

The Netherlands, cheerfully greeted and ushered us to our romantic room which looked as if it were staged for a Jane Austen movie. She managed everything, from registering us, serving our drinks, waiting our table, and even preparing our food, I think. I once saw her with brass polish and cloth in hand.

In the late afternoon on our first day, we met Margaret Sutherland, a local resident who knows everything about the 500-year old parish church next to the inn. With her were Sinclair, her husband, and Colin McCullum, an Irishman and a genealogist, whose ancestors also came from the Kilfinan area here in the County of Argyll. Margaret and Sinclair live nearby in Tighnabruaich. This couple spearheaded a drive

to restore and maintain the Kilfinan Parish Church. The five of us shared dinner and conversation in the inn's basically unaltered 18th century dining room. The walls were covered with forest green felt and nearly filled with portraits of stiff aristocrats, dead long ago. Jane and I were served the area's famous Loch Fyne salmon. Fish from this loch is much sought after, and an upscale restaurant chain that



Kilfinan Parish Church, adjacent to the hotel.

specializes in sea food, especially salmon, is named Loch Fyne. Yes, my Scotch cocktail was predictably smooth. We five talked about our family histories, Loch Fyne, Kilfinan, and the Kilfinan Parish Church. Margaret told us that at least one MacEwen was buried there. At first, because of the fragility and decay of the tombstones, she replied "No rubbing is allowed" to our request to make a rubbing of an ancestor's tombstone. After dinner, though, she reconsidered with, "It's your tombstone. Rub it if you wish." So we did.



Ann MacEwen's gravestone.

On Wednesday morning, after an English breakfast modified with frighteningly large duck eggs, we phoned Margaret to confirm that her final statement of the night before still held, and we were reassured that it did. Margaret, however, declined our offer to accompany us on the rubbing expedition. Jane and I entered the adjacent church, whose roots go back to the 12th century, and were impressed by the extent and good taste of the restoration. The interior was responsibly refurbished in detail as well as in scope. In the vestibule we found the binder that Margaret had prepared of the alphabetical listing



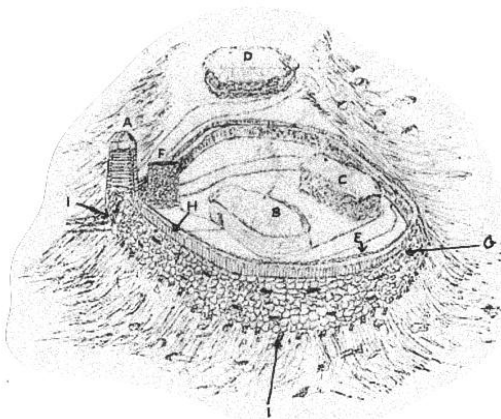
Wally rubbing Ann's tombstone.

of nearby graves. One MacEwen was on the list and a corresponding diagram identified the location of that burial site. In the churchyard (to us, cemetery) we stepped reverently amid the dreary and lonely tombstones, overgrown with brambles and ivy, to the appointed dwelling-place. We located Ann McEwen's tombstone, undoubtedly a distant cousin. Mindful to not disturb the lichen and moss-clad crumbling stone, we taped a length of rice paper over the lettering and began to rub with our heel ball, a globe of hard wax. Our efforts resulted in a good impression of the inscription, which read, "Erected by Donald Martin, Farmer, Park, in memory of his wife Ann McEwen, who departed this life on the 3rd May, 1851, aged 60 years." Later research revealed that Ann and Donald were married in Kilfinan, most likely at the parish church, on April 27, 1815.

Back at the hotel, Maddy offered Wellington boots to Jane and me for our hike to MacEwen castle, situated on a high bluff above Loch Fyne, at least a two-mile trek from the hotel. Two roughly drawn maps, each with a different course, guided Jane and me to the site by directing us around a farmyard, through meadows, and into pastures populated with sheep bleating in protest at the intrusion, and then to the shore of Loch Fyne. We made our way by hoisting ourselves over stiles and hedge-rows, negotiating gates, slogging through brooks deep with muck that nearly sucked our Wellingtons off our feet, and dipping down into and up out of steep ditches, nervously eyeing equally nervous cows as we passed near them, treading over the slimy and slippery boulders that were on the loch shore, and scaling minor cliffs. We arrived at the promontory we had eyed in the distance only to discover that the castle site must be farther on. The trek was not in vain, for we ventured on this obstacle course-of-a-march and finally came upon the cairn that marks the castle's site,

Castle MacEwen

- A Wood tower
- B Turf building
- C Inside stone building
- D Outside stone building
- E Ramparts (undressed stone)
- F Stone tower
- I Gate
- G Inside and out wood reinforcements
- H Wood palisades
- I Stakes to keep walls from sliding down hill



A sketch of Castle MacEwen, as it might have appeared in the 13th century. [Courtesy Kilfinan Hotel.]

high atop another promontory. The castle has been in ruins for centuries. Stones were used as a quarry for those needing them to repair their homes so, ultimately, the castle was dismantled. Despite the castle's despoiled state, I was moved as I stood on ground where my ancestors walked as long ago as 1200. A plaque embedded in the cairn informed us that the memorial was erected in June, 1990 by the Clan MacEwen Society. I recalled the words of British poet William Wordsworth: "While change is inevitable in life, through memory nothing is truly lost and change itself yields its own rich rewards."

