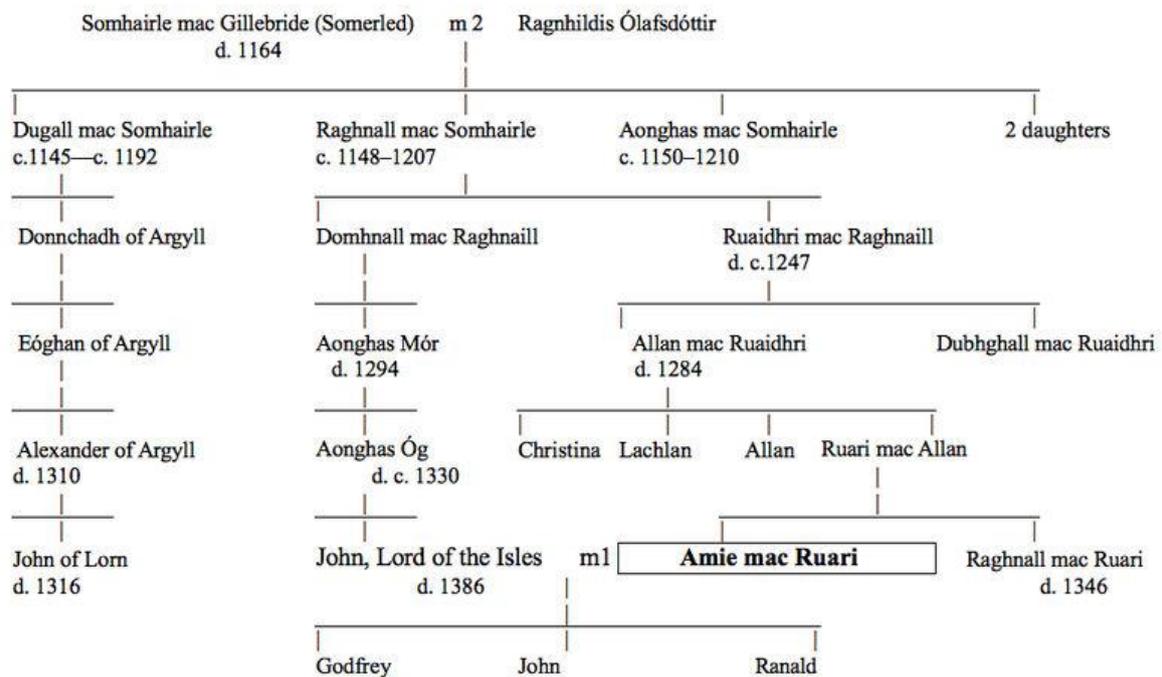


A family tree of the descendants of Somhairle mac Gillbride and Ragnhildis Ólafsdóttir with the left hand column showing the formation of Clan MacDougall, the next column the formation of Clan Donald and the Lord of the Isles and the third column the formation of Clan Ruari



The R1a Piper MacNeils of Barra - by Alex Buchanan and Vince MacNeil

The R1a MacNeils of Barra are the second most populous group in the Barra Isles. They make up less than half the population, after the dominant R1b-L165 group. But they exceed the small I2a group that was virtually confined to the tiny island of Sandray.

Our MacNeil DNA Project has found that all the known descendants of Rory the Piper belong to the R1a group, leading us to believe that the Piper lineage arrived in Barra as a distinctive family and may have been of MacDonald descent. It is known that the Chiefs of Barra (members of the R1b-L165 group) employed pipers, as part of their wider household, to support their leadership, especially on ceremonial occasions. The position of Piper to the Chief was hereditary, it was passed down from father to son, and the earliest known, from oral history, was Rory the Piper (or Malcolm) who flourished in the 1730s.

Rory's son John MacNeil was the next in line, he was known as 'Iain Phiobaire' which translates as John the Piper. John's son Donald, 'Domhnall Phiobaire', may have continued the tradition until the time of large scale emigration from Barra to eastern Canada, especially to Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island.

The question arises: where did Rory MacNeil the Piper come from? We can tell by their close Y-DNA matches that the R1a MacNeils, including Rory and his forebears, that this lineage was probably part of Clan Donald (current testing will answer this question). The MacDonalds were Lords of the Isles and their influence extended over much of the west coast of Scotland. The R1a Chiefs of Clan Donald are said to descend from Somherled, the self-styled King of the Hebrides. Somherled died in 1164 during an attempted invasion of the mainland near Glasgow and this event marked the decline of Norse power in the west. One hundred years later the failed Battle of Largs, which led to the Treaty of Perth, saw the Hebrides pass from Norse rule and the Isles became part of the Kingdom of Scotland. Gaelic language and culture dominated clan society.

Exactly how the R1a MacNeils of Barra emerged as Pipers to the Chief is not known, but they played an important part in bringing the Barra MacNeils into the modern world of prestigious Scottish clans. Their descendants are now scattered throughout the former British colonies, wherever emigrant Scots settled.

Territorial map of the area controlled by the Lord of the Isles
and of his descendants who were the progenitors of Clan MacDougall, Clan
Donald and Clan Ruari

