

SCOTTISH CLAN CONNECTION

Newsletter

CEANGAL CHLANN NA H-ALBA

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Remembering Michael Ancram: A Tribute to Clan Kerr's Chief

Michael Ancram, 13th Marquess of Lothian, Chief of Clan Kerr, and Life Peer Lord Kerr of Monteviot, passed away on October 1, 2024, at 79. Honored as the Chief of Clan Kerr and North America's honorary Chieftain of Clan Kerr/Carr, he was esteemed by Kerr organizations worldwide. Born Michael Andrew Foster Jude Kerr in 1945, he used the name Michael Ancram in daily life. A dedicated Conservative politician, he served in Northern Ireland and the British House of Lords. Although the ancestral Ferniehirst Castle is the Clan's historic stronghold, he allowed his younger brother, Lord Ralph Kerr, to reside there while he focused on

public service from Monteviot House and London. Married to Jane Fitzalan-Howard since 1975, he leaves behind three daughters—Clare, Mary, and Rose—and a legacy of clan leadership and political service. His successor as Clan Chief will be named according to clan tradition. He leaves a legacy of political dedication and clan stewardship.



Conservation Work Begins at Auchindoun Castle

Historic Environment Scotland (HES) has commenced vital conservation work at Auchindoun Castle, a remote and historically significant 15th-century L-Plan tower located in Moray, Scotland. This castle, once at the center of clan conflicts involving Clan Gordon and Clan Mackintosh, sits on rugged terrain just south of Dufftown, accessible only by foot. Due to its secluded location, a helicopter was required to deliver essential conservation materials such as scaffolding and equipment, ensuring that the preservation work could proceed without disruption.

Auchindoun Castle has witnessed centuries of Scottish history and clan feuds. Originally held by Clan Gordon, it became a focal point of tension, notably in 1592 when Clan Mackintosh retaliated against George Gordon, 1st Marquis of Huntly, who had killed their ally, James Stewart, the "Bonny Earl O'Moray." This attack left significant damage, which has contributed to the castle's ruin over time. Following the Battle of Glenlivet in 1594, James VI ordered Auchindoun and other Gordon strongholds to be dismantled. Stones from the castle were

later repurposed for nearby buildings, further contributing to its deterioration. HES's conservation project is part of its mission to protect Scotland's historic landmarks. A recent condition assessment revealed issues in the castle's high-level masonry, exacerbated by climate and aging. As the public body responsible for over 330 historic sites across Scotland, HES aims to stabilize Auchindoun's structure, which includes a central tower, curtain walls, and outbuildings like stables. Once restored, the goal is to safely reopen Auchindoun Castle to the public, allowing visitors to explore this Highland stronghold and its unique history within Scotland's rich heritage of clan legacy.



Modern Tech Unveils Culloden's Battlefield Secrets

The archaeological dig underway at Culloden Battlefield near Inverness combines advanced methods from recent Waterloo excavations with traditional techniques to delve deeper into the events of the 1746 battle. This pivotal battle, fought on April 16, 1746, saw Jacobite forces, loyal to Bonnie Prince Charlie, defeated by British government troops under the Duke of Cumberland. The tragic outcome left 1,600 men dead—most of them Jacobites—and marked the end of the Jacobite rising. Nearly 280 years later, Culloden remains one of Scotland's most significant historical sites, and this excavation promises fresh insights. The dig, organized by the National Trust for Scotland (NTS) and led by Derek Alexander, NTS head of Archaeological Services, is benefiting from the expertise of Professor Tony Pollard of the University of Glasgow. Pollard, who last excavated Culloden nearly two decades ago, is returning with newly refined techniques, many of which he developed during work at the Waterloo battlefield in Belgium. Pollard, who described his return as both exciting and meaningful, has previously uncovered artifacts at Culloden, including items displayed in the visitor center, offering tangible links to the people who fought in this iconic battle.

