



Girnigoe

Newsletter of the Clan Sinclair Society

No 8 - September 1997

HALKIRK GAMES

As has become our custom, the Society manned a tent at the Halkirk Games to which all Society members, and prospective members, were cordially invited.

Margaret, Viscountess Thurso was Chieftain of the games, with her son the 3rd Viscount Thurso, Malcolm, Earl of Caithness, our Clan Chieftain, and his son Lord Berriedale in attendance. For much of the day, Lord Caithness and Lord Berriedale chatted to visitors in the Society tent.

Also in attendance were two overseas visitors, Gordon Sinclair-Flaws and John Sinclair.

Souvenirs, including Iain Sutherland's booklet about Sinclair and Girnigoe castles were on sale.

Overall, the day was a great success with many visitors and Society Members dropping in.

Annual General Meeting.

The Annual General Meeting was held on Sunday 27 July 1997 in the Ross Institute, chaired by our Honorary President and Clan Chieftain, Malcolm Earl of Caithness.

Mr Roger Poynton from Leicester had written to ask if the Society should consider publishing the names of members so that members could exchange information. It was noted that since members had not been specifically asked if their addresses could be published, it would be improper to publish them. It was suggested that a tick box on the Membership Application/Renewal form would be an appropriate means of asking the membership.

Plans for a millenium gathering were also discussed, for which see later.

A small, but steady growth in membership, was noted.

A donation of £577 resulting from our January fashion show was noted, with a bank balance of £689.72 at year end noted.

Following the AGM, Society members crossed the road to the Ulbster Arms for an excellent meal.

Noss Head Lighthouse Cottages.

In a marvellous development, Manchester based hotelier Ian Sinclair has completed the purchase of the cottages and land around Noss Head Lighthouse from the factors.

Current plans are for himself and his wife, Joan, to move north to live in one of the cottages, with other cottages on the site available for use by volunteers working on the nearby Castles Sinclair and Girnigoe.

Other buildings on the site could house a permanent Clan Sinclair museum.

The thirty acres of land around the lighthouse would also make an ideal tented village and caravan site for the Millenium Gathering.

Watch this space.

MILLENIUM GATHERING

Plans are now afoot for a millennium Sinclair gathering in Caithness. Our Clan Chief, Malcolm Earl of Caithness has written to Chairmen of Clan Sinclair Associations worldwide to enlist their support.

Millenium Events

Provisional plans for the millennium gathering are to build the programme around the Halkirk Highland Games.

Plans already pencilled in include a welcome for Society Members in London by Lord Thurso and the Earl of Caithness, with a visit to the House of Lords.

Moving north, the gathering proper will start with the Halkirk games (last Saturday in July), with lectures, receptions, visits to historic sites,

including Sinclair Castles and possibly a visit over the Pentland Firth to Orkney.

We hope, Clan Societies and Associations overseas will respond positively to our initiative and join with us in the homeland of the Sinclairs in 2000.

Plans are firming up and it is hoped we can publish a draft itinerary in the not too distant future.

Meantime, volunteers are needed to assist the local committee to plan and man the events, so please don't hesitate to come forward and help make the Gathering the success it deserves to be

Auction Sale

As part of our continuing efforts to raise money for the restoration of Castles we will be holding an auction sale.

This will be on Thursday 27 November 1997 at the Park Hotel, Thurso, Caithness.

The committee is now hard at work gathering items for sale, but additional items and extra help on the night will always be very welcome.

Please support us if you can.

Which Sinclair Are You?

In the last issue of Girnigoe, we reproduced extracts from Roland William St. Clair's book "St. Clairs of the Isles" (published 1898), which chronicled the genealogy of Sinclairs of Stirkoke, Sinclairs of Ulbster, Sinclairs of Lybster, Reay, and the Sinclairs of Achingale and Newton.

The Sinclairs Of Stirkoke

- I In 1587 **DAVID SINCLAIR** obtained a Crown charter of Stirkoke and Alterwall, in which he is designed "filio naturali quond. Joannis Magistri Cathanensis," and in 1588 he received letters of legitimation. He died cir. 1595. leaving a son John, as also a natural son, Colonel George Sinclair, who was slain in an expedition to Norway in 1612.
- II **JOHN SINCLAIR OF STIRKOK** fell in fight at Thurso in 1612. It is uncertain whether he had any issue.

III **FRANCIS SINCLAIR, LAIRD OF STIRKOE** in 1624. was a natural son of George III., 43rd Earl of Caithness by (semble) Barbara Mearns. Stirkoke married Margaret Williamson, by whom he had:-

1. **Francis**, his successor.
2. **John**.
3. **Gustavus**.
4. **Marjory**, fifth wife of Donald, first Lord Reay.
5. **Anne**, married Colonel Francis Sinclair of Scrabster, son of the first Assery.

