

MOUNTAIN ECHO ONLINE

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

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Martin Connection



Ian Martin, at left, is the current owner of the ancient Martin farm, which still sits just above Caisteal Uisdean. The author, Jim McQuiston, is shown at right with Ian, in 2006.

Mark McCuiston was the photographer and the three of us talked for quite awhile about the old legend of Hugh, the Castle Builder.

NOTE: The masthead of the Mountain Echo now features a new picture, which also appears on our latest Celtic Creek musical album, "No More War".

The first time that I ever heard of the Martin/McQuiston family connection was in regard to a story about Caisteal Uisdean and its unfortunate builder, one Hugh, son of Archibald the Clerk, or, as he was known in Gaelic, Uisdean MacGillespig Chleirich.

To keep this Hugh separate from Hugh of Sleat, I usually refer to him as "Hugh, the Castle Builder".

Hugh of Sleat died in 1498. Hugh,

the Castle Builder, most likely died in 1601, the year he tried to murder the Chief of Clan Donald.

Hugh was a descendant of our McQuiston progenitor, Hugh or Uisdean McDonald of Sleat.

Sleat is a southern peninsula on the Isle of Skye. Caisteal Uisdean was located on a northern peninsula of Skye known as Trotternish.

Both of these areas of Skye, Sleat and Trotternish, were under the

control of Clan Donald for hundreds of years, and still today the Clan Donald Center is located at Sleat, where Dunscaith and Armadale castles are also located. Caisteal Uisdean and Duntulm Castle are on Trotternish.

Caisteal Uisdean is located on the edge of the sea and there is essentially nothing visible from its location beyond water, rugged coastline, and a few sheep.



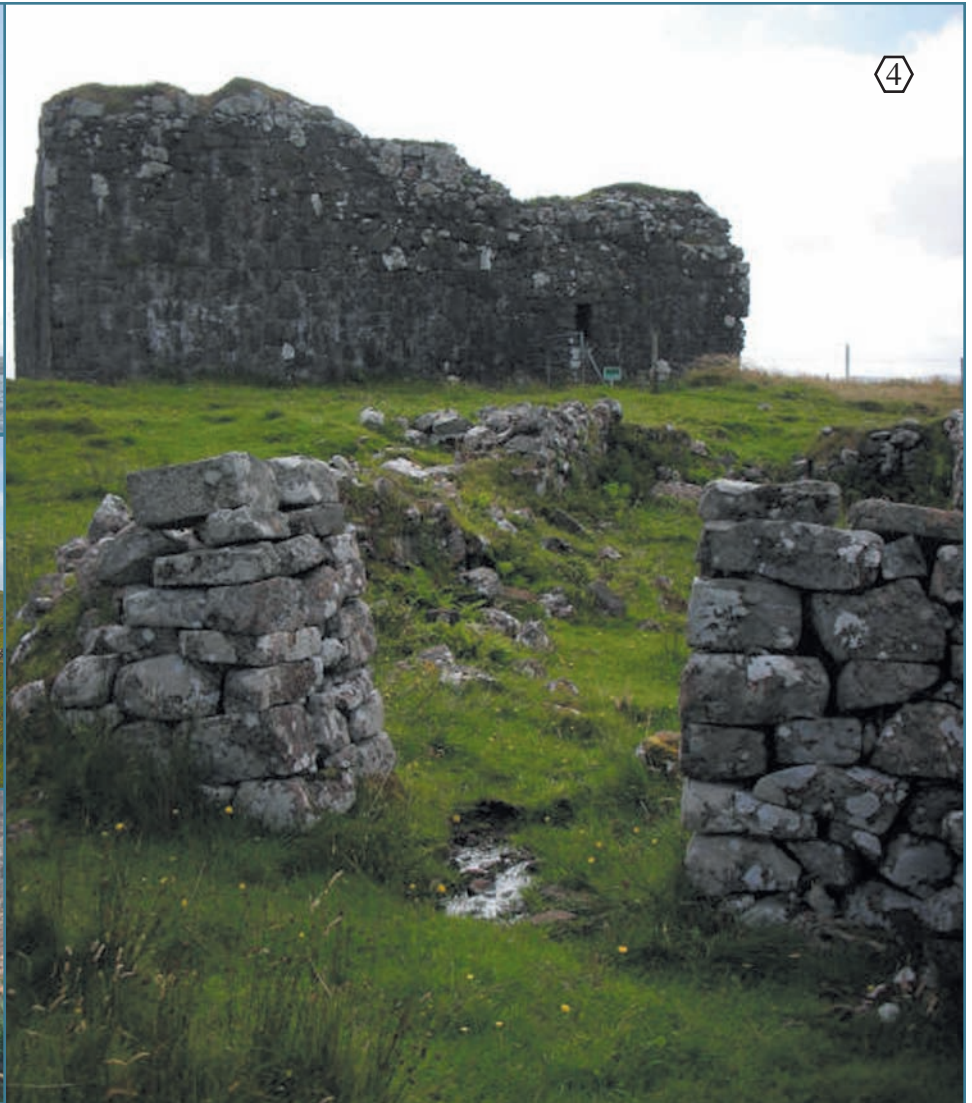
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Just over the hill toward the roadway is located the Martin family farm, which has been in that family for well over 500 years.

