



## Clan Bell and the MacMillan Sept Claims

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Clan Bell has been a driving force in the history that makes Scotland so fascinating. Starting as knights in Northern France, the Bells fought in the Norman conquest, in the Crusades, and more. Bells have been Knights Templar, master masons for beautiful castles in Scotland, and fought for Scottish independence.

Fighting to survive on the Scottish Border as reivers, Bells were known as one of the Devil's Dozen, the 13 strongest and most active of the riding clans. Bells thrived under hardship, so much that Scots needed the proverb: "*numerous as the Bells of Middlebie.*" A Bell carried Kinmont Willie of the Armstrong clan over his shoulders during the battle to free him during the raid of Carlisle Castle. The Bells from Scotland and from England were lined up across from each other at the Battle of Solway Moss, and refused to fight their cousins. England and Scotland gave a war, but Bells turned it into a family reunion.

Bells have been inventors and thought leaders in many professions, invented the telephone, mechanical reaper, pioneered steamships, and advanced knowledge in medicine, forensic science, and the law. Bell entrepreneurs created companies that advanced aviation with helicopters and the first supersonic jet, and of course the "Scottish" food of Taco Bell. A Bell was founding co-publisher of Encyclopedia Britannica. A Bell founded Bell's Whisky – which is a best-selling scotch in Scotland, the UK and South Africa. A Bell was the author of "The Principles of the Laws of Scotland" that taught law to generations of lawyers.

When England and Scotland united into the United Kingdom, a first priority was to send the most unruly of the unruly Bell clan to Northern Ireland in order to help pacify the Scottish border. Many Bells migrated to Northern Ireland, the United States, Australia, Canada and other nations. The story of Bells is still being written by our families bound together by friendship, fellowship, and a rich and proud history.<sup>1</sup>

Bells who could join Clan Bell may feel they were cheated by historical errors that claimed Bell was a sept of another name. The information below corrects some errors, to help Bells deprived in this way.

### The MacMillan Claim of a Bell Sept Is Not Valid

Although MacMillans are fine Scots and it is appealing that they want to consider Bells part of their extended family, the facts prove the sept claim is false and it dilutes the honor that is due to the Bells.

The term "sept" has two definitions:

1. *First are the men of the clan who were related by blood and formed separate divisions,*
2. *Second were individuals and groups who looked for and received protection of the clan.*<sup>2</sup>

The mid-18th century name change of MacMillans (of the MacIlvoyle names) to Bell fails to create a Bell sept of Clan MacMillan under both definitions of a sept:

A related group of MacMillans changing their names to Bell created a Bell-named sept of Clan Bell, even if they all later showed loyalty to MacMillan as individuals while keeping the Bell name. The Lord Lyon Court policy is that "*where a particular sept has traditionally been associated with a particular clan it would not be appropriate for that name to be treated by another clan chief as one of its septs.*"<sup>3</sup>

The name change to Bell around the time of Culloden was likely to give these ex-MacMillans protection using the Bell surname. These ex-MacMillans were therefore a Bell-named sept of Clan Bell.

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<sup>1</sup> Bell history is too amazing to fully footnote here. To learn more, join Clan Bell at <http://www.ClanBell.org>

<sup>2</sup> House of Gordon, "Family & Septs", *House of Gordon*, <http://www.houseofgordon.com/>

<sup>3</sup> The Court of the Lord Lyon, "Who is a member of a clan?", *The Court of the Lord Lyon*, (Archived at <https://web.archive.org/web/20180627072357/http://www.lyon-court.com/lordlyon/240.html>)



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The ex-MacMillans who changed their names to Bell did so after a dispute with Clan MacMillan, and there is no valid Bell sept of Clan MacMillan. The small percentage of Bells who can trace their genealogy to the names of McIlvoyle were even considered a distinct group from MacMillan before the name change.

Ex-MacMillans named Bell were not called Bell before the name change and then totally changed their names to Bell. Therefore, it was never correct for Bell to be a considered sept of MacMillan.

Some of the failed Clan MacMillan arguments for a Bell sept include:

- Cormac, Bishop of Dunkeld, is not related to Bell clergy present at Dunkeld over 130 years later. Cormac had no last name (typical in Scotland at his time), but Bells did (common in France but not Scotland at their time), and Bells were likely in Scotland to reduce Celtic Church influence.
- The name of Gilbert le fitz Bel in 1304 was not equivalent to “McBell” (recorded in 1666 and 1795). A Donald le fitz Can appears in English records for Donald McCan/Cahan in the 1300s, but there is plenty of evidence for McCan/McCann and a conspicuous lack of McBell and Mhaoil evidence, so Gilbert le fitz Bel as “Gilbert McBell” or “Gilbert Mhaoil” is unlikely.
  - Descendants of Gilbert le fitz Bel living around Annandale do not match MacMillan DNA results, so there is physical evidence against him being related to MacMillans.
- Robert Bell of Berwickshire in 1427 and an unnamed MacMillan in England with similar coats of arms is a coincidence since a chevron with 3 stars is a very popular design used by at least 37 unique surnames. It is very unlikely that Robert Bell and the unnamed MacMillan were related.
- The power of MacMillan chiefs was reduced after Culloden (around the time of the name change to Bell) so that the chiefs could not command allegiance to Clan MacMillan in some areas.
  - It is ironic that the historic setting with the most diminished power for MacMillan chiefs is used as the basis for claiming Bell as a sept of MacMillan.
- Phonetic changes to arbitrarily get to “Bell” do not create a valid sept claim. The old MacMillan names were closer to “Gullible” and could have been changed to other English names, instead.
- The total change of names in the parish register to Bell is not explained by arbitrary phonetics, showing a great need to change to Bell for protection. Even protection “by the Bell surname” would make the ex-MacMillans a sept of Bell, by definition and by Lord Lyon Court policy.
- A small number of people named “McBell” and a Bell gravestone with an ancient MacMillan name respects family heritage but does not create an argument for a Bell sept of MacMillan.

Additional refutation of the MacMillan claim of a Bell sept includes:

- A name change to Bell means the group is assumed to be part of Clan Bell, and not MacMillan, per Lord Lyon Court policy. This prevents a group taking over another name.
- Tartan books are not reliable on sept matters, often reflecting one person’s opinion of name groups in a clan’s area. Tartan books have a commercial bias to lump many names into clans with a tartan to avoid stocking additional tartans and to not have any name that does not have a tartan.
- A rough estimate of relative populations has people named Bell (but not related to MacMillans) outnumbering the former MacMillan-Bells by about ten to one (91% versus 9%).

The MacMillan arguments all fail badly when given a critical examination that looks for the underlying facts needed to support them.