

The Lairds of Blaich from 1460 to 1758

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This is one of a series of 38 articles which should to be read in conjunction with each other. Look at [‘Setting the Scene’](#), in Small Print on the left of the homepage, for a list of all these articles and explanations of some concepts being used. Also see [‘Overview of Donald’s life’](#) for summaries of each of the notes.

Our notes:-

- This document is a collation of information about the traditional clan hierarchy in Blaich and begins to explore the possible impact on Donald and his family.
- Of particular relevance to these notes are related documents which are (or yet to be) placed on the website:-
 01. [‘Setting the scene’](#): This explains the clan structure, lairds, chiefs etc
 08. [‘Places of our McLeans in Scotland’](#): For descriptions of Ardgour, Blaich, Duisky and other locations mentioned in this document
 03. [‘Chiefs of Clan McLean’](#):
 04. [‘Jump Where the Wall is Lowest’](#): How the McLeans took over Ardgour
 05. [‘The Macleans of Ardgour’](#):
 06. [‘The Lairds of Blaich’](#): This document
 16. [‘Donald McLean’s ancestors’](#): The search for Allan.
[‘Places: Ardgour – the district, the estate, the house, and Sallachan farm’](#):
[‘Places: Blaich & Duisky’](#):
 10. [‘Tour guide for Fort William, Blaich & Duisky’](#):

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Summary – purpose & highlights

Donald McLean:-

- Donald McLean was born in 1779 in Blaich on northern side of Ardgour, in the Western Highlands. He leased the Duisky Estate next to Blaich which is a was a string of xxx cottages and crofts, rather than a village. There was never more than 200 people living there. It was on the southern shores of Loch Eil across from Fort William.
- In 1837, Donald migrated to South Australia with his wife, Christina nee McPhee, and their 10 children. The family history on [www.christinaanddonaldmclean.com](#) has a great deal of information about their descendants in Australia, but very little about their ancestors in Scotland.

The search for Allan:-

- The only thing we were sure about Donald’s kin in Scotland was that Donald was born around Blaich in the 1779 and that his father was Allan McLean and mother probably Rachel Rankin.
- Allan must have been born some time between 1720 and 1760 some where in the Western Highlands, possibly near Blaich. He might have been the son, grandson, nephew or cousin of the laird. The Laird of Blaich in that period was the 10th but unfortunately we know very little about this particular laird.
- In other notes we have collated details about the lairds of Ardgour in order to explore the connections between the lairds of Blaich and Ardgour. And in yet another document we have looked for interactions between the lairds of

Ardgour and the Duart chiefs. However there is little likelihood that Allan has any remote connections with the Ardgour line, and certainly no significant relationship with the chiefs.

- We have not been successful in finding 'our' Allan - so far.

The lairds:-

- The 1400s was a time of expansion of Clan McLean. They established themselves in Mull, an island off the west coast, in the late 1300s. The line of 28 chiefs are detailed in our ['Chiefs of Clanm MacLean'](#). In 1420 a branch was established in Ardgour, which is on the mainland across from Mull, when the McLeans took over Ardgour from Clan McMaster (see ['Jump where the wall is lowest'](#)). There is an unbroken line of 18 McLean Lairds of Ardgour up to the present time (see ['The McLean in Ardgour'](#)). And in the late 1400s another branch was established in Blaich which is the eastern side of Ardgour. The first line of lairds of Blaich petered out in the early 1600s and a second line was established in the late 1660s. 'Our' Donald McLean was from this second family but this line discontinued around the time that Donald was born.
- Hector was the first laird of Blaich in around 1480. He was followed by Donald Dubh, Ewen Uaibhreach, Hector, Ewen and another Hector. This last Hector became laird in 1615 but it is not known what happened for a while. Then a second line commenced in 1684 with Lochlan Mor. There is some uncertainty about the sequence of lairds in this second line but following Lochlan Mor, it might be Allan, Lachlan (or Hugh or William) and then William. This William became laird in 1758 and we do not have any information about who took over from him.
- Many questions remain. Did the line cease after William the 10th Laird? If so, why? Was there ever an 11th or subsequent Laird?
- So there were two lines in Blaich. The BRB states that Donald descended from the second line.

FIRST FAMILY

1st MacLean of Blaich – Hector – from 1480 to ???

