**Introduction**

This introduction was adapted from “The quarrelsome Neishes from St. Fillans” found on “Perthshire Diary – a daily dose of Perthshire and Scottish History”, for the year 2006 and found at [www.perthshirediary.com](http://www.perthshirediary.com)

The Neishes occupied the land around St. Fillans[[1]](#footnote-1), in Perthshire near the east end of Loch Earn (Lake of the Irish) and the island at the eastern end of that Loch known variously as the Easter (eastern) or Neish Island. The island is a crannog, a type of artificial island built by the ancient lake dwellers and connected to the mainland by a causeway of large boulders reportedly still to be seen in the water.

Their dwelling is described as an ancient fortalice probably just a large “Black House” similar to those to be found all over the highlands. A windowless stone walled shelter with dirt floors and thatched roofs held up by cabers (timber beams). Easy to build and repaired by throwing new logs across the walls and putting on new thatch. These days the island is heavily wooded and it is not known if there are any visible ruins.

The Neishes were a quarrelsome and troublesome family and in 1490, King James IV gave orders to Lord Drummond to *“cast doon ye house of ye Ester Isle of Loch Ern and destroy all ye strengthis of ye samyn and tak away ye bate and put her to the Wester Isle[[2]](#footnote-2) (*near Lochernhead). Though the dwelling was demolished the Neishes repaired it and continued to dwell there, occupying most of the land near round St. Fillans and as far west as Tyndrum.

The Clan Neish or MacNeish and the Clan an Aba or MacNab were great rivals and carried on a long feud over grievances long since lost and forgotten. The seat of the MacNab’s lay at Eilean Ran at the western end of Loch Tay while that of the MacNeish was just to the south on the island at the eastern end Loch Earn on the road from Crief to Killin. The Neish apparently existed largely by raiding their neighbors, including the MacNab’s.

The feud came to climax at the Battle of Glen Boultachan in 1522 when the Macnabs, tired of the constant raids, marched over from Loch Tay to St. Fillans. The Neishes gathered their forces to meet this threat but were utterly defeated by the MacNabs who killed the majority of Clan Macnish, the survivors of which fled to refuge on their island in Loch Earn.

In the winter of 1612 the Neishes saw a line of ponies laden with supplies approaching St. Fillans. The opportunity was too good to miss, the party was ambushed and the food and drink removed to their island. They were even more pleased when they discovered that the supplies belonged to their old enemies the MacNabs and were intended for their Christmas feast. Having sent the servants back to Elyen Rayne empty handed the Neishes proceeded to enjoy their ill-gotten gains.

Learning what had happened from their servants, the MacNab’s plotted their revenge. according to most accounts the twelve sons of Finlay MacNab, 12th chief, carried a boat from Loch Tay over the mountains to Loch Earn, launched it in the lake and approached the Easter Isle in the darkness. By this time the Neishes were drunk or asleep so that it was a simple task to massacre all the inhabitants (excepting a young boy and girl who hid beneath a table). The MacNabs beheaded the Chief and some of his followers and brought the heads back with them to Killin where they were offered to their father as proof of their revenge.

Growing weary on their way back, and perhaps having found some whisky un-drunk, the MacNabs left their boat in the mountain pass, where it could be seen for years afterwards.

When a the coat of arms was granted to John McNab of McNab (15th chief) it was given as a crest “a savage’s head erased Proper” or a severed head colored natural! In the base was placed an “open boat, oars in action in a sea Proper.” i.e. colored naturally with oars out.

Sometime in the 1960’s a unit of the Black Watch territorials in operation John MacNab commemorated this event by carrying a boat from Loch Tay to Loch Earn launching it and rowing it to Neish Island.

On the following pages are reproduced the various printed accounts of the feud between the MacNeish and the MacNabs. Though the basic facts are as I have given above, they differ in detail and several are quite romanticized. David Rorer

**The printed accounts of the great feud**

The earliest printed account of the feud seems to be in a book titled “Historical tales of the Wars of Scotland and of the Border Raids Forays and Conflicts, Vol. Il” by John Parker Lawson, published by A. Fullerton & Co. Edinburgh, London, and Dublin; 1849. The book may be found at [www.archive.org](http://www.archive.org)

The story is in a section titled “A Legend of Strathearn” and the author states that:

“The present writer got possession of this story, so singularly illustrative of the habits of the Highlanders in former times, by mere accident. A version of it appeared in a work entitled “Antiquities of Strathearn, with Historical and Traditionary Tales and Biographical Sketches of Celebrated Individuals belonging to the District”, by John Shearer, junior. The First Part of it seems only to have been published at Perth in 1836” The story is presented as found in that volume.

“The night was the night, and the lads were the lads!" Such was an exclamation long known in the neighborhood of Strathearn, and originated in one of the most characteristic instances of Highland ferocity and revenge to be found in the history of the Gael. During the reign of James IV the MacNabs and the Neishes were septs of considerable influence in the vicinity of Loch Earn, and had been long opposed to each other. The families and their adherents lived in a state of mutual warfare, embittered by ancient jealousies, and by real or supposed acts of aggression, of which the one sept accused the other. The retort was of course any thing but courteous; both were equally right in their own estimation, and consequently the insults and injuries could not be allowed to pass un-revenged.

After a number of years had elapsed, during which skirmishes between the families and followers of Neish and MacNab had been frequent and fatal, a regularly pitched battle was fought on the confines of a glen which divides two hills rising due north of the foot of Loch Earn. In this conflict both clans mustered their followers almost to a man, and it was marked by that ferocity and hatred which long series of animosities had rendered implacable. They assailed each other with savage yells and imprecations, disdaining to ask quarter, receiving none, and fighting for revenge. At length victory declared in favor of the MacNabs, and only a remnant of the defeated sept Neish remained. Their chief fell covered with wounds, but not before several of the MacNabs had fallen by his broadsword. A large stone still marks the spot where he fell covered with dagger and dirk wounds inflicted by the MacNabs. He long kept the enemy at bay, standing with his back to this stone, on which the inhabitants of the neighborhood credulously believe the stains of his blood are still visible, and can never be effaced.

The few of the sept Neish who escaped retired to an islet at the eastern extremity of Loch Earn, and placed themselves under the command of an old Highlander, a relative of their chieftain slain in the conflict already mentioned. This Highlander seems to have been a complete personification of Donald Bean Lean in Waverley. He and his followers subsisted entirely by plunder, and as they possessed the only boat on Loch Earn, their retreat was inaccessible in a neighborhood at that time, and long afterwards, thinly inhabited. They were thus enabled to carry on their warfare against all and sundry without any opposition, or any attempt on the part of the Government to punish such dangerous banditti, but in reality the Highlands abounded with similar robbers, rendered desperate by their poverty and unscrupulous by their savage life.

The clan Neish continued their freebooting and predatory incursions until an incident occurred which brought against them their old and implacable enemies the MacNabs, in the reign of James V. The then chief of the MacNabs, probably the same who had routed the clan Neish, was a personage more generally feared than respected even by his own feudal followers. He was known to be an absolute despot; his word was considered law, and to contradict, disobey, or offend him in the slightest manner, was certain to incur summary punishment. He resided in his castle, which stands upon a rocky isthmus near the head of Loch Tay, ruling his clan in the most arbitrary manner, and vindictive and unrelenting to his enemies of every rank and condition.

At the particular time stated the haughty chief of the MacNabs sent one of his domestics to Crieff for provisions of various kinds, intending to entertain his friends and allies with a great carousal on Christmas Day. The man made all his purchases in obedience to his chiefs directions, and was on his way back to MacNab's castle with the goods, when he was surrounded by Neish and his followers, and robbed of every article. He threatened them with dreadful retaliation from his chief and the clan if they did not restore the goods, but the banditti ridiculed all his declarations, and even threatened to dispatch him if he annoyed them by any farther expostulations. It was probably seldom that such a quantity of tempting viands had fallen in their way, and they were determined to enjoy them whatever might be the consequences.

When the servant arrived at MacNab's residence, and informed him that he had fallen among thieves in the way, and that these thieves were the clan Neish, his rage was unbounded, and having informed his sons of the insult, the most sanguinary revenge was resolved to be inflicted. It is traditionally said that MacNab could boast of having twelve sons, all of such bodily and muscular strength that the weakest of them could drive his dirk through a board two inches thick. One of them in particular, in addition to his athletic appearance, and a body of more than ordinary dimensions, was of such rough manners and uncompromising countenance that he was ironically distinguished by the soubriquet of Smooth John[[3]](#footnote-3) MacNab.

The robbery of the provisions had prevented MacNab from inviting his friends to his intended carousal, and on the evening of the Christmas Day in question Smooth John and his brothers were seated round a table which was by no means replenished in the manner it would have been if the provisions had safely arrived, and it was evident from their countenances that they were meditating some desperate deed. The old chief, who recollected with rage that the Neishes were feasting at that very time on what he had been forcibly deprived of by them, entered the apartment after taking a turn in the court-yard. He paced the floor with his arms folded, occasionally looking at his sons, and at length broke silence by exclaiming in Gaelic “This night is the night, if the lads were but lads."

It was not uncommon among the Scottish Highlanders, as among other tribes, for the chiefs and their emissaries to communicate their sentiments and wishes by significant hints, looks, and signs, which were rarely misunderstood. On the present occasion the old chief's laconic expression, which was intended to reprove his sons for their slowness to revenge the insult, was taken precisely as he wanted. Smooth John exclaimed " The night it the night, and the lads are the lads." He and his brothers instantly started to their feet, and each belted his pistol, dirk, and claymore. The old chief viewed their equipment with unspeakable pleasure, and enjoined them to act like lads a recommendation on his part altogether unnecessary.

The Mac Nabs well knew that without a boat the clan Neish were altogether inaccessible, and as they had no time to delay, led on by Smooth John, they proceeded to a creek in Loch Tay, where their pleasure-boat was lying, and drawing it on shore they raised it upon their brawny shoulders, and man to man they carried it between them, six of the brothers occasionally relieving the other six. In this manner, with the boat on their shoulders, they ascended a hill which runs to a considerable height, by steep and irregular slopes in a south direction, till betwixt it and another to the westward there is a crooked narrow pass leading to Glentarkin. Here a mountain stream served them as a guide for several miles, till it precipitates down the steep copse-covered banks of Loch Earn.

