

Na Lìneachan Mòra

The Bynames, Genetics & Lore of Lewis

Issue 4: April 2023

Welcome to another issue of Na Lìneachan Mòra.

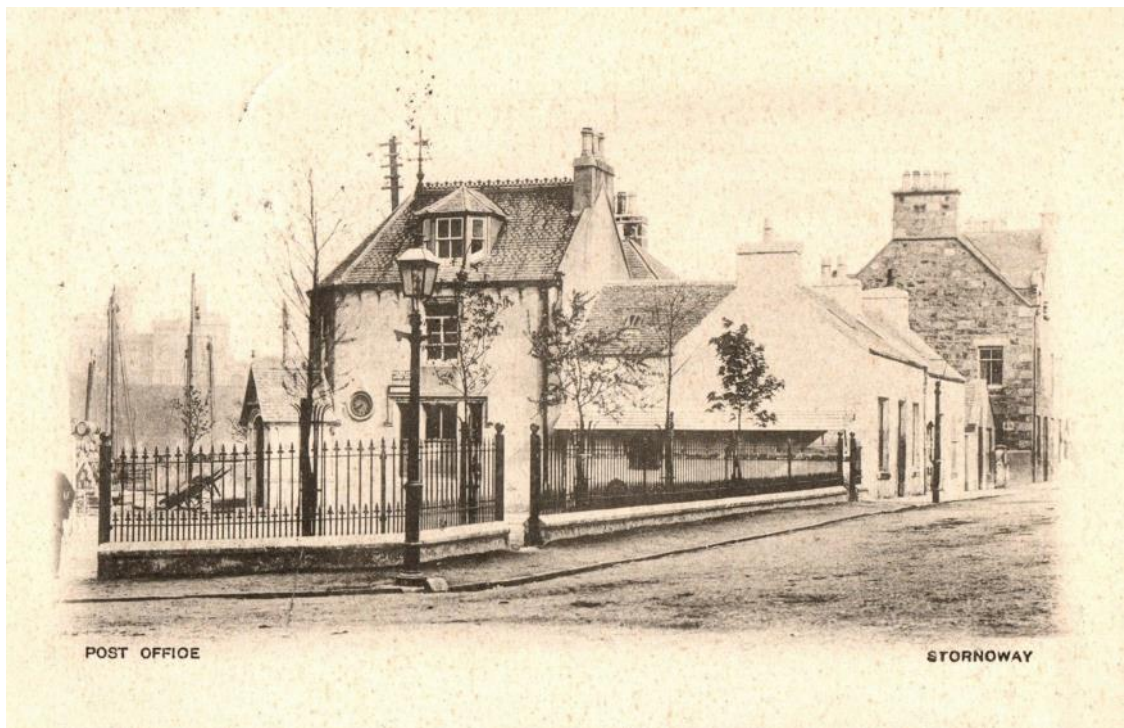
I hope that this finds you well, and that you're enjoying the spring, although as I write this it's snowing! My own spring looks like it will contain an unexpected visit to Lewis, which is most exciting. My visits typically occur every other August because of other family commitments and the need to have longer holidays during the school holidays. However, an opportunity as arisen, and I anticipate being able to spend a happy week on the island over Easter.

It's a huge pleasure to be able to reveal that I have gained the necessary permissions to reproduce Rev. William Matheson's *Families of Lewis* articles from the Stornoway Gazette. I hope that I've found a happy medium between releasing them (very slowly) one at a time, and all in one (indigestible) lump. This issue contains the two articles which he wrote on the Nicolson family.

Please let any friends who may be interested know about the journal. I recently had to change the location where the back issues are hosted - a new link is [here](#).

Yours faithfully,

William



Stornoway, 1904.

