

Clan Evolution

Not surprisingly, each person interprets the meaning of a Scottish “clann” differently. Like all societies, clan evolved as Scotland progressed into a nation.

Medieval Age, 500 AC to 1500 AC

Early records show the existence of clans in the Outer Hebrides and in Argyll during the 11th, 12th, and 13th centuries. These tribes were comprised of Norse traders and invaders, Picts, and other indigenous northern inhabitants. During the 12th century, warrior chiefs led their tribes east and south from the northern isles. At a time before nationalism, these clan warlords ruled by dominating the land and providing protection to those who swore fealty. In the 13th century, people of Anglo-Norman and Flemish ancestry moved north into Scotland and some of these families grew to adopt the clan structure.

The clan survived by their own governance and loyalties. They chose their alliances and decided when, or if, they would support a monarch or a monarch’s enemy.

Modern Age, 1500 AC to 1800 AC

A time of great upheaval in Scotland. Political and religious turmoil forever changed Scotland. A fully formed Scottish government was better equipped to bring citizens under control.

Parliament enacted increasingly tough laws such as the December 1585 Act 92, “Anent the quieting of disordered subjectes, inhabitants of the Bordours, Hielandes, and Iles.” The rights of clan chiefs were striped away with such legislation as the 1660 Tenures Abolition Act and the Clan Act of 1715. Culloden, 1745, vanquished the remaining independent spirit of many Gaelic and Celtic Scots who were further demoralized by the Disarming Act of 1746 and the Act of Proscription that included the Dress Act prohibiting clansmen and clanswomen from wearing kilts and tartan.

The Killing Times began in the 1600's. Brought about by government intolerance of the practice of any religion other than the one they mandated. This propelled the exodus from Scotland of thousands of brave Scots, the greatest portion of them clan highlanders, who sailed across oceans to carve out a space for themselves in a new country.

Adding insult to injury, Highlanders and clanspeople also fell victims to The Highland Clearances in the 1700's. Tenant farmers kicked off their lands to make way for sheep, destroying forever the close bonds once held together under the cooperative unity of clanship.

Contemporary Age, 1800 AC to Present

The Dress Act was repealed in 1782. Victorian Scotland experienced a renaissance of all things clan, helped by Sir Walter Scott as well as King George the IV, who wore a kilt during his royal visit to Scotland in 1822.

Today, we look around the world to find those who bear the surname of Baird and who might wish to resurrect the spirit of mutual heritage and kinship through a new expression of clan. The "rules" have changed, clan is regulated by Scottish government, but we no longer need to be proficient and wielding a broadsword.

Prior to May 2009, the website for Scotland's Lyon Court defined Clan with the following entry:

The clan system is closely bound up with Scottish heraldry. The best definition of a clan provided by a heraldic authority is contained in Nisbet's "System of Heraldry", published in 1722: "A social group consisting of an aggregate of distinct erected families actually descended, or accepting themselves as descendants of a common ancestor, and which has been received by the Sovereign through its Supreme Officer of Honour, the Lord Lyon, as an honourable community whereof all of the members on establishing right to, or receiving fresh grants of, personal hereditary nobility will be awarded arms as determinate or indeterminate cadets both as may be of the chief family of the clan."

A clan is therefore a community which is both distinguished by heraldry and recognized by the Sovereign. At the head of his honourable community is the chief. He is the only person entitled to display the undifferenced shield of Arms, ie without any marks of dependency upon any other noble house.

Chiefship is a title of honour and dignity within the nobility of Scotland. Any claimant to such a title must establish, to the satisfaction of the Lord Lyon representing the Sovereign, that he or she is entitled to the undifferenced arms of the community over which they seek to preside. It is the determining of chiefship which is among the Lyon Court's central work.

Many of the cases which have come before the Lyon Court in the last 50 years have related to the chiefships of clans. There are now about 140 clans that have chiefs recognised by the Lord Lyon.

A clan or family which has a recognised chief or head confers noble status on the clan or family which gives it a legally recognised status and a corporate identity. A family or name group which has no recognised chief has no official position under the law of Scotland.

The Lyon Court clan definition transcribed above was removed from their website before May 2009 and replaced with the notation, "This page is currently under review." As of September 2015, no new description of clan has been presented.

Baird Heritage