Bain's book means more to me now than it did before this trip: "Although it is of ancient origin," Bain wrote, "there are few authentic records of this clan. Skene [19th century Scot historian] quoting the M.S. of 1450 shows that Clan MacEwen . . . existed long before 1450 and that they were known as the MacEwans of Otter. [The village of Otter is a few miles north of Kilfinan.] Rev. Alexander McFarlane, minister of the parish of Kilfinan, writing in 1794, states that 'On a rocky point on the coast of Lochfyne [sic], about a mile below the church of Kilfinan is to be seen the vestige of building called Caisteal mhic Eoghuin, or MacEwen's Castle. The MacEwen was the chief of a clan and proprietor of Otter.'

"Eogain no h-Oitrich (Ewen of Otter), who gives his name to the clan, lived at the beginning of the thirteenth century. Gillespie 5th of Otter, flourished about a century later. Swene MacEwan, 9th and last of Otter, granted in 1432, lands of Otter to Duncan Campbell, and resigned the barony of Otter to James I., but it was returned to him with remainder to Celestine, son and heir of Duncan Campbell of Lochow. In 1513 James V. confirmed the barony of Otter to Colin, Earl of Argyll, and thereafter Otter remained in possession of the Campbells.

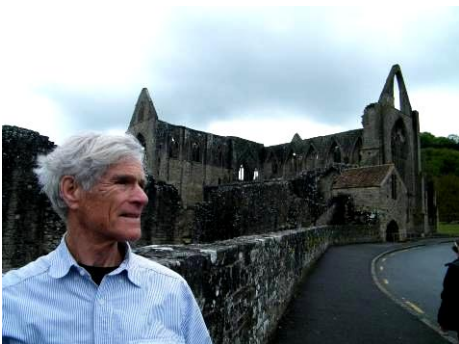
"Without lands the MacEwans became a 'broken' clan and found their way to many districts. A large number settled in Lennox country, others went farther afield to Lochaber, Perth, Skye and the lowlands, including Galloway, but to-day they still form a not inconsiderable clan." [Items in parentheses are part of the original text; my additions are in brackets.]

Our friends in Kidlington gave me a later edition of Bain's book, this one printed in 1976. A comparison of the newer book with the older one revealed only one alteration: the last sentence had been removed, intimating that few if any MacEwen descendants still populate the ancient clan grounds.

We descended the promontory and wondered if we might find a better way back. Jane and I decided to avoid the stony and slippery shoreline and hike the whole distance through forest and meadow. That was not a good decision. This route was even worse than our journey to that illusive cliff. The erratic course we took back to the hotel was even longer and more uncertain. We became lost in the woods and, thus, lost sight of the loch which was our landmark. Feeling completely disoriented, we stood still and listened for the bleating of sheep. They would be in the direction of the farm where we left the road on our way to the castle. We hiked toward their sound, found the meadow, and finally spied a section of our road home, but a barbed wire fence blocked us. I pushed the wire down as low as I could to help Jane over, but nevertheless barbs caught her jeans, which produced a yelp but no rips. We finally alighted on the blacktop road and followed it to the inn, weary wanderers eager to exchange Maddy's Wellingtons for her seared scallops from, of course, Loch Fyne. The next morning we would motor along the same road, this time exchanging the misty lochs of Scotland for the lofty spires of Oxford.

Wallace K. Ewing's grandfather, A. E. Ewing, bequeathed him the family genealogy gene. Some of Wally's earliest memories are of sitting on A. E.'s lap listening to stories of their early Ewing ancestors: Pocahontas James, Swago Bill, and Indian John, among a host of others. A. E. knew how to tell a story and how to make history personal and exciting for even a five-year old. "More than seventy years later," Wally says, "my pulse still quickens when I read or hear about another Ewing, and if that Ewing is remotely related to me, my heart beats even faster." A retired teacher,

Wally has delved deeply into the history of his hometown as well as his family genealogy. He can be reached by eMail at WKEwing at charter dot net.



Another journey took us to Tintern Abbey in Wales.



Jane was thankful for finding the church in Westley Waterless, England, where she once rubbed monumental brasses.