

Na Lìneachan Mòra

The Bynames, Genetics & Lore of Lewis

Issue 2: October 2022

Welcome to the second issue of Na Lìneachan Mòra.

It has been very encouraging to see others recognising the danger of snippets of amateur research being lost, often after a lot of hard graft. Thank you to those of you who have already contributed items; please continue to do so. Once we have sufficient material, perhaps after ten issues or so, I plan to start indexing each submission so that some order can be introduced to what might otherwise be somewhat chaotic.

A link to all issues is [here](#). Please feel free to forward any issue on to any like-minded friend.

The rules stated on the next page simply aim to encourage responsible participation. Again, please get involved!

Yours faithfully,

William



Born in England, [Benjamin Oliver](#) relocated from Leith to Stornoway in 1827, taking with him the revenue cutter 'Prince of Wales'. She had a crew of 45, with 14 guns. He remained on the island until his death in 1847. The envelope shown is marked, on the reverse, as having been posted in April 1842. Oliver's Brae in Stornoway is named in memory of him.

Terms & Conditions for submissions

- 1) There is no fee to be paid at any point.
- 2) Submissions may be of any length and should be emailed to cummingwj@hotmail.com.
A fifty-word piece of oral history is as welcome as a ten-thousand word essay.
- 3) Copyright remains with the submitter.
- 4) Submissions should be submitted as Word documents. These may be edited for formatting, but will otherwise be published as submitted. Images should be submitted as high resolution .png or .jpg files. If the compiler believes that there are issues to be concerned about, these must be resolved before publication.
- 5) In making a submission, the submitter is stating that there are no copyright issues. If that is later found to be incorrect then the submitter is liable, rather than the compiler of the journal. In particular, the work done by Bill and Chris Lawson of *Seallam!* may not be quoted at any length. Instead the work referred to should be cited so that the reader can refer to the original text.
- 6) All submissions must relate to a family which lived in Lewis prior to the year 1900.
This could be a fairly tenuous link; for example, if a Raasay tradition has a Lewis connection this would be very welcome.
- 7) Where a tradition is known in the original Gaelic, please provide the original, but also translate the text for the benefit of those of us who, sadly, do not speak the language.
- 8) It is inevitable that submissions will sometimes contain errors.
These may be corrected by the submitter or politely challenged by others in future issues.
- 9) Submissions relating to DNA testing must have received consent from the individual whose DNA was tested. Individuals other than the submitter must not be identifiable, unless it can be confirmed that specific permission has been granted by those other individuals.

These conditions will be updated from time to time.

Please email me (cummingwj@hotmail.com) if you would like to be notified when a new issue is published.

