

PETER BEAUCLERK DEWAR - RESEARCHING THE PAST

Interview by Sarah Powell

Peter Beauclerk Dewar presents his family history as a straightforward tale of unremarkable, hard-working, responsible Highlanders. They made few headlines but, over the centuries, built on their skills and experience and went on to exploit the opportunities arising from the union with England and the development of trade and industry. However there is much more to it than that. Several members of his family made notable contributions in their time to civic, sporting and military life. Meanwhile, through his mother, Peter is a direct descendant of Charles II and his famed mistress Nell Gwyn - hardly unremarkable.

There are also some colourful-sounding conundrums in Peter's family's past. How did it arise that a relatively modest family of shoemakers should have had a family crest and arms? What did John Dewar and his apprentice Andrew Yuill get up to in 1710 to be fined £50 each - an enormous sum in those days - for "blood and riot"? Why did John grant a 'Charter of Alienation and Sasine' to his brother Patrick in 1714, leading the latter to obtain his house and lands? And what were the circumstances that later led Patrick to be on the receiving end of another episode of "blood and riot", this time initiated by a certain John Glen whom Patrick sued, receiving damages of some £3?

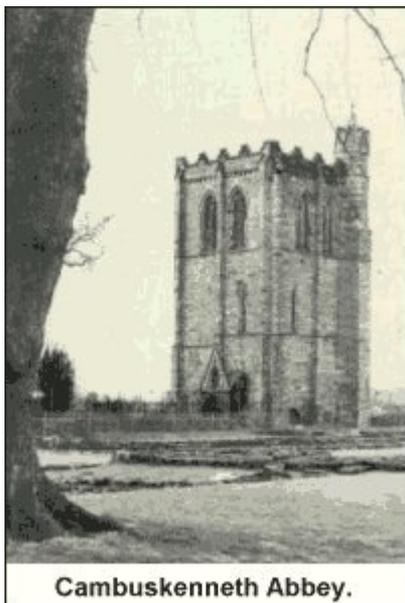
Regrettably a dearth of information in the records means the stories behind these events may never be known.

Exploring family history

Peter Beauclerk-Dewar explains that his interest in his family history was aroused almost by chance when, on his twenty-first birthday, he was given a signet ring handed down through generations of his family. "My father, who was so punctilious in so many things, seemed to know remarkably little about it, so I took up the challenge to find out more. First I approached the College of Arms in London. There I was told that the crest belonged to the family of Dewars of Vogrie. My quest then led me to Scotland and to Stirling where I visited Cambuskenneth and the Church of Holy Rude where there is an early family tomb dated 1705. From there I was able gradually to put together the different pieces of the family jigsaw.

"I subsequently discovered that my family is probably the largest family of Dewars on record - with branches on all five continents of the world. Through my research I identified, made contact with, and in some cases met, a great many different cousins worldwide that I never knew I had. It has put me in touch with literally hundreds of people, which I have enjoyed tremendously.

"Although there were Dewars in Stirling from 1483, our earliest known direct ancestor was a Patrick or Peter Dewar (the two names are interchangeable). In 1671 he lived as a tenant in the village or hamlet of Cambuskenneth, on the opposite side of the River Forth from Stirling.



Cambuskenneth Abbey.

"Cambuskenneth Abbey is well known and a site of considerable historical interest. Founded in 1140 by King David I, it was one of the great Augustinian Monasteries. Some two centuries later King David's great-great-grandson, King Robert the Bruce, convened several parliaments in the abbey, notably in 1314 after the Battle of Bannockburn. In 1488 King Robert's great-great-grandson, King James III, was buried there, alongside his wife Queen Margaret, following his death at the battle of Sauchieburn nearby. Sadly, today only the Abbey bell-tower remains.

"Returning to my family, we know that Patrick Dewar had two sons, John and Patrick (the latter being my direct ancestor), both of whom were *cordiners* or shoemakers, as also were a number of their descendants. As qualified craftsmen, these Dewars were members of the Royal Incorporation of Shoemakers of Stirling, one of the craftsmen's guilds of the time.

"By 1713 Patrick, the younger of the two, was well established enough to have been able to lend 200 merks to the Incorporation of Fleshers of Stirling. Intriguingly, while presumably an upstanding member of the Royal Incorporation of Shoemakers of Stirling, he is also described in *Burke's Landed Gentry* as having 'defied the Deacon, Dean of Guild and Bailie of the Royal Incorporation of Shoemakers of Stirling as to buying of new shoe leather'.

