

Notes for researchers

# 'Donald's Plough'

## Overview of Donald McLean's life

Version 2 – September 2017  
www.christinaanddonaldmclean.com

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.

Throughout these present notes, there are summaries of each of the other notes.

The working title, 'Donald's Plough' is linking his oat and barley cropping in Duiskey, the plough he took on the ship, his first wheat crop in Hilton, farming of properties around Strathalbyn, and the social life embodied in the ploughing competitions in the new colony.

Care should be taken for this to be Christina's story as well as Donald's.

..ooOOoo..

### Summary – purpose & highlights

Donald was born in 1779 in Blaich which is on the southern shores of Loch Eil in the Western Highlands. Christina was born about 1787. Donald leased a large estate called Duiskey which is next to Blaich. Donald and Christina had 11 children. The family migrated from Scotland to Australia in 1837 when he was an old man.

They were amongst the earliest pioneers in the colony of South Australia. For three years they were near Adelaide, at Hilton, where they grew the first wheat crop in the colony. In 1841, they were one of the first families to establish Strathalbyn. The large family acquired extensive farming properties around this district. Donald died in 1855 and Christina died in 1869.

In 1995, the family history, 'Donald and Christina McLean and their Descendants', was published in an 850 page big red book which we refer to as the BRB. The BRB had very little information about Donald's ancestors in Scotland, but a great deal of details about their descendants after they established themselves in Australia. Everything from the BRB has now been placed on our website. New material is being added all the time.

In these notes, we will show some highlights and point to researchers' notes which include all the details we have been able to gather so far. Also, we point to other information which is on the website – the biographies and the profiles. We have identified the researchers' notes in **blue font** and biographies in **green font**. These can be found on the website in Small Print on the left of the homepage.

..ooOOoo..

# Scotland

What was life like for our McLeans when they were living in Scotland in the late 1700s and early 1800s?

This was a time of great change. Scottish traditions were still strong but the clan system was beginning to break down. Gaelic was giving way to the English language. Highlanders were being forced off their small crofts as sheep were taking over from cattle. In the Scottish lowlands and England, the industrial revolution was transforming the country. Many highlanders were thinking of migrating to the colonies which were growing in Canada, America or Australia.

## Ancestors

The McLeans in Blaich were a branch of the McLeans of Ardgour and, in turn, the Ardgour McLeans were a branch of the Clan which originated in Mull.

We know that Donald's father was Allan McLean. Up to this point, we have not been able to find definite records of who this Allan was and thus we are unable to confirm anything about the previous generations.

The search for Allan: We have undertaken a great deal of research in the following researchers' notes:-

- [‘The Chiefs of Clan Mclean’](#): We have gathered details of 28 chiefs, mainly in Mull, from the 1200s to the present day. This is an interesting approach to the history of the clan, but we have not been able to find even an indirect connection with our line of McLeans.
- [‘The Macleans of Ardgour’](#): The first laird, Donald ‘The Hunter’, was a son of the 7<sup>th</sup> Chief and there is an unbroken line of 18 Lairds from the 1400s to the present. We are exploring our possible connection with the 8<sup>th</sup> Laird, John Crubach in the 1600s. In Donald's time, the Alexander Maclean, the 13<sup>th</sup> Laird of Ardgour, owned all the properties along the southern shores of Loch Eil and Donald would have leased Duisky from this laird.
- [‘The Lairds of Blaich’](#): There are many gaps here. The line began about 1480 with Hector who was a son of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Laird of Ardgour. This line discontinued in the early 1600s. In 1684, a second family was commenced by Lachlan Mòr who was a son of John Crubach, the 8<sup>th</sup> Laird of Ardgour. This line also ceased, in the middle 1800s. We are connected with this family and we are still trying to find confirmation of the details.
- [‘Time line of the chiefs, lairds & our family’](#): This is a spreadsheet which shows the contemporaneity of the formal clan hierarchy with key events and with what we know about our family.
- [‘Clan Maclean in the Jacobite Uprisings’](#): The events leading up to the battle of Culloden in 1846, and the awful aftermath, are an important part of clan history. We have not yet been able to identify any specific involvement of our family.
- [‘Donald's parents and grandparents – our strategies’](#): These notes explain how we are going about finding Allan and his kin.
- [‘Donald's parents and grandparents – searching original records’](#): This provides the details of what we have found – but nothing definite so far.
- [‘Christina's parents and grandparents’](#): These notes detail what we have found so far – but, again, nothing confirmed.

## Life in Scotland

We know very little specifically about Donald's life in Scotland in his first 58 years. All we are sure of, from the BRB, is that he was born in Blaich in the 1779, he leased Duiskey, his wife was Christina McPhee, and their children were baptized in Kilmallie. And they migrated on the *Navarino* in 1837.

