

# ***A Plaid given to Lady MacKintosh by Prince Charles Edward Stuart***

## **Introduction**

Amongst the small number of tartans that can be dated with certainty to the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, and thus the end of the clan system, is the *Moy Hall*<sup>1</sup> *Plaid*, so-called on account of it having been given to Lady MacKintosh<sup>2</sup> by Prince Charles Edward Stuart (PCE) when he stayed with her at Moy in February 1746. The story of the Prince's association led to the plaid being revered as a Jacobite relic and it was subsequently divided amongst Charles supporters as a keepsake. At the height of the Highland Revival in the early 1800s attempts were made to reproduce the design based on a large piece of the original plaid retained at Moy. Unfortunately, that undertaking was flawed and modern research revealed that the original pattern differed from the reconstruction. Further copies were made in the period 1830-40, none of which were exactly the same, however they in turn have been divided up, confused with the original and the story of the plaid in turn attached to them. As a result, upwards of sixteen specimens survive in museums and private collections all of which are claimed to be part of the original plaid. This paper will examine these, identify which are original and which later copies, and attempt to make an accurate reconstruction of the original sett.

## **Early Records**

The tartan was first recorded by D.W. Stewart in his 1893 work<sup>3</sup> (Plate 1) where, referencing it to the Culloden Coat<sup>3</sup>, Stewart said of it:

*'.....but the fabric contains evidence of earlier manufacture than the date of Culloden. Indeed, with the exception of two plaids at Dunimarle, certified as having been at Sherriffmuir in 1715, the writer knows of no example so large in size, and possessing so much internal evidence of great age. It may, with every probability, be assigned to the first years of the last century, if not considerably earlier. Nor is this incompatible with its appearance at Culloden,....'. 'The plaid....., shows an intricate and unusual sett; and the single check (repeat), as here displayed, represents half of the plaid,.....' When shown in exhibitions it has been catalogued "Highland Plaid, found on the field of Culloden the day after the battle".*



**Plate 1. D. W. Stewart's Plaid found at Culloden**  
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<sup>1</sup> Moy Hall, often spelt Moyhall, is the seat of the MacKintosh chief. The [present house](#) replaced the Jacobite era one in 1872.

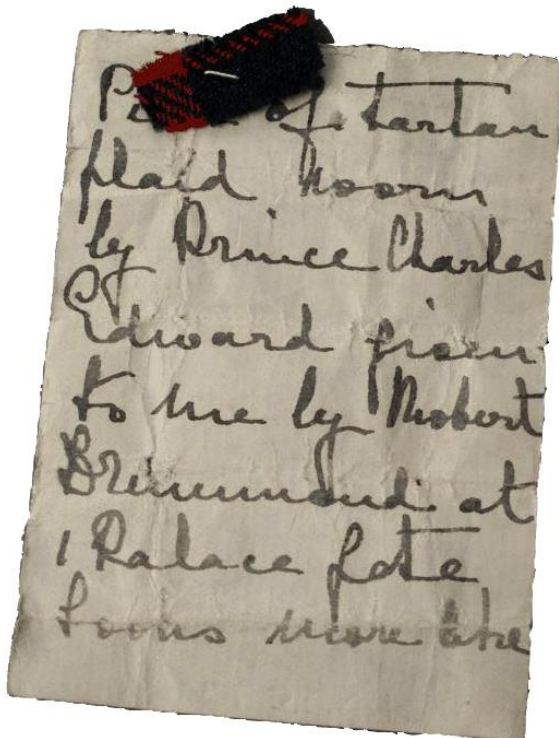
<sup>2</sup> [Lady Anne MacKintosh](#), also known as Colonel Anne, was a Jacobite heroine and wife of the chief, a Hanoverian Officer.

<sup>3</sup> The Culloden Coat is discussed in this [paper](#).

Quite how Stewart was able to claim an early 18<sup>th</sup> century, or possibly much earlier, date for the plaid is unclear. His description of the sett as *intricate and unusual* was possibly a reference to the plaid having a complex design that may have been offset<sup>4</sup> and perhaps had a selvedge mark or selvedge pattern. But as he didn't clarify his remark one can only speculate based on surviving fragments. The claim that the plaid was found on the Culloden battlefield is not borne out by evidence and is an example of the romanticisation surrounding artefacts associated with the Prince and the Jacobite cause.

