

## SPECULATION ABOUT GRIERSON DNA - May 2005

This article was written by John David Grierson, known in the family as John (6), the 5th generation descendant of John Grierson who was born 1778 at Parton, Scotland, and who died in Australia in 1855. It is a work in progress, and will be amended as the research progresses.

### Is descent from Rob Roy wishful thinking, or was it through Mary Burgess?

I have earlier (1994) surmised that the family legend of descent from Rob Roy MacGregor (or a brother) might be wishful thinking. I went down that line at the time because I was unable to establish any connection with the Glengyle branch of the MacGregors despite the fairly good knowledge then available from the extensive research of Dr Ward, or from other sources. I also observed that a seemingly huge number of Scots claimed descent from Rob Roy, far more than seemed reasonable. However, until recently, there was nowhere to go in the search for alternative theory, church/civil records for our family not being available prior to 1714, and apart from a few legal references there were no other clues.

But, at that point, I still had no doubt about the relationship between Grierson and MacGregor in Clan terms. There was the obvious similar derivation of the names, a strong indicator of a blood relationship, together with the established usage patterns in legal documentation of "Grierson alias MacGregor", or the reverse, predominantly as a consequence of the era of proscription. I wore my "Ancient MacGregor" tartan proudly, and clung to the romance of the legend. Of course, nothing changes there, whatever we find, because there is no doubt that through Mary Burgess we remain MacGregors in clan terms.

I therefore thought it likely that the rumoured ancestor who had become unhappy with the incessant warfare (as dictated by John(2) in 1900) might well have been a MacGregor clansman without necessarily being a descendant of a chieftain's line. I also gave some credence to the notion that our MacGregor descent may have become confused in the mind(s) of family historians of a century or more ago, and that it was the MacGregor (McGrigor) ancestry of Mary Burgess in the Perthshire area (Parish of Auchtergaven) that was from a Glengyle family. The "settled on the banks of the Dee" recollection from John(2) could also be applied to the northern River Dee (as distinct from the Galloway Dee), and it was notionally possible in terms of a timeline for Mary's family to have descended from Glengyle - there are many John MacGregors documented in Perthshire (her grandfather, John McGrigor would have been born c1730) whose descendants (if any) are not known. Finally, I speculated that if the confusion above noted had existed, there might be a connection with the extensive Grierson family of Dumfriesshire and Galloway - the family of Lag(g).

The next step in my line of thought was that as a good Presbyterian family, and certainly with the Covenanting wars within the folk memory of our migrant ancestors, there might also have been some tendency to want to deny a connection with "Bloody Robert Grierson" (Scott's "Redgauntlet"), and his family, if indeed there was a connection. So, for the moment, there things stood.

### Y chromosome DNA testing in relation to family history.

Then, in 2002 or thereabouts, the prospect of YDNA testing became a reality. The significance of YDNA, which in simplistic terms is a portion of the DNA that the male supplies to the female to become 50% of the forming infant, is that a part of the Y chromosome has been found to remain very nearly constant through succeeding generations. Changes are called mutations, and the rate of mutation of each particular part has been statistically ascertained. Each male in a succeeding generation will pass on to his son(s) an identical, or very close series of component parts (called alleles) of the Y chromosome. The significance of this is that generally, males have also passed their surname on to the next generation, at least for the past 500-700 years in Britain. Therefore, genealogists can associate YDNA and surnames in certain circumstances. There are, of course, potential errors in this

methodology, the most obvious being an adoption, where there would probably be no correlation between YDNA and surname in succeeding generations in that family.

Assuming a normal course of events, it follows that if a large number of men with the same (or associated) surnames, who also have properly documented family lineages have their YDNA tested, we can arrive at a profile for a given family within a clan with a high degree of certainty. Coming down the line from that family baseline, we can also predict the likely number of mutations with some certainty. Therefore, we can decide on the YDNA evidence whether or not certain people are closely, or distantly, or not related for practical purposes - of course, going back far enough, say several thousands of years, all Celts have similarities in their profile.

