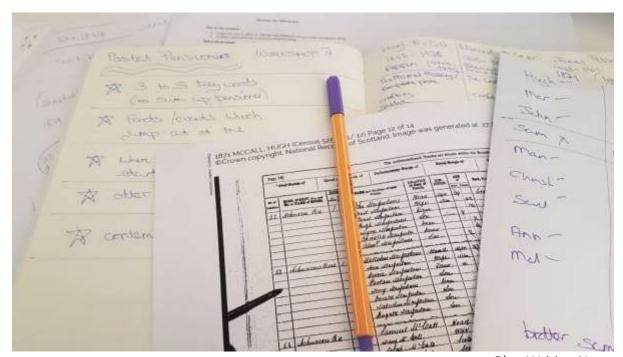
AM POSTA PÒSTA (THE MARRIED POSTMAN): HUGH MCCOLL (1848-1928) BY SANDRA CAIRNCROSS

Hugh McColl was born into a Gaelic-speaking, crofting family in the West Highlands. His life provides insights into a changing way of life, as families moved away from crofting to seek work in new fields that offered better security and provision for old age. It was not just their way of life which changed; the language that people spoke in their homes, and with neighbours also changed, as English replaced Gaelic in daily life.

Hugh was the eldest child of Samuel McColl and Mary McFarlane. He had at least eight younger siblings. Mary was 22 when Hugh was born and 40 when she gave birth to her youngest. The 1871 census sees Hugh's parents living in a croft in Appin with eight of their children, aged between four and twenty-one. Sarah, an elder sister of Samuel, is also living with the family. She is described as a pauper and having been an imbecile for thirty-two years. Sarah remained with Samuel and Mary until she died from bronchitis in 1882.

Living conditions must have been cramped - their house is described as having only two rooms with windows. One room would be a kitchen, where the family would sit and eat, with meals typically cooked over a peat fire. Vegetables and other crops would be grown, and the family may have had access to common pastureland for livestock.



Blog Writing Notes

Census records show that Hugh's father also worked as a shepherd, drystone builder, and an agricultural labourer, suggesting that the croft on its own could not sustain the family.

Hugh's mother Mary was in her early sixties when her husband – Hugh's father -- died in 1890. Mary then took over the croft. Three daughters are living with her in the 1891 census; two are dressmakers and the third a domestic servant.

Hugh had married Mary McNab in November 1876. He was twenty-seven and a rural messenger. Mary was thirty-one and a domestic servant.

Their first child, Samuel, was born in August 1878 in Fort William. Hugh's occupation is described as "letter carrier" on his son's birth certificate, but it is not until December 1878 that he officially joined the Post Office, when he was appointed as a messenger in Appin. This was perhaps prompted by the need to secure a more regular income than crofting on its own could provide. The Post Office with its pension provision would also have offered security for old age.

The family settled in Port Appin. Unlike his parents, Hugh and Mary moved regularly, although links with crofting remained as census records show:

•	1881 Rural Letter Carrier 8 Crofter	2 Port Appin Crofts
•	1891 Rural Postman	Dalnashean
•	1901 Retired Postman	Linnhe View Villa Druimnahurrich Cottage
		_

• 1911 Post Office Pensioner & Crofter Port Appin Crofts

Hugh was living on a croft when he died at home of senile decay. His death was registered by his eldest son who was still living with his parents. The onset of senile decay would have meant that Hugh was less able to look after himself. Just as his parents had looked after his aunt, so too did Hugh's family care for him in his later years.

Many poorer families would have been unable to look after family members with this condition, and instead they would try to have them admitted to poorhouses/workhouses or lunatic asylums. They were often being seen as too physically weak for asylums but too challenging for poorhouses/workhouses ¹.

Hugh possibly had joined the postal service as a new father in order to provide a regular income and a better standard of living than crofting alone could offer. It seems fitting that when "Am posta pòsta" himself needed care, it was provided by his wife and eldest son.

Postscript: Gaelic and English

The census record from 1881 onwards show that Hugh, Mary and their children were all Gaelic speakers. A count of Gaelic speakers was first made in 1881 with a 'G' simply added to

¹ Andrews, Emily Stella. "Institutionalising senile dementia in 19th-century Britain." *Sociology of health & Illness* 39, no. 2 (2017): 244-257.

the place of birth for those who spoke Gaelic. A new column was introduced from 1891 onwards to record if someone spoke Gaelic only, or Gaelic and English. It was left blank if the person was a non-Gaelic speaker.

