THE CLAN EWEN SOCIETY *Bulletin*

Number 2 – October 1979.

Since the last number was published we have had another very successful meeting at Otter Ferry, a description of which is given in the present number. Another meeting is arranged for the 6th October at Killearn, and a report will be given on this in the next number.

I have had a very interesting correspondence with Michael McEwen, of 413 N. W. 48th Street, Oklahoma City, OK 73118, U.S.A. He produces in America a similar bulletin to this one, but he suggests that we ought to get together and produce a single, joint bulletin, with the aim of bringing out regularly four numbers per year. I am sure everyone will agree that this would be desirable, and I hope that in the next number I may be able to announce that we have come to an agreement about this.

As I mentioned in the first issue of the bulletin, I am very keen to build up an extensive record of family history from members of the Clan, worldwide. Some members have already been kind enough to send me copies of their records of genealogical research, and I look forward to receiving similar details from many more of you. Remember, I am not only interested in formal research, but also in informal details reconstructed as far as you and your families remember them. If you can supply the place and date of birth of your ancestors as far back as you can trace them, and the places and dates of marriages, this would be of great interest.

Douglas M. C. MacEwan.

HISTORY OF CLAN EWEN by the late R. S. T. MacEwen.

Don't forget to let me have your orders for the reprint of the above book. As I mentioned in the previous issue, this is, as far as I know, the only book which has been published on the history of our Clan, making use of such very incomplete records as are available. It was published in 1904 by John Mackay, and is now quite rare. The reprint will be sold to members at £5 plus postage (estimated at 50p). This will have a soft cover, but we can supply a hard binding at cost price.

Douglas M. C. MacEwan.

Account of the excursion to Loch Fyne, on 19th May 1979.

This being our second gathering at this site, we were blessed with a beautiful, clear, sunny day. After some preliminary talk, piping and a picnic lunch, the group set off for the McEwan Castle remains (Caisteal Mhic Eoghain). There was an apology from Mr. Archie MacIntyre as he could not carry out his duties as guide to the castle owing to illness. Mr. MacIntyre has an intensive knowledge of the history of Kilfinan Parish. We look forward to hearing what he has to say at some future date.

Our treasurer, Mr. Archie McEwan acted as guide as he had been many years ago to the castle and has many connections in this area. We have to thank Martyn Bergius, Fearnoch, for allowing us to walk through his fields. This was arranged by Mr. McEwan.

The going was very rough and, sad to relate, one lady had a serious mishap: a broken wrist. We had with us two young pipers: Mary McLauchlan and Rosemary MacInnis from Strathlauchlan, who played some striking tunes and, according to our Vice Chairman, Rev. Peter McEwen, did a good job, and lent an air to the whole proceedings. Mary's grandmother was a McEwen born at Ardghaddon.

The visit to the remains of the castle was interesting, though there is not much left, and many photographs were taken of the assembled party. We hope to see some of them at our next meeting in the autumn, which will be indoors.

After returning to the many parked cars (we had around 30 people), we set off to look at the Oil Rig Building Yard at Portavaidie, which cost £13m., is not completed and may never be used for its original purpose. Then into cars again and a halt at the Observation Post on the new road to Tighnabruaich to view East Kyle and Loch Ridden before going down to Glendaruel.

We have to give thanks to Gilbert MacKeller for conducting this part and giving us a talk in Kilmoden Kirk and kirkyard. Gilbert farmed in the Glen for many years and has considerable knowledge of the history of Glendaruiel and any MacEwen connections. He pointed out tributes to MacEwens who were living in the Glen at some time, many important people, and he has written a pamphlet which we could take by putting money in a box provided for church building funds.

It was agreed after that a meeting would be arranged later in the autumn for another 'Get Together'. Details of this will be sent to all members.

This visit to Otter Ferry was altogether a very beautiful and enjoyable outing, with a friendly atmosphere, and thanks must be expressed to our treasurer, Archie McEwan, for arranging it.

Mrs. W.E.H. Williamson.

