

## One Clan, Two Families

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A note on the origin of the clan by Alasdair White, President of MacleanNet. This story goes back to the romantic period of Scottish history when Robert The Bruce was King of Scots and was twisting the tail of the English King, Edward I. At the time (the late 1200s and early 1300s) the Maclean clan did not exist as a separate kindred nor was the name being used. However, in 1296 a certain Gilli Colium mac maoiliosa whose lineage is given as "son of Moal iose, son of Gille eoin (Gillean)" is identified as a vassal of Robert Bruce, Lord of Carrick, and the father of Robert The Bruce who became Robert I, King of Scots, in 1306. Gilli Colium mac maoiliosa - or Malcolm son of Maoiliose - married Rignach, a relation of Robert Bruce, Lord of Carrick. This set up a dynastic link to the powerful Bruce family and from this marriage there appears to have been three sons Donald, Neil and John (Iain Dubh in Gaelic), all of whom were active in 1326 when they appear in the Exchequer Rolls of that year. The family link to the Bruce family must have benefited the emergent kindred or clan now calling itself MacGille eoin (Maclean) as Neil was appointed Constable of the royal castle of Scraburgh (possibly Tarbet) in 1329, while his elder brother, Donald, appears to have been a commander of the Kings galleys and John (Iain Dubh) can be found at Sael (Seil) Castle in Lorn - another royal stronghold. According to early genealogical manuscripts dating from the 1400s, Donald appears to have had four sons and Neil three but no record of succeeding generations is mentioned in the Maclean genealogies and Gilli Colium was succeeded as chief of the kindred (clan) by his youngest son Iain Dubh. Now, if Donald and Neil and their sons were still alive, this succession of John as head of the kindred is an example of an important Celtic principle - that the head of the kindred (clan) fell to the one considered most capable of ensuring its success and survival. The law of primogenitor did not apply in the gaeldom until much later.

Iain Dubh had three sons - Hector, Lachlan and John about whom many romantic and probably unprovable stories are told. Research done for Nicholas Maclean-Bristol when writing his excellent "Warriors and Priests" shows that Hector was the oldest, Lachlan the middle son and John the youngest. The latter was also a "natural" or illegitimate son and is considered the progenitor of the mainland Macleans of Lorn, Ardgour and Morvern.

Lachlan Lubanach and his brother Hector Reaganach were, respectively, the progenitors of the Duart and Lochbuie families but how these two acquired land in Mull is not known for certain, but they are certainly the first Macleans on the island. The most popular clan legend claims that the two brothers murdered Mackinnon a vassal of MacDougall of Lorn, took MacDonald, Lord of the Isles, prisoner, and finally demanded lands in Mull from MacDonald. Given the critical strategic position of the lands granted to Lachlan and Hector, this legend seems unlikely and requires some more analysis.

MacDougall held many of the western isles but the family sided against King Robert The Bruce in the Wars of Independence whereas the MacDonalds sided with him and when King Robert won, MacDougall saw his lands forfeited and granted to MacDonald. However, when the King died and was succeeded by his son King David II in 1329 there was a rapid realignment of loyalties and MacDonald supported the Balliol faction against King David - fortunately for his survival, this support was not very prominent and in 1343 John MacDonald received a Royal Charter (which included the island of Mull) and started to call himself John de Yle or John Lord of the Isles.

This is where dynastic marriage came into the equation - bubonic plague (the Black Death) was sweeping Scotland and MacDonald was finding it hard to man all his strongholds and needed reliable men, bound to him by marriage, to install as constables. On 13 May 1367, Lachlan MacGillieoin received a mandate from the pope to marry Mary, the daughter of John de Yle, and, given the supreme importance of the matrilineal inheritance (inheritance through the female line), this gave Lachlan a particularly powerful link to his immediate overlord.

MacDonald, Lord of the Isles, then made his son-in-law, Lachlan MacGillieoin, chamberlain of the household (the most powerful position in the feudal hierarchy) and in July 1390 granted him the castle of Duart and various other lands. At the same time, Hector was granted four merks of land, which apparently must have included Lochbuie where he promptly built a fortified keep.

This, then, is how the kindred (clan) of MacGillieoin - now referred to as MacGillean - came to be settled on Mull and holding large tracts of land. As a result of this dynastic marrying one thing becomes clear - Lachlan had established himself as the most powerful of the MacGillean kindred: he held Duart which was the most powerful castle on Mull, he was the son-in-law of his feudal overlord, and he had earned his nickname of Lachlan Lubanach or Lachlan the crafty.

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The supremacy of Lachlan resulted in him being appointed as chief of the MacGillean kindred. At all times since then the clan has recognised the Duart family as the Chiefly family and at no time did the descendants of Hector of Lochbuie do other than recognise, accept and support this situation.

Legally and structurally (in clan terms) there is only one clan Maclean and all are descendants of Gillean of the Battle Axe. It is irrelevant how the name is spelt and indeed there was no regularisation of the spelling of the name until the late 1700's and it was some time later that each family "fixed" the spelling of their particular line, thus Maclean and Maclaine are the same clan. Indeed, the Lochbuie family did not start spelling their name "Maclaine" until 1745 following the failed Jacobite rebellion. There is a strong likelihood that this was to differentiate the Lochbuie family (who did not come "out" for the Jacobites) from the Duart line (who were "out") in this way Lochbuie may have been able to defend the clan lands from the Campbells and thus ensure the survival of the clan.