Hector was the son of Ewen, the second laird of Ardgour. Sinclair (p330) stated that Hector was Ewen's fifth son of Ewen however JP McLean (p 279) stated he was the third son.

Hector became laird around 1480. The circumstances of the establishment of this line were much more peaceful than Hector's grandfather's murderous conquest of the McMasters which marked the beginning of the Ardgour line 60 years earlier. Perhaps there was some mutual agreement between Hector and his father or with the brothers.

He had three sons (Sinclair p 335):-

- Donald Dubh who became the second of Blaich (according to Sinclair)
- Ewen who became the first Maclean of Cornaig in Tiree
- Hector Odhar. According to the Ardgour MS, his descendants, Sliochd Eachainn Uidhir, were scattered over Mull and Tiree.

2nd Laird of Blaich

There is disagreement about who was the 2nd laird. There are three suggestions.

JP McLean (p 279) stated it was either Hector, the grandson of Hector the first – or Eoghan Uaibhreach, second son of Donald, third laird of Treshnish.

Sinclair stated it was Donald Dubh, the first son of Hector the first of Blaich. Donald Dubh also had possession of Treshnish which were islands to the east of Mull – so he was the third laird of Treshnish besides being the second of Blaich. (ref: Sinclair p 336)

He had six sons (ref: Sinclair p 336):-

- Ewen of Treshnish
- Ewen Uaibhreach of Blaich
- John Odhar of Achnadale
- Lachlan Fionn of Hynish
- Lachlan
- Donald

3rd Laird of Blaich - Ewen Uaibhreach

He was the second son of the 2nd Laird
He had a son, Hector (Sinclair p 336)

4th Laird of Blaich - Hector

He had a son, Ewen (Sinclair p 336)

5th Laird of Blaich - Ewen

He had a son, Hector (Sinclair p 336)

6th Laird of Blaich - Hector

Hector, son of Ewen, was served heir to his father in 1615 (Sinclair p 330 & 336 & JP McLean p279)

JP McLean states that Hector had a three-merk property of Blaich, holden of the crown (p275) – this might be a fact, but the reference is wrong).

Unfortunately, we know little about Hector (or about any of his five predecessors). We do not know when he was born, and how old he was when became laird – nor when he died.

Hector was apparently the last in this line. It is not known why it ceased.

- Maybe this Hector had no sons to pass on his inheritance, but surely there must have been someone else who could own the land or acquire the title. Maybe they had lost control of all their lands.
- Maybe, at some stage, the direct control of Blaich was taken back by the Laird of Ardgour.
- Or there is an indication that an Eoghainan Morar MacEachain, who was born about 1575, was a Laird of Blaich (ref: My Heritage family trees managed Robert McEachen and Whitney Joudrey). So it is possible that the ownership of a substantial part of Blaich passed from the McLeans to the MacEachain family. Eoghainan Morar would have been about 40 years old when Hector became laird and maybe Eoghainan Morar took over from Hector some time after 1615. We do not know why or how this might have occurred.
- Whatever happened, it is clear that the McLean's control of the area around Blaich was declining.

INTERIM PERIOD

7th Laird

Possibly because of this lack of details, Sinclair did not number this second Blaich line in the way that he numbered other lines. So we will have a go at this ourselves – just for the purposes of our little history. There is a gap of about 70 years between when Hector the 6th of the first family became heir in 1615 and when the Lachlan Mor became the first laird of the

new line in 1684. Hector probably ceased to be laird when he died sometime during those 70 years. So the gap was at least a few decades, possibly much longer. Whatever the gap, let's just regard that gap as the 7th Laird and that first laird of the new line is the 8th McLean of Blaich.

SECOND FAMILY

There are no Hectors in this second line whereas there were many Hectors in the first line. In the first line of Lairds of Blaich, the 1st, 2nd, 4th & 6th were probably all called Hector.

There is only patchy information about the first family and there is not much more known about the second Blaich McLean family line. This is a pity because this is 'our' line and so is of greatest interest to us. There are only two 'facts' we have confidence in - that Lachlan Mor established this new line in the 1680s – and that his great-grandson, William, became laird in 1758. Thus, much of the following, which covers less than eight decades, is speculative.

