



Surnames, as we know them, were not used in Britain prior to the Normans (1066) & it was centuries later before they became common in the Highlands. They were unnecessary when people knew everyone in their own tribe & were all good genealogists. Even in the late 1700's there were many Highlanders who could give a connected & minutely detailed account of all the tribes & families for many miles around & for a period of several hundred years. However, as the population increased it became awkward to live in a village where possibly a third of the males were called John. Thus, surnames were introduced to further distinguish people. This trend was reinforced by court & church administrations which depended on efficient documentation for their expanding tax collections.

At first, in Scotland (& England) surnames were based on residency, some examples being Douglas, Murray & Dunbar. And, just as these heads of houses were called by the names of their respective estates, their tenants were called after the farms they rented -- a custom still followed in the Lowlands; & so, we find Greenfield, Newton & Broadwood. These territorial surnames, arising from farm names, gave rise to other names such as Laird, Tenant & Shepherd. Then tradesmen took their names from their trades & became Butcher, Skinner, Cooper, Miller, Carpenter, Smith, Tailor & Shoemaker. (140v?p.180 'The Origin of Surnames') Also, the British, like the Vikings used nicknames to differentiate themselves. (Quickfall & Armstrong).

A number of suggestions have been put forth regarding the origin of the name McGilvray. The simplest meaning, based on current phonetics, is Gille-bhraighe (the young man of the brae or hill); or, Gille-breac (the freckled youth). However, in olden times Gille had an ecclesiastic meaning. Such a direct church connection was possible until c1125 as it was only then that clerical celibacy became Church law (although the Protestants would later revert).

The Gaelic name for cleric was 'cleireach' (in English; clerk or clark). This became M'Chlery as Celtic surnames were patronymic; i.e. based on their fathers' Christian names. Thus MacNab (Mac-an-Aba) is son of the abbot; & McTaggart ('sagart' or Mac-an-t-Sagairt) is son of the priest; while Gillespie is from (Gilleasbuig) Bishop's-gille; i.e. servant; & Gilchrist is from Gille-crist or servant of Christ. For McGilvray, the progression is, Mac Gille-mhoire (or mhuire); i.e. "the son of the servant (or devotee or follower) of the Virgin Mary". This would be spelt McIlvora in English because 'mh' in Gaelic sounds like our 'v'; & this, plus McIlvera, were our usual early spellings.

It is also of interest that the old church at Carsaig (demolished in 1825) was called St. Mary's Chapel (s #323) & that Finachy, part of the McGilvray lands, was named after Finchan, a contemporary of St. Columba. As well, the stone for the early Iona Cathedral is believed to have come from Carsaig, a part of the McGilvray lands. However, this 'Mary' connotation is believed by some to be the origin of the name Morrison via the anglicized McIlvora.

This clerical version does, however, link into the most likely meaning of our name as MacGhille-Bhreithie (or Bhrath) - son of the servant of the Judiciary. It should be remembered that priests & judges were often analogous. The confusion in pronunciation is explained by the fact that 'b' in Gaelic also has the 'v' sound. (142p.27 & 90 & 132) Such a connotation would indicate our descent from the 'doomsters' or judges of the old Lordship of the Isles, or even from before that era. This could have been the hereditary office our small clan once tended to occupy. Thus, the name McGilvray seems to be a patronymic based on an occupation.

And, the name originally may have been Maolbrath, the Maol- later being displaced by Gille-, as with other ancient names. (9p.502)

