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| |  | | --- | | ***Narrative accompanying the***[***Family History Chart***](http://www.maybole.org/history/surnames/macilvean/MacIlveans%20of%20Carrick.xls)***(Excel file) presented to Maybole Historical Society during History Week in May 2002 by Irene Anderson :-***    **THE MACILVEANS OF CARRICK**    I have discovered that I have ancestors from all over Carrick, the hilly, pastoral, southern part of Ayrshire.  One of them had the very unusual name of Quintin MacIIvean, and through him I got involved in the history of Carrick in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.    Inevitably this lead me to the history of the Kennedies, the Earls of Carrick, Cassilis and Culzean, which is well documented.  I got useful information from Paterson’s ‘History of the County of Ayr’ (1847); Robertson’s ‘Ayrshire, its History and Historic Families’; Black’s ‘Surnames of Scotland‘;  Testaments left by the MacILveans; and the Old Parish and Kirk Session Records of several parishes in Carrick.    By the side the road from Culzean to Maidens stand the substantial ruins of a castle known as Thomaston.  It is believed to have been built about 1335 by Thomas, the illegitimate son of Edward, Robert Bruce’s brother, who held the title of Earl of Cassilis.  By 1507 it was owned Thomas Cory of Kelwood (a seat near Dumfries).  I have not found any records of the 15th century, but it is likely that a Bruce daughter married a Cory, who then inherited the castle because there was no male Bruce heir.    Abercrummie, writing in 1690 about Thomaston notes:- ‘Once the residence of the Corrys but now of the MacIlveans of Grimmet, a very pretty house with gardens, orchards and parks around it’.  The writer of the Old Statistical Account, writing about 1795 of Kirkoswald parish says:- ‘The next old building is the house or castle of Thomaston, about half a mile to the south east of Culzean.  Tradition tells us it was built by a nephew of Robert the Bruce in 1335.  It has been exceedingly strong and of very considerable extent. It was inhabited until 50 years ago and is now the property of the Earl of Cassilis.  It seems to have consisted principally of a strong tower and to have had a moat around it. There are the remains of an extensive orchard in the vicinity’. The L-shaped tower still stands, but there are no signs of the garden and orchard.  The farm next door  is known as the Kennels and free range hens inhabit the tower!   In the corner of the ‘L’  is a strong porch.  In his novel, ‘The Grey Man’, S. R. Crocket calls the tower ‘Kelwood’ and young Lancelot Kennedy and the Laird of Gremmat hide in this ‘yet house’ when trying to retrieve the treasure of Kelwood.    Thomaston is much older than the present buildings of Culzean Castle next door, the original tower there was called Coiff or Cove and it had been replaced before the present house was built in 1777, but the Kennedies lived there as far back as records go. In the 16thand 17th centuries the lives of the families of Coiff, Thomaston and Grimmet were very closely connected and much of the picture that can be built up of the MacIIveans is gleaned from the Kennedy histories.    The name Macilvean is of Scottish Gaelic origin and means ‘the son of the servant of St Beathan (or Bain), MAC - GILLE - VAIN, (in Gaelic ‘b’ is very close to ‘v’ and the name originates in Carrick and Galloway.  For over 200 years the senior MacIlvean was known as the Laird of Grimmet.  The original lands were those of the farm, still called after Grimmet, two miles east of Maybole.  (The name is also used for a farm on the eastern edge of Straiton parish).  Black gives the earliest records of the MacIlvean family as Gilbert Macilmeyn of Grimmet in the Register of the Privy Seal of Scotland in 1503, and his son Alano granted the charter of the lands of Grimmet in 1529 and a Bailie of Crossraguel.    At the beginning of the 16th century the head of the Kennedies was David Earl of Casilis and Thomas Cory was at Thomaston.  David was killed at Flodden in 1513 and Gilbert and Thomas may have fallen with him.  David had at least three sons, the eldest, Gilbert, became the second Earl and in 1516 was sent as Ambassador to England.  The second son, Thomas, married Thomas Cory’s daughter Kathleen whilst her brother George inherited Thomaston.  The third son, William became the Abbot of Crossraguel.    Crossraguel was a Cluniac foundation, an offshoot of Paisley Abbey.  Since 1404 the Abbot had held the Regality of Carrick, which meant he was responsible for maintaining law and order in the district.  William is believed to have built the impressive Commendator’s residence which still stands by the ruins of the Abbey.  As a Bailie Alano was expected to administer justice on behalf of the Abbot or Commendator throughout the Regality.    