
WELCOME

to

Stone Walls: A Different Approach

An on-going project to examine the History and Migrations of the various branches of a Scots-Irish family. the Agnews of Ulster and Galloway

All segments are interim working papers presented so that readers can follow and comment on topics as they develop. Over time added data may alter interpretations and conclusions.

Help ! If you know of resources or publications of any date that refer to Agnew or O’Gneeve topics, we would be deeply grateful for such information.

This research has revealed that, in spite of online indexing and full document imaging, older British compendia widely available in the UK can be rare in the United States, Canada or Australia. Further, the 50 year surge in specialized periodicals has strained major library budgets. Subscriptions have been cut back particularly for overseas regional or highly specialized publications. Then periodical indices (PERSI) have no tables of contents to include or texts to abstract. For example, the text of the important 1993 article on Agnews and O’Gneeves by Hector MacDonnell in *The Glynnys* was unknown and unavailable in the US until a copy was graciously hand carried to me from Britain by Jacqueline Agnew Haugseng in 2008 ! We passed it on to Australian Agnew researchers who were also unaware of it.

A 15 year gap in knowledge is a serious deterrent to Agnew research in the Diaspora. So, please help!

Working Paper 2

Agnew and O’Gneeve: The Gordian Knot, Part 1 ©

by G. Marie Agnew-Marcelli

PROLOGUE

No doubt the first question among Agnews viewing the title is “*Who are the O’Gneeves?*”

This subject does not appear to have been discussed in prior family publications. Probably the only reference to O’Gneeves most of us have seen is the general comments that appear almost universally appended to most descriptions of **Agnew** in clan or family name lists. A common version of the statement reads in part, “An Irish sept, the O’Gnives or O’Gneeves (*Gaelic O’Gnimh*), hereditary bards to the Clannaboy O’Neils who englished their name to Agnew, leading some to mistakenly consider Agnews to be of Irish origin.”¹ Brief information on O’Gneeves will be appear in this paper to demonstrate the need to consider them in more detail later.

¹ Black, pg. 10

Before considering the relationship, if any, between Agnews and O’Gneevs² we need to examine the broader issue of who the present day Agnews are.

Many of us across the world, believing we were a single family, have searched for decades – 30, 40, 50 years – without ever making any progress linking us together with other emigrant Agnew families or identifying the exact overseas locale from which our progenitor came.

Our first query must be in the vein of that ubiquitous television question -

I. Who do we think we are? Do we know?

Other Irish and Scottish Clan or Family Internet sites universally include an introductory History of the family that encompasses the *totality* of the group – the rank and file as well as the chief. They usually outline origins, times, places, joint actions and remarkable events that provide an historical background and tradition shared by each individual member and all branches that develop over time. It is the fundamental warp and woof that ties the fabric of a family together.

Remarkably it appears that Agnews, *as a family have NO such common traditions of origin or accomplishment* - only a surname. For records we have but 4 books:

1. *The Hereditary Sheriffs of Galloway*, a century-old scholarly volume based on mid-19th century resources recounting the history of the direct line of the Sheriffs of Wigtownshire³. Except for some small additions in the second edition, earlier cadet lines are not followed far and relationships to the occasional individual termed kin or kinsman are not given.
2. A nearly century-old American volume, *The Book of Agnews*⁴, covering the descendants of a single early Agnew immigrant to Pennsylvania, James Agnew (b. 1711) plus a collection of documents, extracts and reports mentioning Agnews who did not necessarily have connections to that specific line..

Both the above were prepared before the current standards for acceptable genealogies were established and both require extensive updating and more detailed documentation. The American work in particular lacks verification for many salient items.

3. The third, *Gibson Agnew, his Family and Descendants*, is a well-documented extension of the *The Book of Agnews* covering the later Gibson Agnew sub-branch of the above James Agnew⁵.

² For ease of the reader O’Gneevs, the most common English version of O’Gnimh, will be used except in quotes.

³ Agnew, Andrew. *The Hereditary Sheriffs of Wigtownshire, 2nd Ed.2 vols. 1893*

⁴ Agnew, Mary Virginia. *The Book of Agnews 1926*

⁵ Miner, Ruth Lumley. *Gibson Agnew 1974*

4. Major Douglas Agnew’s, *The Whites of Their Eyes*, is a military and naval history of some Agnews of the Lochnaw line who saw service beginning with the organization of Scottish forces in 1636 through the First World War. Each chapter centers on a specific individual and content ranges from short biographies covering significant events to brief vignettes. Many include extracts from dispatches and numerous letters. The material makes enjoyable reading but has no index, no bibliography and is devoid of footnoted sources. Principal figures are well identified but there is no information at all provided on a considerable number of Agnews mentioned incidentally.⁶ The volume was printed in limited edition and has been out-of-print for some time.