In about 1621 he fought a duel with his relative Sir Wm. Sinclair of Mey.

IV **FRANCIS SINCLAIR OF STIRKOE** married in 1658, Anne, eldest daughter of Patrick Sinclair of Ulbster. His mother and his 'uncle,' Francis Sinclair of Northfield were parties to the marriage contract. Francis Sinclair had four sons and a daughter:-

1. **Patrick**, eldest son in 1676.
2. **John**, who succeeded.
3. **George**, called the second son, who in 1673-5 had a charter to Sibster-Wick.
4. **Charles** of Bilbster, who had the unenviable sobriquet of "Earl of Hell". He married, first, Katharine, daughter of George Sinclair of Barrock; and secondly, Mary Dunbar. He had issue:-
 1. **Fennella**, married to Donald Sinclair of Olig.
 2. **Jane**, married John Gibson, minister of Evie, Orkney

V **JOHN SINCLAIR** was served heir to his father in 1681, and died about 1706. He married Margaret, daughter of Sir Jas. Sinclair of Mey, and had two sons:-

1. **Francis**.
2. **George**, successively of Stirkoke.

VI **FRANCIS SINCLAIR** had several daughters, of whom FRANCES, married Bernard Clunes, merchant in Cromarty, and had issue.

Having no sons, Francis Sinclair disposed the estate to his brother George in 1610. Some litigation ensued between the daughter Frances Clunes and her uncle with regard to the lands, but under a submission they were awarded to him as heir-male.

VII **GEORGE SINCLAIR OF STIRKOE** married Isabella Strahan, and died in 1744, leaving three sons and two daughters:-

1. **Charles**, apparent in 1768. 2. **FRANCIS**, shipmaster in Wick.
2. **Elizabeth**, m. Geo. Smith in Dunnett.
3. **Helen**, m. John Sinclair of Sibster.

VIII **CHARLES SINCLAIR OF STIRKOE** married Elizabeth, daughter of Alexander Sinclair of Olig, and had an only daughter:-

1. **Katharine Sinclair Of Stirkoke**, who resided and died at Scorraclett, unmarried.

The Sinclairs Of Ulbster

The ancestor of this family was William Sinclair, first Laird of Mey, second son of George II., 42nd Earl of Caithness. His elder brother John having with his connivance been imprisoned by his father in Castle Girnigo, he was, on the occasion of a visit to the dungeon of the Master, laid hold of by him and crushed to death in an iron embrace. The event occurred in 1572 or 1573, and prevented him from legitimatising by subsequent marriage either of his two natural sons Patrick and John. The mother of the former was Margaret, daughter of James Mowat of Balquhollie, and of the latter was Lucy, daughter of Gordon of Gight. Letters of legitimation passed the Great Seal on 20th June, 1567, for "Patricio et Magistro Joanni Sinclair filiis naturalibus quondam Willelmi Sinclair de Mey."

I **PATRICK SINCLAIR, FIRST OF ULBSTER**, got a disposition of these lands in 1596 from his "cousin" George, 43rd Earl of Caithness, and dying, without issue, was succeeded by his brother.

II **JOHN SINCLAIR OF ULBSTER**, who was a man of education and ability. His name is invariably prefixed by “Mr.” or “Maister,” a term usually applied to pedagogues, preachers, notaries, and the like. In 1601 the General Assembly planted ministers in the families of the Catholic nobles, and Lord Gordon, eldest son of the Marquis of Huntly, and the Master of Caithness were allotted to the care of two pedagogues, one being John Sinclair, who was compelled to declare himself an adherent of the reformed faith. That John Sinclair the pedagogue was afterwards Mr. John Sinclair of Ulbster is clear, for in a letter from him to his “uncle” George Sinclair of Mey, in 1604, we find that he and the Master of Caithness lived in the family of the Marquis of Huntly at Bogg Gight; and in regard to the Master he writes: “always the Mr. is verie weill, God be prayseit, and commends him heartily to you.” John Sinclair was twice married: first, to Jean Chisholm, daughter to the Laird of Straglass, and secondly, to Katharine Stewart. By his first marriage he had two sons and a daughter -

1. **Patrick**, his successor.
2. **George**, a merchant in Leith.
3. **Henrietta**, married the Rev. Wm. Abernethy (son of John, Bishop of Caithness) of Halkirk 1627, and of Thurso in 1636.

