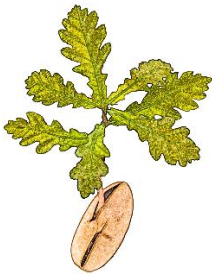


The Sprouting Oak

The Newsletter of the House of Watson International
houseofwatson.scot



No. 5 – June 2026

Welcome to the fifth edition of our newsletter, albeit under our new guise of the House of Watson International!

I go into the reasoning behind the name change in the *What's In A Name?* article midway through this newsletter, but I do hope you'll read through the rest of the issue as it sets this change in context of the other developments that have happened over the past year, including the launch of our Chief Restoration Project.

We're constantly making progress across several fronts as we build our society, and I'm pleased to announce that things have moved on since the article on the Chief Restoration Project was written and we are now looking to commence the process of petitioning for a Commander of



our name imminently! More details are available in our [Facebook group](#) and are being communicated with our monthly email updates, so if you aren't a member of the groups or receiving the newsletter, please sign up either on Facebook or by filling in the *Join our mailing list* form on our [website](#).

More exciting news this year, as the House of Watson stand will be returning to Canada this summer. I attended the Fergus Scottish Festival and Highland Games last summer, where I convened a Watson stand and supported Clan Buchanan Society International as their sept consultant (that's me carrying the Watson pennant in the picture, supported by Doug Watson from Scotland). This year, I will be returning with my wife and adding the Glengarry Highland Games and the Montreal Highland Games to the itinerary. I will once again be supporting the Buchanans at each event as well as convening a Watson stand. A good number of our Watsons are already signed up for Fergus – it would be great to see even more of you there! Check out the final article in this issue for more details, and please feel free to reach out to me if you have any questions.

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Last year in Fergus was my first time convening an event, so I know first-hand how intimidating it can be as a first timer. With that in mind, I've written an introductory article on convening, based on the guidelines issued by other societies and with a dose of my own lessons learnt sprinkled in. If you are interested in running your own Watson stand at an event near you but are unsure what is involved, I recommend you read the article and contact me if you would like to discuss further.

One of our existing conveners who has already become an experienced hand is Barry Watson, one of our many members in Texas. Not only has he represented us at several events over the past few years, but he is remarkably busy with several other projects. You can read all about him in this issue's *Meet the Watsons* article. If you are based in Texas, keep an eye out for Barry at an event near you, or come and join him in Fergus in August!

Our *Watson Places* series of articles continues this issue with a look at Cranshaws, an estate based around a defensive tower in the border region between Scotland and England. The estate was used by the Watsons of Saughton, the family of our last Chiefs, as a holiday getaway, a health retreat and a base for hunting.

We also touch on one of the darker periods of European history in this issue as we take a look at some historic Watsons of Antigua in the Caribbean, including one family that owned sugar plantations that relied heavily on the labour of slaves forcefully imported from Africa. It is probably not an exaggeration to say that pretty much everybody of European descent has either directly or indirectly benefitted in some way from the slave trade, and we Watsons are no exception. I had the pleasure of visiting Antigua a few years ago and a couple of my own photos feature in the article.

I do hope that you enjoy this issue. As usual, I extend my thanks to each and every one of you for sticking with me as we continue to build our community, especially as we enter a potentially exciting period for Watsons worldwide as we look to appoint a Commander of our name!

As always, I welcome your feedback on this newsletter and any contributions that you may have for the next one. Of course, there's no need to wait for the next issue to get involved – head on over to the [Facebook group](#), sign up, say hello and join the discussion! Don't forget to check out our other social channels – links are below!

Long may we flourish!



Shane Watson FSAScot
President
House of Watson International





House of Watson – Out and About!

2025 was another exciting year on the North American events scene; not only were we represented at a good number of gatherings in the US, but the Watson banner was raised once again in Canada after a hiatus of around 20 years, and we'll be back in Canada for even more events in 2026!

If you are interested in coming along and meeting some fellow Watsons, please do keep an eye out on our [member map](#) and [House of Watson Near You](#) webpage to find events and volunteer conveners near you! If you are interested in convening your own stall, check out the introductory article on the topic later in the newsletter. Alternatively, why not contact one of our current conveners and offer to help them with their stand if you'd rather test the waters and gain a little experience before branching out on your own?

If you'd like a little more encouragement, take a look at the pictures on the following pages that show members of our community out and about representing our name!



Matthew Watson with Quite Possibly the Cutest Member of House of Watson



Matthew Watson and Family at the Las Vegas Celtic Festival



Anthony Watson at the Pittsburgh Tartan Day



Shane Watson with a Visitor at the Fergus Scottish Festival and Highland Games



Some Watsons and MacQuatters at the Salado Scottish Gathering and Highland Games



Michael & Rene Watson with Visitors at Their Stand at the Longs Peak Scottish Irish Highland Festival



Todd & Linda Watson at the Salado Scottish Gathering and Highland Games



Katrina Rumley and Tonya Watson Pence at the Pleasanton Scottish Highland Gathering and Games



The Family Marching with a Watson Banner in Pleasanton



Katrina Rumley With Her Watson Stole from the Celtic Craft Centre in Edinburgh



Elizabeth Watson-Hopkins Modelling a Rather Lovely Watson Tartan Skirt that She Had Made in Scotland



Meet the Watsons

Barry Watson

As we continue our series of articles about members of our diverse community we meet Barry Watson, another one of our number who strongly believes in the value of service.

Barry Watson is a retiree of the United States Air Force and the State of Texas.

He has always led a life of service, and not just to his country and his state. He also served in the Civil Air Patrol, an official auxiliary of the Air Force. He has been actively involved with Scouting and has created social groups to bring together SCUBA divers, and people with interests in genealogy and small computers.

Barry is a level 2 archery instruction/trainer with USA Archery and has taught the sport to tens of thousands of people, both children and adults. He was also selected to create an archery programme at a church for youths who are out of school.



As a fletcher, Barry crafts custom wood arrows for archers. He is also active as a member of the cast at Sherwood Forest Faire in central Texas and is the Chief Financial Officer for The Greenwoode Village, a non-profit organisation whose goal is to teach the public about medieval crafts and skills.



Barry has been actively pursuing his family genealogy for over 50 years. When he learned about the existence of the House of Watson International (then called the Clan Watson Society), it was an easy decision for him to get involved. And get involved he did, representing the society at several clan gatherings in Texas. Barry is looking forward to representing the House of Watson International at more events in Texas and the surrounding states in the future, and is also keen to help to form a regional chapter covering the area.

Remarkably, despite his many very worthwhile pursuits, Barry still finds a lot of time for gardening and managing the 10 acres of forest on which he lives!

If you'd like to help Barry to form a regional chapter of House of Watson International, please contact us and we will be more than happy to discuss.



You can also check out the following links to learn more about Barry and The Greenwoode Village and to follow them on social media:

- Barry's Facebook: <https://web.facebook.com/Barry57>
- Barry's website: <http://sherwoodforesteast.com/>
- The Greenwoode Village: <https://www.thegreenwoodevillage.org/>

Our aim for the *Meet the Clan* page is to feature a different member of our community in each issue, so if you'd like to appear in a future edition please [contact us](#)!



Introducing *The Chief Restoration Project*

This year, you will (hopefully) see us publicising the House of Watson Chief Restoration Project. But what is the House of Watson? What is this project? Read on to find out more!

The first thing to make clear is that this *isn't* a new project, more a consolidation of several already ongoing activities under one banner to enable clearer communication and, hopefully, to raise wider awareness of our aim to once again see a [Chief of the Watson](#) name after more than 200 years.

For the past three years, we have been actively researching the family of the last Chief, looking for living descendants that could be eligible heirs to his title. In parallel, and in line with our [short-term strategy](#), we have been growing our numbers and putting steps in place to formalise the society and to make it sustainable.

The various workstreams that fall under our Chief Restoration Project – details of which you can read in the articles that follow this one – are summarised below.

