

The early use of the Murray of Tullibardine Tartan

The Murray of Tullibardine is one of a relatively few clan tartans with a design that can be dated with certainty to the period of the '45. Many of the early references are connected with the Murrays which demonstrates a long association of the tartan with the family and/or Perthshire.

This tartan is unique in being shown in not just one or even two, but five, 18th Century portraits. Only one is of these is definitely of a Murray and it is slightly later than the others all of which date to within approximately five years of the 1745 Rising.

The claim by James Grantⁱ *'That tartan called Tullibardine..... was adopted and worn by Charles, first Earl of Dunmore, second son of the first Marquis of Tullibardine.....'* and that he *'...in 1679 was Lieutenant-Colonel of the Royal Grey Dragoons....'* has been taken by later writers as evidence of the antiquity of the Tullibardine tartan. However, he appears to have misunderstood the information given by the Smithsⁱⁱ (known to be the source for much of his work) who wrote *'We found this very pretty pattern of Tartan in the market, but we can say nothing more anent it, than that the proprietors of the respectable Tartan Warehouse from which we obtained it assured us it is the Tartan used by the Earl of Dunmore. The respectable Tartan Warehouse mentioned by the Smiths was probably Wilsons of Bannockburn's. A recently discovered sample book of their tartans c1830-40 includes a piece named simply Tullibardine meaning that we know that the leading manufacturer of the day from whom the Smiths obtained their specimens was selling this tartan.*



Portrait of an Unknown Jacobite Woman
by Cosmo Alexander 1740-46.

Probably the first evidence of the pattern is to be found in Cosmo Alexander's unidentified *Portrait of a Jacobite Lady* c1740-46 which is one of a small number of pre-Proscription pictures to show tartan wore by women. For a long time it was assumed that the sitter was wearing an unidentified red tartan but recent research by the author proved that she is in fact wearing the Tullibardine tartan. A fuller examination is [here](#).

Roughly contemporary with the *Jacobite Lady* are three portraits by the famous Scottish artist Allan Ramsay: *John Campbell, 4th Earl of Loudoun*, *Norman MacLeod of MacLeod, 22nd Chief*, and *Flora MacDonald*. This is where matters become confused with various claims concerning the origins and ownership of the plaid worn by the sitters. It's known that Ramsay painted the composition, face, and hands and that he sub-contracted the costume painting to another artist Joseph Van Aken. He died

in Jul 1749 so the costume in all three portraits must have been completed by then if the costume detail was by Van Aken.

Lord Loudoun's portrait was probably painted in 1747 when he was in Edinburgh before sailing to Flanders in late June. He is referred to as having been painted 'in his Regimentals' which must have referred to his scarlet jacket and insignia of rank, but not the tartan. Although the regiment wore plaids we know from orders and samples of the time that his regimental plaids were a blue, green and black type tartan very different from the one in his portrait. In his fulsome paper on the portrait Ruairidh MacLeodⁱⁱⁱ identified the tartan as Tullibardine and postulated two possible sources: Loudoun's mistress, Anne Farquarson, wife of MacKintosh of MacKintosh, is said to have woven Loudoun a plaid *'which became his "favourite" garment* (ibid). Alternatively, his cousin, Lady Margaret MacDonald, wife of Alexander MacDonald of Sleat, wove him a plaid in 1746 (ibid). In neither case do we know what the tartan was and although it's tempting to conclude that he must have been wearing his 'favourite' plaid we just do not know.



John Campbell, 4th Earl of Loudoun
by Allan Ramsay 1747

There is also the very real possibility that this is neither of the plaids but the 'brighter' sett that Loudoun supposedly sought, possibly from the Crieff weavers, in 1747. There is a poor quality portrait of one of his officers, Lt Reid, wearing a red tartan waistcoat and it's possible that Loudoun had a plaid in the same pattern.



Norman MacLeod of MacLeod, 22nd Chief
by Allan Ramsay 1748

The following year Ramsay painted Norman MacLeod of MacLeod, 22nd Chief. Again Van Aken painted the clothing; MacLeod's coat and trews are of a red and black check now commonly called Rob Roy but once again the plaid is of Tullibardine tartan. Coincidence? Stewart^{iv} suggested that MacLeod wore the tartan to denote the connection with his grandmother, a Murray. Elsewhere it is claimed^v that the plaid was from an 11 yard bolt of fabric ordered by MacLeod from Skye in 1747 and that the same fabric was also used by Ramsay/Van Aken for the portraits the Earl of Loudoun and of Sir Francis Charteris with his sister. No evidence is offered to support this claim. We know that Loudoun was painted a year earlier and that Charteris, 7th Earl of Wemyss, wears a similar style suit of Rob Roy with a matching plaid *not one of Tullibardine*.