The 1881 census records that all the family spoke Gaelic, including Hugh and Mary's second son who was only one year old. Everyone else on that page is also a Gaelic speaker. The same is largely true for the page including Hugh's parents; all are Gaelic and English speakers, except for the wife and sons of a farmer who had 105 acres, although the farmer himself spoke Gaelic. An early example, perhaps, of the start of the disappearance of Gaelic.

Hugh and Mary and their children are recorded in 1891 as being Gaelic speakers only. There are three other households on their census page, one is also Gaelic-only and the other two are recorded as speaking both Gaelic and English.

In 1901 and 1911 Hugh and Mary, and children still living with them, are shown as speaking Gaelic and English. I wonder if this means that people who had been brought up as native Gaelic speakers now also had to speak English more frequently. Everyone in the other households listed on the same page are also recorded as speakers of both Gaelic and English.

The situation has shifted further in 1911. There are 11 households listed on the census page for Hugh and Mary. There are no Gaelic-only speakers, and the majority of people still speak both. There is evidence of children no longer being brought up speaking Gaelic. In one family the eldest child of 14 is recorded as speaking Gaelic and English but her three younger siblings aged 12,10 and 4 do not speak Gaelic.

This is just a small insight into the shift away from Gaelic to English in Scotland, a decline which hastened over the course of the 20th century. There were 254,415 Gaelic speakers in 1891 in Scotland, including Hugh and his family. This had fallen to 58,652 in 2001.²

It is not known what happened to Hugh and Mary's children. If they married and had children, then it is likely that these children would have been brought up predominantly speaking English. This is the experience in my own family. One of my great-grandmothers was brought up in Argyll speaking Gaelic. She moved to Dundee and her children grew up speaking English.

Recent years have seen an increase in the language, with Gaelic-Medium Education being offered in nearly half of all Scottish Local Authorities and growing numbers of adult learners and so, perhaps like me, a descendant of Hugh and Mary is also learning the language that our ancestors spoke at home.

Further Reading

The Open University in Scotland offer a free online course Gaelic in Modern Scotland³ which explores the history of Gaelic and its relevance today.

² <u>Gaelic in modern Scotland: 3.2 Decline - OpenLearn - Open University - Gaelic 1</u> https://www.open.edu/openlearn/languages/gaelic-modern-scotland/content-section-3.2

³ Gaelic in modern Scotland - OpenLearn - Open University - Gaelic 1

Fact Sheet: Hugh McColl

Pensioner Details

Pensioner Name: Hugh McColl

Person ID: SC1021

Your Name: Sandra Cairncross

U3A Group: Scotland

Part One: Birth and Family

1: When and where was your pensioner born?

Hugh McColl was born about 1849 in Appin in Argyllshire.

This is inferred from the 1851 census in which his age is given as 2.

No baptism records have been found.

2: Who were your pensioners' parents? Record any details you can find out about them here (e.g. occupation, religious affiliation, whether they could read or write)

His death certificate (1928) lists his parents as:

• Samuel McColl crofter and Mary McColl maiden surname McFarlane (both deceased).

His marriage certificate (1876) lists his parents as:

• Samuel McColl shepherd and Mary McColl.

The 1851 census suggests that Samuel was born about 1823 and Mary about 1827

Samuel and Mary were married on the 24^{th} January 1849 in Lismore Argyll. The banns were read in the Church of Scotland.

Samuel died on 18th Nov 1890 and Mary 1st May 1898

The inscription on the Headstone states that Samuel died at Achnahone, Appin

Hugh was with his parents in the 1851, 1861 and 1871 census

1851

The transcription in Ancestry names the family as Mccoll.

The household consists of:

- Samuel Mccoll 28
- Mary Mccoll 24
- Hugh Mccoll 2

The address is given as Ledgrianach, Argyll

Samuel McColl's occupation is given as Agricultural Labourer.

Samuel had been born in Appin, Argyllshire. The transcribed record on Ancestry doesn't state where Mary and Hugh were born.

1861

The transcription in Ancestry names the family as Maccall.