Research

We have been researching the family of the Watson chiefs for many years, and efforts have ramped up over the past three years, with a professional researcher employed and the House of Watson

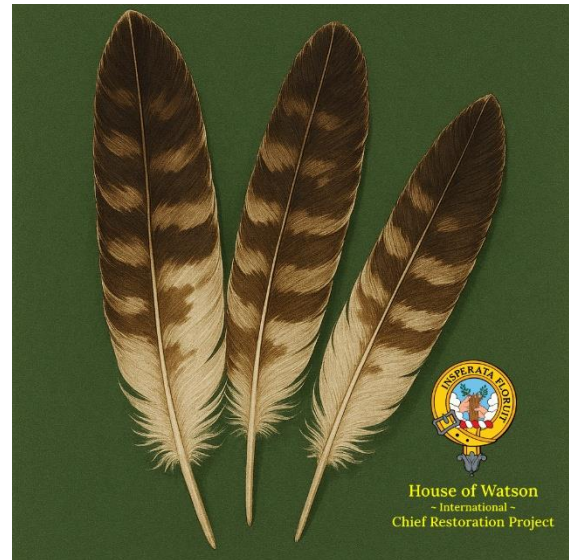


Reviewing Progress with Our Researcher Pauline McQuade

Supporters group created by those that helped to fund our research programme. We are systematically covering as much ground as we can, working through each generation of the [Watsons of Saughton](#) to look for potential lines of descent to the present day and following those lines until they peter out, which they invariably do. There is still plenty to do here as we collate our findings to date into a series of research dossiers that will be used to support any claim to the Chiefship should we find an eligible, living heir.

The House of Watson Supporters have been active in helping to source documents, reviewing the output from the research project and generally acting as a sounding board, providing advice and direction as the project progresses.

To find out how to support our research and to become a House of Watson Supporter, please visit our [Donations page](#).





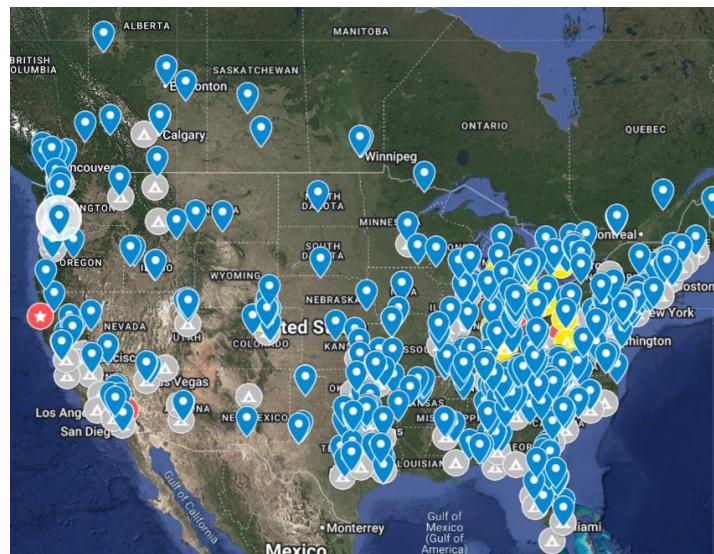
Rebrand

We have been advised to rebrand from Clan Watson to House of Watson prior to launching any formal process to reinstate a Chief or Commander. This will avoid protracted side discussions on whether the Watsons were a Clan or a Family, which risk causing a major distraction and hence significantly delaying the process - not to mention costing us a whole lot more money! We are quite happy to join the ranks of the distinguished Houses of history - House of Bruce, House of Stewart, House of Douglas, to name but a few - and in early 2026 we started a major rebranding effort.

Rebuild Our Global Presence

For us to be able to petition the Lord Lyon for either a new Chief or a Commander of our name, we need to demonstrate that any candidate for either position is not only worthy of assuming the title but has the support of a significant number of the world's Watsons.

Our numbers continue to climb steadily, year-in, year-out, and the more of us there are, the more we can each help to spread awareness of our society and our aims. We are now at a point numbers-wise where we are looking to set up regional chapters, which will allow us to organise and attend events under the direction of local leadership, increasing the efficiency of our outreach. This will also allow us to form a global committee of regional leaders whose feedback will be critical in demonstrating widespread support when it comes to petitioning for a new Chief or Commander.



Our North American Members, as Plotted on Our Member Map

Convert to Charitable Status

During informal discussions with Lord Lyon, he made it clear that we would need to demonstrate a strong tie to Scotland in order to petition for a new Chief or Commander. We shared with him that we were planning on converting to non-profit status via a charity registered in Scotland, which he advised would be deemed acceptable. There are additional reasons for us to seek formal non-profit status, and this will be pursued in 2026.

Petition for a Commander

In the event that we are unable to find an eligible hereditary heir to the Chiefship, we will petition Lord Lyon for a Commander of the Name. We need to have made good progress on all of the above activities in order to complete the process, but we are looking to kick things off as soon as we can and have already started consulting with one of Lord Lyon's advisors, who will guide us through the process.

In order to petition, we will need to setup a steering group of a small number of people that represent our global membership, and we will have to put out a call for people who would like to submit an interest in being a candidate for the role of Commander. The job of the steering group will be to define the requirements of the Commander's role, support a publicity drive for candidates, and screen any



applications that are received to ensure that the best possible shortlist of candidates is put forward for wider voting.

How You Can Help

We need all kinds of volunteers in order to make the above happen, and we will have a place for your skill set, location and availability. We need people to staff our stands at events, to help to form and run our regional chapters, to provide material for our newsletters and social media, or just to share our story and our social media posts far and wide. We also need funding, both to complete our research but also to help with the costs of our website and other running costs, so please do take a look at the [Membership page](#) and consider making a donation - every donation received, no matter how small, really does help us.

We are always happy to welcome new conveners, so if the House of Watson isn't represented at your local event and you'd like to change that, take a look at our *Introduction to Convening* article and think about whether it's something you'd like to get involved in. We have an established community of conveners now and we will be more than happy to help you get set up for your first event!

If you want to get a taste of convening a stand without the responsibility, why not come and join us in Canada this summer? As you will have read in the introduction to this issue, we will be at events in Ontario and Montreal where we will be joined by a good number of our members and the several members of Clan Buchanan. It is already turning into our first in-person Watson gathering, and it would be great to see even more of you there! Check out the last article in the issue for more details and do keep an eye out on our socials and our monthly updates, as more details will be provided as they come available!

We would also love to see some regional chapters established so that members near each other can organise meetups and attendance at events. If you haven't already done so, head over to our website and fill in the questionnaire we have created to help us plan what these chapters will look like: <https://www.houseofwatson.scot/chapters>.



As stated above, we have started discussions with an intermediary to Lord Lyon about submitting a petition to start the process of appointing a Commander of our name. An essential first step in the process is that we launch a steering group that will set the terms by which the search for a Commander is conducted and will ensure that all the prerequisite steps are completed to Lyon's satisfaction. We already have a leader in place for the steering group but are very keen to see representation from our community members around the world. To join the steering group, you must have the legal last name of Watson, but please rest assured that any future Commander will be acting in the interests of all our members, whether they carry the name Watson, are descended from Watsons, or carry one of our surname variants.

We are also looking for trustees that can help us to administer our non-profit organisation, so if this is of interest to you, again please [let us know](#). No experience is necessary and you do not need to be



based in the UK; in fact, we would prefer to have a panel of trustees that represents our global membership.

We love to see our members getting involved in our society, and if that's something that you might be interested in, head over to the [Volunteers page](#) on our website for inspiration! We suggest a few ways in which you may wish to get involved and provide brief descriptions of each role. Please don't feel limited by our suggestions – if you have a particular passion or skill set and think you could be of use, you're probably right, so drop us a line and we can discuss further!

We're also always on the lookout for new material, so if you have a story to tell, have visited somewhere related to Watson history or have been looking into your own family tree, we'll happily help you put an article together for our newsletter or website.

If any of the above sounds like something you may be interested in, please do drop us a line at <https://www.houseofwatson.scot/contact-us!>

Even if you don't have the time or the energy for a volunteer role, you can still help us just by telling other people about us! If you know someone who may be interested in learning about Watson history (hint: if you are a Watson, you probably have other family members, for a start), tell them about what we do and point them towards our website, Facebook group or social media channels!

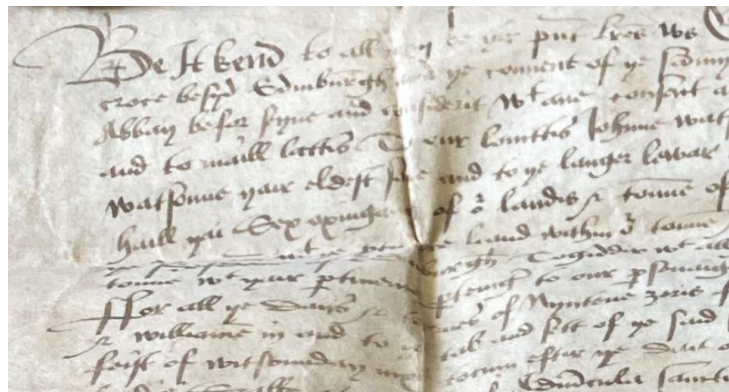
We have made huge progress in the last few years, and we are now very close to the point at which we will see the fruits of our labour. We're on the home stretch, and we appreciate the support of each and every one of you!



