



Clan MacNeil

Association of Australia

Newsletter for clan members and friends.

December 2015

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New Member

Robert McNeil of Sunbury, Victoria became a member at our national gathering in Beechworth in November. Robert is a brother of Rhonda Lark and Vicki Bond. We welcome him to our association.

Members and their families who have renewed their membership

During the last 6 months the following people have renewed their membership as it became due. I thank them for their ongoing support for the Clan association.

It is most pleasing to see the ongoing support of our clan families who have continued to align themselves with our clan association.

John McNeil
Kirsty Almond
Andrew McNeil
Richard McNeill
Barrie McNeil
Roxanne Pattinson
Margaret Baxter

Roderick McNeil
Melissa McNeil
Sue Neil
Veronica Duffy
Cliff McNeil
Iain MacNeil
Ian McNeill
Ken McNeill
Michael McNeill
Margaret Macneall Walker
Pat Neil

Ian McNeill retires from the position as our association representative in NSW

It is with some regret that Ian has decided to retire from the position as our association representative for NSW. He has been a long term part of the national management team and in this role has been ably supported by his wife Robyne and son Stephen. They have particularly retained a presence for the Clan MacNeil at the annual Bundanoon highland games each year. I thank Ian, Robyne and Stephen for their friendship and support for the association and Ian as our representative in NSW.

Ian, Robyne and Stephen will continue with their membership of the association and want to continue to participate in Scottish community events and our national gatherings.



Stephen McNeill on left of John Palmer and Ian McNeill on right
2012 national clan gathering

Australian national clan gathering at Beechworth November 2015

The gathering was held over the weekend of 6th to 8th November to coincide with the Beechworth annual Celtic Festival.

The festival this year had a smaller program than in past years and there was no street parade on Saturday morning. There were still a number of activities and entertainment.

We met together on Friday evening for an informal dinner together at the Hotel Nicholas and during the evening we were entertained by an Irish folk band.

Our clan association members' annual meeting was held on Saturday morning at the Old Priory. There were 17 persons present and we welcomed Robert McNeil as a new member.

A report on the business activities of the association was presented by the president and a statement of income and expenditure was also presented. A members' discussion forum then took place. There were two items of importance – firstly whether future national gatherings should be held either annually or biyearly and the second how we should use our increasing value of funds in our credit union account.

Future clan gatherings

We have previously discussed whether we should change the interval of our gatherings from one year to two years. Some of you may feel that the personal expense to you in coming to an annual gathering is too great, particularly if we continue to select different geographical locations around Australia.

We feel that it is important to get together on an annual interval to ensure that there is a sharing of information and discussion on the management of our heritage and culture. We are the caretakers of this information and a sharing of it will ensure that it is maintained for our younger families at the time when we may retire as individuals.

Distances of travel in Australia are great and while a plan to hold a gathering in Queensland or in Western Australia is very attractive for families who live in those states, it represents additional expenses to those of us who live in Tasmania, Victoria, NSW or SA.

The two gatherings which we have held in Queensland have been well attended by Queensland families and in view of the size of the State and the spread of the homes of our local families, I would like us to plan for future gatherings in Queensland.

Holding a clan gathering with a sizable attendance by member families in either Western Australia or in Tasmania may be too difficult. However I think that we could consider a small delegation from our national management committee visiting these states.

Our next national clan gathering is to be held in Canberra and will be organized by Toni McNeill and John Palmer. A tentative date will soon be set and hopefully we can coordinate our weekend with the annual Floriade Festival.

Investing our surplus funds in Scottish and clan heritage and culture

The balance of money in our credit union account has continued to grow and is now well in excess of the annual expenses of the association. One suggestion was raised at our members' meeting that we consider using some of these funds to subsidize the expenses to bring our clan chief to visit us in Australia. It is worth considering that both his father and grandfather came to Australia during their terms of office.

Another suggestion which has been discussed with me is to use funds for the support and encouragement of young people learning skills in Scottish culture. In this respect our association in its early days donated trophies for highland dancing championships in NSW and more recently we donated a perpetual trophy for the most improved snare drummer in the Knox Grammar School pipe band.

We have also made a small donation to the University of Sydney for the teaching of Scottish Gaelic.

Please think about how best we can use our funds to achieve lasting benefits in preserving our culture and heritage. I look forward to hearing from you in this respect.

Our clan gathering dinner at Beechworth

This was another successful event and I thank the staff of the Old Priory for providing the dinner for us. I would also like to thank Chris Earl and the Bendigo Golden City Pipe Band for providing a piper to play for us on our arrival at the Old Priory and the commencement of our dinner.