By his second wife Ulbster had a son and two daughters:-

4. **John** of Tannach and Brims, who served in the German wars, and in 1660 bought Brims from the heirs of the first Sinclairs of Dunbeath. He married Ann Goldman, and had -
 1. **John**, afterwards of Ulbster.
5. **William** of Thrumster, married Margaret, daughter of Jas. Innes of Thursater. His wife had Oust in liferent. He had a son:-
 1. **William**, who in 1719 disposed Oust to John Sinclair of Brims. He married Jean, natural daughter of Sir George Sinclair of Bilbster and Clyth (Bart.).
6. **Charles**.
7. **Jean**, married, first, Francis Sinclair of Dun; and secondly, David Sinclair of Southdun.
8. **Elizabeth**, married Wm. Sinclair of Rattar.

John Sinclair of Tannach had two natural sons, one of whom was James, probably James Sinclair “in Lythmore” and the same James Sinclair who in 1702 obtained from his “brother,” John of Ulbster and Brims, a wadset of Holbornhead, Uttersquoy, and Sandiquoy.

III **PATRICK SINCLAIR OF ULBSTER** was served heir to his father John in 1640, and in 1647 married Elizabeth, daughter of John McKay of Strathy and Dirlot. He had two sons and seven daughters:-

1. **John**, who succeeded.
2. **Sir George Sinclair** of Bilbster and Clyth (Bart.), married Jean, daughter of Wm. Sinclair of Dunbeath, and had no issue. He had three natural daughters:-
 1. **Jean**, m. Wm. Sinclair, yr. of Thrumster.
 2. **Mary**.
 3. **Anne**
3. **Anne**, married Francis Sinclair of Stirkoke.
4. **Elizabeth**, married in 1660 John Sinclair of Brabster.
5. **Mary**, married in 1675 Sir Robert Dunbar of Northfield.
6. **Isabel**, married in 1673 George, eldest son of James Sinclair of Assery.
7. **Margaret**, married in 1679 her cousin-german Hugh McKay of Cairnsloch, son of John McKay of Skerray. 6. **JEAN**, married Angus McKay, apparent of Bighouse.
8. **Katharine**, married James Sinclair of Lybster.

In 1660 Ulbster and his son John acquired various lands by purchase from the Earl of Caithness, and others from Lord Glenorchy in 1676.

IV **JOHN SINCLAIR OF ULBSTER** married Janet, daughter of Wm. Sinclair of Rattar. Having no family he settled the estates in 1709 by an entail, the first substitute being John of Brims, eldest son of John Sinclair of Tannach and Brims.

V **JOHN SINCLAIR OF BRIMS AND ULBSTER** was twice married, first to Jean, daughter of Munro of Culrain; and secondly, to Jean Cores. By his first marriage he had issue:-

1. **John**, his successor.
2. **Patrick** of Brims. Tradition ascribes to him an intrigue with a daughter of James Sinclair of Uttersquoy (probably natural brother of his father). She disappeared mysteriously, and was supposed to have been spirited away by Brims, and her body concealed in the castle, which consequently had the reputation of being haunted. Patrick left the country, and is said to have enlisted in the Guards.
3. **James** of Holbornhead. This property, which was disposed to him by his father, he sold to Robert Sinclair of Geise.
4. **Gustavus**, a merchant in Leith.
5. **Sidney**, eldest daughter.
6. **Jean** or Janet, married first, Benj. Dunbar, yr. of Hempriggs.
7. **Elizabeth**, married John McKay, second of Strathy.

VI **JOHN SINCLAIR OF ULBSTER**, sometimes younger of Brims, married Henrietta, daughter of Geo. Brodie of Brodie, and died in 1736. He had:-

1. **George**, his successor.
2. **James** of Harpsdale. He married first Marjory, daughter of David Sinclair of Southdun; secondly, Mally Sutherland of Spinningdale; and thirdly, Katharine, daughter of Alex. Sinclair of Lybster; and died s.p.
3. **Capt. John**, married Elizabeth, widow of John Wilmer.
4. **Emilia**, married John Sutherland of Forse.

VII **GEORGE SINCLAIR OF ULBSTER** married Janet, daughter of Lord Strathnaver. He died in 1776, having had:-

1. **John**, who succeeded.
2. **Helen**, married Alex. Campbell of Barcaldine, whose daughter Jane married James, Earl of Caithness in 1784.
3. **Mary**, married James Homerigg of Gamalshiels.
4. **Janet**, married Wm. Baillie, Lord Polkemmet of the Court of Session.

VIII **SIR JOHN SINCLAIR OF ULBSTER** was born in 1754, and in 1788 was created a baronet, with remainder in default of male issue to the male issue of his daughters.

The Sinclairs Of Kirk And Myrelandhorn

I **HENRY SINCLAIR IN CANISBAY** in 1592 got a charter from the Earl of Caithness of part of Kirk and Myrelandhorn. In 1582 there is mention in the Earl of Caithness' testament of Henry Sinclair, his servitor, who may have been the Henry Sinclair of 1592. Henry Sinclair of Kirk had two sons:-

1. **James**.
2. **David** in Orlig.