In 1527, as part of a local feud, Hugh Campbell, Sheriff of Ayr, waylaid and killed Gilbert Kennedy, the second Earl, at Loudon when he was travelling from Coiff to Edinburgh.  In revenge the Kennedy faction killed Hugh Campbell’s son and Allan MacIlvain was one of those arraigned for his murder, but murder was not a capital offence in the 16th century.    Alan MacIlvain’s son Gilbert became Laird of Grimmet and married Jean Corry, I do not know who her parents were.  Thomas Cory inherited Thomaston and married Margaret Napier.  This Gilbert MacIlvean, Thomas Cory and Thomas Kennedy of Coiff of the previous generation were all killed at the battle of Fawside, on the hill south of Musselburgh, the day before the battle of Pinkie in 1547, when the English routed the Scots.  Thomas Kennedy’s son, also Thomas inherited Coiff and Macilveanstane (I do not know the significance of the name).  George Cory inherited Thomaston on the death of his father and also owned Brochloch, just to the north.  He married Margaret Blair but they had no children so the property passed to his nephew John.  In the MacIlvean family, Patrick inherited from his father, Gilbert, the lands of Nether and Over Grimmet and Attiquin.  I do not think Over Grimmet could possibly have been the farm beyond Straiton.  Attiquin is still a farm between Grimmet and Maybole.    Most of the parish churches in the 16th century Carrick were under the Abbot of Crossraguel.  When Abbot William died in 1547 his nephew Quintin, the son of the second Earl of Cassilis, and brother of the third, became the last ordained Commendator.  He was an influential churchman and a good theologian; a strong supporter of the celebration of the Mass and the ‘old’ religion.  So much so that the following decision was made at the first General Assembly of the reformed Church of Scotland in 1560:- *‘To ask at the Estates of Parliament and the Lords of the Secret Council for eschewing of the Wrath and Indignation of the Eternall God and removing of the plagues threatened in his Law, that sharp Punishment be made upon the Persones underwritten and uthers Idolators and Maintainers thereof the contempt of God, his true Religion, and also of Parliament whilk says and causes Masses to be said, and are present thereat, within the places following ......... the Erles of Eglintoune and Cassilis ......... the Abbot of Crossraguel; the Parochiners of Mayboil, Gariane, Oswald, Dively within whilk Kirks Mass is openly said and Maintained’.*    Abbot Quintin took no notice, and the power of the Kennedy family no doubt helped to protect Crossraguel, when the other abbeys were sacked and burned.  In 1562 John Knox visited Carrick and tried his best to influence the people.  For three days the two theologians argued their cases somewhere in Maybole.  The kirks in Carrick were some of the slowest in lowland Scotland to adopt the ways of John Knox.    The family feuds in which the MacIlveans were involved seem to have been numerous and bloody.  In the mid-sixteenth century the Laird of Grimmet helped the joint Cassilis and Bargany factions of the Kennedies to besiege John Cory in Thomaston, because he refused to give up the golden treasure which he had acquired, and John was put in prison for a time.    By 1595 the feud between the Cassilis and Bargany was parties had reached a such a pitch that they received a personal reprimand from James VI, who was still in Edinburgh.  The Kennedies took no notice, and on December 11th 1601, a confrontation with hackbuts took place at Ladycorse near Brochloch on Cory land, when the Bargany group were trying to skirt round Maybole, where Cassilis would have been in residence for the winter.  All his men were wounded and Bargany himself was killed.  Both Patrick, Laird of Grimmett and his son were with Cassilis and, to quote, *“The young Laird of Grimmat was struken throw the chin and he and his horse bayth  struken to the eird (earth)”.*  Patrick must have lived to a ripe old age because he became Laird of Grimmet in 1547, after Fawside, and did not die till 1613.  In the spring, after Ladycorse, young John was involved in another escapade.  The Lady Cassilis, whose first husband had been Maitland of Lethington had been with her escorts to visit the Kennedy properties in Galloway. On the way home it was considered wiser to take the hill road to avoid Bargany, but their enemies, intent on revenge, waylaid them.  They tried to take refuge in Auchensoul, a house in the glen near Kirk Dominae in Barr, but Bargany’s men set fire to the house.  On this occasion no-one was killed but John MacIlvean and some of the others were taken prisoner by Kennedy of Drummurchie.    Thus the Macilvean history reflects the wild goings on which were typical of the sixteenth century Carrick.  In the seventeenth we have to try to understand the domestic affairs of the family in the context of the reigns of Charles I and IIwith the Civil War and Commonwealth in between.    