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# KILFINJAN PARISH

A Timeline from 800AD to 1800AD

# Kilfinan Parish

An introduction to the history of Kilfinan Parish, highlighting the west coast of the Parish from Ardlamont to Otter Ferry (Loch Fyne shore). In medieval times, this now tranquil shore was an important land base for the earliest Clan families: Lamonts, Campbells and MacEwens. The lives of the people who lived there were much affected by national events and politics through the centuries. The village of Kilfinan lies on the east side of Loch Fyne, north west of Tighnabruaich.

***"For that is the mark of the Scot of all classes . . . there burns alive in him a sense of identity with the dead, even to the twentieth generation"***

**(R L Stevenson.)**

Norse period (800 - 1263 A.D.) c843 :: Kenneth MacAlpin : King of Scots  
1034 :: Duncan 1 : King of Scotland (House of Canmore)

The Scandinavian Norse people had widespread influence throughout the west coast of Scotland. There is little evidence of Norse settlement on the Kilfinan shores, except in a few place names of Norse origin (Ascog, Ormidale). The Norsemen named the lands of the Western Isles and Clyde estuary "Sudsey" (Southern Isles). Unattributed sources suggest that the Archdiocese of Trondheim had church authority in Sudsey, which would have included Kilfinan, even for a time after the defeat of Norse rule at the Battle of Largs in 1263.

1066 :: Norman Conquest

Norman influence extended quickly and relatively peacefully into Scotland, establishing land ownership and regal status. Two possible Norman settlements in the area are evidenced by remnants of motte and bailey structures. One is near Ballimore House (Croc mhic Eoghainne), and the other on the shore near Kilfinan village on the site known as MacEwen's Castle. (Caistel mhic Eoghainn)

1115 – 1164 :: Somerled : First Lord of the Isles  
1200 :: Ewen of Otter: MacEwen Clan first recorded

By the late medieval period the clan Lamont appear to have been well established throughout the Cowal peninsula. The name Lamont is believed to have derived from the Norse, Logmoor, lawman or lawgiver; Ladhman in Gaelic. It is not recorded how they came to settle in Argyll but it is likely that Lauman, the first documented chief, lived at Inveryne, his stronghold being situated on ground above the present day farmhouse. Along with Clan Ewen of Otter, whose ruined fort can be visited just north of Kilfinan Bay, the Lamonts were part of the Anrothan dynasty, descended from the royal house of fifth century Ulster O'Neils. Lauman first appears in a charter of 1231-1246, when he and his uncle, Duncan, granted the church and associated land at Kilfinan and Kilmun to the monks Paisley.

- 1292 - 1296 :: John Balliol King of Scotland
- 1286 - 1371 :: Wars of Independence
  - :: Resistance to English attempts to rule in Scotland
  - :: Struggles over succession to Scottish monarchy
- 1274 - 1329 :: Robert the Bruce : 1314 Battle of Bannockburn

Prior to his death in 1293, Lauman, knighted by Queen Margaret, had already sewn a seed in the decline of the family's fortunes when, on the death of King Alexander III in 1286, he supported John Balliol's claim to the Scottish throne over that of Robert the Bruce. Following victory at the Battle of Bannockburn, Bruce gave authority to the Black Knight of Lochow, Sir Colin Campbell, to take land from the Lamonts. They refused to forfeit until the 1360s when Lamont land in Kilmun and Loch Eck was ceded to the Campbells, leaving the Lamonts with the Kerry Estate in Kilfinan and Nether Cowal Estate in Inverchoalain.



Gravestone at Kilfinan [Church](#)

Reconciliation with the Campbells and a declared “profitable and lasting bond” with the ruling Stewarts, allowed the Lamonts to remain significant landowners. Charters confirm that Inveryne was the clan chief's main residence in the early 1400s. King James III created the Barony of Inveryne in 1472, a title which granted “John Lawmanson of Inueryn” superiority over the local cadet lairdships of **Ardlamont**, with land at Stillaig, Glennan and Achourkbeg and **Ascog**, with land at Corra, Kilbride, Achadalvory, Dergbruich and Achourkmor, and confirmed the inclusion of “Cragnaveache, Demellalauche, Auchinske, Drumglas, Invyryn” in the title. The Ascog cadets, whose castle dated from earlier in the century, were required as clan kindred to supply a birlinn for the use of their chief. In the late 1400s, the chief appears to have moved to Toward Castle, newly built around that time and overlooking the Royal Palace of Rothesay.



