

**Submission by the Clan Ewen Society to the
Lord Lyon regarding the proposed Family
Convention at which a Commander of the
Ewen name, broadly defined, might be
recognised.**

October 2012

The recent search for a Chief of Clan Ewen began twenty years ago when it came to the attention of the Clan Ewen Society that the MacLachlans, in advertising for members of their society, had issued an announcement which implied that the MacEwen Clan was in its entirety a MacLachlan sept.

On July 13th 1992, the Lord Lyon, Sir Malcolm Innes, wrote to the secretary of the Clan MacLachlan Society, regarding the matter:

“It will be seen from Iain Moncrieffe’s work that the Clan MacEwen was an independent Clan of considerable importance but became a scattered Clan. It would appear that quite a number of those who had been members of Clan MacEwen became associated with, or dependent upon, Clan MacLachlan but by no means did all members of the Clan MacEwen become so dependent or connected. Other members of Clan MacEwen became dependent on, or connected with, a number of other Clans. I suppose it would not be impossible at some future date for the MacEwens to re-organise themselves into a distinct Clan on their own and by appropriate means select a Chief. All this, however, is something that will take time and will be very much in the future. I see no harm in you listing the MacEwens as a dependent group within Clan MacLachlan with the clear understanding that until individual families are traced no individual family can say with any certainty to which particular family his MacEwen was connected with.” (1)

Although somewhat uncomfortable with this ruling, we were powerless to object because we had no representation at the Standing Council of Scottish Chiefs, because we had no Chief or Commander; and we remain powerless – this letter is still quoted in Clan MacLachlan Society publicity and MacEwen merchandise is still being offered for sale, especially in the United States, for the benefit of the MacLachlan organisation.

Our chairman, Lt.Col. Alan Ewing corresponded on the subject with the Lord Lyon and on January 26th 1995 Sir Malcolm acknowledged our point:

“In retrospect I think I may have been somewhat generous with regard to the listing of the MacEwans as a dependent group within Clan MacLachlan, However, you will also see in that letter that I certainly envisaged that the MacEwans would organise themselves into a distinct Clan of their own.

“I am certainly of the opinion that if Clan MacEwan were to come together and organise themselves so that they were in a position to convene an *ad hoc derbhfine* and select a Commander from such a *derbhfine*, the view could then be taken that the Clan had become organised and it would then be inappropriate for MacEwans to be regarded as dependent on any other Chief ...” (2)

Thus began the process now bearing fruit in the form of the forthcoming Family Convention.

The Clan Ewen Society follows Iain Moncrieffe, Innes of Learney and many others in taking the view that the Clan is “scattered” (3) and the Chiefly line of the

MacEwens of Otter is, as Sir Malcolm Innes indicated to us, “utterly lost” (4); we have therefore, in order to fulfil our constitutional imperative to help the Clan find itself a Chief, followed the guidance of Sir Malcolm Innes and petitioned the Lord Lyon to stage an *ad hoc derbh fine*, or Family Convention, at which, in the first instance, a Commander of the name might be recognised and our Clan officially unified.

While the society has always acknowledged that those who belong to Clan Ewen, like those who belong to any other Clan, have various origins, we believe that we belong together and our present sense of Clan fellowship is stronger than any past differences, which might, in any case, have been overstated: we have a coherent identity in the 21st century and this, together with our considerable numbers, demand that we achieve proper recognition by the Standing Council of Scottish Chiefs; a Commander of the Clan needs to be found.

Concerted efforts have been made in this respect by Lt.Col.Alan Ewing and his successors as chairmen of the society. The question which repeatedly arose was whether the Ewings would want to be included in the freshly constituted Clan (5). Alan Ewing was firmly of the opinion that the Ewings and the MacEwens should be part of the same Clan and the society has tended to follow that view. However, if the Ewings did decide to seek a Commander of their own, they would certainly have the blessing of the society.

