

The Maxwells and MacKays of Lochbroom

Some notes on the family of Isabella Maxwell and John MacKay of Ullapool, on the shores of Lochbroom in Scotland.

Isabella's brother, William Dunbar Maxwell, emigrated from Lochbroom to Pictou, Nova Scotia in 1833 as recounted in "The Maxwells of Mount Thom"¹ and other related files in the online archives of the McCulloch Heritage Centre in Pictou. Some of Isabella's descendants also emigrated to Canada and to the US.

Dates are written in DD/MM/YYYY format.

The Maxwell Family of Todholes and Achindrean

Isabella Maxwell's immediate family is depicted in Figure 1 below, with flag sequences indicating each person's country of residence and migrations.

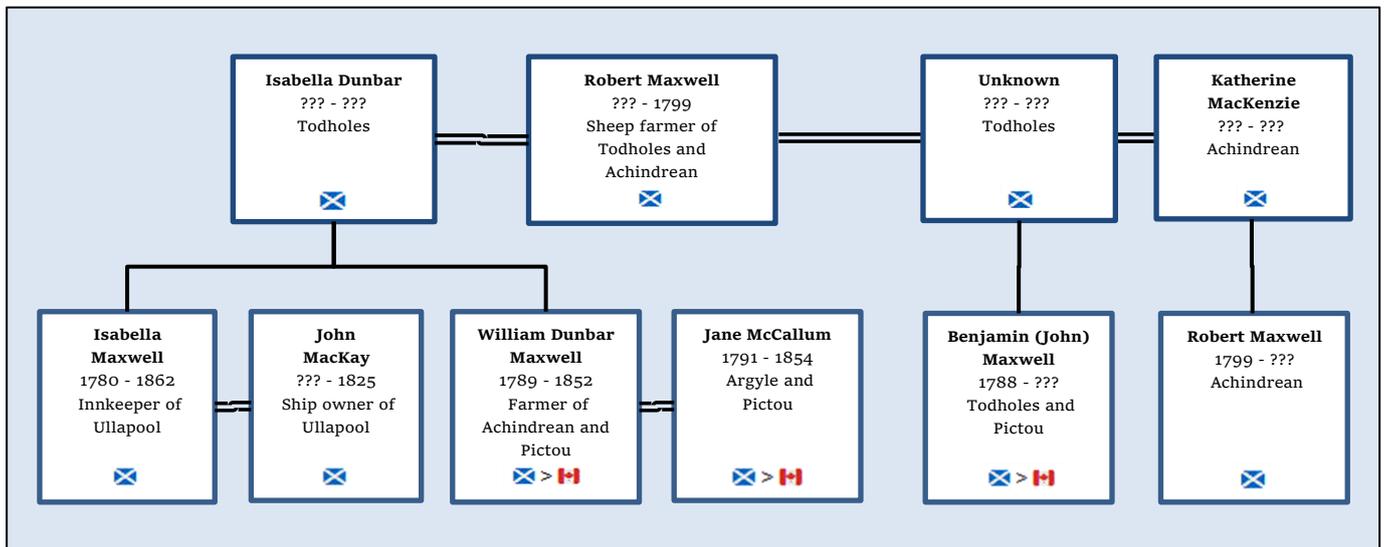


Figure 1: Maxwell Family Tree

The following pages provide some further details relating to the farms of Todholes and Achindrean, and the family's time there.

¹ "The Maxwells of Mount Thom", file 86-120-2, McCulloch Heritage Centre, Pictou: <http://haggis.mccullochcentre.ca/document/4460>

Todholes Farm

Isabella Maxwell was born to Robert Maxwell, sheep farmer, and Isabella Dunbar of Dumfriesshire² between 1780 and 1783^{2,3,4}, at Toddshole³, also written 'Todholes', near Kirkconnel⁴.

This seems likely to be the Todholes Farm that can be found pictured at grid reference NS7314 on Geograph: <https://www.geograph.org.uk/photo/1313986>

Isabella married a ship owner named John MacKay². An early C19th 'arrivals' list held at Ullapool Museum records John as being of 'Achindrean'. The 1798 Lochbroom Militia List⁵ has an entry for 'Achindrain', listing it as a property with four working horses and no boats, whose residents include Robert Maxwell, his son William, a servant and three farm workers. "The Maxwells of Mount Thom" confirms Robert and William to be Isabella's father and brother respectively.

