

Sprig Of Heather September 2015



# *Sprig Of Heather*



**September 2015**  
**The Official Newsletter of**  
**Clan Little Society New Zealand & Australia**  
[www.littleclan.net](http://www.littleclan.net)

Sprig Of Heather September 2015



## *Editors Quill*

### **LITTLE BY LITTLE**

Like many around the world I have been interested in events beyond Earth. Often we have seen amazing images on TV showing detail from **Pluto**. Pluto takes 248 years to complete one full orbit around the Sun. Whilst the mythology of the night sky is generally tied to the Greeks, stories and myths became encapsulated into the everyday lives of ancient peoples, giving a sense of purpose and binding them closer to the natural world around them. Remarkably, many of these traditions, custom and folk memories are still alive and connected to an astronomical heritage which rivals that of the classical world. I'm referring in this case to Celtic mythology and traditions, which bind the stories of the night sky to events, symbols, literature and cultural trappings which are very much a part of life in Scotland today. Pluto like much of the ever expanding Universe has existed for a very long time. Today we know planets in our solar system travel in elliptical orbits rather than perfect circles, and so the distances between them are constantly changing. At its most distant, when the two bodies are on the opposite sides of the sun Pluto lies **7.5 billion kilometres** from Earth. Our Crofter and Reiver ancestors knew how to read the night sky and determine the seasons. The reivers came from every social class and could be labourer or landowner. Mighty chiefs like Scott of Buccleuch was a reiver as were the powerful Wardens chosen to try keeping law and order in their own Marches, or areas. Reivers were skilled horseman who rode sturdy ponies in the quiet of night when the moon was at rest, they rode under the stars. Our ancestors knew their night sky well. University of Birmingham recently announced an astronomical discovery in Scotland marking the beginnings of recorded time. This Mesolithic monument consists of a series of pits near Aberdeenshire, estimated to date from 8,000 B.C., this 10,000 year old structure would pre-date calendars.

*Allen Little*



# What to wear in the lowlands

Historically, Lowland and Borders clothing was much more like styles south of the Border. By the time of George IV's visit to Edinburgh in 1822 and the publication of the 'Vestiarium Scotium' in 1842, many Lowland Families had begun to adopt aspects of Highland culture, particularly tartan, which muddled the distinctions between the Highlands, Lowlands, and Borders. Many Lowland families seem to be showing a slight preference among the Chiefs of Lowland families (e.g. the Duke of Buccleuch, the Chief of the Nisbets, Lord Borthwick, etc.) to wear regular trousers or tartan trews, instead of the kilt.

## **The CelticTrews** An article from the Scottish Historical Review.

I've often wondered why more Scots don't wear this dress rather than the kilt. As you'll read in the following article it is a quite ancient dress and an early use of tartan. When the Baron of Bradwardine complimented Waverley upon the handsome figure he presented when fully attired as a Highland gentleman, he incidentally drew a comparison between the respective merits of the kilt and the trews, giving his decision in favour of the latter. 'Ye wear the trews,' he observed, 'a garment whilk I approve maist of the twa, as mair ancient and seemly.' There may be a difference of opinion at the present day as to which of these two varieties of Highland garb is the more seemly, but there is no doubt as to the antiquity of the trews, regarded as a part of the Celtic dress.

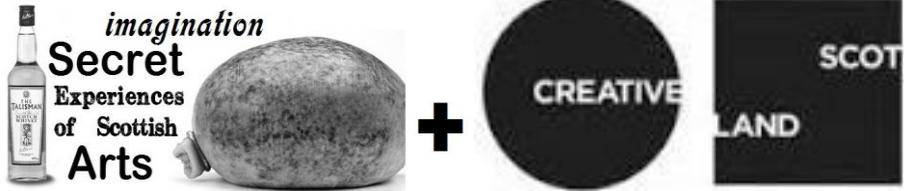
## Sprig Of Heather September 2015

Scott himself, speaking in his own person, states that Waverley had 'now fairly assumed the "garb of old Gaul," 'and there is sufficient evidence that this statement is correct, making due allowance for some modifications in vogue in the eighteenth century, and introduced at one time or another during that period and the immediately preceding centuries.