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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The Crichtons of Cromwell Street, Stornoway

The Crichtons have been present in Lewis since at least the end of the 18th century, and may have arrived long before that. The earliest known reference to them is given by Hector Hugh Mackenzie. He states* that:

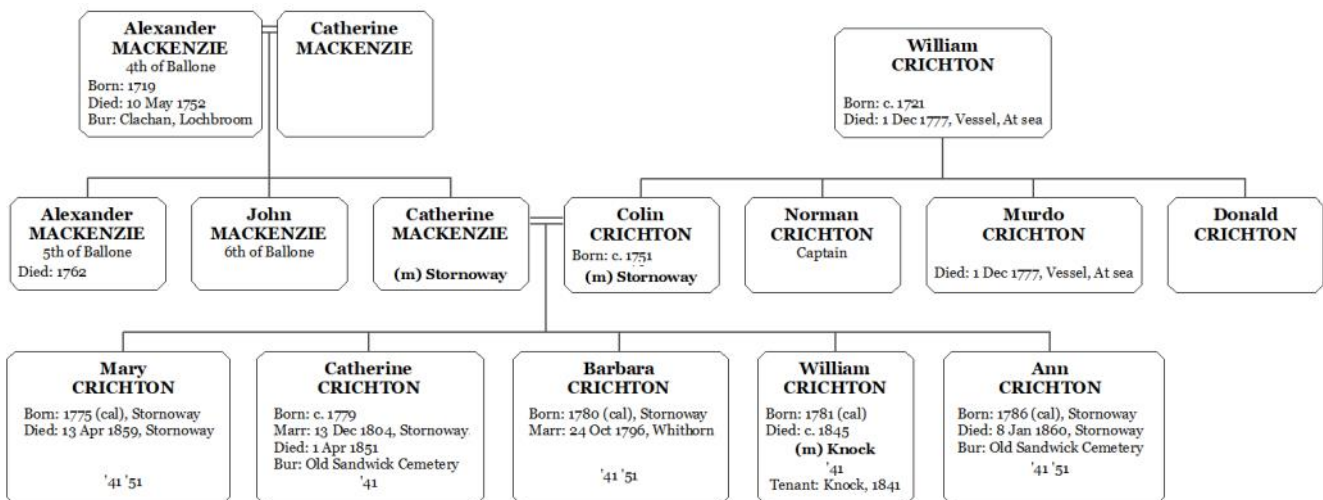
Alexander Mackenzie, fourth of Ballone, born in 1719....married Catherine, daughter of George Mackenzie, second of Gruinard ... with issue: ...

4) Catherine, who married Colin Crichton, son of William Crichton of Holm, Lewis (who has a Sasine of the lands of Achaghlunachan, and others, granted by Captain John Mackenzie, sixth of Ballone, and dated 15th, 16th and 17th November, and registered 26th December 1770), and brother of Captain Norman Crichton, Stornoway, with issue.

Colin Crichton entered upon a Tack of Ballone and Hilltown of Ballone in May, 1783.

Mackenzie, in his History of the Mackenzies, states that Catherine married Colin Knight in the Lewis. In this he is in error, for she married as above, and, if further proof that this was so were required, it is to be found in the following extract from the missive of Tack of the lands of Ballone and Hilltown in favour of Colin Crichton:- "A Minute of Tack was accordingly entered into betwixt Mr Mackenzie the Factor, and Mr Crichton, at Contin, in the month of May 1783 in presence of Mrs Crichton, and John Mackenzie of Ballone, her brother, who came along with Mr Crichton to witness this transaction."

The marriage described between Colin Crichton and Catherine Mackenzie was evidently between two individuals of high social rank. They went on to have at least five children, all of whom would have benefited from their parents' standing in the community. The diagram below shows the relationships which came into being at the time of the marriage, and the resulting children.