Piping in the garden of the Old Priory



Toni McNeill & Robert McNeill at the Beechworth gathering dinner



Mary Surman & Helen Trochoulis at the Clan MacNeil dinner



City of Melbourne pipe band playing at the Beechworth Celtic Festival



Friday informal dinner from left John Palmer and other side of table Jean Buchanan, Toni McNeill and John Whiddon- Lesley Neil behind John Whiddon



Vicki Bond and Rhonda Lark at the Cln MacNeil dinner

Celtic Festival service at the Beechworth Uniting Church on Sunday morning

As has been our custom in previous years all our clan families attended this service wearing the MacNeil/McNeill tartans. The Celtic Festival service is beautiful and involves a number of people commencing on a local pilgrimage together for several days.

Our clan association members who have moved to a new residence

Mary Surman has a new home at Emerald Beach after selling her home at Umina Beach, NSW and is building a new home at Fiddaman Road, Emerald Beach, NSW. She is currently staying with friends during the construction phase.

We attended the Canberra Highland Games for the first time

In October Toni McNeill and John Palmer attended the Canberra games on behalf of our clan. We arranged to participate as a member of Scottish House who provided a marquee for clans such as ourselves to use on the day.

Toni received a visit from Tommy McNeil of Bathurst and I hope that he will join all of us as supporters for the Clan MacNeil.

Alan McNeil and Polini return to Honiara in the Solomon Islands

Some of you will remember attending a luncheon several years ago at Balgowlah with Alan and Polini. At the time they were living on Norfolk Island. In the interim period they have lived in Australia and now have returned to the Solomon Islands.

In last October I received information of a newspaper article in which Alan released information on a new 5 year development project for Honiara.

Alan is the chief technical adviser at the Ministry of Lands, Housing and Survey.

Polini is working with the United Nations Population fund in Honiara.



News from the Isle of Barra

Items published in the “Guth Bharraidh” weekly newsletter.

‘Spàgan’ Our Community Wind Turbine is now into its 2nd year of production and Spàgan has settled in well after a challenging 1st year. After a 12 month period in which we had many production interruptions due to planned and unplanned maintenance our total year’s production reached 2500Mwh. 2015 has begun well with production already better than this time last year. The project is still on budget with loan repayments and operational and maintenance costs being met by Spàgan’s generated money. However, legislation and the terms of the loans require us to build up substantial financial reserves before we can start making loans or grants to the community.

Current projections suggest that community dividends will start in April 2018.

Tràigh Mhòr Oysters Expansion Plans

A local oyster farm recently established by Gerard MacDonald in Eoligarry is expanding its operations and investing in new equipment with the support of Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE).

Tràigh Mhòr Oysters is a new venture between A.P. Jess, the family owned food group and Isle of Barra Oysters Ltd, owned by Gerard Macdonald and based on the island. As part of the deal, Tràigh Mhòr Oysters Ltd has purchased the full share issue of Isle of Barra Oysters Ltd and is fast becoming one of the largest producers of quality oysters in Scotland. HIE awarded funding of £490,000 to assist with the expansion of production and the project is expected to create new employment in the Isle of Barra.

Tràigh Mhòr Oysters is investing in stock and new equipment to help meet the demand from Scottish and UK markets. As production grows,

the company plans to explore international markets such as France, Spain and the Far East where demand for live shellfish is growing. Unlike oyster farms throughout most of Europe, which grow the oysters in baskets in sub-tidal waters, Tràigh Mhòr Oysters will employ a method similar to that used for growing mussels and scallops. This process will involve the mooring of headlines on site with drop lines spaced out along them.

The oysters feed on natural plankton making the industry is sustainable and environmentally friendly, and the oysters have a lengthy growing cycle with the first harvest expected in 2016. David Jess, from the A.P. Jess Scottish Food Group, said: “We are delighted at our new venture with our partners on Barra and are looking forward to a new stage in the development of A.P. Jess. Barra is a beautiful Island and one advantage of the site in Barra is that it's remote from any possible contaminants. The waters are absolutely pristine, which gives a great marketing opportunity and it's great to know that people can enjoy the oysters in as fresh a condition as possible.”

Bùth Bharraigh

Where on Barra can you find locally produced gifts, craft and fresh produce, a wide range of wholefood and speciality foods, children’s and local interest books, wool for knitting and crochet, free Wi-Fi, laundry facilities, the Barra Bunting Project, craft lessons and information about local events – all under one roof?

The answer – Bùth Bharraigh! It could easily take the whole of this article to list the goods and services on offer. The best way to see what they have would be to go in for a browse.

