

# *Dalrymple of Castleton*

## **Introduction**

The portrait of Sir Robert Dalrymple of Castleton (Plate 1) is a good example of how poor research can lead to inaccurate claims about a tartan that are later presumed to be historical facts. This picture was included in Hesketh's book 'Tartans'<sup>i</sup> in which she said of it that it was '*one of the earliest pictures of a Lowland laird wearing tartan. Anon c. 1720*'. In fact, the identity of the artist is known, as is the date of the portrait which is later than that attributed to it by Hesketh.



**Plate 1. Sir Robert Dalrymple of Castleton. Anon. c.1720 in Hesketh's *Tartans*, 1961**

## An Incorrect Dating

The sitter, Sir Robert Dalrymple of Castleton, 1<sup>st</sup> Bt, died in 1734. His portrait was painted c.1720 by William Aikman<sup>1</sup>, hence the date attributed by Hesketh; however, Aikman's portrait showed the sitter in typical Lowland/European fashionable clothes of the period. Of note, Aikman's portrait does not include any tartan.

In 1743 William Mosman<sup>2</sup> was commissioned by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Bt, Sir Hugh Dalrymple, to paint a posthumous portrait of his brother. Mosman was loaned the earlier Aikman portrait to copy Sir Robert's face, the artist added a tartan Banyan<sup>3</sup>, a fashionable garment for wealthy gentlemen at the time (Plate 2).



Plate 2. Comparison of the portraits of Sir Robert Dalrymple by Aitken, c.1720 and Mosman, 1743

Writing to Sir Heugh (sic) in 1744, Mosman remarked that he *had* "...been at more than ordinary pains with it as I wish nothing more than to please you in what you are pleased to employ me for". He goes on to comment on Sir Robert's "love of his country and encourager of the manufactures I have clothed him herewith".

Far from being by an unknown artist c.1720, the survival of the letter proves without doubt that the portrait with the tartan banyan was painted by William Mosman in 1744.<sup>4</sup>

Notwithstanding the Dalrymple family's support for the Union and the Hanoverian monarchy, Mosman chose to dress Sir Robert in tartan at a time that it was often regarded as denoting Jacobite sympathies, something often attributed to the artist himself. However, the inclusion of a tartan banyan may have been nothing more than a reflection that it was fashionable at the time. It is not known if the family owned the banyan or whether it, or some piece of the tartan, that was part of the artist's studio repertoire.

<sup>1</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William\\_Aikman\\_\(painter\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Aikman_(painter)) Accessed 23 July 2022.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nationalgalleries.org/art-and-artists/artists/william-mosman> Accessed 23 July 2022.

<sup>3</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Banyan\\_\(clothing\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Banyan_(clothing)) Accessed 23 July 2022.

<sup>4</sup> Letter from Wm. Mosman to Heugh Dalrymple dated 1<sup>st</sup> Aug. 1744.

## The Sett

Extracting a tartan from a portrait is often an imprecise art, especially when the pattern is large, or complex as is the case here. In the mid-1980's an attempt was made to extract the sett; two versions were developed and are available commercially (Plate 3).



Plate 3. Commercial specimens of Dalrymple of Castleton and Dalrymple of Castleton #2 Photo: Clan.com

It is not known if the extraction of the pattern was done from the original portrait or from Hesketh's picture. The latter could certainly lead to an assumption that the major ground colours were red and green as in Plate 3, #2. Unfortunately, neither interpretation is entirely reliable, a fact that is supported following recent cleaning of the portrait (Plate 4) which allows a better interpretation of the pattern and colours involved.



Plate 4. Robert Dalrymple of Castleton by Wm. Mosman, 1744 Photo: James Wylie

A detailed examination of the main area of tartan shows it to have been uniformly painted and that the assumed green is very definitely blue in the portrait (Plate 5).



Plate 5. Tartan detail from the newly cleaned portrait. Photo: James Wylie

The principal blue, black and red ground colours are obvious, so too the white overstripes. Less obvious are the colours of the small bar that separates the red and black grounds, and the duller stripe that bisects the bar. The modern weavings of this pattern render these as yellow and purple and whilst the yellow is a logical interpretation, the original could equally have been yellowish-green, a common shade in many old specimens. More questionable is the assumption of that the finer line was purple; a brown, darker red, or event the same shade of red is equally possible and anyone would be more traditional. An alternative interpretation by the author is shown in the comparative colour strips (Fig 1) and extraction overlay (Pate 6).

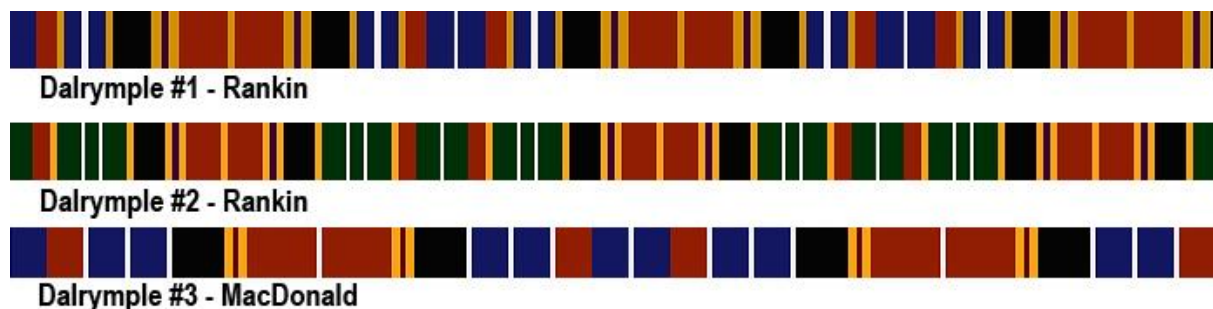


Fig 1. Comparative extractions from the portrait: Rankin 1985 and MacDonald 2022. © The Author