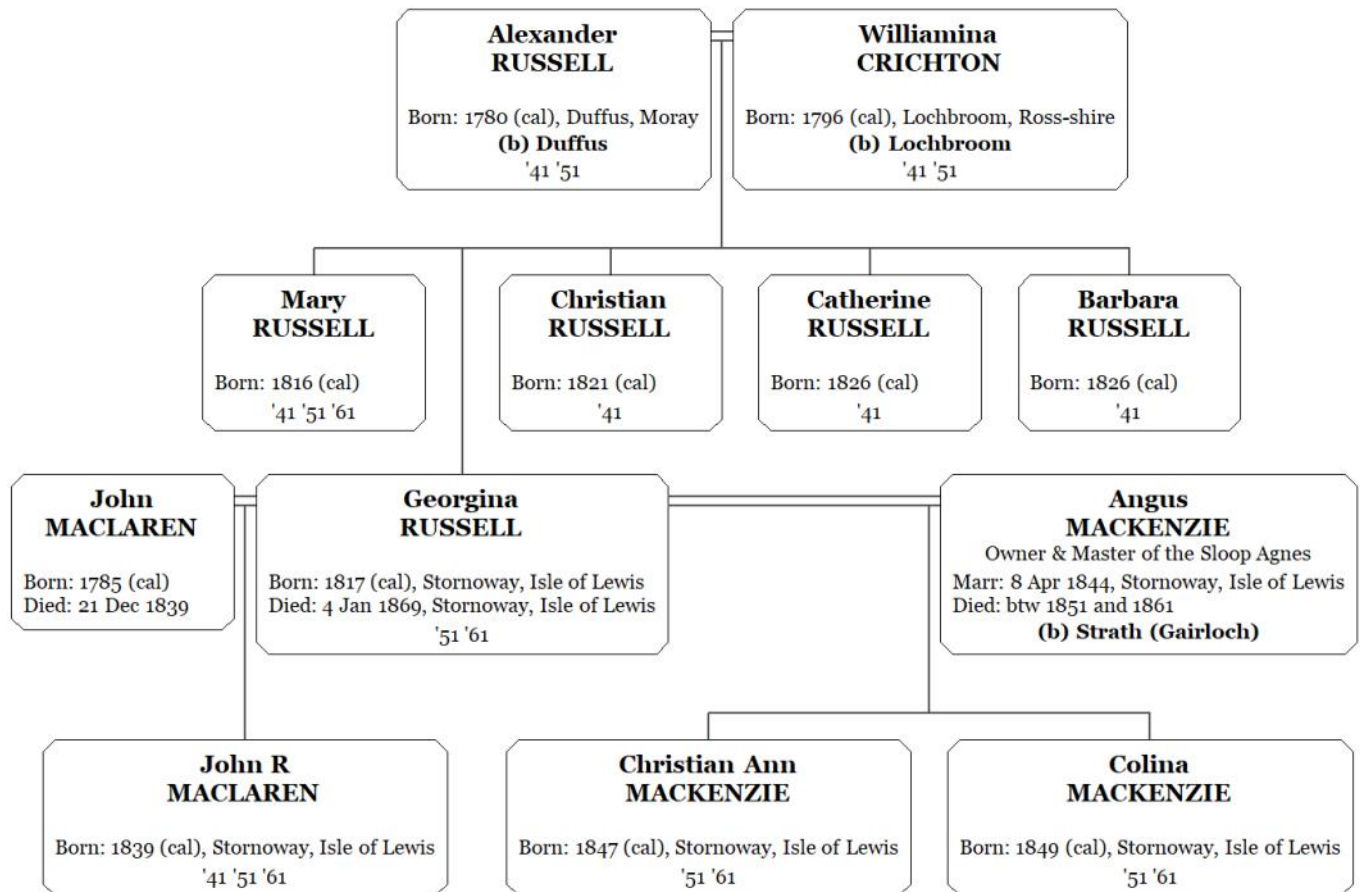
In the census of 1851 Mary, Barbara and Ann are shown as living together on Cromwell Street, and “possessed of heritable property”. This property may be the house referred to [here](#). Barbara married very young, possibly by eloping, as she married a mariner by the surname of Logan (forename not specified) in the parish of Whithorn in the very south of Scotland.

* Hector Hugh Mackenzie, *The Mackenzies of Ballone*, pp.36/37
(The Northern Chronicle Office, Inverness, 1941)

This is freely available online, courtesy of [FamilySearch](#). A free account is required.

Mary died in 1859, a 96 year old spinster, at Cromwell Street. The informant given on her death certificate is one John MacLaren, a nephew. This is significant because Mary's sister Ann also died a spinster at Cromwell Street, and the informant was John R. MacLaren, a grand-nephew.

It transpires that John MacLaren was two generations younger than the sisters, and so it would appear that 'grand-nephew' is more accurate. His grandmother was one Williamina Crichton:



The name of Williamina's youngest known grandchild is of particular interest, suggesting an ancestor called Colin. It seems very likely that Williamina was another child, previously unknown, of Colin Crichton and Catherine Mackenzie.

It must be asked why some of the daughters (Mary, Barbara and Ann) were made heirs, while other siblings appear to have been overlooked. It is for this reason that it has been suggested that William Crichton may have been illegitimate. If so, William still regarded his father kindly, naming his own son after him in 1806. It is perhaps more likely that Colin simply provided for those children whom he regarded as more vulnerable: Mary and Ann were single, and Barbara was probably a widow by 1841 (and perhaps much earlier). William, on the other hand, was capable of earning a living, and Williamina probably married around 1815. Catherine, it is believed, married George Macleod in 1804; her family was discussed in some detail in Issue 2 (October 2022).



