

# Clan MacAulay – An Irish perspective

By Laurence Ross McAuley



Having explored my family tree for the past thirty years using all the traditional genealogical research methods, I was of the opinion that I had arrived at a dead end with my g/g/g/g grandfather John McAulay (headstone surname spelling) born in Co Antrim, Ireland in 1782.

Scottish MacAulay's are of course familiar with the three branches of the clan in their homeland, but are maybe not so aware that two indigenous Irish clans also bore the name (phonetically speaking) from Counties Fermanagh and Westmeath.

Therefore my burning question had always been, was I of Irish or Scottish descent?

Modern day genetic science was to come to my aid through my DNA submission to the MacAulay Surname Project ([www.familytreedna.com](http://www.familytreedna.com)). The outcome was fascinating and although a proud Ulsterman, the results showed that in all probability (when added to family hearsay and circumstantial evidence), that I was descended from a branch of Scottish MacAulay migrants from Ardincaple, Rhu, Helensburgh. These migrants had settled the area known as the Glens of Antrim in the north east of Ireland in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century.

A number of these settlers may have accompanied or come to assist the McDonnell clan, who had obtained a foothold in Antrim by the marriage of John Mor MacDonald (Lord of the Isles) to Margery Bissett (sole heiress of the Glynn's or Glens of Antrim) as 'Gallowglasses' or Highland fighting mercenaries. However they arrived they were to dispossess the original land occupiers.

A check of the surviving Hearth Money Rolls and Poll Tax Returns for Co Antrim 1660-69 for the Glens Cushendall area lists 42 persons bearing the name McAuley

(and its various guises – McAla, McAwlye, McAly, McAmly, McAlye), the most prevalent surname of the time.

The name McAuley continues to dominate ‘The Glens’ area today, and infact I along with the other descendents of these Scottish settlers give Co Antrim the greatest concentration of McAuley’s in the world!

With my Scottish ancestry confirmed and my love of genealogy, it was natural then that I should look further into the functioning of the modern day ‘Clan MacAulay’.

Making contact with Clan Secretary Hector, I was aware that the clans next bi-annual Gathering would be held in Edinburgh to coincide with the historic celebrations surrounding ‘Homecoming Scotland 2009’ and the ‘International Gathering of the Clans’.

The three day event (24-26 July) sounded to good an opportunity to miss and a great occasion for my partner Karen and I to meet my far off MacAulay ‘cousins’. As all things tartan where to be to the fore, I commissioned a made to measure MacAulay kilt and associated regalia before travelling to Edinburgh for ‘The Homecoming’.

We duly flew into Edinburgh and arrived at the cities university, where accommodation had been booked by the clan in the Pollock Halls.

Over the following three days a fantastic and memorable time was had. With hardly a spare moment we went from one event to another. Highlights were the formal clan banquet and ceilidh, where we were to meet other MacAulay’s from USA, Canada, S. Africa, New Zealand, England and of course Scotland.



**Tented village with Clan Chief Diarmid**

Invites to the Edinburgh homes of Lord and Lady MacAulay of Bragar and Donald and Eileen MacAulay also proved very interesting as we chatted about all things MacAulay/McAuley.

To my surprise I was to learn that I was the first ever Irish McAuley to attend a Clan MacAulay Gathering!

Another highlight was the Highland Games with its tented clan village and the surrounding feast of entertainment and activities at Holyrood Park, held beneath the majestic rugged peak of Arthurs Seat.

The historic clan parade held on the Saturday evening was also something I'll never forget. In glorious sunshine and to the skirl of the pipes the numerous clans, all resplendent in their tartan, assembled near the Royal Palace of Holyrood before marching off in alphabetical order behind their clan chiefs and banners up The Royal Mile



**Clan Parade -L-r Betty Ribble from USA, Clan Treasurer Lewis born Catriona Mackenzie and Karen Montgomery (my partner) in their MacAulay 'Modern' sashes**

Not since 1822, for the visit of King George IV, had the clans paraded up to Edinburgh castle. The atmosphere was electric passing the thousands of cheering spectators, as we proudly marched the one mile route to the roar of our Gaelic clan roar "Macamhiaidh gu brath!" (MacAulay forever!). On reaching the castle esplanade we then took our seats to watch the clan pageant unfold. It really was an unforgettable experience!

The following morning I attended the clans AGM and gave the attending members an insight into my McAuley ancestry. On presentation of my DNA findings I pointed out how results could help them trace what part of the MacAulay branch they may be akin to.

At the end of the meeting end I was totally surprised, when Clan Chief Diarmid put forward a motion that I should be elected onto the clans committee for the following year. This was quite amusing as at that point I was not even an official clan member. However, I was told that by the end of the evening I certainly would be! Formalities were subsequently completed and as a committee member I now hold the title of 'Clan MacAulay Representative for Northern Ireland'.

That evening, the last of the Gathering saw top Gaelic group 'Gleusda' provide the musical entertainment at the clan ceilidh. It turned out a great night as Karen and I gave everyone more than a laugh with our lack of ceilidh dancing skills. At one point even two members of the band came off the stage to lead us round the floor.

Later, with the Clan Chief bringing the night and the Gathering to a close we sadly said our goodbyes.

The clan aims of 'promotion of the spirit of Clansmanship' and 'of belonging in kinship' had certainly not failed, as over the weekend we could not have been made more welcome by one and all and as such had made a host of new friends, both near and far.

With the ancient MacAulay links to Co Antrim, at the committee's request, preliminary plans are in place to hold the next clan gathering, the first outside Scotland, in the small picturesque Co Antrim coastal village of Carnlough, in August 2011.

Karen and I had an unforgettable first gathering experience with your warm and sincere Scottish hospitality, so roll on 2011 and the opportunity for us to try and repay it. Through the clan we welcome all MacAulay's worldwide to come and visit. You really will find the Causeway Coast and Glens a beautiful and fascinating place, from the world famous Giant's Causeway (a UNESCO World Heritage site) to the Middle Age ruins of Cushendall Layde Church and Cemetery (resting place of many of our MacAulay ancestors).



**Clan Formal July 24, 2009 - Laurence and Karen**

We sincerely hope to make your stay a memorable one!