The fatigue which the MacNabs, or the lads, as their father designated them must have undergone on this occasion, carrying on their shoulders a heavy boat over several miles of rugged and mountainous country in a winter night is astonishing, and evinces their determined resolution to inflict on the island caterans a dreadful punishment. None but such men, and so circumstanced and impelled, could have accomplished such a journey. Having arrived at Loch Earn they launched their boat, and plied the oars across the dark and still waters of the lake. All was still and silent. A partially clouded moon afforded them a little indistinct light, and occasionally reflected on the lofty mountains which rise in all directions round this romantic lake, and terminate in various bold and rocky outlines, intersected with precipices and masses of protruding cliffs, deep hollows and ravines, from which innumerable torrents pour into the lake. The MacNabs moored their boat alongside the skiff belonging to the banditti, and lauded on the islet. Proceeding to the low roofed dwelling of the Neishes, which was little better than a hovel, they found that a dead silence reigned within, occasionally interrupted by the sonorous groans and sounds of deep intoxication. Looking through a hole or aperture in the wall, the MacNabs perceived one solitary individual seated besides a few expiring embers of firewood. This person was old Neish, the leader of the caterans. Smooth John MacNab immediately struck the door with his fist, and the unexpected noise made the heart of him within quake. Starting to his feet, he exclaimed “Who knocks at the door?" '\* One whom you have no wish to be here," was the reply. Neish at once recognized the voice “Smooth John MacNab?" he uttered. “If he has hitherto been smooth," replied MacNab, "you will find him rough for this one night."

No sooner had MacNab uttered these words than he struck the door of the hovel in such a manner as to break it in several pieces, and rushing in, followed by his brothers, he seized the old man by his few remaining grey hairs, twisted him below his knee, and deliberately severed his head from his body with his claymore. While thus employed, his brothers were busily slaughtering the drunken caterans, who were lying sound asleep in different parts of the hovel. The only one who escaped was a little boy, who contrived to conceal himself under a bed till the slaughter was over This boy when he grew up settled peaceably in the neighborhood, and from him, it is said, are descended the Neishes of the present time inhabiting Strathearn and Strathallan, who are known in Gaelic by the name of Macllduie, or sons of the black man.

The MacNabs having completed their bloody work, and satisfied their revenge in this cruel manner, threw the dead bodies into Loch Tay, and left the islet in their own boat, carrying with them the head of the old cateran to present to their father. They resolved to carry back the boat on their shoulders, but when about halfway to their own residence they felt fatigued, as well as retarded by the cumbrous load, and they threw it down on the hill side, where its moldering planks were long visible, and regarded with superstitious dread by the people. When they appeared in their father's hall, and threw before him the head of the old cateran, who had deprived him of his Christmas supper, the savage chieftain exultingly exclaimed " Dread Nought," which is supposed to be the origin of the motto and of the crest of MacNab of MacNab, the former being Dread Nought, and the crest a bushy head with a beard. The family piper struck up a pibroch of victory; friendly cups of whisky were freely circulated among the domestics, with as many congratulations as if the most important victory had been gained, or as if the sons of MacNab had achieved a most praiseworthy, noble, and generous action, instead of having perpetrated a series of barbarous and cowardly murders on intoxicated robbers in their sleep. The old chief of MacNab made himself drunk with joy, as did also Smooth John and his brothers, and as long as he lived the Laird always referred to this exploit with peculiar satisfaction, using the expression, which was long proverbial in the district “Aye! Aye! The night was the *night*, and the lads were the lads!"

The map depicted below, taken from the Ordnance Survey, One-inch to the mile maps of Scotland 3rd Edition - 1903-1912, shows the eastern end of Loch Earn, with Nish Island, St. Fillans and St Fillans Church while Crieff is off the map to the east.

****The first printed history of the Clan MacNab, titled “The Clan Macnab a Short Sketch,” was written by John McNab of Callander, Historian of the Clan Macnab Association, 13 South Charlotte Street, Edinburgh, published in 1907. In this pamphlet the account of the feud between the Macnish and Macnab was given as follows:

“In 1486 Finlay Macnab[[4]](#footnote-4) obtained a Charter from King James III., under the Great Seal, of the lands of Ardchyle and Wester Durnish, in Glendochart. Again, in 1502, he received from James IV a Charter of the lands of Ewer and Leiragan, in Glendochart.

At the same time he obtained from the Prior of the Carthusian Monastery at Perth a grant of a croft in Killin, paying, therefor, ‘Yearly to the parish of Killin three pounds of wax in honor of the Blessed Virgin, and St. Fillan, and All Saints, for the increase of St. Fillan's light before his image, one pound whereof at the Feast of St. Fillan in summer and another at the Feast of St. Fillan in winter.’

Soon after that date, Finlay died and was succeeded by his son, also Finlay (V, Chief), who seems to have been satisfied with merely safeguarding the property which had been recovered by his father. He appears as a witness to a Charter under the Great Seal to Duncan Campbell of Glenurghy[[5]](#footnote-5), which is dated September i8th, 1511, and wherein he is designated ‘Finlaus MacNab dominus de eodem.’ It was in the time of this Chief that the Neishes were at last defeated, and reduced to a small band of reckless outlaws. Mr. Christie, in one of his articles, quotes the following notice from the chronicle of Fothergill: “Finlay MacNab of Bowayne, died at Ilia Rayne, and he was buried at Killin, 13th April, 1525."

At this time the MacNabs seem to have set about the recovery of those of their possessions which had been lost in their struggle with the Bruce. They became involved in a feud with the Dewars concerning certain relics of St. Fillan; and, at the same time, they commenced that struggle with the Neishes which culminated, many years afterwards, in the defeat of the Clan Neish at the battle of Glenboultachan, about two miles north of the lower end of Loch Earn. The Dewars[[6]](#footnote-6) were neither numerous nor warlike, and in their extremity they applied to the Crown for protection. In 1487 they obtained a Charter confirming them in their possessions, and from that date they had no further trouble with the MacNabs. It was probably due to those clan feuds and his own advanced age, that Patrick resigned his honors to his son. Be that as it may, Patrick died at Auchlyne, in the year following his resignation in favor of his son[[7]](#footnote-7).

At Christmas tide, 1612, Macnab sent some of his clansmen to the neighboring town of Crieff[[8]](#footnote-8) to purchase the necessary stores for the approaching festivities. On their homeward way, the MacNabs were ambushed by a party of the Neishes, who sallied from their island fortalice in Loch Earn, and captured the supplies.

Dire was the wrath of Chief and Clansmen when the plundered messengers returned to Eilean Ran and reported their mishap. Enraged, as the MacNabs were, they could think of no method by which they could punish the revivers. In the evening the twelve strong sons of Macnab were assembled in the hall of Eilean Ran and busily engaged in planning some signal vengeance on their foes, when their father entered and said in Gaelic: "Si an nochd an oidhche nam b'iad na gillean na gillean.” (This night is the night if the lads were the lads.) In an instant the twelve lads were on their feet and arrayed in their war gear. Then hurrying down to the waterside they crossed the stream and took up the family barge, which they bore on their shoulders across the hills to Loch Earn, by way of Glentarken. Having reached the loch, they launched their boat and rowed to the island, where the robbers were holding their carousal with the stolen supplies. On their arrival at the island the grim avengers sunk all the boats in the little harbor, and then proceeded to the habitation of the Neishes. In the keep was a scene of revelry and confusion, for holding all the boats on the loch in their own keeping, the Neishes deemed their hold to be impregnable.

Strange, therefore, must have been the thoughts which passed through their minds, when loud above the din of their noisy mirth they heard a sharp and sudden knocking at the outer door. Immediately their noisy merriment ceased, all became silent, and then in a quavering voice the terrified Neish demanded the name and mission of the one who had thus disturbed their orgy. Swiftly came the answer, “Whom would ye least desire?” The speaker was Iain Min, or "Smooth John," the heir of Macnab, and the strongest and fiercest man in all Braidalbin. With that stern voice sounding in his ears, and with a foreboding of his doom rising before him, the Neish replied, "Iain Min."

Sharp through the midnight air came again that grim voice: "Then I am he, but rough enough I'll be this night." Trusting in the strength of the stout door the robbers attempted to treat for terms. But spurning all thought of parleying, Iain Min, with one swift blow sent the door reeling off its hinges; and next instant he and his brothers were dealing death to the hereditary foes of their House. The Neishes surprised and demoralized by the rapidity and ferocity of their assailants, offered but little resistance.

When the fighting, if such it can be called, was over, there remained of the Neishes but two survivors. One was a young lad who had succeeded in concealing himself in time to avoid the vengeance which overtook his family. The other was a female child who escaped the notice of the MacNabs by being under an overturned cradle. Their task having been accomplished, the young MacNabs secured the gory head of the Neish as a trophy of their victory, they then recovered their boat and retraced their journey of the previous night. Ere they left Glentarken they abandoned their boat as it retarded the news of their triumph. The boat was never removed from the place where it was left by the MacNabs, and men born within the past century have talked with men who have viewed its well-bleached fragments. Some time early in last century a portion of the keel was dug out of the moss in which it was embedded. Part of it was given to a Mrs. MacNaughton who lived near St. Fillans, and she had it made into a bicker and a walking stick. She was Margaret Macnab, daughter of James Macnab, Milmore, near Killin, and was known as "Margaret Innishewen." The bicker and certain Macnab heirlooms which belonged to her father are still preserved by her descendants. But this is a digression from our narrative.

In the morning the chief was delighted to find that the mission of vengeance had been successful. The proof was convincing when Iain Mln cast Neish's head at his feet and said in Gaelic, "No, biodh fiamh oirbh" or dread nought. And Macnab acknowledged as he received the gruesome trophy that the night had been the night and the lads were the lads.

From this deed are derived the modern arms of the MacNabs. There is a local tradition to the effect that but three of the sons took part in the enterprise, and that the chief in giving the signal for the attack on the Neishes only acted at the instigation of his wife who had some real or fancied cause of grievance against the three eldest sons. It is said that she hoped that they would be slain so that her favorite son should be heir to the estates. And according to the same tradition, the three sons were by an earlier marriage. History, however, makes no mention of a second wife.

The map below taken from the Ordnance Survey, One-inch to the mile maps of Scotland 3rd Edition - 1903-1912 shows Killin, Kinnell House and Finlarg Castle.

