The name MacTavish stems from Taviss (Taus) Coir, a son born to Colin MacDuine of Lochow (Colin Maol Maith-Good bald Colin) of the family MacDuine, and a daughter of Suibhne Rudah of Castle Sween (Lord and Toisech of Argyll). Maol Maith had been married to a niece (by whom he had one son, Gillespick, from whom Clan Campbell springs) of King Alexander I and upon her death, he married Suibhne's daughter (1105-1007 AD), having by her two sons, Taviss and Ivor. (1, 2)

Taviss was the progenitor of the Clan Tavish and his brother, Ivor, the progenitor of Clan Iver. With the gradual changing of the Gaelic to English, MacTamhais became phonetically “Englished” to MacTavish. MacTamhais’ literal translation is "Son of Thammais" (Son of Thomas). In old charters, the name had many variant spellings. Some spellings found in Argyll appear as MacAvis, MacCamis, McCavis, McKavis, McKnavis, McCavish, M'Ash, MacAnish, and MacTavifh, to give but a few. It seems that from the end of the 1600's, the spelling, MacTavish and/or Thom(p)son were the most common names in use. Both spellings (MacTavish and Thomson) often appear for the same individual(s), at times within the same historical document. (3) The Clan is of great antiquity with Chartered lands from the 12th century in both North and South Knapdale. The Clan was seated at Dunardarie where they were one of the clans known as "the Children of Colla" or "children of mist"**, (4) The Dalriadic Kingdom of Dunadd was encompassed by the lands of Dunardarie.

During the period known as the Jacobite uprisings, the MacTavish, as with many Highland Clans, were sympathetic to placing the Stuarts back on the throne, as was their right. When Charles Edward Stuart, better known as Bonnie Prince Charlie, landed on Scottish soil in July of 1745, some Highland Clans were preparing to join Prince Charles in his quest to regain the throne of Scotland.

Adjacent to the Lands of Dunardarie was, Achnabreck, the lands of Sir James Campbell who was a great friend to the MacTavish Chief (Archibald), and was also a Jacobite sympathizer; he was very "anti" Campbell of Argyll in thought. Unknown to both Sir James and to Chief Alexander, and Dugald MacTavish, Younger, the Duke of Argyll had installed a servant in the house of Sir James, as a spy. This servant intercepted four letters written to Sir James Campbell from Dugald MacTavish, Younger, of Dunardarie, making arrangements and plans for raising their men to join Prince Charles Edward Stuart's Highland army. During this time the Sheriff of Stonefield wrote two letters to Dugald, the Younger, asking him to be aware of any Jacobite plotting. Dugald MacTavish found this request to be most distasteful. (6, 9)

When Argyll received these letters from the servant, he sent the Sheriff of Stonefield, John Campbell, to confront Chief Archibald MacTavish of Dunardarie and Dugald MacTavish, Younger. Dugald admitted to writing the letters as, "these are of my hand". A warrant was issued, and Dugald MacTavish, Younger, was arrested for “treasonable acts” against the Crown, and transported to Dunbarton Prison, September 1745. The Duke of Argyll hoped this would put an end to the Jacobite plotting in Knapdale. He
took no action at this time against Sir James, no doubt because Sir James was titled and a Campbell kinsman. However, the Duke took measures against Sir James after Culloden, the finale of the 1745 Rising. A tremendously large request of funds was demanded from Sir James Campbell of Achnabreck as part of his "contribution" to the costs incurred by the Campbells of Argyll for placing the Argyll troops at Culloden. The Duke of Argyll knew well that Sir James Campbell of Achnabreck could never pay this amount. The Lands of Achnabreck were sold at public auction to pay the debt; and the "House of Campbell of Achnabreck" was no more. Dugald was released in the General Pardon in 1747 and upon the death of his father, became Chief Dugald MacTavish of Dunardarie. Dugald later bought Lot #4 (consisting of 8 Merk Lands) of Achnabreck land, which was the area of Kilmichael-Inverlussay and adjoined the border of Dunardarie lands. (6, 9)

