
Rev. Robert McClure 1732 – 1823

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RevRobMcClure_revised notes 16Jun11.doc

This man is the earliest McClure mentioned in existing documents and family mythology. Without doubt he is but one of a long line of McClure's but unlike other family members, is remembered for his stature in the society he was part of, and possibly for other achievements now long forgotten. Given the history of this part of Ireland, the McClure family, along with others similarly placed, left Scotland to be free to worship as Protestants.

According to family legend, in addition to being a prominent member of the Presbyterian Church of his day, he wasn't a bad businessman. He is supposed to have owned property in Belfast, and while poking around various free Internet sites, the author of these notes discovered that a Robert McClure was an active player in 18th century Belfast in the flax market – flax of course being the raw material for linen, the production of which was one of the main industries in Northern Ireland at that time. This material was on an American site and very brief – more details could have been had by payment to the Genealogical outfit concerned.

That some members of the McClure family had money is without doubt. Take for example Mary Jane and her sister Ellen, neither she nor Ellen, apart from Mary Jane's employment as a Governess by a family of the surname Mitchell in Sydney, seem ever to have worked. In spite of this they bought and sold property in central Sydney, traveled within NSW and interstate to Victoria – they also buried, and in some instances reburied, some of their own, always without too much concern for the cost involved. Who did they inherit from? Perhaps there exists a Probate Office in Belfast that has on file answers to these questions? Although it is as yet not known what vessel conveyed them to NSW, according to the NSW Death Registration of Mary Jane, her death occurred on 18/8/1880 and she had been in the colony for 30 years. This places the date of arrival of these apparently very close sisters at around 1850. Their father James left for Australia sometime between 1828 and 1839, so who looked after the girls on his departure?

Around 1890, Ellen McClure by then in her late 60's, and the last living of the McClure's who migrated from Ireland, received a circular titled "The Congregation of Anahilt" dated May, 1889 - a call to all members, past and then current of the congregation, to kick in for a new church! The copy of this document still exists and is reproduced below – it very eloquently speaks for itself needing little comment or qualification.



☉ The Congregation of Anahilt ☉

Is one of the oldest in connection with the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. Its first settled minister was the Rev. JOHN M'BROOM, who in days of persecution was forced to leave his charge at Portpatrick, in Scotland, and, under a gracious Providence, found his way to this Parish in the year 1662, and having laboured faithfully for Christ, died in 1682. He was succeeded by the Rev. CHARLES SEARON, who for thirty years preached the Gospel, and died in 1737.

The next minister had a short career. For nine years the Rev. JOHN SEMPLE carried on the good work, entering into rest in 1758. His successor, the Rev. ROBERT M'CLURE, ordained in 1769, was spared to the ministry for the unusually long period of 63 years, and reached the 93rd year of his age. These all sleep in the quiet parish graveyard, beneath a simple slab, placed there by the children of those for whose eternal interests they lived and laboured.

Then followed the Rev. WILLIAM WRIGHT, M.D., who studied for the medical profession and obtained his doctor's degree, but having a preference for the Church, he entered on his theological course, and became minister of the Congregation in 1802, discharging the duties of his sacred office till incapacitated by paralysis.

The Rev. THOMAS GEEKER was appointed his assistant in 1839, and for 47 years he gave himself to the work of the Lord in Anahilt. At his death he left behind him a truly sorrowing people, who erected over his grave, alongside of the church in which he dwelt on solemn themes, a beautiful and costly granite column.

The present minister, the Rev. JOSIAS MITCHELL, was installed in 1857, and under his pastorate the Congregation continues to flourish.

Many prosperous congregations have sprung from Anahilt during its long and eventful history. These are: Hillsborough, Drumlough, Legacurry, Cargycreevy, and the Mass. Still, however, the mother congregation flourishes numerically, financially, and, it is hoped, spiritually—having in its connection about 200 families.

For the first 50 years of its history the Congregation worshipped in a sod house, the seats being of the same material, and not till 1719 was a stone structure erected, which, having undergone repairs from time to time, remains till the present day. It has the usual mark of antiquity, being one of the few cruciform structures characteristic of the old Ulster congregations.

