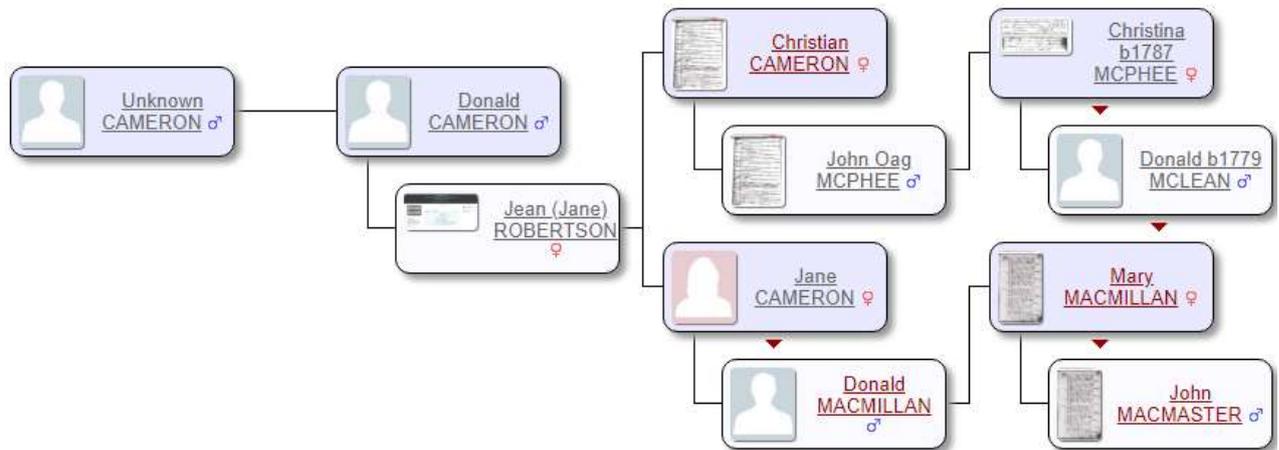


# Our families at Loch Arkaig

Some Camerons and McPhees in Achnacarry and Crieff in the last half of the 1700s

By Don Gordon in March 2022



## Contents

This document gathers together the summaries of detailed research notes. These are D50, D53, D55 & D57 in the Small Print directory in [www.christinaanddonaldmclean.com](http://www.christinaanddonaldmclean.com). They are also at the bottom of the profiles of the various individuals on this website.

- This document D59 - 6 pages
- Places: Achnacarry and Crieff- Life at the eastern end of Loch Arkaig in the 1700s E27 - 13 pages
- Christina McLean, nee McPhee D50 -12 pages (6 pages of notes and 5 appendices)
- False path in search for birth of Christ'n Cameron D53 - 74 pages (16 pages of notes and 48 appendices)
- John Oag McPhee & Christ'n Cameron D55 - 60 pages (31 pages of notes and 20 appendices)
- Donald Cameron & Jane Robertson D57 - 54 pages (16 pages of notes and 21 appendices)
- John MacLeod's memoirs (and family tree) D56 - 31 pages (11pages of notes and 14 appendices)

## Names

To avoid confusion between people with similar names:-

- Jane Robertson was the wife of Donald Cameron and mother of Christ'n and Jane. She was sometimes called Jean, but she is referred to as Jane in our notes to avoid confusion with her daughter.
- Donald Cameron was the husband of Jane Robertson. Depending on the context he is sometimes denoted as 'our Donald' in our notes. He is not to be confused with Lochiel Donald Cameron who was the 22<sup>nd</sup> chief of the clan.
- John Oag McPhee was the husband of Christ'n Cameron. He is referred to as 'our John', 'John Oag McPhee', or 'the 4<sup>th</sup> John McPhee tenant of Crieff'.
- Christ'n Cameron was the wife of John and mother of Christina. We refer to her as Christ'n in our notes because this is how she is recorded on the birth record of her daughter who is also recorded with this same name – ie mother and daughter both were recorded as Christ'n.
- Christina McPhee is the daughter of John and Christ'n. Her birth record has her as Christ'n so, to distinguish from her mother, we denote her as Christina. The BRB also refers to her in this way.
- Jean Cameron was the daughter of Jean Robertson and sister of Christ'n Cameron.

