

Sprig Of Heather December 2014



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This has certainly been an interesting year against the backdrop of the homelands Referendum and all that went with it. Here in the South West Pacific we may be some ways apart from Scotland but we are close at heart and mind.

After a close fought campaign our Scots kin voted by 55 to 45 to reject the notion of independence from Westminster. The 307year-old union with England remains intact. "We settled the independence question in a way that was legal, fair and decisive, the people of Scotland voted to remain in the United Kingdom and that democratic decision must be respected," said Secretary of State for Scotland Alistair Carmichael. If it can re-unify its people, Scotland will continue growing stronger and more successful. If they can muster and encourage a sense of national pride and set aside differences 'Caledonia' will endure.

Clan Little NZ&A is interested in sharing our heritage with anyone who is inclined to engage. We do this by running our web site www.littleclan.net, publishing the '**Sprig Of Heather**' and attending events where possible. It takes some time to prepare and publish the '**SoH**' which is mailed out, but seldom attracting any comments. I am led to think this is not uncommon. In Scotland It's said to be difficult getting people interested in researching and sharing our Family History, or working to preserve and promote Clan heritage. There is so much to learn from and share with each other but many people just want to **Let by gone's be by gone's...** Family history and celebrating our heritage as a Clan requires communication and sharing. Sadly from one edition to the next of '**SoH**' I seldom hear from members. I hope in the new year there will be more opportunities for us to celebrate, share and connect around our heritage.

Allen Little



Little's enjoy
season

Yuletide Customs of Old Scotland

Christmas & New Year were equally welcomed by Scots before the Reformation of the 16th-17th centuries. All the customs of both festivals stem from that time. The name comes from the Scandinavians, for whom 'Yultid' was the festival celebrated at the twelfth month, being the twelfth name of Odin, who was supposed to come to earth in December, disguised in a hooded cloak. He would sit awhile at the firesides listening to the people, and where there was want he left a gift of bread or coins. (Strains of Father Christmas here!) Christmas was often known as Nollaig Beag , Little Christmas. The custom was to celebrate the Birth of Christ with all solemnity, the festivities began a few days later, and spilled into New Year and Twelfth Night, which was known as 'Little Christmas'. However, the French often called Christmas colloquially, 'Homme est né' (Man is Born) which is thought by some scholars to be the origin of the word, 'Hogmanay', steaming from the time of the 'Auld Alliance'.

The Reformation hit Scotland as hard as everywhere else. By 1583, Bakers who made the Yulebreads were fined, their punishment could be lessened if they gave the names of their customers! In 1638 the General Assembly in Edinburgh tried to abolish Yuletide. While the same things were going on south of the border, with the Restoration of the Monarchy came the restoration of Christmas. In Scotland, the rigid laws of the new Kirk still frowned upon Christmas celebration, so it stayed underground. Only the High church and the Catholics kept the old traditions going.



Black Bun

Customs & Beliefs of Scottish Christmas

Black Bun. Originally Twelfth Night Cake is a very rich fruit cake, almost solid with fruit, almonds, spices and the ingredients are bound together with plenty of Whisky. The stiff mixture is put into a cake tin lined with a rich short pastry and baked. This takes the place of the even more ancient Sun Cakes. A legacy from Scotland's close associations with Scandinavia. Sun cakes were baked with a hole in the centre and symmetrical lines around, representing the rays of the Sun. This pattern is now found on the modern Scottish Shortbread, and has been misidentified as convenient slices marked onto the shortbread! Bees leave hives Xmas Morn. There is an old belief that early on Christmas Morning all bees will leave their hives, swarm, and then return. Many old Scots tell tales of having witnessed this happening, though no-one can explain why. One explanation is that bees get curious about their surroundings, and if there is unexpected activity they will want to check it out to see if there is any danger. As people were often up and about on Christmas night observing various traditions, or just returning from the night services, the bees would sense the disturbance and come out to see what was going on.

Candle Light

All of the Celtic countries have a similar custom of lighting a candle at Christmas time to light the way of a stranger. In Scotland was the Oidche Choinnle, or Night of Candles. Candles were placed in every window to light the way for the Holy Family on Christmas Eve and First Footers on New Years Eve. Shopkeepers gave their customers Yule Candles as a symbol of goodwill wishing them a 'Fire to warm you by, and a light to guide you'.