Hugh built his Caisteal Uisdean about 1600. Many sources say he finished it in 1601. Some have it being built in the last few years of the 1500s. It is likely that it took a few years to build and may have been started in the late 1500s and finished up by 1601.

The stones appear to have been brought to the site of the castle from another location. The castle is the last built on Skye and does not appear to have been of a spectacular design, although inside the ruins is evidence of a large fireplace and a stone stairway climbing up a wall. Access was gained from the roof or

1. Mark McCuistion stands triumphantly on the top of Caisteal Uisdean during our 2006 visit to Scotland.

2. Caisteal Uisdean from the distance, sits right on the edge of a cliff. In the foreground you may just slightly make out a ring in the grass. It is much more prominent in person and it is probably an old defensive moat or fort from many years ago, although it could have been some type of ceremonial ring or meeting place.

3. This is the fireplace inside Caisteal Uisdean. I believe this photo was taken by Jack or Mary Joe McQuestion during their earlier visit to the castle.

4. This shot, photographed by Mark, shows the foundation of Hugh's house. It was in this very house that many years later the famous Flora McDonald became sick and eventually passed away, while visiting friends.

at least from the second floor, and there are really only two openings in the side walls.

One opening is located facing the open sea. Another is located on the north side of the castle. It has been blocked up a little to prevent tourists from crawling inside, although this

didn't stop three McUisdeans from crawling inside, a couple years ago. Mark McCuistion, my wife, Beth McQuiston, and Betty Mathews, a McCuistion descendant, all were able to squeeze through the tiny opening. Mark climbed to the highest part of the castle to take pictures of

the interior, which is in very rough shape. I believe Mary Joe and Jack McQuestion also once entered the forbidden walls of Caisteal Uisdean. Others may have, too, that we just don't know about.

It is said that a ladder was placed against the castle and once all were within its protective walls, the ladder would be drawn up. It is obvious that the castle wasn't meant to be the main living quarters but rather a defensive fort against attack.

Very nearby is the foundation of a home, which was Hugh's principal abode. It was in this same home that the famous Flora McDonald, who helped save Bonnie Prince Charlie, passed away one evening while visiting friends. She is buried not too far away at the Kilmuir cemetery.



Grave of Flora Macdonald. She died at the house Hugh, the Castle Builder, formerly lived in, next to Caisteal Uisdean.

Flora was actually a McUisdean descendant and Flora's maternal grandfather was known as "Aonghas MacUisdein of Ghriminish". Her step father was a totally different Hugh McDonald, 12th in line from Hugh of Sleat, who lived at Armadale Castle on the Sleat Peninsula. He, too, would technically be a McUisdean, though he used the McDonald name.

