

<http://www.quillen.info/Quillen_History1.htm> 4/4/2011

THE CLAN OF THE MACQUILLINS OF ANTRIM

A History of the Quillen Family

This article is a partial transcription of a history included by Adam Quillen for his book about his KY Quillen family, "The Quillen Family and their Kith and Kin". It was taken from the Ulster Journal of Archeology by M. Webb in 1861-2. The complete article is 27 pages long in Adam's book. (DW Lane, 9/2011)

Credits and many thanks for some of this transcription goes to the unknown editor of the original Quillen.org website - circa 2000-2001 (possibly Suzanne Quillen?).

The MacQuillins hold that they are descended from Fiacha MacUillin, youngest son to [Niall of the Nine Hostages](#); and that their ancestors, from the beginning of the 5th century to the latter end of the 12th, were, according to native phraseology, "kings" or princes of Ulidia, and from the 12th to the 16th, of Dalriada. We do not find that any authentic Irish history can be produced which disproves this their claim. We are well aware, however, that settlers and their friends from England and Scotland, who obtained grants of different sections of the MacQuillin property in the 17th century, in order to lessen the popular sense of wrong at the expulsion of the only remnant of the Dalriadan proprietors that bore the ancestral name, assiduously represented the MacQuillins as an alien race. And, thus, it was said that, taking their antecedents into account, they had no great right to complain of being dispossessed. Some declared they were descended from a son of Llewelyn, Prince of Wales, who had intruded himself into Dalriada in the 12th century; but of the particular details of whose intrusion no written account could ever be mentioned.

Another story said they were descended from an English or Norman Lord, whose name was William, and whose family assumed the name of MacWillies, which ultimately became MacQuillin. Thus, in the large work styling itself the Parliamentary Gazetteer of Ireland, we find, under the head of "Dunluce," the following statement:--"In the 15th century, it [Dunluce Castle] belonged to a noble English family, of the name of MacWillies, who afterwards came to be called MacQuillin, and to be regarded as an Irish family; and in the last quarter of the 16th century, it passed into the possession of the MacDonnells of the Hebrides." Of course, these particulars are taken by the compiler, unconscious of their character, from some of the early fabrications that were got up for a special purpose, as we cannot imagine the publishers of the Gazetteer in question would wish to circulate a false statement. However, it is evident that they had not done their part in the examination of native history, when they could give currency to such a historical blunder. It is certain that not a word can be found in the Annals of the Four Masters, nor any other Irish annals we know of, which suggests the idea of the MacQuillins being an alien race, but much that indicates that they are not. During the centuries that intervened between Fiacha MacUillin, their great ancestor, and the irruption of the Norman lords

into Ulster, the kings of Ulidia (according to the MacQuillin MS.) were elected from the descendents of that Fiacha.

An ambiguity has arisen from its occasional association, during the 12th century, with the name Dunslevey. Under date 1178, we have the following chronicle: -- "Murrough O'Carrol and Cu Uladh, son of Dunslevey, King of Uladh, attacked De Courcy's forces, of whom they slew 450." Dunslevey has been explained as signifying 'The Mountain Fortress,' which fortress, belonging to the kings of Ulidia, is said to have been situated on one of the Mourne Mountains. There are several indications which go to prove that Dunslevey was not, under any phase, the real surname of the family which occupied that fortress, several of whom were conspicuous as kings of Ulster during the 12th century. Whilst they were popularly called Dunslevey, from their mountain castle, it appears that they belonged either to the MacUillin or the O'Huigin families, both of whom were descendants of Fiacha, son of Niall. It has thus been suggested that there may have been two branches of Fiacha MacUillin's descendants, one residing at Rath Mor, in Moylinnie the other at Dunslevey--who, according to national usage, being of the same origin, were equally eligible to the kingship of Ulidia--and that the Dunslevey branch was annihilated by De Courcy. It may either have been so, or that Dunslevey in that age had become the principal royal residence of the kings of Ulidia, and that, when De Courcy assumed the title of Earl of Ulidia, or Ulster, the ancient princes were forced to the title of kings of Ulidia. Be that as it may, after the 12th century the MacQuillin territory was limited to Dalriada, and their residence established at Rath Mor Mac Uillin; and we hear no more of Dunslevey as a name among the Ulster chieftains, unless Slevan MacQuillin, in the 14th century, can be regarded as an exception.

Dalriada, as compared with other parts of Ireland, was in a very quiet state during the 13th century. Whilst neighbouring chiefs were at war with the English, and with one another, peace prevailed there. Hence, there is no mention in the chronicles of that century of Dalriadan war, or of any defences or attacks of MacQuillin chieftains. And during the 14th century, in the Annals of the Four Masters, Dalriada and its lords appear only in a peaceful character. In 1358, the Annals tell us that "Senicen MacQuillin, high-constable of the province of Ulster, died." In ten years after, they record the death of his successor, a "Slevan MacQuillin," whom also they style "constable of the province of Ulster." These circumstances indicate that the lords of Dalriada were on good terms with the English; and, either by tact or by treaty, had kept the aggressive English generals from making any very formidable inroads on that part of the principality which had been left to the MacQuillins as a patrimony.

The river Bann and Lough Neagh, according to our MacQuillin manuscripts, formed the western boundary of that northern region, secured to its ancient lords till Hugh Buidhe O'Neill, one of the Tyrone chiefs, crossing the Bann in the 14th century, took possession of a district to the east of Lough Neagh. His posterity afterwards retained it, and were called the Clann Aodha Buidhe, or The Clan of Yellow Hugh. The district of country was by the English named Clandeboy, embodying in some degree the sound of the native name. How far the intrusion of that O'Neill on the MacQuillin territory was resisted, we have no detail by the Four Masters; but as they afterwards regarded the occupancy of

Clandeboy by the O'Neills as an usurpation, the latter must have taken possession by force. "De Courcy and De Lacy," says our Manuscript, "were styled Earls of Ulster by the kings of England, but the English monarchs had not possession of a tenth part of Ulster to give to any person for some centuries after their time."--Of course not, in the sense which "Ulster" is now understood. But it would seem that the Ulad and Ulidia of that day was the Ulster of the English, and included little more than the Countries of Down and Antrim. De Burgo also had the title of Earl of Ulster; and he said he was MacWilliam, the true lord and chieftain of Ulidia. That name seems to have been assumed to please the native ear, but without any expectation that he would ever be recognized by the people themselves as a "MacQuillin," however truly he might be called "MacWilliam."