Also in the 15th century, the Campbells secured land to the north and south of Inverlyne. In 1432 Swene, son of Ewen, resigned his title to the Barony of Otter to King James I. The King restored Swene to his title but designated Gillespie Campbell, heir of Lochow, as heir to the Barony of Otter. Swene died in 1493 and the barony passed to the Campbells. Thereafter, the MacEwen clan dispersed elsewhere in Scotland. A year later, in 1493, Archibald, Earl of Argyll, bought part of Ardmarnock, the sale confirmed by King James IV. Acharossan Mor and Acharossan Beag, meantime, to the east of Inverlyne and Drum, was granted to Robert Bannatyne of Bute by King James III in 1475.



- 1542 - 1587 :: Mary Queen of Scots
- 1560 :: The Reformation
- 1557 - 1688 :: Covenanter Movement
- 1603 :: Union of Crowns
- 1566 - 1625 :: James VI and I

Under the tenth Lamont Chief, John, [1515 -1568] the Clan entered into an alliance with the House of Argyll, pledging that he and his heirs 'is and salbe leill, trew, and stedabill men and servandis to the said Erle..... [and would] gang and ryd wytht all and sundry our kyn." This may have been an expedient move with the Campbells becoming the dominant power in Argyll and with the fall of the Lord of the Isles in 1483. It may also have allowed the Lamonts to expand their estate which Chief John set about doing by means which included litigation, local skirmishes and the purchase of various properties. By the late 1550s, he had been granted land at Kames and Achadachoun by the Campbells, acquired Evanachan, taken South Auchagoyle from the failing Ardlamont cadets, bought Rhubodach, created a new cadetship at Stillaig. He was knighted by Mary Queen of Scots in 1546 - 7 and entertained the Queen at Toward in 1563.

- 1559 :: Lamonts reclaimed the Kilfinan Kirklands after Paisley Abbey was burned
- 1574 :: The Rev D Campbell was inducted as the first post Reformation minister in Kilfinan Church.

There are few traces of medieval dwellings in the area. Those with enough wealth would have used stone, but evidence is probably lost beneath later farm buildings. During the 16th century, most tenants were reportedly living in traditional habitations “made very much of rough sticks and branches taken from the nearest brushwood with timber frames, wattled walls and an external covering of mud or of some kind of plaster.” The dwellings consisted of one apartment, without windows and with a peat fire in the centre of a mud floor. Families slept on heather and there was no furniture “beyond a keg of butter, a tub for salting and a kist for meal.” Wooden bowls and horn spoons were used for eating, poultry kept in the rafters and cattle to the side of the cottage. The rural diet may have consisted of oatmeal, barley, milk and cheese. For the poorer people, meat may have been uncommon, and for rich and poor alike fresh meat was not available during winter months. Pasture was very poor, and many animals were slaughtered at Martinmas (11th November) with the flesh preserved in brine. Fish and shellfish probably contributed to the diet and may have been preserved by smoking.

About 1560, cornmills were introduced at Melldalloch, Millhouse and later Lindsaig. Previously grain had been hand ground by quern stone. Payment was made in kind.

For almost a hundred years after Chief John’s death, relationships between the Lamonts and the Campbells fluctuated with periods of threatened conflict and times of reconciliation. Little was added to Lamont holdings, except that they purchased Acharossan and repurchased Kildavaig and Achadachoun. Politically, however, Chief James [1634-1650], who was knighted by Charles I, made a fatal choice during the British Civil Wars of 1638 – 1660. He initially supported the Covenanters, as did the Earl of Argyll and the Campbells of Otter, but changed over to the Royalist cause. When King Charles was defeated and executed, the leading Lamonts were seized and their land scorched. Thirty six prominent Lamont clansmen were hanged at Dunoon in 1646 and possibly about a hundred more were massacred. Sir James was forced to surrender his lands and goods to the will of the Campbells; Ascog Castle and Toward Castle were almost wholly destroyed by fire and Toward Castle had to be abandoned in favour of *Ardlamont*. Many smaller tenants had, meanwhile, gone into exile on Mull and elsewhere and Lowlanders had been introduced by the Earl of Argyll onto appropriated estates. Following the massacre, many Lamonts changed their surname.



The Education Act passed by the Scottish Parliament in 1633 ordered that local funded Church supervised schools be established in every parish. Kilfinan School was built opposite the Church by 1650. Schools were set up in Otter Ferry and Millhouse in 1677, taught by older male scholars. In 1705, an English speaking teacher was appointed at Kilfinan although Gaelic was still commonly spoken.

