

ON THE EARLDOM OF CAITHNESS

" The earldom of Caithness was possessed for many generations by the Norwegian Earls of Orkney. They held the Islands of Orkney under the King of Norway, according to Norwegian custom by which the title of Jarl or Earl was a personal title. They held the earldom of Caithness under the King of Scotland and its tenure was in accordance with the laws of Scotland.

We find from the Orkneyinga Saga that during this period the Orkney Islands were frequently divided into 2 portions, and each half held by different members of the Norwegian family, who each bore the title of earl. We likewise find that the earldom of Caithness was at such times also frequently divided, and each half held by different Earls of Orkney, though whether both bore the title of Earl of Caithness does not appear.

It is unnecessary for our purpose to go further back than the rule of Thorfinn, Earl of Orkney, who died about A.D. 1056, and undoubtedly held the whole of Orkney and the entire earldom of Caithness for a long period.

He had two sons Paul & Erlend who after his death ruled jointly without dividing the earldoms and their descendants may be termed the line of Paul and the line of Erlend.

After their death the islands were divided between Hakon, son of Paul and Magnus son of Erlend, each bearing the title of earl. The latter was the great earl known at St. Magnus. After his death Earl Hakon appears to have possessed the whole.

Earl Hakon had two sons, Harald Slettmali and Paul, who again divided the islands, each having an earl's title, but Earl Harald appears to have held the whole of Caithness from the king of Scots. On his death Earl Paul obtained possession of the whole.

In the meantime the line of Erlend had failed in the male line in the person of Earl Magnus, but his sister Gunhild married a Norwegian called Kol, and had by him a son Kali who claimed a share of the islands ~~and~~ when the King of Norway gave him the name of Rognwald, an earl's title and divided the islands between him and earl Paul.

Earl Paul's sister Margaret had married Maddad, Earl of Athol and had by him a son Harald, and by a revolution which took place Earl Paul abdicated and his nephew Harald was made earl in his place and shared the islands with Earl Rognwald



Caithness Earls. cont.

the latter then went on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and in his absence Malcom IV made Erlend Ungi, son of Harald Slettmal, Earl of Caithness and gave him half of Caithness, Earl Harald Maddison having the other half.

Earl Rognwald then returns and on Erlend's death Orkney and ~~Shetland~~ Caithness were shared between him and Earl Harald.

The line of Erlend again failed on the death of Earl Rognwald who left an only daughter Ingigerd who m. a Nor: Eric and had 3 sons, Harald Ungi, Magnus Mangi and Rognwald and 3 daus:

Earl Harald now possessed Orkney and Caithness but soon after the King of Norway gave Harald Ungi and earl's title with the  $\frac{1}{2}$  of the Os, and by agreement with Earl Harald ~~the whole of the~~ King William the Lion gave Harald the half of Caithness which had belonged to Earl Rognwald, but they afterwards quarrelled and E. Harald Ungi was slain by the other Earl Harald who again possessed the whole.

Owing to the mutilation of the Bishop of Caithness ~~which~~ ~~had belonged to Earl Rognwald~~ by Earl Harald, he was attacked by W. the Lion in 1201 and only allowed to retain Caithness on payment of 2000 merks of silver, while the district of Sutherland was taken from him and given to Hugo Freskin of Moravia.

1264 Earl Harald died in 1206 and was succ: by his son David who died 1214 when his brother John became E. of Orkney and C. Fordun tells us that K. Will: made a treaty of peace with him that year and took his daughter as a hostage, but the burning of Bishop Adam brought K. Alex: II down upon E. John who was obliged to give up part of his lands into the hands of the king, which however he redeemed the following year by paying a large sum of money. and by his death in 1231 the line of Paul & Erlend again came to an end.