This chapter contains the account of the great feud between Macnab and Macnish as given in *“The History of the Clan Neish or MacNish of Perthshire and Galloway”* by David Macnish, M.A., M. B. and William A. Tod, F.S.A. SCOT, published by William Blackwood and Sons, Edinburgh and London MCMXXV.

If I read the roman numerals correctly, this book was printed in 1925 and since Mr. William A. Tod’s name is followed by F.S.A. SCOT therefore it seems reasonable to assume that he is the actual author of the “*History of the Clan Neish or MacNish.”* I also assume that he was employed by David Macnish to research the history of his family and name. In the text Mr. Tod gives numerous sources for the story and he seems to have taken some literary license in relating it, though how much license is hard to ascertain as few of these sources are available for comparison except “The Clan Macnab a Short Sketch,” by John McNab of Callander,

There are some notable differences between this version and the two given in part one of **The Great Feud**. No mention is made of James IV ordering the Neish’s dwelling demolished and the battle of Glen Boultachan is presented in a more Romanized version. In this version, as in “The Clan Macnab a Short Sketch,” the events on Nish Island are presented as though there was a real battle instead of a massacre of some passed out drunks, thus showing this incident in a far better light.

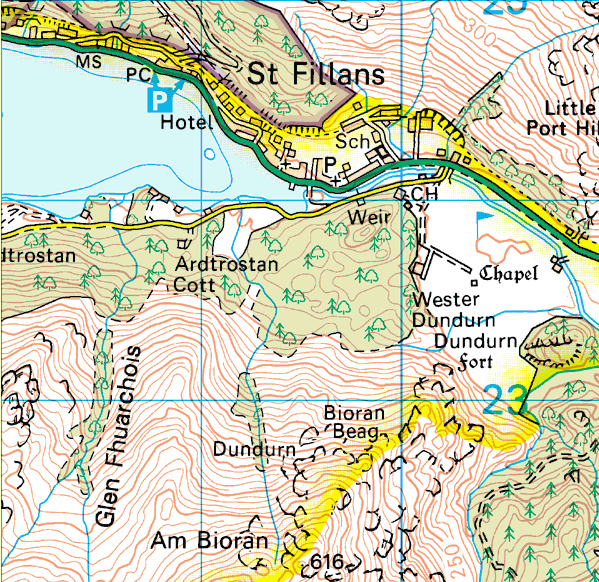
The dwelling of the Neishe’s is also referred to as an “island fortalice” though it was probably nothing more than a large version of the traditional “black house” with walls of dry laid stone and a thatched roof held up by cabers (wooden beams). It would have had only one entrance, dirt floors and been occupied by both humans and livestock. Being set in an ideal location, just offshore on a trade route, easily defended but not impossible of access, it probably was occupied from before recorded history.

The island is also referred to as an “artificial island” would be a “crannog” an island built by the prehistoric peoples, known as lake dwellers. The lake dwellers built their villages just offshore in shallow lake waters all over Scotland, and there is a restored crannog near Killin in Loch Tay. Because of the size of the island there may have been a natural islet already there which was “improved” by subsequent occupiers who put up the buildings and laid the stone foundations for a wooden causeway to the mainland. The dwelling would not have to be fortified as the lake would serve as an impassable moat, so long as the causeway was pulled in at night and the inhabitants insured that they had the only boats on the lake.

This picture is a view from St. Fillans, down Loch Earn with Nish Island in the distance to the right, beyond the white motorboat and the spit of land. (The original can be found on Google maps)

On the next page is a map taken from MapQuest which shows the island as a small white circle in the lake, just offshore from St. Fillans.

In the pages that follow the text is presented as it was in the book, with only a few minor changes (mostly of spelling) and the addition of footnotes where it seemed an explanation was in order.

The above map shows the eastern end of Loch Earn one of the most picturesque of Scottish lakes, and next to Loch Ness, the deepest in Scotland, in one part being about 300 ft. deep. Limited, as are the dimensions of Loch Earn, it is exceeded in beauty by few Scottish lakes, its style being that of a lake of far greater dimensions, the mountains that bound it being lofty, bold, and rugged. The mighty Ben Vorlich stands majestically above the loch, which is sometimes calm as a mirror, and other times dark and turbulent, its waves dashing wildly against the shores.

At the east end of the loch is a beautiful small wooded island, known for many centuries by the name of Neish Island. It is an artificial isle, which appears to date back to the era of the lake-dwellers.

In after ages, according to tradition, the island became a Royal Fortalice of many of the kings or chiefs of Fortrenn.

The island was a residence of the Clan Neish at an early period, probably from 1250 to 1420; after that it was probably only in occupation by the Neishes at periods until 1622, the date of the massacre.

The dwelling was a stone building, divided into different chambers, which now ruined; the great thickness of the walls testifies to the care, foresight, and energy expended in the erection thereof.

A small harbor and landing-place for boats still exists on the east side, and at one time the island was connected with the mainland by a kind of causeway formed of large boulders, the remains of which may still be seen in a line between the isle and the villa called Portmore.

**The Battle of Glen Boultachan – 1522 an account from “The History of the Clan Neish or MacNish of Perthshire and Galloway”**

The MacNeish of Perthshire possessed the upper parts of Strathearn and inhabited an island on Loch Earn, called after them Neish Island. Very little is known of the early history of the clan; they appear to have been almost exterminated or scattered early in the sixteenth century; various traditional accounts have been handed down in Strathearn concerning them, and the written records of the county contain only notices of individual members of the clan[[9]](#footnote-9).

During the fifteenth century the Neishes of Upper Strathearn commenced a struggle with the Clann an Aba[[10]](#footnote-10); many battles were fought with various success, and the culminated fight ended about 1522 in the defeat of the Clan Neish at the battle of Glen Boultachan.

The last battle was fought, by the present farm of Littleport, in the wild Glen of Boultachan where the MacNabs were victorious over the Neishes who lost nearly all their fighting men.

Finlay MacNab of Bovain[[11]](#footnote-11) gathered all his fighting men for one decisive effort for the supremacy of the northern Loch Earn district. The two clans met in battle in the glen between two high and solitary mountains, about two miles north of the lower end of Loch Earn. Each clan was led by its chief as they rushed down the green slope to mingle in close and mortal strife, with wild yells and bitter epithets, while the war-cries rang and the pipers blew with their might. Conspicuous among the struggling throng was the eldest son of the chief of Clan Aba.[[12]](#footnote-12) He bent all his energies to capture the Neishes banner, which bore their crest, a cupid with his bow in the right hand and an arrow in the left hand, with the motto "Amicitiam trahit amor."[[13]](#footnote-13)

On the other side the aged MacNishe chief fought with great strength and activity and unparalleled bravery, but the MacNabs eventually bore all before them, and the aged chief, on beholding three of his sons perish by his side, placed his back to a large rude granite block, which still marks the scene of the conflict, and, poising overhead his mighty claymore, stood like a lion at bay. His vast stature, his known strength and bravery, as he towered above the fray, with his white hair streaming in the wind, the blood streaming from his forehead, which had been wounded by an arrow, and from his huge sword, which had a remarkable accessory in the shape of an iron ball that slid along the back of the blade to give an additional weight to every cut. All this combined made the bravest of the MacNab pause for a moment ere they encountered him; but after a dreadful struggle, in which he slew many of his assailants, the brave old man sank at last under a score of wounds inflicted by swords and daggers; the MacNeishes were swept from the field, and the majority of them were slain.

The red lichens which spot the old grey granite in Glen Boultachan are still believed by the natives to be the encrusted blood of the chief of the MacNeishes. According to tradition, MacCallum-glas, their bard, with about twenty of the tribe, escaped and took refuge on their isle on Loch Earn.

**The Account of the Feud in the Annals of St Fillans, by A. Porteous, 1912:**

"Like all the rest of the Scottish clans, the Neishes had their own particular feud; this was with the Clan MacNab.” The feud was the outcome of a long-continued series of petty jealousies and imagined grievances on both sides. Frequently, isolated parties of the clans met, and a fight ensued.

At last both clans mustered their full force, and meeting in Glen Boultachan, a regular battle was fought.

The chief of the Neishes for long held his own, standing with his back to a large boulder, until at last he was overcome and fell covered with wounds. Tradition says that his blood still stains this boulder, and that the marks cannot be obliterated.

The rest of the Neishes fought equally stubbornly, but finally they were completely over-come, a remnant only making their escape. These settled down on the eastern island of Loch Earn under the leadership of a relative of the chief, and became practically freebooters, lying in wait for defenseless travelers, whom they robbed and murdered. Many years elapsed since the battle of Glen Boultachan ere the Neishes thought them selves once more formidable enough to try conclusions with their ancient enemies, the MacNabs.

The Neishes lay in ambush in Glen Lednoch," &c &c[[14]](#footnote-14)

**The Later Massacre at Nish Island – Christmas 1612 from** **the Statistical Account of Scotland, published in 1838**

In 1487 Finlay (of Bovain who is recognized as 6th chief) became chief of the Clan MacNab. At this time the MacNab seem to have set about the recovery of those of their possessions, which had been lost in their struggle with the Bruce[[15]](#footnote-15). They became involved in a feud with the Dewar’s concerning certain relics of St Fillan, and at the same time they commenced that struggle with the Neishes which culminated many years afterwards in the defeat of the Clan Neish at the battle of Glen Boultachan, about two miles north of the lower end of Loch Earn.

In 1487 the Dewars[[16]](#footnote-16) obtained a charter confirming them in their possessions, and from that date they had no further trouble with the MacNabs.

Finlay died (between the years 1502-11)[[17]](#footnote-17), and was succeeded by his son Finlay. It was in the time of this chief that the Neishes were at last defeated, and reduced to a small band of reckless outlaws.

This Finlay MacNab of Bowayne died at Illa Rayne,[[18]](#footnote-18) and he was buried at Killin, I3th April 1525.

Finlay 7th chief of the MacNabs, married Catherine Campbell, daughter of the Laird of Glenurchy[[19]](#footnote-19), and had a family of twelve stalwart sons, of whom the weakest is said to have been able to drive his dirk through a two-inch board.[[20]](#footnote-20)

At Christmas-tide, 1612, MacNab sent some of his clansmen to the neighboring town of Crieff[[21]](#footnote-21) to purchase the necessary stores for the approaching festivities. On their homeward way the MacNabs were ambushed by a party of the Neishes, who sallied from their island fortalice in Loch Earn and captured the supplies.