Research Update

Our research really took off in anger in 2023 when we employed a professional researcher to help us to access critical records in Scotland. In 2025, after two years of pretty intense work, our focus switched to taking stock of where we'd got to, formally documenting our research and tidying up loose ends.

The past year has been spent digging out increasingly obscure and hard-to-find documents and finally getting translated the 16th century manuscripts that attest to the first presence of the ancestors of the Chief's family in Saughton to the west of old Edinburgh. As we've progressed, we've closed off more and more potential lines of descent from the family. We are now fairly certain that we will not find any modern-day Watsons that are descended from the last Chiefs, so we've started preparing to petition Lord Lyon to appoint a Commander of our name.



A Portion of a Document from 1524 Confirming the Grant of Land in Saughton to Richard Watson, the First of the Watsons of Saughton

As a reminder, a Commander can be recognised by Lord Lyon to provide a focal point for a clan or family as they attempt to rebuild and as they search high and low for a hereditary heir to the Chiefship. Should no eligible heir be found after a period of at least 10 years, the Lord Lyon can be petitioned to recognise as Chief an alternative candidate put forward by the clan or family members. With this 10-year timeframe built into the process, we are keen to open formal discussions with Lord Lyon as soon as possible!



Shane Watson with The Lord Lyon

Our President, Shane Watson, had informal discussions with Lord Lyon last year at the Fergus Scottish Festival and Highland Games. The feedback from Lord Lyon was extremely positive – he was very happy with the breadth and depth of our research to date, pleased to see that we are rebuilding our numbers across the globe, and happy that our plans to convert to charitable status in Scotland would be sufficient to demonstrate a strong link back to the country.

As stated above, we have now started to compile our research into a series of dossiers that will ultimately be used to demonstrate the extent to which we have gone to find an eligible heir to the Chiefship – or to support such a claim should an heir be found.

Going forward, our research will continue to focus on completing our set of research dossiers and on closing loose ends, which is likely to require more professional help with both sourcing documents and transcribing them. We would not have made anywhere near our current progress without our Watson



Supporters, who are listed at the end of this article. If you are interested in joining the ranks of our Supporters as we continue our quest to find a new Chief, please visit our [donations page](#) to find out more!

Huge thanks as always to our Watson Supporters, not just for funding our research but for being so actively involved in the surrounding discussions and decision making: Anthony Watson, Barry Watson, Bruce Watson, Danyel Becker, David Watson, David R. Watson, Dustin Watterson, Gary Rummel, Glendon Watts, Heather Sholter, James Watson, James T. Watson, Jed Watson, Jennifer Watson, John Neth III, John Watson, Jon Watson, Justin Watson, Katrina Rumley, Kellie Watson, Lynette Kaufmann, Matthew Watson, Michael Watson, Peter Warren, Robert Wedding, Rodney Watson, Samuel Watson, Scott Watson, Shaun Watson, Steve Watson, Susan Wood, Thomas Watson, Todd Watson, Tyler Tatum, William McQuatters, William J. Watson and William Wesley Watson.



What's in a Name?

When I first heard mention of the term “Clan Watson” over 20 years ago, I – like most people, I suspect – felt a little flush of pride at the thought that I may have had ancestors who were clansmen¹. At the time, there were active Clan Watson societies in the USA and Canada who were busily attending events, issuing membership cards and conducting their own research into an heir to the Watson Chiefship. When I started up my own website, it was therefore a no-brainer that it should be called “Clan Watson Society UK”.

All was well for many years, and it wasn't until a few years ago that I first heard somebody say, “the Watsons were never a Clan”. At first, I laughed this off, but the voices slowly started to increase in number and, it has to be said, ferocity. As the world has become more and more connected, as ancient records have become available to anybody at the click of the button, and as the entertainment industry has popularised ancient cultures and the great families of history, a lot more people have been drawn into researching their family history. There is now a whole spectrum of people in this world of ours, from those who believe everything they read on social media to those that won't consider something to be even half true unless they have checked it against at least three primary sources – and all of them have an opinion on *everything*!

The one topic – other than “I am a direct descendant of Robert the Bruce” – that draws the most heated debate is the discussion around which names are “proper” clans and which ones are not. You will often find different scholars on different sides of the same argument, which really doesn't help to provide clarity; for example, Professor Murray Pittock of the University of Glasgow refers to the Watsons as clan, whereas Dr. Bruce Durie, one of Scotland's top genealogists is adamant that they were not one.

So, where do we turn for answers? Surely the Court of The Lord Lyon, which regulates all heraldry in Scotland, has the final say? Unfortunately not, and for two reasons. The first is that Lord Lyon only concerns himself with who has the right to bear arms or to call themselves Chief of a name in Scotland; he has no jurisdiction over whether a kin group is a clan or a family. Secondly, a [guidance note](#) written in 2001 by Sir Crispin Agnew, Rothesay Herald at the Court, makes it quite clear that the Court considers the words “clan” and “family” to be interchangeable.

The fact is that the debate will probably never be settled definitively. This has never been an issue for the Clan Watson Society before, but if we are to petition Lord Lyon for the right to appoint a Commander of our name it will become an issue. We simply cannot afford to get bogged down in a sideshow debate about whether the Watsons are or are not a clan; instead, we must ensure that all energies are focused on the question of whether the Watsons are in a legitimate position to petition for a Commander, a discussion for which we are in a strong position.

As such, I have made the seemingly-difficult decision to rebrand The Clan Watson Society as House of Watson International for the purposes of petitioning Lord Lyon.

I say seemingly-difficult because the more I think upon the matter, the more that I see this rebranding as an opportunity rather than some kind of demotion or punishment. The term “clan” does suggest a strong link to the Highlands, and as House of Watson we now have an opportunity to cast off these

¹ I use the term “men” here in its original, genderless form; I am, of course, equally as proud all my ancestors, regardless of their gender.



implied geographical shackles and to celebrate the truly international nature of our family. Our history is so much richer than boundary limits set around some remote, inhospitable mountainous terrain. Our ancestors rode with Kings, they spoke Norse, Old English, Scots and Gaelic, they owned large estates and manor houses throughout the British Empire and they held influential positions in many of Scotland's major cities.

So, changing our name to House of Watson is far from a demotion; in fact, the most influential families in history have been Houses rather than Clans: think House of Bruce, House of Douglas, House of Stewart and House of Tudor to name but a few.

One thing that I can promise you is that our mission, our strategic goals and our values will be completely unaffected by what is merely a change to the name on the branding; we will continue as before, with all ongoing work streams continuing uninterrupted.

I do hope you will join me in celebrating as we move into an exciting new era in which we close out our research, launch as a charitable body and finally start the formal process of one day reinstating a Chief of our name!

Welcome to the House of Watson!

Long May We Flourish!



Watson Places: Cranshaws

We often see references to the Watsons being present around the Scottish/English border, including those that list them as being border reivers, and we know that the Watsons of Saughton owned property near Berwick-upon-Tweed, probably the most famous of the border towns. Although we are yet to find any evidence for the Watsons as reivers, we have managed to track down their property in The Borders. Read on to find out more...

Where is Cranshaws?

The village of Cranshaws is in southeast Scotland, roughly halfway between Cranston, where the Watsons of Cranston lived (see last issue), and Berwick-upon-Tweed. The name first appears in the mid-13th century as *Craneschawes* / *Cranessawys* / *Cranshaus* in connection with a now-ruined medieval kirk. The name is likely to date from the Old English kingdom of Northumbria, being derived from *cran*, the Old English word for “crane” (the bird), as was the case for Cranston, suggesting that the birds were present in the area in good numbers. The second element of the name is derived from the Old English word *sceaga*, meaning “a small wood, a copse, a strip of undergrowth or wood” and which evolved into *shaw* in Scots after the northern part of Northumbria was seized by the Scottish monarch in the 11th century, becoming part of his enlarged Scottish kingdom. The name being plural (i.e. “Cranshaws” rather than “Cranshaw”) suggests that the area was probably dotted with several small copses or areas of woodland.



“Cramnfhaws”, as Depicted in a 1654 Map
(Map from National Library of Scotland)

Cranshaws can be seen (as “Cramnfhaws”) on a map dating from 1654, which depicts both the original kirk (“Cramnfhaws K.”) and Cranshaws Castle (“Caft.”).

