

# THE CLAN MACLEAN: AN AMPHIBIOUS FIGHTING FORCE

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Towards the end of the 19th Century two studies on the Clan Maclean were published in North America: JP Maclean *A History of the Clan Maclean*, Cincinnati (1889) and A Maclean Sinclair *Clan Gillean* Charlottetown (1899). Both are still referred to by modern writers.

Although both authors had access to primary sources in Scotland, neither appears to realise that the manuscript histories of the clan on which both relied were based on a lost unpublished manuscript which was the work of Dr Maclean of Gruline (1704-83).

Once this fact is realised and Dr Hector's prejudices are appreciated it is worth while taking a new look at the clan's history. Additional information which was not available to the North American authors is now available in the Maclean papers at Inverary Castle. Through the courtesy of the present Duke of Argyll and his father I have been able to examine many of these papers. What follows is based on these two new sources of information.

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Eachann bacach, the 17th Century Mull bard, says of the Macleans 'Your origins went back to Pharaoh'. Doubtless he believed it too. Belief in the mythical origin of clans lasted long after the 17th Century. Dr Hector more prosaically wrote, 'The surname Maclean or more properly MacGillean, means the son of Gillean. It derives from one Gillean known as *Gillean na tuoidh*, because his usual weapon was a battle axe'. Gillean appears to have lived in the 13th Century.

Gillean's descendents first appear in record in 1326 and it is probably significant that when they do so three Maclean brothers are in the service of King Robert I and had charge of a fleet of galleys. These first Macleans were probably related to the King himself as the latter's mother and the mother of the three brothers were daughters of the Celtic Earls of Carrick.

If the Macleans' career in the Hebrides began as supporters of King Robert the Bruce they rose to prominence as followers of the Bruce's ally, the Lord of the Isles. At least five families of Macleans, Lochbuie, Duart, Coll, Kingerloch and Ardgour received their lands directly from the Lord of the Isles. Contrary to 18th Century

Duart propaganda produced by Dr Hector it is probable that the progenitor of the Macleans of Lochbuie was the representative of the eldest branch of the family. He may originally have had the largest estate as well. It was however Lauchlan Iubanach, the progenitor of the Macleans of Duart, who became the Lord of Isles's Steward, the keeper of his most important castles and the husband of his patron's daughter.

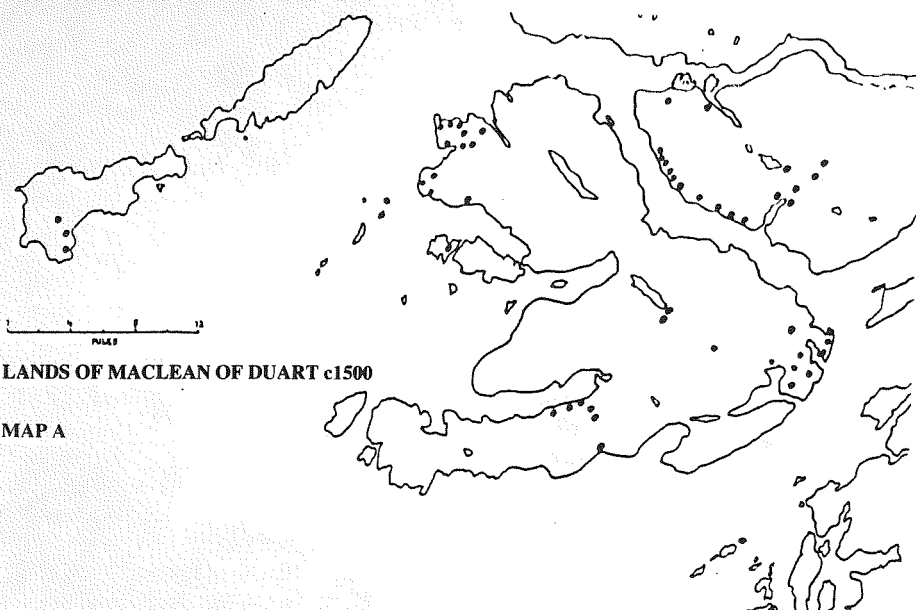
Lauchlan Iubanach's most important charge was the constablership of the great castle of Duart, which stands on a rocky headland on the south-east coast of the Isle of Mull. Its site is one of the most important strategic positions on the whole of the western seaboard, as it lies at the intersection of four major waterways, the Sound of Mull, Loch Linnhe, the Firth of Lorn and Loch Etive. From Duart Castle it is possible to observe the movement of shipping and to communicate by signal with the other important castles in the area, Dunstaffnage, Dunollie, Achadun in Lismore and Ardtornish in Morvern. It was also possible to draw up galleys close to the castle itself. This combination of a fortified strength and a fleet of galleys, birlinns and other small boats was the key to an island clan's power base, and for four hundred years Macleans were one of the most formidable amphibious powers in the Inner Hebrides.