Before 1600 George Cory of Thomaston had married Margaret Chalmers and they had twelve children, most of whom died in infancy.  Only girls reached maturity.  Anna the eldest and therefore heiress to the property, married John MacIlvean, the laird of Grimmet, and they had four girls, Margaret, Helen, Alice and Marion before Anna died in 1632.  At the time of Anna’s death, John MacIlvean, together with Hew Kennedy of Drummelane, John Kennedy of Cassilis, Hew Kennedy of Girvanmains, Walter Kennedy of Knockdow and John Chalmers of Sauchie entered into a contract to repair and maintain the Collegiate Kirk of Maybole, as a burial place for their respective families.  This was perpetuating the pre-reformation function of a Collegiate Church.  The old observances had continued there until late in the sixteenth century.  Then the reformers built a new church in Maybole and the old church dedicated to St. Mary and built by the Kennedies had fallen into disuse.  The ruin still stands just behind Maybole High St.  There is a list of the Kennedies buried there but I have not found the record of the MacIlveans, but it explains why there are no MacIlvean tombstones elsewhere in the district.    In 1622 Sir Alexander Kennedy of Craigreoch had acquired the castle at Culzean from others of his family.  Before his formal marriage, he took advantage of John and Anna’s eldest daughter, Margaret, by whom he had a daughter.  When he died in 1653, he left instructions:- *“... to his son 1000 marks to be employit to the use of Margaret his first daughter gotten of his marriage procreate betwixt him and Margaret MacIlvean”.*  The daughter was also to receive one boll of meal yearly in her lifetime.  Later his second son, Alexander married another Margaret MacIlvean, daughter of MacIlvean of Grimmett, presumably cousin of the Thomaston MacIlveans.  Their daughter married David Kennedy of Drummelane and his sister in 1673, married a later Patrick MacIlvane of Grimmett.    To go back to John MacIlvean, styled Laird of Grimmett, but resident at Thomaston, who as a young man had been wounded at Ladycorse in 1601 - he lived a long and eventful life not dying until 1668.  After Anna died, his second wife was Juliane Schaw, I think the daughter of Quintin Schaw of Grimmet who signed the National Covenant in 1636.  Juliane could not have married John until 1633, and she had at least four children before she died in 1641, Quintin, Gilbert, Patrick and Anna. I do not get the impression that John was enthusiastic about political affairs.  He ran a large merchant’s business from Thomaston, which was sited above the cliffs at Culzean, where there were caves most convenient for smuggling.  The grounds were well planted.  The Ayrshire walled gardens of that period were producing peaches and apricots, as well as more northern fruits and a wide range of vegetables.  The castle was comfortably appointed and there was quite a family of children to bring up.  He is, however, named in the list of Ayrshire lairds who, in 1646 received orders from Edinburgh to constitute a Committee of War to defend the National Covenant.  In 1660 he was amongst those fighting against Cromwell, who sacked and plundered Drumlanrig, belonging to the party known as Remonstrators.    In 1668, the year before John died, Charles II ordered the Ayrshire landowners to raise a militia, and in the case of Grimmett the order went to the ‘Younger’; this was Quintin, who was born about 1635, and was about to inherit Thomaston from his aged father.  Quintin was on the side of the Covenanters and therefore a Presbyterian.  The Lairds were instructed to forbid their employees and tenants to attend Conventicles. In 1678 troops were sent to Carrick to attempt to enforce this rule, because many of the lairds had failed to obey the instructions sent by Maitland, Duke of Lauderdale. The Laird of Grimet was one of those imprisoned for disobedience.  In another attempt to enforce the law, highland troops were sent to Carrick.  1500 were billeted, mainly on Cassilis lands, incurring the Earl in a loss of £137,499.6d. It is said that the Highlanders were amazed when they penetrated the Carrick hills to find they could converse with the local people in Gaelic.  I cannot help speculating that the reason Quintin’s son went over the hills to Barr was because he identified himself  with the Covenanters in the ‘killing’ times.    Meanwhile at home in Thomaston, Quintin had had at least four children, John and Gilbert by his first wife, and Anna and James by his second.  There are Testaments at Register House left by Quintin in 1694 and 1699, and by Gilbert, his brother in 1688.  In 1694 John is designated Quintin’s ‘air’, and in 1699 John was to make a bond with one, Andrew Kerr over debts.  So Quintin’s first son, John, inherited Thomaston in 1699.  This John had an only son, also John, and at the same period, there was a third John, probably the son of the second Gilbert.  