

Notes for researchers

Donald's continuing work – with a growing family 1811 to 1837

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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.

The following notes provide a context for understanding this phase of Donald's life:-

- '[Overview of Donald's life](#)': This has summaries of each of the other notes.
- '[Donald's childhood](#)':
- '[Donald's initial working life](#)':
- '[Blaich & Duiskey](#)':

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Summary

– purpose and highlights

- Donald childhood was in Blaich in the Western Highlands and he probably started his working life as a teenager on the Duiskey Estate which is next to Blaich on the shores of Loch Eil.
- Around 1811, his wife, Christina had their first child and they had about 12 children over the next 25 years – the first in 1811 and the last in 1835
- These notes attempt to describe what it might have been like for Donald and his family at this time.

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Farming in Duiskey

"Donald grew oats and barley and raised cattle and he also had some interests in the herring fishing industry" (BRB p4).

In our separate notes, 'Blaich & Duiskey', we have gathered a great deal of detail. In addition to this, in these present notes, we can add the following.

Results of changes

In earlier times, during his initial working life, Donald was at the centre of changes to the crofting system. This restructuring was prompted by the continuing shift towards sheep farming and by the reforms introduced by

Alexander McLean, the 13th Laird of Ardgour. Donald would have been directly affected by all this and, as tacksman, he might have been partly responsible for implementing the changes. Many decades later, in 1850, Alexander reflected on the long term impact of the new scheme. He concluded that it resulted in:-

- General good conduct and persevering industry
- Crofts improved
- Rents paid: "At this date, the whole arrears are under eight per cent- one-half of which is due by five individuals."
- "On one point only have you disappointed me - the improvement and cleanliness of your dwelling-houses. For this you have facilities which few crofters in the West Highlands possess. You get small timber for houses and offices gratis, almost for the asking."

Donald as a leaser

The role of tacksman:

- Rents for crofts and cottages "were paid through the channel of tacksmen, a lesser gentry acting as estate managers who allocated strips of land, lent seed-corn and agrarian tools and arranged droving of cattle, taking a minor share of the payments made to the clan nobility, the fine. They also organized the mobilization of the clan host for warfare, weddings, funerals and hunts" (Rev JA Carruth, 'The Bonnie Prince Charlie Country', Norwich, 1996).
- Donald might not have fulfilled all the roles described by Carruth but xxxx

Size

From Strachan's map, in 1858, South Duisky was 3234 acres and North Duisky was 748 acres – about 4000 acres combined. This is consistent with Fraser's calculations for 66 years earlier (in 1792) where the 93 farms across the Kilmallie parish averaged 4000 acres.

There were xxx crofts on the Duisky Estate. Crofts were typically xxxxx acres.

Crops

- At Duisky, only a small area along Loch Eil is arable – just a narrow band, about 400? metres between the loch and the steep hillside. We do not have specific details of what areas of Duisky were suitable for various crops, or to what extent the estate was used for sheep rather than black cattle. However, as the move to sheep was so strong, it is most likely that Duisky was part of this movement.
- McGillvray : 'Considerable exertions have been made by some proprietors to drain and improve portions of the land near their residence ; and wherever the attempt has been made, the returns have fully paid the expense.' (p123)

Fishing

- Fresh water fish: Salmon, sinnacks, char, grilse, trout (white, black and yellow). (Fraser p410) [research: Loch Eil was salt water, but was there any fresh water fish around Blaich and Duisky? – perhaps in the An Dubh Uisge River?]
- Sea fish: *Herrings are the fish that abound most, and that are of the greatest benefit. There are red cod, lythe, seath, skate, flounders, mackarels, whittings and a few haddocks. If the weather be moderate, lythes and seaths may be fished every day of the year. They are killed with small rods, and a hook, having a feather, resembling one of the herring fry. Cod, skate, and flounder are caught with long lines with bates of herring or muscles. There are great many eels and sturgeons"* (Fraser pp412&413).
- Recreational fishing: See our notes on Donald's childhood
- Commercial fishing – and fishing rights:

- In 1792, Herring was the main commercial focus with 2000 barrels caught in a good season (Fraser p412) but in 1791 they had a very good season with about 3000 barrels of herrings which, at 18 shillings per barrel, was 2700 pounds (ref p 426).
- By 1835, commercial fishing had become one of the main sources of employment (McGillivray p 123).
- Fees: In 1792 people in Ardgour paid an annual fee of 20 pounds to fish upon the property of Mr McLean of Ardgour (Fraser p411). This 20 pounds sounds quite a lot – so was probably for commercial fishing, rather than recreational. It is not known what fees Donald would have paid around 1811 – and whether such payments were required for fishing in the loch and streams near Duiskey and whether Donald was in the position of charging people for this occupation or whether in fact he had to pay the laird of “*some interests in the herring fishing industry*”.
- We don’t know whether this was a major part of Donald’s income, or even whether he was fishing himself, or had others fishing on his behalf – perhaps with boats he provided.
- What methods of herring fishing did Donald use? On boats or from the shore? With long lines or nets? On an individual basis or an organized commercial operation?

Sheep

- The life experiences were very different for those who were on sheep farms compared to those on cattle farms – see the comparison in the notes on Donald’s childhood.

Timber

- ‘On Lochiel and Ardgour’s properties there is a good deal of oak wood, and kept in the best order, particularly by Colonel McLean of Ardgour, who is enthusiastically fond of wood. He has several spots planted with fir, well enclosed, which no doubt will be profitable hereafter. In the meantime, it is a great ornament to the country’ (ref p120)

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Married life

We do not know where they met.

We have not found any records of their wedding but it was assumed that it was around 1810 because their first child was born in 1811. At the time of their marriage Donald was about 31 years old and Christina was about 23 years old. She was 8 years younger than Donald.

For the first 27 years of married life they must have lived within easy travel to a kirk in Kilmallie because 9 of their children were christened there.

- Allan - baptised 12/2/1811 in Kilmallie
- Mary – the first Mary, who died early.
- Ewen - baptised 10/1/1814 at Kilmallie - known as Hugh the Elder.
- John - born 6/2/1816 and baptised 20/2/1816 in Kilmallie.
- Mary (the second Mary) - born 2/4/1818 and baptised 5/4/1818 in Kilmallie.
- Archibald - baptised 4/3/1821 in Kilmallie.
- Ann - baptised 6/4/1823 in Kilmallie.
- Rachel - baptised 13/2/1825 in Kilmallie.
- Margaret – in 1827 or 1828 - the only one not baptised in Kilmallie.
- Jane - baptised 16/8/1830 in Kilmallie.
- Elizabeth – maybe - born in 1836, died 1907 – she is on a Navarino passenger list.

- Ewen - baptised 26/5/1836 at Kilmallie (known as Hugh the Younger).

Place

- Baptisms from the Argyllshire Parish Records confirm that all the children (except Margaret) were born in Kilmallie.

Naming

- As can be seen from this list there are two Ewens but no Hughs' yet both are the children of Donald and Christina, (nee McPhee). It would seem that to Donald, the name Ewen and Hugh were the same, as in his Will of 1846 he refers to his son-in-law Ewen McDonald as Hugh McDonald of Finniss. This explains the vanished Ewen of the ship (?passenger list? "Navarino" in 1837.

Other children

- The persistent inclusion of a Donald and a Hugh McLean who arrived in 1840 by ship "Tomatin" must be an error as the listed children are the same 10, who with their emigrating parents and in the father's Will. These two may have been nephews. If they were of an earlier marriage of Donald, he had three sons named Hugh which is carrying things a bit far, as to names! There is a family story that "two sons were sent to Venezuela to look for farming possibilities" referring of course to the Donald and Hugh on the "Tomatin" of 1840. Then not discovering anything suitable followed on to SA. Nothing further is known of them although two men of the same name were at Naracoorte in the South East quite early, and the names of the families were the same as those of the Donald McLean's. They were not mentioned in Donald McLean's Will.