It is not necessary to say that long ere this the old building should have given place to a new one, but agricultural depression of late years, and the hope that more prosperous times for farmers were approaching, have caused us to put up with many discomforts, till at length, after careful examination by an architect, the building has been pronounced unsafe.

We are now forced to face all the difficulties and anxieties of a new house. The Congregation has generously responded, offering in money and work about £600.

All our members, without exception, have given something, so that we feel as having some claim upon the sympathy and the liberality of the Christian public.

We have survived the troubles and trials of centuries, and have no need as we glance over our past history to be ashamed.

We hope in this year of our Lord, 1880, to erect a new church in Anahilt worthy of our historic associations, and as wise custodians, pass on to future generations the glorious heritage handed down to us.

At least £1,000 additional must be obtained, but we trust God will raise up friends for us at home and abroad to assist us in the work.

Your contribution to this noble object will be very thankfully acknowledged by the

Rev. JORIAN MITCHELL, B.A., Anahilt, Hillsborough, Co. Down.

Mr. ROBERT MARTIN, Colra, Donagh, Lisburn.

WM. THOMSON, Esq., M.D., J.P., Anahilt, Hillsborough.

Mr. WM. KEATTIE, Edenticallo, Hillsborough.

Mr. THOMAS RUTHERFORD, Carricknahariff, Anahilt, Hillsborough.

Mr. JOHN IRVINE, Loughshogy, Anahilt, Hillsborough.

May, 1880.

Obviously Ellen responded to the call and forwarded a donation and in turn received a letter of thanks from Rev. Josias Mitchell which still exists (although is very frail and has been perforated by insects) and is copy typed below:

Anahilt, Hillsborough
14th January 1890

My Dear Madam

I beg to acknowledge receipt of your kind letter & to thank you most sincerely (on) behalf of the congregation of Anahilt for the enclosed subscription.

On Sabbath last I took the liberty of reading your letter publicly to the congregation & I need not say that many of our old people wept for joy. Some of them say they remember you & all of us were glad indeed to know that the late Rev R. McClure had a worthy representative still in the land of the living. Your subscription coming as it did - unsolicited & from the descendant of a former Minister of this our old Church is looked upon as an answer to our prayers & cannot fail to act as a great stimulus to ourselves, & I am requested to send you the most cordial greetings from the congregation & to express their joy hearing from you & receiving such a tangible token of your love. No doubt you would like to hear how we are getting along with our new church. Well we have arranged to have our opening services on the 6th April when a minister from Belfast is to preach.

We hope also to be able to open free of debt - at most there cannot be more than £100. For this end we have been working & praying. I have visited a great many places soliciting subscriptions & with great success - among others Glasgow & Edinburgh. Then we wrote to friends in other lands & have been hearing from a great many of them. Your subscription makes up £16-5-0 from the city of Sydney so you see Anahilt people are scattered everywhere. A Sydney gentleman & his wife were at the laying of the foundation stone, his name is Joseph Gibson 105 King St - a true "son of the Sod" who will I'm sure be glad to meet you & give you the modern history of the old place.

But having got the church up we cannot stop there...After a period of 170 years wear everything has got done out - so we must set about building a lecture hall & stables - but it will take time as our people are all farmers & the times are very trying on them - still a lecture hall must be built for our Sabbath School & recessional meeting our Sab. School is in a most flourishing state. We have in constant attendance about 230 scholars & of course they would improve the new appearance of the church. We met a great loss by the death of the gentleman who laid the foundation stone. He promised to clear off whatever balance might be against us after making an honest effort but God took him away very suddenly - in the midst of his usefulness. We only were the losers - he the gainer. He was a Mr. W K Brown a Cambric manufacturer in Belfast. We are at present worshipping in Bally Hill-Edvafounell school to which we added a temporary - I dare say this school wasn't in existence in your day.

I should also say that we are erecting a marble tablet in the porch of the new church to perpetuate the memories of all the members of the congregation - & an honorable list will it contain - the leading spirits of a lay history in the records of presbyterianism since 1662. I should like very much to secure a newspaper with the history of the congregation as gathered up by myself & stated at the laying of the foundation stone. I shall when in Belfast go to the paper office & find if they have any back numbers. I fear I shall not be able to secure any & there is no other print in which the full history appears. One could expect some of the people to have preserved copies of the paper - but no - they sent all off to their friends - I can at present only enclose a copy of our appeal. It is a mystery to me how you came across one of our circulars - Some friend must have had it - but a good friend saw it.