One of these is briefly referred to in Kirkoswald Session records as having had an affair with Elizabeth Cumming in 1701.    These Kirk Session records report a saga which led to the excommunication of the only son John.  Evidently this spoilt young man became a real thorn in the flesh to the elders.  In the Spring of 1723 he was enjoying himself with his father’s maidservant, Joan Semple.  He invited her up to his room in the castle and evidently provoked a quarrel.  Joan got so angry that she threatened to report him to the Kirk Session.  John retaliated by storming out of the room, locking the door, and taking away the key.  Some time later the old Laird discovered that Joan was locked in his son’s room on her own, but the doting father blamed her for the misbehaviour.  He wrote a letter to the Maybole magistrates and had her put in goal in the cellars of Maybole town house, on the charge of the scandal of uncleanness.  Joan must have had some influential friends because on June 25th she was allowed to appear before the Kirkoswald Session to plead her case, and she accused young John of seducing her.  When John discovered what had happened he got some friends to smuggle Joan out of goal and arranged for her to go into hiding.  Meantime the Kirkoswald minister believed Joan’s story, and at the meeting on July 5th minuted that Joan must appear before him.  From that time on there is a note in the margin of the minute book every time ‘Young Grimmat’ was discussed.  John did not answer the first summons so on September 15th he was given fifteen days to appear.  On October 6th he pleaded innocence, whereupon the minister retorted that, if he was innocent, why did he go to all the trouble to organise Joan’s escape from goal?  He refused to confess so was given, so was given thirty days to reconsider his statement.  The matter was reported at the meetings of December 15th, January 12th, 1724, January 14th, and July 19th but John never came back.  Therefore on July 31st he was reported to Presbytery. At subsequent meetings on October 25th, November 8th, December 6th, January 16th, 1725, and April 12th the case was raised with no developments.  On May 2nd John was threatened with excommunication and, in the margin of the minutes of December 29th 1725, there is the terse heading ‘Grimmat excommunicated’.  But the story did not end there.  On February 20th 1728, John and Joan had the nerve to appear before the Session to explain that they were in fact living together and were married, when asked ‘how?’ they replied it was before a justice of the peace, about three years earlier.  They had decided to confess because they were finding it embarrassing to be considered to be cohabiting!  The last entry in the minutes is in shaky handwriting, the writer obviously having aged considerably, but in 1730 the matter was still being considered.  What exactly happened we will never know.  One record says John went off to America; but he left a will when he died childless and without a legal wife in 1739, and with colossal debts.  His father did not die until 1740.    There are several testaments at Register House relating to John of Grimmett.  The first is an inventory of the contents of a house. Before I knew the MackIlveans had inherited Thomaston I was puzzled at the quantity of possessions, but the list makes sense as the contents of Thomaston, which is in Kirkoswald parish.    VALUATION OF THE PROPERTY OF JOHN MACILVEAN OF GRIMMETT, KIRKOSWALD IN 1741, AFTER HIS DEATH                In the dining room, an oval table and an old carpet 15s., 2 old resting chairs 5s., an old arm chair and six old leather chairs 6s.,  old chimney 1s.              In the chamber, a stand bed with old sewed brown hangings 5s., feather bed, bolster and two pairs of blankets £1., a cabinet £1., an old chimney and tongs 1s.6d., looking glass 1s., down bed, bolster and pillow £1., 2 pairs of blankets 5s., 5 old carpet chairs 5s., looking glass 4s., a little square table 1s.6d.,  chamber box and broken pot 3s.              In the broad room, stand bed and old brown hangings 10s., feather bed, bolster, pillows, 2 pairs blankets £1.              In the green room, a stand bed and some old green hangings 10s., feather bed, bolster, pillows, and 2 pairs blankets £1.              In the kitchen, old pair tongs, old bunnock iron 1s., 2 old pots and old pan 7s., 4 brass candlesticks and hand candlestick 5s., pair of snuffers and box and 3 smoothing irons 3s.              In the brew house, old mast, old caldron 10s., an blinkin yat 3s.6d., a tub and two working fats 5s., old barrels 9s.              ................? of naprie and bed linen, 5 Dornick table cloths £1., 18 table napkins 9s., 6 towels 3s., 8 pairs linen sheets £1., 8 covairs 4s., old silk bed £2., old bridlehous holster, pair old pistolls, pair old boots £1., peuter ale, old light, plates £1.5s., 16 trenchers 8s., pint stoup 1s.2d., chopine (½ pt.) stoup 1s., flagon and sall 1s.6., 3 chamber pots 2s., tanker 6s., some old pictures £1.  