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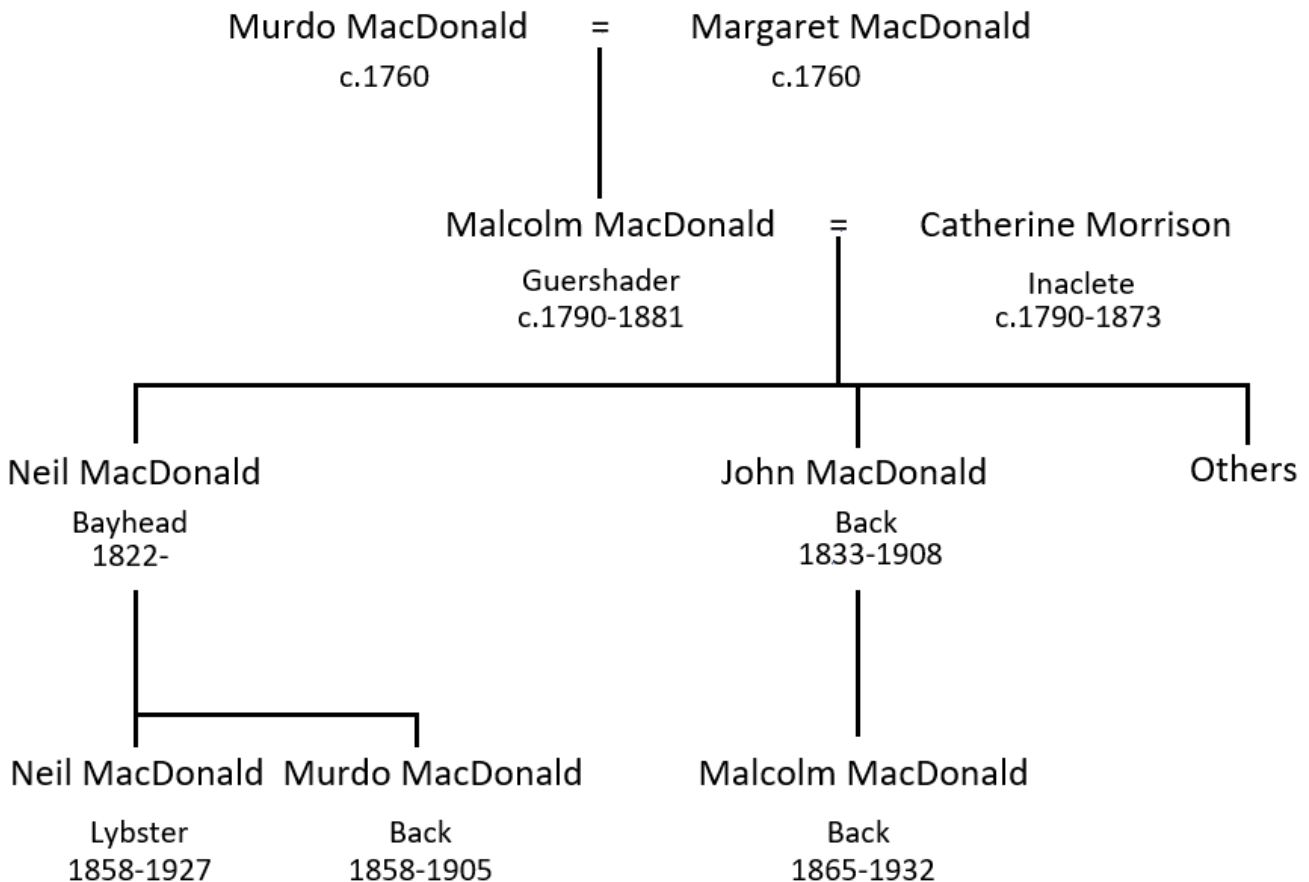
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One Bad Apple?

Murdo MacDonald was a weaver from Guershader who later lived in Bayhead, Stornoway. He was an early convert to evangelical Christianity and was known as Murchadh Mòr nan Gràs or Murchadh Rìgh¹. It is not known where or when he was born or if he was married and left offspring, but we do know that he died and was buried in Skye before the year 1830². So maybe it is safe to assume he was born *circa* 1760.

Malcolm MacDonald was born in the parish of Stornoway *circa* 1790, and was the son of perhaps another Murdo MacDonald who was married to Margaret MacDonald. But Malcolm was also a weaver who first lived at Guershader and then moved to Bayhead. Later in life, he is to be found on a croft in Back. He married Catherine Morrison of Inaclete in 1814, and they had two daughters and several sons. One son, Neil, was born at Bayhead in 1822. He was my great-great-grandfather.

Neil MacDonald was an enigmatic and shady character. He doesn't appear on any census returns and is only known through other documents. He is variously described as a merchant seaman, fisherman and agricultural labourer. In 1858, he left two illegitimate sons - one in Back and the other in Caithness - and is not heard of again. Supposedly, he was deceased by 1879.



Abbreviated pedigree showing the relationships described in the text

My great-grandfather, also Neil MacDonald, was born at Swiney in the parish of Latheron on 31 August 1858. As stated above, he was illegitimate but seems to have had some knowledge of his reputed father. An acknowledged cousin in Wick was Malcolm MacDonald, a tailor in the town. He had been born in Back but had later moved with his parents to Caithness, his mother being a native of Latheron. Malcolm's father was *Iain Chaluim Mhurchaidh*, my great-great-grandfather's younger brother. Along with many other Lewismen, he was a migrant worker at the herring fishery of Caithness during the 1850s. Malcolm was wont to insist that we were related to the former Labour Prime Minister, Ramsay MacDonald, who was also illegitimate, the son of a John MacDonald of unknown provenance. This is a story I heard in Back as well as in Wick.

