

Na Líneachan Mòra

The Bynames, Genetics & Lore of Lewis

Issue 5: July 2023

Welcome to another issue of Na Líneachan Mòra.

I apologise that this issue is so late. Life took over, as did other genealogical questions, so it's good to finally get to this!

Following the last issue which had quite a focus upon the Nicolson family, it was lovely to finally visit the site of Caisteal mhic Creacail, just west of Flesherin in Point. I hope the photographs and details are of interest. I certainly recommend a visit if you're in the area - it's a fascinating spot.

Looking ahead to the new academic year, I suspect that it's going to be much busier than usual, with correspondingly less time to give to projects such as this. Consequently any articles, however small they may be, would be very welcome. 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,

William



Easter 2023

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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Duncan Macleod of Lower Bayble, ex Tolsta Chaolais

I was told this story by my father many years ago.

My great-great-great-grandfather Duncan MacLeod was born in Tolsta Chaolais in the late 18th century. One day when he was a young teenager he was attending a still at the south end of the village not far from where his family home was. He was able to see his home from where the still was situated, and he noticed some men approach his home with nobody but his mother in the house. He must have realised who the men were and he stayed away from the house until he saw them leave. When he thought the men were far enough away from the house, he left the still and went home.

He got to the house and immediately his mother told him to go back to the still as it was the press gang that were looking for him. Duncan then left the house to go back to the still, but as he was making his way there the press gang set upon him from their hiding place aiming to take him to be pressed into service. They made their way across the moor to wherever they were taking him, but on their approach to the Garynahine river Duncan noticed a young lamb on their side of the river with its mother bleating on the far side, with the river in full spate.

Duncan asked the press gang Sergeant if he could take the lamb with him across the swollen river to return it to its mother, mentioning that the ewe would be missing her lamb much as his own mother would be missing him. The Sergeant agreed, thinking that Duncan wouldn't succeed in crossing the swollen river. However, Duncan had a determined nature and made it across the swollen river with the lamb. None of the press gang were willing to follow him, and Duncan ran as fast as he could until he was out of sight and reach of the press gang.

Duncan eventually made his way to the tack of Nether Bayble where he settled and married. He brought up his family there and lived with them there until his death in 1857 as an old man in his eighties. His oldest son Alasdair signed his death certificate. My great-great-great grandfather Domhnall was a younger brother of Alasdair.

John Murdo Macdonald, as originally shared on Facebook, 24 May 2023
 Edited and reproduced here with his kind permission.

1857 . DEATHS in the Parish of Mouroway in the County of Arg

No.	Surname and Name. (whether Married or Single, Widower or Widow.)	When and where Died, with Hour of Death.	Sex.	Age.	Parents' Names, and Rank, Profession, or Occupation.	Cause of Death, and how long Disease continued.—Medical Attendant by whom certified, and when he last saw deceased.	Burial Place. Under what, or other Person, by whom certified.	Signature, Qualification, and Resi- dence of Informant, if out of the House in which the Death occurred.	When and where Registered, and Signature of Registrar.
80	MacLeod Duncan	1857 September 5th P.M.	M	88	Donald MacLeod Profrs. deceased	Infirmities of Age	M.D.	Alasdair MacLeod Proprietor	1857 September 10 th Mouroway
	MacLeod Duncan	Bayble			Donald MacLeod Profrs. deceased	No medical attendant	Not certified	Alasdair MacLeod Registrar Mouroway	Alasdair MacLeod Registrar Mouroway

Reproduced here by permission of the National Records of Scotland.

Caisteal mhic Creacail

I first intended to visit this site about ten years ago, and last Easter I was up on the Isle of Lewis alone, and free to do as I pleased with my time. According to Bill Lawson, this site is known locally as the remains of the old Nicolson castle, although it has been [officially designated](#) as a Neolithic chambered cairn.

I am no archaeologist, but upon looking at the heap of stone, I had to agree with the official interpretation — it didn't strike me as the remains of a castle. Nonetheless, it does have one very interesting feature.



The coastal inlet, whether it was formed by natural processes or by design (or a mixture of both), is immediately adjacent to the large patch of stones. This is, at least, an interesting coincidence. Andrew P. MacLeod has helpfully observed that it may be a ‘noust’:

NOUST, NAUST, NOAST *noun. Orcadian and Shetlandic.* A landing place for boats; a slip, either natural or artificial into which a boat is drawn up for protection.

(ISBN 978-1-84682-173-8) Diarmaid Ó Muirthe (2010) *From the Viking Word-Hoard*
A dictionary of Scandinavian words in the languages of Britain and Ireland, page 129

A more detailed image of the inlet is on the next page.



Is it possible that a birlinn would be drawn up here, perhaps in the days when the Nicolsons held the island?