dated 15 Jan. 1741    It took 8 years to sort out John’s business affairs.  The testament of August 1749 consists of 24 closely written pages listing all the debtors and creditors.  The affairs had been left in an incredible muddle.  For example Sir William Cunningham of Auchenshiel, who I think was his brother-in-law, was owed £218, but since Sir William owed John ‘merchant goods’ the matters were to be sorted out by James, son of Quintin MacIlvean by his second marriage.  The original executor had been Sir John Kennedy of Culzean who died in 1742.  He had married in 1705 Jean, daughter of Captain Andrew Douglas and together they had 20 children!  Dame Jean Douglas, Lady Culzean, had to take over as executor.  She had been renting the parks at Turnberry from John and in the settlement was to get four years rent free.  Curious items listed to be sold  were the empty bottles in the caves at Balleyard at Culzean, which makes one wonder what sort of merchant John was!  Very few personal items are listed.  There were three snuff boxes of silver and one of steel, something illegible of hartshorn (a form of smelling salts).  There was a stand of weights for weighing gold.  The defunct’s watch was valued at three pounds sterling “but it hath been stolen!“    In 1747 there is the valuation of the property of “John the Younger”, I think that this John who died young, was the son of the first Gilbert, John, the merchant‘s cousin.  His relict was his sister, Anna.  The value of this property is given in £ Scots, which was about one twelfth of a £ Sterling:- The plenishings of the defunct’s house of £50 Scots, a caldron and some brewing vessels £40 Scots,  The abulgraments (clothing) and some furnishings £20.18s.4d., a silver tankard and sugar caster £90 Scots, some pictures and trinkets £48 Scots, jewels set with diamonds £90 Scots, three cows at £24 Scots each and three hives at £20 Scots.    In the next place there was a debt owing to the said defunct at the time of his death by Sir James Cunningham of Milnercraig the sum of £2300 Scots.    About the middle of the 18th century the MacIlveans became bankrupt and were no longer able to stay at Thomaston and the ownership passed to the Earl of Cassilis and the castle has not been occupied since.  Meantime the Earl spent vast sums on the new Culzean.  The majority of the lands and estates in Carrick belonged to the Kennedies and I think the MacIlveans became tenant farmers.    In the early 1700s Gilbert,  Quintin’s second son moved to Glengennet in the parish of Barr and he lived there for about 40 years.  Glengennet, “popularly known as Pingarroch”, or Pinjerrock, had been a small barony in the sixteenth century and is referred to as the forty shilling land of Nether Glengennet.  The land stretches from the Girvan road into Barr for about two miles eastward on the north side of the river Stinchar.  The ruins of the ancient house can still be seen just north-east of the village, but the land is now farmed from an imposing Victorian farmhouse on a bluff further east.  The old parish records of Barr are well and fairly legibly kept from 1690.  Gilbert MacIlvean had two sons baptised, William in 1715 and Quintin in 1720.  Unfortunately at that date the wife’s name is not given.  According to the Kirk Session minutes, Gilbert became a deacon in 1735.  Marriage records are incomplete, but in 1753 Quintin married Jean Doak.  She and her twin sister Elizabeth were born in 1724 to James Doak in Auchenarrock, the next farm to Grimmet, but in Kirkmichael parish, in which kirkyard there is an old and interesting tombstone which gives Jean’s background.    Jean Doak’s grandfather, Gilbert, was born in 1663 and married Margaret Fliming, born 1680.  He was the manager of a small wauk mill in the village.  The village landowners were the Kennedies and in 1653, the corn and waulk mills are named as part of the barony of Kirkmichael.  When Abercrummie was writing, about 1690, he said there was no clachan by the church, but a settlement must have grown quite rapidly, because in the early 1700s it became known as a village of weavers, with a reputation as a source of Ayrshire needlework.  Gilbert Doak’s standing as a waulkmiller is commemorated on the back of his gravestone, where there are carvings of waulking shears and a millwheel.  There is also a ploughshare and a searing iron and, at the bottom, a ploughman with a team of four oxen and a boy with a goad; which would indicate that he was also a well-to-do farmer.  He died in 1722 and his wife in 1731.  On the front of the stone is a small shield with their initials.  They had three sons, John, James, and Robert.  James married and farmed Auchenarrock and his daughter Jean married the second Quinton MacIlvean.    As young married men William and Quintin went over the hills to farm in the remote, southern part of the parish of Barr, William to Ferter and Quintin to Cairnfore.  