

SUTHERLAND

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

The clan Sutherland, which gets its name from being located in the district of that name, is regarded by Skene and others as almost purely Gaelic. The district of Sutherland, which was originally considerably smaller than the modern county of that name, got its name from the Orcadian Norsemen, because it lay south from Caithness, which, for a long time, was their only possession in the mainland of Scotland.

According to Skene, the ancient Gaelic population of the district now known by the name of Sutherland were driven out or destroyed by the Norwegians when they took possession of the country, after its conquest by Thorfinn, the Norse Jarl of Orkney, in 1034, and were replaced by settlers from Moray and Ross. He says, "There are consequently no clans whatever descended from the Gaelic tribe which anciently inhabited the district of Sutherland, and the modern Gaelic population of part of that region is derived from two sources. In the first place, several of the tribes of the neighbouring district of Ross, at an early period, gradually spread themselves into the nearest and most mountainous parts of the country, and they consisted chiefly of the clan Anrias. Secondly, Hugh Freskin, a descendant of Freskin de Moravia, and whose family was a branch of the ancient Gaelic tribe of Moray, obtained from King William the territory of Sutherland, although it is impossible to discover the circumstances which occasioned the grant. He was of course [273] accompanied in this expedition by numbers of his followers, who increased in Sutherland to an extensive tribe; and Freskin became the founder of the noble family of Sutherland, who, under the title of Earls of Sutherland, have continued to enjoy possession of this district for so many generations." [230] We do not altogether agree with this intelligent author that the district in question was at any time entirely colonised by the Norsemen. There can be no doubt that a remnant of the old inhabitants remained, after the Norwegian conquest, and it is certain that the Gaelic population, reinforced as they were undoubtedly by incomers from the neighbouring districts and from Moray, ultimately regained the superiority in Sutherland. Many of them were unquestionably from the province of Moray, and these, like the rest of the inhabitants, adopted the name of Sutherland, from the appellation given by the Norwegians to the district.

The chief of the clan was called "the Great Cat," and the head of the house of Sutherland has long carried a black cat in his coat-of-arms. According to Sir George Mackenzie, the name of Cattu was formerly given to Sutherland and Caithness (originally Cattu-ness), on account of the great number of wild cats with which it was, at one period, infested.

The Earl of Sutherland was the chief of the clan, but on the accession to the earldom in 1766, of Countess Elizabeth, the infant daughter of the eighteenth earl, and afterwards Duchess of Sutherland, as the chiefship could not descend to a female, William Sutherland of Killipheder, who died in 1832, and enjoyed a small annuity from her grace, was accounted the eldest male descendant of the old earls. John Campbell Sutherland, Esq. of Fors, was afterwards considered the real chief.

The clan Sutherland could bring into the field 2,000 fighting men. In 1715 and 1745 they were among the loyal clans, and zealously supported the succession of the house of Hanover. Further details concerning this clan will be given in the History of the Highland Regiments.

The Earldom of Sutherland, the oldest extant in Britain, is said to have been granted by Alexander II., to William, Lord of Sutherland, about 1228, for assisting to quell a powerful northern savage of the name of Gillespie. [231] William was the son of Hugh Freskin, who acquired the district of Sutherland by the forfeiture of the Earl of Caithness for rebellion in 1197. Hugh was the grandson of Freskin the Fleming, who came into Scotland in the reign of David I., and obtained from that prince the lands of Strathbrock in Linlithgowshire, also, the lands of Duffus and others in Moray. [232] His son, William, was a constant attendant on King William the Lion, during his frequent expeditions into

Moray, and assumed the name of William de Moravia. He died towards the end of the 12th century. His son, Hugh, got the district of Sutherland, as already mentioned. Hugh's son, "*Willielmus dominus de Sutherlandia filius et hæres quondam Hugonis Freskin*," is usually reckoned the first Earl of Sutherland, although Sir Robert Gordon, the family historian, puts it three generations farther back.