This, at present, looks like the most likely way forward. There is a demonstrable sense of Ewing fellowship, separate from MacEwen identity, and especially in view of the two names’ distinct heraldic traditions and established mottoes (“Reviresco” and “Audaciter”) it seems reasonable to propose that each Clan has a sufficient sense of itself that a Commander for each name be recognised. Although there are some Ewings who would like us all to come together, the most coherent voice (that provided by our dear friends in the Ewing Family Association, based in the United States) has come down in favour of the “Two Commander Solution”. And the Clan Ewen Society has always pledged to support the wishes of its Ewing members. In the first instance, however, we are determined that a Commander of the MacEwen Clan be recognised; whether this includes the Ewings is, as stated above, up to the Ewings to decide.

The question has arisen about descent from the last certain Chief of the MacEwen Clan, Swene MacEwen who died in 1493. In maintaining the view that the Clan is scattered and the Chiefly line utterly lost, we see the Family Convention as recognising a suitable (probably armigerous, Scottish resident) person of the name as Commander. That Commander, or those Commanders (if a Ewing Commander were to be recognised as well), would derive in spirit if not in proven blood-line, from Swene MacEwen of Otter.

We have clear evidence from the 15th century about the agreements which led to the loss by the MacEwen Clan of the land at Otter. For example, on June 12th 1432, “at the Ottir, Gillaspy Cambel son and ayr to Duncan Cambel lord of lochawe, and Suffne McEwyn lard of the *Ottirinveran*” entered into a contract as to payment to Gillaspy Cambel in the event of Suffne having a son (6). After the death of Swene (Suffne) in 1493, without a son, the picture becomes considerably less clear. This is perhaps not surprising given that, as Thomas Innes of Learney explains, a landless Chief, or a Chief whose land would in due course be lost, must have been considered something of a lost cause (7). It seems reasonable to speculate that the Clan was dispersing, as Innes of Learney implies, for decades before 1493.

This accounts for some of the name’s geographical range though it would certainly be acknowledged that there have been other sources of MacEwenness, not excluding random sons of Ewen at various times and in various districts. We would argue, however, that the distinctness of the various strands of MacEwen identity has been emphasised too urgently. Associations between those of the same name but of arguably different origin have proved relevant in many Clans; so have inter-family marriages within Clans. There are indeed strong family links to other Clans such as MacDougall and Cameron, as well as Stewart and MacGregor to name a few. But all Clans have close links with other Clans; and the MacEwen identity remains a powerful source of legitimate pride.

Such observations help to demonstrate that in the area of Clan history, there is often a great deal of uncertainty. Very few of us can trace their ancestry further back than the 18th century and it is not at all uncommon to find a MacEwen with no knowledge of his great grand-father’s first name, let alone place of birth. In seeking a Commander for our Clan, we wish to pay every possible respect to what is certainly known about the history of our Clan but also to prove the relevance of our Clan and of Clans in general to the 21st century: we aim for a refreshed MacEwen identity to inspire all our Clansfolk and to ensure that our many thousand fellow Clanspeople can feel properly represented in this exciting time for the Clans by proper representation at the Standing Council of Scottish Chiefs.

We would also insist that the sense of fellowship which has existed among all who share the name since the revival of interest in the Clans, led by Sir Walter Scott, is a real thing and a genuine outcome of history; our commonest motto – “Reviresco” – and most used crest – the blasted oak tree giving forth new life – have developed an importance and meaning for all, or most MacEwens, regardless of the (disputed) origins of those symbols.

Incidentally, a possible candidate for the post of Commander, Sir John McEwen, 5th Baronet of Marchmont and Bardrochat, knows his ancestry back to the early 17th century and maintains his belief in a robust family tradition that his forebears came down to Ayrshire in a boat from Loch Fyne. While he would make no claim to descend in the male line from Swene MacEwen of Otter, with what we know it is not impossible that he did. His grand-father, the 1st baronet, Sir Jock, was first approached in the 1950s as a potential Chief.

It might also be mentioned that through John McEwen’s father’s mother, a grand-daughter of the 15th Lord Lovat, and through his grand-father Jock’s mother, Mary

Dundas (“a penniless lass wi’ a lang pedigree”) he counts among his direct ancestors many significant figures from Scottish and British history including Napier of Magdala, Duncan of Camperdown, King James IV, Robert the Bruce, Somerled and Donnalebhe, the traditional forebear of Eoghan, the founding father of Clan MacEwen. (Eoghan, we learn, was the son of Gillespie, the great grand-son of Saibaran, one of the twelve sons of Donnalebhe {8}). We do not know the names of any of the wives of the nine certain MacEwen Chiefs but it is not unreasonable to suppose, inter-marrying being the norm, that John McEwen is also descended from at least one of them.

