



Clan MacNeil

Association of Australia

Newsletter for clan members and friends.

December 2010

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New Members

I would like to welcome our new clan members who have joined since the last newsletter.

Mary Surman
Carol & John Searcy
Phillip Draper

Over recent months I have met with John Andrew & Pam McNeil who live in Tea Tree Gully, a suburb of Adelaide. John's ancestors come from Tyrone in Northern Ireland. I am now trying to find ancestral records in Tyrone to help him build his family history.

Carol Seary's ancestors came to Australia from the isle of Barra and we will try to find

more information for her from Calum MacNeil, genealogist on Barra.

Births, Marriages and Deaths

On 2nd October John McNeil married Lisa van Grinsven at the Bird in hand winery in the Adelaide hills



John is the son of Peter and Mary and grandson of Ronald McNeil, my cousin. He represents the fifth generation of a John McNeil in our family. Please join with me in congratulating them on their marriage.

We offer our deepest sympathy to Cliff McNeil on the death of his mother, Helen Mary McNeil who died on 8th November 2010, age 96 years. Helen was a member of the committee for the Clan MacNeil Association of Australia in its early days in Sydney.

National clan gathering in Canberra October 2010

Clan families met in Canberra, capital city of Australia for our annual gathering on Friday 1st October.

Most clan members stayed at University House which was an ideal location as we had our informal dinner on Friday evening as well as our formal dinner on Saturday evening in the complex.

My wife Joy was unable to go to Canberra due to pain in her back due to pinched nerve. However our family was well represented as our daughter Kirsty and her son Harry age 8 years, travelled by train down from Sydney to Canberra for the gathering. I was very proud to have them with me.

The younger family generation was also represented by Jason Lamb, grandson of Rhonda and Michael Lark.

I would also like to thank Kim & Robyn McNeil who represent our clan association in Western Australia for arranging to attend their first gathering.

Our numbers of people who attended the Canberra gathering was less than in past years and it was regrettable that so many people found that they had other commitments on this weekend.

The gathering program events went very well and it was a memorable experience for all of us who attended.

I would like to particularly thank Toni McNeill and John Palmer for their organization of the accommodation and functions held on the weekend. The final function being a barbecue luncheon at their home was very much appreciated by all of us who were able to be there.

The clan annual gathering is an important event in our yearly program and offers an opportunity for all clan families to meet other kindred members and share information.

We have now held eight gatherings and these have been held in different locations of Australia to give you the chance to join us when it is held in your State.

I would greatly appreciate it if you can try to reserve the date of the next gathering in 2011 in your diary as we would very much appreciate your support. We are hoping to hold it at Wollongong during October.



Keith & Bonnie Williams, John Palmer and Jean Buchanan at the clan members' meeting



John Palmer addressing the Haggis watched by Ian McNeill and our piper



Mary Surman, Janeen Webb, Cliff & Jean McNeil, Keith & Bonnie Williams at the clan dinner

World clan gathering on Barra August 2010



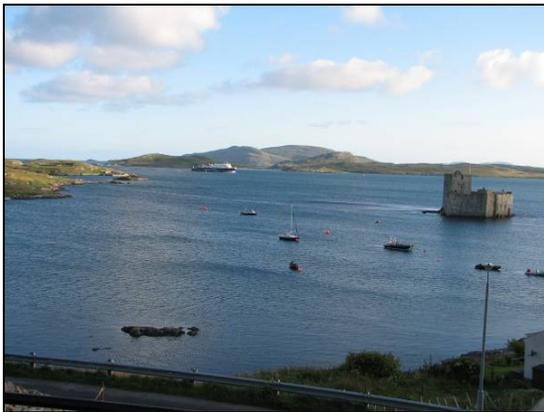
World clan gathering on Barra group picture. Mary Surman kneeling in front on right and Louise Harris immediately behind.

Rory Macneil of Barra is standing in front row wearing his kilt, jacket and sporran.

