Gunn / Baikie / Geddes

Ancestral &

Historical

Sites in Caithness
From “The Clan Gunn & Its Country”
The Gunns were of Nordo-Celtic descent...successive intermarriage of the Norse with the Celts eventually produced a Clan more Celtic than Norse.

**The Norse Jarls (or Earls) of Orkney**

- Sweyn Asleifsson
  - See over

- Anders m. Frida

- Gunni Andresarson
  - See over

- Moddan
  - See over

- Moddan "in Dale"
  - See over

- Earl & Saint Rognvald
  - See over

- Eric Stagbrell
- Ingrid

- Ragnhild
  - See over

**The Celtic Mormaers (High Stewards) of Caithness**

- See over

- Difficult to ascertain with certainty.

**Snaekoll Gunnason** (c. 1200-after 1231)...See over

- Ottar Snaekolls, circa 1230-?
- Seumas Gunn, circa 1260-?
- Ingram Gunn, of Clyth & Ulbster, circa 1290-1340.
- Sir Donald Gun of Clyth & Ulbster, circa 1320-?
- Seumas II Gunn of Ulbster, circa 1345-?

**George Gun the Crowner**, of Ulbster, circa 1380-1464

- James
- McHamish
- Robert
- Brae-Morgan
- John
- Torquil
- William
- Alexander
- Henry
- Bessie
- Mary
- Catlarrg / Cattaig
- = Us ??

**Pre 12th Century**

- **The Picts**...inhabited the northern part of Scotland...
  - They were of mixed descent from successive waves of Stone Age people.
  - Lived in tribal groups...each had a chief or “Maor”.
  - Each province (Caithness & Sutherland called “Cait” or “Cat”) called had a “Maormor”.
- **563 on...St. Columba** from Iona spread the Gospel over the north of Scotland.
- **580...St. Donan** (an Irish Pict?) arrived from Ireland...**patron saint of the Clan Gunn**...
  - His name from then on is evermore connected with the Gunns.
  - He did make contact with St. Columba.
  - He established his centre at Suisgill on the Helmsdale River...became a centre of Christianity north of the Clyde.
- **617...April 17th**. Norse pirates came to the church while Holy Communion was being celebrated...St. Donan and his followers were killed and burnt alive.
- **7th-11th Cent. ...the Viking Age** (Norwegians essentially, plus Danes)...“pirates, plunderers, conquerers, colonisers”...
  - 793...attacked & burnt the church at Lindisfarne on the Northumbrian coast.
  - 780-850 (approx.)...The Orkneys were settled by the Vikings...
  - No trace of Picts.
  - Norn became the language.
  - End of 9th Cent...the first earldom of Orkney.

*The history of Orkney and Caithness during the 10th to 14th centuries is one of savagery and barbarity, fights, feuds and hangings and the most appalling atrocities and mutilations. All walked constantly on the frontiers of life and death and neither prince, priest nor peasant could be sure of life from one moment to another*  (Mark Rugg Gunn).

Much of the material has been adapted from...

- Clan Gunn Heritage Trust...“The Clan Gunn and Its Country”
12th Cent...

- **1116**...St. Magnus (another patron saint of the Gunns) died.
  - He was a peaceful devout man.
  - He was related to the Gunns through his nephew, Earl and St. Rognvald's grand-daughter, Ragnhild, who married Gunn Andreasarson, grandson of Sweyn Asleifsson.
  - He was martyred...killed by his cousin Earl Hakon at Elgisay, Orkney..."his skull cleft by an axe".
  - His tomb was at Birsay.
  - He was related to the Gunns through his nephew, Earl and St. Rognvald's grand-daughter, Ragnhild, who married Gunni Andresarson, grandson of Sweyn Asleifsson.
  - He was a peaceful devout man.

By the time the Norse arrived from the Orkneys, the Scots spoke Gaelic...the Norse freely inter-married with the Celts.

The Gunn Norse Ancestry

- **Sweyn Asleifsson**
  - He was killed in 1160, during the sacking of Dublin.
  - The "Ultimate Viking"...famed in the Sagas.
  - He had 2 castles...
    - One on the island of Gairsay in the Orkneys...the outlines of his long hall can still be discerned.
    - His mainland home in Caithness..."Lambaborg" at Freswick, at Ness Head, a few miles south of Duncansbay Head...flanked by cliffs and difficult to conquer.
  - He was the most powerful man then.
  - He married twice...(1) Ragnhild - son Olaf; (2) Ingrid - son Andres.
  - After his death his inheritance was divided between his 2 sons.

The account in the Orkneyinga saga (106) of Svein Asleifarsson's Viking exploits in the mid-twelfth century..."In the spring he had more than enough to occupy him, with a great deal of seed to sow which he saw to himself. Then when that job was done, he would go off plundering in the Hebrides and in Ireland in what he called his "spring-trip", then back home just after midsummer, where he stayed until the fields had been reaped and the grain was safely in. After that he would go off raiding again and never come back until the first month of winter was ended. This he used to call his "autumn-trip".

The Gunn Celtic Ancestry

- **The Celtic Mormaers (High Stewards) of Caithness**
  - **Moddan**
    - Mormaer (regional ruler) of Caithness.
    - Killed in 1040.
  - **Moddan "In Dale"** (upper reaches of Thurso River).
    - He was wealthy...held land in Caithness & Sutherland.
    - He had 2 daughters, Frakark & Helga, and a son, Ottar (Earl of Thurso)

The Gunn Norse Ancestry

- **Ragnhild**
  - Became chief of the Moddan Clan & inherits estates in Caithness ("Katanes") and Sunderland ("Sundrlund") after the death in battle in 1190 of her brother Harald Ungi, Jarl in Orkney & Earl in Caithness.
  - Gunni died 1226.

Dr. Anna Ritchie, writing for Historic Scotland in her book "The Vikings in Scotland", says this regarding the sagas..."The major historical source for the Norse Earldom of Orkney, Caithness, Shetland and the Western Isles lies in the Icelandic Sagas. Primarily Orkneyinga saga, but also Landnamabok, Egil's saga, Magnus' saga, and others. But the historical value of these sagas varies and is not always easy to define. At best they convey an impression of political life in the Eleventh and Twelfth centuries, at worst they may be misleading in failing to distinguish anachronistic oral tradition and contemporary society".

- "Attempting to trace the lineage of a clan that was primarily Norse and left no written records until the 13th-14th century, is very speculative work by its very nature.
  - Therefore, we must use caution when taking the sagas as historical texts rather than as narrative political histories.
  - The original history of the clan (the Olaf the Black theory) appears very flawed and unsupportable, but if one reads those early accounts it clearly states "Clan Gunn claims descent from" Olaf the Black, but it never confirmed it.
  - The clan's early emblem was the galley (longship), the boat which symbolised their ancestral (Norse) mother-goddess Freya.
  - Whatever the real origins of Gunni, we do know he existed, and he is the name-father of the clan and must have been a powerful man in Caithness...the Gunns' are of Norse Viking descent and the name-father of the clan was one Gunni."
13th Cent...

- Circa 1200, Snaekoll Gunnason ("White Head")...2nd "chief"...
  - Eldest son of Gunni Andresarson & Ragnhild.
  - Snaekoll & his early descendants were Norseman speaking "Norn".
  - When his father, Gun (Gunn) died he became the chief representative of the Moddan family in Scotland, and the Orkney Earls, and inherited the lands in Caithness.
  - His rights to the Norse Earldom were, however, forfeited as he had murdered his cousin John, the then Jarl in Orkney.
  - He returned to Caithness and resided at Ulbster.
- Snaekoll or his son is reputed to have built Castle Gunn at Bruan, about 7 miles south of Wick at Clyth...thought to be the earliest known castle of the Clan Gunn...
  - 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 aboard were drowned.
- The castle was destroyed in revenge and the Gunn chief and his retainers were slain.
- The Castle may have been rebuilt after it's destruction by the King of Norway but it was eventually found to be too small and was abandoned at the end of the 13th Century in favour of Castle Halberry, one mile to the South.
- Snaekoll died about 1230.

- Circa 1230, Ottar Snaekollsson...the Sagas inform us.
- The line of descent from then on is difficult to ascertain...210 years = perhaps 7 to 9 generations...
- See summary tree.

Mid 13th Cent...the Gunns were essentially a Caithness family...at this time the Clan Gunn were at the height of their power...
- They appeared to possess much of Caithness, which was then passing from the influence of the Norse Earldom, to that of the King of Scots.
- Their property included west as far as and including Strathnaver, and south to Braemore and perhaps Kildonan.
- These were the days when the Gunn's only had a few neighbours and proudly held almost all of the area.

Latter part of 13th Cent...Halberry Castle was built by the Gunn chiefs as their principal stronghold to replace Castle Gunn...
- It was the stronghold of George Gunn, 8th Chieftain of the Clan Gunn and Crowner, of Caithness.
- After the battle at Chapel of St. Tears in 1464 when George was killed, the castle was abandoned.
- David II (1320-1370) introduced feudal barons...the first were the Cheynes who came over with William the Conquerer...granted lands in Caithness.

14th Cent...

- Little is known of the history of the Clan during this century.
- During the 14th and 15th 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 or by marriage, anxious to increase their influence over the fringes of their kingdom...
  - The Norse influence gradually declined (1331, Magnus V, the last of the Norwegian Earls, died...no successor).
  - The Sinclairs (also Norman) claimed the Earldom.
  - 1455...James II granted the Earldom of Caithness to William 3rd Sinclair Earl of Orkney.
  - The people of Normandy began to infiltrate from the south, especially the Celtic-Teutonic-Norman clan Keith.
  - The Gaelic-Norse-French clan Sutherland.
  - The people of Normandy began to infiltrate from the south, especially the Celtic-Teutonic-Norman clan Keith.
  - The Gaelic-Norse-French clan Sutherland.

- So, the Gunns were finding themselves sandwiched between powerful and numerically superior clans & families and driven back into the mountains on the Caithness border for the next 4 centuries...
  - Therefore it isn't surprising that the clan felt quite threatened by all the new arrivals.
  - They were constantly forced to defend themselves against the invaders.
  - They held land in Caithness and along the Sutherland border...they defended it by "the sword".

So, the Clan Gunn became a very war-like clan and had continual feuds / battles with their more numerous neighbours...
- The history of the clan is filled with feuds, wars and conflicts with their neighbours and often, the much smaller clan of Gunn had "their backs against the wall".
- Sir Charles MacKinnon describes the Gunn's as "survivors" and this is most accurate.
- The Gunn's reputation for being aggressive and war-like can be directly attributed to their geographical situation - hemmed in by sometimes-hostile neighbours.