The household consists of:

- Samuel Maccall 27
- Mary Maccall 34
- Hugh Maccall 11
- Margaret Maccall 9
- John Maccall 7
- Samuel Maccall 4
- Mary Maccall 2
- Christina Maccall 9 Mo

The address is given as Strath Of Appin Rd Achnacon Crofts.

Samuel McColl's occupation is given as Ag Lab.

The birthplace of all family members is given as Appin.

1871

The transcription in Ancestry names the family as McCall.

The household consists of:

- Samuel McCall 46
- Mary McCall 44
- Sarah McCall 52
- Hugh McCall 21
- Margaret McCall 19
- John McCall 17
- Mary McCall 12
- Chirstie McCall 10
- Sarah McCall 8
- Ann MacCall 6
- Malcolm MacCall 4

Samuel McColl's occupation is given as shepherd.

The address is given as Achnacone Rd

Sarah McCall (52) is a sister of Samuel. Her occupation is given as pauper.

Sibblings of the postal pensioner are discussed in Section 3 below

1881

The transcription in Ancestry names the family as McColl.

The household consists of:

- Samuel McColl 54
- Mary McColl 52
- Mary McColl 22
- Malcolm McColl 14
- Sarah McColl 62

Samuel McColl's occupation is given as Dry Stone Builder Crofter

Mary McColl's occupation is given as Dry Stone Builder's Crofter Wife

The address is given as Inverfolla Crofter'S Ho

Sarah McCall (52) is a sister of Samuel. Her occupation is given as pauper.

Siblings of the postal pensioner are discussed in Section 3 below

1891

The transcription in Ancestry names the family as McColl.

The household is listed as:

- Mary McColl 62
- Mary McColl 31
- Christina McColl 29
- Sarah McColl 27

Mary's occupation is given as Crofter.

The address is given as Shop.

Siblings of the postal pensioner are discussed in Section 3 below

3: Did your pensioner have any siblings? What were their names, and how old were they in relation to your pensioner? Use this space to record anything else you have found out about them (e.g. occupation)

Hugh was the eldest child. His was born in 1849

The following sibblings have been identified from the 1871 census

• Margaret McColl 1852 -1892

• John McColl 1854 -1890

• Samuel McColl 1857 -

• Mary McColl 1859-1892

• Christina McColl 1860- 1942

• Sarah McColl 1864

Anne McColl 1865-1909

Malcolm McColl 1867 –

Note: Year of birth is inferred from census record.

There may have been other sibblings who died in infancy and who do not feature on census records.

Margaret McColl 1852 -1892

Margaret is with her parents in 1871. Her occupation is given as Dom Serv Ord Employed

John McColl <u>1854 -1890</u>

John is with his parents in 1871. His occupation is given as shepherd.

The inscription on John's headstone says he died in Sutherland.

Samuel McColl 1857 –

Samuel appears in 1861 census with his family. He is 4. He does not appear with family in 1871 census.

Mary McColl 1859-1892

Mary is with her parents in 1881. Her occupation is given as crofter's daughter.

Mary is with her mother and two sisters in 1891. Her occupation is given as dressmaker.

Mary died at Achnacone

Christina McColl 1860-

Christina is with her mother and two sisters in 1891. Her occupation is given as Tablemaid - Dom – Serv.

Christina was living at Achnacone Cottage when she died on 24th Sept 1942⁴. Her surname is spelt MacColl. Her headstone was erected by her sister Sarah.

Sarah McColl 1864

Sarah is with her mother and two sisters in 1891. Her occupation is given as dressmaker.

Sarah was still alive in 1942 when she erected a headstone in memory of her sister Christina.

Anne McColl 1865-1909

No further information found

Malcom McColl 1867 –

No further information found

Part Two: Marriage and children

⁴ Christina MacColl (1859-1942) - Find A Grave Memorial

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1: Did your pensioner marry? What was their spouse's name, and when and where did they marry them? Use this space to record any extra details you can find out about their spouse (e.g. when/where they were born, their occupation)

Hugh McColl married Mary McNab ion the 23rd November in 1876.

