

Ewing Surname Y-DNA Project Status Report

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The following is a message I posted to the Clan Ewen Google Group's list on January 25, 2011.

I believe that evidence from genetic genealogy could be a useful adjunct to considerations about the composition of Clan Ewen and perhaps even about who should become chief. Genetic testing certainly must not be used as a litmus test for who is properly qualified to be a member of the Clan or its chief, but it can give us a very much richer understanding of the roots of and relationships among the many families that bear variants of the surname Ewen.

There are many popular misconceptions about genetic testing, including some ill-founded fears about how the results of such tests might be misused, but adequate consideration of these would require much longer discussion than is possible in a short message. Detailed understanding of the methods and implications of testing in genetic genealogy requires learning a fair amount of technical scientific information, but obviously discussing that cannot take place in a brief forum, and in any case is not necessary to understand what I am suggesting here. Much discussion of these and other matters, as well as the results of the Ewing Surname Y-DNA Project (the Project) are available on our web site, the home page of which can be found at www.EwingFamilyAssociation.org/DNA_Project/index_Y-DNA.html.

The Project was begun in October 2004. As of today, we have enrolled a total of 135 participants. Four of these are women, who have been tested for mitochondrial DNA. Women do not have Y-DNA, which is passed strictly from father to son, so our results on them do not give any information about their paternal lines. We also have two men we know not to have Ewings in their paternal lines (my wife's brother and a cousin in my maternal line, who I added to the Project for my own interest and amusement). This leaves 129 participants in the Y-DNA portion of the Project. Four of these have unrelated surnames (Hodges, Young, Scott and Smith) but are known or suspected to have Ewing ancestors in the strict paternal line and received their non-Ewing surnames because of adoptions, etc. This leaves:

- 114 men named Ewing
- 4 men named Ewin
- 2 men named Ewan
- 1 man named Ewen
- 1 man named McEwan
- 1 man named McEwen
- 1 man named McEwin
- 1 man named Eunson

As must be plain to anyone with remotely scientific sensibilities, we have too small a sample for any of the spellings on this list except Ewing to make any generalizations about relatedness. That said, two of the Ewins are second cousins once removed of one another and are plainly related to the large group of related Ewings I will speak about below. The other two Ewins are third cousins of one another and sixth cousins of a man named Ewing, but these three are not genetically related to anyone else in the Project (group 5a). As it happens, the earliest known ancestors of all four of our Ewins were named Ewing, and they know when the spelling of the name was changed from Ewing to Ewin.

One of the Ewan men closely matches one Ewing man (group 5b), but they are not genetically related at all to anyone else in the Project. None of the others is genetically related to anyone else in the Project.

The situation is quite different for the men that spell their names Ewing. The genetic results suggest that two thirds of them have a common ancestor who lived four or five hundred years ago (groups 1 and 2). Another group of seven men (4a) appear to have a different common ancestor at a comparable time depth, and three of them are known to be descended from an ancestor born in 1730. Another group of three men (4b) appear to be related to one another but not to others in the Project, with the possible but doubtful exception of a man named McEwen. A pair of sixth cousins and a known relative for whom I do not have a lineage and a pair of second cousins once removed constitute two more groups (4c and 3a, respectively) genetically unrelated to the others, and four men who are fifth cousins at various removes and a known relative for whom I do not have a lineage constitute another unrelated group (4d). Finally, an uncle/nephew pair and a third man whose conventional genealogic connection to them is not known constitute yet another group (3b) unrelated to the others, but they appear to be closely related to a McLaughlin family with origins in Donegal. If I have counted right and have not left anyone out, this means that we have found eight unrelated Ewing families represented by two or more participants in our Project and nine individual Ewings (in groups 4* and 5*) who are not genetically related to one another or to anyone else in the Project.

Let me tell you a little story to help you understand why I think this exercise is interesting and important. The Rev. Ellsworth Samuel Ewing (1908-1995) had the idea that many, if not most, American Ewings were descended from one William Ewing of Stirling, Scotland. In the early 1990s he and others organized *Clan Ewing in America*, which was originally intended to be an organization for just members of that family line. He put together a set of huge paper charts purporting to show the genealogical connection of the Ewing lines represented among members of the organization. At that time perhaps the most preeminent American Ewing genealogist was a woman named Margaret Ewing Fife, whose book *Ewings in Early America*¹ set a high standard in the field. Neither Rev. Ewing nor Mrs. Fife thought that her Ewing line was related to the line Rev. Ewing was interested in, and he initially opposed her membership in the organization. Finally the criteria for membership were relaxed so that she could become a member and she eventually became the second Chancellor of *Clan Ewing in America* in 1995 when Rev. Ewing died. By the time we started the Ewing Surname Y-DNA Project, conventional genealogists had already called some of Rev. Ewing's assumptions and conclusions into question. As so often happens in genealogy, his wish for a good story had outweighed the evidence.

Once we had analyzed enough Y-DNA samples from our participants to check Rev. Ellsworth's claims about the relationships between family lines, we found that there were quite a number of mistakes and that he had included some Ewing families in his charts that were plainly not genetically related to the others. We also found that though he was mistaken about the particulars, it turns out that a very large fraction of American Ewings are in fact descended from a common ancestor of the approximate vintage of the semi-legendary 'William Ewing of Stirling' that he thought to be the patriarch of the Clan. We also learned that there is quite a lot of genetic diversity among the Ewings we tested. And to our surprise (and I must say, to my delight) we also discovered that Mrs. Fife and Rev. Ewing were mistaken and

¹ Fife, Margaret Ewing (ed. James R. McMichael). *Ewing in Early America*, Family History Publishers (Bountiful, Utah), 2003. Available from www.HigginsonBooks.com and online at www.EwingFamilyAssociation.org.

that they are in fact genetically related (remember, we cannot get this information from testing a woman because women do not have Y-DNA, so we learned this by testing a couple of Mrs. Fife's male cousins). Have a look at dl.dropbox.com/u/431003/Group4dRelationshipDiagram2.pdf.