The dress of the Celts of Western Europe, about 2000 years ago, has been described by Mr. Charles Elton; his statements being drawn from such authorities as Diodorus Siculus, Pliny, and Pausanias, and from such evidences as the pictures on the medals of the Roman emperor Claudius. Mr. Elton writes as follows: The men and women wore the same dress, so far as we can judge from the figures on the medals of Claudius. When Britannia is represented as a woman the head is uncovered and the hair tied in an elegant knot upon the neck; where a male figure is introduced the head is covered with a soft hat of a modern pattern.

The costume consisted of a blouse with sleeves, confined in some cases by a belt, with trousers fitting close at the ankle, and a tartan plaid fastened up at the shoulder with a brooch.' This form of Celtic dress is of special interest to all who are connected with the Scottish Highlands. Because, while it may have been worn by Continental Celts for many centuries after the date of Claudius, it eventually vanished from the Continent, and from all other parts of the British Isles except the Scottish Highlands, where it continued to be worn without any radical variation down to our own times.





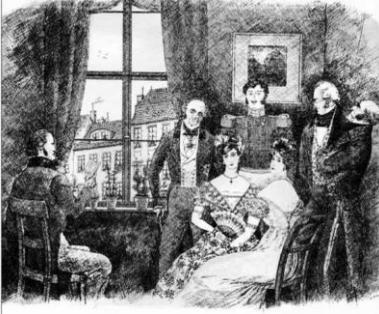
**Creative Scotland** is the public body which supports the arts, screen and creative industries across all parts of Scotland on behalf of everyone who lives, works or visits there. They help people and organisations to work in and experience the arts, screen and creative industries in Scotland by helping others to develop great ideas and bring them to life just as the Scots have done for Centuries.

Since Pre-Historic times the people of Scotland have expressed themselves with symbols, pictures and words. Earliest examples of art from Scotland are highly decorated carved stone balls from the Neolithic period. From the Bronze Age there are examples of carvings, including the first representations of objects, plus cup and ring marks. Other examples of patterned objects and gold work are found from the Iron Age whilst elaborately carved Pictish stones and impressive metalwork has also been found from the early Middle Ages. In our modern times many Scots express themselves in various artistic styles supported by Creative Scotland.

In the eighteenth century Scotland began to produce artists that were significant internationally, all influenced by neoclassicism, such as Allan Ramsay, Gavin Hamilton, the brothers John and Alexander Runciman, Jacob More and David Allan to name a few. Our ancestors had times of peace and leisure to marvel at amusement's and appreciate artistic expression. Sadly there was an intolerance of idleness when 'The Kirk' proclaimed 'The devil finds work for idle hands.' meaning people who have no work or activity are more likely to do things they should not do... People found things to do and enjoy like 'Tatting' making knotted lace or Whittling the making of objects such as children's toys with a knife from a piece of wood.

## Sprig Of Heather September 2015

When resources were available some people took an interest in Sketching, Engraving or Lithography in times when photography 1738– 1820 was less known, producing picture's which endure to the present.



**Creative Scotland** fosters and promotes appreciation of Artistic Heritage including the Celtic Revival seen in the late nineteenth century when Scotland's art scene was dominated by the work of the Glasgow Boys and the Four, led Charles Rennie Mackintosh, who gained an international reputation for their combination of Celtic revival, Art and Crafts. Scotland possess significant collections of art, such as at the National Gallery of Scotland and National Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh plus the Burrell Collection and Kelvin grove Art Gallery and Museum in Glasgow.

Many images from Elizabethan Scotland are from the hands of engravers such as Andrew Bell (1726–1809) an Scottish engraver and printer, who co-founded Encyclopædia Britannica with Colin Macfarquhar. Bell was born in Edinburgh in 1726, his father a baker. He had little formal education and was apprenticed to the engraver Richard Cooper.

Bell produced almost all of the copperplate engravings for the 1st-4th editions of the Encyclopaedia Britannica: 160 for the 1st, 340 for the 2nd, 542 for the 3rd, and 531 for the 4th. He produced three full pages of anatomically accurate depictions of dissected female pelvises and of foetuses in wombs for the midwifery article; these illustrations shocked King George III (1738–1820) who commanded that the pages be ripped from every copy because it offended his sensibility and decency.