We at the Clan Ewen Society are trying to participate in something real and developing, something which is important to Scotland and the Scottish diaspora. As was shown by the Clan March up the Royal Mile during the Gathering in 2009, the Clans matter, their identities are real, the people respect them, and they are many. In order to play a full part, the MacEwens must in due course become Chiefly. It was very plain at the Gathering that the armigerous Clans are placed firmly in the second rank. We deserve to be speaking with a louder voice and should be the guardians of our own heritage. We need a Chief.

While this represents the settled will of the Clan Ewen Society, an interested party, Thor Ewing, has recently introduced a new element into the discussion – his fascinating theory that William Ewing of Ladytoun, who is thought to have flourished in the mid-16th century, was the successor of Swene MacEwen. Because this theory is almost certainly unprovable (although it has not been disproved either), it might be thought that it need not detain us long: after all, in such matters as this, “male-line descent must be proved with 100 per cent watertight documentary evidence” (9). However, out of respect and because it continues to be brought into the discussion, which has been vigorous and extended, this theory might be worth addressing to an extent.

The theory is introduced in one publication thus: “According to tradition, the MacEwens, under their own chief, sought the protection of the Earls of Lennox in the fifteenth century when Clan Ewen lost the barony of Otter (MacEwen 1904)” (10). The reference is to R.S.T. MacEwen’s 1904 history of the Clan where he says this about the Lennox sept: “According to tradition, this sept, under a chieftain of their own, sought the protection of Levenach, the Celtic Earl, in the fifteenth century” (11). The slight but important differences between those two sentences (when one is clearly signalled to have derived from the other) indicate the passion with which this theory is held; it has indeed been presented in public as if it were beyond doubt (“our Ewing ancestors come from the chiefly line of the clan, represented by William Ewing of Ladytoun...” {12}) and is clearly believed in with considerable sincerity. It should be noted, however, that the “tradition” to which R.S.T. McEwen refers did not, according to him, state that “the MacEwens, under their own chief” sought protection “when Clan Ewen lost the barony of Otter”; it states what it states, which is otherwise..

Our concern with this at the Clan Ewen Society derives not merely from the theory’s speculative nature and unprovability; there are also many good reasons to believe that the small number of known facts might be alternatively interpreted.

In reference to the “Lennox sept”, R.S.T. MacEwen, writes, “Between 1625 and 1680 there are at least four charters in which successive Dukes of Lennox and Richmond are served heirs in the lands of ‘MacKewin’ and ‘McEwin’ as the name was then written.” His belief was plainly that the Lennox sept went by some form of the name MacEwen. The theory maintain that the MacEwens of Otter lost the “Mac” between Loch Fyne and Loch Lomond, and stayed Ewing thereafter. While this, along with several other theories, remains a possibility, it is not unreasonable to suppose that events and nomenclature might have unravelled otherwise: while a 16th-century Ewing might have descended from a MacEwen, it has not been certainly proved in any particular case that he did.

While the Clan Ewen Society would prefer all “Children of Eoghain” to come together, because the possible and probable connections seem stronger than their lack, it is quite possible that the Ewings of Loch Lomond have no connection with Cowal at all. (And, in any case, some of us are convinced that the numbers, dates and time-line make it extremely unlikely that the Ewings were the bearers of the Otter line.) It would not be correct to state that the Ewings appeared in Lennox lands straight after the loss of Otter. Ewings (and Youngs, Youings, Yewings, Zouings, Zewings, Ewisons, Ewinsons and Eowings) were present in Lennox from a much earlier date. The supposed sudden arrival of many Ewings might be a consequence of a certain solidification of surnames that took place in the 16th century. There are strong Ewing links with the south-east of Scotland, especially the area around Kelso; the long-held belief, as proposed by E.W.R. Ewing and others (13), that the Ewings were an essentially lowland clan, cannot be entirely discarded (14) whatever DNA studies of some Ewings urge us to believe. There was a 15th-century Abbot Ewing of Dunfermline and a 15th-century Bishop Ewing of Galloway; the subsequent Ewing ownership of land at Ladytoun might well have a connection with those personages.