- It was in the 12-15th Cent. that the Clan system emerged and survived for about 400 years until the battle of Culloden...the feudal system based on the family and a chief...
  - Family ties became very strong...all bore the same surname.
  - The various smaller tribes with their chiefs owed their allegiance to the supreme chief.
  - The land became the chief's land.
15th Cent...It was not until the 15th century that history records the exploits of the Clan and its chiefs...

### The Gunns & the Keiths were forever in conflict: complete lawlessness existed throughout Scotland.

- The Gunn's had been emboldened in combat and conflict primarily with the Keith's of Ackergill, newcomers to the area and who challenged the Gunn Chief's both for the political supremacy of the region and for the land itself...they obtained lands near and of the Gunn's by grants and inheritance through marriage.
- They also feuded with the MacKay's & Sutherlands, but it was the Keith's with which the Gunn's would have the bitterest of troubles.
- There were constant skirmishes and raids along the borders, especially in Strathnaver...Clan McKay.
- The conflict and tension that already existed between the Gunn's and the Keith's was about to escalate into a series of protracted feuds and battles that would last for many generations to come.

#### 1415 (between 1400 & 1420)

- Helen Gunn of Braemore was abducted...which began the feud with the Keiths.
  - Braemore was settled by the Gunns from a very early date, certainly before the Crowner, and was the seat of the Robson Gunns otherwise known as the Gunns of Braemore.
  - Lachlan Gunn of Braemore had an only daughter named Helen who was so striking a woman she was known as "the Beauty of Braemore".
  - Helen was soon to marry Alexander Gunn, her cousin (common in those days), whom she'd known since childhood.
  - The event was set, but fate intervened before the marriage could take place.
  - Dugald Keith, factor of the district had other plans.
  - Legend says he first glimpsed Helen one day when passing through Braemore and was immediately smitten by her beauty and charm.
  - He'd made some advances to Helen, which she rejected.
  - Spurned and angered by her rejection he set his plan to kidnap Helen in motion.
  - On the night before the wedding of Alexander and Helen, the Gunn's were gathered in Braemore for a celebration and feast.
  - Dugald Keith and some of his men came riding in, taking everyone by surprise, and to the shock and dismay of the Gunn's he took Helen and slaughtered several Gunn's who tried to stop him...her lover, Alexander, was one of the people slain by the Keith's.
  - Dugald Keith secluded Helen away in Ackergill Castle where she was a virtual prisoner.
  - She was distraught at her capture and the death of her lover, Alexander, and did her best to deter the lustful advances of Dugald Keith.
  - What actually happened to Helen during her imprisonment isn't really known, but the outcome is.
  - Knowing there was no escape and determined not to give herself to Dugald, she devised a plan to get to the top of the castle tower.
  - One day she asked her keeper if he would allow her to go to the tower so she could look upon her 'new' land.
  - The guard, charmed by her beauty, acquiesced thinking she could not escape...escape wasn't Helen's plan.
  - Rather than become the victim of the advances of Dugald Keith, Helen threw herself from the tower and plummeted to her death.
  - The Braemore estate passed from Gunn ownership in 1793 when it was sold by George Gunn-Munro of Braemore.

#### 1424

- James 1st passed laws forbidding war between private people and clans, and the Sheriffs were ordered to find out what land belonged to the king...many chiefs were killed, imprisoned or banished.

#### 1426

- A desperate battle was fought between the two clans at Acharalie, Harpsdale, eight miles south of Thurso...the conflict was long, desperate and bloody, but indecisive.

#### 1437

- Skirmish between the Mackays and the Gunns, in which the latter were out-numbered, and defeated at a small conflict was long, desperate and bloody, but indecisive.

#### 1438 (64?)

- Another encounter occurred (the first recorded feud between the Keith's & the Gunn's) on the Muir of Tannach, with great slaughter on both sides, and the Gunn's were defeated...the Battle of Tannach (Blare Tannie or Blar-Tannie. (Scottish Gaelic: Tannach Moor) fought about 3 miles southwest of Wick...

### Accounts of the Battle...

- Sir Robert Gordon (1580 - 1656) wrote an account of the battle in his book the "Genealogical History of the Earldom of Sutherland"...

- About the year 1464, some serious disputes had arisen between Keith of Ackergill and the Gunns and other inhabitants of Caithness. The Keiths, mistrusting their own forces, sent to Angus Mackay (the son of Neil-Wasse) entreating them to come to their aid; whereunto he easily conceded. Then did the inhabitants of Caithness convene in all haste, and met the Strathnaver men and the Keiths, at a place in Caithness called Blare Tannie, i.e The Moor of Tanach. There ensued a cruel fight, with great slaughter on either side. In the end the Keiths had the victory, by the means chiefly of John-More-MacK-Ean-Reawich, who is very famous in these countries for his valour and manhood shewn at this conflict.

- Another account of the battle was written in the book "Conflicts of the Clans" first published by the Foulis Press in 1764, written from a manuscript from the time of King James V1 of Scotland (1566 - 1625)...In this account battle is dated as taking place in 1438..."About the year of God 1438, there fell some variance betwixt the Keiths and some others of the inhabitants of Caithness. The Keiths, mistrusting their own forces, sent to Angus Mackay of Strathnaver (the son of Neil Wasse), entreating him to come to their aid, whereunto he easily yielded: so Angus Mackay, accompanied with John Mor Maclan-Riabhaich, went into Caithness with a band of men, and invaded that country. Then did the inhabitants of Caithness assemble in all haste, and met the Strathnaver men and the Keiths at a place in Caithness called Blair-tannie. There ensued a cruel fight, with slaughter on either side. In the end the Keiths had the victory, by means chiefly of John Mor Maclan-Riabhaich (an Assant man), who was very famous in these countries for his manhood shown at this conflict. Two chieftains and leaders of the inhabitants of Caithness were slain, with divers others. This Angus Mackay, here mentioned, was afterward burnt and killed in the Church of Tarbat, by a man of the surname of Ross, whom he had often molested with incursions and invasions".

- George the Crowner there?
- Consequences...the Gunni’s were defeated and some moved south to Braemore and the Strath of Kildonan (Strathullie)....
15th Cent...

**Date unknown (1460?)...Battle of Mannistanes...**

- "About 1438, there is a story of a Hugh Keith involved at the battle of Hallberry Castle, who allegedly captured several Gunns and "tore the eyes out of their sockets." The legend has it that the Keith's came back with a "huge raven" on their shoulders that it did the deed to the eyes of the captured Gunns. The Norse raven is a symbol Woden (Odin) and was the raven-banner of not only many Viking, but of the old Orkney Earls (Jarls). This is likely nothing more than a metaphor for some cruelty or feud, and perhaps only a legend.

- Mark Rugg Gunn..."History of the Clan Gunn"..."the battle involving the Raven and the Big Keith"..."After Tannach Moor (1438), the Battle of the Mannistanes & the black raven took place about a half a mile from Halberry Castle. The raven probably represents the raven flag, which to people of Norse ancestry, assures victory in battle. At Mannistanes the Keith had a champion of huge size and strength known as 'Caith Mor' or Big Keith. He is said to have wielded a large claymore (broadsword) and killed 4 or 5 of the Gunn's but was himself wounded by an injured Gunn. One of the wounded Gunn's managed to draw a knife (probably a dirk) and sliced Big Keith's leg tendon thus disabling him and taking him out of the battle. After this the Keith's seem to have lost heart and leave the battle".

- Moncreiffe..."the battle was won by the Keith's".

- So perhaps it is best to look at this battle as a draw or indecisive.
  - This battle seems to belong to tradition rather than historic fact.
  - No date can be attributed to it & the outcome is different in two accounts.
  - Nevertheless, there probably was some sort of skirmish between the two clans once again without any real conclusive results for either side.

**1455...James 2nd invests William Sinclair as the Earl of Caithness.**

**Mid 15th Cent...George Gunn of Ulbster, Chief of Clan Gunn and Crowner of Caithness, held his main lands at Ulbster and Clyth on the rocky coast of Caithness...**

- George Gunn, The Crowner...
  - The Crowner (an office of Warden or Steward) often spell coroner, was the office George held...he dispensed the justice of the county before the Scottish King created the Earldom of Caithness in 1455.
  - George's castle was at Hallburg or Halberry Castle in Mid Clyth, just north of Lybster...he is said to have held court in his castle in such splendour with his kinsfolk and followers as to rival any Highland chief.
  - He was "more Celtic" than Norse...
    - He was known to wear a great silver badge of that office to signify his authority, which he used to fasten his plaid...that is how he acquired the nickname "Am Braisteach Mor" - this stood for 'the great broached one'.
    - He wore the Highland dress.
    - At this time, the Gunns probably occupied the highlands of Caithness, Braemore, Halkirk, Westerdeall in the west, and south along the Sutherland - Caithness border...
      - George also had a residence at Kildonan...spent summer there.
      - The main burial ground was at Spittal, south of Halkirk...
      - Nearby, there was a hospital and a church, probably built by St. Magnus.
      - Snaekoll probably had lands in this area.
    - He was an exceptional man of considerable ability and a great commander who was respected.
    - He was married twice and had at least 9 children...
      - Sons = James, Robert, John, Torquil, William, Alexander, Henry (aged 20+, 1456).
      - Daughters = Bessie (lived near Loch More of Strathmore), Mary (married Hugh McDonald).

**1464...Battle of Dirlot...**

- The two clans fought again at Dirlot, resulting in massive casualties on both sides, the less numerous Gunn's losing the battle, but not before their archers inflicted heavy losses on the Keith's...see over under "revenge".