**t's usually the Aristocrats and Influencing classes who capture the headlines and people of accomplishment who have the wherewithal to make records of their endeavour's establishing a place in the annals of history.**

So long as humanity has existed there have been those who have and others who don't. Its this later group for whom the Scottish Poor Relief was initiated. Prior to 1845, the funding and administration of poor relief in Scotland was shared by the kirk sessions (church authorities) and heritors. A heritor was a privileged person in a parish who was usually encumbered with burdens, such as the minister's stipend, manse and glebe assessments, schoolmaster's salary, poor rates, rogue-money (for preventing crime) as well as road and bridge assessments, and others like public and county burdens. An occasional female landholder of this class was known as an heritrix. Support for the destitute was mostly through outdoor relief; handouts of money, food, clothing or fuel.

Edinburgh, Glasgow and towns such as Ayr, Dunfermline and Aberdeen also established poorhouses to house the destitute. The most significant records from this period are the minute books and accounts of the heritors and kirk sessions which include details of poor relief applications and payments. Other surviving documents may include parish poor rolls which are lists of named individuals receiving relief such as cash or portions of oatmeal.

## Sprig Of Heather September 2015

Under the 1845, the Poor Law (Scotland) Act the able-bodied were explicitly excluded and could be given in cash or in kind. Large parishes also set up a poorhouse their sick or destitute poor. Parishes in Scotland were only obliged to relieve those who were legally settled there. Settlement in Scotland was based on the place of birth or by continuous residence in another parish for seven years. The complexities of 'Poor Relief were recently discussed in the popular TV Programme **"Who do you think you are?"**

After 1845 when someone sought Poor Relief they would be interviewed in their abode by a inspector of the Poor. The details of the claim (whether successful or not) were recorded in a register of relief applications. Many of these records survive and can be a rich resource of genealogical information giving details of the applicant's name, age, birthplace, residence, marital status, occupation, religion, earnings', names and ages of dependants, disabilities, any other relevant information, and details of any previous applications.

The custom in Scotland was to record women even if married under their maiden name. The modern family historian will know names may sometimes be spelled phonetically. This is particularly so when literacy is challenging. In addition, the occupations stated may not always be reliable or consistent. An applicant might, for example, initially describe himself as an unskilled labourer in the hope of this helping his claim. In a subsequent application, he might describe himself as a weaver.

When I was in Glasgow some years ago I met with a staff person in charge of large collections of poor relief applications at Glasgow's Mitchell Library which holds about a million records in its archives. These include not only those made by residents of Glasgow but also from the counties of Bute, Dunbartonshire, Lanarkshire and Renfrewshire. The names of those granted poor relief were compiled in each parish's General Register of the Poor listing each claimant's details.

[AJL]



# Laugh's

*A Thoughtful Scottish Husband.* Did you hear about the thoughtful Scotsman who was heading out to the pub? He turned to his wee wife before leaving and said, 'Jackie - put your hat and coat on lassie.' She replied, 'Awe lain that's nice - are you taking me to the pub with you?' 'Nah, I'm just switching the central heating off while I'm oot.'

*Old Sandy McPherson was dying. Tenderly, his wife Maggie knelt by his bedside and asked, 'Anything I can get you, Sandy?' No reply. 'Have ye no' a last wish, Sandy?' Faintly, came the answer ... 'A wee bit of yon boiled ham.' 'Wheeshit, man,' said Maggie, 'ye ken fine that's for the funeral.'*

*Jimmy, a very popular man* dies in Aberdeen and his old widow wishes to tell all his friends at once, so she goes to the Aberdeen Evening Express and says, 'I'd like tae place an obituary fur ma late husband.' The man at the desk says, 'OK, how much money dae ye have?' The old woman replies, '£5' to which the man says, 'Ye won't get many words for that but write something and we'll see if it's ok.' So the old woman writes something and hands it over the counter. The man reads 'Jimmy Reid, fae Kincorth, deid.' He feels sad at the abruptness of the statement and encourages the old woman to write a few more things, saying, 'I think we cud allow 3 or 4 more words fer ye money.' The old woman ponders and then adds a few more words and hand the paper over the counter again. The man then reads - 'Jimmy Reid, fae Kincorth, deid. Ford Escort for sale.'

