



Newcastle Family History Society Inc

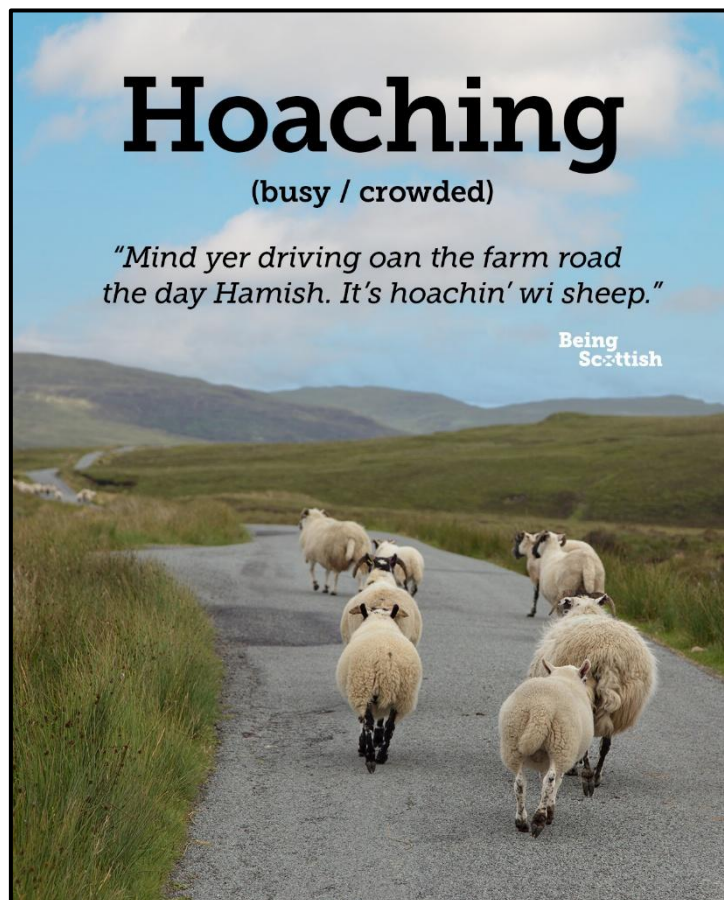
Newsletter of the Scottish Special Interest Group

No 12

Whitsunday 2026

Faillte !

Welcome to this Whitsunday newsletter!



From *Being Scottish* Facebook page - 20 March 2026

Twice Buried Mary Elphinstone

Submitted by Marilyn Bridges – article from *The Scots Magazine*, October 2024, author Pauline Cordiner



TWICE BURIED MARY

Hundreds of years ago, a beautiful young woman called Mary Elphinstone lived in Inverurie. When a new minister, Johnny, came to town, he was immediately taken by her, and within a year, the pair were married. Unfortunately, Mary quickly became ill. She began to fade away and the local doctor told Johnny there was nothing he could do for her, leaving him bereft.

After Mary's funeral, Johnny returned home to the manse. Meanwhile, in the local pub, everybody drank to Mary's memory. Expressing their concerns for Johnny, they wondered, had he arranged for somebody to guard the grave? In the corner of the pub, two men were listening. They drank up, tipped their hats to the funeral party, and off they went on the hunt for Mary's grave.

Soon, the men had dug up Mary's coffin, ready to make a quick buck from selling her body. She was lying peacefully, her arms crossed over her chest.

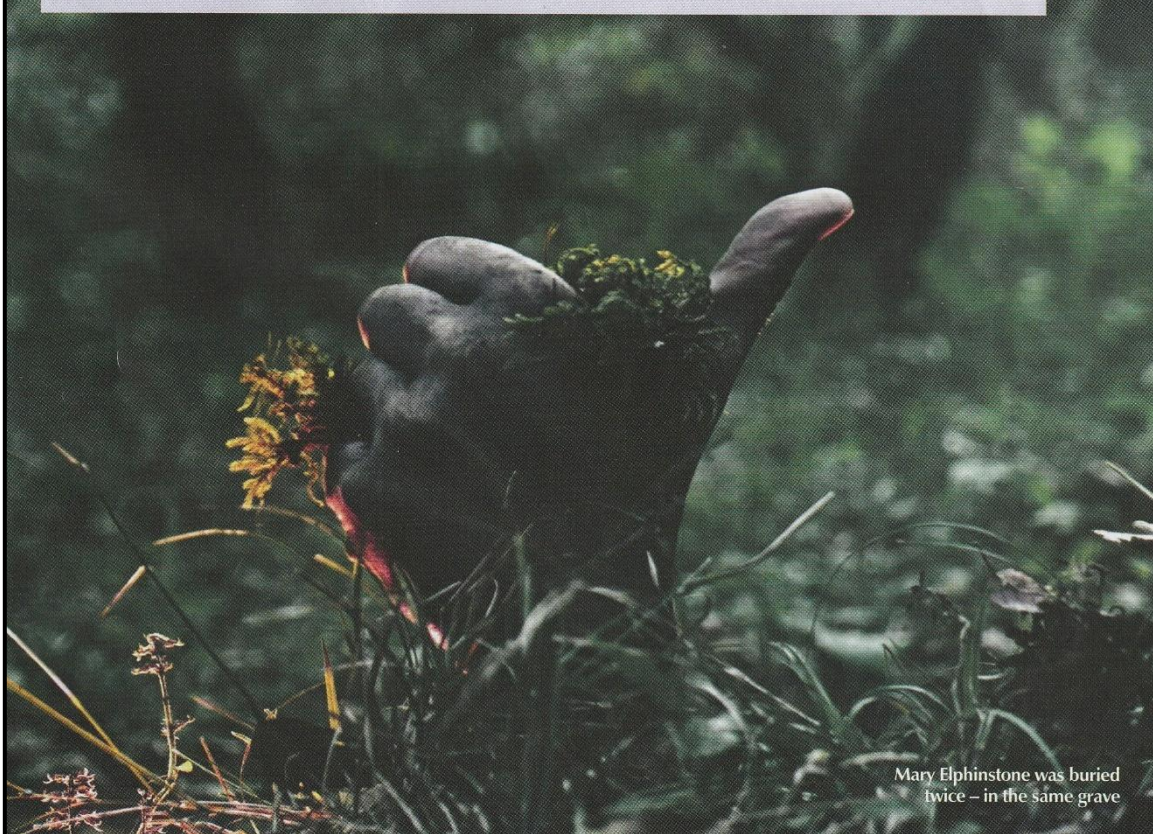
Immediately the men spotted a ruby on her finger. They tried and failed to pull it off. So, they took a saw to her hand and started to hack away.

Suddenly, Mary opened her eyes. She, in fact, wasn't dead but had simply been in a coma. Terrified, the men fled.

Mary began to make her way back to the manse, passing her own wake on the way. Arriving home to a locked door, she began to bang and bang, until Johnny answered. Seeing Mary standing in the moonlight, Johnny immediately fainted. When he came around, Mary was cradling his head in her lap, and he realised she really was still alive.

The pair never spent a minute apart the rest of their lives, and died within a few days of each other.

Buried together in the same spot Mary had originally been laid to rest in, legend has it that knocking can still be heard echoing through Inverurie kirkyard, coming from the fabled grave of Mary Elphinstone. »



Mary Elphinstone was buried twice – in the same grave

Simon Fraser: 15th Lord Lovat

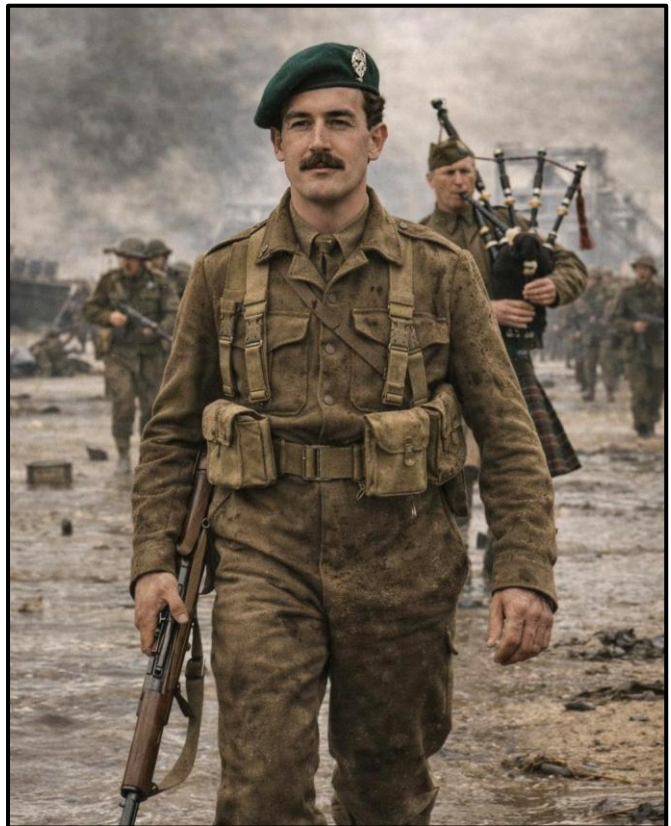
Article submitted by Ken Shilling. From Facebook page *Scottish Banter* - 17 March 2026

On this day in 1995, the last clan chief in history known to have led his men into battle died at the age of 83. Simon Fraser, the 15th Lord Lovat, was the Chief of Clan Fraser. He was the man Winston Churchill described, in a letter to Joseph Stalin, as ‘the mildest-mannered man that ever scuttled ship or cut a throat.’ The Scottish Commando chief whom Hitler placed a 100,000 Reichsmark bounty on, dead or alive.