Aila Writes

There are many online blogs on many themes, but one which recently caught my eye was that written by Aila MacDonald. She says:

One thing I love about the Isle of Lewis is the sheer number of stories that are weaved all through it. My grandpa used to tell me them all the time, particularly stories of second sight. I've read as much folklore as I can get my hands on and so many of the other-worldly creatures owe their creation – and even their Gaelic names – to the Highlands and Islands.

Although some of the traditions Aila recounts are not from Lewis, many are; for example, her post for the 14th of January describes a ghost story from Bragar, on the West Side. She plans to upload a new piece each Friday, so there should be much to look forward to.

Aila's blog can be found here: ailamacdonald.wordpress.com



Newspaper Clippings

The Ross-shire Journal, 2 January 1894

Stornoway Notes

Before Sheriff Davidson on Friday last,

John Smith, fisherman, Bayble, and **Murdo Macdonald, fisherman, Aird Point**, were each fined 15s or seven days imprisonment, for committing a breach of the peace in Stornoway on 2nd January.

Roderick Macleod (“Polly”), labourer, was charged with assault and breach of the peace, committed in town on 20th December last. He pled not guilty, but, after evidence, he was found guilty, and fined 7s 6d or three days imprisonment.

Malcolm Maclellan, Tolsta West, pled guilty to committing a breach of the peace at Callernish [sic], on 2nd January. He was fined 7s 6d.

Norman Morrison (“Black Norman”), a well-known character from the Ness district, was charged with theft, committed at Ness on 23rd December last. On this man being placed in the dock, he looked so old and miserable—apparently between eighty and ninety years of age—that the Fiscal withdrew the charge against him.



Letters, Comments and Enquiries

If you would like some help regarding your own Lewis family, or you have a query relating to something in a previous issue, please consider writing in. Perhaps you have an old photograph you would like to share? This section of the journal will only re-appear if you make it happen!



Colin Nicolson, buried within Eaglais na h-Aoidhe

One of the more recent burials to have actually taken place within the walls of Eaglais na h-Aoidhe was that of Colin Nicolson, a carpenter. Colin was born in Bayble in 1852, his parents being Finlay Nicolson and Christian Campbell. His paternal grandparents were Colin Nicolson and Margaret Macleod, she being the daughter of Angus Ban Macleod. This Margaret was the older sister of Ruairidh Ban Macleod, elder in the local Free Church, and a very significant figure in the struggle for land reform.

Colin's baptismal record can be seen [here](#) (p.37, entry 4) and is reproduced here:

Philip Nicolson and Christiana Campbell had a lawful son
born 20th April 1852 and a baptism in the presence of the
congregation 1st November 1852 by Rev. J. Murray Edin. Edin.

Colin died aged only 45; he had been suffering from pneumonia for a week and from pericarditis (inflammation of the lining around the heart) for one day. Despite being relatively young he had been widowed twelve years previously, having one son, Finlay, born to him just before his wife Isabella passed away. His headstone is still fairly legible:



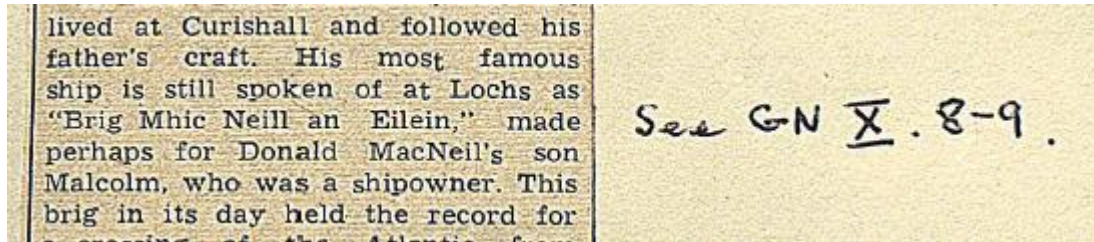
ERECTED
BY HIS BROTHERS
IN LOVING MEMORY OF
COLIN NICOLSON
BAYBLE
DIED 19TH SEPT 1897 AGED 45 YEARS
DEEPLY REGRETTEED BY ALL
WHO KNEW HIM

Families of Lewis, by Mac Gille Chaluum

As stated in issue 1, Rev. William Matheson wrote a series of articles (under the pseudonym Mac Gille Chaluum) for the Stornoway Gazette between November 1950 and October 1977.

