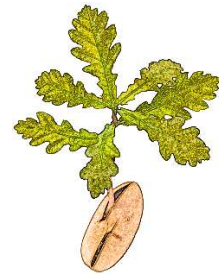


The Sprouting Oak



The Newsletter of the Clan Watson Society
clanwatson.org

No. 1 – February 2022

Welcome to this, the first newsletter of the relaunched Clan Watson Society!

In this edition, we will cover our vision for this new society, go over some of the things we've been up to lately – much of which is currently occurring "behind the scenes" – and we'll talk about our ideas for taking the society, and the Watson clan as a whole, forwards.

We're intending to issue this newsletter on a periodic basis (but don't expect one a month!) to provide a summary of recent developments and to help raise awareness of the society and the initiatives that we are undertaking. We'd like to use the newsletter to introduce members of the extended Watson family, so if you'd like to feature, please drop us a line through the website, the address of which is at the top of this page!

You don't have to wait for the newsletter to engage with your namesakes – head on over to the Facebook group at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/clanwatson/>, sign up, say hello and start getting involved!

Each edition of the newsletter will also carry a feature article, with this edition's introducing the Watsons of Saughton, the only family that we are aware of that carried the chiefly line. If you would like to contribute a feature article, please let us know!



One exciting development occurred at the end of 2021 when the Court of the Lord Lyon amended their rules of succession for clan chiefs, especially the rules around appointing new clan commanders for armigerous clans such as ours. We'll cover the recent changes and their potential implications for the Watsons in more detail on Page 8.

Finally, as we grow the society there will be more and more ways in which each and every one of you can get involved. We'll talk about these opportunities later in the newsletter, but please do think about whether your involvement could benefit the society as we aim to grow!

We hope you enjoy this newsletter and would love to hear your feedback on this first issue to help us to ensure it hits the mark going forward, so if there are bits that you particularly like or bits that you felt weren't so good, please let us know!

May we flourish beyond expectations!

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President's Welcome

Welcome all! I am Shane Watson, the founder and current president of this new Clan Watson Society.

My interest in Watson history was piqued nearly 20 years ago now when I went for a travel vaccination and the nurse, as she was about to administer the jab, said to me, "Ah – another member of the clan!". I asked what she meant, and heard mention of the name "Clan Watson" for the first time.

My maternal grandmother was a genealogist and one of my aunts an archaeologist and between them they have done a thorough job of uncovering that side of the family tree going back several centuries, but I'd always had working on my father's side on my future to-do list. With my new realisation that the Watsons might not just be randomly scattered across the UK and that there may have been a nuclear Watson family from which many of today's Watsons might draw their roots, I started doing some research. I

quickly realised that there is a huge interest "out there" in anything to do with the history of Scottish and Irish names, and so I set up my personal website clanwatson.co.uk, more recently followed by the [Facebook group](#), in order to reach out to other Watsons around the world. The site has attracted a steady stream of visitors and many enquiries over the years, and I've really enjoyed communicating with Watsons from around the globe and, in some cases, helping them out with their own research. In my own research, a combination of historical records and DNA analysis has taken my own paternal family history back four centuries and, even further back, to the Viking settlement of Shetland!

I've recently decided that it's time to take things forward an extra step and so, in a clean break with my personal site, I set up a new website dedicated to establishing a Clan Watson Society, given that the US society is now defunct and the Canadian society appears to have completely scaled back its activities. My aim is to increase awareness of the society and grow the membership to the extent that we can start representing the Watson name at various events, establish networks across the world, research collaboratively and, in short, once again refer to ourselves as a family!

None of this will be possible without you all signing up for the journey and spreading the word far and wide! So please, stay tuned, get involved and – as our family motto says – let us flourish beyond expectation!



Shane Watson
President
The Clan Watson Society



Our Vision

We want the Clan Watson Society to grow until it is the one place that all Watsons think of when they want to meet other Watsons, to research their family history, to organise or attend events, or just to learn about what is going on with Watsons past and present.

