

1467 MS: MacSorleys of Monydrain

The pedigree of the MacSorleys of Monydrain is no. 29 in the 1467 MS, tucked into column b of the verso (1vb11–15). The verso is perfectly legible, having seemingly served for centuries as the inside front cover of what is now Adv. MS 72.1.1, and thus been spared the rubbing and scraping that have so badly affected parts of the recto. No. 29 is the last of a long series of Argyll and Lennox pedigrees; it is preceded by what is probably a sept of MacDougalls (no. 28) and followed by the MacDonalds (no. 30). It is perhaps something of an afterthought, as its most obvious connections are with nos. 9 (MacEwens), 21 (Lamonts) and 27 (MacLachlans).

Monydrain (*Monadh Droighinn*, ‘Thorn Muir’) is a farm a mile north of the modern town of Lochgilphead in Argyll. It would probably be safe to describe the MacSorley patrimony as the land now occupied by the town and its environs. The Monydrain family should not be confused with the MacSorleys of Glen Nevis, a MacDonald sept which was absorbed by the Camerons, or indeed with the *Clann Shomhairle* (MacDougalls, no. 31 in the manuscript).

I will begin by quoting *verbatim* the transcriptions and translations made by Skene in (1) *Collectanea* (1839) and (2) *Celtic Scotland* (1880), then (3) by my wife Máire and myself in our website (2009). As always, for ease of comparison Skene’s words are made to correspond to the lines of the manuscript.

(1) *Collectanea*:

- 11 *Genelach clann Somarle.*—
- 12 Donall ic Gilleeasp
- 13 mc Angusa ic Domnaill
- 14 mc Somarle ic Fearchar
- 15 mc Dunsleibe ic Bean.

- 11 THE GENEALOGY OF THE CLAN SORLY.—
- 12 Donald son of Gilespic
- 13 son of Angus son of Donald
- 14 son of Somerled son of Ferchar
- 15 son of Dunsleve son of Bain.¹

(2) *Celtic Scotland*:

- 11 GENELACH CLANN SOMAIRLE
- 12 Domnall mac Gillaespic
- 13 mic Aengusa mic Domnaill
- 14 mic Somairle mic Ferchair
- 15 mic Duinsleibe son of Buirche

- 11 GENEALOGY OF THE CLAN SORLEY.
- 12 Donald son of Gillespic
- 13 son of Angus son of Donald
- 14 son of Somerled son of Ferchard
- 15 son of Dunslebhe *son of Burche*.²

(3) www.1467manuscript.co.uk, with our footnote:

- 11 genelach cloinni somairle
- 12 domnall mac gilla espaig
- 13 mhic aengus mhic domnail
- 14 mhic shomairle mhic ferchair
- 15 mhic duinsleibe mhic buirce.

- 11 The genealogy of the MacSorleys:
- 12 Donald son of Archibald
- 13 son of Angus son of Donald
- 14 son of Sorley son of Fearchar
- 15 son of Duinnshléibhe son of Buirce.*

* This Buirce is the same man as in 1va, lines 35 and 36. Duinnshléibhe and Gille Críost were two of his sons.

The text is very clear, and a photograph of it may be viewed on our website. The only palaeographic problem is **f. b** at the end of line 15, and Skene gradually resolved it for us. In *Collectanea* 1839 he made it *ic Bean* ‘son of Bain’. In *Collectanea* 1847 he printed a correction: referring to the Gaelic he wrote ‘pro “Bean” lege “B.”’, and referring to his English translation he wrote ‘instead of “Bean” read “B.”’.³ The latter should of course read ‘instead of “Bain” read “B.”’. By the time he published *Celtic Scotland* he had realised that the abbreviation was for Buirche (or Buirce), a figure who also appears in the aforementioned Lamont, MacLachlan and MacEwen pedigrees. He was therefore able to group these four kindreds together under the rubric: “CLANS supposed to be descended from the HY NEILL or race of Niall Naoi Giallach, King of Ireland, through Niall Glundubh, head of the northern Hy Neill and King of Ireland, slain 917.”⁴

The footnote in our website does scant justice to Buir(r)c(h)e. He appears not only at 1va35–36 (MacLachlans, as *Buirce*) but also at 1re24 (Lamonts, as *Buirce*) and, much less legibly, at 1rd12 (MacEwens, as *an Buir*—). These other pedigrees make it clear that it originated as the nickname of Aodh Álainn, an eleventh-century descendant of Niall Glúndubh.