First Footers

It was and still is the custom for a stranger to enter the house after midnight on New Years Eve / Day. There were taboos about the luck such a stranger would bring, especially in the days of hospitality to travelling strangers. A fair haired visitor was considered bad luck in most areas, partly due to the in-fighting between the dark scots and the fair Norse invaders. However, in Christian times, a fair haired man was considered very lucky providing his name was Andrew! St Andrew is the Patron Saint of Scotland. A woman as a 'First footer' is considered taboo still in many areas! The First footer must make an offering, a HANDSEL.... of food, drink or fuel for the fire. The rituals which have grown up around this custom are many. An offering of food or drink must be accepted by sharing it with everyone present, including the visitor. Fuel, must be placed onto the fire by the visitor with the words '**A Good New Year to one and all and many may you see**'. In todays often fireless society the fuel is usually presented as a polished piece of coal, or wood which can be preserved for the year as an ornament. Sayings such as : "Is blianach Nollaid gun sneachd" which translates - Christmas without snow is poor fare.

Here in the South West Pacific our Christmas and New Year happens in the Summer. On migrating from Scotland to the antipodes our ancestors had to learn a whole new way of celebrating the seasons. Occasions for conviviality were still Important to Scottish Settlers.





Looking back

memorable visit and quite a high point of our trip to Scotland .

My wife Elaine and I visited Scotland at the end of August 2006 with another couple, all from Levin, New Zealand.

Our arrival in Scotland was not uneventful! We flew out of Auckland, had a two day stopover at Manhattan Beach in Los Angeles, then on to Scotland via Heathrow Airport in London. This was the time of very high security at Heathrow, following on from the discovery of the planned use of liquid explosives, and baggage clearance slowed. Consequently, we arrived at Edinburgh, but our luggage didn't! For the best part of a week we had only the small carry bag containing our electronic equipment, and the clothes we were wearing.

A short trip to the Barber Tartan Shop for a shirt and another shop for spare underwear; black rubbish bags did us proud as raincoats when we returned from the Edinburgh Military Tattoo in light rain. From Edinburgh we travelled to Inverness to stay with a couple we had met in Napier some time before. They were living at their house at Fortrose, on the shores of the Black Isle, directly across from Fort William, but put us up in their Inverness house.

Of interest in this house was the heating pipe that ran around the back of the built-in seat at the kitchen table – obviously a very cold place in winter! We were told that eight feet of snow in the valleys is not uncommon. Over the years this couple have become firm friends, as they have visited NZ regularly to see family.

We travelled south to Dumfries. One of the objectives of our trip to Scotland was to make contact with Dr Johnnie Little, who at the time was head of the Little Clan.

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We arrived at Dr Johnnie's house which was at the end of a long lane and although we had arranged with him to visit, we had a bit of trouble making ourselves known.

Finally he came around the corner of the house and we were able to introduce ourselves. At the time Dr Little was living alone as his wife had died. He had previously been a medical Doctor, but had been retired 25 years. He was very knowledgeable about all things 'Little', telling us that there are five different branches of the family name, not all related. Our Little family had come to New Zealand from Wishaw, but that generation was born in Ireland. Am I from an Ulster-Scottish family and did the family previously come from the border area in Scotland? Difficult to know without further investigation, and information from Ireland is not easy to obtain!

Dr Little demonstrated the formal attire for a Little – Little tartan pants (the Littles were horsemen, hence the pants not a kilt), white shirt, black blazer, hat (bright blue, with a black and white check band, and black and white pompom). He had an enormous piece of black and white check material (it was over a wire near the ceiling and touched the floor on both sides, and was over a metre wide) that he wound around himself to show us how it was worn. This fabric would be wound around a person while riding, and used at night as a blanket to keep warm. Dr Little told us the ladies would wear a Little tartan skirt, white shirt and a tartan sash pinned at the waist. It was disappointing to us that Dr Little had no family trees in his possession as we had hoped to have been able to do a bit of research. It was a memorable visit and quite a high point of our trip. By now we had retrieved our luggage and I could carry on around the UK in some comfort.



Gordon *Bruce* Little of Levin



Black Bun

Black Bun is a rich and delicious fruit cake formerly eaten on Twelfth Night, but nowadays served at Hogmanay. It should be made several weeks before it is wanted, like a Christmas cake, so that it can mature. See also: Het Pint and Haggis.