The Kirkconnel parish register has several references to Maxwells from Todholes. Three daughters of a John Maxwel in Todholes^{6,7,8} were baptized in the 1750s. This would fit with John being perhaps a father or uncle to Robert Maxwell, but their precise relationship is unclear from the records. A 1st April 1788 entry records the baptism of Benjamin, "natural son to Robert Maxwel" of Todholes. This is presumably the same Benjamin Maxwell, later known as John Maxwell, who was the first of the Maxwells to emigrate to Pictou, as described in "The Maxwells of Mount Thom". Benjamin's mother is not named, but his description as a "natural son" indicates that he was born out of wedlock. Assuming Robert Maxwell and Isabella Dunbar were married (as indicated on Isabella Maxwell of Ullapool's death certificate), this would make Benjamin a younger half-brother of Isabella Maxwell.

Isabella's brother William Dunbar Maxwell is as recorded as having been born in Dumfriesshire, Scotland in about 1789, at his burial in Pictou County⁹. This appears to conflict with William's inclusion in the 1798 Lochbroom Militia List, which is supposed only to record males aged 15 to 60, so William's actual birth date could potentially be some years earlier.

The above indicates that the Maxwells moved from Todholes to Achindrean sometime between 1788/89 and 1798.

Robert Maxwell appears for a final time in the Lochbroom parish records in this baptism record of 1799¹⁰: *"At Achindrein on Wednesday 22 May 1799 in the name of the deceased Mr Robert Maxwell late of Achindrein by Katherine Mackenzie his widow, was baptised by the Revd. Mr Kennedy to the name of Robert."*

² Isabella MacKay, née Maxwell: National Records of Scotland, Statutory Deaths 075/01 0015 (Scotland's People)

³ Scotland Census 1851, 075/00 005/00 017 (Scotland's People)

⁴ Scotland Census 1861, 075/01 001/01 003 (Scotland's People)

⁵ 1798 Lochbroom Militia List, transcribed by Donald MacDonald-Ross, <http://freepages.rootsweb.com/~coigach/genealogy/militia1798.htm>

⁶ Baptism of Margaret Maxwel, 06/02/1753, Old Parish Registers, Births 834/ 10 10 Kirconnel (Scotland's People)

⁷ Baptism of Margaret Maxwel, 05/08/1755, Old Parish Registers, Births 834/ 10 12 Kirconnel (Scotland's People)

⁸ Baptism of Jean Maxwel, 30/10/1758, Old Parish Registers, Births 834/ 10 13 Kirconnel (Scotland's People)

⁹ Memorial to William Dunbar Maxwell, Salt Springs, Pictou County, Nova Scotia:

<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/78275125/william-dunbar-maxwell>

¹⁰ Baptism of Robert Maxwell, 22/05/1799, Old Parish Registers, Births 075/ 10 15 Lochbroom (Scotland's People)

Achindrean

Ullapool Museum's old maps of Lochbroom show several small settlements named Achindrean (variously spelled 'Achindrain', 'Achendrain', 'Achindrein' and 'Auchindrean'): one north of Ullapool in the valley of the river Canaird beneath Ben Mór Coigach (the settlement is now named Strathcanaird), another in the valley of the river Broom, south from the head of Lochbroom, and a third on the Rhidorroch estate east of Ullapool. The Maxwell's home in the 1798 militia list⁵ is recorded as being the property of George Mackenzie of Dundonnell. At the time, Strathcanaird was owned by Lady Elibank (Isabella Mackenzie of Cromarty), and the Rhidorroch estate belonged to a Mr Davidson of Tulloch, which makes the Broom valley the most likely candidate site for the Maxwell residence.

This is modern Auchindrean, which remains a sheep farm, as Robert Maxwell's profession suggests it would have been in his day. It can be seen in the foreground of Figure 2, taken from the Corrieshalloch Gorge reserve looking north towards Lochbroom. The farmhouses are hidden in the trees at the foot of the hill. Auchindrean can be found on Geograph at grid reference NH1980¹¹, and today is accessed from the main road by a fine wrought-iron bridge over the River Broom, designed by Sir John Fowler of Forth Bridge fame¹².



Figure 2: Auchindrean and Lochbroom (photo by Ed Soldat, 2019)

¹¹ <https://www.geograph.org.uk/gridref/NH1980>

¹² <https://www.geograph.org.uk/photo/3466077>

The MacKay Family of Ullapool

Figure 3 below shows two generations of Isabella Maxwell and John MacKay's descendants.