Dire was the wrath of chief and clansmen when the plundered messengers returned to Eilean Ran and reported their mishap. Enraged as the Macnabs were, they could think of no method by which they could punish the reivers. In the evening the twelve strong sons of MacNab were assembled in the hall of Eilean Ran, and busily engaged in planning some signal vengeance on their foes, when their father entered and said in Gaelic: "Si an nochd an oidhche nam biad na gillean na gillean" (This night is the night if the lads were the lads).[[22]](#footnote-22) In an instant the twelve lads were on their feet and arrayed in their war gear. Then hurrying down to the waterside they crossed the stream and took up the family barge, which they bore on their shoulders across the hills to Loch Earn, by way of Glentarken. Having reached the loch, they launched their boat and rowed to the island, where the robbers were holding their carousal with the stolen supplies. On their arrival at the island the grim avengers sunk all the boats in the little harbor, and then proceeded to the habitation of the Neishes. In the keep was a scene of revelry and confusion, for, holding all the boats on the loch in their own keeping; the Neishes deemed their hold to be impregnable.

Strange, therefore, must have been the thoughts which passed through their minds when, loud above the din of their noisy mirth, they heard a sharp and sudden knocking at the outer door. Immediately their noisy merriment ceased, all became silent, and then in a quavering voice the terrified Neish demanded the name and mission of the one who had thus disturbed their orgy. Swiftly came the answer, "Whom would ye least desire?" The speaker was Iain Min, or "Smooth John," the heir of MacNab, and the strongest and fiercest man in all Braidalbin.[[23]](#footnote-23)

With this stern voice sounding in his ears, and with a foreboding of his doom rising before him, the Neish replied, “lain Min."

Sharp through the midnight air came again that grim voice, "Then I am he, but rough enough I’ll be this night." Trusting in the strength of the stout door, the robbers attempted to treat for terms. But spurning all thought of parleying, Iain Min, with one swift blow, sent the door reeling off its hinges, and next instant he and his brothers were dealing death to the hereditary foes of their House. The Neishes surprised and demoralized by the rapidity and ferocity of their assailants, offered but little resistance. When the fighting, if such it can be called, was over, there remained of the Neishes but two survivors: one was a young lad who had succeeded in concealing himself in time to avoid the vengeance which overtook his family; the other was a female child who escaped the notice of the MacNabs by being under an overturned cradle.

Their task having been accomplished, the young MacNabs secured the gory head of the Neish as a trophy of their victory. They then recovered their boat, and retraced their journey of the previous night.

Ere they left Glentarken they abandoned their boat, as it retarded the news of their triumph. The boat was never removed from the place where the MacNab left it, and men born within the past century[[24]](#footnote-24) have talked with men who have viewed its well-bleached fragments.

Some time early in the past century a portion of the keel was dug out of the moss in which it was embedded. Part of it was given to Mrs. MacNaughton who lived near St Fillans, and she had it made into a walking stick (and a bicker). She was Margaret, daughter of James MacNab, Milmore, near Killin, and was known as "Margaret Innishewen.[[25]](#footnote-25)" The bicker is still preserved by her descendants.

In the morning the chief was delighted to find that the mission of vengeance had been successful: the proof was convincing when Iain Min cast Neishs head at his feet, and said in Gaelic,”Na biodh fiamh oirbh," or "dreadnought."[[26]](#footnote-26) Moreover, MacNab acknowledged as he received the gruesome trophy that the night had been the night, and the lads were the lads. From this deed are derived the modern arms of the MacNabs.

There is a local tradition to the effect that but three of the sons took part in the enterprise, and that the chief in giving the signal for the attack on the Neishes only acted at the instigation of his wife, who had some real or fancied cause of grievance against the three eldest sons. It is said that she hoped that they would be slain, so that her favorite son should be heir to the estates. Moreover, according to the same tradition, the three were by an early marriage. History, however, makes no mention of a second wife.

The MacNab arms are: Sable, on a chevron argent three crescents vert, in base an open boat with oars argent, sailing in a sea proper. Crest the head of a savage affronte proper. Supporters Two Highlanders with shouldered claymores.[[27]](#footnote-27) Motto "Timor omnis abesto" (“Be all fear absent").

John MacNab of MacNab matriculated the modern arms in 1765, but they had been used before that time. The author of The Clan MacNab[[28]](#footnote-28) informs me[[29]](#footnote-29) that his account of the Neishes was obtained from the following sources: Shearers Traditions of Strathearn, Scottish Wars, also from some private histories of the Clan MacNab, and from old natives of Breadalbane.

The Rev. Samuel Ferguson, minister of Fortingall, mentions the feud in his “Queens Visit.”

Malcolm Ferguson also gives the story in his “Rambles in Breadalbane,” published in 1891.

A short account of the Neishes is given in The Beauties of Upper Strathearn, 1870; also in the Scottish Tourist, 1825, P. 79.

The Neish tradition was utilized by James Grant in Mary of Lorraine, pp. 261-281. Grants account contains some facts and much fiction. He describes the country of the MacNeishes as: Glentarkin, Dundurn, part of Glenartney, the Pass of Strathearn, and the Hill of St Fillan (Dunfillan Hill).

It is curious that Grant says that one of the Neish survivors in 1522 was Muriel, daughter of the chief, who eventually married the Laird of Torwood.

The Lairds of Torwood were the Forrester family, the ancient hereditary foresters of Torwood Forest. Mariot Forester, spouse to James Campbell of Lawers, obtained a charter of the lands of Glentarkin in 1525.

Campbell of Lawers was granted a charter of Glentarcane in 1540, and James VI gave a confirmation of the grant in 1616.

The Neishes probably held Glentarkin originally by the sword; many of the Gaelic clans in earlier times neglected to obtain charters of their lands from the crown.[[30]](#footnote-30)

James IV granted the lands of Glentarkane to the Drummonds. In 1511 (R.M.S.i. 3574)

Glentarken is a glen in Comrie parish, descending from an altitude of 1150 ft., 2 miles south by eastward to Loch Earn (306 ft.), at a point 1 ¾ miles west by north of St Fillans.

It contains a huge monolith, "The great stone of Glentarken." It is not a traveled stone, but a mass detached from the low cliff below, which has rolled but a short distance and is poised in the most singular way upon one of its edges. It measures 70 ft. in circumference at the base, 110 ft. in circumference 10 ft. above the ground, and its solid contents above ground exceed 25,000 cubic ft. The glen probably derives its name from "Tarachin," or "Talargan," an old Pictish personal name.

In the olden days what might be called a clachan existed on the hillside at the entrance to Glentarken, but life on that exposed site was latterly found inconvenient and uncomfortable; accordingly, the families were moved to more suitable surroundings at the foot of the loch, and the cottages in the glen were allowed to fall into ruins. The remains of these may still be seen in heaps of stones here and there.

The most colorful account of the final conflict in the feud between Macnab and Macnish comes from Roland Wilds book “Macnab the Last Laird” published in 1938 by The Macmillan Company, New York. The similarity of this book title to that of a previous book by Alexander Fraser titled “The Last Laird of Macnab, an episode in the settlement of Macnab Township, Upper Canada”, published in Toronto in 1899 (a copy of which may be downloaded from [www.archive.org](http://www.archive.org) ) suggests this as Wild’s source. However, he claims as his inspiration a newspaper article from Ottawa and as his sources the Clan Macnab Association (possibly the clan history by John Macnab of Callander, which can also be downloaded from [www.archive.org](http://www.archive.org)) and the Hamilton Spectator as well as a number of other individuals both in Scotland and in Canada.

Except for the story of the raid on Nish Island related in The Great Feud – part one “Tartan Background” the books are very similar. Wild’s highly fictionalized account of the raid on Nish Island is related below on pages 1-3. Except for the conversion of words from British to American English the text is as found in the book

FINLAY, VIII CHIEF OF MACNAB, stared out of the windows of the ancestral home of his Clan. Snow fell, and in the dusk the whole Valley of the Dochart, seen in the twilight of this winter night, was transformed. The roads were almost impassable, and the only sound was the thud of hoofs as a crofter made his way home to the cottages in the dark village of Killin.

The Macnab was cold. For seven days the snow had fallen and blocked the road that led from Perth. Provisions were low in the great mansion of Eilean Ran, and it was no place for a man who flattered himself that his taste was too good for the home-made potions that his servants could brew on the premises. The Macnab household was out of good whisky.

Three days before, servants had been dispatched to Perth to bring back provisions sufficient to make an adequate Christmas and New Year for The Macnab and his household. They were overdue, and though in the year 1612 it was not always possible to ensure a regular supply of provisions, this enforced delay made the Macnab angry and short-tempered. ‘He was a man of giant height, like all the members of his Clan. He exerted supreme domination over his twelve sons, each one of whom, it was said, was able to drive a nail through a twelve-inch board with his fist. He was always aggravated by the fact that his second wife, a Campbell, resented the prowess of her step-sons. And this night it was a very testy Chieftain who watched through empty windows and strained his ears for the sound of a servant who would herald the approach of the consignment of food and drink.

An important feature of the generous board of the Macnab was the whisky. True, there was spirit now in an earthenware jug, but it was uisge-beathe, distilled on the estate, and as such it was not considered worthy of being poured from the giant bottle, named the ‘Bachelor’, which now awaited the good whisky that could be bought in Perth. The ‘Bachelor’ was eloquent of the prestige of the Macnab; it passed slowly round the table among his twelve sons, but it remained usually at his elbow; he was accustomed to drink deeply before going in stately manner to bed; and often the servants rendered aid to his guests.

He turned round savagely as one of his sons came into the cold, stone-flagged hail. He uttered only a curt monosyllable of greeting, for he was a man of few words, and the fear was growing in his mind that he would pass another night with only the solace of coarse spirit. The light failed as he stood there, a kilted silhouette against the long, narrow window, his plaid flung over his shoulder enhancing his great stature; a granite face, old, but still arrogant; a mouth that showed impatience and intolerance; clear eyes that were used to the Highlands a hand on the dagger at his waist, his feet planted squarely; the most famous of the Macnabs, descendant of seven hundred years of Chieftainship.