The old place at Edenvale is still flourishing but the property is in new hands - a Mr John Gibson possesses it now. The Kidd family has not a single representative living but one Lady - a Mrs McKee in Hillsborough. It's wonderful how families become extinct. We have still in our midst a grand daughter of Mrs McClure's. She was the daughter of the Rev Wm. Wright & was the wife of the Rev John Bell. Before her husbands death he retired from the active duties of the ministry & came to this district letting the very house in which Mr Wright your uncle lived. Mrs Bell has been a widow for 5 or 6 years - but she still lives in the same place. She is over 80 years old - but wonderfully fresh & lively. Of course she is not able to come to church on Sabbath - but I try to visit her frequently & always feel cheered by her company & conversation. She too will be delighted I am sure when I tell her of your letter. She has but one daughter alive, & though she is an invalid she is a source of comfort to her aged mother. I cannot just now think of anything more that would interest you, but shall be most happy indeed to write to you again at any time you wish to communicate with me - & answer any questions you may ask. I might tell you of this family history & that - but of the great many families seen in leading positions when you lived here we'd just say "They are gone". The Cowan family of Ballylin tafh Pack is gone - The Scott family of Spire Hill is gone & strangers fill their places. Anahilt would no doubt be a strange world to you now - but still we have seed time & harvest Summer & Winter as usual. The population is not 1/4 what it was in your time - All the small farmers are moving into Belfast - & the weaving industry is passing out of the country houses into the great steam looms in Belfast. Every year our numbers are getting less - & this is all the better - Farms are enlarging by those who leave us & those who remain improve their position. I am here nearly 3 years. My native county is Monaghan, but I like the change. I like to live in a godly Presbyterian atmosphere. Wishing you every comfort & blessing in your declining years & trusting that we shall all meet some time in a better land & again thanking you.

*I am
yours very affectionately
Jocios Mitchell*

Miss McClure

These documents are both very informative. While at that point the Kidd family had passed into history, to quote the Rev. Jocios Mitchell, "*It's wonderful how families become extinct*", a Wm. Beattie was living at Edenacullo – perhaps the son of the scribe, John Beatty, who wrote the letter for Robert Kidd to James McClure back in 1849.

The letter clearly confirms that Ellen McClure is a direct descendant of the Rev. Robert viz. "*Your subscription coming as it did - unsolicited & from the descendant of a former Minister of this our old Church*".

The letter also indicates that a (as yet unknown) daughter of the Rev. Robert married his assistant and successor, Rev. Wm. Wright M.D. This is further confirmed by Rev. Mitchell's comment, "*.... letting the very house in which Mr Wright your uncle (in-law!) lived*". Furthermore the 80 odd years old Mrs Bell he referred to must have been Ellen's 1st cousin.

The above contradicts the verbal rendition of the McClure history from **Anna Davies** recorded on reel-to-reel tape by her son in 1967. Her information on the McClure's follows:

A = Anna Davies, B = Bill Davies

B: While you were up at...living at Bundanoon you spoke quite a lot with your Aunt (great aunt Ellen McClure) about her family.

A: Yes...she had a big black case...ah box...a great big one...and she had all these things that she had kept from her life...and a...I used to ask her...she used to think I was an inquisitive child but she used to laugh at me and stroke me on the head. I'd sit at her feet and ask her all about her people in Ireland...and she told me everything...she said well you may as well know it as anyone else...and I never forgot it...and ah, I asked her what her home was like...she said our home was beautiful...she said I never knew what it was like to lift a teaspoon off the table...we had our maids...we had our men that worked the farm and she said the bedroom I'm sleeping in now wasn't as good as their servants slept in.

B: They were gentlemen farmers?

A: They were gentlemen farmers...and the Robertson's lived next door...and they were cousins.

B: 1st cousins?