- Status: The clan had a powerful, but waning, local presence in Blaich. We can only make guesses about Donald's personal standing or prestige. He would have local status as the tacksman of Duiskey. It was a small community and so he would have been well known. Maybe there was a significant network of the extended family across the area. Donald's family were not in the line of hereditary lairds however they probably had connections because "*tradition was that only a kinsman of the Laird might lease any of the estate*" (ref: BRB, p8). If he had been entrenched in the local Highland establishment, Donald would have been less likely to have decided to migrate away from the area. As far as we know, once he settled in Australia, Donald did not make much of any possible connections with Scottish aristocracy.
- Wealth: Although not amongst the richest, the family was more prosperous than most people in that area. They might have experienced some decline in their circumstances (because of economic changes and perhaps crop failure) but, at the time of migration, Donald was described as a "*respectable Highlander ... with 632 pounds at his disposal*" in correspondence for his migration (John Mathews p7). In fact, he had considerably more than this. He was able to prepay 1000 pounds for land in Adelaide and his sons took 850 pounds with them to purchase supplies in Hobart – and he must have other funds to establish his large family in the new colony. This was a large amount (equivalent to several million today). How did he get hold of this much cash? Did he sell some land – or ... or .....
  - [‘How wealthy was Donald?’](#)
- Six decades: Donald lived in Blaich and Duiskey from the 1780s to the 1830s. These were times of great changes in the Highlands. We do not know how well he comprehended this revolution in social and economic life - as with most of us, it is difficult to see the enormity of the trends when we in the midst of everything swirling around us. However, we do know that he finally decided that there were better prospects for his family by moving away from the Highlands to the colony which was about to be established on the other side of the world.
  - [‘Donald's childhood’](#): Much of his time was focused on the loch – fishing and ‘messaging around with boats. When he was 12 years old, he was probably amongst his cousins and friends who rushed to the lochside to marvel at a giant whale. And on another day, they saw a dog-fish shark washed ashore.
  - [‘Donald's initial working life’](#): Alexander, the 13<sup>th</sup> Laird, initiated reforms to the crofting system and Donald would have been involved in this process.
  - [‘Donald's continuing work and growing family’](#): The move from cattle to sheep was ongoing. Donald built a substantial dwelling house at Duiskey. There is some speculation whether any of this structure still remains today. Christina gave birth to at least 12 children over a 26 year period.
- There were many upheavals and transitions over the past two-and-a-half centuries so we will look at six scenarios – before Donald's birth, his childhood, his working years, family years, the time they migrated, and changes after the family left, including the present day.

## Places

- [‘Places of our McLeans in Scotland’](#):
- [‘Ardgour – the district, the estate, the house and Sallachan Farm’](#):
- [‘Blaich & Duiskey’](#):
- [‘Tour of Fort William, Ardgour, Blaich & Duiskey’](#): This can be enjoyed as a virtual tour or an actual visit to Scotland (luck you).
- [‘Kilmallie’](#):

## Migration

- [‘The lead-up to migration’](#):
- [‘Why did the McLeans migrate?’](#):
- [‘The journey out on the Navarino’](#):

..ooOoo..

# South Australia

## Adelaide

- [‘The first wheat grown in South Australia’](#): These notes explain how Donald grew wheat. He notes also detail the evidence that the McLeans were the first to produce this crop in the colony.
- [‘Life of our McLeans around Adelaide’](#): Donald had an 80 acre farm in Hilton where he grew the wheat and attempted other crops. He built a house which he called ‘Douski’?? Nothing is left of any of this, but it was located at where xxx is now. He also had an acre in Hindley Street – this is now the site of a university and hotel.

