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Reel of Tulloch

by Sheena Blackhall

The main chiefs on Deeside, the two clans are the Gordons and the Farquharsons and for many centuries they were at each other's throats. One of the most colourful characters on Deeside was the Black Colonel, Iain Dhubh Farquharson of Glen Ey, a very, very flamboyant character, he did actually live. There are ballads about him - there's the Ballad of Braichlie. He was very handsome supposedly - and very fond of his Ballater tenants down around Pannanich and Ballater. Now as I said, long ago, the main village wasn't Ballater because that didn't exist, it was Tulloch and there was the stile of Tulloch and this was a little inn called the Stile of Tulloch right beside the Dee. Now, one particularly extremely snowy Sunday, the Black Colonel struggled to get through the snow drifts from Glen Ey to the kirk. And when he arrived there, it was bitterly, bitterly cold but the minister he'd had to come even further so he'd been delayed, he was up to his oxters as they say in Scots, in sna, so the tenants, Iain Dhubh's tenants were very, very cold so he said why don't we get a keg of whisky from across the road from the Stile of Tulloch and into the kirk (which is now a ruin of course) and so the keg was duly rolled into the kirk and they breeched it and they had their whisky and their drams and they invented a dance called the Reel of Tulloch and they were in the middle of dancing this beautiful dance, egged on by the Black Colonel when who should arrive but the minister? And the minister was horrified and he cursed each dancer and said that they would all be dead within the year, and the legend is they were, apart from the Black Colonel who seemed to be exempt from that sort of thing.

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