



Clan Watson

If you're Scottish, you've got to have a clan!

Scottish Clan Basics

Wikipedia describes today's Scottish clans as kinship groups among the Scottish, providing a sense of shared identity.

Historically, clans were more tribal, primarily consisting of families and their allies who achieved political and social dominance over the people of a particular region. They fought or formed alliances to further their interests. Robert the Bruce offered land charters to numerous clans in order to gain their support during the Wars of Scottish Independence against the English, which reinforced the clan structure.

The power of the clans waned over time, especially after the clans found themselves on the wrong side of the 1745 Jacobite Uprising. This resulted in punitive expeditions against the clans, legislation against clan culture, and converting clan chieftains into landlords over their lands, and holding them responsible for their tenants' actions. Highland dress was banned, although that and other anti-clan laws were repealed in the late 1700s. The Highland Clearances from 1750 to 1860 led to the evictions of a number of tenants in the Scottish Highlands, resulting in many Scots choosing to emigrate to the United States and elsewhere.

A more romantic image of the Scottish Highlands developed in the years since then, leading to the type of interest in Scottish clans that we see today. Clans are legally recognized groups, and many have one or more associated tartans, crests, badges and mottos.

Clan Watson

The surname "Watson" first appeared in Scotland's written record in Edinburgh in 1392, where a John Watson was a landowner. A Robert Watsoun was documented in Aberdeen in 1402. More examples of "Watson" and its variants appeared in the 15th century, and the name became much more common in the 16th century, especially in the Lowlands and the northeast.

But is there a Clan Watson?

All heraldry in Scotland is controlled by the Court of the Lord Lyon, King of Arms, Edinburgh, Scotland. Armorial bearings recorded in the books of the Lord Lyon in 1818 identified James Watson, Esquire, “as direct male line from Richard Watson of Saughton, to be described as: Chief of the name in Scotland.”

In addition, Collins' Scottish Clan and Family Encyclopedia in its section Clans and Armigerous Families of Scotland lists Watson on page 469. Also, the Standing Council of Scottish Clans and Chiefs recognizes Watson as being a Clan unto itself. Thus, there is indeed a Clan Watson.

Saughton once belonged to Holyrood Abbey, the ruins of which stand adjacent to the Palace of Holyroodhouse in Edinburgh, the official residence of the British monarch in Scotland. The lands of the abbey were divided among a number of families early in the 16th century. Richard Watson of Saughton acquired some of those lands and was their proprietor in 1537. The role of the Chief of the name Watson was handed down from Richard Watson through the generations until it came to James Watson in 1818.



Part of Holyrood Abbey ruins at the Palace of Holyroodhouse, Edinburgh, Scotland

James Watson had two sons, but both were killed fighting the First Boer War. His only daughter, Helen, married the Earl of Morton. The Mortons are of Clan Douglas, so this may have carried the Watson Chief's title to that clan. Or there may be other male relatives of James Watson to which the chief's title should have passed. In any event, James Watson was the last *registered* chief of Clan Watson.

Clans are required to have chiefs. Clan Watson may very well have an unregistered chief who will be identified once the genealogy gets all sorted out AND the identified person accepts the role. The Clan Watson Society of Canada is reportedly investigating who the chief may be.

The lands associated with the Watsons of Saughton are found in Costorphine and Saughton, today part of suburban Edinburgh, located two to three miles west southwest of Edinburgh Castle. Saughton is known as the home of HM Prison Edinburgh and a famous skatepark.

The seat of the Watsons was Saughton House, which was built in 1693. It was left an empty shell after a 1918 fire, and was demolished some years later. It stood where Broomhouse Primary School stands today.



Saughton House © RCAHMS

The family also shared a tack on the lands now known as Saughtonhall, located around today's Saughton Park. Ownership of the Saughtonhall lands was consolidated under Thomas Mudie in the 1600s and lost its Watson connection at that time.

