

Clan Irving

The Border Irvings & Irvines

Clan Chief vs. Laird

There is a common misunderstanding of exactly what is meant by a Clan Chief and what is meant by the old Scots term of Laird.

For quite a few people this has been confused to mean one and the same, as after all this is Scotland and aren't these words more or less meaning the same thing.

Sadly but no.

These words mean very different things and this article will set out exactly how different these words are, and in Scotland it is important to get it right.

Clan Chief

Whilst Scottish Law recognises the existence of Scottish Clans, Clan Chiefs and Chieftains, the title is only of social dignity or precedence, and as such does not devolve any interest for which the law has jurisdiction.

The Court Of The Lord Lyon is the formal legal jurisdiction and heraldic authority for Scotland, dealing with all matters relating to Scottish Heraldry and Coats of Arms and maintains the Scottish Public Registers of Arms and Genealogies.

The Lyon Court makes the recording of the dignity of a Clan chiefship acknowledged by attestation. This involves a formal petition being made to Lyon Court along with supporting proofs, genealogies and formal documentation. This supporting documentation is extensive, detailed and thorough without which the petition is likely to fail.

The process of preparing and submitting a formal petition to Lyon Court is lengthy and not without expense with the detailed and thorough research often involving accredited members of ASGRA – the Association of Scottish Genealogists & Researchers in Archives.

The Association of Scottish Genealogists and Researchers in Archives (ASGRA) is the only accrediting body for professional genealogists in Scotland. The organisation promotes the highest standards in the profession of genealogy and historical research with Members undergoing rigorous assessment before being accepted as full members of the association.

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The formal Grant of Arms is often with the territorial designation “Chief of the Name and Arms of ...”, and it is that designation which is the accepted formal term for a Scottish Clan Chief.

The Standing Council of Scottish Chiefs is the definitive and authoritative body for information on the Scottish Clan System and a further useful point of reference.

Laird

Lyon Court states that the term “laird” has generally been applied to the owner of an estate, sometimes by the owner himself or, more commonly, by those living and working on the estate.

There are a number of well known examples where the owners of an estate have styled themselves as “Lairds of ...” but it must be noted this is not a formal hereditary title nor is it a recognised term in Scottish nobility.

The term Laird is a description and would be tied to a physical property such as a small Scottish shooting estate. It would not be appropriate for the owner of a normal residential property, far less the owner of a small souvenir plot of land to adopt this term.

It goes without saying that the term “laird” is not synonymous with that of “lord” or “lady”. In England for example the equivalent use would be that of a local squire or land owner.

“Laird” is not a title as explained above, but a Scottish description applied to the owner of an estate usually by the people round about or working on it.

If someone called John Smith owned Bonshaw Tower, the ancient seat of the Border Irvings, he could style himself John Smith of Bonshaw Tower. The difficulty arises when the estate owner has the same surname as the clan chief.

For example, for people not aware of the facts, the family that now owns Bonshaw Tower has the same surname of Irving. If they felt it important for to style themselves as Lairds, it would be correct that the property owner is known as Laird of Bonshaw Tower, being the property owner of the tower and house. As otherwise there could be confusion with the Clan Chief & Chief of the Name & Arms of Irving of Bonshaw – Captain R.A.S. Irving RN (Retd.).

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In a case such as this, to avoid confusion in the eyes of the Scottish and overseas public, the differences would have to be made absolutely clear. The last thing one wants to find out is that someone is not who they really are.

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If you have any questions or need assistance with tracing your Irving/Irvine roots, then please do not hesitate to email us on **irvings@clanirving.com** and we will do what we can to help, to answer your questions and to steer you in the right direction on your journey of discovery.