

Clan Keith

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Clan Keith is a Scottish clan, whose chief historically held the hereditary title of Great Marischal of Scotland.^[1]

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History

Origins of the clan

The placename Keith comes from a Cumbric form of the Modern Welsh *coed* (“wood”).^[2]

A warrior of the Chatti tribe is said to have killed the Danish General Camus at the Battle of Barrie in 1010.^[1] For this valour Malcolm II of Scotland dipped three fingers into the blood of the dead and drew them down the warrior’s shield.^[1] The warrior was thereafter named *Marbhachair Chamuis* which meant the *Camus Slayer*.^[1] The chief of the Clan Keith has borne the same three lines on his shield ever since.^[1] It can be found as early as 1316 on the seal of Sir Robert de Keith.^[1]

King Malcolm’s victory at the Battle of Carham in 1018 brought him into possession of Lothian and the lands of Keith in Lothian were subsequently held by the Camus Slayer.^[1] It is from these lands that his progeny took their name.^[1]

Clan Keith

Ceiteach

Motto Dexter: *Quae amissa salva* (What has been lost is safe)

Sinister: *Veritas vincit* (Truth conquers)

On compartment: *They say: quhat they say: thay haif sayed: let thame say*

Slogan *A Keith, Veritas Vincit (also Truth Prevails)*

Profile

Region Lowlands and Highlands

District East Lothian, Aberdeenshire (lowlands), and Caithness (highlands)

Plant badge White Rose

Chief



James William Falconer Keith

14th Earl of Kintore

Seat Keith Hall, Aberdeenshire

Historic seat Keith Marischal House

Dunnottar Castle

Fetteresso Castle

Septs of Clan Keith

Austen, Austin, Cate, Cates, Dickson, Dixon, Dixson, Dick, Falconer, Faulkner, Harvey, Hackston, Haxton, Hervey, Hurrie, Hurry, Keath, Keech, Keeth, Keyth, Kite, Laird, Lumgair, MacKeith, Marshall, Ouston, Urie, Urry

Clan branches

Keith of Kintore (current chiefs)

Keith of Marischal (historic chiefs)

Allied clans

A Norman adventurer named Hervey married the native heiress of *Marbhachair* and in about 1150 David I of Scotland granted her a charter for the lands of Keith.^[1] In a charter of 1176 their son was styled as *Marischal of the King of Scots*.^[1] The Marischal was charged with the safety of the king's person within Parliament and was also custodian of the royal regalia.^[1]

Clan Forbes
Rival clans
Clan Irvine
Clan Gunn

Wars of Scottish Independence

In 1308 Robert the Bruce granted the royal Halfforest of Aberdeenshire to his friend, Robert de Keith.^[1] Here the Marischal built his castle.^[1] His nephew was William Keith of Galston who returned Bruce's heart to Melrose Abbey after the death of the Sir James Douglas at the Battle of Teba in Andalucia.^[1] Bruce confirmed to the family the hereditary office of marishcal by a charter of 1324 and Sir Robert de Keith had commanded the Scottish cavalry at the Battle of Bannockburn.^[1] The office was held upon the condition that they bore the ancient arms that they had inherited from *Marbhachair Chamuis*.^[1]

Sir Robert Keith, the Marishchal escorted the young David II of Scotland when he fled to France to escape the usurpation Edward Balliol.^[1]

15th century and clan conflicts

The Clan Keith were often at feud with the neighbouring Clan Irvine and in 1402 the Clan Irvine are said to have attacked and defeated an invading war party of the Clan Keith in what was known as the Battle of Drumoak.^[3]

Sir William Keith the Marischal who died in 1407 married the heiress of Sir Alexander Fraser and in doing so added great estates in Buchan, Kincardine and Lothian to his existing patrimony.^[1] William's brother, John Keith, married the Cheyne heiress which brought the Keiths massive estates in Inverugie as well as Inverugie Castle, which later became the seat of the clan chiefs.^[1] Three of Sir William Keith's children married children of Robert II of Scotland, while another daughter married Sir Adam Gordon, ancestor of the Earls of Huntly.^[1]

In 1458 the third Lord Keith was made Earl Marischal and was the only peer to be styled by his office of state.^[1]