Due to the fact that Dugald, the Younger, was imprisoned in September of 1745 and his father, Chief Archibald was quite elderly, during the 1745 Jacobite Rising the MacTavishes did not attend the Army of Bonnie Prince Charlie as a Clan. Some of the MacTavishes fought within the ranks of their neighbor, MacIntosh; and the Garthbeg McTavishes (Fraser of Lovat) were there as well. Stories abound that many of the clan simply made their way to join Prince Charlie's ranks and were never formally enlisted in the Stuart cause. For this reason there are few instances of the MacTavishes or Thomsons being noted as Jacobite soldiers, as they came and went of their own accord, having no formal leadership from within their own clan. Some fought with the MacIntosh, and this may be one reason that MacIntosh formerly listed the Name of MacTavish as a sept. (5A)

On 16th April 1746 the Highland army was defeated by a much larger force of the English army (5000 fighting for Prince Charles and 9000 fighting for the Government). The largest Highland force fighting for the English was the Argyll Highlanders. How different history could have been had the Argyll Campbells fought with the Highlanders rather than for the English. On that day, the Highland army of Prince Charles lost the battle, and the fate of the Jacobite cause was sealed.

After Culloden and for upwards of 2 years Argyll’s Highland troops were acting as agents for the government in the Highlands. Unfortunately, after Culloden, some Jacobite Highland Chiefs joined with the victors and treated their own clansmen very badly transporting their Clan members off their land and, indeed, from their country. This was the period known as the Clearances. The MacTavish Chiefly line, still seated in Dunardarie with their clansmen, were not involved in the "clearing" of their own kin, and no MacTavish kindred were put off the lands. (5, 6)

Soon after the rebellion was put down, the English, under King George the IInd, implemented a series of Acts to eliminate the Scottish threat. Ingenious in their conception, these laws not only restored order, they virtually eliminated a way of life by destroying the Chiefs powers, the clans, their identities and economic structures. The rule of the Scottish lairds and their absolute control of the Clans had to be broken, and on August 1st, 1746 the Act of Proscription went into effect, forbidding the wearing of any type of Highland Dress, tartan, trews, kilt, belt, etc... The Act of Proscription was closely followed by the Heritable Jurisdictions Act. This new Act forced all Scottish landowners to either accept English jurisdiction or forfeit their lands. The impact of these Acts on all levels of Scottish society was swift and brutal. Landed peers who participated in the '45 had already lost their territory to the English outright. Now all
the remaining lieges of the land lost power over their subjects except the rights of landlord. The English system of law was forced onto the people and there was no turning back. It was not until the Repeal of the Act of 1782 that the Wearing of Highland Dress was granted to the Scots. (6A)

After Culloden, many more of the MacTavish started to use the Thom(p)son spelling, for it was not healthy to be known as a "Mac". Use of an obvious Gaelic name, like MacTavish, could draw a suspicious scrutiny as a Jacobite sympathizer if used. Taking an "Englished" spelling of the name was believed to lessen such suspicion, and hopefully avoid trouble. Many MacTavish kin scattered to the border country, to Ireland and to the New World. The Chiefly line of MacTavish, however, retained the name MacTavish and remained seated at Dunardry. If there was one advantage in Dugald MacTavish, the younger, being incarcerated in Dunbarton Prison, it was that the MacTavishes kept their lands without penalty. If Clan MacTavish had attended the Jacobite Army, or fought at Culloden as a clan, the clan lands might have been forfeit. It is of interest to note that the Duke of Argyll, the same man who had Dugald arrested in 1747, was advised by King George III (in the 1750s) to place Dugald MacTavish as Argyll's Chamberlain and Bailie of the area. One of Dugald's first cases in this position was between the Duke of Argyll and a young woodsman who worked for Argyll. The Duke of Argyll lost his case. (7) By this time very few MacTavish Clan Members remained on the old Clan Lands, having left for the new world, or the lowlands. The Inventory of Inhabitants living on the Duke of Argyll Estates in 1779, show only two possible MacTavish-Thomson families still living there.