Situated in the centre of Castlebay, Bùth Bharraigh is the Barra and Vatersay community local produce shop. It has evolved from individual people selling their wares at the monthly Island Markets, through a feasibility study, pop-up Christmas shop and early days in a unit near the Co-op, to the bright, flourishing, well-stocked shop it is today. Bùth Bharraigh has grown from around 30 local people supplying their products to around 90 (as well as offering produce from food businesses in the Western Isles and beyond).

Barra Sings Their Way to Success at the Royal National MOD 2015

As another successful Mod draws to a close in Oban, Barra will have many winners returning to its shores with medals in hand. The results for the Finals are as follows:

Gold Medal Final Ladies (Wednesday) 1. Carrie MacNeil, Barra 2. Ainsley Hamill, Cardanross 3. Ceitidh Smith, Inverness 4. Isabel MacLeod, Carloway

Choral Rural 1. Coisir Ghaidhlig Mhealbhaich 2. Coisir Ghaidhlig Charlabhaigh 3. Coisir Ghaidhlig Bharraigh

Ladies Traditional Gold Medal 1. Katie, Graham, Lewis 2. Lisa MacNeil, Barra

Many Congratulations to Carrie on winning the women's Gold Medal on only her 2nd ever attempt. Carrie, who occasionally plays in the Vatersay boys along with her father, Donnie, is currently a PhD student studying Gaelic Media at Sal Mor Ostaig. Donald Iain Brown from Tiree won the Men's event.

The next world clan gathering on the island of Barra

The next gathering will be held in the week commencing Monday 8th August 2016. Assuming that the program of the gathering will follow the previous one in 2014 then activities will be held on each of Monday to Thursday inclusively.

If you are considering attending the gathering then please let me know and I recommend that you reserve your accommodation on Barra as soon as possible. At this stage I am planning to attend the gathering with my son, Andrew.



View of the west coastline of Barra



Rory Macneil of Barra and Kisimul Castle

Scottish Community events which we have attended in the last 6 months

26th July

We celebrated the anniversary of the life of Robert Burns at his statue bore the State Library of South Australia. A garland was placed around his statue and then a concert was provided in the Basil Hetzel auditorium



Robert Burns statue at the State Library of SA

Other local Scottish Community events which I attended included the annual Clan MacLeod luncheon, the annual Royal Scottish Country Dancing Society ball, the Glenbarr Highland gathering held near to Strathalbyn in South Australia, the annual Clan Donald / MacFarlane luncheon, the annual Kirkin of the tartan church service at St. Augustine's Anglican church, Unley and the display of the Scottish Diaspora tapestry panels at the Burnside Library.

I know that Jean Buchanan and John Whiddon represented our clan at the Daylesford highland gathering on 5th December.

I was delighted to receive a photograph from Valerie Walters of her grandson Angus Hill age 5 years old who competed in the highland dancing competition at Daylesford where he was placed third in his Pas de Basque dance.



Coming events

January 9-23

Hobart display of the Scottish Diaspora tapestry panels representing 34 countries across the world at the Lic State Library, TAS.

For further details see -

www.scottishdiasporatapestry.org

January 17-25th

Robert Burns anniversary of his birth celebrations at various locations across Australia.

January 26

Australia day celebration Celtic Festival at Bradford Park, Milson's Point, Sydney, NSW

February 3-24

Albury, NSW - Scottish Diaspora Tapestry exhibition

February 12-14

Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo concert at Etihad Stadium, Melbourne, Vic

February 13

Scots Day Out, Bendigo in Rosalind Park, Bendigo, Vic.

March 13

Scots School Bathurst highland gathering, Bathurst, NSW

March 20

Geelong highland gathering at Corio Goldsworthy Oval, Vic.

March 23 – 3 April

Scottish Diaspora tapestry panel exhibition at the Chrissie Cotter gallery, Camperdown, NSW

March 25-26

MacLean highland gathering, NSW

www.macleanhIGHLANDGATHERING.COM.AU

April 3

Ringwood highland gathering at Jubilee Park, Ringwood, Vic.

April 9

Bundanoon highland gathering at Bundanoon.

April 28 – 2 May

Glen Innes Celtic festival at the Australian Standing Stones, Glen Innes, NSW.

May 21 Berry Celtic festival at the Berry

showgrounds, Berry, NSW

May 28

The Bonny Wingham festival gathering in central park, Wingham, NSW.

June 10-13

Portarlinton Celtic festival at Portarlinton, Vic.

June 11-12

Boonah, QLD - Fassifern Highland Gathering at the Boonah showgrounds

June 26

Spring Hill, QLD - Kirkin' o' the Tartan at St. Paul's Presbyterian church, Springhill, Brisbane commencing at 9.30 am.