Recipe from Miss Daisy Welland.

FOR THE CASING

8 oz. (2 cups) flour

4 oz. ($\frac{1}{2}$ cup) butter

$\frac{1}{2}$ teasp. baking powder

a little cold water

1 beaten egg for finishing

TO MAKE THE CASING

Rub the butter into the flour, add baking powder and mix to a stiff paste with water (about 4 tablespoons). Put on to a floured board, and roll out to a thin sheet. Grease a loaf tin 8 in. square and line with the pastry, keeping back enough for the lid.

FOR THE FILLING

2 lb. seedless raisins

3 lb. currants

$\frac{1}{2}$ lb. chopped blanched almonds

$\frac{3}{4}$ lb. (3 cups, scant) flour

$\frac{1}{2}$ lb. (1 cup) sugar

2 teasp. Jamaica pepper (allspice)

1 teasp. ground ginger

1 teasp. ground cinnamon

$\frac{1}{2}$ teasp. black pepper

1 flat teasp. cream of tartar

1 flat teasp. baking powder

1 tablesp. brandy

$\frac{1}{2}$ pt. ($\frac{1}{2}$ cup) milk

TO PREPARE THE FILLING

Mix all the filling ingredients together except the milk. Then add just enough milk to moisten the mixture. Put it into the lined tin and put the pastry lid on top, damping the edges well to make it stick. Prick all over with a fork, and with a thin skewer make four holes right down to the bottom of the cake, brush with beaten egg and cook in a slow (225° F.) oven for about 3 hours. It will keep for a year in an airtight tin.

SCOTTISH CHRISTMAS FAIRY

I am a little fairy
On tap o' the Christmas Tree
It's no' a job I fancy
Well how would you like tae be me?
A'm tarted up WI tinsel
It's enough to mak ye boak
An a couple o' jaggy branches
Rammed up the back o' your froack.
An' wi'a' these lights a'roon me
I canna get my sleep
An' there's the yearly visit
Fae Santa – Big fat creep!
On Christmas Day I'm stuck up here
While you're a a'wirin' in
An' naebody says "Hey you up there,-
Could you go a slug o' gin?
It's nae joke bein' a fairy
The job's beyond belief
Ye go 'roon and 'roon the bairnies beds
An' lift their rotten teeth.
But o' a' the joabs a fairy gets
An' I've mentioned only some,
The very worst is up a tree
Wi' pine needles up yir bum.
When a' the fairies meet again
By the light of' the silvery moon,
Ye can tell the Christmas fairies -
They're the wans that canna sit doon.
The Christmas tree's a bonny sight
As the firelight softly flickers
But think o' me,- A'm stuck up here
Wi' needles in my knickers !
So soon as Christmas time's right by
An' I stop bein' sae full o' cheer
I'll get awa back tae Fairyland
An' Ah'll see yous a' next year. **Merry Christmas**

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**Saturday 31st
January 2015**

Highland Games
Turakina Domain
Cameron Road

Clan Little will be there

The 151st Caledonian Games are again being held in the Turakina Domain on Saturday 31st January. This Highland Games are the longest running such event in New Zealand.

Following the huge success of the 150th Turakina Highland Games organisers are planning to repeat many of the events and attractions that entertained the crowds who flocked to Turakina on a brilliantly sunny day.

There will be all the sights and sounds you have come to expect with the pipe bands, solo drummers, solo pipers, Highland dancers and traditional field events. The hospitality marquee was such a highlight that it will be there again with entertainment running throughout the day. The Clydesdale horses will be providing cart rides and of course the children will be well entertained with athletics, fun games and a bouncy castle.

We have all the Clan and market stalls to tempt you, along with plenty of food and refreshments. While there is lots to sit back and watch and listen to, if you are more adventurous have a go at the Field Events, toss a caber or sheaf, move the stones, run up the hill or join a tug-of-war team. Stay on into the evening, sample the haggis, enjoy a bar-b-que dinner and dance the night away at the Ceilidh with live band "Bowmore".

Entry to the grounds is \$10 per person with children under 15 free. Camp sites are available for \$5 per night. We have two areas available, one for the livelier, late nighters or a quieter area at the primary school.

www.littleclan.net

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Turakina is a small village in the western Rangitikei district in the southern North Island of NZ.