Y-dna testing has placed my lineage firmly in Lewis. Matches with other MacDonalds and, strangely enough, a couple of MacMillans suggest the possibility that our kindred has been on the island for a fair length of time, but only further and deeper testing can prove that hypothesis. Autosomal testing has proved links between myself, my Caithness cousins and the family of *Calum Breabadair*, the weaver of Back. Whether or not Malcolm MacDonald was actually a son of Murchadh Mòr nan Gràs I'll never be able to prove, but at least there's a good chance he might have been. And I like to think that it was so.

NOTES

¹ *The Men of the Lews*, MacFarlane, Rev NC, p.27

² *Aspects of the Religious History of Lewis*, MacAulay, Rev M, p.201

Submitter: Kenny MacDonald, Inverness



Contract of Marriage: Macaulay — Macintosh

Contract of Marriage, dated at Lettoch, 4th December 1722, of Aulay Mackaulay, eldest lawful son of John Macaulay, tacksman of Kirkibost in Lewis, and Marjory Mackintosh, fourth lawful sister of William Mackintosh of Daviot, with consent of her said brother. Her tocher is 700 merks. Among the witnesses were Roderick Mackenzie of Redcastle, Mr. Ludovick Mackenzie, and Mr. James Mackenzie, his lawful sons, Captain John Mackenzie, brother-german to Kinraig, and John M'Bean, Sheriff Clerk of Inverness: also Extract thereof, dated 23d November 1757: and Discharge by the said Aulay Macaulay of Auchindrean, to Aeneas Mackintosh of Mackintosh, brother and heir of the said William Mackintosh of Daviot, for the said tocher and interest due thereupon promised with his now deceased wife, Marjory Mackintosh; dated at the Kirkton of Lochbroom, 16th February 1758.

NRS Reference: [GD176/729](#)



Roderick Macleod, shoemaker of Bayhead, c.1780

Although the Stornoway Parish Register of Marriages & Baptisms did not get properly underway until the early years of the 19th century, there was an attempt to begin such a register in 1780.

The first entry pertained to the family of the Stornoway minister, John Downie. Patrick Downie, cooper of Stornoway, then proceeded to document his family, as did George Mackenzie, shoemaker of Stornoway. The fourth man to enlist his family was Roderick Macleod, shoemaker of Bayhead. Other than two or three further entries the venture stalled until 1804.