Moreover, a thirsty Laird and it was not the sound he wished to hear that made him start to the door, not troubling to call for a servant. There was no welcome hail, nor the jingle of the bridle of a pack-horse. The door shook with an agitated drumming, and when the Chief opened and let in the snow flurries, a man tumbled across the threshold with blood on his forehead and his clothes bedraggled and torn. Macnab flung the door shut and dragged the man to his feet, thrust his glowering face up to that of his servant and bellowed for an explanation.

“Laird! Cried the servant.” It’s the McNeish, Laird! As we came along the road with the load, the MacNeish fell upon us and have taken the whisky to their— selves! Donald is near to dead on the road, Laird, and Angus Mcnab is badly wounded. They have taken the whisky, and they’re on the island near to Glentarkin, in the loch. . .”

Macnab flung the man from him and stared round the hall, his color rising, to find that the commotion had brought all twelve of his sons round him. They made a silent circle, afraid to speak, and when he found his voice, the old Laird looked at them, turned his head round slowly to stare at each in turn. Then he spoke, a phrase that has come down the years. Softly he said it: “The nicht is the nicht, if the lads were the lads. . .”

He stalked from the hail without another word. But behind him there were mutterings and frightened looks from one to the other of’ those twelve stalwarts. The mother was there too, that Campbell woman who was jealous of the prowess of her step-sons, and who fancied a favoritism towards them from their father. “If the lads were the lads . . .” She resolved that the step-sons should take up the dangerous challenge.

The McNeishes had always been troublesome. Down through history they had harried and chivvied the Clan Macnab, until after the epic battle of Glenbultacher only thirty McNeishes survived of a force of five hundred. These were the remnants, caterans and robbers, who now offered supreme insult to the Macnab. The McNeish robbers were bold and undignified, and delighted in tweaking the nose of a Macnab. But now they had impaired his comfort as well as his dignity, and with the cunning of cowards, had retreated to the island, little more than a foothold in Loch Earn, that was called Neish Island. They were thinking that on this winter night they were secure from all interruption. Time and again they toasted the Macnab in ribaldry, and the rafters of the old fortress that offered them shelter on the island rang with their oaths. There were eleven of them there, and a woman or two and a child. The whisky tasted better for being stolen; and thrice as good because it was stolen from Macnab.

In the house of Eilean Ran few words were spoken as the Laird left the room. But the brothers knew what was in the mind of their father, and knew full well the meaning of that phrase with which he had taken his leave. Revenge could not wait until the morning; during the night the insult must be avenged. The mother urged the four eldest of the brothers to volunteer; they needed little encouragement; the Laird had given sufficient intimation of his wishes.

There are some who say that the Laird’s wife chose the eldest of the family to make that fateful errand because of her jealousy, and because it was unlikely that in a feud with the McNeishes any would return alive. But it was an obvious choice, and it was not long before they had agreed upon a desperate venture. The road to the island was some eleven miles, and it would be dawn before they could reach the extremity of Loch Earn. By morning the McNeishes might be sober, and it was the intention of the brothers to surprise them while still in their cups. To ram their insults down their throats while they were still drinking stolen whisky.

“We know the route over the hills,” said one.”

“That is so,” said another, “But there is the loch. The water is likely to be high at this time, and it is a tidy way from the shore. . . . There isna’ a boat. . .”

Then the voice of lain, the eldest son, the mightiest of them all, cried with a voice of thunder, and there seemed to be triumph in his mind.

“Man!” he cried. “We have a boat in the loch here, and it’s no more than a wee rowing-boat that we could carry, the four of us, over the shepherd’s way to Glentarkin! Before the dawn we could be over on the road and the boat in the water, and the McNeishes will tremble at the hammering of our dirks on the door! The nicht is the nicht, and the lads are the lads!”

The incredible project was begun, and there is not a ghillie in Loch Tayside to-day that will not see an insult in the suggestion that such is not true history. The hall of Eilean Ran was in sudden commotion, as with high spirits they buckled on dirks and belts, flung their plaids over their shoulders, and tossed down a mugrul of the raw home-brewed whisky to strengthen their courage and their sinews during that terrible night. They did not dare to tell the old Laird of their intentions, but flung out of-the door with an oath and a challenge to the storm; down to the lake a mile away where there rocked a tiny fishing-boat, the timbers of which were to be preserved in Perthshire history long after their own bones were scattered and forgotten.

The snow blew in flurries, and, save to a Highlander, the shepherd’s path over the hills was indistinguishable. But they knew the contour of every knoll and slope from innumerable hunting expeditions, and this was their own heath. The whisky in their stomachs lost its fire, but their heads were singing with another inspiration, the glory of revenge. The boat was heavy on their broad shoulders and they staggered before ever they reached the gradual slope that leads near to the summit of Creach Uchdag. Their feet were slipping in the snow, and a cruel wind came from the east into their young faces; but the Laird had been right when he said: “The nicht is the nicht . . .” there was not a McNeish who would believe that he was not impregnable in his island sanctuary on such a night. The Laird’s phrase rang through their brains. They sang the old gathering cry of the Clan Macnab as they labored, and foot by foot they covered a mile, another mile, and found themselves on the heights of the hill, in the teeth of the storm.

Up Achmore Hill and close to Breachioch. Up into the snowdrifts, along a path that they knew, they carried the rowing-boat fifteen hundred feet high to save a few miles round by Glen Ogle. There might be watchers on the loch track, and such a feat as carrying the boat over the direct path would be dismissed as impossible.

They crossed Glen Beich, came down to the level of the loch by the side of Glentarkin Burn, and marched another three miles to where the island showed dimly. It was lain, Smooth lain as he was called, who led them and whipped up their courage. He knew the path better than his brothers, and in him there burned, stronger than in the others, the fire of Clan-pride. When they came to the steep path leading down to the road near Glentarkin, he led their songs, for victory was very near. The boat was a crushing weight on the shoulders of men who would have hesitated to undertake such a journey unencumbered; but they had achieved the impossible; they had proved that the lads were the lads.

From Glentarkin the snowdrifts were deep, but a few travelers during that day had cleared a path, and they ran along the side of the loch shouting with triumph. A roisterer coming home late that night would have bolted for fear; here were four storm—lashed giants running with a row-boat through the snow, laughing as they went. But the laughter was grim, with a note of fearful anticipation. These were Macnabs, with anger in their hearts.

They halted and took their breath, tightened their belts and made their dirks ready to hand. Then they launched the boat, and leapt in to paddle their way across awkwardly with the branches of trees broken by the storm. The island loomed no more than a hundred yards ahead, and there was a light shining from the little fortress. The sound of song and laughter came across the water.

“Ye will beach the boat and follow me,’ whispered lain. ‘Don’t trouble yourselves wi’ thoughts of mercy. We have an insult to think over. . .”

The door showed no chink of light. But the dark shape of lain showed through the snow, and they gathered round him. His dirk thundered on the timber, and within the fort, there was silence.

“Open the door!” shouted lain. “Open the door we set the place on fire!”

Still silence. But there came a voice that trembled, and the question was asked: “Who’s there?”

“Who would ye least like to hear?” bellowed lain, and his brothers knew he was grinning with relish. “Answer me. Who would ye least like to hear?”

“Smooth lain Macnab” came the voice of a McNeish.

“Then I am he, but tis rough I’ll be this night!”

The crash of a tree-trunk splintered the wood, and the four brothers tumbled into the/room, dirks drawn, their eyes alight. The McNeishes had no time to rush to arms, and, mellow though they were with the Macnab whisky, they could not conceive that on such a night, retribution had indeed come to an island stronghold where they had felt doubly secure. The dirks with the crest of the Chief on the handles flashed and fell on drunken and defenseless men, and high above the sound of combat, through the sounds of awful carnage, there came the laughter of Smooth lain as he dealt out death without mercy. Eleven men, the heads of the Clan McNeish, lay dead and dying on the floor, and the only other note in that room of debauch was the whimpering of a child found hidden under a rough bed. At last they were fmished, and lain stood, sweating and bloodstained, with a gory trophy in his hand.

“A trophy for, the Laird!” he cried. “A trophy for the Laird o’ Macnab!” It was the head of the Chief of McNeish, through which had passed the Macnab whisky, and then the Macnab dirk.

But there was still work to do that night. They stumbled over lifeless forms and dragged out half-finished pitchers of whisky, poured them into one, and spilled the remainder over their faces and their blood-soaked clothes as they drank. They were drunk with fighting, and before they reached the shore again in their boat, they were drunk with spirit. But they set off down the track again with the pitcher and the head of McNeish hanging by the hair, and never noticed the ever-raging storm.

Before dawn they were back at Eilean Ran. The Laird was still keeping watch on the old house, knowing that Clan history was being made that night. They marched in and flung the gory head at his feet.

“Na biodh fiamh oirbh” said lain, “Dread naught!” They called for mugs, and in silence toasted the old man whom they had honored with their courage. They had crushed the Clan McNeish for ever, and they had given the Clan Macnab its crest.

The head is still the crest of the Clan, and wondering tourists gaze at it in the windows of the hotel at Callander, guessing at its meaning. For years the rowing-boat lay on the shore near Neish Island, and when it began to rot, the crofters took its timbers away to keep for their families, telling them the story of that famous journey. The little boat found its way into the crest also, and the ghillies of the Highlands to-day have their own convictions as to the route taken over the hills that night, some saying they went right over to Ardeonaig before they climbed the heights. But all agree that the Macnab brothers of 1612 were men whose strength and courage will never be known again.

So runs the most famous legend of the Clan Macnab.

These images and the accompanying text were not part of the Wild book but are my own additions. Authentic illustrations, for this period would be hard to come by. These particular illustrations, while not historically accurate were chosen because they come close to depicting clansmen from about the period of the Macnab – Macnish feud. They were originally done by R.R. McIan for his book “The Clans of the Scottish Highlands” published in 1845. The text is partly from that book and from “The Clans, Septs and Regiments of the Scottish Highlands” by Frank Adam and Innes of Learney. These illustrations were copied from the Electric Scotland website.

The artist had been an actor before becoming a painter and his works take their look from stage paintings of the time as well as the romantic view of the highlands held by the Victorians. One of the purposes of the illustrations was to depict various clan tartans, most of which were actually of 19th century development. Some of the weapons were modeled after authentic examples but the short kilts are not authentic. At this period clansmen probably wore a one piece garment wrapped around the body and secured in place at the waist with a belt. Falling to the knees it was then draped over the shoulders and fastened on the breast with a pin of wood or bone.