As the story goes, Hugh, the Castle Builder, was jealous of his relative, Donald Gorm Mor McDonald, Chief of Clan Uisdean, (the McDonalds of Skye). Hugh devised a plan in which he would invite Donald to see his new castle and then ambush him. In order to carry out the plan Hugh would call on the Martin family,

living just a short walk away, up over the hill. There is a tradition that Hugh was more popular with some of the clans-people and perhaps the Martins were among those who preferred Hugh.

Hugh wrote a letter of invitation to Donald and a letter to the Martins requesting their assistance in the plot. Unfortunately, for Hugh, at least, the letters were crossed. When the Martin family informed Hugh of the mistake he took off for the island of North Uist. There, he hid in an old broch-styled castle, called Dun an Sticir, which had a causeway through the water used to gain access to the old-style fort.

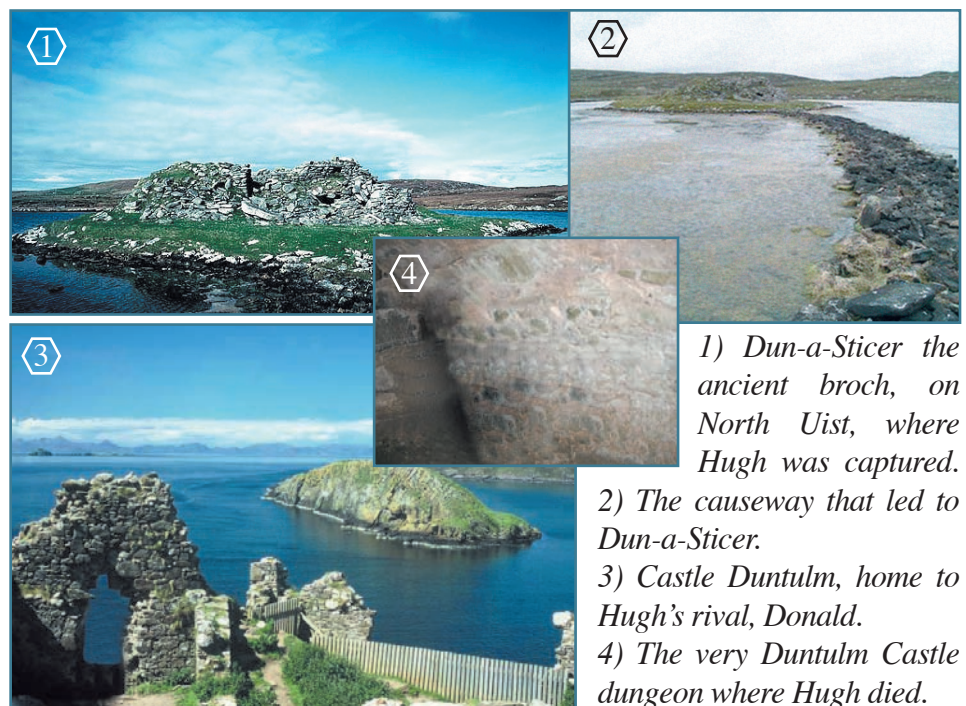
Donald immediately sent a band of men to capture Hugh. They watched the broch until they saw someone walk across the causeway to discover its location. Then they rushed the castle and took everyone inside captive, while looking for Hugh. He was hiding in plain sight by dressing in women's clothing and sitting at a weaving loom.

One story says that a follower of Donald threw a loaf of bread to Hugh and he caught it with his hands

instead of with his apron, as most Highland women were wont to do, thus giving himself away. This was supposed to have taken place on the beach so it could be that Hugh was on the beach, in women's clothing, looking for a way to escape when he was discovered, and that one of Donald's men suspected him and so threw the bread at him. Hugh may have been unaware, at first, that he was discovered, and returned to the broch and the weaving loom, hoping Donald's men would just go away.