The probability that Duart was not originally the senior branch of the Clan and the fact that it was the Lord of the Isles and not Duart who gave the individual Maclean families their estates was a source of considerable weakness to the clan. More often than not most Macleans followed Duart's lead; however some followed grudgingly. On several occasions certain families took the opposite course to Duart. For example, the tutor of Coll defeated Duart's men at Sruthan nan Ceann in 1583, and Lochbuie fought with the Macdonalds against the Macleans at Lochgruinar in 1598.

Duart's land holding and his power in the islands had however expanded dramatically after the forfeiture of the Lord of the Isles. He obtained a Royal Charter to his lands. He took over MacIain of Ardnamurchan's property in Islay and Morvern. He became feudal superior of MacQuarrie of Ulva, and for a time, of his cousin Maclean of Ardgour. Duart also obtained a grant of the crown lands of Aros in Mull. His most important acquisition however came at the Reformation, when he was granted the church's land holding in Mull, Iona, Morvern, Tiree and the two ends of Coll. An outline of how Duart's land holding expanded in the 16th Century is shown at maps A and B.

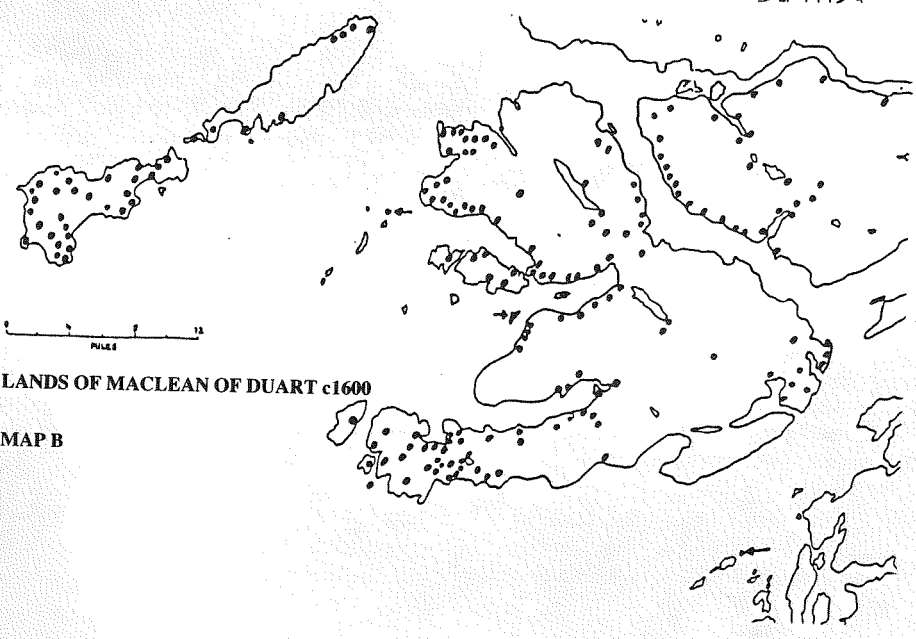
As we have seen Duart failed to deprive Coll and Lochbuie of their independence. Macleans however were united in being early converts to the protestant church, and much of Duart's influence was at the expense of the Roman Catholic Macdonalds. It was often won in alliance with the equally protestant Clan Campbell.

It is clear from the surviving bonds of manrent made by successive 16th Century Macleans of Duart to the Earls of Argyll that Duart considers himself to be Argyll's



**LANDS OF MACLEAN OF DUART c1500**

**MAP A**



**LANDS OF MACLEAN OF DUART c1600**

**MAP B**

man<sup>2</sup>. Bonds of manrent and maintenance were seldom given between men of the same surname, and those exceptions only occurred when normal relationships between a 'name' had broken down. For in 15th and 16th Century Scotland it was accepted that a laird's kin would automatically serve, give council and follow the chief of their surname.