On Armstrong’s map of Ayrshire of this time the track from Barr to the Minnoch takes a different route from that over the Nick of Balloch used today.  It goes south from the village up the south side of the valley of the Water of Gregg, past the old farm of Darlae (spelt Darley on the modern O.S.map).  Immediately south of Darlae there is the following comment on the map:- *At the Nick of Darlae & half a Mile West the Road leads on the Side of a very steep Hill, its not above two feet broad and if you tumble you must fall almost Perpendicular six or seven Hundred Feet*(the capitals and spelling are copied from the map).  The close contours on the north side of Cairnhill can be seen on today’s map.  The track then turns west and joins the road from Straiton at Cairnfore.  It is difficult to know where Quintin lived.  Cairnfore is marked on the O.S. Map as an antiquity and the Forestry Commission trees at the site are currently impenetrable.  The 18th century buildings were probably nearer the Minnoch on the alluvial plain.  If you go down to the road to the Kirreoch  Picnic Area, it would seem that the Forestry Commission bridge has been built about a quarter of a mile downstream from the ancient ford.  On the west side of the Minnoch beside the ford there are several strange hummocks covered with turf, which I guess are the piles of stones, all that remains of the houses which were still inhabited  at the time of the 1841 Census.    Ferter could approached from Barr by a track to the west of the Cairnfore one, and there were tracks running east to west from the Clachries, and Ferter to Fardin and Cairnfore.  Ferter means a shrine and may have had significance for pilgrims on their way from Galloway to Kirkdominae.  The white-washed cottage there, just outside the forest, is still inhabited and there are signs of old cultivation, but it is difficult to imagine seven children being brought up there, with father an elder of the Barr Kirk.  At Fardin (the name probably comes from the old word for a quarter or farthing), there are the ruins of a more substantial house with four rooms downstairs and a steep stair to bedrooms in the coomed ceiling.  The old sheep rees nearby incorporate some old stones, which may have had a more important function.    From these farms William recorded the baptisms of seven children and Quintin, six.  I wonder whether they kept the rules that babies should be baptised in church, because it is at least six miles by those treacherous hill paths to Barr village. In the Kirk Session minutes Quintin is not mentioned, but William was appointed a collector in 1781, and again in 1783.  In 1788 he became Presbytery Elder; by then he was 73 and it seems to me it was tough enough to have to ride over the hills to session meetings, never mind going to Presbytery.  By 1788 William’s first born Alexander was farming at Clachrie, and had a daughter, the second son John was at Ferter in 1796. In 1831 his daughter Mary, now 65, was still in the district, because she felt that she had to confess to the Kirk Session that she had fornicated with David Gibb many years before, actually when she was 42!  The Session forgave her because of “the peculiar circumstances of age and infirmity”.  Her son took George his father’s name and put up a stone in Barr to his mother when she died in 1841 aged 74.  Two months later, at the 1841 Census, I could only find one MacIlvean in Barr, Mary’s sister, Jean living at Cairnfore, Independent, aged 80 (actually 77)    Quintin and Jean Doak’s children  were baptised - Jean 1756, James 1759, John 1761, Kathrine 1763, William 1766, Isabella 1767 when her mother was 43.  Isabella was my great, great, great, grandmother.    **THE MUIRS OF BARR**    Isabella MacIlvean married Robert Muir and they spent a long life together in Barr Parish.  This remote Ayrshire parish has an interesting history which must have influenced the people who lived there. It is in Carrick which is mostly hill country, very different from the lush farmlands of Kyle. Until 1747 it was part of Galloway and Barr only became independent of Kirkoswald and Dailly in 1653. Barr covers over 100 square miles.  In the North the river Stinchar runs through a picturesque valley, with the village at its confluence with the water of Gregg. It is difficult to imagine the valley 300 years ago, when the writers commented on the absence of trees, as it is now very well wooded with tree lined water meadows.  Going south from the village the land is high, ill-drained moorland dotted with small lochs, the biggest of which is Loach Moan, now lost in the forest. The burns here run into the Cree and its main tributary the Minnoch, which has a long valley running southwards and containing the road to New Stewart.    It not surprising Barr had a reputation for being remote and cut off for even now it is only served by an inferior second class road.  