

# híghlanó family hístóry society



## comunn sloinntearachd na gaidhealtachd

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A bit short on members' material today, so you're going to have to put up with my maunderings a bit more than usual. To stop this sort of thing happening again it is in your hands to send us stories of why your ancestors stayed in the Highlands or left, or reviews of books or computer software, or anything else that takes your fancy.

Why has no-one sent us a paper on the U.K. army command system which deliberately used minorities in the Empire military to do the suppressing of other minorities? How often I have read books on Irish rebellions wherein the locals got to hate the Scottish soldiers who came in to stamp them flat, and how many of us know the first line of the Aberdeenshire song 'The Bonny Lass of Fyvie' which says that "There once was a troop of Irish Dragoons" campaigning in NE Scotland!

Now that I think of it, I am inclined to divide most books between the two categories of Stories and Quarries. Many have elements of both and the separating line is by no means clear or strong, but I find some books readable even if not necessarily interesting and others not particularly readable for their own sake, but can be decidedly interesting and useful as sources of information for writing or understanding yet other books. Extreme examples could be a Nigel Tranter historical novel, highly readable and entertaining, and the Old Parish Register for Kilmelford, anything but. Family histories of other people's relatives are seldom especially entertaining outwith the family circle, but I certainly prefer the ones where the writers have smoothed over the joins between the quote from this census list and the statement from that marriage record.

One of the family histories in our archive is on the subject of the 1770s soldier 'James Harrower, Royal Highlander' by Barbara Knutsen and Barbara & Donald Harrower and is a pleasure to read with the precise details of the historical record not detracting at all. Others, nameless here, may be far longer than that paper, but are full of statements of fact with no feel for human lives. He did this, then he did that. She lived here, then she lived there. They are buried in such-and-such a place.

I have two photos of my grandparents with the four-year-old boy who would one day become my father. One picture has always been on show somewhere so all of us were familiar with the formal setting in the enclosed dark garden, the prim mother, the proper father and the perfectly disciplined child. Then I found another negative for a picture none of us had seen before, the next on the reel: my grandmother was laughing! The two males were relaxed and smiling and the sun was even shining more comfortably. I think many people in the family circle would far prefer to read our private histories if they were to be written in that same relaxed manner with the sun shining in.

## MEMORIAL CAIRNS and HIGHLAND ESTATES

(An illustrated talk given to the Society on Nov 24th 1992)  
by **H Fraser MacKenzie**

This cairn is on the side of Culvain on the Achnacarry Estate of Cameron of Locheil and refers to the spot where the Earl of Dalkeith was killed on the 17th September 1886. It is very precipitous, that is Loch Arkaig in the background. He was out that particular day with his head stalker John Cameron and Alex MacLeod the gillie, plus a number of pony men. They came upon some stags towards the end of the afternoon and Dalkeith shot at one, seemed to hit it and the beast went off down this slope out of sight.

He reloaded and set off after it down the wet ground and slipped and slid down the hill coming to a sudden halt where the stone is on which this cairn is built and the gun which he hadn't thrown away went off and he was killed. A very graphic description is in the Achnacarry game book, which Lochiel himself was good enough to let me see. That particular cairn is one of the most remote in Scotland and one that is very rarely visited.

Now moving on to the next cairn, this is the one where I got the information that pointed me in the right direction last time. That's Glenquoich up from Invergarry before the dam was built in the 1950s, the water level rose by some 300 feet in places. Loch Quoich Lodge of which I have some photographs here, has disappeared and the only thing you will see now as you drive west to the head of Kinloch Hourn is the rhododendrons which mark where the lodge used to be.

My researches in the Invergarry area connected with a particular cairn uncovered quite a number of photographs and you can see how the lodge looked. It is a lovely place. There is no trace of many of the estate houses that were there right up to Quoich Bridge.

These are the keepers of the time. The particular keeper that I am interested in was an old chap whose name was James Henderson, he was head keeper on the Glenquoich estate and this is a photograph of the keepers taken in the 1890s. They were employed by Lord Burton who had the shootings of Quoich Lodge.

These trees have all disappeared as well so all we have is some rhododendrons at the top where the dip is.

We will move on to the next one, another set of keepers taken about the same time but unfortunately none of them are named and I have been trying to find out who they were.

