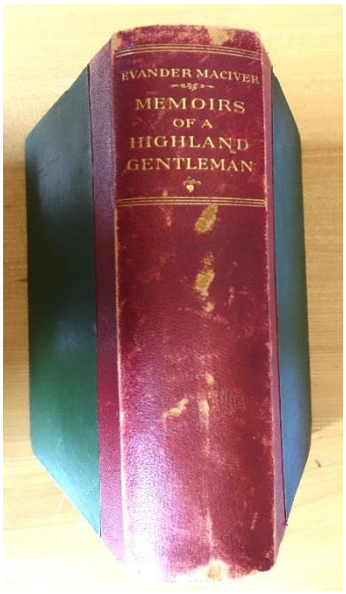
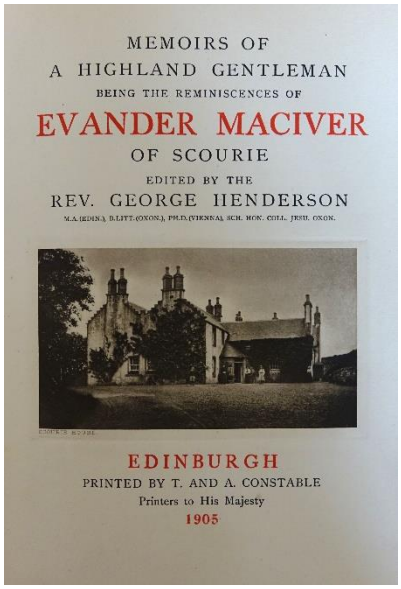
Evander Maciver and Duncan Davidson of Tulloch.

The detailed history of our ancestral families is often lost in the mists of time. Occasionally, we discover the published observations made by others who worked alongside some of our ancestors. One such example is included in the *Memoirs of a Highland Gentleman; Being the Reminiscences of Evander Maciver of Scourie.* This was edited by Rev. George Henderson and originally published in 1905, two years after Evander's death in 1903. Original copies of this book rarely appear in the second-hand book market. However, there are modern OCR reproduction copies, the quality of which is sometimes a little patchy.



Evander MacIver aged 90



This book provides valuable insights into aspects of life in the Highlands as observed by Evander McIver through his extraordinary career as a factor for ten years to **Duncan Davidson, the famous 4th Laird of Tulloch (from 1834-1844)** and subsequently, for 50 years, for the Dukes of Sutherland, as well as, in the late 1890s, the Agent for the Duke of Westminster for his estates in the North West Highlands.

Not only did Evander work for and with these great landowners, he also met a vast network of other local families, as well as many English visitors. There are also many references to relatives, who were resident in different parts of the Highlands and elsewhere in Scotland and England. He seems to know everyone. Sometimes his name dropping of the great and the good is rather over the top, but, in reality, his long career in the Highlands probably meant that he was bound to have met such a wide range of folk. Business in the Highlands at the time was, and to some extent today, still is very much dependent upon one's ability to get on with a wide range of different people.

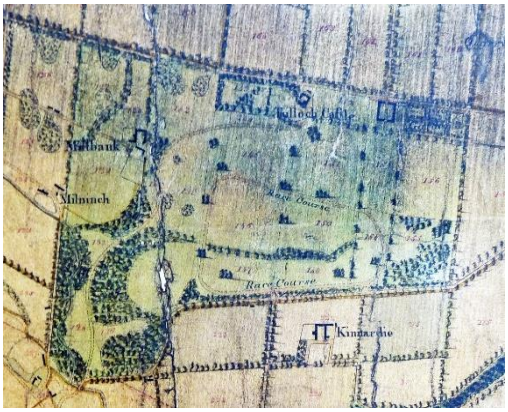
Evander Maciver was born in 1811 at Gress, in the parish of Stornoway, on the Isle of Lewis in the Outer Hebrides. His father was Lewis Maciver, tacksman of the farm of Gress and also a prominent merchant, fish-curer, shipowner and general dealer in Stornoway. His mother was Catherine Robertson, the daughter of the Collector of Customs at Stornoway. His *Memoirs* detail his childhood, education on the Hebridean Islands and in Edinburgh, early farm experience in Lanarkshire and Dumfries and time spent learning about factoring and estate accounts in the factor's office for the estate of the Duke of Buccleuch in Dalkeith. He was also a Gaelic speaker, which must have helped him throughout his long career in the Highlands, in particular in those areas where the majority spoke Gaelic

In the autumn of 1834, during conversations between his father and John Bowie, a prominent Edinburgh lawyer and agent for various Highland estates, including Davidson of Tulloch estates, it was indicated was that Bowie was looking for a new Factor for the Tulloch estates. Bowie was aware of the years of mismanagement at Tulloch. Evander's father recommended his son for the position of factor for Tulloch. His father's business connections clearly gave Evander early advantages. Eventually Evander received a letter informing him that he should visit **Duncan Davidson at Tulloch.** Duncan had inherited Tulloch Castle and its estates on the death of his father in 1827.