The old church was called the Kirk Dominae and was on a bluff on the north bank of the Stinchar about two miles down stream from the village.    On the meadow beside the church, the famous Kirkmadie Fair was held avery year and continued long after the church had been transferred to the village. In addition to the jollification it was an occasion to settle disputes and there were frequent brawls.  The following are two stanzas from an old ballad :-                O Robin lad where hae ye been?              Ye look sae trig and braw man              Wi’ ruffled sark and neat and clean              And Sunday coat and a’ man.              Quo’ Rob’ ‘I had a day to spare              And I went to Kirkdandie Fair              Like mony anither gouk to stare              At a’  that could be seen man,                The tents, in a’ three score and three              Were planted up and down man,              While pipes and fiddles through the Fair              Gaed bummin’ roun’ and roun’ man:              And mony a lad and lass cam’ there              Sly looks and winks to barter              And some to fee for hay or hairst              An others for the quarter.    Then there is the legend of the Laird of Schang  (a farm just east of the village) who fought with the devil:-              Then Cloutie ga’e a horrid hooch              And Schang nae doubt was fear’d enough              And hit him hard across the mou’              Wi’ his sharp steel,              He tumbl’t back out owre the cleuch              Schang nail’d the Deil !!    Up the steep hillside above the site of the Fair is a sacred spring, there are still the ruins of the retaining wall, but the history of its origin seems to be lost.    In the 17th Century there were many wild happenings in the hill country of Galloway.  The years 1685 to 1688 were known as the ‘killing times’, when fanatics who supported the Presbyterian ministers waged guerrilla warfare against the Episcopalians.  Many of the local people were superstitious and they were still killing witches in 1698 .  Some of them were still speaking Gaelic.  In addition the last three years of the century were extremely miserable, damp, and sunless, and there was widespread failure of crops and deaths from starvation.  The landowners were trying to introduce improvements, but it was in Galloway that the locals revolted against the abolition of the run-rig system, and they became known as the ‘Levelers’ when they tries to flatten  the dry stone dykes built to enclose the fields.    Against this background I tried to sort out the history of the Muirs.  The earliest testaments for the Muirs in Barr are for John of Cairnquhan and his wife Mary Stevenson in 1661, and for Adam of Glengennet in 1688.  The script is very difficult to read but Adam left his property to three children, Andro, Marion, and Ro...... (illegible).  From 1690 the register of baptisms in Barr is well kept, but in the early years only the father is named and the farm is rarely given.  The first wedding is of Adam Moor to Margaret Shokshaw. At the beginning there was more than one John Moor recording babtisms.  The first is Hugh to John Moor in 1690 ; there is no other Hugh till this Hugh had four sons, Hugh in 1719,  Gilbert in 1721, Thomas in 1726 and Quintin in 1730.    Amongst  the testaments there is one relating to Hugh Muir in Green of Barr in 1754.  It is interesting to contrast this inventory with that of John McIlvean of Grimmet 13 years later.                Testament of Hugh Muir in Green of Barr, 6th May 1754.                Summary of the preamble:-  Hugh Muir who married Jean had no children at his death.  His property was left to his nephews and neices, Jean the daughter of Gilbert who married Blair of Woodside; Dalquharn, Hugh who had gone to Ireland, Alexander of Dalquharn, and Thomas and John McNeish, sons of his sister Janet.                Valuation                                                                    Notes  15 pint vat, 2s,  a press  15s.,                                  press = a large cupboard with  2 runged chairs  3d                                                               wooden spokes enclosed or  closs bed in kitchen, 6s  8d                                     box bed for spinning  2 tubbs,  7s 4d, little wheel 5s, grate 1s 4d  peuter pint stoup,  1s  6d                                                      sroup = tankard  3 rounged chairs abnd stool 1s 4d                                     grape = farm fork  grape, long crook, 4 little coques 1s 6d.                            coque = wooden container  parcel of old iron 1s 6d,  29 old bottles 3s 7½d  2 pecks salt 1s 3d,  little books 10d  10 spoons  5d,  2 old sacks 2s.  old chaff bed and bolster 1s 6d, little pack 4d                   (probably of wool)  2 old covers 2s., cadda 1s 8d, covering 2s 5d,    cadda  = rough