The Barra gathering program started on Monday 2nd August and continued through to the evening of Thursday 5th August.

The events followed those of past years with a reception hosted by the clan chief, Rory Macneil of Barra and his family at Kisimul castle, a bus tour of the island, a display of produce and

crafts, evening entertainment, a genealogy talk by Calum MacNeil and a clan dinner. Reports from Mary and Louise confirm that it was a great time to visit Barra and we recommend this experience to all of you who have not yet enjoyed the pleasure of visiting Barra..



Ferry 'Clansman" entering Castlebay with Kisimul castle on the right

The next world clan gathering will be held on the island of Barra in 2012. Please watch for preliminary information as it becomes available.

News from the Isle of Barra

Barra Airport named one of world's most scenic

Barra has hit new heights after its airport was named as having one of the most stunning and inspirational approaches in the world. Barra Airport, one of the only airports in the world where scheduled aircraft land on the beach, had a starring role earlier this year in Visit Scotland's Perfect Day big-screen advertising campaign, helmed by "Girl With a Pearl Earring" director Peter Webber.

According to private jet booking network PrivateFly.com, the airport in Barra, has the tenth most spectacular approach anywhere in the world. Sion Airport, which is nestled in the heart of the Swiss Alps, tops the list, while the Caribbean island of St Barts and the stunning approach to Las Vegas also feature.

Adam Twidell, the company's Chief Executive and a former RAF pilot, took regular family holidays to the isles as a child,

"Barra's airport is a great example of using the efficiency of its natural landscape to dramatically stunning effect. On a private charter approach to Barra, passengers can connect with the crew, the island and the view for a unique beach landing."

Guth Bharraidh- the Barra weekly newsletter



Twin Otter aircraft arriving at the Barra airport.

Isle of Barra Malt Whisky distillery

Plans have been made to establish a small malt whisky distillery on Barra. The owners aim to arrange with crofters to grow a particular strain of barley suitable for the soils and weather conditions on the island.

The distillery is to be built at Borve on the west coast of the island.

Lunch with Cliff McNeil & Bob Neil

After the last national gathering in Canberra I spent 10 days at Manly to be able to spend time with our daughter Kirsty and our grandchildren. During this period I was pleased to be able to arrange to meet Cliff McNeil and Bob Neil for a light lunch. While I have communicated with Bob and Lesley for some time this was my first opportunity to meet Bob. Lesley was at the time overseas on business,



Cliff McNeil, John McNeil & Bob Neil at Circular Quay, Sydney

Jean Buchanan & John Whiddon at Daylesford

The Daylesford highland gathering is held each year in early December and I greatly appreciate the valuable support which Jean Buchanan and John Whiddon provide in representing our clan there.

Several months ago I arranged for some new banner signs to be produced for our use at gatherings and other Scottish events.

The picture below shows Jean with the clan information tent and one of our new banners.



Jean Buchanan at the Daylesford highland gathering
December 2010

Reintroduction of beavers into Knapdale, Scotland

Beavers are a native species which have been missing from the UK since the 16th Century, when man hunted them to extinction. Beavers are a missing element of our native biodiversity and they are a species worth having in any ecosystem. Known as a 'keystone' species, the presence of beaver should bring a vast number of benefits to other native Scottish wildlife as well as wetland and waterside habitats. By modifying their habitats through coppicing, feeding and, in some cases, damming, beavers create ponds and wetlands which attract other species, provide a food source to others, and can even help improve water quality

Scottish Wildlife Trust, in partnership with the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland (RZSS) and Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS), released the first beavers to live in Scotland in over 400 years in May 2009. This marks the UK's first-ever formal wild reintroduction of a native mammal species.

The beaver families are now settling in to their new home in Knapdale Forest, Mid-Argyll. This release is for a time-limited five-year period (2009-2014), during which time an independent scientific monitoring program will take place to

assess the effect beavers have on the local environment as well as how well the beavers settle in to Scotland.