There would have been some connections between the first family and the second family. For example, Francis McLean, who was the most distinguished person from Blaich, had ancestral connections with both families (ref: Sinclair p345). Even though the first laird line of succession had ceased, there probably were some descendants of the first family still living in the area. Maybe the descendants of each line, identified themselves as being either from one or the other line. Was this relevant to their lives? Were there any tensions between the two families?

8th Laird of Blaich - Lachlan Mor - laird from 1684 to after 1703 (19 years)

It is not known how this new line began. What actual land did this include? How was it taken or purchased? Who was it taken from? Who controlled the land between when the last Hector ceased and Lachlan Mor started. The most likely process was that it was in the control of the Laird of Ardgour and maybe it was granted by the 8th Laird of Ardgour to his son.

Lachlan Mor was the second son of John Crubach McLean who was the 8th Laird of Ardgour. (Edwin Maclean stated that he was the sixth son of Allan the 7th of Ardgour but this is not consistent with JP McLean p279 and Sinclair, p343). But this is consistent with notes by MBD who stated "Lachlan Mor was a son of either the 7th or 8th Ardgour".

He was born about 1614 (ref: Burke & ref: Edwin MacLean)

He was styled "Lachlann Mor" in Burke's Landed Gentry, and Sinclair refers to him as Lachlan MacEwen.

He became laird of the tack of Duisky on 9th May 1684. (ref: Burke) so he would have been 70 years old when he took over the estate. This is consistent with JP McLean who wrote that 'around 1680 Lachlan became the progenitor of the MacLeans of Blaich' (ref: JP MacLean pxxx).

Lachlan's father John 'Crubach' had the following children:-

- Ewen his heir – the 9th Laird of Ardgour
- Lachlan – this Lachlan who became the 8th Laird of Blaich
- Donald
- Archibald.
- Allan – born about 1640, died 1709 (Willowburn) – He MIGHT be the 3X grandfather of 'our' Donald. As Allan was a brother of Lachlan, the 8th Laird of Blaich, we are closely connected with this new line of lairds but are not in a direct line of inheritance. None-the-less, we can claim to be part of the second family of Blaich

In 1700 the 8th Laird of Ardgour divided Ardgour and gave the north-east portion to Lachlan Mor and created the Barony of Blaich (ref: Douglas McLean, BRB p4)

On 8th December 1702, he became a vassal of Maclean of Kingairloch (ref: Burke).

His wife was Marie MacLean of Coll. and they had two sons :-

- the first son was Allan who probably became the next laird.
- The other son was Lachlan who was born about 1650 and was in Blaich in 1709 (ref: Willowburn) and who died in that year (ref: Edwin MacLean).
- Lachlan also had a grandson (ie the son of Allan or Lachlan) who was William, the Music Master (see William B, below)

Lachlan Mor died some time after 1703, at a “great age” – ie at least 89 years old. He must have been the Laird for about two decades but we do not know whether or not he was well enough to discharge all his duties in the later years.

9th Laird of Blaich - Allan – laird from after 1703 to 1709 (6 years)

Lachlan Mor seems to have been succeeded in Blaich by his son, Allan. (Sinclair p 343) – so presumably Allan took over the tack of Duisky when Lachlan died after 1703.

Allan was born in 1645 and died in 1709 (Edwin MacLean) – so he died in the same year as his brother Lachlan.

Edwin MacLean refers to him as ‘Allan MacLean of Blaich’. He was about 60 years old when he became laird and he held that position for less than 6 years.

Allan had at least two sons – Lachlan and Allan. Lachlan was born in 1679 (ref: Edwin MacLean) and Allan was born in 1680 and died in 1749 (Edwin MacLean).

10th Laird of Blaich – Lachlan – from 1709 to 1758 (49 years)

There is some uncertainty about whether Lachlan was laird, perhaps a short time rather than 49 years, or whether it skipped a generation to William.

Although we do not have confirmation from any source claiming that Lachlan (b 1679) became the next laird after Allan the 9th, there are some indications that this might be the case because:-

- In the normal course of events, the next laird would have been Lachlan (b 1679) because it is understood that he was the first son of the previous laird, ‘Allan MacLean of Blaich’.
- Edwin MacLean called him ‘Lachlan MacLean of Loch Eil’ (ref: person 1 in Edwin MacLean’s genealogy) which implies a status above being just an ordinary resident of the area.
- Sinclair stated that “*William was returned heir general to his grandfather Allan MacLean of Blaich in 1758*” but he could not have taken over directly from his grandfather because 1758 is 103 years after Allan of Blaich was born and in fact he died in 1709 at the age of 69 years. So there must have been a laird or two between Allan and William. Lachlan is the most likely contender for at least part of this period but there might have been others.