Boirche, *Bairche*, the name of a mythological cowherd, has been tentatively explained as a word meaning ‘the bull or stag that leads the herd’. I know of only one other holder of the name, and he, too, had a Scottish connection: Bec Boirche (‘Little One the Cowherd?’), king of Ulster (d. AD 718), to whom is attributed the poem beginning *Is uar in gáeth dar Ile / dofuil oca i Cínd tire*: “Cold is the wind

over Islay / that they have in Kintyre.”⁵ The name served as the early surname of the Lamonts – Dubhaltach Mac Firbhisigh headed his Lamont pedigree ‘Genealach Meg-Buirrce agus Mhec Ladhmainn in Albain’, and Cúchoigríche Ó Cléirigh headed one of his two Lamont pedigrees ‘Genelach Meg Buirrce’.⁶ Taken together, the MacSweens or MacSweeneys, Lamonts, MacSorleys, MacLachlans and MacEwens must have been the *Buirrceich* or *Clann Buirrce*.⁷ The name was clearly familiar to a certain Robert de Lamont who informed Louis XIV of France in 1621 that he could trace his descent through twenty-seven generations to ‘Oneille bark roy d’Irlande’.⁸

The MacSorleys have been very fully described by two able historians, Hector McKechnie and David Sellar.⁹ McKechnie’s account is full of sound documentary detail but vitiated by cavalier treatment of our manuscript. On the grounds that ‘if Somerled’s son was alive in 1355, Somerled himself can hardly have been earlier than *c.* 1300’, McKechnie concluded that our pedigree was too short, and inserted Duncan son of Fearchar and Angus his son (both known from the Register of the Monastery of Paisley) between Fearchar and Somhairle – for which, says Sellar, ‘there seems to be no warrant’.¹⁰

The first three figures in the pedigree are shown by record evidence as succeeding each other as lairds in Achahoish and other lands in the vicinity of Monydrain: Donald between 1414 and 1451, his father Celestin (Gillespie, Archibald) in 1410, and Celestin’s father Angus ‘called MakSowirle’, who was dead by that year. There is no documentary evidence for Angus’s father, Donald, but he was presumably an elder brother of Alexander McSommarli of 1355. Somhairle (Somerled), the eponym, will have lived *c.* 1250–1310. It seems possible that his elder brother Gille Colaim, ancestor of the Lamonts (who was dead by 1235), had married a daughter of the celebrated Somerled of the Isles, thus introducing the name into the family.¹¹

The MacSorleys (or Lamonts) of Monydrain struggled on as bonnet lairds until 1726, when all that remained of their patrimony was sold to Coll Lamont of Duncholgan. This second Monydrain family died out in turn in 1816, when the estate passed to a branch of the Lamonts of Inverye.¹²

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NOTES

- 1 The Iona Club, *Collectanea de Rebus Albanicis* (Edinburgh, 1839), pp. 56, 57. *Collectanea* was published in unnumbered parts with consecutive pagination, beginning in 1833.
- 2 William F. Skene, *Celtic Scotland* (3 vols, Edinburgh, 1876–80), vol. 3, p. 474.
- 3 The Iona Club, *Collectanea de Rebus Albanicis* (Edinburgh, 1847), pp. 359, 360.
- 4 Skene, *Celtic Scotland*, vol. 3, p. 472.
- 5 Whitley Stokes, ‘The Annals of Tigernach. Third Fragment. A.D. 489–766’, *Revue Celtique*, vol. 17 (1896), pp. 119–263: 178; A. O. Anderson, *Early Sources of Scottish History* (2 vols, Edinburgh, 1922), vol. 1, pp. 147–48; William J. Watson, *The History of the Celtic Place-Names of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1926), p. 87, note 1; W. D. H. Sellar, ‘Family Origins in Cowal and Knapdale’, *Scottish Studies*, vol. 15, part 1 (1971), pp. 21–37: 24, 25–26; *DIL (Dictionary of the Irish Language, compact edn, Dublin, 1983)*

- s.v. *Boirche*. Stokes translated the second line of the verse as ‘there are warriors in Cantyre’; in understanding *oca* rather than *óca* I am following the inspiration of the late George Campbell Hay, see my *An Tuil: Anthology of 20th Century Scottish Gaelic Verse* (Edinburgh, 1999), p. 776. I am grateful to Michel Byrne for his help on this point.
- 6 Rev. Paul Walsh, *Leabhar Chlainne Suibhne: An Account of the Mac Sweeney Families in Ireland, with Pedigrees* (Dublin, 1920), p. 90; Nollaig Ó Muraile, ed., *Leabhar Mór na nGenealach: The Great Book of Irish Genealogies Compiled (1645–66) by Dubhaltach Mac Fhirbhisigh* (5 vols, Dublin, 2003), vol. 1, p. 304; Séamus Pender, ed., *Analecta Hibernica No. 18: The O Clery Book of Genealogies* (Dublin, Stationery Office, 1951), p. 45. *Meg* is for *Méig*, genitive of *Mág*, a curious by-form of *Mac* which appeared following the introduction of surnames in the tenth and eleventh centuries (*DIL* s.v. *mac*).
 - 7 See Sellar, ‘Family Origins’, p. 33.
 - 8 Hector McKechnie, *The Lamont Clan 1235–1935: Seven Centuries of Clan History from Record Evidence* (Edinburgh, 1938), p. 47.
 - 9 McKechnie, *Lamont Clan*, pp. 378–93; Sellar, ‘Family Origins’, pp. 32–34.
 - 10 McKechnie, *Lamont Clan*, p. 379; Sellar, ‘Family Origins’, p. 34.
 - 11 McKechnie, *Lamont Clan*, pp. 43–44, 378–79, 381.
 - 12 McKechnie, *Lamont Clan*, pp. 388, 392.