

McQuiston, McQuiston, McQuesten, McQuestion,
McCuiston, McCuiston and other related names.

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Wha's Like Us?

Damn Few And They're A' Died!

We are Scots! Never mind that most of our family came to America about 275 years ago. Never mind that they lingered in Northern Ireland for a hundred years or so, first.

We are Scots!

Our very blood, as proven over and over again through DNA testing, links us directly back to the earliest Scots, those who came over from Ireland as "scotti" and settled land

on the Islands and Highlands, which then became known as Scotland.

Our proof?

The majority of our family DNA tests matched Colla Uais within six markers, and one test, within five.

What does this mean?

It means that, with our additional historic records, we are well within the acceptable level of relationship to the calculated DNA of Colla Uais

based on samples taken from many different clans claiming descent from him. One genealogist has calculated a 72% probability that we are of the same bloodline as Colla.

But who is Colla?

Colla Uais is often called the "Father of the Highland Clans." His DNA is considered among the most famous DNAs in history - and we match it well beyond chance.

Colla Uais was a King of Ireland who moved many families to Scotland in the 4th Century A.D.

Several Highland clans claim descent from him, including Clan Donald. Most of the McUisdean family members who participated in the Clan Donald DNA Project are a genetic distance of six from Colla, but one - John C. McQuiston - is only five away.

With historical records a person is allowed to lop off one marker difference, meaning John could be considered only four markers out of 25 away from the main man of Scottish settlement in the Highlands and Islands - a man who lived about 1700 years ago - making us a legal relative and also a pretty pure line from Colla Uais down to us.

We have a spread of three markers even within recently documented relatives, so a spread of four is nothing. We have proof positive that we are part of the original Scots and later became part of the first people ever called Scotch-Irish.

We are much more Scottish than even Lord Godfrey Macdonald, Chief of all Clan Donald, or Sir Ian Macdonald, Chief of the Scottish Clan Uisdean.

It has been calculated that these men are 1/128th Scottish. Many of us are at least 50% Scottish, some 100%. Recently, the administrators of the Clan Donald DNA Project proclaimed the McUisdean name as a "clear subset" of Macdonald.

In the year 322 A.D., we are able to find written records of the activities of three brothers, known as "The Three Collas."

In the *Annals of the Four Masters* is written, "Fiachaidh Sraibtime, son of Carbri Lificar, son of Cormac Ulfada, of the line of Erimhon, held the sovereignty of Ireland for thirty-three years, when he fell by the

three Collas, in the battle of Dubh-Comar..."