The fellow I am interested in is Alan Foster. There he is. He was a 'deer forester' and was accidentally killed near this spot

in 1890. He was out in December with a chap called Robertson, also a stalker on the estate. They came across a group of hinds and Foster had an old gun. According to the papers he asked for Robertson to pass his gun to him and, as he passed his own gun back to Robertson, it went off and he was killed leaving a young family behind.

I got in touch with Roy Wentworth of the Argyll Heritage Museum who was able to tell me that there were probably Fosters working on the Letterewe Estate in Gairloch in the 1840s and I was able to trace them. Foster is actually a Northumberland variation of Forester. William Foster came up from the Borders to work for the Letterewe estate.

His first wife, Ann Hitchcliffe, is buried in the little cemetery of Poolewe along with their elder daughter. He then married a Mary McGregor from Gairloch. They had a large family and they moved around Highland estates. One of the sons was born at Attadale, Lochcarron. Another group of sons was born at Knoydart and finally some were born at Corran in Arnsdale and it is at Corran where Alan Foster, his father and his mother were buried and I have got a little photograph of it later on.

You can see where the cairn is on the side of the hill. I presume that they were coming down and that the hinds were in the spot below them. The stone itself is all right but the base is cracked. That is the fate of a number of these memorial stones and cairns.

If you follow the path which goes right down the valley you will come to the house at Aultbea. This is the house as it was in 1971, you go along to the left of the picture for a couple of miles and then across the valley and then you start to climb and there you come across the memorial.

When I took the chance of looking up the census which you have in the library for 1891 Foster's widow was there as was one little child. Their other child died some months after his father and they are both buried at Corran in Arisaig. What happened to the young Mrs Foster, she was in her mid twenties, about ten years younger than her husband, I don't know.

That is Corran with Knoydart in the background and those old houses are still there, in a more derelict condition than they were there.

I always think this is my favourite one. This is the heights of Kinlochleven, an estate which used to belong to the Wills family. It was actually split up, half of it has gone to the man who owns the Letterewe and half to a chap who has the Hill Farm and the farming estate of Lochalsh.

Now this actually marks the spot where the gentleman was buried and I have photos of the burial here with me. John Ferguson was

a native of Tomatin and spent many years working at the Kinlochewe Estate and he decided one day that he was getting on a bit, he wanted to be buried at Kinlochewe, and of course they weren't a hundred percent sure about having him there on unconsecrated ground as it were.

He was determined and eventually the head keeper, Mr Mathison and a local crofter, Mr MacDonald undertook the burial. They carried the body a considerable distance over the hills to reach this and get back to the house at Kinlochewe. I had to wade the burn there and the old chap who came with me would be standing on that ridge which he pointed out to me. You go to the back of that ridge and then back to your left you get back to the heights of Kinlochewe, a long long way out.

They actually buried him there and put this pile of stones on top and I believe and it must be just where he told them. I can see no evidence for it but I was very loath to dig the cairn up! They would put the story in a bottle and bury it underneath the cairn but I have never had the brass neck to smash a cairn down to see if there is a bottle underneath it. That's John Fergusons cairn.

This is only one of the ghost stories that people have told me connected with this. Ferguson was ill. It was his last illness and his wife was finding him difficult to nurse, but there was another relative in the house also helping to nurse. He woke up in the middle of the night, and called over to this woman and he said, "I have just seen what is going to happen. It was a lovely day and I was out on the hills, and a big crowd of people with me and then all of a sudden I was alone and it was a lovely day".

Now we are talking of February at Kinlochewe and according to my informant the day on which he was buried turned out to be lovely, one of those crisp winter sunny days, not a breath of wind and all the rest of it and that would be in the middle of a period of rough nasty weather on either side. So the suggestion is that this man had seen his own funeral.

This is another one at Kinlochewe. I put it up because it is on the Wills estate or at least Wills gave permission for it. Angus J.D. MacDonald, M.C. He won the cross in World War II against the Japanese and then he got another Military Cross in the terrorist uprising in Burma. He stayed on, Major MacDonald, M.C.