Before the large scale introduction of sheep they were woven of linen, those worn by gentlemen were dyed yellow with saffron; those of the humbler classes were painted or daubed with pitch. In cold weather it would be covered with deerskin or a mantle.

The first illustration was labeled Ferguson though the figures garment has no pattern; instead what is shown is the saffron dyed plaid over a long sleeved shirt in what the accompanying text referred to as the “Irish style.” Some kind of sleeveless vest, presumably made of leather has been thrown over all. In reality, the mantle would be discarded in preparation for battle and he would fight in just his shirt with the tails tied between his legs. If he wore shoes, which would just be pieces of hide laced over his feet, they would be discarded for the better grip his bare toes could achieve on the moss.

The figure wears a steel cap, with a plant badge affixed at the peak and in his left hand is the traditional round targ or target made of thin strips of wood with a round iron boss in the center to protect his hand. The targ was both shield and weapon; it could be used to punch and strike an opponent as well as deflect knife and sword thrusts and some had a spike which could be fixed to the boss increasing its utility.

His sword, has the down turned hand guards that are typical of Scottish swords, and was modeled after an original believed to be 600 years old. It appears to be a hand and a half sword, held one handed for thrusting or two handed for slashing.

This illustration was labeled MacInnes. The clansman is depicted wearing a short sleeved mail shirt, of iron links, worn over his shirt which is dyed saffron. The plaid is the short kilt which wasn’t invented until the 18th century. In this era he would have worn a long shirt and the belted plaid over all, which would have most likely been discarded so as not to impede his movements

He has caught several arrows with his targ which seems a risky thing to do since they have penetrated it. In his right hand is a spear tethered to his wrist by a short rope. The spear has an iron or lead ball on the butt. Presumable the rope allows the spear to be recovered after being thrown so it was not a long range weapon. Probably it was meant to be used for stabbing with the point or throwing butt first as an impact weapon.

This clansman is also shown bare foot, and the ground appears to be snow covered. I have read that the Scots went bare legged because it was easier to wash mud from bare skin than to wash and dry stockings.

This illustration was labeled Macquarie and shows an archer. Note that he is drawing his bow to the chest, not to the eye as modern archers do. His two handed Claymore, being too large to carry any other way is slung across the back. He is still wearing his foot gear which is just hide, worn fur side out, with rawhide laces, though he has dropped his bonnet.

The arrows are carried in a hide quiver, presumable hooked to his belt as is the targ which appears to have an iron rim. The rest of his costume is the short kilt which is probably more appropriate for the 18th century than the 15th century and undoubtedly owes much to the artist’s stage background.

The Macnabs of Barachasalain were Hereditary Armorers to the Chiefs of the Clan and produced broad swords and chain mail at their forge.

This last figure, labeled MacLaurin, is probably the most accurate of all. The clansman is depicted wearing the belted plaid, fastened at the shoulder with a broach. He has a short sleeved mail shirt under a vest, presumably of hide, and carries a bow with a quiver of arrows.

His conical iron cap may have been inspired by those worn by the Vikings many of whom settled in the Isles and West of Scotland. The cap was made of several pieces riveted together and worn over a round cap for padding.

His plaid would have been handmade and if it was patterned it would be in muted rather than bright colors. At this period any sort of crisscross pattern is mere conjecture since only a very few examples of plaids, dating from before the 19th century exist. The material was wool instead of linen. This being much warmer, it was unnecessary to wear anything over it, even in winter, and the mantle became the upper part of the single garment which was now worn. This was called the "breakan or plaid." The plaid does not mean the patterned cloth we call by that name, but the single garment, which included kilt, coat, waistcoat, and plaid in one. It is described as "made of fine wool of diverse colors, its length is commonly seven double ells tied on the breast with a bodkin of bone or wood; it is pleated from the belt to the knee." it was a reproduction of the linen shirt in cloth, a good deal heavier, because the material was thicker, and including four parts of the modern dress instead of three.

Among other symbols of Scottish culture, the plaid was outlawed after the last attempt by the Stuarts to reclaim the throne in 1745 and it would not be legal to wear it again until the time of King George IV in the 19th century. Shoes were pieces of the hide of a cow, horse or deer, with the hair on, being tied behind and before with a piece of leather.

As there was no pocket in any part of the old Highland dress they wore a deer hide purse fastened to the front of the belt, which evolved into the modern sporran. This man’s purse is just visible below the folds of the plaid.

A.C. McKerracher wrote and published a number of stories about Perthshire. His stories were collected and published in a book titled “Perthshire in History and Legend.” The following version of the Macnab Macnish feud also comes from the Scot’s Magazine

The story of how the Clan MacNab exterminated the Clan Neish is to be found in many books. The versions vary, but briefly the usual account goes something like this: the Macnabs had been suffering at the marauding hands of the smaller Clan Neish, and after a bloody battle in Glen Boltachan the Neishes retired to their island refuge off St. Fillans on Loch Earn. Some time after this they ambushed the servant of the chief of the Macnabs who was returning from Crieff to Killin laden with delicacies for the Christmas season. When news of this reached the Macnab chief at his stronghold, Ellanrayne Castle, he was in despair for his larder was empty and the appetites of his twelve sons were immense. Calling them together, he uttered the cryptic words; "Si an oidche an oidche na b'iad na gillean na gillean" ("Tonight is the night, if the lads were the lads!")

His sons at once seized their weapons, hurried to their boat on Loch Tay, and rowed down to Ardeonaig where they lifted it from the water on to their shoulders and carried it overland to Loch Earn. Here they launched the craft and silently made their way to the Neishes' island. After a challenge from the chief of the Neishes the sons broke down the door of the small castle and slaughtered everyone inside, except one small boy who was crouched under the table. They cut off the chief's head, and in the dawning light carried it and the boat back over the hills. When the boat grew too heavy it was abandoned at the head of Glen Tarken.

Their arrival back at their castle at Killin was greeted with joy, their father crying out, "Tonight was the night, and the lads were the lads!" The sons proudly handed over the sack containing the gory head to their mother, telling her to give it to the younger children as a plaything.

Well, that's the story as it appears in many books, and yet there seem many conflicting aspects to the tale. Why, for instance, should the Macnab chief say to his sons, "Tonight is the night . . ." These almost contemptuous words hardly seem those a proud father would use to his grown-up sons, who had already proved their manhood.

Why again do the books say that twelve sons took part when the clans crest portrays a boat with only four oars?

Why should the sons have taken the long overland route from Ardeonaig on Loch Tay to St. Fillans on Loch Earn? A Black Watch T.A. exercise "John Macnab" was carried out in 1968, and it was proved to be impossible to carry even a light coracle over this route in less than eight hours.

Lastly, it seems highly improbable, even in those violent times, that the sons would present a severed head to their mother, with the ghastly suggestion that the younger children play with it.

Unfortunately, the clan papers were destroyed when Ellanrayne Castle was burnt by Cromwellian troops, and this, coupled with a gap of more than three centuries, makes it a difficult task to unravel the true facts behind the legend. However, much new evidence has come to light, particularly through the work of the 22nd chief, the late Archibald Corrie Macnab, and research in other areas persuades me that the real story is probably as follows:

The Clan Macnab descends from one of the lay abbots of Strathfillan, and tradition has it that the founder was a son of King Kenneth Macalpine. The early chiefs are first mentioned in 1124 A.D., and in 1306 the then chief joined forces with McDougall of Lorn against Robert the Bruce. For this the Macnab lands were forfeited, but in 1336 Gilbert Macnab of Bovain received a Charter from David II, and Gilbert is recognized as the first proper chief of Clan Macnab.

During the next two centuries the Macnabs consolidated their lands until these stretched from Tyndrum to beyond Killin. Their castle stood at Ellanrayne, or Eillan Ran, an island commanding the strategic Port of Ran at the mouth of the River Lochay at Killin, and from here the Macnabs held power over Loch Tay and Glendochart.

Their nearest neighbors to the south were the small Clan Neish. They descended from Ness, son of one William, who was Sheriff of Perth and Lord of Leuchars around 1100 A.D. Ness gave his sons land in Angus, Fife and Galloway, but to his youngest son, Math, he gave land in Strathearn. Far removed from the rest of the family, Math established a small, independent clan, and in 1250 A.D. their headquarters were in a keep on a crannog, or artificial island, at St. Fillans on Loch Earn.

They seem to have been an unruly and troublesome lot, for at a Council held at Linlithgow on January 9, 1490, James IV gave orders to Lord Drummond: "Whin 15 dias fra this dai furth to ger cast doon ye hoos of ye Easter Isle of Loch Ern, and distroy all ye strengthis of ye samen, and tak away ye bate, and put her to ye Wester Isle (at Lochearnhead)."

However, the MacNesses, or Neishes, as they were now called, still inhabited the ruins of their tower, and continued their unlawful activities mainly at the expense of their northerly neighbors, the Macnabs. The enmity between the clans grew stronger, and there was always fighting whenever isolated groups of clansmen encountered each other.

Then in the year 1522 the Neishes made a major raid on the Macnab herds. Finlay Macnab, 8th chief of the House of Bovain, summoned all his clan and they marched over the hills from Loch Tay to Glen Boltachan. The Neishes were alerted, and they, too, summoned all their men and advanced up the glen carrying their banner of a cupid armed with bow and arrow. The site of the conflict was around a huge boulder on what is now Little Port Farm, and as the Macnabs rushed downhill they threw away their plaids and, naked apart from their brogues, flung themselves upon the Neishes. The Neishes threw off their plaids as well, and soon the glen was packed with naked, screaming warriors locked in mortal combat.

The Neishes were no match for their adversaries and they fell like ninepins. The aged chief saw his three sons killed before his eyes. He retreated until he stood against the boulder and fought off his attackers with his claymore, which had a remarkable accessory in the shape of an iron ball that slid on a chain along the blade to give added weight to his blows. But the attackers were too many, and the old man finally succumbed to a hail of stabs from dirks and claymores. It is said that the unusual red lichen that covers the stone is still stained with the blood of the Chief of Clan Neish.