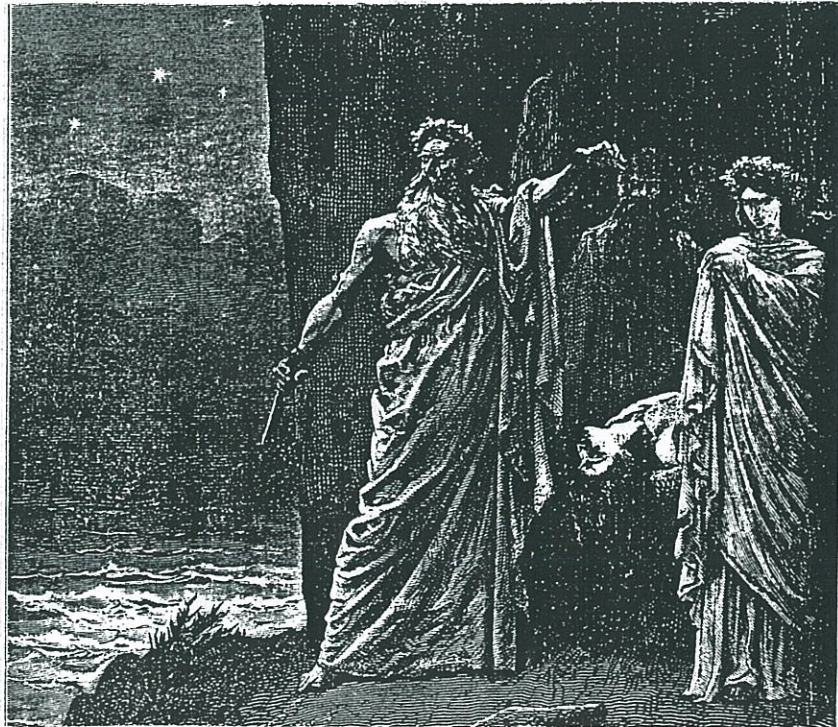
Celtic tribal law had already been written down in Ireland before the 7th century. The rights & interests of each tribesman were prescribed in the minutest detail. The Senchus Mor (code of the tribes) provided for all contingencies from cultivation & pasture to road repair. (139p.31)

In those days, & before, the church was the only source of education & thus these judges would also have been involved with the priesthood. It is very likely that the knowledge required for this role would have been passed down through the generations just as the Beatons passed their medical knowledge from father to son. Membership in such a learned family would allow entry into the much wider arena of all professions based on knowledge. Clerics, doctors, judges; all sprang from this group whose members provided solidarity for one another against all 'outsiders'. (158p.5) The McGilvrays have been well represented in these groups.

As will be shown later, with specific family members, an exceptional memory has been a common McGilvray trait. Such an observation is made credible by the known tendency for certain mental traits to run in families. (44p.110) Before the invention of the printing press, a highly developed memory was all important for entertainers, priests, physicians & lawyers. Memory is the mother of all wisdom (Aeschylus) & is the treasury & guardian of all things (Cicero). The skills for such memory cultivation would also have been passed down (likely exclusively) within the family. It is interesting that the last McGilvray laird associated with the church & possessing a great memory lived in the 1600's. The printing press & the democratic Reformation conspired against such men. At a later date, men with such talents would be attracted by the benefits offered from membership within the urban Industrial Revolution.

These inherent skills may indicate a much earlier connection. If one wants to really grasp at straws, such a learned family can be easily linked back to the Druids. These individuals were not only the priests & physicians to the Celtic tribes but were their judges, orators & bards. This intellectual elite were recruited from among the ranks of the nobility & formed a very privileged class. They were exempt from taxes & were not obliged to bear arms. Although they did not form a hereditary caste they were recruited from the most able people. It is believed each Druid, although literate, devoted about 20 years to memorizing their laws & the sacred texts (it was forbidden to write down the latter). They were also versed in mathematics & astronomy. The Druids regulated religious ceremonies, presided at sacrifices, interpreted omens & generally acted as mediators between mankind & the gods, to whom they alone had access. They also acted as judges of the people. (190p. 119&p. 158)

The power & influence of this singular order were immense, for those who refused obedience to their orders could be excommunicated or even 'chosen' as sacrificial victims. Such a class could easily adapt to, & would be the natural base for, any new order of things, be it religion, law or politics.



