

2.4 Strathconon, Scatwell and the Mackenzies in the written record, c. 1463–c. 1700¹

Although some writers have considered the earlier history of Ross, these studies tend to focus on dynastic and political events and not much is known about the internal workings of Ross-shire far less Strathconon in the historical record prior to the end of the fifteenth century.² Strathconon, strategically situated in central Ross, was the key to the control of the earldom of Ross in that possession of these lands secured control of the few good access routes from coast to coast. The earldom of Ross and the possession thereof in turn was pivotal to the fortunes of the Macdonald Lords of the Isles in the fifteenth century who were fatally undermined by their loss of the area to the Stewart monarchy in 1475. This essay will consider the Strathconon and Scatwell area from the time of its earliest appearance in the historical record at the end of the fifteenth century (at much the same time as the Mackenzie clan themselves) and go on to concentrate on the area in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. An attempt will be made to pull together a variety of written sources in order to try to build up a picture of the area in this period inasmuch as the evidence will allow. These lands, Strathconon and Scatwell, which form the focus of this investigation, were a small part of a much wider (and expanding) estate that was controlled in this period, c.1463 to 1700 by the Mackenzies of Kintail / Seaforth.³ (see the map at the end of this paper, appendix one)

I Early mentions of the Strathconon area, and the Mackenzies ante 1508

The parish of Contin, of which Strathconon and Scatwell seem to have been a part, was served by a vicar named John in 1227. Other than that, the earliest mention of ‘Strathconon’ or the immediate

¹ I would like to thank my colleagues Professor Thomas Clancy and Dr Simon Taylor in *Roinn na Ceiltis is na Gàidhlig* (the Department of Celtic and Gaelic) in the University of Glasgow and also thank Dr Alasdair Ross and Dr Alison Cathcart, in the history departments of the Universities of Stirling and Strathclyde respectively, for their patient and helpful comments and suggestions all of which have saved me from a great many errors. All remaining mistakes are, of course, entirely of my own making.

² For the pre and immediately post Norse period in Northern Scotland (1266-) see Barbara Crawford, ‘Earldom Strategies in Northern Scotland and the Significance of Place Names’ (105-124) in G. Williams & P. Bibre eds., *Sagas, Saints and Settlements* (Brill, Leiden, 2004). R.A. MacDonald, ‘Old and New in the Far North: Ferchar Maccintsacairt and the Early Earls of Ross, c. 1200-1274’ 23-45 in S. Boardman and A. Ross, eds., *The Exercise of Power in Medieval Scotland c.1200-1500* (Four Courts Press, Dublin, 2003). Alexander Grant, ‘The Province of Ross and the Kingdom of Alba (pp. 88-126), Norman MacDougall ‘Achilles Heel? The Earldom of Ross, the Lordship of the Isles and the Stewart Kings, 1449-1507’ (pp. 248-275): these last two essays are to be found in E.J. Cowan & R.A. MacDonald, eds, *Alba. Celtic Scotland in the Medieval Era* (Tuckwell, East Linton, 2000).

³ The Mackenzies, by 1602, effectively controlled much but not of all of Easter Ross, most of central Ross (excepting some Munro and Ross lands) and the western seaboard between Assynt and Kintail. A list of the lands controlled by Kenneth Mackenzie of Kintail when he became chief in 1594, giving an indication of the extent of this can be found in the National Archives of Scotland [‘NAS’ hereafter], *NAS GD 128/23/1/3*; *NAS GD 305/1/166/7*; and in print in G. Burnett & G. P. McNeill eds., *The Exchequer rolls of Scotland 1264-1600: Rotuli Scaccarii Regum Scotorum 1264-1600* (Edinburgh, 23 vols, 1878-1908) [referred to as ‘ER’ hereafter] *ER* xxii, 504-6. For the lands of Strathconon and Scatwell on which this essay is focused, see the map (on page 3) of the *NOSAS* or *North of Scotland Archaeological Society* report, entitled ‘A Project to Identify, Survey and Record Archaeological Remains in Strathconon, Ross-shire. Report of Phase One, Scatwell and Lower Strathconon. November 2006 - April 2007.’ This is published on the internet at:

< <http://www.nosas.co.uk/publications/siterecords/SC1%20Report.pdf>>

See also the map at the end of this paper.

area is a reference to a (now lost) grant by King Robert I to Earl Hugh of Ross around 1309.⁴ These isolated early references apart, the earliest substantial body of historical evidence dates from the later fifteenth century. The earliest surviving credible reference to a Mackenzie in the historical record is around the same time: to Alexander (Alasdair ‘Ionraic’) Mackenzie in 1463/4. This document, a charter to Alexander from John Macdonald of Islay, Lord of the Isles and Earl of Ross, does not survive. Moreover, this charter (1463/4) would appear to have been the earliest title deed that was in the possession of Colin Mackenzie, the first earl of Seaforth around 1627, the chief of that name, when a notary, possibly ‘Johne Williamson,’ made an inventory of Seaforth’s charters. This inventory survives and is preserved in the Cromartie Papers in the National Archives of Scotland.⁵ This inventory is headed with the earliest and first title deed held by the Mackenzies: a note of a charter by John Macdonald Lord of Islay and Earl of Ross to his ‘cusing’ or cousin, Alexander Mackenzie of Kintail as follows:⁶

In the ffirst Ane chairtor gevin be Johne of Ila Earle of Ros and [Lord] of the Yllis to his cusing Alex[ande]r Mckenze of Kintaill off the fyve merk lands of Ki[[llin ?] the fyve merk lands of Garve. The tua m[er]k land of Corriewulzie, the thrie m[er]k land of Kenlochluichart, the tua merk land of Garbat, the tua m[er]k land of Dalnatwa, the four merk land of Auchlask, the four m[er]k land of Taag lyand within the Earldom of Ros and She[rr]iffdome of Invernes haldin of the earles of Ros be s[e]rvice of ward & relief and is daitit at Dingwall the sevint day of Ja[nua]r 1463. Gevin under the gevaris seill w[i]thout ony sub[scripti]on.⁷

Alexander Mackenzie, the first Mackenzie chief for whom we have surviving contemporaneous documentation was succeeded sometime around 1479 by his son Kenneth. This Alexander was styled ‘of Kintail’ and had held his lands in this period, according to this note, from the Macdonald earls of Ross. However, King James III (1460-1488), forfeited the earldom of Ross in 1475, taking it from the Macdonalds without having enough strength to make good the royal claim against them. Such was the context for Kenneth’s short, bloody period as clan chief (c.1479-1491), as Stewart monarchs struggled for over a quarter of a century to realise their claims to the earldom against Macdonald counter-claims. Kenneth was known in Gaelic as ‘Coinneach a’ Bhlàir’ (of the battle). Kenneth seems to have turned on his erstwhile allies, the Macdonalds, against whom he fought at

⁴ C. Innes, ed., *Origines Parochiales Scoticae* (Bannatyne Club, Edinburgh, 1850-1855) vol. ii, part 2, p. 504. cf NAS GD 90/1/23 ‘Mora’ (Main?) in ‘Strathonan’ in 1321.

⁵ A. MacCoinnich, ‘Kingis Rabellis to Cuidich’n’Righ ? Clann Choinnich and the Emergence of a Kindred, c. 1475-c. 1514 (175-200) in S. Boardman & A. Ross, eds., *The Exercise of Power in Medieval Scotland* (Four Courts Press, Dublin, 2003) 178-9 (& n. 16), 188-9. A. MacCoinnich, *Tùs Gu Iarlachd, Eachdraidh Chlann Choinnich, c. 1466-1638* (Tràchdas PhD, Oilthigh Obar Dheathain, 2004) 405-435.

⁶ J. Munro & R.W. Munro, eds., *Acts of the Lords of the Isles, 1336- 1493* (SHS, Edinburgh, 1986), no 81, p. 129.

⁷ ‘Inventar of Seaforth Charters’ (c.1627) NAS GD 305/1/166/7. J.M. Thomson & J.B. Paul eds., *Registrum Magni Sigilli Regum Scotorum: Register of the Great Seal of Scotland, 1306-1668*, (Edinburgh, 11 Vols, 1882-1914: Clark Constable Reprint, 1984) referred to as ‘RMS hereafter’ RMS ii, no. 801, p. 171. This is also cited by R. & J. Munro eds, *Act of the Lords of the Isles 1336-1493* (SHS, Edinburgh, 1986), no 81, p. 129-130. The Munros’ source was Sir George Mackenzie (1630-1714), styled Lord Tarbat and made a peer as Earl of Cromartie in 1711. Tarbat/Cromartie was intent on “proving” a fictitious ‘Fitzgerald’ origin for the Mackenzies and claimed to possess documents from the thirteenth and fourteenth century which would surely have appeared in the earlier inventory had they existed. MacCoinnich, ‘Kingis Rabellis’ p. 178-9, n. 14-16.

least two battles in Ross-shire, Lag a' Bhrèid sometime in the 1480s which he lost, and Blàr na Pàirce (c.1489-91) which he won. This final battle broke the Macdonald stranglehold on Easter Ross, resulting eventually in Crown domination of the area and a great increase in the power of the Mackenzies.

The Mackenzies were, as we have seen above, strongly associated with the Strathconon area in the Macdonald charter of 1463 which specifies the immediately adjacent areas of Kinlochluichart and Corriemoillie. This association is confirmed in surviving documentation associated with Kenneth Mackenzie of Kintail, Alexander's heir and successor. Kenneth (or Coinneach a' Bhlàir †c. 1433-91), who succeeded his father as chief sometime around 1479, was involved not only in serious conflict with the Macdonalds, but he was also in dispute with the Crown over the rights of possession of various lands. This latter dispute with the Crown over rents and rights of possession is of interest to us for the purposes of this paper. Between 1479 and 1487 Kenneth Mackenzie withheld his payments to the Crown and claimed that he had a 'right' to the lands of 'Eskadellis,' (Eskdale) 'Meyn' (Glenmeanie) in 'Straquhonane' and 'Innerquhonray' (Inverchoran), Kenloch Benquharane (Ceann Loch Beanncharain, near Scardroy) all in Strathconon, suggesting that their claim to these lands, based perhaps on continued possession, may have stretched back over several generations.⁸ It seems in any case that these lands while they had been in the possession of the earls of Ross prior to 1475 and had belonged to the Crown thereafter, they were, by the later fifteenth century in any case, under Mackenzie occupancy, as were lands in the lower country such as Fairburn, Moy, Brahan, Contin and 'Skatolmor' (Meikle Scatwell).⁹

II The strategic importance of the Strathconon and Scatwell area

Barbara Crawford has plausibly suggested that the Strathconon corridor may have been an important strategic east-west thoroughfare in Viking times (as no doubt was Strathgarve-Strathbran).¹⁰ The importance of these straths in central Ross in controlling east-west access was not lost either on the Macdonald earls of Ross (c.1411-1475) or on the kings of Scots (1475-). Strathconon seems to have

⁸ *ER* viii, 595. *ER* ix, 405-6, 532. See R.W. & J. Munro, eds., *Acts of the Lords of the Isles 1336-1493* (SHS, Edinburgh, 1986) at p. 201-202, for a discussion of these lands. For 'dùthchas' or 'kindly' tenancy, a right to occupancy acquired by possession over several generations, see M.H.B. Sanderson, *Scottish Rural Society in the Sixteenth Century* (Edinburgh, 1982) 58-62.