Hugh's occupation was given as rural messenger and Mary's as domestic servant. Mary was 31 (so born about 1845). Her parents were Donal McNab (Woolen Dyer deceased) and Catherine McNab ms McDonald

Mary died in 1931. Her name appears as MacNab on gravestone

Hugh and Mary are buried in Kinlochlaigh Old Churchyard in Argyll. Hugh's parents and some sibblings are also buried here

2: Did your pensioner have any children? What were their names, and when they were born? Use this space to record any extra details you can find out about them (e.g. occupation, where they lived later in life)

The following children have been identified from the 1891 census.

- Samuel McColl 1878
- Donald McColl 1880
- John McColl 1883
- Catherine McColl 1885
- Maryann McCall 1887
- Margaret McColl 1890

According to the 1891 all the children were born in Appin with the exception of Samuel who was born in Fort William.

Samuel McColl 1878

Samuel become a house-joiner. He was living with his parents in all census years between 1881 and 1911 and was the only child still living with his parents in 1911.

Donald McColl 1880

No further details established

John McColl 1883

No further details established

Catherine McColl 1885

Possibly working as General Serv Ass Domestic at the Baker's House Port Appin aged 15 in the 1901 census. The head of the household is Alexander Smith. He is a baker.

Maryann McCall 1887

With parents in 1901 census

Margaret McColl 1890

With parents in 1901 census

Part Three: Work

- 1: What occupation was your pensioner recorded as doing in census years? Please make sure to state clearly which year you are referring to
 - 1851 none
 - 1861 scholar
 - 1871 coachman (unemployed)
 - 1881 rural letter carrier & crofter
 - 1891 rural postman
 - 1901 retired postman
 - 1911 post office pensioner & crofter
- 2: What occupations were people living with your pensioner (e.g. spouse, children, boarders) doing in the census years? Please make sure to state clearly which year you are referring to

The occupations of all adults staying at the address where Hugh McColl (postal pensioners) was on the night of the census 1851 to 1911 are listed below, essentially collating information provided in Sections 1 and 2.

Name	Relationship to Postal Pensioner	Occupation
1851		
Samuel Mccoll	Father	Agricultural Labourer
Mary Mccoll	Mother	None-listed

	1		
1861			
Samuel MacCall	Father	Ag Lab	
Mary MacCall	Mother	None-listed	
1871			
Samuel McCall	Father	Shepherd	
Mary McCall	Mother	None	
Sarah McCall	Aunt	Pauper	
Margaret McCall	Sister	Dom Serv Ord Employed	
John McCall	Brother	Shepherd	
1881			
Mary McColl	Wife	Rural Letter Carrier Wife	
Angus McNaughton	Servant (aged 14)	Herd-Farm Servant	
1891			
Mary McColl	Wife	None given	
1901		J. Control of the con	
Mary Mccoll	Wife	None given	
Samuel Mccoll	Son	Joiner	
1911			
Mary McColl	Wife	None given	
Samuel McColl	Sone	House Joiner	
33301 17100011	1 55.115		

Part Four: Anything Else

Please use this space to record anything else you have found out about your pensioner

Postal Appointment

The postal appointment book indicates that he was appointed in Dec 1877 as a messenger n Appin.

His registration number is 172098

Gaelic

The 1911 census states that Hugh McColl, his wife Mary and son Samuel all had Gaelic and English.

Death

Hugh McColl died on March 2nd 1928 fro senile decay. His son Samuel registered the death.

His occupation was given as postman retired and he died at home at Ardtur Croft, Port Appin.

Burial

Hugh McColl (Postal Pensioner) and his wife Mary McNab Kinlochlaigh Old Churchyard. His parents (Samuel McColl and Mary MacFarlane) are also buried there and three sibblings (Mary, John and Anne) are buried in the same plot as his parents.

