

FROM MULL TO VICTORIA

The Real Places, People and History
Behind William A Allan's Novels

*A reader's guide to Mull, memory, exile
and one family's journey across the world*

BY WILLIAM A ALLAN



ISLE OF MULL, SCOTLAND

Welcome from the Author

Thank you for joining me on this journey.

My novels are rooted in the landscapes, history and family memories of the Scottish Highlands, especially the Isle of Mull, where land, language, kinship and belonging shaped generations of ordinary people before many were forced to leave.

Echoes of the Clearances and Dispossessed are works of historical fiction, but they are drawn from real places, real events and real family memory. The MacGillivrays, Campbells, McLeans and MacDonalds who move through these stories are part of a wider human history: one shaped by eviction, endurance, migration, love, loss and the long search for belonging.

This guide is an invitation to step behind the novels and into the world that shaped them: Burg, Shiaba, Killunaig, Pennyghael, Iona, Knocknafenaig, Saorphin, the emigrant ship Hornet, and the difficult new beginning of colonial Victoria.



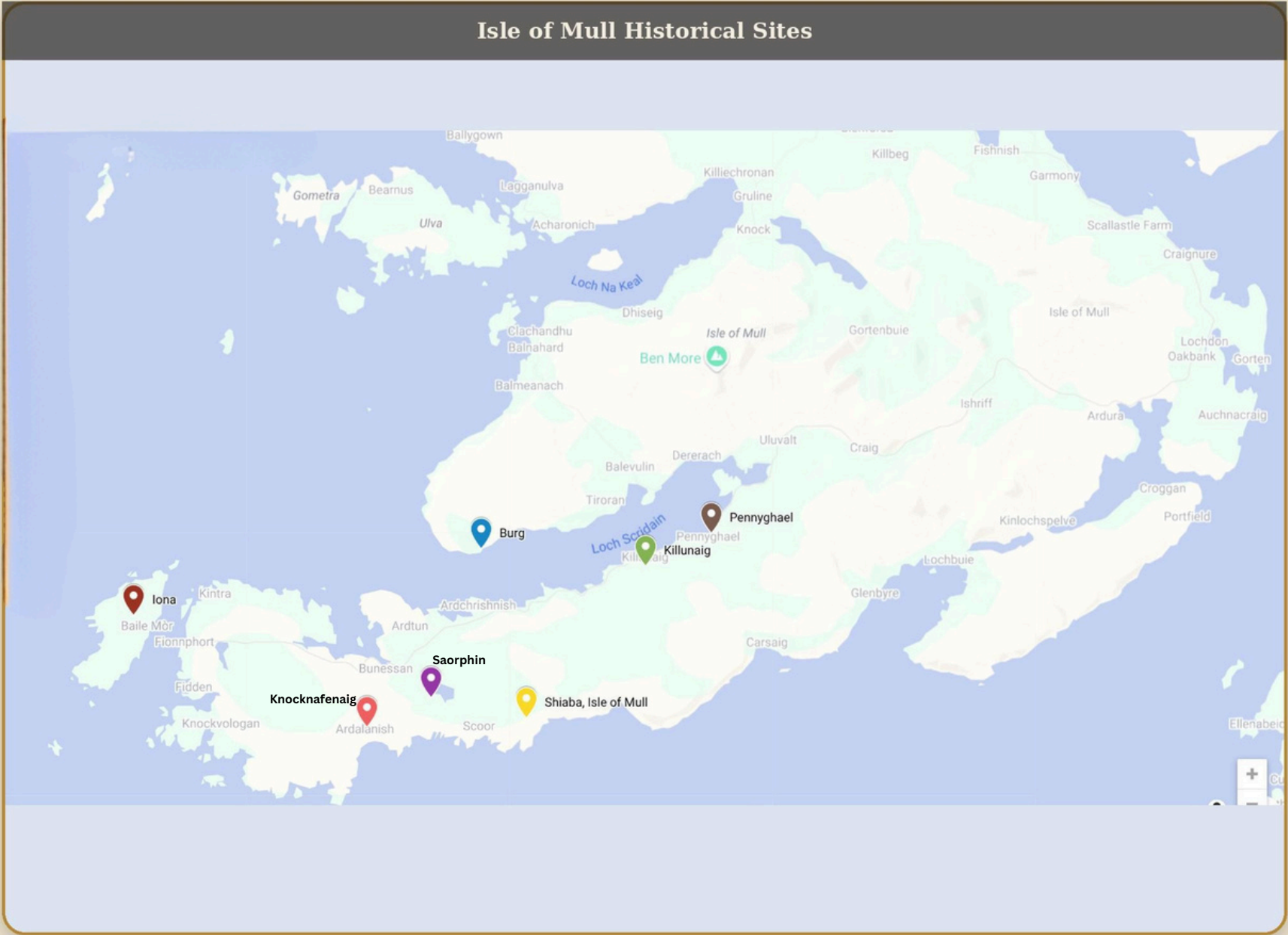
William A Allan - author of historically grounded Scottish-Australian fiction shaped by genealogy, memory, exile and belonging.