Over the course of three days of meetings with Duncan, Evander learnt that Duncan was quite willing that he should be appointed as Factor, subject to him first meeting with John Bowie in Edinburgh and then going on to London to meet Duncan's younger brother Henry Davidson, a prominent London merchant. (We now know that Henry was attempting to control the spend thrift ways of his older brother.) Evander appears to have been at ease with Duncan. Although Duncan was only 10 years older than Evander, one suspects the younger man must have been rather nervous during these early meetings at Tulloch. He was certainly stepping into a world somewhat different from his early years out in the Hebrides.

The journey to Edinburgh was made by taking a steamer from Invergordon (a short drive from Tulloch). The steamer took Evander to Leith, the main port for Edinburgh, where he met with Tulloch's Agent, John Bowie, and received letters of introduction for him to take to Henry Davidson in London and some cash for his onward travelling expenses. His journey to London should probably have been by steamer but he was anxious to experience one of the new railways. Instead, he travelled by coach to Glasgow and then to Liverpool by steamer where he met relatives. From Liverpool, he had his first experience of travelling by train to Manchester (disappointed by the brevity of the journey) and then an 18 hour journey by coach to London, his first visit to the great metropolis. The memories of the sights and sounds of this first-time visit clearly lasted a lifetime as they feature feature prominently in his *Memoirs.*

Evander met Henry Davidson at his business premises in Lime Street in the City of London where Henry explained “a good deal about his brother and the estates and their present management”. He was also introduced to Mr Barkly, Davidson’s partner in the firm Davidson, Barkly & Co in Leadenhall Street, a major West India merchanting business, and also to Lord Reay, who acted with Henry Davidson as a Trustee for the Tulloch Estates. Evander remained in London for about 10 days meeting friends, relatives and taking in the sights. He then returned to Dingwall where he started his career as Factor for the Tulloch estates in November 1834 at £200 per year.



Part of a very large 1827 Map of the Tulloch Castle Estate

Portrait of Duncan Davidson as young man

This new career started with difficulty. On calling on Dr James Wishart, who was his predecessor, he was treated to ”a most rude and ungracious reception”. Later, he goes on to describe how he witnessed Dr Wishart undertaking rent collection at Aultbea on the west coast, where the good Doctor was unable to resolve angry altercations about a rent dispute. Evander volunteered to step in and successfully resolved the situation with the rent collection, then being completed more rapidly and agreeably.

During the Spring of 1835, as Evander was finding his feet as Factor at Tulloch, it became clear that although Dr Wishart had been Factor for several years, he had never rendered any proper accounts. An accountant, Archibald Marshall, was brought in from Edinburgh to sort out the situation. Apparently, Dr Wishart had kept no regular cash-book, rental books, or ledgers but had a bag full of letters, receipts, and accounts all jumbled up together in a confused mess. Evander admits he learnt much working alongside Archibald Marshall. He also indicates that Dr Wishart had lent money to Duncan Davidson. Such practice was not uncommon.

Evander’s *Memoirs* provide a snapshot of the extent of the Davidson estates in the mid 1830s and in addition, to the substantial lands adjacent to the Castle (we have a copy of map dated 1827 showing the extent of this estate). There was a small estate at Braelangwell on the Black Isle (“very troublesome and unprofitable”); a farm at Mountrich, next to Tulloch Castle (“fine rich soil producing heavy corn crops”) and a fine estate at Fodderty (located just west of Tulloch). Beyond Contin, over on the west coast of Ross-shire there were large extensive hill-farm including the Balone and Leckholm estates at Loch Broom and Strath-na-shalag and Fisherfield and the Gruinard estate in Gairloch. In addition, in 1838, Duncan acquired the Hilton estate near Strathpeffer.

Interestingly, there is no mention of any land holding in Caithness. We know from other sources that Duncan Davidson was listed as one of the electors for the Caithness parliamentary elections prior to the Reform Act of 1832 and was also listed as result of the Reform Act of 1835. Duncan must have owned property in Caithness to have been on the electoral roll. This was probably inherited property.

There is also no mention of the major fires at Tulloch Castle during the late 1830s & early 1840s of which Evander must have been aware. The Castle remained a partial ruin until Duncan’s grandson restored the damaged east wing in the early 1890s.

Evander provides details of the sale of some of the Tulloch estates after he ceased to act as Factor in 1845. These sales continued under Duncan Davidson and his son Duncan H.C.R Davidson, until his grandson, also named Duncan Davidson, managed to stabilise the estate finances and restored Tulloch Castle in the early 1890s.