The date of the creation of the title is not known; but from an indenture executed in 1275, in which Gilbert, bishop of Caithness, makes a solemn composition of an affair that had been long in debate betwixt his predecessors in the see and the noble men, William of famous memory, and William, his son, Earls of Sutherland, it is clear that there existed an Earl of Sutherland betwixt 1222, the year of Gilbert's consecration as bishop, and 1245, the year of his death, and it is on the strength of this deed that the representative of the house claims the rank of premier earl of Scotland, with the date 1228.

Earl William died at Dunrobin^[233] in 1248. His son, William, second earl, succeeded to the title in his infancy. He was one of the Scots nobles who attended the parliament of Alexander III. at Scone, 5th February 1284, when the succession to the crown of Scotland was settled, and he sat in the great convention at Bingham, 12th March 1290. He was one of the eighteen Highland chiefs who fought at the battle of Bannockburn, in 1314, on the side of Bruce, and he subscribed the^[274] famous letter of the Scots nobles to the Pope, 6th April 1320. He died in 1325, having enjoyed the title for the long period of 77 years.

His son, Kenneth, the third earl, fell at the battle of Halidon-hill in 1333, valiantly supporting the cause of David II. With a daughter, Eustach, he had two sons, William, fourth earl, and Nicholas, ancestor of the Lords Duffus.

William, fourth earl, married the Princess Margaret, eldest daughter of Robert I., by his second wife, Elizabeth de Burgo, and he made grants of land in the counties of Inverness and Aberdeen to powerful and influential persons, to win their support of his eldest son, John's claim to the succession to the crown. John was selected by his uncle, David II., as heir to the throne, in preference to the high-steward, who had married the Princess Marjory, but he died at Lincoln in England in 1361, while a hostage there for the payment of the king's ransom. His father, Earl William, was one of the commissioners to treat for the release of King David in 1351, also on 13th June 1354, and again in 1357. He was for some years detained in England as a hostage for David's observance of the treaty on his release from his long captivity. The earl did not obtain his full liberty till 20th March 1367. He died at Dunrobin in Sutherland in 1370. His son, William, fifth earl, was present at the surprise of Berwick by the Scots in November 1384.

With their neighbours, the Mackays, the clan Sutherland were often at feud, and in all their contests with them they generally came off victorious.^[234]

John, seventh earl, resigned the earldom in favour of John, his son and heir, 22d February 1456, reserving to himself the liferent of it, and died in 1460. He had married Margaret, daughter of Sir William Baillie of Lamington, Lanarkshire, and by her had four sons and two daughters. The sons were—1. Alexander, who predeceased his father; 2. John, eighth Earl of Sutherland; 3. Nicholas; 4. Thomas Beg. The elder daughter, Lady Jane, married Sir James Dunbar of Cumnock, and was the mother of Gawin Dunbar, bishop of Aberdeen.

John, eighth earl, died in 1508. He had married Lady Margaret Macdonald, eldest daughter of Alexander, Earl of Ross, Lord of the Isles, and by her, who was drowned crossing the ferry of Uness, he had two sons—John ninth earl, and Alexander, who died young, and a daughter, Elizabeth, Countess of Sutherland.

The ninth earl died, without issue, in 1514, when the succession devolved upon his sister Elizabeth, Countess of Sutherland in her own right. This lady had married Adam Gordon of Aboyne, second son of George, second Earl of Huntly, high-chancellor of Scotland, and in his wife's right, according to the custom of the age, he was styled Earl of Sutherland. The Earl of Sutherland, when far advanced in life, retired for the most part to Strathbogie and Aboyne, in Aberdeenshire, to spend the remainder of his days among his friends, and intrusted the charge of the country to his eldest son, Alexander Gordon, master of Sutherland, a young man of great intrepidity and talent; and on the countess'

resignation, a charter of the earldom was granted to him by King James V., on 1st December 1527. She died in 1535, and her husband in 1537. Their issue were—1. Alexander, master of Sutherland, who was infeft in the earldom in 1527, under the charter above mentioned, and died in 1529, leaving, by his wife, Lady Jane Stewart, eldest daughter of the second Earl of Athole, three sons—John, Alexander, and William, and two daughters; 2. John Gordon; 3. Adam Gordon, killed at the battle of Pinkie, 10th September 1547; 4. Gilbert Gordon of Gartay, who married Isobel Sinclair, daughter of the laird of Dunbeath.