Settlers arrived from Scotland by ships from 1840's and walked up the beach from Wellington following the land purchase from the Ngati Apa people in May 1849, negotiated by Sir Donald McLean. In the late 1880's Turakina area boasted 3 churches, St Andrews Presbyterian (the current church was built in 1865), St George's Anglican Church (opened 1883) and St Joseph's Catholic church (opened 1868). St Joseph's was shifted to be the chapel of St Mathew's school Masterton in the 1980s. The First Christian Church Service in the Rangitikei was conducted in Turakina on Dec 15th 1852 by the Presbyterian Minister Rev. James Duncan.

Apart from the state primary school which was established in 1852, there have been several other schools including Turakina Maori Girls College, now sited in Marton.

Early business and industries included a saddler, baker, black smith, milliner, tailor, grocer and butcher, lawyer, brick kiln, dairy factory, racecourse, flourmill, thriving flax industry, orchard and sale yards. There was an illicit whisky distillery, 4 hotels including Ben Nevis [re-built after 2 fires], the Railway [re-built once after fire], the Family, and the Shamrock (burnt down in 1876). The 1st N.Z. health camp was established in 1919 on the Lethbridge farm. The courthouse and jail (which is still standing shifted down the beach road in the 1940s to make room for tennis courts), 2 railway stations and the Annual Highland Games established in 1864. All these made for a prosperous and busy township during coach and wagon days. The arrival of the Railway led to a slow decline in the fortunes of the Turakina Village.

The 1980's saw an upturn in the fortunes of Turakina as new people settled in the village building new houses and renovating and restoring old ones. Today Turakina has many heritage buildings dating from the 1850's and is surrounded by fertile agricultural land.

Hosts for the 151st Turakina Highland Games are Clan Keith the descendants of a very old and illustrious clan.



Clan Keith



Clan Little

For more information about the

151st Turakina Highland Games

Saturday 31st January 2015

Visit www.turakinahighlandgames.co.nz

E-mail highlandmay@gmail.com

phone 0 27 6656238 or 06 327 6179



Ailing Scottish Comedian Speaks Up.....

Scottish comedian Billy Connolly clearly did not support Scottish independence saying **people should remember that the Union saved a “bankrupt” Scotland.** He also said he disliked patriots, adding: “I’m deeply suspicious of patriotism. People following the band, you know? I don’t want to be part of it. It’s paved with fools.” In an interview with the Radio Times, Connolly said “he did not plan to say which side he favoured, because the issue was too important for someone like him to “put in their tuppenceworth” adding I don’t have a “great belief in the Union of England and Scotland”, but had a great belief “in the union of the human race”.



With Parkinson's onset and Prostrate issues Connolly aged 70 something, spends most of his time in the United States, but has a mansion in Aberdeenshire. He said that he did not vote in the independence referendum on September 18th describing the debate as a "**morass that I care not to dip my toe into**".



Reasons for.... !

In these modern consumption orientated days we often forget the heritage which contributes to the world we know. The Christmas season is many things to us all but it was hardly observed in the Lowlands after the Reformation although broadly observed as a relatively secularized holiday. New Year's Eve, called Hogmanay, has long been the main midwinter celebration. Fairlike events and public gatherings for the changing of the year are promoted by major cities. Customarily, some entertained guests at home, while others went "firstfooting." First-footers carry a bottle of whiskey and perhaps some food and, if traditional, a lump of coal or something black.



Isolated farm house in the Borders

Celtic seasonal rituals fused to medieval saints' days survive in modern secularized celebrations. The **May Day** celebration of Beltane, involving bonfires on hilltops, has seen a revival. Many towns have fairs and gala weeks, especially during the summer. Annual **Highland Gatherings** serve a similar civic function, as do the **Common Ridings** in the Borders towns, when a horseback procession "beats out" the boundaries of the medieval burgh.



Langholm in Dumfriesshire (The Muckle Toon) is a town of over 2500 inhabitants,

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Saint Andrew's Day (30 November), named after the national patron saint, sees many national events falling on the day. Perhaps the most symbol-laden holiday is **Burns Day** (25 January), named after the "national" poet, Robert Burns. Set around a ritual "peasant" meal of haggis (a mixture of oats, offal, and seasonings boiled inside the lining of a sheep's stomach), neeps (turnips), and tatties (potatoes), accompanied by whiskey. The event involves an elaborate series of speeches and set readings from Burns's opus. This ceremony plays upon Burns's bawdy celebration of the common people and penchant for deflating the self-righteous and highborn. Traditionally very male-dominated and chauvinistic affairs, gender participation is now more equal, and even feminist readings of Burns's radicalism can be found.