Out of the Cauldron, by Bernice Kohn. 1972 p.39

*Talk not of kings - I scorn the poor comparison:
I am a SAGE, & can command the elements -
At least men think I can; & on that thought
I found unbounded empire. (Albumazar; in Quentin Durward by Scott, p.198)*

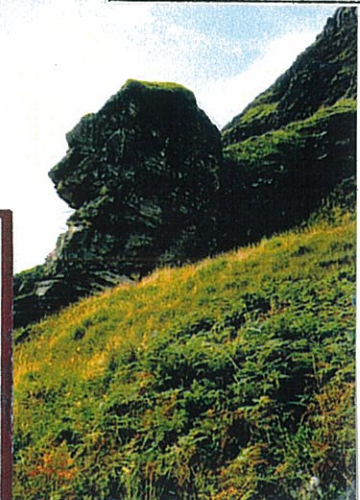
natural for Somerled to link up with relatives for such a major undertaking as his father had been the Thane of this area. This Gillebride had been forced to hide in a cave in Morvern when driven out by the Norse. (94p.6)

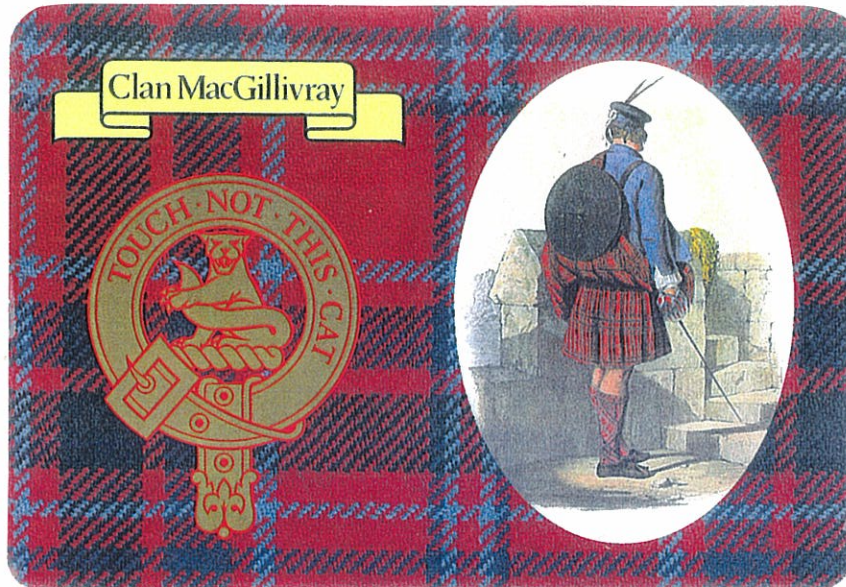
The McDonald's, as mentioned, descend from Somerled's grandson Donald; but, they have an earlier connection to the Islands. The family of Fergus MacErc (who emigrated in 503; see p.10) supplied many Thanes of Argyll & the most famous was Somerled. (94p.6) The McDonalds can thus state they have been in this area from time immemorial. There is even evidence of a Pictish descent. (223p.198) It is likely that any early emigrant would have been melded with the original Picts & thus the McGilvrays, too, would have some such roots. And, our clan, being one of the *original* Dalriadic tribes of the region, could even be akin to the Campbells. Nothing definitive will ever be known & such speculations become just more of our folklore. As with most such legends, the author's bias often determines which tale is emphasized.

Onesuch bias goes so far as to state (Farr MS c1860) the McGilvrays of Mull sprang from Gillemartin, a fourth generation descendant of the clan's supposed progenitor. It goes on to place his arrival in Mull c1350 or about the same time as that of the McLeans (which is much too late). This legend relates that a Macintosh, having killed a neighbor, fled to Mull & called himself 'Gillebraigh' (lad of the brae). He courted & married a daughter of MacMillan of Glencannel through whom he inherited Glencannel. This version is used to indicate that the McGilvrays are descended from their Inverness namesakes, the MacGillivrays, which is contradictory to every other theory. (Farr resided in Inverness.)

Another questionable item is the Crest attributed to the McGilvrays; which is a camel's head. (57) Possibly this is a 'modern' idea submitted by a McGilvray returning from the mid-east. Or, an earlier escaped Viking slave to Constantinople. Could it be linked to the camel that is reputedly on the Inverness town crest. It might also refer to a chief who went on a crusade with Olaf the Red. At that same time, 1098, the Scots King Edgar gave a camel to the Irish King Murketogh. (146p.61) Could a McGilvray have delivered it?

