

Clan Maclean International Gathering 2012

Clan Congress 'The Future of the Clan Maclean'

Tomorrow's World

by

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One hundred years ago, when my grandfather knocked on the doors of Duart Castle in order to summon the Chief to be welcomed by his clan, there was no television; the first aeroplane had flown only a few years earlier; two World Wars still lay ahead; Britain had an empire; of course there were no computers; and the population of the world was less than one quarter of what it is today.

When we consider the future of the Clan Maclean, what sort of world will we inhabit during the next 100 years?

Well, on this subject I agree with Nils Bohr, the Danish winner of the Nobel Prize for physics, who said "Prediction is very difficult, especially if it's about the future". I would however like to pick up on two trends that are already clear and which are relevant to us as a clan.

First, it is clear that Western countries have been living beyond their means. It is not certain that the good times will return. Couple this with ageing populations and relatively fewer people generating wealth, it becomes clear that governments will have less money to spend on welfare. Increasingly, it will be the responsibility of individuals, families and charities to cope with the sick and the needy. This is a burden which I believe that we as a clan should share.

Historically, the function of a clan, led by its chief, was to provide support and protection for its members. In today's more egalitarian world I believe that all clan members have a responsibility to look after less fortunate members. Indeed, the requirement to undertake philanthropic activities is written into the constitution of the Clan Maclean Association in Scotland. Other Associations have followed this in their own constitutions.

In London we have set up links with two charities that help Scots in London. The idea is that when they come across a Maclean, or a member of a Maclean sept, who needs assistance, they contact us and we ask our members to help. Other Associations could consider similar schemes.

It may be, too, that at some stage the clan should set up its own benevolent fund, as for example the Stewarts have already done.

The second trend is the reducing power of governments and correspondingly the increasing power of individuals. Governments can no longer dictate. They are challenged by newspaper campaigns, by big business (which has the ability to move operations from countries whose policies they regard as unfavourable) and by individuals. Individuals in

particular have been empowered by the internet. This provides them with two things: access to information - governments can no longer control this - and the ability to organise. All this has forced governments to address the concerns of lobby groups and minority interests to a much greater extent than before.

This has brought problems. The silent majority can be held hostage by more vociferous and intolerant minorities. There are signs that society is fragmenting. In this situation it is important to build bridges, not only between different parts of society within countries but also across borders.

I believe that clans have an important role to play in building and maintaining such bridges. Clans are made up of people from different parts of society, different faiths, different political outlooks, all linked by a common heritage and a common interest, the clan.

I am not proposing an active role for the clan in this connection. I am simply suggesting that the fact that there are organisations such as the Clan Maclean, which link people rather than emphasise their differences, is and will be important.

In this area I hope that Clan Maclean International Association will play an important role. Our Associations today cover six countries. Yet from sales of Fiona Maclean's book, registrations for this Gathering and other research, I am aware of Macleans in more than 50 countries. Establishing new Associations has proved difficult. I do believe however that, if the Clan is to operate and be perceived as a genuinely world-wide body, we must find a way of bringing into the fold the Macleans in countries where there is no local Association. Somehow we must make these people feel that they are part of the Clan and that they have the opportunity to learn what the Clan is doing in other countries and even, perhaps, to have a say in how the Clan develops in the future. Equally, we should be making the members of our existing Associations aware of the real extent of the Maclean family. At this morning's meeting of CMIA we agreed to try to develop a network of national contacts, who can be the links between the Macleans in their countries and the Clan at large. They will act as a sort of half-way house towards an Association.

There is one thing that has not changed in the last 100 years and which in my view will not change during the next 100 years. That is the human need to be with other human beings. Telecommunication through telephones, video links, and social media networks has never been easier or less expensive, and the future will offer more scope in this respect. But people still need to interact socially with other people in the same place. The pubs in London are still full; hundreds of thousands of people still go to football grounds each week; and recently more than a million people thronged the streets of London in order to celebrate the Queen's Diamond Jubilee.

The social activities of the Clan will therefore remain an important function, providing places for people to meet or even, when the geographical distances are too great, simply a network of people who can talk to each other. This will be especially important for two reasons. First, as economic power shifts, people will want or will need to move between countries in order to find work. Being able to connect immediately with a local Clan network will help these people to settle in. Second, as the family unit continues to break down, there will be more people living alone for whom the Clan will provide an important link to other people.

Finally, I would like to consider the elements that are needed in order to enable the Clan to function in the ways that I have suggested.

The first element is a common interest. This of course for us is our Maclean heritage. In this connection genealogy is of widespread interest. I think that there is more than we can do in this area in terms of co-ordination and making existing information more widely known and easier to obtain.

The second element is a focal point. For us this is the Chief, his family and Duart Castle. All of these will continue to be critical, the points at which all our interests converge, and the Chief will be talking later about the future of the castle.

The third element is pride in the Clan. Groups flourish as long as people want to join them. We must ensure that the Clan is an organisation of which people are proud to be members. This is not just a matter of celebrating battles long ago. We must show that the Clan continues to be vibrant and strong, and is not dependent on deriving strength from a past that grows ever more distant. In fact Macleans throughout the world continue to achieve great things. We must ensure that their achievements are made widely known and are celebrated. This is what the Clan Maclean Heritage Trust does and will continue to do.

The fourth, very important, element is the continuing supply of people who are willing to undertake the work. These have always been relatively small in number. I don't see this changing. I am not despondent about this, because I believe that volunteers will always come forward. The important thing for us is to keep the door open for these people and make sure that they know where the door is, and to keep expanding the pool from which volunteers are likely to come. Bob McLean in his talk will be suggesting some ideas about how to attract members.

The fifth and final element is communication. Associations need to be able to communicate effectively and efficiently, not only with their own members but also with the wider Maclean network. Alasdair White in his talk will be giving us some pointers in this respect.

In summary, therefore, I believe that the Clan has and will continue to have an important social function, supporting the lonely and the less fortunate, building bridges and maintaining lines of communication between different groups and different countries, and providing the means of bringing people together. In this way I firmly believe that the Clan Maclean has a great future and will continue to flourish.