A: 1st cousins...the Robertson's and the McClure's had their farms next door to one another...and she told me then about the Rev. Robert McClure...preaching in the little church...the little stone church.

B: That was her father's brother?

A: Yes...that was her father's brother...and he was asked by the Lord...Lord isn't it?

B: You can't remember his name?

A: Argyl wasn't it?

B: There is a Lord Argyl or some name like that...

A: or Duke of...

B: Duke of Argyl?

A: Yes or something...I forget his name now...and he...this Lord, asked him to come over and join his church and give up the Presbyterian church and take over the English church...as a minister...and he said no...he could never do

that...but he said if ever he wanted a sermon preached in his church he would do it...but he could never leave the old place (folks?).

B: He had his portrait painted there didn't he?

A: and this Lord would er...ah!...I forget his...

B: Duke of Argyl?

A: Duke of Argyl...he asked him to sit and have his portrait painted...and the Rev. Robert McClure had his portrait painted and it was hung in his art gallery.

B: It's still there didn't we hear?

A: It's still there!!...and I said isn't there anymore you can tell me about them?...yes she said I can tell you about them...she said your mother and ah your er...what was it?...your grandmother and your grandfather were cousins...he was a McClure...my brother, she said.

B: They married against the wishes...

A: ...and they married...he married his cousin next door...Robertson...

B: Against their wishes?

A: Yes...Elizabeth Robertson...against the Robertson's wishes...they didn't want it! But they married and they cut them out from...and the Robertson's wouldn't have nothing to do with them anymore...and they were wealthy people...so they sold their farm and they came out to Australia!

To put the above into context, the exchange between Anna and her great-aunt took place at Bundanoon, in 1894, at a boarding house run by Anna's parents. At the time Anna was 14 and Ellen approaching 70. Their stay at Bundanoon was short lived – Anna's parents, Anna, her sister Charlotte and brother Charles moved to this business in 1892, when Anna the youngest, was 13. At that time another of her sisters, Mary Jane Hoffmann was still living with Ellen McClure in Sydney, but sometime in 1894 both traveled to Bundanoon to join the family; apparently Ellen's health wasn't good and it was thought the change would do her some good. As it transpired Ellen suffered what was thought to be a stroke within 3 months of their arrival and died shortly thereafter.

The business was a disaster and it was probably Ellen's death that saw them pack up and return to Sydney – Rockdale – where within a few months Anna's father died in 1895.

Anna then had kept this information in her memory from the time she was 14 to when she eventually spoke for Bill's tape recorder at age 88 – if she got some things a little scrambled after 74 years who can blame her!! The Rev. Robert was born in 1732 – too early to be the brother of James McClure who was born in 1879 – it would be unusual indeed to find brothers separated in age by 47 years. He could have been James' father or James' uncle...but if, as is written in the above letter from Rev. Mitchell to Ellen McClure, Ellen was a descendant of Rev. Robert, then it follows that James was his son!!

The Duke of Argyl could exist but probably in Scotland (but the author hasn't checked!). However taking into account other available information the chief honcho concerned could have been the Marquis of Downshire*.

It is unlikely that Robert and Elizabeth had many assets (let alone a farm or farm lease to sell) when they left Ireland. He was not more than 23 years old at the time (about 1838). His father James surrendered his farm lease in 1834! Note that Anna never mentions her grandfather, James McClure by name! What did he do, or fail to do, that lead to his receiving such cursory treatment in the family mythology? The author did hear Anna once say Robert squandered it all, the farm etc. etc., but in the light of all the evidence she should have been maligning poor old James – it seems likely neither her mother nor great aunt ever spoke much about James and when they did she confused him with his son Robert who they could well have tried to also forget! It would seem they planted James at St. Peters at Richmond, NSW in 1855 and forgot about him (although his daughter Ellen made some reparation when she erected the family monument at Waverley cemetery in 1890 – for details ref. the notes on the children of James McClure).

* Taken from "Hillsborough – A Visitor's Guide" and "Hillsborough" by John Barry:

Without going into too much detail, the first member of the Hill family is reported to have arrived in the area in the late 16th century.

The 1st Marquis of Downshire was Wills Hill (1718 – 1793).