⁹ John Mackenzie of Kintail was a tenant in the 'Lordship of Ardmannoch' for the lands of 'Skatell Meikle' and 'Scattel Beg' and he paid rent to the Lordship (belonging to the Crown) for these lands as early as the 1497-1507 period (and continued to do so thereafter). The names of the tenant(s) earlier than this are more obscure. They may have been possessed by John Mackenzie's predecessors but there is no way of knowing. He did not, however, claim a longstanding right of association with this area as he did with the Strathconon lands. *ER* ix, 406. John obtained a charter to Meikle Scatwell in 1528, but it was not until 1591 that his grandson, Cailean Cam obtained a feu charter to Little Scatwell. MacCoinnich, *Tùs gu Iarlachd*, 407, 417.

¹⁰ For a discussion of the possible strategic use of Ross, including the Strathconon area, by the Norse see an article by Barbara Crawford, 'Earldom Strategies in Northern Scotland and the Significance of Place Names' (105-124) in G. Williams & P. Bibre eds., *Sagas, Saints and Settlements* (Brill, Leiden, 2004) at 111-116. B. E. Crawford, *Earl & Mormaer, Norse-Pictish Relationships in Northern Scotland* (Groam House, Rosemarkie, 1995) 24.

been one of the routes used to access the east coast by the Macdonald forces that tried to reclaim the earldom of Ross sometime around 1490. An account in a seventeenth century Mackenzie history indicates that Macdonald and Lordship of the Isles forces used the same route shortly afterwards to retreat home to the west following their heavy defeat at the hands of a Mackenzie led force at Blàr na Pàirce (c.1489-90) near modern Strathpeffer.¹¹ One party of retreating Macdonalds, were, it seems caught by pursuing Mackenzies at Inverchoran; some were killed there and others escaped.¹² This (admittedly late) account of Macdonald forces plundering their enemy lands in Strathconon as they passed through to the Dingwall area prior to their retreat by the same route, seems plausible. The placing of the Mackenzies athwart such strategic passes, by granting them the lands of central Ross enabled them to control movement through the straths: Strathconon itself, Strath Bran, Strath Gairbh and Strath Mòr.¹³ This had been recognised initially by the Macdonalds (in or before 1463) who may even have placed the Mackenzies there in the first place, and later, ironically, by the Crown who benefitted from the Mackenzie presence in the area at the end of the fifteenth century at the expense of the Macdonalds. The strategic importance of Strathconon and adjacent lands which had been recognised by the Macdonald grant of 1463 of lands in central Ross to Alexander Mackenzie was paralleled by the grant issued by James IV of exactly the same lands to Alexander's grandson, John Mackenzie of Kintail in 1508/9.¹⁴

III Ownership of the Strathconon area post 1508/9

James III had, arguably, instigated much of the chaos that visited the west Highlands and Islands due to his attempt to oust the Macdonalds from Ross in 1475. It took thirty-three years before his successor James IV achieved a measure of control in the area, although Macdonald discontent died hard and lingered for generations. In 1506 James IV suppressed a rising by supporters of Dòmhnall Dubh (Macdonald), who had probably hoped for a restoration of the Macdonald lands previously

¹¹ For the location of Logiebride or (Lagaidh Bhrèid ?) see W.J. Watson, *Place Names of Ross and Cromarty* (Inverness, 1904: Evanton reprint, 1996) 113-14. 'Logiebride' or 'Logivraid' is well attested in the medieval period up until the seventeenth century after which it is harder to find. Watson located it next to 'Balvraid'. It may be that the 'Bal' pre-fix replaced 'Logie' and that 'Baile Bhàird' supplanted 'Lagaidh Bhrèid' placed by Watson about a mile north east of Muir of Ord. For the location of the battle of Park (see Watson op.cit., 100), probably near modern Strathpeffer, and for dating see MacCoinnich, 'Kingis Rabellis,' p. 190-193 & n. 73.

¹² A. Mackenzie, *History of the Mackenzies* (Inverness, 1894; Clan Mackenzie Society reprint, Ontario, 1998) 95.

¹³ MacCoinnich, *Tùs gu Iarlachd*, 147-148. See also Alasdair Ross's discussion of the 'Lords and Lordship of Glencarnie' in central Strathspey where there were similar issues of lordship and control. In S. Boardman & A. Ross, eds., *The Exercise of Power in Medieval Scotland, c. 1200-1500* (Four Courts Press, Dublin, 2003) 159-174 at 159, 164-5.

¹⁴ The King confirmed the granting and of the barony of Eilean Donnan to John Mackenzie of Kintail in 25 February 1508/9. This included various lands in Kintail, Garve, 'Corriemullie,' the lands of 'Kenlochbenkerane,' 'Invercorachane' (Inverchoran), 'Invernesny' (Invermeannie?), 'Meyne,' and 'Eskadellis.' *RMS* ii, no. 3313 p. 708. Some of the place names in this such as Eskadale in Strathconon, may almost have been almost obsolete at the time of this transaction, but remained in use due, presumably, to prior usage in documentation. The Barony of Eilean Donnan of which Strathconon was a part, survived as the core lands of the Mackenzie of Kintail / Seaforth until the heirs of that family broke up and sold the estate in 1844. A deed from that date lists the townships associated with these lands. 'An Act for vesting in Trustees certain parts of the estate of Seaforth to be sold...' 29 July 1844. Anno Septimo & Octavo, Victoriae Reginae. *A Collection of Private Acts printed by the Queen's Printer. Passed in the Seventh and Eighth Year of the Reign of H. M. Queen Victoria* (London, 1844) Cap. 16. p. 394-5.

held by his grandfather, John Macdonald of Islay, last lord of the Isles (and the last Macdonald earl of Ross).¹⁵ The crown settlement of 1508/9 installed supporters of the Stewart monarchs in or adjacent to territories formerly controlled by the Macdonalds. The Campbells, Frasers, Grants and Gordons all benefitted at the expense of the Macdonalds and by being granted these lands and thus had a vested interest in holding future Macdonald rebellions at bay.¹⁶ In the earldom of Ross this function was largely performed for the Crown by the Mackenzies, former supporters of the Macdonald earls but who from now on had a close and mutually beneficial relationship with the Stewart monarchs which was to be both the making and eventual downfall of the clan in the later seventeenth century. They were confirmed in their possession of much the same lands as they had held as tenants of the Macdonalds, only now, from 1508, they were tenants in chief, holding their lands directly of the crown rather than as subordinates of another clan.¹⁷

The Mackenzie hold of the lands of Strathconon, Kintail, and adjacent lands became stronger during the sixteenth century as the clan, favoured by the Crown, and benefitting from competent leadership not least that of John of Kintail, (chief c.1500-1561), strengthened their grip of these and other lands in Ross-shire, often at the expense of less fortunate neighbours.¹⁸ Indeed it was at Inverchoran in Strathconon that John Mackenzie of Kintail, ended his career, dying aged around 80 in January 1561.¹⁹ Jean Munro has recently drawn attention to the way in which the clan developed in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, which found its expression on the ground with the establishment of numerous cadet families, many of whose substantial buildings remain.²⁰ A succession of deeds name the lands of Strathconon as an integral, if a small, part of the burgeoning Mackenzie 'empire' bound up (from 1508-9) with the lands of Kintail as part of the barony of Eilean Donnan.²¹ The

¹⁵ D. Gregory, *The History of the Western Highlands and Islands of Scotland* (2nd ed., Glasgow, 1881. John Donald Reprint, Edinburgh, 1975) 96-103. Macdonald pretensions to recovering Ross, although by now an impossibility were still sung about by Iain Lom, the Macdonald bard, in the mid seventeenth century. A. I. Mackenzie ed., *Òrain Iain Luim: The Songs of John Macdonald, Bard of Keppoch* (SGTS, Edinburgh, 1964) lines, 1580-1590; 1848. pp. 124, 126, 148.

¹⁶ MacCoinnich, *Tùs gu Iarlachd*, 130-134.

¹⁷ *RMS ii* no. 3313, p.708.

¹⁸ One of these less fortunate neighbours were the Mackenzies of Gairloch. Eachann Ruadh the first of Gairloch was John's uncle and attempted, unsuccessfully to supplant his nephew (1500-11). Although John patched up relations with his uncle from 1511 onwards, tension continued between both houses for over a century, turning murderous in the late 1540s when the head of the Gairloch branch was captured and killed by Mackenzie of Kintail in Eilean Donnan castle. The Earl of Cromartie, *A Highland History* (Berkhamstead, 1979) 132-4. MacCoinnich, "Kingis Rabellis," to 'Cuidich'n' Rìgh,' 197-8.

¹⁹ He is said to have died in January 1560/1 and to have been buried at Beauuly with his father Coinneach a' Bhlàir. W. Fraser, ed., *The Earls of Cromartie, Kindred Country and Correspondence* (Edinburgh, 1876) ii, 492. J.R.N. MacPhail ed., *Highland Papers ii* (SHS, Edinburgh, 1916) 33. He died in January and his son Kenneth (chief 1561-69) was 'retoured' as his heir by an inquest of his peers, 15th April 1561. *NAS SC 29/1/1* fol. 43v-45r. R. Adam, ed., *The Calendar of Fearn, 1471-1667* (SHS, Edinburgh, 1991) 121.

²⁰ J. Munro, 'The Mackenzies' in R. Oram & G. Stell, eds., *Lordship and Architecture in Medieval and Renaissance Scotland* (Birlinn, Edinburgh, 2005) 273-291.

²¹ *RMS ii*, no. 3313, p.708. MacCoinnich, 'Tùs gu Iarlachd,' 147-149.