Stewart was loaned the plaid by Mr Gourlay Steell R.S.A.<sup>5</sup>, but does not say if it was complete or merely a portion of the original, nor whether it was owned by Steell or whether he was merely the agent to make it available. Given that the colours are completely different to those in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century copies (discussed later) it is possible that Steell's piece was the original setting and may have been a portion of the Moy Hall plaid given to Lady MacKintosh by PCE. The sett of that piece is the same as that shown by Stewart but his proportions are wrong and the colours defective: he gave yellow for green in the original. Stewart made a similar error with his *Coat from Culloden* which he also got wrong as this author discussed in a [related article](#). The whereabouts of Gourlay Steell's plaid is unknown and it is therefore impossible to know whether his was the original or one of the copies.

To confuse matters further, Stewart's work also included tartans attributed to *MacDonald of Keppoch* and *MacKintosh*. Writing of the Keppoch he said that the design '*represents a portion of the plaid of '45 given Prince Charles Edward, long preserved at Moyhall, but many years back divided amongst several families*' and of the MacKintosh that it '*was the sett worn by Prince Charles Edward in the Mackintosh country*'. The references to the Prince, Moyhall and MacKintosh cannot have escaped Stewart's attention and the similarities between these two and his Culloden plaid (discussed later) are obvious, so much so that it's remarkable that Stewart did not make the connection.



A number of pieces from the plaid survive<sup>6</sup> in museums or private hands but many are tiny (Plate 2) making determination of the original sett tricky and reconstructions often erroneous.

**Plate 2. Fragment of Prince Charles Edward's plaid.**  
Photo: [SCRAN](#)

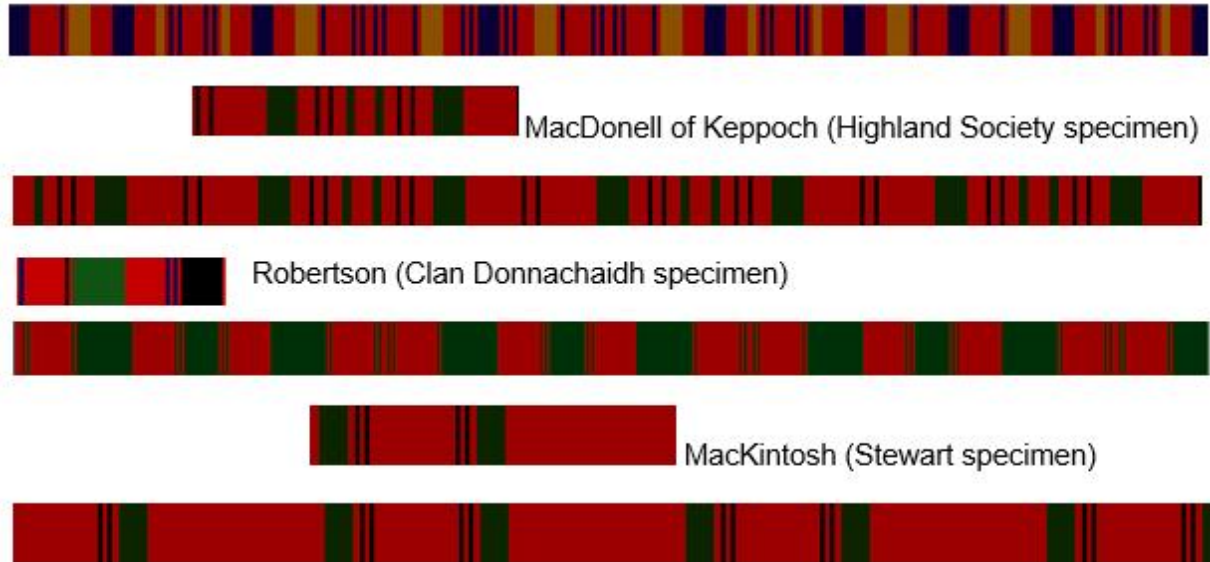
<sup>4</sup> The practice of setting the warp from the centre of one pivot that was placed on one selvedge to the selvedge mark or selvedge pattern on the other. When woven the tartan appears unbalanced until two pieces are joined at the pivot selvedge giving a double width piece with a balanced sett and border on each side.