Knapdale forest an ideal site for beavers - Venturing into the native woodlands of the west coast is to enter Scotland's own rainforest. Swathed in both native Atlantic oak woodland and coniferous plantations much of this large, stunning reserve is draped with mosses, ferns and lichens which prosper in the mild, wet climate of the Argyll coast. Steep, rocky ridges, or "knaps", cloaked in woodland and separated by narrow, often flooded "dales" create a landscape unique in Scotland where fingers of land jut out into the sea at Loch Sween. The inland freshwater lochs support an excellent array of dragonflies and rare pondweeds. As well as being one of the most important sites in Europe for otters the area is the site of the first beaver reintroduction in the UK.

Knapdale in Argyll is a location of important ancient lands owned by the McNeill families (Arichonan, Gallochallie, Tainish and Ardbeg)

Proposal for a clan young adults' program

Some time ago I became aware of a program which has been established and managed by Clan MacLeod Societies and this coincides with their gathering held every four years on the island of Skye.

The objective is to provide a program over about 4/5 days where young members of clan families aged between 18 – 25 years can participate under supervision in a program which allows them to participate in activities of archeology, environment, local community and physical activities such as walking, canoeing, bicycle riding as well as meeting young people of their own age living in Scotland.

At the end of the program they join the clan families who are attending the gathering on Skye.

I think that this is an opportunity to develop a clan young adult program which will provide a unique experience for some of our children and

grandchildren which they will remember for the rest of their lives.

I think that it may provide us with future leaders for our clan associations and societies and is worthy of our support.

As these ideas are only in the formative stage I would very much like to hear from you and letting me know how you feel about this idea?

Recent Scottish events in Australia

During the last 6 months we have attended a number of Scottish gatherings and other events.



Burnside Scottish Country dancers at Tartan Day celebrations July 2010

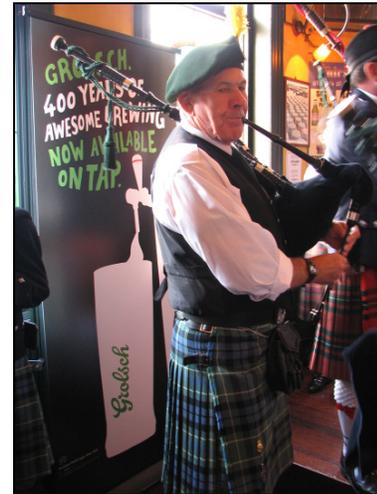
The Scottish Associations of South Australia joined with the Burnside Library to provide a concert of entertainment to celebrate the anniversary of the repeal of the legislation banning the wearing of tartan.

In August we were not able to participate at the Toukley highland gathering in 2010 and we will try to overcome this problem for 2011.



Rosemary McKay, Barbara Medhurst, John & Joy McNeil at the Port Adelaide Caledonian Society celebration for Tartan day July 2010

Bill MacNeil Sadler and I attended the annual luncheon hosted by the Clan MacLeod. Bill represented the clan at the combined luncheon hosted by Clan Donald and Clan MacFarlane



A piper from the Adelaide Irish pipe bands wearing the McNeill of Colonsay tartan kilt at the piping jam session after the Norwood Christmas pageant

I walked in the Norwood Christmas pageant with a small group of kindred Scots and at the finish Hamy Marcelin and I retired to the front bar of the Norwood hotel with a number of highland band pipers and drummers.

During November Bill MacNeil Sadler and I attended a luncheon for Sir Lachlan Maclean of Duart and Movern. Sir Lachlan visited Australia and New Zealand.

Ian & Robyne McNeill attended the St Andrew's day anniversary event in Hyde Park, Sydney.

In early December I attended the Celtica festival at Port Adelaide and manned our information table for Clan MacNeil over two days.

Coming events 2011

New South Wales

26th January

Australia Day Celtic festival at Bradfield Park, Milson's Point 9.30 am to 5 pm

29th January

Scottish House annual barbecue lunch at Guildford to celebrate the birthday of Robert Burns

2nd April

Bundanoon highland gathering at Bundanoon Southern Highlands.