History of Cranshaws (pre-Watson)

The lands of Cranshaws were originally part of a larger area called the Barony of Bothwell, which was created for David Olifard (Oliphant) in the mid-12th century. The Barony of Bothwell passed to his descendants, and ultimately to his daughter who had married William de Moravia (Murray), son of William, son of Freskin, a Scoto-Flemish noble. By 1252, the barony had become the property of their son, Walter de Moravia, who began the construction of Bothwell Castle, the impressive ruins of which can still be found today overlooking the River Clyde in South Lanarkshire. We assume this is the same de Moravia family whose ownership of the lands of Cranston Riddell was confirmed by royal charter just over a century later (see the article on the Watsons of Cranston in the last issue).



*Richard Eric Laurence Oliphant of that Ilk,
Chief of Clan Oliphant, is a Descendant of
David Olifard*

Although the de Moravias had inherited the Barony of Bothwell through David Olifard's daughter, the lands of Cranshaws and Hatherwick (Hedderwick) were inherited by a junior branch of the Olifards as David Olifard had granted occupancy of the lands to a younger son. In 1329, William Oliphant, Lord of Aberdalgie, who was the senior representative of this junior line and 7th Chief of Oliphant, died without heirs, and by 1336/7 the lands of Cranshaws and Hatherwick had been reclaimed by the English monarch, King Edward III.

In 1362, Joanna de Moravia, the heiress of Bothwell, married Archibald Douglas, 3rd Earl of Douglas. Their son, Archibald Douglas, 4th Earl of Douglas, inherited Cranshaws but he gave it to Sir John Swinton, calling Sir John his "beloved cousin". Sir John died in battle in 1363 and his son, also called Sir John Swinton, inherited the lands. It is believed that this Sir John

Swinton built Cranshaw Castle, which still stands to this day. The castle was built at the beginning of the 15th century in the form of a peel tower, a small, fortified tower house of a type that was common along the Anglo-Scottish border. It was built some 200 yards to the northeast of the medieval kirk previously mentioned, which suggests that the Oliphants had probably had a manor house on the site and were the patrons of the church although no trace of an earlier residence is visible today.

Throughout most of the 15th century, the Oliphants contested ownership of Cranshaws, believing that they had been unfairly dispossessed of the lands. This dispute came to a culmination in 1476 when Lord Oliphant made an agreement with Alexander, Duke of Albany and Earl of March, in which Lord Oliphant agreed to pay for the years that the Oliphants had not officially owned Cranshaws and the Duke gave Lord Oliphant permission to try to reclaim any money or goods that Sir John Swinton had taken from the lands. That same year, believing he had regained ownership, Lord Oliphant raided the castle in an attempt to reclaim it, and took oxen and horses from the estate.

After this raid, there is a gap in the records with regards to the castle and the lands of Cranshaw. The next mention we see of the castle states that another branch of the Douglas family, the Earls of Morton, bought the castle in the 1700s. George Douglas, 13th Earl of Morton (1662-1738), made many changes and improvements to the building.

In 1739, a new parish kirk was built in Cranshaws, possibly using masonry from the medieval kirk by the castle. It is likely that the old kirk was in a state of disrepair by this time, although it was still in use until the new kirk was completed; the ruins of the kirk and its graveyard are still in place, with the latest readable gravestone carrying a date of 1724. The new kirk was built some distance away, but the 1739 build was not of good quality and need constant repair. By 1899 it needed to be completely rebuilt and the architect George Fortune built the current kirk in the Romanesque Revival style on the foundations of the existing one.



The Modern-Day Cranshaws Parish Church



Cranshaws – The Watson Era

In 1739, a few years after buying the Cammo estate to the west of Edinburgh, which he renamed “New Saughton”, James Watson, 8th of Saughton bought the Barony of Cranshaws, possibly to add to his social status and to impress his Hope relations (his wife, Lady Helen Hope, was the daughter of the 1st Earl of Hopetoun). James most likely used Cranshaws for shooting expeditions, and his family went there for holidays and for health reasons. The Watson men continued to use Cranshaws as a hunting lodge into the third decade of the 19th century.



Cranshaws Castle (by [Lisa Jarvis](#))

In July of 1784, James’s son, Charles Watson, 9th of Saughton, gave a presentation at Cranshaws Castle to “the Moderator and other members of the Presbytery of Dunse” nominating a candidate for the post of “Minister of the Gospel at Cranshaws Parish Church”. In the record that mentions this presentation, Charles is described as “undoubted patron of the Parish and Parish Kirk of Cranshaws”.

In *The Statistical Account of Scotland*, which was compiled between 1791 and 1799, it is stated that “Cranshaws castle. The property of Mr. [Charles] Watson of Saughton, is an oblong square of 40 feet by 24. The walls are forty-five feet high, and it has a battlement on top. It is a very ancient building, and before the union of the two kingdoms [Scotland and England], had been used as a place of defence, to which the inhabitants of this part of the country were accustomed to retreat, upon sudden incursion of the English borderers”.

Similar text appears in the 1834 edition of *The Statistical Account*, which again names Charles Watson of Saughton as the owner of Cranshaws; however, this is not the same Charles but his grandson, Charles Watson, 11th of Saughton. When this latter Charles died in 1836, Cranshaws Castle would have been inherited by his brother William Ramsay Watson. Unfortunately, William’s tenure was not a long one as he died in 1841, at which point his sister Helen, the 13th and final Watson of Saughton, took possession. Ironically, Helen was to marry Sholto John Watson Douglas, Lord Aberdour, who would become the 18th Earl of Morton, returning the castle to the family of the Douglasses of Morton.

When Sholto died in 1884, his son Sholto George Watson Douglas, 19th Earl of Morton and the last descendant of the Watsons of Saughton to carry the Watson name, inherited the Cranshaws estate. The *Ordnance Gazetteer of Scotland*, published in 1885, states: “The fine old peel tower called Cranshaws Castle...measures 40 by 24 feet, and is 65 feet high; a former stronghold of the Douglasses, and the haunt of a drudging brownie, it now is a seat of the twenty-first Earl of Morton, Sholto George Watson Douglas”.

We have not yet established how long the Douglasses of Morton held on to the castle during their second period of ownership, but we do know that they had sold it by the end of the 19th century as it was repaired in 1896 and 1897 by Andrew Smith, who was the owner at the time. In 1931, the castle passed to his nephew, Stenhard Landale. Today, Cranshaws Castle is available as a holiday let (although their website is currently down for maintenance), giving you an opportunity to step briefly into the world of our Watson forebears, albeit at a handsome price!



The Watsons of Antigua

In this issue, we will be looking at one of the darker aspects of European history as we switch our focus from the British Isles towards the Caribbean, where we find Watsons involved in the slave trade. In this article, we will look at the Watsons of Antigua, an island in the Lesser Antilles that is part of Antigua and Barbuda, an independent Commonwealth country that was once a British colony.

A Brief History of the Sugar Industry on Antigua

Hunter-gatherers started to settle the islands of Antigua and Barbuda in around 3000 BC, most likely arriving by canoe from Central and South America. The Arawaks from Venezuela settled on the lands during the Ceramic Period (500 BC to 1500 AD), a period named after the pottery they made. The Arawaks were an agricultural people and established the first villages on the islands. In 1493, Christopher Columbus surveyed Antigua, which resulted in a failed attempt at Spanish settlement in 1520. The first European people to successfully colonise Antigua were English and arrived from the neighbouring island of St. Christopher (aka. St. Kitts), where Captain Thomas Warner had established a tenuous foothold in 1624. The settlement of Antigua in 1632 by Warner's son, Captain Edward Warner, was equally as tenuous at first. They grew subsistence crops for themselves and



A Modern-Day Watson (My Wife!) Enjoys the View Towards Montserrat from a High Point on Antigua

tobacco for export, but these early settlers were described as living in a “state of perpetual crisis” by the historian Richard Dunn. The early settlers were frequently attacked by the native Caribs (who gave their name to The Caribbean), who considered Antigua to be their territory and were caught up in the wars between the English, French and Dutch as they extended their empires and fought for supremacy. The number of people on Antigua did, however, grow slowly, with the population of the island increasing from 750 in 1646 to 1,200 in 1655. It was not until the arrival of the sugar industry that the population really took off.

Susan Lowes, in her 1994 paper *The peculiar class: The formation, collapse, and reformation of the middle class in Antigua, West Indies, 1834-1940*, tells us that sugar cultivation in the Leeward Islands began in the early 1660s and developed slowly, set back by the destruction wrought by a French invasion in 1666, a lack of capital and the greater attractiveness of Barbados as a place for investment. She goes on to say “Nevis was the first of the Leewards to convert to sugar, followed by St. Kitts, while Antigua and Montserrat lagged behind. A large quantity of tobacco (as well as indigo and cotton) was still being produced in Antigua in 1671 when St. Kitts and Nevis were already growing only [sugar] cane. Nevertheless, the conversion to sugar, once it began, was rapid: in 1672 it was reported that about 40,000 acres were planted in cane; by 1676 this had increased to 70,000 acres, over half the 120,000 that were considered arable.”



