

The Clan MacAulay DNA Project – A Dalriadic past?

By Laurence Ross McAuley

Today nearly all will be familiar with the role that even the smallest piece of DNA evidence can play in the solving of the most serious of crimes. But how can this modern day facet of medical science aid the budding genealogist in ones quest to find family roots from generations long past?

Having come across the [online MacAulay DNA Project](http://www.familytreedna.com) at www.familytreedna.com, this very question would be answered when I recently received the intriguing results of my own personal DNA submission.

The DNA Project

As the basis of the company's Surname Project was to trace members of a family that share a common surname and since surnames are passed down from father to son like the Y-chromosome, the test was for males only (Y-DNA test). The simple test that consisted of two mouth swabs and its subsequent result was to be quite a revelation.

To explain in layman's terms, the Y-chromosome looks like a fuzzy lowercase 'y' with small strands of DNA material looking like hairs protruding out from the arms of the 'y'. Each 'hair' of DNA on the Y-chromosome always occurs at the same place so that locations (called short tandem repeat or STR markers) can be numbered like house numbers on a street. An extensive chart of numbers can then be formulated from this information. Therefore the more numbers that match between two people, the more closely the two people are related. Would my initial 12-marker level test provide enough data to identify which of the ancestral MacAulay clans I was descended from?

Scottish MacAulay's will know of the different ancient clan heartlands that make up our modern clan association but are probably not aware that two indigenous Irish clans also bore the surname McAuley. Therefore, although a proud Ulsterman, my burning question had always been was I of Scottish or Irish origin? Could my DNA possibly tell me?

Results and historical conclusions

I therefore awaited my test results with great interest. On arrival, the results not only placed me in one of the initial eight DNA MacAulay pattern groups, but to my great surprise linked me to two other McAuley's (both of Co Antrim descent) who shared my DNA baseline exactly at the 12-marker stage, namely Sean McAuley from Dorset, England and the Rev. John McAuley, a Catholic Priest from New York (with the ever expanding project, Canadian Terrence Macauley and Belfast born Barry Macaulay, also both of Co Antrim descent, have recently been tested and have matched us).

An interesting element to the results shows that although today we may have differing religions and surname spellings, we are intrinsically the same people with a common ancestor way back in the annals of time.

Sean, Terrence and I were to further match exactly at the more in depth 25-marker test and have therefore a more recent common ancestor (as you can see Sean and I do possess similar traits – as in our lack of hair!).



Laurence R. McAuley



Sean M. McAuley

The following table shows in percentage terms the likelihood as to when Sean and I shared our common ancestor.

<p style="text-align: center;"><i>A generation equals on average 25years. The father of the tested person equals one generation.</i></p>					
<p style="text-align: center;">In comparing 25 markers, the probability that Mr. Laurence R. McAuley and Sean M. McAuley shared a common ancestor within the last...</p>					
<p>4 generations is 61.17%</p>	<p>8 generations is 84.92%</p>	<p>12 generations is 94.15%</p>	<p>16 generations is 97.73%</p>	<p>20 generations is 99.12%</p>	<p>24 generations is 99.66%</p>

As I know from genealogical research that Sean does not feature in my family tree within 8 generations, I can therefore state with certainty that our common ancestor occurred over 200 years ago.

The tests also showed that our ‘Antrim’ DNA results were significantly different from any of the other Macaulay’s tested and that “they are remarkable in that they are a perfect match at the FTDNA-12 level with the Dalriadic baseline DNA signature. This DNA pattern is found in the chiefly families of some of the great clans of Scotland and Ireland, and is traced to Colla Uais who was High King of Ireland in c.325AD” as deduced by Mark E. MacDonald, the National Historian for Clan Donald and Director of the MacDonald DNA project, the renowned clan who also bear this DNA signature.