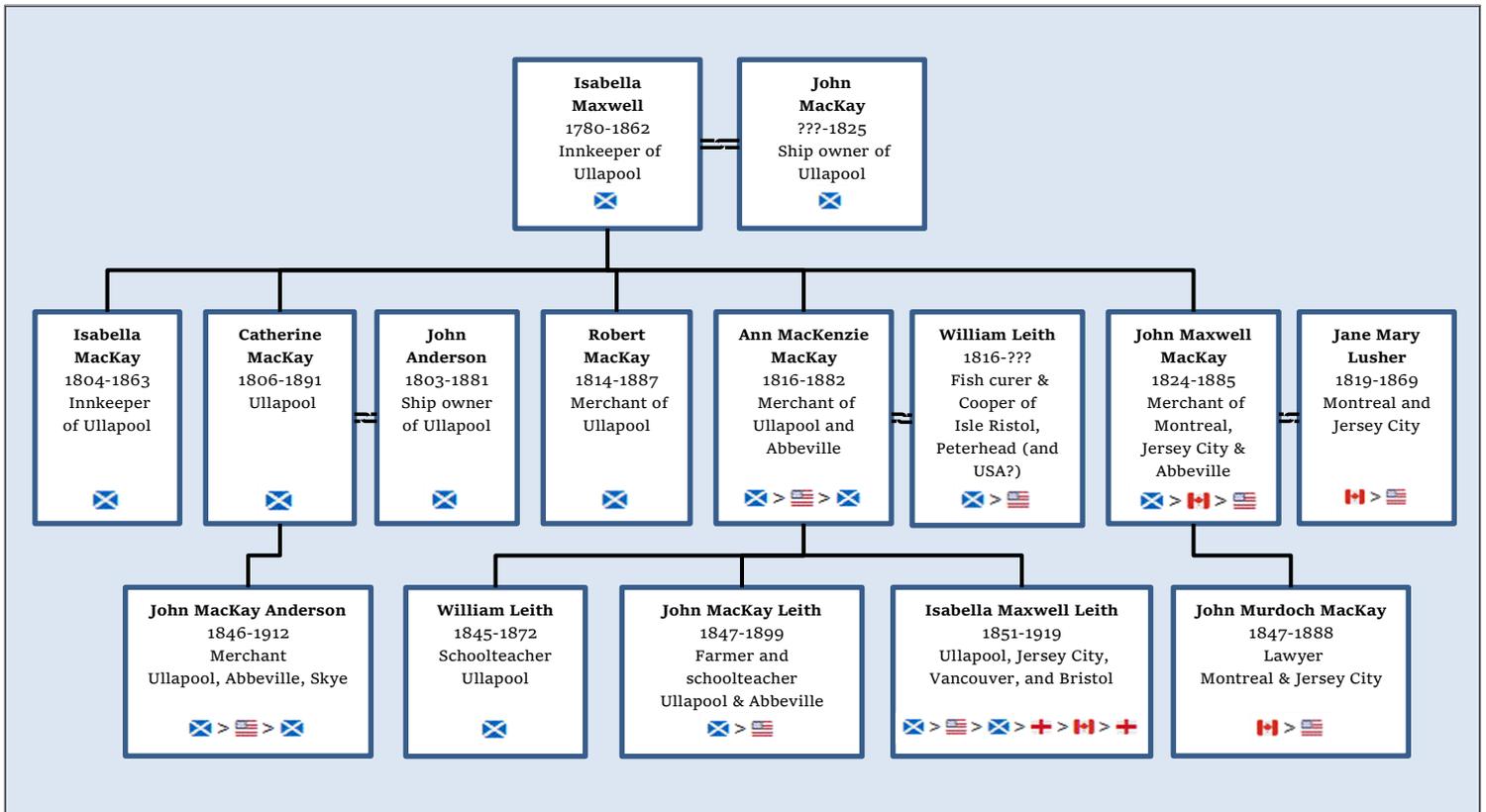


Figure 3: MacKay Family Tree

Isabella Maxwell's marriage to John MacKay, the ship owner, presumably occurred prior to the birth of their first child in 1804 (no marriage record found to date). They went on to have at least five children, as shown on the tree above. All five children (repeated below in larger font) were born in Lochbroom parish:

- Isabella MacKay jnr. (Abt. 1804 – 1863)
- Catherine MacKay (Abt. 1806 – 1891)
- Robert MacKay (Abt. 1814 – 1887)
- Ann MacKenzie MacKay (Abt. 1816 – 1882)
- John Maxwell MacKay (Abt. 1824 – 1885)

John MacKay

John MacKay snr. is missing from the Ullapool census records, but given the dates in question, and the militia lists indicating that MacKay is an uncommon name in Lochbroom at that time, it seems likely that it is this John MacKay who features in an 1822 letter to the Inverness Journal¹³. The letter recounts a disastrous night for Ullapool, starting with the loss of the sloop "Friendship" with all hands, off the coast near Thurso, followed by:

"The Christopher, John Mackay, another open sea herring buss, and the sloop Janet and Mary, also belonging to Ullapool, were cast ashore and totally wrecked at Widewall, Orkney, the same night. Both crews were most miraculously saved"

The letter goes on to say that:

"These three vessels were exactly the one half of the small fleet belonging to this port."

In addition to the tragic loss of the *Friendship's* crew, Ullapool's fortunes were almost entirely dependent on the herring trade in those days¹⁴ and with the loss of half the port's fishing fleet, the folk of Lochbroom must have feared a desperately hard winter to come.

The small size of the Ullapool fishing fleet adds to likelihood that John MacKay of the *Christopher* is the same ship owner who married Isabella Maxwell. It also suggests that John's luck to be "miraculously rescued" in 1822 was soon to run out.

By the announcement of Ann MacKay's marriage¹⁵ in 1844, her father had become "the late Mr John Mackay". This notice¹⁶, published in the Inverness Courier and the Inverness Journal, likely recounts his fate:

"On the 18th ult. the Brothers of Ullapool sailed from Tanera for the fishing at Glendow, parish of Assint, and about midnight struck an island in the entrance to Loch Olderney and sunk, when four of the seven men onboard unfortunately perished, viz. John McKay, owner of the vessel, Angus McDonald, John McDonald, and Malcolm McDonald, all belonging to Ullapool."

Of the locations mentioned for the *Brothers'* final voyage, 'Tanera' would be the fishing station at Tanera Mòr, the largest of the Summer Isles in Lochbroom, while 'Glendow' looks like an old spelling for Loch Gleann Dubh in Assynt, Sutherland. 'Loch Olderney' does not feature on modern maps, but could be one of the channels or inlets to the south of Oldany Island on the north Assynt coast, a potentially treacherous stretch of water to navigate on the way to Gleann Dubh.

¹³ The loss of the "Friendship" of Ullapool, Inverness Journal and Northern Courier, 18/10/1822. Transcribed by Donald MacDonald-Ross: <http://freepages.rootsweb.com/~coigach/genealogy/articles/18221018ij.htm>

¹⁴ "Ullapool, Lochbroom" by James ("Seumas") Matheson, from "Lochbroom Through the Centuries", by Kenneth MacLeod

¹⁵ Marriage notices: Ann MacKay and William Leith, Inverness Courier, 03/01/1844

¹⁶ Loss of the *Brothers* of Ullapool, Inverness Courier, 30/11/1825. Also transcribed from the Inverness Journal by Donald MacDonald-Ross: <http://freepages.rootsweb.com/~coigach/genealogy/articles/18251125ij.htm>

Mrs MacKay's Inn

In the 1840s and 1850s, Isabella Maxwell (now the widow of John MacKay) was living in Ullapool, with her profession on the census given as "Innkeeper" or "Publican"^{3,17}. The Inverness Courier makes occasional mention of formal dinners held at "Mrs MacKay's Inn"^{18,19}, also known as the "Commercial Inn"²⁰.

The 1841 and 1851 censuses show Isabella living at the very end of Shore Street, Ullapool's sea front, near the Manse, and at the far end of the street from the smithy²¹, indicating the west end of the street²². If Isabella's residence indicates the site of her inn, that would probably make it the site on which the Arch Inn²³ currently stands.

Lives and Travels of the MacKay Children

Isabella MacKay jnr. lived with her mother, helping to run the inn, and taking it over as Isabella snr. reached old age⁴. As far as the records show, Isabella jnr. lived in Ullapool all her life. She died at the inn in 1863²⁴, a year after her mother.

Robert MacKay also remained in Ullapool, becoming a merchant and general dealer. He died unmarried in 1887²⁵.