THE CLAN MACEWEN

This clan was of considerable importance at one time. Its habitat was in Cowal. The MacEwens were known as CLANN EOGHAIN NA H-OITRICH - the MacEwens of Otter - and as late as 1750 there stood on a rocky point on the coast of Lochfyne, about a mile below the Church of Kilfinan, the vestige of a building called CAISTEAL MHIC EOGHAIN - MacEwen's Castle. The MacEwens were closely allied to the MacLachlans and the MacNeills. In the twelfth century the Lamonts, the MacLachlans and the MacEwens were in possession of the greater part of Cowal.

The earliest Chief of whom we have any record flourished about the thirteenth century. He was succeeded by Severn (II) of Otter. About 1315 Gillespie (V) of Otter assumed the chiefship. From this date there were four Chiefs - Ewen (VI), John (VII), Walter (VIII) and Swene (IX), the last of the Otter Chiefs.

In 1431-32 this Swene granted a charter of certain lands of Otter to Duncan, son of Alexander Campbell. In 1432 he resigned the Barony of Otter to James I, but received it anew from the King, with remainder to Celestine Campbell, son and heir of Duncan Campbell of Lochow. After Swene's death King James in 1493 confirmed the grant to Archibald, Earl of Argyll, as heir to his father, Colin. In 1575 another Archibald Campbell appears in a charter as "of the Otter", and in the Act of 1587 a Campbell is entered as "the Laird of Otter".

After the middle of the fifteenth century the Barony of Otter passed and gave title to a branch of the Campbells, and the MacEwens became a scattered clan. As a necessity of the times some of them sought new alliances. Some appear to have followed MacLachlan of MacLachlan, and others sought protection as "men" of the Earl of Argyll. Some joined the Campbells of Craignish, while colonies were formed in the Lennox country in Dunbartonshire, and in Galloway.

The MacEwens were hereditary bards to the Campbells.

The only landed branch of the clan at present extant is McEwen of Bardrochat, in Ayshire, and of Marchmont, in Berwick, descending from the Rev. John McEwen, and now represented by Sir James McEwen of Marchmont and Bardrochat, Bt. The chiefship is claimed by MacEwen of Muckley, but no steps have yet been taken to establish this.

(The Tartans of the Clans and Families of Scotland by Sir Thomas Innes of Learney - First published December 1938, Eight edition 1971)
Johnston & Bacon.

The Editor would be very glad to hear news of any events connected with the Clan, which have taken place anywhere in the world. Please send your accounts to Dr. Douglas M.C. MacEwan, 52 Ormonde Road, Hythe, Kent.

From the WEEKLY SCOTSMAN, October 25th, 1962.

MACEWEN - Their fighting strength was Five Men!

Music was the lifeblood of the MacEwens. It was their guarantee of safety, their only hope in a land ripped and torn by feuds and battles.

In the fifteenth century they were a broken clan ... deprived of their chief, without any lands, they badly needed the protection of a powerful chief. That protection came from the Campbells, for whom the MacEwens became hereditary bards - a position that ensured the safety of themselves and their families. The post was an important one, for the Bards played a vital part in the Celtic system and were generally among the most learned men in the clan; they became poets, genealogists and heralds of arms; they accompanied the clan to war. MacEwen bards appeared in many other parts of Scotland as well as in Argyll, and allied themselves to different clans.

Their early history is obscure, and little is known of them after the fifteenth century. A western clan originally settled in Cowal, they are thought to be descended from the Dalriada Scots. They are undoubtedly very close to the Lamonts, and one authority believes that the founders of the two families, Ferchard and Ewen, were actually brothers. Further back in history, the clan is thought to have sprung originally from Aodha Alain, of the great family of O'Neils, kings of Ireland.

Their genealogy actually brings four clans together sharing a common ancestor - the MacEwens, the Lamonts, the MacLachlans, and the MacNeills. The first three held the district of Cowal from Strachur to Toward Point; the Lamonts were separated from the MacEwens by the Kilfinan Burn; the MacEwens from the MacLachlans by the stream splitting the parishes of Kilfinan and Strathlachlan. The MacNeills took possession of the islands of Gigha and Barra.