He was a well-respected man that already had a serious war record before D-Day. The night before D-Day, Lovat addressed his men. He closed with this: ‘A hundred years from now, your children’s children will say - they must have been giants in those days.’

Then came 6 June 1944. Sword Beach, Normandy. As Brigadier of the 1st Special Service Brigade, Lord Lovat waded ashore leading 3,000 commandos into hell. And behind him came the sound that made the whole scene unforgettable. The English War Office had strictly banned bagpipes in battle. They said it was too conspicuous. Too dangerous. Lovat brought his personal piper, Bill Millin, and gave the order: ‘Play us ashore.’ When Millin hesitated, citing the regulations, Lovat smiled and replied: ‘Ah, but that’s the English War Office. You and I are both Scottish, and that doesn’t apply.’ So Millin played Highland Laddie, The Road to the Isles, and All the Blue Bonnets Are Over the Border.

Men fell around them. Bullets tore through the surf. The noise of artillery was deafening. And through it all, the unmistakable scream of the bagpipes. Captured German snipers later admitted they had Millin in their sights, but didn’t shoot him because they assumed he had gone completely mad.



Lovat’s mission was to reach Pegasus Bridge, where British glider troops were desperately holding on. The schedule said 1.00 pm. Lovat and his men fought their way off the beach and arrived at exactly 1.02 pm. He calmly walked up to the commanding officer under enemy fire and apologised for being two and a half minutes late. His commandos then marched across the bridge in the open. Lovat had ordered his men to wear their green berets instead of steel helmets, so the Germans would know exactly who was coming for them. Twelve men were shot through their berets that day. After that, they finally put their helmets on.

But they held the bridge.

For Clan Fraser, there was something almost mythic about it. Their ancestors had come from Normandy centuries earlier. Now their chief had led Highland soldiers back onto those same shores in one of the most decisive battles in modern history. Six days later, Lovat was given his last rites after being hit by friendly fire from a stray artillery shell. Against all odds, he survived. He returned home a hero.

He went on to serve in Parliament, judge cattle internationally, and manage his massive 250,000-acre Highland estate. But his final years were marked by grief. Two of his sons died within weeks of each other in 1994. Beaufort Castle, his ancestral home, had to be sold that same year.

When Lord Lovat died on 16 March 1995, an era died with him. Bill Millin later played at his funeral, bringing the story full circle.

The last clan chief who went to war.

The brigadier who brought bagpipes onto D-Day.

The Highlander with a price on his head.

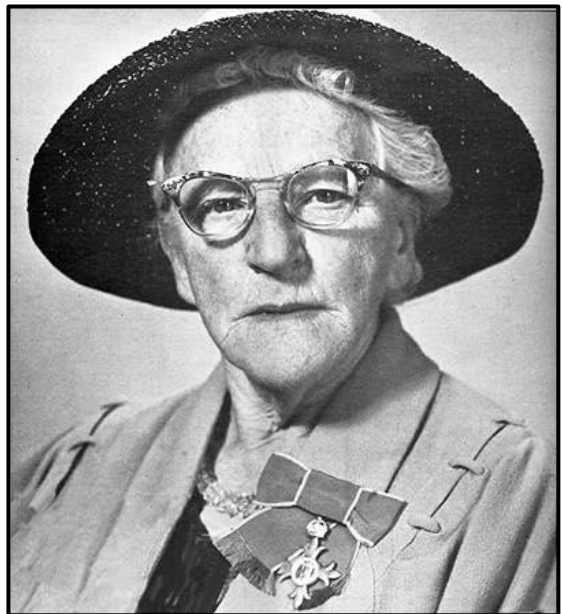
Scotland does not produce many men like that. 🏴󠁧󠁢󠁥󠁮󠁧󠁿 🏴󠁧󠁢󠁥󠁮󠁧󠁿

Georgina McCready nee Johnstone

Article submitted by Liza Moss on the NFHS Facebook page - 27 March 2026

Georgina McCready née Johnstone (1888-1980) originally trained in bookkeeping but changed careers to become a nurse before her family emigrated from her native Scotland to Australia. After satisfying Australian qualifications, she worked in various hospitals including as matron at Maitland and Cessnock hospitals. She further qualified as a midwife and a Tresillian nurse before becoming a supervisory nurse inspecting hospital standards across the state.

Influenced by Jessie Street and acting with Ione Nowland of the Nurses' Registration Board, Johnstone formed the NSW Nurses' Association on 27 March 1931, reacting to the fact that many hospitals did not meet legislated standards and nurses lacked industrial cover. By August the NSWNA was a registered trade and industrial union. The following year she married Samuel McCready, a dairy farmer. Georgina McCready's long career as an executive of the union saw improvements to conditions for nurses and expansion of the union. She retired in 1960 and was awarded an MBE in 1963. She died in 1980.



Read more at the Australian Dictionary of Biography:

<https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/mccready-georgina-10922>

Scottish Heraldry

Article by Lea Harris

An AI overview describes heraldry as the system of designing, displaying, and regulating hereditary symbols, known as armorial bearings or coats of arms, used for identification, distinguishing individuals, families, and institutions, especially in medieval times when knights needed to be recognised in armour. These symbols, like lions, crosses, and specific colours, appeared on shields, banners, and seals, evolving into a complex visual language still seen today in company logos, sports badges, and official insignia, managed by officials called heralds.

Why heraldry is useful?

Heraldry is all around us – on buildings, in stained-glass windows, on bookplates, school and club badges, regimental banners and the like, on signs at the entrance to towns, carved on chairs, engraved on family silver, depicted on pub signs ('The Such-and-Such Arms') and at various times during the year displayed on standards up and down Edinburgh's Royal Mile. In fact, heraldry is hard to avoid once you start to notice it.

Often, it is discounted as some sort of medieval relic, or obscure symbolism of no relevance today. But heraldry is alive, well and thriving, and no place has such a well-developed and tightly regulated system of heraldry as Scotland. It is also of central importance in genealogy, as a coat of arms is a pictorial shorthand of an individual's family tree.

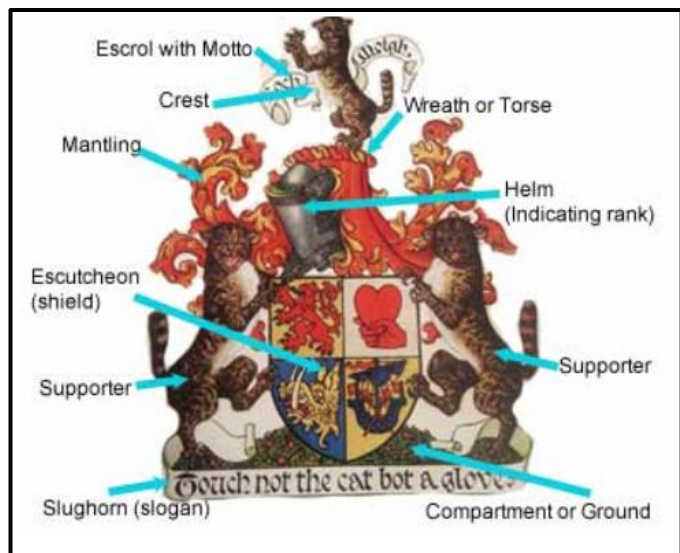
The components of an achievement of arm

It is best to start with an understanding of what a coat of arms consists of. Shown here is an 'achievement' of arms with its various components.

Shield – also known as the escutcheon, the main and most recognisable component of the arms, often used on its own

Helmet – the actual configuration of this denotes the rank of the armiger

Wreath – also called a torse, this has the same colours as the mantling (below)



Mantling – this takes the main colours of the 'livery' (the overall coat of arms, banners etc.). It probably started as protection from the sun in the Holy Land, where the crusaders realised that wearing a metal pot on the head in the blazing sun was an invitation to having your brains fried. They noticed that the locals wore a cloth, held down by a burnous (the origin of the wreath or torse, above), to keep the sun off. The mantling is usually depicted cut and tattered (in a very florid and stylised way) to indicate the sword-play of battle

Crest – this arises from the wreath (below) and is the element used in a Crest Badge; it was physically worn atop the helmet and served as a further identifier of the armiger

Motto – in Scottish arms, the motto should be at the top, but this is often ignored in, for example, civic arms on buildings

Coronet of rank – if the armiger is noble, the coronet will indicate baron, viscount, earl, marquess, duke, prince or sovereign

Supporters – not everyone merits supporters, but where granted they are usually animals, humans or mythical beasts of some sort

Compartment – in Scotland, the supporters always stand on a compartment or ground, which is sometimes adorned with the family's plant or flower Slughorn – as well as the motto at the top there may be a subsidiary slogan under the compartment, often the war-cry of the clan, for example

How did arms originate?