July 2

Aberdeen highland games at Jefferson Park, Aberdeen, NSW www.aberdeenhIGHLANDGAMES.COM.

July 10

Greenbank, QLD - Scotland in the Park at the Greenbank recreational reserve, Greenbank, Qld

July 16

International Tartan Day in King George's Square, Brisbane, QLD commencing at 9.00 am <http://www.aussie-scots.org.au/>

Sept 3

Norah Head Gathering of the clans at the Norah Head sports ground. SW

<http://gatheringoftheclans.weebly.com/>

Oct 1-2

Australia & South Pacific pipe band championship at Knox Grammar School, Hornsby, NSW

<http://www.knox.nsw.edu.au/latest-news/knox-to-host-pipe-band-championships>

Researching the descendants of Somhairle and the first use of the name Ruari by a chief of Clan MacNeil

In the last copy of this newsletter Alex Buchanan provided an article discussing the new descendant specific markers on the Y-chromosome data of people who have provided samples of their DNA to the Clan MacNeil DNA Ancestry project.

In particular the Barra ancestors are now shown in many cases to have a Viking rather than Celtic ancestry.

The marker L165 has been found in the Orkneys, Caithness, Barra and Jura families.

This article looks at the period of the settlement of the Viking families in the Outer and Inner Hebrides of Scotland, the patronage to the King of Norway, the later transfer of the territorial ownership of the Hebrides to Scotland, the family of Somairle (Somered) and the first use of the name Ruari by a chief of Clan MacNeil.

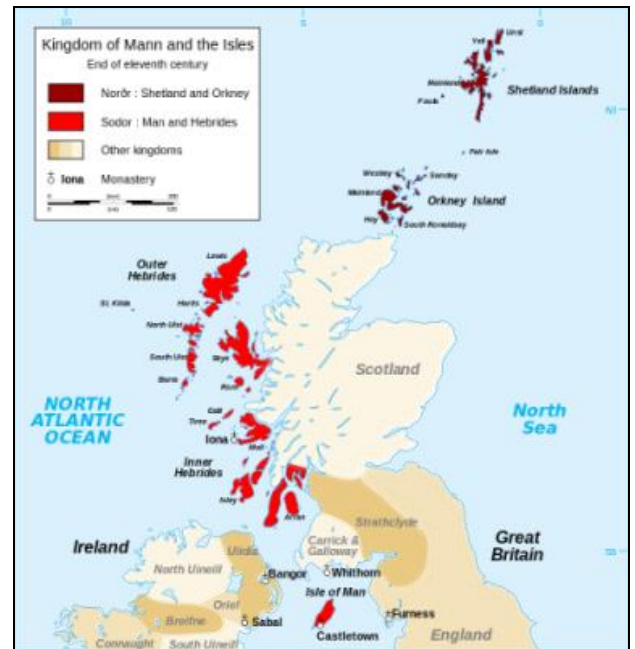
The foremost source of information on this subject is the book titled "History of the Western Highlands and Isles of Scotland" by Donald Gregory. My second reference is the University of Glasgow PhD thesis document written by John Raven titled "Medieval landscapes and lordship in South Uist".

Viking settlement

After a century of Viking raids and sporadic settlement, the Hebrides came under Norse control in the middle of the 9th century under Ketil Flatnose who, while nominally owing allegiance to the Norwegian Crown, essentially established an independent Kingdom of the Isles. Two centuries later, Norse control of the Hebrides was formalised by the Scottish King Edgar ceding the islands to the Norwegian King Magnus III.

In reality, the islands' population remained Gaelic under the control of local kings of mixed Gaelic Norse background for another century until the creation of the Lordship of the Isles by Somhairle Mor – Somered in 1156, himself the progenitor of the great Gaelic clan Macdonald.

Norway ceded Hebrides to Scotland in Treaty of Perth in 1266.



Purple colour - Shetland and Orkney islands
Red colour – Kingdom of Man in 11th century

The **Kingdom of the Isles** comprised the Hebrides, the islands of Firth of Clyde and the Isle of Man from the 9th to the 13th centuries AD. The islands were known to the Norse as the *Suðreyjar*, or "Southern Isles" as distinct from the *Norðreyjar* or Northern Isles of Orkney and Shetland.

The rise of Somairle (Somered)

The Hebrides had been difficult to control from a distance since the days of Ketil Flatnose, and even in the time of Magnus Barelegs it is likely that *de facto* control was that of local rulers rather than nominal governance from over the seas. Somered took this to its ultimate conclusion, declaring himself an independent ruler of the isles from his power base in the southern Hebrides and Kintyre and he had, in effect, recreated Dalriada.