*Hamish McTarg, a Scottish minister, was making his rounds to parish homes to receive their tithes and offerings. One of his parishioners gave, but had a distinctly stingy attitude when parting with his money without receiving something in return. As he put the gift away, Hamish commented dryly, 'Tha Good Book says tha Lord loves a cheerful girer, but the Church o' Scotland canna be so choosy.'*



## Scottish Terrier

The earliest origin of the Scottish Terrier will always be something of a mystery. The principal source of historical knowledge is found in religious works, literary fragments, and available drawings and paintings. The antiquity of the breed's ancestry is unassailable, however. Known by many names, the "Scotch Terrier" has been native to Scotland for several hundred years. It is believed that the original stock was brought in by the Celts, and probably the Scandinavians. The Norsemen had been ruling the Hebrides and adjacent islands long before the Norman conquest, and there are records of the terriers which they brought with them. The Scottish, the Skye, the West Highland White, and the Cairn are all likely descendants of a common breed native to the Scottish soil of Norse descent.

One of the earliest references to these game little dogs was by John Leslie, the Bishop of Ross, who wrote a history of Scotland covering the period 1436 to 1561 and in it mentioned a dog of low stature being used to "go to ground" to kill or drive out the wild cats, foxes, otter, and other vermin.

The reason Scotland has produced so many terriers is that, although the land has a limited area, it presents a variety of environments. In early times, each district had its official "todhunter" or gamekeeper. It was his duty to wage an eternal war of extermination on the badger, the fox, the otter, and all vermin. He was, of necessity, accompanied by his "tyke," a small, rugged terrier, active enough to keep on the move all day long over rough country, and courageous enough to follow a fox into its den and drive it out or kill it. The dogs were picked for their gameness rather than for their looks.

## Sprig Of Heather September 2015

They were cherished for their splendid working qualities and were bred with that alone in mind. No record of lineage was maintained, and the sole criterion of type was adaptability to the work at hand. However, because of the nature of the work and because the smallest, gamest, and toughest dogs were bred from a type did evolve-our beloved Scottish Terrier, sometimes referred to quite appropriately as the "Diehard. "

The Scottish Terrier is a sturdy little dog weighing about 9 Kgs and standing some 26 to 28 cms tall, with short legs and a head proportionally longer than the rest of its body. This attractive animal has an alluring countenance which dog lovers find irresistible. The Scotties back top-line is level with its tail thicker at the base, medium in length and covered with short, hard hair. The coat has a distinctive profile with longer hair on the beard, eyebrows, legs and lower part of the body. Colours come in black, wheaten, or brindle.

With a brave and alert temperament, the 'Scottie' is a hardy and lovable dog which makes an ideal pet. Its described by many charming and full of character. As a puppy the Scottish Terrier is playful and friendly who matures into a dignified adult. The Scottish Terrier makes a very good watchdog and companion for people confined to their own home. Like many a human these small dogs have an inclination to be stubborn but responds well to firm yet gentle handling from an early age. In some situations the Scottie has been known to dominate the household but responds well to consistent care and attention and socializes well. This breed is sensitive to correction, therefore if you are firm and confident, the dog should respond to you. If handled inconsistently the Scottie which is intelligent will exploit opportunities and remember what it's gotten away with. Obedience training must be consistent but persuasive. This is an endearing animal with personality which is lively, proud and intelligent. Scottish terrier's likes to dig or enjoy a walk, play ball games, and is a thoroughly sporty home loving animal.