One focus area, the Field of the English, is being meticulously scanned with techniques adapted from Waterloo. Combining grid-based test pits with advanced metal detection allows archaeologists to pinpoint smaller items, such as buttons or musket balls, which might otherwise go unnoticed. The first find—a button unearthed by visitor assistant Lorne MacLeod—has sparked interest, suggesting the potential for more discoveries over the dig's course. Each artifact helps reveal details of battlefield tactics, movements, and personal stories, adding texture to historical records.

Previously, digs at Culloden have unearthed a shoe buckle believed to belong to the clan chieftain Donald Cameron of Lochiel, along with musket balls and grapeshot. These items reflect the intensity of the battle and offer glimpses into the lives of the Jacobites and government soldiers who fought there. The new techniques offer a way to explore



previously overlooked areas and reconsider battlefield strategies with heightened precision.

In addition to artifacts, this dig underscores the commitment of the National Trust for Scotland to respectful historical exploration. Culloden is a designated war grave, and the NTS emphasizes that all activities are conducted with a sense of reverence for those who lost their lives there. Ellen Fogel Walker, NTS estates and conservation manager, explains that Culloden is a “living landscape,” a site continuously shaped by both history and modern conservation efforts. The Trust's dedication to preserving this history ensures that each piece uncovered contributes thoughtfully to Scotland's cultural heritage. For archaeologists, this project represents a unique opportunity to refine battlefield archaeology techniques in a respectful yet revealing manner. At Waterloo, similar approaches have helped archaeologists uncover human and animal remains, weapon fragments, and evidence of battles that reshaped history. The hope is that the Culloden dig will similarly yield valuable artifacts that deepen our understanding of the battle's strategies, key locations, and aftermath.

The public's role in this dig is equally significant, as volunteers from across the region join NTS staff, archaeology students, and experts.

Clan Gordon

VS.

Clan Grant

Famous Clan Battle

The feud between Clan Grant and Clan Gordon began in the 1500s when the Catholic Earl of Huntley, chief of the Gordons, felt threatened by Protestant neighbors and relocated to Ruthven in Badenoch, building a castle near Grant lands. Protestant vassals on Gordon territory, influenced by the Grants and Clan Chattan, neglected their duties, heightening tensions. In 1590, John Grant refused to pay debts to Gordon of Lesmore's sister, resulting in the death of a Gordon clansman. Declared an outlaw, John Grant was captured by Gordons, leading the Grants to seek refuge with James Stewart, Earl of Moray. Earl Huntley demanded their surrender, but Moray refused, sparking animosity. Huntley attacked Forres, forcing Grants to flee to Moray's castle, which Gordons besieged. Grants escaped into the mountains;

Moray was captured and executed. In 1591, Huntley sent MacRonald to Straspey, killing 18 Grants, then attacked Ballindalloch, destroying their properties. The major clash occurred in 1594 when King James VI uncovered a Catholic Gordon plot with Philip II of Spain. He sent Earl of Argyll with Clan Grant and allies to attack Ruthven Castle. At the Battle of Glenlivet, Grant of Gartinbeg betrayed Argyll by abandoning his flank, allowing Gordons to charge and secure victory. The Grants' treachery was pivotal in the Gordons' triumph, intensifying the longstanding feud.



This victory solidified Clan Gordon's dominance in the region, while Clan Grant's reputation suffered a lasting blow. The animosity between the two clans continued for generations, shaping their histories and alliances in Scotland.

Historic Clan Castles of Scotland



Dunbar Castle

Dunbar, Scotland

Dunbar Castle, perched dramatically above the North Sea, has been a silent witness to Scotland's turbulent history. Located between Berwick and Edinburgh, it served as a vital coastal defense against English and Viking invasions.



Established as early as the 11th century, it became the seat of the powerful Earldom of Dunbar. Over centuries, Dunbar played a key role in Scotland's independence wars and noble rivalries. In 1338, during a siege by the English, Agnes Randolph, "Black Agnes," famously defended the castle for five months, mocking her attackers and securing her place in history.