After the articles were printed, Matheson cut them out and pasted them into two scrapbooks. This enabled him to annotate the printed articles with later thoughts. Until now these have only been available to researchers with the time to go to the National Library of Scotland in Edinburgh.

In the annotations to these articles Matheson makes frequent references to ten 'Genealogical Notebooks'. For example:



[NLS Acc.9711 Box 8-2, p.95]

Matheson also referred these notebooks in an [interview](#) (Part 2: 17 minutes 30 seconds) given towards the end of 1980. An extensive search for these notebooks has been conducted; they would surely contain much of great interest - not least the sources for his many otherwise unexplained statements.

A careful comparison of the notebooks currently held by the NLS with the annotations described above has demonstrated that the NLS do not hold the notebooks. The following individuals and institutions have also been asked about any knowledge they may have of the notebooks, but every enquiry has drawn a blank:

- William Matheson's nephew and niece - they were executors of his will.
- Bill Lawson
- William Gillies
- Ronnie Black
- Donald McCormick
- Stornoway Library
- Tasglann nan Eilean (the archive service of Comhairle nan Eilean Siar)
- Centre for Research Collections, Edinburgh University
- The School of Scottish Studies, Edinburgh
- New College, Edinburgh

If you have any knowledge of the whereabouts of these notebooks that would be wonderful!

Families of Lewis

It is a real pleasure to be able to bring the full set of articles to readers of the journal. Particular thanks are due to those individuals and organisations who have made this possible:

The *National Library of Scotland* provided the images of Matheson's scrapbooks and gave permission for them to be used in this way. I am most thankful to Dr. Ulrike Hogg for her assistance in this matter. The original scrapbooks are held by the NLS (Acc.9711 Box 8, Items 1 & 2) and can be viewed there.

National World Publishing Limited (who now own *The Stornoway Gazette*) gave permission for the reproduction of the original articles.

Mrs Mary Yardley, niece of Rev. William Matheson, kindly gave permission for her uncle's work to be made more widely accessible in this manner.

We begin in this issue with two articles (printed November 1950) on the Nicolson family. The other articles will follow, issue by issue, in the order in which they were originally printed:

- Murray
- Macphail
- Maclellan & Maclean
- Matheson
- Maciver
- Macleod
- Mackenzie (1)
- Mackenzie (2)
- Macdonald
- Macaulay (1)
- Macaulay (2)
- Macaulay (3)
- Macaulay (4)
- Macaulay (5)
- Macaulay (6)
- Smith
- Morison

If one of the later articles is of particular interest to you, please submit a short article and I will see what I can do for you!

NICOLSONS—1

This is perhaps the oldest surname in Lewis. Following the Norse occupation the family held sway on the island, and it was through marriage to a Nicolson heiress that the Mac Leods came into possession. Thereafter the name is not recorded in Lewis for hundreds of years.

Only at the beginning of the 18th century do the Nicolsons raise their heads again as tacksmen holding their lands from the Mackenzies. The first of them on record is:

I.—Angus Nicolson, who was one of the three tacksmen of Little Bernera in 1726, and sole tacksman of Kirivig in 1740. He married a daughter of John MacIennan (Iain mac ~~Muir~~ ~~chaich~~ ~~mhic~~ ~~of~~ Chleirich), tacksman of Kirkibost, and had at least two sons—

(1) John, of whom below.