Arms started from the necessity to identify knights and nobles on the battlefield and at jousting tournaments after the invention of the barrel helmet, which completely covered the face. There are no examples of arms as we know them (unique, heritable designs on shields etc.) among the Normans because the Norman fighting men wore an open helmet with a nose-guard.

With the need to identify warriors uniquely, the practice arose of painting a high-contrast design possibly first on a banner, standard or other flag, and then on the linen surcoat worn over armour to keep it clean, hence the term 'coat of arms'. This naturally spread to the whole livery – the shield and even the horse's caparison. Shown is a particularly florid example of this in plate, showing James I of Scotland.



The earliest Scottish heraldic artefacts are from the late 1100s and early 1200s – the armorial seals of Allan, 2nd Hereditary High Steward of Scotland from 1177, showing the typical fess chequy of the Stewart coats of arms still seen in Scots heraldry today. The earliest documentary references to a 'King of Arms of Scotland' are said to be in an English exchequer record of 1297 (which the author has never seen), and one in an Exchequer Roll of 10 October 1337 for a payment of £32 6s. Scots for the making of seventeen armorial banners. But there are mentions of Lord Lyon in Scottish documents from 1318, and of other Scottish heralds in 1327 and 1333. The office of Lord Lyon dates at least to the reign of Robert Bruce in 1318, but the role probably grew out of that of Shennachie (Gaelic *seanachaidh*) from the ancient Celtic tradition. The earliest mention of a 'Lord Lyon King of Arms' is in 1388, with a record of a payment to '*Leoni regi heraldorum*'. However, as we have seen, heraldry was well established in Scotland before the year 1200.

Heralds and armorials

The Lord Lyon is the senior heraldic authority in Scotland with wide-ranging and statutory powers over the granting and usage of armorial bearings.

Heralds had ambassadorial status from the earliest times, and were trusted emissaries of the King with the equivalent of diplomatic immunity. As arms proliferated, someone had to keep a record of what these were, and ensure that there were no duplications. From this came a system of Armorials (pictorial and textual descriptions of coats of arms).

The first roll of arms was the mid-thirteenth century *Chronica Majora* by Matthew Paris. Another early armorial was the *Dering Roll* (c. 1270–80). It soon became the practice for heralds to swap these at battles, and they were copied for the benefit of other knights and nobles. Similarly, at jousting tournaments in later centuries, heralds controlled the fixture lists. These even crossed the continent – there are three folios illustrating the arms of some Scottish nobles and knights in the *Flemish Armorial de Gelré*, collated between 1370 and 1414.

Rules of heraldry

Here are some rules of Scottish Heraldry:

- Each coat of arms should be unique
- The arms should be distinguishable at a distance, so the majority of components should be large, simple and composed of a very few tinctures (colours)
- The main charge (design on the shield) should cover its field (the whole of the space available on the shield)
- There are two metals, four main tinctures (colours) and a few furs. The metals are Or (gold) and Argent (silver but depicted white); the four tinctures are Gules (red), Azure (blue), Vert (green), and Sable (black), plus the rare Purpure (purple), Tenne (tawny) and Murrey (sanguine); the main furs are Ermine, Pean, Vair and Potent, with variants of these.
- Metals may not be displayed on top of metals; for example, do not display an Or charge on an Argent field unless the charge is outlined in a tincture
- Do not display a tincture on top of another tincture; for instance, an Azure charge may not be displayed upon a Gules field unless the charge is outlined in a metal

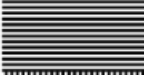
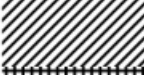
Metals		
	<i>Or</i>	
	<i>Argent</i>	
Colours		
	<i>Azure</i>	
	<i>Gules</i>	
	<i>Purpure</i>	
	<i>Sable</i>	
	<i>Vert</i>	
Furs		
	<i>Ermine</i>	
	<i>Ermines</i>	
	<i>Erminois</i>	
	<i>Pean</i>	
	<i>Vair</i>	
	<i>Counter-vair</i>	
	<i>Potent</i>	
	<i>Counter-potent</i>	

Table of the tinctures and furs copied from
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heraldry>

Of course, there are exceptions: a charge may overly a partition of the field and contrast cannot be avoided. When Godfrey of Bouillon was made King of Jerusalem, he chose arms with five crosses Or potent on a field of Argent.

How does Heraldry work?

Heraldry has its own language. This is based on the Norman French of the Angevin Kings of the time and stems from the need to describe arms in an unambiguous way when it wasn't possible to draw or paint them. This is known as the Blazon. As Arms became more elaborate, the language of their blazons acquired its own rules, vocabulary and syntax. It is necessary to get used to the vocabulary – and that comes with practice. (See above Rules of Heraldry)

Achieving a Coat of Arms - Why not just download a 'Family Crest' from a website?

- Those are not 'crests' but 'arms', or at least the shield component of the full achievement – the crest is a different element, and can be worn by anyone of the surname (Figure 1).
- There is no such thing as a 'Family Coat of Arms' in Scotland – any arms you see are almost certainly not yours, but those of someone of a similar surname, dead or living; Scottish heraldic law makes a Coat of Arms the property of one person at a time and the lineal descendants of that person. People with similar surnames, including those in cadet branches, will have similar arms differenced according to a set of rules. That make arms a bit like a pictorial family tree, but which branch would you be in? If you share a surname with the arms you have seen on a website or elsewhere, you MAY have a claim to them, or a derivative of them, but you cannot just assume them without the permission of the heraldic authority.

Getting arms properly

Strictly speaking, arms can only be granted to someone within The Lord Lyon's jurisdiction.

1. If you normally live or have property in Scotland, you can apply for a new grant of arms in your own right, or re-matriculate those of an armigerous (arms-bearing) ancestor.
2. If an ancestor of yours had arms granted in Scotland, these can be re-matriculated in your name if you are the lineal descendant, or with a difference (Figure 2) if you descend from a collateral branch.
3. If your ancestor came from Scotland, arms may be granted retrospectively, with a cadet matriculation to you and your heirs; even if not of direct armigerous descent.
4. Foreigners of Scottish descent may be able to have a relative in Scotland (or a Commonwealth country) obtain arms from The Lord Lyon and thereafter obtain a cadet matriculation, in which case both parties will have arms.

In all these cases you will require an application to the Lyon Court in Edinburgh, establish a pedigree and present a properly-constructed set of proofs.

This is just a very brief overview on Heraldry. For a lot more detailed information, refer to the website I used – Tartan Shop - <https://tartanshop.com/pages/all-about-scottish-heraldry>

Lieutenant General Sir Thomas Maitland

Article researched and written by Coreene Kennedy, Australia ©2026

It was just a glance



Poster from Annasi and Kadalagotu Literary Festival
held at the Mount Lavinia Hotel, 2017

That was all it took for a story so enchanting that 220 years later it still fascinates.

This is the story of Lieutenant General Sir Thomas Maitland, Lovina Aponsuwa

..... and a Tunnel

Before that tantalising story is told let's learn a little about Thomas Maitland.

Born into the Maitland Clan of Scotland as the second son of the 7th Earl of Lauderdale, Thomas was a professional soldier who saw action in India, Saint Domingue, Belle Ile (France). However his particular skills were in administration and these were honed throughout his career, more particularly in Ceylon and later Malta.

He was not always a popular man and was often described as a despot but he was also a fair man who earned the respect of many including the people of Ceylon (Sri Lanka).

Maitland had one philosophy that not only earned him local respect, it also enabled him to succeed in places where others had failed.

'Tact, tact, tact'; this was the text of Maitland's daily sermon to the service. 'Study life, study men; above all the men around you here in the East and as they are. Learn local manners, local customs, local habits, local religions, local prejudices. Not till you are at home in all these can you venture to move, still less to alter what is around you.'

Maitland arrived in Ceylon on 27 July 1805 as Governor and Commander in Chief.

His job was to dismantle the mess left by the First Governor, The Hon. Sir Frederick North.

Ceylon had only recently been wrested from the Dutch East India Company (1602-1796) and was still managed by The Honourable East India Company of England (1600 –1874).

It was also a divided country with the Kingdom of Kandy resisting British rule.

Rather than go to war against the Kandyan King he chose to focus on improving the economy of the British controlled areas.