The last & least likely explanation draws a parallel between the sphinx & a rock, just west of Carsaig.





Romilly Squire for Lang Syne

The Clan Macgillivray or Clann Mhic Gillebhrath, trace themselves back to 1263 (or 1268) when their ancestor Gilbrai placed himself, & his posterity, under the protection & tutelage of Ferquhard Mackintosh, fifth chief of that family, & became bound by oath. (132p.4 & 131p.164/5 & 103) As a tutor is the guardian & administrator of the estate of a pupil (minor), often named by the parents before their demise, this indicates Gilbrai was a young orphan. It is interesting to note that this was the same year as the expedition made by King Alexander III against Hakon, King of Norway, when the latter attempted to reconquer the Inner Hebrides. A reason for this tutelage in the McGillivrays may be that they joined with Hakon, in a futile attempt to regain their lands previously lost to Alex II, when their chief was killed in the process.

In 1274, this same Ferquhard Mackintosh was playing chess with a certain gent of the Islands when they stabbed one another with their dirks. Possibly the chess set was similar to those found about 1850 on the Isle of Lewis. They are about 4" high & were lost during this period by a Norse chief.



Nat'l Museum of Antiquities; Scotland

The MacGillivrays ultimately settled in Lower Strath Nairn (a long valley 15 miles south of Inverness & just east of Loch Ness) & were long associated with the Clan Chattan federation; the one that deserted the Lord of the Isles in 1429. It is interesting to note there is a Moy Castle near Strath Nairn just as there is next to Pennyghael. One source thinks the McGillivrays probably originated in Mull. (103) Could some McGillivrays have been displaced from Lochbuie when those Maclaines took over in the 1300's? This might account for Pennyghael's lack of association with these next-door neighbors. There is also a Moy just north of Fort William in that area of Lochaber which was once the country of the Clan Chattan. These MacGillivrays could have moved east with this clan while the McGilvrays of Mull became followers of the Duart Macleans. The McGilvrays in later day Morvern & Ardnamurchan may be remnants of Somerled's time or may have returned when these areas were taken over by Duart. There are many possible explanations & the truth may be a mixture of all of them. For much more information (albeit quite biased) on the Inverness Sept of McGillivrays, see (132).

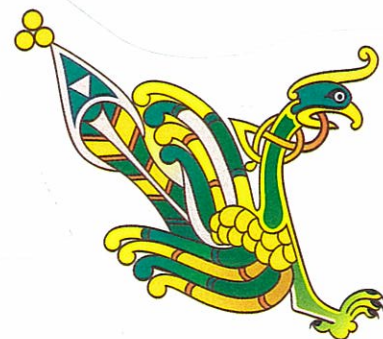
For some reason it seems there was available land in this region of Inverness at that time, because other clans also settled there. In 1662 a family of MacLeans, on the Chisholm territory of Strathglass were tried for witchcraft. One escaped & fled for help to their chief, Sir Allan MacLean of Duart. Even though this group had left Mull 2-300 years earlier, warriors were dispatched & the family was saved. 'The Ford of the Men of Mull' (Ath nam Muileach) near Loch Affric commemorates this action. (68p.221)

A similar trial faced John McIlvorie of Kinross-shire (just north of Edinburgh) on 24 Nov 1643. He was charged with witchcraft &/or sorcery in the High Court of Justiciary. (119) There is no record of armed intervention on his behalf & his fate is unknown. He was said to be single & was likely merely an old, friendless, man; possibly with a farm that some official coveted.