Bonds of manrent were thus intended to make unrelated inferior neighbours become as kinsmen to their local lord. The first surviving bond of menrent between Argyll and an island chief was signed at Dunstaffnage on the 14th July 1519, when Lauchlan Maclean of Duart, Alexander MacLeod of Dunvegan and five other islesmen gave a bond in perpetuity to Colin, third Earl of Argyll.

The alliance between the Campbells and the Macleans probably reached its height in the late 16th Century when Archibald, seventh Earl of Argyll, was chief of the Campbells and his cousin, Sir Lauchlan mor, lead the Macleans.

One English spy even wrote that; 'the Earl of Argyll and Maclean (brother's and sister's children) [are] in such natural love as they will not be employed ... without the other'.

In 1594 both men fought gallantly against the Roman Catholic earls at the battle of Glenlivet. In 1596 both were supporters of the kirk against the king. Most important of all both men were in correspondence with Sir Robert Cecil and planned to bring mercenaries to Ulster to help the English against the Irish.

Both Argyll and Duart were of particular interest to the English government because both could raise men who were equally adept at fighting at sea as on land. Both also controlled fleets of galleys and birlinns which in summer were to be found everywhere in the Irish coast and had a mobility that is inconceivable to the inhabitants of the Hebrides today.

In the event Sir Lauchlan never invaded Ulster. Instead he was killed in 1598 at the battle of Lochgruinar in a skirmish with the Macdonalds. The army that he raised at his own expense was probably instrumental in ruining his family. Macleans and Campbells however continued to cooperate well into the 17th Century. Both clans were involved in the final destruction of the Macdonalds of Duniveg and MacIains of Ardnamurchan. But although the Macleans did much of the hatchet work it was the Campbells who took over Kintyre, Islay and Ardnamurchan. The Macleans of Coll gained the Isle of Muck. Duart however got nothing and was forced to sell his lands in Islay and Lochaber.

In the 16th Century the Earls of Argyll had been content to receive bonds of manrent from chiefs such as Duart and Dunvegan. In the 17th Century the situation changed. Why this is so is not entirely clear. For the purposes of this paper it is only

necessary to note that it happened. It is also unnecessary to examine in detail how the Macleans of Duart became indebted to the Earls of Argyll. Whatever the rights or wrongs of the case it occurred, and when Sir Allan Maclean of Duart died in 1674 Argyll moved in for the kill.

The story of the vicious little war between Duart and Argyll from 1674 to 1681 has not been told in full. It has been glossed over through lack of access to documentary evidence available at Inveraray. It has also been suppressed for political reasons (to prevent discord between Jacobite clans, in particular to protect the reputation of Sir Ewen Cameron of Locheil who was evidently one of the villains of the piece). I do not propose going into more detail on the course of the Campbell takeover of Mull in this paper. Further detail will appear in *The Lame Adventurer* which Paul Hopkins and I have nearly finished. Instead I wish to comment on the personalities and background of those who ran Mull in the period between the end of the Civil Wars and the start of the first Jacobite rebellion.

The brief renaissance of the Clan Maclean which followed the forfeiture of the 9th Earl of Argyll in 1681 is relatively well documented. It was the last occasion when the Macleans dominated Mull, a fact that is underlined by a valuation roll in the archives of Argyll & Bute District Council which shows who owned how much land in 1688. Unfortunately we do not have a list of all the inhabitants of Mull at this time, for the collectors of the poll tax in 1693 could not visit Mull, Coll and Tiree which they note as being in rebellion.

Although valuation rolls should be treated with caution the 1688 list is of interest (see figure 1). It shows the relevant position of differing heads of the branches of the clan Maclean in 1688 and makes the point that although Duart was by far the most important Maclean laird he was not the only one. Coll appears to have overtaken Lochbuie who had sold his property in Jura and some of his lands in Morvern. Maclean of Ardgour had regained the superiority of his lands which he had held off Argyll since the 1630s. Other new Maclean families had been established during the 17th Century. Brolas who descended from a younger son of an early 17th Century Maclean of Duart had received a wadset of part of the Duart estate when his father made a marriage settlement when he married for the second time.

Maclean of Torloisk had had to purchase his estate. The first Torloisk's father was a younger son of Sir Lauchlan mor. The latter had been killed before he had settled any property on his younger children. Torloisk's father therefore claimed that he was only a tenant and not a chieftain at all. The first Torloisk however was a shrewd business man who had lent money to Argyll whom he had followed during the Civil Wars and had been able to purchase another part of the Duart's estate.