Part Five: Your Sources

Please use this space to record the sources you have used

Hugh McColl (Postal Pensioner)

Census

- 1851 Census Parish: Lismore and Appin; ED: 13; Page: 6; Line: 13; Roll: CSSCT1851_112; Year: 1851
- 1861 Census Parish: Appin; ED: 2; Page: 23; Line: 16; Roll: CSSCT1861_71
- 1871 Census Parish: Appin; ED: 1; Page: 12; Line: 19; Roll: CSSCT1871_92
- 1881 Census Parish: Lismore and Appin; ED: 2; Page: 4; Line: 6; Roll: cssct1881_154

- 1891 Census Parish: Lismore and Appin; ED: 2; Page: 17; Line: 1; Roll: CSSCT1891 169
- 1901 Census for Hugh McColl Parish: Lismore and Appin; ED2 Household schedule number37 Line4 RollCSSCT1901 181
- 1911 Census (Scotland's People): 1911 1876 MCOLL, HUGH (Census 525/2 2/ 9)
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Other

- No baptism record found
- 1876 Marriage Certificate (Scotland's People): 1876 MCOLL, HUGH (Statutory registers Marriages 525/2 4)
- 1877 Postal Appointment British Postal Museum and Archive; Series: POST 58;
 Reference Number: 88
- 1928 Death Certificate (Scotland's People): 1928 MCOLL, HUGH (Statutory registers Deaths 525/2 3)
- Hugh MacColl (1850-1928) Find A Grave Memorial
 https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/116829143/hugh-maccoll

Wife of Postal Pensioner

Mary McNab (Wife)

Census

- 1881 Census Parish: Lismore and Appin; ED: 2; Page: 4; Line: 7; Roll: cssct1881 154
- 1891 Census Parish: Lismore and Appin; ED: 2; Page: 17; Line: 2; Roll: CSSCT1891_169
- 1901 Census Parish: Lismore and Appin; ED: 2; Page: 9; Line: 5; Roll: CSSCT1901 181
- 1911 Census (Scotland's People): 1911 1876 MCOLL, HUGH (Census 525/2 2/9)
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Other

- 1876 Marriage Certificate (Scotland's People): 1876 MCOLL, HUGH (Statutory registers Marriages 525/2 4)
- Mary MacNab (1845-1931) Find A Grave Memorial
 https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/116829382/mary-macnab

Parents of Postal Pensioner

Samuel McColl (Father)

Census

- 1851 Census Parish: Lismore and Appin; ED: 13; Page: 6; Line: 11; Roll: CSSCT1851 112; Year: 1851
- 1861 Census Parish: Appin; ED: 2; Page: 23; Line: 14; Roll: CSSCT1861_71
- 1871 Census Parish: Appin; ED: 1; Page: 12; Line: 16; Roll: CSSCT1871 92
- 1881 Census Parish: Lismore and Appin; ED: 2; Page: 24; Line: 9; Roll: cssct1881 154

Other

- Marriage: MCCOLL SAMUELMARY MCFARLANE/FR505 (FR505) 24/01/1849
 525/20 2 Lismore Appin and Duror (Scotland's People) (taken from search result; certificate not downloaded)
- Samuel McColl (1821-1890) Find A Grave Memorial https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/116829800/samuel-mccoll

Mary McColl maiden surname McFarlane (Mother)

Census

- 1851 Census Parish: Lismore and Appin; ED: 13; Page: 6; Line: 12; Roll: CSSCT1851_112; Year: 1851
- 1861 Census Parish: Appin; ED: 2; Page: 23; Line: 15; Roll: CSSCT1861_71
- 1871 Census Parish: Appin; ED: 1; Page: 12; Line: 17; Roll: CSSCT1871 92
- 1881 Census Parish: Lismore and Appin; ED: 2; Page: 24; Line: 10; Roll: cssct1881 154
- 1891 Census Parish: Lismore and Appin; ED: 2; Page: 9; Line: 14; Roll: CSSCT1891 169

Other

- Marriage: MCCOLL SAMUELMARY MCFARLANE/FR505 (FR505) 24/01/1849
 525/20 2 Lismore Appin and Duror (Scotland's People) (taken from search result; certificate not downloaded)
- Mary McFarlane (1828-1898) Find A Grave Memorial https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/116829938/mary-mcfarlane

Siblings of Postal Pensioner

Margaret McColl (sister)

Census

- 1861 Census Parish: Appin; ED: 2; Page: 23; Line: 17; Roll: CSSCT1861 71
- 1871 Census Parish: Appin; ED: 1; Page: 12; Line: 20; Roll: CSSCT1871 92

John McColl (brother)

Census

- 1861 Census Parish: Appin; ED: 2; Page: 23; Line: 18; Roll: CSSCT1861 71
- 1871 Census Parish: Appin; ED: 1; Page: 12; Line: 21; Roll: CSSCT1871 92