**1464 (78?)...Battle at St. Tears Chapel (St. Tayres), Ackergill...the last stand of the Gunns...**

- Background...conflicts between the two clans over land claims were for the most part indecisive, and losses were numerous on both sides...
  - So many Gunn's and Keith's had perished in the quarrelling and conflicts, especially the Battle of Tannach, 1464 or 1434 & Battle of Dirlot 1464, that followed the abduction of Helen, that farms were going untended and fallow.
  - So it was decided (probably by agreement of George Gunn, The Crowner and his rival George Keith, Chief of the Keith's, to settle the whole matter in one equal meeting between the two clans with the two clan Chiefs in attendance.
  - It isn't known if this was a meeting of reconciliation gone sour, or a "battle of champions" of equal numbers of men.
  - It was agreed that 12 horsemen from each clan would meet at an arranged place, and if they could not settle their differences, they would resolve it with a battle of champions.
  - The Gunn's, including George and many of his sons were to meet the Keith's outside the Chapel of St. Tears.
- The battle...
  - It took place at St. Tayre's Chapel at Ackergill was situated on the coast roughly equidistant from Ackergill Tower and Gimmogoe Castle (It was said to have been pulled down about 1800...nothing now remains).
  - Note...some claim that the reconciliation meeting took place at Strathmore, in the interior of the County.
  - The battle was to between twelve men on horseback on either side but the Keith's arrived with two men on each horse.
  - George the Crowner was killed in the battle at the chapel, and later, Halberry Castle at Clythe abandoned.
  - Several of his sons were with George...
    - James, the eldest, was in Sutherland.
    - Robert & John were killed but left issue.
    - William & Henry survived.
    - Torquil may have survived but died of wounds later?
    - Alexander may have been killed but he left issue.
An account of the battle was written in the book *Conflicts of the Clans*, published by the Fouls Press in 1764, written from a manuscript from the time of King James VI of Scotland (1566–1625)... About the year of God 1478, there was some quarrelling between the Keiths and the Gunn's, A meeting was appointed for their reconciliation, at the Chapel of St. Tayre, in Caithness, hard by Gimigo, with twelve horse on either side. The Crowner (chief of Clan Gunn) with the most part of his sons and chief kinsmen came to the chapel, to the number of twelve; and, as they were within the chapel at their prayers, the Laird of Inverugie and Ackergill arrived there with twelve horse, and two men upon every horse; thinking it no breach of trust to come with twenty-four men, seeing they had but twelve horses as was appointed. So the twenty-four gentlemen rushed in at the door of the chapel, and invaded the Crowner and his company unawares; who, nevertheless, made great resistance. In the end eight the Clan Gunn were slain, with the most of the Keith's, Their blood may be seen to this day [1764] upon the walls within the Chapel at St. Tyre, where they were slain. Afterwards William MacKames (the Crowner's grandchild) in revenge of his grandfather, killed George Keith of Ackergill and his son, with ten of their men, at Drummuny in Sutherland, as they were travelling from Inverugie into Caithness.

Robert MacKay wrote an account of the battle in his book *History of the House and Clan of the Name MacKay* (1829), quoting from historian Sir Robert Gordon (1580–1656, 160 years after the event)... After long quarelling between the Keiths and Guns, it was agreed that riders on twelve horses each side should meet at the Chapel of St. Tayr, near Ackergill, to adjust all their differences. At the time appointed the chieften of the Guns with eleven men of his tribe attended; and as the Keiths had not arrived, they employed the intermediate time in devotion. At length the Keiths appeared on twelve horses, but with double riders on each, and immediately set upon the Guns, and killed ever man of them, but with the loss of the greater part of their own number. Sir Robert who relates to the tragedy, says their blood was seen on the walls of the chapel in his time. The chieften or coroner's son, James Gunn, then left Caithness with his clan, and settled in Sutherland, where they became wardens of that district. William, son of this James, and a number of his tribe, afterwards intercepted George Keith of Ackergill, accompanied by his son and twelve of their followers, on their journey from Inverugie to Caithness, and killed them all in revenge of the above massacre. This William was surnamed Mackamish, i.e. son of James; and thenceforward the chieften of the clan Gunn has always been titled Mackamish...bloodstains could be seen on the walls of the chapel for many years after the conflict.

The Gaelic accounts... "The battle of Altnagown or "Ailt Nan Gamhna" which means "brook of the year-old calves"..."The Gunn's, led by their Chief, George Gunn "The Crowner", arrived first and went into the chapel to pray. The Keith's arrived slowly, and seeing the horses tied up outside the chapel, decided on an ambush. Using the words of author Sir Charles MacKinnon of Dunakin, "the Keith's played a dirty trick, mounting two men on each horse," giving them a 2 to 1 advantage over the Gunn's. Led by their chief, George Keith of Ackergill and his 23 men, they fell upon the Gunn's inside the chapel and a great and confused battle ensued. Claymores, dirks, swords and targes banged out a terrible sound of carnage as the battle spread from the chapel to the outside and all around. Considering they were so deviously outnumbered, the Gunn's fought bravely and killed many of the treacherous Keith's, before the sheer force of numbers overwhelmed them. The Gunn's were forced to make a retreat, but seven (some accounts say 8 or more) of the Gunn's lay dead as well as many Keith's, including the Gunn Chief, George the Crowner. Four of his sons were also killed and the Crowner's great silver brooch was stolen by the Keith's. The remaining four or five Gunn's found safe cover and hid in a glen near a stream in upper Strathnaver.

The Gunn's were forced to make a retreat, but seven (some accounts say 8 or more) of the Gunn's lay dead as well as many Keith's, including the Gunn Chief, George the Crowner. Four of his sons were also killed and the Crowner's great silver brooch was stolen by the Keith's. The remaining four or five Gunn's found safe cover and hid in a glen near a stream in upper Strathnaver. There, they dressed their numerous wounds and burned with anger and revenge.

Revenge...
- Most accounts agree it was Henry Gunn (and William?), one of the sons of the slain Crowner, who followed the Keith's...
  - Henry took with him several Gunn's and set up an ambush outside Dirlot castle.
  - Henry climbed up a steep and windling hill that eventually put him on a level with a window of Castle Dirlot, where he could see the Keith's celebrating inside.
  - Henry took aim with his bow and shot an arrow through the open window, striking George, the Chief of the Keith's, in the neck, thus killing him.
  - After this he is said to have shouted... "A Gunn's compliment to a Keith", although another Gaelic translation is, "A Gunn's blessing to a Keith!"
  - The remaining Keith's ran towards to seek out the shooter, but were ambushed one by one by Gunn's hiding outside the door.
  - It is said that more Keith's were killed here at Dirlot castle than the Gunn's that died at St. Tears.
  - Another account, which appears to be verified by both Robert Gordon's writings and the Fraser Chronicles...
    - A grandson of the slain George Gunn, the Crowner, William MacKames (also spelled William MacHamish), waited for an occasion to take revenge on the son of the Keith Chief, (also named George Keith of Ackergill), his son Alexander and 10 Keith retainers.
    - It was apparently an ambush at Drummoy in Sutherland as they were travelling from Inverugie to Caithness.
    - William MacKames and his fellow Gunn's, ambushed with bow and sword, the Keith Chief (George Keith of Ackergill), his son and 10 men - killing them all.
    - The Keith's, expecting death, asked for time for prayers but were refused...William is reputed to have said, "Your father interrupted my grandfather at prayer in God's house" (St. Tears) and that he (William) would grant them no time for such devotion, since they denied it to his grandfather's men.
    - All of them were slain by the Gunn's.
    - According to Mark Rugg Gunn, the Castle Dirlot was occupied by one Alexander Sutherland a relative of the Dunrobin family...
    - It was said that it was he who welcomed the Keith's so cordially after the battle with the Gunn's at the Chapel of St. Tears.
    - This would explain why the Keith's went to Dirlot after the battle rather than to their Castle at Ackergill.

The end of the feud...
- By the 1970s, with North American members of both clans on friendly terms, the feud between them was no longer an issue.
- At the urging of their clan members, the Chief of Clan Keith, Sir James Ian Keith, Earl of Kintore, and the Commander of Clan Gunn, Ian Alexander Gunn of Banniskirk, signed a "Bond and Covenant of Friendship" on 28 July 1978, at the site of St. Tears on the 500th anniversary of the battle there.
- The treaty has since been celebrated by members of both clans at highland games and other common gatherings.
After the death of George and some of his sons in 1478, the Crowner Clan became scattered, and split into three distinct families (= Septs)...most continued to live in the highland of Caithness...

James or Seumas, the Crowner's eldest son, who survived the battle, moved with his family to Kildonan in Sutherland, subsequently known as "Gleann na Guineach" or "Gunn's Glen", where he obtained lands from the Earl of Caithness, and then the Earl of Sutherland.

They held the lands as vassals...no legal titles to their lands...although physically in possession of lands in Caithness from about the 12th or 13th century, no branch of the Gunn's had any legal tenure of land until the middle of the seventeenth century, so presumably they held their possessions by the sword.

Donald was famous for his strength & marksmanship - he was chief of Braemore and lived in splendour, and was buried at Spittal...
- Nothing is known of his son, David.
- The next chief, Alexander had to relinquish his seat in Braemore for a while...went to Kildonan, but got the lands back...he died about 1706.
- He was succeeded by his son, George, the last chief of Braemore...died about 1730.
- The lands of Braemore were sold in 1793.
- Donald's brother, John Gunn MacRob became chief of Strathy...both known as the "MacRobes".

While the chiefly line continued in the neighbouring county a very large section of the clan under the leadership of the "Robson" Gunns of Braemore continued to spread through the Highland parishes of Latheron and Halkirk in Caithness.
- Owing to this detachment they became to be recognised as almost a separate branch - Gunn of Braemore is frequently mentioned in history as Chief of the Gunns in Caithness.
- Note...the Gunns would have been in Braemore from an early date...occupied the area for nearly 400 years.

See Page 14,15

See Page 16
After the death of George and some of his sons in 1478, the Crowner Clan became scattered, and split into three distinct families (= Septs)…most continued to live in the highland of Caithness…

- John was killed at St. Tears, but he had a son, William (“William of Cattaig”)…not the main line of the chiefs...

- He settled in Cattaig or Bregual in Strathmore, in the higher reaches of the River Thurso above Westerdale.
- He is the ancestor of the Gunn’s of Dale, Dalemore, and Camster.

- Plus...
  - William moved towards Sutherland, and then to Strathullie…became independent of the McHamish-es…ancestor of the Williamsons.
  - Henry also moved with William, but a “family difference”, led him to around Halkirk…also became independent of the McHamishes…ancestor of the Hendersons.

- Note...the McHamish chiefs had little or no jurisdiction over other Gunns.

- Other Gunn families established themselves at Crosskirk, near Forss, on the north coast of Caithness and in Reay, Strathy and Strath Halladale in the Mackay country…
  - The various chieftains leased their lands from the Chiefs of Clan Sutherland and Clan Mackay and in turn sublet these to their immediate families who subdivided them among their families.
  - There was, however, a surprising amount of movement from one part of the country to another and so it cannot be assumed that all Gunns in one area were necessarily all of the same branch of the family.

All ancestral charts are taken from Mark Rugg Gunn…“History of the Clan Gunn”.

---

**Caithness**

John-Strathmore
Dirlo
Ackergill
George-Clyth, Ubister Halberry Head
Robert-Braemore
James-Kildonan Strath


**Gunn History - An Outline**

16th Cent...