Edwin MacLean has provided a genealogical chart which starts with Lachlan – and designated him as person 1.

He was 30 years old when his father died and so he would have become laird at that age if in fact he did become laird.

These would have been tumultuous times for whoever was laird:-

- The Jacobite uprising: The call-to-arms by the Bonnie Prince at nearby Glenfinnan in 1745, the disaster at Culloden in 1746, and the subsequent reprisals. See the separate document about the parts the various MacLean branches played at different times in the uprisings.
- The decline of the lairds: We might assume, by Sinclair’s lack of detail about the lairds of Blaich during this period, that the Blaich line was weak and disorganized. To cover this shortcoming, maybe the lairds of Ardgour resumed a more direct role in Blaich, but Ardgour was having its own difficulties for most of the period in question. By 1709, Allan the 10th Laird of Ardgour, had been laird since 1694. Allan was described as extravagant and a poor manager

who had brought the estate to the brink of ruin. (ref: Sinclair). Things might not have been much better when John was the 11th Laird of Ardgour from 1732 to 1739. Then Hugh became the 12th McLean Laird of Ardgour as a toddler and there were many years of intra-family intrigue about the control of the estate. In 1751, Hugh was described as owning Blaich and Duiskey as well as many other neighbouring areas, including salmon fisheries. (ref: p 29 of "Directory of Land Ownership in Scotland" edited by Loretta R Timperley – Scottish Record Society, new series 5, produced in 1976). The Ardgour estate eventually recovered, but this might have been after 1758.

According to Edwin McLean's chart, Lachlan had three sons – Donald (b 1708 – person 2), Allan (b 1711 – person 3) and John (b 1717 – person 4). –Note that **Donald 1708 might have been the grandfather of 'our' Donald 1779**.

It is not known when Lachlan died or who took over from him following his death. If he died before three score years and ten, Donald 1708, as the oldest son might have been in line to be the next laird. But a generation might have been skipped because Lachlan might have died in 1758 (at the age of 79 years) which is when William took over.

Skipped

We are left to guess at the circumstances if a generation was skipped – ie if either Lachlan was not the 10th Laird, and/or his oldest son Donald b 1708 did not become laird:-

- Intrigue: Maybe there was conflict in the family. Or perhaps inability or unwillingness of the first son, or any others of that generation to take over. This could have given rise to resentment towards William by those who were overlooked. There might have been disquiet within the family if in fact Lachlan's sons and their sons all missed out.
- Decline of lairds: It might have been a time when the Laird of Ardgour took a more direct role in Blaich and the role of the Laird of Blaich was subservient to Ardgour. However, Ardgour was having its own difficulties for most of the period in question. By 1709, Allan the 10th Laird of Ardgour, had been laird since 1694. Allan was described as extravagant and a poor manager who had brought the estate to the brink of ruin. (ref: Sinclair). Things might not have been much better when John was the 11th Laird of Ardgour from 1732 to 1739. Then Hugh became the 12th McLean Laird of Ardgour as a toddler and there were many years of intra-family intrigue about the control of the estate. In 1751, Hugh was described as owning Blaich and Duiskey as well as many other neighbouring areas, including salmon fisheries. (ref: p 29 of "Directory of Land Ownership in Scotland" edited by Loretta R Timperley – Scottish Record Society, new series 5, produced in 1976). The Ardgour estate eventually recovered, but this might have been after 1758.

11th Laird of Blaich - William – from 1758

Sinclair stated, that "in March, 1758, we find William Maclean, lately a journeyman barber in Edinburgh, returned heir general to his grand-father, Allan Maclean of Blaich". (ref: Sinclair p 343).

William's status and role is unclear. He was heir to his grand-fater but Sinclair does not specifically state that HE became the laird. In effect, the line of lairds of Blaich had probably ceased by this time. In 1751, at least 7 years before William became heir (maybe the laird of Blaich), the Laird of Ardgour, Hugh, was described as owning Blaich and Duiskey as well as many other neighbouring areas, including salmon fisheries. (ref: p 29 of "Directory of Land Ownership in Scotland" edited by Loretta R Timperley – Scottish Record Society, new series 5, produced in 1976) .

