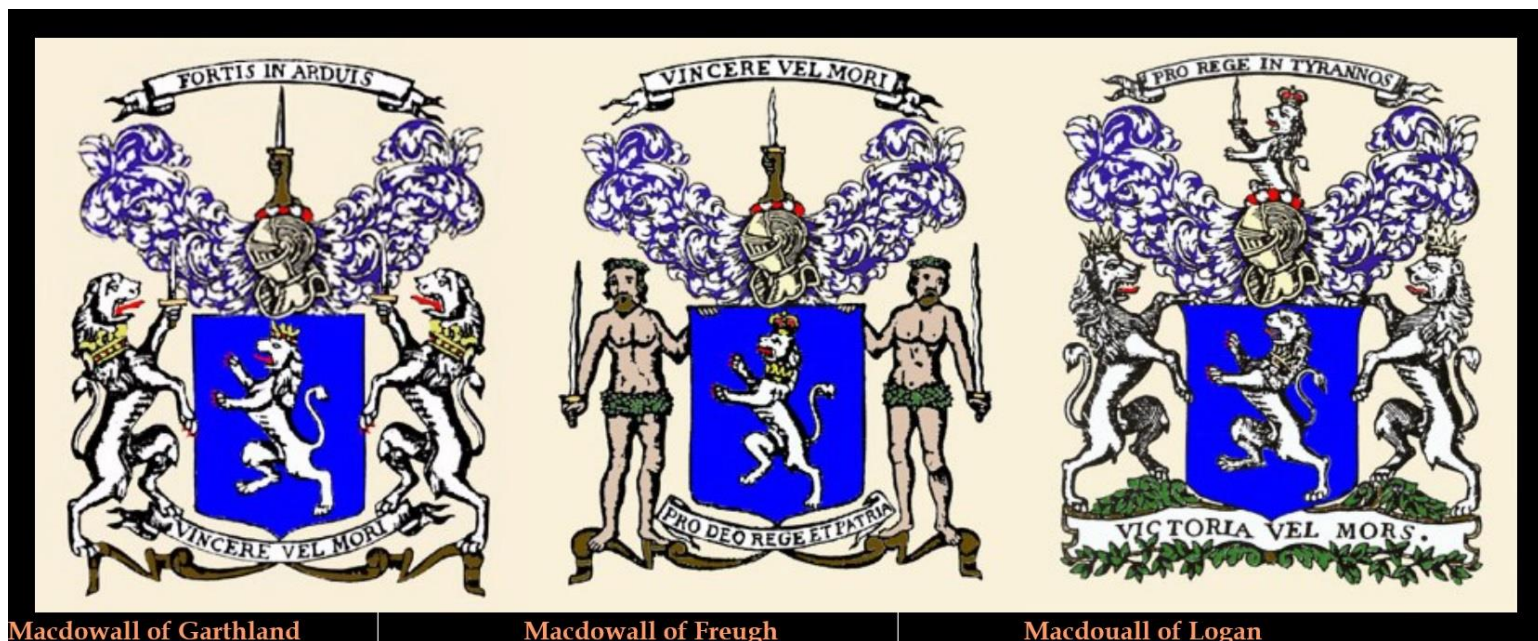


THE MCDOUALLS

THIS IS YOUR LAND –
THESE ARE YOUR PEOPLE



Foreword on the article below.

The author, Alexander Bayne, got his facts substantially correct. Three points are worth noting however.

1) "If romance was ever their strong point, it has not found its way into the history books."

Romance there certainly was, resulting in mostly legitimate lines, some illegitimate, or 'natural born' as it was politely termed. Such records exist across all three principal families of Logan, Garthland and Freugh.

2) "Their names are on charters and title deeds and transactions of a peaceful nature."

They were not always of a peaceful nature. They readily fought in several battles for Scotland, some of them paying dearly with their lives. And each had their rogue Lairds who also broke the laws of the land, including murder.

3) "They minded their own business and outlasted all the others."

The McDoualls did not always mind their own business, far from it. The Freugh McDoualls in particular were staunch Covenanters, and actively defended their beliefs.

Our history readily tells the tales of all three traits, and can be found on our website in a number of articles.

Philip McDouall
June 2026

Note:

Scotland's Magazine was published from 1928 to 1975.

It originally launched as the SMT Magazine (Scottish Motor Traction/Scottish Bus Group) and later became the official publication of the Scottish Tourist Board.

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THE
McDOUALLS

ALEXANDER BAYNE

IT IS as well to look twice at the origins of the McDoualls of Wigtownshire. There are rival theories about where they came from and there has been a great deal of not very temperate argument on the subject. Either version could be correct and few of the experts have a good word to say for each other, so present-day McDoualls must make their own choice. Their family goes so very far back that the truth will probably never be known.

It is one of the most ancient families in Scotland and there are or were three main branches of it, the Macdowalls of Garthland, the McDoualls of Logan, and the M'Dowalls or M'Dougals of Freugh. Despite the variations in spelling they are the same family, which they claim is descended from the old Celtic Lords of Galloway through the line of Fergus. There is evidence to support this, but the difficulty of establishing the claim beyond doubt lies in the fact that no one, the line of Fergus or anyone else, felt the need for a fixed surname until much later in our history. There were no McDoualls and no other Scottish surnames either until the end of the thirteenth century. There were certainly McDoualls active in Wigtownshire by that time, but who could say for certain what they had called themselves before?