Lamont fortunes improved following the Restoration of Charles II, 1660. The massacre of the Lamonts (1646) formed part of treasonable charges against the Earl of Argyll who was executed in 1661. By 1740 the Lamonts had redeemed most of their Kilfinan estates and Stillaig and Ascog were brought under the control of the Chief. Ballimore, Auchnaba and Feornach remained within Otter Estate which Colin Campbell of Otter purchased from the Earl of Argyll in 1670. Rev John Campbell, Colin's grandson, purchased Ardmarnock and Dalnacorach Farm when he succeeded to the lairdship in 1704.

1687 A change house was set up at Millhouse, the first in the parish, an indication that clansmen and lairds were beginning to engage in trade. Cattle were still being used as currency as late as 1701.

1707 :: The Treaty of Union between Scotland & England

1715 :: Jacobite rebellion (1st)

1745 :: Jacobite rebellion (2nd)

1746 :: Battle of Culloden

During the early part of the 18th century, the people of Kilfinan Parish had apparently engaged in "a ruinous contraband trade with the Isle of Man, to an astonishing extent". In 1742, the son of Archibald Black of Otter Ferry Inn had foreign spirits seized by Customs and Excise. There followed a skirmish and Black was prosecuted, but Archibald Lamont of Lamont, John Campbell of Otter and other gentlemen struck a bargain to pay damages to the excisemen and the prosecution was dropped.

1715 and 1745 Clan Lamont did not come out in support of the Old Pretender or Bonnie Prince Charlie and gave only lukewarm support to the Hanoverians. By the time of the Valuation Roll of 1751, Archibald Lamont of Lamont was the single largest landowner in Kilfinan Parish and John Campbell of Otter the second. This marked a change in land ownership from the chiefly kindred or duthchas to personal ownership. Half a century after the Treaty of Union, and five years after Culloden, the traditional clan system had been significantly undermined. The Earl of Argyll could, however, still depend on his clansmen for political support – John Campbell, son of John Campbell of Otter, was one of twelve Campbells in a fifteen man jury to find James Stewart guilty of the murder of Colin Campbell at the infamous Appin murder trial of 1752.

Alexander McLea of Lindsaig, proprietor of West Lindsaig, East Lindsaig, Tayinluig and the corn mill of Lindsaig, is recorded as a small estate owner in the 1751 Valuation Roll. Earlier records describe the McLeas as surgeons to the clan Lamont, living near to Inveryne and at Achnaskeoch, but it is believed that they left Achnaskeoch in the mid 16<sup>th</sup> century. At around the same time, the McLeas also seem to have been buried at Kilfinan Church under the title of Barons of Lindsaig, with surgical instruments etched on their gravestones. Lindsaig is, however, recorded in 1634 as being in possession of the Campbells, and the McLeas are not believed to have taken ownership until the late 17<sup>th</sup> or early 18<sup>th</sup> century. Assuming that Alexander McLea is a descendant of one of the Lamont surgeons, it seems uncertain where the family lived during the 1600s. Clan McLea is believed to have also adopted the name Livingstone, a name associated with Lismore.

Most people were poor. Other than agriculture, fishing and limited employment in associated trades, the only recorded industry was in very small scale processing of kelp. Short leases were common and it was not unusual for eight to fifteen families to share one small farm; as small tenants, cottagers and crofters with grazing rights. The farms themselves were reportedly overstocked and cultivation was largely by run-rig. To make ends meet, the majority of men worked in herring fishing from July to December, three men sharing a boat and dividing the proceeds between them. Tenants were compelled to use specific mills and smithies and to pay for mulching, even for barley which was sold by the miller to outside distillers, and the grain grown was usually short of what was needed in the parish. Potatoes and herring, cooked on locally harvested peat, formed the staple diet of the poor, with the occasional addition of poultry and veal. Only the better off used coal shipped from the mainland and only eleven houses in the parish were slated. There were around 29 people registered for poor relief in the parish in the early 1790s and "a great many others", not considered poor enough for a claim, reportedly existed by begging. An average of 55 pupils attended school in winter and 28 in summer. The population of Kilfinan Parish decreased from 1,793 in 1755 to 1,417 in 1795.

From the Statistical Account of Scotland 1791 - 1799. Parish of Kilfinan.

In 1765, the British Government passed the Customs Act to legislate against smuggling from the Isle of Man. The end of smuggling contributed to the loss of livelihoods and subsequent bankruptcies. Although land improvement in Kilfinan was slower than in other parts of Argyll, by the end of the century small scale farm enclosure was being encouraged. Small white faced sheep had been replaced by the less popular black faced breed. Around 1770, Lamont of Lamont introduced large scale sheep farming which, along with the loss of the smuggling trade, encouraged depopulation.

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