Somered met his death in 1164, possibly assassinated in his tent as he camped near Renfrew during an invasion of the Scottish mainland. At this point Godred, King of Man re-took possession of his pre-1158 territories and the southern isles were distributed amongst Somered's sons.

Dugal ruled as the first chief of Clan MacDougall of Argyll until his death in 1207. Ragnair inherited Islay and Kintyre, and took Bute, Arran and Gamoran (located between Ardnamurchan and Glenelg) from

his brother Angus. Both Dugal and Raghnaill were titles kings of the Isles, or their own territory.

Aonhgas (Angas) succeeded his father, inheriting lands in Garmoran, Skye, Rum, Eigg, Bute and Arran and became known as Lord of Bute and Arran.

Raghnaill (Ranald/ Reginald) and his wife produced –Domhnall and Ruaidhri. The family line of Domhnall led in descendants to the Lord of the Isles (Aonghas Mor, the Aonghas Og and John, Lord of the Isles.

Ruaidhri established the Clan Ruari, died in 1284 and had produced two children Ailean and Dubhghall.

Ruaidrí founded the meic Ruaidrí (or Clann Ruaidrí), a more obscure kindred who were seated in Garmoran. Ruaidrí seems to have been the senior of Raghnaill's sons, and is first recorded by name in 1214.

As vassals of the King of Norway, the clan participated in Haakon Haakonarson, King of Norway's campaign of 1263. Dubhghall died without male issue and was succeeded by his brother Ailean. His estate was inherited by his daughter Christina of Garmoran who then resigned her lands to her brother Ruaidhri mac Ailean.

Ruaidhri had two sons Raghnaill mac Ruari, Ailean mac Ruari and a daughter Amie nic Ruari,

Amie of Garmoran also known as Amie MacRuari and Euphemia was a 14th-century Scottish noblewoman who was the sister of Raghnaill mac Ruaidhri, Lord of Garmoran and the spouse of John of Islay. She married John in 1337.

Amie was a direct descendant of Somhairle mac Gille-Brighde (better known as Somerled), through her great-grandfather Ruaidhri mac Raghnaill, the founder of Mac Ruaidhri (MacRuari) kindred.

Ruaidhri's son Ailean mac Ruaidhri possessed the "North Isles" of the Uists, and Benbecula. He is known to have attended Parliament in 1285 when the succession of Margaret, Maid of Norway was debated and to have added Barra to his lands in 1309. When Christina succeeded to the extensive estates of her father, Ailean (Garmoran and

the North Isles including Harris and the Small Isles of Rùm and Eigg) she resigned a large proportion of them to Ruaidhri.

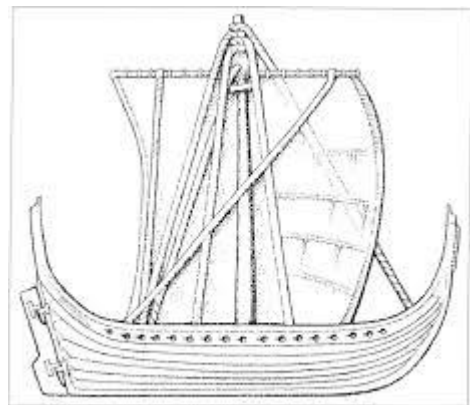
The Clan MacRuari held a large territory in the period of about 1210 to 1337 and had a close relationship with the Norse kingdom. Their presence in occupation of lands on South Uist and for a short time on Barra may have generated the creation of Ruari or Roderick in the descendants of the MacNeil family.

A study of records shows the first chief of the MacNeil of Barra family in the ancestral records to bear the Christian name Roderick was Roderick who witnessed a Charter to MacLean of Duart in 1409.

He married a daughter of Ferquard MacLean of Glen Urquart and was succeeded by his son, Gilleonan. Gilleonan received a charter of lands on Barra and South Uist from the Lord of the Isles, Alexander in 1427.

The presence of the Clan Ruari family on South Uist and Barra in this period would have had some influence on the MacNeil of Barra families and the Clan Ruari controlled a larger territory and was more prominent than Clan MacNeil at that time.

A family tree table is attached for the descendants of Somairle mac Gillbride and the Clan Ruari.



†The galleon was the invention of Alexander MacLeod of Raigmore in 1488. He died in 1519 but the design of the ship was probably similar still. The Lords of the Isles, chiefs of the Clan

Joy & I send our best wishes to all clan families and friends of the clan.

John McNeil