23rd April

MacLean highland gathering at MacLean NSW

28th April – 1st May

Glen Innes standing stones Celtic festival at Glen Innes, NSW.

25th June

Bannockburn lunch arranged by Scottish House

24th June

Start of Scottish Week – details not yet available.

2nd July

Aberdeen highland gathering at Harrison oval commencing at 9.30 am Aberdeen, NSW. Further information at the web site www.aberdeenhIGHLANDGAMES.com/index.php?page=games

27th August

Toukley highland gathering at the Harry Moore oval commencing at 11.00 am.

October

Clan MacNeil national gathering at Wollongong, NSW. Information will be circulated to you by April / May.

Victoria

12th February

Berwick highland gathering at Akoonah Park, Berwick Victoria

20th March

Geelong highland gathering – a new location still to be finalized.

10th April

Ringwood highland gathering at Jubilee Park, Ringwood, Victoria

South Australia

29th January

Celebration of the birth of Robert Burns concert in the Burnside Library 11 am – 3 pm. Attendees must book at the library. 8366 4280

19th February

Mount Barker “Celts on the Green” concert at Mount Barker recreation reserve oval

20th February

Mount Barker highland gathering at Mount Barker Reserve oval 10 am – 4 pm
Come and visit our clan tent.

25th June

Gathering of the clans dinner at the Feathers hotel, Glynburn Road, Burnside – hosted by Clan MacNeil

1st July

Tartan day celebration in the Burnside library
The entertainment program is not yet available and will be circulated later. Bookings may be necessary

Queensland

3rd July

International tartan day at Southbank Brisbane

Our clan library

Additions to our clan library resources during the last 6 months.

Scottish Reference book

Records of Scottish immigrants and their descendants in the State of South Australia compiled by Barbara Medhurst

Mungo of the House of Neill

A family record produced by Junemarie Mason. A tribute to the Watch cats who protected the rare manuscripts, books and paper from damage by vermin.

The House of Neill was a recognized publisher in Edinburgh during 1749 to 1973. The House of Neill was associated with the printing of the Encyclopedia Britannica between 1768 and 1771. The encyclopedia was printed in numbers with each selling for 6 pence or 8 pence if printed on fine paper. Mungo was the favorite Watch cat of Dr.Patrick Neill in the printing works. The Neill family descendants arrived in Australia in 1859.

An update on our project of the MacNeil / McNeill families who lived in Argyll & Bute during the period of 1400 to 1800 AD

At our national clan gathering in Canberra Bonnie Williams gave me a copy of a large McNeill family ancestral chart. It is titled –“The pedigree of Sir James Graham Robert Douglas McNeill and the McNeills of Faughart, Cushingdun, Gallochallie and Colonsay”.

The title is interesting as it indicates that the family line has been generated to show the

descendants who lived in Irish counties of Antrim, Derry, Louth and their link to the older generation of their family in Knapdale, Kintyre and Colonsay in Scotland. The chart provided a lot of information and links between family members. It will be a valuable resource as we link into the Irish families.

Many McNeill, McNeal, McNeile, O'Neil and Neal families lived in Ireland. Unfortunately Irish family records are not as complete as the Scottish ones and for many individuals it is much harder to trace family ancestral records.

While some families showed a clear ancestral link to earlier generations in Scotland, for others there is no easy pathway to clarify their genealogy.

Our research in gathering information for the Argyll project has shown records of a number of families living in the areas investigated by us in addition to the specific families whom we have tracked in our project. Where we have found these records they have been copied into our files and also printed in our report documents of the research project.

Prior to the 1851 census collection when detailed census information was collected for every family, family information was limited to rental records, tax collection, legal deeds estate records, and church records of births and marriages.

Parish records were not always complete and tenants did not own sufficient assets to need a Will to be created. As a result many families were not shown in area records.

The family records of the McNeills whose ancestors lived on the Kintyre Peninsula show that some relations had settled in Antrim and Louth by 1739.