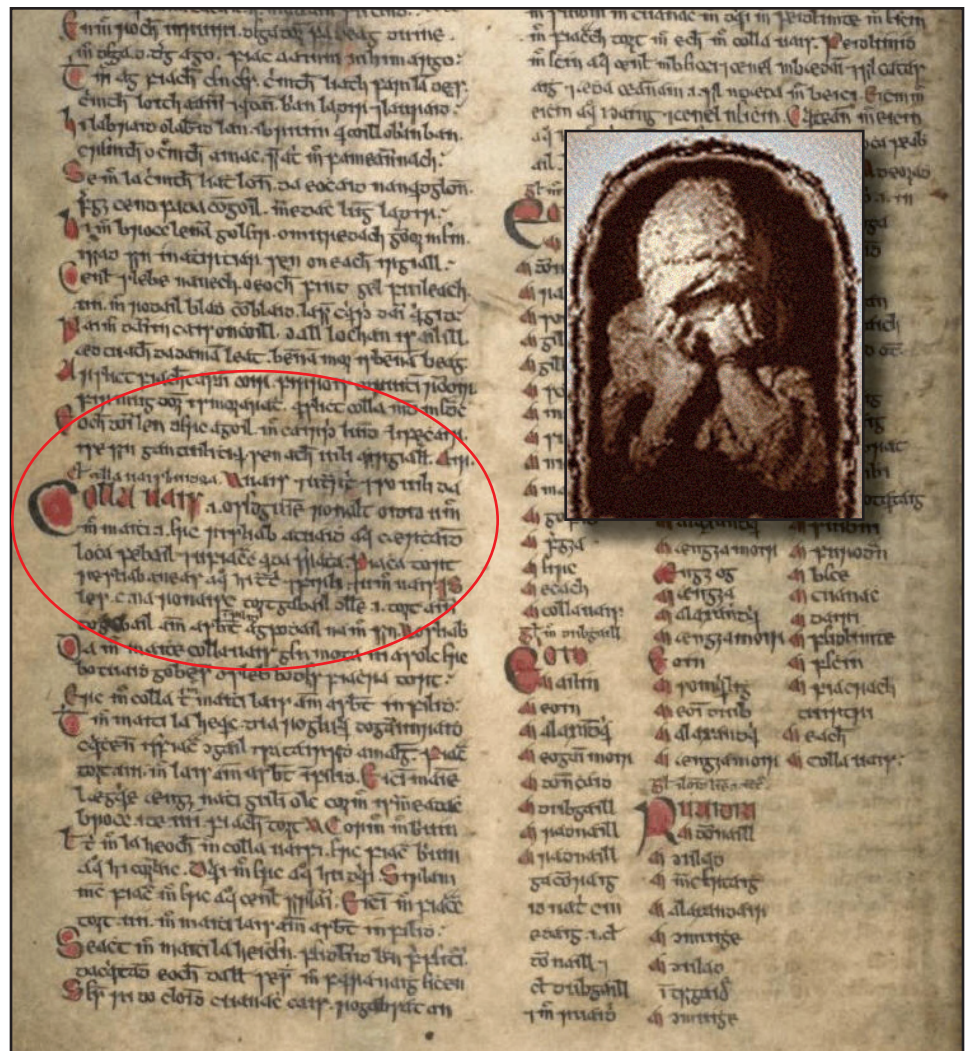
Colla Uais's given name was Cairell. He and his two brothers, Muiredach (Colla Fo Chrí), and Áed (Colla Menn), were known as the Three Collas. The ship icon on the Clan Donald of Skye (Clan Uisdean) coat of arms, and on our Clan Uisdean, USA, Inc. shield, has three oars on it, and these are meant to represent the three Colla brothers.

Colla meant "strong man". Colla Uais is the brother who brought the scotti to Scotland and from whom many of the Highlanders descended, including one Uisdean McDonald,

the progenitor of the McUisdean family, otherwise known as Hugh of Sleat.

By the way - have you ever noticed how close Uais is to Uis as in Uisdean, and as in the Isles of North and South Uist?

Uist is often said to mean "West", so our Colla was the "strong man of the West". There is no documented origin of the name of the Uist isles, but logic would say it may have come from Colla Uais who settled this very area. Hugh of Sleat (Uisdean Macdonald) owned much of North Uist and is buried there. The apple doesn't fall far from the tree.



The ancient book of Ballymote, circa 1400, clearly shows Colla Uais in records of the early genealogy of Clan Donald (see circled area). Our average McUisdean DNA is a very close match to the projected DNA of Colla. The inset photo is thought to be a sculpture of Colla Uais, though not much of his face is showing.

It was Colla Uais from whom Clan Donald and the Scottish, and later the English royalty descended.

Colla came to Scotland from Ireland and established the Scottish version of the Irish kingdom of Dalriada on land given to him by his mother's family. She was Aileach, daughter of the Pictish King of Alba, an early kingdom of Scotland.

Leona McQuiston's book, from 1937, tells us how all the brothers had the first name of Colla, with a different middle or second name, and I eventually found those names in Gaelic, and translated into English.

Colla Uais emerged as the leader and there may have been a good reason why. The English translation of the three Colla names is Colla the Noble (Uais), Colla the Stammerer and Colla the Nasty-Faced!

The Collas set up their kingdom in the Isles and on the western coastline of Scotland. This later became the land of the Lords of the Isles, along with much of the Highlands.

There is another book, found in an Irish monastery, from about 1450, that traces Hugh of Sleat's brother, John, back to Colla Uais, and back further to Conn of the Hundred Fights, King of Tara - the same story as told by Ed McCuiston, in Leona McQuiston's book.

It is apparent that Clan Donald and at least some members of the McUisdean family knew of our history back to Conn and Colla.

It is also apparent why Colla the Noble might have beaten out Colla the Stammerer or Colla the Nasty-Faced, as king of Dalriada.

The switch to the McUisdean surname, rather than the Macdonald surname, came about with Uisdean Macdonald, known often as Hugh of Sleat. Ed McCuiston first told us about Hugh of Sleat in his "Introduction" to Leona's book.