- 1517...the Battle of Torran Dubh against the MacKays of Strathnaver...William McHamish with 100 Gunns “came to the rescue” of the Sutherlands.
- (“Shortly after”). William McHamish killed George Keith & his son (the male line then became extinct) of Ackerhill, with ten men, at Drummay (9 miles west of Golspie) or the Helmsdale River...the “final revenge” for the Gunn’s (now allied with the Sutherlands).
- 1585/6...
  - Altgowan/ Aldgowne...the Gunn’s and the Mackay’s beat the combined forces of the Earls of Sutherland and Caithness at Altgowan...the Clan Gunn, who though inferior in force, had the advantage of the hillside at Aldgowne, and using their bows so well that Henry Sinclair was slain with 120 men, and the rest put to flight.
  - John Gunn, the Chief of the Gunns of Braemore was hanged at the Sinclair Gimigoe Castle by the then Earl of Caithness in revenge for the defeat of the Caithness men at Altgowan by Clan Gunn.
  - The Gunns were still a relatively strong clan, despite not holding lands from the king, and being scattered...they were allies to the Earls of Caithness who leased them property. However, they had to continually fight for their existence
  - The Robson Gunns were “a lawless set of thieves” (Mark Rugg Gunn).

17th Cent...

- 1601...the Sutherland’s, Mackay’s and Gunn’s put the Sinclair’s to flight at Ben Griam / Altgowan...
  - The McHamish was Alexander, Grandson of the Crowner.
  - This is commemorated by the Cairn Teaghighie.
- 1612...William Angus Rory Gunn escaped from the Sinclair Gimigoe Castle by jumping into the sea.
- 1615...the corn fields at Sandside were burnt by John Robson, chieftain of the Clan Gunn in Caithness at the instigation of the Earl of Caithness who had a vendetta with Lord Forbes who then owned the Sandside estate...but it led to their temporary banishment from Caithness to allegiance with the house of Sutherland until the time of the clearances.
  - The Mackays dispossessed them of Dirlot, Strathy & Strath Halladale.
  - The Earl of Caithness drove them from Braemore & his other estates.
  - 1874...The “story” of the Clan Gunn (not individual Gunn’s) ended as far as the lands were concerned with the eviction of the clearances (see chapter 17 of Mark Rugg Gunn’s book)...emigration, both forced and voluntarily.

18th Cent...

- The majority of the Gunns lived in Braemore, Strathullie, Strath Halladale & Upper Strathnaver (Mark Rugg Gunn)...
  - The main line was the McHamish in Strathullie.
  - The Robsons of Braemore did not consider themselves subject to the McHamish.
  - Clan life (see Mark Rugg Gunn, “History of Clan Gunn”, Chapter 12)...
    - The chief: granted land (“wadset” = mortgage, or lease) to the tacksmen.
    - The tacksmen...
      - Often related to the chief...obtained leases (“tacks”) of land...then let their land to tenants who cultivated the land and paid rent.
      - Had larger houses.
      - Many continued to use the cemetery at Spittal and nearby Dirlot...often travelling great distances to get there.
    - The tenants (“cottars”).
      - Also required for military service, peat cutting, ploughing and harvesting.
      - Lived in crofts, clustered in villages...2 roomed “but and ben” with stone wall and thatched roof with simple furniture, plus a “byre” (barn).
      - Depended on cattle, grazed in the uplands; goats were common....diet was porridge, cabbage, oat cakes plus fish near the coast.
- Other aspects...
  - There were no roads...horse tracks and the sea were used.
  - There were itinerant tradesmen, shoemakers, tailors... the tenants were very hospitable.
  - They were Gaelic speaking (until the clearances) and wore the kilt (forbidden between 1747 & 1782)...the ancient tartan of today.
  - Many continued to use the cemetery at Spittal and nearby Dirlot...often travelling great distances to get there.
  - The rites of baptism, marriage and death were carried out in the home.
- 1746...Battle of Culloden...the final battle of the Jacobite Uprising of 1745/46...
- The army of Prince Charles Edward Stewart, consisting mainly of Highlanders, was soundly defeated by the Duke of Cumberland, bringing to an end the ambitions of the “Young Pretender” to recover the throne for the Stewart dynasty.
  - Unlike some highland clans, the Gunn’s did not rise under the standard of the Stuarts during the Jacobite Rebellion, and indeed supported the government in conflict of 1745, along with other Highland clans such as Clan Munro, Clan Campbell, Clan Mackay, Clan Sutherland and Clan Ross.
  - The Clan Gunn came out for the government, led by the MacKeamish...there were about 120 men under arms, and they were attached to the Earl of Loudon’s regiment.

19th Cent...

- 1819...The “story” of the Clan Gunn (not individual Gunn’s) ended as far as the lands were concerned with the eviction of the clearances (see chapter 17 of Mark Rugg Gunn’s book)...emigration, both forced and voluntarily.
- 1874...The “nominal” chiefship of the Clan had been dormant since the death of the son of George Gunn of Rhives (grandson of George who was brother of Donald Crotach...see page 10).

20th Cent...

- 1960...The Clan Gunn Society was formed to promote a spirit of kinship amongst members of the clan throughout the world, and acquired the Old Parish Church at Latheron as a Clan Heritage Centre...the clan gathers in Caithness every three years.
- The head of the Clan, in the absence of a recognised chief is lain Gunn of Banniskirk, who has been appointed Commander of the Clan by the Lord Lyon King of Arms at the request of the landed and armigerous members of the Clan.
- 1978...the Earl of Kintore, Chieftain of Clan Keith and lain Gunn of Banniskirk, the Commander of Clan Gunn, signed a...
The Castle…
- It was first built by Robert, the 6th Earl of Sutherland in the late 14th century.
- It was the 2nd Duke who, in the 19th century, transformed the typical Scottish castle into the beautiful French style palace you can visit today.
- There are also beautiful formal gardens with falconry displays and a museum of souvenirs brought back from hunting trips around the world.

How to get there…
- Begin at Inverness to Black Isle, over the Cromarty Firth, and then to Golspie...A9...53 miles.
- Just north of Golspie is Dunrobin Castle, the principal seat of the Sutherland chiefs.

Duke of Sutherland Statue…
- Dominating the skyline above the village of Golspie (and visible from many parts of east Sutherland) is the 100 foot tall statue on top of Ben Bhraggie.
- It is of George Granville Leveson-Gower, Marquess of Stafford and first Duke of Sutherland who became notorious through the part he played in the Highland clearances.
  - He was born in 1758, the son of the Marquess of Stafford.
  - In 1785 he married Elizabeth, daughter of the Earl of Sutherland (she had inherited the Earldom and its associated estates following a well-known legal case which established the unusual principle that the Earldom could pass through the female as well as the male line).
  - Leveson-Gower was created first Duke of Sutherland for his services to politics in 1833, just a few months before his death.
  - He died in July of that year at Dunrobin Castle and was buried at Dornoch Cathedral.
- In 1834 a subscription was started in order to pay for a monument in his memory…
  - Subscriptions came in from far and wide, which is surprising given his reputation today.
  - Work soon began and the stone for the massive base and plinth was quarried from the north east side of Ben Bhraggie, just 50 yards or so from the monument’s location.
  - The statue itself was sculpted by Sir Francis Chantrey and it was taken up to the top of the Ben in pieces by horse and cart.
  - The monument, 100 feet high, was completed in 1837 & it has dominated the views of east Sutherland ever since.

The Clearances…
- In the early nineteenth century the couple initiated sweeping reforms to their estate in Sutherland…this is where the Duke’s reputation will vary, depending upon who you are talking to.
- Two views…
  - Some would say that he was shocked by the conditions his tenants were living in and he became convinced that the interior of Sutherland could not support these subsistence farmers long term...advised to follow the latest economic and social theories he decided to resettle the population in new villages along the coast to make way for large sheep farms inland.
  - The other, and probably more common view, is that he decided it would be more profitable for the estate to turn the land over to large scale sheep farming, and so the tenants would have to go, whether they wanted to or not.
- These “reforms” led to thousands of people being evicted from their homes and farms…
  - There are many accounts of people being forcibly evicted and houses, even whole settlements, being set on fire by the over zealous actions of the people employed by the Duke.
  - The Sutherland clearances were not by any means the only clearances - this period saw similar occurrences throughout Scotland, not just in the Highlands but in many rural lowland areas as well.
  - However the Sutherland clearances are among the most notorious.

Gunn Connections…
- The Sutherland Earls both feuded with Clan Gunn and offered them protection at different times in their long history as neighbours and powerful rivals.
- George Gunn of Rhives (near Golspie), was a protégé of the Countess of Sutherland, who had purchased a commission for him in the Royal Marines. The estate of Rhives was also given to him by the Countess, who appointed him as an under factor at Assynt and later head factor at Dunrobin. He laid claims to the chiefship through his grandfather, George. He died in 1859.
Helmsdale...

- Helmsdale was originally a Viking settlement but was greatly extended as a planned village to accommodate some of the people cleared from their crofts in the interior of the County of Sutherland by the Duchess of Sutherland at the beginning of the 19th century.
- The Timespan Heritage Centre retells the story of the clearances and other historical events which took place in the area, including the 1869 gold rush.

WELCOME TO TIMESPAN / FAILTE OIRBH GU TIMESPAN

TIMESPAN is on the riverside in the centre of Helmsdale; a picturesque fishing village which boasts a harbour, coastal and hillside walking trails and one of the best salmon rivers in the North. It is a vibrant meeting place between our past and our future; linking culture, heritage, the arts, people and their ideas.

OUR MUSEUM reopened in 2008, using the latest design and technology to explore the past times which have shaped Helmsdale today. Step into the Helmsdale history street and experience a taste of how life was in the village shop, croft or smithy in the 1900s. Immerse yourself in the colourful animated tales in joined by the lore and legend of the area told and created by the community. Come and listen to our new tour telling tales of old and reading letters from those that left these shores.

FIND OUT MORE in the museum database; an expanding collection of local images, interviews and information. Trace your roots in our Archive. Enjoy the annual community exhibition. Explore our stunning riverside: Geology Garden – the ancient rocks in our collection have a combined age of 16000 million years!

GET HANDS ON with art and heritage activities and events in our multi-purpose workshop. Films, talks, dance and drama and more... Schools and groups can book our special story-teller tours.

Navidale...

On the coast of Sutherland north of Helmsdale, is the township of Navidale which was held by several generations of the McHamish chiefs.
Turn onto the A897 at Helmsdale to the Strath (valley) of Kildonan...9 miles...

**Kildonan**
Named after St. Donan who established his monastery at Suisgill.

- Gunn clansmen lived in the middle of the glen from the mid 13th century up to the Clearances in 1819...
  - From the mid 13th Century, the Gunns, under the Earls of Sutherland, held lands here.
  - After the death of George, the Crowner, and his sons at St. Tears Chapel, Ackerhill in 1464 (78?), the Clan split into three distinct families...one of the, James or Seumas, the Crowner's eldest son, who survived the battle, moved with his family to Kildonan in Sutherland, subsequently known as "Gleann na Guineach" or "Gunn's Glen", where he obtained lands from the Earls of Sutherland.
  - The Mac Sheumais (or McHamish) Gunns continued to live in Strath Kildonan at Killearnen until 1690, when the house and family charters were destroyed by fire.
  - As a result, they were forced to give up their lands at Killearnen and Kildonan and move to Badenloch, at the top of the Strath, where they remained until the chiefly line, Alexander McHamish, died here in 1763. Nothing remains of this house.