## Profile Of my Grandma



The way it smells when she cooks.  
When you're bad, the way she looks.  
How she would do anything to help a friend.  
The way she'll stick by you until the end.  
She's one of the nicest people you'll ever meet.  
Unless you get on her bad side, then you're in for a treat.  
The way she'll cheer you up when you're down.  
And how she helps you to turn your frown.  
The way she jokes and laughs with me,  
Her soul so kind, so sweet, so free.  
She inspires me in different ways every day.  
My grandma is wonderful in every way. **(ANON)**

~~~~~

### **Granny and Grandad Little** By Susan Little. Dunedin



“Dad, Ernie was the third youngest in a big family of my grandparents William and Margaret Little. My childhood was full of visits to Outram every Sunday for lunch. Granny always greeted us wearing her slippers and an apron over her Sunday dress. I was always told I was her image so felt really proud. She was a fantastic baker and my mum said her recipes were in her head, if you asked how to make a cake - it was a pinch of this and a cup of this – today I bake the same way. Granny’s scones were the best. Outram was an amazing place to visit with walks down to the river. The time with my grandparents may have been short but enjoyable. When my mum had my youngest brother Richard, Granny came and stayed and yes wore her slippers everywhere.”



# *Ceilidh*

One thing the Scot at home knows well and that's how to dance and have fun. The energetic conviviality which added interest to one's social life is no better portrayed than in the **Ceilidh**. It seems with the passage of time, many of us have lost the spontaneity which was such an important feature of community life. Originally the word Ceilidh (kay-lee) descended from the Gaelic word for 'gathering' or 'party'... However, these days when people think of a Ceilidh, they think of a fun filled night of wild dancing, good music and great company!

The beauty of a ceilidh or Barn Dance is that everyone can take part, young or old, experienced dancers to beginners and even those with two left feet! Musically there's something for everyone at a Ceilidh!

Today Bands such as the **"Clarty Clout Ceilidh Band"** plays music which is raw, committed and enthusiastic for dancing and fun. The band's signature is the singing sound of fiddles. Add to that the flowing air of flute and whistle and back it up with the rhythm and fill of guitar and bouzouki. Based in the Scottish Borders, the band has been on the go since the mid-90s and has a reputation which travels from Glasgow and Edinburgh, through the Borders and Dumfries and Galloway, into Cumbria and Northumberland. The band's bread and butter is playing for Scottish ceilidh dancing. With a wide-ranging repertoire and a very experienced caller, our dances are fun and sociable, whether the audience are experienced dancers or are enjoying ceilidh dancing for the first time. Ceilidh. You can have any excuse you like - but ceilidhs are for fun. The "Clarty Clout Ceilidh Band" have had the pleasure of playing for dances in all sorts of venues throughout the Scottish Borders, the South of Scotland and beyond.

## Sprig Of Heather September 2015

There's a sound that starts in your feet and turns into total energy on the dance floor. It's impossible to sit still. What a grand way of socialising. Ceilidh dancing is great for breaking the ice whether the crowd are weel-kent faces or relative strangers. There is a mood for every occasion. From the more relaxed and easy approach with a steady beat to guide the steps, to the energetic, dizzying and driving rhythm that has the dancers birling wildly Ceilidh around the dance floor.



Cartoon courtesy of Robert Thompson and The Guardian

**FIRST SCOTTISH COLONY for New Zealand**

That Place **Easy** TEAK-BUILD **SHIP**  
SAILING

**BENGAL MERCHANT,**  
301 Tons Register—JOHN KEMERY, COMMANDER,  
WILL PORTERLY

**SAIL FROM PORT-GLANGOW**  
For NEW ZEALAND.  
**With the first Body of Settlers**  
FROM SCOTTLAND,  
**On FRIDAY, Oct. 25.**

**SINGLE WOMEN,** going out as Servants to obtain Passages, or in charge of Married Emigrants, will receive a Free Passage on board of this Ship.

All Goods and Engage must be forwarded by the 25th instant at latest, on which day the Ship will clear out.

For Freight (charging room for dead Weight and Measurement Goods) and Passages, apply to  
**JOHN CRAWFORD,**  
24, QUEEN STREET,  
New Zealand Land Co. OFFICE,  
WELLINGTON 20th Dec. 1840.

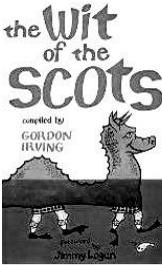
# *Looking for new opportunities abroad in New Zealand & Australia*

Poverty has always been noted as a reason for Scottish emigration. Two-thirds of the land is harsh – rocky, ill-drained, swept by rain-bearing winds off the Atlantic and far from the Mediterranean and medieval centres of European trade and culture. The first Scottish communities away from home were founded by traders.

In the 17th century a new factor was driving Scots away from their homes. Schools in Lowland parishes producing a literate population resulted in five universities in a country of under a million people. This created a highly educated middle class. In an underdeveloped Scottish economy. The 19th century presented new opportunities in new destinations. Scots went abroad as missionaries, explorers and traders. For the impoverished Scot, however, Australia and New Zealand were the lands of opportunity. Emigration was perceived by trade unions and other voluntary groups as a practical solution to unemployment and economic depression. The height of emigration corresponded with years of harsh economic depression, particularly in the late 1840s and early 1850s, the mid-1880s, and the period of 1906 to 1913.

Scotland lost 10% to 47% of the natural population increase every decade in the 1800s. Until about 1855, a number of the emigrants from the Highlands were forced to leave the land because of evictions. In the Lowlands, emigration was almost always the outcome of wanting to improve one's living standards.

## Scottish Humour



Author Gordon Irving produced a book many years ago entitled "The Wit of the Scot" which brought together many amusing anecdotes and stories about Scotland. The book is unfortunately out of print.

Here are a few of the items which appeared in Gordon Irving's classic **Wit of the Scots**

**When** a tradesman finishes a job at a house in Scotland, it is an old custom to offer him a wee drink. 'Would you like a wee dram ' the lady-of-the-house asked a joiner. 'A wouldna' say No,' he replied. The lady produced the bottle. 'How do you like it, Sandy?' she asked. He replied: Half whisky and half water. An' pit in plenty o' water.