Due to gaps in the records, it is not clear when slaves were first brought to Antigua, but come they did. By 1672, the first year for which there are detailed figures, there were reported to be “570 Negroes and 800 English”, and by 1678 there were 2,172 slaves out of a total population of 4,480. The intervening six years had seen a major step towards the slave-based production of sugar, although the plantations in 1678 were still largely small scale. Moreover, the demographics had changed from being primarily (male) frontiersmen to including a sizeable proportion of women and children; by 1678, 30% of the white adults were women and there were 528 white children and 499 slave children.

	Year	White	Slave
This transformation continued apace, and by 1708 Antigua had become the leading producer of sugar in the Leewards, accounting for over half the sugar production of the islands and more than half of the slaves. As production ramped up, the small-scale farmers made way for larger plantations managed by merchant-agents and the use of slaves to provide the associated labour became industrialised. The table to the right is from Lowes’ paper and summarises what figures are available on the growth of both the white and slave populations on Antigua.	1673	nd	570
	1678	2,308	2,171
	1707	2,892	12,892
	1720	3,672	19,186
	1729	4,088	22,611
	1741	3,538	27,416
	1753	3,412	31,428
	1787	2,590	37,808
	1788	nd	36,000
	1798	nd	37,808
The Leewards weren’t the only islands in the Caribbean on which the new sugar industry took hold, and by the early 18 th century other islands such as Jamaica were starting to outcompete Antigua.	1805	3,000	36,000
	1810	3,000	37,000
	1817	nd	32,249
	1821	1,980	31,604
	1824	nd	30,314
The slave trade was officially abolished on 1 August 1834 and all slaves were granted immediate freedom. The British government paid compensation – to their previous owners, rather than to the slaves themselves – and many of the accounts are available online. Interestingly, Antigua’s exports of sugar actually increased after emancipation, from an average of 12,189 hogsheads (a type of barrel) between 1829 and 1833 up to an average of 13,545 between 1834 and 1838, with the quantity of molasses exported increasing fourfold. By the 1850s, Antigua was regarded as the most populous, productive and wealthy of the Leeward Islands.	1827	nd	29,830
	1832	nd	29,537
	1834	1,980	33,432

Competition continued to ramp up as more and more islands were planted and their virgin soils gave more productive harvests, and it wasn’t long before Antigua was struggling as the seventh-largest sugar producer in the Caribbean. Towards the end of the 19th century, sugar production began to decline drastically as a lack of water from several periods of drought and exhaustion of the island’s soils after over a century of monoculture took a toll. In the 1890s, the crisis really came to a head as competition from much cheaper, subsidised beet sugar caused prices on the world markets to drop significantly, sending the Antiguan economy into a tailspin.

The British government launched a Royal Commission that recommended modernising the sugar industry on Antigua by expanding sugar processing capacity and encouraging the island’s poorer residents to diversify the crops they planted. They also scrapped the subsidies on beet sugar and, although beet sugar remained cheaper than cane sugar in Britain, import of cane sugar to Canada increased significantly, with imports from Antigua rising sevenfold between 1901 and 1910.

Two factories opened in 1904 – the renovated Bendals and the new Antigua Sugar Factory at Gunthorpes – and they immediately started processing half of the sugar from the island. The Antigua Sugar Factory quickly established itself as the dominant factory and launched on a programme of



expansion. The company running the Antigua Sugar Factory built a new, upgraded sugar refinery in 1923, and Bendals was out of business and dismantled by 1940. The Antigua Sugar Factory finally closed for good in 1988!

What of the Watsons?

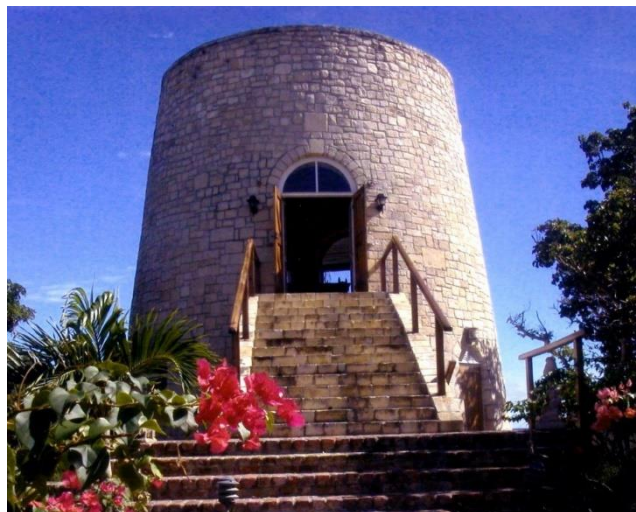
The first mention that we see of Watsons being connected to Antigua is not on the island itself but in relation to the ships that brought enslaved people to the area. In 1718, a British ship named Friendship picked up six slaves from Antigua and transported them to Charleston on the island of St. Kitts and Nevis. Five slaves disembarked here – it is not known what happened to the sixth – and they ended up being sold in the Americas. The slave trader, and captain of the ship, was called James Watson.

On 21 March 1759, the British vessel Swift departed from Bristol in England and sailed to Bonny in Nigeria. There it picked up 92 slaves and transported them to Saint John in Antigua. Only 70 of the slaves disembarked. It is assumed that the missing 22 died on the voyage. Five investors backed this voyage, with two of them sailing on the ship as captains. One of them was called Abraham Watson.

Abraham Watson is recorded as making a second voyage to the Caribbean. On 18 July 1767, he captained the British vessel Roebuck on a voyage from Bristol to Africa where it picked up 250 slaves. The vessel had a crew of 10 people and was fitted with six guns. The vessel sailed to St. Kitts and 208 slaves disembarked and were sold. It is assumed that the remaining 42 died on the voyage. Abraham is listed as one of the two slave traders and captains on this vessel.

The first Watson that we see actually on Antigua is a Robert Watson who is recorded as owning Watson's Plantation on the island. Although the plantation appears to have been founded in around 1740 by a Nicolas Power, the Watsons soon took over and owned the plantation for over a century, renaming it as their own. Robert Watson died in 1754 and the plantation was taken over by James Watson (1740 to 1799). It is assumed that James was Robert's son, although no records have been found to confirm this.

James Watson had three children. Two of them – Thomas and James are reported to be the sons of James's housekeeper, Winifred Ann Olton. It is unclear whether his other son, Francis, was with Winifred or with his wife.



*The Remains of the Mill House at Watson's Plantation -
Nowadays Converted into a Guest Cottage*

In 1800, Watson's Plantation is recorded as being owned by a James Watson, the son of the previous James. James Junior died at sea in 1806 at the age of 38, and the next recorded owner of the plantation is his brother, Francis, who was joint owner of the plantation from 1821 to 1834, probably with his surviving brother Thomas. The plantation is listed as covering 400 acres and having 55 slaves in 1829. The Watsons, along with all other plantation owners, had to free their slaves in 1834 following emancipation. To compensate them, the British government paid out several claims to Watson's Plantation. In 1835, they received £185 5s 9d for granting freedom to 17 enslaved Africans, in 1837 they were awarded £391 6s 2d for freeing 54 slaves, and in 1840 they received £502 4s 11d for granting freedom to 44 slaves. In total, this would be worth around £154,000 or \$207,000 in today's money.



Thomas was deceased by 1834, as his share of the compensation was awarded to his heirs, one of whom was James Watson Roberts, his (and Francis's) nephew.

Francis is still recorded as being the owner of the plantation in 1852, by when it covered 460 acres. By



The Ruined Mill at the Hope Plantation

then he also owned the Hope Plantation of 208 acres. It is not clear what happened to Francis, but by 1860, Watson's Plantation was owned by James Watson Sheriff (it is not clear if he was a relative) and by 1878 the Hope Plantation was owned by a Frederick Berkley Harman. Francis was married to Jane Margaret Watson (née Thomas), who died in East Ham (England) in 1895 at the age of 84. Whether Francis, Jane and their daughter Mary Ann Eliza moved back to England together, or whether Jane and Mary moved back after Francis's death is currently

unknown. Interestingly, Mary's married name was Harman, although she appears to have been widowed by 1891 when the census shows her as boarding with an Elizabeth Wood in Essex.

Further investigations into this family of Watsons are ongoing, including investigating their descendants. It does appear that after over a century of owning sugar plantations in the Caribbean, the descendants of the family settled back in Britain and lived modest lives.

