



ALEXANDER MCGILVRAY

(1783 - c1853)

Born: 1783 (He was age 68 on the 1851 census.)

Married: (Unmarried on 1851 census.)

Died: Apr 1851 - Jan 1855 (Not on the civil register.)

Alex McGilvray remains largely an enigma. Despite the many letters which have survived there is little mention of him throughout the upheavals caused by the forced sale of his family's property. Nor is he mentioned officially after the death of his father when he would have become the landless Laird of Pennyghael.

It is unlikely that Alex grew up in a happy home - not because the inhabitants were sour but rather due to the continual strains caused by the endless financial troubles. These strains would have been accentuated when Hugh departed for the winters leaving Alex to mature without a father image. There are also hints regarding less-than-perfect relations with neighbors.

Because his father was away so often it would have been natural for Alex to become head of the household at an early age. Children then were forced to mature early & he was no exception, for in 1798, at age 15, he left home to attend Glasgow University - for how long & with what success is unknown. He wasn't listed on the 1794-1838 university list but students could pay to attend classes & not bother to graduate. He was known to be in Glasgow, about Oct 1799, when Malcolm McGilvray, the Glasgow merchant, wrote Hugh regarding his son Sandy's account. There was also a letter from Malc McGilvray (who?) to Malc McGilvray & Co, Glasgow, in 1800, regarding the £2 balance of A. McGilvra's account. (GD174/638)

Education has always been a Scottish strong point & it was said "*there is no 'gentleman' of ever so small an estate but strictly cultivates the education of his children as the sure foundation of their future fortune*". (160p.16) Scottish gentlemen farmers & tacksmen were certainly better classical scholars than men holding the same rank & education in England. Dr Johnson remarked "*I never was in any house in the Highlands where I did not find books in more languages than one*". (110p.82) Most gentlemen spoke Gaelic, English, Latin & French & even Spanish. All classes were well acquainted with the topography of Scotland & with its history for at least 300 years back; & knew & understood thousands of lines of poetry. And, everyone was an expert genealogist.

No details pertaining to schooling in Mull are known, but a typical Glasgow school master, in 1800, taught 60-70 pupils of all ages. One such master would whack, with his cane, any older boy (there were no girls then in school) he spied goofing off. He said, "*I will not allow you to rob either yourself or those who sent you, nor will I permit such bad conduct to corrupt others. If you think I am harsh, the door is open & you may walk out*". Very few did so.

Many sons of Highland gentry went into the army (often the French army in olden days) in order to finish their education (143pp.309/10) but there is no indication Alex served during these war years.

Alex & his mother moved in with, & became part of the household of, their relatives at Pennycross. They also spend some of their time with his sister, Isabella McKinnon, in Glasgow & Greenock. The fate of his other sisters, Una, Cath & Mary Ann, remains a mystery. It is unknown if they married, where they lived or when they died. His sister Isabella's descendants are shown in Appendix 6 but these other sisters are not mentioned after the 1813 sasine. There is no McGilvray or McKinnon listed in the Tutor Register (SRO) but Mary Ann may have been no longer a minor by this time.

However, it is very interesting what the discovery of a single document can do to preconceived ideas. A whole new aspect of the situation facing Hugh & what he should have done with the estate, comes to light with a statement dated 25 Aug 1817 at Pennycross. (Register of Deeds RD5/119/442; & Inhibitions 25 Mar '18 DI cc1x194) "*Alex McGilvray, resident of Pennycross, Mull, son of the late Hugh McGilvray, Esq; considering that I am of a facile & pliable disposition & liable to be legally misled, & can't rely upon my own skill in managing my affairs*" hereby agree to rely on Alex McLean, Esq younger of Pennycross. McLean had to endorse all his money matters & Alex McGilvray bound himself not to sell any of his lands & heritages or to sign contracts, & to allow this fact to be published.

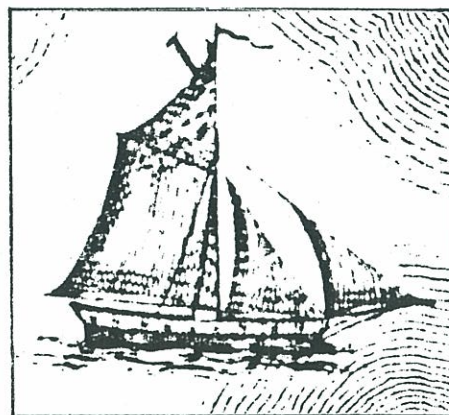
Alex's inheritance must have attracted the attention of shysters & other con artists who had or were trying to take advantage of his simplicity. Hugh could never have allowed Pennyghael to fall into his hands & thus had no alternative but to sell out. It seems Hugh kept trying to get a capable heir up to 1795. Were his daughters 'facile' too?

This was the same type of document that Hugh's widow, Cathrine McGilvray, had signed on 25 July 1805 at Pennycross, just six months after Hugh had died. (RD3/308/908 & Inhibitions 26 Aug '05 DI ccxix732) She also was of a pliable & facile disposition & couldn't manage her own affairs. She named as her executive, Arch McLean of Pennycross (Alex of Pennycross's father), with the witnesses being Allan McLean, surgeon in Mull & Dunc McFaden, his servant. She, too, had inherited assets which unscrupulous people wanted to grab.