(2) Donald, who in 1766 became tacksman of Kirivig, with his brother John as cautioner. In the same year the Mill of Carloway was rented to him and to Donald MacLeod (Domhnall mac Thormoid), tenant in Garenin. *

II.—John Nicolson was tacksman of Carnish and Ardroll, Uig, and at one time also had possession of Kirivig and Skealiscro. He was one of the most extensive farmers and graziers on the estate, and altogether an outstanding Lewisman of his day. His most formidable rival as a man of means and influence in Uig was Donald MacAulay of Brenish (Domhnall Og), and the parish appears to have been rather small to hold the two of them. Both Nicolson and MacAulay had mountain pasturages on the shores of Loch Resort, and there were ~~the~~ differences about boundaries, and ~~the~~ accusations that the cattle were not being kept to their own side of the march. They are said to have come to blows over a place called Ceann Chuisill, where the burn proved an inadequate frontier. About 1762 MacAulay died suddenly in his boat while taking a load of corn (luchd arbhair) from Brenish to Pennydonald. Even then his old foe would not forget the past. His comment on hearing the news was: "Seallaibh 'na phocaidean ach a bheil sgath a dh'fheur Cheann Chuisill ann."

It may be added as a footnote to the

Ruairidh ~~_____~~ /

x General Notes II. 62, V. 3

He died in 1770-1, leaving his widow in possession of the Donald MacIennan, tacksman of Kirivig and Skealiscro in 1723, _____

x Neil Niclan, Remembrance (man of the house, 249)

(? M. d. of Kenneth MacAulay, tacksman of Carnish.)

John Nicolson married, in 1773, Anne Mackenzie, Stornoway, but she cannot have been his first wife. /

He/

> Kenneth Nicolson, probably his son, lived at Carnish. He married Catherine Buchanan, with issue, baptised as follows: Mary (24/2/26); Donald (19/8/29); Ann (4/6/31); Mary (11/2/33); Micol (10/6/35). It is believed that this family emigrated, when James died in 1851 (GN V. 87). There was also a John Nicolson in Carnish, who married Cecily Mackenzie, and had a son Malcolm, baptised 4/2/40. (Cf. Magan's Outlaws, 456; GN, III. 190) daughter of Alexander Morison (Alasdair mac Ailein), tacksman of Shaster (Point).

it is thought/

story that in 1780 John Nicolson was given a renewal of his tack of Carnish "with the Pendicle of Kean-chuslick presently possess by the Tacksman of Brenish"; which suggests that he was a man determined to get what he wanted, even if it took him long years to do so.

We do not know who John Nicolson's wife was, but he had a son (1) Angus, of whom below, and (2) A daughter, who married Donald MacAulay (Dombnall-mac Sheorais), tacksman of Linshader.

In 1780, Ardrol was separated from Carnish and given in tack to Kenneth Nicolson, together with "one half of the Pendicle of Torry possessed by Dond. McAulay, Brenish." The same Kenneth Nicolson was also granted "the Liberty of Changekeeping in the Parish of Uig." He looks like a second son of John Nicolson of Carnish.

III.—Angus Nicolson settled in Stornoway, and is said to have been the founder of the fish-curing industry there. He amassed a considerable fortune as fish-curer, merchant, and exporter, and by his will bequeathed one thousand pounds for the benefit of the poor in his native island. He married first, a daughter of Captain Colin Mackenzie, Stornoway, with issue, Catherine, who married Major Forbes Mackenzie, Deputy Lieutenant of Ross. Angus Nicolson married, secondly, Mary Morison, Carlisle. Their sons were

IV.—Roderick Nicolson, merchant and shipowner in Stornoway. At one time he had several vessels trading to the Baltic, Spain and Portugal. His most famous ship was the schooner "Arrow," commanded by Captain William Morison, Bayhead. Roderick Nicolson must have been a man of boundless activity, for he was as deeply involved on land as on sea. He had the sheep farms of Tolsta and Coll, and another in Uig—Erista, we believe where he built the salmon trap on the river, known as Ciste an Fhors. He married Jane Hay, the daughter of an Invergordon banker, with issue.

(A second, and concluding, article on the "Nicolsons" will appear on this page next week. It gives details of the descendants of Roderick Nicolson and Jane Hay, and information about families of Nicolsons in other parts of the Island.)

NICOLSONS—2

Last week we published the first part of this account of the Nicolsons of Lewis—"perhaps the oldest surname in the Island"—from Angus Nicolson, who was tacksman of Little Bernera in 1726, to Roderick Nicolson, who married Jane Hay, the daughter of an Invergordon banker, with issue:—

(1) Angus, born 1824. He was a civil engineer, and for many years in charge of railway construction work in England. Afterwards he built a large cotton and woollen factory, where over one thousand operatives were employed. He died at Skipton in 1896.

* Inferred to find the exact monument to John Mackenzie of Bannockburn in 1877 (Celtic Magazine, III. 39).