He was born at Kinlochewe, a widow's son and his mother worked as a house keeper on the Wills estate. He did very well at Dingwall Academy and went off to the war, got promoted and stayed on with the Gurkhas after the Second World War. His widow had an awful struggle. Eventually she got permission to build this and to take his remains back from the cemetery in the Far East where he had been originally buried.

There is an interesting story tied into that which was told to me by a gentleman called Bee Jay who wrote a number of books about Wester Ross. I was brought up in Kyle of Lochalsh and my grandparents stayed in Gairloch where I spent every summer and worked right through my student days. He was very much to the fore there, full of all sorts of stories and this particular one he told to me has to do with a man called Gillespie who had been a tea planter. He met MacDonald at the time of the communist troubles in Burma and Malaya.

I am unsure where they were but he had spoken to this young Scottish major. He passed him and said he would be back that week, but he never met him again. That was just before he was killed. This chap just happened to be driving his family some time in the 1950s down through Kinlochewe and noticed the cairn.

He stopped and went up to it and realised that he was looking at the cairn of the chap he had last spoken to in Burma four or five years previously.

Now that is me by the way, on the left in full cairn-finding gear. "Erected in 1867". This is the oldest standing stone. This is where we are moving on to a story about dogs.

This chap is a keeper and he was up with another keeper called John Ross in 1867. He was at Gruinards Estate up from Ardgay and this is on the ground of a sheep farmer. Alderson is buried in Kincardine Cemetery and you can find the information there about it.

Anyway they were up looking for hinds in January and came on a parcel of them and Ross had a dog tied to his belt. That seemingly was the practice. The dog was there for tracking down wounded deer. It wouldn't be one of those big deer hounds, a kind of collie cross he had.

Alderson shot and didn't seem to hit them so Ross lifted his gun to his shoulder and immediately fired. The two shots had almost gone at once but unfortunately the dog was startled by the first shot and took a jump and pulled Ross's gun round and Alderson was wounded in the head.

They took him down the hill unconscious, bleeding very badly but they were told there was no hope. He was an Englishman and his wife is mentioned on the stone. There are no Aldersons in the area now and nobody seems to know them. He did have a young family but it is quite possible that the girls in the family married locals from Ross and have now disappeared into the local population or they went back to the estate in Yorkshire.

Yet another dog one. This one is on what was known as the Mamore Forest. It is up Kinlochleven way, the Blackwater Reservoir and it is to Father MacConnachie. Father MacConnachie

was a priest in the Episcopal Church and he was very much involved in what was called the Oxford Movement in the middle years of the last century. He was a mission priest and the main complaint against him at the time was that his services were much too High Church.

About 1886 he came up to stay at a lodge with the Bishop of Argyll and the Isles and he was away on this particular day when MacConnachie went out for a walk. He took the bishop's two dogs with him. One was a large deer hound and the other a small Skye terrier. He walked a long way right up to Kinlochleven, that's from Ballachulish, up from North Ballachulish where the house is, up to Kinlochleven and then on to the hills, some considerable distance to where the Blackwater Reservoir is.

I didn't approach it from that angle. I was friendly with the gamekeeper who took me in one of these agrocats all the way, I didn't have to walk a step, right up more or less to the memorial. MacConnachie perished in a snow fall and the dogs stayed with him and they would not have discovered the remains quite so quickly if it were not for the dogs remaining with him. The dogs lived on until 1893. I have a photo of them in the file which I have got with me.

This one really interested me and it took me some time to discover it. Wester Fearn Estate is where the owner was killed by lightning on May 31st. I am not sure of that date, it looks to be 1899 or 97 or 93. I could find no trace anywhere in newspapers of this one.

This estate is between Edderton and Ardgay, and owned by Sir John Brook. This particular chap Davidson was out with another called McNab. They were out shooting crows on the estate in May and they were caught in a thunder storm. They weren't actually caught, they saw it coming on and McNab went off down to Wester Fearn, you can see the gamekeeper's house.

Davidson stayed up there and he didn't come home. There was a family of MacKenzie's in the house, shepherds, and the children went out and discovered the remains. The body was taken back down to Wester Fearn by cart.

They found his guns some distance away from where his body was and they think that he was holding one. It being metal and there was a lot of lightning about, they think he put the gun down to get away. He happened to be walking along beside a fence, probably a metal one, as in the late 1890s metal fences were beginning to appear.