Hugh was likely born in 1436, or around that year, at Castle Dingwall.

Just fourteen miles north-west of Inverness, at the mouth of the River Peffrey which drains into the Cromarty Firth, lies the ancient and Royal Burgh of Dingwall, a town which has enjoyed a prominent and colorful past. Dingwall is in the county of Ross and houses the headquarters of the District Council and Northern Constabulary Central Division. The latter designation may be due, historically, to the fact that Hugh's father, Alexander, Earl of Ross and Lord of the Isles, also served as Justiciar, or Sheriff/Judge of all the Highlands. He moved into Dingwall Castle shortly before Hugh was born there.

The name Dingwall comes from the Viking word "Thingvollr", or "Field of the Thing" - the Thing being the Viking name for its court of law and governance.

Hugh's father no doubt held many court cases in the burgh of Dingwall.

MacBeth, who was immortalized in a play by Shakespeare, was also born at Dingwall Castle. The town of Dingwall was granted "burghal rights" by King Alexander II of Scotland in 1226. Prior to that date it was called, by many, by its Gaelic name of "Dinkeual". Dingwall has been a Royal Burgh now for seven hundred years.

There is only a small part of the castle left, which five McUisdean family members visited in 2006.



This is all that remains of Dingwall Castle, the birthplace of Hugh of Sleat. It is a rebuilt tower made from one that collapsed, which was part of the original castle. I took this picture in 2006.

Upon the death of Alexander, in 1449, Hugh's older brother, John, succeeded to the throne of the Lord of the Isles and Earl of Ross. He would forfeit the earldom in 1476, and the lordship by 1493.

However, shortly after he had followed his father as Lord of the Isles, John invested his brother, Hugh, or Uisdean Macdonald, in the lands of Sleat, on the Isle of Skye.

In 1469, Hugh of Sleat's charter was confirmed by the king and so it is certainly from this date that we can chart the beginning of Clan Uisdean. Sir Ian Macdonald is the current chief of Clan Uisdean, the Macdonalds of Skye, and also the Premier Baron of Nova Scotia.

Hugh moved into an ancient castle on Skye known as Dunscaith.

Castle Dunscaith is the place where Clan Uisdean, and our name, were born. It was found, in the earliest of Celtic legends, as home to a tribe a female Amazonian warriors. The legendary Irish hero, Cuchullin, studied the art of war, here. The great Cullin mountains that surround the castle were named for him.

Dunscaith became the home to Clan Uisdean when Hugh of Sleat, progenitor of our name, began using it as his home-base sometime around 1469. His son, and generations after, continued to use it up to about the year 1616.

The first Scottish record of the castle name was recorded when Hugh's first son, John Makhuchone, also given as MacHuistean and Mac Huistiuin, sells it in 1505.

This deed contains the first or oldest Scottish record of the name Dunscaith Castle in existence when it is called "castro et fortalicio de Dunskahay". It is often mentioned in old Irish Celtic lore but must have been called by another name in Scotland, as Clan Donald records

say John's deed of sale was the first mention of the name as something similar to Dunscaith, in Scottish history.

There is little argument that our family name, McUisdean, in all its modern variations, began at Dunscaith Castle with the birth of Hugh's first son, John.

Hugh had six sons by six different women. Many of those sons grew up with their mother's families. He also is recorded to have had one daughter. John is considered the first McUisdean or "son of Uisdean".

John died with no issue, or no progeny. Records of this are stated so specifically and I often wondered how, when so many old records have an air of vagueness to them, historians could be so certain of this one. However, I then found a story that might explain this.

There is a legend that the family that previously lived at Dunscaith was attacked by the Macdonalds, in

the night, and nearly all were slain. One who wasn't slain was a young girl. She is said to have returned to the castle after she had grown up, and secured a job there as a nanny.

She waited several years until the times was right and then, while the Macdonald lord was away, she threw all of his children off the wall of the castle, killing every one of them.

If this story is true, and most of these old stories have at least a ring of truth to them, it could not of been Hugh's children thrown off the wall, because they all lived into their middle years.

Also, since she waited until she had grown and then an additional several years to carry out her plan, it is likely that it was John's children she threw off the castle wall, and that is most likely why historians are so sure he died with no progeny.

It seems that the first several McUisdeans died a young, violent death on the rocks below Dunscaith.



The remains of Dunscaith Castle, located on the Sleat Peninsula of the Isle of Skye, Scotland. I took this picture in 2006.