Emigrations to Montreal and New Jersey

The youngest of the MacKay children, John Maxwell MacKay, was the first of his generation of MacKays to emigrate. He left Scotland for Canada, following in the footsteps of his uncles Benjamin and William Dunbar Maxwell. Whether John met with his relatives in Nova Scotia is not clear, but by 1843 he was living in Montreal, where he married Jane Mary Lusher²⁶, daughter of the Methodist minister Rev. Robert Langham Lusher^{27,28}. John and Jane had a son, John Murdoch Mackay, in Canada in 1847²⁹. By 1850, John, Jane and son had moved to Van Vorst, New Jersey, soon to be incorporated into Jersey City.

Meanwhile, back in Ullapool, Catherine MacKay had married John Anderson³⁰, another ship owner, and the couple had had a son, John MacKay Anderson³¹.

Ann MacKenzie MacKay married in 1844¹⁵, to William Leith, a fish curer working on Isle Ristol in the Summer Isles³². Ann and William had three children, William Leith (1845), John MacKay Leith (1847)

¹⁷ Scotland Census 1841, 075/00 009/00 021 (Scotland's People)

¹⁸ "Public dinner at Ullapool", Inverness Courier, 20/10/1853

¹⁹ "The Duchess Countess of Sutherland – Ullapool", Inverness Courier, 21/11/1861

²⁰ Death notices: Isabella MacKay, Inverness Courier, 27/02/1862

²¹ Ullapool census transcriptions by Donald MacDonald-Ross:

<http://freepages.rootsweb.com/~coigach/genealogy/ullapool.htm>

²² Ordnance Survey map 1881, sheet XIV, showing Ullapool in 1875: <https://maps.nls.uk/view/228780004>

²³ The Arch Inn on Geograph: <https://www.geograph.org.uk/photo/4842551>

²⁴ Death notices: Miss Isabella MacKay, Inverness Courier, 23/04/1863

²⁵ National Probate Index, Scotland: Robert MacKay, died 21/01/1887

²⁶ Quebec, Canada, Vital and Church Records: Marriage of John Maxwell MacKay and Jane Mary Lusher, 10/06/1843

²⁷ Quebec, Canada, Vital and Church Records: Baptism of Jane Mary Lusher, 24/10/1819

²⁸ Dictionary of Canadian Biography: Robert Langham Lusher

http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/lusher_robert_langham_7E.html

²⁹ US Federal Census 1850: Van Vorst, Hudson, New Jersey; Roll: M432_452; Page: 432A; Image: 518

³⁰ Catherine Anderson, née MacKay: National Records of Scotland, Statutory Deaths 075/01 56 (Scotland's People)

³¹ Scotland Census 1851, 075/ 5/ 39 (Scotland's People)

and Isabella Maxwell Leith (“Bella”, abt. 1851). The children were all born in the fishing port of Peterhead, Aberdeenshire, but by the 1851 census, William Leith snr. had disappeared from the records, never to re-appear, while Ann and the children had returned to Ullapool³³. Leith family legend has it that William snr. went to seek his fortune in the USA but died before the family could join him.

In their father’s absence, Ann’s sons remained in Ullapool, but Bella Leith was sent to Jersey City, to be brought up by her uncle, John Maxwell MacKay, and his wife, Jane. She was to remain in New Jersey for some 18 years, later recounting fond memories of winter skating and sleighing parties to her children³⁴.

Emigrations to South Carolina

In the aftermath of the US civil war, John Maxwell MacKay, with the help of his business partner William C. Barrett, purchased a plantation and mill in Abbeville County, South Carolina, from James N. Cochran³⁵, a captain in the defeated Confederate army. While John MacKay travelled back and forth between Abbeville and Jersey City, his nephews John MacKay Leith and John MacKay Anderson emigrated to the US to live and work on the plantation at Long Cane, where they can be found in the 1870 census³⁶. Following the unexpected 1872 death of her son William Leith jnr., who had grown up to become a schoolteacher in Ullapool, Ann Leith (née MacKay) also moved to Abbeville, where she lived with her remaining son John for some years³⁴.

John Maxwell MacKay appears to have engaged in many business ventures and speculative land investments with William C. Barrett that frequently turned out badly. These and a protracted legal dispute with James N. Cochran³⁷ ultimately led to William C. Barrett fleeing the US³⁸, and John being forced to relinquish a significant part of the Abbeville estate in 1876³⁹.