His successes in Ceylon included:

- codified Ceylon law adding English law where appropriate
- established The Supreme Court
- centralised authority by reducing reliance on native chieftains
- streamlined the Civil Service
- improved irrigation and roads networks
- tightened regulation of the cinnamon monopoly

Most importantly he was respectful of local practices regarding the Caste system. On 1 June 1806, Maitland legislated that all religions were free to pursue their own form of worship without losing civil rights.

He was always concerned for the welfare of the people he governed. In Ceylon his instructions were: *'The sole object of Government is and always ought to be to ensure the prosperity of the island through increasing the prosperity and happiness of the natives.'*

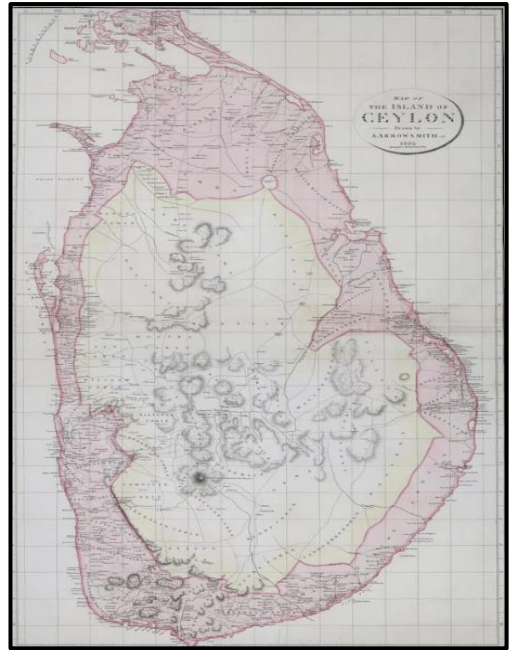
Acknowledged as a man who enjoyed luxury, he decided that the house that Governor North had lived in was not suitable.

He wrote to London – *'My own situation in one respect is exceedingly uncomfortable. I would have had no place to live in at all if Mr. North had not ordered the house I am now in, and which has been unroofed by lightning, to be repaired antecedent my arrival. As it is, it is an extra bad one, and will require constant repair, but I must have some place in the country without which nobody can go on.'*

I do not consider the house Mr. North lived in decent accommodation for any man.'

Without waiting for official permission from London, he set about having another built. He selected a spot 11 kms south of Colombo in an area named Galkissa. His house was built on Point de Galle. It is now known as Mount Lavinia.

The bungalow was sited on rocks about 30 metres above the ocean allowing for cool breezes to enter the house. It was constructed of wood and with a thatched roof.



Sir James Mackintosh, a friend of Maitland wrote in 1810 that it was ‘a bungalow of one storey, rustic on the outside, but handsomely laid out, and furnished beautifully.’

By 1825 Thomas Maitland’s ‘cottage’ was in ruins but the tunnel remained.

‘What tunnel?’ I hear you say. Ah yes, the Tunnel.....

That will have to wait because here enters Lovina.

Lovina’s father was Portuguese and her mother Singhalese.

She was slim with long black hair and dark brown eyes and around sixteen years old. Lovina’s parents were from the Rodiya caste, the lowest caste in the Singhalese system.

To better understand the story of Thomas Maitland and Lovina it is useful to know that the lives of the Rodiya caste was severely constrained and lacked economic freedom.

Rules included not being allowed to:

- draw water from a well, thereby relying on often polluted rivers and streams
- farm the ground around their homes
- build more than a back wall of mud with a lean to roofed with palm tree leaves
- have windows or doors for their homes
- although Buddhist they were forbidden to enter a Buddhist temple
- neither gender could wear any clothing above the waist or below the knee

They were forced to live by asking for alms, stretching skins to make drums, bury dead animals or as Lovina’s family did, become an entertainment troupe managed by her father.



Lithograph by Prince Alexei Soltykoff, 1841

So it was that his Troupe were hired to entertain the new Governor Thomas Maitland and his guests at the first official function.

The stage was set. The musicians began to play and in came Lovina.

We don’t have any identifiable paintings of her but Ernest Bowden (Author and Inventor 1859-1904) writing on ‘Types of Oriental Beauty’ in 1892, described the Rodiya women as having ‘dark expressive eyes,

well chiselled lips and long, dark slightly wavy hair. He said ‘There is in her face a touch of sadness as well as sweetness.’

In 1841, the Russian traveller writer and artist, Prince Alexei Soltykoff painted several pictures of the Rodiya women, saying of one of his models that ‘the girl’s charm was irresistible, whose figure, graceful movements and uncertain glance he still remembered.’

It seems that as soon as he saw her Maitland was smitten. He was 45, she 16. He had never married.

Nor, in spite of the millions of words written about him has there been any suggestion of other romantic liaisons.

Soon she was in a relationship with him. What did Lovina see in him?

Given the hierarchy of the times, the imbalance of power, did she have a choice?



Without Lovina’s side of the story, we cannot know if there was love between them.

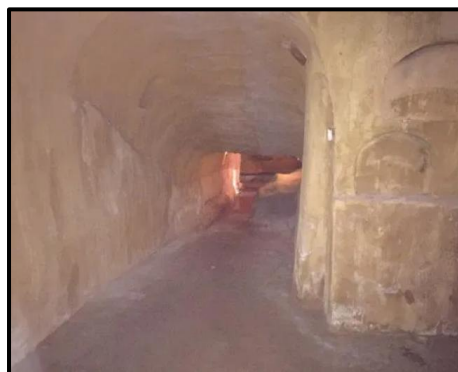
Except for the connection to Thomas Maitland, there would have been nothing known about Lovina. Her caste and social situation would have ensured that. What is known has been handed down by word of mouth. It is possible that the story has also been embellished, even fantasised over the centuries and modern publicists.

As the Governor of Ceylon and she an outcast from Society, their relationship had to remain secret. If discovered the British in Ceylon and Britain would have scorned him.

His authority as Governor would have been severely compromised.

Ever resourceful, Maitland had a tunnel constructed. It led from the cellars under his house into the garden of the hut she and her family lived in.

Lovina was able to come and go in secret. The relationship lasted for six years.



Aspects of the ‘Tunnel’ Photos: Mt Lavinia Hotel publicity

The original tunnel was sealed up in 1920s but appears to have been ‘found’ again.

It is said that he named his house ‘Mt Lavinia’ in her honour.

If that didn’t tell the gossips what they had already perceived was indeed fact, the servants and staff would have known. Eventually news of his clandestine relationship reached England.

In 1811 he was recalled 'Home' with 'ill health' as the reason for his sudden departure.



Before he left, he was presented with this Candelabrum.

The Maitland Centrepiece:
A Magnificent Regency
Silver Gilt Candelabrum

ENGRAVED:

Presented to Lieutenant
General the Right Hon.ble Thomas Maitland, late
Governor of Ceylon
by the Civil and Military
officers who served under
him in that Colony

Description

The shaped triangular base supporting three seahorses set with a plinth with three sides, decorated alternately with a frieze of Indian elephants, an engraved coat-of-arms within military trophies, and an engraved presentation inscription; all supporting a waterleaf baluster flanked by three stylised dolphins and set with three bifurcated candle arms to support six candle sockets, each with removable nozzle, all surmounted by a figure of a lady wearing a turban and holding a herald's staff in one hand and a laurel wreath in the other, next to an oval shield and a cornucopia, *fully marked, the base stamped*, mark of Paul STORR, London, Rundell Bridge et Rundell, Aurifices et Principis Walliae Regentis Britannias; 34¼ in. (87 cm) high; 872 oz. (27,122 gr.)

Maitland did do some good for the Rodiya caste. He decreed that:

- they could have doors and windows in their houses
- gave them the right to cover their bodies as they chose

When Maitland left in 1811, he was 52 and she approximately 22 years of age.

Were there babies from the liaison? If so, who raised them?

There are many apocryphal stories around Lovina. One is that he gave her a large piece of land in present-day Attidiya. If he did do so, was it to provide her with a better life? Was it to atone for his guilt at using and then leaving her? Without Records or Title Deeds there is no evidence.

There is a story that, so beset with grief at Maitland's departure she rushed to a cliff and threw herself over. There is NO proof of this ever occurring.

Sadly, we know nothing more of Lovina.

The township of Galkissa has been renamed Mt Lavinia. Was it in her honour?

Having been repeatedly refurbished and changed hands often, the Mt Lavinia Hotel is today a jewel in the Crown of Sri Lanka and a Select Member of the most Famous Hotels in the World.

The stories associated with the hotel and its beginnings are not always accurate.

What does it matter?

After all, who doesn't enjoy a good romance?

Maitland went on to have an extraordinary career as an Administrator for the British Government. However, it was noted that after Ceylon his demeanour changed. By the time he was Governor of Malta his temper was brusque and more autocratic. He had lost the gentle aspect of his character. Had it been left behind in Ceylon with Lovina?