In part, these discoveries led us to explicitly change our focus to include all Ewing families regardless of genetic relatedness and all Ewen families in any of its spelling variants and to seek participation from Ewens around the world. As a part of the shift in focus, we also changed the name of *Clan Ewing in America* to the *Ewing Family Association*.

So whatever does this have to do with Clan Ewen in Scotland? The large majority of the participants in our Project are American. Maybe only half of these can trace their conventional genealogy to their immigrant ancestors, and most of these hit the inevitable genealogical brick wall in Ulster. We do have three or four British participants, a couple of Canadians, one New Zealander and some Americans who are relatively recent immigrants from Scotland, and we have a few American lines with well documented lines back to Scotland, but none of these have well documented conventional genealogies back to the 16th century. If you want to read a little more about some of these, have a look at www.EwingFamilyAssociation.org/DNA_Project/DNA_Articles/DNA_Articles/101601_Ewing_David.pdf. Our data presently have nothing to say about the relationship between any of our Ewings and the MacEwans of Scotland. And I suspect that the MacEwans of Scotland know little about the genetic relationship among their various lines. We could start to say something interesting about this if we had twenty or thirty well-chosen samples from Scots with related surnames.

Of course, nothing important depends on this. Our names are our names and each of us is due equal respect. It is preposterous to speak of 'real' or 'original' or 'genuine' Ewens, whether on the basis of genetic data or otherwise. But wouldn't it be interesting to know the results of this kind of survey in Scotland? Might it be possible to identify genetic signatures specific to the various lines Thor Ewing documents in his *New Notes on Clan Ewen*?² Would it not be fascinating to identify actual genetic cousins 'across the pond'?

Perhaps I should say that I had at one time pretty well convinced myself that though there once existed a Clan Ewen of Otter, it had nothing to do with modern-day Ewings. I thought probably that the logic of E. W. R. Ewing in his *Clan Ewing of Scotland* was correct.³ He thought that Ewing originated among Brythonic Celts in the lowlands and had nothing to do with the highland MacEwans. Indeed, I made a big effort to apply genetic genealogy to answering that question, which you can read about at dl.dropbox.com/u/431003/Ewing_Y-DNA_Article11.pdf, but the results of that were inconclusive because of a shortage of Y-DNA data on living Scots, and Thor Ewing's recent arguments have persuaded me to think again about this. It would inform my thinking and our discussion if we could gather some of this data.

Please educate yourself about the Ewing Surname Y-DNA Project. Our web site is well organized and comprehensive. You can find Results Tables, Relationship Diagrams, Network Diagrams, and a host of background information and explanatory material. My recommendation is to start with the home page, at www.EwingFamilyAssociation.org/DNA_Project/index_Y-DNA.html, and after reading that, to open

² Ewing, Thor. *New Notes on Clan Ewen*, The Clan Ewen Society, 2009. www.clanewen.org/shop/newnotes

³ Ewing, Elbert William R. *Clan Ewing of Scotland*, Corben Publishing Co., Ballston, Virginia, 1922. Available for purchase from www.HigginsonBooks.com and online at www.ClanEwing.org/books/EwingEWR/index_ewr.htm.

the *Results Directory* by clicking the link at the top right of the page. There, you might wish to start with *Results Introduction* at the very top of the list of links. Or you might prefer to begin reading through my series of Y-DNA Articles, for which you can find links under *Resources* toward the bottom of the list. The earlier articles are a kind of primer on the logic and science of Y-DNA testing for genealogical applications. You also might find the articles by John McEwan or John McLaughlin about Clan origins interesting. More materials are available through the web site of the *Ewing Family Association* at www.EwingFamilyAssociation.org, including numerous complete books on Ewing genealogy that are electronically searchable and have links to a wealth of information. The *EFA* makes all of this information available for free to the general public. If you would like to help support this effort, we would welcome you to join us. You can learn about that at:

www.EwingFamilyAssociation.org/index_Membership.html.

And most of all, if you would like to sponsor a male MacEwan relative for Y-DNA testing, please visit www.EwingFamilyAssociation.org/DNA_Project/index_Y-DNA_ToJoin.html.

Index for this Article

| | | | | | | | |
|---------------------|--------|----------------------|----|-------------------------|--------|--------------------|----|
| Eunson | 15 | Ellsworth Samuel, | | Hodges | 15 | McMichael | |
| Ewan | 15, 16 | Rev. | 16 | MacEwan | 17, 18 | James R. | 16 |
| Ewen | 15, 17 | Margaret | 16 | McEwan | 15 | Scott | 15 |
| Clan | 15, 17 | Thor | 17 | John | 18 | Smith | 15 |
| Ewin | 15 | William, of Stirling | | McEwen | 15, 16 | Young | 15 |
| Ewing | | | 16 | McEwin | 15 | | |
| David Neal | 15 | Fife | | McLaughlin | 16 | | |
| E.W.R. | 17 | Margaret (Ewing) | | John | 18 | | |
| | | | 16 | | | | |