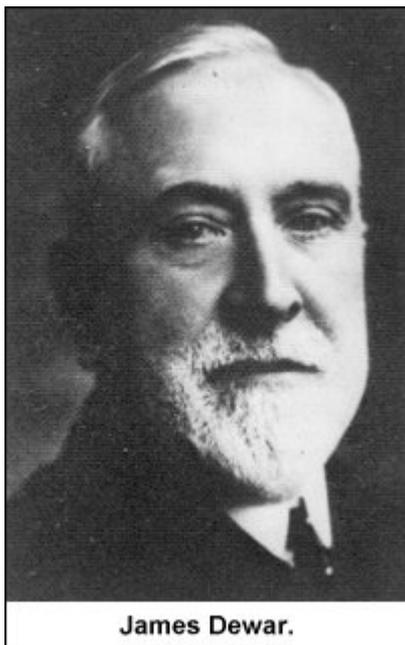
"It was Patrick who, in 1705, had erected the family tombstone at the Church of Holy Rude in Stirling, inscribing it with the arms of Dewar. Perhaps the seeming mystery of why a modest family of shoemakers should have had a family crest and arms may be explained by the considerable variations in wealth and status which could (and still can) exist within one family in countries such as Scotland where primogeniture prevails. When the eldest sons inherit all, junior branches frequently need to fend for themselves; but they remain entitled to matriculate an individual variation of their family arms."

Farmers, grain merchants and oarsmen

Over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the Dewars made the transition from their trade as *cordiners* to become successful farmers and grain merchants. Patrick junior's grandson and namesake was the first to do so, becoming a farmer at Cornton outside Stirling in the mid-eighteenth century. He was nominated a Burgess of Stirling, a position of some standing in the community, and he and his descendants went on to farm no fewer than ten farms encircling Stirling. Patrick's son Peter, also a Burgess of Stirling as were several other family members, was a prominent farmer and Crown tenant of King's Park.



"Several separate branches of the family then, quite independently, took up grain merchanting," notes Peter. "The most successful of these was my great-grandfather, James Dewar, the youngest son of Peter Dewar of Craigniven and King's Park. James was the youngest son and would not inherit the family business, so he left Stirling for London to seek his fortune. There, building on his knowledge and experience of cereal farming, he co-founded a firm called Dewar & Webb in 1872. The company soon also had branches in Portland, Oregon and the American Press of the day rather charmingly dubbed him 'King Corn'.



"James was a member of the Baltic Exchange, a Freeman of the City of London and a Liveryman of the Worshipful Company of Bakers (he became Master in 1906). In his spare time, he was a keen oarsman and a member of the London Rowing Club, an interest he shared with his two sons, Peter and James Evan (known as Evan). They in their turn went on to become leading lights in London rowing circles. Peter represented Great Britain in the Olympic Games in 1908 and Evan rowed in the Diamond Sculls in 1910 and 1911.



"Peter, the elder son, eventually took over Dewar & Webb which he subsequently sold. He then went out to Kenya where he lived for the rest of his life. His son by his second marriage, David, served as a captain in the Kenya Regiment during the Mau Mau uprisings of the 1950s, and is now a farmer in Ayrshire where he is factor of Lord Inchcape's Glenapp estate. David is the current head of our branch of the family."

A story of bravery

"Evan, my grandfather, served in World War I in the London Rifle Brigade and was killed in action at Lesboeufs, France in 1916. He left an only son James who, as a pilot officer in Coastal Command Flying Boats 204 Squadron in World War II, was among the first of those to be awarded the George Medal for bravery (the George Medal like the George Cross was instituted in 1940 by King George VI). This he received for saving the lives of several injured members of the crew of his Sunderland flying boat after it had crashed into a mountainside in Iceland. Four crew members including the captain were seriously injured. James and other crew members managed to carry the wounded clear of the wrecked hull just before it caught fire; moments later the bombs it was carrying exploded.

"The captain's injury meant that James, as second pilot, took charge. He and a volunteer went to find help from the village below the mountain, walking for ten miles down through the lava desert that was the mountainside, their rubber flying boots torn to shreds.

"The alarm was raised and a rescue party of lorries and ambulances assembled, but was unable to cross the lava beds. The rescuers had to continue on foot and my father volunteered to lead the way; he then had to trek back to the village on foot yet again.

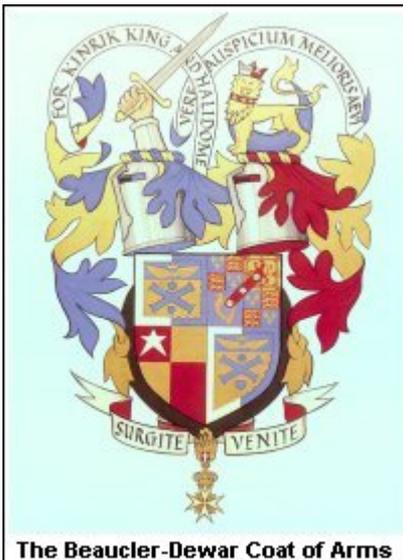
"Some months later my father was appointed to the General School of Air Reconnaissance where he played a major role in the invention and development of an important flying and navigation training aid which was subsequently adopted by many air forces and airlines. He was mentioned in despatches and in 1946 he was awarded the MBE."