Christenings

- Each of the children were born at home, presumably either in Blaich or Duisky. They would have been taken to a kirk for their christening some days or months after their birth.
- Between 1811 to 1837, at the time of the births, Blaich and Duisky were part of the huge Kilmallie parish (it was later split to form the Ardgour parish). The christenings were registered in the old parish register.
- The parish is called Kilmallie, but there is no village of that name. So, in which church did these christenings take place? There are several possibilities:-
- Corpach: This was built in 1783 – four years after Donald was born. Fraser described it as an 'excellent parish church' (p434). McGillivray said this it can 'accommodate about 900 or 1000 sitters.' (p 125). It is in the top left hand corner of Strachan's 1858 map. It was the main church in the parish and is the most likely place where christenings took place, and also, this is probably where the register was kept. This photo is from the website of the Lochaber and North Argyll Family History Group (LANAFHG) [research: Permission required]



- Maryburgh: A government church which was built in Maryburgh in 1791 (Fraser p434 & McGillivray p 126).
- Blaich: This little church was originally a cottage which was modified to be used as a church. "*The datestone was probably moved from a flat-headed lintel to its present position to the right of the door. It reads 18 A ML 17*" (Canmore # 1692). This indicates that 1817 was the year that the cottage was modified for use as a church (rather than the year it was initially built as a cottage). The first four children were born before 1817 but it is possible that the younger children could have been christened in the Blaich church – except that there are no indications that baptisms took place there. Even if the baptism were not held there, this little kirk might have, none-the-less, been a part of family life as they grew up, because it was so close to where they were living. It ceased to operate as a church in xxxx. This photo is from Cranmore [research: permission needed].



- Ardgor: A 'parliamentary' church was built near the Corran Ferry in 1832. This is xxx kms from Duiskey, but our McLean family may have participated in the activities of this church from time to time. This photo was from Guthrie Hutton [research: Permission required].



- Episcopalian: McGillivray stated (p126) that this existed in 1835, but it is not clear how long before this year it was built.
- Roman Catholic chapel: McGillivray stated (p126) that this existed in 1835, but it is not clear how long before this year it was built.

Schooling

- There is little information about schooling in that locality in that era.
- In 1835, Rev McGillivray reported that "*There are eleven schools in the whole parish : one, a parochial school, at Fort William six schools supported by different societies, of which three are supported by the Society for Propagating Christian Knowledge; four school supported by private individual*" (McGillivray p126). There is nothing to indicate that one of these schools were near Duiskey. The McLean children would not attend school at Fort William or Corpach because they were living too far away to travel daily and there are no indications of any boarding arrangements.
- The government schools taught English, reading, writing, arithmetic, Latin, Greek, book-keeping and geography (McGillivray p126). There were also Gaelic schools which were mainly for religious instruction.
- School fees were about 50 pound per year.
- Maybe there were some knowledgeable souls were giving occasional private instruction in estates like Blaich and Duiskey.

Raising children

- What description can be created of their family life, given that we only know birthdates and some general background about the times and the area they were living.
- Christina had lengthy child-bearing years – until she was about 43 years old. Over those 25 years she bore 11 children who lived to adulthood and there might have been others lost through miscarriages or early deaths. So she was pregnant, for almost a third of the time and had the continuous care of infants and growing children. These were hard times when birth, probably at home, was hazardous and childhood illness was an ever-present fear.
- Raising so many children is always a challenge. Distance would have been a factor in an area with scattered populations, limited local resources and transport by foot, horse, or boat.
- There were probably people around her who would have been some help. The first children were boys whereas there were more girls among the later born. If it had been the other way around, the girls would have been of greater assistance to Christina in the care of the younger ones. Maybe she had her mother, sisters, aunties, friends or midwives nearby. We do not know.

- *“Life was hard. The older children as soon as they were old enough went away to work. The girls into service and the boys usually agricultural labouring, or fishing on the loch. With thatched roof crofts and mud floors it was no picnic. You got up with the light and the mother of the house tried to keep the place warm, tidy and tried to feed everyone with not too much at times”* (Willowburn, 19th Oct 2012).