John Macleod had a wadset on Mishnish, Mackinnon's ancient estate on Mull. John Macleod of Mishnish is better known as Macleod of Contullich, the property he

## FIGURE 1: MULL DIVISION OF ARGYLL IN 1688

Sir John Maclean of Duart	£6000.0.0d
Isle of Tiree: his Majesty's property	£2222.4.0
Laird of Coll	£2140.13.4
Laird of Lochbuie	£1816.4.4
Hugh Maclean of Ard gour	£ 923.6.8
Lauchlan Maclean of Brolas	£ 825.6.8
Maclean of Torloisk	£ 635.11.0
Isle of Canna: Clanranald's property	£ 622.4.0
Hector Maclean of Kingerloch	£ 609.6.8
Bishop of the Isles's land in Mull	£ 584.8.10
MacQuarrie of Ulva	£ 534.8.10
Hector Maclean of Kinlochaline	£ 508.8.10
Sir Ewen Cameron of Locheil	£ 484.0.0
John Macleod, wadsetter of Mishnish	£ 333.6.8
Allan Maclean of Drimnin	£ 151.2.2
Laid of Calder, wadsett from Lochbuie	1 142.4.4
Charles Maclean of Inverscaddle	£ 133.6.8
Bishop of Argyll's feu duties of Maclean's estate	£ 110.0.0
Bishop of Argyll's lands in Morvern	£ 88.17.8
Bishop of Isles's feu duty of ?	£ 55.11.0
Bishop of Argyll, Knock and Culchelis	£ 45.18.6

later purchased in Easter Ross. He was the eldest son of Sir Normand Macleod of Bernaray, was a lawyer, a poet and a Jacobite. He was later a factor to Macleod during the minority of the 20th chief. Earlier he had been a trusted advisor of Sir John Maclean.

Sir John Maclean was chief of the Macleans from 1674 until 1716. He was a remarkable young man. Born in 1670 he was handsome, aimiable, polished and had a charm which few could resist. His faults were less obvious. They were not the indolence and extravagance which Balhaldie accused him of in his biography of Sir Ewen Cameron of Locheil, but were rather a failure to use his undoubted talents in a consistent fashion and an overreliance on his charm to get him out of situations which he should never have got himself into. As was said of his contemporary, the Duke of Gordon, he had some very good links in him but it was impossible to make a chain of them.

Sir John was an improvement on his father. The latter was described by the 9th Earl of Argyll as a 'long-eared beast commonly called an ass'. This opinion was not just Campbell prejudice but is supported by one of his surviving letters written in 1669 to Lauchlan Maclean of Lochbuie. In it Sir Allan states 'I am going about your destruction and will perform it tho it should cost me the half of my estate'. Lochbuie

had slighted Sir Allan's entertainment, treating Duart 'lyke a slave or vagabond'. Sir Allan also complained that Lochbuie's son 'had not the wit to take leave of me'. As a result he intended to put his hand to Lochbuie's ruin: 'it will be delayed no longer than tomorrow at night, or Sunday night', wrote Sir Allan. 'And the proofs you shall see or Lambas day...'.

Such conduct to a vitally important ally when Argyll was closing in for the kill was lunacy. In 1671 Sir Allan did have the commonsense to secure the allegiance of the Macleans of Ardgour who as we have seen had earlier lost the superiority of their estate to Argyll. In what must have been one of the last bonds of manrent ever signed the Ardgours agreed 'for the favour and deuitful respects we owe to and carie towards the said Sir Allan our Chieff and for certain good deeds done and to be done be him to us are most willing to adhere to and follow him and spend our lives and fortunes against all and sundrie the King's Majesty only accepted ... and follow him with all our men, might and power against all oppressors whatsoever bot particularlie against the Earl of Argyll ...'.