The clan bard, and relation of the chief, MacCallum Glas, managed to drag away only twenty survivors to the island refuge on Loch Earn. During the next century their numbers increased little, and they were now nothing more than thieves and freebooters who preyed upon helpless travelers. However, they were no longer a major threat, and they might have continued their wax of life but for a dreadful error in the year 1612.

Just before Christmas of that year the chief of the clan Macnab had dispatched his servants to Crieff to bring back food and drink for the festive season. The laden line of ponies was returning slowly by way of Comrie when the party was suddenly surprised and ambushed by the Neishes. There was great rejoicing when it was discovered who the goods were destined for, and they gleefully carried them off to Loch Earn.

As they were nearing the shore they were suddenly confronted by an aged crone who lived nearby. She was reputed to be a witch, being wild of face and deformed, and the Neishes respectfully saluted her and offered her a share of the plunder. She rejected it, pointed her finger at the Neishes moored boat, then raised her arms to the sky and cried out, beware, sons of Ness, beware of the time when there will be two boats on Loch Earn."

The Neishes looked at each other uneasily, and then remembered that they owned the only boat on the loch, and burst out laughing. They conveyed the goods across to their island in the boat, while the remainder used the secret causeway of boulders that can still be seen in line with the islet and the villa called "Portmore" at St. Fillans.

Meanwhile the Macnab servants had reached Ellanrayne Castle and gasped out the story to Finlay Macnab, 12th chief of the clan. Finlay had married twice. His first wife was Katherine Campbell, the natural daughter of Sir Duncan Campbell of Glenorchy, and she had borne him two sons and a daughter. The name of his second wife is unknown, but she gave him ten sons. This lady, on hearing the story, suddenly saw an opportunity of removing her two stepsons, and making her own children the heirs. She looked at the eldest, Iain Min ("Smooth John") and sneeringly remarked, "Tonight is the night - if the lads were the lads! “She knew the fierce pride of Iain Min - a giant of a man who was nicknamed Smooth because he was anything but that - and knew that her words would goad him into hasty action. They did. Iain Min leapt to his feet shouting for hiss brother Duncan to arm himself. His two eldest half-brothers, John Roy and Patrick, also demanded to go, and their mother bit her lip but dare not refuse. Iain Min brushed aside his father's protests that the entire clan should be called out, and the brothers hurried to the lochside and unmoored their skiff. From here they rowed down Loch Tay to Cloichran where they hoisted the boat from the water on to their shoulders, and began the long trek up the side of Alt Breaclaich to the lochan at the top.

Gasping and staggering in the deep snow, they climbed over the saddle and down across the desolate plateau that leads to Glen Tarken. The descent down the steep, boulder-strewn glen was severe, but by the middle of the night they had launched their boat on Loch Earn.

The moon shone fitfully from behind scudding clouds as they rowed stealthily toward the island. Quietly they steered their craft into a tiny creek from where they could see a glimmer of light from the ruin. They crept up to a straw-filled window and peered inside. There lay the entire gang, gorged and drunk, and on a chair, snoring, the uncouth elderly chief. The four sons of Macnab made their way round the ruin to the makeshift door where Iain Min drew his dirk, and hammered on the wood.

"Who knocks?" called out the sleepy voice of the MacNeish chief. Iain Min replied in true Highland manner with another question: "Who would you least like to see?"

There was a drunken laugh from inside. "Smooth John Macnab!" "Smooth John it is, but you'll find him a rough man tonight!" shouted Iain Min as he kicked the door open. The brothers rushed inside and began slaughtering all that were there - except for a boy and girl who cowered in terror under the table and were overlooked. Iain Min cut off the head of the chief of Clan Neish and instructed his brothers to cut off several others. With the heads stuffed in a sack, they set out on the long journey home.

They rowed back up Loch Earn, and, pulling the boat from the water, struggled up Glen Tarken, probably stopping to rest at the giant monolith that lies a short distance up the glen. From here it was a lung-wracking climb to the head of the glen. Eventually they could carry the boat no farther and left it in the heather.

Then they hurried on and down to Loch Tayside, to make their way along the shore to Ellanrayne Castle.

About mid-morning they arrived back, to be greeted by their anxious father. “Dreadnought!" cried out Iain Min - an expression that is now part of the clan slogan.

His stepmother appeared, looking disappointed, and the chief turned to her and said in delight, "Tonight was the night - and the lads were the lads! “She inquired what was in the sack, and Iain Min gave her a cold stare. “Bowls for your bairns!" he said, and opened the bag and rolled out the heads at her feet.

The girl who had hidden under the table during the massacre was the daughter of the Neish chief, and she eventually married the Laird of Torwood in Stirlingshire. The boy made his way to South Perthshire where he settled. The MacIldowie families in this area are descended from him - their name meaning "Son of the Black-haired Lad."

The Macnabs' boat lay rotting in the heather high up on the watershed between Loch Tay and Loch Earn, and is said to have been still visible around 1900. All traces of it were destroyed in a peat fire early this century, although a walking-stick made from the keel is supposed to be still in existence. Iain Min later fought for Montrose and was captured while defending Kincardine Castle. He was condemned to death, but escaped from Edinburgh Castle. In 1651 he fought for Charles I at the Battle of Worcester along with three hundred of the clan. He returned home, but was killed in 1653 in a skirmish with Cromwellian troops who were raiding his cattle. The following year Ellanrayne Castle was burnt to the ground and the chiefs moved residence to Kinnell House on the other side of the River Lochay.

From that time the fortunes of the clan went into decline. Of latter chiefs, probably the most famous was Francis, born in 1734, whose celebrated picture by Raeburn now hangs in the London offices of the Dewars whisky firm. It epitomizes the proud arrogance of a Highland chief, even if Francis conducted himself in a manner more appropriate to an earlier age while his debts steadily increased. His nephew, Archibald, who succeeded him in 1816, inherited impossible debts, and a writ of foreclosure was served in 1823. Archibald fled to Canada where he obtained a grant of 80,000 acres in the valley of the River Ottawa. He named his estate Macnab, and his house Kinnell. Many clansmen were persuaded to leave Scotland and join him, although he continued his feudal jurisdiction. Some clansmen objected to this when they learnt the land was free, and the chief had to repay all the rents.

His intentions were not altogether dishonorable - he was hoping to recover the ancestral lands. Alas, these were sold in 1828 to the fourth Earl of Breadalbane, even the beautiful burial ground of Inch Buie on the Falls of Dochart. Nothing was left, and curiously at this time the prophecy of the Lady of Lawers came true - that when a fir tree fell against another on Inch Buie, and grafted on to it, then that would be the end of the Macnabs. Archibald died in poverty in France, and his Canadian house of Kinnell was burnt to the ground in 1938 by a clanswoman to prevent it being turned into a museum. The clan’s folk are scattered to Canada, Australia, British Honduras (where they became celebrated pirates), United States and to almost every corner of the globe.

However, in 1949 the late Archibald Corrie Macnab, 22nd chief, repurchased Kinnell House, and about 7000 acres of the old clan lands from the Breadalbane estates. Strange to relate, the tree graft on Inch Buie which had marked the fall of the clan, withered and died shortly after.

While researching for this article I visited Kinnell House and was welcomed by the present chief, J. C . Macnab of Macnab. The house is little changed and contains much of its 17th century nucleus, while attached is the long conservatory containing the celebrated Black Hamburgh vine, planted in 1832. The Macnab supplied me with much helpful information, and then took me up a hill road by Land-Rover to point out the only possible route his ancestors could have taken on their epic overland raid. The present chief is descended from John Roy, the third son who followed Iain Min on the raid on the Neishes.

Just before Christmas of 1976 I followed the path of Iain Min and his brothers, almost 364 years to the day since they annihilated the clan Neish. With three companions I first visited the site of Ellanrayne at Killin, now marked only by a grassy mound on a swampy peninsula. From here we drove to Cloichran on the south side of Loch Tay, just past the Edinburgh University Field Station, and climbed uphill through deep snow to the Hydro Electric dam which now engulfs Lochan Breaclaich. From there it was uphill again, and over the saddle to the desolate plateau that is the watershed between Loch Tay and Loch Earn. It was a beautifully clear, crisp winter's day, and the only signs of life in the white wilderness were the deer and mountain hares that bounded away at our approach as we headed to the top of Glen Tarken. The descent of the glen was heavy going, but eventually we were at Loch Earn, and the comfort of a roaring log fire in a St. Fillans hotel.

We agreed that an overnight crossing by this route was quite feasible, even if a boat were being carried, and our time for the crossing of just over four hours would certainly have allowed a return trip the same night.

Back at Killin, we visited Inch Buie on the Falls of Dochart, where all the tombstones bear the head of the Neish chief. On this wooded island, justifiably described as the most beautiful burial ground in the world, lie Iain Min and his brothers, whose daring exploit gave the Clan Macnab its crest, its slogan, and who created a legend that has passed into immortality.

Excerpt from: Hoofprints in the Clouds – Jeep Tracks in the Mud

By Geoffrey Tudor, 2008

Chapter 11

From mules to jeeps

'This is some sort of special spot, is it?' asked Sgt. Ballard, looking puzzled. They'd left Inveraray in the early morning. Past Dalchenna, with no Wrens to be seen; past naval stores, where Graham had fought the battle of the rope; past the George Hotel, where he and Ian kicked their heels after they missed the dinner date and nearly blew their chances. And then, last view of all, the turrets of Inveraray Castle, where a Duke had confessed to his misadventure with French blackberries, and had fallen - like Graham - under the spell of his little 'roitelet'. Then, shrugging off the memories of those golden days, they'd followed the tourist route, past Loch Long and the wooded shores of Loch Lomond, and across the hills again to Lochearnhead.

Now Graham and Sgt. Ballard were sitting on the roadside turf near the eastern end of Loch Earn. They were keeping an eye on the lorry, having sent the men off to the water's edge for a stretch and a smoke. Opposite them was a tiny island, scarcely breaking the surface of Loch Earn. It was disappointingly small, Graham thought, an insubstantial basis for the story he had to tell: but, having chosen this route 'for a special reason', he felt obliged to be out with it. So he explained how among his various forebears were numbered the famous, (and sometimes infamous), Clan Macnab, whose ancestral lands lay across the hills behind them, at Killin at the western end of Loch Tay.