The MacEwens were a small clan: their territory covered a mere 25 square miles and their fighting force was in the region of 200 men. Loyal adherents of Somerled, then ruler of Argyll, the clan suffered severely when Alexander II conquered all Somerled's possessions in 1222, and they were stripped of their lands. A remnant survived, however, and under their own chief at Otter, on the banks of Loch Fyne, they began a grim struggle for survival ... a struggle that petered out two and a half centuries later when the last chief died.

The first MacEwen of Otter lived about 1220, and was succeeded by Severan, the second of Otter; the names of the third and fourth chiefs are lost, until Gillespie assumed the chiefship as the fifth of Otter. The chiefs who followed him were Ewen, John, Walter and Swene, the last. The clan had their own fortress, for an entry in the "Old Statistical Account of the Parish of Kilfinan" about the middle of the eighteenth century, reads: "On a rocky point on Loch Fyne there stood in 1700 the ruins of Castle MacEwen, stronghold of the earlier lords of Otter."

Swene, the last chief, incredibly resigned the Barony of Otter to King James I. It was returned to him with remainder to Celestine Campbell, heir of Duncan Campbell of Lochow. After his death the MacEwen heritage fell into the waiting hands of the Campbells, and it was not long before a Campbell was entering his name in the record books as the "Laird of Otter." The sad story of the MacEwen decline was now almost complete as they found themselves without chief or land. Now they were desperate men, urgently in need of fresh alliances to secure their future. Many joined the Campbells, and others settled on the estates of Colquhoun of Luss in Lochaber and in Skye.

To these families the MacEwens brought their bardic gifts: Neil MacEwen composed a Gaelic elegy on Sir Duncan Dow Campbell of Glenorchy in 1630. And there is a MS. in Cawdor Castle entitled "Genealogy Abridgement of the very Ancient and Notable Family of Argyll, 1779," written by MacEwen, hereditary sennachie and bard.

A strong band of MacEwens allied themselves to the banner of the Earls of Lennox, and received grants of land in Dunbartonshire, on the shores of Loch Lomond. They joined the standard of Mary at the Battle of Langside in 1568, where they received a banner for their services. In Galloway, the Laird of Lochnaw settled a band of the landless MacEwens in farms after they had helped to rout a force led against him by the Black Douglas.

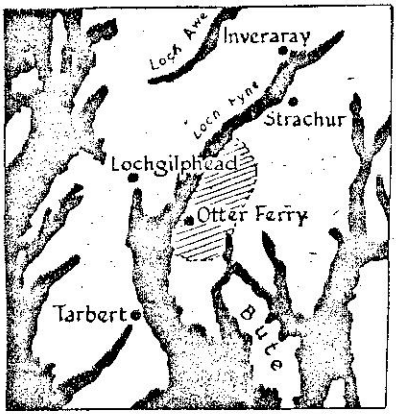
The MacEwens of Lochaber offer the historians a much more difficult task. For instance, their integration with the Camerons was so complete that the name Ewan, or Ewen, became a popular Christian name among the Camerons. Furthermore, of all the other clans settled in and around Lochaber, the name is seldom used at all. It is a popular belief that the MacEwens, in their early wanderings, became the progenitors of the later Camerons.

In one Privy Council Record dated 1598 we find the MacEwens described as "200 brokin hieland men and sorneris, all bodin in feir of weir." Later these men joined those other famous children of the mist, the MacGregors, and were fined for defending the Clan Gregor.

But the MacEwens lived on. In fact their solid position today is an eloquent tribute to the struggles of their ancestors, who fought so hard to preserve their identity in battle-scarred Scotland.

How near they must have come to extinction; for in a record of those persons who took part in the 1745 Jacobite uprising the total fighting strength of the clan is given as ... five.

Below: a map showing the ancient territory of the Clan.



From THE BUTEMAN AND ROTHESAY EXPRESS – 18th May, 1956.

THE MACEWENS OF BUTE - Farmers, Sailors and The Great Surgeon.

(The following article has been compiled from the writings of Dr. Hugh A. Macewen, the eminent surgeon's son, who died in 1955 and who in his later years devoted considerable research into the history of the Clan MacEwen of Otter).