<sup>5</sup> Gourlay Steell also loaned the Culloden Coat for Stewart's book so it's possible that, like the Coat, the Moy Hall plaid previously belonged to James Drummond, from whom Steell obtained it and, before him, W. B. Johnston, both of the R.S.A.

<sup>6</sup> Research by the writer has identified eighteen specimens claimed to be part of the original plaid although some are obviously of a later date.

## Errors in interpretation

A small section of the cloth will inevitably lead those unfamiliar with traditional plaid weaving techniques to misinterpret the original sett, especially where it is large or complex. For example, the colour strips below are for the tartans associated with the MacDonells of Keppoch and Robertsons said by D. W. Stewart to have been taken from portions of plaids associated with the Prince, plus Stewart's MacKintosh. The strips show the amount of the surviving warp and their 'assumed' original repeat (by Stewart) mapped against his Culloden Plaid at the top (Fig 1).



**Fig 1. Colour strips of the MacDonell of Keppoch, Robertson and MacKintosh specimens compared with Stewart's extrapolation of the design.** © The Author

The resulting tartans extrapolated from individual fragments are logical but technically wrong and the result of trying to deduce the sett from such a small fragment in isolation. Had other similar pieces been consulted then the broader pattern would have been obvious. In the case of the Robertson piece, Stewart's extrapolation is problematical because the specimen includes four colours, not two as he records, as well as a herringbone selvedge. This latter feature should have alerted him to the fact that this was the edge of the cloth and that his extrapolation was therefore woefully inaccurate. Mclan<sup>ii</sup> used the tartans extrapolated from the Keppoch and MacKintosh fragments for the plaid and kilt respectively in his MacDonald of Keppoch and MacIntosh characters (Plates 3 and 4).



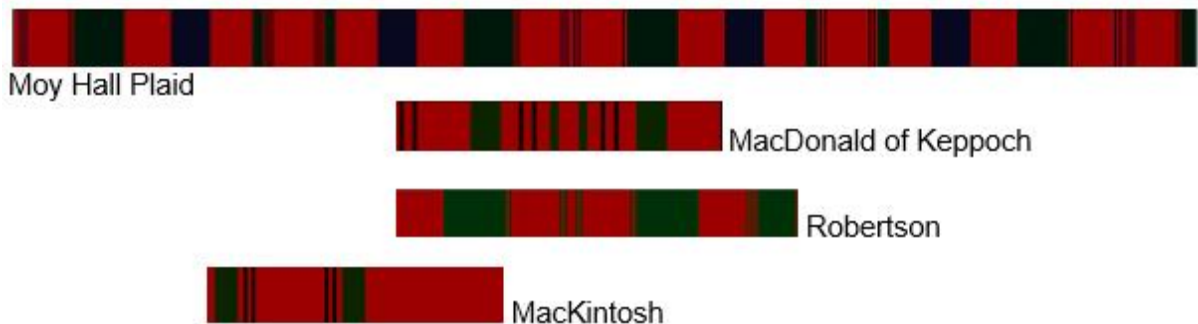
**Plate 3. MacDonald of Keppoch by RR Mclan**



**Plate 4. MacIntosh by RR Mclan**



If these various fragments are positioned relative to their place in the original Moy Hall plaid then it is quite apparent that they are sections from that material, either the original or part of the later copies (both discussed later), rather than being similar tartans with much the same story concerning their origins (Fig 2).



**Fig 2. The MacDonell of Keppoch, Robertson and MacKintosh specimens aligned with the full sett**  
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The slight differences between the original and the three fragments is the result of variations in historical data and how they have been recorded in later databases; they do not necessarily reflect the actual threadcounts. Writing of the MacKintosh tartan Stewart's correspondent, the Rev. A. Thomson Grant, said:

*"The piece of tartan I sent you was given me in September 1860 by Mrs Christina Mackintosh or Grant, widow of the Rev. James Grant, minister of Cromdale. I was at the time on a visit to Coulmakyle House, some miles above Grantown, where Mrs Grant and her family then resided. Mrs Grant produced a piece of tartan, which she confidently assured me was a piece of the kilt worn by Prince Charlie while in the Mackintosh country. The kilt, she added, was religiously divided among the then members of the chief's family and near relations, and the piece she possessed had come down to her by regular descent from her ancestors of that time. When I was bidding good-bye, Mrs Grant halved the piece of tartan, and gave me that which is now in your possession."*

We therefore know that the piece Stewart copied had been further divided (halved) in 1860, and that the family tradition was that it had been handed down through several generations.