Photo courtesy of QANTAS Publicity

References and acknowledgments

Ceylon Today, article by Shanuka Kadupityage

<https://www.worldgenweb.org/lkawgw/rodiya.html>

<https://www.mountlaviniahotel.com/>

<https://www.christies.com/en/lot/lot-5251972>

Do you know the answer?

See last page to find out if you're right



This castle is said to be one of Scotland's most haunted. What is it?

- ☐ Fyvie Castle near Aberdeen
- ☐ Glamis Castle in Angus
- ☐ Brodick Castle on the Isle of Arran
- ☐ Eilean Donan Castle in the Scottish Highlands

The Isle of Skye

Written by Kirstie Carrick. Photos taken by Kirstie Carrick in 2013, unless indicated otherwise.

Skye is a very popular tourist destination with an interesting geological and historical background. Skye is just off the west coast of Scotland about half-way up. It is an irregularly shaped island, about 50 kms long, and looks a bit like a lobster. It is the largest of the Inner Hebrides at 1,656 km². Skye is in the Highlands Council local government area, and the Skye and Lochalsh district. The capital is Portree, but there are other villages, like Dunvegan, Staffin and Uig in the north and Armadale, Carbost and Broadford in the south.

In the central area of the island are the Cuilins. These are dramatic basalt mountains and include 12 Munros: that is a mountain over 3,000 ft (or 914.4 m). Scotland has 282 Munros and 226 Munro Tops (which are also over 3,000 ft, but

lower than the nearby primary mountain). These were all documented by Sir Hugh Munro and published as a table in the September 1891 *Scottish Mountaineering Club Journal*. The table is updated on an irregular basis, as more accurate surveys are carried out. Some are included because their summit is hard to reach but is under 3,000 ft. By the way, a peak between 2,500 and 3,000 ft is a Corbett, and between 2,000 and 2,500 ft is a Graham. There are only two Corbetts on Skye.



Map of Skye (Colin Baxter Photography)

a Corbett, and between 2,000 and 2,500 ft is a Graham. There are only two Corbetts on Skye.

There are three peninsulas jutting out of the island to the north. The north-easterly is the Trotternish, also basalt, with some spectacular scenery.

Right at the tip of the peninsula is Duntulm Castle, once a MacDonald stronghold. The bee-hive-like structure is a memorial. The inscription reads:

This cairn
is to commemorate the Macarthurs,
hereditary pipers to
the MacDonalds of the Isles
During the 18th century
Their School of Piping stood at nearby Peinco
*“Thig crìoch air an t-saoghal
Ach mairidh gaol is ceol”*
(The world will end
but love and music endureth)



Duntulm Castle and Memorial



Part of the Quiraing

The Trotternish Peninsula includes the Quiraing, a series of rock pinnacles and peaks on the east side of the peninsula. On the coast is Kilt Rock, a 230 ft (70 m) cliff with a column-like structure in the rock that looks like the folds of a kilt. A burn (stream) falls into the sea here in a very scenic way, made all the more evocative when a bagpiper started busking nearby, which he apparently does regularly.

Further south from there is the Old Man of Storr (or *Bodach an Stoir*), a rock pinnacle left behind as The Storr, the mountain behind it, and weathered away from it. It is 48 m tall, the height of 11 double-decker buses stacked up. One can walk up to it, but it is a long steep walk, further than it looks from the road.



The Old Man of Storr



Kilt Rock and Piper

The middle of the three northern peninsulas is Waternish, separated from Trotternish by Loch Snizort, and on the west Loch Dunvegan defines the east coast of the Duirnish peninsula and contains the island of Isay. There are impressive sea cliffs almost 1,000 ft high (300 m) in this area. Further south, on the west of the island is the wide Minginish peninsula and the smaller Strathaird. The southern extension of the island is Sleat, with Torridonian sandstone and boggy lower ground.

Skye connects to the mainland by means of the Skye Bridge between Kyleakin on Skye and Kyle of Lochalsh on the mainland, opened in 1995. There is still a ferry to Mallaig from Armadale in the south of the island. There is an airstrip at Broadford on the east side of the island. Uig is the port for ferries to the Outer Hebrides, on the west side of the Trotternish peninsula.



Skye Bridge from Am Ploc lookout

(<https://www.undiscoveredscotland.co.uk/skye/bridge/index.html>)

There have been dinosaur fossils found on Skye. In fact, more than ten percent of Mid-Jurassic dinosaur species and over 15% of such dinosaur sites are on Skye. It is a very important palaeontological area, for footprints and fossilised bone. The Staffin Fossil Museum (formerly known as the Staffin Dinosaur Museum) is at Staffin in the north of the island on the Trotternish peninsula (<https://www.isleofskye.com/skye-guide/history/jurassic-skye>).



Possible Iron Age Hill Fort on the west coast of Skye

There is evidence of human occupation in the late Upper Palaeolithic period (last part of the Old Stone Age) which ended about 12,000 years ago. It is possible that hunter-gathers followed the retreat of the ice as it withdrew from Europe, leading up to about that time. There are a fair few possible Mesolithic sites around the island, with an excavation at Staffin which dates that site to about 7th millennium BC. There are a variety of sites on Skye that date from the Neolithic onwards including a chambered cairn (2 or 3 millennia BC), a Bronze Age settlement and an Iron Age promontory fort.

During the Iron Age, the inhabitants of Skye were probably Pictish. Some Pictish symbol stones have been found on Skye and Raasay (small island between Skye and the mainland). A manuscript written in the late-7th century (*Adomnan's Life of Columba*) reports that St Columba visited Skye. Irish records tell of some events on Skye in the 7th to 8th centuries. The period of Norse settlement spanned from the 9th century until the Treaty of Perth in 1266.

An artificial canal at Rubha an Dunain, has been determined to be of Norse origin. The site is on an uninhabited peninsula south of the Cuillin Hills. Archaeologists also unearthed stone-built quays and found the remains of a boat in the loch. In addition, a hoard of Viking silver was found near the Old Man of Storr in 1890. The coins date from about 935 AD.



Viking canal at Rubha an Dunain (Wikipedia)

After Somerled defeated the Norse forces in the 12th century, several clans came to dominate Skye. The MacDonald Lordship of the Isles held Skye until the late 15th century. The MacDonalds of Sleat were in the south, with the MacLeods on the Trotternish peninsula. Later, Clan MacKinnon held land centered on Strathaird (the wee peninsula north of Sleat) and a late 15th century castle near Kyleakin was a MacKinnon stronghold. The MacNicols were also associated with Trotternish and there were many of the MacInnes clan about Sleat.



Dunvegan Castle (<https://www.dunvegancastle.com/>)

Meanwhile, the MacLeods developed Dunvegan Castle at the southern end of Loch Dunvegan which was their seat from the 13th century. A curtain wall to secure the small rocky peninsula was built first, along with a tower house, and there were additions and alterations over the following centuries. In the 19th century the castle was remodelled in a mock-Medieval style, unifying the five separate buildings from earlier periods. It has been continuously occupied for about 800 years, by the one family.

The Castle is still owned and occupied by the 30th Chief of Clan MacLeod, Hugh Magnus MacLeod of MacLeod. It is open to the public from April until mid-October. See the web-site above. The estate has amazing gardens and grounds plus there is a nearby seal colony that boats take visitors to see.



The Round Garden



The Walled Garden

Inside the castle several clan heirlooms are on display: the Dunvegan Cup, Sir Rory Mor's Horn and the Fairy Flag.

This photo (borrowed from Wikipedia) was taken before 1927. The Dunvegan Cup dates to about 1493. It is a ceremonial vessel of wood decorated with silver mountings, about 27 cm tall standing on four legs. It is square at the top and rounded at the bottom. Acquired by the MacLeods in the 16th or 17th centuries, it was created in Ireland. Sir Rory's Horn is a drinking horn, dating to the 16th century, or perhaps as far back as the



MacLeod heirlooms (Wikipedia)

10th century. It is customary for a new Chief of the Clan to prove his manhood by drinking the horn full of wine. There are several legends associated with the Fairy Flag, the obvious being that it was the gift of a fairy lover of an early Lord and that it would save the Clan from destruction if waved in Battle, but that its powers would be extinguished if waved without need. In fact, it is thought to be a square of gold or yellow silk from Constantinople or Syria, apparently dated to the 4th to 7th centuries AD and obtained by the MacLeod's ancestor in the 11th century. Possibly it was some sort of religious relic and the story has changed over time.