~~~~~

**Proclamation** from the pulpit of Luss Church, on Loch Lomondside: O yiss! O yiss! O yiss! There will be no Lord's Day here next Sabbath, because the Laird's wife will have a muckle washin', and she needs the kirk to dry her claes in.

~~~~~

**A modern** young girl in Edinburgh remarked "What I find wonderful is how my mother learned all the things she keeps telling me to avoid".

~~~~~

**The old** Scotsman was asked by a friend what he thought of his nearest neighbour. He replied: "Och, weel, he's a decent-like lad, but he's no' exactly a temperance man. He was sittin' there juist drinkin' an' drinkin', until I could scarcely see him."

~~~~~

**The two** old Scots had imbibed overmuch. Saying his good-night, the one told the other: "John, man, when ye gang oot at the door, ye'll see twa cabs. Tak' the first yin - the t'ither ane's no' there!"

## Sprig Of Heather September 2015

**An old** Scots minister, stressing to his congregation the wisdom of repentance, remarked: "Yes, my friends, unless ye repent, ye shall all perish, just as surely as I'm gaun tae ding the guts oot o' that muckle blue flea that's lichtit on my Bible." As he was about to strike, the fly got away, whereupon the Scot struck the book with all his strength and exclaimed: "My frien's, there's a chance fur ye yet!"

~~~~~

**A young** reporter from Glasgow was flown out by his newspaper to cover the after-effects of a particularly violent earthquake in south-east Europe. He filed a graphic story which opened: "God sat on a mountain-top here today, and looked down on a scene of. . ."The reporter got a cable back by return from his editor in Glasgow. It said: "Forget earthquake, man! Interview God."



**We need your support. Have you  
contributed to our funds recently?  
Donations are welcome. Write to  
CLSNZA, 7 Earl St, Levin 5510 NZ**

## Meaning of motto !

**Because I want to use it in a Sermon I have for some time been looking for the meaning of our Clan Motto "Fidei Coticula Crux"** I understand the Latin but am somewhat bemused as to why and how it could become one of our Clan Mottos. We know that for over three centuries the Border Littles shared with the Armstrong's and Beattie's the steep-sided dales to the north and west of the present town of Langholm and the majority of Littles, Lytles and Lyttles in Australia and New Zealand have their family roots deep in the old West March of the Scottish Border. In the Anglo-Scottish Border Wars of 1296-1603 the Littles were one of the fighting clans of the West March. By the close of the 16th Century they had earned a reputation as the finest light cavalry in Europe.