The mighty oak was the symbol of the family. Their coat of arms showed two hands extending out of clouds gripping a young oak sapling with roots extending. There were five oak trees leading up the lane to the estate at Saughton. When Broomhill Primary School was built on this estate after Saughton House had burned down, the children re-planted the five oaks on the road into the school. The oak appears in the Clan Watson crest.

Some family trees have been posted online for the Watsons of Saughton, but none of what I saw in them puts the family anywhere close to Dailly Parish, Ayrshire. So, it does not appear that we have any ancestral ties to Clan Watson. We just have the Watson surname in common.

Watson Septs

Clan Watson is a lesser-known clan. Watsons are more commonly described as a sept of two other clans. In the context of Scottish clans, a sept is a family that followed another family's chief. This sometimes happened if the families intermarried or if one family lived on the lands of a powerful laird. However, some of today's sept connections have little to no historical basis. Rather, it was a means for clan societies and tartan manufacturers to cash in on growing interest in Scottish heritage.

Different Watson families are generally regarded as septs of Clan Buchanan or Clan Forbes, although Watsons are more commonly tied to the Buchanans.

The Buchanan Clan dates back to 1225 when the small island of Clairinch, in Loch Lomond just offshore from Balmaha, was given to Sir Anselan, Absalom de Buchanan.



Clairinch, in Loch Lomond, and the small crannog of Keppinch, were the original land holdings of Clan Buchanan.

Other land grants followed in the parish of Buchanan, the source of the clan's name. Buchanan Parish is in northwest Stirlingshire, and follows the east coast of Loch Lomond. Clan Buchanan lands eventually stretched east from Loch Lomond to include parts of Stirlingshire and western Perthshire. The clan had a succession of 19 clan chiefs until 1681. A petition to claim the chiefship of Clan Buchanan was filed in 2016, and after 337 years Clan Buchanan finally had a new chief named in 2018.

Watsons may be connected to Clan Buchanan through the House of Leny, although the Buchanan Society does not officially recognize the Watson family as a sept. The society recognizes only the four family names specified in its 1725 constitution – Buchanan, McWattie, McAuslan and Risk. That said, McWattie is the Gaelic version of Watson.



Leny House

Clan Forbes likely gets its name from the lands of Forbes in Aberdeenshire in northeast Scotland. Duncan Forbes received a grant of lands there in the 13th century. Castlehill at Druminnor, near Rhynie, Aberdeenshire, was the site of the first stronghold on the lands. The Forbes family held this land from 1271 to 1440. The Vale of Alford estate near Alford, Aberdeenshire, has been home to the Forbes family for over 600 years, although its Castle Forbes dates back only as far as the 19th century. Castle Forbes is the current seat of the chief of Clan Forbes. “Watson” was and remains an especially common surname in the region.

Clans and Genealogy Research

The Gaelic word “clann” means “children”, or more broadly “kindred”. Clan affiliation passed from parents to their children who took their father’s surname. But you didn’t have to be related to a clan chieftain to take his surname.

There were also people who coincidentally shared the same surname as a clan chieftain but who were not affiliated with the clan. That was especially true for those who lived outside of the region that the clan dominated.

For those reasons, sharing your surname with a clan or its septs doesn’t mean that you are necessarily a true member of the clan in the traditional sense or related to those in the clan, although the odds are much greater if your ancestors with the name were from a region dominated by that clan.

“Watson” is a common name across Scotland, and it originated in several places. I have not come across anything yet in the parish records or elsewhere that suggests that our Watson ancestors had family ties to the Watsons of Saughton or were part of Clan Watson.

With Dailly Parish’s location in southwest Scotland’s Lowlands, but the Clan Buchanan region found in the southern Highlands and the Clan Forbes region on the opposite side of the country, it is highly unlikely that our Watson ancestors were part of sept families affiliated with those clans. After all, our Watson ancestors were not even related to all the Watsons in Dailly Parish.