## Strathalbyn

- [‘Properties’](#): Donald built a two-story house, ‘Auchanada’s’ (which is no longer there) and a large barn and stables (which still can be seen on the banks of the Angus River). Over the years, Donald and his children purchased many properties in the Strathalbyn and Lake Plains districts. These included Auchanada’s, Meadow Bank, Melrose, Belvidere Hotel, Navarino, Coowey, Waterloo, Angas Park, Crickhowall, Watulunga, Balmarino, Lakeview, Mapelmore, Innisvale and Burnside. Each of these are described in these researchers’ notes.
- [‘Highway robbery’](#): In 1847, on his way back to Strathalbyn after a visit to Adelaide, Donald was robbed near the ‘Mountain Hut’. It was a hold up at gun-point by three men who was robbed him of 75 pounds. One of the robbers was quickly arrested – he was Robert Spearman, the inn-keeper of the ‘Mountain Hut’. Spearman’s conviction was based on Donald’s evidence but Spearman continued to claim his innocence. He was sentenced to 15 years in Van Diemen’s Land but he escapade as soon as he got there. It was said that he later died in California at the hands of a lynching mob (for some other unrelated issue). Donald never got his 75 pounds back.
- Language: It is probable that most of the talk in the household was in Gaelic. Donald’s family bible is in gaelic – maybe he could read this??? Groome’s Ordinance (p370) indicated that three-quarters of the population where they came from were Gaelic speakers in 1881 so it would have been even stronger four decades earlier when the McLeans left for Australia. Donald had such a strong brogue that the judge in the highway robbery trial thought it relevant to ask him if he could speak English before he came out from Scotland. His sons Allan and John (and probably others) used to lapse into Gaelic when they were excited.
- Relationships: What sort of people were Donald and Christina? Some clues from what they did – eg adventurous, good organisor. It was always a busy home with so many children and their spouses and the grandchildren. We can take it that they were stubborn and determined at times. There were occasionally tensions between them and the children at times. They disapproved of the marriages of Allan and then Rachel?. In the last few years there was a breakdown between Donald and Hugh the elder. We do not know how things were within their marriage but it lasted from when Christina was about 24 years and Donald 32 until his death, after 44 years of their marriage.
- There is a story about the church harmonica [research: How can we find out what this story is all about?]
- Community impact: For comments about the McLean fame, see the notes on the McLean-Gordon connections. The family would have been well known across the district because of the number of family member and the extent of land they farmed. But they did not appear to take a significant part in public life

– no records of their activities in church or local government. No sporting stories. No commerce stories. No streets (except McLean Place) or public buildings named after the McLeans. But one of the sports factions at the school is called McLean – the others are xxxx and xxxx.

- **'Donald's final year'**: Donald wrote his will and later made several changes. Further changes were made on his death-bed. It was said that in his dying days he was trying to say where he had hidden some money on the river bank – but he was too incapacitated to reveal his secret. At the time of his death, 18 years after coming to Australia, Donald was 76 years old, his wife was 68 years and all his children were still living, ranging from Allan at 44 years old to Hugh (the younger) at 19 years.
- **'Christina's final years'**: Christine lived for another 14 years after Donald had died. She continued to live on at Auchanada's after Donald had died. It is not clear who else might have been living there with her. Hugh (the younger) probably joined her there for a while. At some stage, he had his own cottage 'Ardour' but this might have been later. He married in 1861. Christina was 82 years old when she died in 1869. She died with virtually no estate. Her will made special provision for her 12 year old illegitimate grandson (Donald McLean, son of Hugh the younger and Ann McBain). There was no property because it was not until some years later that the Married Women's Act allowed women to own property in their own name rather than it automatically becoming their husband's on marriage.
- **Burial**: In section 1/84 at Strathalbyn Cemetery there is a table top tomb (above ground) for Christina and Donald. It is built of red brick and waste high with a thick slab of polished marble on the top. The date of his death is inscribed incorrectly as 10<sup>th</sup> October 1856. It is not known whether Donald was re-interred there or left in his original grave but both their names are engraved together above where at least Christina is buried (BRB p16). The inscription is "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord".
- **Reflecting on their own lives**: Donald could have looked back over his life with great satisfaction. The years in Scotland were xxxx. In his old age in the new colony he would have been pleased with the marriages of his children and delighted in his many grandchildren, but no great grandchildren were born before Donald died. He would have enjoyed his prestige across the district as the patriarch of a large family with many farming properties. All this might have been overshadowed by dramas about his riches and the will in his last few months. And Christina would have seen things differently. She lived to see xxxxx great grandchildren. Xxxxx

## Places

- **'Places of our McLeans around Adelaide'**: These notes include descriptions of Adelaide in the first four years of the establishment of the colony. Also, Donald's 80 acre property at Hilton (now Marleston) and town the acre in the CBD (Hindley Street).
- **'Places of our McLeans around Strathalbyn'**: These notes describe the first three decades of the development of Strathalbyn and neighbouring areas.
- **'McLean tour around the Strathalbyn district'**: This is a guided tour of places which have been connected to the McLeans.
- **'Places of our McLeans in Australia'**: These notes describe places, apart from Adelaide and Strathalbyn, where the McLean families settled in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Some are highlighted – eg Innisvale.