A Twist in the Tale

I have referred to numerous sources to put this article together, with one very useful source being a series of books on Antigua's plantations written by Agnes Meeker. Although her married name is Meeker, her maiden name was Watson.

When the Bendals sugar factory was closed in 1940, one of the junior engineers tasked with dismantling it was a certain James MacIndoe Watson. James was one of a number of Bendals staff taken on by the Antigua Sugar Factory (ASF) following the closure of the former.

James, a Scot, was a mechanical engineer who had received his training at Mirrlees Watson & Co. in Glasgow, a company that specialised in the production of machinery for processing sugar. He arrived in Antigua in 1937 and, in 1939, he married Mae Conacher, a sixth-generation Antiguan who was working in the sugar industry, as had all her Antiguan generations before her.

After his stint at Bendals, he worked as a junior engineer at ASF from 1940 to 1946, and was then transferred to several other sugar factories in the Caribbean. In 1952, he returned to ASF as a senior engineer and rose to the position of general manager in 1954.



Agnes C. Meeker, MBE (photo from <https://cpoise.gov.ag/places/agnes-c-meeker-mbe/>)



Jimmy and Mae's daughter, Agnes, was born in 1940 in one of the staff houses of the Bendals factory, just before the factory closed. She grew up in the close-knit sugar industry community, which sparked her interest in the 300 hundred or so years of Antiguan history over which the industry shaped the island. She has spent over 20 years researching the plantations of Antigua – of which there are over 250! – and has published all her findings to date in a series of volumes. Agnes was appointed a Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) in the 2016 New Year Honours for services to St. John's Hospice and to the National Archives and Museum of Antigua and Barbuda.

It's clear that the Watsons were intimately involved in Antigua's sugar industry for generations. They bought, transported and sold slaves, and they owned plantations that used dozens of enslaved Africans for labour. It seems somehow fitting that a modern-day Watson has invested so much of her life in rigorously cataloguing every aspect of this bygone era.

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An Introduction to... Convening

Having convened a stand for the first time in August of 2025, I thought I would put together a guide for others who may be considering running a Watson stand at an event but aren't sure how to get started. Although I was understandably a little nervous as I drove into the event ground on the first day, I had a fantastic time. My hope is that by outlining what is involved, I will inspire others amongst you to consider representing our name at an event near you!

What is Convening?

The dictionary definition of a convener is somebody who calls others together for a meeting. In the context of clan societies, a convener is somebody who puts up and mans² a stall containing information about their society – hopefully with the result of calling passers-by in for a meeting, or at least a discussion!

What Sort of Person can be a Convener?

There are no qualifications necessary to be a convener, other than having an interest in the history of your name, being able to setup a stand and being able to talk to people. Information on our society and as much information as we have on Watson history will be made available to you, but there is no need to commit it all to memory – if you point interested people towards information, they are generally perfectly capable of finding what they need!

What is a Typical Event Setup?

As an absolute bare minimum, a stand will consist of a pop-up canopy, a table, a couple of chairs, and a large banner with the family name or name of the society on it. This will be enough to bring people over, but if you want to keep their attention, we'd recommend more materials. You can see an example of a Watson stand (this was our stand at the 2025 Fergus Scottish Festival and Highland Games) on the next page.

What Materials do I Need?

We've already covered the bare minimum setup above. In addition to your large Watson banner, you may wish to consider some or all of the following:



Shane Watson, President of House of Watson International, with Kevin J. Logan, Commander-Elect (now Commander) of Clan Logan, in Front of the Watson Stand at the 2025 Fergus Scottish Festival and Highland Games

² Again, I am using the term “man” in its original, genderless form; I hope it goes without saying that you do not need to be male to run a stand!



- Retractable banner providing information on Watson name variants, associated families, famous Watsons and where the Watson Chiefs lived
- Vertical banners (2-off) giving information on the Watson Chiefs, the Chiefs' motto and coat of arms, and the various colour palettes of the Watson tartan
- A self-inking stamp of the Watson crest badge – very popular with the youngsters as they try to collect the full set in their clan crest passports!
- Samples of the three Watson tartans – in the form of a small sash with a tartan bow or rosette works well
- A horizontal marching banner for parades (needs two people to carry it!)
- A pennant for parades and for hanging at the stand
- Our booklets containing summary information on various aspects of the Watson name and history and on places associated with historic Watsons
- Some activities to keep children occupied while you talk to their parents
- A set of our business cards, providing contact details and a QR code linking to our website
- Our House of Watson t-shirts and/or polo shirts
- A book of Scottish names in which passers-by can look up information on their name – the [*Scottish Clan and Family Encyclopaedia*](#) published by St. Kilda (previously published by Collins) is one of the better ones

You can see examples of all of the above on our [Convener's Kit webpage](#), together with cost estimates. Please contact us if you would like to order any of our kit and we can make arrangements.

In order to setup your stand, you will also need the following:

- Plastic tubing to construct the frame for your main banner – see the next section on how to do this
- A hacksaw for cutting the plastic tubing (if you haven't prefabricated your frame)
- A tape measure
- Cable ties
- Duct tape
- Rope – I find paracord is ideal
- A craft knife
- Scissors
- A permanent marker
- Something to write stuff down with – a pen and paper if you're old school, your choice of electronic gizmo if you're not
- Plenty of water – for visitors as well as yourself!

It probably goes without saying at this point that you will also need your own transport – lugging all of the above on the bus simply won't be possible!

How do I get Set Up?

The key thing to get up is your main banner; this needs to go across the top of the tent and it will take some time if you haven't prefabricated the frame before the event.

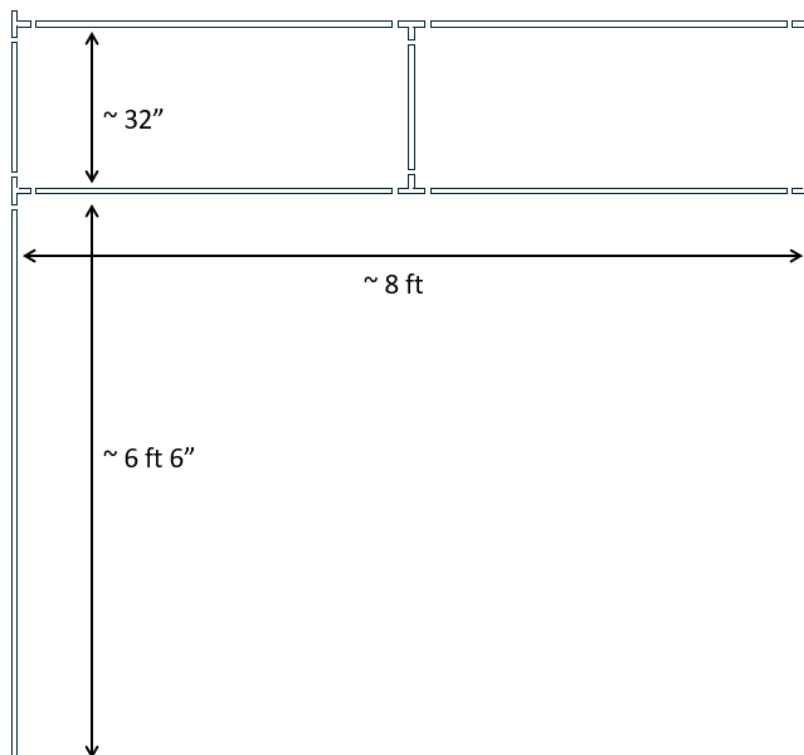
If you are using your own popup canopy, it is well worth knocking up the frame well in advance of your first event. If you are using a canopy that is provided by the venue, ask if you can have access to the



site the day before the event starts, as you will need a good hour or two to make the frame from scratch.

To make the frame, you will need five 10-foot lengths of $\frac{3}{4}$ " plastic tubing of the kind you can find in the plumbing section of a hardware store. Some people prefer a larger diameter for extra stability, but I've found that $\frac{3}{4}$ " works just fine. You will also need six T-piece connectors (or four T-pieces and two right-angle connectors if you want the top corners to look neater). You will need to cut the lengths of tubing (hence the tape measure and the hacksaw!) to construct the frame, and remember the carpenter's motto: Measure twice, cut once! Approximate dimensions are shown in the diagram below, but the final dimensions need to fit the tent you will be using, so wait until you have the tent

erected before cutting the sections too short!