*These stories matter because they are not only about the past.
They are about memory, identity, exile, family
and the deep human need to belong somewhere.*



A Journey Through Mull

The real Mull places behind the novels — Burg, Shiaba, Killunaig, Pennyghael, Iona, Knocknafenaig and Saorphin.



The real Mull places behind the novels — shown for reader orientation.
Marker colours follow the author's historical-sites map.

Echoes of the Clearances: Burg → Shiaba → Killunaig → Pennyghael → Iona

Dispossessed: Knocknafenaig and Saorphin → Glasgow → Liverpool → the Hornet → Victoria

Map based on William A Allan's research locations across Mull.



Mull:

More Than a Setting

The Isle of Mull is more than a setting in my novels. It is the emotional heart of the story.

Mull is a place of sea, stone, weather, memory and silence. Its landscapes are beautiful, but they also hold the traces of loss. Across the island, old townships, ruined settlements and abandoned crofting places remind us that people once lived, worked, worshipped, loved and grieved there.

For generations, families lived close to the land. Their lives were shaped by cattle, kelp, fishing, crops, seasons, kinship and the Gaelic language. The land was not simply property. It was memory. It was survival. It was identity.

When families were removed from places such as these, they did not lose only a roof or a field. They lost the familiar shape of their lives.

Yet Mull is not only a place of grief. It is also a place of endurance. Families continued to love, marry, raise children, work the land, keep faith, share stories and carry memory forward.

That is the world behind
Echoes of the Clearances.

“

The land was not simply property. It was memory, survival and identity.

”



Mull — not merely a place, but a keeper of memory.



Echoes:

What the Novel Carries

At the heart of Echoes of the Clearances is a simple but painful question:

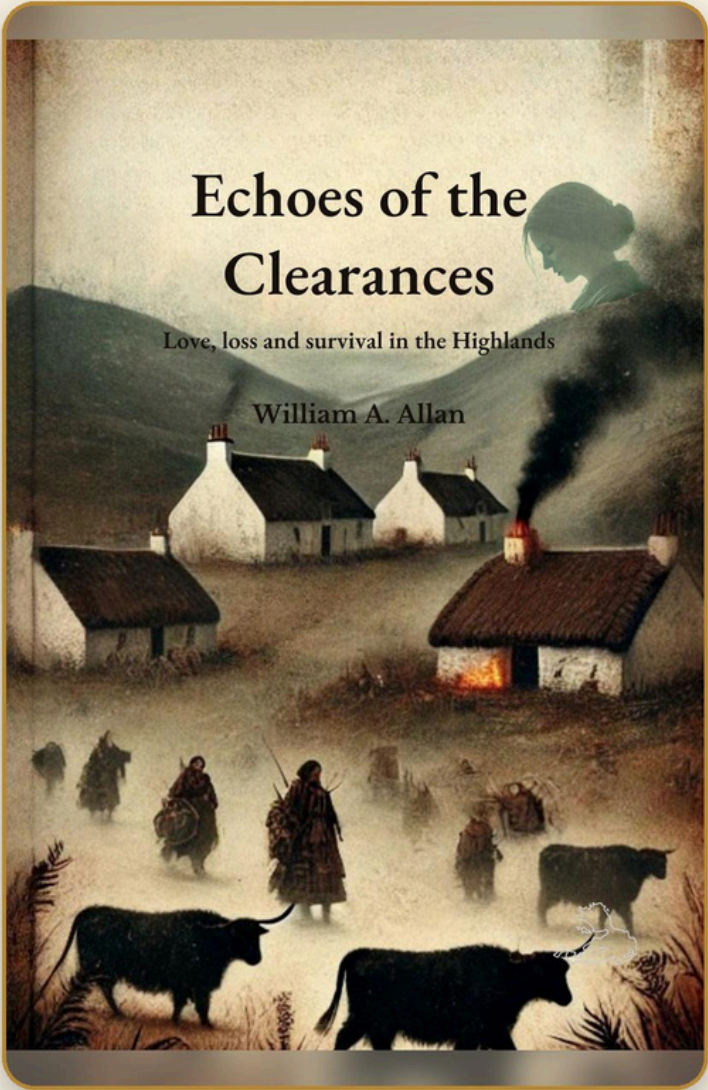
What remains when a family is forced from the land that made them?