To pin the tail of the line of Fergus on to the beginning of the family of McDouall three pieces of evidence are produced. The first, rather late to be convincing, is a document of 1686 which records that the family of Fergus was traditionally known as McDouall. The second, which could be based on a chronic misapprehension on the part of the family, is that for centuries it christened its sons Fergus, Alan, Uchtred and Gilbert, all names from the line of Fergus. The third is the most telling, the fact that from the very earliest times the heralds have accepted the descent from the Lords of Galloway and confirmed the family in bearing the same arms.

Fergus is said to have had a white lion rampant on an azure field. The Garthland branch had the lion crowned, the Logan branch the lion gorged, and the Freugh lion was both crowned and gorged.

The link is still tenuous, but these facts do go some way to giving it substance. They show that the Fergus theory has been accepted for at least five hundred years by professional genealogists.

But in that part of the world around the eleventh and twelfth centuries "Douall" or "Dougal" had a special meaning. The Dubh Gall were the Dark Strangers, the Danes. It could be that Macdowall or M'Dougal or McDouall simply meant the Dane's son. The suggestion here is that there was a link with Somerled, who liked the look of Argyll when he was raiding it and took it over in 1156. He settled there, and ruled, and when his youngest son was born he was called Dougal. It is claimed that his line and the McDoualls of Galloway were the same blood, a plausible enough theory since the Danes did settle in Galloway and the dates are about right.

So there is the choice, descent from the Lords of Galloway or from the Danes. One or other is probably correct. All that can be said for certain is that the very earliest records show the McDoualls so firmly in control of the Rhinns of Galloway that they must have been established there for generations.

They held land in many parts of Wigtownshire, and a McDouall looking for his ancestors today can wander almost anywhere in the western part of the county in the knowledge that they must have known the countryside even if they did not own it; but their main holdings were in the Rhinns, that curiously hooked corner of the south-west with Loch Ryan pinching it out on one side and Luce Bay on the other. Here all three of the branches lived and prospered, Freugh and Garthland in the parish of Stoneykirk just south of Stranraer, and Logan in the adjoining parish of Kirkmaiden, which runs south to the Mull and is the most southerly parish in Scotland.

This is green and prosperous country, but as draughty as an island, which some of it nearly is: the neck between Luce Bay and the North Channel is only two miles wide. In the whole of Kirkmaiden parish there is not a tree of any size, apart from those round Logan House, and the few that grow at all lean away from the wind. But the grazing is good, and the milk that was once made into cheese and butter on the spot still goes away in the big tanker lorries to the creameries. At the neck of the Rhinns is Stranraer, a solid town with its harbour, and the ferries shuttling back and forth to Larne, and tourists, and country folk coming in for their shopping; but it is on the fringe of the McDouall country. The real heart of it is the windy fields and beaches to the south.

The male line of the M'Dowalls of Freugh died out in the eighteenth century, and the daughter who was the heiress married into the Bute family and took her inheritance with her. The Macdowalls of Garthland sold their land in 1803 and moved to Lochwinnoch in Renfrewshire, where they christened their new estate after the old one. The most ancient and also the most recent of them all were the McDoualls of Logan, who had a charter from John Baliol in 1245 and were settled on their lands long before then. They lived there until 1945, when the long line ended with the death of Nigel Douglas McDouall, the last of two brothers, both unmarried.

In countryside where the sea tends to dominate the land it is not surprising that the few reminders of the McDoualls are connected with the sea. The quay at Portlogan, built by Colonel Andrew McDouall of Logan in 1820, was an attempt to establish a strong local fishing industry: it was not a success and is now in ruins. Better known and certainly more popular is the pond he built on the far side of the bay to provide sea-fish for his table. It has had its ups and downs (it was hit by a mine in 1939 and was not in working order again until 1955) but now it is a tourist attraction, with fish so tame that they come to the keeper when a bell is rung and eat from his hand. Here, too, was the celebrated Portlogan lifeboat station, started in 1866 with money raised largely by R. M. Ballantyne, the writer of boys' stories, and based on the curious system that if its boat was needed in Luce Bay on the other side of the neck it was loaded on to wheels and dragged there by horses. It did this as late as 1926.

In general it is modern scenery rather than ancient history that gives this corner of Scotland its character, though there is one odd relic from

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THE McDOWALLS**

(continued)

the past near the Mull of Galloway, St. Medan's Chapel, made from a cave. The sea has worn pot-holes in the rock nearby and these once had a reputation as holy wells which cured sick children. The first Sunday of May was Cove Sunday or Cave Sunday, and people came from far and near to dip their children in the water in the holes by the tide. Incidentally, St. Medan is supposed to have floated on a rock from the far side of Luce Bay to the Mull.

But after this remarkable feat little seemed to have happened in the McDouall country and it would be pleasant to tell romantic stories of the family, but if romance was ever their strong point it has not found its way into the history books. Their names are on charters and title deeds and transactions of a peaceful nature. Possibly due to their isolation on the far-reaches of Scotland they do not seem to have been called upon to take sides when taking sides was dangerous, but were left to be careful lairds going about their business century after century in a quiet and sensible way. There is no blood and thunder in the McDouall story and precious few characters, only a tenacity which established them in that vague period of history when Danes and Celts were at each others' throats, and that kept them in their chosen countryside possibly for longer than any other Scottish family.

The McDoualls of Wigtownshire had one major claim to fame, durability. They minded their own business and outlasted all the others. □

RIGHT: A visitor feeding fish at the famous Port Logan fishpond. This pond has now become a major tourist attraction in the area. BELOW: Logan House. BELOW RIGHT: George Street and the old Town Hall at Stranraer. The town is on the north fringe of the McDouall territory.