Having shown that the MacDonald of Keppoch, MacKintosh and Robertson setts are in fact pieces of the Moy Hall plaid/later copies rather than unrelated but similar tartans they need not be discussed further.

### **The Moy Hall Plaid**

It's not known when the original plaid was divided but in the writer's opinion it was almost certainly done by Lady Anne MacKintosh; she died in 1787<sup>7</sup>. It seems likely that it would have been *'..divided among the then members of the chief's family..'* shortly after the '45 when the memory of the Prince was at its strongest; c1750-60 is a reasonable hypothesis.

Stewart's and subsequent writers' difficulty in determining the pattern was exacerbated by the fact that they were working from a portion of the original plaid. It had a large sett and was woven offset with a herringbone selvedge mark meaning that the pattern did not balance

<sup>7</sup> Lady Anne was pre-deceased by her husband, Angus, the 22<sup>nd</sup> chief, and died without issue. Moy Hall and contents, including the plaid (or remnant if already divided as speculated by the author) passed to Angus' nephew, Aneas, 23<sup>rd</sup> chief.

across the loom from the centre. Therefore, the design could not be extrapolated in the usual manner to work out the sett.

The surviving piece of the original plaid is still at Moy Hall but even that is relatively small. Writing in 1990, Scarlett<sup>iii</sup> described it as ‘...a piece of hard tartan about 26 inches by 6 inches the length running from the selvedge towards the centre of the web.’ And then ‘The length of the piece is not sufficient to make clear at what point the sett reverses.’ The latter meaning that the cloth stopped short; i.e., was missing a portion containing the second selvedge. The author has examined the fragment which conforms to Scarlett’s description, except for the width which is actually 23<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> inches<sup>8</sup> (Plate 5).



**Plate 5. The surviving fragment of the Moy Hall Plaid with herringbone selvedge pattern. © The Author**

The hard tartan<sup>9</sup> specimen was hand woven using naturally dyed hand spun singles (non-ply) yarn for both warp and weft. If the yarn were tested the analysis would probably confirm the dyes were cochineal for the red, indigo for the blue plus indigo combined with unknown dyestuffs for the black and green.

Lady Anne’s death coincided with the beginning of the Highland Revival<sup>10</sup> in which genuinely old tartans with a Jacobite connection offered a social pedigree at a time when tartan was becoming increasingly popular across Scotland as a whole. These ‘genuine tartans’ were seized on by the early manufacturing trade and copies made for an eager market.

### **1821 and subsequent copies**

In Oct 1821 the Border weaving firm J&W Hilson, Jedburgh, received an order from Dunkeld for a dozen plaids exact to description given<sup>11</sup>. It is not known whether the letter survives and it is unclear from the reference whether the ‘description given’ included a specimen but the order is said to have been from *Lady MacIntosh of Moyhally near Dunkeld* and that *they were for use by the men of her husband's regiment in India*. Apart from the spelling, there are several inconsistencies in this narrative: Moy Hall is not near Dunkeld, the 23<sup>rd</sup> chief died the previous year and was succeeded by his cousin who died unmarried in 1827.

Irrespective of who exactly ordered the plaids, a portion of one of the plaids, a full width piece, survives in the collection at Blair Castle (Plate 6). In it the single width material is 22 inches

<sup>8</sup> Scarlett corrects his measurement later in his treatise stating that the piece is ‘23<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> inches long and stops just short of the plain selvedge’.

<sup>9</sup> Hard Tartan - a term used to describe a particular type of fine, coarse cloth that was common until the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was made from the fleece of native sheep, finely spun as a worsted yarn and tightly woven. The cloth was used straight off the loom and was not finished (fulled) as cloth is today.