In 1232 we find Magnus son of Gillebride, Earl of Angus called E. of Caithness and the earldom remained in this family till between 1320 and 1329, when Magnus E. of O. & C: died; but during this time it is clear that these earls only possessed one  $\frac{1}{2}$  of Cai: & the other  $\frac{1}{2}$  appears in the possess: of the De Moravia family, for Freskin Lord of Duffus, who married Johanna who possessed Strathnaver in her own right and died before 1269 had 2 daus: Mary M. to ~~William de Federett~~ Sir Reginald Cheyne and Christian M to William de Federett and each of these daus: had 1 4th part of Caithness, for William de Federett resigns his 4th to Sir Reginald Cheyne, who then appears in possession of one half of Caithness. (Chart of Moray Robertson's Index) These daughters probably inherited the  $\frac{1}{2}$  of Caithness through their mother Johanna.

Gillebride having called one of his sons by the Norwegian name of Magnus, indicates that he had a Norwegian mother.



" We are then told that Melbrigda Tóhn, or of the tooth, a Scottish Earl, and Earl Sigurd made an arrangement to meet in a certain place with forty men each in order to come to an agreement regarding their differences. On the appointed day Sigurd, suspicious of treachery on the part of the Scots, caused eighty men to be mounted on forty horses. When Earl Melbrigda saw this he said to his men ' Now we have been treacherously dealt with by Earl Sigurd, for I see two men's legs on one side of each horse, and I believe there are thus twice as many as the beasts. But let us be brave and kill each his man before we die.' Then they made themselves ready. When Sigurd saw it, he also decided on his plan, and said to his men, ' Now let one half of your number dismount and attack them from behind when the troops meet, while we shall ride at them with all our speed to break their battle array. There was hard fighting immediately, and it was not long till Earl Melbrigda fell, and all his men with him. Earl Sigurd and his men fastened their heads to the saddle straps in bravado, and so they rode home triumphing in their victory. As they were proceeding, Earl Sigurd, intending to kick at his horse with his foot, struck the calf of his leg against a tooth protruding from Earl Melbrigda's head, which scratched him slightly; but it soon became swollen and painful, and he died of it. Sigurd the Powerful was buried in a mound at Ekkialsbakki.

(8, This account of Sigurd's death which is more detailed than that in the Orkneyinga Saga, is taken from the Flatey book ( see Anderson's Orkneyinga Saga, P 204). The word Bakki means in Icelandic the bank of a river; and Ellialsbakki has usually been assumed to be the river Oikel, which separatesutherlandshire from Ross-shire. Mr Anderson, whose opinion is entitled to weight, takes this view, and fortifies it by a very plausible identification of Sigurd's grave on its north bank. The place he mentions is, however, not on the north bank of the river Oikel, but on the Dornoch Firth and he is obliged to admit that this identification of Ekkialsbakki is inconsistent with other passages. A comparison with the accounts of Sigurd's conquest shows that it must have been at or near the southern boundary of Moray and the passage in chapter lxxii where Swein Asleif's son goes to Moray and thence by Ekkialsbakki to Athol points to the Findhorn, which is remarkable for a high bank, has an estuary which ships could enter and would be the natural route to Athol. The resemblance between the name Oikel and Ellial is merely accidental. The battle may have been fought near Forres, & the sculptured ~~stone~~ pillar known as Sweno's stone a record of it. Its connection with the name of Sweno is no older than Hecotr Boece, and it seems to tell the tale-----



(description of carving on pillar) ----- when digging in a mound close to the pillar in 1813, eight human skeletons were found (Stuart Sculptured Stones. P. 9.) and in 1827 there was dug out of a steep bank above the Findhorn a coffin of large dimensions, composed of flagstones containing the remains of a human skeleton. N.S.A. vol. xlii, p. 222.