However events actually took place, it is certain that Hugh was captured and returned to Donald's castle on upper Trotternish, known as Duntulm Castle where he was placed in a dungeon with a plate of salty beef and an empty water jug. He died an agonizing death and his ghost was said to have haunted the castle over the next several years to the point where the McDonalds finally moved out and down to Armadale Castle.

One of the more famous early Scottish historians was Martin Martin from this group of Martins on Trotternish. He lived from 1678



1) Dun-a-Sticer the ancient broch, on North Uist, where Hugh was captured.

2) The causeway that led to Dun-a-Sticer.

3) Castle Duntulm, home to Hugh's rival, Donald.

4) The very Duntulm Castle dungeon where Hugh died.

to 1744. He was born on Skye and died in Henry County, Virginia.

The Martins were originally McDonalds and took their new name from the name MacGhille Mhartain (servant of St. Martin) to differentiate themselves from the growing McDonald clan. The first known Martin was a crazy character by the name of Angus of the Storms, or Angus of the Winds, who got his name because he seemed to relish setting sail into rough, stormy waters.



Grave of Angus of the Storms, also in Kilmuir Cemetery, not too far from Castle Uisdean. Angus reportedly took this stone from Iona.

The following passages are taken from the booklet, “The Martins of Skye, a Short Family History”, author unknown and printed by Alex. MacLaren & Sons, Glasgow.

The historical progenitor of the Skye Martins was then a soldier and sailor of some capacity and position in the early years of Queen Elizabeth (b.1553-d.1603), known as Aonghas na Gaoithe, or Angus of the Storms. He is said to have had as a wife Biurnag (Bernice) who was a Danish Princess and alternatively, (or as a second spouse), the sister of his MacDonald chief (Donald Gorm Mor MacDhomhuill). He also had a taste for writing poetry and sonnets, which led him into misfortune.

The chief had married a MacLean (Mary MacLean), and this lady persistently

solicited Angus to honour her with an ode. Disliking her intensely, he at last complied, with some most abusive lines in Gaelic, long preserved. Such an insult rendered his residence in Skye unhealthy, and though the chief, in view of his relationship and undoubted status and capacity, bore Angus no hostility whatever, he arranged that he should leave Skye while his own wife lived.

Aonghas, therefore sailed for Antrim to assist Sorley Boy (or Somhairle Buide) in the conquest of that province, taking with him a thousand Skyemen. In Ireland, he acted as Lieutenant to this kinsman, who became Earl, and his son Marquis of Antrim.

(Editor’s Note: Hugh of Sleat’s grandson, Alexander, also went to Ireland to aid Sorley Boy, possibly along with Angus. Sorley was “Captain of the Route”, along the fertile Bann Valley but was never made earl. It was his son, Randall, that became the first Earl of Antrim, and in his service is found James McQuiston, sometime after 1620.)

Angus had seven sons, and some of these may well have continued to serve the Antrim branch of the MacDonald clan. They certainly obtained many grants of land in Ireland. (Another note: perhaps this is why it is mistakenly thought that the surname Martin came originally from Ireland).

At last the MacLean lady died, and Angus returned to Skye, stopping at Iona to annex a stone with a sculptured knight on it which still adorns

the Martin burying place in Kilmuir, Trotternish. (Note: It is thought that this stone was either the marker for a king’s grave or a Templar grave. It still exists at the Kilmuir cemetery.)

His first act on landing was another ode to the MacLean lady, which he had graved on the stones marking the places where her coffin had rested. It is so abusive as to be unrepeatable, but has been preserved in the Gaelic to this day. Curiously, no one, not even the chief, in any way resented this effusion. Writing of the MacLean lady he says, “We” (either he personally, or the MacDonald clan) “never obtained any benefit from this marriage”.

Angus named his son “Gille Mhartain” or “servant of St. Martin”. His grandson, therefore, became known as “Mac Ghille Mhartain” or “son of the servant of St. Martin”. Eventually, such a long title came to be shortened to “Martin”.