A Cavalier ancestry

"Through my father's marriage to Hermione de Vere Beauclerk, I can also boast a wonderfully Cavalier ancestry. My maternal grandfather was heir-in-line to the Dukedom of St Albans - Charles Beauclerk, Duke of St. Albans having been the first son of the liaison between Charles II and the actress Nell Gwyn, and one of fourteen acknowledged illegitimate children of Charles II - a notoriously flamboyant and colourful character.

"Nell Gwyn was said to be by far the most popular of all the king's mistresses - largely because of her ready wit but perhaps also because she was beautiful and never put on airs and graces, never forgot old friends, and remained faithful to her 'Charles III' (he was her third lover of that name) to the end.

"In 1965 I presented the details of, and evidence supporting, all these chapters in our family history to the Lord Lyon King of Arms in Edinburgh, seeking confirmation and registration. He permitted me to matriculate arms, quartering my Dewar arms 'of ancient user' (the Lord Lyon King of Arms believed these dated back to the early 1500s), as on the seventeenth-century tombstone, with those of the Beauclerks, Dukes of St. Albans, and the de Veres, Earls of Oxford, reflecting my mother's status of heraldic heiress. Thus my arms are a sort of pictorial genealogy, signifying both my maternal descent from Charles II and Nell Gwyn and my paternal descent from Dewar.



The Beaucler-Dewar Coat of Arms

"In keeping with Scottish heraldry, it is interesting to note that my Dewar arms bear strong similarities to those of all other Dewar families in Scotland. However, we have been unable to establish any connection between them, despite undertaking considerable research.

"My strong interest in genealogy led to my specialisation in this field of study and I founded a heraldic and genealogical practice more than thirty years ago. Since then I have become increasingly involved in lecturing and writing, as the heraldic consultant to Christie's and numerous other similar activities which I undertake in addition to my main occupation as an accountant, management consultant, 'headhunter' and magistrate. From 1965 until 1992 I also served as a Lieutenant Commander in the Royal Navy Reserve, latterly in naval intelligence which I see as requiring many of the same investigative and presentational skills used in genealogy."

Maintaining tradition

"More traditional roles include my membership of the Royal Company of Archers which acts as the Queen's personal bodyguard when she's in Scotland. We don marvellous green uniforms, wear feathers in our caps and bear bows and arrows. Although the Royal Company dates back to 1676, its role as the Royal Body Guard commenced in 1821. Its presence at the Royal Garden Party at Holyrood, at Investitures and at the Thistle Service adds a splash of colour and romanticism.

"I have also served as Falkland Pursuivant Extraordinary to the Lord Lyon King of Arms on numerous occasions since 1975, in connection with the Service of Installation of Knights and Dames of the Most Noble and Most Ancient Order of the Thistle. This ceremonial role involves leading in the procession of the Royal Household. In July this year I shall again be acting as Falkland, for the twelfth time, when the Queen is to invest the Princess Royal as a Dame of the Thistle in St. Giles' Cathedral.



James Dewar with his wife and daughter.



Peter Beauclerk Dewar at the Installation of The Most Ancient and Most Noble Order of The Thistle in Edinburgh at St Giles Cathedral, 8th July, 1999.

"In addition I am a Liveryman of the Worshipful Company of Haberdashers which ranks eighth among the 'Great Twelve' Livery Companies of the City of London (there are a hundred or so in total), and dates back to pre-1468. My earliest traceable ancestors were members of not dissimilar guilds, so the family has perhaps now gone full circle. Today, though, most of the livery companies are much less involved in the trades from which they take their names, and more in the charities they support such as schools.

"Over the last year I have been particularly involved in researching and editing the new edition of *Burke's Landed Gentry*, in the exciting prospect of getting this on to the Internet. This is a marvellous initiative as it will enable us continually to update, correct and improve on the hundreds of family and thousands of individual entries making up the directory, creating a vast online research resource. It also means we shall be able to use colour liberally - the first time we have been able to do so. For instance, we shall be able to show each generation in a different colour, which will make it far easier to follow and be more 'user-friendly' than the traditional indentations. As far as we are aware, we shall be the first genealogical or reference resource to use colour in this way.

"Finally, where my own family is concerned, for many years I have owned the tiny Scottish island of Holm of Huip, by Stronsay, in the Orkney Islands. This once formed part of the dowry brought by Margaret, daughter of King Christian of Denmark, upon her marriage to King James III of Scotland in 1469. Both Margaret and James are my thirteen times great-grandparents on my mother's side, and both are buried at Cambuskenneth Abbey. So again perhaps the wheel has come full circle, but is this not what history is all about?"

In 1975 Peter Beauclerk-Dewar published his first book, *The House of Nell Gwyn - the fortunes of the Beauclerk Family 1670-1974* (co-authored with Donald Adamson). He is also the author of *The House of Dewar 1296-1991* and *The Family History Record Book (1991)*, and editorial director of *Burke's Landed Gentry The Kingdom in Scotland*.



Peter Beauclerk Dewar

Sarah powell is a regular contributor to Burke's online magazine "[Atavus](#)"