Residence

- Donald built a house in Duiskey. It might have been a significant construction because it was still worthy of noting his connection in a report 17 years after he had left the area as *“A dwelling-house is noted as having been build (sic) by 'Donald MacLean, now in Australia”* (ref: NRAS3583/Bundle 22). Apparently there are no remnants of this building but it might have been similar to another with which the McLean children would have been familiar - Black Croft in Blaich (ref:RCAHMS) which was typical of the cottages in the area where these children grew up.



Health

- Donald and Christina and all the children appear to have been in good health (except little Mary)
- Donald’s health was sound enough, when he was 58 years old, to embark on a migration which required an arduous sea voyage and the prospect of heavy physical work to establish a new farm. He lived to the grand old age of 83 years.
- Christina lived to 78 years. In her childbearing years she was in sufficient health to bare 12 children in 27 years from when she was 19 years to 46 years. Although there are no records to show, there might have been some miscarriages or children dying as infants. The gaps between the children’s births were all two or three years except between some of the youngest with five years between Jane and Elizabeth, but only one year between the two youngest, Elizabeth and Ewen.
- There were, no doubt, some premature deaths in other families – eg Donald’s cousin, Alexander lost two children - Ewen who was born in 1826 and Mary who was born in 1837.
- We have no records of any of the 10 children experiencing poor health as children or as adults.
- There were only three ‘medical gentlemen’ in Fort William in 1835 (McGillivray p 123)

Language

- *“The prevailing language is gaelic, but the English is gaining ground”* (McGillivray p122)

Clothing

- *“The rising generation imitate their equals in the south country in their dress. Tartan among men, and cotton cloth among women are the common costume”* (McGillivray p123) Note, that after Culloden, it became illegal to wear certain types of clothing associated with clan traditions.

Diet

- *“The common diet of the peasants is potatoes, with herrings and milk. Such as are in better circumstances may have a little meal and mutton, but potatoes is their principal food three quarters of the year”* (McGillivray p123).

Cost of living

- Inflation
- Price eggs, butter, cheese,

Employment

- Mostly fishermen and shepherds (McGillivray p123).

Economic activity in 1835 (per McGillivray p123)

“There is not much arable land in this parish, so that the people are employed chiefly as fishers and shepherds; neither is there any cotton or woolen manufactory. There is one bank agent at Fort William; and about 20 merchants between Fort William and Corpach. There are three medical gentlemen at Fort William, four lawyers, and a Sheriff-substitute. There is a sufficient number of carpenters, masons, shoemakers, and tailors, between Fort William and Corpach, to supply the wants of the parish and adjacent country.

- Agriculture: There is not acre out of 300 cultivated or capable of cultivation in this parish. Considerable exertions have been made by some of the proprietors to drain and improve portions near their own residence; and wherever the attempt has been made, the returns have fully repaid the expenses.
- Rent of land: The average rent of arable land is about L1, 10s per acre; the average rent for grazing a cow is L2 per annum; the rate per ewe is from 2s to 3s per annum.
- Quarries: There is a slate quarry on Lochiel’s property at north Balachulish; but it has not been wrought hitherto. There is also a stone quarry at Fassfern, which was of great advantage at the time of making the Caledonian Canal, and lately is building a quay at Fort William.
- Fisheries: Salmon and herring are the principal fisheries in this parish. The river Lochy is famed for the excellency of its salmon. There are stake-nets in several places along the coast, and extraordinary exertions are making to improve the salmon fishing. Time will tell how the present speculation will pay the adventurers, but no expense has been spared to insure success. The herring fishing is a great source of support to the country people; but when it fails, they are destitute, particularly in the village of Fort William.”

The environment around the area

- Animals - pine martins and red squirrels.
- Flowers - bluebells and daffodils.
- Birds - oystercatchers, eider ducks and herons.
- Sealife - otters, and seals.
- Fish on the loch - mackerel and pollack.
- Fish at the Narrows - codling and coalfish.