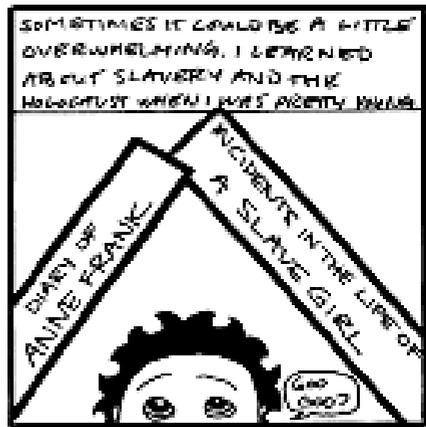
Some other enduring seasonal custom's include :-

- ✚ **Christmas cards** supposed to be invented in Edinburgh 1800 ?
- ✚ **Sowns Nicht** - Christmas Eve, Sowans being a dish made from oat husks & fine meal steeped in water, and branches of a rowan tree were burnt on the fire on xmas eve to signify that any bad feeling between family or relatives had been put aside for yuel tide
- ✚ **Kissing the mistletoe** is an old Druid Fertility Rite.
- ✚ **House decorations** started off with Holly as it was a revered evergreen
- ✚ During the church reformation in 1600 , xmas was seen as a POPISH celebration ie Christmas Mass and banned the celebration for nigh on 400 yrs, **until 1958 when English custom prevailed** and workers celebrated a public holiday
- ✚ **ODDIN the GIFT BEARER**, from Norse mythology is said to have swept across the skies in a chariot drawn by horses. He stopped at selected houses and sat by the fireside with his hood over his face and if shown hospitality he left a present of money or food.

Encouraging the young ...!

Encouraging young people to be interested in their own history is challenging at best. *Clan Little* is interested in positively connecting with young people and stimulating their excitement about times and places beyond the digital age. It's a tragedy that many modern young people don't know or have never met their Grandparents.

History is not a favourite school subject for many young people. For many their learning of history has often meant little more than memorizing dates, studying heroes and retrospectively interpreting the by gone era. Through family history we have an opportunity to make connections and give young people an opportunity to know something of what ordinary people were thinking, doing, and saying. When they see an ancestor had been engaged they become eager to learn more.



History, particularly social history, is actually a collection of stories every bit as fascinating as fiction, more so because it's true! In order to become interested in history, youth and adults need to see themselves in it.

Using all the technologies and information available today young people need to find people, ideas and causes that speak to their interests. History can excite young people and help them make sense of the struggles in their own lives today.

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One of the reasons many young people are turned off by history is because their only experience has been reading textbooks and listening to boring lectures in class. *Clan Little* needs to accentuate authentic information and share compelling stories which are supported by accessible historical documents. We live in a mobile world when we should be able to connect with our ancestors wherever we are. **FamilySearch** has released two new mobile apps making it easy to do just that. Today's young people know about mobile devices and **FamilySearch Tree** offers everything needed Free in sync with www.FamilySearch.org

A way to connect with young people is to get them considering what others of their age knew and experienced in history how many children were sent away to live and work in someone else's home. Not surprisingly, the children didn't always like it. Around the year 1500, an assistant to the Venetian ambassador to England was struck by the strange attitude to parenting which he had encountered on his travels. He wrote to his masters in Venice saying "*the English kept their children at home till the age of seven or nine at the utmost*" but then "*put them out, both males and females, to hard service in the houses of other people, binding them generally for another seven or nine years*". *The unfortunate children were sent away regardless of their class, "for everyone, however rich he may be, sends away his children into the houses of others, whilst he, in return, receives those of strangers into his own"*. It was for the children's own good, he was told but he suspected the English preferred having other people's children in the household because they could feed them less and work them harder. For the poor, there was an obvious financial incentive to rid the household of a mouth to feed. But parents believed they were helping their children by sending them away, and the better off would save up to buy an apprenticeship. These typically lasted seven years, but they could go on for a decade. The longer the term, the cheaper it was a sign that the Venetian visitor was correct to conclude that adolescents were a useful source of cheap labour for their masters.