The land which the Ewings can be linked to in Cowal appears to derive from estates confiscated by Clan Campbell, after the end of the Lordship of the Isles in (coincidentally) 1493, and then, after 1510, divided up as tacks and distributed to retainers and servitors who had served the Clan.

MacEwens (etc) and Ewings rarely if ever inter-marry: this would be extremely unusual if they were related. MacEwens from Cowal frequently inter-married with Clans associated with them in Cowal, and such links continued in other areas, such as Lennox, Perthshire, Skye and Lanarkshire.

Most of the inter-linked families that were friends of Ewings or married them and went to Ireland and America come from the Lowlands of Scotland (e.g. Orr, Porter, Nisbet, Smollett); none are related to Cowal.

The family which received a banner at the Battle of Langside might have been the MacEwens of Boig, rather than the Ewings. The Ewing link with Langside might have come from Lennox through Galloway and not through the Argyll and Otter family groups. The Boig family had a paper in the family linking them with Langside. Thor Ewing has lately declared the proposed Ewing flag-bearer, William Ewing of Ladytoun, “semi-hypothetical”. (We have been unable to trace a copy of *History and Legends of Clan MacLachlan* {1995} by James Finnegan which contains the reference to William.)

We are not necessarily convinced by the connected theories put forward about the oak tree symbol. The Irish Studies Department of the University of Dublin has made significant studies of the relevance of the oak tree to the Clans associated with Dalriada, both in Ireland and Cowal. (The site of Castle Otter on Loch Fyne is approached through spectacular ancient oak woodland.) Incidentally, in 1983, it was discovered that a Glasgow manufacturer was marketing a McEwan Clansman's badge having the territorial designation of Muckly. This was bogus on three counts, first this McEwan did not record a crest, second he was not chief of a clan, third a chief need not have a territorial designation: the matter was referred to the Court of the Lord Lyon after an exchange of correspondence did not reach an amicable conclusion.

On July 20th 1983 the Court of the Lord Lyon made the following decision – “No chief of the name of MacEwen has ever recorded arms and therefore, a crest badge for the MacEwens cannot derive from this usual source. However, all the early MacEwans who have recorded arms recorded the same Crest and motto, the oak stump sprouting afresh, and the same motto 'Reviresco'. Therefore, the Lord Lyon has decided that if any person successfully laid claim to Chiefship in the future, those would be the Crest and Motto he would be given as Chief. Therefore, they may correctly form the Crest Badge for the MacEwens in anticipation of a Chief being discovered”.

There has been, until this theory was proposed, absolutely no reference whatsoever by anyone to any sort of connection between this Ewing family and the MacEwen Chiefs of Otter. The suggestion that they found their motto – “Audaciter” – by reading Hector Boece's *The History and Chroniklis of Scotland* where they saw that motto used by the ancient King Eugenius, might be taken to indicate their eagerness to acquire lustre for their name from somewhere other than their own recent past to which they never seem to have made any mention.

The Ewing arms recorded in *Workman's Armorial* (c.1566) show one of the “seven hundred and forty-one shields of the minor barons and gentlemen” (15). It is not known from where these arms derive; they might be related to the Bryson arms; they do not appear to reference MacEwen of Otter.

Support for the theory is supposed to come from this memory recorded in 1901: “According to the tradition of the Ewing clan the Ewings of America trace their origin to six stalwart brothers of a Highland clan, who, with their chieftain, engaged in insurrection in 1685, in which they were defeated, their chieftain captured and executed and themselves outlawed” (16). It is suggested that the executed father, James Ewing, would not have been termed “a chieftain” had he not had chiefly antecedents. But it might suggest the opposite, that the Chiefly line was indeed utterly lost and irrelevant to this family which, being numerous, called its head a chieftain as one might.