The 2nd Marquis was Arthur Hill (1753 – 1801). Also known as Lord Kilwarlin.

The 3rd Marquis was Arthur Blundell Sandys Hill (1788 – 1845).

Now Robert McClure was born around 1732 and was ordained in 1760. He died in 1823 aged 93. If it was one of the above who paid him the compliments referred to by Anna, the most likely would have been the 1st Marquis, who was only 14 years Robert's senior – the 2nd Marquis did not assume the title until 1793 and by then the Rev. Robert would have been 61 – hardly an up-and-coming youngster espousing fire and brimstone in what we might today expect of an 18th century protestant minister. A photo of the bust of Wills Hill follows and provides an idea of the appearance of men of substance in the mid 18th century.

Arthur Rees visited County Down in 1965 and attempted to find traces of the McClure's. While he found no descendants he did visit Hillsborough, where he took some interesting photos. These are reproduced after the letter he wrote about the visit to Thirroul at the time – see below:

9/9/65

Dear All at Thirroul,

Here I am back in London after a trip to North Wales, Ireland and Scotland.

I stayed with Joy's in-laws at Llanrug (sp?) just near Caernarvon. They gave me a wonderful time and the vales and mountains are beautiful. For the two weeks the weather was mainly fine and one day I walked up Mt. Snowden. It took me 6 hours to the top and back. A cog railway goes up costing 25/- return but I preferred to walk. I've still got a knot tied in my tongue and have run out of spit trying to pronounce the Welsh names.

I also went to the Shrewsbury flower show, which is a picturesque town across the border in England. It was 15/- to go in, but I was staggered by the display of flowers. I've never before seen it's equal. Masses of Roses, Carnations, Delphiniums, Glads, African Violets, Sweet Peas and many other species worth £1,000,000. The displays were by the leading nurserymen. Ray just wouldn't have believed his eyes. It was a gardeners dream.

I took the ferry from Hollyhead across to Dublin. Accommodation here was hard to get and prices high, so I only stayed one day and one night and caught the train to Belfast. Hillsborough is only 12 miles from Belfast so I took a bus out and the countryside is lovely. No trace of the McClure's there now. I found Trench Farm and its now called Trench House – nothing spectacular! I went back a second time to take some photos and the camera jammed so I'm afraid they will be no good. Weather lousy too.

I could find no record of the Rev. Robert McClure. The Presbyterian Church in Hillsborough only goes back to 1830 and he certainly did not preach there. It is a plain church of Georgian design and painted grey. The grounds are well kept but there is no churchyard with graves. The Anglican Church featured in the brochure (herewith) is very charming and the grounds really beautiful – I couldn't find any McClure's buried there.

I called on the Presbyterian Minister and he told me there is an older Presbyterian church 2 miles further on and it is possible the McClure's worshipped there. He is going to search the records to see if any Rev. R McClure existed there.

I went to Lisburn the next big town where all the records are kept and saw the births of several McClure's registered but they were all weavers and labourer's and the records only go back to 1860. It was a heart-breaking search as I had no idea of the dates or names of whom I was seeking.

From Belfast I caught the ship to Glasgow and stayed 3 days there and visited an old army pal. These Scots are very hospitable but they drink too solidly for me – pints of beer with whisky chasers. I went to the art gallery and was greatly taken with the enclosed painting by Salvador Dali. Most of his paintings have given me the horrors but this is a magnificent work of art. It cost the gallery £8,750 to buy then some fanatic hurled a big rock through it and one can see where it has been repaired. Show it to Doris and Jane then send it on to Bill. I have another book on Hillsborough to send to the girls.

From Glasgow I took a train to Oban (sp?) seeing a few of the locks and part of the Highlands. It is the most beautiful and spectacular of the Scottish scenery. I wish I could have gone further but the lousy weather spoils all enjoyment and its also getting cold so I took off for Edinburgh. Jean's cousin lives at Broxburn not far from the city and I stayed there for 5 days. They made me most welcome and even gave me a feed of Haggis. Every mouthful choked me but I smiled and said it's nice. The Edinburgh Festival was on but it rained most of the time so I didn't see the famous Tattoo at the castle. Seats were 15/- and I wasn't paying that to sit in the rain. It was miserable and wet the whole time I was there. However I managed to walk over the new Firth of Forth Bridge and back. It's 1½ miles long. The people I was staying with wanted me to stay longer but it costs a lot of money to trip around and I thought I'd better get back to London as I didn't know what Hilton was doing. When I reached the flat I found he had gone to the continent so I don't know when he'll be back. Don't know whether he's given up his job or not. Do hope Aunt Jennie is OK also Laura.