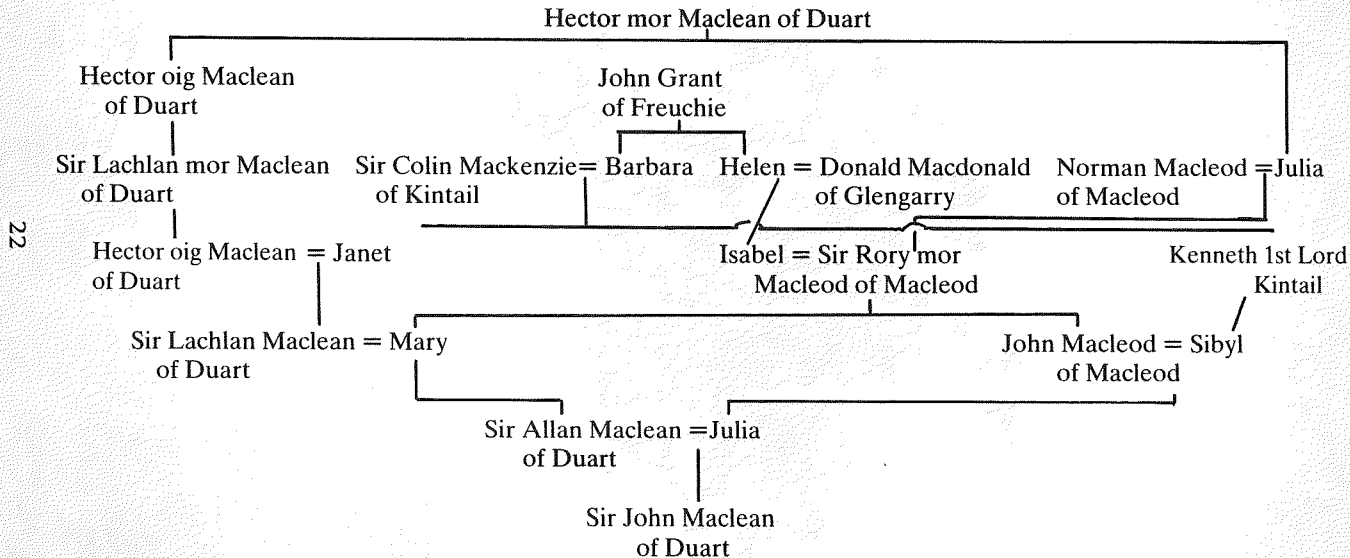
The bond goes on to say that should the Ardgour family lose their own land for supporting Sir Allan the latter would give them a merkland for every merkland they should lose.

Sir Allan's contemporaries in the lowlands probably blamed his curious behaviour on his upbringing. Sir Allan's education both in Duart and in Glasgow had been superintended by Mr Neil Maclachlan, a member of the learned Kilbride family. His education included genealogy and traditional history, for in 1663 Sir Allan is said to have been curious and taught in these things. The Synod of Argyll did not approve of Sir Allan's education. In 1657 they exhorted the Marquess of Argyll 'to take care that younge mcleane be sent to schools abroad'. Neither did they approve of his pedagogue for Mr Neil is described as being scandalous carriage. In 1659 Sir Allan's curators were ordered to dismiss him and obtain some honest qualified young man who should be tried and approven by the presbytery of Lorn. Mr Neil however continued at his post and in 1660 resided in Glasgow with his charge. He was there ordered to report to the presbytery of Lorn 'to answer for the scandal of swearing, drunkenness and fornication'.

Whatever his contemporaries thought I suspect that modern opinion would think that Sir Allan's problem was the result of inbreeding. His parents were related many times over. To make matters worse Sir Allan was to marry his first cousin Julian Macleod (see figure 2).

If neither Sir Allan nor his son Sir John had much chance genetically events in the latter's early life did no help. Sir John was fostered by his kinsman Charles Maclean of Ardnacross (Charles macAllan). In 1674 when he was living at Ardnacross Sir John was captured by Lord Neil Campbell's men. They stripped him naked and

**FIGURE 2: RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE ANCESTORS OF SIR JOHN MACLEAN OF DUART**





abandoned him. He was four years old.

I have not yet discovered who Sir John's pedagogue was. Sir John was well educated as he was later described as 'the learned and ingenious Sir John Maclean'. He was evidently familiar with the works of Buchanan, had studied Caesar's commentaries, and like his father was familiar with the work of local historians and genealogists. Whilst he was living in exile in France he was able to discuss philology with the eminent Père Pezeron, although he admits that he was not a good judge of the language. He means of course Gaelic.