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 continue in this issue with two articles (printed January 1951) on the Murray family. The other articles will follow, issue by issue, in the order in which they were originally printed:

- MacPhail
- MacIennan & 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!

MURRAYS (I)

THE story of the Murrays in Lewis begins on a day when watchers on the coast of Ness saw an unknown boat rounding the Butt and making for the beach at Cunndal. There were two men on board and, as custom was when strangers came to those shores, were taken to the Big House of Habost, there to be entertained—and scrutinised — by Morison, the Judge of Lewis. We do not know whether hospitality was provided for the time-honoured year and a day before the men were asked their name and their business, but it ~~did~~ eventually transpire that they were fugitives from justice, rather than underlie the law, sought permission to remain in Lewis. Morison granted their request, but not, ~~without~~, without asking for something in return. This is a matter to which we ~~shall~~ / ~~shall~~ / ~~shall~~ advert in another article.

they/

of

of

there is reason to believe may be summarised/

shall/ ~~shall~~ advert/

One of the men was distinguished by what looked like a blue birth-mark on the side of his face and neck. In due course he set up as a smith at Swainbost, and came to be known in Lewis as An Gobha Gorm, by which name only he is now remembered. From him (with some exceptions to be mentioned in another article) are descended the Murrays of Lewis. Thus far the traditions of Ness.

are led/

For reasons which will be given, we ~~lead~~ to the conclusion that An Gobha Gorm was ~~probably~~ William Murray, a citizen of Dornoch, whose name has come down to us in connection with a fight that took place there in 1607.* The encounter ended fatally for Charles Paip, sheriff-clerk of Sutherland, while his brothers, William, minister of Dornoch, and Thomas, minister of Rogart, were seriously wounded. The weapon used was the sword, and it is worthy of note that the ministers were armed. As a result of this affray, the following persons were put to the horn on 1st October, 1608: "William Murray, bower in Dornoch, Hutcheon MacPhaill, brother of the late Thomas MacPhaill, citizen of Dornoch, John MacPhaill, son natural of said Thomas, and Alexander Poilone, his servant." These men were never apprehended. We are told that two of them died in Holland, and that William Murray was still living, at a place unspecified, in 1630.

of

Earldom of Sutherland, 257.

* True date is 1st July, 1608. On 14th July the Earl of Sutherland and Mackay of Farr are ordered to appear before the Privy Council as landlord of John MacPhaill in Dornoch and William Murray, bower there. - RPC, ad tempus.

The Earl of Sutherland and Mackay are denounced rebels for failing to appear, 1st September, 1608. - Ibid.

o/

RPC VIII . 189, 699.

Among the reasons for connecting An Gobha Gorm and his coming to Lewis with the events thus briefly summarised are the following:—

1. By reckoning the number of generations, the date of his arrival in Lewis can be fixed at about the time that William Murray made his escape from Dornoch. An account now current in Ness makes

An Gobha Gorm the first of twenty-five generations of smiths in Swainbost; but the error of this is manifest when we consider that the history of the name of Murray in Scotland goes back no further than that. Much more worthy of credit is the tradition handed down among the Murrays of Swainbost

a/

themselves, according to which Alexander Murray, last of Swainbost, who died in 1857, was seventh of his line.

2. An Gobha Gorm was a Murray and, unless we go as far south as Moray or Atholl, the obvious country in which to look for him is the east of Sutherland (Machair Chat), where the northern Murrays had their lands.

3. It has been the invariable tradition that An Gobha Gorm, as already stated, came to Lewis as a fugitive from justice (fo 'n choill).

4. While it is true that William Murray is described as a bowyer, it has to be remembered that the bow was going out of use in his time; and it is probable that he was able to make other weapons, including weapons made of iron.

5. According to tradition, An Gobha Gorm was regarded as a skilled worker in iron, so much so that he had the reputation of having acquired the secret from the fairies.* A descendant explains that in cases where the other smiths in Lewis had to insert rivets, he was able to weld, and that for ~~the~~ purpose, instead of using peat charcoal, he imported a certain amount of coal. This could be accounted for by supposing that he had contacts in the east of Sutherland, where coal-mining commenced at Brora in 1598.

* Cf. WHT II.60.