Alexander's eldest son, John, born about 1525, succeeded his grandfather as eleventh earl. He was lieutenant of Moray in 1547 and 1548, and with George, Earl of Huntly, was selected to accompany the queen regent to France in September 1550.

On the charge of having engaged in the rebellion of the Earl of Huntly in 1562, the Earl of Sutherland was forfeited, 28th May 1563, when he retired to Flanders. He returned to Scotland in 1565, and his forfeiture was rescinded by act of parliament, 19th April 1567. He and his countess, who was then in[275] a state of pregnancy, were poisoned at Helmsdale Castle by Isobel Sinclair, the wife of the earl's uncle, Gilbert Gordon of Gartay, and the cousin of the Earl of Caithness, and died five days afterwards at Dunrobin Castle. This happened in July 1567, when the earl was in his 42d year.[235] Their only son, Alexander, master of Sutherland, then in his fifteenth year, fortunately escaped the same fate.

The eleventh earl, styled the good Earl John, was thrice married—1st, to Lady Elizabeth Campbell, only daughter of the third Earl of Argyll, relict of James, Earl of Moray, natural son of James IV.; 2dly, to Lady Helen Stewart, daughter of the third Earl of Lennox, relict of the fifth Earl of Errol; and 3dly, to Marion, eldest daughter of the fourth Lord Seton, relict of the fourth Earl of Menteith. This was the lady who was poisoned with him. He had issue by his second wife only—two sons and three daughters. John, the elder son, died an infant. Alexander, the younger, was the twelfth Earl of Sutherland.

Being under age when he succeeded to the earldom, the ward of this young nobleman was granted to his eldest sister, Lady Margaret Gordon, who committed it to the care of John, Earl of Athole. The latter sold the wardship to George, Earl of Caithness, the enemy of his house. Having by treachery got possession of the castle of Skibo, in which the young earl resided, he seized his person and carried him off to Caithness, where he forced him to marry his daughter, Lady Barbara Sinclair, a profligate woman of double his own age. When he attained his majority he divorced her. In 1569, he escaped from the Earl of Caithness, who had taken up his residence at Dunrobin Castle and formed a design upon his life.

In 1583 he obtained from the Earl of Huntly, the king's lieutenant in the north, a grant of the superiority of Strathnaver, and of the heritable sheriffship of Sutherland and Strathnaver, which last was granted in lieu of the lordship of Aboyne. This grant was confirmed by his majesty in a charter under the great seal, by which Sutherland and Strathnaver were disjoined and dismembered from the sheriffdom of Inverness. The earl died at Dunrobin, 6th December 1594, in his 43d year. Having divorced Lady Barbara Sinclair in 1573, he married, secondly, Lady Jean Gordon, third daughter of the fourth Earl of Huntly, high-chancellor of Scotland, who had been previously married to the Earl of Bothwell, but repudiated to enable that ambitious and profligate nobleman to marry Queen Mary. She subsequently married Alexander Ogilvy of Boyne, whom she also survived. To the Earl of Sutherland she had, with two daughters, four sons—1. John, thirteenth earl; 2. Hon. Sir Alexander Gordon; 3. Hon. Adam Gordon; 4. Hon. Sir Robert Gordon of Gordonstoun, the historian of the family of Sutherland, created a baronet of Nova Scotia, being the first of that order, 28th May 1625.