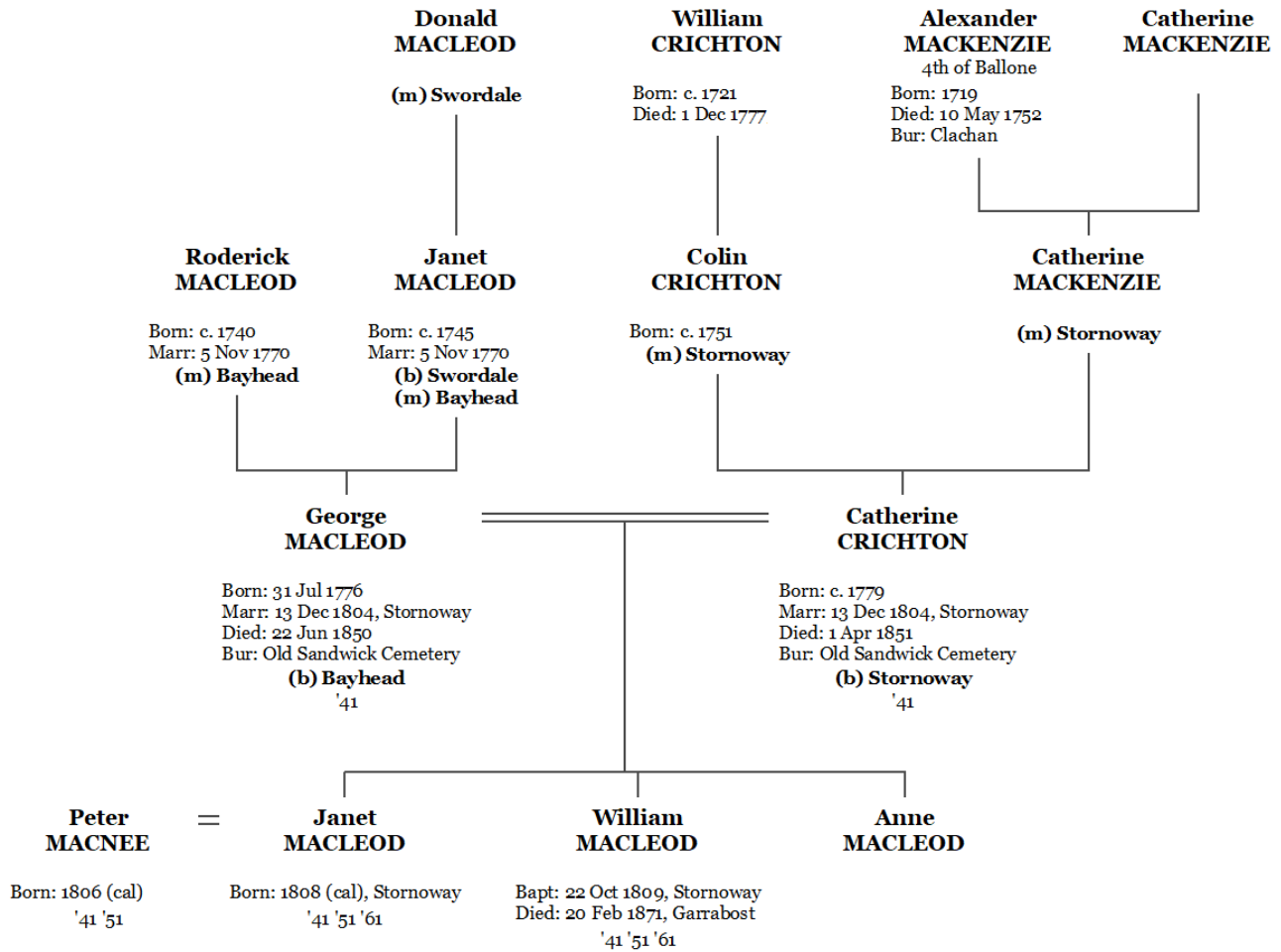
Roderick's entry reads as follows:

At Stornoway the eight Day of November one thousand—
seven hundred & eighty years— State of the family of Rod^r
M^rLeod Shoemaker in Bayhead Stornoway—
Rod^r M^rLeod was Married to Janet M^rLeod third lawful
Daughter to Donald M^rLeod Taylor in Swardle in the Parish
of Ege on the fifth Day of Nov^r one thousand seven—
hundred & seventy years—
Their first Daughter was born the sixth Day of February
one thousand seven hundred & seven hundred years Named *Janet*
Their second Daughter was born the nineteenth Day
of December one thousand seven hundred & seventy
three years Named *Margaret*
Their first son was born the thirtyfirst Day of July
one thousand seven hundred & seventy six years Named *George*
Their third Daughter was born the twentyfirst Day of
March one thousand seven hundred & seventy nine
years Named *Christian*
Said Christian Died the thirtieth Day of said month
At Downie

for the Parish of Stornoway Continued.—
State of Rod^r M^rLeod's family Continued.—
Their second son was born the fourth Day of Nov^r
one thousand seven hundred & eighty years Named *Donald*
(So signed) *Rory MacLeod*

It only seems reasonable to presume that Roderick was a capable man, and highly regarded within the community. The family also had connections in Point; Roderick's wife Janet was from Sworddale, and his grandson William spent his final years in Garrabost.

Roderick's appearance as one of the first signatories of the Register is matched by the significant marriage of his son George in 1804. George married Catherine 'Ketty' Crichton, grand-daughter of William Crichton, Stornoway merchant, and also of Alexander Mackenzie, 4th of Ballone.



The implication, once again, is that Roderick was probably a significant man in his own right.

At present there is no other evidence as to who Roderick's people were, and it may never come to light as no male-line ancestors have been found. George's only known son William died single and without any known children. George's brother Donald may well have married but finding the marriage record of the correct Donald Macleod has proved difficult!

