ireland were generally *Cruithín* while *Dál Riata* were *Éireann*. This left them somewhat isolated and subject to frequent raiding and attacks from other tribes. Alongside larger clans such as the *Uí Néills* of Ulster, the *Dál Riata* were a relatively small force.*

*The boundaries of Dalriada are hard to determine and probably, as a result of skirmishes, changed frequently. At its largest extent it may have extended from the estuary of the River Bann to the west, south along the Antrim Coast to Glynn in Islandmagee; what is well-documented, however, is that the core area of the kingdom ran from the River Bush in the west, south to Glenravel. The most likely site of the capital of Dalriada was Dunseverick in County Antrim.*

*The origins of the kingdom are lost in early history. The earliest settlement from Dalriada in Ireland to Scotland was probably in the late Second Century when Cairbre Riada, Son of Conary, King of Ireland, and Grandson of Con of the Hundred Battles, established a presence on the west coast of Alba. More than four hundred years later this was documented by the Venerable Bede:*

*"In the course of time, Britain, besides Britons and Picts, received a third nation, the Scoti, who, issuing from Hibernia under the leadership of Reuda, secured for themselves, either by friendship or by the sword, settlement among the Picts. From the name of their commander they are, to this day, called Dalreudini."*

*There were a number of settlements during the Fifth and Sixth Centuries; the most remarkable of these was in 503 or 506 AD when the three sons of Erc, Fergus, Aengus and Loarn, seized power in Scotland. The area they colonised subsequently became known as *Aírrer Gaedhil*, the territory of the Gael - modern-day Argyll. Interestingly, some accounts refer to the six sons of Erc and names them as the Two Ferguses, the*

*Two Aenguses and the Two Loarns. What is more certain is that one of the Loarns gave his name to Lorne in Scotland.*

*It is said that Fergus Mac Erc obtained from his cousin, Murkertach, King of Erin, the *Lia Fail* or Stone of Destiny which he brought with him - this would secure forever the throne to a prince of Scotie blood. Later history tells us of its removal to Scone and subsequently to Westminster Abbey - or was it? The Irish in the Twelfth Century still believed that the stone was at Tara, early seat of the High Kings of Ireland.*

*Early in the Sixth Century, Christianity was embraced throughout Ireland and Scotland. Saint Brigid or *Bride*, one of the most revered of Irish patron saints, founded a monastic settlement in Kildare. She was of noble birth, also claiming her lineage back to Con of the Hundred Battles. Saint Brigid died on 1 st February 525 AD. What is less well-known is that *Bride* is also revered in Scotland; it is said that the Western Isles - *The Hy-Brides* - are named after her.*

*From the time Fergus had established a powerbase in Scotland, the Irish Dalriada went into decline. There were constant squabbles with the Cruithin clans in Ulster. In the early part of the Sixth Century Fergus moved the capital of Dalriada to Dunadd in Scotland and from this point forth, the Irish Dalriada was subservient to the Scottish kingdom. This was a source of friction in itself for there certainly remained an Irish King of Dalriada after this time.*

*Christianity was now firmly established and Saint Columba enters our story at this point. Again of noble birth, he was said to have changed his original name *Crimthian* - which means 'The Fox' - to *Colm* (Dove) when he developed an interest in Christianity. He built many churches throughout Ireland and Scotland and this earned him the title, *ColmCille*, Colm The Church Builder.*

*It is said that Colm's copying of the *Cathach* (The Book of Psalms) was the source of dispute over copyright. The dispute was the cause of one of the greatest battles of the period, *Cul Dreimne* in 563 AD. It is known that Colm's people hired themselves as mercenaries to the Uí Néills. Some stories say that following the battle, Colm was filled with remorse and was intent on leaving Ireland "to find an island from which Ireland could not be seen". Other accounts suggest he was forced into exile.*

*In any case, Colm went to Dunadd to seek help from his cousin, Conall, King of Dalriada. It seems that through Colm's aristocratic connections he was granted the island of Iona where he established Scotland's most influential church. From this time Colm became a significant player in the politics of Dalriada; he may even have visited Brude, King of the Picts, to ensure an established peace with Dalriada. Despite his commitment not to return to Ireland, Colm made several visits on both diplomatic and church business.*

Colm's entry to Dalriada was marked by an extremely unsettled period in the kingdom's history. The Picts had recently defeated Dalriada in battle and the Irish part of the kingdom was pushing for total independence from Scotland. We read that Conall was a weak king and that Colm was in fact the real power behind the throne.

In 575 AD a meeting was held at *Ros-na-Rig* (Rosnaree, the peninsula of the King) in Islandmagee, County Antrim. The then King of Dalriada, Aedán Mac Gabráin, submitted to Baetan Mac Cairill of the *Dál Fiatach*, King of Ulster. Colm had undoubtedly exerted considerable influence over the accession of Aedán as king to succeed Conall. But his diplomacy did not prevail; the meeting at Ros-na-Rig did not settle the issues between Ireland and Scotland; and so, a great convention was called at *Drum Cett* in 590 AD. The most likely setting for Drum Cett is Drumahitt, south of Ballycastle in County Antrim - by 590 AD, Tara had been abandoned as the court of the Irish kings.

The Convention of Drum Cett was attended by Aedh Mac Ainmire, High King of Ireland, and Aedán Mac Gabrain, King of Dalriada in Scotland. There were also large numbers of minor kings and nobles and, of course, the clergy. There is, most notably, no mention of an Irish King of Dalriada. A number of issues were discussed including Aedh's wish to expel what he saw as the increasingly arrogant and contentious Bards and Poets from Ireland - again Colm intervened! On Dalriada, it was agreed that the King of Ireland could call on its military support when required; but that Aedán

would have the right to raise taxes in his own kingdom. A closer alliance was also forged with the Uí Néills of Ulster. There is no doubt that Colm played an enormous role in the settlement at Drum Cett.

Drum Cett marked the last major event of its kind in Ireland and the agreement held for nearly forty years until Domnall Brecc, King of Dalriada, rejected them. He sided against the Uí Néill at the battle of *Mag Roth* (Moira, County Down) in 637 AD. Domnall found himself on the losing side and henceforth Dalriada distanced itself from politics in Ireland.

In later years Dalriada expanded from its base in Argyll at the expense of the Picts and Britons of Strathclyde. The Scots influence over the tribes of Northern Britain was extended through marriage with the Picts and Britons. In the middle of the Ninth Century, the separate kingships of Scotland were united under Cinaed Mac Alpin, King of Dalriada.

From its first king, Fergus Mac Erc, Dalriada established the bloodline of subsequent Scottish monarchs. Through the Stuarts, this has continued to subsequent British kings and queens. It is clear that from humble beginnings the Dál Riata have helped shape the history of the British Isles for the past 1600 years.