“Watson” is a common enough surname in England that there are plenty of people in the United Kingdom with that name who aren’t Scottish at all.

Most of the surnames found to date among our Scottish ancestors align with Scottish clans.

<u>Surname</u>	<u>Aligned Clan</u>	<u>Motto (translated when necessary)</u>
Bell	Clan Bell	I Beir the Bel
Cathcart	Clan Cathcart	I Hope to Speed
Lambie	Clan Lamont	Neither Spare nor Dispose
Russell	Clan Russell	Virtue without Stain
Skeene	Clan Skene	A Palace the Reward for Bravery
Stewart	Clan Stewart	Courage Grows Strong at a Wound
Swan		
Wasson/Watson	Clan Watson	It has Flourished beyond Expectation
Weir	Clan Weir	Nothing Truer than Truth
Wilson		

However, only our Cathcart and Weir ancestors lived in or near the regions historically dominated by their aligned clans. In fact, some of our Dailly Parish, Ayrshire ancestors lived for a time on Cathcart-owned property – Hawkhill, near Old Dailly – just across Girvan Water from Killochan Castle, the ancestral homeland of Clan Cathcart. We are also descendants of at least three generations of Weirs who lived on Auchren, a farm in Lesmahagow Parish, Lanarkshire that for some time was a holding of Clan Weir through their Stonebyres Estate.

So, for example, although many members of British royalty have blood ties to Clan Stewart, we are not likely related to them through one of our earliest known Scottish ancestors, John Stewart.

Clan Watson Paraphernalia

The crest of Clan Watson features an oak tree grasped by two hands emerging from clouds. It includes the motto, “Inesperata Floruit”, which mean “It has flourished beyond expectation”.



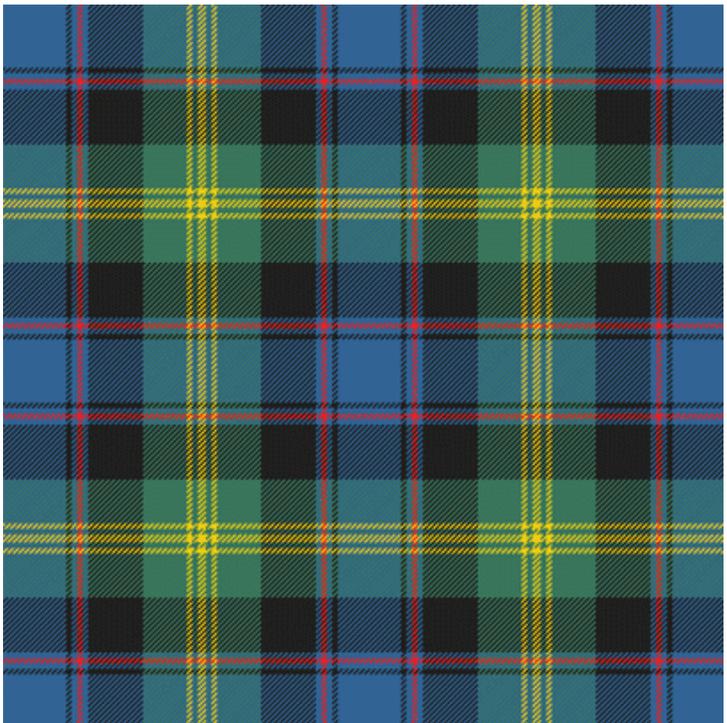
Clan Watson Crest

This is basically the image found on the family crest of the Watsons of Saughton.

Rev. Mhuir Watson, a minister at Glamis Church in Angus, Scotland, designed the Clan Watson tartan for family use. The tartan dates only to the 1930s, so it lacks historical ties to the clan.



Watson Modern Tartan



Watson Ancient Tartan



Mark models a Clan Watson tartan kilt. Could you rock a Clan Watson kilt as well as Mark does?

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