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The Background to a Beautiful Brooch.



The laird of Keppoch, having sent his two sons to be educated in France, died during their absence, and left the management of his affairs to the care of seven brothers, men of his own clan. Thus placed in a station of unexpected authority, these kinsmen relished the advantages it afforded better than became men of honour, and resolved to insure its continuance at every risk. But as the heir of Keppoch still remained in France, they suffered no interruption for a considerable time. At length the young laird and his brother, having returned home to take possession of their inheritance, were waylaid and murdered on the very night of their arrival. The perpetrators of the foul deed evaded for some time the strong arm of justice; but the family bard succeeded at last in drawing down upon them that vengeance which they so richly merited.... as recorded on the monument:

The heads of the seven murderers were presented at the feet of the noble chief, in Glengarry Castle, having been washed in this spring; and ever since that event, which took place in the sixteenth century, it has been known by the name of Tobar nan Ceann or the Well of the Heads.

This beautiful brooch was on sale at the Lincoln Convention, and was acquired by Peter Gill as a birthday present for Sheila. When I first saw it, I was sure that I had seen a version of the painting before, and my feeling was that it had had a Jacobite connection. Consequently I spent some time searching the internet for pictures and engravings to do with the Jacobites. Eventually, more by good luck than good judgement, I found the print I had remembered, in a general collection of Scottish prints. It proved to be of *Loch Oich with Invergarry Castle*. It was originally drawn by the architect and artist Thomas Allom and engraved by J. Redaway as an illustration for a part work *Scotland Illustrated*, published by William Beattie in 1838. Subsequently separate engravings of the picture seem to have been produced.

The picture accompanies the following account in *Scotland Illustrated*:

On the western shore of Loch Oich, where it receives the tributary stream from Loch Garry, is the modern residence of the Macdonell family - distinguished for centuries as the chieftains of that name, and the leaders of a warlike clan. Not far distant from the present mansion is the ruined castle of Invergarry - the ancient stronghold of the same illustrious family - which was burnt at the close of the last rebellion..... Over a well in the neighbourhood a small monument commemorates the following fact, highly characteristic of the lawless period to which it relates.



The Well of the Heads,
Loch Oich