<sup>10</sup> A period spanning the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries that included much of the reign of George III (1760 -1820), the Regency (1811-1820) and subsequent reigns of George IV (1820-30) and William IV (1830-37); which saw a great variation and change in the development of Highland Dress.

<sup>11</sup> [Ancrum, The Tartan Blanket and a Puzzle.](#)

wide including a herringbone selvedge. The hard tartan material was probably intended to have been joined in the traditional manner to make a full plaid, but it could equally have been worn as a narrow plaid.



**Plate 6. Specimen of the 1821 version showing the full width of the reconstruction.** ©The Author

The direction to J&W Hilson that the reconstruction should be an 'exact match' was not wholly achieved. This is discussed later but at this stage it's noteworthy that the incomplete Moy Hall piece is 23½ inches wide whereas the Blair sample runs selvedge to selvedge is only 22 inches wide. The direction was therefore presumably about the sett but not the exact proportions of the original. A contemporary specimen<sup>12</sup> shows that there was at least one other attempt to reconstruct the Moy Hall plaid at about the same time and although only a portion of the web, it includes the same plain selvedge arrangement finishing in a blue bar as the Blair (Hilson) specimen (Plate 7). Given that the shades of the Blair sample are closer to the Moy Hall specimen it is likely that this private specimen was from a second length by Hilson, or another weaver copying the Hilson setting; a copy of the copy. Both fragments are claimed to be from the original plaid but a detailed study shows this not to be the case.



**Plate 5. Fragment from a c.1821 copy of the Moy Hall plaid.** ©The Author

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<sup>12</sup> From a Private Collection, the hard tartan specimen dates c1821-40.



In the late 1800s Hilson rewove three plaids in the tartan but on that occasion the cloth was double width<sup>13</sup>. Of the three; one was offered at a local sale of work in 1899, another sent to Queen Victoria in 1890, and one plaid given to an apprentice at the Hilson mill. The latter survives and is believed to be owned by a descendant in Canada. Attempts to trace the owner have proved unsuccessful but examination of the online photo shows a plaid that appears to be of a softer cloth, possibly merino which was becoming widely used by the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. The single width pattern is shown on the double plaid by the pale line (Plate 9).



**Plate 9. 1899 double width reconstruction of the 1821 copy at Blair Castle. ©The Author**

### **The Original Setting**

Scarlett had access to both the Moy Hall fragment and the 1821 copy at Blair (Plate 6) from which he drew conclusions about the original sett. The original Moy Hall specimen stops short of the second selvedge but we know, because of the selvedge mark on the other side, that it is the incomplete one that would normally be the joining edge of a double plaid. Based on the 1821 copy, Scarlett's interpretation of the second selvedge and therefore probable second pivot is logical but results in a structurally very unbalanced pattern.

The difficulty of getting the colours right, especially the thinner stripes, is evident from the 1821 copy where the blue and green are both dark and readily confused with black. In 2011 the author examined a portion of another early 19<sup>th</sup> century copy (in a Private Collection) which, whilst incomplete and with a slightly different threadcount in places, follows the 1821 setting

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<sup>13</sup> The change resulted from the introduction of wider looms in the mid-1800s which avoided the need to join material to make wide cloth.

but in shades closer to the original. It can therefore deduce that there were at least three attempts to reconstruct the original setting, two in the early 1800s and one double width version at some point in the middle of the century.

Below is a strip representing Scarlett's interpretation of the total width of the Moy Hall warp, with the selvedge mark indicated by the arrow, followed by the assumed full sett, less the selvedge mark, with the pivots marked and showing how it would repeat once joined (Fig. 3).



Fig 3. Scarlett's interpretation of the original warp. ©The Author

Whilst this is a logical extrapolation of the incomplete sett, the resulting tartan is ungainly and the effect is a busy pattern that is not well balanced or particularly visually pleasing (Plate 10).



Plate 10. Scarlett's reconstruction of the Moyhall Plaid ©The Author

Having examined the 1821 copy it just doesn't make sense that the pattern should finish where Scarlett presumed it did at the joining selvedge. The setting suggests that that reconstruction was based on an incomplete specimen and was a *best guess* at the time. If it is assumed that the broad second (blue) pivot identified by Scarlett is incorrect then a simplified setting is immediately apparent with the pivots on the red between the alternating bands of narrow lines (Plate 11).