## Descendants

- **'The children of Christina and Donald'**: These notes have some highlights of the lives of each of ten children. There are biographies of **'Allan McLean & Catherine Dawson'**, **'Ewen (Hugh the elder) McLean & Christina Black'**, **'John McLean & Mary Stacey & Elizabeth Dixon'**, **'Mary McLean & Adam Abercrombie & Duncan McRae'**, **Archibald McLean & Ann Soward Janeway & Christine McKenzie'**, **'Anne McLean & Robert Leslie & Jeffrey Jeffreys'**, **Rachel McLean & Ewen McDonald'**, **Margaret McLean & James Keating & Richard Johns'**, **'Jane McLean & John Cheriton'**, **'Ewen (Hugh the younger) McLean & Ann McBain & Margaret Tannahill'**.
- **'The grand-children of Christina & Donald'**: There were xxx grandchildren. These researcher's notes highlight some of them and draw attention to some of the xxx biographies of this generations. The profiles on the website provide all the details which we have been able to gather.

- [‘The great-grandchildren of Christina & Donald’](#): There were xxx great-grandchildren.
- [‘The 5<sup>th</sup> & 6<sup>th</sup> generations’](#): There were xxx GG-grandchildren and xxxxx GGG-grandchildren.
- [‘Present generations’](#): So far, there are xxxx profiles of the 7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> generations. Xxx of these are still living. Details on the profile remain hidden unless it has been confirmed that someone has died (xxxhowmanyxxx), or they were born over 110 years ago (xxxhowmanyxxx), or they have given their consent (xxxhowmanyxxx). The lives of a few are highlighted in these notes.

..ooOoo..

## Sources

### Scotland

- At this stage, apart from the information in the BRB (appendix A), we do not have many details about Donald’s life in Scotland.
- However we can gather together a comprehensive picture of what life was probably like for him at different periods of his life from several sources which describe Kilmalie and Ardgour. These are specific to what was actually happening in this area – not generalizations about the Highlands as a whole. Most of these are original sources which were written near the time – rather than historical reviews. Also, because the population was small, we can be reasonably confident that these descriptions encompass Donald’s experiences.
- These sources are listed in [‘Library’](#) but, in brief, we have relied mainly upon the Ardgour papers, Sinclair, JP McLean, Frazer and McGillvary - and of course the BRB.

### Australia

The McLeans are well organized.

- The Clan McLean Association is a worldwide organization based at Duart Castle. There are three associations in Australia – they are independent but acknowledge the standing of the Duart association.
- The descendants of Donald and Christina are a small part of the great McLean Clan but we had our own formal organisation, the Donald & Christina McLean Genealogical Council Inc. They first met in 1986, arranged a re-union in 1988, published the BRB in 1995 and ceased to function in 1997. The official records of the council are placed in the Small Print as [‘Previous Council’](#). Since this council has ceased, the copyright of the BRB is now held by the NTSA.
- An informal C&D McLean Committee began meeting in 2005. It has connections with the Strathalbyn branch of the National Trust of South Australia. We are managing a website, [www.christinaandmclean.com](http://www.christinaandmclean.com) and have inputted all of the BRB and are adding other information.
- The BRB is the source for most of the genealogical details (profiles and family trees) and biographies which have been placed on our website. New details are steadily being added from our own research or from descendants who offer more particulars.
- Each entry in the website cites the source – either the BRB, a descendant, or other sources such as xxx.
- It is best to look at individual profiles for full details and sources if you want to explore things more closely. You should draw your own conclusions about how much you trust the accuracy of a particular detail, depending on the reliability of the sources cited.

..ooOoo..

## APPENDIX A

From BRB p8

*The Donald McLean of this present history had ancestry back to 1420 as has already been shown and that he was of the Blaich branch of the Ardgour McLeans. He used the surname McLean, not the older form of MacLean.*

*Tradition was that only a kinsman of the Laird might lease any of the estate so it follows in having 12,000 acres of Duiskey by Loch Eil, Donald belonged. The old house at Duiskey is no more, and even a later one which Donald may have occupied is now used as a farm building together with the huge stone barn. It was owned in 1933 by an English absentee landlord, the Earl of Morton.*

*Records are sketchy, but Donald and his family seem to have resided for the most part in the Lochaber district. It is said he brought them to South Australia to escape prosecution for the illegal distillation of whisky, when he was aged 65. However, the 1836 famine in Scotland due to harvest failure, which contributed to the Highland Clearances, is a more likely explanation.*

*It is evident that he was not without resources as he was able to pay £1,000 in cash (in golden sovereigns, the family maintains) at London in July 1837 for a land section of 80 acres, "sight unseen" at the new Colony of South Australia (Land Order no, 454).*

*So, Donald made his move, together with his wife and family, and left Scotland and London and travelling by the "Navarino" arrived in December of 1837.*

..ooOOoo..