Dugald's son and Heir, Lachlan MacTavish succeeded his father in 1775; but by 1785, was forced to sell Dunardry at public auction on the 31st December, as he fell into financial difficulties, partly due to the building of the Crinan Canal, which split the MacTavish lands in half. The Canal had lasting effects for Scotland, and against the MacTavishes, and its building eventually broke the Clan and was the cause of the scattering of the MacTavish kindred. Lachlan, his wife and son, Dugald, who was three years old, moved to Edinburgh where Lachlan was installed as Governor of Taxes for the Crown, living at St. James' Court. Lachlan and his wife, Mary, had three more children: John George (1787-1847), Margaret and Flora. Lachlan registered his Arms in April 1793 and was attempting to buy back Dunardry but passed away in September 1796 without accomplishing this quest. His Heir, Dugald, was a mere lad of 14 (under the age of consent) and did not attempt to register his Arms. Dugald was well schooled and studied law, and was appointed one of His Majesty’s Writers to the Signet (WS) for Kintyre. (Sir Malcolm Innes of Edingight, former Lord Lyon King of Arms, is also a Writer to the Signet). (6)

During his tenure as WS and Sheriff-Substitute of Kintyre, Dugald MacTavish built "Kilchrist House" (now known as Kilchrist Castle) at Stewarton, Argyllshire, in 1824. It was a palacial house resting on 12 acres of prime land. His wife, Letitia Lochhart, bore him 10 surviving children. The first born, Lachlan, died at birth. The second son, William (1816-1870) at age 18 immigrated; sailing in 1833 to Canada with the Hudson Bay Company (HBC) as a company clerk and later became a Chief Factor, taking up duties at Fort Garry. He succeeded as Chief on the death of his father, Dugald, in 1855. William rose within the HBC to be appointed as Governor of Assinaboia and Ruperts Land (now Manitoba) and was instrumental in the formation of events leading up to the confederation of Canada in 1867, along with John A. MacDonald, first Prime Minister of Canada. (8)
Lachlan's son, Dugald, under age in 1796, did not register the MacTavish arms; and as a grown man, with his duties as the Sheriff Depute (Substitute) of Kintyre he obviously did not feel inclined to do so, as he was, legally titled MacTavish of Dunardry. He died without having re-registered the Arms. Unfortunately, this carried on with his son William who had moved to the wilds of Canada. William also declined to register the Arms. It is nominally suggested by Lord Lyon that at least every other generation re-register the Chiefly Arms, to avoid dormancy of the Clan. As a result of William not matriculating the arms the Chiefly line was "lost" until 1949, when the Lord Lyon, Sir Thomas Innes of Learney, contacted the MacTavish family in Canada, advising them that they were, indeed, the long, lost MacTavish Chiefly line, inviting them to petition for the Arms and Chiefship of the Clan. (6, 7, 8, 9)

William's great grandson, Edward Stewart Dugald MacTavish, was matriculated by the Court of the Lord Lyon 23 July 1997 and granted the Arms and Title of Chief of the Clan MacTavish of Dunardry, and was the 26th Chief. Chief Dugald passed away on 19 June 2005 at his home in Vancouver, BC. He is succeeded by his son and heir, the 27th Chief of the Clan in an unbroken line, The Much Honoured Steven Edward Dugald MacTavish of Dunardry.

Footnotes
1- Manuscript History of Craignish, P. Campbell, 1720
2- The House of Argyll and Collateral Branches of the Clan Campbell, 1871
3- Commons of Argyll, D.C. MacTavish, 1941
4- Anals of the Four Masters, Ancient Eire
5- Culloden, by John Prebble, 1998
5A- World Tartans, Iain Zaczek, 2001
6- MacTavish of Dunardry, E.F. Bradford, 1997
6A- Composite of the Highland Proscriptions
7- Sheriff Advocate Records, Argyll
8- Encycolpedia of Canadian Biography, Governor William MacTavish
9- MacTavish Family Papers
10- 1997 MacTavish Matriculation, Court of the Lord Lyon.

* Not to be confused with Clan Gregor, who are known as "The Children of the Mist".