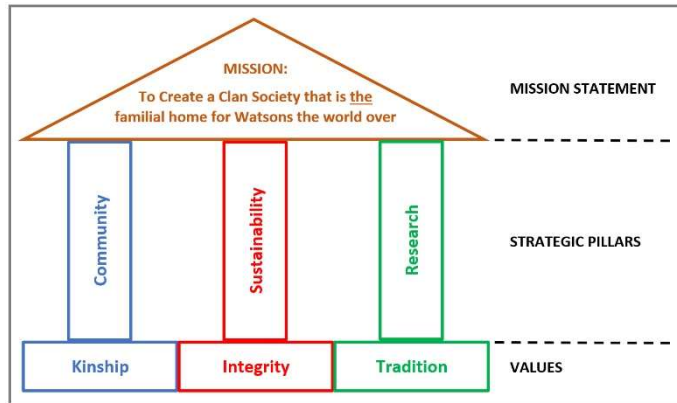
Our [Mission and Values](#) are detailed on the website, and will guide us as we grow the society.

It is really important to us that the society is seen as all-inclusive and not just limited to people of immediate Scottish descent. The word "clan" is used to refer to the society in recognition of the Scottish origins of a large number of the world's Watsons, but it is by no means intended

to limit membership of the society or its interests to those with Scottish connections. The international nature of today's clan associations and their continued revival is bringing people from a diversity of backgrounds together under the various family banners. We are hoping that the Clan Watson Society will see the same, and we are looking forward to hearing stories of Watson communities around the world and to researching and collecting information on some of the diverse groups and their origins.

We are currently investing a lot of time and effort in developing the website. As it nears completion, we will start to promote the society a lot more actively to try to drive traffic our way. We recently ran a Facebook campaign to try to get Watsons in the New York City area to meet up to attend the upcoming Tartan Day Parade. The promotion reached nearly 4,000 people and resulted in a decent amount of engagement with the published post but, unfortunately, no takers this time! We've taken onboard the lessons learnt and future campaigns will focus on promoting the society across broader geographic areas as we look to build wider awareness.

As the society is still in its early days, the funding and time requirements are currently manageable for just the president; however, as the society grows in scale it will be necessary to bring onboard volunteers for various roles, for example arranging events, generating publicity and running local chapters.



As the requirement for funding and expenditure grows it will, at some point, be necessary to form a recognised charity or community interest company in order to allow the society to generate revenue in a transparent, auditable manner.

This new society will live and thrive through the collective efforts of its members. If you are interested in getting involved and helping us to achieve our vision, don't hesitate to get in touch!



What's in a Name?

Some of you may be wondering why we've chosen to call this newsletter *The Sprouting Oak*.

To answer that question, we need to investigate some of the coats of arms registered to Watsons over the years. Many of the arms depicted in the registers of the Court of the Lord Lyon show the same thing, and many of those that don't describe it: the crest shows "two hands holding the trunk of one oak tree sprouting out fresh branches, the hands issuing out of clouds" (from the 1818 matriculation of the arms of the last chief, James Watson of Saughton). A few of the depictions of the crest are shown below, some with and some without the grasping hands:



1815



1818



1871



1880



1912



1913

These descriptions of the sprouting oak date back at least as far as 1673, shortly after the Court of the Lord Lyon was established, and are a common theme over the ensuing centuries. As you can see from the first page of this newsletter, the sprouting oak also appears on the Clan Watson crest, taken from the 1818 personal arms of James Watson (although the hands have been moved under artistic licence to grasp the sprouting branches!).

We will include an article giving an introduction to heraldry in the next issue, together with a summary of what we can learn from the various Watson coats of arms registered with the Court of the Lord Lyon.

In terms of the Watson name itself, it is a contracted form of "son of Walter", and it has many variants. The name Walter itself was introduced to what is nowadays the UK and Ireland by the Normans (in the form of "Gauthier") and the Flemish (as "Walter"), although it pops up in different guises across the European continent. The name itself is often understood to have originally meant "commander of the army" or "powerful warrior".

In Scotland, people called Walter were commonly called "Walt", "Watt" or "Wattie", and in Gaelic "Quat", "Quattie", "Quhat" or "Qwat". Surnames were historically modified by the suffix "son" to denote "son of" or prefixed with the Gaelic equivalent "Mac". "Son" was spelt in several different ways, including "sone", "soun" and "sounne", often depending upon how a particular registrar decided it should be written!