## Life at the eastern end of Loch Arkaig in the 1700s

Everyone's life is intertwined with the big events swirling them. These research notes provide background information for understanding the lifetimes of:-

- Donald Cameron and Jane Robertson who settled in Achnacarry in the 1760s (and their daughter, Christ'n)
- John Oag McPhee and his predecessors on Crieff

There were dramatic changes sweeping across the Highlands, especially around Loch Arkaig. There are at least two stories being told at the same time – the big picture and the family history. We must show how the personal is impacted by the macro, but we must not let the macro obscure what we are primarily interested in – our own family history. Another perspective is that the lives of ordinary people influence the macro because the broad sweeps of history are partly determined by how individuals take small steps in reaction to the big events. It is a two-way process, the macro and the micro are always affecting each other. In order to keep these two together as well as separate, we have laid it out in several documents:-

- Context: In this present document, [E27](#), we have collated all the general information we could find about life on the Lochiel estate, particularly Crieff and Achnacarry. This is in the context of events, social structures, economic changes, agricultural transformation, cultural destruction and power struggles between Clan Cameron, the chiefs and the English government.
- Family histories: The biographies, [D50](#), [D53](#), [D55](#), [D56](#) & [D57](#) have the details specifically connected to the lives of Donald, Jane, Christ'n and John

## Donald Cameron & Jane Robertson

D57

We are particularly interested in Donald and Jane because they were the parents of Christ'n Cameron who married John McPhee. In turn, Christ'n and John were the parents of Christina McPhee who married Donald McLean, and they are the central focus of our family history website - [www.christinaanddonaldmclean.com](http://www.christinaanddonaldmclean.com).

No official records have been confirmed for Donald and Jane – neither their parents' names, births, marriage, offspring, or deaths. We are mainly relying on information about Donald from Chris Doak, and the memoirs of John MacLeod for Jane.

Jane was from an upper class family in rural Aberdeen shire and she went to the Aberdeen township to finish her education. This was known as 'white seam' which included sewing and other homecrafts as well as some literacy.

Donald's father was a sawmiller in Aviemore and Donald might have been there in his childhood before going to Aberdeen to undertake training as a millwright. It is not clear whether Donald had been in Achnacarry before he went to Aberdeen.

Achnacarry, near Loch Arkaig, is 94 kms southwest of Aviemore and is 226 kms west of Aberdeen. Aviemore, near the Cairgorm National Park, is 133 kms east of Aberdeen.

Jane and Donald met in Aberdeen and eloped to Achnacarry. This was in the 1760s and they might have both been in their late teens, so their birth years might have been in the 1740s or early 1750s.

Donald was the sawmiller at Achnacarry. The farm had been the seat of the Cameron chiefs, but the chief was in exile and the castle had been destroyed after Culloden in 1746. This was two decades before Donald and Jean settled in Achnacarry.

Their first child, probably Jane, was born in the 1760s and then Christ'n around 1771. Donald and Jane might have had other children, but there is no direct evidence of this. Jane taught her children handicrafts, and English by reading the bible. This is significant because Jane came from a lowland area where English was the dominant language whereas she settled with Donald into a highland locality where people spoke Gaelic. She never quite lost her lowland accent and was always considered to be an outsider and was referred to as the 'lowland wife'. Loch Arkaig was regarded as 'wild fastness' compared to her upper class upbringing in the rural environment of Aberdeen shire.

We gain the impression that Jane was a determined character as she was prepared to be disowned by her family when she eloped with Donald, and she persisted in living within a community which was foreign to her. She had a big impact on those around her. Indeed, her reputation as the 'lowland wife', her handicrafts skills, and her commitment to teaching the children, all formed such a strong impression that her story was passed down several generations and were considered significant enough to be included, 16 decades later by her great-grandson, John MacLeod, in his memoirs.