- The Clearances
  - In 1807 Elizabeth Gordon, 19th Countess of Sutherland, touring her inheritance with her husband Lord Stafford (later made Duke of Sutherland), wrote that "he is seized as much as I am with the rage of improvements, and we both turn our attention with the greatest of energy to turnips".
  - As well as turning land over to sheep farming, Stafford planned to invest in creating a coal-pit, salt pans, brick and tile works and herring fisheries.
  - That year his agents began the evictions, and 90 families were forced to leave their crops in the ground and move their cattle, furniture and timbers to the land they were offered 20 miles (32 km) away on the coast, living in the open until they had built themselves new houses.
  - Stafford's first Commissioner, William Young, arrived in 1809, and soon engaged Patrick Sellar as his factor who pressed ahead with the process while acquiring sheep farming estates for himself.

**Killearnen**

A mile east, from the church at Kildonan was Killearnen the seat of the McHamish Gunns for over 200 years, until it was destroyed by fire in 1690...

- Nothing remains of the original house.
- The first chief of Clan Gunn to appear in records was the "great brooch-wearer" (because of the insignia he wore), George Gunn, the Coroner or Crowner of Caithness in the 15th century...he was known as "Am Braisdeach Mor", as coroner.

**Ben Grian**

- 1601...the Sutherland's, Mackay's and Gunn's put the Sinclair's to flight at Ben Grian...this is commemorated by the Cairn Teagheie.

- At the top of Kildonan, and is said to have been named after the Crowner's brooch.
- The Crowner & early chiefs had a fortress / castle north west of the township where they spent the summer.

**Donan’s Chair**

- About halfway along the strath is Donan’s Chair...large hollow stone...it is no longer there.

- It was only in the mid-nineteenth century that the second, more brutal phase of the Clearances began...
  - Elizabeth Leveson-Gower, Duchess of Sutherland, and her husband George Leveson-Gower, 1st Duke of Sutherland, conducted brutal clearances between 1811 and 1820.
  - Evictions at the rate of 2,000 families in one day were not uncommon.
  - Many starved and froze to death where their homes had once been.
  - The whole parish of Kildonan was cleared – with the exception of three families.
  - Men, especially the young, left the country, but the aged and those without the means of travelling accepted the wretched allotments allowed them on the sea shore.
  - It was at this time many of the families of Sutherland left their homeland forever...to Canada, America, Australia, New Zealand, the lowlands of Scotland, & to England.

**Kinbrace**

- At the top of Kildonan, and is said to have been named after the Crowner’s brooch.
- The Crowner & early chiefs had a fortress / castle north west of the township where they spent the summer.

**Kildonan Strath** (also known as Strath Ullie) is a broad valley of East Sutherland - it extends in a south-easterly direction from Kinbrace to Helmsdale on the North Sea coast.

- It carries the water of the Helmsdale River, the railway and the A897 road which passes Kildonan Lodge, a Victorian shooting lodge erected in 1896.
- A bridge was erected at Kilphedir in 1820 during a period of road improvement that followed extensive evictions from the Sutherland Estates that took place in the Strath in 1813.
- There are a number of ancient hut circles, cairns and broch sites in addition to old Kildonan Parish Church which dates from 1788.
- The Strath of Kildonan was the scene of a gold rush in 1869 which brought an influx of prospectors who set up a temporary settlement named Baile-an-Or (town of gold) by the Kildonan Burn.
The original church of Kildonan probably dated from about 1100, when it was repaired and enlarged.

A mortuary chapel for the Clan Gunn chiefs was added at its western end in c. 1250.

Nothing is left of this medieval church...it was taken down and replaced & a new church built in 1788.

Most of this church was destroyed in the clearances...woodwork taken to make an inn. What was left was used as a school and lived in during the gold rush.

The present church incorporates some of the old building.

The lands of the Gunn’s were in the Highland tracts of Caithness, and especially a long stretch of territory called “Gleann na Guineach” or Gunn’s Glen in Kildonan. This was close to the border on Sutherland around the uppermost region of the river Helmsdale. It was a precarious place, being between the territories of the rival Earls of Caithness (Sinclair) and Sutherland.
Navidale

Continue on the A9 from Helmsdale to Navidale...2 miles...

- Here several generations of the McHamish chiefs (John, Alexander) lived.

See Page 9

Braemore

Continue on the A9 from Navidale to just before Dunbeath...about 14 miles...
Turn left to Braemore...about 9 miles

- Braemore was settled by the Gunns from a very early date, certainly before the Crowners, and was the seat of the Robson Gunns otherwise known as the Gunns of Braemore.
- It was from here that Fair Helen of Braemore was abducted in 1415 (26?) which began the feud with the Keiths.
- The Braemore estate passed from Gunn ownership in 1793 when it was sold by George Gunn-Munro of Braemore.

See Page 6,9

Dunbeath

Return to Dunbeath on the A9...about 10 miles...

- Neil Miller Gunn (November 8, 1891 - January 15, 1973) was a prolific novelist, critic, and dramatist who emerged as one of the leading lights of the Scottish Renaissance of the 1920s and 1930s.
- With over twenty novels to his credit, Gunn was arguably the most influential Scottish fiction writer of the first half of the 20th century.
- Like his contemporary, Hugh MacDiarmid, Gunn was politically committed to the ideals of both Scottish nationalism and socialism (a difficult balance to maintain for a writer of his time).
- Gunn's fiction deals primarily with the Highland communities and landscapes of his youth, though the author chose to write almost exclusively in English rather than Scots or Gaelic (a language he lamented never having learned).
- Despite his lack of Gaelic he was heavily influenced in his writing style by the language.

The sculpture at Dunbeath Harbour based on Kenn, the central character in Gunn's "Highland River"

Neil Gunn memorial above Strathpeffer, off A835, NW of Inverness

See Page 9
Continue on the A9 from Dunbeath to Latheron… 6 miles…

Latheron…

- Located here is the Clan Gunn Heritage Centre and Museum.
- From the Clan Gunn website (www.clangunnsociety.org)
  - “Clan Gunn is one of the oldest and most northerly clans in Scotland, claiming descent from the Norse “Jarls” of Orkney in the tenth century. The name “Gunn” is believed to come from “Gunni”, the grandson of Sweyn Asleifsson, the “Ultimate Viking” hero of the Orkneyinga Saga.
  - The first Clan Gunn Society was founded in Thurso, Caithness, in 1821 with the title “The Loyal and United Benevolent Society of the Clan Gunn”.
  - The present Clan Gunn Society was formed in 1960 to “promote a spirit of kinship amongst members of the clan throughout the world”. Now 45 years on we have a membership of over 300 families worldwide.
  - Clansmen and women travel to Scotland from all parts of the world to take part in the International Gatherings of the Clan. These take part every three years.
  - Sightseeing trips are organised both in the Orkney Islands and on the Scottish mainland in Caithness and Sutherland so that clansmen may visit all the places associated with our Clan’s long history. In addition many fun activities are provided to make it a holiday to remember.
  - The Society publishes a magazine, the “Gunn Herald”, three times a year.
  - In the intervening years Mini-Gatherings are held in Caithness timed to coincide with the annual Halkirk Highland Games at the end of July. The St. Donans Day Dinner is held each year in April, in a different location each year. The Society also arranges a less formal occasion each year aimed at the younger members and their families”.
- The Clan Gunn Heritage Centre and Museum.
  - “It is housed in the old Parish Church, Latheron which was built in 1734. The church was gifted to the Society in 1974 and after considerable fund raising within the clan and with financial support from the Highlands and Islands Development Board, Caithness District Council and The Scottish Countryside Commission it was officially opened on 22nd August 1985.
  - The Heritage Centre is open from 1st June to 30th September- Mondays to Saturdays- 11.00am to 1.00pm and from 2.00pm to 4pm.
  - The centre tells the story of the clan from its Norse origins to the present day against the background of the history of the north of Scotland. It also contains one of the best clan archives in Scotland based on many years of research by Dr. Colin Gunn, the clan Seannachaidh and by Abb L. Gunn the clan genealogist”. 
The Clan Gunn Heritage Centre, on the A99 to Wick and John O’Groats, 200 metres north of the intersection with the A9 to Thurso, is 11/2 hours drive from Inverness.

The Centre is open from 1st June to 30th September, Mondays to Saturdays – 11.00am to 1.00pm and 2pm to 4pm and on Sundays in July and August from 2.00pm to 4.00pm

Admission £2.00 for adults and £1.00 for children, senior citizens and groups. Coach parties are welcome.

The Clan Gunn Heritage Centre was established by the Clan Gunn Heritage Trust in 1985 in the 18th Century Old Parish Church of Latheron.

The remains of Castle Gunn, the original seat of the chiefs of the Clan, and of Halberry Castle, the later stronghold, are situated on the Caithness coast seven miles north of the Heritage Centre. Neil Gunn’s “Highland River”, which was the basis for a number of his works, is at Dunbeath, four miles south.

The Centre has a Clan Shop and is the base of the Clan Gunn Society, which maintains the traditions of the Clan throughout the world. There are also Clan Gunn Societies of North America, Nova Scotia and New Zealand open to members of Clan Gunn and its septs.

Among the 77 septs traditionally associated with the Gunn are the Hendersons, Johnsons, MacWilliams, MacNisons, Robsons, Robinsons, Thomsoms, Williamsons, Wilsons and Wyllies. Is your family name related to our clan? Why not come along to the Clan Gunn Heritage Centre and find out?
Continue on the A9 from Latheron (through Lybster) to Mid Clyth & Halberry head...8 miles...

Halberry Castle...
- Halberry Castle occupies a promontory, Halberry Head...
  - Halberry Castle was built by the Gunn chiefs in the latter part of the 13th century as their principal stronghold to replace Castle Gunn.
  - There are no remains visible apart from the vague footings of the keep, 18 metres back from the defensive ditch.
  - In its day, around 1450, Halberry must have been one of the most impressive fortified structures on that coastline.
  - It was also the site of a battle between the Gunns and the Keiths in 1460.
  - The promontory upon which it was built was the largest of all the Caithness Castle sites...about 2 acres.
  - Permission should be sought from the local landowners before visiting this site and great care should be exercised, as the cliffs are precipitous.
  - Nearby is the Hill of Mannistanes (“Hill of Many Stones”), a Bronze Age stone alignment dating from about 1500 BC.
  - It was the stronghold of George Gunn, Chief of the Clan Gunn and Crowner, or Coroner of Caithness.
  - Crowner Gunn and a number of his sons were treacherously killed by the Clan Keith at the Chapel of St Tears around 1464 after a running feud between the two clans.
  - After this, the castle was abandoned.