(8) This account of Sigurd's death which is more detailed than that in the Orkneyinga Saga, is taken from the Flatey book (see Anderson's Orkneyinga Saga, p. 204). The work Baki means in Icelandic the bank of a river; and Mikilbaki has usually been assumed to be the river Oikel, which separates Orkney and Shetland from Ross-shire. Mr. Anderson whose opinion is entitled to weight, takes this view, and fortifies it by a very plausible identification of Sigurd's grave on its north bank. The place he mentions is, however, not on the north bank of the river Oikel, but on the Donoch. And he is obliged to admit that this identification of Mikilbaki is inconsistent with other passages. A comparison with the account of Sigurd's conquest shows that it must have been at or near the southern boundary of Moray and the passage in chapter lxxiii where Swain Asolf's son goes to Moray and thence by Mikilbaki to Athol points to the Findhorn, which is remarkable for a high bank, has an estuary which ships could enter and would be the natural route to Athol. The resemblance between the name Oikel and Mikil is merely accidental. The battle may have been fought near Forres, & the sculptured cross pillar known as Swain's stone a record of it. Its connection with the name of Swain is no older than Hector Boece, and it seems to tell the tale -----



Duncan jarl of Caithness, had brought that district to the Norwegian earls of Orkney. But although they appear to have assumed Caithness as now forming an integral part of their dominions as Norwegian earls, and maintained possession of it as such, the kings of Alban seem also to have asserted a right to a sovereignty over it as one of the dependencies of their kingdom. By Greluga, Earl Thorfinn had five sons, three of whom ~~successively~~ were successively earls of Orkney. Harvard succ: him and was slain by his wife, and we find that when Liotr, the second brother, was E. of Orkney, another brother Skuli, went to Scotland and obtained the right to the earldom of Caithness from the king of the Scots. This led to a conflict between the brothers, in which Skuli was supported by the Scottish king and a Scottish earl called Magbiodr, and a battle ensued in which the Scots were defeated and Skuli slain. Earl Liotr then took possession of Caithness and remained at war with the Scots, when Earl Magbiodr again came from Scotland with an army and met him at Skidamyre in Caithness, where a hotly contested battle took place, in which Liotr was victorious, but was mortally wounded. Hlodver, the only surviving brother, succ: to the earldom but died of sickness and was buried at Hofn, in Caithness. Sigurd, his son who succ: him about the year 980, was and was, we are told, a powerful man and a great warrior. He kept Caithness by main force from the Scots and went every summer in war expeditions to the Sudreys or W. Isles, to Scotland and to Ireland.

Soon after Sigurd's succession, we find Finleikr, a ~~Scotch~~ Scotch jarl, entering Caithness with a large army and challenging earl Sigurd to meet him in battle at the same Skidamyre in Caithness where Magbiodr had met the former earl. He was no doubt the Finlaic, son of Ruaidhri, Mormaer of Moreb or Moray, whose death p. 375 Tigernac records in the year 1020 and Magbiodr was probably the Maelbrigdi who is mentioned as his brother, and had been the previous Mormaer. Sigurd drew an army together, but it was p375 inferior in numbers until he obtained the aid of the 'Bondir' or allodial possessors of Orkney, by restoring to them the full right to their allodial lands, which had been taken from them by Earl Einar. and then went to battle with Earl Finleikr, whom he entirely defeated. Sigurd seems to have followed up his victory by overrunning the provinces north of the Spey as we find him in 989 in possession of the four provinces of Moray, Ross Sudrland or Sutherland and Dalriada.

Note 52 Nial's Saga Coll de Rebus Alb. p337. The sons in which the sons of Nial fought with the sons of Moldan from Dunshaugh Bay was probably Loch Broom.

P. 376 and thus, while the Danes gave kings to Dublin, Waterford and Northumbria, the Norwegians gave Earls to Orkney, which they colonised and possessed the Innse Gall, Sudreys, or Western Isles -- the island of Man appearing to have been a bone of contention between the two



This is clear from his also becoming Earl of Orkney which the King of Scots could not have given him, Gillebride died in 1200, so that Magnus must have been born before that date, and about that time of Earl Harald Ungi who had half of Caithness and died in 1198. Magnus is a name peculiar to this line, as the great Earl Magnus belonged to it and Harald Ungi had a brother Magnus. The probability is that the half of Caithness which belonged to the Angus family was that half usually possessed by the earls of the line of Erlend, and was given by King Alexander with the title of Earl to Magnus, as the son of one of Earl Harald Ungi's sisters, while Johanna, through whom the Moray family inherited the other half was, as indicated by her name, the daughter of John Earl of Caithness of the line of Paul, who had been kept by the king as hostage and given in marriage to Freskin de Moravia.