Donald continued with the Achnacarry sawmill for at least two decades. It was a substantial operation which was milling a large volume of timber and transporting it far afield.

We have no details of their lives in their old age or when they died.



## Christ'n Cameron & John Oag McPhee

D55

The McPhees of Crieff: A birth record for John has not been found, but we are confident that he was born in Crieff. He was the last of a long line of tenants of that farm. For many generations the tenancy was passed from father to son, all named John McPhee.

John's great-grandfather was the first McPhee tenant of Crieff in the first half of the 1700s. This was a time when the Cameron chief was a powerful presence, and clan traditions were strong. Then John's grandfather took over the tenancy some years before the battle of Culloden in 1746. After the battle, the Lochiel farms, including Crieff, were rampaged by the English troops. The chief was exiled and the farms were taken over and controlled by 'factors' who continued to rent Crieff to the McPhees.

In 1751, when John's father took over the tenancy, the role of the chiefs were continuing to decline, highland traditions were being destroyed and the new English order was consolidated. The factor pushed for improvements of farming practices. In 1784, the ownership was passed back to the chief but he remained exiled in France.

Christ'n's childhood: The parents of Christ'n were probably Jane Robertson and Donald Cameron of Achnacarry. Old Parish Records for her birth could not be found because the Kilmallie parish records before 1773 are missing. However, we have concluded that she was born around 1771 because she was reported as being 40 years old when she was a witness in a court case in 1811.

Christ'n and her older sister, Jean, grew up in Achnacarry where their father operated a large sawmill and their mother taught them handicrafts and English.

Family: In 1786, when Christ'n was 15 years old, she married John McPhee and they lived in Crieff. Later in that same year, her sister Jean married Donald MacMillan, on the Callich farm.

Achnacarry and Crieff are 5 kms from each other, near Loch Arkaig, in the parish of Kilmallie. Callich is 12 kms from Crieff, westwards along Loch Arkaig. They were amongst the 38 farms that comprised the Lochiel Estate which belonged to the chief of the Cameron clan. There were possibly half a dozen families living in Archnacarry and about four families in Crieff.

In 1787, John and Christ'n's daughter, Christina, was born. There are no records of any other children.

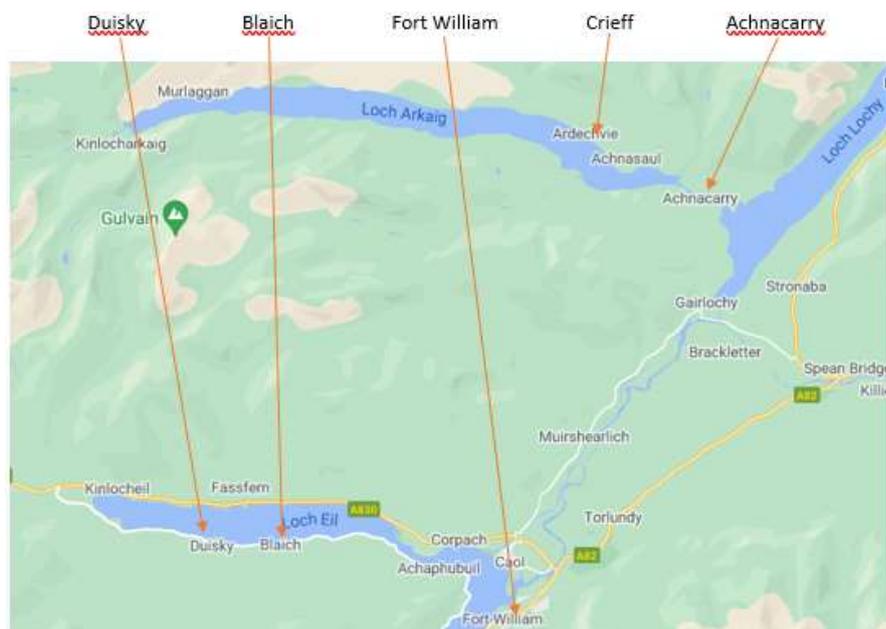
In 1788, John's father died and he took over the tenancy of Crieff. Black cattle had been the main livestock on the farms but sheep were becoming more profitable if properties were fenced. This led to the enclosures.