Evander describes the great difficulty of travelling to and from the different estates on the west coast as there was no road on which a vehicle could be driven (we are still in the era of horse driven vehicles) from Garve to Loch Broom or from Kinlochewe along Loch Maree to Aultbea or along the coast from Little Gruinard to Ullapool. He made his journeys on a strong Highland pony, carrying saddle bags with some clothing and small official books and papers and he remembers these trips being laborious.

He describes his position as “very agreeable, Tulloch (Duncan Davidson) being a perfect gentleman manner, kind, courteous, and reasonable with an amount of acuteness and good judgement in the conduct of business that greatly aided me in the beginning of my official career. But, he had one most unfortunate failing. He was extravagant, and spent much more than his income, and thus in money matters, I was often plunged into difficulties how to supply his demands”. As we now know this situation became far more serious in the later 1840s after Evander had left his service as Factor to the Tulloch estates. In c.1849, Duncan Davidson was forced to leave the country with his family, taking up residence in Belgium for a decade, to escape his creditors. He only returned to Scotland in the late 1850s when his eldest son was of an age so that the legal entail on the estates could be broken, allowing land to be sold to pay off the creditors.

Evander’s *Cash Book* covering his time as Factor for Duncan Davidson has survived and is held by the Highland Archives in Inverness. This meticulously records every receipt and payment and provides extraordinary detail how Evander was successfully managing the estates from a financial point of view, as well as trying to cope with Duncan’s extravagance. The late Ian Davidson, former CDA historian, included a full review of the contents of this cash book in *The Davidsons* book published by the CDA in 2006. The detail provides extraordinary insight into the business of running Highland estates at this time. The *Cash Book* also highlights

Duncan's responsibilities for the salaries and house rents of the schoolmasters located across the estates, the stipends of the ministers and the maintenance of the manses, the road taxes, the property taxes, the legal fees as well as the wages of the estate workers and Duncan's own large retinue of servants, horses, carriages and his expensive garden.

It is impossible to tell from the *Memoirs* and the *Cash Book* what others, particularly the crofters and tenants, thought about Evander or even Duncan. There is no mention of any criticism of his actions but one suspects he must have been quite a hard businessman who put his Laird's interests first with possibly little interest in the difficulties of others. Life in the Highlands as a tenant/crofter was never easy and historical relationships with the factors who were not only rent collectors, but also responsible for any reorganisation of farms, crofts and other estate businesses would have been difficult at times/

In 1836, Evander first met his future wife Mary Macdonald but because of opposition from his father and friends, it took until November 1838 before they were married.

Undated photo Evander MacIver with his wife Mary Macdonald

The *Memoirs* also highlights the legal nature of some of his work and how small disputes sometimes ended up as expensive litigious affairs. In 1841, Duncan Davidson lost a major case in the Court of Session brought by one Murdo Mackenzie ("a very singular man with whom the love of law amounted to mania") over Murdo's claim to salmon fishing rights in the Bay of Gruinard out on the west coast. His detailed descriptions of other third-party disputes involving Murdo Mackenzie provide insight to the litigious nature of land disputes, fishing rights and inheritance in the Highlands at the time.

At some point in 1838, he was recommended to be appointed as Bank Agent for the recently formed Caledonian Banking Company in Dingwall in addition to his duties on the Tulloch estate. Clearly his reputation since working for Duncan Davidson was bringing him to the attention of the wider business network.

A few years later, as a result of Duncan Davidson's continued extravagant expenditure, his dual role as Bank Agent and Factor forced Evander to come to the conclusion that he would have to resign as Factor. He indicates that he also had difficulties with James Melville who, was the new Agent and Managing Trustee of the Tulloch estates. In addition, the bank was displeased with his advances to Duncan Davidson. In 1845, he gave up being Factor for the Tulloch estates. He and Duncan parted as good friends. He also gave upp his role as Bank Agent in Dingwall for a new role on the Sutherland estates, in particular the remote parishes of Assynt, Edderachillis and Durness. This was a very different role from that which he had enjoyed with the Tulloch estates. Although this part of his *Memoirs* is not relevant for this article, Evander now faced first the first time the problems of the potato disease and the difficult relationship between laird and tenants because of the earlier forced clearances and large-scale emigration.

In summary, the section of *Memoirs* which covers Evander's time working for Duncan Davidson provides us with his experiences and observations in dealing with Duncan, the management of the Tulloch estates and the manner of business dealings in the Highlands during the 1830s and early 1840s.This first successful decade of Evander's long career starting at the age of 23, portrays both himself and Duncan in a very positive light. Up to the point of his starting work for Duncan, he had had no formal training or experience in estate management. It is also doubtful that Duncan had had any training either. One should also be mindful that Evander was writing, many years after the events which he records. Such hindsight may not always reflect the reality of events which took place over 70 years before