‘wastelands’ of Monar and Ned were added to John Mackenzie of Kintail’s list of titles in 1542, and these were grouped together with Strathconon for exchequer purposes in 1588.²²

While many nowadays might consider the moors and hills of these lands a ‘wasteland’ or wilderness, they were a keenly contested resource in the sixteenth and seventeenth century in terms of not only their hunting and fishing potential but especially their value as summer grazing.²³ Such resources were jealously guarded and neighbours on both sides of the boundaries were keenly aware of the extent of their rights.²⁴ Mr James Fraser, writer of the Wardlaw MS (1660), gave an account of a regality court held by the Tutor of Lovat at Beaully in June 1589, following which he gave the lands of ‘Ardnacraske’ to a Donald Maciver and his brother John to keep the [Fraser] marches along the river Orrin between Ardnacraske and up into the wilds of Coire Chairbe secure ‘against the Strathconon men.’²⁵ Of these ‘Strathconon men’ perhaps the one who attracts the most in the way of historical ‘column inches’, although for matters relating to areas outwith Strathconon, was ‘Torcal Conanach’ or Torquil MacLeod (c.1535-c.1612), son of Ruairidh Macleod of Lewis by one of his spouses, Janet Mackenzie. This unfortunate Torquil MacLeod was the unsuccessful Mackenzie-backed claimant for the lordship of Lewis. He was known as ‘Torcal Conanach,’ due to his being raised and fostered in the region of Strathconon.²⁶ Torquil’s *oide* or foster father was his maternal uncle, John Mackenzie of Kinlochluichart (or Ord), second son of John Mackenzie of

²² (1542) RMS iii, no. 2817, p. 654; M. Livingstone et al eds., *Registrum Secreti Sigilli regum Scotorum: Register of the Privy Seal of Scotland 1488-1580* (Edinburgh, 7 vols, 1948-1966) [‘RSS’ hereafter] RSS ii, no 4944, p. 748. (1588) ER xxi, 337. Frith Mhonair / Forest of Monar [Ordnance Survey reference, ‘OS’ hereafter, NH 083 435], Nid an Fhainich / Nest of Fannich [OS NH 145 705].

²³ A. Ross, ‘Assessing the Impact of Past Grazing Regimes: Transhumance in the Forest of Strath’an, Banffshire.’ *AHRC Centre for Environmental History, University of Stirling, Short Report 3*.

<http://www.cehp.stir.ac.uk/resources/short-reports.html> See also the discussion of ‘soums’ – the grass requirements of one cow by the same author for the late medieval / early modern period. A. Ross, ‘Scottish Environmental History and the (mis)use of Soums’ *The Agricultural History Review* 54/2, 2006, pp.213-228.

²⁴ Martin Martin observed (c.1695) that the best way to ensure the continued remembrance of the boundaries between two estates was to take the youngest boys from each side of a march to attend the perambulation of the bounds. The agreed bounds were then marked by burying some ashes with a cairn and by beating both the boys soundly to help them remember the day. M. Martin, *A Description of the Western Highlands and Islands of Scotland, circa 1695* (Birlinn, 1999) 78.

²⁵ W. Mackay, ed., *Chronicles of the Frasers... ..the Wardlaw Manuscript* (SHS, Edinburgh, 1904) 185. ‘Ardnacraske’ OS NH 504 487, ‘Coire Chairbe’ and ‘Allt Coire Chairbe’ can be seen on the OS 1:50,000 map, NH 310 455. The 1:25,000 OS map shows the placename ‘Coracharabic Forest’ in the same area. For Coire Charabic, see Simon Taylor’s database under the headword ‘Coracharabic.’ Simon Taylor, *Beaully, the Aird, and Strathglass Place Name Survey* (St Andrews, 2005) published on the internet at <<http://arts.st-andrews.ac.uk/beaully/>> Accessed 21/10/2009.

²⁶ “By his first and only lawfull wyfe he [Ruairidh Macleòid, last undisputed Macleòid chief of Lewis] haid Torkill who being fostered with his uncle, John McKenzie, at Strathconon, was agnamed Torkill Conanach.” ‘History of the family of Mackenzie,’ by Sir George Mackenzie, First Earl of Cromartie, in Sir W. Fraser, ed., *The Earls of Cromartie, Kindred Country and Correspondence* (Edinburgh, 1876) ii, 512. For more on Torcail see, A. MacCoinnich, ‘Siol Torcail and their lordship in the sixteenth century.’ pp. 7-32 in: *Crossing the Minch: Exploring the Links Between Skye and the Outer Hebrides* (The Islands Book Trust, Port of Ness, 2007) p. 12 & n. 18. Available on the internet at: <http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/4622/>

Kintail (chief 1500-61) and brother to Kenneth Mackenzie of Kintail (or Coinneach na Cuil, chief 1561-69).²⁷

IV Cailean Càrn's Estate Accounts, 1569

While it is clear that boundaries of estates were keenly observed and contested, the activity within these bounds is not always clear. An estate account prepared by Mr Alexander Mackenzie of Kilchrist for Colin Mackenzie of Kintail (or Cailean Càrn, chief 1569-94), the chief of the Mackenzies of Kintail survives for the first year of Cailean's chiefship in 1569.²⁸ This supplies us with some fascinating vignettes of life on the large estates of the Mackenzies of Kintail including Strathconon. The lands of 'Strathconon' returned rents to the chief in that year together with separate returns for 'Scatoll M[e]ikle' and 'Litill Skatoll.' The names of the tacksmen, let alone the tenants remain elusive, although a Duncan 'Bane'²⁹ is named as the person paying the rents for his lands of Little Scatwell, £3 6s 8d for the term of Martinmas 1569. Further downstream John Mersell (*John Marshall*) & the rest of the 'tenentis of kingis Urray' (who were not named) paid 20s for their lands.

Some other individuals are named too. A man referred to as 'mc Dow Moir' (*mac Duibh mòir*) in Scatwell made a payment of 6s 8d in lieu of the heriot horse he owed his chief following, presumably, his father's death. The 'heriot' was a sort of 'death duty' levied in Scotland at that time whereby the lord/clan-chief could take the best horse or cow of the deceased from the deceased's next of kin, as a return to the chief for a lifetime's protection of his clansman.³⁰ Despite the evident circulation of cash, payments in kind remained common. The 'customis' or renders (taxes) of Kintail and Strathconon were paid to the estate in merts ('marts' or cattle). Strathconon supplied four that year which were then sent by the estate onwards to the port of Cromarty. Other cattle were sent sporadically to the chief on demand. Such was the case when the 'bowman' (cattle-farmer) of Corriemoillie in 1569, a man named mc Ane Reoch (*mac Iain Riabhach*), delivered two marts to Tormot mcCowlew (*Tormod macAmhlaigh*) which were slain at Redcastle, presumably after having been driven there from Strathconon (or Strathgarve), for the laird's Christmas dinner.

²⁷ D. Warrand, *Some Mackenzie Pedigrees* (Inverness, 1965) 85-6. For the custom of fosterage, common among clans in Gaelic Scotland at this time, see MacCoinnich, 'Daltachas, Fineachan agus Alba anns anns an t-Siathamh agus an t-Seachdamh linn deug' in G. Munro & R.A.V. Cox, eds., *Cànan & Cultur: Rannsachadh na Gàidhlig 4* (Dunedin Academic Press, Edinburgh, forthcoming 2010).

²⁸ *British Library Additional Manuscripts* ['BL Add MS' hereafter'] 39210 ff. 7-17. MacCoinnich, *Tùs gu Iarlachd*, 380-404.

²⁹ This Duncan Bayne (1569) could, possibly, have been a relation to Alexander 2nd laird of the Baynes of Tulloch (laird from 1559-1600), or, equally likely been called 'Bain' as a by-name or nickname. For the family of the Baynes of Tulloch, see D. Mackinnon, 'Old Ross-Shire Families: The Baynes of Tulloch' in *The Scottish Genealogist* 1955 vol. 2, no. 1, p. 3-5. Kenneth Bayne 'son lauchfull' to Duncan Bayne 3rd laird of Tulloch (laird 1600-1620) was witness to a Sasine related to the transfer of the lands of Kinlochluichart to Kenneth Mackenzie, third son of the tutor of Kintail in 1619. *NAS RS 37/1* fol. 106.

³⁰ A.I. Macinnes, *Clanship, Commerce and the House of Stuart, 1603-1788* (East Linton, 1996) 12. See the definition in the Dictionar o the Scots Leid: <http://www.dsl.ac.uk/dsl/>. See also M. Martin, *A Description of the Western Islands* (Birlinn, 1999) 78-9.

A ‘Ferchir mcConchie Dow’ (*Fearchar MacDhonnchaidh Duibh*), gave 13s and 4d to ‘ane puir wyfe of StrathCho[nn]an’ in this account from 1569. Unfortunately the reason for this expenditure is unrecorded, and we have no way of knowing why Fearchar would make such a payment to the ‘poor wife.’ Ferchir mcConchie Dow was the ‘officiar’ of Strathconon and he disbursed 40s that year which was given to the ‘blawaris of the Irne.’ The ‘irne’ or iron referred to here is unclear. ‘Blawaris’ of the iron would seem to imply that some tenants on this part of the estate had a duty, perhaps, to man bellows in the production of iron. Forty shillings seems like quite a large sum. It is unclear where this iron was being worked, and the Loch Maree area over to the west would seem more likely than the immediate environs of Strathconon and this area was parcelled together with the Loch Maree area in terms of estate management at this time (see discussion of iron works below).³¹

Further down the glen, John mcConchie Moir (*Iain mac Dhonnchaidh Mhòir*), ‘officiar’ of Skatwell in 1569, paid 13s 4d for a horse hide to be used on the curra[ch] or coracle presumably used for crossing the river Conon. Although pitch is not named in conjunction with this entry it does appear elsewhere in the account and one hopes that John’s currach was watertight. In any event it appears that the ferry at Scatwell for which the curach, presumably, was used was a profitable concern as it generated enough revenue to be liable to taxes to the tune of 20s in 1588. It was not an occupation that was without its hazards as crossing the river by boat could be a risky business. Mr James Fraser reported nearly 100 years later (6th February 1667) that twenty-two persons had drowned in the Conon due to overloading of the ferry, which sounds like a larger craft than the earlier coracle.³²

V Cailean Càim’s last will and testament, 1594 and Jane Ross’s testament, 1604

The rental of 1569 is a document that is related to the beginning of Cailean’s time as chief and the next document that sheds light on matters in the Scatwell and Strathconon corners of his estates appears at the death of Cailean Càim at Redcastle in 1594. Cailean’s last will and testament includes a lengthy list of debts owing to the deceased and this included items related to Strathconon. The sum of £148 was owed to Colin’s estate in both money and victual (beir) by ‘Tormot mcIwer (*Tormod MacÌomhair*), Donald McEwir (*Dòmhnall MacÌomhair*), and the remanent tenantis & occupiaris of the ground and lands of Strath[ch]onane.’ The lands of Strathconon were parcelled together with the