The 15th and 16th centuries saw Dunbar Castle grow into a formidable artillery fortress. However, its history took a tragic turn in 1567 when Mary, Queen of Scots, was taken there by the Earl of Bothwell, leading to her downfall. Shortly after, the castle was dismantled by order of the Scottish Parliament to prevent further use. Today, its ruins remain a haunting landmark, a testament to its once-strategic importance and the dramatic stories it holds. The battered red stone walls evoke the spirit of Scotland's medieval past and its resilient figures.

Robert Henderson

The Miracle Surgeon of 16th-Century Scotland

In 16th-century Scotland, medicine was a blend of superstition and emerging science. Robert Henderson, a Scottish surgeon, became legendary for his “miraculous” cures. In 1562, he treated patients with grave injuries, defying the limited medical knowledge of the time. Among his most astonishing feats were saving patients with fatal sword wounds and reportedly reviving a woman thought dead for two days, feats that blurred the line between medicine and magic.

Scotland was transforming due to the Protestant Reformation, shifting views on nature, health, and healing. While many still relied on folk medicine, educated circles began adopting surgical practices rooted in anatomy and science. Henderson, a rarity in his field, navigated this evolving landscape. Surgery was primitive, often done by barber-surgeons who handled bloodletting and amputations. Despite these limitations,



Henderson’s skills earned him a reward from the Scottish Council, validating his contributions. Henderson’s legacy represents the era’s intersection of science and superstition, foreshadowing a more empirical future for Scottish medicine. His reputation, cemented in folklore, symbolized a healer bridging the physical and mystical, marking a fascinating period in medical history.

Scottish Clan Myths and Legends



The Phantom Harper of Culcreuch Castle

In the atmospheric halls of Culcreuch Castle, the legend of the "Phantom Harper" endures, filling the ancient rooms with an unforgettable air of romance and sorrow. The story goes that in 1582, a member of Clan Buchanan was fatally wounded in a feud with Robert Galbraith, son of the 16th chief of the Galbraith clan. The dying Buchanan clansman was brought to the now-famed Chinese Bird Room, where he was tended to by his lover in his final hours. In her grief, she took up her clarsach—a Gaelic wire-strung harp—playing a soft, haunting tune as his spirit slipped away. Her tender music was her last offering, easing his passing with melodies of love and loss that would linger far longer than she ever could have known. Today, guests and staff report hearing faint strains of her harp floating softly through the castle’s corridors, particularly on quiet, late nights. The music seems to drift from the Chinese Bird Room, where her story



began, but has also been heard in adjoining rooms, as if her spirit roams, revisiting memories of that fateful night. Many listeners find themselves captivated by the music, with its gentle, mournful tones said to bring an unusual stillness to the castle, as though the air itself listens. The Phantom Harper remains one of the most cherished tales of Culcreuch, a spectral reminder of an undying love echoing through time, reminding those who visit of the castle’s deep, poignant history.

The Battle of Tannach, 1438

The Battle of Tannach was a significant conflict that unfolded in the far northern reaches of Scotland, near the town of Wick, during the tumultuous 15th century. The exact date of the battle remains uncertain, with historical accounts placing it either in 1438 or as late as 1464. This brutal encounter saw Clan Keith and Clan Mackay, who had forged an alliance, pitted against Clan Gunn and possibly their allies, Clan Oliphant and Clan Sutherland, who stood together on the opposing side.

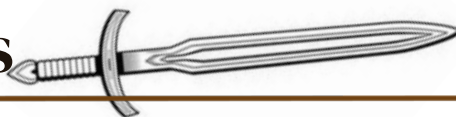
The exact cause of this fierce battle is unclear, though it likely stemmed from a dispute over land or perhaps the simmering tensions of a long-standing feud. According to some historical sources, the Mackays were called upon to assist the Keiths, who found themselves facing a formidable force in the Gunn and Oliphant clans. In response, the Keiths and Mackays led an invasion into Caithness, culminating in a violent clash at a site known as Blair-tannie. Accounts describe this encounter as a "cruel fight, with heavy slaughter on both sides." Yet, despite the bloodshed and ferocity of the combat, the Keiths ultimately emerged



victorious, thanks in no small part to the bravery and skill of John Mor MacIain-Riabhaich, who played a pivotal role in securing their victory.