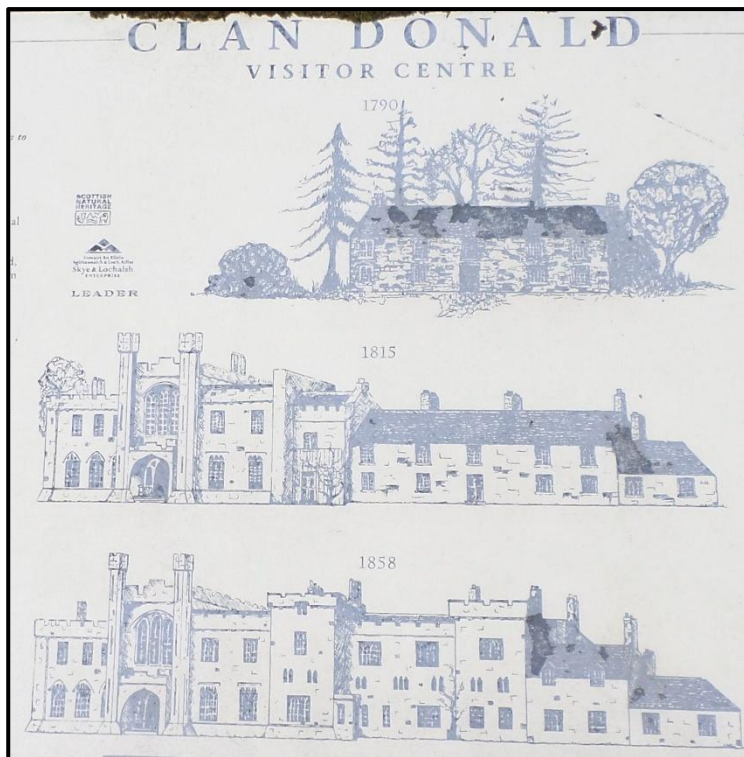


Diagram of expanding castle (Information board at Armadale Castle)

The other great clan of the Island is the MacDonalds of Sleat, who were based at Armadale Castle (in the south) until the mid-19th century. A mansion house was built in the 1790s, possibly replacing an old Tower House defensive castle. In 1815 a Scottish Baronial style addition was built next to the original house. In 1858 there was a great fire after which the central part of the Mansion House was replaced in Baronial style, but not so elaborate as the earlier extension. By the late 20th century the place was crumbling, possibly due to the after-effects of the fire, the Baronial extension (left side) had to be mostly demolished, the later central section was stabilised, and the original Mansion House section (the right-hand side) was restored to house a Museum of the Isles. There is a Clan MacDonald Centre there now.



The Baronial Entrance (after the fire)



Flora MacDonald's grave

There are other ruined castles on the island, including two more MacDonald castles near Armadale, Knock Castle and Dunscaith Castle.

Another story associated with Skye is the escape of the Bonnie Prince, Charles Stuart, after his defeat at Culloden in 1746. Disguised as a servant, he travelled with Flora MacDonald to Skye. The folk song 'The Skye Boat Song' remembers the event.

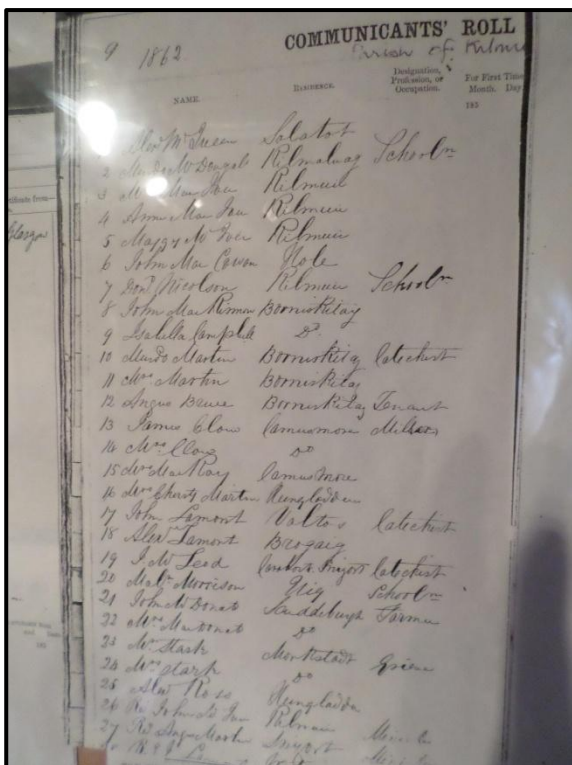
Flora MacDonald spent some time in the American colonies, but returned to Skye later, meeting with Dr Samuel Johnson during his tour to the Hebrides in 1773. Flora died in 1790, at 68 years of age and is buried at the Kilmuir graveyard on the Trotternish Peninsula. An impressive monument was erected on her grave in the Victorian era.

In the 18th century kelp harvesting became a significant supplement to crofting life on Skye, but the market collapsed in the early 19th century, and this along with the potato famine and Clearances led to thousands of evictions from the island.

On Skye, unrest stirred up by evictions led to what became known as 'the Battle of the Braes', in 1882, near the village of Camastianavaig (about 5 km south east of Portree). What happened was that local crofters were facing eviction and when the Sheriff Officer from Portree was sent along to hand out eviction notices, an angry group of crofters forced him to burn the notices. He retreated and called for reinforcements. Thus, 50 police were sent up from Glasgow, but they were faced with a mob of about 100 angry men, women and children. These people were armed only with sticks and stones, according to Wikipedia, so the altercation ended with a few injuries and five men arrested. The unrest was noted however, and it was this event that was instrumental in the creation of the Napier Commission, which enquired into the crofters' concerns, and ultimately created the Crofters (Scotland) Act of 1886. The Act introduced security of tenure for crofters in the crofting counties (the

northern ones) and allowed for crofters to apply for independent rent assessment from a Crofters Commission, which later became the Scottish Land Court. There is a folk song that commemorates the Battle of the Braes and a monument near the site.

While we were circling the Trotternish Peninsula we called at the Museum of Island Life which has lots of information about crofting life and fishing, all housed in replica black-houses and farm buildings. Of interest to family historians was a list of communicants at one of the local churches in 1862.



NAME	RESIDENCE	Designation, Profession, or Occupation	For First Time
1. Mr. W. Macdonald	Salisbury		
2. Mr. J. Macdonald	Salisbury	School	
3. Mr. J. Macdonald	Salisbury		
4. Mr. J. Macdonald	Salisbury		
5. Mr. J. Macdonald	Salisbury		
6. Mr. J. Macdonald	Salisbury		
7. Mr. J. Macdonald	Salisbury	School	
8. Mr. J. Macdonald	Salisbury		
9. Mr. J. Macdonald	Salisbury		
10. Mr. J. Macdonald	Salisbury		
11. Mr. J. Macdonald	Salisbury		
12. Mr. J. Macdonald	Salisbury		
13. Mr. J. Macdonald	Salisbury		
14. Mr. J. Macdonald	Salisbury		
15. Mr. J. Macdonald	Salisbury		
16. Mr. J. Macdonald	Salisbury		
17. Mr. J. Macdonald	Salisbury		
18. Mr. J. Macdonald	Salisbury		
19. Mr. J. Macdonald	Salisbury		
20. Mr. J. Macdonald	Salisbury		
21. Mr. J. Macdonald	Salisbury		
22. Mr. J. Macdonald	Salisbury		
23. Mr. J. Macdonald	Salisbury		
24. Mr. J. Macdonald	Salisbury		
25. Mr. J. Macdonald	Salisbury		
26. Mr. J. Macdonald	Salisbury		
27. Mr. J. Macdonald	Salisbury		
28. Mr. J. Macdonald	Salisbury		

List of Communicants, 1862

In terms of the economy in the present day, the largest sector is public – administration, health and education. Next comes tourism: hotels, restaurants and attractions. Whisky is distilled on the island, including Tallisker and Torabhaig. Crofting is still important, today there are about 2,000 crofts on Skye, but only about 100 are big enough to support a crofter without other income (Wikipedia). Other industries include fishing, renewable energy production (there is a windfarm



Museum of Island Life

It is estimated that about 30,000 people were evicted from the island between 1840 and 1880 (Wikipedia). The 1841 census shows 23,827 people on the island, which dropped to under 10,000 by 1891, and remained between 7,000 and 8,000 throughout the 20th century, only increasing in the 21st century to a population of about 10,500 at the 2022 census. Skye was overwhelmingly Gaelic speaking, over 75% in the 1901 and 1921 censuses and even in 2001, 31% reported speaking Gaelic.



Portree Harbour

near Dunvegan) and arts and crafts. There is a Scottish Gaelic College '*Sabhal Mor Ostaig*', near Kilmore in Sleat (the south-western peninsula).

As mentioned earlier, Portree is the main town of the island. It has a quaint harbour and holds an annual Highland Games, which just happened to be on one of the days we were there. The games were held on the hilltop behind the town, and I think there were the ruins of a castle, or at least a watch tower, up there.

Massed Pipe Bands, Portree



Tossing the caber

The Highland Games began with a march through the town by the Pipe Band to the Town Square where they played a lament at the War Memorial, and then marched away again. The next day, the events ran all day, but we only called in later in the day to see some caber-tossing and sack heaving.