³¹ For a discussion of Mackenzie iron production on their estates, c. 1569-1630 see A. MacCoinnich, ‘‘Cleiffis of Irne’: Clann Choinnich agus Gnìomhachas Iarainn, c. 1569-1630’ in W. McLeod, J.E. Fraser & A. Gunderloch eds., *Cànan & Cultur / Language & Culture. Rannsachadh na Gàidhlig 3* (Dunedin Academic Press, Edinburgh, 2006) Available online at

<http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/7732/>

³² *ER* xxi, 332. W. Mackay, ed., *Chronicles of the Frasers... ..the Wardlaw Manuscript* (SHS, Edinburgh, 1904) 472-3.

lands of Kinlochewe in terms of another commodity appearing in the inventory: iron. A John mcCondochie (*Iain mac Dhonnchaidh*), Donald mcGillespie (*Dòmhnall mac Gilleasbuig*) and a Thomas mc[Inglas] (*Tòmas mac Iain Glais*), tenants and occupiers of the lands and ground of Strathconon and Kinlochewe ‘paid the dutie on 1500 cleiffis of irne’ to Cailean Càrn their chief, coming to a sum of £1500.³³

This £1500 was a substantial sum, amounting to 10% of the estate’s income, and Cailean’s estate compares favourably with that of his fellow nobles. He was a very wealthy man by the standards of the day and this income from iron was a significant sum.³⁴ Colin was succeeded by his son Kenneth Mackenzie of Kintail. Kenneth married Jane Ross, a daughter of Ross of Balnagowan in 1593. Jane died in 1604 and her last will and testament included reference to the payment of mails or rents due to her from the part of the Mackenzie estates bestowed on her. This included a reference to a John mcConneil (*Iain mac Dhòmhnail*), Donald mac Ewir (*Dòmhnall mac Ìomhair*) and other tenants in Strathconon in regard of the meal and bere they owed the estate. A separate entry appeared for those who were to work on the iron in both the Strathconon and Kinlochewe areas. Jane Ross’s testament in 1604 showed some of the same names which had appeared in her late father in law’s testament ten years earlier: John mcCondochie (*Iain mac Dhonnchaidh*), Donald mcGilleis (*Dòmhnall mac Gill’Iosa*), and Thomas mcInglas (*Tòmas mac Iain Glais*), all named as tenants in Strathconon.³⁵

The recurrence of Strathconon tenants in an entry related to iron in 1569, 1594 and 1604 (as discussed above) raises some interesting questions. Although it has long been recognised that there was significant iron working on the ground in the Loch Maree area, the linkage of this area with Strathconon in connection with iron working is new. In terms of the place-names, almost all in the Strathconon area are of Gaelic origin with earlier substrata including a Norse element. Some toponymic elements in the place-name bank of the Strathconon area, such as ‘ruadh’, ‘mèinne’ and ‘iarann’ are suggestive of iron working but these are also fairly generic words and this might be reading too much into limited evidence. The dearth of source materials makes such interpretation of the place-name evidence very tempting. Scardroy, or *An Sgàrd Ruaidh*, for instance, means a reddish scree - a reddish marking on rocks, indicating the presence (perhaps?) of traces of iron ore

³³ NAS CC 8/8/29 fol. 68.

³⁴ MacCoinnich, ‘‘Cleiffis of Irne’’: Clann Choinnich agus Gnìomhachas Iarainn, c. 1569-1630’ in W. McLeod, J.E. Fraser & A. Gunderloch eds., *Cànan & Cultur / Language & Culture, Rannsachadh na Gàidhlig 3* (Edinburgh, 2006) 142-143 & n.30. Available online at <<http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/7732/>>

For the relative wealth of Scottish nobles at this time see K.M. Brown, *Noble Society in Scotland, Wealth, Family and Culture from Reformation to Revolution* (Edinburgh, 2004) 105-108.

³⁵ Although these may have been surnames, it is more likely that these names were patronymics. NAS CC 8/8/43 fol. 731-732.

although this seems difficult to prove without geological analysis.³⁶ The name element ‘Mèinne,’ (Glenmeanie) however, would seem on the face of it to signify a ‘mine.’³⁷ Although the British geological survey’s report on the area would not appear to support economically viable concentrations of ore nowadays, this might not always have been the case.³⁸ The Highlands may also have had very different definitions of economic viability in the sixteenth century than those of today. What is economically marginal nowadays might have been feasible with a large labour pool in a very different economic climate. This being so, and with documentary sources telling us that Strathconon men were engaged in iron working, but being unable to satisfactorily identify iron-working sites in Strathconon, it does raise a further question. Were people from the Strathconon lands used as a labour force in iron production activity in the Loch Maree area, for which we have better evidence, or were they engaged in iron-working closer to home?³⁹

VI The economy

The economy of the area based on the strength of these two documents, despite the significant reference to iron, and a significant salmon fishery, was based largely on cattle production. Perhaps not surprisingly bere (barley) and meal are listed as an exaction from the tenants of Strathconon in 1604, which implies the existence of mills necessary for the production of such meal together with activities attested elsewhere on the Mackenzies’ estates such as brewing and presumably distilling.⁴⁰ While there was cultivation in some sections of the strath, most of this land was marginal agricultural land. Cattle production, rather than arable farming, was the main focus of activity on the Strathconon section of the wider Kintail/Seaforth estates. This is reflected in the explicit mention in

³⁶ However, a local Ross-shire tale is suggestive of a quite different etymology. J.H. Dixon collected a tale in the Gairloch area (1886) that said that Lochaber men had raided cattle in Easter Ross sometime perhaps around 1600. They returned with their *creach* (rustled cattle) through Scàrd Ruaidh, stopping there for the night. It was they who named the place Scàrd Ruaidh as the cattle were so hard pushed they bled, staining the rocks. J.H. Dixon, *Gairloch in North West Ross-shire* (Edinburgh, 1886) 50. The ‘bleeding’ origin explanation for reddish rocks may have been a popular one in Gaelic storytelling. There is a similar one for ‘Clach na fala’ in my home parish on Habost Machair, Ness, the Isle of Lewis, where blood is meant to have stained a prominent rock red as enemies of the local clan were despatched over the stone - an explanation that would probably not find favour with geologists.

³⁷ W. J. Watson, *The Place Names of Ross and Cromarty*, 154. See also the placenames in neighbouring areas such as Strathglass and the Lordship of Lovat, where ‘Main’ and its variants are also found, as collected and discussed by Simon Taylor, *Beauly, the Aird and Strathglass Place Name Survey* (St Andrews, 2005) <<http://arts.st-andrews.ac.uk/beauly/>>

³⁸ MacCoinnich, ‘Cleiffis of Irne’ 143. <<http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/7732/>>

³⁹ Future research may unearth records of tacks which specify such service in return for land, but I have yet to discover these.

⁴⁰ For a brief assessment of agricultural activity on Seaforth estates see A. MacCoinnich, *Tùs gu Iarlachd*, pp. 270-274. For recent work on mills and milling in another part of what was the Seaforth estate, 1611-1844, see (in Gaelic) F. MacLeòid, *Muilnean Beaga Leòdhais* (Acair, Steòrnabhagh, 2009) 20-25; and (in English) F. MacLeod, *The Norse Mills of Lewis* (Acair, Stornoway, 2009) 20-23. Examples of milnes and alehouses proliferate in the manuscript sources relating to Mackenzie lands. Only a small selection of documentary references is offered here to illustrate this point. Meikle Suddie Alehouse in 1566, Alehouses of Kynnculledrum (Ord), Kessock and Lochbroom, 1569, *BL Add./ MS 39210* f. 5, ff. 7-17 (this same source also refers twice to aqua vitae: i.e. *uisge-beatha* or whisky). Kilchreist (1666), *BL Add Ch. 61669*; Alehouse and Milne of Fodderty (1522), Alehouse & Milne of Allangrange (1564), Alehouse and milne of Coul and of Tarradale (1593), The farm, still and alehouse of Easter Kessock, 1594 (*NAS GD 305/1/166/7*). These were commonplace across the Mackenzie estates. MacCoinnich, *Tùs gu Iarlachd*, n. 987.

a number of conveyancing documents (and evident in the place-names) of grazings and sheilings.⁴¹ These place-names would not be mentioned in such documents unless there was a distinct economic angle to the transaction, although often this is implicit rather than explicit, and we have - unless future research clarifies this - little to quantify the precise nature of the cattle-rearing operation on the Kintail/Seaforth estates, including Strathconon, other than confidently saying it was substantial.⁴² Research by Dr Alasdair Ross on the Stratha'an estate, and on Breadalbane lands where documentation does exist clearly indicate the importance of such intensive cattle-farming on highland estates during this period. It would seem that the Mackenzie management of their estates including the Strathconon area, with an emphasis on cattle farming on marginal lands, closely paralleled what was happening elsewhere in Highland Scotland during this period.⁴³

VII The lands and the church

Colin Mackenzie the first earl of Seaforth (c.1594-1633) was praised by late seventeenth-century clan chroniclers for his piety. He laid the foundation, apparently, for a church in Strathconon of which the walls are 'still to be seen in Main in Strathconon, the walls being built above the height of a man above the foundation, and he had a mind to endow it further had he lived longer.'⁴⁴ This source used by Alexander Mackenzie (1879 & 1894) was probably a late seventeenth or early eighteenth-century Mackenzie clan manuscript history – possibly the 'Ardintoul MS,' written c. 1680, and it is not clear if this church was left unfinished or if it ever came into use. Certainly by the time of the Old and New Statistical Accounts, of 1793 and 1834, there was no mention of such a church, any previous building having been superseded by the new churches at Kinlochluichart and at

⁴¹ The mentions of grassings and shielings are a commonplace in deeds at this time. A few examples are offered here to illustrate the point. The grassings of the forest of Monar with sheilings and fishings (1620) *NAS GD 46/20/6/5*; *NAS RS 37/1* fol. 216. The half-grazings of Corriemoillie and Strathvaich (1600,1607, 1610) *NAS GD 1/1149/4 & 25*, *NAS RS 36/1* fol. 267-8. The lands, shielings and grazings of Kinlochluichart (1619) *NAS RS 37/1* fol. 106. The davoch land of 'Dauchnaclerich' (Fodderty parish), with its sheilling of the Garbet (1619, 1637) *RMS vii*, no. 1995, p. 722; *RMS ix*, no. 634, p. 228. The lands of Comrie, Tarvie and their grazing in 'Glenuiack' (OS NH 110 479) in the upper reaches of the River Meig (1667), *NAS GD 1/1149/26*. The lands of Drynie with their grassings of Strath Sgitheach (1618) *NAS RS 37/1* fol. 73. Further research in estate papers and the deeds in the Register of Sasines should be able to add more detail to this picture. A casual glimpse at the Ordnance survey map shows a number of place elements that one would associate with transhumance activity: Càrn Airigh Chàrn [NH 302 578], Loch Airigh Lochain [NH 287487] Allt Airigh Leitreach & Arrileitreach [NH 373602], Mòinteach Coir a' Bhuic [NH 170520] all of which point circumstantially to sheiling or grazing activity, while place names such as Meallan nan Uan, Maoil nan Gamhnach, Coire nan Each, Glac nan Each, Càrn na Bà Brice, Meall nan Damh, all in the Strathconon area may also add to such circumstantial evidence which hint at the presence of livestock.