Because each publication is limited to a single line descent, even taken together, they do not provide a broad and encompassing history for *Agnews* as a Clan or Family.

So we are left to wonder -

In the endless strife of the Gaelic World from the mid 1300’s through the 18th century did our rank and file ancestors follow the chief in war? For what battles did they muster? How many fell or lived? Did any provide heroic aid or precipitate disaster on the field? What devastation or misfortunes befell them where they lived? Were the southern part of the shire and the sheriff himself involved in the Border Wars? Were any subjected to the horrors and repeated deprivations of those engagements? Certainly present day Agnews would be interested in how the ordinary Galloway folk of the family fared during the Highlander Occupation of Lochnaw and the ensuing trials and punishment during the Killing Times of 1673-88. The chief’s tribulations are covered in Chapters 35 & 36 of HSW but those of ordinary people only alluded to. Did these troubles encourage family members to migrate to Antrim? If so, this may be a clue to tracking Antrim families back to Scotland. Apparently the Sheriff himself may have refuged there as well.

Were the rank and file farmers or herders? Or were they simple illiterate peasants grubbing through the misery of medieval and preindustrial era survival? Did any rise to distinction in religious or scholarly professions or become adventurous seafarers or wide-ranging merchants?

For a literate people we know almost nothing of our past before emigration. For most of the families who left the British shores our history stops at the dock sometime between 150 and 200 years ago. In a real sense many of us are orphans.

Now DNA opens a further question: Are we, the rank and file Agnews of the 21st century, one family, two families more or less distantly related or allied, or 2 distinct families of quite different origins? The Agnew sample is still small (about 30) although the participants do represent a good range of different paper descents and samples from Brazil, the US, the UK, Australia, New Zealand and Canada.

⁶ Agnew, Douglas. *The Whites of Their Eyes*, 1926

In every other Irish or Scottish family/clan, some with as few as 20 samples up to the very large clans with 1200 or more participants, the vast majority of individuals share one general haplotype (80+% R1a/b) with the minority a distinctly different type (5-15% I2b). The present sample of the Agnews is markedly different – it is split almost evenly between R1a/b and I2b with the type I2b in a very slight majority. *Clearly something is different.* Since participants are self-selected and most of us have only a very limited number of documented generations, it *may be* the result of inadvertent nonrandom sampling but, presently, results suggest we may differ from the broad range of Northern Irish and Scottish families.⁷

In sum we, the rank and file in the Diaspora, appear to have no general encompassing historical record prior to migration of who we are or where we came from and this is complicated by genetic data suggesting we are at least 2 different families.

II. Who do others *think* we are?

Victorians of the Establishment, faced with the question of Agnews and O’Gneevs and ensnared in their era’s conventions and prejudices, took the straightforward approach of Alexander the Great and severed the Scots Agnews and Irish O’Gneevs irrevocably apart – often in commentary that is more than a slightly derogatory.⁸

But this is a different time with different social perspectives and far easier access to a greatly expanded data pool. Faced with the possibility of two different bloodlines encompassed within the Agnew surname it seems reasonable to update what is known of the O’Gneevs and reassess data of what seems a far more complex history than earlier recognized.

George F. Black, long regarded as a leading authority on Scottish surnames, repeated Sir Andrew’s history of the chieftaincy as presented in the *Hereditary Sheriffs of Wigtownshire* and cited the documented Scottish use of the name as Agnewe 1610, Aggnew 1512, Agnev 1436, Angnew 1473. It is worth noting that the earliest variant found was **Agnev** (sic).

“AGNEW. This surname is of territorial origin from the Baronie d’Agneaux in the Boscages of Normady. ‘A Marquis d’Agneaux still owns portions of the ancestral fiefs, and the Chateau d’Agneaux still overlooks the valley of the Vire.’ (Agnew HSW, I, p.180). in 1363 the Lochnaw family of the name were appointed hereditary sheriffs of Galloway by King David II and they gradually became great land-owners in the province, holding many estates. An Irish sept, the O’Gnives or O’Gneevs, hereditary bards to the Clannaboy O’Neils, englished their name to Agnew, a change that has led some to mistakenly consider the Agnews to be of Irish origin.”⁹

⁷ DNA data see Family Projects, YDNA Tables at www.ftdna.com

⁸ Hill, *The MacDonnells of Antrim*, 1883, xx; *The Hereditary Sheriffs of Wigtownshire*, 1893, v. 1, xxx; McKerlie *Lands and Their Owners in Galloway*, New Ed. 1906, v.i, p 445-8