Following this intense battle, the victorious Keiths and Mackays withdrew to their lands in Strathnaver, while the defeated Gunn and Oliphant clans retreated back to Caithness. Although the long-term consequences of the conflict remain uncertain, the Battle of Tannach stands as a stark reminder of the often-violent power struggles between Scotland's clans, marking a bloody chapter in Scottish history that resonates to this day.

Scottish Clan Artifacts



Milnholm Cross

In the heart of Armstrong territory, you may find the historic Milnholm Cross, a monument that stands as a somber reminder of clan loyalty and tragic loss. Erected around 1320, the cross commemorates the murder of Alexander Armstrong, the second laird of Mangerton, who met his end at Hermitage Castle at the hands of a member of the infamous de Soulis family. This ancient relic, possibly marking Armstrong's final resting place, is one of the clan's most revered symbols.

The Milnholm Cross stands over eight feet tall, with carvings that, although worn, reveal the Armstrong heraldic device—a bent arm, symbolizing the clan's strength—and the initials "M.A." and "A.A." etched below. A four-foot sword carved into the shaft evokes the turbulent times of the Border

Reivers, where feuds were settled in blood. For those wishing to explore further, Etleton Cemetery is just half a mile away, offering a glimpse into the lives of Armstrongs and other local families laid to rest here. Looking across the valley, you may catch sight of Mangerton Castle, the Armstrongs' ancient stronghold, just beyond the river. A journey to Milnholm Cross and its surroundings offers a powerful connection to Clan Armstrong's storied past.



Highland Games and Festivals

November 2024

Tuscon Celtic Festival November 1

\4502 N. First Ave, Tuscon, AZ

United States

Charleston Scottish Games and Highland Gathering November 2

1061 Everglades Ave, North Charleston SC

United States

Austin Celtic Festival November 2

10621 Pioneer Farms Dr., Austin TX

United States

Salado Scottish Gathering & Highland Games November 8

\575 Salado School Rd, Salado TX

United States

Highlands and Islands Highland Games November 9

\15321 County Farm Rd, Gulfport, MS

United States

Hororata Highland Games November 9

\Hororata

New Zealand

Highlands and Islands Highland Games November 9

\15321 County Farm Rd, Gulfport, MS

United States

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Featured Clan Crest



CREST: Out of a rest Coronet Or, a roebuck's head Proper, attired Or
MOTTO: Veritas vincit Truth conquers

Clan Keith's history is one of valor and loyalty, dating back to the Battle of Barrie in 1010, where their ancestor earned the title "Camus Slayer" for his bravery. Over centuries, the Keiths gained prominence, holding the prestigious title of Marischal, trusted as guardians of Scotland's royal regalia. Their contributions extended to education with the founding of Marischal College, influencing Scotland's intellectual growth. Despite setbacks, including the forfeiture of lands for supporting the Jacobite cause, the Keiths adapted and remained influential. Today, the thirteenth Earl of Kintore continues to uphold Clan Keith's traditions, preserving their proud legacy.



We are excited to introduce "A Clan A Day," a new podcast hosted by Colin MacDonald that delves into the history of a different Scottish clan each day. Through engaging stories of legendary battles, key figures, and enduring traditions, Colin brings Scotland's rich heritage to life. Whether you're of Scottish descent, a history enthusiast, or just love a good tale, this podcast offers something for everyone. Subscribe on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Substack, or YouTube Podcasts to join us in exploring the fascinating stories of Scotland's clans.

About Us

Our Scottish clan newsletter is a publication dedicated to exploring the rich history and culture of the Scottish clans. As a community of proud Scots, we are passionate about preserving and sharing our heritage with the world. We are committed to celebrating the unique character and identity of each Scottish clan, highlighting their achievements, and exploring their place in Scottish history. Whether you are a member of a clan, a descendant, or simply a lover of Scottish culture, our newsletter has something for you



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