⁴² MacCoinnich, *Tùs gu Iarlachd*, 274-276. See also the discussion of the Strathconon section of the Mackenzie of Kintail estates above, in 1569. While casual references to cattle and related activity abound in the sources the only detailed deed I have discovered thus far specifically relating to cattle was a contract worth £10,000, whereby George Mackenzie, second earl of Seaforth undertook to supply James Barnes an Edinburgh merchant with 1500 head of cattle, his 'best ky' from his lands on Lewis over a five year period from 1641. *NAS GD 201/1/54*.

⁴³ A. Ross, Assessing the Impact of Past Grazing Regimes: Transhumance in the Forest of Stratha'an, Banffshire. *AHRC Centre for Environmental History, University of Stirling, Short Report 3*. <<http://www.cehp.stir.ac.uk/resources/short-reports.html>>

⁴⁴ Mackenzie, *History of the Mackenzies* (1894) 245.

Strathconon built in 1821 and 1830. The placename ‘Cnoc Ministeir’ by Scardroy hints at a more ad hoc arrangement.⁴⁵

The lands of Strathconon fell under the parochial watch of the vicars or ministers of Contin and, seemingly, Urray and Fodderty. Of these parishes not too much is known prior to the Reformation. A vicar named John is on record in 1227 for Contin and the next surviving reference to a clergyman for this parish seems to be in the early sixteenth century. There is a record of a man surnamed ‘Fores’ (‘For[b]es’ or ‘Forres’?) as the incumbent of Contin parish prior to 1550, when he was succeeded by a David Stewart.⁴⁶ A Mr Robert Burnet was the parson of Contin – or at least in receipt of the parochial income at the time of the Reformation, 1560 – and Sir Alexander Peddir and a Mr David Halyburton were in receipt of vicarage and parsonage fees in the adjacent parish of Urray although it is not clear whether any of these persons actually performed any ecclesiastical duties.⁴⁷ A Donald Adamsoun is named as an exhorter of Urray and Dingwall in 1569, but the same record does not mention Contin.⁴⁸ Master Robert Burnet, son of the previous parson of Contin seems to have succeeded his father in the vicarage of Contin in 1587.⁴⁹ More research will doubtless add to this and bring further clarity to this picture. But it seems that formal clerical provision may have been patchy in the Strathconon area if not in Scatwell.

This impression of a patchy clerical provision for Strathconon around the Reformation and earlier is reinforced when the historical record does become fuller during the seventeenth century. Dingwall Presbytery records from the latter part of the seventeenth century give us more information about Strathconon and its difficulties in securing the services of a minister due to the area’s reliance on surrounding parishes. Mr Farquhar MacLennan, minister of Fodderty and Mr Donald MacRae, minister at Urray were ordered in 1649 to go and preach in Strathconon as this ‘was incumbent on them.’⁵⁰ The moderator of the Dingwall Presbytery in a meeting of 1666, commented that all the ministers present were ‘diligent in their preaching and catechising save that Strathconon alone was neglected.’ The brethren ordered Mr George Cumine, minister of Urray (1658-1705) and Mr Donald Ross, minister of Contin (1651-1674) to take action regarding the serving of Strathconon.⁵¹ Mr Donald Ross in any case seems to have acted on this and was recorded as having preached at

⁴⁵ *New Statistical Account* 14, 238. OS Pathfinder 158. NH 212 518.

⁴⁶ C. Innes, *Origines Parochiales* ii, part 2, p. 505.

⁴⁷ J. Kirk, ed., *The Books of the Assumption of the Thirds of Benefice: Scottish Ecclesiastical Rentals at the Reformation* (Oxford, 1995) 635, 640, 645. G. Donaldson, ed., *Accounts of the Collectors of the Thirds of Benefices, 1561-1572* (Scottish History Society, Edinburgh, 1949) 210-211.

⁴⁸ Donaldson, ed., *Accounts of the Collectors of the Thirds of Benefices, 1561-1572*, 208.

⁴⁹ C. Innes, *Origines Parochiales* ii, 505.

⁵⁰ W. Mackay ed., *Records of the Presbytery of Inverness and Dingwall, 1643-1681* (Scottish History Society, Edinburgh, 1896) [‘Mackay, *Records*,’ hereafter] p. 145-146, 166.

⁵¹ Mackay, *Records*, 315. H. Scott et al eds., *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticae* (Edinburgh, 11 vols, 1915-) [Hereafter ‘FES’] *FES* vii, 30, 49.

Strathconon in 1664.⁵² The presbytery did record that they were mindful that it was difficult for ministers to serve at Strathconon, and they seem to have built a house for itinerant ministers visiting the area and a reference to such a house appears in a surviving fragment of Gaelic verse attributed to the Rev. Angus Morison, minister of Contin, at the end of the seventeenth century.⁵³

It seems, according to Cosmo Innes, that the parish of Urray contained a davoch of land in Strathconon.⁵⁴ The lands of Main in Strathconon may have been attached to the parish of Fodderty, as Mr John Mackenzie, minister of Fodderty 1666-1721, refused to preach in Strathconon in 1672 as he had, as minister of Fodderty, been deprived of these lands. However, the dispute was resolved by the following year with Mr John promising in June 1673 to ‘discharge ministerial dutie to that part of Strathconon that belongs to the parish of Fottertie.’⁵⁵ Mr John Mackenzie’s predecessor in this charge, Mr John MacKillican, minister of Fodderty 1656-1662, had also appeared extremely reluctant to serve Strathconon and had come under pressure from the Presbytery to fulfil his duty to this area.⁵⁶ Although more research would, no doubt, give better definition to our understanding of the division of duties in Strathconon between the ministers of neighbouring parishes, the compromise in terms of the division of Strathconon into attached portions to different parishes can be glimpsed in a later rental of the Seaforth estates from 1726 where the parishes relating to various townships are specified such as Eskadale, Scardroy, Kinlochbencharane, Corribuic in Contin parish; Main and Porin in Fodderty parish and Inverchorain seemingly allotted to Urray.⁵⁷

The Presbytery records also afford us an occasional fleeting glimpse of the lives of the inhabitants. Mr Farquhar Maclellan, minister of Fodderty had to turn detective as in April 1650 he was ordered to travel to Strathconon in order to discover the identity of the perpetrators of an alleged murder.⁵⁸ Unfortunately this source reveals no further information about any homicide. The Kirk Session were also trying to summon a Mr Murdo Mackenzie from ‘the hight of Strathconon’ for a thorough inquisition before the presbytery in Dingwall, in 1649. The Session had not been placated by the written representation he had sent to them prior to this with his son and threatened him with excommunication unless he made an appearance in person.⁵⁹ A Mr Hector Mackenzie from the area was summoned by the Kirk session in Dingwall in 1664 charged with habitual drunkenness and unruliness.⁶⁰ The inhabitants of Strathconon, like those of any other area of Scotland committed a

⁵² Mackay, *Records*, 307.

⁵³ ‘...Bha mi oidhch an Strath Chonain an Taigh a’ mhinisteir chorraich...’ W. Matheson ed., *The Blind Harper (An Clàrsair Dall) the songs of Roderick Morison and his Music* (Edinburgh, SGTS, 1970) 225.

⁵⁴ C. Innes, ed., *Origines Parochiales*, ii, pt 2, p. 518.

⁵⁵ Mackay, *Records*, 1672 p. 328-9. *FES* vii, 37

⁵⁶ Mackay, *Records*, 294. *FES* vii, 26.

⁵⁷ For full details see the ‘Rental of the Seaforth Estates, 1726’ in J.R.N. MacPhail, ed., *Highland Papers ii* (SHS, Edinburgh, 1916) 332-36.

⁵⁸ Mackay, *Records*, 181. *FES* vii, 36.

⁵⁹ Mackay, *Records*, 166.

⁶⁰ Mackay, *Records*, 306.

variety of misdemeanours to which further research may be able to add detail. And, while their language was in no way categorised as a misdemeanour, it is clear that the inhabitants of Strathconon spoke Gaelic (or ‘Irish’ as it was called by contemporaries), a language viewed as an impediment to progress by authorities in the south.⁶¹ Mr John McKillican, minister of Fodderty, 1656-62, was directed by the Dingwall Presbytery in 1657 ‘to indeavour to pray in the irishe language and to own a portion of Strathconon for part of his church,’ presumably Invermeanie and Porin.⁶²

VIII The language, naming patterns and river systems

Only 6.9 % (or five persons) in the Strathconon area still spoke Gaelic according to the census of 2001, a low percentage which is paralleled by language usage in neighbouring areas.⁶³ While the medieval period saw some Norse presence and possibly settlement attested by some of the place-names they have left in the area, not least Scatwell and Dingwall, the language of Strathconon (and of the surrounding area) for most of the late medieval and early modern period was Gaelic.⁶⁴ As recently as 1891, post clearance, three quarters of the remaining 249 residents of Strathconon still spoke Gaelic.⁶⁵ (That 75% figure is as high, proportionally, as that of the strongest Gaelic speaking area anywhere in Scotland at the last census, 2001.) At least two natives of Strathconon from the late eighteenth century have left us examples of their Gaelic, *Fearchar a’ Ghunna* (1780-1866) and *am Bàrd Conanach* (1780-1832), even though the subject matter in these surviving examples of their Gaelic was not directly related to their native district.⁶⁶

We are largely reliant on place name evidence for Gaelic usage in the area prior to 1700. Another indication of language usage can be seen in the personal names of the tenantry recorded in the Forfeited Estates rental of 1719-24 and in the personal names noted, above, in the account from

⁶¹ V. E. Durkacz, *The Decline of the Celtic Languages* (John Donald, Edinburgh, 1983) 5, 24-30. MacCoinnich, ‘Where and how was Gaelic written in late medieval and early modern Scotland? Orthographic practices and cultural identities’ (309-356) in: C. Ó Baoil & N.R. McGuire eds., *Caindel Alban. Fèill-Sgrìobhainn do Dhòmhnall E. Meek = Scottish Gaelic Studies, XXIV* at note 13, p. 334. <<http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/4940/>>

⁶² Mackay, *Records*, 294. MacPhail, ed., *Highland Papers ii*, 334-5.