The novel follows the MacGillivrays through a real and deeply personal Mull landscape: Burg, Shiaba, Killunaig, Pennyghael and Iona. These are not decorative settings. They are the emotional map of the story.

- At Burg**, the wound begins.
- At Shiaba**, displacement deepens.
- At Killunaig**, love takes root.
- At Pennyghael**, birth and marriage carry the family forward.
- At Iona**, memory becomes home again.

The moral heart of Echoes of the Clearances is not bitterness, although there is much to grieve. It is not nostalgia, although Mull is loved deeply. It is the belief that ordinary lives matter, that families carry history in their names and stories, and that a place can hold memory long after the people who lived there are gone.

The Clearances tried to remove people from the land.
But they could not remove the echo.



*Echoes of the Clearances —
a story of family, eviction, endurance and memory.*

*The Clearances tried to remove people from the land.
But they could not remove the echo.*



Burg:

Where the Wound Begins



Ardmeanach peninsula across Loch Scridain from Killunaig - the landscape of Burg, memory and removal.

Burg lies on the Ardmeanach peninsula, one of the most dramatic and exposed landscapes on Mull.

In *Echoes of the Clearances*, Burg is the first great wound. It is where John and his siblings are forced from the place that has shaped them. The loss is not simply of shelter. It is the loss of inheritance, labour, neighbourliness, security and the right to imagine a future on familiar ground.

A photograph of Ardmeanach belongs here because readers need to feel that this was not an abstract historical event. It happened somewhere. It happened to people. It happened to a family.

The beauty of Burg is part of its sorrow. The same land that holds the memory of family, labour and childhood also holds the memory of removal. That is why Burg matters so deeply in the emotional journey of the novel.

It happened somewhere. It happened to people. It happened to a family.



Shiaba:

The Haunted Place



Shiaba - where the family tried to begin again, before facing another eviction notice served by their own cousin.

Shiaba is one of the most powerful Clearance landscapes on Mull.

Its abandoned settlement remains speak quietly but forcefully of a community that once lived there. Roofless walls, empty hearths and broken boundaries still suggest the shape of lives interrupted.

For readers of *Echoes of the Clearances*, Shiaba represents both survival and further loss.

John, Archie and Mary move there after Burg, hoping to make a life among the ruins, but even there they are not safe from eviction.

The most painful moral moment in this part of the story is that the eviction notice is served by William Campbell, their own cousin. This is where the novel moves beyond a simple story of landlord and tenant. It becomes a story of conscience, pressure and family division.

William is not the great architect of the Clearances, but he becomes one of the hands through which the system works.

Sometimes the machinery of eviction moved through people who shared blood, language and memory.



Killunaig:

Where Love Takes Root



Ben More across Loch Scridain from Killunaig graveyard - a landscape of love, memory and renewal.

After Burg and Shiaba, Killunaig offers the family something different.

It is not an escape from hardship, but it is a place where the story begins to breathe again. Here, John finds love with Annie McLean. Here, family life begins to renew itself. Here, the future becomes possible again, even if it remains fragile.

Killunaig matters because Echoes of the Clearances is not only a novel of suffering. It is a novel of endurance.

The family survives not only by resisting, but by continuing to live: working, loving, marrying, caring for one another, and bringing children into the world.