'Life in the Highlands was pretty tough in those days, cattle-raiding, feuds among the clans, and from time to time an English invasion to put up with. Mostly the highlanders took the law into their own hands, and rough enough justice they served out - as you'll see in a moment. It was way back in 1612 - James I of England and VI of Scotland on the throne - that a party of Macnabs was coming along this road laden with supplies for the Christmas feasting. Somewhere around here they were ambushed, set upon by a rival clan, the Neishes, and well and truly beaten up. All the Christmas hooch and other stuff was carried off by the ambushers and ferried across to that little island over there.'

'Doesn't seem much of a spot to hide up on!' said Sgt. Ballard, echoing Graham's own thoughts. 'Not now it doesn't. But I gather there were loads of these island fortresses in the old days, both here and in Ireland. Once abandoned they gradually crumbled away, and some have entirely vanished below the surface. This island must have been a good deal larger in those days, and rising from it was a stone tower. Not much left now, yet that was where the Neishes went to ground, while the Macnab party went on to Killin without their wine and provender and with their tails between their legs.' 'They got their own back pretty quick, didn't they?' asked Ballard. 'Too true they did! The Clan Chief of those days had twelve sons, and when news came of the insult he summoned them to his presence. He said to them, so tradition goes - and in Gaelic of course - "The night is the night if the lads were the lads!"' Graham grinned, his concern for historical truth coming to the surface. 'That phrase sounds a bit like later embroidery to improve the story. What he probably said was: "If you've got any spunk, go get those buggers!"'

'Problem was, they had to find a way of crossing to that island over there. You see, the Neishes were the only folk with boats on Loch Earn, and all those boats would be drawn up on the island, out of reach. Solution - take your own boat with you! The eldest son, (he was called Smooth John in jest because he was so hairy!) led the assault force. The twelve of them went down to Loch Tay and dragged ashore their own family barge. It must have been a heavy boat, large enough to carry cattle and other cargoes, and strong enough to cope with the stormy waters of the loch. Well, they picked up that boat, lifted it onto their shoulders, and carried it over those mountains behind us and down to the water's edge just about here.' Sgt. Ballard glanced at the map, and then stood up to get a better view of the hills. 'I reckon that's about seven miles, and the watershed's 2,000 feet! They'd have made useful mountain gunners, those blokes!'

Graham paused while a couple of planes passed overhead, and then picked up the tale. 'It was all over pretty quickly. Just like we've been learning at Inveraray: the keys to success in amphibious warfare - speed and surprise! The Neishes never dreamed they could be attacked so quickly. There were no look-outs, all were inside, carousing on the stolen liquor. So the boat was launched, Smooth John and his party landed on the island and battered on the fortress door. 'Who's there?" "'Tis I, Smooth John, but rough enough I'll be this night!" They battered down the door, overran the drunken Neishes and put them to the sword.

One report has it that a sackful of heads was carried back to Killin as "boules for the bairns": in another account it was only the gory head of the Neish himself. I don't expect they were able to recover much of the food and drink - the Neishes had put paid to that: but so far as revenging the insult was concerned it was "mission accomplished"!' 'Good story that!' said Sgt Ballard enthusiastically, and Graham recalled from their time in the hills that he'd shown a liking for bloodthirsty yarns. 'What happened to that boat, by the way?' 'Oh yes! That's part of the story. It seems they humped their boat back to the top of the ridge, and there they left it. Some said that by that time they'd got fed up with carrying it; but it seems more likely they left it there on purpose as a memorial of their feat. A memorial it certainly was, for it was never fetched down and parts of it were still to be seen up there two centuries later. The story goes that part of the keel was dug out of the bog and carved into a walking stick which is still knocking around somewhere.'

By now the gunners were drifting back from their smoke and their stroll along the shore of the loch. It was time to turn away from the barbarous deeds of seventeenth-century Scotland and return to the warlike preparations of their own dark age. 'You wouldn't think I was descended from a rough crew like that, would you?' said Graham. 'I dunno,' reflected Sgt. Mallard, 'seeing the way you laid about that wee Scotsman in the boxing ring. At least you didn't bring his head back to Maryculter in a sack! I suppose that's progress!'

1. St. Fillan of Rath Erenn, whose chair and well is situated between Comrie and the eastern end of Loch Earn. He is not be confused with St Fillin of Glendochart, who gave his name to Strathfillan and who’s relics are to be found in Glendochart. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Cast down the house of the Ester (eastern) Isle of Loch Ern and destroy all the strengths of the same and take away the boat and put it at the Wester (western) Isle – reputedly the Nishes had the only boat on the loch. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. In Gaelic “Ian Min” Ian = John, Min = Smooth. In Gaelic the descriptor comes after instead of before the name as in English [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Note: this is at odds with the modern clan history which lists Finlay as 4th chief and indicates he died in 1464 to be succeeded as 5th chief by Patrick, d. 1488 at Auchlyne. In turn he was succeeded by Finlay the 6th chief who died in 1499 and was the father of Smooth John. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The modern spelling of Glenurgy is Glenurchy [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The Dewars were the hereditary keepers of the relics of St. Fillan and each possessed a croft in right of their keepership. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Patrick 5th chief d. 1488, his son would be Finlay 6th chief mentioned above as “Finlay (V. Chief). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. East of the eastern end of Loch Earn, they would have had to pass through St. Fillan, on the way hence right by Nish Island. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. In the book Mr. Tod suggests that the Macnishes are descended from the ancient kings of Dalrida, as the Macnab’s also claim, but he gives no source for this. A number of clans make this claim, however, that does not mean the claim is valid as it was common, at this time, for professional genealogists to claim a family had noble or royal descent.

   Frank Adam and Sir Thomas Innes of Larney in their source book *The Clans, Septs, and Regiments of the Scottish Highlands* merely list MacNeish as a sept of the Clan MacGregor and state “This small sept were all but exterminated during a feud with the Macnabs.”

   Since the ancestral lands of the Clan MacGregor adjoin those of the Clan Macnab on both north and south it is quite possible that this family of Macnish did spring from that source. However, as Neish is a form of the name “Angus” doubtless there are other unrelated families who adopted the surname Macneish. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. The Clann an Aba, or Macnab, supposedly is a rendering of the Gaelic Mac-an-Aba (or Abba), which in English means “the children of the Abbot. In those days there were lay Abbots as well as clerical Abbots and even the latter were allowed to marry. It was the Celtic custom for abbots to be chosen from among the kin of the founder of that abbey and the office eventually became secularized. Gaelic manuscript genealogies supposedly trace the mediaeval Macnab chiefs through some *twenty* generations from Saint Fillan’s brother Ferchar mac Feradach, however there are significant gaps in the historical record.

    Those gaps in the record throw serious doubt that the MacNab does actually go back that far, though the Lord Lyon King at Arms, Scotland’s chief heraldic officer, has been persuaded to recognize the chief of the Clan MacNab as the hereditary Abbot of Glendochart. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Bovain was the residence of the Chief and name of his estate. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Probably Finlay the 8th chief who died at Eilean Ran 12 April 1525 and was buried in Killin [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. “Love draws friendship” in Latin no less! This banner seems a bit farfetched for this period; perhaps the original author was taking some literary license. There is, however, no way to ascertain the truthfulness of this story [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. This account ends here; presumably the rest of it concerns the hijacking and massacre as related below in the Clan Macnab Account [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. The Macnab backed the Comyn family in the struggle for the crown and when Robert the Bruce emerged the victor their estates were seized and their writs burnt and their lands given to Dundas of Weed, as punishment for having chosen the wrong side. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. The Dewars were the hereditary custodians of the relics of St. Fillan, founder of the Abby of Glendochart. The Macnab’s descend from a holder of that Abbacy. There were five of them and each had possession of a croft for fulfilling his office. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. According to the official clan history, Finlay died in 1499 and was succeeded by John who was in turn succeeded by Finlay [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. According to the official Clan Macnab history, Finlay of Bovain who died at Eilean Ran, 12 April 1525 was the 8th chief. He was buried at Killin. The Lord Lyon counts Gilbert of Bovain as the first chief of the Clan Macnab and has issued a recognized list of chiefs.

    The spelling “Bowayne” and “Illa Rayne” presumably follow that of the original source the modern spelling is “Bovain” and “Eilan Ran” respectively [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Modern Glen Orchy or Glenorchy [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. In the official Clan Macnab history this Finlay is the 12th chief, and though he did marry Katherine, a natural daughter of John Campbell of Glenorchy, these were actually the children of his previous wife (name unknown) and it speculates that the second wife hoped they might be slain so one of her sons would be heir. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Crieff may be found south of Loch Tay on the A85. The route to it runs along the shores of Lock Earn [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. In other words “Do something about this outrage now if you have the stones!” [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Modern Breadalbane [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. The book this was taken from was printed in 1925 therefore, “within the past century” probably means the early portion of the 19th century. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Innishewen is a cadet branch of the chiefly family, it is named after a farm they held in Glendochart. In previous accounts Margaret Innishewen is said to have “had it made into a bicker and a walking stick.” For some reason the bicker was left out here but still mentioned in the final sentence of the paragraph.

    A “bicker” is a small wooden vessel made of staves with one or two staves prolonged to form lugs. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. In the official Clan Macnab history “Gun Eagal” or “Dreadnought” was the watchword with which Smooth John answered the lookout and Ian Min told his father that “the night had been the night and the Lads were the Lads.” *David Rorer* [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. The coat of arms as depicted, in The Clans Septs and Regiments of the Scottish Highlands is as described, however, instead of the highlanders as supporters, it has two black dragons, with claws and tongues of gold and erect wings of silver, on which are three green crescents each, which is also the coat of arms depicted in the official clan history. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. This would be the Jo. MacNab who wrote a Clan MacNab history in 1907, quoted by Mr. Tod as one of his sources [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. William A. Tod, FSA SCOT. The presumed author of the “History of the Clan Macnish or Nish” from which this is taken [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Charters, historically, were a relatively recent development. Many families and clans held their lands from before the time when writing and written charters were known and often preserved a relic such as a sword, knife or even tooth that had been given to an ancestor as token of their ownership. Only later did it become common to obtain charters from the crown. Many families, of course, did not get charters and were displaced, as happened to the Clan Gregor or Macgregor when the Campbell’s were granted title to the lands they had held from time immemorial [↑](#footnote-ref-30)