The first part to build is the top section consisting of four horizontal sections and three smaller vertical pieces. The height of this part of the frame is dictated by the height of your banner. Banners are typically $2\frac{1}{2}$ feet height, and you'll want a good inch or so clearance between the top and bottom of the banner. The width of the frame is not dictated by the banner but by the width of the canopy. Canopies are typically either 8 or 10 feet in width (with 8 feet being the more common), so for a standard 8-foot-wide banner, it may be necessary to

Approximate Dimensions of the Frame for the Main Banner

curl the ends slightly around the frame (hence the duct tape!).

Once you have constructed the top part of the frame and fixed the banner (using the cable ties), the two main uprights can be cut to a length that puts the bottom of the top part of the frame at around the level of the frame of the canopy. Don't make it too low, as people will need to come in and out, and don't make it too high as the higher it gets, the less stable it will be and the more leverage the wind will be able to apply to it!

Once your frame is complete, sized to fit your canopy and the banner is mounted, you can attach it to the canopy legs using cable ties; I find that ties placed at the top, middle and bottom of both supports provides good stability.

The photographs below show the various stages of my frame being constructed in Fergus. Note that I chose to cut the uprights in half for easier transportation, so I used a pair of straight connectors in the middle of each side. One thing I would suggest is that before you disassemble the frame, use a permanent marker to write on each section of tubing where it sits in frame – it could well be a good few months before you next use it, and it will be a lot easier to remember which bits go where!



Tubing, Tape Measure and a Small Hacksaw



The Top Part of the Frame Complete and Ready for the Banner to be Attached - Note that the Banner is Curled Around the Side Members and Duct-Taped on the Reverse



Checking the Length of The Uprights



The Fully-Assembled Frame for the Main Banner, Cabled-Tied to the Canopy Uprights. The Retractable Banner is Loosely Cable-Tied to the Right-Hand Upright

If you have opted for a retractable banner, it is a good idea to cable tie this loosely to a leg of the canopy through the vertical supporting pole of the banner; the banners are reasonably sturdy, but they are likely to blow over in anything more than a gentle breeze!

For the rest of your display, feel free to get creative! I like to use paracord to suspend the vertical information banners (see below), and I like to use a cable tie to hang my pennant in the tent when it's not being used for a parade. Other materials can be displayed on the table. If you have access to the stand the day before the event, it is recommended not to leave materials lying around overnight but to bring everything with you on the first morning to complete the setup.



A Selection of Materials for Visitors to Browse Through, and a Watson Tartan Sash Decorating the Table



Inside of the Tent with a Marching Pennant Hanging at the Back and Vertical Banners Hanging at the Sides



What Happens After I'm Set Up?

The good news is that once you're all set up, the hardest part of the event is over!

The first thing you need to do is make sure that you've got all the event timings to hand. There will be several activities that will require the presence of clan representatives – the opening ceremony, clan parade, dedicated meetings, etc. – and you don't want to miss any of them!

Other than that, all you need to do now is to welcome people to your stand and share your enthusiasm with them. Spend some time explaining various aspects of Watson history with them and let them know all about what we do. If they are Watsons or one of our name variants, encourage them to sign up to our website or Facebook group and to follow our socials. Share any materials such as business cards and QR codes with them, and don't forget to stamp any clan crest passports that come your way!



Interacting with Visitors to the Stand is the Most Critical Part of Being a Convener!

Also make sure that you take plenty of breaks so that you can get food and water, see the rest of the clan and trade stands, visit the exhibits and attend any special events that take your fancy. If there is more than one of you, you can take shifts on the stand, but if you are alone, you will normally find a willing volunteer from a neighbouring stand to keep an eye on things while you're gone.

Wrap Up

Convening a stand for the first time can be a little intimidating, but hopefully this article has made it a little less so. The setting up and packing away does require a little work, but if you are well organised and have everything you need to hand it is very straightforward, and if there is more than one of you it's even easier!

Attending events as a convener really is a lot of fun – it's a great weekend away and you will get to meet a lot of likeminded people to learn from and swap stories with, many of whom will become valued friends for life. As a bonus, you will help to raise awareness of the House of Watson and help our numbers grow, increasing our global network and pool of knowledge!

If you have any questions about convening, please don't hesitate to contact us. We have a dedicated conveners' message group and will give you as much support as you require. We'd love to see more of you out and about, manning our stands and helping us to continue to build our numbers!



2025 Fergus Games

Following on from the introductory guide on convening, I thought I'd write up my experience as a first-time convener at the 2025 Fergus Scottish Festival and Highland Games.

Pre-Event

Having encouraged/supported/cajoled various members to run Watson stands at events in the USA, I was keen to give it a go myself. I'd scoped out a few events in the UK to target as my first attempt and had narrowed down to a couple of potential events in Scotland and one in England when, courtesy of Jo Watson (see the *Meet the Clan* article in last year's newsletter), I received an invite to join the clan village in Fergus, Ontario. Jo was planning on attending with her charity [Làmhnan](#) and, as an added draw, several clan chiefs and the Lord Lyon were confirmed to be attending. As I'd been hoping to find a way to bump into the Lord Lyon it seemed like too good an opportunity to pass up!

I paid the (very reasonable) entrance fee for the stand (which included free entry and a parking space) and booked fully refundable flights, hotel and hire car, *just in case*. Fortunately, there were still several months to go, so I was more than certain I'd be prepared.



Jo Watson at the Stand for Her Charity Làmhnan at the Fergus Scottish Festival and Highland Games

When it was confirmed that Clan Buchanan would be present at Fergus, I requested that I be given stand next to theirs so that I could support them with their septs but also be on hand to give more information on the Watsons should discussions become more detailed; Clan Buchanan considers Watson to be one of its septs, and I've spent the last few years developing a good working relationship with the Clan Buchanan Society International, so this seemed like a good opportunity to trial a new way of working together.

My first task was to make a list of everything I would need for the weekend. Fortunately, I'd spent the previous couple of years creating various items for stands and supporting our conveners in the USA, so that was fairly straightforward. Dave Radley, the Clans & Heritage Lead for the Fergus event, very kindly offered to take delivery of the various banners that I ordered, which avoided having to get them shipped to me overseas only to then have to cart them halfway around the world again!

With the kit assembled – albeit on two different continents – all I had to do now was wait until August!

August Cometh!

I travelled out to Fergus two days before the event, landing late morning to give myself plenty of time to hit the local stores to buy materials that I didn't want to ship with me (tubing for the frame, colouring pencils, drinking water for the stand, etc.). This turned out to be an excellent idea as I had a



leisurely afternoon picking up the hire car, driving to the hotel, and buying everything I needed. That evening, I arranged to meet up with Jo and her husband Doug in downtown Fergus to watch the opening parade (after sampling a local beer, of course!).

The next day, which was the day before the event opened, I had access to the clan village, so I went down to prefabricate the frame for the main banner (see previous article). It was also a good opportunity to wander around the event ground to get the lie of the land and to work out where all the places I needed to be were! Again, I finished the day's errands in plenty of time to head back to the hotel to get cleaned up and changed into my kilt, ready to meet up with Jo and Doug for the opening ceremony later in the evening.

The opening ceremony itself was quite a spectacle, with a full-blown tattoo consisting of many marching bands and Highland dancers. It finished off with the ceremonial lighting of the hearth, in which Doug and I were proud to represent the Watson name as each of the clans and families present at the gathering marched, flaming torches in hand, to the centre of the parade ground to contribute to the fire that raged there.



Doug Watson and I with Our Torches Ready for the Lighting of the Hearth

Opening Day

I got to the event ground nice and early – around an hour and a half before it opened to the public – and I'm glad I did, as I needed every minute of that time to set things up! The main banner was very quick to put up, but it did take longer than I anticipated hanging the other banners and the pennant and arranging the table. Fortunately, Doug came over to help, and between the two of us we were done just in time. It was already over 30°C by 9am, so by the time the stand was done I was absolutely drenched in sweat, not helped by my assisting both the Buchanans and the Scots of Canada to put up their rather impressive canopies – not the start to the day I'd hoped for!

Just as I was putting the finishing touches to the stand, the first visitor dropped by – an early bird who'd come through the gate right as it opened! We had a good chat about all things Watson, and she spent some time perusing the various materials on the stand – all-in-all, perfect for my first-ever visitor!



The rest of the day was spent interacting with visitors, both on the Watson stand and on the neighbouring Buchanan stand, where I was happy to talk at length to various passers-by about the Buchanan septs. I also took a few minutes to wander around the clan village and some of the other



*Jo & Doug Watson, Myself and Jim Buchanan, President of CBSI,
at the Lord Lyon's Dinner*

attractions, including the Lànhan stand at which Jo was giving a live kiltmaking demonstration. Importantly, I managed to have two key discussions – one with the Lord Lyon about our progress with our Chief Restoration Project, and one with J. Kevin Logan, Commander-Elect of Clan Logan, to get his feedback on his experience of having recently been through the process of petitioning for a Commander.