- The castle...
  - The promontory jutting out to the sea upon which the castle was built...is separated by a large rock cut ditch about 25 ft wide across which would have been crossed by a bridge, to a drawbridge and gatehouse.
  - The western side of the promontory is protected by a geo or sea inlet, some 150 ft below the level of the site and by similar perpendicular cliffs to the sea on the other two sides.
  - One cannot appreciate the defensive significance and size of the site until you walk to the end of the promontory and look back to the mainland and gaze down the cliffs to the water.
  - The enclosure at Halberry would have been large enough to house all the usual ancillary out-buildings and offices associated with a castle such as chapel, stables, brew house, stores, blacksmith, offices, kitchens, washhouse, sleeping accommodations etc.
  - It would, as a whole, have dwarfed many of the other Caithness strongholds of the time such as Castle of Old Wick, Ackergill and Buchollie.
  - The stones from the castle were used to build a great network of dry stone dykes in the Clyth area in the early part of the 19th century.

The foundations of the keep are clearly discernable and measure 13.5 x 8.5m.

Ulbster...
- Ulbster was associated with the Gunn’s from a very early date (Snaekoll Gunnason).
- After the Battle of St. Tayre’s (1478) it passed to the Keiths, then to the Oliphants, and in 1606 to the Earl of Caithness.
- It was subsequently acquired by a cadet Sinclair family of whom Lord Thurso is the present head.
Continue on the A9 from Halberry Castle to the village of Braun...4 miles...

Castle Gunn (Castle Clyth, Castle Bruan, Gunn’s Castle)...
Where...about 7 miles South of Wick, running parallel to the cliff face off the mainland near Braun (“Buail’ na Creige”/“Builacraig”), stands an isolated rock, detached from the mainland, upon which stood what is thought to be the earliest known castle of the Clan Gunn.
- The site is a forbidding one and almost inaccessible today, except from the rocky foreshore.
- The peninsular rock, upon which the castle stood, almost has the profile of a shoe when viewed from the NW.
- A steep cliff of rock slopes up from the foreshore up to the summit, which is level in height with the mainland.

History...
- It was probably established by Snaekoll (may have been in existence before then) or his son (Ottar) in the mid 13th Cent.
- It was said to have been destroyed by the King of Norway in revenge for his daughter's death.
  - One of the Gunn’s from Castle Gunn married the daughter of the King of Norway...it is not known which Gunn it was, but it was probably James de Gun’s father Ottar who was known to have visited the Norwegian Royal Court on at least 2 occasions.
  - However, he already had a wife in Caithness and when the arrangements were made for the Norwegian Princess to come to Scotland, with her large dowry, he had no intention of allowing her to arrive alive and made plans to wreck the ship and recover the dowry of gold.
  - He arranged with the Ship’s Master to make for a point called Roeberry at Ulbster where a lighted beacon was set up to guide it safely in...on the night of the ship’s arrival he moved the beacon to a more treacherous part of the coastline and the ship grounded on the rocks with the loss of all passengers and crew, including the Princess.
  - A pot of gold was found washed up on a nearby rock and for a long time afterwards people claimed they could see metal shining in the water at low tide...this place was subsequently named “Leac an air” (flagstone of the gold).
  - The Norwegian King took rapid revenge and sent a heavily armed task force to Castle Gunn, slaying Ottar and all his retainers and set fire to the buildings.
  - There may have been another building measuring 24x14 feet within the courtyard but the site is a restricted one and other necessary buildings for the garrison would probably have been temporary, dispensable and situated on the mainland.

Access...there is a much speculation on how Castle Gunn was accessed...
- Supplies could have been brought in by ship, which was a common mode of transport at the time, but it is unlikely that this would have been the only means of access to the stronghold...winter gales, storms, difficult tides and a treacherous coastline would all have caused considerable difficulties in landing here.
- There is evidence of a rough stair cut into the rock on the mainland coming down a very steep cliff, which would have allowed access to the castle from the foreshore up the steep glacis (bank sloping down from a fort) of rock...it is unlikely that this could have been the main route in to the castle for all the necessary supplies of food, fuel, weapons, livestock, building & maintenance materials etc..
- Other medieval fortifications such show that access to Castle Gunn could have been from a fortified tower incorporating a drawbridge to the mainland as illustrated in Andrew Spratt’s painting.
- After crossing the drawbridge and through the tower, access to the castle would be by a timber gantry (four footed stand) up the glacis to the castle gate.

The Castle...
- The foundations of the keep are barely discernible now, measuring 37 x 23 feet externally with walls some 3 feet in thickness - the whole being positioned on the NW cliff edge of the site.
- On the NE angle of the keep is a depression, 9 feet in diameter and 2 to 3 feet in depth, which is thought to be the position of a well.
- There may have been another building measuring 24x14 feet within the courtyard but the site is a restricted one and other necessary buildings for the garrison would probably have been temporary, dispensable and situated on the mainland.

Tannach
Continue on the A9 from Ulbster to the turn-off to Tannach...3 miles...continue for about 3 miles to the small village of Tannach...

Battle of Tannach (Blare Tannie or Blar-Tannie, Tannach Moor)
- The first recorded feud between the Keith’s & the Gunn’s about 3 miles south-west of Wick.
- It was fought between men of the Clan Keith and Clan MacKay from Strathnaver against men of the Clan Gunn and possibly their allies the Clan Oliphant and Clan Sutherland from Caithness.
- The date is uncertain, it was probably in 1464, but may have been in 1438.
Continue on the A9 from the Tannach turn-off to Wick...7 miles...

**Girnigoe and Castle Sinclair**
- They were the principal seats of the Earls of Caithness.
- Girnigoe was erected between 1476 and 1496 by William, Earl of Caithness.
- Castle Sinclair which was built adjacent in 1606...now in a ruinous condition having been attacked and partially destroyed by the rightful heir to the Earldom when it was in the possession of Lord Glenorchy who had bought the Earldom from the previous Earl of Caithness.
- The castle is still the official seat of the Earls of Caithness.

**The Gunn’s and Girnigoe and Castle Sinclair**
- 1586...John Gunn, the Chief of the Gunns of Braemore was hanged at the castle by the then Earl of Caithness in revenge for the defeat of the Caithness men at Altgown by Clan Gunn.
- 1612...William Angus Rory Gunn escaped from the castle by jumping into the sea.
Ackergill Tower

Brief history

- The Clan Keith, under John Keith, inherited the lands of Ackergill in 1354, from the Cheynes family.
- Ackergill Tower may have been built by his son, but was first mentioned in 1538.
- 1547-1676... Keiths and Sinclairs variously owned & occupied the Castle.
- In 1676, John Campbell, 2nd Earl of Breadalbane & Holland possessed Ackergill in repayment of debts owed to him by the Sinclair’s.
- 1699... John Campbell put Ackergill Tower up for sale in 1699, and it was bought by Sir William Dunbar of Hempriggs... they began extensive renovations, including the addition of a lean-to-shaped extension to the tower.
- In the mid 19th century, further additions were made by architect David Bryce on behalf of George Sutherland Dunbar, 7th Lord Duffus.

Today

- It remained in the hands of the Dunbars of Hempriggs until 1986, when it was sold.
- The castle underwent a two-year period of restoration work before opening as an exclusive hotel and business venue.
- The tower was sold on in 2009, although the new owners have maintained the existing business.
Keiss Cemetery

Donald’s birthplace

Nybster...where Peter & Alexandrina Gunn died from

Keiss Castle

Keiss Castle

A9

Murdoch & Margaret Gunn’s croft
Keiss is a fishing village at the northern end of Sinclairs Bay. Keiss Castle is a partially ruined castle, located less than one mile north of Keiss village centre, on sheer cliffs, overlooking the bay, and has been a major tourist attraction for many years. Keiss House replaced Keiss Castle around 1755,
- George, the 5th Earl of Caithness in the late 16th early 17th Century, built Keiss the exact year of its construction not being known.
- It was reputedly built upon the site of an earlier fortalice called “Raddar” but nothing of this now remains.
- The Castle...the castle stood four stories in height plus an attic. Unfortunately the NE angle of the tower, which contained the entrance is gone, as have the upper floors. According to the Rev John Brand the castle was ruinous in 1700, but in 1726 it seems to have been in repair with “at the side of it a convenient house lately built”.

Maureen Miller, (page 315d) is Principal of the Keiss Primary School.

Keiss Cemetery...Gunn’s buried here...

Keiss Cemetery

Peter & Alexandrina Gunn (Donald’s parents)...p.32-33 Note the Celtic Cross

Murdoch & Margaret Gunn (Donald’s brother)...p.315

Murdoch (Donald’s brother) & Margaret Gunn’s croft (page 315)...turn left onto a dirt track at the first house of the village...continue for about half a mile.
Donald's Parents (G.-1.), PETER GUNN (1820-1902) & ALEXANDRINA ROBERTSON (1821-1910)

CHRONOLOGY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CODE</th>
<th>WHO</th>
<th>EVENT</th>
<th>WHEN</th>
<th>WHERE/COMMENT / SOURCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>G-1.</td>
<td>GUNN, Peter</td>
<td>Born</td>
<td>21/12/1820</td>
<td>Family Bible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Christened</td>
<td>11/01/1821</td>
<td>Auckengill, Canisb., Scotland...IGI / Clan Gunn Film 1368497</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>02/11/1844</td>
<td>Bower North, (“Alexandrina Robison, in Wick”...OPR), Caithness (No. 149) ...IGI / OPR (Clan Gunn Film 368497)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>Fisherman</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Residence(s)</td>
<td>“Roadside”, Auckengill, Canisbay...PR (Clan Gunn Film 1368497) / Census 1851/61/71</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Died</td>
<td>09/11/1902</td>
<td>Aged 82, Nybster, Keiss, Canisbay, “natural causes, several years in old age, probably heart disease”, Informant = Murdoch, son of Wester Cottage, Keiss...Certificate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Buried</td>
<td>1902/03</td>
<td>Keiss (No. 149)...Monumental Inscriptions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ROBERTSON, Alexandrina

Born...09/08/1821, Bower Halkirk, Parents = David (mason, born Dunnet) & Margaret nee Swanson (died 15/05/1874)...Death Cert.