Finally, the third of Ramsay's portraits, that of Flora MacDonald, was painted in London and signed by him *Ramsay pinxit anno 1749*. The first owner, and presumably commissioner, of the portrait was Dr Richard Mead, physician to George II. Why Mead would want a portrait of Flora MacDonald is unclear but in 1749 she was something of a popular figure whose actions in assisting

Charles Edward Stuart were already beginning to be romanticised. She had no close connections with the Murrays yet the detail of the Tullibardine tartan is very clear in the portrait.

Some may argue that someone such as Loudoun or MacLeod would not have wanted to be painted in someone else's tartan but that presupposes its use as a form of clan symbol, something which we know did not develop until the early C19th. Very little is known about the use of tartans in portraits beyond the fact that in combination with the clothes, it denoted political (Highland or Scottish), and social status, particularly the use of large amounts of red. The likelihood that all three sitters owned a length of the same tartan is not credible and given Ramsay/Van Aken's use of the same tartan in three portraits it seems more likely that they were



Flora MacDonald by Allan Ramsay 1749

working from a single source. Possibly Loudoun, as the first of the three sitters, owned a plaid whose design was used a default tartan or perhaps a length had been acquired by Ramsay or Van Aken to be used as a studio prop. More important in terms of this paper is the fact that all three confirm the existence of the Tullibardine tartan in the mid-18th century.



John Murray, 4th Earl of Dunmore by Sir Joshua Reynolds c1770

The last of the portraits in which the sitter wears the Tullibardine is that of John Murray 4th Earl of Dunmore by Sir Joshua Reynolds in which Murray wears a coat and waistcoat of Tullibardine tartan and belted plaid of 42nd (Black Watch) tartan. This is the first positive evidence of the use of the tartan by a member of the clan with which it is generally associated. Although painted in 1770 the style of the jacket is earlier, c1750-60, so it's possible that Murray wore a jacket that he'd had for some time.

In every case examined the tartan has been painted with such clarity as to allow the details to be extracted and confirmed as Tullibardine. If one accepts the hypothesis that the plaids in the Ramsay portraits were one and the same then there is evidence of at least three pieces of the tartan in use during the 18th century and that this use was not exclusively by Murrays with whom it is now commonly associated.

Having demonstrated the early use of the tartan in portraiture what about actual specimens of the period? The oldest known named reference to the tartan is a piece in a sample book of Wilsons of Bannockburn's patterns c1830-40 although older unnamed specimens survive. Blair Castle, clan seat of the Murrays, has a set of old bed hangings made from a length of Tullibardine tartan c1800. The amount of material and, the offset nature of the pattern and use of a herringbone selvedge are indicative of the cloth having been a copy of an older, probably early-mid 18th century, plaid rather than being the original. Whilst examining a number of old pieces at Blair the author discovered a fragment of

tartan, a portion of a plaid that dates to the first half of the 18th century, which was probably the original piece from which the bed hangings were copied. The structure of the Tullibardine tartan is considered in a [companion paper](#).

In conclusion, the Tullibardine tartan can be dated with certainty to the mid-18th century when it appeared in a number of portraits. Based on the available evidence I believe that the Ramsay portraits used the same plaid as the source for all three portraits in which it appears. Whether Loudoun owned such a plaid or whether Ramsay/Van Aken obtained a length to use as a studio prop is unclear. The use of the Tullibardine tartan in the Reynolds' portrait of John Murray, together with the early samples at Blair, make a strong case for its traditional use by the family and/or being a pattern associated with that part of Perthshire. The sett and colours in the coat and the old sample are very different suggesting that the family had at least two lengths of the material during the 18th century which furthers support to this proposition.

Irrespective of its origins, this is one of the very few tartans worn today that can be shown to date to the era of the clan system and to have been used continuously to the present.

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ⁱ **GRANT J.** 1886 *The Tartans of the Clans of Scotland*. W & A.K Johnston, Edinburgh

ⁱⁱ **SMITH W & SMITH A.** 1850 *Authenticated Tartans of the Clans and Families of Scotland*. W & A Smith,. Mauchline

ⁱⁱⁱ **MACLEOD R,** 1984 *The Proceeding of the Scottish Tartans Society*. Series 3, No.1

^{iv} **STEWART DC,** 1950 *The Setts of the Scottish Tartans*. Oliver and Boyd. Edinburgh.

^v **Scottish Tartan World Register,** <http://www.scottish-tartans-world-register.com/tartan.aspx?record=1173>