After seizing Ulster, Colla Uais subsequently took his followers to Scotland where his descendants, known as the sons of Erc (Angus, Fergus and Loarn) became the traditional founders of the Scottish line of the Dalriada kingdom in c.465AD (Dalriada or Dal Riata was the predecessor to the medieval kingdom of Scotland. It covered parts of the western seaboard of Scotland together with territory on the north coast of today’s Northern Ireland, territory that centuries later would also be ruled over by the MacDonald clan, the ‘Lords of the Isles’). The inhabitants of Dalriada were often referred to as Scots (from the Latin, scotti) that latter came to mean Gaelic speakers, whether Scottish or Irish. The kingdom reached its height c. 574-608AD.

This discovery was fascinating reading – it appears we McAuley’s have close ties to ancient royal blood! Results of the further 25-marker test were to show that the probability of a close relationship between Colla Uais and our McAuley’s is ‘very high’. It also gives an insight as to why a close connection prevails between the clans of McAuley and McDonnell (MacDonald) and their descendants now resident on Irish soil.

It is widely accepted that a branch of the Scottish Clan MacAulay from Ardencaple, Dumbartonshire had settled in the Parish of Layde (Glens of Antrim) early in the 16th century, pre Reformation times. Whether they were a direct branch of the Ardincaple clan, or ones who may have subsequently settled elsewhere, such as on the island of Islay, where the MacDonald’s had their seat of power, is unknown. With regard to the hierarchal clan system, it is likely they and other Scottish clansmen came under orders to assist the ruling McDonnell’s (direct cousins to the MacDonalds), who had gained a foothold in County Antrim (by the marriage of John Mor McDonnell of Kintyre to Margaret Bissett in 1399, sole heiress of the Glens of Antrim), in their skirmishes against the English crown and other local clans such as the MacQuillan’s and O’Neill’s. Many others would have come as Gallowglass soldiers (Highland fighting mercenaries). As a reward many were probably given the opportunity to farm small plots of land, land that their descendants still hold and farm to this day. It is to these Scottish settlers that many Antrim McAuley’s apparently owe their allegiance too.

The 1660’s surviving Hearth Money Rolls for the Layde Parish area lists the name of McAuley (in its various spellings) as being the most numerous of the area. Many other family names that are distinctly Scottish such as McDonnell, McAllister and McKillop etc are also listed. With the proximity of the Inner Hebrides and Argyllshire (the Mull of Kintyre is only about 13 miles across the Sea of Moyle and clearly visible on a good day) it is of no surprise that many clansfolk from this part of Scotland sailed over the short sea crossing to assist the McDonnell’s and their kinfolk.

Interestingly, in 1603 Randall McDonnell in order to develop his massive Antrim estate of over 300,000 acres started a mass influx of lowland Scots (mostly Presbyterians) to settle and work on his land. It is more than probable that a number of McAuley’s also landed on Antrim’s shores by these means.

To conclude therefore, it would appear that our McAuley ancestors left Ireland many centuries ago for a land that was in time to be known as Scotland, before beginning to return to settle in the north east corner of Ireland around 500 years ago. Their DNA, built up through these passing generations, was to be a fusion of Dalriadic blood!

With each additional submission to the MacAulay DNA Project comes a clearer picture and understanding as to the make up of our ancient clan groupings. The project needs more clansmen to submit their DNA. Unfortunately, to-date no specific Ardincaple DNA pattern has been identified or is it likely to be, as no-one has come forward with a documented history linking him or her with this family seat. This group, if ever found, would prove or disprove the historical link between Irish McAuley's and there presumed cousins from that part of Scotland.



Gathering August 2011, Layde Cemetery, Cushendall (ancient MacAulay burial site) – Barry Macaulay, Laurence McAuley, Matthew McCauley and Sean McAuley all of Co Antrim descent and DNA matched!

Perhaps this article may have stirred the reader's interest in their own MacAulay roots and the chance to find out more about what particular clan grouping they may belong to? The [MacAulay DNA Project](#) is open to MacAulays of Scottish and Irish descent, including all the spelling variations of the name. Participants need not be members of the Clan Association to use the group discount offered.