It is clear that interest in the traditional learning of the Gaeltachd survived in Mull into the 1680s. Mr John Maclean, the minister of Kilninian and Kilmore who was himself a poet, stated in 1702 that because Sir John was not of age when his father died 'and the place in disorder', because of the controversy with Argyll, the hereditary offices of physician, bard and seannachie had lapsed. However amateur scholars such as Mr John Beaton, poets such as Anndra mac an Easbuig and Iain mac Ailean still composed their songs, as did Beaton himself. Some of the latter's Gaelic manuscripts have survived and are now part of the collection in the National Library of Scotland. It is tempting if unprofitable to speculate just how many more might have survived were it not for the disorder in Duart in the 1670s.

Sir John's interest in antiquarian matters may have been the result of his having been fostered by Charles MacAllan. Much has been made of the closeness of the relationship established by fosterage in the Highlands. Less has been made of the benefit of the fostering family. Charles did remarkably well from being Sir John's foster father and from being one of Sir Allan's closest advisors. He was for many years baillie of Aros and in 1654 had been in a position to purchase the small estate of Drimnin in Morvern from the Marquess of Argyll for his eldest son. Another son became baillie of Mornish and a third was collector of the cess in Mull from 1684-1689. The latter found that post sufficiently profitable to purchase the wadset of Gruline from Lochbuie.

Charles MacAllan was not the only MacLean to feather his own nest. The next heir to Sir John was his cousin Maclean of Brolas who had become tutor to Duart at Sir Allan's death. When the 9th Earl of Argyll had invaded Mull in 1674 Brolas made a treaty with the Earl which did remarkably little to protect his chief's own interest, but did preserve Brolas's own wadsett.

The clergy were not above looking after their own interest and it is possible that Mr Hector Maclean, the Bishop of Argyll from 1680-1687, was proposing to defraud Sir John by helping the 9th Earl concoct an impossibly high rental for Tiree which was designed to evade meeting Sir John's claims to an income from his own estate. Mr Hector had become Bishop of Argyll through the Earl's patronage.

This evidence of avarice at the expense of their young chief is unattractive. The conduct of those Macleans who did well during Sir John's minority should not be however taken out of context. From the start of the Civil Wars Mull had been subject to constant invasion and cattle raiding. A generation had been subject to poverty and starvation to a degree which can only be imagined today by those who have experienced African civil wars and the subsequent famine. Starvation does not improve the human character.

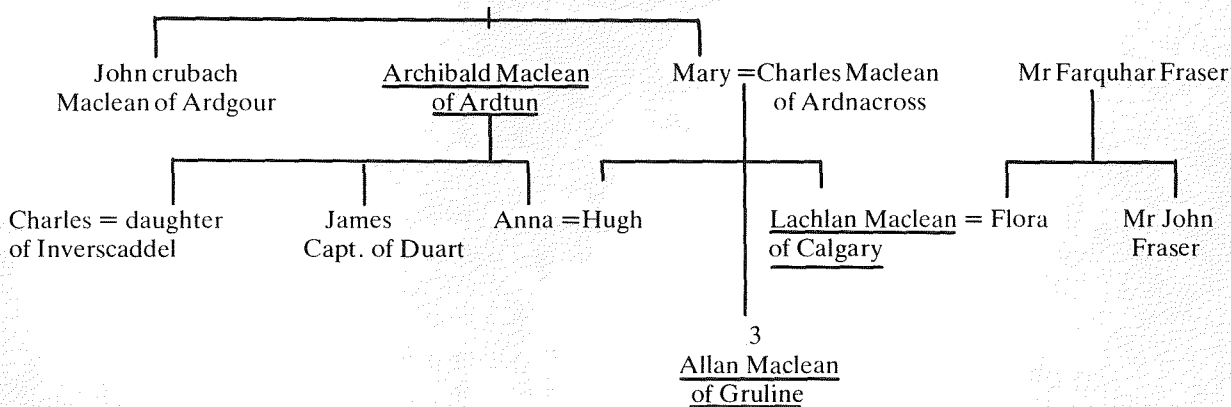
The leading Macleans who ran Mull during Sir John's minority were as closely related to each other as their chief was related to his peers (see figure 3). It was not entirely a one gene pool. One incomer who was to leave his mark on Mull was Mr Farquhar Fraser, Dean of the Isles. Despite his surname Fraser was descended in the male line from a deposed Macintosh chief who had probably married a Fraser heiress. It is also probable that his family became one of the hereditary learned families in the Highlands. Such families were not just professional poets, genealogists and musicians, they also included families of ecclesiastics. Farquhar's son Mr John succeeded his father as Dean of the Isles. He wrote a book on second sight.

