



ROCK OF AGES: The old church in Tarbet overlooks an ancient graveyard where the MacFarlane clan's ancestors are buried

By **Dean Herbert**

THEY have been embroiled in bitter power struggles and bloody battles over the centuries, clashing with Mary Queen of Scots and defending Scotland from Henry VIII's forces.

But now Clan MacFarlane face their toughest battle yet – after losing out on a 19th century building overlooking an ancestral graveyard to property developers.

The 1,700-strong clan have vowed to fight builders tooth-and-nail over plans to convert the old church into luxury flats after failing to buy it themselves

'How does more housing benefit a National Park?'

to create a heritage centre. Furious clan chiefs, who have historical links to Argyll, have lodged an official objection to plans for the Ben Lomond restaurant in Tarbet to be converted into luxury flats.

They claim the new properties would be out of place in the Trossachs National Park, near Loch Lomond, and that their own idea to develop a heritage centre above the existing restaurant would be more beneficial to the area.

The old church overlooks a 579-year-old burial site containing the remains of medieval clan chiefs, and campaigners say the plans to convert it into homes would restrict access to visitors.

The clan – which has members scattered all over the world,

MacFarlanes in battle to protect chiefs' burial plot from flat developers

and whose motto is: "This I'll defend" – had bid £435,000 for the old church.

But last week members discovered they had been beaten with the listed building sold instead to property developer, Torrance Building Services of Rutherglen.

Now clan chiefs are looking to jeopardise the developer's plans by launching an objection to the application to transform it into luxury homes.

Brian MacFarlane, vice chairman of the Clan MacFarlane society, said yesterday he is devastated at the news, after a similar bid to land the building failed in 2001.

He said he has written a letter of objection stating: "We believe an important local amenity is in danger of being lost to the area. Just as we have found there is a scarcity of suitable sites for a heritage centre and museum, there is also a scarcity of independent restaurants in the local area.

"It would therefore be a great pity to lose this one for no apparently worthwhile reason. As our

plans meant the retention of the many staff employed in the business we were very disappointed to learn that those loyal employees' jobs are now under threat.

"How does more housing benefit a National Park? There is surely plenty of opportunity for house building/renovating in the surrounding area without unnecessarily altering a landmark listed building.

"The modern Velux windows they propose are absolutely essential to this application yet on a 150-year-old roof are clearly an outrage."

Mr MacFarlane explained that thousands of people with the clan's family name already visit the

site – which is home to grave-stones bearing the clan's coat of arms – and the proposals would restrict access to the historical tombs.

His letter adds: "It is therefore very important to the estimated 250,000 claiming MacFarlane descent from all over the globe.

"There is little reference to this MacFarlane burial ground in the application, yet the access to it is through this proposed

development and only through the development."

Mr MacFarlane, from Dunfermline, Fife, said yesterday: "I've no problem with the owner accepting the other bid. It's up to them which one they accept.

"But it is what the developers are planning for it that bothers us. I'm sure flats in such a location, in the National Park, will be at the top end of the market.

"But in that case it is only the developer that benefits from this and nobody else in the community."

The clan caused controversy in 2006 when it made a claim to the island of Eilean-I-Vow in Loch Lomond.

'Nobody in the community will benefit from it'

Chiefs eventually succeeded in their legal bid for the 100ft-long island, which they claimed after discovering youths had been using it as a party venue.

The clan claims descent from the old line of the Earls of Lennox, and its ancestral lands were Arrochar, located at the head of Loch Long and further north-west of Loch Lomond.

The lands of Arrochar were first granted to an ancestor of the clan in the 13th century and were held by the chiefs until sold off for debts in 1767.

Warriors took part in historical battles such as Glasgow Muir and the Battle of Pinkie Cleugh in the 1500s. The clan has also boasted of capturing three standards of Mary Queen of Scots' army in the battle of Largside in 1568.