Nonetheless, it is worth noting that Malcolm son of Norman, of the MacLeods of Garrabost, left three daughters and seven sons, one of whom was Roderick* and who may have been born around the middle of the 1700s.

* see 'The MacLeods of Garrabost Revisited', by W. Cumming

Submitter: William Cumming



The R1a Macleods of Lewis

The four FTDNA kits considered below all belong to men who have documented Macleod ancestry from the Isle of Lewis. The initials shown belong to the man tested, whilst the bracketed initials refer to the administrator of the kit. The descent of the line is listed where known.

The figures at the bottom left of the table show the genetic distance between the two men indicated. These are all based upon the 111-marker test. The figures at the top-right of the table show the BigY STR differences, which FTDNA have not yet found a way of using – let us hope that they can pull something out of this data in the future.

	IN38075 NM (WC)	IN100396 AM (KB) 'Maidsear'	771480 PW (PW)	IN101780 DPM (DPM) 'Iain Ruadh Mor'
IN38075		5 of 633	3 of 623	5 of 580
IN100396	8		2 of 619	2 of 593
771480	10	4		2 of 584
IN101780	7	5	7	

PW is the descendant of one Murdoch Macleod, whose Canadian death certificate and gravestone tell us that he was born on the Isle of Lewis and died on 8 April 1887 aged 65 years and 8 months. If this very precise information is accurate then he was born between 9 July and 8 August 1821. ScotlandsPeople shows only one candidate across the whole of Ross & Cromarty:

1821. July 27. To Angus MacLeod Grasskeeper at Aignish a son born July 20th. Murdoch.

It is possible, then, that PW descends from Angus Macleod, grasskeeper at Aignish.

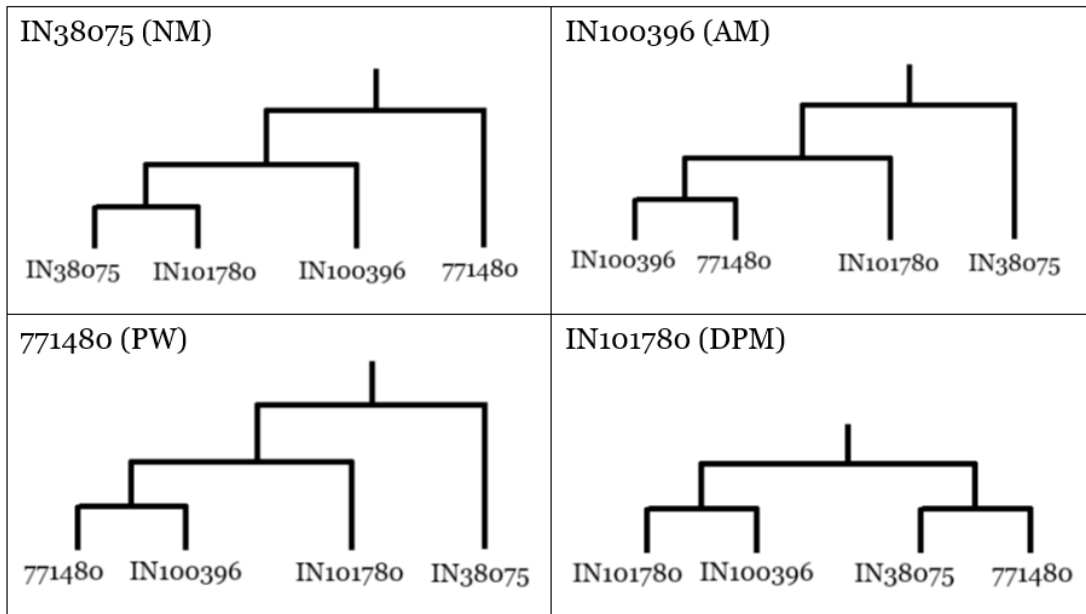
However, some autosomal research (not described here but which might appear in a future article) suggests a close link to AM, below. It has been postulated that Murdoch's father may actually have been Norman, *Tormod Sidhear*, son of *Iain Maidsear*.

