

MacFarlanes' heritage centre bid setback

CLAN VOWS TO FIGHT FOR A NEW HOME

By **TINA KEMP**

ONE of Loch Lomond's best known clans has pledged to fight on after shock news that its plans for a heritage centre had fallen through.

Clan MacFarlane's ambitious bid to reclaim a stake in the area where its ancestors once roamed was dashed when the building it had earmarked as a base was sold to someone else.

This week, clan members spoke of their bitter disappointment at losing the former church at Ballyhennan near Taret — the burial site for many MacFarlanes.

But clan society vice president Brian MacFarlane issued a stirring rallying cry to members worldwide.

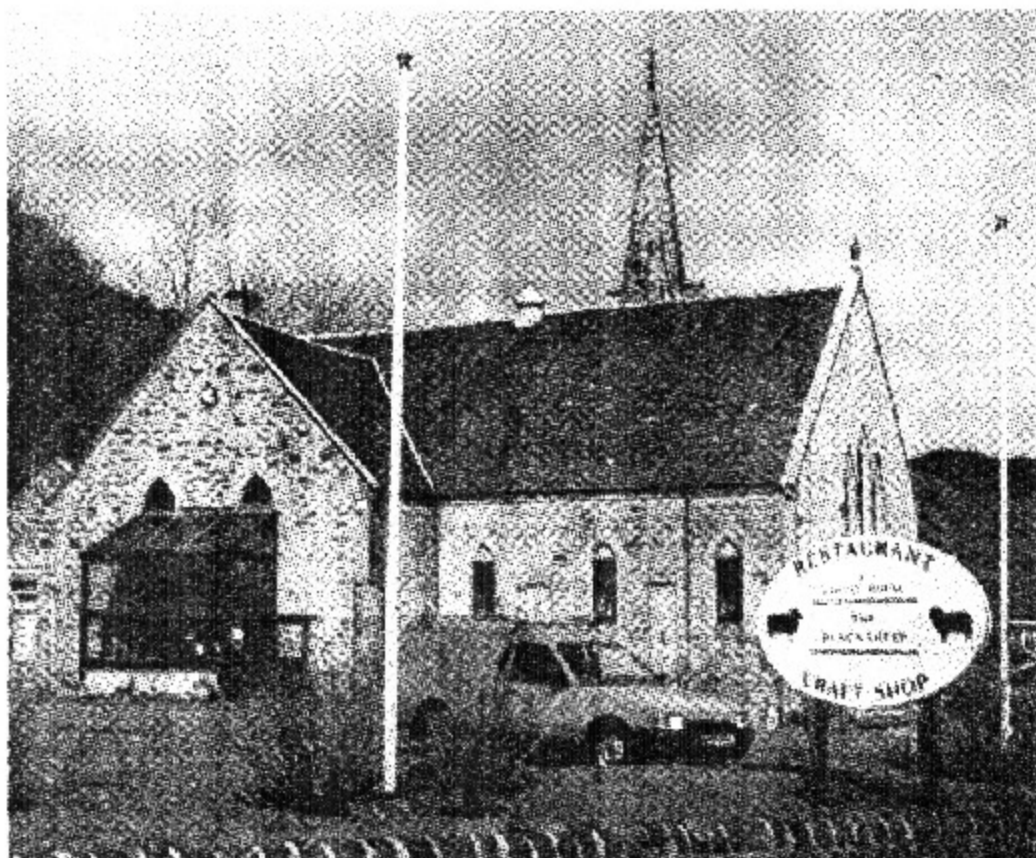
BATTLE

He vowed not to give up the battle to find a home for the clan which historically held lands at the heads of Loch Lomond and Loch Long.

Three years ago, the clan says it reached what it described as a "gentleman's agreement" with the owners to buy the building, which has been operating as The Black Sheep licensed restaurant and craft centre for several years.

The clan launched a major fundraising drive among its 1,200 members worldwide to fund the creation of a heritage, museum and educational centre, and pulled in £100,000.

But the dream was shattered in February, just as the clan secured a generous interest-free loan from a prominent UK



The MacFarlane clan lost out in bid for the Black Sheep

member towards the £400,000 cost of the project. Explained Brian: "The owners contacted us late one night and told us that they would be accepting the first bid which they received the next morning. That didn't give us time to put in an offer.

"It was a massive disappointment for us as up until then we had believed we had a gentleman's agreement over the sale of the building.

PROBLEMS

"There were some problems regarding a pension fund and it was going to take two to three months to sort that out but we had the money and we were confident we could have completed the sale this summer."

The Clan MacFarlane Society had aimed to buy the former United Free Church, built in 1867, along with its cemetery which has several clan grave sites bearing the escutcheon

from the chiefly coat of arms. The clan, which held its annual gathering in Arrochar last summer, also believes one of its chiefs was laid to rest there.

It was hoped not only to fill the building with clan related material but to use it as a museum of the local area, with free access for local schoolchildren to encourage them to learn more about their past.

SITES

Brian said despite losing the Black Sheep building, the clan was still determined to push ahead with its heritage centre plans and had already investigated several potential sites.

He told The Lennox: "We have looked at a couple of places which are no longer options and have had an offer of land in Arrochar which we are currently looking into. We are a resilient lot and will not give up."