⁶³ Analysis of 2001 census figures in a report by Kurt C. Duwe (p. 34). Published on the internet at http://www.linguae-celticae.org/dateien/Gaidhlig_Local_Studies_Vol_24_March_2005-a.pdf. Accessed, 28 January 2009.

⁶⁴ For the earlier period see B. E. Crawford & S. Taylor, ‘The Southern Frontier of Norse Settlement in North Scotland: Placenames and History’ *Northern Scotland* 23 (2003) 1-76.

⁶⁵ Srath Chonainn & Gleann Oirrin (Strathconon & Glen Orrin): Càrnach, Inbhir Chòmhrainn, Monar, Sgàrd Ruaidh, A’ Ghlaic Odhar, Pòrainn, An Srathan Mòr & Dail Breac. This based on Kurt C. Duwe’s analysis of 1891 census figures available on the internet (accessed 28 January 2009) at:

<http://www.linguae-celticae.org/dateien/1891_GLP_029_Srath_Chonainn.pdf> Many families, (estimated at 500 people according to Alexander Mackenzie) were removed from Strathconon during the nineteenth century a process that reached its greatest intensity in the 1840s. E. Richards & M. Clough, *Cromartie: Highland Life, 1650-1914* (Aberdeen, 1989) 222-7. E. Richards, *The Highland Clearances* (Birlinn, Edinburgh, 2000) 22-30.

⁶⁶ A.B. MacLennan (?), *Fearchair-a-Ghunna. The Ross-shire Wanderer* (2nd Ed, Inverness, 1868). This is written in English, but the comments attributed to Fearchar (aka Farquhar MacLennan) are all in Gaelic. For *Am Bàrd Conanach* (Dòmhnall Dòmhnallach / Donald Macdonald), see J. Mackenzie, ed., *Sàr Obair nam Bàrd Gaelach. The Beauties of Gaelic Poetry and the Lives of the Highland Bards* (Edinburgh, 1907) 377-382.

1569 and the testaments of 1594 and 1604.⁶⁷ They did not all necessarily have ‘surnames’ as we would know them. This custom of formal surnames was, the clan chief and his next of kin and his immediate relatives apart, a feature of the Scots and English-speaking world. Nevertheless, had it been put to tenants on the Seaforth estates in an external setting what their names were, they might well have replied, ‘Mackenzie,’ ‘MacRae,’ ‘MacLeay’ or ‘MacLennan,’ but these were ‘external’ names that were not widely used within the Seaforth estates, and they were little used either by the estate tacksmen/factors or by the tenants themselves prior to the nineteenth century. The names that mattered to them were family names, patronymics and by-names.⁶⁸

There may well be some more examples in print of which this writer (a *Leòdhasach*) is not aware of relating to Strathconon Gaelic (with apologies, of course to any in or from the area who do still speak Gaelic!). Most of the rest of the direct evidence available to W. J. Watson (Watson was himself a native Gaelic speaker from the Evanton area) around 1900, when Gaelic speech was still common, has gone. Watson, however, together with the place name materials, recorded an enigmatic local saying.

Abhainn Mìg tre Srath-chonuinn
Abhainn Conuinn tre Srath-bhràinn
Abhainn Dubh-chuileagach tre Srath-ghairbh
Tri aibhnichean gun tairbh iad sin.⁶⁹

[translated as: *The River Meig through Strathconon, The River Conon through Strathbran, The river of Black nooks⁷⁰ through Strathgarve; three rivers without profit, these*]

While the reason for this verse is not clear to me, the sentiment in it, perhaps ironic, that the rivers were without profit, is contradicted by all the other evidence which suggests that the river systems were harvested to good effect on the Mackenzie/Seaforth estate.⁷¹ The recurrent appearance of

⁶⁷ The rentals of the forfeited Seaforth Estate from 1726, showing the names of the tenantry appear in J.R.N. MacPhail, ed., *Highland Papers, vol. ii* (Edinburgh, 1916) 332-336.

⁶⁸ This was also a feature of the naming patterns on the Isle of Lewis, another part of the Seaforth estates as late as 1800. For a contemporary description of naming practices and the uses of patronymics see E. Burt, *Burt's Letters From the North of Scotland, as Related by Edmund Burt* (1754. Birlinn edition, Edinburgh, 1998) 198-199. A.I. Macinnes, *Clanship, Commerce and the House of Stuart*, 5.

⁶⁹ W.J. Watson, *The Place Names of Ross and Cromarty* (Inverness, 1904) xxvii, 149. Interestingly the name of the river that flows through Strathgarve, ‘Abhainn Dubh’ englished ‘Blackwater’ seems to have been quite recent and to have supplanted an earlier name of Norse origin, ‘Rassal.’ It was referred to in deed as the ‘Rasary’ in 1610 and 1625 (NAS RS 37/1, fol. 106); and as ‘Rasay’ in 1610 and 1642, although it was probably becoming an obsolete form by then. W. Macgill ed., *Old Ross-shire and Scotland as seen in the Tain and Balnagown Documents* (Inverness, 1909) [no. 410] p. 160-1.

⁷⁰ This could also be translated as: ‘The river Meig through Strathconon, The river Conon through Strathbran, the Black-flyridden river through Strathgarve, these are three rivers that bring no profit.’ Watson, op cit., 149.

⁷¹ Charter granted by Kenneth Mackenzie of Kintail to Alexander Mackenzie of Coul, 1610, of the fishings in the Lin of Coul, called Rogie, and the Conon in the barony of Braeross (Brazrose) and the lands and grazings of Corriemoille...’, which were to be held by Alexander as a vassal off his brother. *NAS GDI/1149/4*, W. Macgill ed. *Old Ross-shire and Scotland as seen in the Tain and Balnagown Documents* (Inverness, 1909) [no. 410] p. 160-1. A charter was granted by Murdo Mackenzie of Kenlochluichart of the lands and fishing of Kinlochluichard to Kenneth Mackenie (son of the tutor

fishings, lochs and rivers in title deeds indicates that this was a valuable resource that was being actively exploited, implying the use of river systems for mill-lades, yairs (fishtraps) and weirs. While the destination of the end product from the rivers, presumably salted and barrelled salmon is unknown, the fact that they were using ‘Hamburg’ measures in this period, the sixteenth century suggests they may have been sent to a Baltic market.⁷² The earldom of Ross was reserved to the king (or to the duke of Ross, a title reserved to a son of the Stewart monarchs), with the associated lordship of Ardmannoch (the Black Isle) reserved for the consorts of the monarchs after 1475. The existence of the office of ‘caner’ of the salmon, i.e. the royal collector of ‘càin’ or tax related to the salmon in the area also highlights the economic importance of this resource for both the local inhabitants and the Crown.⁷³

IX The Mackenzie families of Coull, Kinlochluichart & Ord

As noted above, the lands of Strathconon were an integral part of the estate of the Mackenzies of Kintail/Seaforth. As the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries progressed, and the Mackenzie clan amassed land and power, cadet families such as the Mackenzies of Ord, Kinlochluichart, Coull, Scatwell slowly established themselves as landed families while remaining (in this period anyway) under the wing of the senior family or ‘chief’ of Kintail/Seaforth who was their feudal superior.⁷⁴ At some point in the sixteenth century John Mackenzie of Ord, brother of Kenneth Mackenzie of Kintail, became possessor of the lands of Kinlochluichart and probably Strathconon. John of Ord was a shadowy figure about whom little is now known and whose existence was only realised by genealogists in the early twentieth century. His son, however, Thomas Mackenzie of Kinlochluichart appears more frequently in surviving documentation from about 1580.⁷⁵ Thomas had seemingly lost 400 ‘scheip, mearis and horsis’ (sheep mares and horses) which were lifted from him in Kinlochluichart by followers or ‘servandis’ of George Ross of Balnagownan in March 1590/1.⁷⁶

of Kintail) in 1619: ‘in all and hail the half davoch of Scatwell (little) with fishings river and loch.’ Kenneth Lord Kintail wadset or mortgaged some lands in lands to his brother, Alexander Mackenzie of Coull, in May 1610. These wadset lands included ‘the whole davoch of Coull and pertinents, mill ailhous... [etc] ... [the] salmon fishing on the water of Rasary [or Blackwater river] and Connan in [the] barony of Bray Ross ... and also half the lands and fishings of Corriemulzie p[rese]ntlie possess be the said Alexander [Mackenzie of Coull], and the two sheilings and grassings thereof...’ This wadset was redeemed by Colin Mackenzie 1st Earl of Seaforth, son and heir to Kenneth Lord Kintail in June 1625 for a payment of 5000 merks. *NAS RS 37/1* fol. 106.

⁷² *ER* xiii, p. 47, 147-148. For an overview of Scottish trade at this time with Europe see D. Ditchburn, *Scotland and Europe: The Medieval Kingdom and its Contacts with Christendom 1214-1560* (East Linton, 2000) 146-8.

⁷³ *ER* xix, 213. For an account of another salmon fishery in the highlands in the sixteenth century with a ‘kanar’ or a ‘kinner’ see A. Murray, ‘The Salmon Fishings of Strathnaver, 1558-1559’ (pp. 77-83) in *Review of Scottish Culture* 8, 1993.

⁷⁴ For this process in the Mackenzie lands see J. Munro, ‘The Mackenzies’ (273-291) in R. Oram & G. Stell, *Lordship and Architecture in Medieval and Renaissance Scotland* (John Donald, Edinburgh, 2005) 279, 283-289. MacCoinnich, *Tùs gu Iarlachd*, 184-196. For cadets and related expansion on Campbell lands. J.E.A. Dawson, *The Politics of Religion in the Age of Mary, Queen of Scots. The Earl of Argyll and the Struggle for Britain and Ireland* (Cambridge, 2002) 59-69.

⁷⁵ Sasine, Thomas Mackenzie of Kinlochluichart & Annabel Mackenzie his spouse: the lands of Ruiffs, from George Sutherland of Ruiffis, 24 June 1594. BL Add Ch. 61522. Warrant, *Some Mackenzie Pedigrees*, 86.

⁷⁶ It took over seven years before Thomas was able to get compensation from Balnagown. BL. Add. Ch. 62148.