In 1686/7 the deaths took place of three Lauchlans: Lauchlan Maclean of Torloisk, Lauchlan of Brolas, and Lauchlan Maclean of Coll. All three had played a prominent part in running affairs in Mull during Sir John's minority. These three deaths which occurred during the twelve month period were considered to be ominous and that a down turn in the wheel of fortune was approaching the Macleans, or so the Minister/poet Mr John Maclean was to suggest.

Mr Hector Maclean, Bishop of Argyll, also died in 1687. Sir John was thus deprived of some of his most experienced advisors and the King, James VII, was given an opportunity to interfere with Sir John's upbringing in an attempt to convert him to Roman Catholicism. On the 23rd May 1688 King James informed the Scottish Treasury that Sir John was going to France for his further education and breeding. Although grand tours of the most diverse kind were becoming more common amongst the Scottish aristocracy – Donald Macdonald of Sleat had just set out to fight against the Turks in Hungary – it was obvious what James intended by 'education'.

Sir John set out for Paris having named four gentlemen in Mull as factors for his estate. They were: John Macleod of Mishnish, Archibald Maclean of Ardtun, Lauchlan Maclean of Calgary, and Allan Maclean of Gruline. The last two were Sir John's foster brothers. Two were tacksman: two held wadsets. None were members of the hereditary landed proprietors in the clan. The choice is probably significant. None of them were in positions to stand out against the King's catholicising policies as the late Lauchlan Maclean of Brolas certainly would have done.

**FIGURE 3: RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN SIR JOHN'S CURATORS IN 1688**



– The underlined were Sir John's Curators.

Sir John was duly converted to catholicism at the Scots College. However instead of remaining in France he cut short his grand tour and returned to the British Isles with King James who arrived in Dublin in March 1689 in an attempt to regain his throne from William of Orange.

King James gave Sir John a colonel's commission to raise an infantry regiment from amongst his clan and early in May he sailed for Mull. The order of battle of the Maclean regiment shows the clan in its role as a fighting formation. All the leading families produced men led by their respective chieftains, or his close relation.

There was also another Maclean regiment in the Jacobite army that fought under Dundee that summer. It was raised by Sir Alexander Maclean of Otter, *the lame adventurer* of our forthcoming book. He was not originally a landed proprietor but a son of the manse being the second surviving son of Bishop Hector Maclean. Sir Alexander was one of the most remarkable men the Clan Maclean has ever produced. His family was one of the learned families of the Gaeltachd. His brother Andrew was a poet. He himself was destined for the church but became a judge before becoming a soldier. His major claim to fame however was not to be his exploits under Dundee which were remarkable enough but the fact he left a treatise on guerrilla warfare which preceded by two hundred and fifty years the use of irregular forces in the Second World War.

The Macleans were undoubtedly a formidable fighting force. Even Dalrymple, the mastermind of the massacre of Glencoe, thought highly of them, for he said that the Macleans were 'never a robbing, thieving people, nor ever deserved ill at the hands of its country'. Whilst William Sacheverell, the Governor of the Isle of Man, who visited Mull at the height of the famine in the 1690s describes the men of Mull 'to be large bodied, stout, subtle, active and patient of cold and hunger. There appeared in their actions a certain generous air of freedom and contempt of those trifles, luxury and ambition, which we so servilely creep after. They bound their appetites by their necessities and their happiness consists not in having much but in coveting little.'

It was their tragedy that so formidable a military force should not have been better led by the Jacobite leaders who succeeded Dundee after Killiecrankie. Instead their undoubted talents were dissipated in the bitter street fighting at Dunkeld and the shambles at Cromdale. By the time Argyll invaded Mull the best of their men were dead or incapacitated. The surviving Macleans were unable to prevent the Campbells and their allies from taking over Mull, Morvern and Tiree. The diaspora of the Macleans had begun.....

#### NOTES

1. See my 'Maclean family manuscripts' in *West Highland Notes & Queries* No. X pp. 3-12, No. XI pp. 10-18, No. XII p.26.

2. J. Wormald *Lords and Men in Scotland*, Edinburgh (1985).
3. For further details of the alliance between the Macleans and Campbells see my 'the Macleans from 1560-1707: a reappraisal in *the 17th Century in the Highlands* Inverness 1986.