1876 was a tumultuous year for South Carolina. A backlash against the Republican government’s post-civil-war Reconstruction programme gave way to a narrow, and contested, Democrat victory in state elections. The elections were marred by widespread violence and voter intimidation, primarily in support of Democrat Wade Hampton III by paramilitary groups such as the Red Shirts, particularly targeting black voters. John MacKay Leith had become a secretary of the Democratic Club in Long Cane and assisted the vote counting for Long Cane ward. In that capacity, John was interviewed as part of a Senate enquiry into the South Carolina election, regarding claims of voter intimidation at Long Cane, which he denied any knowledge of⁴⁰.

³² Scotland Census 1841, 075/00 014/00 009 (Scotland’s People)

³³ Scotland Census 1851, 075/ 5/ 41 (Scotland’s People)

³⁴ Leith Family Papers, University of South Carolina: https://pascal-usc.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01PASCAL_USCCOL/1oceqbt/alma991016298199705618

³⁵ “Improvements in Hodges District”, Abbeville Press and Banner, 02/11/1871

³⁶ US Federal Census 1870: Long Cane, Abbeville, South Carolina; Roll: M593_1481; Page: 268B (Ancestry)

³⁷ Mackay v. Cochran, 8 S. C. 48: <https://cite.case.law/sc/8/48/>

³⁸ Abbeville Press and Banner, 28/03/1876

³⁹ Abbeville Press and Banner, 14/06/1876

⁴⁰ Senate documents, Volume 2; Volume 6; Volume 290: <https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=D7pF8F86L3sC>

Returns to Scotland and Further Travels

Around or after the events of 1876, Ann Leith and John MacKay Anderson returned to Scotland. Ann Leith lived the remainder of her life in Ullapool⁴¹. John Anderson eventually married and settled on the Isle of Skye⁴², but stayed in close contact with Ullapool and the Leith family. John MacKay Leith married and remained in Abbeville County, eventually becoming a schoolteacher in the town of Hodges⁴³.

Bella Leith returned to Scotland from Jersey City in 1877, where she married in Edinburgh before settling in Bristol, England. In 1912, Bella, now widowed and living with her daughter's family, crossed the Atlantic once more, this time to Canada, where the family lived in Vancouver for a few years. The outbreak of the first world war led to the family returning to England in 1915, where Bella resided in Liverpool and Bristol for the remainder of her life.

The lives of the Maxwells and MacKays touched on many parts of the history and the great Atlantic migrations of the 19th century, and their descendants can be found on both sides of the Atlantic today.

Edward Soldat, great-great-grandson of Bella Leith, 22nd January 2022

⁴¹ Scotland Census 1881, 075/1 1/ 12 (Scotland's People)

⁴² Scotland Census 1901, Parish: Sleat; ED: 11; Page: 5; Line: 19; Roll: CSSCT1901_35 (Ancestry)

⁴³ "School Examination", Abbeville Messenger, 19/01/1886

Sources and Acknowledgements

Besides the usual genealogical repositories of census data, church records, newspaper archives and so on, several specific sources have been particularly helpful in piecing together the above history, and may be similarly useful to others investigating the same:

The HAGGIS online genealogical archive of The McCulloch Centre in Pictou, Nova Scotia provided the story of William Dunbar Maxwell's emigration that linked him to Isabella Maxwell.

<https://mccullochcentre.ca/>

Many of the details from Achindrean, Ullapool and Lochbroom generally, were found amongst the wealth of historical information collected and researched by Donald MacDonald-Ross of Niagara, at his site "Some Coigach Genealogy".

<http://freepages.rootsweb.com/~coigach/genealogy/index.htm>

Further Lochbroom history was provided by Kenneth MacLeod's book "Lochbroom through the Centuries" (2011, Ardvreck Publishing).

The staff and volunteers at Ullapool Museum provided some very helpful assistance in tracing John MacKay to Achindrean and locating Isabella Maxwell's inn.

<https://www.ullapoolmuseum.co.uk/>

The University of South Carolina holds a file of letters written to John MacKay Leith and his family in Abbeville County from John MacKay Anderson and Bella Leith following their return to Scotland, and from Bella's children in Bristol. These letters confirm the movements of the MacKays and Leiths in America, as well as recounting details of life in Bristol and the news events of the day, including the Boer War and the death of Queen Victoria (see footnote 34).