Thomas Mackenzie of Kinlochluichart died sometime between 1598 and 1600. He was twice married. His eldest son from his first marriage, Murdo (*fl.* 1600-20), succeeded him in the lands of Kinlochluichart while his eldest son from his second marriage, John of Ord (*fl.* 1600-42), followed his father in the lands of Ord. Thomas of Kinlochluichart was survived by his widow, Anabella (or Mirabell) a daughter of Mackenzie of Fairburn who married Alexander Mackenzie of Coul in 1600. By 1607, the half-lands of Strathvaich and Corriemollie, together with the town of Ord were being transferred from Annabel's guardianship into the hands of her son from her first marriage (to the late Thomas of Kinlochluichart) John of Ord and his wife, Isobel Cuthbert, with the approval of Kenneth Mackenzie of Kintail, from whom all these lands were held as feudal superior.⁷⁷

X The Mackenzies of Ord and the new Mackenzies of Scatwell

John of Ord (1607-42) known in Gaelic as 'Iain Dubh a' Ghiuthais' and his spouse Isobel Cuthbert did not get all of his father's lands.⁷⁸ His elder half-brother Murdo (*fl.* 1611-19), seems to have succeeded to the lands of Scatwell formerly held by his father and, confusingly, also seems to have retained the designations of 'Kinlochluichart' and 'Ord.'⁷⁹ Murdo had a close connection with Roderick Mackenzie of Coigeach, known as the tutor of Kintail (progenitor of the earls of Cromartie). Although Murdo was married to a Catherine Mackenzie, the couple seem to have been childless. Murdo and Catherine fostered Kenneth, Roderick of Coigeach's son and, in a deed of 1619, resigned these lands of Scatwell to the young Kenneth in exchange for 'certane sums of money and good deeds' performed for him by Roderick, on the proviso that Murdo and his wife would themselves remain childless.⁸⁰ This document is of interest as it clearly states that Colin Mackenzie, Lord Kintail, was the feudal superior of these lands. It also defines the boundaries of the lands of Kinlochluichart, lying in the barony of Eilean Donnan, as being bounded at the south west and north west by the grassings (or sheilings) of the heirs of the late Murdo Mackenzie of Fairburn, and at the north and north east, the lands of Corriemoillie, presumably marching with lands held by Alexander Mackenzie of Coul. This was tied in with the 'half davoch' lands of Little Scatwell

⁷⁷ Annabel, widow of Thomas Mackenzie of Kinlochluichart married Alexander Mackenzie of Coul in 1600. NAS GD 1/1149/25. Isobel Cuthbert daughter of Alexander Cuthbert married John Mackenzie of Ord, son to the late Thomas of Kinlochluichart and his wife Annabella. NAS RS 36/1 fol. 267r-268r. Mackenzie, *History of the Mackenzies*, 595-7. Warrant, *Some Mackenzie Pedigrees*, 86-9.

⁷⁸ A. Mackenzie, *History of the Mackenzies* (Inverness, 1894: Clan Mackenzie Society reprint, 1998) 527. His Gaelic by-name might mean something like dark (haired / featured ?) John of the Pine-woods/Fir trees.

⁷⁹ *BL Add Ch. 62158*. Warrant, *Some Mackenzie Pedigrees*, 87.

⁸⁰ For the custom of fosterage among the Mackenzies and other Highland clans in this period see MacCoinnich, 'Daltachas, Fineachan agus Alba anns anns an t-Siathamh agus an t-Seachdamh linn deug' in G. Munro & R.A.V. Cox, eds., *Cànan & Cultur: Rannsachadh na Gàidhlig 4* (Dunedin Academic Press, Edinburgh, forthcoming 2010).

including the river and Loch fishings.⁸¹ These lands remained in the hands of Kenneth's descendants, the Scatwell family, for many generations after this (1619-).⁸²

XI The Mackenzies of Scatwell, Ord & Kinlochluichart (2)

Kenneth (†1662), the first of this branch of Little Scatwell was succeeded by three of his sons in turn, the first two dying young. In 1688 Kenneth Mackenzie of Scatwell having outlived his brothers, succeeded his father as heir male in the lands of Little Scatwell with its pool and salmon fishing, the lands of Kinlochluichart with fishing illustrating that despite the Gaelic saying quoted above, the seventeenth century lairds clearly saw the rivers as a resource worth exploiting.⁸³ Kenneth married Lillias Mackenzie, heiress to the lands of her father, Roderick Mackenzie of Findon, who inherited her father's lands in 1693.⁸⁴ This inheritance gradually drew the family's centre of gravity away from Scatwell. According to Alexander Mackenzie (1894) the family removed from Lochluichart to Findon (in the Black Isle) in 1696, although retaining an interest in the original lands until 1844.⁸⁵ Indeed, although most of the lands listed in the document drawn up to disentail or break up and sell the estate of the heavily indebted Sir James John Randoll Mackenzie in 1844 were in and around the Findon area, the lands of Little Scatwell and Kinlochluichart had remained an integral part of the Mackenzie of Scatwell family lands until then.⁸⁶

The proliferation of Mackenzie cadet branches makes tracing these families tricky, however. This is compounded by the presence of another, lesser known, cadet family – the Mackenzie family of Meikle Scatwell. Mr John Mackenzie (†1620) minister of Dingwall held the lands of Tolly, which he passed on to his son Murdo. Murdo succeeded Mr John in these lands with the addition of Meikle Scatwell, granted him by Kenneth Mackenzie of Kintail in 1608. This family continued to hold these lands of Meikle Scatwell, which seems to have had grazings in Strathconon attached to it, until the family faded out of the historical record about 1700.⁸⁷ Malcolm Bangor-Jones noted in his study of

⁸¹ 19-21 January 1619 at Cultaleoid and Chanonrie. *NAS RS 37/1* fol. 106. A late eighteenth century document, 'a decret of transumpt at the instance of Sir Kenneth Mackenzie of Scatwell,' 1782, incorporates the text of several older documents including the 'bounding of Kinlochluichart' which would repay further examination. *BL Add Ch. 61880*.

⁸² A. Mackenzie, *History of the Mackenzies* (Inverness, 1894: Clan Mackenzie Society reprint, Ontario, 1998) 566-572.

⁸³ T. Thomson, ed., *Inquisitionum ad Capellam Domini Regis Retornatam quae in Publicis Archiivis Scotiae adhuc servantur abbreviato* (3 Vols., Edinburgh, 1811-16) [Hereafter 'Retours'] Retours II, Ross & Cromarty, no. 148. Service of heir, 'Kennethus Mckenzie de Scatwall,' as heir in the lands of Strathconon., 6 Nov. 1688.

⁸⁴ Retours II, Ross & Cromarty, no. 157.

⁸⁵ Mackenzie, *History of the Mackenzies*, 567.

⁸⁶ 'An Act to allow Sir James John Randoll Mackenzie of Scatwell, baronet, to add certain lands...' (29th July 1844) *Anno Septimo & Octavo. Victoriae Reginae. 7 & 8 Victoria. A Collection of Private Acts printed by the Queen's Printer. Passed in the Seventh and Eighth Year of the Reign of H. M. Queen Victoria* (London, 1844) Cap. 16. p. 373. A. Mackenzie, *The History of the Mackenzies* (1894: 1998) 572.

⁸⁷ There is a note of an instrument of Sasine of toun and lands of Meikle Scatwell lands & grassings of Achair (?) & Srathconon, Crombell [Srath Chrombuill NH 140 643 ?] & others in favour of Alexander Mackenzie, eldest lawful son of Rorie Mackenzie of Tolly in 16 Sep 1653. This is 'Inventory of Writs relating to the parks of the Estate of Seaforth,' in *NAS GD 46/21/2*. The Rev John Mackenzie of Tolly (†1620), second son of Mackenzie of Fairburn, was succeeded in

Lochbroom that the establishment of cadet families as landed families in their own right was 'largely determined by the financial difficulties of the Mackenzies of Kintail/Earls of Seaforth.' These difficulties became particularly acute from the latter half of the seventeenth century onwards partly due to the unfortunate choices (with the benefit of hindsight) made by the clan hierarchy in their support for the Stuart monarchy.⁸⁸ While the focus in these last sections has been on cadet families it is worth noting that the senior family, the Mackenzies of Kintail/Seaforth, retained an interest in the Strathconon area from our earliest records in the mid fifteenth century until their estate was also broken up in the mid nineteenth century.⁸⁹

Conclusion

By the end of the period under consideration here, at the end of the seventeenth century, as at the beginning, the lands of Strathconon and Scatwell were under the control of the Mackenzies. While the Kintail branch of the family remained dominant, the families of Tarbat/Cromartie, Scatwell and Coul became increasingly important. Iron seemingly played an important if little understood role in the local economy, while salmon-fishing, agriculture and especially cattle rearing were all mainstays of the economy on the Mackenzies estates during the seventeenth century. Considerable research remains to be done on the untapped wealth of source material from the seventeenth century in collections of family papers and in official collections such as the Registers of Deeds and the Sasines in the National Archives of Scotland that would do much to illuminate patterns of landholding and conditions in the Strathconon and Scatwell area in the seventeenth century, in much the same way as Malcolm Bangor Jones has done for the Barony of Lochbroom. Such a detailed survey is outwith the scope of this more limited investigation, which, nevertheless, does offer a framework for further historical and archaeological research on the Strathconon area.

the lands of Tolly (and Meikle Scatwell) by his son Rory (1620-53) and then by his grandson Alexander (fl. 1653-c.1682). Retours II, Ross & Cromarty, no. 139 (Apr 19 1681). Warrant, *Some Mackenzie Pedigrees*, 153-155.