Although "Watson" is by far the most common spelling of the name nowadays, other variants that can be derived from the above include: MacQuat, MacQuattie, MacQuhat, MacQwat, MacWalter, MacWatt, MacWattie, Walterson, Watsonne, Watsoun, Watsoune, Wattson, Wattsonne, Watsoun and Watsoune, and you will probably find many of these recorded as you research your own family history!



The Watsons of Saughton

To understand the Watsons as a clan, we need to learn about the Watsons of Saughton, the only family of Watsons believed to have held the chiefship.

Where is Saughton?

Saughton is an area in the west of Edinburgh. The area was planted with willows by generations of highland drovers; as they came into the city to sell their animals, the accompanying women would use the willows to make baskets, creels, fencing and other goods for sale. The name Saughton itself is derived from *Saileach*, the Gaelic for willow, and was historically pronounced *Soch-ton*, with the hard “ch” sound as found in “loch”, rather than *Saw-ton* as might be assumed. The spelling seems to have evolved from the early *Salechtune* via *Slachton* and *Saughton* to the *Saughton* that is still in use today.

The first recorded mentions of Saughton are found in association with the formation of Holyrood Abbey in 1128.

What of the Watsons?

The Watsons are first mentioned in association with Saughton when, in 1537, Richard Watson acquired the lands of Saughton from the abbey. Richard was married to Janet Stenhope, who came from a family that had tack on the nearby Stenhope mills. We have an account stating that Richard was descended from some Watsons who had been living in Cranstoun Riddel, to the southeast of Edinburgh, since at least the 14th century. From the earliest accounts and for several hundred years thereafter, we see that many of the Watsons were prominent merchants in Edinburgh, so it may be that the original Walter from whom they drew their name was a Flemish trader who set up business in the city.

Richard Watson, upon acquiring the lands, became the 1st Laird of Saughton, a title that was to carry through the next nine generations of his family from father to son. James Watson, 3rd of Saughton and Richard’s grandson, was buried in the kirk at Corstorphine. The large flat stone that originally covered the Watson burial place in the floor of the kirk is nowadays mounted in one of the walls, and still bears the initials of James and his wife, Jean Douglas. The Watsons of Saughton continued to bury their deceased in the kirk until the close of the 18th century, despite interment in churches being forbidden by the post-Reformation church, a clear sign of their local influence.



Watson Ringstone in Corstorphine Kirk

The Watsons mixed with nobility in the region, as is evidenced by many of their marriages. James Watson, 6th of Saughton, married Margaret Dalmahoy, daughter of Sir John Dalmahoy, a baronet. Their son, also James (the name James is a recurring theme!) married Bethia Baird of the noble Saughtonhall Baird family. Their son, James, 8th of Saughton, married Helen Hope, the daughter of Charles Hope, 1st Earl of Hopetoun. Their son, Charles, married Margaret Carnegie, daughter of George Carnegie, 6th Earl of Northesk, and their son, James, 10th of Saughton, married Janet Ramsay, daughter of the prominent George Ramsay of Barnton. James and Margaret’s sons died before they could produce heirs, but their daughter, Helen, married the 18th



Earl of Morton, bringing the hereditary lands and titles of the Watsons of Saughton into the Douglas family.

The Watsons added to their land holdings over the centuries. Throughout the 17th century, they added the adjoining lands of Broomhouse, Lairdship, Redheughs, Saughton Loanend, Sighthill and Stenhouse. In 1741, James, 8th of Saughton, bought Cammo House and changed its name to New Saughton. Charles, 9th of Saughton, was still using it as his main residence in 1794 when John Philip Wood wrote *The Antient and Modern State of the Parish of Cramond*, in which he noted that New Saughton was “the property and residence of Charles Watson, of Saughton in the parish of Corstorphine, chief of the name in Scotland. New Saughton is a commodious mansion, built in 1693 by John Menzies of Cammo, commanding a remarkably fine view of the windings of the Amon, among steep and woody banks, as also of the Frith of Forth. Extensive tracts of



New Saughton, the Seat of Charles Watson Esquire of Saughton

valuable and well grown timber adorn this estate, particularly on the side of the river; and the grounds about the house are laid out in a very ornamental style by the present proprietor, a gentleman not more respectable for his extensive possessions and splendid connections, than for unaffected kindness and hospitality to his friends”.