Skye is noted for its cuisine sourced locally. We had some lovely meals while in Portree, here is a Cranachan dessert (cream, oatmeal and raspberries).

There are several places on the island that are useful for people tracing family from Skye. The Skye and Lochalsh Archive Centre in Portree has useful records; it holds archival material relating to Skye and Lochalsh from the 17th century onward. Look at highlifehighland.com and there is a Facebook page: *Skye and Lochalsh Archive Centre*, which has regular events and livecasts. Also, the Clan MacDonald Centre at Armadale, is useful if one is searching for anyone associated with the MacDonald estate lands.



Cranachan dessert

There is a webpage devoted to tracing family history on Skye and Raasay: <https://skye-roots.co.uk>. This site is based on 30 years of research by a Skye woman, Norma MacLeod, who has a huge database of genealogical information. [Isleofskye.com](http://isleofskye.com) has a Family History page, which refers to Norma MacLeod and also Marjorie McInnes, both now contactable through Skye-roots.

There does not seem to be a specific Skye Family History Society, but Skye is included in the Highlands Family History Society, based in Inverness, which covers the administrative district that includes Skye, see highlandfhs.org. However, I am told this group may not be operating now.

DNA studies of Skye populations don't seem to be as broad as in Orkney and Shetland, but I have found that the Associated Clan MacLeod Societies has run a Y-DNA project and is also looking at at-DNA and mt-DNA. You can find their page online. They report that MacLeod men are a genetically diverse group of descendants of Viking and Celtic people who have intermarried over the centuries. There is a paper in the *Journal of Genetic Genealogy*, issue 131, Winter, 2025.

The Clan MacDonald USA webpage for BigY700 Results, presents all the MacDonald results within the R1a and R1b groups and their SNP streams. Some of the MacDonald BigY700 results show the distinction between Keppoch and Sleat groups of MacDonalds, due to divergence after the CLD56 SNP. The page 'Descendants of Somerled: DNA Evidence' has a family tree of (genealogically substantiated) descendants of Somerled down 28 generations to 20 descendant lines, including MacDonald, MacDougall, MacDonnell, MacDaniel and MacKean surnames.

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www.undiscoveredscotland.co.uk/skye/bridge/index.html

Wikipedia: Isle of Skye (and various other search terms)

George Something

Mel Woodford found this delightful entry on the *Scotland's People* Facebook page on 10 April 2026



Governor Lachlan Macquarie

Article by Lea Harris. The following was posted on 1 February 2026 on the Facebook page *Lochaber and North Argyll Family History* which was shared from the Facebook page *Scottish Histories*

31 January 1762: The birth on the Isle of Ulva of Scottish military officer and colonial administrator Lachlan Macquarie. He would become known as ‘The Father of Australia’.

He received his education at the Royal High School in Edinburgh and enlisted in the army in 1776, where he became a junior officer in the 84th Regiment of Foot. His military service took him to North America, Egypt, and India, and by 1805, he had attained the rank of colonel of the 73rd Regiment of Foot. In November 1807, Macquarie wed his cousin, Elizabeth Henrietta Campbell.



In April 1809, he was appointed as the Governor of New South Wales, tasked with restoring order following a rebellion against the former governor, William Bligh, who is more famously known for his role as captain of HMS *Bounty* during the notorious mutiny. Macquarie held the governorship until 1821 and made significant contributions during his administration that helped shape Australia into its modern form. Notably, he was the first individual to officially use the term ‘Australia’ in a document in 1817.

Macquarie was instrumental in shaping urban planning within the colony. His influence on the evolution of modern Sydney was profound, as he laid out the foundational design of the contemporary city centre, established Hyde Park as Australia’s inaugural public park, supervised the construction of numerous public edifices along Macquarie Street, and planned the layouts of several settlements that now form part of Western Sydney.

Additionally, he commissioned the design of a street plan for Hobart. A proponent of exploration, Macquarie sanctioned the 1813 expedition that successfully crossed the Blue Mountains, marking the first British passage through the area. He also initiated the founding of Bathurst, the first inland British settlement in Australia. In his efforts to foster morality and order, Macquarie advocated for the humane treatment of ex-convicts, referred to as emancipists, appointing them to significant governmental roles and granting them substantial land allocations.

He expressed a commitment to the fair treatment of Aboriginal peoples, establishing the first school for Aboriginal children in 1815; however, in 1816, he issued orders that resulted in the Appin Massacre, which affected the Gundungurra and Dharawal peoples during the conflicts known as the Hawkesbury and Nepean Wars.

Lachlan Macquarie passed away in London in 1824 and was laid to rest on the Isle of Mull.

An addendum to the post stated that in later years he acquired an estate at Salen on Mull.

The Outpost

An interesting article by Alex Garrick-Wright found by Mel Woodford on the *Shetland Islands of Opportunity* website. Although it is dated 27 August 2018, you can still visit the Outpost.

Australia might be 10,000 miles away from Shetland, but you can get there in about half an hour thanks to one enterprising expat and his Outpost. In just a short journey, you can find wallabies, home-made cider, pigs and goats, and even a music festival - Pigstock - with a distinctly Aussie flavour.

East Burra is already a brilliant place to visit, with unparalleled scenery, friendly locals, and a number of stops on the venerable Shetland Craft Trail. However, its best-kept secret is the Outpost, a tiny slice of down under courtesy of Tasmanian expat Dave Kok.

The Aussie flag fluttering in the brisk Burra breeze lets the weary visitor know that the Outpost is open. The building itself is like something from another world; a wooden *portakabin* transformed into an incredible little bar, chock-full of mementos and souvenirs of Australia, books about antipodean wildlife and nature, art and postcards all over the walls. Everything feels (and is) hand-made, salvaged and cobbled together. Behind the tiny bar is the man himself, Dave Kok, with a smile and a demijohn of his delicious homebrew cider.



The Outpost exists because of Dave's passion and hospitality; it's not a licensed premises, and it doesn't actually sell anything. Dave hands over a cider or coffee without thought of payment, because as far as he's concerned, if you're in the Outpost, you're a guest in his home. Given that the Outpost is literally a stone's throw from his front door, you technically are. There's a donation box for any contributions towards the running of the place, but the Outpost isn't a business, or a charity. It's a labour of love.

Some of the Outpost's most famous residents are outside, however. Two huge, friendly *kunekune* pigs, a sturdy New Zealand breed, are always pleased to see folk, and to receive a handful of feed (which is available from a convenient box). There's also Toffee the dog, a trio of goats, and the most recent additions: a pair of wallabies.



Ned and Kelly (named for the famous Aussie outlaw/folk hero), are the UK's northernmost marsupials. A particular Tasmanian breed that thrives in that UK's changeable climate, the pair have fast become a popular addition to the Outpost, peacefully sharing an enclosure with the goats. Dave's plans for the future include expanding the menagerie to include emus and sugar-gliders — an incredibly cute species of gliding possum.



Pigstock 2018

While the Outpost's business-as-usual already marks it out as one of Shetland's most unique attractions, this summer's Pigstock festival surely stands out. A day-long festival of music, entertainment, games and prizes for the whole family — for free.

Dave Kok has considerable experience of organising large events and festivals, both in his native Tasmania and in Shetland, where he ran the popular *Vunkfest* music festival for a number of years. He and his crew of friends and family worked tirelessly to build the stage and set up gazebos in an adjacent field; organise a dozen artists and their equipment, arrange for transport and shuttle buses; and, importantly, stock up on the homebrew cider.

'It was always a thing I wanted to do,' he said. 'I liked the look of that hill up there and I thought "Wow, would be cool to do an open-air thing!" Used to do it back home a lot, don't really do it much in Shetland. So I thought "Yep, cool; bring it on".'

The festivities kicked off at 12 pm, slightly hampered by the miserable weather which had already caused the bouncy castle to be dismantled. Still, there was plenty to keep the kids occupied, with face-painting, soft play, ride-on toys, tombolas and a miniature treasure hunt; when you could get them away from the animals. The parents contented themselves with drinks in the Outpost, and Dave's wild yarns.

As the day progressed, the weather cleared up and more and more visitors began to arrive. Music was laid on all day, with a variety of acts covering pop, folk and heavy metal to make sure all tastes were catered for. Shuttle buses ferried visitors from the car park at the nearby Bridge End Hall and Lerwick to and from the festival, and a constant rotation of volunteers in their official Pigstock shirts kept the bar running like a well-oiled machine all day and night.

'Yeah, it was fine,' Dave said with an air of classic Tasmanian nonchalance. 'I don't feel it was a big deal; just make a few phone calls, slap it together, build a stage.'

Everything about the festival was big and unique; especially the entertainments. The hotdog eating contest drew a large crowd, many of whom were eager to witness their first experience of competitive eating. This was followed by a delightfully messy find-the-gummy-bears-in-a-plate-of-cream game, and a raffle of prizes generously donated by local businesses, with all proceeds going to the SMA Trust, for spinal muscular atrophy.