John, thirteenth Earl of Sutherland, was born 20th July 1576. Many details concerning him will be found in the former part of this work. He died at Dornoch, 11th September 1615, aged 40. By his countess, Lady Anna Elphinston, he had, with two daughters, four sons, namely—1. Patrick, master of Sutherland, who died young; 2. John, fourteenth earl; 3. Hon. Adam Gordon, who entered the Swedish service, and was killed at the battle of Nordlingen, 27th August 1634, aged 22; 4. Hon. George Posthumus Gordon, born after his father's death, 9th February 1616, a lieutenant-colonel in

the army.

John, fourteenth Earl of Sutherland, born 4th March 1609, was only six years old when he succeeded his father, and during his minority his uncle, Sir Robert Gordon, was tutor of Sutherland. In this capacity the latter was much engaged in securing the peace of the country, so often broken by the lawless proceedings of the Earl of Caithness. By Sir Robert's judicious management of the affairs of the house of Sutherland, his nephew, the earl, on attaining his majority, found the hostility of the enemy of his house, the Earl of Caithness, either neutralised, or rendered no longer dangerous. In 1637, the earl joined the supplicants against the service book, and on the breaking out of the civil war in the following year, espoused the liberal cause. In [276] 1641 he was appointed by parliament a privy councillor for life, and in 1644 he was sent north with a commission for disarming malignants, as the royalists were called. In 1645 he was one of the committee of estates. The same year he joined General Hurry, with his retainers at Inverness, just immediately before the battle of Auldearn. In 1650 he accompanied General David Leslie when he was sent by the parliament against the royalists in the north.

On the Marquis of Montrose's arrival in Caithness, the earl assembled all his countrymen to oppose his advance into Sutherland. Montrose, however, had secured the important pass of the Ord, and on his entering Sutherland, the earl, not conceiving himself strong enough to resist him, retired with about 300 men into Ross. In August of the same year, the earl set off to Edinburgh, with 1,000 men, to join the forces under General Leslie, collected to oppose Cromwell, but was too late for the battle of Dunbar, which was fought before his arrival. During the Protectorate of Cromwell the earl lived retired. He is commonly said to have died in 1663, but the portrait of John, who must be this earl, prefixed to Gordon's history of the family (Ed. 1813) has upon it "Aetatis Suae 60: 1669." This would seem to prove that he was then alive.

His son, George, fifteenth earl, died 4th March 1703, aged 70, and was buried at Holyrood-house, where a monument was erected to his memory. The son of this nobleman, John, sixteenth earl, married, when Lord Strathnaver, Helen, second daughter of William, Lord Cochrane, sister of the Viscountess Dundee. He was one of the sixteen representatives of the Scots peerage chosen in the last Scots parliament in 1707, and subsequently three times re-elected. His services in quelling the rebellion were acknowledged by George I., who, in June 1716, invested him with the order of the Thistle, and in the following September settled a pension of £1,200 per annum upon him. He figured conspicuously both as a statesman and a soldier, and obtained leave to add to his armorial bearings the double "tressure circum-fleur-de-lire," to indicate his descent from the royal family of Bruce. His lordship died at London, 27th June 1733.

His son, William, Lord Strathnaver, predeceased his father 19th July 1720. He had five sons and two daughters. His two eldest sons died young. William, the third son, became seventeenth Earl of Sutherland. The elder daughter, the Hon. Helen Sutherland, was the wife of Sir James Colquhoun of Luss. The younger, the Hon. Janet Sutherland, married George Sinclair, Esq. of Ulbster, and was the mother of the celebrated Sir John Sinclair, baronet.

William, seventeenth Earl of Sutherland, contributed greatly to the suppression of the rebellion in the north. Under the heritable jurisdictions' abolition act of 1747, he had £1,000 allowed him for the redeemable sheriffship of Sutherland. He died in France, December 7, 1750, aged 50. By his countess, Lady Elizabeth Wemyss, eldest daughter of the third Earl of Wemyss, he had, with a daughter, Lady Elizabeth, wife of her cousin, Hon. James Wemyss of Wemyss, a son, William.