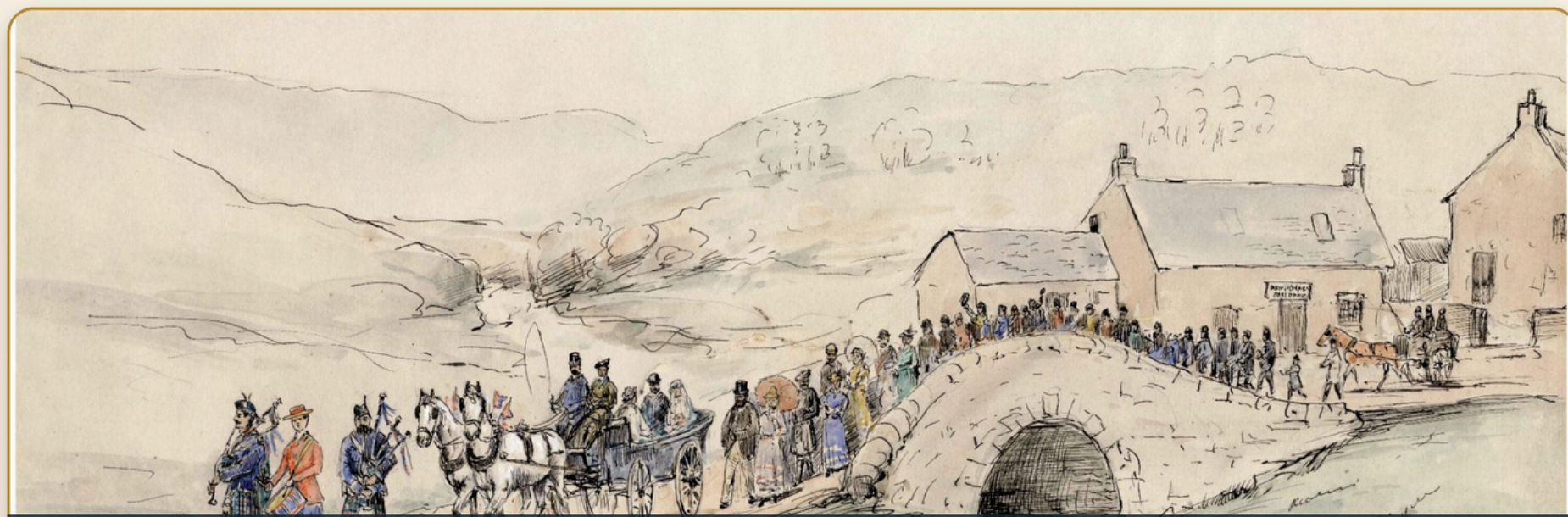
In that sense, Killunaig is one of the emotional turning points of the story. It reminds us that survival is not always loud. Sometimes it is quiet and domestic. Sometimes it is a shared meal, a repaired wall, a newborn child, or the first fragile thought that life might still hold tenderness.

*Survival is not only resistance.
Sometimes survival is allowing love to take root in damaged ground.*



Pennyghael:

Birth, Marriage and Continuity



Donald and Mary's wedding procession at Pennyghael. Painting by Chris Meadows; current owner Jan Weiss.

Pennyghael holds a special place in my family story.

Donald, my great-grandfather, was born here after his parents, John and Annie, had already endured eviction, movement and uncertainty elsewhere on Mull. His birth at Pennyghael marks the continuation of the family line after the losses of Burg and Shiaba, and after the fragile rebuilding of life at Killunaig.



Pennyghael bridge today — the Post Office, Smithy and Old Schoolhouse still mark the scene.

But Pennyghael's place in the story did not end with Donald's birth.

Years later, Donald married Mary MacDonald, the Pennyghael postmistress. They were married in the old schoolhouse in Pennyghael, a building that still stands today.

The painting of their wedding procession carries that memory into image: the bridge, the gathering, the music, the white horses provided by the Squire of Bentley, and the ordinary village buildings that became part of the family story.

Pennyghael becomes more than a point on a map. It becomes a birthplace, a marriage place, and a surviving witness to the lives that passed through it.

Pennyghael represents continuity — birth, marriage, family and the carrying forward of memory.



Iona:

Memory, Faith and Renewal



Cnocoran, Iona — the farmhouse built by John and Annie, still standing today.

Iona carries a different kind of weight.

For centuries, Iona has been associated with faith, pilgrimage, learning, burial and spiritual memory. Its presence off the coast of Mull gives the surrounding landscape a sense of deep time.

In the family story behind *Echoes of the Clearances*, Iona becomes the place where Donald grows up, and where John and Annie build Cnocoran, the farmhouse that still stands today.

After so much movement, Cnocoran matters.