⁹ Black p.10

Nonetheless, in his Introduction on general aspects of Scots and Irish family and linguistic relationships this authority on Scottish names offered a general exception by quoting a leading Scottish historian as follows:

“The names of the Galloway clans are not those of the highlands; or, in instances where they are the same, it is inconceivable that they were offshoots from, say, clans in Badenoch. *It cannot well be doubted that there was a silent but steady stream of immigration from Ulster to the opposite coast; and here we have another factor in the mixture of the races which cannot be ignored.*”¹⁰ (emphasis added)

Black, through MacKenzie, concedes that there was a steady flow of families, such as the Agnews, between Ulster and Galloway. This is most particularly true for *Antrim* and Galloway and, as history to be discussed in a later paper demonstrates, it was in *both directions*, over a millennium. More than one historian has lamented that the origins between the two areas may never be sorted out.

III. Who Claim Us ?

The MacDonalds

Clan Donald with all its many branches is a huge family and includes within its descents the “Agnews” (actually the O’Gneevs) and admits them to their DNA project. Historically it is a classic gall-gael (i.e. “foreign gael”) population made up primarily of Norse and Dalriadic Irish elements who became the major power in the northwest part of the British Isles. From the 12th century they controlled at their zenith the Hebrides, the western coast of Scotland, what is now Cumberland county England, the northern part of Wales, the Isle of Man and coastal Ulster in the area.

Ancient MacDonald genealogies show a descent for the O’Gneevs of Antrim from Somerled and his progeny, the Lords of the Isles. Over the past 30 years both Scottish and Irish scholars have reviewed the validity of these genealogies together with additional material only recently available from which they have been gradually developing a very preliminary historical identity for the O’Gneevs. What relationship, if any, there may be between these MacDonald O’Gneevs and the Lochnaw Agnews is presently unclear.

Certainly, Galloway lay securely within the Somerled hegemony and was populated by the same gall-gaels when the first Sheriff acquired Lochnaw. In fact, another major clan descending from a brother of the MacDonald progenitor, the Macdowells (earlier, MacDougal) had long been powerful in Galway and Thomas Macdowell, a witness to the 1426 charter, was identified as a kinsman of Andrew Agnew. Existing bloodlines of Galloway inhabitants of the time would be expected to mirror those of the MacDonalds.

The MacDonald DNA project with 1000 participants, many with very long documented descents, has undertaken to relate subgrouping within the R haplotype to specific locations and historical events in MacDonald history. This may help some Agnews to locate progenitor or-

¹⁰ MacKenzie, W. C. *The Races of Ireland and Scotland*, Paisley. 1916.

igins. For example, my brother’s 37 marker test results are closest to a Macdonald grouping that dates to the gallowglass exchange with Clann O’Cahan (Kanes) about 1290 when Angus Oge MacDonald married the chief’s daughter. The O’Cahans controlled Derry and along the Route (the Bann Valley), a critical area in Ulster that eventually came into MacDonald of Antrim hands.

The Frasers

The Frasers are another very large Scottish clan with more than 220 septs. When the original line failed the heiresses were married to Sir Patrick Fleming, Earl of Wigton and the Sir Hugh Hay of Tweeddale in the Borders. Thus they were neighbors of the Agnews of Lochnaw over several centuries and maintained close contact.. The Hays of Park are mentioned widely throughout the HSW as are the Flemings occasionally. Around 1700 a James Fraser was chaplain at Lochnaw.

Thus, although reasons are not given, it is not surprising that Agnew is listed among names included among in the Clan Fraser DNA projects. It is hoped that with more than 1200 participants it will be possible to sort out actual bloodline septs from “bowl of porridge” septs who allied to a powerful clan for safety and security.¹¹

Three additional names of interest to Agnews are included on the Fraser list:

MacAnawe MacNeive MacNiff

These are puzzling as they appear very similar to O’Gneev variants seen in 16th and 17th century *Irish* documents.

MacAnawe *per se* I have not found in modern name lists. There is no W in either Irish or Scottish Gaelic; instead mh or bh diphthongs are used for V. In Galloway and Antrim gaelic over time V is often attenuated to the W sound. The name here is then very similar to MacAneave which is an Anglicization of the *Irish* sept *Mac Giolla na Naomh* (son of the servant of the saints) of Roscommon. Some of these in recent times have further change it to Agnew. (See the following section on “other” Agnews.)

MacNeive, is very close to some 16th century versions of O’Gneev and to the modern *Irish* names McNieve/McNeeve/McNiff. However, 20th century Irish experts disagree on their gaelic equivalents and they do not seem to appear on 19th century tabulations of Irish names.¹² They may be recent garbled attempts at regaelicizing.

