



In a sleepy village in Angus, Scotland, lies the derelict Netherton Cottage, known to have been home to Sandy Davidson, grandfather to Arthur, William and Walter, who became three of the four founder members of the Harley-Davidson Motorcycle Company. After a three-year struggle to save the cottage, Harley-Davidson enthusiast Mike Sinclair has begun a restoration project that will create a Davidson Legacy visitor centre and museum. Here, Mike tells us the story so far...

AS A FANATICAL owner, importer and builder of Harley-Davidsons since 1983, I had long been aware of the rumours that the Davidson family originated from the small Angus town of Brechin. This was at last verified in 2006 when an Angus Council employee, Norman Atkinson, researched the family's history and pinpointed the Davidsons to Netherton Cottage on the Melgund estate, where Sandy Davidson worked as the estate's wright. It was from here that Sandy, his wife Margaret and their six children emigrated to America in 1857.

Early in 2008 I was told that the cottage, now derelict, was on the market and I set about investigating ways to secure it. Having tried, without success, to interest friends and acquaintances, I approached local community worker Maggie Sherrit, who I knew shared my enthusiasm for Harley-Davidsons. We enquired about the cottage to find that it was already under offer to a local developer pending planning permission. What a disaster! We were now looking at the impending demolition of the area's only physical link to the Davidson family.

It was clear that there was no way we

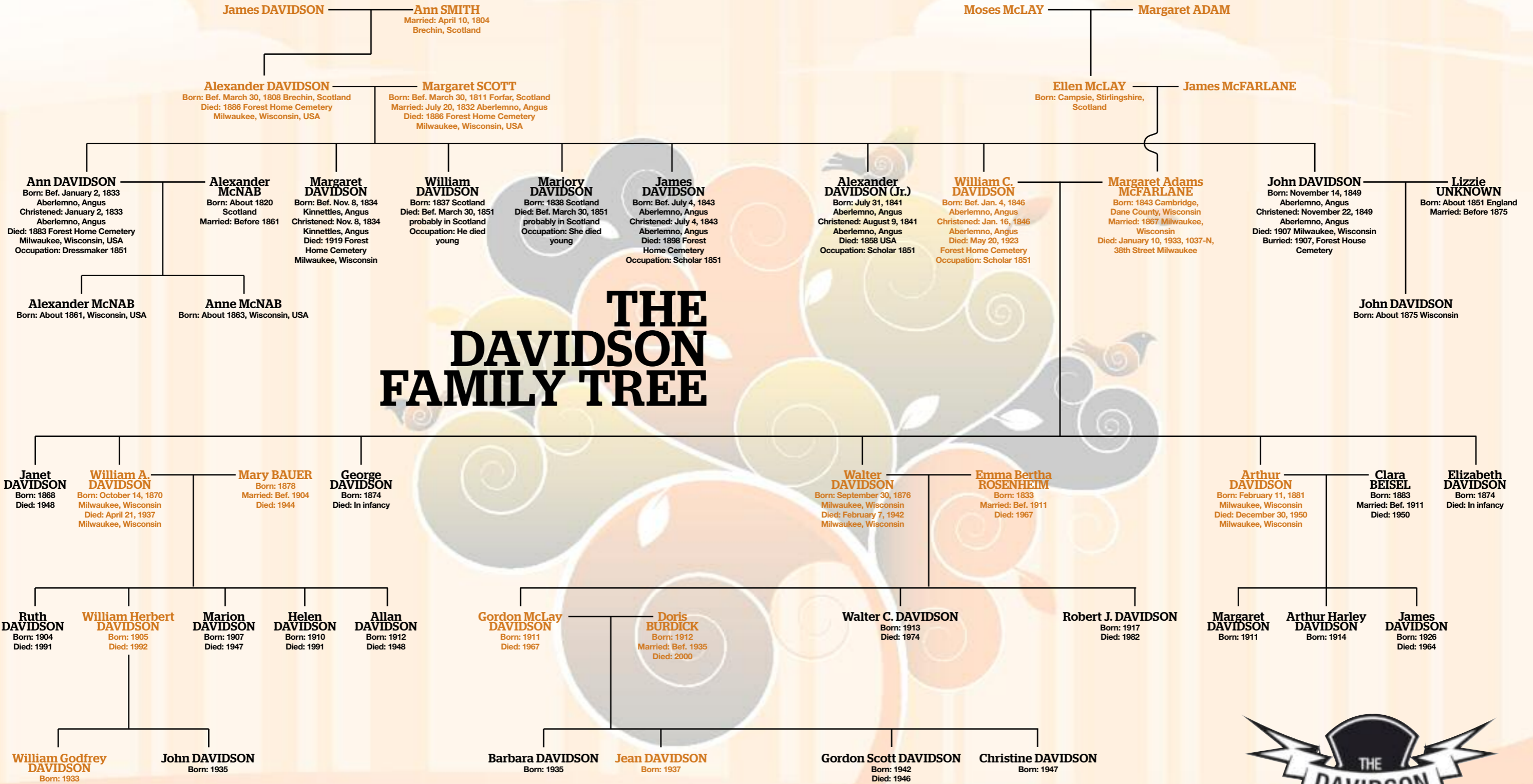
could do the work involved in establishing a community organisation and raising the funding to buy the cottage in time to save it, but Maggie was interested, the property wasn't that expensive, and we calculated that bringing in one more partner could make it happen.