It is not merely a building. It is evidence of endurance. It is a sign that, after eviction and uncertainty, the family was still able to create a home.



Iona graveyard — where family memory rests beside sea, stone and faith.

Its survival into the present gives the story a living connection between past and present.

Iona holds faith, burial, childhood, labour and renewal together. It is both ending and beginning, memory and future, grief and peace.

Sometimes family history still stands in stone.



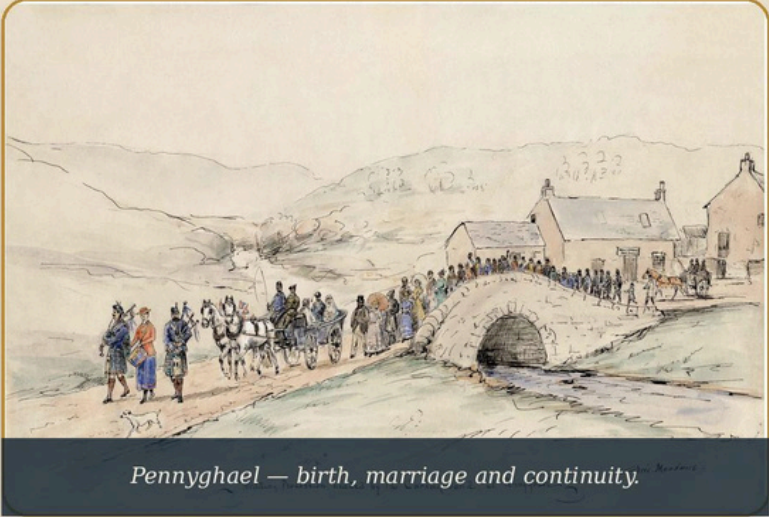
The Family Places

Still Standing

One of the most powerful things about this story is that some of its places can still be seen. The ruins of Shiaba still speak of a cleared community. The old schoolhouse at Pennyghael still links the present to Donald and Mary’s marriage. Cnocoran still stands on Iona, a farmhouse built by John and Annie after the losses and movements that shaped their lives.



Cnocoran, Iona — evidence of endurance.



Pennyghael — birth, marriage and continuity.



Shiaba — the story survives in stone, landscape and memory.

The grave of John and Annie can be found in Iona Abbey graveyard, another quiet reminder that family history does not belong only to paper records. It belongs to stone, field, shoreline, weather and memory.

These places remind us that family history is not only preserved in certificates, dates and names. It can also survive in buildings, roads, crofts, graveyards and landscapes that still carry the echo of those who came before.

That is part of what historical fiction can do. It can stand in the space between record and imagination. It can honour what is known, while giving emotional life to the silence between the facts.

Family history is not only found in records. Sometimes it still stands before us.



From Echoes

to Dispossessed

Dispossessed grows naturally from the same author world as Echoes of the Clearances.

Where Echoes follows the MacGillivrays through the landscapes of Mull, Dispossessed follows Margaret and Martin McGilvray from Mull to colonial Victoria.

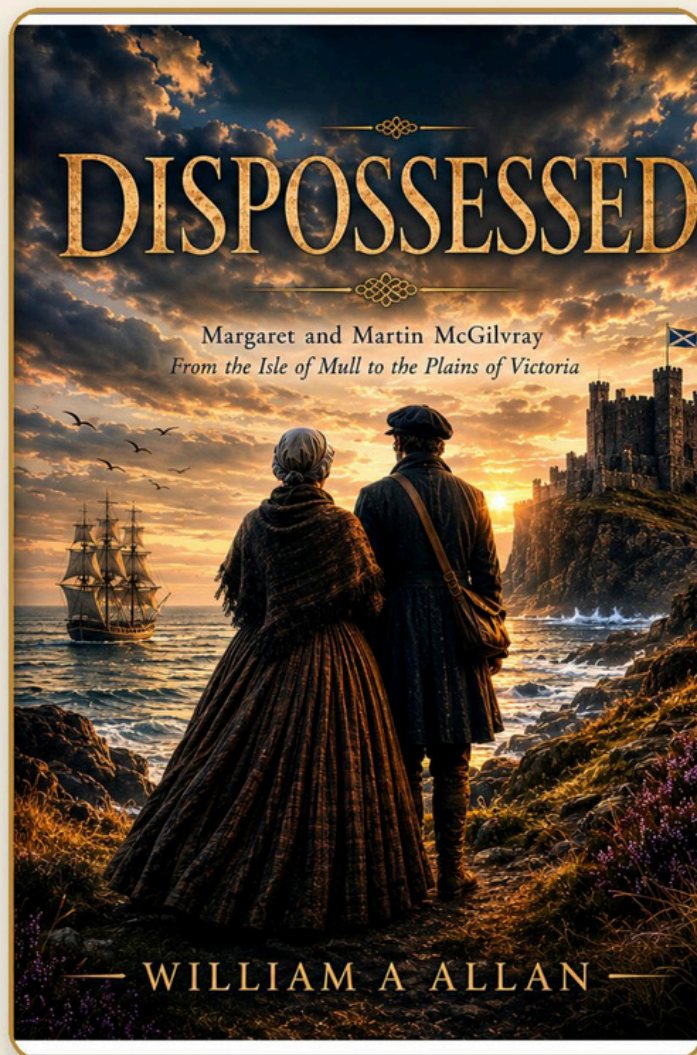
The emotional connection between the two books is clear.