Skene Vol 1 P. 326

In the meantime Olaf the White, the Norwegian King of Dublin had a son by his wife Audur the wealthy----- who was called Thorstein the Red, and he appears on his father's death to have commenced making piratical expeditions, infesting Scotland far & wide and usually obtaining victory. His attacks were directed against the northern Provinces and he is said in the Islands Landnamabok to have conquered 'Katanes and Sudrland' or Caithness & Sutherland, Ross and Moray and more then half of Scotland and to have reigned over these districts until he was betrayed by the Scotch and slain in battle.....

Thorstein's kingdom however, lasted only one year. The Pictish chronicle refers to it when it says that the northmen passed an entire year in Pictavia, and the Ulster Annals record in 875 that Ostin or Thorstein, son of Amlaiph, King of the Northmen was treacherously slain by the people of Alban.

Vol 1 374.

' but if Kenneth ( mac Alpin) did not add permanently to his kingdom in the S. we find that the districts beyond the Spey on the North had again fallen under the dominion of the Norwegian Earl of Orkney. The earl who ruled at this time was sigurd ' the stout'. He was the son of Holdver, the previous earl of Orkney, whose father Thorfinn, called the 'Skullcleaver' was the son of earl Einar, and by his marriage with Greluga, daughter of



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*Thursfield (in red)*

East. Duncan - Isaac

Eina -

Thurfinn = Fulod.

5 sons!

#lodser - Harvard - List. Skuli, asbjorn.

asked by Skuli by  
Harvard - List

Signe the stout at Skiller.

Skuli: had obtained the title of Earl from the King of Scots - I was slain by List to avert this from him

List succeeded by H. Lodser's

Brandon. Thurfinn son

of Signe the stout &  daughter of Harald the

Hist. Scot. Thompson.

1211. P. 124

1212 Adam. B. of C. odious to his people by reason of his rigorous  
exaction of tithes & at last they rose in rebellion & besieged his episcopal  
dwelling. The B. hemmed in by a furious multitude, unable to resist  
sent to the military lord of his district, the E. of D.C. praying him to  
come to his assistance. "Let the B. come to me & I will protect him"  
In the meantime the dwelling was fired & the unfortunate B.  
burned alive. Alex. received tidings of this atrociously while  
on journey to England. — returned to C. & inflicted on them a  
punishment more terrible than their crime. 400 executed  
& emasculated their children. Forster. lib. IX. c. 37.

The E. servants murdered him in his house & set it on fire

C.S.  
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Sigurd died in ——— He was succeeded  
by his son Galvorn, who reigned only for one winter &  
died childless, & then Earl Rogwald, who had  
~~been~~ sent his son Halland as Earl, but Halland  
resigned the earldom, which was then given to  
another son Finar.

Ancient Earls of ~~Brit~~ <sup>Galles</sup> says Thurstain became  
possessor of Caithness after the death of Sigurd —

Finar was the father of Thorsfinn — called the  
skull-splitter — ~~who~~ Thorsfinn married the daughter  
Gaelad, daughter of Earl Duncan of Caithness &  
native chieftain — & by her he had 5 sons —

Earl Duncan was married to Gwa daughter  
of Thurstain the Red — (son of Olaf, King of Dublin)  
Duncan then, must have reigned in the right of his  
wife Gwa — he ruled for one year, & was succeeded by  
his 3rd son Pod —

Earl Paul's sister = brother & sister

H. Haddarson