

THE CLAN CHATTAN HISTORIANS

6 - Historians of the Macphersons (Part 2)

The Seanchaidhean

by Dr Alan G. Macpherson

In the *Sliochd nan Triuir Bhraithrean*, or "Posteritie of the Three Brethren", the great genealogical work compiled by Sir Aeneas Macpherson of Invereshie during the latter half of the seventeenth century, there is only one reference to a possible source for at least some of the information which it contains. He identifies one of his contemporaries as Duncan *lóm* McPherson in Strathmashie, "a great genealoger". Duncan *lóm* was a nephew of Bean McPherson of Strathmashie, one of the "pledges" or hostages detained at Ruthven in 1648 to enforce the Covenant and to make sure that the "Malignant" Macphersons and their royalist friends in Badenoch conformed to the new regime. Duncan's father William was a younger brother of Bean of Strathmashie, but nothing is recorded of his mother. So far as we can tell, he was not a close relative of Sir Aeneas, but it is interesting to note that his cousin Muriach (Murdo), Bean of Strathmashie's fourth son, was married to Elspeth McIntosh, a daughter of Lachlan McIntosh of Kinrara, the historian. Duncan *lóm*, the lame or halt, may well have pursued genealogy as a result of his disability if this was severe enough to prevent his pursuit of normal Highland life and activities on the hill.

The Macphersons of Strathmashie were an ancient and important branch of the *Sliochd Iain*; indeed some of Duncan's ancestors had acted as attorneys for McIntosh in Lochaber. So it is safe to assume that Duncan *lóm* was in a position to provide Sir Aeneas with the bulk of the material on the *Sliochd Iain*, the largest of the Macpherson lineages, and the one upon which the cohesion and solidarity of the Clan Macpherson principally depended. From his central vantage point within the clan he may well have been able to provide much more, thus earning Sir Aeneas' encomium: "a great genealoger". Elsewhere in his writings Sir Aeneas Macpherson mentions others of his clan with whom he "hade at divers times the honour to discourse of the rise and origine of most of the Highland families: . . . McPherson of Brecochie, Gillicallum. McPherson of Phoyness, Thomas McPherson of Eterish, and James McPherson, grand-uncle to the deceast John McPherson of Invereshie". Of these, only the last was a close relative of the compiler. "The deceast John McPherson of Invereshie" being Sir Aeneas' older brother who died in the early 1670s, James McPherson must also have been Sir Aeneas' grand-uncle. He was, in fact, a bastard half-brother of their grandfather Angus McPherson of Invereshie, probably much younger than Angus. He was probably the James McPherson in Invermarkie who subscribed to the Muchrach Bond with the Grants in the troubled days of 1645. James McPherson was almost certainly the source of the early history of the *Sliochd Ghilliosa* and Sir Aeneas' own family, involving migration from Letterfinlay on Loch Lochy-side in Lochaber to Rimore of Rothiemurchus, and then the final move to Invereshie in Lower Badenoch by Angus and James' own father William McPherson.

Reference to the *Sliochd nan Triuir Bhraithrean* genealogy reveals that the other three *seanchaidhean* mentioned by Sir Aeneas were very closely related to each other: Gillicallum of Phoyness and Thomas *ruadh* of Eterish were in fact brothers, and were double cousins of the Macphersons of Breakachie. The relationships are best appreciated in the accompanying "tree", carried down to the generation contemporary with Sir Aeneas Macpherson.

"Brecochie" was identified by the Rev. Alexander Murdoch, editor of Sir Aeneas' papers, as Hutcheon (Hugh) McPherson of Crubenmore, on record during and immediately after Montrose's Rising. But in view of the time of writing it seems more plausible to identify this man with Hutcheon's younger brother and successor in the *duthchas*, Donald *óg* McPherson of Crubenmore and Breakachie. The

Macphersons of Cruben and Breakachie belonged to one of the oldest and most influential branches of the *Sliochd Choinneach*, with extensions into the Castlelands of Inverness in Strathnairn and Strathdearn as well as lands in Badenoch; their older cousins, the Macphersons of Essich, had acted and died in McIntosh's service, while they themselves had been more closely associated with the affairs of their own chief, Macpherson of Clunie.