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In 1350, the Black Death had reduced Europe's population by roughly half, so hired labour was expensive. The drop in the population, on the other hand, meant that food was cheap so live-in labour made sense.

There are indications 'North Britain' contained relatively large numbers of slaves, often taken in war and raids, or bought, as **St. Patrick** indicated the Picts were doing, from the Britons in Southern Scotland. Slave owning probably reached relatively far down in society, with most rural households containing some slaves. Many slaves were relatively young and usually racially indistinguishable from their masters with whom they integrated. Many adolescents were contractually obliged to behave. In 1396, a contract between a young apprentice named Thomas and a Northampton brazier called John Hyndlee was witnessed by the mayor. Hyndlee took on the formal role of guardian and promised to give Thomas food, teach him his craft and not punish him too severely for mistakes. For his part, Thomas promised not to leave without permission, steal, gamble, visit prostitutes or marry. If he broke the contract, the term of his apprenticeship would be doubled to 14 years. A decade of celibacy was too much for many young men, and apprentices got a reputation for frequenting taverns and indulging in licentious behaviour. In 1517, the Mercers' guild complained that many of their apprentices "have greatly mysordered theymself", spending their masters' money on "harlotes... dyce, cardes and other unthrifty games".

Today it's important that we use every opportunity to help young people discover and claim their own story. History unfolds down the generations, beginning in a distant time and place. This knowledge has passed from our forbears to the present generation. We can learn much from Maori in their appreciation of **Whakapapa** and "***Te Here Tangata***", or the rope of Mankind which is used to describe genealogy.



The Scottish Valuation Rolls for 1875



We're delighted to announce that the **Valuation Rolls (VRs) for 1875** are now available on the Scotland's People website. For the first time, the index is Free to Search [and can be browsed free of charge until the 31st December 2014.] Valuation rolls for 1875 covering the whole of Scotland have become available, enabling searches for property owners, tenants and occupiers across Scotland from 1875 to 1920, and often revealing valuable information about the inter-census years. The latest addition comprises over 900,000 index entries and almost 72,000 digital images taken from 141 volumes of Valuation Rolls. What do the 1875 Valuation Rolls contain? All the Rolls are fully searchable by name and address, and researchers can investigate people living, working and playing all over Scotland – from country estates to city tenements, castles to crofts, and factories to golf courses. The web site is www.scotlandsppeople.gov.uk



"The Wedding"

After announcing he was getting married, a Lad tells his pal he will be wearing the kilt. . .

"And what's the tartan?" asks his mate,

"Oh, she'll be wearing a white dress," he replies.



University of the
West of England

Name Studies

What's in a name ?

According to the University of West England. "Little" is recorded in several spellings as shown below, this is one of the oldest of English surnames. Originally in ancient times it was a personal name of endearment as in "Little man," and even as a medieval nickname surname, probably did not describe a man of small stature, but the very opposite. This is proven to a large extent by the famous outlaw of Robin Hood fables "Little John," so called because he was a giant of a man. His long bow supposedly seven feet in length, was for many years was to be found at the famous Bolton Arms, at Bolton Abbey, in Wharfedale, Yorkshire. It is also claimed that word was used for the younger of two bearers of the same name, as in the modern and mainly American practice of using "junior" for a son with the same name as the father. Early examples of the surname taken from surviving registers include Lefstan Litle in Feudal Documents of the Danelaw at the abbey of Bury St. Edmunds in the county of Suffolk, whilst Thomas Lytle was recorded in Sussex in the Subsidy Tax rolls of 1296. John and Jane Little were early emigrants to the English colonies of the New World being recorded in the parish of Christchurch, Barbadoes, in 1678. Modern spellings of the surname include Little, Littell, Lytle and Lyttle. The first recorded spelling of the family name is shown to be that of Eadric Little. This was dated 972, in the register of Old English Bynames, for the county of Northamptonshire, during the reign of King Edgar, 959 - 975 a.d. Surnames became necessary when governments introduced personal taxation. In England this was sometimes known as Poll Tax. Throughout the centuries, surnames in every country have continued to "develop" often leading to astonishing variants of the original spelling. Reports from the Universities Research will be available soon.