AM is documented as a descendant of the Maidsear Macleods, believed to be so called because their ancestor John Macleod - *Iain Maidsear* - was a boundary shepherd at Scapraid for Major McIver of Upper Bayble and Aignish.

DPM (a great-grandson of *Ceistear Mor nan Loch*) has a fourth cousin once removed who has done a 37-marker test (kit no. 208719); they have a genetic distance of zero at 37 markers, corroborating their shared ancestry – they descend from Iain Ruadh Mor, tacksman of Loch Seaforth and then Kershader. He was the son of John macEan vic Gillichaluim, tenant of Borrowston in 1763 and 1766.

NM is documented as a descendant of Murdo Macleod of 17 Knock, b.c.1744. He belonged to one of just six families east of Stornoway who used the name of Torquil. All these families appear to have lived in Knock until about 1810, after which they started to disperse across Point and the surrounding area. It is probable that they were one extended family (see 'The Torquils of Point, Lewis', by the submitter, for more information on this research).

The Y111 STR results, as seen from each individual's point of view, imply relationships as shown below:

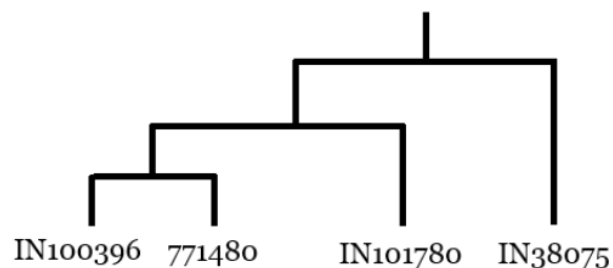


This has to be acknowledged as confusing; different degrees of relationship are suggested depending upon whose kit is being considered.

STR (short tandem repeat) analysis is very good at demonstrating that two individuals are *not* related, and for showing that two individuals *may* be related. It is not so useful for proving a relationship or for describing the closeness of any such relationship. This is because, amongst other things, a mutation in one generation can be reversed in the next, implying a closer relationship than actually exists.

In order to judge how the different connections stand in relation to one another it is more useful to consider the SNP analysis. Watch [this](#) excellent video to learn more about STR and SNP analysis. It is a few years old, but the points made remain valid.

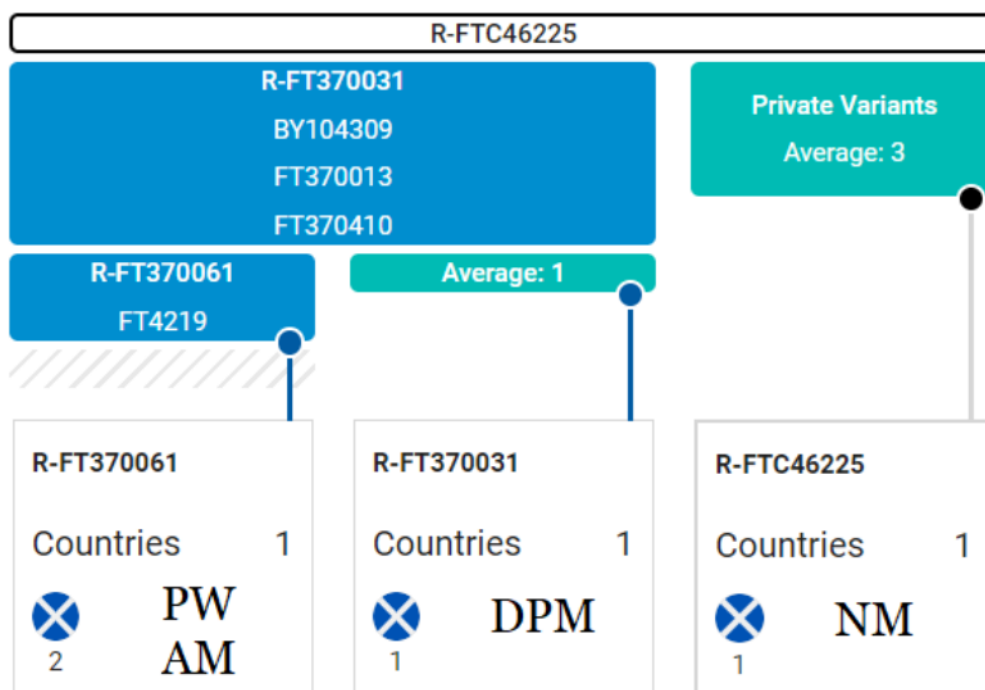
This is where FTDNA's 'Block Tree' comes into its own. Considering the much more reliable SNP analysis tells us definitively that the connection between the four men is as follows, although it does not tell us how many generations exist within each branch:



This happens to agree with two out of the four interpretations of the STR data, but there would have been no way of knowing this without the SNP data. As already mentioned, there may be autosomal DNA data which will help to refine our understanding of the connections between IN100396 and 771480.

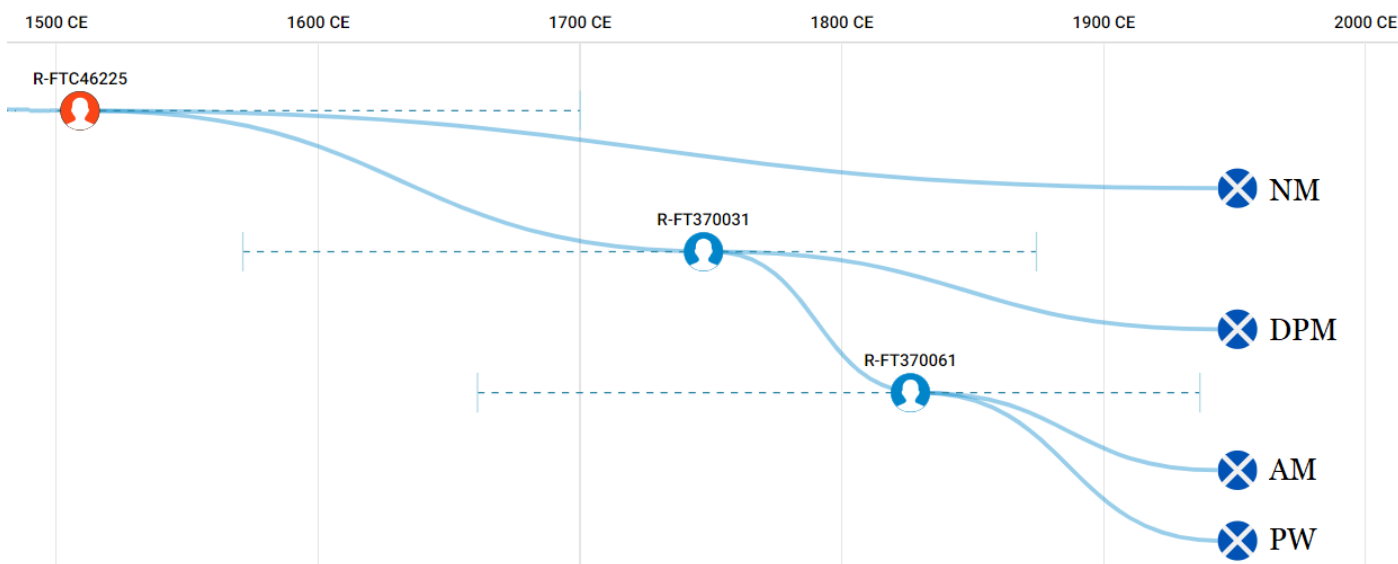
My conclusion is that although the BigY test is undeniably expensive, it is not necessarily worthwhile drawing too many big conclusions from anything less. There may be an exception if a particular STR marker is very rare, but that is beyond the scope of this introductory article.

The FTDNA Block Tree shows more detail of the relationships shown above:



One SNP mutation is believed to occur, *on average*, roughly every 140 years. Three of the men described previously bear the name of Macleod (and the other is the grandson of a Macleod in his paternal line). It may be the case, then, that the common ancestor of these four men lived around 840 years ago, with this also being the rough timeframe for the beginning of Clan MacLeod.

Just before publication, an email was received from FTDNA introducing their new 'Time Tree'. This appears to be an attempt to make the Block Tree more understandable, not least by showing estimated dates for each split in the genetic tree.



There is much still to be understood; the key will be more R1a Macleod men testing.

Submitter: William Cumming