While we at the Clan Ewen Society remain deeply grateful for the introduction of this theory and the invigoration it has brought to our historical awareness, we feel that it must remain incidental to this search for a Commander, or Commanders, of our Clan(s). The Ewings of Lennox appear to have operated with some independence and coherence but their descent from the MacEwens of Otter is speculative – possible but not necessarily likely; there is a marked absence of actual evidence. However, we feel

that MacEwens and Ewings belong together: whatever the actual origin of any particular Clansman (his ancestor might be a Cameron, might be a Young), his Clan exists and deserves proper representation. If the Ewings wish to stand alone behind their “Audaciter” banner, so be it, we understand. The MacEwens, meanwhile, must find themselves a Commander and fulfil once more their ancient boast, “Reviresco” - “We Shall Rise Again”.

Notes

1. Letter from Sir Malcolm Innes, Lord Lyon King of Arms, to Roderick MacLachlan, July 13th 1992.
2. Letter from Sir Malcolm Innes, Lord Lyon King of Arms, to Lt.Col. Alan Ewing, Jan 26th 1995.
3. *The Tartans of the Clans and Families of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1938) by Thomas Innes of Learney, p.188: "After the middle of the 15th century the barony and estates of Otter having thus passed into the hands of a branch of the Campbells, the MacEwens became a scattered clan"; *The Highland Clans* (London, 2010) by Alistair Moffat: "By 1602, they [the MacEwens] were listed as a broken clan."
4. Letter from Sir Malcom Innes, Lord Lyon King of Arms, to John McEwen, Oct 24th 1995.
5. Letter from Sir Crispin Agnew to Lt.Col. Alan Ewing, Aug 14th 2001: "The Lord Lyon says he is reluctant to suggest that one or other group should be disenfranchised. He wonders if a Ewing would be acceptable to the McEwens or vice versa. He says that if the adoption of one or other name as Commander by the *derbh fine* was likely to be unacceptable to the other name, then it may be that the Ewings need to consider whether it is appropriate to continue under the umbrella of the MacEwens and whether or not each name group should go its own way."
6. *Highland Papers Vol.IV 1299-1752* (Scottish History Society, Third Series, Volume XXII. Edinburgh, 1934), p.234.
7. *Op. cit.*, Innes of Learney, p14.
8. C.f. "Family Origins in Cowal and Knapdale" (Scottish Studies, Vol. 15, Edinburgh 1971) by W.D.H. Sellar.
9. *Tracing Your Family History* (HarperCollins, 2008) by Anthony Adolph.
10. *New Notes on Clan Ewen* (Historical Arts, 2009) by Thor Ewing, p.20.
11. *Clan Ewen: some records of its history* (Glasgow, 1904) by R.S.T. MacEwen, p.12.
12. An article, "Who were the Ewings?" by Thor Ewing, available on Ewing Family Association web-site.
13. *Clan Ewing of Scotland* (Ballston, Virginia, 1922) by E.W.R. Ewing; *A web of kinship. The Ewing Family in the Stirling Area in the 17th century* (1991) by John G. Harrison; *Burke's Peerage* (1871): "The family of Ewing has been long settled in the west of Scotland and one of the name (Dovenaldus filius Euy) is witness to a charter granted by Walter, Steward of Scotland, 1177."
14. C.f. this reference in *Scottish Armorial Seals* (Edinburgh, 1904) by William Rae Macdonald: "EWING, Thomas, templar bailie, in the sheriffdom of [Soft Break]Berwick and constab. of Haddington of Walter Lindsay, [Soft Break]the Lord of St. John, Preceptor of Torphichen. Three lily [Soft Break]heads stalked and pendant with a cinquefoil in chief. [Soft Break]Legend (Goth. l.c.) : s . *thome euyn*. Diam. in. Laing [Soft Break]Ch. 26 Nov. 1532, do. 12 Feb. 1534/5, do. 19 July 1543." (There is a Ewingston near Haddington to this day.)
15. *Scottish Arms: being a collection of armorial bearings, A.D. 1370-1678* (Edinburgh, 1881) by R.R. Stodart. Quoted by E.W.R. Ewing, p.152.