It was in the year 1450 that the marauding forces of the Campbells wrested from the Clan MacEwen their heritage, the Barony of Otter. Situated on Ardghaddon, a rocky promontory to the north of Kilfinan Bay, the Castle overlooked the hills and moorlands of Argyll, and below it, to the south, stretched the glorious waters of Loch Fyne.

When Gillasny Campbell became Lord of the Barony of Otter, little was left to the Clan MacEwen, save a few of the outlying farms and "Dun Mhic Eoghain," the mound where lay their dead. In the years that followed the MacEwens had scattered, some finding homes in the inland counties of Perth and Stirlingshire whilst others went overseas to Ireland.

One of the last to bid farewell to his native heath was Donald MacEwen of Doile-nan-Corach, a farmer noted for his blackfaced sheep and for his seamanship. A master mariner, he owned one or more sailing vessels employed on the coastwise trade. He bought and sold herring, then a staple article of diet in Scotland, and he laid the foundation of his family's long and intimate association with the Loch Fyne herring industry.

Not forgetting to take with him the badge of his Clan, "REVIRESCO", showing the stump of a withered oak tree putting forth new shoots, Donald with his wife and his two sons came to settle on the farm of Kilmichael on the Isle of Bute. John, the elder son, had the sea in his blood and whilst still a lad could sail a lugsail boat or handle a fishing smack as well as any man.

Having gained his Master's Certificate for seamanship he became Master of his father's brig, the "INVERINE", a strong, seaworthy vessel of good design, and, on the death of his father, John became owner of the brig, whilst to the younger son, Colin, was left the Loch Fyne herring business, which he carried on for many years from his premises in Howard Street, Glasgow.

On November 27th, 1826, John, or "The Skipper" as he had come to be known, married Janet Stevenson, of Ardmaleish Farm in Bute. Her family hailed from Ayrshire, famed for its "handsome men and bonnie lasses", and she nobly upheld the tradition of the bard. The young couple set up house in "Woodend", situated on the Ardbeg side of Rothesay Bay and there, in the years that followed, they were blessed with a dozen healthy boys and girls who filled the little house with gaiety and laughter.

The Skipper led a hard and hazardous life. At certain seasons he shipped cargoes of salt herring to Scandinavia and the Baltic ports and returned laden with timber. At other times he undertook the transport of general cargo to the Highlands and to the outer Hebrides. Of exceptional physical strength, with well proportioned head and shoulders, the Skipper had inherited the splendid physique and distinguished bearing of the race from which he sprang, and with merchants and traders alike his reputation stood high for honesty, reliability and, above all, for his able seamanship.

For many years the "Inverine" gave faithful service to her owner, but ultimately she met her doom on the West Coast of Ireland on a wild winter's night. The morning had been fine with rising barometer and steady off-shore breeze. With all sails set, the vessel was making good speed southwards,

but as the day wore on the Skipper became uneasy, scanning sea and sky and casting anxious glances toward the horizon. Entering his cabin, he noted that the barometer was falling. Sail was shortened and course altered a few points to the west to obtain more sea room between the ship and the shore. Soon the wind backed anti-clockwise, first to the north, then to the west. The sky became dark and threatening. The wind as it rose sang through the rigging with melancholy wail and water was being shipped on the weather beam. All sails were reefed and all movables on deck securely lashed. In the early afternoon snow began to fall, enveloping the vessel in the dense curtain of impenetrable gloom and the last vestige of daylight faded into inky darkness. The blizzard from the west increased in violence and, making little headway the brig was carried ever nearer to the rockbound coast.

