



Were some MacNeills  
really MacLeans?

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BY

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NOTES

WERE SOME McNEILLS REALLY MACLEANS ?

This question seems to have been first raised by the Reverend A. Maclean Sinclair in 1909/10<sup>1</sup>. Briefly, he argues that, in the 14th century, Neil Maclean, cousin to Lachlan Lubanach and Hector Reaganach, became the progenitor of a new sept of McNeills, when his son Malcolm came to be called, and chose to remain, Malcolm McNeill.

The suggested cause was jealousy over the Chiefship of the Clan having gone to Lachlan, who married Mary, daughter of the Lord of the Isles, in 1367 after a papal dispensation, but Loraine Maclean of Dochgarroch (in correspondence) discounts the jealousy. Lachlan won his wife, castle and chiefship by sheer audacity and courage.

Sinclair believed that Lachlan had a lesser claim than his cousin; he also suggested that some Macleans made themselves Morrisons<sup>2</sup>. His documentation is poor.

There was certainly a Maclean, "filiorum Gilhon", in Kintyre in 1296 (Ragman's Roll). In 1326 his sons, Donald, Neil and John were all involved in sending a ship, in the service of Bruce, round the Mull of Kintyre to Tarbert<sup>3</sup>. The Maclaine of Lochbuie genealogy<sup>4</sup> states that John lived in Mull, while W. Anderson<sup>5</sup> writes that "John Gillemore, surnamed Dhu . . . appears to have settled in Mull about . . . 1330". The above genealogy puts Donald in the royal service from 1325. The Exchequer Rolls<sup>6</sup> record "Dofnald, Neil and John, the three sons of Gilhon" as Helpful and neighbourly" toward Robert Bruce at

Tarbert, but it is Dofnald who provided the ship, though Nigel and John sent men for duty.

In 1329 Neil was made Constable of the royal castle of Cairnburg in the Treshnish Isles and was paid<sup>7</sup>. Sinclair's attribution of Castle "Scraburg" to Neil follows the corrupt spelling in the Exchequer Rolls, but he was wrong to suggest the identification of Castle Sween with "Scraburg"<sup>8</sup>.

The above Maclaine genealogy states that Neil's two sons, Diarmad and Malcolm, were "styled MacNiall". Donald, who remained in Kintyre at least until 1329, could not have produced "MacNialls" and Neil went to the Treshnish Isles in 1329.

It is thus possible that two Maclean "MacNialls" might have grown up in Kintyre after 1329, but there is no evidence either the patronymic or the location continued. John Bannerman (in correspondence) thought that "MacNiall" was no more than a patronymic.

Sinclair's theory finds and fills a gap in Gigha and Argyll McNeill genealogy, in the mathematical sense, but it is no strong case to link an untraced Maclean family with untraced (by name) McNeill generations. The question of the location of the "styled MacNiell" family needs to be pursued and their continued use of the patronymic checked, if either is possible.

J.P. Maclean's History of Clan Maclean (1889) is full, though less so for the 13th and 14th centuries. He claimed to have used the Ardgor MS., but had noticed nothing there to suggest the name-change later proposed by Sinclair (above) and James N.M. Maclean (below).

Sinclair's The Clan Gillean, pp. 43-44, mentions the brothers of John Dubh and their sons, but in 1899 the name-change had not occurred to him. In the Celtic Review (1909-10), he makes a patchy case for Malcolm Maclean's becoming Malcolm McNeill, but does not mention his brother Diarmad. Sinclair makes few references to sources, but seems to have used the Clan genealogies given in the Appendix to Vol III of Skene's Celtic Scotland and the Ardgour MS. (printed 1872)<sup>10</sup>. It has been said that the late J.N.M. Maclean, while working on the Ardgour MS., suggested that the McNeills of Tainish, Lossitt and Borlands were originally Macleans. This writer would welcome comments from those more expert in the Maclean family MSS.

Duke Niall of Argyll, from encyclopaedic historical and genealogical knowledge, flatly rejects Sinclair's views. In the Celtic Review (1913-14)<sup>11</sup>, he refers to him and writes, "There is no doubt that [the Argyllshire McNeills] come from the same original stock as the Lamonts, MacSuibhnes, alias MacEwens of Otter and Castle Sween, and the MacLachlans". MS 1467, written in Gaelic, given in Skene's Appendix, supports this view. Neither allows, however, for possible additional name-changed McNeills.