Hugh lived at Dunscaith until about the time of his own death in 1498. John lived there until he sold it, in 1505. He died later that year, perhaps in battle over the last vestiges of his father's kingdom.

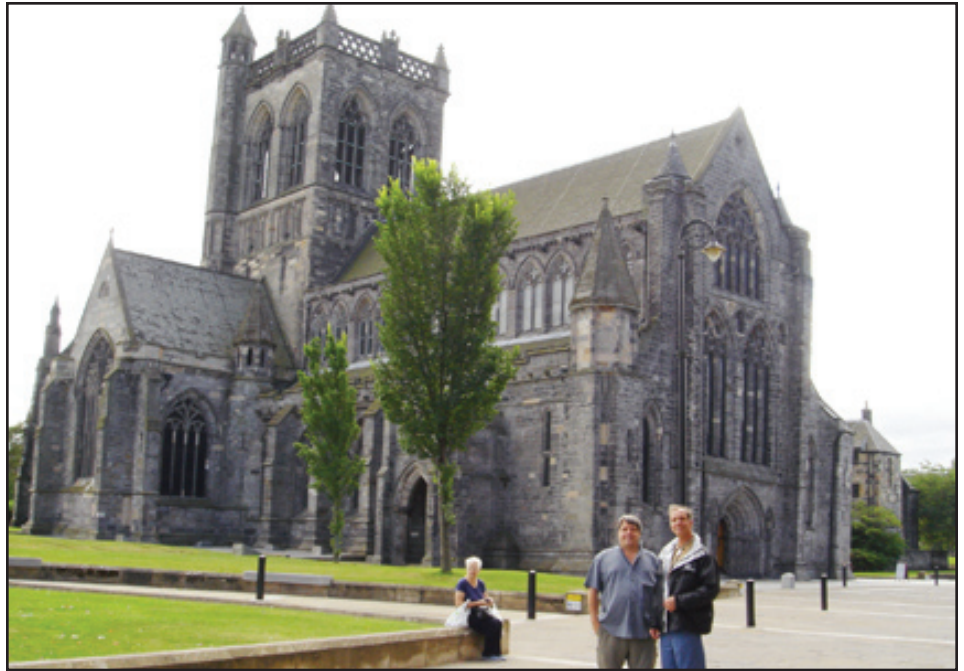
John was followed by Hugh's second son, Donald Gallach, the man we most likely descend from.

It appears that Hugh may have died at Paisley Abbey, located in the town of Paisley, just west of Glasgow. The abbey had been financially supported by Clan Donald since the death of Hugh's ancestor, Somerled, the hero of the Isles, in 1164.

One old record says that the "chief of Clan Donald" died at the abbey in 1498. Sometimes it is said that this refers to Hugh's brother, John, but John did not die until 1502, although he was buried at the abbey.

John was also not really the chief of Clan Donald. He was Lord of the Isles and Earl of Ross. Hugh was really the first "Chief" of Clan Donald, once John relinquished all his greater titles.

Hugh, the Chief of Clan Donald, died in 1498, the same year as the old record of the Clan Donald chief dying at Paisley Abbey, and so, for all intents and purposes, it seems that Hugh of Sleat, progenitor of the McUisdean family, is the man being spoken of.



The author of this story, Jim McQuiston, along with Mark McCuiston, standing in front of Paisley Abbey, during their 2006 visit to Scotland. This is where Hugh of Sleat most likely died.

Hugh was buried on the island of North Uist, of which he owned the greater share. He is interred at a place called Sand.

I believe I have found a reason John, son of Hugh, might have given up his land, castle, and title.

The King of Scotland at the time of John McUisdean was James IV. He was the first to establish a royal navy. In 1498, the year of Hugh's death, James made a personal trip to the islands. On August 3rd, of that year he issued a charter to Ranald MacAlan, Chief of Clanranald, the

same man John McUisdean had relinquished land to just shortly before this, and apparently just shortly after his own father's death.

Ranald was working for the king and the land charter was given "for services rendered". We can only imagine what those services were.

The official charter to Ranald was to confirm what John had already turned over to him. Very likely there was considerable pressure on John, since his father had just died, and he was faced with the forces of the King of Scotland.

By 1505, the same year John dies, he is found giving up a charter to Dunscaith Castle, held by his father since 1469.