An example – the family of Alexander McLean (re: Allan MacLean of Willowburn)

- In the absence of some specific information about Donald’s family, Alexander McLean’s family will help throw some indirect (reflected) light on Donald’s experiences.
- Alexander was born in 1797. His parents were Lachlan McLean and Mary McColl. He died in 1862.
- Alexander was the gt-gt-grandfather of Allan McLean of Willowburn – and gt-gt-gt grandson of Lachlan who was born about 1650 and this Lachlan was a son of Allan, the 8th Laird of Blaich.
- He was brought up in Blaich
- His wife was Christian MacMillan
 - Christian was Alexander’s ‘cousin’
 - She also came from a crafting family in Blaich.
 - Her mother was Mary McLean 1759-1853
 - Her father was Alexander McMillan?? Or John McMillan??
- Children of Alexander and Christian
 - John – 1824 to 1905
 - Ewen – 1826 – possibly died young
 - Lachlan – 1832 to 1921
 - Allan – 1840 to 1892
 - Ewen – 1842 to 1912

- As an adult, he kept a croft there and he was also a tailor travelling across to Fort William for work each day.
- Alexander died in 1862
- We can dwell on Alexander's life because it gives some insights into what life was like for Donald's family.
 - Alexander was probably a cousin of Donald. Alexander was born 25 years after Donald but he married much younger. Donald married Christina McPhee when he was 38 years old in 1810, whereas Alexander married Christian MacMillan when he was 21 years old in 1818 which was 8 years after Donald's marriage.
 - They both had large families. The families would have had a lot to do with each other in this small community. Although Donald was much older than Alexander, they certainly would have known each other very well. The two wives were probably the same age.
 - Donald's oldest son, Allan, would have been the same age as Alexander. But of greatest interest are the middle children of Donald and Christina's family – there were six children from each family who were about the same ages (12 children were born between 1818 and 1832) who would certainly have knocked around together before the McLeans migrated in 1837.
- In the section of Donald's childhood, there are more details about Alexander's siblings. Some of whom remained in the Blaich/Garvan area and presumably had children who would have grown up with Donald's children.

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Other events which the family would have noticed

Donald and the family would have reacted to some events which they would have been aware of.

- Canal: The Caledonian Canal was commenced around 1805 and finished in 1822. Donald would have been between 26 years and 43 years old as it was being built. About 1000 were employed and Donald might have known some people who worked there – particularly on the Fort William end of this grand construction. *"The canal was conceived as a way of providing much-needed employment to the Highland region. The area was depressed as a result of the Highland Clearances, which had deprived many of their homes and jobs. Laws had been introduced which sought to eradicate the local culture, including bans on wearing tartan, playing the bagpipes, and speaking Gaelic."* - Wikipedia. We wonder our Mclean family attended a grand opening and ever travelled along the canal?
- Ardgour House fire: Colonel McLean of Ardgour's house was burnt down in 1825. (ref p122). Although it is a long way (xx kms) from where Donald was living he would have heard, and reacted to, the dramatic news about the Ardgour House burning down.
- Ardgour Kirk: Donald would have known about the construction of the parish kirk near the Corran Narrows – a xxx kms from Blaich. It was built in 1832 when Donald was 53 years old. It was designed by Thomas Telford who engineered the Caledonian Canal. Did the family attend this kirk? If so, did they have designated seating for their family?
- The concerns of people being forced off the highlands
- Changes – social, cultural, economic, residential. The changes in the McLean clan structure.
- Larger towns – moving to larger towns, particularly industrial living rather than agrarian surroundings
- The village near the garrison of Fort William is no longer referred to as Maryburgh – it is all now called Fort William.
- A quay at Fort William was constructed
- Emigration - The excitement and apprehensions of people hearing about, planning, and leaving for strange lands - new beginnings. *"Fort William was to become one of the seven main points of departure for emigrants; in 1801 alone, eleven ships sailed from the town carrying 3,300 emigrants"* (Fiona Maclean, 'Around Lochaber' p6).

- For descriptions of the movements of people away from the highlands in 1800s see - "Emigration and Scottish society - The migration of Scots - NQ Higher Scottish History"
<http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/higherscottishhistory/migrationandempire/migrationofscots/emigrationandsociety.asp>

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Sources

- See ['Library'](#)
- Rev McGillivray's chapter on Kilmallie in 1835, in the second Statistical Account of Scotland was particularly useful when we were compiling these present notes.

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