But, if they are Irish names, how did they become attached to Clan Frazer? Unlike most of the southeast Scottish clans and families, the Frasers did not serve as gallowglasses nor participate

¹¹ – so-called because the sign of allegiance and acceptance was the giving of a bowl by the chief and its acceptance by the petitioner;

<http://www.igenealogy.com/en/index.php?c=76&npi=4102>

<http://www.fraser-clan.org>

http://www.familytreedna.com/Clan_fraser.com/public/Clan_Fraser/default.aspx

¹² For instance, Matheson, R.E. Surnames of Ireland, 1909, which is based on tabulations of birth and census data.

actively in the 17th century private or government plantations in Ulster. It seems very unlikely they were enlisting new sept in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Another clan, the Campbells, requires comment. Although they do not specifically claim Agnews, Alexander Campbell, Lord of Corsewell is identified as Andrew Agnew’s kin and provided his seal for some of the 1426 charters. Thus there was some connection.

The Campbell DNA project is headed by professional geneticist, Neil Campbell, who is doing major research on the R1b haplotype attempting to clearly define the subgroups and tie them to specific geographic locations in the British Isles. Results may eventually be helpful in sorting out Agnews within the R1b haplotype.

IV. Who, in fact, *are* Present Day Agnews ?

It is evident that we do not truly know!

Since few if any of us know our pre-immigration family history or are aware of an O’Gneeve connection , we need to consider this possibility when we hit a stonewall – especially as we cannot know when such a name change was adopted.

From Where and Why Did They Come? This is a question most of us are totally unprepared to answer. Research I have undertaken to date reveals some Agnew lineages widely regarded as reliable are, in fact, partly or wholly in error. Generally those descents generated in the 19th century are largely undocumented and, increasingly, numerous points can be shown to be at least unlikely if not clearly wrong. *Why* they came most of us do not know.

We Have Not looked broadly enough. For one thing – and I am painfully aware of my own failure in this issue – we have not searched variants adequately. Without thought we depended on Soundex-based search engines which are tied by definition to an invariable first letter. As demonstrated below, this automatically guarantees we have worked with very incomplete results. Double metathesis is newer and better but is not included on usual genealogical search engines. Additionally, *too many search engines still only look for the name as entered.* That is why the following information from an Irish site was a shock.

Here is a table of standard variants for Agnew currently *routinely* employed by the UK genealogical site, rootsireland.com in searches of its databases of 19th and 20th century material

Variations of the Surname ANGNEW

The following surnames will be matched in your search query:

AGNEW	AGNEWS	AGNUE
EGNEW	IGNEW	AGNIUE
ANGNEW	AGGERS	AGNER
AGNU	ALLUE	AGNESS
MCAGNEW	AGREW	AGNAW

HEYNEW	AGOW	"AGNEW
AGNICE	AAGNEW	AGNEN
	EEGGNEW	

The site also indicates the additional names listed below are not included in their routine search but should also be considered by those researching the Agnewsurname:

AGNEAU AGNEN AGNER AGNEY AGNIFF AGNUS AGREW
 GNA GNAGH GNAW GNEA GNEE GNER GNEW GNIEF GNEIVE
 MCAGNAY MCAGNE MCAGNEW MCAGNEY MCAGUE MCGNA MCGNEEVE

While some of the latter merely cover common misreadings or misentries, many yield records for real people. For example, there are :

2 Gnew households recorded in Griffiths Valuations in the Antrim Parish of Racavan; Henry and James.

U.S Censuses show several Gnew families in Kentucky and the Middle Western states like Illinois where there is an unresolved tangle of as many as a dozen different Agnew lines,

Ignew is *rare* in the Diaspora but 19th century Irish Birth Records include a dozen Iggnew entries and a handful of marriages,

MacNeive, McNieve and McNeeve appear in shipping lists as well as Canadian US censuses . They are listed in Irish (Roscommon) , Scottish (southwest) & English (Cumberland) censuses.

In the Commonwealth period around 1658/9 when Agnew lands were confiscated, the Sheriff along with other “popular” (translate “troublemaker”) Scots was scheduled for “transportation” to “comparable” land in Connaught¹³. Plans were made for some “servants” to go ahead to prepare for the leaders’ arrival. Did some Antrim “Agnews” actually go to Roscommon before the order was cancelled by the Restoration of King Charles? Names were very much in flux at the time with different versions applied to the same individual even in the same document. If so, some of these Roscommon “MacNeives” may be Agnews.

