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## *Alasdair MacColla and The Old Woman by John MacFarlane*

We're standing looking out over a loch called Loch Tromelee which belonged to a family called the MacCorquodales of Phantelanes and this area here was an area which was full of violence in the year 1644 when the Marquis of Montrose came into this area with his army, part of which was commanded by a very fierce, savage and cruel Highland man called Major General Alasdair MacDonald of Colonsay or in Gaelic he was known as Colkitto although he was actually the son of Colkitto, he was known as Colkitto. He was very a gifted tactical soldier and he had lots of very fierce Irishmen with him who were very good soldiers indeed and the Marquis of Montrose was victorious in a lot of his battles. But they decided to come here in the winter of 1644 to harry Argyll and to despoil the lands of the Campbells of Argyll at Inverary.

They crossed Loch Awe just here and were intent on going into Lorn and plundering the area at Lorn there. But as they were passing up this valley here beside Loch Tromelee, they weren't doing anything because MacCorquodale of Phantelanes was very keen on the Royalist cause and they didn't want to upset him. But unfortunately, he had his own agenda and he was frightened of a Campbell of Barbreck who was in the next estate. So when MacColla, Alasdair MacColla and his band of Irish mercenaries came past up this valley, he decided that he'd better do something. So he fired one token arrow at the army but unfortunately it skewered some unfortunate Irishman and so Colkitto, Alasdair

MacColla, took a very dim view of this and said 'Right, if that's the way they want to play it, we'll show them what we can do'. So they started burning all the houses all the way up the valley. And below us here we can see the ruins of a couple of houses which are probably around the same era.

When they got to the top of the valley here, an Irish gallowglass was just about to put a lump of burning heather into the thatch of a house when he was suddenly surprised by an old woman who came tearing out of the house, pulling a dagger out of her capacious bosom and leapt upon him, felling him to the ground where she proceeded to try and cut his throat. Suddenly she felt a rough hand on her shoulder and she was pulled off the man and brought to her feet and when she turned round, there was Major General Alasdair MacDonald of Colonsay himself standing and he looked at her and he smiled. And she thought 'I'm going to be killed here'. But he said 'My goodness, woman, that was a fine stroke you gave him. I wish you were a man because you could join my army'. And he turned round to his soldiers and said to them 'No-one here is to touch either this woman or any of the houses round here'. And so they passed through and down into Glen Nant and into the forest of Glen Nant.

Now, there's a connection with my own family. Because my mother when she was very young, was in Glen Nant, and was down in a very deep area of the river. And she comes from a family that has stayed in this area since the time of Alasdair MacColla and the harrying of Argyll. And when she was down there, she was suddenly taken by a great feeling of dread and had to rush up out of this area of evil and get on to the top of the bank where she felt safe and she always said that she thought that one of her ancestors had probably been killed in that area there.

Alasdair and his men moved on through Lorn from Glen Nant Forest and laid the whole place waste and crossed over Loch Etive at Connell and made their way north. And it was there outside Fort William, at Inverlochy, that they were able to defeat the Campbells yet again and kill 1,200 of them. But that's another story.

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