Other

• <u>John McColl (1854-1890) - Find A Grave Memorial</u> https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/116830454/john-mccoll

Samuel McColl (brother)

• 1861 Census Parish: Appin; ED: 2; Page: 23; Line: 19; Roll: CSSCT1861_71

Mary McColl (sister)

- 1861 Census Parish: Appin; ED: 2; Page: 23; Line: 20; Roll: CSSCT1861 71
- 1871 Census Parish: Appin; ED: 1; Page: 12; Line: 22; Roll: CSSCT1871_92
- 1881 Census Parish: Lismore and Appin; ED: 2; Page: 24; Line: 11; Roll: cssct1881_154
- 1891 Census Parish: Lismore and Appin; ED: 2; Page: 9; Line: 15; Roll: CSSCT1891 169

Other

 Mary McColl (1859-1892) - Find A Grave Memorial https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/116830602/mary-mccoll

Christina McColl (sister)

- 1861 Census Parish: Appin; ED: 2; Page: 23; Line: 21; Roll: CSSCT1861 71
- 1871 Census Parish: Appin; ED: 1; Page: 12; Line: 23; Roll: CSSCT1871_92
- 1891 Census Parish: Lismore and Appin; ED: 2; Page: 9; Line: 16; Roll: CSSCT1891 169

Other

- Birth: https://www.ancestry.co.uk/discoveryuicontent/view/25101942:60143?tid=168569660&pid=162254200371
- <u>Christina MacColl (1859-1942) Find A Grave Memorial</u>
 https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/116829573/christina-maccoll

Sarah McColl (sister)

- 1871 Census Parish: Appin; ED: 1; Page: 12; Line: 24; Roll: CSSCT1871 92
- 1891 Cenus Parish: Lismore and Appin; ED: 2; Page: 9; Line: 17; Roll: CSSCT1891_169

Anne McColl (sister)

• 1871 Census Parish: Appin; ED: 1; Page: 12; Line: 25; Roll: CSSCT1871_92

Other

 Anne McColl (Unknown-1909) - Find A Grave Memorial https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/116830685/anne-mccoll

Malcolm McColl (brother)

- 1871 Census Parish: Appin; ED: 1; Page: 12; Line: 26; Roll: CSSCT1871 92
- 1881 Census Parish: Lismore and Appin; ED: 2; Page: 24; Line: 12; Roll: cssct1881_154

Other

 Birth: https://www.ancestry.co.uk/discoveryuicontent/view/18742263:60143?tid=168569660&pid=162254200110

Children of Postal Pensioner

Samuel McColl (son)

- 1881 Census Parish: Lismore and Appin; ED: 2; Page: 4; Line: 8; Roll: cssct1881_154
- 1891 Census Parish: Lismore and Appin; ED: 2; Page: 17; Line: 3; Roll: CSSCT1891 169
- 1901 Census Parish: Lismore and Appin; ED: 2; Page: 9; Line: 6; Roll: CSSCT1901_181
- 1911 Census (Scotland's People): 1911 1876 MCOLL, HUGH (Census 525/2 2/ 9)
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Donald McColl (son)

- 1881 Census Parish: Lismore and Appin; ED: 2; Page: 4; Line: 9; Roll: cssct1881_154
- 1891 Census Parish: Lismore and Appin; ED: 2; Page: 17; Line: 4; Roll: CSSCT1891_169

John McColl (son)

• 1891 Census Parish: Lismore and Appin; ED: 2; Page: 17; Line: 5; Roll: CSSCT1891 169

Catherine McColl (daughter)

- 1891 Census Parish: Lismore and Appin; ED: 2; Page: 17; Line: 6; Roll: CSSCT1891 169
- 1901 Census Parish: Lismore and Appin; ED: 2; Page: 5; Line: 12; Roll: CSSCT1901 181

Maryann McCall (daughter)

- 1891 Census Parish: Lismore and Appin; ED: 2; Page: 17; Line: 7; Roll: CSSCT1891 169
- 1901 Census Parish: Lismore and Appin; ED: 2; Page: 9; Line: 7; Roll: CSSCT1901_181

Margaret McColl (daughter)

• 1891 Census Parish: Lismore and Appin; ED: 2; Page: 17; Line: 8; Roll: CSSCT1891_169