John McNab said that when they were building the stables at Wester Fearn he had met Davidson maybe a couple of weeks before Davidson died. His face was as white as paper. Why? He had seen a cart coming down the hill as if there were a body on it going to a funeral and a large number of people going past. He told

McNab that story and McNab passed it on. Davidson had seen his own cortege coming down the hill.

That's the cairn, I am trying to make out the lettering. The stone is quite easy to find. That is me. I pose beside them, it is like a trophy to a large extent.

Now can anyone guess what that is? It is Ben Wyvis Estate, that is Loch Glass. It is called the Jackson Stone and I have seen little references to it occasionally and I was fortunate enough to get the whole story from a little old lady who had been brought up on the Wyvis Estate.

This lady knew this particular stone and the estate at the time was owned by a Mr Walter Jackson, who was a furniture manufacturer from England. They bought it in 1885 and they kept it on until the 1930s. Jackson happened to be visiting in 1896. He was coming from the wooded area and he was tipped out of his carriage at this point and landed in the water. He was badly cut but he survived and erected this memorial at the spot, a little brass plaque. Renovations on the road have almost made it impossible to find. I spent some time looking for it before I could take this photograph.

Now the date is there, I think it is 5/10/1896 but you won't make anything of the writing unless some of you realise it is in Greek. I couldn't make anything of the writing but I did take a note of the inscription and I sent it to the classics department in Glasgow University and the gentleman there came back with the translation. It said - "This roguish rock almost killed a craftsman and friend. He fell from his carriage into the water."

I wrote back to say thank you but who picks out an expression like "roguish rock", is there any sort of allusion to the classics there? The chap did some research on it and he said the quote is an adaptation of one from the Eleventh Book of the Odyssey where Sisyphus is pushing the roguish rock. A little private joke I suspect from their school days.

This one here is obviously a gravestone to John MacLennan who was killed by a stag. You will see the Latin inscription. It means - "This victor of many stags fell not to old age but to a stag."

This poor chap was killed by a stag up at Achnashellach and where the cairn stands is now deep in the forestry and I searched diligently for it on several occasions but I have not been able to find it, it may be that the trees are so thick there that the original cairn has been moved away or knocked over.

MacLennan was a native I think of the Ullapool area, or in that direction and had been a keeper for a number of years on the



## FAMILY TREE-ING

by Jonathan McColl

I am a committee member and co-editor of the journal at the moment but this article is written from my personal point of view, (illustrated by the use of the first person perpendicular) not the Committee's, and the only reason I have the unfair advantage of publishing it is that I'm the only person who wrote it. No-one else has submitted anything similar so far.

The main functions of the Highland Family History Society are obviously for members to be able to exchange information and collectively to own expensive tools for genealogical research like the I.G.I., fiche and film readers, O.P.R.s and so on. We are thus really a source-centre for members to employ in their researches. One major source which is extremely difficult to organise is the end-result of each member's activity: a collection of B/M/D certificates, medals, stories, pictures, card indices and so on concerned in his or her family's history.

The only real way to draw much of the facts together in an easy-to-comprehend form, aside from writing a book, is to draw up a family tree of some sort. The point of this article is to put forward the idea that the Society deliberately forms a collection of family trees in an organised way as a straightforward and standard set of relationships in Highland & Islands families. Not that we haven't started of course, in that we already have the nucleus in a set of wallet files each containing a submission from a member. There are computer lists, pedigree charts, stories, indexes, hand written, typed or photocopied, and all are kept in our archive in Farraline Park.

What format should we recommend? There is the Burke's Peerage format wherein each person in a family is listed with his or her children immediately following, indented one or two spaces. The children are separated by grandchildren and great-grandchildren scattered in there as well, indented more and more. Each line has a potted biography perhaps consisting only of dates and places, maybe with sources as well.