As with the above McLean story, an affinity must have also long remained between the split McGilvray clan for one verse of a Gaelic song in praise of the MacGillivrays of Clan Chattan says;

*At short time warning
Thy friends will come
from North & South,
Men of excellent form
From Mull of the green hills,
like waves
Pennygael with his men
Will come from over the seas.*

(133p.14 & 138p.380)



It is of interest to note some dissimilarities between the two main branches of the clan; at least in the 1700s & 1800's. The McGillivrays seem to have chosen the risks of emigration sooner & to have entered the more adventurous vocations of fur trader or the army, while the McGilvrays moved to urban jobs in Glasgow &, when they later emigrated, tended to become farmers or missionaries. In either case, most families seemed to be merely following the path initiated by relatives. Of course it's only an observation.

The records show that over the years there have been many changes in the spelling of the name. This is due to changes in the way the family pronounced the name, to changes in the people recording the name, & to the general changes in the English language. Thus, different spellings will occur in different areas at the same time, & will vary in each area over time. It must be remembered that any spelling is merely the anglicization of the pronunciation of the original Gaelic. Genealogists must be aware of these changes which have resulted in more than 20 variations, including; McIlwray 1542, VcGillevorie 1609, McIlra 1616, McIlvrach 1618, McGillavrach 1638, McGillivray 1672, M'Ilvray 1674, M'Gwillwray 1685, McGillievraid 1713, & M'Gillowray 1745. It has also been spelt M'Olvorie & M'Ilvorie. As well, McGillivour was another spelling in Inverness-shire.

In the late 1700's the common spelling, in the Western Isles & in Glasgow, was McGilvra which changed to McGilvray in the early 1800's. Although McGilvray was used as early as 1751 & 1786 the first use in Glasgow was July 1806 on the OPR. After 1850 McGillivray was the more common form to be found in the newspapers & even many of the Mull people took this Dunmaglass Sept spelling. Today there are also McGillvray, McGillavery, McGillivrie, McGillivry, McGuilevray, McGil(l)vary, & McGilvery.

Take your pick.

Mc & M' are merely abbreviations of Mac which is the modernization of the Celtic Maqq. The anglicized version would be, for example, Donaldson rather than the Scottish McDonald. Vic is, basically, grandson of, as in Martin M'Donald vic Ilvray. And, Nc or Nic are the feminine forms of Mc (i.e. daughter of) & are the contraction of the Gaelic 'Nighean' which means a female of the family.

In the 1841 Glasgow census there were Irishmen whose names were spelled as McIlvray, McIlvery, McIlravey & McIllerey. Whether they descended from the original stock (possibly confirming that McGilvrays are Irish-Scots) or were from later reverse emigration from Scotland, is unknown. Gilvory is also an Irish name.





PENNYGHAEL &



ARSAIG

Just as many surnames, in the Western Isles, are derived from the Norse so too are many of the current place names; which is natural considering their long-time association here. Even the name 'Pennyghael' is derived from either Peighinn a Ghaidhil - the Gael's pennyland (66p.112) or from Beinn na Gael - the mountain of the stranger. (162) Gael means foreigner & is usually applicable to the Norsemen. For example, Donegal is from 'Dun na nGall' or Fort of the Strangers; &, the Hebrides were known as Innse-Gall or Isles of the Stranger (i.e. Norwegian) (187p.107) However, if Donegal was called that before 800 then this 'stranger' could not have been Norse. As well, the Pennyghael 'stranger' may refer to the earlier Celtic usurpers or even to the people before them. In any event, whether the McGilvrays were 'the stranger' or the later owner of his lands is unknown. The term 'penny', however, does come from the Norse whose basic land measurement was the ounce (or farthing). This refers either to its size (a farthing being four plough gates wide) or, to its value (a tax of a pennyweight of silver). On such a holding a family could live in reasonable comfort & afford to pay taxes. (166)

The name Carsaig comes either from car (plain) + aig (bay); hence 'Bay of the Plain' or from Kjarr-Skogr; a Norse home name meaning a brush wood. There is another Carsaig Bay on the Scottish coast west of Lochgilphead which is more appropriate to these meanings. One would think that the magnificent setting of our Carsaig should have conjured up a much more descriptive name, such as 'Spectacular Cove', to an impressionable wanderer. The stunning backdrop of this beautiful & rugged bay was used as the setting for the 1945 movie 'I Know Where I'm Going'.