The McGilvrays placed a lot of faith in their relatives at Pennycross because Hugh's daughter, Isabella McGilvray, & her husband John McKinnon, appointed as their executive, Arch McLean

Esq of Pennycross. The advantage of such a Power of Attorney would be to ensure adequate accountability. (SRO RD3/308/905 Dur) This 'factory' document was drawn up by John Reid, advocate, on 2 July 1805, & signed at Glasgow. It was registered 5 Sept 1805. Isabella said Hugh had died the preceding Feb, intestate, leaving "considerable property" to her & the other kids. As would have been expected, son Alex wasn't handling this affair. Isabella (& the family) were doing this because her husband was a mariner in Greenock, & "frequently out of the Kingdom" (thus he must have been sailing to the Continent or to America, etc). The witnesses were Lachlan McLean of Bunessan, Allan McLean, Edinburgh writer, Alex Morrison, Glasgow writer, & Joseph Walker, waiter at Buck's Head Inn, Glasgow (likely where it was signed).

In Jan 1819, both Alex McGilvray & his mother Cath, were staying with this sister's family, the McKinnons, in Glasgow. John was again said to be a Greenock mariner, operating a boat called "The Trader" which seems to have plied the Inner Hebrides including Mull. (Possibly John met his wife, Isabella McGilvray, on one of his trips.) John was experiencing heavy repair expenses & had little extra cash to support two relatives, especially as Alex is unemployed. Alex requested letters of introduction from Mull lairds in order to



"procure a situation". Considering his facile nature, this was a very unlikely occurrence & there is never any mention of him obtaining employment.

In the meantime Alex asked his cousin, Sandy MacLean of Pennycross, to sell his (Alex's) black horse & mare, & to forward the money to Glasgow. Had all the land sale money gone in just 14 short years? (197c) Alex also asked McLean to "get my money from John McGilvra" (likely the John who was a tenant at Carsaig in 1841). He went on to say "Capt'n MacKinnon is here idle & the Trader will not be allowed to leave port till the £100 is paid & that must be a loss to yourself as much as it is to him". It may be that some of the McGilvray inheritance, or even some McLean money, was in the ship.

And, Alex asked "is there any news about the MacGilvray(s) from? Canada", possibly referring to the Arch McGilvray who went to Red River with the Selkirk settlers but who returned after 1815.

In June 1819, a (Capt?) Allan McKinnon wrote Alex McLean, in Edinburgh, that the vessel was now ready for sea (bound from Greenock to Oban & Tobermory) but still required considerable expense. He requested that Mrs McGilvray's annuity be left with Allan's "wife & her mother". Possibly Allan was a son or brother of John McKinnon. An Allan McKinnon was a Carsaig tenant in 1795 but there is no likely baptism for him on the parish register. The 1812 postal rate from Glasgow to Oban was 9p; & to Tobermory 10p.

The Oct 1819 sasine listed Alex McGilvray residing at Pennycross, which was the residence of his cousin Arch McLean. Alex McLean (Arch's eldest son) was now at Pennyghael. Alex McGilvray may, therefore, have returned to Mull or possibly this was his 'home address'. When the Nov 1813 sasine was written at Pennycross, John MacKinnon had signed for all the family & for an "absent" Alex. Where he was then is unknown. Alex McGilvray was, however, living at Pennycross during the 1841 (Kilfinichen p.3) & 1851 (Kilfinichen 3p.6) enumerations, but not in 1861 (Kilfinichen 2p.11). Because he was not listed in the post 1855 official death registers it would appear he died between 1851 & 1855 (unless he emigrated, which is unlikely).

A relative (possibly another son) of Pennycross, Capt Hector MacLean, saw distinguished action in the Peninsula War (Portugal). His residence was Carsaig in Mar 1821 when he sued the Rev Alex Fraser, minister of Torosay, for the embarrassment caused when the minister stopped him from taking Communion. The minister claimed Hector had gone sport fishing after kirk the previous Sunday in gross violation of the Sabbath. Although Fraser never spoke to Hector he claimed the assistant minister at Kilfinichen had notified him. Hector won this trial (during which Pennycross was examined) but the minister's appeal was successful as no malice was proven (May 1823). (112v2) Such rural petty-mindedness would have contributed to driving away the very people most needed by Mull.

In 1819 an Inverness McGillivray purchased the estates of Pennyghael & Pennycross from the creditors of Arch McLean. Wm McGillivray had been born in 1764 at Dunlichity & was of the Northwest Fur Trading Co of Montreal. It is uncertain why he purchased the Mull properties. He added two wings to the original centre portion. When he died in 1825 he had no lawful son to succeed him & the estate passed into the hands of his son-in-law.

The old Pennycross house had a clock dated 1657 which was water powered. It had been made by Ben Lee-Yorke & until recently had been fixed to the outside wall of Pennyghael - but it is now gone.

It must have been with heavy hearts that the remaining McGilvrays of Pennyghael turned their backs on the graves of innumerable ancestors. Each & every one of our forbears had played out their part in our history under the precipices which towered over their rooftops. And, while these heather clad mountains loomed behind them there was the ever restless sea which throbbed in front of their doorways. During storms the crash of the surf on the beach & rocks would have sounded like thunder & always the myriads of waterfalls glistened as they tumbled from the misty cliffs. If only these rocks & this ocean could tell the tales of our clan.

Without doubt there are McGilvrays who might justly claim the title Pennyghael (if not its lands) but none has ever come forward to be recognized as head of this important clan. And, as memories fade & as such honors become less important, it is unlikely this position will ever be filled again. If my John Sr's father is ever determined & if he was, in fact, the next in line to Pennyghael then the task facing my family becomes more important than merely a single genealogical history. It would then involve the whole clan, the continuity of a noble line & the melding of an encouraging future with a glorious past.



Pennyghael/Pennycross - looking across Loch Scridain to Ben More