Just two years before, Donald Dubh, a descendant of Hugh's brother, John, the very last Lord of the Isles, finally escaped 40 years of captivity and was heralded as the new leader of Clan Donald. This probably usurped any claim John McUisdean may have had to the title, and led to his final demise, when the king's men attacked the isles.



This is most likely the burial place of Hugh of Sleat, or Uisdean Macdonald, progenitor of the McUisdean family. It is called Clachan Shannda Cemetery and is located on North Uist. Clachan means "a small town with a church." Shannda means "sand", and Hugh is recorded as being buried at "a place called Sand, on the island of North Uist."

Donald Dubh raised an army and ranged over the old territory of the lords. He was finally defeated and in 1505, King James prepared to take the Islands, once and for all, BY SEA!

I have always wondered why so many castles were in a terrible state of ruin in the Islands. They are everywhere lying crumbled near the shore.

Only a few aren't in this shape - Caisteal Uisdean, Eileandonan, and Armadale Castle, which, although in a state of ruin, is not so totally decimated as the others.

The obvious reason, I believe, is that these castles were bombarded from the sea. They were built to withstand arrows and spears, not cannon shot.

Castle Uisdean was built at a later time. Eileandonan Castle was deliberately skipped over by the navy of King James. Armadale, like Edinburgh Castle, is too far from the sea to be effectively destroyed by ship's cannons.

So many others, once nearly impenetrable, were easily reduced to a pile of rocks by the cannons of King James.

Even though Dunscaith was signed over to Clanranald, John's half-brother, Donald Gallach, followed him as Chief of Clan Uisdean, and moved into the castle for at least awhile.

Eventually, the seat of the Skye Macdonalds was moved to the Trotternish Peninsula on upper Skye, and that became the new home of Clan Uisdean.

The chief lived at Duntulm Castle. Another descendant of Uisdean, also named Uisdean, built Caisteal Uisdean on the shore of Trotternish about 1601. That castle, and a small town nearby, named MhicCuithean for our family, still exist.



Halberry Castle was home to the Gunn family of Caithness in the upper right-hand corner of Scotland. Hugh of Sleat first appears in historical records engaged in a piratical raid on the nearby Orkney Islands. He came to Caithness, most likely to gain forgiveness from the Crown (or Coroner) of Caithness, and ended up having a child with his daughter. This child was named Donald Gallach, Gallach being the Viking name for Caithness. It is from Donald that our family members most likely all descend. Donald



most probably was born and raised at Halberry. As chief of Clan Uisdean he resided at Dunscaith Castle. Later the seat was moved to Duntulm Castle (shown at bottom). Another descendant of our Uisdean, also named Uisdean, built Caisteal Uisdean (at left) about 1601. It is the newest castle on the Isle of Skye.



Donald Gallach was the son of Hugh of Sleat and Elizabeth Gunn, according to Clan Donald records, and of Mary Gunn according to Clan Gunn records.

It could well be that this woman was actually Mary Elizabeth Gunn, a common paring of names. Elizabeth was also known as Bessie and was said to have gone off to live by herself and nothing was heard of her since.

It could be that Bessie gave birth to Donald but he was raised by a sister named Mary - Bessie leaving the area in shame over her unwed mother status. Elizabeth is sometimes given as a wife of Hugh of Sleat but there is no record of their marriage and it is likely that they never cohabited, since Hugh already had a wife - the mother of John, his first son.

After Hugh died, in 1498, and John died, in 1505, Donald Gallach took over as chief and moved into Dunscaith. He was followed by a son named Donald Grumach, or "Donald the Grim."

Donald Gallach also had another son named Alexander, who had sons of his own. It was these McUisdeans who took our name to Ireland.

Donald Grumach was followed by his son, Donald Gorm, meaning "Donald Blue" probably because he had blue eyes.

In 1537, Donald Gorm made a bid to regain the Lord of the Isles title and attacked Eileandonan Castle in the process. It was located near Applecross the home of Hugh's mother's family.

Donald Gorm's uncle, Alexander Gallach, was with him that day, when Donald took an arrow in the calve while crossing the bridge to attack the castle. He impatiently pulled the arrow out, expanding the wound, which led to his death.