Died...23/09/1910, aged 90, of “Senile decay, Gangrene of foot, Exhaustion”, at Nybster, Canisbay, Informant = Murdoch, son...Certificate

Buried...09/1910...Keiss (No. 149)...Monumental Inscriptions

Roadside – Donald Gunn’s Birthplace

- Perhaps Gavin Gunn & Janet Steven lived here.
- (1851-1881)...Peter Gunn & Alexandrina Robertson (G2761)
- Mrs Matheson...sometime after 1891, Peter and Alexandrina moved to “near Nybster”.
- The house was later occupied by...
  - Thomas Gunn (G27723)
  - William & Janet’s son, Peter Gunn (G2772), an unqualified teacher, and Elizabeth Bain.
  - Now demolished.

Burnside House

- Also known as “Middle House”
- (1841-1861)...William Gunn & Janet Bain (G2761)
- Mrs Matheson...1881...the home of G2779. William Gunn and Jane ?? (see photo in boat), He went to Canada after World War 1

- 1851...William a farmer of 15 acres, Auckengill
- 1860...William dies and is buried in the Canisbay Church.
- 1861-1871...Janet is listed as a farmer of 20 acres at Auckengill...her son, Alexander aged 21/32, is cited as a ploughman / farmer.
- pre 1881...Janet dies.
- 1881...Alexander who had married Mary Dunnett, pre 1881, took over the farm still of 20 acres, but 15 arable.

Seaview

According to Mrs Matheson...

- The home of G27792. William Gunn and Lizzie Thompson (see photo in boat), but some time after 1877 (He was born in 1875).
- This is the cottage that Murray Hill saw with the plaque “WG1906” on it. It was built by William Gunn, and his son, also William, lived in it. It is still standing (2011)
Continue along the A9 for about 1 miles to south of Freswick...turn off to the site of Freswick Home...

At Ness Head was the Caithness home of Sweyn Asleifsson

- The "Ultimate Viking"...famed in the Sagas.
- He had 2 castles...
- On the island of Gairsay in the Orkneys...the outlines of his long hall can still be discerned.
- His mainland home in Caithness..."Lamaborg" at Freswick, at Ness Head, a few miles south of Duncansbay Head...south of the fortified House of Freswick (built by Sinclair of Freswick in the 17th century)...it is flanked by cliffs and difficult to conquer.
- He was the most powerful man then.
- He married twice... (1) Ragnhild - son Olaf; (2) Ingrid - son Andres.

See Page 4
The capital of Orkney derives its name from Kirkjuvagr (church bay) after the church erected by Jarl Rognvald Brusison to the memory of his friend King Olaf Haraldsson, patron saint of Norway.

Kirkwall was already a market town of some significance at the beginning of the 11th century and became a Royal Burgh in 1486, eighteen years after Orkney was annexed to Scotland, being pledged for 50,000 florins by King Christian I of Norway as part of the dowry of 60,000 florins when his daughter Margaret married James III of Scotland.

St. Magnus Cathedral was started in 1137 by Jarl Rognvald Kol'sson in honour of his uncle Jarl Magnus who was martyred in the church of Egilsay on 16th April 1116 by his cousin Jarl Hakon.

The main part of the Cathedral was completed in 1158 but a number of additions were made to it during the next four centuries, the 133 foot tower having been built in 1525.

The building which is 218 ft. long and 45 ft. wide houses the relics of St. Magnus and Jarl Rognvald, who was himself canonised.
Canisbay

- Canisbay is a rural hamlet located about 2.5 miles (4.0 km) southwest of John o’ Groats.
- It lies on the A836 coast road, which bypasses the hamlet to the north.
- It is home to Canisbay Primary School, a Youth Hostel, Village Hall, Medical Practice, and two Churches.

Canisbay and the Gunn’s

It is reputed to be the birthplace of Sweyn Asleif’s son, son of Olaf Hrolf’s son, Norse Governor of Duncansbay, who was burnt alive in his castle in 1135.

Canisbay Church

Where...

- Canisbay Kirk can be found beside the main A836 coast road in the hamlet of Kirkstyle, just over two miles west of John o’ Groats.
- This beautifully maintained and startlingly white church stands on a slight rise at the eastern end of Gills Bay, and from the kirkyard there are superb views north to the abandoned island of Stroma and out over the ten mile wide Pentland Firth to Orkney.
- It has served as a landmark for shipping in these sometimes very turbulent waters for centuries.

History...

- The origins of Canisbay Kirk may be very ancient...legend has it that it stands on the site of a chapel established here by St Drostan in the 500s.
  ⇒ St Drostan seems to have been a son of the royal family of Dalriada who became a follower of Saint Columba.
  ⇒ He was active in Aberdeenshire, and founded a monastery at Old Deer.
  ⇒ As a missionary it is possible he made the journey north to the north coast of Caithness, but equally possible that the early chapel that stood here was dedicated to him rather than founded by him.
  ⇒ Either way, it is likely that there has been a place of Christian worship on this spot for the better part of 1400 years.
- It is also likely that a number of further churches would have stood on this same spot over that period...
  ⇒ The earliest stonework that can be found in the church you see today dates back to the medieval period, perhaps to the 1200s, but most of what now stands is considerably more recent.
  ⇒ The medieval church was probably still in use at the time of the Reformation in 1560.
  ⇒ Throughout Scotland, however, old churches were proving very difficult to adapt to the needs of a new style of worship, and as soon as funds became available medieval churches tended to be replaced or significantly changed.
  ⇒ By the early 1600s patronage of Canisbay Kirk belonged to the Mowat family of Freswick.
  ⇒ Over the following three centuries the kirk underwent a series of revisions, restorations and rebuilds which resulted in the building you see today.
- The connection with the Castle of Mey has continued, with the late Queen Mother worshipping at Canisbay Kirk when in residence at the castle, and other members of the family continuing to do so...it is now used by Charles, Prince of Wales.
- Standing in the vestibule is the John de Groat Stone...
  ⇒ This originally marked the burial place within the church of John de Groat or Jan de Groot, who gave his name to nearby John o’ Groats.
  ⇒ It was found under the floor of the church during work in 1898 and embedded in the south wall.
  ⇒ It has since been moved to its current location.
  ⇒ The stone is impressively large and carries an inscription in a highly unusual text that looks almost modern in style.
Canisbay Cemetery...buried here...

Flat Stone = Gavin Gunn & Janet Stephen (p.30)
RHS = Peter Gunn (p. 393.24) & Elizabeth Bain & family

William Gunn (p. 393.24)

James Baikie & Catherine Calder (p. 43)

Magnus Baikie & Jane Geddes (p. 349); James Baikie & Margaret Ham (p.357)

William Geddes & Bella Leith, Alexander Geddes (p.387)

Charles Geddes & Andrewina Skene (p. 392)
James Baikie & Catherine Calder
(Helen Baikie's Birthplace)
- Simon family

John Geddes & Christine Forsyth
-the most northerly cottage in the UK mainland?
- James Baikie & Catherine Calder
- St John's Point

Jane Baikie & Thomas Swanson
- James Baikie & Margaret Ham
- Willie Ham (met Murray Hill in 2005...parents owned Harrow Farm)

John Geddes & Jean Ham
- William Geddes & Isabella Leith

Catherine Baikie & Alexander Calder?
- John Geddes & Jean Ham
- William Geddes & Bella Leith
- Sandy Geddes
- Margaret Dunnet

Margaret Geddes & James Geddes

Magnus Baikie & James Geddes

Simpson family

Sandy Geddes

Margaret Dunnet
Harrow Harbour / Tang Head

10. White Cottage
9. Cliff Cottage
8. The Mill
7. Tang Head

2. Harrow Farm
Phillip (Harrow) Harbour
3. Rosebank

4. Pearl Cottage
5. Lowland Cottage

6. Rose Cottage (Helen Baikie's birthplace)

(From the book "Caithness From The Air")
Harrow Harbour & Harrow Farm-Birthplace of Margaret Ham (p.357)

Rosebank Cottage-Home of John Geddes & Margaret Geddes (p. 13)

Pearl Cottage (p.359)-Magnus & Jane Baikie

Lowland Cottage-Home of John Geddes & Christine Forsythe (p. 381)
The town of Thurso, in Scotland, has the distinction of being the most northerly town on mainland Britain.

- Once an important port, it remains today a pleasant fishing town and resort.
- Thurso Castle lies on the shore, one-mile north east of the town.
- Beyond the castle stands Harold’s Tower—the Sinclair burial place...Harold’s Tower was erected over the grave of Harold, an Earl of Caithness who was killed in 1196.
- The name Sinclair is of Norman origin from “Saint-Clair-sur-Elle” and was established in Scotland in 1162 when Henry de St Clair of Roslin was granted lands in Lothian.
- Sir Henry Sinclair fought with Robert the Bruce at Bannockburn and was one of the Scottish barons who signed the letter to the Pope asserting Scottish independence.
- His son, Henry married Isobel, co-heiress of the Earldom of Orkney and Caithness providing the Sinclairs with land in the far north of Scotland.

History...

- Thurso’s origins are revealed in its name, which comes from the Norse for Thor’s River...
- After the Viking’s eviction from Caithness by the Scots in the early 1200s, Thurso continued to grow around its fishing and trade. Little remains from its early days, though the now roofless Old St Peter’s Church was first established in 1220.
- In 1798, Sir John Sinclair of Ulbster built Thurso’s New Town to the south and west of the Old Town with wide streets laid out on a regular grid...today much of the original pattern of both old and new towns remains on view.
- In the 1850s Scrabster, to the west of Thurso, developed into an important harbour.
- The development of Scrabster led to a reduction in significance of the old port in the mouth of the Thurso River, but it also increased traffic for the area as a whole, with steamer links to Orkney and Shetland, as well as to Oban and Leith.
- Better shipping links in turn led to boom times for the area’s flagstone industry, which employed up to 1000 men.
- By the end of the 1800s, despite paving virtually the whole of Paris during the 1890s, the industry was in decline and Thurso’s economy followed it.
- Thurso’s most recent bout of growth followed the establishment from 1954 of the Dounreay Nuclear Power Development Establishment at a disused wartime airfield eight miles to the west of the town.
- At its peak in the 1970s Dounreay employed 3500 people, many of whom lived in Thurso.
- Employment levels have declined since then, but even the task of decommissioning the establishment will ensure a significant contribution to the economy of the area for a long time to come.

Thurso Castle...

- Thurso Castle was originally a 12th century earthwork fortress, founded by the Norse Earls.
- George, Earl of Caithness, built the original Thurso Castle in 1660...he founded a stone tower house on the site of the castle.
- Thurso Castle was never meant to be and never was a stronghold...the castle has known no violence.
- In 1872, under Sir Tollemache's guidance, Thurso estate became a monument to Victorian values with the remodelling of the whole structure in the style of the French chateaux at Loire and of Holyroodhouse.
- Sir Tollemache, absorbed the house in the construction of a Scottish baronial mansion...he drew up the designs himself, and together with a local mason "stone was placed upon stone in an alarmingly random fashion, so that the completed project defied the laws of physics: stairways led nowhere and the 100 foot tower was built on a foundation suitable for one of 40 feet".
- It was at Thurso Castle in 1876 that Sir Tollemache lunched with the Prince and Princess of Wales, later to become King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra.
- In 1952 defects which appeared in the structure (during the Second World War a sea-mine exploded nearby making the castle unsafe) made it necessary to abandon the castle as a residence and to remove the upper portions of the building in the interests of safety...the remains are now a roofless shell.

