

## Short History of Clan Gunn

The Clan Gunn claims descent from the Norse Jarls or Earls of Orkney and from the ancient Celtic Mormaers of Caithness through Ragnhild, daughter of Moddan in Dale, son of Moddan, Mormaer (High Steward) of Caithness, who was killed in 1040, and grand-daughter of Saint Rognvald, Jarl in Orkney, who married Gunni, the reputed name-father of the Clan. Gunni was himself a grandson of Sweyn, Asleif's son, the "Ultimate Viking" and hero of the Orkneyinga Saga.

Sweyn Asleif's son had his long hall on the island of Gairsay, off the east coast of the Mainland of Orkney, and lands in Caithness at Freswick, a few miles south of Duncansbay. The principal Gunn lands were, however, acquired through Ragnhild, who inherited great estates in Caithness and Sutherland on the death of her brother, Harold Ungi, Jarl in Orkney and Earl in Caithness in 1198.

These were inherited by Snaekoll (White Head), Gunni's son, the second chief of the Clan. His rights to the Norse Earldom were, however, forfeited as he had murdered John, the then Jarl in Orkney, over a land claim dispute arising from their mutual descent from the ancient Jarls of Orkney. Thus from the middle of the 13<sup>th</sup> century the Gunns were essentially a Caithness family.

At this time the Clan Gunn were at the height of their power. They appeared to possess virtually the whole of Caithness, which was then passing from the influence of the Norse Earldom to that of the King of Scots. Snaekoll, Gunni's son, is reputed to have built Castle Gunn at Bruan, on the east coast of Caithness south of Wick. There is a tradition that Castle Gunn was destroyed by the King of Norway, whose daughter one of the Gunn chiefs had married, though he already had a wife at Castle Gunn. When the second wife sailed to Caithness to join her husband, the Gunn Clan arranged for the beacon to be placed on a dangerous rock at Ulbster and so wrecked the ship and all on board were drowned. The Castle was destroyed in revenge and the Gunn chief and his retainers were slain.

Little is known of the history of the Clan during the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries and it is not until the 15<sup>th</sup> century that history records the exploits of the Clan and its chiefs. Nonetheless, it is clear that during the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries the Gunns were gradually dispossessed of their lands in the fertile parts of Caithness by the Sinclairs, Keiths and others, who obtained grants of land from the Scottish kings, anxious to increase their influence over the fringes of their kingdom. Consequently by the mid 15<sup>th</sup> century George Gunn of Ulbster, Chief of Clan Gunn and Crouner of Caithness, held his main lands at Ulbster and Clyth on the rocky coast of Caithness in what are now the Parishes of Latheron, Halkirk and Reay.

It was George Gunn, the Crouner, also known as "Am Braisdeach Mor", or "Big Broochy" from the insignia worn by the Gunn chiefs, as Crouners of Caithness, who after many skirmishes with the Clan Keith over rival land claims sought to reach a conciliation with the Keiths at St. Tayres Chapel, near Ackergill Tower, the seat of Keith of Ackergill, in 1478 (others say 1464) and was killed in the unequal battle at the chapel where the Keiths arrived for the twelve aside parley with two men to each

horse. In 1978 the Earl of Kintore, Chief of Clan Keith and Iain Gunn of Banniskirk, the Commander of Clan Gunn, signed a Treaty of Friendship between the two clans at the site of the chapel, bringing to an end the 500 year old feud.

### Chiefship 24<sup>th</sup> July 2015

It has now been declared by the Lord Lyon of Scotland that Iain Alexander Gunn of Banniskirk, the current Commander of Clan Gunn has now been elevated to the position of Hereditary Chief of Clan Gunn after the Clan had been 230 years without a Chief.