The missing selvedge would therefore be the narrow red between the fine blue lines which gives a balanced pattern in which one repeat plus the selvedge pattern would have spanned the whole width of the warp (Fig 4). The resulting joining selvedge is marked 'J'.





Fig. 4 Author's reconstruction of the Moy Hall warp; missing selvedge pivot marked 'J'. ©The Author



Plate 11. Author's reconstruction of the Moy Hall Plaid (pivots marked 'x') ©The Author

A study of the Moy Hall specimen's threadcount revealed inconsistencies that showed that the weaver had to adjust the count in order to make the warp fit. This was achieved by varying the number of threads in some of the broad bars. For example, the two blue bars should be of equal size but are 68 and 72 ends; similarly, the reds on the inside of the blue are 78 and 72 ends. Allowing for the threadcount discrepancies and including the missing section of the Moy Hall specimen would give a reconstructed warp of 1300 ends @ 54 epi.

**Surviving Specimens – Original or Copy?**

The Moy Hall specimen contains a number of elements that allow other surviving pieces to be compared with it and a determination reached over which are pieces of the original plaid and which later copies. Some surviving fragments are so small that it's impossible to confirm to which group they belong. The most significant feature is the herringbone selvedge which comprises 7 alternating bars of 10 black threads and a final bar of 10 red threads (Plate 12).



Plate 12. Herringbone selvedge on the original Moy Hall Plaid. ©The Author

There are actually 72 black threads; the first one, right as viewed in Plate 12, is a continuation of the twill threading and the herringboning actually starts with the second black thread. Similarly, the last black thread follows the direction of the final red band meaning that it comprises 11 threads in all. This arrangement suggests that the warp was measured and tied onto the remains of an earlier length of cloth on the loom and which included a herringbone selvedge, rather than the weaver threading the herringbone especially for this length. Two specimens held in museum collections<sup>14</sup> have a herringbone selvedge comprising 8 unequal black bars (Plate 13) meaning that they cannot be part of the Moy Hall plaid but are from a later copy.



Plate 13. Sample of the Prince's Plaid, Inverness Museum. ©The Author

The other significant variation between the Moy Hall fragment and some of the other pieces that are claimed to be from the original plaid is differences in threadcounts. In several of the specimens the broad red sections contain over 100 thread whereas the largest comparable in the Moy Hall piece has 80 threads. A comparison of the various fragments claimed to be from the Prince's plaid show where the individual pieces fit in relation to the original warp and emphasises the difficulty in identifying fragments in isolation (Fig 5). Each specimen is colour coded; grey – original, buff – copy, blue – indeterminable.