Many of the 45,000 Littles who are dispersed around the globe maybe aware that their progenitors came from Dumfriesshire on the Scottish side of the Anglo-Scottish Border, or perhaps from neighbouring Cumberland on the English side of the Border, or from Ulster in Ireland.

According to a 1587 Act the "Litill's" are among the names listed under West March and were clearly regarded as a Clan. In 1672 David was the last Laird of Meikledale and last Chief of Clan Little to register arms consisting of the shield and the crest. The Shield shows the arms - a silver St. Andrew's Cross on a black background. The dominant black and silver (black and white) comprise the livery colours of the Border Littles. The Chiefs two mottoes are well known with that used amongst the Reivers "Concedo Nulli" (no surrender, no retreat, yield no ground) seemingly the more popular. My questions relate to the second motto "**Fidei Coticula Crux**" (The Cross is the Test of Truth). And how it came to be significant for our Clan. Did the early Clan Chiefs have religious or ecclesiastical allegiances?. Its well know that apart from the dogmatic reforming Presbyterians religion was an important feature of historic Scotland..

For over three centuries the Border Littles shared with the Armstrong's and Beattie's the steep-sided dales to the north and west of the present town of Langholm. In 1426 **Simon Littll** became the 1st Laird of Meikledale being granted tenure of the lands in Ewesdale by James I, King of Scots. Elsewhere **"Littles of less warlike disposition found their vocation as monks in Abbeys and Convents"**. Could this be the elusive clue I'm searching for? While the quartet of Historic abbeys in the Borders at Melrose, Jedburgh, Kelso and Dryburgh are renowned, there are ruined abbeys in Dumfries and Galloway as well. All of the Dumfries and Galloway abbeys boast their own unique charms, sharing their **Cistercian** heritage. It was the same order of white robed monks who inhabited all these sacred places before the ravages of the Reformation. **My question is was it in these Abby's that "Littles of less warlike disposition found their vocation"? What evidence endures?**



Cistercian Ministry



**Contact Allen Little if you know the origin of our Motto 'The Cross Is The Test Of Truth'**

## **Notions and potions.**

This article draws extensively on prior writing of **Dr Ross Mitchell FRCPE (Royal College of Physicians, Edinburg)** who said ~~ “Hundreds of years before the Christian era, Celtic tribes from the Rhine and Danube began to spread into Western Europe and by 300 B.C. they were considered the greatest people on the continent”.

Throughout Scotland back to the 9th Century, when incursions of Norsemen modified Celtic customs, gaining insights into wellbeing and gradually merging into Gaelic culture they gained access old knowledge. By the Middle Ages, Celtic social life was organised on the clan system where Clansmen were kinsmen. People established themselves with mystique or insight such as in the “Leech”. Leeches (Gaelic 'lighiche' a physician) was skilled in medical craft. They were regarded as of the learned classes and those below freemen, labourers and slaves eeked out a living as best they could in lives of drudgery.



There is little evidence of the health of the people. Its probable, that once the dangers of birth, infancy and early childhood were past, the general health of the Celtic communities was good. The Celts diet of oatmeal, fish, dairy produce and fruit was nutritious and deficiencies were not widespread, though rickets did occur. The advice of a wise woman or healer versed in the herbal remedies and healing charms handed down through many generations was well regarded. With the arrival of the Christian religion to replace the old druidic rituals, scholarship flourished and spread some skills in tending the sick. Clan physicians or Healers would have known about the nostrums and charms of folklore and probably ignored or disparaged them in public.

## Sprig Of Heather September 2015

The Clan Physicians and Healers strived to disguise their inability to cure or prevalent diseases such as smallpox. In private they probably condoned the herbal and other remedies of wise women.



Indigenous treatments were seldom written or condoned. Some scholars translated recognised medical texts into Gaelic from recognised Greek, Latin or Arabic sources.

Beliefs about health and disease are seldom unique to one society, for they tended to pass from one community to another by word of mouth and the tales of itinerant travellers.

In Scotland the line between Highlands and Lowlands was never precisely defined in cultural terms and there was always some intermingling of ideas, especially in the marginal areas of Atholl, Angus and Mar. However, certain practices are recorded as having been widespread in the Celtic areas. In the early Celtic world, there was general belief in the supernatural - fairies, demons and the threat of the evil eye ('droch-shuil') and there were certain people who were believed to have occult powers while others were able to exorcise evil spirits. The wise women and other gifted individuals would use these medicinal substances in combination with charms and incantations in the treatment of disease.