woolen cover  5 pairs old blankets  8s  little remnant of plydeing (plaid)  6d  7 hanks of white worsted, 1 hank blue worsted 2s.  3 servits 1s 6d,  table cloth 1s,  old quarter (quarto)  Bibles 2s 6d.  ane bed 10s, 3 rounged chairs and crap stool 1s 4d       crap = creepie  armed chair 6d, ambrie 8s 4d,                                            ambrie = wooden  store  3 old chests 8s 4d, little table 1s.  2 little pots and one tub 2s 3d.  brandy cask and old casks 6d,  a big wheel  (spinning) 1s 6d.  but and pewter plate  2s 6d,  1 pr. sheets  2s.  old milk stap 2 hammers, rake, pr. of clasps 2d                stap = wooden bucket  with 1 1 year spade, 1s  6d                                                                        extended stave)  old soan kite and sieve 4d, old caques 6d                        soans  =  fermented oatmeal  old groat skep 2s 8d, grindstone 6d,                                  groat = hulled grain                                                                                                  skep = wicker basket  The body clothes of the defunct Hugh Muir  a suit 10s, suit 8 s, suit 4s, big coat 3s, big coat 6d, 4 old woolen shirts 2s, 1 old linen shirt of coarse cloth 1s 6d, 5 old cravets 1s 8d, old cotton napkin 7d, old silk napkin 1s 6d (neckerchief), 43 sheep 6 pounds, 1 pr stockings 2s 6d, (the sheep seem to be misplaced!)    This was followed by two pages of debtors  all over the parish.    When Hugh’s third son started to have children he was living in the clachan, that was the part of the village on the west side of the Water of Gregg.  The baptisms of William 1769, Sarah 1772 and Thomas 1775 were recorded but I think he must have had another son, Robert.  There is no Robert Muir in the record, but he must have been born in the early 1770s (he was a little younger than his wife and said he was 70 in the 1841 Census).  The reason I think he was Thomas’s son as he named his first son Thomas, and when that child died in infancy he named the second Thomas, to keep the custom of calling the first child after his father.    In addition to farming Robert had a business dealing in skins.  It is likely he frequently travelled the road through the hills to Newton Stewart which was the main port for sending skins to Glasgow.  On the way he would pass the Macilvean farm at Cairnfore.  Of this road, in J. McBain’s book  ‘The Merrick’ written about 1920  he says:- “the road throughout is a single grass grown track with but scant room for two vehicles to pass. Prior to about the middle of the last century, when inland transport in the district was carried on mainly in horse-drawn vehicles, this was one of the main thoroughfares between Galloway and Ayrshire.  Its importance as an artery of trade was attested by a tollgate, tollhouse, and Inn at Rowantree, the blackened walls of which are still standing.  Long strings of carts loaded with all sorts of merchandise might then have been met wending their slow way along, sometimes passed by more speedy vehicles carrying passengers.  After their marriage Robert Muir and Isobel MacIvean stayed on farms near to Cairnquhan west of the village.  At Holm house Isobel was born in 1795 and Grizel in 1800.  The first Thomas was born in 1802, and the second in 1805.  The later children were born at Bourtries, Robert in 1807, and Quintin in 1809 and finally in 1813 when her mother was 46 -  ‘*Agnes, daughter of Robert Muir in Bourtries and Isobel MacIlvean was born upon the second and baptised on the 6th day of March 1813’*    (Barr O.P.R.).  Agnes was my great, great grandmother.    Bourtries is marked on the 1855 map about two miles out of the village on the Ballantrae road.  When I went to look for it in pouring rain, all I could see was a very old bourtree (elderberry) by the side of the road, and they are not very common in the valley.  There is also an old gooseberry and possibly the founds of a house.  In the 1841 Census  there was a toll house next to Bourtries.   I was told in the village  that in the past Barr people were not friendly to strangers, so they erected a gate on the road at each end of the parish and exacted a toll from all who passed by, including the smugglers setting out across the country with their booty from Ballantrae.    Bourtrie was also ideally situated to trade with those who came to Kirkdamdie Fair, just across the ford.  By 1841 Robert had moved in to the village with his wife and son Thomas. They had been married nearly 50 years and he was still a skin trader.  Thomas had just married a girl called Douglas McMurray. Thomas took over his father’s business and moved out to Laggangill, a farm in the hills about 2 miles south of Bourtries.  They had six children, Robert 1842, Thomas died young, Alexander  1847, Elizabeth 1849,  Thomas 1851 and John 1853.  Before John was two his father died aged 50, Robert was only 13, how did Douglas manage to bring up her family? | |