The son, William, eighteenth Earl of Sutherland, born May 29, 1735, was an officer in the army, and in 1759, when an invasion was expected, he raised a battalion of infantry, of which he was constituted lieutenant-colonel. He was appointed aide-de-camp to the king, with the rank of colonel in the army, 20th April 1763. He was one of the sixteen representative Scots peers, and died at Bath, 16th June 1766, aged 31. He had married at Edinburgh, 14th April 1761, Mary, eldest daughter and coheirress of William Maxwell, Esq. of Preston, stewardry of Kirkcudbright, and had two daughters, Lady Catherine and Lady Elizabeth. The former, born 24th May 1764, died at Dunrobin Castle, 3d January 1766. The loss of their daughter so deeply affected the earl and countess that they went to Bath, in the hope that the

amusements of that place would dispel their grief. There, however, the earl was seized with a fever, and the countess devoted herself so entirely to the care of her husband, sitting up with him for twenty-one days and nights without retiring to bed, that her health was affected, and she died 1st June the same year, sixteen days before his lordship. Their bodies were[277] brought to Scotland, and interred in Holyrood-house.

Their only surviving daughter, Elizabeth, born at Leven Lodge, near Edinburgh, 24th May 1765, succeeded as Countess of Sutherland, when little more than a year old. She was placed under the guardianship of John, Duke of Athole, Charles, Earl of Elgin and Kincardine, Sir Adam Fergusson of Kilkerran, and Sir David Dalrymple of Hailes, baronets, and John Mackenzie, Esq. of Delvin. A sharp contest arose for the title, her right to the earldom being disputed on the ground that it could not legally descend to a female heir. Her opponents were Sir Robert Gordon of Gordonstoun and Letterfourie, baronet, and George Sutherland, Esq. of Fors. Lord Hailes drew up a paper for her ladyship, entitled "Additional Case for Elizabeth, claiming the title and dignity of Countess of Sutherland," which evinced great ability, accuracy, and depth of research. The House of Lords decided in her favour, 21st March. 1771. The countess, the nineteenth in succession to the earldom, married 4th September 1785, George Granville Leveson Gower, Viscount of Trentham, eldest son of Earl Gower, afterwards Marquis of Stafford, by his second wife, Lady Louisa Egerton, daughter of the first Duke of Bridgewater. His lordship succeeded to his father's titles, and became the second Marquis of Stafford. On 14th January 1833 he was created Duke of Sutherland, and died 19th July, the same year. The Duchess of Sutherland, countess in her own right, thenceforth styled Duchess-Countess of Sutherland, held the earldom during the long period of 72 years and seven months, and died in January 1839.

Her eldest son, George Granville, born in 1786, succeeded his father as second Duke of Sutherland, in 1833, and his mother in the Scottish titles, in 1839. He married in 1823, Lady Harriet Elizabeth Georgiana, third daughter of the sixth Earl of Carlisle; issue—four sons and seven daughters. His grace died Feb. 28, 1861, and was succeeded by his eldest son, George Granville William. The second duke's eldest daughter married in 1844, the Duke of Argyll; the second daughter married in 1843, Lord Blantyre; the third[278] daughter married in 1847, the Marquis of Kildare, eldest son of the Duke of Leinster.

George Granville William, third Duke of Sutherland, previously styled Marquis of Stafford and Lord Strathnaver, born Dec. 19, 1828, married in 1849, Anne, only child of John Hay Mackenzie, Esq. of Cromartie and Newhall, and niece of Sir William Gibson Craig, Bart.; issue—three sons and two daughters. Sons—1. George Granville, Earl Gower, born July 25, 1850, died July 5, 1858; 2. Cromartie, Marquis of Stafford, born 20th July 1851; 3. Lord Francis, Viscount Tarbet, born August 3, 1852. Daughters, Lady Florence and Lady Alexandra; for the latter the Princess of Wales was sponsor.

There are a number of clans not dignified by Mr Skene with separate notice, probably because he considers them subordinate branches of other clans. The principal of these, however, we shall shortly notice here, before giving an account of four important clans located in the Highlands, which are generally admitted to be of foreign origin, at least so far as their names and chiefs are concerned.