

Correspondence

Historic Argyll welcomes letters to the Editor. Letters may be edited for length and style. In this issue we are pleased to print the following letter containing additional information on the subject of Changing Argyll Names (Historic Argyll 2010, p24).

Dear Sir,

I read with interest Jo Currie's 'Changing Argyll Names' in your last issue, and can clarify some of the questions she raises.

The 'Kintyre divinity student named Obrolachan who changed his surname to Brodie on becoming ordained' was actually Neil Brolachan (1813-92), and the story is far from being 'obviously anecdotal'. If Andrew McKerral related the story, I am not aware of it, but it appeared on p 60 of the Rev A. J. MacVicar's *The Book of Blaen* (Oban 1965), in which account Neil's name is erroneously given as 'John'.

"In his first year at Glasgow University he enrolled in the Latin class. When Professor Ramsay was marking the roll, he came to the name John Brollachan. He stopped, looked up at him and said: "Where did you get that barbarous name?" The students laughed. On the class being dismissed, John, feeling a little mortified, proceeded to the Professor's room and told him that after this he wished to be known as John Brodie."

I would be surprised if Neil Brolachan had changed his name quite so impulsively. Indeed, the entire story seemed suspect to me. Nonetheless, I was intrigued, and in 1983 I wrote to Michael S. Moss, Archivist at Glasgow University, and asked him to search his records. He found that Neil had matriculated as 'Niel Brolachan' in 1830, but that by the time his name appeared in the junior Hebrew class of 1834/5, he had become 'Niel Brodie'. He also observed that William Ramsay was Professor of Humanity from 1831 to 1863. There are clearly discrepancies in the story, but the archival evidence does suggest a basis in truth. See my *Kintyre: The Hidden Past* (Edinburgh 1984) p 42.

Mrs Currie refers to ‘the scholarly Iain Maclulich of Glenurquhart, later Dr John Smith of the Highland Parish in Campbeltown’, and speculates that he ‘felt it necessary to assume a safe and dull name’. Smith was his name, and he was born in 1747 in Glenorchy. His middle name, MacLulich, ought to have been his surname, but his father, John MacLulich, was ‘out’ in the final Jacobite campaign and had to flee the battlefield at Culloden. The story, according to Dr Isabel M. Scott, a great grand niece of Smith, is that John MacLulich sought refuge in the smiddy of a nearby village and that the smith dressed him for the part and, with false information, turned away the pursuing soldiery. MacLulich ultimately returned to Glenorchy and married Mary Stewart, a sister of ‘James of the Glens’, but he was still an outlaw and retreated to Accurach, in the watershed between Loch Awe and Loch Fyne, and changed his name to ‘Smith’ in gratitude to the blacksmith who had saved his life. The scene in the smiddy, as the ‘redcoats’ enter, was represented in a painting of 1884 by John Seymour Lucas (1849-1923), which is titled ‘After Culloden, Rebel Hunting’, and is in the collection of the Tate Gallery. (John Smith, D.D., *Kintyre Magazine* No. 2, pp. 8-9.)

In her paragraph on the dropping of the ‘Mac’ from certain surnames in Kintyre, Mrs Currie suggests that ‘MacEacherns might become simple Eacherns’. I doubt that. ‘Ceachran’ was, and remains, the colloquial form of MacEachran, which, incidentally, indicates how some other surnames in Kintyre were clipped into their final form, for example Currie from *Mac Mhuirich*.

Some MacEachran families adopted or received the name Cochrane by a process of anglicisation, the ease of which transition is demonstrated in the record of ‘Gilbert McCocheran Loch Kierran, beyond Clachan’, illicit whisky-distiller in the 1820s. (*Kintyre Magazine* No. 37, p 9)

Mrs Currie remarks that she has been ‘trying for many years to catch somebody out in the act of changing his name’. I can give her an example. As late as the middle of the last century, a Campbeltown man, about to migrate south for work, changed his name from McEachran to Cochrane, but one of his sons, in England, expressed to me the wish ‘that the old

HISTORIC ARGYLL 2011

name had been retained as it ties the family to our home town and to Kintyre'. (Letter, 7/6/2007)

Other families were clearly content to retain the name in England. In September 2010, a 17-year-old English footballer broke into the Chelsea F.C. first team. His name is Josh McEachran and he has been tipped as a remarkable prospect. The spelling, when I saw it, suggested to me a Kintyre origin for the boy's family, and, sure enough, his grandfather, John McEachran, was from Campbeltown.

Yours etc., Angus Martin, 13 Saddell Street, Campbeltown, Argyll
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(Jo Currie did not wish to respond to this letter Ed.)