In 1804, the Cameron chief and his trustees evicted all the tenants and families from their traditional lands. John and Christ'n (and Christina who was then 17 years old) were forced to leave Crieff. Jean and Donald MacMillan were probably evicted from Callich at the same time.

Most families settled around the outskirts of Fort William. This is how Christina met Donald McLean and, in 1811, they had the first of their 12 children in Blaich, a little west of Fort William. (Christina and Donald are the focus of [www.christinaanddonaldmclean.com](http://www.christinaanddonaldmclean.com).)

While Christ'n and John were living near Fort William, he was in court twice for old debts which he had incurred while he was farming at Crieff. Christ'n was a court witness for a friend who was facing eviction.

Little is known about their later years. They probably remained not far from Fort William. An examination of the censuses in 1841 and 1851 was inconclusive, but maybe Christ'n died before 1841 and John lived with relatives as an old man.



## False path for looking for the birth of Christ'n Cameron

D53

An earlier search was based on the assumption that Christ'n's mother was not known but that her father could have been Donald Cameron. Donald was the sawmiller at Achnacarry, but he might have moved from somewhere else prior to 1774. So, this left open that Christ'n was born elsewhere and then moved with her family to Achnacarry when she was a young child.

Many possibilities were considered. In order to identify Christ'n's family, we have explored many possible siblings by downloading the images of 41 pages of the old parish registers regarding 86 individuals – and matched these against particular criteria. All were discounted except one which met all of our known criteria – Christian Cameron, born 12<sup>th</sup> December 1770 in Georgetown at Loch Rannoch in the parish of Fortingall – with parents Ann and Donald Cameron. But this must now be discounted because of details which came to light subsequently.

Subsequently, we found memoirs of a great-grandson who wrote about the memories of relatives who personally knew Donald and his family in Achnacarry. Most significantly, Donald's wife was identified as Jane/Jean Robertson. So, our searches for mothers other than Jane/Jean Robertson were on a false path. (The memoir was in 'Gaelic Society of Inverness', page 236 in volume 57.)

So, the whole basis of this search had been false. None-the-less, in honour of the effort, the research notes have been retained. They might come in useful at some stage.

# Christina McLean, nee McPhee

D50

'The History of Donald & Christina McLean & Their Descendants' (a big red book = BRB) was published in 1995 and all the details have now been entered on the website [www.christinaanddonaldmclean.com](http://www.christinaanddonaldmclean.com). The website has a great deal of information about their descendants in Australia but nothing about Christina's background in Scotland.

We have found confirmation that Christina was born in Crieff on 28<sup>th</sup> April 1787. Her parents were John Oag McPhee of Crieff and Christ'n Cameron of Achnacarry. We have the OPR confirming that John and Christ'n were married in March 1786. Crieff and Achnacarry are 5 kms apart, near Loch Arkaig.

Her father was from a long line of tenants at Crieff farm - passed from father to son for four generations – all called John McPhee.

Her mother, Christ'n, grew up at Achnacarry where Christina's grandfather was possibly Donald Cameron (a sawmiller at Achnacarry) and grandmother was Jane Robertson. Christ'n moved to Crieff when she married John. Christina was born there the following year.

When Christina was about 17 years old, the family were evicted off Crieff and moved to near Fort William. This is how she met Donald McLean.

Christina and Donald McLean lived in Blaich and Duiskey on Loch Eil where they had 12 children over the next two-and-half decades. Their first child was born in 1811. Two died of their children died as infants.

In 1837 the family migrated to South Australia on the Navarino. They were amongst the earliest pioneers of the colony. They set up a small farm near Adelaide where they grew the first wheat crop. After a few years, they moved to Strathalbyn and they named their farm Achananda's. The McLean families established many farms throughout the district.

Donald died after almost two decades in the colony and Christina died 14 years later, after more than three decades as a pioneer.

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