

Alexander Gillies and Mary Cameron of Argyll x2

Neil Gillies and his wife and new-born baby emigrated to Australia in 1838. I am one of his numerous descendants. The immigration record states that his parents were Alexander Gillies and Mary Cameron and that he was from Kildalt[on] in Argyll, Scotland. His father had a herd of cattle.

A number of ancestry.com trees had taken from this that his parents were the Alexander Gillies (c1781-1870) and Mary Cameron (1785-1864) in Kilmallie, Argyle, nearly 150 miles north of Kildalton, on the Scottish mainland. They ascribe to this couple the parentage of 3-4 children born in Kildalton followed by a further 4-6 children born in Kilmallie.

I am not so convinced that these were Neil's parents and believe there are stronger arguments for Neil being the son of Alexander Gillies (c1781 – 184?) and Mary Cameron (1767 – 1855) of Kildalton, Islay.

I have yet to find a burial record for this Alexander Gillies, which almost certainly occurred in Kildalton between 1841 and 1851. Unfortunately death registrations did not begin to take place in Scotland until 1855. However, his wife and widow died that year. Mary was recorded as 90 years of age at her death (she was 88) and the registration entry details the following information;

- Died 3 February 1855, Kildalton, Islay, the widow of Alexander Gillies.
- Mary's parents were Lachlan Cameron and Ann McKinnon. She had been born on the Island of Mull.
- She had had 4 children; Neil 52 years of age, Donald 49 years of age, Mary 47 years of age and John deceased.

The Kilmallie couple

There are 1841, 1851 and 1861 census records for Alexander Gillies of Kilmallie who died on 14 November 1874 from bronchitis. The record of his death states that his parents were farmer Archibald Gillies and Ann Campbell and that he was the widower of Mary Cameron and formerly the keeper of Lochy Bridge. This death record is consistent with the 1861 census where he is described as a 'bridge collector'.

The 1841 census has him as a 'spirit dealer' and it lists 4 likely children; May 24yo, Alex 21yo, Janet 18yo and John 16yo. Based on the baptism records I believe there were two older children; Ann b1810 and Ewan b1812. It appears that these first two children were named after their grandparents; Mary Cameron's father Ewan Cameron, and Alexander Gillies' mother Ann Campbell. Neither Alexander's nor his wife's death registrations records their children except in so far as they reported their deaths, May and John respectively.

The reason I believe that this couple were not the parents of Neil born circa 1803 is that for them to have been his parents they must have started off in Kildalton (where we know Neil was born) before relocating to Kilmallie in around 1810 where they baptised Ann. This is not an impossible scenario but the fact that there is an alternate Alexander Gillies and Mary Cameron in Kildalton in the

1840s suggests that our Gillies family never left Kildalton and that the Kilmallie family is another family altogether. If they had relocated to Kilmallie around 1810 it begs the question of how it was that Neil was back living in Kildalton in 1837 where he married.

It also relies on there having been two identical sets of 4 children (Neil/Duncan/John/Mary) born in Kildalton with one set going with No.1 Alexander & Mary to Kilmallie while the other set stayed behind with the other Alexander & Mary in Kildalton. Needless to say there is only one set of baptisms so there is no evidence of a Neil born Kildalton son of the couple who were in Kilmallie.

The Kildalton couple

Along with the fact that the alternate Gillies family were still in the town of Neil's birth in the mid 19th century there are other markers that suggest they are a better fit as his family. Of the 8 boys names Neil uses for his 7 sons three can be accounted for in this family, namely those of his third son Donald and his last son Lachlan John.

Indeed I wonder if all eight boys names can be linked to the immediate family. Dougal was the name of Neil's father-in-law, Alexander was his father's name Neil was his own name. Were James and Duncan named from Agnes' side? Brothers maybe?

The 1841 census for Alexander Gillies at Kildalton has him as an agricultural labourer which is closer to a cattle herder than the Kilmallie Gillies who was respectively a 'spirit dealer' (1841), 'ferryman and crofter' (1851) and bridge collector' (1861). Though of course as a crofter the Kilmallie Alexander Gillies may have had cattle and his father was a farmer according to his death record. So this point is far from conclusive.

However, the only substantial evidence that links the Gillies of Kilmallie with Neil is the fact that the couple were named Alexander Gillies and Mary Cameron and were the right age to have been Neil's parents. Conversely the Kildalton couple also bear the names Alexander Gillies and Mary Cameron but additionally they are found resident in the same town that Neil came from while Mary's death records her having a son named Neil born around the same year our Neil was born. Also all the known male names in the Kildalton family are used by Neil to name his sons.

Therefore, unless there is anything else that specifically links Neil to the Kilmallie Gillies my view is it is much more likely that he is the son of Alexander Gillies b1781 and Mary Cameron of Mull b1767 who seem to have raised their family and lived out their days in Kildalton on Islay.

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London 1 August 2017