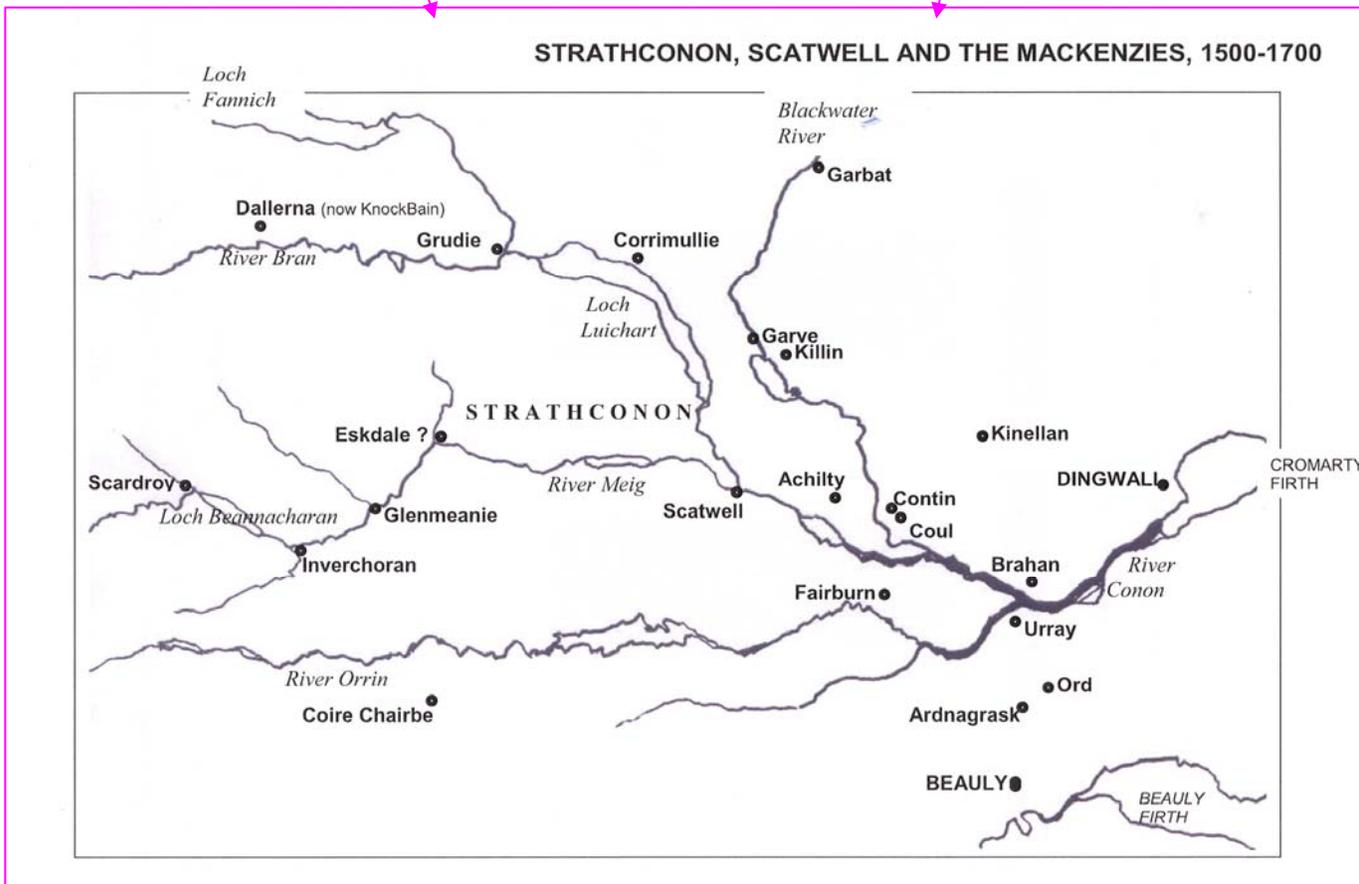
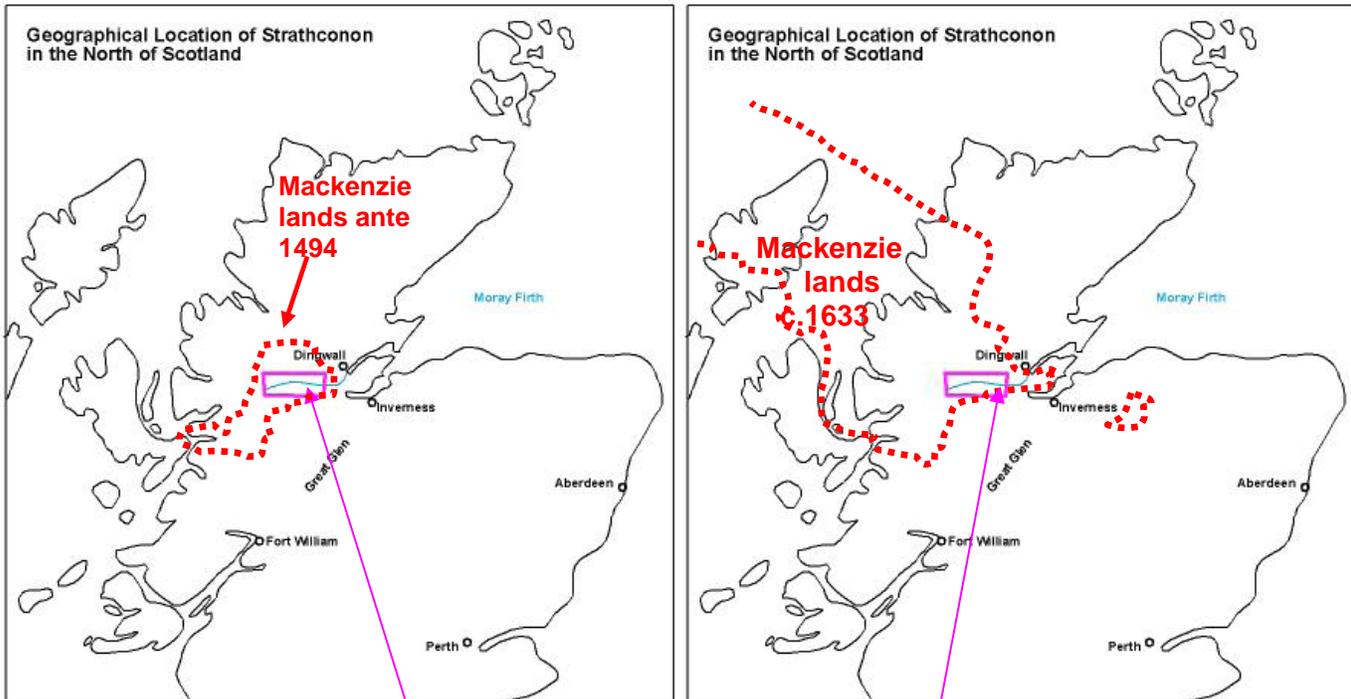
⁸⁸ M. Bangor-Jones, 'The Mackenzie Families of the Barony of Lochbroom' (79-117) in J.R. Baldwin, ed., *Peoples and Settlement in North West Ross* (Edinburgh, 1994) 86-9, 90-93, 110. For the wider context of the indebtedness of Highland lairds in this family and the consequences thereof see A.I. Macinnes, *Clanship, Commerce and the House of Stuart, c. 1603-1788* (East Linton, 1996) 210-34.

⁸⁹ Francis Lord Seaforth drew up a deed in 1810 that listed these lands that remained integral to the core barony of Eilean Donnan which included Garve, Kenlochluichart and Corrimoillie, Garrowbad (Garbad), Dalernie (Knockbain)... ..Kenlochbeancharan, Inverchoran, Invermaine, Mainzie.' This is in, 'An Act for vesting in Trustees certain parts of the estate of Seaforth to be sold...' 29 July 1844. *Anno Septimo & Octavo, Victoriae Reginae. A Collection of Private Acts printed by the Queen's Printer. Passed in the Seventh and Eighth Year of the Reign of H. M. Queen Victoria* (London, 1844) Cap. 16. p. 395, 398.

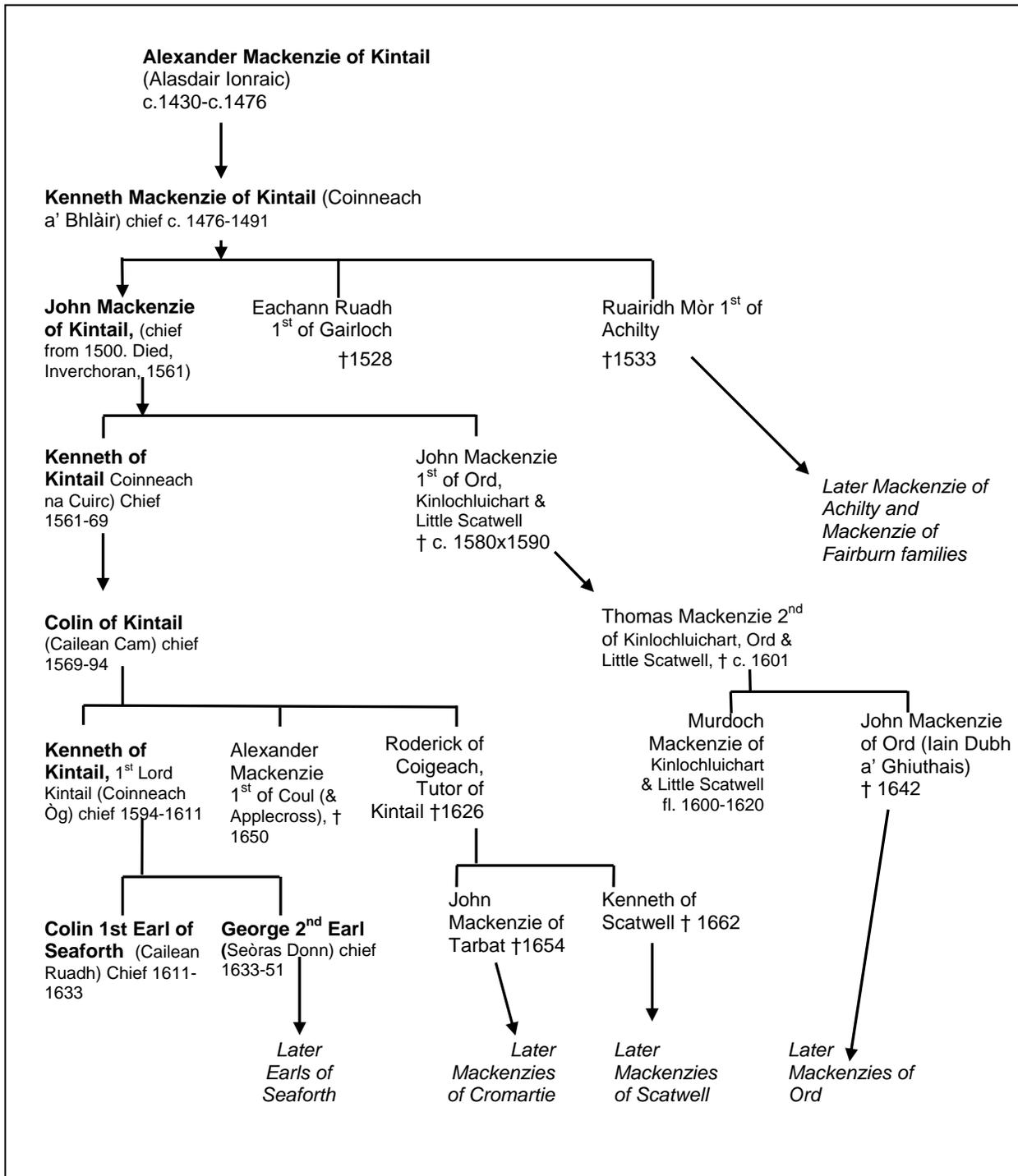
Appendix 1:

Strathconon within the Mackenzie of Kintail lands

These base maps showing the location of Strathconon taken from the NOSAS report have been copied and superimposed with a red line showing the approximate extent of Mackenzie controlled lands a) prior to c.1493, and b) in and around 1633



Some Mackenzie family connections
(Kintail / Seaforth line in **bold**)



Simplified family tree showing some of the Mackenzies mentioned in the text.

For more details see D. Warrand, *Some Mackenzie Pedigrees* (Inverness, 1965)

Aonghas MacCoinnich
Roinn na Ceiltis is na Gaidhlig
Oilthigh Glaschu