After wading in the Elizabethan fiants and 17th century papers of the Plantation period I now known that “Agnew” must be sought under A, E, I, G, M, N and O.¹⁴ As the RootsIreland website lists demonstrates, the same is necessary for more recent times.

A scanning of the British telephone directories from the WW I period until the middle 1980’s suggests there are likely variants that still do not appear in the Irish name lists. A small group

¹³ Indeed, the English Crown seemed quite enamored with Roscommon as a depository for Scots “troublemakers” as they shipped the Border Grahams there a couple of decades earlier in the same century.

¹⁴ The early variants will be covered in a later section

with the surname **Giniffe** appeared in the mid-1920’s and every year thereafter through 1986, the last year on the Internet lists. All these names were located in the Belfast area *and no other*.

The lists of the 1916 rebels of the Easter Rebellion includes in the contingent at the Post Office, both an Agnew and a Liam McNeive. A recent compendium of 20th century poetry includes a poem by an S. O’Gnimh dated 1936 and a few contemporary O’Gnimhs, a handful in Ireland and one in Switzerland are listed in the business social network, LinkedIn.

These late versions began to appear in the 1890’s when a Gaelic revival led to a fast-growing conversion of previously Anglicized names back to earlier Gaelic forms. MacLysaght¹⁵ discusses this movement and some of the errors made in the revisions.

V. Some Modern “Agnew” who are neither Lochnaw or O’Gneeve

As noted under the Clan Fraser, some Irish *MacAneaves*, particularly in Tyrone, changed their names to Agnew. I encountered 3 Agnews from Tyrone I dubbed “the Wild Horsemen of Tyrone.” They appeared to be brothers or cousins who arrived separately just before the American Civil War began. The earliest served in the infantry until the war ended and then transferred to the Cavalry while the other 2 went directly into the Cavalry. All 3 served through the Indian Wars of the West. I did not follow up thereafter as they did not fit into Agnew lines I was tracking. However, this Tyrone origin was unique in my searching and I now wonder if they may have been MacAneaves originally - although most MacAneaves who change their name chose Ford or Forde.

Magner, of Castlemagner, County Cork, is another Irish family, some of whom assumed the surname Agnew. Fortunately, they were located in the far south or this could be a problem for Agnew searches in and after the Plantation period. For instance, I have seen M’Agner used where it clearly referred to the Sheriff or one of his captains.¹⁶

SUMMARY

So where do we stand so far?

In this segment we have identified additional possible “*stonewalls*” for Agnew families trying to link back “across the waters”.

- a. Possible variants for ‘Agnew’ *per se* that must be considered in searching databases, records and documents are far more numerous than any of us routinely use;
- b. Possible non-Agnew Anglicized variants for ‘O’Gneeve’ should be added to all searching especially in records dating before 1800. Previously surveyed resources should be *re*-searched using these additional alternate name forms.

¹⁵ MacLysaght. *The Surnames of Ireland 6th Ed. 1985* . pp . ix

¹⁶ Hill. G. *History of the MacDonnells of Antrim*, Appendix

- c. Some small number of Agnews may prove to be from other Irish or Scottish families altogether. the most likely being Magner or McAneave in west Ireland and Fraser on the Scottish borders.
- d. If you are in the Diaspora, you may have to track through other intermediate geographic areas since opportunity for employment and advancement for both Scots and Irish lay largely in the military and mercantile ventures of the British Empire. Flow between the Canada and the US went *both* directions. In the 18th century, both North American sites were closely linked to the West Indies where some additional records may be found – especially for mercantile families...
- e. But does anyone remember India where thousands of British men *and their families* - including many Agnews – spent large parts of their lives with the military or the East India Company? 1/17/2012 2:40 PM 1/17/2012 7:30 PM Records of these families are no longer buried and forgotten in government and church archives but *are now appearing online*.
- f. In all areas clerical errors and unconnected families can complicate searching. Coast-to-coast along the Canadian- American border French Canadian Agneaux have almost uniformly become “Agnews” and live side-by-side and married among Scots and Irish Agnews. Entirely different record sources must be search for both the nonconnected and “real” Agnews. And the Canadian notaries and priests created a wholly new group of mangled variants of Irish and Scottish names.

In sum, you *never* find what you do not look for!

What’s next?

O’Gneevs may make up a substantial subgroup within the current worldwide Agnew population. As a group, we are all quite unfamiliar with the background of these namesakes and possibly distant cousins.

Therefore, the next paper will focus on what is presently known of 16th and 17th century O’Gneevs (O’Gnimh in Irish Gaelic) who were contemporaries of the Agnews reported in the 1669 Hearth Rolls in Paper I.