The Watsons owning land in and around Saughton is not what makes them so interesting to Watson family historians; rather, the more that we research this particular family, the more we see their influence spreading throughout Scotland and beyond. Perhaps the clue is in the term “chief of the name [Watson] in Scotland”, a title held by at least Charles and his son James, 10th of Saughton, but what we see is clusters of influential Watsons popping up in various places, many of whom seem to have links back to the Saughtons.

We see the Watson name, and the family arms, cropping up in Muirhouse, Dundee, Glasgow and Aberdeen in Scotland, in Oxfordshire, Northamptonshire and in the area of London in England, and as far away as Jamaica. Often, the Watsons in these places are referred to as merchants, and sometimes as other prominent figures such as baillies, provosts and bankers. Although we have not yet proven all links, it does appear that the Watsons built a political and trading power base in key locations of what would become the British Empire. This opens up the exciting possibility that many of today’s Watsons owe their name to this key family of Saughton!

In the next issue of this newsletter, we will cover Watson heraldry in more detail, and give an introduction to heraldry for those of you that might not be too familiar with the subject. In future issues, we will cover some of the clusters of Watsons in more depth, especially those that tie back to the Watsons of Saughton.

In the meantime, anyone wishing to contribute to the research is more than welcome to [contact us!](#)



The Watson/Buchanan Link

It is fairly general knowledge that the Watsons are listed as a sept of the Buchanans, as can be confirmed by a visit to the [official site for the Clan Buchanan](#). Before we discuss this link, it is worth briefly talking about septs.

Septs were families that followed another family's chief or were part of the extended family but held a different surname. The first definition leads to an assumption that an agreement has been forged between two clan chiefs, with a smaller clan pledging fealty to a larger one. Although this may be the case for the Watsons and the Buchanans, we have not as yet been able to find any conclusive proof that the chiefs of Clan Watson had any form of interaction with those of Clan Buchanan.

One possible reason for the association of the Watson and Buchanan names is outlined in *The History of the Ancient Surname of Buchanan and of Ancient Scottish Surnames; More Particularly the Clans*, which was written by William Buchanan of Auchmar and published in 1793. In it, he describes how the Buchanan family of Lenny is the oldest cadet branch of the Buchanan family. The first mention of a Buchanan laird of Lenny is in a charter dated 1247, which refers to an Allan Buchanan de Lenny. One of his descendants, John Buchanan, the second laird of Lenny called John, is stated as being laird during the reign of King Robert III, who reigned between 1390 and 1406. One of John's sons was called Walter, although he was referred to as "Wattie in Calintuy, being the name of the place of his residence". Wattie's son John lived in the parish of Luss and "according to the ordinary custom of those, and even of the present times among highlanders, had his surname changed into a patronimical one, derived from his father's proper name, being thence termed John MacWattie". John had nine sons and the MacWatties became "in a small process of time pretty numerous". Many of these MacWatties and their descendants retained the name, although some branches did later reassume the Buchanan name. As discussed on Page 4, the name "Watson" is the anglicised version of "MacWattie".



Coat of Arms of the Buchanans of Lenny

We have not yet uncovered any evidence that any of these MacWatties were related to, or had any other interactions with, the Watsons of Saughton, although we do know that relatives of the Watsons of Saughton spread out towards traditional Buchanan territory, so they may well have come into contact.

Our research into other links between the Watson and Buchanan names is continuing, especially as we investigate Watson clusters closer to traditional Buchanan homelands; however, the absence of a signed contract between the Watson and Buchanan chiefs should not stop any present-day Watson from forming their own association with the Buchanan clan, whether it be by following them on [Facebook](#) or by actively [signing up as a member](#). I have been in contact with the president of the Clan Buchanan Society International, and he has been instructed by the soon-to-be-inaugurated Clan Buchanan Chief to welcome as members anyone bearing the Watson name or one of its variants, so feel free to join up!