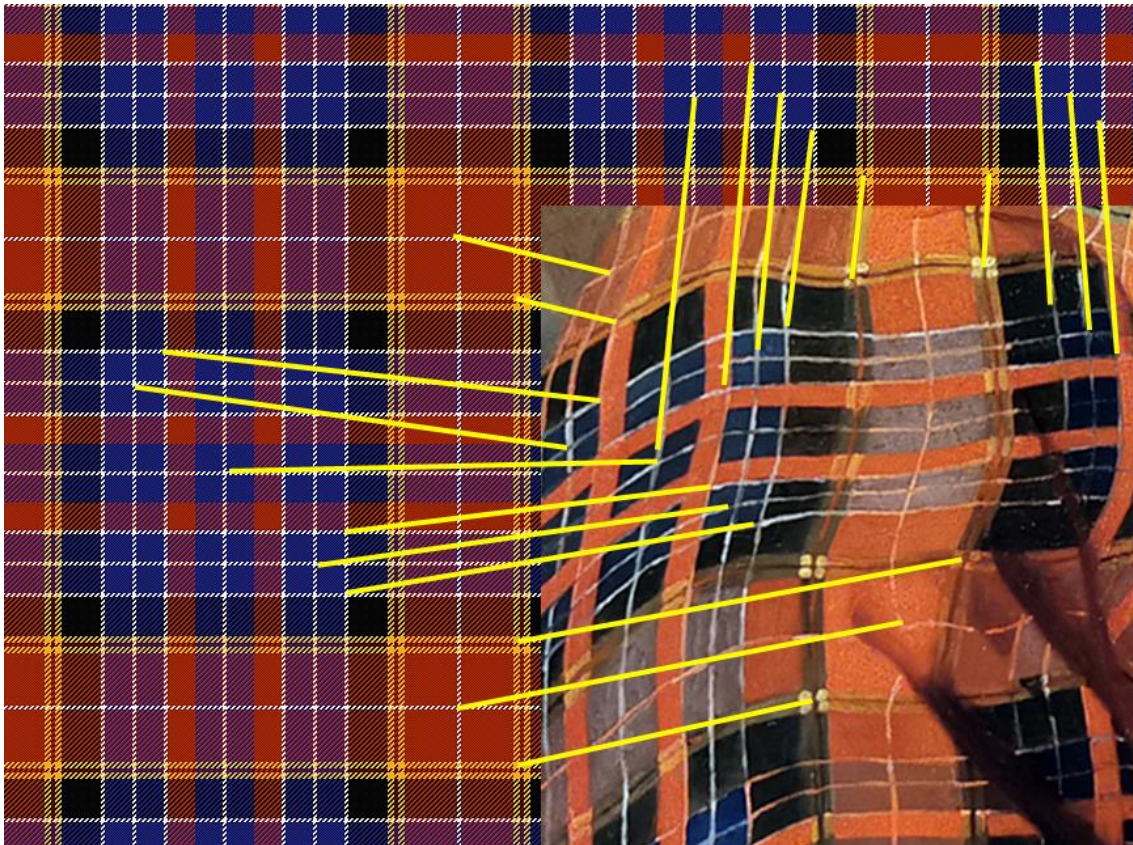


Plate 6. Detail from the portrait overlaid on the revised pattern. © The Author

## Conclusion

The existence of the letter dated 1744 from William Mosman to Sir Hugh Dalrymple (Plate 7) proves unequivocally that the portrait was painted that year and not c.1720 as stated by Hesketh. She must have somehow conflated the date of the earlier portrait with Mosman's posthumous portrait that used the earlier one to capture the Sir Richard's features.

Equally clear is that the cleaning of the portrait confirms that there is no green in the pattern and that the image included by Hesketh led to an incorrect reconstruction of the sett in the mid-1980's. Recent study by the author of this paper gives a more realistic interpretation of the pattern. That said, there is still a degree of conjecture over the colour of the fine line centred on the yellow.

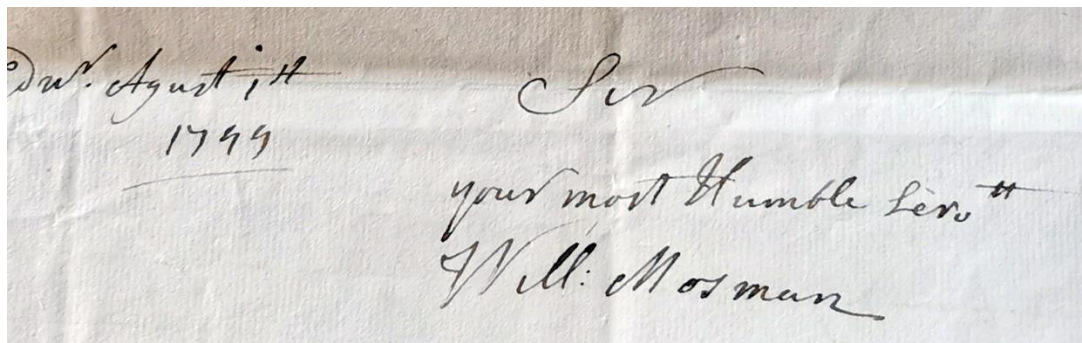


Plate 7. Signature and date from William Mosman's letter to Hugh Dalrymple. Photo: James Wylie

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<sup>1</sup> HESKETH C. 1961 *Tartans*. Octopus Books. London