My love to all,

Yours,

Arthur

Prior to undertaking the visit in 1965, Arthur was given the information about Trench Farm by his aunt Anna. She said that this was the name of the farm told to her by her great aunt Ellen (even though she didn't mention this in the taped interview). It must be right because he found the farm about 1 – 2 miles walk along a country lane leading out of Hillsborough. He said it matched the description given him by Anna.



On left: The road from Hillsborough to Trench Farm

On right: Trench Farm (now Trench House)



Left and right: views of Trench Farm



Left and right: more views of trench farm

Arthur also advised that when he first visited Hillsborough, he managed to get in touch with an old Gent living there who was a past Land Agent of the Marquis of Downshire (probably the last!). He told Arthur that all of the old records of the land office had been transferred to Somerset House in London.

On reading the above letter from Arthur, Bill Davies (Anna's son and Arthur's cousin) wrote to Arthur and advised him that Robert McClure was minister at the Presbyterian Church at Anahilt, a small farming hamlet, just out of Hillsborough. Arthur also received a letter from the minister at the Presbyterian Church at Hillsborough:

*The Manse
Hillsborough
Co. Down
Northern Ireland*

2.9.1965

Dear Mr. Rees,

I made inquiries from our "Church House" and the information on their records is as follows:-

Rev. Robert McClure was ordained in Anahilt Presbyterian Church on 29th April 1760 (Anahilt is two miles from Hillsborough and is a country parish).

He died in his 91st year on the 11th May 1823 at Edenvale near Hillsborough.

We have no further record of his ministry except that he was Moderator of the Synod of Ulster 1779-80.

I trust that this information is of some interest to you.

Yours Sincerely

J B Irvine

Following receipt of the above information, Arthur returned to Northern Ireland and visited Anahilt and the grave of R. McClure.



Above: "New" Presbyterian Church at Anahilt – building commenced in 1889.

Below: Photo of marble plaque inside entrance, which lists ministers of the Anahilt congregation – past and present. Unfortunately the photo of the plaque didn't come out well so the content has been reproduced alongside:



A. D. 1889

This tablet was erected on the rebuilding of the church to perpetuate the memories of all the ministers who successively laboured in this portion of our Lord's vineyard since the organization of Anahilt congregation in 1662.

Rev.	John McBroom	1662 – 1682
	James Ramsay	???? – 1708
	Charles Seaton	1707 – 1737
	Samuel Simms	1739 – 1748
	John Semple	1749 – 1758
	Robert McClure	1760 – 1823
	William Wright MD	1802 – 1844
	Thomas Greer	1839 – 1888
	Josias Mitchell	1887 – 1931
	Hugh McKinty	1928 – 1950
	David Jarwin BA	1950 –

"The ??? of the just(?) is blessed" _Prov. X X (?)



Left: Another view of the "New" church.



Above: The Presbyterian Manse at Anahilt. Standing in front - presumably Rev. David and Mrs. Jarwin (Irvine??).

In the envelope with Arthur's photos was a piece of "headed" note paper bearing the address and phone number of the Anahilt Manse on which was written these notes:

*"Mr. Robert McClure
Ordained 29th April 1760
Died 11th May 1823
leaving a family"*

and,

*"Had considerable property in Belfast
New church 1889"*

Arthur also learned that Robert McClure was buried in the attached cemetery of an Irish Free Church (Protestant but different from Presbyterian and Anglican). Anyway he was kindly driven there by the minister at Anahilt. He thinks, but is not sure that the photo, below left, is of the church:



Above right: The "grave of four ancient ministers", one of which is R McC.

The flat slab marks the grave and the crack runs through the name Robert McClure. A closer shot follows:



Ken Stacey
26th March 2002