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By JOHN ROSS

Man installed as clan chief after fighting 30 years for the honour Claim to the title disputed due to an ancestor born out of wedlock in 1832 New chief plans to set up a clan museum in Lochaber

Key quote

"In the years he has been pursuing this claim, he has not attracted the support of the clan. We have ignored him pretty successfully until now and I think we will be able to go on ignoring him." - RORY MACDONALD

Story in full RESPLENDENT in his kilt, plaid and glengarry with three feathers, Ranald Alasdair MacDonald smiled proudly yesterday as he was installed as the first chief of his clan for more than a century and a half.



A proud Ranald Alasdair MacDonald arrives for yesterday's ceremony. Picture: PA

The 76-year-old is the 32nd chief of the MacDonalds of Keppoch, having fought for the honour over more than 30 years. But accession rarely comes without enemies, and a feud with some of his kinsmen continued last night as the ceremony to recognise the new chief took place.

The Keppoch MacDonalds were once one of Scotland's fiercest clans, fighting for James VII at Killiecrankie and Prince Charles Edward Stuart at Culloden. In-fighting is nothing new, either. In 1663, in the Keppoch Murders, Alexander MacDonald, the young chief, and his brother Ranald were stabbed to death by rivals within the clan. Their seven killers were hunted down, killed and decapitated.

The latest battle was fought in the courts, in the media and on the internet, and has continued despite seemingly being settled by judges.

The title had lain dormant because the 21st chief, Chichester MacDonald, died without male heirs in 1848. The new chief, a retired Edinburgh audiologist, fought a lengthy campaign for the title and presented a petition, which was refused by the Lord Lyon, King of Arms, in 2002. However, an appeal was lodged two years later with the Court of Session, which upheld the claim.

The Lord Lyon subsequently granted Mr MacDonald the Letters Patent (legal warrant) and Ensigns Armorial (coat of arms) which were formally presented to him by Sir Crispin Agnew of Lochnaw, Rothesay Herald of the Lord Lyon, at a ceremony in Fort William organised by Highland Council.

The new chief was piped in at the start of the ceremony. Then, in front of clansmen and family members from the UK and North America, the clan bard recited the chief's Sloinntearachd (genealogy) and a eulogy in his honour, a tradition dating back to the anointing of the Scottish kings and chiefs.

Mr MacDonald said: "It is a great day for the family and the clan. I'm proud to be here - it's where my family come from, going back to 1398."

Asked about the opposition to him, he said: "I'm not interested. I'm not here to make excuses or defend my position. I've already done all that legally."

Mr MacDonald, who plans to set up a clan museum in Lochaber, said he was told as a boy by his father that they were chiefs of Keppoch. "He said one day it would come to me as the eldest son; now it has."

However, the ceremony only brought the feud to a head, with claims that Mr MacDonald has no right to the title because he comes from an illegitimate side of the family. Rory MacDonald of Blarour, near Spean Bridge, says one of the new chief's ancestors, Alexander, was born out of wedlock in 1832.

He said: "In the years he has been pursuing this claim, he has not attracted the support of the clan. We have ignored him pretty successfully until now and I think we will be able to go on ignoring him."

He said he would not accept the court's ruling and added that, if the new chief would "go away and stop bothering us, it would be all right".

Olwyn Macdonald, Highland Council's Lochaber area committee convener, said she was disappointed with the bad feeling, and added: "I think it's quite sad that the MacDonalds cannot get together and unite on this."