Gunn’s in the Thurso area...

- 1231...Snaekol Gunni’s son killed Jarl John here.
- 1437...Sandside...the site of a skirmish between the Mackay’s and the Gunn’s, in which the latter were out-numbered, and defeated.
- 1615...the corn fields at Sandside were burnt by John Robson, chieftain of the Clan Gunn in Caithness at the instigation of the Earl of Caithness who had a vendetta with Lord Forbes who then owned the Sandside estate.
The Chapel...still a place of pilgrimage for the Gunns.
- The dedication is to the Norse St Magnus, who was executed in 1116.
- 1358...St. Magnus at Spittal was described as “A poor hospital in the diocese of Caithness”.
- 1440...it was described as “St Magnus de Skymer” (where ‘Skymer’ is almost certainly a mis-reading of a hand-written ‘Skinnef’ = Skinnet).
- Pilgrimage was discouraged after the Reformation and more than one Act (1568, 1581) was passed banning it altogether.
- 16th Century...the chapel of the hospital was also the church of Spittal parish, which was combined with Halkirk and Skinnet parishes.
- While the legislation, decreased traffic and donations, the chapel at Spittal continued to be used until about 1644 (was still in existence in 1633).
- 1791...the minister of Halkirk remarked that its chapel was “some feet broader and several feet longer than the present parish church [built in 1753], which is among the largest in these northern counties”.
- By 1769 the roof had gone and “nothing remained but the walls of the kirk”.
- 1910...the crumbling condition of the chapel is a historic tragedy. It would be a worthwhile piece of work for Caithness history if volunteers came forward to secure the remaining fragments of the chapel walls and to uncover, record and restore this once respected burial place”.

The adjoining graveyard...
- Over the years, the graveyard had become a special burial place for the clan Gunn and the site is often referred to as Gunn’s Kirk, where interments continued until about 1871.
- The area of both the graveyard and the church is covered with uninscribed gravestones and is enclosed by an old sunken wall.
- It is now neglected.

The hospital...
- It is a relic of the pilgrimage route to and from St. Magnus Cathedral in Kirkwall and despite its location within the diocese of Caithness, its link with Orkney survived long after its demise...“It was annexed to the diocese of Orkney, and is still on the Exchequer books as part of that diocese”.
- The site of St Magnus's Hospital appears as a rectangular sunken area measuring 30.5m E-W by 6.0m transversely, with what appears to be a division near its W end.
- Between the hospital and chapel lie the footings of several buildings with internal divisions, which appear to be contemporary, and associated with the hospital.
- It had grown from a 'poor hospital' to a relatively large establishment.
- A survey in 1872...“It had been demolished for many years”.

On the slopes of Spittal Hill below the Myster-Georgemas road are the remains of St. Magnus Chapel, which probably dates from the 12th century.
- This was the main, and most ancient burial place of the clan and Gunn chiefs in Caithness.
- Many were carried over the hills from Kildonan for burial after the chiefly line and focus of the Clan moved to Kildonan in Sutherland.
- The burial ground was used until the early part of this century.
Dirlot Castle

- It has a long association with the Clan Gunn and with the Hendersons, an important Sept of the Clan.
- The later chiefs of the Cattaig family resided at Dale House, which is close by.
- The confusion as to where the battle of Alt-no-gaun took place has arisen because the area south of Westerdale is also said to be the site.

Dalemore (within a mile of Dirlot)

- The old farm house of Dalemore was the home of Marcus Gunn the chieftain of the Gunn's of Cattaig in the 18th century.
- The farm is still occupied by Gunn's, continuing 500 years of intermittent Gunn possession.

Westerdale (B879, 3 miles SW of Spittal)

- It has a long association with the Clan Gunn and with the Hendersons, an important Sept of the Clan.
- The later chiefs of the Cattaig family resided at Dale House, which is close by.
- The confusion as to where the battle of Alt-no-gaun took place has arisen because the area south of Westerdale is also said to be the site.

Battle of Dirlot...

- In 1464, the two clans fought again at the Battle of Dirlot (it has been said that George Gunn occupied the tower of Dirlot by force), resulting in massive casualties on both sides, the less numerous Gunn's losing the battle, but not before their archers inflicted heavy losses on the Keith's.
  - The Gunns were noted as excellent archers by all accounts, and used the short bow (not the long bow) to offset their inferior numbers.
  - They were also known to be great swordsmen wielding great broadswords and most likely claymores.
- As an interesting side note, Alexander Sutherland, the cordial host, had himself, killed a MacKay a year earlier.
  - That MacKay, Alexander Dunbar of Cumnock, killed in a quarrel, and was later apprehended by Dunbar's uncle, MacKay of Strathnaver.
  - Mackay of Strathnaver used nearly as devious a strategy as did the Keith's at St. Tears to apprehend Sutherland.
  - Mackay with ten followers on a 'friendly' visit where they were given a feast with Alexander Sutherland and twenty of his men.
  - The wiley MacKay of Strathnaver, arranged for each of his ten men to sit in between every two of the Sutherland men.
  - At a given signal, the MacKay's stood drawing their dirks and quickly stabbing to their right and then their left, killed or wounded all of the Sutherland men and captured Alexander Sutherland taking him as prisoner to Edinburgh and then to Stirling where he was executed in 1499.
  - In reward for this deed, James IV of Scotland gave the Castle Dirlot and some of Sutherland's estate to the MacKays, which was very considerable.
  - In attendance of the MacKay men who dispatched the Sutherland's were three Gunn's.
Dirlot Castle sits in a peat moor 3 miles south of Westerdale.
- Leave the minor road from Westerdale to Loch More and drive about 1/2 a mile through a sand pit to Dirlot Farm.
- Park at the farm and then walk about 300 yards along a footpath to an old walled cemetery, remarkable in that the walls of the cemetery are laid out in the shape of an arrowhead.

The Cheynes, Gunns, Mackays and the Sutherlands occupied the castle at various times until its abandonment around 1660.
- It was formerly a small keep, built about 1350 by Ronald Cheyne as a hunting Lodge.
- Later it passed to the Sutherlands and then to the Mackay’s, and at one time was occupied by the Gunns.
- The stones were used to construct the walls of the graveyard whose earliest recorded grave is 1664.
- It is perhaps fitting that the walls were laid out in the shape of an arrowhead, given Dirlot’s long history and true purpose.
- Henry Gunn, one of the surviving sons of Crowner Gunn, is said to have revenged his father’s death here by shooting an arrow through a small window, killing the Keith chief who was celebrating his victory.

The area was thickly peopled with Gunn’s in former years.

A gigantic plug of rock rises vertically out of the River to a height of 40-50 ft with rocky precipices on all sides.
- The rock is adjacent to a bend in the river containing a very deep stretch of water known as the Devil’s Pool.
- The rock itself is impressive enough, but when one considers that a keep also stood upon it, to a height of 3 storeys, the viability of the site as an impregnable defensive location becomes clear.

The castle.
- Once you’ve clambered down the slope to the base of the rock and then climbed to the top of it you will no doubt appreciate the practical and enterprising nature of the medieval castle designers and builders as you ponder the sheer logistics of building a stone tower some 50 - 60 ft high on top of such a feature with only manual labour...a formidable task indeed.
- The structure was used for some 300 years, with some fascinating events taking place there during this period.
- The keep was very small, measuring only 18ft x 10ft internally with walls 6 ½ ft thick occupying the North end of the Rock, while a courtyard measuring 40ft x 24ft within walls stood on the South portion into which was an entrance gate on the river side. The keep rose to three storeys in height.
- There is a rampart to the West of the base of the rock, about 30 ft out whose purpose has not yet been determined. This still stands to a height of 6ft today.

The artistic reconstruction by Andrew Spratt shows how the castle may have looked in its prime.
- Note the defensive hoarding, which allowed defenders to drop material upon attackers at the base of the keep.
- Access to the keep would be at first floor level from within the courtyard and access to the courtyard gate would be a hazardous journey for attackers around the narrow base of the keep, which was effectively protected from the hoarding above.
- Tradition states that a wet ditch surrounded the whole.
Close by the Castle, is a small graveyard which was the burial place for the Gunns of Cattaig and Dalnaglaton...

- Here, near the cemetery wall, the ground plunges into a gorge.
- The cemetery is shaped like an arrowhead.

Alexander Gunn tenant Dalnaglaton died 29 June 1765 Aged 77 Years
Janet Mcloud His Spouse
The burial place of George, John, & Aeneas Gunns his children

Jemima Gunn died 3 January 1863 aged 3 weeks
Helen Ann Gunn Died 1 July 1873 aged 19
Lizzie Gunn Died 21 December 1874 aged 14
Is a small village mid-way between Wick and Thurso, and lies at the end of Loch Watten which is famous for its fishing.

- The village is within the parish of Watten, which has the Parish of Bower to the north, that of Wick to the east, that of Latheron to the south and that of Halkirk to the west.
- There are no market-towns or other towns in the parish, and the nearest market-town is in Wick, a distance of eight miles.
- The amount of population by the census of 1811 was 1109; by that of 1821, 1158; and by that of 1831, 1234...since 1831 the population has decreased, chiefly from the great size of some of the farms, the introduction of sheep and etc.
- The crops that are grown in the parish are oats, bear, potatoes, turnips, and hay.

The parish church lies in the north-east extremity of the parish...

- The date of its erection is unknown.
- It appears from the session records to have been repaired in 1714.
- Since that period, it has received several repairs, and was propped with wooden supports, a couple of years ago.
- Now it is in a very bad state.
- It may accommodate from 700 to 800 persons.
- The parochial registers have been regularly kept since 1701, but there are not many.

Famous as the Birthplace of "Alexander Bain" inventor of the Electric Printing Telegraph and the Electric Pendulum Clock.

A military camp was built in Watten during World War II in early 1943, and at the end of the war this became POW Camp 165.

- This had been described as "Britain's most secretive prisoner of war camp" because many prominent Nazis were moved there from POW Camp 21 at Comrie in Perthshire.
- The camp closed in 1948.

Our ancestors, Donald Gunn & Margaret Keith

Donald's g.g grandparents... 
- 1762...moved from Wick to Tails of Watten.
- Their last 5 children (including Peter Gunn, Donald's g. grandparents) were born there.
- 1774...moved to Auckengill.