II **JAMES SINCLAIR** got a charter from his father in 1627, and was succeeded by his brother.

III **DAVID SINCLAIR**, only lawful brother, got a precept of clare constat in 1667, and was succeeded by his son John.

IV **JOHN SINCLAIR** got a disposition from his father in 1669, and a charter of novo-damus from the Bishop in 1680. John Sinclair was "servitor to Sir Wm. Sharp, Keeper of the Signet," and he afterwards appears to have been a merchant in Edinburgh.

In 1643 Wm. Sinclair, elder, merchant in Thurso, got a wadset from James Sinclair; and had a son Thomas, who again had a son William. They adjudged Kirk and Myreland, and in 1680 Wm. Sinclair disposed these lands to John Sinclair, who sold them to John Sinclair of Barrock. Nisbet mentions the arms of "Thomas, lawful son to Wm. Sinclair, merchant in Thurso, of the family of Caithness." These may have been the same Sinclairs who appraised Kirk and Myreland, and who

may have been connected with the Sinclairs descended from Henry Sinclair in Canisbay, who got the lands from the Earl of Caithness.

The Sinclairs Of Lybster, Reay

Before the rise of the Sinclairs of Lybster in Latheron, there were Sinclairs of Lybster in Reay, dating from at least 1636. Their origin is uncertain, but it is conjectured that they may have been the descendants of Henry Sinclair, who died about 1614, a natural son of John, Master of Caithness, and who got from his brother, the Earl of Caithness, a wadset of Downreay and part of Lybster. Or possibly this family may have been of the Sinclairs of Dunbeath, who held Downreay and other lands in Reay.

In 1636 there is mention of David Sinclair of Lybster, and in 1638 of Wm. Sinclair of Lybster, who then appears as witness to a deed by Oliver Sinclair of Spittal, son of Richard of Brims, and grandson of Wm. Sinclair of Dunbeath. David and William were probably brothers, each inheriting a portion of Lybster. William had a daughter Margaret, who as heir to her father executed a remunciation in 1648, in favour of her cousin, James Sinclair of Lybster.

I. **DAVID SINCLAIR OF LYBSTER** had two lawful sons:-

1. **James**, fiar of Lybster in 1637, who died between 1648 and 1661. He married Margaret Macleod, and had:-
 - a. David, who is mentioned down to 1670.
 - b. Barbara, married Donald Campbell, Elder in Thurso.
2. **Robert**, who with consent of his brother James, in 1640, married Barbara, daughter of George Sinclair in Downreay, the brother of Richard Sinclair of Brims, and son of Wm. Sinclair of Dunbeath.

The Sinclairs Of Achingale And Newton

I. **WILLIAM SINCLAIR**, first of Achingale and Newton, was the son of Alex. Sinclair of Sixpenny, who is thought to be identical with Alex., eldest son of Wm. Sinclair of Hoy, of whom there is otherwise no particular account. Alex. Sinclair married in 1697 Beatrice, only daughter of Geo. Sinclair, second son of Jas. Sinclair, first of Lybster, and she and her husband, on the supposition that the latter was son of Wm. of Hoy, stood in the relation of cousins. By this marriage Alex. Sinclair had several sons and daughters, among whom were -

1. **William**, mentioned in 1733 as second son.
2. **Francis**.
3. **Sidney**.
4. **Margaret**, eldest daughter, married in 1722 Alex. Calder of Achingale.

II. **WILLIAM SINCLAIR OF ACHINGALE** married in 1738 Elizabeth, daughter of Sir James Sinclair of Dunbeath. Sir James had acquired the right of reversion of the wadsets of Achingale held by the Calders; and about 1738 or 1740 he had redeemed the lands, which he thereafter sold to Wm. Sinclair, by whom a Crown charter was expedite in 1752. Wm. Sinclair had a son and two daughters:-

1. **Alexander**.
2. **Janet**.
3. **Margaret**.

III. **ALEXANDER SINCLAIR OF ACHINGALE**, who was a merchant in Jamaica, succeeded his father, and was infert in 1768. He died without issue.

IV. **JANET SINCLAIR** succeeded her brother, and died unmarried in 1783.

V. **MARGARET SINCLAIR** succeeded her sister, and married in 1798 Alex. Sinclair, a son of Alex. Sinclair, tenant in Houstry, Halkirk, who had been for some time in Jamaica. In 1804 they

sold the lands to Wm. Sinclair of Freswick for £7,000. There was no issue of the marriage, and the family of Sinclair of Achingale is presumably extinct.

This newsletter depends on contributions and news from members to keep it viable. Please send your news and articles to the Editor.

Issue Schedule. Newsletters will normally be issued approximately quarterly at the end of each month shown below. Additional special issues may also be produced from time to time.

June
September

November
March

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