#### Clan MacGregor YDNA profiles.

The Clan MacGregor has for some years been conducting a survey of YDNA profiles of men who claim connection with the Clan, or carry surnames that have a sept relationship with it. Dr Richard McGregor, who is the moving force behind the survey, has published the results for 119 individuals, including the profiles for the two major families within the Clan with pretty well 100% certainty. Another aspect is that when comparing two profiles, we can identify the time period during which an unidentified person called the Most Recent Common Ancestor (MRCA) lived. For a full explanation, see: <http://www.clangregor.org> and navigate to the DNA pages.

Now, consider for the moment the published MacGregor results. Richard has proposed the YDNA profile for the Glengyle branch (Rob Roy's branch) together with that of Glencarnoch, the present Chief's line. There is also a general sort of Clan line that shows a few variations from the above two sets. All these profiles can be said to descend from one man sometime within the last 1000 years, so there is a MRCA who might be said to be the father of the MacGregor clan. It is not possible to say who he might be because the earliest extant MacGregor documentation is from the 15th Century.

Sadly, my DNA profile is sufficiently far removed from all of the MacGregor main lines for me to say with some certainty that I don't descend from that man through the male line, but rather, that he and I descend from a common ancestor hundreds of years back again. So much for the family legend! Now that is not to say that there wasn't a William MacGregor in the male line (the one who allegedly changed his name to Grierson), but if he existed at all, he must have descended from distant relatives of the MacGregors. For reasons that will become clear, I am moving to the belief that there is another explanation.

#### Grierson Family of Lag(g).

What of the Grierson family of Lag(g). The earliest certain documentation relating to this family actually predates any MacGregor document, and deals with land grants and legal arrangements at about the end of the 14th Century, in particular, the acquisition by one Gilbert Geresone (ie, son of Greer as distinct from Gregor, although that might be a function of Gaelic pronunciation) of the lands of Lag. He was already a significant landholder in the Nith Valley, and subsequently acquired much other land as well. He served George, 10th Earl of Dunbar, perhaps as early as 1370, and in 1419 entered the service of Archibald, 4th Earl of Douglas and Lord of Galloway, following the sale by Dunbar of the Lordship of Nithsdale to Douglas. Unfortunately, most of the records of the Lag family were destroyed in a fire two hundred years ago.

During the 19th Century, it was fashionable in Scotland for the establishment families to have family trees drawn up, and some were extremely fanciful. The general aim was to show descent from major historical figures, and the Grierson tree of Lag certainly reflects this wish, claiming descent from, among many others, Charlemagne, Egbert 1st of England Grandfather of Alfred the Great, Alpin King of Scotland and William the Conqueror. Now this tree is probably the source of the long repeated claim that Gilbert Geresone was a certain Gilbert Gregorson who had changed his name from MacGregor in compliance with a Charter of 1400 (not known today), and who was the second son of Malcolm, Lord MacGregor. But nowhere in extant documentation is Gilbert identified as MacGregor. He was also shown as having married Janet Glendonning who descended from the Earls of Douglas.

Now the problem with all of this is that the evidence we have today is that firstly, Gilbert Geresone's father was named Duncan, and secondly, that he married the sister of John Durant, Lord of Betwixt the Waters in Kirkcudbrightshire, and the Grierson tree is largely discredited. I believe Lyon King of Arms has abandoned it. However, it is much used on the internet by people seeking high connections. Conceivably, the alleged Janet Glendoning connection might be a consequence of confusion with a later Gilbert (of Kirkbryde) Grierson's marriage to a Janet Glendoning of Parton, probably in the mid 15th Century. This later Gilbert was the grandson of Gilbert Geresone son of Duncan, according to the Lag tree. It is not known whether he had issue. So the MacGregor and Glendinning ancestries in the Lag line do not stand up (which removes Alpin, Charlemagne and Egbert from the scene!).