Into the evening, this little part of Burra had turned into a full-blown music festival, with a huge crowd of fans rocking into the night, throwing themselves into the mosh, or just hanging out at the Outpost, which was going through more cider than anyone could have believed. Ever the conscientious neighbour, Dave made sure that the music wrapped up at 10:30 pm, and buses made sure that everyone made it up the road in safety, with information for onward travel freely available. Many, however, chose to stay, and the revelry continued through the night.

Dave was pleased with how the events had gone, and was already looking forward to the inevitable Pigstock 2.

‘I feel it’s gone pretty good, yeah,’ he said. ‘I think everyone who’s here has enjoyed it ... It’s just the prep. I mean, we wanted to try and do the bouncy castle for the kids, and we had to cancel that.

‘So yeah; bigger and better next year, if we’re looking at doing next year, or every second year. But there’s definitely gonna be another one. The only way is up, baby.’

Shetland Islands of Opportunity website - <https://www.shetland.org/blog/wallabies-in-shetland-a-surprising-attraction>

Dictionaries of the Scots Language

Article by Lea Harris.

On a Facebook post on *Scottish Indexes Group*, on 24 February 2026 Lynda Shaw asked could anyone help with the meaning of a phrase. She stated that in the Kirk Session minutes it was recorded:

‘This being a trilapse in fornication’, the Session referred the case for advice to the Presbytery.

She couldn’t find the word trilapse in the dictionary.

Responses referred her to the Scottish dictionary at <https://dsl.ac.uk>, DSL being the Dictionaries of the Scots Language, *Dictionars o the Scots Leid*. These dictionaries are in two parts: the Scottish National Dictionary being results from 1700 onwards; and A Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue being results prior to 1700. So, if you’re looking for the meaning of a Scottish word, then take a look at this website.

On the website homepage, there is a short video explaining the differences between the two dictionaries.

They also have a Scots ‘Word of the Week’ which is very interesting.

And to answer Lynda’s question, the Scottish National Dictionary states the following:

Trilapse (adjective) - Of an offence against morals or church discipline: occurring or repeated for the third time.

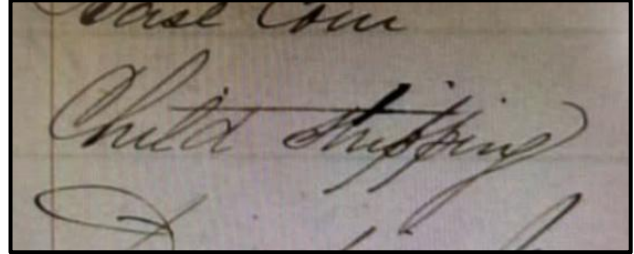
Trilapse (noun) - A third offence against church discipline, especially in regard to fornication. Hence a trilapser is one guilty of this.

The Scourge of Child Stripping

Article by Lea Harris.

I had never heard of this term. Maybe you are the same. A post on the *Scottish Indexes Group* Facebook page on 27 February 2026 by Denis McElhinney stated:

From 1852 prison register. The female defendant was given 30 days' imprisonment for child shipping or stripping? Any ideas what this might be?



A response referred Denis to the Scottish Legal News webpage, where it showed the word was actually child stripping and gave a great overview of the meaning.

Our Legal Heritage: The scourge of child-stripping

Children of the labouring poor like these Dubliners were vulnerable to child stripping.

From Dublin to Dundee and Belfast to Birmingham, the labouring poor of 19th century Britain and Ireland had to contend with the widespread scourge of child-stripping – the theft of their children's clothing by heartless thieves who faced the full rigour of the law when apprehended.

Local police were unsurprised when four-year-old William Lister was found wandering the bustling streets of Glasgow barefoot and in his undergarments. The vulnerable lad was inconsolable. In the dingy closes of West Howard Street, William had been robbed of all the riches any child could hope to possess in 1847. Boots, stockings, cravat, jacket and bonnet were all cruelly stripped from his helpless person by the lowest of criminals.

A child of the early 19th century would harbour many anxieties. The factory, the cane, the workhouse, the devil, the mines, the kelpies, Victorian parents and of course, the aforementioned terror of child-stripping. Indeed, this seldom cited practice became something of a plague in Britain's industrial communities, frightening poverty-stricken parents and prompting harsh retribution from authorities.

In a typical case, a child left unattended by working parents (and children were routinely left to fend for themselves in the streets while parents worked) would be tricked or coerced by their thief to a secluded spot where they would be robbed of their clothing. There is a distinction to be drawn in law between, first, the theft of a child under the age of puberty, which is known as plagium, and, secondly, the theft from a young child, which is known as theft by child stripping.

The punishment for such a foul act was severe. As one writer recounts, the theft of a 'peculiar nature, which, on account of the excessive depravity of heart which it evinces, it has always been the disposition of our practice to punish with great severity.' David Hume records the case of Janet Irvine in 1827, who was sentenced to transportation for life (being sent to an overseas colony), for stealing a rather inconsiderable tartan frock from a three-year-old child.

Precognitions could be awkward. Child complainers were often in the age range of two to 12, and when the court convened to briefly assess them, difficulties often arose. As one child, Elizabeth Johnston, succinctly put it, 'I don't know how old I am'.

In the case of Elizabeth Vallance, which is notable for having 17 charges involving 16 children, a five-year-old girl was questioned 'but she can hardly be prevailed upon to speak though she had signified that she knows the [stolen shawl]'. Another seven-year-old girl was 'extremely shy and could not be prevailed on to give any account of the theft'.

Historians Macraill and Neal record:

'Recidivism and multiple offending laid even heavier emphasis upon the seemingly immoral nature of the perpetrators and placed them beyond societal preferences and norms. Recidivism featured strongly in 1838 when Sarah Armstrong of Glasgow was transported for seven years for repeatedly stripping children. The same was true in 1843, when 22-year-old Eliza Hanson was apprehended after a three-month spree. A decade later a woman in Gateshead re-offended immediately after being released from prison and was promptly returned to gaol. In 1855, Elizabeth Wilson endured a court case of 'somewhat animate appearance' because 19 victims and their mothers attended to see justice dished out. In 1861, Mary M'Donald was given nine months for seven offences, while Margaret Macintosh (or Hayward) of Edinburgh was brought up in 1883 on no less than ten charges. Still more repetitive were the escapades of a Middlesex woman called Green, against whom six cases were brought, with the court being told she may have committed 40 or 50 others. Yet, perhaps the most prolific child-stripper uncovered in this research was Elizabeth Potter of Salford who, in 1886, stripped a succession of children almost every day for two months. Potter's case is more remarkable than these others because she was just 14 years old herself when the authorities apprehended her. Her profile challenges contemporary wisdom because she was not an old woman preying upon children.'

Where did such a bizarre crime sprout from? James Kelly provides one potential root in his article '*Horrid and infamous practices: the kidnapping and stripping of children*'. He recounts Ireland's struggles with kidnapping in the 18th century, where victims captured on the isle were sold into slave labour in the Americas – a practice common in Scotland too. Following the end of the American War of Independence in 1783 however, the combination of falling demand for labour in the northern states, and local public hysteria over kidnapping, served to dampen business. In the place of the diminishing people smuggling racket, often involving children, child stripping rose to prominence.

Other factors abound – the new industrial lifestyle, the rapid increase in city population, the expansion of the urban underclass – but the surging crime placed a new focus on child protection. The heavy penalties reveal a deep paternalism in the early 19th century, spurred on by shell-shocked authorities attempting to grapple with the rapid transformation of social realities.

Scottish Legal News website - <https://www.scottishlegal.com/>

Scottish Legal News article on Child Stripping - https://www.scottishlegal.com/articles/our-legal-heritage-when-child-stripping-was-a-thing?fbclid=IwY2xjawQS1pdleHRuA2FlbQlXMAbicmlkETfWR1pQUdDdV3Z1ZzV3aXpQc3J0YwZhcHBfaWQQMjlyMDM5MTc4ODIwMDg5MgABHotjST31mtG9ABBVkBK2jdk1eGZh-abSAcCv01xu219Wep8bdcgWQe9MPhug_aem_VmdBOqzOLeYKS_xRnIG9A

Miscellaneous

Scottish Special Interest Group

**2nd Tuesday each month at 1pm –
February to November:**

**9 June
14 July
11 August**

**8 September
13 October
10 November**



All interested NFHS members are invited.

**New members to the group are always
welcome.**

If you would like to submit an article or pictures for a future issue of the *Caledonian*, please send them to nfhspresident@gmail.com

Our next *Caledonian* will
be the Lamas issue on
28 August 2026

This castle is said to be one of Scotland's most haunted. What is it?

Answer

The correct answer is Glamis Castle in Angus

Glamis Castle, the former family home of the late Queen Mother, is said to be one of Scotland's most haunted. Alleged sightings include child ghosts, a Lady in White and an old lady wandering the grounds at night.