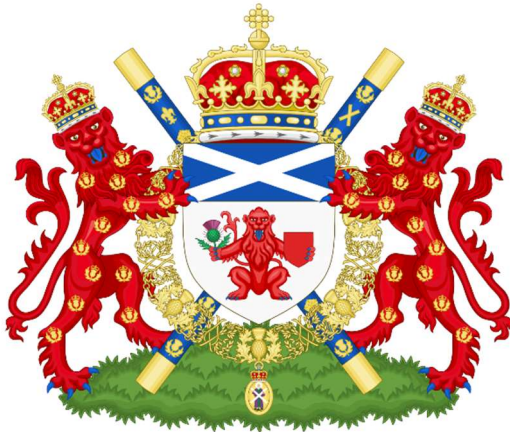


Succession of Chiefs

Historically, the role of chief of a clan passed to a hereditary male heir, often the eldest son, or a very close relative in the event that a chief had no sons. In the event that no obvious heir was apparent, an *ad hoc derbhfine* would be called in which prominent members of a clan would gather to agree on a suitable heir. Until an heir was agreed upon, a clan commander would be appointed to keep clan affairs in order.

This tradition continued well into the present day. In 1992, the Court of the Lord Lyon updated its guidance for appointing a new clan chief or clan commander where no clear heir could be found. Any candidates for either role would have to have been resident in Scotland for a period of three years before being put forward, and the membership of the *derbhfine* was only open to those with a Scottish surname who had been holders of Scottish arms for at least a year and a day prior to the meeting.

The Court comprehensively updated the guidance on 16 December 2021, although in my subsequent discussions with the Court it became apparent that the update was to reflect current practices rather than to change them.



Coat of Arms of the Office of the Lord Lyon

Regardless, there are two routes by which a recognised clan with no current chief can appoint a new one.

The first is to find a hereditary candidate willing to take on the position. This is not as straightforward as it may sound, especially in cases where a clan has been without a chief for several generations. The Court generally requires a significant burden of proof, both that the candidate is a genuine hereditary heir

and that all closer lines to the last chief have been thoroughly researched and found non-viable. It is generally required to employ the services of a professional genealogist specialised in such research in order to generate the necessary dossier of evidence.

The second route is by the appointment of a clan commander. Before the Court will consider the appointment of a commander. A clan society must be well established, with a formal membership structure and regional chapters, and the society must engage a supervising officer from the Court to prepare for and to chair a family convention to discuss the appointment. Importantly, the process is no longer Scotland-centric, perhaps in recognition of the more international flavour of many of today's clans, and all holders of the clan surname must be given a chance to attend the convention. The requirement for a candidate to have been based in Scotland for three years has now been dropped, but the court will only agree on the appointment of a new clan commander – typically for a 5-year term – if it is clear that the majority of the family members present at the convention are coalescing around the same candidate.

A clan commander's primary role is to leave no stone unturned in the search for a hereditary chief. This means that he must lead research that demonstrates that all lines leading to a rightful claim to the chiefship have been extinguished. He also needs to be actively engaged in reestablishing the clan



and promoting the search for a candidate to the chiefship. The Court may extend the initial 5-year term if the commander has been fulfilling the terms of the role and there is clear support from the extended family to do so.

After a clan commander has been in place for a period of 10 years, the court will consider non-hereditary candidates for the chiefship. It is important to note that the commander will not necessarily be named as chief if more worthy candidates are put forward or if the family is not clearly behind his candidature.

As such, the role of a commander is somewhat of a thankless task and really only suitable for those who are able to put their egos to one side and to expend considerable efforts over a long period of time purely in the interests of the clan!

From my discussions with the Court of the Lord Lyon, it is clear that they wish to see a much more established Clan Watson Society before they will consider the appointment of a commander, so unless our continued research uncovers a hereditary heir who is willing to assume the chiefship, we may well be without a chief for the foreseeable future as we seek to build our society.

What's On, Watson?

The title of this section harks back to my school days, when my classmates went through a (thankfully brief) period of finding it hilarious to ask me “Shane, What’s On?”, before sharing their TV viewing plans for the weekend. Here, we will present a few events that members of the society might find interesting.

25 – 27 March 2022



Hawick Reivers Festival

<https://www.hawickreivers.com/>

9 April 2022



New York City Tartan Day Parade

<https://nyctartanweek.org/>

7 – 10 October 2022



Buchanan Chief Inauguration

<http://www.buchananchief.org.uk/inauguration/>

If you are interested in any of the above events and wish to meet up with other Watsons, [let us know](#) or put a post on the [Facebook group](#)! If you are aware of any other events that you think other members may find interesting, [drop us a line](#) and we'll add them to the next issue!