

GUNN

Source: The Scottish Highlands, Highland Clans and Highland Regiments, Volume II (of 2) by Sir John Scott Keltie

As we have given in minute detail the history of the somewhat turbulent clan Gunn in the first part of the work, our notice of it here will be brief.

The clan, a martial and hardy, though not a numerous race, originally belonged to Caithness, but in the sixteenth century they settled in Sutherland. Mr Smibert thinks they are perhaps among the very purest remnants of the Gael to be found about Sutherlandshire and the adjoining parts. "It is probable," he says, "that they belong to the same stock which produced the great body of the Sutherland population. But tradition gives the chieftains at least a Norse origin. They are said to have been descended from Gun, or Gunn, or Guin, second son of Olaus, or Olav, the Black, one of the Norwegian kings of Man and the Isles, who died 18th June 1237. One tradition gives them a settlement in Caithness more than a century earlier, deducing their descent from Gun, the second of three sons of Olaf, described as a man of great bravery, who, in 1100, dwelt in the Orcadian isle of Græmsay. The above-mentioned Gun or Guin is said to have received from his grandfather on the mother's side, Farquhar, Earl of Ross, the possessions in Caithness which long formed the patrimony of his descendants: the earliest stronghold of the chief in that county being Halbury castle, or Easter Clythe, situated on a precipitous rock, overhanging the sea. From a subsequent chief who held the office of coroner, it was called Crouner Gun's Castle. It may be mentioned here that the name Gun is the same as the Welsh Gwynn, and the Manx Gawne. It was originally Gun, but is now spelled Gunn."

The clan Gunn continued to extend their possessions in Caithness till about the middle of the fifteenth century, when, in consequence of their deadly feuds with the Keiths, and other neighbouring clans, they found it necessary to remove into Sutherland, where they settled on the lands of Kildonan, under the protection of the Earls of Sutherland, from whom they had obtained them. Mixed up as they were with the clan feuds of Caithness and Sutherland, and at war with the Mackays as well as the Keiths, the history of the clan up to this time is full of incidents which have more the character of romance than reality. In one place Sir Robert Gordon, alluding to "the inveterat deidlie feud betuein the clan Gun and the Slaughtean-Aberigh,"—a branch of the Mackays,—he says: "The long, the many, the horrible encounters which happened between these two trybes, with the bloodshed and infinit spoils[279] committed in every part of the diocy of Catteynes by them and their associats, are of so disordered and troublesome memorie," that he declines to give details.

Previous to their removal into Sutherland, George Gun, commonly called the Chruner, or Coroner, and by the Highlanders, Fear N'm Braisteach-more, from the great brooch which he wore as the badge of his office of coroner, was killed by the Keiths of Caithness, as formerly narrated.

The Crouner's eldest son, James, succeeded as chief, and he it was who, with his family and the greater portion of his clan, removed into Sutherland. The principal dwelling-house of the chiefs was, thereafter, Killernan, in the parish of Kildonan, until the house was accidentally destroyed by fire about 1690. From this chief, the patronymic of Mac-Sheumais, or MacKearmish, (that is, the son of James,) which then became the Gaelic sept-name of the chiefs, is derived. From one of the sons of the Crouner, named William, are descended the Wilsons of Caithness, (as from a subsequent chief of the same name, the Williamsons,) and from another, Henry, the Hendersons. Another son, Robert, who was killed with his

father, was the progenitor of the Gun Robsons; and another son, John, also slain by the Keiths, of the Gun MacEans, or Maclans, that is Johnsons, of Caithness. The Gallies are also of this clan, a party of whom settling in Ross-shire being designated as coming from Gall'-aobh, the stranger's side.

William Gunn, the eighth MacKearish, an officer in the army, was killed in battle in India, without leaving issue, when the chiefship devolved on Hector, great-grandson of George, second son of Alexander, the fifth MacKearish, to whom he was served nearest male heir, on the 31st May 1803, and George Gunn, Esq. of Rhives, county of Sutherland, his only son, became, on his death, chief of the clan Gunn, and the tenth MacKearish.