He died apparently in 1795, and is buried at Baile na Cille. (General Notes, II. 122.)
born in 1752 (GN IX. 15).
(2) Kenneth, (General Notes I. 9.)
born at Carloway (Minivick) in 1746.
(3) ? John (LF, 10).

again when he receives a
He is on records in 1795 as tacksman of Pabbay, and in 1800 as ground-officer of Mig.

Roadh of the Dundonnell family,

(Cailean P...), GN VIII. 20.
Chamberlain of Lewis, and
(see Forti, 37)
Mackenzies, 379
(1) Roderick, of whom note;
(2) Neil, ultimately, ship-master in Stornoway.
General Notes II. 53. 1831,
Grandson of John Mackenzie, tacksman of Pabbay, with issue
(1a) Alexander, who emigrated with his family to Nova Scotia, his grand-daughter being Mrs Elizabeth Nicolson Lewis, Middleton, Conn., USA.
(2a) John, and (3a) Matilda, both of whom also emigrated. (4a) Murdoch (see GN VIII. 27.) (But see *ibid.*, 158.)

x Cf. General Notes II. 54.

(2) Colin John, born 1825. He emigrated to New Orleans, where he became partner in a firm of cotton factors and exporters. In the Civil War he fought for the Confederates, and attained the rank of Colonel. Though he resumed his business after the war, his health was affected by the rigours of his military service, and he eventually retired to one of his plantations on the Mississippi, where he died in 1877.

(3) Peter Hay, born 1826. His bent was for the sea, and he followed it to such good purpose that he ended as captain and owner of an East Indiaman. He spent his retirement in Australia, first in Melbourne, and latterly in Albany, Western Australia, where he died in 1897.

(4) Roderick Hay, born 1829. After passing through the University of Glasgow and taking his theological course, he became minister of the parish of Applecross. Afterwards he was Scottish Chaplain to the Brigade of Guards in London. He died at Ravenswood, Kyles of Bute, in 1907.

(5) Alexander Morison, the founder of the Nicolson Institute, Stornoway. He was a shipbuilder and engineer in Shanghai. His tragic death, in his thirty-third year, was caused by a boiler explosion on board a ship which was making a trial run. Education in Lewis owes a great debt to Alexander Morison Nicolson, and to his brothers, whose bequests and other benefactions were subsequently added to his original endowment.

(6) Kenneth Donald, born 1839, for some years a farmer in South Africa. Thereafter he entered into possession of a large cotton plantation on the Mississippi by inheritance from his brother Colin John. In like manner he became owner of the cotton and woollen factory at Skipton on the death of his brother Angus. He died at Ravenswood in 1907, three months after his brother Roderick.

do not find

We have not found that there are any of these Nicolsons now in Lewis. Some families of the name there are in Uig, whose ancestor lived on the islet of Wiay, but they changed their name to Nicolson from MacRitchie. ~~The~~ Nicolsons at Lochs, however, may be of the old ~~Uig~~ stock.

27

There have been Nicolsons in the parish of Barvas for many generations, particularly at South Dell, Borge, and South Galson. A branch of the Borge Nicolsons were once tenants of Asmigary, and were known as "Na Fiosaichean," presumably because they had an ancestor reputed to be a seer.

The South Galson Nicolsons were called "Na Cleirich." Present tradition has it that an ancestor acted in some clerical capacity for the Chamberlain of Lewis. It should

1830 (Justh)

He married Ann, d. of James Gibson, minister of Avoch, with same h. (Firdon No. 4) born 1832 h (q. CD III. 224-5)

Some of the

x See An Gàrdheal IV. 320.

x GN II. 85; III. 115.

priest's ork

be noted, however, that in pre-Reformation times, and as late as the eighteenth century, "cléreach" was the term used for church officer or bedellus, who often combined the office with that of minister's "man." In former days, when the mentally deranged resorted to Teampull Mhaol-uibhe near the Butt of Lewis, there to be sprinkled with holy water from St. Ronan's Well, the stone cup in which the water was brought was in the custody of a functionary known as "cléreach an teampull," whose office was hereditary. It is possible that the Nicolsons at South Galson once held some office of the same kind. SG 24/11/50

regularly h

c. 1850

* PSA (1860-2), 268.



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Click the image to view my website.