A branch of the Clan Keith who inhabited Caithness fought at the Battle of Tannach (probably 1464) where they assisted the Clan Mackay against the Clan Gunn.^[4] They later fought another battle against the Gunns, known as the Battle of Champions (probably 1478). This battle was fought between twelve men of the Clan Gunn and twenty four men of the Clan Keith. All the Gunns, including the chief of the clan, were killed. However, the chief of the Clan Keith was soon after killed by the Gunns in a revenge attack.^[5]

16th and 17th centuries

William Keith, 3rd Earl of Marischal, along with the Earl of Glencairn invited John Knox the religious reformer back to Scotland in 1559.^[1] William Keith, 4th Earl Marischal founded the Marischal College in Aberdeen.^[1] George Keith, 5th Earl Marischal undertook the embassy to Denmark which resulted in the marriage of James VI of Scotland to Anne of Denmark.^[1]

After Charles II of England was crowned in 1651, William Keith, 7th Earl Marischal was captured and imprisoned in the Tower of London.^[1] He remained there until the Restoration when the king appointed him a Privy Councillor and later Lord Privy Seal as recompense for what he and his family had suffered in the royal cause.^[1] After Charles's coronation the Scottish crown jewels had been hidden on the Keith lands and as a result Marischal's brother, John Keith, was created Knight Marischal and Earl of Kintore.^[1]

18th century and Jacobite risings

George Keith, 8th Earl Marischal was appointed a Knight of the Thistle by James Francis Edward Stuart (the *Old Pretender*).^[1] During the Jacobite rising of 1745 the Clan Keith supported the Jacobite cause.^[1] As a result George Keith, 10th Earl Marischal along with his brother, James, forfeited their lands, castles and titles.^[1] However the two Keith brothers played a part in Continental affairs during the 18th century with the earl being one of the very few Jacobite Knights of the Garter.^[1] He also received the highest order in Prussia, the Black Eagle.^[1] While his brother, James, was given Russia's Imperial Order of St Andrew.^[1]



The ruins of Dunnottar Castle, a seat of the chiefs of Clan Keith

Modern history

In 1801 the Lord Lyon King of Arms recognised Keith of Ravelston and Dunnottar as representers of the Marischal Keiths and his nephew was dubbed Knight Marischal in 1822 for George IV's visit to Edinburgh that year.^[1]

The 9th Earl of Kintore was flamboyant and decimated the Kintore estates.^[1] However Ian Keith, 12th Earl of Kintore promoted the clan internationally and appointed a Seanchaí to preserve their history and traditions.^[1]

Chief

The current Chief of Clan Keith is James William Falconer Keith, 14th Earl of Kintore (b. 1976).

Castles

- Keith Marischal House, site of the original Barony of Keith, held by the family until the 18th century.
- Keith Hall estate in Aberdeenshire is the current seat of the chief of Clan Keith.^[1]
- Dunnottar Castle became the seat of the chief of Clan Keith in 1639 but is now ruined.
- Fetteresso Castle passed from the Clan Strachan to the Clan Keith chief, Earl Marischal during the early 14th century.

Notes and references

1. [^] *abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz aa ab ac ad ae af ag ah ai aj ak* Way, George and Squire, Romily. *Collins*

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2. ^ Taylor, Simon (2004), "Scandinavians in Central Scotland - By-place-names and their Context". pp. 131.
3. ^ irvinehistory.com. "Clan Irvine Brief History" (http://www.irvinehistory.com/Brief_History.htm). Retrieved 22 September 2013.
4. ^ Gordon, Sir Robert. (1580 - 1656. "Genealogical History of the Earldom of Sutherland". p.69.
5. ^ Mackay, Robert. "History of the House and Clan of the Name MacKay (1829). P.82. Quoting Gordon, Sir Robert. (1580 - 1656). "Genealogical History of the Earldom of Sutherland".

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External links

- Clan Keith Society, USA (<http://www.clankeithusa.org/>)
- Clan Keith Society, Canada (<http://www.clankeith.ca/>)
- The Clan Keith.com (<http://www.thekeithclan.com/>)
- Keith Highlanders Pipe Band, Official Pipe Band of Clan Keith (<http://www.khpb.org/>)

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