The day ended with the Lord Lyon's Dinner at a local hostelry. This was a great opportunity to unwind over some refreshments after a punishingly-hot day at the event ground. I very much

enjoyed chatting with Jo and Doug over dinner, and discussing strategy with Jim Buchanan, the President of Clan Buchanan Society International, and Scott Buchanan, CBSI Regional Director for Canada and one of the Buchanan Chief's Pipers.

Day Two

The second day picked up where the first one had stopped, with a steady trickle of visitors wandering around the clan village and stopping by the various displays. It was a little quieter on the second day, and many of the visitors that were doing the rounds were quite serious about their family history, which made for some invigorating discussions. The lower visitor count also meant that I could spend some time meeting representatives from some of the other name groups that were present.

Later in the morning, an insightful open discussion, chaired by Lord Lyon, was held with the clan chiefs that were in attendance. The topic was regarding the future of the clans and clan organisations, with particular emphasis on how they can stay relevant amongst the diaspora whilst respecting their heritage and history. A good discussion was had!



*With the Commander of Clan Young, the President of Scots in
Canada, and Scott Buchanan at the Buchanan Tent*

By mid-afternoon, things were really starting to wind down, with the steady stream of visitors drying up into a trickle. Several clans started to slowly pack away their stands, and by late afternoon the Buchanans and I started to shut down our respective displays. As a measure of how supportive the event circuit is, I received a couple of offers to store my convener's kit at people's places in Canada



rather than cart it all the way back over the Atlantic with me; I politely declined as I didn't know where I'd need it next!

After another day of roasting under the Ontario sun, it was quite a relief to get back to my hotel room to get cleaned up and packed, ready for my flight back to the UK in morning!

Wrap Up

I thoroughly enjoyed my first attempt at convening a stand, and I'm really pleased that I decided to take the leap. The amount of support I received before and during the event was incredible, and it definitely made the whole weekend run a whole lot more smoothly. It was great to immerse myself in diaspora culture for a few days, to meet so many like-minded people, make new friends and to discuss various strategies with the Buchanans, clan chiefs and the Lord Lyon.

If anyone else is thinking of taking the plunge and running a stand of their own, I can wholly recommend it! Having done it myself, I'm fully aware of how intimidating it can feel to rock up to an unknown place – on your own, in my case – and represent your name. If you are in any way interested or just want to learn more about my personal experience, please don't hesitate to [drop me a line](#) – full support will be given, we can help you to sort out your convener's kit, and you will be put in contact with our growing army of conveners! What are you waiting for?

Alternatively, as stated earlier in this issue, why not come and join us on our stand in Canada this summer? More details in the next article!



2026 Canada Meet Up

If you haven't already got the message, we will be returning to Canada this summer under the Watson banner, and you will be able to find us at the [Glengarry Highland Games](#), the [Montreal Highland Games](#) and the [Fergus Scottish Festival and Highland Games](#). We already have quite a few of our members joining us in Fergus and it would be amazing to get even more of you there so that we can have a first-ever in-person gathering of our society!

Full Itinerary

The full itinerary for the games is as follows:

Date	Event	Place
31 Jul – 1 Aug:	Glengarry Highland Games	Maxville, Ontario
2 Aug (Day):	Montreal Highland Games	Verdun, Quebec
2 Aug (Eve):	Buchanan/Watson social gathering	Downtown Montreal
6 Aug (Eve):	Fergus games opening parade	Downtown Fergus, Ontario
7 Aug (Eve):	Fergus games opening ceremony	Fergus, Ontario
8 – 9 Aug:	Fergus Scottish Festival & Highland Games	Fergus, Ontario
8 Aug (Eve):	Buchanan/Watson social gathering	Guelph (near Fergus), Ontario

Special guests will be attending on the following days:

	July 31	1	2	6	7	8	9
James Buchanan <i>President of CBSI</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Scott Buchanan <i>CBSI Regional Director, Canada Piper to the Chief</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Chris Conlon <i>CBSI Genealogist</i>	X	X	X				
Shane Watson <i>President of House of Watson International CBSI Sept Consultant</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

Other members of Clan Buchanan Society International (CBSI) and House of Watson International will also be attending some or all of the events. Anyone interested in further details of any of the events or attendees is welcome to [contact me](#).



Getting There

For anyone overseas, by far the easiest way to get to the area is via Toronto Pearson Airport (YYZ), which is well served by many airlines. Ottawa International Airport (YOW) and Montréal-Trudeau International Airport (YUL) might be more convenient for the Glengarry and Montreal games, but I find that they tend to have less flight options available and flights are a little more expensive than those serving Toronto.

Those within reasonable driving distance of any of the events might wish to consider bringing their own vehicle, as a car will make travelling around when you are there a whole lot easier (see below).

Getting In

US citizens can get into Canada with a valid US passport; no visa is required.

Citizens of other countries can usually apply for electronic travel authorisation (eTA) in advance of travel. Please, please make sure that you use the official website of the Canadian government, as there are many “agencies” (I prefer the term “scammers”) who have official looking websites that offer to apply for visas on your behalf for a hefty fee. An eTA costs \$7 (CAD) from the official site, and closer to \$100 (CAD) from one of these agencies; it is also much, much quicker (as in within minutes) to receive the eTA if you go through the official channel.



Shane Watson with The Chief of Clan Buchanan

The official site to check whether you need a visa, and to apply for one if you do, can be found here: <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/visit-canada/check-visa-eta.html>

Getting Around

There are no two ways about it – you will find it much, much easier to get around Canada if you have a car, either your own or a rental. Distances are significant (it is a good few hours from Montreal and Fergus, for example), and public transport appears to be a little hit-and-miss. Whilst it is possible to fly between Montreal and Toronto, you will still have the issue of travelling from the airports to your accommodation and to the event grounds. There will be spare seats available in some of our vehicles, but please don't bet on this – unless you have arranged to be driven around when you are there, it is probably a wise precaution to book a rental car. All the airports are well-served by the usual rental car companies.

Where to Stay

There is a range of accommodation options available, from Airbnbs to hotels. I don't have any tips for the Glengarry or Montreal games other than to use Google, as another member of our party has sorted our accommodation for these.

For the gala dinner in Toronto, there are several hotel options in various price ranges around The National Club; again, Google is your friend here.



For the Fergus festival, many of us are staying in the Delta Hotel & Conference Centre in Guelph. This is around a 30-minute drive from the event grounds so, again, you will either need your own transport or to have arranged for a ride. The conference centre is offering a group discount for those attending the Fergus games that is accessible via [this link](#). If you have problems accessing the link, please let me know and I'll send it to you directly.

It is also possible to stay in Fergus itself, either in a hotel or an Airbnb; none, however, are within walking distance of the event grounds so some means of getting around will still be required. Another option for Fergus that many people take is to camp onsite, as there is a considerable area set aside for camping.

What to Bring

The most important things to bring – apart from your travel and accommodation booking documents and some means of spending money – are tickets for any events that you are planning to attend. The festivals and the gala dinner can all be booked and paid for in advance, but make sure you also check the schedule for each of the festivals as they may have events taking place that you will need to prebook for – Fergus certainly has a lot going on around the main festival itself, and you will need to book well in advance to avoid disappointment.



Our New House of Watson Polo Shirts

Our Watson stand will have a full range of materials available for passers-by to peruse, but if you have anything you think would augment our display, please contact us in advance to make sure that we won't be duplicating! If you have items of tartan clothing or Watson-themed t-shirts, please bring them along with you, as you will look great when you join us in the parades! I will be putting in an order for House of Watson polo shirts to bring out with me, so if anybody would like one, please contact me to discuss sizing and colour options.

The most important thing to bring, of course, is yourself and your passion! This will be the first in-person meeting for many of us, and it's a great opportunity to make new friends and to share a bit of our passion with others – the more people our enthusiasm rubs off on, the more quickly we will be able to grow our society!

Wrap Up

I hope this article has enthused some of you to come along to Canada this summer and has answered most of your questions. There will undoubtedly be other questions that come to mind, so please don't hesitate to [contact me](#) with any other queries that you may have. If you can't make it to Canada but you are interested in either attending an event, convening a stand or meeting other members near you, please do check out our [member map](#) and the introductory article on convening in this issue, and please fill in our [questionnaire](#) on regional chapters to help us to make plans!

And that is it for another edition of *The Sprouting Oak*! I do hope you have found something of interest in this issue and would welcome any feedback or input for future editions!