Two interesting web sites with information about the McNeill families in Ireland are www.ancestryireland.com/index.php?id=1072 www.antrimhistory.net/content.php?cid=47

Clan MacNeil merchandise available to you

We can offer you a small range of products which we buy from overseas on behalf of members due to the level of demand. Pictures of these items are shown below.

We can make enquiries for other items on demand.



Clan crest material badges



Tales from Barra by the Cuddy
The Clan MacNeil by Robert Lister Macneil



Packets of 20 tartan serviettes

Please let me know if you are interested to buy any of these items or want to receive information about other items

Berneray, a part of the Bishop's isles located south of the island of Barra

In 1764 the island of Berneray had a population of 20 people and 30 years later there were three families remaining on the island.

Berneray is located at the foot of the string of islands in the Western Hebrides and is one of a group called the Bishop's isles. The people on Berneray lived by crofting, fishing and fowling. A short distance to the north is the island of Mingulay which was the home to 120 people.



Picture taken from Berneray looking to the island of Mingulay

During the 19th century agriculture was based on crops of barley, potatoes, oats, turnips and cabbages and livestock including sheep and cattle. Ponies were kept, although their use may have been to transport materials to the lighthouse, and goats were also recorded in 1863. Berneray lacks peat, which had to be brought over from Mingulay at considerable effort.

The harvest of the seas remained important, with the island a base for exploiting the rich stocks of white fish by fishermen from several local islands. Seabirds were also an important part of the economy, supplying both food and feathers for sale. Such was the abundance that in 1868 a single fowler caught 600 birds in six to eight hours

The National Trust for Scotland purchased the island in 2000 from a local crofters' syndicate called the Barra Head Isles Sheepstock Company who had owned the island since 1955.¹ The National Trust of Scotland was able to acquire it through a bequest by Miss J. M. Fawcitt "to provide an area of natural beauty in memory of her parents and the courage of her late brother, Bernard." In 2009 the Trust removed all the sheep from the island, citing the difficulties of maintaining the flock in such a remote location. Further information on the "last clearance" in the next column shows how difficult it has been to dislodge the last of the sheep from their island.

The last native islanders left the island about 1910. From this point the three families of the lighthouse keepers were the only residents and the island became uninhabited with the 1980 automation of the light.

During the Clearances in Barra, the population of the Bishop's Isles rose, as those who were

pushed off their land chose to stay there rather than emigrate.

The eyes of some of the islanders looked north to the fertile island of Vatersay.

That island was run as a single farm, under Lady Gordon Cathcart who owned the estate - and only visited the islands once during her 54 year ownership.

To those without land, or even a proper dwelling, the island with its sheltered anchorages was ideal. In July 1906, landless men from Barra, who weren't even allowed to build a proper house in Barra, took land on Vatersay.

Lady Gordon Cathcart took them to court, but the judge said that she had neglected to fulfill her duties as a landlady.

He said she had been ambivalent towards the needs of the cottars - those without land - and that there was little wonder at what they had done.

A book has now been written by Ben Buxton titled "The Vatersay Raiders" describing the events.

I have looked up a copy of the "Scots Heritage" magazine number 43 where contains an article titled "Sheep out, tourists in"- The story is about the author's experience in joining Archie McLean of Craigston, Barra and four other crofter fishermen in the final roundup of sheep on the island of Berneray.

The National Trust of Scotland owners of Berneray and had given instructions for the last of the sheep to be removed. The sheep had had no contact with human beings over the last five years and were wary of the intruders. The sheep were intimately familiar with the rough ground and even with the best resolve of the crofters a few wild ones resisted being round up and leapt for their freedom among the cliff and ravines. Those that were caught were sheared of their multiple fleeces and transferred to the island of Vatersay.

Archie's last comment in looking over the pile of letters from the National Trust was "ach, we'll get the wild ones next time"

Joy & I send our best wishes to all clan association members and friends of the clan.

John McNeil