Which William was this?

A). William – son of Allan MacLean (b 1680, d 1749)

- On Edwin McLean's genealogical chart, the only William who was a grandson of Allan McLean of Blaich was a son of Allan (b 1680). We cannot be confident that this is the right William.
- He was the second son of the second son because William had an older brother (John MacLean of Ardgour, b 1708 – (ref: Edwin McLean) and William's father had an older brother who of course was Lachlan McLean of Loch Eil (b 1679 – ref: ref: Edwin McLean)

- Edwin McLean gives no information about this William. We do not have his birth year, death or indications of offspring. Without a birth year, we have no idea when he could have taken over from Allan, but we know that, as his father Allan was born in 1680, we might assume that William was not born before 1700 and thus must have been no more than 58 years old when he took over. We need other information about whether he was a barber and had connections with Edinburgh.
- He was not designated as Laird by JP McLean – see notes about the 12th Laird and notes about Francis.

B). William – born in Mull in 1660

- A Seneachie in 1838 (repeated by JP McLean in 18xx) described a “*William of the Ardgour family*” who was born in Mull in 1660. JP McLean stated that he was a grandson of Lachlan Mor (8th Laird). He does not appear on Edwin McLean’s genealogical chart. A Seneachie stated that “*he was left an orphan at a very early age. In youth he applied to himself to the study of music, became an accomplished musician and attained such proficiency that James, the duke of York (afterwards James II of England), while Lord Commissioner in Scotland, invited him to court and honoured him with the appointment of music master to the princesses Mary and Anne; and afterward to the position of ‘Master of Revels of Scotland’.*” To whom he was married is not mentioned but he had a son (also called William) – see below. (ref: JP McLean p 279). If he was orphaned at a very early age, his father, whoever that was, must have died somewhat prematurely.
- Dr James MacLean (ref: MBD) puts the Blaich descent differently as he believes that the Music Master was son of Charles (4th son of the 7th of Ardgour) by his second wife, Margaret, who was a sister of Hector Knox (she married secondly about 1660 to Capt John Finning of Glasgow).
- Dr James makes William born c1660,
- Dr James states that William married Anne, daughter of James Pittendreich of Edinburgh, and ancestor of the MacLeans of Plantation in Glasgow, whose present representative, he says, is Wing Commander Charles Hector MacLean, Kilmacolm, Renfrewshire, Scotland. (ref:
- There are no indications that he was ever a barber in Edinburgh.
- This William did not become the 11th Laird of Blaich because he would have been 98 years old in 1758. And he was the wrong generation – the William who became laird in 1758 was the grandson of Allan MacLean of Blaich (ie great-grandson of Lachlan Mor).

C). William – son of William from Mull (above)

- This William was the son of the William above.
- A Seneachie stated that this William obtained a commission in the army and served as captain in the wars in Holland under the Duke of Marlborough.
- Captain William married a daughter of Sir Francis Kinloch, by whom he had two sons, Francis and James.
 - James died in 1748 - in the East Indies (according a Seneachie and JP McLean) or the West Indies (according to Sinclair).
 - The life of Francis is out lined below, when considering the 12th laird.
- There are no indications that he was ever a barber in Edinburgh.
- Neither Sinclair nor JP McLean indicate that this William became laird.
- He features prominently in Fryer’s fact-novel ‘Allan Maclean – Jacobite General’

The latter two Williams (B&C) might have been uncles/cousins to the first William (A). Their relevance is that we are considering whether their son/grandson, Francis, was the 12th Laird.

We don’t know whether William (A, born 1680) had any children, nor when he died. So we do not have a starting point for considering when he ceased to be laird and who the next laird might have been. There are so many unknowns and the year 1758 is the last firm point we have to work with (the latest time we know who the laird was). Maybe there were no lairds after William.

12th Laird of Blaich

We have not come across any sources which throw light on who was the next laird so there is uncertainty about the 12th.

Francis: A Seneachie and Sinclair highlight the life of Francis MacLean.