- Both are about families shaped by land and loss.
- Both are about people forced to make impossible decisions.
- Both are about the search for belonging after displacement.

But Dispossessed carries the story into a new moral landscape. Margaret and Martin leave Mull carrying the wounds of Highland exile. Yet when they arrive in Victoria, they enter a land that is not empty, and never was.

They seek security and belonging on Country that already belongs to First Nations people whose own lives, culture and connection to land have been violently disrupted by colonisation.

That is the difficult truth at the heart of Dispossessed.



*Dispossessed - from the Isle of Mull
to the plains of Victoria.*

It does not cancel the suffering of the Highland poor.

It deepens the story.

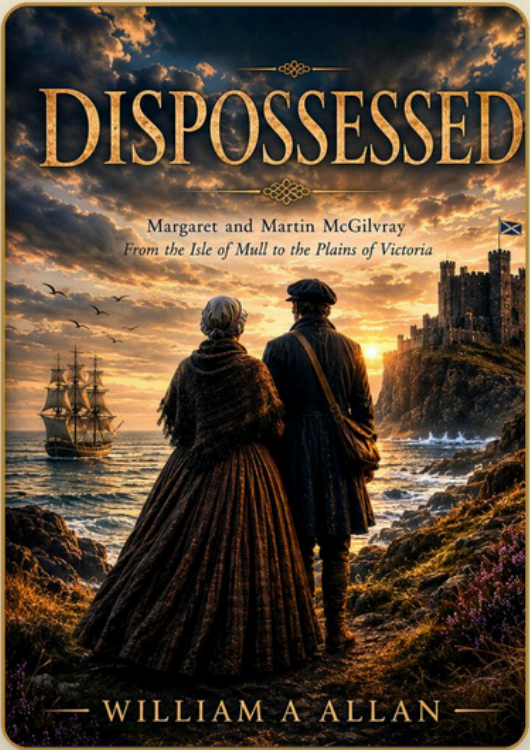
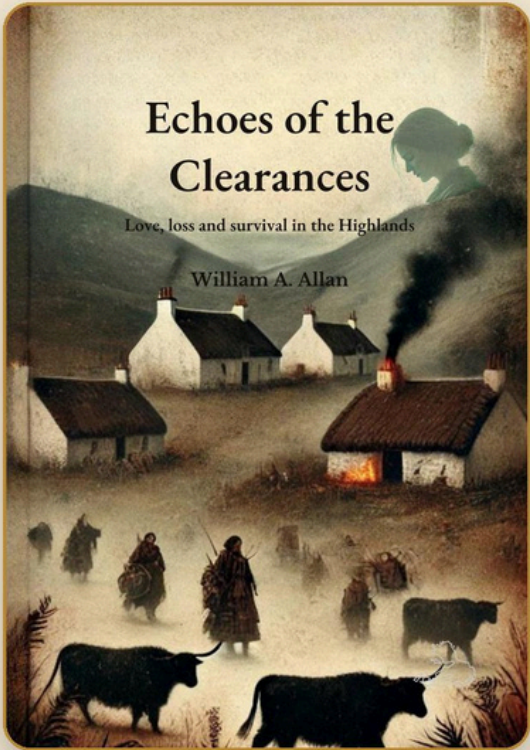
It asks us to hold more than one truth at once.