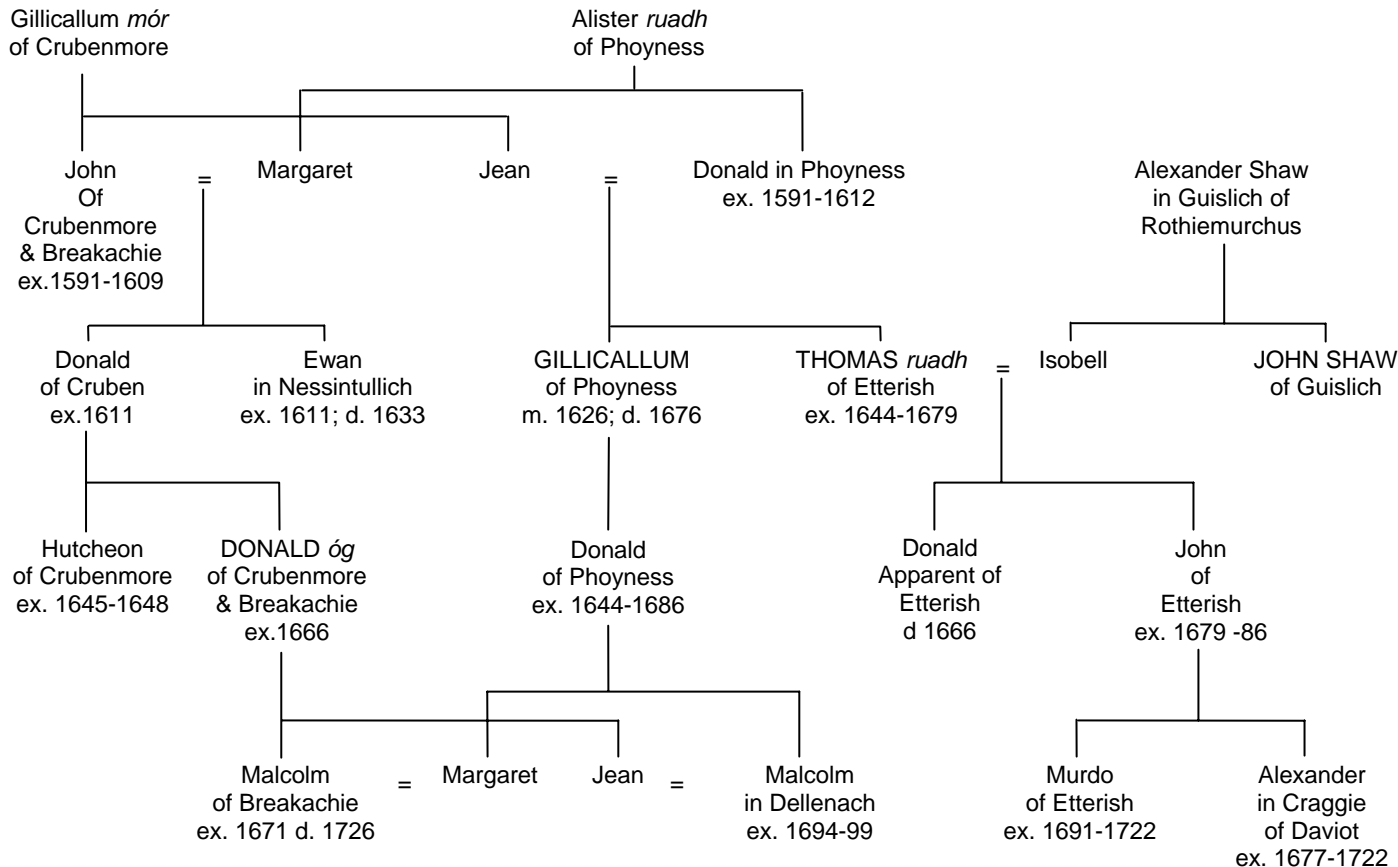
Gillicallum (Malcolm) McPherson of Phoyness was quoted by Sir Aeneas Macpherson in his *Loyall Dissuasive* as saying

Tir viis tu ain asshi is ffuile vic-ndoshich, Cuir oin treule er do ghorris: Tir in shi Cuir gho.

(When you are at open war with the McIntoshes, Bolt your door once; when in peace and friendship, bolt it twice.)

Sir Aeneas uses this couplet as a severe saying, but it was probably originally intended as a piece of dry Highland humour. Its author was married in 1626 and was accompanied by his eldest son and by his brother Thomas *ruadh* in Montrose's rising of 1644-45. Both he and his brother Thomas died in the late 1670s, indicating that Sir Aeneas must have obtained his clan lore from them while he was quite a young man, and long before he went on his travels as a Jacobite fugitive and returned exile. Interestingly, Thomas *ruadh* of Eterish was married to Isobel Shaw, a daughter of Alexander Shaw of Guislich in Rothiemurchus and a sister of John Shaw of Guislich, another of Sir Aeneas' informants - from whom the Rev. Lachlan Shaw, the historian of Moray, is reputed to have been descended. The Macphersons of Phoyness and Eterish represented the oldest cadet branch of the *Sliochd Ghilliosa*, headed by the Macphersons of Invereshie. As such they were able to provide traditional lore that complemented that of Sir Aeneas' grand-uncle James McPherson. With their double cousin of Breakachie these veterans of Montrose's Rising were undoubtedly in a position to provide Sir Aeneas Macpherson with a substantial

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body of clan lore, crucial to the authenticity and accuracy of his great compilation.

It is to these five men, therefore, that the *Clann Mhuirich* Macphersons are indebted for all that was transmitted to us through Sir Aeneas Macpherson of Invereshie. We must salute their memory.