Resort was had to a device known as a sea-anchor in an endeavour to stay her fatal drift towards the land. It brought her head to the sea, but the landward drift continued. In the bitter cold the hours passed slowly as the vessel strained and laboured on the mighty waves that washed her decks from stern to stern. About midnight the snow ceased falling, but the wind continued to blow with unabated fury. The hawser attached to the sea anchor snapped and the ship swung broadside on to the waves. Ordering all hands below, the Skipper and "Airchie," the first mate, remained on deck lashed to a stanchion at the steering wheel. They feared that the brig would roll her masts out and it was not long ere their fears were realised. With a resounding crack the mainsail split a few feet above deck level, and, wrenching the windward stays and halyards from their fastenings, fell heavily over the leaward side of the ship. A perilous moment followed as mast and rigging surged backwards and forwards threatening to stove in the timbers of the maimed vessel. Unless cleared of these encumbrances she would founder. Cutting the rope that bound him to the stanchion, the Skipper fell to among the rigging. Working with the energy of despair, he was joined by Airchie, axe in hand, and between them they effected their purpose.

Freed of her burden, the "Inverine" shook herself like a dog emerging from the water and became more lively. At last the fierce wind tore a rent in in the clouds, and in the weird, silvery light of the full moon shining through the rent, they saw looming before them a long, white, ghostlike shadow!
"The reef," shouted the Skipper. "It's the waves breaking on the reef."
"God Almighty! So it is," gasped Airchie. "We're lost!"
"The gap," roared the Skipper again. "The gap - can we make it?"
"No dom good tryin'." "Go forward and slacken her gibs," cried the Skipper, "and I'll have a try." Watching his chance, the mate crept forward along the wave-swept decks and, having adjusted the sails, he hurried back to assist the Skipper in steering. "Port," yelled the Skipper, as Airchie bent his great back to the wheel. "Starboard ... Steady ... Port - Now steady at that." Fascinated, the two men held their breath as the vessel rose and fell on the mountainous seas. Then, towering above all the others, there came a wave that caught the brig and lifted her up, up, up on to its foaming crest and hurled her through the gap in the reef far on to the beach beyond. There she descended with a mighty crash, splintering her timbers on the rock-strewn shore.

Is there, in a sailing ship, some quality provocative of romance that induces the sailor to allude to it as "she?" Does it lie in the majestic beauty of a ship in full sail, the graceful lines of the hull, the masts with their wealth of white canvas outspread against the sky? As he placed his hand for the last time upon the shattered timbers of his ship, the Skipper murmured softly, "I have been fortunate indeed in having two sweethearts, and such sweethearts as my Janet and my 'Inverine'." Then, doffing his cap, he repeated the words of the funeral service, "The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away, Blessed be the name of the Lord."

After the loss of the "Inverline" the Skipper was appointed captain of the "Breadalbane," a handsome, square-rigged schooner built after the Disruption to carry officiating clergymen of the Free Church from the mainland to the Western Isles, there being at that time no regular communication by steamer.

Woodend was silent now. The young folk had, for the most part, found homes of their own in various parts of the world, and one small boy, her youngest son, alone remained to warm the heart of the mother whom he adored. It was at her knee that he learned the purpose of life, reverence for things sacred and the love for all creatures of God's creation. No sense of loneliness assailed the child, for Nature claimed him for her own and spread before him lavishly the wealth and beauty of her treasure house. With inborn sympathy and understanding for animals and birds, the outdoor world appealed to him with each new phase in the lives of living things - the nests with speckled eggs that waited his finding in tree and hedge and overhanging bank, the music of the thrush and whistle of the blackbird that filled the Skeoch Wood with song. All suffering things he brought to the shelter of Woodend, the bird that, still unfeathered, had fallen from her nest, was nurtured there until her wings were strong enough to bear the burden of her weight in flight, and the hedgehog, waking hungry from his winter's sleep, would sip with eagerness the dish of milk awaiting him in the chimney corner. The sea was always there for his delight, for the windows of Woodend overlooked the wide stretches of Rothesay Bay and the constant coming and going of seacraft, and often he would wander to the builder's yard at Ardbeg and watch for hours the fashioning of small boats - the laying of the keel, the planing of the planks. It was there that he learned the use and handling of tools, an art which was to serve him well in his life's work.

What was the boy's name? It was William, and on the site where Woodend stood in bygone years one may read today: "This plaque marks the site of the birthplace of Sir William Macewen, C.B., D.Sc., D.C.L., M.D., F.R.S. Surgeon, and was placed there by the Royal Burgh of Rothesay in recognition of the valuable services rendered by him to humanity."

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