After more talking to everyone we could think of, and trying to enthuse them, long-time friend and local music shop owner Keith Mackintosh was infected by our enthusiasm and the Netherton Cottage Development Company was born. We tracked down the seller, made our offer and, in May 2008, became the proud, slightly bemused and much impoverished owners of a derelict cottage.

From there we had to put our heads together and decide what to do next. The cottage still had a roof (with a very large hole in it), still had windows and a door and was filled with the decaying possessions of the last occupier, an elderly lady named Bella who had been moved to a nursing home eight years previously and had subsequently died.

Other than the years of decay, little had changed. The original range was still there and there was no electricity and »





Davidson Legacy

Top to bottom: Netherton Cottage in Scottish landscape; Mike and Keith present a slate from the roof to Jim Fricke (Curator, Harley-Davidson Museum); Mike, Maggie and Keith with Jean Davidson and Arthur Harley Davidson



no bathroom; the outside toilet was long gone. Unfortunately, within weeks of our purchase, the empty house was attacked by vandals and the door and windows were smashed. None of this mattered much, though, as we had by now decided that we must completely restore the cottage as it would have been when Sandy, Margaret and the children left.

With the enthusiastic help of some local bikers we began to tackle the overgrown grounds and clear away the debris whilst talking to the planning department about the restoration. Not surprisingly, the talks became a soul-destroying 18-month slog that resulted in our discovering that we hadn't needed planning permission in the first place!

Undaunted, we resolved to move into phase one of our project – getting the word out. During our struggle to secure the property and save it from the bulldozers I had been writing to, and phoning, the Harley-Davidson Motor Company and one evening around the time of the purchase I was thrilled to receive a phone call from Willie G's son Michael. Michael was enthusiastic to hear about the house and its history and passed me on to the Motor Company's International Regional Manager, Martin Ginns, who became the greatest source of help and support we could ever have wished for.

For the past three years Martin has kept in touch, followed our progress and, in 2010, helped us to arrange a visit to Milwaukee to meet the directors of the Harley-Davidson Museum. So it was that, last March, we boarded the plane laden with copies of the Davidson family tree, bottles of Old Fettercairn malt and an engraved slate from the original roof of the cottage. In Milwaukee we were treated to a guided a tour of the fantastic museum (if you haven't been – go!), followed by a meeting with the museum directors to discuss our plans. We left them a copy of the family tree and the roof slate.

It was in Milwaukee that we were lucky enough to meet with one of

our main sources of inspiration, Jean Davidson, granddaughter of Harley-Davidson founder Arthur. We had read Jean's books and were determined not to leave town without tracking her down. It was worth it! With Jean we went to Forest Home Cemetery where, far from the impressive Davidson family plot, we managed to find the modest stone marking the resting place of Sandy, Margaret and some of their children. The highlight of the trip, though, was being taken by Jean to visit the home of her uncle, Arthur Harley Davidson, last surviving son of the Harley-Davidson founders. At 96, Arthur is an amazing, lively and totally charming old guy who entertained us with tales of his long-ago visit to Scotland to trace his family's roots. He was sure that he had found the cottage as well as sampling the delights of Scottish haggis ("didn't like it") and the famous Forfar bridie (like a Cornish pastie, but different). He also told us of the time when he, as a young boy, was made to wear a white shirt by George Hendee (Indian Motorcycles) who proceeded to use him as a target for practising his golf shots in the dark!

Since returning from Milwaukee we've worked flat out to raise the funds to complete the restoration. Our plan now is to make the house available as holiday accommodation for Harley-Davidson enthusiasts to sample life as the pioneering Davidsons would have lived it in Scotland in the 1850s. The Angus and Dundee Tourism Partnership has provided funds to furnish and decorate the interior and we have just been awarded a grant from the Scottish Rural Development Programme fund. All we need to do now is match that grant and the cottage will be ready to receive its first overnight guests.

What a ride it's been so far, and we've only just set out... ■

Follow the progress of the restoration in future issues and in the monthly HOG eMagazine.
www.davidsonlegacy.com



WIN a trip to Netherton Cottage!

HOG magazine is offering one lucky H.O.G. member the opportunity to visit Netherton Cottage in Scotland this summer to see the restoration in progress. Mike Sinclair and his team will provide a guided tour of the site and the area, sharing their passion for this project.

This is your chance to see the work in progress, and be one of the first Harley riders to tread the path of the Davidson family of yesteryear.

For your chance to win a two-day break in Scotland, including return flights and accommodation, email us at hogtales europe@harley-davidson.com with your name, daytime telephone number and H.O.G. membership number.

Tell us what you ride, where you ride, and your touring plans for 2011, and let us know if you're attending any Harley-Davidson or H.O.G. events this year!

Closing date: July 30, 2011. The winner will be notified as soon as possible for travel during August.