Border Marriage

Such was the unruly state of the Border regions that both Scotland and England, compiled new laws in an attempt to bring order. One very strict law on the Marches was that those living on either side of the border may not marry without the consent of both the English and Scottish Wardens and it was very difficult to obtain. The penalty for breaking this law was death. So rigorously was this enforced that even so late as A.D. 1587, Archie Graeme was given up to the English Warden for having married Mary Fenwick, and they were hanged side by side in the market place of Haltwhistle, even though she had a child of just two months. The death penalty was also imposed on any priest who married persons from opposite sides of the border with-out permission.

Trial marriages were popular with young couples throughout the Border and they were sealed by the joining of hands. Fairs were held once a year and were anticipated eagerly by everyone especially those who were seeking a partner to marry. It was the custom for a single person to live with a chosen partner until the next fair. If, at the end of the year they were both happy with the arrangement, they would live together for the rest of their lives as a married couple. However, if they did not agree, the couple would part and they would both begin looking for a new partner.

Children born as a result of this trial period were regarded as being legitimate and would be brought up by the one who had objected to the arrangement. This custom was known as Hand-Fasting. The practice whereby women used their husband's surnames was not widespread in the Borders until the 17th century. It was the practice of women to use a surname different from that of her husband, usually her father's. Many examples of this can be seen in Border cemeteries today. Anyone marrying a resident across the Border could be sentenced to death. Nevertheless the Borderers were never ones to let laws made in London or Edinburgh interfere with their existence, least of all their love life and so cross Border marriages were quite common.

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In more recent times English couples, anxious to get marry, walk across the Kershope burn for ceremonies on a hillside or in a shepherd's cottage under the easier Scottish rules. About the time of the of the popularity of Gretna as a marriage venue, young English couples would cross the Kershope burn for ceremonies on the hillside or in a nearby cottage on Scottish soil where the Scottish marriage laws were more relaxed. It may be a surprise to learn that until 1923 a girl over twelve and a boy over fourteen could be legally married in Scotland. No parental consent was required; all that was required was a declaration by each child.

Many couples chose to runaway to Gretna Green for their wedding. In the early days the most important person in the village was the blacksmith and he also doubled as the local minister. Such was the volume of weddings taking place, he soon got tired of constantly having to change before conducting a wedding. Instead he took the couples into his workshop and performed a religious wedding ceremony over the anvil which is where the history of anvil weddings comes from.



In 1754 Lord Hardwicke introduced an act Parliament which basically prevented anyone in England marrying under the age of 18 without their parent's approval. Nothing would stand in the way of young love, so when the brides and grooms learnt they could marry in Scotland provided they were over 16 they flocked to the nearest Scottish wedding venue, which more often than not was Gretna Green. The tradition of Gretna Green weddings holds strong to this day with about 5000 marriages a year.

From our Clan Guardian

By Crawford Little

Allen Little has invited me to write a few words about the armigerous Clan Little Society in Scotland, of which I am the Guardian.

In recent times it was necessary for me to invest most of my time and effort into attempting to bring some sort of order to that organisation styling itself Clan Little Society Scotland and Worldwide, following the resignation of its officers. Eventually, there was no alternative but to declare it “dormant”. But on a positive note, the winding up of CLSSW will allow me to concentrate on the armigerous CLS.

I should perhaps explain that while Lord Lyon has stated that a “modern” clan includes all who bear the surname, in our case that includes those of French, German, Irish and English extraction. Indeed, it even includes those Littles whose ancestors lived in the English West March, under English protection, and never rode beneath the chief’s banner! All that aside, the main concern of CLS, at least for the time being, will be to research the history of the Scottish clan, particularly in Meikledale, Ewesdale, Eskdale and Redkirk.

There is much to be investigated – including some of what has long been accepted as definitive clan history. For example, we are told that the clan was founded by William Wallace’s nephew, Edward Little of Meikledale, in about 1300. But we only have the word of a blind minstrel, writing many years later, that such a man existed. It would be good to find some more definitive proof. And even if he did exist, he certainly had nothing to do with Meikledale. Indeed, it is unlikely that he would even have heard of it. As you can probably imagine, there will be no end to the research that might be conducted by the armigerous CLS in the future. All we have to do now is to decide how best to pass on our findings. A website might seem like the best option – but that’s something else we’ll need to investigate...

Crawford



Check us out on Facebook or at the website where we welcome any comments, questions or feedback.



**Celebrating kinship
in memory of the
Clans modern day
founder the late
Dr Johnnie Little**



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