Above is a scene from the movie "Highlander" showing an attack on Eileandonan Castle. This would have mirrored the attack Hugh of Sleat's great grandson, Donald Gorm, carried out on the castle, in 1537. He died in the attempt. Hugh's grandson, Alexander Gallach, was also there, that day. He later took our name to Northern Ireland, along with his sons, where the early spellings of Makhuchone, Mac Huistiu, Mac Huisdiun, MacHuistean, and VhicHuiston, became the more modern spellings of McQuiston, McCuiston, McCuistion, McQuestion, McQuesten, etc.

Alexander Gallach later received remission for the role he played in the attack.

You may have seen Eileandonan Castle in one of her many roles on the small and big screens.

Most famous is the castle's role in the movie "Highlander" starring Christopher Lambert and Sean Connery. It was also featured in "Loch Ness", with Ted Danson, "The Master of Ballintrae", with Errol Flynn, and even for the 007 movie, "The World is Not Enough".

After Donald Gorm's death the clan was once again reduced and Alexander decided to take his sons

with him to Ireland, to support his first cousin, Sorley Boy McDonnell, in his fight against the English and the native Irish.

I have had personal assurance that our name came from these McDonalds of Skye, Clan Uisdean.

In 1999, I met Johnny Ivy Macdonald, the premier historian of Clan Donald.

I first said to him, "My name is McQuiston. It comes from Clan Uisdean."

He answered, "I know, I know, but we are all Macdonalds over here. The following year I asked him if I could be absolutely sure

my McQuiston name came from Uisdean Macdonald.

Johnny Ivy's answer to my question, posed on February 2, 2000 at about 12:00 Noon, as he tossed his head back in certainty, was . . .

"Ach, I wanna have a doubt!"

Within two years our family began its involvement in the Clan Donald DNA Project, which would eventually and scientifically prove Johnny Ivy's words.

Donald Gormeson, the son of Donald Gorm, continued as chief of Clan Uisdean. Both Sir Ian and Lord Godfrey are descended from this line.

Alexander Gallach and his sons went to Ireland and we descend from them.

Alexander's father, Donald Gallach, was Hugh of Sleat's second son. He had four others. Three of them had no issue, but one, Donald Hearrach, did.

Donald Hearrach, was the third son, and like Donald Gallach he lived with his mother's family and took the name of her homeland, the island of Hearrach, which became the island of Harris.

Several Harris men, about one-third of all DNA entrants, matched our McUisdean DNA. There is a record of some of Donald Hearrach's descendants using the MacUisdean name, spelled exactly that way.

Some of this family moved back to Skye, to land just above Caisteal Uisdean, and there founded the little town of MhicCuithein. Their version of our name was eventually translated into McQuein, and later, McQueen. This has been written about by serious Scottish genealogists.

It is doubtful that any, or at least very few modern McUisdean descend from this group. It is most likely that we all descend through Donald Gallach MacHuisdiun.



To help the reader better understand our Scottish heritage I've marked some important locations on the map, above.

At the upper right are the Orkney Islands. This is where Hugh of Sleat first appears in the history books, attacking these islands. Below, on the mainland is John O'Groats, the northernmost city in Scotland. Nearby is Thurso, where Hugh landed on his way back from the Orkneys. Below is Wick, and near Wick is Halberry Castle, where the Gunn family lived.

On the east coast you see Elgin, and Aberdeen. Between them is Harlaw, where Hugh's grandfather fought the great Battle of Harlaw in 1411. Below this is Arbroath, where the Scottish declaration of independence was written in 1320. It was the pattern for the American Declaration of Independence.

On the upper left you see the homeland of Clan Uisdean - Skye and the Uist Isles, along with Dunscaith Castle, Caisteal Uisdean, and other haunts. In the center is Inverness, and nearby is Dingwall Castle, where Hugh was born.

On the lower left are Mull, where the Knights Templar landed in Scotland in 1313; Islay where Hugh's great, great grandfather, Good King of John of Islay, ruled; Paisley, where Hugh died; Ayrshire, where many McUisdeans escaped to when under persecution in Ireland, and where the Troon Open Golf Tournament features the "McQuiston Cup". To the east are Glasgow and Edinburgh. Hugh and his forefathers and descendents were called to Edinburgh Castle many times by the king.

At Stranraer the ferry leaves for Northern Ireland and Larne. In Belfast is McQuiston Church, the largest ever Presbyterian congregation in Irish history, and Ballycastle, where Alexander McUisdean landed in 1565.