In all the clan battles, feuds and forays of the time, the Martins bore their share, as tacksmen (managers of estates) of the “Beallach”, a farm and property between Uig and the Quirang, at the pass or summit of the watershed, as its name implies. And so far as can be gathered, owing to their unbroken holding of this tenancy and the acquirement of additions, and later of Duntulum itself, and failing any evidence to the contrary, always maintaining a constant fealty to their MacDonald chief.

And so ends this account of the Martins. However, we've added our own account as of late. In 1999, I traveled to Skye and met an elderly Martin man, owner of the farm above the castle. His brogue was thick and he seemed preoccupied so I did not have much of a conversation with him except to receive basic directions to the castle. My son accompanied me on this trip and it was a great feeling to have two McQuistons standing just outside of Castle Uisdean.

In 2006, I returned again to Trotternish with my wife, Beth, with Mark and Lynn McCuistion, and with Betty Mathews, a McCuistion descendant. Mark, Betty, and Beth braved the narrow passageway into the castle and took many pictures.

On this trip I was fortunate enough to meet the newest Martin owner of the ancient Martin farm - one Ian Martin. He knew well the story of Hugh, the Castle Builder, and said that he never thought he'd ever meet any of Hugh's kin. He was very pleased that we visited him.

Angus of the Storms was not the only Trotternish man to have trouble with his wife. Donald Gorm Mor was another. In the late 1500s Margaret, the daughter of Rory Mor MacLeod, who lived just across the water from Donald, was wed to Donald. At that time, it was the custom in the Highlands for a marriage to have a trial period of one year, a tradition known as "hand-fasting". If the partnership worked, the marriage would become formal, but if not it could be terminated.

History doesn't record how it happened, but Margaret lost an eye during her first year at Duntulm. She also bore no children, and when the year was up, Donald cast her out on a one-eyed horse, led by a one-eyed man and accompanied by a one-

eyed dog. Not surprisingly, Rory Mor MacLeod was outraged, and a new war began between the clans - The War of the One-Eyed Woman. This culminated in 1601, in a battle in Coire na Creiche (the corrie of the spoils), when both clans suffered heavy losses. It was the last battle fought between the two clans.

Margaret went on to become a nun. It has been said that she was in love with Hugh all along and that is one reason Donald rejected her. When it is said some of the clan members seemed to like Hugh better than Donald, perhaps Margaret was one of them.

Donald was a heavy drinker and his host, along with two of his drunken friends, are said to haunt the castle. Also, a maid accidentally dropped a child out of a window at Duntulm. She was lashed to a boat, sent off to sea and eventually drowned. Her ghost, and that of the child, also are said to haunt Duntulm.

It was about the time of the rejection of Margaret that Hugh, the Castle Builder, decided to try to unseat Donald. Perhaps this resulted from his own love of Margaret, as well as a desire to be chief of Clan Uisdean. Hugh died at Duntulm Castle and his ghost is said to have

haunted the place so badly that Donald moved out. A total of six entities are reported to haunt these ruins; the screams of Hugh the starving prisoner, walled up in the tower, the weeping nun, Margaret, the three drunkards, and the cries of a nursemaid holding the dead child that she accidentally dropped from the out a window onto the rocks below!

The McDonalds moved on to Sleat but the Martin family has stayed on the same farm and land for all of these years.

A group of McUisdeans, through Hugh of Sleat's third son, Donald Hearrach (or Harris) returned from Harris to settle on the Trotternish Peninsula. It is thought that the small community of MhicChuithean, located just above Caisteal Uisdean, was named for these McUisdeans, and that residents, there, who took the name McQueen were really McUisdeans. About one third of all McQueens in the McDonald DNA project match the McUisdean DNA profile, as do 36 Martins.

With this story, and these DNA results, we have just that much more proof of our descent from Hugh of Sleat and our close association with the Martin family.

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Jack McQuestion in the ruins of Duntulm Castle.