- He was the son and grandson of the Williams (B&C) mentioned in our discussion of the 11th laird.
- Francis was born about 1717. and had a distinctive military career. He started in the same regiment as his father. Most of his service was in Canada, but he also served in France, Portugal and Spain. His impressive military exploits are detailed by a Seneachie and will not be repeated here.
- He could not have been an active laird managing the Blaich estate because he was absent on military service in Canada. Neither JP McLean, a Seneachie nor Sinclair state that Francis became the laird, but they all include Francis in their account of the lairds of Blaich. His inclusion within the story of Blaich is warranted because, with his great military achievements, he was the most prominent person with Blaich connections.
- He was unmarried.
- He died in 1781 in Halifax, Canada. (ref: a Seneachie and Sinclair p345).
- He features prominently in Fryer's fact-novel 'Allan Maclean – Jacobite General'

If Francis was never the laird, who in fact had this title after William 11th?

After 1758

- It seems that, sometime in the late 1700s, the control of Blaich reverted to the lairds of Ardgour – most likely during the time of Alexander, the 13th Laird of Ardgour who held this position for a very long time – from 1768 to 1855.
- 1837 - Our Donald McLean, leasee of Duisky, migrated to South Australia
- 1843 – There was a Hugh MacLean who was a crofter of Blaich. He was named as one of eight people who were the chief supporters petitioning Locheil for a site to build a 'Free' Presbyterian Church. The request was initially rejected but then this rejection was cancelled and a site granted – however we do not know whether or not the church was built on the site in question – indeed we do not know the location of this particular site - was it more likely to be on the north side of Loch Eil rather than the south side? The petitioners were tenants of Locheil and it is significant that, of the eight tenants, three were on the southern side of Loch Eil – Drumsallie, Achaphobuill and Blaich. (ref: The Antiquarian notes of Charles Fraser-Mackintosh, p218). (Research: It is generally understood that Locheil (another way of referring to the Laird, usually a Cameron) of the area north of Loch Eil, but not south of that loch – but this petition implies that the Camerons were in control of at least some of Ardgour whereas this was at a time when we understood (as indicated by the McLean NAS papers) that Alexander McLean (the 13th Laird of Ardgour) was the landlord) was the landlord of Blaich.

An indication of the weakness of the Blaich line is that it is not mentioned in 'A Breif Genealogical Account of the Ffamily of MacLean' which Alexander 13th had a hand in writing (and which Alexander 14th arranged to have printed), even though details of recorded for the other Ardgour branches which developed from the other sons of John Crubach.

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Research - questions remain.

- Did the line cease after William the 11th Laird? If so, why? Or was there an 12th and subsequent lairds? Who is next in line?
- Duisky : In 1933 Duisky was owned by English absentee landlord, the Earl of Morton (ref H xxxx) of the Douglas clan. The current Earl of Morton is John Stewart Sholto Douglas, Lord Aberdour.
- Do the MacLeans still have lands in Blaich?
- What is the difference between the following titles?
 - Barony of Blaich
 - Laird of Blaich
 - Tacksman of Duisky

- Blaich : What were the boundaries of the Barony of Blaich? Did it overlap with Ardgour? Was Blaich part of Ardgour or were they separate areas? What is the significance of the 'Barony of Blaich'?
- The seat of the McLeans was Ardgour House. Was there a seat for the McLeans of Blaich?
- Duisky : What were the boundaries of the Duisky estate? Was it part of Blaich? When Donald was leasing it, there were 20 square miles (ref: BRB p9) or 12,000 acres (ref: BRB p8). The BRB stated that "From owning 100,000 acres the family leased 12,000 acres (ref: BRB p 4). This implies a decline in family fortunes – from owners of a huge estate to just leasers of one much smaller (but still substantial).
- Donald : What relevance or impact did any of this have at different times in Donald's life? In Donald's long life he experienced great changes in the McLean Clan (its structure, power, lands and culture) – as a child in the 1780's, as a tacksman (perhaps in the 1810s) and prior to migrating in the 1830s. It is unlikely that Donald's family were ever in the inheriting lines of lairds, but did they have any connections (perhaps through cousins or spouses). The BRB stated that "Tradition was that only a kinsman of the Laird might lease any part of the estate" (ref: BRB p8). Did they personally know and associate with the families of the Lairds? Did it matter?
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References

See ['References & library'](#)

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