For instance:- John McColl m Ann Buchanan

Angus m Mary Leonard

Alfred

Clare

Ernest m Mildred Belden

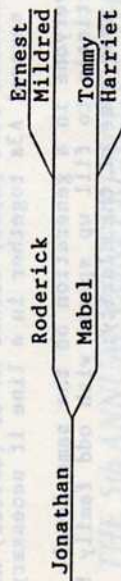
Christina m Donald McGugan

and so on. It's a very efficient way, easily understood in a computer file and easily amended when a previously ignored uncle is discovered to have had a crop of descendants after

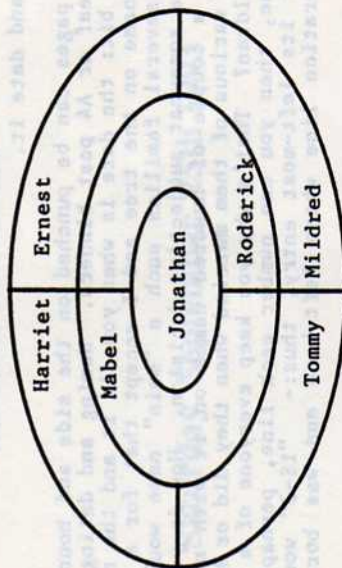
- 10 -

all. I dislike this method only because it looks boring and very daunting when more than a page long.

Pedigree lists are neat, listing all the direct ancestors of a person either off to one side like a fallen poplar or wrapped around in a series of concentric circles; eg.



or:-



These give an excellent statement of all the ancestors' surnames and any gaps in your knowledge are readily evident. Their disadvantages are that no collaterals are mentioned and dates mess up the tidiness if you add too many.

I also like John Durham's system of runs of print-out paper with dates down the side and vertical lists of parents on the level of their marriage year with their children placed on the levels of their birth years. When the kids get married, start other lists elsewhere down the page and join them to their birth entries with dotted lines. These lists give extraordinarily clear pictures of relations in time as well as by generation. Gaps in early families show up so you know to look for missing children who, if found, can be slotted in with no problem. Different families on other lists can be set side by side to continue the illustration, but oh what a lot of paper it all covers!

So what should the Society use for its volume of family trees? Burke's Peerage looks very off-putting, pedigree lists are tidy

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# My Heart's in the Highlands

THE 5th ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE  
SCOTTISH ASSOCIATION OF FAMILY  
HISTORY SOCIETIES

Saturday September 25th 1993

Hosted by the  
HIGHLAND FAMILY HISTORY SOCIETY



COMUNN SLOINNTÉARACHD  
NA GAIDHEALTACHD

but incomplete and the dateline system covers too much paper. My favourite is the bog-standard family tree showing all the descendants of one or two distant ancestors so that it looks more like a root system than leafy branches. Until I am swayed by argument or am over-ruled by Democracy-in-Action I shall recommend this method with qualifications:

- (a) use a standard size paper, either A4 or (better) A3 on its side gumming several A3s together in a line if necessary;
- (b) keep everyone in a generation on the same level, it does look more artistic to fill up spaces with odd family branches but it takes away some of the clarity;
- (c) index it, but on the back, not on a separate page, and with places as well as people;
- (d) name and date it.

A3 and A4 pages can be punched on the side and bound together in loose-leaf or A4 post binders. Naming and dating it is the other easy bit: the date is when you did it and the name is the "main" surname on the tree and I accept that for a large tree embracing several families such a "main" name would have to come from a somewhat subjective decision. How do you index it if it has a couple of hundred names on it with no rhyme or reason why various of them married when they did or had so many or few children? That's why you keep everyone of a generation on one line, then you can number each line, perhaps with the century of its left-most entry, thus:- "18-3" would be the third generation line whose left-hand end was born in 18 - something.

Has anyone some better ideas? There will be arguments of which I haven't thought that could sway the committee to favour one of the tree-types I rejected, or suggestions of a better indexing system. Perhaps we could Officially recommend anyone with access to a computer to use the LDS'S PAF or another specific piece of software? Eventually, I hope a standard will be picked and all members asked to submit copies of their own trees, dated and indexed, for filing. They could be up-dated at any time obviously, replacing or supplementing what is already on file.

Each person's own notes and all articles or queries in the journal would all be related to the trees and would bind everything together. As new trees come in, an enthusiastic committee member could be volunteered to collate the indices into a super-index, but perhaps of surname only, relating them to a main-name (with a sequence page if there are more than one) and generation level. These trees would become a centrepiece source document set in the H.F.H.S. archive. Perhaps in a hundred years or so someone will reprint them in a volume of the Scottish History Society series!