A great variety of plants were used in Celtic medicine and there was a general familiarity with common herbs. Some of these were undoubtedly of real value, though many were probably ineffective and achieved any perceived result through the belief of people in the accompanying charms and spells. Thus a poultice of hemlock applied to a skin cancer with the appropriate incantation was believed to remove the growth, at least in some cases.

## Sprig Of Heather September 2015

Certain plants had a general application, such as the medicinal tea made from the common speedwell. Others were reserved for particular conditions. The juice of juniper berries was thought to be effective in curing epilepsy. Infusion of wild garlic was one of many remedies for bladder stone and infusion of tansy got rid of intestinal worms. Figwort was widely used for healing cuts and sores: it was called the plant of the thunderer ('lus an torranain') The Water of Life - 'uisge beatha' in Gaelic, usquebaugh in Scots and whisky in English - was understandably considered to be almost a panacea, given for a variety of ailments but believed to be specific for smallpox. In 1785, the right of Forbes of Culloden to distil duty-free whisky at Ferintosh in Cromarty was withdrawn by law, which prompted Robert Burns to write:



.. "Thee Ferintosh! O sadly lost!  
Scotland lament frae coast to coast!  
Now colic grips an' barkin' hoast  
May kill us all !"

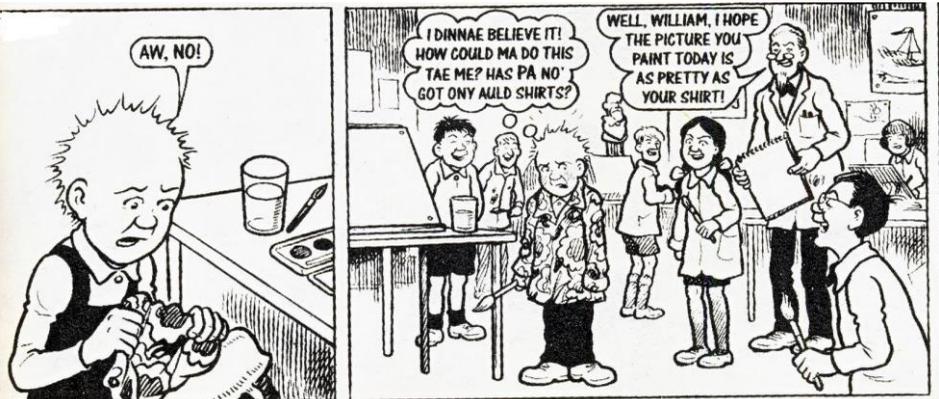
Clearly confidence in the medicinal value of whisky endured in Scotland long after the Middle Ages.

No doubt many early Celtic leeches used plant and animal products in good faith and believed in their efficacy, though later generations of physicians relegated them to folklore. Conversely, however, some ancient Celtic remedies, such as giving the thyroid gland of a sheep born on St Brigit's Day to a child with cretinism, may have been compatible with the scientific facts that form the basis of modern therapeutics.



**Clan Little NZ&A is financed by donations from our friends. Have you made a donation to help with our local expenses? All Donations are gratefully received. Please write to us:-  
C/o 7 Earl St, Levin 5510. New Zealand  
Email: [kiwilittle@inspire.net.nz](mailto:kiwilittle@inspire.net.nz)**

# OOR WULLIE



Spring Of Heather September 2015

**Clan Little Society in New Zealand & Australia is a Board Incorporated under the Charitable Trusts Act 1957.**

**Web site:- [www.littleclan.net](http://www.littleclan.net)**

**Email:- [kiwilittle@inspire.net.nz](mailto:kiwilittle@inspire.net.nz)**



Find us on

**Facebook**

**Clan Little South Pacific**

**Write:- Clan Little Society  
7 Earl Street  
Levin 5510  
New Zealand**

**Phone:- 0064- (06)-3675900**

**Mobile:- 0064- (021)-02533330**