this/

6. ~~There appears now to be no tradition giving the name of An Gobha Gorm's companion in adversity/~~ A hundred years ago, ~~however,~~ there were traditions in Lewis of a warrior in the service of the Movisons whose exploits clearly belong to the beginning of the 17th century. His name was given as Iain Ruadh MacPhail and Iain Mór MacAoidh. The variation is significant. It identifies the individual in question as one of the Siol Phail of the east of Sutherland, who, though Mackays, preferred to take their surname from one of their more recent ancestors, Paul Mackay by name. The first MacPhail on record in Lewis is Donald MacPhail in rental of 1726. He appears also in the patronymics of his sons as Donald Roy and Donald Mac Hormoid, and was presumably a descendant of the above Iain Ruadh MacPhail. It is interesting to find that his place of abode was Eoropie, as near as might well be to Tràigh Chunnail, where, as tradition avers, An Gobha Gorm

many about this/ in the service of the Movisons/

also

of it

~~But~~ What practically settles the question, ^{however,} is that, according to Ness tradition, the name of An Gobha Gorm's companion in adversity was Iain Ruadh Mac Phail./

the/ s/

1718 and/

~~more or less~~ completes/

and his companion first set foot on Lewis soil. It thus looks as if the companion of An Gobha Gorm was Iain Ruadh MacPhail. If so, it strengthens the case for identifying the former with the aforesaid William Murray, whose chief accomplice in the affair at Dornoch had the name of John MacPhail. Sir Robert Gordon, it is true, states that John MacPhail died in Holland; but his narrative does not wholly agree with the contemporary records, and it is possible that on this point he was misinformed. see 5/1/51
(To be concluded).

The fact that/ of

Sir Robert Gordon was writing of from Nearsay. From 1606 to 1610 he was resident in England (Old Dornoch, 56.) (Earldom of Sutherland, 255, 266.) cat.

- even possible in the nature of the case - h

MURRAYS (2)

As we explained in last week's article, we have some grounds for beginning our account of the Murray family with:

thus good/

I.—William Murray, who settled as smith at Swainbost about 1608, and was known in Lewis as An Gobha Gorm. His span of life would be c. 1575—c. 1645. He was followed as smith by

II.—His son (c. 1610—c. 1680), whose name is unknown. He was followed by

III.—His son (c. 1640—c. 1710), name also unknown. His son was

IV.—Neil (c. 1670—c. 1740). Niall Gobha, as he was called, is on record as tenant in Swainbost in 1726 ~~and 1728~~, when he gave evidence before the Forfeited Estates Commissioners. By his time the Murrays had spread to different parts of Lewis, as is shown by the following names: John Murray, in Nether Bayble; Angus Murray, in Stornoway; John Murray and Patrick Murray, in Lower Barvas; and Kenneth Gow (probably a Murray) in Shawbost. Neil Murray left at least two sons:

1718 and/

- (1) William, of whom below.
- (2) Donald, on record in 1726 as tenant in Eoropie, where he was followed by Domhnall Ban Gobha, probably his son. The Murrays at No. 1 Eoropie are descended from Domhnall Ban Gobha.

x He was followed in Shandruit h by Donald Gow and Roderick Gow, tenants at various dates between 1766 and 1787, and Angus Gow, tenant in 1780 and 1787. (cf. Hebridean here and Romance, 219ff.)

V.—William Murray first appears in Swainbost as tenant in 1726. In his time began the long association—which still continues—of the Murrays with the island of Rona, of which he received a tack in 1740. By 1754 he had also become tacksman of Swainbost. He married Elizabeth Mackenzie and had at least two sons:

- (1) Roderick, of whom below.
- (2) John, who shared Swainbost with his brother. In 1781, for example, the tack is to Roderick Murray and John Murray, "whereof the former 2/3rds and the latter 1/3rd, with the whole Island of Rhona to Rodk."

x Domhnall Ban's grandson, Domhnall mac Iain mac Rionnadh Bhaire, had three sons, Iormal Mór (himself), Iain Mór, and Ruairidh Bann. The last named had Finlay (Iain Iain Bann) who died, 13th September, 1949, aged 84, and Alexander, who has probably succeeded Finlay as tenant.

and apparently the same as Donald ~~Donald~~ ^{Donald} ~~Bain Murray~~ ^{Bain Murray} Ban Gobha in later rentals. (1766, 1780, 1787, 1792, 1808) x May also have been the father of Alan Smith (Ailean mac Dhòmhnall Bhaire), Knapdale. (Gen. Notes III. 187.)

He died before 1752, and/ by then/ (HP, 98)

x Father of Flora (Fionnghal), first wife of Kenneth Morrison (Cormeach mac Aonghus 'e Dhòmhnall).

GN VIII. 43. Father of Domhnall Mór in Eoropie. GN VIII. 45.

VI.—Roderick Murray (Ruairidh Gobha) succeeded his father as tacksman and smith at Swainbost. An anvil he used and other tools of his trade are still preserved. In addition to following the family avocation he found time for other activities, such as whisky-distilling and sheep-rearing. In an inventory dated 9th May, 1780, one of the items is a still, and another is "To one old worm lent Rory Murray in Ness." It should be explained that at that date many of the tacksmen of Lewis were allowed to distil whisky by licence from the Chamberlain.