#### The Amuligane Clan connection.

It is also of interest that the local Dumfriesshire historian Alfred Truckell has on more than one occasion stated that the Griersons were descended from the ancient House of Galloway, possibly based upon clues in heraldry, because Gilbert's arms used the lion rampant, which was also used by the Earl of Galloway. Now, Gilbert Geresone purchased the lands of Lag from his kinsman John McRath (as stated in the Charter) who was a direct descendant of Macrath ap Molegan. Molegan was a member of the Amuligane clan, the known history of which goes back to 1210. He was the ancestor of many men known today as Milligan, Milliken, Millican and other similar names. Note also that the Mullikine arms depict three lions demi-rampant, and in heraldry, the use of similar symbols often runs in families.

There is no doubt that the Griersons and the Amuliganes (and their descendants) interacted together in the Nith Valley in particular, and in Dumfries and Galloway in general, over succeeding hundreds of years. Indeed, the property of Milliganton is in the same Parish as Lag, about two miles away. There are many documents extant which detail dealings between these two families, and many more in which members of both families together witness signatures, land exchanges and so on. In the words of Alan Milliken: "That the Amuliganes and Griersons are related in early history isn't in dispute. How they were related is!"

#### DNA test results so far.

What are we to make of all of this? The nearest DNA relative I have found so far is named Millican. I also have close matches with a Milligan and a Mullikin. I have a Greer at two-mutation difference (MRCA up to 600 years ago). I am aware of one other Grierson (from USA) tested, but unfortunately he hasn't completed the same series of markers as I have, so results are inconclusive, except to say that he is from the same Celtic group. But in the absence of a DNA line known to be from the Lag family, one may speculate that if we accept that Gilbert Geresone is the ancestor of the Lags, that he was related to the Amuliganes, and that I am related to modern Millican etc surnames, it is a reasonable hypothesis that I am descended either from Gilbert himself, or from a common ancestor. Further, Richard MacGregor has stated: "In my opinion your 2nd marker at 24 is a mutation from 25 and therefore you and the other Grierson are potentially related." Interestingly, if this were true, a revised result would also move me closer to some of the Amuligane results. Continuing this line of thought then, the Geresones, Amuliganes (through them the MacCampbells) and probably many others descend from a person who also is the ancestor of many of the MacGregors two or more thousand years ago, and possibly in Ireland. Now there's a thought for you!

#### Challenge to other male Griersons.

Finally, one way to establish whether my YDNA sequence has one or more recent mutations is for several other male Griersons within our wider family to have their tests done. Should one or more cousins return identical results, it would be a virtual certainty that John(3) Grierson had identical YDNA, and any mutations must have occurred in generations before him. If on the other hand a cousin was found to have a different result, more tests would be needed to establish the John(3) sequence. Such a process would at least eliminate recent mutations from the search. Unfortunately, to establish with any certainty what the definitive family sequence was prior to the emigration to Australia, we would need to find male descendants from the Grier(son) families of Parton (or elsewhere) who have common ancestry. I surmise that finding such relatives is more likely to occur as a consequence of wide-ranging YDNA testing than it is from a study of early records. I therefore encourage Grier,

Grierson and Greer (because of their claimed descent from the Lag family) males to have their YDNA tests carried out. In my opinion, this should be done within the MacGregor study, see above reference.

I am indebted to Alan Milliken of Armadale, Scotland, for his work on early Scottish Charters and his insights into the Border Scots. There is some very interesting material at [http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.com/~alanmilliken/regarde\\_bien/](http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.com/~alanmilliken/regarde_bien/) and at <http://www.millican.com.au/dna.html>. He is now working on finding links between Dunegal, last Prince of Nithsdale, Fergus of Galloway, and the Brythonic or Old Briton group of clan/families whose origins are native to both Britain and Ireland.

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26 May 2005