W.D.H. Sellar, in Family Origins in Cowal and Knapdale<sup>12</sup>, specifically considers the Sinclair articles and writes, "He cannot be relied upon in this matter". He does not consider there to be enough evidence to require refutation or consideration. On the other hand, Colin Campbell, of Belmont, Mass.,

to the Scottish Genealogist, has kindly given me the following items of information, even if the first could rank as hearsay.

1. J.E.S. wrote to the Oban Times in 1951 and 1971. He had been told in Argyll that the McNeills "in that area were not real McNeills, but were descended from a certain Neil Maclean, who received a charter at some remote date to certain lands in Kintyre and Knapdale".

2. The J.N.M. Maclean information given above.

The present writer recalls that the Reverend Somerled Macmillan (Macmillan clan historian in 1960) accepted Sinclair's views, but he was also poor on documentation.

Of course, if there is any truth in the speculations of Sinclair and J.N.M. Maclean, there may be a large number of McNeills who descend from name-changed Macleans.

The suggestion of the late R.L. Macneil of Barra, that a Neil of Barra founded the Argyllshire cadets in 1350, fails by reason of the lack of time for the large numbers of McNeills in Gigha and Argyllshire to have developed by about 1400. The name-changed Maclean theory faces the same difficulty.

J.N.M. Maclean's belief in Maclean-McNeills at Taynish, Lossitt and Borlands would be hard to reconcile with McNeill genealogies and beliefs. The present Lossitt family traces its line back to Nialls who accompanied early Dalriads.

Could the well-known Torquil of 1429, laird of Gigha and Taynish and Constable of Castle Sween, have been ex-Maclean? It seems unlikely, though evidence for or against will always

be welcome.

Those who seek evidence on this matter should note the warning of Nicholas Maclean Bristol in "Maclean Family Manuscripts"<sup>13</sup>, "Many Macleans have had the same Christian names and historians have often confused men of the same name. As a result, many incidents have been misunderstood". Our problem may be such an example.

The Maclean MS in Macfarlane's Genealogical Collections<sup>14</sup> does not mention the brothers of John Dubh - Donald and Niall. We have seen that Sinclair makes this Niall and his son Malcolm jealous of John Dubh and Lachlan Lubanach, leading to the change of name by Malcolm. The Macfarlane MS., however, contains the same "plot" four generations later, with evidence in place of apparent guess-work.

Neil, great-grandson of Lachlan Lubanach, had a younger half-brother named Lachlan Og. The mother of Lachlan had obtained a marriage settlement in favour of her son, who succeeded his father. From this Niel descended the family of Ross called Sliochd Neill vic Neill. Grounds for jealousy are obvious.

The similarity of names is clear; the evidence for the later story is clearer; and, important from a McNeill point of view, Kintyre does not appear. The later story does not say whether the Ross family remained McNeills. It makes the 14th century theory of Sinclair less likely. The Scottish verdict "Not Proven" seems the right one.

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References.

1. Celtic Review, Vol VI, 1909-10, "McNeills of Argyllshire".
2. Ibid., p. 57.
3. Exchequer Rolls, Vol I, Preface lxxiii.
4. Burke's Landed Gentry (1972), p. 582.
5. The Scottish Nation (1859-1863), Vol III, p. 39.
6. As 3.
7. Exchequer Rolls, Vol I, p. 238.
8. As 1., p. 58.
9. As 1.
10. Notes & Queries X, p. 5.
11. Celtic Review, Vol IX, 1913-14, p. 347.
12. Scottish Studies, Vol XV, 1971, p. 32.
13. Notes & Queries, X, p. 3.
14. S.H.S., 1905, pp. 118-143.

SIR COLIN CAMPBELL OF GLENORCHY (1400-1480) AND THE KNIGHTS  
HOSPITALLER

In my contribution to the Inverness Field Club's recent publication The Middle Ages in the Highlands, I discussed the question of Sir Colin Campbell of Glenorchy's connection with the Knights Hospitaller of Rhodes<sup>1</sup>. In the light of subsequent research carried out in the Archives of the Knights Hospitaller now preserved in Malta, made possible by a generous grant from the Glasgow University Ross Fund, some of the conclusions I reached in that article need to be revised.

The Black Book of Taymouth asserts that Sir Colin was "maid knight in the Isle of Rhodos", and Campbell family tradition supports this assertion by pointing to a charm-stone which Sir Colin "woir when he fought in battell at the Rhodes agaynst the Turks, he being one of the knyghtis of the Rhodes"<sup>2</sup>. Sir Colin was known as Colin dubh na Roimh because he "wes thre sundrie tymes in Rome"<sup>3</sup>. The tradition is so firmly rooted that it can hardly be disbelieved that Sir Colin was widely