They left one wounded landscape and entered another.



The Question

That Connects Both Books



Two novels. One connected journey through land, memory, exile and belonging.

The question that connects *Echoes of the Clearances* and *Dispossessed* is not simply:

Where did the family go?

But

What did displacement do to them, and what did they carry forward?

In *Echoes*, the family moves across Mull: Burg, Shiaba, Killunaig, Pennyghael and Iona.

In *Dispossessed*, Margaret and Martin move from Mull to Victoria: Knocknafenaig, Saorphin, Glasgow, Liverpool, the Hornet, Geelong, Barrabool, Alma, Maryborough and Wareek.

Across both novels, the pattern repeats:

- Home is threatened.
- The land remembers.
- Men struggle with pride, work, duty and grief.
- Families are forced to choose.
- Women hold families together.
- Children inherit both loss and resilience.

The moral question deepens as the journey moves from Scotland to Australia. In Scotland, the family suffers from the loss of land. In Victoria, they seek land of their own, but that land carries another people’s older and deeper story. That is why these novels belong together. They are not only stories of Highland Clearance. They are stories of memory, land and belonging.

What did displacement do to them, and what did they carry forward?



Continue

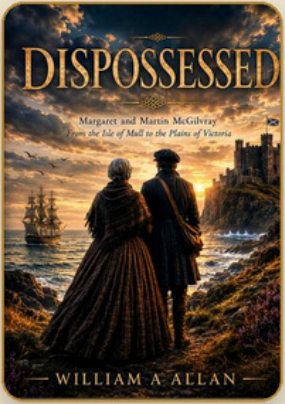
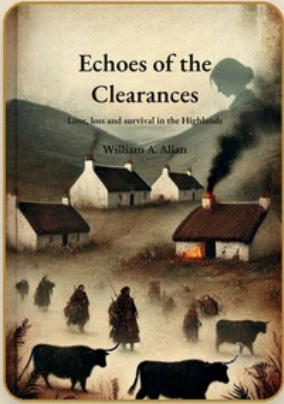
the Journey

If this guide has stirred your interest in the real places, people and history behind my novels, I invite you to continue the journey.

Read *Echoes of the Clearances* to enter the world of the Highland Clearances and the families whose lives were changed forever by exile from the land.

Look out for *Dispossessed*, the story of Margaret and Martin McGilvray, whose journey from Mull to Victoria carries the ache of one homeland into the moral complexity of another.

This reader list is where I share the stories behind the stories: author updates, book news, historical reflections, family discoveries, research notes, photographs, talks and behind-the-scenes glimpses into the making of my novels.



Stories from Mull, carried through memory, fiction and family history.

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*From Mull to Victoria.
From memory to fiction.
From the past into the present.*



William A Allan

Historical fiction shaped by ancestry, exile and belonging



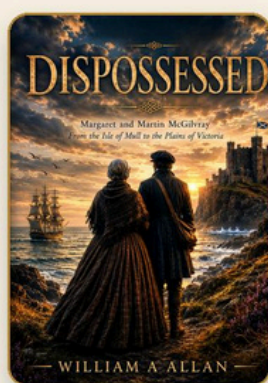
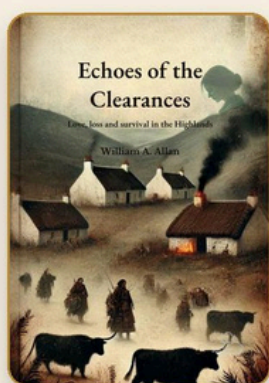
William A Allan writes historically grounded fiction shaped by genealogy, memory, exile and belonging. His novels explore the human stories behind the Highland Clearances, migration and the long consequences of displacement across generations.

His work follows ancestral journeys from the Isle of Mull into the wider world, including Australia, Canada and New Zealand, tracing how families carry loss, faith, identity and hope across oceans.

His novel *Echoes of the Clearances* brings the emotional world of the Scottish Highlands to life through a story of loss, endurance and family memory. His forthcoming novel *Dispossessed* follows Margaret and Martin McGilvray from the Isle of Mull to colonial Victoria, tracing one family's search for belonging while confronting the moral complexity of land, settlement and survival.



William A Allan



From Mull to Victoria.

From memory to fiction.

From the past into the present.

Website: <https://www.mullmacgillivrayheritageproject.com>

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