Roderick Murray kept sheep on Rona. He had one tenant on the island, who paid his rent in kind, which included oil manufactured from the fat of sea-birds, and a special cheese that fetched good prices in the southern markets. On one occasion, when out in Rona for the shearing, he found his flock smaller than he expected, and accused the tenant of helping himself to the mutton, despite the latter's protestations that the missing sheep had fallen down a deep chasm called Geo Mèadhar. The tenant gave expression to his feelings in a song in which he said:

Saoil sibh féin nach mór an náire
Dh'fhear a leughas Beurla 's Gàidhlig,
Dh'ol a dh'fheach ormsa "Mheairlich"
Air son na bhàth Geo Mèadhar.

As this verse indicates, Roderick Murray was a man of education, and so was his brother John. The credit is probably due to James Thomson, who came to Lewis as a teacher under the auspices of the S.P.C.K. and, after being nineteen years at Barvas, opened school at Swainbost in 1756.

The original house on the site of the present farmhouse at Swainbost dates from 1767, and was built by Roderick Murray. Since then it has been altered and improved by Sir James Matheson and others. Adjoining the farmhouse is a field in a certain part of which peat ash is still turned up by the plough. Here stood the house of Swainbost before Roderick Murray's time. It was not demolished when the new house was built. There were those living fifty years ago who could remember it. It was a thatched house, but had gables and white-washed walls. The smithy used by Roderick Murray and his predecessors was situated at some distance to the west, where a knoll on the machair is still known as Cnoc na Ceardaich.

[REDACTED]

- (1) Alexander, of whom below.
- (2) Donald, who was for some

Who had a lease of the excise from the Commissioners of the Excise, dated at Edinburgh, 15th October, 1771. (General Notes, IV. 20)

Jane,
Roderick Murray married, daughter of Alexander Morison (Alasdair mac Ailein), tacksman of Shader (Pain), with issue.

X Cf. Am Measg nam Bodach, 103.

somewhat
~~much~~ depleted/
(a MacLeod)

sx/

Mr. Roderick Murray, of Swainbost, Lewis, a subscriber to the 1790 edition of Duncan Macisbyre's Songs (GN VIII. 171).

They are said to have made the iron ^{themselves,} they used a form one found on their own lands.

~~It is said that they were the first to use iron tools, which makes it probable that the names of these Macisbyres~~

1796. Joint-tacksman of South Galson?

North Dell/ (1808)

John, tacksman of North Dell (1823) (1841) Bove, who married Mary Morrison, with issue, of Kenneth and Robert. [about 1830] Kenneth, blacksmith at North Bove, married Catherine, with issue Mary, born in 1840. (Lewis Notes, 4, 64; GN VI.7.) (GN IX.445.)

- x (1) Margaret (20)
- (2) Annabella (15)
- (3) Alexander (14)
- (4) Donald (6)
- (5) — (5 months) Colin (1841 Census). (6) Roderick (Lewis Notes, 2) (7) Kenneth (See also Highlander, 112-3)

years a cooper in Stornoway, and afterwards tenant in North Dell. He married Catherine (Ceit nighean Fhearchair)* daughter of Farquhar Smith, tacksman of Earshader, and an aunt of Seonaidh Phadruig, the poet, by whom he had a large family. His son, Farquhar Murray (1828-1912), married Catherine Campbell (nighean Aonghuis mhic Iain mhic Fhionnlaigh), ~~Gross~~, leaving issue, including his son Malcolm at North Dell.

(8) Elizabeth, who married William Campbell, smith in Stornoway.

VII.—Alexander Murray was the last of the family to be tacksman at Swainbost. He left there and took the farm of North Dell, where he died on 16th November, 1857, aged 86. He is buried on the south side of St. Peter's Church, Swainbost, close to his ancestor An Gobha Gorm, whose grave is marked by an undressed headstone of the native Lewis rock next to the wall of the church. Alexander Murray married Margaret, one of the twenty children of Kenneth MacIver, tacksman of North Tolsta. By her he had two daughters, one of whom, Margaret, married John Nicolson (Iain mac Mhurchaidh mhic Iain), South Dell, with issue a daughter Annabella, who married Charles Orrock, Chamberlain of Lewis. Alexander Murray's sons left Lewis. Three of them, Colin, Kenneth, and Donald (Danny), went to India, and prospered as tea planters there. They all had issue, among whom may be mentioned Ronald Roderick, a doctor in Edinburgh, who is a son of Colin Murray, and the sons of Donald Murray—Sir Norman, Alasdair, in the Punjab, and Donald, banker in Ceylon.

SC 12/1751

* She survived him (Lewis Notes?) She was his second wife.

GN VIII.19; IX.41, 43. and ~~is~~ on record as such ~~who succeeded his father~~ 1823.

GN VIII.20.

1819 (John Nicolson in N. Dell 1792) (John McNicol in N. Dell 1772) GN III.66

See GN IV.113.

* GN VII.79.

⊗ Mr K. Murray is chief of the Lewis Murrays. K.D. McL. (Highlander, 5/1/1878)



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