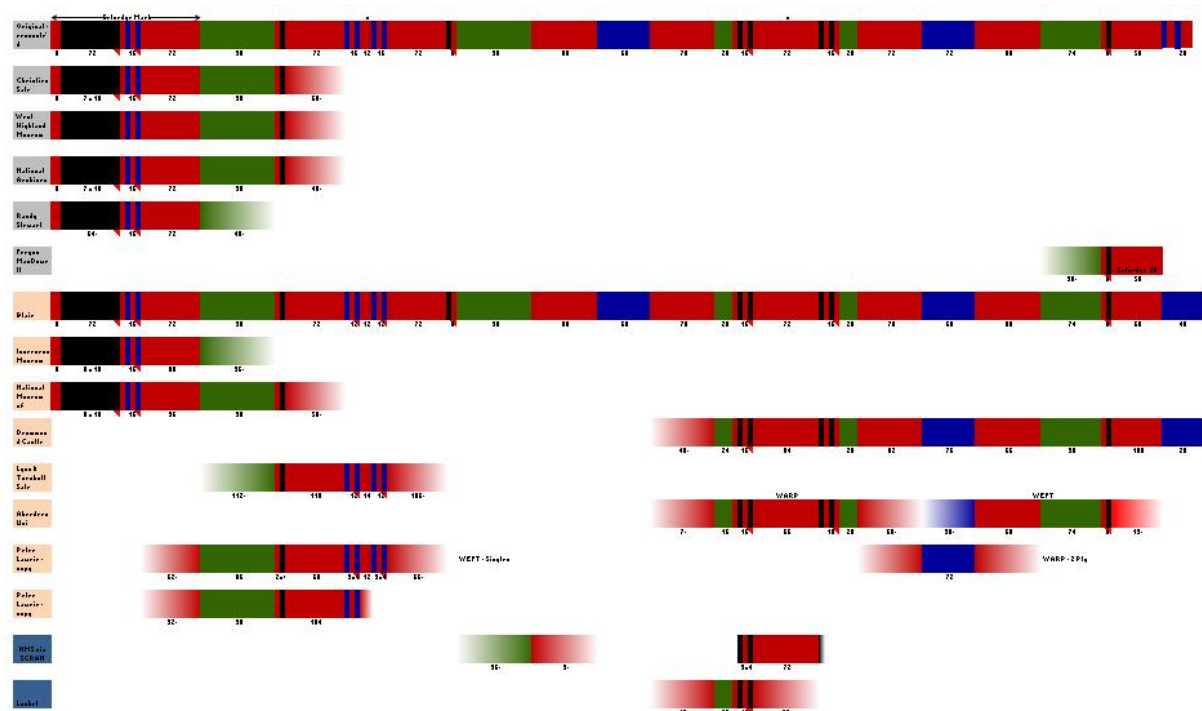


Fig 5. Comparison of the fragments claimed to be part of Price Charles Edward's plaid. ©The Author

Of the twenty specimens so far identified, only seven are known to be part of the original plaid (top stripe reconstruction). Of these, three, are in Scotland; two others have only recently come to light and are owned by individuals in Canada. This author is this paper is fortunate

<sup>14</sup> One sample can be viewed in the Inverness Museum, the other in the National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh.



to own the largest surviving piece after the one at Moy Hall (Plate 14). In the graphic showing the relationship between the samples (Fig 5), the first buff strip represents the warp of the 1821 copy at Blair Castle.



**Plate 14. Alignment of the Moy Hall specimen with the largest other extant piece of the original.**

© The Author

## **Conclusion**

There can be little doubt that the original Moy Hall plaid was a treasured Jacobite relic and no reason to suppose that the story of the Prince having given it to Lady MacKintosh is not true. That would certainly account for it, like a number of other plaids connected with the Prince, having been divided up as souvenirs amongst his supporters. This was most likely done by Lady Anne, probably by 1760, and a number of the pieces were later further divided.

Of the numerous small pieces of the original plaid examined none include the joining selvedge, which is frustrating. Unless or until such a piece comes to light the correct setting of this tartan will always remain in doubt but what seems perfectly clear is that both the so-called Old Robertson and MacDonald of Keppoch are the result of errors in interpreting small portions of the Moy Hall plaid and were not distinct tartans as claimed by Stewart and later writers.

The Blair specimen and Scarlett's resulting interpretation offers an alternative arrangement of the original sett which finished on the broad blue as the second pivot. The resulting joined plaid was a large, busy design with only a half repeat plus selvedge mark across the warp meaning that the second pivot was wrong in the original; i.e., the warp was incorrectly set up. Whilst that is possible there is no other known example of only a half setting across a warp and it seems unlikely that that was the case in the original material. Scarlett's view that there may have been a second, similar plaid, which was the source of the Blair copy is not supported by an older sample; besides which, the setting is still illogical for the reasons outlined above.

We cannot know how many pieces the plaid was originally cut up into and it's frustrating that no single surviving piece is large enough to show the full width of the cloth. There is little

doubt that further research will unearth more pieces of what are claimed to be from the original plaid. Perhaps one of these will include the missing selvedge so that the original setting can be confirmed. Unless or until such time, the reconstruction outlined in this paper is the most logical and likely arrangement for the original mid-18<sup>th</sup> century plaid.

#### Acknowledgements:

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<sup>i</sup> **STEWART D.W.** 1893 *Old & Rare Scottish Tartans*. Geo. P. Johnston., Edinburgh

<sup>ii</sup> **LOGAN J and MCIAN R.R.** 1845 *The Clans of the Scottish Highlands*. Ackermann & Co., London

<sup>iii</sup> **SCARLETT J.S.** 1990 *TARTAN The Highland Textile*. Shepheard-Walwyn., London